

**JEWS AND GENTILES IN THE ECCLESIA:
EVALUATING THE THEORY OF INTRA-ECCLESIAL JEW-
GENTILE DISTINCTION**

By

David B. Woods

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Supervisor: Dr William Domeris

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Woods', with a stylized, cursive script.

David B. Woods
Cape Town, South Africa
25 February 2015

Dedication

לישראל

Doxology

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ	Blessed are You, O LORD our God,
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Sovereign of the world,
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת דֶּרֶךְ הַיְשׁוּעָה	Who gave to us the way of salvation
בְּמִשִּׁיחַ יֵשׁוּעַ	in the Messiah, Jesus,
בָּרוּךְ הוּא	blessed be He. ¹

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ	Blessed are you, O LORD our God,
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Sovereign of the world,
הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לָעַמִּים	who distinguishes Israel from the nations. ²

וְהָיָה יְהוָה לְמֶלֶךְ עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ	And the LORD will be king over all the earth;
בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יְהִיָּה יְהוָה אֶחָד	on that day the LORD will be one
וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד	and his name one. ³

¹ By John J. Parsons (translation mine.)

² Adapted from the *Havdalah* prayer in the *Siddur*.

³ Zechariah 14:9.

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Abstract

Elements of the Jewish faith tradition, including Torah observance and other Jewish practice, appear to be increasingly common among believers in Jesus. This development is troubling many Christians who, for doctrinal and practical reasons, believe it is heretical and brings division within the body of Christ (ecclesia). The objective of this research is to critically examine the biblical case against making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia, considering the narrative of Acts 10:1–11:18, 15:1–28:31, and a key metaphor in Ephesians 2:14–16. Does the text validate or refute the notion that the ecclesia should make a distinction between its Jewish and its Gentile members? Three specific problems were addressed in five research papers for this compilation thesis, each employing methods of biblical exegesis and logical argumentation.

The three research problems addressed were: i) the interpretation of Peter's vision; ii) the evaluation of three key texts which appear to refute the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction; and iii) the example of the very early ecclesia with regard to making distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Peter's vision, in Acts 10:9–16, was shown to have a single meaning: Gentiles have been purified by God. Its message had nothing to do with unclean foods, so the popular Christian interpretation that the vision signalled the termination of Jewish dietary laws (and the Mosaic Law in general) is not substantiated. In Acts 11:12, the Spirit told Peter to accompany Cornelius' messengers *without dispute*. There is no sound basis for interpreting the Spirit's command to mean that Peter should go, 'making no distinction' between the Gentiles of Cornelius' household and Peter's Jewish kinsmen. Acts 11:12, therefore, does not eradicate the prevailing distinction between Jews and Gentiles nor the theological significance thereof.

Similarly, Peter's comment that God made 'no distinction' between Gentile and Jewish Jesus believers when he purified their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9) cannot be generalised to mean that the ecclesia is an undifferentiated mix of Jews and Gentiles. The context, including direct speech of Peter and James, constrains the interpretation to a restricted, soteriological sense:

there is ‘no distinction’ between them *in terms of how they are saved*. These findings are further validated throughout the remainder of Acts, where the leaders of the ecclesia, especially Paul, teach and practise making distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus by their varied obligations to Torah. Finally, Paul’s metaphor for the ecclesia in Ephesians 2:15, ‘one new man,’ is examined to determine which of two contradictory interpretations he intended: homogenous uniformity or compound unity. The certain outcome is the latter: the ecclesia comprises Jesus believing Jews and Gentiles without compromising Jewish particularity or heritage. Such ‘unity with distinction’ of former enemies is achieved by Christ without erasing those distinctions, and Messianic Jews form a bridge between Israel and the nations.

The studies conclude that the text and teaching of Acts 10:1–11:18, 15:1–28:31, and Ephesians 2:14–16 continue the biblical norm for making distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia. Thus, the biblical case *against* making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia is flawed. Major implications of the conclusion include doctrines concerning the identity and election of Israel, the Christian church’s relation to Israel, the structure of the church (as a twofold unity composed of Jews and Gentiles), and the varied applicability of Torah (and Jewish practice) for Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. Making distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia results in: i) a clear and hermeneutically consistent eschatology; ii) reconciliation of seemingly self-contradicting actions and writings of Paul; iii) protection of Gentile believers in Jesus from unnecessarily seeking to become Jewish; and iv) a unity of Jewish and Gentile believers as complementary (yet distinct) parts of the whole body of Christ, each a blessing to the other in fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham.

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1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to orientate the reader to the research topic by sketching dominant features in the theological landscape without attempting to fill out the details or cite references to scholarly literature, which are reserved for the analytical chapters following. Once the background has been outlined, details of more technical aspects of defining the research programme and its approach will be presented, followed by the particular format and structure chosen for this thesis, and an overview of its content.

1.1 Background

Since its early history, the Christian church⁴ has almost universally frowned upon or condemned Jewish practice by Jews who believe in Jesus (Kinzer 2005:181–212; Rosner 2013:147–148; Rudolph 2013:24–25; Soulen 1996:2, 11, 25–56), the practice of observing the Law of Moses above all (c.f. Rom 10:4; Gal 5:2–6). Generally, the church holds to an interpretation of the New Testament (NT) that forbids making distinction between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews)—especially among those who are members of the body of Christ (Kinzer 2005:181, referring to the Christian church in general. An example of this view is that of Lloyd-Jones 1972:275, 277–278, critiqued in chapter 6.) This interpretation appears to be based on the NT’s supposed abrogation of the Law, such as those cited above, and on several NT texts which, explicitly or implicitly, deny that such a distinction should be made.

NT texts which seem to deny the validity of making distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus include Peter’s vision of the sheet full of unclean animals in Acts 10:9–16; his claim that God made no distinction between Gentile and Jewish hearers of the gospel, Acts 15:9; Paul’s assertions in Romans 3:22 and 10:12 that there is ‘no distinction’ between Jew and Greek; and very similar expressions in Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 that, in Christ, ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek’ (Col 3:11). In some translations, Acts 11:12 also speaks of ‘making no distinction’. Finally, Ephesians 2:15 speaks of Christ as having created

⁴ The word ‘church’ broadly denotes all Christians, past present and future. This differs from the meaning of *ekklesia* (or ‘ecclesia,’ as I have used it), as explored in the remainder of this thesis. Refer to section 1.4 below (Terminology) for further comment on the difficulty of words such as ‘church’ and ‘Christian.’

‘one new man [humanity]’ in himself, a people drawn from Israel and the nations who are reconciled, at peace, and united in him.

Two Christian doctrines are particularly affected by the abovementioned ‘no distinction’ reading of the NT: ecclesiology and eschatology. The church generally understands itself to be composed of members whose ethnicity is theologically irrelevant (except for their being representatives of various nations since, in the end, every nation must submit to Christ’s reign). In this understanding, therefore, being Jewish has no particular significance for Jewish believers in Jesus, and church leaders usually discourage them from continuing their practice of Jewish tradition, if not forbidding it altogether. Moreover, the present age and eschatological outlook must fit the constraint of there being ‘no distinction’ between Jew and Gentile, at least for those in Christ. However, a number of biblical prophecies concerning Israel remain unfulfilled at present, for example, Isaiah 2:2–3; Jeremiah 34:24–31; 37; Zechariah 8; 14:9–21. (Note the expectation of Jesus’ followers in Acts 1:6.) Christian theologians frequently attempt to solve this problem by presenting the church as ‘the new Israel’ (or ‘the true, spiritual Israel’ as Justin put it, *Dialogue* 11), so that all biblical expectations regarding Israel will be fulfilled in its substitute, the church. This is the central tenet of replacement theology, or supersessionism. Due to various hermeneutical difficulties, however, some Christians reject supersessionism, and many of these hold to dispensationalism, a theological framework that allows for a more literal fulfilment of prophecy regarding ethnic Israel by the future removal of the church from the earth for a certain period of time. The identity of Israel in the NT is, therefore, a key element of Christian eschatology, but underlying the identity question is a deeper issue: election.

The election of Israel in the new covenant era is a point of difficulty in Christian theology. Here, the term election encompasses national identity and destiny, divine gifts, appointment to a special role for the fulfilment of God’s purpose in the world, and scriptural and covenantal obligations unique to God’s chosen (elect) people. If God had never chosen Israel, Israel’s identity would surely never be of concern to Christians, but since his election is so marked in scripture, the church is in a dilemma. How does the Gentile-dominated Christian church relate to ethnic (and national) Israel in the present era? Has the church replaced Israel in God’s plan? How can one hold together Paul’s claim that God has not rejected Israel (Rom 11:2) with the fact that Israel has largely rejected Christ historically? Christians may be

united in faith in Christ, but they are divided in doctrine concerning the identity and election of Israel.

A rapid increase in the number of Jewish believers, especially over the past five decades (Harvey 2009:1–2; Rudolph 2013:30),⁵ has accentuated this doctrinal division. Some Jewish believers fully assimilate into the Christian church to the point of being indistinguishable from Gentile believers, while others remain wholly Jewish in tradition. This range between opposite extremes is mirrored by Christian attitudes to Judaism: many Christians reject the on-going election of Israel outright, whilst others convert to Judaism. Zionism and the Jewish Roots movement are flourishing, yet supersessionism prevails nevertheless. Much of the church regards Messianic Judaism with suspicion or worse, as heretical, yet another part endorses it. Thus the church is divided not only in eschatological perspectives, but in practical ecclesiology—its understanding of its own composition. Are Messianic Jews Christians? Are they members of the church? Are they different from Gentile believers in a theologically significant way? Are they to observe the Law in a way that Gentiles do not, or should not?

The applicability of the Law, or Torah, for Jesus believers is a significant source of contention. Many Jewish believers who refer to themselves as Messianic Jews observe Torah in very similar ways to other expressions of Judaism. Most of the Gentile Christian church, on the other hand, stresses Paul's objections against those who would pressurize Gentile believers to 'Judaize' (or 'live like Jews') or to be circumcised (Gal 2:14; 5:2). Many Christians I have encountered skirt some difficult passages regarding the persistence of the Law in perpetuity, choosing only commandments they classify as 'moral law' for continued application. This is a controversial approach, however, since the Bible itself does not distinguish between moral and ritual laws, but rather sees the Law as an integrated whole (James 2:8–11).

⁵ Quantifying this growth difficult (c.f. Stern 2007:197–198), but it is reflected in the relatively recent establishment of Messianic Jewish organisations such as the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations in 1979, the International Union of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues in 1986, and the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council in 2006. The increasing occurrence of scholarly literature (such as *Messiah Journal* and *Kesher*) and academic conferences on Messianic Judaism (such as the Hashivenu Forum, Borough Park Symposium and the Helsinki Consultation) provides similar testimony. Further, the establishment of education and ministry initiatives, such as First Fruits of Zion (in 1994) and the Messianic Jewish Training Institute (in 1997), also demonstrate the rapid growth of Messianic Judaism.

Why is the subject of Torah observance of relevance to the debate on making distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the Jesus movement? Because the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is primarily maintained through Jewish observance of Torah. Torah is the foundation of the Jewish tradition, including language and names, liturgy and prayer, calendar cycles and appointed times, education, marriage and burial ceremonies, morals, ethics and justice. If the new covenant brought an end to the authority of the Law, then little if anything remains to distinguish Jewish Jesus believers from Gentile ones. Although Messianic Judaism itself comprises groups with diverse theologies, including obligation to Torah (see Harvey 2009), the movement generally promotes a much higher level of Torah observance than the Christian church does, from the ‘sign laws’ which mark the Jewish people (such as circumcision, eating *kosher* foods only, and wearing fringes) to extra-biblical tradition such as celebrating *Hanukkah* and lighting Sabbath candles. For a Jew to forsake these is to cut himself off from his people, and the church has often taught Jewish believers in Jesus to do so since, in Christian tradition, there is ‘no distinction’ between Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Thus the question of Jewish Torah observance is central to the distinction debate.

Theological shifts in recent times, especially since the Holocaust, have yielded new readings of Paul in relation to the Law. The first major development, boosted by the translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, was ‘the new perspective on Paul’ which challenged the traditional assumption that Paul presented Law as the antithesis of grace, and Judaism as a ‘religion’ whose members seek to ‘earn salvation’ by doing ‘works of the Law’ (see Zetterholm 2009 for a variety of approaches to Paul). Moving beyond the new perspective on Paul, some leading scholars are now presenting ‘Paul within Judaism’ (Nanos and Zetterholm 2015, for example). Viewing Paul as living and writing from within Judaism, this school of thought argues that Paul distinguished between Jews and Gentiles in the Jesus movement, warning Gentiles not to become Jewish, while expecting Jewish believers to observe the Law according to Jewish tradition. This theological framework is generally preferred within the modern Messianic Jewish movement, though it has limited traction in the Christian church. ‘Paul within Judaism’ is the locus of my research on what I have named intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction, or the theory of distinction.

The debate about making distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the church is key to the abovementioned questions of eschatology and ecclesiology, identity and election, Jewish

Torah observance and unity in the ecclesia. If the NT (not just Paul) was written from a ‘pro-distinction’ (as opposed to a ‘no distinction’) perspective, then some seeming contradictions within Paul’s writings are resolved (e.g. Rom 3:31 and 7:12 versus 6:14 and 10:4) and apparent differences with other Bible authors and even Jesus himself are reconciled (see Jeremiah 31:33; Matthew 5:17-19; James 4:11). Jesus’ prayer for protection of disciples so that they may be one (John 17:11) suggests that resolving the question of Jewish distinction within the ecclesia is imperative. The case for making distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia indefinitely has not faltered so much because it lacks scriptural support, but rather that it has not systematically responded to the biblical texts which appear to deny such distinction. Richard Harvey noted that Messianic Jews (and implicitly all who support the theology of distinction) “have not sufficiently proven their position, because the inherent weaknesses of the ‘non-distinctiveness’ position have not been sufficiently critiqued” (2011, pers. comm., 12 June). Such a critique is the purpose of this research.

1.2 Research definition

1.2.1 Objective

The objective of this research is to critically examine the biblical case against making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia.

1.2.2 Problem domain

This research falls primarily within the scope of biblical studies, using the methods of biblical studies and eliciting implications for systematic and practical theology.

1.2.3 Hypothesis

The text and teaching of the Bible make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia.

1.2.4 Research problems

1. What did Peter’s vision in Acts 10:9–16 mean for Jewish dietary laws and for making distinction between Jews and Gentiles, especially those within the ecclesia?

2. Do Acts 11:12, 15:9 and Ephesians 2:15 invalidate the practice of making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia?
3. Does the latter half of Acts, from 15:30 onwards, provide evidence that the ecclesia and its leaders made a distinction between its Jewish and its Gentile members, or did they regard making distinction as a thing of the past, inapplicable to those in the new covenant?

1.2.5 Purpose, value and contribution

This research addresses the problems identified above, thus offering benefits for systematic and practical theology. Longstanding interpretations of key texts in the New Testament commonly used to controvert the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction are tested by my own exegesis. If the studies refute distinction theory, then Christians will benefit from a clearer articulation of why they reject it—one which directly addresses arguments raised by the pro-distinction group. Such an outcome would leave no place for Messianic Judaism within the ecclesia; Jews who believe in Jesus must become converts to Christianity. However, if the claim that distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers is supported by the research findings, then two difficulties of biblical theology (numbered 1-2) and two of practical theology (3-4) may be overcome:

1. The identity and election of Israel in the present and eschatological eras.
2. Paul's writings on the Law, which appear to esteem it at one point and undermine it at another, may be more coherent.
3. Pastors should be able to respond better to a resurgence of desire among Gentile believers to take on the Law, since doing so would undermine God's purpose for distinction.
4. Unity among Jewish and Gentile believers may be established in a manner that affirms their uniqueness as complementary rather than divisive.

Most studies in the area of my research either undertake to disprove, or invalidate, the biblical case for intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction, or else they set out to validate it. No research that I am aware of seeks specifically to test the case against distinction theory in a

progressive way, examining each relevant text on its own in order to establish a biblical theology.

Various NT texts are used against making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia, and those in the ‘pro-distinction’ camp typically respond with *other* NT texts that affirm their case. They have not, to my knowledge, responded by methodically addressing each of their opponents’ arguments. (This observation is a generalisation and does not deny that many responses in favour of making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia have sought to tackle one—or perhaps more—of the text-based arguments against it.)

Although this thesis does not examine all the key ‘no distinction’ texts in the NT, it covers three (Acts 11:12; 15:9 and Ephesians 2:15) and assesses the important evidence in Acts related to distinction theory, including the interpretation of Peter’s vision (10:9–16) plus the narrative from 15:30, immediately after the council in Jerusalem (15:1–29), to the end of the book (28:31). I believe this to be a unique contribution to the distinction debate, therefore, and a platform for further research on the remaining texts most pertinent to it (including Romans 3:22; 10:12; Galatians 2:28 and Colossians 3:11).

The entire research programme was conceived, undertaken and written up by myself. These steps included:

- identifying the real-world problem, defining the research to carry out (this section), and preparing the research proposal;
- developing the research approach (described below) as needed for each investigation; and
- submitting five, sole-authored papers for publication in a peer-reviewed academic journal, presented also in the following chapters, and completing this thesis.

1.3 Research approach

1.3.1 Research design

The type of research involved in this study is predominantly conceptual with no empirical component at all. Thus it is qualitative in nature.

The research design involves application of similar methods on five related biblical texts, producing five independent papers.⁶ While there is some degree of building upwards from one study to the next, the intention is rather to cover more horizontal ground—more of the objections to distinction theory—than to build each study on the conclusion of the previous one. Thus each paper is an iteration of similar methods applied to another biblical text. Each iteration entails literary investigation (using the Bible and other sources—both ancient writings and modern scholarship), which combines various degrees of textual, contextual and historical analyses (depending on what is most needed), with conceptual and philosophical elements incorporating critique, discussion and logical argumentation, in order to (re)construct a theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. The resulting conceptual development is not, however, a doctrine since it does not systematically analyse all the biblical data on the topic and synthesize the results into a formal statement, positioning it in relation to other doctrines. Rather, this research programme may be regarded as one of biblical theology contemporized; it seeks to determine biblical norms and teaching in order to establish an expression of appropriate praxis for the ecclesia today.

1.3.2 General methodology

The method of primary research used is analysis, examining related key elements (in this case biblical arguments) in turn with the exegetical methods described below. Methods for secondary research components are descriptive, synthetic and constructivist methods. The descriptive methods are dialogical and comparative, meaning that I discuss and compare different beliefs and biblical interpretations. Exegetical analysis of the selected texts includes both textual and contextual analysis. Some historical analysis is included (especially in the first study), whereby information regarding contemporary practice or situation in ancient

⁶ See the section below on the format, structure and overview of the thesis.

literature guides, affirms or constrains the exegesis. Historical interpretations are also assessed to some degree (especially in the last study). Critical discussion is woven into all the analyses, rather than distilling it into a separate discussion section or chapter; this is a more intuitive approach for the argumentative nature of the work, where observation of the facts leads naturally to evaluation *in situ*. Each of the five texts studied concludes with a synthesis of the findings into an exegetical conclusion and some implications (i.e. theological commentary) on it. The final, concluding chapter reviews all five studies in order to evaluate the hypothesis.

1.3.3 Selection of key texts

The key ‘no distinction’ texts were identified by a search of the NT for texts which appear to deny most strongly the distinction of Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia, gauged simply by reading the NT and academic literature on the topic, as well as from personal discussion with NT readers. The book of Acts showed itself to contain a great deal of information related to distinction theory, such that it became the focus of this research. Also, the phrase ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 was noted as a ‘sticking point’ for opponents of distinction theory.⁷ The scale of the study did not allow for the remaining key texts to be examined, namely Romans 3:22, 10:12; Galatians 2:28 and Colossians 3:11, though section 4.3 (Further research opportunities) of chapter 5 briefly suggests a reading of them which coheres with distinction theory.

1.3.4 Exegetical methods

A synchronic approach is used, meaning that the biblical text is to be taken as-is regardless of any possible tradition development and redaction that produced it. That is, application of biblical hermeneutics underpins the exegesis, while methods of biblical criticism are not employed at all. However, textual apparatus is reviewed where variant readings are material to the interpretation.

For each of the selected texts, lexical-syntactical analysis will be used to examine the meaning conveyed by individual words and their arrangement, and a contextual analysis will

⁷ This resistance was confirmed later by Toby Janicki of First Fruits of Zion, and is the reason that the study on ‘one new man’ (chapter 6) is currently being republished in *Messiah Journal*.

seek to determine whether each passage is descriptive or prescriptive and, if prescriptive, whether its message is general (and thus normative) or special (only applicable in the exceptional situation addressed).

Where historical analysis is used, evidence from ancient sources is presented to illustrate how the biblical text was interpreted at the time. These sources include the Bible itself (particularly the historical narrative of Acts, Paper One) and other literature from early in the common era. More weight is given to the older sources, especially those of the first century. To a limited extent—except Paper Four, where the focus of the study *is* the history recorded in the latter half of Acts—the historical data are used to guide the exegetical process.

Finally, each investigation ends with a synthesis of the findings of its various analyses, leading to an exegetical conclusion on the text concerned. Some theological commentary is also included.

1.3.5 Personal bias

As I critique the theology of others from the distant past to present day and undertake my own exegesis, it would be naïve at best to claim to be intellectually neutral, unmoved by my own beliefs, unaffected by interpretations to which I have been exposed, whether or not I am aware of them. In criticising others for allowing the history, culture and theology of the times in which they were immersed to influence their biblical interpretations, it is easy to forget one's own vulnerability to make the same error. Erickson (1998:27-28) promotes three activities of historical theology to expose one's presuppositions through recognising his own 'preunderstandings.' These include studying various interpretations and statements of the church at different points of its history, studying how others have done theology, and using history to evaluate a particular belief. I have sought to do all three.

Concerning Paul's writings in particular, Zetterholm (2009) repeatedly mentions the tension between scholarship and theology, and intimates that theology is often driven by a religious agenda. I concur with him when he says, "The issues that are seen as relevant and acceptable are bound up with rather specific interpretations of Christian theology... Truth is to some extent bound up with religious belief, which is always complicated. Thus the amalgamation of normative theology and historical scholarship is, in my view, problematic" (2009:238). He concludes by suggesting that "the relationship between science and normative theology

should be reversed” – that is, a theological paradigm should never determine NT scholarship, but rather be inspired by it (ibid). I aim to do exactly that—to take a scholarly approach that becomes theologically significant, rather than imposing my theology on the text.

1.3.6 Presuppositions

The theological foundation of the exegetical studies will be essentially conservative evangelical in nature. That is, the Bible will be treated as true, complete, inspired by God and authoritative for the ecclesia. Appeals to the Septuagint, the Deuterocanonical books and other ancient literature may be made to support a biblical interpretation, but they are not regarded as authoritative. These presuppositions have significant implications regarding two concerns in particular: i) the account of Paul’s activities in Acts (especially 15:30–28:31); and ii) the veracity of Ephesians 1:1 which identifies Paul as the author of Ephesians.

This study presumes that Luke wrote the book of Acts, and thus that it was written relatively early (perhaps in the sixties or seventies). Moreover, in keeping with the conservative evangelical approach mentioned above, I have taken the record of events narrated in Acts as an accurate (albeit selective) account of history. Such an approach is not always accepted by modern scholars (e.g. Gilbert 2011:197; Vielhauer 1966:33–50) but it should not be discounted as incredible (Bock 2007:15–27; Carson and Moo 2005:290–300; Crossway Bibles 2008:2073; Utley 2003:1–3).

The anonymous author of Acts claimed to have been Paul’s travelling companion at times, as indicated by the pronouns (first person plural) used in Acts 16:10–17, 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16 to include the author and Paul (and others). Moreover, the author frequently presented Paul’s words as direct speech (e.g. 17:22–31; 20:18–35; 22:1, 3–21; 24:10–21; 25:10–11; 26:2–27; 27:21–26; 28:25–28). Luke is only mentioned by name three times in the NT, but in every case it was by Paul in prison, accompanied by Luke at the time (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Philem 24). If only the last of these (Philem 24) is regarded as authentically Pauline (a practically undisputed claim, Carson and Moo 2005:589; Geller 2011:402), the evidence is nevertheless sufficient to establish that Luke knew Paul and spent time with him, and therefore he had opportunity to capture accurately in writing many details of Paul’s missions. Moreover, if Christian tradition dating from the second century (Bock 2007:16; Carson and

Moo 2005:291; Utey 2003:1) is correct, the authenticity of Acts is upheld, and Colossians and 2 Timothy are genuinely Pauline—not just Philemon.

Modern scholarship has also largely dismissed the church tradition that Paul was the author of Ephesians, claiming that it lacks key characteristics of his writing and contains evidence of being written after Paul's death, probably in the eighties or nineties (Grossman 2011:345). This conviction is so strong that some current publications on Paul's writings contain no references to Ephesians at all in their indexes (e.g. Zetterholm 2009; Nanos and Zetterholm 2015). There is, however, an opposing camp which maintains that the textual content of Ephesians, in the historical setting of the sixties (during which Paul is believed to have died), as well as early Christian tradition (Carson and Moo 2005:369–370, 480–486; Hoehner 2002:2–61).

Readers holding to a faith-based perspective which esteems the integrity of scripture may be uncomfortable and defensive about questioning Ephesians' claim to be written by Paul in its opening address (1:1). On the other hand, scholarship is clearly obliged to examine the evidence critically and impartially *without* theological commitment, even if doing so leads to the conclusion that the book is pseudepigraphical. The purpose of this section is not to persuade the reader of Pauline authorship of Ephesians, but simply to point out that there are recognised scholars who endorse it. Hoehner tabulates a long list of such scholars from the time of the Reformation up until around the start of this century when he compiled the list. These include Gordon Fee, Stanley Porter and himself, Harold Hoehner (Hoehner 2002:9–18.) Hoehner's exegetical commentary on Ephesians also includes a lengthy discussion on Pauline authorship (2002:2–61) which considers the objections in detail, yet concludes that Paul was indeed the author of Ephesians, and this thesis proceeds with that as a presupposition. Moreover, if it is reasonable to consider Paul to be the author of Ephesians, the date of the letter would accordingly be much earlier than some scholars estimate—perhaps some time in the early sixties when Paul was imprisoned in Rome (Carson and Moo 2005:486–487). Those who object to the presupposition of Pauline authorship, however, need not dismiss the study of 'one new man' (Ephesians 2:15) in chapter 6, since the argumentation presented therein does not fundamentally depend on the identity of Ephesians' author.

Finally, the research presented presupposes that the biblical text has one primary meaning—that which the author intended—which is generally the plainest reading of a particular passage according to its genre.

1.3.7 Delimitations of the study

This study will be limited by the research problem and key questions above, with related topics explained only to the extent warranted by the investigation.

This thesis does not investigate or aim to establish the case *for* distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus, though that case is appears as part of the discussion. Thus, only one side of the distinction debate is critiqued in depth: a critique of counterpoints *against* intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

1.4 Terminology

Generating definitions for this kind of research exposes some intractable problems. One difficulty is the diverse usage of specific terms by various ‘stakeholders’ including Christians, Jews and Messianic Jews (here, each group and its members using the label by which they name themselves). Another difficulty relates to translation from other languages, especially ancient ones. Yet another is that definitions change over time, or according to context. Some words, such as Torah, are accepted as ambiguous and the reader or hearer is expected to deduce the intended sense from its use in context.

That said, the group of people who identify themselves as believers in Jesus, members of Christ’s body, followers or disciples of Jesus, or by similar expressions. This group is typically known as the church, as I have called them in Papers One and Two. However, the church is often viewed as an anti-Jewish entity, especially by Jews. Therefore, if the group of Jesus-believers comprises two distinct sub-groups, Jews (i.e. Messianic Jews) and Gentiles (i.e. Christians), and if the label, church, applies only to the latter, then it would be appropriate to use another word for the entire group. That is, if the hypothesis is upheld by the findings, then another word is needed to denote all believers in Jesus. For this reason, Paper Five (which was published before Papers Three and Four) follows Mark Kinzer (2005) in using *ekklēsia*, a transliteration of the NT Greek term, ἐκκλησία. See section 1.2, called ‘The *ekklēsia* and the church,’ in Paper Five for further explanation. Finally, Papers Three

and Four use ‘ecclesia’ (without italics) as an English word in its own right, in spite of the risk that readers may make an unintended association with the Roman Catholic Church, owing to the Latin term *ecclesia*. ‘Ecclesia’ is intuitive and less awkward than other labels for the entity concerned, and is therefore also used in the Introduction and Conclusion chapters.

The changes in terminology from one paper to another were not made arbitrarily. The final papers factored in reading five years of related scholarly literature (where no standard terminology prevails) and many hours of deliberation about the problem.

A final note is necessary to clarify what is meant by ‘traditional Christian interpretation,’ particularly in chapters 2 and 3 where it is used in connection with Jewish practice (including Torah observance) by Jewish believers in Jesus. From the second century, some Church Fathers began to reject such observance as being contradictory to the instruction of the NT (Kinzer 2005:181–282), and that ‘carnal’ Israel had been superseded in God’s plans by the ‘spiritual’ church (Soulen 1996:25–56). Rudolph notes that, in the fourth century, canon law and Constantine’s forces ensured that ‘Jews could not become Christians and remain Jews’ (2013:25). The earliest attested church writings that deny that Jewish believers Jesus are ‘Christian’ if they continue to practise Judaism date to the turn of the fifth century (Rudolph 2005:18–19). The tendency of the church (including Roman Catholicism and, more recently in history, Protestant traditions) to suppress or oppose Jewish practice by Jewish Jesus believers may be traced to the present age (Juster 1995:141–145). Indeed, Stern (2007:13–16) identifies six kinds of opposition that (Torah observant) Messianic Jews today face from Gentile Christians. Thus I regard the prohibition by the church in general of distinctly Jewish practice (above all, male circumcision) for all believers in Jesus, including Jewish believers, as ‘traditional,’ based on the ‘traditional Christian interpretation’ of the NT.

1.5 Format, structure and overview

1.5.1 Format

This is a compilation thesis, or a thesis by publication. The thesis therefore does not follow the usual format of a series of chapters, each one leading to the next, but instead it contains a series of related papers. Each paper is prepared as a stand-alone publication and could be read on its own (though there is an intimate connection between two of them in particular). All of

the papers were submitted to *Conspectus*, the journal of the South African Theological Seminary (SATS). Papers One, Two and Five have been published. Paper Three is to be published in the next issue, and Paper Four is in review. A shortened version of Paper Five is also being republished in *Messiah Journal* by First Fruits of Zion. Some of the papers contain a few very minor corrections to the version published in *Conspectus*.

1.5.2 Structure

Following this introductory chapter, each of the five published papers is presented in succession and then an overall conclusion chapter draws together and synthesises the conclusions from each paper. This structure is somewhat different to a conventional (chapter-based) thesis. Instead of having a whole chapter dedicated to reviewing literature in the field, literature is cited as needed in each paper, each containing its own reference list. These references are repeated at the end of the thesis, together with those for this chapter and the Conclusion. For the sake of consistency, the same title and format as those in the five papers was used.

In keeping with the approach of biblical theology to keep focused on the biblical text in question and curtail reliance on other texts which have not been examined, each paper integrates discussion in its analysis. The discussion is also restricted in the conclusion of each paper for the same reason, though enough is presented to stimulate theological reflection.

The order of the papers is almost but not quite the chronological order of publication. The chronological order of publication was: Paper One (March 2012); Paper Two (September 2014); Paper Five (September 2014); Paper Three (March 2015); Paper Four (in review for September 2015). Thus, although Paper Five on ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 is presented last, it was published at the same time as Paper Two on ‘no distinction’ in Acts 11:12. This arrangement presents the papers in canonical order. More importantly, the four papers on Acts are presented in succession, making for a logical flow, followed by the paper containing the most theological reflection.

The reader is asked to keep the chronological order of the papers in mind, since they cite one-another. Therefore, Papers Three and Four cite Paper Five. The page numbers in these citations refer to those of the published version, not of this thesis.

The heading numbering of the original publication was preserved in each case⁸ in order to maintain the consistency of each paper with the original publication.

Some information, including publication details and author's remarks, is given as a kind of preface to each paper.

1.5.3 Overview

In order to test the hypothesis, it is necessary to examine several key texts which appear to invalidate the hypothesis. The first of these records the vision given to Peter in Acts 10:9–16, which has often been taken as a divine abolishment of Jewish dietary laws and hence the Law in general (or at least the ritual dimensions of it). The Law is central to the establishment and maintenance of Jewish particularity, so its annulment might suggest that making distinction between Jews and Gentiles—especially those within the ecclesia—is *passé* in the new covenant era.

Two other texts in Acts appear to deny intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction explicitly: Acts 11:12 (in some translations) and 15:9. Additionally, the latter half of Acts (following the watershed council in Jerusalem in Acts 15) provides much data on the teaching and practice in the nascent ecclesia concerning Jewish particularity. Finally, the 'one new man' spoken of in Ephesians 2:15 is sometimes used as a proof text against the theory of distinction. Each of these texts has been carefully scrutinised in the five papers outlined in more detail below.

Firstly, Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16 is examined in Paper One to determine its meaning, and thus whether or not it was a divine abrogation of the Law, or at least Jewish dietary laws. This is important because, if the Law has been abolished, then the biblical distinction between Jews and Gentiles is severely deteriorated since it is the Law which makes, and requires the maintenance of, such distinction. On the other hand, if the Law is upheld, or is not pertinent to the meaning of the vision, then there is no reason to derive the implication the Jewish particularity (i.e. the making of distinction between Jews and Gentiles) remains a biblical mandate in the new covenant era—at least for members of the ecclesia.

⁸ This includes the anomaly in Paper One, whose Introduction is not numbered. (The application of heading numbers in *Conspectus* is not consistent.)

In some English Bible translations, Acts 11:12 says that Peter was told to make ‘no distinction’ between the Gentiles of Cornelius’ household and, implicitly, his Jewish kinsmen. In other translations, the instruction implies as much by expressing that he was not to hesitate, doubt, or waver about going to Cornelius. If any of these translations conveys the author’s intended sense of the word in question, *diakrinō*, then the text would appear to oppose the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. Paper Two analyses the use of *diakrinō* in Acts 11:12 to determine whether it provides any evidence that making distinction between Jews and Gentiles is unbiblical, especially in the context of the new covenant. This paper provides a useful foundation for investigating the use of *diakrinō* in a much more direct and climactic statement made later by Peter, as done in the next paper.

Paper Three examines Peter’s comment in Acts 15:9 where he is quoted as saying that God made ‘no distinction’ between Gentile and Jewish Jesus-believers, in that he purified the hearts of both by faith. Should this be taken to mean that the ecclesia is an undifferentiated mix of people whose identity as Jews or Gentiles is theologically irrelevant? A brief textual analysis shows that this interpretation is possible at a lexical level, but a study of the context from Acts 15:1–29 is necessary to clarify the intended meaning of Peter’s words. Paper Three studies closely Peter’s speech and James’ verdict, as well as other evidence in this pericope, in order to answer the question of whether or not Acts 15:9 refutes the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

Whilst the contextual analysis of Acts 15:9 in Paper Three provides a conclusive answer to the question of making distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia, it falls short of surveying the remaining historical evidence on the topic in Acts. Paper Four thus sets out to determine whether Acts 15:30–28:31 presents evidence either supporting or invalidating the theory of distinction. Did the leaders of the early ecclesia demonstrate, through their words and actions, that they made distinction between Jewish and Gentile Jesus-believers? Is the evidence consistent with the findings of Paper Three? Special attention is given to Acts 21:17–26 which appears to encapsulate the stance of Paul, James and all the elders in Jerusalem regarding making distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia.

Finally, the study moves from the historical narrative of Acts to the didactic content of Ephesians wherein Paul describes the ecclesia using the metaphor of ‘one new man’ (2:15). Starting with two contradictory interpretations of this phrase, one arguing that it disproves the

theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction and the other that it supports the theory, Paper Five examines the biblical usage of these three words and other data in the immediate context in order to elicit Paul's intended meaning. Did Paul mean that the categories of Jew and Gentile had fallen away, being replaced by an ecclesia composed of members whose ethnicity is to be disregarded, as though they were uniform, even homogenous? Or is there evidence that the unity of the 'new man' did not diminish Jewish particularity? The nature of this investigation leads to a greater theological dimension in this paper than the others, which seek to trim the theological discourse in favour of biblical exegesis. The special request made by an editor of First Fruits of Zion to republish the paper confirms that the 'one new man' of Ephesians 2:15 is a 'sticking point' for those who promote intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

A conclusion chapter reviews the findings of each of the five papers, synthesising them and extracting the key theological implications which they raise.

2. Paper One: Interpreting Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16

Abstract

This paper challenges the traditional Christian interpretation of Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16. The text, in its biblical context, and together with related developments in early church history, point conclusively to a single interpretation: that the Gentiles have been cleansed by God. The vision does not nullify Jewish dietary laws or the Mosaic Law in general, since there is no support for the interpretation that the vision also pertains to the cleansing of unclean food. This conclusion contradicts the traditional Christian interpretation that the vision has a two-fold meaning, though it is not unique in the literature. The main implication is that Christians need to reassess their reading of the New Testament, and especially Paul, on the Law, in the light of recent literature which challenges traditional interpretations and posits various solutions to age-old disputes.

