

Does the New Testament support Messianic Judaism?

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Abstract

This article considers whether the New Testament supports Messianic Judaism. As a form of Judaism, Messianic Judaism is found to be anachronistic to ancient Israel of the Old Testament and the Judaeans of the second temple, making it problematic to use the New Testament in support of Messianic Judaism. The contention that the New Testament propagates an ongoing distinction between gentile and Judaeans Christ-believers is contested in respect of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15), the claim that Paul was fully Law observant and Paul's portrayal of the nature of the identity in Christ in respect of gentile and Judaeans believers. It is found that belief in Christ constitutes a new identity for both gentile and Judaeans believers that fulfilled and superseded the identities in the old age before the Christ event. The notion of an ongoing Judaeans-gentile distinction in the early church is thus incompatible with the way in which Paul portrayed the new identity in Christ. The

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

final conclusion is reached that the New Testament does not support Messianic Judaism.

1. Introduction

Messianic Judaism in its current form is a relatively recent phenomenon that surfaced with the 1960s Jesus movement, and became known as Messianic Judaism in the 1970s (Kinzer 2000:3, 6; Ariel 2006:191, 194–195; UMJC 2013:16). Messianic Jews see themselves as essentially Jewish rather than being (Hebrew) Christians (Kinzer 2000:4, 2013:131–132; Ariel 2006:195). In Messianic Judaism, ‘Judaism’ is the genus and ‘Messianic’ is the species, signifying the priority of their connection and identification with the Jewish people and their religious tradition (Kinzer 2000:4). Their approach is inclusive, in that they recognise and acknowledge other forms of Judaism. They are messianic in that they recognise Jesus as Messiah, who they normally refer to as ‘Yeshua’ (e.g. Kinzer 2000, 2013; UMJC 2013), and acknowledge the New Testament as apostolic and authoritative. But other than in the protestant tradition, Messianic Jews do not normally adhere to the principle of *sola scriptura*, for that would mean that they would not value the Rabbinic tradition, including the Oral Law, which they are not generally willing to do (Kinzer 2000:4–8).²

Since Messianic Jews see themselves as essentially Jewish, they adhere to the Mosaic Law as well as Jewish culture and tradition (e.g. keeping Jewish feasts and sabbaths, adhering to dietary laws, practising circumcision, and gathering in synagogues). But by believing in Jesus as Messiah, they do believe that one is saved by accepting Jesus into one’s heart and by believing in him as Lord (UMJC 2004; 2013:2). The

² There are exceptions in the Messianic Jewish community in that some do not accept Rabbinic Judaism (e.g. Brown 2016) or that some selectively adhere to Talmudic instruction (Burgess 2006:308).

observance of the Law is thus not usually understood as a prerequisite for salvation (Ariel 2006:209, 213). By both identifying with Judaism and accepting Jesus as Messiah, they see themselves as a link or bridge between the gentile people of God (Christians)³ and the Jews, whom they see as God's eternal people (cf. Kinzer 2000; Woods 2014b:129). Messianic Jews base their unique identity on what they perceive to be an *ongoing distinction* that the New Testament portrays within the body of Christ between gentile believers in Christ and believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι ('Judaean', see below). In their understanding of the *ekklesia* in the New Testament, gentile Christ-believers were only subjected to a limited set of requirements (primarily based on Acts 15) whereas believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι would maintain full obedience to the Mosaic Law, including circumcision and dietary restrictions (e.g. Juster 1995:68–87; Kinzer 2000:32–39; UMJC 2013:22–24; Woods 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2015a; 2015b). The different sets of requirements that are perceived to be required of gentile believers and believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament, correspond with the idea in Judaism to accept a gentile as righteous on the basis of the Noahide Laws (or Noahic Covenant), which Messianic Jews tend to retroject into the New Testament.⁴ This approach to identity in the New Testament, including the reference to the Noahide Laws, closely coheres with the so-called *Radical New Perspective on Paul* (RNPP), which is advanced by scholars such as Bockmuehl (1995; 2000), Tomson (1990:259–281; [1996] 2001:251–270), Nanos

³ In Judaism, the designation 'Christians' is normally identified with the gentiles (*goyim*), which is one of the reasons why Messianic Jews would differentiate being messianic from being Christian (Kinzer 2000:4).

⁴ The complete set of the seven Noahide Laws is contained in the *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 8:14, twelfth cent. CE), and includes prohibitions on (1) idolatry, (2) blasphemy, (3) murder, (4) theft, (5) sexual immorality, (6) eating living flesh, and (7) exhortations for the establishment of courts of justice. They are considered in Rabbinic Judaism as binding to all humankind. A gentile that adheres to these seven laws would be considered a 'righteous Gentile' (Blickenstaff 2009:280) or a 'Godfearer' (Tomson 1990:50).

(1996:50–56; 2012:123–124), Campbell (2008a:89–93), Eisenbaum (2009:252), Rudolph (2011) and Tucker (2011:62–114).

The main focus of this article is to determine on an exegetical and theological level if the view that an ongoing distinction of identity between gentile Christ-believers and believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι is supported by the New Testament. Was there a *universal and fixed principle* laid down by the apostles that determined that a distinction between gentile believers and *all* believers from the Ἰουδαῖοι needed to be upheld? Can one derive such a distinction from the Pauline material? Did Paul remain fully Law observant after his Damascus Experience? Another pertinent question is whether one can equate contemporary Judaism with the faith of ancient Israel or with the Ἰουδαῖοι of the New Testament. While a comprehensive treatment of these questions cannot be achieved within the scope of this article, the focus will be (1) on the hermeneutical distance between contemporary Judaism, the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament and ancient Israel, (2) the Apostolic Decree (esp. Acts 15:22–35), (3) the question whether Paul remained fully Law observant (esp. Acts 18:18; 21:17–26; 1 Cor 7:17–22; 9:19–22), and (4) how one should understand the identity in Christ in respect of gentiles and the Ἰουδαῖοι in the Pauline material (esp. Gal 3; Eph 2:11–19). Yet, even in this discussion, some of the main arguments that pertain to certain passages will be presented in light of previous publications (Du Toit 2013a; 2013b; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2016a; 2016b) instead of a comprehensive treatment of each passage.

2. The Hermeneutical Distance Between Ancient Israel, the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament and Contemporary Jews

In Messianic Judaism, the continuity of Judaism with the faith of Old Testament Israel is often stressed without fully accounting for the hermeneutical distance that exists between these two traditions. As

pointed out before (Du Toit 2015b:46–48; 2015c:420–422), Judaism as such only started to develop into a full scale religious system after the fall of the second temple in 70 CE. In the strict sense, a ‘religion’ is a Western category with no counterpart in ancient culture. As Mason (2007:481–488) explained, the Ἰουδαῖοι in the time of the second temple, which includes the Ἰουδαῖοι in most of the New Testament, were more of an *ethnos* than a religion. That is why many prefer to translate the term Ἰουδαῖος in the New Testament with ‘Judean’ rather than ‘Jew’ in order to account for this hermeneutical distance between contemporary Jews and the Ἰουδαῖοι in the New Testament. The same will be done in the rest of this article. A matter that lies adjacent to this hermeneutical distance is the different connotations attached to the designations Ἰουδαῖος and Ἰσραήλ (‘Israel’) in the time of the second temple. In the time of the second temple, the designations Ἰσραήλ and Ἰσραηλίτης (‘Israelite’) leaned towards denoting the ancient *people of God* who lived *before* the time of the second temple. The term Ἰουδαῖος leaned more towards denoting the *ethnic people* that *descended from* historical Israel, without necessarily carrying connotations of being God’s people (see esp. Josephus, *Antiques* 11.169–173; see Du Toit 2015c:420–421).

