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## DQ4 – GOD-FEARERS

God-Fearers were Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism and its monotheistic beliefs but were not full converts to Judaism. They were considered sympathetic to the Jewish religion and culture and often attended synagogues, observed some of the Jewish customs and laws, and donated to Jewish causes. The term "God-Fearer" is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, but it is used in some early Christian and Jewish texts.

God-Fearers had a somewhat ambiguous status in relation to the Jewish people. On the one hand, they were not considered full members of the Jewish community and were excluded from certain rituals and activities reserved for Jews. On the other hand, they were welcomed and encouraged to participate in Jewish worship and community life and were considered allies of the Jewish people.

The significance of God-Fearers for understanding the strategy of the first-century church in preaching the Gospel to Gentiles is debated among scholars. Some argue that the early Christian missionaries targeted God-Fearers because they were already predisposed to monotheism and Jewish religious practices and were therefore more receptive to the message of Jesus. Others suggest that God-Fearers were not a significant target of the early Christian mission and that the majority of converts to Christianity were non-Jewish pagans.

The story of Izates in Josephus' Antiquities 20 illustrates the complex relationship between God-Fearers and Judaism in the first century A.D. Izates was a ruler of Adiabene, a kingdom in northern Mesopotamia. Although he was not Jewish, he became interested in Judaism and eventually converted along with his family. However, he did not fully observe all the Jewish laws and customs and was criticized by some Jewish leaders for not being a "real" Jew. Nonetheless, he remained a friend and ally of the Jewish people and supported Jewish causes.

Overall, while God-Fearers were not a homogeneous group, they played a role in the spread of Judaism and the early Christian mission to the Gentiles. Their inclusion in the Jewish and early Christian communities helped to bridge the gap between Jews and Gentiles and paved the way for a more inclusive religious tradition.