

The Persuasion of the Apostle Peter: Pentecost Revisited

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Around nine o'clock on a Sunday morning in the year A.D. 30, thousands of Jews who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost gathered to investigate an astonishing noise—the sound of a rushing wind in a house occupied by the apostles of Jesus.¹ Just prior to this time, Peter and ten fellow apostles had convened in an upper room in Jerusalem to decide who would fill the apostolic office vacated by Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Christ to Roman authorities. They appointed Matthias and when Pentecost arrived, the twelve apostles were “together in one place” waiting to receive the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised.²

According to the writer of “Acts of the Apostles,” several weeks earlier Christ had told his apostles to go to Jerusalem and wait there “until ye be clothed with power from on high.”³ It was during this time that “there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind...” and there appeared “tongues...like as of fire” that sat upon them. Moreover, “Acts” records that the apostles “began to speak with other tongues.” When the Jews who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost heard this commotion, it amazed and perplexed them. Not only were they attracted by the noise, but they were also confounded because “every man heard them [the apostles] speaking in his own language.” Some Jews asked, “What meaneth this?” Others simply scoffed and accused the apostles of being “filled with new wine.”⁴ At this point the apostle Peter, who De Satge suggests had “pre-eminence among the apostles” and “was always to the fore,” rose in defense of his fellow apostles.⁵

What followed altered the course of history. “Acts” records that “three thousand souls” were converted as a result of Peter’s discourse. Ironically, the people who had become “pricked in their hearts” as a result of Peter’s preaching were those who had crucified Christ some fifty days earlier.⁶ Nevertheless, on this Pentecost day the apostolic church—the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy and the kingdom “not of this world” as spoken of by Christ—came into existence.⁷

This biblical record raises the question: What was it about Peter’s sermon that made it so persuasive? Although Kennedy, in his *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*,⁸ attempts to account for the success of Peter’s sermon, he leaves many questions unanswered or calling for more attention. For example, what was it specifically about the rhetorical situation that contributed to Peter’s success? Did Peter’s ethos contribute anything to his acceptance by the audience? What were the specific arguments that Peter used? Given the situation in which Peter found himself, why were his arguments compelling? The present analysis attempts to address these issues and to enlarge on what Kennedy has begun; in short, to give a more detailed account of why Peter succeeded on the Day of Pentecost.

Before attempting to answer the above questions, it is important to know why a study of Peter’s sermon is significant. Kennedy argues that Peter’s address in Acts 2 is the first example of Apostolic preaching in which the speaker uses some situation, occasion, or sign to lead into proclaiming the gospel.⁹ In addition to being the first post-resurrection sermon preached, it also provides an example of apostolic preaching in the early church. As the noted biblical scholar John A.T. Robinson writes, “Acts 2 comes to us as the most finished and polished specimen of the apostolic preaching, placed as it were in the shop window of the Jerusalem church and of Luke’s narrative.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Broadus suggests that one may find in the apostles’ preaching a greater number of practical lessons on how to preach than in any other place in the Bible. Like Jesus and the prophets, says Broadus, the apostles left “noble and highly instructive examples” from which one can learn.¹¹ Similarly, Dargan contends that the preaching of the apostles and their co-workers is an “abiding model.”¹²

Another question to address before analyzing the speech asks: To what extent can one be sure that what is recorded in Acts 2 is actually what Peter said? How can one be sure that Peter’s sermon, or any other sermon recorded in Acts, is not a mere invention by the writer of Acts? These types of questions have long plagued the historical-rhetorical critic. Bruce concedes that it is well known that classical historians, like the writer of “Acts,” did not give verbatim accounts of orations. Although the speeches recorded in Acts, says Bruce, are not verbatim accounts, one can be confident that the speeches recorded are “at least faithful epitomes, giving the gist of the arguments used.” By and large, he argues, the speeches in Acts suit the occasion, the audience, and the speaker. The conclusion, therefore, is that these speeches are not mere inventions of Luke, the assumed writer of “Acts,” but are faithfully condensed accounts of speeches actually delivered by the apostles. They are, therefore, valuable sources of the history and theology of the infant church.¹³

