

Repentance unto life: Acceptance and behavioural expectations of Gentiles in the Jerusalem church in light of the experience of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 11:18)

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DEDICATION

To my parents: my earthly dad for teaching me about identity so I never had to wonder about my standing in the world, he showed me I was invaluable. And to my mother, one of the incredible grafted-in-ones, whose curiosity, zest for life and desire for learning impacted my own dreams and propelled me toward a sense of adventure.

NOTE TO THE TEXT

Greek and Hebrew words are provided in Greek and Hebrew script, and also transcribed in Roman characters at times when the author sees added benefit to the reader and/or clarification to the point of explanation. English biblical references are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

A term all too familiar to readers is used in this study in a fashion that may be new to many. In the spirit of Jewish thinking and customs, the name of the Lord appears with a hyphen in the middle, as G-d, rather than the letter “o”. Many orthodox Jews will not write out the word “G-d,” but instead will instead insert a hyphen in the middle to write ‘G-d.’

The thinking comes from Deuteronomy 12:4, a verse that some Rabbis of old linked to the verse immediately preceding it. From this they deduced a prescription to avoid “obliterating” the Divine Name. To them this meant not defaming the Name like other nations do. As a result, they would take great care with how the Name is written. If in a scroll or book, the text would be buried at the end of their lifetimes. If the Name was written outside of formal scrolls or books, the word would take an altered form, ‘G-d’, to preserve the sanctity of the Name. In short, it was a way of showing reverence and the practice remains until today. Rabbi Aryeh Sheinberg, noted in the acknowledgements, explains it as such: “So we write the hyphenated form, G-d, to show great respect.”

I learned this and other customs, including some in place around in the time of Jesus — such as reciting the daily Shema and recognizing events on the annual calendar — while spending extended periods of time studying in and around Israel.

One year while studying in Turkey, I was greatly impacted standing in front of the ancient theatre in Miletus. An inscription on the theatre seating stood out like a placard for “reserved seating”. The inscription, written in Greek, transliterated read: “topos eioudeon ton kai theosebion,” meaning, “place of the Jews, who are also called G-d-fearing.” While the term G-d-fearing could have been an appellation for the Jews in Miletus, my professor pointed out that it could have referred to G-d-fearing Gentiles who could be mistaken for Jews. These were Gentiles who worshiped the G-d of Israel and in many instances kept the Mosaic Law, but did not take the final step of circumcision necessary to become a proselyte. This cemented my interest in discovering more about these so called G-d-fearers, who they were and how they sought to draw near to the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph.

ABSTRACT

In the two or three centuries before the Common Era and the two centuries afterwards, Israel experienced dynamic shifts in its socio-economic and religious life. Under Roman rule the population grew, the Jewish literacy rate improved and urbanization increased. This environment was the birth place of the earliest Church, the habitat of the disciples, and the historical entry point of Cornelius, the G-d-fearing centurion.

Like other G-d-fearers, Cornelius may have considered the stringent ritual purity laws and ethnic identity issues impenetrable barriers to full conversion to Judaism. For that reason, and perhaps others, he stayed on the fringes of the religion, while his Hebrew-like mindfulness and lifestyle garnered attention from those around him, including “all the Jewish people”. The divine intervention that accompanied Peter’s unlikely house-call brought about a change that no one anticipated.

This dissertation sets out to examine the events surrounding Acts 10 and determine the behavioural expectations of the Gentiles to whom the letter of Acts 15 was written. What degree of Torah observance was expected of them and what degree of observance was incorporated/demonstrated in their lives? The key word “who are turning” (ἐπιστρέφουσιν or epistrepousin) (Acts 15:19), in the Present Active Participle Masculine Plural Dative form, reflects the continuous change they experience on the road to fullness.

Drawing on earlier research, I present an ethnographic study of Gentile Jesus followers. As such I argue that while they were not obligated to follow more of the Torah than what was presented at the Jerusalem Council, some enjoyed a higher level of observance than the prescriptions inherent in the Apostolic Decree. Secondly, I argue that the apostles may have anticipated a higher level of observance as words from the Didache seemed to encourage (Didache 6:2-30).

Key Words: Second Temple Judaism, First-century Christianity, Noahide Commands, Didache, yirei shamayim, God-fearing proselytes, Righteous Gentile, sebomenoi ton theon, phoboumenoi, Birkath Haminim, halakha, tsedaqah, mikvaoth, God fearers, sympathizers, Jerusalem Council, Second Commonwealth, Two Ways Document, Apostolic Decree, Cornelius, Caesarea, Unclean. New Testament Studies, Acts 10, Acts 15, Jewish Identity.

OPSOMMING

In die twee of drie eeue voor die Christelike Tydperk en die twee eeue daarna het Israel dinamiese verskuiwings in die volk se sosio-ekonomiese en geloofslewe ervaar. Die populasie het gegroei onder Romeinse regering, die Joodse ongeletterdheidsyfer het verbeter en verstedeliking het toegeneem. Hierdie omgewing is waar die vroeë Kerk tot stand gekom het, dit was die habitat van die dissipels, en die historiese ingangspunt van Kornelius, die G-dvresende hoofman (centurio).

Soos ander G-dvresendes, kan dit wees dat Kornelius die streng ritualistiese reinheidswette en etniese identiteitskwessies gesien het as 'n struikelblok tot volle bekering tot Judaïsme. Hy het daarom, en miskien vir ander bykomende redes, aan die rand van die geloofsgemeenskap gebly, maar sy ingesteldheid het herinner aan 'n Hebreeuse denkwysse en leefstyl wat die aandag getrek het van diegene rondom hom, insluitende "al die Jode". Die G-ddelike intrede wat tydens Petrus se onwaarskynlike huisbesoek plaasvind, het 'n verandering gebring wat niemand kon voorsien nie.

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die gebeure rondom Handeling 10 en bepaal watter optredes van die nie-Jode aan wie Handeling 15 gerig is, verwag is. Watter mate van Torah-handhawing is van hulle verwag en watter mate van handhawing blyk uit hulle lewens? Die sleutelwoord "die wat hulle bekeer" (ἐπιστρέφουσιν of epistrephousin) (Handeling 15:19), in die Teenwoordige Aktiewe Deelwoordelike Manlike Meervoud-Datiewe vorm, dui op die aanhoudende verandering wat hulle ondergaan op weg na volheid.

Deur uit vorige navorsing te put, bied ek 'n etnografiese studie van nie-Joodse Jesus-volgelinge. Ek voer as sodanig aan dat al is daar nie van hulle vereis om meer van die Torah te volg as wat by die Raad van Jerusalem besluit is nie, sommiges tog 'n groter mate van handhawing getoon het as wat blyk uit die beskrywings in die Apostoliese verordening. Tweedens voer ek aan dat die apostels dalk 'n groter mate van handhawing voorsien het as wat die woorde van Didache aanmoedig (Didache 6:2-30).

Sleutelwoorde: Tweede Tempel Judaïsme, Eerste-eeuse Christendom, Nuwe Testament Studies, Handeling 10, Handeling 15, Raad van Jerusalem, Noäietiese voorskrifte, Didache, Tweede Ryk, Eerste-eeuse Judaïsme, Joodse identiteit, Israel, Regverdige nie-Jood, Joodse Grondskrif (Two Ways Document), Apostoliese verordening, Kornelius, Sesarea, onrein, Birkath Haminim, halakah, tsedaqah, mikvaoth.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Problem Statement

1.1.1 Context

In the two or three centuries before the Common Era and the two centuries afterward, Israel experienced dynamic shifts in its socio-economic and religious life. Under Roman rule the population grew, the Jewish literacy rate improved and urbanization increased with the founding of new towns and the rebuilding and enlargement of others (Bar-Ilan, 1992:46-61). Civil life was good. Religious life was just as vivacious. Judaism's monotheistic faith produced an abundance of sects, linked by the same basic presuppositions and divided by political tensions and diverse interpretations of Scripture (Josephus, Jewish War 2:8:2, Antiquities 18:1:6).¹ This was the birth place of the earliest Church, the historical entry point of Jesus, and the habitat of the Disciples.

Outside the circle of the historical Hebrew people of faith, the pantheism of the Romans thrived. Worship of "the gods" adopted by cultures conquered by the Romans permeated all aspects of life and proliferated widely through travel and trade. "Virtually all of society revolved around religious principles associated with 'the gods,' from the worship of Caesar to the many household and civic deities" (Nanos, 1996:66). Greeks and Romans commonly adopted gods like Jupiter Dolichenus and Cybele, along with the practices of various nations, adding to their private pantheon without "converting" or losing their identity. Unlike entering the cult of Isis, taking part in the imitation ceremonies of Demeter and Persephone, or following Etruscan mythology, becoming a Jew meant total renunciation of other religious pursuits. It furthermore required identification with national aspirations of all Jews. If a person chose to believe in Caesar as his G-d, he was required to make an intellectual posit as required by Roman law, but was not intrinsically tied to other obligations. One who chose to believe in the G-d Adoni would embrace an ethnic, national and geographic identity. While most Romans chose their religious affiliation through pagan means, some chose religious satisfaction by seeking after the G-d of Israel.

First-century historian Suetonius wrote about Roman pagans pursuing Jewish beliefs in the context of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in the year 19 C.E. in Tiberius 36. Louis H. Feldman captures the historian's words in his book *Jew and Gentile*:

¹ From Josephus alone we know that Jewish divisions in the first century were listed as Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and followers of Judas the Galilean.

“There we are told that, in addition to the Jews of military age, whom the Emperor Tiberius assigned to provinces of less healthy climate, he banished others who were of the same race (gentis) or who were pursuing (sectantes, ‘following continually,’ ‘pursuing eagerly,’ ‘chasing’) similar beliefs (similia, literally ‘similar things’)” (Feldman, 1993:345).

Recognizing this Gentile attraction to Judaism, first-century Jewish historian Philo, in his treatise *De Vita Mosis II*, recorded his own related observation that the laws of Moses were honoured in his own day not only by the Jews but also by “almost every other nation” (Philo, *De Vita Mosis II*, 2:4:17).² Likewise, Jewish historian and apologist Josephus noted about the Jews in Antioch that they were “constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks, and these they had in some measure incorporated with themselves” (Josephus, BJ 7.45).

Gentile followers of the G-d of Israel were by no means a new phenomenon.³ When Israel left Egypt, a mixed multitude (עַרְבֵי רַב) (Exodus 12:38) followed, presumably fringe segments of the populous and enslaved ethnic groups living in the country (Okoye, 2006:3). Later in biblical history, other non-Jews — Rahab (Joshua 2), Naaman (2 Kings 5:17), and Ruth (Ruth 1:16-17), for example — found Adoni, turned to him, and affiliated themselves with the tribe to differing degrees; Ruth became a model for future Gentile converts; Naaman continued in his service to a pagan king, but worshiped the G-d of Israel.

In the Second Commonwealth, similar patterns of Gentile attraction to Judaism appear. Gentiles interested in the faith of Abraham could convert, but could also draw near without crossing the border into Judaism. Non-converters, sometimes called sympathizers or righteous Gentiles in the book of Acts (Acts 13:6, 26) — G-d-fearers (φοβούμενοι or *phoboumenoi*) and devout ones/worshippers (σεβομένοι or *sebomenoi*) (*transliteration added for clarity*)— clung to the sides of the Faith, participating as much as the belief system would allow outsiders (Levinskaya,

² Philo notes that the Laws of Moses had been kept, “securely and immutably from all time.”

³ Abram, later renamed Abraham the father of many nations, was blessed for the benefit of “all peoples on earth” (Genesis 12:2-3, 17:5). Isaiah spoke of outsiders in a number of settings: as they swore allegiance to the LORD, when G-d called to Gentiles, the inclusion of the foreigner, and gathering all nations and tongues (19:16-25, 49:22, 56:1-8, 66:18-24). Prophecy from the prophet Zechariah pointed to a time when the LORD would be recognized as king over all nations (Chapter 14).

1990:312-318).⁴ They maintained a non-Jewish, but Jewish-like status. A well-known G-d-fearer, a “righteous and G-d fearing man”, named Cornelius the Centurion, left behind the idolatry of Rome and adopted the ways of the Jews (Acts 10:22).

1.1.2 Problem Statement

All that is known about Cornelius, the Italian Centurion, is packed into chapters 10 and 11 of Acts. A handful of verses describe his leadership in the Italian Cohort, his gracious giving to the poor, and his practice of praying at specified times of the day. Like other G-d-fearers, Cornelius may have considered the stringent ritual purity laws and ethnic identity issues impenetrable barriers to full conversion to Judaism. For that reason, and/or perhaps others, he stayed on the fringe of the religion, while his Hebrew-like mindfulness and lifestyle garnered attention of those around him, including “all the Jewish people”. Attention to Cornelius also came from the Lord, who summoned Peter to make a house call on the highly esteemed Gentile (Acts 10:3ff; 10:22).

The events of Peter’s unlikely house call were prompted by divine intervention and facilitated by two servants and a soldier who led the apostle to Caesarea where Cornelius lived. On Peter’s arrival, Cornelius fell at his feet and then rose to speak. “Now we are all here in the presence of

G-d to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us,” he said, reflecting his awareness of G-d’s active presence in daily affairs (Acts 10:33). With these words, Cornelius showed an acquaintance with divine communication, a characteristic of the Faith he may have learned through teachings in the synagogue. Further, Acts 10:36ff implies that he had a more than casual familiarity with the Jesus story. This could indicate that Cornelius’ knowledge of the Faith was directed by, or at least augmented by, leaders of the Torah-centric sect that declared Jesus as the Messiah, those known as the apostles.

The apostles were highly regarded among Jews of the Second Temple Period (Acts 5:13). They maintained a high degree of ritual purity and Torah observance by refraining from unclean food (Acts 10:14), partaking in the Temple worship (Luke 24:53, Acts 2:46, 21:26), participating in scheduled celebrations, keeping the Sabbath and ordering their daily routines according to

⁴ See definition of G-d-fearer as one who worships G-d, but does not to become a Jew in the full sense of the word. Some scholars, including Louis H. Feldman (1950:200–208), reject the notion that “phoboumenoi” and “sebomenoi” necessarily refer to a class of people.

established times of prayer.⁵ With this in mind, Cornelius surely had to be aware that the invitation leading Peter to his home would put the apostle outside the boundaries of the code of holiness.

However, the importance of the invitation outweighed his concern, as soon becomes evident from the unusual series of events that followed. In the first event, the Holy Spirit (רוח הקודש) was “poured out” on Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:15). In the second (and as a result of the first), Peter felt persuaded to, and proceeded to, baptize the entire Gentile household (Acts 10:48-49). It became apparent that G-d-fearers could now be granted something heretofore unheard of on such a grand scale: “repentance unto life” (μετανοιαν εις ζωην) (Acts 11:18). Challenging the accepted paradigm of how one joined the “People of G-d,” the entire Cornelius experience turned the apostles’ attention to their perception of Gentiles. From this time forward their perception would change, dramatically and irreversibly. Positioned on the cusp of religious transformation, the leaders were forced to wrestle with a wholly central tenant of their faith.

In this study, we will look at the identity of the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Jesus, as an emerging entity within a religious body. How did they identified themselves within the context of Judaism. Further, what made Peter feel compelled to baptize Cornelius’ household as only Jews had previously been baptized?

What exactly did “repentance unto life” mean to the apostles? How did they understand the term and how did they interpret Peter’s actions in Cornelius’ home, i.e. his assumption that once Cornelius and his household were filled with the Holy Spirit, baptism should follow? Did that make them fully Jewish? Were they to be accepted into this Hebrew/Middle Eastern faith, both in terms of nationality and ethnically? Or was a new avenue to Adoni created according to which a Gentile did not have to become Jewish to be in a right relationship with Israel’s G-d? What did Cornelius and his family “become” that day, or put another way, what exactly did they “enter into” through the Holy Spirit and baptism?

Furthermore, what was the reaction of the broader Hebrew body? Having been given a new status by the apostles within the larger fellowship of Jewish believers in Jesus, how would the activities, manners and conduct of these newcomers reflect the change? What were the lifestyle requirements incumbent upon them? The Torah — made for the Hebrews and those who

⁵ Authors with material about Torah observance by Jesus and among the apostles that extend beyond the written Scriptures include Brad Young (Young, 2007) and David Flusser (Flusser, 1987).

converted to join them — did not bind non-Jews who stood outside the Jewish boundary.⁶ The Rabbis recognized the special obligations incumbent upon Israel, which did not fall on Gentiles (Sanders, 1977:211). Nevertheless, in the case of the Jesus movement and its ground-breaking inclusion of Gentiles, uncertainty arose among leaders responsible for making sense of the new circumstances. Some of the apostles appear to have believed that outsiders could join only if they first converted to Judaism (Acts 15:1-5; Galatians 2:12) and some entered into a debate about dietary concerns and the need for separation from Gentiles, particularly at meals (Acts 10:28; Galatians 2:11-14; Colossians 2:21). Regarding issues of purity, Peter seems to have initially embraced a similar position, such that Torah-observance was required of all members of the Jesus movement (Galatians 2:12; Acts 10–11).

To be clear, the Torah did not preclude outsiders from taking upon themselves additional observances according to their respective abilities and desires (Le Cornu & Shulam, 2003:835). The tendency for Gentile followers of Judaism to model their behaviour after Jewish ways was exemplified with Cornelius. His behaviour, apparently pleasing to G-d (Acts 10:4), is mentioned in the writings of Isaiah the prophet of an earlier era, regarding foreigners who find favour, specifically those who “bind themselves to the Lord” and “keep the Sabbath without desecrating it”, and “hold fast to G-d’s covenant” (Isaiah 56:5-6). In this sense, the complex system of scripturally based purity guidelines that directed the apostles’ lives served as a role model for followers of Jesus, both Jew and Gentile.⁷

In what seems to be an autonomous act, the Cornelius event enabled the sect of Judaism that claimed that Jesus was the Messiah to enlarge the boundaries of Judaism to include G-d-fearers associated with Jesus and his followers. This new era in which G-d-fearing Gentiles were given the same “gift” as full-fledged members of the Faith, begged the question about “purity”. The Council at Jerusalem became the locale where the apostles set forth deliberating on the matter.

It was decided in the Council setting that incoming Gentiles would be given a list of behavioural imperatives — no polluted foods, no sexual immorality, no strangled animal meat, nor blood. One has to wonder what gave them the authority to make decisions of inclusion here-to-fore reserved

⁶ Regarding Gentiles, who are made righteous without the law, note that both Noah and Abraham were called righteous. For more on Gentile righteousness with reference to Sifra Ahare pereq 13.13, see E.P. Sanders (Sanders, 1981:207).

⁷ See 1 Peter 2:11-25 in which Peter encouraged “G-d’s elect” to conduct themselves honorably so that Gentiles may glorify G-d in light of their honorable deeds. Also see 1Peter 4:3 regarding unG-dly behavior of Gentiles.

for governance leaders. James issued the decree after much debate, adding, “For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21).⁸ In other words, the list of behavioural imperatives would be put in place knowing that the synagogue would serve as a venue for continuing education. Moses’ instruction would round out what it meant to be part of the new tribe as G-d-fearing Gentiles started the process of “turning” (ἐπιστρέφουσιν) from paganism to the faith of Jesus (Acts 15:19).⁹ The present, non-finite form of the verb “turning” implies a continuing rather than a one-time action. In other words, transformation wouldn’t happen all at once; it would take time to learn the complexities that Moses’ followers had known for well over a millennium.¹⁰

If G-d-fearers attended synagogue before acceptance into the apostle’s faith, the idea of synagogue attendance may have simply encouraged a weekly habit already adopted and in place by Gentiles like Cornelius. The polytheistic faith systems from which Gentiles came slowly faded into the background as regular exposure to Torah-centric living shaped lives into those more closely associated with Adoni.¹¹ Clearly, adherence to the law was not an entrance requirement for salvation, just as the Law was never intended to bring salvation to any man, but respect for basic rules of behaviour would define the minimal requirements of Law and customs as they formed a new relationship between Gentiles and the people of Israel (Nanos, 1996:23). The guidelines at the Council at Jerusalem were but a starting point on the road to becoming fully mature followers and disciples.

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the newly formed Church began to tilt away from Jerusalem and away from its Hebrew/Middle Eastern heritage. As the gospel spread throughout the Western world — capturing hearts and permanently changing the landscape of pagan civilizations in the Roman Empire — Gentile followers began to outnumber the Hebrew followers of Jesus. At the same time, Roman culture, Greek customs, Hellenism, fused together with Jewish philosophy, theology and traditions, creating a new, not-so-Jewish-looking belief system. By the middle of the third century, what was once a Jewish sect made up of Jewish believers in Jesus,

⁸ For other first century synagogue functions, see Anders Runesson (Runesson, 2004).

⁹ The form of the word ἐπιστρέφουσιν is a present active participle dative plural masculine {PAP-DPM}.

¹⁰ Nanos’ interpretation of Paul’s understanding of Gentiles and purity sheds new light on the subject. “If Paul had maintained (as is generally assumed) that Christian Gentiles are entirely free from embracing the Law and purity behavior, then why does he spend the greater part of this letter (Romans 5-16) insisting on proper behavior...?” (Nanos, 1996:23).

with its physical and spiritual identity planted inside the land of Israel, hardly resembled the Faith embraced by the Italian Centurion of Acts.

With little regard for later developments in Jewish or Christian history, this study delves into the defining nature and character (i.e. level of Torah observance) incumbent upon Gentiles in Israel entering the fellowship of believers in Jerusalem that declared Jesus as the Messiah before the destruction of the Second Temple. What level of Torah observance was expected of them by early Church leaders and what level of “acceptance” was actually given to them?

To that end, this research project considers the identity of the apostles’ fellowship of believers, and their place in the larger Hebrew body. It also considers the biblical account of Cornelius the Centurion as a possible prototype for later Gentile adherents while asking the question “who were the Gentiles attracted to Judaism in the Second Temple Period, particularly the Jesus-following G-d-fearers, and how were they attracted”?

The main problem statement to be researched is:

The “repentance unto life” granted to the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house begs questions concerning the level of acceptance granted to these gentiles, their unique identity, and indeed the identity of the Torah-centric sect in Jerusalem who felt empowered to baptize them (Acts 10-15).

The following questions are considered in the research:

- Who were the Gentiles attracted to Judaism in the Second Temple Period, particularly the Jesus-following G-d-fearers, and how were they attracted?
- Who were the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Jesus, as an emerging entity within a religious body, and how did they identify or define themselves within the context of Judaism?
- In light of Second Temple practices, how are we to understand the meaning of events at Cornelius’ house, particularly Peter’s spontaneous response to baptize Gentiles.
- What unique circumstances concerning incoming Gentiles did the Apostles face as a result of events at Cornelius’ house and what gave them the authority to make decisions of inclusion here-to-fore reserved for governance leaders?
- Having gone through the transformation experience, what level of “acceptance” was granted to Gentile believers and what level of Torah observance was expected of them by early Church leaders?

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to determine the behavioural expectations of Gentiles to whom the letter of Acts 15 was written in order to determine the level of Torah observance expected of them and incorporated in their lives.¹¹ The objectives of this project are as follows:

1. To examine Gentiles collectively, as well as Gentile attraction to Judaism (and the Jews who attracted them) during the Second Temple Period in order to gain insight into the identity of the G-d-fearing Gentiles leading up to the formation of the Church (Chapter 2).
2. To acquire knowledge about how the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Jesus identified or defined themselves within the context of broader Judaism (Chapter 3)?
3. To ascertain the meaning of events at Cornelius' house in light of Second Temple cultural practices, including Peter's spontaneous response to baptize Gentiles (Chapter 4).
4. To consider issues faced by the Apostles concerning incoming Gentiles, and to understand how the apostolic leaders saw themselves as qualified to make organizational decisions about Gentiles apart from the Sanhedrin (Chapter 5).
5. To re-examine the levels of "acceptance" granted to Gentile Christians and to ascertain the level of Torah observance early Church leaders expected of them (Chapter 6).

1.3 Central Theoretical Argument

Through the act of baptizing Cornelius and his household, Peter concedes that the Holy Spirit's visitation is an unquestionable sign of G-d's inclusion of Gentiles into the People of G-d. As a result, the requirements listed in Acts 15:20 for incoming Gentiles were seen as the beginning of the road in "repentance unto life", not the end state. "Repentance" and "turning" are conceived as ongoing continuous actions as in Hebraic thought.

¹¹ A subsidiary aim is to ascertain the implications of this study for a current-day Christian understanding of the first century Church.

1.4 Method of Research

This study is based on the framework of a socio-historical perspective with an emphasis on Jewish texts, writers and historians. As a former student at a Reformed seminary in Florida, the content presented here aligns with the traditions of the Faculty of Theology at the Potchefstroom Campus.

With a focus on life within the land of Israel and the experience of believers in Jesus in the first part of the book of Acts, this research project intends to interweave socio-historical, linguistic and historical-critical approaches to Jewish and Gentile life in the Second Temple Period. Of interest are original sources, including Scripture, Intertestamental GrecoRoman literature, as well as Rabbinic and early Jewish writings. Recent developments in the understanding of Second Temple Period Judaism and its implications for the study of early Christianity receive special attention.

Guidelines for research methods employed are:

- A historical-critical review of biblical and extra-biblical references to G-d-fearing Gentiles, including avenues toward inclusion and levels of membership to the Jewish faith.
- A historical-critical examination of the body of Jesus followers in Second Temple Judaism within the cultural context of contemporaneous Judaism with a particular focus on its unique and divergent practices or theologies.
- A review of the book of Acts from a Hebraic/Rabbinic historical-linguistic context, examining religious precepts and technical terms relating to conversion.
- An examination of the governance structures of early Judaism and the conversion requirements balanced with the NT corpus and early Christian writings.
- An examination of early Christian writings, Rabbinic literature and early Jewish Christian communities, including a reverse trajectory analysis from groups like the Ebionites.

1.5 Breakdown of Chapters

The study divides into the following chapters. See the chart below for a graphic presentation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Gentile Attraction to Judaism in the Second Temple Period: Relationships and Attitudes

Chapter 3: The Jewish Fellowship of Jesus Followers - The Cornelius Event: Plausible Implications of an Unprecedented Event

- Chapter 4: Cornelius' House: An Unprecedented Event
- Chapter 5: Opening Doors: The Challenge of Incoming Gentiles
- Chapter 6: The Early Church: Acceptance and Expectations of Gentile Believers.
- Chapter 7: Conclusion

Table 1-1: Chapter outline

Chapter	Chapter Heading	Problem Statement	Aims	Method
2	Gentile Attraction to Judaism in the Second Temple Period: Relationships and Attitudes.	Who were the Gentiles attracted to Judaism in the Second Temple Period, particularly the Jesus-following G-d-fearers, and how were they attracted?	To examine Gentiles collectively, as well as Gentile attraction to Judaism (and the Jews who attracted them) in the Second Temple Period in order to gain insight into the identity of the G-d-fearing Gentiles leading up to the formation of the Church.	A historical-critical review of biblical and extra-biblical references to Gentiles and G-d-fearers with an emphasis on methods of influence and the impact of Jewish evangelism.
3	The Jewish Fellowship of Jesus Followers -The Cornelius Event: Plausible Implications of an Unprecedented Event.	To determine the identity of Torahcentric Jewish believers in Jesus as an emerging entity within a larger Jewish body.	To acquire knowledge about how the Torahcentric Jewish believers in Jesus identified or defined themselves within the context of broader Judaism?	A historical-critical study of the body of Jesus followers in the Second Temple Period with a particular focus on understanding practices or theologies.
4	Cornelius' House: An Unprecedented Event.	In light of Second Temple practices, how are we to understand the meaning of the events at Cornelius' house, particularly Peter's spontaneous response of baptizing Gentiles?	To ascertain the meaning of events at Cornelius' house in light of Second Temple cultural practices, including Peter's spontaneous response of baptizing Gentiles.	A review of the book of Acts from a Hebraic/linguistic context, examining technical terms.

Chapter	Chapter Heading	Problem Statement	Aims	Method
5	Opening Doors: The Challenge of Incoming Gentiles.	What unique circumstances concerning incoming Gentiles did the Apostles face as a result of the events at Cornelius' house and what gave them the authority to make decisions of inclusion here-to-fore reserved for governance leaders?	To consider issues faced by the Apostles concerning incoming Gentiles, and to understand how the apostolic leaders saw themselves qualified to make organizational decisions about Gentiles apart from the Sanhedrin.	An investigation into the Jerusalem Council, issues of purity, governance structures of Judaism, and rabbinical writings balanced with NT corpus.
6	The Early Church: Acceptance and Expectations of Gentile Believers.	Having gone through the transformation experience, what level of "acceptance" was granted to Gentile believers and what level of Torah observance was expected of them by early Church leaders?	To re-examine the levels of "acceptance" granted to Gentile Christians and ascertain the level of Torah observance early Church leaders expected of them.	A breakdown of early Christian writings, Rabbinic literature and an analysis of early Jewish Christian communities.

Before closing this chapter, it may benefit the reader to learn my view of the Christian church since the contents of this paper may sound "Jewish," or at the very least unconventional. I'm a graduate of Trinity School for Ministry, an Episcopal theological college outside of Pittsburg, and I've also taken courses at Wycliffe College Oxford, Columbia University in NYC, and Yeshiva University, an Orthodox Jewish seminary also in NYC. My passion for learning Scripture and Jewish history prompted my pursuits to study these subjects.

I grew up in the American Episcopal church, the daughter of an Episcopal priest, embracing conventional Christian doctrines that remain invaluable in my current belief system. Over the last

twenty years or so, because of study and exposure to Israel and Israeli scholarship, these values took on an added dimension. As mentioned earlier, I spent quite a lot of time in Israel beginning in 1999. Returning over the years, I studied at Jerusalem University College (touring Greece, Turkey, Jordan, and Israel), led tours, met with Christian leaders, Jewish leaders and consulted in the nonprofit sector. While at Jerusalem University College, I learned under archeologist Dr. Gabriel Barkay and more intensively under the tutelage of R. Steven Notley, Program Director of Nyack College Graduate Programs in Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins.

The Christians I met in Israel celebrated their faith in ways unfamiliar to me. They gathered for Friday night for meals to usher in the biblical Sabbath, made a cohesive blend of the Older and Newer Testaments and took part in biblical holiday events during the year. With subsequent visits, I met more and more Christians expressing their beliefs in these seemingly odd ways. A new understanding of life and Christianity emerged, much of which is expressed in the pages that follow.

Interestingly, in my hometown of San Antonio, Texas, some members of a mainline denominational Methodist church gather on Friday nights; they also observe Saturday as the Sabbath in voluntary, unburdened ways. The head pastor of this church leads a large congregation who recite in the Shema in Hebrew at the beginning of Sunday morning services. The same holds true for two other mainline church services in and around San Antonio.

Last summer, I attended a 4-week consortium with Christian leaders from around the world at the Center for Jewish-Christian Relations. Dr. Brad Young of Oral Roberts University, whose research appears in this present work, taught these leaders at the Max Stern Academic College campus of Emek Yezreel. Those attending the consortium believed in Jesus and hailed from different parts of the world including China, India, Ireland, South Africa, and the United States. I watched as they too expressed their New Testament faith with an informed position of the cultural context of Jesus and integrated various first-century church customs.

The more I learned, the more I became fascinated with Christian thinking at the time of its origin, influenced by the customs, traditions and social intellect of Jesus. My passion for gaining insight into the first-century worldview led to the topic of this dissertation. My hope and prayer are that it is intriguing to read, stimulates new thoughts and leaves the reader filled with a joy hunger for more.

CHAPTER 2: GENTILE ATTRACTION TO JUDAISM IN THE SECOND

TEMPLE PERIOD: RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES

2.1 Introduction

From the time that Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans up until the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 C.E.) — or certainly by the time of Constantine (272-337 C.E.) — Gentiles were exposed to the unique monotheistic religion of the G-d of Abraham. During the Second Commonwealth a combination of exceptional factors drew Gentiles to the same faith like no other time in history.

The aim of this chapter is to examine Gentiles collectively, especially the Gentile attraction to Judaism (and the Jews who attracted them) during the Second Temple Period, to gain insight into the identity of the G-d-fearing Gentiles leading up to the formation of the Church.

Based on my conception of the world related to the topic here and the sources available to my research, the objectives of this chapter are as follows: To explore the concept of Gentiles from a collective perspective given my understanding; to explore terms and definitions related to G-dfearers; and to delve into the process of Gentiles drawing near to Judaism - what was particularly attractive to them? Finally, this chapter explores Jewish evangelism.

An historical critical review of biblical and extra biblical references to Gentiles and G-d Fearers will be implemented including methods of influence and the impact of Jewish evangelism. The Second Commonwealth, or Second Temple Period, coined the “age of diversity” by Jacob Neusner, covers the time of the formation of Hebrew Scriptures around 586B.C. E. to the destruction of the second temple in 70 C.E (Neusner, 1992:393; Freedman, 2000:365).

2.2 Gentiles – a View from Scripture

Gentiles are found in the narrative of Hebrew Scripture in great abundance, supporting the people of G-d at times, and opposing them at other times. Starting from a high elevation, the first section of this chapter looks at the concept of non-Jews from a Hebrew perspective, with Scripture references that form a theology of Gentile participation in G-d’s overarching plan for humanity.

The word *goy* (גוי) and its variants, often translated as “gentile” or “nation”, appear in the Hebrew Bible over 550 times in reference to both Israelites and Gentile nations (Bromiley, 1979:219). The

first occurrence of the word is found in Genesis when the writer looks back at the descendants of Noah's sons. It reads, "From these the coastlands of the nations (הַגּוֹיִם) were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations (בְּגוֹיֵיהֶם)" (Genesis 10:5). A promise given to Abraham about his descendants, that they will form a "great nation" (לְגוֹי גָדוֹל) (Genesis 12:2), and another promise about his status as father to a multitude of nations (הַמְיוֹן גּוֹיִם) (Genesis 17:4) come from the same word. Abraham is the corner stone upon which Jewish thought constructs a living community of faith (Young, 1995:201). Though a Gentile, his faith through righteousness laid the groundwork for Jewish history. Strong defines the word goy in detail:

"Rarely (shortened) goy {go'-ee}; apparently from the same root as gevah (in the sense of massing); a foreign nation; hence, a Gentile; also (figuratively) a troop of animals, or a flight of locusts — Gentile, heathen, nation, people" (Strong, 2011:1471).

This word and others describe diverse groups of people revealed throughout the Tanakh. Rebekah, as she prepares to give birth to Esau and Jacob, inquires with the Lord about the babies jostling inside of her, and the Lord answers, "Two nations ([כ=גויים] or *goyim*) [ק=גויים] or *govyim*] emphasis mine) are in your womb; and two peoples (וְלָאִם or *leummim*) will be separated from your body" (Genesis 25:23). Later, Jacob hears a divine declaration with similar overtones, "A nation (גּוֹי or *govy*) and a company of nations (גּוֹיִם or *goyim*) shall come from you" (emphasis mine) (Genesis 35:11).

It is hard to miss the fact that among the nations mentioned in the Bible, Israel stands alone. The distinction between Israel and other nations is a major theme in the overall trajectory of biblical theology, particularly between the Exodus from Egypt and the Second Temple Period. Adam, Eve, Enoch, and Noah, among other Gentiles, live near the beginning of the chronological timetable. Noah, a righteous and blameless man among the people, is particularly notable in this discourse. He walks faithfully with G-d to the extent that his pious nature is analysed in a later era and deemed suitable for emulation by Gentiles.¹² Guidelines based on Noah's virtuous behaviour, coined the "Noahide Commandments" in rabbinic Judaism, are detailed in the Tosefta of the late second or third century C.E. (Nanos, 1996:53).

¹² Genesis 6:9. According to the Midrash, this is a lesser designation than Abraham who "walked before G-d" (Genesis 6:9b; Bereshit 17:1, 24:40).

A number of Gentiles had a notable impact on biblical history. For instance, Hagar, the first woman after the Garden to hear G-d's voice (Genesis 21); Tamar, whose story of morality stood as a model (Genesis 38)¹³; Asenath, the mother of Ephraim and Menasseh (Genesis 41:45)¹⁴; Shifrah and Puah, midwives in Egypt that spared the lives of Hebrew baby boys (Exodus 1:15ff.)¹⁵; Rachav, whose chord of crimson saved her life and the lives of her family; and of course Ruth, the Moabitess, the great-grandmother of Jesus. Villains that find their way into the Tanakh include Leban, Pharaoh, Amelek, Goliath, and Haman.

The Torah is punctuated with marks of Israel's "chosenness" as well as her responsibility to the other nations of the world.

- "For you are a holy people to YHWH your G-d, and G-d has chosen you to be his treasured people from all the nations that are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2).
- "Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."(Exodus 19:5-6a).
- "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:6).
- "I will also make you a light of the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

Although one might think the condition of being set apart should be accompanied by an elite status, Israel's standing was not equated with superiority. On the contrary, an axiom within Judaism tells why. According to tradition, the Lord of the Universe, before giving the Torah to his people Israel, went around to all the nations of the world offering them the Torah. Nation after nation refused, until finally the proposition landed in the lap of the Jews, who whole-heartedly agreed. In good apologetic tradition, Rabbi Hiyya bar Lulyani stated that Israel was not extraordinary, but they were chosen because they were the only group willing to accept the Divine Code (Herchman, 1996:6). Israel's agreement to the covenant led to an eternal bond with

¹³ Genesis Rabbah 85:9 states that she was an Israelite and the Talmud (Sotah 10a) states that she was a proselyte.

¹⁴ Midrash Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer (38) records that Asenath was the daughter of Dinah, conceived during rape by Shechem. For the full apocryphal story, see Sparks, 1984:465-504.

¹⁵ Although ancient Rabbis considered these women Jewish, Philo of Alexandria agreed with the Septuagint's translation, "midwives of the Hebrews" instead of "Hebrew midwives" (Salkin, Schulweiss & Tickle, 2008:42). Josephus also identifies the women as Egyptians (Josephus (A.J. 2.9.2 (sec)206).

international ramifications designed to have a lighthouse affect. The choosing, after all, was for the express purpose of Israel becoming an exemplar or ambassador for other nations who would eventually come to share in the blessings of G-d.

According to the Torah, if Israel failed in keeping the Divine Code or Covenant, they would be tossed among the nations where G-d's ways were "unknown"; there they would lose their way in life.¹⁶ Indeed, being a "holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) came with a set of behavioural expectations toward G-d and humankind. The psalmist articulated the benefit that

Israel would bring to the nations by saying, "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him" (Psalm 22:27). This thinking indicates that the nations, i.e. descendants of Adam and Eve from the farthest reaches to the distant islands, would one day find, know and worship the G-d of Israel.

The following selection of verses from the Tanakh, chiefly Isaiah, establish a point of reference for observing Israel's neighbours — translated as 'nations,' 'many peoples,' 'ends of the earth,' 'foreigners' and 'all mankind.'

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 28:64; Psalm 147:19-20

Table 2-1: Verses for Observing Israel’s Neighbours – Tanakh

Book	Verse	Summary Description
Isaiah 2:4	“And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples.”	G-d rules over Gentiles.
19:23	“In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.”	Gentile kingdoms turn to worship the Lord ‘in that day’.
45:22	“Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am G-d, and there is no other.”	There is a salvific invitation to Gentiles.
49:22	“Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations and set up My standard to the peoples; and they will bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters will be carried on their shoulders.”	Provision is arranged for Gentiles who then show kindness to Israelites.
56:4-6	“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath.”	Gentiles who join themselves to the Lord, (collectively along with eunuchs) and hold fast to his covenant are graced with eternal favour.
60:10	“Foreigners will build up your walls and their kings will minister to you;”	Israel to be supported materially and spiritually by Gentiles.

Book	Verse	Summary Description
62:2	“The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory;”	Gentiles see G-d’s glory.
66:23	“From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the LORD.”	Before G-d all Gentiles bow.
Psalm 22:27-28	“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD’s and He rules over the nations.”	All nations will turn to the Lord and He will become their G-d.
146:9a	“The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow ...”	G-d’s provision covers all people.
Zach 8:23	“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that G-d is with you.’”	Gentiles will look to Jews to learn about G-d.

In the theology of Gentile participation in G-d’s overarching plan, Jonah plays an exceptional role.¹⁷ The prophetic tenor of the account of Jonah points to inclusion of Gentiles who, through repentance, align themselves with G-d, avoid cursing and enjoy blessing. It is no wonder that classical Jewish thought equates Jonah with the act of repentance. In fact, ancient Israelites recalled the account of Jonah on fast days when the Torah was brought into the public square.

An elder spoke to the crowds saying, “Brethren, it does not say about the men of Nineveh that G-d saw their sack cloth and fasting, but that G-d saw their deeds, that they had turned from their

¹⁷ Jonah is listed as one of the “Twelve Prophets” in Sirach 49:10.

wicked ways” (M. Taanit 2:1).¹⁸ G-d cared for a wholly Gentile nation through a Jewish prophet and that Gentile nation served as an example to Jews.

