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5. Negotiating Identity

The Jewishness of the Way in Acts

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Abstract

Acts is often read as an anti-Jewish text that validates a gentile church which has separated from Judaism and the Jewish people. While the text does depict opposition between the Way and “the Jews,” it simultaneously challenges this construction by attributing elements of Jewish identity both to “the Jews” and to the Way. This paper argues, in four steps, that Luke presents the Way as a Jewish group with ongoing ties to other Jews: (1) Luke uses familial language to demonstrate a continuing connection between Jews in the Way and other Jews; (2) the initial construction of the Way includes only Jews through a redefinition of the boundaries of Israel; (3) when gentiles join the Way they do so in accord with the law of Moses; and (4) Luke carefully shows that Jews in the Way observe the law of Moses. Luke has constructed a complex narrative in which both the Way and other Jews are characterized in Jewish terms, a move made possible by the ambiguity and malleability of Jewish identity during the period in which Luke is writing.

Keywords: Acts, Jews, identity, identity construction, community, the Way

Introduction

Although Acts 11:26 announces that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch, the presence of the word “Christian” in Acts should not be taken to indicate a well-developed division between Christians and Jews whether in the time and location described in the narrative itself or in the time and location of its composition. Rather, Acts bears witness to a period in which group identities and the boundaries between and within groups were being negotiated.¹

One indication of this process of negotiation is Luke’s use of Ἰουδαῖος, which means “Jew” or “Judean.” Ἰουδαῖος carries a variety of meanings in Luke’s narrative. Most often (about 35 times) it refers to Jews in general, such as when Paul enters the synagogues of the Jews (13:5; 14:1; 17:1, 10), or when Luke refers to the chief priests and leaders of the Jews (25:2, 15) or distinguishes Jews from proselytes or God-fearers (2:11; 13:43; 14:1; 17:17). Nearly as often (about 30 times) the word Ἰουδαῖος is used to describe particularly those Jews who do not follow Jesus; these Jews are generally marked by their opposition to Paul’s ministry. While Luke often refers to this group simply as “the Jews” (e.g., 13:45, 50; 14:4), he does once distinguish them from other Jews by referring to them as “the Jews who were not believers (οἱ δὲ ἀπειθήσαντες Ἰουδαῖοι)” (14:2).² Less frequently (10 times) Luke uses the term Ἰουδαῖος to describe specific individuals, including both members of the believing community, which Luke refers to as “the Way,” and other Jews. Timothy’s mother (16:1), Paul and Silas (16:20), Aquila (18:2), and Felix’s wife Drusilla (24:24) are all described with a form of Ἰουδαῖος.

All three of these uses of Ἰουδαῖος occur throughout the narrative indicating that Luke does not change his use of the term as his narrative progresses. Rather, he uses the same term with multiple, and seemingly contradictory, meanings. The second use of Ἰουδαῖος – referring to Jews who do not follow Jesus – suggests that, for Luke, the Way is to be distinguished from “the Jews,” that they are something “other” than Jews. (When the term Ἰουδαῖος is used in this second sense, quotation marks will be used to indicate that Luke is referring specifically to those Jews who are opposed to the Way.) However, in Luke’s complicated negotiation of identities and boundaries, the matter is not so simple. While one of Luke’s uses of Ἰουδαῖος indicates a division between the believing community and “the Jews,” many other elements of Luke’s text disagree with this interpretation.

¹ See Becker and Reed for a series of essays that contest the common notion that Judaism and Christianity split into two distinct entities in the first or early second century CE.

² All translations are my own. This phrase in Acts 14:2 is translated “the unbelieving Jews” in the NRSV and “the disbelieving Jews” in the NAB, both of which risk bringing to mind the “perfidious Jews.” As this paper seeks to undermine the claim that Acts presents all Jews as unbelieving or faithless, I have here intentionally deviated from the standard translation. It is also possible to translate the phrase as “the Jews who were disobedient.” Given Luke’s claims that the Jews who believe are the obedient ones, which will be demonstrated below, he likely intends his reader to understand that the ἀπειθήσαντες Jews are both unbelievers and disobedient.

This paper will focus on four elements of the narrative of Acts that indicate that Luke does not imagine that the Way is distinct from Judaism or the Jewish people.³ First, Luke uses familial language, particularly ἀδελφός (brother) and πατήρ (father), to demonstrate a continuing connection between the Jews in the believing community and other Jews in the narrative world of Acts. Second, Luke's initial construction of the believing community in Acts 3 defines the Way in terms of Israel; those Jews who follow Jesus are the ones who remain within Israel. Third, gentiles who join themselves to the Way do so in accordance with the law of Moses. Finally, Luke is careful to show that the Jews who are in the Way observe the law of Moses.

Luke simultaneously composes the believing community in Jewish terms and draws a distinction between believers and “the Jews,” which indicates that Acts is a text in which group boundaries and identities are in the process of being negotiated. Attention to the precise way in which Luke constructs the relationship between the Way and other Jews in the narrative of Acts has implications for one of the enduring questions in Acts scholarship – whether Luke's narrative is anti-Jewish.⁴ By demonstrating that Luke constructs the Way in Jewish terms, I hope to add credibility to the claim that the narrative of Acts as a whole is not anti-Jewish even though some Jews are portrayed in a negative light.

Establishing Kinship between the Way and Other Jews

Luke uses familial and ethnic language – that is, language that utilizes the imagery and ideas of peoplehood (see Buell) – to construct the relationship between the Way and other Jews in the narrative of Acts. This first part of the paper will examine how Luke's use of familial language indicates an ongoing relationship, however tenuous, between the Way and other Jews while ensuring that the Jewish members of the believing community retain their ethnic identity; they do not cease to be Jewish. Luke uses the term ἀδελφός, meaning “brother,” to appeal to shared kinship among Jews of the Way and other Jews, and the term πατήρ, meaning “father” or “ancestor,” to claim their shared ancestry.

