

HOW ETHNICITY PLAYS A ROLE IN THE BOOK OF ACTS: ACTS 8:26-40; 10:1-11:18

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By

Samuel Martins
Student ID
2300087

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Supervisor
Pieter B. Hartog (Assoc. Prof.)

Declaration Sheet Master's Thesis

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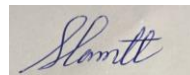
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2. General information about research and subject of the thesis

(Provisional) title of the research / thesis:

How Ethnicity Plays a Role in the book of Acts: Acts 8:26-40; 10:1-11:18.

Short description of the research project and method(s):

The inclusiveness of the Jesus movement has created a universal space that accommodates people of different ethnic backgrounds. In the book of Acts, we have Jews, Greeks, Ethiopians, Maltese, people from Lystra. All the different people who became part of the Jesus movement were incorporated through acknowledging Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets, and that he is the initiator of the new divine covenant. Through this covenant in Christ, all people, Jews and gentiles, tribes and tongues are reconciled back to God and brought into fellowship with one another. But there is a problem of identifying persons who became part of this Jesus movement in the narratives of Acts. Acts uses ethnic markers to characterize persons. In recent scholarship, there are debates in trying to understand the ethnic characterization of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 and Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18. This thesis carried out a study on Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 10:1-11:18 using a literary/narratological reading of the texts to understand how Acts characterizes these persons. The eunuch is labelled as an Ethiopian (Αἰθίοψ) in Acts 8:27 and Cornelius is labelled as an *Allophulos* (ἄλλόφυλος) in Acts 10:28. The findings of this research have shown that this eunuch is a gentile and a foreigner to the Jewish background. He is the first gentile to join this movement and he is a representative of those at the farthest part of the earth. And Cornelius is not a Jew, but a foreigner also. He is a man with an exemplary piety. Cornelius is the second gentile to join the Jesus movement. The

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God, the Father of all and the giver of knowledge and wisdom. And I also dedicate this thesis to

my lovely wife (Philomina) and daughter (Hesed/Grace)

My mum and all my siblings, nieces, and nephews

I love you all.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCE- Before Christian Era

CE- Christian Era

ESV – English Standard Version

LXX - Septuagint

MT – Masoretic Text

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1.0 CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that ethnicity played a role in ancient contexts, in the New Testament, and in the book of Acts of the Apostles.¹ From the perspective of the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts of the Apostles, there is a dynamic interplay between human diversity and the divine purpose of God for humanity towards becoming God's people.² This thesis studies two passages from the book of Acts to show how ethnicity plays a role in the book of Acts. These passages are Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 10-11:18. These passages illustrate how the gospel of Jesus, the risen Lord, broke ethnic grounds, and barriers and reconciled all humans to God.³ This thesis explores the exegetical relevance of biblical texts, even as it focuses on the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius respectively. The study shows how the Jesus movement, through the influence of the divine agent, beats down ethnic barriers by transcending ethnicity to become a universal community which houses both Jews and non-Jews from various ethnic backgrounds.

This study examines how ethnicity influences the narrative and theological constructs within the Book of Acts, focusing on Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 10:1-48. In my analyses of these passages, the study seeks to uncover the role ethnicity plays in the book of Acts of the Apostles, by studying how the Acts applies ethnic markers in the characterization of persons within these narratives.

¹ Nagel, Joane. *Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 152; Kinoshita, Glen. "The Book of Acts as a Case Study: Examining the Ministry of Reconciliation," *Justice, Spirituality & Education Journal*: Vol. 2015, Article 7, (2015): 73-90. (79-81). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jsej/vol2015/iss2015/7>

² Hays, J. Daniel. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 21.

³ Kinoshita, "The Book of Acts as a Case Study", (79-81).

1.1 The Importance of Ethnicity in Biblical Interpretation

To understand the connection between social dynamics and identity matters, ethnicity is a very important and indispensable phenomenon to consider. The study helps to understand the connection between different groups and the differences that exist between them in the ancient world.⁴ For instance, the study of ethnicity informs today's biblical reader about the boundary differences that existed between Jews and non-Jews in ancient times because of their cultural differences. It is on this note that scholars like J. Daniel Hays stress that the understanding of historical and cultural settings of biblical texts works by recognizing the ethnic diversity present in the Bible. He further affirms that ignoring these aspects is prone to arriving at twisted interpretations that undermine the significant and meaningful elements of biblical narratives.⁵ In other words, ethnic contents are important in trying to understand the real message of biblical texts. And it also helps the reader to understand what the author tries to communicate to his primary audience.

1.2 Overview of Selected Passages

1.2.1 Acts 8:26-40

This passage discusses a divinely initiated private encounter between Philip, the evangelist, and the Ethiopian eunuch. He is characterized as a high-ranking official at the court of the Ethiopians' queen. This eunuch is the custodian of the treasury of the queen of Kandace.⁶

⁴ Jaspal, R. & Cinnirella, M. "The Construction of Ethnic Identity: Insights from Identity Process Theory," *Ethnicities*. 12(5):503-530. Here is 504-5. DOI:[10.1177/1468796811432689](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796811432689)

⁵ Hays, J. Daniel. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 21.

⁶ Tannehill, Robert C. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, 2 vols.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986), 2:108.

According to Robert C. Tannehill, this passage demonstrates the spread of the gospel of Jesus in a geographical dimension. And that, this passage fittingly demonstrates how the gospel transcends ethnic distinctions. This happened through the reaching out of the gospel to a representative of those at the “ends of the earth” and by his conversion into the community of God’s people, a community that knows no ethnic bound.⁷ Through the divine initiative that attracted Philip to him, the eunuch willingly accepted the gospel concerning the life and messiahship of Jesus. Through divine providence, water was made available, and this eunuch willingly showed interest to get baptized. This baptism functions symbolically as a mark of inclusion into the community of Jesus followers. This narrative illustrates a divine vindication of a foreigner from a Jewish background who identifies with the God of Israel.⁸ The inclusion of this Ethiopian eunuch into the community of God’s people is pivotal in the narrative of Acts because it marks the emergence of the gentile mission signifying the breaking of all ethnic hostilities, thereby, presenting both Jews and gentiles as equal before God.⁹

1.2.2 Acts 10-11:18

Like in the narrative of Philip and the eunuch, this passage discusses a divinely initiated encounter between Cornelius and the apostle Peter. Cornelius is a Roman centurion who is based in Caesarea. He is described as a devout man who feared the God of Israel. Cornelius gave alms generously to people, and he prays continually to God. The passage outrightly describes Cornelius as a “God-fearer” (10:2).¹⁰ His outstanding piety makes him to earn favor before God by being vindicated through a vision that instructs him to send for Peter.¹¹ In his

⁷ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108.

⁸ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108; Dunn, James. D. G. *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospel*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 185.

⁹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108; Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospel*, 186-7.

¹⁰ Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 430.

¹¹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 430.

opinion about this divine influence, James D. G. Dunn argues that this is an attempt of bridging the gap between a Jew and gentile.¹² It demonstrates a sort of breaking of ethnic borders.

Similarly, Beverly R. Gaventa argues that this passage is important in the book of Acts of the apostles. Her reason is that it shows how the Holy Spirit is involved in doing the work of bridging the gap between Jews and gentiles. Furthermore, Gaventa observes that the openness of Cornelius to Peter and the gift of the Holy Spirit, before baptism, does challenge members of the Jesus movement. She asserts that this shapes the understanding of purity, inclusion, and the preconditions of belonging to the people of God.¹³ Likewise, Tannehill and Joel B. Green observe that the conversion and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the household of Cornelius identifies a shift in the understanding of God's salvation plan for gentiles.¹⁴

These passages illustrate the universality of the gospel and the process of divine vindication of non-Jews brought into the community of God's people through believing in the message of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus serves as the fulfilment of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, thereby making him the initiator of the new covenant. While this covenant breaks down all social and religious dominance, it brings in people from different ethnic background into a table fellowship. This inclusivity of gentiles emphasizes unity and equality between Jews and gentiles and presents them (both) as a unified people of God.

1.2 Ethnicity from a Broader Perspective

1.3.1 Ethnicity in Ancient Context

¹² Dunn, D. G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Ed. Scot McKnight. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 166.

¹³ Gaventa, Beverly R. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 150.

¹⁴ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 430.

In the ancient era, ethnicity played an important role in structuring societies. It also helps in defining the identity of people that were in the society. Take for instance, the ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman world, and during the early Jewish and Christian communities, the people present in these societies were categorized based on their respective ethnic grouping. Their cultural practices and beliefs mark their differences. Each person's ethnic identity in these societies is tied with his or her own origin, language, and religion.¹⁵

In the Roman empire, society was littered with people of various ethnic groups. This diversity was as a result of the conquest and the integration of numerous and different kinds of people. Cities like Rome, Antioch and Alexandria are examples of this diversity. There were Romans, Greeks, Syrians, Jews, Egyptians, and many other kinds of people there. Their ethnic differences affected their social interactions, including the practice of religion and economic activities. This ethnic differences in the Roman empire helps to understand the ethnic dynamics that flows in the New Testament. This is so because, this is the world of the New Testament. The structure of the administration and military strategies of the empire contributed to the movement of people. It also contributed to how people related and interacted across ethnic differences.¹⁶

1.3.2 Relationship between Jews and Non-Jews

According to E. P. Sanders, the relationship between Jews and gentiles is a central theme in the New Testament. Sanders reflects on the longtime tension and interaction between Jews and gentiles. He asserts that Jews upheld a distinct identity through their religious practices. They also show their uniqueness through their social customs and their dietary laws. This makes

¹⁵ Nagel, Joane. *Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 152.

¹⁶ Gruen, Erich S. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 85-92.

them different from the non-Jews present in the Roman world. Sometimes the differences they exhibit causes frictions and misunderstandings with the non-Jewish people (Acts 15). Sanders argues that there are various instances in which Jewish and gentile relations shift from a conflicts and prejudice case to a reconciliation and unity case. For example, Jesus' interaction with gentiles in the gospel often challenges Jewish attitudes. And that indicates the inclusiveness of Jesus' ministry and the portrayal of the breaking down of ethnic barriers.¹⁷

The Jesus movement promotes a new unified identity among the followers of Jesus.¹⁸ The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is another important event during the formation of the Jesus movement. This council addresses the question whether circumcision and observing Jewish laws is necessary for gentiles as they interact with Jewish believers. This council, under the leadership of James, underlines efforts to resolve ethnic tensions. This effort is aimed at creating a harmonious relationship as the Jews and the gentiles share same faith in Jesus. This relationship creates a communion that surpasses barriers of ethnicity and even biological attachments.¹⁹

1.4 Backgrounds of the book of Acts

Traditionally, the book of Acts is attributed to Luke, and it serves as the continuation of the Gospel by Luke. The book of Acts of the Apostles gives the account of events from the ascension of Jesus to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome. The book of Acts canonically connects the Gospels and the epistles. The book of Acts is structured around some certain characters and some certain events. Those characters include Peter, Stephen, and Paul the events include the

¹⁷ Sanders, E.P. *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 59-62.

¹⁸ Martyn, J. Louis. *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 357-360.

¹⁹ Aryanto, Antonius G. A. W. "The Significant of God-Fearers for the Formation of the Early Christian Identity in Acts 8-10," in *Jurnal Jaffray*, 20(1), (2022). 74-93. Here is 87-91 <http://doi.org/10.25278/jj.v20i1.621>

spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to other new places around the Roman Empire. The narratives in the book of Acts stress the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit instructs, guides, and empowers the Apostles for the mission work, working towards the realization of the promise in Acts 1:8.²⁰

1.5 Theological themes in Acts

The book of Acts contains several theological themes. Firstly, the book of Acts emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as the divine active force behind the engagements of the Apostles in creating the reach of the gospel to all people. The Holy Spirit causes the conviction of sin that led to repentance through the preachings of the apostles. Those who got converted were added to the numbers of the Jesus' followers.²¹ The presence of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost played a significant role in the spread of the gospel towards other geographical spaces. The apostles were empowered to witness to the message of the risen Lord and the kingdom of God from Jerusalem, across all Judea and Samaria, and to "the ends of the earth".²²

Secondly, the book of Acts of the Apostles emphasizes witnessing and mission. The apostles preached the gospel by bearing witness to the testimony of Jesus' resurrection and his teachings.²³

Thirdly, the book of Acts of the Apostles emphasizes the ethnic inclusivity of the Jesus movement. Through the divine active force and the involvement of human agents such as the

²⁰ Bauckham, Richard. *James and the Jerusalem Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 40-45.

