Audience Engagement in Lukan Framing of Petrine Speeches in Acts: Considerations for Preaching in an Asian Context

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Abstract

This article evaluates the initial readiness, content engagement, and ensuing response of the listeners in each of Peter's five speeches in Acts as presented from Luke's perspective in order to examine the role of the audience in relation to the speeches. Are the Lukan Peter's speeches shaped and influenced by the narrative audience involved? If so, in what ways and to what extent? We will observe in the five speeches whether the audience within each Lukan frame is presented as Jew or Gentile, crowd or authoritative figure, receptive or hostile, and whether Peter's speech content manifests a particular rhetorical fit with the depicted audience. Based on these findings from Peter's speeches, we conclude by considering some applications for preaching to audiences in Asia.

Keywords

Petrine speeches, narrative frame, audience, Acts, preaching

INTRODUCTION

After the publication of C.H. Dodd's *Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (1936), which included discussions of similarities in the speeches of Peter in Acts,¹ various scholars have built on his work in the area of Petrine speeches. The topics range from comparing the functions

1 C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments: Three Lectures with an Appendix on Eschatology and History* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), 24-30.

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in Peter's sermons with Luke's narrative to using Peter's preaching in Acts to authenticate the authorship of the Petrine epistle(s).² Given the importance of the content of the speeches for Lukan theology and historical reconstruction, it is understandable that less attention has been given to the framing of scenarios that immediately precede and follow the speeches, specifically, information about the narrative audience.

Using a literary and narrative approach, this essay will evaluate the initial readiness, content engagement, and ensuing response of the listeners in each of Peter's five speeches in Acts as presented from Luke's perspective (2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43)³ to examine the role of the audience in relation to the speeches.⁴ Are the Lukan Peter's speeches shaped and influenced by the narrative audience involved? If so, in what ways and to what extent? Following on from this question is the inquiry of how sermons preached in an Asian context should also be shaped and influenced by its audience. Thus, the purpose of this essay is twofold: it seeks to understand the narrative audience in Peter's speeches (a longer treatment), and, based on these findings, considers potential homiletical applications for preachers speaking to an Asian audience today (a brief discussion). Given the literary-narrative approach of this essay, Luke's narrative audience is synonymous with Peter's audience in the Petrine speeches; for our current purposes, I do not intend to discuss the historical Peter or historical audience.

It has been argued that audience awareness is crucial to the style and content of speeches in Acts;⁵ I will examine this assertion. For each

2 Robert C. Tannehill, "The Functions of Peter's Mission Speeches in the Narrative of Acts," *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 1991): 400-414; Richard F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter's Speeches of Acts 2 and 3* (Nashville: Published for the Society of Biblical Literature by Abingdon Press, 1971); Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994); Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Speeches of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament lecture (London: Tyndale Press, 1962); Bo Ivar Reicke, "Risen Lord and His Church: The Theology of Acts," *Interpretation* 13, no. 2 (April 1959): 157-169.

3 Strictly speaking, Peter's first speech is at 1:16f (directed to believers), but for this essay I focus on speeches that engage nonbelievers for more dynamic audience interaction.

4 This study is confined to Peter's speeches solely because of space limitation.

5 Cornelia Cook, "Travellers' Tales and after-Dinner Speeches: The Shape of Acts of the Apostles," *New Blackfriars* 74, no. 875 (October 1993): 448 makes this observation

speech, I will discuss the way in which Luke's narrative frame begins and ends before looking at the relationship between the audience and speech content. In order to examine audience engagement, I will observe in the five speeches whether the audience within each Lukan frame is presented as Jew or Gentile, crowd or authoritative figure, receptive or hostile, and whether Peter's speech content manifests a particular rhetorical fit with the depicted audience. I will conclude the investigation by observing whether there are patterns of correlation between the narrative audience and Peter's speeches. Finally, I offer some reflections on how my findings from Peter's speeches may be applied to preaching in an Asian context.

SPEECH 1 (2:14-40)

The first Petrine speech sits within the narrative frame of 2:1, which introduces the day of Pentecost leading up to the speech and ends at 2:42⁶ with a description of the speech's response and after-effects.⁷ Peter's first speech to nonbelievers was delivered to a crowd that represented the greater portion of the entire Jewish diaspora; they were "amazed and astonished" to hear Galileans speaking their languages (vv. 7-11). The surprise of hearing Galileans speak their own tongue (neither Aramaic nor Greek) likely prepared them for Peter's speech.⁸ Even though they were prepared for the speech and even asked for an interpretation of the event (v. 12), there were also scoffers in the audience who sneered and said they were filled with wine (v. 13). The audience was "a half inquiring, half mocking crowd."⁹

Peter's first speech does not begin with a full exordium, which Witherington explains is unnecessary because the audience was already

to demonstrate that speeches in Acts are drawn with a consistent character and form a pattern in the narrative.