Of all the terms Luke uses to describe the believing community (including believers, the Way, and ἐκκλησία), ἀδελφοί is the most common. Notably, this word which Luke uses to refer to the believers, and even to gentile believers in particular (cf. 15:23), is also used to

³ This claim about “the believing community” applies primarily to the believing community as Luke constructs it in his narrative. However, it seems likely that Luke's construction of the believing community reflects a community of Jesus-followers with which he is familiar and whose existence his narrative serves to legitimate in some way. For this reason, the above claim about “the believing community” applies also to the historical community that is reflected, even if imperfectly, in Luke's narrative.

⁴ An ongoing debate in Acts studies centers on the portrayal of the Jews and whether the text as a whole is anti-Jewish. Some scholars (following in the path of Ernst Haenchen and Hans Conzelmann) read Acts as justification for the gentile Christian church and maintain that the Jewish rejection of the gospel was necessary for the subsequent mission to the gentiles. This position assumes that Luke is writing at a time when “the Jews” have rejected Jesus. Other scholars (following Jacob Jervell) argue that Acts does not present the Jews rejecting Jesus *en masse*, but rather that large numbers of Jews accept the “Christian” message. Jervell claims that the mission to the gentiles requires that the promises to Israel be fulfilled; responding to the widely-held position of Haenchen, Jervell writes, “One usually understands the situation to imply that only when the Jews have rejected the gospel is the way opened to gentiles. It is more correct to say that only when Israel has accepted the gospel can the way to gentiles be opened” (55). For a summary of the scholarly debate, see Tyson.

describe the relationship between the Jewish members of the believing community and other Jews in the narrative.

When Jewish members of the believing community speak to Jewish audiences – audiences that clearly include Jews who do not follow Jesus – they refer to them as ἀδελφοί. In Peter’s speeches in Acts 2 and 3 he addresses his Jewish audience, his kin, as ἀδελφοί (2:29; 3:17). In Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 he addresses the high priest and the Jewish council as ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες (7:2). In Paul’s speech in Antioch in Pisidia in Acts 13, he addresses those in the synagogue as ἀδελφοί (13:26, 38). Notably, even those who “fear God (οἱ . . . φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν)” but are not “descendants of Abraham (υἱοὶ γένους Ἀβραάμ)” are included in this address (13:26). When Paul speaks to the crowd at the barracks in Acts 22 and to the council in Acts 23, he refers to these Jews as ἀδελφοί (22:1; 23:1, 5, 6). Even at the very end of the narrative, in Acts 28, Paul addresses those Jews who come to him in Rome as ἀδελφοί (28:17). This demonstrates that in Luke’s presentation, the Jewish followers of Jesus continue to imagine other Jews as their kin. *At no point is this familial connection cut off.*

In addition, in one instance other Jews who are not members of the Way (but who may still join) recognize Paul and Barnabas as their brothers. In Antioch in Pisidia, the officials of the synagogue address Paul and his companions as ἀδελφοί (13:15). Whether Luke presents the views of Jewish followers of Jesus toward other Jews or the views of other Jews toward those in the Way, he represents both groups as acknowledging a common kinship: they are ἀδελφοί to one another. Thus, ἀδελφοί serves as an in-group term shared by Jews in the Way and other Jews, suggesting that when this term is applied to gentiles in the Way, it locates them within the bounds of kinship shared by all Jews. The term ἀδελφοί is not in-group language unique to the Way; Luke does not construct the Way as a new and different kinship group. Rather, certain gentiles are brought into the kinship shared by Jews.

A second way in which Luke suggests the continuing familial connection between the Jewish followers of Jesus and other Jews is through shared ancestry. When Jewish members of the believing community address audiences of Jews – again, audiences that clearly include Jews who do not follow Jesus – Jewish members of the Way affirm their shared ancestry by referring to Abraham, David, and the Israelites as “our ancestors (πατέρες ἡμῶν).” For example, “the God of our ancestors” (3:13; 5:30; 22:14) is said to have made promises to “our ancestors” (13:32; 26:6). The language of “our ancestors” is most concentrated in Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, but is also clustered in Peter’s speech in Acts 3 and Paul’s speech in Acts 13. Additionally, Paul claims to share ancestral laws (πατρῶου νόμου; 22:3) with his Jewish audience at the barracks in Acts 22 and ancestral customs (τοῖς ἔθεσιν τοῖς πατρῶοις; 28:17) with the Jews who gather around him in Rome in the final chapter of Acts.

Noticeably, at four points in the narrative, the language switches from “our ancestors” to “your ancestors” (3:25; 7:51, 52; 28:25), which suggests that perhaps the speaker wants to distance himself from the audience at these points. This is the case in the two occurrences of “your ancestors” at the end of Stephen’s speech in Acts 7. Stephen accuses his audience, the Jewish council, of following in the path of *their* ancestors who opposed the Holy Spirit (7:51) and persecuted the prophets (7:52). Here it is the case that Stephen distinguishes himself

from his audience by denying that he shares these ancestors with them.⁵ However, the use of “your ancestors” in Peter’s speech in Acts 3 does not function in this way at all. After Peter says, “You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to *your* ancestors” (3:25), he reminds his audience of the blessings God sends to them. Peter is not trying to distance himself from association with these ancestors.⁶ Thus, there is not a stark difference between “our” ancestors and “your” ancestors in every case.⁷

To summarize so far: Luke uses ethnic language to demonstrate an ongoing kinship between the Jewish members of the Way and the rest of the Jews. This is especially true when “the rest of the Jews” are presented as the intended audience of missionary work – when there is hope that they will join the believing community. However, it happens even in Acts 7 when Stephen addresses the Jewish leaders whom he assumes will not be convinced to follow Jesus (Acts 7:51-53). Thus, even when they are at odds, Jews of the Way and other Jews in Acts continue to regard one another as kindred and address one another in terms of a common peoplehood.

