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Peter and Paul in Antioch

Gaye Strathearn

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“When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision” (Galatians 2:11–12). So wrote the Apostle Paul to the Galatian Saints. This passage is a difficult one. Just as ancient Saints were not comfortable with the public tension between Christianity’s most prominent leaders, neither are modern Saints today.

Peter’s importance comes from his close association with Jesus during his mortal ministry and his prominence among the Twelve as the chief Apostle. In the synoptic Gospels “he is always spokesperson for and representative of the disciples as a group,”¹ and as Acts opens, after Christ’s Ascension, it is clear that Peter is the one leading out and shepherding the church. In contrast, Paul comes on the scene only after the Ascension. Not only does he play no role in Jesus’ mortal ministry, but when he does first appear in Acts he is making “havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Luke’s decision in Acts to shift focus from Peter’s ministry to that of Paul’s has undoubtedly impacted the course of early Christian history.

Paul's importance comes from the sheer weight of his writings that were collected into the canon and because he is arguably the one who most shapes the Christian message in a way that is both acceptable and enticing to the Gentile world.

Given the importance of both leaders, it can be difficult to understand what would cause Paul to publicly confront and question Peter's actions. Latter-day Saint commentators on this passage acknowledge the tension. In trying to explain it, sometimes Paul's actions are criticized,² but sometimes he is vindicated.³ Generally, if addressed at all in Latter-day Saint writings, the passage is used to simply explain that leaders in the church can disagree,⁴ but rarely is the passage analyzed in its Galatian context.

Frankly, there is no simple explanation for Galatians 2:11–12 because the incident is complicated by many issues, three of which we will try to address in this paper. First, Jesus' command to the Apostles on the Mount of Olives to "be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8) exposed deep-seated tensions between Jews and Gentiles, especially with respect to Israel's status as God's covenant people and the place of the law of Moses in the church as it began to expand its missionary work among the Gentiles. The early church struggled to envision a church that proselyted both Jews and Gentiles: how would the law of Moses function in such a church, and how would it impact Israel's calling as God's chosen people?

Second, the issue in Galatians 2:11–12 is further complicated because we only have access to one side of the story. The New Testament does not include Peter's perspective, only Paul's. It might be helpful, for example, if we had more information about questions such as the following: Why had Peter come to Antioch? What was the nature of the gathering? What was Peter thinking as "he withdrew and separated himself"? If we had Peter's side of the story, we might be able to gain a more balanced perspective of the event. Without his perspective we can only postulate possibilities.

Third, the issue is also compounded by the fact that Paul is clearly upset as he writes to the Galatian Saints because both his authority as an Apostle and the gospel that he taught were under attack. This leaves modern readers trying to recreate the events and motives from an account that has a decided agenda, with rhetorical language that is sometimes used to heighten, rather than downplay, the tension.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to provide some context for Galatians 2 that may help modern readers better understand the relationship between Peter and Paul and why the issues were so important to them. In doing so we will first briefly overview the historical interaction between Jews and Gentiles to understand the early church's reluctance to widen the scope of its missionary

activities. Then we will discuss the Antioch incident in its larger Galatian context, which includes two other meetings between the two Apostles: Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (see Galatians 1:16–19) and the Jerusalem Council (see Galatians 2:1–10; Acts 15:1–11). While it is impossible, without further information, to come to a definitive and comfortable answer to explain the tension in Antioch, I will argue that the incident took place sometime after the Jerusalem Council (see Galatians 2:1–10; Acts 15:1–11) but before the apostolic decree described in Acts 15:12–21. Therefore, while the issue of circumcision for Gentiles had been decided by the Jerusalem Council, the issue of table fellowship, which is at the heart of the Antioch incident, had not been settled by the church. Therefore, I will argue that what we see in Galatians 2:11–14 is evidence of a theological debate between Peter and Paul that had not yet been decided by the church leadership.

Teaching All Nations

The tension in Galatians 2 is broader than the one incident between Peter and Paul; it is between two fundamentally different ways of interpreting Jesus' command on the Mount of Olives to expand their missionary activities beyond the house of Israel (see Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8). This Olivet command must have raised some questions for the early church leaders and members; especially since Jesus, on calling the Twelve, had directly instructed them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5–6). Historically and theologically, Abraham and his descendants, the house of Israel, had been called to enter into a covenant with God that *they* would be his covenant people. As part of that covenant, Abraham and his seed were promised two blessings that sometimes stood in tension with each other: that they would become "a great nation" (Abraham 2:9) and that through them "all the families of the earth [would] be blessed" (Abraham 2:11; Genesis 12:3).

On the one hand, to make Israel into a great nation God required that Israel distanced themselves from other nations in order to establish its geographical, political, and religious boundaries. At Mount Sinai, God reiterated that *they* would "be a peculiar treasure [i.e., a treasured possession; Hebrew *sĕgullāh*] unto me above all people, . . . a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:5–6; 1 Peter 2:9). They were to be "the people of the Lord" (2 Samuel 1:12; Ezekiel 36:20), distinct from the other nations of the world. As they entered the promised land, God knew that the nations of Canaan would be a constant threat to the covenantal integrity of his chosen people (see Deuteronomy 12:1–3, 29–32). Therefore, they

were directed not to marry outside of the covenant: “For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods” (Deuteronomy 7:4) and they were directed to “make no league with the inhabitants of this land” (Judges 2:2). Nevertheless, Israel always struggled with these commands and so the prophets routinely called them to repentance on this account.

