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ATTITUDES TO GENTILES IN ANCIENT JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

EDITED BY
DAVID C. SIM
AND JAMES S. McLAREN

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Formerly Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series

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B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury T&T Clark
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

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First published 2013

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-0-56763-766-6
ePDF: 978-0-56703-578-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

David C. Sim and James S. McLaren
Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity /
David C. Sim and James S. McLaren p.cm
Includes bibliographic references and index.
ISBN 978-0-567-63766-6 (hardcover) – ISBN 978-0-5670-3578-3 (ePDF)

Typeset by Forthcoming Publications Ltd (www.forthpub.com)
Printed and bound in Great Britain

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>AJSRev</i>	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BNTS	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BSR	Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theological Bulletin</i>
BUS	Brown University Studies
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBNTS	Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> Monograph Series
<i>CIG</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
CQS	Companion to the Qumran Scrolls
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Ad Novum Testamentum
CSCT	Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>Epigraphica Anatolica</i>
EJL	Early Judaism and its Literature
ETS	Erfurter Theologischer Studien
EUS	European University Studies
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Museum
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>IGR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i>
<i>IJO</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i>
<i>IK</i>	<i>Inschriftengriechischer Städte auskleinasien</i>
JAJSup	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i> , Supplements
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JPS	The Jewish Publication Society
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSJSup	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i> , Supplements
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> , Supplement Series
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Supplement Series
JSPSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i> , Supplement Series
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
<i>MAMA</i>	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i>
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTABh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTSI	The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel
NTT	New Testament Theology
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York, 1983
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
RECAM	Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumrân</i>
SBEC	Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SCSS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SHC	Studies in Hellenistic Civilization
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World

SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>SPhA</i>	<i>The Studia Philonica Annual</i>
SPM	Studia Philonica Monographs
SPNT	Studies on the Personalities of the New Testament
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
<i>TAM</i>	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i>
TBLS	The Bible and Liberation Series
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–76
THNTC	Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VTSup	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> , Supplements
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

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PREFACE

This volume began as one project of a Research Support Team funded by the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) at Australia Catholic University. The editors would like to acknowledge the great assistance provided by Australian Catholic University towards the original project and the volume that it has subsequently created. Our thanks also extend to our international team of collaborators whose partnership with the ACU Biblical scholars has contributed enormously to the diversity and overall quality of this collection of essays. The editors owe a debt of gratitude to our colleague, Dr Dermot Nestor, who provided invaluable support on various technical issues. Finally, this volume has been delayed by a number of unavoidable factors, and we would like to offer our thanks to the team at Bloomsbury T&T Clark who liaised with us and who completely supported us when problems emerged. It needs to be said that we originally envisaged a chapter on ‘the historical Jesus and the Gentiles’ which would have formed a bridge between the Ancient Judaism chapters and the Early Christianity chapters, but the scholar allocated this chapter was unfortunately unable to complete it due to various reasons, and finding a suitable replacement would have delayed the volume even more. Our decision to proceed without this chapter leaves an obvious gap in the volume, but we ask for the indulgence and understanding of readers and reviewers alike. The chapters that deal with ‘Early Christianity’ reveal the diversity of ways in which the later followers of Jesus tackled the issues of Gentile nature, status and inclusion.

David C. Sim
James S. McLaren

INTRODUCTION

James S. McLaren

There are a number of well-trodden pathways traversed regarding the manner in which Jews and Christians in the ancient world interacted with the wider social contexts in which their respective religious traditions were situated. Some paths have highlighted the extent to which conflict and tension acted as the main frame of reference. Traditionally prominent here has been discussion of major flash points, such as those associated with the actions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the responses by Jews to his actions.¹ Some paths have focused on the possible cultural interaction, especially in terms of the extent to which Jews and/or Christians engaged with Greco-Roman society.² Some paths have been concerned to chart the types of formal interaction in terms of official policy and rulings and/or wider social perceptions regarding the status of Jews and Christians.³ At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the importance of situating these discussions in the context of developments within the study of the ancient Roman world and of how its empire functioned.⁴

1 A notable example here is E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)* (rev. G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Black and M. Goodman; 3 vols. in 4 parts; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973–87), who uses the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes as one chronological boundary and the reign of Hadrian as the other boundary marker.

2 For example, see D. Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism: Jewish and Christian Ethnicity in Ancient Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); E. S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (HCS 30; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996).

3 For example, see E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule, from Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), and P. Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

4 For example, see G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

One of the issues common to each of these different pathways is the way that Jews and Christians viewed the people with which they were interacting. This interest in the *other* has covered instances where there is an active dialogue partner or where either Jews or Christians have found themselves needing to respond to a specific situation. Particular attention has been devoted to the question of how Jews and Christians interacted with one another, especially from the perspective of the latter community.⁵ While there has been some consideration of how one or another of these faith communities understood themselves from the perspective of being the *outsider* in a given situation, the bulk of discussion has focused on Jews and Christians as the *insider*.⁶ This approach is clearly understandable. Drawing on biblical tradition there was a divide between the notion of Israel on one side and the nations (*goyim*) on the other (e.g. Exod. 33.16). Writing in the first century CE Paul expresses the dichotomy as ‘Jew’ and ‘Greek’ (Gal. 3.28), admittedly in the context of claiming such a divide no longer existed.