²¹ Levine, Amy-Jill. *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: Harper One, 2014), 78-81.²² Wright, N.T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1245-1250.

²² Wright, N.T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1245-1250.

²³ Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 199.

apostles, the book of Acts of the Apostles demonstrates the vindication of gentiles from not being associated with the Jewish people who claims adherence to the Law of Moses.²⁴ An example of this is the Ethiopian eunuch. This narrative demonstrates how the Kingdom of God, through the messianic proclamation of Jesus, transcends Jewish standards and include this foreigner of the Jewish *ethnos*. Other examples of similar narratives include the vindication of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11-18, the ministration of Paul to the Maltese people in Acts 28:1-10. These are some examples of gentiles coming into fellowship with Jewish believers. In this inclusivity that this movement upholds, gentiles do not have to become Jews in order to identify with the God of Israel as Jesus followers. Rather, Jesus' Jewishness became a means through which gentiles go into fellowship with Jews. But this fellowship operates on the basis that gentiles must forsake their idolatrous practices, while they relate with God, through Jesus the Lord of all.²⁵

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Before I commence my study, I find it necessary to define some of the technical terms that need to be understood. This will help my reader to grasp the real flow of my thoughts within the body of the research.

1.6.1 Ethnicity

According to Thomas H. Eriksen, ethnicity is an anthropological phenomenon that explains how a group of people define themselves as different from other peoples' group. Members of ethnic groups define themselves across shared identities such as cultural, linguistic,

²⁴ Esler, Philip. *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 122-5.

²⁵ Aryanto, "The Significant of God-Fearers," 81.

and historical traits. Eriksen opines that ethnicity is dynamic and multifaceted. It involves a sense of feeling belonging to a group with a shared identity.²⁶ According to Fredrik Barth and Teresa Morgan, ethnicity describes a “social organization that is based on shared cultural, ancestral, religious, territorial, and linguistic traits.”²⁷ Eriksen highlights that ethnicity is not a static or a singular identity. But he opines that it is negotiated and constructed through social interactions and through historical context.²⁸ This agrees with what Eric Barreto writes about the flexibility of ethnic identities. Ethnic identities are not fixed, rather they are malleable and fluidic.²⁹ Anthony D. Smith observes that it is important to recognize the role of power dynamic in shaping of ethnic identities. He affirms that dominant groups often impose their own definitions and boundaries on minor groups.³⁰ This is a sign of human domination. Thus, ethnicity can be a source of social tension and conflict. And it can also be a basis for solidarity and communal support.³¹

²⁶ Eriksen, Thomas H. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives, 3rd ed.* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 16.

²⁷ See Barth, Fredrik. "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 10; Morgan, Teresa. "Society, Identity, and Ethnicity in the Hellenic World," in *Ethnicity, Race, Religion Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation*. Ed. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, T&T Clark, 2020), 23.

²⁸ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 16.

²⁹ Barreto, Eric D. *Ethnic Negotiations: The Function of Race and Ethnicity in Acts 16*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 55.

³⁰ Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 20.

³¹ See Ibita, Ma. Marilou S. *Ethnicity, Race, Religion Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the (In)Visibility of the Christ believers' 'Trans-ethnicity': A Lowland Filipina Catholic's Perspective*. Ed. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, T&T Clark, 2020), 183-201.

1.6.2 Ethnic Markers

These are identifiers of ethnicity. They define ethnic boundaries and categorization of ethnic groups. These identifiers include geography, language, tribe, kinship, culture, religion, ancestry, descent, diet.³²

1.6.3 Jesus Movement

In this thesis, the Jesus Movement refers to the community of Jesus followers in the first century CE. It all started with Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew. The Jesus Movement was a ministry that is into healing, exorcism, and preaching about the kingdom of God. During Jesus' ministry, people began to gather around him in small groups. Those he called became his followers. Those who gathered around him identified him as the Messiah and the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets. Jesus' crucifixion did not bring an end to this movement. The activities of this movement continued with his disciples after he had ascended into heaven (Acts 1:6-11). He commissioned and empowered them for the advancement of the kingdom of God to all people, to all tribes, to all kindred and to all nations. Members of this movement were first called Christians at Antioch, Syria in Acts 11:26.³³ But the two passages I am studying in this thesis are events that took before the Antioch experience. Therefore, in my analysis, I refer to this group of Jesus followers as the "Jesus Movement", and not as Christians.

³² Boyd, Robert and Richerson, Peter J. "The Evolution of Ethnic Markers" in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (1987), 65-79. (66). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/656396>.

³³ Irvin, Dale T. and Sunquist, Scott. *History of the World Christian Movement: Volume 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453*. (Great Britain: T&T Clark, 2001), 1.

1.7 Literature Review

This literature review is structured into two main sections. In the first section, I briefly discuss the findings of some biblical scholars who carried out research on ethnicity in the book of Acts of the Apostles. Their research engages the socio-religious context of the Jewish and gentile relationships in Acts and the role of the inclusivity of the Jesus movement towards accepting gentiles into the relationship with their Jewish brethren.

In the second section, I briefly discuss some of the arguments about the ethnic categorization of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Some scholars argue that he is a Jew, while others argue that he is a gentile. This research argues that he is a gentile, a foreigner to the Jewish background. And on the side of the Cornelius narrative, some scholars argue that he is the first gentile to join the Jesus movement, while others argue that the Ethiopian eunuch is the first to join the Jesus movement. This research argues that Cornelius is not the first to join the Jesus movement, rather it is the Ethiopian eunuch, even though Cornelius' inclusion is pivotal to the future of the Jesus movement. Still on the Cornelius narrative, some scholars argue that he is a God-fearer, while other scholars argue that he is a proselyte. But this research argues that he is a God-fearer and not a proselyte.

Philip Esler and John Elliot share a similar perspective about the role that the Mosaic Law plays in creating a social distance between Jewish Christians and gentile Christians in the book of Acts. This creates tension amongst these two groups. Esler emphasizes on the social problem militating against human co-existence between the Jewish people and the gentiles due to the Law given to Moses for the children of Israel to abide by. Esler highlights the death of Stephen, who was executed on the charges that he expressed a negative attitude towards the Jewish temple.³⁴ Esler further argues that the book of Acts of the Apostles was written for the

³⁴ Esler, Philip. *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts. The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 122-5.

purpose of trying to legitimize the Jesus movement. He also adds that the book of Acts demonstrates the parting of the ways from Jewish practices and laws with the lifestyle of true Jesus followers.³⁵ And on this same note, Elliott refers to Jesus as the Jew through whom gentiles can share the godly inheritance with the Jewish people.³⁶

John Elliott analyses the narrative of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18. Elliott discusses the revocation of the Jewish purity codes as a way to show the inclusion of Cornelius. Elliott stress that this is a strategy used by the author of Acts to show the transition of Jewish exclusivism to the inclusivism of the Jesus movement. That by this, Jewish attitude of creating social distance with non-Jews is broken. Elliott also discusses about temple purity. Elliott emphasizes the role of the messiahship of Jesus, who transcends over ethnic differences.³⁷ For this reason, Elliott describes the inclusion of Cornelius into the Jesus movement “as a transition from ‘Temple and exclusivity’ towards ‘household and inclusivity’”.³⁸

In his study on ethnicity in Acts, Eric Barreto analyses the way in which the book of Acts represents Jewishness and gentleness. Barreto further studies how these two relate to each other. He highlights how the Jewishness of Jesus and also of the other apostles serves to authorize the Jewish identity of the Jesus movement even as it advances towards gentiles. Barreto’s findings show that the principle of inclusiveness of the Jesus movement rests only on negotiations between different ethnicities, thereby redefining a new identity that supersedes ethnic boundaries.³⁹ Barreto shows that the concept of ethnicity is relevant to the understanding of the narratives and theology of the book of Acts and explains how Jews and gentiles came

³⁵ Esler, Philip. *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 122-3.

³⁶ Elliott, John Hall. Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts: A contrast in social institutions. *HTS Theologese Studies / Theological Studies* 47(1) (1991). 102-108. DOI:[10.4102/hts.v47i1.2356](https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v47i1.2356)

³⁷ Elliott, “Temple versus Household”, 102.

³⁸ Elliott, Elliott, “Temple versus Household”, 103-5.

³⁹ Barreto, Eric D. *Ethnic Negotiations: The Function of Race and Ethnicity in Acts 16*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 2-23.

together into a fellowship that stands more significant and relevant than their ethnic differences.⁴⁰

Similar to the views of Barreto on ethnicity in Acts, Robert C. Tannehill critically employs a narratological reading of the book of Acts of the Apostles. Tannehill emphasizes the way the book of Acts demonstrates the inclusion of gentiles into the Jesus movement through the ministries of the apostles and the evangelists. He also focuses on the unity of the members of the group when they discover their identity in Jesus. Tannehill argues that the book of Acts does challenge ethnic boundaries, for the book of Acts presents an imagery of the future of this community because its peoples' identity transcends traditional and cultural boundaries. In this community, though there are diversities, everyone sticks to their primary identity in Jesus, which does not know any ethnic differences.⁴¹ Basically, the findings of Tannehill make emphasis on unity in diversity.

Joshua Jipp analyses Acts 28:1-10. This text is about Paul's encounter with the Maltese people. Jipp discloses how the author of Acts of the Apostles employs a strategy to raise the cultural image of the Maltese people. According to Jipp, the narrator employs a socio-cultural ideology of raised tropes in order to subvert the ethnic stereotype of this people of Malta. He argues that the author uses the words "barbarians" and "lovers of mankind" to raise the trope of the inhospitable and uncultured, and superstitious people".⁴² Jipp argues that the author employs a ritualized hospitality/friendship (ritual of *xenia*) in order to demonstrate a fictively created relationship, which is an ethnic reasoning. It demonstrates how Acts establishes a relationship that incorporates the Maltese people with those who worship the God of Paul (the God of Israel). The Maltese people joined the Jesus movement. Jipp further highlights that the

⁴⁰ Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations*, 23-5.

⁴¹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 43-48.

⁴² Jipp, Joshua W. "Hospitable Barbarians: Luke's Ethnic reasoning in Acts 28:1-10." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2017): 1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26368318>.

author of Acts employs respect for cultures of those who are getting incorporated into the Jesus movement. Jipp refers to this strategy as a reversal of ethnic stereotyping.⁴³

Pieter B. Hartog writes on Acts 10, about the encounter between Peter and Cornelius. Hartog analyzes the ethnic marker that the author used to characterize Cornelius. Hartog makes a contrast between the ethnic marker of Cornelius, who is referred to as an *alloghulos* (ἀλλόφυλος), and the ethnic marker used by the author to characterize the Ethiopian (Αἰθίοψ) eunuch in Acts 8. Hartog draws the attention of his readers to the characterization of Cornelius, opining that this ethnic marker is not really an ethnic marker. Rather, *alloghulos* is a marker that identifies someone from a different ethnicity in a general sense. So, Cornelius is from a different ethnicity, a foreigner. He stresses that the ethnic marker in Acts 8 (Αἰθίοψ) explicitly categorizes the character that bears the marker.⁴⁴

Gay L. Byron studies ancient texts like the New Testament and the apocrypha books. Her research is aimed at critically uncovering racial dynamics dynamic from these early Christian writings. Byron's findings help to give awareness and to show sensitivities how ethnicity and racial differences were communicated in these ancient writings. Her work studies the rhetorical use of whiteness and blackness and how black was negatively represented and whiteness was considered as a symbol of virtue and purity. She uses the case of the Ethiopian eunuch to make her claims on how he was marginalized because of his blackness and his physiological challenge.⁴⁵ The findings of Byron uncover the interplay of rhetorical dynamics around color symbolism (white and black).

⁴³ Jipp, "Hospitable Barbarians, 1-23.

