

Outsiders Becoming Insiders

*A Study of Jewish Constructions of Identity for
“Gentiles Amongst Israel” in the First Generation
of Jesus-followers (ca 50 CE) through an analysis of
Acts 15:20*

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Abstract

With a Post-Supersessionistic approach, this thesis presents arguments for a new spin on an old interpretation of the four prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15:20: the gentile Jesus-believers, through an appeal to Lev 17-18, were declared by the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem to be *eschatological gerim*, i.e. a renewal – or rather a restoration – of the halakhic category of “strangers (non-Jews) amongst Israel”, representatives of the nations who actually become citizens of Israel.

Reversing the narrative flow of Acts backwards, intertextual and discursive analyses are performed on the following building blocks: 1) the wording of the four prohibitions in the Apostolic Decree, 2) the main speeches at the Jerusalem meeting, 3) the conflict in Antioch (as described in Acts) and 4) the events surrounding the gentile household of Cornelius. Having gathered scholarly research informing a Post-Supersessionistic reading of the four prohibitions, in the discussion chapter I argue that the four prohibitions are intertextual allusions that function as *identity markers* for an eschatological version of the Torah-based *gerim*-category. As such, gentile followers of Jesus are under a Mosaic Torah of their own, albeit limited, and covenantal partners with God together with the Jewish tribes, susceptible to Levitical impurities and the risk of being “cut off from the people” if they fail to adhere to the stipulated prohibitions of Acts 15:20.

1. Introduction

“Now you say, what’s this specific meaning of the vision? [...] Specifically, He’s saying this – now hang on – He is abolishing, I believe, the Old Testament Jewish dietary laws. [...] That’s the whole reason Roman 14 is written, because the – you know what would happen? The Gentiles were abusing their privileges. They’d have Jewish converts over and serve ham. See? And Paul says, ‘Now you don’t need to do that. Sure, you’re free, and there’s nothing unclean, but you don’t need to do that, because that’s purposely offending that Jew who doesn’t yet understand his liberties’. But he also says to the Jew, ‘Don’t you try to make the Gentile conform to dietary laws that God has set aside.’”

John MacArthur on Peter’s vision in Acts 10¹

“Turn to the God of Israel and stop worshipping your pagan demons – don’t even visit a temple! No messy sexual immorality or misconduct! And learn how to eat properly.” By a surface reading, this encapsulates the Apostolic Decree, which contains the foundational requirements of the earliest gentile believers within the Jewish revival movement that in time came to be called Christianity. In Acts 15:20, Jacob², the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem community of Jesus-followers, established precisely these basic house-rules for gentile members of the Jesus-movement: no idolatry, no sexual immorality, no blood, and no “choked”.

2000 years on, however, most Christians subscribe to a view more similar to the one that John MacArthur expresses in the initial quote, in one of his sermons. Many would probably acknowledge the prohibitions on idolatry (although their notions of it would differ quite a lot from the earliest believers) and be familiar with some sort of regulations on sexuality (marriage before sex is preferred in most churches).

Furthermore, at least the Catholic and Orthodox churches still adhere to certain rules on food, pertaining to fasting days and certain holidays – but how far must a Christian really go, who is “no longer under the law”? No more *halal* chicken burgers, really

¹ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1734/the-salvation-of-the-gentiles-part-1> [31-07-20]

² In this thesis I will consistently use the Hebraically flavored name *Jacob*, rather than the later English substitution *James*.

(Hm, is Allah not the same as the Christian God?)? And what’s this blood business (ah, the delicious black pudding)? And what about the trouble of having to ensure that animals have been properly slaughtered, according to *shechita*³ guidelines (most likely behind the “choked” prohibition), before buying meat (150 miles to the closest kosher butcher – yikes)? And surely by now we all agree that consenting adults are free to do what they want between the sheets, and with whom they want to, as long as they are monogamous, right? The rules laid out by Jacob above are either unheard of or seen as somewhat outdated, illogical, and possibly “too Jewish”. Someone who follows such rules would be considered as the Jew in MacArthur’s sermon, who has not yet fully understood her or his liberties.⁴

However, “back then”, as it were, the very first believers were Jewish and considered themselves as such (subsequently, of course, joined by a growing number of gentiles). Looking at the Apostolic Decree, it would thus be a misconstrual to speak of a *Jewish background* to, or *Jewish influence* on, the text: Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, could very well have been a Jew himself (see further down in this chapter), and even if this were not the case, in many ways he still wrote a kind of *Jewish* text from inside a *Jewish* movement, where also the gentile members were seen as members of a *Jewish* community.⁵ And to *Jews* (and those God-fearers⁶ well-versed in the Torah) in the second temple period, the prohibitions postulated in Acts 15:20 made a lot of sense. Particularly the prohibitions pertaining to food!

Actually, in this master’s thesis I will make a case that not only were such rules part of the lifestyle of *all* early followers of Jesus (be they gentile or Jewish), but also that *such rules were very important in order to define who, in particular, the gentile believers were*, in a time period when a growing number of scholars today agree that

³ *Shechita* labels the right procedure for slaughtering a kosher animal, according to Jewish *halakha*.

⁴ See <https://www.bethimmanuel.org/audio-series/it%27s-too-jewish%21> for an interesting contemporary discussion on the common Christian demur of “It’s too Jewish”, from a Messianic Jewish perspective.

⁵ Isaac Oliver, “Torah Praxis after 70 C.E.: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts”, (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2012), 4.

⁶ *God-fearers* is a somewhat disputed category but has nevertheless caught on in scholarly circles as a designation for the (sometimes quite large numbers of) gentiles who frequently visited synagogues in the diaspora, sometimes practicing certain aspects of Torah and inserting (albeit not exclusively) the God of Israel in their pantheon of divinities.

there was yet no such thing as “Christianity”, and that the word “Christians”, though used by some people (at least in Antioch, Acts 11:26) to refer to Jesus-followers, had yet not become a self-designation. In short: *the Apostolic Decree was given to the gentile believers because it clarified their identity.*

Scholarly terminology and early “Christian” identity

Just as many modern Christians find it hard to grasp the four prohibitions of Acts 15:20, they also find it difficult to comprehend the scholarly problems surrounding a Christian identity. It seems simple enough: the right word is “Christian”, period. Bengt Holmberg, for example (as most Christian theologians do), still considers “Christian” and “Christianity” to be the best available terms for referring to the Jesus-followers of the first century, since we do find early evidence in the New Testament text *The First Letter of Peter* (1 Pet 4:16) of at least the term “Christian” being used as a self-designation. This would indicate enough continuity between the earliest referents and the emerging religion, the term therefore not being anachronistic in and by itself.

Whether we accept this scholarly stand or not, among the first few generations of Jesus-followers things were anything but simple. Since they could be both Jews and gentiles, outsiders did not always manage to tell them apart⁷ and Acts 15 is only one of many texts in the New Testament that reveal problems pertaining to the issue of identity *inside* the movement as well. Anders Runesson is one of the scholars who believes that it is important to go through a process of unlearning of preconceived ideas about Christianity in the earliest days of the Jesus movement, partly by putting aside traditional terminology. Steps need be taken towards “more general categorizations that may reflect ancient rather than modern realities”⁸, where scholars engage themselves “in a process of decolonizing the past, liberating the dead from the bondage of our

⁷ See Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 121 ff., for a discussion.

⁸ Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul Ignatius and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, ed. Bengt Holmberg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59-92: 63.

contemporary political identities”.⁹ It is not only a matter of trying to see afresh what the New Testament texts actually say, but it is also an attempt to understand a truly *emic* perspective on the New Testament texts.¹⁰

Since identity is the main focus of this master’s thesis, awareness of this terminology issue is central. We actually do not know much about what the first believers called themselves, if they ever used some form of all-encompassing term, or if they used subsumed labels such as “brothers”, “believers” and “holy ones”.¹¹ Here follow some recent academic suggestions to illustrate the dilemma of how to replace the modern label “Christian” (and partly “Christianity” and “church”):

- Runesson suggests using a transliteration of the Greek word for “Christian”, *Christianoi*, referring both to Jewish and gentile believers; “**Christ-fearers**” (as opposed to God-fearers) for specifically gentile believers; and the term “**Apostolic Judaism**” for the actual Jesus-movement of the earliest generations (including Pauline groups).¹²
- Karin Hedner Zetterholm prefers “**Jesus-oriented**” or “**Jesus-follower**” rather than *Christian*, to label the earlier generations of believers in Jesus.¹³
- Isaac Oliver suggests “**ekklesia**” or “**Jesus movement**” instead of “church”, and “**Jewish/ gentile followers of Jesus**” instead of “Christians”.¹⁴

⁹ Anders Runesson, “The Question of Terminology: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussions on Paul,” in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 53-77: 57.

¹⁰ Runesson, “The Question”, 60; cf. Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” in *Studies in Religion/ Sciences Religieuses* 35/ 2: 231-246.

¹¹ See Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) for a detailed discussion of early terms.

¹² Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul Ignatius and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, ed. Bengt Holmberg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59-92: 72 f.

¹³ Karin Hedner Zetterholm, “Jewishly-Behaving Gentiles and the Emergence of a Jewish Rabbinic Identity,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 25 (2018): 321-344, p. 324.

¹⁴ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 19.

- Mark Nanos has proposed that one might refer to gentile believers as “**non-Jews behaving ‘Jewishly’**”.¹⁵
- Philip Esler prefers the terms “**Christ-follower**” instead of Christian, and “**Christ-movement**” instead of Christianity.¹⁶
- Charles Talbert uses the term “**Messianist**” for a Jesus-follower, and “gentile **Messianist**” specifically for a non-Jewish believer.¹⁷
- Paula Fredriksen argues that the gentile Jesus-follower identity was a theoretical construct, i.e. something which, up until the emergence of the Jesus-movement, had lacked an actual, physical representation: **ex-pagan gentiles**.¹⁸
- Joshua D. Garroway suggests that the gentile Jesus-followers actually became Jews of sorts, “authentic Israelites, authentically ethnic Jews”, albeit not according to standard reckoning. They were a hybrid race: “**Gentile-Jews**”.¹⁹

Throughout the thesis, I will be using several of the terms from the listing above, with a preference for *Jesus-followers*, *Jesus-believers*, *Jesus-movement*, or derivatives from those forms. My main point in doing so, albeit perhaps inconsistently so, is to alert the reader to the fact that neither Jesus, Paul nor any of the early followers of the Jewish Messiah used the term “Christian” to describe themselves. Trying better to understand the Apostolic Decree, I thus want to be wary of anachronisms. Still, I do use “Christian(ity)” from time to time, for the sake of overall clarity – I am indeed discussing the emergence of Christianity. I do not deny the historical connection between the early Jesus-movement and the later, fully developed Christianity – I simply wish to draw attention to the fact that they were not through-and-through the same.

¹⁵ Mark Nanos, “Paul’s Non-Jews Do Not Become ‘Jews’, But Do They Become Jewish?” in *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Early Setting* 1 (2014): 26-53: p. 39 ff.

¹⁶ Philip Esler, *Galatians* (London: Routledge, 1998), 13, 36.

¹⁷ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2005), 16, 133.

¹⁸ Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul’s Gospel” in *New Testament Studies* Vol. 56, Issue 2 (April 2010): 232-252.

¹⁹ Joshua D. Garroway, *Paul’s Gentile Jews – Neither Jew nor Gentile, But Both* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 5.

Ethnic distinctions – yes, please!

The most important aspect of the previous section has however not been expressed clearly enough: the first generations of believers did not use self-designations and identity labels simply to distinguish themselves from non-believers outside of the Jesus-movement. The four prohibitions of Acts 15:20 reveal to us that the first generation of believers also struggled with *telling believing Jews and gentiles apart*; and they wanted to tell each other apart. The precision in such distinctions was *vital* to their understanding of what God was doing through their Messiah Jesus.²⁰ It aided them in understanding how the prophecies from God were coming true – God was doing something unique among the non-Jewish nations, that would lead to the restoration of all of Israel!

How dare I state this? The ***** is in the details. When Jacob gave the four prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree, they seemed to be *important, non-optional*, and somehow *rooted in the Mosaic legislation*. Furthermore, these four prohibitions seemed to both verify, and be verified by, the inclusion of gentiles into the people of God through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To put it short:

The Holy Spirit is given to (certain) gentiles
⇒ **ergo** (such) gentiles are members in God's people, as foretold by
the prophets
⇒ **ergo** the four prohibitions
⇐ **because of** Moses

To phrase it another way, Acts 15 reveals that:

- 1) *gentiles have become members of God's people;*
- 2) *the prophets verify this membership;*
- 3) *Moses has specific laws for such gentiles.*

The Apostolic Decree (hereafter referred to as the AD) thus says something about gentile identity in the Messianic community. This thesis will be pursuing in what way – namely, how Acts 15:20 contributes to our understanding of how the earliest generation of Jesus-believing *Jews* scripturally perceived the *gentile* Jesus-believers. Acts 15:20 is

²⁰ Holger Zellentin, “Gentile Purity Law from the Bible to the Qur’an,” in *The Qur’an’s Reformation of Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Holger Zellentin (London: Routledge, 2019), 115-216, p. 127 f.

namely a clear example of a *particularly gentile halakha* in the New Testament.²¹ And *halakha* is a uniquely Jewish expression of *identity*. By receiving a particular set of commandments through the AD, the gentiles are ascribed some sort of Jewish category of identity.

And the fact is that depending on ethnicity, gender, cultic function, purity status, and other factors, the Torah offers *various sets* of *halakha*. Unbeknownst to most Christians, Jewish law has never been a monolithic all-or-nothing body of commandments but has always had a certain flavour of “relativity” to its demands. It all depends on who you are (levels of *holiness*), and what cultic state you are in (levels of *purity* and *impurity*).²² To ascribe a person certain commandments is hence to define who that person is before God (and vice versa: to claim an identity is a way of letting the surroundings know what kind of *halakha* you are devoted to).²³ Acts 15:20 tells us something about who Luke (and/ or Jacob) thought that the early gentile Jesus-followers were. And to the extent that Luke’s account is historically reliable (or at least representable), it also tells us something about how the “in-group” of early Jewish Jesus-followers viewed the other “in-group” of gentile believers in the decades after the emergence of what would eventually become the Christian faith and religion.

A Post-Supersessionist Reading

Avoiding the term “Christian”, as well as inserting various “Jewish” concepts like *halakha* and purity, smacks with preconceived and “untraditional” ideas about what Acts 15:20 might actually yield. Fear of an impartial verdict seems justified: and Bible scholars overall are not always too keenly aware of the bias in their own (often inherited traditions of) interpretation. It has, for example, been a struggle of more recent research over the last 20-30 years to try to introduce a label for what has otherwise, for centuries,

²¹ In this thesis I will set aside the discussion of anachronism in the term *halakha*, admittedly a term emerging in scriptural sources later than the New Testament, and I will simply use it as a catch-all phrase for discussions of Biblical practical lifestyles and commandments as defined from a *Jewish* perspective.

²² These topics will surface in more detail throughout the thesis.

²³ See Yair Furstenberg, “Outsider Impurity: Trajectories of Second Temple Separation Traditions in Tannaitic Literature,” in *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Menahem Kister et al (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 40-68, p. 48 ff.

been considered a neutral (!), or simply “truthful”, stance of interpretation: the *traditional view*.²⁴

The label of *the traditional view* is most often used to describe a Christian mainstream understanding on the apostle Paul and his letters, but it has a much wider application. Pauline scholarship has had to go through several phases since the 1960s, in order to retain a more historically plausible image of Paul: apart from the *traditional* perspective on Paul, there has emerged the *New Perspective* on Paul²⁵, and eventually also the *Radical New Perspective* on Paul, more recently and better redubbed *Paul within Judaism*.²⁶ The two latter views have entailed distinct moves away from common Christian interpretations, in the direction of comparative studies in Second Temple Judaism and even rabbinic sources. Studies on the historical Jesus have gone through a similar development through several so-called “quests”.²⁷ The last 60 years have thus seen a growing amount of scholarship acknowledging how early Christianity and the emergence of modern Judaism are closely entwined, and how the texts of the New Testament find historical-critical plausibility in the cultural matrix of ancient Judaism. Various insights drawn from such studies have generated the above-mentioned perspectives – and through my use of specific terms, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to such scholastic works, but also to signal that my theoretical point of departure is indeed another than the *traditional* perspectives on the New Testament texts.

To be more specific, my interpretative outlook or mode is one which has received its name and content only recently, albeit aligning itself with certain aspects of previous

²⁴ Also referred to as the old or standard perspective: see John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21-42; Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 69 – 93; Christopher Zoccali, *Reading Philippians After Supersessionism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 11.

²⁵ Zetterholm, *Approaches*, 95-126; Zoccali, *Reading*, 12.

²⁶ Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul within Judaism – Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 2015); Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 17 ff. For a summary of some of the main ideas in such a re-reading of Paul, see Stefan Larsson, “Just An Ordinary Jew – A Case for Why Paul Should Be Studied within Jewish Studies,” in *Nordisk judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies*, 29(2), 3-16, <https://doi.org/10.30752/nj.73240> [20-07-27].

²⁷ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus – A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 1-16.

perspectives: *Post-Supersessionism*. It refers to a perspective on, or better, a particular *reading* (from now on abbreviated PSr) of, the New Testament texts. As Joel Willitts puts it: “Post-supersessionism is a unified ‘sensitivity’, an ‘intuition’ if you like, about the *kind of conclusions* that are satisfactorily valid *historically, exegetically and theologically* in light of the *historical circumstances and intentions* of the NT canonical documents.”²⁸ To have “intuitions” about ones conclusions might sound somewhat dishonest, as far as scientific integrity goes, but it is actually a step in the opposite direction. Such intuitions can be expressed. Every scholar has *some* sort of intuition about the conclusions – it is the very hermeneutical spiral of prior knowledge that guides us in our interpretations. The PSr is simply one more tool in the box for scholars to openly declare their theoretical point of departure (and their own awareness of it), based on their previous research and convictions. The PSr can be defined through a set of axioms, as follows²⁹:

1. *Supersessionism* (the idea that the Christian church has superseded Israel and that the Torah has been annulled or is a matter of indifference, leading to the disappearance of the Jewish *ethnos* in the church) is flawed and dangerous, and should be done away with;
2. God’s covenant relationship with the Jewish people is irrevocable, both in the present and in the future;
3. The Jewish people has a unique role in God’s redemption program;
4. There continues to be an important and positive, even *divinely ordained*, ethnic distinction between Jews and gentiles within the Christian community (referred to by Paul as “the truth of the Gospel” in Gal 2); Christians are not a “third race” or a new entity, but stand in direct continuity with historic Israel as an orientation of Judaism;
5. Jews are still supposed to keep all of God’s commandments as described in the Torah, as an expression of their covenant faithfulness towards God;

²⁸ Joel Willitts, “Jewish Fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ) in Post-Supersessionist Water: Messianic Judaism within a Post-Supersessionistic Paradigm,” *HTS Theologese Studies/ Theological Studies* 72 (4) (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3331>: p. 2 (of 5).

²⁹ The definition is a synthesis from the following sources: Willitts, “Jewish Fish”, 2-5 (of 5); Windsor, *Reading Ephesians*, 3 f.; Zoccali, *Reading*, xi, 15.

6. The New Testament is a collection of Jewish texts;

The PSr agrees with what Isaac Oliver calls a *Maximalist Torah-perspective*: according to Oliver, Luke-Acts “affirm[s] the observance of the Mosaic Torah *in its totality*”.³⁰ A Post-supersessionistic reading of Acts 15:20, as in this thesis, is thus a reading that to a much greater extent takes into account a *Jewish understanding* of the main narrative themes of the Hebrew Bible and their interplay with Luke’s writings. A PSr reading therefore actually brings us closer in alignment with the above stated historical description of gentiles and Jews mixing in the first generation of Christianity-to-be, with difficulties for on-lookers to distinguish between the two ethnicities in any given synagogue environment; such was also the case with the very thought-milieu where the then-being Jewish *Weltanschauung* and the theology of the “church” had yet not separated from their common ground(s). I thus do not claim impartiality – I will let a PSr guide and influence my analysis and discussion section. My interest is simply “wie es gewesen”: and there is something amiss in how Christian theologians traditionally treat Acts 15:20. I wish to fare better.

The Apostolic Decree according to Nanos: an initial assessment

One of the scholars who has actually analysed the Apostolic Decree (AD) from what might be termed a *Post-Supersessionist* perspective (although he did not use the term himself at the time), is Mark Nanos in his *The Mystery of Romans* (1996). Nanos states the following³¹:

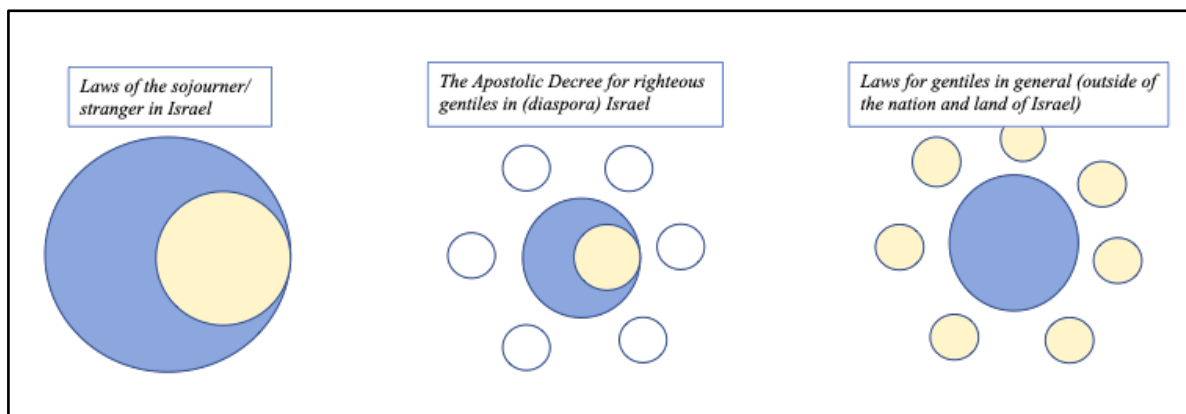
1. The four prohibitions of the AD address the “minimal purity requirements”³² for gentiles seeking association with Jewish diaspora communities (“wherever Moses was read”);
2. The AD constitutes *halakhot* for righteous gentiles who are members of the community of the Holy Spirit;

³⁰ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 17.

³¹ See Mark Nanos, *Mystery of Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), for **point 1** p. 168 (n. 9), 193; **points 2-4** p. 166 f.; **point 5** p. 166, 169, 171 f.; **point 6** p. 172 f., p. 173 (n. 21), 176 f., 179.

³² Nanos, *Mystery*, 193.

3. The ingathering of such gentiles is a part of the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Scriptures about the restoration of Israel;
4. These gentiles are equals with the Jewish members of Israel, as evidenced by their reception of the Holy Spirit;
5. The AD gives us insights into the development of *halakha* for gentiles in Antiquity, as it appears to have been a kind of bridge between the Mosaic laws for *gerim* (“sojourners/ strangers among Israel”) and the later rabbinic notion of Noahide laws. *Gerim*-laws were cultic and ethical commandments for gentiles living in the land of Israel together with the twelve tribes; the Noahide laws are more general, ethical laws for gentiles in the world outside of Israel (whether connected to Jewish communities or not) – and the AD is an in-between option, containing laws of both *cultic* and *ethical* nature for gentiles who are included in the diaspora Jewish community of the Holy Spirit as equals, but who remain *outside* of the nation (and the land) of Israel proper.³³



6. The AD solidifies both the status of *gentiles qua gentiles as members of God's people*, since it verifies that God is the God not only of the Jews but of all the nations on earth, but it also verifies the Law, as it stipulates how the Mosaic legislation relates to non-Jews in God's people.

This give us an impression of the kind of reading which is possible when a PS perspective is applied. In the final discussion I will reintroduce Nanos' interpretation and compare it to my own.

³³ It remains open whether gentiles living in Biblical Israel ever joined the movement in these early stages – the AD, however, seems to be directed primarily at gentiles coming to faith amongst diaspora Jews.

False use of the historical-critical method?

PSr is merely a theoretical stance, and it does not exclude, nor even function properly without being coupled with, historical-critical methods. Such methods (albeit never being quite successful) counteract bias and subjectivity, irrespective of what one's preconceived ideas happen to be. They hopefully expose too partial an assertion before it goes into print. The methodological goal is to hypothesise about *objective and actual history* (though fully aware of the quality of subjectivity in this endeavour, as in any other scientific writing).³⁴

For this minor master's thesis I would like to reiterate briefly the suggestions from Christoph Heilig, to show my own good intentions in further safeguarding a sufficient level of scholastic decency. Heilig states that in order to find the most plausible hypothesis to explain a historical phenomenon, one must reflect on:

1. The *explanatory potential* of a hypothesis: investigating the evidence we have for a particular event, phenomenon et c., is it really likely that our hypothesis is the best explanation?;
2. The *background plausibility*: how well does our hypothesis align with other sources from the same time and place, i.e. other background material?;
and also do:
3. A *comparative assessment*: how does our own explanatory potential and background plausibility stand in comparison with other hypotheses?³⁵

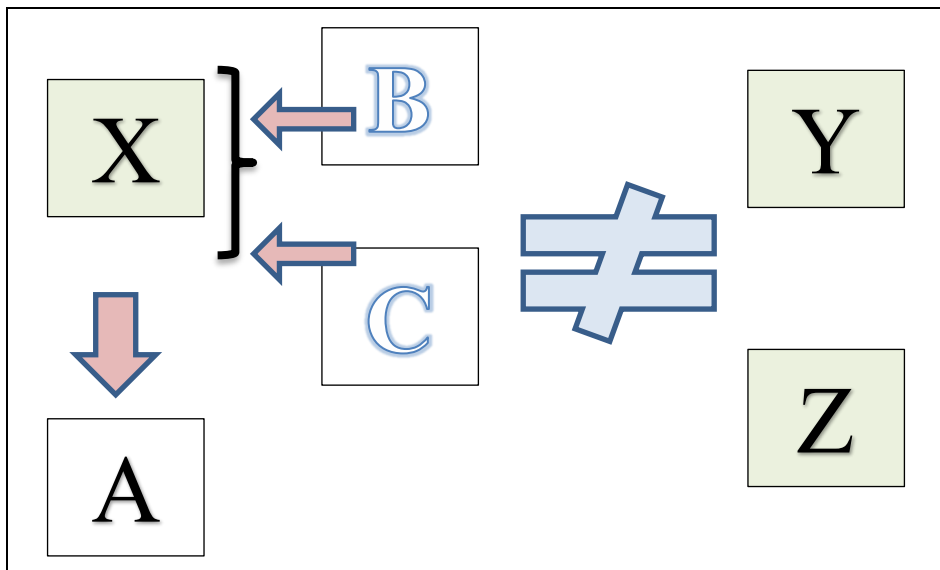
Put another way:

- does the hypothesis (X) fit the content of a particular historical source under scrutiny (A);
- do other historical sources (B) and (C) back up the hypothesis (X);
- and do other hypotheses (Y and Z) prove themselves to be less capable of
 - 1) giving a satisfactory answer to (A) as well as

³⁴ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 74, 234.

³⁵ See Christoph Heilig, "The New Perspective (on Paul) on Peter: Cornelius's Conversion, the Antioch Incident, and Peter's Stance towards Gentiles in the Light of the Philosophy of Historiography", in *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 459-496: 466.

- 2) aligning themselves with sources (B) and (C)?



I will apply the above outlined principles in this thesis, focusing on points 1 and 2 throughout chapters 2 through 5, and on point 3 in my final discussion chapter. Yet, in order to be able to compare the hypothesis of this thesis with something else and see if a PSr has any advantages to other readings, we need options to choose from. In the next section I will therefore give a brief overview of the main current hypotheses for understanding the AD.