Publication information

Publication: *Conspectus* 13:171–214

Date: March 2012

Author's remarks: This paper was the first tangible output of my research programme, and a crucial test piece for this compilation thesis. At the time of writing, owing to the evangelical Christian audience of the publication, I opted to refer to the whole ecclesia as 'the church.' This included 'the church in Jerusalem,' which obviously would have been a congregation of Jewish believers in Jesus (perhaps with a few exceptions from the nations). In later papers, I preferred to use *ekklēsia* or *ecclesia* for the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ (Jews and Gentiles), generally reserving the term 'church' for (Gentile) Christians. At one point in the paper, a direct quote has been altered to avoid writing the LORD's name in English (with vowels), indicated by square brackets.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

Introduction

Acts 10:1–11:18, or ‘the Cornelius incident’, presents the circumstances, content, and meaning of Peter’s vision of the ‘sheet’ full of animals and, therefore, forms the key text of this study. This paper examines the meaning of the vision to determine whether it pertains to Gentiles—that they are not to be regarded as unclean by Jewish believers—or to do with unclean foods specified in the Mosaic Law. The traditional Christian interpretation is that the vision refers to both Gentiles and unclean food; by implication, the Law as a whole is taken to be annulled, for which the selected passage is commonly used as a proof text. In fact, the two are often regarded as inextricably connected. There are various problems with this dual interpretation, however, and the text itself testifies that only the first interpretation is true: the vision pertains to the cleansing of Gentiles, not unclean food. Supporting this conclusion is a wealth of contextual evidence in the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament, as well as post-canonical history. Ultimately, however, the strongest support for this interpretation is within the text itself, Acts 10:1–11:18.

Scriptural quotes are taken from the Lexham English Bible (LEB) unless otherwise indicated, and footnotes in quoted texts have been omitted or given separately. Much of the ancient literature is freely available online at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, including that used herein (by ‘Barnabas’, Irenaeus, and Augustine).

A synchronic exegetical approach is taken, meaning that the Greek text is taken ‘as-is’, without regard for how it developed. My hermeneutic is literal for the narrative and symbolic for the vision, as I will justify, and I have adopted a simple grammatico-historical method of exegesis. I seek to establish the meaning of the text in its own right, principally in the context of the book of Acts—as the original audience would have—and to test this against other contextual evidence in the New Testament and early church history.

1. Literary elements

The genre of Acts is historical narrative. This is surely the easiest genre to interpret, and the reason I believe a simple, literal reading of the text—in its historical and literary context—is sufficient to interpret it correctly. The vision Peter saw in Acts 10 was a type of prophetic revelation, exposing God’s will for the body of Christ from that time onward. It was not a

prophecy in the form of an utterance, like those of Israel's prophets. In addition to hearing a voice from heaven, Peter 'saw' strange and supernatural things whilst in a trance. Elements of the vision are symbolic of real-world entities, not a literal presentation of the entities themselves. Also, the events of the vision were not real (i.e. they were not acted out as prophetic actions [compare with Ezek 5:1–4]). Though the implication of the vision continues even today, the vision itself was not future orientated; rather, it contained a commandment to Peter for that present moment, inducing a critical and permanent change in the constituency of church membership. In Ramm's terminology, the prophecy was essentially didactic, not predictive (1970:250, cited in Osborne 2006:272). That is, it was a 'forthtelling' or proclamation of God's will, as opposed to a foretelling or prediction of the future. Biblical visions are generally not polyvalent; each one has a specific meaning and is not overloaded with additional meanings for the reader to determine. This is especially pertinent because the vision was prescriptive, not descriptive; the revelation of a foundational principle of the New Covenant ought not to be ambiguous.

Acts 10:1–11:18 describes five closely bound primary events:

1. An angelic appearance to Cornelius in Caesarea, instructing him to send for Peter;
2. Peter's visions of the 'sheet' during his stay with Simon, the tanner, in Joppa;
3. Peter's visit and preaching to Gentiles (Cornelius and his household) in Caesarea;
4. The Gentiles' reception of the gospel and baptism in the Holy Spirit and in water under Peter's supervision;
5. Peter's defence of his actions to Jewish believers in Jerusalem, resulting in their acceptance of the revelation that God calls even Gentiles into his kingdom.

Thus, Peter is the central figure and the Gentiles' entry into the kingdom is the primary outcome. Each of the points above indicates a surprising event, three of which involved divine intervention. Taken together, these events indicate a radical change in the New Covenant order from the prevailing *status quo* of the Mosaic Covenant. Also, at the time of Peter's arrival in Caesarea, neither he nor Cornelius nor any of their companions knew what God was about to do—in spite of the angelic appearance and the vision. The familiarity of the story amongst Christians detracts from the element of surprise that it would convey at the

time, and the infusion of meaning by Christians using other New Testament texts anachronously (since most of them were still unwritten) has obscured its simplicity.

2. Historical and literary context

The events narrated in Acts 10:1–11:18 took place at a crucial time in the spread of the gospel to every nation. Carson and Moo (2005:323) point out that one of Luke's primary concerns in writing Acts was to tell of God's plan to include Gentiles among his people. The divide between Jews and Gentiles was very marked, as indicated in both extra-biblical and biblical texts of the period, including Acts itself (*J.W. passim*; Matthew 15:22–26; Acts 15:1–31). The Roman occupation of Israel and the oppression of Jews at times throughout the Empire during the period covered by Acts (c.30–62 AD) exacerbated tensions between Jews and Gentiles.

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples in Acts 2, the new-born church was fervently evangelising its native people, the Jews. Later, in Acts 8, Philip presented the gospel to the people of Samaria who received it, believed in the name of Jesus and were baptised in water. This is significant in that, though Samaritans were partly Jewish and had a very similar faith, the Jews did not accept them as true Jews. Shortly after this, they were baptised in the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Peter and John. These apostles returned to Jerusalem proclaiming the gospel among other Samaritans as they went. Philip, meanwhile, evangelised and baptised the Ethiopian eunuch and then spread the gospel from town to town, all the way up the coast from Azotus in the south to Caesarea in the north (also Acts 8). Acts 9 describes Paul's coming to faith in Jesus, allowing 'the church throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria' to have peace, be built up, and multiply (9:31); note that 'and Samaria' suggests the church's growth amongst semi-Jews. Peter undertook an itinerant ministry among these churches, which brought him to Joppa where he stayed for some time with Simon, the tanner, after his prayer for the resurrection of Tabitha was answered (9:32–43).

The narrative under investigation, Acts 10:1–11:18, is immediately followed by Luke's account of the spread of the gospel to Jews in Cypress and Cyrene, and then to Antioch, resulting in Barnabas moving there. Paul, who had been ministering in Tarsus, presumably to both Jews and Gentiles (according to his calling, Acts 9:15), then joined Barnabas in Antioch, which became known for the establishment of a predominantly Gentile community of

believers. Acts 12 moves on to describe Herod's persecution of the church in Jerusalem and his death, leading to Paul's mission to the Gentiles described in the remainder of the book. The ruling of the apostolic council in Acts 15:1–31 concerning Gentiles' obligation to the Law is particularly significant.

It is no exaggeration, therefore, that Acts 10:1–11:18 is embedded in a matrix of events telling of the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.

3. Interpretations in the literature

Historically, Christians have usually interpreted Peter's vision to mean that both unclean food and Gentiles have been pronounced clean by God. From at least the time of the Reformation this dual interpretation was well established. Calvin's commentary on Acts 10:15 (1585:322) makes this clear:

He speaketh of meats; but this sentence must be extended unto all parts of the life. It is word for word, *That which God hath made clean, do not thou make profane*; but the sense is, it is not for us to allow or condemn any thing; but as we stand and fall by the judgment of God alone, so is he judge of all things, (Romans 14:4). As touching meats, after the abrogating of the law, God pronounceth that they are all pure and clean.

Later influential Christian writers such as Matthew Henry continued in this vein (Henry 1994, originally 1706) as have many modern scholars, including FF Bruce (1988:206), Darrell Bock (2007:390, 394) and Robert Stein (2011:106). Furthermore, this view is often published in marginal notes of study Bibles commenting on Acts 10:15, such as the NIV (1985) and the *ESV study Bible*. Also common is the argument that the issues of food and the Gentiles are inextricably related (see Bruce and Bock, for example). Rudolph Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* summarized in Zetterholm (2009:74), presents the traditional Christian interpretation of Paul's writings in general, in which 'Paul makes no distinction between Jews and non-Jews', and contrasts law and works with grace and faith—the law now leading to death (p. 75), and hence, no longer applicable to anyone. Evidently, Bultmann could not reconcile texts like Romans 10:12, in which Paul says there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, from those where Paul explicitly differentiated between Jews and Gentiles

(such as Rom 9–11 and, speaking of believers in both groups, 1 Cor 1:23), so he ignored the latter. The antinomian tradition which Bultmann reinforced is so deeply entrenched in Christian theology that some Bibles (HCSB; LEB; NRSV) are careful to use an alternate interpretation of *torah*, 'instruction', rather than the usual 'law' in Isaiah's eschatological prophecy, 'out of Zion will go forth the law' (Isa 2:3, KJV). The NET goes so far as to supply 'moral': 'For Zion will be the center for moral instruction...'

In *An introduction to the New Testament*, however, Carson and Moo (2005:287) are silent on the interpretation of unclean food, preferring simply to state that it was about Gentiles. It is difficult to imagine that this silence is unintentional, given the gravity of the vision. Some other biblical scholars such as Jacob Jervell (cited in Bock 2007:390) limit the vision's interpretation to Gentiles and deny that food is in view (Jervell uses food distinctions in Acts 15 to support his case). John Moxton's (2011) doctoral thesis on Peter's vision focuses not so much on the meaning of the vision as on the dilemma it placed Peter in—at least at that point in time—referring to it as a nightmare. He does however conclude, that 'its target was certainly Peter's misconceptions about Jew-Gentile contact' (p. 209). The NET Bible's study note on Acts 10:28 states, 'Peter sees the significance of his vision as not about food, but about open fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentiles.' Notably, the commentators refrain from 'correcting' Peter.

It is not surprising that Messianic Jews—many of whom observe laws that distinguish Jews from Gentiles (especially circumcision, Sabbath, and food laws)—commonly argue that the vision is not about food, only about Gentiles. Michael Brown (2011:206), David Stern (1992:257–261), and Mark Kinzer (2005:68–71), for example, are all in agreement about this.

The literature reveals only two principal interpretations of Peter's vision; there is universal consensus that it pertains to the cleansing of Gentiles, but disagreement over whether it also pertains to cleansing of unclean food. The following section examines what the text itself says regarding the interpretation.

4. Textual analysis: Acts 10:1–11:18

4.1 The key question: what was cleansed?

Peter's repeated vision ended each time with a voice from heaven saying, '*The things* which God has made clean, you must not consider unclean!' (Acts 10:15–16). It is important to note that the voice did not specify explicitly what God cleansed; the LEB supplies '*the things*' (hence the italics) whilst most translations supply 'what'. For example, the NET says, 'What God has made clean...' The key question is obvious: *what did God make clean?* Was it unclean food, or was it the Gentiles, or was it both? Christian tradition answers 'both', and uses this text to argue that Jewish dietary laws—and the whole Law in general—were abrogated by God at that point in time. The events that followed, however, indicate that Peter came to a different conclusion.

4.2 Vision genre

The scripture tells us that even 'Peter was doubting within himself what the vision which he saw might be...' (Acts 10:17) and pondering its meaning (Acts 10:19) when he was instructed by the Spirit to go with the messengers from Cornelius. Unlike many readers of Acts, Peter did not automatically assume the vision was about food laws. Rather, he reflected on its meaning, which immediately suggests he sought to interpret it figuratively. 'Like the seer of the book of Daniel, Peter realizes he has received a symbolic vision that requires interpretation. As a practicing Jew and a knowledgeable reader of scripture, Peter presumes that the vision is not to be taken at face value' (Kinzer 2005:69).

Each biblical genre has its own interpretive hermeneutic; parables, poetry, and prophecy are all interpreted differently. Unlike historical narrative, visions are interpreted symbolically, not literally. Jeremiah's vision of the boiling cauldron (Jer 1:13) had nothing to do with food. Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (Ezek 37:1–14) had nothing to do with bones. Zechariah's vision of the woman in the basket (Zech 5:5–11) had nothing to do with women or baskets. Amos' vision of summer fruit (Amos 8) concerned neither summer nor fruit. And Peter's vision had nothing to do with unclean food any more than it did with sheets. The unclean food in the vision was a metaphor. I demonstrate repeatedly below that it was a metaphor for the Gentiles. Jews, on moral grounds, regarded Gentiles as unclean, whilst the uncleanness of

certain animal species was a ritual uncleanness as defined by the Torah (Deut 14:3–19; Lev 11:1–23). The claim that Acts 10:1–11:18 abrogates the Mosaic Law is based on an allusion that is nowhere made explicit in the text, and originates in a visionary symbol being interpreted literally in spite of Peter explicitly interpreting it differently (10:28), with demonstrable divine endorsement (10:44).

Bock (2007:389) argues that the Old Testament gives precedents for offensive divine commandments to be taken literally, citing Genesis 22:1–2, Hosea 1:2–3, and Isaiah 20:2–3, and therefore that Peter's vision is to have literal application to the cleansing of unclean food (Bock could have added Ezek 4:12; note the similarity between Ezekiel's protest in Ezek 4:12 and that of Peter in Acts 10:14). His case is undermined in several ways. Firstly, these examples are descriptive not prescriptive, exceptional cases for the purpose of illustration, not normative. There is no suggestion that they received their revelation in bizarre visions, unlike Peter. Hosea's and Isaiah's actions were *intended to offend* in order to shock Israel into repentance to *conform* their conduct to the Law (thus affirming it), not to *change or nullify* the Torah—not a *yod* nor a *kots* of a *yod*!⁹ They were action parables (i.e. literally acted out), and that only by the prophet himself. Peter's revelation, on the other hand, was in a trance and had an element of mystery. Also, unlike Bock's examples, its meaning was unclear to the recipient afterwards (10:17). Moreover, Peter did not get up, slaughter and eat as commanded, unlike the obedience shown in Bock's three proof texts. Clearly, Peter did not take this as a positive command¹⁰ to be literally obeyed, but rather, he understood that the negative command ('*The things* which God has made clean, you must not consider unclean!') conveyed the message. Finally, while the positive command to Peter was clearly illegal, none of the Old Testament examples given contained such a command: Abraham was not under Mosaic Law; although prostitution is contrary to the Law, marrying a prostitute is not; neither is going about in one's undergarments.¹¹

Peter saw the vision three times over. Repetition in the Bible is a technique to emphasise something. Thus, Peter was assured that his vision bore a message of great importance and

⁹ Better known as 'not a jot or a tittle', this well-known Hebraic expression was used by Jesus to stress *the same point*, possibly in Hebrew (Matt 5:18; Bivin 2007:94–96).

¹⁰ One of Kinzer's (2005:69) key questions on this text is, 'Does the vision entail a positive command that Jews now eat nonkosher meat?'

¹¹ Probably not literally 'naked' as many translations say (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown 1997; Smith 1992).

one might expect it to relate to the Gentiles, because of the hints Luke inserted in leading up to the Cornelius incident (see 5.1.1 below).

4.3 Breaking the Law?

Peter was a devout, Law-abiding Jew who, by his own words, had ‘never eaten anything common and unclean’ (Acts 10:14). Yet, Acts 10:28–29 tells us,

And [Peter] said to [Cornelius' household], ‘You know that it is forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or to approach a foreigner. And to me God has shown *that* I should call no man common or unclean. Therefore—and without raising any objection—I came *when I* was sent for. So I ask for what reason you sent for me.’

Furthermore, Peter was the head apostle. His ritual purity and leadership role were critical elements of his selection by God to be the witness of the vision and the first bearer of the gospel to the Gentiles (see Stern 1992:261). The testimony of a Jewish believer who was defiled or had no position of authority would not have carried the weight of someone with Peter's qualities and position.

Peter claimed that it is unlawful (10:28 in many English translations including the NIV, NASB, ESV, and NET¹²) for Jews to associate with Gentiles—yet, there is nothing written in the Law of Moses against it. Could Peter be referring to the Oral Law, regarded as authoritative even by Jesus (Matt 23:3)? Jewish association with Gentiles was not contrary to the Oral Law either, but rather, to strongly-held social customs enforced as *halakha*. Luke's choice of words implicitly supports this contention: it is ἀθέμιτος (*athemitos*) ‘forbidden’, as per the Holman Christian Standard Bible and LEB, not ἄνομος (*anomos*), ‘unlawful’.¹³

Tannaic *halakha* concerning Jew-Gentile fellowship was complicated by differences between Jewish sects following conflicting halakhot: some condemned it whilst others condoned it under certain conditions. Tomson (1990:230–236) gives examples of both sides, explaining

¹² The ESV Study Bible comments on the word ‘unlawful’, ‘Not in terms of violating OT commands but in the sense of not following the later customs of strict Jewish traditions about uncleanness. The Jewish traditions of purity made it virtually impossible for them to associate with Gentiles without becoming ritually unclean.’

¹³ William Tyndale's Worms octavo edition of 1526 was probably the first English Bible to use the word ‘unlawful’ in Acts 10:28: ‘an unlawfull thinge’, followed similarly by the Matthew's (1537) Bishops (1568), Geneva (1587) and KJV (1611) Bibles. Other early translations including the 14th century Wycliffe follow the Vulgate (‘abominatum’) to render ‘abhominable’ (abominable).

that the rabbis, who ruled against Jews having fellowship with Gentiles, were a minority, even within the Land. It would appear from Acts 10:28 that Peter held to this more conservative view, as did the circumcision party (11:2–3), and probably James (Gal 2:12–13) prior to the apostolic council in Acts 15. Thus, Jew-Gentile association could be regarded as ‘unlawful’, but only concerning a disputed *halakha* held by minority sects, not covenant law.

Stern (1992:258) goes further by saying even that ‘forbidden’ is too strong: ‘the word “*athemitos*”, used only twice in the New Testament, does not mean ‘unlawful, forbidden, against Jewish law’, ... but rather “taboo, out of the question, not considered right, against standard practice, contrary to cultural norms.”’ Bruce (1988:209), Witherington (1998:353), and Stott (1990:189) all agree that ‘taboo’ is preferred. Judaism has never formally classified Gentiles as ontologically unclean; rather, the prevalence of idolatry and sexual immorality in Gentile society—especially the pagan Greco-Roman society of the time—resulted in their uncleanness. For these reasons, Jewish rules were introduced to dissociate from Gentiles, reflected anachronistically in Jubilees 22:16, for example. Although such regulations did not carry scriptural authority, they did become engrained in Jewish thinking (see John 18:28). As Stern explains (1992:259), the classification of Gentile products and practices as unclean for Jews was probably extended to include Gentiles themselves, resulting in pervasive negative attitudes toward Gentiles. But contamination through Gentile-association was not automatic. Trade between Jews and Gentiles was common. Table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles is even mentioned in the Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 5:5) since ‘the coexistence with gentiles was accepted as a fact of life’ (Tomson 1990:158). The point here is that it was not, in fact, *unlawful* for Peter ‘to associate with or to approach a foreigner’, nor was Peter pronouncing the Law null and void by doing so. Instead, God had revealed to him that Gentiles are not intrinsically unclean and thus the taboo of associating with them was invalidated.

Bock (2007:389–390) mentions the Jewish tradition in Midrash Psalms 146:4 that God would one day (alluding to the days of the Messiah) declare all animals clean. This is not convincing evidence for his interpretation of Peter's vision. Firstly, the reference is to ‘[The LORD] sets prisoners free’ in Psalm 146:7; clearly, the link to cleansing of unclean food is tenuous at best. Moreover, the midrash is not decisive on this; it says ‘*Some say* that every creature that is considered unclean in the present world, the Holy One blessed be He will declare clean in the age to come’ (cited in Brown 2007:282, emphasis added). *Aggadic* material is not

authoritative, at least not in the evangelical tradition. The midrash is arguably contrary to Jeremiah 31:33; moreover, we are not living in 'the age to come', under the Messiah's reign over the nations from Jerusalem, as the tradition anticipated. Brown (2007:277) similarly objects to this application of the midrash to Mark 7:19 because, first of all, 'the disciples, for many years after this teaching, continued to follow the Torah, and second, that changing the law would contradict Yeshua's rebuke of the Pharisees', referring to Matthew 15:3–9.¹⁴

'Returning to the point that Jew-Gentile relations were not truly unlawful, it is important to note that Cornelius and almost certainly 'his relatives and close friends' who had come to hear Peter were God-fearers.¹⁵ They were thus respectful of Jewish Law, likely keeping the food laws themselves (Bruce 1952:215; NET Study Note on Acts 10:2 quoted in fn. 15 above). They certainly were not rank, immoral, pagan idolaters. Peter indicated that they were acceptable to God because they feared him and did what was right (10:35).¹⁶ This being the case, it is unlikely that there was any unclean food in Cornelius' house at all (Kinzer 2005:70). He used to do many charitable deeds for 'the people', almost certainly meaning the Jewish people (Bruce 1952:215; Stern 1992:257).¹⁷ He also prayed 'continually' (LEB; ESV) or 'regularly' (NET), literally, 'through everything' (διὰ παντός, *dia pantos*). He probably even prayed in accordance with the regular Jewish prayer times, since the angel appeared to him while he was praying at three o'clock in the afternoon (Acts 10:3, 30)—the hour for daily Jewish prayer. His piety was noted by God himself (10:4). At the time of the angelic encounter (Acts 10:3), Cornelius had no reason to believe that the Law was nullified though he must have realized that obeying God's instruction ran contrary to Jewish social mores. To

¹⁴ *Yeshua* is the Hebrew name for Jesus.

¹⁵ The NET study note on Acts 10:2 explains: 'The description of Cornelius as a *devout, God-fearing man* probably means that he belonged to the category called "God-fearers", Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel and in many cases kept the Mosaic law, but did not take the final step of circumcision necessary to become a proselyte to Judaism'. Contrary to other authors (Skarsaune 2002:82; Dunn 2006:166), Bock (2007:386) argues that Luke is probably not using 'God-fearer' as a technical term and that Cornelius may not have been a regular worshipper in the local synagogue. In light of the usual use of the word, this seems unlikely. Either way, Luke records that Cornelius feared, honoured, and prayed to the God of Israel.

¹⁶ Similarly, Paul's hearers in Acts 13:46–49, 18:6 and 28:28 were 'not just any Gentiles, but "God-fearers"' (Skarsaune 2002:171). Skarsaune (p. 172) justifies this claim by observing that 'Only twice in the whole of Acts does Paul address Gentiles who do not belong to the God-fearers'; on the first occasion (Acts 14:8) he was forced to, and the second occasion (Acts 17:16–34) was not his initiative either.

¹⁷ In Acts 10:35, Cornelius together with his family and close friends are described by Peter as those who did what was right. As noted by Bruce (1952:224), this may be an allusion to almsgiving since the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioṣunē*: righteousness) is צדקה (*ṣḏāqāh*), which was (and still is) commonly used in Jewish parlance to denote acts of charity.

him, as a Law-respecting God-fearer and one who esteemed Peter supremely (Acts 10:25), it would have been unthinkable to insult his Jewish guests by offering them unclean food. On three occasions, Luke mentioned the story of the Gentile, Cornelius, and his household believing the gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit (10:1–48; 11:1–18; 15:7–7). This triplet calls attention to the Gentile-cleansing theme, whilst ignoring food entirely.

Taken together, these facts refute the traditional Christian claim that Peter broke the law by eating with Cornelius, and further, that this proves he ate unclean food. 'The vision concerned men, not the menu' (Rudolph 2011:48). Dietary laws are not in scope in these events at all; the focus is entirely on a change in Jewish-Gentile relations, not being a change in the Law but in cultural tradition.

4.4 Events resulting from the vision

Acts 10:20 provides a clue to the meaning of the vision; the Spirit said to Peter, 'go down, and go with them—not hesitating at all, because I have sent them.' Peter was explicitly instructed by the Holy Spirit to go with the messengers from Cornelius, 'not hesitating', 'without doubting', 'not discriminating', as various translations say. Why would he have hesitated or doubted whether he should go with them, or discriminated against them? Because they were Gentiles: Cornelius was a Roman centurion (Acts 10:1), and his messengers were 'two of the household slaves and a devout soldier' (Acts 10:7). So, from the outset, we have a strong indication that the vision was about Gentiles.

FF Bruce (1988:206) appears to contradict himself in some measure: 'The divine cleansing of food in the vision is a parable of the divine cleansing of human beings in the incident to which the vision leads up. It did not take Peter long to understand this: "God has taught me", he says later in the present narrative, "to call *no human being* profane or unclean" (v. 30).'¹⁸ Why does Bruce write that the events of the vision were a parable and then take them literally? Bruce himself applied the italics to emphasize that the vision's message is about people, yet, he unquestioningly assumes it *also* to be about animals. He does, however, explain that there is a link between the two: consumption of unclean food by Gentiles makes them unclean, so the supposed cleansing of unclean animals thus also cleanses Gentiles. This

¹⁸ The reference to Acts 10:30 should be 10:28.

intertwined relationship is certainly of concern, but does not justify his conclusion. As already discussed, Gentiles are not defiled by eating unclean food because it is not unclean for them, and social relations between them and Jews do not defile the latter. The uncleanness of the Gentiles derived from immorality and idolatry, so the supposed cleansing of unclean animals would not have the effect that Bruce claims.

Stern (1992:258) notes on Acts 10:28 that Peter sought to avoid offending his Gentile hearers by referring to them not by the usual term, ἔθνος (*ethnos*: nation—typically used by Jews of any nation except Israel), which ‘could be interpreted as having a deprecatory nuance’ (citing Matthew 5:47) but rather by ἀλλόφυλος (*alloghulos*), ‘someone who belongs to another tribe’. As a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament this is particularly notable, and it hints that Peter has grasped the meaning of the vision. His comment, ‘God has shown *that* I should call no man common or unclean’ in 10:28 makes it explicit. This cannot be overemphasized, and Luke here used direct speech to stress the point. Peter explained that God showed him, through the vision, that Gentiles are not to be regarded as unclean. *The text interprets itself* without relying on other books of the New Testament, as the traditional Christian interpretation does—at risk. There is no indication whatsoever that the vision pertains to cleansing of unclean food. Thus, Peter's own uncertainty on the meaning of the vision (Acts 10:17, 19) was resolved by Acts 10:20 (discussed above) and 10:28. This is greatly reinforced by Acts 10:34–36:

So Peter opened *his* mouth *and* said, ‘In truth I understand that God is not one who shows partiality, but in every nation the one who fears him and who does what is right is acceptable to him. *As for* the message that he sent to the sons of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—this one is Lord of all ...’

Often overlooked is the fact that the ‘sheet’ Peter saw also contained clean animals; this is implicit in the reference to ‘all the four-footed animals ... of the earth’. Why would God pronounce clean animals which were never unclean to begin with? It is far more persuasive to interpret the mix of clean and unclean animals contained together in the ‘sheet’ as an image of the mixture of Jews and Gentiles, respectively, together in the Body of Christ—especially considering that Jews who believe in Christ are cleansed from sin in the same manner as Gentiles.

4.5 God's confirmation of Peter's interpretation

Acts 10:34–35 makes it clear, yet again, that the vision had taught Peter that God is not partial to Jews, but accepts anyone from any nation who 'fears him and does what is right.' It is worth noting that God's cleansing was not a universal cleansing of all people regardless of their behaviour; those who did not fear God or do what was right were not automatically cleansed.¹⁹ In Luke's wording, Peter 'opened *his* mouth', which indicates 'a solemn expression' (Bock 2007:295) or something of importance; Matthew used the same expression to introduce Jesus' benediction in Matthew 5:2. In addition, Peter's opening words 'in truth' (effectively a translation of 'amen') are used in scripture to convey importance. This is a meta-comment which serves 'to alert the reader that what follows the meta-comment is especially important' (Runge 2008a). Peter was not still pondering what the vision meant; he had fully grasped the meaning and presented it in the same sentence. His choice of words, whether in Greek or else in Aramaic (or even Hebrew) via an interpreter,²⁰ suggests that such people are not in any way inferior to the people of God; the Greek προσωπολήπτης (*prosōpolēptēs*, literally *lifter of faces*) in verse 34 alludes to the priestly blessing in which God is called upon to lift up his face on, or show favour to, the Israelites (Num 6:26; Bruce 1988:210). This emphasizes that God does not favour Israel over the Gentiles in charging sin (Bock 2007:396) and 'why judgment and accountability before God are keys to Peter's speech' (p. 402). Acts 10:36 carries this through: Jesus Christ is Lord of all—that is, *all nations*, not only Israel. God's *international* reign was anticipated by Israel's prophets (Isa 2:2–4; 25:6; 60:1–3; 66:18–20 and Zech 14:9; also see Bruce 1988:211–212) and commonly in the Psalms (22:27–28, 46:10 for example); a widely-held Jewish belief was that the Messiah would bring the nations under the reign of the one true God. Luke's description of the vision and subsequent events portrays God's kingdom as universal and non-discriminatory toward different *ethnos*, not that dietary laws are cancelled.

Peter went on immediately to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (10:37–43), upon which the Holy Spirit fell upon Peter's Gentile hearers (Acts 10:44), resulting in them speaking in

¹⁹ In this regard, I have already presented the godly lifestyle of Cornelius, who clearly harboured no anti-Semitic sentiment. Similarly, those Gentiles who first heard the gospel in Antioch were probably God-fearers who heard it being preached when they went to worship in the local synagogue (Skarsaune 2002:167).

²⁰ Bruce (1988:213) mentions there are a number of 'Aramaisms' in Peter's speech, suggesting that it may have originally been given in Aramaic.

tongues and praising God. By contrast, although the Samaritans and Ethiopian eunuch described in Acts 8 had believed the gospel and been baptised in water, they had not yet been given the Holy Spirit. Thus, God confirmed that Peter's interpretation of the vision was correct: the Gentiles were not to be regarded as unclean or common. This astonished the circumcised believers who accompanied Peter. They discussed the matter and concluded immediately that the believing Gentiles must be baptised. Yet again, the discourse is about Gentiles. Not a word has been spoken about cleansing of unclean food since the vision itself, nor have any events alluded to it.

4.6 Peter's defence and the church leaders' conclusion

Chapter 11 opens with news of a scandal: 'that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God'—not that the Law had come to an end. Acts 11:3 appears to raise both concerns—that Peter associated with uncircumcised men and ate with them, therefore, possibly eating unclean food. Yet, there is no explicit accusation that Peter broke the dietary regulations, only that he ate with uncircumcised men. Even if Cornelius and his household had eaten unclean food (most unlikely, as demonstrated earlier), this does not prove that Peter himself ate unclean food any more than a vegetarian sharing a meal with non-vegetarians proves that he ate meat. Note that Peter's defence (11:4–17) does not include any defence for eating unclean food; rather, he explains why he had gone to the Gentiles, preached to them, and baptised them. Peter's explanation in 11:12, that 'the Spirit told me to accompany them, not hesitating *at all*', or perhaps, 'making no distinction' (ESV) brings Jew-Gentile relations into focus. The silence on food speaks too loudly to be ignored. Indeed, one can infer that Peter did not, in fact, eat non-kosher food at Cornelius' home. He produced six witnesses in his defence²¹ (11:12): 'three times more than what would normally be required' by Jewish Law (NET study notes, alluding to Deut 19:15). This suggests that he had, by no means, broken or disregarded any of the written Law.

Luke created a tension for the reader in Acts 11:17 by describing how the former opponents of the Gentile mission first 'became silent' and then 'praised God', before the climax and conclusion of the entire pericope in verse 18: 'God has granted the repentance *leading* to life to the Gentiles also!' The Gentiles, though grammatically the indirect object, are brought to

²¹ Or seven by Jewish reckoning (that is, including Peter's own testimony); see Bruce 1952:232.

the front of the sentence (not counting the conjunctions)—before the subject ‘God’, verb (‘has granted’) and object (‘repentance *leading* to life’). Such fronting is typical in Koinē Greek as a means of stressing a term, in this case, *the Gentiles*. Further, Luke uses direct speech to emphasize this conclusion. All these literary devices convey the profundity of the conclusion. The final verse contains no hint whatsoever that those charging Peter concluded that their dietary laws had been rescinded, only that God has granted repentance unto life to Gentiles ‘also’. The ‘also’ that Luke uses is καί (*kai*), which when used adverbially (as here) indicates that additional information is provided (Runge 2008b), the content of which is explicitly stated. To add matters of food laws to it is simply eisegesis.

4.7 Conclusion of the textual analysis

The information that can be derived directly from the text, Acts 10:1–11:18, points clearly to a single meaning of Peter's vision, namely, that Gentiles are no longer to be regarded as unclean. Contrary to the traditional Christian interpretation, the meaning is not obviously that unclean foods have been cleansed, as revealed in the fact that Peter was puzzled about the meaning of the vision, and the fact that visions are symbolically interpreted, and that they generally have one primary meaning. That primary meaning has to be that the vision pertains to Gentiles, since it is the only undisputed meaning. The derivation of the traditional interpretation leans heavily on the misunderstanding that it was ‘unlawful’ for Jews to associate with Gentiles, which was neither according to Mosaic Law nor according to Oral Law. The events which followed the vision also confirm the ‘Gentile’ interpretation by virtue of the gift of the Spirit to them and by Peter's own confession in 10:28, 34–35. The assumption that Peter ate unclean food with Cornelius has been shown to be very unlikely, Cornelius being a God-fearer who had the greatest respect for Peter. The accusation against Peter by the church leaders and ‘those of the circumcision’ (11:2–3) in Jerusalem did not explicitly state that he ate unclean food, but rather, that he had table fellowship with them. Neither did his defence (11:4–17) contain any justification for his supposed eating of unclean food, thus undermining the abovementioned assumption. Finally, I noted that Luke used several literary devices to emphasize the one and only conclusion reached by all his hearers, that ‘God has granted the repentance *leading* to life to the Gentiles also’ (11:18).

5. Analysis of the contextual evidence

5.1 Contextual evidence in Acts

5.1.1 *Preceding context*

There is little contention that the Jewish believers in Jesus remained Torah-observant, at least until the events of Acts 10. The great Pharisee, who formerly had disciplined Paul, Gamaliel the Elder, bravely protected the apostles from execution, suggesting that the Jesus-movement might even be 'of God' (Acts 5:27–40). This would be most unlikely if they were living contrary to Jewish law. Skarsaune (2002:154–155) explains the reasons for the two waves of persecution of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 5:17–41; 7:54–8:3), neither of which had anything to do with abandoning the Law. In fact, Acts 6:8–15 describes how Diaspora Jews residing in Jerusalem *falsely* accused Steven of speaking against the law and the temple. Skarsaune (2002:160–162) further presents a case for the early Jewish believers continuing in Torah-observance except for the cult—at least *atonement* sacrifices which were 'superfluous' (p. 161)—long after Peter's vision. For example, Paul's sacrifice in Acts 21:23–26 was 'votive'—a type of thanksgiving offering—not atoning (p. 157, fn. 22).

The historical context reveals an ever-widening circle of peoples to whom the gospel was proclaimed, from Jews in Jerusalem to Samaritans (semi-Jewish but widely regarded by Jews as outcasts) in Acts 8 and then, in the same chapter, to the Ethiopian eunuch. His pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost indicates that he was either a proselyte to Judaism or a God-fearer (though in either case he was unable to enter the Temple due to his emasculation, Deut 23:1). In Acts 10, the gospel was preached more widely to a select group of God-fearers and by the time of Acts 18:6–11, Paul was ministering freely to Gentiles in Corinth. Peter's vision of the 'sheet' was pivotal to this development which changed the course of history forever. On the other hand, the presumed abrogation of Jewish dietary laws by means of Peter's vision is not even mentioned within the broader historical context of events described in Acts,²² nor is the Law as a whole abolished.

²² Acts 15:1–31 is discussed under the next section below.

While in Joppa, Peter was hosted by Simon, the tanner. Luke mentioned Simon's occupation three times (Acts 9:43, 10:6 and 10:32) which hints at something significant. 'Some degree of uncleanness was reckoned to attach to a tanner's work, because it involved regular contact with the skins of dead animals' (Bruce 1988:200). 'Tanning was an unpleasant and despised trade, regarded as a defect and ground for divorce, or to be kept at a distance, like corpses and graves (*m. Ketuboth* 7.10; *Baba Bathra* 2.9)' (Dunn 2006:97 fn. 70). Simon's potential uncleanness derived from his trade; there is no suggestion that he ate anything unclean—given Peter's convictions (Acts 10:14); he would not have stayed with Simon if that were the case. The issue Luke was preparing his readers for was that those regarded as unclean were, in fact, not.

Luke provides another clue as to the meaning of Peter's vision by way of parallel in the story of Paul's encounter with the Lord, resulting in his coming to faith (Acts 9:1–20). The Lord told Ananias to seek Paul 'because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel' (9:15). The surprise is not only in the fact that the very man who hated Jesus' disciples would be chosen, but also, in the fact that he is chosen to testify of Jesus to *Gentiles* and their kings (since Israel had no king). Luke was careful to emphasize this in his ordering of those who would hear Paul: first Gentiles, then Gentile kings, and lastly the sons of Israel. Again, the focus is on Gentiles, not food.

