

**Missionary flexibility or continuity:  
Paul's purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26 in  
light of a Jewish Second Temple period  
background**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a reassessment of Paul's purity rite in Acts 21:18-26. Contrary to the traditional reading of Acts 21:18-26 which views Paul's action in contrast to the Corpus Paulinum, this study investigates the view that Acts 21:18-26 is compatible with Paul's encounter with the Messiah of Israel and his own writings. It aims to compare, study and evaluate different approaches. First, the study examines in chapter 2 different traditional approaches to Acts 21:18-26 which argue that purity laws became obsolete after the coming of Jesus. In this light Paul's purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26 is seen as an adaptation to the Jewish community for missionary purposes. But a plain and literary reading of Acts contradicts such a view. Chapter 3 examines new approaches such as the New Perspective on Paul. Those approaches to Pauline studies also understand ritual and ceremonial aspects of the law as overcome and obsolete. Cultic and ceremonial aspects of the Torah are separated from the moral aspects of the Torah. But a study of literature from the Second Temple period shows that Jewish literature did not have an obvious division of the Torah into three parts. Thus both traditional and new approaches to Acts 21 are unsatisfactory in their understanding of Paul's purity ritual. More promising seems the understanding of Paul as a continuing Jew. Chapter 4 describes Paul as a man living a genuine and coherent Jewish life with individual Jewish aspects characteristic of the Second Temple period. Thus a non-supersessionist reading of the New Testament is applied. Chapter 5 interprets Acts 21:18-26 in light of a Jewish Second Temple period background embedded in the Roman world. The described events in Paul's life are historically viable. A comparison of Acts 15 with Acts 21 demonstrates that both Gentile and Jewish identity were affirmed in the early church. Gentiles do not have to become Jews and Jews do not have to become Gentiles; both parties may live within the one church. Paul's purity rite is a confirmation of his genuine Jewish identity and not a concession to Judaism. The final chapter compares Acts 21:18-26 with the Corpus Paulinum, especially with passages that suggest a negative view of ritual purity. But the examination shows that those texts do not express Paul's self-understanding as a Jewish believer or his Jewish identity. Therefore, these passages cannot be used as a refutation of the ritual act described in Acts 21:18-26. It is plausible to take the purity rite in Acts

21:18-26 literally as it is described there, namely as a confirmation of Paul's genuine Jewish identity.

**Key terms:** Paul, ritual purity, law, identity, Gentile Christian, Jewish Christian, New Perspective on Paul

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ASV	American Standard Bible
B	Babylonian
bMen	Mishnah
bNaz	Babylonian Tractate Nazir
bNed	Babylonian Tractate Nedarim
bOhal	Babylonian Tractate Ohalot
bPar	Babylonian Tractate Parah
bPes	Babylonian Tractate Pessahim
bShabb	Babylonian Tractate Shabbat
bSanh	Babylonian Tractate Sanhedrin
Chr	Chronicles
Col	Colossians
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
D	Codex Bezae
DBLG	Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains
Deut	Deuteronomy
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
En	Enoch
Eph	Ephesians
ESV	English Standard Version
EWNT	Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament
Ex	Exodus
Ezek	Ezekiel
Gal	Galatians
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
Jub	Book of Jubilees
Lev	Leviticus
LXX	Septuagint
M	Mishnah
mBik	Babylonian Tractate Bikkurium
mKil	Mishnah Killim
mMid	Mishnah Middot
mNaz	Mishnah Nazir
mToh	Mishnah Tohorot
mYad	Mishnah Yaddaim
mZab	Mishnah Zabim
NASB	New American Standard Bible
Nah	Nahum
Neh	Nehemiah
NIV	New International Version Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NPP	New Perspective on Paul
NRSV	New Revised Standard Bible
NT	New Testament
Num	Numbers
OT	Old Testament
Pet	Peter
Phil	Philippians
QMMT	Ma'ase Miqsat Hattora, Qumran Cave 4



QS	Community Rule, Qumran Cave 1
QSam <sup>a4</sup>	Book of Samuel A, Qumran Cave 4
QToharot	Toharot, Qumran Cave 4
Rom	Romans
RSV	Revised Standard Bible
Sa	Sahidic
SpecLegPhilo	Special Laws
sy <sup>hmg</sup>	Syriac text
tAvZarah	Tosefta Abodah Zarah
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TLNT	Theological Lexicon of the New Testament
tSanh	Tosefta Sanhedrin
Zech	Zechariah

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

He adopted the same flexible attitude to such customs as observance of special days or abstention from certain kinds of food: "let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:2-6). He himself was happy to conform to Jewish customs when he found himself in Jewish society. Such conformity came easily to him, in view of his upbringing, but he had learned to be equally happy to conform to Gentile ways in Gentile company. If it is asked what his practice was when he found himself in mixed Jewish and Gentile society, the answer probably is that he acted as he thought each situation required: any Jews who were content to participate in such mixed society had doubtless learned some measure of adaptation already. For anyone who stayed by the letter and spirit of the law, Paul's regarding some of its requirements as matters of indifference, his treating as optional things that the law laid down as obligatory, must in itself have constituted "apostasy against Moses"; but in practice he avoided giving offense to those in whose company he was from time to time (Bruce, 2008:406).

Bruce deals in his commentary on Acts 21 with Paul's arrival in Jerusalem and his purity ritual demonstrating his Torah observance. He describes Paul's actions in Acts 21:18-26 as missionary flexibility. Paul performed ritual purity in order to be more effective with his missionary efforts among the Jews. Sometimes Paul adjusted himself to the Jews and sometimes to the Gentiles in order to win them for Christ. He conformed to Jewish customs in Jewish society and to Gentile ways in Gentile company. He was culturally sensitive. Bruce's opinion reflects the main consensus in New Testament scholarship. Acts 21:18-26 is not a confirmation of Paul's continued Torah observance either in the Diaspora or in the land of Israel, but is an example of his theology of adaptation described in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 (cf. Dunn, 2016:285). Those passages are often the background for the understanding of Acts 21:18-26.

But an alternative background text could be 1 Corinthians 7:18ff. Paul remained a Jewish believer with a Jewish lifestyle and didn't seek to remove the marks of circumcision. It is indisputable in modern scholarship that Paul was a Jew and was even connected to Judaism after his encounter with Jesus. This is quite different from traditional Christian interpretation. Neubrand (2011:361) states that in the last thirty years a rethinking occurred regarding the understanding of Paul and his theology within the Christian church. Today it is almost natural to see and understand Paul in the context of his Jewish beliefs and religion, not in contrast to them. The question is now to what extent Paul remained Jewish? Did his Jewishness extend only to Jewish thinking and theology which can be found in the New Testament or also to a daily lifestyle which could even include a cultic action like a purification rite? There are several works that deal with Paul and purity in his letters (Newton, 1985; Vahrenhorst, 2008; Gilbrant, 2007), but they all fail

to consider in this respect Acts 21:18-26. When it comes to this passage, it is not acknowledged as a proof text for Paul's Jewish lifestyle as we have mentioned above. At most, as some new approaches suggest, it is Luke's tendency to Judaize Paul. Paul appears more Jewish than he actually was. The conclusion is the same: Acts 21:18-26 is not compatible with Paul's theology and life. But is Acts 21:18-26 really not compatible with a consistent Torah observant lifestyle of Paul as many commentators assume?

### **1.1 The problem**

As we have seen, generally commentators describe Paul's action in Acts 21 as an expedient action. This research will question whether this assumption is correct. If we apply the traditional view (missionary flexibility) to Acts 21 there arise several problems. It means that Paul's behaviour was dishonest because the intention of James was to show to fellow Jews that Paul *never* did anything against the Law, and not only when he was among his fellow Jews. Luke describes Paul as a genuine Jewish believer<sup>1</sup> who lived consistently according to the Torah. Thus the action in Acts 21 was maybe not an action of missionary flexibility but in accordance with Paul's continual Jewish lifestyle as a Jewish light to the nations, as David J. Rudolph, a Messianic Jewish theologian, points out in his study on Acts 21:17-26 (Rudolph, 2011: 53ff.). Those two divergent approaches stay in contrast.

### **1.2 The central question**

The central question of this thesis, therefore, is: "Was Paul's purity rite in Acts 21:18-26 an action of missionary flexibility or evidence of his consistent Jewish lifestyle?" An answer to this question may affirm the identity of Messianic Jewish believers<sup>2</sup> and help them to develop a distinctive Messianic Jewish theology (Harvey, 2009:283). At the same time, the answer can also be a challenge for traditional churches to take a different view on Messianic Jewish theology.

The questions that naturally arise from the central question are:

- What are the arguments for the view that the ritual was an act of missionary flexibility as it is established from 1 Corinthians 9:19-22?

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms "Jewish believer" and "Jewish Christian(s)" interchangeably. A Jewish Christian "is a Jewish believer in Jesus" (see on definitions and problems: Skarsaune, 2007:5)

<sup>2</sup> Harvey (2009:1) defines Messianic Judaism as the "religion of Jewish people who believe in Jesus (Yeshua) as the promised Messiah."

- What are the arguments for the view that the ritual was in continuity with Paul's Jewish lifestyle?
- What is the biblical evidence from Acts 21:18-26?
- How is the action of Paul compatible with his antinomian statements regarding purity in his letters and why did he agree to perform the purification rite?

### **1.3 Aim and objectives**

The main aim of the thesis is to determine whether the purification act of Paul in Acts 21:18-26 is to be understood after his encounter with the Messiah of Israel as an act of adaptation or as evidence for his consistent Jewish lifestyle.

The objectives of this study are to:

- study and evaluate the arguments that the ritual was an act of missionary flexibility;
- study and evaluate the arguments that the ritual was in continuity with Paul's Jewish lifestyle;
- study the biblical evidence of Acts 21:18-26 in light of a Jewish Second Temple period background;
- compare Paul's purification act with his antinomian statements in his letters.

The central theoretical argument of this thesis is that Paul's purification rite as described by Luke is totally in accordance with his continual Jewish lifestyle even after his encounter with the Messiah Jesus and is not in contrast with the so-called antinomian statements in the Corpus Paulinum. Luke's description of Paul is in accordance with Paul's self-descriptions in his letters. It is widely accepted that Paul's action was an example of his strategy of adaptation described in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, but this study will also consider 1 Corinthians 7:18ff. as possible background for Acts 21:18-26.

### **1.4 Methodology**

This study will be based mainly on a biblical-historical interpretation as proposed by Maier (1994).<sup>3</sup> The interpretation will be historical in the sense that because the Bible "comprises a document of history of God with man, it must be understood and interpreted historically" (Maier, 1994:377). It will be biblical in the sense that the biblical text is the starting point (Maier, 1994:384). Maier (1994:384) explains further: "The first step of our interpretation is devoted to the text. In this way we are remaining true to the procedure of

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<sup>3</sup> He also calls it a historical-biblical interpretation.

the church's interpretation of Scripture down through the centuries." Therefore determining the text (or textual criticism) is an important task. Philological exegesis will be the main emphasis. Maier (1994:386) states that "such exegesis investigates overarching structural features and more immediate context as well as grammatical and linguistic structure. It illuminates word meanings and literary forms (genre) and flows naturally into a suitable translation." Also, "it explains the words, the linguistics, and the literary forms of the New Testament first of all with an eye to the Old Testament and to Judaism" (Maier, 1994:387). "From philological exegesis interpretation progresses to historical exegesis" as Maier (1994:388) explains the next step. The interpreter illuminates the text by ancient history or broadens the understanding with comparative religious illumination. Thus "biblical-historical interpretation devotes concentrated attention to all historical dimensions. It places high priority on understanding and interpreting the Bible historically" (Maier, 1994:389). This point may also be expanded to the fact that every interpreter has certain presuppositions which he brings to the text (worldview, culture, values, language, ideas, etc.). Those presuppositions can be disregarded to a certain degree. A biblical-historical interpreter knows of his limits and presuppositions when dealing with ancient texts.

Thus the biblical-historical interpreter does not labor as a historian "but as theologian in the service to the church" (Maier, 1994:389). He remembers that he is forming a hypothesis of a historical reconstruction of the original circumstances and thus has to distinguish between hypotheses and facts as clear as possible (Maier, 1994:390). The last step of the biblical-historical interpretation is synthetic interpretation (Maier, 1994:394), which means to obtain an overview. Maier (1994:394) explains what this interpretation includes:

The conspicuous mark of a synthetic interpretation is discussion. The text ... must be brought into dialogue with the following: 1) other texts of enscripturated revelation; 2) previous interpreters, including dogmaticians; 3) the believing Christian fellowship, the church; and 4) the challenges of the surrounding world.

Thus the whole interpretation of this study will be placed within the broad framework of an evangelical protestant tradition with a particular Christian perspective which upholds a non-supersessionist theological interpretation of Judaism (Jenson, 2003:9-11). To understand what non-supersessionist interpretation of Judaism is, it is important to define supersessionism. Vlach (2010:12) defines supersessionism as follows:

Supersessionism, therefore, appears to be based on two core beliefs: (1) the nation Israel has somehow completed or forfeited its status as the people of

God and will never again possess a unique role or function apart from the church, and (2) the church is now the true Israel that has permanently replaced or superseded national Israel as the people of God. In the context of Israel and the church, supersessionism is the view that the NT church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God.

Thus a non-supersessionist interpretation maintains an opposite position: (1) The nation of Israel has not forfeited its status as people of God and possesses a unique role apart from the church, and (2) Israel is the people of God and is not replaced by the church.

I will especially consider a Messianic Jewish reading and understanding of the New Testament (Rudolph, 2005). I will analyse and compare the standard and traditional exegetical biblical commentaries on Acts 21:18-26 (Bruce, 2008; Witherington, 1997; Keener, 2014 et al.) in order to evaluate them. I will also pay critical attention to the broad framework of the New Perspective on Paul, which usually views Paul within the Judaism(s) of his days (Wright, 2013; Dunn, 2006). In order to evaluate the biblical evidence in Acts 21:18-26 it will be necessary to exegete the passage in light of Jewish Second Temple period literature like the Qumran texts (Newton, 2005; Werrett, 2007; Klawans, 2000) and Jewish pseudepigraphic texts (Neusner, 1973). It will also be necessary to consider rabbinic texts (Neusner, 1994; bOhal; mToh) though they are from a later period but may contain Second Temple period sources of information. Paul also worked and lived as a missionary for the most part of his life in the Diaspora. Thus it will also be necessary to present a broader picture of his Jewish life and Jewish purity regulations in respect to mission work in the world of Roman paganism (Alon, 1977; Grabe, 2000; Hayes, 2002). Finally, Acts 21:18-26 will be compared with texts within the Corpus Paulinum which connote a negative view on purity issues. Such passages may contradict Acts' representation of Paul.

## CHAPTER 2: WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE RITUAL AS AN ACT OF MISSIONARY FLEXIBILITY?

### 2.1 Introduction

Research literature on Pauline studies and the Mosaic Law is innumerable and has grown exponentially during the last decades with the development of the New Perspective on Paul (cf. Dunn, 1996:2). Generally speaking, Pauline studies focus their attention on the relationship of Paul to Judaism after his encounter with the Messiah Jesus. Tiwald (2008:11) describes it as the “*Gretchenfrage der Paulusexegese: Wie hielt es Paulus nach seiner Bekehrung mit dem Judentum und jüdischem Gesetz?*” (“The crucial question of the exegesis of Paul is: How did Paul feel about Judaism and the Jewish law after his conversion?”) Also for Stuhlmacher (1992:253) it is the most challenging question in the theology of Paul. Especially in the last century, after the Holocaust (Zetterholm, 2009:95), scholars have tried to give an answer to this pivotal question, but they are far away from a consensus. Actually there is more dissent than consensus, states Tiwald (2008:12), and explains further that “*In keinem anderen Fachbereich ntl Exegese klaffen die Positionen weiter auseinander als hier.*” (“In no other field of New Testament studies do the positions differ more than here.”) But it is possible to reduce those numerous positions to three main divergent approaches: Paul was Jewish before and after his encounter with the Messiah (William D. Davies, Krister Stendahl, E.P. Sanders, J. Dunn); Paul was Jewish before his encounter and Christian afterwards (Weber, Bousset, Bultmann, Käsemann, Jürgen Becker), and Paul was mostly influenced by Greek culture (Folker Siegert) and thus his writings have to be read against a mainly Greco-Roman-Jewish culture. The last position was predominant before the development of the New Perspective on Paul. Since then the first two positions have been in competition.

More specifically, recent Pauline studies limit their research on the question of the relationship between Paul and Judaism to the narrower focus on the Mosaic Law and justification and/or righteousness and/or salvation. While moral aspects of the law are treated intensively, cultic and ceremonial aspects—and especially purity rituals—attract less attention. Though the New Testament doesn’t differentiate between moral, civil, and ceremonial laws (e.g., purity, sacrifice and cult), many scholars adhere to this division and there are some scholars who defend a tripartite division of the Mosaic Law (e.g., Liroy, 2004:17ff.). Despite the fact that the New Testament and Second Temple Judaism did not recognise such a tripartite division (and I will argue against such a division), I acknowledge that for the vast majority of time throughout church history Christians have

adhered to such a division. Therefore, in this study we focus on the third division of the Mosaic Law, the ceremonial laws. In New Testament scholarship ceremonial laws are a subordinate topic and are treated either as an indifferent matter for Christian theology or as part of Jewish culture and identity. New Perspective scholars consider purity rituals as Jewish “boundary markers”. They “are a group’s way of marking itself off from others—boundary defining acts” (Dunn, 1990:48). According to Dunn (1990:52) Jesus “set inward purity antithetically against ritual purity”. Jesus “challenged the normal understanding of (Palestinian) Judaism on boundary issues”. Thus also Paul was attacking the Law as a boundary (Dunn, 2006:82). This means that those boundary markers had to be demolished. Wright (2013:1036) also holds a similar position.

Reformed theologians still see valid aspects of moral and civil laws for Christian theology. Lioy (2004:17) writes that “The laws in the Old Testament about ceremonial purity, diet, and sacrifice were temporary edicts that taught God’s people important truths.” Later they “were cancelled” (Lioy, 2004:17). Classical and revised dispensationalists argue that the whole Mosaic Law (including the ceremonial laws) was completely abrogated in the NT and is therefore no longer binding for the church (Lightner, 1986:236; Ryrie, 1999:348). Thus Reformed scholars and dispensationalists agree that the ceremonial laws were completely abrogated and don’t have any meaning for the church today, since they were fulfilled in Christ. They were also not binding for Jewish Christians in the New Testament era. Combs (2013:26) sums it up: “It is universally agreed that the ceremonial law has been set aside, having been fulfilled in Christ.”

However, Baltes (2016:271) states that some scholars (Ben Chorin, Gaston, Tomson, Nanos, Zetterholm) don’t see a contradiction in Paul’s letters between believing in Christ and Jewish Torah observance, including the cultic law. Thus it is controversial to what extent Paul and other Jewish followers of Jesus lived according to the Torah. In this study we focus on the ritual purity act of Paul in Acts 21:18-26 and what contribution this passage can make to answer the research questions of this study.



## 2.2 Context of Acts 21:17-26

After Paul's third missionary journey he and his co-workers arrived in Jerusalem and the brothers received them gladly (21:17). Our section begins with the note that James and the elders met Paul the next day (v. 18) and talked to him. The following verses up to verse 25 are a report of the discussion between the elders and Paul. The elders tell Paul that many Jewish followers of Jesus have heard about Paul that he is teaching Jews in the Diaspora to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to Jewish customs (v. 21). To dispel the rumours he should purify himself and pay the expenses of four men under a vow (vv. 23-24). This action would demonstrate that Paul as a Jewish follower of Jesus is actually living according to the Torah and upholds it. But the Gentile believers are not required to follow a Jewish lifestyle and adhere to Jewish customs except for the regulations which were enjoined on them in Acts 15. The section is brought to an end with an action of Paul in verse 26. Paul acts according to the suggestions of the elders.

Verse 27 introduces new events in the flow of the story with the phrase Ὡς δὲ ἔμελλον αἰ ἐπὶ ἡμέραι. The rumours are not dispelled but to the contrary they reach their climax with turmoil in the temple (vv. 27-31) and the arrest of Paul by Roman authorities (v. 33). In the following verses and chapters Paul defends himself before the Romans (vv. 34-40), the Jewish people (Acts 22) and the Jewish leaders (Acts 23). Hence our section is an important turning point in the flow of the whole story in Acts, with the encounter between Paul and the elders affecting the following years of Paul. He was arrested and spent the next few years in prison because of his behaviour in Jerusalem.

But how is the action of Paul to be interpreted? Why did he perform the ritual purification act? Was it a mere act of accommodation to the Jewish culture and identity from which Paul had been freed since he encountered the Messiah Jesus? In the following we will provide an overview of the traditional argument that Paul's act in Acts 21:18-26 demonstrated a flexible attitude for the purpose of mission. We will first gain an overview of how the church has traditionally explained Paul's action in Acts 21. Afterwards we will look at recent interpretations. It would be beyond the scope of this study to go through all of the interpretations in church history and it is also not necessary to deal with all interpretations. A cross-section of mainstream church theologians will be sufficient to identify the traditional points of view, and to evaluate them.

## 2.3 Historical-traditional approaches

In this section we will group thematically the most common interpretations in church history until the beginning of the twentieth century about Paul's adherence to the purification rite in Acts 21, and assess them. Since World War II had a great impact on theology (Post Holocaust Theology; cf. Rubenstein 1966; Katz 1983), we will group the interpretations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in a subsequent section.

### 2.3.1 To win the Jews

One of the first interpretations is that Paul's action was a way to win the Jews, those under the law. Origen (1897:384) described in his commentary on John 10:5 Paul's action as such. Origen writes:

If he becomes to the Jews as a Jew that he may gain the Jews, and to those under the law as under the law that he may gain those under the law, and to them that are without law as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that he may gain those without law, and if to the weak he becomes weak that he may gain the weak, it is clear that these statements must be examined each by itself, that he becomes a Jew, and that sometimes he is under the law and at another time without law, and that sometimes he is weak. Where, for example, he says something by way of permission and not by commandment, there we may recognize that he is weak; for who, he says, is weak, and I am not weak? When he shaves his head and makes an offering, or when he circumcises Timothy, he is a Jew; but when he says to the Athenians, "I found an altar with the inscription, To the unknown God. That, then, which ye worship not knowing it, that declare I unto you," and, "As also some of your own poets have said, For we also are His offspring," then he becomes to those without the law as without the law, adjuring the least religious of men to espouse religion, and turning to his own purpose the saying of the poet, "From Love do we begin; his race are we." And instances might perhaps be found where, to men not Jews and yet under the law, he is under the law.

Origen interprets Paul's behaviour as an adaptation for missionary purposes. Paul became to the Jews as a Jew to gain those under the law. Origen refers to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Sometimes Paul could live according to the law and sometimes not. It depended on the situation.

For John Chrysostom (1889:278f.) in his Homilies on Acts the action of Paul was expedient and a sign of cooperation with Jewish believers:

Here with a kind of remonstrance (ἐντροπετικῶς), as "we," say they, commanded them, although we are preachers to the Jews, so do thou, although a preacher to the Gentiles, cooperate with us. Observe Paul: he does not say, "Well, but I can bring forward Timothy, whom I circumcised;

well, but I can satisfy them by what I have to say (of myself)” but he complied, and did all, for in fact thus was it expedient (to do). For it was one thing to take (effectual) measures for clearing himself, and another to have done these things without the knowledge of any (of the parties). It was a step open to no suspicion, the fact of his even bearing the expenses.

According to Chrysostom, Paul adapted himself for expedient purposes. He accommodated himself to Jewish customs to cooperate with the Jews.

### **2.3.2 Allowed for Jewish believers for a period of time**

Some theologians were not against the ceremonial rites. They saw them as being allowed for Jewish believers but only for an interim period until they would disappear. Augustine (1886:352) saw behind the rumours against Paul a party of Jewish believers who were already active in Antioch and who taught that salvation can only be attained by observing these rituals:

This party, therefore, endeavoring to raise odium and persecution against him, charged him with being an enemy of the law and of the divine institutions; and there was no more fitting way in which he could turn aside the odium caused by this false accusation, than by himself celebrating those rites which he was supposed to condemn as profane, and thus showing that, on the one hand, the Jews were not to be debarred from them as if they were unlawful, and on the other hand, that the Gentiles were not to be compelled to observe them as if they were necessary.

But Augustine (1886:352) doesn't neglect the possibility that Jewish believers could observe such rites, “as a way of declaring the divine authority of these rites, and their holy use in the prophetic dispensation, and not as a means of obtaining salvation, which was to them already revealed in Christ and ministered by baptism.” God gave those rites in the former dispensation not for attaining salvation but as a shadow of things to come (cf. Col 2:16ff.). If Paul practised Jewish rites he confirmed them as God's institution (Augustine, 1886:352):

As to Paul's circumcising of Timothy, performing a vow at Cenchrea, and undertaking on the suggestion of James at Jerusalem to share the performance of the appointed rites with some who had made a vow, it is manifest that Paul's design in these things was not to give to others the impression that he thought that by these observances salvation is given under the Christian dispensation, but to prevent men from believing that he condemned as no better than heathen idolatrous worship, those rites which God had appointed in the former dispensation as suitable to it, and as shadows of things to come. For this is what James said to him, that the report had gone abroad concerning him that he taught men “to forsake Moses.” This would be by all means wrong for those who believe in Christ, to forsake him who prophesied of Christ, as if they detested and condemned

the teaching of him of whom Christ said, “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me.”

Our section doesn't explain what kind of Jewish party stood behind the rumours against Paul. Luke makes a general statement that the believing Jews were falsely informed that Paul taught to forsake Moses. Later on (chapter 5.3.4.3.2) we will investigate what kind of party might be behind the rumours. It is a complex question. During the time of Augustine the church condemned Jewish practices and Judaism in general. Therefore, it is noteworthy that Augustine allows Paul to practise Jewish rites but only for Jewish believers and only with the understanding that those rites were a “shadow of things to come”. They would soon disappear.

A similar viewpoint was later maintained by Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274). He discusses in his *Summa Theologica* (Aquinas, 1921:I-II q.103 a.4) the statement that “legal ceremonies can be observed since the Passion of Christ without committing mortal sin” since Paul circumcised Timothy and took part in a purification act in Acts 21. He rejects vehemently such a view (Aquinas, 1921:I-II q.103 a.4 ad 1) referring to Jerome and Augustine. He states that Jerome

distinguished two periods of time. One was the time previous to Christ's Passion, during which the legal ceremonies were neither dead, since they were obligatory, and did expiate in their own fashion; nor deadly, because it was not sinful to observe them. But immediately after Christ's Passion they began to be not only dead, so as no longer to be either effectual or binding; but also deadly, so that whoever observed them was guilty of mortal sin. Hence he maintained that after the Passion the apostles never observed the legal ceremonies in real earnest; but only by a kind of pious pretense, lest, to wit, they should scandalize the Jews and hinder their conversion.

But Aquinas (1921:I-II q.103 a.4 ad 1) objects to this view and favours Augustine, who

more fittingly distinguished three periods of time. One was the time that preceded the Passion of Christ, during which the legal ceremonies were neither deadly nor dead: another period was after the publication of the Gospel, during which the legal ceremonies are both dead and deadly. The third is a middle period, viz., from the Passion of Christ until the publication of the Gospel, during which the legal ceremonies were dead indeed, because they had neither effect nor binding force; but were not deadly, because it was lawful for the Jewish converts to Christianity to observe them, provided they did not put their trust in them so as to hold them to be necessary unto salvation, as though faith in Christ could not justify without the legal observances.

In this tradition stands also Matthew Poole (1853:456), one of the most influential Puritans in the seventeenth century. In his *Commentary on the Holy Bible* he assesses the action of Paul negatively. The ceremonies were in his sight only given to Jews for a period of time. According to Poole,

These ceremonies (after their accomplishment in Christ) not being at all necessary, they were not imposed upon any that received the faith of Christ from amongst the Gentiles, or other nations; only suffered for a while unto the Jews that turned to Christ, for the hardness of their hearts, and inveterate zeal for them.

Though the New Testament knows of at least two dispensations, one before Christ and one beginning with the coming of Christ, there is no hint in the New Testament that there was a third period of time in between in which legal ceremonies might be observed by Jewish believers and later not.

### **2.3.3 Spiritual immaturity**

Another view is that ceremonial rites were seen as spiritual immaturity. Thus also Paul's action is seen as a spiritual immaturity. Severus of Antioch (488 – 538) contends (Martin, 2006:264):

Thus the apostles and the holy disciples of the Savior, in the beginning, allowed converts from Judaism to the life of the gospel to be circumcised according to the law of Moses in order that they would just believe in the Lord. Later, they themselves on their own, filled with worship in the Spirit and with evangelical perfection, rejected the small shadowy observances of the law.

Severus maintains that though the apostles allowed Jewish Christians to adhere to the Law of Moses it was only because of the spiritual immaturity of the followers of Jesus. When they became spiritually mature they would voluntarily give up the observance of the Law. In light of such an interpretation Paul's action would be just a concession to immature Jewish followers of Jesus. A similar view was held also by Gregory Nazianzen (1894:326) who detected a spiritual growth in Paul's life regarding the law and his Jewish life:

Paul ... having at one time administered circumcision, and submitted to legal purification, he advanced till he could say, "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution?" His former conduct belonged to the temporary dispensation, his latter to maturity.

According to Nazianzen Paul was immature while conducting the purity rite in Acts 21. But Paul performed the rite at the end of his life after he had carried out three missionary journeys and after he had fought several battles for the gospel. Most of his letters were already written and his theology firm. Thus he performed the rite with spiritual maturity.

#### **2.3.4 Unnecessary action**

Calvin has a short section in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* on the ceremonial law. For him the ceremonial law has been abrogated since Christ's coming. Calvin (2011: 364) states that,

Christ by his coming has terminated them, but has not deprived them of anything of their sanctity; rather, he has approved and honored it... Consequently Paul, to prove their observance not only superfluous but also harmful, teaches that they are shadows whose substance exists for us in Christ [Col. 2:17]. Thus we see that in their abolition the truth shines forth better than if they, still far off and as if veiled, figured the Christ, who has already plainly revealed himself.

The ceremonial law is a shadow and points only to Christ. Calvin (2011:364) concludes his investigation with the following remark:

Let it be regarded as a fact that, although the rites of the law have ceased to be observed, by their termination one may better recognize how useful they were before the coming of Christ, who in abrogating their use has by his death sealed their force and effect.

In his *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* he also deals with Acts 21 and Paul's purification act. He refuses the view that Paul acted as a hypocrite. His action was a missionary act to win the Jews. He explains (Calvin, 2010:284):

... Paul, who through voluntary subjection sought to win the favour of the rude, and such as were not thoroughly instructed, that he might do them good; being about to do that not willingly, but because he had rather yield to the brethren than stick to his own judgment. Furthermore, when he was once admitted, he might fitly have passed over to moderate that zeal. His courtesy doth rather deserve great praise, in that he doth not only gently abase himself for the unskilful people's sake, but doth also obey their foolishness who did unworthily, and against reason, suspect him. He might well have reproved them, because they had been so ready to believe reports contrary to his estimation [reputation]. In that he abstaineth, he showeth great patience; in that he winneth their favour so carefully, it is singular modesty.

According to Calvin (2010:285) James and the other elders were in error because "the sight of the temple, and the very seat of the law, did hinder them in defending the use of

liberty.” But in our section we have no hints that James was in error. Paul doesn’t correct him or put in a veto. Though it is an *argumentum ex silentio* it is important to stay with the text. Actually Luke doesn’t describe any answer by Paul. The only reaction we read about is that Paul did what James suggested. In what kind of mood he accomplished the purification is not handed down.

### **2.3.5 Paul lapsed in his faith**

Rudolph (2011:59) refers to Jerome who explained Paul’s actions in Acts 21:17-26 as a compromise to his faith. Paul lapsed in his faith. Actually he didn’t live according to the law but just pretended then to live according to the precepts of the law out of the fear of the Jews (Jerome, 1887) and to win the Jews. “To gain the Jews, you pretended to be a Jew” states Jerome (Epistles 112:10). Rudolph (2011:60 cf. 53ff.) rightly observes in contrast to Jerome that Acts pictures Paul as a Torah-observant Jew in a positive way. Rudolph (2011:60 cf. 53ff.) also notes that “an additional weakness in Jerome’s case is the absence of any evidence in Acts that Paul lapsed”.

### **2.3.6 A matter of indifference**

Another view is that Paul’s action was a matter of indifference. Paul was free from the law through Christ but he had the liberty to observe the law for the sake of others. Thus a ceremony like a purification act was a matter of indifference for him. McGarvey (1892:206-207) describes this position in his commentary on Acts as follows:

He had not taught them to forsake the customs; on the contrary, he had written to the Corinthians more than a year previous, that he had been a Jew to the Jew, that he might win the Jew; and as to the law in general, he had been “as under the law,” that he might gain them who considered themselves still bound to keep the law (1 Cor. 9:20, 21). In order to reconcile this position with Paul’s teaching in those epistles written previous to this time, we have only to observe the distinction which he never lost sight of, between that which we are at liberty to do for the sake of others, and that which we are bound to do in order to obey God... But while teaching thus, he had found no fault with the Jews who continued the observances of the law; he had only tried to convince them that the observance was no longer binding on their consciences. The only difference between him and the most extreme Judaizers, of whom there were doubtless some in the multitude of believers to whom James referred, was that the latter held these observances to be matters of duty, while he held them to be matters of indifference.

But our text doesn't show that the action of Paul was a matter of indifference. The purity rite was important for Paul to disqualify the rumours. James' advice should show that Paul lived in observance with the law (Acts 21:24), not sometimes and not only in Jerusalem but constantly. Actually the last explanation is probably the one which is today favoured by many scholars. Paul accomplished the purity act as a flexible missionary act to win others. We will later analyze this approach in more depth.

### **2.3.7 Summary**

So far we have looked at six explanations regarding Paul's behaviour in Acts 21. The underlying tone in all of the explanations was that the law, especially the ceremonial aspects of the law, was something negative. The law was morally inferior and wasn't given to the Jews to bring them to a higher level than the Gentiles but to the lowest level of humanity, as Ruether once stated (Ruether, 1987:142). The law was abrogated by Christ (Justin, Dialog 11; Chrysostom, Adv. Jud. Homily 1, II,3; Thomas Aquinas; Calvin). It was given just for a short time of period (Old Testament and for Jewish believers during the New Testament period). The ceremonial law, in particular, is useless. Justin (1885:201) states about ritual purification:

But the cisterns which you have dug for yourselves are broken and profitless to you. For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and, lo! The body is pure.

For him it is not the literal statutes of the law that are important but the spiritual and allegorized meaning of it. Graves (2014:7) concludes that,

Many early Christians believed that Old Testament laws conveyed symbolic meaning. There were also Christians who regarded the law as a punishment on Israel, or as a concession granted to Israel after they learned animal sacrifice in Egypt.

From this perspective the action of Paul cannot be correct. But spiritualizing does not need to be a contradiction to a literal understanding and living out of the law. Philo spiritualized the law but did not neglect its literal meaning. He condemned those allegorists who believed that the spiritual significance of the law was fulfilled, while they neglected the literal commandments (Philo, 1995:261). Lichtenberger (1996:17) describes regarding the understanding of the Torah in Jewish Hellenistic literature during the Second Temple period:



Man bemühte neben oder anstelle des Literalsinnes allegorische Deutemuster, meist mit ethisch-moralischer Ausrichtung. So konnte man am Wortlaut der Tora festhalten, zugleich aber den tieferen Sinn deutlich machen und die Plausibilität begründen.

In addition to or instead of the literary sense, allegorical patterns of interpretation were used, usually with an ethical-moral orientation. In this way one could stick to the wording of the Torah, but at the same time make the deeper meaning clear and justify the plausibility. (My translation)

Also for Paul a spiritualized meaning of the law does not replace the literal meaning. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 he is spiritualizing leaven with sin and the Passover lamb with Christ. But this does not mean that he abandoned the celebration of Passover. On the contrary, in verse 8 he encourages the congregation to celebrate the feast (cf. Crawford 2017:103). Thus the action of Paul in Acts 21 doesn't necessarily cancel a symbolic meaning of the law.

## **2.4 Recent explanations and approaches**

David Rudolph identifies six recent explanations of Paul's behaviour (2011:59-73): 1. Paul lapsed in his faith; 2. James tricked Paul; 3. James and Paul fooled the naïve Jewish converts; 4. Paul was inconsistent; 5. Luke's account is a pious fraud; and 6. Paul became as one under the law to win those under the law.

The first explanation we have already looked at and will therefore go to the next five explanations. First we will give short overviews of the first five explanations and then do an in-depth study of the last argument, which will be our main focus. I will add some more important arguments for Paul's action, which Rudolph in his study doesn't mention.

### **2.4.1 James tricked Paul**

The second explanation Rudolph identifies is that James tricked Paul (Rudolph, 2011:60). He refers to Mattill (1970:108) and Porter (2008:172) who both proposed this explanation. They both assume that the Jerusalem Church actually refused Paul's mission and didn't support him. Mattill (1970:116) argues:

Luke also learned that the mother church had now decided against Paul in the question concerning Paul's attitude towards the Law, thus reversing their previous action (15:1-35; 21:25). But the biggest shock to Luke was the refusal of the Jerusalem church to accept Paul's collection, thereby symbolizing their break with the Pauline mission.

When Paul was arrested the Jewish Christians could have helped Paul but they didn't (Mattill, 1970:116). Though Porter (2008:175) doesn't express it as harshly he nevertheless assumes that "not only were possibly more conservative members of the Jerusalem church still suspicious of Paul, but the leaders of the church may well have been as well, thereby causing consternation for the entire church there". Therefore, the accusation against Paul might have been "manufactured by the Jerusalem leaders" (Porter, 2008:182) to bring Paul in some way into a trap (Porter, 2008:179). Paul on the other hand accepted James' suggestion to clear himself from such accusations (Porter, 2008:185). He acted according to 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. and became a Jew to the Jews. Porter (2008:185) states, "This does admittedly result in an inconsistency in Paul's conduct, between in some contexts practicing the law and in others not. In this instance, the resulting events turn sour." Rudolph, in line with Bauckham, is right in refuting this view on Paul. He concludes that, "Mattill's and Porter's historical reconstruction is far-fetched. There is no direct evidence in Acts that the Jerusalem leadership opposed Paul or plotted to get rid of him during his final journey to Jerusalem" (Rudolph, 2011:62; cf. Bauckham, 1995:478). Moreover, there is no direct evidence from Acts that the Jerusalem leadership opposed Paul, but the evidence is contrary. The encounters between Paul and the Jerusalem community are described in a positive way. There was friendly relationship between the Jerusalem and Antioch communities (Acts 11:19-30). Paul and Barnabas were welcomed with great joy in Jerusalem (Acts 15:3). Paul travelled several times to Jerusalem. He collected money for the believers in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26). He expected opposition in Jerusalem (Rom 15:31) but not from the believers. Thus it is highly speculative to suppose an opposition between Paul and James.

