

Paul the Jew

Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism

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Fortress Press
Minneapolis

26. See especially Rom. 2:12–29. J. Bassler, *Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 78–79.
27. Bassler, *Navigating*, 78–79; see also Hodge, “A Light to the Nations,” 170.
28. Bassler, *Navigating*, 71.
29. Räisänen, “Paul, God, and Israel: Romans 9–11 in Recent Research,” in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee*, ed. J. Neusner, E. S. Frerichs, P. Borgen, and R. Horsley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 178–206, here 182.
30. There is disagreement as to which part of Israel Paul is referring. Räisänen states “most commentators think that the ‘first fruits’ and the ‘root’ refer to the patriarch.” Räisänen, “Paul, God, and Israel,” 188.
31. The NRSV reads: “And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, ‘Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively’” (emphasis added). John Paul Heil addresses the issues of recent translations and offers a more accurate one in the first part of his article, “From Remnant to Seed of Hope for Israel: Romans 9:27–29,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 703–20.
32. For a discussion of the use of 1 Kings in Romans 11, see Christopher D. Stanley, “The Significance of Romans 11:3–4 for the Text History of the LXX Book of Kingdoms,” *JBL* 112, no. 1 (1993): 43–54.
33. Abraham J. Malherbe, “ἡ γένοιτο in the Diatribe and Paul,” *HTR* 73 nos. 1 and 2 (1980): 232.
34. John G. Lodge, *Romans 9–11: A Reader-Response Analysis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 136.
35. For a review of the scholars and literature supporting each option, see Ben L. Merkle, “Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel,” *JETS* 43, no. 4 (2000): 710–11.
36. Heikki Räisänen, “A Controversial Jew and His Conflicting Convictions: Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People Twenty Years After” in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, ed. F. Udoh et al. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 322.

The “Historical Paul” and the Paul of Acts

Which Is More Jewish?

Isaac W. Oliver

By distinguishing the “historical Paul”—that is, the Paul known to us through the undisputed letters—from the Paul of the Acts of the Apostles, a text written sometime after 70 CE, but probably before the Bar Kokhba revolt,¹ I am assuming that the two are obviously not one and the same: that the author of Acts has thoroughly appropriated, reconfigured, and incorporated the figure of Paul into his work in ways that suited his interests. Paul Vielhauer’s seminal article, published many decades ago, unsettled the facile assumption that the author of Acts simply transcribed Paul’s theological thought without any further modification.² Indeed, some even ignore Acts as an historical source for reconstructing Paul’s life and thought, given all the methodological problems involved. I would like to revisit the perennial question of continuity and discontinuity between Acts and Paul’s undisputed letters by assessing how the Jewishness of Paul is represented in both writings. This issue merits renewed consideration, given the many

recent positive assessments of Paul's ongoing Jewishness, as allegedly expressed in his own letters,³ as well as the growing contention put forward by many scholars, including myself, that the books of Luke and Acts are thoroughly Jewish documents.⁴ The book of Acts, particularly, emphasizes the *ongoing* relevance for Jewish followers of Jesus maintaining their Jewish identity through Torah praxis by systematically negating any application of Paul's teachings that would claim otherwise. This inquiry, then, works under the dual assumption that Paul did remain a Jew even after joining the Jesus movement and that the Acts of the Apostles also stands in far greater continuity with its Jewish heritage than many think, particularly in its affirmation of the perpetuity of Torah observance and Jewish identity within the *ekklesia* as envisioned by its author.

How Many "Pauls"?

One caveat, however, should be added: I note greater tensions in the writings penned by Paul (that is, the undisputed letters) *vis-à-vis* the Torah than in Acts (and the Gospel of Luke), which consistently presents Paul as a faithful Jew who follows Jewish custom. Much has been said about Paul's possible inconsistency or incoherence in thought, as expressed in his own writings.⁵ Others deny this possibility, advocating for a coherent Paul, which, undeniably, can serve the needs of those seeking to extract a culturally and theologically relevant message out of Paul's writings.⁶ One could alternatively envisage a dynamic and continuous shift in Paul's opinions *vis-à-vis* his Jewish heritage and relationship with other Jews. That Paul could change his mind over central theological tenets should come as no surprise. He, at least once, radically reconsidered his views on Jesus and the movement surrounding this figure, ceasing to oppose Jesus' followers and even joining their ranks. Could Paul have continued to wrestle with his religious convictions even after joining the Jesus movement? Could he have modified his opinion on certain issues more than once?⁷

It comes as no surprise that those scholars who belong to the so-called Radical New Perspective and maintain that Paul remained