6 John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 118-120 reckons 2:42 should possibly be the conclusion to the Pentecost narrative. The longer summary (vv. 43-47) gives a fuller description of the life of the entire Christian community following v. 42.

7 Determining the narrative frame for each speech is not straightforward since characters and activities are related and relevant to previous and later frames.

8 Polhill, *Acts*, 101.

9 William H. Willimon, *Acts*. Interpretation. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2010), 31-2.

keen to listen.¹⁰ The opening salutation “men of Judea” (*andres ioudaioi*) and “all who live in Jerusalem” (*oi katoikountes ierousalēm pantes*) clearly addresses the Jewish audience. Luke’s Peter is seen gradually establishing rapport with them in his variation of personal pronouns: Peter begins by addressing the people as “men of Judea” (*andres ioudaioi*) (v. 14) and “men, Israelites” (*andres israēlitai*) (v. 22) (both formal addresses), but as the speech progresses and focuses on the Hebrew background, he calls them with the more intimate “men, brothers” (*andres adelphoi*) (v. 29). Then even the audience responds with the same address (v. 37).¹¹ The audience’s “men, brothers” (*andres adelphoi*) response “shows that their hearts are already won over.”¹²

Luke’s Peter begins with correcting the misconception of the audience (v. 13) by explaining that the apostles are not drunk (v. 15). He responds to their question (v. 12) with a scriptural reference from Joel that God has poured out his spirit and offers salvation to all who call on his name (vv. 17-21), followed by a second part that clarifies the true identity of Jesus (vv. 22-36).¹³ Peter draws on common ground between him and his audience: first, he shares with them firsthand knowledge concerning Jesus’s recent crucifixion; and then, as a result, Peter appeals to their awareness that God had done mighty deeds through Jesus (v. 22) but also that the Jews had been complicit in Jesus’s death (v. 23).¹⁴ Their responsibility in Jesus’s death is emphasized in the repeated use of pronouns in v. 22: “to you” (*eis humas*); “among you” (*en mesō humōn*); and “you yourselves know” (*kathōs autoi oidate*), a direct assertion with the emphatic pronoun “you” (*autoi*). The accusation “this Jesus whom you crucified” (v. 36), which enhances the pathos, is repeated in other Petrine speeches too. Peter, however, softens

10 Ben Witherington, *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the Art of Persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), 49.

11 Witherington, *Rhetoric*, 49; Carol Lahurd, “The Author’s Call to the Audience in the Acts of the Apostles: A Literary-Critical-Anthropological Reading” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1987), 117; Zehnle, *Discourse*, 26-27.

12 Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 183-184.

13 John Kilgallen, “‘With Many Other Words’ (Acts 2,40): Theological Assumptions in Peter’s Pentecost Speech,” *Biblica* 83, no. 1 (2002): 74-75.

14 John Duncan, “Peter, Paul, and the Progymnasmata: Traces of the Preliminary Exercises in the Mission Speeches of Acts,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 41, no. 4 (2014): 356.

the accusation by balancing the responsibility of the Jews with God's purposes and foreknowledge in the crucifixion (v. 23). Further, the term "killed by the hands of those outside the law" (v. 23) refers to Gentiles since Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.¹⁵ The Jews are guilty,¹⁶ but the Gentiles and the mystery of God's will are included.

Peter's citation from Joel 2:28-32 (2:16-21) to explain the Pentecost phenomenon and his whole use of Psalm 16:8-11 (2:25-28) to establish the messianic status of Jesus are appropriate for his Jewish audience. Peter's adaptation of the original Davidic psalm to Christ (2:30-31) may appear stretched, but it is actually suited to Hebrew thought, which viewed individuals and their descendants as closely linked.¹⁷ The link is further heightened by calling David a prophet (Acts 2:30) who knew the divine covenantal promise of a Davidic descendent.¹⁸ Not only is the speech's Hebraic content fitting to the audience, but Peter responds directly to the listener's question and comment about what was happening and whether they are drunk (2:14ff). Then, he reacts swiftly to the second emotive question "what should we do?" by those receptive to his speech ("they were cut to the heart," v. 37).