#### **2.4.2 James and Paul fooled the naïve Jewish converts**

The third explanation is similar to the second one, but this time the conspiracy is between James and Paul against the Jewish converts. Rudolph refers to Trobisch (2000:83) who thinks that Paul just outwardly appeared as a Torah-observant Jew but technically he fooled the naïve Jewish converts. As in the second explanation, we have no clues in the text itself that James and Paul fooled the Jewish converts (Rudolph, 2011:63). As we have seen, according to Acts and the letters of Paul the relationship between Paul and the Jewish converts in Jerusalem was extremely positive.

### **2.4.3 Paul was inconsistent**

The fourth explanation maintains that Paul was inconsistent in his thoughts about the Jewish Law (Rudolph, 2011:63). Rudolph refers to Harnack who first formulated these thoughts (Harnack, 1911:74ff.). According to Harnack, Paul on one side affirmed the Jewish law for Jewish believers and on the other side he wrestled with “the implications of Christian freedom and equality in his communities” (Rudolph, 2011:63). Thus Paul was inconsistent and paradoxical. This approach was followed by F.J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (Rudolph, 2011:63) and recently by Räisänen (1986:264ff.) who sees in Paul’s thought many difficulties and inconsistencies. But, as Rudolph (2011:64) rightly says, Luke doesn’t portray Paul as inconsistent on the matter of Torah observance. Paul doesn’t have any “hesitation”. He is a “man of conviction and single-mindedness”. He isn’t pictured as a man with inner struggles. Rudolph (2011:64) concludes his observations on Acts by writing that “subsequent to Acts 21, Paul confirms three times that his life and teachings are consistent with the Torah (Acts 24:14-18; 25:8; 28:17). Once he refers to himself in the present tense as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6)”. As we will later see (chapter 6), the thoughts of Paul in his letters are not inconsistent or contradictory to the law.

### **2.4.4 Luke’s account is a pious fraud**

Several scholars don’t see the book of Acts as a reliable source for the description of the life of Paul. Specifically, they are sceptical about the description of Paul’s Torah-observant lifestyle in Acts. Baur (cf. Rudolph, 2011:64ff.) for example reads Acts in his 1845 published work *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi* (Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, 1876) against the backdrop of Galatians (Baur, 1876:195ff.) and contends that a law-observant Paul is an erroneous description in light of Galatians. He opposed all forms of Christian adherence to Jewish law (Baur, 1876:196). Baur actually sees a contradiction between the Paul of the letters and the Paul in Acts. The Christian Paul stood antagonistically to the Jewish faith. This view was common throughout church history, as we have already observed. Zetterholm points out that Baur discerned two main factions in Corinth. Zetterholm (2009:37) states that:

To Baur, it seemed clear that the text revealed a basic antagonism between a Pauline, universal type of Christianity, for which the Torah had had its day, and a Jewish-oriented, particularistic type of Christianity, still bound by the Torah. This perspective, the basic conflict between—in practice—Judaism and Christianity, became the keystone in Baur’s idealistically inspired writing of history.

These two factions were represented on one side by Paul and on the other side by Peter. Peter's factions could also be found in Galatia and elsewhere. Following Baur, Ernst Hänenchen (1955) and Hans Conzelmann (1963) were also very sceptical about Luke's description of Paul in Acts. Rudolph rightly notes that for Hänenchen "Luke was far removed from the historical Paul and the early church, he used late sources and a rich imagination to write his account" (Rudolph, 2011:65). But Rudolph neglects to consider what Luke, according to Hänenchen, really intended with the situation of Paul in Acts 21. We now want to have a closer look at it.

#### **2.4.5 Reconciliation of the Pauline missionary churches and the Palestinian Jewry**

Ernst Hänenchen assumes that the Jerusalemite authorities tried to prevent a split between the Pauline missionary church and the Palestinian Jewry (Hänenchen, 1955:550). The background for the whole incident, according to Hänenchen, is Paul's collection in the Diaspora churches. The Jerusalemites couldn't just reject Paul's collection to maintain a good relationship to the Jewry in Jerusalem. A rejection would mean a break with the Pauline Gentile churches. On the other hand, they couldn't just accept and receive his collection, which would mean a break with the Jewry. What would be the best solution? Paul should pay the expenses for the four men under a vow, so that the unity of the church would be preserved. It would be an act of reconciliation between Paul and the Jewry.

Though it is a relatively coherent explanation, Hänenchen overlooks that Luke doesn't mention the collection in our section but only later in Acts 24:17. Indeed Paul arrived in Jerusalem with the collection from the Diaspora (cf. chapter 5.3.2) but it is doubtful that the collection is the main background for our incident in Acts 21. It is nowhere mentioned and, from an ethical point of view, it would be unethical for Paul to use the money only for himself (cf. my solution chapter 5.3.7.1), instead for using it for poor people in Jerusalem as he intended (Rom 15:25) and as he himself stated later before Felix (Acts 24:17). Though Hänenchen states that the money was for the four poor men under vow, the text nowhere makes a statement about the socioeconomic status of the four men. It is also possible that Paul paid their expenses not because they were poor and couldn't afford the expenses but because, as Luke states, he intended to show his faithfulness to the Torah. Maybe Paul paid the expenses from his own savings.

Furthermore, Paul expected hatred in Jerusalem from the unbelieving Jews, as he writes in Romans 15:31, and not from the believing Jews, as Acts portrays the situation in

Jerusalem. There the problems arose not from the Jewry in general but from believing Jews. Häenchen's reconstruction is ahistorical. Hengel (1996:45) comments ironically about Häenchen's methods that he "neigt sowieso dauernd dazu, seine eigene ahistorisch-kritizistische Kurzsichtigkeit auf Lukas zu übertragen, das macht die Lektüre seines einst vielgepriesenen Kommentars so unangenehm." ("Anyway, he always tends to transfer his own ahistorical-critical short-sightedness to Luke, which makes the reading of his once much-praised commentary so unpleasant.")

#### ***2.4.5.1 Other solutions***

Rudolph (2011:66) refers further to Philip Esler, who also considers Luke's portrait as a fabrication. The Paul of the epistles permitted Jesus-believing Jews to abandon Jewish practice. Like Esler, there are several other commentaries, especially in the German-speaking area, which construe the description of Luke as an invention and which we want to investigate below. According to those scholars, Luke tries to describe Paul as a genuine Jewish believer though Paul's lifestyle and preaching was not very Jewish. Actually Paul's preaching differed from Luke's picture, states Schille in his commentary. Schille (1989:414) writes, "Man will Paulus durch eine Gesetzesleistung, also echt lukanisch, vor den Augen der Judenchristen rehabilitieren." ("They want to rehabilitate Paul through a work of the law before the eyes of the Jewish Christians, that is, a genuine way of Luke.") Schneider (1982:310) also concludes similarly: "Der Vorschlag der Ältesten entspricht dem lukanischen Kirchenverständnis." ("The proposal of the elders corresponds to the Lukan understanding of the church.") (cf. Conzelmann, 1963:122). Alfons Weiser (1985:598) also writes, "Der Vorwurf, Paulus lehre die Judenchristen, sie sollten ihre Bräuche preisgeben, trifft indes wirklich zu." ("The accusation that Paul is teaching the Jewish Christians that they should give up their customs is really true.") Like Baur, those scholars see quite often a tension between a Petrine and Pauline Christianity (or between James and Paul). Luke was a mediator between those parties and tried to picture Paul as more Jewish than he actually was. He tried "to smooth over real differences between Peter and Paul" (Bock, 2007:8). Therefore, Acts is of less historical value. Luke's account is a pious fraud. According to Bock (2007:16), "The debate about these references concerns the seemingly different portrait of Paul in his epistles from that in Acts; this is said to bring doubt on the tradition of Luke's association with Paul... Marshall (1980:42) notes that this is a key reason many doubt the historical value of Acts." But there is also "another group of scholars, however, dating back to Ramsey and extending to Bruce,

Gasque, Hemer, Hengel, Marshall, Sherwin-White, and Witherington, who have high regard for Luke as an ancient historian” (Bock, 2007:9). As part of this study we will later (chapter 4) compare and investigate in more detail the picture of Paul in Acts and his letters and see that Luke’s account was not a pious fraud.

However, it is interesting that Lüdemann, who otherwise is sceptical about the general reliability of the New Testament, states that Acts 21 is “of great historical value” (noted by Rudolph, 2011:66). Also Chepey (2005:173-174) argues in his dissertation *Nazirites in Late Second Temple Judaism* for a historically plausible account in Acts 21:17-26 (cf. Rudolph, 2011:67).

#### **2.4.6 Paul became as one under the law to win those under the law**

The last interpretation mentioned by Rudolph is that Paul became as one under the law to win those under law (Rudolph, 2011:67-74). This is probably the most common explanation by scholars who accept Acts 21 as historically reliable. According to this explanation Paul was missionary-sensitive and flexible. His desire was to win his Jewish compatriots for the gospel. For this reason, Paul had been willing to put aside his own convictions. In this context 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 is quite often cited.

##### ***2.4.6.1 Howard Marshall and the law of Christ***

Marshall (1980:365-366) refers to 1 Corinthians 9:19-20 and explains Paul’s action:

The truth would seem to be that Paul was prepared to live as one ‘under the law’ to those under the law, although he did this primarily with a view to winning unconverted Jews rather than to pacifying Christian Jews ... It looks as though Paul was prepared to make a conciliatory gesture, although his own testimony remained that he no longer lived under the law of Moses but under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21).

According to Marshall, Paul was free from the law of Moses but not free from the law of Christ, which he doesn’t describe further. But actually this is a contradictory argument. If Paul, as a Jew, was free from the law of Moses it would mean that other Jews would be also free from the law of Moses. The accusation that Paul was teaching them to forsake Moses would then be right. Though he makes the restriction that Paul was ἔννομος Χριστοῦ, it doesn’t eradicate the problems. He doesn’t explain the ἔννομος Χριστοῦ. But usually the law of Christ is understood by scholars as a new type of law for believers. There is no consensus what exactly this law is because the NT doesn’t give an explanation. Moo (1993:343) describes it as follows:

This “law” does not consist of legal prescriptions and ordinances, but of the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles, the central demand of love, and the guiding influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Fruchtenbaum has a dispensationalist approach and describes the law of Christ as a completely new law (2005:12):

The Law of Moses has been disannulled, and we are now under a new law. This new law is called the law of Christ in Galatians and the law of the Spirit of life in Romans 8:2. This is a brand new law, totally separate from the Law of Moses. The Law of the Messiah contains all the commandments applicable to a New Testament believer.

If Paul is free from the law of Moses, then he is also free to observe the law if he wants to. Fruchtenbaum (2005:13) explains his position:

As we have been saying, the believer in the Messiah is free from the Law of Moses. This means that he is free from the necessity of keeping any commandment of that system. But on the other hand, he is also free to keep parts of the Law of Moses if he so desires. The biblical basis for this freedom to keep the Law can be seen in the action of Paul, the greatest exponent of freedom from the Law... The strongest passage is Acts 21:17-26, where we see Paul, the apostle of freedom from the Law, himself keeping the Law.

If we apply this definition to the life of Paul, he would seem to be an apostate from Judaism because he would follow a new and different type of law whenever he wants to. This would be kind of arbitrariness. If we examine the Pauline corpus regarding the law of Christ we will notice that there are too few mentions to build a whole systematic theological concept on that.

The phrase ἔννομος Χριστοῦ appears only one time in the New Testament, namely in 1 Corinthians 9:21. In 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 νόμος is mentioned nine times. Of these, eight times he speaks of the “law of Moses”, so why can’t he mean the ninth time also the “law of Moses”? Rudolph (2011:165) concludes that, “given that νόμος θεοῦ in 1 Corinthians 9:20 almost certainly means ‘law of Moses’, and given the consistent meaning of νόμος as ‘law of Moses’ leading up to Galatians 6:2, it is likely that ἔννομος Χριστοῦ refers to the ‘law of Moses’.”

But why does Paul write of the “law of Christ” and not of the “law of Moses” if he means it? It is possible that Paul refers to the example of Christ as he handled the law of Moses. Therefore, Rudolph proposes that “ἔννομος Χριστοῦ refers to God’s law (the law of

Moses) in the hand of Christ as reflected in Christ's association with sinners." This argumentation is also in line with Galatians 6:2, where Paul speaks of the νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ which can be fulfilled by bearing one another's burdens. Christ bore our burdens of sin (1 Pet 2:24; Col 2:14) and thus by doing the same Christians fulfil the legality of Christ. Thus it is unlikely that Paul meant by "law of Christ" a different type of law but rather the way Christ lived out the law. Schnabel also doesn't see a contradiction between the Torah and the law of Christ. He explains (Schnabel, 2012:655):

The law continues to be the revelation of God's will. The believer encounters the law as someone who belongs to Jesus Christ and thus as the "law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). Jesus Christ "owns" the Torah as a result of his atoning death, replacing the ownership of the Torah over the sinner, with the result that the believer lives "under Christ's law" (1 Cor 9:21).

We can conclude that there is no contradiction between the law of Moses and the law of Christ. If Paul lived according to the law of Christ, he also lived according to the law of Moses. It is one and the same. But Paul handled the law of Moses as Jesus did. His application of the law was in some ways different from some of his Jewish contemporaries but was still within a Jewish spectrum.

#### ***2.4.6.2 Du Toit: Paul not under the law***

Du Toit asks in an article whether Paul was fully Torah-observant according to Acts (Du Toit, 2016:1) and negates the question on basically one main observation: that Paul and thus other believers from the *Ioudaioi* were not ὑπὸ νόμον anymore (2016:4). Some of the statements of Paul go in that direction. Du Toit refers to Romans 14, where Paul seemingly speaks of Jewish purity laws (v. 14) and Sabbaths laws (vv. 5-6) which were now obsolete. Du Toit believes that Paul is writing about a Jewish-Christian group of believers who still hold to Jewish customs (similarly Rosenius, 2000:346; Michel, 1978:420; Schnabel, 2016:742). But this conclusion is not necessary. It is also possible that Paul is writing about a non-Jewish group. Even Michel admits that in the Greco-Roman world there existed groups like the Orphics and Pythagoreans who would fit the description of Paul (Michel, 1978:420). Actually, the text nowhere refers explicitly to the Torah or Jewish customs, as Eby observes (Eby, 2012:56). We are missing in the chapter all meaningful words like Israel, law, Jews, Sabbath or circumcision which would point to Jewish believers. But what about days and impurity? Are they not basic Jewish concepts? As I have already shown (Heimbichner, 2013:51) special days and purity rituals were also common in the Greco-Roman world. When Paul states that "nothing is



unclean in itself” (Rom 14:14) he doesn’t declare Jewish purity laws to be obsolete but probably “refers to the rabbinic concept that Gentiles (or anything else) are not intrinsically ritually impure” (Heimbichner, 2013:51). Something is not impure in itself, as assumed in the Greco-Roman world, but impure because God declared it so. Therefore, Romans 14 can’t function as a proof text that Paul didn’t observe the law anymore.

But Paul indeed sometimes writes that he and other (Jewish) believers are not ὑπὸ νόμον anymore, as Du Toit rightly notes. He explains (Du Toit, 2016:4): “Paul states that believers in Christ, including himself and believers from the *Ioudaioi* by implication, are not under the Law or the curse of the Law anymore.” Before concluding that Paul denied being a Torah-observant Jew on such a basis we have to take into consideration the following point:

The term νόμος can have varied polysemantic meanings in the New Testament. Martin (2001:22, cf. also Tiwald, 2008:186ff.) states that “*nomos* in Paul can refer to the OT as a whole, the Pentateuch, the Mosaic legislation, the Decalogue, the OT prophets, and perhaps the creation narrative.” But this is not yet exhaustive. In recent years scholars have pointed to the fact that Paul used νόμος in a different sense. He contrasted, especially in Romans 6-8, two different types of νόμοι. He contrasted the νόμος τοῦ θεοῦ (Rom 7:22), which is the OT or the Decalogue, with the ἕτερον νόμον (Rom 7:23), which is the νόμος τῆς ἀμαρτίας (Rom 7:23), as Baltes (2016:279) has shown. This is exactly what Paul is trying to explain already in Romans 6, where he explains that the believer has died to sin through Jesus Christ (vv. 2-10). As a climax he exclaims in verse 14, “ἀμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ χάριν”. The believer is not under the law of sin anymore. Young (2009:89) points to rabbinic Judaism where a similar concept is found. Young refers to Midrash Ruth Rabbah 3:1, where Rabbi Simeon ben Pazzai taught:

... ‘and the servant is free from his master’ (Job 3:19). A person, as long as he lives is a servant to two masters: the servant of his Creator and of his [evil] inclination. When he does the will of his Creator, he angers his inclination, and when he does the will of his inclination, he angers his Creator. When he dies, he is freed, ‘the servant is free from his master’!

Thus in rabbinic Judaism a person either serves God or the sin nature. The individual becomes a slave to sin or a servant of righteousness to obey God. Paul is stating that the believer through the death of Jesus Christ has died to the sin nature or the law of sin and is no longer under this law.

In light of this analysis we can conclude that Paul didn't abrogate the Torah by using the term "not under the law" but he abrogated the law of sin.

#### 2.4.7 To win those under the law

Like many commentators, Du Toit also points to 1 Corinthians 9 as the principle on which Paul acted among Jews and Gentiles. This was now the basis for Paul's action in Acts 21. But 1 Corinthians 9 doesn't work as background for Acts 21 for two main reasons:

- 1) The main reason for Paul's adaptation laid out in 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. is to win Jews and Gentiles for Christ (Rudolph, 2011:165). It is a missionary context and gospel language. The term εὐαγγελίζω appears several times in the immediate context of verses 16 through 18. But in Acts 21 Paul has a conflict mainly with Torah-observant believing Jews. He doesn't need to win them for Christ. They are already followers of Jesus. If the Jewish believers had a wrong theology regarding the Torah Paul would correct them as he always did in his letters. It would be a fatal error if he would conform to their understanding of Torah.
- 2) Rudolph (2011:69-70) rightly sees that there would also arise an ethical problem in the behaviour of Paul. Paul would be a liar and hypocrite. Outwardly he would appear as someone who observes the Torah though inwardly he objected to living according to the Torah. Even if his goal would be to win law-observant Jews or for the sake of a "higher consistency".

But doesn't Paul mean by "to be a Jew to the Jews" (ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος) that he at least sometimes adopted a Jewish lifestyle even though he wasn't a Jew anymore? Du Toit (2016:6) states that Paul's "freedom in Christ allowed him to have the liberty to be like an *Ioudaios* for the *Ioudaioi*" as though he wasn't a Jew anymore but only sometimes, from time to time. But having the social identity to be a Jew was a complex matter. It wasn't possible to undo the Jewishness by renouncing one's Jewishness or by some other action. A Jew remained a Jew because Jewishness implied nationality though it was not bound to a specific land, religion or a special way of living and ethnicity. But all these aspects could be and were part of Jewish identity (cf. Cohen, 1999 on Jewish identity in antiquity).

There was no homogenous Judaism, but many Judaisms (Pharisees, Essenes, Sadducees etc.) in the Second Temple period with different ways of life. There was no normative Judaism (Keener, 2003:181). So if Paul wanted to win Jews from these different groups he had to adapt himself as a Jew to these Jewish groups. Rudolph (2011:152) thinks that

Paul adapted in Jewish households to their standard of *halakhah* as expected from guests when he visited them:

Guests are expected to conform to the standard of the household they enter even if their standard is different. Thus, Paul's ἐγενόμην...ὡς ethic in a household setting would not have been a deception but a common and reasonable expectation. Receiving hospitality in a household context would have also naturally led to conversation and an opportunity for Paul to "win" (κερδαίνω) the household to the truth of the gospel.

In this manner Paul, though he was a Jew and remained a Jew, had to become sometimes a Jew to the Jews in order to win them for Christ.

#### **2.4.8 Summary**

We have looked so far at five recent readings of Acts 21:18-26. They all have in common that Paul did not practise the ritual purity in order to confirm his identity as a Jew or to conform to the law, but that he was driven by other motivations. The first explanation sought to construct an opposition between Paul and James. But the New Testament doesn't show us such a picture. On the contrary Luke describes the encounters between these men as overwhelmingly positive (cf. Acts 15). Also Paul writes about James in his letters in a friendly way (cf. 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9.12).

The next approach is similar to the first and construes an opposition between Paul and James on one side and the Jerusalem community on the other side. But also for such a historical reconstruction we have no direct evidence from the text. The third attempt describes Paul as inconsistent and paradoxical and does not try to resolve differences between Acts and the Pauline corpus. Actually Luke describes Paul firmly and consistently in a Torah-positive way.

The fourth explanation objects to the historicity of Luke's text. Acts would be unreliable in his description on Paul. Though the aim of this present study is not to show the reliability of Luke or Acts, most scholars agree that our section is historically reliable.

The last approach tries to explain the action of Paul in light of 1 Corinthians 9. Paul became as one under the law to win those under the law. As we have seen, Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 9 his missionary approaches. But in Acts Paul deals with Jews who are already followers of Jesus. He doesn't need to win them for Christ. As we know from his letters, if Paul is dealing with believers who err in their understanding regarding the law he rebukes them and corrects their theological understanding. He doesn't try to adapt

himself to wrong ideas in order to win them. Thus we should also expect a similar behaviour in Acts.

All explanations are unsatisfying. Therefore, we will analyse in the next chapter approaches like the New Perspective on Paul which are more Torah-positive in their understanding of Paul.

## CHAPTER 3: PAUL AS A CONTINUING JEW

### 3.1 The New Perspective on Paul and purity

Since Ed Parish Sanders published his work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, New Testament scholarship has faced a paradigm shift, especially within the Pauline scholarship. At this point we do not need an exhaustive introduction to this shift because it has already been accomplished by others (cf. Bendik, 2010; Westerholm, 2004). Usually the shift is called the New Perspective on Paul (Dunn, 1983:97) in contrast to the old traditional perspective. Though the paradigm is not uniform, there are some overlapping elements which are important for our study on Acts 21.

Sanders (1977:75ff.) criticized scholars like Weber, Bousset and Strack/Billerbeck for their misrepresentation of the Judaism of Paul's time. He analyzed the rabbinic literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works and came to the conclusion that the Palestinian Judaism of Paul's day was not a legalistic religion. The issue was not soteriology but ecclesiology—staying in the covenant. He called it covenantal nomism (Sanders, 1977:75). Israel was elected by God and had to maintain thorough obedience to the Torah within the covenant. Jewish people practised Kashrut, Shabbat, circumcision and purity rituals to demarcate them from the nations. Dunn (1983:110-111) described these practices later as “boundary markers” or “identity markers”. In his later work *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* Dunn (1998:355) expands on the issue and writes regarding one of the purposes of the law, “As God's choice of Israel drew the corollary that God's saving righteousness was restricted to Israel, so the law's role in defining Israel's holiness to God became also its role in *separating Israel from the nations*.” In order to separate Israel from the nations they needed “works of the law” which consisted of circumcision, Sabbath, and the laws of clean and unclean, that is, purity laws (1998:356). Regarding the laws of clean and unclean Dunn (1998:356) observes:

In some ways more archetypal still were the laws of clean and unclean, which marked not only a separation of clean and unclean birds and beasts but also a separation of Israel from the peoples (Lev 20.20-26).

Those identity markers marked Jewish exclusivism. By maintaining them one showed that they belonged to the people of Israel. Those identity markers were called “works of the law”. The expression “works of the law” doesn't appear in the rabbinic literature, but Paul used it several times in his letters (Rom 3:20,28; Gal 2:16; 3:2.5.10). The Hebrew

equivalent for “works of the law” is מעשי התורה and is found in 4QMMT (Dunn, 1998:357). Dunn reads the letters of Paul against this backdrop and comes to the conclusion that Paul was against the works of the law. He concludes (Dunn, 1998:366):

In sum, then, the “works” which Paul consistently warns against were, in his view, Israel’s misunderstanding of what her covenant law required. That misunderstanding focused most sharply on Jewish attempts to maintain their covenant distinctiveness from Gentiles and on Christian Jews’ attempts to require Christian Gentiles to adopt such covenant distinctives.

Thus, the whole issue concerns ecclesiology and not so much soteriology. For Paul, those identity markers were set aside through Jesus Christ. This function of the law “was temporary, until the coming of Christ” (Dunn, 1998:720). From this point of view Paul was able to devalue some commandments and affirm others. Dunn (1998:720) states,

For in the event the commandments which were devalued and discarded in Paul’s theology were those which, for good or ill, had come to mark out Israel and to maintain Israel’s separation from the other nations (particularly circumcision, food laws, and feast days) ... and, less explicitly, those which Christ had rendered unnecessary (Temple sacrifice).

Dunn assumes that Paul was against the ritual purity laws for Jews and Christians. Therefore Paul’s action in Acts 21:18-26 was a flexible act. He (Dunn, 2016:586) explains that Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19-21 “sets out clearly his own policy of compromise, or better, principle of flexibility and adaptability.” Actually this is the point on which the NPP proponents agree, though there are different nuances and approaches among scholars. Wright has a similar approach and view on the purity law (2013:1036). He thinks that living like a Jew “was no longer Paul’s basic identity” (Wright, 2013:1436).

Since the publication of Dunn’s thesis the discussion on the issue continued extensively (cf. Bachmann, 2005:76). But if the purity law has no meaning anymore with the coming of Jesus for Jews, Acts 21 becomes irrelevant and is not a confirmation for continuing Jewish-Christian identity as was intended by the text.

### **3.2 Identities in Christ**

Paul states in Galatians 3:28 that there is “neither Jew nor Greek”. All are one in Jesus Christ (cf. also Rom 10:10-12). It seems that Jewish and Greek identities are cancelled in Jesus Christ. Martyn (2008:376) comments (similarly Sechrest, 2009:205; Richardson and Gooch, 1978:107f.):

Not only for Jews of Paul's day but also for numerous Gentiles, one of the basic elements providing structure to the world in which one lived consisted of the religious distinction—to use Jewish terminology—between the Jew, the person of the Law, and the Gentile, the person of the Not-Law. Now baptism into Christ involves the recognition that that distinction does not any longer exist, and its nonexistence is what causes one to participate in Christ's death (cf. 2:19).

But are the former identities really cancelled by Paul? Was that his intention with his statement in Galatians 3:28? In verse 26 Paul states that “you are all sons of God” and in verse 29 he concludes that “you are Abraham's offspring”. Paul's audience are in the first place Gentile Christians (Gal 1:16; 2:2, 8, 9, 12, 14; 3:8, 14). Except for Romans there is no other Pauline letter which contains so many references to Gentiles. Paul is concerned regarding the nations and makes clear that the nations are justified by faith (3:8) and the blessing of Abraham came to the nations (3:14). In Ephesians, he states that the nations had no part in the blessings of Israel (Eph 2:12) but now have access through Jesus the Messiah (Eph 2:13). In this light Paul doesn't eradicate identities in Galatians 3:28 but intends to proclaim that Gentiles as Gentiles have access to salvation (soteriology) and thus belong also to the people of God (ecclesiology). But Paul still knows the difference between Jews and Gentiles. Bruce (1982:188) makes the right observation regarding 1 Corinthians 7 when he writes that, “Paul makes some reference to these three dual categories in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 where he exhorts the circumcised and uncircumcised to remain as they were in this regard at the time of their conversion.”

Du Toit (2015:41) argues that Paul doesn't speak of two identities in Christ in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 but instead he wants to show “the irrelevance of circumcision in marking off one's righteous standing before God”.

But again and again Paul differentiates between Jews and Gentiles even after their conversion. He knows of different identities. From his Gentile audience in Rome he is expecting spiritual harvest like that from other nations (Rom 1:13). In Romans 11 he writes about the relationship between Israel and the nations. Especially in verse 13 he speaks to his audience as Gentiles. In Romans 15 he writes about his ministry among the nations. Gentile believers ought to share material things with Israel (Rom 15:27-28). In Romans 16:4 he speaks of “all the churches of the Gentiles”. In 1 Timothy 2:17 Paul calls himself a “teacher of the Gentiles”. On the other hand, Paul was aware of his Jewish identity after his Christ encounter. In Romans 9:3 he speaks of his Jewish compatriots as his “brothers according to the flesh”. And in 11:1 he insists that he is an “Israelite, a

descendant of Abraham”. Paul has several fellow workers “from the circumcision” like Aristarchus, Mark (Col 4:10-11) and Justus (cf. Hvalvik, 2013:23ff.).

In Galatians 2:7 Paul writes that he was “entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised.” Paul also preached the gospel to the Jews (Acts 14; 26:20) but his distinctive mission was to the Gentiles. It was the same gospel but probably with different aspects, as Bruce (1982:120) explains:

Peter’s gospel for the Jews may have had different emphases and nuances from Paul’s gospel for the Gentiles, but plainly these did not make it in Paul’s eyes a ‘different gospel’ in the sense of [Galatians] 1:6–9. It was based on the same recital of saving events as Paul’s and, like Paul’s, it proclaimed the grace of God brought near for men and women’s acceptance by faith (1 Cor. 15:11).

Paul preached in a synagogue differently (Acts 13:15ff.) than at the Areopagus before a Gentile audience (Acts 17:22ff.) in Athens. In the synagogue he often referred to the OT whereas in Athens he avoided any references to the OT.

But 1 Corinthians 9:20 is often used as an argument that Paul was not a Jew anymore since he “became like a Jew to the Jews”. Thus, he was only from time to time a Jew. His Jewish identity was irrelevant (also DuToit, 2015:22). It seems that Paul eliminated Jewish particularity (see also Burge, 2010). But as we have already seen in the previous chapter, Rudolph (2011:202ff.) argues convincingly that Paul as a Jew adapted or adjusted himself to the different kind of Judaism(s) which existed in the ancient Mediterranean world (also Tucker, 2011:100ff). He was “halakhic flexible” (Kinzer, 2005:88).

Paul knows of two identities within the *ecclesia* of God: the *ecclesia* from Israel and the *ecclesia* from the nations, and both are one in Christ. But this oneness doesn’t mean sameness, rather “unity with distinction” (Rudolph, 2011:32). This is comparable to the unity of male and female in Genesis 2:24. They are בָּשָׂר אֶחָד (“one flesh”) but still distinct from each other. They have their own identities. Paul uses this unity language in Ephesians 5:31 as he is describing the marriage and the unity between a man and a woman. This is exactly the letter where Paul three chapters before argues for the oneness between Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph 2).

Tucker (2011:89ff.) argues in his book *Remain in Your Calling* that Paul still valued his Jewish identity as a follower of Christ. Regarding Gentile identity, he states that Paul didn’t see the Gentiles as (new) Israel or part of Israel but still as Gentiles in a new sense



(Tucker, 2011:115ff.). In Christ “Gentile identity is transformed” (Tucker, 2011:128). Further, he states that “this ritual transformation overcomes the separation between God, Israel, and the nations and is further described as a ‘calling’ that does not erase difference.” Christ-following Gentiles belong to the wider family of Abraham (Gal 3:7-8) but they worship the God of Israel still as Gentiles (Tucker, 2011:129). Tucker (2011:132) notes that Paul refers in Romans 11:24, 25-27 to Gentile believers “as grafted into God’s family while at the same time remaining distinct from the natural branches.” Kinzer (2005:151) coined the term “bilateral ecclesiology” to describe the unity and distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers (similarly Bockmuehl, 2000; Tomson, 1990:259–281; Nanos, 1996:50–56). Although Kinzer’s church model is not undisputed and debated within the Messianic Jewish community, he has recognized that there are two identities within the one body of Christ.

Juster (2013:203) speaks of “dual expression churches” and Lancaster (2016a:34) calls it “radical ecclesiology”. Rudolph (2010:1) calls it “Torah-defined ecclesiological variegation”. He is referring to 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, where Paul is introducing the “rule in all the churches”. Rudolph (2010:3) explains that, “The principle behind this rule that Jews should remain Jews, and Gentiles should remain Gentiles, is that each person should remain in the calling he was in when God called him.” This means that Jewish believers should remain within their Jewish calling and be faithful to their Jewish customs, except when these customs become “works of the law” as merit for salvation. For in respect to salvation there is no difference between circumcision or uncircumcision, between Jews and Gentiles. Woods speaks in this context of an “intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction” (2018:31ff.).

If Paul knows a difference between Jewish and Gentile believers with their own particular identities, then it is irrelevant to see Jewish ritual purity laws as cancelled boundary markers, as the NPP proposes. The purity ritual of Paul in Acts 21 would be thus a confirmation of his Jewish identity. If Paul still lived as a Jew, there is no need to interpret Acts 21 other than the text is intending it. On this point we will elaborate in the next chapter.

### **3.3. Markus Tiwald and the purity law**

Tiwald (2008:184ff.) in his monumental work *Hebräer von Hebräern* proposes that Paul did not turn against the Torah. He had a Torah-positive view and attitude. But in regard to Acts 21 he does not know if Paul really participated in the temple cult (2008:378). He

does not consider Acts 21 as a reliable source. He comes to such a conclusion because his thesis is that Paul's criticism of the *nomos* was aimed at the ritual and cultic aspects of the law. Tiwald (2008:402) states that

These dieser Arbeit ist, dass Paulus in seiner Nomoskritik auf den – zumeist rituell verstandenen – Forderungscharakter der Tora fokussiert und nicht prinzipiell auf die Tora als solche. Es sind in erster Linie die rituellen Forderungen der Tora, welche für den Menschen keinerlei Heilsrelevanz mehr besitzen.

The thesis of this work is that Paul in his criticism of *nomos* focuses on the—mostly ritually understood—demanding character of the Torah and not in principle on the Torah as such. It is primarily the ritual demands of the Torah which no longer have any relevance for the salvation of human beings. (My translation)

With the “works of the law” Paul criticized the *kashrut* laws, the purity laws and the cultic laws (Tiwald, 2008:289). They are obsolete (Tiwald, 2008:323). For Paul, the Torah cult was merely man-made statutes (Tiwald, 2008:342). They are useful but not necessary. Cultic laws are “nachträglich hinzugefügten und unfrei machenden (vgl. Gal 3,23f) Kultvorschriften des Gesetzes” (“subsequently added and constraining (cf. Gal 3.23f) cult regulations of the law”) (Tiwald, 2008:320). The cultic law is in opposition to the moral law (Tiwald, 2008:339). He separates these aspects of the law after reviewing some documents from the Second Temple period, though he admits that there is no terminological difference but an intentional text-pragmatical (“intentional-textpragmatisch”) difference (Tiwald, 2008:360). Thus, the ritual purity laws are diminished in their value. The moral law is more valued. The same is true with Paul according to Tiwald.

### **3.4 Moral and ritual law in the Second Temple period literature**

The Second Temple period literature seems to go in a different direction. Moral and ritual laws are actually treated quite equally. The Book of Jubilees focuses on purity and impurity. It begins with a description how the people of Israel rebel against God and how they “walk after the Gentiles, and after their uncleanness” (Jub 1:8). God laments that

they have forsaken My ordinances and My commandments, and the festivals of My covenant, and My sabbaths, and My holy place which I have hallowed for Myself in their midst, and My tabernacle, and My sanctuary, which I have hallowed for Myself in the midst of the land, that I should set my name upon it, and that it should dwell (there) (Jub 1:9).

God mentions ordinances and commandments in general next to festivals and Sabbaths. Moral law is mentioned in conjunction with the cultic festivals. The Jewish people will abandon God and his commandments but one day he will cleanse them and give them a circumcised heart (Jub 1:23). The circumcised heart will be the requirement to cleave to God and all his commandments (Jub 1:24). Then they will fulfil his commandments. The author seems not to compare the moral law against the cultic law but shows the right order of things. One needs first a righteous heart in order to live out the cultic law in a right way, not the other way round.

The following tabular overview helps us to see how closely ritual and moral aspects of the law are mentioned and interlocked. Actually the words “ritual” (or the synonym “cultic”, which connotes more the temple worship and Levitical aspects) and “moral” can’t be found in the Hebrew Bible or the post-biblical Jewish literature, as Klawans notes (Klawans, 2004:22). So they are a modern description and conceptualization of biblical categories.

Included in the ritual aspects of the law are dietary laws (Lev 11), instructions regarding birth and circumcision (Lev 12), leprosy (Lev 13-14), bodily discharges and ritual washings (Lev 15), and cultic worship through sacrifices or with certain rituals. On the other hand, moral aspects include references to (un)righteousness, uncleanness as a metaphor for unlawful deeds, idolatry and fornication. This is of course a theoretical methodology which we will apply to literature of the Second Temple period. Klawans observes that moral impurities are the consequences of sinful acts but ritual impurity is not sinful in itself (2004:29). But ritual impurity may become sinful if a person (for example) doesn’t apply ritual purity laws after ritual impurity. The borderline between ritual impurity and moral impurity is blurred during the Second Temple period.

Text	Ritual/Cultic/Levitical	Moral
Jubilees 21	<p><sup>6</sup> And do not eat <i>any blood</i> of beasts or cattle or any bird which flies in heaven.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> And <i>eat its flesh</i> on that day and in the second (day), but do not let the sun of the second (day) set upon it until it is consumed. And do not let it remain until the third day because it will not be acceptable since it was not chosen. Therefore, it will not be eaten. And all of those <i>who eat</i> it will raise up sin against themselves. Because thus I have found written in the books of my forefathers and in the words of Enoch and in the words of Noah.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> And at all of the (appointed) times <i>be pure in your body</i> and <i>wash yourself with water</i> before you go to make an offering upon the altar. And wash your hands and your feet before you approach the altar. And when you have completed making the offering, wash your hands and feet again. (cf. verses 17 – 19)</p>	<p><sup>5</sup> And you, my son, keep his commandments and ordinances and judgments, and do not follow <i>pollutions</i> or <i>graven images</i> or <i>molten images</i>.</p> <p><sup>23</sup> Turn yourself aside from all their deeds and from <i>all their defilement</i>; and keep the commands of God Most High.</p>
Jubilees 22	<p><sup>16</sup> Separate yourself from the Gentiles, and <i>do not eat with them</i>, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are <i>defiled</i>, and all of their ways are <i>contaminated</i>, and despicable, and abominable.</p>	<p><sup>14</sup> May he cleanse you from all sin and <i>defilement</i>, so that he might forgive all your transgressions, and your erring through ignorance. May he strengthen you and bless you, and may you inherit all of the earth.</p>
Jubilees 23	<p><sup>14</sup> And all of this will come in the evil generation which sins in the land. <i>Pollution</i> and <i>fornication</i> and contamination and <i>abomination</i> are their deeds.</p>	<p><sup>17</sup> For they all did evil and every mouth speaks of sin and all of their deeds (are) <i>polluted</i> and abominable. And all of their ways (are) contamination and <i>pollution</i> and corruption.</p>
Jubilees 30	<p><sup>10</sup> And there is no limit of days for this law. And there is no remission or forgiveness except that the man who caused <i>defilement</i> of his daughter will be rooted out from the midst of all Israel because he has given some of his <i>seed to Moloch</i> and sinned so as to <i>defile</i> it.</p>	<p><sup>8</sup> And do not let an adulteress or <i>defilement</i> be found in Israel all of the days of the generations of the earth because Israel is holy to the LORD. And let any man who causes <i>defilement</i> surely die, let him be stoned.</p>

This overview shows us that cultic aspects are quite often mentioned next to moral aspects of the law. It is sometimes impossible to decide whether one should classify a verse as ritual or moral. In Jubilees 30:10 a man shall be uprooted out of the midst of all Israel if he has defiled his daughter (moral) or has given his seed to Moloch (ritual/cultic). There

is no hint that the compiler of the Book of Jubilees had a negative view of the cultic law. They seem to have the same value for him. They are intermingled together. We find also a similar description of the law in the Letter of Aristeas. In verse 106 some people are described as bound positively to the rules of purity:

<sup>106</sup> There are steps leading to the thoroughfares. Some people make their way above them, others go underneath them, their principal aim being to keep away from the main road for the sake of those who are involved in *purification rites*, so as not to touch any forbidden object.