Torah-observant often point to passages from the Letter to the Romans to make their point.⁸ Overall, Paul's tone in Romans is friendlier and more accommodating with respect to the observance of Jewish commandments (Rom. 14), the status of the Torah (3:31; 7:7; 12), and Jews in general (3:1; 9-11, especially 9:4; 11:1, 26) than in Galatians (Gal. 3:10, 11; 6:15; and so on). Different audiences and circumstances might account for these apparent discrepancies. But could a reoccurring shift in Paul's thought account for the different portraits presented in both letters? Hopefully, all will agree that Paul at least wrote in a manner that led some Christians, very early on, to interpret his letters as abrogating the Torah. Marcion could represent one extreme understanding of Paul that developed in this direction.⁹ Perhaps, the Pastoral Letters might be understood as representing yet another Pauline school of thought that interpreted Paul's letters as condemning all those who held onto Jewish circumcision, Torah observance, Jewish "myths," and other Jewish traditions (for example, Titus 1:10-16; 3:9). Could the so-called deuteropauline Epistles such as Colossians and Ephesians be read along similar lines in tune with Galatians (Col. 1:13-17; Eph. 2:14-16)?¹⁰ The book of Acts, on the contrary, would lie at the other end of the spectrum from Marcion and the Pastorals, applying Paul's thought in a way that aligns itself more closely with the position voiced by the "Paul of Romans." We must admit that Paul's complex writings generated various interpretations concerning the relationship of the Jesus movement with its Jewish fabric, with some early interpreters rearranging their Pauline blocks on a foundation they thought aligned with the spirit of Galatians, while others affirmed a Pauline perspective more conciliatory toward Judaism that is ultimately built upon the cornerstone of the Letter to the Romans.¹¹ Indeed, I will try to show that the portrait of Paul in Acts stands in greater continuity with the Paul of Romans, insofar as Acts depicts Paul as an ongoing Torah-observant Jew who remains committed to the Jewish people and their ultimate destiny.¹²

Two Takes on the Jewishness of the "Historical Paul" and the Paul of Acts

At least two distinct and opposing views exist on the relationship between Paul's undisputed letters and the Acts of the Apostles as far as their Jewishness is concerned. The first view, which we might dub the "classical" approach, posits that Paul was, at best, indifferent to his Jewish heritage. He ceased being Jewish by abandoning Torah praxis and retained an ambivalent relationship with those followers of Jesus who did insist on keeping the Torah. On the other hand, the author of Acts recast Paul to portray him as utterly faithful to the Torah and the Jewish people. The author of Acts domesticated and re-Judaized Paul, placing him back within the Jewish fold he had supposedly abandoned. Vielhauer represents this position well. Concerning Paul's attitude toward the law, he states that Paul was "free from the Law,"¹³ having announced its end.¹⁴ For Paul, "Moses was not a prototype but an antitype of the Messiah and a personification of the dispensation of death' and 'of condemnation' (2 Cor. 3:4-18)."¹⁵ Paul believed that "the acknowledgment of circumcision meant the nullification of the redemptive act of Christ on the cross (Gal. 5:1-12)."¹⁶ By contrast, the book of Acts portrays Paul "as the Jewish Christian who is utterly loyal to the law."¹⁷ The motivation in Acts was to show that Paul never said anything affecting Judaism in the very least.

Vielhauer rightly points out that for the author of Acts, the law retains its validity for Jewish followers of Jesus. Accordingly, in Acts, Paul makes conciliatory concessions toward Jewish practices, such as having Timothy circumcised or joining zealous Jews in their purification rites in the temple.¹⁸ Yet, Vielhauer diminishes the importance of Judaism in Acts, claiming that its author esteemed it to be at the same level as "pagan religion": "Acts depicts Paul's attitude toward the ancient religion of the Jews just as positively as the Areopagus speech presents his attitude toward the ancient religion of the Greeks."¹⁹ This position is typical of the classical approach, which acknowledges the Jewish portrait of Paul in Acts only to then

reduce its relevance by downplaying the importance Jewish tradition apparently continued to enjoy among many followers of Jesus living after 70 CE, the author of Acts included. The late Conzelmann is perhaps the most influential scholar in this regard.²⁰ His strategy was to compartmentalize the "salvation history" supposedly present in Luke and Acts into three eras: 1) the period of Israel; 2) the period of Jesus; and 3) the period of the church.²¹ The Torah was relevant especially during the first period, but lost its importance when the church arose. The major weakness with Conzelmann's schematization is that it does not align with the narrative of Luke-Acts: the Torah enjoys an elevated status in Luke and Acts throughout all of the three epochs he outlined—even after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:9-11) and the proclamation of the so-called Apostolic Decree in Acts 15. Apparently aware of this quagmire, Conzelmann resorted to dismissing its significance on the grounds that the author of Acts was merely reminiscing about an earlier period of "church history" that necessitated a literary adjustment of Paul as a law-abiding Jew.²² In other words, the Jewish portraits of Jesus, Paul, and many of the other Jewish protagonists in Luke and Acts carried no significance for contemporary debates about Torah observance. As a supposed "Gentile Christian," ignorant about and indifferent to Judaism, the author of Acts did not care whether Jewish followers of Jesus emulated the Jewish Paul sketched in his work. He was only nostalgically reminiscing of a time when the primitive *ekklesia* could boast of a Jewish hall of fame of Torah-observant believers that included such prominent figures as Paul and James. Surprisingly, the dissonance between the author's narration and worldview has not bothered commentators of Acts who embrace the classical approach.