Two watershed events heightened Israel’s sense of isolation from the other nations: the Exile (ca. 597–538 BC) and the Maccabean Revolt (ca. 167–160 BC). Prior to the exile, “the identity of the people had been shaped and supported by a number of complementary factors—common territory, political loyalty, ethnic continuity, common language, religious observance, and tradition.”⁵ But during the exile, the people had to find ways to maintain their identity in a Gentile environment. Thus, their “religious tradition and observance assumed an ever greater role in maintaining distinctive identity.”⁶ They had to learn to “sing the Lord’s song in a strange land” (Psalm 137:4). When they returned to Judea, Ezra and Nehemiah focused on establishing the social, religious, and political boundaries that separated the returnees from outsiders in an effort to reestablish a holy people (see Ezra 3–4, 9–10; Nehemiah 3–4; 8:1–8).

The second watershed event was the Maccabean Revolt. Alexander the Great had invaded Palestine militarily and culturally, and one of his successors attempted to unify the Seleucid kingdom under the banner of the worship of Zeus. This highlighted the tension between the desire to be a peculiar people and the yearning for acceptance among the other nations. The Maccabean Revolt championed religious independence, but it did not advocate cultural independence.⁷ It did, however, force the Jews to identify what were the core elements that gave them their cultural and religious identity and enabled them to be a peculiar nation: worship at the temple, circumcision as the sign of the covenant, keeping the Sabbath day holy, and table fellowship.⁸ The last of these, table fellowship, included not only the dietary restrictions outlined in Leviticus 11, but by the intertestamental period they were expanded to include elements of ritual purity.⁹ As we will see, two of these elements, circumcision and table fellowship, will be issues central to the interactions between Peter and Paul. Table fellowship, in particular, created a wall of isolation for some Jews from Gentiles, particularly those living in the diaspora. In a blessing reportedly given by Abraham to his son Jacob recorded in the *Book of Jubilees*, we read, “Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable” (22.16). Similarly, in the *Letter of Aristeeas*, we read that Moses “surrounded us

with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter. . . . So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or by mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and touch and hearing and sight, after the manner of the Law” (139, 142). Thus it is not surprising that Cicero, as an outsider, notes that in Rome the Jews stick together as a large, close-knit group (*Flaccus* 28.66).

In the Roman Empire, Jews were generally afforded freedom to practice their religion (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 19.288–90). But that did not mean that they were exempt from episodes of persecution. The Emperors Tiberius and Claudius both ordered expulsions of Jews from Rome (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.83–84; Acts 18:2).¹⁰ Philo describes riots that took place in Alexandria in AD 38 because of the destruction of Jewish synagogues (*Flaccus* 41–54; *On the Embassy to Gaius* 132–37).¹¹ Undoubtedly these attacks from without only served to fuel their sense of religious isolationism, especially when living in the midst of Gentile communities.

But we must not let these issues overshadow the very real efforts that Jews made to bless “all the families of the earth” (Abraham 2:11; Genesis 12:3; 28:14). Although God covenanted with Israel that they would be a peculiar people, the covenant was never intended to be an exclusive affair.¹² Abraham left Haran with “the souls that they had gotten in Haran” (Genesis 12:5), and when Israel left Egypt “a mixed multitude went up also with them” (Exodus 12:38). Ruth, a Moabite, converted to the Abrahamic covenant through Naomi (see Ruth 1:16); Jonah was called to cry repentance to the inhabitants of Ninevah (see Jonah 1–4); and Isaiah prophetically declared that Israel would be “a light to the Gentiles” (49:6), that “the Gentiles shall come to thy light” (60:3), and that “the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness” (62:2).

During the intertestamental period there appears to be a heightened awareness of, and attraction to, Judaism by Gentiles.¹³ The antiquity of the religion and the ethical guidelines of the law of Moses were two characteristics that appealed to Gentiles.¹⁴ Two Jewish writers, Josephus and Philo, make significant comments about Jewish proselytes. Josephus records that the Jews welcomed those who wished to adopt their laws (*Against Apion* 2.28) and that “the masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances” (*Against Apion* 2.39). Philo says that those who have chosen to follow a single creator must be looked upon “as our friends and kinsmen” (*On the Virtues* 33.179).¹⁵ In part, this is because “those men . . . have left their country, and their friends, and their relations for the sake of virtue and holiness (Greek *hosiotēs*)” (*The Special*

Laws 1.9.52). What is their motivation for conversion? According to Philo, it was because of their search for “the certainty and clearness of truth, and of the worship of the one true and living God” (*On the Virtues* 20.102).¹⁶ In the New Testament, Jesus confirms that Jews actively proselyted converts. He declares that scribes and Pharisees “compass sea and land to make one proselyte” (Matthew 23:15).¹⁷ Josephus also records the conversion of the royal house of Adiabene in the first century AD (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20.2.3–4).