⁴⁴ Hartog, Pieter B., "The Apostle and the Foreigner: Cornelius' Vindication and Peter's Transformation in Acts 10," in *Meaningful Meetings with Foreigners in the World of the Bible: Essays in Honour of Klaas Spronk on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. Marjo C.A. Korpel and Paul Sanders, CBET 119 (Leuven: Peeters, 2024), 233–46. "Page numbers in references to this article are based on the author's proofs, which do not match page numbers in the final publication."

⁴⁵ Byron, Gay L. *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 15-29, 53-104.

In his interpretation of Acts 10, Hartog opines that this passage does not refer to a conversion of Cornelius. This interpretation challenges the conventional interpretation of the text, which suggests that Cornelius was converted. Hartog stresses this by showing that Cornelius does not convert from one thing to something else. Rather, Peter was transformed. As for Cornelius, Hartog suggests that Cornelius is an exemplar of piety.⁴⁶ Hartog's findings about ethnic markers are similar to the aim of this research, but Hartog does not show to his readers how the book of Acts applies ethnic markers in the characterization of person. He only analyzes the ethnic markers in Acts 10. This is one of the major aspect this research intends to address, even if it only focuses on Acts 8:26-40 and 10:1-11:18. And for other literatures I reviewed, they are relevant to biblical studies by showing the theology of Acts and the central message of the book. And that message holds strong to the inclusivity of the Jesus movement. But they have not also discussed, fully, how the book of Acts applies ethnic markers in the characterization of persons.

1.7.1 Ongoing debates on the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40

1.7.1.1 *The Ethiopian Eunuch as a Gentile (Foreigner)*

Several scholars provide a consistent interpretation of the narrative about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. They emphasize its significance for the spread of the Jesus movement to the 'ends of the earth'. But there is no general agreement about the eunuch's ethnic status, and whether he is a Jewish proselyte, a God-fearer, or a gentile. For instance, Tannehill, Richard P. Thompson, John T. Carroll, and Scot McKnight read the Ethiopian eunuch as a gentile. These scholars argue that, first, this Ethiopian's origin already describes the eunuch as someone who is outside of the Jewish diaspora. Secondly, they argue that his high-ranking position as an official in the courts of the Ethiopian queen, would make it unlikely for him to be a Jewish

⁴⁶ Hartog, "The Apostle and the Foreigner", 1-14.

proselyte.⁴⁷ F. F. Bruce reads the eunuch's narrative as a conversion which demonstrates the reach of the gospel beyond the boundaries of the Jewish people. Bruce points out that this event is a fulfillment of the Isaianic prophecy about the removal of the ban on foreigners (Isa. 56:3-5). This shows the inclusion of Ethiopia in the salvation plan of God.⁴⁸ Other scholars too, like Richard N. Longenecker, Carl Holladay and others agree about the position of reading this Ethiopian eunuch as a gentile. They claim that his inclusion into the Jesus movement is a representation of the inclusion of gentiles. They further emphasize about his high status and influence as a court official.⁴⁹

According to John Polhill, the eunuch's role as a highly positioned man, his conversion is significant in the mission to the gentiles. He therefore reads the eunuch as the first gentile to join the Jesus movement.⁵⁰ Beverly R. Gaventa describes this conversion as the breaking of both ethnic and social boundaries in the book of Acts.⁵¹ Bruce claims that the eunuch played the role of a gentile, and not a proselyte.⁵² Polhill highlights the kind of ambiguity that surrounds the religious identity of the eunuch. But he suggests that this story of this eunuch signifies the gospel's reach to gentiles.⁵³

Carl Holladay describes this eunuch as a pagan African.⁵⁴ Nwando Achebe describes the Ethiopian eunuch as someone who has been hearing of Jerusalem and decided on his own desire

⁴⁷ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 109, 111; Carroll, John T. *Luke: A Commentary*. (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2012), 215-6; McKnight, Scot. *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary, 1 Edition*. (n.c: Eerdmans Press, 2015), 286-8; Thompson, Richard P. (2010). "Luke-Acts: The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles". In Aune, David E. (ed.). *The Blackwell Companion to The New Testament*. Wiley-Blackwell. 396-431. *ISBN 978-1-4443-1894-4*

⁴⁸ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 175.

⁴⁹ Longenecker, Richard N. *Acts* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 136-138; Holladay, Carl R. *Acts: A Commentary, NTL*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 188. Kurz, *The Acts of the Apostles*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press), 46.

⁵⁰ Polhill, John B. *Acts* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 267.

⁵¹ Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 140-146.

⁵² ⁵² Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 173-179.

⁵³ Polhill, *Acts*, 266-274.

⁵⁴ Holladay, Carl R. *Acts: A Commentary, NTL* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 188.

to go and worship at the Temple. He can embark on such a journey because of his high economic status and position as an official (δυνάστης) in the queen's kingdom.⁵⁵ To a far end, some scholars clearly refer to the Ethiopian eunuch as a black African. For Mary Kay and Cora Barnhart, this Ethiopian is a black or dark-skinned African eunuch.⁵⁶ Byron describes the eunuch as an outsider to Judaism and analyses the expression δυνάστης Κανδάκης to show that this eunuch is a black African. Byron marks this eunuch as a “signal of a political threat,” and as a “geopolitical enemy of Rome”.⁵⁷ Felicia LaBoy identifies this eunuch as an African. She gave reason based on undermining a racialized reading of the text. She observes that,

“an African American biblical hermeneutic insist that an acknowledgement of the anthropological attributes of black Africans in the biblical text has the ability to undermine racialized readings of the biblical text and the often racist, colonial/neo-colonial evangelistic and ethical practices of a particular believing community towards another.”⁵⁸

1.7.1.2 The Ethiopian eunuch as a God Fearer/a Proselyte

Here, the argument is that, some scholars read the Ethiopian eunuch as a God-fearer. God-fearers and proselytes are categories of people who are somewhere in-between Judaism and the religions of the gentiles. E. J. Schnabel, Craig S. Keener, David Rudolph read the eunuch as an Ethiopian proselyte. These scholars argue that for this eunuch to travel such a distant journey must suggest that he has a connection with Judaism. They further stress that the eunuch's interest in the prophesy of Isaiah suggests his familiarity with the scriptures of the

⁵⁵ Achebe, Nwando. *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa*, Ohio Short Histories of Africa (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020), 75–78.

⁵⁶ Copeland, Mary K. and Barnhart, Cora. “The conversion of the first Gentile, a dark-skinned, African eunuch” (“The Ignored Miracle of the Dark-Skinned Eunuch: Ideological Texture Analysis of Acts 8:26–40,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 10 [2020]: 81–101, 81, https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/vol10no1/Vol10Iss1_JBPL_7_Copeland_Barnhart.pdf)

⁵⁷ Byron, Gay L. *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 111-12.

⁵⁸ LaBoy, Felicia Howell. “You Want Me to Talk to Whom? Explorations in Fear and Faith from the Underside of the Bible,” *RevExp* 115 (2018): 26–39, 29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637317754282>.

Jewish people.⁵⁹ Outrightly, Schnabel argues that the eunuch has connection with Judaism, plausibly he is a proselyte.⁶⁰

1.7.1.3 *The Ethiopian Eunuch as a Jew*

As some scholars read the Ethiopian eunuch as a non-Jew, other scholars suggest reading the Ethiopian eunuch as an ethnic Jew. Margaret Aymer and John Ahn argue that he was already an ethnic Jew. They suggest that the eunuch should be read as one of those exilic Jews that are in diaspora.⁶¹ Margaret Aymer challenges traditional interpretations of the Ethiopian eunuch in biblical scholarship. She contends that the traditional interpretation of the Ethiopian eunuch as a "black African" is problematic and oversimplified. She argues that the Ethiopian eunuch's ethnicity is ambiguous and cannot be reduced to a single modern ethnic or national category. Aymer further presented a fabulation which suggests reading the Ethiopian eunuch as a Jew in diaspora.⁶² But does such a fabulation do justice to the reading of the text? Gaventa argues that reading the eunuch as an Ethiopian is a deliberate choice to show the breaking of boundaries of socialization and ethnicity. She reflects that the gospel is inclusive in nature.⁶³

⁵⁹ Schnabel, E. J. *Early Christian Mission. 2 vols.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity/ London: Apollos), 685; Rudolph, David. *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish contours of Pauline flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9: 19–23*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016, (116-130); Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 4: 24: 1-28: 31*. (Baker Academic, 2015), 197-214.

⁶⁰ Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 685.

⁶¹ Aymer, Margaret. Exotica and the Ethiopian of Acts 8:26–40: Toward a Different Fabula. *JBL* 142, no. 3 (2023): 533–546; John J. Ahn, Mark J. Boda, Frank R. Ames, and Mark Leuchter, eds., *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration*, AIL 21 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 28.

⁶² Aymer, "Toward a Different Fabula", 533–546.

⁶³ Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 147.

1.7.2 Ongoing debates on Cornelius the Roman Centurion Acts 10-11:18

The story of Cornelius is often referred to as the conversion of the first gentile. Bruce reads Cornelius as the first gentile convert. He also argues that this narrative marks the official acceptance of gentile into the Jesus movement. Bruce highlights that Cornelius' conversion was duly recognized at the Jerusalem council, claiming that it took precedence of the Ethiopian eunuch's narrative. Bruce also stresses on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which characterizes the Cornelius narrative. He claims that this marks a very important milestone in the gentile mission.⁶⁴ Similar to Bruce's opinion, Richard N. Longenecker interprets the Cornelius narrative as the first gentile conversion. He claims that the story demonstrates the power of the gospel over ethnic boundaries.⁶⁵ Bock stresses the importance of Peter's vision. He claims that the vision redefines Jewish dietary laws which shows the extension of the gospel and demonstrates how inclusive the mission to the gentile is.⁶⁶ Haenchen reads Cornelius as a gentile and the first non-Jew to be included into the Jesus movement.⁶⁷ His argues that the author did not state that the Ethiopian eunuch was a gentile.⁶⁸

Should Cornelius be read as a proselyte? Scholars like Martin Goodman, Bock and Polhill argue that Cornelius is a proselyte. Goodman claims that to be a proselyte one does not necessarily require a complete formal process of conversion. He adds that, the depth of Cornelius' commitment to Judaism takes a form of strong affiliation to Judaism. Thus, Goodman lists him as a proselyte.⁶⁹ Bock and Polhill assert that it is possible that Cornelius is

⁶⁴ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 202-4.

⁶⁵ Longenecker, *Acts*, 155-7.

⁶⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 392-5.

⁶⁷ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 110; Haenchen, Ernst. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. Translated by Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 315.

⁶⁸ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 315.

⁶⁹ Goodman, Martin. *Mission and conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 75-76.

a proselyte or he may be making an effort to be one.⁷⁰ Paula Fredriksen, in contrast, emphasizes the significance of God-fearers in Jewish communities. She argues that exceptional people like Cornelius played a key role in their inclusion into the Jesus movements. She claims that people like Cornelius helped in the spread of the monotheistic idea of Judaism among gentiles. She points out that Cornelius was a good connector that connects Jews and other peoples from the Greco-Roman society and that people like Cornelius helped in the expansion of the Jesus movement.⁷¹

However, Gaventa considers the broader theological relevance that is based on the religious status of Cornelius in the narrative arguing that the conversion of Cornelius demonstrates the inclusion of gentiles. For Gaventa, therefore, the question whether Cornelius was a proselyte, or a God-fearer is less significant.⁷²

Having stated some of the debates about the characterization of the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, I am arguing, firstly, that the Ethiopian eunuch is a gentile and not a Jew. He is the first gentile convert to be included into the Jesus movement. Secondly, in chapter two, I am arguing that Cornelius is a God-fearer and not a proselyte, and that he is the second gentile to join the Jesus movement.

In response to the debates sketched above, I will be studying the respective ethnic markers in Acts 8:26-40 and in Acts 10:1-11:18. In chapter two, I am studying who is an Αἰθίοψ' and where Ethiopia is from the understanding of ancient authors. Secondly, I am studying the role that the Αἰθίοψ' plays in the text. And lastly, I am studying the purpose of the Ethiopian within the context of the narrative.

⁷⁰ Bock, *Acts* 392-5; Polhill, *Acts*, 219-221.