It has become relatively common to refer to the *outsider* by the term ‘Gentile’. Although the term was never used by any specific group or community to identify itself, it is employed here as a term of convenience. It is deliberately broad in scope, referring to any person or community that was not counted among the *insiders* by Jews. It could refer to cultic and/or social practices and to matters of conviction. For Christians, ‘Gentiles’ referred to people who had no link with the cultural and religious heritage of Israel.

The most important recent contribution regarding the place of Gentiles among Jews and among Christians is the work of T. L. Donaldson.⁷ He notes a well-established tendency for Christianity to be depicted as a religion that was universalistic in outlook, readily welcoming and explicitly open to Gentiles. At the same time, Jews have been depicted as particularistic, concerned to protect their practices and beliefs in a way that made them wary of *outsiders*. Donaldson set about challenging the validity of this universalistic/particularistic paradigm in the approach of Jews and Christians toward interaction with Gentiles. His detailed study

5 For example, see S. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), and W. Horbury, *Jews and Christians: In Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

6 For example, regarding the place of Jews in Rome, see D. Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Duckworth, 2000).

7 While some of the issues were addressed in T. L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), the key contribution is T. L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008).

brought together an extensive collection of passages from primary sources that help show Judaism was universalistic. He identifies four key categories that display the universalistic nature: a range of ‘sympathisers’, Gentiles that participated in Jewish worship; converts to the Jewish way of life; ethical monotheists; and Gentiles as participants in eschatological redemption. Donaldson’s detailed study has clearly exposed a major shortcoming in previous reconstructions of how to explain and compare Jewish and Christian attitudes toward Gentiles. However, it is also clear that in order to redress that shortcoming Donaldson focused on redrawing the picture within the existing universalistic/particularistic frame of reference. He deliberately concentrated on discussing passages that helped show the extent and manner of Gentile interaction with Jews and of how Jews were universalistic in their attitudes toward Gentiles. The picture constructed from the source material examined by Donaldson was intentionally a positive one that sought to redress past caricatures of Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles. Although his study clearly helped dispel past distortions in comparisons of Jewish and Christian attitudes, its focus on positive interaction does not necessarily convey the full extent of how Jews thought of Gentiles. It is appropriate to go even further and to question the effectiveness of the universalistic/particularistic paradigm for explaining how Jews and Christians interacted with Gentiles.⁸

The point of departure for this collection of essays is to provide an overview of the attitudes expressed by various Jews and Christians regarding Gentiles in the ancient world *per se*, rather than as an expression of a particular outlook. The subject matter examined in this study is grouped in two broad categories: the attitudes of late Second Temple period Jews (with some supplementation from the Rabbinic literature) and the attitudes of first- and early second-century CE Christians. The chronological timeframe covered in the former category ranges mainly from the early second century BCE through to the later part of the first century CE.⁹ In the opening chapter D. Sim provides an overview of Jewish attitudes toward the place of Gentiles, God-fearers and proselytes. He focuses on the important issue of the boundaries that distinguished Gentiles from Jews. In particular, he discusses the shifts in attitude

8 See A. Runesson, ‘Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity? Some Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology’, *Studia Theologia* 54 (2000), pp.55–75.

9 The chronological boundary for the study, therefore, does not extend into the post-Second Temple period of second century CE, early Rabbinic Judaism and post-apostolic Christianity.

toward the question of conversion to the Jewish way of life, charting changes from the biblical period through to the end of the second Temple period. In broad terms, he shows that although Jews were not actively seeking converts as engagement with the Greco-Roman world increased, their way of life did attract varying levels of interest from Gentiles. Some of those people became known as God-fearers, Gentiles that displayed a variety of levels of commitment to the Jewish way of life. They were, however, not converts, not members of the Jewish community. To convert, to become a proselyte, required three major actions: exclusive worship of the one God and the rejection of idolatry; full acceptance of the Torah, including circumcision for males; and incorporation into the Jewish community.

All the other chapters focus on a particular individual, group, institution and/or corpus of writings. Largely due to a shared religious-cultural heritage derived from the biblical tradition it will be evident there are various points of overlap between the attitudes expressed. At the same time, it is important that the variety and the distinctiveness of the attitudes are explored as articulated within the confines of the specific group or individual. For some the issue of interaction with Gentiles was a matter of explicit concern, even if not necessarily a major priority. For others, comments and thoughts regarding Gentiles was no more than a periphery subject matter. It is somewhat ironic that the latter approach is no more evident than in the case of Philo, as explained by D. Runia in his discussion of the copious writings of the Alexandrian Jew who lived at the turn of the era. Immersed in a social, religious and political setting where interaction with the Gentile world was an everyday reality, Runia examines how Philo employed the notion of the Gentiles in his efforts to affirm the validity of his own religious heritage. Runia examines a selection of key passages from Philo's biblical commentaries and from his other non-exegetical works. Although Philo draws upon the binary contrast of Jew and Gentile, he does so in terms primarily in an allegorical manner: contrasting the good soul with the evil soul. Philo rarely pairs Jew and Gentile as nations or ethnic groups that were in competition with one another.