Some verses later (v. 139) the people of Israel are described as surrounded by an iron wall:

<sup>139</sup> In his wisdom the legislator, in a comprehensive survey of each particular part, and being endowed by God for the knowledge of universal truths, surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul, preserved from false beliefs, and worshiping the only God omnipotent over all creation. <sup>140</sup> Hence the leading priests among the Egyptians, conducting many close investigations and with practical experience of affairs, gave us the title “men of God,” which is ascribed exclusively to those who worship the true God, and not to those who are concerned with meat and drink and clothes, their whole attitude (to life) being concentrated on these concerns. <sup>141</sup> Such concerns are of no account among the people of our race, but throughout the whole of their lives their main objective is concerned with the sovereignty of God. <sup>142</sup> *So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or by mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and touch and hearing and sight, after the manner of the Law.*

This iron wall consisted of rules of purity, as verse 142 explains. The purpose of the wall was to keep the people of Israel pure in body and soul and to prevent them from intermingling with any of the other nations. They should serve only the one almighty God. Both aspects of the law are interconnected in those verses.

In the Testament of Levi 14 the author exhorts his sons to be pure like their father Israel. But they are darkened through transgressions. The transgressions are cultic (v. 5: “You plunder the Lord’s offerings”) and moral (v. 6: “adulteresses”). Again, it is not recognizable which aspects are more important.

In 4 Maccabees 5:19-21 the law is described as a unit. Actually there is no distinction between small and great things in the law:

<sup>19</sup>Accordingly, you must not regard it as a minor sin <sup>20</sup> for us to eat unclean food; minor sins are just as weighty as great sins, <sup>21</sup> for in each case the Law is despised.

Transgressing a small thing in the law is equal to transgressing a great thing. The whole Law teaches self-control, to be a master of all pleasures, endure all pain (v. 23), justice and righteousness (v. 24). This is the reason why the nation doesn't eat unclean meat (v. 25).

A similar holistic view of the law we also find in the Testament of Asher 2:8-9:

Someone else commits adultery and is sexually promiscuous [moral], yet is abstemious in his eating [cultic]. While fasting, he is committing evil deeds. Through the power of his wealth he ravages many, and yet in spite of his excessive evil, he performs the commandments. This also has two aspects, but is evil as a whole. Such persons are hares, because although they *are halfway clean, in truth they are unclean.*

Also among the Dead Sea Scrolls purity is an important topic. The texts deal quite often with it. In the Community Rule 1QS 8:17 we read that any man who “deliberately, on any point whatever, turns aside from all that is commanded” shall be punished (Abegg, 2005:129). 1QS 8:20-22 is even clearer when it is stated that:

<sup>20</sup> These are the rules by which the men of blameless holiness shall conduct themselves, one with another. <sup>21</sup> Any covenant member of the Yahad of Holiness (they who walk blamelessly as He commanded) <sup>22</sup> who transgresses even one commandment from the Law of Moses intentionally or deviously is to be expelled from the party of the Yahad (Abegg, 2005:130).

Again there is no distinction between the different kinds of laws. Any violation is equally sinful. 1QS 8:22 reminds us of Paul's letter to the Galatians when he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in 3:10: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’.” He is quoting from the LXX which intensified the verse from Deuteronomy explicitly to “*all things* written in the Book of the Law.” He makes no distinction between the different kinds of law. Transgressing every law or commandment has consequences.

1Q28a Col. ii:6 states that a cultic impure men or with bodily discharges may not enter the *yahad*, whatever this community was (Abegg, 2005:139-140):

<sup>3</sup>No man who suffers from *a single type of the uncleanness* <sup>4</sup>that affects humanity shall enter their assembly; neither is any man so afflicted <sup>5</sup>to receive an assignment from the congregation. No man with a physical handicap—crippled in both legs or <sup>6</sup>hands, lame, blind, deaf, dumb, or possessed of a visible blemish in his flesh—<sup>7</sup>or a doddering old man unable to do his share in the congregation—<sup>8</sup>may en[ter] to take a place in the congregation of the m[e]n of reputation. For the holy <sup>9</sup>angels are [a part of] their congregation.

It is beyond the scope of this work to analyze exhaustively the purity rules referred to in the DSS. This analysis has already been accomplished by others (Harrington, 2004; Klawans, 2004:67ff.). It is noteworthy that there exist many scrolls and fragments which deal explicitly with ritual purity rules, such as the Damascus Document, Temple Scroll, 4QMMT, 4QToharot (4Q274-278), 4Q284, 4Q414, 4Q512 and others. Harrington (2004:12-13) counts four points where the DSS have their own distinctive interpretation of purity:

(1) among the Scrolls there is a tendency to expand the categories of holiness and purity of the Torah and to interpret purity restrictions maximally; (2) impurity is defined as a more malevolent force than in any other ancient Jewish text in terms of sources, contagion and purification; (3) the pure food and drink of the community, often called 'the purity', becomes a central focus of the community; (4) ritual and moral impurity are intertwined.

Though the DSS have their own distinctive interpretation, which is stricter than other Second Temple period literature, ritual purity was also a very important topic among other texts from the Second Temple period, as we have seen. Sometimes moral and ritual (im)purity were separated and sometimes intertwined. Quite often the moral (im)purities are valued very highly without degrading ritual purity. And sometimes it is almost impossible to decide whether the description belongs to the ritual or the moral law. In the next stage we will make a brief overview of the Pauline letters.

### **3.5 Paul and the cultic law**

Having reviewed the Second Temple literature we now look at the Pauline letters to see how the ritual/cultic law is treated there. However, it is not the aim of this study to contribute an in-depth study on Paul and the cultic law. In chapter 6 we will deal especially with those passages in the Corpus Paulinum which seem to stay in contradiction with the cultic law. For now a brief overview will be enough for our purposes.

In principle, throughout his letters Paul treats sexual immorality as impurity. Impurity is mentioned next to fornication in Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3.5 and Colossians 3:5. Though it is a moral aspect of impurity there is no negative attitude to the purity laws recognizable.

In 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 Paul states that sexual contact with a harlot, who was impure, polluted the believer. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul warns of mixed marriages between believers and unbelievers. In verse 17 he is quoting Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34, verses

which contain cultic language, and applies it to his audience. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 Paul encourages his audience to cleanse themselves from every impurity. He uses “mikweh language”. Barnett (1997:356) thinks that Paul is not applying purity and impurity metaphorically but literally to his audience. It is a literal commandment to the readers to separate themselves from the temple cults of Corinth. Elsewhere I have stated:

Comparable to a Jewish person who was defiled and had to go to the *mikweh* for cleansing, so too the believer has to cleanse himself by separating and avoiding unclean things. Second, Paul makes the statement that even “body and spirit” (σαρκὸς καὶ πνεύματος) can be defiled. The whole body is affected (Heimbichner, 2013:58).

It seems that some believers in the Corinthian church sinned and polluted themselves through immoral sexual behaviour. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:21:

I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. (ESV)

In Romans 1:24 Paul writes concerning the nations, that “therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves” (ESV) (Διὸ παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς·) Again, the nations polluted their bodies. In Ephesians 4:19 he describes the nations in similar terms: “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.” (NIV) (οἵτινες ἀπηληγηκότες ἑαυτοὺς παρέδωκαν τῇ ἀσελγείᾳ εἰς ἐργασίαν ἀκαθαρσίας πάσης ἐν πλεονεξίᾳ.)

In contrast to that, in Ephesians 5:26 he describes the *ekklesia* as sanctified (ἀγίαση) and purified (καθαρίσας) through washing of water with the word (τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι). In Titus 2:14 Paul states that Jesus “purified for himself a people” (καθαρίσῃ ἑαυτῷ λαόν). The purification occurred through regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

This short and selective overview shows that purity was a topic which Paul from time to time applied to the church. It is not an important topic in this theology but it is part of his theology.



### 3.6 Summary

We have so far analyzed some of the Second Temple Jewish literature and have realized that quite often both aspects of the law (moral and cultic) are mentioned next to each other. The Law is an indivisible unity. There is (against Tiwald) no recognizable differentiation between the moral and cultic law. The moral law is not overemphasized or devalued, but the spiritual attitude is always necessary to the ritual commandments. The ritual commandments are not holy in themselves.

In the Pauline corpus Paul from time to time applies purity language to the church. Those passages we have looked at so far have no negative connotations regarding purity. Other passages will be examined in chapter 6. Paul does not impose Jewish ritual laws on Gentile believers but he still applies purity language to Gentiles without requiring ritual observance. Thus they have a meaning for Gentile believers. Gentile believers does not have to become Jewish and Jewish believers do not have to become Gentiles. Each identity may live out their special calling within the one body of Christ.

Though the NPP tries to look at Paul with a new and more Torah-positive paradigm, it has the same negative view of the Jewish purity system as the old paradigm. Thus even the NPP has an unsatisfying approach to purity laws and Acts 21. More promising is the approach that Paul didn't deny different identities within the one body of Christ. Jewish and Gentile believers have in their own respect a special identity. During the Second Temple period Jewish believers could express their special relationship to the Torah and their people through purity rituals as Paul did in Acts 21.

## CHAPTER 4: PAUL AS A JEW IN ACTS AND HIS LETTERS

### 4.1 Introduction

For some 200 years there have been two divergent approaches to the reception of Paul as he is described in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. According to one view, Paul's image in Acts is incompatible with his image in the Epistles. The presentations of Paul in his letters and in Acts contradict each other (cf. Marguerat, 2013:2). In Acts 16:3 he circumcises Timothy, and in Galatians 5:2 he turns against circumcision. In Acts he is an excellent orator (Acts 14; 22; 23), while according to the letters he did not speak with wisdom (1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 10:10). According to Acts 15:20, 29 there are four commandments imposed on the Gentiles, while nothing was imposed upon Paul according to Galatians 2:5-10.

These tensions can easily be solved, as we will see. Therefore, the second approach to the image of Paul is the harmonizing one. The accounts of Paul in Acts and the Pauline letters can be harmonized. This approach was the consensus in church history until the eighteenth century and has been revived during the last thirty years. Thematically, it is about Paul as a Jew. Hengel (1991:178) concludes that, "Die Kenntnis des Juden Saulus ist eine Voraussetzung zum Verständnis des Christen Paulus. Je besser wir jenen kennen, desto klarer werden wir diesen verstehen." ("The knowledge of Saul, the Jew, is a prerequisite for the understanding of the Christian Paul. The better we know the former, the more clearly we will understand the latter.") Ben-Chorin (1970:9) states similarly that, "Paulus aber ist Jude gewesen und geblieben. Das hat ihn nicht daran gehindert, seine Botschaft in die Völkerwelt zu tragen. In seiner Argumentation, in seiner Theologie und insbesondere auch in seiner Christologie, seiner Lehre vom Messias, ist er jüdischer Theologe geblieben." ("But Paul was a Jew and stayed a Jew. That did not prevent him from carrying his message to the nations. In his argumentation, in his theology and especially in his Christology, his teaching of the Messiah, he has remained a Jewish theologian.")

Therefore, one response to the discrepancies between Acts and the Epistles is the perspective. Acts has a different goal, theme and approach to the description of Paul and his work. Luke chose and emphasized certain aspects of Paul's life. In contrast Paul wrote his letters in a different context and with different questions. That is why they emphasize other aspects of Paul's life. Each eyewitness has different perceptions. Moreover, self-

perception is often different than the perception of a fellow traveller. They must not contradict each other. Sometimes it may just seem like a contradiction.

As we have seen in the last few chapters, the questions are how much Paul remained a Jew and where he may have fallen outside of the Jewish context. The answers to those pivotal questions are quite different. The main approach was to compare the Corpus Paulinum with an artificially constructed picture of Judaism. The title of Ed Parish Sanders' ground-breaking work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* shows in detail the traditional approach.

Since the discovery of the DSS the picture of Judaism during the Second Temple Period has changed. Judaism is described as a religion with different layers. It was complex and multi-coloured. Paul is also inserted in this polychrome picture of Second Temple Judaism. Tiwald (2008:25) refers to Theissen (1997:117-120) who developed the tool of *historische Kontextplausibilität* (historical plausibility) which consists of the criteria *kontextplausiblen Kohärenz* (contextual plausibility) and *kontextplausiblen Individualität* (contextual individualism). Tiwald applies this method to Paul. It allows us to see Paul as a Jew in coherence with Second Temple Judaism, and on the other hand it allows him individuality not in opposition to Judaism but within the sphere of Judaism.

In the previous chapter, we saw that Paul spoke of a dual identity (bilateral ecclesiology) within the one church. Both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians should live within their special calling according to 1 Corinthians 7. In this chapter we will apply this paradigm to the life of Paul and check whether it is consistent and coherent with the image of Paul in Acts and the Corpus Paulinum.

## **4.2 Biographical sketches of Paul in Acts and in the letters**

It is not the aim of this section to reconstruct a detailed biography of the life of Paul, but mainly to work out the Jewish aspects of Paul's life in Acts (cf. the exhaustive biographies by Schnelle, 2014; Tiwald, 2008; Wright, 2013).

According to Acts, Paul is described as a Torah-observant Jewish man. He is presented with the firmly Jewish name Σαῦλος / שְׂאוּל (Acts 7:58), a name that only occurs in Acts and that never appears in the letters. But also his Greek name Παῦλος is introduced to the readers in Acts 13:9. Why do we find from Acts 13:9 onwards and in Paul's letters only his Greek name Παῦλος?

One possible explanation is that Paul worked mainly among Greek-speaking people, for whom the name Παῦλος was more familiar.

Hengel (1991:200) states that, “Der Übergang zum neuen Namen erfolgt so nicht bei der Berufung, sondern dort, wo Paulus nach Lukas erstmals als Heidenmissionar aus dem jüdisch-christlichen ins heidnische Milieu übertritt...” (“The transition to the new name does not take place at the time of his calling, but rather where Paul, according to Luke, for the first time as a missionary to the Gentiles crosses over from the Judeo-Christian into the Gentile milieu.”) Thus the transition from Σαῦλος to Παῦλος corresponds to the transition from a mainly Jewish milieu to a pagan milieu. Leary suggests also that the Greek word Σαῦλος had some connotation to a certain walking style of prostitutes (Leary 1992:467-469) and its usage would be improper in a Greek milieu.

Before he had come to believe in Jesus, Paul had been a persecutor of the church, as Luke described in Acts 9:1-2. Paul also refers regularly to this former life in his letters (1 Cor 15: 9; Gal 1:15).

In Acts 23:6 Paul describes himself as a Pharisee (cf. Phil 3:5). It is noteworthy that Paul describes himself in the present tense. For the reader, it sounds like Paul still belonged to the Pharisaic movement. Schnabel (2012:23:6; similarly Polhill, 1992:469) comments on Acts 23:6:

The formulation in the present tense (εἶμι) may imply that Paul still regarded himself as a Pharisee in some sense, although most certainly not in the “party” sense of the word (i.e., as αἵρεσις, as described by Josephus) but in terms of their belief in the resurrection, in angels and spirits, and in their devotion to God’s revelation of his will in the law, transmitted, preserved, and developed (!) in written and oral tradition.

By contrast, Schneider (2002:332, similarly Du Toit, 2015:30 on Phil 3:5-11) says that this statement is incompatible with Philippians 3:5-11. But these statements need not be in contrast to each other. In Philippians he compares his ethnic identity with his relationship to Jesus. His affiliation with the Pharisaic movement means nothing compared to his relationship with the Messiah. This is his Jewish context-plausible individuality.

#### **4.2.1 Paul and Jerusalem**

Paul had a great attachment to Jerusalem. He received his early education in Jerusalem. There is no compelling reason to doubt this note in Acts. There are, however, different views about when Paul arrived in Jerusalem. Unnik (1973:259ff.) argues that Paul was

brought to Jerusalem as a child. Although Schnelle (2014:53) thinks that Jerusalem did not play a significant role in Paul's thought, he assumes that he came to Jerusalem at least at the age of fifteen. Vegge (2006:67) thinks that Paul came to Jerusalem as a child (cf. Hengel, 1991:238). Tiwald is sceptical about the statement in Acts 22:2 (Tiwald, 2008:168) but still allows the possibility that Paul studied in Jerusalem (Tiwald, 2008:172). The scepticism about Acts 22:2 is mainly due to the fact that Paul doesn't speak about his education in Jerusalem in Philippians 3:2 or 2 Corinthians 11:22 where it would be appropriate (Tiwald, 2008:168). But the absence of facts doesn't mean that he hadn't received his education in Jerusalem. There is not sufficient reason to believe that Acts 22:2 is only an editorial interpolation.

Not only was Jerusalem important to Paul during his upbringing, but he continued to travel there again and again (Acts 11:29-30, 13:13, 15:4). After the third missionary journey, Paul's concern was to travel to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21). He wanted to go there to deliver a gift of money, as he states in Romans 15:25 (cf. Hvalvik, 2013:23ff.). After his arrival in Jerusalem he was arrested. The event in Jerusalem was a turning point in Paul's life. Though Paul does not mention Jerusalem as his place of education in his letters he nevertheless shows an attachment to this city. He is concerned about the collection for Jerusalem (Rom 15:25f.; 1 Cor 16:3) and encourages the churches to make a contribution. In Galatians 1:17-18 and 2:1 he writes about his visitations to Jerusalem. Thus, also in the letters an attachment to Jerusalem is visible.

#### **4.2.2 Traditions of the fathers**

Luke is constantly describing Paul as a Jew, who lives within the sphere of the Judaism of the Second Temple period. Hvalvik (2007:151) points to the fact that Paul affirms several times that he is worshipping the God of the fathers (Acts 22:14; 24:14; 26:6) and "that his preaching and ministry is based on Moses and the prophets (24:14; 26:22; cf 23:5)". Especially in Acts 28:17 Paul confirms that he didn't violate τοῖς ἔθεσιν τοῖς πατέροισι. In Galatians 1:14 he is also confirming that he lived according to τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων. These terms described not just the Torah but also the oral law or, as the later Mishnah Avot 1:1 calls it, the הַרְבֵּל לַתּוֹרָה (fence around the Torah). Bruce (1989:91) explains that "the 'traditions' would be more particularly those enshrined in the oral law (*tôrāh še-b' al peh*) or *halakhah* handed down in Pharisaic schools." In Galatians 1:14 Paul isn't writing that he gave up those traditions. He is not judging or evaluating the παράδοσις. But what does Paul want to clarify in Galatians? In Galatians 1 he explains

that he didn't receive the gospel by humans nor did he receive it in a traditional process (such as the traditions of the fathers), but directly from God. Man-to-man lore (though zealous) led to a catastrophe in his life, the persecution of the church (Lancaster, 2011:33-40). Also James confirms in Acts 21:21, 24b that Paul didn't violate the ἔθος of the fathers. Although the traditions of the fathers didn't play any role in Paul's doctrine of justification (they are not mentioned), Paul did not deny these traditions. He actually lived according to them also after his encounter with the Messiah.

#### **4.2.3 The circumcision of Timothy**

In Acts 16:1-3 we read how Paul circumcised Timothy. This does not contradict what Paul wrote in Galatians 2:3. In Galatians we have a very different situation (cf. chapter 6.3.2). There were ψευδάδελφοί who forced (ἀναγκάζω) Gentiles to circumcision in order to gain salvation (cf. Acts 15:1). But the apostles didn't demand that (Gal 1:6). Paul verified it by the example of Titus (Gal 1:3), who was a Greek and wasn't forced to be circumcised. Paul and his associates had the freedom (τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν) not to circumcise the Gentiles.

But the ψευδάδελφοί wanted to bring Paul and his co-workers into bondage (Gal 2:4: καταδουλώσουσιν) to circumcise Gentiles. So the discussion wasn't about Judaizers who wanted to bring Paul back under the law. Baltes (2016:284-285) observes that the text doesn't express that Paul or Barnabas should be circumcised, but instead they were forced to circumcise the Gentile Christian Titus. Also Galatians 6:12 is about the compulsion to circumcision. That was the aspect of enslavement. "Freedom" and "enslavement" are not used in the context of Torah observance, but in the sense of subordination under human authority. These human authorities, ψευδάδελφοί, called for the circumcision of Gentiles. Thus, Galatians has nothing to do with the situation of Timothy in Acts 16.

In Galatians 5:11, Paul denies that he preaches circumcision. Following what has been said before, Paul wants to say that he didn't proclaim circumcision (proselytism) to the Gentiles.

Though Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:19 (cf. also Col 3:11) that circumcision is nothing (οὐδέν) this doesn't imply that it has no meaning at all, for in the same verse also uncircumcision is οὐδέν. This does not mean unimportance, as Horrell (2000:343) postulates, but "with respect to status before God and eschatological blessing, being Jewish or Gentile is irrelevant" as Rudolph argues (Rudolph, 2016:178). Rudolph (2016:178) points out that Paul is using in this passage hyperbolic language to "stress that

being ‘in Christ’ is more important than being Jewish.” In summary, what we have seen so far is that Paul affirms his Jewish identity and in Acts 16:1-3 also the Jewish identity of Timothy.

#### 4.2.4 Paul and the Jewish feasts

Paul regularly attended synagogue services. He proclaimed the gospel to fellow Jews. He also celebrated according to the Torah (Lev 23) Jewish festivals, such as Passover / Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6), Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9) and Shabbat (Acts 18:4).

Festivals are also an issue in his letters. There are three main passages in the Pauline Epistles that are commonly cited, where Paul writes against the Sabbath: Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16-17; Romans 14:5.

We will first look at Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16-17 and thereafter at Romans 14:5. In Galatians 4:10 Paul states that the Galatians “observe days and months and seasons and years!” (ESV). And in Colossians 2:16-17 he writes, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (ESV)

It is important to note that nowhere in these passages, except for Colossians, does he explicitly mention the Sabbath. Nevertheless, the verses are usually interpreted as if Paul is actually referring to Jewish festivals. For example, George (1994:317) explains that

Paul linked four measurements of time, each of which likely refers to certain aspects of the Jewish system of religious feasts. Thus *days* could refer to the weekly Sabbath observance as well as to other feasts celebrated for only a day; *months*, to the new moon rituals mentioned in Num 10:10; *seasons*, to the great annual feasts such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (cf. 2 Chr 8:13; Zech 8:19); and *years*, to the Year of Jubilee, the Sabbatical Year, and the New Year celebrations.

It is possible that Paul was thinking about Jewish festivals, and especially about the Sabbath. But it is not mandatory. Pagan religions also had certain holidays (Scullard, 1981). In this context, it is important to know which opponents Paul had in mind. Were they Jews or Gentiles who partially observed Jewish practices and imposed them on other believers? The answer is hard to find. The opposing groups are not mentioned by name. In Galatians and Colossians it seems that they were in some sense Jewish (be it Jews or Gentiles with Jewish aspirations) and tried to impose the Torah on Gentiles as a way of salvation (Gal 5:4). But their message was also mixed with pagan heresies. Paul mentions

both in Galatians (Gal 4:3) and Colossians (2:8, 20) that believers had submitted themselves to στοιχεῖα. There is a broad discussion among scholars about what Paul had in mind by στοιχεῖα (cf. White, 2018:222ff.). But the consensus is that στοιχεῖα was used in the context of syncretistic Hellenistic pagan worship (Philo, 2002:592-593) or to denote the elements of the world (we leave the discussion about the exact meaning aside). But it was not a Jewish or rabbinic technical term to describe aspects of the Torah. There is a minority of interpreters who believe that Paul meant by the term the “law and flesh” (cf. Bandstra, 1964:68-72; Yates, 1993:54-55). But Paul talks about στοιχεῖα as man-made traditions and philosophies (Col 2:8). The Torah was given by God and was not man-made. Thus Paul sharply attacked this doctrine because (1) they proclaimed it as the way of salvation, and (2) because it was pagan syncretism. For the sake of these things, the faithful should not be troubled or judged. Paul didn’t oppose the festivals, new moons or the Sabbath (Jewish terms; cf. Neh 10:34; Ezek 45:17; Jub 1:14) per se in these verses (Col 2:16). He didn’t forbid them or impose them on the believers but explained their significance for the believing community. Their meaning was to point to Christ (actually Paul uses present tense). It wasn’t a way or tool to salvation.

#### ***4.2.4.1 Romans 14:5***

The situation is similar in Romans 14. There Paul doesn’t turn so sharply against a particular group but writes about the weak (14:1). The “weak in faith” didn’t eat meat, but vegetables (v. 2), and some didn’t drink wine (v. 21) whereas Jews ate meat and drank wine. The whole context of chapter 14 speaks of food and drink. Now, in verse 5, Paul says that some believers respect certain days more than others, and other believers pay equal attention to every day. It isn’t clear whether the weak or the strong honoured certain days. Anyway, Paul writes that everyone should be convinced in his opinion. This verse is often used to prove that believers are now free to choose a day of rest (Mounce, 1995:253).

In other words, believers may choose to observe the Sabbath or Sunday, or worship on each day equally. But does Paul really teach in this verse that Jewish believers should be indifferent to Sabbath observance? We should keep in mind that esteeming Jewish festival days is not an opinion of men but something that God himself introduced to Israel. Sirach 33:7-10 gives us an insight about how Jewish people thought of their festival days during the Second Temple period:



<sup>7</sup> Why doth one day excel another, when as all the light of every day in the year is of the sun? <sup>8</sup> By the knowledge of the Lord they were distinguished: and he altered seasons and feasts. <sup>9</sup> Some of them hath he made high days, and hallowed them, and some of them hath he made ordinary days. <sup>10</sup> And all men are from the ground, and Adam was created of earth: <sup>11</sup> In much knowledge the Lord hath divided them, and made their ways diverse. <sup>12</sup> Some of them hath he blessed and exalted, and some of them he sanctified, and set near himself: but some of them hath he cursed and brought low, and turned out of their places. (NKJV)

The context of Romans 14 is about food. In verse 6 Paul connects the elements of “food” and “days,” so we may have to think about certain fast days (or days when no meat was eaten) that some believers paid attention to. The Sabbath was and is not a fasting day, but a feast day! Fasting or eating vegetarian food is neither forbidden nor commanded to the believers. This is why Paul gives the believers the freedom to choose one or the other variant. But the Jewish festivals are not the issue in chapter 14; there is no direction whether one should keep them or not (so Morris, 1988:480).

#### ***4.2.4.2 Positive references to feasts***

In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 Paul speaks positively about the Passover. There Paul even invites his audience to celebrate the Passover—not metaphorically as some interpreters think, but literally (cf. Crawford, 2017:103). In fact, we know from early church history that Gentile Christians celebrated Passover in the first centuries. There was a controversy in the church about the correct date of Easter and Passover. This controversy is known as the Quartodeciman controversy (Hagg, 2017:131ff.). But in the course of time the main part of the church abandoned the practice of celebrating Passover.

In 1 Corinthians 16:8 Paul writes about his plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (Shavuot). It seems to be important for him to connect his travel plans with the Jewish festival calendar. This is in accord with Acts 20:16 where Luke states that Paul hastened to Jerusalem, if possible, for Pentecost. This event has to be dated chronologically after he wrote 1 Corinthians (Shulam, 2012:1119). Pentecost seemed to be so important for Paul that by his action he even denied the hospitality of the Ephesian community. It is possible that he was practising pilgrimage according to Deuteronomy 16:16. Pilgrimage was an important feature during the Second Temple period. There were some Jews from the Diaspora who did a pilgrimage to Jerusalem but there were probably more Jews who never did a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The expenses were too high and traveling wasn't easy. Kerkeslager (1998:106) states that “most Jews who lived at a great distance from Palestine rarely or never went to Jerusalem for the yearly feasts.” Though Acts and Paul

in his letters does not state explicitly that he is doing a pilgrimage it is still remarkable that Paul is hastening to Jerusalem for Pentecost, one of the Jewish pilgrim festivals.

#### **4.2.4.3 Summary**

In none of the passages is a Sabbath or other festival observance forbidden for Jewish believers. And on the other hand Paul did not impose Sabbath or festival observances on his audience. But he definitely opposed festival observances as a way of salvation. The description of Paul in Acts shows that he celebrated Jewish festivals. He even planned his travel according to a Jewish festival calendar as 1 Corinthians shows. This description is in accordance with Acts 21:24 where James states that Paul lived according to the Torah.

#### **4.2.5 Paul and the law**

In the Pauline letters there is an abundance of *nomos* criticism. In Romans he writes that “the righteousness of God has been manifest apart from the Law” (ESV Rom 3:21). The promise to Abraham and his offspring came not through the law but through the righteousness of faith (Rom 4:13). The “law brings wrath” (Rom 4:15). The “law came in to increase the trespass” (ESV Rom 5:20). The treatment of the law in Romans 6-8 sounds in some parts very negative, but, as we have already seen, in Romans 6-8 Paul may be using the term “law” not in the sense of Torah but as a description for different laws (“law of sin” versus “law of the spirit”). Some verses in Galatians sound similarly negative about the law. Paul “died to the law” (Gal 2:19). Righteousness isn’t through the law (Gal 2:20). And in Galatians 3:11 he writes that “no one is justified before God by the law”. The law was a guardian (Gal 3:23). Believers who wanted to be justified by the law have fallen away from grace (Gal 5:4). In Ephesians 2:15 Paul states that Christ abolished the law of commandments. In Philippians 3:5-9 Paul is describing the law in relationship to himself.

But there is also an appreciation for *nomos* in the Pauline letters. In Romans 2:25 he observes that circumcision is of value if one obeys the law. And in 3:31 Paul asks: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?” and answers “By no means”. In Romans 7:21 Paul ascertains that the “law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” The τέλος of the law is the Messiah (Rom 10:4). In 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul cites the law to establish church rules. In 1 Corinthians 9:8-9 Paul cites Deuteronomy 25:4. He applies an Old Testament commandment to a church situation and creates the right for a

fulltime minister to be paid. In 1 Corinthians 14:34 he is referring to the Torah (though we don't know exactly to which verse he is referring) to substantiate his claim that women should be silent in the church. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 he is alluding to Deuteronomy 7:2-3 and in verse 17 to purity rules (ceremonial laws) in order to separate the believers from unbelievers. When Paul is writing about generosity and giving in 2 Corinthians 8:15 he cites Exodus 16:18 as encouragement and promise. Thus he refers to a historical passage in the Torah. Before finishing his letter Paul expresses in 2 Corinthians 13:1 his wish to come for the third time to the Corinthians to establish every charge by two or three witnesses, as the Torah commands. This is a reference to the civil part of the law.<sup>4</sup> Paul uses every part of the law for his argumentation.

#### **4.2.5.1 Summary**

Summarizing our observations, we can conclude that Paul's usage of *nomos* is not uniform but polyvalent. It is noteworthy that most of the *nomos* criticism appears in the context of justification. But in the context of ecclesiology he also uses the law as a standard for moral behaviour. But the law doesn't exhaust itself only in the moral sphere. Paul sometimes used it, as we have seen, to strengthen his argumentation in church life and rule.

We can describe the usage of *nomos* in the Pauline letters as complementary, not as conflictual. Just as God in the OT both exhorted and blessed Israel, so Paul could both criticize and affirm (uphold) the law. In sum, the Pauline letters do not stand in opposition to a Torah adherence as described in Acts 21.

#### **4.2.6 Paul the persecutor and his calling**

In several places where Paul gives some biographical information, he describes himself as a former persecutor of the church (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13), which corresponds to the description in Acts 9:1-2. It is noteworthy that he doesn't give details about his life as a persecutor; he only describes himself as διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν (Phil 3:6) or writes that ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13). It seems that he is not keen to write about his former life, but we can deduce that Paul was indeed a harsh persecutor of the church. This is implied by the terms καθ' ὑπερβολή ("extremely", "violently", Gal

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<sup>4</sup> We have already seen that during the Second Temple period there was no distinction between the three parts of the law (cf. 3.4).

1:13), ἐπόρθει (“destroying”, Gal 1:23) and κατὰ ζῆλος διώκων (“as to zeal a persecutor”) (Phil 3:6). The description connotes that he has violently and harshly persecuted the church. This is also in correlation with Acts. In Acts 9:1-2 Paul is described as ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου (“breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples”) and if possible δεδεμένους ἀγάγη εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ (“bringing them bound to Jerusalem”).

Acts 9:1-18 describes the encounter of Paul with his Messiah and the receiving of his special calling to a (Gentile) missionary work. This was a context-plausible individual Jewish experience, to which he also refers several times in his letters (cf. Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15-16). His constant self-description as κλητὸς ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ (1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1) emphasizes his individual calling.

### **4.3 Summary**

In this chapter we have applied the bilateral ecclesiology according to 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 to the biographical life of Paul as it is described in his letters and in Acts. Superficially the picture of Paul in Acts and his letters may seem different or divergent but a careful study shows that there are many agreements in the sense of contextual plausibility. The differences may result from the different atmosphere and situations where the letters were written. On the other hand, difference does not have to mean contradiction. We should allow for Paul’s life, his encounter with the Messiah, and his special calling a historical contextual individualism in which Paul might be different from some Jewish groups but still within the sphere of Judaism of the Second Temple period.

## **CHAPTER 5: EXEGESIS OF ACTS 21:18-26**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter we will present a detailed exegesis of Acts 21:18-26. We will examine the text exegetically in the light of a Jewish background of the Second Temple period embedded in the Greco-Roman world. So far, we have seen that Paul, as a Jew, met Jesus as Jewish Messiah and as a Jew he worked among the nations. Purity was an important topic for the Jewish world during the Second Temple period and part of the everyday Jewish lifestyle. The subject of purity remains also relevant for Paul after his conversion. Paul didn't give up his Jewish identity during the course of time. On the other hand, neither did he cancel Gentile identity. As we have seen, he did not preach uniformity and similarity between Jews and the nations.

### **5.2 Historical background to Acts 21:18-26**

#### **5.2.1 The Jerusalem collection**

During his third missionary journey Paul accomplished a collection for the Jewish community among his churches. He describes this collection project in the Corinthian correspondence and in Romans. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 Paul encourages his readers to make a "collection for the saints" in Jerusalem on the first day of the week. Approved brethren will bring these gifts to Jerusalem. Up to this point Paul leaves open whether he will travel with the group or not.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul gives more detailed instructions for the collection. We learn that the communities in Macedonia have already raised money (2 Cor 8). The collection is a "service to the saints" (2 Cor 8:4; 9:1). Titus is one of the main people responsible for the collection (2 Cor 8:6). The collection is a voluntary gift and serves as a support for the poor people in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:7-15 cf. Gal 2:10). Titus is not the only co-worker for this area. Another brother is mentioned without a name (2 Cor 8:18), and there were also others involved in this project. Munk (1954:303) counts in connection to Acts 20:4 a total of ten persons who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem, something that Downs (2008:8) rejects, especially because Paul mentions in Romans 15:14-32 just himself as messenger of the collection. In Downs' opinion, Paul would have mentioned other co-workers also, if it were theologically important for him. Downs states (2008:8):

It would seem that, if the presence of a large coterie of Gentile companions was essential for Paul's vision of the collection's theological significance, he would have commented on the role of this party in the delivery of the gift to Jerusalem in Rom 15: 25-32.

For this reason, he rejects the collection as an eschatological pilgrimage. However, apart from Paul, Titus, the unknown brother and also the other co-workers were involved in the collection, as can be derived from 2 Corinthians 8:23.

In Romans 15:25-32, Paul explains that he is on his way to Jerusalem for "the ministry of the saints" (Rom 15:25). The communities of Macedonia and Achaia are in Israel's debt (Rom 15:26). They want to make "some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem." (Rom 15:26 ESV)

It is obvious that Paul wants to support the saints in Jerusalem, but what is the theological basis for his action? An overview of the different approaches is given by Downs (2008:3ff). One approach is to see the Jerusalem collection as an eschatological pilgrim event (Downs, 2008:3), which ties in with the eschatological pilgrim texts of the Old Testament. Although there are some similarities between Paul's collection and Old Testament eschatological pilgrim texts (Downs, 2008:9) the problems outweigh this possibility. At no point does Paul justify the contribution with eschatological pilgrim texts.

The next approach assumes in the Pauline collection an analogy to the Jewish temple taxes (Hvalvik, 2011:93-111). Although Downs (2008:10) rightfully notes that the temple tax was paid annually and by everyone, Paul's project was probably a once-in-a-lifetime event. Nevertheless, the analogy cannot be completely rejected. Paul spoke of a "sacrifice" (Hvalvik, 2012:24) and a "debt" of Gentile contributors (Downs, 2008:11) to the Jewish people.

## **5.2.2 The Feast of Shavuot and Acts 21:18-26**

### ***5.2.2.1 The Feast of Shavuot during the Second Temple period***

The historical context of Acts 21:18-26 is the time of Shavuot. Paul hurries from Achaia and Macedonia to reach Jerusalem for Shavuot (Acts 20:16). Shavuot was the last of the spring festivals and was celebrated after Passover. It was the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the firstfruits festival. It was one of the three pilgrimage festivals in Judaism (Deut 16:16) and therefore an important festival. The festival commemorated two main aspects

from the history of Israel which are also important for our study: (1) the bringing of the firstfruits and (2) the remembrance of the giving of the Torah.

#### (1) The bringing of the firstfruits

Shavuot was celebrated fifty days after Israel “brought the sheaf of the wave offering” (Lev 23:15 ESV). During the Second Temple period there was discussion about when the counting of the Omer had to be started. The Pharisees counted differently than the Sadducees. Shavuot was called in the Torah also the “feast of harvest” (לֶחַם הַקֵּצִיר - Ex 23:16) or the day of “firstfruits” (Ex 23:19). The Greek name was Πεντηκοστή (Acts 2:1), which means fifty (days). Since Shavuot was a harvest festival the people of Israel brought the firstfruits of their wheat harvest as two grain offerings (two loaves of bread – שְׁתֵּי הַלֶּחֶם). This offering was the only grain offering which was baked with leaven (Ariel, 2018:404).

Besides the bringing of two loaves of bread Jewish farmers brought also the firstfruits of the seven species growing in their field: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranate, olives and dates (Deut 8:8). This bringing was also known as בִּכּוּרִים (Bikkurim). But it wasn't necessary to bring the fruits exactly to the feast. Usually it was accomplished sometime between Shavuot and Sukkot. A farmer went through his field and chose the best firstfruits of his field. He tied the fruits with a reed and declared: “These are Bikkurim” (bBik 3:1).

It was a joyful festival (Ariel, 2018:397) and therefore the synagogues and houses were nicely decorated with fruits and flowers. Pilgrims came to Jerusalem for the feast from all over the land of Israel to bring their firstfruits even from the Diaspora. Pilgrimages were also joyful events (Ariel, 2018:386ff. cf. also bBik 3). The fruits were brought in seven different utensils or special baskets to the Temple (Ariel, 2018:394). The pilgrims brought them near to the altar and waved them there with a priest (Ariel, 2018:400). Subsequently the Bikkurim were placed near the southwest corner of the altar (Ariel, 2018:398). It was a special event.

