

all of the other sources of impartation and future purpose constitute my unique identity.

I have not even begun to describe the aspect of Jewish priestly purpose. Suffice it to say that Jewish life and prayer is a *kohanic* act of witness and prayer for the redemption of the world. Our life is an important part of God's plan to bring his Kingdom in fullness. So Messianic Judaism affirms both a universal identity—shared with all true believers—and a Jewish identity rooted in Scripture and Jewish history.

The sharing of these thoughts on definition reveals a task that is incredibly difficult. Only by the grace and wisdom of God may we begin to fulfill this task. Combining the best of our Jewish heritage with the power and realities of the New Covenant after nearly 2,000 years of development of Christianity would seem to be virtually impossible. However, we serve a God of the impossible. May he equip us and lead us in this great purpose.

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PAUL AND THE TORAH ACCORDING TO LUKE

David J. Rudolph

For Messianic Jews, the book of Acts is crucial to a proper understanding of Paul's view of Torah vis-à-vis the remnant of Israel. Paul's circumcision of Timothy in Acts 16:3¹ anticipates a carefully designed trajectory of Pauline ritual Torah observance in Luke's diptych. (18:18, 21-22; 20:6, 16; 21:20-26; 24:17) The climax of this trajectory occurs in Acts 21:20-26 when Paul enters the Temple and participates in the Temple service. This article explores the nature and purpose of Paul's actions.²

PAUL'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TEMPLE

Before taking up the question of Paul's intent in Acts 21, it is important to ascertain the exact nature of his involvement in the Temple. It will be argued that two Temple-related rituals are referred to in the pericope: A renewed Nazirite vow for four Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and a rite of purification for Paul.

THE FOUR NAZIRITES

In Acts 21:24-26, Ya'akov and the Jerusalem elders introduce Paul to four men under a vow who are in need of a benefactor

1 It is notable that Paul's circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:3) occurs immediately after the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council decision (Acts 16:4) and prior to the anti-circumcision charge against Paul in Acts 21:21. "This so-called Apostolic Decree is of central significance in the diptych as a whole. The author tells how Paul with Barnabas and two others are sent as representatives to take the letter to Antioch. Once there, Paul puts the decree immediately into practice by having Timothy circumcised, who was Jewish through his mother and thus actually bound to the whole law" (Peter J. Tomson, *If this be from Heaven...: Jesus and the New Testament Authors in their Relationship to Judaism* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 234.) On the matrilineal principle, see Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting* (vol. 5 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*; ed. B. W. Winter: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12-7; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Was Timothy Jewish?" in *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 363-77; Christopher Bryan, "A Further Look at Acts 16:1-3," *JBL* 107 (1988): 292-94. Acts 16:3 would seem to inform the reader that Paul upheld circumcision in the case of a son of intermarriage, a *fortiori* a son of Jewish-Jewish marriage. The statement διὰ τοῦτο Ἰουδαίου may imply that the timing of the circumcision, and not the circumcision itself, was motivated by concerns expressed in the Lystra Jewish community over Timothy.

2 It is beyond the scope of this article to address the apologetic reading of Acts 21 as put forth by F. C. Baur, Schrader, Schwegler, Zeller, Haenchen, Conzelmann, Vielhauer, etc. Hemer's methodology is accepted. See Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (ed. Conrad H. Gempf; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989). 28-9, 179, 189, 191.

(Acts 21:23). Paul is asked to bear the cost of shaving their heads (ξυρήσονται τὴν κεφαλὴν), an idiom for “to bring the offerings of a Nazirite.” (m. Naz. 2:5-6)³ These men were consecrated to Hashem for the duration of their vow and prohibited by Torah from cutting their hair, eating/drinking anything from the grapevine,⁴ and being in the presence of a corpse. (Numbers 6:1-8) The four were also in need of purification. (Acts 21:24, 27)⁵ Though the reason for this is not explicitly stated, the Nazirite context suggests that it was due to corpse defilement and necessitated the seven-day purification ritual described in Numbers 19:11-12. (cf. m. Naz. 7:3; b. Naz. 54b; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.205) To renew their vows, Nazirite law required these men to shave their heads and offer sacrifices once their purification was complete. (Num. 6:9-12)⁶