Only Those Jews Who Listen to the Prophet Like Moses Remain in Israel

In Acts 3 Luke uses the words of Moses to redefine the boundary around Israel, and thus articulate the identity of the believing community. In the speech given by Peter in Acts 3, Luke places on Peter’s lips a “citation” of Deuteronomy 18:15-19, the promise that God will send a prophet like Moses. Luke uses this evidence from Moses to draw a dividing line between those Jews who follow Jesus and those who do not, claiming that the Jews who do not listen to Jesus, the prophet like Moses, will be cut out of Israel.

Acts 3 is the second of two speeches given by Peter. Luke explicitly identifies the Jewish audience of each speech. In Acts 2, on Pentecost, Peter speaks to “devout Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι, ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς) from every nation under heaven” (2:5),⁸ and he addresses them as “Israelites (Ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται)” (2:22). Likewise in Acts 3, Peter speaks to Jews. He begins his speech by addressing his audience as “Israelites (ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται)” (3:12; see Zehnle: 19). He subsequently refers to them as “brothers (ἀδελφοί)” (3:17), thus identifying them as

⁵ Even though Stephen’s switch from the first person, “our ancestors,” to the second person, “your ancestors,” functions to accuse his Jewish audience of being the “betrayers and murderers” of Jesus (7:52), it does not necessarily follow that the text is anti-Jewish. Ten verses after Stephen quotes a prophetic rebuke from the prophet Amos, warning that because of their improper worship the people will be sent into exile (7:42-43), Stephen speaks a prophetic rebuke to his own audience because they have killed the Righteous One of God.

⁶ However, Peter does accuse “you” of killing the Righteous One (3:14-15), but Peter declares this excusable because it is done in ignorance (3:17) and to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets (3:18). Peter’s speech in the second person rebukes but also appeals for reconciliation (3:19).

⁷ This is significant for the interpretation of Acts 28:25, which contains the fourth occurrence of “your ancestors.” Whether this passage is anti-Jewish is hotly debated by scholars. For a recent discussion of Acts 28:23-28, see Matthews 2014: 190-206.

⁸ In the list of all included in this group, Luke mentions “visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes (Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι)” (2:10-11). Though the proselytes are grouped in with the “devout Jews from every nation under heaven,” they are also distinguished from the Jews. Their identity is ambiguous. Luke does not make explicit his understanding of the status of proselytes and God-fearers.

his own kin, and later says to them, “You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors” (3:25).⁹

In the Acts 3 speech to his fellow Jews, Peter proclaims Jesus as the Messiah whom the Jews rejected (3:13-14), but whom God raised from the dead (3:15). Though Peter accuses his fellow Jews of rejecting Jesus, he claims that they “acted in ignorance” (3:17), and he encourages them to repent (3:19). Their previous rejection of Jesus does not determine their future status. Rather, what is at stake is precisely their promised rightful inheritance as fellow Israelites; Peter’s audience is encouraged to repent “so that times of relief may come from the presence of the Lord, and he might send the Messiah appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must welcome until the times of universal restoration, which God announced long ago through his holy prophets” (3:20-21). Their repentance leads to the promised messianic kingdom.

Having thus identified Jesus as the one “whom God raised (ἤγειρεν) from the dead” (3:15), Peter proclaims that all that has happened and will happen concerning Jesus was foretold by God through the prophets (3:21). With this introduction about the foreknowledge of the prophets, Peter quotes the words of the prophet Moses:

Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ· αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς. ἔσται δὲ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἣτις ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσῃ τοῦ προφήτου ἐκείνου ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ.

Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people” (3:22-23).

Though in the Pentateuch Moses does say all these words, he nowhere says them in this combination. Peter’s citation of Moses derives from Deuteronomy 18:15-19, but it also contains elements from elsewhere in the Pentateuch. Luke has either crafted his own scriptural citation or inherited it from an earlier source.¹⁰

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 is part of Moses’ farewell address before the Israelites enter the promised land. Moses says:

⁹ Peter’s quote continues: “saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (3:25). While the text is looking toward the inclusion of gentiles with this reference to Genesis 22:18 and 26:4, it is also clear that Peter is still speaking solely to Jews, those who are included in the covenant with Abraham.

¹⁰ Acts 3:22-23 is the first extant witness of this particular version of Deuteronomy 18:15-19. Wevers’ critical edition of Deuteronomy lists two variants for 18:19 that include the final phrase from Acts 3:23 (*Deuteronomium*, 226, apparatus 18:19); both are from the Greek fathers. Isidorus Pelusiota (*Epistolarum Liber* 3, XCIV in PG 78, col. 797) has ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἀπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτῆς, and Nilus Ancyranus (*Epistolarum Liber* 1, CXXVIII in PG 79, col. 137) has ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ θείου λαοῦ. The only other text in which this construction of the Deuteronomy 18 promise of a prophet like Moses is preserved is the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, which presumably copies Acts. On the construction of the *Pseudo-Clementine* version, see Jones: 141.

προφήτην ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου ὡς ἐμὲ ἀναστήσει σοι κύριος ὁ θεός σου, αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε κατὰ πάντα, ὅσα ἠτήσω παρὰ κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου ἐν Χωρηβ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας λέγοντες Οὐ προσθήσομεν ἀκοῦσαι τὴν φωνὴν κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ τὸ πῦρ τὸ μέγα τοῦτο οὐκ ὀψόμεθα ἔτι οὐδὲ μὴ ἀποθάνωμεν, καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς με Ὁρθῶς πάντα, ὅσα ἐλάλησαν· προφήτην ἀναστήσω αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν αὐτῶν ὡσπερ σὲ, καὶ δώσω τὸ ῥῆμά μου ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ, καὶ λαλήσει αὐτοῖς καθότι ἂν ἐντείλωμαι αὐτῷ· καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὃς ἂν μὴ ἀκούσῃ τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ, ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ ὁ προφήτης ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐγὼ ἐκδικήσω ἐξ αὐτοῦ.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to him according to everything, as you requested from the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, “We will not continue to listen to the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire – and we will not die,” And the Lord said to me, “Everything that they said is right. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from their own people, and I will put my word in his mouth, and he will speak to them whatever I command him. And the person who does not listen to his words, whatever the prophet says in my name, I will exact vengeance from him (18:15-19).¹¹

As shown in the layout of the texts below, Peter’s citation in Acts 3:22 uses the language of Deuteronomy 18:15, but more closely follows the word order of Deuteronomy 18:18 (see Richard: 109-10).