In addition to proselytes to Judaism, we also find evidence for people who were attracted to Judaism, but who did not convert. Philo mentions proselytes who have not undergone circumcision and insists that they are not true converts (*Questions and Answers on Exodus* 2.2). Josephus, in describing those who sent contributions to the temple, makes a distinction between the “Jews throughout the habitable world” and “those who worshipped God” (Greek *sebomenōn ton theon*; *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.7.2). The same Greek phrase is also found in the New Testament to describe Lydia (see Acts 16:14) and Justus (see Acts 18:7). Another parallel New Testament phrase that seems to also describe Gentiles who participate in Judaism to a limited degree are those who “fear God” (*phoboumenoi ton theon*; see Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 17:4, 17). Scholars sometimes identify this group of Jewish sympathizers with the technical term of “God-fearers,”¹⁸ which may help us understand why two Gentiles, the centurion and the Canaanite woman, could appeal to Jesus with such extraordinary faith (see Matthew 8:5–10; 15:21–28). Both the proselytes and the God-fearers seem to have been a fruitful source for early Christian missionary activity.

In summary, the Abrahamic covenant was designed to accomplish two tasks: to create a peculiar and holy people who would become a great nation and to bless all the nations of the earth. This brief sketch of Israelite and Jewish history highlights that there was sometimes a pulsating tension between these two goals. At times an emphasis on the first goal overshadowed the importance of the second, but in the intertestamental period we see the planting of seeds that would mature to harvest in the New Testament. Although there is no evidence for an organized, large-scale Jewish program of proselyting, there is evidence to suggest that missionary work did exist on some level (see Matthew 23:15).¹⁹

When the resurrected Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives and gave his command to take the gospel to all the world, he initiated a major shift in direction for the early church. Given the evidence in Acts, it is fair to say that the church and its leaders struggled to comprehend and act upon the new direction. The Twelve, as represented by Peter and John, did not immediately respond. Rather they continued to concentrate their missionary work among the Jews, particularly those

that they found in and around the temple precinct (see Acts 2; 3:11–26; 4:1–22; 5:12–16, 19–21, 27–42).

Two events seemed to shift the momentum. The first event was Saul’s persecution of Christians after the death of Stephen. This persecution forced Christians to be “scattered abroad” and, as a result, they “went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). In particular, Acts represents this expansion with the work of Philip among the Samaritans and with the Ethiopian eunuch (see Acts 8:5–40). The second event was Peter’s vision of the unclean animals that he reluctantly received in Joppa and that led to him teaching the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household (see Acts 10:9–48). What is significant about the results of both of these events is that the missionary work only expanded to those who already had a relationship with Israel: the Samaritans who had a connection with Israelite religion and lived the law of Moses (although not the oral law), a eunuch who was probably a proselyte because he was returning home after worshipping in Jerusalem (Acts 8:27–28), and the God-fearer Cornelius, “a devout man, and one that feared God [*phoboumenoi ton theon*] with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” (Acts 10:2). The reaction of the Jerusalem church to these missionary endeavors was mixed. Apparently they approved of Philip’s work among the Samaritans, because Peter and John came down and conferred the Holy Ghost upon the converts (see Acts 8:14–17).

Unfortunately, Acts is silent on the reaction of the Jerusalem church to the conversion of the eunuch. However, they react heatedly to the news of Peter’s dealings with Cornelius: “And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11:2–3). This reaction of the Jerusalem church focuses on two of the four elements that, as we have seen, were identified as the key essentials in Jewish cultural and religious identity. Circumcision and table fellowship are also the two issues that are at the very heart of the tension between Peter and Paul in Antioch and evoked important questions for the early church. For example, not only did the early leaders and members struggle to envision a church that included both Jews and Gentiles, they also struggled with the questions of the doctrinal and practical implications of Gentiles becoming part of the seed of Abraham. The command on the Mount of Olives and in Peter’s vision to include Gentiles in the missionary work did not give specific instructions for how it was to be carried out. Paul’s missionary work “to bear [Christ’s] name before the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15) brought the issue to a head, and Antioch became the test case for two competing approaches.

Peter and Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians

Paul wrote to the Galatians in response to charges against him by Christian missionaries who had come to Galatia with a very different approach to the Gentile mission. Although he never specifically mentions their charges, we can get a pretty good sense of them because of the issues Paul chose to address in his response. The three overarching concerns in the epistle seem to center on the issues of Paul's authority and the gospel, how Gentiles *become* a part of the seed of Abraham, and how they then *live* within the covenant.

Scholars generally identify Paul's opponents in Galatia as a group of Jewish Christians, known as Judaizers, who insisted that Gentiles enter the church through the law of Moses. As we have seen in Acts, the Judaizers' approach probably represents the church's earliest interpretation of the Olivet command. From their perspective they were continuing the established method of proselyting Gentiles who were already attracted to Judaism. Paul's earliest missionary endeavors seem to be situated within this same paradigm: when he entered into a new city at the beginning of his first missionary journey he went and taught in the synagogue. There he was able to address both Jews and those who "fear God" (*phoboumenoi ton theon*; Acts 13:16, 26). But by Acts 13:46–47, Paul shifted his missionary focus to the Gentiles. Acts does not provide us with the specific details of how that shift in focus impacted his preaching. At the end of that first mission, however, Christian missionaries from Jerusalem (probably Judaizers) came to Antioch criticizing him for not requiring the Gentile converts to be circumcised (15:1). The result was "no small dissension and disputation with them" (15:2), meaning that there was major contention over the issue.