The story immediately confirms this with the account of an angelic appearance (Acts 10:3) to Cornelius, who was not only Gentile but also a centurion of the Roman army occupying the Jewish homeland. However, Luke is careful to qualify Cornelius as 'devout and fearing God together with all his household, doing many charitable deeds for the people and praying to God [continually]' (Acts 10:2). Though Luke is simply following chronological order, in the stories of Paul's divine encounter, the mention of Simon's tanning business, and the angelic appearance to Cornelius, the reader is being prepared for a significant shift in the Gentiles' relation to God. None of these incidents allude to a change in Jewish dietary law, or the Law in general.

The events described in Acts 11:19–26 may have occurred after those of 10:1–11:18, but it would appear that they took place earlier, and that Luke deliberately told the story of Peter's vision first so that the reader was prepared for 11:20, in which the gospel was proclaimed to Gentiles in Antioch.

Luke certainly highlights the significance of the Cornelius episode with the benefit of hindsight: he has inserted it (Acts 9.32–11.18) together with the account of Paul's conversion (Acts 9.1–31) into the otherwise unbroken sequence of Hellenist history (Acts 6.1–8.40; 11.19–30) so that in his narrative at least it clearly precedes the breakthrough at Antioch (Dunn 2006:165).

Two hints that the evangelising of Hellenists²³ in Antioch in Acts 11:20 took place before the Cornelius incident are given. Firstly, the evangelists from Cyprus and Cyrene are described as moving to Antioch right after the scattering of believers from Jerusalem 'because of the persecution that took place over Stephen' (11:19, see 8:1). This was before Peter and John's trip to Samaria, the time of peace in the region (9:31) and Peter's work in the coastal areas (9:32–43), and it triggered the Jerusalem church to send Barnabas to Antioch to inspect the matter, who evidently approved (11:22–24). Secondly, there is no indication that the Spirit was given to the Hellenists in Antioch at that time. If the Hellenists were indeed Gentiles, it implies their acceptance by those who formerly considered them unclean, which may have motivated Luke to delay the narration till after the Cornelius incident. This would support the interpretation of the unclean animals in Peter's vision as representing Gentiles, being an example of their acceptance by Jews, whilst adding nothing to the claim that the animals also represented unclean food.

5.1.2 *Post-vision evidence*

Interpreting Peter's vision as an abolition of the food laws runs contrary to the whole of Luke's writings, the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles*, which constitute one quarter of the New Testament. Luke and the apostles, whose story he narrates, uphold the Law at every point. James especially was known for his Torah-observance (James 2:8–12 [see Bauckham 1999:142 on this]; Painter 2001:54–57; *Ant. 20.200–201*²⁴). Hegesippus, cited in

²³ The interpretation of Hellenists as 'Greeks', that is, Gentiles, is not certain because the word Ἑλληνιστῆς (*Hellēnistēs*) could refer to Greek-speaking Jews (as in Acts 6:1), according to the LEB study notes. Other study Bibles such as the ESV and NET disregard this possibility. Given the placement of this passage relative to the Cornelius incident, and the fact that the disciples in Antioch were called Christians (11:26) instead of Nazarenes or Jews, I submit that the Hellenists were, in fact, Gentiles.

²⁴ Here, James is falsely accused of breaking the law, but later (too late to spare his life), he was defended by those most committed to the Law—probably the Pharisees (see Skarsaune 2002:160).

Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.2–18, indicates that James was highly regarded by devout Jewish leaders. As for Paul, Carson and Moo (2005:293) state, 'the Paul of Acts is utterly loyal to the law ...' The central question of the 'Jerusalem council', or 'apostolic council', described in Acts 15:1–31 is whether or not the *Gentile* believers in Jesus are to be subjected to the Law. This would make no sense if the Jewish believers had concluded from Peter's vision that the Law was abrogated for themselves; in that case the group of Pharisees mentioned in 15:5 would have criticised the apostles for forsaking the Law. Rather, 'the Jewish obligation to maintain Jewish identity was universally presupposed' (Soulen 1996:171). Kinzer (2005:67) argues, 'If one was a Jew, one was not just free to live as a Jew, one was obligated to do so. Otherwise, the issue of Gentile obligation to live as a Jew would have been nonsensical.' Moreover, Peter's address to the council in 15:7–11 refers to God's acceptance of Cornelius' household without coming under the Law, yet Peter retained a crisp distinction between 'we' (Jewish believers) and 'they' (Gentile believers). This too would be meaningless if the Law had been abolished. God made 'no distinction' (15:9) in terms of how Jews and Gentiles are saved, yet Peter, in his speech to the council in Jerusalem, made a distinction between Israel and the nations, consistent with the rest of scripture (discussed below).

Skarsaune is most helpful in showing that the aim is to remove any remaining cause for offence prohibiting table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. A lengthy quote from Skarsaune (2002:170) concerning the stipulations imposed by the Jerusalem council upon Gentile believers is warranted:

Gentile believers are told to make a concession to their Jewish brethren: they should not eat meat sacrificed to idols, or meat from strangled animals, that is, meat with blood in it (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). In the Torah the stranger living among Israelites, the 'resident alien,' was told to observe these commandments: 'If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens that reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood' (Lev 17:10; cf. further Lev 18:26; 20:2).

In the light of this, the meaning of the 'apostolic decree' becomes clear: the Gentiles need not become circumcised Jews in order to be fully accepted into the people of God, but they are requested to keep those commandments of the

Torah which are obligatory for Gentiles living among Jews. Among these commands, special emphasis is laid on those related to *table fellowship*—*in other words, the decree is specifically aimed at the unity of mixed congregations* [emphasis added]. The Jewish believers are asked to recognize their uncircumcised brethren as belonging fully to the new people of the Messiah, while the Gentiles are asked to respect the sensitivities of their Jewish brethren and not to violate the Torah commandments valid for Gentiles living among Israelites.

It is important to note that James' implicit appeal to the Torah validates its continuing authority over Jews, rather than disregarding it. It would be incongruent for James to use the Torah as a basis for a commandment to Gentile believers if the Torah itself had been abrogated. Moreover, we see once again that the context is about Jew-Gentile relations, which were ultimately made possible because of the message of Peter's vision in which the unclean animals clearly portray Gentiles. Indeed, it is in this context that Peter's interpretation of his vision (10:28) is implicitly referred to; apparently, he had explained it to James (15:14), who further validated it from the prophets Amos (9:11–12) and Isaiah (45:21). The NET study note on Acts 15:17 points out that James 'demonstrated a high degree of cultural sensitivity when he cited a version of the text (the Septuagint) that Gentiles would use'. Clearly, James understood Peter's vision to pertain to the cleansing of Gentiles, not unclean food.

In Acts 18:7–11, Luke records that Paul lived for a year and a half with Titius Justus, 'a worshiper of God', or 'a God-fearer', as the LEB footnote to verse 7 explains. Acts 21:17–26 further refutes the theory that the apostles deduced from Peter's vision that the Law was nullified. In 21:20, 'James, and all the elders' listened gladly to the success of Paul's Gentile mission before proudly telling him how their Jewish mission was prospering. In it, they boasted that many myriads of Jews had come to faith in Jesus, 'and they are all zealous adherents of the law.' Stern (1992:300) points out that *πόσαι μυριάδες* literally means 'many tens of thousands', not just 'many thousands' as English Bibles usually say. Instead of despairing of such fanaticism for the Law, they raised a concern to the contrary: that Paul was *falsely accused* of 'teaching all the Jews *who are* among the Gentiles *the* abandonment of Moses, telling them not to circumcise *their* children or to live according to *our* customs'

(10:21). The remainder of the passage describes steps taken to prove just the opposite; these were proposed by James and the elders, and willingly accepted by Paul. Later, in Acts 28:17–18, Paul adamantly denied doing anything contrary to Judaism; how could he do so if he had abandoned the Law? On the other hand, the joyous reception of news about Paul's Gentile mission shows that the elders acknowledged that Gentiles had been cleansed by their faith. Often overlooked is the fact that the Jewish mission would have been hindered by abrogation of the Law, since Jews would be offended by it. If Jew-Gentile table fellowship was not prohibited by Mosaic Law in the first place, as I have already shown, then, the net effect of repealing food laws would be detrimental to the growth of the church.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that Luke portrays the apostles, elders, and myriads of other Jewish believers as continuing in a strictly Torah-observant lifestyle, whilst accepting on equal terms Gentiles who had come to faith even without taking on the Law—except the few regulations specified in Acts 15:20 which enabled table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.

5.2 Contextual evidence in the New Testament

The New Testament contains a number of references to the eating of unclean—or potentially unclean—food (e.g. Mark 7:19; Rom 14:14–15; 1 Cor 8–10), and the traditional Christian interpretation is that all foods have been cleansed for all believers. This has been challenged by a number of scholars (among others, Brown 2007; Leman 2005; Kinzer 2005; Nanos 1996; Rudolph 2011; Stern 2007; Zetterholm 2009). They argue that these verses indicate that all foods (except strangled animals; see Acts 15:20²⁵) are clean for Gentiles—as they always have been. This does not imply they are *ritually* clean for Jews—even Jewish believers in Jesus. The uncleanness of these animals stems not from some quality they possess, but from God's intention to separate a people, Israel, unto himself. Animals cannot be intrinsically unclean because God made them (see Mark 7:18–19 and Rom 14:14; Brown 2011:205–206). 'The Hebrew expressions *tohoRAH* (cleanness, purity) and *tumAH*

²⁵ Strangled animals might be forbidden because they are not drained of their blood, the drinking of which appears to be precluded in this verse (for reasons discussed above), though 'blood' may also refer to bloodshed (Stern 1992:277–279; Bivin 2007:141–144). Food sacrificed to idols may also be forbidden in this verse—as the NIV translates it—but the argument for this is not conclusive.

(uncleanness, impurity) are technical terms that have no positive or negative connotations' (Safrai 2012).

The fact that Peter and other Jewish believers withdrew from eating with the Gentiles in Galatians 2:12–13 does not prove that they ate the same food; the issue at hand was table fellowship, not food laws (see Lancaster 2011:82–83; Rudolph 2011:47–48; Tomson 1990:221–281; Zetterholm 2005); the same argument is used of Peter eating with Gentiles in Acts 10, as discussed below. Referring to the Paul-Peter conflict in Galatians 2:11–14, Rudolph (2011:49) says the assumption 'that Paul consistently lived as a Gentile and expected Peter to do the same is contradicted by the standard interpretation of 1 Cor 9:19–23 that Paul sometimes lived like a Jew. But, if Paul "occasionally conformed to Jewish law" to win others, how could he correct Peter for doing what appears to be the same thing?' Thus, the cause for the conflict was indeed close association with Gentiles, not the eating of unclean food.

Table fellowship was a major cultural issue in the Middle East; it was something Jesus' atonement addressed (Eph 2:14–16) but the unity he created does not necessarily imply homogeneity. R Kendall Soulen explains, 'the gospel and the table fellowship it founds *confirms* rather than *annuls* the different and mutual dependence of Israel and the nations' (1996:169). Indeed, Paul's allusions to the *Shema* (Deut 6:4) in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:6, and 1 Timothy 2:5 implicitly require an on-going differentiation between Israel and the nations: if Gentiles have to become Jewish to follow Jesus, then God is not the God of the nations, but only of Israel; if Jews have to lose their Jewish identity to follow Jesus, then God is no longer the God of Israel (Rom 3:3; 11:1, 29).²⁶ Jewish believers who forsake the Law neglect Paul's 'rule in all the churches' (1 Cor 7:17–24) in which he instructed Jewish believers to remain Jewish. His comment in verse 18 is often misinterpreted to mean the Law is annulled, whereas he was really proclaiming equality of circumcised and uncircumcised. 7:18b actually emphasizes the importance of keeping the commandments of God, that is, the Torah.²⁷

²⁶ For further discussion on the oneness of God in relation to his reign over all nations, see Nanos 1996:184 and Bauckham 2008:94–106. Also refer to Zechariah 14:9.

²⁷ For a comprehensive study on this text, refer to Rudolph 2010.

Jesus neither broke the food laws nor taught that they would be rescinded (Matt 5:18). Following a discussion on Mark 7:19b, in which he argues that it is written for Gentiles, Kinzer (2005:57) writes, 'the Gospel of Mark as a whole presents Yeshua as an observant Jew who never undercuts accepted Jewish practice.' Further, 'Matthew and Luke give no support to the view that Yeshua abolished the Jewish food laws' (p. 58). As for Acts and the Pauline writings, Kinzer continues, they 'show that eating with Gentiles was a major hurdle for Jewish Yeshua-believers—even apart from the issue of nonkosher food. If Yeshua abolished the Jewish dietary laws, then why did his Jewish followers (such as Peter in Acts 10) require special divine intervention before they would even sit at table with non-Jews?' Rudolph (2011:48) concurs: 'Three times Peter rejects Jesus' instruction to kill and eat impure (κοινόν) and unclean (ἀκάθαρτον) animals (Acts 10:14–16). This implies that Peter had never received such a teaching or example from Jesus.' Validating or disproving whether these New Testament verses abrogate the Jewish food laws is not my concern here; my point is that there is a strong case against the traditional view that requires consideration. More importantly, none of the food-related texts outside of Acts refer to Peter's vision. Even if it were conclusively shown that dietary laws have been rescinded in other books of the New Testament, they do not derive from Peter's vision.

God's purpose in the cleansing proclaimed in the vision also needs serious consideration. Few would argue with Bock (2007:390) that it was 'to expand the gospel'. However, the object of cleansing dictates how one understands this. Bock follows the traditional Christian interpretation that the vision pertains to both food and Gentiles; he believes table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus was impossible if they were subject to different dietary regulations. Cleansing of unclean animals would not affect Gentiles, so the purpose would be to release Jews from their kosher diet, thereby allowing them to eat with Gentiles. As discussed above, however, the Mosaic Law does not prohibit Jew-Gentile table fellowship, on condition that those Gentiles keep to basic morals that Jews believed God required of all humanity. These minimal moral regulations 'are simply an early version of the so-called Noahide commandments, described in later rabbinic literature (first in *t. 'Abod. Zar.* 8.4), defining who could be considered a righteous non-Jew' (Zetterholm 2009:151, summarizing Nanos 1996).

Judaism has never required Gentiles to observe what have been called 'identity markers' or 'boundary markers' (Dunn 1990:196, 2006:139 respectively), 'border lines' (Boyarin 2006) or 'sign laws' (meaning laws identifying members of the Mosaic Covenant) that distinguish Jews from Gentiles: primarily circumcision, Sabbath, and food laws. Instead, as the apostle James later formalized, it was enough for Gentiles to 'abstain from the pollution of idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood' (Acts 15:20). The issue that the Jerusalem council sought to address was how unity (particularly as exhibited in table fellowship) between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus may be achieved; the decree it issued did not indicate that all foods have been cleansed, and therefore, Gentiles who eat unclean foods. Rather, it stated that Jews and Gentiles are saved by the same grace (Acts 15:11), that 'God first concerned himself to take from among the Gentiles a people for his name' (15:14), alluding to Peter's vision and interpreting it as pertaining to Gentiles, not foods. This implied that Gentiles are acceptable (not unclean) if only they observe the very minimum of moral laws.

It is difficult to comprehend why God would annul the very laws he had recently affirmed in Matthew 5:17–19,²⁸ and which he uses to distinguish Israel from the nations for his purposes, regardless of its spiritual condition (Rom 11:28–29). Indeed, 'the author of Romans 9:4–5 and 11:1–6 ... could not possibly have told believing Jews to stop being Jews' (Skarsaune 2002:173). 'Tomson argues that all of Paul's letters were exclusively directed to non-Jewish Jesus believers and concerned problems pertaining to their specific situation' (Zetterholm 2009:1535, referring to Tomson [1990]). By retaining a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the body of Christ, there is no contradiction between the enduring validity of the Law (for Jews) and New Testament scriptures which give instructions (to Gentiles) not to take on the Law. The apostles also retained Jew-Gentile distinction after Peter's vision *even amongst believers* in Acts 21:18–25. Such distinction is entirely consistent with God's promises in Jeremiah 31:35–37 and 33:25–26, and since it is precisely observance of the Law which creates that distinction—outwardly, at least—one has to question whether God would cancel the sign laws. Exodus 31:12–17 provides a good example of a 'sign' that God

²⁸ I find the traditional Christian interpretation—that the Law is annulled by Christ's fulfillment of it—unconvincing; fulfillment does not mean nullification. Matthew 5:18 clearly states that the Law will prevail 'until heaven and earth pass away'. Christians wrongly nullify this strong statement of Jesus by arguing that the Law remains but is no longer applicable. If Jesus berated the Pharisees and the scribes for nullifying the word of God for the sake of their tradition, what would he say to the church?

commanded Israel to keep 'forever'. The setting apart of Israel from the nations and the question of on-going Torah-observance for Jewish believers in Jesus are beyond the scope of this paper,²⁹ but, were nevertheless taken for granted by Peter and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

5.3 Conclusion of the contextual evidence

There is no biblical evidence outside of the Acts 10:1–11:18 pericope that Peter's vision was to have a double interpretation (relating both to Gentiles and to food), neither elsewhere in Acts nor in the rest of the New Testament. To the contrary, Jewish believers described in the New Testament—and *especially* in Acts—sought to keep the Mosaic Law, indicating that they understood Peter's vision to mean that Gentiles had been cleansed, not unclean food. The contextual evidence presented provides supporting evidence for the conclusion reached in the textual analysis of the pericope itself. What remains is to examine the history of the early church for any further evidence to support or contradict this outcome.

6. Historical analysis

6.1 The testimony of history as a hermeneutic

If the interpretation derived above is correct, one would expect it to be supported by subsequent church history. In the introduction to *Elusive Israel*, Charles Cosgrove (1997:xi) asks, 'What ought Christians do when faced with conflicting interpretations of scripture?' He explains that the 'plain grammatical sense' of a text—as sought after by the Reformers—is not always adequate to determine its meaning. Thus, theologians turned to 'historical biblical theology' late in the eighteenth century, hoping that 'sound and honest exegesis could provide clarity and certainty about obscure texts.' This, too, was inadequate in some cases, leaving the church to rely on earlier scholarship, which itself was not always in consensus (xii); 'many questions of exegesis cannot be historically resolved, because the texts themselves are irreducibly ambiguous.' A solution Cosgrove offers is that 'canonical interpretation requires, by its very nature, a hermeneutic of use' to adjudicate between

²⁹ I intend to examine these matters in later papers. Suffice it to say the 'unity' texts (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14–16; Col 3:9–11) do not speak of Jew-Gentile homogenisation, and the 'no distinction' texts (Acts 15:9; Rom 3:22–23; 10:12) relate to common human sinfulness and means of salvation, not dissolution of Jew-Gentile boundaries.

‘competing plausible interpretations’ (xiii). He proposes that Christians should consider the *purpose* of scripture as expressed in Matthew 22:37–40; that is, ‘interpretive judgments should be guided by the command ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Using this, Kinzer (2005:33–38) develops ‘hermeneutics of ethical accountability’ in which ‘we must not only employ abstract and theoretical criteria for evaluating theological claims; we must also have recourse to practical or functional criteria for determining theological truth’ (p. 33). In short, bad hermeneutics results in bad ethics and a failure to fulfil what Jesus called the second greatest commandment, referring to Leviticus 19:18. Given the textual and contextual evidence already presented in this paper, I do not believe there remains any ambiguity in the meaning of Peter’s vision. Nevertheless, if my case is sound then Cosgrove’s ‘hermeneutic of use’ should confirm it.

6.2 Historical evidence

Historical evidence shows conclusively that many Jewish believers continued to observe the law for several centuries after the canon was closed, or at least as much of it as possible after the razing of the temple in 70 AD. These included the Nazarenes who, unlike the Ebionites, held to a high christology (Juster 1995:135–140). Kinzer (2005:181–209) describes on-going difficulties within the *ekklesia* to resolve this matter as late as Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Obviously, Jewish believers did not believe that the Law was abrogated, nor had they been taught that through the apostolic tradition. Rather, they believed that they were to continue to live as Jews in unity with Gentile believers who observed at least the four commandments of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:20). They clearly did not take Peter’s vision to mean that food laws were abrogated. Applying Cosgrove’s hermeneutic of use; one would conclude that the Law is still binding on Jewish believers.

After the first century, the Jewish believers suffered a great loss in numbers (Juster 1995:139–140), whereas the Gentile mission prospered in spite of numerous Roman persecutions. Once the church came to be dominated and led by Gentiles, scriptures, warning Gentiles against becoming Jewish to be better or ‘more complete’ Christians (that is, Judaising, as in Galatians) were applied to Jewish believers; they were sometimes forced to abandon the sign laws, including kosher diets. The anti-Jewish polemics of some of the Church Fathers (particularly Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr) show that they wished that Jewish believers would cut all ties with Judaism. Kinzer (2005:187–197) presents a

synopsis of anti-Jewish and antinomian writings in five ante-Nicene fathers, who were all seeking to oppose the 'Judaizing' of believers, namely, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and the authors of the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Epistle to Diognetus*. As far as I can ascertain, their writings do not contain any reference to the abolition of food laws in connection with Peter's vision, in spite of their beliefs. The writer of the *Epistle of Barnabas* (Barnabas 10) validated the Mosaic Law as eternally binding, but then allegorized it altogether. Skarsaune (2002:221) suggests that whoever wrote *Barnabas* was unable to reconcile his own life outside the Law with his belief in its eternal validity; thus, he spiritualised all the purity laws. Irenaeus (*A.H. III* 12.7) was the only one who commented on Peter's vision, interpreting the unclean animals as a reference to Gentiles. He gave no hint that it should be taken also as a literal reference to the cleansing of unclean food. His main concern at that point was to demonstrate that the God of the Mosaic Covenant is the same God as that of the New Covenant, stating that the vision was to teach Peter that the same God who distinguished between clean and unclean through the Law was the God who had cleansed Gentiles by the blood of Jesus.

Kinzer (2005:201–205) refers to an exchange of letters between Augustine and Jerome around the start of the fifth century concerning the permissibility, even appropriateness, of Jewish 'Yeshua-believers' observing the Law. In the 426 AD, Augustine completed the fourth book of *On Christian Doctrine*. In 20.39, where he argued against Christian subjection to the Law, he quoted from Galatians 4, but did not mention Acts 10. Similarly, in his writings against the Manichaeans (14.35), he referred to both Paul's comments on unclean food in 1 Corinthians 8:7–13, but did not mention Peter's vision. From this we can assume that although he took the Law to be annulled, he did not reach that conclusion from Peter's vision. Kinzer (2005:206) argues that 'like Irenaeus and Augustine ... Aquinas seeks to combine reverence for the ceremonies of the Mosaic law with the firm conviction that their observance is no longer valid.' This is similar to the explanation Skarsaune posits about the dilemma that led to the author of *Barnabas* allegorizing Jewish ceremonial laws, though Aquinas apparently used a different approach, comparing Jewish observance with fulfilled prophecy. Paraphrasing Michael Wyschogrod, Kinzer (2005:207) demonstrates that 'both Thomas [Aquinas] and Augustine ... begin with their conclusion, which is for them an incontrovertible article of ecclesiastical tradition, and then work backward. They struggle to find theological justification for an established teaching that is difficult to defend.'

6.3 Conclusion of the historical evidence

There seems to be no historical evidence from the patristic period that Peter's vision was used to justify the requirement for Jewish believers to forsake the sign laws. Not even the Apostolic Fathers, let alone the later Church Fathers, appealed to Acts 10:9–16 in arguing against Christian Torah-observance. Moreover, the fact that Jewish believers continued for centuries to keep the sign laws, including food laws, testifies against the dual interpretation of Peter's vision. Cosgrove's test of love for one's neighbour, and Kinzer's hermeneutic of ethical accountability, applied to the church's efforts to 'Gentilize' its Jewish members—sometimes forcibly—agree with this conclusion. Bad attitudes and ethical behaviour towards Jews, including Messianic Jews, exposes bad exegesis concerning the validity of the Torah for them. This, in turn, undermines the interpretation that the cleansing of unclean animals in Peter's vision literally meant that unclean foods have been cleansed for Jews.

Conclusion and implications

The long-term and widespread propagation of the traditional dual interpretation of Peter's vision has become so deeply ingrained in collective Christian psyche that it is difficult to challenge, regardless of the evidence. Yet, there is nothing in this passage (Acts 10:1–11:18) to support the argument that the Law is done away with, nor that Peter's vision was an injunction by God to forsake the food commandments. On the contrary, the text repeatedly affirms that the vision was about God's cleansing of the Gentiles. This passage, and specifically the vision it describes, does not address the Law at all. As I have sought to show, the narrative itself contains the interpretation of the vision, as indeed confirmed by God himself. Moreover, the study of the context of the passage within Acts strongly supports the contention that Gentile inclusion is the vision's theme, and that the Law was assumed to remain in force for Jewish believers in Jesus. I also showed the same is true in the broader context of the New Testament, and that this understanding did not simply disappear after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, but continued amongst Jewish believers throughout the patristic period. Even movements to 'de-Judaize' Jewish believers did not use that text to justify their intentions. Modern Gentile readers have difficulty in grasping the enormity that termination of the Mosaic Law would have meant for the Jewish believers. Such a dramatic

change would certainly have had to be made by the apostles in an *explicit* proclamation to all Jewry, yet, the book of Acts nowhere mentions any such announcement.

In the light of all the evidence presented, I submit that readers who insist that the vision annulled food laws are 'shoe-horning' the text onto their belief system, projecting it onto their predetermined theological grid. I would also call for serious review of food- and law-related passages in the New Testament in the light of work done by modern scholars³⁰ who challenge the notion that the Mosaic Law is abrogated for Jews, particularly those in the New Covenant. Their work deserves a hearing in mainstream Christian theology, particularly since they have responded thoroughly and respectfully to this aspect of traditional Christian theology.

Many Christians are troubled by the suggestion that certain aspects of the Law are still binding on Jews, especially Jews who believe in Jesus. Paul wrote that 'Christ *is the* end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Rom 10:4), yet he also argued that our faith upholds the law (Rom 3:28). In my estimation, the church's traditional explanation of the apparent contradictions so common in Paul (both his life as recorded in Acts, and his writings) and the Torah-faithfulness of the other apostles is inadequate. It is based largely on an antinomian reading of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. Rudolph (2011) attacks the use of 1 Corinthians 9:19–24 to explain Paul as a so-called 'chameleon' evangelist who only pretended to be Jewish when evangelising Jews. Plausible alternative interpretations of Paul's understanding and application of the Law *are* found in the literature, sometimes referred to as the 'radical new perspective on Paul', conveniently summarized in Zetterholm (2009). I would call upon troubled readers to seriously examine these alternatives without pre-commitment to a particular faith tradition.

The Holocaust triggered a marked change in Christian theology, particularly Replacement Theology, and initiated a renewal of the Jewish mission, which has been particularly fruitful over the past four decades (Harvey 2009:2). The hermeneutic of ethical accountability (Kinzer 2005) and test of love (Cosgrove 1997) should be applied by the church to its doctrines pertaining to Israel and the Law. I submit that this would engender a restoration of

³⁰ To name a few: Mark Kinzer, Joseph Shulam, Hilary Le Cornu, David Rudolph, Mark Nanos, Peter Tomson, Michael Wyschogrod, Jacob Jervell, Daniel Thomas Lancaster, Derek Leman, Markus Bockmuehl, Daniel Juster, and David Stern.

Jewish-Christian relations in which the church not only abandons the triumphalist attitude that emerged in the time of Constantine, but also adopts the humble attitude of indebtedness and gratitude to the Jewish people that Paul promoted (Rom 9:1–5; 11:17–18; 15:25–27). To some extent, this has already begun, but there are deeper dimensions to explore, including the nature and composition of the *ekklesia* (e.g. Kinzer 2005). Further to this, I would call on Christian theologians to review the doctrines which they have inherited from tradition after serious study of first-century *halakha*; the lack of understanding of *halakha* played a very significant role in the church's (mis)interpretation of what was 'unlawful' about Peter's visit to Cornelius (Acts 10:28), resulting in an uncritical reinforcement of the very texts used to sustain this misinterpretation.

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3. Paper Two: *Diakrinō* and Jew-Gentile distinction in Acts 11:12

Abstract

A textual analysis of the word *diakrinō* in Acts 11:12 is undertaken to see if the verse contradicts the theory that Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus remain distinct in a theologically significant manner, as some English translations imply. The study finds no clear evidence in the text to sustain the translation that there is ‘no distinction’ between the two. *Diakrinō* in Acts 11:12 is very unlikely to denote distinction in the sense of differentiation, and even less likely to indicate wavering or doubting on account of the distinction which observant Jews like Peter made between fellow Jews and Gentiles. Instead, *diakrinō* in this text is most likely intended to denote contestation or dispute: Peter was told to obey *without dispute*, not *without making distinction* between Gentiles and Jews.

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Author’s remarks: This paper was written for the sake of completeness in the search for evidence of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction being made in Acts. Although shorter and more technical than the other papers, it provides a helpful review of the key word, *diakrinō*, and highlights the hazard of basing translation options on one’s own theological preference.

In this and subsequent papers, I shifted from using the transliteration *halakha*, used in the previous paper (following Peter Tomson), to *halakhah*.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

In the book of Acts, Luke made use of the word *diakrinō* in the negative to express that there is ‘no distinction’ between Jewish and Gentile believers. This denial of distinction occurs Acts 15:9 and, depending on the English Bible used, sometimes also in 11:12. It is not surprising, therefore, that these texts have been used to support the teaching that the former distinction between Jews and Gentiles, found throughout the Old Testament, is erased among those who believe in Christ. That is, there is no essential difference between a Jewish believer and a Gentile believer; their ethnicity and prior faith traditions are inconsequential. (The same conclusion may be reached by one or a combination of other NT texts which appear to refute intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction: Ephesians 2:15; Romans 3:22; 10:12; Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11, each in its context.) Cultural differences may persist, but these are not of any theological importance. Given the background of biblical evidence that Israel is to retain a particular role in God’s purposes (e.g. Jer 31:35–37; 33:25–26; Rom 11), and the evangelical³¹ assumption that the canon is consistent (see the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978), one is faced with a dilemma: how can we reconcile these apparently contradictory claims? If the Bible is wholly true,³² the texts supporting one or other side of the argument must have been misinterpreted. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the phrase ‘no distinction’ in Acts 11:12 has been accurately understood by Christian faith tradition, or if it may be reasonably interpreted in a manner that allows for intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. The case of 15:9 will be considered separately elsewhere.

Acts 11:5–18 tells of Peter’s defence against certain circumcised believers in Jerusalem who criticized (*diakrinō*) him for visiting, and eating with, uncircumcised men (11:1–3). In his response, in 11:12, Peter recounted the words of the Holy Spirit to him which Luke had already recorded in Acts 10:20. Peter said that ‘the Spirit told me to accompany them, not hesitating *at all*’ (11:12).³³ However, some English translations including the RSV (1971), NRSV (1989) and ESV (2001) state that the Spirit instructed Peter to accompany the men

³¹ I use ‘evangelical’ in the sense indicated under the headings *Purpose* and *Doctrinal Basis* of the *Editorial Policy of Conspectus* (2014 17:131–132) which affirms the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

³² This is another evangelical axiom expressed, for example, in the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Chicago Statement (1978) and the Cape Town Commitment (2011).

³³ Unless otherwise specified, scriptural quotes are taken from the LEB in which the convention of italicizing words supplied by the translators is used.

from Cornelius ‘making no distinction,’ meaning that Peter should not be prejudiced against them on account of their uncircumcision. The broad semantic range of *diakrinō*, as well as the plausibility of various meanings it may denote in this context, account for the differing English translations. However, questions may be raised about why *diakrinō* (albeit in a different inflection) is translated one way in Acts 10:20 and another way in 11:12 when both texts speak of the same event. The translation of *diakrinō* in 11:12 and its use in 10:20 are the topics explored below to see whether 11:12 does indeed refute the theory of distinction.

2. No distinction in Acts 11:12

In traditional Christian interpretation, the vision of 10:9–16 served both to declare to Peter that he should not regard Gentiles as unclean, and that all foods have been cleansed (also see Mk 7:19). In a previous paper (Woods 2012),³⁴ I presented textual, contextual and historical evidence to demonstrate that the interpretation of Peter’s vision ought to be restricted to the former only (the cleansing of the Gentiles), and that it had no bearing on Jewish food laws nor applicability of Jewish Law in general. (Also see Miller (2002) on Peter’s vision, and Rudolph (2003), Furstenberg (2008) and Eby (2011) on Mark 7:19 and the Pharisee’s errors concerning the purity laws.)

If this is the case—that Gentile believers have been cleansed yet the Law still stands—it begs the question of how Peter was to make ‘no distinction’ between Jews and Gentiles in Acts 11:12, since observance of the Law is what outwardly distinguishes Jews from Gentiles. However, it was not Torah that prohibited Jews from associating with Gentiles (as one might infer from Acts 10:28), but the *halakhah* of some Jewish sects including the Pharisees (Woods 2012:182; Tomson 1990:230–236.)³⁵ In such a theological framework, the Law continues to be binding on Jewish life but is not to be extended by *halakhah* in a manner that restricts fellowship with Gentiles who have forsaken idolatry in order to worship the God of

³⁴ In this paper concerning the interpretation of Peter’s vision in Acts 10, I overlooked acknowledging Daniel Juster as the source of the interpretation, being an oral presentation. The missing reference is: Juster, D 2009. *Interpreting the New Covenant from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*. 23-25 October 2009; Beit Ariel Messianic Jewish Congregation, Sea Point.

³⁵ *Halakhah* is a code of conduct for daily life in the tradition of a particular sect; the observance of *halakhah* ought to keep members of the community from breaking the Law though in some cases it was so abused as to defeat this purpose (e.g. Mt 15:1–9). Often the requirements of Pharisaic *halakhah* exceeded those of Torah by far, resulting in onerous legalism. For more on *halakhah* in Jewish and Christian contexts, see Kessler and Wenborn 2005:174–175 and Bockmuehl 2003.

Israel—most especially those baptised into Christ and in the Holy Spirit. However, the question remains concerning the Spirit’s instruction to Peter (11:12) to make no distinction between his Jewish brethren and the Gentile household of Cornelius, since Torah consistently differentiates between Israel and the nations. How could God require Torah observance for all Jews (whether they believe in Jesus or not) whilst simultaneously instructing the Peter not to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles? The first step in answering this question is to examine the key word, *diakrinō*, and its use in Acts 11:12.

2.1 Textual analysis: Word study on *diakrinō*

2.1.1 *Semantic range*

The word in question as it appears in Acts 11:12 is *diakrinanta*, though some variant readings say *diakrinomenon*.³⁶ These variants both come from the same root word, *diakrinō*, which means *to judge, dispute, contend, distinguish, evaluate, or discriminate* or, when applied reflexively, *to doubt, waver, or hesitate* (Mounce 2006; Logos 2011; Louw and Nida 1996; Swanson 1997; Strong 2009; Thomas 1998). *Diakrinō* was not an uncommon word in the period, appearing four times in Acts and another fifteen times in the rest of the NT. It also appears 28 times in the LXX (including Apocrypha) where it most commonly means *to judge* or *to distinguish*. Notably, de Graaf (2005:736–737) provides Ezekiel 20:35–36 in the LXX as an example where *diakrinō* in the passive means to distinguish between members of a faith community, and separating them based on that distinction. The supposed meaning *to doubt, waver or hesitate* is not recognized in any ancient literature prior to the NT.

2.1.2 *Parsing*

The parsing of the textual variants in Acts 11:12 is as follows, with differences underlined:

diakrinanta: verb, aorist, active, participle, singular, accusative, masculine.

diakrinomenon: verb, present, middle/passive, participle, singular, accusative, masculine.

³⁶ The Westcott and Hort, Tregelles, and NIV editions of the Greek New Testament have διακρίναντα, whereas the Robinson and Pierpont edition has διακρινόμενον (Holmes 2010).

A third textual tradition omits the phrase ‘*mēden diakr—*’ (whether *diakrinanta* or *diakrinomenon*) altogether (Spitaler 2007:87). In that case there is nothing to discuss as that reading cannot be construed as refuting the distinction theory. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the phrase (in either form) is original since it was used to recount the same event in Acts 10:20. In 11:12, the word used in in reported (indirect) speech, while in Acts 10:20 (*diakrinomenos*) is included in a quotation (direct speech.) The parsing there is:

diakrinomenos: verb, present, middle, participle, singular, nominative, masculine.

The parsing and usage may provide some clues for interpreting *diakrinō* in 10:20 and in the variants of 11:12.

2.1.3 Interpretation

Most editions of the critical text of 11:12 opt for *diakrinanta*, so that the preceding word negating it, *mēden* (nothing, not at all), becomes its direct object. As an active participle, the lexical connotation more likely has a sense of ‘judging,’ ‘distinguishing’ or ‘discriminating’ than the ‘doubting,’ ‘wavering’ or ‘hesitating’ sense. In 10:20, on the other hand, *diakrinomenos* is in the middle voice, suggesting the latter sense as a better option.³⁷ This creates some tension, since both texts report the same event. One might consider the possibility that Luke deliberately used different voices in these two instances in order to create an ambiguity in which both senses apply. However, it is invalid to draw any theological inference—in this case one of ‘no distinction’ between Jews and Gentiles in Christ—on such conjecture. Moreover, such a proposal has been opposed in the literature—de Graaf (2005:739) states the opposite: ‘It is probably significant that the author of Acts does not appear to have thought that the difference in voice between the two occurrences signalled a significant difference in meaning.’ I prefer to make no conclusion about implications of the voice of *diakrinō* in the two verses and turn our attention to the textual variant in Robinson and Pierpont’s (RP) Byzantine Textform (2005).