Acts 3:22

Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι
προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν
ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ·
αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε
κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you.”

Acts 3:22

Μωϋσῆς μὲν εἶπεν ὅτι
προφήτην ὑμῖν ἀναστήσει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν
ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν ὡς ἐμέ·
αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε
κατὰ πάντα ὅσα ἂν λαλήσῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you.”

Deuteronomy 18:15

προφήτην ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου ὡς ἐμὲ ἀναστήσει
σοι κύριος ὁ θεός σου,
αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to him

Deuteronomy 18:18

προφήτην ἀναστήσω αὐτοῖς
ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν αὐτῶν ὡσπερ σὲ,
καὶ δώσω τὸ ῥῆμά μου ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ, καὶ
λαλήσει αὐτοῖς καθότι ἂν ἐντείλωμαι αὐτῷ·

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from their own people, and I will put my word in his mouth, and he will speak to them whatever I command him.

¹¹ Here I have translated from the LXX, though the differences with the MT are minimal.

Like Deuteronomy 18:18, Acts 3:22 forefronts the verb “raise up” (ἀναστήσει in Acts 3:22 and ἀναστήσω in Deuteronomy 18:18, both from ἀνίστημι); here Luke capitalizes on the word choice in the Septuagint and emphasizes that the prophet of whom Moses speaks will be raised up by God. Given that Luke has just described Jesus as the one “whom God raised (ἤγειρεν) from the dead” in Acts 3:15, when Luke presents Moses as saying, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet” (3:22), it is clear that this prophet whom the Lord will raise is Jesus. Thus, Luke presents Moses as having spoken of Jesus, and having foretold that God would raise him.

Whereas Acts 3:22 largely follows Deuteronomy 18:15-19, the language of Acts 3:23 diverges from the Deuteronomy text. Deuteronomy 18:19 reads, “And the person (ἄνθρωπος) who does not listen to whatever the prophet says in my name, I will exact vengeance from him.” Luke’s text replaces the vague punishment for not listening to the prophet like Moses with a more specific one. According to Acts 3:23 Moses says, “And it will be that everyone (πᾶσα ψυχή) who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people (ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ).” Luke’s construction here – “utterly rooted out of the people” – does not come from Deuteronomy 18, but is commonly used in the Pentateuch to describe what will happen to the soul (ψυχή) who does not do what is required by the law.¹²

According to the Pentateuch, a person will be cut off from the people Israel for not being circumcised on the eighth day (Genesis 17:14), eating leaven during Passover (Exodus 12:15, 19), sacrificing to another god (Exodus 22:20), or working on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14). Not surprisingly, this legal construction appears most frequently in Leviticus, where it occurs nine times. The construction describes what will happen to someone who slaughters an animal somewhere other than at the door to the tent of witness (17:4, 9), eats blood (17:14), engages in sexual misconduct (18:29; 20:17, 18), eats a sacrifice of deliverance on the third day (19:8), comes near to sacred items (22:3), or does not observe the Day of Atonement (23:29).¹³ According to Numbers, a person will be cut out of Israel if he or she does not observe the Passover even though not on a journey (9:13), intentionally sins (15:30), or is not purified after contamination from a corpse (19:20).¹⁴

The redactor of Luke’s citation from Moses assigns a common Pentateuchal punishment to the one who does not listen to the prophet like Moses. Perhaps he imagines that if a person is cut off from the people for not observing the law of Moses, then all the

¹² Mishnah Kerithoth 1.1 lists thirty-six acts for which a person is cut off (Hebrew *keri*).

¹³ Jacques Schlosser observes, “among the numerous Old Testament texts that set out a prescription or prohibition and that connect the threat of extermination, it is Leviticus 23:29 that possesses the most formal similarities with our text” (parmi les nombreux textes vétérotestamentaires que énoncent une prescription ou un interdit et qui y associent la menace d’extermination, c’est Lv 23,29 qui possède le plus de ressemblances formelles avec notre texte; 21).

¹⁴ Many scholars claim that Luke is drawing specifically on Leviticus 23:29 in Acts 3:23 (see Conzelmann: 29; Barrett: 1:209; Bock: 179). However, the above examples demonstrate that Luke’s construction, “utterly rooted out of the people,” is also found elsewhere in the Pentateuch.

more should this happen to one who does not listen to the prophet like Moses.¹⁵ Luke's claim that the one who does not listen to the prophet like Moses will be cut off from the people is also supported by a portion of Deuteronomy 18:18 not quoted by Luke. According to 18:18, God's words will be placed in the mouth of the prophet like Moses. Whoever does not listen to the prophet like Moses thus ignores the very words of God, and presumably therefore threatens his or her place in the people Israel.

According to Luke, whoever does not listen to Jesus, the prophet like Moses, will be removed from the people Israel. Here in Acts 3, Israel is defined by the subtraction of certain Jews, rather than by the addition of certain gentiles. Only those Jews who listen to Jesus remain in Israel.¹⁶ The rest will be cut out – they have not only refused to listen to Jesus but have thus also not obeyed Moses who commanded them to listen to Jesus.