There are differing views on whether 2:37 is an interruption by the audience or a reaction after Peter had completed the first part of his

15 Polhill, *Acts*, 112.

16 Much has been written on Jesus's death in Luke-Acts, Jewish culpability, and anti-Jewish polemic, but they cannot be discussed here for space constraints. For more, see Jon A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Joseph B. Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986); Lloyd Gaston, "Anti-Judaism and the Passion Narrative in Luke and Acts," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, ed. Peter Richardson and David M. Granskou (Waterloo: Published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 127-153; S.G. Wilson, "The Jews and the Death of Jesus in Acts," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, ed. Peter Richardson and David M. Granskou (Waterloo: Published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 155-164; Frank J. Matera, "Responsibility for the Death of Jesus According to the Acts of the Apostles," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 12, no. 39 (May 1990): 77-93.

17 Polhill, *Acts*, 114.

18 For more on David as prophet, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "David, 'being Therefore a Prophet' (Acts 2:30)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (July 1972): 339.

speech.¹⁹ Since v. 36 “is a grammatically complete sentence,”²⁰ and v. 36 repeats from v. 14 the idea of what the audience must now know (vv. 14 and 36), making it a complete start and end of the first part of his speech, I believe it is an audience reaction, not an interruption.²¹ This reaction and question by the audience is very advantageous as it permits Peter’s climactic call to repentance in his final appeal (v. 38ff).²² White observes that similar to a chorus in a Greek play, the audience at Pentecost asks two questions (2:12, 37) that form the macrostructure of Peter’s first speech.²³ Luke portrays Peter as effectively answering both questions, which eventually prompts a successful response in numbers and way of life by those who responded (vv. 41-42).²⁴

SPEECH 2 (3:12-26)

The second Petrine speech is within the narrative frame of 3:1 to 4:22; however, because there are two speeches within this frame, we will analyze this speech in its immediate frame of 3:1-4:4 and then Speech 3 within 4:5-4:22. The apostles were going to the temple at the ninth hour (3pm) (3:1), which is the hour of prayer and the evening *Tamid* (one of the two daily temple sacrifices);²⁵ it would have been most crowded during the

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- 19 It seems to be unique Lukan style to record fresh and immediate reactions during speeches. We will also discuss below whether 4:1 and 10:44 are interruptions.
 - 20 Daniel Lynwood Smith, *The Rhetoric of Interruption: Speech-Making, Turn-Taking, and Rule-Breaking in Luke-Acts and Ancient Greek Narrative* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 218.
 - 21 Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 150 makes a similar argument.
 - 22 Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 80.
 - 23 Aaron W. White, “The Apostolic Preaching of the Lord Jesus: Seeing the Speeches in Acts as a Coherent Series of Sermons,” *Presbyterion* 44, no. 2 (2018): 40.
 - 24 Luke’s record is likely a summary of a longer Petrine speech (“and he testified with many other arguments,” 2:40). Witherington, *Rhetoric*, 45-46 thinks the speeches are Luke’s edited versions since people did not record speeches verbatim in antiquity. I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 41 posits speeches were not so brief, it would take only a few minutes to read aloud speeches in Acts.
 - 25 R.E. Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press,

times of sacrifice.²⁶ The crowd that witnessed the miraculous healing of the lame beggar becomes the audience for Peter's speech. The audience recognized the man (v. 10a), was filled with wonder at what had happened to him (v. 10b), and ran to the apostles in astonishment (v. 11). The audience is filled with both curiosity and awe.

Because the audience is addressed as "men, Israelites" (*andres israēlitai*) (3:12²⁷), we are certain this is also a Jewish crowd. As in Acts 2, Peter begins by correcting the false impression of the audience, this time by explaining that the healing is not a sign of Peter's or John's power or piety but by faith in Jesus's name (v. 16). Here also the responsibility of the Jerusalemites for Jesus's death is made clear (v. 15). Content is customized for the Jewish listeners—the familiar Judaic patriarchal formula of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (v. 13);²⁸ the allusion of 3:13 to Isa 52:13;²⁹ and the mention of prophets Moses, Samuel, and Abraham in 3:22-25. What differs here from the Pentecost speech is a softer treatment of Jewish responsibility for Jesus's death and the conciliatory tone of vv. 17-18. The double emphatic nominative pronoun "you" (*humeis*) in the accusations of vv. 13-14 underlines the audience's negative involvement, but the "you" becomes more positive when Peter excuses them for they had "acted in ignorance" (v. 17).³⁰ Because the Jews and their rulers acted in ignorance (*kata agnoian*), and Christ's suffering was God's plan (v. 18), Peter is offering them a second chance to repent and be forgiven (v. 19).³¹

2003), 723.