The main contestants – Four hypotheses on the Apostolic Decree

In order to briefly contextualise this thesis, I will here present the core of the Lukan narrative in Acts: Jesus has risen from the dead, met with His disciples, and instructed them to create a worldwide movement centred on “the gospel”; in order to do this they receive the Holy Spirit from God to give them strength, according to prophecy; the Jesus-movement grows, but only include Jews, and eventually Samaritans – at least they are the only ones who get to receive the Spirit; all of a sudden, though, this changes when the disciple Peter visits the gentile household of Cornelius and sees them receive the Spirit as well; this creates a kind of cognitive dissonance within the movement, with people questioning the inclusion of gentiles in the movement (causing a conflict in Antioch), calling for a meeting in Jerusalem where the main leaders of the Jesus-movement reside; in this meeting the leaders agree to allow gentiles to be gentiles, and furthermore to give them four mandatory prohibitions the so-called Apostolic Decree

(AD). Below follows a short summary of the four main options proposed by contemporary scholars for how we might understand the AD commandments:

1. The commandments are related to *food-issues in the Jewish law*, and thus pertain to commensality. Since Jews are under strict dietary restrictions from the Torah, if the gentiles keep these four laws, then eating together in the Messianic communities will be more easily facilitated³⁶;
2. The commandments are related to *idolatry only* and are meant to make sure that gentiles do not participate in any kind of worship to gentile gods. Related to this point is the issue of ritual impurity, albeit not via Jewish dietary rules but rather through the contact with demonic powers;³⁷
3. The commandments are meant to be an *ethical guidance*, in the same vein as the rabbinic declaration of the three major sins that gentiles are believed to habitually engage in: idolatry, sexual misconduct and murder (bloodshed);³⁸
4. The four commandments are *Levitical* in nature and correspond to *Leviticus* 17-18, where certain commandments (idolatry in Lev 17:1-9; blood in Lev 17:10-12; “strangled” in Lev 17:13-16; and sexual immorality in Lev 18:1-23)³⁹ are addressed both to Jewish *and* to gentile inhabitants of Israel, the latter being so-called “strangers among [Israel]”.⁴⁰ The gist of the AD is thus that gentiles and Israelites, who were previously to be separated since they were respectively “holy” and “unholy”, may now live together in a new eschatological kind of relationship, where the outpouring of the Spirit of the Messiah has made both camps holy and equals.⁴¹

³⁶ See for example Richard Pervo, *Acts – A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 369 f., 376.

³⁷ Ben Witherington III, “Not So Idle Thoughts About Idolatry,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44.2 (1993): 237-254.

³⁸ See for example Todd R. Hanneken, “Moses Has His Interpreters,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* n. 77 (2015): 686-706, who sees a connection with the tradition of *Jubilees*, its roots going back to the covenant with Noah.

³⁹ W. A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97.

⁴⁰ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, translation by Basil Blackwell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 469; Hedner Zetterholm, “Jewish-behaving”, 321; Marcel Simon, “The Apostolic Decree and its Setting in the Ancient Church,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 52/2 (1970): 437-460, p. 444; Zellentin “Gentile”, 115.

⁴¹ Hedner Zetterholm, “Jewish-behaving”, 321.

All four of these theories could in principle be coupled with a PSr. However, it is only the fourth option that specifically *demand*s a continued relevance for the Mosaic Torah in the Jesus-oriented communities. The first three options, furthermore, are often used together with some form of cessationist view on the Torah, and thus a supersessionist view on the Jewish people. For these reasons, I will use the fourth hypothesis as my starting point and main foundation for the analyses in this thesis, since it best corresponds with a PSr. In my discussion chapter, though, I will offer an assessment of the other three hypotheses as well, weighing them in the light of my findings.

The Lev 17-18 interpretation is of course not without its own problems, and Charles H. Savelle lists some common objections⁴²:

1. None of the AD wordings concerning idolatry in Acts 15:20, 15:29 and 21:25 exist in the LXX version of Lev 17-18;
2. No explicit concept of strangulation/ choking is extant in Lev 17-18;
3. The term *πορνεία* is never used in the LXX;
4. The laws for *gerim* do not create a direct logical link to gentiles living *outside* of Israel, which is the case for the believing gentiles addressed through the AD.

However, as will be discussed in more detail throughout this thesis, a good case for a clear *conceptual* overlap between the terms and Lev 17-18 can be presented.⁴³

Additionally, the other three hypotheses are wanting in their own ways, which I will address in my discussion-chapter. So, at face-value, no hypothesis stands out as the sole, intuitive choice. We have to enter deeper into the AD to look for answers.

The Questions and the Analytical Disposition of the Thesis

In order to give an aim to this study and to make its final discussion operational, I will use the following questions:

1. ***What*** do the four prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree ***mean***, each one on its own merits and as parts of the Apostolic Decree?

⁴² Charles H. Savelle, "A Reexamination of the Prohibitions in Acts 15," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (October – December 2004): 449-68, p. 460.

⁴³ Jürgen Wehnert, *Die Reinheit des "christlichen Gottesvolkes" aus Juden und Heiden* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997), 214 ff.

2. *Why were these four prohibitions **chosen** (by Jacob/ Luke)?*
3. *What does the Apostolic Decree signal about the **identity of the gentile believers**?*

I will work under the following assumptions about Acts, which align themselves well with a PSr and, though they in themselves carry only minor importance for my final conclusions, accordingly are stated here for the sake of lucidity:

1. Luke-Acts was written by the same author, a person who was a Jewish believer in Jesus; I will refer to this person as Luke, according to church tradition;⁴⁴
 2. Luke-Acts is a unity, composed as part I and part II of a unified composition.⁴⁵
- Acts 15:20 will be my main focus, but certain preceding sections in Acts 10, 11 and 15 will, in various ways, be drawn upon for an enhanced discussion of Acts 15:20. I make use of Jeffrey Reed's suggestion for an analysis of any given discourse ("communicative event"), giving attention to:

1. The *cotext*, i.e. the "linguistic units surrounding a sentence", in this thesis **the speeches in the Jerusalem meeting**;
2. The *context of situation*, i.e. "the immediate situation" involving the sentence/discourse, in this case **the Antiochian conflict**;
3. The *context of culture*, i.e. the "wider cultural background" for a text, in this thesis exemplified by an analysis of **the Cornelius incident**, where particularly the tensions between Jews and gentiles are investigated in more detail.⁴⁶

The total discourse in focus, as it were, is thus bigger than the mere prohibitions of Acts 15:20, but with the sole purpose of bringing clarity to the four commandments in the AD and how they relate to gentile identity within the early Jesus-movement.

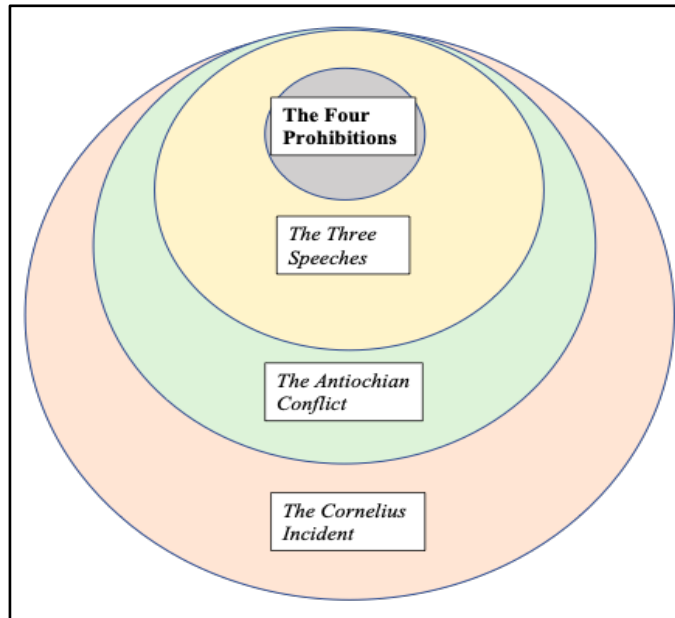
As discussed by Jeffrey Reed, a good working process for a discourse analysis is to take a "bottom-up and top-down" approach, working from the minor details of morphology, going "upwards" to words and phrases, through paragraphs and finally to the overarching discourse – and then go back "down" from the big to the small, to see if

⁴⁴ See Hilary Le Cornu and Joseph Shulam, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts*, vol 1 + 2 (Jerusalem: Academon, 2003), vol. 1: xxx; Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3, 5; Oliver, "Torah Praxis", 29-34.

⁴⁵ Oliver, "Torah Praxis", 38.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey T. Reed, "Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic: A Retrospective and Prospective Appraisal" in *JETS* 39/2 (June 1996): 223-240, p. 225.

the tentatively reached conclusions hold when the analytical order is reversed.⁴⁷ In this thesis, I will apply a similar approach: the analytical order through the chapters will be *the Acts narrative in reverse* (i.e. the same order as the above text-layers in the discursive analyses), *and then back again in the discussion-chapter*.



In this process I will pay attention to how the pieces of puzzle from the contextual analyses fit together with the meaning of the four prohibitions. In the next chapter I will begin my study by analysing the four prohibitions, as they stand on their own.

⁴⁷ Reed, "Discourse", 232.

2. The Apostolic Decree in Acts 15:21

This chapter starts up the analysis and discussion of the AD. The aim is to simply have a look at the individual prohibitions and see what tentative semantical conclusions might be drawn.

The form(s) of the Apostolic Decree

The AD is placed in the final section of Jacob's speech in the so-called Jerusalem meeting. For the first time in *Luke-Acts*, these four commandments for gentile carriers of the Holy Spirit are mentioned. In this specific context, Jacob also refers to Moses, even though the reference is vague.

*19*διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω μὴ παρενοχλεῖν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, *20*ἀλλ' ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς **τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος.** *21*Μωϋσῆς γὰρ ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων κατὰ πόλιν τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἔχει ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκόμενος.⁴⁸

The decree (in bold above) is repeated two more times in *Acts*, with a slightly different wording and ordering: first, in the letter brought to the diaspora congregations, and, second, in a conversation between Jacob and Paul during Paul's last stay in Jerusalem (according to the *Acts* narrative). The different versions look as follows in the 28th Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament:

Acts 15:20	Acts 15:29	Acts 21:25
τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι <ul style="list-style-type: none">• τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων• καὶ τῆς πορνείας• καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ• καὶ τοῦ αἵματος.	29 ἀπέχεσθαι <ul style="list-style-type: none">• εἰδωλοθύτων• καὶ αἵματος• καὶ πνικτῶν• καὶ πορνείας,	φυλάσσεσθαι αὐτοὺς <ul style="list-style-type: none">• τό τε εἰδωλόθυτον• καὶ αἷμα• καὶ πνικτὸν• καὶ πορνείαν.

⁴⁸ Nestle-Aland 28th edition, <https://www.nestle-aland.com/en/the-28-edition/> [2020-01-24]

Apart from these variations within the Nestle-Aland edition, there are also a number of textual deviations in different manuscripts, regarding the number and content of the prohibitions given by Jacob.⁴⁹ W. A. Strange lists six main “versions” of the AD that can be found in the manuscripts:

1. A “food”-version, where *πορνεία* is missing;
2. A version with all the four prohibitions (as in NA28);
3. The four prohibitions plus *the golden rule* (“ὄσα ἂν μὴ θέλωσιν αὐτοῖς γίνεσθαι ἑτέροις μὴ ποιεῖν”);
4. An “ethical” version, where *πνικτὸς* is missing;
5. The ethical version (i.e. no *πνικτὸς*) plus the golden rule
6. A version with no αἷμα.⁵⁰

There are two dominating versions among the manuscripts: one containing all four prohibitions (the “Eastern” or “Alexandrian” reading), and the other containing usually only three prohibitions (leaving out *πνικτὸς*) and seemingly focusing on *ethical instructions*, sometimes by adding *καὶ ὄσα ἂν μὴ θέλωσιν αὐτοῖς γίνεσθαι ἑτέροις μὴ ποιεῖν* (the “Western” reading).⁵¹ On my part, I find the scholarly majority arguments for an Eastern reading by far the most compelling⁵², and thus comply with the Nestle-Aland rendering (28th edition) for all three instances of the AD in *Acts*.

What do the commandments really mean?

I will be analysing the four prohibitions in Acts 15:20 in a slightly different order:

1. Idolatry
2. Sexual immorality
3. Blood
4. “Choked”

⁴⁹ Strange, *Problem*, 87-92 for a detailed discussion of various manuscripts.

⁵⁰ Strange, *Problem*, 88.

⁵¹ Savelle, “Reexamination”, 450 f. See Strange, *Problem*, 93-96, for a critique of the distinctions ritual (Eastern)/ ethical (Western) in this discussion.

⁵² See for example Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 118; Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on The Greek New Testament* (2nd edition) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 379-384; Strange, *Problem*, 90; Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 26 ff, 30 ff; Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 449 f.

The reason for this order is because I want to follow Jacob’s listing as closely as possible, but I also want to give a certain kind of priority to “choked”, by lastly giving it much more space than the other three prohibitions. “Choked” (as will become evident) indeed is in a league of its own, being the most difficult commandment to understand – and also the prohibition that has the greatest potential of transforming our interpretation of the AD as a whole.

A brief word on sources before the analysis: through (primarily) the research of Jürgen Wehnert, support from Aramaic Targumim will be part of the conclusions drawn regarding the meaning of the AD prohibitions. The dating of the extant Targumim is late, ca 7th century CE. Wehnert, however, offers sufficient reasons for valuing the information contained in them, seeing them as “Sammelsbecken von Einzeltraditionen unterschiedlichen Ursprungs und Alters”, containers of various traditions from different places and times, potentially also the time of the AD.⁵³ Furthermore, the content in the Targumim does not stand on its own, as we will see, but finds support in other sources from roughly the time of Acts.

1. Idolatry

In the beginning of the AD of Acts 15:20, it is decided that gentiles should ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων. Το ἀπέχεσθαι, roughly “to keep away from”, is followed by ἀλισγημάτων, a plural noun most likely derived from the verb ἀλισγεῖν, which in the LXX refers to abstention from foods that make a person impure. Therefore, ἀλισγημάτων probably concerns (at least) impurities connected to food.⁵⁴ When the decree is repeated in Acts 15:29, the use of the word εἰδωλοθύτων verifies this assumption, since it refers to things (often, but not exclusively, meat) offered to idols. The prohibition thus covers the worshipping and sacrificial acts of idolatry, the items and foods included, and the pollutions that stem from them.⁵⁵

As noted earlier, the exact terminology of neither εἰδώλων nor εἰδωλοθύτων exists in Lev 17-18, yet Wehnert states that the important connection between Lev 17:1-9 and the AD is primarily *conceptual*, rather than verbal: the main point of the decree is

⁵³ Wehnert (1997), *Reinheit*, p. 217 f.

⁵⁴ Wehnert (1997), *Reinheit*, p. 212.

⁵⁵ Savelle, “Reexamination”, 452 f.

to keep away from idolatry (“the idols”) at large, not just (though including) foods from an idolatrous context. In *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (TPsJ) the context of Lev 17-18 is understood to be that of cultic sacrifice, where one either worships God or the demons.⁵⁶ In early rabbinic texts, Lev 17 forbids all forms of idolatry.⁵⁷ This shows us how ancient Jewish texts perceived Lev 17 to address both the issue of “demonic” food, as well as idolatry in general. Jacob likely intends *both* aspects, albeit possibly with an edge towards eating from “the table of demons” (cf. 1 Cor 10:21) – and Lev 17 might thus very well be the *conceptual* source for this commandment, since it deals with the proper sacrificing of animals to God and no other entities.

2. Sexual immorality

The second prohibition in Jacob’s speech is πορνεία. In its most basic meaning, the word in a general way denotes fornication and unchastity, as it was viewed within Greco-Roman society.⁵⁸ In the late second temple *Jewish* Greek discussions of halakha, πορνεία took on a catch-all meaning of sexual immorality as defined in the Torah, including infidelity, prostitution and incest.⁵⁹ This is evidenced for example in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:1 ff.)⁶⁰, where he used the word to describe an incestuous relationship. This conceptual development had its contemporary Hebrew equivalents in העריות (incest, forbidden relations) and זנות (prostitution, infidelity), which sometimes labelled sexual immorality *in general*, but also was used to specifically label the forms of sexual misconduct described in Lev 18, which in late Second Temple times was considered as a “Verbotskatalog”, i.e. as a unified list of prohibitions.⁶¹

From a Levitical viewpoint this makes sense, since all the prohibitions mentioned in Lev 18 equally rendered people unclean, enumerated to create an outline of sexual immorality as a concept, rather than grouping various kinds of unrelated sins.

⁵⁶ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 215, also n. 16., 219 f.;

⁵⁷ Oliver, “Tora Praxis”, 454 f.

⁵⁸ Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 294.

⁵⁹ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 215.

⁶⁰ Zellentin, “Gentile”, 126 f.

⁶¹ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, p. 232 f.

The use of *πορνεία* in the AD thus most likely should be understood to function in the same way, forbidding incest, adultery, same-sex relations, bestiality and intercourse with a woman during her menstruation, along with the other prohibitions of Lev 18.⁶²

3. *Blood*

“Blood”, being the last prohibition in Jacob’s speech, seems fairly straightforward: it reissues one of the earliest commandments in the Bible of not eating blood, first given to Noah (Gen 9:3-6) and ever since actually valid for all of humanity. Some scholars opt for the interpretation “murder” rather than blood-consumption. However, if the word *αἷμα* is used for “murder”, it is usually paired with another word or phrase which clarifies this specific meaning: standing on its own, as in Acts 15:20, it more likely refers to blood proper. Furthermore, if it were a prohibition on murder, to “abstain from [ἀπέχεσθαι] killing” or “keep themselves (away) [φυλάσσεσθαι αὐτοὺς] from killing”⁶³ seems a very strange way of phrasing such a rule.⁶⁴

In its Lev 17 context, however, the ban on blood is *purity-related*, and refers to the ingestion of blood.⁶⁵ Such is also the understanding of the prohibition throughout the first centuries in the early gentile church, where consumption of blood was forbidden.⁶⁶ Not only would Jacob thus have a conceptual fit with Lev 17, but also a *verbal* one, since the word appears there several times.

4. *Choked*

“Choked”, or “strangled”, is the one commandment which has the biggest impact on the overall interpretation, depending on what we read into it. For it is a matter of “reading in”: the phrase is short, “ἀπέχεσθαι ... καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ”, giving us no further clues and making the commandment the most difficult of the four to understand.

There is a small group of scholars who propagate the idea that “choked/strangled” refers to a cooking method (where certain small animals are cooked whole with all the blood in them, creating an odour especially pleasing to the demons); or to

⁶² Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 458, 461; Strange, *Problem*, 99.

⁶³ See Danker, *Concise*, 43, 377.

⁶⁴ Savelle, “Reexamination”, 455.

⁶⁵ Savelle, “Reexamination”, 455; Simon, “Apostolic”, 439 f.

⁶⁶ Strange, *Problem*, 95.

the brutal custom of actually strangling animals before eating; or even to infanticide.⁶⁷ These interpretations place the AD within either the *idolatry-only* or the *ethics* hypotheses, which I will examine in the discussion chapter. For now, however, suffice it to say that the most common conclusion, particularly amongst recent scholars who accept the *Leviticus* 17-18 connection to the four commandments of the AD, is that “choked” refers to *animals who have been killed in such a way as to leave the blood still in the meat before cooking*. This view has ancient roots amongst Christian theologians, held already by Origen in the third century CE.⁶⁸ There are, however, a logical question-mark: eating blood is most likely already addressed in the commandment in the Apostolic Decree to keep away from “blood”. Why would Jacob include a second blood-related prohibition, albeit in a different form?⁶⁹

Texts by Jewish writers from this time-period and later on in Antiquity seem to have the answer: “choked/ strangled” was associated not primarily with the blood prohibition, but with the purity rules pertaining to *the consumption of carrion* in Lev 17:15-16:

15 “Anyone, whether native-born or foreigner, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be ceremonially unclean till evening; then they will be clean.
16 But if they do not wash their clothes and bathe themselves, they will be held responsible.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ David Instone-Brewer, “Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15,” *JETS* 52/2 (June 2009): 301-21; John Proctor, “Proselytes and Pressure Cookers: The Meaning and Application of Acts 15:20,” *International Review of Mission* Vol. LXXXV No. 339 (1996): 469-483, p. 472 f.; Savelle, “Reexamination”, 456; A. J. M. Wedderburn, “The ‘Apostolic Decree’: Tradition and Redaction,” *Novum Testamentum* Vol. 35, Fasc. 4 (Oct. 1993): 362-389, p. 380, 385 ff.

⁶⁸ Terrance Callan, “The Background of the Apostolic Decree,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* no. 55 (1993): 284-297, p. 289; Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 215 (f. 17).

⁶⁹ This conundrum has most likely caused copyists of later manuscripts to leave out the “choked” prohibition, and instead add the golden rule, more smoothly creating the appearance that the decree is all ethical in nature, with “blood” then most likely understood to (also or exclusively) prohibit murder.

⁷⁰ The NIV translation.

These verses refer to the handling of *a dead, kosher animal*, which has not been killed by human hands, and what you should do if you have eaten such meat. Targumic traditions, along with other Jewish texts in the first and second centuries CE, seem to have widened the application of this category of *impure* meat to also include *the “wrong” method of slaughter*. Animals slaughtered in the wrong way were labelled “strangled” or “choked”.

Jürgen Wehnert is the scholar who, in *Die Reinheit des “christlichen Gottesvolkes” aus Juden und Heiden* (1997), most clearly has laid out the arguments for the slaughter-related interpretation of “choked” in Jewish Antiquity. Certain Targumim on the book of Leviticus (particularly *Pseudo-Jonathan* (TPsJ) on Lev 17), although redacted possibly as late as in the 7th century CE, according to Wehnert contain traditions that go back even to the first century CE.⁷¹ The Aramaic rendering might thus shed light on the Decree in Acts 15.

In particular, there is a certain semantic field⁷², which we might dub “the bad death of a kosher animal”, that shows up in four places in TPsJ, around the term מְקַלְקֵלָא. The first place is in Lev 7:24⁷³:

[...] *the fat of an animal which (a) **corrupteth** [מְקַלְקֵלָא] in the hour of sacrifice, or which (b) dieth a dead thing by death, or the fat of (c) a beast that is torn, may be used in any work; but the fat of an animal that is in a right (condition) shall be burned upon the altar, and shall in no wise be eaten.*

מְקַלְקֵלָא is here translated as the (a) “corrupting” of an animal in the process of slaughter. This category of improper meat is counted as amongst, but not identical with,

⁷¹ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, p. 217 f.

⁷² By this I mean words which are not synonymous but nevertheless refer to the same phenomenon.

⁷³ Here as below, the Aramaic and the Hebrew texts, plus their English translations, are taken from the website *Sefaria*

[https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Leviticus.17.13?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en] [01-28-20]. The English text used is a 19th century translation made by John Wesley Etheridge. The translation is not important for Wehnert’s conclusions, since he works with the Aramaic source texts. I include it, however, so that the reader can more easily follow along in this chapter. All the bold, italic, underlining and brackets are my insertions, if not otherwise stated.

animals that have *died of themselves* (b) or been *torn by beasts* (c). The fat of these three kinds of meat may be used for *daily* purposes, but not for a *right sacrifice* to God. A second place in TPsJ with a similar rendering is interestingly enough Lev 17:13 and 17:15:

*And any man, whether young or old, of the house of the stock of Israel, or of the sojourners who sojourn by dwelling among you, who hunteth venison of beast or fowl proper to be eaten, shall pour out its blood when it is killed; **and if what he hath killed be not destroyed (or strangled?)** [מִתְקַלְקֵלָא], let the blood be covered with dust.*

(Lev 17:13)

As can be seen from the bracketed “strangled”, the word מִתְקַלְקֵלָא caused certain difficulties in the translation (made by J. W. Etheridge), creating an interesting premonition to the discussion at hand in this section. Usually, however, the word is translated as “destroy/ ruin/ spoil” or “defile/ corrupt”.⁷⁵ The commandment to cover the blood of the game with soil is a *follow-up rule*, as it were, implying that the preceding killing first had to be done in the right way (according to certain rules of slaughter) for the covering of the blood to be a fully relevant praxis (since that which has been killed has then *not* been ruined or defiled).⁷⁶ Lev 17:15 has a similar phrasing with a מִתְקַלְקֵלָא-term:

*And any man who shall eat flesh which hath been thrown away on account of **having been strangled (or corrupted)** [בְּקִילְקוּלָא], or the flesh of that which hath been torn, (any man,) whether native or sojourner, shall wash his clothes, and bathe in forty seahs of water, and be unclean until evening when he shall be clean;*

⁷⁴ This bracket is the translator’s own.

⁷⁵ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 222.

⁷⁶ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 222.

⁷⁷ The translator’s own bracket.

Here, the original Hebrew term for animals which have died of themselves (נְבֵלָה) has been replaced by בְּקִיּוֹל. The TPsJ versions of Lev 7:24, 17:13 and 17:15 thus together indicate that טְרֵפָה-words are related to a kind of killing which ruins the meat, placing it in the category of impure carcasses, just like (but not identical to) נְבֵלָה and טְרֵפָה, but sometimes also *synonymous* with at least נְבֵלָה. This last statement is further borne out by a fourth TPsJ passage, Deut 14:21. The term נְבֵלָה in the original Hebrew text is once again replaced by a מִיִּקְלָא- wording, מִיִּקְלָא:

*You shall not eat of anything that is **unclean** [מִיִּקְלָא] **through the manner of its death**; you may give it to the uncircumcised stranger who is in your cities to eat it, or sell it to a son of the Gentiles; for you are a holy people before the Lord your God.*

(Deut 14:21)

The above four passages from TPsJ show clearly that animals which have died of themselves or have been torn to death are *conceptually linked to animals which have been “destroyed” by the wrong slaughter-method*. To this, Wehnert adds the logical conclusion that this overarching concept of unfit meat concerns *profane* slaughter, not a ritual context, since it includes hunting and at least once denotes things explicitly not fit for sacrifice. Hence the term has to do with daily consumption of *kosher meat*. The exact meaning of טְרֵפָה-words is however somewhat unstable, since Lev 7:24 shows that the טְרֵפָה-concept at times was considered as a category of its own, separate from נְבֵלָה and טְרֵפָה, and sometimes not.⁷⁸

These Targumic sources are not our only sources for this semantic field. There are good reasons to believe that TPsJ testifies to a much earlier discourse of a similar kind. Already during the centuries after the formation of the Hebrew Bible, hundreds of years before the final redaction of TPsJ, we find *Hebrew* traces of a terminological trend reminiscent of the usage in the Aramaic Targumim. Two “new” kinds of non-edible meat, not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, were defined in rabbinic Jewish traditions:

⁷⁸ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 223.

1. meat from an animal *slaughtered in the wrong way* (for example by a badly performed cut or an unsuitable instrument being used, which results in the animal's blood not being properly drained), expressed by the word נִבְלָה,
2. and meat from a slaughtered animal which on later inspection was shown to have had a *lethal defect* in its body, expressed by טְרֵפָה.⁷⁹

As can be seen, the Hebrew word for *animals who have died naturally*, נִבְלָה, in Rabbinic tradition expanded its meaning to also incorporate *the wrong way to slaughter* (exactly as in the Targum version of Lev 17:15 and Deut 14:21 above), as exemplified by the following quote from *Tosefta Chullin* 2:19 “All that which becomes carrion *by his slaughtering* is carrion”, where carrion translates the word נִבְלָה – killing an animal in the wrong way makes the meat impure.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the rabbis used the Hebrew term for a torn animal, טְרֵפָה, to refer to *antemortem* lethal defects in a slaughtered animal.⁸¹

Here we find the rabbis making a similar terminological move as the Targumic writers, expanding the semantic field around the terms נִבְלָה and טְרֵפָה in order to designate “new” (so to speak) categories of meat not included in the original Torah text, pertaining to profane contexts of slaughter. This rabbinic reuse of the Lev 17-terms to designate impure meat from bad slaughter very likely evidences a use of such concepts that *predate the rabbinic texts themselves*. One thing that makes this likely is that the rabbis and the Targumim use slightly varying terminology for similar things, indicating that (at least) one of the sources uses innovative, non-original terminology, and that both thus have *genealogical parallels*, i.e. draw from the same kind of cultural matrix albeit not necessarily being textually dependent on each other (see the next chapter for more details on this concept).⁸² The rabbis hardly invented such concepts, since they were not the first Jews to struggle with performing a correct procedure of slaughter.⁸³

⁷⁹ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, p. 226 f.

⁸⁰ m.Chul 1:1, 2:4 (roughly dated to 200 CE), and t.Chul 2:9, later on in the 3rd century CE; see Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 224-226.

⁸¹ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 223 f.

⁸² Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 224.

⁸³ There is no space to explore this, but Ez. 4:14 (discussed briefly in chapter 5) also contains a “third” category when discussing impure meat, perhaps being a very early precursor.

But can we discern such a more original term? Yes, most likely, so Wehnert. The answer is in the rabbinic, third century CE text *Mishna*, in Chullin 1:2, dealing with the slaughtering of an animal *with an unsuitable tool*. Above we saw that the rabbis performed the smart exegetical move of “verifying” their halakhot on bad slaughter by claiming that it was prescribed already in the Torah, by the term נִבְלָה. In m.Chul 1:2, however, we find a discussion of the same phenomenon, yet with a Hebrew word for – you guessed it: choking/ *strangling*.