John Gager, an advocate of the Radical New Perspective on Paul, assesses the Jewishness of Paul in the undisputed letters and in Acts in reverse direction to the classical approach.²³ The historical Paul remained faithful to his Jewish heritage. All of the negative pronouncements he made concerning the Torah only applied to gentiles. Gager commendably argues against the common view that

"Jewish Christianity" quickly disappeared from the historical scene once the first generation of Jesus' Jewish followers passed away. He also perspicaciously critiques the common perception of a rapid and inevitable "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity, going as far as postulating that "Jewish Christianity" could have survived into the Islamic period.²⁴ A culprit from the past, however, must be found in order to account for the undoing of Jewish Christianity and the painful divorce between Jews and Christians. If neither Jesus nor Paul were responsible for this process, who then should be blamed? Gager condemns the author of Acts for the eventual demise of the Jewish foundation of early Christianity. Concerning the representation of Paul in his own letters and in his depiction in Acts, Gager states:

Contrary to the portrait in Acts, Paul did not repudiate Judaism—or those whom we call Jewish Christians; instead, he focused entirely on his mission to Gentiles, insisting simply that Gentile believers had no need to observe the customs and practices of the Torah. The author of Acts has deliberately drafted Paul to serve for his own anti-Jewish and anti-Jewish-Christian message.²⁵

Gager obviously disagrees with those who uphold the more traditional depiction of Paul as an apostate Jew. However, he believes that Judaism was no longer relevant for the author of Acts, even going a step further by denying that its author recast Paul in Jewish terms as a Torah-observant Pharisee. My point is neither to single out Gager nor to downplay the significant considerations he has raised for our understanding of early Judaism and Christianity: it is only to highlight an unfortunate misunderstanding of Acts that, ironically, depends on an approach to the problem of the "partings of the ways" that Gager so aptly criticizes.²⁶ The claim that the Paul of Acts repudiates Judaism cannot be sustained when one looks closely at the text of Acts. Its author repeatedly portrays Paul as faithfully attending the synagogue on the Sabbath,²⁷ keeping Jewish festivals such as Shavuot/Pentecost (20:16) and Yom Kippur (27:9),²⁸ attending the temple in Jerusalem and partaking in its rituals (21:24), affirming his fidelity to the Torah

and Jewish customs (28:17), and even circumcising Timothy (16:3).²⁹ A different approach, then, seems necessary—one that acknowledges the affirmations concerning Torah and Judaism made by Paul in Romans and the author of Acts, respectively, to which we now turn.

To the Jew First and Then to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16)

Very early in his Letter to the Romans, Paul affirms the primacy of the Jewish people in God's design, declaring: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The privileged standing Jews enjoy, which calls for a higher accountability is formulated in similar terms in 2:9-10: "There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek."

The book of Acts presents the special status of the Jewish people in God's "salvation history" through numerous reports in which the Jewish people have the privilege of hearing the gospel before the gentiles do. This motif of Israel's primacy is built into the geographical scheme of the commission proclaimed by the resurrected Jesus in Acts 1:8, which centers on the city of Jerusalem: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The book of Acts closely follows these introductory words, first by relating how the Jewish followers of Jesus announced the crucified and risen Jesus to the many Jews assembled in Jerusalem during the Jewish festival of Pentecost (Acts 2), and then, by having its main protagonist, Paul, continually proclaim this message, first to the Jews, and then, to the gentiles. Thus, right after joining the ranks of Jesus' followers, Paul proclaims Jesus in the Jewish synagogues, purportedly confounding "the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah" (Acts 9:22). On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas address the Jews of the synagogue of Salamis, Cyprus. This pattern repeats itself throughout Paul's itinerary across the Mediterranean world. Upon arriving in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul

preaches in a synagogue full of Jews, addressing them as his compatriots: "You Israelites, and others who fear God [φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν], listen" (Acts 13:16).³⁰ Gentile addressees eventually hear Paul's message (Acts 13:44, 48), but this occurs in the Jewish synagogue that hosts Paul as a speaker and only after Paul has interacted extensively with the local Jews. In the next city they visit, Iconium, Paul and Barnabas go through the same motions, visiting a synagogue and speaking "in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers" (Acts 14:1). Acts phrases this successful proselytizing campaign with the formulation "Jews and Greeks" rather than "Greeks and Jews," subtly conveying again the primacy of the Jewish people as hearers, and in this case, accepters of the good news (see 18:1; 19:10, 17; 20:21).³¹ Even in a city such as Athens, the symbolic cradle of Greek civilization, Paul first addresses the Jews in the synagogue before confronting the Athenian philosophers at the Areopagus (17:17). Although, in Acts 18:6, Paul angrily announces to the Jews in Corinth that he will now turn his attention to the gentiles, he continues to address Jews wherever he can. Thus, when Paul leaves Corinth and arrives in Ephesus, the first thing he does is to enter the synagogue and discuss with the Jews (18:19). Other Jewish followers of Jesus in Acts, such as Apollos, also continue to reach out to Jews after Paul's solemn declaration made in Corinth (18:24-28). Until the very end, the Paul of Acts goes out of his way to solicit the attention of the Jews in order to proclaim his beliefs about Jesus. Accordingly, when Paul arrives as a prisoner in Rome, he calls together the local Jewish leaders in order to explain his situation and relate his spiritual convictions (28:17-28). Only after doing so does Acts suggest that Paul preached to gentiles in Rome (28:28-31).³²