Similar conflict over Paul's missionary work with the Gentiles is again a prominent concern underlying his epistle to the Galatians. That there is an added criticism of his apostolic authority seems certain given Paul's opening declaration: "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)" (Galatians 1:1).²⁰ In no other epistle does Paul immediately begin with a justification for his apostolic authority. Generally he simply acknowledges that he was "called to be an apostle" (Romans 1:1), sometimes adding the statement "through the will of God" (1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1). The criticism by Paul's opponents in Galatia, however, is not just about his apostleship. The question of authority is directly tied to the gospel that he taught. With language that is closely tied to the opening verse, Paul also defends the veracity of his gospel message: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached

of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11–12).

Paul’s feelings about the attack on his authority and the gospel are reflected in his pejorative choice of words to describe the situation in Galatia. He argued that “false brethren” (Galatians 2:4) had “bewitched” (Galatians 3:1) the Galatian churches, and he fears that he has become their enemy (Galatians 4:16). It is therefore not surprising that immediately after his opening salutation he forgoes his usual thanksgiving and immediately writes:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:6–10)

The more specific issues from the law of Moses that the Judaizers seem to be pushing in both Galatia and Antioch, and that Paul is opposing, is that the church, and all who join it, should continue the practices of circumcision and table fellowship. Remember that these practices were two of the four core elements that enabled Jews to live in a Gentile world while still maintaining their religious covenantal identity. From the Judaizers’ perspective, Paul’s missionary efforts, if unchecked, placed their very identity in jeopardy.

In responding to these accusations, Paul makes reference to three meetings that he had with Peter: two in Jerusalem and one in Antioch. Even though all of these meetings occur outside of Galatia, it is clear that Paul believes that they have a bearing on the argument that he will make to the Galatians. In appealing to these three meetings, it is also clear that there is an underlying tension in the rhetoric of Paul’s description of them. On the one hand, he specifically meets with Peter (and James) when he travels to Jerusalem some three years after his conversion (see Galatians 1:17–19); he also acknowledges the importance of Peter, James, and John as pillars of the church (2:9); and he seeks their approval for his missionary activities among the Gentiles (2:9). Yet, on the other hand, he is quick

to remind his opponents that “they [Peter, James, and John] . . . added nothing to me” (2:6), and, in fact as we have noted, in Antioch he “withstood [Peter] to the face, because he was to be blamed” (Galatians 2:11).

In recounting Paul’s first visit with Peter (Galatians 1:15–19), he seems to be trying to correct “possible misperceptions . . . as to where [he] got his Gospel and how much contact he may have had with the Jerusalem authorities.”²¹ Paul writes that “it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the [Gentiles]” (Greek *ethnoi*; Galatians 1:15–16). Paul addresses the concern about his authority in two ways. First, he uses language that hearkens back to Jeremiah 1:4–5. In doing so, Paul implies that he, like Jeremiah, was foreordained to his call. Second, by referring to his revelatory experience on the road to Damascus, he reminds his audience that his call to preach came directly from the resurrected Jesus.

Paul then insists that “immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus” (Galatians 1:16–17). His point is that just because his contact with the Jerusalem authorities was limited, it did not weaken his authority to teach the Gentiles because his authority did not come from humans, but from God. In making this claim it is important to note that here Paul is not attacking Peter and the other Apostles. Rather, he acknowledges that there were people in Jerusalem who had been Apostles before him, and as one scholar has noted, “He does not call them so-called or pseudo-apostles (contrast 2 Cor. 11:13), there is no pejorative tone to this mention of these persons. . . . [Rather,] this is a tacit admission of the legitimacy of these persons, and that they had a certain pre-eminence over Paul as authorities having been commissioned before Paul.”²²

In some important ways, however, Paul was not like Peter and the other Apostles; he did not come through the same ranks, so to speak.²³ For example, Paul did not meet all of the requirements that were established in Acts 1:21–22 for a person to fill the vacancy in the Twelve: He had not “complicated with [the other disciples] all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that [Jesus] was taken up from us.” His experience on the road to Damascus, however, did qualify him for the second requirement: “one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection” (NRSV, Acts 1:22).

Since Paul often uses the language of his opponents’ rhetoric,²⁴ perhaps one of their issues that they had against him was that he didn’t qualify as an Apostle because he had not been associated with Jesus’ ministry from the beginning, and

therefore, his brand of missionary work among the Gentiles was invalid. Paul's response is that he received his authority directly from God, not from any human, not even from Peter. When eventually he did go to Jerusalem, not until three years after his conversion, he went to get the "history" (Greek *hístōreō*) from Peter. The Greek word *hístōreō* can mean that he went to meet Peter, probably because Paul recognized his status as a pillar in the early church, but the fact that he stayed with him for fifteen days suggests that he also went to get information from him. Perhaps that information included, among other things, Peter's reminiscences of Jesus' ministry. While in Jerusalem, Paul also met with James, the Lord's brother. This visit suggests that Paul also recognized James' importance in the Jerusalem church. But he is quick to note: "But other of the apostles saw I none" (Galatians 1:19). In other words, Paul acknowledges the importance of Peter and James, but his point is that his authority did not come from them; it came because of the revelation that he had experienced on the road to Damascus.

