

Jerusalem

P E R S P E C T I V E

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Dedicated to the memory of Gregory Steen^[2]

Jerusalem Perspective is pleased to make available to the English-speaking world this important article written originally in German by David Flusser and Shmuel Safrai: “Das Aposteldekret und die Noachitischen Gebote,” in E. Brocke and H.-J. Borkenings eds., *Wer Tora mehrt, mehrt Leben: Festgabe für Heinz Kremers* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1986), pp. 173-192.^[3]

In August 1769 Lavater urged Moses Mendelssohn to undergo conversion to Christianity, thereby causing much distress to Mendelssohn.^[4] For our subject it is especially productive to consider the letter that Mendelssohn wrote to the Crown Prince of Braunschweig-Wolfenbuettel.^[5] Among other things, he wrote: “The founder of the Christian religion never explicitly said he wanted to remove the Mosaic Law, nor to dispense with the Jews. Such a notion, I do not find in any of the Evangelists. For a long time the apostles and disciples still had their doubts as to whether Gentile believers must accept the Mosaic Law and be circumcised. Eventually, it was decided ‘not to lay too heavy a burden upon them’ (Acts 15:28). This agrees completely with the teaching of the rabbis, as I noted in my letter to Lavater. But as regards the Jews, when they accept Christianity, I find no basis in the New Testament for exempting them from the Mosaic commandments. On the contrary, the apostle himself had Timothy circumcised. Therefore, it should be clear that there is no way that I could free myself from the Mosaic Law.”

When Mendelssohn spoke of “the teaching of the rabbis,” he was referring to what he had written to Lavater, “All our rabbis are united in teaching that the written and oral commandments, of which our religion consists, are binding only on our nation...all other peoples of the earth, we believe, are commanded by God to obey the law of nature and the religion of the patriarchs.”^[6]

In order to clarify this latter statement, Mendelssohn gave a list of those ordinances that the peoples of the earth must obey. “The seven main commandments of the Noahides, which encompass the essential ordinances of natural law, are avoidance of: 1) idolatry; 2) blasphemy; 3) shedding of blood; 4) incest^[7]; 5) theft; 6) perverting of justice—these six ordinances were understood to have been revealed to Adam—and finally, 7) the prohibition, revealed to Noah, against eating from the limb of a living animal (b. Avod. Zar. 64; Maimonides on Kings 8,10).”^[8]

Mendelssohn’s fundamental insights were:

a) According to the New Testament, a Jew is not obligated to abandon the Mosaic Law when he or she accepts Christianity. It follows, then, that Christians who are

of Jewish origin, the so-called Jewish Christians, are obligated to observe Torah according to the teaching of the Apostolic Church.

b) According to Acts it was decided not to lay too heavy a burden on the Gentile believers. Rather, they were to be freed from the Mosaic Law and were obligated to follow only the prohibitions that make up the so-called Apostolic Decree.

c) This teaching of the Early Church is completely compatible with the unanimous rabbinic view that the Mosaic Law is obligatory for the Jewish people only, and that God has directed the rest of the peoples of the earth to follow only the seven main Noahide commandments.

Mendelssohn's conclusions are historically correct as was demonstrated in an earlier article.^[9] In this article we will discuss the two forms of the Apostolic Decree, the canonical and the non-canonical.

Mendelssohn equated the rabbinic Noahide commandments with the prohibitions of the Apostolic Council. Since the Apostolic Decree differs significantly from the rabbinic Noahide commandments, was he precise in making this equation? The rabbis listed seven Noahide commandments. According to Acts 15:19-20, the apostles accepted the suggestion of James, the Lord's brother, that "one should not make difficulties for those who turn to God from among the Gentiles, but rather should require of them only that they abstain from defilement of idols, from fornication, from strangled [meat] and from blood." The Mishnah, likewise, refers to defilement as a result of idolatry (m. Shab. 9:1). From Acts 15:28-29 and 21:25, the parallels to Acts 15:19-20, we learn that the early church understood "the defilement of idols" to mean, "meat offered to idols." The "western" text of Acts, whose most important representative is Codex Bezae, presents us with an alternative form of the Apostolic Decree. In 1905 Gotthold Resch drew attention to the importance of this alternative form.^[10] According to the western text, Gentiles who turn to God are to avoid meat sacrificed to idols, blood and fornication. Resch correctly understood that "blood" refers to murder, and not to the eating of blood. In the western form of the text, at Acts 15:20 and 15:29, there is an addition: "Whatever you do not want others to do to you, you should not do to others." This is the usual negative form of the so-called Golden Rule.^[11]

In our view, Resch succeeded in presenting the philological proof that the western text of the Apostolic Decree is the more original, but his theological understanding was limited to his contemporary situation. Furthermore, the historical support that he adduces for his arguments is often of little value. For this reason his suggestion was quickly forgotten, despite being happily accepted at the time by Harnack. Today it is generally accepted that the usual, or canonical, form of the Apostolic Decree is the more original. One exception to this consensus is Harald Sahlin.^[12] He argued correctly that, "The Decree must be understood against its Jewish background...the formulation 'idolatry, blood and fornication' is almost identical to the well-known rabbinic formulation of the three central sins, 'idolatry, bloodshed and fornication.'" We would argue that the rabbinic and the western text of the Apostolic Decree, are not identical by chance, and that this identity is decisive proof for the authenticity of the western text. Resch did discern the matter correctly, but failed to prove decisively the correctness of his observation. His reason for preferring the western form of the Apostolic Decree was his mistaken notion that its ethical content expressed the break with Jewish ceremonial

requirements that was supposedly intended by Jesus and finally spelled out by the Apostles.

Resch's studies of the non-canonical form of the Apostolic Decree helped three Jewish researchers independently to get on the right track.^[13] All three noted the relationship between the western form of the Apostolic Decree and the decision of the rabbinic synod of Lydda. This synod met in the year 120 C.E. and handed down the following decision: "Of all the trespasses forbidden in the Torah it holds true that if you are told, 'trespass or be killed,' you may trespass them all, except for idolatry, fornication and bloodshed [murder]."^[14]

It is enlightening to take a closer look at the words of the third researcher, Gedalyahu Alon, to learn from them and also to apply them to other areas of Jewish and Christian traditions of faith. Alon demonstrated that there was a tendency in ancient Judaism (and later in Christianity) to summarize the essence of one's religion in formulations. Such a formulation could be called a *credo*, a confession of faith, or a statement of principles [*Regula*]. The purpose of such declarations was to achieve a formulation of the quintessence of Judaism. Alon rightly commented that the aim of these ancient Jewish definitions was not usually to make a dogmatic statement about the contents of the faith, but rather to set out the essence of the Jewish ethic—the fruit of which is the performance of individual commandments.^[15] Moreover, these moral rules, whether positive commands or prohibitions, are not the "light" but the "heavy" commandments. At issue is the keeping of the "least of these commandments," to use the language of Matthew 5:19. Reference to commandments as "light" usually occurs when the point being made is that small trespasses soon lead to large trespasses.^[16]

It would be worthwhile to examine in ancient Judaism the various axiomatic statements of the essence of Judaism. Sometimes this can be accomplished by looking at ancient Jewish catalogues of virtues and vices, or by considering the so-called "household codes" found in the New Testament (e.g., Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1). Especially widespread was the view that the Ten Commandments are to be considered the expression of the religion of Israel,^[17] with preference given to the second half of the Decalogue. In order to define the essence of Judaism, people used formulations such as the Golden Rule, or selected Bible verses. Not only in Matthew 22:34-40, but also in Jewish sources, two main rules were adduced: one must love God (Deut 6:5); one must love one's neighbor (Lev 19:18).^[18] In the rabbinic view, the command to love one's neighbor (or its equivalent, the Golden Rule) was seen as the essence of the Mosaic Law. This tendency makes it clear why it was that the summation of the Torah was understood to be the second half of the Decalogue, which deals with prohibitions relating to one's neighbor.