In Rabbinic Judaism, the Oral Law is claimed to be communicated to Moses in parallel with the written Law (Oral Torah 1997; Oral Law 2002). The Oral Law can be considered an esoteric tradition (cf. Jaffee 1997:527; Oral Torah 1997) with no clear antecedent in the Bible. However, it is possible that an earlier form (or forms) of such a tradition might have been present in biblical times (cf. Mark 7:7–9). As part of Rabbinic teaching, the Oral Law is held to be an orally transmitted legal tradition from sages or *tanna'im*—those who transmitted Rabbinic teachings (Jaffee 1997:526; Schiffman 2009:336). The period of the *tanna'im* can be dated within the second century CE (Oral Law 2002). At about 200 CE the Oral Law was codified in the Mishnah (Neusner 1984:18). The

Mishnah led to further discussions that were collected and edited in the sixth century in the form of the Babylonian Talmud (Oral Law 2002). There is thus no concrete evidence that the Oral Law, which is an essential element of that which constitutes Judaism, was part of the tradition of Biblical Israel, which in turn contributes to the hermeneutical distance between the faith of Israel of the Old Testament and contemporary Judaism. Another factor that is often overlooked is that Rabbinic Judaism developed partly as a *reaction* on the claim of Jesus being Israel's Messiah (Charlesworth 1992:16, 30; Dahl 1992:382). In the Mishnah (200 CE) the whole concept of an 'anointed one' developed into an ahistorical system where the anointed ones became 'a species of priest' (Neusner 1984:18). It is thus questionable whether Judaism's rejection of Jesus being the Messiah was merely a result of early Christians' antagonism towards those descending from historical Israel or Christians' denial of their historical heritage, as Messianic Jews seem to argue. Neither is it completely accurate to propose that in Judaism's formative period, their rejection of Jesus as Messiah was not foundational to their identity (contra Kinzer 2000:21–22). The fact that believers in Christ were persecuted by the Judaeans from the earliest times, including Saul before his Damascus experience (Matt 23:34; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12; John 5:16; 9:34; 16:2; Acts 5:18, 40; 7:58–60; 9:4–5, 23–24; 17:5–8; 18:12–17; 20:19; 21:27–32; 22:4, 8, 19–20; 23:12–14; 26:10–15; 1 Cor 15:19; 2 Cor 11:24; 1 Gal 1:13, 23; 4:19; 1 Thes 2:14–16; Rev 2:9–10; 3:9; cf. Reasoner 1997), strengthens the notion that the development of formative Judaism was influenced by a reaction to faith in Jesus as Messiah.

3. The Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:22–35)

Notwithstanding the hermeneutical distance pointed out above, the main question is whether the New Testament indicates a fixed, universal

principle in the early Christ-believing community that would *distinguish* between gentile and Judaeian believers. A passage that probably features the strongest in the latter contention is Acts 15:22–35, which reports the so-called Apostolic Decree (cf. Acts 16:1–5; 21:25; e.g. Juster 1995:81–87; Woods 2015a).

In the narrative of Acts 15, after certain people from Judaea insisted that gentile Christ-believers had to be circumcised in order to be saved (vv. 1–2), Paul and Barnabas were met by a similar opinion by believers from the party of the Pharisees, but with the added condition that gentiles should adhere to the whole Mosaic Law (v. 5). Peter, a Judaeian believer, stood up and explained that God decided to include the gentiles in the gospel (v. 7) and to give the Holy Spirit to them ‘just as to us’ (καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν, v. 8). Peter added that God ‘made no distinction between us and them’ (οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξύ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν, v. 9). Then, quite significantly, Peter protested against placing a yoke (the Mosaic Law) on the neck of the disciples that neither the patriarchs nor they, Judaeian Christ-believers, were able to bear (v. 10). Peter then contrasted the Law with the grace in Christ and applied it to Judaeian believers like himself—a grace that he considered as applicable to them in the same way as to gentile believers (v. 11). Two elements stand out in Luke’s account of Peter’s speech: (1) there is *no distinction* between the way in which gentile or Judaeian believers received the Spirit and the cleansing of their hearts by faith, and (2) in terms of salvation, the *grace in Christ is contrasted* to the Mosaic Law for both Judaeian and gentile believers. These characteristics correspond with Peter’s words to Cornelius about God showing no partiality and his acceptance of anyone who fears him (10:34–35; cf. also Paul’s speech in 13:39, 43).

The remark about the yoke of the Law (v. 10) might seem surprising on the lips of Peter, for the bearing of the yoke of the Law was seen by many

as a privilege and a help, and no reason for complaint (Haenchen 1971:446; e.g. Psa 119:97–98). But a few factors have to be considered in respect of the context behind such a reference in Acts: (1) As a Galilean fisherman, Peter might have seen at least parts of the Law as a considerable burden, especially the feasts that would require pilgrimage up to Jerusalem and involve the abandoning of work and family; (2) the attempts to extend various priestly requirements of the Law to all Judaeans by the Pharisees and the Qumranites may have led to such a view among the ordinary working class; (3) Jesus seems to have suggested that the yoke of the Law was heavy (Matt 11:30; *Sir* 51:26; Witherington 1998:454; cf. Bruce 1990:337 on point 1). Dunn (2006:430) went so far as stating that Peter was ‘*the bridge-man ... who did more than any other to hold together the diversity of first-century Christianity*’ (emphasis original).⁵ Furthermore, if the Mosaic Law would only have positive connotations for all Judaeans believers, why would the Mosaic requirements (see below) be considered as a limited set of requirements ‘not to trouble’ (μη παρενοχλεῖν, v. 19) gentile believers and as imposing ‘no further burden’ (μηδὲν πλεόν ... βάρος, v. 28) upon them? Could it be that the Mosaic Law was considered by many of the Judaeans believers as burdensome altogether? Although it is quite evident from the text of Acts 15 that the motivation of those from Judaea and the believers from the party of the Pharisees was that circumcision and full Torah observance had to complement *salvation* (vv. 1, 11), and that Peter’s reaction indicated that there was freedom from the Law for Gentile believers and Judaeans believers in respect of *salvation*, it may be asked if the freedom from the Law did not go beyond salvation for all believers (contra Woods 2015a:121). Strictly speaking, we have no indication from Acts that *all* Judaeans believers in the early church thought that

⁵ Cf. how Dunn (2006:430) perceives Peter as serving a kind of mediatory function between the extremes in the early church, being sensitive to both the heritage of the Judaeans, which Paul seemed to have lacked, and an openness to the demands of developing Christianity, which James seemed to have lacked.

circumcision or full observance of the Law was expected of *all* Judaeans believers. That the latter assumption might have been ‘prevailing’ (Woods 2015a:115) for many Judaeans believers is certainly possible, but if so, that would not mean that such an assumption would have been universal for all Judaeans believers in the early church. It is in fact quite likely that Luke meant to say that the believers ‘from the party of the Pharisees’ (ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων, v. 5) were in fact Pharisees ‘in their pre-conversion days’, just like Paul, and that their ‘old attitudes’ were carried over to their belief in Christ (Marshall 1980:249).

Although in Woods’ (2015a:118) interpretation of Acts 10:34–35, he is right that Cornelius’ conversion meant that Judaeans had ‘no advantage concerning acceptability to God’ (10:34–35), the acceptability of the gentiles had to do with more than merely extending salvation to them. For in Peter’s vision (10:10–16), God asked him to eat food that was considered unclean and impure for historical Israel, which Peter refused. God then commanded Peter to eat the food, because ‘what God has made clean, you must not call profane’ (v. 15, NRSV; cf. Mark 7:19). This vision is certainly about ‘the abolishment of the dietary laws’ (Schnabel 2012:491; cf. Marshall 1980:197; Milgrom 1991:726; Peterson 2009:330). This interpretation is the only one that makes sense of the vision, for the food laws had set Israel apart from the gentiles and *constituted a distinction* between Israel as holy and the gentiles as impure (Schnabel 2012:492; cf. Marshall 1980:197; Milgrom 1991:726). By removing the food laws, gentiles themselves were no longer considered impure by extension. Peter’s vision thus constituted a ‘new stage’ (Peterson 2009:330) and a ‘new order’ (Marshall 1980:197; Schnabel 2012:492) in the progress of the Gospel. The fact that Luke reported in 11:3 that Peter was accused of eating with gentiles (in Cornelius’ house), followed directly by Peter’s retelling of the vision (vv. 4–10), confirms that Peter’s vision *primarily* involved the abolition of the food laws and

the acceptance of the gentiles *by extension* (cf. Schnabel 2012:492; contra Keener 2013:1773). The fact that Peter interpreted his vision as implying that gentiles cannot be considered unholy or impure (v. 28), does not mean that he interpreted the vision differently from its original, literal intention (v. 28, contra Woods 2012:180), but that gentiles could not be considered unclean *on account of their diet* any more (Schnabel 2012:497–498; Marshall 1980:199; Peterson 2009:333). That the declaring of all food as pure was (primarily) at stake in 10:10–16 is also explicitly attested by the ante-Nicene father, Clement of Alexandria (second to third cent. CE), in his *Paedagogus* 2.1, other than what Woods (2012:206–207) contended.⁶