Jesus mentions the Ninevites, comparing his generation to the people of Nineveh (Matthew 12:38-42). He does this in the same context as a discussion about the Queen of the South (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31). She too represents a Gentile nation and along with the Ninevites she is a sinner in the eyes of at least some Second Temple Jews (Galatians 2:15). The Queen comes “from the ends of the earth” to ask King Solomon hard questions and to talk to him at length about imperial matters and perhaps other concerns (2 Chronicles 9:1). Maybe this surprised the Israelites. The repentance of Nineveh, a civilized but unG-dly nation, may also have been unexpected, since such spirituality was not expected from Gentiles.

By the Second Temple Period, theology concerning Gentiles had developed further. The following selection of verses from the New Testament establish a point of reference for observing and creating an understanding of Gentiles from a New Testament point of view.

¹⁸ The Book of Jonah is the haftarah reading for the Yom Kippur afternoon services.

Table 2-2: Observing Israel’s Neighbours - New Testament

Book	Verse	Summary Description
John 7:34-35	(Jesus’s voice) “You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.’ The Jews said to one another, ‘Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him?’ ‘Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?’”	It could be hard for a Jew to live among Gentiles outside of Israel, presumably because of the massive population of Gentiles.
John 12:20-21	“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’”	Greek Gentiles seek after Jesus.
Acts 15:1 (see also 15:5)	“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’”	Pharisaic believers in Jesus require circumcision for believing Gentiles.
Acts 15:7	“After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago G-d made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.’”	G-d’s plan is for Gentiles to believe in him.
Acts 15:9	“He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.”	Distinction between Israel (Jews) and the nations (Gentiles) is annulled.

Acts 15:14	“Simon has described to us how G-d first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.”	Perhaps not all Gentiles are part of G-d’s choosing.
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The Syrophenician woman pericope found in Matthew 15:21-28 and paralleled in Mark 7:25-30 is also highly relevant to this discussion. The whole passage revolves around a Gentile woman.

“Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.’ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, ‘Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.’ The woman came and knelt before him. ‘Lord, help me!’ she said. He replied, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.’ ‘Yes it is, Lord,’ she said. ‘Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was healed at that moment.”

By comparing the Gentile woman to dogs undeserving of the food intended for children, Jesus makes the point that Gentiles were not the intended recipients of the Messiah’s attention. That didn’t stop the woman, who targeted the Jews, specifically Jesus, to solve her crisis. The high level of faith she showed, presumably unexpected, was enough to persuade him to break his normal practice of confining himself to Jews.

Similar faith is seen in the account of the centurion’s servant, where the centurion trusts Jesus to heal from afar (Matthew 8: 5-18; Luke 1-10)¹⁹. The centurion, like Cornelius in Acts 10, may have been a G-d-fearer. Likewise, the Greeks, who were in Jerusalem to celebrate a festival, approach Philip and Andrew in hopes of speaking to their rabbi (John 12:20-2) — these too could be G-dfearers or Greek-speaking proselytes.

2.3 G-d-Fearers – Terms and Definitions

The book of Acts refers to G-d-fearers, also referred to as righteous Gentiles. In Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26 they are called φοβουμενος (those fearing) and in Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7 they are called σεβομενων (those reverencing). Besides Cornelius, the only named G-d-

¹⁹ Also see the Gadarene demoniac (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20).

fearers in the New Testament are in the book of Acts, Titius Justus (18:7), “one who worships G-d” (σεβομένου), and Lydia (16:4), one who “worshipped G-d” (σεβομένη), but others may also fall in this category.

Scholars offer a variety of explanations for the term “G-d-fearer.” Levenskaya defines “G-dfearers” as those who worshipped G-d, but did not become a Jew in the full sense of the word. She argues against usage of G-d-fearer as a strict technical term in all circumstances, much like the word “saint,” for example, points to a person canonized by the church while it can also be used to describe a person who is exceptionally meek, charitable and patient (Levinskaya, 1990:316).

Bernd Wander’s study (Trobisch, 2001:556) notes an uncertain use of the term G-d-fearer in pertinent literature. The author’s review of literary evidence in biblical and rabbinic passages, followed by a thorough lexicographic analysis of Greek terms, leads him to surmise that G-d-fearers are not necessarily confined to Jewish communities but appear in different religious contexts. Turning to evidence provided by inscriptions related to G-d-fearers attracted to Judaism, he finds three legitimate interpretations of the term.²⁰

“It is sometimes used as an honorary title for specific Jews; it sometimes denotes Gentiles who sympathize with the Jewish community; and in other cases it refers to a complex and not clearly defined group” (Trobisch, 2001:556).

Shay Cohen explains the term with a larger civic milieu in mind. Rather than looking upon G-dfearers simply as Gentiles interested in Judaism, Cohen sees the term as more of a phenomenon that Judaism contributed to Hellenism — the cultural melting pot of people and ideas of the time.

Just as polytheists indulged themselves in the “gods” of barbarian nations, pagan worshipers may have chosen to include into their practices Jewish ideas and observances like the Sabbath, holidays, attendance at synagogue, the fasts, and veneration of G-d — all this without converting or walking away from other gods. In this way, Judaism, through G-d-fearers, had a clear and distinctive impact on the Hellenistic culture, even though those who “feared G-d” did not see themselves as Jews and were not seen by others as Jews (Cohen, 1988:56-58).

²⁰ Wander suspects that Paul’s readiness to accept Gentiles into Jewish communities without observation of Jewish law was a radical deviation unfamiliar to the Diaspora congregations until sometime later (Trobisch, 2001:556).

Louis Feldman originally rejected the notion of G-d-fearer as necessarily referencing a class of people, but later put forward that these people, who observed some practices of Judaism, notably the Sabbath, yet did not convert, represented an intermediate class. “Even if we did not have actual evidence of the existence of such a group, we would postulate it on the basis of parallel movements, which have historically led to the evolution of such intermediate classes.” To this end, G-d-fearers represent a bridge from the Gentile world to the world of Judaism (Feldman, 1950:200-208). Likewise, Grabbe defines the term as those who had not taken the full step of conversion (Grabbe, 2000:114).

Josephus presents one of the major sources of pertinent data on the subject of Gentiles in the Second Commonwealth. Shay Cohen came up with three sorts of Gentiles that are well disposed towards Judaism as described in Josephus’ narratives: the first are righteous or tolerant “monarchs” and “dignitaries”, the second are “adherents,” and the third are “converts.” He says: “For Josephus, ‘adherence’ and ‘conversion’ are ill-defined concepts that never receive extended discussion.” In contrast, the author adds, “‘tolerant monarchs’ and ‘dignitaries’ are those who respect Judaism and benefit the Jews” (Cohen, 1987a:409-430). According to Josephus, the practice of almsgiving was one of the benefits of these Gentiles. In the following passage, Gentiles from various geographical locations give to the Temple in Jerusalem.

“And let no one wonder that there was so much wealth in our temple, since all the Jews throughout the habitable earth, and those that worshipped G-d, nay, even those of Asia and Europe, sent their contributions to it, and this from very ancient times” (Josephus, Antiquities 7.2).

Elsewhere *theosebeis* is used to reference those who worship G-d. The only biblical reference is John 9:31: “We know that G-d does not hear sinners; but if anyone is G-d-fearing (θεοσεβῆς) and does His will, He hears him” (NAS). Extra-biblically, the word is used in Hellenistic literature, including a description of Poppaea Sabina, Roman Empress and second wife of the Emperor Nero who was almost certainly a Jewish proselyte (θεοσεβῆς γὰρ ἦν) (Ant. 20. 8, 11). Moreover, an inscription in one of the most important cities in the ancient Greek world, Miletus, bears the same word (see Figures 2-1 and 2-2 below). The fifth row of seats in the theatre in Western Turkey holds the inscription, witnessed by the author of this present work, measuring four feet long, with letters measuring 1 1/4 to 2 1/2 inches in height.

Transliterated it reads: “topos eioudeon ton kai theosebion,” meaning: “For the Jews and the G-d-fearers.” This reinforces Josephus’ report about tolerance for Jews at Miletus and indicates a sizable Jewish community participating in the theatre. Some experts believe the inscription is

better translated as, “Place of the Jews, [who are also called] G-d-fearing” (Deissmann, 2003:451), referring to non-Jews who joined the Jewish community.²¹



Figure 2-1: *The Jewish Inscription at the Miletus, Western Turkey Theatre*



Figure 2-2: *Miletus, Western Turkey Theatre Photo by Leon Mauldin (Source: Photos by Leon Mauldin, 2010)*

²¹ In Aphrodisias, Turkey, among the Jewish Donor Inscriptions, there is an important inscription found in the late Twentieth century (published in 1987 by Reynolds and Tannenbaum, Cambridge Philological Society) with the Greek inscription “ΚΑΙ ΟCΟΙ ΘΕΟCΕΒCΙ” (καί οσοι θεοσεβεις) meaning, “and to the G-d-fearers”.

Philo, writing not many years before the book of Acts, uses the term *proselytoi* figuratively in the sense of “aliens who have come over to the truth” of some Jewish beliefs. He does not equate the term *proselytoi* to *sebomenoi*, but just as the Septuagint translated “ger” as proselytes in a number of passages, Philo renders *ger toshab*, that is “resident alien,” as proselytes who do not necessarily agree to the whole law (Feldman, 1950:207).

In light of the plethora of names used to describe Gentiles who sought to identify with Jewish practices and beliefs without crossing the barrier to Jewish conversion, and partly because of the confusion created by terminology related to the topic within the ranks of even the greatest scholars, Louis Feldman uses “sympathizer” as a neutral term. It distinguishes those that become full converts and defines those who observe one or more Jewish practices. After three great revolts of 66-74 C.E., 115-117 C.E., and 132-135 C.E., the Jews continued to win full adherents, especially among “sympathizers” (Feldman, 1993:xi).

Confusion over terminology related to this topic is not surprising given the varied nature of historical sources one has to consult when trying to paint a coherent picture of the religious and ethnic identity of Second Temple Judaism.²² Different cultural backgrounds and dissimilar social contexts of ancient authors make it difficult for the individual scholar to synchronize or equate what at times appear to be inconsistent and even opposing world views. Extant sources reveal diverse explanations of the period, “so much so that one scholar, specializing in one set of sources, may arrive at different conclusions than a colleague investigating another set of sources” (Flusser, 2009:7). Nowhere is this truer than the wide range of “Judaisms” present in the Diaspora. This being the case, one might turn in another direction for further research - language for instance. Greek was of course the *lingua franca* of the Diaspora. Interestingly, the same language may have been more common than expected in Israel. Take the names of two disciples of Jesus, Philip and Andrew, both Greek names. Philip hailed from Bethsaida in Galilee. Having a Greek name may point to the common use of Greek in Galilee (often referred to by Israeli scholars focused on first-century cultural context as “the Galilee”). Likewise, Peter’s parents chose to give his brother Andrew a Greek name, possibly indicating that Greek was spoken with familiarity within the family. Unmistakably, it was common for Jews to adopt Greek or Latin names — often

²² According to the Flusser, the most important is Josephus, followed by the Jewish-Hellenistic corpus (Philo and the author of Wisdom of Solomon), Apocryphal books not included in the Jewish canon, the New Testament, and Ben Sira (or Sirach) and the Midrashim and Talmudic literature (although few statements from sages of the Second Temple Period have been preserved in this corpus).

names that were phonetically close to their given Hebrew name — and to use either name according to context (Bauckham, 2002:182). The Greek language was put to use by Jews.

Archaeology further illustrates this matter. In the land of Israel, a number of inscriptions on ossuaries dating from 65 B.C.E. to 135 C.E. have Greek inscriptions. Oskar Skarsuane writes, “out of a total of 194 known inscriptions, 26 percent are in Hebrew or Aramaic and 64 percent are in Greek alone.” One can presume that the inscriptions were meant to be read primarily by family members of the deceased and were therefore in the language with which the family was most at ease. Other Jewish inscriptions, also written in Greek, were among the finds in the Cave of Letters in the Judean Desert. These, ascribed to Bar Kokhba and his men, are not unlike other Greek inscriptions on catacombs dating from the first or second century (Skarsaune & Hvalvik, 2002:41). It can be concluded that Greek was much in use in Israel, making it easy for Greek-speaking Gentiles to communicate with Jews both inside and outside of the Land. The language also made it easier for Jews to converse with Greek-speaking Gentiles.

Jewish law (*halakha*) would have been one of the important matters of communication for Gentiles interested in drawing near to the G-d of Israel. Jewish life in the Second Temple period in Israel revolved around *halakha*. The seamless unity between halakhic behaviour and spiritual ideals is what allowed the different movements to flourish as the leaders developed their “sublime religious ideas,” writes noted author David Flusser.

“Today it is difficult for us to comprehend the spiritual freedom of men like Simon the Righteous, Yose ben Yoezer, and Hillel the elder — a freedom that manifests itself within the normative halakhic framework. The Mishnah tractate Avot (‘Wisdom of the Fathers’) contains fewer halakhic discussions than do the synoptic gospels, but its authors were none-the-less key figure in the establishment of the halakhic system” (Flusser, 2009:16).

There is no reason to think that the Jewish law of the First Temple Period was particularly onerous, as most often believed: “*halakha* was a natural component of Jewish life in the Land of Israel, part of the fabric of the daily spiritual life of the Jewish people” (Flusser, 2009:16). This was apparently not true in the Jewish Diaspora. Philo, among others, documented that some Jews of Alexandria

interpreted the laws of the Torah as more allegory than practical for daily application.²³ Furthermore, some ignored all the commands, save Yom Kippur.²⁴

Halakah, derived from the verb to walk, refers to the way a person should walk before G-d in their daily life. It is the legal system in Judaism, including the various 613 commandments of the Torah and all the legal rulings of the rabbis found in the oral law. It should be remembered that, although some legal rulings were undoubtedly stricter than others (say observance of the Sabbath, preservation of life, etc.), the Oral Torah was not a rigid legalistic code dominated by one single interpretation, but a tradition that allowed a certain amount of latitude and flexibility.

Within Israel the open forum of the Oral Torah invited vigorous debate and even encouraged diversity of thought and imaginative creativity (Young, 1995:105; Heger, 2003:1). On the other hand, smaller Diaspora communities throughout the empire were preoccupied with defending and justifying the Jewish way of life in terms comprehensible to an antagonistic or unsympathetic majority, rather than entering discourse about the details of *halakha* (Bockmuehl, 2000:230).

In general, *halakha* requirements didn't seem tough enough to dissuade the increasing number — perhaps millions by the first-century — of *sebomanoi*, Gentiles who had not gone the whole route toward conversion in the Diaspora (Berenbaum & Skolnik, 2007:294).

What can be learned from extra-biblical texts about how Gentiles viewed Jews and how Jews viewed Gentiles? The attitudes and relationships between Jews and Gentiles during this time varied within regions and according to the political swings of the day. It is thought that in Greek and Roman periods, until the Jewish War broke out (66-73 C.E.), relations between Jews and pagans were generally good in cities within Israel like Bet Shean (Safrai, 1976:1065). A few years before the Jewish War, a bloody day in Jewish history occurred in Jerusalem, giving insight into Gentile/Jewish relations.

Under Cicero's consulship, the strongest point in Jerusalem, the Temple mount, was breached. A son of the dictator Sulla was the first to make way through the breach with his troops and a frightful massacre followed. The priests engaged in offering sacrifice would not desist in the sacrificial duties and were hewn down at the altar. No fewer than 12 000 Jews lost their lives according to Josephus. It was on a Sabbath towards the close of the autumn of the year 63 according to Dio Cassius. Josephus records the day as the Day of Atonement (Schürer,

²³ Philo, De Specialibus Legibus 1.186

²⁴ Philo, De Migratione Abrahami 89f.

1890:332). Whether the annual or weekly day was chosen for war, it seems clear that the siege on this day shows awareness on the part of the Roman leader as to the vulnerability of Jews on sacred days.

Communication styles also shed light on attitudes from a Jewish point of view. Eleazar ben Arach of the first-century said, “know well how you should answer an Epicurean (atheist)”, indicating that when an explanation is needed, it should be in the best defence of the Faith (M. Aboth 2:14). Ostensibly, Jewish sages were sharply critical of paganism in personal conversations, but did not seek debate with pagans who were thought to be the initiators of religious conversations. Through the example of Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai one finds that only a concise, defensive answer was given when answering a polemical question put forth by a non-Jew, while the full positive answer found its way into the conversation between the teacher and his disciples (Safrai & Stern, 1976:1065).²⁵

Finally, one positive and one negative portrayal of Jewish seeking Gentiles and G-d-fearers. On the positive side, Michael Avi-Yonah mentions the “numerous class” of G-d-fearing Gentiles under the Roman Empire, saying, “They were to be found in the provinces as well as in Italy, even at Rome...As they often belonged to the upper classes, their mere presence added in the eyes of the authorities to the weight of Jewish influence...” From this we learn of the wealth of G-d-fearing Gentiles, a position that is supported by literary and epigraphical evidence of G-d-fearing benefactors (Avi-Yonah, 1976:37).

On the slightly negative side, an excerpt from Tacitus. As mentioned in the previous chapter, pagan religious life embraced multiple gods. Tacitus’ famous digression on the Jews on the eve of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. represents one view of Jews and Judaism. In his largely negative portrayal, which was circulated energetically by Graeco-Egyptian scholars such as Apion, he speaks of a change in attitudes toward the “gods” after Gentiles “go over to their ways.”

“Those who go over to their ways observe the same practice (circumcision) and they are barely initiated before they start despising the gods, disowning their native land and holding cheaply their parents, children and brothers. To the

²⁵ The original reference (unattainable by author of this current work) is W. Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten I* (1903), pp. 36-9. Perhaps part of the reasoning here has to do with general distrust of Gentiles, characterized as robbers in Tannaitic sources (Le Cornu & Shulman, 2003:557).

increase of their own numbers, however considerable attention is paid ...”
(Tacitus, *Histories* 5.4-5).

The same reading in Tacitus mentions characteristics of Gentiles attracted to Judaism (whether converts or those who do not take the step of conversion, we do not know). It helps paint a picture of these individuals. Like the Jews, they have a belief in the afterlife, passion for procreation, contempt of death, and they bury the dead, rather than cremate (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.4-5). For all intents and purposes, the identity of these gentile-imitators-of-Judaism was tied to the very faith they sought to emulate. In sum, although research of the terms describing Gentiles attracted to Judaism, including use of the term “G-d-fearer,” does not lead to a concise characterization per some scholars,

Gentile “attraction” is clear. Language, archaeological evidence, rabbinical writings, and extra-biblical texts shed light on this phenomenon. Name studies and epigraphy show wide usage of the Greek language among the Jews, a practice that opened the way for Gentile-Jewish communication. Open communication meant that “ill-meaning” Gentile leaders (attested here by the attack lead by Cicero) could take advantage of Jewish vulnerability (and perhaps vice versa), promoting Jewish skepticism of Gentiles. Open communication also meant that “Halakah”, the fabric of daily Jewish spiritual life, could be understood by Jewish-seeking Gentiles, who, when converted, could show staunch adherence and be elucidated by evangelizing Jews.

2.4 Gentiles Drawing Near

What was so particularly attractive to Gentiles about Judaism? One of the earliest spectators to the development of formal Jewish “converts” is found in the book of Judith, dated to the Hellenistic period when Judea battled the Seleucid monarchs. Notably, Achior the Ammonite witnesses Israel’s redemption and decides to join their number.

“And when Achior had seen all that the G-d of Israel had done, he believed in G-d greatly, and circumcised the flesh of his foreskin, and was joined unto the house of Israel unto this day” (Judith 4:10).

Some scholars go as far as to say that pagans all over the civilized world felt drawn to Judaism. Indeed the intrinsic, universal structure of Judaism had begun to influence pagans (Flusser, 2009:1090). At the very least, Achior represents a widespread and growing interest in Judaism before New Testament times (Bright, 2000:446).

Some authors attribute the Gentile attraction to a movement from earlier history, namely the Persian period. Unlike the end of the First Temple era when sun worship was common, Jewish

people in the Persian period in Palestine and elsewhere fostered the ability to resist the attractions of paganism against which the prophets roared. One indication of this is an activity at the annual festival of Tabernacles. At the Feast, a shout publically announced that in earlier times Jewish forefathers used to worship the sun towards the east (Ezekiel 8:16), “but now we bow down to the Lord and it is to the Lord that our eyes are turned” (M. Sukkah 5:3).

A tale in the Talmud illustrates this point by saying that Jews in the time of Nehemiah, “rid themselves of the inclination to idolatry,” attributing the elimination of leanings toward paganism to the Persian era (T.B. Sanhedrin 64a). Rabbi Rabba (c.300 C.E.) captured the Jewish makeover, building on the decisive behaviour of Jews in the time of Esther who, “took it upon themselves” to observe the days of Adar, saying they finally took action to fully observe the Torah (Shabbath 88a). After the Babylonian Exile, with the exception of some apostate Jews, the general tenor of Judaism reflected faithful conduct towards G-d as seen here in the book of Judith.

“We do not worship gods made with human hands. Not one of our clans, tribes, towns, or cities has ever done that, even though our ancestors used to do so. That is why G-d let their enemies kill them and take everything they had. It was a great defeat. But since we worship no other G-d but the Lord, we can hope that he will not reject us or any of our people” (Judith 8:18-20).

Could it be this faithful devotion that caused Gentiles to turn their heads and notice Jews with favour? Good chance it had something to do with it, but other factors cannot be excluded. In particular, the general Roman milieu may have led to alternatives to the commonly available religions of the day.

“The existence of semi-proselytes and G-d-fearers (non-Jews drawn to the synagogue and Jewish practice) shows that the Hellenistic Jewry’s way of life was attractive to non-Jews who were searching for a replacement for the now waning Greek and Roman cults” (Shiffman, 1991:201).

Judaism presented a freshly viable replacement option, particularly when the polytheism of Roman life was no longer as appealing as it had been in an earlier era.

How did Gentiles get from “paganism” to “Judaism?” There was no prescribed policy for “formal conversion.” All the same, the Jewish concept of integration structured itself around the concept of the “sojourner” or “stranger” (גֵר or *ger*) found in Hebrew Scripture. A *ger* was a person who came to reside in the land of Israel, whom G-d commanded to be, “as a native among you, and you shall love himself as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:34). In

the Second Temple period a formal transition took place wherein גר (*ger*) came to mean proselyte or convert (Acts 10:44-48 and 15f).

“The Hebrew ger (in post-biblical times translated as ‘proselyte’) literally means ‘stranger’ and refers to a non-Israelite who lived among the Israelite community. When the Torah commands compassion and equal justice for the ger, it is referring to these ‘strangers.’ But rabbinic tradition interpreted the word ger as also referring to proselytes...” (Angel, 2005:17).

The book of Acts contends that the Jewish proselyte (derived in Greek from προσήλυτος or *proselytes*) existed in two forms: First, full conversion through circumcision, ablution, and sacrifice and a commitment to observe all the commandments and second, synagogue “adherence” or “attachment” – represented most prominently by the class known as G-d-fearers (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:25). Nicolas of Antioch, a former Gentile described by the disciples of Jesus to be “full of the Spirit and wisdom,” underwent the conversion process²⁶ before serving under Stephen to serve widows of Grecian Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 6:3).

Full conversion was not the stratagem for G-d-fearers. According to Cohen, Gentiles that accepted certain aspects of Judaism but did not convert to it were even more numerous than those who converted (Cohen, 1988:55). Likewise, Louis Feldman, who connects the rise in literacy of this period to the rise in conversion and the activity of Jewish evangelism, put forth good reason for believing that the Jews were successful in winning multitudes of proselytes who converted, but contends that they also succeeded in gaining many “sympathizers,” the so-called “G-d-fearers”²⁷ (Feldman, 1993:436, 439). Rabbinic Judaism, however, did not officially formalize the process of conversion until the second century C.E. At that time, the three requirements for conversion (circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice) were established as binding (B. Ker. 9a; Cohen, 1988:199).

A possible reference to Gentiles drawn to Judaism shortly after the Second Temple Period may provide information regarding Gentiles who converted in a slightly earlier era. In a collection of satirical poems attributed to the Latin author Juvenal, late 1st and early 2nd centuries C.E., Gentile Roman fathers are described as being on the fringes of Israel’s faith, observing the Sabbath,

²⁶ προσήλυτος or *proselutos*

²⁷ Orthodox Jewish authors do not write out the name of G-d in reverence of the commandment not to take the name of G-d in vein.

eating kosher food, and entering into a monotheistic belief system. Their sons took it a step further; they became circumcized and fully converted.

“Some who have had a father who reveres the Sabbath, worship nothing but the clouds and the divinity of the heavens, and see no difference between eating swine’s flesh, and that of a man; and in time they take to circumcision. Having been wont to flout the laws of Rome, they learn and practice and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses handed down in his secret tome, forbidding to point out the way to any not worshipping the same rites, and conducting none but the circumcized to the desired fountain. For all which the father was to blame, who gave up every seventh day to idleness, keeping it apart from all the concerns of life.” (Satires, 14.96-106)

Juvenal’s Satires may point to the frequent instances of Roman conversions between the two Jewish wars. During the great persecution of the Hadrianic war (first half of the second century C.E.), the Babylonian Talmud reveals rules for judging the sincerity of Gentile converts, a process that had earlier roots (Yev.47a-b).

In the Minor tractates of the Mishna, the ninth topic contains Rabbi Judah the Prince (Yahuda Ha Nasi), writings “On Converts”. Four chapters in this non-canonical work deal with the treatment of converts in the Jewish community. Genuine proselytes, it states, are to be given favour because they are like Abraham the Patriarch who showed the example of faith. The entire conversion process, however, must not have been an easy route and not all who set out on the path persevered to the goal, presumably because of the hefty requirements of the process. Though the date of this particular tractate may be as late as the 4th century, it most likely reflects earlier practice.

Leaders of the Jesus movement hint at the rigorous requirements, indicating they were a *burden* to Gentiles. Perhaps for that reason, they scaled down the guidelines to a limited few, saying, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to *burden* you...” (Acts 15:28). Perhaps the fear of Gentiles starting on a path and falling short of the finish line due to difficulty prompted the language used in the letter to the Gentiles from the Jerusalem Council. In rabbinic writings, the limited commands left for the Gentiles are labelled, “the Seven Commandments” (T. ‘Abod. Zar 8.4).

The apostles apparently wanted to keep from “disturbing”, “troubling” or “burdening” the nonJewish newcomers. “We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, *troubling* your minds by what they said ...” (Acts 15:24). The reason for

concern was valid. The Sages recognized the need to not overly “burden” Gentiles upon initial conversion.

The newcomers were to be given instruction “in *some* of the minor and some of the major commandments” (Yevamot 47ab). A rabbinic principle dealing with edicts that were beyond a person’s capability stated that, when related to supplementary ordinances over and above those given in the Torah itself, an edict automatically loses its validity when one is unable to comply (AZ 36a).

Surely the apostles rested assured knowing that there was already a process in Jewish discipleship through which, over time, newcomers would become more and more familiar with the faith, thus enabling them to comply more fully. The key word about Gentiles, “who are turning” (ἐπιστρέφουσιν or epistrephousin), in the Present Active Participle Masculine Plural Dative form, is descriptive of an action currently happening. An acceptable translation of this verse could be, “Wherefore I judge not to trouble those while they are turning from the Gentiles back to G-d,” rather than, “those who have already turned back to G-d” (Acts 15:19).

2.5 Jewish Evangelism

The concept of spreading the Good News to non-Jews is hard to overlook. The book of Tobit repeats the refrain, “Confess him before the Gentiles, ye children of Israel: for he hath scattered us among them” (Tobit 13:3) (Zimmerman, 1958). Judging from the criticism that Jesus hurled against the Pharisees about their overseas missionary efforts, one would think that evangelizing Jews in the first-century failed miserably.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Acts 23:15).

One scholar agrees with the evangelistic failure, at least in gaining as many pagans as some claim. Rick Strelan points out that Stern, who distinguishes proselytes from G-d-fearers, is inaccurate in asserting that the first-century and the beginning of the second saw a “heyday” of Jewish proselytism. “There is little evidence that there were ‘masses of Gentiles who wished to join the Jewish people of faith’ by voluntary conversion” (Strelan, 1996:187).²⁸ Cohen states that several writers refer to the keenness of Jews to gain Gentiles to their side, but adds that there is

²⁸ Strelan cites Stern (Stern, 1977:622).

no evidence for an *organized* Jewish mission to the Gentiles, rather, “individuals seem to have engaged in the activity on their own” (Cohen, 1987a:56).

Josephus speaks of Jews in Antioch after Antiochus Epiphanes who, “made proselytes of a great many of the Greeks perpetually, and thereby, after sort, brought them to be a portion of their own body” (Wars 7:45). The Roman Lyric poet, Horace (65-8 BCE), in a passage from his Satires (presumed to be exaggerated), indicates that Jewish zeal in seeking proselytes is apparently proverbial, saying, “...and we, like the Jews, will compel you to make one of our throng” (Satires 1.4.43).

Elsewhere, Josephus states that, “the masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances” especially Sabbath, fasts, lighting lamps, and dietary laws (C. Apion 2.282). Likewise, Tacitus (ca. 56-120CE) refers to successful Jewish proselytism and the “persistence” of the Jews, adding a bitter lament about the money gained for the Temple through those who convert and then despise the “gods” (Tacitus, Histories 5:5.1-2). Later, Origen claims that Jewish proselytism continued from the time of Jesus to his own time (as cited in Feldman, 1993:443).²⁹

Finally, there is a story from the early first-century about the royal house of the kingdom of Adiabene in Northern Mesopotamia that became Jewish through the influence of itinerant Jewish merchants (Jewish Antiquities 20. 34-46)³⁰. In the account, the household of King Izates was visited by an itinerant Jewish merchant named Ananias who taught the king’s wives to worship G-d in the manner of the Jews. After his wives, King Izates was won over by the merchant. Enthusiastically, thinking he would not genuinely be a Jew without circumcision, Izates sought to undergo the operation for circumcision like a devoted adherent.

The king’s mother tried to dissuade the king, telling him that the people of the Kingdom would not take kindly to a Jewish king reigning over them. Ananias consoled Izates, saying that if he was constrained from circumcision, by necessity and fear of his subjects, he could receive pardon from G-d and be excused from performing the rite. The king was convinced by these arguments “for some time,” until another Jew named Eleazar came along.

²⁹ The same author may be consulted for later references to proselytism.

³⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20. 34-5, 38-39, 40, 41-6. The Midrash presents a much later account of the conversion of the brothers Monobazus and Izates that is consistent with the version of Josephus (Genesis Raggah 46.11 — codified in approximately fifth century C.E.).

Eleazar was a Jew from Galilee with a reputation of being strict. When it came time to pay his respects to king Izates, he found the king reading the Law of Moses. Eleazar convinced the king of circumcision and the deed was no longer postponed.

“In your ignorance, O king, you are guilty of the greatest offence against the law and thereby against G-d. For you ought not to merely read the law but also, and even more, to do what is commanded in it. How long will you continue to be uncircumcised?” (Jewish Antiquities 20.14-6)

It could be said that the role of a merchant in reaching out to the would-be converts in Adiabene suggests an economic factor in winning them. A study about Jewish merchants in the first-century Diaspora might prove such an argument. Regardless, if it was his role as merchant that led Ananias to a position of teaching G-d’s ways to the royal house, he must have boldly sought out the opportunity.

Allowing the Gentile king to remain uncircumcised, thus settling for “semi-conversion,” may reflect the concessions that took place in the Diaspora, where the majority populace remained pagan and uncircumcised. Contrarily, Eleazar demands total satisfaction of conversion rites. Reigning from Galilee, Eleazar’s behaviour could have been expected. The region of Galilee was sterner than other regions of the country, according to Safrai (2006:176) “[some of the] commandments [were] being observed more scrupulously and strictly [in the Galilee] than in Judea”. Further differences between Galilee and other parts of Israel are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Gentiles like King Izatar living during the Second Commonwealth learned about Israel’s G-d through the purposeful intent of Jewish missionary efforts. While some scholars refute the presence of Jewish evangelism during this time, literary evidence points to the activity, even if not on an organized scale. Concerted Jewish efforts combined with a phenomenon of Gentile attraction independent of persuasion. In both cases, full converts and partial converts (i.e. G-dfearers) experienced the “light” mentioned in Isaiah intended to lead Gentiles to salvation (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

2.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine Gentiles, Gentile attraction to Judaism, and the Jews who attracted them during the Second Temple Period to gain insight into the identity of the G-d-fearing Gentiles leading up to the formation of the Church.

The chapter explored the concept of Gentiles collectively, examined terms and definitions related to G-d-fearers, delved into the process of Gentiles drawing near to Judaism, and explored Jewish evangelism.

The first objective set out to explore Gentiles in the Second Temple period. Who were they? How did they function? How were they attracted to Judaism?

The word *goy* (גוי) and its variants is prevalent in the Hebrew Bible, referencing both Israelites and Gentile nations. A number of Gentiles make a notable impact on biblical history, including Hagar, Tamar, Asenath, the mother of Ephraim, Menasseh and a few villains as well. By the Second Commonwealth, Gentiles drawn to Judaism were not few, but rather substantial in number.

Living in relatively proximity to Jews, whether in the Diaspora or in the land of Israel, a shared language (Greek, the *lingua franca*) increased communication between Jews and people from the surrounding nations. High levels of exposure through communication and other factors, inclined Gentiles to draw near to the G-d of Israel, to emulate followers, attend synagogue, and adhere to Torah practices such as Sabbath observance. Israel's *choseness* was for the express purpose of becoming an exemplar or ambassador to all other nations who would eventually join in the blessings of G-d.

The second objective set out to examine terms and definitions related to G-d-fearers.

These Gentiles, labelled "G-d-fearers" at times and identified with other terminology in other circumstances, saw themselves in large part in relation to Judaism. Scholars offer a variety of explanations for the term φοβουμενος or σεβομενων, often translated as, "G-d-fearer." Louis Feldman originally rejected the notion of the term *G-d-fearer* as reference to a class of people, but later put forward that these people, who observed some practices of Judaism, notably the Sabbath, yet did not convert, represented an intermediate class. Shay Cohen came up with three sorts of Gentiles that are well disposed towards Judaism as described in Josephus' narratives: tolerant dignitaries, adherents, and converts. Converts were of concern to the Sages, who recognized the need to not overly "burden" Gentiles upon initial conversion. The apostles followed suit, apparently wanting to keep from "disturbing", "troubling" or "burdening" the non-Jewish newcomers (Acts 15:24).

The third objective set out to explore the process of Gentiles drawing near to Judaism and explored Jewish evangelism.

Louis Feldman, who attributes the rise in literacy of the Second Temple Period to the rise in conversion and the activity of Jewish evangelism, put forth good reason for believing that the

Jews were successful in winning multitudes of proselytes who had converted. The story from the early first-century about the royal house of the kingdom of Adiabene in Northern Mesopotamia is exemplary. Feldman contends that in the evangelism process, Jews succeeded in gaining many “sympathizers,” the so-called “G-d-fearers”.

It can be said that G-d-fearing Gentiles were plentiful and receptive leading up to the formation of the early Church. The unique monotheistic religion of the G-d of Abraham was available to them like no other time in history.

CHAPTER 3: THE JEWISH FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS

3.1 Introduction

Who were the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Jesus as an emerging entity within a larger religious body, and how did they identify and define themselves within the context of Judaism? The aim of this chapter is to gain knowledge about the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Jesus and how they identified themselves within the context of Judaism. This aim is explored through four distinct objectives.

The first objective is to determine what can be known about the followers of Jesus by exploring the cultural and historical backdrop that surrounded them within broader Judaism, including the land in which they lived. The second objective is to find answers to how ancestry and identity played a part in the newly forming Jewish fellowship of Jesus followers. The third objective is to examine the main streams and sects of Judaism in the first-century to determine their influence on the new sect. Finally, the fourth objective is to investigate the Jewish fellowship of Christian followers or Jewish Christians themselves. What differentiated this group from other sects?

The chapter's subsections follow each of these objectives and are entitled as follows: First: Cultural Context of Judaism, Second: Streams and Sects of Judaism, Third: Who is a Jew? and Fourth: The Jewish Fellowship of Jesus Followers.

This chapter is highly descriptive in nature, showing the Jewish people, places, events and ideologies that surrounded the followers of Jesus, as it intends to paint a picture of the setting into which this particular group of Jews issued forth. A better grasp of their world will provide a fuller understanding of how they expected non-Jewish newcomers to participate in their Faith. Major historical events of great impact that surround this period include the Maccabean Revolt (166-60 BCE), the destruction of the Temple (70 CE) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 CE).

3.2 Cultural context of Judaism

A true description of the Jews or Judaism involves people and place, reaching back 3 000 years to when King David claimed a hill town from the Jebusites (Salisbury, 2001:303). King Solomon later built the famous Temple on Mount Moriah, recorded in the Bible as the location where Abraham was willing to offer his son (Salisbury, 2001:303). From this beginning, the Land and the people were synonymous.

3.2.1 The Land – Judah

In the fourth century BCE, Clearchos of Soli, Greek philosopher and scholar to Aristotle, recorded his master's observations about Jews in the land of "Judea" (Ιουδαία or *Ioudaía*), saying they were of the descent of Indian philosophers and Syrians and took their name from their country called "Judea" (Josephus, CA 1.22).³¹

Just as the geographical locus is tied to Jewishness, the G-d of Israel identified himself in relationship to the people of that place. His promise was not one of theology and philosophy like the gods of pagan religions, but a covenantal promise of ancestry and geography, making both important aspects of the relationship. This chapter turns first to explore geography.

A grand physical description of Jerusalem comes from noted French author Reme Chateaubriand upon entering Jerusalem in 1806. In his travel journal entry, Chateaubriand mentions having read nearly 200 modern accounts of the Holy Land in addition to rabbinic collections and "passages of the ancients" on the land of Judea before arriving in the City. None could have prepared him, he said, neither him nor any visitor, for the glorious sight of Jerusalem. He, like the Crusaders before him, revelled in the sight (Mintz & Detsch, 1996:6).³²

Jerusalem was the Holy City set on a hill, the apex of Israel's geographic hierarchy and the pinnacle of religious importance. Jews saw it the same way. The obvious fact that the Torah was the foundation of Hebrew thought and society and that the Temple was positioned in Jerusalem, made the city the unquestionable core of the faith. The rabbis referenced Jerusalem in a superlative way saying, "The Land of Israel is situated in the centre of the world, and Jerusalem in the centre of the Land of Israel, and the Holy Temple in the centre of Jerusalem..." (Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 10). After Jerusalem, Judea was second in importance because of its proximity to Jerusalem, then Samaria and Galilee, followed by the world's remaining landscape.³⁴

The Apostle Paul certainly held the context of the land Jerusalem in high regard. In a profession of identity after his arrest in Jerusalem, he makes reference to Jerusalem to prove his

³¹ "Jews are derived from the Indian philosophers; they are named by the Indians Calami, and by the Syrians Judaei, and took their name from the country they inhabit, which is called Judea; but for the name of their city, it is a very awkward one, for they call it Jerusalem" (Josephus, CA 1.22).

³² "I stood there, my eyes fixed on Jerusalem, measuring the heights of its walls, recalling all the memories of history from Abraham to G-dfrey of Bouillon. If I were to live a thousand years, never would I forget this wilderness which still seems to breathe with the grandeur of the Lord and the terrors of death" (Mintz, 1966:6).

creditworthiness.³³ It was as if adding his connection to Jerusalem added value to his case: “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city [Jerusalem]” (Acts 22:3).³⁴

For all its glory, Jerusalem was not without problems. Since the time of King David the city was destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked and added 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times, according to Cline’s estimations (Cline 2004:10). After the fall of the Temple in 70 CE until a racial change after the *Bar Kokhba Revolt* (132-135 CE), the city of Jerusalem was sparsely populated with survivors. After the Bar Kokhba Revolt, Jews were driven out and the city became populated by Gentiles.³⁵

³³ The act of Paul bringing the Ephesian Tryphimus to Jerusalem makes the same point (Acts 21:29).

³⁴ It should not be forgotten that the luminary Sage, Hillel, who lived in Israel was from Babylon, a significant powerhouse. Another geographical entity that should not be dismissed, is Egypt, specifically Alexandria, where the Septuagint was written and from whence Philo hailed. / The rest of the verse reads “... I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for G-d as any of you are today.”