The last five commandments of the Decalogue served as a starting point for new formulations. Sometimes, not all of the last five were quoted, and sometimes other ethical admonitions were inserted into this list. In terms of genre, these formulations were attached either to the command to love one's neighbor (Lev 19:18) or, to its equivalent, the Golden Rule. To this genre belong the words of Jesus to the rich young ruler (Matt 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27).^[19] The fact that following Jesus' words we find the command to honor one's parents, which according to the original Jewish reckoning belongs to the first half of the Decalogue, seems to indicate that the command to honor one's parents was only later added to Jesus' words. Matthew concluded Jesus'

words to the youth with the command to love one's neighbor. Admittedly, this conclusion is not original, but it is stylistically genuine: love for one's neighbor, according to the understanding at that time, does belong to the second half of the Decalogue.

Another especially important example of a summation of the Mosaic Law (Matt 5:17-18) on the basis of the second half of the Decalogue is the first part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-48).^[20] Here, too, we find that not all of the five commandments of the second half of the Decalogue are dealt with, but that other ethical requirements are introduced. Again, the unit is concluded with the command to love one's neighbor (Matt 5:43-48)—entirely in accord with the rules of this genre.

For our purposes the most important representative of this genre is the early Christian Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Didache),^[21] or, more precisely, its Jewish source, the so-called "Two Ways." In the first part of this document (chaps 1-4), the way of life is described; in the second part (chaps 5-6), the way of death: "This now is the way of life. First, you shall love God who created you. Second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Moreover, anything that you do not want to happen to you, you shall not do to another" (Did. 1:2). We see that the way of life is characterized by both the double rule of loving God and neighbor, and also by the Golden Rule.

To this same genre belongs the western form of the Apostolic Decree, in our opinion the Decree's more original formulation. Two of the three sins it lists are found in the second half of the Decalogue—bloodshed (i.e., murder) and fornication—the sixth and seventh commandments,^[22] and the other central sin, idolatry, is mentioned in the first half of the Ten.^[23] Accordingly, it is stylistically authentic that in the first two references to the Apostolic Decree according to the western text (Acts 15:19-20 and 15:28-29), the decree concludes with the negative form of the Golden Rule. However, in the third reference to the Decree (Acts 21:25), the Golden Rule would have disturbed the context. It is difficult to decide whether the Golden Rule really belongs to the Apostolic Decree. Those who doubt that it belongs can note the fact that it is lacking in the canonical text, and that in Matthew 19:16-19 the command to love one's neighbor is a Matthean addition. However, as we have pointed out, the Golden Rule fits the Apostolic Decree in terms of genre authenticity.^[24]

The western form of the Apostolic Decree is composed of three sins.^[25] These are the sins that a Jew cannot commit under any circumstances. Additionally, these three sins are the first three Noahide commandments. We align ourselves with Alon's view that these three sins express the focus of ethical behavior. They are also a succinct formulation of that which Judaism most strongly abhors and seeks to avoid. In a special way, the list defines the essence of Judaism. This is true for this list and for other such summary statements in Judaism (and in Christianity). There is often a peculiar dialectic that is involved; ancient Judaism did not attempt to establish dogmatic confessions of faith, but rather to lay down rules of ethics. Attempts to encapsulate the essence of Judaism kept their distance from the ceremonial, ritualistic, legalistic side of Judaism. One reason for this paradox is that religions like Judaism, in which the legal side is strongly developed, do not need to concern themselves with the legalities when they come to summarize the essential, because the legal aspect is taken for granted. In Judaism, existence, as formulated through these summary statements, is essentially theological-ethical.^[26] Accordingly, Rabbi Akiva, who knew how to spin myriad

halachoth from every tittle of Torah,^[27] nevertheless declared that the command to love one's neighbor is the greatest principle of Jewish learning (Lev 19:18).^[28]

Understanding how existence is summarized in Judaism is important for the correct understanding of the western form of the Apostolic Decree, which is composed of the three Jewish prime sins. As long as it has to do with the inner Jewish ethic, it is the ethical-theological aspect, and not the ritual, that is the definitive factor in the choice of these three sins. However, when one steps out of inner Jewish boundaries in an attempt to determine correct behavior for non-Jews, there is a tendency to erect ritual limits. For Jews ritual limits are superfluous, since they are already "under the law." This truth will become clearer in the course of our study as we now turn to the developmental stages of the Noahide commandments, comparing the extra-canonical form of the Apostolic Decree with the canonical form.

This list, like other formulations of its kind, was originally designed to shed light on the essence of Judaism as a religious system and lay bare its roots. Granted that such formulations are aimed at expressing the essential, nevertheless, whether they do or do not intend it, they cast a certain shadow over everything else and gain an intrinsic worth and independence. This is especially so in the case of the normative, formulated Christian confessions of faith, which led to the labeling of others with differing opinions as heretics. Ancient Judaism did not have such creedal statements, yet, after a fashion, the Jewish *regulae fidei* do present a certain self-understanding. The "three-sin doctrine" was well suited not just to express the inner Jewish way-of-life in the face of external pressures, but also to provide minimal moral limitations for non-Jewish God-fearers. The western text of the Apostolic Decree admonished believing Gentiles to avoid the three crucial sins, and we assume that these were at the time the original content of the Noahide commandments. Thus, the early apostolic church simply accepted Jewish legal practice relating to believing non-Jews.

Unfortunately, our sources do not allow us to determine what were the external circumstances that led the early church to begin using the Lydda ruling as a measure applicable to its own needs for discipline. We know only that the ruling came into use by the church sometime after 120 C.E., almost certainly before the year 200.^[29] At that time, exclusion from the church was the punishment for lapsing into idolatry, sexual transgression and murder. If the morally fallen were truly repentant, they could not attain forgiveness during their lifetime, however, they were still granted a hope of forgiveness in the world to come. At that time the three major sins in Christian circles were called the *peccata capitalia* (capital sins) or the *peccata mortalia* (mortal sins).^[30] The oldest witness to this trio of sins is Irenaeus who wrote (between 180 and 185 C.E.) that the unjust, idolaters and whores had lost eternal life and would be thrown into everlasting fire.^[31] Furthermore, two church fathers, Tertullian and Hippolytus, mention the three mortal sins.^[32] Apparently, Hippolytus, as well as Tertullian, emphasized the importance of the mortal sins in connection with the laxity of Pope Kallistus. We may conclude that the original text of the Apostolic Decree prohibited the three primary sins and that these prohibitions were the same prohibitions that early Judaism laid down for non-Jewish God-fearers. These were also the sins that, according to the Lydda decision, no Jew could commit even if it meant the loss of one's own life. This Jewish ruling was accepted by the church in the course of the second century. It was applied to Christians who had sinned greatly and whose repentance was not adequate. The result was that the church