Therefore, in Acts 3, the believing community is defined within the bounds of Judaism. The Jewish Peter speaks to a Jewish audience and quotes the law of Moses from the Jewish scriptures in order to claim that only some Jews will continue to be part of Israel.¹⁷ Further, Peter's warnings to his Jewish audience are not inconsistent with Jewish tradition. First, Peter's rebuke threatening excision of those who do not listen to the prophet like Moses is consistent with prophetic rebukes that threaten exile and national disasters (e.g., Amos 8:9-14; Jeremiah 25:8-11). Second, Peter's threat of excision and consequent definition of Israel by subtraction is consistent with other Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic exegesis (e.g., 1QS V, 8-13; CD III, 12-17). The initial configuration of the Way in Acts 3 is thus thoroughly Jewish.

“Moses Has Had Those Who Proclaim Him”

According to many scholars, this Jewish beginning is no more than a beginning, and by the end of the narrative, the Way is a gentile movement.¹⁸ This third part of the paper will demonstrate that even the inclusion of the gentiles in the believing community occurs within a Jewish framework, and thus does not compromise the Jewish character of the community.

¹⁵ In Rabbinic exegesis, this method of reasoning is referred to as *qal va-homer*. It is possible that Luke is not responsible for the citation preserved in Acts 3:23, but has inherited it from an earlier exegete.

¹⁶ Jervell writes, “the unrepentant portion of Israel has forfeited its membership in the people of God” (43). Barrett, by contrast, recognizes that this is the meaning of the words, but says, “Whether Luke meant so much is doubtful. He probably thought the verse a powerful means of expressing in negative terms what is positively stated in 4.12” (1:210). Pervo apparently disagrees with Barrett; he writes, “those who do not listen to Jesus and heed the call to repent will be expelled from the people of God” (109), but he adds, “the threat of 3:23 will be, in retrospect, a foreshadowing of the ultimate Jewish reaction to the message” (110). Despite this initial Jewish construction of the believing community, Pervo follows in the footsteps of Haenchen and Conzelmann by claiming that the Jews reject the gospel.

¹⁷ Jervell rightly states that for Luke “‘Israel’ does not refer to a church that is made up of Jews and gentiles, but to the repentant portion of the ‘empirical’ Israel; they are Jews who have accepted the gospel, to whom and for whom the promises have been fulfilled” (43).

¹⁸ A recent example of this reading can be found in Pervo, who writes: the Jews “had the first chance, and repeatedly they rejected the offer, as Acts will demonstrate” (109).

It is widely noted in the scholarship on Acts that the introduction of gentiles into the Way occurs in Acts 10–11 with Peter’s vision of the sheet,¹⁹ and that the question of how this will work in practice is addressed in Acts 15.²⁰ That God has welcomed the gentiles is signified by their receipt of the Holy Spirit in Acts 10 (10:44-48; also 15:8). Yet the question of *how* these gentiles will be joined to the Jewish believing community remains. The perceived need to determine how gentiles can live together with Jews demonstrates the Jewishness of the Way. This issue is addressed in Acts 15, in which the Jewish members of the believing community determine how the gentiles can join them.

Acts 15 begins with the claim from some Jews that the gentile members of the Way must be circumcised and observe the law of Moses (15:1, 5).²¹ Significantly the debate in Acts 15 addresses how the law of Moses applies only to gentile members of the Way; the text assumes that the Jewish members of the Way will continue to observe the law of Moses as they always have.²²

Concerning the question of whether the gentiles need to be circumcised and observe the law of Moses, Peter, Barnabas and Paul, and James speak. The decision is pronounced by James. He says:

διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω μὴ παρενοχλεῖν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν,
ἀλλ’ ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς
πορνείας καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος.

Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not add extra difficulties to those gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood (15:19-20).

From this decision it is clear that the gentiles do not need to be circumcised; rather, they are to observe four instructions or laws.²³

Why Luke presents James as selecting precisely these four laws and no others is a matter of scholarly debate.²⁴ The most common explanation of Acts 15:20 is that these four

¹⁹ The proselyte Nicolaus is identified as a member of the Way in Acts 6:5. Whether Luke considers him a “gentile” is unclear.

²⁰ For example, Fitzmyer describes the account involving Cornelius in Acts 10–11 as “an important episode that prepares for the decision of the ‘Council’ in chap. 15” (447).

²¹ At the beginning of Acts 15, two groups make claims concerning the gentiles. In Acts 15:1 “certain individuals came down from Judea (τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας)” and say, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved (ἐὰν μὴ περιμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι).” Paul and Barnabas disagree with them and travel to Jerusalem to discuss the issue with the apostles. Once the action has shifted to Jerusalem, “some believers from the sect of the Pharisees (τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες)” make a similar claim: “It is necessary to circumcise them and order them to keep the law of Moses (δεῖ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως)” (15:5).

²² Later in the narrative Luke ensures that the reader knows that the Jewish members of the Way keep their Jewish customs, as will be demonstrated in part 4 below.

²³ This set of four laws appears two other times in the text of Acts, in 15:29 and in 21:25.

²⁴ I am not concerned here with the historicity of this prohibition, but only how it functions in Acts.

elements are based on the prohibitions for foreigners living in the land in Leviticus 17–18.²⁵ When James declares that the apostles will “not add extra difficulties to the gentiles who are turning to God,” he recognizes that the law makes certain demands of gentiles (signified by the four laws of Acts 15:20), and the apostles will not add any “extra difficulties” to this list.