The Law is Holy, and the Commandment is Holy and Just and Good (Rom. 7:12)

On more than one occasion in Romans, Paul speaks about the Torah in favorable terms. For Paul, the law is "spiritual" (Rom. 7:14), "holy," and contains just and good commandments (7:12). Paul values circumcision

and other oracles inscribed in the Torah: "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God" (3:1-2). Paul details the benefits, granting of the Torah included, that God showered upon Israel: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever" (9:4-5). Paul also avoids the insinuation that his teaching, in some way, does away with the Torah: "Do we then throw the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law!" (3:31).

There is only one passage where the Paul of Acts directly touches on the status and role of the Torah. It occurs in a speech Paul delivers on a Sabbath to those attending the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch: "by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed [δικαιωθήναι] by the law of Moses" (13:39). The author of Acts is not mounting a critique here against the Torah.³³ Jesus, according to Acts, provides the Jewish people with a clean new slate by providing forgiveness for their corporate sins. This is God's doing. The language used here recalls one of Paul's statements in Romans: "For 'no human being will be justified [δικαιωθήσεται] in his sight' by deeds prescribed by the law" (Rom. 3:20; compare Gal. 2:16). In addition, the law, according to Paul, provides knowledge of sin, but does not aid the human in overcoming sin, since the law is "weakened by the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Acts 13:39 frames the limitations of the Torah differently. It does not openly claim that the law "is weakened by the flesh" or unable to assist the human in overcoming sin. Rather, the law cannot acquit Israel of its corporate, covenantal shortcomings.

The accent on the failure of Israel to live up to its covenantal calling at the corporate level appears elsewhere in Acts in a small speech attributed to Peter during the so-called Jerusalem Council. Peter tries to persuade the Jewish followers of Jesus not to force gentile males to undergo circumcision, pointing out how the latter have received the spirit of holiness, just like some Jews have. He adds: "Now therefore

why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). For many, Acts 15:10 represents a gentle perspective on the law, written by someone distant from Judaism: a "pagan," a "Gentile Christian," or a God-fearer insufficiently acquainted with Jewish teachings. Acts 15:10, however, really betrays a rather typical Jewish recognition of Israel's corporate and historical failure to observe the Torah. The Peter of Acts blames *Israel* for failing to fulfill the law, not the supposedly overwhelming stipulations contained in the Mosaic Torah.³⁴ Romans 9:31 expresses a similar assessment of Israel's performance: "Israel . . . did not succeed in fulfilling that law."

The reference to the law as a yoke in Acts 15:10 is not negative. Interestingly, this metaphor concerning the Torah is matched by a *contemporaneous* Jewish work, *2 Baruch*, overlooked in studies of Acts: "For behold, I see many of your people who separated themselves from your statutes and who have cast away from them the yoke of your Law. Further, I have seen others who left behind their vanity and who have fled under your wings" (*2 Bar.* 41:3-4). The author of *2 Baruch* is aware of the apostasy of some Jews from the Torah and cognizant of the historical failure of Israel as a collective entity to live up to the high covenantal standards expected from a divinely elected people. Nevertheless, the author of *2 Baruch* remains optimistic that, by God's grace, a sufficient number of people among the Jewish people will eventually gather together and successfully carry the yoke of the law: "In you we have put our trust, because, behold, your Law is with us, and we know that we do not fall as long as we keep your statutes. . . . And that Law that is among us will help us" (48:22-24). By contrast, certain passages contained in the book of *4 Ezra* reveal a grim outlook on this issue, suggesting that only a select few will be saved: "The Most High made this world for the sake of many, but the world to come for the sake of few. . . . Many have been created, but few will be saved" (8:1-3). The author of Acts joins the authors of *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* as well as other Jewish thinkers of his time in recognizing that history testifies to

Israel's collective failure to follow God's Law. "O look not upon the sins of your people, but at those who have served you in truth" is the cry of a Jewish prayer confessing Israel's sins in the aftermath of the failure of the First Jewish Revolt (*4 Ezra* 9:26). The author of Acts, by contrast, prays that the Jewish people look to the risen Jesus, the heavenly and Davidic messiah reigning high above, who announces release from sins to Israel and the pious gentiles, and will soon return to execute his final judgment upon this world as the vindicated and victorious Son of Man. What Israel needs, according to Acts, is a *supplement* (not a supplanter!) to the Torah to assist it in fulfilling its vocation and destiny.³⁵