was influenced twice by the Jewish prohibition of the three prime sins: the first time by the original form of the Noahide commandments in the older (Western) form of the Apostolic Decree; the second time by the disciplinary decision reached at Lydda, which was followed by similar disciplinary measures in the early church. From the non-canonical form of the Apostolic Decree, Tertullian concluded that after Christian baptism one's violation of the three mortal sins could not be atoned for by repentance. In referring to the mortal sins, the first sin he mentioned was offerings to idols (*sacrificia*), yet in his commentary, he spoke of worshiping idols (*idolatria*).^[33] In addition, the later ecclesiastical writers sometimes changed the wording of the Apostolic Decree by substituting "meat offered to idols" for "idolatry," because they, too, identified the Apostolic Decree, in which meat offered to idols was prohibited, with the later ecclesiastical rules of discipline, according to which idolatry was unforgiveable. From this proceeds an important fact that one can check on the basis of the texts. The western form of the Apostolic Decree also spoke of meat offered to idols. This means that from the prohibition of idolatry in the three Noahide commandments, the apostles derived the prohibition of meat offered to idols. That idolatry was forbidden to all believing Christians was, of course, totally obvious; however, the eating of the meat sacrificed to idols was not so obvious. Paul and the Revelation of John provide testimony that the Apostolic Decree expressly forbid Christians the eating of meat offered to idols.^[34] John of Patmos, who in Rev 2:24-25 is certainly referring to the Apostolic Decree when he says, "I will not impose any other burden on you,"^[35] prohibits in Rev 2:14 and 2:20 the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. Anyone who takes a look at 1 Cor 8 and 1 Cor 10:14-11:1 will see that Paul also dealt with the problem of the prohibition of meat offered to idols and found a penetrating solution.^[36] In other words, the apostles took the Jewish rejection of idolatry and sharpened it by forbidding the Christians of Gentile origin to eat offerings to idols.

We assume that under no circumstances was a Jew to trespass the three capital sins, but also that non-Jews were equally obligated if they wanted to participate in the salvation of Israel. We assume, therefore, that by a decision of the apostolic church in Jerusalem, these mortal sins also were forbidden to believers of Gentile origin. We now turn to the Jewish background of the Apostolic Decree and ask ourselves whether or not, of the seven Noahide commandments, it was indeed these three that were especially suited to be carried over to the behavior of non-Jews. In rabbinic literature it is assumed that Ishmael, the son of Abraham, and Esau^[37] and the inhabitants of Sodom had all committed the three central sins.^[38] Debauchery^[39] and the giving of false testimony^[40] were considered as serious as idolatry, fornication and murder. It is evident also here that the decisive seriousness of the three major sins relates not only to the non-Jews (Ishmael, Esau, Sodom), but to all mankind and, therefore, includes Jews. On the Day of Atonement the scapegoat brings reconciliation for the uncleanness of the children of Israel as regards idolatry, fornication and bloodshed (i.e., murder).^[41] These three sins apply not only to inner-Jewish but also to extra-Jewish matters as well, since these sins are part of the Jewish religious system as well as being universally applicable—they are foundational principles.^[42]

We have determined that in their original form the Noahide commandments were limited to three prohibitions.

The number three is as suitable for such a list as is seven. Three is the number of the Noahide main commandments in the Book of Jubilees, but they are not identical with the usual triad.

In the twenty-eighth Jubilee Noah began to offer to his grandchildren the ordinances and commandments that he knew. He prescribed and testified to his children that they should act justly and that they should cover the shame of their nakedness and that they should bless their Creator and honor their father and mother and that each should love his neighbor and that each should protect himself from fornication and uncleanness and all injustice. The reason being that it was because of these three that the flood covered the earth. (Jub. 7:20-21)

Here we have, along with other moral ordinances, three prohibitions attributed to Noah: fornication, uncleanness, and injustice. Similar descriptions are given about the antediluvian giants and about Sodom:

And he (Abraham) told them (his children) about the judgment upon the giants and the judgment of Sodom, how they were judged because of their badness, because of fornication and uncleanness and perversity with each other and fornication worthy of death. “So you must keep yourselves from all fornication and uncleanness and from every taint of sin.” (Jub. 20:5-6)

About the judgments at the end of time it is said: “All this will come over this evil generation because the earth allowed such sins in the impurity of fornication and in blemishing and in the hideousness of their deeds” since “all their work is impurity and hideousness and all their works are blemishing and impurity and perversity” (Jub. 23:14, 17).

And in Jub. 30:15 there is threat of discipline and curse:

...both when someone does these deeds, and also when one makes his eyes blind to these deeds, when they act impurely and when they profane the holiness of the Lord and stain His Holy Name—they will all be judged....

All these places in the Book of Jubilees deal with the same theme, in which the three sins are named that brought the Flood upon the earth, namely, fornication, uncleanness and injustice (Jub. 7:20f).^[43]

A closely related list of three main sins is found in the Damascus Document (CD 4:13-19).^[44] The Book of Jubilees was composed in the second century B.C.E. and belongs to the same Jewish movement as that out of which the Essene sect of Qumran arose. The Damascus Document comes from a sister congregation of this sect; fragments of this document were found in the caves of Qumran. In the Damascus Document there is reference to Isa. 24:17:

“Terror and pit and snare confront you, O inhabitant of the earth.” The meaning of this refers to the three nets of Belial about which Levi, the son of Jacob, has said that he [Belial] uses them to ensnare Israel and he gives them the appearance of three types of righteousness; the first is fornication, the second is riches, and the third is defiling the sanctuary. Whoever escapes one of these nets falls into the next, and whoever escapes that net falls into the next.^[45]

The Damascus Document here mentions—doubtless on the backdrop of the older Testament of Levi^[46]—three main sins, namely, fornication, riches, and profanation of the Holy, whereas the Book of Jubilees (7:20f.) names fornication, impurity and injustice as the three main sins. That the two triads are related cannot be doubted; it is only that the

list in the Damascus document has become more “Essenic.” Fornication remains, but instead of speaking in general about impurity and injustice, the Damascus Document speaks of impurity of Satan (Belial) and of riches.

It is known that the “poor in spirit,” the Essenes, saw in riches a gate that leads to sin, and considered the contemporary devil in Jerusalem as unclean. If we compare the three Noahide prohibitions of the Book of Jubilees with the rabbinic and early Christian triads, we notice the following: the two triads agree not only in respect to fornication, but also in that they both relate to Noahides, that is, non-Jews. However, in contrast to the triad of the book of Jubilees (and the related triad in the Damascus Document), the rabbinic and early Christian triads list idolatry, murder and fornication as the three major sins. And it is precisely this latter triad that also is included in the normative form of the seven Noahides commandments, in the decision of Lydda, and in the early church’s list of mortal sins. These same three serious trespasses are the ones forbidden in the extra-canonical text of the Apostolic Decree.

From what we have seen in the Book of Jubilees (and in the Damascus Document), it is obvious that there existed three Noahide prohibitions from the beginning. This supports our assumption that the original Noahide commandments named only the three mortal sins and that the apostolic church simply applied these to the Noahide God-fearers who had come to faith in Christ. In support of our argument is a generally known fact that is also decisive, that is, the seven Noahide commandments that are now binding in Judaism, are first mentioned only after the Hadrianic persecution, that is, from the second half of the second century.