³⁵ A student interested in the continuing history knows Aelia Capitolina refers to Jerusalem’s Hellenistic name (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:758-9). The meagre Jewish population throughout Israel between the war in 70 CE and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 CE) was deduced from archaeological evidence which revealed a dearth of Jewish burials in Aelia Capitolina during this time. The absence of Jewish burials indicates that the majority of Jerusalem Jews who survived the war of 70 CE moved to other parts of the land of Israel, probably to the Transjordan. Jewish believers in Jesus who survived may have done the same, unless there is credence to Eusebius’ claim that they fled to Pella after the war (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.5.2-3). There are abundant archaeological remains of the Tenth Roman Legion Fretensis indicating a large Gentile population (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007: 756). In the Bar Kokhba Revolt, Emperor Hadrian was brutal toward the Jews. His troops took the lives of 580 000 of them (Pasachoff & Litma, 1995:97), destabilizing the region’s remaining Jewish population by excluding them from Jerusalem. That’s when the Holy City was converted into a pagan Hellenistic city, “Aelia Capitolina”, having already been renamed Aelia after the destruction in 70 CE. At that time a shrine to Jupiter was erected on the Temple Mount, and another shrine to Aphrodite on the site identified with the death and burial of Jesus (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2002:53). Hadrian discriminated against all Judeo-Christian sects, but the worst persecution was directed against religious Jews. He made anti-religious decrees forbidding Torah study, Sabbath observance, circumcision, Jewish courts, meeting in synagogues and other ritual practices. Prominent men and many Sages were martyred, including Rabbi Akiva and the *Asara Harugei Malchut* (ten martyrs). Numerous Jews assimilated. This age of intense persecution lasted throughout the remainder of Hadrian’s reign, until 138 CE, though statements made by religious leaders of later centuries hint at the fact that the ban was in force until a later time (Schoenberg, 2010). Following this period of time, a long-

By 135 CE, the Jerusalem community of Jews, including Jewish believers in Jesus, literally vanished from Israel; their traditions would be continued in other places on the globe. Sometime between 147 C.E. and 161 C.E., the apologist Justin Martyr in an address to the Roman Senate was recorded reporting on the ban on Jewish access to Jerusalem. This is later recorded by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, "... the whole race (the Jews) has been completely banned from setting foot on the territory around Jerusalem by a legal decree and ordinances of Hadrian, which ensured that not even from afar could they see their ancestral land" (Eusebius, 4.6.3).³⁶

Put another way, one hundred years after Jesus died; Gentiles outnumbered the Jews, leaving hardly a trace of Judaism in Israel. In its infancy then, the Jewish sect of Jesus followers was drawn away from the real estate that in part made up their identity.

3.2.2 The Land – Galilee

As mentioned earlier, it was thought that land around Jerusalem, including Galilee, was subordinate to Jerusalem and Judea. An anonymous *baraita*, Avot de-Rabbi Nathan 27:43a³⁷, convey the worldview in which Judea is better than Galilee, and Galilee is better than Transjordan (Safrai, 2010).

Galilee in the first-century sought to meet the expectations of the Faith at high standards. Gedalyahu Alon in *The History of the Jews in the Land of Israel during the Period of the Mishnah and the Talmud* (Alon, 1953:318-323) reflects Second Temple Period cultural life in Galilee as attested by Josephus and the New Testament. "Jewish cultural life [in Galilee] and a strong attachment to Judaism flourished well before the destruction of the Second Temple. Apart from Jerusalem, it [Galilee] even excelled the other parts of the Land of Israel in these respects" (Safrai, 2010).

term tenuous and sometimes bellicose relationship existed between Judaism (with its desire to return to Israel) and Rome up until the time of Constantine when it was clear to Jews that going back to reclaim to Israel wasn't an option (Schoenberg, 2010).

³⁶ An additional quote from this speech is recorded as follows: "You yourselves are aware that care is taken by you to prevent any Jew from coming there, and that death is pronounced against any Jew who attempts to enter" (Martyr, Apologia 77).

³⁷ "Because at first they would say, 'Breadstuff in Judea, straw in Galilee, and chaff in Transjordan,' they later said, 'There is no grain in Judea, but rather stubble; and there is no straw in Galilee, but rather chaff, and neither one nor the other in Transjordan'" (Avot de-Rabbi Nathan 27:43a).

In an article, Safrai talks about the Torah-centric Jewish culture of Galilee seen in Halakhic and Aggadic literature (Safrai, 2010:1-27). See Addendum 1 for bullet points from this article to shed light on a renewed thought about the atmosphere of Galilee, ties to Jerusalem, rabbinic education, and observance of Torah (Safrai, 2010:1-27).

Safrai notes that the pietist movement called the Hasidim viewed from books of the New Testament, synoptic gospels and the Gospel of John, is sometimes unidentified because of confusion about the location of the individual events that occurred. Safrai asserts that the location of the activity of the Hasidim can be plainly established with certainty as Galilee (Safrai, 2010:25).

The Hasidim were known as the “men of deeds”³⁸ a subgroup on the fringes of Pharisaism. “Quite commonly their relationship with G-d was characterized as that of a father to a son” (Flusser, 2007:82). Most active in the first-century B.C.E. and first-century C.E., the Hasidim considered human compassion the highest priority, thus they often concerned themselves with performing miracles, praying for rain and healing people through their prayers (Tournage, 2011). Particularly active in Galilee, their primary technique in communicating with the public was through story-parables.

Mentioned in rabbinic literature, the Hasidim were not Sages, nor were they called Rabbi in earlier sources, but just as they influenced the public they also influenced the Sages (Tournage, 2011). In fact they created a bit of a challenge for the Sages, whose power with the people was in Torah study and interpretation. The power of the Hasidim was threefold: personal relationship (particularly relationship with the needy), the prominence of frequent prayer and the espousal of “poverty” as a concern above Torah study (Tournage, 2011).³⁹

The Hasidim did not always consider the ritual purity of the helpless they sought to support, raising the eyebrows of the Pharisees and contradicting the teachings of the Sages (Tournage, 2011). Nonetheless, the Sages recognized the Hasidim for their remarkable piety and turned to them in troubled times (Tournage, 2011). Mark Tournage (2011) says, “There is a certain paradox in rabbinic literature where on the one hand, the Sages admired their piety and miracle working powers, yet on the other, they also rejected them and their deeds”. Many of the same

³⁸ See m. Berachot 5:1, 5; t. Baba Qama 2:6; b. Niddah 38a-b; b. Nedarim 10a; b. Menahot 40b-41a; y. Teramot 8, 4.46b; Tractate Derekh Eretz; and Tanna d’be Eliahu.

³⁹ To be sure, they never rejected Torah study, but seem to have placed it after “deed”.

characteristics seen in the Hasidim and many of the Sages' teachings are seen in the life and ministry of Jesus (Flusser, 2007:82).

Considering the religious atmosphere of the Galilee described above, the activity of the Pharisees, Sages and Hasidim, it is no surprise that synagogues found an integral place within community life; synagogues were important gathering places (Charlesworth, 2006:30). Research gives a clue as to what these structures might have been like.⁴⁰

Charlesworth (2006:30) goes on to say that pre-70 synagogues were diverse and often unimpressive. During the time of Jesus many synagogues (places where believers gathered to read and study Torah) were most likely rooms in large houses. On several counts, Josephus mentions a noteworthy edifice in Tiberias,⁴¹ one of the two leading cities in Galilee.⁴² The edifice, called a *proseuche*, is described as a monumental structure that could accommodate a large crowd used for Sabbath celebrations, fast day rituals as well as the deliberation of fiery political issues. Levin notes the connection between the *proseuche* and the *synagogue*. "In Josephus' other accounts, as well as in the gospel traditions, the Theodotos inscription, and rabbinic literature, the term used for this Judean communal institution is invariably Synagogue" (Levine, 2005:52-53).⁴³

Before concluding discussion of the topic of Galilee, further distinctions must be made, namely the divisions within the region: Upper Galilee in the North, Lower Galilee in the South.⁴⁴ Feldman

⁴⁰ The extant archaeological evidence discloses that pre-70 synagogues were rectangular rooms in larger buildings, as in the Herodium, or more public areas, such as at Masada and Gamla. It therefore seems proper to assume that Jesus did teach in synagogues, provided that we do not imagine an architectural edifice as is evident in post-third-century Palestine (Charlesworth, 2006:30).

⁴¹ For further discussion and notation of the expansive scholarly work on the Tiberian *proseuche* see Levine, 2005.

⁴² The other leading city was Sepphoris, called the "ornament of Galilee" by Josephus. The population of both Herodian cities, Tiberias and Sepphoris, are estimated to have been between 6 000 and 12 000 inhabitants (Reed, 2000:82).

⁴³ Most significant here is the building's purportedly large size. Josephus continues by saying that when not meeting in the *proseuche*, Tiberian Jews would meet in the local stadium, similar to diaspora meetings in theatres. Immense synagogue buildings such as the *proseuche* are known only from the Diaspora, dating from the third to seventh centuries CE. Therefore, the unusual presence of this "synagogue-like" building in Lower Galilee attests to a vibrant and sizable worshiping community there (Levine, 2005:52).

⁴⁴ The Mishnah adds Tiberias as a third division (Mishnahh Sheebiith 9:2).

stresses a difference in Greek influence or Hellenization between Lower Galilee (an area of roughly 470 square miles) and Upper Galilee (an area of roughly 180 square miles butting up against the Golan Heights) (Feldman, 1993:418; Meyers, 1976:95).

If the region is divided at the Beit HaKerem valley, it could be said that the Upper Galilee had a high concentration of Jews and was simultaneously almost totally devoid of Greek influence. The isolated self-enclosed nature of the North situated a few hundred meters higher in elevation than Lower Galilee and defined by the awesome slopes of Merion massif, caused Upper Galilee to be less affected by outside influences, foreign policies and urbanization. Some scholars say that Upper Galilee, given the Greek name Teracomia (four villages) during the Roman period (Segal, 1982:21),⁴⁵ was not under the effective control of Rome during the Roman period (Meyers, 1976:95).

On the other hand, Lower Galilee seems to have had no barriers to communication. Closely tied to the busy trade of both the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee, it was an area bustling with energy (Meyers, 1976:95). Four major valleys dissect the area latitudinally, making the area hard to traverse in a North/South fashion. Roads of significance to those other than locals, crossed in an East/West direction (Aharoni, 1962:28). Fertile soil made the region highly valued — it was a place where peasants fared better than their Judean counterparts, although their situation was far from ideal (Witherington, 1990:89, 90). The predominately peasant ethos of the region was broken up by the large cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias. In comparison to Upper Galilee and Transjordan, Lower Galilee exhibited a generally cosmopolitan and open environment, more Hellenized in culture and linguistic character (Witherington, 1990:89).

One of the most important cities in Lower Galilee was Sepphoris, built by Herod Antipas beginning in 3 BCE. A beautiful fortified city, less than 4 miles north and an hour's walk away from Nazareth, Sepphoris was "perched like a bird" on a four hundred-foot hill overlooking the Bet Netofa Valley.

Its Hebrew name, Zippori, "bird," reflects its lofty location as it commanded a panoramic view of Lower Galilee (Batey, 1991:134). The city provided a market for potters, artists, fishermen and glassmakers, as well as middlemen who specialized in the sale of others' products (AdanBayewit,

⁴⁵ "This designation itself raises problems. We know there were many more than four villages in Upper Galilee in this period. The four villages referred to were apparently the largest — the only ones more than tiny hamlets. Roman documents do not identify the settlements to which the provincial title refers and modern scholarship has not yet successfully identified them with certainty. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to determine the size of an ancient site" (Meyers & Meyers, 1978).

1993:233).⁴⁶⁴⁷ Johonathan Reed points out that Nazareth, one of the southernmost villages in Galilee, was likely to be more oriented toward Sepphoris than to the South where the steep incline of the Nazareth ridge made traversing in a Southwardly direction difficult (Charlesworth, 2006:216). This was the stomping grounds of Jesus and his disciples.

3.3 Who is a Jew (Race and Ancestry)?

Earlier it was said that G-d's promise was not a promise of theology and philosophy, like gods of the pagan religions, but a covenantal promise of geography and ancestry. This chapter turns now to ancestry. It considers what makes a person Jewish; how Jewishness is defined; or more simply put, "Who is a Jew?"

The answer for current day Israel lies within governmental debates about Israeli citizenship. A 1970 amendment to the Law of Return, reads, "For the purposes of this Law, 'Jew' means a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion"⁴⁹ (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). Avigdor Lieberman's Israel Beiteinu faction has proposed a new law saying that non-Orthodox converts aren't counted as Jews. The idea is that only Orthodox believers should be given citizenship, since they alone keep the level of Torah observance required by halakha, upon which the nation in its current state was founded in 1948 (Banks, Muller, & Overstreet, 2008:639).

Nehemiah and Ezra certainly knew the weight of the question, "who is a Jew"? In their day, foreign women who joined themselves to Jewish men in marriage were sent away and marriages were dissolved because the women were not allowed.⁴⁸ This critical time in history in which exiles returned to re-establish a "Jewish" homeland caused the leaders to consider G-d's call for racial purity. Ezra put the ball in motion with a confession on behalf of the people who had broken G-

⁴⁶ Although scholars differ in their opinion about the relationship between Sepphoris and Nazareth, hostility between the Galilean villages and Sepphoris became apparent in the devastation of the 66 CE Revolt, speaking about Sepphoris, Josephus says, "the Galileans ... venting their hatred of one of the cities which they detested" (Josephus Life 375).

⁴⁷ B of the Law of Return (Amendment No. 2) 5730-1970

⁴⁸ Legislation prohibiting intermarriage appears in Exodus 3:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4. A notable exception is the book of Ruth, although articulation of Ruth's conversion is evidenced in her declaration (Ruth 1:16).

d's commands by marrying foreign women, followed by the audible resolve of Shekanyah, son of Yehiel (Ezra 10:2-3).⁴⁹

Beginning with the priests, each man who had married a foreign wife resolved to put her away and offer sacrifices to resolve their sins (Ezra 19-20). There didn't seem to be much talk about possible conversion for these women, but then "conversion" may have been unfamiliar to Ezra (Cohen, 1985:51).⁵⁰ Had some of the "foreign" women discussed in the book of Ezra *crossed over* to Judaism? If so, three of the ritual requirements required for conversion in second temple period — circumcision, immersion and sacrifice — would have been reduced to the last two for them as women.⁵¹ But there is no mention of the conversion option.

What about the children? Were they Jewish? This is where the matrilineal and patrilineal debate comes into view. Up to this point, the children of Jewish fathers by Gentile mothers were considered Jewish.⁵² Patrilineal identity and full acceptance of converts (certainly their offspring) was established as echoed in the Talmud, "one's family on his father's side is termed 'family' (for the purposes of inheritance); one's family on his mother's side is not termed 'family' (for the purposes of inheritance)" (Bava Batra, 109b).^{53 54}

⁴⁹ "We have been unfaithful to our G-d by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now let us make a covenant before our G-d to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our G-d. Let it be done according to the Law" (Ezra 10:2-3).

⁵⁰ Ezra's contemporaries, on the other hand, were talking about the concept of conversion, speaking rather favourably about the advancements of Gentiles in the Kingdom. See Isaiah 56:6-8, referencing foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, love him, minister to him, and become servants. Also see Isaiah 14:1 about foreigners worshiping the Lord in Jerusalem at the end of days; finally, Isaiah 66:21, predicting Gentiles holding the position of priests and Levites. Shay Cohen says, "...these centuries saw the creation of an institutionalized method for the admixture of Gentiles" (Cohen 1985:51).

⁵¹ To this, Dunn adds, "instruction in and acceptance of the Torah" (Dunn, 1992:4).

⁵² Ishmael is the one notable exception of children born to Biblical heroes by Gentile women who don't inherit the promises made to Abraham. However, he remained under G-d's blessing to Abraham. משפחה מקרייה אינה אם משפחה; משפחה קרויה אב משפחה
Hebrew translation

⁵³ Hebrew Translation משפחה קרויה אינה אם משפחה; משפחה קרויה אב משפחה

⁵⁴ By choosing to follow Naomi's G-d, and subsequently marrying into the faith, Ruth was incorporated into Judaism without being born into the bloodline (Ruth 4:10). She is listed in the record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, "Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and

Somewhere along the line, though, perhaps starting with the Babylonian Exile, proof of Jewish status came through the mother's lineage, so that by the 2nd century CE onwards, matrilinearity was fully established. In his seminal work on Jewish identity, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, Shaye J.D. Cohen says, "This [matrilinear Judaism] is surprising within the context of ancient culture, especially Jewish culture, where the important parent was always the father" (Cohen, 1999:283).⁵⁵

One thing that was probably monolithically agreed upon by the various Jewish sects and governmental entities in the first-century was the clear delineation between Jews and non-Jews. Jewish communities lived by a set of guidelines not incumbent upon non-Jews. The latter were not part of the ancestry-defined belief system, whereas Judaism was all about being born into or outside of the family or tribe. Becoming Jewish meant walking into, embracing, and being bound by all that Judaism had to offer: the creeds, beliefs, ordinances, promises, covenants, etc. Broadly speaking, once Jewishness was acquired, it could not be lost (Dunn, 1992:4).

Rav Shaul, better known to us as the Apostle Paul, weighs in on this subject by talking about the real descendants of Abraham. When addressing the community at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16), he makes a distinction between Jews who are descendants of Abraham and non-Jews (i.e. Gentiles) who love and follow the ways of Adoni. The distinction seems to be a point of clarification to his audience, which surely harkens back to themes from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 51:1-6).

Shaul's theology isn't so clear-cut in the book of Romans (Chapter 9). There he explains that the sons and daughters of Abraham are not just natural blood descendants of the patriarch, in fact some natural born descendants, in other words "children of the flesh (verse 8)," are NOT to be considered children of Abraham because of their unbelief. Furthermore, non-Jews who believe in

Obed the father of Jesse" (Matthew 1:5). No one questioned King David's kinship succession though his non-Jewish grandmother who was at least not a Jew by birth (Ruth 1:4).

⁵⁵ Valid arguments can be made on both sides of the debate for patrilineal and matrilinear recognition of Judaism in the Second Temple Period, most likely reflecting the fact that Jewish identity was probably not monolithically agreed upon by the various sects and governmental entities of the time. Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy could be a reflection that Timothy's status as "mamzer" (bastard) needed to be legitimized. Alternatively, it could have been that Timothy was fully Jewish and was therefore in need of circumcision. A third option is that Paul circumcised Timothy as part of a full conversion process, to dispel any doubts of Timothy's religious and ethnic standing. The phrase outlining the reason for Paul's decision, "because of the Jews", indicates the importance of setting things in order so that Timothy would be deemed acceptable by other Jews (Acts 16:1-3).

Adoni, in other words “children of the promise” (Romans 9:8), are considered sons of Abraham and attain righteousness as a result (Romans 9:30).

When G-d-fearers like Cornelius were granted “repentance unto life” (μετανοϊαν εις ζωην) (Acts 11:18), Paul’s response was quite remarkable. He dealt with the challenge by redrawing the boundary lines of Judaism to include incoming Gentiles. In effect, he redefined what it meant to be “Jewish”. Observance of the Torah was enough for G-d-seeking Gentiles to become “sons of Abraham” without the ancestral ties.

One thing was clear: race and ancestry was of vital importance to the leaders of the Jesus movement. One question, however, remains unanswered: Did Peter and James and the other Talmidim in Jerusalem redraw the boundaries as Paul did? In their minds, did Gentiles become FULL members of the Faith, as equally validated as the original founders, or are they somehow side-lined? As an emerging entity within a religious body that did not accept Gentiles as such, how did they, in the face of these developments, define themselves? This topic is explored further in Chapter Four.

3.4 Streams and Sects of Judaism⁵⁶

The 18th century German writer, G.E. Lessing, known for his literary works that includes the play, “Nathan the Wise” was also an important scholar of early Christianity. In one of his theological tractates he writes that Jews interpret Scripture in various ways and that they believe that different interpretations will be equally valid.⁵⁷ On the contrary, Flusser says that while there is room to play with interpretation, there are rules that determine interpretative validity (Flusser & Notley, 2007:235). The streams and sects of Judaism in the first-century would test the boundaries of interpretation.

For that reason, it is extremely difficult to use historical gauges to lay down a norm for Judaism in the first-century.⁵⁸ In fact, the rabbinic definition of Jewishness was probably not normative within Judaism before Amoraic times, 200-500 C.E. at the earliest (Dunn, 1992:3). The discussion below

⁵⁶ See Table 3-1 at the end of the chapter for details in chart form.

⁵⁷ Flusser says that while there is room to play with interpretation, there are rules that determine interpretative validity. “It is true that there is a wide range of possible interpretations in Judaism, but each approach is bound by certain rules, rules that are determined by the biblical text, on the one hand, and the clues that guide the reader’s search for deeper truths within the text, on the other” (Flusser, 2007:235).

⁵⁸ “The attempt to do so sometimes barely conceals apologetic motives” (Dunn, 1992:3).

constitutes an attempt to paint a picture of Jewish sects active in the first-century given the resources available for the period and my view of the content within its context. Josephus's schematic construct recording the divisions of Second Temple Jewish society is a good starting point (Jewish War 2.119-166).

With the Temple still standing, rituals such as the mikveh, and festivals such as Passover, probably shared a broad, national praxis that would have in turn generated a large commonality around religious practice and belief. This was the broader Jewish community. Obvious distinctions existed between the various groups, but this shared world view likely made it easier for Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and possibly adherents of other groups to identify themselves with Jesus and his movement.

According to Josephus, Judaism was thought to be divided into three schools that came into existence during the Hasmonean period: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes (Baumgarten, 1998:1). These schools are also known from rabbinic, biblical and other historical material, including the Dead Sea Scrolls (known as Peshar Nahum) (Flusser, 2007:215). This indicates that it is not just Josephus who divided Jewish society this way; the Essenes also adhered to the "three school" view (Flusser, 2007:215).

A generalization of Josephus' contribution to the subject and his elevation of the Essenes within the three schools is summed up in the words of Steve Mason in *In Quest of the Historical*

Pharisees (Neusner, 2007:5). "Pharisees and Sadducees are both dwarfed by the Essenes. In Ant. 13.171-173, each school receives one sentence. In Ant. 18.120-15, the Pharisees again receive less attention (and praise) than the Essenes (18.18-20). And in Life 10-11, all three schools yield immediately to Josephus's beloved teacher Bannus" (Neusner, 2007:5; War 2.119-166).⁵⁹

3.4.1 Pharisees

Josephus uses the word "*akribeia*" (meaning "in accordance with the strictness of the Mosaic law"⁶⁰) when referring to the Pharisees, indicating the idea of excellence and accuracy (Baumgarten, 1998:413). As a sect, the Pharisees pointed to halakha with meticulous exactness

⁵⁹ This present work does not endeavor to explore the opinions of Josephus' mentor, Bannus, but explores the better known divisions of Jewish society represented in this construct: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes (Table 3-1).

⁶⁰ As defined in Strong's #195

(Baumgarten, 1998:413). Paul, one of the two self-confessed Pharisees in the pre-70 period,⁶¹ characterized Pharisaic doctrine in Acts 26:5 by saying the Pharisees were, “the strictest sect of our religion”.

The theme of purity defined the Pharisees. According to Baumgarten, their name, *perushim*, is not offered explanation in ancient Jewish sources (Baumgarten, 1998:412)⁶² but probably stems from their self-imposed separation from the common people (*‘am ha-‘aretz* or “people of the land”) when it came to ritual table laws.^{63 64}

Rabbinic sources trace the Pharisees to the Men of the Great Assembly, leaders of Israel who had returned from exile and laid the foundations of the new polity connected with the Second Temple. According to Jewish tradition these men, also known as the Great Synagogue, were an assembly of 120 scribes, Sages, and prophets in the period ranging from the end of the Biblical prophets to the time of the development of Rabbinic Judaism (Baumgarten, 1998:412). They are sometimes identified as the “Sages” in rabbinic sources, resulting from the Rabbis’ view of themselves as the inheritors of the Pharisaic tradition (Shiffman, 1994:77).⁶⁵

The Dead Sea scroll use of the term *dorshei halakot*, “those looking for smooth interpretations”, has long been thought by scholars as a reference to the Pharisees. The term “smooth interpretations” seems to point to lenient rulings (Young, 2007:8). The people described by this term are presented as hypocrites, lacking integrity, those who study and preach the Torah using easy interpretations. The Qumran scrolls contain repeated allusion to the deceptive ways of the *dorshei halakot* (the Pharisees), concerning the lies they used when speaking to the people

⁶¹ Josephus Flavius is the other self-attested Pharisee (Life 12, Phil. 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:5). Similarly, Gamaliel’s son, Simon, is described as a Pharisee.

⁶² The only ancient source containing some explanation of the Church Fathers (Baumgarten, 1998:412).

⁶³ While the people of the land may not have been consumed with Levitical purity and tithes, the Pharisees maintained a certain level of purity in their daily life as seen in the Mishnah. “Anyone who accepts four things is accepted as a companion (*havar*): that he not give offerings and tithes to the *‘am ha-‘aretz*, that he not undergo purification with the *‘am ha-‘aretz*, and that he eat non-sacrificial meat in a state of purity, and that he commit to being faithful” (t. Demai 2.2).

⁶⁴ Economically lower to middle class, the Pharisees remained within common society, not separating themselves physically — this was the teaching of the liberal Rabbi Hillel, “Do not separate yourself from the community” (Neusner, 1984:26).

⁶⁵ To be clear, rabbinic literature never labels the Sages as Pharisees (Flusser & Notley, 2007:44).

(Flusser, 2007:218). Writers of the scrolls saw the Pharisees as Bible teachers who looked for an easier path.

Excerpts from the Qumran writings Peshar Nahum shed light on at least one less-than-positive lens through which the Pharisees were seen (Flusser, 2007:219) "...the misleaders from Ephraim {Pharisees}, who with their fraudulent teaching and lying tongue and perfidious lip misdirect many: kings, princes, priests and people together with the proselyte attached to them Cities and clans will perish through their advice, nobles and leaders will fall due to the ferocity of their tongue" (Peshar Nahum 2.8-10).⁶⁶

To be clear, the Pharisees condemned hypocrisy within their own ranks, including rabbis who were successors of the Pharisees who remarked on their own double standards. Rabbi Eleazar was one such rabbi, who professed, "Any person in whom hypocrisy can be found, will bring down {divine} wrath on the world" (b. sotah 41b). Brad Young suggests an honest view of the criticism of Jesus could be seen in the same way and reflect his closeness, in teaching and practice, to the Pharisees (Young, 2007:8). Jesus' call to them was intended to cause a spiritual revitalization movement that would awaken an inward holiness (Young, 2007:8).

Despite the accusations of hypocrisy, or perhaps in part because of it, the Pharisees held tremendous influence over mainstream Judaism. They held the allegiance of most the Jews (Young, 2007:8). They were the teachers who sat in Moses' seat at the synagogue (Matthew 23:2-3), instructing Jews and Gentiles drawn to Judaism (including those who followed Jesus). For all their faults, they had a deep spirituality as seen in their acts of compassion and their prayers. According to Brad Young, they wanted genuine spiritual renewal (Young, 2007:8).

Flusser and Notely echo the same message. "This makes sense, for although Jesus was apparently indirectly influenced by Essenism, he was basically rooted in universal non-sectarian Judaism. The philosophy and practice of this Judaism was that of the Pharisees." (Flusser & Notely, 2007:47). In the Pharisees, Jesus saw the contemporary heirs of Moses, and commended their teachings as valuable material upon which lives should be modelled (Flusser & Notely, 2007:47).

⁶⁶ In another verse, the author of Peshar Hosea laments that Israel erred by regarding the Pharisees in such high esteem, saying the people, in their blindness, listened to the "*misdirected*" Pharisees, acclaimed them, and feared them like G-d (Q166 [=4QpHos] 2.5-6) (Flusser & Notley, 2007:219).

Lawrence Schiffman categorizes the Pharisees as having three major characteristics (Schiffman, 1989:105). The first, he says, is their representation of the middle and lower classes. The second may be an outgrowth of their social status, and that is that they were not truly Hellenized and seem to retain their Near Eastern culture. That's not to say they didn't adopt certain Greek words or intellectual approaches, but they regarded only the ancient traditions of Israel as authoritative. Third, they accepted the extra-biblical laws and customs passed down through the generations, known as "traditions of the fathers". These teachings were part of what the rabbis later called the oral law and it supplemented the written Torah. In summary, Schiffman (1989:105) says, "They were said to have been extremely scrupulous in observing the law and to have been expert in its interpretation".

In the first-century, the Pharisees were the educators of the masses, intentionally identifying themselves with popular faith. They accepted ideas about the immortality of the soul (indicating belief in afterlife), the existence of angels, and the divine intervention of G-d in the works of humans. In addition, they believed in the concept of reward or punishment after death and the idea of free will (Schiffman, 1989:105; see Table 3-1). The Pharisees also believed that the law given to Moses on Sinai was both written and oral. The first, in their minds, could not be interpreted easily without the latter (Schiffman, 1989:105)).

Some scholars estimate that the Pharisees numbered only six thousand in Herodian times and lived in a period of about two centuries, ending c. 70 CE (Schiffman, 1994:77). They embodied one of the most noteworthy reform movements in Judaism at the close of the Second Temple Period (Young, 2007:8).

Pharisaic acceptance of the Oral Law that grew from the traditions of the fathers allowed Judaism to adapt to the new and varied circumstances that it would face in Talmudic times and later. Over time, Pharisaism — which may be the *havarim* (fellowship group/associates) referred to in Talmudic sources — became rabbinic Judaism: the basis for ensuing Jewish life and civilization.⁶⁷ While there was a period of time in modern scholarship when the authorship and dating of the Mishna removed it from the genus of the Second Temple Period, David Instone-Brewer has

⁶⁷ One of the invaluable contributions recorded for posterity by the Pharisees is an extensive corpus of rabbinic literature. Rabbinic literature consists of assemblages of traditions written by and about rabbis alive during and after the 1st century. D. Instone-Brewer examines these texts at length with interest in the earliest traditions, which can be determined to some extent by the names of various rabbis and the dates in which they lived. He comments on the fact that this literature is useful for understanding both Jewish and Christian origins, giving a brief explanation of the corpus (Instone-Brewer 2008).

reexamined these texts and demonstrated that much of the content is clearly originally tied to the cited authors and is reflective of life in the Second Temple Period, contemporaneous with the New Testament (Instone-Brewer, 2008).⁶⁸

An important group called the Hasidim stood on the very edge, if not actually within the circle of the Pharisaic movement (Safrai, 2008). The term Hasidim has a long history in biblical Hebrew, Hebrew-derived Greek literature of the Second Temple, and in other contexts in the Mishnah (Ben-Amos & Noy, 2011:10). They emerged in the intertestamental period as a group of forerunners to the Pharisees⁶⁹ and continued after the rise of the Pharisees (Young, 2007:21).

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa was thought to be a leading Hasid of the first-century, as well as the epitome of *anshei ma'aseh*, the pious ones or men of great deeds (Ben-Amos, 2011:10).⁷⁰ When he died, it is said that the *anshei ma'aseh* ceased (Sotah 9:15). The term *anshei ma'aseh*, a compound of two words, (literally men of deeds or works) appears first in Mishnaic Hebrew, possibly interchangeable with the Hasidim. A link between the term *anshei ma'aseh* and the religious group is made in the following excerpts from the Babylonian Talmud: Mishnah Sukkah 5:4 Tosefta Sukkah 5:4; BT sukkah 53a; BT Sanhedrin 97a.⁷¹

⁶⁸ “Traditions about legal matters were called Halakhic and traditions more closely related to sermons than law cases were called Agadic. Mishna is the earliest Halakhic collection. It was originally oral, but was written down at about 200 CE. Tosephta is a supplement to Mishnah and, in some ways, a later rival collection, finished about 400 CE. The Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds are commentaries on Mishnah by rabbis living 200-500 CE. All four follow the same structure based on subjects, with 6 orders divided into about 10 tractates each, then into chapters, verses and Talmud, page references” (Instone-Brewer, 2008).

⁶⁹ See Adolf Buchler.

⁷⁰ Shumel Safrai states that “anshei ma'aseh is but an appellation for Hasidim” (Ben-Amos & Noy, 2011:18).

⁷¹ “Men of piety [“Hasidim”] and men of good works [“anshei ma'aseh”] used to dance before them with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises” (Mishnah Sukkah 5:4 Tosefta Sukkah 5:4). “Some of them used to say, ‘Happy our youth that has not disgraced our old age.’ These were the men of piety [Hasidim] and good deeds [anshei ma'aseh]” (BT sukkah 53a). “Our Rabbis taught: In the seven year cycle at the end of which the son of David will come — in the first year, this verse will be fulfilled: And I will cause it to rain upon one city and cause it not to rain upon another city [Amos 4:7]; in the second the arrows of Unger will be sent in the forth; in the third, a great famine, in the course of which men, women, and children, pious men (Hasidim) and saints (anshei ma'aseh) will die, and the Torah will be forgotten by its students” (BT Sanhedrin 97a).

Rabbi Akiva and his pupil, Rabbi Meir, were among some of the other Sages who travelled and taught as evangelists, making their way to Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria, Italy, Spain and beyond (Flusser, 1987:78). Jesus travelled like the Sages and Hasidim who used parables and communicated ideologies such as the “fear of sin”, the kindness toward others, and charity.

3.4.2 Saducees

The upper-class expression of Judaism is seen in the Sadducees, a conservative sect active in Israel starting from the 2nd century BCE until the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. One of the chief complications in describing them is that all that we know about them comes from their adversaries⁷², seen in rabbinic texts, Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament.

“In the New Testament, they seem to be the primary opponents of Jesus and the early Christians because of their political ties to the Roman government” (Young, 2007:232).

Their name alone is a quandary. Young comments on the origin and the meaning of the name saying that “Saducees” is related to the Hebrew verbal form of *sadaq* (or *tsahdak*), “to be righteous” (Young, 2007:232). Commonly, researchers go to the personal name *Zadok* as an explanation, whether to the Zadok of Solomonic times or a later Zadok⁷³.

⁷² An important source for the study of the religious ideas of the Second Temple period, and perhaps also for the study of the Sadducees, is the book of Ben Sira (or Sirach), composed about the year 180 BCE, which represents the views of a single, tentative man who belonged to clearly defined social circles. Ben Sira was a priest associated with a group from which the Sadducees later emerged (Taylor, 1897:115).

⁷³ The Zadok of Solomonic times would be fitting since he was the father of the priestly families, but there is no evidence for the connection. Further complicating matters, not all Sadducees were priests and some priests of the Zadokite line resided at Qumran. Furthermore, the Hasmoneans brought an end to the Zadokite priesthood, leaving the name with no substance, only a title.

A later Zadok, a disciple of Antigonus of Socho, presents a second option. Antigonus taught his students to serve G-d with no thought of the afterlife, which, according to the theory, led to a disbelief in resurrection and afterlife. This is in line with Sadducean thinking. One of the other students of Antigonus, Boethus, went on to form the Boethusians, while Zadok became a leader of the movement of the same name. So the theory goes.

Finally, Young shares a third view in which the name is simply related to “righteous ones” (*saddiqim*). “This would be like and in contrast to the Hasidim, the ‘pious ones,’ the early title for the group out of which developed the Pharisees. But this view, like the others, is etymologically difficult; the spelling of the name ‘Sadducee’ suggests that the name is a passive — ‘righteous ones’ would be active” (Young, 2007:232).

As the ruling upper stratum of Jerusalem, the Sadducees are the only Second Temple sect whose identity was not founded on matters of purity. They held positions of power and authority in their day, and were the most influential among landholders and merchants (Ross, s.a.).⁷⁴ They poke at the Pharisees for their strictures (p. Hagigah 3.5, 79d) even though they were directed by the ways of the rabbis themselves (Cohen, 1985:12).⁷⁵

Josephus writes about the Sadducees saying they held that “only those observances are obligatory which are in the written word but that those which derived from the tradition of the forefathers need not be kept” (Ant. 13:297; Rubenstein, 1994:418).⁷⁶ In other words, they denied the validity of the oral law, following the Torah in written form only. This may be because they preferred to have the freedom to interpret the Scriptures as they desired. When it came to the written word, however, they stood for strict adherence in religious matters and conservatism in both ritual and belief. In this way, they won over the main body of officiating priests and wealthier men (Neusner, 1984:27). Generally wealthy members of the Jewish aristocracy, the Sadducees embraced Hellenism, and because of their support for the programme of economic and military expansion instituted by the Hasmonean rulers, the Sadducees came to exercise considerable influence in the court of John Hyrcanus (Neusner, 1984:27).

Sadducees are most often associated with their role of priests, although not all priests were Sadducees, some were Pharisees. Notice that it was the priests of the Pharisees who were sent to question John (John 1:19-24). The New Testament reveals a close tie between the Priests and the Sadducees both of whom made up the Sanhedrin (Acts 23).

⁷⁴ Their influence, however, did not spread to the masses. “Josephus says they were able to persuade none but the rich, meaning among other things that they had a small following of their peers, whereas the Pharisees were backed by the masses” (Ross, s.a.).

⁷⁵ An account from the Tosefta illustrates this truth, telling of the calamity that ensued when a Sadducean priest did not follow rabbinical law. In the account, a priest prepares to pour the feast of Sukkot libation on the altar as part of the oral tradition, but instead, he turns and pours the water at his own feet. The resulting damage done when onlookers pelt him with flying citrons, is said to have suspended sacrifices until the horn could be repaired. Reflecting on the account, S. Cohen says, “the story becomes part of a cycle designed to show that the Sadducees, although they disagree with the rabbis, must nevertheless obey them” (y Yom 1.5, 39a; Cohen, 1985:12).

⁷⁶ Jeffrey Rubenstein notes that “new evidence from Qumran, together with more methodologically aware analyses of rabbinic texts, has revised the general conception of the Sadducees and their approach to law” (Rubenstein, 1994:418).

The beliefs held by Sadducees included an acknowledgement of Scripture as the only authority and themselves as its sole arbiters, thereby debunking the notion that Scripture could be elucidated by the Pharisees (Neusner, 1984:27). It seems they believed that G-d gave Israel the written Torah as a guide for one's free will decisions (Flusser, 2007:12). They probably also did not believe in the coming Messiah (Young, 2007:202).

Another belief, in opposition to the non-sectarian universal Judaism of the Pharisees whose distinctive beliefs included the immortality of the soul, reward and/or punishment after life, free will, and G-dly intervention, is that the Sadducees denied all these things (Schiffman 1989:105). They also denied the existence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 23:8; Flusser, 2007:11, see Table 3-1).⁷⁷

The fact that they did not believe in resurrection of the dead is mentioned in Josephus, Ant. 18.16; J.W. 2.165; Mark 12.18; Luke 20.27 and Acts 23.8. This thought is not the same as, but is linked to the concept of the absence of afterlife, also thought to be part of early Sadducean ideology (Flusser, 2007:11).

If there is no life after death — and clearly no reward or punishment system after death — it stands to reason that human actions are responsible for determining one's fate. A denial of divine providence on this side of death freed up conceptual space in which the Sadducees believed that positive and negative events were a result of good and evil human actions (Flusser & Yadin, 2009:225). Some scholars disagree with the Sadducean disbelief in the afterlife, saying the belief was not established by the Second Temple Period (Saldarini, 1988:307). This does not help explain, however, the Pharisees belief in the concept in the same time period (Saldarini, 1988:307).

With the Roman invasion of 70 CE the Sadducees virtually disappeared from history, because the nucleus of their existence, the Temple, was destroyed. They themselves left no documentation of their history, their organization, or their understandings. Some scholars maintain that their views were partly maintained and echoed by the Samaritans, with whom they are frequently identified (Finkel, 1974:40, 50, 69, 78).

⁷⁷ "They likely considered these harmful folk beliefs; however, it is not clear how they could anchor their positions in the Hebrew Bible, which contains clear endorsements of some of the rejected views. They most likely had to employ creative exegesis to harmonize their beliefs with the biblical text" (Flusser, 2007:11).

3.4.3 Essenes

If the Pharisees and Sadducees, both with representation in Jerusalem's Supreme Court (the Sanhedrin), saw their way as the only right way, and they did, the Essenes saw themselves as the "true" Israel (Flusser, 2009:8). Their trademark was their isolationist view and unconcealed hostility toward anyone who did not accept their rigorous ideas on ritual purity (Flusser, 2009:8). They held no governmental representation and according to Pliny, had no money, and did not marry.⁷⁸ They were known primarily from the writings of Josephus and Philo rather than rabbinic literature, the latter referring to them obliquely at best (Safrai, 2008).

The Dead Sea Scrolls (200 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.) spoke of a group of people with whom G-d had secretly renewed his covenant, granted forgiveness of sins, and graced with the presence of the Holy Spirit (Wright, 2001). These people, thought to be the Essenes, saw themselves as the authentic people who returned from the exile. They revered a messiah-like figure, called the 'teacher of righteousness', who promoted a strict form of priestly holiness (Wright, 2001). The community drew upon these beliefs, creating an ever-increasing tight-knit and isolated community based on Torah obedience (Wright, 2001).^{79,80}

A description from Pliny's ancient travelogue supports the same view; the Roman writer, in his *Natural History*, describes a sect at length (Wise, Abeg, & Cook, 2005:16). He refers to the Essenes who lived "without women, sex, or money" by the shores of the Dead Sea, south of Jericho and north of Engedi. Most scholars made the logical conclusion: the Essenes were the Qumran group, the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls, after all, the area matches the region where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found (Wise, Abeg, & Cook, 2005:16). The "Essene hypothesis" prevails today, but Wise, Abegg, and Cook, authors of *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, suggest that different interpretations may be worth noting (Wise, Abegg & Cook, 2005:55).

⁷⁸ *Historia Naturalis*. V, 17 or 29; in other editions V,(15).73

⁷⁹ French scholar, André Dupont-Sommer was one of the earliest scholars to identify the Dead Sea Scrolls as the product of Essenes. Gabriele Boccaccini and James C. VanderKam assert that the prominent view of the Essenes, called the "Essene hypothesis", identifies the *Essenes* as the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This theory is supported by academic studies in the time of the discovery of the first scrolls. It was announced on April 1948, at the discovery of the Scrolls, that the Essenes were a Jewish group of notoriety at the time of the writings of Josephus (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1950:100.).