Whereas chapter 1 focuses on Paul's personal credibility, chapter 2 describes his second visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1–10), but this time the focus is on the credibility of his gospel message to the Gentiles.²⁵ Unfortunately, the nature and timing of this visit is the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Paul writes, "Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also" (2:1). The text is unclear as to whether this date was fourteen years after his conversion or after his first visit to Jerusalem. In addition, there is considerable debate over whether this account refers to the Jerusalem Council that Luke describes in Acts 15.²⁶ There are some significant parallels. Both the Jerusalem Council and the meeting described in Galatians 2 are the result of people criticizing Paul's missionary activities among the Gentiles; in both, the issue centers on Paul not requiring Gentiles to be circumcised; both accounts include the same major players: Paul, Barnabas, Peter, James, and the Judaizers; both deal with issues of how Gentiles join the church; both conclude that circumcision is not required for Gentiles to become members of the church; and both agree that this issue involved participation in the Christian church and had nothing to do with "the relationship between non-Christian Jews and Christians"²⁷ (see Galatians 2:1–10; Acts 15:1–11).

Certainly, there are also some differences in the two accounts,²⁸ something that we would expect given that Luke and Paul have very different agendas for recording their accounts. Since Galatians 2 reflects a firsthand account of the events, its details should be given priority, when necessary, over Luke's second-hand account. Some of the unique material that Paul includes in Galatians 2, but is missing in Acts 15, is that he and Barnabas took Titus with them to Jerusalem

(Galatians 2:1). Titus becomes an important living witness that a Gentile could be an acceptable member of the church without being circumcised.²⁹ The passive voice in Galatians 2:3 opens the possibility to infer from this verse that neither Paul nor the Jerusalem authorities required that he be circumcised. In addition, Paul indicates that he went up to Jerusalem by revelation, which again reminds readers that his call in Galatians 1:16 continues to be the undergirding moving force of his missionary work.³⁰ Such a statement does not need to be, as some have argued, a conflict with the account in Acts that they went because of the dispute with those who “came down from Judea” (15:1).³¹

Paul notes two outcomes of this meeting. First, the conference decided that the church would have two parallel missions: “the gospel of the uncircumcision” over which Paul and Barnabas would have stewardship, and “the gospel of the circumcision” over which Peter was given stewardship (Galatians 2:7). There is nothing in this verse to indicate that Paul considered “the gospel of the circumcision” to be “another gospel” which “would pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:6–7) that he strongly objects to in chapter 1. Rather, Galatians 2:7 indicates that Peter, Paul, and Barnabas were united in their missionary efforts, although they recognized that their approaches would have different emphases according to their audience. In addition, we should note that this verse does not necessarily mean that their responsibilities were exclusive to the mission over which they had stewardship. Paul’s commission by the Savior was that he was “a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15), and in his letter to the Romans he notes, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans 10:1). Likewise it appears that Peter was active in Gentile locations such as Antioch, where he was eating with Gentile members, and also gained some missionary converts in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12).

Second, Paul notes that “James, Cephas [Peter], and John,”³² who he acknowledges are recognized (Greek *dokēō*) as “pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the Gentiles [Greek *ethnoi*], and they unto the circumcision” (Galatians 2:9). Paul’s point in verse 6 that the Jerusalem leadership “added nothing to me,” in the context of verse 9, indicates that, unlike the “false brethren” of verse 4, they did not want to change Paul’s methods or insist that Gentiles had to do any more than Paul and Barnabas required of them. The only exception was that the Gentiles should remember the poor,³³ which Paul says he was eager to do (Greek *ho kai espoudasa auto touto poiēsai*; 1:10). Instead, James, Peter, and John gave them the “right hands of fellowship” (2:9). Thus Paul’s

second visit with Peter, like the first, was amicable. Paul recognized the status of Peter as one of the leading Apostles in Jerusalem and came seeking his seal on Paul's missionary work.

The question then remains, if on the Mount of Olives Jesus gave the command to teach the gospel to all the world, why did it take around fifteen years for the church in Jerusalem to come to a decision on how Gentiles were to join the church? The simple answer is that the issue would have had a higher priority for the church in Antioch than it would have for the church in Jerusalem. The evidence in the New Testament suggests that the church in Jerusalem consisted predominantly of Jewish Christians, people who were already living the law of Moses, and who continued to live it even after their conversion to Christianity (Acts 21:20). Christian Jews continued to worship at the temple (21:23–26) and at the synagogue (9:20; 13:5, 14–15; 14:1; 17:1–17; 18:4, 7, 19; 19:8), to participate in the Jewish festivals of Passover (18:21) and Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8), and to make Jewish vows (Acts 18:18).

For all intents and purposes, Christianity was initially viewed as just another one of the varieties of Judaism.³⁴ That's certainly how Saul viewed it as he embarked on his persecutions. In Antioch, however, the situation would have quickly become very different. Although the Christian congregation there began within the synagogue, the city was predominantly Gentile, and the converts to the church eventually were attracted from outside the sphere of the synagogue and the Gentile proselytes and God-fearers. But it wasn't until Judaizers came from Jerusalem the first time that the status quo was upset. The Jerusalem Council settled the issue of how Gentiles should *enter* the church: Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, but it did not address the question of how Gentiles should live *in* the church. That issue came to a head when the Judaizers came to Antioch a second time.