It is therefore not an accident that the contents of the Apostolic Decree were at that time identical with the Noahide commandments. It is very noteworthy that in both cases a similar tendency was at work, a tendency that was responsible for the present usual forms both of the Noahide commandments and of the Apostolic Decree. In both cases there was a tendency to enhance the basic universally human ethical principles by means of additional ritual requirements for Gentile God-fearers who were not ritually bound. Such requirements for those who already lived under the law were superfluous.

For the Apostolic Decree, taken formally, the change was simple: one need only add the word “strangled.”^[47] Blood is thereby not understood as shedding of blood, i.e., murder, but as the prohibition of eating blood. This shows that the simple change in the text is not to be explained primarily as a matter of literary-critical considerations, but that this other version, the canonical text, is preserving an actual practice that set in within certain circles of the ancient church. There is no lack of evidence that there were Christians who observed the eating regulations of the canonical Apostolic Decree. We can even assume that the Christians who were the teachers of Mohammed were followers of this “halachic” tradition, a tradition that we know from the canonical text of the Apostolic Council. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain the similarity of the verses in the Koran about eating meat with the usual form of the Apostolic Decree.^[48]

We will now seek to show that the halachic approach of the canonical Apostolic Decree is based on the Jewish regulations for Noahides. However, we must not forget that in the time of the Church Fathers the extra-canonical form of the Apostolic Decree did not exist off in some hidden corner. The most important of the Church Fathers knew it and used it.

From rabbinic sources it is easy to see that there was a tendency not to be restricted just to the seven Noahide commandments. Various rabbis wanted to impose additional rules on the God-fearers from among the nations. Some even went so far as to propose thirty Noahide commandments.^[49] Naturally, one can ask whether the additional suggested regulations were actually so intended, i.e., as a further burden—though well-meant—to be laid on the Gentiles, or whether at least part of this list of extra-canonical Noahide commandments simply came out of the period before the seven Noahide commandments were fixed in their normative form. The usual form of the Apostolic Decree demonstrates that the second option is the correct one, and points to the fact that these earlier, non-normative Noahide rules were in fact observed by some of the God-fearers. This is the only way one can explain how the prohibitions of blood and the strangled parallels show up precisely in the Jewish “extra-canonical” forms of the commandments.^[50] As to the meaning of “things strangled” in the canonical formulation of the Apostolic Decree, one needs to consult the old church fathers because they still observed this regulation.^[51] Origen names as strangled any meat from which the blood had not been extracted. John Chrysostom defines it as “meat with the blood of the soul.”^[52] He points to Gen 9:4: “the flesh in its soul, its blood, you shall not eat.”

What is important is that Judaism used exactly the same verse to draw conclusions about the prohibition of eating morsels of the living. Augustine (354-430 C.E.), referring to the matter of strangulation, asserts that Gentile Christians of his day no longer felt bound to abstain from eating the meat of a bird from which its blood had not been drained, or a hare killed by a blow to the neck (without a bleeding wound), evidence that such abstention had been practiced previously by Gentile Christians.^[53] What was meant in this matter was that “the meat of such animals that were neither slaughtered nor shot, but killed in some external way without the spilling of blood, so that their blood—without any wound through which it could bleed—was trapped in them.”^[54] In the most important text^[55] of the tannaic discussion of the Noahide commandments we read: If one [a non-Jew] strangles and eats a bird that is smaller than an olive, he is allowed to do it. R. Hananiah ben Gamaliel^[56] said: “The non-Jew also is prohibited from eating the blood of a living animal.” (t. AZ 8:4-8 [p. 473f.]

There existed, therefore, the opinion that not only was it forbidden for a God-fearer from among the Gentiles to eat a piece of a living animal, but that this God-fearer was also not allowed to eat the blood of a living animal. As one can deduce from the canonical Apostolic Decree, this was not just a matter of learned reflection by a rabbinic authority, rather in ancient times there really were God-fearers who actually did abstain from the blood of animals.

The rabbinic sources that speak about the prohibitions of strangulation and blood for Noahides seem to show that both variants of the Apostolic Decree, i.e., both the extra-canonical and the canonical, are nothing other than variants of the Jewish regulations for non-Jews, before these regulations stabilized into the customary seven Noahide commandments. How could it have been otherwise? Once Gentiles, too, began coming to faith in the Messiah Jesus, it was natural to apply the Noahide commandments to them. At first, according to the “extra-canonical” text, they were required to follow the oldest form of the Noahide commandments, that is, abstaining from the three central sins: idolatry, fornication and bloodshed. Later the text was adapted to a second form of the Noahide commandments, one probably practiced by Christians native to another locale,

the commandments that Jews of that local expected of God-fearing Gentiles. It was this second form that eventually became the dominant textual variant.

Let us take a closer look at the earlier stages of the present seven Noahide commandments. As has been demonstrated, there were only three such stages. The first stage consisted of the prohibition of the three main sins. The second stage involved the five basic principles without which the maintenance of human social order is unthinkable. The third stage was the six Adamic commandments.^[57] At the end of this development stand the customary seven Noahide commandments.

We do not want to argue that this is a matter of a strict historical development; we would rather speak in terms of the development of a principle. Also when considered chronologically, these four systems of expressing the basic principles existed contemporaneously. To what extent each of the four formulations were not more than ideologically learned constructions, or to what extent they also had practical applications, is difficult for us to discern today. But one should not forget that both practice-oriented regulations and also “philosophical” principles of justice were meaningful, and not only in Judaism. In any case, it is certain that at least the first and the last stages did function as halachically concrete regulations. As to the primarily halachic meaning of the seven Noahide commandments, we need not elaborate.

As to the first stage, we have concluded that these original three prohibitions required by the Jewish religion system, were also the ones required of non-Jews. The immutable prohibitions against idolatry, fornication and bloodshed (i.e., murder) were adopted by the church in the course of the second century. (Whether or not the five basic principles and the six Adamic commandments actually influenced the behavior of people we cannot know.)

Perhaps the developmental history of the five basic principles, without which the maintenance of human social order would be unthinkable, is the most interesting.^[58] Added to the three prime sins are the sins of theft^[59] and blasphemy.

“My judgments” [Lev. 18:4], these are the words of the Torah, which, if they had not been written, would have had to be written and added. They are the following^[60]: theft, fornication, idolatry, blasphemy and bloodshed. Had these not been written, they would have had to be written and added.

Afterwards, more such regulations of ritual nature were added against which objections were raised both by human reasoning and also by the Gentiles. Five of the customary Noahide commandments are mentioned here as being natural laws that can be derived from human and humanitarian necessity. Perhaps it is no accident that these five ordinances are negative rather than positive commandments. These five natural laws are also an extension of the three major sins. One could perhaps surmise that the five basic laws are a pure invention of the rabbis that came about by simply excluding two of the seven Noahide commandments. This is not the case, because these same five serious sins can be found in an entirely different kind of Jewish source, the so-called Didache.^[61] It has earlier been noted that Didache 3:1-6 is an independent unit which the Jewish writer of this tractate has adapted to the context. The unit belongs to a genre already mentioned. Other instances of this genre are the seven Noahide commandments and their earlier stages, as well as the first part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-48). As we will see, Didache 3:1-6 is related to both the Noahide commandments and also to the Sermon on the Mount. But before we demonstrate this, we will attempt a reconstruction of the

unit as it may have been worded before it was adapted by the composer of the Jewish source of the Didache^[62].