Although the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29) on a surface level seems to have accommodated believing gentiles among Judaeans believers in order that they could have mutual fellowship (cf. Talbert 2005:135; Parsons 2008:220), it may be asked if those who were really being accommodated were not the more Law-oriented Judaeans believers. Apart from Peter's vision of all foods being pure, if one compares the situation in Acts 15 with the situation addressed in Romans 14, it is noteworthy that the 'weak' persons in Romans 14:1, 2 and 15:1 are portrayed as Judaeans believers who adhered to dietary restrictions and the observance of days out of continuing loyalty to the Mosaic Law (Moo 1996:829; Schreiner 1998:713–714).⁷ It seems that they condemned gentile

⁶ Although not an ante-Nicene father, see also Cyril of Alexandria (fifth cent. CE) in *Against Julian* 9.318–319.

⁷ Several factors favour this interpretation. (1) The differences between the Judaeans and gentiles is an important theme in Romans (e.g. 1:14–16; 9:24; 10:12; 15:8–13) and the significance of the OT food laws was a primary issue in the early church (e.g. Mark 7:19b; Acts 10; 15; Gal 2:11–15). (2) Paul's plea for the understanding and acceptance of the 'weak' shows that they were not propagating a view antithetical to the gospel. In other words, it could not have been Judaeans who thought that the Law was necessary for salvation. (3) Paul's failure to mention 'food sacrificed to idols' (cf. 1 Cor 8:1), his reference to the observance of special days and abstention from wine makes it unlikely that the dispute in Romans can be confined to food offered to idols. (4) The practices

believers who did not adhere to these restrictions (Rom 14:3). The ‘strong’ with whom Paul agreed (Rom 14:14a, 20; 15:1) would then be gentile believers who believed that the coming of Christ had brought an end to the ritual requirements of the Mosaic Law (Moo 1996:831; cf. Cranfield 1979:697). Such a conclusion would cohere with Paul’s statement that he was persuaded that in the Lord Jesus nothing is unclean in itself (Rom 14:14b).

Although the things listed in the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29) mostly cohere with Mosaic, ritual requirements of the Old Testament (Lev 17:10–14; 19:26; 1 Cor 8:1, 4–13) and not to the Noahide commandments found in Rabbinic Judaism,⁸ πορνεία (‘adultery’ or ‘fornication’) seems to carry a stronger ethical connotation. Yet, although πορνεία might have been intended in a mainly ritual sense of sexual activities that defile a person (cf. Polhill 1992:331), it probably stands in

that Paul ascribed to the ‘weak’ can all be related to requirements in the Mosaic Law (Moo 1996:829–839). See also Gagnon (2000) who argued against Nanos (1996:105) who contended that the ‘weak’ referred to those of monotheistic ‘Jewish’ faith. Gagnon shows from the context that the ‘weak’ persons have to be believers in Christ.

⁸ As argued in some length elsewhere (Du Toit 2013b), the idea that these requirements represented an earlier form of the seven ‘Noahide Laws’ (e.g., Campbell 2008a:6; Eisenbaum 2009:252; Nanos 1996:50–56; Tomson 1990:50), a belief in (later) Rabbinic Judaism that implies that ‘righteous gentiles’ who adhere to these seven laws (see above) would have a place in the world to come, is unfounded. The prohibitions listed in Acts 15:19–32; 16:1–5 and 21:25 do not correspond well with the seven Noahide Laws and are rather to be interpreted as having a Mosaic origin, constituting a practical arrangement in the early church with the intention to establish unity. That the idea behind the Noahide Laws is present in the book of *Jubilees* 7:20–21 is doubtful (the restrictions in *Jubilees* do not correspond well with the seven Noahide Laws; the requirement that the laws would be binding on all people is absent; that those concerned would be ‘righteous gentiles’ is absent; that they would obtain a place in the world to come is absent). That the Noahide Laws existed in some kind of early form in the *Didache* (3:1–6; 6:3) is questionable too. Apart from the tendency to date it later than Paul, the *Didache* lacks a reference to Noah, and the correspondences that there are with some of the stipulations in the *Didache* with the Noahide Laws are embedded within many other commands and covenantal requirements akin to the Mosaic Law.

direct connection with the sexual immorality associated with pagan religious festivals (cf. 1 Cor 10:7–8, Gaertner 1993:268; Witherington 1998:466). Nevertheless, even if the reference to *πορνεΐα* might have involved an ethical reprimand to gentile believers, on a deeper level, the other conditions in the Decree could well be a compromise to accommodate ‘weak’⁹ Judaeen believers (cf. Bruce 1990:331; Fernando 1998:425) and not so much a requirement for gentile membership (contra Polhill 1992:330). From the text of Acts it is thus not clear whether the whole of the Jerusalem church was zealous for the Law. It is quite likely that there was a strict Law-abiding group within the Jerusalem church (Longenecker 2015:196).

Paul’s reaction on the Apostolic Decree is not known from the text of Acts 15, and neither is it clear from his own letters. Yet there is no reason to suspect that he would disagree with it either (cf. Bock 2007:643). Using Paul as a guide, Bock (2007:644) suggested two options: ‘(1) keep the law scrupulously for the sake of evangelizing Jews, or (2) be less scrupulous for the sake of Gentiles (1 Cor 9:19–22; Rom 14–15). Each person is to do what conscience permits without imposing a requirement on someone who has different convictions’. In other words, Paul might have adhered to the Decree, especially the ritual requirements, for the sake of those with a ‘weak’ conscience (cf. Bruce 1990:331; Longenecker 2015:230).

4. Was Paul fully Law-abiding?

While the notion of an ongoing Judaeen-gentile distinction in the early believing community presupposes that Judaeen believers in the time of

⁹ Longenecker (2015:207) pointed out that Paul’s reference to the ‘pillars’ (the elder apostles) in Galatians 2:9 could imply that in some ways Paul considered them as weak. Paul did not directly speak of them as pillars, but wrote that they ‘were considered to be’, ‘were reputed to be’ or even ‘seemed to be’ (*δοκέω*) pillars (cf. BDAG, s.v. *δοκέω*).

the New Testament observed the whole Law, it is often argued that Paul is portrayed in the New Testament as being fully Law observant (e.g. Juster 1995:85–87; Nanos 2009:4; Woods 2015a:136). Since such a contention cannot be discussed in full in the scope of this article, and since I have argued elsewhere from the Pauline material (Du Toit 2013a:66, 180; 2015a) and Acts (Du Toit 2016b) that Paul was *not* fully Law observant, the focus will be on the main arguments in this debate.