PAUL'S NAZIRITE VOW

Was Paul under a Nazirite vow? Neusner contends that Paul needed to present Nazirite offerings when he arrived in Jerusalem during his third journey, and that Ya'akov and the elders had advised Paul to fulfill his obligations with the four

- 3 The Nazirite vow was an act of dedication “to the Lord” (Num 6:1-2; Judges 13:7; 16:17; 1 Samuel 1:11; Luke 1:15; cf. 1 Maccabees 3:49; t. Nez. 4:7; b. Naz. 4b; b. Ned. 9b) and shares some elements in common with the levitical priesthood (cf. Leviticus 10:9; 21:1; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.249; m. Naz. 7:1). Philo refers to the vow as “the great vow” (Ebr. 2). King Agrippa showed his generosity to Jerusalem by bearing the expenses of many poor Nazirites; this enabled them “to shave” their heads (Josephus, *Ant.* 19:294); cf. Alexander Yannai (y. *Naz.* 54b; y. *Ber.* 7:2; b. *Ber.* 11a-b; *Gen. Rab.* 91:3). Women were also permitted to take the Nazirite vow (Num. 6:2; Josephus, *J. W.* 2.313-14; m. Naz. 3:6; 6:11; t. Nez. 4:10). For a survey on Nazirites in the Second Temple and Rabbinic period, see Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halachah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 36-48.
- 4 Fermented drink of any kind was also prohibited (Num. 6:3-4), suggesting that Messianic Jewish Nazirites could not participate fully in Pesach or “the Lord’s Supper” (cf. Yeshua’s words in Mark 14:25; 15:23-4; see also m. Naz. 2:3).
- 5 In the LXX, a ἁγιζῶ can refer to the purification of individuals who have touched a dead body (Num. 19:12; 31:19) and sanctification for reasons having to do with the service of God (1 Chronicles 15:12; 2 Chronicles 29:5; cf. 2 Maccabees 12:38). Josephus notes that Jews underwent purification to enter the enclosure of the Temple (*Ant.* 12:145).
- 6 The Nazirite vow was costly and involved a burnt offering (a year old male lamb without defect), a sin offering (a year old ewe lamb without defect) and a fellowship offering (a ram without defect), together with their respective grain offerings and drink offerings and a basket of unleavened bread (Num. 6:13-15). The final “offering” came from the Nazirite himself, his hair. It was shorn and thrown into the fire like a sacrifice (Josephus, *Ant.* 4:72; Num. 6:18). See Roger Tomes, “Why Did Paul Get His Hair Cut? [Acts 18:18; 21:23-24],” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; JSNTSS; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 191-92.

other Nazirites.⁷ The scenario is possible. (cf. m. Naz. 7:3; t. Nez. 1:5)⁸ The preponderance of evidence, however, suggests that Paul had already concluded a Nazirite vow at Cenchræe (Acts 18:18)⁹ and presented his Nazirite offerings during a festival pilgrimage to Jerusalem prior to visiting Antioch. (Acts 18:21-22) This is supported by the Western text of 18:21 and Luke’s use of ἀναβαίνω in 18:22.¹⁰ Taken together, it is reasonable to assume that Paul was only in need of ritual purification in Acts 21.¹¹