⁸⁰ Here is no info for this footnote

The speculation is that these scrolls were taken to the desert for the purpose of safekeeping while fleeing the destruction of Jerusalem (Wise, Abegg & Cook, 2005:55).⁸¹ An argument in support of this view comes from recent analysis of the high-quality linen, like that of the Zadokite or priests, found with scrolls in several of the caves. The linen supports this notion (Feldman & Reinhold, 1996:249).

According to Josephus there were about 4 000 Essenes (Ant 18.1.5) who lived communally (Dead Sea Scrolls, *Community Rule* (1QS) 1.11-13); they had their own understanding of the Law. Pliny the Elder (5.73), less known as Gaius Plinius Secundus (23 CE – August 25, 79), speaks in the first-century about the Essenes with high regard as having been in existence through thousands of ages (Pliny, 5.7).⁸²

For the Essenes, the Teacher of Righteousness was their leader and priest (4QpPsa 1,3-4 iii 15; 1QpHab 2:8), ostensibly a member of the Zadokite line, whom G-d raised up to guide the groping community (CD 1:11). The Essene community regarded him as one whom G-d endowed with a special understanding of Scripture (Fitzmyer, 1992:56). When considering the early Christian community in light of the Essenes, it could be thought that by substituting Jesus of Nazareth for the Teacher of Righteousness, one held the exegetical keys for discerning early Christian exegesis (Fitzmyer, 1992:56). N.T. Wright says John the Baptist is poised uneasily between the Essenes and the earliest followers of Jesus (Wright, 2001).

While it is tempting to draw conclusions from apparently common practices and beliefs, religious Jewish factions in the Second Temple Period shared much in common. Paul's rejection of marriage or John the Baptist's asceticism don't lead to the label "Essene" either on the lips of

⁸¹ Norman Golb was one of the first to posit the assertion and though there have been significant controversies and scandals around his assertion, a growing consensus among Israeli scholars is that Golb is essentially correct (See Yizhak Magen and Yuval Peleg's "Back to Qumran: Ten Years of Excavation and Research, 1993-2004").

⁸² "On the west bank (of the Dead Sea) the Essenes take refuge, to the point where they are harmful. This is a solitary people and remarkable in comparison with others in the whole world. They live as partners of the palms, without any women---having renounced all desire---and without money. From day to day this throng of refugees is renewed by crowds weary with life, whom fortune drives in waves from afar to adopt their customs. Thus, through thousands of ages---incredible to say---a people in which no one is born is eternal, so fruitful for them is others' repenting of life!" – (Pliny, Natural History 5.15.7)

Jesus, his followers or other witnesses within the New Testament. However, his practice of baptism and other traditions shared Essene traits.

3.5 The Jewish Fellowship of Jesus' Followers

My intent is to show that before the formation of the Jesus fellowship there was a well-established Jewish culture — language, beliefs, and practices. These were integral to the life of Jesus' followers and the setting of the Gospels and the New Testament. It is my belief that this culture affected the way they saw the world, interpreted the Messiah, and made sense of their faith system. Determinations they made in the midst of these surrounds caused them to distinguish themselves as a separate group. So, who were they and how did they identify themselves as an emerging entity within the larger body? To answer this, let's look to characteristics of the Messiah himself and then the characteristics of Jesus' followers.

One doesn't have to look far into the different forms of Judaism to find different expressions of when and how the Messiah might appear and what redemptive history might look like. Jesus' followers distinguished themselves by the claim that the rabbi from Nazareth was the expected messiah of Israel.⁸³

Clearly, he came from an observant Jewish family (Casey, 2010:169). The New Testament serves as an invaluable historical witness to traditions in his childhood home. For example, Joseph,

Jesus' father, is identified as "faithful to the law" — literally "a righteous man" (Matthew 1:19). The Hasid is also called "a righteous one" (Josephus, Antiquities 14:22; y. Ta'anit 3, 67). In the Epistle of James, the brother of Jesus, we find the Hasidic impulse upon doing, the source of the Hasidim, being called the "men of deeds" (Turnage, s.a.; James 2:1-26; 5:13-18; m. Avot 3:9).

⁸³ John the Baptist expected a Messiah (heavenly Redeemer) who would bring vindication for the righteous and chastisement for the wicked. The imminence of judgment is reflected in John's proclamation, "The axe is already at the root of the trees" (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9; Notley, 2004).

John's rabbinic contemporaries had a different view. The three-part view of redemptive history held by the Sages, his rabbinic contemporaries, put an intermediate period in place between the present era and the future "End of Days" when the righteous would be resurrected and the wicked receive judgment. The intermediate time resembled what rabbinic sources call, "the days of the Messiah" (; Notley, 2004).

Traditions of the family include customs of the 8th day circumcision and the practice of naming one's son (Safrai 2004:1-2).⁸⁴ ⁸⁵ Luke mentions two other Jewish customs observed by baby Jesus' parents: Mary's sacrifice for her purification and Joseph's payment of the ransom for his firstborn son (Luke 2:22–24).⁸⁶

Another detail that draws the reader's attention to the observant upbringing of Jesus' family is the instructions to appear before the Lord for festivals three times a year, including Passover (Luke 2:41; Exodus 23:17). As stated by Safrai, the Sages did not demand this literally (Mishnah, Hagigah 1:6; Safrai 2004).⁸⁷

On one occasion, Jesus and his family were returning (or coming down) from Jerusalem when the boy Jesus was separated from his immediate family (Luke 2:44).⁸⁸ A self-confident child could

⁸⁴ Outside of the New Testament, the next mention in written Jewish sources about these combined practices appears in the seventh-century A.D. work, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (Safrai, 2004:1-2).

⁸⁵ According to Notley, these are the earliest written records of these practices in the Second Commonwealth (Notley, 2004). Circumcision on the eighth day is a biblical commandment (Leviticus 12:3; Genesis 21:4), but the public naming of a baby boy on the eighth day, along with the gathering of family and acquaintances to celebrate the occasion, are Second Temple-period Jewish customs (Safrai, 2004).

⁸⁶ A mother is impure for forty days after the birth of a son according to Scripture, after which time she is to visit the temple with an offering for her purification (Leviticus 12:1-8). According to Numbers, a firstborn son can be redeemed starting on his thirtieth day (Exodus 13:3), yet Rabbinic interpretation of this passage encouraged fathers to pay the ransom as soon as the baby reached the age of redemption or the thirtieth day (Mishnah, Bechorot 8; Babylonian Talmud, Bechorot 12b).

⁸⁷ A pilgrimage from the Galilee was so expensive and time-consuming that a Galilean usually conducted it only once, or at the most, two or three times in his or her lifetime. Therefore, observant Galileans usually did not "go up" to Jerusalem every year. Jesus' parents were exhibiting an exceptional devotion by making an annual pilgrimage (Safrai, 2004).

⁸⁸ Whole households would have travelled together from Galilee and would have spent time together in Jerusalem worshipping, studying and walking in the city together, so when it was time to leave Jerusalem for home the community of travelers would be quite used to one another's company (Safrai, 2004).

easily have spent the first day of the return journey away from his parents among the large number of new and old acquaintances without great cause for worry (Safrai 2004).^{89 90}

As Jesus grew up he spent his years in Nazareth in Lower Galilee and later intensely on the Northwest shore of Lake Gennesaret and in the Rift Valley district, with headquarters at Capernaum (Meyers 1976:95). He would have been at home in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the area and greatly exposed to the intellectual foundations of Judaism.

By the time that Jesus began his public ministry he would have had a thorough religious training typical of the average Jewish man of his day. In addition to that, he probably spent years studying with one of the outstanding rabbis of the Galilee (Bivin, 2004), so that when Jesus appears on the scene, he is a respected rabbi in his own right, recognized as such by his contemporaries and others. Passages in the New Testament help illustrate this truth (Bivin, 2004; Luke 7:40, Matthew 22:35-36; Matthew 19:16; Luke 12:13; Luke 19:39; Luke 20:27-28).

Note the diversity of those who addressed Jesus as rabbi: a lawyer, a rich man, Pharisees, Sadducees and ordinary people. Clearly, there was a broad range of individuals who saw him as a rabbi. Interestingly, according to David Bivin, it was only after 70 A.D. when the term *rabbi* became a formal title for a teacher (Bivin, 2004).⁹¹

Setting aside Jesus' notoriety for a moment, it might be beneficial to look at what was rather more ordinary about this first-century teacher and the commonalities he had with other Jewish teachers at the time. David Bivin notes that Jewish teachers in the land of Israel travelled, accompanied by

⁸⁹ The fact that he was later found in the temple court sitting and discussing issues with the elders (Luke 2:46-47) speaks to his focus in life and hints at his unique destiny.

⁹⁰ Later he was found in the temple court, asking questions. It was customary in the rabbinic world for the youngest to have the opportunity to answer first when a question was raised. Students were encouraged to voice their opinions and argue their case in an atmosphere where neither silence nor uniformity of opinion was considered of great importance. It is quite possible that the boy was given a hearing and opportunity to show his ability, "even in the very exalted company of teachers found in the temple court" (Safrai, 2004).

⁹¹ The term "rabbi" is derived from the Hebrew word *rav*, which in biblical Hebrew meant "much, many, numerous, great." It also was sometimes used to refer to high government officials or army officers (e.g., Jeremiah 39:3, 13) (Bivin, 2004). In Jesus' day, *rav* was used to refer to the master of a slave or of a disciple. Therefore *rabbi* literally meant "my master" and was a term of respect used by slaves in addressing their owners and by disciples in addressing their teachers (Bivin, 2004).

their disciples, from place to place, depending on the hospitality of the people (Bivin, 2004). Jesus taught outdoors, in homes, in villages, in synagogues and in the Temple using a style of teaching and method of Scripture interpretation common for Sages at that time: parables (Bivin, 2004). These were extremely prevalent and over 4 000 have survived rabbinic literature (Bivin, 2004).

Many of his engagements happened in area synagogues not far from where recruits to the Jesus movement were trained and where they practiced much of their faith (Van der Laan, 2016). Preaching, healing, teaching and driving out demons took place in these settings as recorded in the book of Mark, “So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues ...” (Mark 1:39).

When he spoke, Jesus often made use of parables. He did not invent the parable; rather the rabbinic genre predated his ministry by some time. In fact, the form of parable he used was not much different in form and structure than those to be found in the Talmud. Many of the parables in the Gospels and rabbinic literature have similar motifs, such as the wise and the foolish, unfaithful tenants and labourers in a vineyard (Pileggi, 2004).

A student of late Professor David Flusser participated in a class in his professor’s home in Jerusalem one day when his teacher said, “The question is not whether or not Jesus was a Jew; rather, the question is what kind of Jew was he?” (Tournage, 2011). It has been suggested earlier that Jesus may have aligned himself closer to sects associated with the Pharisees than other Jewish sects of his day (see Table 3-2). It has also been suggested that, if Jesus was not actually among the Hasidim — a subgroup on the fringes of the Pharisees — he aligned himself with them in belief and practice (Tournage, 2011).

Brad Young mentions the Hasidim as the zealous movement born out of the abundantly rich culture of religious piety of the Galilee. The conservative religious mind-set spawned academies of learning supporting the needs of the mindfully devout and the Torah-studying population (Young, 2007:58).⁹²

Teachers of the pietist movement who resided principally in Galilee, included Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa from Arav; Abba Hilkiah, the grandson of Honi ha-Heaggel, (who was from Kefar Imi, also

⁹² Young also cites Chancey, M.A. 2002. *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

known as Kefar Yama in Lower Galilee); and the priest from Ramat Beit Anat.⁹³ To this list, Professor Flusser and his student Tournage, as well as other scholars, Safrai and Vermes, include Jesus of Nazareth (Safrai, 2010).⁹⁴

If Jesus was indeed considered part of the pietist movement, it behoves the reader to know more about the identity of the Hasidim. For one, they thought of themselves as *'ben beit'*, the son of the house of G-d; they also feared heaven and were known to be humble and modest. Most would have considered Hillel their rabbi, giving charitably to such an extent that they were known for saying, "*Sheli shelkha ve-shelkha shelkha*" "what is mine is theirs, what is theirs is theirs" (Nezikin, avot 5:13; Safrai, 1964:15). Notice similar wording in the story of "The Prodigal Son", where the father says to the older son, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (Luke 15:31). The same idea is seen in these words, "do what is good and lend (money), expecting nothing in return" (Luke 6:36).

Mark Tournage continues with an in-depth description of how the ways of the pietists and the ways of Jesus intersected. He starts by defining two impulses that motivated the Hasidic ideology of poverty (Tournage, 2011). The first impulse was the fear of sin⁹⁵ which led them to say, "Keep aloof from everything hideous and from whatever seems hideous, lest others suspect you of transgression" (Tournage, 2011; Derekh Ereta Zuta 1:13).⁹⁶ Compare this with the NT verse, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of G-d" (Matthew 19:24).

The second impulse that motivated Hasidic ideology of poverty has to do with the strict laws regarding relationships, for instance the firm observance of how people were to treat one another (Buth & Notley, 2013:175). The Hasidim made a connection between how a person connected to

⁹³ Flusser, D. 1998. Jesus. Magnes Press: Jerusalem and Vermes, G. 1977. Jesus the Jew. Fontana Collins: London; and Vermes, G. 1993. The Religion of Jesus the Jew. SCM Press: London.

⁹⁴ "To this (list) we may add Jesus of Nazareth, whose teachings and miraculous acts exemplify several of the characteristic lines that we have found in the teachings and acts of the pietists" (Safrai, 2010).

⁹⁵ This concept is so well developed that it was divided into six phases that could lead a person to the "way of death." The first is impure thought, the second is scoffing, the third stage is haughtiness, the fourth roughness, the fifth is idleness and the sixth is causeless hatred and the seventh is an "evil (translated "non-generous") eye" (Derekh Ereta Zuta 6:10).

⁹⁶ They also recognized the potential of money to lead to unethical behaviour (Safrai, 2010; Derekh Ereta Zuta 1:13).

another, treating him like himself a creation in the image of G-d, with a person's relationship with G-d (see T. Peah 3:8; and Avot de-Rabbi Nathan version A, 3)⁹⁷ Compare this with the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the merciful (charitable), for they will receive mercy (charity)" (Matthew 5:7). These two impulses, the fear of sin and motivation to treat others justly, are seen in the piety of Jesus (Tournage, 2011).

The Hasidim believed that as long as a person held on to any wealth, he was apt to violate the higher meaning of the commandments and the only way to avoid such sin was to get rid of one's wealth (Safrai, 1965:19). Apparently, many people gave all of their wealth, or a large part of it, to the needy, for example the tax collector Zacchaeus who gave half of his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:8). Jesus suggested the same to the rich man who followed the law extravagantly, "Sell everything you have and distribute it to the poor" (πάντα ὅσα ἔχεις πώλησον καὶ διάδος πτωχοῖς) (Luke 18:22). The practice of giving became so common that the Sages eventually ruled that one should give away no more than 20% of one's wealth (Bivin, 1993:4). The objective was to prevent the donor from becoming destitute and constituting a burden to the community (Bivin, 1993:4).

Leaving the thought of a close association between Jesus, his followers, and the Hasidim aside for a moment, one might ask, what did Jesus' teachings and lifestyle have in common with major sects of the time? A similarity between Christianity and the Essenes can be seen with regard to the reading of the Hebrew Scripture. For the Essenes, Scripture reading was done as if the passages were being fulfilled in the events of the sect's history and their current existence. Clearly Jesus taught his disciples to read the Scripture in the same lively manner, pointing to him as the ultimate fulfilment. Consider these New Testament readings: Luke 2:27; 22:44-46; Matthew 5:17; John 5:39.

⁹⁷ "Concerning those who are merciful, who feed the hungry and who give drink to the thirsty, who clothe the naked and distribute alms, Scripture declares, 'Say to the righteous that it shall be right with him'" (Isaiah 3:10) (Safrai, 2010; Derekh Eretz Rabbah 2:21).

Both communities, the Essenes and the early Christians, had high standards of morality and behaviour. Members of the Essene community were chastized if they stumbled in this regard (CD B 20:25-27).^{98 99}

Followers of “the Way”¹⁰⁰ grew at a fast pace almost from the beginning of the Jesus movement. Consider these passages as compiled by author Michael L. Brown in *Answering the Jewish Objections to Jesus, Vol. 4*.

- On the first celebration of Shavuot (Weeks; Pentecost) just days after Messiah’s ascension to heaven, Peter preached to the Jews assembled in Jerusalem, and “about *three thousand* were added to their number that day” after being immersed in water (Acts 2:41).
- Not many days later, because of a powerful demonstration of Messiah’s healing power and a clear sermon from Peter, “many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to *five thousand*” (Acts 4:4; the account begins in Acts 3).
- According to Acts 6:7, “So the word of G-d spread. *The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith*” (emphasis added to Scriptures cited here and above).
- Roughly two decades later, the Jewish elders in the Jerusalem congregation could say to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20; note that the Greek here is literally “how many myriads” or “ten thousands” or “countless thousands”) (Brown, 2007:185).

Brown goes on to talk about historian and sociologist Rodney Stark’s argument that the number of Jews who believed in Jesus in the first centuries of this era was far higher than most have recognized, a thesis that has been supported by an international team of scholars, while other scholars have argued that there were at least one hundred thousand Jewish believers in Yeshua by the end of the first-century (Brown, 2007:185).

The account of the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus gives a glimpse of the notoriety of the rabbi (Luke 24:13-35). Along their journey, returning pilgrims are astonished that the

⁹⁸ Edward Cook in Wise, Abegg and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, p.60 as quoted in Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period.

⁹⁹ Paul’s advice, although outside of the scope of this research project, sounds strikingly similar (1 Corinthians 5:13b; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 2 Thessalonians 14-15).

¹⁰⁰ Acts 9:2, 18:25-26, 19:9-23, 24:14-22.

unrecognized pedestrian among them could have possibly been unaware of the headline news of the day, saying “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” It was incomprehensible that these events could have escaped anyone’s attention, much less passed without leaving an indelible mark on their lives. How could anyone not know about this famous rabbi?

What the disciples may not have initially grasped in totality became a pinnacle of their belief system: Jesus was G-d’s messiah, raised from the dead by G-d himself who exalted him to share G-d’s throne in heaven. A long-held understanding was made plain that G-d’s intentions were not just for the benefit of the chosen people, descendants of Abraham, but to all Gentiles on the face of the earth. Unlike the Essenes whose following was ever-increasingly close-knit, the followers of Jesus came to understand that their task was just the opposite, to take the good news of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter captured information about the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Jesus. The specific aim was to decipher how they identified themselves within the context of Judaism. In an effort to summarize the mainstream relevant material, the summary below encapsulates the most relevant evidence, leaving marginal findings aside.

The first objective of this chapter intended to determine what can be known about the followers of Jesus through exploring the cultural and historical backdrop that surrounded them within broader Judaism, including the land in which they lived.

We determined that Jesus and his followers were unquestionably shaped by the cultural context of the land and the people of Israel. The Apostle Paul attested that Jerusalem formed the apex of Israel’s geography. The impact of the region’s history and culture on the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Yeshua is inescapable.

In addition, Lower Galilee influenced Jesus’ devotees with a strong attachment to Judaism, flourishing well before the destruction of the Second Temple. Vivacious worshipers throughout the region attended synagogues, some of which were massive in size. Lower Galilee, the stomping ground of Jesus and his disciples, had a cosmopolitan environment, Hellenized in culture and linguistics. Influenced by leaders of the pietist movement like Abba Hilkiyah, the grandson of Honi ha-Heaggel.

A creative Jewish culture borne through interactive and traditional Oral Torah bred the pietist or Hasidic movement, characterized by parables and story-telling similar to that of the Pharisees. The sect of Jesus followers walked with particular attachment to the Hasidim and the teachings of the Sages. I would unapologetically answer “yes!” to the question, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Cultural upbringing influenced Yeshua’s followers against the backdrop of the Lower Galilee region as Yeshua shared that cultural identity with his disciples.

From this segment, we can deduce several things about the sect of Jesus followers:

- They were highly exposed to non-Jews.
- They saw their identity as being tied to the land.
- They had a vibrant faith.
- Their leader emulated the Hasidim.
- Their lives and teachings were shaped by the Sages.

The second objective set out to find answers to how ancestry and identity played a part in the newly forming Jewish fellowship of Jesus followers.

Two things in relation to this objective can be seen from Paul, one of the later members of the Jesus believing sect. He proudly reflected his Jewishness, showing his continual identification as a Pharisee. He also pushed Timothy to undergo the circumcision process in order to solidify his Jewish status. This reflects Paul’s view on the ongoing efficacy of the Torah. Paul’s Jewish identity was not in question. Later, with the conferral of “repentance unto life” to Cornelius, Paul responded by redrawing the boundary lines of Judaism to include incoming Gentiles. In effect, he *redefined* what it meant to be “Jewish.” G-d-seeking Gentiles gained acceptance and could become “sons of Abraham” without ancestral ties. This changed their identity and changed the identity of the Jewish believers, as they were now “family” alongside non-ancestral Jews.

The third objective surveyed the main streams and sects of Judaism in the first-century to determine their influence on the new sect.

How did the emerging Jesus-believing group define themselves in larger context of Judaism? This section painted a picture of the religious sects into which they issued forth. Knowing the cultural context in Israel created by these sects in the Jewish milieu gives some insight regarding our topic. For instance, we saw that the Sadducees’ political ties to the Roman government made

them the primary enemies of Jesus and the early Christians. The sect of the Essenes drew in John the Baptist, a man whose character reflected their separatist tendencies and focus on purity.

Although Jesus was apparently indirectly influenced by Essenism, he was basically rooted in universal non-sectarian Judaism. Flusser and Notley (2004) postulate that the philosophy and practice of the Judaism of Jesus was that of the Pharisees and Hasidim. He travelled like the Sages and Hasidim who communicated parables and ideologies. Later Sages emulated the same evangelistic practices, including Rabbi Akiva and his pupil, Rabbi Meir.

The fourth objective was to investigate the Jewish fellowship of Christian followers, the Jewish Christians themselves. What differentiated this group from other sects?

Before followers of the Galilean Sage Jesus existed, well-established Jewish cultural and theological practices surrounded the coming Messiah. He was born into a Torah-centric Jewish family, the son of a Hasid, closely aligned to Hasidim, steeped in customs and traditions from infancy.

In his ministry, Jesus travelled like the Sages and Hasidim who employed the Oral Torah, used parables, and communicated ideologies. Perhaps that's why the message of Jesus attracted Torah-faithful Jews across the board, in higher numbers than previously thought, into an intense spiritual fellowship.

Stationed in Lower Galilee — the living centre of the Jewish people where the Oral Torah was collected and in large degree created — the Fellowship of Jesus followers were surrounded by Jewish gatherings. They lived among a vibrant synagogue life and between those enthusiastic about religious practice. Judaism was flourishing. Jesus aligned himself closely to sects associated with the Pharisees and the Hasidim within the Pharisaic sect, more so than other Jewish sects of his day.

A unique aspect of the earliest followers of Jesus was the fact that, though they came from diverse economic, political and spiritual backgrounds, they all agreed that they had found the one of whom Moses wrote: Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:45). It would take all they knew to tackle the enormous challenge that lay ahead as a result of the unprecedented event at the home of the G-d-fearing Gentile, Cornelius. The conclusion ends off with summaries of the context provided above.

Table 3-1: Streams and Sects of Judaism (Schiffman, 1989:105)

Sect:	Sadducees	Pharisees	Essenes (probably = the Qumran Sect who composed the “Dead Sea Scrolls”).
General			
Meaning of Name:	Descendants of Zadok, members of the old (pre-Hasmonean) High Priestly family	“Separatists” — probably because their special dietary restrictions and purity rules limited their social interactions with outsiders.	Unknown — Possibly “healers” because of their reputation for performing miraculous cures.
Factors related to their political and social class			
Attitude towards the Hasmonean Rulers:	Opposed their usurping of the High Priesthood (which had previously belonged to the Zadokite dynasty).	Opposed the Hasmoneans’ combination of Priestly and political power.	Apparently opposed to the non-Zadokite priesthood. Their founder, the “Teacher of Righteousness” had been persecuted by a Hasmonean king.
Social Class:	Aristocratic priests	Common people	N/A
Figures of Authority:	Priests	Scholars and Scribes They challenged the importance of the priesthood, limiting it to the performance of Temple rituals.	The “Teacher of Righteousness” The apparent founder of the sect was probably a Zadokite priest who rejected the Jerusalem leadership.
Factors related to their reliance on the Bible or other sources of tradition			

Sect:	Sadducees	Pharisees	Essenes (probably = the Qumran Sect who composed the “Dead Sea Scrolls”).
Attitude to Bible ¹⁰¹ :	Literalist: As a hereditary leadership they did not have to justify their authority and did not have to develop special skills in interpreting it.	Sophisticated scholarly interpretations: This was proposed as an alternative to priestly authority: Leadership had to be earned through knowledge and ability, not inherited .	“Inspired Exegesis” — distinctive interpretations of their own sect, especially those of the “Teacher of Righteousness”.
Attitude to “Oral Torah”:	Accepted only what was explicitly written in the Torah.	Believed in authority of “ancestral traditions”, even if they had no basis in the Torah.	The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate their distinctive Biblical interpretations and rules, similar in purpose -- but not in content -- to the Pharisees’ “Oral Torah.”
Practices:	Based directly on the Torah.	Accepted many additional laws and interpretations based on the “Oral Torah” and their own interpretations.	“Inspired Exegesis”.
	Emphasis on priestly rituals and obligations (which enhanced the priests’ holiness and authority).	Extension of priestly laws (e.g., purity of food) to non-priests.	Accepted many additional laws and interpretations based on their own interpretations.
		“Luni-solar” calendar	Solar calendar

¹⁰¹ Here the author is using the term “Bible” to refer to Hebrew Scriptures.

Sect:	Sadducees	Pharisees	Essenes (probably = the Qumran Sect who composed the "Dead Sea Scrolls").
Beliefs:	Rejection of ideas that have no clear basis in the Bible, such as lifeafter-death. Assertion of human freedom and accountability for their actions.	Acceptance of some non-Biblical beliefs that had been accepted by the people, e.g., physical resurrection of the dead. Believed in limited free will: "Everything is in the power of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven."	Believed in spiritual survival after death. Dualistic determinism: Humanity has been divided into "Children of Light and Children of Darkness," who will soon clash in an apocalyptic war.

Table 3-2: Pharisees in the Lukan books of the New Testament

A New Testament view of the Pharisees in Lukan books gives some indication that Jesus' circle consisted in part of Pharisees. *

NT Passage	Activity	Implication
Luke 14:1	Jesus is the guest of honour and shares a Sabbath's night dinner with one of the Pharisees.	More than just casual friendships.
Luke 13:31	Pharisees are portrayed as warning Jesus regarding Herod's aspiration to kill him.	Pharisees concerned about Jesus' welfare.
Acts 5:33-39	Gamaliel the Pharisee ¹⁰² argues in favour of the release of the disciples.	Pharisaic leader concerned about the welfare of his disciples.
Acts 15, 21	Pharisees who join the newly-formed community following Jesus maintained their Pharisaic affiliation.	Pharisees could be part of the early church.
Acts 23:1-10	Paul boldly proclaims to the Great Sanhedrin that he is a Pharisee.	Being a Pharisee was a matter of which to be proud, also present tense indicates that he did not cease to be a Pharisee as a follower of Jesus.

*Additions include Josephus of Arimathea, Nicodemus and Ananias

Torah-centric Jewish culture of Galilee seen in Halakhic and Aggadic literature

- During the second to fourth centuries and even later, Galilee was the living centre of the Jewish people and its leadership, and the place in which the Oral Torah was collected and

¹⁰² Depicted as, "a teacher of the Torah, respected by all the people ..." (Acts 5:34).

in large degree created. Organized formation of information on such a large-scale points to concentration of Jewish scholarship in the region [Galilee] in an earlier timeframe.

- When discussing the cultural image of Galilee, Jewish scholars of the history of the Halakah or Talmudic literature refer in some degree to the history of Christianity or to the background of the beginnings of Christianity in which rabbinical teachings were prevalent.
- If Jerusalem is barred, most of the Sages about whom there is confirmation of their origin and activity in the Second Temple Period, were from Galilee, or were especially active in Galilee.¹⁰³
- A saying in Galilee by the Sages reveals study groups in which teachers and students met, “let your house be a meeting place for the Sages, and sit amidst the dust of their feet” (Avot 1:4).
- Evidence of a permanent academy in Lower Galilee may be assumed in association with Rabban Johanan be Zakkai in Arav, who lived there for eighteen years (j. Shabbat 16:15d). Rabbis visiting from outside of Galilee would find audiences in public places and also engage in discussions with the local Sages and groups of pupils.
- The Jerusalem Talmud speaks of Galileans’ involvement in the weaving of garments as gifts for the apparel of the priests in Jerusalem. Intense involvement with the Temple is apparent from pilgrimages and the presence of Galileans in Jerusalem.
- The Jerusalem Talmud and Lamentations Rabbah report large quantities of gifts from three cities in Lower Galilee: Kavul, Sikhnin and Migdal Zevaya (Ta’anit 4:69a; Lamentations Rabbah 2).
- Generosity in particular on the part of two wealthy families from Ruma in the southwest of the Beit Netofah Valley mentioned by Josephus, shows the observance of the tradition of “giving of charity” with scrupulous attention to Sabbath bounds (permitted walking distances 4 000 amot, about 2 kilometres).¹⁰⁴
- Numerous accounts in the Galilee testify to the meticulous observance of the laws of cleanness. In one such account, Rabbi Jose ben Halafta bears witness to the close attention

¹⁰³ Hillel from Babylon is a notable exception. Among those with a strong Galilean presence are Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Halafta, Rabbi Hananiah (Hanina) ben Teradyon, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria, Rabbi Zadok and Elisha ben Avuyah, and Rabbi Jose ben Kisma.

¹⁰⁴ The wealthy families mentioned were the Mammal and Gurion families who distributed dried figs to the poor village of Shihin during drought years on the Sabbath.

to cleanliness in the treatment of legumes and the gathering of vegetables from the fields in Sepphoris¹⁰⁵. In another, observance of the laws of *kilayim* — the forbidden junction of plants or animals — is raised in relation to the growers of produce in different locals in Galilee and the details of these laws (T. Kilayim 1:4;j. Kilayim 1:24d.).

- The Tosefta, Talmuds and Midrash¹⁰⁶ relate how the Sabbath was observed in Shihin (in the Galilee region) beyond the stringent requirements of the law. In one report, Shihin locals show respect for nearby Gentiles who offered to send aid to extinguish an accidental fire that erupted in the courtyard of Joseph ben Samai on the Sabbath.¹⁰⁷
- A combination of narratives about Rabban Gamaliel and his sons dating to around the end of the first-century talk about the strict practices of the Galileans which, when combined with other narratives from the Tosefta (and parallels), provide ample evidence that religious and social life there was rooted in the tradition of the Oral Torah in a superior way compared to the tradition of Judea.
- Pharisees were native to the region of Galilee, while the scribes came from Jerusalem as discussed earlier on in this chapter¹⁰⁸
- Synagogues, the great invention of the Second Temple Period, are found in Nazareth, Capernaum and in all the cities of the Galilee.¹⁰⁹ The context in which synagogues are mentioned in the Gospels and in Tannaitic literature is not prayer, but the reading of the Torah.
- Evidence demonstrates that the *pietist* movement or trend known as Hasidim from the Second Temple period as being rooted in and active in Galilee. The movement, rather than

¹⁰⁵ The crops mentioned here were to be kept dry so they would not be capable of becoming unclean.

¹⁰⁶ T. Shabbat 13 (14);9;j. Shabbat 16:15d;b. yoma 8:5b;j. Nedarim 4:38d;b. Shabbat 121a; Deuteronomy Rabbah

¹⁰⁷ Afterward, Joseph ben Samai sent payment to them for their involvement.

¹⁰⁸ Jacob Neusner states that there were few pharisaic Sages in Galilee. He cites words from the Jerusalem Talmud on Amora Ulla Rabbi Ulla that said that he resided in Arav (Lower Galilee) for eighteen years and was asked only two questions. Indicating a lack of interest in Torah on behalf of students, Rabbi Ulla is quoted as saying, “Galilee, Galilee, you hated the Torah; you will eventually be forced by the officers” (Neusner, 1975:64). Ulla, however, lived in the second half of the third century and of the tradition. There seems to be some question as to the authenticity of this tradition tied to Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai (Safrai, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Matt. 4:23, 9:35; Mark 1:21, 39 and 6:1; Luke 4:15, 16, 21, 31; John 6:59.

springing from a world empty of Torah, is better viewed as coming from creative Jewish culture, innovative in both thought and conduct, as were the active personalities of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, Abba Hilkiyah (b. Shabbat 121b; m. Avot 2:5).

CHAPTER 4: CORNELIUS' HOUSE: AN UNPRECEDENTED EVENT

4.1 Introduction

What happened in the events that led up to and included the activities at Cornelius' house as recorded in the tenth Chapter of Acts? How are we to understand these events, particularly Peter's spontaneous response to baptize Gentiles in a Jewish tradition? The aim of Chapter Four is to ascertain the meaning of events at Cornelius' house in light of Second Temple practices.

This aim can be divided into four objectives. Objective number one gleans information on the topic from the sequence of events in the Acts 10 narrative. This objective entails a literal retelling of the story. Objective number two interprets the narrative. The next objective examines baptism and why the very familiar Jewish ceremony of baptism is used in an unconventional way. The fourth objective delves into philological terms such as "repentance unto life" and reviews what happened as a result of these events at Cornelius' house.

Subsection titles appear below as: 4.1 The Acts Narrative; 4.2 Interpreting the Narrative 4.3 Baptism 4.4 The Philological Argument and the Story's Outcome.

4.2 Acts Narrative

The prophet Isaiah, deliberating his awareness of Gentile interest in Judaism, talked about a time when Gentiles would follow Jews and fall before Israel confessing the only true G-d.¹¹⁰ Merrill says Gentiles will have at long last found the G-d of their desires (Merrill, 2001:207)¹¹¹ and the second generation of these nations will fall and bow before the Jews, calling them, "the city of YHWH, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Merrill, 2001:207; Isaiah 60:14). Another important precept in the first-century comes from the apostle John saying that the only hope of salvation is through the Jews (John 4:22). Whether Cornelius the G-d-fearer¹¹² was aware of this precept is unknown, but

¹¹⁰ "... they will follow you, they will come over in chains; and bow down to you. They will confess to you; 'G-d is indeed with you, there is no other; there is no other G-d'" (Isaiah 45:14).

¹¹¹ The divine name YHWH is not used here, rather Elohim, for it seems suddenly obvious to all the nations that their "G-d" is Israel's G-d.

¹¹² Φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν

the precepts may have led him to respect the Jewish rules (Halakah) for Gentiles in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Common Era.

The narrative of Acts chapters 10-11 lays the groundwork that identifies Cornelius as a Roman centurion in the cohorts Italica¹¹³ stationed in Caesarea (Acts 10:1), the residence of Roman governors, nicknamed “little Rome” (Schwartz, 1990:131). Burrell, of the University of Cincinnati, did extensive research to determine the plausible changes to this structure having undergone a transformation from “Herod’s Praetorium” to the seat of a Roman government (Burrell, 1996:228). Levey describes Caesarean Jews as materially prosperous, group-conscious, integrated with their Syrian neighbours (though they despised their lack of wealth) and Sabbath-observant (Levey, 1975:43).¹¹⁴

Cornelius is named by Luke by his Gentile *nomen* alone, as is the centurion named Julius later in the book (Acts 27:1). Le Cornu notes this naming practice as common for Greeks bearing Roman citizenship and also postulates that Cornelius was conceivably one and the same as P. Cornelius Sulla who liberated 10,000 slaves in 82 B.C.E. (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:545). The editors of *The New Testament in its First-century Setting* disagree, stating that Cornelius’ name came from the famous P. Cornelius Sulla, and that the Cornelius named by Luke stands among 2 600 other inscriptions of the same *gens* “Cornelia” (Winter & Williams, 2004:107).

Impressed by his vision in which Cornelius sees an angel of G-d, he sends two messengers and a devout soldier to fetch Peter in Joppa (Acts 1:3-6), a 30-mile trip to the south of Caesarea (Bolen, 2013). Randall Buth describes Joppa as a place of importance for trade and commerce, along with the “villages of the great plain” (Buth & Notley, 2013:157). Like other cities in Galilee, Joppa likely had a flourishing observant Jewish population by the time Herod the Great came to the position of king (Buth & Notley, 2013:157).

Peter is on the rooftop where he has gone to pray when the visitors approach the next day (Acts 10:9). The concept of praying on a roof is not unfamiliar to Judaism, as seen in a descendant of Honi ha-M'agel better known as Honi the Circle-drawer (1st-century B.C.E.) (Frieman, 2000:105).

Frieman collected a story about Honi’s grandson Abba Chilkiah, visited by first-century Israeli scholars who were understood to have come “on behalf of the rabbis” to ask him to pray for rain

¹¹³ σπειρήσ τῆς καλουμένης Ἰταλικῆς

¹¹⁴ The Caesarean Jews probably made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the three appearance festivals each year (Levey, 1975:43).

(Frieman, 2000:105). Chilkiah and his wife complied, ascended the staircase leading to the rooftop where, standing in different corners of the roof, they pray (Frieman, 2000:105).

We're told that once on the rooftop, Peter was hungry¹¹⁵ (after all it was noon) and falls into a trance (Acts 10:9). In a semi-conscious state, a great sheet comes down from heaven containing 'unclean'¹¹⁶ (Acts 10:11, 12) animals and a voice saying, "rise up, Peter, kill and eat" (Acts 1:13).

At Peter's rebuttal, the voice continues, "What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!" (Acts 10:15 NET Bible Version). This happens three times (Acts 10:15, 16) and while Peter ponders the meaning, men sent from Cornelius shout out for him at the gate (Acts 10:17). Peter hears the Spirit telling him to go with them without hesitating¹¹⁷ (Acts 10:20) and he invites them in for lodging¹¹⁸ (Acts 10:23). The next morning, they leave for Caesarea, accompanied by believers (Jews) from Joppa.

The travellers arrive in Caesarea the next day at the ninth hour/3:00pm (Acts 10:30), the same time the angel appeared to Cornelius four days earlier. Rooker notes that the ninth hour became associated with prayer in Jerusalem as the priests offered incense and the rest of the Israelites gathered in the outer court for prayer (m. Tamid 4:3; m. Kelim 1:9; Rooker, 2000:95). Many of the centurion's relatives and close friends are assembled at Cornelius' place in anticipation of Peter's arrival. According to Le Cornu, they were also gathered for prayer because of the time of day, the time for prayer according to halakha (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:553).

Upon arrival, Cornelius tells his story about why he called for Peter, adding, "So now all of us are here in the presence of G-d to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say" (Acts 10:33). Scholars Bockmuehl and Richards propose that this conversation may be the first the Gentiles had encountered with Jews in a non-public setting since it would have been against halakha for a Jew to do otherwise (Bockmuehl, 2009:59; Richards, 2002:718).

¹¹⁵ Πρόσπεινος. This Greek word is a hapax legomenon.

¹¹⁶ ἀκάθαρτον

¹¹⁷ διακρινόμενος

¹¹⁸ ἐξέμισεν

Almost immediately, Peter launches into what he has come to understand: that G-d shows no *distinction*¹¹⁹ (Acts 10:34) but considers *acceptable* every non-Jew that fears G-d and does what is right (proof for this argument follows in the next segment *4.2 Interpreting the Narrative*).

Jervell notes that in Peter's dramatic speech about the Messiah and the hope of salvation for Gentiles, Luke shows the legitimacy of Christ by linking him to the G-d of Israel (Jervell, 1996:19). During his speech, the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles¹²⁰; and they respond by extolling G-d, speaking in tongues, and thus astounding the circumcised believers (Acts 10:45).

In Acts 10:47, Peter associates the experience of the Gentiles in his midst to an earlier experience of Jews who gathered on Shavuot and three thousand Jews came to faith in Jesus when the Holy Spirit fell on them (Acts 2:41). Automatically, Peter's mind turned to Scripture to make sense of the circumstances.¹²¹¹²² Nickelsburg notes that Philo, the Jewish philosopher, used this technique (referencing Scripture to make sense of his circumstances) to interpret what was happening around him in the world (Nickelsburg, 2011:19).

The Scripture Peter refers to (Acts 2:17-18) recounts Joel's vision of a time when the Spirit would be poured out not just on the Jews, but on *all* people (Joel 3:1-2).¹²³ According to Shulman and

¹¹⁹ Προσωπολήμπτης

¹²⁰ Sleeman calls this the 'third spatial' intervention or third incursion from heaven in the book of Acts (Sleeman, 2009: 241).