There is some evidence for this explanation. Leviticus 17–18 contains instructions directed at both Israelites (e.g., τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ in Lev 17:12) and proselytes, from the Greek προσήλυτος, which literally means “one who has entered in or arrived” and can be translated “sojourner” in the context of the Pentateuch (προσήλυτος appears in Leviticus 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26). With only a small degree of creativity, it is possible to find parallels for each of the four prohibitions of Acts 15:20 in Leviticus 17–18. Acts 15:20’s prohibition of idolatry (ἀλίσγημα τῶν εἰδώλων) may reflect the instruction in Leviticus 17 to offer sacrifice only at the door of the tent of meeting (17:8–9). Acts’ prohibition of fornication (πορνεία) may be a summary of the list of improper sexual unions identified in Leviticus 18:6–30. The prohibitions in Acts 15 against what has been strangled (πνικτός) and blood (αἷμα) perhaps reflect the Leviticus 17 injunction against eating “blood (αἷμα)” (17:12) and against eating “a carcass or what has been torn by wild beasts” (17:15; Conzelmann: 119).

However, the connection of Acts 15:20 with Leviticus 17–18 is not without its problems.²⁶ Though it is possible to link the four elements of the Acts 15:20 prohibition with Leviticus 17–18, the connection is not obvious; the only verbal parallel between Acts 15:20 and Leviticus 17–18 is the word “blood (αἷμα).”²⁷ Additionally, as Wilson (86) has observed, the LXX contains additional laws that apply to the foreigner living among the Jews.²⁸

It seems likely that Luke is presenting laws that he understands to be applicable to non-Jews living among Jews. Many scholars have suggested that these four prohibitions allow Jewish and gentile followers of Jesus to live together. Three of the four elements (all but πορνεία) may be related to dietary regulations (see Fitzmeyer: 557), presumably allowing gentile believers to eat with Jews. It is reasonable to assume that laws directed at foreigners living among the Israelites were in some way influential in Luke’s use of the decree. There is little to suggest that Luke was concerned that the theory work out perfectly. Pervo’s assessment is safe: “The basis appears to have been the regulations for gentiles resident in the holy land (Leviticus 17–18), but the matter is far from certain” (376–77).

²⁵ A bold version of this interpretation comes from Conzelmann: “These are the prohibitions of Leviticus 17–18 . . . which were also valid for non-Jews living in Israel” (118). Similarly Haenchen writes, “What links these four prohibitions together, and at the same time distinguishes them from all other ‘ritual’ requirements of ‘Moses’, is that they – and they only – are given not only to Israel but also to strangers dwelling among the Jews” (469).

²⁶ The difficulties are too numerous to address fully here; see Wilson: 84–94, and the response by Callan: 284–97.

²⁷ Wilson observes, “the word πνικτός does not occur anywhere in the LXX and is extremely rare elsewhere” (88).

²⁸ Callan argues against Wilson, claiming that the elements of the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15:20 come from those “laws that apply both to the Israelites and to the *gēr*, are introduced by the idiom *’iš ’iš*, and are followed by the warning that the violator will be cut off from the people” (287).

A related possibility is that the behavior prohibited of gentiles in Acts 15:20 reflects Jews' common assumptions about gentiles – that they were idolaters who engaged in improper sexual behavior (see Hayes: 54-55). Perhaps Acts 15:20 aims to correct these “non-Jewish” behaviors of the gentile followers of Jesus. This goal likely fits with the claim that Luke has Leviticus 17–18 in mind. Not all the instructions of the Torah apply to gentiles, but some instructions do. The point of Luke's introduction of elements from Leviticus 17–18 is that the Torah does not allow even gentiles to be idolaters who commit *πορνεία*. Thus, the text of Acts 15 presumes not only that Jewish members of the Way continue to observe the law of Moses, but also that the law of Moses determines what gentile members of the Way must do.

Immediately after revealing his decision regarding the gentile members of the Way, James provides support for it. In Acts 15:21, James says, “For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.” It is largely agreed that “Moses” here is a metonym for the law of Moses, but the precise meaning of this verse is yet another matter of scholarly debate.²⁹ Respected scholars have even questioned the relevance of this claim to James's decision.³⁰ For example, in his recent Hermeneia commentary, Pervo writes, “It can hardly mean that, since the Torah can be heard everywhere (cf. 13:27), gentile believers should have availed themselves of the opportunity to hear it and learn of these prohibitions” (378).³¹ Such a claim appears to overlook the evidence of the text that gentiles have indeed been in the synagogues and thus presumably listening to the Torah.

Many of the gentiles who attach themselves to the Way have previously demonstrated an affinity to the synagogue. Nicolaus, one of the seven men chosen to “wait on tables” (6:2) in Acts 6, is identified as a “proselyte (*προσήλυτον*)” (6:5), which presumably means that he is a gentile who attached himself to the synagogue in some way prior to joining the believing community. Cornelius, whose receipt of the Holy Spirit marks one turning point in the Acts narrative, is introduced as “a devout man who feared God (*φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν*) with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God” (10:2). It is in the context of this devotion to the God of Israel that Cornelius has a vision in which he is directed to send men to Joppa to collect Simon Peter (10:3-5). All of this happens before Cornelius has even heard of Jesus; he hears the gospel only after Peter arrives at his house.

²⁹ Pervo writes, “If Luke were the sort of author who deliberately included something to challenge his subsequent interpreters, v. 21 could qualify for that honor” (378). At least three options have been suggested in the literature. One option is that James wants to say that “gentiles . . . who want the Law can go to the synagogue for it” (Barrett 2:737). A second possibility is that since Moses has been proclaimed, the gentiles should be familiar with Leviticus 17–18 and thus aware that they should be following these prescriptions (Fitzmyer: 558). A third option is that because there are “so many observant Jews” (Barrett 2:737), gentiles will need to follow at least part of the law to live among them – either (a) the parts of the law which the law itself requires of gentiles or (b) the parts of the law which will allow for Jew and gentile believers to live together in community. (The division within this third option is not from Barrett.)

³⁰ Pervo writes, “the immediate relevance of this claim is not clear” (378). Barrett suggests that 15:21 may refer to 15:15–18; 15:19; or 15:20 (2:737).