- 7 Jacob Neusner, “Vow-Taking, the Nazirites, and the Law: Does James’ Advice to Paul Accord with Halachah?” in *James the Just and Christian Origins* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 81.
- 8 M. Boertien, Nazir (Nasiräer). Text, übersetzung und Erklärung nebst einem textkritischen Anhang. *Die Mischna* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), 28-9, 71-2, 90-5; Chilton, 254-55; Bockmuehl, 43.
- 9 Evidence for Diaspora observance of the Nazirite vow is open to interpretation, “It is difficult to be certain about the halachah on whether Nazirite hair could be cut outside the land, and indeed about the extent to which less formal practices would have pertained in the Diaspora. It seems reasonable to infer from the cumulative evidence of t. Nez. 1:5; 4:6; m. Naz. 3:6; 6:8b; 7:3 that vows were contracted and could be valid outside the Holy Land, even if the Hillelites required of Diaspora Nazirites a brief symbolic period of another thirty days’ Nazirite in Jerusalem. In any case m. Naz. 6.8 suggests that the shaving of the hair and the offering of sacrifices were not always carried out together” (Bockmuehl, 42); Bart J. Koet, “Why Did Paul Shave His Hair (Acts 18:18)? Nazirite and Temple in the Book of Acts,” in *The Centrality of Jerusalem: Historical Perspectives* (ed. M. Poorthuis and Ch. Safrai; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 136-41; Friedrich W. Horn, “Paulus, das Nasiräat und die Nasiräer,” *NouT* 39 (1997): 117-37; Bruce Chilton, “Conclusions and Questions,” in *James the Just and Christian Origins* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 252-56.
- 10 Koet, 140 n. 49, points out that ἀναβαίνω in Acts 18:22 is a technical term for going to Jerusalem. He cites Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 156; Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte*, 254, and Satake, ‘Paulus’ Besuch der Gemeinde in Jerusalem am Ende seiner zweiten Missionsreise,’ *AJBI* 11 (1985) 54-94. For this reason, the NRSV translates Acts 18:22, “When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.” See F. F. Bruce, “The Church of Jerusalem in Acts,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 2 (1985): 656. In Acts 18:21, Codex Bezae and the majority of Byzantine MSS insert, “I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem” (Syr., KJV, NKJV, YLT). The Western text variant is consistent with the NRSV rendering of 18:22 and the parallel in Acts 20:16. The case for the Codex Bezae insertion is argued by J. M. Ross, “The Extra Words in Acts 18:21,” *NT* 34 (1992): 247-49; also M. Black, “Notes on the longer and the shorter Text of Acts,” in *On Language, Culture and Religion* (ed. W. A. Smalley; The Hague-Paris, 1974), n. 5. Against the Western addition, see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), 465; W. A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (SNTSMS 71; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 47, 163.
- 11 Notably, Acts 21:20-26 and 24:17 are silent on the matter of Paul concluding a Nazirite vow. There is also the question of whether Paul would have been in Jerusalem long enough to fulfill Nazirite halachah. See m. *Naz.* 3:6; 6:3; m. *Ed.* 4:11. “Mishnaic halachah suggests that anyone coming from outside the Land would have had to spend at least another standard period of thirty days as a Nazirite before being able to complete a valid vow” (Bockmuehl, 43). This was enough time to grow more hair after purification (Chilton, 254, 256). Cf. Josephus, *J. W.* 2.313. See Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church,” in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1995), 478, n. 186; Tomes, 195. Paul may have been under a vow of a different sort in Acts 21, “Within the halachah of the Mishnah, one had the possibility of taking a vow to supply Nazirites with their offerings; a father might so commit himself to his son, or the son to the father, for instance” (Neusner, 51).

PAUL'S PURIFICATION

Why would Paul need to be purified? There are at least three possible reasons:

1. According to the author of Acts, Paul had recently touched a corpse at Troas; Eutychus had fallen from a third story window and was picked up dead. (Acts 20:9) This would have rendered Paul ritually unclean prior to arriving in Jerusalem (Num 19:11);
2. Ritual purification was expected of Diaspora pilgrims who came to offer Shavuot sacrifices. (Leviticus 23:17-19; Acts 20:16; 24:17; cf. Yochanan 11:55; 2 Chronicles 30:17-18; Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 1.229)¹² Brown has noted that there "would have been a need for those who lived in contact with Gentiles to purify themselves. For instance, Gentiles often buried their dead near their houses, and this would make their Jewish neighbors subject to the seven-day purification commanded by the laws governing defilement from corpses. (Num. 19:11-12)"¹³
3. Ritual purification may have been required of those bearing the cost of Nazirite offerings. Paul's purification at the Temple was likely due to one or more of the above reasons. This, combined with being a benefactor of the four Messianic Jewish Nazirites would have involved the following participation in the Temple:
 - A. A kohen sprinkled water (mixed with the ashes of a red heifer sacrifice) on Paul and the four Nazirites for purification. (Acts 21:26a; Num. 19:12)¹⁴
 - B. Paul publicly informed the kohen of the date when their purification would be completed and the "sacrifice would be made for each of them." (Acts 21:26b NRSV) The group's rite of purification would have been completed on the seventh day (Acts 21:27; Num. 6:9; 19:11-12), which is also the day on which the Messianic Jewish Nazirites would renew their vows by shaving their heads. (Num. 6:9) On the eighth day, the Nazirites would bring sacrifices and offerings before the Lord (Num. 6:10-12), including a sin offering and a burnt offering (of two doves or young pigeons) as well as a guilt offering (a one year-old male lamb). By paying for these sacrifices, Paul made it possible for the Messianic Jewish Nazirites to fulfill their Torah obligations.¹⁵

12 S. Safrai, "The Temple," in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976), 903.

13 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I, 1-12* (AB29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), 445; Kalervo Salo, *Luke's Treatment of the Law: A Redaction-Critical Investigation* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1991), 262, n. 20. See Tomes, 193, 195.

14 This was to be done on the third and seventh days (Num. 19:12). It is possible that Paul and the men had already exceeded the three days and it was incumbent on them to be purified immediately.

15 The Nazirite vow is voluntary. Nonetheless, once initiated, the Nazirite is obligated to follow through with the Torah's regulations in Numbers 6:1-21.

PROOF OF PAUL'S ORTHODOXY

Acts 21:20-26 was designed to establish that Paul observed the Torah regularly and scrupulously. The Nazirite vow was a voluntary act of piety and the Jew who participated in this holy rite was seen as exceeding the maximum standards of Torah. The Nazirite was also paradigmatic of Torah-observant Israel. (Amos 2:11-12; 1 Macc. 3:49) Given this background, Paul's decision to undertake a Nazirite vow at Cenchreae and to associate with four Messianic Jewish Nazirites in Jerusalem was a huge statement to his critics and served as incontrovertible proof of his devotion to Torah in word and deed.¹⁶

A TORAH OBSERVANT JEW

Studies on "Paul and the Law" have tended to overlook the significance of Acts 21:24, a text that addresses Paul's relationship to Torah in markedly clear language. Ya'akov, the "adherent of the law *par excellence*,"¹⁷ and the Jerusalem elders affirm:

Καὶ γνώσονται πάντες ὅτι ὧν κατήχηνται περὶ σοῦ οὐδὲν ἔστιν ἄλλὰ στοιχεῖς καὶ αὐτὸς φυλάσσων τὸν νόμον.

The expression *στοιχεῖς καὶ αὐτὸς φυλάσσων τὸν νόμον* has been variously translated: "you are a practicing Jew and keep the Law yourself" (NEB), "you yourself live in observance of the law" (RSV, NAB, Gspd), "you yourself are living in obedience to the law" (NIV), "you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law" (with minor differences—NKJ, KJV, ASV, NAU), "you yourself observe and guard the law" (NRS), "you yourself are living as a constant observer of the law" (Wms).

16 Koet notes the link between Naziritism and lawabidingness in Acts, "After the accusations in Acts 18:12-13 about Paul not being lawabiding enough, this vow and the suggestion that it is a Nazirite vow, shows the reader, that Paul is even more than lawabiding, he is doing more than what is strictly necessary . . . By connecting Paul twice with the phenomenon of Naziritism as an answer to critics on his attitude towards the Law, Luke demonstrates the importance of Paul fulfilling even supererogatory rituals to show his lawabidingness" (Koet, 141).