4.1. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

One of the prominent passages that those within the RNPP seem to have difficulty in explaining, is 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, where Paul stated that he would make himself a slave in order to ‘win’ them for the Gospel. To Judaeans he would become ‘like’ or ‘as’ (ὡς) a Judaeans in order to ‘win’ them. Paul would place himself under the Law if he could win people by doing so. Similarly, he indicated that he would become like a weak person for the weak, and that he would become ‘all things to all people’ in order that he might get them saved—all for the sake of the Gospel. In verse 20 Paul specifically wrote that ‘I myself am not under the Law’ (μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμου), a reading that Tomson (1990:276–277), a RNPP proponent, attempted to argue away on the basis of weak textual evidence.¹⁰ For Nanos (2012:129–130), Paul did not actually become weak, or saw himself as free from the Law. Paul was merely prepared to meet people rhetorically. Tucker (2011:102–107) read this passage in terms of a ‘relaxed halakhah’, which he saw as a kind of middle ground between Nanos and Tomson (1990:276–277), who also read the passage

¹⁰ Tomson problematised the first ὡς in 1 Cor 9:20, referring to manuscripts that omit it (e.g. (F) G* 6* 326 1739 Cl Or^{1739mg}). But he also questioned the authenticity of the participle phrase: μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμου (cf. Juster 1995:107 who omitted this phrase from his quotation of 1 Cor 9:20). Manuscripts that omit the latter phrase are e.g. D2 K Ψ 81 1241 1881 2464 M sy^p. The external evidence with these readings included is far superior, however.

through the hermeneutical lens of Jewish halakha. Tucker (2011:102–107) argued that Paul differentiated between two types of Judaeans in verse 20, where the one group would point to the majority of Judaeans living around the Mediterranean basin and the other group would represent a subgroup identity within this broader classification that adhered to a stricter interpretation of the Law of the Pharisees.

To propose, however, that Paul in verse 20 used some form of coded language to a largely gentile audience to make a distinction *within* Judaeans, is highly unlikely, and mars Paul’s view of the cross being a stumbling block (1 Cor 1:23; Wright 2013:1437). Further, such an interpretation can hardly be harmonised with the notion that Paul saw himself¹¹ as being dead to the Law in Galatians 2:19 and the idea of not being ‘under the law’ in Romans 3:19; 6:14–5; Galatians 3:23 and 4:4–5 (cf. Wright 2013:1437; see below). In terms of the halakhic interpretation of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, it is questionable if an approach that views Paul as communicating in ‘cross-culturally intelligible terms’ (Nanos 2012:139) can be superimposed on Paul. Such an approach is rather postmodern in nature, and can hardly be understood as Paul enslaving himself (v. 19). In the halakhic model, Paul would not have given up anything (Wright 2013:1437–1439). The halakhic model is rather a contemporary Jewish model that is retrojected and superimposed on Paul. The fact that Paul stated that he was *not himself* under the Law and became *like* a Judaeans rather suggests that Paul was not fully Law observant after his Damascus experience, and that he did not see himself as within the Judaeans identity any more—at least not in the way that those zealous for the Law envisioned their identity.

¹¹ Paul used the first person singular: ἐγὼ ... ἀπέθανον.

4.2. 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

A passage that is often used in an attempt to offset what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 9:19–24, is 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, where Paul advised people to remain in the calling in which they were called. Those in the RNPP argue that Paul here made an intra-ecclesial distinction between gentile and Judaeon Chirst-believers. The reference to the keeping of God’s commandments (v. 19) would then point to the continued binding force of the Law, although it would have involved different ethical obligations for gentile and Judaeon believers (e.g. Tomson 1990:259–281; Nanos 1996:50–56; 2012:123–124; Campbell 2008a:89–93; Eisenbaum 2009:252; Rudolph 2011; Tucker 2011:62–114; Woods 2014b:112). According to this interpretation, the gentile subgroup of believers would have been accommodated within the social community on the basis of Jewish halakhah. Nanos (1996:366) and Tomson (1990:271) interpreted this halakha in terms of the Noahide Laws (see above).

1 Corinthians 7:19–24 is, however, a difficult passage to interpret on several counts. Sanders (1983:103) considered Paul’s reference to the keeping of God’s commandments (v. 19b) as ‘one of the most amazing sentences that he ever wrote’. (1) The first problem is that in Galatians 5:6 and 6:15 the insignificance of circumcision and uncircumcision is contrasted with being in Christ and terms of not keeping the Law. In verse 1 Corinthians 7:19a Paul’s reference to the insignificance or irrelevance of both circumcision and uncircumcision in terms of one’s new standing in Christ (Thiselton 2000:551; Wright 2013:1434; Taylor 2014:205), is then followed by a reference to the keeping of God’s commandments: ‘but the keeping of God’s commandments’ (ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ). (2) The wording of this verse 19 is elliptical, requiring a predicate in contrast to οὐδέν ἐστίν (‘is nothing’).¹² (3) The verb ἐπισπάομαι (‘undo

¹² E.g. ‘but the keeping of God’s commandments *is something*’ (Fitzmyer 2008:308).

circumcision’) in verse 18 is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament and both the noun τήρησις and the phrase ἐντολῶν θεοῦ are *hapax legomena* in Paul (v. 19). (4) 1 Corinthians 7:19–24 is best understood as a digression (Kistemaker 1993:229; Thiselton 2000:546; cf. Fee 2014:339). There is for example no indication in the letter that circumcision (or slavery) is a special problem in the congregation (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:306). Paul did not address the theme of circumcision anywhere else in the Corinthian correspondence. Apart from cursory references to the Law in the letter (9:8–9, 20; 14:21, 34; 15:56) and a reference to the Mosaic ministry in 2 Corinthians 3, there is no elaborate and explicit discourse on the Law as such in the Corinthian correspondence. The disconnected and elliptical nature of 1 Corinthians 7:19–24 thus asks for caution not to derive too much theologically or in terms of identity from this passage, a danger that seems to be lurking behind the RNPP-interpretation of this passage.

In 1 Corinthians 1:9, the calling (καλέω, see also 7:15, 17–18, 20–22, 24) points to the calling into the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ the Lord (Collins 1999:274; Fee 2014:340). Paul’s instruction that someone who is circumcised at the time of calling must not undo his actual, physical circumcision or vice versa (7:18; Dunn 2008:335; Wright 2013:1435; cf. 1 Macc 1:15; Josephus, *Antiques* 12.241), can thus be understood as an instruction to stay in the same *physical or social condition* at the time of coming into the fellowship and under the lordship of Christ. There is no indication in 1 Corinthians that the calling itself involves a subordinate identity in relation to Christ. Christ’s calling rather transcends everything related to your physical appearance (circumcision), ethnicity or any other social identity, including being a slave or free (vv. 21–24; cf. Fee 2014:340). In the RNPP, one’s ethnicity or cultural tradition is very much constitutive of how one relates to God, for the Law, including circumcision, has always been constitutive in marking off the status of God’s people and their relationship to him. The Law and

circumcision was always more than something belonging to the domain of tradition or culture, but was constitutive of one's covenant relationship with God and thus constitutive of one's status before God (see below). The argument that the different relationship wherein Judaeans believers would stand towards the Law over against gentile believers, would not imply a superior-inferior relationship (Woods 2014b:102), does not fully account for the constitutive significance of the Law in determining one's status before God. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with his people. Someone who was not circumcised had to be removed from God's people (Gen 17:9–14). Doing the Law safeguarded life (Lev 18:5; Ezek 20:11, 13, 21), and so forth. Romans 2:23 is precisely directed against an attitude that the possession of the Law, including circumcision, would safeguard one's status before God (see Du Toit 2016a:3–5), even if such a safeguarding involved merely staying in the covenant and thus remaining part of God's people, as proponents of the *New Perspective on Paul* normally argue.

As argued in some length elsewhere (Du Toit 2015a:35–43), given the disconnected and elliptical nature of 1 Corinthians 7:19–23, it is possible that Paul's reference to the doing of God's commandments (v. 19b), which is contrasted to the irrelevance of physical circumcision, can be understood as a pejorative, short-hand reference to a more elaborate teaching on the Law to the Corinthians that Paul must have undertaken previously. His reference to the doing of God's commandments (v. 19b) would then imply that if one attaches significance to circumcision in terms of one's status before God, as circumcision would claim, one could just as well revert to doing the whole Law, for that is what really mattered in the old era under the Law. Such a short-hand reference would then correspond to (1) the requirement of doing the whole Law in the old existence under the Law in Romans 2, which I also argued elsewhere (Du Toit 2016; see also Du Toit 2015a:39–40), and (2) Paul's reference to the

obligation in Galatians 5:1–6 to do the whole Law if one let oneself be circumcised (Du Toit 2015a:36–39).