The sectarian writings among the large corpus of the Dead Sea Scrolls offer a distinctive perspective on the topic. As J. Collins explains, the two branches of the sect represented in the surviving texts seek to separate themselves from other Jews as much as from any non-Jews. Working on the premise that reservation, if not open hostility, should be evident in the depiction of Gentiles, Collins examines two key categories referred to the scrolls, the *kittim* and the *geruim*. The *kittim*, foreigners

most likely understood to be Romans, act as agents of destruction and will, in turn, also suffer a similar fate. As Collins notes, however, this negative depiction of Gentiles was not necessarily distinctive to the sect. Collins then reviews the presentation of the *gerim* in several of the sectarian texts. There he notes a change in the depiction, especially between CD and 4Q174. While the former appears to allow for the *ger* to be included in the community by the time of the latter text the *ger* are rejected. Collins proposes that the variation is best understood as a change in the attitude over a period of time within the sect. As Collins observes, the presence of even a minor inclusive approach to the place of Gentiles in CD helps affirm that the predominant depiction of Gentiles in the scrolls was negative.

The subject of the next chapter, Josephus, might be expected to be one Jewish writer from the period that would display a constructive attitude toward Gentiles. However, in his discussion of whether or not Josephus respected Gentiles, J. McLaren argues there is no evidence to suggest he did so. McLaren reviews the presentation of Gentiles in two of Josephus' texts, his account of the recent war and in his apologetic defence of the Jewish way of life, and of the occasions where Josephus had direct interaction with Gentiles during his career. Josephus displays no particular interest or enthusiasm for Gentiles, their customs or their practices. While some Gentiles were depicted in a positive manner it was always in order for Josephus to draw a contrast with his main subject matter, the behaviour of fellow Jews.

Another large, important group of ancient Jewish texts is the apocalyptic literature. While clearly written over a long period of time and the work of many different people, there are shared characteristics that warrant considering the attitudes regarding Gentiles in these works as a corpus. M. Theophilus provides a review of passages from seven texts that reveal secrets regarding the future. Conscious of the importance of considering both the literary and the historical contexts in which various allusions to Gentiles occur, he observes a definite pattern: Gentiles will be subject to divine judgment and destruction in the future. In some instances Gentiles act as the agent of divine punishment and are also even capable of participating in the vision of the future restored rule of God. However, any such constructive views are situated in a broader context of punishment and demise.

The next two chapters focus on institutions directly associated with the functioning of communal worship and celebration of the Jewish way of life: the Temple at Jerusalem and synagogues. In Chapter 6, J. McLaren provides a reassessment of the current scholarly consensus that Gentiles

were welcome to participate in the sacrificial activities of the Temple. He reviews the available evidence through the lens of what can be gleaned by the actual Temple structure, and goes on to review the function of the Temple as a place of sacrifice, the layout of the Temple, especially in terms of the major development undertaken by Herod, the decisions made regarding activities at the Temple, and examples of Gentiles interacting directly with the Temple. McLaren concludes that Gentiles were not afforded a place or a role in the ritual activity of the Temple. Taking a lead from the recent debate about the existence of God-fearers, D. Binder examines the interaction between Jews and Gentiles in general regarding synagogues. He draws attention to pertinent evidence from literary and epigraphical sources across various parts of the Mediterranean world. He examines the evidence in two basic categories: constructive relations and destructive relations, with the bulk of evidence falling into the former category. Evidence from diverse locations, including Egypt and the Bosphorus region, indicates that Gentile authorities supported the existence of synagogues and their role within the functioning of the local community, even to the extent of acting as patrons. In contrast, the examples of destructive interaction noted by Binder are associated with decisions made by specific officials. In effect, the synagogue was a conduit through which Jew and Gentile engaged in public interaction.

The remaining chapters address attitudes associated with people that were directly linked with early Christianity. The first two deal with material from the earliest layers of the tradition, Q and Paul. In Chapter 8, C. Tuckett considers the manner in which the Q tradition refers to Gentiles. Focusing on what is regarded to be the final form of Q, Tuckett commences by reviewing the passages regularly cited as evidence in support of a positive attitude toward Gentiles and their inclusion in the new movement. He contends that those references are somewhat ambiguous in meaning and that, in fact, Gentiles are not really part of the story world of Q. He notes that Q presents a relatively conservative attitude regarding the Law and then comments on the possibility of Gentile believers comprising a small part of the Q community. Tuckett suggests there is insufficient evidence to establish on what basis that participation took place, possibly because it was not yet a matter of discussion or debate. Paul's reputation as 'apostle to the Gentiles' means his writings form another major source warranting examination. In Chapter 9, S. Winter examines a number of what he terms 'descriptive' issues related to Paul's inclusion of Gentiles among the covenant community and related 'explanatory' questions for why he did so. Winter argues that

Paul understood the mission to Gentiles as rooted in the Scriptures of his Jewish heritage. Much of his writing addressed issues pertinent to communities where Gentiles were already in the majority and the issues related to how they might participate in the inheritance of Israel. At the same time, however, Paul was very critical of practices and ideas associated with the Gentile world.