Believers in the New Testament are sometimes called “firstfruits” (Jas 1:18: ἀπαρχή). This is the same word which is used to describe the firstfruits in Leviticus 23:10 (LXX). Paul also describes believers as firstfruits in the context where he writes about his collection project:

Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia (ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀσίας). (Rom 16:5 ESV)

Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia (ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀχαΐας), and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. (1 Cor 16:15 ESV)

## (2) Remembrance of the giving of the Torah

The second main important aspect of the feast was the remembrance of the giving of the Torah (Ex 19:1.16). In the third month (the month of Siwan) Israel arrived at Mount Sinai and received the Torah. The Talmud describes this event as follows in bShab 88a:

A Galilean taught above Rav Hisda: Blessed is the all-Merciful One, Who gave the three-fold Torah to the three-fold nation by means of a third-born on the third day in the third month.

### ***5.2.2.2 Paul and Shavuot***

Two pilgrim festivals have an important place in the structure of Luke-Acts. Luke begins his Gospel by mentioning Jesus at the Passover in Jerusalem (Luke 2:39ff.) and ends his Gospel with Jesus dying innocently during Passover (Luke 22). In his second work Luke describes the coming of the Holy spirit on Shavuot (Acts 2) and concludes his account with the arrest of a faithful and innocent witness of Jesus during Shavuot (Acts 21-22). According to Kinzer (2018:201),

The opening chapters of Luke tell of Joseph and Mary's custom of traveling each year to Jerusalem for the holiday of Passover (Luke 2:41), and then recount an incident that occurred on one of those occasions (Luke 2:42-51). As the Gospel of Luke unfolds, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem with his disciples to celebrate Passover becomes the scaffolding around which Luke arranges his main narrative (see Luke 9:51). Just as Luke places at the beginning of his Gospel an incident dealing with the family of Jesus and the Passover pilgrimage, so he places at the beginning of his ecclesial history a foundational event occurring during the pilgrim-feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5) in which the family of Jesus is also present (Acts 1:14) And just as Jesus' journey to Jerusalem for Passover establishes the narrative tension that will reach its climax in this arrest, trial, and execution, so Paul's journey to Jerusalem for Pentecost functions in a similar way in Acts (Acts 20:3-6, 13-16, 25,36-38; 21:4, 10-15).

As we will see (chapter 5.2.3) Paul arrives in Jerusalem during the Shavuot festival season. According to Acts 20:6, Paul celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Macedonia in Philippi and then left for Jerusalem. It is very plausible that he was there on time for the festival, even if it is not explicitly stated. But in Acts 20:16 it is said that



Paul hastened to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Why was it important to him to travel to Jerusalem at this time with the collection?

As we have just seen, Shavuot was one of the three pilgrimage festivals in Judaism (Deut 16:9-11, 16). But not every Jew made a pilgrimage from the Diaspora to Jerusalem to participate for these festivals (Goodman, 2006:63). Jews in the Diaspora celebrated the pilgrimage festivals wherever they lived (Hwang, 2013:95). Nevertheless, some Jews from the Diaspora also made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, so that it was also a well-attended festival (Goodman, 2006:61). Stevenson (2001:140) explains:

Many Diaspora Jews took part in the worship through pilgrimages to the temple for religious festivals. These pilgrimages were seen as a sign of one's piety and faithfulness and they fostered religious and social solidarity.

It seems that Paul planned to travel to Jerusalem to attend the festival because he was celebrating the Jewish holidays (Hagner, 2007:145). Rudolph (2002:69) states that "Paul's presence in Jerusalem during Shavuot could be seen as a Torah ritual." Since he was actually in the Diaspora and thus was not obliged to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival, this journey again underlines his Jewish lifestyle. In Acts 24:11, Paul defends himself before Felix, saying that he has made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship. Jerusalem was an important place for Paul as for most Jews during the Second Temple period. He expressed his attachment to Jerusalem with his journey. Already in 1 Corinthians 16:8 Paul mentions Pentecost and his plans to stay in Ephesus until this feast. In addition to the Passover (1 Cor 5:7-8), it is the only festival that Paul mentions in his letters by name and without explaining to the Gentile believers the meaning of the festival (Hwang, 2013: 99). Hwang concludes that "Paul and his Gentile converts largely shared the Jewish calendar reckoning" (Hwang, 2013:99) and not the Roman or Greek calendar. This corresponds to the description of Paul as a festival pilgrim in Acts. But Paul's attachment to Jerusalem was not the only reason for his pilgrimage to Jerusalem on Shavuot.

The other reason has something to do with his collection project and the offering of firstfruits on Shavuot. As we have seen during the festival, farmers brought the firstfruits of their field to the temple in Jerusalem (Ariel, 2018: 385ff.). In Romans 15 Paul makes an analogy between the bringing of firstfruits and his collection project. He describes his collection as καρπός (Rom 15:28). Though it is not the same word as for firstfruits in the LXX, the similarities are striking. He now wants to bring this καρπός of the churches to Jerusalem. On Shavuot, firstfruits were offered to God. Paul now builds an analogy

between the collection and the offering of the firstfruits and correlates them with each other. He wants to bring the gifts of the churches to Jerusalem as an offering to God. At the same time the collection is a voluntary help from the predominantly Gentile churches to the people of Israel. It is an “Ausdruck der Gemeinschaft von Judenchristen und Heidenchristen” as Schnabel (2002:959) notes.

### ***5.2.2.3 Paul and charitable support***

Paul stands in this Jewish tradition of fund-giving for his Jewish fellows. The collection was a voluntary assistance for the Jewish people. Paul was told to remember the poor in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10). The aspect of giving was not innovative. The innovative aspect of his collection was that the collection came predominantly from Gentile churches for the Jewish people. The gathering and delivery of the collection would be an expression of community between Jewish and Gentile believers (Schnabel, 2002:959).

## **5.2.3 Chronological aspects of Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem**

For a chronological reconstruction of Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem we have two important events in Acts which correspond to the environment of the Greco-Roman world: the expulsion of Roman Jews under Claudius and the Proconsul Gallio in Achaia (Schnelle, 2014:30).

### ***5.2.3.1 Claudius’ expulsion of Jews in Rome***

When Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary journey, it is mentioned in Acts 18:2 that Claudius issued an edict that all Jews had to leave Rome. This edict is dated to the ninth year of the reign of Claudius (49 AD) (Schnelle, 2014:30; for the problem of dating the edict see Riesner, 1994:139-180). Thus Paul arrived in Corinth shortly after the edict in the spring of AD 50.

### ***5.2.3.2 The Gallio Inscription and chronology***

A second chronological point is Acts 18:12. There we find a statement which helps us to date the events of Paul in Corinth (mostly there are one or two years of difference between the different chronological approaches; cf. Schnelle, 2017:47). Gallio is mentioned there as proconsul of Achaia. The regular term of office as a proconsul over a senatorial province was one year. The term of office of Gallio is dated from early summer 51 to

early summer 52 (Schnelle, 2014:31; cf. Riesner, 1994:184). If Paul was in Corinth for one and a half years according to Acts 18:11, Paul's accusation happened in the summer of 52.

Then Paul returned to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18-22) and probably began his third missionary journey in late summer 53 (Acts 18:23). He stayed in Ephesus for three years from late summer 53 until spring 56 (Acts 19:8.10; 20:31). Afterwards he made the collection journey through Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 20:1). Since he wanted to spend the winter in Corinth (1 Cor. 16: 5), he arrived in Corinth at the end of the year 56 or the beginning of the year 57, and stayed there for three months (Acts 20:3), before going to Jerusalem to attend Pentecost there (Acts 20:16). Paul celebrated Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Philippi (Acts 20:6). In the year 57 Passover (14th Nisan) was celebrated on the 7th of April (Riesner, 1994:195).

### ***5.2.3.3 A chronological reconstruction of Paul's last journey to Jerusalem***

Passover began on April 7th AD 57 on a Shabbat. Since Paul celebrated Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Philippi (Acts 20:6) for seven days until Thursday, it is possible that Paul travelled always after Shabbat, as was customary for Jewish people. Jewish people avoided traveling on Shabbat as Josephus (1987:352) explains:

And truly he did not speak falsely in saying so; for the festival, which we call Pentecost, did then fall out to be the next day to the Sabbath: nor is it lawful for us to journey, either on the Sabbath day, or on a festival day. (cf. Acts 1:12.)

Therefore, we won't count Shabbat as a travel day for Paul either. It is likely that Luke calculated according to the Jewish calendar (Hwang, 2013:102). This would mean that Paul left Philippi for Troas on April 17th. It took him about five days to arrive in Troas (see also Koch, 2013:587-593 on the chronological reconstruction). He arrived in Troas on April 21st/22nd (Thursday/Friday) and stayed there for seven days (Acts 20:6). On the last evening of his stay in Troas Euthychus was raised from the dead (Acts 20:7-12). The meeting occurred likely the evening after Shabbat (Hemer, 1990:270) which was April 30th. On May 1st Paul travelled for Assos.

The rest of the chronological itinerary is a bit more difficult to reconstruct, but Luke carefully states the individual travel days that could be reconstructed in this way. Sunday morning (May 1st) Paul sails about 30 km to Assos (Acts 20:13) and probably arrives there in the evening (Acts 20:14-15). The next day (May 2nd) he travels with his group

to Mitylene. On May 3rd (“next day” Acts 20:14) they arrive in Chios and on May 4th (“next day” Acts 20:15) in Samos and on May 5th (“next day”) in Miletus (Acts 20:15). In Miletus he gives the farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus. Since it was a Shabbat, Paul probably did not leave until the 8th of May and arrived in Cos (Acts 21:1). On May 9th (“next day” Acts 21:1) to Rhodes and the next day on May 10th they arrived in Patara. The journey from Patara to Tyre in Syria took about five days (Koch, 2013:588). Thus they arrived in Tyre on May 15th.

They stayed there for seven days (May 20th) (Acts 21:4) with some of the disciples. They travelled from Tyre to Ptolemais one day (May 21st) and stayed one day in Ptolemais (Acts 21:7). The following day (May 23rd), they came to Caesarea (Acts 21:8) and stayed there for several days (Acts 21:9). How long they stayed there, we cannot know. Luke (Acts 21:15) writes that they went up to Jerusalem “after these days” (Μετὰ δὲ τὰς ἡμέρας).

Tuesday May 29th AD 57 would have been Pentecost in Jerusalem. So, it is quite possible that Paul arrived in Jerusalem shortly before Pentecost. Well, in time for the festival. Hemer (according to Keener, 2012:2961) estimated a minimum travel time of 30 days. In addition, there are a few more days left in Miletus, Tyre and other travel time. Thus, Paul arrives according to Hemer even before Pentecost (similarly Chepey, 2005:172). The events in Acts 21 probably did not happen on Pentecost, because Luke does not mention the feast. Nevertheless, we should not completely rule out the possibility that it was on the feast. Definitely it was a festive season around the events described in Acts 21.

### 5.3 Exegesis of Acts 21:18-26

#### 5.3.1 Verse 18

<b>A</b> Τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ	<b>A</b> The following day
<b>B</b> εἰσῆει ὁ Παῦλος	<b>B</b> Paul went in
<b>C</b> σὺν ἡμῖν	<b>C</b> with us
<b>D</b> πρὸς Ἰάκωβον,	<b>D</b> to James,
<b>E</b> πάντες τε παρεγένοντο οἱ πρεσβύτεροι.	<b>E</b> and all the elders were present.

## Exegesis

### A Τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ

Paul hastened to Jerusalem for the festival of Shavuot. This hastening is emphasized by Luke's usage of 17 geographical names in Acts 20 – 21:17. The fact that they met the leaders of the Jerusalem church the very next day (Τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ) shows how important and urgent their mission was (Schnabel, 2012:21:18). Paul's long-term goal was to come to Rome (Acts 19:21) and maybe he wanted to get there before the seafaring season ended (Schnabel, 2012:21:18).

### B εἰσῆει

The place where Paul and his fellow travellers met with James and the elders is not mentioned in the text. Shulam (2012:1170; similarly Bruce, 1988:404) suggests that the group met at James's home or wherever he lived. However Keener (2014:3117) points out that the word εἰσῆει means "more than a random visit; Luke elsewhere employs the Greek verb only to designate the temple (3:3; 21:26)". Barrett (2004:1005) comments that the verb εἰσῆει "conveys a hindrance to the presence of a great person ... or coming into a law court." This would mean that they met in an official meeting room, even though churches in the modern sense did not exist yet. Schnabel (2012:21:18) suggests that they may have gathered in the Temple in "Solomon's Portico" (cf Acts 5:12) or at least in one of the larger meeting rooms.

Since the church in Jerusalem was obviously a Jewish-Christian community, it is likely that they gathered in a synagogue in Jerusalem. The early church tradition knows a Jewish-Christian gathering place on today's Mount Zion, which was built where the Coenaculum is today (Pixner, 1991:303). Cyril of Jerusalem (1894:116) speaks of the "Upper Church of the Apostles". Bishop Ephiphanius (Pixner, 1991:303) writes of a "little church of God" erected where the disciples returned from the Mount of Olives after the ascension of the Saviour to the upper room. There are also other references from church tradition to a Jewish-Christian community on Mount Zion (Germano, 2003).

### C σὺν ἡμῖν

Paul did not travel alone, but was accompanied by several brothers from different churches (Schnabel, 2012:21:18). In Acts 20:4 these associates are named: Sopater of

Beroea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius and Timothy of Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. Also Luke accompanied them.

#### Sopater

We do not know much about Sopater (Σώπατρος). Some interpreters think that the mentioned Sosipater (Σωσίπατρος) in Romans 15:21 is the same as Sopater in Acts (Schnabel, 2016:919; Hvalvik, 2012:25). So Sosipater would be the long form of Sopater. In addition, this would mean that Sopater was a Jewish-Christian (Rom 15:21) from Berea.

#### Aristarchus

Aristarchus (Ἀρίσταρχος) was also a Jewish believer and co-worker of Paul (Col 4:11), whom Paul met on his second missionary journey. Aristarchus was with Paul when he was in Ephesus (Acts 19:29) and accompanied Paul not only to Jerusalem (Acts 20: 4) but also later to Rome (Acts 27: 2). Later he is mentioned as a fellow prisoner with Paul in Rome (Col 4:10).

#### Secundus

Secundus (Σεκοῦνδος) is mentioned in Acts 20:4. We know nothing about him except that he came from Thessalonica. It was the “most common name in Thessalonica” (Keener, 2014:2995). Keener suspects that he was a person of status and a Roman citizen (Keener, 2014:2995).

#### Gajus

Gajus is identified as a fellow worker of Paul from Derbe (Γάϊος Δερβαῖος) in Galatia. But in Acts 19:29 a Gajus from Macedonia (Γάϊον ... Μακεδόνας) is mentioned by Paul in Ephesus. Probably that is why the manuscript D in Acts 20:4 has the reading Gajus of Doberus (Γάϊος Δουβεριοῦς), a city south of Philippi in Macedonia (Hvalvik, 2012:26). But the majority and most of the oldest manuscripts read from “Derbe” (Δερβαῖος). Although Hvalvik thinks that it is quite possible that the same Gajus is meant in both passages, it could well have been two different people. The name was widely used (Keener, 2014:2995). In 1 Corinthians 1:14 and Romans 16:23, a Gajus is mentioned in Corinth, but he must have been yet another person.

## Timothy

Probably Timothy (Τιμόθεος) had been Paul's most faithful co-worker. He was the son of a Jewish woman (2 Tim 1:5) and a Greek father from Lystra (Λύστρα) (Acts 16:1ff.). Although he was instructed in the faith by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:3; 3:15) he became a believer through Paul. In 1 Timothy 1:2 he is called “my true child in faith”. When Paul met him on his second missionary journey in Lystra (Acts 16:1ff.), he was still uncircumcised, but, according to Jewish tradition and law, the son of a Jewish mother was subject to circumcision. Thus Paul circumcised him so that he did not offend the Jews (Acts 16:3). After that, he travelled with Paul. According to 2 Timothy 4:5 Timothy was an evangelist and therefore not bound to a specific place. He travelled a lot. He had been appointed by prophecy for this ministry (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14) and had received special gifts (2 Tim 1:6). He was also present on the third missionary journey (Acts 19:22). He is mentioned several times in the NT (2 Cor 1:19; 2 Cor 1:1; Rom 16:21) and Acts (18:5; 20:4). Even when Paul was in prison in Rome, he was with him (Phil 1:1; 2:19; Col. 1:1; Phlm 1:1) It is possible that shortly after the death of Paul Timothy also was placed in captivity for a short time (Heb 13:23).

## Tychicus

Tychicus and Trophimus (Ἀσιανοὶ δὲ Τύχικος καὶ Τρόφιμος) are mentioned as members of the the delegation from Asia (Ἀσιανοὶ). Tychicus had been an associate of Paul (Col 4:7) and was the messenger of the letter to the Ephesians (Eph 6:21). He is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:12 and Titus 3:12 as Paul's co-worker. The manuscripts D, sy<sup>hmg</sup> and sa read instead of the province name Asia the city Ephesus (Ἐφεσίοι) as the place of origin of Tychicus and Trophimus. That is quite possible and not inconsistent with what we know about Tychicus and Trophimus.

## Luke

Though Luke (Λουκᾶς) is not mentioned as a delegation member there are some reasons to believe that he accompanied the delegation. He had been traveling with Paul for some time (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5 – 21:18; 27:1-28, 16). He probably joined Paul at Troas and accompanied him to Philippi where he stayed for some time. Later he accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and Rome. From his captivity in Rome, Paul sends greetings from the beloved physician Luke to the church in Colossae (Col 4:14). In Philemon 24, Paul calls him an assistant.

According to 2 Timothy 4:11 Luke was the only one with Paul. Usually, Luke is considered the only author of the Bible who was not Jewish. The main argument for this is that in Colossians 4:10-11 Luke is not listed among Paul's Jewish co-workers, but separately in verse 14. But do we have to conclude that Luke was not a Jew? The letter to the Colossians is not a systematic book, but a letter. Perhaps Paul did not mention Luke in verses 10-11 because he was not one of the teachers or preachers in his staff. In fact, there is a NT passage where Luke may be classified as a Jew. In Romans 16:21 a Lucius (Λούκιος) greets the church in Rome:

Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. (NASB) (Ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Τιμόθεος ὁ συνεργός μου καὶ Λούκιος καὶ Ἰάσων καὶ Σωσίπατρος οἱ συγγενεῖς μου.)

The last three are identified as Jewish-Christians and as οἱ συγγενεῖς—people who belong to the same extended family or clan (Louw-Nida, 1996:112; Schnabel, 2016:919). Lucius could be the Latin form for Luke (Λουκᾶς), or Λουκᾶς may be a diminutive of Lukius (cf. Ramsay 1915:370-384). Accordingly, Luke would be a Jewish Christian. (On the Jewishness of Luke, see also Jervell, 2002; Oliver, 2013).

### ***5.3.1.1 Geographical aspects of the collection delegation***

The companions of Paul were not a homogeneous group coming from the same geographical area. Sopater came from Berea. Aristarchus and Secundus came from Thessalonica. This was the delegation from Macedonia (Rom 15:26). Gajus, on the other hand, came from Derbe in Galatia, where Paul stayed on his first mission journey (Acts 14:21). From there came also Timothy (Acts 16:1-2). Tychicus and Trophimus are not assigned to a specific city, but to the province of Asia. Luke is not easy to classify geographically. In the early Christian tradition, it was believed that Luke came from Antioch in Syria (Carson, 2010:246). We also find this indication in Acts 11:28 in some manuscripts. There we see for the first time the “we-formulation” (Carson, 2010:246).

If that is correct, it means that the delegation represented the whole mission area of Paul from Antioch to Achaia and Macedonia. According to Romans 15:26 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, believers from Corinth also made a contribution.

The fact that the last two companions are not assigned to a city but to a province can be explained by the fact that they may represent not just a congregation but a group of congregations, as Hvalvik (2012:27) suggests. On the other hand, it is striking that Corinth and Philippi, which were obviously important stations in Paul's work, are not



mentioned. Hvalvik (2012:27) thinks that the listing in Acts 20:4 is incomplete. We have just seen that money came also from Corinth, although Corinth is not mentioned in Acts 20:4. It is also possible that the list was complete and the unlisted communities were represented by other people.

Titus is also not mentioned, though we know from the Corinthian correspondence that he was particularly involved in the collection. But he is not mentioned in the delegation. It is quite possible that he accompanied Paul, although he is not mentioned in Acts (Hvalvik, 2012: 31).

The group was not only geographically diverse, but it consisted also of different identities. The group consisted of Gentile and Jewish believers. At least four participants (Sosipater, Aristarchus, Timothy and possibly Luke) were of Jewish origin. Hvalvik thinks that Jason also accompanied Paul (Hvalvik, 2013:31) and can also be counted as a Jewish-Christian according to Romans 16:21. So then there would be five Jewish delegate members. The other three or four members (Secundus, Gajus, Trophimus and as possible companion Titus) were Gentile Christians. While some interpreters believe that it was very unlikely that Jewish Christians would represent Gentile Christian communities (Hvalvik, 2013:31), Hvalvik rightly points out that the church was indeed predominantly Gentile, but that doesn't mean that it did not have Jewish elements (Hvalvik, 2013:31). Both according to Acts and the epistles of Paul, we know that churches consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. Hvalvik concludes (2013:32): "If we take the facts into consideration, we should not be surprised to see some Pauline churches."

On the one hand, Paul wants to demonstrate unity between the churches and, on the other hand, a difference between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The delegation with the collection shows solidarity with the Jerusalem churches. It becomes clear that the earthly Jerusalem was not simply replaced by a spiritual Jerusalem, but that Jerusalem had a concrete meaning for the first communities. Even if Paul does not ask his churches to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Romans 15:25-26 expresses the debt that the predominantly Gentile churches owed to the earthly Israel, even if Jewish Christians belonged in those churches.

#### **D** πρὸς Ἰάκωβον

Paul and his travel companions met with James. This James is mentioned several times in Acts, the first time in 12:17. He was the half brother of the Lord (Gal 1:19; Mk 6:3; cf. Schnabel, 2012:15:23). After Mary gave birth to Jesus, we read that Joseph and Mary had

more children. James was the second son of Mary and the first child of Joseph and Mary. Before the crucifixion of Jesus, James seems to have been a sceptical man who did not acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. In John 7:5, we read, “For not even His brothers were believing in Him” (NASB). Only after the resurrection of Jesus did he accept Jesus as Messiah. In 1 Corinthians 15:7 we are told that Jesus appeared to James in person. He soon gained authority in the Jerusalem community. When Paul was in Jerusalem for the first time after his conversion, he became acquainted with James (Gal 1:18). That was about AD 35. In Galatians 2:9 he is described along with Peter and John as a pillar of the church. Bauckham (2007:67) notes that James is mentioned first. This shows his pre-eminent role. At the apostolic council he spoke the final word (Acts 15:13ff.). And when Paul came to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, he was greeted by James (Acts 21:18). According to Eusebius (1890:176), James was the first bishop of the church in Jerusalem. Eusebius (1890:176) lists in his tradition fifteen bishops of Jerusalem, among whom James, the brother of the Lord, is mentioned first (Bauckham, 2007:66). Interestingly the title of a bishop (ἐπίσκοπος) is not assigned to him in Acts (Fitzmyer, 2008:692). James had a good reputation from all sides. He led the church in Jerusalem and was mainly active among Jews. He was known among his Jewish compatriots as a just (δίκαιος) and law-abiding person (Eusebius, 1890:125) The fact that he was awarded the epithet “just” was a peculiarity, as Bauckham (2007:68) points out. James had an eminent position in the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to the church tradition, he was called a “camel’s knee” because he spent so much time on his knees (“his knees became hard like those of a camel,” Eusebius, 1890:125). How far this is true, we can’t know, but we can see that James served his people. He was martyred in Jerusalem around AD 64. We have two reports of his death, one by Josephus Flavius and one later by Hegesippus. Josephus (1987:538) tells us:

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus] assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.

Hannas [Ananus] had probably demanded of James that he renounce his faith in Christ before all the people. But when James then openly and freely confessed to the whole crowd, contrary to all expectations, that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God, they could no longer endure the testimony of this man. They killed him. Hegesippus (Eusebius, 1890:126-127) writes that James was dragged to the top of the temple and thrown down from there:

16 So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, 'Let us stone James the Just.' And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, 'I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

17 And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying, 'Cease, what do ye? The just one prayeth for you.'

18 And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieged them.

Although James is rarely mentioned in the NT there is a relatively broad apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature which is devoted to the person of James in the early Christian centuries; this includes the Proto-gospel of James, Pseudo-Clementine Writings, *De Viris Illustribus* of Jerome, First and Second Apocalypse of James. However, these works did not appear until the post-apostolic period and are of little value for the historical reconstruction of James.

### ***5.3.1.2 Paul and James***

Since the time of Baur (cf. 1963:1-146) James has been pictured as antagonistic to Paul. As we saw earlier (chapter 1.4) Peter was described as a law-abiding person who belonged to a party which was in conflict with Paul. James also belonged to this party. This Peter and James party was not as free and open to Gentile Christians as Paul was. This image, constructed by Baur, was influenced by the Pseudo-Clementine Writings (Deines, 2017:41ff.), which have little historical value (Deines, 2017:43).

But as evidence for this reconstructed tension between Paul and James Galatians 2:12ff. is cited, the so-called "Antiochene incident". There are mentioned certain (τινας) opponents of Paul, who came to Antioch ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου. Usually this is interpreted to mean that James endowed these men with his authority and that he had sent them (see Schreiner, 2010:140; Witherington, 1998:156). They were emissaries of James. Martyn (2008:233) states: "Although Paul uses a colorless expression," (some persons from James) "the ensuing course of events shows that they constituted an official delegation." Grammatically, however, this interpretation is not mandatory. Mußner (2002:139) points out:

Verbindet man ἐλθεῖν mit τινας, dann ist ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου Präpositionalattribut zu τινας und diese „einige“ werden mit Jakobus in irgendeinen Zusammenhang gebracht, ohne daß dieser näher beschrieben würde; es kann dann einfach gemeint sein: diese „einige“ stammen aus der judenchristlichen Gemeinde des Jakobus, wobei geographisch sehr wahrscheinlich an Jerusalem gedacht ist.

If one associates ἐλθεῖν with τινας, then ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου is a prepositional attribute to τινας, and “certain” is brought into connection with James without any further description; it can then simply mean: certain men come from the Jewish-Christian community of James, which is geographically very likely to be from Jerusalem. (my translation)

After all, Mußner also comes to the traditional conclusion that the people mentioned were emissaries of James, because the name of James is explicitly mentioned. This confirms the traditional interpretation. With the “sender’s thesis” it would mean that James / Peter stood in a tension with Paul. And if Galatians is also dated to the time after the apostolic council (cf. Schnelle, 2014:280-282), the tension is further increased. It would mean that at some point and for whatever reason, after the apostolic council, a tension arose between James and Paul (Schnelle, 2014:387, describes a tension between Paul and the Jerusalem church). It is grammatically quite legitimate to favour the sender’s thesis, but it is also possible that the “certain men” were in some way related to James, perhaps came from his church and James was the most important leader of the church, but they were not sent by him.

Keener (2019:145) states that “...their coming from Jacob (conventional English translations: ‘James’) indicates clearly that they come on an errand specified by James... we cannot infer this conclusion simply from the language, because Paul does not actually say that James ‘sent’ them, which he could easily have specified.”

Moreover, in Galatians 2, Paul criticizes only Peter and not James (Keener, 2019:145), which is also an indication that there was no tension between Paul and James.

Another possible explanation would be that Galatians is dated before the apostolic council (cf. Carson, 2010:561-564). If so, it would not be surprising that James had sent some people to Antioch, because the relationship of Gentiles to the Torah was not settled yet. The tension, if any, between James and Paul existed, but was diminished after the apostolic council. A long-lasting tension between James and Paul cannot be derived from the New Testament.

Ε πάντες τε παρεγένοντο οί πρεσβύτεροι

The πρεσβύτεροι are also mentioned several times in Acts, though their identity and number is not clarified in the New Testament. Eusebius lists 15 bishops who led the congregation in Jerusalem until the Bar Kochba revolt (Eusebius, 1890:176). He writes regarding the bishops in Jerusalem:

<sup>3</sup> But since the bishops of the circumcision ceased at this time, it is proper to give here a list of their names from the beginning. The first, then, was James, the so-called brother of the Lord; the second, Symeon; the third, Justus; the fourth, Zacchæus; the fifth, Tobias; the sixth, Benjamin; the seventh, John; the eighth, Matthias; the ninth, Philip; the tenth, Seneca; the eleventh, Justus; the twelfth, Levi; the thirteenth, Ephres; the fourteenth, Joseph; and finally, the fifteenth, Judas. <sup>4</sup> These are the bishops of Jerusalem that lived between the age of the apostles and the time referred to, all of them belonging to the circumcision.

The impression is that many bishops ruled the church one after the other. Eusebius states that they were short-lived (Eusebius, 1890:176). According to Bauckham (2007:70), it is not convincing that so many bishops served for such a short time one behind the other. Therefore he suggests (Bauckham, 2007:70) that twelve of those bishops headed the church in Jerusalem with James. Only the first three served as chairs of the congregation in succession. Symeon, the second bishop, was not executed before 100 AD (Bauckham, 2007:70). Only after that event Justus led the church in Jerusalem until 135 AD. The other bishops formed the group of elders who led the church with James. Thus James, Symeon and Justus were the presidents or chairmen of the leadership. The most prominent was James, for he is mentioned separately from all others (Keener, 2014:3117). Barrett (2004:1005) thinks that James “appears in the role of a president accompanied by a group of leaders”.

It is striking that the twelve apostles, especially Peter, are not mentioned in Acts 21. In Acts 16:4 they were still present in Jerusalem. This indicates that Peter and the other apostles did not reside in Jerusalem anymore at the time of Paul’s last arrival in Jerusalem (Keener, 2014:3117; Shulam, 2012:1171). Probably they left Jerusalem before.

### 5.3.2 Verse 19

**A** καὶ ἀσπασάμενος αὐτοὺς

**A** After greeting them

**B** ἐξηγεῖτο καθ' ἓν ἕκαστον,  
ὧν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν  
διὰ τῆς διακονίας αὐτοῦ.

**B** he began to relate one by one  
what God has done among the nations  
through his ministry.

#### Exegesis

**A** καὶ ἀσπασάμενος αὐτοὺς

Paul, as leader of the delegation, greeted James and the elders first. The singular participle ἀσπασάμενος is used, according to the Alexandrian text, but this does not exclude the presence of the other companions of Paul. The Western text reads a plural participle and includes the other companions of Paul (cf. Schnabel, 2012:21:19-20). The greeting included a hand gesture and clasped hands, “firm shaking hands, and embraces and kisses” (Keener, 2014:3118). In addition, the inferior first greeted the superior, so here Luke shows us how Paul respected the Jerusalem leaders (Keener, 2014:3118).

**B** ἐξηγεῖτο καθ' ἓν ἕκαστόν ὧν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν διὰ τῆς διακονίας αὐτοῦ

Then Paul gives a report about his work among the nations. The details are not told here by Luke because the reader has already learned a lot of information in the chapters before (Keener, 2014:3118). By using the word ἐξηγεῖτο Luke shows that it must have been a very detailed account. Except for 1 John 1:18, this word is used only five times, by Luke (EWNT, 2011:15). It includes the aspect of a detailed account of the supernatural action of God. In extra-biblical literature “*exēgeomai* is used thus constantly for interpreting an oracle or a dream” (TLNT, 1994:22). In this sense, it also used by Luke. In Luke 24:35, the Emmaus disciples recounted how they had a supernatural encounter with Jesus. In Acts 10:8 (ἐξηγησάμενος), Cornelius tells his servants about his supernatural encounter with an angel shortly before. In Acts 15:12, (ἐξηγουμένων) Paul and Barnabas narrate the signs and wonders that God has done through them among the nations. In verse 14, James recalls how Simon Peter reported on his supernatural experience in Joppa (ἐξηγήσατο). Thus in Acts 21:19 Paul reports on the supernatural actions of God among the nations. But it was not about signs and wonders (Barrett, 2004:1006: “the present verse makes no clear reference to miracles at all”), since on his second and third missionary journeys Paul didn’t experience many signs and wonders.

Paul reports καθ' ἕν ἕκαστον (cf. Barrett, 2004:1006). Keener (Keener, 2014:3118) states that “Paul’s recounting the events ‘one by one’ may be equivalent to the character of Peter’s narration in 11:4 (καθεξῆς) and Luke’s own in Luke 1:3”. Paul reports extensively on his work in Asia, Macedonia and Achaia. He focuses on his work among the nations (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν).

Probably then Paul introduced the delegates from his group one after another (Lancaster, 2011:733). Lancaster explains:

When he reported on his work in Syrian Antioch, he presented Titus and Luke. As he described his labors in Galatia, he presented Timothy and Gaius of Derbe. When telling about the congregations in Macedonia, he introduced Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica. As he told about the years he spent in Ephesus, he brought forward Tychicus and Trophimus. He almost certainly had brought delegates from Corinth as well.

But it was probably not just about missionary work among the Gentiles, but generally about his ministry outside of Judea, with a focus on Gentile mission (cf. Rom 11:13), because Luke regularly tells the reader that Jews came to believe in Jesus. Thus, Schnabel concludes (2012:21:19-20a) that “it is preferable to interpret the phrase as describing the lands outside of Judea, i.e., the Diaspora, where the majority of people are Gentiles.”

The term διακονία may not only mean the proclamation of the gospel in the Roman empire, but also have an implicit reference to the collection brought from the communities. Interpreters wonder why we don’t have an explicit reference to the collection. It is quite probable that Luke meant by διακονία also the collection project.

Cho (2004:160) sees in the term διακονία a Pauline term for the collection. He (Cho, 2004:161) states that Paul explicitly uses the term διακονία five times (Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13) and the term διακονέω three times (Rom 15:25; 2 Cor 8:19, 20) when he is writing about the collection project. Although Luke doesn’t explicitly make any references in Acts 21:19 it seems plausible. Therefore, Witherington (1998:647) correctly asks, “Could this be the reference to the collection?” He answers: “Paul does refer to the collection using this very sort of terminology in Romans 15:31.” That in turn would mean that the Jerusalem leadership accepted the collection with gratitude, because they praised God for what they heard (cf. Witherington, 1998:647).

By accepting the collection the Jerusalem church expressed the acceptance of the mainly Gentile churches. Stenske (2015:7) states:

For them to accept the donation and—with the sum of money—also its donors meant—at least for Paul—the full recognition of these Gentiles as part of the people of God as Gentiles.... By accepting the collection, the Christians of Jerusalem would not only express their bond with the Jewish Diaspora and Jewish-Christian communities outside of Jerusalem... but they would also accept the predominantly Gentile Christian donating churches with their drastically reduced observance of the law..., and Paul and his disputed gospel.

In Romans 15:31, Paul asks for prayer so that his ministry (ἡ διακονία μου) for Jerusalem may be pleasing to the saints. Schnabel (2002:959) states, “Die Kollekte bestätigt die Gleichrangigkeit von Judenchristen und Heidenchristen.” And indeed, that the meeting had something to do with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles shows the structure of the narrative. Paul meets the Jewish community and tells them what God has done among the nations (Acts 21:19). The Jewish way of life of Paul is questioned by some people (Acts 21:21), but at the same time his way of life is confirmed. In addition, a reference (Acts 25:25) to the apostolic decree is drawn (Acts 15) which also deals with the relationship between the nations and Israel.

### 5.3.3 Verse 20

**A** Οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν  
**B** εἶπόν τε αὐτῷ· θεωρεῖς, ἀδελφέ,  
 πόσαι μυριάδες εἰσὶν  
 ἐν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις τῶν πεπιστευκότων  
**C** καὶ πάντες ζηλωταὶ  
 τοῦ νόμου ὑπάρχουσιν·

**A** But when they heard it, they praised God  
**B** and they said to him: you see, brother,  
 how many thousands there are  
 among the Jews who believe  
**C** and they are all zealous  
 for the law.

### Exegesis

**A** Οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν

When the elders heard the report of Paul they praised God (ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν). ἐδόξαζον is imperfect and expresses a lasting joy (Bock, 2007:646). δοξάζω appears several times in Acts. The reader has already heard in Acts 11:18 (ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν) and 13:48 (ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν) in the context of the pagan mission a praise of God and here again. This means that

they recognized and acknowledged God’s presence in Paul’s ministry as the one who had caused people to come to faith and mighty acts to occur... Thus they acknowledged Paul and his missionary work as well as the congregations that he had established” (Schnabel, 2012:21:19-20a).



If, as we have seen above, Paul handed over the collection on this occasion (which is only implied), the reaction would mean that they accepted it. We can agree with Witherington when he writes (1998:647, also Schnabel, 2012:21:19-20a) that, “If so, then v. 20 indicates that the Jerusalem church accepted the collection, because they praised God for what Paul just spoke of.” (Basically, however, he rejects this view, as does Bock, 2007:646). That the collection was accepted is also confirmed from another side.

In 2 Corinthians 9:12-13, Paul states that “the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints” but also that the believers in Jerusalem “will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all” (NASB). Paul is confident that the believers in Jerusalem will glorify God for this ministry among the nations. Although Paul later worries whether his ministry will be accepted or not (Rom 15:31-32), his worries were likely to be dispelled. According to Acts 21:19-20, the leaders of the church praised God for the ministry of Paul. The joy of the believers described by Luke shows the acceptance of the ministry of Paul. However, this acceptance was not shared by everyone, as is clear in the second half of the story. The issue was Paul’s Jewish way of life.

**Β** εἶπόν τε αὐτῶ· θεωρεῖς, ἀδελφέ, πόσαι μυριάδες εἰσὶν ἐν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις τῶν πεπιστευκότων

Then they answer Paul and give him some instructions. Although James is mentioned in Verse 18 separately from the elders, Luke doesn’t mention at this point who exactly spoke to Paul. Was it James or someone else? (Polhill, 1992:446). Or is he deliberately not mentioned to protect James from the charge that he is ultimately responsible for the later arrest of Paul? (So Schnabel, 2012, 21:20b-e). Or is it a demonstration of the unity of the Jerusalem community? Their instructions for Paul are unanimous. However, they call him brother (ἀδελφέ), which show their appreciation of his work.

Luke does not give us the exact number of believers at this point. Previously, Luke spoke of 3,000 believers (Acts 2:41) and then later 5,000 believers (Acts 4:4). In Acts 6:7 he speaks of the fact that ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα, πολὺς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει (“the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” NASB). The population of Jerusalem in the first century was between 30,000 and 50,000 (Bock, 2007:646; Reinhardt, 1995: 237ff, assumes a population between 60,000 and 120,000). The number of Jesus followers would thus have been significant.