⁷¹ Fredriksen, Paula. *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle* (New Heaven: Yale University, 2017), 89.

⁷² Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 161.

In chapter three, I am studying who is an ἀλλόφυλος, this includes studying ancient writings, too. I am also studying the role that the ἀλλόφυλος plays in the text. Lastly, I am studying the purpose of the designation ἀλλόφυλος in the text.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO. EXEGESIS OF ACTS 8:26-40

This chapter is an exegesis of Acts 8:26-40. The passage is about the encounter of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. It demonstrates how the gospel is advancing across people of different cultural background.⁷³ Tannehill shows that this encounter is a divine arrangement through a divine agent and accomplished by a human agent.⁷⁴ And with the curiosity the eunuch expressed for baptism shows the passion that the Ethiopian eunuch has towards becoming a member of the Jesus movement (Acts 8:36). He desires to partake in the temple worship and feel belonged among the Jewish people, in Jerusalem. As I have mentioned in chapter one, most scholars like Bruce interprets this passage as a fulfilment of the promise Jesus made in Acts 1:8. His inclusion into the Jesus movement symbolizes the future reach of the gospel to those at “the ends of the earth.”⁷⁵ He is a representative of those at that geographical region of the earth.

2.1 Literary Context of Acts 8:26-40

“It all began in Jerusalem.”⁷⁶ In Acts 1:8, before Jesus ascended into heaven, he made a promise to his disciples about the coverage of the gospel, according to which they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and beyond. The gospel is not meant to remain only in Jerusalem for the Jews alone, it is meant to become a global and a universal message. This means that, it is meant to be gentile inclusive. Gentiles must be incorporated into this movement as a fulfilment of God’s salvation plan for the gentiles.⁷⁷ In the incorporation of gentiles, Israel plays an important role. Seeing that Israel counts as God’s covenanted people, the gentiles are considered

⁷³ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 182.

⁷⁴ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108.

⁷⁵ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 109.

⁷⁶ Dunn, D. G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Ed. Scot McKnight. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 30.

⁷⁷ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 144.

as “outsiders” of this covenant. People from the nations (ἔθνη) can participate in Israel’s covenantal identity through a social conversion without necessarily becoming Jews.⁷⁸ Acts connects this development to Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms. And he is the initiator of the new divine covenant through which gentiles can become part of God’s people.⁷⁹

Acts portrays the Pentecost gathering in Acts 2, as a gathering of empowerment for the realization of this promise made by Jesus in Acts 1:8. All those present were filled with the Holy Spirit. This gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts has the effect of providing the apostles with a lingual ability to speak diverse languages. This becomes a strategy on proclaiming the gospel message to all people, of all tribes and tongues.⁸⁰ The Roman empire and the Eastern Mediterranean, including Judea were littered with people of different languages.⁸¹ For this promise in Acts 1:8 to be realized, these disciples and all that were present at the Pentecost must be able to understand several earthly languages to be able to extend the walls of this message to “all people”⁸².

After the death of Stephen, persecution broke out that scattered the church (Acts 8:1-3). In the face of this persecution, the apostles remained at Jerusalem, while others like Philip found themselves in Samaria.⁸³ In Samaria, Philip proclaimed the gospel of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. His ministry was accompanied with power and great signs (Acts 8:4-13). People were

⁷⁸ Esler, Philip. “Paul’s Contestation of Israel’s (Ethnic) Memory of Abraham in Galatians 3.” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36, no. 1 (2006): 23-34; Cf. Kuecker, Aaron J. “The Spirit and the ‘Other’: Social Identity, Ethnicity, and Intergroup reconciliation in Luke-Acts: transcending Ethnic: The Spirit and trans-Ethnic Identity in Acts 10-15” (PhD Dissertation, Saint Andrews University, 2008), 130.

⁷⁹ Esler, Philip Francis. *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 122-5.

⁸⁰ Hartog, P. B. “Polyglots and Polyglotism in the Damascus Document and Acts of the Apostles” in *Qumran and the New Testament*, BETL 340 (Leuven: Peeters, 2024), 271-293.

⁸¹ Hartog, P. B. “Polyglots and Polyglotism,” 271.

⁸² Hartog, P. B. “Polyglots and Polyglotism,” 285-6.

⁸³ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 102.

healed. His ministry was divinely accompanied, such that his actions mimic the ministry of Jesus and the apostles through healing and exorcism.⁸⁴

When Peter and John heard that the Samaritans had received the word of God through the ministry of Philip, they now came to verify the work of the evangelist. The order of divine function has changed. According to Tannehill, the apostles were supposed to function as the witnesses of Jesus and the initiators of the Gospel in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and in the ends of the earth (according to Acts 1:8) and not Philip, who is an evangelist.⁸⁵ But Philip did not go on a personal wish, rather he was divinely assigned and equipped for this mission. Implicitly, he functions as an apostle. Kurz further opines that Saul (Paul) ironically plays a role in the spread of the gospel given his initial persecution of Jesus followers.⁸⁶ In Act 9:1-32, this same Paul, who was the persecutor of the Jerusalem church, joined the Jesus movement. In Acts, Paul became an apostle even though he was not with Jesus like Peter and other apostles. In Acts 13:13-52, Paul began to witness the gospel to gentiles at Antioch in Pisidia.

2.2 Organizational Structure of the Narrative- Acts 8:26-40

The episode comprises of three major events. The first event leads to the dialogue between the main character, Philip, and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-30b). The second event is the dialogue that is between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:30c-35). The third event led to the inclusion of this eunuch into the community of God's people (8:36-40).⁸⁷ In verse 36, this inclusion of the eunuch was sealed by baptism.

⁸⁴ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 105.

⁸⁵ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 102.

⁸⁶ Kurz, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 44.

⁸⁷ Nguyen, Vien V. "A Parallel Case of Two Conversion Stories: A Narrative Criticism of Acts 8:5-40." *In The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, Volume 20(35): 1-15. Here is 3 (September 1, 2019)

2.3 The Characterization of the Ethiopian (Αἰθίοψ) Eunuch in 8:26-28

An angel of the Lord commands Philip, to arise and go to meet with the eunuch, somewhere between Jerusalem and Gaza, in the desert. The angel of the Lord acts as the divine instructor and the source of divine providence.⁸⁸ This matches the fact that the mission of the apostles in the book of Acts is often ordered by God.⁸⁹ In verse 27, Philip acts on this command to locate the eunuch somewhere in the desert between Jerusalem and Gaza. Philip is, therefore, characterized as a human agent under a divine influence and instruction.⁹⁰ In verse 27b the eunuch arrives. He is an Ethiopian (Αἰθίοψ), a eunuch (εὐνοῦχος), a court official of Kandake of Meröe, the royal court of the queen of the Ethiopians (δυνάστης Κανδάκης βασιλίσσης Αἰθιόπων). He is the person in-charge of the queen's treasure. The word δυνάστης refers to someone in position of power, a ruler, a court official. It is also used to describe a rich and wealthy man. In Luke-Acts, money symbolizes the power of this world.⁹¹ In this passage, the Ethiopian eunuch is described as someone with a high position. He is a man with authority. He acquired the education of his time since he could read the Isaiah passage from the Greek text. His journey to Jerusalem to worship at the temple and his desire to read the scroll of Isaiah suggests a spiritual yearning and reverence for the God of Israel.⁹²

⁸⁸ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108; Ben Witherington III opines that the angel of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord are possibly two different personages. In v.26 the angel of the lord acted as the divine instructor/director and in v.29, 36, 39, he acted as the divine providence by availing water for the baptism of the eunuch, and one who moves Philip to places. But Witherington III opine that their roles work in concert-Witherington III, Ben. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: The Paternoster Press Carlisle, 1998), 294.

⁸⁹ Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 149.

⁹⁰ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108; The characterization of Philip in this narrative takes a form that shows a reminiscence of both prophets Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kg 18 and 2 Kg 2; 5.

⁹¹ Cf. Luke 12:13-21; 16:10-11; 18:18-30; Acts 5:2; 8:20; Barrett, C.K. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 428.

⁹² Bock, *Acts*, 339.

Lastly, he is characterized as someone who desires a pious lifestyle. He had come to worship the God of Israel.⁹³ Irrespective of his exotic class, this eunuch displays humility to learn. This humility helped him to learn from Philip, about whom the prophecy is about in the Isaiah text, Isa. 53:7-8, (cf. Acts 8:30c-35).

2.3.1 The Ethiopian Αἰθίοψ

Based on the ongoing debates about this character in biblical scholarship, there is yet to be a consensus about the ethno-religious status of this character. Who then is an ‘Ethiopian Αἰθίοψ’? According to Byron and Todd Berzon, the ideologies of ancient Christian authors did not develop in vacuum, which means that their ideology was not perceived and written in a vacuum. But they were deeply influenced by the styles, patterns, and use of rhetoric by secular authors in the Greco-Roman world. Through the writings of these secular authors, Christian authors developed their own exegetical interpretations, allusions, theological discourse, authorial schemas.⁹⁴ For this reason, I find it relevant to study how some of these ancient authors understand who an ‘Ethiopian’ is.

The word ‘Ethiopian (Αἰθίοψ) is a hapax legomenon in the New Testament, occurring only in Acts 8:27. Whereas in the LXX, ‘Αἰθίοψ’ occurs in 2 Chron. 14:8, Jer. 13:23 and Jer. 38:7, 10, 12, 19. In Jer. 38:7, 10, 12, 19, it is used to describe the servant of the king –

⁹³ Aryanto, Antonius G.A.W. “The Significant of God-Fearers for the Formation of the Early Christian Identity in Acts 8-10,” in *Jurnal Jaffray*, 20(1), (2022). 74-93. <http://doi.org/10.25278/jj.v20i1.621>; Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 109.

⁹⁴ Byron, *Symbolic Blackness*, 29-30; Berzon, Todd, “Ethnicity and Early Christianity: New Approaches to Religious Kinship and Community” in *Currents in Biblical Research* 2018, Vol. 16(2) 191–227. DOI: 10.1177/1476993X17743454, 215.

Ebedmelech who was instrumental in the release of prophet Jeremiah from the cistern/pit (Jer. 38:7-13).⁹⁵ The Hebrew word from the MT that parallels ‘Αἰθίοψ’ in the LXX is כּוּשִׁי *Kushi*.

In Esth. 1:1, 8:9, Kush marks the limit of King Ahasuerus’ kingdom. Ethiopia is referred as a remote geographical area located somewhere around the south of the Mediterranean (Ezek. 29:10; Esth. 1:1; 8:9; cf. Jdt. 1:10).⁹⁶ Which is known for its wealth (Job. 28:19; Isa. 45:14). The prophets recurrently categorized Kush with other wicked nations, such as Egypt, which opposed the people of God and deserved his judgement (Isa. 20:3-5; 43:3; Ezek. 30:1-9; Nah. 3:9; Zeph. 2:11-12). Kush is reckoned among those foreign nations destined to be converted and acknowledge the true God of Israel.⁹⁷ Robert Hood, a racial human activist writer, although he is not a historian, reads the Ethiopians as a people with great dignity, as he quotes Psalms 68:31, which says, “Nobles shall come from Egypt; Kush (Ethiopia) shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God.”⁹⁸ (ESV). This suggests a prophetic declaration about the divine vindication of Ethiopia, when it will be brought into the salvation plan of God.

Kush is described as a land with military prowess and threat to other people (2 Kgs. 19:9; 2 Chron. 14:9-13; Isa. 37:9; Jer. 46:9).⁹⁹ From the experience of Cassius Dio, Ethiopia was perceived as a symbol of military threat to Rome.¹⁰⁰ For instance during the reign of Augustus, there has been series of brutal battles between the Roman forces and the Ethiopian armies, somewhere around Elephantine in Egypt. During this time, the Ethiopian population spreads across Egypt, and they lived among the Egyptians. And there were incessant battles

⁹⁵ Hay, J. Daniel. *Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2016) 357-73.

⁹⁶ Edward Said, “An Ideology of Difference,” in *“Race,” Writing, and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 38-58; Byron, *Symbolic Blackness*, 1, 34.

⁹⁷ Spencer, F. Scott. *The Portrait of Philip in Acts: A Study of Roles and Relations*. Ed. Stanley E. Porter. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 149.