In the RP edition of the Greek NT, the verb in question in Acts 11:12 is in the same middle voice as that of *diakrinomenos* in 10:20; only the case differs. In this case, the

³⁷ I gratefully acknowledge Kevin Smith’s insights in establishing the nuances implicit in the different Greek forms discussed above (pers. comm. 10 February 2012).

‘discriminating’ might seem the intended meaning, and it would be fully consistent with 10:20 and the historical context: Peter was to go with the Gentiles without discriminating against them (on account of their being non-Jews.) David de Graaf (2005), however, argues that *diakrinō* in Acts 10:20, 11:12 and in seven other places in the NT should be ‘rendered with words that express *divided loyalty* or *disunity*’ (emphasis added; p 733). This interpretation creates rhetorical irony if *diakrinō* in 11:2 is also interpreted in the same way—the so-called circumcision party ‘kept their distance from’ Peter for associating with Gentiles (de Graaf 2005:740). In that case, the division indicated by *diakrinō* nevertheless relates to that between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. In fact, even the less likely but more commonly used sense of ‘doubting’ also suggests making ethnic distinction for the purpose of preserving purity, which was indeed a concern for Peter (10:14, 28). For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to accept that the text in 11:12 may have indicated that Peter was not to discriminate against Gentiles—regardless of the original form of *diakrinō* therein. Due to the uncertainty involved, the key question must change from asking whether the text refutes the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction to whether it *could* do so. However, there is an additional interpretation that must first be considered.

In 2007, Peter Spitaler published his doubts about interpreting *diakrinō* to mean ‘doubt,’ ‘hesitate’ or ‘waver’ in Acts 10:20 (and elsewhere in the NT) owing to lack of evidence for this new semantic sense. He argued that ‘contextual, grammatical, linguistic and semantic markers’ necessary to identify a new ‘NT meaning’ not found in prior or contemporary literature are absent (p. 92). He noted the inconsistent use of the authors of Acts, James and Jude if ‘doubting’ is indicated by *diakrinomai* in Acts 10:20; James 1:6 and Jude 22 whereas the older Hellenistic Greek meaning—to ‘contest’ or ‘dispute’—is used in Acts 11:2; James 2:4 and Jude 9. Further, Spitaler objects to the reliance of the ‘doubting’ interpretation on a conjectural ‘faith-doubt’ antithesis (p. 85). He posits that an older and established sense of the form, *to dispute* or *contest*, fits the context better especially in the light of Peter’s triple objection or disobedience to the voice in the vision (10:9–16). This established semantic option links 10:20 with 11:2 (p. 90) where ‘those of the circumcision’ *disputed*, *contested*, or *contended* (YLT, LITV) with Peter, in a similar irony to that noted by de Graaf (2005:740) who preferred the lexical sense of *separation*. de Graaf’s point that in Acts 10:29 Peter said he went with Cornelius’ messengers ‘without raising any objection’ (*anantirrētōs*) surely strengthens Spitaler’s case that the Spirit’s instruction was to go without *contention* (against

the Spirit) rather than to go without ‘doubting’ (within himself.) Spitaler’s interpretation may also be used comfortably in 11:12: Peter was not to contest with the Holy Spirit who commanded him to go with Cornelius’ men. If Spitaler is correct, the sense of *diakrinō* in 10:20 and 11:12 relates to uncontentious obedience, not to Jew-Gentile distinction. In that case, Acts 11:12 does *not* indicate that ‘no distinction’ is to be made between Jews and Gentiles. The sound rationale of Spitaler’s opposition to an assumed new meaning of *diakrinō* in the NT undermines the inference that Acts 11:12 provides concrete evidence against the theory that Jews and Gentiles remain distinct in the New Covenant era.

Adding weight to Spitaler’s proposal is the fact that Luke (and Peter and the Holy Spirit) had viable alternatives for expressing another concept rather than employing a new meaning of *diakrinō*. *Diastolē* would have been ideal for the sense of ‘making a distinction,’ just as it was used in Exodus 8:23 (LXX) when God said, ‘I will put a distinction between my people and your [Pharaoh’s] people.’³⁸ *Diastolē* is also used to denote distinction in the Psalms of Solomon 4:4 (LXX Apocrypha), Romans 3:22; 10:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:7. Similarly, *diapherō* might have been used to denote ‘differentiating’ (see its use in 1 Cor 15:41; Gal 4:1; 2:6; and Diognetus 3:5). If ‘doubting’ was the concern, *apisteō* was an option. If ‘wavering,’ then *adiakritos* (‘impartial’ or ‘unwavering’) or perhaps *aklinēs*, (‘without wavering’) might have been used in place of ‘*mēden diakr-*’ (‘*mēden diakrinanta*’ or ‘*mēden diakrinomenon*,’ Swanson 1997.) In fact, *adiakritos* may have been ideal because it can carry both senses (that is, both ‘impartial’ and ‘unwavering’). Surely these alternatives would have provided Luke a better option than to use a new and inconsistent semantic shift of *diakrinō*?

A brief note is warranted regarding the ‘hesitating’ interpretation: if Peter was instructed in Acts 10:20 to go ‘not hesitating at all,’ then he was disobedient. Instead, he invited Cornelius’ messengers for a meal and accommodated them overnight (10:23) before setting out. (Contrast Claudius Lysias’ response to the news of the planned ambush on Paul, 23:12–31.) The temporal sense of hesitating (i.e. delaying) is clearly not intended in 10:20.

Finally, the interpretation ‘making no distinction’ does not specify what Peter was speaking about; it assumes the reader will mentally insert the phrase ‘between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles].’ By contrast, Peter explicitly inserted that phrase in Acts 15:9: ‘*metaxy hēmōn te*

³⁸ The corresponding Hebrew text, Exod 8:19, uses the word *pēdūt* which denotes redemption.

kai autōn.’ In fact, at the time the Spirit spoke to Peter (10:19–20), Peter did not know that the men of whom the Spirit spoke were Gentile. Spitaler’s option, ‘without dispute,’ works better on both counts: there is no need to identify who is to obey without contention, since it is Peter to whom the Spirit spoke; and there is no assumption that Peter already knew the ethnicity of the men seeking him.

In summary, there are at least two possibilities in which the distinction issue may be invalidated in Acts 11:12. One is the variant reading which omits the phrase ‘*mēden diakr–*’ altogether. The other is Spitaler’s strong argument that the issue at hand is obedience without dispute or contest. Moreover, Luke could have chosen another word, like *diastolē*, to convey the message that Peter was instructed to ‘make no distinction’ among the two groups concerned. However, to provide more comprehensive coverage of the options, a response to the traditional interpretations of *diakrinō* that state or imply that Peter was not to make any distinction between his Jewish kin and the Gentiles is necessary.

2.2 Could Acts 11:12 possibly refute distinction theory?

If *diakrinō* is interpreted in some way as differentiating between Jews and Gentiles in Acts 11:12, whether it is taken as making distinction, doubting or hesitating (for ethnic reasons), or having a sense of disunity (as per de Graaf 2005), does this undermine any basis for distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the church? Certainly not on its own. Consider the ESV translation: ‘And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.’ It is hardly reasonable for Luke, with a passing phrase, to expect his readers to eradicate the key doctrine of Israel’s election established in Torah and maintained in the Prophets, the Writings and even his own Gospel. The gist of Peter’s vision (10:9–16) was that the Gentiles had been cleansed (Woods 2012) and his defence (11:4–17) hinged on this; he did not argue that Jew-Gentile distinction among Jesus-believers had been eliminated altogether, but rather that believing Gentiles were demonstrably acceptable to God (11:15. Also see 15:8–9.)

Moreover, while the discrimination *against* Gentiles by Jesus-believing Jews was done away with (see 10:34–36), the discrimination *between* (i.e. differentiation of) Jews and Gentiles was never eradicated nor in the early church. Both ancient literature and archaeological evidence indicate that the distinction between the two groups remained firmly established

even within the church for several hundred years (Kinzer 2005:197–209; Rudolph 2013:24–25).³⁹ The mosaic at the Church of Saint Sabina in Rome, dating to the fifth century, demonstrates this most effectively with two figures that it explicitly names. One figure, representing the church of the circumcision, stands on one side while on the other side stands another figure representing the church of the Gentiles (Skarsaune and Hvalvik 2007:216). Hence, even if the technical objections regarding the meaning of the keyword, *diakrinō*, were resolved such that it may mean ‘distinction,’ both its context and subsequent church history would nevertheless weigh substantially against this interpretation.

3. Conclusion

This paper examined the word *diakrinō* in Acts 11:12 which some English Bible translations interpret as ‘distinction.’ Others imply an element of distinction by opting for a sense of doubting, hesitating or wavering to interpret *diakrinō*. Some commentators, such as the contributors to the ESV Study Bible, have taken the verse to mean that Peter was to make ‘no distinction’ between Jews and Gentiles. This reading supports the prevailing Christian view that there is no essential difference between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus; some cultural differences may remain, but the particularity of Israel is a purely historic phenomenon—its role in the redemption of humanity has been completed—and thus Israel has no on-going theological significance in the Christian era or within the church. However, some key biblical texts appear to contradict the notion that Jews and Gentiles, or Israel and the nations, are ultimately to become members of an ethnically undifferentiated mix in the messianic kingdom—a homogenization of the two groups. Thus the question arises as to whether Acts 11:12 and other ‘no distinction’ texts identified in the NT have been interpreted correctly. That is, how robust are interpretations of *diakrinō* which implicitly contradict the theory of distinction? Can Jew-Gentile distinction safely be discarded as a vestige of things past among members of the Body of Christ?

The use of Acts 11:12 to support the case against intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is compromised by a number of concerns, primarily the controversy surrounding the interpretation of *diakrinō*, its apparently inconsistent use in three instances in close proximity

³⁹ Skarsaune (2002:436–442), among others, even discerns that ‘philo-Semitism’ among Christians at grassroots level was the background to Chrysostom’s anti-Semitic sermons.

(10:20; 11:2; 11:12) including a recounting of the same event (10:20 and 11:12) and the contention that it suddenly has a new meaning for the first time in all of previous Greek literature, when other suitable words were available to denote ‘distinction.’ Furthermore, it is questionable that a major biblical premise, the election of Israel, would be undone in a brief episode without warning or further clarification.

The lexical study discovered that ‘without dispute’ is a better translation of ‘*mēden diakrinanta*’ than ‘no distinction;’ Peter was to obey the command of the Holy Spirit without dispute. Combining this insight with the concerns listed above, it is evident that Acts 11:12 cannot be taken as a renunciation of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. The text does not support, let alone prove, the case against distinction (in the sense of differentiation) of Jews and Gentiles within the church. What remains for further research is whether other key texts in the NT (particularly Acts 15:9; Rom 3:22; 10:12; Gal 3:28 and Col 3:11) are sufficient to uphold traditional Christian stance that the ancient categories of Jew and Gentile—Israel and the nations—are inconsequential in the present and future ages. This has particular relevance within the church in the present time, as Messianic Jews seek to maintain traditional Jewish practice (invariably including some degree of Torah observance) within their communities whilst promoting equality and close fellowship with Gentile Christians.⁴⁰

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4. Paper Three: Does Acts 15:9 refute intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction?

Abstract

This study examines Peter's comment in Acts 15:9, that God made 'no distinction' between Gentile and Jewish Jesus-believers in purifying their hearts by faith, to determine whether the text teaches that the ecclesia is composed of an undifferentiated mix of people from the two groups. Textual analysis shows that the comment could be interpreted at a lexical level as a denial of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction, but the context of Acts 15:1–29 demands a narrower interpretation: there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles in terms of how they are saved, but they remain distinct in other respects. Both Peter's speech and James' verdict provide strong evidence that the leaders of the nascent ecclesia made distinction between its Jewish and Gentile members, upholding Jews' obligation to Jewish Law and faith tradition, whilst imposing only a few moral prohibitions on Gentile believers.

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Author's remarks: This paper focuses on a climactic statement made at a watershed event in the formation of the ecclesia, in which all the most senior leaders of the nascent community were present. The study demonstrates the value of the narrative as a historical record of a decision made by the ecclesial authorities that is legally binding—a *halakhic* verdict. It is thus generally and indefinitely applicable within the ecclesia.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

While Acts 10:1–11:18 records the watershed event in which Gentiles are declared pure by God (Woods 2012), 15:1–29 describes a related and equally important event often called the Jerusalem council. The council ruled that Gentile believers are not subject to the Law (Torah) except for a few necessary rules (15:19–20; 28–29); the decision is variously referred to as the apostolic decree, James’ verdict, the Jerusalem council ruling, and so on. In 15:7–9, Peter retold the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about God’s work among the Gentiles, alluding to the Cornelius incident mentioned above, and claimed that God ‘made no distinction between us [circumcised Jews] and them [uncircumcised Gentiles].’⁴¹ Here, as in 11:12, Peter used the word *diakrinō*. Previously, I discussed difficulties of translating it as ‘distinction’ in 11:12 (partly explaining diverse translations), and concluded that ‘dispute’ is a better translation there (Woods 2014a). In 15:9, there is strong interpretive agreement among English Bibles which translate it as to ‘make a distinction’, ‘put a difference’ or ‘discriminate’ between circumcised and uncircumcised believers in Jesus. Being preceded by a negative adjective, the text indicates that God made no such distinction. Acts 15:9 is thus used as a proof text in the case against making any distinction within the ecclesia⁴² between its members descended from Israel and those from the nations. However, to cease differentiating between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus creates difficulties in interpreting other biblical texts, especially prophecies relating to the nation of Israel (e.g. Rom 11). Therefore, a closer inspection of what Peter meant by ‘no distinction’ in 15:9 is warranted, which this paper sets out to do. However, a brief overview of distinction theory is needed first in order to frame the study.

Distinction theory—that of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction—says that Jewish Jesus-believers have a different role and responsibility within the ecclesia to Gentile believers, just as Israel was divinely elected for a special and unique service among the nations (Gen 12:1–

⁴¹ Biblical quotes are taken from the Lexham English Bible unless otherwise specified.

⁴² The problem of terminology continues to hinder communications (see Woods 2014b:101). By ‘ecclesia’ I mean *Christ’s community, whether Jew or Gentile*, since ‘church’ is generally seen as a non-Jewish (and often anti-Jewish) entity. (Even the term ‘Jew’ is problematic; see Mason (2007). It is also dubious as to whether Jewish Jesus-believers in the NT ever identified themselves using the label ‘Christian’, which similarly has a non-Jewish sense—hence terms like ‘Jesus-believer’, ‘Christ-follower’ etc. in my writing. See *Table 1* and surrounding discussion on labels in Woods 2014b:114–115.) I previously used the transliteration, *ekklēsia* (from ἐκκλησία), but ‘ecclesia’ seems a better balance between the needs of readability and contrast with the (non-Jewish, Christian) church, notwithstanding the apparent Latin-ness (and hence Roman Catholic-ness) of the spelling.

3; Exod 19:3–6; Jer 31:31–37; Ezek 37:26–28; Rom 9:4–5; 11:1–5). A relatively small but growing proportion of scholars, several of whom I have cited, precedes me in developing this concept. Both *distinction theory* and *intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction* are my own labels for a biblical interpretation that others already pioneered using terms such as ‘bilateral ecclesiology’ (Kinzer 2005), ‘unity and diversity in the church’ (Campbell 2008), ‘Torah-defined ecclesiological variegation’ (Rudolph 2010) and ‘dual expression’ churches or congregations (Juster n.d.). For my research, I deliberately chose ‘distinction’ over less objectionable synonyms like ‘differentiation’ because so many English Bibles use ‘distinction’ to translate *diakrinō* in Acts 15:9 (and some in 11:12) and *diastolē* in Romans 3:22 and 10:12. By using ‘distinction’, I do not mean to imply superiority of Jewish believers over Gentile believers, but rather that Jews within the ecclesia should be distinguishable in theologically significant ways from Gentiles. This distinction is most visible in the response of Jewish Jesus-believers to Torah.

These texts (Acts 11:12; 15:9; Rom 3:22 and 10:12), together with Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 3:11, are the key texts of the NT which apparently deny that the ecclesia should distinguish between its Jewish and its Gentile members. They have been used together as a bulwark against distinction theory, though I have already argued that two of them (viz. Eph 2:15 and, to a lesser extent, Acts 11:12), have been misinterpreted in Christian tradition (Woods 2014b and 2014a respectively). I found that these two texts provide no obstacle to the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

Reverting from that overview of distinction theory, this paper seeks to answer the same question of another text: *Does Acts 15:9 affirm Christian tradition by teaching that the ecclesia is composed of an undifferentiated mix of Jewish and Gentile Jesus-believers?* A surface reading of the text suggests it is a substantial obstacle to distinction theory since it explicitly states that God ‘made no distinction’ between the two groups. However, the whole discussion revolves around the differing covenantal obligations of ‘us’ (from the speakers’ perspective, i.e. Jews) and ‘them’ (Gentiles). The Jewish apostles, elders and brothers (15:23) decided not to place on the Gentiles any greater burden (legal obligation, explained below) than a few ‘necessary things’ (commandments, 15:28). Subsequent events in Acts suggest that the us-and-them classification persisted; it did not fall into disuse after the Jerusalem council. Moreover, the narrative presupposes that circumcised Jewish believers remain bound

to the Torah. In fact, Israel's covenantal obligation to Torah is a foundation of distinction theory. From these observations, the continuation of Jew-Gentile distinction appears axiomatic in the early ecclesia described in Acts. Therefore, the application of Acts 15:9 as evidence against distinction theory needs investigation, which is the purpose of this paper.

The method used is simply to examine the key phrase in the Greek text of Acts 15:9 to see if 'no distinction' is an appropriate translation from a lexical perspective, and if there are any notable variant readings to consider. Thereafter, a study is undertaken of the immediate context of the Jerusalem council (15:1–29) to determine whether it supports the outcome of the textual analysis, or if the context presupposes a different sense of the word 'distinction'. The conclusion reviews the findings of the textual and contextual analyses which seem to be inconsistent *prima facie*. It then discusses distinction theory as a possible solution, before making a final judgement on the key question. Reflection on the implications of the study is reserved. In another paper, I present an historical analysis of later events recorded in Acts (from 15:30 onwards) to determine whether or not they are consistent with the findings of this study (see chapter 5: Paper Four).

2. Textual analysis

Peter used the word *diakrinō* in an important statement in his speech to the council of apostles and elders who had gathered in Jerusalem over the question of whether Gentile believers needed to be circumcised. In Acts 15:8–9, Peter argued that 'God, who knows the heart, testified to them *by giving them* the Holy Spirit, just as he also *did* to us. And he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing [purifying] their hearts by faith.'⁴³ He concluded that Gentiles should not be subjected to the yoke of the Law (discussed in detail below), noting that '*we [Jews] will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way those [Gentiles] also are.*' (15:11).

This text in Acts 15:9 is simpler to treat than its counterpart in Acts 11:12 because there are no notable variant readings; God '*outhen diekrinen metaxy hēmōn te kai autōn.*' (RP uses

⁴³ The difficulty with 'cleanse' is its cognate relation to 'clean', which is used ambiguously in English Bibles as both the opposite of 'impure' (whether ritually or morally) and of 'unclean' (a term applicable to some animals and foods, but never to humans). This ambiguity reinforces a misinterpretation of Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16, as readers may view 'unclean' as the opposite of 'pure'. (See Woods 2012.)

‘ouden’ instead of ‘outhen’ but this has no impact on the translation since both mean ‘nothing’ in this context.) English translations are practically unanimous in their interpretation of *diakrinō* here as ‘making a distinction,’ or ‘putting a difference.’ Indeed, de Graaf (2005:739) points out that ‘to make a distinction’ is a ‘well-attested’ sense of *diakrinō*. The objects of the verb are explicitly identified (‘us’ and ‘them’), unlike in 11:12. Also, the verb is in active aorist indicative form, a simple manner of recounting an event. On these grounds, it would appear that 15:9 refutes distinction theory, since God himself plainly made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Instead, he gave his Spirit to Gentiles who heard the message of the gospel and believed, thus testifying to them just as he had done for Jewish believers, and he similarly purified their hearts by faith (15:7–9). The doubting, wavering or hesitating sense of *diakrinō* (see Woods 2014a) cannot be considered in 15:9 for the sentence to be coherent. Regardless of the nuance, whether judging, differentiating or separating the two groups, the general sense is to make a distinction between two parties. Thus ‘outhen *diekrinen*’ clearly indicates that God made no such distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in his gracious deeds to them.

The textual analysis is thus easily concluded. However, the immediate context and subsequent events recorded in Acts should be examined to determine whether Peter’s statement in 15:9 has any applicability for the ecclesia. Did God remove Jewish particularity so that the ecclesia would become an undifferentiated mix of Jews and Gentiles—a non-Jewish Christian church—or did he merely disregard Gentile strangeness (foreignness) in that he purified them by the same means as he did Jews?

3. Contextual analysis

3.1 Narrative outline

The flow of the narrative describing the Jerusalem council follows, itemised by verse numbers in Acts 15:

Verse 1: Some men from Judea taught the brothers at Antioch that they cannot be saved unless they are circumcised according to the Mosaic custom.

Verse 2: Paul and Barnabas strove hard and debated against the men from Judea. Paul, Barnabas and other (possibly Gentile) representatives from the ecclesia in

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Antioch were appointed to take the issue to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

Verse 3: They travelled from Antioch through Phoenicia and Samaria, ‘telling in detail the conversion of the Gentiles [in Antioch]’ which brought great joy to all the brothers in those places.

Verse 4: The ecclesia in Jerusalem received the travellers and heard the same report.

Verse 5: Some Jesus-believing Pharisees objected, supporting the claim of the men from Judea in verse 1. Not all the believing Pharisees did so, but ‘*tines*’ (some).⁴⁴

Verses 6–7: The apostles and elders met to discuss the matter and had a long debate. If the events of 15:22 followed immediately, then the whole ecclesia of Jerusalem was assembled. It appears likely that the objectors mentioned in 15:5 were present, as well as delegates from Antioch, and certainly Paul and Barnabas (15:12).

Verses 7–11: Peter gave a short speech in which he recalled God’s choice to bring the Gentiles to faith through the gospel, giving the Holy Spirit to them, and making ‘no distinction between us and them, cleansing [purifying] their hearts by faith.’ Peter rhetorically asked the motive for subjecting the Gentile disciples to the yoke (of the Law), pointing out that the means of salvation for Jews and Gentiles is the same for both: ‘through the grace of the Lord Jesus.’

Verse 12: Barnabas and Paul described ‘all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them’ to the whole group.

Verses 13–21: James responded. Referring to Peter’s testimony and citing the prophet Amos, he concluded that Gentile believers in Jesus only need to observe a few basic restrictions.

⁴⁴ Note that Paul himself remained a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).

Verses 22–23: The whole ecclesia in Jerusalem decided to send Paul, Barnabas, Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas to the ecclesia in Antioch (and Syria and Cilicia, v. 23) with a letter recording the decision.

Verses 23–29: The contents of the letter: salutations; invalidation of the circumcision agitators of 15:1; endorsement of the four messengers; and a terse record of the council's decision.

This brief outline suffices to support the following contextual analysis of Peter's claim that God had 'made no distinction between us and them' (15:9).

3.2 Background

3.2.1 A prevailing assumption

Those among the Pharisees in the Jerusalem ecclesia who believed it was necessary to circumcise Gentile believers and command them to observe the Law of Moses (15:5) were surely doing the same with their own sons, yet this was apparently of no concern to anyone at the meeting. It may even be surmised that all those present did so, since that was their Law and custom and Jesus had instructed them to 'do and observe everything' that the Jewish authorities determined (Matt 23:2–3)—even the seemingly trivial matters of the Law (23:23). Had they abandoned the Law themselves it would be very strange to debate at length (15:7) whether or not Gentile disciples of Jesus had to observe the Law.

If the Gentile brothers were becoming fully-fledged Jews there would have been no need for debate, but only the circumcision faction held that such conversion was required (Acts 15:1, 5).⁴⁵ The brothers mentioned in 15:1 were Gentile believers, since otherwise the men from Judea would not have perceived the need for them to be circumcised. Gentiles were the subject of the conversation in Phoenicia and Samaria in 15:3, of the report in Jerusalem in 15:4, of the dispute in 15:5, and of the council meeting in 15:6–21, as well as the addressees of the letter in 15:23–29. Finally, when the letter concerning the Gentile believers was read in

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the label 'circumcision faction' or 'circumcision party' may mislead readers into thinking that the other Jewish believers in Jesus, including the apostles, were opposed to circumcision and, by inference, Torah-observance in general. Rather, the label denotes a sub-group of Jewish Jesus-believers who insisted on *Gentile* believers being circumcised.

Antioch, they were probably those who rejoiced the most over the ruling, and they were the most encouraged (15:31). The letter did not contain any encouragement specifically for Jewish believers in the ecclesia in Antioch. The ‘long message’ by Judas and Silas that further ‘encouraged and strengthened the brothers’ (15:32) surely explained the events and decision of the Jerusalem council in much more detail than the short letter itself.

Bauckham (2013:180) affirms the assumption that Jewish believers were to continue observing Torah after reminding his readers of biblical prophecies that produced an expectation for the nations to worship the God of Israel in the eschatological age (p. 178). The logic is very compelling, especially after dispelling the notion that Peter’s vision in Acts 10:9–16 meant that Jewish food laws were *passé* (see Miller 2002; Woods 2012). The oft-assumed abolition of Mosaic Law would have been a momentous occasion in biblical history, at least equal to the Sinai event.⁴⁶ It would also be difficult to reconcile with some key texts (such as Matt 5:17–19; 23:23; Acts 21:20–24; Rom 2:13–16; 3:31; 7:12, 14; 10:16) and it would have obviated the need for the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, since no Jewish believers would be arguing for Gentile observance of the Law if they weren’t keeping it themselves (see Rudolph 2013:23; Wyschogrod 2004:209). Employing the biblical method of *kal v’khomer* (‘light and heavy,’ or *a fortiori*): if it was hard for the apostles and elders to avoid putting the yoke of the Law on Gentile disciples, how much harder it would be to remove the same yoke from the neck of the Jews on whom God placed it! It took ‘no little strife and debate’ (15:2) in Antioch and ‘much debate’ in Jerusalem (15:7) even before Peter, and later James (after further evidence was presented, 15:12) reached a conclusion concerning Gentile believers’ obligation to the Law. How much greater would have been the difficulty to cancel the Law for Israel? *The prevailing assumption concerning the Law at the time of the Jerusalem council, therefore, was that all Jews (including Jesus-believing Jews) were subject to it.* The *status quo* of the time is crucial for the exegesis of Acts 15:9a.

3.2.2 Derivation of the four prohibitions

The prohibitions for Gentile disciples in Acts 15:20 may be related either to the Law for resident aliens (e.g. Bauckham 2013:183; Dauermann 2012; Michael and Lancaster 2009;

⁴⁶ Acts 2, which records how God gave his Spirit to Jesus’ disciples, does not suggest any change in status of the Law. In the new covenant, the Spirit internalises the Law (Jer 31:31–33; Heb 8:10; 10:16), thereby affirming it.

Skarsaune 2002:170) or to the Noachide laws (Flusser and Safrai 2012; Stern 1992:278 and 2007:154–156)—or both, whilst implying much more (Janicki 2012). In the first case, the same Law applies to the whole community, Jewish and Gentile, but it makes different requirements for different sub-communities. Gentiles dwelling among Israel (‘resident aliens,’ to use the Lexham English Septuagint translation) had the lowest level of legal obligation;⁴⁷ women had some laws applicable uniquely to them; priests and Levites had their own laws too. Yet all of these regulations were contained in the same Torah, and all its subjects enjoyed similar benefits of legal protection and of blessing. Thus, according to the first view, when God purified Gentile believers in Jesus without their becoming Jewish proselytes they were expected to submit to the commandments for resident aliens. Since Paul described Gentile believers as ‘fellow citizens of the saints [of Israel] and members the household of God’ (Eph 2:19), he may well have mentally classified them together with aliens dwelling in the midst of Israel.

Further to the prescriptions for aliens living among Israel, Judaism sees all humans as ‘Noachides’ (descendants of Noah) and hence subject to the commandments God gave in his covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1–17). Thus the Noachide laws were established from the Noachide covenant and are universally applicable, at least from the Jewish perspective. The rabbinic tradition, expressed in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 56a) distils these prohibitions to seven and presents them as the minimum standard for righteousness of Gentiles before God. The view that the four prohibitions in Acts 15:20 derive from the Noachide laws assumes an earlier, coarser, oral form of them which banned idolatry, sexual immorality, the consumption of blood (assumed to be the purpose of those who strangle animals)⁴⁸ and murder. (*Tou haimatos* (‘from blood’) in Acts 15:20, may be taken as a ban on drinking blood or on bloodshed, i.e. murder.) For more information on the derivation of the Noachide laws and their possible use in the apostolic decree, refer to Neuhaus (2012); Flusser and Safrai (2012); Michael and Lancaster (2009:59); Payne (2013); Stern (1992:277). (Also see Lev 17:10–16 and Abodah Zarah 8:4–8 in the Tosefta.)

⁴⁷ Lev 17:10, 12, 13 and 18:26 specifically include resident aliens in their commandments.

⁴⁸ In Jewish tradition, the prohibition against the consumption of blood derives from Genesis 9:4–5 which simultaneously prohibits consuming strangled animals.

In a third option, Janicki argues that the situation of Gentile members of the new covenant was not as simple as that of resident aliens or of Noachides (2012:37, 49–72). Though the principles of both standards provided guidance for the apostolic decree in Acts 15, the legal derivation thereof was more complex, and the anticipated application of the Law to Gentile believers was much more extensive. ‘Gentiles in Messiah have a status in the people of God and a responsibility to Torah that far exceeds that of the God-fearer of the ancient synagogue and that of the modern-day Noachide’ (Janicki 2012:50). In any case, however the four prohibitions were derived, consensus is that the source was the Torah—the Law of Moses. *Therefore, the apostles and others at the Jerusalem council regarded the Law as applicable and authoritative.* This is an important point for understanding the background, or historical context, of the decision expressed in Acts 15:20.

3.3 Peter’s speech

3.3.1 Was ‘no distinction’ meant in a general or a restricted sense?

A key question to be addressed is whether or not the means of salvation mentioned in Acts 15:11 implicitly restricts the eradication of distinction in 15:9 to soteriological matters only. That is, does the fact that Gentiles are saved in exactly the same way as Jews really mean that *all* distinctions between them are removed or, at least, theologically inconsequential? Or did Peter simply mean that God made no distinction between them in terms of how they are saved?

According to the text, Gentiles heard the message of the gospel and believed (15:7), whereupon God ‘testified to them *by giving them* the Holy Spirit, just as he also *did* to us [Jews]. And he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing [purifying] their hearts by faith’ (15:8–9). Peter closed by stating that the faith and salvation of himself and his Jewish companions would materialise in the same way as for the Gentiles: ‘through the grace of the Lord Jesus’ (15:11). His conclusion (discussed further below) brought the central concern into sharp focus: the means of salvation. God’s equal treatment of the Gentiles meant that they were saved the same way that Jews were, without distinction. However, none of Peter’s words suggest the undoing of Jewish particularity in general.

3.3.2 *The example of Cornelius*

When considering God's salvation of the Gentiles, it is helpful to revisit the Cornelius incident in Acts 10 when the Spirit was first given to them, and Peter's report of it in 11:1–18. In 10:34–35, Peter said, 'God is not one who shows partiality, but in every nation the one who fears him and who does what is right is acceptable to him.' Peter thus indicated that Jews have no advantage concerning acceptability to God, who gave Cornelius and his household his Spirit without requiring their conversion. Being Jewish was apparently not the criterion for receiving God's favour, but rather right attitude (fear of God) and conduct, as demonstrated by Cornelius. Nevertheless, at no point does the narrative of Acts imply, let alone state, that Jesus-faith cancels Jewish observance. Thus Peter said, 'To this one [Jesus] all the prophets testify, that through his name everyone [whether Jewish or Gentile] who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins' (10:43).

Similarly, the angel who appeared to Cornelius, a Gentile, said that Peter would speak words by which Cornelius and his household would be saved (11:14). Peter did *not* say, 'Surely no one can withhold *circumcision* for these [Gentile believers].' Instead, he spoke of withholding water for washing (baptizing) them (10:47). Gentile believers were to be washed from impurity to make them pure, but they were not to be circumcised to make them Jewish. Neither were Jewish believers told to forsake their faith tradition. The Jew-Gentile boundary apparently remained intact in Peter's view, in spite of God's surprising salvation of Gentiles who believed the gospel. The earlier Jerusalem conference (11:1–18) confirmed this in its climactic statement: 'God has granted the repentance *leading* to life to the Gentiles also!' The salvation that God had already provided for Israel was now also accessible to the nations without their becoming Israelites. Apparently, God's impartial treatment of all nations (10:34–35) was not a revocation of Israel's particularity, but an affirmation of his fairness in issuing salvation.

3.3.3 *On the Law*

Returning to the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, Peter accused those who demanded Gentile circumcision of putting God to the test (15:10), as though God had not already made his acceptance of the Gentiles clear. In the same sentence, Peter referred to the Law as 'a yoke that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.' The verb 'have been able,' *ischuō*,

appears in aorist active indicative form which need not be taken as a perfected action, as though Jewish believers no longer bore the yoke of the Law. To assume a past tense, ‘were able,’ which the ASV, KJV (1900), NCV, NKJV, NLT all do in following the tradition of the AV/KJV of 1873, is a theological imposition on Peter’s generation since there is no hint in the text that Jewish believers had forsaken the Law. Accordingly, most modern translations opt for the more appropriate wording, ‘have been able.’

Acts 15:11, which speaks of salvation, starts with the emphatic disjunction, *alla*, contrasting it to the previous sentence on responsibility to the Law. This contrast de-couples any perceived connection between Law and salvation, expressing that both Jews and Gentiles ‘will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.’ However, the contrast does not convey any antinomian sentiment. It simply shows that salvation is by grace; it is not—as the circumcision proponents thought—by bearing the yoke of the Law. Thus Gentile disciples were not required to observe the Torah in the same way as Jews. Rudolph (2010:12–13 fn. 53) reaches a similar conclusion:

I interpret Acts 15:10–11 to mean that Jews experience soteriological blessing ‘through the grace of the Lord Jesus’ and not by Torah observance according to the standards of Pharisaic halakhah (note the Pharisaic context of the demands in Acts 15:5). It does not follow from this statement that Peter considered Jesus-believing Jews exempt from the responsibilities of Jewish covenantal life stipulated in the Torah or that he considered these responsibilities necessary for salvation. He may have viewed them as commandments of God for Jews, the observance of which did not have a direct bearing on salvation. Similarly, the apostolic decree lists a number of ritual ‘requirements’ (ἐπ’ἀνάγκης) for Jesus-believing Gentiles (Acts 15:28–29) but there is no indication that they are necessary for salvation.

3.3.4 Language and logic

An additional contrast to the one made by the disjunction (‘but’) is also evident in the us-and-them language of 15:10–11. Peter clearly identified with Israel which bears the yoke of the Law, not with the Gentile disciples whom he said should not do so. Nevertheless, he said, ‘we’ (Jews) and ‘those’ (Gentiles) are both saved by grace. In other words, Peter

distinguished between Jewish and Gentile believers in relation to Torah in 15:10, and 15:11 he contrasted this distinction with their common means of salvation. Far from refuting distinction theory, Acts 15:10–11 validates it firmly.

Similar validation is found in Paul's writings. God's salvation by grace is common to the circumcised and uncircumcised alike *as they are*; members of neither party are to alter that condition (1 Cor 7:17–24). Additionally, those who are circumcised are obligated to keep the whole Law (Gal 5:3). Combining these texts creates a syllogism with the 'necessary conclusion: All those who are born as Jews are obligated to live as Jews' (Kinzer 2005:73). By the same token, Gentile believers are to continue to live as non-Jews. Moreover, the mutual dependence of Jews and Gentiles on Jesus' grace expels the notion that intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is a distinction of priority (i.e. that Jews are superior) and demands that it has the sense of differentiation.⁴⁹ The theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction holds that the two groups are distinct from one-another in a theologically significant way, not that one group is superior to another (see Woods 2014b:102).

3.3.5 Purity and sanctification

Peter's speech, therefore, does not dismiss the distinction of Jews from Gentiles *in general* but only in a *soteriological* sense. A similar but more nuanced interpretation is presented by Bauckham (2013), who sees Acts 15:9 as referring to the end of Jew-Gentile distinction among all believers in relation to moral purity, which was a far greater concern than ritual purity. The type of impurity of concern late in the Second Temple period was that which resulted from the wickedest sins, particularly idolatry, sexual immorality and murder (p. 179), as we might expect from the Noachide commandments and from the Torah's regulations for aliens living among Israel. Jews were wary of being defiled by the widespread moral impurity of Gentiles and thus had to constantly avoid contact with them, most especially in table fellowship, which they regarded as intimate (p. 180). (Note the accusation that Peter ate with uncircumcised men in Acts 11:3.) The purification of hearts in Acts 15:9 is a reference to Ezekiel 36:16–36 in which God's people are purified and enabled to keep his commandments (p. 180). Peter said that Gentiles had been purified in the same way—not

⁴⁹ This differentiation is made public largely by Jewish observance of specific laws required of them but not of Gentiles, pre-eminently that of circumcision.

through circumcision but by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8–9). Thus, among Jesus-believers, the distinction between pure Jews and impure Gentiles fell away because God had purified them all from moral impurities. Surely, the purification of Gentiles also enabled them to keep God’s commandments too, but apparently the Law did not apply to Gentiles in the same way as to Jews. With the fulfilment of Ezekiel’s prophecy, ‘it became possible to envisage the messianic people of God as a community of both Jews and Gentiles, the former observing Torah, the latter not’ (Bauckham 2013:180). Thus, in Bauckham’s view, Jew-Gentile distinction was erased in regards to purity, but retained in regards to Torah-obligation.