*If one slaughtered with [the smooth edge of] a hand sickle, with a flint or with a reed, the slaughtering is valid. All may slaughter; at all times one may slaughter; and with any implement one may slaughter, except a scythe, a saw, teeth or a fingernail, since **these strangle** [הֵן חוֹנְקִין].*

The Hebrew keyword is the verb חָנַק, “strangle”; the rabbinic utterance deems badly slaughtered meat to be “strangled” and thus inedible.⁸⁴ The dating of the various source texts suggests that *later* rabbinic traditions preferred נִבְלָה and טָרְפָה to discuss the wrong method of killing, whereas the use of the verb חָנַק most likely is *older*, eventually falling out of fashion in halakhic discussions. חָנַק *thus creates a likely second to third century CE Hebrew equivalent of the Aramaic קַלְקַלָּא*.⁸⁵ The passage in *Mishna Chullin* preceding the one just mentioned above, namely section 1:1, indeed makes this connection even more likely:

All may slaughter, and their slaughtering is valid, except a deaf-mute, an imbecile or a minor, lest they mess up [the animal]⁸⁶ through their slaughtering [קַלְקַלְוּ בְּשַׁחֲטָתָן].

And if any of these slaughtered while others were standing over them, their slaughtering is valid.

That which is slaughtered by a non-Jew is carcass [נִבְלָה] and defiles by carrying.

(m. Chullin 1:1)

⁸⁴ Callan, “Background”, 289. The verb also exists in Tosefta Chullin 1:7 but is otherwise non-existent.

⁸⁵ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 227 f.

⁸⁶ Translator’s own brackets and word insertion.

Here we see how קָלַל , the same verb as in the TPsJ, is used in a rabbinic discourse to describe slaughter which is performed in the wrong way (by an unqualified person), making the meat into נֶבֶלָה , similar to קָלַל (referring perhaps more strictly to the tool being used) in the following section (m. Chul. 1:2). The rabbinic evidence thus contain a semantic field where קָלַל , קָלַל , and the Lev 17 term נֶבֶלָה relate to each other, showing that “choking/ strangling” could be part of the terminology when discussing bad slaughter, as a way of explicating Lev 17.⁸⁷

With the verb קָלַל we thus, finally, find a likely candidate for the “missing link” to τοῦ πνικτοῦ in Acts 15:20. However, if Acts were the only known source using a *Greek* term for some kind of food prohibition, the case for the unclean meat interpretation might still be considered as weak. What we finally need to do is to take a leap over into the Greek language world, to see if the Aramaic and Hebrew discourses on bad slaughter had their equivalents, and if the terms in such discussions could have a connection to τοῦ πνικτοῦ . And indeed, there *are* some Greek sources, from the time *before* the writing of the Mishnah, that validate the existence of such a “choking” category.

Philo (first century CE) uses the terms ἀλλογοντες and ἀποπνίγοντες , “strangled” and “choked”, when describing forbidden meat which has the blood “buried in the body” because the animal has not been slaughtered properly, thus not allowing the “life” (blood) of the animal to flow out freely.⁸⁸ This kind of meat is presented in Philo’s writings precisely as a *third category, after the Levitical concepts of carrion and torn animals* (much like the Aramaic categories in TPsJ), revealing yet again a conceptual connection between the three categories, and *thus between strangulation and Lev 17*. Philo furthermore insists that this strangulation-category is *forbidden by the Torah*, putting it on the same level of prohibition as carrion and torn animals (much like the rabbis eventually would do in the Mishna), and also declaring the meat unclean.⁸⁹ What TPsJ calls “destroyed” meat due to a faulty slaughter praxis thus seems to correspond to Philo’s category of “unslaughtered” meat, which he calls “choked”.

⁸⁷ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 224, 227 f.

⁸⁸ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 463 ff.

⁸⁹ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 228; Callan, “Background”, 289.

It is true that Philo's discussion of the category also include *intended* preservation of the blood in the body, as part of the cooking process – very likely due to the specific setting of Egyptian Alexandria in Philo's days, where such a method of cooking was considered a delicacy by many gentiles – whereas TPsJ seems focused only on erroneous (shechita) slaughter. Yet, the fact that both sources have a “third” category, alongside carrion and torn, that both consider it a part of the Torah, and that both refer to profane, daily consumption of meat, strengthens the likelihood that *they shared a common halakhic discourse on kosher slaughter including the term “choked”*, which persisted throughout the centuries, from Philo, via the rabbis, all the way to the final redaction of the Targumim.

A second Greek source is Clement of Alexandria, a Church leader in the late second century CE Alexandria, who uses the verb ἀποπνίγειν to also describe *a third category of meat forbidden to the Jews according to the Torah*.⁹⁰ He furthermore uses the term from the Apostolic Decree, πνικτόν, in the same text, referring to a form of gluttony (thus seemingly having a similar understanding to Philo regarding the possible context where such meats would be eaten).⁹¹ When thus both Philo and Clement refer to “choked/ strangled” as 1) a kind of *dietary category from the Torah*, 2) involving *how animals were slaughtered*, it is primarily Leviticus in the Torah, especially 11 and 17, and Deut 14, which contain such discussions – with Lev 17 alone containing rules for non-Jews on the matter.

Wehnert's research has thus yielded the following:

1. The Aramaic Targumim have **a third category of unclean meat**, referring to bad slaughter and tied to the Levitical laws for edible meat;
2. This “third” category existed in **rabbinic** sources, with varying terminology tying it both to **Lev 17** and to the concept of “**strangling/ choking**”;
3. “strangling/ choking” also existed as a “third” category **in Greek texts** discussing **Levitical commandments** on edible meat.

Thus we have a good connection between אֲלֹכְוֹתָא וְאֲבִיבִין and אֲבִיבִין, and also between אֲבִיבִין and ἀγχοντες/ ἀποπνίγοντες/ πνικτόν, all of them designating *meat that has been improperly*

⁹⁰ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 466.

⁹¹ Callan, “Background”, 289.

*slaughtered according to God's decrees in the Torah.*⁹² The overriding logic of putting erroneous slaughter with naturally deceased or torn-to-death animals seems to be that *the wrong way for a kosher animal to die turns the meat into an impure animal corpse, i.e. "carrion",* consumption of which would demand purification of the consumer afterwards. Israelites should thus only eat meat from an animal which has been killed in a controlled environment.

This is the reason why the “choked” meat in the TPsJ is treated separately (v. 15-16) from the blood prohibition proper (v. 10-14) (even though the TPsJ text of Lev 17:13⁹³ reveals just how intertwined slaughter and blood consumption are). This would also explain why the AD in Acts 15:20 also separates “blood” from “choked”, as two distinct prohibitions – the one pertains to blood on its own, and the other to meat where the blood has been improperly drained (or where possibly other aspects of the slaughter procedure have failed as well).⁹⁴ A chronological overview of Wehnert’s argumentation looks like the following:

	<i>Hebrew Bible</i>	<i>Greek terms</i>	<i>Rabbinic terms</i>	<i>Targum PsJ</i>
ca 300 BCE	נְבֵלָה / טְרֵפָה (carrion/ torn)			
ca 30 CE		ἄγγοντες; ἀποπνίγοντες (strangled/ choked)		
ca 50 CE (Acts written late 1 st century CE)		πνικτὸν (the AD)		

⁹² Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 229.

⁹³ Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church” in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995): 415-480, p. 459, believes that the “choked” prohibition should be connected to Lev 17:13, since that verse contains the “in the midst of”-phrasing central to his thesis (see chapter 3 for a presentation of his views on the AD).

⁹⁴ Haenchen, *Acts*, 449 fn. 5; Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 476.

ca 200 CE		ἀποπνίγειν/ πνικτόν (strangled/ choked)		
ca 200 CE			קַנַּק (strangle)	
			יִקְלַקְלוּ (ruin)	
			<i>An innovative new use of נְבִלָה / טְרִפָּה ("bad slaughter")/ "lethal sickness/ injury")</i>	
ca 650 CE			קַלְקַל(-) (ruin/ defile)	

ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων

If, as suggested above, “choked” refers to food impurities, which are *ritual* and thus must be *ritually purified*, we may all of a sudden turn with renewed interest to the word ἀλισγημάτων in the AD. As seen above, it very likely has a connection to cultic impurities in food, and many interpreters therefore understand a connection primarily to τῶν εἰδώλων, since this prohibition in the later reiterations is expressed with the word εἰδωλόθυτον, pertaining to things, often food, offered to idols. Wehnert, however, wishes to expand the connection between ἀλισγημάτων and the ensuing prohibitions, connecting it to *all four* of them:

τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων...

1. τῶν εἰδώλων
2. καὶ τῆς πορνείας
3. καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ
4. καὶ τοῦ αἵματος.

The actual phrase ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων, so Wehnert, has its equivalent *in Aramaic*, evidenced in the Targumic traditions by פְּרִשׁ מִסְּוֵאוֹת (“to separate (oneself) from impurities”). סְוֵאוֹת often refers to food-related impurities, similar to ἀλισγημάτων,

but it can also denote impurities *in general*.⁹⁵ In the same way, ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων could have all the four prohibitions as its objects: not only idolatry creates impurities, but also sexual misconduct, blood and (as evidenced above) “choked”.

Isaac Oliver adds strength to this suggestion by pointing to the Greek text 4 Bar 7:32, which contains the formulation “ἀπέχεσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν ἐθνῶν τῆς Βαβυλῶνος”. Judging from this text, so Oliver, it seems that the phrase ἀπέχεσθαι ἐκ τῶν ἀλισγημάτων could be used to label a more generic concern for impurities in Greek as well.

Finally, Holger Zellentin states the obvious: all four prohibitions of the AD, should they come from Lev 17-18 (which he believes), do pertain to actions which create “pollutions”, both ritual and immoral⁹⁶, increasing the likelihood that ἀλισγημάτων refers to all of them.⁹⁷ This means that impurity should be a, or rather *the*, common denominator for the AD, and that Luke most likely meant to signal that *gentile believers, just like their Jewish brethren, could become ritually impure*, as stated in Lev 17.⁹⁸ All in all, this chapter has presented a compelling and historical-critically valid hypothesis for a meaning behind the AD which aligns itself very well with a PSr. The kosher kitchen is at the centre, and Levitical purity arches over all four prohibitions.

⁹⁵ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, p. 234 f.

⁹⁶ See chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of these two distinctions.

⁹⁷ Holger Zellentin, “Judeo-Christian Legal Culture and the Qur’an: The Case of Ritual Slaughter and the Consumption of Animal Blood” in *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, ed. Francisco del Rio Sánchez (Turnhout, Brepols Publishers, 2018); 117-159, p. 131 (see also fn. 33).

⁹⁸ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 451, f. 1012 and 1013; Talbert, *Reading*, 132.

3. Three Speeches on the Gentile believers

According to Reed's recommendations in the introductory chapter, we now move from the textual level of the AD (Acts 15:19-21) to the *co-textual* level, i.e. to the narrative of the actual Jerusalem meeting where the AD is stipulated. As could be seen in chapter 2, the first verse of the AD passage, “διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω μὴ παρενοχλεῖν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν,” starts with the word **διὸ**, a Greek word which functions as a coordinating conjunction and has the lexical meaning of “therefore”/ “for this reason”⁹⁹. This word puts the AD itself in the category of *inference*, i.e. as some sort of conclusion based on an assessment of preceding information (X):

X ⇒ The Apostolic Decree

The preceding information (X), in our case, is the three main speeches of the Jerusalem meeting, presented by Peter, Paul, Barnabas and Jacob.¹⁰⁰ Before we have even started to analyse those speeches, we thus know that we should be looking for *reasons* and *arguments* for why the AD should be the fitting finale to the Jerusalem meeting's discussion on the Antiochian conflict.

Intertextuality: Quotes and allusion

We are, however, immediately faced with a challenge when we want to understand the three speeches: many commentators discuss in some detail how Luke has crafted them (and Jacob's in particular) through the use of both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Septuagint. Luke (or the speakers) furthermore does not state the premises for the use of such texts quite as openly as we would like. Instead Peter, Barnabas, Paul and Jacob refer to other passages in Acts (the Cornelius event and the evangelisation to both Jews and gentiles) and to an allusive cluster of quotes from Scripture, with *Amos 9* at its heart – but we as readers are left to connect the dots ourselves. Rather than applying the traditional historical-critical motto “Wie es eigentlich gewesen”, we must therefore, so to speak, ask ourselves the equally important “Wie es eigentlich gedacht”: what did

⁹⁹ G.K. Beale, Daniel J. Brendsel and William A. Ross, *An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 36

¹⁰⁰ Huub van den Sandt, “An Explanation of Acts 15:6-21 in the Light of Deuteronomy 4:29-35 (LXX)”, in *JSNT* 46 (1992): 73-97, p. 73.

Luke, the writer of Acts, actually mean to convey by reporting the speeches of the Jerusalem meeting in the way he did, and putting the AD as a logical outcome of those speeches?

The recognition of insertions of passages from earlier texts into later ones is called *intertextuality*.¹⁰¹ When interpreting Biblical texts, intertextual analyses help us understand an author's system of reference: in Antiquity, Jewish (and eventually Christian) writers had no system of chapters and verse numbers when they wanted to highlight a certain portion of Scripture. Instead they used words, phrases, or sentences to direct the reader to a certain passage. Finding out such references, intertextuality also focuses on the notion of *concepts and ideas*: a quote or an allusion can be used to bring in certain discourses into the new text. By looking at the original context of an inserted fragment, the importation of concepts into the new text is better understood.¹⁰² The following forms of intertextual operations are commonly discussed by Bible scholars:

- **Quotes/ Citations:** A quote is simply the verbatim reproduction of fragments of text from an older writing in a newer writing.¹⁰³ It can be both *formal* (using some sort of *quotation formula* (“as it is written”) to highlight the quotation) and *informal* (without a formula).¹⁰⁴
- **Allusions:** an allusion is less verbatim than a quote, but still has to have the intention of the writer, and the potential by the reader, of being recognised.¹⁰⁵ It consists of fewer words, and can be “less linear”, even a “word cluster” of separate words and/ or phrases (however from the *one* same source-passages), broken up and somewhat spread out in the new text-section into which it is inserted.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Richard B. Hays (1989), *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 14.

¹⁰² Hays, *Echoes*, 15.

¹⁰³ Beetham, *Echoes*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Beetham, *Echoes*, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher A. Beetham (2008), *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (Leiden: Brill), 12, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Beetham, *Echoes*, 17 f.

- **Echoes / metalepsis:** This can be as vague a notion as a “recollection”¹⁰⁷ on part of the writer, and it can even be unconscious.¹⁰⁸ The writer actually does not intend to point the reader to a particular earlier passage of text – the echo appears because “the author’s mind is saturated with the source text”.¹⁰⁹ When discussing echoes, Richard Hays also uses the term *metalepsis* to refer to the “unstated or suppressed (transumed) points of resonance” in echoes, which create a “broad interplay [...] beyond those [aspects] explicitly echoed”, a “field of whispered or unstated correspondences”.¹¹⁰ It is almost a worldview-like, taken-for-granted kind of information.
- **Strong genealogical parallel:** This refers to the influence of one text upon another later text, in terms of themes and doctrine. There is no clear connection to a particular passage of text, and yet there exists an “organic” relationship on the level of abstract discourse (The OT, for example, has influenced the NT concerning the doctrine of monotheism).¹¹¹
- **Weak genealogical parallel:** There is no direct connection between two texts, but instead they seem to draw from the same cultural matrix, and, on their own, as it were, use the same discursive “elements” and formulate the same or similar ideas.¹¹² (We encountered this kind of connection in the previous chapter, as we saw parallels between the Targumim, rabbinic texts and Greek Jewish sources)

These intertextual categories are of value for our understanding of the AD. To start with, the scholarly debate overviewed in chapter 1 testifies to the fact that the AD is not a quote, though it partly (“blood”) might be verbatim. However, all scholars seem to agree that the AD indeed is a conscious construct of prohibitions – the categories of echoes and parallels do not seem to fit the gist of those four words. Accordingly, the best term to designate the AD would be an *allusion*, particularly if we use the notion of a “word cluster”: The AD alludes to a certain passage and/ or concept. Now we turn to

¹⁰⁷ Hays, *Echoes*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Beetham, *Echoes*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ Beetham, *Echoes*, 21.

¹¹⁰ Hays, *Echoes*, 20.

¹¹¹ Beetham, *Echoes*, 25.

¹¹² Beetham, *Echoes*, 26.

the three speeches to see if their respective quotes, allusions or other intertextual signals can aid us in deciding the source and meaning for the AD.

Peter's speech

Peter is the first person in the Jerusalem meeting to speak on the matter of gentile believers. To him, the incident in Cornelius' home in Acts 10, where the Spirit of God is given to the non-Jews, is the clearest proof that God has accepted "gentiles qua gentiles" as members of the Messiah-believing community¹¹³: "ἀφ' ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίων ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου ἀκοῦσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ πιστεῦσαι" (Acts 15:7). In short, he states that "God chose, God testified, God did not discriminate"¹¹⁴, since God "οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν" (Acts 15:9). Peter had received the grace to be God's mouthpiece in an extraordinary event that nevertheless happened according to God's will.¹¹⁵ This is reminiscent of Peter's own words in chapter 5 before the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem (5:29-32): "We are witnesses of these things, and **so is the Holy Spirit**, whom God has given to those who obey him." But Peter's Jerusalem speech also rings with the gravity of Steven's words in chapter 7 (v. 51-52):

"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: **You always resist the Holy Spirit!** Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute?"

In a sense, Peter's speech is the culmination of a theme created throughout Luke-Acts, of how God would reach the gentiles with a message of revelatory light (Luke 2:32, Acts 1:8), forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47), salvation (Luke 3:6), and even with the Spirit (Acts 2:39, 3:25-26)¹¹⁶, of which the last is key to Peter's understanding of events: "καὶ ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτοῖς δοῦς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν" (Acts 15:8). Peter therefore further warns the leaders of Jerusalem not to put

¹¹³ Bauckham, "James", p. 452; Glenny, "Septuagint", p. 2; Tannehill, *Narrative*, p. 184.

¹¹⁴ Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 820; Tannehill, *Narrative*, p. 184.

¹¹⁵ Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 820.

¹¹⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1992), 186.

God to the test (“νῦν οὖν τί πειράζετε τὸν θεόν”, 15:10), which they would do if they changed or added to the divine decision of gentile salvation (see Acts 11:14) by inclusion through the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷ Demanding circumcision and full Torah observance from the gentiles, they would be fighting against the very plans of God.¹¹⁸

Paul’s and Barnabas’ speech

Barnabas and Paul add to Peter’s claims by testifying to the wonders and signs God performed among the gentiles when they preached the gospel¹¹⁹: “Ἐσίγησεν δὲ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ἤκουον Βαρναβᾶ καὶ Παύλου ἐξηγουμένων ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν δι’ αὐτῶν” (Acts 15:12). Of particular interest is the phrase “σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα”, which often occurs in the LXX as a reference to God’s leading the Israelites out of Egypt. This enhances the impression that some sort of salvific work is at hand (cf. Acts 11:14 and 15:11), where God is leading the gentiles from out of their captivity.¹²⁰ I will not analyse chapters 11 (the latter half), 13 and 14, which cover these events, since I do not believe them to be instrumental to the discussion of the AD. However, a brief summary of the events helps us understand what Paul and Barnabas refer to. I have chosen some segments below, and marked certain bits in bold to highlight the experiences I consider relevant to the gentile question discussed in Jerusalem¹²¹:

- **The Holy Spirit** [set apart] Barnabas and Saul “for **the work to which I have called them.**” (13:2-3) [Via Cyprus] they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue [and preached the Gospel, saying] “Fellow children of Abraham and **you God-fearing Gentiles** [οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν], it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent” (13:14, 16, 26).
- [Paul and Barnabas proclaimed] “This is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you **a light for the Gentiles**, that you may bring **salvation** to the

¹¹⁷ W. Edward Glenny, “The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22:1 (2012): 1-26, p. 2; Johnson, *Acts*, 198.

¹¹⁸ Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 825; Tannehill, *Narrative*, 185.

¹¹⁹ Bauckham, “James”, 452; Glenny, “Septuagint”, 3.

¹²⁰ van den Sandt, “Explanation”, 91.

¹²¹ The passages below are from the NIV translation, with my own insertions in brackets [].

ends of the earth.” When **the Gentiles** heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed**. (13:44-48)

- At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews **and Greeks** believed. (14:1)
- [After meeting some resistance] Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who **confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders**. (14:4)
- [Having gone to various places, finally] they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for **the work they had now completed**. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how **he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles**. (14:26-28)

In this summary we see both miracles and signs, at the same time as the belief in Jesus the Messiah spreads among the gentiles. Though Luke only gives them a mere verse (in the layout of our modern Bible versions) in the meeting, the reader/ listener is of course meant to keep the previous chapters in mind, inserting the above travelogue as part of the argumentation for gentile inclusion into God’s people: *God had indeed sent Paul and Barnabas to perform a work of God, opening the door of faith to appointed gentiles, who receive eternal life by faith.*¹²²

Jacob’s speech

Jacob’s speech contains the final and all decisive words at the Jerusalem meeting.¹²³ Whereas the preceding speeches were mainly reports from previous events, Jacob’s delivery is *halakhic* in nature, i.e. a legal exegesis: the Scriptures, more precisely the

¹²² This is most likely the reason for Jacob’s statement in 15:28 “ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν”: not that the events reported (and the scriptural references in Jacob’s speech below) carried little weight and had to be assisted by spiritual revelation, but rather that the very acts of the Spirit were clearly discernable in what had happened in the ministries of Peter, Paul and Barnabas: see Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 848.

¹²³ Glenny, “Septuagint”, 3.

prophets (Jacob says in 15:15 “καὶ τούτῳ συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν καθὼς γέγραπται”), are used to decide on *status* for gentile carriers of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁴ The speech runs as follows (defined here as the section that runs up until the AD):

13[.] ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἀκούσατέ μου. 14Συμεὼν ἐξηγήσατο καθὼς **πρῶτον ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἔθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ**. 15καὶ τούτῳ συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν καθὼς γέγραπται·

16μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀνοικοδομήσω καὶ ἀνορθώσω αὐτήν,

17 ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς, λέγει κύριος ποιῶν ταῦτα 18γνωστὰ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος.

In his speech, Jacob confirms Peter’s proposition (v. 14) that (A) God in the Cornelius incident has started a process of choosing (“taking”) gentiles from the nations for the creation of a people.¹²⁵ Here must be noted that Jacob uses the word *λαός* for the gentiles, a word otherwise reserved for the Jewish people in *Acts*. This underscores that God’s “taking” of non-Jews has brought them ἐξ ἔθνῶν into a/ the people of God, without making any distinction.¹²⁶ In addition, the language of Acts 15:14 might actually be an allusion to Ex 6:7, where God chooses *Israel* to be His people: “λήμψομαι ἐμαυτῷ ὑμᾶς λαὸν ἐμοῖ”.¹²⁷

Furthermore, Jacob also quotes Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:16 corresponds to Amos 9:11, and Acts 15:17-18 corresponds to Amos 9:12), stating that God *has called His*

¹²⁴ Bauckham, “James”, 452; Glenny, “Septuagint”, 10; Todd R. Hanneken, “Moses Has His Interpreters,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, no. 77 (2015): 686-706, p.690; Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 831; Nanos, *Mystery*, 166.

¹²⁵ Tannehill, *Narrative*, p. 186; Savalle, “Reexamination”, 466.

¹²⁶ Peter J. Goeman, “The Role of the LXX in James’ Use of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:15-18,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* (Summer/ Fall 2014): 107-125, p. 119. As will be evident from my continued analyses, although *λαὸν* is anarthrous, I conclude that there is only *one* people of God, namely Israel, not two. Acts 15:14 thus indicates somehow an inclusion into Israel. I will argue more fully for this conclusion in the discussion chapter.

¹²⁷ Tannehill, *Narrative*, 187.

Name upon these particular gentiles, thus making them into His property much as the Jewish nation already is.¹²⁸ The quote provides a scriptural foundation for accepting gentiles into the congregations of the Messiah: *God has in some sense separated them from the rest of the gentiles, and brought them to Israel.*

The Amos 9-quote as the hub of Jacob's speech

Beginning my intertextual analysis of Jacob's quote from Amos 9:11-12, it is valuable to understand its original textual context as part of an epilogue in the prophetic book of Amos, in which the time described is a post-judgement scenario where Israel has already suffered the consequences of its breach to the covenant-relationship with God (laid out in previous chapters in Amos) and now will receive *mercy and restoration*.¹²⁹

The quote consists primarily of the Septuagint form of Amos 9:11-12, but Luke/Jacob also seems to insert bits and pieces from various other Septuagint texts, in order to amplify his interpretation of the quote and thus make it *an in-depth explication of the message in Amos 9:11-12 as he perceives it*.¹³⁰ These changes seem to be allusions from various other prophets, primarily from the minor prophets.¹³¹ This is hinted at by how the events narrated by Peter and the others *συμφωνοῦσιν* with the words of *τῶν προφητῶν*, in plural: the reader/ listener is guided to instantly understand the next section as a synthesis.¹³² Creating such amalgamations, through small changes in a quote from Scripture, is a method also known from the *pesharim* writings in the Qumran library, as well as from the slightly later rabbinic method of *al tiqre*, where a quote is temporarily amended in order to make a theological point.¹³³ When Jacob subsequently announces the AD, it presumes this Scriptural synthesis as its basis.

¹²⁸ Richard Bauckham, "James, Peter and the Gentiles" in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul*, eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 91–142, p. 119; Goeman, "LXX", 116 f.

¹²⁹ Glenny, "Septuagint", 3; Goeman, "LXX", 107 f.

¹³⁰ Bauckham, "James", 453; idem. "James and the Gentiles" in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington, III. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154-184, p. 157.

¹³¹ Glenny, "Septuagint", 11; Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 832.

¹³² Glenny, "Septuagint", 14 f.; Goeman, "LXX", 119.

¹³³ Bauckham, "James and Gentiles", 161.

Yet, even though the expanded Amos-quote is based on Greek Septuagint texts, some scholars also discern readings of *Hebrew* Scripture-passages mixed in the synthesis, particularly in creating a connection between Jacob's use of prophets and the concluding four prohibitions (more on this below), thus making the final halakhic stance one that depends on both Hebrew *and* Greek Vorlagen of the Bible. This kind of bilingual exegetical labour is advanced. On the other hand, considering the fact that the first Jerusalem congregation had a mixed membership of Hebrew- and Greek-speaking/-reading Jews, this kind of "Greco-Hebrew" exegesis is really not surprising; as pointed out by Wehnert, the Jerusalem congregation furthermore probably spoke Aramaic and very likely had access to, or at least drew inspiration from, written Aramaic Targumim existent in Jerusalem.¹³⁴ In order for all parties to accept the conclusions drawn at the Jerusalem meeting, some sort of verification in Hebrew, Greek, and very likely Aramaic, is thus quite logical and indeed historically plausible. Other contemporary Jewish writers too presented their understanding of Hebrew Scripture by for example analysing variant readings/ Vorlagen of Hebrew texts combined with Aramaic renderings to produce their interpretations.¹³⁵

The alluded-to texts in Jacob's speech were most likely chosen both through 1) verbal so-called *gezera schawa*-linkages¹³⁶ within the respective languages, where a particular wording or phrase in the one verse is read in the light of other textually separate passages containing the same word or phrase (ergo Greek texts linking to each other, and Hebrew texts linking to each other), but *also* through 2) *conceptual overlaps* within *and* between the two language-spheres (Greek and Hebrew texts sharing certain discourses, albeit not necessarily the equivalent wording). The total picture emerges of a consciously bi-lingual, exegetical effort by the earliest Jewish Jerusalem congregation.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 216 f.

¹³⁵ Bauckham, "James", 456; idem, "James and the Gentiles", 161; Glenny, "Septuagint", 23; Toby Janicki, "Rabbinic Perspectives on Being Grafted In" in *Messiah Journal* 115 (2014): 68-73, p. 69 f.

¹³⁶ Bauckham, "James", 454, 458; Glenny, "Septuagint", 8.

¹³⁷ Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles", 182 f.; Glenny, "Septuagint", 23.