4.3. The picture that Acts paints of Paul

For those who promote an ongoing distinction in the early church between Judaeans and gentile Christians, it has often been argued that the Acts of the Apostles portrays Paul in such a way that he was loyal to the Law: he circumcised Timothy, who had a Gentile father (16:3); in Jerusalem's temple he participated in purification rites akin to the Judaeans way of life (18:18; 21:17–26); he referred to himself as an Judaeans (21:39; 22:3) and even a Pharisee (23:6; 26:5). Since I have addressed these passages in a recent article (Du Toit 2016b), I will summarise the main lines of argument here.

While some would see in Timothy's circumcision as reported by Acts 16:3 a precedent for Paul to promote circumcision for Judaeans believers (e.g. Nanos 2009:4; Woods 2015b:101), the reason for his circumcision is more complex. Paul specifically stated that he circumcised Timothy 'because of the Judaeans'. Since Timothy had a Greek father, Paul could just as well represent him as a Greek. Why would Paul choose to present him as a Judaeans? While gentiles were admitted in synagogues, the sentiment among Judaeans around the admittance of gentiles in the temple (21:28; 24:6) is probably the main reason why Paul wanted to present Timothy as a Judaeans rather than a gentile. Paul thus accommodated Judaeans sensitiveness after the principle of salvation by grace had been established (15:11). In other words, Paul's action was consistent with the principle(s) laid down in 1 Corinthians 9:20 to become like a Judaeans for the Judaeans in order to 'win' them for the Gospel (see Du Toit 2016b:4). Timothy's circumcision could thus not be used as proof that Paul promoted circumcision for Judaeans believers.

The argument that Paul's participation in purification rites would be proof that he was fully Law abiding, cannot be sustained either. Paul's actions as described in Acts 18:18 and 21:17–26 have to be understood in a *polemical context*. Paul's shaving of his head as a result of being under a vow (18:18) might primarily be understood, not as a means to obtain certain blessings from God, but as a private religious exercise to show his thankfulness to God who enabled him to complete his mission in Corinth under God's protection. But as argued elsewhere, it is quite plausible that the shaving of his head might secondarily have involved a kind of delayed reaction to pacify the earlier antagonism he experienced from the Judaeans who accused Paul of not adhering to the Law (18:12–13, Du Toit 2016b:4).

The purification rite that Paul underwent according to Acts 21:17–26 has to be understood against the background of the antagonism that Paul experienced from believers who were *all* ($\pi\alpha\zeta$) zealous for the Law (v. 20). While $\pi\alpha\zeta$ is probably meant in a hyperbolic way (Witherington 1998:647; Bock 2007:841), even if it is meant literally, the many being zealous for the Law does not necessarily imply that *all* Judaeans believers in the *early church* were zealous for the Law. It is in fact likely that many of Paul's Judaeans converts, when they joined communities of largely gentile believers, ceased to be Law abiding. Teachings such as are found in Romans 2:25–30, Galatians 4:9; 5:3 and 5:9 seem to point in this direction (Witherington 1998:648; Pervo 2009:544). Note especially the first person plural ('we') in which Paul stated that believers in Christ, including himself and Judaeans believers by implication, are not under the Law or the curse of the Law any more (Rom 6:15; 7:5–6; Gal 3:13, 23–25; 4:2, 4, 5; 5:1, 5). Paul's willingness to undergo purification would thus be a prime example of being a Judaeans for the Judaeans although he did not consider himself to be under the Law any more (1 Cor 9:20). As Thiselton (2000:703) pointed out, Paul's freedom from the Law has to be

understood in both ways. Just as Paul did not view it necessary to comply with Mosaic regulations on circumcision, feast days and food, he did not regard it as forbidden for a Christ-believer to undergo something such as the Nazirite vow (or similar) either. Wright (2013:1441) concluded that Paul, who believed that the Gospel was to the Judaeans first (Rom 1:16), had to choose between either leaving the impression that he was loyal to the Law or leaving the impression that he tore up scripture. Under these difficult, tricky, and life-threatening political and/or religious circumstances, Paul chose the former (see Du Toit 2016b:4–5).

In context, Paul's participation in purification rites thus does not point to him being fully Law abiding. Although the early church was still in a developmental phase in terms of its identity, the question is not whether there *were* Judaeans believers who still wanted to (partly) define their identity by full Law observance, especially food laws and circumcision, even though they might have been great in number. The question is rather whether one could derive from the text of Acts if a *fixed principle* was laid down in the early church that Judaeans believers were *all expected* to distinguish themselves from the gentile believers in terms of Law observance. On this question the answer has to be negative. Neither can one derive from Paul's vows that he would adhere to such a fixed principle. He was rather like a Judaeans to the Judaeans (1 Cor 9:20), or in this case, to Judaeans believers who demanded full Law observance (see Du Toit 2016b: 5–6).

Paul's conduct in terms of the purification rites suggests that there was some truth in the allegations that Paul forsook Moses, or that he told Judaeans not to circumcise their children or observe their customs (Acts 21:21; cf. the allegations in terms of profaning the temple in 21:28 and 24:6). Although Paul probably did not directly prohibit Judaeans believers to circumcise or actively prevented them from adhering to the customs, such implications were probably implied in Paul's teaching. The same is

probably true of the allegations against Stephen's teaching (6:11–14). It is not so much Paul and Stephen's inherent antagonism towards the Law in their teaching that aggravated those who wanted to protect the Mosaic Law and preserve the identity of the Judaeans, but rather the implications that would arise from the kind of teaching that the Law has been fulfilled and completed in Christ (Acts 7:48–55; 13:39–43, see Du Toit 2016b:6; cf. Rom 7:5–6; 10:4; 2 Cor 3:7–17; Gal 3:10–13, 23–25; 4:4–5, see Du Toit 2013a). Although the allegation that Paul would have defiled the temple by bringing gentiles into it is most likely untrue, the other allegations seem to be based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the message(s) that Stephen and Paul preached. For them, their teaching did not denigrate the temple, the people or the Law, but revealed their true glory (Stott 1990:344).

As argued elsewhere (Du Toit 2016b:7), both Paul's references in Acts to being a Judaeon (21:39; 22:3) and being a Pharisee (23:6; 26:5) are set within a *highly polemical context*, and can be understood as part of Paul's rhetorical strategy to avert his detractors and to win people over for the Gospel. Paul's reference to being a Judaeon from Tarsus (Acts 21:39; 22:2–3) follows immediately on an attempt to kill him (21:26–34). His reference to being a Judaeon has more to do with his former, national identity and his pedigree than his current identity in Christ. Such an understanding is strengthened by Paul's retelling of the change that came into his life as a result of his Damascus encounter, followed by the new way in which he perceived Stephen's death by implication (22:4–21). Paul's reference to being a Judaeon can thus be understood as another example of being like a Judaeon for the Judaeans, for he aimed to win their favour in order to bring the Gospel to them and hoped to change their minds about wanting to kill him.¹³ Paul's references to being a

¹³ Cf. Paul's references to 'the Judaeans' in Acts 20:21; 25:8, 10; 26:2–4, 7, 21 and 28:19, implying that he left the Judaeon identity and considered himself an outsider.

Pharisee, once in the present tense (23:6) and once in the past tense (26:5), occur within the same chain of events following Paul's arrest and his words to the tribunal and the crowd (21:33–22:39). By identifying with the Pharisees, Paul tried to divide the crowd on the resurrection and to confirm the validity of the resurrection itself. While Paul's aim could be understood as rhetorical, his conduct falls under the pattern of being 'everything to everybody' (1 Cor 9:22) in order to win them over for the gospel (1 Cor 9:23). Paul wanted to show that he was a product of Pharisaic instruction rather than being a practising Pharisee. Again, in 26:5, Paul's reference to being a former Pharisee and his reference to 'our' (ἡμετέρως) religious practice shows that his belief in Christ shared roots with Pharisaism, especially in terms of resurrection (see esp. v. 8). Given the context(s), Paul's references to being a Judaeen or a Pharisee thus do not show that Paul saw himself as still being a Judaeen or that he still observed the Law in full.