¹²¹ For both groups (the group at Shavuot and the group at Cornelius' house) certain events happen in a particular order. At Shavuot, after the larger group of Jews witnessed the disciples' unusual Holy Spirit experience, Peter speaks to them about G-d's Messiah, then exhorts them to repent and be baptized. After baptism, it is assumed that the Holy Spirit will fall on the Jews who repent. Peter's discourse comes first, then those who follow the exhortation, are baptized in the name of Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. The disciples experienced these three events in a similar order. Rather than hearing a discourse, however, they lived out the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, then they are baptized into Jesus and then have the unusual Holy Spirit experience (Acts 2:1-42). At Cornelius' house the order shifts. While Peter is speaking, the Holy Spirit falls on his audience and he prescribes baptism (Acts

¹²² :47). In Peter's line of thinking, G-d gave the same gift (the Holy Spirit) to Gentiles that he had given to Jews when they believed in Jesus (at Shavuot). The normal response was baptism, "Who was I that I could hinder G-d?" (11:17). In Peter's mind, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and baptism were inseparably linked (see Table 4-1 at the end of the chapter).

¹²³ "In the last days it will be, G-d declares that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream

Stroumstra, Joel 2:28 serves as a specimen, or *locus classicus*, for describing and justifying the validity of dreams and visions among Christians (Shulman & Stroumsa, 1999:190). These authors claim that religious beliefs and allegiances make a difference in the perception of dreams (as in other aspects of anthropology) (Shulman & Stroumsa, 1999:190). In other words, because the dreamer in Joel 3:1-2 was a believer in G-d, he interpreted his dream according to his belief system, specifically G-d's movement in future history. Peter, in turn, quotes Joel because it fits in his worldview. Schreiner adds that Paul would later interpret this as an entrance of Gentiles into the church (Shulman & Stroumsa, 1999:562).

In the book of Acts, Luke refers to Joel 2:28, but adds the introductory declaration "In the last days G-d says ..." (Acts 2:17; Robbins, 1996:69). The Ellicott's Commentary reminds readers that the book of Joel, with the possible exception of Hosea, takes its place as the oldest of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Ellicott). If this is true, it makes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles, including Cornelius and his household, one of the oldest prophecies in Scripture (Ellicott).¹²⁴

When recounting this story to the circumcised believers in Jerusalem who criticized him, Peter tells how he has come to understand how G-d has given Gentiles repentance that leads to life¹²⁵ (Acts 11:18). Later at the Jerusalem Council he refers to the larger body of Gentiles, who like Cornelius, seek after the G-d of the Jews, as those in the process of turning to G-d¹²⁶ (Acts 15:19).

Chronologically between 8-14 years pass between the event at Cornelius' house and the Jerusalem Council (Blue Letter Bible). After this time, the book of Acts talks no more of Gentiles in Israel, in part because the author is traveling in the diaspora where he records plentiful Gentile-Jewish contact (Blue Letter Bible).¹²⁷ In these places, Gentiles were exposed to the "light" that Jews were intended to be to the nations (Isaiah 49:6).

dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2: 17-18).

¹²⁴ Joel's prophecy was to happen *after* a change of heart occurred ... when the people of G-d were no longer thought of as a disgrace/object-of-scorn/reproach by the surrounding nations (Joel 2:19).

¹²⁵ μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν

¹²⁶ ἐπιστρέφουσιν

¹²⁷ The first city mentioned is Antioch where a great number of Greeks hear the word and became believers (Acts 11:20). Barnabas is sent there and later gets Paul from Tarsus to help (11:20-25). Acts continues with Peter who finds himself in jail in Judea at the hands of King Herod (Agrippa I) then miraculously

At Pisidian Antioch one Sabbath, almost the whole city showed up, Gentiles included, to hear the message of Paul (Acts 13).

“It was necessary that the word of G-d should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 13:46-47)

Mark Nanos suggests that rather than the traditional understanding of this verse: “Israel is being taken from you and given to the Gentiles,” it might be more accurately interpreted as, “look at what is taking place before your very eyes — don’t miss out! Your failure will not stop G-d’s plan” (Nanos, 1996:271). The Gentiles who agree with G-d and accept the message, win in a big way (Nanos, 1996:271). As a result, they are glad and as many as had been “destined for eternal life” became believers (Acts 13:48) and received the “fullness of the blessing of Christ” (Romans 15:29; Nanos, 1996:271).

4.3 Interpreting the Narrative

From his professional perspective as a Roman officer, Cornelius was likely aware of and impacted by the 200-year political history that preceded him regarding the Jews. Louis Feldman, in his book *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, recounts a plethora of details, some of which are included later in this chapter (see Table 4-3; Feldman, 1993:84).

From a religious perspective, Cornelius is “devout”¹²⁸. Kinzer notes that it is unlikely that there was unclean food in Cornelius’ house, a sign of his reverence for the customs of Judaism (Kinzer, 2005:70). According to Krummacher and Ferguson, whether or not he was circumcised is

escapes and goes to Caesarea (12:1-19); one can’t help but wonder if Peter sees Cornelius while staying in the seaside port town. After that, Paul and Barnabas complete their “mission” [presumably their activity in Antioch (12:25)], and find themselves on a seven city tour ending in Iconium. As usual, the Gospel is taken to the synagogue first, following the pattern of “to the Jew first” and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:6; 2:12). A new phase of history is launched after the message is taken, in usual form, first to the Jews in the synagogue. On that occasion, many Jews (i.e. Jewish Christians) accept the Good News and repent (Acts 13:43). Paul and Barnabas are invited to speak more (13:42).

¹²⁸ εὐσεβής

unknown, but unlikely (Krummacher & Ferguson, 2016:15).¹²⁹ These scholars identify the centurion as a pagan by birth and education, but certainly not in his mind or character (Krummacher & Ferguson, 2016:15).¹³⁰

His devotion can be seen from prayer, charity and fasting (Acts 10:2, 4; 10:30). These three — charity, prayer and fasting — were like a trio in which at least two (if not all three) are often found together in Jewish thinking. The late Apocryphal work of Tobit phrases it like this, “Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness” (Tobit 12:8). Bivin asserts that all three were chief elements of first-century piety putting almsgiving or charity, *tsedakah*, as the most important of the three (Bivin, 2001:110).

Schnabel shows that Ben Sira, the professional sage and scribe who studied and taught in Jerusalem during the first quarter of the second century B.C.E., included the topic of charity¹³¹ in his writings (Schnabel, 2011:49). Ben Sira promoted carrying out charity and avoiding wickedness and injustice (Schnabel, 2011:49).¹³² The scholarly works of Miles and Karris expose that the recipients of Cornelius’ generosity were most likely the “poor” Jews in Israel (Miles, 2010:24; Karris, 1992:1051). Verses that support the concept of beneficiaries being Jews are numerous (see Table 4-2 at the end of the chapter). Larry Burkett asserts that, in the ratio that the disciples had means, each of them resolved to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea (Burkett, 2015).

¹²⁹ Cornelius would certainly have known the words from the Torah and the Prophets confirming the idea that circumcision was a physical rite intended to signify a spiritual change (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4).

¹³⁰ Further, these scholars clarify Cornelius was not a proselyte (Krummacher, 2016:15). They go on to outline two types of proselytes: *proselytes of justice* - those who renounce heathenism, embrace Judaism, undergo circumcision and conform to the whole Levitical law (Krummacher, 2016:15), and *proselytes of the house* - those who renounce heathenism and the worship of idols, profess belief in G-d, and pledge themselves to obey the moral law, but without undergoing circumcision or following the whole Levitical law (Krummacher, 2016:15). Cornelius was neither.

¹³¹ הקדצ

¹³² Further, he contrasted generous giving and stinginess (Sir 14:3-8) and promoted almsgiving and other acts of kindness to the poor and needy (Sir 4:1-6; 7:32-36; 29:9-13).

As recorded by Luke, Cornelius' household¹³³ imitated the centurion by praising G-d (Acts 10:2); they also declared high praise for the centurion along with "the entire nation of Jews" (Acts 10:22). Skarsaune asserts that weekly synagogue attendance and participation in Jewish festivals were likely part of their activities (Skarsaune & Hvalvik, 2007:72). Safrai notes verses in which Gentiles are found in synagogues (Acts 13:16; 14:1; 17:4; 17:17; 18:4), saying that this is also in keeping with the reality of rabbinic sources on the late Second Temple Period and immediately afterward in the time period of Cornelius (Safrai, 2004). Safrai continues to say that Gentiles attended and frequently contributed to synagogues, such as the centurion in Luke 7:5 who reportedly built a synagogue for the Jews (Safrai, 2004).¹³⁴¹³⁵

Praying during the "ninth hour" (3:00 pm) indicated that Cornelius observed at least one of the three daily times for traditional Jewish prayer.¹³⁶ Of course, prayers could be offered any time of day or night, as seen in Peter's noontime prayer (Acts 10:9).¹³⁷ Barker notes that aside from the Book of Acts, the pattern of praying three times a day (morning, noon and evening) is seen elsewhere in Scripture (Psalms 55:17; Daniel 6:10), in the pseudo-epigraphic work of Enoch (2 Enoch 51:4), in early Christian writings (Didache 8:3) and in the Mishnah (Barker, 1985:1648). Appointed prayer times occurred midmorning (the third hour, 9:00am), the time of the evening sacrifice (the ninth hour, 3:00pm) and sunset (Barker, 1985:1648). The sacrifice was offered in

¹³³ Described as G-d-fearers (φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν) who pray continuously to G-d (δεόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ παντός) (Acts 10:2).

¹³⁴ Gifts for rebuilding the Temple under King Cyrus and Artaxerxes had already been established (Ezra

¹³⁵ :4; Nehemiah 2:8) and voluntary sacrifices and gifts from non-Jews were allowed by halakha (Safrai, 2004) (excluding the half shekel tax (Exodus 30:11-16), which was not accepted from non-Jews but obligatory from every Jewish male from the age of twenty).

¹³⁶ In his book, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*, Peter Thompson comments on Sanders' hypothesis that Jewish Christian were not obliged to keep halakha (like prayer times), calling this view 'short-sighted' (Thompson, 1990:17). Thompson sides with Schweitzer, Davis and Stendahl, saying that Paul envisaged a pluralism in which Jewish Christians keep all the commandments of the Law (Thompson, 1990: 17).

¹³⁷ The morning Tefillah [can be said] until midday; R. Judah [T4; PA4 or PA5 in Y] says till the fourth hour. The afternoon prayer [can be said] till evening; R. Judah [T4; PA4 or PA5 in Y] says, until the middle of the afternoon. The evening prayer has no fixed limit. The time for the additional prayers is the whole of the day; R. Judah [T4; PA4 or PA5 in Y] says, till the seventh hour (m.Berakhot 4.1).

the Temple twice a day, morning (third hour) and evening (ninth hour).¹³⁸ Even those living away from Jerusalem observed these times (see Judith 9:1, Daniel 6:10; Ezra 9:5; Daniel 9:21; Acts 10:30; Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:553).¹³⁹

As part of his prayer life, Cornelius likely incorporated traditions such as saying the Shema during both morning and evening prayer (“when you lie down and when you rise”) (Deuteronomy, 11:19) and perhaps, according to Safri, at all prayer times (Ber 1.4; Safrai, 1976:800). Safri notes this tradition as customary at the time (Safrai, 1976:800). Another time-appropriate custom entailed the physical act of turning toward Jerusalem when praying outside the city (Ber 4.5-6; Safrai, 1976:800). Wylen says Daniel’s model, while stationed in Babylon, set a neat precedent for observing both customs (the Shema and facing Jerusalem) (Daniel 6:10; Wylen, 1996:86). How much knowledge of these customs G-d-fearers would have possessed and put into practice, David Instone-Brewer says remains speculative (InstoneBrewer, s.a.)¹⁴⁰.

Another custom in Peter’s time entailed “*tfilin*” (Hebrew) or “*phylacteries*” (Greek) as part of ordinary everyday Jewish dress (Bivin, 2004). Safri notes that Jews interpreted the obligation to write certain texts and affix them as specified in the Torah literally (Safrai, 1976:779). “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads” (Deuteronomy 6:8). One wonders if Peter took off his “*tfilin*” to go into Cornelius’ house.

Skarsuane launches the conversation about the forbidden nature of close association between Jews and Gentiles, making Peter’s visit an anomaly (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:73). Association was forbidden because of the dangers of impurity — including spending time in Gentile homes, sharing meals, etc. The fear, as Skarsuane sees it, meant that a Jew could be “drawn into or condoning the idolatrous and immoral practices common to Gentiles life” (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:73), thereby becoming ritually unclean. But Peter’s revelation ensured him that these Gentiles were cleansed from moral impurity (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:73).

David Woods claims that close association with Gentiles is not contrary to the Law of Moses or to Oral Law, but rather, to strongly-held social customs enforced as halakha (Woods, s.a.:182). Tannaic halakha regarding Jew-Gentile fellowship was complex given the differences between

¹³⁸ Mishna: Tamid 3:2 for morning; Antiquities of the Jews 14.4.3 [14:65]; Philo Special Laws I, XXXV [169] for evening.

¹³⁹ The mishnaic division of the day divided it into twelve units (from dawn to dusk), a different way than the Roman division of each day.

¹⁴⁰ See David Instone Brewer’s work for more on this <http://www.tyndalearchive.com/TRENT/Vol1/>

Jewish sects. Some condemned it while others tolerated it under certain conditions (Woods, s.a.:182). P.J. Tomson explains that the rabbis who ruled against Jews having fellowship with Gentiles were a minority, even within the Land (Thompson, 1990:230-236).

Returning to the narrative, Peter launches into an explanation (Acts 10:28) as to why he came to visit even though it was unlawful.¹⁴¹ Here his interpretation of his vision becomes clear and it is this: people who were formerly considered unclean are no longer unclean. Peter interprets his own vision, unlike other Scriptural settings in which dreams were interpreted by others (for example Genesis 37:1-44:9). Scholars Tournage and Kinzer independently assert that the theme of Peter's vision wasn't about what to eat for dinner, but about the nature of humankind, "G-d has shown me that I should not call *anyone* (no *persons* — emphasis mine) profane or unclean" (10:28) (Tournage, 2011¹⁴²; Kinzer, 2005:69). Moxon, writing about dreams and nightmares in his Durham University thesis, comes at Peter's vision from another perspective. He says, "The vision does not so much commend the abolition of Torah as expose the illegitimacy of allowing such 'nightmares' to impede fellowship with Spirit-filled Gentile followers of Jesus" (Moxon, 2015:i).

In Luke's account of Peter's dream, heaven¹⁴³ opens and a vessel¹⁴⁴ comes down filled with all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds, and a voice says "kill and eat" (Acts 10:13). Woods highlights the presence of *clean* as well as *unclean* animals mixed in the sheet (Woods, s.a.:187). The word "all"¹⁴⁵ indicates the large number and variety of animals that may have been represented.¹⁴⁶ Peter proclaims that he had never eaten anything considered unclean for consumption (Acts 10:14; Leviticus 11:47)¹⁴⁷, much like the proclamation of Ezekiel (4:14) and

¹⁴¹ ἀθέμιτόν

¹⁴² See video by Marc Tournage, Professor and Director of Center for Holy Land Studies in sources below.

¹⁴³ οὐρανὸν. The singular form of the noun compares here to the plural form οὐρανοῦς found in Acts 7:56 when the heavens open and Stephen sees the son of man at the right hand of G-d.

¹⁴⁴ σκεῦός. This generic word for "thing" occurs in Acts five times.

¹⁴⁵ πάντα

¹⁴⁶ Notice that the order of the animal listing (quadrupeds, creeping things, etc.) takes a different order than the animal listed in the creation (beginning with sea creatures, birds, land animals, creeping things...) which differs from the order found in Leviticus (quadrupeds, water creatures, insects ...).

¹⁴⁷ Onieu ben David makes an argument using three passages, Luke 24:25-26; 24:31-32; 24: 44-45 (Onieu ben David). According to these passages, after the resurrection, Jesus taught his disciples everything about how he had fulfilled the law and the prophets on the cross. Ben David's argument is that if they

Daniel (1:8). Although, as Shulam points out, eating food that was not clean did not require horrid punishment (Shulam 2008:6). The only reckoning was that on the same day he could not go up to the Temple and worship G-d; the next day when he woke up he would be pure again and able to go up to the Temple (Shulam 2008:6). In contrast, if a person embarrassed someone in a public setting, the punishment was much more austere (Shulam 2008:7).¹⁴⁸ Mark Tournage expounds on Peter's interpretation of the dream in a way he describes as unlike the majority view (Tournage, 2011). Marc Tournage asserts that Peter's own interpretation can be taken at face value, in other words, he did not see Jesus' death and resurrection as bringing an end to his Judaism (Tournage, 2011). Rather the animals were a symbol to lead Peter to understand the communication of the message about Gentiles (Tournage, 2011). Woods adds to that saying that Peter's comment, "G-d has shown that I should call no *man* common or unclean" in 10:28 makes the interpretation explicit (Woods, s.a.:187). The opposing view deduces a meaning in which all foods become acceptable for consumption (Hale & Thorson, 2012:466; Woods, s.a.:172).¹⁴⁹

Daniel also had visions of unclean animals, setting yet another precedent (Daniel 7:2-8).¹⁵⁰ Barnes' comments, "It is not uncommon for the prophets to make use of animals to represent or symbolize kingdoms and nations" (Barnes, 1834). In Isaiah 27:1, leviathan, or the dragon or crocodile, is used to connote Babylon; in Ezekiel 29:3-5, the dragon or the crocodile of the Nile represents Pharaoh; and in Ezekiel 32:2, Pharaoh is compared to a young lion and to a whale in the seas. In Psalm 74:13-14, the kingdom of Egypt is likened to the dragon and the leviathan (Barnes, 1834). Another detail in Luke's description worth mentioning is the sheet¹⁵¹ or linen that is let down from heaven by four corners (Acts 11:5).¹⁵² The concept of *four corner*¹⁵³ appears in the Tanakh; two instances worth mentioning here (Sebesta & Bonfante, 2001:183).

were told everything, why would Peter not have known that food laws had been changed? He concludes that if they were changed, Peter would certainly have known.

¹⁴⁸ To engage the reader, Shulam poses a series of questions, neither to convict or condemn readers, but to add fodder for thought. "Did Yeshua or His disciples break the Torah and teach against

¹⁴⁹ According to Woods, the traditional Christian interpretation is that the vision refers to both Gentiles and unclean food (Woods, s.a.:172). In other words, both were made clean in the transaction.

¹⁵⁰ The animals in Daniel's dream were few (only four); whereas the animals in Peter's dream are not numbered, but seem to be all-inclusive.

¹⁵¹ ὀθόνην (sheet or linen cloth; a piece of fabric)

¹⁵² τέσσαρσιν ἀρχαῖς (Greek) אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת (Hebrew)

¹⁵³ τέσσαρσιν ἀρχαῖς in Greek; אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת (Hebrew)

The first relates to fabric “You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself” (Deuteronomy 22:12; Numbers 15:38). Sebesta and Bonfante identify the “garment” in Peter’s vision as the daily cloak to be worn (Sebesta & Bonfante, 2001:183). Interestingly, the term “four corners” in Isaiah 11:12 alludes to the fact that G-d will pull Gentiles into His fold, thus breaking ethnic distinctions between Jew and Gentile (Sebesta & Bonfante, 2001:183). “And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:12). Perhaps the cloak in Peter’s vision is a familiar Jewish concept with a hidden Jewish message. Peter is told in a Jewish manner, in a way he can understand, a pressing, world-altering message. Things were about to change for the nations around him.

The second concept relates to the idea of the Lord calling to himself those who had been away from his presence; in this case, the dispersed tribe of Judah (Isaiah). Umoren (2007:194) comments on the word choice in the Isaiah passage, saying it points to G-d gathering the remnant *out from every place* on the globe. Umoren continues coining the “gathering” as G-d’s salvific action, which, when it dawns will alert not only the nations where the remnant of G-d’s people will be found, but will indicate G-d’s imminence and might to all nations, showing the way through which they need to pass (Umoren, 2007:194). I assert that the Isaiah 11:12 passage is fulfilled at least in part by the entrance of Gentiles into Jesus’ stream of Judaism, starting with Cornelius and his household.

4.4 Baptism

Cornelius and those with him lacked the outward requirement for baptism. They were not Jewish, nor were they proselytes.¹⁵⁴ So what made Peter think he could perform Jewish baptism when the critical baptismal prerequisite wasn’t met?

¹⁵⁴ The Talmud tells of Hiyya bar Abba (ca. 180-230 CE), who argued in the name of Rabbi Jochanan that a man could never become a proselyte until/or unless he had been both circumcised and also performed the prescribed ritual of immersion (baptism). This, according to the Talmud, was the *majority rule* and the view of Rabbi Jose. Although the Talmud is a later date than Cornelius, the sheer existence of a *majority rule* proves that there was also a minority opinion at the time (Mandl, 1994:133). Some must have thought both were not required. The Babylonian Talmud indicates as much in the following statement, “A male convert who has been immersed but not circumcised, or circumcised but not immersed, is a convert.” (Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 46a and Gerim 1:6). Perhaps there was also a similar rule during the time of Cornelius.

According to Dunn, two kinds of baptism (immersion) are referenced in New Testament times: *ritual purity* and *purity of the heart* (Dunn, 2003:14.4). Examples of ritual purity are the washings required for various conditions, including at the entrance of the Temple, after the delivery of a child, after contact with a dead body (Dunn, 2003:14.4). Issues of ritual purity most likely kept Jesus's followers from going into the Palace of Caiphas when Jesus was on trial; the time was Passover and doing so would make them unclean (Dunn, 2003:14.4). According to Leonhardt, Philo of Alexandria picks up on the theme of *baptism of purity* in the context of Leviticus and the Temple, and he also speaks of *spiritual washing* (Leonhardt, 2001:270). The latter is called *purity of the heart*, a concept repeated in Psalms, Proverbs and by the prophets who encouraged followers to cast off evil and strive for righteousness (Leonhardt, 2001:270).

Newman writes about the Second Temple concept of ritual cleansing among the Essenes, describing how transgressions "clung" to the transgressor (1QS 5:13-14), the effects of which could be washed away only through righteousness (1QS3:8-9) (Newman, 2013:55). Newman asserts that after righteousness through repentance, the individual could become holy and ready for the water of baptism (Newman, 2013:55). John the Baptist followed this line of thinking calling his baptism, the *baptism of repentance* (Matthew 3:2).¹⁵⁵ John's invitation to ritual immersion links John's baptism to that of the Essenes (Robinson, 2004:47).

Scholar Brad Young says John's baptism of Jesus hints at Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 (Young, 1995:18). The first, a Messianic text, asserts the unique nature of the baptized as the Messiah; the second refers to Spirit empowerment for service (Young, 1995:18). According to Young, the link between the Spirit and the Messiah is sometimes seen in rabbinic thought (Young, 1995:18). For instance, the ancient rabbis interpreted "the spirit of G-d hovered" (Genesis 1:2) as alluding to the spirit of the Messiah (Young, 1995:18). The linkage is apparent in the baptism of Jesus when John the Baptist asserts that "the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him" Isaiah 11:2. Young says that the "him" was none other than the Messiah himself (Young, 1995:21).

Ferguson notes that hundreds of baths used for ritual immersion in Judaism, called *mikvaoth* (plural), have been uncovered through excavations in Israel from the period before the destruction

¹⁵⁵ "They shall not enter the water ... unless they turn from their wickedness" (1QS5:115).

of the Temple (Ferguson, 2009:64).¹⁵⁶ Most of the early *mikvaot*¹⁵⁷ comprised a single pool and met Pharisaic requirements. The others were the double pool variety: one for storing pure water and the other for immersion. Nearly every uncovered stepped bath met rabbinical requirements for size and construction requirements (Ferguson, 2009:65).

When Peter saw the same miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit at Cornelius' house, he followed the same pattern and continued with the logical final step: baptism. He might have recalled the words of the School of Hillel which said, "He that separates himself from circumcision is as one that separates himself from the grave." (Ferguson, 2009:99).¹⁵⁸ The obvious difference between the two occasions was the audience, the first (Acts 2) entirely Jewish or proselyte^{159 160}, the second (Acts 10), entirely Gentile. Peter's spontaneous response seems to him to have been the logical conclusion, revealing his open-mindedness to this unprecedented act of G-d, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (Acts 10: 47).

Gould points out that water-based rituals saturate Jewish life by the first-century (Gould, 2009:59). Ray van der Laan describes the specification for the *mikvoth* outside each synagogue, that they had to be hewn out of a rock or placed into the ground, and the water had to be "living" — flowing freely into the *mikveh* without being drawn based on Numbers 19; Leviticus 15 (Van der Laan, 1999:134).¹⁶¹ Did the baptism of Cornelius happen in a *mikveh*, located locally in Caesarea?

¹⁵⁶ One hundred and fifty of them from first century Jerusalem, many of which were attached to the Temple mount. Others are in Jericho, Gamla, Masada, and Herodium (Ferguson, 2009:64).

¹⁵⁷ One requirement, specified in the book of Leviticus, is that the pool for emersion be 'pure'. "But a spring and a pit, a gathering (*mikveh*) of water, shall be pure" (Leviticus 11:36).

¹⁵⁸ Baptism was a necessary condition to be fulfilled by a proselyte to Judaism (Yeb. 46b, 47b; Ker. 9a; 'Ab. Zarah 57a; Shab. 135a; Yer. Kid. iii. 14, 64d)

¹⁵⁹ The argument of Hiyya bar Abba (ca. 180-230 CE) on behalf of Rabbi Jochanan, shows that there is at least a minority rule that said baptism alone (or circumcision alone) was sufficient for entrance into the faith. Cornelius and his household qualify under the minority ruling.

¹⁶⁰ Donaldson peeks into the future by making a distinction in thought between proselytes G-dfearers saying "Gentiles may have a share in salvation without becoming full converts to Judaism. Gentile converts will be saved as well, but Gentiles do not need to be converts to be saved" (Donaldson, 2006:66).

¹⁶¹ For detailed discussion see *The Great Mikveh Debate* (Source List).

Sandford speculates that water was brought into the house for sprinkling (Sandford, 1837:29), however this doesn't seem to fit the typical immersion practice of the day.

The next verse, Acts 10:48a, continues, "So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" and presents another set of challenges. Le Cornu suggests that the Greek syntax in this sentence may represent either a direct command to the gathering — "Be baptized!" — or an indirect statement: "He ordered that they should be baptized" (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:604). The word order suggests the phrase "in the name of Jesus" may modify the command rather than the baptism, reading "I command you in the name of Jesus" rather than "be baptized in Jesus name" (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:604).

Le Cornu's argument is possible if the outpouring of the Spirit constitutes proof that Cornelius and the gathering had already repented. In other words, if Cornelius and his household filled the moral prerequisite that should follow any ritual purity: repentance, the outpouring of the Spirit would be a natural result (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:604). Acts 10:46, 47 seems to support this position, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." It would appear that those who were willing, were baptized right away, but as Le Cornu notes, there is no indication of where the event took place (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:604). They plead for Peter to remain with them (Acts 48b) with mention of the actual baptism.

With this in mind, the events at the account of Shavuot in Acts 2 takes on new meaning. On that day, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit arrived in full blown presence. The Messiah had already come, so the period of the *bat kohl* was over, the faint echo was no more (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:604). The events for the people present at that Shavuot occurred in this order: evidence of the Holy Spirit, a call for repentance, then baptism. Zhang reminds the reader that afterward, the Spirit appears fifty-six times in Acts (Zhang, 2011:69). To repeat the question, what made Peter think he could perform Jewish baptism when the critical baptismal prerequisite of repentance and circumcision wasn't met? His vision told him that they were acceptable, and even though the details of circumcision hadn't yet been decided, the critical baptismal prerequisite of repentance had been met.

When the last of the prophets died away it was thought that the Holy Spirit was taken away, ending the prophetic time of miracles and deliverance (Young, 1995:22). The daughter of the voice (*bat kohl*) or the echoing voice was thought to replace prophetic inspiration, until prophecy was renewed and people were prepared once again for the Holy Spirit (Young, 1995:22).

4.5 Philological Argument

This segment explores phrases from the pericope that led up to and include activities at Cornelius' house. With the purpose of improving an understanding of events, each term is examined in the order in which they appear in the text.

κοινὸν / ἀκάθαρτον Acts 10:14 clean and unclean

διακρινόμενος / διακρίναντα Acts 10:20b and 11:12 doubting or hesitating

Προσωπολήμπτης Acts 10:34 favouritism; make no distinction

- **κοινὸν / ἀκάθαρτον.** These two words for *common and unclean* occur in Acts 10:14, as part of Peter's rebuttal to the Lord's urging, "*But Peter said, not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*" The concept of "clean and unclean" was instilled into Israel's identity from the beginning of her nationhood (Leviticus 20:24b-26).¹⁶²

Establishing and sustaining cleanliness entailed setting boundaries. In fact, the entire sixth order of the Mishna (Tosefta and Talmud) called *Tohorot*¹⁶², literally 'Purities', contain two principal themes according to Jacob Neusner: secretions of the body which are deemed unclean and impart uncleanness, and doubts about these same excretions (Neusner, 1993:1). Each of the 12 tractates of *Tohorot* covers a wide variety of topics from the preparation of food, to stalks of fruit, to baptism (*mikveh*), to utensils, to skin conditions and so forth. Israel was to be "clean" in a world that was filled with Gentiles who were basically the opposite. Tractate Ohalot 18:7 states that the dwelling places of the Gentiles are ritually unclean (Stern, 1992:258). Author David Stern abridges other related passages in the Mishna this way, "...Jews may not remain alone with Gentiles, leave cattle at their inns, assist them in childbirth, suckle their children, do business with them when they are traveling to idolatrous festivals, drink their milk or vinegar or wine...or eat their bread or oil or pickled vegetables or...their cooked food" (Stern 1992:258).

¹⁶² "I am the LORD your G-d, who has set you apart from the nations. You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground — those which I have set apart as unclean for you." (Leviticus 20:24b-26).

¹⁶² טהרות

As mentioned earlier, ancient literature imagery of animals could represent Israel, but more commonly represented the nations¹⁶³ where the ones being described as unclean animals (like pigs, rabbits, camels, donkeys, and dogs) were Gentiles (Stern, 1994:33). Peter's vision sounds slightly similar to another story from the Babylonian Talmud (Stern, 1994:33). In San 59b, Rabbi Halafta encounters lions who roar at him while walking along a path (Stern, 1994:33). Halafta quotes Psalm 104:21 "The young lions roar for their prey," and two pieces of meat miraculously fall from heaven (Stern, 1994:33). The lions eat one piece and leave the other, which the Rabbi takes to the Sages and asks whether it was clean or unclean (i.e. kosher to eat) (Stern, 1994:33). He was told: "nothing unclean descends from heaven" (San 59b). Could this phrase be an oral teaching in existence before the time of the Talmud or even the Mishna? If so, it could impact the discussion.

- **διακρινόμενος / διακρίναντα.** These words for *doubting* or *hesitating* have a root word, διακρίνω, found in both Acts 10:20 and 11:12, and can express different meanings. The first reads, "Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." And the second, "The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house."

Short definition words offered by Strong's Concordance (2008:1252) include: *distinguish*, *discern*, *doubt*, and *hesitate*. A fuller explanation of the word by Strong goes on to say, "properly, investigate (judge) thoroughly – literally, judging 'back-and-forth' which can either (positively) refer to close-reasoning (discrimination) or negatively 'over-judging' (going too far, vacillating). Only the context indicates which sense is meant" (Strong, 2008).

Some translators, perhaps moved by the context, their theology, or more likely the change in voice, use different words for the two occurrences of the root διακρίνω in Acts. For instance, ESV interprets Acts 10:20 as "without hesitation" (written in middle voice) and Acts 11:12 as "making no distinction" in (written in active voice). NASB chose the English word *misgivings*. Degraaf notes that in contemporary Greek literature (200 BCE to 100 CE), the verb διακρίνω in the middle voice could be used to prompt a reflexive or reciprocal sense found in the active voice (for example "to separate from each other," or "to distinguish oneself"), and could be used to imply either "to dispute" or "to settle a dispute" (Degraaf 2005:735).

¹⁶³ Dan 7:2ff, 8:3ff; 1 Enoch 85-90, etc.

In its various forms διακρίνω occurs less than thirty times in the LXX, almost always used in the context of judging, judging between or separating people. Five of these occurrences are middle or passive voice, most notably in Jeremiah 15:10 (Degraaf 2005:737). In this passage, Degraaf notes that the prophet applies the verb to himself as part of a complaint that he has been isolated from the rest of humankind (Degraaf 2005:737). Two other important references are Joel 3:1-2 (G-d's judgment of the nations) and Ezekiel 20:35-36 (G-d's judgment of the Israelites). The action indicated by διακρίνω in these passages involves separating people based on distinctions (Degraaf 2005:737). In Acts 10:20, διακρίνω is preceded by the word μηδέν, which could mean *don't negatively over-judge* (Degraaf 2005:740). One wonders if the writers weren't trying to communicate two themes, "Waste no time" and "accept Gentiles and no longer discriminate against them." Degraaf puts it another way, "Go with them, making no distinctions between yourself and them," or even more explicitly "without keeping your distance because they are Gentiles" (Degraaf 2005:40).

- **Προσωπολήμπτης**, the word for favouritism and "make no distinction" has a few extra meanings.¹⁶⁴ Found nowhere else in this form, according to F.F. Bruce, this Scriptural *hapax legomenon* in Acts 10:34 is the negated form of a word that means "respector of persons," literally "lifter of faces" (Bruce, 1988). It reflects the Hebrew idiom "lift (someone's) face" and hence "show favour" or, in a pejorative sense, "show favouritism" (Bruce, 1988). Προσωπολήμπτης is in a negated form and means "showing no favouritism".¹⁶⁵ To add to this meaning, Nagel points out the Hebrew idiom "to lift up one's face", which infers biblical forgiveness (Nagel, 2006:21). If the negated form of **Προσωπολήμπτης** means to grant forgiveness, one derives added meaning from Acts 10:34. "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that G-d does not show favouritism' could possibly be reworded, 'I realize how true it is that G-d forgives every nation' then continues '...who fears him and does what is right.'"

¹⁶⁴ The cross-reference for this verse is Deuteronomy 10:17: "shows no partiality and accepts no bribes" and Leviticus 19:15: "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly".

¹⁶⁵ Other translations of the word include: "no respector of persons" (ASV), "shows no partiality" (NSV), and "no distinctions" (Weymouth NT). The Blue Letter Bible Lexicon shows that the writer of Acts took two words and combined them to make a new word. The two words are πρόσωπον (Strong's G4383 prosōpon) meaning "face" and λαμβάνω (Strong's G2983 lambanō) meaning "take" (Blue Letter Bible Lexicon: online).

Bruce asserts that Acts 10:34 alludes to the priestly blessing in which G-d is called upon to lift up his face on, or show favour to the Israelites (Numbers 6:26; Bruce, 1988:210; Woods, s.a.:189). In Acts this emphasizes, according to Bock, that G-d does not favour Israel over the Gentiles in charging sin (Bock, 2007:396) and reflects why judgment and accountability before G-d are keys to Peter's speech (Bock, 2007:402). Emerson points out that the opposite of "impartially" is found in 1 Peter 1:17, "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear."

Finally, Donin relates it to the idea of "distinguishing" one from another and identifies *distinguishing* as basic biblical theme (Donin, 1991:140). In Genesis, the nature of the Sabbath embeds itself in time and creation as something to be "distinguished" or set apart from all other days (Leviticus 23:3). The weekly Havdalah prayer that ends the Sabbath reads: "Blessed are thou, Lord our G-d, who separates the holy from the everyday" (Donin, 1991:140).

The story's outcome offers a viable solution not only for Cornelius and his household, but also to other Gentiles following in their footsteps. In Acts 11, Peter recounts the story to the circumcised believers in Jerusalem, from start to finish. He ends by saying, "If then G-d gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder Gd?" When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised G-d, saying, "Then G-d has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11: 17-18). Le Cornu asserts that in court-like contexts such as this, silence can mean assent and closure to the argument, in other words, they were convinced (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:612). In response, the listeners glorify Gd, which seems to acknowledge that Peter had been acting with G-d's favour (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:612).

The phrase "G-d has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν) (Acts 11:18) parallels "same gift as He gave to us" in verse 17. In other words, the Jews concede that the Gentiles got the same thing that they got, "repentance that leads to life". According to Kohler and Schlesinger, the full implication of repentance, "*teshubah*", as it is understood in Jewish doctrine, is summed up in the meaning of the Hebrew term (Kohler & Schlesinger, s.a.). The word, a combination of two verbs, literally means "return" and "to feel sorrow" (Kohler & Schlesinger, s.a.). In Greek μετάνοια is used with an underlying idea that denotes "change of mind and heart" (Kohler & Schlesinger, s.a.).

Joseph Telushkin introduces a story by Hillel that elucidates this further (Telushkin, 2010:125). The story is about a non-Jew who comes to Hillel and asks him to define Judaism while standing on one foot. Shammai, Hillel's rival rabbi at the time, having been asked the same question, waves

his arm to shoo the man away. Hillel, on the other hand, answers quite succinctly, “what is hateful to you, do to your neighbour, the rest is commentary, now go and study it” (Telushkin, 2010:125). Then, according to the Talmud, Hillel converted the man. Two points stand out is firstly the emphasis on Hillel’s final words, placing an emphasis on learning and studying the faith. The second, more central to this chapter, is the fact that this famous Sage, before the time of Jesus, does to not close the door, but makes a way for the Gentile to enter Judaism. The atmosphere for change was present in the years leading to the Cornelius event.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter set out to answer the question: What happened in the events that led up to and included the activities at Cornelius’ house as recorded in the tenth Chapter of Acts and how are we to understand these events, particularly Peter’s spontaneous response to baptize Gentiles in the Jewish tradition? This aim was divided into four objectives: to glean information on the topic from the chronological sequence in the Acts 10 narrative; to interpret the narrative; to examine baptism and to delve into philological terms such as “repentance unto life” and evaluate the outcome.

From the Acts narrative, this research shows that the events in Caesarea had an irreversible impact on Gentiles who found their complete fulfilment in G-d. They were among those that Isaiah prophesied would fall and bow before the Jews because of their association with YHWH. The major players in the narrative were Cornelius the Centurion (a devout man imitating Jewish behaviour and mannerisms to reverently honour G-d); and Peter (who sought the Lord on a rooftop, a not-so-unusual Jewish pattern, and obediently followed through with promptings of his vision). Peter was bold enough to break the norm and standards acceptable to the Jewish community. He associated the appearance of the Holy Spirit in Cornelius’ home with the Jews at Shavuot, tying them both to the prophecy of Joel about “the last days”. The reverberations were felt far and wide throughout the diaspora, including Pisidian Antioch and Antioch. Paul, who spearheaded the advancement, could possibly have communicated to Jews in these faraway places, “look at what is taking place before your eyes — don’t miss out!”

Interpreting the Acts narrative reveals the very Jewish nature of the account. Cornelius represented a new kind of man in a way that was noticeable. Firm in his stance, he was a man of charity and fasting, recognized favourably by G-d and others and emboldened by his divine vision. Likely a synagogue attender, he prayed, likely recited the Shema, turned toward Jerusalem, may have eaten ‘clean’ foods and followed Jewish traditions.

Cornelius' way of living is precisely what allowed Peter to embrace the assignment to visit the centurion's home. Cornelius loved G-d and furthermore, because of Peter's vision, had become clean in G-d's eyes. The key to Peter's interpretation of the vision drove the same meaning home twice. Both the "animals" and the "four corners" of the sheet made references to *nations*, i.e. Gentiles. Both communicated familiar Jewish concepts, helping him understand the hidden Jewish message. I assert that the Isaiah 11:12 passage is fulfilled, at least in part, by the entrance of Gentiles into Jesus' stream of Judaism, starting with Cornelius and his household.

Although there are no details about the actual baptism, Peter's decision to command baptism in the name of the Messiah was the only logical conclusion because rabbinic thought linked the Spirit with the Messiah. Earlier, when the Holy Spirit came to the mostly Jewish audience at Shavuot, the crowd was cleansed and many came to know the Messiah. In Caesarea, Gentiles filled the prerequisite to baptism with repentance, hence the appearance of the Holy Spirit.

The use of the terms *κοινὸν / ἀκάθαρτον* in Acts 10 indicates cleanliness. Peter's distinction between edible and inedible animals represents the distinction between Jews and other nations. Interestingly, the Babylonian Talmud indicates that food from heaven is never unclean, a repetition of the earlier idea.

The second, *διακρινόμενος / διακρίναντα*, has more than one meaning: "without hesitation" and "making no distinction". In this sense, the passages in which the words occur could be reworded, "waste no time to accept Gentiles who are no longer to be discriminated against" and "go with them making no distinctions between yourself and them".

Finally, *Προσωπολήμπτης*, the *hapax legglomena* in Acts 10:34, reflects the Hebrew idiom "lifter of faces", known from the Aaronic blessing, meaning to *show favour*. It also infers biblical forgiveness. The idea of distinction between the holy (*kodosh*) and ordinary is also indicated. Israel was chosen or set aside from amongst the nations at an earlier time in history, and now Cornelius and his household also became chosen or set aside. The Lord conferred forgiveness through their repentance and showed them favour.

It seems that the things that lead up to and are included in the activities at Cornelius' house, recorded in the tenth Chapter of Acts — particularly Peter's spontaneous response to baptize Gentiles — should be understood in light of the response given by the larger group of circumcised believers in 11:17, 18. They grasped that the separation between Jews and Gentiles, designed by the Mosaic Law as a safeguard, was no longer in place. In Peter's line of thinking, G-d gave the same gift, the Holy Spirit, to Gentiles that he had given to Jews when they believed in Jesus. Peter could see nothing left to deter the next logical step, "Who was I that I could hinder G-d?"