3:1 My child, flee from every evil thing and what resembles it.

3:2 Don't be prone to anger, because anger leads to murder.

3:3 Don't be lustful, because lust leads to fornication.

3:4 Don't be a bird watcher, because bird watching leads to idolatry.

3:5 Don't be a liar, because lying leads to theft.

3:6 Don't be a complainer, because complaining leads to blasphemy.^[63]

The relatedness between the background of Didache 3:1-6 and the first part of the Sermon on the Mount cannot be doubted. The warning against evil and all that is similar to it (Did. 3:1) corresponds to the admonition of Jesus to attend to the least of the commandments as well as the most important (Matt 5:17-20). That anger leads to murder is not something we learn only in Didache 3:2, but also in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:21-22). We learn in Didache 3:3 that lustful cravings lead to fornication; the same is said in Matt. 5:27-28. Additionally, both in the Sermon on the Mount and in Didache we find the same approach as in the general introductory warning to the sixth and seventh commandments in the Decalogue, in fact, the same method of movement from "light" to "heavy." The relationship between the Didache and the first part of the Sermon on the Mount can be said to be firmly established.

It is important to note that in Didache 3:1-6, fornication, idolatry, theft and blasphemy are listed as the heavy sins. About this last heavy sin, Wengst rightly commented: "When murmuring leads to blasphemy, murmuring is hereby presented as quarreling with destiny, though it has been sent by God. Whoever, then, complains against his destiny stands in constant danger of blaspheming God."^[64] But the most noteworthy thing about the heavy sins mentioned in Didache 3:1-6 is that they are identical with the list of the five central sins in older rabbinic sources (see Sifra on Lev. 18:4, and b. Yoma 67b), namely, theft, fornication, idolatry, blasphemy and murder (lit., shedding of blood). One must not forget that these are five of the seven Noahide commandments.^[65]

Before indicating the importance of this section of Didache for the chronology of the history of the Noahide commandments, let us take a closer look at one of the heavy sins, the sin of blasphemy against God; it is found in the Didache, in rabbinic teaching, and in the Noahide commandments.^[66] This fits very well with the parenthetical section of the Didache, since it, as well as the entire Jewish source, is meant primarily for Jews—and so the mention of blasphemy is understandable. Surely this source was also meant for pious God-fearing non-Jews, and, therefore, could have been edited and expanded by a very early Christian of Gentile background; it arose from the teaching of the twelve apostles. The distant possibility did exist that a pious non-Jewish, God-fearer might blaspheme God in a weak moment. But the general Jewish view at the time was that a non-Jew was not obligated to believe specifically in the God of Israel—he was only to avoid idolatrous worship. The prohibition of blasphemy against God is easy then to understand as a warning to Jews against a really terrible sin, but what is the prohibition against the blasphemy of God doing among the ordinances that are binding on all mankind? It is not difficult to suppose that a universalistic definition of Judaism involved a binding formulation of the prohibition of blasphemy as applying to all of mankind. However this may be, the prohibition against blasphemy does show up among the

universalistic Noahide commandments as representative of the sin of atheism, which throughout all antiquity was considered criminal. Plutarch (*De Iside et osiride*, ch. 23) says that faith is implanted in nearly all people at birth. According to Gen. 20:11, Abraham excuses himself before Abimelech for passing off his wife as his sister: “I thought that there is no fear of God in this place, and therefore you might kill me because of my wife.”

In the Septuagint the word for “fear of God” in this passage is translated as *theosebeia*, which means reverence for God, piety or religion.^[67] The idea is that if one is at a place where there is no religion, in that place life is not secure. In a Midrash on this verse, we read:

Fear of God is a great thing, because as regards anyone who fears Heaven (i.e., God), it can be assumed that he does not sin, but in contrast, as regards anyone who has no fear of God, it can be assumed that there is no sin from which he will desist.^[68] It seems, then, that the general rejection of irreligiosity makes it plausible that the prohibition of blasphemy against God was meant also to be applied to non-Jews.

Now we return to the five basic sins enumerated in the rabbinic dictum quoted above and in the Didache. The appearance of the same catalog of sins both in Jewish sources and in the Didache demonstrates that this list of the five basic sins did not come to life as some kind of learned reduction of the seven Noahide commandments. The reason is that these five, “heavy” sins are found in a completely different context in the Didache, and they serve a completely different function there than they do in the rabbinic dictum quoted above and in the Noahide commandments. The dating of the lists therefore depends on the dating of the early Christian Didache. The final form of this document came into existence before the end of the first century, but the Jewish source is older than the Didache. We tend toward the assumption that Didache 3:1-6 was an independent unit and was taken over by the author of the Jewish source. It would seem advisable to set the time of origin of this passage as not later than 50 C.E. This leads to the conclusion that the five commandments’ composition took place at the same time the apostolic church was applying the three prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree to Christians of Gentile origin. The second stage of the Noahide commandments’ existence, then, most likely was at the time when the Noahide commandments’ early form was still authoritative for the relationship of non-Jews to Judaism.

We have attempted to demonstrate that the list of the five basic commandments is not a matter of some historico-cultural theory of development from Adam to Noah. To what extent the six Adamic commandments arose independently of the seven Noahide commandments is very difficult to determine.

How many obligations were laid [by God] on Adam, the first human? The sages have taught: “Adam was required to observe six prohibitions: idolatry, blasphemy, justice, bloodshed, fornication and theft.” (Deut. Rab. 2:17, on Deut 4:41) In contrast to the seven Noahide commandments, the eating of a limb of a living animal is lacking, and in comparison with the list of the five basic ordinances, justice has been added. May we assume that justice, in contrast to all the prohibitions, is to be considered a positive commandment? That is not at all sure. The universal necessity of having some structured system of justice is basically there to hinder criminal capriciousness in dealing with people’s rights. Thus, the command to respect justice in the Adamic and Noahide

versions of the commandments is also to be understood primarily as a negative commandment.

To the six Adamic commandments the descendants of Noah received a seventh, namely, the prohibition against eating a limb of a living animal. Biblically considered, this prohibition was senseless before the Flood, since according to God's will Adam lived as a vegetarian. Noahides were allowed meat, but with limitations. There were limitations also for the non-Jews, but they were not adopted in the "canonical" form of the seven Noahide commandments. As we have attempted to demonstrate, it is precisely the ritual food laws of the secondary form of the Apostolic Decree that go back to two extra-canonical Jewish restrictions. The original form of the Apostolic Decree was purely ethical and was identical with the three Mosaic obligations for non-Jews, i.e., with the original (three) Noahide commandments.

This progressive ritualization needs a short explanation. Neither the original, purely ethical form nor the two final "ritualized" forms are difficult to explain. The Noahide commandments and the closely related Apostolic Decree go back to formulations of the basic ideas of Judaism. The content of such summaries is ethical and universal. These summaries are by their nature intended as generally applicable and aimed at all mankind, also the non-Jews. That is how they could be considered as binding for non-Jews.