Each of the next four chapters address the attitude toward Gentiles found within the four canonical Gospels. In Chapter 10, I. Elmer examines Mark's Gospel, focusing on the role played by the disciples in the advent of the Gentile mission in Mark 1–8. He explores the meaning of the disciples' call to become 'fishers of people', contending that the phrase had an eschatological, judgment connotation and that the disciples act as a foil to much of what Jesus undertakes in starting the mission to Gentiles. Next, D. Sim provides a detailed critique of the notion that the Gospel of Matthew was largely positive in its attitude toward Gentiles. After briefly reviewing the material normally cited to support the positive outlook, he then discusses five key passages that are critical of Gentiles and examines the manner in which Gentiles are depicted in the Gospel narrative. He comments that ongoing observation of the Torah was essential for anyone who wanted to participate in the community. As such, while some Gentile converts were likely to be part of the Matthean community, it was on the basis that they had become Jews and adopted all the components of the Torah. In the next chapter, E. Dowling examines the presentation of Gentiles in Luke–Acts. Noting that the Gospel openly signals a mission to Gentiles from very early in the story of Jesus, she explores why two key Marcan stories associated with that theme are not used (Mark 7.24–30; 8.1–10). She notes that a major concern of Luke–Acts was to explain how the restoration of Israel formed a key part of the mission to the Gentiles. Working from this basis, Dowling contends that Luke–Acts inserts stories about the restoration of Samaritans as a key step in the process that preceded the mission to the Gentiles. She charts how this is achieved in the narrative of both the Gospel and the story of the work of the followers of Jesus in Acts. In the next chapter, M. Coloe addresses the one Gospel that seemingly offers little direct comment regarding Gentiles, the Gospel of John. Noting the lack of overt interest, Coloe offers a detailed reading of one of the key passages, Jn 12.20. She argues that by reading the reference to the 'Greeks' within a narrative-critical context, including its allusions to earlier biblical traditions, the reference is to the future inclusion of Gentiles within the Christian community. By the time the Gospel was written this mission had already commenced and Gentiles were now part of the community.

The final two chapters offer examples of specific communal contexts where the reality of the Gentile mission and its impact on the nature of the particular community was readily apparent. In Chapter 14, A. Cadwallader considers the situation in Colossae, drawing upon evidence from the epistle and from epigraphical material from the region. He argues that Colossae is a clear example of the shift from a 'Jewish matrix to Gentile dominance'. Noting the use of 'Greek and Jew' (Col. 3.11) rather than the widely attested 'Jew and Greek', Cadwallader examines the regional literary context. He observes how the local population readily placed value on being Greek above and beyond their own cultural heritage. As such, for the early Christian community allegiance to things Jewish was no longer valued as much as things Greek in order to become part of the Roman empire. In the final chapter, J. Draper examines the *Didache*. While precise details about the community responsible for the text are still debated, its purpose was clearly that of a manual. Commencing with the reference to not giving holy things to 'dogs' (*Did.* 9.5), Draper examines the concern for purity within the community. Using Qumran as a point of comparison, he places emphasis on the extent to which the *Didache* community saw itself as holy and the living Temple. As such, the dogs were Gentiles, outsiders that conveyed impurity. He then examines another trajectory preserved through the *Apostolic Constitutions* that indicates openness to Gentile converts, in a manner similar to that portrayed in the Rabbinic tractate *Gerim*.

Chapter 1

GENTILES, GOD-FEARERS AND PROSELYTES

David C. Sim

1. *Introduction*

The related topics of Gentiles, God-fearers and proselytes raise a number of significant issues. These include matters of Jewish identity, the relationship(s) between the Jewish people and the Gentiles, the boundaries that separated these groups, the manner in which outsiders could join the people of Israel and when the process of conversion became possible, and the nature and status of such converts. In this study it will be argued that in very early times conversion to the covenant community of Israel was not possible, but that the barriers between the Jews and Gentiles were relaxed considerably in the post-Exilic era due to the interaction between Judaism and Hellenism. In the late Second Temple period and beyond we find many Gentiles sympathetic to Judaism who followed some Jewish practices and who were closely affiliated with their local Jewish communities. These people are known today by the generic term ‘God-fearers’, although our sources use other names to identify them as well. The same period also witnessed some Gentiles taking advantage of the relaxation of the boundaries that separated the people of Israel from the other nations, and fully converting to Judaism. The very existence of such converts or proselytes presumes a mechanism by which Gentiles could cross the boundary and become a member of the Jewish people, and the process of conversion will be examined as well. A further issue of interest concerns the Jewish attitude(s) to these proselytes, as well as their status within the people of Israel.

The following analysis will focus largely on the Second Temple period and the relevant sources from that time. At some points, however, reference will be made to later evidence, particularly the Rabbinic literature. While the witness of later sources often confirms or supplements what is revealed in the Second Temple material, it sometimes reveals important developments as well in the topics under review, and some

attention will be paid to these. Ancient Judaism was not a static religious tradition, and the subject of Gentiles, God-fearers and proselytes well demonstrates just how flexible and innovative this tradition was in the later Second Temple period and the centuries beyond.