26 Polhill, *Acts*, 125.

27 The choice of "Israelites" (*israēlitai*), instead of "Judeans" (*ioudaioi*) could suggest an anticipation of the upcoming positive response if we consider the addresses in the Pentecost speech as a positive progression from "Judeans" (*ioudaioi*) (2:14) to "Israelites" (*israēlitai*) (2:22) and then to "brothers" (*adelphoi*) (2:29).

28 Cf. Ex 3:6, 15.

29 Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 105; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 31 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 284; Polhill, *Acts*, 131.

30 Lahurd, "Author's Call," 118.

31 Duncan, *Progymnasmata*, 359 argues that the appeal to repent is invested with additional pathos through Peter's acknowledgement that the Jews were ignorant.

In 4:1, Peter and John³² find that they have an additional audience—the priest, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees (4:1). The appearance and reaction of these leaders were an interruption to the speech (cf. 10:44); Luke’s use of the genitive absolute “speaking” (*lalountōn*) (v. 1) tells us that Peter and John were still speaking.³³ According to Smith, interruption typically marks conflict between speakers and audience of the narrative;³⁴ Johnson translates “came” (*epestēsan*) (v. 1) as “confronted.”³⁵ Despite the resistance and arrest by the officials, the audience still responded very favorably to the message of the apostles, and “they numbered about five thousand” (4:4).³⁶ Despite the adversities, the speech and call to repentance were no failure—a sign of successful audience engagement.³⁷

SPEECH 3 (4:8-12)

The above narrative continues into the next day after the arrest, when the leaders gather to interrogate Peter and John (4:5-7). This short speech, initially occasioned by the healing of the lame beggar, is now primarily focused on responding to the Jewish authorities. Peter addresses the

32 Although at 3:12 Peter is the only one speaking, at 4:1 it is both Peter and John. However, by 4:8 it is again only Peter speaking. Even though John is silent, it is clear that he is actively present. In 4:9, the pronoun *hemeis* is used; in vv. 13 and 19, Peter and John are mentioned together. Peter often serves as the “official spokesman” as evidenced in the Pentecost speech (the eleven were with him but only Peter speaks, 2:14) and again in Speech 4 (Peter is mentioned while the rest remain “apostles,” 5:29).

33 Smith, *Interruption*, 221-222.

34 Smith, *Interruption*, 2-3.

35 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series 5 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 76.

36 Haenchen, *Acts*, 188-189, 215, 220; Adolf von Harnack, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908), 143; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Acts, in the Revised Standard Version*, New Clarendon Bible 5 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 76 discuss the question of whether the figures 3,000 (2:41) and 5,000 (4:4) are accurate. Despite our inability to corroborate accuracy, I believe the report of large numbers is to accentuate the growth of the church in Luke’s narrative.

37 Contra Donald Juel, “Hearing Peter’s Speech in Acts 3: Meaning and Truth in Interpretation,” *Word & World* 12, no. 1 (1992): 45, who overlooks 4:4 and states that unlike the previous speech this one reports no response from the crowd but only from the religious authorities.

audience respectfully as “rulers of the people and elders” (v. 8) before emphatically defending the apostles’ views and beliefs. Peter responds directly to the inquiry of the leaders (4:7-12),³⁸ a clear act of engaging his audience.

The leaders’ question about the “name” (4:7) that provoked Peter’s response is restated by Peter in 4:9; since they want to know about that name, Peter proceeds to tell them about the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that saves (vv. 9-12).³⁹ There is a play on the word “save” (*sōzō*) that is used for both physical healing for the man (“has been healed” *sesōstai*, v. 9) and spiritual, eschatological salvation by the name of Jesus (“salvation” *sotēria*, v. 12). Peter creatively answers the interrogation by explaining the healing of the man while preaching forth the message of salvation in Christ to the leaders.