The Other Amos-quote in Acts 7

Before we go any further in assessing the possible allusions in Jacob's Amos 9-quote, there is yet another thing to investigate. Luke namely uses another Amos-quote, Amos 5, in a previous section of Acts, in chapter 7. Apart from Acts 7 and 15, there are no other quotes from Amos in Luke-Acts. On top of this, Luke only uses the phrase καθὼς γέγραπται two times in Acts, with precisely these two Amos-quotes in chapter 7 and 15, making them connected both textually and as proper formal quotations in Acts. By highlighting the significance of those two scripture-passages, Luke signals that they interact: they seem to form a *contrasting inclusio*, where the second Amos-quote in Acts 15 is to be read in the light the first quote in Acts 7.¹³⁸ We therefore have to look at the use of Amos in chapter 7, in order to better understand what Jacob is saying about the AD eight chapters later.

In Acts 7, Stephen is talking before a crowd of enraged non-believing Jews in Jerusalem, who have seized him and accuse him of blaspheming both God, the Torah and the temple (Acts 6:11-14). Some way into his speech, in 7:38-44, Stephen describes how Israel made the golden calf, and how God, as a consequence, *turned away from Israel* and abandoned them to idol worship: “ἔστρεψεν δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς λατρεύειν τῇ στρατιᾷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ” (7:42). Stephen argues for his understanding of the golden calf incident by stating καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ τῶν προφητῶν, then quoting Amos 5:25-27 in Acts 7:42-43:

(7:42) μὴ σφάγια καὶ θυσίας προσηνέγκατέ μοι
ἔτη τεσσαράκοντα ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ;
(43) καὶ ἀνελάβετε τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μόλοχ
καὶ τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ θεοῦ [ύμῶν] Ραιφάν,
τοὺς τύπους οὓς ἐποιήσατε προσκυνεῖν¹³⁹ αὐτοῖς,
καὶ μετοικιῶ ὑμᾶς ἐπέκεινα Βαβυλῶνος¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁸ van den Sandt, “Explanation”, 77; Aaron W. White, “Revisiting the ‘Creative’ Use of Amos in Acts and What It Tells Us About Luke”, in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* Vol. 46, No. 2: 79-90, p. 80 f.

¹³⁹ The LXX text of Amos 5:25-27 does not contain the word προσκυνεῖν.

¹⁴⁰ The LXX text of Amos 5:25-27 has Δαμασκοῦ.

The reference to Scripture in Steven’s speech concerns βίβλω τῶν προφητῶν, referring most likely to the 12 minor prophets, which usually were written in the same scroll during Antiquity.¹⁴¹ There, in those prophetic utterances (in this case Amos 5), can be found the texts that explicate both Israel’s turning away from God (Acts 7:42b), God’s turning away from Israel (7:42a), as summarised by Stephen, but also *God’s final return* (ἀναστρέψω, “I will return”) *to His people*, which turns out to be Jacob’s big point in using Amos 9 in Acts 15 to prove that the gentile situation is a sign-act from God.¹⁴² When we thus read Jacob’s speech in the Jerusalem meeting, God reversing the plights of Israel into a glorious restoration has to be included in Jacob’s assessment of the gentile situation.

Divergences in Jacob’s quote

When comparing the Greek and the Hebrew versions of Amos 9:11-12, there are some deviations. They do not result in any huge discrepancies, though, neither in content nor meaning.¹⁴³ The LXX version lends itself better to illustrate the *non-conversion policy* that Jacob was arguing – gentiles were being freely gathered to Israel, in accordance with the prophets – but the Hebrew version could well have been used to a similar effect.¹⁴⁴ For this reason, I will now turn to Jacob’s quote of the LXX text of Amos, where we, on the other hand, *do* find quite a few deviations from the Septuagint rendering of greater interest for our quest to understand the AD. The structure of Jacob’s Greek Amos-quote in Acts 15 runs as follows, alongside the original LXX text:

<i>Amos 9:11-12</i>	<i>Acts 15:16-18</i>
11 ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἀναστήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀναστήσω	16 μετὰ ταῦτα ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν - καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀνοικοδομήσω

¹⁴¹ Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 832; van den Sandt, “Explanation”, 77.

¹⁴² van den Sandt, “Explanation”, 77.

¹⁴³ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles”, 169.

¹⁴⁴ Glenny, “Septuagint”, 10.

<p>καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτήν καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος, 12 ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς, λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα. -</p>	<p>καὶ ἀνορθώσω αὐτήν, - 17 ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐφ’ οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτούς, λέγει κύριος ποιῶν ταῦτα 18 γνωστὰ ἂπ’ αἰῶνος.</p>
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Jacob uses Amos 9:11-12 as a hub, but the words in bold above, as well as the hyphens, reveal how he attaches to, or removes from, the original quote, creating a new combination of *theologically value-laden sections*, also giving a new (or at least a wider) meaning to the Amos-text.¹⁴⁵ All in all, Jacob seems to make seven main adjustments to the Amos-text. I will go through them, one by one, to see how they contribute to Jacob’s logical argumentation for the AD.

<i>Original Amos-text (LXX)</i>	<i>Insertions/ omissions in Acts 15</i>
A. Ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ	A. μετὰ ταῦτα
B. -	B. ἀναστρέψω
C. ἀναστήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυεὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν	C. καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν
D. καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς	D. - (omission)
καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος	- (omission)
E. καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτήν	E. καὶ ἀνορθώσω αὐτήν
F. ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων	F. ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον

¹⁴⁵ Glenny, “Septuagint”, 11.

G. ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα	G. ποιῶν ταῦτα γνωστὰ ἀπ' αἰῶνος.
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A. μετὰ ταῦτα

The insertion of **μετὰ ταῦτα** (insertion A in the above chart) in the beginning of the Amos 9-quote is believed to come from the following context in Hosea 3:5¹⁴⁶:

5 καὶ **μετὰ ταῦτα** ἐπιστρέψουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐπιζητήσουσιν Κύριον τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν καὶ Δαυεὶδ τὸν βασιλέα αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐκστήσονται ἐπὶ τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν.¹⁴⁷

The context in Hosea refers to a change of fate after a period of time when Israel has been without a king or prince, without sacrifice, but also without sacred stones and household gods, i.e. without the temple worship *but also* without idolatry. This creates an interesting connection to the interplay between Amos 5 and Amos 9, as described above: Amos 5 describes Israel's apostasy and God's punishment, Hosea 3-context describes the period of exilic suffering for the twelve tribes but also its coming to an end, and Amos 9 brings in the final redemption of Israel.¹⁴⁸

The Hosea-allusion has both *thematic* (restoration¹⁴⁹) and *verbal* (ἐπιστρέψουσιν, ἐπιζητήσουσιν Κύριον, Δαυεὶδ) connections to Jacob's Amos-quote¹⁵⁰, and both seem to be describing two sides of the same coin, mirroring each other:

- Amos 9:11-12 focuses on *God* returning to *Israel* and restoring David's tent, parallel to an *election of gentiles*;

¹⁴⁶ Glenny, "Septuagint", 12.

¹⁴⁷ Underlining and bold type are my own insertions.

¹⁴⁸ Pervo, *Acts*, 375.

¹⁴⁹ Expressions like "after these things", "in that day", "in those days", and "in the latter days" are acknowledged expressions in prophetic texts/ passages of the Hebrew Bible, alluding to a time of restoration when God will again turn the fate of Israel and save them from their hardships, see Goeman, "LXX", 108.

¹⁵⁰ Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles", 163.

- Hosea 3:5 focuses on *Israel* turning to *God* and looking for David their king, and how they marvel at the Lord and His “good things” in the last days.

However, in Hosea, Israel is in focus; *in Amos the gentiles too go through the similar motions of searching for God and becoming His people*. Connecting Amos and Hosea in this way thus creates an *interconnectedness* between the future fates of both Jews and gentiles, both of them going through similar motions. The main point in my opinion, though, is the good things in store for Israel in the last days, when they turn to God and seek David their king. Furthermore, all that has happened to Israel has been according to God’s plan, indicated by the “ταῦτα” in “μετὰ ταῦτα” as well as in the end of Jacob’s Amos 9-quote (“λέγει κύριος ποιῶν ταῦτα γνωστὰ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος.”).¹⁵¹

B. ἀναστρέψω

The first sentence subject in the Amos 9-quote is God Himself, who promises once more raise up the fallen tent of David – but Jacob also inserts a promise to return (ἀναστρέψω) to Israel. The verb stem without a prefix, *στρέφω*, occurs only three times in Acts, in 7:39, 42 and in 13:46, and gives us a good precursor as to the meaning of ἀναστρέψω:

- 1) The first time is in Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, a section we have already had a look at and have discovered connections to: there, *στρέφω* refers to *the desert generation of Israelites turning their hearts back towards Egypt*;
- 2) the second use of *στρέφω* (in the same speech) refers to *God turning away from Israel*;
- 3) the third time the verb is used, *Paul turns from unrepentant Jewish listeners to the gentiles*.

The verb *στρέφω* is accordingly heavy-laden with theological significance: it carries the weight of a broken relationship between God and His covenant people.¹⁵² When **ἀναστρέψω** shows up in Acts 15:16, right after μετὰ ταῦτα, it therefore arguably has a strong connection to the destitute situation of Israel, namely by introducing its reversal: *God returns*.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Pervo, *Acts*, 376.

¹⁵² White, “Revisiting”, 82.

¹⁵³ White, “Revisiting”, 83 f.

Although this fact is interesting enough on its own, the verb ἀναστρέψω is also believed by many scholars to be an allusion to either Jer 12:15 or Zech 8:3 (or possibly both).¹⁵⁴ One immediate reservation undermines this suggestion: in Acts 15 it says ἀνα(στρέψω) whereas in Jer 12:15 and Zech 8:3 it reads Ἐπι(στρέψω). Yet, the verb στρέφω appears many times in the LXX with both the prefixes ἐπι- and ἀνα- without any real difference in meaning. They both often translate the Hebrew word כָּשַׁב, meaning to “turn back” or “return”. Thus, the shift of prefix is fairly insignificant for the actual *meaning*, but rather most likely serves a *stylistic* function for Luke: the ἀνα-prefix aligns ἀναστρέψω with ἀνοικοδομήσω (see insertion C) and ἀνορθώσω (see insertion E), creating a chiasmic pattern of *alliteration*.¹⁵⁵

ἀναστρέψω

καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν

καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀνοικοδομήσω

καὶ ἀνορθώσω αὐτήν

Let us first look at the suggestion that the ἀναστρέψω-allusion comes from the LXX version of Jer 12:15. This allusion would entail the larger context of verses 12:14-17, where God promises to *expel the nations from Israel* and *restore the Jewish people*.

15 καὶ ἔσται μετὰ τὸ ἐκβαλεῖν με αὐτοὺς ἐπιστρέψω καὶ ἐλεήσω αὐτούς, καὶ κατοικιῶ αὐτοὺς ἕκαστον εἰς τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστον εἰς τὴν γῆν αὐτοῦ.

Once this is done, however, the passage indicates a reversal of the animosity between Israel and the gentile nations. God will have mercy on the gentiles, “ἐπιστρέψω καὶ ἐλεήσω αὐτούς” (v. 15). The gentiles will be settled onto their own respective shares of land (“καὶ κατοικιῶ αὐτοὺς ἕκαστον εἰς τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστον εἰς τὴν

¹⁵⁴ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles”, 163; Glenny, “Septuagint”, 12; Johnson, *Acts*, 265.

¹⁵⁵ Glenny, “Septuagint”, 13; Pervo, *Acts*, 375.

γῆν αὐτοῦ”)¹⁵⁶, and they will turn to God and be built up in the midst of God’s people¹⁵⁷:

16 καὶ ἔσται ἐὰν μαθόντες μάθωσιν τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ λαοῦ μου [...] καὶ οἰκοδομηθήσονται ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ λαοῦ μου·

Like in the Hosea-allusion above (insertion A), the allusion to *Jeremiah* thus also contains a kind of “double” pattern of God’s actions, where the *Amos*-quote puts Israel in focus, whereas the inserted allusion also adds *the parallel restorative fate of the gentile nations*. If the gentiles do not turn to God, however, He will ἐξαρῶ τὸ ἔθνος ἐκεῖνο.¹⁵⁸

Second, when we investigate Zech 8:3 in its LXX version as the possible allusion for ἀναστρέψω, what kind of ideas and concepts are transmitted?

τάδε λέγει Κύριος: **Ἐπιστρέψω** ἐπὶ Σειῶν,
καὶ κατασκηνώσω ἐν μέσῳ Ἱερουσαλήμ,
καὶ κληθήσεται ἡ Ἱερουσαλήμ πόλις ἡ ἀληθινή,
καὶ τὸ ὄρος Κυρίου Παντοκράτορος ὄρος ἅγιον.

Unlike Jer 12:15, the Zech 8:3-verse resounds exclusively with the hopes of the Lord’s return to restore Jerusalem. This verse, though, has a thematic connection to verse 22 later on in the same chapter of Zechariah (indicated by the words in bold):

¹⁵⁶ This is likely referring to the intended regions of the seventy nations, according to Deut 32:8, (MT) לַחֲרֹשׁ׃ בְּגֵי רַמְסֵי מִיָּמִים תִּלְבַּח בְּצַד מִצְרַיִם וְיִזְרְקוּהָ מִיָּד לְיַיִץ לְקַבְּלָהּ: (LXX) ὅτε διεμέριζεν ὁ ὕψιστος ἔθνη, ὡς διέσπειρεν υἱοὺς Ἀδάμ, ἔστησεν ὄρια ἔθνων κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ. The connotation of inheritance is clearer in the Hebrew Vorlage, where the verb לַחֲרֹשׁ׃ appears in its Hifil-infinitive form, which can mean “to give as an inheritance” (The Septuagint verb διεμέριζεν has rather the more straightforward meaning of distribution or dividing up). The Jeremiah passage might thus allude to a sort of geographical restoration of the nations too, parallel to a returning of the Israelites to their promised land.

¹⁵⁷ Bauckham, “James”, 454.

¹⁵⁸ This creates yet another interesting parallel, with the overall hypothesis that the AD comes from Lev 17-18: those chapters repeatedly state that also the *gerim*, the stranger amongst Israel, will be uprooted from the people if they do not obey the commandments of God (although the Greek term used is ἐξολεθρευω, rather than ἐξαῖρω; also, Jer refers to an ἔθνος, a people, not individuals).

καὶ ἤξουσιν λαοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ ἔθνη πολλὰ ἐκζητῆσαι τὸ πρόσωπον Κυρίου
Παντοκράτορος ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ

Zech 8:22 actually has a similar flavour to the Amos 9-quote, stating that the nations will seek God, while at the same time confirming the message from Zech 8:3 that God will dwell in Zion. Together, the two Zechariah-quotes show once again the parallel aspects of how the restoration of Jerusalem will involve benign attitudes from the nations towards Israel and its God, linking it conceptually to the previous *Jeremiah*-text prophesying that gentiles will live peacefully amongst the Israelites, learn the ways of the Israelite nation, and worship their God.¹⁵⁹

To really drive home the theory that Zechariah is a source of allusion in Jacob's Amos-quote, there is a third Zechariah-section which sheds light on both 8:3 and 8:22, namely Zech 2:10-11 (Hebrew numbering, but in the LXX version), with the connection of **ἔθνη πολλὰ** to Zech 8:22 and the connection of the verb **κατασκηνώσω** to Zech 8:3, but also with **Παντοκράτωρ** connecting to both texts (see the text in bold below). The passage tells of how God first will come to dwell amongst Israel, followed by the nations fleeing for refuge to the Lord and even becoming part of God's people¹⁶⁰:

10 [...] ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἔρχομαι καὶ **κατασκηνώσω ἐν μέσῳ** σου, λέγει Κύριος.
11 καὶ καταφεύξονται **ἔθνη πολλὰ** ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ ἔσονται αὐτῷ εἰς λαόν, καὶ κατασκηνώσουσιν ἐν μέσῳ σου, καὶ ἐπιγνώσῃ ὅτι Κύριος **Παντοκράτωρ** ἐξαπέσταλκέν με πρὸς σέ.

When God comes to dwell with Israel, the gentiles will flee to the Lord and settle in the midst of the Jews, and though this Israel will know that God is at work.¹⁶¹ This passage

¹⁵⁹ Glenny, "Septuagint", 13 f.

¹⁶⁰ Glenny, "Septuagint", 13; Johnson, *Acts*, 264.

¹⁶¹ One noticeable difference between the Septuagint version of Zech 2:11 and the MT, very relevant for this thesis, is that the Hebrew Vorlage reads **אֶשְׁכֵּן בְּתוֹכְךָ**, "I will dwell amongst you", whereas the Greek has the third person plural **κατασκηνώσουσιν ἐν μέσῳ σου**, "They will dwell in your midst". The Hebrew texts states that God's future dwelling amongst His people will be the sign that God has truly sent "me" (the messenger in the text), whereas the LXX version of Zech 2:11 says that the *indwelling of the*

really seems to nail several of the most important points from the Jerusalem meeting, including the gentiles becoming God's people. Though the passage is several steps away from Amos 9 in the chain of *gezera schawa*-allusions brought about by the insertion of ἀναστρέψω in Jacob's Amos-quote, it is definitely very close conceptually!

Too much to handle?

The point of the analysis above, connected to the one, lonely verb stem στρέφω, is that the passages in Jeremiah and Zechariah are discursively and lexically interconnected, and that Jer 12: 15, Zech 8:3, or both, thus can be expected to *draw with it/ them* (into Jacob's Amos 9-quote) the alluded-to terms and concepts of the passages mentioned above. Seems far-fetched?¹⁶² Not according to exegetical standards of Second Temple Judaism. Jacob (or Luke) used the exegetical method of *gezera schawa*, as previously mentioned, where the same word(s) in different passages creates interpretative chains, allowing scripture to be read in the light of a cluster of other passages, without there necessarily existing any explicit narrative connections or textual proximity between those passages.¹⁶³ A Jewish reader of the time would have been familiar with such exegetical methods, enough to recognise the integrative approach of Jacob's interpretive effort.¹⁶⁴

nations amongst the Israelites will be this very same sign. The Septuagint thus makes a good case for seeing the ingathering of gentiles in the midst of Israel as a sign to the Jews that God is at work.

¹⁶² White, for example, questions these kinds of speculations, see White, "Revisiting", 83 ff. He thinks it is enough to only use the connections between the Amos-quote in Acts 7 and the one in Acts 15 to explain Jacob's changes in the Amos 9-quote, with the contrastive *inclusio* (between Amos 5 and 9) telling the story of God's abandoning and returning to Israel.

¹⁶³ Considering the testimony of Acts itself, in 6:2, "οὐκ ἀρεστόν ἐστὶν ἡμᾶς καταλείψαντας τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διακονεῖν τραπέζαις", the narrative does suggest some ten plus years of searching in the "word of God" by the apostles, before leading up to the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15, very likely referring to in-depth studies in the Scriptures to clarify the gospel message.

¹⁶⁴ Glenny, "Septuagint", 9. For discussions of exegetical methods in late Second Temple Judaism, see David Instone-Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992); Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

C. ἀνοικοδομήσω + E. ἀνορθώσω and “the tent of David”

For those who know the original Septuagint version of Amos 9, it might come as a surprise that Jacob replaces the otherwise Messiah-related ἀναστήσω (I will raise up) with ἀνοικοδομήσω (I will build up), thereby missing out on an excellent reference to Jesus’ being raised from the dead. This indicates that the Amos-quote is *not* meant to refer specifically to the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁶⁵ Jacob also once replaces ἀνοικοδομήσω (I will build up) with ἀνορθώσω (I will restore).¹⁶⁶ These inserted verbs create connections to several passages in the Septuagint dealing with the Davidic Dynasty and God’s promises to David.¹⁶⁷ An emphasis is thus placed on *rebuilding* and *restoration*, rather than resurrection: *the gentiles coming to faith is a sign that God is restoring the tent of David.*¹⁶⁸

D. The omissions

Since C and E are connected, I have chosen to handle the in-between omissions here, afterwards. No commentators have really offered any significant thoughts on the meaning of the omissions. Goeman is probably correct when he writes that we should understand the whole quote as an intended merging of several prophets that were considered to connect, rather than to produce the whole Amos-context; Amos is a *conceptual hub*, not a necessary verbatim structure.¹⁶⁹ As White suggests, it therefore probably a way of narrowing down the quote to its essentials, keeping a clear focus on the rebuilding aspect.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles”, 157; Tannehill, *Narrative*, 188.

¹⁶⁶ Glenny, “Septuagint”, 11.

¹⁶⁷ Glenny, “Septuagint”, 19 f.; Tannehill, *Narrative*, 188 f. Cf. 2 Sam 7:11 and 1 Chr 17:12; see Glenny, “Septuagint”, 19 f. for more examples. Here Glenny adds the important point that the books of Samuel and Chronicles count as prophetic material in the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the utterances of David, and thus might have been included in Jacob’s reference to “the prophets”.

¹⁶⁸ White, “Revisiting”, 85.

¹⁶⁹ Goeman, “LXX”, 120.

¹⁷⁰ White, “Revisiting”, 87.

F. ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον

In the original LXX Amos-context, the verb ἐκζητήσωσιν lacks an object, which is supplied in Jacob's quote, "τὸν κύριον". A possible allusion is Zech 8:22 in LXX, a text already mentioned above¹⁷¹: "καὶ ἤξουσιν λαοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ ἔθνη πολλὰ ἐκζητῆσαι τὸ πρόσωπον κυρίου παντοκράτορος ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ [...]". It functions as yet another confirmation that the gentiles will seek God in the midst of Israel.

G. γνωστὰ ἀπ' αἰῶνος

Finally, the addition of **γνωστὰ ἀπ' αἰῶνος** in Jacob's quote is believed to be an echo from Isa 45:21.¹⁷² There, the wording is not the same, but the basic notion of the phrase is similar: "21[...] ἐγγισάτωσαν, ἵνα γινῶσιν ἅμα τίς ἀκουστὰ ἐποίησεν ταῦτα ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. τότε ἀνηγγέλη ὑμῖν Ἐγὼ ὁ θεός, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν ἐμοῦ [...]." This way of inserting an allusion to Isa 45 signals the prophetic consent to the inclusion of members from the nations, defining it as a part of *God's long proclaimed will and plan*.¹⁷³

Summary of Jacob's speech

In total, the above references reveal a sophisticated scriptural argument for the inclusion of the Spirit-bearing gentiles *as* gentiles in God's people, not as a possibility only, but *as the actual fulfilment of prophecies and as one of the major signs that God is restoring the twelve tribes back to the land of Israel*.¹⁷⁴

A summary of prophetic points in Jacob's speech

1. After a period of exile, the people of Israel will return to the promised land
2. The Israelites will seek the Lord and their king David
3. The Lord will return to Zion
4. The Lord will rebuild the tent of David, the Messianic kingdom

¹⁷¹ Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles", 162.

¹⁷² Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles", 164.

¹⁷³ Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles", 165; Glenny, "Septuagint", 14; Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 834.

¹⁷⁴ Glenny, "Septuagint", 14.

5. A “remnant of the humans”, namely the gentiles over whom God’s name have been called, will search for the Lord
6. These gentiles will be a people to the Lord and dwell in the midst of the Israelites – this will be a “sign” to the Israelites from God. It might be the case that this co-dwelling will take place primarily in the diaspora.¹⁷⁵
7. These gentiles will follow the way of the Lord’s people, and they will be continually built up by receiving Mosaic teachings “amongst Israel”.

Why the four prohibitions? – Bauckham and Callan on how the prophetic message of Jacob’s speech connects to the prohibitions of the AD

We have surveyed the speeches of Peter, Barnabas and Paul, and finally Jacob, who seems to settle the issue. They have all witnessed to the inclusion of gentiles in the people of God as an act of God Himself, according to His prophesied plans. But how does the content of these speeches actually connect to the four prohibitions of the AD? It is not explicit neither in the text nor in the co-text, yet the **διὸ**, as was discussed in the beginning of this chapter, indicates an argumentative flow from Peter all through to the AD.¹⁷⁶ *What is the glue holding all the pieces together?*

Richard Bauckham and Terrence Callan are two of the scholars who think that the key, at least to a large extent, is the prepositional phrase “in the midst of”, or simply “among”. We have seen from particularly Jacob’s speech how several allusions point to prophetic texts that speak of the gentiles coming to dwell or somehow be “in the midst of” or “amongst” Israel. This makes sense, seeing that the gentiles have become members of God’s people.

As it turns out, a possible common denominator for the four AD prohibitions is that they stem from a particular group of commandments which, in the Hebrew text, contain the prepositional word **בְּתוֹךְ**, “in the midst of”, in proximity to the actual

¹⁷⁵ Such an interpretation puts points 4-7 before points 1-3. This is a consequence of the mix of prophetic texts, but a conclusion which actually aligns well with Paul’s descriptions of the end-times in Rom 11.

¹⁷⁶ Bauckham, “James”, 460.

prohibition. This brings us back to the exegetical methods discussed earlier concerning Jacob's speech – the textual connections legitimizing the AD seem to require both Greek *and* Hebrew components.

At Sinai and subsequently during the forty-year desert walk, Moses gave hundreds of different commandments in order to prepare the people of Israel to enter the Promised Land and live there in a way that sanctified God, the land and the people. Amongst the Israelites there was also a group of non-Jews, referred to initially as **גֵּרִים** (Ex 12:38), a “mixed multitude” of gentiles. They had joined the Jews in the Exodus from Egypt and were also allowed to enter and live in the land of Israel together with the twelve tribes. Such gentiles were considered to be members of the larger Israelite community. They were not members specifically of the twelve tribes, “Israel according to the flesh”, and were therefore referred to with the term *gerim*, “strangers”, but members they were, nevertheless. They too received their own legislation through Moses in various commandments that they were expected to keep, lest they be subject to ritual and moral impurities and eventually be “rooted out of the people”. Such laws for “*gerim batokh*”, so to speak, are found in Lev 17-18!

This idea has been promoted particularly clearly by Richard Bauckham. In the Hebrew book of Leviticus there are five passages which contain commandments for the *gerim* where the phrase “in the midst of” (Israel) also is part of the text. Out of these five, two refer to the same commandment, which leaves us four separate commandments, all four existent in Lev 17-18.¹⁷⁷ This is an exegesis mainly built on readings of the *Hebrew text*, since the Septuagint does not render the “**בְּתוֹךְ**”-verses in the same consistent manner in order to facilitate this *gezera schawa*-pattern.¹⁷⁸ The result, however, creates a strong conceptual connection, so Bauckham, to Jer 12:16 and Zech 2:11/15 in *both* their Hebrew and LXX versions, alluded to by the Amos 9-quote, since those two verses *also* contain *ἐν μέσῳ*-/ **בְּתוֹךְ**-phrasings.¹⁷⁹ It thus seems that the logic of the **διὸ** in the beginning of the AD-passage looks like this: the gentile Jesus-believers are the long prophesied people-groups “out of the nations” who have come to join Israel and live “in the midst of” the Jews at the commencement of Israel's

¹⁷⁷ Bauckham, “James”, 459.

¹⁷⁸ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles”, 176 f.

¹⁷⁹ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles”, 177; idem. “James”, 458.

restoration. *The gentile Jesus-believers are a renewed “stranger” category, “chosen” gentiles dwelling in the midst of Israel*¹⁸⁰ – therefore, **δὴ**, they should of course adhere to the laws from Moses given particularly to them!

Terrance Callan contributes to this analysis by giving us a little bit more precision in the choice of the exact four prohibitions. Callan agrees, with some of the critics of Bauckham’s theory, that there are more *gerim*-laws that could qualify in Bauckham’s exegesis, and that the four commandments in the Apostolic Decree in no way can be viewed as a simple summary of the (all-in-all 25!) passages of the Torah pertaining to *gerim*. The connection between Lev 17-18 and the Apostolic Decree would be a stronger hypothesis if more factors could be involved in the choice of prohibitions.¹⁸¹ Callan’s own suggestion is to extend Bauckham’s hypothesis by adding the following criteria for the chosen prohibitions:

1. an **שִׂיִּי**-formulation (meaning “everyone”), and
2. the threat of being **קָרַח** (“rooted out of/ cut off from the people”, the so-called *Ausrottungsformel*¹⁸²).

When the **קָרַח**-criterion is supplemented by the *Ausrottungsformel* and the **שִׂיִּי**-formulation, the four prohibitions make a nicer fit, coming from just about the only passages in the Hebrew Bible that contain all three ingredients.¹⁸³ The reason for the commandments are thus still *purely* exegetical in Callan’s eyes, referring to a category of people who live amongst Israel and, since they can be threatened with **קָרַח**, in some way *have been incorporated into the people of Israel*.¹⁸⁴

I am personally persuaded by Bauckham’s and Callan’s suggestions. Even if the threat of being rooted out is not explicit in Acts 15, it does exist in Acts 3:23, and in the Pauline letters (often expressed through the threat of *anathema*, as in Gal 1:8-9 and 1 Cor 16:22, but also through the language of cutting, cf. Rom 11:22 and Gal 5:4),

¹⁸⁰ Bauckham, “Peter”, 120; idem, “James”, 459.