In addition to God’s purification of Gentiles, they were also sanctified by his gift of the Spirit (10:44).⁵⁰ Thus there is another sense in which the distinction between Jews as God’s holy (set apart, or sanctified) people and Gentiles as common (not set apart unto God) was removed: God himself had sanctified Jesus-believing Gentiles just as he had done with the nation of Israel long before. The Gentiles’ purification and sanctification, plus their close fellowship with Jews and unity with Israel (see Woods 2014b on Eph 2:15) are all elements of their salvation. Indeed, the purpose of the Jerusalem council was to determine the requirements for salvation of Gentiles (Acts 15:1, 5) which the previous passage hinted at in closing: God ‘had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles’ (14:27). Faith is the way of sanctification, purification and salvation for both Jews and Gentiles alike, without distinction (15:7–9, 11). Yet faith does not by any means nullify the Law (Rom 3:31, also notable in Israel’s Torah-observant heroes of faith, Heb 11:32–40)—the very Law that distinguishes between Jew and Gentile, and that the apostles applied differently to Gentile believers.

3.3.6 Review of Peter’s speech

Thus the evidence in Peter’s speech all testifies that *the distinction which God did not make between Jews and Gentiles in Acts 15:9 pertained to how they were saved*. Peter’s words do not suggest in any way that the Law no longer applied to Jews, nor that all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles had been erased. Acts 26:17–18 implicitly confirms the soteriological domain of Peter’s speech in 15:7–11 by way of parallel. In it, Paul recounted how Jesus had assured him that he would rescue him from both Jews and Gentiles (26:17) in

⁵⁰ Also see 10:28, 47 which allude to both sanctity and purity, the latter by mentioning water baptism and Spirit baptism.

order to bring them to repentance ‘*so that* they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me’ (26:18). Here we see that both Jew and Gentile may be forgiven of their sins through repentance and sanctified by faith in Jesus, equally together joining the fellowship of the saints. In this regard, there is no distinction—Jews and Gentiles are saved in the same way. As to Jewish customs and obligation to the Law, the *status quo* was assumed.

3.4 James’ verdict

3.4.1 Background

Though not beyond dispute, historical records and modern scholars indicate that James, the brother of Jesus who became the first leader of the ecclesia in Jerusalem, was known for his piety and strict observance of the Law, yet he was put to death on account of the false accusation by the high priest, Ananus, of breaking the Law (Josephus: *Antiquities* 20:199–203; Eusebius: *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1:2–3 (citing Clement); 2.23:passim (citing Clement, Hegesippus and Josephus); Woods 2012:196).⁵¹ Evidently James observed the Law until his death long after the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost in Acts 2:1–4. As shall be observed in his role in the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, James’ whole paradigm for Jesus-faith existed within the matrix of Torah.

After calling attention of the assembly to himself, James began by extracting the key point of Peter’s testimony, that ‘God first concerned himself to take from among the Gentiles a people for his name’ (Acts 15:13–14). This reminded the assembly that God’s election was not limited to the people of Israel who, as Bauckham (2013:182) explains, were accustomed to being called by God’s name (Deut 28:10; 2 Chron 7:14; Jer 14:9; Dan 9:19) in contradistinction from the nations who were not (Isa 63:19). In Acts 15:15–18, James appealed firstly to Amos 9:11–12 and then alluded to Isaiah 45:21 as evidence that it was God’s—not man’s—plan ‘from of old’ for all nations to ‘seek the Lord.’ That is, God had always intended for people from all nations, not only Israel, to honour him.

Since Jeremiah 12:16 and Zechariah 2:11 (LXX) both speak of Gentiles dwelling in the midst of Israel during the messianic age (Bauckham 2013:183), these prophecies presumed future

⁵¹ Note similar false accusations made against Stephen (Acts 6:11–14) and Paul (21:21).

application of the four prohibitions (in Acts 15:20) for aliens in the midst of Israel. Thus, Bauckham concludes, the Torah made provision in advance for these messianic-era Gentiles ‘who are not obliged, like Jews, by the commandments of the Torah in general, but are obliged by these specific commandments.’ That is, Gentiles whom God was to call to himself in the messianic era were only to be subjected to these few commandments of Mosaic Law—the four prohibitions that James specified in Acts 15:20.

Moreover, Leviticus 18:24–30 (referring to offences identified in Lev 17–18) shows that the Canaanites defiled themselves and the land by practising the four things James prohibited. If such behaviour even defiled the moral purity of Gentiles who did not acknowledge Israel’s God, surely Gentiles whose hearts God ‘cleansed [purified] their hearts by faith’ (Acts 15:10) should refrain from it! In fact, ‘the moral imperatives and ethical authority of the Torah were not a part of the discussion in Acts 15,’ not because they were irrelevant but quite the opposite: ‘these were already well understood as essential’ for Gentiles (Michael and Lancaster 2009:53). James identified these requirements as implications of Peter’s position based on his (James’) exegetical connection of the prophets with the Law: because Gentile believers ‘are members of the messianic people *as Gentiles*, they do not require circumcision and other requirements that the Torah makes on Israelites in order to become or remain morally pure, but they are obliged by these specific prohibitions of the Torah against morally polluting practices’ (Bauckham 2013:183).

3.4.2 A legally binding decision

James’ words in Acts 15:19 (‘Therefore I conclude...’) seem to indicate that he took authority and made the final ruling regarding Gentile’s obligations to the Law. Context supports this: at the conclusion of a long debate (15:7), James made a final decision. Yet James’ decision was the apostles’ decision and the council’s decision; it was apparently even God’s decision (15:28). This is shown by the unanimity of ‘the apostles and the elders, together with the whole church [in Jerusalem]’ (15:22) expressed in 15:22; 25, and by the consensus between the council members (namely ‘the apostles and the elders, brothers,’ 15:23) and the Holy Spirit (15:28). Thus terms like the ‘apostolic decree’ and ‘James’ decision’ may be treated as synonyms. Yet it was more than a consensus ruling which the council claimed to have God’s stamp of approval; the decision bore legal authority.

The term Luke used for James' decision, *krinō*, indicates something stronger than just an opinion. Whilst interpretations differ from one English translation to another, the most conventional use of *krinō*, 'to judge', appears most justifiable. Jesus had given authority to the apostles to set *halakhah* for the Kingdom (Matt 16:19; 18:18–20; Juster 2009; Kinzer 2005:249; Stern 1992:54, 56–58), and the Jerusalem council functioned as 'a kind of Messianic *Sanhedrin*' (Stern 2007:156). It was within this Jewish legal context that James issued a *halakhic* verdict—a judgement on the matter for how life in the ecclesia is to be ordered: Gentile believers are not to be subjected to the Law but must observe a few rules in order to preserve the purity of their hearts (i.e. moral purity) and to enable them to participate in table fellowship with Jews (Bauckham 2013:184).

Since the decision to be taken was *halakhic*, that is, pertaining to interpretation and application of the Law, it likely had to be based on the Hebrew scriptures regardless of the miracles to which Peter, Barnabas and Paul testified (Bauckham 2013:181–182). This explains James' use of Amos and Isaiah. Bauckham also links James' quotes to Hosea 3:5 and Jeremiah 12:15–16. James' method was *halakhic midrash* (Shulam 2008:40)—a Jewish hermeneutical approach to resolve a legal question. Janicki (2012:141 endnote 22) explains it as a *ma'aseh* ('it once happened'): 'a halachic ruling based on the occurrence of an actual event.' That event was the purification of uncircumcised Gentiles when Peter visited Cornelius' home and ate with them (Acts 10), as shown by Peter's speech (15:7–11) and James' reference to it (v. 14). James' decision was *legally binding* for all Gentile initiates of the new covenant; it was an application of the Law to be enforced in all ecclesia indefinitely. From this, it is apparent i) that the Law was still in full force for Jewish believers (with no hint that it would be abolished at any time); and ii) that Gentile believers need not be circumcised and subjected to the whole Law, but only to a few restrictions (15:20). In other words, Jew-Gentile distinction was re-affirmed, not only for society in general, but particularly within the ecclesia.

3.4.3 Affirmation of prophecy and apocalypse

The quote James drew from Amos 9 stated that the Lord would restore 'the tent of David' (i.e. the kingdom of Israel), 'so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord' (Acts 15:16–17). Note the marker of purpose, 'so that' (*hopōs*), serving as a conjunction between God's restoration of Israel (recall Acts 1:6–8) and the salvation of the nations. The Lord's

restoration of Israel was a prerequisite for the other nations, ‘even all the Gentiles’ (15:17), to seek himself. James quoted from the LXX in which ‘humanity’ (*anthrōpos*) parallels ‘all the Gentiles,’ whereas the Hebrew text (both MT and DSS) speaks of ‘Edom,’ not ‘humanity.’ (‘Edom’ is spelled very similarly to ‘Adam’ in Hebrew, and the latter may be understood as humanity.) Bauckham (2013:182) assumes there was a Hebrew textual variant which the LXX followed (rather than a poor translation to Greek) and he explains that the LXX says ‘the rest of humanity will seek’ the Lord, unlike the MT in which ‘they will possess the remnant of humanity.’ His point is that ‘the dwelling of David’ is an eschatological temple where all nations will go to seek God’s presence (see Isa 2:2–3; Zech 14:16), even though James was referring to the physical temple in the messianic era (pp. 182–183). Because the nations already are called by God’s name, that is, they belong to God, they ‘do not have to become Jews in order to belong to the messianic people of God’ (p. 182).

Since it was always God’s plan to choose from the nations a people for himself, James decided that the council should not ‘cause difficulty for those from among the Gentiles who turn to God’ (15:19). In other words, Gentile believers should not be obligated to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses. In 15:28, this ‘yoke’ (*zygos*, 15:10) or ‘difficulty’ (*parenchleō*, 15:19) is called a ‘burden’ (*baros*): ‘it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us to place on you no greater burden...’. Flusser and Safrai (2012) noted that the same word is used by Jesus in a similar expression in his message to the ecclesia in Thyatira: ‘I do not put upon you any other burden’ (Rev 2:24). Moreover, two of the four prohibitions mentioned in Acts 15:29 are mentioned in the letter to Thyatira and similarly in the letter to Pergamum, namely, sexual immorality and consumption of food sacrificed to idols (Rev 2:14, 20).⁵² It would appear, therefore, that Jesus upheld the apostolic decree for the Gentile-dominated church in Thyatira almost half a century after the events of Acts 15, supporting the notion that the decree applies indefinitely to all Gentile Christians. (Note also Rev 9:20–21 and 22:15 in which idolaters, murderers, and sexually immoral people are judged, together with those who practise various other heinous sins.)

⁵² Combining these observations leads me to propose that the implicit object of Revelation 2:25 is the set of prohibitions in Acts 15:20 and 29, and that Jesus’ instruction to the church in Thyatira could be paraphrased: ‘Nevertheless, keep what you have—the four prohibitions specified by James—until I come.’ Such a proposal cannot be justified here.

3.4.4 *Four prohibitions in writing*

James' proposal to put the council's decision in writing (Acts 15:20) should not be overlooked. Assuming he was confident that the decision would be conveyed by trustworthy men, as indeed happened (15:22; 30), why would he require it to be recorded in writing? The answer is surely that a written ruling has a certain fixedness and bears the writer's authority, offering greater surety than an oral report. The letter was very brief, yet the written medium gave its contents the weight of legal authority and fixedness. (See Matt 4:4–10; 21:13; 26:24, 31 for some examples where the phrase 'it is written' is used in this way by Jesus.) The *halakhah* for Gentiles in the new covenant was set, and Luke's written volume has ensured its permanence.

Acts 15:20 continues by listing James' decision that Gentile believers should 'abstain from the pollution of idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood.' Luke's manner of emphasizing the importance of these prohibitions was to record them three times in Acts, in 15:20, 29 and 21:25.⁵³ As explained above, the four prohibitions may have been derived from an early form of the Noachide laws, or from the commandments for aliens living among Israel, or both. Regardless, the four prohibitions of Acts 15:20 were drawn from the Torah, thus demonstrating it still to be in force. Yet this is the same Law which differentiates between Jews and Gentiles—even Gentiles living within the community of Israel and worshipping the God of Israel. The question thus arises of how such distinction could be entirely erased when God made 'no distinction' in Acts 15:9, since the Holy Spirit and the whole Jerusalem council affirmed the Law (15:25, 28). By restricting the disregard of Jew-Gentile distinction to matters of salvation, a more consistent reading of the text emerges.

Some writers, including myself, have sought to explain James' decision as purposing to remove any obstacles to Jewish believers having table fellowship with Gentile believers (e.g. Skarsaune 2002:170, quoted in Woods 2012:197 in my own case to support this view, pp. 197–199.) After all, no Torah-observing, Jesus-believing Jew would dine with Gentiles who practised idolatry, even if these Gentiles proclaimed faith in Jesus. However, Bauckham (2013:184) argues that table fellowship is not the primary reason for the four prohibitions;

⁵³ Note 10:1–48; 11:1–18; 15:7–9 where Luke records the gift of the Spirit to Cornelius' household three times; and 9:43; 10:6, 32 in which Simon the tanner's occupation is mentioned three times.

rather, ‘they are prohibited primarily because they are pollutions of which all the people of God, Jewish and Gentile, must be free.’ Bauckham presents ‘close association of Jews and Gentiles,’ which includes table fellowship, as a secondary reason for James’ prohibitions (p. 184); his argument for moral purity based on connecting the prophecies and the laws for the resident alien have already been presented. I yield to Bauckham’s claim; my paper centred on the interpretation of Peter’s vision in Acts 10:9–16 whilst Bauckham’s chapter is a condensed version of three much greater studies undertaken by him (2013:178). Not that commensality was irrelevant as a motive for the ruling, but it was surely less significant than moral purity. Regardless, the four prohibitions of Acts 15:20 were Torah-determined bare essentials for Gentiles, whilst Jewish believers still bore the full yoke of the Law. Thus the prohibitions conveyed a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia.

3.4.5 Moses is read

The following verse, Acts 15:21, has led to much puzzlement and conjecture among commentators. David Stern (1992:279) identified six ways to interpret it. Of these, two appear most plausible in context. The first is that interaction between Gentile believers and Jews is inevitable (presumably desirable), so Gentile believers should not ruin the possibility of fellowshiping (especially at meals) with Jews. The discussion on table fellowship above concluded that it was a secondary motive for the four prohibitions, but it was nevertheless important. Jewish contact with Gentiles was unavoidable because of the Jewish dispersion ‘in every city,’ not merely temporarily but ‘from ancient generations’, as shown by the fact that Moses is read in synagogues every Sabbath in such places. Moreover, Acts 15:20–21 (among other NT texts) implies that Gentiles ought to seek fellowship with Jews.

The other most sensible interpretation, in my view, of Acts 15:21 is that Gentile Christians would attend synagogue on Sabbath for instruction, and that they would not be accepted into the synagogue if they did not keep the most basic commandments—those James identified in 15:20. This interpretation can be used together with the one pointing to close fellowship, even table fellowship. The purpose of Gentiles attending synagogue relates to their becoming ‘fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God’ (Eph 2:19) which would naturally require an orientation to the writings of Moses that the synagogue would provide. Yet all Jews, believers in Jesus or not, are obligated by Torah to separate themselves from idolaters, from the sexually immoral and from those who consume blood. So James’

comment in Acts 15:21 explains the need for the prohibitions in 15:20, as implied by the conjunction *gar* (because) linking the two verses.

In anticipating that Gentile believers would attend synagogue each Sabbath to hear Moses proclaimed, James affirmed the validity of the synagogue, the Sabbath and the Law of Moses (15:21), and he expected that these Gentiles would honour all three, yet without any obligation to become proselytes (15:20). One should not read this with subsequent events in mind as though James anticipated the changes to come in the ecclesia following the destruction of the temple; he expected his ruling to apply until Christ's return and indefinitely thereafter. In fact, Jeremiah (12:16) prophesied of a coming age in which God's consent for Gentiles to live among his people was contingent on their diligence to 'learn the ways of my people'. Perhaps this condition was behind James' comment in Acts 15:21. Yet Jeremiah 12:17 clarifies that even in that age, God will distinguish between the Gentiles living among Israel and the people of Israel.

By James' reference to Moses, the synagogues and the Sabbath, and possibly also to Jeremiah's prophecy, Acts 15:21 undermines the case against intra-ecclesial distinction of Jews and Gentiles, which hinges on the abolition of the Law. By implication, 'no distinction' in Peter's speech (15:9) should not be interpreted as a complete, or general, eradication of Jew-Gentile distinction.

Finally, Michael and Lancaster (2009:55–56) comment that the apostles' intention for Gentile believers to learn Torah in the synagogue likely reflected an anticipation that they would begin to observe the Torah's commandments; however, the apostles refused to *require* this of the Gentiles. Nor did the apostles specify any time-limit for Gentile believers to become thoroughly Torah observant. Nevertheless, the option of observing Torah was 'open' for Gentiles who wanted to do so—except for legal conversion through circumcision (p. 57). In other words, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles must remain in place, but Gentiles may otherwise take on as much of the Jewish faith tradition as they wish; indeed, it is a privilege for them to do so (p. 61–62). Michael and Lancaster suggest six 'compelling reasons for Gentile Torah observance' (p. 62–66) as a 'divine invitation' to Gentiles who might wish to surpass the minimum requirements of them, even as Jewish Nazirites did. Acts 15:21 illustrates the assumption that Gentiles would participate in synagogue meetings, including worship and instruction in Torah, yet without converting to Judaism; thus the Law,

with its distinction between Jews and Gentiles, remains in place both in the synagogue and among Jesus-believers (i.e. the ecclesia).

3.4.6 Comments on James' verdict

James' tersely worded prohibitions in Acts 15:20 were for Gentiles who turned to God, in order for them to live in a manner acceptable to God and to their Jewish counterparts. This explains why James extracted the rules from the Law. He did not spontaneously think up some solutions to objectionable behaviour; rather, he derived his ruling from Torah and its requirements for Gentiles according to traditional Jewish interpretation. Since James based his verdict on Torah, it is illogical that the Torah was abolished by the same verdict. Jews who came to faith in Jesus clearly remained under the yoke of the Law, whilst Gentiles were only required to observe a few essentials. Therefore, as Michael and Lancaster (2009:54) write, 'The very existence of Acts 15 insists that the apostles recognised a legal differentiation between Jewish and Gentile believers'. Similarly, Jewish theologian, Michael Wyschogrod (2004:209) notes, 'The verdict of the first Jerusalem Council, then, is that the Church is to consist of two segments, united by their faith in Christ.' So, not only did James' verdict validate the applicability of Torah for the ecclesia, it simultaneously formally established boundaries between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia, as reflected in the differing responsibilities of Jewish and Gentile believers to the Law.

3.5 Paul's role

Noteworthy in the narrative describing the Jerusalem council is that Paul does not argue his case. He was evidently willing to submit to the ruling the council would make. Apparently, Barnabas and Paul only testified by 'describing all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles' through them (15:12) and said no more. Luke switched the order of Barnabas' and Paul's names (c.f. 15:2, 3), from which one might infer that Barnabas did most of the talking. If so, it would seem that Paul was confident the leading apostles would support his case. His confidence stemmed not only from Peter's vision and encounter with Cornelius' household (Acts 10:1–11:18), nor only on stipulations of Torah (for Noachides and for resident aliens among Israel), but also on the basis of Christ's atonement. Skarsaune (2002:174) writes, 'the only good reason to impose circumcision and the law on Gentiles would be that salvation came from the law, and in that case "Christ died for nothing" (Gal

2:21).’ This reasoning is in complete harmony with the final statement of Peter in Acts 15:11 concerning the common means of salvation. To impose the Law on Gentiles who had already been saved would be to detract from the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice. Meanwhile, Torah-observance by Jesus-believing Jews was assumed; it was not even tabled for discussion at the Jerusalem council of Acts 15.

Bauckham’s (2013:181) view is that Paul and Barnabas had previously met with the three ‘pillars’ of the ecclesia in Jerusalem, Peter, James and John, to discuss the question of Gentile believers taking on the Law. This occurred even before Paul’s and Barnabas’ mission to south Galatia (Acts 13–14), and thus before the Jerusalem council of Acts 15. Their meeting with the senior apostles in Jerusalem is presumed to be the one mentioned in Galatians 2:1–10. This would further explain Paul’s confidence in the Jerusalem council—since they had already discussed the matter and made a provisional ruling—as well as James’ readiness on the day of the council with a *halakhic* ruling that entailed advanced hermeneutics combining multiple texts.

3.6 The letter from the council

The Jerusalem council concluded by writing a letter to send with Paul, Barnabas, Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas ‘to the brothers *who are* from among the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia’ (Acts 15:22–23). This opening address maintains the prevailing paradigm of Jew-Gentile distinction by labelling its recipients as *ex ethnōn* (‘from among the Gentiles’). The address did not mean that those believers had *exited* their ethnic status, but that they, as Gentiles, were equal members (‘brothers’) of God’s people as the Israelites. The council continued by dissociating itself from Jewish believers who had supposedly—but not—been sent by it in (15:24). These false delegates had caused confusion by upsetting the Gentile believers’ minds (literally, ‘souls’). In most text traditions, the reader is left to infer from 15:1 that this disturbance was induced by telling the Gentile believers that they need to be circumcised in order to be saved. The Robinson-Pierpont edition of the Greek text states explicitly what the unauthorised men from Jerusalem had said to unsettle Gentile believers in Antioch: ‘*You must be circumcised and keep the law*’ (15:24 NKJV).

According to the letter, the council had reached a ‘unanimous decision.’ They affirmed Barnabas and Paul (15:25–26), and indicated that Judas and Silas would orally report the

decision (15:27), which it then summarised (15:28–29). Acts 15:28 expresses that the decision seemed to have the approval of the Holy Spirit, not just the council members. Thus the council decision bore divine authority. It was to lay ‘no greater burden’ (of Torah-obligation) on the Gentile brethren than the four prohibitions already explained. A closing comment notes that abstaining from the stated prohibitions was sufficient to ‘do well’ (15:29). However, there is no comment in the letter corresponding to 15:21 regarding Moses being read in the synagogues every Sabbath, perhaps because the synagogues of Antioch might seek to proselytise Gentile Jesus-believers.

The implications of the letter are very clear. Since it was addressed explicitly to the Gentile believers in the congregations in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, Jewish believers were not affected by the ruling. The Jewish believers referred to in 15:24—those insisting on Gentile circumcision—were overruled in their attempt to impose the Law on Gentile believers, but they were not reprimanded for their devotion to the Law. The lack of reference to Jewish believers in the congregations to whom the letter was addressed strongly confirms the underlying assumption that they are to keep the Law throughout their generations, passing it down to their children (Num 15:37–41; Deut 6). Thus, the letter from the Jerusalem council implicitly affirms the theory of distinction; Jewish believers are assumed to be bound by Torah, whilst Gentile believers are only subject to a few ‘necessary things’ (Acts 15:28).

4. Subsequent events

Much other data may be presented regarding the distinction made by the apostles and the early ecclesia between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. The book of Acts itself is a key source. In an accompanying paper (Woods 2015), I have examined the life of Paul following the council in Jerusalem described in Acts 15. There I found good agreement with the findings of the contextual analysis above: Luke presents Paul as a paragon of Torah-observance who, at the prompting of James and all the elders of the ecclesia in Jerusalem, took decisive action to disprove rumours that he taught Jews in the diaspora to abandon the Torah and Jewish customs (Acts 21:18–26). The remainder of Acts follows Paul’s life following his arrest under the false accusation of teaching and acting contrary to Torah (21:28). From this and the analysis above, it is clear that Paul himself kept the Law and taught other Jews to do so, whilst instructing Gentile believers ‘to observe the rules that had been decided by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem’ (16:4), that is, ‘to abstain

from the pollution of idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood' (15:20). In other words, Paul's life and teaching provide a context which constrains our interpretation of Peter's statement in 15:9—in giving his Holy Spirit to Jews and Gentiles alike, and equally purifying the hearts of both by faith, God was not erasing Jewish particularity. Rather, God was demonstrating his impartiality, saving both groups by grace. Subsequent events in Acts clearly demonstrate that the apostles differentiated between Jewish and Gentile Jesus-believers, especially by the differing requirements they made on Jewish and Gentile believers regarding the Law. By his life and teaching, Paul endorsed the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. God's impartiality in 15:9 (reflecting the start of Peter's address in 10:34–35) pertained to matters of salvation; it did not signal a revocation of Israel's election.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Research aspects

This paper set out to determine whether or not Acts 15:9a refutes the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. The text reports direct speech of the apostle Peter saying that God made 'no distinction' between Jews and Gentiles in giving his Spirit to both groups and purifying their hearts by faith. Was Peter's statement intended to convey a new, general norm for the ecclesia by which all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles should be disregarded? If so, then Jewish believers should abandon their faith tradition (including Torah-observance), or else Gentile believers should convert to Judaism. The study examined both of these options in the context of Acts 15:1–29, and considered an alternative: that Peter's statement about distinction pertained to soteriology and should be limited to that theological domain.

5.2 Findings

A brief textual analysis affirmed that the text could be taken to refute the theory of distinction if viewed from a purely lexical perspective. On the surface, the phrase '*outhen diekrinen*' does appear to deny intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. The contextual analysis was much more complex, however, and demanded a more nuanced interpretation. After a sketching the narrative, two interpretive keys were presented. Firstly, the first-century assumption that Jews were indefinitely bound by Torah should not be overlooked—something Christians looking

back in time do too easily. Secondly, the four prohibitions of the apostolic decree for Gentile believers derive from Torah, whether from the laws for resident aliens (Gentiles living among the Israelites) or from the Noachide laws, or as an extension of both. This would appear to demonstrate the applicability rather than annulment of the Law. The bulk of the contextual analysis considered Peter's own words and James' verdict, followed by some observations on Paul's role in the council and the council's letter to the Gentile congregations concerned.

Peter's concluding remark in Acts 15:11 provides important context for interpreting 15:9; he emphasised that the means of salvation for Gentiles was the same as for Jews—'through the grace of the Lord Jesus'. This suggests that God's making 'no distinction' between the two groups pertained to soteriological matters. A prior incident in which the Gentile, Cornelius, and his household were given the Spirit (10:1–11:18) supports this hypothesis, especially considering Peter's remark in 10:34–35 that God shows no partiality; ethnicity is not a criterion of acceptability to him. Some technical and logical argumentation followed, including a challenge to the translation of *ischuō* in 15:10, the flaw in thinking that salvation by grace undermines the value of keeping the Law, the Jew-Gentile distinction Peter continued to make in his language (15:10–11), and a scriptural syllogism that reinforces the need of Jews (including those who follow Jesus) to observe the Law. Bauckham's view that the sense of 'no distinction' in 15:9 related to moral purity was found helpful. Further to purification, sanctification was identified as an area in which God made 'no distinction'; both purification and sanctification are components of God's salvation, however, and neither requires nor implies a termination of Jewish particularity, an end to Jew-Gentile distinction.

James' ruling provided many insights into the distinction debate. James himself was reputedly a strictly observant Jew, and his decree was wholly based on the Torah and the Prophets. In James' eschatological view, the messianic era had broken in, so it should be anticipated that all nations would acknowledge the One God of Israel and abide by the four prohibitions for Gentiles, yet *without becoming Israel*. Naturally, Gentiles who joined God's people through faith in Israel's Messiah would have to live morally pure lives, but James emphasised that the council should 'not cause difficulty' for them by imposing the same legal requirements on them that Jews bear. The decision was unanimous and legally binding. James set *halakhah* for Gentile members of the ecclesia by using the Cornelius incident as a precedent and by employing Jewish hermeneutical methods on Israel's prophetic scriptures. I

proposed that Jesus implicitly endorsed the apostolic decree half a century later, in Revelation 2:24, thereby establishing its catholicity and permanence.

In order to ensure the decree was recognised as a fixed, authoritative ruling, the council followed James' request to put it in writing. This provided Luke an opportunity to reiterate the four prohibitions, which he would do yet again for special emphasis later (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). The context provided by James' ruling makes very clear that Gentile Jesus-believers are not required to undergo a full conversion to Judaism as part of their Christ-faith, whilst Jewish Jesus-believers remained obligated to Torah observance. Nevertheless, a final, somewhat enigmatic, comment by James required special attention.

James closed with a deliberate mention of Moses (i.e. Torah) being proclaimed 'in every city from ancient generations' by means of synagogue readings every Sabbath (Acts 15:21). This likely indicated the need for Gentile believers to avoid impure behaviour in order that they may commune, dine, and worship with Jews, who were presumed to live in purity themselves. Readers should not overlook James' implicit affirmation of Sabbath worship in the synagogues, which includes the reading of Torah. While James and the elders in Jerusalem specified minimum requirements for Gentile behaviour in the form of the apostolic decree, it seems that Gentiles were free to explore Jewish practice further and that James anticipated their spiritual development through Torah study in local synagogues every Sabbath. However, James did not cancel out differences between Jews and Gentiles in terms of obligation to the Law; rather, his words upheld the prevailing Jew-Gentile distinction, applying it even among members of Christ's body. (See Acts 21:20–25; Woods 2015.)

Paul's apparent quietude throughout the council suggests he was completely confident in an outcome that would vindicate his stand against the agitators for circumcision (Acts 15:1–2), likely based on the work God had already done among the Gentiles (without converting to Judaism) in the Cornelius incident and his own experience (15:12), plus his prior meeting with Peter, James and John in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1–10).

The letter from the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:22–29) was written to assure Gentile believers that they did not need to be circumcised or take on the yoke of the whole Law, but only to abstain from four particularly offensive practices. It thereby sustains the making of distinction between Jews and Gentiles (as suggested even in its address) by imposing

different requirements on Gentiles to those that were applicable to Jews, including the Jewish leaders of the ecclesia. The remainder of the book of Acts contains further clear evidence of distinction-making by Paul especially, and also by James and all the elders in Jerusalem, as portrayed most graphically in 21:17–26. This evidence is presented in the subsequent paper.

5.3 Intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction as a possible solution

The immediate context, from Acts 15:1–29, of Peter’s statement that God made no distinction between Gentiles and Jews (15:9), strongly contradicts the idea that the apostles terminated all prevailing distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. The contextual evidence is consistent: it all weighs in favour of making such a distinction, even among members of the ecclesia. In the discussion of the Jerusalem council, Jewish believers in Jesus were assumed to remain under the jurisdiction of Mosaic Law, whilst it was determined that Gentile believers were not to be subjected to it, except for four universal prohibitions. Thus, Peter’s observation in 15:9 cannot mean that God removed *all* distinctions between Jews and Gentiles.⁵⁴ Another explanation of Peter’s statement is necessary; in what sense did God make no distinction between Jews and Gentiles?

The answer I have already presented is found in Peter’s speech itself. Several key aspects of salvation are found therein: the giving of the Holy Spirit, the purification of hearts by faith, and the grace of the Lord Jesus (Acts 15:8–9, 11). His closing words in 15:11 strongly suggest that God’s non-differentiation of Jews and Gentiles pertained to the common means of their salvation: grace. This notion is evident in other texts in Acts such as 10:1–11:18 and 26:16–18. It explains the continued Torah-observance of the Jewish leaders of the ecclesia found in the contextual analysis above, covering 15:1–29, and in the accompanying paper, covering 15:30–28:31. Given that tension—between God making no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers, and the ecclesia doing the opposite—the explanation makes sense: God made no distinction between the two *in terms of how they are saved*, but he did not abolish the existing distinction *in general*.

⁵⁴ The possibility of a ‘third race’ that is neither Jewish nor Gentile in nature was not discussed since it is not suggested by the text. In a related paper on the ‘one new man’ of Ephesians 2:15, I addressed this topic and argued that the ecclesia is a corporate entity comprising Jews and Gentiles united in Christ, not *former* Jews and Gentiles (Woods 2014b:113–122; 125). Unlike the Gentiles’ ‘former way of life, the old man’ (Eph 4:22), the faith tradition of Jewish members of Christ’s body is not to be cast off upon their spiritual regeneration.

Restricting the scope of the ‘no distinction’ phrase to matters of salvation unlocks the possibility of an ecclesiological structure that has generally been dismissed in the history of the Christian church. A new theological vista is revealed when one views the ecclesia as a community comprised of Jews *as Jews* and Gentiles *as Gentiles*, united in Christ yet distinct in practice. In this perspective, both groups are entirely dependent of Jesus’ grace for their salvation, yet Jews retain the distinctive practices of their faith tradition in accordance with the Law, so that the ecclesia is visibly a twofold entity. Each member of Christ is to remain in his calling, whether as a Jew or as a Gentile (1 Cor 7:17–24 and see Rudolph 2010, 2011; Tucker 2011). I posit that such duality is the realisation of God’s plan, portrayed in the prophets, to incorporate all nations in his kingdom, faithful Gentiles becoming ‘fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God’ (Eph 2:19), no longer ‘alienated from the citizenship of Israel’ (2:12). The sense is that of accompaniment, not replacement; it speaks of unity with humility, not triumphalism of one over the other; it requires reconciliation, not competition.

5.4 Concluding statement

In the context of Acts 15:1–29, Peter’s comment in 15:9 that God made ‘no distinction’ between Gentile and Jewish believers in Jesus cannot be taken to mean that he abolished Jewish particularity altogether, blending the two into a homogenous, non-Jewish community. Rather, Peter meant that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in terms of how they are saved, since both depend entirely on the grace of the Lord Jesus. Yet even within the ecclesia, each person was regarded either as a Jew or as a Gentile, and was expected to live accordingly; Jewish believers in Jesus were expected to observe the Law and Jewish tradition, whilst Gentile believers were only required to observe the four prohibitions of James’ decree and were not required to become Jews.

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4. Paper Three: Does Acts 15:9 refute intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction?

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5. Paper Four: Testing intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction theory in Acts 15:30–28:31

Abstract

Acts 15:30–28:31 is examined for evidence that either supports or invalidates the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. Particular attention is given to Acts 21:17–26 which reflects the stance of Paul, James, and all the elders in Jerusalem. Without any exception, the evidence confirms distinction theory by demonstrating that the leaders of the ecclesia observed the Law and taught other Jews in the Jesus movement to do likewise, whilst teaching Gentile believers not to convert to Judaism but at least to abstain from four moral offences. These findings concur with those of my previous studies on the same topic, which falls in an emerging field called ‘Paul within Judaism’. Some questions are posed on implications of Jews and Gentiles jointly comprising the ecclesia.

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Author’s remarks: This was the easiest of the five papers. The textual analysis did not require solving difficult issues of translation or textual criticism. I sought to simply follow the narrative, not engaging deeply with differing scholarly interpretations nor consulting a great deal of literature. Though such activity would be valuable, the purpose of the paper and large span of text reviewed called for a different approach. Rather than doing exegesis of the selected text, I tested distinction theory along the historical path traced by the narrative, from one event and statement to the next. The study presupposes an accurate account of historical events in the selected text. (For further comment, refer to the Introduction (chapter 1).)

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

This essay follows on from an analysis of Peter’s comment in Acts 15:9 that God made ‘no distinction’ between Gentile and Jewish believers in Jesus when he gave both parties his Holy Spirit (15:8) and purified their hearts by faith (Woods 2015). In that study, the immediate context of Acts 15:1–29 provided critical information that led me to conclude that God made no distinction between Gentile and Jewish believers *in soteriological matters*, yet other dimensions of Jew-Gentile distinction remained intact since Jews (including Jewish believers in Jesus) bore the yoke of the Mosaic Law whilst Gentiles did not (ibid).

Does the remainder of Acts support my prior finding that the scope of the comment in Acts 15:9, that God made no distinction between Gentiles and Jews, relates to soteriology only, and is not a termination of Jewish particularity? Or does it contradict this claim by testifying that the earliest leaders of the ecclesia⁵⁵ made no distinction in any regard between Jews and Gentiles in the Jesus movement? In other words, *does the text from 15:30–28:31 support or undermine the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction?* I described distinction theory previously in Woods 2014a; 2014b and 2015. In essence, it supposes that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles which existed prior to the Christ event, as established by Mosaic Law, should continue in the present era—even within the ecclesia. If distinction theory is valid, then one would expect evidence of Jewish Jesus-believers continuing faithfully in Jewish tradition, including Torah observance, whilst Gentile believers only adopt some elements of Jewish tradition, especially those stressed in the NT such as the commandment to love others (Matt 22:39; 2 John 5-6), but not those which distinguish Jews from Gentiles. Such distinguishing elements include those commandments known as ‘boundary markers’ or ‘sign laws’ such as circumcision and *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws).