I Myself Am an Israelite, a Descendant of Abraham, a Member of the Tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1)

In his letters, Paul often boasts of his Jewish heritage (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:4-6; Gal. 1:13-14). However, he does not shy away, at least on one occasion, from (hyperbolically?) downplaying his Jewish credentials, counting them as "loss" because of Christ (Phil. 3:7). Galatians 1:13 is ambiguous. The New Revised Standard Version renders it, "You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism," allowing for the possibility that Paul continued to remain Jewish. But why would Paul bring up the word Judaism (which he only uses in this section of his writings) at all to speak of a former attitude? And to what extent does his current way of living in Judaism conform to or depart from his Pharisaic past? Does he, for example, still consider himself a Pharisee, especially when we consider the issue in light of Phil. 3:5?

The perceived tensions in the Pauline Letters concerning Paul's relationship to his Pharisaic heritage and perspective on the Torah do not reappear in the book of Acts. The Paul of Acts clearly remains a Jew and a Pharisee throughout. He is Torah-observant and a Pharisee par excellence. As noted, the Paul of Acts attends the synagogue on the Sabbath³⁶ and keeps Jewish festivals such as Shavuot (20:16) and Yom Kippur (27:9). The Paul of Acts never commits any halakic infringement on the Sabbath or other holy days. He never eats any forbidden foods (for example, swine). His itinerary is even designed in Acts in such a

way so as to avoid traveling on the Sabbath or on other holy Jewish festivals.³⁷ Throughout Acts, Paul affirms his fidelity to the Torah and Jewish customs. The statement in Acts 28:17 suggests that Paul remained Pharisaic in his praxis. Before a delegation of Jews in Rome, Paul denies that he has done anything against the Jewish people or the "customs of our ancestors" (τοῖς ἔθεσι τοῖς πατρώοις). The reference to the "customs of the elders" could suggest compliance with Pharisaic tradition—the author of Acts opting to employ the word ἔθος because of its usage among Jews in the Greco-Roman Diaspora. But it is with respect to the hope of the resurrection that the Paul of Acts most clearly embodies Pharisaism. During his appearance before the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, Paul testifies before his Sadducean and Pharisaic audience that he is a Pharisee: "Brothers, I am a Pharisee [ἐγὼ Φαρισαῖός εἰμι], a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6). Here, the Paul of Acts is not simply portrayed as an opportunist who cleverly sees his way out of a dangerous situation. The reality of the risen Jesus for Paul both confirms the doctrine of the resurrection and anticipates the collective restoration of Israel. We might even say that the belief in the resurrection is the central theological tenet of Acts—a very un-Greek belief, to say the least (Acts 17:32). In fact, the author of Acts insinuates that the essential difference existing between the messianic movement known as "The Way" (24:14) and the rest of mainstream Judaism only amounts to a failure on the latter to recognize the veracity of the doctrine of the resurrection as manifested through the risen Jesus. Thus, the Paul of Acts claims that his arrest is merely due to the "hope and resurrection of the dead" he so boldly proclaims (23:6; compare 24:15).³⁸

In two instances, the Paul of Acts exemplifies a spirit of accommodation to Jewish sensibilities. Acts 16:1-4 is most remarkable for its presentation of a Paul who concedes to Jewish pressure and has Timothy circumcised. This episode, strategically placed right after the proclamation of the so-called Apostolic Decree, serves as defensive buffer against the rumors circulating during the time of the author

of Acts that Paul had taught "all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses and . . . not to circumcise their children or observe the customs" (21:21). If Paul was willing to circumcise the child of a mixed marriage (Timothy's mother was Jewish; his father Greek), how much more would he affirm the circumcision of children born into Torah-observant Jewish families, so the book of Acts argues. To dispel the rumors about Paul's apostasy, James, the brother of Jesus, advises Paul to assist and accompany some Torah-observant Jewish followers of Jesus in their ritual purification at the temple. The Paul of Acts readily complies, affirming, in this concrete and public way, the value of preserving and transmitting Jewish identity. The Apostolic Decree, with its four stipulations given to *gentile Christians*, also clearly presumes, from the point of view of Acts, that Jewish followers of Jesus will continue to observe the Torah in toto.³⁹ This is the *Doppelgeisigkeit* or "bilateral ecclesiology" so clearly evident in Acts: Jewish followers of Jesus continue observing all of their ancestral customs; while gentiles observe a minimal set of Mosaic requirements.⁴⁰ It was important for the author of Acts that a visible, corporate body of Jews retained their distinctive presence within the *ekklesia*. These Jews, however, were not to compel gentiles to become Jews (through circumcision in the case of males). On the contrary, gentile Christians were not to lead their Jewish comrades away from their particular way of living; they were supposed to accommodate to their practices if any *Tischgemeinschaft* and *koinonia* were to occur between Jews and gentiles who believed in Jesus. No other book in the entire New Testament is clearer and more consistent than Acts in making such ecclesiological, ethnic, and halakic distinctions.