(11:17), so he baptized them. Cornelius and his household were set aside, distinguished from other Gentiles, forgiven, counted as equals with Israel.

Table 4-1: Order of Events at the Appearance of the Holy Spirit

JEWS (at Shavuot)	DISCIPLES (at Council)	GENTILES (at Cornelius' house)
Telling of the story	Telling of the story	Telling of the story
Baptism	Baptism	Arrival of Holy Spirit
Arrival of Holy Spirit	Arrival of Holy Spirit	Baptism

Table 4-2: Almsgiving in Jewish Thinking

Vayikra 25:35:	And when your brother will become poor and you will extend your hand to him.
Proverbs 19:17:	He who gives graciously to the poor makes a loan to G-d.
Proverbs 28:27:	He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack...
Psalms 41:2:	Happy is he that considereth the poor.
Tosefta Peah 4:17:	If someone says he will give charity and he does so, he gets a reward for speech and reward for action.
Baba Batra 9b:	Rabbi Yitzchak said, "Whoever gives even a small coin to a poor man receives six blessings, but whoever speaks reassuringly to him receives eleven blessings."
Baba Batra 10a:	All the charity and deeds of kindness that the children of Israel perform in this world promote peace and good understanding between them and Gd.
Shabbat 139a:	Jerusalem will only be redeemed through tzedakah (charity).
Pirkei Avot 2:8:	Hillel used to say, The more tzedakah, the more shalom.

Table 4-3: Roman Political History

<p>Jews were expelled from Rome in 139 B.C.E. [as noted in the first-century C.E. by Valerius Maximus (1.3.3)] for fear of Jewish expansion in numbers, and for “endeavouring to spread Jewish practices among ‘sympathizers’ without requiring the rite of conversion”.</p>
<p>The later general expulsion 65 B.C.E. (noted in <i>lex Pappia</i>) did not include the Jews.</p>
<p>After the expulsion mentioned in <i>lex Pappia</i>, Cicero, in his <i>Pro Flacco</i> (28.66) (59 B.C.E.) noted that the Jews were numerous (also clannish and influential in the assemblies).</p>
<p>Soon after, Julius Caesar granted numerous privileges to Jews (exemption from military service, permission to form corporate groups and send money to the Temple, etc.) out of gratitude for their assistance during the civil war with Pompey.</p>
<p>In a Roman court, Jewish king, Agrippa I, convinced Caligula to abandon his plan to foist his worship as a G-d on the Jews (Philo, <i>Legatio ad Gaium</i> 42.330-34; Josephus, <i>Ant.</i> 18.289-301).</p>
<p>Caligula’s successor Claudius, apparently influenced by his friend Agrippa, issued an edict (<i>Ant.</i> 19.280-85) reaffirming equal civil rights for Jews.</p>
<p>After the bloody and unsuccessful Jewish revolution of 66-74, when one would expect restrictions toward Jews, Titus and Vespasian made pronouncements to the contrary on several accounts (Josephus, <i>War</i> 7.100-111; <i>Ant.</i> 12.121-22).</p>

CHAPTER 5: OPENING DOORS – THE CHALLENGE OF INCOMING GENTILES

5.1 Introduction

Dramatically positioned on the cusp of religious transformation, leaders of The Way faced issues of integration concerning Gentiles at the Jerusalem Council. The problem statement for this chapter is: What unique circumstances concerning incoming Gentiles did the Apostles face because of events at Cornelius' house and what gave them the authority to make decisions of inclusion here-to-fore reserved for governance leaders?

The aim of this chapter is to consider issues faced by the Apostles concerning incoming Gentiles, and understand how the apostolic leaders saw themselves as qualified to make organizational decisions about incoming Gentiles apart from the Sanhedrin.

The objectives are to explore the opinions of the larger Jewish population regarding Gentile inclusion in Judaism, to examine the topic of incoming Gentiles as debated at the Jerusalem Council, to inspect the Noahide commands and the Apostolic Decree, and to pour over governance structures of Judaism — particularly the Sanhedrin.

5.2 Jewish Opinion on Gentile Inclusion

According to Grabbe (2004:171), during the Persian period (539-331 BCE) few non-Jewish men sought to become a part of the Jewish community. Likewise, some Jews probably never became reconciled to letting outsiders in their community (Grabbe, 2004:171). Whether this assessment is accurate or not, a different scenario becomes apparent by the first-century. Historians of that era, Philo, in his treaty *De Vita Mosis II*, and Suetonius, who wrote about Roman pagans pursuing Judaism and Josephus, indicate much interest in Judaism on behalf of Gentiles. Josephus, for example states, “The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances...” (C. Apion 2.282). Additionally, reflecting the attitude of Moses, Philo reiterates the act of Jewish acceptance of converts in full accord: “He commands all members of the nation to love the incomers, not only as friends and kinsfolk but as themselves both in body and soul.” (De virt. 20:102-3; Cohen 1987:411). So the question moving around in the socio-political circles in the first-century wasn't whether or not Gentiles were attracted to Judaism, but rather, as Rashkover and Kava suggests, the question was how to deal with Gentiles (Rashkover & Kavka, 2008:127).

Clues to first-century Jewish thinking can be detected thirty years before the Common Era. At that time Menaham, vice-president of the Sanhedrin, served under President (Nasi) Sage Hillel (Harvey, 2005:179). Like Hillel, Menaham believed that Israel had failed to be a light to the

Gentiles, so according to Daniel 9, he believed Gentiles would destroy the Temple (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 51:4) (Falk, 2003:179). In response, both men believed that reaching out to Gentiles might move G-d to defer his judgment (Falk, 2003:179). Shammai, who later replaced Menaham, disagreed. Unlike Hillel, Shammai believed that Gentiles had no place in heaven (Harvey, 2005:179). So vehement was his attitude that Shammai proposed to prevent all communication and commerce between Jews and Gentiles (Martin, 1993:79). In his book, *Studies in the life and ministry of the early Paul and related issues*, Martin cites Mendelssohn, who points out this attitude, saying "... the Shammaites proposed to prevent all communication between Jew and Gentile, by prohibiting the Jews from buying any article of food or drink from their heathen neighbours" (Martin, 1993:79). Shammai's low opinion of Gentiles and his efforts to separate Jews and Gentiles thrived (Martin, 1993:79).

Relatedly, a Baraita from the Talmud (b. Yoma 71b) reveals unfavourable Jewish Sadducean opinion toward Gentile converts. Granted, the actual account occurred a generation before Yeshua, but the source is from a later time and is therefore presented here to reflect a possible perspective of an earlier view. Taken with this view in mind, I believe this source to provide an applicable perspective. The Baraita, found in Insights to the Daf. Masches Yoma, tells of a Jewish high priest *en route* to his home after completing his priestly obligations on Yom Kippur. He was accompanied by the people who, when they saw the two great Sages in the distance (protégés of Shammai and Hillel) (Kalimi, 2014:445S), left the high priest to accompany them.

The Sages, Shmaya and Avatalion,¹⁶⁶ were converts or descended from converts to Judaism (probably from Sennacherib) (Hayes, 2002:189; Kalimi, 2014:445). When the Priest saw them that day, he cast dispersions on them saying, "Let the descendants of the {Gentile} nations go to peace" (Insights, 241). These words were interpreted as a derogatory reference to the status of the Sages as converts (Insights, 241). In response, the two rabbis answered, "Let the descendants of the [Gentile] nations, who perform the act of Aharon, go to peace, and let not the descendant of Aharon, who does not perform the act of Aharon, go to peace." Their retort, according to Rashi, reflected actions in accordance with attributes of Aharon, the high priest who

¹⁶⁶ Ziegler says that the Gemara (Chagiga 16b) claims that each time these two sages, Shmaya and Avatalion, are mentioned together in the Mishna, the understanding is that one of them held the position of Rosh Bet Din (Nasi or president) and the other served as Av (head of) Bet Din. (Ziegler 2005:137).

always pursued peace and brotherhood (Insights, 241) (Avot 1:2). Another interpretation, given by Kozhnutzer Magid, proposes that the Sages implied that it was the descendants of the nations, Shemayah and Avtalyon, who attained atonement for the Jewish people, and not the descendant of Aharon who, in their opinion, did not properly perform his obligations (Insights, 241). This Baraita serves as an example of Jewish (specifically Sadducean) disdain of Gentile inclusion, even after their conversion.

In another example of rabbinical thinking, an excerpt from the Babylonian Talmud indicates how difficult it was for Gentiles to convert. Using a two-part rabbinical filter in the conversion interview process, the rabbis first asks: “Do you not know that Israel at the present time is persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?” (This question was designed to warn prospective converts they’d be subject to persecution like other Jews.) Second: “Before you were not subject to punishment for not keeping the law, now as a Jew, all the law is incumbent upon you” (b. Yevamot 47a). Another tool used for the conversion process, commonly characterized as a “Jewish pre-Christian” resource, was the Jewish Two Ways document, which is discussed later in this chapter (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:838). Hillel, influential during the transition into the Common Era, is recorded as quoting this document with a prospective convert (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:838) (see Shab. 31a). From this we can deduce that the rabbis insisted that Gentiles take careful account of the cost of conversion.

What else do we know about the Jewish opinion of Gentiles? Despite the documentation time gap, we can make a few assumptions based on some available written sources. One incident around the end of the first-century or the beginning of the second century points to a Jewish controversy about the canonicity of an early Christian document titled *Euangelion* (the Greek word for Gospel) (Bruce, 2003:104). Most probably an Aramaic version of the Gospel of Matthew, *Euangelion* was said to have been a favourite Gospel of the Jewish Christians in Palestine and the surrounding area. Purportedly, Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Meir made an unfriendly pun about this Gospel, altering vowels in the word *Euangelion* (Ευαγγέλιον) to make it read “Awen-gillayon” or “Awon-gillayon” (Bruce, 2003:104). The pun created an insult that translates into English as something like, “Iniquity of the Margin” or “Sin of the Writing-tablet” (Babylonian Talmud, tractate Shabbath, 166 a,b). By slandering both the document and the authors, the obscure insult provides insight about the opinion that Orthodox Jewish thinkers held of Jewish Christians and the Christian movement known for accepting Gentiles (Bruce, 2003:104). These Jewish Christians could have been the ones described in the book of Acts as “zealous for the law” (Acts 15:5; 21:20). It is possible they came from among the Orthodox Jewish thinkers who poked fun at them.

What about non-converted Gentiles like the “righteous Gentiles” or G-d-fearers? What did traditional Jews think of them, was it better to leave them in their non-converted state? Some

rabbis thought so based on a conversation about “the world to come”, attributed to a conversation between Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer (Tosefta, Sanhedrin 13:2). In that conversation, R. Eliezer asserted that all the Gentiles who forget G-d do not have a place in the afterlife and are destined for Sheol. Rabbi Yehoshua responded, “...the fact that it is written, ‘All the Gentiles who forget G-d’ indicates that there are also righteous people among the Gentiles of the world who do have a portion in the world to come.” (Tosefta, Sanhedrin 13:2). To put it simply, Rabbi Yehoshua concluded that there was hope for G-d-loving Gentiles. Even in their non-converted state, they could conceivably gain entry to “the world to come.”

Nevertheless, proselytizing efforts continued, with Jews trying to convert Gentiles. Notley notes that when a Gentile converted, they were bound to the entire law and, if they could not keep it in its totality, they could fall spiritually and be subject to divine perdition (Notley, 2004). With this in mind, Jesus’ critical statement concerning the Pharisees’ overzealous proselytizing efforts makes sense (Matthew 23:15). In that verse, he says, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are” (Matthew 23:15). Notley suggests that the Pharisees’ short-sighted conversion efforts risked causing a convert’s wholesale rejection of the law because it was too hard for them. In that case, the proselyte would be in a worse position after than before conversion (Notley 2004). By setting the process in motion, the Pharisee could potentially create a “child of hell” (Notley 2004). Wiersbe says the wording in this verse, “child of hell”, is the same as “child of the devil,” a term Jesus uses for the Pharisees (Matthew 12:34; 23:33; John 8:44) (Wiersbe, 2010:210).

Notley says that the possibility of causing more harm than good led some rabbis to discourage conversion (Notley, 2004). Segal disagrees, saying rabbis did not intend to discourage conversions, but rather to set high standards for conversion to cultivate committed converts (Segal, 1992:102).

The rabbis were aware of the difficulties of non-Jews taking on Jewish ways. Tractate Abodah Zarah says any edict that is beyond the peoples’ capability to observe automatically loses its validity (AZ 26a). In other words, don’t make rules that are too hard to follow. The school of Hillel thought it was better to leave G-d-fearing Gentiles with only the obligation of the moral laws given to Noah (Notley, 2004). Is it any wonder that Paul, who studied at the feet of the Pharisee Gamaliel (the grandson of Hillel), adopts Hillel’s progressive opinion regarding Gentiles? “Is G-d the G-d of the Jews only? Is he not the G-d of the Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one G-d, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” (Romans, 3:29-30).

Another strain of Judaism offered a less progressive approach. The Essenes' assessments can be seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls, making it clear that followers are justified by performing works of the Law (4QMMT lines 112-118)¹⁶⁷. This legalistic mind-set of the Qumran community, including the strict interpretation of the Law of Moses by the community's leadership, was heavily oriented toward conversion (Segal, 1992:102). Qumranians' communal meals had to remain in a strict state of ritual purity (1QS 5:13) (Blomberg, 2009:43). For the Essenes, "conversion followed by adherence" was the only way for Gentile inclusion. John the Baptist came from this strain of Judaism.

Accepted or not, first-century Jews definitely focused on Gentiles. Nanos emphasizes the attention given to Gentiles seeking after G-d in the first-century, saying the "general agreement that the behaviour and destiny of "righteous Gentiles" or "G-d-fearers" in the context of their association with the Jewish community was of considerable concern in the period we are examining..." (Nanos, 1996:51). One of the main reasons concerning Gentile integration was the issue of how to associate with them if they were attracted, but not converted (i.e. circumcised), especially when it came to purity issues in communal meals, better known as table fellowship.

Table fellowship in Judaism was more than food; it was a social statement that marked off close friends or co-worshippers from Gentile outsiders. The volumes written on this topic cannot be given justice here. However, a few salient issues jump out. Josephus records that Juvenal and Tacitus recommended that Jews refuse to eat with Gentiles, an attitude evidenced in Jubilees 22:16, "Keep yourself separate from the nations, and do not eat with them; and do not imitate their rituals, nor associate with them".¹⁶⁸ Jacob Neuser in his book *Politics to Piety: The emergence of Pharisaic*

¹⁶⁷ The full reading: "We have (indeed) sent you some of the precepts (works) of the Torah, according to our decision, for your welfare and the welfare of your people, for we have seen (that) you have wisdom and knowledge of the Torah. Consider all these things and ask Him that He strengthen your will and remove from you the plans of evil and the device of Belial so that you may rejoice at the end of time, finding that some of our practices are correct. And this will be reckoned to you as righteousness, since you will be doing what is righteous and good in His eyes, and for your own welfare and for the welfare of Israel." (4QMMT lines 112-118)

¹⁶⁸ This verse was popular among Qumran sectarians according to Bockmuehl (2000:59).

Judaism portrays the Pharisees as a “table-fellowship sect” (Neusner, 2003:67). He determined that of the 341 rabbinical rulings in this period, no less than 229 directly or indirectly pertain to table fellowship; that is 67% of the whole (Neusner, 2003:67).

N.T. Wright says table fellowship underlines the debate in Galatians 2:11. The question underlying the passage is, “Are Jewish Christians allowed to sit down and eat at the same table as Gentile Christians, when the latter have not been circumcised?” (Wright, 2002). Clearly, the Galatians faced the shared meal challenge. In Antioch, Josephus claimed that substantial numbers of Greeks became sympathizers, attending the splendidly furnished synagogue there, and they enjoyed a measure of social integration (i.e. meals) with the Jewish population (War 7.3.3) (Bockmuehl, 2000:57). As we know, Paul enjoyed the Diaspora hospitality of Gentiles on several occasions (Acts 16:14-15, 25-34; 18:7-1).

Bockmuehl adds that New Testament scholars widely assume that the halakha surrounding Jewish Christian practice of meal fellowship can be candidly branded as “all or nothing.” In fact, there was an objectively broad spectrum of Jewish halakha, both in outlook and in practice, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora (Bockmuehl, 2000:60). One acceptable view was that Jews could eat with Gentiles without ceasing to be Jews (Bockmuehl, 2000:60). After much debate, and painful discourse, the Apostles eventually came to this conclusion. However, it is evident that the practice of table fellowship was viewed differently in the Diaspora than in Jerusalem (Bockmuehl, 2000:61). For example, objections surrounding table fellowship arose in Jerusalem, where more stringent rules applied, and not elsewhere (specifically Antioch) (Bockmuehl, 2000:61).

The men from Judea (Acts 15:1), bound by stringent rules, caused a commotion and demanded answers from the Apostles. The first-century church needed a cohesive voice on issues, including those regarding table fellowship. The ever present and increasingly pressing question of “how to deal with the Gentiles” posed a tremendous challenge to the Apostles. It would take the deliberation of the Jerusalem Council to determine a cogent response from which a unified framework could emerge.

5.3 The Jerusalem Council Debates Incoming Gentiles

The outline of the research method (Chapter 1) in this present work propose a strategy to examine biblical and extra-biblical references using a historical-critical review. This method makes sense because the historical-critical method is used prolifically in exegesis and with few exceptions, scholars use historical-critical analysis for a review of Acts 15 (Mahan, 2013:41).

Those who engage in the historical reconstruction of early Christianity have been said to either modify or oppose nineteenth-century views of the founder of the Tübingen schools (Bennema, 2013:754). Bennema notes that those who modify, affirm that earliest Christianity was characterized by substantial tensions and conflicts, while those who oppose claim unity and homogeneity in early Christianity (Bennema, 2013:754). Dunn (2006), Baur (1979) and Robinson and Koester (2006) uphold the position of tension which argues that Christianity did not develop as a homogeneous movement (Bennema, 2013:754). Others, like Bauckham (2005) and Schnabel (2004), lean towards the side of homogeneity (Bennema, 2013:754).

A novice exegete borders on presumption when writing about the Jerusalem Council from a historical-critical view, since reconstructing the events contiguous to the Council is fraught with difficulty (Meier, 1996:446). Osborne brings clarity in his comments on Acts 15 saying, “Our task is to decipher the meaning of the historical-theological text in the biblical narrative, not to reconstruct the original event” (Osborne, 2006:200). In this section, rather than endeavour an exhaustive reconstruction, I attempt to decipher the meaning of select contexts and texts. Both history and theology are considered, all the while working from a “modifying” framework.

As exposed in the previous section, Jews outside of the Jesus movement in the first-century were asking the question, “How do we deal with Gentiles?” (Rashkover & Kavka, 2008:127). However, inside the Jesus movement another question, described as the most contentious and divisive question of the first-generation Church, was being asked: “Do Gentiles need to become Jews to be saved?” (see Acts 15:1) (Notley, 2004). One obvious implication of the later question is, “are Gentiles to be circumcised?”

Bock proposes a set of questions, listing the practical concerns at stake from the Pharisaic Christian point of view (Bock, 2007:486):

- “How can Gentiles ignore G-d’s covenant law?”
- “How can fellowship occur if Jewish Christians keep the law, but Gentiles do not?”
- “Does the issue of uncleanness emerge?”
- “How can law-observing Jewish Christians and law-ignoring Gentile Christians coexist?”

The pressure to address these questions mounted when men from Judea arrived in Antioch demanding circumcision and adherence to the full Law of Moses for the salvation for Gentiles

(Acts 15:1).¹⁶⁹ According to Hengel and Schwemer (1997:266), this visit from the “men from Judea” was probably not the first. The passage is likely connected to Paul’s reference to “brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (Galatians 2:4) (Hengel & Schwemer, 1997:266).

The majority view holds that this account in Galatians 2:1-10 relates to Acts 15 and that the Antioch crisis occurs after the Jerusalem Council (Dunn, 2009:454).¹⁷⁰ Alternatively, Bennema, in his article *The Ethical*, notes that Bauckham in *Conflict in early Christianity: An appraisal of Bauckham’s proposal on the Antioch crisis and the Jerusalem Council* proposes that the Antioch crisis was the lead-up to the Jerusalem council and that the Jerusalem church remained central by giving authoritative guidance for the entire Christian mission (Bennema, 2013:754). The author of this document supports the majority view. Either way, the general problem of dealing with Gentiles had become intolerable, making the Jerusalem Council imperative.

Supporting the majority view, Hengel postulates that the Gentiles who were being baptized in the middle or late 30s were the ones in Antioch subject to the visits from the “men from Judea.” The Gentiles are those accepted into “the sect of the Pharisees” (i.e. the earliest church) (Hengel & Schwemer, 1997:266). If the dating of the “Jerusalem Council” isn’t until the second half of the 40s, what took so long for the issue of circumcision to arise and for a crisis to break out? Several reasons for the delay suggested by the same authors include the intensification of the former more “liberal” position in Jerusalem and the growth of Zealotism there (Hengel & Schwemer, 1997:266). Dunn proposes that the delay is due to Jewish traditionalists who saw Gentiles in the same ambiguous situation as Gentile ‘G-d-fearers’ without the need for a change in status (Dunn, 2009:445).

Turning to the Council itself, Luke reports on the Jerusalem meeting from the perspective of the Jerusalemites (Haenchen, 1971:461). Lead actors in his report include Peter and James (Acts 15:7-11; 13-21) with secondary appearances by Barnabas and Paul (Acts 15:12) (Dunn, 2009:449). The author of Acts demonstrates the vital importance Luke gives to the Cornelius episode (Acts 10:1-11:18). In that role, Peter’s acceptance of Cornelius is “the determinative precedent for the whole Christian mission” (Dunn, 2009:449-50). On the other hand, out of the spotlight, Paul recalls his contribution to the decision not to require circumcision for Gentile

¹⁶⁹ Of course, the law was never intended to lead to salvation (Romans 3:20)

¹⁷⁰ For more, see Walker, 2013

believers in the account of Galatians 2.1-10. His account is secondary in Luke's account (Acts 15:12).

Several aspects of the Council narrative reflect a judicial "court-like" setting and are worth exploring considering the authority demonstrated by the Apostles. Peter speaks like an expert witness saying, "Now then, why do you try to test G-d by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). At that point, the whole assembly becomes silent (15:12), a sign of admission in halakhic settings (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:828). The phrase "he replied" (15:13) (an idiomatic phrase and possibly a formal halakhic construct) shows that his answer is coming. He continues by saying, "Brothers, listen to me" (Acts 15:13) using ἀκούσατέ, possibly the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Shema (שמעו). Le Cornu says that in doing so he calls others to "hear" what was spoken as if in the Shema itself (Deuteronomy 6:4, Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:830). The language in the next scene (Acts 15:14ff) also displays signs of court mannerisms. James relates to Peter's experience with Cornelius as if it were a "precedent" or "case law" (ma'aseh in Hebrew משפטה) (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:830).

Without delay, James continues, saying "The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written..." (Acts 15:15), indicating that what he is about to say gives credibility to his stance (Longenecker, 1984:831). He continues talking about Gentiles with a striking resemblance to words normally reserved for people over whom G-d's name has been invoked (Longenecker, 1984:831) as follows: "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things, things known from long ago" (Acts 15:16-18).

LaVerdiere shows that "the words of the prophets" in Acts 15:15 refer to several prophetic passages seen in the next three verses. Instead of quoting all three of the prophets, he conflates Amos 9:11-12; Isaiah 45:21 and Jeremiah 12:15. Spangler speaks about this rabbinic technique of bringing together passages from different places in Scripture, as "stringing pearls."¹⁷¹ The author describes stringing pearls as combining verses to explore their great truths. Jesus employed the

¹⁷¹ When Ben Azzi, a rabbi from the early second century, employed the practice of 'stringing pearls', it is said that "a fire flashed around him". "When they were 'stringing pearls,' the words in the Pentateuch with those in the Prophets, and the Prophets with the Writings, the fire flashed around them and the words rejoiced as on the day they were delivered from Sinai" – Song of Songs Rabbah 1:10 (Spangler & Tverberg, 2009).

technique in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 when he collected passages with references to Isaiah and the Psalms (Spangler & Tverberg, 2009:43).

By using the “stringing pearls” technique, a biblical architect can explore great truths and express them with great credibility (Spangler & Tverberg, 2009:43). Tverberg explains, “‘You are my Son’ comes from Psalm 2:7; ‘whom I love’ comes from Genesis 22:2; and ‘with you I am well pleased’ comes from Isaiah 42:1.” In just three short quotes from Old Testament Scriptures, “G-d speaks of Jesus as a king, a servant and a Son who will become a sacrifice” (Spangler & Tverberg, 2009:43).

With his choice of passages, specifically Isaiah 16:5 and Amos 9:11, James conjures up images of the tabernacle (or “tent”) of David, the eschatological temple, restoration, and rebuilding (LaVerdiere, 1998:181).

The “tent of David” in this passage may serve as a metaphor for the community of Jesus-believers, the restoration of Israel, or the resurrection of Christ (Wendel, 2011:264). Levine and Brettler (2011:229) contribute, “The Septuagint, which in Luke’s account is what James quotes, refers to G-d’s act of restoration of all peoples, Jews and Gentiles”. Bauckham (1995) posits that the fallen tabernacle or “tent” is the Temple, rebuilt as the eschatological Temple, which then becomes the Church (Turner, 1996:313). Max Turner (1996) in his article, Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts, disagrees, leaning instead on the interpretation (with modifications) of Dupont and Strauss (Turner, 1996), who argue that the metaphor in Acts 15:16 refers to David’s fallen household rebuilt through the Christ-event. Wendel concludes that the intention of the term “tent of David” is equivalent to Jewish Christ-believers or the Jerusalem church (Wendel, 2011:265). The Targums¹⁷² (albeit late date) of Isaiah 16:5 and Amos 9:11 take these passages to be messianic (Glenny, 2007:311). Amos 9:11 reads;

“At that time, I will set up again the kingdom of the house of David that has fallen. I will rebuild their cities and set up their congregations anew. It shall rule over all the kingdoms, and it shall destroy and make an end of the greatness of armies, but it shall not be rebuilt, and re-established as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11).

This verse appears in the Qumran writings, where the community interpreted the fallen “tent of David” in Amos 9:11 as a reference to the neglected Books of the Law, which were later

¹⁷² Amos 9:11 is also quoted (without 9:12) in CD 7:16 and in 4Q174 3:12 from Qumran.

reestablished (Wise, Abegg & Cook, 1999: 433)¹⁷³. The context of Qumran writing (4Q174 3:12) is the time of future glory envisioned as the setting for the arrival of the inspired Interpreter of Scripture, most certainly a hint of a future event. Wise *et al.* (1999:433) surmizes that the passages speak of G-d's overarching plan and act of restoration for all people, Jew and Gentile.

The fact that the quotation from Amos 9:11 already functioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, was not accidental; it formed the backdrop for the new thing G-d was doing in the first-century world concerning gentiles. The phrase "... and set up their congregations anew ..." (Amos 9:11) is particularly insightful considering gentile synagogue attendance (Acts 5:21). The reality of a new kind of congregation, integrating gentiles who bore G-d's name, was a reality for those watching G-d do things from long ago (Acts 15: 17,18). No one would be the same.

The conflation of Amos 9:11-12; Isaiah 45:21 and Jeremiah 12:15 in Acts 15 gave James insight into how to deal with gentile newcomers and inspired him to launch his speech. Against the "tent of David" backdrop, James gives his final decree saying circumcision is not required while other virtues, relating to basic to human nature, are required (Acts 15:19-20). His decree does not provide an answer for Gentile Christians to know what rule of life they must observe in order to be saved (though the extreme Jewish Christians in Acts 15:1 pose the problem in these terms). Instead, the decree of James intended to decide under what conditions Gentile Christians could be admitted to full religious fellowship with their friends of Jewish birth (Simon, 1970:438).

Who benefits from the verdict? Advantages fall in several courts. The liberal decision on circumcision falls in favour of Paul; the other verdicts — like Acts 15:20 forbidding things "strangled and from blood" — favour the Jewish conservatism of James (Del Tondo, 2006:116).

The text forbidding what is "strangled and from blood" probably refers to the kosher laws, and thus successfully sets regulations for table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians on Jewish terms (Bennema, 2013:753; Dunn, 2009:462).

On this matter, Bockmuehl is careful to point out that although table fellowship was an issue from the Jewish point of view, it was not the primary point. "It should be noted carefully that the primary point in this Lucan account is not that of table fellowship in mixed congregations (unlike Galatians 2:12 and pace most commentators) but more generally the halakhic status of Gentiles" (Bockmuehl, 2000:164). Likewise, Yehoshua suggests that the four rules, including the Apostolic Decree, dealt with cultic idolatry and not "table fellowship", although admittedly, they contain

¹⁷³ Amos quotes are found in Qumran, in CD 7:16 and in 4Q174 3:12 (excluding 9:12)

special laws of Judaism demonstrating that within the Christian community, Jews and Gentiles were expected to eat together regularly (Segal, 1992:199).

Explanations regarding the guidelines as to what Gentiles must do (or not do in this case) are listed in Acts 15:29 and Acts 15:20-21. The requirements in these two passages have some similarities to, and have been referred to by some as “the Seven Commandments” listed in the Talmud (T. ‘Abod. Zar 8.4) (mentioned in Chapter 2 of this work). These laws are elaborated in the Talmud as the offences of idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, forbidden sexual relations, theft, tearing of a limb from a living animal and the positive obligation to set up a system of justice (Sinclair, 2003:36). Sinclair comments, “It is noteworthy that according to an aggadic tradition cited in the Talmud, six of these laws were given to Adam. The seventh was given to Noah since meat-eating originated with him” (Sinclair, 2003:36). In other Jewish literature, they’re known as the so-called Noahide Commands (Wilf, 2008:77), though some scholars refute the correlation between the Acts 15 verdict and these labels (a topic addressed in the next section).

Whatever their title, the text reflects Luke’s account of the agreement reached by these three key figures, Peter, James and Paul, in Christianity’s beginnings. In a most harmonious way, he conveys (and all three agree) that a genuine turning to G-d by a Gentile should be sufficient. Moreover, non-Christian Jews can dispense with most of the ritual barriers to associate with such Gentiles, and cease bothering and harassing them to convert (Dunn, 2009:465).

Judaism had always been conscious of and concerned with the condition of the righteous nonJew (Sanders, 1977:210-212) and the Jerusalem Council addressed the condition like no other event in history. In effect, the decision reached by the council must be considered “... one of the boldest and magnanimous in the annals of church history” (Longenecker, 1984:39).

5.4 Noahide Commands and the Apostolic Decree

While it could be said that the New Testament contains two versions of the Jerusalem Council, Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15, this present document focuses attention on the account in Acts. The omission of Galatians may be considered short-sighted by Achtemeier (Dunn 2009:463) who, in *Quest for Unity* (chapters 2-5), states that “most commentators conclude that Luke’s account (of the Jerusalem Council) cannot be regarded as straightforward historical” (Dunn 2009:463).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Some scholars dispute whether the Jerusalem Council even produced the Apostolic Decree (Bockmuehl, 2000:81).

Partial reasoning for Achtemeier's assertion is the specific omission of Paul's singular exhortation in Galatians to "remember the poor" (Gal 2:10) (Dunn 2009:663).

F.F. Bruce clarifies the two versions, saying that Galatians 2:1-10 was a private conference, and the Acts 15 meeting was held publicly (Bruce, 1988:311). Both meetings purposed to find a solution to the problem of G-d-fearers who became followers of Jesus and received the Holy Spirit as they entered the new Jesus movement. Their decision seems to reflect an attitude of concession for encouraging newcomers to the faith. Accordingly, they chose not to trouble or burden Gentiles turning to G-d through Yeshua with matters beyond their capacity.

On the other hand, Gentiles were expected to learn more about the Torah each week (Acts 15:21). They would not be deterred from taking upon themselves additional observances according to their respective abilities and desires (Isaiah 14:1, 56:6). This attitude lines up with the rabbinic view: "A Noahide who wishes to perform any other commandment of the Law with a view to receiving a reward, is not to be hindered from performing it properly" (Yad, Kings 10:10) (Le Cornu & Shuman, 2003:835).

The Council's decision at Jerusalem, written and later referred to as the Apostolic Decree, appears in Acts in 15:20, 15:29, and is paralleled in 21:25 (NIV). The first version is James', the second belongs to the Council, and the last is reiterated by the Jerusalem leaders. Both the first and the second occur somewhat concurrently, but differently in terms of authority. The last one occurs about eight years later (57 C.E.) than the first two (49 C.E.) (Park 2009:278):

- Acts 15:20 "we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood."
- Acts 15:29 "you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."
- Acts 21:25 "they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality"

Table 5-1: Council Determinations

Acts 15:20	food polluted by idols	sexual immorality	meat of strangled animals	Blood
Acts 15:29	food sacrificed to idols	Blood	meat of strangled animals	sexual immorality
Acts 21:25	food sacrificed to idols	Blood	meat of strangled animals	sexual immorality

The requirements listed in these passages is mentioned earlier in this document as part of “the Seven Commandments” (T. ‘Abod. Zar 8.4). I support the proposal that “the Seven Commandments” originated from a document fashioned by Jews for non-Jews (people of the earth) called the Noahide Laws.¹⁷⁵ Some scholars who align with this thinking assert that the Noahide Laws correspond closely to Apostolic Decree, specifically the non-canonical Western text (Tucker, 2011:93; Zetterholm, 2009:139; Pawlikowski & Perelmuter, 2000:128).

Novak casts doubt on the fact that the Noahide Laws were in effect in the first-century. He supported his reasoning, in part, by the fact that no New Testament or Patristic text refers to a definite body of laws as specifically “Noahide”.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Novak says that the four prohibitions in Acts 15:29 were required for even nominal transition of Gentile converts from paganism to Christianity. In that way, they would be in place with or without mention of the term “Noahide Commands” (Novak, 2011:28). Novak continues saying that New Testament authors had to deal with the question of minimal moral standards for Gentile converts to Christianity. He criticizes

¹⁷⁵ Extensive treatment of the Noahide Laws by J. Schultz appears in *Two Views of the Patriarchs: Noahides and pre-Sinai Israelites*, in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Hahum M. Glatzer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday by His Students*, edited by Michael A. Fishbane and Paul R. Flohr (1975:43-59).

¹⁷⁶ Further, Novak refutes the power of a body of moral principles to cause Gentiles to be pleasing to Gd without accepting the Church’s message of G-d’s revelation (Novak, 2011:28).

W.D. Davies for claiming that New Testament authors were familiar with the Noahide commandments (Novak 2011: 28).¹⁷⁷

Dunn believes that the terms of the agreement in the apostolic decree are seemingly *not* based on the Noahide Laws. His thinking is that the Noahide rules would have already been in place as “rules of association” between Jews and Gentiles (Dunn 2009:466). Fitzmyer (Lyall 2006:67; Fitzmyer 2008:256) proposes another reason why the Noahide Laws are not the basis of the Decree. He suggests the *Holiness Code* of Leviticus 17-18 as the basis of the Decree¹⁷⁸. Likewise, Bochniel demonstrates that the prohibitions in the Decree are precisely those that in Leviticus 17-18 apply to Gentiles living “in the midst of the house of Israel” (Bochniel, 2000:78). Segal refers to the Noahide Commands as an “anachronistic term” in the first-century, saying Paul believed that because of the transcendent natural law within them, the Torah was the moral guide for Gentiles as well as Jews (Segal, 1992:200).

Some scholars hold a middle ground. Taylor reflects his theory that something like the Noahide guidelines was already in place when James crafted words for the Decree. In Taylor’s words, the Decree was “close to the first Noahide precepts” and were intended to lead Gentiles back to civil legislation (Taylor, 2001:376). Nanos refers to the Noahide Commandments and the “apostolic decree” synonymously. He sees them as behavioural requirements contiguous with Jewish faith and practice for Gentiles who have turned through faith in Jesus Christ to the One G-d of Israel as the One G-d of the nations (Romans 6; 14:15-20, 21ff.; 16:17-20) (Nanos, 1996:10).

Some scholarly opinions side with the Noahide Commands as the basis of the Decree. They include Cohen (2006:210), who asserts that the Noahide laws were “lurking in some form” in the background to Acts 15. Skarsaune reflects his opinion on the status of the Noahide commands while talking about Gentiles converted to Judaism. After conversion, he says, “One is no longer outside the people of Israel; one is inside, and therefore has to relate to the entire law, not just Noahide or other commandments considered valid for all people” (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:12).

David Instone-Brewer (2009:307) asserts that the Decree “may originate from the list of so-called Noachian commandments which Jews regarded as universal”.

¹⁷⁷ W.D. Davies in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* says Judaism has always known that the whole of the Law should not be required of the Gentiles (1980:348).

¹⁷⁸ He also puts forth that the Decree was a practical concession to help Jewish and Gentile Christians to get along, not a theological statement intended to eternally bind all Christians.

Despite diverse opinions from available extra-textual sources, document origins may shed new light on the problem. For example, beginning with Ancient Judaism, there was a tendency to summarize the essence of one's religion into formulations, credos, confessions of faith, or statements of principles known as Regula (Flusser, 2012)¹⁷⁹. Each credo distilled virtues and vices into concise wording based on teachings of the rabbis. The following discussion explores this background.

A Jewish teaching, the so-called Jewish Two Ways Document, was identified by van de Sandt and Flusser as the source for many better-known religious formulations (Van de Sandt, 2007:39; Koet, Moyise & Verheyden, 2013:331).¹⁸⁰ Some by-products of the Jewish Two Ways may have been the letter of James, the Didache (also called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)¹⁸¹ and the Western (non-canonical) form of the Apostolic Decree (Van de Sandt, 2007:39; Flusser, 2012).¹⁸² The "two ways" pattern, thought to be written before the end of the first-century (Draper, 1996:197), is also reflected (in the Yeshua tradition). These include the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 7:13-14) (Bieringer *et al.*, 2014). Draper continues by saying, "Already in the first decades of Christianity the Two Ways was considered to be a product of the Apostolic Mother Church" (Draper, 1996:211).

Zangenberg is among those who disagree with the proposal of the Two Ways Document as the life source for other documents. Speaking about the Didache, he puts forth the possibility that Flusser may have gone too far in reconstructing the *Wortlaut* of a Jewish "Two Ways" (Zangenberg, 2008:51). Another sceptic concerning the Didache is Grandbery, who says the original document behind the Didache is doubtless the Greek behind a Latin manuscript discovered by Schlecht in 1899, entitled *De Doctrina Apostolorum* (Grandbery, 1909).

Flusser expounds his theory about the Apostolic Decree by saying it existed in canonical and noncanonical forms. The latter, also known as the "Western" text of Acts, whose most important

¹⁷⁹ Gedalyahu Alon demonstrates this tendency to create confessions of faith (Flusser, 2012).

¹⁸⁰ For more on the influence of the Two Ways Document, including influence on the epistle of Barnabas, Timothy J. Horner recently finished his D.Phil. thesis at the University of Oxford <http://ecole.evansville.edu/articles/earlyrel.html>

¹⁸¹ For the most part the Two Ways is covered in the first six chapters of the Didache (Van de Sandt, 2007:39).

¹⁸² It may be noted here that the western form of the Apostolic Decree, an early Christian formulation whose most important representative is the Codex Bezae, is possibly the original form of the canonical Apostolic Decree (Flusser, 2012).

representative is *Codex Bezae*, he estimates to be the original form of the Apostolic Decree (Grandbery, 1909; Flusser, 2012). The non-canonical text shows the Acts decree as including the three capital offenses of Judaism, these are things which Judaism most strongly abhorred and sought to avoid: namely idolatry, fornication and homicide (Watkins, 1920:11).¹⁸³ ¹⁸⁴ Referencing the three capital offenses Flusser states,

“We assume that under no circumstances was a Jew to trespass the three capital sins, but also that non-Jews were equally obligated if they wanted to participate in the salvation of Israel. By a decision of the apostolic church in Jerusalem, these mortal sins also were forbidden to believers of Gentile origin” (Flusser, 2012).

The School of Ishmael (90-135 C.E.) hints at the three-fold list in a comment on Psalm 125, “Uttering slander is as great a sin as the three capital sins” (idolatry, murder, and fornication) (b. Ber. 19a, Tractate Tehilim).¹⁸⁵ ¹⁸⁶ Instone-Brewer (2009:312) labels these three as “mortal sins” identifying them as idolatry, uncovering nakedness (i.e. sexual sin) and blood (both eating it and shedding it), Instone-Brewer asserts these three were easily recognized by the Jews of the firstcentury.¹⁸⁷

The three-fold formulation articulating the essence of Judaism correlates within the Noahide commands. The Mishnah says the Noahide Commands were to ensure a place in the world to come (Torah, Hilkhot M'lakhim 8:14). According to the Mishnah, a Gentile who followed the

¹⁸³ Interestingly, the Day of Atonement scapegoat brings reconciliation for the uncleanness of Israel in regard to idolatry, fornication and bloodshed (i.e. murder) (Sifra to Leviticus 16:16 and b. Shevi. 7 b.)