17 Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 59.

Luke's use of the verb *στοιχεῖς*¹⁸ and the participle *φυλάσσω* (used in the LXX for *שמר* in Deut 6:17; 7:9; cf. 32:46) underscore the point that Paul is regularly observant of Torah. Torah observance (in the present active tense) characterizes his lifestyle. He is "a practicing Jew."¹⁹ The bold statement is consistent with Luke's portrayal of Paul leading up to Acts 21 (Acts 16:3; 18:4, 18, 21-22; 20:6, 16) and agrees fully with the trajectory that follows. Paul identifies himself *expressis verbis* as a Pharisee in the present tense: *Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί ἐγὼ Φαρισαῖός εἰμι, υἱὸς Φαρισαίων*. ("Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees" [Acts 23:6 NRSV]),²⁰ a self-designation intended to communicate the strictness of his Torah observance vis-à-vis the diversity within Second Temple Judaism.²¹ On three subsequent occasions Paul confirms the fact that he is a Torah faithful Jew:²²

CONFIRMATION 1: Paul's standard of faith and life is the Torah. (24:14-18)

CONFIRMATION 2: Paul has not violated the Torah. (25:8)

CONFIRMATION 3: Paul has not violated the Torah. (28:17)

The implications of Acts 21:24 and its literary context are apparent to Davies, "Paul observed the Law, and that in the pharisaic manner, throughout his life."²³

18 Cf. Paul's use of *στοιχεῖω* in Rom. 4:12; Gal 5:25; 6:16; Phil 3:18.

19 J. W. Packer, *Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 177. See also F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICHT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 10; Reidar Hvalvik, "Paul, the Jew—According to Acts," *Mishkan* 24 (1996): 18-26; G. W. H. Lampe, *St. Luke and the Church of Jerusalem* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), 12-13. On Jewish affirmation in Paul's speeches, see F. Veltmann, "The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (ed. C. H. Talbert; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 243-56.

20 Cf. Acts 26:5. Ellison has noted that the RSV is "probably correct in translating the aorist *ἔζησα* by 'I have lived,' instead of by the past tense as in AV, RV, NEB. Not merely would there have been little point in stressing to King Agrippa what he had done, if he no longer did it, but in addition it hardly brings out the force of the *καὶ νῦν* that follows, which implies not a contradiction but rather an intensification" (H. L. Ellison, "Paul and the Law—'All Things to All Men,'" in *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 199. NRSV renders the statement, "...I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee."

21 Paul regards Pharisaism as *τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην αἵρεσιν τῆς ἡμετέρας θρησκείας* ("the strictest sect of our religion" [Acts 26:5 NRSV]).

22 See also Acts 21:39; 22:3, 12, 17; 24:11; 27:9.

23 W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 70.

THE MISUNDERSTOOD APOSTLE

The credibility of Luke's portrait of Paul is buttressed by the admission in Acts 21:21 that Paul was a controversial figure in Jerusalem; he was thought to have opposed circumcision and other elements of ritual Torah observance:

*κατηχήθησαν δὲ περὶ σοῦ ὅτι ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως τοὺς κατὰ τὰ ἔθνη πάντας Ἰουδαίους λέγων μὴ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς τὰ τέκνα μηδὲ τοῖς ἔθεσιν περιπατεῖν.*²⁴

Luke corrects this misunderstanding in verse 24 with the words: *Καὶ γίνονται πάντες ὅτι ὧν κατήχηνται περὶ σοῦ οὐδὲν ἔστιν ἀλλὰ στοιχεῖς*. The rumor is fallacious. "Luke depicts James as knowing both that the rumors are false and that Paul himself lives in obedience to the law."²⁵ Moreover, the accusation against Paul in Acts 21:21 (*ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως*) echoes the unsubstantiated rumor leveled against Stefan in Acts 6:13-14. Here "Moses" is equivalent to "the Torah." (cf. Luke 16:29; 24:27; Acts 6:11; 15:1, 21)²⁶

THE LANGUAGE OF OBLIGATION

Some commentators attempt to weaken the force of Acts 21:24 by suggesting that Paul did not oppose Messianic Jewish circumcision; he viewed it as a matter of *adiaphora*. Such a reading, however, fails to account for the Second Temple Jewish *Sitz im Leben* and grossly underestimates the conservatism of myriads of Jerusalem Messianic Jews who were *ζηλωταὶ τοῦ*

24 Calvin well expressed his agreement with the rumor when he wrote, "It was so indeed" (John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. II [Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844], 279).