And So All Israel Will Be Saved (Rom. 11:26)

Romans 11:26 claims that, one day, all of Israel will be saved. This eschatological and soteriological promise was built upon Paul's conviction concerning Israel's permanent election (Rom. 11:27-28). The Jewish rejection of Jesus as the messiah greatly troubled Paul, who even expressed willingness to "be cut off from Christ" for the sake of

his people (11:1). Paul earnestly searched the Scriptures to find the divine anticipation of this unexpected turn of events in Israel's history. For Paul, God predetermined, in some mysterious way (11:33), that Israel's "no" to Jesus would ultimately translate into its own salvation (11:15, 31, 25). A key question is whether the author of Acts also held onto similar views or had given up on the salvation of the Jews. Did God forsake the Jews permanently, according to Acts?

According to Buttica, the majority of interpreters have responded positively to this question.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this conclusion does not fit well with the concerned pronouncements regarding the fate of Israel that are made throughout Luke-Acts—from the very first chapters of Luke (chapters 1-2) to Paul's numerous speeches made before various audiences after his arrest in Jerusalem.⁴² The very beginning of Acts opens with a question raised by the Jewish apostles of Jesus about the future of Israel: "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) The disciples' question has startled those accustomed to viewing the author of Acts as a Roman-friendly gentile Christian.⁴³ Here, the disciples of Jesus wonder whether the time has finally arrived for Israel's restoration. Their question has rightly been interpreted as expressing hope for Israel's national liberation from the yoke of Roman occupation.⁴⁴ The prevailing judgment that views the disciples' question as representing a misunderstanding of the gospel message is hardly hinted at in Acts. The oblique answer provided in Acts simply advises the disciples not to worry about calculating "the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority" (1:7). If there is an implicit rebuke to the disciples' question, it has nothing to do with their concern regarding the national restoration of Israel, but with its *timing*. In other words, the disciples should not speculate about the *when*, but focus on how to bring this process about. This includes serving as Jesus' witnesses, starting from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and beyond. In this way, Jesus momentarily turns the attention away from the end of time "to the end of the earth" (1:8) without denying Israel's political hope for national restoration.⁴⁵

The question in Acts 1:6 and the subsequent answer given by its Jesus

are entirely compatible with expectations voiced only in the Gospel of Luke concerning the restoration of Israel: "They [those in Judea] will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled [*ἄχρι οὗ πληρωθῶσιν καιροὶ ἐθνῶν*]" (Luke 21:24). The restoration of Jerusalem will come after the time of the gentiles is fulfilled. In Romans, Paul, who lived before the tragic destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE, describes the "time of the gentiles" differently, presenting this period as a window of opportunity for gentiles to be saved: "I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). The phase of the gentiles is viewed in Romans as a time open for non-Jews to repent from their supposed immorality while Israel remains momentarily "hardened." The author of Acts, however, who wrote his text in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple after many gentiles had been offered numerous opportunities to hear the gospel, views the "time of the gentiles" as a time of oppression for Israel, during which Jerusalem is trampled by Rome.⁴⁶

This state of affairs, however, will not endure forever. The hope for the restoration of Israel is openly announced at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, and is never explicitly renounced anywhere else in Luke or Acts: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them [*ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αβραῖμ*]" (Luke 1:68).⁴⁷ At the end of Luke, two disciples on their way to Emmaus lament in resignation after Jesus' crucifixion, ironically not knowing that the risen Jesus is standing in their midst: "we had hoped that he was the one to redeem [ἀντρωσῆσαι] Israel" (24:21). In his response to the disciples of Emmaus, Jesus, according to Luke, does not openly deny that Israel will eventually be delivered. Instead, he shows them from the Jewish Scriptures how it was necessary (*ἐδει*) for the messiah to suffer before being glorified (24:26-27). Besides functioning as a rhetorical device to augment the credibility of events reported in the narrative,⁴⁸ we note that the impersonal verbal form *δει* also