But is the purely ethical enough for the natural law of mankind? The five basic ordinances already added to the primary sins both the prohibitions of theft and blasphemy, and the six Adamic commandments added the obligation of justice. Judaism—whose self-definition involves being bound by rituals—can manage with purely ethical definitions of basic principles. But does that mean that non-Jews should live with no ritual obligations whatsoever? This is why a moral-ritualistic obligation appears amid the Noahide commandments, that is, the prohibition against eating the limb of a living animal. There were other practical suggestions in this direction, and two of these prohibitions were adopted in the canonical text of the Apostolic Decree.

We started out to show that the non-canonical form of the Apostolic Decree was the original, and that the original content of the Noahide commandments was the prohibition of the three sins of idolatry, murder and fornication.^[69] The Apostolic Decree sharpened the prohibition of idolatry and expressly forbid the eating of meat offered to idols. A proof for the importance in Judaism of the three major prohibitions is the decision of Lydda, according to which no circumstance would justify a Jew's committing these three sins. This decision also was taken over by the young church into its discipline in the course of the second century. We also have tried to show that the original prohibition of these three central sins developed into the seven Noahide commandments. The canonical Apostolic Decree also developed out of Jewish premises. It appears to us that the results of our investigation not only have meaningful implications for the history of early Christendom, but they also cast light on the relationship between early Judaism and Christianity.

Appendix

At the beginning of this essay, we referred to the words of Moses Mendelssohn. He was of the opinion that, according to New Testament teaching, a Jew, even if a believer in the Messiah, was still obligated to keep the Jewish ordinances. In contrast, a

Christian of Gentile background, in accordance with Jewish halachah, is bound by the Noahide commandments. A similar view had been reached earlier by the English deist, John Toland (1670-1722) in his book, “Nazarenus.”^[70] Unfortunately, this important book did not receive sufficient recognition. We could find no evidence that Toland’s work was known to scholars of the German Enlightenment. We must suppose that Mendelssohn, too, had no knowledge of Toland’s thinking.

Toland viewed the twin streams of the early church—the Torah-keeping Jewish Christians and the non-Jewish Christians, as the “original plan of Christianity” from which it would be damaging to deviate. That is why he says, similarly to the later Mendelssohn, that: “It follows indeed that the Jews, whether becoming Christians or not, are forever bound to the Law of Moses, as not limited; and he that thinks they were absolved from the observation of it by Jesus, or that it is a fault in them still to adhere to it, does err not knowing the Scriptures” (Introduction, VI).

Toland held the view that Jewish Christians were forever obligated to observe the Law of Moses, while the Christians of Gentile background, who lived among them, needed only to observe the Noahide commandments, abstaining from eating blood and making offerings to idols.^[71] He, of course, knew only the “canonical” text of the Apostolic Decree; however, he tended to accept the hypothesis of a researcher from the century before who had surmised that the mention of the strangled offerings was a secondary interpolation, since it was not mentioned by many of the old church fathers.^[72] Resch reached the same conclusion. This subject is worthy of further investigation.

- ^[1] The translator would like to thank Horst Krüger, Christina Krüger, and especially Dr. Guido Baltes, for their invaluable assistance in preparing this translation. [↩](#)
- ^[2] This article’s translation to English was made possible through the generous financial assistance of Paul, Clarice and Jeffery Steen, the loving father, mother and brother of Gregory. [↩](#)
- ^[3] Jerusalem Perspective wishes to thank Dr. Volker Hampel and Neukirchener Verlag (<http://www.neukirchener-verlagsgesellschaft.de>) for permission to publish this article in English. [↩](#)
- ^[4] David Flusser, “Lavater and Nathan, the Wise,” in *Bemerkungen eines Juden zur christlichen Theologie* (1984): 82-93. [↩](#)
- ^[5] M. Mendelssohn, *Schriften zum Judentum* (1930), 1:303. [↩](#)
- ^[6] *Ibid.*, 10-11. [↩](#)
- ^[7] “Fornication” would be a more accurate translation. [↩](#)
- ^[8] Regarding the Noahide commandments, see E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes* (1909; reprint 1970), 2:178f.; H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (1926), 3:36-38; A. Lichenstein, *The Seven Laws of Noah* (1981). The most important reference is t. Avod. Zar. 8:4-6 (473, 12-25). See also Gen. Rab. 17.17 (on Gen 2:17; ed. Theodor-Albeck, 149-151), and notes; Gen. Rab. 34.8 (on Gen 8:19 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 316-17)). [↩](#)
- ^[9] D. Flusser, “Die Christenheit nach dem Apostelkonzil,” in *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament: Exegetische und systematische Beiträge* (eds. W. P. Eckert, N. P. Levinson and M. Stöhr; 1967), 60-81. [↩](#)

- ^[10] G. Resch, “Das Aposteldekret nach seiner ausserkanonischen Textgestalt untersucht,” in *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, NTF (1905), 3:1-179. ↩
- ^[11] A. Diehle, *Die Goldene Regel* (1962), 107. ↩
- ^[12] H. Sahlin, “Die drei Kardinalsünden und das Neue Testament,” *Studia Theologica* 20.1 (1970): 93-112, esp. 109. Regarding the three central sins, see also L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (1947), 5:292, n. 147; cf. 6:388, n. 16. ↩
- ^[13] The three Jewish researchers are: L. Venetianer, *Die Beschlüsse zu Lydda und das Aposteldekret zu Jerusalem*, *Festschrift für A. Schwarz* (1917), 417-19; M. Guttmann, *Das Judentum und sein Umwelt* (1917), 118; and G. Alon, “The Halachah in the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” in *Studies in Jewish History* (1978), 1:274-94 (Hebrew), published previously in *Tarbiz* 11 (1939-1940). ↩
- ^[14] See Billerbeck, 1:221-24. ↩
- ^[15] G. Alon, op. cit., 279, n. 27. ↩
- ^[16] Cf. D. Flusser, “Die Tora in der Bergpredigt,” in Heinz Kremers (ed.), *Juden und Christen lesen dieselbe Bibel* (Duisburger Hochschulbeiträge 2) (1977), 102-113. In rabbinic parlance, one can speak of “great” and “small” commandments (Billerbeck, 1:903f.). ↩
- ^[17] Cf. D. Flusser, “The Ten Commandments and the New Testament,” in *The Ten Commandments* (ed. Ben-Zion Segal; 1985), 118-187 (Hebrew); see also G. Alon, op. cit., 278, and Y. Amir, “Die Zehn Gebote bei Philon von Alexandrien,” in *ibid.*, *Die hellenistische Gestalt des Judentums bei Philon von Alexandrien* (1983), 131-63. On p. 135 Amir refers to a midrash: “Just like in the ocean there are little waves between two huge waves, so likewise between every pair of the ten commandments there are the individual prescriptions and regulations of the Torah” (j. Shek. 1, 9, 60d). A similar notion is found in the case of Hananiah, the nephew of Yehoshua: see W. Bacher, *Die Aggada der Tannaiten* (1903), 1:388. Similar is Gen. Rab. 8, line 16 (ed. Ch. Albeck; 1940), and see the note to that line. Targum Jonathan to Exod 24:12 reads: “I will give you stone tablets on which the words of the Torah are explained, and the 613 commandments.” ↩
- ^[18] Cf. D. Flusser, “Neue Sensibilität im Judentum und die christliche Botschaft,” in *ibid.*, *Bemerkungen eines Juden zur christlichen Theologie* (1984), 35-53 (see also n. 40). ↩
- ^[19] *Ibid.*, 166-69. ↩
- ^[20] D. Flusser, op. cit. (see n. 16), 175-77. ↩
- ^[21] The most recent annotated editions of the Didache are: K. Wengst, *Schriften des Urchristentums* (1984), 3-100, and *La doctrine des Douze Apôtres (Didache)*, SC 248 (eds. W. Rordorf and A. Tuillier; 1978); there (203-226) one finds a critical edition of the Jewish sources of the text. Regarding these Jewish sources, see also D. Flusser, “The Two Ways,” in *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (1982), 235-252 (Hebrew). Regarding Philo, see p. 239 in that article. For our purposes, an important list of sins can be found in Philo in his discussion of the individual laws (*Spec. Laws* 2, 13): “theft, temple robbery, addiction, adultery, bodily injury, murder or like scandalous deeds.” The list is given in the context of the second half of the Decalogue, but more important is the similarity with the