As a continuing pattern from the previous two speeches to Jewish audiences, Peter again accuses the listeners of their responsibility in the crucifixion (v. 10). Luke has Peter referring to Ps 118:22, which is appropriate for a Jewish audience, and the modifications are noteworthy: a stone cannot be “scorned,” but a person can be, so Luke changes the verb in v. 11 to “scorned/disdained” (*exouthenētheis*) (Ps 118:22 in the LXX is “rejected” *apedokimasan*) “to unmask the attitude of the authorities before whom Peter stands.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, adding the words “by you” clarifies that it is pointing to the immediate audience; and calling them “builders” is fitting since these same people were still in the process of completing the Herodian temple.⁴¹

This speech evidently departs from the previous two in that there is no appeal for repentance at all; there is, at best, an implicit appeal through the proclamation that “there is salvation in no one else” (v. 12). The reasons for the absence of a call to repentance will be discussed in the next speech. The reaction of the audience is amazement (v. 13), but Witherington cautions

38 There are different opinions about what it means when the Jewish leaders ask, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” (4:7). Some assume it refers to the man’s healing, while others argue that it refers to the proclamation about Jesus and his resurrection; Polhill, *Acts*, 142-143. Based on Peter’s reply (4:9), I argue that the issue is the miraculous healing.

39 Zehnle, *Discourse*, 38.

40 Witherington, *Rhetoric*, 53.

41 Witherington, *Rhetoric*, 53.

that amazement does not mean the crowd is persuaded or showing signs of faith.⁴² This is confirmed when the authorities warn them “to speak no more to anyone in this name” (v. 17), threatening them (v. 21a) but finding no way “to punish them because of the people” (v. 21b). The only recorded reactions to this speech are the authorities’ antagonistic and hostile responses.

SPEECH 4 (5:29-32)

The speech in Acts 5 is a response on the part of the apostles after they are arrested and interrogated a second time. At the beginning of the frame there is a heightened reaction by the Jewish authorities (v. 17) because of the growing success of the Christian witness (vv. 12-16) and at the end rejoicing by the Christians (vv. 41-42). In this second interrogation, after the miraculous rescue from prison (5:19) and the apostles’ disobedient persistence in preaching about Jesus (v. 20), the dialogue begins with the high priest’s accusation (v. 28) followed by Peter’s speech (vv. 29-32). Peter, the spokesman, delivers a second short speech before the Sanhedrin, also his last to an audience of Jerusalem Jews.

The accusation by the high priest, “we gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” (v. 28) prepares for the speech’s opening line that “we must obey God rather than any human authority” (v. 29). The content is a summary of the previous speech (4:10-12) that includes the guilt of the Jewish leaders for crucifying Jesus, the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, repentance, and forgiveness (5:30-32). What is different is the description of Jesus’s crucifixion as “hanging on a tree” (v. 30, an allusion to Deut 21:23), which was a common Jewish and early Christian understanding,⁴³ so it would be fitting for a Jewish audience. As mentioned above, Speeches 3 and 4 do not have any clear call to repentance. We can at best say that there was an implicit invitation when “repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” were mentioned (5:31). In Acts 4 and 5, Luke’s Peter is speaking

42 Witherington, *Rhetoric*, 53.

43 4QpNah 3-4 i 7-8; 11QTemple 64:6-13; 4Q282i. See Craig Evans, “Hanging and Crucifixion in Second Temple Israel: Deuteronomy 21:22-23 in the Light of Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Qumran und die Archäologie: Texte und Kontexte*, ed. Jörg Frey, Carsten Claußen, and Nadine Kessler (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Max Wilcox, “Upon the Tree: Deut 21:22-23 in the New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 1 (March 1977): 85-99.

to religious leaders (4:5, 6; 5:27) who are asking questions that are not genuine inquiry but are designed to oppose the apostles. The audiences in these two speeches do not show signs of openness to the gospel, so it is probably no mere coincidence that there is no call for repentance by Peter in these two cases.⁴⁴

The audience's increased animosity is expressed in the possibility of death (v. 33), which was not raised prior to this. The apostles' death penalty was thwarted by the wise words of Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee of the Sanhedrin (vv. 34-39). It is hard to determine whether Gamaliel's words can be considered a positive response to the apostles' speech, but it is definite that the initial Jewish leaders reacted negatively by having them flogged before releasing them (v. 40). The tension between the apostles and Jewish leaders is intensified in Acts 5, and the speech does not soften their reactions.