⁹⁸ Hood, Robert. *Begrimed and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 63.

⁹⁹ Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts*, 149.

¹⁰⁰ Byron, *Symbolic Blackness*, 33-4.

between the Roman forces and the Ethiopian armies, Petronius sought for a peace treaty with the Kandake Κανδάκη of Ethiopia who almost overpowered the Roman forces in Egypt. Due to Ethiopia's military might, both Cassius Dio describes the Ethiopia military and the nomadic groups of Ethiopia (Blemmyes), as threat to Rome.¹⁰¹

According to Herodotus and Homer, Ethiopia is described as 'the ends of the earth'. The 'ends of the earth' geographically describes the farthest limits of the earth.¹⁰² According to Strabo, Ethiopia is the land of the Nubians located south of Egypt and lies between the first and sixth cataract of the Nile. It has two main cities namely, Napata and Meroe.¹⁰³

In Greco-Roman literature, color symbolism was used to communicate moral contents: good and bad values. For instance, Aristotle refers to black people, like the Ethiopians, as Cowards.¹⁰⁴ Sometime around 522 BCE, Pindar, the Greek poet uses blackness to refer to an apostate heart; and a hardened heart. Yet, Pindar's description of blackness contradicts Homer's blackness which describes the black beauty of the Ethiopian people.¹⁰⁵

Homer describes Ethiopians as blameless ones, those who feast with Zeus and other gods join. Homer describes the Ethiopians as a people without blame; those held in high esteem and approved by the gods.¹⁰⁶ And Herodotus describes the Ethiopians as a people worthy of being adored and venerated. Herodotus also describes the Ethiopians as the long-lived ones.¹⁰⁷ Ethiopians are a people of with exceptional physical beauty (taller and finer than any other people).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Dio, Cassius. 54.5.4-6.

¹⁰² See Homer, *Odyssey* 1.22—24; Herodotus 3.17, Strabo, *Geography* 1.1.6, 1.2.24.

¹⁰³ Strabo, *Geography*. 17.2.1-3.

¹⁰⁴ Aristotle, *Physiognomics* 6.812b.

¹⁰⁵ Pindar, *Fragment Incert.* 225.1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Homer, *Iliad* 1.423-24.

¹⁰⁷ Herodotus 3.17.

¹⁰⁸ Herodotus 3.20.

Plutarch is known as a moralist, someone who focuses on the character and ethical behavior of persons. His assessment and use of blackness has a negative undertone as in the case of Pindar. He refers blackness as evil. Plutarch portrays black men as malevolence. In the context of Plutarch's understanding and use of blackness, male Ethiopians are perceived as a wicked and evil set of people.¹⁰⁹

During the Patristic era (100 - 451 CE), the blackness of Ethiopians serves as a trope for sin, evil and heresy.¹¹⁰ There is an indication of overlapping of ideology in the symbolic representation of Ethiopia, black-skinned people, as with the ancient authors mentioned above. Black μέλας¹¹¹ played a very key role in the early church. It was allegorically used to pass warning, instructions and to admonish and encouraging members about the need to endure threats from within and from outside, threats that may challenge their Christian identity. Early church fathers allegorized blackness as evil, which their members must do all they can to avoid it.¹¹² The adjective "Ethiopian" was used to refer to sin that leads to apostacy among Christians.¹¹³ In the Acts of Peter (180-200 CE), an Ethiopian woman is allegorically identified as a black female demon.¹¹⁴

By deductions from the above details, the Ethiopian is referred to someone from the far end of the earth, geographically. Although, the negative portrayal of Ethiopian/Ethiopia by the early church fathers would not count in my approach of the primary text, because these were

¹⁰⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia* 12E.

¹¹⁰ Berzon, Todd, "Ethnicity and Early Christianity: New Approaches to Religious Kinship and Community" in *Currents in Biblical Research* 2018, Vol. 16(2) 191–227. DOI: [10.1177/1476993X17743454](https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X17743454).

¹¹¹ Epistle of Barnabas, 4.9.- Ho melas simply means 'the black one' or 'the black person'.

¹¹² Berzon, "Ethnicity and Early Christianity", 191–227.

¹¹³ Herm, *Sim.*9.19.1. Text and English Translation in *Apostolic Fathers* (trans. Kirsopp Lake; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 2:268-9.

¹¹⁴ Bremmer, Jan N. "Aspects of the Acts of Peter: Women, Magic, Place and Date." in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles, and Gnosticism*. Ed. J.N. Bremmer. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 1-20.

later experiences after when the book of Acts was written. Therefore, Ethiopians/Ethiopia has a positive connotation in Acts.

Scholars observe that the book of Acts of the Apostles employs an ‘ethnic reasoning’ in the characterization of persons. Joshua Jipp holds that the author of Acts employs an ethnic reasoning in how he characterizes persons.¹¹⁵ His ethnic reasoning engages a social imagination, or a social construct aimed at raising the trope of a character through a deconstruction and reconstruction of ethno-geographical background.¹¹⁶ Acts does a stereotyping of the background of people joining the Jesus movement as a mark of respect. And Byron argues that the description of this personage both as an Ethiopian and as a eunuch does not generate a stereotype of this Ethiopian as a symbol of vice or sexual passion nor of a salacious, hybrid/ambiguous monstrosities, rather his characterization depicts a model of virtue, silent and humble to learn from Philip about whom the prophecy in the Isaiah scroll was written.¹¹⁷

Regarding the Jewishness of the Ethiopian eunuch as suggested by some scholars, on the contrary most scholars reacted to this argument. According to Tannehill, the ethnic identity of the eunuch, (Ethiopian) may have implication on his religious identity. Tannehill argues that the Ethiopian eunuch is a gentile, a foreigner.¹¹⁸ Similarly to Tannehill’s views, Martin stresses that the marker “Ethiopian” is such an explicit one that stands in parallel to a Nubian, she further argues that this eunuch is of a black-skin.¹¹⁹ Demetruis Williams and Martins concertedly allude that denials of the ethnic category of this eunuch is a neglect of Africa in the study of Christian

¹¹⁵ Jipp, “Hospitable Barbarians”, 7-12.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan M. Hall. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25.

¹¹⁷ Bryon, *Symbolic Blackness*, 108–15; cf. Jipp, “Hospitable Barbarians”, 11-12.

¹¹⁸ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 109.

¹¹⁹ Martin, “A Chamberlain’s Journey,” 111-4.

origin Acts.¹²⁰ Kurz, Sampson S. Ndogo, Carl H. Holladay, Martin, Frank M. Snowden and Williams, share similar opinion that this eunuch is a non-Jew.¹²¹

Hans Conzelmann dismisses the notion that Acts' uses ethnic sense to communicate in Acts 8:26-40. Conzelmann opines that the author of Acts did not communicate in an ethnic way to show the Ethiopian's inclusion into the Jesus movement.¹²² But Tannehill mentions it that Acts uses geographical advances to show its readers how the Jesus movement spreads.¹²³ For example in Acts 28:1-10, Jipp shows how the spread geographically got to Malta through Paul and how the Maltese people found their way into this movement.¹²⁴ This Ethiopian eunuch is of Ethiopian origin. Ethiopia is a geographical marker, and geography/territory is an index of ethnicity and a criterium of ethnicity.¹²⁵ To be an Ethiopian is to be an Ethiopian ethnically. Ethiopia is a geographical/territorial marker.¹²⁶

By deductions, my findings from the above consulted ancient authors, Ethiopian/Ethiopia has never been used to refer to a Jew. The author of the book of Acts of the Apostles, is sensitive in the use of ethnic marker in referring to person. The use of ethnic markers informs the reader about the kinds of people the gospel is reaching out to. Therefore,

¹²⁰ Williams, "Acts," 226; Martin, "A Chamberlain's Journey," 114.

¹²¹ Read Kurz, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 46; S. Shauf, "Locating the Eunuch: Characterization and Narrative Context in African Acts 8:26–40," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71/4 (2009): 765; Snowden, Frank M. *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970); Clarice Martin, "A Chamberlain's Journey and the Challenges of Interpretation for Liberation," *Semeia* 47 (1989); Demetrius K. Williams, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (ed. Brian Blount; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Ndogo, "The Biblical Portrayal of Ethiopia", 492.

¹²² Conzelmann, Hans. *Acts of the Apostles* (trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel; ed. Eldon Jay Epp with Christopher R. Matthews, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 68.

¹²³ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 111.

¹²⁴ Jipp, "Hospitable Barbarians", 1-12.

¹²⁵ Here, Hall outlines several points for identifying ethnic groups, but his emphasis was on these two markers "common myth of descent" and by "the connection with a specific territory". Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 24–25.

¹²⁶ Hall outlines several points for identifying ethnic groups, but his emphasis was on these two markers "common myth of descent" and by "the connection with a specific territory". Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 24–25.

it is important not to jeopardize the reading of this text by importing what is not in the text. The text says an Αἰθίοψ' and not a Ἰουδαῖος.

In her description of the role the ethnicity of this Ethiopian played in this passage and in a broader perspective of the book of Acts, Martin argues that this narrative of Ethiopian best plays a significant role in the whole book of Acts. Her reason is that this narrative perfectly fulfils Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8 that emphasizes 'the ends of the earth'. This gentile inclusion foreshadows the dominance of the gentile mission in the second half of the book of Act.¹²⁷ Though, one gentile may not be 'the end of the world'¹²⁸ but he represents those at 'the ends of the earth'.¹²⁹

The strategy of raising social and geographical tropes of characters in the book of Acts creates the opportunity for "respect of human dignity and people's geographical origin, especially those gentiles who are joining the Jesus movement community".¹³⁰ This social imagination deconstructs possible colonial dominance, thereby enhancing mutual respect and equality between both Jews and gentiles.¹³¹ This is a social imagination that is efficient in deconstructing any possible dominance, thereby enhancing mutual respect and equality between both Jews and gentiles.¹³² In this narrative, the social imagination that presents respect for human dignity and people's geographical origin works by the characterization of this eunuch as a δυνάστης. The author portrays the Ethiopian eunuch as a person of high social class and value. This accords respect to the eunuch and the people of Ethiopia since he is a representative

¹²⁷ Martin, "A Chamberlain's Journey," 105–35.

¹²⁸ Niccum, Curt. "One Ethiopian Eunuch Is Not the End of the World: The Narrative Function of Acts 8:26–40," in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, ed. Eric F. Mason et al., JSJSup 153, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 883–900.

¹²⁹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:109.

¹³⁰ Jipp, "Hospitable Barbarians", 1.

¹³¹ Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 8.

¹³² Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 8.

of those at the farthest point of the earth. As I have discussed above, this eunuch originates from a different ethno-geographical background, outskirts of the Roman Empire, thereby coming into a perpetual relationship with other people from other different ethno-geographical background. The raised trope of this eunuch is a mark of respect, value and worth as the gospel of the risen Lord breaks the barrier of social dominance, thereby unifies Jesus' followers as those in a family-like relationship that surpasses biological or ethnic ties.¹³³

2.3.2 The Ethiopian Eunuch as a Foreigner

This encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is a divinely orchestrated event because Philip acts under divine instruction (v. 26). The divine agent (an angel and the Spirit; Acts 8:26, 29) who decides the course of events is ever present throughout the narrative.¹³⁴ In verse 27, the text introduces the Ethiopian eunuch as someone one “had come to Jerusalem to worship”. As a gentile, the eunuch’s coming to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel suggests three possible characterizations: he is either a proselyte, or a God-fearer or he is strictly a foreigner who just came to worship.¹³⁵ God-fearers are those gentiles who sympathize with Judaism without converting to Judaism. They have an informal connection with Judaism. God-fearers are often tagged as (φοβούμενοι/σεβομένοι τὸν θεὸν, or θεοσεβεῖς in the book of Acts).¹³⁶ There are different levels of commitment a gentile can have with Judaism. Shaye Cohen distinguishes the following options: Those “(i) admiring some aspect of Judaism. (ii) acknowledging the power of God (iii) benefiting the Judeans or being friendly to the Judeans conspicuously. (iv) observing some or many rituals of the Jews. (v) venerating the God of the

¹³³ Jipp, “Hospitable Barbarians”, 12-18.