Foakes-Jackson argues that Luke gives one an “extraordinarily accurate picture” of the theology of the infant church and an accurate description of the way the gospel was presented in the primitive church. “However produced,” contends Foakes-Jackson, “the speeches in Acts are masterpieces, and deserve the most careful attention.”¹⁴

Writing in reference to the integrity of Luke's historiography, the eminent archaeologist Sir William Ramsey claims that Luke is a first-rank historian who deserves to be listed alongside the best. Ramsey argues, "You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond another historian's, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment, provided always that the critic knows his subject and does not go beyond the limits of...justice."¹⁵ Confidence that Luke faithfully recorded Peter's sermon encourages us to analyze it, examining first the Jerusalem context and audience on that Pentecost.

The Context and Audience

Contextually, the freedom of speech the Jews enjoyed during this period contributed to Peter's success. At this time, Tiberius Caesar ruled the Roman empire of which Jewish Palestine was a part. Pontius Pilate governed Judea, the province of Jerusalem. Under these men, the Jews freely practiced their religion. The average Roman made little distinction between Jews and Christians during the early first century, and had even less concern for their religious acts. Not until the reigns of Caligula and Claudius did Christians experience hostility from the Roman government. In 30 A.D., therefore, Peter was free to speak as he desired.¹⁶

Peter's immediate audience was composed of religiously "devout" and probably friendly Jews.¹⁷ Kennedy points out that since this was the case, "there [was] no serious problem provided [Peter] [could] get their attention."¹⁸ In his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vincent suggests that devout carries the idea that a person "takes hold of things carefully." It emphasizes "the element of circumspection, a cautious, careful observance of divine law; and is thus peculiarly expressive of Old Testament piety, with the minute attention to precept and ceremony."¹⁹ Similarly, Vine says that devout means "careful as to the realization of the presence and claims of God..."²⁰ These definitions describe accurately those Jews who had come "from every nation under heaven" to observe a religious feast according to Old Testament law.

Pentecost, one of three major Jewish feasts, occurred fifty days after the Feast of the Passover. Passover commemorated the salvation of the Jewish firstborn in Egypt when Jehovah passed over them. Always falling on Sunday, Pentecost was a major gathering of the Jews.²¹ Tenney says that it brought people of the Jewish Dispersion from foreign countries to offer, at the Temple, bread made from the harvest of spring grain (Ex. 34:22, Lev. 23:15-21, Deut. 16:9-11). The people in Peter's audience, therefore, devoutly worshipped Jehovah. Pentecost, therefore, provided occasion to proclaim the gospel.²²

Boles argues that in many ways Pentecost was considered the greatest feast of the year. More Jews came to this feast than any of the others. Many of these Jews had stayed over from the Feast of the Passover. Others, however, had come to the feast of Pentecost who had not come to the Feast of the Passover.²³ Specifically from where did these Jews come?

Halley points out that the events in Acts 2 occurred at the zenith of Roman dominion and Roman built roads made the entire empire accessible.²⁴ These roads made it possible for the large gathering of people in Jerusalem from all over the empire. Luke, for example, records that there were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and "dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene..." There were Jews and proselytes from Rome. There were also Cretans and Arabians.²⁵

Boles says that the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites came from the East beyond the Caspian Sea and the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Judeans were from southern Palestine. Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia were all major provinces in Asia Minor. Large colonies of Jews lived in Egypt. "Sojourners from Rome," says Boles, were Romans who were Jewish proselytes. Proselytes converted to the Jewish religion, having been born of Gentile parents or of half Gentile, half Jewish lineage. Jews from Rome were those who were born of Jewish parents. Cretans were from the western isle of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea, and Arabians were those Jews who had settled in Arabia.²⁶ The point here is that Peter's audience was composed of sincere and dedicated people who had traveled great distances, often by foot, to keep the Jewish law. Indeed, they had sacrificed to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Tenney suggests that while the cultural background of these people was cosmopolitan, they all "agreed on the common faith of Israel." He continues, "Their common bond was the Law; their central interest, the Temple Worship."²⁷