appears in Luke and Acts to signal the divine anticipation, even foreordination, of Jesus' death and resurrection: events viewed as necessary steps in bringing eventual salvation to Israel and the nations.⁴⁹ Luke's Jesus seems keenly aware of his fate, yet determined to fulfill his destiny. Thus, already in Luke 9:22, Jesus solemnly warns his disciples that "the Son of Man must [δέξ] undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Similarly, when the Pharisees warn Jesus of Herod's plan to kill him, Jesus nevertheless insists that it is necessary (δέξ) for him to make his final pilgrimage and die in Jerusalem (Luke 13:33).⁵⁰ To be sure, these solemn proclamations prepare and condition the reader to accept the credibility of Luke's report concerning Jesus' incredibly shameful death. But they also show how such an unexpected and embarrassing event fit within a greater *Heilsplan* inscribed long ago in the Jewish Scriptures. In line with Jewish tradition, the book of Acts maintains that Jerusalem would be preserved and eventually delivered, even if it had handed its own messiah to be crucified, the divine will anticipating events to occur in this way. Accordingly, when Peter claims in Acts that the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem delivered Jesus to lawless men to be crucified, he states that this event occurred in conformance with God's "definite plan and foreknowledge" (2:23). In Acts 3:17, Peter adds that this act was done out of *ignorance* (κατὰ ἀγνοίαν). Similarly, when Paul delivers a sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, he claims that the people of Jerusalem and their rulers, *not knowing* (ἀγνοήσαντες) Jesus or the words of the prophets, unwittingly fulfilled prophecy by condemning Jesus to death (13:27). In unexpected ways, the divine will is fulfilled. Consequently, Acts never claims that "the Jews" should be punished for having Jesus crucified. Rather, a general call to repentance is made to the Jewish addressees who feel remorse after realizing their unintentional wrongdoing. Forgiveness for all sins is now provided in Jesus' name (2:37-38).⁵¹

The author of Acts does not so much hold the Jews accountable for Jesus' crucifixion as he wishes Israel would be stirred to collective

repentance and accept its deliverer so that they might finally receive the promise of restoration made to them long ago (3:19-20). The theological dilemma that really disturbed the author of Acts was not the supposed Jewish crucifixion of Jesus, but a more perplexing and present reality that also agitated the Paul of Romans: namely, the persistent Jewish rejection of the "good news" about God's vindication of Jesus through his resurrection and appointment as messiah of Israel and lord over all creation. This greatly troubled the author of Acts, given his Israel-centric worldview and conviction about the integral role divinely assigned to the Jewish people in "salvation history." Rather than relinquish Israel's central role in the grand scheme of God's redemptive plans, the author of Acts, like many Jews from the Second Temple period, returned to the Jewish Scriptures, searching therein for evidence of the divine anticipation of Israel's rejection of its alleged messiah. Thus, at the end of the book of Acts, Paul, in a final frustrated reply to a Jewish delegation from Rome that remains divided over the message of the gospel (28:24), cites the Septuagintal version of Isaiah 6:9, stating:

You will hear indeed and not understand at all, and you will indeed see but not perceive at all. For the heart of this people has become thick, and with difficulty do they hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn back, and I will heal them. (Acts 28:26-27; author's translation)

According to Acts, even Israel's continual hardness and failure to perceive God's plan, as purportedly revealed through Jesus, was predicted in Scripture. Making such a prophetic assertion allows the author of Acts to affirm, once again, God's control over history even in the most unexpected of events such as the Messiah's crucifixion and persistent rejection by God's own people. The book of Acts, however, leaves hope for the eventual and collective restoration of Israel. Following Bovon, I have literally translated the last phrase of the Septuagintal version of Isa. 6:9, as cited in Acts 28:27, in the future indicative: "and I will heal them" (καὶ ἰάσωμαι αὐτούς).⁵² The LXX differs

at this point from the Masoretic Text, embracing a more optimistic stance toward Israel's collective restoration, which Acts also holds on to. These observations are in complete harmony with the wider Lukan perspective on divine providence: throughout Luke-Acts, God has always anticipated and adapted to unexpected circumstances in order to fulfill divine promises, especially those made to Israel. The story is not over for Israel in Acts. Jewish restoration remains in view. I find, therefore, that the perspective on Israel's final destiny in Acts is close to Paul's own views as penned in Romans, where he also affirms the eventual salvation of all of Israel (11:26).⁵³ The author of Acts, however, wrote a generation or more after Paul. While Paul was certain that the present age would pass away within his lifetime, the author of Acts had to deal with the problem of the delay of the Parousia. Paul had asserted that the proclamation of the Gospel to the gentiles would arouse the jealousy of the Jews (11:11). But in the aftermath of 70 CE, the author of Acts and the Jesus movement had reached a new impasse: the Gospel had been proclaimed as far as Rome, yet the Jews still remained divided, if not largely indifferent and opposed to the Jesus movement. The Messiah had still not come back, and the first generation of Jesus' followers had all passed away. How was the Jesus movement, during the delay of the *eschaton*, to relate to the Jewish people and Jewish custom?

It is remarkable that though the author of Acts seems to have experienced alienation from the Jewish world of his time, he still maintained that Jewish followers of Jesus should retain their distinctive Jewish identity by remaining faithful to the Torah and circumcising their children (16:1-3; 21:21). The large segment of Israel that did not believe in Jesus would continue to remain opposed to the Jesus movement until the end—in conformance with divine will, as prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures—after which God would finally heal them. No one, however, save for God—so Acts claims—would know the exact timing of the consummation of these events.