¹⁸⁴ The first mention of a closely related list of the three proscriptions, though not identical with the usual triad, are mentioned in a book that belongs to the same Jewish movement as that out of which the Essene sect of Qumran arose, the Book of Jubilees composed in the second century B.C.E (Jub. 20:56; 23: 14, 17). Likewise, the much later Damascus Document lists similar prohibitions (CD 4:13-19).

¹⁸⁵ Flusser and Safrai reference W. Bacher (Die Aggada der Tannaiten (1903) vol. 2, 336) here.

¹⁸⁶ R. Ishmael came up with his own list of rules, based on Hillel’s list of seven rules, dealing with hermeneutics (Hirsch 1984:51).

¹⁸⁷ David Instone Brewer talks about the three prohibitions (called capital offences above) in their ‘early’ form (Jub. 7.20–21) and ‘late’ form of the Noahide commands, citing the latter as a list officially enacted at the rabbinic synod of Lydda in the early second century (Instone-Brewer, 2009:308).

Noahide Commands was considered righteous (Sanh.105a). Over time, commands known as Noahide grew in number and influence in Jewish thinking.

At this point, it is prudent to examine the Jerusalem Council's document concerning the three-fold capital sins. What was the apostolic four-fold list designed to accomplish? In his book, *The Lifting of the Veil*, Avram Yehoshua (2008:14) suggests that they were a filter that Gentiles needed to pass through to know the boundaries of the Covenant into which they had entered. Gentiles had the propensity to add more gods to the gods they already had and to carry on in their sacrificial or sexual idolatry. Every Gentile in the ancient world fully understood pagan worship, and many practiced it (Levine, 2011:229). As new Christians, Jesus couldn't be seen as "one more G-d." In that way, the package of rulings from the Jerusalem Council gave Gentiles freedom to stop pagan practices immediately. It also revealed to them what was permissible and what was not permissible. When put into their proper place, the four proscriptions served as a filter to open the doors that led to the observance of the law. Thus, Gentile salvation could be seen as authentic (Yehoshua, 2008:13).

In essence, the four items were red lines no Gentile should cross, even under the new grace given to them. Yehoshua adds, "It'll become apparent that these four rules weren't the 'only ones' for the Gentile but the first of many that G-d gave to His people Israel, both Jewish and Gentile believer" (Yehoshua, 2008:14). Regarding the order of items listed in Acts 15:20, Yehoshua (2008:14) offers this explanation:

- Rule one forbids the Gentile from eating meat of the pagan sacrifice.
- Rule two forbids cult prostitution after eating of the sacrifice.
- Rule three speaks of a pagan sacrifice where the neck was strangled.
- Rule four forbids the drinking of fresh raw blood from the pagan sacrifice (which according to Yehoshua, is the negative counterpart to the drinking of the Messiah's blood from the third cup of the Passover).

In the order of items listed in Acts 15:29 and 21:25, Instone-Brewer (2009:257) suggests each is associated with food and also with social and moral implications (see Table 5-2).

Table 5-2: Social (Culinary) and Moral Implications of the Apostolic Decree

	Idol offerings	Blood	Smothering (strangling)	Sexual immorality
Culinary	Do not buy meat which may have been an idol offering.	Do not buy meat which has not been properly drained...	... including animals that may have been killed by asphyxiation.	Do not let a woman in her menses prepare the meal.
Morality	Avoid idolatry, including social functions in temples.	Avoid bloodshed and violence...	... especially including infanticide (or abortion) used for birth control.	Avoid improper sexual relations, including prostitutes and homosexual practices.

Before leaving this chapter, two final comments are worth noting. The first from Harvey Falk, who adds an interesting twist by saying the dispute of the first-century wasn't about whether these proscriptions were incumbent upon Gentiles, but rather, whether a Gentile who observed them received a share in the world to come (Falk, 2003:75).¹⁸⁸ The second is from Deines' discussion of Wehnert (Wehnert, 1997; Deines 2013:157), who speaks about the regulations in Apostolic Decree as perceivably, "only the tip of the iceberg" (Deines 2013:157). In other words, there would be more shaping of their lives by the hearing of Moses' teachings each Sabbath.

5.5 Governance Structures: Sanhedrin and the Authority of the Apostolic Leaders

This segment examines the customary avenues for establishing and enforcing halakha (rulings) prior to the temple destruction. It also considers how the apostolic leaders considered themselves authorized to establish Jewish laws regarding Gentiles outside the customary law-making avenues. What made them feel qualified to make decisions heretofore reserved for Judaism's governance leaders? Specifically, how could they include Gentiles when they did not meet the requirements for inclusion? This segment considers one of the unique circumstances that

¹⁸⁸ Sages R. Eliezer and R. Joshua headed the debate.

occurred as a result of events at Cornelius' house: the need for new religious laws regarding goyim. We begin by briefly examine the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Notably, the Sanhedrin was the official priestly regulating body that governed Temple activities (Price, 2012:174). As a governing organization, the Sanhedrin of the first-century was a legislative and scholarly judicial group, consisting of Pharisaic Sages and Sadducees, headed by two Pharisaic scholars (zugot) (Price, 2012:174). A diversity of names used included *beit din ha-gadol* (the Great or High Court), *beit din shel shi'im ye'ehad* (the Court of Seventy-one), and Sanhedrin. "Bet Din" will be used interchangeably with "Sanhedrin" from here onwards.

Not all members of the Sanhedrin were Sages, but all Sages were *smukhin* (plural designation of semikhah) (Safrai *et al.*, 2006:66). Berger critically reviews the Sanhedrin and Sages saying that both Sanhedrin and Sages decided all doubtful matters of Jewish law (Berger, 1998:44). In essence, Sages carried the same level of authority as the Sanhedrin. Kaplan notes that "outside" Sages (those without Bet Din status, i.e. not part of the Sanhedrin) could enter into the deliberations of the Sanhedrin without voting privileges (Kaplan, 2004). Neusner (1970:218) says that from the first generation of ordination onwards, Sages constituted an influential and ongoing class of officials in Jewish life with official status within the Jewish polity: "Before then, the Sages were recognized through neither title nor official status". Even though they had no 'official' status or title, one wonders if the elevated status of Sages started stirring in the cultural background of Jerusalem before the first official ordinations took place.

Scholars generally concede that the first generation of ordained rabbinic Sages began with Simon ben Gamaliel II, a foremost authority of the Bet Din and a distinguished Sage of the first-century (Neusner, 1970:218). He was a Pharisee of Jerusalem (Acts 5:34; 22:3), grandson of Hillel the Elder, heir to a prestigious house of Hillel (Cohen, 2006:218).

However, there is some controversy surrounding the postulation that ordination began with Gamaliel. According to Neusner it was not Gamaliel, but rather Yohanan ben Zakkai who instituted the formal appointment of ordination. At that time, the term "rabbi" appeared as an official office (Goldenberg, 2007:214; Safrai, 2006:66). Zakkai purportedly arrived at Yavneh after the 70 C.E. war, before Gamaliel, and situated himself as the legitimate authority of the academy of Hillel Zakkai. He transitioned his disciples into rabbis, and then Gamaliel arrived, took leadership and continued the movement of ordination (Neusner, 1970:218).

After ben Zakkai's attempt to assume the top academy position, Gamaliel was undercut again, this time by R. Mier and R. Nathan, who tried to depose him. In a hostile response to an ordinance initiated by Gamaliel, the former rabbi said to the latter, "I am the Hakam, and you are the Av Beth

Din let us retaliate... I shall become AvBet Din and you the Nasi¹⁸⁹ (Talmud, Horayot 13b; Becher, 2005:106).

From these examples, neither political stability nor positions of authority could be taken for granted. Both were subject to takeover by other qualified leaders. One wonders if the practice of appropriating positions of authority went on in the years before this incident. The Sages involved acted boldly and against the regular traditional order of the day.

What was the nature and structure of the first-century Sanhedrin? Newman (1950) provides the groundwork for associating the Sanhedrin with *semikhah* (Terry, 2013:544). *Semikahah* (*smicha* or *semikhah*) derives from a Hebrew term meaning “laying on of hands,” it sometimes also means to “rely on” or “to be authorized”. The term signifies the transmission of authority to give advice or judgment (Bridger, 1976:438). According to the Mishnah, classical *semikhah* was granted by a court of three judges and later required the participation of at least one who attained *semikhah* status (Mishnah Sanhedrin 2a). Each Sage of the Bet Din, according to Halakhic tradition, was required to be ordained by his teacher, continuing an official chain of ordination (and *Semikahah*).

The tradition went back to Moses’s ordination of Joshua (Numbers 27:15-23, Deuteronomy 34:9, Pirke Avot 1:1) and stopped in 360 CE when Hillel II dissolved the Sanhedrin and fixed the Jewish calendar (Collins, 2002:197).

In the author’s mind, the Sanhedrin is understood as a cohesive, stable, singular institution. Jewish writings provide detailed stipulations about the form and function of the Sanhedrin supporting this view. But maybe that wasn’t the case.

Brad Young affirms that some rabbinic sources described the way the Sanhedrin intended to function, rather than the way it truly operated (Young, 2008). Grabbe asserts that the Sanhedrin may well have been presented as an idealized concept centuries after the Temple had fallen, and the office of high priest had disappeared. He doubts that a specific, singular body known as the Sanhedrin ever existed (Grabbe, 2004:234).

Goodblatt (1994:99) analyses passages using the term “elders” (πρεσβύτεροι) in first-century Jewish leadership and takes the position of the Sanhedrin as, “a noninstitutionalized oligarchy” (Goodblatt, 1994:99). Goodblatt, as quoted by Cohen (2013:167), describes the term as an “indeterminate group of elders rather than a formally constitutive collective.” Grabbe concludes that it may have varied in “composition, authority, function, and status” through the Second

¹⁸⁹ The meaning of the term *Nasi* is literally “prince” or “captain.”

Temple period (Grabbe 2004:235). Howard Clark Kee (1999:52) draws on Greek Jewish sources of the Hellenistic period and Roman Empire, regarding the term 'synednon' of the first-century, and challenging the reality of a singular institution.

Kee says that one thing is clear: there is no single 'synednon' (spelling occurs as Kee states) that served as a kind of Jewish Supreme Court. Instead, he says the term "synednon" referred to gatherings (councils) of rabbis. In his article, entitled *Central Authority in Second-Temple Judaism and Subsequently: From Synedrion to Sanhedrin*, Kee (1999:52) argues the plurality of the term 'synednon', saying the councils or smaller sanhedrins were,

"informal consultations by individuals seeking advice from families and friends to formal sessions called by governmental leaders of administrators to confer with local leaders, as well as official councils composed of local or regional agents of power and prestige".

Secondly, Kee asserts that these councils served at the pleasure of, or in collaboration with, the central Roman government, rather than as Jewish agencies fostering the religious interests of the priestly establishment. In his opinion, the "synednon" (or 'Sanhedrin') of the first-century was more politically motivated, regardless of the religious makeup of its leadership (Kee, 1999:53).

Mordechai Becher suggests a volatile Sanhedrin during the first-century (Becher, 2005:83, 106). Encyclopaedia Britannica states that although mention of the Sanhedrin occurs in eminent sources — the Hellenistic-Jewish historian Josephus, the New Testament, and the Talmud — these accounts are "fragmentary, apparently contradictory, and often obscure. Hence, its exact nature, composition and function remain a subject of scholarly investigation and controversy" (Abdulla, 2008).

From the research so far, according to a construction of reality from my worldview, these observations stand out as pertinent to this discussion about first-century governance:

- The Sanhedrin may have been in a "volatile state of existence".
- The threat of leadership usurpation among Sages and Rabbis could not be underestimated.
- The Sanhedrin existed with fluidity of structure rather than as a singular, clearly defined entity.
- Seats within the Sanhedrin may have been filled by combinations of members.
- We cannot assume that all the information needed to make conclusions is available.

Prior to answering how leaders of The Way influenced the governance of the day, we must determine how they saw themselves in juxtaposition to other Jewish leaders. Oakley says that, like the Sages of that time, leaders of the Way were looked up to by their communities to settle disputes, interpret Scripture, and negotiate solutions in crisis conditions (Oakley, 2013). A relevant example is the dispute between the Hellenistic and native Jews over the care of widows (Acts 6:1-6). Witherington argues that James, the leader of the Church, was a Sage (Witherington, 2006). Additionally, Paul the Apostle, having been sent to Gamaliel to be “brought up and educated and thoroughly trained in the law” (Acts 22:3), may have had *semikhah* conferred upon him as a Sage. Collins (2002:197) argues that Timothy, as Paul’s apprentice, would have also been granted *semikhah*.

If Paul and James held *semikhah*, in theory, they had the clout to make decisions on the level of the “court” of the Sanhedrin. It can be deduced that they were relied upon by the body of the early church for advice and judgment. Also, they made determinations about doubtful matters of Jewish law just like the Sanhedrin.

Peter also had authority. Whether he acted formally as a Sage is unknown, but he had been given authority by Jesus, who promised to hand over to him the “keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19). Jesus may or may not have conferred *semikhah* upon him. Either way, he was chosen to be the one through whom Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and come to believe (Acts 15:6).

The author asserts that because of the condition the Sanhedrin — volatile, multifaceted, fluid — and the authoritative positions of at least two of the leaders of The Way — Paul, James and possibly Peter — the leaders felt confident to make decisions heretofore reserved only for other governance leaders.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to understand how the earliest Christian leaders saw themselves as qualified to make organizational decisions apart from the Jewish governing body at the time, the Sanhedrin. It also further explored the behavioural expectations of Gentiles attracted to the movement of Jesus (the main research problem).

The objectives were to explore opinions of the larger Jewish population regarding Gentile inclusion in Judaism, to examine the topic of incoming Gentiles as debated at the Jerusalem Council, to inspect the Noahide commands and the Apostolic Decree, and to pour over governance structures of Judaism — particularly the Sanhedrin.

According to my construction, it seems that first-century Jews accepted Gentiles, but also exhibited bigotry toward them in certain circumstances and at certain times. Looking at Jewish teachings, if a proselyte found the conversion edicts overly harsh, the whole transformation process could be rendered invalid (Abodah Zarah). A further understanding was that, if they fell away from the faith after conversion, they could end up in a worse state than before. Fortunately, even in their non-converted state, Gentiles conceivably had “a portion in the world to come.”

Relations between Jews and Gentiles in their non-converted state were complicated at best. One complex issue was Table Fellowship. “To what degree should — or could — Jews fellowship with Gentiles?” This seemingly black-and-white question formed a crucial backbone as Jewish Christian leadership wrestled with the idea of Gentile inclusion. An objectively broad spectrum of halakha, in outlook and practice, may have existed such that Jews could eat with Gentiles without ceasing to be Jews. Jesus and his movement made generous allowances along these tolerant theological lines, following in the path of Hillel. However, pressure regarding table fellowship from traditional Jews created an intolerable environment for the apostolic leaders.

In a court-like setting, they gathered at the Jerusalem Council to engage in a doctrinal debate and tried to settle the question “how to deal with the Gentiles.” Diplomatically, they established an official set of halakhic rulings for non-Jews who followed the Jesus movement. The solution offered latitude so that Gentiles did not have to become converted Jews or even undergo circumcision. They would fulfil necessary qualifications by following certain guidelines that later came to be known as “the Seven Commandments” or Noahide laws.

The Noahide laws, which feasibly originated from an early creed called the “Two Ways”, were lurking in some form in the background to Acts 15. Their decision, called the Apostolic Decree, filtered the Gentiles through the boundaries of the Covenant so they could establish their relationship with G-d. They would learn G-d was an inclusive and yet desirous of an exclusive relationship with them. Additional guidelines required participation in continuing education through weekly Torah lessons (Acts 15:21).

Opinions in the Council congealed as James applied Amos 9 to envisage a restoration of Israel with a message to Gentiles seeking the Lord. For James, the messianic redemption would find its eschatological corollary in non-Jews seeking the G-d of Israel (Bockmuehl, 2000:82). James’ message refreshes the status of outsiders, giving them a new place among those who bore G-d’s name (Acts 15:17). This new vision essentially taught that “all other peoples” have a part, and “all the Gentiles” are called by G-d. The outcome reflected an attitude of concession and encouragement among the leaders of the Way. Paul’s singular addition to basic Gentile requirements was to “remember the poor.” The epoch-making and powerfully influential

Jerusalem Council proved to be a momentous meeting addressing the long-awaited inclusion of Gentiles.

According to my investigation, governance structures of the first-century left an atmosphere ripe for intervention by early church leaders. The variable structure of the Sanhedrin along with and the authority given to first-century Sages with Semikhah strengthened the environment. A couple of incidents, including Yohanan ben Zakki's appropriation of Simon ben Gamaliel II's place of authority, became the precedent for taking command without permission. Additionally, at least two of the first church leaders, Paul and James, held the credentials to sit in on court proceedings of the Bet Din and held qualifications to perform judgments. When combined, these factors paved the way for the apostolic leaders to feel qualified to make decisions heretofore reserved for Judaism's traditional governance leaders.

Based on the research, the author constructs a case based in part on how Paul and James (and possibly Peter) acted as Sages authorized to establish Jewish law regarding Gentiles. They did this outside the very traditional law-making avenues, but within the acceptable avenues available to them. These were among the unique circumstances that led them to make decisions of inclusion heretofore reserved for governance leaders. They ran the Jerusalem Council like a judicial proceeding of the (actual or idealistic) Sanhedrin (possibly acting as local or regional gathering). They acted within their credentials. Advantageously, creeds imbedded in their background proved to be a rich treasure-trove of instructions on what to do given their situation. In this way, they took

CHAPTER 6: THE EARLY CHURCH — ACCEPTANCE AND THE EXPECTATIONS OF GENTILE BELIEVERS

6.1 Introduction

The problem statement for this chapter is: After the Gentiles were transformed at Cornelius' house, how well were they accepted? And, having gone through the transformation experience at Cornelius' house, Gentile how much of the Torah did early Church leaders expect of them? Our problem statement decomposes with greater specificity when we ask: What were Christians observing? How did the Gentile Christians see themselves, and how did Jewish leaders of early Christianity adapt to, and incorporate these Gentiles? The answers to these inquiries form the foundation of this chapter.

The objectives are twofold. This first is to explore biblical texts with an emphasis on New Testament writings that reflect early Church thinking. This is entitled Canonical and Non-canonical literature. The second is to examine rabbinical and otherwise non-Canonical writings that reveal the cultural milieu in which the first Christians lived.

Before we determine the levels of “acceptance” granted to Gentile Christians (the aim of this chapter), we need to ascertain the level of Torah observance that early Church leaders expected of incoming Gentiles and how much acceptance they received. We will accomplish this by answering, in each subheading below, two specific questions: “What level of Torah observance did the early Church leaders expect of Gentiles?” and “What level of acceptance did they grant to Gentiles?”

The framework of this chapter, as with this entire dissertation, expresses the ethnography related to this fascinating historical era based on extra-textual realism found in available sources.

Evidence of the Jewish Christian leaders' attitudes towards Gentile Christians during this period is meagre and difficult to interpret. Hence, the process of examining this material is more subjective than other parts of my research endeavour, primarily because of the information gaps of antiquity. My personal intrigue about Jewish acceptance of Gentile Christians leaves me with the unavoidable sense that Jews wanted Christian Gentiles to fully enter the belief system that they were embracing. I believe Jewish Christians wanted to share the nature of the Father's full inheritance and full benefits (Galatians 3:26, Colossians 3:24 and Hebrews 9:15).

I'm captivated by the words of the prophet Zachariah who said, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by

the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that G-d is with you'" (Zechariah 8:23). How was this prophecy fulfilled by Gentiles and how were they truly perceived by Jewish followers of Yeshua in the first-century?

6.2 Canonical Literature

As we explore the mind-set of early Church leaders on the topic of Gentile "acceptance", one question stands out, namely, "What were early church leaders thinking on this topic?" New Testament writings contain several important clues.

Norman Geisler, Christian systematic theologian, philosopher, and apologist, sheds light on this in his article, "Should We Legislate Morality?" and later in his book, *Legislating Morality: Is It Wise? Is It Legal? Is It Possible?* (Geisler, 2003). Geisler's first premise is that the moral laws of the Old Testament were intended solely for the ancient Jews and secondly, that civil legislation (specifically current day legislation) should be neither secular nor explicitly Christian (Geisler, 2003). We'll look at his first point here. Geisler (2003) states, "Nowhere in the Bible are Gentiles ever condemned for not keeping the Law of Moses". In other words, he suggests that Gentiles were held to a different standard than ancient Judaism. Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen disagrees in his article, "For Whom Was G-d's Law Intended?" (Geisler, 2003).

Dr. Bahnsen's counterargument starts with Scripture. He begins with a reference to Sodom (Genesis 19:5-9, Jude 7) as an "example unto those who intend to live in an unG-dly manner" (2 Peter 2:6) (Geisler, 2003). Bahnsen's point is that even though Sodom was a Gentile nation, it met the same punishment prescribed for descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To emphasize the fate of a nation choosing this living pattern, Bahnsen references the Torah, wherein those who committed unlawful acts, such as the Sodomites, had blood upon them—that is to say, they would "surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:13) (Geisler, 2003). Sodom's 'death' came through incineration. Even though the city's inhabitants were Gentiles, they were condemned for behaving contrary to G-d's law (Geisler, 2003).

Moving to New Testament writings, Bahnsen cites John the Baptist's judgment of Herod for transgressing Mosaic restrictions on the degrees of suitable marriage (Mark 6:18) (Geisler, 2003).¹⁹⁰ Bahnsen points out that the very thing that Geisler said does not occur in the Bible ("Nowhere in the Bible are Gentiles ever condemned for not keeping the Law of Moses"),

¹⁹⁰ King Herod Antipas was an Idumaeen who married the wife of his half-brother, Philip.

happened in this passage (Geisler, 2003). Herod's actions contradicted "lawful" behaviour for Jews, and he was punished for his conduct.¹⁹¹

Another relevant, slightly more obscure reference, is "the Beast" in the book of Revelation (Revelations 13:16-17). Here John talks of a Gentile tyrant whom the Lord will punish for attempting to replace G-d's law with his own law (see Deuteronomy 6:8). Paul condemns this Gentile ruler in Thessalonians for acting as a "lawless" man, the very essence of sin (1 John 3:4) (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Bahnsen notes that both the "beast" and the "lawless man" are Gentiles, both condemned for abandoning G-d's ways. The point of Dr. Bahnsen's argument is to show that condemnation follows Gentiles who do not keep the Law of Moses. I would add that New Testament thinkers and leaders, specifically Peter, would come from this mind-set and would have kept Gentiles responsible for observing the major themes of G-d's law.¹⁹²

These Scripture references attached to Peter, Mark and John the Baptist, allow a glimpse into New Testament mind-sets. In sum, we see confirmation of G-dly judgement on an unG-dly Gentile nation, a Mosaic restriction applied to Gentile dictator, and G-d's punishment on a Gentile tyrant. Likewise, Paul's word to the Philippians (2:10) asserts that all nations without exception will acknowledge the G-d of heaven. In short, despite their non-Jewish status, the weight of G-dly living rested on these Gentiles of biblical history. "Acceptance" in this case would have included adherence to Hebrew standards of moral and ethical living.

Swinging far to the left of these interpretations, Philip Alexander takes exception to Bahnsen's scholarship. Alexander considers the phrase "neither Jew or Greek" in Paul's writings to imply that not only did Christians (of the first-century or any other generation) *not* have to adhere to the Law, but neither did Jewish Christians (Dunn, 1992:24). In short, both groups were roughly the same, both exempt from guidelines of Judaism.

Thomas Loebel takes an interest in the specific practices of Judaism in his book *Letter and the Spirit of Nineteenth-Century American Literature: Justice, Politics, Theology*. He concludes that

¹⁹¹ I would note that the reason stated for Herod's death in Acts 12:23 is recorded for not giving praise to G-d. For this reason, Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

¹⁹² Lest we end this discussion on a negative note, let it be said that Hebrew Scripture saw ramifications against sinning Gentiles as a coin with two sides. When a nation honoured G-d's ways (i.e. bowed down to him) it — the nation — is honoured in return (1 Samuel 2:30). Fascinating that in the end, everyone qualifies by remembering and turning to him (Proverbs 14:34, Psalm 22:27-28, Isaiah 45:23, Philippians 2:10).

the “ethnocentric and nationalistic” particularities — like circumcision, kashruth, the observances of Sabbath, and the holidays that defined Judaism — would’ve been a part of the faith of Jesus (Loebel, 2005:155; Segert, 1999:2). One significant premise is that since it was part of the faith of Jesus, these same practices would’ve been lifestyle norms for his Jewish followers.

Author Lois Tverberg illuminates the matter by pointing out that Peter and the other early Christians continued participating in Temple worship (Acts 3:1, 21:23-26) and even used the Temple courts as their main meeting place (John 10:23; Acts 3:11; 5:12) (Tverberg, 2013)¹⁹³. One possible reason is that although their leader Jesus denounced Temple corruption and sought to purify worship he, unlike the Essenes, never abandon the Temple. According to Tverberg, this implies that he did not preach against the Temple’s ceremonies. In response, his followers carefully observed the Torah and were even known for their avid Torah observance (Acts 21:20, 25; Tverberg, 2013). When accused of trying to persuade Jewish Christians who are “zealous for the law” to stop following the ways of Moses, Paul even sponsors a sacrifice in order to show his commitment to following the guidelines associated with the Temple (Acts 21:24-27). According to Notley, Paul would have seen no incompatibility between “Gospel belief” and this kind Torah observance for his Jewish, Christ-believing brothers (Notley, 1986:18).¹⁹⁴

James Dunn and Boyarin, following the work of nineteenth-century German theologian F.C. Baur¹⁹⁵, apparently read Paul as an accomplished Jewish cultural critic who objected to peculiar

¹⁹³ Outside of the scope of this paper is the difficult passage in Matthew 5:17 that Jesus “came not to abolish the law but to fulfil it.” A traditional way of interpreting it is to say that when Jesus “fulfilled the Law” he brought it to an end, even though in the next several verses, Jesus emphasizes the importance of its continued existence. The key is the phrase “fulfil the Law,” an idiom found several places in the New Testament and in Jewish sayings from Jesus’ time. The translation of “to fulfil” is *lekayem* in Hebrew, which means to uphold or establish, as well as to fulfil, complete or accomplish. For more on this topic see Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Safrai, 1974:799); Bivin, *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus: Insights from His Jewish Context* (Bivin, 2005:51-53); Spangler, *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith* (Spangler, 2009: 58); J. P. Garcia, *NT Intro: Jesus and the Law* (Garcia, 2014).

¹⁹⁴ While making the distinction, Notley clarifies that Paul would’ve expressed vehement opposition to the requirement of Torah observance for Gentile believers (Notley, 1986:18).

¹⁹⁵ Baur’s viewpoint diminishes the importance of the physical/literal observances that signify “chooseness”, saying Jewish practices made Jewish Christians too closely identified as “*Jewish*” (Loebel, 2005:155). In other words, if the ‘ethnocentric and nationalistic’ particularities that defined Judaism were to be maintained by Jewish Christians, they would stick out as Jews and not be considered

ethnic markers of Jewish identity such as circumcision, dietary regulations, and festivals (Garroway, 2012:58). These scholars choose instead a universal Jewish identity in which a law of faith replaced works of the law as the means by which the covenant is entered (Garroway, 2012:58). Garroway says that Dunn and Boyarin see Paul as having, “devised a scheme in which Gentiles become Jews while at the same time remaining Gentiles” (Garroway, 2012:58). The upshot of their opinion in Garroway’s estimation leads to the understanding that a Jesus-following Jew, rightly understood, becomes devoid of ethnic content (Garroway, 2012:58).

Loebel disagrees with Baur’s perception saying this way of thinking causes early Christianity to become, “a single universal faith based upon a divorce from Judaism” (Loebel, 2005:153). Rosenzweig chimes in, acclaiming the importance of the law in the connection between Judaism and Christianity. He references passages (Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:26-7), that develop a relationship between Judaism and Christianity with the subordination of Christianity to Judaism (Loebel, 2005:157). In other words, Christianity is most accurately understood supported by Judaism’s foundation.

This foundation, according to Galloway, means that the descent from Abraham achievable through Yeshua permits one to become reckoned an actual bodily descendant of Abraham — in other words an Israelite with full benefits of the law. In a sense, the physical markers of Jewish identity are neither removed nor transcended.¹⁹⁶ “They remain the essential determinants of Jewish identity; all that has changed is the manner in which they are achieved” (Galloway, 2012:61). It is not that transformation from Gentile paganism to the Jewish faith of Jesus removes the foreskins from males or reconfigures bloodlines, but the availability of circumcision happens *through* a new entranceway — that is baptism into Christ (Galloway, 2012:60).

The Apostle Paul addressed the new entranceway when he said, “... is G-d the G-d of Jews only? Is he not the G-d of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one G-d, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” (Romans 3:29). Joseph Shulam examines the Greek prepositions used to show that Jews were justified *out of* or *by* their own history as they lived it out; whereas Gentiles were justified *through* the salvation history of the Jews (Shulam, 2016). Jewish history made it possible for Gentiles to pass *through* Judaism

part of the One (meaning the early church). Furthermore, by adhering to and maintaining these particularities, they (Jewish believers) would be figured as “*damned*” (Loebel, 2005:155).

¹⁹⁶ Paul’s dispute with the apostles in Jerusalem, by extension, is a disagreement over how one gains admission into the patriarchal covenant (Garroway, 2004:61).

in a sense, to become transformed, and in that way gain accreditation from G-d. Judaism in all its richness made the transformation possible.

The transformation as Paul sees it, deals with the way the “definitive markers” of Jewish identity (circumcision) are reckoned; something new replaced genital circumcision and physical descent (Garroway, 2012:60). Garroway says this view preserves the concept of circumcision as the defining indicator of Jewish identity (Garroway, 2012:60). Joseph Shulam reminds NT enthusiasts that heart circumcision was always G-d’s intention for his people as exemplified in the Torah (Shulam, 2016). Jews are commended to circumcise their own hearts first then undergo heart circumcision by G-d himself (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6). In the first-century, the same offer was made to Gentiles through the Judaism of Rabbi Jesus.

For Paul, the transformation from Gentile paganism to the Jewish faith creates an acceptance such that in the wake of Christ, circumcision is performed through faith in Jesus, not by men (Galloway, 2012:61). Christ makes Gentiles into members of Israel and into *ethnic* Jews (Garroway, 2012:58). Ben Witherington III says it like this, “For Paul, the new covenant in Christ is the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, and like the earlier covenant, it is available to all because Abraham had both Jewish and Gentile heirs” (Walker, 2012:15). Wendel uses a term regarding Jews and non-Jews coming together, saying it created a “shift in ethnic composition.” (Wendel, 2011:81).

This “*shift*” no doubt had a huge impact on Jewish believers. They were able to work through the tough issue of incoming Gentiles with some hopeful and unified results. This can be seen in the fact that news of Gentiles converting “brought great joy to all the believers” (Acts 15:3) and they were all eager to hear the report (Acts 15:12).¹⁹⁷ Their attitude reveals their feelings about including Gentiles, and perhaps something about the degree to which they accepted them.

Notably, Paul’s opinions of Judaism’s acceptance of Gentile believers differed from the acceptance of the Jesus community of Jerusalem (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:317).¹⁹⁸ Asano, in

¹⁹⁷ This was not the case between Jewish believers and Jews outside the Jesus movement, as seen in the “dissension” in Acts 15:2. A detailed account indicates how this “dissension” was resolved for the former group. The same “dissension” in Acts 15:2 contrasts the disagreement between Jewish believers and non-believing Jews, one that remains unresolved and reappears throughout the narrative of Acts.

¹⁹⁸ Even within the new Jesus movement there was not total consensus of thought, a characteristic reflective of the “Judaisms” within the larger Jewish community as mentioned in chapter 2 (page 8) of this present work.

his article titled *Depiction of the church's early struggle for community-identity construction*, as quoted by Tucker (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:317) refers to two distinct approaches to the issue of Gentile incorporation seen in varying degrees of primordiality (defined as: resistance to changes in physio-cultural features). Some of the community members of the Jesus-community of Jerusalem are found with a greater resistance to incoming Gentiles than others. One example is their insistence of circumcision upon Titus (Galatians 2.4), which seems to imply a high degree of primordiality (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:317).

Paul's low degree of primordiality seems to be an object of conflict for the Jesus community of Jerusalem since his forward-thinking acceptance included the apparent side-lining of core Jewish ethnic sentiment, manifested in significant physio-cultural features such as circumcision (Acts 15:1,5) (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:317).¹⁹⁹ Again, Atsuhiko Asano²⁰⁰ says, "As Gentile sympathizers are incorporated into the Jewish commonwealth, identity becomes an important issue, and the particular physio-cultural feature of circumcision plays a significant role, as it clearly reflects the Jewish core ethnic sentiment" (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:316).

Table fellowship further identified two views for incorporating Gentiles. Paul's integrative mode of communal dining reveals an identity marker that differentiated the communities founded by Paul and other Jesus communities (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:329).

For instance, in the scene from Galatians 2:12, Paul and Peter are approached by those from James (i.e. Jewish Christians known to exhibit a high degree of primordiality). Peter chose to leave so as not to be seen by them.²⁰¹ This example shows a diversity of opinion regarding the behaviour of the very core of Jewish Christian leadership. I would agree with Asano, who says conflicting views may exist between individuals and groups because of their diverse approaches to the construction of their community identity (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:331). Tucker says this *sometimes led to exclusive measures and sometimes to concessions* (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:331). In other words, the response of different Jesus-following Jewish groups differed because they followed different rules of acceptance.

¹⁹⁹ Also eating together (Galatians 2:12, see Acts 10:28), and other customs and traditions based upon the Torah (see Acts 21:18-21).

²⁰⁰ Atsuhiko Asano's article is entitled Galatians 2.1-14 as Depiction of the church's early struggle for community-identity construction.

²⁰¹ The scope of this thesis does not allow exploration of the question about whether Jewish Christians readily accepted the ruling of the Jerusalem Council, but that would be an interesting related topic.

Delving further into Jesus-accepting Jewish communities, Tucker and Coleman (2014:331) describes that the theoretical framework of Asano identifies a theoretical framework that defines the coexistence of unity and diversity among members. He defines three Jewish groups in the earliest Church: the Jerusalem leaders, the “false brothers” (ψευδοδελφοί) (Galatians 2:4), and Paul (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:330). These exist with varying approaches to what Asano calls “community-identity construction and maintenance”. From this perspective, inter-party relations existed as a collection of groups with divergent approaches to community-identity construction (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:331).

This interpretation of the life of the early Jesus movement deters some modern interpreters from reading an ideal of unity into the early experiences of the community. Clearly, the first Jesuscommunity — like Judaism — was not a monolithic community (Tucker & Coleman, 2014:331). One can hardly blame them. They were living in unprecedented times. How were they to deal with Gentiles as insiders of a purely Jewish faith? Paul described it as a ‘mystery’ “... through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6). This mystery led to a new identity (and thus ethnicity) that influenced how Gentile believers saw themselves and how they were perceived by early church leaders.

6.3 Non-Canonical Literature

Non-Jewish historians, philosophers and theologians in the second century wrote about Christians and provide auxiliary views for our research quest. The religious and philosophical satirist Lucian of Samosata (ca. A.D. 120-180) wrote about Christians in the diaspora saying they thought they were “immortal and live for all time,” and that they despised death (McDonald & Porter, 2000:258). Another voice from ancient history, Galen (ca. A.D. 129-199) a Greek from Pergamum, rose from being a gladiators’ physician to being a physician of Marcus Aurelius’s court (McDonald & Porter, 2000:260). He writes about Christians saying that, because they controlled their daily conduct and had an intense desire for rectitude they became, “...not inferior to those who are true philosophers” (McDonald & Porter, 2000:260).

Yet another writer, Lucian, mentions Christians of his day saying, “... their first lawgiver [Jesus] persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws” (McDonald & Porter, 2000:260).

This elucidates the question, “What were Christians observing?” from the standpoint of a pagan writer. I’m struck by Lucian’s mention that the Christians lived under the laws of their crucified

leader. More important for this discussion, however, is what Jews were thinking. What practices did *they* see Gentile Christians observing? Two major non-canonical documents, the Didache and the Birkath Haminim, furnish a starting point for some answers.²⁰² Minor comments from additional non-canonical manuscripts look at the Ethics of the Fathers, the Mishna and the Epistle of Barnabas.

6.3.1 Didache

Nessim poses a related question that clarifies “What were Christians observing?” Specifically, he asks “Wouldn’t it be fascinating to see how first-century Jewish believers and Gentile believers implemented Acts 15 and reacted to the teaching of Paul?” (Nessim, 2013:2). The answer, as he sees it, exists in a document called the Didache, otherwise known as *The ‘Teaching’ of the Lord according to the twelve Apostles* (see Acts 2:42; Nessim, 2013:2). It was originally thought that the Didache was composed in the second half of the second century or later²⁰³. However, a growing consensus is emerging, in recent scholarship, that it was composed around the turn of the first-century CE (Koet, Moyise & Verheyden, 2013:334) (Van de Sandt & Flusser, 2002:48). Draper and Jefford assert an early date of 50 –70 CE (Draper & Jefford, 2015:530).

The first line of the Didache²⁰⁴ is, “Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles (or Nations) by the Twelve Apostles” (Huntley, 2013:59). The document took what was known about the expectations given to the early church, unpacking practical Gospel implications for Gentiles and putting them down in writing (Nessim 2014:3). Apparently, the Didache was so “Christian” that it was considered by some Church Fathers as part of the New Testament writings.²⁰⁵ Yet at the same time, its Jewish flare caused Jurgen Zangenberg to say, “the didachist might have considered this group as still being ‘Jewish.’” (Draper & Jefford, 2015:22)²⁰⁶

²⁰² See Table 6-1 for more information on the *Didache* and the *Birkath Haminim*.

²⁰³ For dating, Koet quotes this from an article by R.H. Connolly (Connolly, 1937:364-379) and F.E. Vokes (Vokes, 1938:51-61, 86), both found in the source list.

²⁰⁴ Διδάχη in Greek, Didachē means “Teaching.”

²⁰⁵ Young looks at the commonality between the Didache and Matthew, saying that the latter may be dependent on the first. Alternatively, the two documents may have simply have grown out of a closely related milieu (which explains their overall commonality of tradition and idiom) (Young, 2011: 213).

²⁰⁶ Draper quotes this from an article by Jurgen K. Zangenberg found in the source list (Zangenberg, 2008:65).

Van de Sandt and Flusser asserts that most scholars agree that the origin of Didache goes back to an originally Jewish basic model called the Two Ways document (Van de Sandt & Flusser 2002:49) (Nessim, 2013:3).²⁰⁷ Vermes, who sees the Didache as a late first-century key text for understanding the Jewish Jesus movement, sees in it a mixture of Jewishness and Christianity.

About the Didache, he says, “The Christian document focuses on the Mosaic Law and the love of G-d and the neighbour, and describes the observance of Jewish traditions alongside baptism and the recitation of ‘Our Father’” (Wiener, 2015).

Nessim chimes in, saying the Didache taught Gentile believers using a traditionally Jewish methodology enlivened by the words of the Messiah interpolated into the mix (Nessim, 2013:4).²⁰⁸ In the context of the document, followers of Jesus were commended to not abandon the commandments of the Lord (4:13); to avoid unlawful deeds (4:14) and to strive for the ‘perfection’ that came through following these ways (1:4; 6:2) (Nessim, 2013:4). The last may be beneficial for deliberating how much of the Torah a Gentile is obliged to keep. The Didache recommends keeping all of it, but leaves the matter up to an individual’s capacity: “For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able, then at least do what you can” (Didache 6:2-3)²⁰⁹

6.3.2 Birkath Haminim

A later non-canonical document relevant to this discussion, is the Birkath Haminim or *Benediction of the heretics*, traced back with some confidence to the first half of the second century C.E. or earlier (Ehrlich & Langar, 2005). Skarsuane narrows the timeframe from 70 and 100 C.E. (Skarsaune & Hvalvik, 2007:198)²¹⁰. Philip L. Mayo says, “A discussion of the state of

²⁰⁷ Koet points out that the *Two Ways* tradition can be found in a variety of other early Christian documents, including *the Coctrina*, *the Letter of Barnabas* 18-20 and some five later writings (Koet, 2013:331). These include the *Apostolic Church Order*, *the Epitome of the Canons of the Holy Apostles*, *the Life of Shenoute*, *the P’s*, *Athanasian Syntagma Doctrinae*, and *the Fides CCCXVIII Patrum* (Koet, 2013:331).

²⁰⁸ Nessim also says the document reveals the effects of the Gospel for Jews, perhaps in surprising ways (Nessim, 2014:3).

²⁰⁹ J.B. Lightfoot translates the same verse into English, “For if you are able to support the whole yoke of the Lord, you shall be flawless; But if you are not able, do that which you are able.” (Didache 6:2-3) (Lightfoot, n.d.)

²¹⁰ John Parsons says the Birkat Minim was instituted at the council of Yavneh sometime after the ruin of the second Temple and was composed in reaction to the Essenes, among other Yeshua followers (Parsons, n.d.).