Jewish scholar Israel Bettan suggests that Jews were fond of preaching. Basically, they wanted from sermons spiritual applications to their lives. The Jewish sermon, says Bettan, has always derived its interest from the spiritual applications that can be made rather than from its "homiletical framework."²⁸ Similarly, Foakes-Jackson contends that twentieth-century man's dislike of legalism makes it difficult to understand the Jewish fascination with their religious law. They loved their law, found consolation in it, and "delighted in studying it," says Foakes-Jackson. He also reports that a Jewish synagogue in which Jewish sermons were heard could be found in every Jewish town and village, and the Jews were dedicated to attending these synagogues and learning their religion. In addition, Gentiles often attended these synagogues to hear the Law and the Prophets read in Hebrew.²⁹ Perhaps this helps explain why the Jews and the Gentile proselytes in Acts 2 wanted to listen to and then to accept the preaching of Peter. Listening to preaching was part of their cultural habits.

In summary, three contextual factors may have contributed to Peter's success. First, Jews were religiously devout people who took advantage of opportunities to hear preaching. They were willing subjects for Peter's discourse. Second, Peter had the freedom to preach and therefore to accommodate the Jewish interest in preaching. Third, and perhaps most important, were the events that occurred prior to Peter's address. The Jews were astonished at the noise that filled the house where the apostles were sitting. They were also amazed because they heard the untutored Galilean apostles speaking in foreign languages. Luke writes, "And they were all amazed and marvelled saying, 'Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own language wherein we were born?'"³⁰ These three elements, therefore, set the stage for Peter's discourse.

The Speaker

Of all the elements that had a bearing on Peter's accomplishment in Acts 2, perhaps the weakest was the character of the speaker. Peter, sometimes called Simon Bar-Jonah or Cephas,³¹ and his brother Andrew were mere fishermen from Bethsaida in northern Galilee, the northern-most province of Jewish Palestine during the first century.³² Coincidentally, Peter was fishing with Andrew when Christ said to them, "Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew says they immediately dropped their nets and followed Christ.³³ For the next three years, Peter spent his life with Christ and learned about the kingdom that Christ said he would establish. In fact, Matthew records an occasion when Christ told Peter that "I will build my church...I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."³⁴ Just as Christ promised, it was Peter who unlocked the doors of the new kingdom—the church that Christ promised to establish—on the Day of Pentecost.

By and large, Peter lacked a formal education. In Acts 4, after having locked Peter and John in jail for preaching to the people, the Jewish Sanhedrin brought Peter and John before them to be tried. Luke records that the magistrates "perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men..." Nevertheless, these rulers also perceived that Peter and John had spent time with Christ by the way they answered their questions.³⁵

Perhaps Peter's lack of education allowed him to earn the reputation of being impetuous. On one occasion, for instance, he rebuked Jesus, his own master.³⁶ On another occasion, he impatiently jumped from a boat into the lake to meet Jesus, who stood on the beach. He could not wait until the boat was rowed ashore.³⁷ Furthermore, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter impetuously drew his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, much to the dismay of Christ.³⁸

Despite these character weaknesses, Scripture recognizes Peter as first in the inner ring of Christ's disciples. For example, when Mark records the miracle of Christ raising the daughter of Jarius in Mark 9, only Peter, James, and John are mentioned, and Peter's name comes first. In Matthew 17, on the Mount of Transfiguration, only Peter, James, and John are recorded, Peter's name again coming first. Finally, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as recorded in Matthew 26:36-44, only Peter, James, and John are mentioned, in that order, as being with Christ. Evidently Christ thought enough of Peter to command him to "feed my sheep."³⁹ This was exactly what Peter was attempting to do in Acts 2.