Paul now moves to address his third meeting with Peter, this time in Antioch. He claims that the reason that he “withstood [Peter] to the face” was because “before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.” Even more problematical in Paul's eyes was that “the other Jews [played the hypocrite (Greek *sunupekrithēsan*)] likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their [hypocrisy (Greek *hypokrisei*)]” (Galatians 2:11–13). Therefore Paul confronted Peter, “But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (Galatians 2:14).

At the heart of the tension between Peter and Paul on this occasion was the issue of table fellowship. It seems clear that initially Peter had no reservations about eating with Gentiles, and the imperfect tense of the verb “did eat” (Greek *sunēsthien*) suggests that his actions were not a once-off event but had taken place over a period of time. Such an understanding corresponds with Peter’s experience with Cornelius in Acts 10 and the general statement that he gave at the Jerusalem Council, “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke [i.e., the law of Moses] upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:10–11). Paul does not tell us what the men from James said or did that caused Peter to withdraw, but it seems certain that they disapproved of his eating with Gentiles, just as the Jerusalem church had when they heard that he had done likewise with Cornelius and his household (see Galatians 2:12; Acts 11:1–3).

Again, we reiterate that any understanding of this incident is limited because we do not have access to Peter’s side of the story. Nevertheless, we can say a few things. First, it seems likely that the men from James came to Antioch insisting on a strict separation of “the gospel of the circumcision” and “the gospel of the uncircumcision” that had been established at the Jerusalem Council. Thus they would have argued that Peter should continue to live the law of Moses, as did the Christians in Jerusalem.³⁵ Peter may have felt that his actions to withdraw from the meal would alleviate the tension, at least on the part of the Judaizers. Perhaps he felt that he needed to do what Paul claimed for himself: “And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law” (1 Corinthians 9:20).³⁶ After all, at one point Paul seemed to have done likewise when he had Timothy circumcised “because of the Jews” (Acts 16:1–3).

Second, the imperfect tense of the verbs “withdrew” (Greek *hypestellen*) and “separated himself” (Greek *apōrizen*) indicates that Peter’s withdrawal and separation was done over a period of time. Perhaps this indicates that Peter came to the realization that to maintain the unity of the church the separation of the two missions should indeed be maintained and that he should focus on his particular stewardship.

Third, it seems to me that the best way of understanding the account of the Jerusalem Council in both Galatians 2 and Acts 15 is to recognize that the Lukan account conflates two different meetings: the first of which, where Peter presided, dealt with the issue of circumcision of Gentiles, and that the second, where James seems to be in charge, dealt with the issue of table fellowship.³⁷

This reading helps a number of issues. For example, it explains why Peter seems to be in charge in Acts 15:6–11 but then falls into the background when James delivers the apostolic decree in Acts 15:13–19. It also helps us understand why Paul makes no reference to the apostolic decree when he confronts Peter in Galatians 2:11–14. Lastly, it also helps us understand James' comment in Acts 15:24, "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment." Acts 15 indicates that Paul's opponents "came down from Judea" (Acts 15:1). There is no mention of their relationship with James; that is found only in Galatians 2. If this reading is correct, then the crisis in Antioch precipitated a return to Jerusalem where the matter would be sorted out by James, since the Judaizers were claiming their authority through him. Therefore Peter's actions in Antioch, Paul's response notwithstanding, would not have been a betrayal of guidelines already established by the church. Rather they would simply be evidence of the ongoing development of the church to understand, line upon line, the practical implications of Jesus' direction to take the gospel to all the world.

So, why was Paul so angered over this incident in Antioch, especially since his two previous meetings with Peter had been both cordial and amicable, with Paul implicitly acknowledging Peter's position? Again, there are a number of factors that we should consider. First, we must recognize the tone of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The lack of any kind of thanksgiving section, which he normally includes after his salutation, suggests that Paul is upset as he pens this epistle.³⁸ Second, the reason for Paul writing this epistle is that members in the Galatian churches are in a situation where they are returning to a law-observant understanding of the Christian message. Thus Paul implores them, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage," which he understands to be the law of Moses (Galatians 5:1). I have argued elsewhere that this situation is best understood if the Galatian churches consist predominantly of Gentile God-fearers who, prior to being taught the gospel by Paul, were already attracted to the law of Moses.³⁹ These were Paul's converts. He had taught them that the Christian message is founded on Christ's grace, which is now incompatible with the law of Moses. True, the law was indeed a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ," but only so that they could be made righteous or justified by faith (3:24). Paul himself had been "more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" than "my equals in mine own nation" (1:14). He had lived the law as well as it was possible for a human to do so, but it was God's grace, not the law, that led to his revelation

on the road to Damascus and his conversion. In Paul's mind, Peter's actions at Antioch were a type of what the Saints in Galatia were doing: having received the gospel that comes through Christ's grace, they were trying to turn back to their old ways of understanding God, ways that were not consistent with "the truth of the gospel" (2:5). It is possible that Paul's language in describing this incident is so strong because his opponents were using Peter's actions as evidence that the Galatians should also return to a law-observant understanding of the Christian message. The whole message of Galatians is that all people, both Jew and Gentile, are made righteous through the faith of Jesus Christ and not, as the Judaizers argued, through the law of Moses (2:16). According to Paul, the Christian approach to inviting Gentiles into the kingdom of God was meant to be very different from the Jewish approach. Clearly, Paul had strong feelings on this topic, and it may well be that, in an effort to convince his readers that they were headed in the wrong direction, he intentionally employed rhetoric that heightened the tension of the Antioch incident.