25 Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 194.

26 *ἀποστασίαν* in the LXX refers to religious apostasy (Joshua 22:22; Jeremiah 2:19; 2 Chronicles 29:19; 1 Macc. 2:15). See Martin Hengel, "Early Christianity as a Jewish-Messianic, Universalistic Movement," in *Conflicts and Challenges in Early Christianity* (ed. Donald A. Hagner; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 35.

νόμου,²⁷ a direct allusion to Maccabean Torah faithfulness in an era marred by compromise.²⁸ Circumcision was *לְאוּת בְּרִית* (Genesis 17:11); not merely an “ethnic” custom. To forego circumcision of one’s son was to have him cut off from the covenant of the Lord with Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:14). This helps to explain why many Jews in the period of the Chasmonaim surrendered their lives rather than violate God’s command.²⁹ The annual celebration of *הַנֶּחֱמָה* in the First Century (Yochanan 10:22) no doubt recalled these martyrdoms, adding an emotional element to the observance of circumcision. Jews who were “zealous for Torah” understood well that a consciousness of obligation to God’s commandments (e.g. *διαθήκη περιτομῆς* [Acts 7:8]) preserved Israel as a distinct and enduring people.³⁰ Given this Second Temple Jewish background, it is historically unimaginable that the *ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου* in the Jerusalem congregation would have accepted an “optional” stance from Paul over circumcision. This too would have been viewed as teaching apostasy from Moses (*ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως*). Only a public statement that Paul viewed circumcision as incumbent on Messianic Jews would

27 *ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου* refers to “an ardent observer of the law” (W. Bauer, et al., “*ζηλωτής*” BAGD: 338). In the LXX, *ζηλωτής* is almost always used in reference to the Lord’s zeal/jealousy (Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Nahum 1:2). 1 Maccabees 2 includes six references to zeal for the Torah; three are in the explicit context of covenant faithfulness (2:20, 27, 50). Philo uses the expression *ζηλωταὶ νόμων* in reference to those who are guardians of the Torah (Spec. 1:253). In Acts 21:20, Luke uses the expression *ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου* in juxtaposition with *ἀποστασίαν* (apostasy; cf. 1 Macc. 2:15). It is clearly Maccabean/Pharisaic language and would have been understood as such (Martin Hengel, *The Zealot* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989], 180). “The term suggests not only ‘zeal’ for observance, but also ‘jealousy’ for honor to be paid to Torah, and therefore hostility toward any perceived derogation of that honor” (Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992], 74).

28 Hengel (1989), 180.

29 “Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people and that all should give up their particular customs...According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers’ necks” (1 Macc. 1:41-2, 60-1; cf. 2 Macc. 6:10; 4 Macc. 4:25).

30 Circumcision served as a central boundary marker of identity for Israel, “Here the identity and boundary markers are clear—circumcision and the laws of clean and unclean food...For since the Maccabean period these two sets of legal requirement had been fundamental to the devout Jew’s identity as a Jew, as a member of the people whom God had chosen for himself and made covenant with; these two ritual enactments had a central role in marking Israel off from the surrounding nations” (James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990], 217). See Cohen, 39-49.

have satisfied Paul’s critics, and this would seem to be what Ya’akov and the Jerusalem elders were after.