Not only was Peter impetuous and lacking in formal education, but he was occasionally a coward. During the trial of Christ, as recorded in John 18, Peter denied having ever known the man with whom he spent three years of his life. Realizing what he had done, Peter went out and "wept bitterly."⁴⁰ Ironically, however, after Peter saw the resurrected Christ, he was anything but a coward. Indeed, he was willing to lay down his life for the cause of Christ. "Acts" paints an entirely different picture of Peter's fortitude than that described in the Gospel narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. For example, he preached to the thousands of Jews on the day of Pentecost, telling them that God had raised up Christ "whom ye crucified."⁴¹ Moreover, Peter militantly told the Jewish civil authorities in Acts 4:19-20, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard [referring to Christ's resurrection]." In short, Acts describes Peter differently from the spineless, pusillanimous individual found in the synoptic Gospels. It is hard to say whether anyone in Peter's audience knew of his past. Nevertheless, it did not seem either to help or hinder his persuasive power in Acts 2.

Although Peter lacked the formal education afforded the apostle Paul and other men in the first century, he had a sound knowledge of the Jewish Old Testament. This much is evident from the quotations he cited in Acts 2. More will be said about these quotations in the next section. In addition, Foakes-Jackson points out that the synagogue was an educational center where every Jewish boy learned how to keep the law. By having to learn prayers, these boys developed their memories. Jewish boys also learned disputation skills, in order to reason and to think about the exact meaning of Old Testament scriptures. Consequently, Foakes-Jackson argues that one should not believe that the disciples of Christ were entirely uneducated men.⁴² Similarly, Kennedy adds, "Though the Jews of the pre-Christian era seem never to have conceptualized rhetoric to any significant degree, the importance of speech among them is everywhere evident...and undoubtedly they learned its techniques by imitation."⁴³

Foakes-Jackson claims that knowledge rather than ordination gave Jews the right to teach. The Jewish pulpit, then, was open to anyone who had a knowledge of the Jewish scriptures. Foakes-Jackson argues that although Peter and John were criticized in Acts 4:13 for being unlearned and ignorant, this was probably a result of their accent, which sounded uncouth to the priests who heard them. Also, Foakes-Jackson says that Galilean Jews

seemed to have been simpler people than their Judean brethren and were held in little honor by those in Jerusalem, who often criticized the Galileans for a dialect that was distinct from that in Judea.⁴⁴

Vincent suggests that Galileans were frequently blamed for neglecting to study their language. They often were charged with "ridiculous mispronunciations" and grammatical errors.⁴⁵ If this were the case, Peter's dialect certainly did not affect the way his audience accepted him in Acts 2. This may have been because Peter's audience wanted the commotion that they had heard explained to them, and therefore dialect did not immediately concern them. Peter's success may also have come from his straightforward talk and that he was "quietly earnest" as described by Broadus.⁴⁶

An important question arises at this juncture: If Peter had some training in rhetoric, as informal as it may have been, to what extent was he influenced by the teachings of Roman or Greek rhetoricians of his day? Dargan suggests that with perhaps the exception of the apostle Paul's discourse at Athens, one can detect little, if any, influence of the classical orators on the apostles' preaching. Rather, their preaching was like Christ's. It reached out to all people, taught them to repent, to have faith, showed the way of reconciliation with God, and proclaimed Christ as the central theme.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Kennedy contends that the evangelists of the New Testament could have been acquainted with the handbooks on rhetoric in circulation during the first century A.D. The apostolic preachers, according to Kennedy, would have been "hard put to escape an awareness of rhetoric as practiced in the culture around them, for the rhetorical theory of the schools found its immediate application in almost every form of oral and written communication...." Kennedy suggests that the evangelists of the New Testament would have encountered government documents and public and private letters. In addition, these evangelists would have seen documents in law courts and assemblies and would also have heard various epideictic speeches at commemorations and festivals. Finally, these New Testament ministers would probably have seen compositions in both prose and verse. In other words, argues Kennedy, inhabitants of the Greek-speaking world of early Christianity would have developed necessarily "cultural preconceptions about appropriate discourse" even if they lacked formal education in rhetorical theory and methods.⁴⁸

In summary, we do not know if Peter's audience knew of his background—his lack of formal training, his impetuous nature, or his lack of courage during the trial of Christ. But, if they did, such knowledge seemed not to weaken his credibility with them. It is doubtful that Peter had much, if any, prior ethos with his listeners.