¹⁸¹ Callan, “Background”, 286.

¹⁸² Callan, “Background”, 288.

¹⁸³ Callan, “Background”, 288. Later rabbinic interpreters also understood **שִׂיִּי** as a reference to laws which applied to both gentiles and Jews, interestingly enough discussing several of the non-AD laws for *gerim* which Callan brings up, see Callan, “Background”, 292.

¹⁸⁴ Callan, “Background”, 287 f., 297.

showing that it indeed *was* part of an early identity discourse amongst Jesus-believers.¹⁸⁵ So, case closed? Jürgen Wehnert, who has contributed so well to our understanding of the “choked” prohibition and the nature of the AD overall, does not quite think so. He disagrees with Callan and Bauckham, though not so much in the conclusions as in the theory of how the Jerusalem congregation conducted their exegesis. Wehnert believes that the method of *gezera schawa* is an insufficient answer to explain the AD. Neither the threat of being rooted out, nor the phrases with גִּיּוּרָא , so Wehnert, present a coherent enough picture of the reason for the AD. Instead he builds his argumentation on the phrase ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων in the beginning of the decree-passage, at which we had a closer look in chapter 2. The AD is all about *purity* and it spells out to the gentile members of God’s people what they must avoid in terms of impurities: idolatry, sexual misconduct, and blood (“choked” is here seen by Wehnert as an extension of the blood prohibition, interpreted as a discouragement from eating blood leftovers in badly slaughtered meat). *The AD commandments are the only gerim-commandments connected to warnings on impurity* (Wehnert equates the only exception, Lev 20:2-5 on Moloch-worship, with Lev 17:1-9, a fair assessment if we consider the four AD terms as “labels”).¹⁸⁶ However, Wehnert too ends up with Lev 17-18 as the main source for the AD.

Perhaps we need not choose the one or the other. Wehnert has shown that there is a logic to the choice of the four prohibitions, irrespective of whether the exegetical solution suggested by Bauckham and Callan is correct or not: but I prefer to see Wehnert’s objections as a form of verification of their hypotheses, rather than as two mutually exclusive things.

As a side note, Wehnert’s interpretation becomes a strong indicator of *the level of Torah purity* observed by the Jerusalem congregation under Jacob’s leadership: its members, as Luke describes in *Acts*, participated in the temple services on a daily basis, thus out of necessity strictly adhering to the Levitical laws for cultic purity. The AD

¹⁸⁵ See for example Göran Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 5* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1972) and Hyung Dae Park, *Finding Herem? – A Study of Luke-Acts in the Light of Herem* (London: t&t clark, 2007) for studies of discourses pertaining to “rooting out” in the New Testament.

¹⁸⁶ Wehnert, *Freiheit*, 239 ff. See also Zellentin, “Gentile”, 119, who calls such commandments “gentile purity laws”.

harmonises with an integration of gentiles into precisely such a form of pious lifestyle, further implying that the Torah carried the same weight also in the diaspora (where the majority of the addressed gentiles would live).¹⁸⁷

What about Moses?

There is one more thing which makes the Torah the most likely source for the AD. After the four prohibitions have been spelled out, Jacob makes a *γὰρ* statement in v. 21, indicating that this statement somehow is an *argument* for, or an *explanation* to (“for indeed”), the choice of the four prohibitions in v. 20:¹⁸⁸

*21 Μωϋσῆς γὰρ ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων κατὰ πόλιν τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἔχει ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκόμενος.*¹⁸⁹

A solution to this (to many commentators) vague formulation has already been hinted at: Jacob seems to suggest that he has not invented these laws himself – Moses is the authority upon which the prohibitions rest.¹⁹⁰ But in what way? The *Jeremiah* 12-allusion in the Amos 9-quote in Jacob’s speech gives us a new possible solution to this question mark: if Jeremiah expected the gentiles to be (re)established in their respective national regions (and not necessarily in the geographical region of Biblical Israel), and subsequently be taught the way of God’s people and be “built up in the midst of my people”, then *diaspora synagogue settings* would be the most likely candidate for such a scenario. In this scenario, the gentiles are then meant to be members of God’s people

¹⁸⁷ Wehnert, *Freiheit*, 245.

¹⁸⁸ Beale, Brendsel and Ross, *Interpretive*, 33; Haenchen, *Acts*, 450 fn. 1; Pervo, *Acts*, 378 (who acknowledges the function of *γὰρ*, but fails to see any “satisfactory link” between the Moses statement and the Apostolic Decree); Savalle, “Reexamination”, 466.

¹⁸⁹ Nestle-Aland 28th edition, <https://www.nestle-aland.com/en/the-28-edition/> [2020-01-24]

¹⁹⁰ Haenchen, *Acts*, 450, 469; Jervell, *Theology*, 59; Mark Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 221 f., who believes that the AD is evidence to the Torah’s enduring importance also in the Messianic Era; van den Sandt, “Explanation”, 93; Zellentin, “Judeo-Christian”, 132.

outside of the Holy Land (at least for a time), whereas the Jews have their promises of a return to the actual land of Israel.¹⁹¹

According to Deut 29:11 and 31:12, the *gerim* are supposed to receive Torah-instructions together with the rest of the nation of Israel, and to equally as much commit themselves to obedience as the Jewish members of the people, passing on their Torah-learning to their children. Jacob's final words in Acts 15:21 might thus be considered a declaration that the gentile Jesus-believers are to take part in the weekly Torah-instructions just as much as the Jewish people (since weekly Torah studies in many places had become an accepted way of fulfilling the commandment of Deut 31:10 to instruct the people in the whole Torah every seven years¹⁹²)¹⁹³. Jewish (and gentile) synagogue attendees (going through select parts of the Torah possibly on a yearly basis) were likely to already have been repeatedly instructed on these four prohibitions,¹⁹⁴ not only because they concerned *gerim* but equally as much because *Jews too* were under the same threat of *karet*, being "rooted out", if they omitted the observance of these same prohibitions. This might be why Jacob seems to assume that the teachings of Moses make the four parts of the AD obvious. Either way, the commandments given in the Apostolic Decree, so Jacob, are to be found in the Mosaic legislation and should be recognisable – the gentile believers must keep the Torah for "proselytes and sojourners in the land".¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ I think that the four commandments are meant for everyday life in the diaspora – an idea supported by the fact that the letter from Jerusalem with the Apostolic Decree is addressed also to Cilicia, outside of Israelite land, by the justification of the Torah being read "in every city" (15:21), and by Jacob's statement in 21:25, reiterating the commandments for believing gentiles in a very general way. See Zellentin, "Judeo-Christian", 132, for a concurring opinion.

¹⁹² See Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishna* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2006), 63 f.

¹⁹³ Bauckham hints at a similar possibility, as he states that the AD prohibitions "are not a novel invention but have been read out in the synagogues in every city from ancient times", see Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles", 178; cf. Gerard Rouwhorst, "Leviticus 12-15 in Early Christianity" in *Purity and Holiness*, eds. Poorthuis, M. J. H. M. and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 181-193, p. 181.

¹⁹⁴ S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 84, who thinks that the verb κηρύσσοντες (v. 21) points to this.

¹⁹⁵ Haenchen, *Acts*, 469 f.; Jervell, *Theology*, 59; Johnson, *Acts*, 273 (including quote); Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 838 f.

4. The Antiochian Conflict in Acts 15:1-2+5-6

We've had a look at the AD, and at the speeches which envelop the decree. Those chapters have yielded some possible conclusions as to the nature of the prohibitions, the reasons why they were given, and the identity of the gentile followers of Jesus: at lot seems to centre on a *gerim*-like identity and on issues of purity. But is this borne out as we look at the preceded and eventually created the need for the Jerusalem meeting to begin with? This chapter, focusing on Acts 15:1-6 as a *historical context* to the AD, and the next chapter, focusing on the *cultural* context as evidenced in Acts chapters 10 and 11, will allow us with more certainty to understand why the four commandments were given, since they focus on the problem of Jews and gentiles *mixing*, as it were.

Initially, it is helpful to underline that the issue in the Jerusalem meeting does not concern *the Torah*. Whatever happened in Cornelius' home or in Antioch, no one has gathered in Jerusalem to discuss the Torah per se. In traditional Christian thinking, the Jerusalem meeting has often somehow been turned into the time and place where early Christianity decided that the Torah ultimately was of no consequence (though Jews were allowed to keep it as a matter of tradition and cultural heritage). In the sections of Acts that we have analysed so far, however, the Jewish Law has been portrayed as nothing but *an authority*; this impression will remain in the upcoming chapters as well.¹⁹⁶

Acts 15 tells instead of a conflict in Antioch, arising over the demand for circumcision made against gentile Jesus-followers by certain Jewish believers from Judea: “Καί τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐδίδασκον τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὅτι, ἐὰν μὴ **περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως**, οὐ δύνασθε **σωθῆναι**.” (v. 1). Paul and Barnabas step forward as defenders of a preserved gentile status; they are sent to Jerusalem to resolve the conflict together with the elders of the Jesus-following community there. Once they reach Jerusalem, some Pharisaic believers repeat the demand for

¹⁹⁶ See Jervell, *Theology*, 54-61, for a good case that Luke's view of the Torah is very positive, exemplified amongst other things through the Jewish believers being *zealous for the law* and believing *everything* in the Law and the Prophets (indicating that non-believing Jews were less strict on Torah observance and did not believe in all the promises in the Bible; see also Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 59-68.

circumcision, clarifying that obedience to the Torah is incumbent on all gentiles (once they are circumcised): “Ἐξανέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες λέγοντες ὅτι δεῖ περιτέμναι αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως.” (v. 5). If circumcision and Torah had not still been mandatory for Jews in the Jesus-movement, the likelihood is indeed small that demands for *gentile* circumcision and Torah-obedience would have surfaced. Furthermore, if the Torah had been done away with, why involve the Jerusalem leadership to deal with a closed case, as it were – and had the issue anyhow been brought to the elders in the Israeli capital, we surely would have seen the issue of Torah for *Jews* being dealt with, upon which to base any decisions on *gentile* Torah-observance. Yet, no such evidence exists in the Acts narrative. The only ones who are not to be παρενοχλεῖν are τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν, so Jacob in Acts 15:19 – and it is only regarding them that Torah-demands are seen as problematic.¹⁹⁷ These intuitive recognitions are too often lost on commentators.¹⁹⁸

Instead, the whole situation indicates the Torah-oriented power structure of the earliest believers: gentiles were subordinate to *Jewish halakha*¹⁹⁹. The Jerusalem elders, led by Jacob, had the highest authority to settle the matter.²⁰⁰ This is further indicated in Acts 15:24, where Jacob underscores that the men from Judea in 15:1 had lacked such authority – Jacob had indeed not sent them, indicating that the reaction of the believers in Antioch (“ἐτάραξαν ὑμᾶς λόγοις ἀνασκευάζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν”, v. 15:24) was due precisely to the fact that they *believed* the Judeans had come from Jacob, seeing themselves as obligated to follow any Jerusalem Decrees (only Barnabas and Paul explicitly opposed the newcomers).²⁰¹ Another way to put it would be that gentiles attached themselves to Israel, “the root”, when they became believers in the Jewish Messiah (cf. Rom 11:18).²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 341.

¹⁹⁸ See for example Pervo, *Acts*, 370, who writes: “Soteriologically speaking, the Torah is a dead letter. Jews are free to follow it, insofar as they do not trouble others.”

¹⁹⁹ Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 817; Zetterholm, *Formation*, 144.

²⁰⁰ D. Thomas Lancaster, “Radial Ecclesiology,” *Messiah Journal* 124 (2016): 34-45, p. 41.

²⁰¹ Haenchen, *Acts*, 452.

²⁰² Callan, “Background”, 297.

Acts 15:1 tells us that the Antiochian conflict involved the subject of *salvation*.²⁰³ Earlier in Acts, in chapter 11, Jerusalem believers expressed astonishment over the fact that God has given “τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν” also to the gentiles, and that Cornelius and his whole household in this way had been saved (Acts 11:14).²⁰⁴ We may therefore conclude that Jews at this time, Jesus-believers included, did not take for granted that God would bestow eternal life on the nations. Accordingly, this realisation of gentile salvation was questioned in Antioch: believing non-Jews were not quite safe yet.²⁰⁵

Presumably, they needed to become Jews in order to be certain of “their share in the world to come” (an assertion questioned already in the days of the earliest Jesus-movement, by John the Baptist, cf. Luke 3:7-9).²⁰⁶ There might also have arisen suspicions that gentiles who did not want to undergo conversion were holding back on their loyalty and total commitment to the God of Israel.²⁰⁷ Should the gentile believers not go through with conversion, they would (at least long-term) risk to forfeit their salvation. Therefore, the argument which arose could be defined as one of *soteriology* (besides *halakha* and which commandments one much keep as a covenant obligation).²⁰⁸ The Judeans and the Pharisees could very well have believed that gentile believers had initiated some kind of salvific process – nothing in the debate in Antioch necessitates that anyone rejected a meaningful change in the lives of the believing and Spirit-filled gentiles. What they did do, however, was to demand a change of halakhic *status*, from gentiles into Jews, through the act of circumcision.

²⁰³ Haenchen, *Acts*, 443.

²⁰⁴ Johnson, *Acts*, 198.

²⁰⁵ den Sandt, “Explanation”, 73; Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 447.

²⁰⁶ Bauckham, “Peter”, p. 118; Le Cornu and Shulam, *Acts*, 804 f.; Talbert, *Reading*, 128.

²⁰⁷ Clinton Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Impurity,” *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 505-518, p. 509. Though it is too big a subject to enter here, there were also pockets of so-called Ἰουδαϊσμός flourishing in the region, a religious-nationalistic ideology (rooted in Judea) that at times had resulted, and still did, in demands of forced circumcision on gentiles living on Jewish soil – and possibly, as in this case, in close proximity to Jews, albeit in the diaspora. Such a praxis, however, was not demanded from the Mosaic legislation – ergo the conflict in Antioch (Talbert, *Reading*, 129).

²⁰⁸ John Perry, “Are Christians the ‘Aliens Who Live in Your Midst’? Torah and the Origins of Christian Ethics in Acts 10—15,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Volume 29, Issue 2 (Fall/Winter 2009): 157-174, p. 163 f.

We may therefore conclude that the Antiochian conflict corroborates the findings in chapters 2 and 3: the *identity* of gentile believers is at stake. This fits with all three speeches in Jerusalem, bolstering the case for gentile membership in the Messianic communities. On the other hand, even though the time of the Mosaic legislation is not passed, such gentiles should not keep the Torah: at least not in the way that a Jewish person does. What we know from the detailed analysis of the four prohibitions and the speeches, however, allows us to understand that “*παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως*” (v. 15:5) is not an all-or-nothing statement. There is Torah also for the non-Jew. This seems to be what the antagonistic Judeans and Pharisees did not accept.

5. Peter's visit to Cornelius in Acts 10-11

In chapter 3, we got a brief glance into the experiences of Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys, which prompted them so resolutely to defend the gentile status within the Jesus-movement. But why did Peter side with them? From his speech at the Jerusalem meeting I draw the following quote: “ὁμοῖς ἐπίστασθε ὅτι ἀφ’ ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίων ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου ἀκοῦσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ πιστεῦσαι” (Acts 15:7). He seems to be saying “You should know how to resolve this matter! You know what happened!” – and he is referring to the Cornelius incident, the first clear occasion in his own life where he himself got to see how God gave the Spirit to non-Jews.

In order to gather the last pieces of the analytical mosaic in this thesis, it is time to go back to the very beginnings of the gentile mission, in Acts chapters 10-11, and look at the primary watershed event that made a conflict about gentiles possible in the first place.²⁰⁹ Since *identity* and *purity* have turned out to be two major themes so far, focus will be put these two notions as we turn to the Cornelius event, to extract insights about cultural parameters within which to better understand the Judean/ Pharisaic position and the AD. We will do so by looking at Peter's own change of heart.

The story in Acts 10:1-11:18 of how Cornelius and his household received faith and the Holy Spirit, but also of the resistance it met in Jerusalem, is the second longest narrative section in Acts (only Paul's journey to Rome is longer); since length is also an expression of importance, the pericope accordingly makes out the one most important section of Acts *before* we get to Acts 15. It is no surprise that we should find interpretative keys to the AD discussion here.²¹⁰ It allow us to survey some of the more deep-seated assumptions in second temple Jewish views on gentiles, but also the Torah basis for such dispositions. Most importantly, it also presents Luke's understanding of the rift between Jews and non-Jews, and how belief in Messiah Jesus changes this relationship.

²⁰⁹ These two chapters are intimately connected, making the division between chapter 10 and 11 somewhat unfortunate for the casual reader; it is important to read these two chapters closely together in order to properly understand the meaning of the events unfolding.

²¹⁰ Pervo, *Acts*, 264.

The Cornelius episode in Acts 10-11

Acts 10:1-11:18 can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. Cornelius, a gentile in Caesarea, receives an angelic visitation asking him to send for Peter the Apostle;
2. Peter, who is staying as a guest in Joppa, has a vision wherein the Holy Spirit reveals to him that he needs to change his attitude and understanding of (at least certain) gentiles;
3. After his vision, Peter accepts gentile messengers from Cornelius as guests into the house where he is staying;
4. The following day, Peter goes to Cornelius' home and preaches the gospel;
5. As Peter begins to speak, the holy Spirit falls on the gentile listeners: Peter realises that God accepts devout gentiles as members of God's people, which is the final insight about the meaning of the vision he received, earlier on in the chapter;
6. When Peter comes to Jerusalem, he has to explain why he mingled with gentiles and even ate with them; he reports of the outpouring of the Spirit on gentiles, which is accepted by the Jerusalem believers as God's doing.

Let us begin at the end of the pericope. Peter is being heavily criticized by other Jews in Jerusalem for having mingled and eaten with non-Jews (“uncircumcised men”, ἄνδρας ἀκροβυστίαν ἔχοντας, Acts 11:3) as he was visiting Cornelius' household.²¹¹ He is not, however, criticized for the food he has eaten – no one is accusing him of breaking any dietary laws.²¹² He has simply mixed with the wrong crowd – and he knows it. He defends his behaviour by relating a vision that God gave him: not because it somehow aids him in explaining why he ate non-kosher food (since he did not), but because it helps him justify why he had associated so closely with gentiles.²¹³ The message of the

²¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 148 f.

²¹² Heilig, “New Perspective”, 473; Mark Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 83.

²¹³ Not least since the AD, five chapters later in Acts, focuses very much on food issues, and for gentiles at that (!): any notion of cancelled kosher menu for Jewish believers thus seems out of question, see Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 125.

vision involved *the changed status* of gentiles: God had cleansed the hearts of those particular God-fearers who had gathered in Cornelius' home (Acts 11:9; 15:9).

The first thing to notice in this exchange is that Peter seems to agree that, normally, it would have been a good idea to avoid gentiles. Yet, having now been cleansed by God, these particular gentiles were pure and holy, just like Jews!²¹⁴ This impression is reinforced by the twice-repeated verb διακρίνειν, to “make (an ethnic) distinction/distinguish”²¹⁵: in Acts 11:12 Peter informs his Jerusalem brethren of how he was told by God not to διακρίνειν when gentiles came to request a visit from him, and in Acts 15:9 Peter claims that God Himself did not διακρίνειν between “us” (the Jews) and “them” (the gentiles).²¹⁶ The insinuation is that without the vision, to διακρίνειν would be the norm.

The dominant theme is thus one of (not) making distinctions between *believing* Jews and *believing* God-fearers from the other nations of the world.²¹⁷ Ethnicity is no longer the lone defining factor of membership in God's people; gentiles too, although quite unexpectedly, can receive “ἡ δωρεὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος” (Acts 10:45).²¹⁸

Gentiles as partakers of an Israelite covenant – not a pork feast

The reception of the Holy Spirit among gentiles was indeed an extraordinary event. Prophetic texts about the New Covenant spoke only in clear terms of how the Spirit was going to be poured out *on Israel*. The fact that the Holy Spirit was given *only to Jews* at Pentecost (Acts 2) was thus all in accordance with such Scriptures.²¹⁹ The outpouring of the Spirit on gentiles must therefore somehow have insinuated *a change of gentile status in relation to the nation of Israel*: the gentiles were now *affiliated* with Israel, since they had received the Spirit that God had promised specifically to Israel (*Israel proper* must therefore remain for this affiliation to be possible, since (logically) only *Israel proper*

²¹⁴ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 138.

²¹⁵ See Danker, *Concise*, 91.

²¹⁶ David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 49.

²¹⁷ Perry, “Christians”, 169.

²¹⁸ Heilig, “New Perspective”, 473 ff.

²¹⁹ cf. Jer 31:31 ff., Ez 11:19 f., 36:24 ff. Luke demonstrates his awareness of the New Covenant in Luke 22:20.

can receive God’s promises to Israel: gentiles are an extension of this phenomenon, not a replacement).

However, this conclusion was not intuitive to Peter. For things to unfold the way that God wanted, Peter must have a change of heart regarding the heart of the gentiles, so to speak. If we want to be able to follow Luke’s logic, we must first discard the traditional Christian misconception of how Acts 10 puts an end to Lev 11 and God’s dietary laws in the Torah. Peter’s heart is not changed on the gentile issue because he quits the kosher kitchen. Nothing in Peter’s actions (he thrice refuses to “slaughter and eat” from the animals presented to him²²⁰), in his expressed conclusions (“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right,” Acts 10:34-35), nor in the following critique from fellow Jewish believers in Jerusalem in chapter 11 (as we have seen), reveals that Peter has actually eaten anything unlawful. The way Peter expresses himself when commanded to slaughter and eat, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean” (Acts 10:14), alludes to Ez 4:14, “behold, my soul has not been defiled with impurity and I have not eaten what has died of itself or what has been torn by a wild beast since my birth until now, nor has any stale (Heb. פִּגְגִּיל)²²¹ flesh entered into my mouth”. Peter stoutly stands by the Torah, as he has all his life – the threefold refusal does not end in a pork feast. The whole point of the Cornelius story is rather that:

- Peter and other Jews have an inclination towards *avoiding intimate gentile company* (albeit not necessarily frequent or even daily *contact*);
- God shows Peter (and eventually other fellow Jews who accompany Peter to Cornelius’ home) that there is *no need for Torah-based boundaries between Israel and certain, by God hand-picked (or rather heart-picked), gentiles*.

²²⁰ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 397.

²²¹ This term connects with the rabbinic discussion in chapter two, on forbidden meats; the rabbis used פִּגְגִּיל as one of the terms denoting forbidden meat, of some sort of category different from נֶבֶלָה and טֶרֶף. Therefore, the fact that Peter expresses himself in terms reminiscent of Ez 4:14 (where the passage is phrased similarly to the expanded Targumic and rabbinic understanding of Lev 17 and the inclusion of bad slaughter) makes for an interesting connection to Acts 15:20: as far as diet is concerned, *the gentiles in Messiah are soon seemingly to be officially required to keep roughly to the same dietary categories that Ezekiel did, and, by inference, Peter!*

This is what we saw in the analysis of Peter’s speech in chapter 3 of this thesis: those gentiles whom God has chosen, have been cleansed and have received the Spirit of God, having thus been made into members of God’s people.²²² This in itself, however, does not give us direct clues as to why the AD later on in chapter 15 was given in the exact form of its four prohibitions. I will therefore try to create an overview below as to *why* second temple Jews would have wanted to erect boundaries between themselves and gentiles in the first place. Those reasons turn out to be fruitful for our understanding of Jacob’s decision on gentile Jesus-believers.

A problem with “mixtures”

Peter claims that mixing with gentiles is *ἀθέμιτος*, forbidden, to him. Historical sources indicate that Jews (at least at certain times) indeed did avoid gentile company, and anti-Semitic sentiments were accordingly common stock in certain Greco-Roman writings, describing Jews as misanthropic, xenophobic, and resorting to *amixia*.²²³ A pertinent issue, though, is whether *ἀθέμιτος* should be understood as referring to a breach of a Torah commandment, or simply as a deviation from customs and traditions – was this *amixia* really commanded by the Torah?

Bauckham builds a good case for abandoning the softer “cultural” interpretation of the word, showing how the term is actually a strong word denoting *breaches of Torah law*.²²⁴ Wahlen concurs, claiming that the contexts of both Acts 10-11 and 15 are *halakhic*, i.e. legal, in nature, and that Peter uses the term *ἀθέμιτος* for Torah-oriented distinctions.²²⁵ Thiessen further emphasises that to do something *ἀθέμιτος* is often to perform a serious sin (like performing abominable sacrifices and eating pork, as in 2 Macc 6:5 and 7:1).²²⁶

So how was mixing with gentiles against the Torah? In scholarly studies there are primarily four reoccurring suggestions:

²²² See for example Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 125 f.; Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, chapter 10.

²²³ John Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 399-444; Zetterholm, *Formation*, 113 f., 119, 150.

²²⁴ Bauckham, “Peter”, 107 f.; See also Johnson, *Acts*, 190.

²²⁵ Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision”, 507 fn. 12.

²²⁶ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 132.

1. The gentiles were impure in some way: Some commentators opt for the hypothesis that a fear among Jews to be defiled by gentile impurities created the practice of *amixia*. According to the Levitical laws given to Israel in the Torah, a person could become *impure* – a notion having nothing to do with hygiene but rather with one’s status before God, in worship and as a citizen of the Promised Land of Israel. Jonathan Klawans has argued that a person in a pure state could be defiled in two ways in the period of Second Temple Judaism:

1) *By ritual impurity*, i.e. by a person going through, or coming into direct contact with, certain natural physiological processes that generate a temporary kind of impurity, like childbirth, death (dead bodies), menstruation and certain skin-diseases. This category *affected a person’s state of holiness*, and was therefore considered to apply *only to Jews*, who by definition alone are *holy* (set apart) since they belong to a *holy nation*, Israel, a nation chosen by God to be in a covenantal relationship with Him. In practical terms, ritual impurity meant that a Jewish person had to go through the proper rituals of purification (taking anything from hours to weeks or months, depending on the form of impurity) and was prohibited from participating in the collective worship to Israel’s God until that person had been purified.

The thing about ritual impurity was that it also was *contagious*: an unclean Jew might convey her or his impurity *to other Jews*, creating a chain-effect of Israelites who had to purify themselves, being temporarily blocked from participating in collective worship and from making sacrifices until such purification had been properly performed.²²⁷ This called for certain strategies of seclusion, both in order to avoid becoming ritually impure or, if such was already the case, in order to avoid making other people ritually impure. Since gentiles, on the other hand, were *not* holy (i.e. chosen by God for a priestly function in the world) and therefore could not participate in the cult in the same way as Jews do, they *could not become ritually impure*.²²⁸ Hence, touching a gentile person was generally of no consequence for a Jew.

²²⁷ Furstenberg, “Outsider”, 47-54.

²²⁸ This is admittedly a tricky issue, since there are indications that the Qumran community considered gentiles to be ritually impure in a contagious way; yet the majority of Jews seem not to have embraced this concept until a few centuries after the emergence of Christianity, as the rabbis developed this notion further: see Bauckham, “Peter”, 94; Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (New York:

Pertinent to this thesis, however, the Torah does describe one category of people who seem to be an exception to the above description: the *gerim*, gentiles living amongst Israel. They *could* become ritually impure, for example by eating meat from an animal that had died naturally or from an attack by another wild animal, as described in Lev 17:15 f. They too had to go through processes of ritual purification.²²⁹ Very likely this is due to the fact that they were in a (limited edition of) Mosaic covenant relationship with God, with their own obligations, as described in chapter 3;²³⁰

2) *By moral impurity*, i.e. through committing certain sins, specifically connected with idolatry, sexual immorality and murder.²³¹ Moral impurity was *not* contagious by physical contact: instead it was contained within the guilty individual on a more permanent basis, and also got “spiritually distributed” onto the land of Israel and onto the temple, creating the need for *Yom Kippur*, one day per year wholly set aside for rituals of purgation to cleanse the Israelite land and the temple from such moral impurities.²³² This kind of impurity could emerge from actions committed by *both* Jews *and* gentiles: for example, the Canaanite tribes were driven out of the land of Canaan (soon to be Israel) because of their immoral actions (Gen 15:16; Lev 18: 24 ff). When enough individual Jews (and gentiles amongst Israel) had committed moral sins in Israel, the Presence of God had to leave the temple; eventually the Jewish people would also be evicted from the land of Israel and be thrown into *exile*.²³³

Oxford university Press, 2002), 20 f.; Jonathan Klawans, “Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism,” *AJS Review* 20/2 (1995): 285-312, p. 286 ff., 290 f., 299 f.; Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 131 f.