My larger research agenda is to test the strength of the case against distinction theory biblically, and this article extends a study of what ‘distinction’ meant in Acts 15:9. It takes the form of a topical commentary, the topic being evidence of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction in Acts following the Jerusalem council in chapter 15. That is, I shall only discuss data in the second half of Acts that pertains to distinction theory in order to answer the

⁵⁵ By ecclesia I mean *Christ’s community, whether Jew or Gentile*. See Woods 2015 for further explanation on the difficulties of nomenclature.

research question framed above. These data include the teaching, words and behaviour of Paul and other leaders of the ecclesia, as presented by Luke. I acknowledge that Luke deliberately selected and wrote about events in Paul's life in order to convey a particular message, but my presupposition is that he did justice to 'the Paul of history' rather than merely using Paul for ulterior purposes. In fact, the great detail Luke provided in certain points of emphasis suggests that his source was Paul himself, who *wanted* Luke to stress these biographical details.⁵⁶ Due to the large swath of text to cover and the specific purpose as ancillary to the related analysis of Acts 15:9, interaction with scholarly literature is curtailed. The following section tracks Luke's narrative from 15:30 to the end of Acts, while section 3 returns to examine the first week of Paul's final visit to Jerusalem more carefully. The Lexham English Bible is used except where otherwise specified.

2. Paul in relation to Judaism and the Law following the Jerusalem council

2.1 Textual analysis of Acts 15:30–28:31

Paul is the figure in focus almost constantly in Acts following the Jerusalem council (15:30 onwards). Time and again, both explicitly and implicitly, Luke portrays Paul as a Torah-observant Jew—a fact to which his frequent evangelism in various synagogues testifies: in Thessalonica for three Sabbaths (17:1–3); in Berea (17:10–11); in Corinth for some time (18:4, 11), even persuading the synagogue ruler, Crispus, and his whole household to believe (18:8); in Syrian Antioch where he was invited to stay longer (18:19–20); and in Ephesus for three months (19:8). Luke even noted that it was Paul's custom to attend synagogue (17:2), and on some short visits to remain with his hosts for seven days; the latter might, I suggest, be Luke's way of saying Paul stayed long enough attend synagogue on Sabbath (20:6; 21:4; 28:14) rather than an accurate record of the duration of Paul's visit. Apollos also evangelized the synagogue in Ephesus (18:24) and publically refuted the Jews in Achaia (18:28). Yet surely Paul and Apollos would not have been admitted to the synagogue, let alone heard there, if they were known to have renounced the Law and departed from Judaism? Apparently other Jews—even opponents—never questioned Paul's or Apollos' Jewishness.

⁵⁶ Note Luke's use of first person plural pronouns in Acts 16:11–17; 20:6–8, 13–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16.

Additionally, Acts 16:20 demonstrates that even pagans, the owners of a fortune-telling slave girl, identified Paul and Silas as Jews.

Paul retained his Roman citizenship (16:37–38; 22:25–29; 23:27). Therefore, if he had forsaken Judaism, he could have appealed to Rome against the judgements he received from the synagogue authorities. He did so on one occasion when Roman officials planned to flog him (22:25), but never when Jewish officials did. Instead, Paul endured the maximum beating permitted by Oral Law (keeping within the restriction of Deut 25:1–3; Stern 1992:516), thirty nine lashes, *five times* by the time he wrote 2 Corinthians (11:24). Sanders (1977, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 1, in Nanos 2008:16) argued that this is evidence of Paul's willing submission to synagogue authorities. Instead of balking at their judgment, Paul yielded to it. Was Paul simply acting 'Jewishly' for the sake of the gospel? It seems not.

Moreover, Paul did not teach that Christ's atonement released Jews from their obligation to the Law (21:20–26, discussed further in the section below), which the Jerusalem council assumed to retain force (for Jews) indefinitely (15:1–29; Woods 2015). In fact, Paul steadfastly defended himself within the authority of Torah (24:12–14; 26:22–23; 28:17–19, where both written Law and Jewish *halakhah* and are implied; see Skarsaune 2002:174). His accusers could not find any specific commandment with which to charge him. In 17:6–7, Paul's accusers claimed that he had been 'acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar,' not Moses. In 18:13, Paul was accused of 'persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law' (NIV)⁵⁷ but no specific charges were laid. The falseness of the accusation is apparent in the unjust beating of Sosthenes, the synagogue ruler, *without trial*—even 'in front of the judgment seat' of the Roman proconsul of Achaia (18:17)!

In Acts 21:21–22, James and the elders in Jerusalem exhibited great concern about the *false* impression that very large numbers of strictly observant Jewish Jesus-believers had, that Paul taught Jewish believers to abandon the Law. (This occasion is discussed in more detail in the next section.) In 21:27–28, Paul was *falsely* accused of teaching against the (Jewish) people,

⁵⁷ Note that the text speaks of 'the people,' [*tous anthrōpous*], not just 'people' or 'men' as seemingly all other English translations choose. 'The people' is a common way for Jews to refer to the Jewish people in particular (e.g. Matt 4:23; Mark 14:2; Luke 24:19; John 11:50; Acts 2:47; 13:17; 26:17; Heb 2:17; 1 Peter 2:1; Jude 5). Though *tous anthrōpous* sometimes refers to all people in general, the context of Acts 18:13 makes clear that Jews are the referent, so the NIV translation is appreciated here.

the Law and the temple,⁵⁸ and of defiling the temple by bringing Greeks into it. Luke deliberately added a parenthetical explanation of how the accusers got the *wrong* idea that Paul had taken ‘Trophimus the [Gentile] Ephesian’ into the temple. Apparently, Luke wanted to emphasize that Paul did not in any way break the Law nor dishonour the temple. Furthermore, in 23:9, Paul was declared innocent by ‘some experts in the Law from the party of the Pharisees’—a surprising verdict from those generally viewed as his opponents, and thus most noteworthy. One may thus infer that he remained fully within Jewish tradition, living in accord with Jewish Law. Indeed, during his trial Paul could refer to the Sanhedrin ‘brothers’ in 23:1, 5 and 6. He had already addressed the Jewish crowd in 22:1 with the same term, and in 28:17, Paul also called the most prominent Jews in Rome ‘brothers’. Like James and the elders, Paul remained a Jew throughout his life—something his faith in Christ did not alter.

In 24:1–8, before the Roman governor Felix in Caesarea, an attorney for Paul’s opponents, Tertullus, moderated the initial accusation against Paul, presumably due to lack of evidence to support it. Tertullus said that Paul had *attempted* to desecrate the temple, but added that Paul was ‘a public menace and one who causes riots among all the Jews throughout the Roman Empire and a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes’ (24:5–6). However, Paul’s accusers were unable to prove any of the ‘many and serious charges’ against him (25:7), and he denied having done anything ‘against the law of the Jews nor against the temple nor against Caesar’ (25:8), adding that he had ‘done no wrong to the Jews’ (25:10). Thus Paul insisted that he kept Jewish Law without compromise.

At one point Paul did sin in ignorance (23:3), though he repented immediately, citing the Law against his own actions (Acts 23:5. See Exod 22:8.) He clearly did not see himself as free from the Law even if the Sadducean authorities were illegitimate and corrupt. In fact, Paul’s accusation of Ananias (23:3) appears to be based on the Oral Law (Sanhedrin 3:6–8) which specifies the proper process for cross-examination (see Anonymous 2006), in which case it is evidence that Paul perceived the whole of the Jewish tradition as still having authority.

⁵⁸ Similarly, Stephen was accused by false witnesses of ‘speaking words against the holy place and the law’ (Acts 6:13).

Alternately, he may have been appealing to Leviticus 19:15 which demands just judgement, but the point is the same: the Law remained in force.

In keeping with Jewish tradition, Paul also sought to keep the feasts. In Acts 20:6, Paul and Luke apparently observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread since they waited in Philippi until it was over before sailing to Troas. In 20:16, Paul bypassed Ephesus in his haste to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost (to worship, 24:11). In Acts 20:22–24, Paul said he was ‘bound by the Spirit’ to travel to Jerusalem. Indeed, he was determined to do so in spite of warnings in 21:4, 10–15 and in spite of his having been sent ‘far away’ from the temple to other nations by none other than Jesus himself (22:17–21). Paul’s on-going affinity for Jerusalem and the temple is evident, congruent with his keeping the feasts of Israel.⁵⁹ Luke even mentioned the Fast (Day of Atonement) as a marker of time in Acts 27:9, which might imply Paul’s observance of it (see Stern 1992:320).

Paul identified as a Jew in other ways too. He shaved his head at Cenchrea in completion of a vow (to the Lord, Acts 18:18) which may have been a Nazirite vow (Anonymous 2006; Barry *et al.* 2012). In 21:23–26, Paul purified himself at the temple and paid the offering for the completion of the Nazirite vows of four Jesus-believing Jewish men.⁶⁰ The text does not specify why Paul needed purification. It may have been because Paul had touched the corpse of Eutychus (Rudolph 2002:64); see Acts 20:9–10; 21:26–27 in relation to Numbers 19:11–13. Also, Paul (together with other diaspora Jews celebrating Pentecost in Jerusalem) may have sought formal purification because of his travels in Gentile lands (Crossway Bibles 2008:2132), since Gentiles often buried their dead close to home—close enough potentially to cause ritually impurity (Rudolph 2002:64⁶¹). Finally, those paying for Nazirite offerings may have had to undergo ritual purification themselves (*ibid.*) Regardless of the reason Paul needed purification, his undertaking is evidence of his commitment to Torah and to Judaism.

⁵⁹ Note also Paul’s instruction in 1 Cor 5:8, ‘let us celebrate the feast’, and his comment in 16:8, ‘But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost’.

⁶⁰ I shall return to Acts 21:17–26 to make a more detailed assessment later.

⁶¹ Rudolph quotes from Raymond Brown (1966, *The Gospel according to John*, vol. 1, New York: Doubleday, p. 445) and also cites Kalervo Salo (1991, *Luke’s treatment of the Law: A redaction-critical investigation*, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, p. 262).

Paul's defence in Acts 22:1–21 shows his self-identification as a Jew. Speaking in Hebrew,⁶² he began by stating 'I am a Jewish man' (22:3). Later (23:6), he said that he was a Pharisee. Paul kept his conscience clear and practised 'charitable giving and offerings' to his people (24:16). Shortly after the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, Paul even required Timothy to be circumcised (and thus to take on the whole Law, see Gal 5:3) on account of his partially Jewish heritage (Acts 16:3), and near the end of his life (28:20) his Jewish kin remained at the heart of his self-sacrificial messianism: 'for because of the hope of Israel I am wearing this chain!' It is thus difficult to interpret Paul's behaviour as ethnically-neutral, as though he did not see any special purpose remaining for the sons of Israel in the new covenant era.⁶³

2.2 Summary

This section concludes that the book of Acts portrays the apostle Paul as continuing in his Jewish identity and practice throughout his life. In particular, the text from 15:30–28:31 reveals Paul as a synagogue worshipper, submitted to synagogue authorities, innocent of breaking Jewish Law, a keeper of Israel's feasts, devoted to piety and to ritual purity, competent in Hebrew and the Hebrew scriptures, cleaving to Jewish identity and committed to his Jewish compatriots. In order to relate this evidence to the key question on making distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia, it must be contrasted with Paul's teaching of the apostolic decree by which Gentile believers were exempt from the bulk of the Jewish Law (Acts 15:13–35; 16:4). Doing so makes a strong case for distinction theory. However, before reflecting further on the ecclesiological implications—what these findings mean for Jewish identity and practice within the ecclesia, especially *vis-à-vis* those of Gentile Christians—a more thorough review of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem is warranted. The portion of the narrative in Acts 21:17–26 contains crucial evidence for the distinction debate.

⁶² Most English Bibles translate *tē Hebraidi dialektō* (lit. 'in the Hebrew dialect') as 'in Aramaic' in Acts 21:40 and 22:2. (Also see 26:14.) The widespread use of Aramaic at the time makes this extremely improbable because Luke stressed the point of the language twice in quick succession, and noted that the Jewish crowd 'became even more silent' when they heard him speaking it (22:2). Why would the crowd be surprised by Paul speaking the common language? Rather, Paul deliberately spoke Hebrew in order to demonstrate his authentic Jewishness and his competence in the language of the Torah and temple liturgy. (See 22:3 for Paul's own claim to be qualified in Jewish Law).

⁶³ See Paul's own writings on the status of Israel, which climax in Romans 11.

3. Paul, James, and all the elders in Jerusalem

3.1 Further textual analysis of Acts 21:17–26

The account of Paul's final stay in Jerusalem begins in Acts 21:17. Paul arrived there some years after the council meeting of Acts 15, long enough for consequences of the ruling of 15:6–29 to have surfaced. (The Jerusalem council is dated at 48/49 AD and Paul's arrest at 54 AD or perhaps 57 AD, Crossway Bibles 2008:1806–1807; Rusten and Rusten 2005:83, 88.) The narrative is especially important because it not only records Paul's views but also those of 'James, and all the elders' of the ecclesia in Jerusalem (21:18). Notably, the pericope starts by mentioning that Paul and his companions received a glad welcome by 'the brothers' in Jerusalem (21:17). This is important in disarming any proposition that Paul was at odds with the other apostles, as might otherwise be inferred from Galatians 2:11–14. To the contrary, Luke's comment expresses the warm sentiment felt for Paul by the brothers in Jerusalem.

James, together with all the elders in Jerusalem, glorified God on hearing of Paul's work among the Gentiles through Paul's ministry (21:19), and then they responded by noting how many *myriades* (myriads) of Jews had come to faith in Jesus, all of whom were *zēlōtai tou nomou*: 'zealous adherents of the law' (21:20).⁶⁴ Rudolph (2002:68) draws attention to force of these words as 'a direct allusion to Maccabean Torah faithfulness in an era marred by compromise.' Zeal for the Torah appears six times in 1 Maccabees 2. In Acts 21:20, Luke uses it in juxtaposition with *apostasia* (apostasy) in 21:21, a term also found in 1 Maccabees 2:15 (Rudolph 2002:68). Throughout the discussion (21:19–25), the making of distinction between Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles is strongly evident in the language of the apostles.

In Acts 21:21, a great concern of James and all the elders emerged: among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Paul was rumoured to be 'teaching all the Jews *who are* among the Gentiles *the* abandonment of Moses, telling them not to circumcise *their* children or to live according to *our* customs.' Often overlooked is the question of how this rumour arose, especially since Luke recorded nothing to indicate any truth in it. The answer is surely that Paul taught *Gentiles* not to take on the Law, not to circumcise their children and not to live

⁶⁴ Note that, even after years of discipleship under Jesus and years of leading the *ekklēsia*, Peter's commitment to keeping Jewish dietary laws (i.e. eating *kosher*) was unwavering (Acts 10:14). I already argued that his vision in 10:9–16 did not compromise the dietary laws at all (Woods 2012).

according to Jewish customs. This would be in keeping with the ruling of the Jerusalem council (15:20, 29), and is implicitly confirmed in 16:4. As Paul taught in synagogues in the diaspora, it would be no surprise if Jews deliberately or accidentally recounted his instructions to the Gentiles as though he had issued them to Jews. Another important point to note in 21:21 is that the elders expressed no concern that Paul was instructing Gentiles not to keep the Law. In this, we see both that they made a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus regarding their obligation to the Law, and that they did not require Gentile believers to observe it. Thus, this verse strongly supports the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

The narrative continues to tell how James, Paul, and all the elders in Jerusalem found it important for Paul to refute the rumour by a public demonstration of Paul's devotion to the Law and tradition of the Jews. The tone of 21:22 is that of alarm: 'What then is to be done? Doubtless they will all hear that you have come!' The elders were concerned especially since misinformed Jewish believers would hear that Paul was in their holy city (21:22) for Pentecost (20:24. The fact that these events probably took place around the time of Pentecost serves to heighten the climax, firstly because Jewish tradition asserts that Pentecost was the time when the Torah was given to Moses at Sinai, and also because many devoted Jews from the diaspora would have made pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast.) The elders' solution in 21:23–24 suggests that there were currently four members of their messianic community who had taken Nazirite vows. According to Rudolph (2002:65), Nazirite vows were voluntary, pious and regarded as surpassing the maximum requirements of the Law. Therefore these vows 'served as incontrovertible proof of his devotion to Torah in word and deed' against Paul's critics (ibid.). As the elders said to Paul, his purification and payment would let everyone know that 'you yourself also agree with observing the law' (21:24). Thus even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 15:22–23; 16:4; Rom 1:5; 11:13; Gal 2:7–9; Eph 3:1–8; 1 Tim 2:7), agreed with James and all the elders on the importance of Jews keeping the Law.

In Acts 21:25, James and all the elders in Jerusalem told Paul of their decision years earlier (even though Paul had been present at the time): Gentile believers 'should avoid food sacrificed to idols and blood and *what has been* strangled and sexual immorality'. The context of that decision (15:1–29) makes it clear that Gentile believers were not to be subjected to the Law as a whole, but these four prohibitions were unavoidable. (Note

especially 15:10, 19–20, 28–29.) The reiteration of this ruling in 21:25 confirms that the apostolic decree applied to all Gentile believers indefinitely, not just those in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia at the time of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, as Rudolph (2010:12) also observed. Surely Paul could not have forgotten the ruling, given his role in the council, his part in delivering the council’s letter, and its centrality to his mission to the Gentiles! Indeed, Acts 16:4 records that Paul and Timothy taught congregations in all the towns they went through ‘to observe the rules that had been decided by the apostles and elders *who were* in Jerusalem.’⁶⁵ So, why did James and the elders recount to Paul details of the letter containing the apostolic decree as though he didn’t already know about it, and why did Luke opt to reiterate it in favour of presenting other material or reducing redundancy?

Rudolph (2010:13) suggests that ‘James [assumed to be the speaker in Acts 21:20–25] anticipates Paul’s concern that a public testimony of Torah faithfulness may be misinterpreted by Jesus-believing Gentiles to mean that they too should be Torah observant.’ Therefore, James’ reminder of the letter was to reassure Paul that the risk of Gentiles misinterpreting Paul’s actions was already mitigated. Such a concern would indicate that the ecclesial leadership was averse to Gentile Christians converting to Judaism even (or especially) as they continued in faith in Jesus. This aversion is also marked in the account of the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–29) and in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, most climactically in 5:2: ‘if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing!’ Yet 5:3 obligates those who are circumcised to keep the whole Law, which is *also* in keeping with James’ and all the elders’ view expressed in Acts 21:20–24. As for Luke’s editorial decision to reiterate the decree at this point, it may have been to emphasize its gravity—he stated it *three times* in Acts (15:20, 29; 21:25), just as he did some other notable points.⁶⁶ Luke intentionally repeated the record for the same reason that James did; he did not want his audience—whether Jewish or Gentile—to think that Paul’s surpassing Torah-observance in the same text (Acts 21:17–26) was intended for Gentile believers to emulate.

Paul began his ritual purification the day after his meeting with the elders (Acts 21:26) and purified himself two days later (see Num 19:11–12). Thereafter, he entered the temple

⁶⁵ Note: *krinō* (to decide, or make a verdict) is used in both 16:4 and 21:25, just as James had used it in 15:19.

⁶⁶ E.g. Peter’s refusal to kill and eat unclean animals in his vision (10:14–16); the giving of the Holy Spirit to uncircumcised Gentiles at Cornelius’ home (10:44–46; 11:15–16; 15:8); and the occupation of Simon, a tanner (9:43, 10:6, 32).

precinct to announce ‘the completion of the days of purification until the time the offering would be presented behalf of’ himself and the four others (21:26). At the end of seven days Paul would again be pure, though he was arrested before that (Acts 21:27 and following). His consent to purifying himself at the temple, and his payment for the others’ offerings, was not arbitrary. Paul did so *in order that everyone would know that the allegations of his teaching Jews in the diaspora to abandon the Law were nothing, and that he himself behaved in obedience to the Law* (21:21, 24). In other words, Paul was demonstrating his conviction that Jews must not forsake the Law, and that he remained a Jew regardless of his faith in Christ. Noteworthy is the irony in Luke’s narrative: Paul’s purification and payment for the others’ vows led to his arrest on charges of (previously) breaking the Law and defiling the temple (21:27–28)—the very charges he sought to disarm. His attempt to clear his name was thus exploited as an opportunity to accuse him falsely of the same guilt from which he sought to vindicate himself.

3.2 Summary

Acts 21:17–26 tells of Paul’s return to Jerusalem, reunion with the ecclesia and its leadership there, and his purification in the temple with four other Jesus-believing Jews. The contrast between Jewish and Gentile members of the ecclesia in terms of their obligation to the Law is starkly portrayed in this text. Myriads (literally, tens of thousands) of Jews were reported to have believed the proclamation about Jesus, and they were *all zealous adherents of the Law* (21:20); they were *not apostates from Judaism*. Indeed, the juxtaposition of zeal for Torah with apostasy appears to be an allusion to 1 Maccabees 2 (Rudolph 2002:68)—rhetoric intended to promote faithful Torah observance and condemn apostasy from it. Meanwhile, Paul was rumoured to have taught against Torah-observance by Jews in the diaspora (21:21)—a fallacy that urgently needed rectification. The elders in Jerusalem requested that Paul purify himself, and pay for four others from their messianic community to be purified. In this way, everyone would know that the rumours were ‘nothing’ and that Paul himself agreed with the community on the importance of Torah-observance, so Paul willingly consented (21:24, 26). There is no hint that this was a temporary, transitional period in or after which the Law would be phased out; Jewish practice and even identity were unchanged.

However, James and all the elders in Jerusalem made it clear that they did not expect Gentile Jesus-believers to become Jews or to observe the whole Law. This is most evident in the

elders' words of 21:21, which explicitly concerns *Jewish* believers among the Gentiles, and 21:25, which reiterates the apostolic decree that specified just four commandments for Gentile Jesus-believers as an assurance to Paul that they will not be misled into thinking they should emulate his stringent adherence to the Law. Luke was very careful to document the obligations for Jewish and Gentile Jesus-believers separately, as the following quotes confirm. Rudolph (2010:13) referred to 21:17–26 as 'the mirror text of Acts 15,' making explicit the view that 'the Jerusalem council decision presumes that Jews will (and should) remain Jews in keeping with the "covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8; Gn 17:9–14).' Remarking on 21:24–25, Michael and Lancaster (2009:56) rightly state, 'The passage unambiguously illustrates that the apostles did not preach that Gentiles had a mandate to keep the Torah in the same manner as the Jewish people.'

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary and concluding statement

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the events following the Jerusalem council, narrated in Acts, support or undermine the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. That is: Does the text provide evidence that Paul and other leaders of the ecclesia made a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus with regard to obligation to Jewish tradition, including Torah-observance and Jewish practice?

The investigation proceeds in two stages, both of which presuppose that Luke's account accurately records 'the historical Paul'. The first stage scans Acts 15:30–28:31, extracting for comment any indication of Paul either making or abolishing distinction between Jews and Gentiles, especially within the body of believers in Jesus. Paul was shown to observe Torah carefully himself whilst, at the same time, teaching that Gentile disciples did not need to shoulder the yoke of the whole Law, though they did have to abstain from a few 'necessary things' (15:19–20, 28–29; 16:4). Thus, *Paul propagated intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction by strictly observing Jewish tradition, including Torah, himself yet teaching that Gentile believers should not do so.*

The second stage of the investigation focuses in much greater detail on the first week of Paul's final visit to Jerusalem in Acts 21:17–26, including his meeting with James and all the

elders of the local ecclesia, as well as his temple ceremonies. In this text, Luke stressed that James and the elders were unanimously in accord with Paul's devotion to Judaism and the Law, insisting that he make a public demonstration of it to dismiss rumours to the contrary. These findings are perfectly congruent with other events recorded in Acts, discussed in section 2. There is no mention of believers as 'former Gentiles' or 'former Jews' in Acts. Rather, *the language used, and the behaviour exhibited by the ecclesial leaders, continued to identify believers as either Jews or Gentiles; this classification apparently determined one's responsibility to Jewish Law, regardless of an individual's faith in Jesus.*

To conclude, then, *Acts 15:30–28:31 strongly supports the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.* All the evidence—every relevant statement in this part of Luke's narrative—weighs in favour of making distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia. There is no discontinuity in Acts with the previous era in regard to making distinction between Jews and Gentiles. At no point are Jewish believers relinquished of Jewish Law, nor Gentiles required to take on the whole Law, but quite the contrary—Jewish believers are expected to keep the Law whilst Gentile believers are instructed not to become Jews but only to refrain from a few major moral offences identified in the Law. By this one may conclude that a sharp distinction was consistently made between Jewish Jesus-believers and Gentile Christians in the very early ecclesia.

4.2 Cohesion with my related studies

This paper accompanies and extends another (Woods 2015) in which Peter's comment in 15:9, that God made 'no distinction' between Jews and Gentiles in purifying their hearts by faith, was analysed in the context of 15:1–29. Additionally, I previously examined Acts 11:12 which, in some English translations, also suggests that the era of differentiating between Jews and Gentiles came to an end when Gentiles received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Woods 2014a). Both other studies concluded that the text does not cancel the prevailing biblical distinction between Jews and Gentiles, or Israel and the nations, even *within* the body of believers in Jesus Christ. However, a review of the rest of Acts (following the Jerusalem council in chapter 15) was essential to establish whether such a conclusion is sustained in the subsequent narrative. This paper has established complete agreement between the finding of the previous studies and the evidence in Acts 15:30–28:31, without a single exception. Moreover, my exegesis of Peter's vision in 10:9–16 (Woods 2012) found that it bore no

relevance to the applicability of Jewish Law (to Jews, whether Jesus-believers or not), which should therefore not be regarded as annulled. (The concept of clean and unclean foods found in the Law was simply used for a metaphor to convey a message.) Indeed, as this paper has shown, the words and actions of Paul, James, and all the elders in the Jerusalem ecclesia demonstrably upheld the Law with great zeal.

But what of Paul's letters? In a paper published last year, I explained that the 'one new man' Christ created in himself from Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:15) did not produce a raceless people, but rather a new humanity comprising spiritually regenerated Jews and Gentiles who retain their ethnic identities and, for Jews, their faith tradition too (Woods 2014b). Further research on Paul's letters is recommended below.

4.3 Further research opportunities

This section provides suggestions for further research on the topic of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. Firstly, I recommend a comparison of the life of Paul, as portrayed in this paper, with Paul's letters. In particular, statements he made in Romans 3:22; 10:12; Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 9:11 appear to deny any room for making distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia. I posit that the first three of these texts relates to how people are made right with God—by faith in Christ—rather than signalling a termination of Jewish particularity (and election). This would concur with my prior conclusion that 'no distinction' in Acts 15:9 relates to soteriology, nothing more (Woods 2015). As for Colossians 9:11, I propose that Paul's point is not a cancellation of Jew-Gentile distinction, but that their differences are overcome by the unity of membership in Christ, who is 'all, and in all.'

Therefore, I suspect a review of the seeming contradictions in Paul's words and behaviour could be resolved in the light of distinction theory, especially when paying careful attention to the reason for Paul's writing and to the identity of his intended audience (majority Gentile). Already, a number of scholars have gone beyond the new perspective on Paul; they interpret his letters as works written from 'within Judaism'—see Nanos and Zetterholm (2015); Mattison *et al.* (2014) for current developments. Accordingly, Paul remained a Jew all his life and understood the ecclesia to be bilateral in composition—Jews and Gentiles as distinct categories. Nevertheless, a study focused on the abovementioned texts of Paul in relation to Luke's presentation of Paul may have great value.

Furthermore, I recommend a discussion of the findings in this paper in relation to commentary on the same text by scholars with a traditional (opposing) perspective on Jewish practice within the ecclesia. (Recall that herein I curtailed interaction with scholarly literature on account of the large swath of biblical narrative to review.) I anticipate that opponents would rely on the notion that Jewish observance in the time of the apostles was being phased out, but I think one would have difficulty establishing this from the biblical text.

Finally, I propose that extra-biblical sources be examined specifically for evidence of the early ecclesia making distinction between Jews and Gentiles. There are some particularly illuminating sources that help in this regard, including, for instance in Eusebius' listing of fifteen successive bishops in Jerusalem, starting with the apostle Peter, 'all of them belonging to the circumcision' (Schaff and Wace 2014:390–391/*HE* 4:5:2–4.)⁶⁷ Indeed, 'their whole church consisted then of believing Hebrews' (p. 391).⁶⁸ Moreover, the anti-Jewish rhetoric which emerged in Christian literature of the second century (pre-eminently in 'Barnabas', Justin and Irenaeus),⁶⁹ and climaxed in the Latin Fathers (most especially John Chrysostom), likely indicates the survival of an authentically Jewish expression of Jesus-faith in those times. Intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is even evident in some ancient artwork, as the mosaic in the Church of Saint Sabina exemplifies (see Skarsaune and Hvalvik 2007:216).

The findings of this paper, together with the potential avenues of investigation just identified, lead naturally to the question of application for the ecclesia today. If intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction was normative in the days of the apostles, then we might assume that distinction theory is still applicable. That would require a change in ecclesiology and, for some, a major eschatological review plus a fresh look at Jewish-Christian relations. Indeed, the Christian church's relation to Israel would need re-evaluation—at least from an evangelical perspective. In particular, the modern Messianic Jewish movement would need to be reconsidered. Is Messianic Judaism a valid, biblical expression of Jewish Jesus-faith,

⁶⁷ Here Eusebius did not identify his source, but only that he had 'learned this much from writings' (Schaff and Wace 2014:390/*HE* 4:5:2).

⁶⁸ Later, Eusebius quoted Hegesippus (p. 454/*HE* 4:12:3): 'In every succession [of three bishops in Rome], and in every city that is held which is preached by the law and the prophets and the Lord.' This peculiar statement appears to affirm that the ecclesia 'in every city' equally valued the teaching of the Law, the prophets and the Lord Jesus.

⁶⁹ I deliberately omit Ignatius of Antioch, whose work I believe can be read differently and much more neutrally than the others.

alongside which the (Gentile) Christian church ought to operate? Can the two function in unity whilst making distinction between their members with regard to Torah-obligation and faith practice? Can mixed congregations of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles harmoniously and practically exist? How would the dual traditions be expressed in a single congregation?

My research suggests that such ‘unity with distinction’ is just what the apostles, especially Paul, sought to establish, and a growing number of congregations worldwide are answering these questions strongly in the affirmative. The field lies open for innumerable further studies to pursue, following the pioneers, some of whom I have cited in this and previous publications.

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_____ 2015. Does Acts 15:9 refute intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction? *Conspectus* 18.

6. Paper Five: Jew-Gentile distinction in the one new man of Ephesians 2:15

Abstract

Two contradictory views of the ‘one new man’ metaphor in Ephesians 2:15 are presented, one arguing that it denies any distinction between Jewish and Gentile Jesus-believers, and the other insisting that it confirms the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. This paper explores the meaning of the ‘one new man’ with special attention to the question of making distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the *ekklēsia*. The study focuses in turn on each of the three keywords in the metaphor, reviewing their meaning and use in the canon and providing some theological commentary alongside. Supply of the phrase, ‘in place of,’ in some translations is evaluated. Internal evidence in the form of personal pronouns is examined to determine whether it sustains or contradicts distinction theory.

The study concludes unequivocally that the ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 is a composite unity of Jews and Gentiles who retain their ethnic identities even after spiritual regeneration in Christ. The classification of individuals as believers or unbelievers in Jesus does not erase the biblical distinction between Israel and the nations, even within the *ekklēsia*. The mixed usage of personal pronouns in Ephesians confirms this finding. To assert that the ‘one new man’ is created ‘in place of’ Jews and Gentiles is therefore misleading. Major theological implications include the validation of Jewish tradition and practice among Jewish Jesus-believers, and their recognition as the living connection between the nations and Israel. The peace Christ made by creating Jew and Gentile in himself into ‘one new man’ is currently most evident in Messianic Jewish synagogues where members of each party worship together and have table fellowship in unity, whilst retaining their own distinctive faith traditions.

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Author’s remarks: This paper was published immediately after the previous one in the same issue of *Conspectus*, before Papers Three and Four were submitted. It contains more theological reflection than the other papers, presenting the climax of the distinction debate: the ecclesia’s relation to Israel. In the following edition of the paper, the English form of the LORD’s name was replaced in two places with the circumlocution, ‘the LORD.’ As discussed in the Introduction (chapter 1), the study presupposes Pauline authorship, a contended point but supported by a number of leading scholars.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

1.1 The text and historical interpretations of it

In Ephesians 2:14–16, Paul wrote:⁷⁰

(¹⁴)For he himself is our peace, who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of the partition, the enmity, in his flesh, (¹⁵)invalidating the law of commandments in ordinances, in order that he might create the two in himself into one new man, *thus* making peace, (¹⁶)and might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in himself.

This text indicates that the two, identified in 2:11 as Gentiles and Jews, have become one in Christ. Jesus broke down the barrier dividing the two in order to create ‘one new man’ in which there is peace and reconciliation. ‘One new man’ is a metaphor for the church⁷¹ but, in spite of its apparent simplicity, two diametrically opposing views of its nature appear in the literature. Each of these views is underpinned by antithetical perspectives on Israel (by which I mean Jewish people) in the present era inaugurated by the Christ-event.

In the Christian faith tradition (‘religion’),⁷² Jesus-believers (whether Jewish or Gentile in lineage) are not bound by obligation to Mosaic Law (though yielding to the ‘moral Law’ is often promoted, those being the timeless moral principles of the Law). An array of texts in the NT, including that quoted above (Eph 2:14–16), is used to justify this orientation. Consequently, Christian theology often dissolves the ancient biblical categories of Israel and the nations, reclassifying all humans into another binary system comprising those who believe in Jesus and those who do not. The church is thus widely understood to be a people of faith whose spirituality transcends their ethnicity, such that the latter lapses as irrelevant or immaterial. Consequently, Paul’s ‘one new man’ is interpreted as the Christian church comprising former Jews and former Gentiles who are now undifferentiable from any

⁷⁰ Using the Lexham English Bible except where otherwise specified.

⁷¹ The following section, ‘1.2. The *ekklēsia* and the church,’ explains what is meant by ‘church’ in this paper.

⁷² See Mason 2007:480–488 for a discussion on the anachronistic term, ‘religion.’

theological perspective. Two witnesses, one ancient and one modern, will suffice to testify to this interpretation of Paul's 'one new man.'

Late in the fourth century, John Chrysostom described Jews and Gentiles as 'two statues, the one of silver, the other of lead,' which are then 'melted down' to produce one new statue that comes out gold, not a mixture of silver and lead (Schaff 2014:71). In Chrysostom's words, Christ 'blended them together,' declaring that 'so long as they continued still as Jews and Gentiles, they could not have been reconciled' (p. 72). A similar interpretation was propounded by Martyn Lloyd-Jones last century. He wrote,

The Jew has been done away with as such, even as the Gentile has been done away with, in Christ. ... nothing that belonged to the old state is of any value or has any relevance in the new state. (1972:275).

Lloyd-Jones went on to state that 'there is no such thing as a Jewish section of the Christian Church' (p. 277). Citing 1 Peter 2:9–10, he insisted that the church is 'not a mixture of Jew and Gentile, but a new man; Jew finished, Gentile finished, a new creature' (p. 277).

At two separate seminars I attended in 2009, two speakers presented a different interpretation of Ephesians 2:15; they both claimed that the unity of the 'one new man' does not imply, let alone require, a flattening of its Jewish and Gentile members into homogeneity. Instead, the unity spoken of in Ephesians 2:14–16 strengthens the case that Jewish identity of Jews who believe in Jesus is fundamental. The seminars were presented by John Atkinson⁷³ and Daniel Juster,⁷⁴ and seeded the research presented in this paper. Their interpretation of the text leads to the conclusion (further explained below) that Gentile Jesus-believers are joined to (or added to) Israel, rather than replacing (or displacing) Israel.

The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC 2010:24) similarly states,

⁷³ *Whose Law is it anyway?* Roots and Shoots Conference. 25 July 2009; Christ Church Kenilworth, Cape Town. See Atkinson (2008) for his earlier published article containing similar content.

⁷⁴ *Interpreting the New Covenant from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*. 23-25 October 2009; Beit Ariel Messianic Jewish Congregation, Cape Town. The essence of Juster's Messianic Jewish theology, in which intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is pivotal, is available on the internet at http://youtu.be/zH8xi_dz6hI (accessed on 1 August 2014).

One new man does not mean that the distinction and mutuality between Jews and Gentiles are obliterated. Instead, it means that Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles, with their differences and distinctions, live in unity and mutual blessing in Yeshua.

A seemingly growing number of modern scholars support this view which might be called ‘unity with distinction’ or something similar.⁷⁵ Markus Barth did so forty years ago:

Ephesians 2:15 proclaims that the people of God is different from a syncretistic mixture of Jewish and Gentile elements. The members of the church are not so equalized, levelled down, or straightjacketed in a uniform as to form a *genus tertium* that would be different from both Jews and Gentiles. Rather the church consists of Jews and Gentiles reconciled to one another by the Messiah who has come and has died for both (1974:310).

Barth’s words are, in part, a reaction against the notion that the church is the ‘third race’ which transcends and succeeds the first two, namely Israel and the nations. ‘Third race’ was a term used by opponents of Christianity as early as 200 A.D., the first race being the Gentiles, and the second being the Jews (Harnack 1972:273). The oldest extant reference to it is in the Latin Church Father, Tertullian (*Marc.* VII 10), and it is still commonly used in self-designation by the church today. It is possible that the concept of Christians as a race originates from the *Epistle to Diognetus* (1:1), dating to c.170 A.D. There the writer refers to *kainon touto genos*: ‘this new race,’ a term which I posit was equated with Paul’s ‘one new humanity’ in Eph 2:15. Unlike Paul, however, the author of *Diognetus* was patently anti-Jewish (see ch. 3–4), inconsistent and sometimes downright incoherent (e.g. by suggesting that Jewish observance of Jewish Law is unlawful, 4:1–2.)