2. From Exclusion to Possible Inclusion: The Origins of Conversion in Second Temple Judaism

In the period between the conquest/settlement (however this process is perceived) and the Exile, Israel was a tribal society with each tribal group living within specific boundaries of the promised land. According to ancient tradition, these tribes were descended from the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). God had delivered the twelve tribes of Israel from oppression in Egypt, entered into a holy covenant with them at Sinai, and then given them the land originally promised to Abraham. In these early centuries membership of the covenant community of Israel was based strictly upon birth within an identifiable kinship group. The people of Israel shared their land with other groups, but they were careful to distinguish themselves from these 'resident aliens' or *gerim* (e.g. Lev. 17.8, 10, 13; 20.2; 22.18).¹ In an attempt to maintain this distinction, the Torah specified that the Israelites were not to intermarry with the seven Canaanite nations among which they lived (Exod. 34.11-17; Deut. 7.3-4), though this seems not to have extended to other nations (cf. Deut. 21.10-14).² Yet, even when intermarriage did occur, the offspring were not considered members of the Israelite community for a number of generations and in some cases never at all (Deut. 23.3-8).³ This manner of identifying an Israelite on the basis of ancestry, kinship and tribal affiliation involved strict boundaries around the covenant community, and essentially precluded the possibility of conversion on the part of outsiders born to other racial groups.⁴ The Torah itself reflects this reality by remaining silent on the subject of conversion.

1 See J. Milgrom, 'Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel', *JBL* 101 (1982), pp.169-76 (170-1); and S. J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp.120-1.

2 Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp.243-4, 255-6, 260-1.

3 Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, p.486.

4 Milgrom, 'Religious Conversion', p.175; and S. J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), pp.21, 50.

This situation, however, was not to last. The catastrophic events of the Assyrian conquest and deportation of the northern tribes, followed by the later Babylonian victory and deportation of the southern tribes, laid the groundwork for significant changes in Israelite or Jewish self-identification.⁵ The original tribal basis structure of society had been seriously ruptured, and those who returned from Babylon placed less emphasis on their tribal ancestry and more on their status as Priests, Levites or (lay) Israelites. Tribal ownership of specific areas was now irrelevant, and this was further emphasised as more and more Jews migrated to areas outside the Israelite homeland. But despite these developments, the entrenched and traditional view of Israelite self-identity proved difficult to move, at least in official circles. In the mid- to late fifth century BCE, both Ezra and Nehemiah were horrified that many Israelite men had married women from foreign nations, and each took steps to force or convince them to send away their wives and children (Ezra 9.1–10.44; cf. Neh. 10.28–31; 13.1–3, 23–37). Even at this stage the national/racial definition of the people of Israel still held sway, and conversion for non-Israelites (or non-Jews) was not an option. Certainly no attempt was made to integrate these woman and children into the covenant community.⁶

This situation probably prevailed for the next two centuries or so. S. J. D. Cohen has argued that in the first half of the Second Temple period the Hebrew term *Yehudi* and the Greek equivalent *ῥουδαῖος* meant not ‘Jew’ but ‘Judean’. This ethno-geographic term denoted either a member of the Judean people living in the traditional homeland or, in the Diaspora, a member of an association of people who originally hailed from Judah. During this period membership of the covenant people of Israel was still exclusively tied to birth and ancestry, and the conversion of other peoples remained impossible.⁷ Cohen’s analysis is supported by the little extant evidence we possess. No text from this period makes any clear reference to outsiders joining the people of Israel.⁸

5 Here I am following Cohen, *Maccabees to the Mishnah*, p.51.

6 So too L. H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish–Christian Schism* (Hoboken: KTAV, 1985), p.15.

7 Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, p.109.

8 It has been suggested that the book of Esther, which can be dated to the fourth century BCE, contains an allusion to Gentile conversion. The Hebrew version of 8.17 states that, after the Jews had been given permission to kill their enemies, many Gentiles declared themselves to be Jews (*mityahadim*) for they were afraid of the Jews. According to L. H. Feldman, this situation involves a conversion to the Israelite or Jewish tradition. See L. H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton

It is generally agreed that it was the interaction between the Judean tradition and Hellenism that significantly affected Judean self-identification which, in turn, loosened the strict traditional boundaries around the covenant people and paved the way for the possibility of conversion. The conquest of Alexander the Great had introduced the Greek notion of citizenship (*politeia*). Citizenship involved not merely membership in a given state or nation, but also a particular way of life. Alexander and his later successors encouraged non-Greeks to hellenise or to become Greek, which could be achieved by speaking the Greek language, worshipping the Greek gods and fully adopting the Greek lifestyle. In this schema, the emphasis was placed much more firmly on cultural and religious practices than on racial origins. As is well known, many Jews were attracted to Hellenism, while others rejected this path and remained faithful to their Jewish heritage.