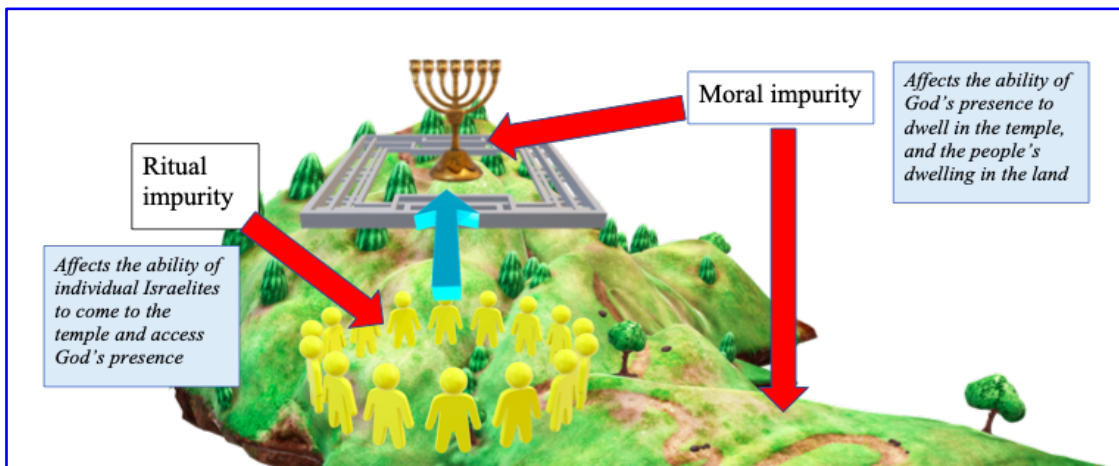
²²⁹ See Klawans, “Notions”, 290 fn. 26: the *gerim* could contract impurity from corpses and carcasses.

²³⁰ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 21.

²³¹ Jonathan Klawans, “Notions”, 289 f.; see also Bauckham, “Peter”, 93.

²³² Bauckham, “Peter”, 94; Klawans, “Notions”, 290.

²³³ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 23.



The system of ritual and moral impurity as it pertains to Israelites.

Non-Jews living in *other nations in the world* could also be morally impure (though their actions did not affect Israel a geographical zone) – moral impurity was therefore a *global* phenomenon.²³⁴ As a matter of fact, gentiles and gentile lands were by some Jewish groups considered to be morally impure by default. In the centuries after Ezra and the return of some of the exiled Jews from Babylon, gentiles increasingly came to be considered as morally impure by nature, *genealogically*, as it were, and hence to be avoided, if possible. At the least, intermarriage became forbidden, since a mixture of gentile and Jewish seed was considered to defile the Jewish lineage, thus making the children unholy. Eventually, any kind of intimate association (including sharing a meal) was preferably to be avoided.²³⁵ Yet this policy of *amixia*, at least in the diaspora, still allowed for the phenomenon of God-fearers partaking in synagogue activities and becoming part of the wider Jewish social network. Gentiles were also allowed to fill the space surrounding the temple in Jerusalem, through which Jews had to pass on their way to the inner precincts.²³⁶ This indicates that the majority of Jews did not consider

²³⁴ There are also Jewish texts expressing the idea that gentile moral impurity affects the world in a more general sense, see for example Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 55 f. The point is, however, that such gentile impurity was not a factor in Israel's own national purgation.

²³⁵ Bauckham, "Peter", 95, 98, 109-112; Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 26-33; Colin House, "Defilement by association," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 143-153, p. 151; Oliver, "Torah Praxis", 425.

²³⁶ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 23; Klawans, "Notions", 298.

gentiles inherently impure in a *contagious* way.²³⁷ Even if a gentile was a hard-core idolater with the lowest moral standards possible, she or he still could not convey this impurity to a Jew. *Contagious impurities were an intra-Jewish issue.*

Commentators on the AD do not always take notice of these details of the Torah-based purity system, and therefore commonly assume that Jews avoided gentiles because of the fear of becoming contaminated by impurity. As the above description has revealed, this model does not quite work. So why avoid them?²³⁸ Another suggestion is that the gentile state of unholiness could profanate.

2. The gentiles were unholy: Since gentiles were *inherently profane* (un-holy, i.e. a non-member of God's people), they could still *profanate*, which means to impinge upon the holiness status of a Jewish person, or a holy item and/ or place, primarily in the context of temple worship. This is not the same as becoming defiled by impurities, although it could have similar consequences in a person's life.

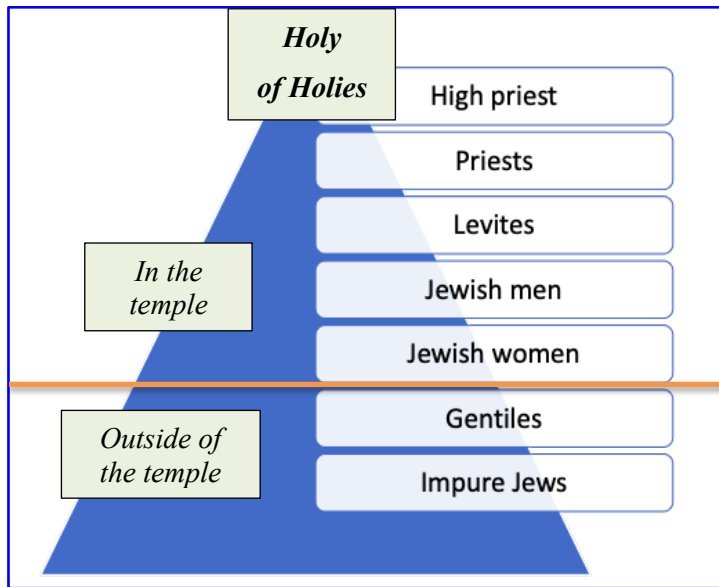
All Jews had different levels of *innate holiness*, depending on their function in the temple worship; the levels descended from the high priest, via priests, Levites and Jewish men (and their wives, so Josephus²³⁹), to Jewish (unmarried/ single) women. The least holy, actually not holy at all and therefore completely profane, were the gentiles, irrespective of gender (although a Jewish person with certain kinds of impurities, for example a person with a genital discharge, was considered to be more dangerous to the sanctity of the temple, as seen in an image further down, and was thus barred from the temple area and even Jerusalem as a whole – strictly speaking an issue of ritual impurity, but with a barring effect similar to an unholy state). A person from a lower level of holiness could compromise objects and spaces of a higher state of holiness. This system therefore regulated the extent to which a Jewish person could access the temple and mix with other Jews in worship: the precinct was divided into segments of increasing levels of holiness, the closer one came to the Holy of Holies, segments which

²³⁷ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 49 f.

²³⁸ I'm painting the broader picture here; there are, as always, exceptions, like the Qumran community, who seems to have considered all non-members, Jewish or gentile, and even members of lesser holiness-levels as impure in contagious ways, but also certain later rabbinic discourses, see Furstenberg, "Outsider", 40f., 46, 52.

²³⁹ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 60. Hayes quotes *Against Apion* 2:103.

persons were allowed to enter only in accordance with their own inherent level of holiness.



Even if a gentile person were to refrain from *all* immoral, idolatrous behaviour and thus expunge all moral impurity from one’s life, such a person would still be *profane*.²⁴⁰ This is also the reason why gentiles could not enter the actual premises of the temple, which had, as it were, too high a level of holiness to allow for their profane status.²⁴¹ Though not without its merits, this seems, once again, a less pertinent hypothesis for the kind of diaspora situation where we find Peter in Acts 10. It is not a matter of the unholy entering the holy, but the reversed – a holy Jew already on unholy ground, entering an unholy gentile home. Being outside of the temple, everyday life was seemingly a constant mishmash of holy and unholy – only when coming close enough to the true source of Holiness, the God of Israel in His designated place of worship, did holiness matter to the extent that demanded seclusion.

3. The gentiles didn’t (want to) eat kosher food: A third hypothesis for Jewish *amixia* is believed to be *kashrut*²⁴²: the *Torah laws* for unclean foods and tithing sometimes made it difficult for Jews to socialize with gentiles, which could be a reason for Jews to avoid

²⁴⁰ Heilig, “New Perspective”, 472.

²⁴¹ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 35; Klawans, “Notions”, 291-295, 298.

²⁴² By *kashrut* I mean the system of dietary rules based on (but not limited to) the *Torah*-commandment on clean and unclean animals.

eating with gentiles. But sometimes gentiles chose to *judaize*, i.e. adhere to certain Torah commandments, to facilitate commensality. This is backed up by both biblical and other texts that show Jews eating together with gentiles (even in gentile homes) as long as dietary requirements are met. In such cases, it is obvious that gentile impurity per se is of no primary concern: as long as the food is prepared properly, Jew-gentile commensality is fully possible.²⁴³ There are even examples of two separate commensality groups being created, with Jews and gentiles eating in proximity to, but not mixed with, each other.²⁴⁴ Thus Peter's claim that eating with gentiles is unlawful or impossible seems yet another ill fit – particularly since we are discussing gentile God-fearers turning to faith in the Messiah, many of them from families who had been God-fearers for generations. Surely, they would be fully knowledgeable on what not to serve or bring to a shared table.

4. *The gentiles were idolaters:* A final motivation for the divide between Israel and the nations centres on the idea that *gentiles generally were considered to practice things forbidden in the Torah*, i.e. to live lawless lifestyles, and to be under the control of demonic forces.²⁴⁵ It was not so much an actual defilement from contact with the gentile person that loomed large, even if the gentile body, as it were, took part in forbidden idolatry.²⁴⁶ Instead the primary fears concerned *the risk of being influenced over time*, into idolatry and all other kinds of sins.²⁴⁷ The Hebrew Bible contains several stories of how Israel was lured into idolatry by being too open to surrounding gentile nations and their cultures. To state that the Torah does not forbid mixing between Israel and the nations, making Peter's behaviour into a distorted "human tradition" unapproved by God, would therefore be too categorical a statement: the incitement to such segregating tendencies is found repeatedly throughout the Mosaic legislation, particularly in Leviticus, but also in other narratives throughout the Hebrew Bible, with the story of Balaam in Numbers as one of the more famous tales of Israel being lured off the straight

²⁴³ Klawans, "Notions", 297; Zetterholm, *Antioch*, 153, 155.

²⁴⁴ Zetterholm, *Antioch*, 130-134, 150.

²⁴⁵ Furstenberg, "Outsider", 40 f.; Klawans "Notions", 294.

²⁴⁶ Klawans, "Notions", 295 f.

²⁴⁷ Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 49 f; Heilig, "New Perspective", 472.

path. Out of the four major explanations for *amixia* presented above, the constant fear of idolatry seems to be the best model for the Acts 10 situation. But this then leaves us with a tricky question: *if* the impurities of gentiles, according to a Jewish majority view, were not contagious, why did Peter’s vision entail debate with a divine voice on the terms **κοινὸν** and **ἀκάθαρτον**, *two concepts connoting purity*?

Views on **ακαθατος** and **κοινος**

As a way of preparing Peter to accept the upcoming gentile visitation and the subsequent invitation to Cornelius’ home, God gives him a vision of clean and unclean animals. In the vision, a voice three times commands Peter to “slaughter and eat”. Peter refuses all three times, in spite of reproach from the voice. In this back and forth, an interesting tension between formulations appear:

Peter’s refusal: οὐδέποτε ἔφαγον πᾶν **κοινὸν** καὶ **ἀκάθαρτον**

The voice: ἃ ὁ θεὸς **ἐκαθάρισεν**, σὺ μὴ **κοίνου**

The *noun forms* used by Peter indicate that he perceives *two* different categories of food in the vision; the NIV chooses to translate the words as “impure” and “unclean”, respectively. To modern ears, those two words sound pretty much the same. This impression is reinforced by the fact that Peter uses *καὶ* – it is possible to translate along the lines of “anything that is impure and unclean”, suggesting that the words are pretty much synonymous. The *verbs* used by the voice in the vision, based on the same word stems as the nouns, seem also to indicate a close semantical relationship between the two nouns, since the one verb can, as it were, undo the other.²⁴⁸ Yet the disjunctive conjunctive ἢ in Acts 11:8, as Peter retells the experience (“κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον οὐδέποτε εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸ στόμα μου”), implies that **κοινὸν** and **ἀκάθαρτον** refer to two different categories. Is there a way to solve this tension? A better understanding of the two Greek terms is needed here.

Looking first at the concept of **ακαθατος**, the term is best translated “impure/unclean”²⁴⁹, and is the usual LXX rendering of the Hebrew **טמא**, referring to various

²⁴⁸ House, “Defilement”, 145 f.

²⁴⁹ Danker, *Concise*, 12.

forms of cultic impurities that a Jewish person can contract through physical involvement in certain natural processes or diseases in daily life.²⁵⁰ This term would thus, semantically, be fairly unproblematic, had it not been for the fact that *ακαθαρτος* is also used to label forbidden meats in Lev 11 and Deut 14.²⁵¹ Unclean foods is a quite different matter from the ritual and moral purity-trajectories in the Torah. Special attention must be paid to the context where the word appears: although fairly simple in its meaning, the word has different referents, and thus different functions. On the other hand, this fact gives us a key to the vision: laws of *kashrut* are activated in Peter's mind, not ritual purity.

Looking at the word *κοινος*, there are some difficulties in assessing its exact meaning. It is often translated as “profane” or “common”, i.e. *not holy*. The word is never used in the LXX to refer to non-kosher or impure food. In non-Jewish, Greco-Roman literature of the time, no *cultic purity*-connotations of the word can be found.²⁵² From its Septuagint beginnings, so to speak, it thus seems to have been distinct from the purity-related *ακαθαρτος*.

Yet, in Jewish post-Biblical writings during the centuries around the birth of Jesus, the word and its derivatives seem partly to have taken on a new or wider meaning, eventually encompassing also forbidden meats and cultic impurities, and more generally referring to *all things outside of the sphere of holiness and purity*, that is, forbidden to a Jewish person – things deemed “common” and belonging to the sphere of the gentile nations. Some texts (like 1 Macc and the Gospel of Mark) seemingly express the idea that one can become *ritually* defiled by consumption of / contact with things called *κοινος*.²⁵³

Matthew Thiessen is one of the scholars who therefore thinks that *κοινος*, like *ακαθαρτος*, simply denotes impurity by the time that Acts is written, and that the two words are synonymous.²⁵⁴ This conclusion, as already hinted at above, is derived partly from the fact that the verb-form *κοινώω* seems to be used as the functional opposite of

²⁵⁰ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 126.

²⁵¹ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 421.

²⁵² Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 127.

²⁵³ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 128 f.; Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 422, 424.

²⁵⁴ See Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 126 ff. for a discussion on the concept and its Greek wording.

καθαρίζω in Acts 10:15 and 11:9, i.e. that κοινώω undoes a purification.²⁵⁵ However, the kind of gentile impurity involved in Acts 10, so Thiessen, is of the *genealogical* kind, i.e. *non-contagious*. Gentiles are born impure, just like certain animals (the non-kosher category) are. This impurity in non-kosher animals does not contaminate while the animal is still alive, but it nevertheless denotes *a category of beings who are potential sources of impurity*, particularly in the kosher kitchen and in the handling of hides and carcasses. Here, a side-note will do us well in our understanding: just as the non-kosher animals are genealogically unclean and born that way, in the opposite way the *kosher* animals are born clean. Actions and natural processes cannot change this while the animal is alive.

<p>Kosher animals, fit for “shechita” slaughter and food = “Born” clean</p>	<p>Non-kosher animals, not fit for any food-related or sacrificial slaughter = “Born” unclean</p>
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When a kosher animal is killed, however, there is a risk that categories alter; when a kosher animal is slaughtered in the prescribed way (according to *shechita* rules), the meat preserves its purity, i.e. its kosher status., and can be eaten without problems. If killed in the wrong way, however, the meat becomes impure, albeit still being kosher. Initially pure and kosher meat thus becomes *spoiled or compromised*. According to Lev 17 (as discussed in chapter 2), such meat may still be eaten, but the person who eats it becomes unclean and must go through a purificatory washing. Deut 14, on the other hand, completely forbids consumption of such meat, making it non-kosher.

Unclean animals, on the other hand, while they do not contaminate as long as they are alive, *automatically* become sources of impurity when they die – and no manner of killing (*shechita* or otherwise) can change this. *Un-kosher meat is thus*

²⁵⁵ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 130 f.

*irredeemable and must never be eaten.*²⁵⁶ This is what Thiessen refers to as genealogical impurity. Such an ontological status cannot be altered by *any* human doing.²⁵⁷

This is where Peter is at, when he sees the mix of animals in his vision. If Thiessen is correct, Peter uses both the words κοινὸν and ἀκάθαρτον to show that he perceives *all* of the animals as inherently impure. This creates a problem, however: from the description of the vision we can safely assume that at least *some* of the animals were kosher, since it included “πάντα τὰ τετράποδα καὶ ἔρπετὰ τῆς γῆς καὶ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ” (Acts 10:12) and “τὰ τετράποδα τῆς γῆς καὶ τὰ θηρία καὶ τὰ ἔρπετὰ καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ” (Acts 11:6). Apart from reptiles (“creeping things”), all these categories contain clean species. Why did Peter dismiss them wholesale?

Isaac Oliver gives us a possible solution. He differs with Thiessen and believes that Luke indeed did intend a different nuance in meaning between the two words κοινὸν and ἀκάθαρτον. To *profane* something (the verb-form κοινώω) is not purity-related but has to do with changing the status of something *from holy into unholy* (i.e. common), as we have touched upon in the overview on holiness earlier in this chapter. Expressed in ethnic terms, *non-Jews* could destroy the holiness of items, foods and the precincts *in the Jewish temple cult* by coming into contact with them, or by entering further than the court of the gentiles in the Jerusalem temple (which, technically speaking, was not a part of the actual sacred temple area).²⁵⁸ A good example of this principle at work is the Acts 21 incident where Paul is accused of bringing a gentile into the temple: the terms used to describe his crime are κεκοίνωκεν (21:28) and βεβηλῶσαι (24:6), which both concern *profanation* of holiness, not desecration of purity. The term κοινὸν thus captures this nuance of profaneness, and Peter’s exclamation should best be translated “anything that is profane and unclean”.²⁵⁹

However, this nuance of profanation seems difficult to apply when we return to the vision: 1) Nothing states that the space in the vision is holy ground, and the

²⁵⁶ Here we find the terminologically confusing phenomenon of two kinds of impurity pertaining to meat. Non-kosher meat is always impure in a *genealogical* way, which really means that it can never be eaten. With kosher animals slaughtered in the wrong way, however, the second kind of impurity mentioned is of a *ritual* kind, contagious and in need of purification.

²⁵⁷ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 134-137, 139.

²⁵⁸ Bauckham, “Peter”, 100.

²⁵⁹ Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 426-429. See also Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 50, who concurs.

existence of unclean animals makes it very unlikely. Profanation of the place is thus not a viable option; 2) there is a good chance that all animals in the vision were unholy – being kosher only denotes that an animal is fit for slaughter and consumption, not that it has been set apart for slaughter in the temple service or for God in some other way, which would be the basic definition of holiness to an animal. Most meat that Jews ate in their life was common (profane). Peter certainly may have stuck to a diet of kosher (i.e. pure) meat all his life, like other Jews, but should we really understand him also to be saying that he had only eaten *holy* food, consecrated to the temple? Nothing in the gospel texts indicates anything of that sort. On the contrary: as a disciple of Jesus he was supposed to eat anything that people put in front of him (cf. Luke 10:7).

There is a third option in this debate on κοινος, which I believe to be the most useful in interpreting Peter’s vision. The word could indicate some sort of influence, from the impure towards the pure, or some kind of deviation from laws of *shechita*. Something which is pure can be considered suspicious or “common” simply by the close presence of something impure, even if the impurity source is not obviously contagious.²⁶⁰ Having clean and unclean animals mixed with each other, as in the vision, should not be a problem to Peter: the unclean animals, since they are still alive, are not contagious, and he could simply choose from the clean ones, which by definition are allowed to be eaten (both for sacrificial and profane use).

Yet, looking at the mixture of animals, Peter *only* uses the words κοινος and ακαθαρτος to describe them – no animals are designated as καθαρος, clean. The term ακαθαρτος clearly refers to the Torah definition of *unclean/ non-kosher* animals (for example the reptiles in the vision²⁶¹) – which means that κοινος somehow must refer to *clean* animals (!).

Clean/ kosher animals = κοινος	Unclean/ non-kosher animals = ακαθαρτος
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²⁶⁰ House, “Defilement”, 147.

²⁶¹ James D. G. Dunn (1996), *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 137.

The voice, in replying to Peter, seemingly ignores the unclean animals, and only focuses on the pure ones, *those God has purified*,²⁶² saying “ὁ θεὸς ἐκαθάρισεν, σὺ μὴ κοίνου”, referring to the fully kosher animals which Peter refuses to eat since he considers them to be κοίνοι.²⁶³ The voice rejects his discrimination.²⁶⁴

Colin House emphasises that if the *kashrut* laws somehow had been abolished through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, or at least for Jews who had received the Spirit (or any similar approach), the reply from the voice rather should have sounded “What God has cleansed you must not call unclean”, meaning that *all foods* were now allowed for consumption. Since this is not the case, the actual dialogue between Peter and the voice actually *confirms* the ongoing validity of distinguishing between clean and unclean animals. The problem is rather Peter’s in-between category, the κοινός.²⁶⁵ House believes that this category is, so to speak, a dietary outgrowth of *halakha* in tandem with the above described process of ethnic separation in the aftermath of the Babylonian exile.²⁶⁶ Previously non-contagious people (gentiles) became potential sources of impurity – and foods otherwise deemed clean might be compromised.

Clinton Wahlen has a similar approach. He thinks that κοινός denotes a third category apart from clean and unclean meat, and suggests that Peter’s stance might be similar to *the rabbinic Shammaite view* that gentiles always were bent on idolatry, making all of their actions part of an idolatrous matrix, also involving food.²⁶⁷ κοινός could therefore bear reference to clean and kosher meat for which there still might be reasons to *suspect* that it has been handled by someone (usually a gentile) with *idolatrous intentions*, or at least by someone who has not slaughtered the meat properly, and that the meat accordingly has become contaminated by impurity.²⁶⁸ When the clean

²⁶² House, “Defilement”, 148 f.

²⁶³ Even if the verb ἐκαθάρισεν implies a process of animals *becoming* clean, the discussion most likely refers to such animals which God already, through Lev 11 and Deut 14, had pronounced as clean (since that in fact was what God once did, in giving the laws of Leviticus through Moses) – yet the symbolic reference is of course to the new status of transformed gentile Jesus-followers.

²⁶⁴ House, “Defilement”, 149.

²⁶⁵ House, “Defilement”, 149.

²⁶⁶ House, “Defilement”, 151.

²⁶⁷ Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision”, 507, 511.

²⁶⁸ Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision”, 512 f.

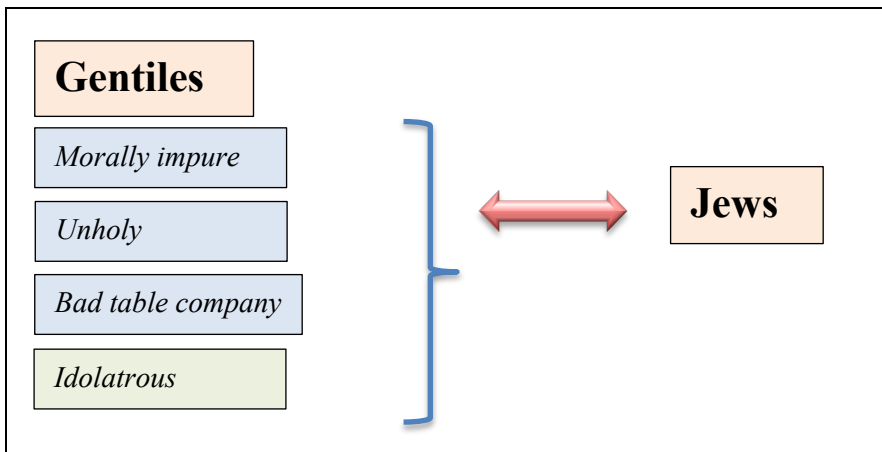
and unclean thus mingle, be it animals or people or both, it gives enough reason to avoid contact with both categories. This is defined as *defilement by association*, a term used by House but also adopted by Wahlen.²⁶⁹ Even if unclean animals, while alive, do not contaminate clean animals, Peter is scandalised by the mix in the vision, maybe since the total impression of the disarray of animals triggers feelings of lack of control and suspicion. Peter’s knee-jerk reaction to reject *all* animals in the vision, by using the two categories analysed above, strongly suggests that he knew there were kosher animals (since he saw them), but that *Peter, not having inspected the animals, disqualified them wholesale as an act of pious safeguarding, including the animals which were normally permitted by the Torah*. He could, however, not call such animals unclean (since God indeed had declared them kosher) – so he labelled them as “common”, i.e. potentially compromised.

Similar to the rabbinic reasoning behind טְרֵפָה in chapter 2, the term κοινός might thus designate *kosher* animals which are *unfit for slaughter* due to some sort of blemish, invisible disease or internal injury. A mix of clean and unclean animals gathered like that in the same spot, presumably for the potential consumption of their flesh, increases the likelihood that some of the animals, though kosher, could suffer from invisible blemishes, similar to the “stale” (פְּגוּלָה) meat that Ezekiel swore he had never eaten! The whole scenario is anything but a controlled *shechita*-regulated environment. It could be presented as the difference between coming to a Jewish and a gentile butcher: *the mixing signalled indifference to, or ignorance of, Torah standards*. It is this third “defilement by association” option which turns out to make the most sense in Peter’s vision.

The interpretation of Peter’s vision

In summary, our survey of theories for Jewish *amixia* and concepts of purity and profaneness in food has yielded something akin to the two images below. The first image shows the general fears that Jews could have pertaining to close association with Jews, with green marking the hypothesis I find most rewarding for the analysis of *amixia* in Acts 10:

²⁶⁹ House, “Defilement”, 147; Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision”, 514.



In the second image, the various interpretations of two terms *ακαθαρτος* and *κοινος* are summarized, with the green space containing the most likely candidate in my estimation:

	<i>ακαθαρτος</i>	<i>κοινος</i>
1.	<i>impure</i>	<i>impure</i>
2.	<i>impure</i>	<i>profane</i>
3.	<i>impure</i>	<i>potentially contaminated by mixing</i>

Due to the setting of the chapter, Peter’s vision must be understood as pertaining to whom one might socialise with – not actual food. It is a *vision*, not a real situation. God is communicating something other than what “meats the eye” (pardon the pun). With a futuristic application, addressing the gentiles that Peter will soon meet, the vision could be interpreted along two main lines:

1. *Jews* are the *clean* animal, and non-Jews are the *unclean* animal, being ontologically distinct and unable to influence/ defile each other. Had this been Luke’s view, Peter could probably just have chosen from the clean animals in the vision, without fear. Since he rejects the clean animals, yet does not reject Jewish persons (neither believers nor non-believers), the clean animals more likely represent something else in this narrative, which brings us to option 2;
2. The clean animals represent *gentiles* who are *morally clean*, but who have not converted to become Jews, and thus still live in their gentile surroundings and

families, i.e. among the unclean animals. This is probably how we should understand the two categories in Peter’s vision.²⁷⁰

As I have argued above, out of the four theories on Jewish *amixia* I believe that fear of idolatry was the most common and dominant discourse: it creates an air of suspicion, rather than of clear-cut lines between the two groups. This mode of relations fits the second interpretation of Peter’s vision: the status of seemingly “clean” gentiles can never be clearly asserted, since they might on and off participate in idolatry or be persuaded to abandon their inclinations towards the Jewish worship of God. Though actually morally clean, they are considered *potentially contaminated*, as it were, by gentile sentiments and idolatrous intentions in their surrounding environment – a view which actually puts the pre-vision Peter in the same ideological group as the Judeans and Pharisees in Acts 15. The only way for gentiles to become something “other”, is by conversion and the concomitant complete transformation of one’s essence into a Jew. Since God knew that Peter would greet the gentiles with this kind of an attitude, the vision was constructed to question Peter’s κοινος-category, to open him up beforehand to the category of non-converting, gentile members of God’s people who are not constantly “potentially compromised”. Building on the three options for ακαθαρτος and κοινος above, option number three thus makes the best fit for how Peter would have viewed Cornelius (in green below), had they met without a vision, so to speak:

	<i>Cornelius was...</i>
1.	<i>impure</i>
2.	<i>morally pure but ontologically/ ethnically profane</i>
3.	<i>potentially contaminated by mixing</i>

Through the vision, God is telling Peter (καὶ μοὶ ὁ θεὸς ἔδειξεν, Acts 10:28) that *some gentiles have become “kosher”*, as it were, and Peter should not question their status just because they remain gentiles and (to some extent) continue being part of a gentile world and context.²⁷¹ Just like Jews do not lose their status as clean and holy simply because they mix with gentiles, neither do these *chosen* gentiles lose their status because

²⁷⁰ So also, for example, Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision”, 515.