A covenantal nomistic reading of the pericope is supported by the author’s use of the term *ἔθουσιν* in verse 21 (cf. 6:14; 15:1; 26:3; 28:17)³¹ and *τὸν νόμον* in verse 24. The meaning of *τὸν νόμον* is consistent with its usage in Acts 7:53; 15:5; 18:13; 22:12; 23:3; 24:14; 25:8 and refers to the legally binding nature of the Torah of Moses. It is the Torah of Hashem. This meaning is reinforced by the covenantal/nomistic language used throughout the pericope: “Zealous for the Torah,” “Moses,” “circumcise,” “vow,” “purify,” “heads shaved,” “observe and guard the law,” “purified,” “Temple,” “days of purification,” “sacrifice.”

Additionally, Luke places the Acts 21 episode in the milieu of Shavuot. Paul “was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Shavuot” (Acts 20:16)[32] so that he might “offer sacrifices” in the Temple. (Acts 24:17 NRSV)³³ These sacrifices were commanded in Leviticus 23:17-19 and included a wave offering (two loaves of bread), a burnt offering (seven male lambs, one young bull and two rams, with their respective grain offerings and drink offerings), a sin offering (one male goat) and a fellowship offering (two lambs). Shavuot was a Torah-prescribed pilgrimage festival that took place fifty days after the week of Pesach (Lev. 23:15-21; Deut 16:9-11, 16), thus coinciding with the month when the Torah was given on Har Sinai. (Ex 19:1)³⁴ Paul’s presence in Jerusalem during Shavuot could be seen as a ritual Torah act.

31 *ἔθουσιν* here refers to “customs ordained by the Jewish law” (F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], 392). See also David L. Balch, “...you teach all the Jews...to forsake Moses, telling them not to...observe the customs (Acts 21:21; cf. 6:14),” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers 32* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 382-83.

32 Josephus comments that on the “arrival of Pentecost...a countless multitude flocked in from Galilee, from Idumaea, from Jericho, and from Peraea beyond the Jordan” to present the required sacrifices (*Bellum Jud. 2.42-43*). Cf. Acts 2:1, 5-11. The book of Acts refers to two other Jewish festivals in the context of Paul’s journeys: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6; Lev 23:6-8) and the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9; Lev 16:29-34; 23:26-32). The festival mentioned in the Western text of Acts 18:21 is likely Passover or Pentecost.

33 “Pentecost lasted only one day, but the pilgrim was permitted to bring the obligatory sacrifices during the six days following the festival” (Safrai, 893). See m. Hag. 1:6; b. Hag. 17a.

34 Cf. *Jub. 1:1; 6:19, 21; 22:1; b. Sabb. 86b*. In Rabbinic Judaism, Shavuot came to be celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the Torah. See Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (New York: KTAV, 1978), 185-88.

Finally, the pericope is placed in the legal context of the decree of the Jerusalem Council. Acts 21:18-26 intentionally mirrors the Council assembly of Acts 15.³⁵ One addresses the Council's stance on Gentiles and the Torah; the other addresses the stance on Jews and the Torah. Paul is present on both occasions. The continuing validity of ritual Torah observance for Messianic Jews is assumed in Acts 15 and confirmed in Acts 21.³⁶ Moreover, Torah ἐπιτάξεις ("requirements" [NIV]) for Gentile believers are spelled out in Acts 21:25 (cf. 15:20, 28-29) by Ya'akov and the Jerusalem elders,³⁷ suggesting that the Torah's "requirements" for Messianic Jews are at issue in the pericope and not mere cultural norms.³⁸