So here μυριάδες would be appropriate to describe the amount of Jewish believers. Luke expresses the innumerable quantity “not to define or specify a number, but to convey the vague idea of a multitude.... It is not the statistics of the Jewish Church that we have now before us, but a strong, yet natural, expression of the fact that they were very numerous” (Lechler, 2008:389).

However, this shows the reader that God has also worked tremendously among the Jews in Jerusalem. It is also quite possible that Ἰουδαίους doesn't only mean Jews from Jerusalem, but also people from the provinces of Judea and Galilee (cf. Keener, 2014: 3119). There was a great awakening in the whole of Judea and Galilee as in the Diaspora (cf. Witherington, 1998:647). This fits Acts 5:16, which mentions believers who came to Jerusalem from the surrounding villages of Jerusalem.

Κ καὶ πάντες ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου ὑπάρχουσιν

These Jewish believers were zealots (ζηλωταὶ) for the law. But they were not followers of the later party of Zealots, who in the late 60s of the first century led the rebellion against Rome (cf. Schnabel, 2012: Acts 21:20 b-e). A ζηλωτής was an “enthusiast” or an “adherent” (DBLG, 1997:2421).

The OT knows several aspects of zeal. One can be filled with jealousy for another person. But also God is described as a jealous God (אֱלֹהִים לֹא יֵאֱמָר) (Ex 20:5). God's name is “jealous” (Ex 34:14: אֱלֹהִים לֹא יֵאֱמָר אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה יְבִי; LXX: ὁ γὰρ Κύριος ὁ θεὸς ζηλωτὸν ὄνομα, θεὸς ζηλωτής ἐστίν). The zeal of the LORD (יְהוָה יִשְׁאָר) can bring judgment upon the people (2 Kings 19:31). But the zeal of the LORD (יְהוָה יִשְׁאָר) also brings restoration (Isa 9:6). That is why Stumpff (1964:879) states: “The divine action thus accomplished with ζῆλος may mean either good or ill, either salvation or perdition, for the men or nations concerned.” On the other hand, the Old Testament knows the zeal of man for God (Ps 119,139). Stumpff explains again (1964:878):

The sense here is a passionate, consuming zeal focused on God, or rather on the doing of His will and the maintaining of His honour in face of the ungodly acts of men and nations. Phinehas, Elijah and Jehu are particular examples of this zeal: Φινεῆς ὁ πατήρ ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ ζηλωσάσθαι ζῆλον (cf. Nu. 25:6–13) ἔλαβεν διαθήκην ἱερωσύνης ἁγίας, 1 Macc. 2:54, and Ἡλίας ἐν τῷ ζηλωσάσθαι ζῆλον νόμου (cf. 3 Βασ. 19) ἀνελήμφθη ὡς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, 1 Macc. 2:58, cf. Sir. 48:2.

In the Second Temple period during the struggle against Hellenism the “zeal for God and his law” plays an important role. The phrase ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου in Acts recalls a similar usage in 1 Macc 2:27: “Πᾶς ὁ ζηλῶν τῷ νόμῳ” (cf. 2 Macc 4:2). The resistance fighters against the Greeks are described as “zealous for the law” (cf. also Philo 2002:592).

In the NT, jealousy can be described as a negative attribute (Rom 13:13; Gal 5:20) that must be abandoned through the Christ. Paul describes his earlier life as ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τοῦ θεοῦ (Acts 22:3). Similarly, Paul describes himself in Galatians 1:14 as περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων. However, this zeal for God led him to become a persecutor of the church (Phil 3:8 “ζῆλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν”). On the other hand, Paul can also speak of his people, that they ζῆλον θεοῦ ἔχουσιν ἀλλ’ οὐ κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν (Rom 10:2). But even after his conversion, Paul has zeal for God and men. He is zealous with θεοῦ ζήλω for the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:2). And the believers from the nations should make the people of Israel in a positive sense jealous (Rom 11:11: “εἰς τὸ παραζηλῶσαι”).

So we cannot give the term in principle a negative connotation, but in each case we have to decide separately. In Acts 21:20 it is stated without any assessment that the Jewish believers have zeal for the law. Shulam (2012:1172f) states that “the epithet ‘zealous for the Torah’ ... merely demonstrated a mark of zeal over and above what might be considered the ‘norm’ ... Loyalty to one or other of the ‘sects’ simply formed the specific expression of one’s piety—not the piety itself, which came foundationally from being Jewish.”

Kinzer even draws a connection to the infancy narrative of Jesus in Luke and concludes (Kinzer, 2018:200):

Just as Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna are all “righteous” and “devout” according to the Torah, so are also the twelve, Mary and James, and the entire Jerusalem *ekklésia*. As these six pious Jews (and the adolescent Jesus) show special reverence for the temple and for the Torah-mandated rites performed in its midst, so also the Jerusalem *ekklésia* in Acts does the same—both under the leadership of the twelve (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12; 5:19-21; 5:42; 6:7) and under James (21:23-24, 26). As goes the infancy narrative, so goes the rest of the two volumes. The imagery of Torah and Torah-faithful Israel, so prominent in the infancy narrative, remains central throughout the story that Luke tells.

On the other hand, zeal can become a danger. Therefore, according to Keener (2014:3123), zeal is “good in itself, it can be distorted to harmful ends, as it is here.” Keener concludes further (2014:3124): “Since these were ‘believers’ zealous for the law,

the picture is mainly positive until coupled with misinformation in 21:21; but its coupling with misinformation foreshadows the dangers of others' zeal without saving faith, expressed in nationalist zeal (21:28; 22:22).” But this does not mean that Paul was in danger from those believers, as Bauckham (2003:254-255) suggests: “In Lukan perspective this need not be a criticism of the Jerusalem Christians. It need not mean that Paul is in physical danger from them. It does mean that, if they believe the rumour, they would want nothing to do with Paul.”

### ***5.3.3.1 Who was this group of believers?***

Some interpreters think that the Jewish believers are the same group as in Acts 15:5, that is, Pharisees (Marshall, 2008:343; Bruce, 1988:430, n. 33). So they were not mainstream but a small group. Were they the same opponents whom Paul opposed in his letters, as Kistemaker (1990:758) suggested? Did James and the elders break away from this group and have different views on the law? (Kistemaker, 1990:758)

Miller points out that one cannot transfer the opponents from Acts 15 to Act 21. In Acts 15 there was the question about Gentile believers and the law, and in Acts 21 the issue is Jewish believers and the law. Miller (1994:137) writes: “The subject and decision of the council is the relationship of Gentiles to the Law, not Jews. The believers in this chapter [Acts 21] were clearly only concerned with their own lifestyle and that of their Jewish brothers who lived outside the land (21:21, 25).”

In addition, the believers in Acts 21:20 are called πάντες ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου (Miller, 1994:137) but Acts 15:5 speaks of τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων. So they are clearly distinguished from the mainstream of believers.

Clearly in Acts 15 the opponents are described negatively and in the wrong, but in Acts 21 the Jewish believers are described without any comment. All this points in the direction that the group of believers in Acts 21 was mainstream in Jerusalem.

#### ***5.3.3.1.1 Jewish believers in Judea***

Early church fathers know of Jewish believers from Judea who lived according to the Torah. From their writings we learn about these Jewish-Christians. There were two main groups of Jewish-Christians: the Ebionites (or *Ebionim*) and the Nazarenes. There were other Jewish-Christian groups such as the Elkasaites, the Symmachians and others (Pfister, 2008:40), but according to the patristic literature they developed later in time.

Maybe they evolved independently from the Ebionites and the Nazarenes or as splitting groups.

### 5.3.3.1.2 *Ebionites*

The Ebionites lived mainly in Transjordan and Syria. It is believed that the origin of the Ebionites is in the early Jerusalem church. Before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70 some Jewish Christians fled to Pella and settled in Transjordan. These Jewish Christians are equated with the Ebionites. But that is not certain. “Ebionites” was a self-designation which meant “poor” (עֲבִיּוֹנִים). In the Old Testament the עֲבִיּוֹנִים (cf. 1 Sam 2:8, Ezek 22:29, Amos 5:12) were the faithful Israelites (Skarsaune, 2007b:424). They were those who were oppressed by the rich and powerful and unjust Israelites.

*Ebionim* was an honourable name for God-fearing Israelites. The term described those who were unjustly suppressed. In terms of the Jewish-Christians, it was a fitting self-description, as they were persecuted by their own compatriots, especially when we think of the persecution under Bar Kochba, who persecuted Jewish-Christians because they didn't acknowledge him as Messiah.

If we identify the Ebionites with the Jerusalem community, then the name gets another dimension. The believers in Jerusalem were literally called “poor” (πτωχούς) by Paul in Romans 15:26.

The Ebionites lived a Jewish way of life. The church father Irenaeus (1885:352), who gives us the earliest testimony of the Ebionites, writes:

Those who are called Ebionites agree that the world was made by God; ... they practise circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and are so Judaic in their style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God.

In addition to the Jewish way of life, the Ebionites had other marks.

1. According to Irenaeus, “They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the law” (Irenaeus, 1885:352).
2. Again according to Irenaeus (1885:527), they rejected the incarnation of Jesus:

Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man, but who remain in the old leaven of [the natural] birth, and who do not choose to understand that the Holy Ghost came upon

Mary, and the power of the Most High did overshadow her: wherefore also what was generated is a holy thing, and the Son of the Most High God the Father of all, who effected the incarnation of this being, and showed forth a new [kind of] generation; that as by the former generation we inherited death, so by this new generation we might inherit life.

Instead, the Ebionites probably believed that Jesus was chosen after baptism to become the Messiah (adoptionist) because he kept the law perfectly. It should be noted, however, that it is only an interpretation of the church fathers about the Ebionites.

3. On the other hand, Origen tells us that there were two parties of the Ebionites. One party recognized the virgin birth of Jesus and the other rejected that view. Similarly, Eusebius (1890:159) knows two directions of the Ebionites. About the first he writes:

For they considered him a plain and common man, who was justified only because of his superior virtue, and who was the fruit of the intercourse of a man with Mary. In their opinion the observance of the ceremonial law was altogether necessary, on the ground that they could not be saved by faith in Christ alone and by a corresponding life.

And about the second party (Eusebius, 1890:159):

There were others, however, besides them, that were of the same name, but avoided the strange and absurd beliefs of the former, and did not deny that the Lord was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. But nevertheless, inasmuch as they also refused to acknowledge that he pre-existed, being God, Word, and Wisdom, they turned aside into the impiety of the former, especially when they, like them, endeavored to observe strictly the bodily worship of the law.

Though both parties had different doctrines their Jewish lifestyle was similar. They lived according to the Torah. Eusebius (1890:159-160) writes: “The Sabbath and the rest of the discipline of the Jews they observed just like them.”

4. They used the Gospel of the Ebionites (cf. Skarsaune, 2007b:435). This Gospel is handed down to us only fragmentarily in the patristic literature. It is also possible that the Ebionites used the Gospel of Matthew and called it the Hebrew Gospel (cf. Panarion 30).
5. Ebionites demanded that Gentile believers should live according to the Torah.
6. According to the Onomasticon Ebionites lived in a village called Choba (Skarsaune, 2007b:447).

### 5.3.3.1.3 The Nazarenes

The second group of Jewish believers were the Nazarenes. In Acts 24:5 we read that the first believers were called followers of the Nazarene sect:

For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (τῶν Ναζωραίων αἰρέσεως). (NASB)

Jesus was described as Jesus of Nazareth (Ναζωραῖος in Mk 1:24; Lk 18:37 et al.) or Nazarene (Ναζωραῖος) in reference to his hometown Nazareth (Ναζαρέτ - Matt 2:23) and the fulfilment of a prophecy from Isaiah 11:1, where the Messiah is called נָצְרִי and from which the word Nazareth (נְצֻרָה - Ναζαρέτ) was derived. Thus the followers of Jesus were also called Nazarenes (cf. Acts 24:5 – Ναζωραῖοί - נְצֻרָיִם). But outside of Acts our trace about the Nazarenes is lost and only reappears with the church fathers Epiphanius (Panarion 29.7.1-8) and Jerome. But it is controversial whether the Nazarenes described by Epiphanius and Jerome can be equated with the Nazarenes in Acts. Nevertheless, one can assume that they have a long history and are possibly also the spiritual descendants of the early Jerusalem church. Pritz (1992:108) suggests that the Nazarenes split up at the end of the first century. Out of this division the Ebionites emerged. The reasons for the division may have included disagreement over the deity of Jesus (Christological issues) or disagreement over leadership within the community.

Similar to the Ebionites, the Nazarene lifestyle was Jewish. Epiphanius (Panarion 29.7, 1) writes that while the Nazarenes confessed Jesus as the Son of God, “they remained wholly Jewish and nothing else,” and then (Panarion 29.7, 5), “Only in this respect they differ from the Jews and Christians: with the Jews they do not agree because of their belief in Christ, with the Christians because they are trained in the Law, in circumcision, the Sabbath and the other things.” (Pritz, 1992:34)

According to the church fathers, they respected the law and circumcision and kept the Sabbath (Skarsaune, 2007b:477). They recognized the Old and New Testaments as Holy Scriptures. They read the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. Jerome (Letters 112.13) summarized his view as follows (Pritz, 1992:53):

They believe in Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again is the same as the one in whom we believe. But while they desire to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other.

So it seems that they had an orthodox view of doctrine and faith that was in harmony with the general church of that time. The church fathers do not condemn their faith but only their Jewish way of life. Other beliefs included the following (cf. Skarsaune, 2007b:477-478):

- They rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees.
- Gentile Christians were respected as equal brothers and sisters. Gentiles weren't obliged to obey the law.
- They did not consider the law necessary for salvation.
- They expected a millennial kingdom.
- In the Eighteen Benedictions the Nazarenes are cursed.
- In the Talmud, the Nazarenes are equated with Christians.

### Evaluation

The division of the early Jewish believers' movement into at least two theologically different groups took place in the post-New Testament period. We do not know exactly what the situation was at the time of Acts. It would be possible that there were already different parties, but surely there not a monolithic strand. This picture is also confirmed by Acts. In Acts 6:1 there was a Hellenistic party and a Hebrew party. Also Acts 15:5 shows us that there were quite different parties with diverging theological approaches. Perhaps these parties further consolidated and developed divergently in the post-New Testament period. However, this remains speculative. Even if there were different theological views between the Ebionites and Nazarenes, the overlap between these groups was such that there were no great discussions about their Jewish lifestyle. It was clear that a Jewish believer continued to live according to the Torah, even if the *halakhah* was seen differently and the Torah was interpreted and applied differently. We have no historical evidence that Jewish Christian groups "ceased to be Torah observant" (as Du Toit, 2016:4 suspects but does not give any proofs).

However, the Jewish lifestyle was not at issue. This is important for our discussion. It corresponds again to Luke's statement that the Jewish-Christian believers in Acts 21:20 were not a marginal group but belonged to the mainstream.



### 5.3.4 Verse 21

Α κατηγήθησαν δὲ περὶ σοῦ ἀποστασίαν ὅτι κατὰ τοῖς διδάσκεις ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως τοὺς τοῖς τὰ πάντα Ἰουδαίους λέγων μὴ μὴ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς τὰ τέκνα μηδὲ τοῖς ἔθεσιν περιπατεῖν.

**A** and they have received about you, that you are teaching all Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

#### Exegesis

These believers have learned that Paul allegedly worked against the Jewish world. They have received it (κατηγήθησαν). The verb κατηγέω can simply mean “transmission of information” (Shulam, 2012:1173) but can also be a “quasi-technical term” in the NT (Shulam, 2012:1173). Κατηγήθησαν stands here in the third person plural passive and shows that this information was delivered by somebody. The text does not imply that the believers also believed the rumours but only that they heard about the rumours (cf. Bauckham, 2003:255). But the reader does not learn who spread this information in Jerusalem (Schnabel, 2012:21:21).

Maybe they were pilgrims who, like Paul, came to Jerusalem for Shavuot and brought this news about Paul (Omerzu, 2002:291). But since the majority of the Jewish believers community had not yet heard of Paul’s coming, one could assume that the Jerusalem congregation had already heard these rumours about Paul for some time (Omerzu, 2002:291). Certainly there was a constant exchange of information between the Jerusalem community and the Diaspora communities. Since when and for how long the accusations against Paul had been spread, we do not know. And we also do not know exactly by whom they were spread.

It is possible that they were Jewish-Christian missionaries who came from Judea. Schnabel suggests that they were “unbelieving Diaspora Jews who visited Jerusalem for one of the festivals, informing the synagogues in Jerusalem about the activities of Paul” (Schnabel, 2012:21:21). Since Acts 21:27 mentions “Jews from Asia” his suggestion makes sense.

Since the accusations are not Christological in nature, Omerzu (2002:291) also assumes “daß [!] es sich bei den Klägern nicht um Judenchristen, sondern um Juden handelt”. In Acts individual Jewish groups are repeatedly depicted as opponents of the Pauline mission (Omerzu, 2002:291; cf. 13:14ff; 13:42; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). Mostly the issues were about Christological questions (Omerzu, 2002:291). Regarding the Torah

(Omerzu, 2002:291: “nicht an der paulinischen Gesetzesauslegung”) and Paul’s Jewish way of life there were no disputes.

Therefore, these reproaches against Paul were constructed and circulated to harm Paul. In any case, the exact opponents in Acts 21 remain unidentified to the reader (Bock, 2007:647).

#### **5.3.4.1 The accusations against Paul**

The accusation against Paul consisted of three points:

- A. to forsake Moses
- B. circumcision and
- C. to abandon Jewish customs.

Paul had “taught to forsake Moses” (ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως). The word ἀποστασία means “rebellion, abandonment or apostasy” (DBLG, 1997:686). It can mean a political apostasy or a religious apostasy from God, as it is often used in the LXX (Josh 22:22; 2 Chron 29:19; 1 Macc 2:15; in the NT only to be found in 2 Thess 2:3) (Barrett, 2004:1008). In Acts 21:21 ἀποστασία is referred to as apostasy from Moses. Moses is often mentioned in Acts in connection with the Torah and the Commandments. Sometimes Μωϋσης is used synonymously for Torah and Commandments, as Omerzu (2002:293) concludes. Later the rabbis taught that the one who rejects the Torah belongs to the category of people who deserve eternal punishment (tSanh 13:3-5 cf. Lancaster, 2011:735). It was a very serious accusation (cf. Bauckham, 1995:477).

This apostasy consisted of Paul’s teaching that Jewish children should no longer be circumcised and that customs should no longer be observed. Paul is not simply accused of indifference to the law, but of teaching *against* Judaism and *forbidding* circumcision.

These are significant accusations (Shulam, 2012:1173). Polhill (1992:447) states that “these matters struck at the very heart of the Jews’ self-identity as the people of God. The Torah, particularly in its ceremonial aspects, set them apart from all other people.” Paul is described like the Jewish traitors (1 Macc 1:11, 52) during the Maccabean revolt who supported Antiochus Epiphanes and also gave up the special laws (1 Macc 1:42: “ἐγκαταλείπειν ἕκαστον νόμιμα αὐτοῦ”) and no longer circumcised their children (1 Macc 1:48 “ἀφιέναι τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτῶν ἀπεριτιμήτους”). The reader of Acts knows that the reproaches are not true, for the reader was already prepared by Luke. The theme of circumcision was introduced by Luke already in the infancy narrative (cf. Kinzer,

2018:204). Luke mentions the circumcision of John the Baptist (Luke 1:59-79) and that of Jesus (Luke 2:22). Later in Acts 15 it is again a topic and leaders of the Jerusalem church discuss whether Gentiles have to be circumcised or not. They come to the conclusion that Gentiles do not have to be circumcised. But what about Jewish believers? This topic is not discussed because “this is not a question that the ‘apostles and elders’ would have deemed worthy of consideration. *Of course* Jewish disciples of Jesus must circumcise their sons!” concludes Kinzer (2018:205). Luke confirms this again with the fact that right in the next chapter Paul circumcises Timothy “because of the Jews” (Acts 16:3). Paul considered Timothy as a Jew, though his father was Greek, and thus Timothy needed circumcision (cf. the discussion on wording “because of the Jews” in Rudolph, 2016:27; Oliver, 2013:433; Kinzer, 2018:206). It was not merely for missionary purposes. Polhill (1992:343) explains: “It was at the very least a matter of missionary strategy to circumcise Timothy (1 Cor 9:20). It may have been much more. Paul never abandoned his own Jewish heritage. He may well have wanted Timothy to be true to *his* (cf. Rom 3:1f.)”

When the reader finally arrives at Acts 21 he knows that the claim that Paul forbids circumcision of Jewish children is wrong. Also as we have seen, he is described as a faithful Jew. In Acts 28:17 Paul testifies that he did nothing against τοῖς ἔθεσιν τοῖς πατρώοις. Paul himself writes in 1 Corinthians 7:18 that περιτετημένοσ τις ἐκλήθη, μὴ ἐπισπάσθω ἐν ἀκροβυστία κέκληται τις, μὴ περιτεμνέσθω περιτεμνέσθω.

In Acts 21:28 three more accusations are added by Jews from Asia. Paul’s teachings were κατὰ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τοῦ τόπου τούτου. In addition, Paul had defiled the Temple (κεκοίνωκεν τὸν ἅγιον τόπον τοῦτον) by bringing Greeks into it. Again, the four terms λαός, νόμος, τόπος and κοινώω correspond to 1 Maccabees. Although they are not terminologically identical, there is still an echo from 1 Maccabees. In 1 Maccabees 2:12 Gentiles have desecrated the sanctuary (καὶ ἰδοὺ τὰ ἅγια ἡμῶν... ἐβεβήλωσαν αὐτὰ ἔθνη). Furthermore, it is always about the people and the law (cf. 1 Macc 1:13, 52; 2:67; 3:48; 4:42). These intertextual references to the intertestamental period show us that the accusations against Paul could certainly be compared to high treason.

The fact that believers in Jerusalem believed the false accusations is perhaps due to the fact that Paul was not well known to all believers, because he travelled abroad so often and for such a long time. He had been to Jerusalem several times and knew the leadership of the Jerusalem church but not so well the mainstream of the believers. Because of Paul’s previous meetings with the leadership (Gal 2:1-10; Acts 15) they knew him personally

and were convinced of his attitude towards the Torah but because of his time spent outside of Israel, as Paul admits, he was not well known by the churches in Judea (Gal 1:22-24).

#### 5.3.4.2 Acts 21:18-26 and Acts 15 in comparison

The events described in Acts 21:18-26 also show numerous literary links to Acts 15. This fact has received little attention so far, as Omerzu has noted (2002:296). The following chart gives an overview of these links.

<b>Links and allusions</b>	<b>Acts 15</b>	<b>Acts 21</b>
Place of problem	Diaspora (15:1)	Diaspora (21:21)
Place of solution	Jerusalem (15:2.4)	Jerusalem (21:17)
View of the nations	Joy over believers from the nations (15:3)	Joy over believers from the nations (21:19)
In Jerusalem	Mission report about the nations (15:2-3)	Mission report on the nations (21:19)
Accusers	Some (15:1) Faithful Pharisees (15:5)	Unknown Zealots for the Law (21:20)
Persons concerned	Believers from the nations (15:3)	Jews and Jewish Christian believers (21:21)
Method	Some “taught” (15:1)	Paul “taught” (21:21)
Persons involved	Apostles, Peter, James, Paul and Barnabas (15:2, 6, 13)	Paul, James and the elders (21:18)
Contents of the prosecution or the demand	Circumcision (15:1, 5) and keeping the law of Moses (15:5)	Circumcision (21:21) and apostasy from Moses and not to walk according to customs
Reaction	Discussion of the doctrine: orthodoxy (15:7-19)	Discussion with orthopraxis (21:23-24)
Outcome	Apostolic decree (15:20-21)	Apostolic decree (21:25)

In Acts 15 as well as in Acts 21 the place of the problem is the Diaspora. Whereas Acts 15 is about Gentiles and Torah, Acts 21 is about Jews and Torah. Therefore in Acts 15 and 21 we have antagonistic demands, which are again interwoven with each other.

In Acts 15:1.24 the demands of the Pharisees are reversed (cf. Omerzu, 2002:293). While in Acts 15 the Pharisees demanded the circumcision of Gentile Christians, here Paul is accused of forbidding the circumcision of Jews and thus disrupting the entire Jewish way of life. The accusations are presented in Acts 15 by believing Pharisees and in Acts 21 by believers who are zealots for the law.

Also the reproach to live no longer according to the Jewish ἔθνη finds its counterpart in Acts 15:5 where the Pharisees demanded besides the circumcision also τε τηρεῖν τὸν

νόμον Μωϋσέως. Although Acts 15:5 speaks of νόμος and not ἔθνη, both terms are used synonymously by Luke (Omerzu, 2002:295). Ἐθνη emphasizes more the Jewish orthopractice, states Omerzu (2002:295). In both chapters the solution of the problem lies with the church in Jerusalem. In both places Paul is involved with a team and in both places James is the leading protagonist of the Jerusalem congregation. Otherwise he remains rather in the background in Acts. In both chapters Paul gives a report about his mission. Every time the reaction is joy.

After the accusations were brought forward, a detailed theological analysis follows in Acts 15. In Acts 21, on the other hand, it's not about the right teaching, but about orthopractice. It's about the Jewish way of life. Especially, the mention of the Apostolic Decree in Acts 21:25 is an indication that the reader should be reminded of Acts 15. What is the intention here?

Usually Acts is read as a description of how the gospel moves away from the spiritual epicentre of Jerusalem and enters the pagan world. The significance of Jerusalem, the Jewish world, and the Jewish people dwindles with each chapter. The geographical structure in Acts also seems to point in this direction. According to Acts 1:8 the disciples will be witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth. For many interpreters, the book is therefore structured in the same way. But this overlooks an important detail.

Luke begins his story with the ascension in Jerusalem (Acts 1). Then the disciples remain in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Kinzer (2018:44ff.) has pointed out that Acts is indeed geographically constructed in such a way that the narrative always comes back to Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Luke tells again and again that the story turns back to Jerusalem. Paul meets Jesus on the way to Damascus and then returns to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29). Peter proclaims to Cornelius in Caesarea and then returns to Jerusalem (Acts 11:2). A church is formed in Antioch and Barnabas is sent there from Jerusalem (Acts 11:22). Later, when a famine breaks out in Judea, help is sent to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30). Paul and Barnabas travel from Antioch to Asia Minor and then return to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). From Jerusalem Paul travels with Silas to Greece and then they return to Jerusalem (Acts 18:22). Paul ends his third missionary journey and travels back to Jerusalem where he is arrested (Acts 21:17-23:11). Though Acts begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome, it is not right to say that Jerusalem is moving into the background. The

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<sup>5</sup> The exception is the end of Acts which is actually intended by Luke to show that one day in the future the story will go back again to Jerusalem through the regathering and rebuilding of Israel.

above structure shows that Acts does not describe the development away from Jerusalem, but a constant return to Jerusalem.

After the question regarding Gentile Christians is resolved in Acts 15 the Jewish people do not disappear more and more into the background. On the contrary, near the end of Paul's life in Acts 21 they move again into the foreground. The Torah and the Jewish way of life are not forgotten. They may still continue to be practised by Jewish believers. The Jewish way of life is not outdated, but continues to be an integral part of Jewish life. With the mention of the Apostolic Decree the reader is reminded once again that also Gentile Christians still belong to the plan of God. Thus Acts 21 in conjunction with Acts 15 shows us a certain balance in ecclesiology.

#### ***5.3.4.3 The tensions and conflicts between Jesus, Paul and the Jewish world***

Where did the tensions and conflicts that developed between Paul and the Jewish world come from? The answer requires a consideration of more than one perspective.

##### *5.3.4.3.1 Rise of nationalism*

The described events happened about ten years before the first Jewish uprising (AD 66-70). Nationalism within Judaism had already begun to grow slowly for some years. In the time of the procurators Cumanus (48-52) and Felix (52-60) there were more riots and revolts. Especially under Felix, who ruled just at the time of Paul, the extremist freedom fighters intensified their activity (Ben-Sasson, 1994:319). There were repeated clashes between Jewish freedom fighters and Roman soldiers. The main centre of uprising in was Judea and the surrounding area. If that was the mood of that time, then it is quite understandable how Jews reacted to the tumult in the temple (Acts 21:27-28; 22:23). The mood was already heated up in the society. The reaction would be a shadow of coming events. Keener (2014:3124) states:

The impending zealous aggression against Paul (Acts 21:30-31), requiring Roman intervention (21:31-32), foreshadows, in a small way, the coming war and implies that the Pauline Christian movement would not have participated in the revolt.

#### 5.3.4.3.2 *Misapprehensions*

It is quite possible that Paul was consciously or unconsciously misunderstood. Thompson points out that there are intratextual links between the allegations of Acts 21 and Acts 16-20. Acts 21:27 mentions Jews ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀσίας. Thompson (2000:45-46) explains:

In verse 29, the narrator provides some inside information that explains in part why the additional allegations of bringing Greeks in the Temple and defiling it were raised. Central to the assumptions about Paul is their earlier sighting of him with Trophimus, the Ephesian. Although the whole city or presumably the entire Jewish populace of Jerusalem is said to react violently against Paul, the downward spiral of this scene starts with Asian Jews over their assumptions about Paul regarding an Asian non-Jew, specifically a non-Jew from Ephesus. Since these details add little to the scene's description, how might one account for their inclusion? Could it be that these two informational items invite the reader to recall what happened when Paul was in Asia and, more specifically, in Ephesus?

The description of Paul's ministry in the preceding chapters is a reference to the events in chapter 21. Thompson (2000:47) draws attention to the fact that Paul leaves the synagogue in Ephesus (Acts 19:8) and provides his ministry outside the synagogue context. Paul separated himself from the synagogue (Acts 19:9: ἀποστάς ἀπ' αὐτῶν) because some of the Jews hardened, disobeyed and spoke badly. The reader knows that the reaction of Paul was justified. Nevertheless, the Jewish identity of Paul was not at stake, rather it had been confirmed before (Acts 16:1-3). But it would be quite possible to read Paul's action as apostasy (Thompson, 2000:47), for he leaves the synagogue.

The events in Acts 18 are described in a similar way. After some time Paul also separated himself from the synagogue (Acts 18:6) and continued to work in the house of a Gentile Christian (Acts 18:7). However, he works in a house next to the synagogue and also with the head of the synagogue, suggesting that Paul continues to maintain his connection to Judaism and affirm his Jewish identity. Nevertheless, the described separation can be described as apostasy. And this is exactly what some Jews unanimously accused Paul of (Acts 18:12-13). He deceives the people into worshipping God against the law (Acts 18:13: παρὰ τὸν νόμον ἀναπαίθει οὗτος τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σέβεσθαι τὸν θεόν. Thompson (2000:48) states: "Notice that these allegations are not dissimilar to what is reported or charged later when Paul is in Jerusalem." Paul's ministry can therefore be understood ambivalently. On the one hand Acts is clear that Paul lives according to the Torah but on the other hand he also works outside the synagogue, which can be interpreted as apostasy from Moses. However, the wrong perception of Paul's ministry could also come from another side.

A few years earlier there were legitimate questions regarding the circumcision of Gentile believers, which then had to be clarified at the apostolic council. The answer was that Gentiles did not need circumcision to be saved. The consequence was that Gentile and Jewish Christians worshiped together. Sometimes they assembled apart and independently from the Jewish community (Acts 18:7). Perhaps then there was the perception that the Jewish believers no longer lived according to the Torah. They therefore had an anti-Torah way of life. If Gentile Christians did not circumcise their children, did the Jewish believers not circumcise their children either? If Gentile Christians (or God-fearing people who had come to believe) did not adhere to Jewish regulations, perhaps Jewish believers no longer practised that either? Finally, Gentile and Jewish Christians gathered for common worship services. Paul was also the one who in his writings now taught unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians (see Eph 2-3).

This perception, mixed with slander and false information, could then lead to the result that Paul, as leader of the movement, taught the Jews in the Diaspora “apostasy from Moses”. And now he was in Jerusalem with a group of Jewish and Gentile Christians. He even went to the temple with Gentiles (Acts 21:28b).

#### *5.3.4.3.3 Paul in full conformity with Jesus?*

Paul’s attitude to the purity regulations is also often understood against the background of Jesus’ words in Matthew 15 and Mark 7. The events described in Acts 10 are also interpreted against the same background (cf. chapter 5.3.4.4). So it is appropriate to take a closer look at Mark 7 and also Matthew 15. Mark 7:19 especially seems to confirm the abolition of the purity regulations by Jesus for the Jewish world.

Many interpreters understand Mark 7:19 to mean that Jesus abolished the purity laws (cf. Pesch, 1977:381; Dschulnigg, 2007:206; France, 2002:291). The words of Jesus were binding for the early church (Pesch, 1977: 381). From there it follows that a connection is drawn to Acts 10 and Peter, where the abolition of the food commandments and purity regulations are affirmed again. It is also against this background that Paul’s action and attitude in Acts 21 are interpreted.

In this section we will examine whether this perspective is valid or whether Matthew 15 and Mark 7 are aiming in another direction.



## Context

The immediate context of Matthew 15:1-20 and Mark 7:1-23 is a discussion of Jesus with the Pharisees and scribes about purity regulations (washing of hands and food commandments). In pre-Pharisaic times, it was customary to wash one's hands before touching holy objects (bShab 14b). Later it was applied to food, which was probably a Pharisaic innovation (Booth, 1986:155). There were discussions between the schools of Shammai and Hillel about the exact procedure. Shammai insisted on washing hands before the meal, while Hillel favoured the time after the meal. In the Tosefta Berachot 5.13 we read that washing of hands before the meal was voluntary but compulsory afterwards. Even that may not have been obligatory for everyone. But why did some groups wash their hands? Probably the idea developed that uncleanness could be transmitted via objects (food on the market) (cf. Bockmuehl, 2000:4; cf. mZab 5.12; mYad. 3.1-2; mToh 2.2). Jesus explains that this is not the case. He makes it clear that the more serious defilement is that of the heart (Mt 15:19-20; Mk 7:15). At the same time this is the climax of Jesus' argumentation.

The focus in Matthew 15:1-20 and Mark 7:1-23 is on the discussion about the נטילת ידיים (ritual handwashing). Both texts begin with the discussion about נטילת ידיים. In Matthew 15 the passage ends with the statement that "unwashed hands" (v. 20) do not contaminate (Rudolph, 2002:308). In Mark 7:23, the passage ends with the words that defilement comes "from within". In between is Mark 7:19, which states that "Jesus declared all food pure". This verse is missing in Matthew. Rudolph (Rudolph, 2002:308) points out that this is not surprising, since Matthew wrote for Jewish-Christian recipients, who continued to live according to the Torah.

### *Exegetical Notes on Mark 7:19*

<b>A</b> ὅτι οὐκ εἰσπορεύεται αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκπορεύεται,	<b>A</b> because it doesn't enter his heart but his stomach and then out of his body
<b>B</b> καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα.	<b>B</b> purified all the food.

Between Jesus and the Pharisees arose a discussion about the נטילת ידיים. The Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why some disciples ate with unwashed hands (Mk 7:2). When they came from the market, they did not bathe (Mk 7:4), that is, they didn't take a ritual bath before eating, as was customary at the time. According to the larger context (Mk

7:3-4), it was about “unwashed hands” (ἐὰν μὴ πύγμα ἴψωνται τὰς χεῖρας) and “not bathing before eating” (ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται). Two different ritual acts were linked together.

We don't know to what extent these purity actions were practised by common people at that time. The religious customs among the various religious parties weren't uniform. But in the rabbinical literature there are reports in some places about how far purity was practised in Israel at that time. Namely, that “a pure and an impure person certainly would not eat together, as everyone was careful with regard to ritual purity” (bChab 13a). Harrington (2001:173) explains: “Even the least observant Jew was trusted to protect priestly food as well as liquids and tithes from impurity” (mToh 8:2). And the Mishnah (bShab 13:1) says: “Come and see how far purity has broken out in Israel that everyone eats ordinary food in a state of purity”. Similar statements we also find in Luke 11:38 and in Josephus (1987:605). Certainly not everyone practised those regulations, but maybe the majority.

Also in our passage Jesus is accused that only *some* of his disciples (τινὰς τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ) didn't wash their hands (Mk 7:2). This means that other disciples did practise the נטילת ידיים. Furthermore, Jesus himself is not accused of a transgression of those customs.

But some of the disciples didn't act according to the “traditions of the elders” (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, Mk 7:3). It is not about a commandment of the Torah, but a matter on oral tradition. Jesus answered the Pharisees with three quotations from the Old Testament (Isa 29:13; Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16), which make clear that the Pharisees have placed the oral traditions above the Word of God (Mk 7:9). The fact that this discussion took place at all shows that Jesus was involved in the questions of his contemporaries.

The discussion concludes with the statement that, “There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him” (Mk 7:15 ESV) (ὃ δύναιται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν). At first the statement seems to be an affront to the Torah, which makes clear in several places that a person *can* be defiled from outside (cf. Lev 11:39-40; Num 19:21-22). It is also true that the Torah knows contamination from within, e.g., menstruation, bodily discharges (Lev 15) and illness (Lev 12-14). What does Jesus mean by his statement? There are several suggestions:

1. The words do not go back to Jesus, but were put into his mouth by the church (Dschulnigg, 2007:206) The church had abandoned Jewish purity laws in favour of

the mission to the nations. The church needed a justification for their behaviour and thus invented those words. But it is unlikely that the church would put such an important topic in a small subordinate clause in the mouth of Jesus.

2. Jesus contradicts the Torah and abolishes the commandments of God (according to Pesch, 1977:379). But by doing so, Jesus would be doing exactly what he accuses the Pharisees of doing, namely abolishing the Torah. The Torah warned against prophets who abolished the Torah (Deut 13:1-6).
3. Others think that it was not about all purity regulations but specifically about purity regulations in regard to food commandments. Thus France (2002:289) states: “The wording of Jesus’ pronouncement is not therefore directly applicable to all aspects of purity law, only to that which concerned food.” Now, did Jesus change the focus from general purity regulation to food issues? Perhaps Jesus turned against the idea that impurity could be transmitted through third objects (food on the market) (cf. Bockmuehl, 2000:4; cf. mZab 5.12; mYad 3.1-2; mToh 2.2).
4. It is also noteworthy that the Greek text in Mark 7:18 uses κοινος and not ἀκάθαρτος which is the common word in the LXX to describe unclean (טמא) food (Lev 11:4). Ἀκάθαρτος is the Greek equivalent for טמא but not κοινος as it is used by Mark. So Eby (2011:16) makes the observation:

It is not unheard of for *koinos* to describe *tamei*. But this less precise choice of words suggests that the topic of dispute is not a matter of ritual purity per se but of holiness. When Yeshua declared that “things that come out of a person are what defile him”, he taught that they compromise a person’s holiness. This makes sense because for the Pharisees, ritual purity was not an end in itself but a method for achieving holiness. Yeshua’s words communicated that holiness was a moral and ethical matter, not only a ritual condition.