SPEECH 5 (10:34-43)

The narrative frame of Speech 5 begins with Luke's typical stage-setting details and ends with a dramatic audience response to the speech at the intervention of the Holy Spirit (10:1-48). It begins with the vision of Cornelius (10:1-8), followed by a corresponding vision of Peter (10:9-16), which results in Peter's journey to Cornelius's home (10:17-23). Luke depicts the eagerness, readiness, and openness of the audience. Cornelius "called together his relatives and close friends" (v. 24) and "many had assembled" (v. 27), fell down, and worshipped Peter when Peter arrived (v. 25), and were keen to "listen to all that the Lord has commanded" Peter to say (v. 33). Luke's description of Cornelius from the start as "a devout man who feared God" (*eusebēs kai phoboumenos ton theon*) (v. 2) adds to the likelihood of a favorable response to Peter's speech. Peter begins his only speech to the Gentiles at the centurion's request (v. 33) with no signs of a mixed or even slightly hostile audience; this is Peter's most open and ready audience thus far.

Since this speech is addressed to Gentiles, we might expect it to differ from the previous ones addressed to Jews, but we find a lack of fundamental difference in the content of the speech. Willimon finds that "sermons

44 Mary Brown, "Preaching Like Peter: Applying the Speeches in Acts 2, 3, 4, and 5 to a Mainline Protestant Pulpit" (DMin diss., Duke University, 2018), 72.

to Jews are based upon Scripture, upon the narrative of salvation, upon prophetic testimony... speeches to Gentiles are similarly linked to the story of God's dealings with Israel."⁴⁵ In fact, Stoic and pagan antecedents have not been found in Gentile speeches in Acts.⁴⁶ It is also consistent in that the crucifixion is still attributed to the Jews; this time the formula spoken to Gentiles states clearly that "*they* put him to death" (v. 39).

While this speech basically follows the pattern of the prior sermons to the Jews, there are nonetheless some significant differences. Unlike his earlier speeches, Peter does not address the audience as brothers (*adelphoi*) or men (*andres*) nor says anything to establish his own credentials, probably because of how much Cornelius revered him and was anticipating his message. Peter opens his speech by announcing that "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him is acceptable to him. ... he is Lord of all" (vv. 34-36). This means that the message and Christ's peace (v. 36) are for *all* peoples, not just the people of Israel, because Jesus is Lord of *all*,⁴⁷ which suits his Gentile audience. While Peter also emphasizes the death and resurrection of Christ (vv. 39-40) as in the other speeches, he speaks of Jesus's earthly ministry (vv. 37-38), which is unique to this speech. Another unique addition is the explanation of Jesus's appearance, "who ate and drank" after the resurrection (v. 41). The added stress on Jesus's earthly life as well as his resurrection would have been significant in preaching to Gentiles because the concept of a bodily resurrection would be new to them.⁴⁸ It is also appropriate that this speech to Gentiles lacks references from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Similar to Speech 3, which was interrupted (cf. 4:1), this speech is also interrupted "while Peter was still speaking," but this time by the descent of the Spirit (10:44). Dibelius describes this as an interruption by "external events," unlike the "intentional interruption of the speaker by hearers" in

45 William H. Willimon, "'Everyone Whom the Lord Our God Calls': Acts 2 and the Miracle of Pentecost Preaching in a Multicultural Context," *Journal for Preachers* 25, no. 4 (2002): 7.

46 Walter Hansen, "The Preaching and Defense of Paul," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 307-317.

47 Polhill, *Acts*, 261.

48 Polhill, *Acts*, 262.

4:1.⁴⁹ Luke records that “the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word” (v. 44) and Peter ordered for them to be baptized (v. 48a). The very positive response by the Gentile audience is further emphasized in their invitation for Peter to stay several days (v. 48b). This speech and audience response is very important to Luke’s overall narrative as seen in the space Luke devotes to repeating this story twice more (11:1-18; 15:7-11).⁵⁰ Speech 5 (Acts 10) can be considered the “Gentile Pentecost,” which connects it back to Speech 1 (Acts 2)⁵¹ and links both speeches with 1:5 (“John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”).

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Our brief survey of Luke’s framing and content for each Petrine speech has shown some consistent patterns. First, in each frame, Luke has a warm-up miraculous event⁵² that prepares the audience and leads up to the speech: the filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2; healing of a crippled beggar in Acts 3 and 4; prison break in Acts 5; and Cornelius’s and Peter’s visions in Acts 10. Also, in each speech, Peter directly and immediately responds to the audience’s need, be it a curious question (2:12), a nonverbal action of running up to him in astonishment (3:11), a hostile inquiry (4:7), an accusation (5:28), or a respectful request to speak (10:33). Luke has Peter always speaking into the situation of the audience. The “contrast” presentation of the death and resurrection of Jesus is also consistent in all speeches (2:22-24; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30-31; 10:39-41) as this is the distinct theological representation of Jesus’s salvific act.⁵³ For Duncan, speeches in Acts are “determined by a three-sided relationship among speaker,

49 Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 160-161.