²⁷¹ Johnson, *Acts*, 190.

they remain gentiles. They have been “ontologically cleared” by God, not only by being made pure, but also by being made *holy* and *members of God’s people*.²⁷² God drives the point home by giving the Holy Spirit to such gentiles. Nothing needs to, is even allowed to, be added to this divine election. Had Peter not received his vision, he would not have received Cornelius’ messengers nor entered Cornelius’ house: Peter needed to change his mind on *gentiles*, not on food.²⁷³

Converts – kind of Jewish?...

Is it really that big of a deal, though, letting in a few gentiles into the Jewish *politeia*? To let the discourses of division between Jews and non-Jews sink in a little further, but also to aid my upcoming discussion on the identity of gentile Jesus-followers, I quickly want to overview some perspectives on *conversion to Judaism* in the Second Temple period. This helps us understand that what happened in Acts 10, and which was later confirmed in Acts 15, was something quite astonishing.

David S. Sim argues that a non-Jew actually becoming Jewish in Antiquity, akin to our modern notion of conversion, would have been possible only from the latter part of Second Temple Judaism and onwards, very much due to the interaction between Judaism and *the Hellenization project* of the Greek rulers in the post-Alexander (the Great) era. The Greeks introduced the concept of *politeia*, an idea of citizenship combined with *culture* and *lifestyle*. This term contributed to an expansion of Jewish identity, beyond an ethnic core of lineage and descent, to also more clearly include *behaviour* and *ideology*, which others could pick up on. By at least the middle of the second century BC, individual gentiles converting to the Jewish *politeia* had become a widely recognized and accepted phenomenon.²⁷⁴

Yet even the very process of conversion in itself (including the dangerous and painful procedure of circumcision for males) was not necessarily enough to make an

²⁷² Bauckham, “Peter”, 114 ff.

²⁷³ Heilig, “New Perspective”, 471. Pervo (*Acts*) is one example of several scholars who make this point (p. 278), but still feel the need to maintain that Peter’s vision did away with Torah-laws for food/ purity (p. 269).

²⁷⁴ David S. Sim, “Gentiles, God-fearers and Proselytes”, in *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds. David S. Sim and James S. McLaren (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 9-27, p. 10 ff.

Israelite in the eyes of other Jews: some ancient Jewish source texts indicate that it took *several generations* for the descendants of a convert to be considered fully Jewish (even though converts were expected from the moment of conversion to reject all idolatry, keep the whole Torah, and fully integrate into the Jewish community). According to Philo, for example, the lineage of a local Egyptian convert had to remain within the *politeia* for three generations in order for the descendants to be accepted as fully Jewish. This “same but different” attitude is reflected in the Greek term προσήλυτος, which for example in *the Book of Acts* is used to reference a group of people seemingly Jewish and yet separated from ιουδαίοι proper (cf. Acts 2:10; 13:43). There are other sources, for example in texts from Qumran, in the Mishna, and in synagogue inscriptions, indicating that proselytes were not seen as “complete” Jews, even though they had become members of the Jewish polity.²⁷⁵ Even if a gentile became a Jew by conversion, the “flesh”, so to speak, took a longer time to be fully transformed. The circumcision of a gentile adult person is namely *not* performed on the eighth day, as demanded by Scripture.²⁷⁶ There was accordingly, in general, a very high bar set for becoming a member of God’s people.

Separation – it means serious business

The vision entails concepts of both purity, holiness and idolatry. Even though I have presented some suggestions for how Peter may have perceived his vision in relation to Cornelius and the other gentiles in the story, since we do not know exactly what Peter thought, we should be open to the possibility that he would not necessarily have been able to explain it any better himself, since he in all likelihood was influenced in his worldview *by all perspectives at the same time*. All the above discussed notions of separation existed, to some extent, with most Jewish groups of this time, in both the Judean and the diaspora forms of Judaism, be it consciously or subconsciously.²⁷⁷ To put it simple, Peter was very wary of gentiles, irrespective of what kind of ideological motives he himself would have preferred to explain his reactions and attitudes. And yet,

²⁷⁵ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 160 ff.

²⁷⁶ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 114 ff.

²⁷⁷ cf. Barclay, *Jews*, 399-444.

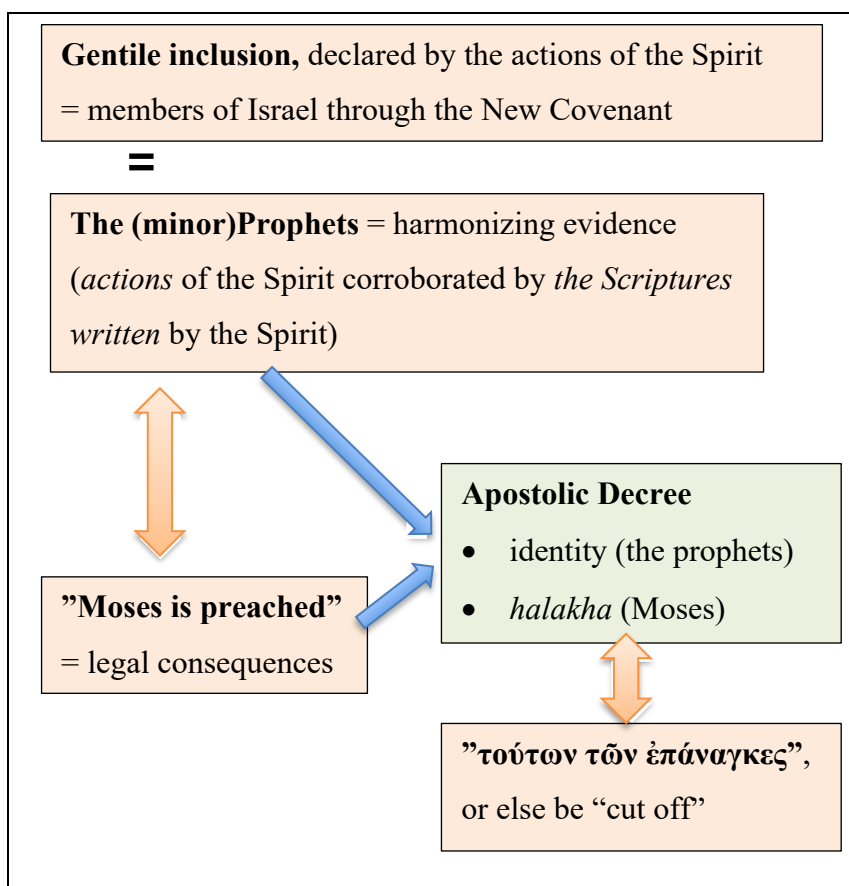
from the Cornelius event and onwards, a new “breed” of gentiles had entered the scene who defied such typologies – they were members of God’s people, *holy* and *clean*, uncompromised.

6. Discussion – who are the gentile Jesus-followers?

Finally, we are at the point where some conclusions might be drawn as to the meaning of the AD and its implications for gentile identity in the Lukan narrative of Acts. More precisely, as stated in the introductory chapter, the questions I wish to answer are the following:

1. *What do the four prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree **mean**, each one on its own merits and as parts of the Apostolic Decree?*
2. *Why were these four prohibitions **chosen** (by Jacob/ Luke)?*
3. *What does the Apostolic Decree signal about the **identity** of the **gentile believers**?*

Before I begin, I wish once more to iterate the discursive logic of the narrative context for the AD in Acts 15:20. It looks roughly as follows, informed slightly by the previous chapters:



The minor prophets speak of a gentile inclusion into the people of God at the time of Israel's restoration; *Moses verifies* that there are certain laws (i.e. a *Torah*) for them. These two "voices" give the gentiles a covenantal position (as members of God's people) without necessitating circumcision and conversion. In order to flesh out this basic description and how it helps us understand the AD and the identity of gentile Jesus-followers, the thesis has worked its way through:

- The four terms τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων, τῆς πορνείας, τοῦ πνικτοῦ and τοῦ αἵματος;
- The three speeches at the Jerusalem meeting;
- The Antiochian conflict;
- and finally the Cornelius incident.

Now it is time to reverse the analytical order of the sections back to its original *narrative* order in Acts, to see how the logic of Luke's build-up to the four prohibitions might be of use in answering my working questions, all in the spirit of a PSr. The following three sections draw on the major points from my analyses in chapters 2-5, in order to answer my thesis questions (headings 1-3), integrating Cornelius and Antioch as a first pre-meeting sub-section, and the Jerusalem-meeting and the AD as a second sub-section.

What do the four prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree mean, each one on its own merits and as parts of the Apostolic Decree? (1)

Cornelius and Antioch

The normal narrative flow of Acts, albeit subtly, does actually prepare us for the possibility of the Lev 17-18 legislation being the source for the four prohibitions, and that the AD accordingly should have a *Levitical* meaning, so to speak. Particularly in my fifth chapter, several indicators from the Cornelius story point in this direction. The gentiles in Cornelius' household make a remarkable transition:

- from profane to *holy*;
- from impure to *pure*;
- from Spirit-less to *Spirit-filled*;
- from lost to *saved*.

This kind of terminology for gentiles is exceptional, since it through-and-through builds on characteristics which, in the Hebrew Bible, are reserved to describe the status of the

Jewish people. Applied to Israel, such concepts are synonymous with a lifestyle of seclusion from the other nations and total obedience to God's Torah. When these concepts are connected with a gentile status-transformation, it is hence logical that the same kind of expectations of *amixia* and obedience might be generated for such gentiles – and the Antiochian conflict seemingly shows that it was! Some Jewish Messianists demanded gentiles to convert and keep all of the Torah, entering a lifestyle of the Jewish *politeia* and fully leaving their gentile pasts behind. *We may accordingly expect the prohibitions of the AD to speak to these sorts of tension*, and the four Lev17-18-prohibitions thus make a good fit.

The Jerusalem Meeting and the AD

Bringing with us the high expectations of Torah-living that some Judeans and Pharisees have expressed for the gentile believers, as we look at the Jerusalem meeting (summoned to settle the disagreement over coerced conversion), the four prohibitions seem to dissolve the tensions and solve the problem – *but in what way?* As we have seen in chapter 2, there is a debate on the meaning of each of the four words in the AD. This debate is directly related to what kind of hypothesis we construe for the meaning and purpose of the AD as a whole. This reciprocity creates a *chicken or the egg* situation of sorts: do we decide on a certain hypothesis to explain the prohibitions because of how we interpret them individually, or do we make our interpretations of the prohibitions based on our assumptions about an overarching hypothesis? This jab at the scholarly craft is impossible to avoid, once the information on the respective prohibitions start building up: anything but a random improvisation on Jacob's part demands some kind of scholarly stand on both the *meaning* of each prohibition and their *purpose* as a whole.

In this thesis I have already declared my intention to make a conscious effort of understanding the prohibitions relative the overarching theory that Lev 17-18 constitutes their source. In my estimation, as described in the previous paragraph, the Cornelius incident and the Antiochian conflict make this hypothesis a good fit: *the expectations on holiness, purity and the continued indwelling of God's Spirit* (as members of a New Covenant with the God of Israel) *naturally calls for a Torah-based solution*, since the gentiles are now members of Gods' people. Here follows a brief summary of some plausible interpretations of the four prohibitions, in the light of this assumption.

§. *Idolatry and blood*: These two prohibitions are fairly straightforward – most commentators agree that they exclude any and all activities with a connection to idols or contexts of idol worship, and also any kind of blood in the food (which could occur every now and then in gentile cooking, like the blood-sausage and, as we have seen in chapter 2, also certain cooking methods (of foremostly smaller animals)). Together with the “choked” prohibition (see below), these two commands make gentile Jesus-followers end up in a situation similar to the commensality plights many Jews faced, if they wanted to be on the safe side of obedience to the dietary restrictions: certain levels of *amixia* all of a sudden become a pragmatic option in daily life. We do not know of any other gentile groups who, in practice, were put under the same mandatory and rigorous seclusion from the pagan world by Jewish *halakha* (though God-fearers voluntarily could practice *kashrut* to the extent that they wished).

§. *Sexual ethics*: The prohibition on *πορνεία* is best understood as a ban on all sexual immorality as listed in Lev 18, thus from a thoroughly Jewish perspective. The fact that this term likely should be coupled with the phrase ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων, evidences the strong connection between the gentiles and the Jews/ Israel – sexual (i.e. moral) immorality can defile the temple and the land, which is particularly interesting when reading Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5: there, he claims that the sexual misconduct of one of his congregation members threatens the purity of their bodies, which are (both individually and collectively) “a temple” where the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor 6:19). The metaphorical language is clear – just as God’s Presence could be driven away from the Jerusalem temple by moral sins of sexual immorality, so the Corinthians can drive away the Holy Spirit from the midst of their Messianic congregation by contracting such impurities. I believe that the prohibition on *πορνεία* in the AD is addressing the exact same phenomenon and metaphor: do not drive away the Presence of God from the “tabernacle” of the Messianic communities.

§. *A clear case of ritual purity*: In chapter 2, a strong case has been made that “choked” refers to kosher animals which have died from natural causes, from an attack by other animals, or by being slaughtered in the “wrong” way, leaving the blood in the body and turning it into an impure carcass. This means that the gentile Jesus-followers indeed *can become ritually impure*, and – when such is the case – must undergo purification, or else risk being cut off from the people of God. This is presumably from the fact that they

have become *holy*, and thus also susceptible to Levitical impurities (see the discussion in chapter 5 of this thesis). In order to safeguard their meat intake, a kosher butcher would be the best option.

To summarise: if we return to the question I initially asked in this section, on how the meaning of the AD resolve the Antiochian conflict, I think the answer to a great extent lies in the fact that it is Torah! – albeit Torah for the nations. Assuming that the four prohibitions come from the same source, namely Lev 17-18, we have the advantage of being able to read them together, as a set. The collective thrust and meaning of them is: “Do not contract any impurities of moral and ritual kind.” Though this will be explicated below, the exegetical use of the four prohibitions as a set, pointing to a *gerim*-context, also makes the following message an unavoidable appendix: “... since such impurities will harm the Messianic community and cause your own expulsion from Israel, causing you to lose the salvation of God entailed in such a membership.” The Torah-prohibitions thus eases the mind of those who wish to see a stricter gentile living.

Why were these four prohibitions chosen (by Jacob/ Luke)? (2)

Cornelius and Antioch

Chapters 4 and 5 have focused on the tensions between Jews and gentiles, due to the demands of the Torah on the Jewish nation on the one hand, and the lawless idolatry permeating the pagan world on the other. As a direct consequence of expressing the meaning of the AD in the previous section (“avoid impurities”), the *purpose* was simultaneously revealed – namely, an honest *threat*, of harming the Messianic communities and of being cut off from the people of Israel. The dangers of contamination by impurities were perceived as real, compromising the spiritual health and future of the Jesus-movement. It is therefore natural that the overarching logic of the prohibitions would be a ban on contracting impurities. We need to remember the core message of Acts 10-11 and 15: *the gentiles are no longer mere gentiles but have become fully “kosher”*, so to speak. The risk of gentile believers becoming impure, in a way that previously only Jews (and *gerim*) would, is real and *not* metaphorical: having been let inside, the gentiles could become a trojan horse of pollution in the Messianic communities, contaminating a social body which God so graciously had purified. The prohibitions therefore function as absolute and minimal guidelines for how the gentile

Jesus-followers must avoid any and all contaminations – but, they also points to the gentile identity, which will be discussed below.

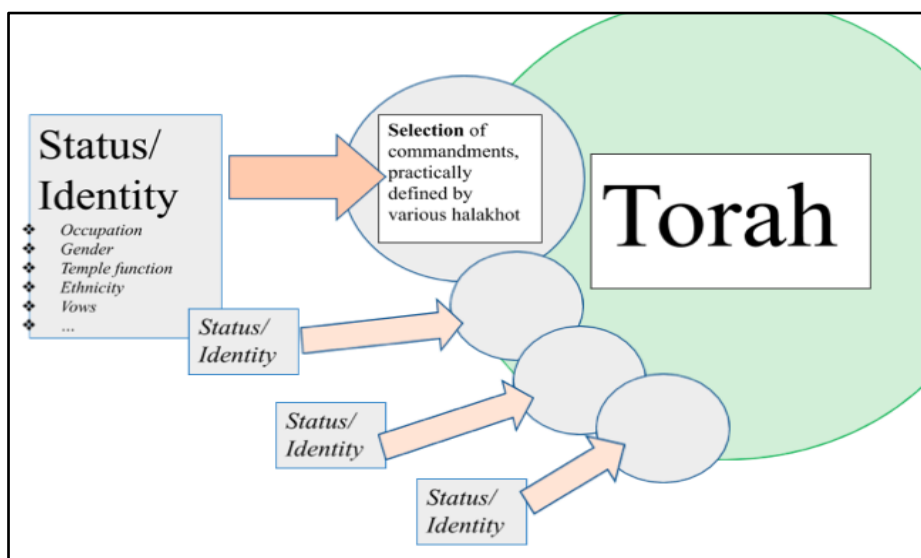
The Jerusalem Meeting and the AD

There is also another possible nuance to why the four prohibitions were chosen. In the Jerusalem meeting, Jacob, albeit using a vague reference, mentions the weekly instructions on the Torah to make his case. If, and I say if, the four commandments would have been something *completely unrelated* to the Torah, it makes you wonder why the Torah was brought up at all. Furthermore, you would expect some kind of explication on that alternative and unknown source – where did the prohibitions come from? Why these four? The reference to Moses is at least *there*, and it points to the Torah. Since 1) no alternative source for the AD is indicated, 2) since the issue of Torah *initiates* the discussion through the Antiochian conflict and the Jerusalem-based disagreements with certain Pharisees, and 3) since *the proclamation of Moses* in every city motivates the Decree, there is coherence to the suggestion that the commandments, albeit not being the “full” Jewish Torah for a convert, are still related to the Mosaic legislation, *i.e. what the Torah demands*. Jacob is not winging it, based on strong yet undefined impressions from his Torah learning, nor is he drawing on some unspecific notions about universal or natural laws: he is explicating exact Torah *halakha* for an exact category of people, in the same way that Jewish men, women, priests and others within Israel had their specific laws. Commandments are identity.

Just as the Amos 9-quote in Jacob’s speech seems to be full of *allusions*, I suggest that the four prohibitions work in a similar way. They are not given to summarise all and any commandments that gentile Jesus-followers must keep but are instead used to allude to Lev 17-18 (and possibly other similar places) with the aim of *evoking the gerim category*. This is a strong declaration against those who demand gentile circumcision – “No, these gentiles are part of God’s people!” – but at the same time also a stark warning to the gentiles (and some sort of confirmation of, at least, part of the gist in the demands for gentile circumcision) – “Do not think that your place in the people of God lets you off the hook as far as Torah-observance goes: we expect that you live pure lives just as we (Jews) do!”

The suggestion that the AD functions as an allusion to identity is based on a foundational principle of Torah observance: nowhere is a Jewish person expected to keep *all* of the Torah. This is often overlooked in contemporary Christian discussions,

and the (most famous) rabbinic estimation of 613 commandments is tossed around quite loosely. The reality, though, is that the set of commandments valid for a particular Jewish person has always been (and still is) dependent on, and relative to, factors like occupation and possessions (for example relating to issues of tithing and social care), gender (concerning for example menstruation and ejaculation), functions in the common worship (e.g. the priesthood), ethnicity (being a gerim or a Jew), temporary vows (like the Nazarite vow), the existence of a temple in Jerusalem (or not), and other issues. What you are tells you (and others) what to do, and what you do tells others (and confirms to yourself) who you are. This is *Torah sociology* (see the image below).



From this viewpoint, Jacob and the elders of the Jerusalem congregation were defining the status of the gentiles in Messiah in relation to the Torah, *based* on the Torah. The *gerim batokh*-exegesis, argued for by Bauckham, Callan and others, evidences precisely such a concern for identity: Jacob and the elders in Jerusalem were not ultimately trying to answer the question “What should gentile bearers of the Holy Spirit do?” Such a halakhic question would be a secondary question to, or outcome of, the most fundamental halakhic issue: “*Who are* the gentile carriers of the Holy Spirit?” Only when this is established might the decision on exact commandments be addressed.

Finally, taking into account what happened in Cornelius’ home, the subsequent approval of the Jerusalem Jews to Peter’s mixing with gentiles (Acts 11), Peter’s speech on God’s actions, and the testimonies of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15), Jacob’s use of the

prophets in tandem with the four prohibitions serves one final purpose: to prove that *God is at work*. The AD is a way of confirming this: the inclusion of gentiles into the nation of Israel is no longer prophetic theory but *a practical reality*, right in front of everyone's eyes.

What does the Apostolic Decree signal about the identity of the gentile believers? (3)

We now finally turn to the pivotal question of gentile identity in the eyes of Jewish Jesus-followers. The previous two questions have only served as a preparation for *this* final question, towards which the whole thesis is aimed. As stated in the title of this master's thesis, I wish to discern Jewish constructions of identity for "gentiles amongst Israel" in the first generation of Jesus-followers (ca 50 CE). And what have I seen?

My answer is connected to what I wrote at the end of the first section in this chapter, answering partly how the AD could resolve the Antiochian conflict: the *Torah-based nature* of the four purity-regulating prohibitions seemingly calmed the tensions of those who demanded full Torah-obedience. Yet, I believe that such a postulation also should contain some sort of resolution to the *identity* issue: since the Judeans in Antioch and certain Pharisees in Jerusalem wanted a change of ethnicity *as well*, possibly seeing a Jewish identity as the only acceptable and salvific status before the God of Israel, it might strike us as somewhat odd that the proclamation of four prohibitions satisfies their demands, if it was *only* a matter of giving the gentiles some rules. However, if the AD also *validated a gentile status* through the Torah, giving some kind of legitimate label to the believing non-Jews who "bear the weight" of being pure, holy and carriers of God's Spirit, then the seeming content and unity created through Jacob's speech would seem more logical. By now, it comes as no surprise that my contention is that Luke had been holding the *gerim*-category in store, ever since Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit, to prove that coerced conversion would be against the Torah and the will of God. Here is how I think.

Cornelius and Antioch

As we have seen, long before the Jerusalem meeting, the Cornelius incident reveals that the gentile believers were considered to have transitioned into a new identity described as holy, pure, Spirit-filled and "saved". This is language usually reserved for Israel in

the Hebrew Bible – ascribing such identity markers to gentiles definitely testifies to a changed relationship to the social body of Israel.

The Jerusalem Meeting and the AD

When we get to the Jerusalem meeting, we learn that the prophets have predicted an ingathering of select members from the nations of the world, *who would learn the ways/laws of Israel*. Jacob’s speech by allusion postulates that such believing Gentiles *are “among us”*, having turned to the God of Israel and to the Israelite nation in a time of Israel’s emerging restoration. God’s election makes gentile believers into *members of God’s people Israel*. What the prophecies are not necessarily explicit on, but which comes as a natural consequence, is that for gentiles to live with a people that is pure and holy, they too need to be pure and holy. And the gentile Jesus-followers are!

The *one* people of God can accordingly contain, even will/ must (so the prophets) contain, two ethnical groups: Jews and non-Jews. Torah-centred Israel is meant to live in harmony with a section of gentiles from the nations, evidenced by the existence of many *gerim*-commandments interspersed throughout the Mosaic legislation. Therefore, just as the Jewish tribes of Israel will be restored, along with the Davidic dynasty, *so will the gerim-members of Israel be restored*. The gentiles are not members according to the *flesh* (i.e. the twelve tribes), but according to God’s choosing them and grafting them in (cf. Rom 11:17). The *gerim*-category, alluded to by the AD, defines *gentiles when they are as close to God as they can come in this world order*, namely gentiles under the wings of Israel. Jesus-followers do not turn into a “third race” – rather, they turn into the ultimate versions of themselves, from a Biblical perspective. And Israel needs such gentiles in their midst to fulfil prophecy!

The fact that all four prohibitions of the AD can be connected to discourses of either *ritual* or *moral* impurity, and to a *rooting-out* of the individual from the nation of Israel, strengthens the impression that the gentile Jesus-followers have received precisely this kind of a membership in Israel. There are no Jewish texts from Antiquity prescribing exactly these *gerim*-laws neither for converts, nor for God-fearers (or Noahides), nor threatening them with *karet*.²⁷⁸ The Lev 17-18 as the main source for the AD, however, makes sense for gentiles who have been included by grace: if Jews (the

²⁷⁸ Callan, “Background”, 291-295; Savelle, “Reexamination”, 458 f.

“natural” members) can be threatened with *karet*, how much more so the gentile members!

The use of the *gerim*-category to label this quite radical transformation of gentiles from outsiders to insiders – without circumcision – seems to be the best fit amongst all the hypotheses, to explain both why the conflict in Antioch (and in Jerusalem) arose, and how the Torah could be used to resolve the conflict and define the gentiles as members of God’s people. *The Jesus-movement re-opened an old category, halakhically unused for centuries*, allowing gentiles to become a special kind of *eschatological gerim* right in the middle of Israel.^{279 280} Arguing for this through prophecy and Torah met the demands from concerned parties at the meeting.

The “choked” prohibition furthermore gives us a subtle signal of the *unique flavour* of this *gerim*-identity for the gentile believers – their standards would be higher than ever before. This fact lies in the tension between two differing laws on eating carrion in the Torah: the laws of Leviticus actually allow for *both* Jews and strangers amongst Israel to eat carrion from kosher animals, as long as they purify themselves afterwards. However, in Deut 14:21, the law on carrion *suddenly forbids Israelites* to eat such meat, allowing only for a stranger (*ger*) or a foreigner proper (*nakhar*) to eat it. Viewed from this perspective, the AD, which bids *also the gentile believers* to abstain from eating such meat, demands *a level of ritual purity previously not halakhically demanded even from the gerim/ gentiles living in close proximity to the Jewish nation*. The eschatological bar of Torah ethics is thus raised, so to speak – a lot is expected from

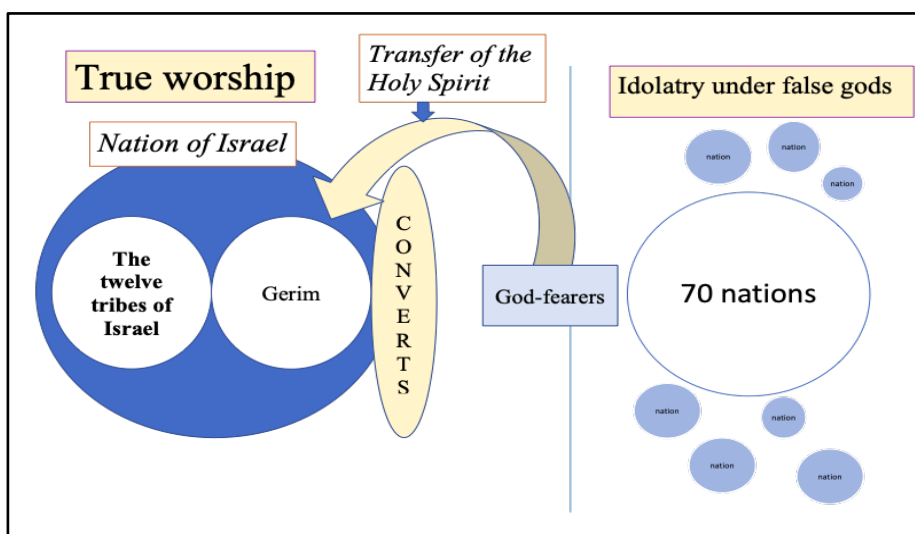
²⁷⁹ This conclusion is by no means new, which in a sense means that at least some of the conclusions of this thesis make out reiterations of previous scholars, like Richard Bauckham, John Perry (“Christians”, p. 167 f.) and Huub van den Sandt (“Examination”, 93). However, I have yet not come across any scholar who has chosen to use the *gerim* category with the kind of precision I am suggesting, as an absolute halakhic, Torah-observant category of members of Israel (albeit not from the twelve tribes), aimed at maintaining an actual (i.e. non-symbolic) state of purity or else be rooted out from the people of God.