His intrinsic credibility, however, is a different matter. Instead of hearing a petty coward, concerned about how he would be received, Peter's audience heard a man poignantly accuse them of crucifying the Son of God. Like Stephen in "Acts" 7, Peter risked death by stoning for this preaching. This threat, however, did not deter him as he proclaimed, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified."⁴⁹

The Message

While the context in which Peter's sermon occurred and the credibility of the speaker himself are important elements to consider, neither had the impact of the message itself. Shortly after the audience had accused the apostles of being drunk with wine, Peter arose to his feet. He "lifted up his voice," and explained why the apostles were speaking in foreign languages.⁵⁰ Peter seemed to be following his own advice that he wrote later. In I Peter 3:15 he admonished Christians to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you...." In his Pentecost discourse, Peter personified his own exhortation.

Bruce suggests that there are four types of speeches recorded in Acts: evangelic, deliberative, apologetic, and oratory. The speech delivered by Peter in Acts 2, says Bruce, is evangelic, the type of speech delivered to Jews or God-fearing Gentiles who had abandoned pagan worship and had embraced the worship of the synagogue.⁵¹ Kennedy points out that Acts 2 is a combination of two species of rhetoric; verses fourteen through thirty-six, divided into two parts, are judicial, while verses thirty-eight and thirty-nine are deliberative.⁵² The remainder of this paper will focus on these three major sections of Peter's speech.

Verses fourteen through twenty-one comprise the first division in which Peter disposed of the notion that the apostles were inebriated. In verse fourteen he began with a formal proem, "Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words." Having gained his listeners' attention, Peter used an enthymeme in verse fifteen to persuade his hearers: "For these [apostles] are not drunken, as ye suppose; seeing it is but the third hour of the day." In Jewish time, the third hour would have been 9:00 a.m. Peter was arguing that it is improbable that anyone would be drunk so early in the morning. Barnes suggests that Jews customarily abstained from food or drink until after the third hour of the day on all festival occasions. Even the intemperate, says Barnes, did not drink before this hour. Peter could, therefore, appeal to this custom with confidence.⁵³ He then argued that the actions the audience had labeled as drunkenness, the ancient Jewish prophet Joel had predicted would occur. Joel predicted in part, "And it shall be in the last days saith God, I will pour forth my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughter shall prophecy.... And I will show wonders in the heaven above, And signs on the earth beneath."⁵⁴ Not all of Joel's prophecy came true on the Day of Pentecost, but what the audience witnessed could have been explained by a reference to Joel's writings. This audience had studied the

prophet Joel, and this knowledge made it easy for Peter to defend his colleagues with references to this Jewish prophet. This demonstrates the ability of Peter to adapt to his audience.

But, Peter did not end his message by discussing Joel's prediction of how the Spirit would be poured out. Rather, he included Joel's prophecy which said, "And it shall be that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."⁵⁵ He accomplished two goals. First, Peter used the ethos of Joel to point out that if a person were going to be saved, he would have to "call on the name of the Lord...." Instead of running the risk of antagonizing his hearers before he was allowed to present his own ideas on the salvation of these Jews, Peter disarmed his audience by saying in essence, "This is what your own prophet says." Second, Peter set the stage for the next major section of his speech, introduced with the transition in verse twenty-two, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words." This section, as mentioned above, is the second part of what Kennedy refers to as judicial rhetoric.

Having defended his fellow apostles and having shown the audience that their own prophet told them how they were to be saved, Peter indicted them for crucifying Christ. The foundation for salvation (i.e. calling on the name of the Lord) had been laid. Peter then, in verses twenty-two through thirty-six, defined who this "Lord" was. In verse twenty-two, for example, Peter introduced "Jesus of Nazareth," and suggested that he was "a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs...." These miracles, said Peter, were done "in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know." Although never mentioned specifically in the speech, Barnes says Peter was probably referring to miracles of healing the sick and raising the dead.⁵⁶ Peter knew that his audience would not deny what they saw Christ perform and they would, therefore, probably believe that Christ was deity. Peter did not end here, however, in attempting to prove that Christ was God in the flesh.