- description of a disobedient Jew in Rom 2:21-22: “You who instruct others, do you learn nothing yourself? You who preach that one ought not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idolatry, do you rob your temple?” ↩
- ^[22] The seven Noahide commandments include yet a third commandment from the second half of the Decalogue, namely, the prohibition of robbery (there, as a fifth commandment). The Hebrew word for “robbery” (as well as the verb “to rob”) gained the meaning of “theft.” The old biblical word for robbery was not used any more in the spoken language. In the Noahide commandments, then, we see that the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments of the Decalogue are preserved. But in the “canonical” form of the Apostolic Decree, by contrast, all the prohibitions of the second half of the Decalogue have disappeared. From bloodshed, we have moved to the eating of blood, and the prohibition of meat offered to idols is shifted to the first half of the Decalogue. On the text of the Apostolic Decree see also B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (1971), 429-35. For more recent literature see n. 12, and M. Simon, *The Apostolic Decree and Its Setting in the Ancient Church*, BJRL 52 (1969-1970), 437-60, and F. Siegert, *Gottesfuerchtige und Sympatisanten*, JSJ (1973), 109-164. ↩
 - ^[23] The Apostolic Decree is mentioned in Acts three times: Acts 15:19-20; 28-29; 21:25. In the first formulation, Gentiles are admonished to avoid the “pollutions of idols.” This corresponds to the “contamination by idolatry” referred to in m. Shab. 9:1. In the second and third formulations, meat offered to idols is mentioned specifically. ↩
 - ^[24] From G. Resch, op. cit., 15-17, one can learn that sometimes the Golden Rule was in fact attached to the canonical form of the Apostolic Decree. One cannot, however, therefore automatically conclude that the Golden Rule belongs to the Apostolic Decree; in these cases, we may be dealing with a mixed textual form. ↩
 - ^[25] Who was the first to formulate the western form cannot be determined. W. Bacher (op. cit., vol. 2, 336) has mentioned a saying from the School of Ishmael (b. Ber. 19a, Tractate *Tehilim* on Ps 125, at the end): “Uttering slander is as great a sin as the three capital sins” (idolatry, murder and fornication). See also j. Peah 15d; *Midrash ha-Gadol* to Gen 49:9 (see notes in M. Margulies edition, 664). S. Schechter also discusses the three capital sins in *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1961), 205-207 and 222-27 (see esp., 222). See n. 31 below. ↩
 - ^[26] In m. Avot (the Sayings of the Fathers) these commandments are scarcely mentioned. ↩
 - ^[27] W. Bacher, op. cit., vol. 1, 263f. ↩
 - ^[28] *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 278. ↩
 - ^[29] Regarding the three mortal sins in the ancient church, see among others W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965), 56, 75, 374, 378. Although no friend of the Jews, Frend did recognize the Jewish parallels to the early Christian “mortal” sins. Cf. also A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1913), 1:439-44, and K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. XI: “Fruehe Bussgeschichte” (1973), esp. 91, 183 189. Especially important is the decision of the rigoristic Synod of Elvira (Spain, 306), which begins as

- follows: “Qui post idoli idolaturus accesserit et fecerit quo est crimen capitale, quia est summi sceleris, placuit nec infine eum communionem accipere. Flamines, qui post fidem lavacri et regenerationis sacrificaverunt, eo quod geminaverint scelera accedente nomicidio vel triplicaverint facinus cohaerente moechia, placuit eos nec in finem accipere communionem” (*Acta et symbola conciliorum*, ed. E. J. Jonkers, *Textus minores*, vol. XIX, [1954], 5). One sees here how similar is the position taken regarding the three mortal sins to the decision of Lydda. ↩
- ^[30] Cf. A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire latino francais des auteurs chretiens* (1954), 130. ↩
 - ^[31] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4:27. Perhaps the reference to the three mortal sins can be placed even earlier. At the end of the Revelation of John (Rev 22:15) it is said: “Outside are the dogs, the poisoners, the fornicators, the murderers, and the idolaters and all those who love and do lies”; similarly also in Rev 21:8. This implies the application of a measure of discipline for preventing the acceptance of such sinners into the congregation and the expulsion of such when discovered. H. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung Johannes* (1974), 279f., is on the right track. ↩
 - ^[32] Regarding Tertullian, see B. Altaner and A. Stuiber, *Patrologie* (1966), 189; regarding Hippolytus, see loc. cit., 166. Hippolytus writes against Pope Callistus (217-222) in *Refutation of All Heresies* 9:11-13. Tertullian writes about the mortal sins in *De pudicitia*, probably his last work. When he wrote about the “pontifex maximus, quod est episcopus episcoporum” who was lax in church discipline, it is argued by some that he did not mean, as Hippolytus did, Pope Callistus. See the bibliography in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ed. F. L. Cross; 1974), 221, s.v. “Callistus.” The three mortal sins are mentioned by Hippolytus in a surviving fragment of his commentary on Proverbs (GCS 1:163f.). ↩
 - ^[33] Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, ch. 12; similarly also Augustine (see G. Resch, op. cit., 12, n. 21). ↩
 - ^[34] See also G. Resch, op. cit., 21f.41 and 37, n. 1. ↩
 - ^[35] Cf. W. Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (1906; repr. 1966), 221. ↩
 - ^[36] Cf. also H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (1969), 162-64. Also in Did. 6:2-3 the non-Jews are warned against meat offered to idols. ↩
 - ^[37] t. Sot. 6:6 on Esau; Gen. Rab. 63.12 (on Gen 25:29; ed. Theodor-Albeck, 694-95). ↩
 - ^[38] t. Sanh. 13:8. See the Aramaic Targums on Gen 13:13. ↩
 - ^[39] S. Eli. Rab. 13 (ed. M. Friedmann, p. 61). ↩
 - ^[40] See n. 25. ↩
 - ^[41] Sifra to Lev. 16:16 and b. Shevi. 7b. ↩
 - ^[42] This is not the place to discuss whether the concept of natural law existed in ancient Judaism, however, this issue has been discussed. See I. Heinemann, *Die Lehre vom ungeschriebenen Gesetz im juedischen Schrifttum*, HUCA 4 (1921), 149-171 and H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (1948), 2:180-191. It is perhaps preferable to speak of the Jewish categories of injustice and foundational principles, which include, as we will see, the Noahide commandments, both in their early stages as well as in their final form. ↩