Conclusion

I noted and discussed a number of points of contact I see between Romans and Acts as far as their treatments of the Torah and the fate of the Jewish people are concerned. The Paul of Acts, I maintain, is just as Jewish as the Paul of Romans, if not more so. A similar accommodating spirit *vis-à-vis* the Jewish people and their heritage, which can be appreciated in Romans, appears in Acts as well, particularly in the two episodes reporting Paul's circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) and in his participation in rituals of purification at the temple of Jerusalem (21:26-27).

In many ways, the differences that emerge between Acts and Romans are due to historical developments and changes in circumstances. Because of his apocalyptic belief in the imminent return of Jesus, the historical Paul did not deal with many of the long-term questions pressing the *ekklesia*, including the question of Torah praxis for future generations of Jewish followers of Jesus. "Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision" (1 Cor. 7:18). These were the words Paul wrote about the question of circumcision, convinced—as he penned in the same letter to Corinth—that the "impending crisis" (1 Cor. 7:26), "the appointed time" (7:29) had drawn near and that the present form of this world was "passing away" (7:31). Caught in this eschatological excitement, Paul did not deal extensively with the question of transmitting Jewish values to subsequent generations. Paul agreed that a Jewish follower of Jesus should remain Jewish and a gentile follower of Jesus, gentle. Left unanswered, however, was the long-term, generational issue concerning how Jewish followers of Jesus should raise their children and perpetuate Jewishness: a matter not central to Paul's missiological interests, given his fervent belief in the immediate arrival of the "day of wrath." If anything, Paul believed that followers of Jesus should remain single or "as if" they were unmarried (1 Cor. 7:8, 29). There is little room within

such an ideology to deal with the anxieties of marriage and children (7:28, 32). Paul's apocalyptic worldview should never be left out of sight, however important he became for the subsequent development of Christian systematic theology.

As far as the salvation of the Jews was concerned, the Paul of Romans believed that the collective redemption of Israel would happen sooner than later. The hardening of Israel until the number of saved gentiles would reach its full number was not supposed to expand and endure indefinitely, at least not on Paul's clock (Rom. 11:25). Paul supposed that the Jews would only remain momentarily hardened until a number of gentiles (rapidly) joined the ranks of the Jesus movement, after which, all of Israel would be saved. All of this was to occur soon. But Jesus never came back. Paul and all of the first Jewish followers of Jesus passed away. It was up to the author of Acts, therefore—who represents only one possible interpretation of Paul's ambiguous and complex thought, and aligns more closely to the views of Paul expressed in the Epistle to the Romans—to tackle, during the delay of the Parousia, some of the persisting questions left unanswered by Paul concerning the relationship between the Jesus movement and mainstream Jewry. In such circumstances, the author of Acts voted on behalf of preserving a Jewish wing within the *ekklesia* that would remain faithful to its distinctive calling and customs. This affirmation is formulated in a clearer and more coherent manner in Acts than in Paul's own scattered writings, which, as noted, generated a variety of interpretations—a reflection of Paul's complex expression.

The historian might wonder, in light of the commonalities noted here between Acts and Romans, how this inquiry affects the larger question regarding the historicity of Acts. Obviously, the Jewish dimension of Acts cannot, by itself, prove the historicity of the events, acts, and sayings attributed to Paul, which must be assessed on an individual basis. This issue is reminiscent of the relationship between Matthew's Jesus and the historical Jesus. Both the historical Jesus and Matthew's Jesus are thoroughly Jewish. But many Matthean scholars recognize that Matthew rewrote Mark's gospel to serve his own

theological interests and needs, which included, among other things, a clear desire to uphold the Torah. This is no more manifest than in Matt. 5:17-20, which does not pass the so-called criteria of "multiple independent attestation" and "earliest attestation," used by some scholars of the Jesus Seminar (but discarded by others) to reconstruct the life and ministry of the historical Jesus. But even if the historical Jesus did not actually utter the words inscribed in Matt. 5:17-20, one could argue that he certainly would have approved its contents. As David Sim notes, the Matthean portrait of Jesus, though formulated much after Jesus' time, "presents a much more plausible progression that involves considerable agreement between Jesus and his Galilean followers and different ideas and practices by converts in the post-Easter period."⁵⁴ For Sim, Matthew did not simply try to "re-Judaize" Jesus, but also sought to correct aspects about him he thought were theologically incorrect and unhistorical.⁵⁵ We might say that the author of Acts was motivated by similar concerns in his recasting of Paul. He framed Paul within a Jewish framework in order to correct what he perceived to be misunderstandings of Paul's comments and actions. Whether the depiction of Paul in Acts corresponds to the historical Paul is another question, which was not the concern of this chapter, set rather on assessing the *Jewishness* of both figures. The Jewish correspondence between the Paul of Acts and the Paul of Romans obviously does not prove that the author of Acts knew Paul personally. What Romans and Acts can really tell us about the early history of the Jesus movement is that many Jewish followers of Jesus continued to remain loyal to their Jewish heritage, both before and after 70 CE: that the relationship between the Jesus movement and Judaism remained a perennial concern for many followers of Jesus who continued to long for Israel's restoration.