But didn’t Jesus declare all food clean in verse 19, as many translations show (cf. ESV; RSV; NRSV; NASB95; NLT; NIV)? That it is not quite so simple can be seen from the fact that some translations (NASB95; NIV; ESV) put this part of the verse in brackets. They set off this part of the verse as Mark’s comment and not part of Jesus’ speech. There is also a different reading among Greek versions. Some manuscripts read instead of the masculine καθαρίζων the neuter καθαρίζον. The NKJV follows this reading and translates the verse: “because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods” (NKJV). That would mean that the stomach cleanses the food. This reading is younger but quite possible. Are there any parallels for this reading in rabbinical literature? Eby (2011:24-25) makes some observations in this regard:

1. The Torah states that excrements should be covered outside the camp (Deut 23:12-14) not because they are נִמְצָא but because they are עֲרֵוֹת דְבָר (a distasteful thing).
2. According to Jewish law dung cannot contract ritual impurity (mKil 10:1).
3. The rabbis discuss some cases (bMen. 691-b; bPes 18a) where the status of purity of objects after the digestion process has changed from *tamei* to *tahor*. Eby (2011: 25) explains: “The digestive process indeed purifies (makes *tahor*) all of the food that is eaten.”

As a conclusion, Eby (2011:25) continues to formulate:

Food that is *tamei* does not have any effect on a person’s essential holiness. In fact, even when food goes in *tamei*, it comes out *tahor*. What ultimately compromises a person’s essential holiness is the “impurity” generated within the person’s heart: his corrupt thoughts, words, and behaviors.

We do not know whether this rabbinical concept was already known or discussed during the Second Temple period. But it fits well into Matthew 15:17 where Jesus explains, “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled?” (ESV). If Jesus had simply declared all food clean he wouldn’t have done it in a subordinate clause. He could have been accused of transgression of the law. This would have led to a major disruption within the Jewish world of that time. It is interesting to note that, according to Matthew 15:17, Peter asked Jesus for a more detailed explanation. Had Jesus declared the food to be pure at that time, Peter would certainly have remembered those words when he had the vision in Acts 10. But there is no reference to a word of Jesus. Since Jesus didn’t teach in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 about purity rules per se, James could easily suggest a purity ritual to Paul in Acts 21:18-26 as proof of his Torah piety. Thus Paul was in full conformity with Jesus.

#### 5.3.4.3.4 *Paul in full conformity with Peter?*

Another variation would be that Paul was in full conformity with Peter as described in Acts 10. The events around Peter and Cornelius are traditionally used to show that God has declared all food pure. But if the food was made pure then also other purity issues are irrelevant (cf. Bock, 2007:389-390; Roloff, 1981:170-171).

But does the text really want to say that, or is something different being said here? Some commentators (Rudolph, 2011:48) argue that the section is not about “menu, but about people”. We want to briefly develop the described events:

The God-fearing centurion Cornelius stays in Caesarea. An angel appears to him during the Jewish time of prayer (Acts 10:1-8; cf. Acts 3:1) and tells him to bring Simon Peter from Joppa. He obeys the appearance and sends two servants for Peter.

At the same time Peter stays with Simon the tanner in Joppa (Acts 10:9-22). In the morning between 11 and 12 am Peter goes on the roof of the house to pray. While he is praying he gets hungry and wants to eat. There he suddenly has a vision of God. He sees a great sheet descending from heaven with unclean animals on it. A heavenly voice commands him to eat the unclean animals. Peter is shocked and rejects the offer. And the voice says: “What God has made clean, do not call uncommon” (Acts 10:15 ESV). This is repeated three times. So Peter ponders the vision. He doesn’t understand what this vision has to say to him. It is important to notice that the voice doesn’t explicitly explain what God has purified (Woods, 2012:178). So the major question is, “What has God cleansed?”

Many Christian commentators answer at this point: “God has cleansed the food”. But Gentiles have never been subject to the Jewish food laws. At any rate, Peter does not draw a connection to Jewish food commandments at this point (Woods, 2012:178). While some exegetes think that the whole section is about food and purity laws, we should note the following points (cf. Woods, 2012:178):

1. In the OT some prophets sometimes experienced visions, but most of the visions were never meant literally. The dry bones Ezekiel saw did not really have anything to do with bones (Ezek 37:1-14). They were a symbol of the scattered people of Israel.
2. Zechariah saw a woman in a barrel (Zech 5:5-11) but it had nothing to do with a woman. It was symbolic for sin.
3. Amos saw a basket of summer fruits (Amos 8) but it had nothing to do with real fruits; it was a sign for judgment.
4. In the same way, Peter's vision had nothing to do with food or unclean animals, but was a sign for something else.

The assertion that the law was abolished at this point is not in the text, but is an interpretation.

While Peter reflects on the vision, the two servants of Cornelius come and seek him. Peter comes to meet them and asks for the reason for their coming.

The next day they make their way to Caesarea to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:23-33). When Peter comes in, he explains that he—as a Jew—was actually forbidden to enter a non-Jewish household, but God has shown him that he should not call anyone unclean (Acts 10:28). Peter was one of the chief apostles and one of the most important witnesses to the people of Israel. His ritual purity adherence was not at issue.

But the community between Gentiles and Jews is not forbidden in the Torah. Did he perhaps refer to the oral law? Maybe he was referring to a halakhic decision, for he declared to Cornelius, after entering his house, that it was “unlawful” (ἄθεμιτος) for a Jew to enter a non-Jewish household. The text does not say that it was against the Torah. The *halakhah* regarding the relations between Jews and Gentiles is complicated and controversial among scholars.

For the most part, Jews and Gentiles lived well side by side and had contact, as shown, for example, by archaeology. Many Gentile donors built or gave money for synagogues. But maybe there was a Jewish minority that prohibited contact between Jews and Gentiles (Woods, 2012:182). In the Talmud (b. Ohalot 18:7) we read, “The dwellings of the Gentiles are unclean” (cf. also Jub 22:16).

But now Peter realized that contacts between Jews and Gentiles were not forbidden. So the pure and unclean animals were symbolically for Jews and Gentiles. Already Jewish sages interpreted this way. In the Midrash Lev Rabbah 13 to Leviticus 11:4-7 it is explained that the four animals alluded to four nations: the camel, hyrax, hare and pig stand symbolically for the four nations Babylon, Persia/Media, Greece and Rome (cf. Eby, 2012:42; cf. Daniel 7:3-6; 8 where nations are described as animals; also 1 En 85-90).

Then Peter preached a sermon to the assembled community (Acts 10:34-48). He emphasized again and again that Jesus is the Lord of the whole world:

1. God doesn't look at the person (Acts 10:34).
2. In every nation, everyone who fears him and works righteousness is pleasing to him (Acts 10:35).
3. He is Lord of all (Acts 10:36).
4. “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43).

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on the assembled community, and the circumcised believers were amazed that the *nations* also received the Holy Spirit. The

speaking in tongues was a visible sign of the outpouring of the Spirit on Gentiles. Now the believers could also be baptized. Peter emphasized once again that the nations also received the Holy Spirit “as we have” (Acts 10:47).

In conclusion, the event in Acts 10 cannot be used as a basis for overcoming Jewish purity laws. This would stand against the overall structure of Acts. On the contrary, Luke shows a Torah-faithful Peter and also a Torah-faithful Paul who highly respected the Jewish customs.

### 5.3.5 Verse 22

**A** τί οὖν ἐστίν; πάντως ἀκούσονται ὅτι ἐλήλυθας.

**A** What now? Anyway, they’ll hear that you came.

James and the elders ask the rhetorical question (Schnabel, Acts 21:22) what Paul should do now. For the law-abiding Jewish Christians will certainly (πάντως) hear that Paul has come to Jerusalem. Some manuscripts (P74 κ(\*) A (C<sup>2</sup>) D E Ψ ℳ latt) read, δεῖ συνελθῆναι πλῆθος ἀκούσονται γὰρ ὅτι ἐλήλυθας (a crowd is sure to gather, for they will hear ... cf. Fitzmyer, 2008:694). This is probably a Western extension of the text (Barrett, 2004:1009-1010) and a shadow of the upcoming turmoil. However, Paul isn't asked for advice, but the elders already have an answer as to what Paul should do. He should perform a ritual purity rite.

### 5.3.6 Verse 23

**A** τοῦτο οὖν ποιήσον ὃ σοι λέγομεν. **A** Do therefore this which we say unto thee.  
εἰσὶν ἡμῖν ἄνδρες τέσσαρες **B** We have four men

**B** εὐχὴν ἔχοντες ἐφ’ ἑαυτῶν. **B** that have taken a vow on them.

### Exegesis

**A** τοῦτο οὖν ποιήσον ὃ ὅ σοι λέγομεν. εἰσὶν ἡμῖν ἡμῖν ἄνδρες τέσσαρες.

Paul should do what the elders say. It is not simply a proposal but rather a demand to do what they say. Osborne (2019:385) states that “actually, it is more than a suggestion, for they virtually demand that he do it.” There were four men in the congregation who took a vow (εὐχή) and Paul should accompany them.

**B** εὐχή ἔχοντες ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν.

The basis for a Nazirite vow is Numbers 6, where the Nazirites (נַזִּירִים - LXX ναζιραῖος) are described for the first time. Everyone (man or woman) could take a vow (נָזַר - LXX εὐχή) and become a Nazirite. That was something special (v. 2: אֵלֶּפּ - hif. doing something special) and voluntary. There is no commandment that makes a vow compulsory. A vow exceeded the regular Torah observance and was thus also a sign for a special Torah-observant life (cf. Omerzu, 2002:299).

A *nazir* separated himself from his environment in order to be completely devoted to God.

When a Nazirite took a vow, some points had to be observed:

1. Abstinance from wine and grapes. Like priests (Lev 10:9), they should abstain from everything that comes from a vine stock. On the one hand, wine stood for pleasures of life. On the other hand, wine could disturb the mind and make the service for God impossible.
2. A *nazir* wasn't allowed to cut any hair. The hair should grow freely, unlike the high priests (Lev 21:5, 10). But like the priests, they were holy to the Lord (Lev 21:6). The free growing hair of a Nazirite is described as a golden diadem (נִזְנָה) like the diadem on the head of a high priest (Lev 21:7, cf. Ex 29:6; Lev 8:9).
3. Like a priest, they were not allowed to touch a dead body (Lev 21:10) or enter a cemetery. God had precedence over the dead.
4. After the vow was fulfilled, the hair was to be cut off and burned before the tent of encounter (later in a chamber in the temple) (cf. Num 6:18). In addition, a Nazirite had to offer several complicated and thus expensive sacrifices (burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings) (Num 6:14-17, 19).

There were two types of Nazirite (cf. Cox, 2008:84):

1. Nazirites who were consecrated to God for a lifetime (lifelong Nazirite), such as Samson (Judg 13:5; 16:17), Samuel (cf. LXX 1 Sam 1:11 and 4QSam<sup>a</sup>) or John the Baptist. Parents could consecrate their children before they were born.
2. Temporary Nazirites.

The Nazirites also existed during the Second Temple period (cf. Bockmuehl, 2000:36-48), but the information about them is sparse. They are mentioned in 1 Maccabees 3:49, in Josephus (Josephus, 1987:106.520.617-618) and Philo (2002:557-558). They are mentioned there in connection with the temple (Koet, 1996:133-134). But that the information about the Nazirites is sparse is probably due to the fact that they were



generally known. Koet (1996:134) states that it was probably a “quite well-known phenomenon” (cf. Bockmuehl, 2000:49). Later, both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds devote much space to the theme. The whole tractate Nazir deals with Nazirites (cf. also bNed).

Although in our section the four men are not explicitly referred to as Nazirites, the connections are obvious (cf. Omerzu, 2002:298; also Chepey, 2005:169-170). The special mention of hair cutting (v. 24) and sacrifice offering (v. 26) point unmistakably in this direction. If a single element of a Nazirite vow is mentioned then “Jews from the Second Temple period were supposed to understand it as a Nazirite situation” (Koet, 1996:135). James and the elders suggest that Paul take special care of the four Nazirites. Eusebius knows from Hegesippus that James was also a Nazirite from his mother's womb. Although the word is not mentioned, the elements described point in this direction. Hegesippus (Eusebius, 1890:125) writes that “He was holy from his mother’s womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath.” We do not know how reliable this source and the description of James is. It is quite possible that here James is described as somebody he wasn’t. We don’t have an independent source of confirmation. If it can be assumed to be reliable, then some of the characteristics mentioned point to a Nazirite of James. “Holy from the womb” (cf. Judg 13:5), “abstinence from wine” and “no cutting of hair” are all characteristics of Nazirites. But as for other mentioned peculiarities, such as abstinence from oil, meat, and bathing, we do not know that they were related to an ancient Nazirite vow (Deines, 2017:54). It’s quite possible, but it is also possible that James, for whatever reason, took these peculiarities upon himself in addition to a Nazirite vow. If Paul would support the Nazirites, he would also identify indirectly with the most important leader of the Jewish-Christian community, James. For according to Hegesippus James was one of the most respected Nazirites in his day. But it would also have another advantage, which Chepey (2005:173) explains: “ Nazirites would have been a popular sight in the temple during Pentecost and easily noticed because of their appearance... By being present with such figures, Paul’s action of purifying himself and paying for the four men to have haircuts and sacrifices offered to renew their vows would likely have been easily witnessed.”

The reader of Luke-Acts is not surprised to see Paul in company with four Nazirites. Luke had prepared the reader previously. At the beginning of the Gospel of Luke John the Baptist is described as a Nazirite (Luke 1:15). Though the word “Nazirite” is not used

the prohibition of drinking wine (Num 6:1) points in that direction. Later on Paul is described as taking a Nazirite vow upon himself (Acts 18:18-32). This again is a preparation for the next station, namely Paul in Jerusalem with the four Nazirites. Kinzer observes a connection between all three events and states that (Kinzer, 2018:202), “John’s lifelong status as a Nazirite prepares the reader for a temporary Nazirite vow which Paul undertakes just before traveling to Jerusalem at the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-23).” From there the reader is prepared for Paul’s encounter with James and his advisors to affiliate with the four Nazirites. Kinzer (2018:203) explains:

However, having read that Paul had earlier taken upon himself a Nazirite vow, in a context that implied no motive other than devotion to God, we are prepared to believe that he would sincerely participate in the vows of these four fellow Jewish disciples of Jesus in order to make known to others what was the simple truth—namely, that he also was a Jew “zealous for the Torah.”

### **5.3.6.1 Psalm 116 and the vows in Jerusalem**

In this context it is interesting to read the events in Acts 21:18-26 in the light of Psalm 116. Psalm 116 is a psalm of thanksgiving (Ps 116:17) which was sung in the worship context during pilgrim festivals (Weber, 2016:247). The geographical context is the temple in Jerusalem (Ps 116:19). In the first part of the psalm, the author describes his rescue from death (Ps 116:1-11) and liars (Ps 116:11). The author is thankful to God and wants to fulfil his vows (הַגִּדִּי לַיהוָה) before all his people (Ps 116:14), which he confirms a second time (Ps 116:18). Here the vows are described as a public sign of reverence and devotion to God. When Paul takes part in the vows of the four Nazirites—even if he has not taken any vows of his own—he shows himself publicly to the people that he is behind the act of piety of the four men.

### **5.3.7 Verse 24**

**A** τούτους σὺν παραλαβῶν

**B** ἀγνίσθητι σὺν αὐτοῖς

**C** καὶ δαπάνησον ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς

**D** ἵνα ξυρήσονται τὴν κεφαλὴν,

καὶ γνώσονται πάντες ὅτι

ὧν κατήχηται περὶ σοῦ οὐδέν ἐστιν

**E** ἀλλὰ στοιχεῖς καὶ αὐτὸς φυλάσσων

τὸν νόμον.

**A** These ones take with you

**B** cleanse thyself with them

**C** and pay their expenses

**D** so they can shave their head

and all will know, that

nothing is true what is said about you

**E** but, that you keep the law yourself and

stand by it.

## Exegesis

### A τούτους σὺν παραλαβῶν

The question is how Paul can now express his connection to the Jerusalem believers (Keener, 2014:3119). In addition to the collection, Paul was also to express his attachment to Jerusalem, the temple and the Torah through further deeds. Although Bock (2007:647) assumes that Paul also took a vow at this point, this is not necessary. He could participate in the procedure of completing the vow without necessarily taking a vow (Keener, 2014:3138). Paul should take these men with him and support them in the fulfilment of their vows. They should actually help Paul with their vows (cf. Omerzu, 2002:299).

### B ἀγνίσθητι σὺν αὐτοῖς

Paul should purify himself with the four men. The Greek text uses ἀγνίζω, which can mean “the ritual of going to a *mikweh* and performing a bathing there” or “separation” (cf. Omerzu, 2002:300). The term appears in both verses 24 and 26. As we will see below, in verse 26 it is to be interpreted as a “separation” in connection with the vow of Nazirites (cf. Omerzu, 2002:300). Some commentators suppose that Paul here entered into an abbreviated Nazirite vow. But the word ἀγνίζω does not designate anywhere the taking of a Nazirite vow, but is always to be interpreted as purification (cf. Omerzu, 2002:300). Therefore it is appropriate here to think of a ritual purification.

But why did Paul perform the purity ritual? The Nazirite vow itself did not demand a ritual bathing. There is much debate and different solutions for the ritual purity act of Paul and the four men (cf. Chepey, 2005:166). I will summarize five possible solutions:

1. Bruce (1998:406) supposed that Paul was ritually defiled after traveling in Gentile lands. But just having contact with Gentiles didn't make one ritually impure. Gentiles were not intrinsically and constantly impure. But nevertheless it was customary when one came from Gentile lands to perform a purification because the soil of Gentile land was impure (mNaz 2:3). One never knew exactly where there might have been graves and where not.
2. Stott (2000:499) and others (Haenchen, 1987:610-611; Marshall, 1980:345; Witherington, 1998:649; Neusner, 1999:81) suggest that Paul joined the Nazirites in their vow. This is unlikely because a Nazirite vow lasted at least thirty days (mNaz 1:3) and the text in Acts 21:27 mentions only seven days. Moreover, Paul spent about twelve days in Jerusalem, which would be too short for a Nazirite vow.

3. Another reason why Paul should perform the ritual bathing was that he touched a dead body in Troas (Acts 20:9-10) and was therefore ritually impure and would need a purity ritual. For this, a priest would sprinkle several drops of the red heifer ash mix upon the impure pilgrims in the Holy Temple's Purification Room (Ariel, 2018:373). But it would also have been possible to perform the ritual in a *mikveh* in Troas (Kazen, 2010:185). In our instance the ritual purity should be performed *σὺν αὐτοῖς*—with the four men.
4. As a pilgrim to Shavuot, Paul was subject to purity regulations for festival pilgrims (cf. Ariel, 2018:371). When pilgrims came from the land of Israel, they were very strict about purity. A month before a feast, emissaries were sent from the Bet Din to the streets leading to Jerusalem. They would paint a white colour “on a grave found in a field on the way to Jerusalem” (Ariel, 2018:361 cf. also the explanations of a *beit haperas* in Ariel, 2018:363). However, such regulations could of course not be implemented in the Diaspora. Therefore it made sense that every Jew coming from abroad had to clean himself first in Jerusalem. Thus the stricter purity regulations applied to pilgrims from the Diaspora, just as they applied to persons who had been contaminated by contact with corpses (Omerzu, 2002:304).

Deines (1993:185) assumes with reference to Philo (2002:615) that every Jew who came from abroad first had to go through a seven-day cleansing ritual before he was allowed to enter the temple (so also Safrai, 1981:143).

This could indeed be connected with Acts 21:27, where we read of seven days. But on the other hand it would contradict Acts 21:26, where it is said that Paul already went into the temple the very next day, that is to say during the seven-day purification process (so Horn, 1997:135). But we do not know exactly whether pilgrims from the Diaspora actually had to go through a seven-day purification process (cf. Deines, 1993:185) before they were allowed to enter the temple. Perhaps all pilgrims, whether from the Diaspora or not, had to go through a seven-day purification process before entering the temple (Kazen, 2010:185). But we do not know for sure.

It would also be possible that one needed a purity ritual but not necessarily of seven days. Or the seven days mentioned are not connected with purification, since verse 27 does not speak of purification. A third possible proposal on the timing of the purity ritual will be discussed later (cf. chapter 5.3.9.3). We will see that the temporal sequence of purification, as shown by Luke, fits into the purification processes during the Second Temple Period.

We should also remember that Paul was never accused of having entered the temple area in an unclean state (cf. Omerzu, 2002:305). The accusation was that he defiled the holy place by bringing Gentile persons there (Acts 21:28). His purity state was not a matter of discussion. Also in Acts 24:18 Paul confirms that he was in a purified state while entering the temple area.

5. Paul and the four men performed the ritual bathing as usual before entering the Temple. Haber (2008:193) explains that “one could not enter the temple or participate in the sacrificial meal in a state of defilement. Pilgrims were therefore required to purify themselves.” Thus Paul’s purity ritual was unrelated to the vow of the four men. But Schnabel (2012, Acts 21:24) explains: “The purification of the four men coincided in terms of time with Paul’s purification.”

There is probably no satisfactory answer to this question but it might be a combination of several solutions. Paul probably had several reasons to purify himself. He came from abroad (no. 1) and was a pilgrim (no. 4) in the area of the temple (no. 5) during the festival season.

Though the term ἀγνίζω appears only in Acts (21:24, 26; 24:18) the reader is positively prepared in relation to the concept of purity. For Luke’s is the only Gospel which points out that Mary practised a purity rite (Luke 2:22: “καθαρισμός”) according to the Law of Moses. She was faithful to the Law. Luke underlines in Luke 2:22-39 that the family of Jesus did everything “according to the Law of Moses” (Luke 2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39). Their faithfulness to the Law of Moses is unquestionable. The same is true also for Paul’s life according to Acts. He practised a purity rite in order to demonstrate his faithfulness to the Law.

Κ καὶ δαπάνησον ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς αὐτοῖς

Probably the Nazirites could not bear the costs themselves and needed help to fulfil their vows. During the Second Temple period it was a pious act to pay the high expenses for the sacrifices of a Nazirite (Koet, 1996:133). Josephus tells about King Agrippa I coming to Jerusalem and fulfilling all that the Torah demanded. He paid for the consecration of the Nazirites. Josephus (1987:520) writes about Agrippa:

Accordingly he returned in haste, as was likely he would, now he returned in much greater prosperity than he had before. He also came to Jerusalem and offered all the sacrifices that belonged to him, and omitted nothing which the law required; on which account he ordained that many of the Nazirites should have their heads shorn.

Horn (1997:133, n. 62) notes that the phrase “omitted nothing which the law required” (οὐδὲν τῶν κατὰ νόμον παραλιπών) refers to the thanksgiving sacrifices of Agrippa but with the words “on which” (διὸ καὶ) he refers to Nazirites “in a direct relationship to this legal piety” (“in eine unmittelbare Beziehung zu dieser Gesetzesfrömmigkeit”).

A similar story is described in Genesis Rabbah 91:3 (Lancaster, 2016b:738). There 300 Nazirites come to Jerusalem and need to make 900 sacrifices. Half of the sacrifices are paid by King Alexander Yannai. We do not know how reliable this description is, but it shows us that the sacrifices were huge and that it was quite common for others to pay the costs for Nazirites. The cost of a Nazirite vow was immense. According to Numbers 6:13-17, in order to complete a vow, a Nazirite had to make the following offerings:

1. One male lamb
2. One ewe lamb
3. One ram
4. A basket of unleavened bread
5. Unleavened wafers smeared with oil
6. Drink offering

In Acts 21 four men are mentioned with a Nazirite vow, thus we have to multiply by four to estimate the whole amount of costs Paul should bear. And if Paul also joined the vow, as some commentators assume, then he would also have to pay the costs for himself in addition.

#### ***5.3.7.1 Where did Paul get the money to pay for the ransom of the Nazirites?***

Luke does not tell us where Paul got the money to pay for the Nazirites. Since Paul was traveling and preaching most of his time, he didn't work continuously and was often dependent on donations from his churches (Phil 4:10ff). Some commentators ask whether Paul took the money from the collection or not. Pervo (2008:546) therefore asks: “Moreover, it is worth asking whether use of funds from the collection to pay for religious vows would have qualified as assistance for the ‘poor’ in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26) and, correlatively, whether the contributor would have found this an appropriate use of their donations.” Bock (2007:648) rejects the idea, without justification, that Paul took the money for the Nazirites from the collection.

Keener (2014:3136) suggests that Paul may have saved enough money himself to pay for the release (cf. Acts 20:33-35). We know that Paul worked at least in some places and so

could have earned some money for his living. It is quite conceivable that he had put some money aside in the course of time.

But it is also quite conceivable that Paul took something from the collection he previously carried out (Lambers-Petry, 2003:34). He may have taken at least a small part of the money for the Nazirites, as Keener (2014:3136) suggests, in line with Hengel and Schwemer (1997:255). The money would then be a help to Jewish-Christian brethren who then could fulfil their Nazirite vows. This may have been an expression of Paul's original idea (Rom 15:25). The money would thus be a sign of unity between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

**Δ** ἵνα ξυρήσονται τὴν τὴν κεφαλὴν

Part of the Nazirite vow was the shaving of the head (Num 6:18). After completing the vow, a Nazirite would go to the temple and cut his hair there and burn it in the fire and offer a peace offering (cf. Ariel, 2018:91). Actually it was forbidden to cut the hair during the festive season. But the Nazirites were still allowed to cut their hair during the festive season in order to complete their vows (Shulam, 2012:1186). Cutting the hair and offering the sacrifice was the last ritual Nazirites had to do to complete their vow. Then they were again free from their vows (cf. Ariel, 2018:206).

The hair cutting was done in the court of the women, where there were four chambers: the Chamber of the House of Oil, the Chamber of the Lepers, the Chamber of the Woodshed and the Chamber of the Nazirites (cf. mMid 2.5; Ritmeyer, 2006:345). These chambers were 21 metres square and had no roofs. They were probably open courts, “with the central area open to the sky and porticos built along the four walls to provide shelter from the hot sun in the summer and protection from rain in winter, so that the various functions could be performed regardless of prevailing weather conditions” (Ritmeyer, 2006:352-354).

To complete the vows of the four men, they would have had to go to the Chamber of the Nazirites. There the hair was first cut and then the peace offering cooked. The hair was then thrown under the cauldron into the fire and burned (mMid 2.5). Afterwards they were free from their vow.

**Ε** ἀλλὰ στοιχεῖς καὶ αὐτὸς φυλάσσων τὸν νόμον.

Although Du Toit (2016:7) admits that “the Acts of the Apostles seems to portray Paul's relationship with the Torah in a positive light” he claims that “it can thus not be derived

from the text of Acts” (Du Toit, 2016:8). But Acts continuously describes Paul living a genuine Jewish life (cf. Acts 16:3; 23:6; 25:8; 28: cf. chapter 4). Apart from the positive examples of a Jewish lifestyle of Paul in Acts, there is no example in Acts where Paul would have deviated from the norm (if there was such a thing as “normative Judaism”). Here too James confirms that Paul lived as a Jew according to the Torah (cf. Davies, 1980:70).

Rudolph (2002:66) makes the observation that, “Luke’s use of the verb and the participle ... underscore the point that Paul is regularly observant of Torah. Torah observance (in the present active tense) characterizes his lifestyle.” The καὶ is emphatic and “identifies Paul with the antecedent—the thousands of Jesus-believing Jews in Jerusalem who are zealous for the law,” states Rudolph (2019:199). Thus Paul is described positively as a “zealot for the law”.

### **5.3.8 Verse 25**

Ἀ περὶ δὲ τῶν πεπιστευκότων ἔθνῶν ἡμεῖς ἐπεστείλαμεν κρίναντες φυλάσσεσθαι αὐτοὺς τὸ τε εἰδωλόθυτον καὶ αἷμα καὶ πνικτὸν καὶ πορνείαν.

A Regarding Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment to abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.

### **Exegesis**

At the end of verse 24 James again confirms that Paul lived in observance of the law. This basically implies that Jewish-Christian communities can adhere to the law. As we have already seen earlier, this was indeed the case with Jewish-Christian communities in the first centuries. The Gentile Christian churches were, so to speak, liberated from this at the apostolic council (Acts 15), which took place several decades before the incident in Acts 21. James now recalls the provisions in Acts 15 that were made at that time. It is now the third time (Acts 15:20, 29) that they are repeated in Acts. This again underlines their importance within the first century.

In Acts 15:23 the regulations were sent to the communities in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. They were regionally limited. But their repetition in Acts 21:25 shows that the provisions were not only meant regionally, but universally (Löhr, 2003:29).



The difficulty in interpreting the four points mentioned lies in the fact that only keywords without any explanation are actually given. In Acts 21:25 the Apostolic Decree is described in even shorter terms than in Acts 15:20. The table below is intended to compare all three passages in Acts. In order to better understand the order of the individual points, I have placed numbers in square brackets.

Acts 15:20	Acts 15:29	Acts 21:25
<p>ἀλλ' ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς [1] τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων [2] καὶ τῆς πορνείας [3] καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ [4] καὶ τοῦ αἵματος.</p> <p>but should write to them to [1] abstain from the things polluted by idols, [2] and from sexual immorality, [3] and from what has been strangled, [4] and from blood. (ESV)</p>	<p>[1] ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων [4] καὶ αἵματος [3] καὶ πνικτῶν [2] καὶ πορνείας, ἐξ ὧν διατηροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς εὖ πράξετε. Ἔρρωσθε.</p> <p>that you abstain from what [1] has been sacrificed to idols, [4] and from blood, [3] and from what has been strangled, [2] and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. (ESV)</p>	<p>περὶ δὲ τῶν πεπιστευκότων ἔθνῶν ἡμεῖς ἐπεστείλαμεν ἐπεστείλαμεν κρίναντες κρίναντες φυλάσσεσθαι αὐτοὺς [1] τό τε εἰδωλόθυτον [4] καὶ αἷμα [3] καὶ πνικτὸν [2] καὶ πορνείαν.</p> <p>But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should [1] abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, [4] and from blood, [3] and from what has been strangled, [2] and from sexual immorality. (ESV)</p>

The order of the enumeration in Acts 15:29 corresponds to Acts 21:25. The first point [1] is always named first. Points [2] to [4] are listed in Acts 15:29 and 21:25 in reverse order to Acts 15:20. This shows us that the order of enumeration can be variable. The enumeration is keyword-like, so that it can be assumed that the points mentioned could be classified correctly at that time. Let us first take a closer look at the individual points and then work out their meaning.

### 5.3.8.1 The four points of the Apostolic Decree

[1] τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων (cf. Lev 17:8)

Acts 15:20 states that believers should stay away from “the defilement of idols” (τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων). In verse 9 as well as in Acts 21:25, however, it says that believers should “abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols” (ἀπέχεσθαι

ειδωλοθύτων cf. 4 Macc 5:2). The term εἰδωλόθυτον (cf. 1 Cor 8:1, 4, 7, 10) appears only in Jewish and Christian literature (Schnabel, 2018:438) and was probably a new word creation. The word had a negative and polemic sound (Schnabel, 2018:438).

The word ἀλισγημάτα is a hapax legomenon in the NT and means “impurity deriving from contact with idol worship” (Shulam, 2012:836; cf. also Dan 1:8). But that also includes eating idol sacrificial meat. Shulam therefore proposes to see the word as inclusive (Shulam, 2012:836). In Revelation 2:20, the church in Thyatira is warned not to practise sexual immorality [2] and to eat food sacrificed to idols (φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα). Public meetings and dinner parties with pagan rites had been common in ancient Roman society (Keener, 2014:2270). Idol sacrificial meat had been part of the society. But one could certainly buy meat that did not come from temple slaughtering (Schnabel, 2018:438). The average population could not afford the daily consumption of meat and was therefore often dependent on public meat distribution at victory celebrations, funeral celebrations etc. (Schnabel, 2018:438). This meat then usually came from pagan religious sacrificial ceremonies. That is why it had been a great seduction for Christians in the first centuries. For Jews, the rejection of idolatrous sacrifices had been a fundamental conviction (Schnabel, 2018:439), which was already based on the Torah on Exodus 34:15: “... lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice” (ESV). This is why the theme was so important for Paul. He writes about it in at least two chapters in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 8 and 10) though he doesn’t mention the decree there.

[2] καὶ τῆς πορνείας – from sexual immorality (cf. Lev 18:6-23; 20)

The word πορνεία occurs relatively frequently in the NT, in Acts, however, only in connection with the Apostolic Decree. It had a broad spectrum of meaning (cf. TDNT, 6:580ff.):

- 1) originally, it meant prostitution. Later, other meanings were added: any form of forbidden intercourse outside the marriage, such as adultery; extra- and premarital sex; homosexuality; intercourse with animals, prostitution, etc.
- 2) Idolatry as religious apostasy from God (because Israel was the “wife of God” through the covenant). Moreover, this idolatry was often accompanied by sexual excesses.
- 3) The one who lets himself be misused for fornication for money (Coenen, 1971:1506).

Although some commentators would like to limit the meaning of πορνεία at this point only to incestuous marriages (Witherington, 1998:463), it is quite possible that the entire spectrum of meaning was in mind here. In the Jewish tradition, pagan sexual behaviour was in principle denounced in many places (cf. Keener, 2014:2273). Although pagan Roman society prohibited sexual misconduct in some respects (such as adultery), Roman sexual freedom was also a great seduction for early Christianity. Keener (2014:2275) states: “The larger culture’s values always threatened to overwhelm the church.”

In Manuscript <sup>Ⓢ45</sup> the reference to fornication is missing. There are only three points listed. This makes the Apostolic Decree ritualistic.

[3] καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ (cf. Lev 17:13)

In Codex D πνικτοῦ is missing. Instead, the golden rule is added in a negative form (ὅσα μὴ θέλουσιν ἑαυτοῖς γείνεσθαι ἑτέροις μὴ ποιεῖτε). This point is probably about the slaughter method (Neudorfer, 2000:101). The Torah gives the commandment that not every meat may be eaten, even if it is kosher. Nobody can “eat what dies of itself (נֶבֶלָה) or what is torn by beasts (חֵרֶץ)” (Lev 17:15). נֶבֶלָה would be meat that still contained blood (see point [4]) and חֵרֶץ would refer to animals that were either strangled by an animal (see Nah 2:13) or by a human (see Bockmuehl, 2003:165). So this meat could not be properly prepared. In this sense, pagans should also eat “kosher meat” (not in the sense of today's halakhic standards). This point is also related to the next one. Neudorfer (2000:101) explains:

Als „koscher“ gilt dem Juden bis heute nur solches Fleisch, das durch Durchschneiden der Hauptschlagader und anschließendes Ausfließenlassen des Bluts getötet worden ist.

To this day, only meat that has been properly killed by cutting through the aorta and then letting the blood flow out is considered to be kosher by Jews. (my translation)

[4] καὶ τοῦ αἵματος αἵματος – and from blood (cf. Lev 17:10-14; Gen 9:4)

Abstaining from blood can be understood in a twofold sense. First, this can be interpreted in such a way that one should abstain from blood murder (see Bockmuehl, 2003:165). If this is to be interpreted in this way, the question arises why James does not simply speak of φόνοϛ (cf. Rom 1:29), but of blood? Therefore most interpreters are right to see that this is about prohibition of blood consumption (see Bockmuehl, 2003:165).

In the pagan environment there was a belief that blood strengthened the life force (Neudorfer, 2000:100). But according to the Torah blood was used for atonement, and it was forbidden to drink or eat blood (Lev 17:10-14). It is interesting to note that we have some early Christian testimonies that Gentile Christians followed the Jewish dietary commandments and, for example, bought meat only from Jews. The Didache 6:3 (1886:379) explains: “And concerning food, bear what thou art able; but against that which is sacrificed to idols be exceedingly on thy guard; for it is the service of dead gods” (cf. Eusebius, 1890:214; also Löhr, 2003:30).

Points [3] and [4] could also be understood grammatically as one point (Keener, 2014:2276). Then this would mean to “avoid eating meat butchered without the appropriate ritual, namely, without the blood properly drained” (Malina, 2008:109). But if they are understood as different points, then point [3] is about the correct preparation (flesh without blood) and point [4] is about the basic prohibition against consuming blood, which was quite common in Roman culture. Both variants are plausible.

### ***5.3.8.2 The meaning of the Apostolic Decree***

The question arises why four points are given for Gentile Christians and what significance (rationality) they had at that time for the believers? There are six main suggestions for the meaning of the Apostolic Decree (cf. Schnabel Acts 15:20; I list them in a different order than Schnabel does).

1. The enumeration refers to the cardinal sins (bSanh 74a) which a Jew wasn't allowed to commit under any circumstances. This includes idolatry, fornication and murder (blood) (Schnabel, Acts 15:20). As we've seen, blood is unlikely to mean murder. In addition, Schnabel rightly points out that this statement omits strangled food (Schnabel, 2012:15:20).
2. The enumeration is from a catalogue of vices and virtues that Jewish people taught to Gentile proselytes (Schnabel, 2012:15:20). But the important point of circumcision is not mentioned. Also this point does not explain strangled food. Besides, Schnabel makes the right observation:

It fails to see that by the removal of the requirement of circumcision, the Gentile converts were thus exempted from the necessity of becoming proselytes. It is questionable whether Jewish proselyte traditions per se, apart from their scriptural basis, would have been regarded as relevant by Peter, Paul, or James, given the fact that it was the law, and Scriptures more

widely, and its application to Gentile Christians which was the focus of the discussion (vv. 5–6, 10, 15–18, 21).

3. The next explanation sees in the four points the Jewish rejection of pagan cultic practices and idols. According to this explanation fornication is to be understood in the environment of temple prostitution. The points about strangling and blood refer to the pagan cultic and religious environment. This reasoning makes sense but Schnabel (Schnabel, 2012:15:20) states:

First, if the four stipulations only wanted to direct Gentile Christians to give up their former pagan practices and to worship the one true God, concerns regarding idolatry could have been formulated more clearly and without recourse to rare Greek words. Second, the decree would not have said anything new and would therefore have been redundant, since the renunciation of pagan religious practices was a fundamental part of the message that missionaries preached among Gentiles. Third, the regulations regarding strangled animals and blood are difficult to associate with pagan temples.

4. What is striking is that only ritual aspects of the Torah were actually given here. Polhill (1992:330) remarks: “When looked at closely, all four of these belong to the ritual sphere.” Whether these provisions still apply today is answered controversially. Most exegetes think that these provisions were only valid as long as Jewish and Gentile Christians were in close contact with each other and lived side by side (Neudorfer, 2000:102; Bock, 2007:507). So this is about cultural sensitivity. Polhill (1992:331; similarly also Fitzmeyer, 2008:556) explains:

The four requirements suggested by James were thus all basically ritual requirements aimed at making fellowship possible between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Often referred to as “the apostolic decrees,” they belonged to a period in the life of the church when there was close contact between Jewish and Gentile Christians, when table fellowship especially was common between them. In a later day, by the end of the first century, Jewish Christianity became isolated into small sects and separated from Gentile Christianity. There no longer existed any real fellowship between them. The original function of the decrees no longer had any force, and they tended to be viewed in wholly moral terms.