He proceeded to tell his listeners that Christ was "delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." In other words, Christ was turned over to his enemies to be slain. Peter then accused his audience of being the murderers of Christ when he said, "Ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay" Jesus.⁵⁷ Had the audience been composed of hostile listeners, Peter may have been stoned to death. He was allowed, however, to continue his discourse.

To strengthen his argument that Christ was the son of God, Peter insisted that God raised Christ from the dead. If this assertion had no empirical support, Peter would have been laughed to scorn or stoned in the presence of these Jews for blasphemy. To refute Peter, the Jews could have gone outside Jerusalem to the grave of Jesus and produced the corpse. This would demonstrate his total humanity and lack of deity. Connick argues that one is driven to the conclusion that they failed to produce the body because they could not.⁵⁸ These Jews were, therefore, compelled to accept Peter's argument.

In addition to miraculous acts, Peter quoted two prophecies from the ancient Israelite King, David, to help establish his point. In doing so, Peter relied on David's ethos. Peter used prophecies from Psalms, written by David, because the Jews revered David. Under King David's rule, much had been accomplished for the Israelites. The Philistines had been expelled from Palestine and the Moabites had been subdued under David's leadership. David moved the Jewish capital to Jerusalem and gathered the materials for the temple that was later to be built there by his son, Solomon.⁵⁹ Jerusalem was often referred to as the "city of David."⁶⁰ Peloubet suggests that David was a king "on the scale of the great oriental sovereigns of Egypt and Persia."⁶¹ Perhaps the Jews as a nation thought highly of David because, as Samuel wrote in II Samuel 8:15, "David executed justice and righteousness unto all his people." Connick suggests that whatever David's personal problems (and they were numerous), "he reached the pinnacle of political greatness." Israel enjoyed her Golden Age under the leadership of Saul, David, and Solomon and, thus, "in times of distress and deportation," says Connick, "later generations looked back to the days of David."⁶²

The Christian Bible also records how much the Jews thought of their former leader. For instance, Matthew 12 tells of Christ healing a blind and mute man, and the witnesses to the event asking, "Can this be the son of David?" Again, in Mark 11:10, many Jews who thought Christ was the coming Messiah about whom the Old Testament prophesied said, "Blessed is the kingdom that cometh, the kingdom of our father David...."

Knowing how highly the Jews thought of their former king, Peter took advantage of David's own words. After suggesting that God raised Christ and "loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it," Peter quoted David in reference to Christ: "Thou wilt not leave my [Christ's] soul unto Hades, Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption." In explaining what David meant by this passage, Peter suggested that David, 'being...a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn...to him that...he would set one upon his throne; he forseeing this spake of the resurrection of Christ...."

Peter continued to argue for the deity of Christ when he suggested, "This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses" and it was Jesus who "hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear."⁶³ Peter attributed the commotion that astonished the Jews to Christ, and he argued that all the apostles had witnessed his resurrection. If there had been no witnesses to Christ's resurrection, the audience could have proven Peter a liar at worst or an uninformed idiot at best. They did neither, however. Connick suggest that although no one saw the actual resurrection of Christ, many saw the resurrected Christ.⁶⁴ For example, the apostle Paul, writing in I Corinthians 15:5-6, said that after Christ arose from the grave "he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep." Probably many Jews in Peter's audience had seen the

resurrected Christ and could not deny Peter's assertion. In any event, these Jews realized that David did not refer to himself in his prophesy, because as Peter pointed out, David "both died and was buried and his tomb is with us this day."⁶⁵

By this stage of the speech, suggests Zehnle, Peter was "progressively winning over his audience." This appears evident, Zehnle argues, from the language Peter uses. Earlier in the discourse, verses fourteen and twenty-two, Peter addressed the listeners formally. By verse twenty-nine, however, Peter referred to his audience as "Brethren," suggesting a more intimate relationship than earlier.⁶⁶