4.4. Is there other evidence that Paul was fully Law abiding?

In addition to the passages already discussed, Nanos (2009:4) argued that Paul remained fully Law abiding in reference to passages such as 2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:3–6; Galatians 2:15 and 5:3. In 2 Corinthians 11:22 and Philippians 3:3–6, Paul employed the terms Ἰσραηλίτης and the Ἰσραήλ (the patriarch) respectively (not Ἰουδαῖος) as designation for his physical heritage and ethnicity and not so much for his current identity (see Du Toit 2013a:60–64, 187–191). Paul's status as being 'blameless' concerning the righteousness in the Law (Phil 3:6) defines his previous identity before belief in Christ, which he rejected and considered as refuse (Phil 3:8).

In Paul's reference to being a Judaeen in Galatians 2:15–16, he merely designates his ethnicity and then went on to state that no one is made righteous from the works of the Law, but through faith in Christ. His

reference to being a Judaeen (v. 15) rather refers to status by birth than denoting full Law observance (Du Toit 2013a:185). Lastly, Galatians 5:3 does not put Law observance in a positive light, but rather implies that if you circumcise yourself, you have an obligation to do the whole Law. Paul stated earlier in Galatians that the Law has put those under the Law under the curse of the Law (3:10, 13). The curse was constituted by the fact that the Law demanded full Law observance (3:10), a demand that no one could fulfil. The context of Galatians thus demands a pejorative understanding of the reference to full Law observance in 5:3. The first person plurals in 5:1 and 5 suggest that Paul implicated himself and Judaeen believers in his aversion to circumcision and full Law observance.

A factor that is often neglected in determining whether Paul was fully Law abiding is the extra-Biblical references to the persecution of Paul that resulted from the Law-free gospel that he proclaimed. Longenecker (1990:26) discussed some of Paul's opposition that he encountered from Judaeen Christ-believers. This opposition to Paul's law-free Gospel was often bitter and intense. The *Ascension of James* (second cent. CE) speaks of Paul's law-free approach: 'he [Paul] ... began to write against circumcision, the sabbath, and the law' (cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion*). In the *Kerygmata Petrou* (second cent. CE), Paul is referred to as 'the enemy man' who proclaimed 'lawless and absurd doctrine'. Although we do not know of any such attacks against Paul in the first century, this kind of opposition 'undoubtedly had roots in earlier times', and it is possible that Paul's opponents in Galatia insinuated something similar (Longenecker 1990:27).

5. The New Identity in Christ According to Galatians 3

Galatians 3 is probably one of the most decisive passages in the New Testament that define the new identity in Christ. Most within Messianic Judaism and the RNPP would contend that what Paul argued in Galatians is targeted solely at gentile Christ-believers (e.g. Nanos 2002; Lancaster 2011). While it is true that the original addressees are most probably gentile believers, Paul's opponents can be considered as Judaeans who wanted gentile believers to perfect (ἐπιτελέω, 3:3) their identity by adding full Law observance to their faith, especially circumcision (Betz 1979:136; Martyn 1997:289–293; De Boer 2011:179). Paul's rhetoric thus did not merely target gentile believers, but Judaeans too. Such an understanding is further supported by the fact that Paul utilised the first person singular (2:19–21) and plural (1:4; 2:4, 5, 15, 16, 17; 3:13, 14, 23–25; 4:3, 5, 6, 26, 28, 31; 5:1, 5, 25) in the context of the freedom from the Law or the new position in Christ: it applies to both gentile and Judaeans Christ-believers.

In Galatians 3, Paul portrayed the beginning of a life of faith in Christ by receiving the Spirit (vv. 3–5, cf. v. 14). Paul's contention in verse 3 was 'that *the mode of existence based on the works of the law is eschatologically obsolete*. Faith, on the other hand, is the way to new life' (Silva 2001:176, emphasis original). The basic contrast in Galatians 3 is thus a contrast between the old, obsolete *era* under the Law (vv. 10–14, 23–25) and the *era* of faith that 'came' (vv. 23, 25; cf. Fee 1994:367–471; Martyn 1997:323; De Boer 2011:239). In verse 23–25, in utilising the first person plural (ἐφρουρούμεθα; ἡμῶν; ἔσμεν), Paul specifically implicated himself in being 'under the Law' in the previous era before faith 'came'. Similarly, in Galatians 4:4–5 Paul used the first person plural (ἀπολάβωμεν, v. 5) to include himself in being redeemed from being under the Law. The mode of existence of the old era under the Law is thus fulfilled and completed in Christ. The mode of existence is

therefore not (partly) based on flesh (including ethnicity, circumcision or even the doing of the Law—see below), but is solely based on the eschatological work of the Spirit in believers. Being children (literally being ‘sons’) of Abraham, which is parallel with being children of God, is solely constituted by faith in Christ (vv. 7, 26). Only those who believe are blessed with Abraham (v. 9) and those who belong to Christ are the ‘seed’ of Abraham and heirs to the promise God made to him (v. 29). The connection of believers to Abraham does not flow through historical Israel according to the flesh (4:21–5:1), but is a punctiliar connection (Martyn 1997:444) to Christ as single ‘seed’ of Abraham (v. 16).

In 2 Corinthians 5:16, Paul in fact stated that in Christ believers neither know Christ nor other believers *κατὰ σάρκα* (‘according to the flesh’). In 2 Corinthians 11:18–28, boasting *κατὰ σάρκα* (v. 18) involved boasting on the basis of pedigree, descent or external credentials (vv. 22–28; cf. BDAG, s.v. *σάρξ* §4, see Du Toit 2013a:60–64). Knowing Christ or others ‘according to the flesh’ in 2 Corinthians 5:16 is thus an extended sense in which Paul used *σάρξ*, and probably involved being a ‘fleshly’ descendant of Abraham and/or included knowing them in terms of excelling in Judaeon culture or pedigree (Harris 2005:427; cf. BDAG, s.v. *σάρξ* §5).¹⁴ The ‘new creation’ (2 Cor 5:17) is thus best understood as a new identity that completes but supersedes the mode(s) of identity in the previous age, which involved ‘flesh’ (cf. Sanders 1983:173, 178–179, 207; Lincoln 1990:14; Sechrest 2009:15; Wright 2013:1443–1449). According to Romans 7:1–6, an existence in the ‘flesh’ (*σάρξ*, v. 5) is portrayed as an eschatologically old way of existence under the Law that all believers have died to. In the new era in Christ, identity is not partly based on that which relates to ‘flesh’ in its extended sense, but is defined by the eschatological ‘now’ (*νυνί*), which denotes a new way of existence

¹⁴ A measure of overlap has to be acknowledged between the meanings in §4 and §5 in BDAG (s.v. *σάρξ*).

for all believers in the Spirit (v. 6; cf. Fee 1994:504, 821; Moo 1996:422; Jewett 2007:436–437; Longenecker 2016:636–367; see Du Toit 2013a: 247–256).

Paul stated in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there would no longer be Judaeans or Greeks, slaves or free, or males and females, but that all of these would be one in Christ. RNPP proponents are right that these distinctions are not eradicated (e.g. Juster 1995:111; Nanos 2009:4–5; Woods 2014b:120). But the important point is that none of these social, natural identities are *constitutive* in one's identity as God's child any more. Being male or female does not influence or help define one's status in Christ. The same is true of being a slave or free. In the same way, being a Judaeans believer in Christ could not have been considered as constitutive of one's identity or status before God. In other words, being a Judaeans believer could not contribute in the way one related to God. The latter confirms that Paul used the designation Ἰουδαῖος *solely in terms of an ethnic and social designation* without connotations about being God's people (see above). The problem is, however, that in Messianic Judaism, being a Jew is very much constitutive of one's status before God. As discussed above, Judaism is in fact the genus whereas being messianic is merely the species. But how can one be messianic without subscribing to the *criteria for identity* in the new era in the Messiah? Messianic Jews very much base their core identity before God on being under the Law (including circumcision) and on claiming cultural, religious and ethnic relation to historical Israel (see above). In other words, in terms of making Judaism the genus they continue to define their core identity 'according to the flesh', a category that essentially belongs to the old age before Christ.