³¹ As far as I can tell, Barrett does not envision the possibility that the gentiles were already in the synagogue (2:737).

Other gentiles who join the Way follow this basic pattern. It has been widely noticed that generally when Paul arrives in a new city, he begins at the synagogue before turning to the gentiles. Conzelmann, Haenchen, and many others read this as Paul giving up on the hope of “converting” the Jews and thus turning to the gentiles (see Conzelmann: 188, 227; Haenchen: 101-102, 414, 535, 723-24; Pervo: 681). What has often been ignored is that there are regularly gentiles in the synagogue who are persuaded by Paul’s message.³²

For example, in Antioch of Pisidia, “When the gathering of the synagogue broke up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes (πολλοὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τῶν σεβομένων προσηλύτων) followed Paul and Barnabas” (13:43). In Iconium, “Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks (Ἰουδαίων τε καὶ Ἑλλήνων πολὺ πλῆθος) became believers” (14:1), and in Thessalonica Paul enters the synagogue, where “Some of [the Jews] were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great number of the devout Greeks (τῶν τε σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων πλῆθος πολὺ) and not a few of the leading women” (17:4). Gentiles who are already in the synagogue are persuaded by Paul’s message also in Philippi (16:14), Beroea (17:12), and Corinth (18:4, 7).

There are fewer instances of Paul persuading gentiles outside of the synagogue (see 16:33; 17:34; and 19:17-18).³³ And when Paul goes straight to the gentiles, it does not go so well (Matthews 2013: 64).³⁴ In Lystra and Derbe, Paul heals a crippled man (14:8-10), is declared the god Hermes, and does not appear to gather any new members into the Way. Rather, “they scarcely restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them” (14:18).

Thus, in the narrative world of Acts many (though not all) of the gentile members of the Way were attracted to Judaism and frequented synagogues before they had heard Paul or anyone else preach about Jesus. This insight is important for understanding Acts 15:21. If “in every city” Moses “has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues,” then the gentile members of the Way very likely had heard the law of Moses. This suggests that the four laws of Acts 15:20 are laws that the gentiles would have heard read in the Torah, and they would have heard in the Torah that these are laws that apply to gentiles living among Israel.

If it is correct that the gentile members of the believing community are already familiar with these four prohibitions from having heard them in the synagogues, this makes sense of

³² Esler does note this: “There are approximately twenty conversion accounts in Acts subsequent to that dealing with Cornelius. Their prominent feature is that Luke portrays Christian evangelism as having been successful almost entirely among Jews and God-fearers attending synagogues where the Gospel was first preached” (38).

³³ It is unclear whether the gentiles in 13:48 are in the synagogue.

³⁴ Esler notes that Luke’s construction of history is likely a revision of the historical facts. He writes, “Luke’s programmatic bias in favour of gentile God-fearers and almost total omission of ex-idolaters from the early congregations are most plausibly explained as a modification of the historical facts, designed to accord with the composition of his own community, in particular with the fact that its gentile members, or a significant proportion of them, had been adherents of Yahweh and synagogue-attenders prior to their becoming Christians” (44).

Acts's claim that this so-called decree is unburdensome.³⁵ James introduces it by saying, "we should not trouble those gentiles who are turning to God" (15:19), and in the letter that is sent with the decree the Jerusalem leaders write, "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials" (15:28). The letter is received by its gentile audience with joy: "they rejoiced at its exhortation" (15:31). One possibility that should not be ignored is that God-fearers who frequented synagogues would have already been observing such laws, and thus the decree is not a burden because it introduces no new practice.

In summary, many, and perhaps most, of the gentile members of the believing community were already attached to the synagogue before they had heard of Jesus. These gentiles, who are familiar with those elements of the Torah that apply to both Jews and gentiles, are joined to the believing community in accordance with the Torah – the same Torah that all Jews, along with many gentiles, hear in their synagogues – or at least with one possible interpretation of the Torah.

Law Observance among Jews in the Way

In Luke's narrative, the Jewish members of the Way not only retain their familial connection to other Jews, but they also retain Jewish customs and laws, two words which Luke can use interchangeably. In many Second Temple Jewish texts, the law of Moses is used as a means of articulating and claiming identity. Those who follow the law "correctly" are truly Israel or truly Jewish, whereas those who veer off course, as defined by the text, are not. Two strong examples of the use of the law as a mark of Jewish identity are 1 Maccabees and the Damascus Document. In Acts as well, law observance serves as a means of demonstrating Jewish identity.

As shown above, the discussion of the law of Moses in Acts 15 is concerned with what demands the law makes on gentiles. Lest there be any uncertainty regarding whether the Jewish members of the Way continue to observe the law of Moses, Acts 21 puts the matter to rest. Here it is not enough for the Jewish members of the Way in Jerusalem to observe the law, but they must also make sure that Paul and those Jews to whom he witnesses in the Diaspora also maintain their ethnic identity by observing the law.³⁶

In Acts 21, Paul journeys to Jerusalem and is confronted with the accusation, made by unnamed opponents, that he encourages others to forsake Moses. James and the elders report to him: "You see, brother, how many tens of thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. But they have been told about you that you

³⁵ The decree is declared unburdensome after Peter suggests that the law is a burden. In Acts 15:10 Peter describes the law as "a yoke . . . that neither our ancestors nor we were able to bear." Pervo notes, "This is, in fact, a gentile view of Torah; for Jews obedience is a source of joy" (368). Luke simultaneously indicates that law observance is a burden, a position that appears to be at odds with much of first century Judaism, and ensures that Jewish believers continue to observe law. The believing community is neither safely in the fold of Judaism nor entirely separate from it.