¹³⁴ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108.

¹³⁵ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 109.

¹³⁶ Read Kraabel, A. T.” The Disappearance of the ‘God-Fearers’” in *Numen*, Vol. 28, Fasc. 2 (Dec. 1981), 113-126. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3270014>.

Judean people and abandoning pagan gods. (vi) joining the Judean community. (vii) and converting to a Jew or becoming a Ἰουδαῖος. The last category clearly refers to a proselyte (a Ἰουδαῖος).¹³⁷

The last category clearly refers to a proselyte (a Ἰουδαῖος).¹³⁸ Proselytes (προσήλυτος) are those who convert fully to Judaism. They become Ἰουδαῖος, a Jewish ethnic and religious title. To become a proselyte, circumcision is very essential. A proselyte observes the Torah and all Jewish customs.¹³⁹

The primary text does not specify to which category this Ethiopian eunuch belongs. Could he be a God-fearer or a proselyte? The text does not mention that he is a proselyte. At the same time, he does not bear the God-fearer marker (φοβούμενοι/σεβομένοι τὸν θεὸν, or θεοσεβεῖς). In 10:2, Acts author describes Cornelius explicitly as someone who fears God (φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν), but the eunuch is neither referred to as a proselyte nor a God-fearer. The text only describes him as someone on transit from a faraway region (“the ends of the earth”) who had come to Jerusalem to worship in the temple in Jerusalem.

The verb used there is a pluperfect (ἔληλύθει from the verb ἔρχομαι). Pluperfect verbs describe a single action in the past not a continuous action. This suggests a one-time experience: “He has not been coming” but “he had come”. Since he is neither referred to as a God-fearer nor a proselyte, he must be a gentile and a foreigner to Jewish background who had come to worship in Jerusalem. Being a gentile/foreigner, he would have been standing in the Court of the gentiles when he visited the temple.¹⁴⁰ This court is the outer-most part of the temple which

¹³⁷ Cohen, Shaye J. D. “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew.” *The Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 1 (1989): 13–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1509510>.

¹³⁸ Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary”, 33.

¹³⁹ Watson, F. *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective. Revised and Expanded Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 75, 76; Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary”, 26-7.

¹⁴⁰ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108-9.

serve as the farthest reach of gentiles in the temple.¹⁴¹ Despite his passion to embark on this journey to come and worship the God of Israel, he could not access the inner courts meant for Jews. This simply implies a socio-religious barrier that this Ethiopian eunuch had experienced due to Jewish laws of gentile impurity. This has created an ethnic boundary between the eunuch and the Jews in the Temple.¹⁴²

The Jewish Temple was a well-known institution when the Jesus movement started in Jerusalem.¹⁴³ The temple functioned as the institution for political, economic, social, and religious power of the Jewish people.¹⁴⁴ The Jewish temple was an institution that interprets the Mosaic law. And these laws were sensitive to gentile impurity.¹⁴⁵ This Ethiopian eunuch experiences marginalization at the Temple due to these interpretations of the laws of purity against non-Jews.

Therefore, this curious foreigner has to be divinely vindicated.¹⁴⁶ The Temple has to be cleansed of its domination and its segregation attitudes towards gentiles.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the book of Acts of the Apostles shows how limited the Law is. For instance, in Acts 13:38-9, Apostle Paul of Acts clearly states that true justification can only be in Jesus and not by the Law. In fact, this Paul in the book of Acts goes to the point of showing the transcendence of Jesus above the Law.¹⁴⁸

To account for the removal of gentile impurity in the case of this foreigner, it takes the following: firstly, the removal of the obstacle of gentile impurities took the involvement of the

¹⁴¹ Roth, Cecil. "The Cleansing of the Temple and Zechariah xiv 21." *Novum Testamentum* 4, No. Fasc. 3 (1960): 174-181.

¹⁴² Elliott, John "Household and Meals Vs. Temple Purity Replication Patterns in Luke-Acts." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21 (1991): 102-08 (105).

¹⁴³ Esler, Philip. *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 131-2.

¹⁴⁴ Elliott, "Household and Meals" (102).

¹⁴⁵ Elliott, "Household and Meals" (102).

¹⁴⁶ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 127.

¹⁴⁷ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 127.

¹⁴⁸ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 127.

Holy Spirit. The angel, and the Spirit in 8:26, 29 instructed Philip to unite (κολλήθητι) with this Ethiopian eunuch, despite the so-called cultic impurity this foreigner has as claimed by the law. Philip has to do this because he is the human agent through whom this gentile/foreigner will be set free. Philip went to contact the Ethiopian eunuch (8:29-31), the eunuch did not go after.¹⁴⁹ Secondly, the Ethiopian eunuch expresses the desire to accept the gospel about Jesus (8:34,35). The narrative does not explicitly indicate how Isa. 53:7,8 is interpreted by Philip. But scholars such as Tannehill holds that the interpretation of the Isaiah text plays a significant role in this narrative. The text was interpreted in the light of Jesus' resurrection and his messiahship. This causes the eunuch to believe in Jesus.¹⁵⁰

Having accepted the message of Jesus, thirdly, baptism was administered to the eunuch. This baptism symbolically demonstrates the vindication and inclusion of this eunuch into the Jesus movement.¹⁵¹ And the narrative ends with the Ethiopian eunuch, a foreigner living for his destination rejoicing. The ending of this narrative parallels the Samaritan encounter, where there was great joy in the city (8:8). And the narrator situates Philip in Caesarea, where he will later meet with Paul in Acts 21:8.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108-9.

¹⁵⁰ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108-9.

¹⁵¹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 111-2.

¹⁵² Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 112.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE. EXEGESIS OF ACTS 10:1-11:18

Like the episode of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, which is initiated by a divine agent,¹⁵³ that instructs Philip to approach the eunuch, this episode of Peter and Cornelius is another divine encounter that leads to the inclusion of a Roman soldier, Cornelius, into the Jesus movement, and the transformation of Peter an apostle, a Jew.¹⁵⁴ Scholars use different terms to refer to the major problem this narrative addresses. Elliott describes this problem as a problem of social association between the two major characters, Peter (a Jew) and Cornelius (a gentile).¹⁵⁵ While Aaron Kuecker describes it as a problem of ethnic exclusivity.¹⁵⁶ Both descriptions are the same: the narrative is about a social problem between two persons of different ethnic identity.

The primary aim of this chapter includes understanding the characterization of Cornelius who is referred to as an *alloghulos*. Moreover, this chapter aims to understand the socio-religious status of Cornelius. And thirdly, this chapter aims to understand the central message of the text, what the author intends to communicate to his readers. This will help to understand the role *Alloghulos* in the text.

3.1 Characterization of Cornelius

In this passage, the narrator characterizes Cornelius as a soldier in the Roman army, a devout man (εὐσεβῆς) and someone who fears the Lord φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν (10:1–2). The

¹⁵³ The ‘angel’ of God and the ‘Spirit’ of God (as in the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch 8:26; 8:29; 8:39) are divine agents, who can be referred to as the ‘voice God’ (in this case of Cornelius 10:5-6; 10:20). Luke uses them as divine agents that defines God’s involvement in directing human actions. Dunn, D. G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Fd. Scot McKnight. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 173.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Hartog, “The Apostle and the Foreigner: Peter’s Transformation in Acts 10”, 1-14.

¹⁵⁵ Elliott, "Household and Meals", 105.

¹⁵⁶ Kuecker, Aaron J. “The Spirit and the ‘Other’: Social Identity, Ethnicity, and Intergroup reconciliation in Luke-Acts: transcending Ethnic: The Spirit and trans-Ethnic Identity in Acts 10-15” (PhD Dissertation, Saint Andrews University, 2008), 181.

passage discusses Cornelius and Peter. In 10:28, Peter referred to himself as a Jew Ἰουδαῖος and Cornelius as an *alloghulos* (ἀλλόφυλος). These two ethnic categories give us an idea of the fact they are from two distinct ethnic backgrounds. The question to address is this, how does a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος) differ from an *alloghulos* (ἀλλόφυλος)? Who is an ἀλλόφυλος? To answer this, I will assess the identities provided by the narrator about Cornelius in this pericope.

3.2 Roman Citizen/*Alloghulos*

In Acts 10:1, Cornelius is characterized as a centurion, that is a Roman soldier. Acts of the Apostles knows of other centurions apart from Cornelius, one in 22:25–29; two centurions are in Acts 23:23, when Paul was taken to Felix to avoid threats from hostile crowd; and one in 27:1-28:16, Julius who took Paul to Rome. Centurions are people of authority and Roman citizens. A centurion is a Roman soldier who commands 100 other men in the Roman army.¹⁵⁷ Roman citizenship (*civitas*) was granted to provincials during the imperial era of the Roman world.¹⁵⁸ The grants of this citizenship began during the Republic. Roman citizenship was issued out by magistrates, who were under the directive of the sitting emperor. It costs exceptional people and people of good financial status to have a Roman Citizen in the first and second century CE.¹⁵⁹

Olivia Elder argues that citizenship is not the clearest and the most secure marker for Roman identity. Her argument is based on how citizenship should relate to other markers of Roman-ness, notably language and origin. Her argument shows that citizenship is a form of

¹⁵⁷ Gruen, Erich S. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 126-7.

¹⁵⁸ Lavan, Myles. “The Army and the Spread of Roman Citizenship.” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 109 (2019): 27–69. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26817655>.

¹⁵⁹ Gruen, Erich S. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*. (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 371-372.

belonging to Rome through just legal means.¹⁶⁰ It was in 212 CE during the reign of Caracalla, that Roman citizenship became free to everyone.¹⁶¹

Cornelius is characterized as an *alloghulos* (ἀλλόφυλος) Acts 10:28. This is not really an ethnic marker, because it does not give any ethnic sense or affiliation. Acts uses this marker in 10:28 to show that Cornelius is not a (Ἰουδαῖος). Less can be ascertained about Cornelius ethnic affiliation. *Alloghulos* (ἀλλόφυλος) is unlike clear ethnic markers such as Αἰθίοψ, Ἰουδαῖος, Ἑβραῖος, Ἑλληνιστής and others. The word ἀλλόφυλος means someone from another nation or tribe (ἀλλό means another, and φυλή means someone from a nation or tribe). During the Greek era, there was a concept of dividing the world's population into two major ethnic categories, Greeks, and others. And the terms ὁμόφυλοι (*omophuloi*) and ἀλλόφυλοι were used to create the ethnic distinction. ὁμόφυλοι was used to refer to those who are ethnically Greeks (insiders), while ἀλλόφυλοι was used to refer to non-Greeks (or outsiders). In this sense, ἀλλόφυλοι does not define a specific ethnic category, rather it defines those who are outsiders or foreigners.¹⁶² In the New Testament, the word ἀλλόφυλος is a *hapax legomenon*.¹⁶³ What kind of individual then is Acts 10 referring to? Acts uses ἀλλόφυλος in 10:28 to show the foreignness of Cornelius. It does not define Cornelius' ethnicity. Therefore, ἀλλόφυλος is not an ethnic marker.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Elder, Olivia. "Citizens of the Wor(l)d? Metaphor and the Politics of Roman Language", in *Journal of Roman Studies*. 2022; 122:79-104. DOI:10.1017/S0075435822000454.

¹⁶¹ Ando, Clifford. "Was Rome a Polis? Classical Antiquity" 18 (1) 1991: 5-34. (12-3). (No DOI)

¹⁶² Hall, J. M. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. Cambridge, 1997), 40-51.

¹⁶³ Stern D. H. *Jewish New Testament commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*. (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 258.