At this point in his speech Peter had presented several impressive arguments to establish the divinity of Christ. He added more argumentation by quoting from King David. He pointed out that David "ascended not into the heavens" like Christ did, implying that Christ was greater than the man the Jews held in highest esteem. Then Peter quoted David as saying, "The Lord [God] said unto my Lord [Christ], sit thou on my right hand, Till I make mine enemies the footstool of thy feet." This passage was the rhetorical coup de grace. Peter concluded that David called Christ his Lord, again implying that Christ was greater than David. The Jews understood that because Christ had risen but not David, that Christ was greater than the greatest. In final pronouncement of the divinity of Christ, Peter boldly affirmed, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified."⁶⁷

Luke records that when the Jews heard this, "they were pricked in their heart" and asked Peter and the other apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"⁶⁸ Vincent says that the expression "pricked in their heart" means that the audience experienced a "sharp, painful emotion."⁶⁹ Peter's sermon had produced a sting.

Peter's reply to the Jews' question constitutes the third and shortest section of his sermon. This section is what Kennedy refers to as deliberative. Peter had spent the greatest portion of his sermon attempting to show that Christ, the son of God, was crucified by his Jewish audience. Peter succeeded in causing dissonance in the mind of his hearers. In order to lead them out of their incongruity, Peter commanded them to "Repent...and be baptized"⁷⁰ Zehnle argues that since Peter had just preached that those who would be saved must call on the name of the Lord, the Jews realized they must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus to be saved.⁷¹

Peter's epilogue followed: "For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him." Here Peter connected the promise spoken of earlier by the prophet Joel (i.e. salvation) to the Jews and their posterity as well as to all mankind. If there had been any audience hostility toward Peter, this promise would have modified it and helped them to accept Peter's message. Luke says that Peter continued to exhort his audience to "save yourselves from this crooked generation." This implies that more was said of which there is no record. Nevertheless, as a result of Peter's urgency, Luke reveals that "they that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them [apostles] in that day about three thousand souls."⁷² Judged by immediate audience response Peter succeeded.

In summary, once Peter had convinced his Jewish audience that the apostles were not drunk, he proceeded to use the unusual events of the day to show that those events were a result of the Lord's promise. Kennedy agrees when he says that Peter may have been successful because of his "adroit utilization of the sign."⁷³ Peter also drew on the ethos of the prophet Joel, one with whom the Jews were familiar, to support his claim.

In addition, Peter succeeded partly because he relied heavily on the Jews' own experiences with Christ. Citing the miracles that Christ performed among them and his resurrection, Peter convinced the Jews that Christ was divine. Peter also relied extensively on quotations from the former Jewish king David. Using David's ethos, it was almost as if David himself were there preaching in place of Peter.

Conclusion

I have attempted to explain why the apostle Peter succeeded in his Pentecost address, delivered before thousands of Jews in the Year A.D. 30. Contextually, I have noted that Peter's listeners were religious, devout Jews who loved preaching and who knew the writings of Old Testament prophets. Second, although Peter's initial ethos did not seem to affect the way he was received, his intrinsic ethos did. Peter established himself as a knowledgeable, bold speaker of conviction. His sermon was uncompromising and unequivocal. Finally, Peter supported his arguments with quotations from the Old Testament prophets, and with the experiences his Jewish listeners had with Christ during his life time.

In fact, these experiences, coupled with what the prophets Joel and David prophesied would occur, proved to be irrefutable by Peter's audience. Nearly two thousand years later, Peter's consoling reply to his first-century audience is still heard vicariously in thousands of churches across the globe: "Repent and be baptized...for the remission of your sins...."⁷⁴

Notes

¹Henry H. Halley, **Halley's Bible Handbook** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1965) 559-61. Halley suggests that there is not enough data to form exact dates in Acts, but there is sufficient data to approximate most of the dates. The formation of the church in Jerusalem occurred ten days after Christ's ascension. See also John Broadus, **The History of Preaching** (New York: Armstrong, and son 1901) 44.

²Acts 2:1. All biblical references are taken from the American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

³Luke 24:49. Compare to Acts 1:4.

⁴Acts 2:2-13.