It is important to note in this regard that Judaism involves more than culture or ethnicity, but involves a claim to being the same people of God as Israel of the Old Testament (see above). In its original meaning,

circumcision was not merely a cultural symbol, but a sign of the *covenant* between God and his people (Gen 17:11, 13) and thus facilitated the marking-off of Israel as God's people. According to Acts 7:8, Stephen told of the 'covenant of circumcision' (διαθήκην περιτομῆς) given to Abraham. Circumcision thus had theological meaning. If one was not circumcised, he was cut off from the people (Gen 17:14). Similarly, the Law, which involved dietary laws, feasts and the sabbaths, marked Israel as God's people and ensured their life and multiplication in the land (Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1; 8:1). The doing of the Law thus confirmed their claim on God's promise to Abraham and their status as God's people by implication. Mixing (contemporary) Judaism with faith in Christ thus cannot be on the same level as being male, female, slave or free. To justify a Messianic Jewish reading of Galatians 3:28, it is thus not enough to designate Paul's reference to οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος ('there is no Jew') as a 'hyperbole intended to stress the irrelevance of one's social status *in comparison to* one's standing in Christ, which eclipses the former' (Woods 2014b:120, emphasis original). Messianic Judaism is more than a social status, but in identifying with historical Israel and the meaning that they attached to the Law and circumcision, Messianic Judaism inevitably *adds* religious and covenantal meaning to Christ's completed work, and can be compared with Paul's opponents in Galatia who wanted believers to 'perfect' their status before God in the realm of 'flesh'. Woods (2014b:127) elsewhere admitted that Messianic Judaism involves more than 'ethnicity and culture', and that it includes 'faith tradition (including Torah-obligation in a manner not required of Gentile Christians) and a unique function (or service) within the body'. The latter notions are not accounted for in his interpretation of Galatians 3:28, however.

One's status of unity in Christ (Gal 3:28) also involved more than an equal status in terms of salvation (see the discussion of Acts 15 above).

For one thing, all who belonged to Christ were entitled to the entire promise to Abraham (Gal 3:29). In Galatians, the sufficiency of Christ involves more than access to salvation, but defines the *whole life* of any believer, including Judaeans, for Paul wrote that *he* died to the Law that he might live to God. His former ‘I’ (his old identity) did not live anymore, but Christ lived in him (Gal 2:19–20). Christ defined the *totality of his identity* in relation to God. In essence, a Messianic Jewish view of identity defies the all-sufficiency of Christ and wars against the principle of *solo Christo*. To illustrate the latter, one could only look at the following statement of Woods (2015a:134): ‘To impose the Law on Gentiles who had already been saved would be to detract from the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice’. The logical question that follows from Woods’ statement is: if the adding of the Law would detract from the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for gentile believers, does the retaining of Law observance not detract from Christ’s sufficiency for Messianic Jews?

6. The ‘One New Man’ According to Ephesians 2:15

The ‘one new man’ (ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον) of Ephesians 2:15 is one of the most fundamental concepts that defines the nature of identity in Christ as a new identity that fulfilled and replaced the old identities before the Christ event. Woods (2014b:106–123, 129), who approached this text from a Messianic Jewish perspective, discussed each of the terms ‘one’ (εἷς), ‘new’ (καινός) and ‘man’ (ἄνθρωπος) individually. In comparison with a marriage relationship, he argued that the unity (εἷς) in Christ does not erase distinctions between individuals, implying different roles for Judaeans and gentile believers. He explained the newness (καινός) of the identity in Christ as a transformation or renewal rather than a re-creation (cf. Campbell 2008b:15), where the gentiles were grafted into the ‘commonwealth’ (πολιτεία, Eph 2:12, see below) of Israel (cf. Rom

11:16–24, see below)—a contention that is often advanced by Messianic Jews and those from the RNPP (e.g. Juster 1995:35; Campbell 2008b:22–24; Woods 2014b:119–120).¹⁵ Lastly, Woods envisioned the new people (ἄνθρωπος) as a new unity of people with distinction.

The contention that gentiles in Christ became part of the commonwealth of Israel is not evident from the text of Ephesians 2:11–19, however. Verse 12 speaks of the gentiles being aliens of the citizenship (πολιτεία)¹⁶ of Israel in the *former age* before the Christ event (vv. 1–3, 5, 11–12).¹⁷ Nowhere does the text of Ephesians indicate that gentiles in the eschatologically new age became part of Israel. ‘Israel’ was rather the name given for God’s people in the Old Testament (see above). In contrast, in the new eschatological identity in Christ, the middle wall of partition that held gentiles out of God’s people was removed (vv. 13–14). In Christ, both those who were Israel in the former era and the gentiles who were formerly alienated from them (v. 12) and were considered as Israel’s enemies (ἐχθρα, v. 14), were now created (κτίζω, v. 15) into ‘one new man’ (v. 15). The grafting of gentiles into the olive tree in Romans 11:16–24 does not specifically point to a grafting into the commonwealth

¹⁵ The whole concept of the Noahide Laws to which ‘righteous gentiles’ ought to subscribe (see above), can be understood as a kind of accommodation of gentiles within the community of ‘Israel’ (as RNPP proponents define Israel), although their status and the requirement of becoming part of God’s people are not the same as ‘Israel’, and they never become ‘Israel’ proper.

¹⁶ While πολιτεία can refer to the commonwealth of Israel, the notion of citizenship or membership is preferred in the context, for it is more inclusive. One can be a resident of a state and not be a citizen. Apart from the fact that Israel was not an independent state as such, but part of the commonwealth of Rome in the time of Paul (Hoehner 2002:357), the status of the gentiles as strangers from Israel in this context pictures the situation in the Old Testament (cf. Perkins 2000:397). The gentiles would not want membership of the political state of Israel so much as they would want the special privileges God bestowed on Israel (Hoehner 2002:357).

¹⁷ See esp. ποτέ (‘formerly’) in vv. 2, 3 and 11, and τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ (‘in that time’) in v. 12.

of Israel or even into Israel itself either, but can be understood as a grafting into God's people of all ages (Moo 1996:698, 702, 709; Wright 2002:684). The branches that were cut off rather point to Israel (Dunn 1988b:659; Fitzmyer 1993:613; Moo 1996:699; Wright 2002:683). As argued at some length elsewhere, Paul's use of the term 'Israel', including in Romans 9–11, can be understood as echoing its prevalent use in the time of the second temple (see above) and as consistently pointing to historical Israel of the Old Testament (Du Toit 2015c).

In terms of Ephesians 2:11–19, Campbell (2008b:15) argued for the retaining of 'ethnic identity' in Christ and the establishment of 'real political and social peace' (Campbell 2008b:25) between gentile and Judaeen believers. But as argued above, in the RNPP the retention of the Law and historical Israel's faith tradition has to involve more than ethnicity or social identity, but carries connotations in terms of being God's special people distinct from the gentiles. In the RNPP and the Messianic Jewish approach to identity, it is inevitable that notions of superiority and exclusivity in the Jewish identity are retained in distinction from gentiles. But can such a position be reconciled with Ephesians 2:11–19?

A decisive question in interpreting the 'one new man' in Ephesians 2:11–19 is: *what* constituted the alienation of gentiles from historical Israel (v. 12), the hostility and the dividing wall between gentiles and Israel (v. 14) in the previous age? The closest that Woods (2014b:103) came to addressing this question is when he wrote that the same 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).'¹⁸

Woods (2014b) rather confined his approach to the 'one new man' of Ephesians 2:11–19 to a study of each individual term that constitutes this concept. In the process, very little, if anything, was made of the immediate *context* in which the concept of the 'one new man' is set. Carson (1996:27–64) keenly warned against word studies that disregard or neglect the context in which words are used. Building on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959:79–95), scholars such as Silva (1983; 1990), Louw and Nida (1989) have shown that language is like a prism through which a non-linguistic system is viewed. Such an approach to language implies that the *meanings* that are expressed by utilising words are primary: rather than words *carrying* inherent meanings, meanings or ideas are expressed by *utilising* words. The meaning that a writer conveys thus transcends the words that he or she uses. The *context* in which language is used or the context that the arranging of words creates is the main determining factor from which meaning can be derived.