Points [3] and [4] may be understood in this way, but [1] and [2] exceed cultural sensitivity. Points [1] and [2] have moral-ethical meaning that have their foundations in the Torah, as we have seen above. The moral aspects (like the Ten Commandments) were not at all up for debate. They were of course part of the ethics of the first followers of Jesus (cf. Gal 5:19-21; Rom 13:9-10). Schnabel correctly notes (Schnabel, 2012:15:20):

This explanation is not convincing since the stipulation that forbids idolatry does not fit the assumed concern for harmony between Jewish Christians

and Gentile Christians; rather, abandonment of idolatry was a fundamental part of the conversion of Gentiles. Also, the matters related to idolatry, immorality, and the ingestion of blood are not mere intrapersonal offenses for Jews (which the Gentile believers should take into account), but offenses against God prohibited in the law.

#### 5. Law for Sojourners

The next explanation makes a connection between Israel's law for the sojourners (Lev 17-18) and the Apostolic Decree (Keener, 2014:2262). There are some commandments which are imposed on Gentiles (strangers) who lived among the people ("in the midst") of Israel (cf. Fitzmeyer, 2008:556). The problem with this approach is that "the Leviticus passage offers guidance only for life in Eretz Israel, not in the Diaspora," notes Keener (2014:2263) and makes the solution with limitation that "one could reply that the passage offered principles that could be applied to evaluating righteous Gentiles or proselytes, but then we are talking about James's depending on a theology based on the passage, rather than on the passage itself" (Keener, 2014:2262). Another solution might be as follows: If believers from the nations have now joined the people of Israel in a spiritual sense and dwell spiritually among and with the people of Israel, they also have to adhere to the same standard the Torah imposed on strangers. But the question would remain why James chose only the Leviticus 17-18 passage, since the Torah contains other different laws for sojourners (cf. Lev 25:35; Num 9:14; 15:26; Deut 5:14; 14:21; 16:11). Those laws are not mentioned or applied. Keener (2014:2263) concludes: "Whether we think of laws concerning sojourners or of Noahide laws, the outcome is largely the same: a preexisting category allows the church to welcome Gentiles as Gentiles, hence without requiring them to observe the full Torah."

#### 6. The seven Noahide Commandments and the Apostolic Decree

According to Jewish tradition, God made a covenant with Noah (Gen 9:8ff.). God blessed Noah and his sons and gave them the following regulations:

- A. Be fruitful and multiply (vv. 1, 7).
- B. Rule over nature (v. 2).
- C. Animals and plants are human food (v. 3), but not the blood of animals (v. 4).
- D. Prohibition of murder (v. 5).
- E. A murderer should be punished (v. 6).

This Noahide covenant was given for all mankind (v. 9). Thus the covenant has a universal character and applies to all people. In Judaism, therefore, the so-called seven Noahide commandments were derived from Genesis 9 (cf. bSan 56a-b; Hertz, 1984:81):

1. Prohibition of murder
2. Prohibition of theft
3. Prohibition of idol worship
4. Prohibition of fornication
5. Prohibition of eating meat taken from a live animal
6. Prohibition of blasphemy
7. Introduction of courts as an expression of justice

This enumeration is first mentioned as Noahide commandments in tAvZarah 8:4-8. The text is dated to the second century AD (Müller, 1998:47ff., cf. Bockmuehl, 2003:159). In addition, there are similar enumerations but with some deviations (cf. the overview at Keener, 2014:2266). The oldest enumeration is found in Jubilees 7:20-24, where Noah gives some commandments to his sons. These commandments are to be understood universally:

And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to command his grandsons with ordinances and commandments and all of the judgments which he knew. And he bore witness to his sons so that they might do justice and cover the shame of their flesh and bless the one who created them and honour father and mother, and each one love his neighbour and preserve themselves from fornication and pollution and from all injustice. (Jub 7:20)

Later, Noah explains to his sons that the earth was punished because men didn't observe the last three points (fornication, uncleanness and iniquity). This meant that they shed blood by killing people and animals (Jub 7:23-24) and ate blood (Jub 7:28-31).

In Judaism, the one who doesn't keep these commandments is called *nochri* (*akkum*), and one who keeps them is called *ben noach* (son of Noah). But a *ger toshav* was a person who has publicly declared before a court to adhere to them. In Judaism it is believed that all non-Jews who observe the Noahide commandments share in the salvation and reward of the world to come (cf. Plaut, 2008:129).

If one compares the seven prohibitions with the four prohibitions in Acts which were given to the Gentile believers, then some parallels stand out:

**Noahide commandments Acts 15**

**על שבע  
מצוות נצטוו בני נח  
tAvZarah 84-8**

Introduction of courts		על הדינימ
Prohibition of idol worship	Prohibition of idol worship	על עבודה
Prohibition of blasphemy		ועל קיללת משה
Prohibition of fornication	Prohibition of fornication	ועל גילוי עריות
Prohibition of murder	Prohibition of murder	ועל יכותפ'ש דמימ
Prohibition of theft		ועל הגזל
Prohibition of eating meat taken from a live animal (cf. 9:4)	Prohibition of strangled meat	ועל אבר מן החי

It is remarkable that the four commandments of Acts 15 match the Noahide commandments. Acts 15 dealt with the question of what should be imposed on the Gentiles from the Torah (Acts 15:5-10). It was concluded that nothing should be imposed on the Gentiles except what the Bible itself imposes on the Gentiles, namely the seven Noahide commandments. These commandments are like a universal law for all people in Judaism. The difficulty with this approach is that only four of the seven commandments are listed. But why are only four listed in Acts? Two answers are possible:

- A. In antiquity, if one quoted or relied on a scripture verse, then one only needed to quote a part of it (*pars pro toto*).
- B. The seven Noahidic commandments were not yet fully developed at the time of the NT.

Keener also sees a connection between the Noahide Laws, Leviticus 17-18 and the Apostolic Decree (Keener, 2014:2268). The Noahide Laws may be the background for Leviticus 17-18 and thus all passages would be fitting for James in Acts 15. Keener (2014:2269) concludes that “these rules at least allowed Gentiles to be seen as God-fearers rather than as idolaters for both the Jerusalem church and other pious Jerusalemites.” But by quoting the Apostolic Decree James does not want to emphasize the Gentiles but the Israelites. In verse 24 James talks about Paul’s adherence to the Jewish Law whereas *περὶ δὲ* in verse 25 contrasts the believers from the nations which live according to an abridged law.



### 5.3.8.2.1 *The testimony to Israel and the nations*

Out text in Acts 21 implies a relationship between Israel and the nations. It is a crux that has always accompanied church history (cf. Pritz, 2007). It is also about Gentile and Jewish mission. As we have seen above, it is precisely verse 25 that makes a reference to Acts 15, where the discussion was based on soteriological questions. The main aspect in Acts 15 was about the relationship between Gentiles and the Torah. Acts 21:18-26 is about the relationship of the Jewish-Christians and the Torah but not in the soteriological sense.

Since the Holocaust, relations between Jews and Christians have changed (see the excellent study by Tatai, 2017). Both sides have come closer to each other and are trying to dispel prejudices. The Catholic Church made great progress at the Second Vatican Council in 1962. With *Nostra Aetate*, the Council published a declaration on how the Catholic Church stands towards other religions, especially Judaism. It says there, among other things (*Nostra Aetate* 9-13):

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, (9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading. (10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle. (11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and “serve him shoulder to shoulder” (Soph. 3:9).

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; (13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

With this document the church has officially eliminated the old theological prejudices. In summary, the Catholic Church declared:

- 1 Although Israel has not known her Messiah, she is still loved by God.
2. Jewish people cannot be held responsible in general for the death of Jesus.
- 3 Jewish people are not rejected or cursed by God.
4. Anti-Semitism, persecutions and outbursts of hatred are rejected.

### *The Protestant (Free) Churches*

The World Council of Churches, which mainly represents the Protestant (and Orthodox) churches, had recommended Jewish evangelization to its members in 1948. Over the next 60 years this position has been abandoned and replaced by a Jewish-Christian dialogue (Pritz, 2007:125; Tatai, 2017:261ff.). In the Protestant churches the topic of the mission to the Jews is very controversial and has been discussed for decades. Officially, all regional churches in Germany reject Jewish mission (EKD, 2000). The Marburger Kreis of regional churches and other individual representatives affirm and support Jewish mission.

Evangelical and pietist groups also understand that the missionary mandate of Jesus (Mt 28:19f) obliges them to tell the gospel to all people and thus also to the Jews. On February 22, 1980, the Konferenz Bekennender Gemeinschaften (Conference of Confessing Communities) in the EKD responded to the Rheinischen Synodalbeschluss (Synodal Resolution) which rejected the Jewish mission (Raisig, 2002:272ff.):

Unser Herr Jesus Christus sagt uns, daß wir allen Menschen, besonders aber Israel, das Evangelium schuldig sind (Mt. 24,14; 28,19; Apg 1,8; Röm. 1,14-16). Den Juden Christus nicht zu bezeugen, wäre ein Vergehen an dem König von Israel (Jh. 1,49) und an seinem Volke.

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that we owe the gospel to all people, especially to Israel (Mt 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8; Rom 1:14-16). Not to bear witness to Christ the Jew would be an offence against the King of Israel (Jn 1,49) and against his people. (my translation)

The Evangelical Lausanne Movement for Evangelism also supports the Jewish mission and founded the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism. Again and again the working group calls the churches to evangelize among Jews. The World Evangelical Alliance also affirms the Jewish mission. In August 2008 the Theological Committee of the World Evangelical Alliance met in Berlin under the theme: “The Uniqueness of Christ and Evangelism among Jews”. Subsequently, “The Berlin Declaration on the Uniqueness of Christ and Jewish Evangelism in Europe Today” (WEA, 2008) was published, where the importance of the Jewish mission was once again underlined.

### *Christian mission in the view of Judaism*

Judaism (whereby Judaism today as well as in antiquity has different forms) is critical of the efforts of Christian missions towards Jews. This has to do with the history of the churches (cf. Ariel, 2000; Singer, 2014).

### *Messianic Jews and Jewish mission*

Most Messianic Jews support and actively engage in evangelism among their brethren (Zaretsky, 2006). But there are also tendencies among Messianic Jews to acknowledge that there is salvation for Jewish people without Jesus.

The theological basis for this assumption was laid by Kinzer in his book *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism*. He postulates in his book that Jesus Christ is under mysterious circumstances with his people, although they rejected him (Kinzer, 2005:303). Jews can be saved without faith in Jesus. In rabbinical Judaism he sees a revelation of God because it has held the Jews together for centuries (cf. also Schnabel, 2006:28ff.). Kinzer has thus set a trend for the Messianic Movement. Although Kinzer writes on ecclesiology and not on soteriology the implications laid out also have meaning for soteriology.

### *The testimony to Israel*

The New Testament announces several times that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. After Andrew met Jesus he said to his brother Simon: “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41 ESV). Jesus also saw his mission as primarily addressed to Israel. In Matthew 15:24 he said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Only later on the mission to Gentiles was added. The disciples were sent out into the whole world in Matthew 28:19 to make other disciples of the nations. Thus Jews were not excluded from “evangelism” or “mission”. In Acts 1:8 that chronologically follows Matthew 28 we read that the disciples would be witnesses for Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the whole world. They should testify to Jesus as the Messiah of Israel to the whole world. This actually happened, for example in Acts 4.

Paul, too, is clear when he says that the gospel is valid for both Jews and Gentiles: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16 ESV). The NT knows only one way of salvation for Jews and Gentiles.

Although the New Testament clearly advocates testimony to Israel, the subject is tense and difficult. This tension can already be seen in the New Testament and especially in our passage. Paul’s work among Jews in the Diaspora and the nations leads to tumult and Paul’s arrest.

### 5.3.9 Verse 26

**A** Τότε ὁ Παῦλος παραλαβὼν τοὺς ἄνδρας  
**B** τῆ ἑχομένη ἡμέρᾳ σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀγνισθεῖς,

εἰσῆει εἰς τὸ ἱερόν  
**C** διαγγέλλων τοῦ τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν  
τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ ἀγνισμοῦ  
**D** ἕως οὗ προσηνέχθη ὑπὲρ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν  
ἢ προσφορά each .

**A** Then Paul took the men  
**B** and the next day he purified  
himself along with them  
and went in to the temple  
**C** giving notice of the fulfilment  
of the days of purification  
**D** and the offering presented for  
one of them.

#### Exegesis

Pervo (2008:546) notes in his commentary on this verse: “It is difficult to reconcile the rite described with what is known of Jewish practice.” In the following section we will try to reconstruct the course of the ritual in verse 26.

At the end of the meeting with James and the elders, Paul takes the men for the ritual. This indicates that Paul fully agrees with James’s proposal. What Paul answered is not described, but only how he acted. Pervo (2008:546) states that “The absence of any formal agreement, verbal or in summary form, is normal Lucan compression.”

He believes that the question of the historical dimension cannot be answered here. But if we apply the Pauline rule of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 instead of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (cf. Pervo, 2008:546) to Paul himself, it makes sense. Paul himself lived as a Jew and so it was natural for him to be able to perform the rituals required by the Jerusalem congregation without difficulty and without having to pretend anything.

**B** τῆ ἑχομένη ἡμέρᾳ σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀγνισθεῖς

As we have seen, Paul purified himself for several reasons (cf. 5.3.7). In the following we reconstruct the sequence of a cleansing ritual that Paul had to go through with the men.

#### 5.3.9.1 How did the ritual purity act happen?

In Israel more than 850 ritual baths from the time of the Second Temple period have been excavated in the last decades (Snyder, 2016:n.p.). There are discussions among archaeologists regarding what can be interpreted as ritual baths and what not (cf. Hoss, 2007:58). Most of the ritual baths found are located near the Temple Mount (cf. Adler, 2011:332ff. ). Ritual purity has shaped many aspects of the daily life of the people during the Second Temple period. Zangenberg (2012:539) states, “Next to monotheism,

circumcision and Sabbath observance, purity regulations were the most obvious characteristics of ancient Judaism in the Mediterranean world.”

Ritual baths were found in private houses, ancient synagogues (Deines, 1993:5), near burial grounds (Adler, 2009:55-73), agricultural installations (Adler 2009:63) and the Temple Mount (Adler, 2006:209ff.; Regev, 2005:194-205). Therefore ritual purity was performed at different times and on different occasions: before work, after touching the dead (Num 19:11-16), after birth (Lev 12:2), after women’s menstrual periods (Lev 15:19-20), after sexual intercourse (Lev 15:18), seminal emission (Lev 15:16), abnormal discharges (Lev 15:1-2; 15:25-27), certain skin diseases (Lev 11:24), certain animals that were also sources of impurity (Lev 11:24; Lev 11:46-47; Deut 14:3), before eating (cf. Mk 7:2ff. ), after diseases (Lev 13) and at the pilgrimage festivals (Safrai, 1981:163).

### **5.3.9.2 Reconstruction of a ritual bath**

According to the Torah, ritual purification should take place in living or rather natural water (Lev 15:13) like rivers, lakes, oceans, wells or wellsprings (Hoss, 2007:55). But because Israel did not have many of these resources, ritual baths (מִקְוֵה) were developed (Hoss, 2007:56). It was a gathering of natural water either of wellsprings or rain. The construction of a *mikweh* usually looked like this (Heimbichner, 2011:31ff.):

It was not allowed to prefabricate, transport or install a *mikweh*. It had to be dug into the earth or a rock and should be at least 1.40 meters (three cubits) deep and contain at least 40 seahs (750 liters) of water. Usually they were larger so that a *mikweh* could be used for a longer period of time. The water had to be gathered naturally through a channel and not by scooping. Scooping was only allowed after the minimum quantity of 40 seahs was achieved. If the *mikweh* was constantly used pollution was unavoidable and a method for changing the water was needed. The method for changing the water was called *Hašaqa*. Therefore two basins were built. One was the *mikweh* and the other was called *ozar* (‘ōzēr). Both basins were connected with a small pipe. When the water in the *mikweh* was dirty it was emptied and refilled by scooping in new water. Afterward the pipe was opened so that the living water of the *ozar* could touch the new water in the *mikweh*, which became pure. The pure made the impure suitable for usage. This method we will also find in Paul’s letters. A similar method was called *sarīah*. There the *ozar* was located higher so that the water could flow, like a living water, into the emptied *mikweh* through a small channel.

Usually a *mikweh* contained steps which led into the water. Sometimes, there was a divided entrance and exit, so that a ritually pure person would not touch a ritually impure person. An impure person would enter the *mikweh* naked without jewellery and with loosened hair to the deepest place and then completely immerse himself by squatting into the water.

Occasionally, the submergence was done by lying down or just bending the upper part of the body. During the procedure, we can assume that the bather spoke a prayer such as 4Q414 and 4Q512 describes.



[Photos taken by myself]

### **Ritual baths near the Temple Mount**

These are two typical ritual baths near the Temple Mount. Such ritual baths have been found practically all over the area south and west of the Temple Mount. They were available in both smaller (as in the picture) and larger variants (Pool of Siloam, Pool of Bethesda or a Pool near the Ophel Road south of the Temple Mount). On the left picture you can see a staircase leading down to the *mikweh*. In the middle is a short dividing wall (parapet in the centre), which separated those who went down in the impure state from those who went up again in the pure state. They shouldn't touch each other. Paul and the men visited one of these ritual baths and performed the cleansing ritual before going to the temple plateau.

Schnabel (2012:15:26) suspects that they did the cleaning in one of the larger pools, maybe the Pool of Siloam or the Pool of Bethesda. It would have had to be a large and public ritual bath where many people could see Paul performing the rite, “thus all may know” (Acts 21:24) that the slanders against Paul were false. Otherwise the proposal of James would not have the full effect he intended.

As we have seen above, Paul performed the cleansing ritual for a different reason than the four men. But the cleansing procedure would have been the same.

### **5.3.9.3 Chronology of the purity ritual in verses 26 and 27**

Following the proposal of the Jerusalem congregation, Paul purified himself and went to the temple (εἰσῆει εἰς τὸ ἱερόν). It seems that Paul already entered the temple during the

purification process, that is to say, the Chamber of Women or the Chamber of Israel. But we know that this area could only be entered after seven days (Safrai, 1981:143-144), which is also laid out in verse 27. Thus some commentators see a difficulty in linking the statements of Luke with Jewish practices in those days (cf. Pervo, 2008:546). The third and seventh day played an especially important role during the purification process (cf. Deines, 1993:185; Philo, 2002:559, 615). But Luke emphasizes the first day and the seventh day of the purification process. What is the solution?

For pilgrims from abroad, the strict purification processes applied, as in the case of contamination through corpses, which means a seven-day cleansing. So Paul had to go through this process. We do not know whether the other men had to go through this seven-day process as well, which could happen even if they lived somewhere outside of Israel (cf. Kazen, 2010:186).

Although the rabbinic literature emphasizes the third and seventh day in the purification process, the DSS show another practice, which was probably quite common at that time. In 11Q19 45:7-18 regulations are enumerated about who is allowed to enter the temple and when not. It is interesting to note that a cleansing on the first day is also mentioned, namely for impurities of nocturnal emission (Abegg, 2003:n.p.):

11Q19 45:7 תערובת. [ ] וא[יש] כי יהיה לו מקרה לילה לוא יבוא אל  
 11Q19 45:8 כול המקדש עד אשר [יש]לים שלושת ימים. וכבס בגדיו ורחץ  
 11Q19 45:9 ביום הראשון. וביום הש[ל]ישי יכבס בגדיו ורחץ ובאה השמש אחר  
 11Q19 45:10 יבוא אל המקדש. ולוא יבואו בנדת טמאתמה אל מקדשי וטמאו.

<sup>7</sup> No m[an] who has a nocturnal emission is to enter

<sup>8</sup> any part of My temple until three [com]plete days have passed. He must launder his clothes and bathe

<sup>9</sup> on the first day; on the third he must again launder and bathe; then, after the sun has set,

<sup>10</sup> he may enter the temple. They are not to enter My temple while unclean, for that would defile it. (Abegg, 2005:614-615)

In addition to nocturnal emission, the DSS also know a cleansing on the first day after contamination by the dead. In 11Q19 49:16-21 we read (Abegg, 2003:n.p.):

11Q19 49:16 ... והאדם כול אשר היה בבית  
 11Q19 49:17 וכול אשר בא אל הבית ירחץ במים וכבס בגדיו ביום הראשון.  
 11Q19 49:18 וביום השלישי יזו עליהמה מי נדה וירחצו וכבסו סלמותמה  
 11Q19 49:19 ואת הכלים אשר בבית. [ ] וביום השביעי  
 11Q19 49:20 יזו שנית וירחצו וכבסו בגדיהמה וכליהמה. ויטהרו לערב

- <sup>16</sup> ... Every person who was in the house  
<sup>17</sup> and everyone who entered it must bathe in water and launder his clothes on the first day.  
<sup>18</sup> On the third day they shall be sprinkled with the water that cleanses from impurity, and they shall bathe and launder their clothing  
<sup>19</sup> and wash the implements in the house. Then on the seventh day  
<sup>20</sup> they shall be sprinkled a second time, bathe, and wash their clothing and implements. When evening comes they will be purified  
<sup>21</sup> of the dead, and may touch their pure things. (Abegg, 2005:618)

The first-day ablution was not only a sectarian practice, but probably widespread in Israel at the time of the Second Temple. This is indicated by the many *mikwehs* found in Judean cemeteries (Kazen, 2010:186; Haber, 2008:200f.).

If pilgrims from the Diaspora were now subject to the same regulations for purification as for corpse impurity (Kazen, 2010:185), then it is understandable that Paul cleansed himself on the first day. After Paul and the men had bathed themselves in a *mikweh*, they went into the temple. Although the process of purification had not yet been completed, Paul could go with the four men to the *soreg* (Ritmeyer, 2006:346-347). There at the *soreg* he gave “notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled” (διαγγέλλων τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ ἁγνισμοῦ)

The rest of the purification process would be as follows:

On the third day Paul (probably with the four men) would have to return to the temple to receive the cleansing with the Red Heifer. Under the Levitical ordinances (Num 19), the Lord gave instructions about a special red heifer:

- A young red cow without faults or blemishes should be slaughtered (Num 19:2-3).
- The blood should be sprinkled seven times against the tent of the encounter (Num 19:4).
- Afterwards the red heifer had to be burned completely (Num 19:5). The priests who were busy with this became unclean until evening (Num 19:6-7). So they had to clean themselves also.
- The ash of the red heifer served as cleaning water (Num 19:9). The water was needed when one had contaminated oneself with the dead and had to clean oneself (Num 19:19).

During the whole ceremony, there were some extraordinary things:



- The cow should be slaughtered before the camp (Num 19:3)
- Cows didn't occur in other sacrifices.
- What is unique is that the red heifer's blood was also burned (Num 19:5). Actually, the animals were allowed to bleed out before.
- At the ceremony the priests became unclean, which was not the case with other sacrifices (Num 19:5).
- A pure man (layman, not priest!) deposited the ashes in a pure place, not in the tent of encounter (Num 19:9).

Nowhere else in the OT is the rite mentioned again. Josephus (Plaut, 2008:178) later reports that the men who buried Miriam were cleansed with the ashes of the first red heifer. Rabbinical sources teach that in the further history of Israel the red heifer was sacrificed nine times and that the tenth heifer would be burned by the Messiah himself (bPar 3.5).

During the Second Temple period the rite of the Red Heifer was very important. The ashes of the Red Heifer were prepared on the Mount of Olives (Ariel, 2018:366). After the heifer was burned, the ashes were transformed into fine powder. Then water was poured from the Siloah pool into a stone vessel with the powder (Ariel, 2018:370). A priest then dipped hyssop into the water and sprinkled it on the pilgrims (Lancaster, 2016b:745). The ashes were kept just outside the *soreg* and the ritual was also carried out there. Paul and his companions probably went as far as this point, when it is said that they εἰσήει εἰς τὸ ἱερόν. This doesn't necessarily mean that Paul went with his companions already during the purification process into the Chamber of Women or the Chamber of Israel. Only in verse 27 (Ὡς δὲ ἔμελλον αἱ ἑπτὰ ἡμέραι συντελεῖσθαι) is Paul again in the temple. And then there is turmoil and Jews from Asia accuse Paul of having brought the Gentiles behind the *soreg*, which was forbidden (cf. v. 31). Perhaps the accusations in verses 28 and 29 arose from the fact that they had previously seen Paul with his travel companions at the *soreg* and then thought that Paul had led them over this point.

#### **5.3.9.4 The chronological reconstruction of Paul's stay in Jerusalem**

On the basis of Luke's data, we have reconstructed a chronology of the stay of Paul in combination with the purification process (cf. the overview at Schnabel, 2012:24:11):

Day 1 Arrival in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17)

Day 2 Meeting with James (Acts 21:18)

Day 3 Ritual purity (Acts 21:26) = first day of purity  
Day 4 Paul in Jerusalem = second day of purity  
Day 5 Paul in Jerusalem = third day of purity, probably Red Heifer ceremony  
Day 6 Fourth day of purity  
Day 7 Fifth day of purity  
Day 8 Sixth day of purity  
Day 9 Seventh day of purity, Paul in the Temple, riot and arrest (Acts 21:27, 31)  
Day 10 Paul and the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30)  
Day 11 Plot against Paul (Acts 23:11-12)  
Day 12 Arrival in Caesarea (Acts 23:32)  
Day 15 After five days trial before Felix (Acts 24:1)

Alternative 1: The first and the last day of his arrival and trial before Felix are counted inclusive.

Day 17 After five days trial before Felix (Acts 24:1)

Alternative 2: The first and the last day of his arrival and trial before Felix are counted exclusive.

In Acts 24:11 Paul says that it was not more than twelve days since he went up to worship in Jerusalem. According to Luke's account, he said this on the 17th day of his journey. Schnabel (2012:24:11) lists three possible explanations:

1) The twelve days are the result of the addition of the figures given in 21:27 and 24:1. (2) The twelve days refer to the time Paul spent in Jerusalem; the twelfth day is the day he was transferred to Caesarea. (3) The twelve days relate to the time between Paul's arrival in Jerusalem and his arrest in the temple.

He favours the third explanation, whereby the arrest took place on the ninth day. That would be a rounded number. A fourth possible explanation would be that Paul counted from the time of the first day of his purification, the day he began to worship (or better: preparation for worship in the temple). That would be the third day of his arrival. If we then count the five days in Caesarea according to the inclusive counting method (Acts 21:1), then we come to the 12 days mentioned in Acts 24:11.

Κ διαγγέλλων τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ ἀγνισμοῦ ἕως οὗ προσηνέχθη ὑπὲρ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν ἢ προσφορά.

After Paul entered the Temple, he “gave notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled” (διαγγέλλων τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ ἀγνισμοῦ). Though there is no

reference in the Mishna for such a declaration (Shulam, 2012:1192), it is possible to assume that Paul announced (better “notified”) to a priest in charge (cf. Barrett, 2004:1016) that he would pay for the sacrifices of the four men (cf. Shulam 2012:1192; Schnabel, 2012:15:26).

The phrase “days of purification” is not a reference to ritual bathing but a phrase which is similar to that found in the LXX in Numbers 6:5 in connection with the Nazirite vow (cf. also Omerzu, 2002:300):

<sup>5</sup> πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ τοῦ ἀγνισμοῦ ξυρὸν αἱ οὐκ ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ- ἕως ἂν πληρωθῶσιν πληρωθῶσιν Κυρίῳ ἡμέραι ὅσας ἠΰξατο Κυρίῳ, ἅγιος ἔσται τρέφων κόμην τρίχα τρίχα κεφαλῆς.

The wording πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ ἀγνισμοῦ is translated by most Bibles either as “all days of consecration” (HCSB, CSB) or as “all days of separation” (NIV, RSV, ASV) though the term ἀγνισμοῦ means literally “purification” (cf. BDL and TDNT on ἀγνισμός).

The other connection between Acts 21:26 and Numbers 6:5 is the wording in Numbers 6:5, ἕως ἂν πληρωθῶσιν αἱ ἡμέραι, which can be translated as “until the time is completed” (RSV, HCSB). πληρωθῶσιν corresponds to the term ἐκπλήρωσιν in Acts 21:26.

Thus Numbers 6:5 lies in the background of Acts 21:26. This also supports the thesis that the four men had taken upon themselves a Nazirite vow, although it is not literally mentioned in Acts 21:18-26. This is also supported by 1 Maccabees 3:49. There a similar terminology is used but explicitly in connection with Nazirites (... τοὺς Ναζιραίους ἐπλήρωσαν τὰς ἡμέρας). Thus Paul announced the end of the Nazirite vow (perhaps to a priest). But the ritual to end the Nazirite vow was probably not accomplished because Paul was then arrested beforehand. The fulfilment of the Nazirite vow would take seven days (v. 27) and they were almost completed before the turmoil occurred.

But the fact that the Nazirite vow could not be brought to a conclusion doesn’t necessarily mean that the congregation did not accept the collection and that Paul’s entire collection mission failed (e.g. Omerzu, 2002:306; Pesch, 1986:222). Luke, who is said to have deliberately concealed this fact (according to Roloff, 1981:313), cannot be accused of such action, because the text doesn’t say that.

It is also possible that Paul handed over the collection beforehand and the suggestions were subsequently made to him to stop the rumours. Perhaps Luke did not mention the

handover because it was not relevant for the events that followed. His focus was on the description of Paul's arrest and the subsequent trial. The collection contributed nothing essential to this except the reason why Paul came to Jerusalem. The immediate cause of the arrest was not the collection, but the circumstances surrounding the Nazirites and Gentiles. That is why the collection in Acts 24:17 is mentioned only indirectly as a reason for Paul's stay in Jerusalem.

**Δ** ὑπὲρ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν ἡ προσφορά

The sacrifices should be made for each of them (Barrett, 2004:1016). The grammatical construction indicates that the sacrifices for the men were offered separately and at different times. They were not offered at the same time.

As we have seen above, three blood sacrifices had to be offered. These were a burnt offering, a sin offering and a peace offering (cf. Ariel, 2018:91). The peace offering was cooked in the Chamber of Nazirites by the priests. Ariel (2018:91) explains: "The Nazirite would give the priest the shankbone of the *shelamim*, which he would have to first cook—and he did so in the Chamber of the Nazirites (so explains the Meiri)." The hair, which had been cut in the same room before, was thrown into the fire.

Besides the blood sacrifices, the Nazirites also had to offer bloodless sacrifices (Num 6:13-17). Paul couldn't accomplish the whole ritual, as the next section indicates (21:27-40). Before the ritual was completed an uprising broke out and Paul was arrested. But until the end of Acts Paul's Jewish identity wasn't questioned.

#### **5.4. Summary**

According to Kinzer (2018:201) "three particular practices that enrich the Torah-observant texture of the infancy narrative recur in Luke's telling of Paul's story." Those elements are, as we have already seen, Pentecost, the Nazirite vow and circumcision. All those elements in Luke-Acts underline the Torah-observant life of Jesus' family, Jesus himself and his disciple Paul (cf. Kinzer, 2018:20ff.).

But there is also another element which occurs in the infancy narrative and also in our passage, namely the purity ritual. Luke shows that Jesus' family practised purity (Luke 2:22) and was faithful to the law. The same is true of Paul's life. He also practised a purity rite in order to show his adherence to the Law of Moses.

The whole setting of Paul's purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26 was a Jewish lifecycle background. Paul's action was not an accidental and spontaneous missionary reaction but an affirmation of his Jewish identity as a believer of Jesus as he set out in 1 Corinthians 7:18. In Acts 20 - 21 Paul is described as a sincere Jewish pilgrim. He makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with a collection from his churches. When he arrives around the festival of Shavuot he meets James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. Some slanderers are brought forward who question Paul's Jewish lifestyle and identity. The slander reminds the reader of Jewish apostates during the Hasmonean time. Those slanderers are refuted by an ritual purity action of Paul with four Nazirites.

Acts 21:18-26 functions as an antipole to Acts 15. Whereas Acts 15 deals with Gentile Christians, Acts 21 deals with Jewish Christians. Acts 15 confirms the Gentile identity of believers and Acts 21 confirms the Jewish identity of believers. Thus Acts 21:18-26 is an important point in the presentation of the ecclesiological development, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, in the narrative of Acts.

Though Acts 15 is usually seen as an important turning point in the ecclesiological development, Acts 21 is not seen as important. Future systematic theological and exegetical works should consider Acts 21:18-26 as an important confirmation of Jewish identity within the church.

## CHAPTER 6: INTERTEXTUAL COMPARISON OF ACTS 21:18-26

### 6.1 Introduction

Though the topic of purity is not a constant topic in Paul's writings, he does refer to it sometimes (see 3.4). Purity does not belong to the central aspects of Pauline theology, but nevertheless is an aspect of his theology. Paul did not demand for his Gentile Christian recipients an adherence to cultic purity aspects of the Torah as stipulated for Israel (Fredriksen, 2010:246). Nevertheless, there are some cultic demands for Gentile Christians (see Fredriksen, 2010:241), such as avoiding idolatry.

But this says nothing about the possible observance of these aspects for his Judeo-Christian recipients or for his own life. As we have seen in the last chapter (chapter 5.3.3.1), Jewish identity was maintained within the divergent directions of Judeo-Christian believers. Even if the theological orientations of the Judeo-Christian groups were different, the Jewish way of life was not at issue for them. What we know about these Jewish believers is that they lived Jewish lives. In this chapter we will examine whether the purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26 is contrary to the theology of the Corpus Paulinum. My intention is not to cover the entire spectrum of Pauline theology. That would go far beyond the scope of this work. Therefore, the task in this chapter will be to examine passages in the Corpus Paulinum which could contradict the behaviour in Acts 21:18-26 or which could make the purification ritual impossible as described in Acts. We will limit our examination to sections in the Corpus Paulinum which refer negatively to purity language. Those passages are found in Romans, Galatians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians and Titus. They may support the view that Paul's action in Acts 21:18-26 was just an act demonstrating missionary flexibility and not a continuing Jewish lifestyle of Paul.

#### 6.1.1 Deutero-Pauline literature

Since this study considers the whole Corpus Paulinum and in particular Colossians and Titus, which are considered by many scholars as deutero-Pauline literature, some remarks are necessary. Since Schleiermacher and Baur there is a considerable scholarly debate about the scope of the Corpus Paulinum (Schnelle, 2017:405). Probably most scholars assume a non-Pauline authorship of Colossians and Titus (Schnelle, 2017:408; Kümmel, 1989; Pokorný & Heckel, 2007:616ff.) though there are also some exceptions (Jaroš

2008:129ff.; Guthrie, 1990:621ff.; Thiessen, 2016). The arguments against Pauline authorship of Colossians and Titus are straightforward. There are basically three arguments which are similar (cf. van Bruggen, 198:12ff.).

(1) The language style with many hapax legomena and other grammatical structures is very different in Colossians (Schnelle, 2017:363) and Titus (Schnelle, 2017:407) compared to the undisputed Pauline letters. But this assumption is questioned by several scholars (White, 2018:17). Studies showed that the language style is actually not much different compared to other Pauline letters. The hapax legomena may be explained as natural thematic differences. The problems Paul faced in Colossians were different from those in Galatia. The different grammatical structures may be explained as influences from scribes such as Tertius, who supported Paul in writing letters (Rom 16:22). Another aspect which should not be underestimated is that the pastoral letters are private and personal letters, which are expected to have a different construction than an open letter to a church (Carson, 2010:677; cf. Guthrie, 1994:633ff.).

(2) The second main argument is the theological problem. The theology of Colossians (Schnelle, 2017:363) and Titus (Schnelle, 2017:407) seems different compared to the undisputed Pauline letters. It seems in some aspects more developed (White, 2018:20). This argument presupposes certain aspects in the historical reconstruction of the church situation in the first century. One aspect is that Paul had no interest in organizing the church (Guthrie, 1990:615). Thus the ecclesiastical remarks in Titus are from a later period (Kümmel, 1989:336; Pokorný & Heckel, 2007:66ff.). Guthrie (1990:625) questions this presupposition by making the following observation: “There is strong ground for concluding that Paul himself appointed elders in the statement of Acts 14:23 that Paul and Barnabas on their return from their first missionary journey appointed elders in every church (i.e., the South Galatian churches).” This observation presupposes of course that Acts 14:23 is an authentic description of his first missionary journey. But to disregard Acts 14:23 as non-authentic on the basis of a certain historical reconstruction of the first century is also a circular argument.

A similar circular argument is also to presuppose an evolutionary development from a “simple theology” to a complex theology which is found in Colossians. One presupposes that Paul was not able to write such high Christological

descriptions in Colossians, and thus Colossians is a deutero-Pauline letter. Sometimes the argumentation goes the other way round. Colossians is deutero-Pauline and therefore we find different theological concepts in Colossians compared to the undisputed Pauline letters (White, 2018:21). But Paul, as we have already seen, was an excellent and well trained theologian. Jewish messianic concepts were very well developed. There is no reason to deny Paul the ability to write high Christological concepts (cf. Thiessen, 2016:66ff.; White, 2018:22ff.).

- (3) The third main argument is the historical argument: the biographical notes in Titus are incompatible with the life of Paul as described by Acts or his undisputed letters (Schnelle, 2017:406). Guthrie (1990:612) summarizes the arguments as follows: “Timothy has been left at Ephesus to have charge of the church there, while Paul moves on to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3).... Similarly at some time Titus has been left in Crete (Tit. 1:5) for the same purpose.”

There are two possible solutions for this problem: (1) The historical notes in the pastoral epistles belong to a period outside of Acts (Guthrie, 1990:612; Mauerhofer, 2004:180; Jaroš, 2008:162). Paul experienced a second imprisonment in Rome as some church fathers proposed (Mauerhofer, 2004:180). (2) The second solution is to place the epistles into the Acts account as proposed by Robinson (Guthrie, 1990:613) and van Bruggen (1981). They place 1 Timothy and Titus between 1 and 2 Corinthians on his last journey to Jerusalem.

On the contrary, there are arguments in favor of Pauline authorship of Colossians and Titus. Even Schnelle (2017:362), who is otherwise very critical about a Pauline authorship of Colossians, admits that a Pauline authorship of Colossians is still significant within a historical-critical interpretation. Many church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen counted them as Pauline epistles (Mauerhofer, 2004:170) as did the Muratorian fragment (Mauerhofer, 2004:138; Guthrie, 1990:611). Guthrie (1990:611) summarizes: “If the external testimony is allowed to decide, there is no doubt that the balance is heavily in favour of authenticity.” There is a close relationship between Colossians and Philemon (Mauerhofer, 2004:143). The last one belongs to the undisputed letters. It would be strange if an anonymous writer chose a church as his addressees in such an unimportant city as Colossae (Mauerhofer, 2004:143).



In sum, there is an endless debate regarding the disputed and undisputed letters of Paul. But there is no compelling reason to exclude Colossians and Titus (and other disputed letters of Paul) from this intertextual study. Actually it would be a deficiency to exclude them from this study as many Pauline studies do. The challenge of this study is to investigate how those letters correlate with Paul's action in Acts 21:18-26.

## **6.2 Romans**

The Letter to the Romans opens the Corpus Paulinum with a detailed description of the gospel. The letter has a preeminently soteriological significance. It is the most interpreted letter of Paul. In the middle of the letter are the chapters 9-11 dealing with the topic of Israel. Some interpreters think that the chapters are an excursus. Accordingly, Paul could go on with his argumentation in chapter 12 right after chapter 8 without losing his thought process.