50 Acts 11 and 15 are not included in the speech analysis for space constraints, but we must note that a threefold recount of the same event demonstrates the high importance Luke places on Gentile inclusion. Each repetition is varied with an emphasis on Gentile positive response.

51 In Acts 2, the time was not yet ripe for the Gentiles, but Acts 10, 11, and 15 describe how God brought about the mission to the Gentiles in his own good time; Haenchen, *Acts*, 174-175.

52 Brown, "Preaching," 18.

53 Zehnle, *Discourse*, 25.

audience, and the events of Jesus's death and resurrection."⁵⁴ The speaker may alter some content depending on the audience, but the core message of the death and resurrection of Jesus is constantly preserved no matter the audience, as also demonstrated by Dodd.⁵⁵ Moreover, Peter accuses only the Jews (even when speaking to Gentiles) of Jesus's death.

Nonetheless, the speeches do vary according to audience. The call to repentance is explicitly made when at least a portion of the audience has previously been depicted as open and receptive to the message, as in the first two speeches. The absence of a clear appeal in the next two speeches can be explained by the hostility of the Jewish leaders who were not sincerely listening. In the fifth speech, the Holy Spirit interrupted Peter's speech and led to conversion. In addition, we observed that the first four speeches are theologically and scripturally suitable for the Jewish audience, while the fifth speech to the Gentiles is suited to them by its emphasis on universal salvation.

Luke's depiction of the audience's reaction must also not be overlooked. Peter's words were capable of eliciting powerful emotional responses from those who heard and accepted in repentance, heard and refused in opposition, or refused to hear altogether.⁵⁶ Interestingly, the response of the audience after each speech seems to correspond with their receptivity, or lack thereof, beforehand. The success of the first, second, and fifth speeches appears to be anticipated by the openness of the audience and the nature of the preparatory miraculous activity before the speech, while the same corresponding trend also applies to the negativity in the third and fourth speeches. This is not to argue that the speeches were ineffective or that audience reaction was predetermined; if so, there would have been no need for Luke to present the speeches. Luke's Peter "acts to influence a particular audience at a particular point" at which the audience's response "will determine the direction in which the plot develops."⁵⁷ However, the

54 Duncan, *Progymnasmata*, 352.

55 Dodd, *Apostolic*, 30-31.

56 Smith, *Interruption*, 188; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 97.

57 Tannehill, *Functions*, 401.

plot Luke recounts throughout Acts is also always within the providential overarching plan of God.⁵⁸

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING TO AN ASIAN AUDIENCE

The above examination has shown that there are common trends, but also that Peter's speeches are audience-centered. This leaves us with the final task of this essay, that is, to consider specifically how Peter's audience-centered speeches could be applied to preaching the gospel within an Asian context. Far from a comprehensive discussion, this final segment attempts to highlight points related to audience-sensitive preaching in Asia, in anticipation of further research and dialogue on the topic.

Since Luke presents Peter as being sensitive to his audience, contemporary preachers in Asia should consider the needs of the listeners seriously. This is especially pertinent in Asia because many preachers may have been directly or indirectly influenced and taught by Western homiletics and preachers, leaving them less sensitive to the Asian audience. The need to adapt the sermon to the unique needs of an Asian audience has been demonstrated in works on preaching in an Asian American context.⁵⁹ My references to solely Asian North American studies are owing to the dearth of work done specifically about preaching in Asia; I hope this lacuna will be addressed in the near future. Nonetheless, some of their concerns are applicable and similar to preaching in Asia. Almost every piece of writing on Asian American preaching addresses the problem of racism as well as the need to recognize the pain and suffering

58 John Squires, "The Plan of God in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 26-37).

59 Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong, *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2020); Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999); Matthew D. Kim, "From Corporate Silence to Real Talk: A New Contextual Homiletic for Second-Generation Korean Americans" (MTh diss., University of Edinburgh, 2003); Matthew D. Kim, "Asian-American Preaching," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

of immigrants in a foreign land.⁶⁰ The situation in many Asian regions is not dissimilar—minority groups within some Asian countries are victims of racism; refugees residing in various Asian countries live in pain and suffering; Asians in poverty-stricken areas experience marginalization and neglect.