But in countering the influence of Hellenism, these traditional Jews were inevitably and significantly affected by it. They saw themselves as citizens of the Judean state with its own distinctive lifestyle based upon the ancient laws of Moses. This attempt to counter Hellenism on its own terms led to a crucial change in Judean self-identification. Citizenship in the Judean state was no longer simply a matter of birth and kinship affiliation. While these elements were retained, greater emphasis was now given to the traditional Judean or Jewish lifestyle that was opposed to the Greek way of living. As a direct result of the opposition to Antiochus IV's enforced hellenising programme, the term ῥουδαϊσμός was coined to contrast the Judean or Jewish cultural and/or religious tradition with its Hellenistic counterpart (cf. 2 Macc. 2.21; 8.1; 14.38; 4 Macc. 4.26). In similar fashion the word ῥουδαίζω came into being to denote the act of living the Jewish lifestyle (Plutarch, *Cic.* 7.6; Esth. 8.17 [LXX]; Josephus, *B.J.* 2.454, 463). At the end of the first century CE, Josephus testifies to this change of stance by stating that the Mosaic tradition involves not simply the matter of birth but lifestyle as well (*C. Ap.* 210). J. M. G. Barclay describes these two factors together as 'ethnicity', a

University Press, 1993), pp.289, 337, 343. A better reading, however, is that these Gentiles, on account of their fear, pretended to be Jews. So Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, p.181; and T. K. Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation and Esther* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.103. When Esther was translated into Greek in the late second century BCE, the text was expanded so that the Gentiles 'were circumcised and judaised' (περιτέμοντο καὶ ῥουδαίζον), a reading followed by Josephus (*A.J.* 11.285). This alteration suggests that the Greek translators understood this event as a true conversion, but by this time conversion to Judaism had become well established.

combination of both kinship and cultural practice.⁹ One of the more important repercussions of this development was the relaxation of the boundaries around the covenant people of Israel. Since membership was now largely dependent upon observance of traditional Jewish practices and customs, it became possible to incorporate non-Jews or Gentiles into the Jewish community.¹⁰ One could become a Jew by worshipping the God of Israel, and by following the Jewish way of life as dictated by the Torah.¹¹

Precisely when and where this momentous shift occurred is not possible to determine. It was noted above in n. 8 that the Greek version of Esth. 8.17, composed in the late second century BCE, refers to the circumcision and conversion of Gentiles. An even earlier witness appears in the apocryphal book of Judith, which also provides an unambiguous account of a Gentile converting to Judaism. When Judith tells Achior the Ammonite how she beheaded Holofernes, he believed in the God of Israel, was circumcised and joined the house of Israel (14.8-10). The story of Judith, which is set in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, is clearly fictional, but its importance lies in the fact that it takes for granted the possibility of conversion to Judaism. If this text was written in the decades following the Maccabean revolt, then it suggests that conversion to the Jewish tradition had become an accepted practice by the mid-second century BCE. We can assume from this that at least some Gentiles had undergone the conversion process in the preceding decades, though we know nothing about them or the circumstances of their conversion.

The earliest concrete evidence for conversions to Judaism relates to the early Hasmonean period, but there is a discrepancy in our sources as to whether these instances were voluntary or forced. Josephus relates that in 128 BCE Hyrcanus defeated the Idumeans and offered them a choice – either be circumcised and live according to the laws of the Jews or be expelled from their land. The Idumeans agreed to be circumcised and to adopt the Jewish mode of life (*A.J.* 13.257-58). This policy was repeated by Aristobulus some twenty-five years later when he subjugated the Itureans (*A.J.* 13.318). That these conversions were made under extreme pressure is also attested by Ptolomy, whose original text on the history of Herod is no longer extant but who is cited by Ammonius (*De Adfinium Vocabulorum Differentia* 243). By contrast, the Gentile author Strabo, writing perhaps a century before Josephus, suggests that the conversions

9 Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, pp.402–5.

10 Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp.125–9.

11 Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp.132–5.

of the Idumeans and the Itureans were completely voluntary (*Geogr.* 16.2.34; cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 13.319, where Strabo is said to be following the earlier account of Timagenes). Scholars are divided over which version of events is the more reliable,¹² but this need not detain us here. The important point for our purposes is that these events provide the first concrete historical record of Gentiles joining the people of Israel. The relaxation of boundaries around the covenant community that enabled this to take place would lead to the voluntary conversion of other Gentiles in the ensuing centuries.

3. *God-Fearers*

In the latter part of the Second Temple period, the attitudes of Gentiles to Jews were far from uniform. This applies both to official attitudes and to more popular sentiments. At one extreme of the official level is the action of Antiochus IV and his attempt to enforce hellenisation on the Jews and ban their traditional practices. The opposite end of the spectrum is represented by early Roman policy prior to the Jewish revolt in 66–70 CE. The Jews were granted complete freedom to practise their religion and to conduct their own affairs (cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 14.190–246; 16.162–73; 19.278–91; 20.1–14). But Roman policy was not always beneficent. On three occasions (139 BCE, 19 CE and 49 CE) the Jews were temporarily expelled from Rome, and in 41 CE the Emperor Caligula attempted to have a statue of himself erected in the Jerusalem Temple. At the unofficial level the close-knit Jewish communities were often perceived as misanthropists who despised their Gentile neighbours, and many of their distinctive rituals – especially circumcision, the dietary laws and Sabbath observance – were criticised and ridiculed.¹³ These sorts of sentiments, usually allied to other factors, led occasionally to the persecution of local Jewish communities.