But the topic of Israel is not just an excursus; it is the main part of the whole argumentation. In the first eight chapters Paul describes the redemption plan of God. First he shows the depravity of all mankind, Gentiles and Jews alike (Rom 3:12). Justification comes not through the law but through Jesus (Rom 3:21). They all need salvation through Jesus the Messiah (Rom 3:22). God is not only the God of the Jews but also of the Gentiles (Rom 3:29). Paul shows this by applying the Shema of Israel to his argumentation (Rom 3:39, cf. Nanos, 1996:181-183). God is one God, thus he is not only the God of Israel but also the God of the nations. The whole description of the gospel is rooted in the Old Testament. Paul refers to Abraham (Rom 4), Adam (Rom 5) the father of all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, and to slavery (Rom 6) which echoes the slavery of Egypt. In 7:1 he states that he is speaking to people who know the law (γινώσκουσιν γὰρ νόμον). Then he gives an exposition on different aspects of the term νόμος (Rom 7). In Romans 8 he writes about the Spirit, which is an echo of the promised Spirit in Ezekiel 37.

In Romans 12-16 Paul describes the life of the church with respect to aspects of everyday life: How do we practise our gifts (Rom 12)? What is the relationship to the state (Rom 13)? How do we treat each other (Rom 14-15)? Though the topic of Israel in those chapters is not obvious, his treatment is still Torah-rooted. The instructions in those chapters can be traced back to the Old Testament. In Romans 13:8-10 he even cites some of the Ten Commandments. In 15:22-33 he expands on the relationship between the nations and Israel. And finally he concludes his letter with the statement that God has revealed the gospel to all nations, Jews and Gentiles, for obedience (Rom 16:26).

Fredriksen (2010:248-249) states:

The sanctity, dignity and probity of the Temple cult provides the inclusio that shapes the second half of the letter, from 9.4 to 15.16-27, where Paul likens his own mission of the Temple service... Chapters 9 through 15 move from Jerusalem to Jerusalem, where Paul anticipates performing his own priestly work... His pagans, through Christ, have moved from wrong ritual—the worship of idols—to right ritual, the worship of the true god.

Similar Nanos (1996:8) states that “in the letter to the Romans Paul built his argument around his pathos for Israel... These Gentiles must learn to live in the service of those for whom Christ died, recognizing their obligation to those Jews who were yet suffering vicariously on their behalf.”

Tatai (2018:225) also assumes that tensions between Jewish and Gentile believers led Paul to build his argumentation around the topic of Israel. The reason for that is the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, according to Tatai. Jews and Jewish-Christians had to leave Rome. Later they came back and found a homogenous non-Jewish *ekklesia* in Rome. The consequences were tensions between those social groups. Questions regarding Israel also arose and needed to be solved. That was the reason why Paul centred his argumentation around the *topos* Israel. His letter is not Law-free, as Nanos (1996:23) observes: “In Romans we are confronted not with a so-called Law-free Paul, but rather with one who regards the Law as Israel’s special gift from God—we meet a Paul who would be better characterized as Law-respectful.”

We can conclude that Israel, besides the gospel and Christ, is the *Mitte der Theologie* in Romans. Since Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans shortly before his journey and so also shortly before the purification ritual, his way of acting in Jerusalem would be theologically consistent and not contrary to the action.

### **6.2.1 Romans 14**

In the book of Romans, Paul deals with purity issues in Romans 14:14 where he states, “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean” (ESV).<sup>6</sup>

The whole chapter concerns Paul giving practical advice to believers regarding food and special days. In the context of Romans 14, Paul advises acceptance of the weak in the

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<sup>6</sup> This section (6.2.1) is a reproduction of a chapter of my unpublished Master Thesis.

faith, who keep a special diet and observe special days. Those people also regard certain things as unclean and others as clean, whereas Paul is convinced that nothing is unclean in itself. Whom is he describing? Traditionally commentators assume that Paul is talking about Jewish Christians who still hold to Levitical practices. They keep the Torah. Those Jewish-Christians were still “bound to statutes and were cautious and fearful,” notes Rosenius (2000:346). Michel (1978:420) also believes that Paul describes a Jewish Christian group who did not eat meat and observed Jewish festivals. He refers to James, who is described by Eusebius as abstaining from meat and wine and to the post-temple practices by certain Jews not to eat meat and drink wine (cf. tSota 15:11-15).

Those Jewish Christian groups were the weak. But the strong believers, who didn’t hold to Levitical practices and who were free of the Torah, should not despise those weak believers. They shouldn’t judge them (v. 4).

But did Paul really refer to Jewish-Christians? Some commentators deny that (Maoz, 2003:168). They think that Paul is describing a different group, a group which was non-Jewish. Even Michel (1978:420) admits that in the Greco-Roman world there existed groups like the Orphics and Pythagoreans who ate only vegetables and abstained from wine. It is likely that Paul thought of believers with a Gentile background. Indeed, the text nowhere refers explicitly to the Torah or Jewish customs, as Aaron Eby (2012:56) observes. He points out that Paul describes the weak in 1 Corinthians 8:7-13 as Gentiles, “who were formerly associated with idol worship—individuals who are far more likely to be Gentiles than Jews” (Eby, 2012:57). Those weak Gentile Christians thought that food which was offered to idols was not appropriate for eating and made a person impure. Therefore, they abstained from such food. The issue at hand, food sacrificed to idols, was the same as in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Though it is not mentioned explicitly in Romans 14, we can assume that Paul wrote his epistle from Corinth.

The same is true about the days mentioned in verse 5. There are no indications that they are Jewish holidays. It is possible that Paul refers to pagan holidays (Eby, 2012:61-63). But on the other hand, why should a believer observe a pagan holiday as for the Lord (v. 6)? A possible explanation would be that Paul talks about believers who for some reasons esteemed some days (during the week, month or year?) as special to the Lord and others didn’t (cf. Stern, 1996:173). Those were not Jewish. And even if we admit that Paul refers to Jewish festivals, it is also important to note that he doesn’t discourage the believers from observing the festivals but for “each man be fully convinced in his own mind.” (v. 5).

If Paul is not referring to Jewish Christian groups, why is he stating in verse 14 that nothing is unclean in itself? Isn't Paul referring to Jewish observances in this verse? Doesn't Paul break here with the whole Jewish tradition and contradict its understanding of Torah as Michel (1978:432) postulates? Eby (2012:64) thinks that Paul refers to the rabbinic concept that Gentiles (or anything else) are not intrinsically ritually impure. He cites Yochanan ben Zakkai, who described the non-intrinsic ritual impurity of Gentiles:

By your lives, a corpse does not actually contaminate, nor does water actually purify. Rather, it is simply a ruling of the King of kings. The blessed Holy One said, I have made a decree; I have made a ruling. No man has the authority to transgress my ruling, as it says, "This is the decree of the Torah" (Numbers 19:2).

The concept of ritual purity and impurity was also practised in the Greco-Roman world, though differently than Jews did. Paul contradicts the Gentile concept of impurity by applying the rabbinic concept that nothing in itself (intrinsic) is impure. Actually, "everything created by God is good" as stated by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:4, where he applies the same argumentation. It is the Lord (or the Torah) which declared for Jewish people certain things as impure. It was not people who declared certain things unclean, but the Lord. But in verse 14b certain Gentile people thought of some things as unclean. Thus, Paul doesn't contradict in verse 14 the Torah concept of purity and impurity.

The issue in verse 14 is not regarding unclean food but regarding the ritually unclean state of a person. Paul uses the word κοινὸν, which means "common" and refers in the New Testament to ceremonial uncleanness (Vine, 1980:649). If the New Testament refers to unclean food, it uses the word ἀκάθαρτος. Paul uses the word καθάρᾳ in verse 20 to describe food as clean, but not in the sense of contradicting the Torah. There it was unclean and now it is clean. Rather, he was thinking of food sacrificed to idols as clean or pure for consumption. Gentile believers who still avoided such food should not be judged but rather be accepted. This is the tenor of Romans 14.

Ambrose (2015:153) puts it this way: "Certainly the issue of Rom 14-15 is not about Paul urging Jewish believers to stop being Jews, nor is it about the division between Jewish and Gentile believers. Rather, Paul is, in fact, affirming Jewish identity in Christ, whether or not these Christ-followers are of Gentile origins."

Thus Paul does not talk in Romans 14 about Jewish believers but rather about Gentile believers who observed certain rules which were similar to Jewish regulations. Since the terms "Torah" or "Jewish" are not mentioned there are good reasons to believe that Paul referred to Gentiles. He didn't contradict the Torah or Jewish practices by his statements

but was within the realm of the Judaism of his day. Romans 14 does not work as an argument against a purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26.

## 6.3 Galatians

### 6.3.1 Galatians 1:13-14

<sup>13</sup> For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. (Gal 1:13-14 ESV)

The Epistle to the Galatians is one of the earliest letters of Paul (Keener, 2019:6ff.). In contrast to the Epistle to the Romans, Paul's interpretation of the Law in Galatians tends to be seen as a negative attitude (Keener 2019:4ff.), although there are other approaches (see Shulam, 2005). Therefore we would like to unfold the passages that are often used as a model for a negative understanding of the law. Galatians may function as a strong argument against a ritual purity in Acts 21:18-26. In Galatians 1:13-14 Paul describes his former life in Judaism. Krimmer (2000:33) describes Paul's earlier life in this way:

Die Speisegesetze waren ihm unverbrüchlich, Die Reinheitsgebote hielt er heilig. Den Zehnten gab er pünktlich. Ein Leben nach dem Gesetz, samt allen 610 Geboten und Verboten, war anstrengend und entbehrungsreich. Das erforderte Zucht und Einübung... Vieles, was andere Juden sich erlaubten, unterließ er. Sein ganzer Eifer galt der pünktlichen Erfüllung der Vorschriften.

The food laws were unbreakable to him, the purity laws he kept holy. He tithed meticulously. A life according to the law, including all 610 commandments and prohibitions, was exhausting and full of privation. It required discipline and practice... and he neglected many things that other Jews allowed themselves. All his zeal was the precise fulfillment of the regulations. (my translation)

But Paul doesn't describe his former life in this manner. He doesn't speak here about the 613 commandments and prohibitions of the Torah. He is writing about his wrong behaviour in Judaism, that he persecuted the church of God. He made progress in Judaism and was a zealot τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων (cf. chapter 4.1.2). Paul also doesn't write that he abandoned this παράδοσις, the oral tradition of the Torah. At the end of his life Paul can freely confess in Rome before the Jewish community: "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans" (Acts 28:17b ESV). But what does Paul want to clarify in the Epistle to the Galatians? In context, Paul speaks of the

fact that he did not receive the gospel from human beings. He did not receive it in a process of tradition, but directly from God.

### 6.3.2 Galatians 2:4

Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery... (Gal 2:4 ESV).

There were false brothers who demanded the circumcision of the Gentiles for salvation (cf. Acts 15:1). But the apostles do not demand this. Paul illustrates this with the example of Titus, who as a Greek was not forced to be circumcised (ἠναγκάσθη). Paul and his associates had the freedom (τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν) not to circumcise a Gentile.

It is important to note that the issue here is not whether or not a Jew is allowed to perform circumcision, or whether or not a Jewish person is allowed to be circumcised, or whether or not it is a matter of Torah observance for a Jewish person. Also Paul isn't postulating freedom from the Law. This isn't at issue here. But what is the issue? The false brothers wanted to bring Paul and his associates into bondage (ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσουσιν), so that he would circumcise the Gentiles. The point wasn't that some Jews forced Paul back under the Law. Therefore Baltes (2016:284) states that "the question at issue is not the duty of (Jewish) Torah observance, but whether a Gentile should be obligated to the Torah at all..." ("Zur Debatte steht also nicht die Pflicht (jüdischer) Toraobervanz, sondern die Frage, ob ein Nichtjude überhaupt auf die Tora verpflichtet werden sollte..."). And he (Baltes, 2016:284) observes that "Paul refers the term καταδουλόω not only to Titus, but also to himself and to Barnabas. Thus circumcision as such cannot be a sign of 'enslavement' (under the Law). For neither Paul nor Barnabas have to be circumcised. But according to Paul, they too are in danger of being 'enslaved'." ("Paulus bezieht den Begriff καταδουλόω zudem nicht nur auf Titus, sondern auch auf sich selbst und auf Barnabas. Damit kann die Beschneidung als solche nicht Zeichen einer ‚Versklavung‘ (unter das Gesetz) sein. Denn weder Paulus noch Barnabas sollen ja beschnitten werden: Sie sollen aber, nach der Aussage des Paulus, ebenfalls ‚versklavt‘ werden.") Therefore he suggests that the terms "freedom" and "servitude" refer not to obedience to the Law but false subordination to human authority. Freedom means for Paul apostolic freedom. This freedom allows the practice of a different halakhic standard than the majority of their Jewish contemporaries.

### 6.3.3 Galatians 5:1-6

Freedom is the main idea in Galatians 5, but it doesn't say here that Jesus freed the Galatians from the law. They were never under the law and therefore cannot be "burdened again by a yoke of slavery". But they can again be forced to do certain rituals and works to earn salvation (v. 4). In this case they were forced to be circumcised (cf. 2:4) or to live a Jewish way of life (cf. 2:14) so that they could be saved. This would then be the false doctrine for Paul. For salvation circumcision is of no use (v. 2). Moreover, the Galatians cannot simply pick out a few points from the Law and keep them and others again not. But salvation through the law is impossible (v. 4). Paul doesn't reject circumcision. He doesn't primarily address Jews. His audience is mostly Gentile.

Freedom, however, does not mean for Paul that one can live an antinomistic life. The whole law is fulfilled in love (v. 14). Similarly, the rabbis have already summarized the Torah without dissolving it (cf. bMac 23b - 24a; bSchab 31a; cf. Mk 12:28-34).

### Conclusion

The Epistle to the Galatians belongs to Paul's early letters and isn't directly connected with Paul's journey to Jerusalem like the epistles to the Romans or the Corinthians. Nevertheless it is instructive for our investigation. In the early days of the apostle Paul, he had an intensive and hard confrontation with opponents (maybe Jewish or with Jewish influence) who wanted to bring at least Jewish elements into the young churches as heresy. Nevertheless, the letter does not have to be interpreted as abandoning Jewish identity, especially because the main recipients are not Jewish Christians.

### 6.4. Colossians

Besides Colossians 3:5, Paul does not refer to purity or impurity literally in Colossians.<sup>7</sup> But we have an allusion to that concept when he writes in Colossians 2:21, Μὴ ἅψη μηδὲ γέσση μηδὲ θίγης. Since avoiding impurity by non-touching is important in purity regulations, it is obvious that Paul refers to it. But what kind of problem did Paul handle in Colossae? Who were the opponents of Paul? Were they Jewish, and did Paul's refusal of their teaching include a refusal of Torah purity regulations? Or was it a gnostic system which Paul attacked or something else?

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<sup>7</sup> This section (6.4) is a reproduction of a chapter of my unpublished Masters Thesis.

Arnold (2012:7-26) argues for Jewish roots of the problem at Colossae. He refuted Gnosticism as the root problem and favours Judaism as a possible source. It was a kind of “folk Judaism” which included worship of angels, visionary experiences, and asceticism (Arnold, 2012:21), a Judaism which was represented in exorcism texts like The Testament of Solomon 18, 11Q11, 4Q560, Sepher Ha-Razim and Hekhalot writings, a collection of Jewish esoteric and revelatory texts. It was also represented in amulets found in Asia Minor, which contain inscriptions of vocations to angels from Jewish mysticism (Arnold, 2012:15-17). Arnold leaves the question open whether Jews or Gentiles employed this Judaism (Arnold, 2012:22).

Others argue that the opponents were also influenced by Judaism but they were not natively Jewish. They incorporated Jewish customs. Paul stresses in Philippians 3:1-6 that he was Jewish and thus they were not. Likewise, Stern (1996:436) assumes that the opponents were Gentiles who were influenced in a damaging way by gnostic elements and Jewish regulations. They misused those regulations. Now, if Paul refers in 2:21 to purity rules, he does not refer to Jewish purity regulations found in the Torah, for they were given and introduced by God himself. But instead, he refers to purity regulations which were based on human precepts and teachings, as he states in 2:22. The opponents probably introduced new and special regulations which the believers should keep and which Paul opposed. In conclusion, in Colossians also Paul did not oppose Jewish purity laws.

### **6.5. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16**

In 1 and 2 Thessalonians there is an absence of Jewish concepts like *nomos*, Israel, purity issues or Jewish traditions. One exception is the reference to Jews in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, which may appear as a harsh anti-Semitic statement. This passage would actually be contrary to a ritual act of Paul in Acts 21:18-26.

We will try to place the passage within its Semitic background—something that, for the most part, the church has neglected. Since the literature on this passage is legion (cf. Weima, 1998:161ff.) we will just summarize common approaches and focus on literature which will help us to place it within the proper background.



### **6.5.1 Content and context**

In the section 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 Paul turns again to the congregation and reminds them how they received his ministry, especially his proclamation of the word of God, and their steadfastness in the faith (v. 14). They hadn't accused Paul. The Thessalonians hadn't accepted his message just as a word of men but as a word of God (v. 13). But after they turned to God (1 Thess 1:9) they experienced persecution and discrimination. They underwent the same fate as the believers in Judaea, who also experienced persecution from the Jews. Paul turns then to the Jews and describes their opposition in detail (v. 15-16):

- Believers experienced persecution from them
- The Jews killed Jesus and the prophets
- They drove out Paul and his companions
- They displeased God
- They are hostile to everyone
- They hinder Paul's speaking to the Gentiles
- They are always adding to the number of their sins
- God's wrath has come upon them at last

This is the content we get from most translations (ASV, BBE, NIV, NLT, RSV, YLT, CSB, GNV, NJB, NAB). It sounds very anti-Jewish. There are several interpretations for this passage we want to look at.

### **6.5.2 Theories of interpretation**

#### *Non-Pauline passage*

According to Ferdinand Baur, the founder of the Tübingen School, 1 Thessalonians doesn't belong to the authentic Pauline letters (Baur, 1867:94ff.). The Tübingen School accepted only four authentic Pauline letters (Hauptbriefe) which are Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. Therefore our passage doesn't belong to Paul. It is non-authentic. Baur compares the passage with the four authentic letters and comes to the conclusion that Paul never polemicizes against Jews and therefore it must be a non-Pauline passage (Baur, 1867:97). But today most scholars accept 1 Thessalonians as an authentic letter of Paul. Therefore they look for different explanations for this passage. The most accepted interpretation is the one which tries to prove the passage as an interpolation.

### *Interpolation*

This explanation has in common with the prior one in that it looks at the passage as non-Pauline. Scholars who adhere to this interpretation think that 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul. But our passage was integrated later, after 70 C.E. This was first proposed by Karl Gottfried Eckart in 1961 (Eckart, 1961:30-44). He suggested that the passage is of a later age, like 2 Thessalonians. Pearson (1971:79-94) published an article on this passage and concluded that the verb “has come” refers to the destruction of the Second Temple and thus it is a later interpolation. But to reject 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 just on the basis of internal evidence is very implausible, since we don’t have any external data which would support such a rejection. We also have no historical justification to prove that the early Christians inserted new sections into Pauline letters (Carson, 2010:648). This explanation is therefore very unlikely.

### *Apocalyptic passage*

John C. Hurd (1998:21-36) proposed in his article “Paul Ahead of his Time: 1 Thess. 2:13-16” that the passage was written by Paul. He suggested that Paul wrote the letter in the light of apocalypticism. He divided the world into light and darkness and black and white. On the one side there was the apocalyptic Christian community and on the other side there were the unbelieving Gentiles and Jews (1998:33-35). Hurd (1998:36) concludes that “1 Thess. 2:13-16 shows that there was a time in Paul’s career when, under the influence of an apocalyptic hope, Paul was ahead of his time in expressing a historical-theological anti-Judaism.” We have no hint that Paul’s theology changed in course of time. In what time would his theology change? Hurd doesn’t answer this question. He just assumes it. Paul’s theology was all the time consistent. This explanation is also unlikely.

### *Other approaches*

Other scholars agree that the passage is Pauline and it is not an interpolation. They look for different interpretations. They think that Paul is referring to the whole (present) Jewish world and their intractability to the gospel. Robertson (1932:33) explains:

The Jews killed the prophets before the Lord Jesus who reminded them of their guilt (Mat 23:29). Paul, as Peter (Acts 2:23), lays the guilt of the death of Christ on the Jews.

### 6.5.3 A different approach to 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

For you become imitators, brethren, of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus, because you have suffered the same things from your fellow countrymen as they have from the Judeans, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us; and they displease God and oppose all men by hindering our preaching to the Gentiles so that they may be saved, to fill up their sins always. And the wrath of God will come upon them at the end. (my translation)

#### 6.5.3.1 Exegetical Notes on 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

Does Paul really speak of the Jews in their collectivity? We want to have a closer look at the passage.

1) Paul shows a parallel between the believers in Thessalonica and the believers in Judaea. He says that the believers in Thessalonica experienced from their fellow-countrymen the same as the believers in Judea from their fellow-countrymen. He compares compatriot with compatriot (similarly Hahn, 2000:43f) and not Gentiles with Jews!

2) What does the term Ἰουδαῖοι mean? During the NT period the term had a diverse meaning as Lowe (1976:101-130; cf. also Cohen, 1999:69ff.) showed:

- a. It could refer to *members* of the tribe of Judah.
- b. Sometimes it could refer to *followers* of Judaism.
- c. And it could also refer to the *inhabitants* of Judea.

3) Paul speaks in verse 14 of Judea and how the believers suffered persecution from their fellow-countrymen, the Judeans. Thus Paul compares believing Judeans with unbelieving Judeans. He doesn't talk about Jews collectively. We always should keep in mind that Scripture never blames Jewish people in general but it often shows us that there were some who did not accept the message of Paul and persecuted him; on the other hand, there were many Jews who accepted the message (cf. Acts 14:1). We should therefore translate "Judeans" instead of "Jews" as the NKJV and the Jewish New Testament by David Stern does it. The context commends such a translation.

4) If we apply this knowledge to our passage we get a different understanding of verses 15 and 16:

*"who killed the Lord Jesus"*

Again the text doesn't say that Jewish people in general killed Jesus, but in fact the Judeans, of course not all, with the help of the Romans (Acts 4:27) killed Jesus. Gilliard (1989:481-502) advocates removing the comma between verse 14 and 15, which was inserted by the editors of the Nestle-Aland. It led the commentators to the conclusion that Paul describes all Jews instead of a restricted group of Jews who killed Jesus. When Paul preached on his first missionary trip in a synagogue in Antioch, he also referred to the inhabitants of Jerusalem who, together with the Romans, killed Jesus (Acts 13:27-28). The inhabitants of Jerusalem were Judeans. Of course the Judeans were Jewish but we have to underline the Judean aspect to show that Paul is not talking of Jews in general, who killed Jesus.

*“and the prophets”*

Most of the prophets lived and ministered in Judah. Thus they were killed there also. The statement is not anti-Semitic but in accordance with the testimony of the OT. We read in Nehemiah 9:26 (NIV):

But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies.

Bockmuehl (2001:9) comments:

This is also a well-rehearsed *topos* of contemporary inner-Jewish polemic that features prominently in a number of Second Temple texts, including not only Chronicles and the Psalms of Solomon, but also the Jesus tradition.

*“and also drove us out”*

The epistle to the Thessalonians is one of the earliest letters of Paul (Davidson, 1965:1052) and was written around AD 50. He probably still had in mind how the unbelieving Judeans persecuted the early church. Their influence ranged far beyond the borders of Judea. Paul himself wanted to persecute the church in Damascus (Acts 9:2). Judeans also came to Antioch and had a controversy with Paul (Acts 15:1). Just a couple of years later Paul is asking the church in Rome to pray for him that he may be saved from the unbelievers of Judea (Rom 15:31). The influence of Judeans could even reach to Rome (Acts 28:21). He was continuously threatened by unbelieving Judeans (cf. 1 Cor 11:24 where he is probably also referring to unbelieving Judeans and not Jews!). Though we don't know from Acts of any persecution of Jewish believers at the end of the 40s, Bockmuehl (2001:18ff.) proposes that there was a persecution of the Jerusalem church in AD 48/49. He based it mainly on a statement of the sixth-century chronicler Malalas of

Antioch. This is the historical setting of our passage. Thus Paul doesn't refer to expulsions in the Diaspora but in Judea or the sphere of influence of Judea.

*"They displease God"*

Again we should remember that Paul is not talking about Jewish people in general and collectively but about unbelieving Judeans. In Paul's views they are like himself, before he accepted Jesus as Messiah; they "have zeal for God but not according to knowledge" (Rom 10:2). This, of course, displeases God.

*"hostile to all men"*

If we take those words out of the context they sound anti-Semitic and all the more if Paul is talking about Jews in general, as most translators and commentators assume. But as we saw, this is not the case and we should also pay attention to the next verse.

*"in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved."*

Verse 16a explains why they are hostile. It is connected to verse 15 through the word *κωλύόντων*. It is a participle modal and should be translated in connection with the word "by" or "in their effort" to show that it refers to verse 15. They keep Paul and his team from speaking to the Gentiles. They keep him from bringing the good news of Jesus to the nations. This is of course hostility towards the Gentile world.

*"they always heap up their sins to the limit"*

God sometimes allows individuals or peoples to accumulate sin to a certain limit and then he judges. The iniquity of the Amorites had to reach its full measure before they could be judged (Gen 15:16). Keeping the good news from the Gentiles is of course a sin which adds to the limit of sins. This will lead eventually to the judgment of God.

*"The wrath of God will come upon them at last"*

Though most Bibles translate this part of the verse as past, it is grammatically possible to translate it as a future event. The verb *ἐφθασεν* has then to be translated as a proleptic (future) aorist. The context also forces us to translate it in the future sense. When the limit is full then the judgment will come upon those Judeans. Most commentators think of the future destruction of the Second Temple. But it is also possible that Paul thinks of the final judgment in the far future when everyone has to give account of their deeds. Later Paul would write in the epistle to the Romans in a very similar way:

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed (Rom 2:5 NIV).

Here his audience is the Gentile world (Rom 2:1). Thus we can say that Paul doesn't make any distinction between the Gentile and the Jewish world. All those who oppose God will bring judgment on themselves.

#### **6.5.4 Conclusion**

The context and the spectrum of the semantic of the word Ἰουδαῖοι in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 forces us to translate the word in this passage as "Judeans" rather than "Jews". Paul is not blaming Jews in general. Paul is writing about some unbelieving Judeans. Paul did experience problems, rejection and persecution in the Diaspora, like in Thessaloniki (Acts 17), but in this particular passage he is not talking of this occurrences. Thus 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 does not need to contradict the ritual purity act in Acts 21:18-26.

#### **6.6 Titus 1:15**

The authorship and date of Titus is controversial.<sup>8</sup> Was the letter written by Paul or by one of his disciples (cf. Lock, 1924:25; Knight 1992:21ff.; Oberlinner, 1996:1ff.)? But the letter belongs to the Corpus Paulinum. If the letter was really written by a disciple of Paul he would certainly write in the spirit of Paul and his theology.<sup>9</sup> Thus I believe it is also important to examine Titus 1:15 and see if it would be an argument against Paul's purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26.

After describing the requirements for a bishop (vv. 5-9) and the characters of false teachers (vv. 10-14) he refers in 1:15 to purity: "to the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled" (Tit 1:15 ESV). The description of purity sounds very negative and would stand in contrast to a purity act in Acts 21:18-26.

The statement about purity seems to reject and cancel all Jewish purity and impurity requirements. For Jeremias (1975:71), these words (πάντα καθαρὰ τοῖς καθαροῖς) are plain and important, because they are a firm possession of the church, and a Christian

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<sup>8</sup> This paragraph (6.6) is a revised and updated reproduction of a chapter of my unpublished Masters Thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Of course it might be that the author of Titus had a different (anti-Torah) theology than Paul. But the church believed for the most part of its existence that the letter belonged to Paul and that the theology of Titus was not in contradiction to his other writings (for arguments for a Pauline authorship of Titus see Thiessen, 2016).

may use all God's gifts freely. Merkel (1991:95) states that the purity requirements are not for Christians [I would add: also not for Jewish believers]. This is rooted in the Jesus tradition and Paul's theology (Merkel, 1991:95).

Similarly, Towner (2006:706) assumes a "Jewish character of the opponents" with "a link to Jewish practices." But Paul neglects them all and "reminds Titus and the opponents that Jewish-type rules defining ritual purity are obsolete and irrelevant" (Towner, 2006:707). On the other hand, other scholars have countered by asking if Paul really addressed Jews or Jewish ritual issues in this verse. This question correlates with the identity of the opponents of Paul. Mostly, the commentators assume that Paul's opponents were Jewish Christians (Jeremias, 1975:70; Hasler, 1978:90). As Christians of Jewish descent, they practised circumcision, purity rules and other Jewish customs. As such, Paul attacked them. Though Oberlinner (1996:35-36) sees in the description of the opponents not mostly Jews or people with a genuine Jewish position, he still acknowledges that the letter to Titus refers to "the Jews".

Stern (1996:499) argues that Paul referred not specifically to Jews but to a circumcision party (v. 10) which consisted both of Jews and non-Jews. It was like a similar party in Galatia, who, contends Olson (2012), consisted of "non-Yeshua-believing pseudo-brethren".

Thus, it is questionable that Paul referred to Jewish purity laws and cancelled them by stating that for the pure (that is, for Christians) everything is pure. This statement, if taken literally, would be in contrast to what Paul wrote in his former letters. For believers, not everything is pure. There are many impurities, like fornication and other sinful things. On the other hand, for unbelievers (if really Jews) not everything is impure. They discern between purity and impurity. Paul did not contrast between us and them, between rightful believers and false teachers. He is rather describing the opponents in the whole verse, as he did the verse before and after. Verse 10-16 is a list of characteristic descriptions of the false teachers. A description of believers in verse 15 would be inappropriate. We have also to remember that the concept of purity and impurity was not only a Jewish concept. Purity regulations had widespread practice in the Mediterranean world. Those concepts could be intermingled with Jewish concepts and used by false teachers on Crete which Paul would oppose.

## **6.7 Summary**

We have examined those passages in the Corpus Paulinum which seem to contradict a continuing Jewish lifestyle of Paul in Acts 21:18-26. There are passages in Romans, Colossians and Titus with a seemingly negatively reference to purity issues. We have seen that the main question concerns the opponents of Paul. Who were those opponents? Were they Jewish or Gentiles?

Many commentators think that they were Jewish or Gentiles with strong Jewish influences. But it is also possible to see Paul's opponents as Gentiles without Jewish influences. Purity issues were widespread throughout the Roman world. Thus Paul would argue against aspects of Roman ritual purity for his Gentile audience.

On the other hand, this does not say anything about his own personal Jewish lifestyle. Ritual purity belonged to Israel and as such Paul could perform the purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26 as an act conforming to his Jewish identity and not just for missionary purposes.

From Galatians and 1 Thessalonians it might be understood that Paul rejected his Jewishness in general. They sound very anti-Torah. Therefore we examined them also. We have seen that in Galatians Paul argued not in general against the law but against a misuse of the law as a way of salvation. Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 Paul did not argue against Jews and Jewish identity but against a special group of opponents from Judea.



## CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to determine whether Paul's purity ritual in Acts 21:18-26 was an act of adaptation due to circumstances or evidence for his consistent Jewish lifestyle. The traditional approach is that the act demonstrated some kind of missionary flexibility toward the Jews in Jerusalem. This means that Paul adapted himself to the heated atmosphere in Jerusalem in order to win the Jews. The other approach is to take Acts 21:18-26 literally, that is, that Paul lived as a Jew even after his encounter with Jesus the Messiah. His purity ritual in Acts 21 was a continuing confirmation of his Jewish identity. In chapter 2 we examined different historical-traditional approaches to Paul's purity ritual. We outlined various interpretations of Paul's behaviour in Acts 21:18-26 but the consensus of all approaches was the insight that the ceremonial and ritual laws became unnecessary for Jews and Gentiles after the coming of the Messiah—not only unnecessary, but also obsolete and even counter-productive for the believer. Thus, according to these approaches, Paul's purity ritual is not interpreted as a confirmation of his Jewish identity.

In chapter 3 we examined the New Perspective on Paul in regard to Acts 21:18-26 and came to conclusion that the result is similar to that of the historical-traditional approaches, namely that Paul has overcome the purity rules and other Jewish identity markers.

Nevertheless, adherents of the New Perspective on Paul do not interpret the Torah as abolished as a whole, but only the cultic and ceremonial aspects of the Torah, similar to some historical-traditional approaches. The cultic and ceremonial aspects of the Torah are separated from the moral aspects of the Torah. But as the exemplary study of the literature from the Second Temple period has shown, Jewish literature did not show an obvious division of the Torah into three parts, namely moral, civil and cultic law. A prioritization of individual parts of the Torah is hardly discernible.

We then examined Paul's way of life in chapter 4, interpreting his life as contextual plausible and contextual individual. As the biographical sketches have shown, Paul lived within the Jewish sphere. Within this Jewish sphere he also had his own individuality and priorities, which distinguished him from other Jews, for at that time there was no uniform Judaism, but rather numerous contrasting orientations of Judaism(s).

With these findings we carried out a detailed exegesis and historical reconstruction of Acts 21:18-26 in chapter 5. We have seen that the entire structure and background of Acts

21:18-26 is a Jewish atmosphere. Contrary to the opinion of many exegetes, the structure of Acts is not that the story line develops from Jerusalem to Rome, from Judaism to Gentile orientation, but that it is a steady return to Jerusalem.

Acts 21 is literarily connected with Acts 15. This is an aspect that has hardly been considered so far. While the interpreters have recognized the importance of Acts 15, the connections to Acts 21 are hardly noticed. The repetition of the Apostolic Decree especially shows this literary connection. Acts 15 describes the relationship of Gentile believers to the Torah and Acts 21 describes the relationship of Jewish believers to the Torah. Gentile believers were not bound to Torah, but Jewish believers were bound positively to the Torah. Thus the paragraph in Acts 21:18-26 and the wider context show us a genuine Jewish Paul and the described events are historically viable. Paul made a pilgrimage with Jewish and Gentile believers to Jerusalem with a collection for the Jerusalem church. He arrived at Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. He met James and other believers who were also genuine Jewish believers. Paul was accused of apostasy from Judaism, but he refuted this allegation by a ritual purity act. We do not know what Paul said to refute the allegations but we do know what he did. Living according to the Torah is more important for the Jewish perception. Thus the whole ritual act of Paul in Acts 21:18-26 should not be understood as a pretended missionary adaptation but as an identity-confirming act. By participating in the ritual purity act Paul showed special devotion to the Law. A Nazirite exceeded the regular Torah-observance. A Nazirite vow was a sign for a special Torah-observant life.

We have also seen that four elements mentioned in our passage are very important: Pentecost, the Nazirite vow, circumcision and the purity ritual. All four aspects have a positive connotation in Luke-Acts. Luke prepared the reader diligently by mentioning them in his Gospel (especially in the infancy narrative) and in Acts. Thus before the readers reach Acts 21:18-26 they appreciate James's suggestion and Paul's behaviour.

In chapter 6 we compared Acts 21:18-26 intertextually with several passages in the Corpus Paulinum which seem to contradict a continuing Jewish lifestyle and ritual purity acts such as described in Acts 21. We chose paragraphs which describe purity in a negative context. But a careful reading showed that those passages do not express anything about Paul's own Jewish identity. Paul criticized some aspects of purity among churches. But purity was widespread in the Roman world. Therefore, these passages cannot be used as a refutation of the ritual act described in Acts 21:18-26.

In particular, the Epistle to the Romans, which was written immediately before the journey to Jerusalem, is coherent with Paul's Jewish way of life and so with the purification ritual in Acts 21:18-26. So Paul's action does not have to be interpreted as a adaptation motivated by missionary flexibility, which perhaps even stands in opposition to his theology of Israel, but rather as a confirmation of the continuity of his Jewish way of life. It is also quite plausible that Luke did not artificially construct the story. Even after Paul's encounter with the Messiah of Israel he lived a Jewish life.

### **7.1. Questions for future research**

There remain several tasks for future research. In light of a Torah-positive view, it will remain the task of further theological research to investigate the exegesis of those New Testament Pauline passages that have been interpreted as critical of Israel. The New Testament is not anti-Jewish, but confirms the Jewish identity of Jewish believers. We find the first fruits to this interpretation in the series entitled "New Testament after Supersessionism" (Windsor, 2017).

Furthermore, this has consequences for the modern, growing Messianic Jewish movement and systematic theology. One should also ask what practical significance (Torah in practice) it has for the Messianic Jewish movement. If Paul and the Jewish believers led a Torah-positive life in the first centuries, cannot also today's Jewish believers in Jesus also lead a Torah-affirming life? Further research should be done here especially in regard to the cultic aspects of the Torah.

The purity ritual aspects of the Torah can be examined as positive Jewish identity markers within the Body of Messiah. The purity ritual aspects should not be considered separately from the discussion of the Law, but as an integral part of it.

Even within the traditional churches and their systematic theological works, more attention should be paid to the significance of the so-called ritual aspects of the Torah for the individual believer and the church. This is an aspect that has so far been rather neglected in theology as a whole and to which little or hardly any attention has been paid. This means that the areas of practical theology and ecclesiology may be also addressed. However, it is not implied here that the church should adopt a Jewish way of life. But how can the church deal with Jewish believers within its congregations? One answer is certainly to be found within Messianic Jewish congregations. These are churches that emphasize and respect Jewish aspects from the outset. But for Paul the first churches were

mixed churches. Hence the questions from a pastoral-theological perspective are as follows: Do Jewish believers have to give up their Jewish identity and live as Gentile Christians within traditional churches? Or how can a congregation take account, from a practical-theological point of view, of the fact that Gentile Christian believers as such worship the God of Israel and Jewish believers as such have a place in the congregation according to 1 Corinthians 7:17-23?

Therefore these questions may be a part of Christian theological training. Training in the broad field of Judaism within the various theological disciplines may become normative:

- Biblical studies: In the exegesis of biblical texts more attention may be given to a “theology of Israel”.
- Historical theology: Part of theological training is the study of church history. But many students are not aware of the history of Jewish Christians or Jews in general, though they were a substantial part of church history.
- Systematic theology: What significance does the Torah as a whole have for the church after the arrival of the Messiah?
- Practical theology: What are the practical consequences of systematic theology for church work?
- Missiology: What are the consequences for the Jewish-Christian dialogue or the Christian testimony about Jesus Christ to the Jewish people?

Finally, Paul did not give up his Jewish identity in the course of time. On the contrary, with the purification ritual described in Acts 21:18-26, he proved his Jewish identity through his action. If we see a literary and theological connection between Acts 21 and Acts 15, as shown in this thesis, the significance of Acts 21 becomes more important. Acts 15 may be read as a confirmation of Gentile Christian identity. Gentiles do not have to become Jews to be saved, nor do they have to live Jewish lives in general. Acts 21, on the other hand, shows us that Jews can emphasize their Jewish identity and continue to live Jewish lives, just as it was actually practised by Paul and Jewish Christian groups in the early centuries.

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