- ^[43] On pp. 39-40 of “Neue Sensibilität im Judentum und die christliche Botschaft,” quoted above (n. 18), D. Flusser has shown that the Book of Jubilees is the earliest witness for the double command of love. [↩](#)
- ^[44] Cf. H. Kosmala, “The Three Nets of Belial,” *ASTI* 4 (1965): 91-113. [↩](#)
- ^[45] This explanation is meant to paraphrase Isa 24:18. [↩](#)
- ^[46] Cf. J. Becker, *Die Testamente der zwölf Patriachen* [T. 12 Patr.], *JSHRZ* 3 (1974), 227. See the translation on pp. 139-152. [↩](#)
- ^[47] *Porneia* (fornication) is missing in some manuscripts of Acts 15:20, 29, but not of Acts 21:25! See also M. Simon, *op. cit.*, 430f. [↩](#)
- ^[48] The Koran 2:168: “He (Allah) has forbidden for you only carrion and blood and pork and whatever has been offered to another than Allah,” i.e., meat offered to idols. The same statement is found in 6:145 and 16:115f. In 5:4 the Islamic eating regulations are extended: “Forbidden to you are carrion, blood, pork and whatever has been offered to another than Allah (by slaughtering); the strangled, the slain, what has died by falling or by being gored, a carcass of an animal killed by wild beasts (except for what you purify), and what has been slaughtered on (idol) stones” [Ronning’s English trans. of M. Henig’s German translation of 1966]. Cf. also G. Resch, *op. cit.*, 28f. [↩](#)
- ^[49] Cf. A. Sperbaum, “The Thirty Noahide Commandments of Rav Samuel ben Hofni,” *Sinai* 72 (1973): 205-221 (Hebrew); A. Sperbaum, *The Biblical Commentary of Rav Samuel ben Hofni Gaon* (1978), 52-58 (Hebrew). [↩](#)
- ^[50] It seems to us that variations in respect to what belongs in the Noahide commandments does not have much to do with the differences between the Pauline and the Petrine views of Christian legal requirements. It can be assumed that at the time the entire church accepted the Apostolic Decree with its three central sins as authoritatively binding. The difference is that Peter considered the Apostolic Decree as the minimum required, and Paul as the maximum. Peter and his followers represented the general Jewish opinion of the time, which was that the Noahide commandments were binding on God-fearers, but that it was up to them to willingly assume more of the standard Jewish practices. See also D. Flusser, *op. cit.* (n. 9). [↩](#)
- ^[51] Cf. Resch, *op. cit.*, 23-26. [↩](#)
- ^[52] *Hom. Gen.* 27. [↩](#)
- ^[53] Augustine, *Faust.* 32.13. [↩](#)
- ^[54] G. Resch, *op. cit.*, 24. [↩](#)
- ^[55] The sentence about strangulation in *b. Hull.* 102b is misunderstood. [↩](#)
- ^[56] Billerbeck (II, 738) notes the opinion of R. Hananiah ben Gamaliel preserved in *b. Sanh.* 59a. R. Hananiah interprets Gen 9:4 as follows: “Its blood, while it is still living, you shall not eat.” [↩](#)
- ^[57] In addition to the three central sins, the additional three stages are discussed in Billerbeck III, 36-38. [↩](#)
- ^[58] The text is found in *Sifra* to Lev. 18:4 (ed. Weiss, 86a), and in *b. Yom.* 67b. [↩](#)
- ^[59] This also includes theft (see n. 22 above). [↩](#)
- ^[60] This is the correct reading. [↩](#)

- ^[61] For bibliography see n. 21. We were alerted to the importance of this passage by Malcolm Lowe. ↩
- ^[62] In the unit Did. 3:2-6, each of the verses is composed of two halves. We consider the first half of each verse to be the original. For example, in the first half of Did. 3:4 reference is made to “bird watcher” (augur; soothsayer; diviner of omens); in the second half, to “enchanter,” “astrologer” and “magician.” We have retained “bird watcher,” although we cannot be sure of exactly what pagan superstition we are being warned. In the first half of Did. 3:3, “fornication” is mentioned; in the second half, “adultery.” We have retained “fornication” in our reconstruction; nevertheless, “adultery” appears to be the original reading since it appears in the Decalogue and also in Matt 5:27-28. ↩
- ^[63] On the basis of this unit in the Didache (3:1-6) one recognizes once again how complex are the relationships between the various homilies in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. We will compare the reconstruction of the unit, which we have just made, with the list in 1 Cor 10:5-11 of the sins of Israel in the wilderness, for the sake of which they had to remain in the wilderness. “These things are examples for us. They happened so that we will not *lust* after evil the way that they lusted. Don’t be *idolaters* like some of them...Let us not commit *fornication* like some of them did fornicate...Don’t *complain* like some of them complained...” The similarities:

1 Cor. 10:6 lustful	Didache 3:3 lust
1 Cor. 10:7 idolaters	Didache 3:4 idolatry
1 Cor. 10:8 fornicators	Didache 3:3 fornication
1 Cor. 10:10 complainers	Didache 3:6 complaining
- In the four parallel expressions we find two “light” sins (lust and complaining) and two “heavy” sins (idolatry and fornication). ↩
- ^[64] Cf. K. Wengst, op. cit., 71, n. 19. ↩
- ^[65] A very interesting historico-spiritual investigation of the Noahide commandments can be found at the beginning of the Introduction to Tractate Berachot in the Babylonian Talmud, which was composed by Nissim Gaon from Kairuan, North Africa (ca. 990-1062). Regarding the five basic principles, see also E. E. Urbach, *The Sages* (1979), 320f. ↩
- ^[66] Regarding the prohibition of blasphemy for non-Jews, see b. Sanh. 56a. The Talmud deduces this Noahide prohibition from Lev. 24:16; the story tells of a blasphemer, whose father was Egyptian—only later did having a Jewish mother become decisive for whether one was Jewish—and this passage closes with these words: “Whether the person involved is a stranger or a native, if he blasphemes the Name [of the Lord], he shall be put to death.” ↩
- ^[67] Cf. W. Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Woeterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (1958), 708. ↩
- ^[68] *Midrash ha-Gadol* to Gen 20:11 (M. Margulies edition, 330) ↩
- ^[69] That the original Noahide commandments were only three comes directly out of b. Sanh. 57a: “A Noahide is to be executed on the basis of three transgressions: fornication, bloodshed and blasphemy,” that is, he will not be executed for transgression of the other commandments. ↩

- ^[70] J. Toland, *Nazarenus or Jewish, Gentile or Mahometan Christianity* (1718). For the text of Toland's work, see: http://www.google.de/books?id=_dFbAAAAQAAJ&hl. ↩
- ^[71] Op. cit., 65 and 68. ↩
- ^[72] Ibid., 181. This scholar was Curcelleus. Toland, in n. 38, cites Curcelleus: "Sed merito nobis suspecta est, cum a multis Patribus non agnoscatur, immo tamquam supposita diserte reiiciatur" (*Diatriba de esu sanguinis*, chap 11, p. 131). The scholar was not aware that there were manuscripts of the New Testament in which the word "strangled" is missing. ↩