³⁶ That the concern is over Paul in particular suggests that Luke may be responding to Paul's letters which indicate that Paul proclaimed the good news primarily to idolaters rather than to proselytes, a point on which Paul's letters and the narrative of Acts seem to disagree.

teach revolt from Moses to all the Jews among the gentiles (ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως τοὺς κατὰ τὰ ἔθνη πάντας Ἰουδαίους), telling them not to circumcise their children or live by the customs (ἔθεσιν)” (21:20-21). This reference to the large number of believing Jews in Jerusalem recalls the multitudes of Jews who join the Way in the early chapters of Acts.³⁷

Immediately the Jerusalem leaders provide a means of countering the accusation by demonstrating that Paul is a law-abiding Jew. Paul is to join with four men who are under a vow. James and the elders instruct him, “take charge of them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses for the shaving of their heads” (21:24). In this way, the Jewish believers in Jerusalem will see that Paul observes the law and thus dismiss what they have heard about him. Paul does as James directs, and the matter is settled.

Perhaps as preparation for this event and to ensure that Paul’s action is believable, Luke previously had Paul undertake a vow. In 18:18 Paul has his hair cut because of a vow, and in 18:22 he goes up to Jerusalem, suggesting that he goes to the temple to fulfill his vow (see Pervo: 455).

Thus, Luke is careful to present the Jewish members of the Way as law-observant (see Jervell: 46) and the gentile members of the Way as joining them in accordance with the law. Far less is said of the practices of other Jews in the narrative. However, Luke does accuse one group of Jews of not observing the law. At the end of Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, he condemns his audience, the Jewish council, saying “You are the ones who received the law as decreed by angels, and you have not kept it” (7:53). Stephen has just accused them of Jesus’s murder, but the summary of Israelite history in Acts 7 indicates that the violation is more extensive. Stephen claims that the Israelites rejected the law from the beginning, and just like the Israelites who turned immediately from the law with their worship of the golden calf (7:41), their descendants (Stephen’s audience) have not kept the law. These are the same Jews whom Stephen accuses of following in the path of *their* ancestors by opposing the Holy Spirit (7:51) and persecuting the prophets (7:52). It is these Jews who do not follow Jesus, but who follow the ways of *their* ancestors, who are accused of rejecting their ethnic customs. Stephen refuses to share ancestry with Jews who do not observe the law.

Conclusion

To return to the discussion of Ἰουδαῖος from the beginning of the paper, Luke does sometimes use Ἰουδαῖος to refer to Jews who are opposed to the members of the Way. Some scholars have taken this usage as part of their argument that Acts is an anti-Jewish text in which the gentile Christian church replaces the Jews as the people of God. As the above examination has demonstrated, the relationship between the Way and Judaism in Acts is far more complex than that assessment suggests.

³⁷ Jervell notes “mass conversions of Jews” in “2:41 (47); 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:42; 12:24; 13:43; 14:1; 17:10ff; (19:20); 21:20,” and contrasts them with mass “conversions” of gentiles, which occur “less often” (44). Only those “mass conversions of Jews” through chapter 6 occur in Jerusalem; 21:20 refers back to these early “conversions” and possibly suggests more have occurred. Though Jervell uses the language of “conversion” here, I have intentionally avoided it. Conversion indicates movement from one religion to another, which, this paper argues, does not represent the situation in Acts.

The believing community in Acts is defined in Jewish terms. The narrative of Acts presents a group of Jews who have distinguished themselves from other Jews, with the claim that they alone listen to Moses correctly. But they are not entirely separated from other Jews in that the ties of kinship remain; recall that both groups refer to each other as ἀδελφοί. The Jews who follow Jesus maintain the marks of Jewish identity recognized by other Jews of their time period – interpretation of scriptures, observance of the law of Moses, and use of common in-group terminology reflecting mutually acknowledged kinship.³⁸ Those Jews in the Way have permitted some gentiles to join their ranks, and these gentiles do so in accord with the Torah, observing those laws that apply not only to Israel but also to sojourners living among them. Thus, Luke’s narrative does not show a Christian community that has broken with Judaism, nor does it show that the gentiles have replaced the Jews as the people of God.

While Luke does sometimes present “the Jews” as a whole as the opponents of the members of the Way, he can also be more precise in his use of Ἰουδαῖος, indicating that he recognizes there are Jews both within the Way and outside of the Way. In Acts 14:2 Luke says it is “the Jews who are not believers” who stir up opposition against the believers, whereas in Acts 15:5 Luke specifies that the Pharisees who claim that the gentiles should be circumcised are believers. Luke describes both Jews who are members of the Way and the rest of the Jews as Ἰουδαῖος. He characterizes the former group as Jewish by claiming that they listen to Moses and observe the Torah, while he characterizes the latter group as Jewish by describing them collectively as “the Jews.” In Luke’s narrative, the boundaries between who is Jewish and who is not Jewish are not clear. The situation is further complicated by the introduction of gentiles. Gentile members of the Way are joined to the group in accordance with the prescriptions in the law of Moses for foreigners living among Israel, positioning these gentiles as living within the bounds of Torah, in contrast to those Jews who are accused of not having kept “the law as decreed by angels” (7:53). Luke has not presented one group as clearly Jewish and the other group as clearly not Jewish. Rather, some ambiguity remains in regard to the characterization of both the Way and the rest of the Jews. Such a presentation of the relationship between these two groups is significant for our understanding of the malleability of Jewish identity in Luke’s time period. That Luke describes both groups (the Way and the rest of the Jews) simultaneously as Jewish in some ways and distinct from Judaism in other ways signifies that the identities of both groups are being negotiated, and that they are being negotiated in relation to one another. Luke’s contrast of the law-observant members of the Way with “the Jews” does not indicate that the narrative is anti-Jewish, but rather that Jewish identity was malleable, could be constructed in multiple ways, and that the relationship between different groups with some claim to this identity was ambiguous and contested.

³⁸ Their practice of applying the scriptures to their own community, as we saw in Acts 3:22–23, is hardly un-Jewish, since it is precisely what the Qumran Community did.

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