Jewish-Christian relations between 70 and 150 C.E. is not complete without a careful treatment of the Jewish Birkath Haminim (BH) or the ‘blessing against heretics’” (Mayo, 2006:326). The Encyclopaedia Judaica assesses the Birkath Haminim (BH) as of “exceptional importance in Christian-Jewish relations from the first-century C.E.” (Skolnik, 2006:711).

The Birkath Haminim (BH) belongs to the concluding part of the daily *Amidah*²¹¹ petitions, which implore the redemption of the people of Israel. The Palestinian siddur from Cairo Genizah records the Birkath Haminim like this:

“For the Apostates let there be no hope. And let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the nozerim and the minim be destroyed in a moment. And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art though, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant” (Skolnik, 2006:711).

To clarify terminology, *Notsrim* may have been an early term used to refer to Jewish Christians, and according to Mayo, it probably ultimately came to reference all Christians, as is showed by

Jerome and possibly Justin (Mayo, 2006:343). Wilson’s work reveals that *Notsrim* and *Nazarene* can be used interchangeably (Wilson, 1989:68)²¹². Prinz makes note that the term *Nazarenes* was applied to all Jewish followers of Jesus until the name *Christian* became attached to Antiochian non-Jews (Prinz, 1988:10).²¹³ The rabbinic term for heretics (*min*, *minim*) refers to

²¹¹ The Amidah (translated as “*The Standing Prayer*”) is the essential prayer of Jewish liturgy.

²¹² By the fourth century Church Father Jerome spoke about the Nazarene’s as “heresy among the Jews throughout all the synagogues of the east” (Dunn, 1989:24). Their crime was not that they believed in Christ, the son of G-d born of the Virgin Mary, or that he suffered and rose again under Pontius Pilate. Rather, their crime was that they wanted to be “both Jews and Christians” thus leaving themselves exposed and vulnerable (Dunn, 1989:24). Dunn’s book proposes that this crime drew apart from both Rabbinism and Gentile Christianity (Dunn, 1989:24).

²¹³ This meant that the name *Nazarenes* signified the entire Church. Afterward, it is possible that the term *Nazarenes* applied only to Jewish believers in Jesus. “Only when the Gentile Church overtook and overshadowed the Jewish one could there be any possibility of sectarian stigma adhering to the name Nazarene within the Church itself” (Prinz, 1988:15). Meier calls the Nazarene “a rabbinic teacher of the Law”. Author Ray Prinz focuses on tracing remains that can be found of the heirs of the first Jewish Church that continued in the apostles’ doctrine in Jerusalem (Prinz, 1988:10). He refers to the reported flight to Pella of the Decapolis as one of the first links between the Jerusalem congregation (i.e. the earliest church) and the Jewish Christianity of Patristic writings (Prinz, 1988:10).

Jews who made bad choices, particularly in terms of practice (Broadhead, 2010:96); later the term included Gentiles and Gentile Christians (Broadhead, 2010:96).²¹⁴

The use of the term “*minim*” can be seen in the formation of the BH benediction during the time of the early church in a baritia’ (B. Berakhot 28bf)²¹⁵. According to Shiffman, the baritia’ tells of a follower of Gamliel, the Rabban Gamliel II of Yavneh in the post destruction period (Shiffman, s.a.). Gamliel’s follower, *Samuel HaQaxan*, agreed to compose a benediction using wording from earlier prayer that asked divine punishment on the *paroshim* (those who separated themselves from the Jewish community) (Shiffman, s.a.). Interestingly, when it was time to recite what he wrote, *HaQaxan* found himself at a loss for words. Lawrence Shiffman shares the baritia’ as follows:

“Our Rabbis taught: Simeon HaPaqoli ordered the Eighteen Benedictions before Rabban Gamliel at Yavneh. Rabban Gamliel said to the Sages: Is there no one who knows how to compose a benediction against the minim? Samuel HaQaxan stood up and composed it. Another year (while serving as precentor), he (Samuel Ha-Qaxan) forgot it and tried to recall it for two or three hours, yet they did not remove him” (Shiffman, s.a.).

This benediction, twelfth among seventeen in the *Amidah*, was to be said three times a day according to Rab Judah (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:198). If a reader made a mistake in any of the other benedictions, they were pardoned, but if he made a mistake in the benediction of the Birkath Haminim, he was to be removed because of the suspicion of being a ‘*min*’ (the singular form of ‘*minim*’) (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:198)²¹⁶²¹⁷. The Talmud specifically designates the BH as a test passage that used to expose Jewish believers in Jesus (Skarsuane & Hvalvik, 2007:198), as Jewish believers were still in the habit of visiting the synagogue (Skarsuane &

²¹⁴ Philip S. Alexander says that the rabbis appear to most frequently categorize the ‘*minim*’ as Christians (Dunn, 1992:6).

²¹⁵ Dr Ruth Langer talks about the ‘intriguing’ origins and early history of the Birkat Haminim in her article entitled *Cursing the Christians? History of the Birkat HaMinim* (Langer, 2012)

²¹⁶ Flusser specifies that the reference to Christians as ‘*minim*’ occurs from the second century onwards (Flusser, 2009:27).

²¹⁷ This rule apparently did not apply to *Samuel HaQaxan* upon forgetting the words to the BH.

Hvalvik, 2007:198). The rejection may have taken several forms, including exclusion from synagogue participation.

Flusser says synagogues were proliferous during the first-century and served as a meeting place where Jews gathered to study and pray, forming a microcosm of the Jewish people (Flusser, 2009:22). The Rabbis' intent was not to read anyone out of the Jewish people because heretical beliefs according to Shiffman (Shiffman, s.a.). Instead they imposed certain constraints on those whom they viewed as standing outside the accepted structure of Jewish belief (Shiffman, s.a.). This included synagogue rejection as seen in the Gospel of John (9:22, 12:42, and 16:2; Shiffman, s.a.).²¹⁸ Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century C.E. in his *Dialogue with Tryphon*, referenced the cursing of Christians in the synagogue (Shiffman, s.a.). A similar testimony comes from Origen (c. 185C. 254 C.E.), who accuses Jews of blaspheming and cursing Jesus (Shiffman, s.a.). Shiffman (s.a.) links both to the Birkath Haminim.

What does the Birkath Haminim tell us about the thinking of early Christian leaders? If an early date for BH construction is accepted (70 – 100 C.E.), then it was fashioned shortly after the Jerusalem Council (47 - 51C.E.) (Gibson, 2013:218). That means not long after Gentiles were extended the hand of membership, Jewish Christian leaders began experiencing rejection from their larger Jewish family. They may have even been excluded from the very synagogues they endorsed to Gentiles as a place to learn the ways of Moses (see Chapter 5).²¹⁹

In the absence of direct answers to the thinking of Jewish Christian leaders, conservative conjecture leads to plausible conclusions. Modern studies help with possibilities. A recent body of research, according to Winch (2013), shows that the feeling of rejection causes internal destabilization and a tendency to draw closer to those who display approval and value toward the one being rejected (Winch, 2013). In this case, the ones displaying approval and value toward

Jewish Christians were the 'entering in' Gentiles. They were reaching out for inclusion. I would postulate that, in response to being shut out by their traditional Jewish family, Jewish Christians leaders may have been disposed to extending an even greater level of acceptance to their newly forming family of Gentile believers. Stephen Spence (2004) points out Luke's intention to make

²¹⁸ The dating of the Gospel of John was most probably around the last decade of the first century (Shiffman, s.a.).

²¹⁹ If indeed the term '*minim*' and '*notsrim*' later referred to Gentile Christians, the BH may have affected Gentile Christian attempts to follow through with the Jerusalem Council guidelines regarding synagogue attendance on Shabbat (Acts 15: 20-21) (see Chapter 5).

clear the ethnic-Jewish Christian mandate to fully accept these G-d-accepted Gentiles (Spence, 2004:64).²²⁰

Mayo concludes, based on the impact of the benediction seems to have increased with the passage of time and eventually contributed to the split of the church and the synagogue. He also asserts that the benediction increased the number of 'notsrim' (i.e. Jewish Christians then later possibly Gentile Christians) (Mayo, 2006:343)²²¹. Said another way, the Church grew because of the BH.

6.3.3 Ethics of the Fathers and the Epistle of Barnabas

Another critical writing to include in this segment is The *Ethics of the Fathers*. It is printed in the Mishnah after the order *Nezikin* and provides significant parallels and insight into the moral message of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Young, 2007:120). Brad Young goes as far as to say "all students seeking to understand ancient Jewish thought and the beginnings of Christianity must study this document and ponder its message." (Young, 2007:120). For those familiar with the New Testament, a first-time read will call to mind copious passages from the writings of the apostles, whose code of ethics and teachings came from the same thought pool. Regrettably, this important manuscript will not be incorporated primarily for reasons tied to dating. It covers the time from roughly 539 B.C.E. to the time of the Mishnah (220 C.E.).

David Flusser commented on one small segment dated to the early second century. Flusser reflects on common elements of Jewish thinking of the first-century, quoting Simon the Righteous²²² who said, "The world rests on three things — Torah, the Temple cult, and deeds of loving kindness" (m. Avot 1.2) (Flusser, 2009:20).²²³ This non-canonical document makes clear

²²⁰ Gentile Christian acceptance (nor non-acceptance) by the synagogue was not Luke's concern (Spence, 2004:64).

²²¹ Both the split and the addition of 'notsrim' is perhaps evidenced by testimonies of Justin and, later, Jerome according to Mayo (Mayo, 2006:343).

²²² Note that Tropper dates Simon the Righteous to early second century (Tropper, 2013:199).

²²³ Wesley Theological Seminary professor Craig C. Hill identifies three common and important elements of mainstream first-century Palestinian Judaism that would most likely be maintained by Jewish believers in Christ (Jackson-McCaleb, 2007:46). He suggests that in respect to Judaism, the following criteria existed: "belief in the election and hope for the restoration of Israel, obedience to the law of Moses, and a reverence for the temple" (Jackson-McCaleb, 2007:46) (By the way, belief in the G-d of Israel is not mentioned, but assumed, and a universal part of earliest Christianity (Jackson-McCaleb, 2007:46)).

three things Jews considered important leading up to the second century that would have been put into writing at that time. Suffice it to say, for Gentile Christians to have a working knowledge of these concepts — the Torah (discussed earlier), the workings of the Temple²²⁴, and acts of kindness — would show respect for the faith and the faith-holders. Gentile tendency to observe these tenants could tend to endear relations between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christian, while unobserved tendencies may have widened the divide.²²⁵

A few last thoughts before moving on to the summary. By the early second century and the writing of the Epistle of Barnabas, and a document shows a “distinctly different Gentile Christianity in its presentation of the Hebrew Bible as allegory instead of covenantal fact” (Wiener, 2015). Vermes writes that after Hadrian’s suppression of Second Jewish Revolt (AD 132-135), Jewish Christians swiftly became a minority group in the freshly established church and their minority status led to a distinctly non-Jewish religion (Wiener, 2015). Warner observes that late in the second century, Jewish Christians either returned to join their Jewish peers or became part of the Gentile Christian church (Wiener, 2015). As Gentiles entered into the Church in increasing numbers, Jewish Christians started to participate in services separate from the Gentile Christian populations, leading to an increased division between the groups (Wiener, 2015).

²²⁴ A few notes on the Temple: Flusser maintains that the Temple remained Judaism’s spiritual centre in theory and in the eschatological thinking of the Second Commonwealth (Flusser, 2009:20). Regev comments on the reverence for the temple in light of current day Christianity, saying they have a tended to presume (without demonstration) that the New Testament has a negative approach to the Temple, seeing Jesus as having completely substituted it (Flusser, 2009:33). The Dead Sea scrolls present the purely eschatological time of the ‘new creation’ in which G-d will recreate the Temple and establish it for all time (11QT 29:7-9) (Flusser, 2009:71).

²²⁵ Hurtado brings up an interesting point, namely the refusal in the Jewish tradition to engage in the worship of other deities (Jackson-McCaleb, 2007:46). For devout Jews, the core requirement of Judaism was the exclusive worship of Israel’s G-d, especially considering recent first century BCE events, Antiochus Epiphanies and the earlier Persian (Babylonian) period polytheistic culture. Withholding of cultic worship in these settings shows the ancient Jewish concern for the uniqueness of G-d as genuinely exclusivist “monotheism”. The accommodation of Christ as a recipient of cultic devotion cannot be discounted as an unusually significant step for early Jewish Christian groups. There was no real analogy in the Jewish tradition of the period (Jackson-McCaleb, 2007:46). For this reason, Christ-devotion could have posed an intriguing phenomenon for Jewish believers (Jackson-McCaleb, 2007:46).

6.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter as iterated in the introduction was to re-examine the levels of “acceptance” granted to Gentile Christians. My objectives were to ascertain the level of Torah observance that early Church leaders expected of incoming Gentiles and the level of acceptance granted to them. This was to be accomplished by answering, in each subheading, two specific questions. “What level of Torah observance did the early Church leaders expect of Gentiles?” and “What level of acceptance did they grant to Gentiles?”

In the canonical section, Scripture references attached to Peter, Mark and John the Baptist provided a glimpse into New Testament mind-sets before and during the establishment of the Church. Their thoughts on the topic shows the advantage of Gentile adherence to basic Hebrew standards of thinking and living.

Continuing, I looked at scholarly assertions of a universal Jewish identity wherein Jews become devoid of ethnic content and Gentile Christians avoided racial (Jewish-like) markers of identity. Garroway posited that Yeshua permitted Gentiles to become reckoned an actual bodily descendant of Abraham while neither obviating nor transcending the markers of Jewish identity. In that sense, Jewish history made it possible for Gentiles to gain justification *through* the salvation history of the Jews, while Jewish believers were justified *out of or by* their own history as they lived it out. The richness pool of Judaism made transformation possible so the concept of circumcision as the defining indicator of Jewish identity remained intact: circumcision and physical descent.

The early Jesus-community, like its parent, Judaism, was not monolithic. Jews had divergent approaches to community identity construction and maintenance. For example, Paul sided for greater lenience and acceptance toward Gentiles, while the Jesus community of Jerusalem exhibited a higher degree of primordality. In other words, some Jewish communities expected a higher level of Torah observance than others. I asserted that varying levels of acceptance may have been granted to Gentiles based on the demographical and theological stance of Jewish communities. These were tumultuous times with no blueprint about how it was to work. The fact that they accepted Gentiles at all was a mystery that led to a new identity (and ethnicity) and that influenced how early church leaders viewed Gentile believers and by default how Gentiles believers saw themselves. One of those ways would've been influenced as they met in the Temple courts must have been the exposure to their leaders participating in Torah observance including Temple activities.

In non-canonical material, the Didache answers questions posed in this chapter. The document was seemingly Jewish, but has often been mistaken as New Testamental as it was designed to give instruction to Gentiles. As a handbook, it gives much more comprehensive instruction for living than Acts 15. Based on the very Jewish nature of this document, I can see how the level of Torah observance for Gentiles could've been perceived as more in-depth than the basic Noahide Laws.

The second non-canonical document reviewed, the Birkath Haminim (BH) imposed certain constraints on those viewed as standing outside the accepted structure of Jewish belief, including Jewish Christians. If the early dating of the document is right, it falls just after the formation of the early church. It is likely therefore that the leaders of the early church were familiar with the cultural milieu and affected by its intent. I would propose that as the BH may have added to numbers in the early Church, it also strengthened bonds between Jewish and Gentile believers.

How was the prophecy in Zechariah (8:23) executed by Gentiles? I would say their entrance into the Church by way of Judaism is the answer. How Gentiles truly perceived by Jewish followers of Yeshua in the first-century? We can say with confidence that there were different opinions on what would have been defined as an "acceptable" lifestyle to the earliest church, but we know that inclusion of Gentiles into The Way brought great joy to all the believers (Acts 15:3).

Addressing the objectives of the chapter, two questions remain. "What level of acceptance was granted to Gentiles in the early Church?" I would propose that one possible result of the rejection of the BH is that Jewish believers extended a greater level acceptance to Gentiles. "What level of Torah observance did early Christian leaders expect of Gentile Christians? Perhaps the Didache itself sums it up best. "For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able, then at least do what you can." (Didache 6:2-30).

Table 6-1: Explanation of Major Non-Canonical Documents

Docu- ment	Purpose	Com- pilation: Earliest Date	Jewish Content	Christian Content	Summary of Outcome	Author's Postulation
Didache	To unpack and document practical Gospel implications for Gentiles.	Between 50 – 70 C.E.	The content makes some scholars assume the writer may have considered the audience as Jewish.	Some Church Fathers considered the Didache part of the New Testament writings because of its connection to Christianity.	Quoting the Didache: “If you are not able to keep all G-d’s ways, then at least keep what you can”.	First-century Jews may have tried to follow Jewish laws beyond the prescription given to them at the Jerusalem Council.
Birkath Haminim	To identify those viewed as outside the accepted structure of Jewish belief system, so action could be taken against them.	Between 70 and 100 C.E.	The target of rejection — the ‘nozerim’ and the ‘minim’ — in the BH formation were originally thought to be Jews who followed Jesus.	The ‘minim’ of the BH benediction may have ultimately included Gentile Christians.	Constraints on Jewish Christians and later Gentile Christians included the intent to eject them from synagogue worship.	The BH may have caused Jewish Christians to feel strengthened bonds with Gentile believers as a result of the rejection of their Jewish family.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this study has been to determine the behavioral expectations of the Gentiles to whom the letter of Acts 15 was written to determine the level of Torah observance expected of them and their actual levels of observance.

This chapter provides brief summaries and conclusions of earlier chapters considering aims and objectives and then turns to the main research question, followed by concluding theological reflections on the research topic.

7.2 Findings on Gentile Attraction to Judaism in the Second Temple Period

The aim of the second chapter was to examine Gentiles collectively, as well as the Gentile attraction to Judaism (and the Jews who attracted them) in the Second Temple Period to gain insight into the identity of the G-d-fearing Gentiles leading up to the formation of the Church. The objectives were to explore the concept of Gentiles from a collective perspective, to explore terms and definitions related to G-d-fearers, and to delve into the process of Gentiles drawing near to Judaism. These inquiries underpin another issue; what was particularly attractive to G-d-fearing Gentiles? Finally, this chapter explored Jewish evangelism.

My findings are that Israel's chosenness, purposed expressly for becoming an exemplar or ambassador to all other nations, allowed for ripe and plentiful conditions leading up to the formation of the early Church. By the Second Commonwealth non-Jews were drawn to Judaism in substantial numbers.

At that time, there was a high level of exposure to Jews through a common Greek language, the rise in literacy and other factors. These factors enabled Gentiles to draw near to the G-d of Israel, to emulate followers, and to practice observances such as Sabbath attendance. The unique monotheistic religion of the G-d of Abraham opened the door to Gentiles like no other time in history.

Josephus' narratives categorize these Gentiles as tolerant dignitaries, adherents, or converts. The latter is exemplified in the conversion story from the early first-century about the royal house of the kingdom of Adiabene in Northern Mesopotamia. The focus of this work is the G-d-fearer, outlined by the terms φοβούμενος or σεβομένων. Philo uses the term proselytoi figuratively as, "aliens who have come over to the truth." Confusing terminology related to this topic is not surprising given the array of historical sources that must be assimilated to paint a coherent picture of religious and ethnic identity Second Temple Judaism. These Gentiles may have been attracted by the evangelistic Jews who spread the good news and gained large numbers of sympathizers.

Historians mention the impact of Jewish evangelism in and around the Second Temple Period.

Josephus states that, “the masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances”, especially Sabbath. Likewise, Tacitus refers to successful Jewish proselytism and the “persistence” of the Jews. Later, Origen claims that Jewish proselytism continued from the time of Jesus to his own time.

The Sages recognized that when non-Jews crossed over to Judaism, they needed not be overly “burdened” (disturb or trouble) upon initial conversion, a sentiment the apostles shared as they welcomed non-Jewish newcomers to the Jewish sect of Jesus (Acts 15:24). The evidence points to a process-based conversion and not a one-time event.

7.3 The Jewish Fellowship of Jesus Followers and the Cornelius Event

The aim of Chapter 3 was to acquire knowledge about how the Torah-centric Jewish believers in Jesus identified and defined themselves within the context of broader Judaism. The first objective was to determine what can be known about the followers of Jesus through exploring the cultural and historical backdrop that surrounded them within broader Judaism, including the land in which they lived. The second objective was to find answers to how ancestry and identity contributed to the newly forming Jewish fellowship of Jesus followers. The third objective was to examine the main streams and sects of Judaism in the first-century to determine their influence on the new sect. The fourth objective is to investigate the Jewish fellowship of Christian followers or Jewish Christians themselves.

My findings are that the historical and geographical backdrop that surrounded them within broader Judaism, shaped the way in which the earliest followers saw the world. This unquestionably impactful cultural context of influence included the land in which they lived and the people there.

For instance, the Apostle Paul (Rav Shaul) attested that Jerusalem formed the apex of Israel’s geography. Lower Galilee influenced Jesus’ devotees with a strong attachment to Judaism flourishing well before the destruction of the Second Temple. Adherents vivaciously worshiped throughout the region, as attested by massive synagogues. This was the stomping ground of Jesus and his disciples: a cosmopolitan environment, Hellenized in culture and linguistics.

Creative Jewish culture, borne through interactive and traditional Oral Torah, bred the pietist — or Hasidic movement — characterized by parables and story-telling similar to that of the Pharisees. The sect of Jesus followers walked with attachment to the Hasidim and to the teachings of the Sages. Abba Hilkiah, the grandson of Honi ha-Heaggel, strongly influenced the pietist movement.

Ancestry and identity in the newly forming Jewish fellowship of Jesus were of vital importance. Not surprisingly, Jews had always defined themselves by their heritage and ancestry, but non-Jewish dynamics became a catalyst for change. Paul's actions reflect a Second Temple postresurrection mindset through his staunch identity as a Jewish Pharisee, his push to solidify Timothy's Jewish status through circumcision, and his Temple sacrifice to prove that he didn't promote that Jews who live among the Gentiles should to turn away from Moses.

Later, with the "repentance unto life" conferred upon Cornelius, Paul responded by redrawing the boundary lines of Judaism to include incoming Gentiles. In effect, he *redefined* what it meant to be Jewish. G-d-seeking Gentiles gained acceptance and could become "sons of Abraham" without ancestral ties. This changed their identity and changed the identity of the Jewish believers, as they were now "family" alongside non-ancestral Jews.

How did the emerging Jesus-believing group define themselves within the larger context of Judaism? The Saducees' political ties to the Roman government targeted Jesus and the early Christians as primary enemies. John the Baptist, although earlier than the actual Jesus movement, was influenced by Essenism, with their separatist tendencies and focus on purity. Jesus was apparently indirectly influenced by Essenism, though it is thought that he was basically rooted in the philosophy and practice of the Pharisees and Hasidim. He traveled like the Sages and Hasidim who communicated parables and ideologies. Later Sages immolated with the same evangelistic practices, including Rabbi Akiva and his pupil, Rabbi Meir.

So, what differentiated Jewish fellowship of Christian followers from other sects? Stationed in lower Galilee — the living center of the Jewish people where the Oral Torah was collected and in large degree created — the Fellowship of Jesus followers were surrounded by vibrant life. They lived among vibrant synagogue life, scholarly Pharisees, and the Hasidim within the Pharisaic sect.

A unique aspect of the earliest followers of Jesus was the fact that, though they may have come from diverse backgrounds, they all agreed that they had found the one of whom Moses wrote: Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:45). It would take all they knew to tackle the enormous challenge that lay ahead as a result of the unprecedented event at the home of the G-d-fearing Gentile, Cornelius.

7.4 The Significance of the events at Cornelius' House

Chapter 4 set out to answer the question: What happened during the events that led up to and included the activities at Cornelius' house recorded in the tenth Chapter of Acts and how are we

to understand these events, particularly Peter's spontaneous response to baptize Gentiles? This aim was divided into four objectives, namely to glean information on the topic from the chronological sequence in the Acts 10 narrative; to interpret the narrative; to examine baptism and to delve into philological terms such as "repentance unto life" while evaluating the outcome.

The Acts narrative shows that events in Caesarea had an irreversible impact on Gentiles who found complete fulfillment in G-d that day. They were among those that Isaiah prophesied would fall and bow before the Jews because of their association with YHWH. The two major players in the narrative could be described as devout and obedient Gentiles (G-d-fearers). Cornelius represented a new kind of man in a way that was noticed by G-d. Firm in his stance, he was a man of charity and fasting, recognized favorably by G-d and others and emboldened by his divine vision. Likely a synagogue attender, he prayed, likely recited the Shema, turned toward Jerusalem, may have eaten 'clean' foods, and followed Jewish traditions. Cornelius' way of living allowed Peter to embrace the assignment to visit the Centurion's home. Cornelius loved, G-d and further, as a result of Peter's vision, had become clean in G-d's eyes.

Peter's experience of going on the rooftop to pray held precedence in Jewish history (in Honi's grandson Abba Chilkiah) as did the key to Peter's interpretation of the vision. Both the "*animals*" and the "*four corners*" of the sheet referred to *nations*, i.e. Gentiles. Both communicated familiar Jewish concepts, helping him understand the hidden Jewish message. In this chapter, I asserted that the Isaiah 11:12 passage is fulfilled, at least in part, by the entrance of Gentiles into Jesus' stream of Judaism starting with Cornelius and his household.

Although there are no details about the actual baptism, Peter's decision to command baptism in the name of the Messiah was the only logical conclusion. Rabbinic thought linked Spirit with the Messiah. Earlier, when the Holy Spirit came to the mostly Jewish audience at Shavuot, the crowd was cleansed and many came to know the messiah. In Caesarea, Gentiles filled the prerequisite to baptism with repentance, hence the appearance of the Holy Spirit. Peter associated them both with the prophecy of Joel about "*the last days*".

The use of the terms *κοινὸν / ἀκάθαρτον* in Acts 10 indicates cleanliness. The distinction between edible and inedible animals represents the distinction between Jews and other nations. Interestingly, the Babylonian Talmud indicates that food from heaven is never unclean, a repetition of the same idea.

The second, *διακρινόμενος / διακρίναντα*, has more than one meaning: '*without hesitation*' and '*making no distinction*'. In this sense, the passages in which the words occur could be reworded,

“waste no time to accept Gentiles who are no longer to be discriminated against” and “go with them making no distinctions between yourself and them”.

Finally, Προσωπολήμπτης, the hapax legomenon in Acts 10:34, reflects the Hebrew idiom “lifter of faces”, known from the Aaronic blessing, meaning to *show favor*. It also infers biblical forgiveness. The idea of distinguishing between the holy (kodosh) and ordinary is also indicated. Israel was chosen or set aside from amongst the nations at an earlier time in history, and now Cornelius and his household also became chosen or set aside. The Lord conferred forgiveness through their repentance and showed them favor.

In the end, things that lead up to and were included in the activities at Cornelius’ house, recorded in the tenth Chapter of Acts — particularly Peter’s spontaneous response to baptize Gentiles like Jews were baptised — should be understood based on the response given by the larger group of circumcised believers in 11:17, 18. They grasped that the separation between Jews and Gentiles, designed by the Mosaic Law as a safeguard, was no longer in place. In Peter’s line of thinking, G-d gave the same gift, the Holy Spirit, to Gentiles that he had given to Jews when they believed in Jesus. Peter could see nothing left to deter the next logical step, “*Who was I that I could hinder G-d?*” (11:17). He baptized them. As a result, Cornelius and his household were set aside, distinguished from other Gentiles, forgiven, and counted as equals with Israel.

7.5 The Christian leadership and the Gentile experience

The aim Chapter 5 was to understand why the earliest Christian leaders saw themselves as qualified to make organizational decisions apart from the Jewish governing body at the time, the Sanhedrin. I also wanted to learn more about the behavioral expectations of Gentiles attracted to the movement of Jesus (my primary research problem). The objectives were to explore the opinions of the larger Jewish population regarding Gentile inclusion in Judaism; to examine the topic of incoming Gentiles as debated at the Jerusalem Council; to inspect the Noahide commands and the Apostolic Decree; and to pour over governance structures of Judaism — particularly the Sanhedrin.

According to my construction, it seems that first-century Jews accepted Gentiles, but also exhibited bigotry toward them in certain circumstances and at certain times. Relations between Jews and Gentiles, in their non-converted state, were complicated at best. One complex issue was Table Fellowship. “To what degree should — or could — Jews fellowship with Gentiles?” This seemingly black-and-white question formed a crucial backbone as Jewish Christian leadership wrestled with the idea of Gentile inclusion. An objectively broad spectrum of halakhah, in outlook and practice, may have existed such that Jews could eat with Gentiles without ceasing

to be Jews. Jesus and his movement made generous allowances along these tolerant theological lines following in the path of Hillel. But pressure regarding table fellowship from traditional Jews created an intolerable environment for the Apostolic leaders.

In the court-like setting of the Jerusalem Council, the Apostolic leaders gathered to engage in a doctrinal debate in an attempt to settle the question “how to deal with the Gentiles.” Diplomatically, they established an official set of halakhic rulings for non-Jews who followed the Jesus movement. The solution was unprecedented. It offered latitude so that Gentiles did not have to become converted Jews or even undergo circumcision. They would fulfill necessary qualifications by following certain guidelines that later came to be known as “the Seven Commandments” or Noahide laws.

The Noahide laws — feasibly originated from an early creed called the “Two Ways” — were lurking in some form in the background to Acts 15. The final Jerusalem document, called the Apostolic Decree, served as a guide to filter the Gentiles through the parimeter of the Covenant so they could establish their relationship with G-d. Additional guidelines required participation in continuing education through weekly Torah lessons (Acts 15:21).

Opinions in the Council congealed as James applied Amos 9 and envisaged a restoration of Israel with a message to Gentiles seeking the Lord. Paul’s singular addition to basic Gentile requirements was to ‘remember the poor.’ The epoch-making and powerfully influential Jerusalem Council proved to be a momentous meeting addressing the long-awaited inclusion of Gentiles.

According to my investigation, governance structures of the first-century left an atmosphere ripe for intervention by early church leaders. The variable structure of the Sanhedrin along with and the authority given to first-century Sages with Semikhah strengthened the environment. A couple of incidences, including, Yohanan ben Zakki's appropriation of Simon ben Gamaliel II's place of authority, set the precedent for taking command without permission. Additionally, at least two of the first church leaders, Paul and James, held the credentials to sit in on court proceedings of the Bet Din and held qualifications to perform judgments. When combined, these factors paved the way for the apostolic leaders to feel qualified to make decisions heretofore reserved for Judaism’s traditional governance leaders.

Based on the research, Paul, James, and possibly Peter, acted as Sages authorized to establish Jewish law regarding Gentiles. They did this outside the very traditional law-making avenues, but within the acceptable avenues available to them. These were among the unique circumstances that led them to make decisions of inclusion.

7.6 Acceptance and expectations of Gentiles

The aim of Chapter 6 was to reexamine the levels of “acceptance” granted to Gentile Christians. My objectives were to ascertain the level of Torah observance that early Church leaders expected of incoming Gentiles and the level of acceptance granted to them. This was accomplished by answering, in each subheading, two specific questions. “What level of Torah observance did the early Church leaders expect of Gentiles?” and “What level of acceptance did they grant to Gentiles?”

The search for answers was twofold, first I explored biblical texts with an emphasis on New Testament writings that reflect early church thinking; and second I examined rabbinical and otherwise non-Canonical writings for revelation to the same. Subsections were entitled Canonical and Non-canonical literature.

In the Canonical section, Scripture references attached to Peter, Mark and John the Baptist provided a glimpse into New Testament mindsets before and during the establishment of the Church. Garroway posited that Yeshua permitted Gentiles to become reckoned an actual bodily descendant of Abraham while neither obviating nor transcending the markers of Jewish identity. In that sense, Jewish history made it possible for Gentiles to gain justification *through* the salvation history of the Jews, while Jewish believers were justified *out of or by* their own history as they lived it out. The rich pool of Judaism made transformation possible so the concept of circumcision as the defining indicator of Jewish identity remained intact: circumcision and physical descent.

Among divergent approaches to community identity construction and maintenance, Paul sided with greater lenience and acceptance toward Gentiles while the Jesus community of Jerusalem exhibited a higher degree of primordality. In other words, some Jewish communities expected a higher level of Torah observance than others. I asserted that varying levels of acceptance may have been granted to Gentiles based on the demographical and theological stance of Jewish communities. The fact that they accepted Gentiles at all was a ‘mystery’ that led to a new identity (and ethnicity). Realization of the mystery influenced how early church leaders viewed Gentile believers, and by default how Gentiles believers saw themselves.

A Non-Canonical called the *Didache* answers questions posed in this chapter. The seemingly Jewish document often mistaken as part of the New Testament, was designed to give instruction to Gentiles. As a handbook it gives much more comprehensive instruction for living than Acts 15. Based on the very Jewish nature of this document, I can see how the level of Torah observance for Gentiles could’ve been perceived as more in-depth than the basic Noahide Laws.

The second non-canonical document reviewed, the Birkath Haminim (BH), imposed certain constraints on those viewed as standing outside the accepted structure of Jewish belief, including Jewish Christians. If the early dating of the document is right, it falls just after the formation of the early church, and was familiar to the early Church. I proposed that as the BH may have added to numbers in the early Church, and strengthened bonds between Jewish and Gentile believers.

7.7 Concluding Theological Reflections

We know from biblical accounts that Gentile followers of the G-d of Israel were an early phenomenon. The mixed multitude (ערב רב) that followed Abraham's descendants out of Egypt is a great example. Other non-Jews later affiliated themselves with Judaism to differing degrees. Isaiah understood G-d's plan to incorporate Gentiles when he spoke of them swearing allegiance to the LORD while all nations and tongues were gathered to G-d (19:16-25, 49:22, 56:1-8, 66:18-24).

I'm captivated by the words of the prophet Zachariah who said, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that G-d is with you'" (Zechariah 8:23). Cornelius and his household fulfilled this prophecy. They adhered to Jewish places and Jewish ways in an attempt to know G-d. This was not unusual for the time, but the outcome was highly unusual: they were accepted.

The aim of this study was to examine their acceptance level and to determine the behavioral expectations of Gentiles to whom the letter of Acts 15 was written. What degree of Torah observance was expected of them and what degree of observance was incorporated or demonstrated in their lives.

While they were "accepted", we can say with confidence that there were different opinions on what was a truly an acceptable lifestyle in the earliest church. Some Jewish Christian communities expected a higher level of Torah observance than others. I asserted that the demographical and theological stance of the Jewish Christian communities may have determined the acceptance level granted to Gentiles. I also found that the Torah clearly did not preclude outsiders from taking upon themselves additional observances according to their respective abilities and desires. "*What level of acceptance was granted to Gentiles in the early Church?*" I would propose that one of the outcomes of the *Birkath Haminim*, was that Jewish believers extended a greater level of acceptance to Gentiles. The reasoning comes from a recent body of research that shows that the feeling of rejection causes internal destabilization and a tendency to draw closer to those who

display approval and value toward the one being rejected. The fact that inclusion of Gentiles brought great joy to all the believers, sets a tone of the attitude of acceptance (Acts 15:3).

“What degree of observance was incorporated/demonstrated in their lives?” If we use Cornelius as a prototype, we see the practice of prayer, fasting and charity to the extent that he captured the attention of G-d who recognized these features and rewarded him. Finally, “What level of Torah observance did early Christian leaders expect of Gentile Christians? Perhaps the Didache itself sums it up best. “For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able, then at least do what you can.” (Didache 6:2-30).

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ADDENDUM ONE

The following background information is based on Safrai (2010: 1-27):

- During the second to fourth centuries and even later, Galilee was the living center of the Jewish people and its leadership, and the place in which the Oral Torah was collected and in large degree created. Organized formation of information on such a large scale points to concentration of Jewish scholarship in the region [Galilee] in an earlier timeframe.
- When discussing the cultural image of Galilee, Jewish scholars of the history of the Halakah or Talmudic literature refer in some degree to the history of Christianity or to the background of the beginnings of Christianity in which rabbinical teachings were prevalent.
- If Jerusalem is barred, most of the Sages about whom there is confirmation of their origin and activity in the Second Temple Period, were from Galilee, or were especially active in Galilee.²²⁶
- A saying in Galilee by the Sages reveals study groups in which teachers and students met, “let your house be a meeting place for the Sages, and sit amidst the dust of their feet” (Avot 1:4).
- Evidence of a permanent academy in Lower Galilee may be assumed in association with Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai in Arava who lived there for eighteen years (j. Shabbat 16:15d). Rabbis visiting from outside of Galilee would find audiences in public places and also engage in discussions with the local Sages and groups of pupils.
- The Jerusalem Talmud speaks of Galileans involvement in the weaving of garments as gifts for the apparel of the priests in Jerusalem. Intense connection with the Temple is apparent from pilgrimages and the presence of Galileans in Jerusalem.
- The Jerusalem Talmud and Lamentations Rabbah report large quantities of gifts from three cities in Lower Galilee: Kavul, Sichnin and Migdal Zevaya (Ta’anit 4:69a; Lamentations Rabbah 2).
- Generosity in particular on the part of two wealthy families from Ruma in the southwest of the Beit Netofah Valley mentioned by Josephus, shows the observance of the tradition of

²²⁶ Hillel from Babylon is a notable exception. Among those with a strong Galilean presence are Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Halaftha, Rabbi Hananiah (Hanina) ben Teradyon, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria, Rabbi Zadok and Elisha ben Avuyah, and Rabbi Jose ben Kisma.

“giving of charity” with scrupulous attention to Sabbath bounds (permitted walking distances 4,000 *amot*, about 2 kilometers).²²⁷

- Numerous accounts in the Galilee testify to the meticulous observance of the laws of cleanness. In one such account, Rabbi Jose ben Halaftha bears witness to the close attention to cleanliness in the treatment of legumes and the gathering of vegetables from the fields in Sepphoris²²⁸. In another, observance of the laws of *kilayim*—the forbidden junction of plants or animals—is raised in relation to the growers of produce in different locals in Galilee and the details of these laws (T. Kilayim 1:4;j. Kilayim 1:24d.).
- The Tosefta, Talmuds and Midrash²²⁹ relate how the Sabbath was observed in Shihin (in the Galilee region) beyond the stringent requirements of the law. In one report, Shihin locals show respect for nearby gentiles who offered to send aid to extinguish an accidental fire that erupted in the courtyard of Joseph ben Samai on the Sabbath.²³⁰
- A combination of narratives about Rabban Gamaliel and his sons dating to around the end of the first-century, talk about the strict practices of the Galileans which, when combined with other narratives from the Tosefta (and parallels), provide ample evidence that religious and social life there was rooted in the tradition of the Oral Torah in a superior way compared to the tradition of Judea.
- Pharisees were native to the region of Galilee while the scribes came from Jerusalem. This supposition is to be discussed further in this chapter.²³¹

²²⁷ The wealthy families mentioned were the Mammal and Gurion families who distributed dried figs to the poor village of Shihin during drought years on the Sabbath.

²²⁸ The crops mentioned here were to be kept dry so they would not be capable of becoming unclean.

²²⁹ T. Shabbat 13 (14);9;j. Shabbat 16:15d;b. yoma 8:5b;j. Nedarim 4:38d;b. Shabbat 121a; Deuteronomy Rabbah

²³⁰ Afterward, Joseph ben Samai sent payment to them for their involvement.

²³¹ Jacob Neusner states that there were few pharisaic Sages in Galilee, citing words the Jerusalem Talmud on Amora Ulla Rabbi Ulla said that he resided in Arav (Lower Galilee) for eighteen years and was asked only two questions, indicating a lack of interest in Torah on behalf of students Rabbi Ulla is quoted as saying, “*Galilee, Galilee, you hated the Torah; you will eventually be forced by the officers*” (Neusner, 175:64). Ulla, however, lived in the second half of the third century and the tradition, said there seems to be some question as to the authenticity of this tradition tied to Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai (Safrai 2010:online).

- Synagogues, the great invention of the Second Temple Period, are found in Nazareth, Capernaum and in all the cities of the Galilee.²³² The context in which synagogues are mentioned in the gospels and in Tannaitic literature is not prayer but the reading of the Torah.
- Evidence demonstrates that the *pietist* movement or trend known as *Hasidim* from the Second Temple period as being rooted in and active in Galilee. The movement, rather than springing from a world empty of Torah, is better viewed as coming from creative Jewish culture, innovative in both thought and conduct, as were the active personalities of Rabbi Hanina ben dosa, Abba Hilkiyah (b. Shabbat 121b; m. Avot 2:5).

²³² Matt. 4:23, 9:35; Mark 1:21, 39 and 6:1; Luke 4:15, 16, 21, 31; John 6:59.

²³² Afterward, Joseph ben Samai sent payment to them for their involvement.

ADDENDUM TWO – PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING



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DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I, Christina Maria Etrechia Terblanche, hereby declare that I edited the thesis
titled:

**Repentance unto life: Acceptance and behavioral expectations of gentiles
in the Jerusalem church in light of the experience of Peter and Cornelius
(Acts 11:18)**

for Gayle Timberlake for the purposes of submission as a postgraduate study.
No changes were permanently affected and were left to the discretion of the
student.

Regards,

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