¹⁶⁴ Hartog, Pieter B., "The Apostle and the Foreigner: Cornelius' Vindication and Peter's Transformation in Acts 10," in *Meaningful Meetings with Foreigners in the World of the Bible: Essays in Honour of Klaas Spronk on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. Marjo C.A. Korpel and Paul Sanders, CBET 119 (Leuven: Peeters, 2024), 233–46

3.3 Cornelius the God-Fearer

This episode presents an ethnic paradox: a non-Judean character portrayed as a one who possess the ideal piety of the Judean people. Cornelius was vindicated because of his passion and commitment to the God of Israel.¹⁶⁵ In Act 10:2, Cornelius is characterized as “a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.” According to Tannehill, the piety of Cornelius parallels that of a committed Jew.¹⁶⁶ Hartog parallels the piety of Cornelius with other exemplary characters in Jewish literature.¹⁶⁷ Cornelius’ pious characterization reflects the piety of Tobit, “the pious Judean that features in the book that bears his name”.¹⁶⁸ In the book of Tobit, alms giving is emphasized. Quoting from Tob. 12:8-10, Hartog argues that except for fasting, Cornelius is a fascinating parallel with Tobit, who portrays Judean piety.¹⁶⁹

For more emphasis, Hartog further parallels the piety of Cornelius with that of Job. Hartog analyses these two characters by studying the LXX use of the verb ‘σέβομαι’ in the characterization of Job rather than the use of the verb ‘φοβέω’ used in Acts 10:2 to describe the Cornelius’ act of reverence.¹⁷⁰ Hartog opines that Cornelius’ piety before the God of Israel is a sort of reminiscence of both Job and Tobit. Indeed, this intertextual connection by Hartog further strengthens the portrayal of Cornelius as an exemplar of a Judean piety, even though he is a non-Judean character. The author’s use of ἀλλόφυλος to show the foreignness of Cornelius in Acts, fulfils a similar literary function in describing Job’s foreignness, a native of Uz (Job 1:1).¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Hartog, “The Apostle and the Foreigner: Peter’s Transformation in Acts 10”, 7.

¹⁶⁶ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 137.

¹⁶⁷ Hartog, “The Apostle and the Foreigner: Peter’s Transformation in Acts 10”, 5-8.

¹⁶⁸ Hartog, “The Apostle and the Foreigner: Peter’s Transformation in Acts 10”, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Hartog, “The Apostle and the Foreigner: Peter’s Transformation in Acts 10”, 6.

¹⁷⁰ Hartog, “The Apostle and the Foreigner: Peter’s Transformation in Acts 10”, 6.

¹⁷¹ Hartog, “The Apostle and the Foreigner: Peter’s Transformation in Acts 10”, 7-8.

Dunn opines that the author's combinational use of 'prayers' and 'alms' was a deliberate one which shows the use of scriptural language in connecting the piety of Cornelius and a typical Judean religious standard (such as that given in Lev. 2:2, 9, 16; 6:15). Cornelius already believed in the God of Israel as the only one true God. He is already living in the light of a typical ideal Judean lifestyle, which shows that he has a strong commitment to the God of Israel. Dunn also adds that, Cornelius must not be a proselyte (circumcised) to become this committed and connected to Judaism.¹⁷² Reflecting on this note, Josephus testifies that, there are lists of other non-Jews who sympathized with Judaism that without becoming proselytes.¹⁷³ Cornelius' deep commitment with the God of Israel simply testifies that there are exceptional gentiles who knows what it means to live righteous life by having a committed relationship with the God of Israel.

Hartog has observed that most scholars describe this narrative as a conversion narrative.¹⁷⁴ Scholars like David Bauer argues that Cornelius got converted to become a member of the Jesus movement.¹⁷⁵ Hartog challenges such a conventional or traditional reading of the narrative as a conversion story, asking: "What does he (Cornelius) convert to?" This narrative does not give answer to the question of Cornelius' conversion. In other words, there is no explicit conversion element present in the text.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the text does not mention that Cornelius gets converted from any faith to become a member of the Jesus follower. The text explicitly mentions the exceptional piety of Cornelius and how he received the gift of the Holy Spirit and was baptized (Acts 10:2; 10:44-48).

¹⁷² Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 171.

¹⁷³ Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.282

¹⁷⁴ Hartog, "The Apostle and the Foreigner", 8.

¹⁷⁵ Bauer, David R. Bauer, *The Book of Acts as Story: A Narrative-Critical Study*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 117.

¹⁷⁶ Hartog, "The Apostle and the Foreigner", 8.

The text testifies that anyone who does what is right from every nation is acceptable (10:35). In 10:2 and 10:22 Cornelius is presented as doing what is right and acceptable. Cornelius already has a connection with the God of Israel. To further buttress this, Bruce and K Southworth argue that “Cornelius was already born again before Peter preached to him” (10:35; 10:2; 10:15; 11:9). They argue that born again in this context simply means someone who is into a healthy and intimate relationship with God of Israel.¹⁷⁷ And according to Bruce, Cornelius is already an embodiment of the quality of life that defines a follower of Jesus.¹⁷⁸ According to Dunn, what it means to become a member of this Jesus movement is to be saved. Dunn further argues that to be saved, in the perspective of the author of the book of Acts, is to believe in Jesus and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁹

3.4 Ethnic Reasoning in Acts 10:1-11:18

In this narrative, the author employs a complex web of “ethnic reasoning” which demonstrates the breaking of boundaries which in the end led to the recognition and inclusion of Cornelius as a follower of Jesus. This ethnic reasoning functions as a strategy which demonstrates the divinely inspired rescindment of previous purity rules. The strategy works in the form of a reversal. It undid the practicality of existing purity codes that governs geographical space, domestic relationship, persons, status, diets, and ethnic distinctions. Through this reversal, the book of Acts illustrates the inclusivity of the Jesus movement. It does this by upholding the transcendence of Jesus above ethnic barriers and social hostility. In this community, all people share equality of worth, status and respect for one-another.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Bruce, *Acts*, 215; Williams 133; Southworth K. *The Pentecostal I* NO.4 (1965) 7.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce, *Acts*, 215; Williams 133; Southworth, *The Pentecostal*, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Dunn, James D.G. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press), 1970), 80.

¹⁸⁰ Elliott, "Household and Meals", 107-8.

3.4.1 The Household/Table Fellowship

In this narrative the author employs a “household” strategy to demonstrate the union between Jews and gentiles. This household ideology¹⁸¹ is focused on establishing a household and kin-like solidarity, hospitality, and mutual support which in the end promotes unity and vitality for the Jesus movement. The Jesus movement became where the gospel is proclaimed and the acceptance of the gospel leads to assurance in healing, repentance, faith, generosity, mercy, and the presence of the Spirit of God. The movement became where Jesus is acknowledged as the promised Messiah, reconciling both Jews and gentiles.¹⁸²

There is a notable paradigm shift or transition of setting present in the “Peter and Cornelius” narrative in Acts 10:1-11:18. The text focuses on the shift towards households rather than Temple. In Acts 10:6, 17-18, 32; 11:11. Cf. 9:43, Peter is hosted at Simon the tanner’s house. The narrative records connections between the house where Peter, a Jew, resides (Acts 10:6, 17-18, 32; 11:11. Cf. 9:43) and the house of Cornelius, a gentile. The divine prompting through the visions (in 10:3-8; 10:10-16) that necessitated the meeting of these two major characters Peter and Cornelius, located them each at households. There was a reciprocation or exchange of domestic hospitality: Cornelius’ messengers visited Peter (the Jew) at Joppa, and Peter (and Simon) came along to Caesarea to see Cornelius (the gentile Roman Centurion). By the divine prompting and through the exchange of domestic hospitality, Cornelius and his household got baptized (10:48; 11:14-17).¹⁸³ Cornelius and his household received the

¹⁸¹ The Household ideology works in a family-like structure. This ideology employs the use of family metaphors such as brothers and sisters. In this narrative, the author employs the metaphor “brothers” (ἀδελφός) to show a new fictive relationship that challenges a typical Jewish thinking. The Jesus movement is a household-like community where Jesus followers see themselves as brothers and sisters. In v. 28 Peter was portrayed as someone who seems to find it difficult to accept Cornelius as a brother due to this Jewish attitude towards Gentile. Therefore, I don’t have challenge with Elliott and Aaron Kuecker who interprets this narrative as a household-like narrative to demonstrate the breaking down of ethnic distinctions. At the end of the narrative, both characters (Peter and Cornelius) went into a fictive household-like relationship where they see themselves as brothers. Kuecker, “The Spirit and the ‘Other’”, 183.

¹⁸² Elliott, “Household and Meals”, 102-3.

¹⁸³ Elliott, “Household and Meals”, 105.

confirmation of their inclusion into this believers' household. This confirmation is the gift of the Holy Spirit (10:44-47; 11:15).

There is a divine rescindment of previous dietary/purity rules that restricts association with non-Jews in order to show a confirmation of the establishment of the inclusive community that accommodates both Jews and gentiles.¹⁸⁴ Elliott asserts that the author of Acts applies a strategy of revocation of purity rules regarding food.¹⁸⁵ In the holiness code in Lev. 11:1-47, God presented the dietary rules to Israel that they must follow. These rules forbid the eating of some animals, because eating them is ritually unclean. Adherence to these laws set Israel exclusively apart as God's holy people.¹⁸⁶ But from Peter's vision (10:9-16), it become obvious that God has rescinded these dietary purity rules. This rescindment of the dietary laws demonstrates the breaking of boundaries and barriers that used to define the Jews as the special and holy people of God in contrast with those that are non-Jews.

In 10:15, the voice in the vision replies Peter saying, "What God has made clean, do not call unclean." (Act 10:15). There are two interpretations suggested by scholars about this statement in v. 15, whereby the animals in Peter's vision symbolically represent gentiles. S.G. Wilson and F. Hauck suggest that Peter's interpretation of the vision is that God has purified the gentiles. On the account of this cleansing of the gentiles, Jews are allowed to relate to and be in communion with gentiles, as in 10:28.¹⁸⁷ The argument here is: were gentiles cleansed or

¹⁸⁴ Elliott, "Household and Meals", 108.

¹⁸⁵ Elliott, "Household and Meals", 105.

¹⁸⁶ These dietary laws were part of a larger corpus emphasizing the purity and holiness which is aimed at presenting Israel as a holy people, those set apart for God and by God (Lev. 11:44-45). There is a symbolic significance of these dietary codes. They serve as Israel's commitment to God (Lev. 11:1-47; 20:24-26). Observance of dietary codes is a way of demonstrating Israel's loyalty to God and their participation in the Covenant (Deu. 14:2-3). Those meat mentioned in Lev. 11:1-47 include the flesh of all animals except of beasts that had cloven hoofs and were ruminants. Imagine the instruction given to Peter in the dream instructs him to kill and eat from these forbidden quadrupeds, birds and even reptiles the Mosaic Law prohibits, Esler, Philip. *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 93.

¹⁸⁷ Hauck, F. "Clean and Unclean in the NT", part of an article on καθαρίζω", *TDNT*, Vol. III, 423-6 (424); Wilson, S.G. *Luke and the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 68.

was the Jewish purity code abrogated? I don't agree with this interpretation by Wilson and Hauck. Rather, I agree with the view of John Elliott and Philip Francis Esler, which claims that the dietary-purity code, that the Torah upholds was reversed, or rescinded because the text does not tell its readers how and when God did the cleansing ritual of the gentiles.¹⁸⁸ Not even Peter could explain how the gentiles were cleansed. After the vision, Peter was left pondering about the possible meaning of the vision. He couldn't ascertain the meaning of the vision (10:17). While the three emissaries came, the Spirit said to Philip, "for I have sent them" (10:19-20).¹⁸⁹

In 10:22, Cornelius' emissaries preceded their request to Peter by presenting positive reports about Cornelius, to avoid undermining and offending Peter Jewish sensibilities. They started by referring to Cornelius as an upright man, a God-fearer, a man well-spoken of by the Jewish nation, a man directed by a holy angel. Little did they know that the Spirit was already working on Peter's Jewish attitude towards gentiles to promote a social and religious relationship.¹⁹⁰ Immediately after Peter's transformation, he realized that God had instituted a balance and equality between Jews and gentiles (10:34). At that spot, Peter (a Jew) hosted these gentiles for a night at Simon the tanner's house, where he has been lodging (10:23).¹⁹¹ A social healing and reconciliation has just begun between Peter (a Jew) and the emissaries (gentiles). However, Peter has come to know that the Spirit is leading him to go and see Cornelius, and this has proven that the Jewish ban on gentiles has been rescinded by God.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*.94; Elliott, "Household and Meals", 105.

¹⁸⁹ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 93-4; Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 129.

¹⁹⁰ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 94.

¹⁹¹ Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 94.