In answer to the above question, the context of Ephesians 2:11–19 reveals that it was 'the law with its commandments and ordinances' (NRSV) or 'the law with its commands and regulations' (NIV, τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν, v. 15) that constituted the dividing wall between Israel and the gentiles in the former age. This certainly refers to the whole Law (Perkins 2000:400; Hoehner 2002:375; Arnold 2010:162; Thielman 2010:169), and not only to those laws that were contained in decrees made by those who interpreted the Law (i.e. the elders, Matt 23:1–4, 15–24; Mark 7:5–8; contra Juster 1995:113). That the Law would be divisible into rites and customs over against Moses' legislation has little

¹⁸ He did supply a footnote to another discussion on the Law (Acts 10:9–16; Woods 2012).

support in Judaeen texts (Deut 8:1; Josephus; CD-A 19.29; 4QMMT; see Perkins 2000:399–400). In Lincoln's (1990:141) words, the Law functioned 'as a fence to protect Israel from the impurity of the Gentiles, the law became such a sign of Jewish particularism that it also alienated Gentiles and became a cause of hostility'. Why was this so? Because the Law constituted a distinction between Israel and the gentiles as expressed in laws such as the food laws, the feasts and sabbaths (see above). It showed that Israel was a distinct people that were pure and holy unto the Lord, separate from the gentiles. The definitive external mark of distinction was circumcision (cf. Lincoln 1990:135). This is why verse 11 specifically mentions circumcision. Circumcision disqualified the gentiles from the citizenship of Israel (v. 12). This enmity, which definitely involved circumcision, has been destroyed (λύω, v. 14; BDAG, s.v. §3; NIV; cf. NRSV; ISV; ESV) in Christ's 'flesh' (v. 14) through the cross (v. 15). A similar idea is conveyed by Colossians 2:11, where the circumcision that is not made with hands in believers (circumcision of the heart) and the putting off of the 'flesh' (the old mode of existence under the Law¹⁹ and sin) is effected through Christ's 'circumcision', which points to his death—his whole body that was sacrificed (e.g. Dunn 1996:157–158; Lincoln 2000:624; Pao 2012:166).

A significant note is struck in Ephesians 2:18, where it is stated that all believers have access to the Father through the Spirit. This was evidently true of Judaeen believers too. The implication is that the Spirit and not the Law, circumcision, or their tradition constituted access to the Father. The indwelling Spirit thus rendered all of these external things in relating

¹⁹ That the Law is at stake here as being part of 'flesh' is confirmed by the reference to the 'record of debt' (χειρόγραφον, v. 14) and the 'legal demands' (δόγμα, v. 14) that were erased in Christ. Such an interpretation would correspond with Eph 2:14–15 (Moo 2008:210; Pao 2012:170–171). Cf. also Paul's reference to food and drink, festival, new moon and Sabbath in v. 16, which all seem to relate to the Law, although it could include broader religious traditions (Moo 2008:220–222). Paul did not want people to judge believers for not observing them.

to the Father redundant and unnecessary. The entity that gentiles became part of in Christ, was ‘the household of faith’ (v. 19), which signifies all of God’s people of all ages (Bruce 1984:302), and can only be described as a new entity that fulfilled yet replaced the old modes of existence (Bruce 1984:296; Perkins 2000:400–404; Hoehner 2002:219; Arnold 2010:164).

In the Messianic Jewish interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–19, (1) the Law that alienated gentiles is not destroyed, but retained, (2) circumcision that held gentiles out of God’s people is retained, and (3) the fundamental distinction that existed between ancient Israel and the gentiles is retained. The ‘unity’ that belief in Christ constitutes for Messianic Jews thus cannot be a unity of equality, for it implies that gentiles do not share in the same core identity, promises, or privileges. The ‘unity’ that Messianic Judaism envisions with gentiles is thus a unity of accommodation and tolerance at best.

7. Conclusion

Since Messianic Judaism can be considered primarily as a form of Judaism, which incorporates the Oral Law and other post-Biblical traditions, rather than being a variant of Christianity, it has to be evaluated in terms of its anachronistic relationship with Israel of the Old Testament and/or the Judaeans in most of the New Testament. In terms of this hermeneutical distance alone, it is problematic to find direct support for Messianic Judaism in the New Testament. But even if this hermeneutical distance is set aside for the moment, as argued in this article, the notion that there was an ongoing distinction in the early Christ-believing community between Judaeans believers and gentile believers in respect of Law observance does not find support in the New Testament.

In comparison with the situation portrayed in Romans 14, the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15) can be understood as constituting a measure by the early church to accommodate Judaeans believers who were zealous for the Law, rather than a set of conditions for gentile membership of the church. That the abolition of impure food was primarily at stake in Peter's vision and the acceptance of the gentiles by extension (Acts 10:10–16), would strengthen such a notion. On the question whether it was expected of *all* Judaeans believers in the early church to observe the Law in full, the answer has to be negative. But that is not to say that there was not a large Judaeans believing contingent that still wanted to (partly) define their identity in relation to the Law. On the other hand, Peter's remarks about the yoke and the burden of the Law (Acts 15) imply that there probably were Judaeans believers who considered the Law as burdensome altogether.

The proposal that Paul was fully Law abiding, which normally accompanies the Messianic Jewish approach to the New Testament, is highly contestable in light of Paul's statement that he did not consider himself as being under the Law and that he was prepared to become like a Judaeans to Judaeans (1 Cor 9:20). An attempt to offset the statements in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 with 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 is problematic in light of the latter passage's disconnected and elliptical nature. 1 Corinthians 7:19b can be understood as a short-hand reference to a fuller teaching to the Corinthian believers that demanded full Law observance when one assigns significance to circumcision and/or reverts to an 'old age' attitude (cf. Rom 2; Gal 5:1–6). As argued, the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3), Paul's participation in purification rites (Acts 18:18; 21:17–26), and his reference to himself as a Judaeans (Acts 21:39; 22:3) and a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5), can all be understood within a polemical context wherein he became like a Judaeans to the Judaeans in order to win them over for the Gospel and to avert his detractors.

The identity in Christ that Paul portrayed in Galatians 3 implies that the era under the Law has been fulfilled and superseded by the era of faith that ‘came’ (vv. 23, 25) for both Judaeans and gentile believers. The latter understanding is strengthened by Paul’s use of the first person singulars and plurals throughout Galatians, which implies that Paul included himself and other Judaeans in everything that he argues in the letter. In other words, no Christ-believers were under the Law any more. The reference to ‘no Judaeans’ in Christ (Gal 3:28) has to be restricted to an ethical designation, which would be similar to the other social designations (slave/free; male/female), and cannot be interpreted as retaining an ongoing Judaeans way of life that included Law observance. For the latter notion incorporates religious and covenantal connotations that are all connected to the Law, and damages the way in which Paul argued the abrogation of the Law in Galatians 3.

Lastly, the ‘one new man’ in Ephesians 2:15 has to be understood as a new entity that fulfilled and superseded the previous identities before the Christ event. For the Law constituted the middle wall of partition that alienated gentiles from Israel in the previous age. To retain an identity that attaches to the Law would disregard the abolishing of this middle wall of partition and resurrect the same enmity that kept gentiles out of God’s people in the first place. The ‘one new man’ rather relates to the new creation and new identity in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) wherein believers do not know Christ or other believers in terms of ‘flesh’ (2 Cor 5:16), which arguably includes descent, pedigree or inherited status. In light of all of the above considerations, it has to be concluded that Messianic Judaism is not supported by the New Testament.

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