Conclusion

Paul's account of the incident at Antioch is part of a larger rhetorical effort to crush the inroads that Judaizers were making in the churches in Galatia. His description has troubled readers who are uncomfortable with such tension between the early church's most influential leaders. While not explicitly referring to the incident at Antioch, the Petrine epistles make a significant effort to emphasize the unity between Peter and Paul. The epilogue of 1 Peter (5:12–13) includes the names of two individuals who are known to be missionary companions of Paul: Silvanus (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and Marcus (see Acts 13:13; 15:37; Colossians 4:10). The inclusion of these two individuals emphasizes the ties (rather than any rift) between the Pauline and Petrine missionary efforts. In 2 Peter 3:15–16, Paul is described as "our beloved brother," and his epistles, although they are described as having "some things [which are] hard to be understood," are judged to be equivalent to scripture.

The incident in Antioch is a reminder that history, even religious or sacred history, is rarely neat and straightforward. Even though the resurrected Jesus directed his Apostles to expand the missionary work to take the gospel to all the world, the early church clearly struggled to grasp and comprehend all of the implications of such a command. Paul's account in Galatians 2 reminds us that leaders of the church, even after receiving revelation, must still wrestle with complex doctrinal issues. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, even though Peter received a revelation and opened the door for missionary work among the Gentiles,

“there would yet be difficult doctrinal, administrative, and procedural problems to be solved.”⁴⁰

Notes

1. PHEME PERKINS, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 20.

2. For example, in 1853 Jedediah M. Grant wrote, “But if you pass on in their history to seek for uniformity and beauty, you will find some grand flare-ups among them. Look, for instance, at Paul and Peter, disputing and quarrelling with each other [2 Pet. 3:15–16; Gal. 2:11]; and Paul and Barnabas contending, and parting asunder with angry feelings [Acts 15:36–41]. ‘When Peter came to Antioch,’ says Paul, ‘I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed,’ [Gal. 2:11] &c. Paul does not gain much credit with the Mormons for taking this course. We know he had no right to rebuke Peter; but some man said he was like Almon Babbit, *he wanted to boast of rebuking Peter*. He thought it was a feather in his cap because he coped with Peter and rebuked him. Had that affair come before a ‘Mormon’ tribunal, they would have decided in favor of Peter and against Paul. We believe when Paul rebuked Peter, he had in him a spirit of rebellion, and was decidedly wrong in rebelling against the man who held the keys of the kingdom of God on the earth.” In *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 1:346.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 2:463–64.

4. D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *New Testament: Apostles Testify of Christ: A Guide for Acts through Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 161.

5. John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1.

6. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 1.

7. The Maccabean rulers appropriated many Greek cultural traits. They adopted Greek names, their burial monuments and graves “reflect a significant appropriation of Hellenistic forms,” their coins begin to have both Greek and Hebrew inscriptions and symbols, and the literature of the time, even if the text berates Hellenism, often reflects strong Greek stylistic influence (e.g., 1 & 2 Maccabees). For a further discussion, see L. Levine, “Hasmonean Jerusalem: A Jewish City in a Hellenistic Orbit,” *Judaism* 46, no. 2 (1997): 143–46.

8. See the account in 2 Maccabees 6, where Jews revolt against the edict of Antiochus outlawing the practice of Judaism by openly displaying their loyalty to these four aspects of Judaism. In the decree of Sardis, Jewish citizens are afforded the right to meet together to offer prayers and sacrifices to their God, and market officials are directed to have “suitable food for them brought in” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 14.259–61). Josephus also records Caesar Augustus’s decree that Jewish monies sent to the temple are inviolable and that they are exempt from appearing in court on the Sabbath or Sabbath eve (*Antiquities of the Jews* 16.6.1–8). Cicero says that each year Jews from Italy sent gold to

the temple in Jerusalem (*Pro Flacco* 28.66–69; see also Tacitus, *Histories* 5.5). In addition, as we will see, the New Testament shows that for Judaizers, the main areas for concern about letting Gentiles join the church center around circumcision (see Acts 15:1; Galatians 5:1–13) and eating with Gentiles (see Acts 11:3; Galatians 2:11–13). Worship on the Sabbath does not appear to be an issue because the early Christians continued to participate in the synagogue on the Sabbath and then added their service on Sunday. In addition, the early Christians continued to worship at the temple (Acts 21:23–26). For a discussion on pagan attacks on Jewish circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary laws, see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 153–70.

9. See James D. G. Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–18),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5, no. 3 (1983): 12–25.

10. The reference in Acts 18 aligns well with the account of a Roman writer, Suetonius: “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [probably a misspelling for Christus], he expelled them from Rome” (*Claudius* 25.4).

11. Dunn, “Incident at Antioch,” 7–11.

12. For a discussion of early Jewish proselytism, see Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 288–341.

13. Tacitus records that proselytes “increase their [i.e., the Jews’] numbers” (*Histories* 5.5).

14. Emile Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 3 vols., rev. & ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 3.1:150–76.