¹⁹² Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 94.

3.4.2 The First Gentile to Join the Jesus Movement

This reversal of the purity codes demonstrates the enactment of God's impartiality (10:34). The gentiles now receive the Holy Spirit, just the Jews did too (Acts 2). This wall of exclusivity has now been shifted towards making the movement inclusive in accepting gentiles for baptism.¹⁹³ According to Elliott, this became a defined warrant for mission to the gentiles.¹⁹⁴ But when studying the structure of the narrative of Acts, Cornelius is not the first to be received as a gentile into the membership of the Jesus movement. As I have noted in chapter one that there are two different positions of biblical scholars about who the first gentile is to join this movement. For scholars like Elliot, the reception of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18 marks the commissioning of the mission to gentiles.¹⁹⁵

Tannehill explains why some scholars claim that Cornelius should be read as the first gentile with whom the gentile mission had begun. He writes that these scholars claim the apostolic involvement of Peter in the Cornelius episode.¹⁹⁶ Tannehill also mentions the reason why these scholars hesitate to refer to the Ethiopian eunuch as the first gentile to join the Jesus movement is about the "disturbance this would cause to a prior conclusion: that the narrator intends to present Peter as the initiator of the gentile mission in the story of Cornelius' conversion".¹⁹⁷ But this isn't true. Paul in Acts 9, who joined the movement after the Philip-Ethiopian eunuch's encounter in Acts 8, came and took over the affairs of the gentile mission to the gentile world, to places like Antioch in Acts 13, Malta in Acts 28:1-10.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 136-7.

¹⁹⁴ Elliott, "Household and Meals", 105.

¹⁹⁵ Elliott, "Household and Meals", 105.

¹⁹⁶ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 110.

¹⁹⁷ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 110.

¹⁹⁸ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 137.

Ernest Haenchen gives his reason for referring to Cornelius as the first gentile to join the Jesus movement. According to Haenchen, the author of Acts did not state that the Ethiopian eunuch was a gentile; otherwise, Philip would have forestalled Peter as the initiator and the founder of the gentile mission and the first to join the Jesus movement.¹⁹⁹ For Robert P. Menzies and Elliott the role of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit marks the Cornelius event as a dramatic event, which means that Cornelius should be referred to as the first gentile to join the movement.²⁰⁰ Elliot strengthens his claim on the basis that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his household parallels the Jerusalem Pentecost experience. Therefore, this event marks the commissioning of the gentile mission.²⁰¹ Dunn and Menzies' argument lies on the role of the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the factor which defines who is a believer. They claim that Cornelius and his entire household had the baptism of the Holy Spirit.²⁰²

These arguments against the Ethiopian eunuch being the first gentile to join the Jesus movement, hover around 1) apostolic involvement, 2) the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and 3) the ambiguity of the eunuch's ethnic category as Haenchen claims. My arguments respond to these claims. Firstly, Acts 8:26-40 explicitly categorizes the eunuch as an Ethiopian. The use of Ethiopian (Αἰθίοψ) is an ethno-geographical marker. To be an Ethiopian, is to be ethnically an Ethiopian. The Ethiopian is even more ethnically defined than Cornelius, who bears a blurring ethnic marker (*alloghulos*). From a chronological structure of the narratives, this eunuch's encounter comes first (Acts 8:26-40), therefore, he should be read as the first gentile to join the Jesus movement and not Cornelius. Also, the implication of this is that the gentile mission

¹⁹⁹ Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 315.

²⁰⁰ Menzies, Robert P. *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 267; Elliott, Elliott, "Household and Meals", 105.

²⁰¹ Elliott, "Household and Meals", 105.

²⁰² Menzies, Robert P. *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 267; Dunn, James D. G. "Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today" *Studies in biblical theology*, 2d ser., 15. (London: SCM Press, 1970), 82.

begun with this Ethiopian eunuch. For the fact that the encounter of the eunuch was not at Ethiopia, but at least the gospel located an Ethiopian on his way.

Secondly, I am responding to scholars like Elliott who claim that the Ethiopian eunuch's encounter was without apostolic involvement. This view claims that Philip is not an apostle and that the church in Jerusalem is not aware of this development. Scholars should acknowledge the fact that as the Cornelius narrative was orchestrated by the divine agent (the Spirit), so also was the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian's eunuch. According to Ricard Dillon, both narratives are accounts of a miracle encounter initiated by the Holy Spirit who clearly directs all events. Philip and Peter were both used by God to bring about the vindication of these two individuals whose commitment and determination to God were acknowledged by God himself.²⁰³ For Philip to be sent by God, Philip must have been fully equipped for the task set before him.

Thirdly, seeing that Philip was also a man filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5), he administered water baptism to the Ethiopian eunuch as a symbol of inclusion into the Jesus movement.²⁰⁴ This confirms the eunuch's inclusion as a member. The Spirit, who plays the role of the divine providence, provided water for the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism to indicate his full membership (Acts 8:36-39).²⁰⁵ The Spirit himself facilitated the inclusion of this eunuch into this movement, therefore, and Philip should be considered as the initiator of the gentile mission and the Ethiopian eunuch as the first gentile to become part of the Jesus movement. If the author of Acts of the Apostles could present Paul, who came later as an apostle to the gentiles, what then stops Philip to one?

²⁰³ Dillon, Richard J. "Acts." *In The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Ed. Joseph A. Fitzmyer et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 743; Johnson, Luke Timothy. "Acts." *In The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Ed. Joseph A. Fitzmyer et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 151.

²⁰⁴ Jipp, "Hospitable Barbarian", 17.

²⁰⁵ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 108.

Not acknowledging Peter as the initiator of the gentile mission and Cornelius as the first gentile to join the Jesus movement does not mean to deny the significance of this encounter. The inclusion of Cornelius into the Jesus movement is a breakthrough for the gentile mission. It is not a breakthrough because gentiles are now accepted for baptism, rather, because Jewish believers, like Peter, now realize their right to freely associate with gentiles as they both go into a perpetual relationship.²⁰⁶ For the gentile now fully participate in God's salvation history for humanity.²⁰⁷ This narrative of Peter and Cornelius focuses on the transformation process of the movement towards becoming a universal institution, by becoming inclusive through the breaking down of ethnic distinctions. The divine agent actively participated through divine promptings and causing human reaction leading to the transformation process.²⁰⁸

3.4.3 The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit/Baptism

There are similarities in between this narrative of Cornelius and the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch discussed in chapter one in the order of their baptism. In Acts 10:19-20, the Spirit gives instruction to Peter to go and meet Cornelius just as in 8:29, the Spirit told Philip to approach the Ethiopian eunuch. As Peter arrived, he preached the gospel about Jesus to Cornelius. In 10:34, Peter opened his mouth. Similarly, in 8:35 Philip opened his mouth. The message of these two persons (Peter and Philip) are introduced in a similar fashion.²⁰⁹ The author makes a parallel of these two narratives. While Peter was preaching the gospel about Jesus, the Holy Spirit now fell on the gentiles. This marks the confirmation of the acceptance of gentiles into the Jesus movement. What would Peter do? His doubt has been cleared. The Jewish nation can now testify that gentiles have been confirmed accepted for mission. Water

²⁰⁶ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 137.

²⁰⁷ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 144.

²⁰⁸ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 137.

²⁰⁹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 110-1.

cannot be withheld from these gentiles (uncircumcised), vindicated by God. Since Peter has received a confirmation of the acceptance of these gentiles through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he got them baptized as a physical ritual for this confirmation.²¹⁰ This baptism aligns with the baptism the eunuch received by Philip, which confirms the commissioning of the gentile mission.

Cornelius now believes in Jesus and is joined in fellowship with the Jewish people through the new covenant in Jesus. This demonstrates the universal significance of the role of Jesus in the inclusivity of the Jesus movement. Through Jesus, both Jews and gentiles are reconciled to God as his people.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 141-2.

²¹¹ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 142.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR. CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at studying how the book of Acts applies ethnic markers in the characterization of persons. The characters considered for this investigation were, firstly the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 and secondly, Cornelius in Acts 10-11:18 who is characterized as *allophulos*. The problem this thesis intended to address is the problem of ethnic identification. In recent scholarship, the characterization of these characters is a matter that demands further investigation. In the case of the Ethiopian, some scholars read him as a gentile while some scholars read him as a Jew. In the case of Cornelius, some scholars read him as a proselyte and others read him as a God-fearer.

4.1 Discussion of results

In chapter two, I discussed the characterization of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. In my analysis of the text, I mentioned the various classes of argument by scholars about the characterization of this Ethiopian eunuch. In my findings, I realized that this character is an Ethiopian ethnically, and he is a gentile and a foreigner to Jewish background because, the text does not describe him either as a Jew or a God-fearer, or a proselyte. This means that the author of Acts is referring to the eunuch as a gentile strictly. He is curious to know more about whom the Isaiah text refers to and his request was granted. Philip interpreted the passage to him which led to his willingness to be baptized. After the baptism, the eunuch left for his destination a happy man. He was divinely vindicated by the God. This event marks a milestone to the history of the Jesus movement, where gentile have now been included into the salvation plan of God.

In chapter three, I carried out an exegesis of Acts 10:1-11:18. This Cornelius narrative also marks a divine intervention where this exceptional pious God-fearer is vindicated by God.

Cornelius bears a marker that does not give any detail about his ethnic belonging. Rather, he is assumedly a Roman citizen. And my reason for this assumption is that I found out that Rome granted Roman citizen to most military personnel.

I found out that Cornelius, as Hartog observes, did not go through any conversion because of his exceptional Jewish piety. To confirm this, the Holy Spirit fell on him and his entire household before he was baptized. Though he is not the first gentile to become a follower of Jesus, but his inclusion challenges the Jewish thought of Peter and the Jerusalem church listening to Peter (11:1-18). Peter's Jewish understanding was challenged by this divine vindication of Cornelius into becoming a member of Jesus followers. The Jerusalem church was challenged by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the gentiles even before baptism. This narrative demonstrates how the salvation plan of God is extended to the gentiles.

From the findings of these two exegeses, it can be deduced that Acts applies ethnic markers in the characterization of person to show how all kinds of people are getting included into the salvation plan of God, by acknowledging the transcendence of Jesus above the Law. In Acts, Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms and the initiator of the new divine covenant, in which all humans are reconciled back to God.

4.2 Contributions to Research

This study makes several contributions to the existing body of knowledge on how Ethnicity plays a role in the book of Acts. Firstly, it provides an overview of some literatures on ethnicity, highlighting the gaps and limitations that this research aims to address. Secondly, this research applies a methodology that offers a nuanced understanding of ethnicity from the texts. The contribution made by this research is significant because it explains how the study of ethnicity in biblical studies can be advanced.

This research contributes to the ongoing debates on the role of ethnicity in the book of Acts by studying the characterization of the Ethiopian “Αἰθίοψ” eunuch and Cornelius the *alloghulos*.

4.3 Reflection on the Limitation of the Thesis

- a. The study timeframe was limited to ten weeks, which may not be capture sufficient opinions of many numbers of scholars to build more arguments.
- b. The study was limited to only two characters in Acts, which may not give a full idea of how Acts applies ethnic markers in the characterization of persons.
- c. The study methodology was based on literary/narratological critical reading approach which yielded a nuanced picture of the narratives.
- d. The selection of books and other relevant materials were limited to my available means, which may not have captured the full range of scholarly views.
- e. The study’s findings may be limited to my personal biases and assumptions.

4.4 Recommendations

- a. Based on these conclusions, biblical scholars should consider that the Ethiopian eunuch is not a Jew, rather a gentile.
- b. Cornelius should be considered as a God fearer as he is labelled.
- c. I recommend that the Ethiopian eunuch be considered as the first gentile convert to the Jesus movement.
- d. With the dynamic understanding of the Qumran interpretation of Isaiah 53, I recommend that further studies should be done on how the Isaiah 53 really works in Acts 8:26-40.
- e. I recommend further studies on this theme of ethnicity in Acts. It has the capacity healing social wounds. If Jews like Philip and Peter can accept gentiles into the Jewishly

dominated community, then this gesture can be extended to our today's violent sensitive world where tolerance and mutual love is becoming difficult to be realize in some places.

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