The *genos* referred to above may have meant the human race generically rather than an ethnic race or racial grouping (as ‘Gentile’ denotes all nations excluding Israel), though later literature has stressed the ethnic sense. Thus, ‘third race’ or ‘new race’ terminology can be used to emphasize the *renewal* of humanity (as ‘new human race’ does in Crossway Bibles

⁷⁵ These usually being post-supersessionist in orientation and roughly fitting into a school called the ‘radical new perspective on Paul,’ or ‘beyond the new perspective on Paul.’ Examples (to my mind) are William Campbell, Mark Kinzer, D. Thomas Lancaster, Derek Leman, Mark Nanos, David Rudolph, R. Kendall Soulen and Brian Tucker. (Some of those listed are members of the UMJC.)

2008:2265), or it can be used to express the *replacement* of the former humanity (including ethnic Israel) as in the examples from Chrysostom and Lloyd-Jones above. Hoehner expresses the latter interpretation eloquently: ‘A new race that is raceless! ... They are not Jews or Gentiles but a body of Christians who make up the church’ (2002:379). In contrast, Hardin (2013:232) reaches the opposite conclusion: Ephesians 2:14–18 does *not* signify the formation of ‘a raceless people.’ Similarly, Soulen responds to the notion to the church’s self-perception as ‘a third and final “race” that transcends and replaces the difference between Israel and the nations’ by arguing that ‘the church is not a third column of biblical ontology next to that of the Jews and that of the Greeks...’ (1996:169–170). ‘They do not become a new *generic, uniform* humanity,’ according to the UMJC (2010:24, emphasis added).

One is compelled to ask which of the two possible meanings Paul intended. Does the ‘one new man’ Christ created *replace* the elements it is made up of, or does it signify a *renewal* (or *transformation*) of humanity? Does the resultant peace, also mentioned in Ephesians 2:15, depend on the elimination of the categories of Jew and Gentile, or is it a peace that triumphs over their differences? This study seeks to answer these questions. Subsequently, I shall briefly discuss the ESV and RSV-NRSV translations’ supply (insertion) of the phrase ‘in place of’ to produce: ‘one new man [NRSV: humanity] in place of the two.’⁷⁶ These clearly favour the replacement paradigm, but is their addition a helpful clarification of the text, or an unintentional obscuration of it?

1.2 The *ekklēsia* and the church

For the purpose of this paper, ‘church’ is intended to denote all believers in Jesus regardless of whether they are Jewish or Gentile, that is, the *ekklēsia* (or *ecclesia*) in general. I ask the reader to bear with the difficulties inherent in this loose and uncomfortable denotation (not a definition), given that I am writing for Gentile Christians who are most familiar with this sense of the word—even with its vagueness. While some scholars prefer to use the term ‘church’ to denote the Gentile Christian majority of the *ekklēsia*, distinct from the *ekklēsia*’s minority Messianic Jewish membership, to do so here would be to assume a particular conclusion before undertaking the study.

⁷⁶ Note that these particular translations do not italicize words supplied by the translators.

The following are some of the manifold difficulties in using the word ‘church’ as I do in this paper, in keeping with most of Christian literature. Firstly, the defining criteria for membership are unclear. I refer to Jesus-believers, but what does it mean to believe in Jesus, and how do other key components such as repentance and baptism contribute? Secondly, the denotation does not specify whether or not pre-incarnation believers (like Abraham, see Jn 8:56) are included. Thirdly, many Messianic Jews dislike being referred to as members of the church (or as Christians) because of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, past and present, in the Christian church (see Stern 2007:25–26). Finally, ‘church’ may connote institutionalized Christianity foreign to the NT’s presentation of the *ekklēsia*.

1.3 Jew-Gentile distinction and related issues

Distinction theory is my term for the theological framework which understands Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus as distinct in certain significant theological senses, including identity and function (role, service) in the economy of God’s kingdom. That is, a biblical differentiation exists between Israel and the nations *within the church* similar to that which existed more visibly before Christ. This distinction results in a twofold structure within the church that I label *intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction*. In this framework, the ‘one new man,’ or ‘humanity’ as I shall explain, comprises Jews and Gentiles who together are devoted to Jesus. My choice of the word distinction is based on its common use in English Bibles to translate *diakrinō* in Acts 11:12 and 15:9, as well as *diastolē* in Romans 3:22 and 10:12. It is not intended to suggest a superior-inferior relationship in any sense. The concept has already been given several other names, including ‘unity and diversity in the church’ (Campbell 2008), ‘bilateral ecclesiology’ (Kinzer 2005:151–179), or ‘Torah-defined ecclesiological variegation’ (Rudolph 2010).

In contrast to distinction theory, church teaching for most of Christian history has denied that there is any theologically meaningful distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Soulen 1996:1–2; 11–12, based on a number of NT texts. In my reckoning, the most striking of these texts are Acts 11:12 (in some English translations); 15:9; Romans 3:22; 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 3:11. I refer to these as the ‘no distinction’ texts, as merited by a cursory reading of them. However, I question whether any of these texts individually, or all of them collectively, provide sufficient evidence to overturn the prevailing Jew-Gentile distinction of the pre-Christian era. My research agenda is to examine each of

these verses individually to see if they substantiate the Christian tradition. If so, then they refute distinction theory; if not it stands. This paper focuses Christ's creation of 'one new man,' mentioned in Ephesians 2:15, which has already been shown above to yield diametrically opposed interpretations with regard to intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

A major obstacle in the distinction discourse is that it is inextricably intertwined with numerous theological concerns such as the election of Israel (and thus replacement theology),⁷⁷ 'nomology,'⁷⁸ and eschatology. Wide differences of opinion in these principal issues profoundly impacts the discussion, since distinction theory interacts with, and is dependent on, a particular view of them. For example, the selfsame verse in which we find 'one new man,' Ephesians 2:15, also speaks of Christ 'invalidating the law of commandments in ordinances.' It is not possible in this paper, however, to present an interpretation of these words that reconciles with distinction theory (i.e. one which does not regard the Law as annulled.)⁷⁹ The reader is asked, therefore, to bear in mind that this study is a miniscule component of a rapidly growing body of literature, a little of which I cite, that addresses all the related and interdependent issues mentioned.

1.4 Approach

This study is at once biblical and theological. The method used is to examine each of the three words in the phrase 'one new man' in turn to see in what ways they contradict or support distinction theory. Examples of how these words are used in other biblical texts are presented in order to evaluate the two views (which could be called *no distinction* and *pro-distinction*). By juxtaposing these radically different theological viewpoints, I have sought to highlight areas of disagreement and to illustrate the significance of the 'one new man' as a key concept in the NT. Some theological discussion is included *in situ* with each word study,

⁷⁷ Replacement theology, or supersessionism, is the notion that the church has replaced, or superseded, Israel as God's chosen people. An alternate (non-supersessionist) view is expressed in a recent expression by Mark Kinzer of 'the one two-fold people of God and of the Messiah,' which says, '*The Jewish people and the Christian Church together form the one people of God...*' (emphasis original, Kinzer 2014:3).

⁷⁸ An uncommon term which, within theology, denotes the doctrine of biblical law (primarily Mosaic Law). A consequence of denying intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is the downplaying of legal obligations (deprogramming Jewish Jesus-believers' orientation to Torah) and, therefore, very limited development of nomology by Christian scholars. For illustration, contrast the amount of Jewish literature on the Law with that of Christian literature, as well the proportion of each to the total corpus of its own faith tradition.

⁷⁹ See Woods 2012 for just one of many publications challenging the traditional Christian view of the Law, specifically the dietary laws in relation to Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16.

but the main implications are left for the conclusion. A brief study of the use of personal pronouns in Ephesians is made to see if they provide evidence either against or for the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

On a personal level, this study has been applied—theology should not happen in a vacuum. While continuing to worship regularly in Christian churches, I have over the past five years also worshiped in synagogues of Reform Judaism, in Messianic Jewish synagogues, and mixed congregations of the Jewish roots movement. Such experience has challenged and shaped my own understanding of Christ's 'one new man,' and when I write of Jews (or Israel), I have real, living individuals in mind whom I regard as representatives of the whole people. Similarly, when I mention the Jewish faith tradition, I have at least a sample of it to relate to. Nevertheless, the study presented is not dependent on my own experience; it is anchored in the biblical text—in spite of unintentional bias it may contain.

2. Textual analysis

Paul wrote that Christ sought to create in himself '*hena kainon anthrōpon*' ('one new man') in Ephesians 2:15. What exactly did he mean by this? Though there is little dissention in terms of translation, the interpreted meaning of the phrase is disputed. Each of the three words is discussed individually below with special attention to whether or not they speak against intra-ecclesial distinction of Jews and Gentiles. Subsequently, the translators' supply of the phrase 'in place of' in some translations is critiqued. Finally, a literary test is applied to the epistle for a possible validation of the interpretation of 'one new man' that emerges from the analysis.

2.1 One

The first notable observation about 'one' in 'one new man' is its deliberate placement in the text. Paul could have written 'a new man' (*kainon anthrōpon*) more simply, since Greek has no indefinite article. Why did Paul specify *one*? It appears he wanted to identify a particular new man, yet could not use the definite article for an entity which he had not yet referenced. Moreover, he wanted to be clear that it was one and not plural. Paul emphasized this unity in innovative ways as he prefixed the preposition *syn* with various verbs and nouns in Ephesians 2:19–22; 3:6; 4:3, 16 (Barth 1963:7. English Bibles usually translate the Greek prefix *syn*

with the English prefix ‘co–’ or with ‘fellow’ e.g. ‘co-heirs’ or ‘fellow heirs’ in 3:6.) Notably, these *syn* compounds do not merely pertain to interpersonal relationships; they relate to the two groups, Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Campbell 2008:21).

Hena assuredly means one, but Jewish and Christian scholars alike are aware that the word is laden with theological import. God, says Deuteronomy 6:4, is one (*’ē-ḥād*—hereafter *echad*—or *heis* in the LXX, where *heis* and *hena* are inflections of the same word). The *Shema*, as the verse is known in Judaism, is the ultimate proclamation of Jewish faith: ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one’ (NIV). The main translation concern here is whether the LORD is ‘one’ or ‘unique,’ as the LEB translates *echad*. The ‘oneness,’ or unity, of God is often used by Jews as to argue against the Christian doctrine of the trinity, though it may also be translated ‘unique’ or ‘alone’ (e.g. Wyschogrod 2004:173–174). The ISV, JPS; NABRE; NLT; NRSV all render *echad* as ‘alone.’ Doing so ‘reads the verse not as making a metaphysical statement about God, namely, that he is one and indivisible, but rather that God alone is to be worshiped to the exclusion of all other gods,’ Wyschogrod explains (2004:174). His aim is not to demonstrate whether God is, or is not, a composite unity but rather that Israel, like God, is unique; Israel has only one God, the LORD, and the LORD has one people alone, Israel, whom he will never divorce (Isa 50:1) or lose compassion for (Jer 31:3–4, 9, 20; Hos 2:16, 19–20; 11:1–6, 8–11; Zech 10:6). Yet he accepts that composite unity in the godhead is not disproved by Deuteronomy 6:4—a crucial element in Christian theology. Even the renowned Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, acknowledged that the singularity of *echad* with reference to God implies the possibility of a plurality (Atkinson 2008:2).

The concept of ‘one’ meaning the unity of differing elements is native to the Bible, with the word being used of well-known composites such as daytime and night time forming ‘day one’ (*yom echad*, Gen 1:5), and man and woman forming ‘one flesh’ (*basar echad*, Gen 2:24). The fact that Ephesians was written in Greek is no barrier to employing the concept of composite unity found in these two examples, with ‘day one’ translated as *hēmera mia*, and ‘one flesh’ as *sarka mian* in the LXX. (*Mia* and *mian* are feminine inflections of *heis*, as is *hen* in the following example.) The marriage relationship is dependent on the distinction between husband and wife; thus ‘unity implies distinctiveness and yet complementarity,’ (Atkinson 2008:14). The distinctiveness and complementarity Atkinson mentions are crucial for the united couple to represent the image of God, as Genesis 1:27 expresses so clearly. The

image is distorted if both members of the couple are of the same sex, or if they are both neuter.

Similarly, the Greek text of John 17 uses the same word for the unity of Jesus' believers with each other, and the unity of Jesus with God: 'so that they may be one [*hen*], just as we *are*' (17:11); 'that they all may be one [*hen*], just as you, Father, *are* in me and I *am* in you, that they also may be in us... in order that they may be one [*hen*], just as we *are* one [*hen*]—I in them, and you in me, in order that they may be completed in one [*hen*]' (17:21–23).

Paul also provided a good example of the compound unity in the body of Christ in Romans 12:4–6:

⁽⁴⁾For just as in one [*heni*] body we have many members, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁽⁵⁾in the same way we who are many are one [*hen*] body in Christ, and individually members of one another, ⁽⁶⁾but having different gifts according to the grace given to us...

The same metaphor appears in 1 Corinthians 12:12–30, where Paul stressed the simultaneous unity and diversity of the one body of Christ. He pressed that 'the body is one' (12:12); it is 'one body' (12:12, 13, 20) but its members are 'many' (12:12, 14, 20) and diverse in nature, in function, and in honour. In fact, greater honour is given some parts than to others 'in order that there not be a division in the body' (12:25). Evidently, the unity of the members of the body is not at the expense of their differences. Rather, the healthy functioning of the body is dependent on its members being different and fulfilling different kinds of roles: 'And if they all were one member, where *would* the body *be*?' (12:19). In both texts cited above, from Romans and 1 Corinthians, Paul stressed simultaneously the unity and diversity of the members of the body of Christ. This is the same body, the church, which he referred to repeatedly in Ephesians (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30).

Ephesians 2:15–16 unequivocally identifies this same 'one body' as the 'one new man:' 'that he might create the two in himself into one new man ... and might reconcile both in one body.' By this equation, and with the support of the other epistles cited above, we can deduce that the 'one new man' comprise members who are united yet distinct in various significant ways. These distinctions are not arbitrary to God's purposes, but are deliberate for producing a whole, fully functioning church. Therefore, they are not erased 'in Christ,' but the diversity

of the members is for mutual blessing within the body, to the glory of God. Moreover, Ephesians 2:11–22 notes that the principal distinction between members of the body is their status in Israel: they are either members of Israel (Jews), or they are drawn from among the nations (Gentiles/non-Jews) into fellow citizenship with Israel—yet without becoming Jews. Thus, the distinction between Jew and Gentile is not at all altered by the unity Christ brought about between them.

The First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD used the word *homooúsios* to describe Jesus and God, the Father, as being of the ‘same substance’ and equally divine in spite of being differentiable. Later, the First Council of Ephesus in 431 AD adopted the term *hypostasis*, or hypostatic union, to express the unity of Jesus divinity and his humanity. Both these truths are examples of composite unities, and are accepted as foundational to Christian theology. Certainly the notion that the unity of the saints suggests nowise that they are, or will be in the age to come, the same in every way, stripped of their unique identity. The Bible even maintains ethnic identities in for those united in Christ after the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth (e.g. Rev 21:3⁸⁰).

From these examples, it is apparent that the biblical use of ‘one’ in both Hebrew and Greek allows for a kind of unity comprising of diverse elements.⁸¹ In fact, such unity seems to have been God’s goal from the beginning; the creation account tells of God making two, Adam and Eve, from ‘singular’ one, Adam, with the intention that the two would be united in ‘composite’ one, (Gen 2:21–24). Is it not therefore reasonable to consider that God’s separation (sanctification) of Israel from the nations was so that the two may ultimately be reunited (not just reconciled), yet remain distinct for the purpose of mutual blessing indefinitely?⁸² Soulen (2013:285) summarizes God’s agenda for mutual blessing like this:

The church of Jesus Christ is a sphere of mutual blessing between Jew and Gentile where the distinction between them (like that between male and

⁸⁰ Most translations prefer the singular collective noun, *laos* (people), as per the Robinson-Pierpont edition of the GNT, but the Westcott-Hort, Tregelles and Nestle-Aland 28 all bear the plural *laoi* (peoples).

⁸¹ Contrast my findings with Lloyd-Jones’ emphatic statement: ‘*The unity of this new body is an absolute unity*’ (1972:277, emphasis original). He did not provide any support from how the cardinal number, one, is used in the Bible.

⁸² On the theme of mutual blessing of Israel and the nations, see Soulen 1996; 2013 and, with Paul’s letter to the Romans in view, Keener 2013. The concept emerges from God’s covenant with Abraham, which purposes that ‘all the families of the earth’ will be blessed through Abraham, and they ought to bless him also (Gen 12:2–3).

female) is not erased, but recreated in a promissory way, as the eschatological sign and foretaste of messianic peace and mutual blessing among all the peoples of the world.

In a similar vein, the UMJC (2005) stated, ‘Together the Messianic Jewish community and the Christian Church constitute the *ekklesia*, the one Body of Messiah, a community of Jews and Gentiles who in their ongoing distinction and mutual blessing anticipate the shalom of the world to come.’

The ‘one new man’ of Ephesians 2:15 may indeed comprise Jews and Gentiles who are united yet distinct. Accordingly, Barth (1963:5) wrote,

There is “no distinction” but full solidarity between all men, whether Jewish- or Gentile-born, when the judgment and the grace of God are described (Rom. 3:22f., 3:28f.; 10:12). But the following passages [Eph 2:11–20; 3:5–6] reveal that within the equal treatment of Jews and Gentiles a decisive distinction must still not be forgotten.

Hardin (2013:231) explains that Paul’s language of ‘oneness’ is part of his ‘metaphor of warring parties, which had come to an armistice through the work of Jesus,’ resulting in a new peace in place of enmity—but “‘oneness’ and ‘ethnic collapse’ are two very different things’. When the metaphor of ‘one new man’ is recognized as such, the text in Hardin’s study (Eph 2:14–18) ‘cannot be interpreted literally to mean that ethnic distinctions have deteriorated’ (p. 231). He points out that the two parties, Jew and Gentile, indicated by the ‘both’ of Ephesians 2:14 are still two in 2:18 where the same word, ‘both,’ is used again.

The Israel to which Paul generally refers in his writings, the people to which Gentile believers in Jesus are to attach themselves, is ‘actual Israel’ (Barth 1963:9)—including both Jewish Jesus-believers *and* Jews who do not believe in Jesus. In speaking of the ‘one new man,’ Paul means ‘both Jews and Gentiles just as they are’ (*ibid.*). Similarly, Zetterholm (2003:158) writes, ‘They are certainly “one in Christ,” but it is precisely as “Jews” and “Gentiles” that they constitute this unity.’ This notion is also evident in Romans 9–11, in which Paul wrote that God’s election of Israel stands in spite of Israel’s stumbling. Also in Romans, Paul referred to the *Shema* (3:30), deducing that the unity, or oneness, of God

himself actually requires ongoing distinction between Israel and the nations in the new covenant era:

His oneness has been compromised if he is *only* the God of Israel, *only* the God of the circumcised, *only* the God of Torah, and not *also* the God of the nations, not *also* the God of the uncircumcised, and not *also* the God of those outside the Torah (Nanos 1996:184, emphasis original).

Accordingly, Paul's rationale is that, if the nations have to become Israel to come under God's reign, then God is not the God of every nation but only the God of Israel (Rom 3:29; Nanos 2008:33–34).

Simultaneously, if Israel has to lose its unique biblical identity in order to submit to Messiah, then the God of Israel has changed his identity, since he affixed Israel to his personal name in Exodus 5:1. God is referred to as the 'God of Israel' about 200 times in scripture, often in apposition to the Tetragrammaton. Consequently, for Israel to assimilate entirely into the nations is theologically extremely problematic in regards to God's unchangeable nature. Similarly, if Israel were exterminated, or if another people took its place (as in replacement theology), the faithfulness of the God of Israel would be called into question; the God of Israel 'is identified by fidelity to the Jewish people through time' (Soulén 1996:xi). Thus, Israel's identity must be fixed in order for God's identity to remain constant. On the other hand, Ephesians indicates that Gentile believers are to appropriate a Jewish identity (Campbell 2008:22)—at least to some extent. 'The church is not equated with Israel,' but Israel in Ephesians is central to the believers' identity and therefore cannot simultaneously be undermined (p. 23). Indeed, 'one cannot be a joint heir with Israel if Israel is an entity only of the past' (p. 24).

These truths, therefore, are to be held in tension: Israel's unique identity prevails; Gentile believers are not to become Jewish, but they are to identify with the Jews, or Israel, as they cleave to Israel's Messiah and are thus brought into the commonwealth of Israel as co-citizens (but never co-Israelites! Campbell 2008:24). Gentile Christians have an especially close relationship with Jewish believers, who are likewise renewed in Messiah and bind the Gentiles to the life of Israel. Gentile believers must 'remember' their dependence on Israel for their relationship with God (Barth 1963:12, commenting on Eph 2:11ff). This is the unity

of the ‘one new man’ which Christ created: not a unity which erases the differences between Jew and Gentile but one which removes the enmity between the two (Eph 2:14).

Paul makes a similar Jew-Gentile distinction not only in Romans and Ephesians, but in his other writings as well. Rudolph (2010:8) points out, for example, that ‘the distinction between Jewish and Gentile identity in Christ is so fundamental that Paul can speak of “the gospel of the foreskin” ... and “the [gospel] of the circumcised” ... (Gal 2:7).’ In 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 Paul published his rule for all the churches: each believer is to remain as he was when he was called (to faith in Jesus). 7:18 states that Jews (‘the circumcised’) are to remain Jews (‘he must not undo his circumcision’) and Gentiles (the ‘uncircumcision’ or ‘foreskin’) ‘must not become circumcised.’ A number of other scholars concur with Rudolph concerning the retention of Jew-Gentile distinction within the church, for example, Campbell (2008:15) and Nanos (2008:17; 23) and Tucker (2011). Further, 1 Corinthians 9:20–21 can be aligned with this reading of 7:17–24, as Rudolph does most eminently in *A Jew to the Jews* (2011). These modern readings of Paul provide a consistent, coherent model in which Jewish and Gentile believers are united in Christ while remaining distinct such that the particularity of Israel is retained. In other words, they harmonize with the interpretation that the ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 is a compound unity of differentiated peoples, most essentially of Jews and Gentiles.

The salient point of this discussion is that being ‘one’ in Christ does not mean being homogeneous; the notion of a compound unity is native to the Bible. Christ’s making Jew and Gentile one in himself—as Paul expressed in Ephesians 2:15—by no means proves that their respective distinctions become erased as they are drawn into undifferentiated membership in the church. ‘The “one new man” is apparently not an international, intercultural, sexless or historical superman’ (Barth 1963:6). Rather, the evidence suggests that ‘one new man’ is a metaphor for the state of unity with distinction achieved by Christ. This leads to the question of whether the *newness* of the ‘one new man’ refutes distinction theory, or if it can accommodate old identities in a new body.

2.2 New

What did Paul mean when he wrote that the one man Christ created was *new*? The word refers to something that did not exist before, yet surely elements of the new man did, such as

the head (Christ himself) and the Jews and Gentiles who comprise the members of his body (c.f. Eph 1:22–23; 2:11–16; 4:15–16; 5:23 for use of the head and body metaphor). Does ‘new’ simply mean that the members are spiritually regenerated? This seems plausible considering the transforming work of the Holy Spirit since the Pentecost of Acts 2 and 10, but the noun modified by ‘new’ in Ephesians 2:15 is clearly the corporate entity (‘man’), not the individual members. One needs, therefore, to identify that which is new about the ‘new man.’ Various answers appear in the literature, of which two diametrically opposing interpretations will be presented. These interpretations have greatly differing implications for Jewish believers in many ways (including their particular ethnicity, their election and roles, their territorial heritage, and their faith tradition and practice.)

Given that the ‘man’ Christ created according to Ephesians 2:15 is ‘new,’ and that this new man comprises Jew and Gentile, are not these categories relegated old and to be discarded in favour of a new binary classification: those ‘in Christ Jesus’ (1:1) and those not ‘in Christ Jesus?’ After all, is not every person’s ultimate destiny determined by his faith, or faithlessness, in Jesus? Casting this differently, does membership in the New Covenant not become so all-important that membership in the Mosaic Covenant becomes irrelevant, even as the New Covenant replaces the old one? Framing the question this way obfuscates the issue by over-exploiting the discontinuity between the eras before and after Christ’s atonement: before Christ, individuals were categorised as Jew or Gentile; since Christ, individuals are categorised as Christian or non-Christian. This one-dimensional approach is not biblical, for the NT abounds with references to Jews and Gentiles of both believing and unbelieving varieties. That is, a two-dimensional cross-classification system is evidenced in the Bible, as the examples in the following table demonstrate:

	In Christ	Not in Christ
Jewish	Paul (Acts 22:3) James (Acts 21:18–25)	Gamaliel (Acts 5:34–39) Elymas Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6–8)
Not Jewish	Cornelius (Acts 10) Titus (Gal 2:1–3)	King Agrippa (Acts 26) Demetrius (Acts 19:24–27)

Table 1: Two-dimensional cross-classification system of individuals with biblical examples

Jewish believers in Jesus continued to live as Jews after the Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts 2. This Pentecost event did not terminate their Jewishness. Moreover, the Gentiles who received the gospel did not convert to Judaism; they continued to live as non-Jews (see Acts 15:22–29). The examples provided in Table 1 demonstrate that one should not let an artificial and overly simplified classification framework—*either* in Christ *or* not—dictate the interpretation of ‘new’ in Ephesians 2:15, but should rather identify the possibilities from real people described in the NT.

If that which was new about the ‘one new man’ was spiritual rebirth, then the prevailing Jew-Gentile classification might be *subordinated* to their identity in relation to Christ without being *eliminated* by it. In other words, one may have a dual identity, both being equally valid simultaneously. This is indeed the witness of scripture clearly portrayed in Acts (15:1–29;⁸³ 21:17–26) and Romans (1:5–7, 13; 1:16; 3:29–30; 9:22–24; 11:13–15; 15:8–12, 15–19), for example. Thus, in spite of the newness of the ‘one new man,’ his members are really ‘something old, something new,’ as the wedding rhyme goes. Mark Kinzer’s critique of *Lumen Gentium*, a publication of the Second Vatican Council, is helpful:

the biblical concept of newness usually connotes eschatological renewal of an already existing reality. The new heavens and new earth are the old heavens and old earth, glorified and transfigured. The new humanity is the old humanity raised from the dead and transformed. This understanding of eschatological newness is supported by its paradigmatic case—the resurrection of the messiah. The risen messiah is new, different, yet the same human being as the one born of Mary (Kinzer and Levering 2009).

Campbell (2008:15) also finds Ephesians 2:15 to indicate transformation rather than re-creation: ‘Pauline transformation in Christ does not mean the creation of a new group without ethnic identity but rather the transformation of those who are Greeks into transformed Greeks, and of Judeans into transformed Judeans in Christ.’⁸⁴

⁸³ The claim of ‘no distinction’ in verse 9 refers to the manner of salvation—by grace (v.11)—and is not an elimination of Jew-Gentile distinction, as will be argued in a separate article.

⁸⁴ Campbell included a note on the discourse concerning whether Jews should rather be referred to as Judeans—a notion which, in my view, has considerable evidence but some difficulties.

The transformation described above—one that retains Jewish and Gentile (or ‘Greek’) identity—directly contradicts the interpretation of what I regard a more common interpretation of the newness of what Christ created. I selected Chrysostom and Lloyd-Jones as well-known representatives of the latter view to demonstrate the great period which it has spanned in Christian history (about sixteen centuries). Chrysostom (Schaff 2014:72) argued that Paul’s choice of the word ‘create’ (*ktizō*) rather than ‘change’ is significant in that Jews and Gentiles are not merely *changed*, they are *created* anew. His argument hinges on the use of *ktizō* in the LXX and NT which typically portrays God creating something out of nothing. Lloyd-Jones (1972:271–272) presented a similar case: ‘There was nothing there before God created. Creation ... is making something out of nothing.’ He insisted that:

It’s not by modification of what was there before; it is not even by an improvement of what was there before. God does not take a Jew and do something to him, and take a Gentile and do something to him, and thereby bring them together. Not at all! It is something entirely new (p. 272).

Thus, for these two famous preachers of very different eras, Chrysostom and Lloyd-Jones, spiritual regeneration is not enough to account for the newness of Christ’s creation in Ephesians 2:15. For them, the prior identities of the members of Christ’s body are blotted out in his work of creating them newly. The juxtaposition above of two interpretations of *ktizō* (create) and *kainos* (new) in the text shows them to be polar opposites, and thus warrants further investigation.

Psalm 51:10 and 104:30 appear to support Kinzer’s reference to eschatological renewal. Notably, in the Septuagint (where they are Ps 50:12 and 103:30 respectively), they both use forms of the words *ktizō* and verbal cognates of *kainos* (Anon. 2011: ἐγκαινίζω; ἀνακαινίζω):

Create (*ktizō*) in me a clean heart, O God, and renew (*egkainizō*) a right spirit in my inward parts (Ps 50:10).⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Using *The Lexham English Septuagint* with LXX verse numbering.

You will send forth your spirit, and they will be created (*ktizō*), and you will renew (*anakainizō*) the face of the earth (Ps 103:30).⁸⁶

In both cases, both words imply a renewal, not an entirely new creation *ex nihilo*. The former objects are renewed and continue to exist; they are not replaced with completely new ones.

Furthermore, it might be reasonable to harness another interpretation of *ktizō* found in the Septuagint where it can mean ‘to form’ (e.g. Isa 22:11; 46:11 LXX, aligning with Hebrew *yā-šār*) or ‘to found’ (i.e. to establish, e.g. Exod 9:18 LXX, aligning with Hebrew *yā-sād*. Anon. 2012: κτίζω.) Though speculative, Paul may have implied that nuance in Ephesians 2:15 to mean either, ‘... that he might *form* the two in himself into one new man...’ or ‘... that he might *establish* the two in himself into one new man...’ (emphasis mine). These options permit the ‘new man’ to be something new, yet made from pre-existing entities (namely, Jews and Gentiles) by their transformation or re-arrangement rather than by elimination. They both fit comfortably with the biblical concepts of ‘one’ and ‘new’, and neither requires creation *ex nihilo*.

Another biblical example of renewal is lunar: the Hebrew word for ‘new moon’ is not at all related to the word for ‘moon’ (*yā-rē^ah*) but rather is derived from *hōdeš*, meaning to ‘make new, restore, renew’ (Swanson 1997; Mounce 2006:470–471). When the Bible speaks of a new moon, it is not a newly created object but rather one that has been ‘renewed;’ it waned, disappeared, then re-appeared as new, yet it was old. For a comparison with something ‘new’ yet ‘not new’ in NT Greek, see Jesus’ commandment on loving one another in John’s writings: John 13:34; 1 John 2:7–8; 2 John 5. The commandment to love one another was not new (Lev 19:18) but Jesus renewed it by adding a requirement: the love commanded must be ‘just as I have loved you’ (Jn 13:34).

The context preceding Ephesians 2:15 emphasizes that Gentiles were formerly ‘alienated from the citizenship [or commonwealth: *politeia*] of Israel’ but are now brought ‘near by the blood of Christ’ (2:11–13).⁸⁷ Gentile believers are incorporated into the citizenship of Israel;

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Chrysostom switched the order, stating that ‘the Jew is then united to the Gentile when he becomes a believer,’ (Schaff 2014:73). This may have been incidental, but readers of Ephesians will note that it is not Israel that is joined to the Gentiles, but rather that the Gentiles are joined to Israel. Paul taught the same principle to the congregations in Rome (see below).

Juster (2014) refers to this as ‘addition theology’—Gentiles are ‘added’ to the household of Israel through their faith in Israel’s Messiah. This change is part of the newness that Paul meant in ‘one new man.’ Accordingly Kinzer writes,

the Church should be seen as a renewed Israel, a renewed people of God. It is an eschatological form of Israel, anticipating the life of the world to come by the gift of the Spirit. As an eschatological reality, it is also an expanded Israel, including within its ranks people from all the nations of the world (Kinzer and Levering 2009).

The idea of a ‘renewed Israel’ fits well with the biblical concept of newness, as demonstrated by the examples above. Elsewhere, Kinzer described the Gentile component of the church as ‘*a multinational extension of the people of Israel*’ (2005:15, emphasis original). This is apt wording to express the non-supersessionist perspective, because i) an extension is not a replacement, and ii) an extension depends on that which it extends for support—it cannot function independently. As Paul expressed it, ‘you do not support the root, but the root *supports* you’ (Rom 11:18). In fact, Paul referred to the Israelites (presumably only those in right standing with God) as ‘holy ones’ or ‘saints’ (Eph 2:19; c.f. Col 1:12). While Paul in Ephesians emphasized the contrast of what Gentile believers were (pagans) with what they now are (e.g. 2:12–13, 19–22), he did not make a corresponding contrast between Jewish believers and ‘Israelite culture and identity’ (Campbell 2008:16). These points collectively make it very difficult to imagine how the ‘one new man’ can replace Israel as God’s people.

Returning to Paul’s olive tree metaphor (Rom 11:13–24), we see that Gentiles are as branches of a wild olive tree (neither schooled in, nor governed by, Torah), but by faith in Jesus they are ‘grafted in’ to the cultivated olive tree, Israel. (See Stern 2007:47–59 on ‘olive tree theology’). Likewise, Gentile believers ‘became a sharer of the root of the olive tree’s richness,’ (11:17). While this imagery is congruent with the notion of the ‘one new man’ being Israel being renewed and enlarged by the attachment all the nations of the world (as presented above), it is incongruent with the complete disjunction of the church from Israel, as some interpret the newness to mean. Ryrie (2010:72), for example, stated the church (‘new man’) is ‘not a continuation or remaking of Israel, but something new and distinct from the Israel of the Old Testament.’ He stressed a *discontinuity* between the redeemed of this era who are ‘in the body of Christ and not some sort of Israel,’ going on to explain that ‘today

redeemed Jew and Gentile belong to God's family of saints without being members of any kind of Israel' (p. 72). My assessment of the biblical data above suggests the opposite of Ryrie's claims. 'Renewed' is not only a permissible interpretation of *kainos* in Ephesians 2:15, but also the best way of understanding it. Yes, the church is a new entity that Christ has created, but not by *replacing* Jew and Gentile (as in replacement theology); rather, it is by restoring, reconciling and spiritually regenerating them.

There is yet another facet of newness in the 'one new man:' the peace between Jew and Gentile which Christ made by destroying the enmity between them and reconciling them both to each other and to God (Eph 2:14–16). For Lloyd-Jones (1972:278), Christ's peace required the binary Jew-Gentile classification to be discarded: 'the moment we begin to bring in those categories there is no longer peace; there is division, separation, enmity.' However, neither the peace nor the reconciliation call for eradication of either Jewish or Gentile identity.⁸⁸ The unity in Christ that results from bringing 'near' Gentiles, who 'once were far away' (2:13), as God's people does not trigger an 'ethnic collapse' (Hardin 2013:232). Indeed, it is the peace between the church's principal differentiated elements, namely Israel and the nations, which is the eschatological sign of God's sovereignty over the whole world. This peace is not an abstraction, nor a future-only reality; it is a present day sign of the fullness of the peace to come.

'It is a real political and social peace that Christ enables and demands of those who truly belong to His kingdom. As Eph. 1–2 indicates, through the power of Christ hostility arising from difference can be turned into a cause of celebration of the blessings of God in Christ' (Campbell 2008:15). Paul may have been comparing this peace with that Solomon brought between the northern and southern kingdoms when both those 'far' (Israel in the north) and 'near' (Judah in the south) worshiped together in the then-new temple, as various similarities suggest (p. 17, with citations to Kreitzer 2005:500–501).⁸⁹ But the peace and reconciliation

⁸⁸ Lloyd-Jones and others who oppose the continuation of Jew-Gentile distinction within the body of believers appeal to Gal 3:28 and similar statements in the NT which I identified above as the 'no distinction' texts. These require careful investigation as to the rhetoric Paul employed. Suffice it to say that Galatians contains strongly-worded instructions to Gentile Jesus-believers to retain their non-Jewish identity, and Gal 3:28 is hyperbole intended to stress the irrelevance of one's social status *in comparison to* one's standing in Christ, which eclipses the former.

⁸⁹ Kreitzer LJ 2005. The Messianic Man of Peace as Temple Builder: Solomonic Imagery in Ephesians 2:13–22. In Day J (ed.) *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*. London, New York: T&T Clark International: 484–512.

brought about by Christ in Ephesians 2:14–16 is not described as a general peace between all nations; it is *specifically* a peace between the nations and Israel, Gentiles and Jews. Such a peace is somewhat meaningless if, as some writers I have cited claim, there is no more particularity to Israel and Jews ‘in Christ’ are no longer fully Jewish.

The argument presented above shows that ongoing intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is permissible and even probable in the ‘one new man’ metaphor of Ephesians 2:15. Inasmuch as the ‘one new man’ is not a Jewish man, neither is he a Gentile; he is a new humanity comprising Jewish and Gentile members ‘in Christ Jesus.’ Before testing that conclusion with other internal evidence, the least controversial word in the phrase *hena kainon anthrōpon* needs a brief discussion: *anthrōpos*.