At this point of writing, many countries in Asia are still desperately fighting the spread of COVID-19 and its devastating economic and social consequences while such countries as the US and UK have received high vaccination levels and are coming out of the pandemic. Sermons for the despairing and devastated Asian communities cannot be a sermon from the West. On a similar note, preaching to Asians who live under corrupt and oppressive governments in a postcolonial era cannot be the same as preaching to people living in a Western democracy that lauds freedom and human rights. Eunjoo Mary Kim explains that when Asian Americans “listen to a sermon, they want to hear...why they suffer and what kind of meanings their present suffering and pain have for the future of their lives”;⁶¹ the same can be said for those struggling to survive in many parts of Asia, especially during a pandemic.

It is only right to acknowledge that there is no homogenous, monocultural Asian audience, just as there is no single, normative Asian North American experience.⁶² Preachers cannot generalize the Asian audience, because every country and culture in Asia is different. The context for a sermon in Asia can range from speaking to highly educated, middle-class Singaporeans or Hongkongers involved in the recent political protests to Khmer villagers desperate for their next meal or Myanmar groups left helpless after the recent coup, and more. Peter’s sermons in Acts should compel preachers in Asia to understand the specific cultural, political, economic, and social demographics of the audience.

Another feature in Asian preaching is its narrative style as opposed to the more rational “three-point” expository sermon that is common in the West. Matthew Kim and Daniel Wong observe that narrational preaching is

60 See, for example, Eunjoo Mary Kim, “Hermeneutics and Asian American Preaching,” *Semeia* 90 (2002): 269-290; Stephen Tu, “An Asian North American Preacher’s Problem with Asian North American (Ana) Preaching: Some Personal Thoughts,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 20, no. 2 (September 2020): 87-93.

61 Eunjoo Mary Kim, “Hermaeneutics”: 279

62 Tu, “Asian North American”: 87-89

one of the characteristics of Asian North American sermons.⁶³ Kim has also written that Asian American preachers “can articulate stories in powerful ways.”⁶⁴ Similarly, Simon Chan, in *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from Ground Up*, contends that in light of the Asian liking for myths and stories, some of Asia’s most influential preachers—Sadhu Sundar Singh, Wang Ming Dao, and John Sung—were great storytellers.⁶⁵ These common findings should provide preachers in Asia with the boldness to experiment with new ways of narrative preaching.

Having mentioned some distinct traits of Asian preaching, we ought to recall how Peter’s speeches also demonstrate that cultural context and audience do not form the center of a sermon: the gospel does—the message of Jesus crucified and raised again. Thus, just as Peter is portrayed adapting the content of his speeches depending on the openness or hostility of his audience, he never dilutes the work and life of Jesus. Whether it is a Jewish or a Gentile audience, the fundamental message of God’s salvific plan remains. In the same manner, preaching in an Asian context does not alter the central message of Jesus Christ. However, for the proclamation of the gospel to be more effective, one must be sensitive to the situation, needs, and responses of the Asian audience.

In my own experience, both as preacher and audience in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, I have noticed the tendency for Asians to ascribe superiority to preachers from the West. This has sometimes been translated into sermons that are a “copy and paste” attempt from a Western church into an Asian community. This study of Petrine speeches in Acts provides the scriptural basis, motivation, and empowerment for preachers to step away from a Western mold and to explore new ways to speak into the situation of an Asian listener. Taking audience awareness earnestly may result in a more careful choice of words and language, use of examples and illustrations, and knowledge of assumptions, worldviews, and impressions held by the Asian audience.

In conclusion, we have observed not only Luke’s narrative technique, but also how the role of the audience shapes and influences Petrine

63 Kim and Wong, *Finding Our Voice*, Chapter 4.

64 Matthew Kim, “Asian-American Preaching,” 203.

65 Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from Ground Up* (Illinois: Downers Grove, 2014), 42 n 114.

speeches. Based on our findings, we find reason to challenge preachers in Asia to attend more keenly to the Asian listener's situation, needs, and context. Inspired by the Lukan Peter, it is perhaps time for homileticians and preachers in Asia—in the midst of all its cultural and linguistic diversities and political and economic turbulence—to consider seriously what it means to proclaim the gospel more effectively to an Asian audience.

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