15. Unless noted otherwise, all Philo quotations are from *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged; New Updated Version*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

16. We find the most detailed description of a conversion to Judaism in a late apocryphal work entitled *Joseph and Aseneth* (third–fourth centuries AD). The impetus for Aseneth’s conversion is meeting Joseph and realizing that he is not interested in marrying anyone who does not share his religious beliefs. The account, however, goes to great length to show that Aseneth’s conversion is spiritual in nature.

17. The only specific extracanonical evidence for “an organized Jewish proselytizing campaign is found in the policies of the Hasmonians toward the Idumeans and Itureans in the late second century B.C.E.” Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 262.

18. There is some debate whether the term *God-fearers* is a technical term for a well-defined class of Gentiles that were connected with the synagogue. The evidence suggests that there were many levels of attachment. For careful discussions on issues, see Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 342–82, and Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 264–72.

19. An opposing view is found in Dieter Georgi, *Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 84, 175, n. 1.

20. To the Corinthians, Paul declared, “for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing” (2 Corinthians 12:11). The question of Paul’s apostolic authority is complex. On the one hand, the Biblical text does not give any specific information of when he was called to be an Apostle. In Acts, Luke first calls him an Apostle when he was at Lystra during his first missionary journey (Acts 14:14). On the other hand, the New Testament uses the word apostle (Greek *apostolos*) in different

ways. The basic meaning of *apostolos* is “messenger,” and the New Testament uses it in this sense, particularly when talking about messengers who are sent out representing various branches of the church (e.g., Philippians 2:25). Sometimes the New Testament uses it in the sense of a priesthood office that is synonymous with the Twelve (Acts 1:21–26), but sometimes the Twelve and the Apostles seem to be two different groups (1 Corinthians 15:5–7). On one occasion Paul refers to a woman, Junia, who is “of note among the apostles” (Romans 16:7). It seems certain that Paul’s opponents in Galatia did not recognize Paul as an Apostle on the same level as Peter and the other Apostles. Paul’s point here is that his apostolic authority came directly from Christ himself.

21. Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 96.

22. Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 116.

23. This is a fact that Paul readily admits in his epistle to the Corinthians. He describes himself as “the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9).

24. Paul writes his letters in response to specific events that are taking place in the respective church communities. Scholars have long noted that in Paul’s Corinthian epistles he uses slogans from his opponents’ rhetoric. For an example, see Denny Burk, “Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul’s Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18, no. 1 (2008): 99–121. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that he may also have included the stories of his interactions with Peter to correct misinformation that his opponents are disseminating about Paul’s relationship with Peter.

25. B. R. Gaventa, “Galatians 1 and 2: Autobiography as Paradigm,” *Novum Testamentum* 28, no. 4 (1986): 316–17.

26. For examples of those who argue for two different events, see Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 15. See also the discussions in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 106–27; Joe Morgado Jr., “Paul in Jerusalem: A Comparison of His Visits in Acts and Galatians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 1994): 55–68. See also Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament: An Illustrated Reference for Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 216–17.

27. Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 14; Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 156.

28. Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 15. See also the discussions in Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 106–27; Morgado, “Paul in Jerusalem,” 55–68.

29. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 88–89.

30. Gaventa, *Galatians 1 and 2*, 316.

31. For examples of those who see Paul’s statement in verse 2 as a reason to separate the two accounts, see Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 15; Morgado, “Paul in Jerusalem,” 61–62.

32. Bart Ehrman argues that the Cephas in Galatians 2:9 refers to someone other than Peter. “Cephas and Peter,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 3 (1990): 463–74. For

a response to his arguments, see Dale C. Allison Jr., “Peter and Cephas: One and the Same,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, no. 3 (1992): 489–95.

33. This verse is the genesis for the Collection that Paul encourages the Gentile converts to contribute to in order to help the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1–3; 2 Corinthians 8:1–11; 9:1–12; Romans 15:25–27).

34. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 255–57; Lawrence H. Schiffman, “At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2, *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period*, ed. E. P. Sanders (London: SCM, 1981), 115–56.

35. Betz, *Galatians*, 108.

36. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.20, in *Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem*, ed. Ernest Evans (London: Oxford, 1972), 51–53.

37. Dunn, “The Incident at Antioch,” 38. Latter-day Saint descriptions of the Jerusalem Conference generally assume that Acts 15:6–35 refers to a single event. For examples, see Robert J. Matthews, “The Jerusalem Council,” in *The Apostle Paul: His Life and His Testimony* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 96–109; Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle*, 93–104; Jared Ludlow, “The Book of Acts: A Pattern for Modern Church Growth,” in *Shedding Light on the New Testament: Acts–Revelation*, ed. Ray L. Huntington, Frank F. Judd Jr., and David M. Whitchurch (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009), 22–24; Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, “Unto the Uttermost Part of the Earth,” in *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles: From the Day of Pentecost through the Apocalypse*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 76–78; Frank F. Judd Jr., “The Jerusalem Conference: The First Council of the Christian Church” *Religious Educator* 12, no. 1 (2011): 55–71.

38. For examples of Paul’s thanksgiving sections in other epistles, see Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 1:4.

39. See Gaye Strathearn, “Law and Liberty in Galatians 5–6,” in *Go Ye into All the World: Messages of the New Testament Apostles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 59–62.

40. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 2:101.