²⁸⁰ Garroway pushes too far in claiming that believing gentiles to some extent laid claim to a Jewish identity; the *gerim* category, I believe, is a nice fit to resolve the tensions that Garroway pinpoints. In this, I also disagree with Fredriksen’s statement that gentile identity was a theoretical construct: on the contrary, the very fact that the gentiles had an already existent, Torah-based identity to lay claim to enhanced the signals of prophetic fulfilment, all the more provoking the zeal of other Jews, to also put their faith in Jesus the Messiah and take part in the eschatological restoration of the Davidic Dynasty (cf. Rom 11).

the gentile believers, as carriers of God’s Holy Spirit. Their *standard of purity* (though regarding *only* the laws pertaining specifically to *gerim*) is as strict as the standard demanded from Israel “according to the flesh” (defined through all the particular laws incumbent upon Israelites *alone*).

But is this very intimate inclusion into Israel the only possible interpretation of gentile identity in the Messianic communities? The following is a brief overview of the Second Temple Jewish conceptual categories for gentiles that have surfaced in the previous thesis-chapters, and from which the first generation of *Jewish* Jesus-followers had to choose, so to speak, in order to more clearly define who their gentile brethren might be:

1. *Gentile idolaters*, who are impure, profane and immoral;
2. *Gentile God-fearers*, who adhere to some Torah commandments and perhaps even worship the God of Israel, but nevertheless also partake in the Pagan cults and culture and would be considered impure and profane;
 - a. Perhaps a group of *strict God-fearers*, who might be called a proto-Noahide group, who chose to exclusively worship the God of Israel – they would have been considered devout, but nevertheless as fully gentile, and thus profane;
3. *Converts*, who enter into the nation of Israel as pure and holy individuals, keep all of the Torah to their ability, but who still have to wait for a few generations to be considered fully, genealogically Jewish;
4. *Gerim-citizens “batokh Israel”*: gentile members of Israel who are considered pure (since they can become defiled) and holy (since they were allowed to partake in the tabernacle worship) without conversion.



In the image above I have tried to visually represent those categories, but also with an insertion of the kind of dynamic relocation of gentile God-fearers enacted by the Holy Spirit. Apart from the text in bold with “The twelve tribes of Israel”, all other categories are in one way or another considered to be gentile/ pagan, or at least not fully Jewish. The image shows a form of *spiritual* geography, where a given ethnic designation ultimately depicts one’s standing with God, in terms of proximity or distance. Since Israel in Biblical terms is the chosen people of God, they become the epitome of human beings in close relationship with the creator God. The various layers of “non-Jewishness” accordingly manifest increasing distance from God.

The category of idolaters goes right out the window, for obvious reasons. It is furthermore very difficult to perceive the category of *God-fearers* provoking the same kind of discord as that which we see in Antioch and Jerusalem – it does not seem to engender any particular debate anywhere else in Acts, since it entails a certain level of social distancing. God-fearers are not crossing the dividing wall between Jews and non-Jews. Neither are they ever referred to as holy and pure.

To define the gentiles as *converts* also goes against the very clear message of the Acts narrative – they are *not* Jews, and they need *not* convert. Conversion must be understood as a change of *ethnicity* in the Second Temple context (and still is within Judaism today) – the equivalent of the modern notion of becoming a (religious) Christian (or any other religion) is not becoming a “Jewian” or a “Judaist”, but precisely becoming an ethnic *Jew*. If the gentiles were considered somehow to have become Jews (as Garroway believes, see the introduction), the expectations for them to take on a Jewish ethnicity by circumcision and to full Torah-observance would have been quite legitimate! The fact, though, that the narrative in Acts 13-14 has been quite explicit on the faith coming to the gentiles *qua* gentiles, that Peter sees coerced conversion as fighting against the will of God, and that Jacob alludes to prophecies about gentiles living with Israel, makes the convert status an untenable option.

As can be seen in the illustration above, *converts* are furthermore positioned at the edge of the Israel-sphere, whereas the *gerim* are placed inside of it. The remarkable, and in the eyes of many, excruciatingly provocative claims of the early Jesus-movement and the Apostolic Decree, was precisely that Spirit-filled gentiles “popped up” according to prophecy, and moved right into the sphere of Israel, without the generational acclimatization-period of the convert. *Non-believing converts thus found*

*themselves in the odd position of being more Jewish than Jesus-believing gentiles, and yet less Israelite; a status which simply could not be accepted by any non-believer.*²⁸¹

In the image above, one more category could arguably be inserted, namely the rabbinic concept of *bnei Noach*. This category would end up either beside (or inside of) the God-fearer box, or on the right (as in opposite to left) side of the dividing line, amongst the 70 nations, yet as a kind of righteous gentile. Although a Noahide category might seem to be an interesting category for this thesis, for two reasons I have chosen to leave the Noahides out of the discussion: 1) it is a later rabbinic construct not existent in Biblical discourses; 2) the concept, as it is defined, is not relevant for the New Testament understanding of the *insider* position of gentile believers.

Perhaps the most obvious detail, and the most decisive at that, is that neither God-fearers nor converts (nor Noahides) have ever been spoken of as receivers of God's Holy Spirit. This is a key point in Acts 10-11, and in Peter's and Jacob's speeches. To claim that gentile believers are God-fearers who have the Spirit but remain outside of Israel is to miss the point. The transformation of identity included in the event is completely left out: it is like saying that male converts to Judaism are gentiles with less foreskin.

Jacob's restoration exegesis and the New Covenant

There is a last detail, or rather scenario, which enhances the weight of the gerim-hypothesis: *the restoration*. In defining the gentile ingathering through prophetic allusions, Jacob at the same time proleptically points to the restored Israel in the coming Messianic kingdom. The use of the category of *gerim* reveals how that future kingdom, similar to the previous (Davidic) kingdom, will have *gerim* in it. The prophecies about the New Covenant declare that *all* of God's laws will be kept when God's Spirit has been poured out on Israel – *thus also the section of the Torah proclaimed for the gerim*. That this verbatim aspect could be a consequence of the New Covenant promises of *total obedience to all of the Torah* is virtually always neglected – the assumption is that only the Jewish part of Israel is addressed through the prophecies and will become fully obedient to the commandments given them. However, the *gerim* as a Mosaic entity are

²⁸¹ See Mark Nanos, *Irony of Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), for an excellent discussion on precisely how provocative a change in gentile identity status could be for all other sections of society, Jewish and pagan.

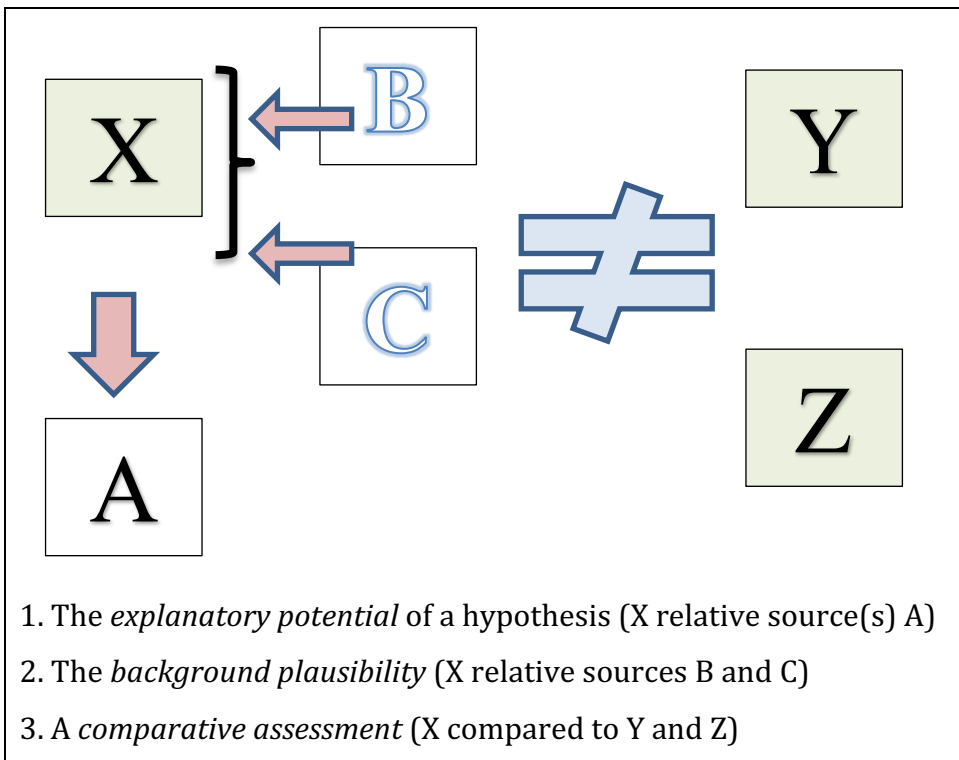
included in the legislation already from the speaking of the commandments at Mount Sinai and onwards, as shown by Callan's analysis. Although it does not say how Jacob and the others geographically and demographically related the Jesus-believing gentiles to the future kingdom, the fact that this category of *gerim* seems to be key to the gentile identity harmonises with the *concrete, geo-political expectations* that the disciples had before Jesus' ascent, as described in the beginning of *The Acts of the Apostles*:

1:6 Οἱ μὲν οὖν συνελθόντες ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ;

This they asked after having been instructed by Jesus for 40 days about the coming kingdom (Acts 1:3). Nothing in Jesus' teachings had convinced them that the coming Kingdom was otherworldly or somehow detached from Israel. The hopes for this restoration are repeated in Acts 3:20-21, clarifying that the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 was not the "final" fulfilment of the promises to Israel but only a step on the way. Acts 15 is the instance where the early Jesus-movement conclude that an earthly Kingdom *is* coming at the end of days, and that it will include many *gerim* who have followed the remnant of Israel in *the Second Exodus* out of sin and death, towards the Messianic Era and the Coming World, just as was the case when the nation of Israel went out from Egypt, travelled the wilderness, and finally entered the Promised Land in the first Exodus.

Heilig's criteria and a brief reassessment of the other models

The above attempts to answer the three questions of this thesis stand as yet another contribution to the hypothesis that Lev 17-18 lies at the core of the Apostolic Decree. The pieces that I have assembled create a coherent and historical-critically plausible interpretation of how early Jewish Jesus-followers understood the identity of their gentile fellow believers. Revisiting Heilig's three criteria from the introduction chapter, I consider the first two criteria to have been satisfactorily met: the *explanatory potential* as well as the *background plausibility* for this hypothesis are good.



Yet the third criterion, a comparative assessment, has only been hinted at throughout the thesis. I therefore wish finally to tackle this issue here. Can “Y or Z” (the other three suggested hypotheses in the introduction) provide more satisfactory answers than the Lev 17-18 hypothesis as to why the AD was given:

- *1) since* (διο) gentiles are members of God’s people *and*
- *2) since* (γαρ) Moses is taught every sabbath in synagogues in every city?

The four prohibitions stand at the centre of a chiastic structure:

*A¹. Paul and Barnabas come with a **halakhic dilemma***

*B¹. **The prophets testify***

*C. **Four prohibitions***

*B². **Moses testifies***

*A². Paul and Barnabas, together with Barsabbas and Silas, go back with a **solution to the halakhic dilemma***

The word of God thus testifies, both through the prophets (B¹ as quoted by Jacob) and through Moses (who (B²), as it were, supplies the four prohibitions through the mediation of the Levitical legislation). In this way the conflict is resolved. Here is a short recapitulation of the other main hypotheses to explain the AD, together with my assessment of their potential to fit this chiastic and logical structure.

1. Food-laws

*The commandments are related to **food-issues in the Jewish law**, and thus pertain to commensality. If the gentiles keep these four laws, then eating together will be more easily facilitated.*

Nothing in the analyses of the previous chapters indicate that food proper has anything at all to do with the overall thrust of the narrative in Acts 15. To redress and paraphrase the chiasmic structure from the previous section:

*A¹. Paul and Barnabas claim that gentile believers **must not become Jews***

B¹. The prophets testify

*C. **Commensality issues are addressed***

B². Moses testifies

*A². Gentile believers **do not have to become Jews***

This hypothesis does not explain why the four prohibitions are sandwiched between the prophets and Moses, and it does not properly address the Antiochian conflict: the demands for conversion would not have been considered as equivalent to a few food prohibitions. Neither does the hypothesis truly solve any imagined *commensality* problems, since the four commandments do not forbid the use of pork or shellfish, nor safeguard the production of oils and wines according to purity rules.²⁸² Furthermore, as mentioned in previous chapters, commensality was by no means impossible between Jews and gentiles. It seems somewhat trivial for Luke to make such a big thing (and honestly waste so much ink and paper) on a matter that surely could have been squared by simply following local *halakhot*. The gentiles who joined the Messianic communities were, so Luke, primarily drawn from the group of God-fearers: they knew they were in a Jewish context. It is just about impossible that such gentiles would be bringing pork chops, bowls of blood, and all other kinds of impure food to the communal gatherings – and if anyone ever did, it would be a straightforward matter of reprimanding and correcting such behaviour, to which all other gentiles present would surely agree. Had the gentiles in Antioch actually been so rude and socially incompetent at the dining tables, the Judean believers in Acts 15:1 would have opted for precisely a correction on

²⁸² See Bauckham, “James”, 464; Savelle, “Reexamination”, 463.

the food regime, rather than risking having “gentile brutes” defaming the Jewish lifestyle and politeia by becoming bad converts.

If the leaders in Jerusalem would have felt it necessary to help out on such an issue, the Decree (and the preceding prophetic references too) surely would have been phrased differently. And why all of a sudden add bans on idolatry and sexual misconduct? All kinds of regulations on food and more general ethics could have been thrown in the mix if Jacob wished to use the “dietary momentum of instruction” to guide the gentiles to a better lifestyle. A ban on sexual immorality as a way to facilitate social interaction or commensality seems particularly absurd: there are no reports in Acts or elsewhere of occasions when Jews and gentiles in the messianic communities ate together and the whole thing turned into a sex-fest (if such had ever been the case, the responsibility would hardly land solely on the gentiles).²⁸³ Rather, the matter in Antioch and subsequently in Jerusalem quite clearly is *coerced circumcision*, so that *all* of the Torah might be observed (not just the food laws). And the decision presented by Jacob is an exegetical verification of *identity*, based on the prophets and Moses, not on *kashrut* proper.

2. Idolatry only

*The commandments are related to **idolatry only** and are meant to make sure that gentiles do not participate in any kind of worship to gentile gods. Related to this point is the issue of ritual impurity, albeit not via Jewish dietary rules but rather through the contact with demonic powers*

Ben Witherington III, one of the scholars who defend this position, has written that “the proper thing to ask about the decree is, where would one find all four of these items being partaken of in one place. The answer is probably in an act of pagan worship.”²⁸⁴ If his logic were followed, the previous chiasm might look like this:

*A¹. Paul and Barnabas claim that gentile believers **must not become Jews***

B¹. The prophets testify

*C. **Idolatry issues** are addressed*

²⁸³ Savelle, “Reexamination”, 463.

²⁸⁴ Witherington III, “Idle”, 249.

B². Moses testifies

A². Gentile believers do not have to become Jews

It can indeed be argued that A¹ (“they are not idolaters”) and B² (“Moses gave laws against idolatry”) deal with issues of idolatry – such a concern is clearly part of the AD. The prophets (B¹), on the other hand, does not square as smoothly with a single theme of idolatry: the prophets speak rather in elated terms of a moral and religious conversion among gentiles, to Torah (learning the ways of God’s people) and to the God of Israel, and the whole phenomenon is sealed by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The prophetic allusions also refer to *restoration*. They *do* concern gentiles turning to God, for sure, but the emphasis is on some sort of *coexistence* where avoiding idolatry is both a given and yet, on its own, insufficient to regulate the mixed congregations in Antioch (and other places) in a meaningful way, which really seems to be the main purpose of the AD.

The idolatry hypothesis is not a satisfactory way to deal with the demand of conversion and full Torah observance in order to be saved, i.e. the Antiochian conflict. It cannot be stressed enough: the *gentile status* seems to be the issue, more than the actual ethic demands that must be put on such believers. One thing which testifies to this is the inclusion of only four prohibitions. There is a lot more to say on idolatry than this, so in a sense the first prohibition could have sufficed, as a pointer, or else the whole list should have been longer.²⁸⁵ The prohibition on sexual misconduct as a part of idolatrous behaviour readily assumes that the gentile believers were using *temple prostitutes* or something similar, which, as previously stated, goes against the grain of Luke’s description of gentile and God-fearing piety (though other New Testament texts indicate that some congregants had issues of this sort). Furthermore, an idolatrous context does not always contain blood (or necessarily impure meat either, for that matter, depending on what the detail instructions of the AD looked like: we do not know for sure if the “choked” ban referred only to meat containing blood or to all non-kosher meats slaughtered in a non-shechita manner). To randomly (?) choose three prohibitions (after the first explicit idolatry-prohibition) as a way to regulate the risks of idolatrous behaviour seems somewhat ineffective, almost like saying: “Don’t go to an idol temple or any other kind of feast with idol-worship – but if you still would happen to end up

²⁸⁵ Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 210.

there, be sure to avoid having illicit sex, drink blood and eat meat (but you don't need to be too strict on the cookies and bread).”

Witherington's point about context would thus better be paraphrased like this: “where would one find all four of these items *being carefully avoided* in one place. The answer is probably in the Jewish *politeia*.” The impetus for the Jerusalem meeting is not the bad and idolatrous behaviour of the gentile believers, but rather the fact that they are not Jews who practice all of the Torah. Their allegiance to the God of Israel is the very reason for their inclusion into the people of God, through reception of the holy Spirit.²⁸⁶ The point of the AD is not where gentiles might go when they are not in the community of Jesus-believers – rather, the point is how Jews and gentiles can be a community *together*. A ban on idolatry is thus important, but not because it might exist in the Messianic community, but because anyone who engages in it apart from the community will ritually and morally contaminate the social body of the Messiah and the people of Israel. The focus is inwards, not outwards.

3. Ethical guidance

*The commandments are meant to be **an ethical guidance**, in the same vein as the rabbinic declaration of the three major sins that gentiles are believed to habitually engage in: idolatry, sexual misconduct and murder (bloodshed);²⁸⁷*

Initially, this hypothesis has a strong potential to fit the chiasm:

*A¹. Paul and Barnabas claim that gentile believers **must not become Jews***

B¹. The prophets testify

*C. **A set of ethical guidelines** are stipulated*

B². Moses testifies

*A². Gentile believers **do not have to become Jews***

The prophetic allusions could be seen as the acceptance of gentile presence in the midst of Israel; the Torah (Moses) could be the source of the kind of ethics that gentiles must obey.

²⁸⁶ Savelle, “Reexamination”, 464.

²⁸⁷ See for example Hanneken, “Moses”, who sees a connection with the tradition of *Jubilees*, its roots going back to the Noahide covenant.

This theory, though, has the problem of explaining the clear connection to food in the AD. Blood is less likely to mean “murder” than blood-consumption. The safe money is furthermore on “Choked” as a part of the original text of Acts 15. Food laws, as I have argued above, are not the main reason for the AD, but *they are nevertheless part of the equation*. The question is why. In this third hypothesis, the reason would be mainly ethical, which seems hard to justify. The modern scholarly dichotomy between ritual and ethics is also anachronistic: even if an ethical justification could be presented (which it cannot) for each prohibition, this would not cover the full scope of the prohibitions. They would simultaneously be cultic and purity-related in nature.

It is also, more importantly, way too thin a list to be of any meaningful use for gentile converts who, once again, primarily have been drafted from the God-fearers, already (like Cornelius) having a high level of piety in their lives. For example, it verges on the trivial to bring up “blood” as a prohibition against murder (which would be the ethical interpretation) – “they do not have to get circumcised, but hey must stop murdering people”. Surely these gentiles were not given the Spirit of God and then ran around killing, copulating and worshipping idols. This hypothesis, as well as the previous ones, seems quite misrepresentative of the kind of narrative that Luke wishes to produce. The AD does not come anywhere near a valid summary of the kind of ethics expected from gentiles in Paul’s letters and other New Testament texts. They leave us asking: why only these four, out of which two seem somewhat superfluous? And did it really demand the extensive discussion and the participation of the Holy Spirit to simply conclude that these gentiles in Messiah should do what is pretty much expected of all other gentiles in the world: not to kill, not to commit sexual immorality and not to worship false gods?²⁸⁸

This hypothesis also lacks a clear option of what to do with “choked”: to not kill infants, or suffocating animals before eating them, or any other kind of cruel behaviour, seems an ill fit with the kind of joy that the gentiles experience when they receive the Apostolic Decree (15:31) (“Phew, only those commandments? We can live with that!”). They see the message as a *παράκλησις*, not primarily as ethical guidance. They seem confirmed, not instructed. The envoys from Jerusalem strengthen (“ἐπεστήριξαν”, v. 32) the gentiles, who thus surely must already have been on the right track. Such joy could

²⁸⁸ Bauckham, “Peter”, 92, 95; Simon, “Apostolic”, 439; Oliver, “Torah Praxis”, 449 f.

only mean that a lifestyle in opposition to the AD *was not a part of their “daily routines” anyway* (otherwise the AD indeed *would* have been a heavy weight to bear). The joy of the gentiles rather seems to be related to their acceptance as already full members of the Messianic communities of Israel. How could otherwise “You do not have more than four ‘ethical’ commandments to obey” comfort them, strengthen them, and give them joy? Only down-right immoral people would respond positively to such a statement.

So, all in all, I find the Lev 17-18 hypothesis, along with the incumbent identity definition of the *gerim* status, to be a far superior hypothesis.

The Post-Supersessionist Perspective/ Reading and Nanos

This thesis has yielded some propositions which align themselves very well with a PSr of the Apostolic Decree:

1. God’s covenant relationship with Israel remains intact and at the centre of events, as does the Jewish nation;
2. Ethnic distinction is the very hinge upon which the AD and the Acts narrative turns! The preservation of the two categories of Jews and gentiles/ the nations are vital to a correct interpretation of the AD;
3. The integrity of the Torah is preserved and, in a unique way for post-Biblical Judaism, extended to gentiles.

In many ways, what I have presented here seems also to harmonise with Nanos’ reading presented in chapter 1. Yet there is *one* important difference, which I believe is a crucial advancement also of what other scholars have previously concluded: The *gerim*-concept is active and alive in New Testament discourses, meaning that the gentiles actually *are* members of Israel. This might seem like a small detail, compared to Nanos’ way of stating that gentiles are equal members of that Jewish community which has received the Holy Spirit – the Spirit is the membership card, so to speak. But I claim that this membership is not into a newly created coalition of Jews and gentiles who believe in the Messiah Jesus (although that is true), but *into Israel proper*. An important distinction is reiterated repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible that *gerim* are part of Israel as a people, receiving laws and being summoned to the reoccurring public readings of the Torah that they may learn and keep all the laws (pertaining to them); but they are not “children of

Israel”, “Israelites” or “natives”. Thus the Mosaic image of *gerim* paints a perfect match with how several New Testament texts describe gentile believers: as brothers and sisters (albeit not a term used for *gerim* in the Hebrew Bible), as members of the people of God, citizens of Israel, and yet as uncultivated olive branches grafted into a cultivated olive tree, not by nature (“Israel according to the flesh”) but by grace – just as with the עַרְבֵי רֶבֶב in Ex 12. Gentiles get to join, to partake in the promises and blessings of the Promised Land, the Coming Kingdom of the Messiah (as children of God and of Abraham, according to Paul). God did promise Abraham that gentiles too would be blessed through his seed – a promise which the NT authors saw fulfilled in a new way in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit “on all flesh”. Israel proper had regained the “lost” group of *gerim*, even before the twelve tribes had been regathered: such *gerim* were namely eternally inscribed in the Mosaic Torah, without whom *all* the law and the statutes of God could not be kept. The New Covenant promises in the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, about total devotion and submission to the Torah, was thus not just an *ethical* promise – it was also a *political* promise of a “restored tent of the Davidic kingdom”, entailing *all* of the (Jewish and gentile) halakhic categories subject to the Mosaic legislation.

7. Conclusions

It is the contention of this master's thesis that *the gerim category could be the hinge upon which the whole New Testament turns*: an M-theory for the definition of the gentile believers that allows for a better understanding of every single text with an ethnic discourse in the New Testament, and a clearer understanding of how the early followers of Jesus understood themselves and their faith.

The following conclusions are drawn from this thesis work:

- 1) The four prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree present Levitical laws on avoiding all forms of idolatry, sexual immorality, blood-consumption and impure meat (kosher meat not slaughtered according to *shechita* rules).
- 2) The Apostolic Decree was given in order to protect against impurity in the Messianic communities.
- 3) The four words of the prohibitions (ειδώλων, πορνείας, πνικτοῦ, αἵματος) were also chosen in order to allude to the *gerim*-category in the Torah.
- 4) The four prohibitions, in their Levitical context of Lev 17-18, have in common that they come from passages that contain the phrases $\Psi\text{ײ}\text{ײ}\Psi$ (meaning “everyone”) and the threat of being $\text{ײ}\text{ײ}\text{ײ}$ (“rooted out of/ cut off from the people”, the so-called *Ausrottungsformel*).
- 5) The inclusion of $\pi\text{νικτοῦ}$, a prohibition against consuming impure kosher meat, reveals that gentile Jesus-followers could become *ritually* impure. This testifies to their status as holy members of the Israelite people of God, further evidenced by the risk or *karet*, of being cut off from the people of God, if they fail to abide by the Apostolic Decree (and other important commandments).
- 6) The Apostolic Decree is therefore not a summary of commandments at its core, but rather a reference to the system of *gerim*-rules in the Torah, to highlight that Jesus-believing gentiles now have gone from being outsiders to being insiders, to define their identity as equal members of God's people together with the twelve tribes of Israel, having their own set of Torah-commandments to keep just like the historical *gerim* had.

- 7) This eschatological restoration of the category of *gerim* is part of the greater restoration of the fallen tent of David, i.e. the Davidic Kingdom of the Messianic Age. Without this category of citizens in Israel, several sections of the Torah-laws would be impossible to keep. The *gerim* are inscribed in the Torah, as it were.

The conclusions I have drawn in this study naturally need further verification. I believe there is great potential in developing this thesis by the inclusion of studies on the following subjects, of which several have only been hinted at in the previous chapters:

- *The promises to Israel in Luke 1 and the “times of refreshment and restoration”*: scholars like Göran Lennartsson and Mark Kinzer tie the restoration motif strongly to an earthly restoration of Israel. This perspective enhances the validity of the proposition that gentile believers are *gerim*, meant to co-exist in such a kingdom;
- *Acts 17 and the 70 nations*: Michael Heiser, Paula Fredriksen and Pamela Eisenbaum put important emphases on the notion of ethnicity and the role of Israel in the redemption of the world – not through the obliteration of ethnicity, but through the defeat of idolatry. This helps us to better understand the role of eschatological *gerim* (the gentile “Christians”), who (in spite of modern Christian notions of universality) clearly are not meant to include all gentiles in the world, but rather to be a first-fruits of sorts, pointing to the kind of freedom from spiritual slavery that other nations will experience in the Messianic Kingdom, though without becoming members of Israel.
- *A New Covenant with the Lord through Israel*: A better understanding of the concept of covenant, and how (if at all) Luke sees the gentiles as actual covenant members, needs to be more fully addressed. Scholars like Rodrigo Morales, Scott Hahn and Scott Hafemann have paved the way for such investigations.
- *Receiving the Holy Spirit - to become “like the stars”*: Matthew Thiessen and David Burnett, to mention but two names, have created interesting hypotheses of what the transformation of both Jewish and gentile Jesus-followers actually will result in, in the long run. This has importance for our understanding of the purity language and the unique status of carriers of the Holy Spirit.

- *Acts 3, karet, anathema, cherem, and the risk of being cut off from Israel also in the era of the New Covenant:* To better verify the Lev 17-18 connection to the AD, a deeper understanding of the concepts of “being cut off” is vital. It pops up in several New Testament passages, not visible to the uninformed eye. Here important work has been done by scholars like Göran Forkman, Hyung Dae Park, William Lyons and David Raymond Smith. To see more clearly how such ideas were part of the early Jesus-movement strengthens a link between the AD and Lev 17-18.

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