12 Those scholars who follow the view of Josephus and see the conversions as compulsory include Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp.324–36; Schürer et al., *History*, III.1, pp.207, 217; and M. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp.75–7. For the alternative position that these Gentile peoples mainly volunteered to convert to Judaism, see Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp.110–19; and A. Kasher, *Jews, Idumeans and Ancient Arabs: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Nations of the Frontier and the Desert During the Hellenistic and Roman Era (332 BCE–70 CE)* (TSAJ 18; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), pp.46–85.

13 See the evidence in Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp.123–76.

But not all Gentiles were negative towards the Jews and their religion. Some admired Judaism for its antiquity, its strict monotheism, its ancient wisdom, its code of morality and the close society of its practitioners.¹⁴ While many of these Gentiles chose to admire the Jewish tradition ‘from afar’ with little or no formal contact, others opted to seek closer affiliation with the Jews and to make a practical commitment to their religious and cultural tradition. Needless to say, there were varying levels of affiliation and commitment, but for our purposes it is sufficient to distinguish only between the God-fearer (φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν) or God-worshipper (θεοσεβής or σεβόμενος τὸν θεόν) and the full convert or proselyte (προσήλυτος).

God-fearers or God-worshippers were Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism and who made a measure of commitment to the Jewish religion and to their local Jewish communities. Such sympathisers loom large in the Acts of the Apostles, where they act as a bridge between the Jewish and Gentile worlds as the Christian mission expands to incorporate all nations (10.2, 22, 35; 13.16, 26, 50; 16.14; 17.4, 17; 18.7). While it is clear that Luke uses the category of the God-fearer to suit his own theological agenda, there is no necessity to question the very existence of God-fearers or sympathisers to Judaism and view them as a mere Lucan invention.¹⁵ There is plenty of other evidence that confirms the witness of Acts that in the ancient world there were many Gentiles who formed an attachment to Judaism.¹⁶

14 Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp.177–287.

15 Some scholars, however, have done precisely this. See A. T. Kraabel, ‘The Disappearance of the God-Fearers’, in J. A. Overman and R. S. MacLennan (eds.), *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honour of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel* (SFSHJ 41; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp.119–30; and R. S. MacLennan and A. T. Kraabel, ‘The God-Fearers – A Literary and Theological Invention’, in Overman and MacLennan (eds.), *Diaspora Jews and Judaism*, pp.131–43.

16 The scholarly literature affirming and evaluating the evidence for God-fearers is extensive. The most comprehensive treatment is B. Wander, *Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten: Studien zum heidnischen Umfeld von Diasporasynagogen* (WUNT 104; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998). Other major studies are Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp.342–82; and I. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting. V. Diaspora Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp.51–126. Important but shorter analyses include, Schürer et al., *History*, III.1, pp.160–9; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, pp.171–4; Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, pp.469–82; P. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.145–66; J. A. Overman, ‘The God-Fearers: Some Neglected Features’, in Overman and MacLennan (eds.), *Diaspora Jews and*

The tradition in Acts is confirmed by the evidence of Josephus, who states that in Antioch many Gentiles were attracted to Jewish ceremonies and were incorporated with the Jews in some measure (*B.J.* 7.45). In other references he singles out large groups of female sympathisers. At the beginning of the Jewish war many of the women in Damascus became attracted to Jewish ways (*B.J.* 2.560), while in Charax-Spasini large numbers of women became worshippers of God (*A.J.* 20.34). On an individual level, Poppaea Sabina, the wife of Nero, is described by Josephus as a worshipper of God who acted on behalf of the Jews (*A.J.* 20.195), while Philo refers to Petronius, who had learnt some elements of Jewish philosophy and religion and had also assisted the Jewish community (*Legat.* 245). The Roman historian Dio Cassius notes that the Emperor Domitian exiled or executed many people, including the consul Flavius Clemens, because of their atheism, which is described as drifting into Jewish ways (*Hist.* 67.14.1-2). The Gospel of Luke refers to a Gentile centurion who loved the Jewish nation and built the local synagogue (Lk. 7.1-10).

The later Rabbinic literature refers to Heaven-fearers (*yirei shamayim*) and they are often contrasted with full converts (e.g. *Mek. de-Rabbi Ishmael* 18; *y. Meg.* 74a; *Gen. Rab.* 28.5).¹⁷ Other Rabbinic texts prefer the more traditional *ger toshab* to describe the Jewish sympathiser (e.g. *b. Abod. Zar.* 64b-65a). Although there is no consistency of definition, this particular individual was likewise a Gentile who followed some but not all of the Mosaic laws.¹⁸

Diaspora Judaism in the Rabbinic period also testifies to the existence of Gentile God-worshippers. There are a number of Greek inscriptions that refer to θεοσέβεις, though some of these are difficult to date.¹⁹ The most important of these is the large inscription from Aphrodisias, which is usually dated to the early third century CE. The stele has writing on two of its four sides. One side lists a number of significant donors to the Jewish community, who are described as members of 'the decany',

Judaism, pp.145-52; and J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987), pp.48-66.