⁵John De Satge, **Peter and the Single Church** (London: SPCK, 1981) 11.

⁶Acts 2:37,41.

⁷John 18:36.

⁸George A. Kennedy, **New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism** (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 116-17.

⁹Kennedy 117.

¹⁰"Christology" 185 in Richard F. Zehnle, **Peter's Pentecost Discourse** (Nashville: Agingdon Press, 1971) 26.

¹¹Broadus 38, 43.

¹²Edwin Charles Dargan, **A History of Preaching** (London; Hodder and Stoughton, 1905) 25.

¹³Frederick F. Bruce, **The Acts of the Apostles** (1951; London: Tyndale Press, 1962) 18. See also Bruce's **The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles** (London: Tyndale Press, 1942) 27.

¹⁴Frederick J. Foakes-Jackson, **The Acts of the Apostles** 16 in Frederick F. Bruce **The Acts of the Apostles** 21.

¹⁵Sir William Ramsey, **The Bearing of Recent Discoveries on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament** (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1915) 89, 222.

¹⁶Merrill C. Tenney, **New Testament Times** (1965; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975) 204-05.

¹⁷Acts 2:5.

¹⁸Kennedy 117.

¹⁹Marvin R. Vincent, **Word Studies in the New Testament**, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904) 1:273.

²⁰W.E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Nashville: Royal Publishers, Inc., 1939) 299.

²¹H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1973) 32.

²²Tenney 182.

²³Boles 32.

²⁴Halley 758.

²⁵Acts 2:9-11.

²⁶Boles 36.

²⁷Tenney 183.

²⁸**Studies in Jewish Preaching** (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939) 36-37.

²⁹Frederick J. Foakes-Jackson, **Peter: Prince of Apostles** (New York: Doran, 1927) 41, 53-54.

³⁰Acts 2:7-8.

³¹Matthew 16:16-19; Mark 3:16; John 1:42.

³²John 1:44. For a detailed account of the life of Peter, see Ronald Browning, **Who's Who in the New Testament** (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

³³Matthew 4:19-20.

³⁴Matthew 16:18-19.

³⁵Acts 4:13.

³⁶Matthew 16:22-33; Mark 8:32-33.

³⁷John 21:7.

³⁸John 18:10.

³⁹John 16:17.

⁴⁰Matthew 26:75.

⁴¹Acts 2:36. In his **Book of Martyrs** p.33, Foxe reveals that Peter was eventually crucified upside down for his faith and testimonies of Christ near the end of the reign of Nero. Peter chose this position, says Foxe, because he felt unworthy to be crucified like Christ was.

⁴²Foakes-Jackson 54.

⁴³Kennedy 11.

⁴⁴Foakes-Jackson 28, 54-55.

⁴⁵Vincent 450.

⁴⁶Broadus 45.

⁴⁷Dargan 25.

⁴⁸Kennedy 5, 10.

⁴⁹Acts 2:36.

⁵⁰Acts 2:14.

⁵¹Bruce, *the Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* 5.

⁵²Kennedy 117.

⁵³Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1962) 381.

⁵⁴Acts 2:17-19.

⁵⁵Acts 2:21.

⁵⁶Barnes 384.

⁵⁷Acts 2:23.

⁵⁸Milo C. Connick, *Jesus: The Man, The Mission, and The Message*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974) 409. See pages 408-10 for a detailed discussion of various theories about Christ's resurrection.

⁵⁹II Samuel 8:1-2, I Chron. 28-29.

⁶⁰II Samuel 5:9.

⁶¹F.N. Peloubet, *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1972) 142.

⁶²Connick 7.

⁶³Acts 2:24-33.

⁶⁴Connick 408.

⁶⁵Acts 2:39.

⁶⁶Zehnle 26-27.

⁶⁷Acts 2:34-36.

⁶⁸Acts 2:37.

⁶⁹Vincent 450.

⁷⁰Acts 2:38.

⁷¹Zehnle 62.

⁷²Acts 2:39-41.

⁷³Kennedy 118.

⁷⁴Acts 2:38. (King James Version).