2.3 Man

It is generally accepted that the ‘man’ whom Christ created in Ephesians 2:15 is not an individual human being, but a people. Paul did not use the word *anēr* but *anthrōpos*; both words can mean ‘man,’ ‘human’ or ‘husband,’ but the latter can also mean ‘people’ as a collective noun, which fits the context best. Paul’s choice of words is remarkable because humanity itself is a compound unity comprising differentiated elements (members of the human population), often viewed in subgroups according to gender, race or family. Thus *anthrōpos* reflects well the kind of entity represented by the body of believers in Jesus. This nuance may not have been conveyed if Paul had chosen another word like ‘creature,’ ‘vessel’ or ‘being.’ Recall the metaphor (already presented above) in which Paul described the church as a ‘body’ comprising distinct members (1 Cor 12:12–30 and Rom 12:4–8). Once again, the theme of *unity with distinction* is a paradigm native to the apostle’s writings.

It is thus surprising that so few English translations use ‘humanity’ (e.g. NIV 2011, NRSV) or ‘people’ (e.g. NLT) to translate *anthrōpos* in Ephesians 2:15. In this instance, ‘humanity’ appears best, especially when taking into consideration Paul’s reference to Christ as the ‘last Adam’ in 1 Corinthians 15:45. In that context (15:42–49), Adam is the ancestor of natural humanity, but Christ is the ancestor of a regenerated (renewed!) humanity. Inasmuch as Christ’s divinity did not displace his humanity—indeed, he was *bodily* resurrected—the spiritual quickening of his followers does not replace their natural bodies. The ‘one new man’ does not displace its members from their current, natural identity. Jews remain Jews, and

Gentiles remain non-Jews. This point touches on a much larger topic, but we should not lose sight of the fact that those who are in Christ are also the sons of Adam.

2.4 ‘In place of’ the two?

As stated above, some Bible translations explicitly say that the one new man is created ‘in place of’ the two (Jews and Gentiles) in Ephesians 2:15. If this is the case, then replacement theology has an anchor in the biblical text, but where do these words originate? The answer, quite simply, is in the translators’ theology. There are no textual variants in any of the ancient sources that witness to these words; they are ‘a gratuitous addition,’ as Campbell calls them (2008:19). The Bible translators supplied ‘in place of’ in order to clarify the meaning, but the meaning they assume does not correspond with the evidence I have presented. Unfortunately, their insertion also serves to validate their theology, though I do not suggest any ill intent—all Bible translators have to make difficult decisions and will naturally favour wording that conforms to their understanding of the ‘right’ interpretation. Moreover, the English is awkward without the phrase, seemingly needing ‘smoothing.’ Following the Greek word order, a literal translation of the clause may be ‘... in order that the [accusative] two [indeclinable] he might create in himself into one new man...’ (Harris 2010). There are no significant variant readings. If the logic of the argument presented above is valid, then the critical text does not indicate replacement but rather a new state of unity. I submit that the phrase ‘in place of’ in some English translations of Ephesians 2:15 is misleading and best omitted.

The discussion above already touched on the profound theological implications of the message of Ephesians that emerges from my (and others’) reading of ‘one new man,’ which is all the more meaningful if the phrase ‘in place of’ is not supplied to 2:15. Markus Barth (1963:5) made a drastic statement concerning the message of the letter: ‘Ephesians makes its readers aware that it is *wrong and suicidal* for the church ... to claim that she alone is the true, the new, the spiritual Israel—at the expense of the old or fleshly Israel’ (emphasis added). Later, he wrote that ‘it is the distinctive message of Ephesians that no Gentile can have communion with Christ or with God unless he also has communion with Israel’ (1974:337). Though matters of supersessionism and Jewish-Christian relations are too vast for this article, it is important nevertheless to mention the theological significance—the applied meaning—of ‘one new man’ in Ephesians.

2.5 A test

Is there an objective test for my finding that the newer identity categories of believers and unbelievers in Jesus does not erase the older ones of Jews and Gentiles? Does the letter to the Ephesians itself offer any internal evidence in this regard? If the two dimensional identity cross-classification scheme portrayed in Table 1 is valid, then we might expect potential confusion in the personal pronouns used in the letter such as ‘we’ and ‘you’ (especially in the plural). That is, the writer, who certainly is to be regarded as a Jesus-believer of Jewish origins, might at times use ‘we’ to denote ‘we Jews,’ or ‘I and the Jews among you [the audience],’ whilst at other times using ‘we’ to denote ‘we believers in Jesus, regardless of our identity as Jews or Gentiles.’ Similarly, ‘you’ might denote either ‘you Jews and Gentiles to whom I am writing,’ or it may refer to ‘you Gentiles,’ excluding the Jews in the audience.

A study of the personal pronouns in Ephesians reveals that this is, in fact, exactly what appears, and the modern reader needs to be particularly careful in interpreting them. The greeting and opening praises appear to include the whole audience of believers, Jew and Gentile, in the pronouns ‘we,’ ‘us,’ and ‘our.’ But at some point there is a switch in usage such that, by 1:12 ‘we’ must refer to Jews, who ‘hoped beforehand [i.e. B.C.] in Christ,’ and ‘you’—the Gentiles who ‘also when you believed were sealed in the promised Holy Spirit’ in 1:13. Again, in 1:19, the phrase ‘us who believe’ clearly places Gentile believers together with Paul and his believing Jewish kin in the first person plural pronoun, ‘us.’ Yet by 2:1, ‘you’ refers to Gentile believers and ‘we’ in 2:3 refers to Jewish believers, each group being differentiated from their unbelieving counterparts. And in 2:4–8 once again, ‘us’ refers to the whole body of believers, Jewish and Gentile, whom God loved, made alive, raised together, seated together for a demonstration ‘in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.’

The evidence grows stronger still in 2:11, where Paul uses an overspecification (in discourse terminology, Runge 2008a) to explicitly identify ‘you’ as ‘the Gentiles in *the* flesh.’ Such overspecification ‘prompts the reader [to] conceptualize the referent in a specific way’ (Runge 2008b); Paul sought to emphasize that ‘you’ meant ‘the Gentiles in *the* flesh’ and *not* ‘the circumcision in *the* flesh’ (2:11). Note that Paul does not refer to them as formerly Gentiles, or formerly ‘the uncircumcision,’ but rather as formerly alienated (2:12). Instead,

‘you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens of the saints’ (2:18) whilst yet continuing to be distinct from Jewish believers, as ‘you Gentiles’ in 3:1 indicates.

Though the difficulty of identifying the referent of personal pronouns in Ephesians has often been noted in the literature, I have sought to use it as an objective test of the letter’s internal evidence. The test results clearly support the notion of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

3. Conclusion

Conclusions and related theological issues have been noted throughout the textual analysis above. This section serves to summarize the findings and point out theological implications for the church and several of its doctrines.

3.1 Summary

The traditional Christian interpretation of the NT is that, after coming to faith in Jesus, no distinction remains between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. That is, within the church there is to be no differentiation between Israel and the nations. The purpose of this study was to determine whether Paul’s reference to the ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 supports this claim. That is, does the text inform us that Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus are no longer distinct in any significant way because of their common membership in the community of Christ? I have presented multiple arguments rejecting that notion based on a study of each of the three words, *hena* (*heis*), *kainon* (*kainos*) and *anthropōn* (*anthrōpos*), concluding that ‘one new man’ is, in fact, an assertion of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. Other keywords in Ephesians 2:14–16, namely ‘body,’ ‘create’ and ‘peace,’ proved to be congruent with this finding.

The study firstly found that the biblical concept of ‘one’ does not necessarily mean a singularity or homogeneity, but it allows for the unity of distinct elements. Some examples, such as the unity of man and woman, suggest that God’s purpose was one of mutual blessing. The oneness of God in the *Shema* and NT references to it are proof texts that the nations are not to become Israel, nor is Israel to assimilate into the nations, in order to signify God’s sovereignty over all, thus demonstrating that his kingdom has come. Ephesians identifies Gentile believers *with* Israel, not *as* Israel; Paul retains distinction between the two as he does in his other writings.

The new man of Ephesians 2:15 is not created *ex nihilo*. While there are aspects of newness to the body of Christ, not all that is old is discarded. The Christ event did not erase the biblical classification of individuals as Jews or Gentiles. Rather, the NT classifies people according to their faith in Jesus *and* according to whether they are Israelites—yet without any prejudice against Gentile believers who are welcomed as fellow citizens, a kind of extension to Israel. Christ’s body is a *new* man because its members are spiritually regenerated. That which is called new in the Bible is often what we today would call *renewed*. Israel is renewed in Christ, not replaced by the church but expanded to encompass Gentile Christians as co-citizens. Another facet of the newness is the actual peace that Christ brought about between Israel and the nations which ought to be evident among Jews and Gentiles who, through their faith in Jesus, have become members of his body.

The ‘man’ whom Christ created is clearly a corporate entity, the church, or body of Christ. ‘Humanity’ is probably a more helpful translation than ‘man,’ as it expresses the fact that the body of Christ comprises many human members. Inasmuch as individual saints are not homogenized in this age—nor beyond the eschaton—the identities of Jews and Gentiles are not washed away in the waters of baptism. Persistence of Jewish identity in particular is not only defined by ethnicity and culture, but also by faith tradition (including Torah-obligation in a manner not required of Gentile Christians) and a unique function (or service) within the body.

While some Christian commentators have argued that the phrase ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 refutes Jew-Gentile distinction within the church, my analysis reaches the opposite conclusion from the same text. The reconciliation of the two groups *as they are* (yet with their members transformed in Christ) is a pledge of Christ’s ability to bring peace to bitterest enemies. God’s astonishing work of reconciliation loses this significance if Jews and Gentiles are homogenized or blended in Christ, if it becomes ‘a mere historical remembrance rather than a miracle that is continually renewed’ (Kinzer 2005:171). One may thus understand the church to be a mix of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles; they are united in Christ but distinct in their ethnic identities.

The test for mixed use of personal pronouns in Ephesians validates this conclusion by providing internal evidence for a cross-classification of individuals according to two binary classifications: i) either Jew or Gentile *and* ii) as either in Christ or not. Notably, some

English translations such as the ESV assert that Christ sought to ‘create in himself one new man *in place of* the two...’ (Eph 2:15, emphasis added). However, based on my interpretation of ‘one new man,’ I suggested that the translators’ supply of the phrase, ‘in place of,’ is misleading. I further suggested that ‘establish’ might bear Paul’s nuance better than ‘create,’ and concur with others who prefer ‘humanity’ to ‘man.’ Thus I propose that the clause in question might best be interpreted, ‘in order that he might establish the two in himself into one new humanity...’

The Christian tradition that there is ‘no distinction’ between Jews and Gentiles in Christ is based on a number of NT texts. In my opinion, the most important of these are Acts 15:9 (and sometimes 11:12); Romans 3:22; 10:12; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 3:11. This paper has only addressed one of these key texts, concluding that Paul’s calling the church ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 does not by any means prove that its members are no longer Jewish and Gentile. Instead, the text allows, and even requires, retention of the Jew-Gentile classification—even among the members of Christ’s body—in a theologically meaningful way, not merely ethnically or culturally. The other key texts pertaining to the ‘no distinction’ argument remain for further investigation.

3.2 Implications

The implications of viewing the church as a unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, rather than a unification that blends the two parties homogeneously, are immense. I shall mention two major ramifications of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. The first is that it permits and even promotes the practice of Judaism by Jewish believers in Jesus—as long as such practice does not contravene NT teaching. (Distinction theory regards cautions in the NT against taking on the whole Law as being addressed to Gentile Jesus-believers. Such differentiation is not possible in the dominant ‘no distinction’ position.) The modern Messianic Jewish movement thus expresses its Jewish identity through Torah-observance and the development of *halakhic* standards, worship in synagogues following Jewish liturgy and norms, participation in traditional Jewish ceremonies (including circumcision and *bar mitzvah*, for example) and festivals. Typically, all of these expressions are adapted to some degree to include key elements of the NT, especially regarding christology. Good examples include *Standards of Observance* (a guide to Messianic Jewish *halakhah*; MJRC 2012), *Zichron*

Mashiach (Messiah's Remembrance Meal—a liturgy; Kinzer 2013), and *The Sabbath Table* (prayers, blessings, and songs for the Sabbath; Anon. 2014).

A second important consequence of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is that Jewish Jesus-believers form a nexus between Israel and the nations, being both members of the people of Israel and members of Christ's body. Karl Barth discerned this even before the modern Messianic Jewish movement developed; he recognized that, corporately, Jewish Jesus-believers 'fulfill their appointed role when they are the ekklesia in Israel and Israel in the ekklesia' (Kinzer 2005:176; see pp. 174–177 on 'Karl Barth and bilateral ecclesiology'). Following on closely, his son, Markus Barth, wrote, 'Brotherhood with Israel is the very essence, not the possible consequence, of the peace Christ has made' (1963:7). The textual analysis on Ephesians 2:15 presented in this paper concurs with both Karl and Markus Barth on these matters. Thus I deduce (as others have done before me, e.g. Rudolph 2013:14) that Jewish believers in Jesus are a bridge that joins the nations to Israel and, furthermore, that the Messianic Jewish synagogue is exemplary as the locus of the peace that Christ initiated, he being their paragon himself.

Messianic Jewish synagogues did not exist when Karl and Markus Barth wrote, but today they flourish as places where Jews and Gentiles express their devotion to Jesus in unity, yet with distinction.⁹⁰ All participants who have repented and been baptized are invited to the communion table, while typically only the Jewish members wear *tzitzit* (tassels, see Num 15:37–41; Deut 22:12) and observe other commandments issued specifically to the children of Israel. Messianic Jewish synagogues are a place where representatives from the nations *actually attach* themselves to the faithful remnant of Israel, remembering with gratitude and humility that the new covenant was formed with 'the house of Israel and with the house of Judah' (Jer 31:31), not with Gentile nations. Such congregations *observably apply* the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction; they offer *concrete evidence* that the 'one new man' Christ created (Eph 2:15) is a regenerated humanity comprising Jews as Jews and Gentiles as

⁹⁰ Practices vary, together with the degree of distinction made, but I am presenting what I perceive (through personal experience and extensive reading) to be the dominant model.

Gentiles—all at peace with one-another in spite of objections by expositors, like Lloyd-Jones, who have declared this impossible.⁹¹

Unity and distinction must go hand-in-hand. Neither unity nor distinction of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles should be emphasized at the expense of the other (Atkinson 2008:17). The interplay between these two aspects of their relationship creates a tension of interdependence which results in mutual blessing. ‘Just as husband and wife have distinct roles within God’s ideal of a unified, joyful whole, so it is with his calling of Israel and the nations’ (UMJC 2010:24). In fact, the intimate composition and mutual dependence of Jews and Gentiles is essential to the church

because the church is a prolepsis of Israel and the nations in the eschaton.

Interdependence and mutual blessing between Jew and Gentile reflects the *raison d’être* of the church and anticipates the consummation when Israel and the nations, in Torah-defined unity and diversity, will worship ADONAI alone (Rudolph 2010:15, emphasis original).

Finally, if there are doctrinal implications, there ought to be a corresponding response in theological education. What I view as a central theme of Ephesians—the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ as a sign or ‘firstfruits’ of the promised eschatological peace between Israel and the nations—is largely overlooked in seminary training and, consequently, in church preaching. To me, it seems that Christian training and preaching generalizes Ephesians’ central motif of reconciliation, unity, and peace *between Jews and Gentiles* by presenting instead *all believers in general* as the parties in focus. Without denying the importance of peace among all Jesus-believers, I suggest that such generalization results in a diluted and compromised reading of the letter, since Paul specifically identified Jews and Gentiles as the primary parties of Christ’s peace accord.

⁹¹ I am not recommending that Gentile Christians leave their churches for a local Messianic *schul*, which would result in the problem of Gentile dominance in numbers in most parts of the world. Church-hosted table fellowship and special worship events could equally demonstrate Jew-Gentile unity with distinction.

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7. Conclusion

7.1 Review of research

7.1.1 Research undertaken

The primary objective of this research was to critically examine the biblical case against making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia. In essence, I tested the hypothesis that the text and teaching of the Bible make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia. To use my own terminology, I evaluated the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

The research focused on the historical narrative of Acts as well as a metaphor Paul used in Ephesians to describe the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. In particular, research on three problems was undertaken as follows:

1. I explored the meaning and implications of Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16 with respect to Jewish dietary laws and to making distinction between Jews and Gentiles, especially within the ecclesia.
2. I examined whether Acts 11:12, 15:9 and Ephesians 2:15 (each in its context) invalidate the practice of making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia.
3. I tested the theory of distinction in the latter half of Acts, from 15:30 onwards, reviewing its evidence to determine whether the ecclesia and its leaders made a distinction between its Jewish and its Gentile members, or if they regarded making distinction as a thing of the past, inapplicable to those in the new covenant.

All five studies on these three research problems focused on the teaching and practice of the senior leaders of the very early ecclesia, especially on the apostles Peter, James and Paul. The study of Ephesians 2:15 examines some of Paul's instruction in his own writing, which is particularly beneficial as we can compare it to Luke's record of Paul's teaching and practice in Acts 15:30–28:31.

7.1.2 Research approach

The research presented is conceptual, being based on literature and logical argumentation. It used methods of biblical studies on five biblical texts to produce five papers published in academic journals, each capable of being read on its own although a progression of thought is evident. Methods employed include studies of the biblical texts and other literature (both ancient writings and modern scholarship), and analysis of the biblical and historical contexts. These methods tested the biblical evidence for teaching and application related to intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction theory in the very early ecclesia (in the period between Paul's conversion and his death).

Each of the five studies synthesised its own analyses, together with findings of previous papers in the series, in order to furnish a conclusion on the given text. Theological discussion was provided wherever relevant in each paper.

7.2 Conclusions of findings

The conclusions of the findings of the five studies are presented below in condensed form according to the three research problems identified above.

7.2.1 The interpretation of Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16

Read in the context of Acts 10:1–11:18, the vision Peter experienced in 10:9–16 meant that he should not regard Gentiles as common or impure. Rather, God is impartial to people of every nation. There is nothing in Acts 10:1–11:18 to support the common interpretation that the vision also meant that Jews (at least Jewish believers in Jesus) should abandon Jewish dietary laws. The vision does not relate to Torah-observance at all, so the Law was assumed to remain in force for Jewish believers in Jesus. This observation is verified by other NT texts, and confirmed by the practice of Jewish believers in Jesus throughout the patristic period.

7.2.2 The contribution of Acts 11:12, 15:9 and Ephesians 2:15

The translation of *diakrinō* in Acts 11:12 as 'distinction' is very dubious, especially considering that no earlier literature extant uses the word in that sense, that alternative Greek

words were available to denote a sense of distinction or differentiation, and that it is translated differently in Acts 10:20, 11:2 and 11:12. ‘Without dispute’ is a better translation of *‘mēden diakrinanta’* than ‘no distinction’ is. The text thus conveys that Peter was to obey the command of the Spirit *without dispute*. Thus, Acts 11:12 does not contradict the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction as some English translations imply.

While a textual analysis of *‘outhen diekrinen’* in Acts 15:9 is inconclusive regarding whether it supports or refutes distinction theory, the contextual analysis provided substantial and unanimous evidence in favour of the theory. That is, Acts 15:1–29 decisively validates the making of distinction between Jewish and Gentile members of the ecclesia. At the time, Jews (including Jewish Jesus believers) had no reason to expect that the messiah’s coming would cancel the Torah. (In contrast, he was expected to establish God’s reign, which would mean to enforce Torah.) No discussion at the Jerusalem council is mentioned in the text regarding Jewish obligation to the Law. Moreover, Gentile believers were required to submit to four prohibitions derived from the Law. Thus, it is incoherent to interpret the text as an annulment of the Law. Moreover, it is illogical to think that Peter’s comment in 15:9—that God had made no distinction between Gentile and Jewish believers (purifying the hearts of both by faith)—signals the end of biblical distinction between the two parties. Such distinction was originally established by the Law and was upheld by the apostles’ application of it to Gentile believers and to Jews, albeit differently.

Peter’s own words suggest that God’s making ‘no distinction’ between the two groups pertained to soteriological matters only, which the Cornelius incident confirms. A study of James’ verdict also reveals a clear distinction between Jews and Gentiles in his eschatological view of the ecclesia, in which Gentiles should not be subjected to the same yoke of the Law that Jews bear. Although James anticipated that Gentiles would learn Torah in the local synagogue each Sabbath, he did not cease to make distinction between Jews and Gentiles in terms of their obligation to the Law. Instead, he sustained the prevailing distinction between them, even within the ecclesia. Other evidence in Acts 15:1–29, including Paul’s apparent confidence in the outcome of the council, the consensus of the apostles, elders and brothers there present, and the fixing of their decree in writing, all supports distinction theory.

A lexical study of each of the words in Paul’s metaphor for the ecclesia, ‘one new man’ (*hena kainon anthropōn*), in Ephesians 2:15 concludes that it supports making distinction in the

ecclesia between Jews and Gentiles. The oneness of the ecclesia neither signifies singularity nor homogeneity, but a unity of diverse (distinct) elements. The newness of the ecclesia (the ‘new man’) indicates a spiritual renewal of Jews and Gentiles in Christ rather than a creation *ex nihilo*; it does not eliminate the distinction between the two. The third word in Paul’s metaphor, *anthrōpos*, here signifies a humanity rather than a man (and certainly not a race in the ethnic sense), the members of which need not be divested of their ethnicity any more than their personal identity.

Similarly, the keywords ‘body,’ ‘create’ and ‘peace,’ in Ephesians 2:14–16 are also congruent with this finding. Indeed, the very theme of the letter is one of reconciliation and peace between the nations and Israel—yet without Jewish assimilation into the nations nor Gentiles becoming Jewish. Paul described Gentile believers as a kind of extension of Israel, but not *as* Israel. Though the Gentiles addressed in Ephesians were required to forsake the pagan ways of their ancestors, Jews were not required to abandon the traditions of their fathers. Reconciliation of, and peace between, Jews and Gentiles occurs through their spiritual transformation in Christ without blending them into one uniform, homogenous people. Their distinctions are no longer a source of enmity but rather an exhibit of Christ’s ability to unite even the bitterest enemies who submit to his reign. The ecclesia is thus a mix of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles.

The varied use of personal pronouns in Ephesians supports the conclusion that the metaphor, ‘one new man,’ does not eradicate intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. Moreover, the supply by some English translations of the phrase ‘in place of’ in translating Ephesians 2:15 is misleading; Christ did *not* ‘create in himself one new man *in place of* the two...’ I propose that the most suitable interpretation of the whole clause is, ‘in order that he might establish the two in himself into [as] one new humanity...’ Thus, the metaphor, ‘one new man,’ for the ecclesia in Ephesians 2:15 allows the maintenance of Jew-Gentile distinction within the body of Christ, and even requires such distinction to be made for theological purposes.

7.2.3 Ecclesial teaching and practice in Acts 15:30–28:31

Acts 15:30–28:31 shows conclusively that the very early ecclesia clearly and consistently made a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. Paul observed Torah carefully himself even though he taught Gentile believers that they were not obligated to keep

the whole Law; they essentially only had to abstain from a few ‘necessary things’ specified in writing by the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:28–29). Acts 21:17–26, describing Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem, is a particularly strong witness to distinction theory. James and the elders were of one accord with Paul’s determination to keep the Law and to honour the Jewish faith tradition. They even insisted that he publically dismiss rumours to the contrary by participating in specific temple rituals which were typically only done by especially devout Jews. Thus, Acts 15:30–28:31 strongly, and without any exception whatsoever, supports the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction.

7.2.4 Concluding statement

This research critically examined the biblical case against making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia, considering evidence within three primary texts in particular: Acts 10:1–11:18, 15:1–28:31, and Ephesians 2:14–16. The outcome answered three research problems, namely, the interpretation of Peter’s vision; the evaluation of three key texts which appear to refute the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction; and the example of the very early ecclesia with regard to making distinction between Jews and Gentiles. In the specified texts, the hypothesis is not invalidated but, in fact, shown to be valid:

The text and teaching of the Bible in Acts 10:1–11:18, 15:1–28:31, and Ephesians 2:14–16 indeed make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia.

Thus, the biblical case *against* making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia is flawed.

7.3 Theological implications of the conclusion

The implications of the validation of the theory of distinction are theologically significant. They cluster around three overlapping areas, all of which involve both the ecclesia and Israel:

1. the identity and divine election Israel, as well as the Gentile Christian church’s relation to Israel in the present era and in the end times;

2. ecclesiology—the twofold structure of the ecclesia, comprising Jews and Gentiles in one corporate body;
3. a doctrine of the Law (tentatively labelled ‘nomology’), differently applied to the two branches of the ecclesia, one Jewish and the other Gentile.

A brief conclusion regarding each of these areas of theology is made below.

7.3.1 Identity and election

Israel—the Jewish people—has a unique identity and an irrevocable divine election which flows from the call of Abraham in Genesis to the eschatological era in Revelation. The new covenant did not bring an end to Jewish particularity—including ethnicity, obligation to Torah, and Jewish practice. In this sense, there is no discontinuity in the transition from the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) through the gospels to Acts. Nevertheless, the children of Israel need spiritual regeneration through faith in Jesus—their own Messiah. Jews who do believe in him remain Jewish whilst also becoming members of the ecclesia. Distinction theory confirms Israel’s on-going theological significance in the present era and even within the ecclesia.

At the same time, Gentile Jesus believers (who make up the Christian church) automatically become attached to Israel as ‘fellow citizens’ (in Paul’s language, Eph 2:19) yet without becoming Israelites, or Jews. Christians, therefore, are rather like foreigners who, at various times in biblical history, attached themselves to Israel without becoming Israelites or fully converting to Judaism. Yet it should be noted that intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction theory does not declare Israel and the nations to be distinct in every way. In fact, Jews and Gentiles are both ‘saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way’ (Acts 15:11), that is, *without* distinction. In terms of soteriology, therefore, there is truly no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but that does not affect Israel’s unique and enduring identity and election.

Israel is thus ultimately renewed in Christ and receives into familial relationship people from all nations who also put their faith in him. Notably, the Christian church has not replaced Israel but is intimately related to, and in some ways dependent upon, Israel. This dependence is well exemplified by the fact that the new covenant was not made with the nations, nor with humanity in general, but specifically with Israel through Israel’s king and high priest, Jesus.

Therefore, membership in the new covenant requires some intimate relation to Israel. Although this relation is achieved through faith in Christ, it is concretely expressed in the present age through unity with Jewish believers in Jesus who form a bridge between Israel and the nations, since they are both members of Israel *and* simultaneously members of Christ.

Where Israel has stumbled in its responsibility to evangelise the nations, the latter have assumed Israel's role bearing witness to the reign of Jesus, now even to Israel itself in order to bring about the ultimate outcome: the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Consequently, there is an interdependence between the two parties, most profoundly expressed in Romans 11. Such interdependence results in even greater fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2–3 as each party blesses the other. R. Kendall Soulen's (1996) seminal study most eminently elucidates this complex exchange.

7.3.2 Ecclesial structure

The ecclesia is fundamentally a twofold entity comprising, as distinct categories of members, Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. Instead of being a source of division, their differences bring about mutual blessing of one-another. The complementarity is well expressed in the phrase, 'unity with distinction.' Unity without distinction produces bland, homogenous uniformity, and distinction without unity leads to enmity—the undoing of Christ's work expressed by Paul in Ephesians 2:14–16. Thus unity and distinction must develop together, hand-in-hand. There is no assimilation of one into the other, no blending, only accommodation of and adaptation to one-another. The 'unity with distinction' of man and woman in a marriage relationship is a useful analogy of how two perpetually distinct yet united parties can realise God's plan of mutual blessing. As I wrote in Paper Three: 'The sense is that of accompaniment, not replacement; it speaks of unity with humility, not triumphalism of one over the other; it requires reconciliation, not competition.'

Boundaries between members of Israel and the nations are to be maintained within the ecclesia through respect for the 'boundary markers'—commandments which specifically identify the members of Israel, most especially circumcision—specified in Mosaic Law for all, yet only, the children of Israel. Appropriate application of these commandments produces an observable distinction between the two parties within the ecclesia. Thus, distinction theory not only permits but also promotes Jewish practice by Jewish believers in Jesus (as long as

such practice does not contravene NT teaching), whilst proscribing Gentile believers from fully adopting Jewish practice.

7.3.3 Applicability of the Law

Jews who believe in Jesus are to continue practising the Jewish faith tradition, including Torah observance and Jewish practice,⁹² whilst Gentile Jesus believers are not subject to the whole Law but are minimally bound to a few necessary commandments pertaining to moral purity. Though Gentiles are free to participate in elements of Jewish tradition, such as observing the Sabbath and the Passover, and in many cases the NT reiterates commandments from Mosaic Law, such as loving one's neighbour, Gentile believers are barred from circumcision and similar observances which distinguish Israel from the nations. Thus, the applicability of the Law to members of the ecclesia is determined by their identity with regard to Israel; Jewish believers remain under the yoke of the Torah whilst Gentile believers are not compelled to subject themselves to it.

Nevertheless, Gentiles *are* bound by the few commandments reiterated from Torah for them by James and the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). James perceived that the messianic era had broken in, so all nations would be expected to submit to the sovereignty of the God of Israel and to live morally pure lives, yet without *becoming* Israel.

7.4 Contribution of this research

No other research that I am aware of focuses exclusively on evaluating the biblical case *against* making distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia, addressing one at a time the texts often used to reject the theory. As such, this research uniquely (albeit indirectly) contributes to the evaluation of the modern Messianic Jewish movement from a biblical perspective, something that has been lacking in scholarly Christian literature.

The biblical studies presented on Acts proceed in a manner somewhat similar to that of biblical theology, thus making some contribution to systematic theology. The theological

⁹² Difficulties related to the priesthood and temple cult were not discussed in the research but may be resolved in the manner of modern Messianic Judaism, that is, to follow the pattern of other expressions of Judaism yet within, and guided by, the teaching of the NT. See Harvey 2009:140–183 (a chapter called *Torah in theory*) and pp.184–222 (*Torah in practice*). Also see Lancaster (2011).

contribution of all this research (on Acts and Ephesians) pertains to the identity and election of Israel in the present and eschatological eras, the structure of the ecclesia (uniform or two-fold?), and the applicability of Mosaic Law in the new covenant era. In each of these, I have identified weaknesses in the typical perspective of Christian theology based on careful exegesis of biblical texts used in the case against distinction theory. Ironically, some of the very texts used to argue against making distinction between Jews and Gentiles within the ecclesia actually support the practice.

Distinction theory contributes to practical theology in the current ecclesial context where Messianic Judaism is growing rapidly and many Gentile believers are adopting elements of Jewish tradition. If distinction theory is indeed valid in general, not just in the texts addressed in this thesis, and if its validity is acknowledged by Christian leaders, then two significant practical benefits emerge for the current situation. Firstly, unity among Jewish and Gentile Jesus believers may be established in a manner that affirms their uniqueness as complementary rather than divisive, since ‘unity with distinction’ would be embraced rather than rejected. In particular, the practice of Judaism, adapted to include the instruction of the entire New Testament, by Jewish believers would be welcome and even encouraged in the ecclesia. Secondly, pastors could guide Gentile believers in their congregations who are seeking to take on the whole Law into the understanding that they are instructed not to do so; the example and teaching of Jewish believers in the NT practising Judaism is for Jewish believers, not Gentile believers. According to distinction theory, Gentiles are called and instructed to remain non-Jews; they are not to be circumcised, wear tassels or observe other commandments given specifically for the children of Israel. Thus, the controversy often referred to as ‘Judaising’ is alleviated, if not overcome, by distinction theory.

The exegetical studies presented as chapters above were submitted as original, sole-authored papers for publication in *Conspectus*, an evangelical journal of the South African Theological Seminary, for greater readership and critique. Four of the five papers have been, or will be, published, and the last one (Paper Four) is in review. As such, they are freely available to the public in electronic format and thus contribute to scholarship in the discipline. Moreover, the format of this research’s output—a compilation thesis, or thesis by publication—has a pathfinding value since very few theses in South Africa follow this route, even at doctoral level.

7.5 Recommendations for further research

7.5.1 *Extension of this investigation to other key texts*

The contents of this thesis are not sufficient to assert that the theory of intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction is valid throughout the Bible—that is, to validate the hypothesis *in general*. The theory does not bear the status of a doctrine. For that to happen, a more systematic study of scripture would be needed to demonstrate consistency of the theory with the entire biblical canon, with particular attention to the other NT texts which appear to deny the validity of making such distinction. These NT texts are identified in the papers presented above and include Romans 3:22; 10:12; Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 in particular. At various points in the papers, including the last section of Paper Four, I provided a tentative response of how these texts may be read in a manner that does not require an end to making distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia. My responses need to be fully developed in exegetical studies of the relevant texts in order to evaluate their impact on distinction theory.

A further, vital extension of this research is to examine the biblical case *for* intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction. Although some of that work has been done in this thesis, the focus was to evaluate the case *against* distinction theory. There are very many biblical texts which need to be studied for their contribution in support of the theory, and these also need to be consolidated, synthesised or systematised into a more extensive presentation.

The recommended exegetical work must pay special attention to factor in first century *halakhah* and the newly emerging school known as ‘Paul *within* Judaism’ (also called ‘the *radical* new perspective on Paul,’ or ‘*beyond* the new perspective on Paul.’) Moreover, the relationship of the new covenant to the old one must be considered: Is it possible to interpret the new covenant not as discontinuous with the old one, but rather as a development that envelops it? Can the new covenant not be seen as a kind of expansion of the old covenant in such a way as to invite people from the nations into its membership, yet without annulling the identity, election, and covenantal obligations of Israel?⁹³ Does the dual priesthood, temple

⁹³ In my view, not discussed in the research presented, the LORD’s agenda is to bring his people, Israel, from participation in the old covenant into the new and better covenant mediated by Jesus (which is also open to people from every nation). This new covenant does not abrogate Torah, but internalises it and reinforces it, adding a new, heavenly priesthood and efficacious offering for sin in the heavenly temple. Yet God maintains

and sacrificial system, one earthly and the other heavenly, described in Hebrews not validate a continuity between the covenants, as per Lancaster's exposition (2011)? Is this a way to honour God's reference to the Mosaic covenant as a *b^erît 'ôlām* (an everlasting covenant, Gen 17:13) without diminishing the sense of *'ôlām* to a less insistent lexical meaning, that of 'long-lasting'?

7.5.2 *Investigation of the past*

Studies in archaeology and ancient literature would help to determine the biblical interpretation and theology of the early church with respect to its making distinction between Jews and Gentiles among its members. The mosaic of the Church of Saint Sabina in Rome is a case in point. My own reading of some early Church Fathers suggests that those whose writings exhibit anti-Semitic sentiment were motivated, in part, by jealousy of Israel's election. It was easy, then, for them misinterpret the NT (both wilfully and in ignorance of its Jewish character), recasting it as a renunciation of Jewish faith tradition and God's rejection of the Jewish people, Israel.

7.5.3 *Intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction in practice*

If the theory of distinction is shown to hold true throughout the Bible, then Messianic Judaism is vindicated as valid, biblical expression of Jewish Jesus-faith, and the (Gentile) Christian church should be united with it to form one, two-fold ecclesia. In what practical ways can these two branches of the ecclesia function in unity whilst making distinction between their members through differential obligation to Torah and Jewish faith tradition? How, in practice, shall mixed congregations of Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians operate harmoniously without dissolving their distinctive characteristics or re-erecting a separating wall of enmity? How would the dual faith traditions, including liturgy, worship and teaching, be expressed in a typical service of a particular congregation?

faithfulness to those who remain under the old covenant, though it is drawing to a close, and he has an unrelenting determination to bring them corporately into the new covenant before he sends Jesus back to Jerusalem. See Heb 7:11–10:18 (note its quotation of Jer 31:31–34); Rom 11:25–32; Lancaster (2011).

7.5.4 The ecclesia's relationship with Israel today

Surely the most difficult research direction I recommend is in the field of practical theology. The task is to examine the theological implication of the biblical obligation for the ecclesia to bind itself to the people of Israel in the modern context, including both the state of Israel and the Jewish people wherever they may be in the world. This has certainly been the most challenging implication of my research for myself, personally, because it cannot be separated from taking a stand on politics and military action in the Middle East. It requires a sound foundation in biblical studies, Judaism, and the history of the modern state of Israel. It entails eschatological studies of the intertwined destinies and interdependence of Israel and the nations under the reign of Christ. In Paper Five, I attempted to initiate some response by Christian readers to the task of understanding the biblical perspective of the ecclesia's relationship with both the state of Israel and the Jewish people. Though there is much activity in this field outside of academia, a scholarly response is yet wanting.

7.6 Closing comments

Although this thesis is dedicated to Israel, on account of Gentile Christians' perpetual indebtedness to the Jewish people for our membership in the new covenant, it is addressed to the Christian church, including Gentile believers in Jesus as well as those born Jewish yet who now identify as Christians *and not* as Jews. Therefore, though Messianic Jews may find the research beneficial, they are not the primary audience—they are already putting distinction theory into practice, making it a reality.

I do not expect or hope that the term 'intra-ecclesial Jew-Gentile distinction theory' will become widely accepted. I only coined the phrase for the purpose of this research because it focuses on the 'no distinction' texts of the NT. Mark Kinzer's 'bilateral ecclesiology' (2005) is more economic, better established, and quite appropriate.

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