17 For discussion of the relevant texts, see Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp.353-5. Cf. too W. G. Braude, *Jewish Proselyting in the First Five Centuries of the Common Era: The Age of the Tannaim and Amoraim* (BUS 6; Providence: Brown University Press, 1940), pp.137-8.

18 See Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp.353-6; and J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York: KTAV, 2nd edn, 1968), pp.135-8.

19 Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, pp.358-62. Cf. too Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, pp.152-64, for discussion of the inscriptions from Asia Minor.

clearly an institution of influence and importance even if its precise meaning is uncertain.²⁰ This list includes thirteen native-born Jews, three individuals specifically denoted as proselytes, and two who are each described as a God-worshipper (θεοσεβής). The other side of the inscription contains further lists of names, presumably of less prominent contributors to the same cause. It begins with a list of fifty-five Jews followed by the words ‘and as many God-worshippers (καὶ ὅσοι θεοσεβῆς), although only fifty-two of these are named.

The degree of commitment to Judaism must have differed from location to location and even from individual to individual,²¹ but all of these God-fearers must have had as a bare minimum a belief in the God of the Jews. This may not have been an exclusive belief that rejected the worship of other gods. In fact, the evidence points in the opposite direction. As we shall see shortly, one of the key elements in the process of full conversion to the Jewish tradition was monotheism and the complete rejection of idolatry. This assumes that prior to conversion, the potential convert probably continued to worship other gods in addition to the God of Israel. Further, no fewer than nine of the named God-fearers in the Aphrodisias inscription are described as councillors (βουλευτής), presumably of the city of Aphrodisias. In order to hold this leading civic position, these people must have participated in the local and state cults, and could not have worshipped the Jewish God exclusively.²² As for the adoption of Jewish practices, our sources provide a good deal of information. The references in Acts spell out that many God-fearers attended the synagogue on the Sabbath (e.g. 13.13-16) and some prayed and gave alms (10.2), and both Philo and Josephus confirm these details and refer to further practices that at least some God-fearers embraced. Philo states that those of virtue in other nations have observed some aspects of the Jewish Law, particularly the Sabbath day and the fast during the Day of Atonement (*Mos.* 2.17-24). In a similar vein, Josephus remarks that many Gentiles have emulated the Jews by observing the Sabbath, fasting, lighting lamps and observing the dietary regulations (*C. Ap.* 2.282-84; cf. too 1.166-67; cf. Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96-101). In other texts the Jewish historian notes that many of these sympathisers contributed to the payment of the annual Temple tax (*A.J.* 14.110; *B.J.* 2.463).

20 The various possibilities are discussed in Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers*, pp.28–38.

21 Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers*, pp.61–2.

22 Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, pp.117–19. Cf. too Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers*, pp.62–4.

While it is always dangerous to generalise when there is no definitive evidence, it can be assumed that for the most part the Jewish community had a positive view of these God-fearers.²³ Certainly Philo and Josephus are completely positive about these people, and all Jews must have deemed them to be superior to the majority of Gentiles who showed little interest in Judaism or who were critical of the Jews and their religion. In some cases God-fearers were permitted to hold important positions within the local Jewish community. The Aphrodisias inscription cites two God-fearers among the decans, which suggests that they enjoyed some prominence. But despite their close affiliation with Jewish groups and the fact that some could hold prominent positions, these God-fearers had not crossed the boundary that separated Jew from Gentile; they still remained outside the covenant community. The God-fearers always appear at the bottom of the lists in the Aphrodisias inscription, and Josephus emphasises their outsider status when he remarks that the God-fearers in Antioch were incorporated with the Jews only in some measure or to a limited extent.

There is one final point to consider. Did the Jews consider that God-fearer status was in and of itself acceptable for Gentile sympathisers, or did they view it as a preparatory stage towards full conversion? The evidence is meagre, but what exists suggests that God-fearers were not subjected to pressure to convert. While there is a late Rabbinic tradition that affirms that the God-fearer (*ger toshab*) had twelve months to decide whether or not to convert, and if no decision had been made he (or she) would be regarded as an unaffiliated Gentile (*b. Abod. Zar.* 65), there is no evidence that this view was common in Rabbinic circles or elsewhere in the Jewish world at any time. The large numbers of God-fearers compared to the small number of proselytes, implied in Acts and Josephus and corroborated in the Aphrodisias inscription, testifies that most or all Jewish communities were content to accept God-fearers as they were. They perhaps hoped these sympathisers would convert, but they were not obliged to do so.

4. Proselytes and the Process of Conversion

The Gentile who decided to cross the boundary and undergo conversion to Judaism was known in the Greek-speaking world as the proselyte – προσήλυτος. This Greek term is most often the preferred word in the LXX for the Hebrew *ger* or resident alien. Needless to say, the meaning

23 Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, p.481.