- 35 Textual parallels include Luke's mention of local stops on the way to Jerusalem (15:3; 21:16) and Paul's welcome by the Jerusalem leaders (15:4; 21:17). The language of 21:19 echoes 15:12. In both cases, the term ἐξηγήσατο ("to explain") is used as well as similar language concerning "the things God did among the Gentiles" (15:4, 12; 21:19). There is also direct quotation. Acts 21:24 includes a part of the Jerusalem Council decision (15:23-29) and the term κρίνω ("judgment"; 15:19; 21:25) is used. Finally, Acts may be structured around the two Jerusalem episodes: (1) 1:1-8:3; (2) 8:4-15:35; (3) 15:36-21:26; (4) 21:27-28:31. See Ernst Haenchen, "The Book of Acts as Source Material for the History of Early Christianity," in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 259.
- 36 This point is often missed, "...it is clear that both parties agreed that circumcision and Torah obedience remained obligatory for Jewish Jesus believers since, if this were not the case, one could hardly debate whether circumcision and Torah obedience were obligatory for Gentiles. Such a debate could only arise if both parties agreed on the lasting significance of the Mosaic Law for Jews" (Michael Wyschogrod, "Letter to a Friend," *Modern Theology* 11:2 [1995]: 170). See also Baukham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," 475; Jervell (1972), 133, 142-43.
- 37 The Jerusalem Council decision did not set aside Torah for Gentiles but applied it correctly to them. "In Leviticus 17-18 (MT) there are five occurrences of the phrase 'the alien who sojourns in your/their midst' (Lv 17:8, 10, 12, 13; 18:26, all using בְּרוּכָבּ or בְּרוּכָבּ). Since two of these occurrences (17:10, 12) refer to the same prohibition repeated, there are in fact four commandments in Leviticus 17-18 which not only the Israelite but also 'the alien who sojourns in your/their midst' is obliged to keep. These correspond to the four prohibitions of the apostolic decree, in the order in which they occur in the apostolic letter (Acts 15:29; cf. 21:25)...It [the apostolic decree] deals with the question of Gentile Christians in a way which by no means sets aside the authority of the Law of Moses but fully upholds it, by requiring of Gentile Christians obedience to the four commandments which the Law itself imposes on them" (Baukham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," 459, 463). See Jervell (1996), 58-61.
- 38 The non-soteriological context is established in Acts 15:6-11; no reason exists to restate it in Acts 21. Luke portrays Ya'akov and the Jerusalem elders as separate from the legalists (Acts 15:1, 5-6, 13-29). See Baukham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," 416.

A CONFESSIONAL ACT

Acts 21:24-26 depicts Paul's participation in the Temple as a symbolic affirmation of his halachic orthodoxy and support for Messianic Jewish Torah observance.³⁹ Tannehill regards this as "a confessional act, a confession of the validity of law and temple for the Jewish people."⁴⁰ Baukham arrives at the same position.⁴¹ Paul's association with Nazirites is of symbolic importance because a "Nazir is a paragon of lawabidingness."⁴² The Nazirite exceeded the maximum standards of God's Torah. Koet teases out the implication of the passage, Ya'akov "(who himself is depicted as a lifelong Nazir and as an example of lawabidingness in Eusebius' *Church History*; see Book II XXII 4-6) suggests to Paul to pay for four Nazirites as a proof of his lawabidingness. By paying for the expenses of the sacrifices of those men Paul associates himself with their lawabidingness."⁴³ The author of Acts, therefore, portrays Paul as a

- 39 This view has been historically held by Augustine, 1.82 (FC 12:395-97); *Matthias Schnuckenburger, Über den Zweck der Apostelgeschichte* (Bern, 1841), 71-6. Willem Christian van Manen, "Paul," *EncBib* 3, col. 3632; Cyril W. Emmet, "The Case for the Tradition: The Paul of Acts and the Paul of the Epistles," in *The Beginnings of Christianity* (vol. 2; ed. F.J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake; London: MacMillan, 1922; Burton S. Easton, *Earliest Christianity: The Purpose of Acts and Other Papers* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1954), 52-6; Adolf von Harnack, *Die Apostelgeschichte, Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament* 3 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908), 180-81; W.L. Knox, *Paul and the Church of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925) 360; Davies, 70; Wyschogrod, 170-171; Koet, 139-42.
- 40 Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts II* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 270.
- 41 "By not only undergoing his own purification (from corpse-impurity inevitably contracted during such a long absence from the Temple) but also paying for the sacrifices required for the purification of four Jewish Christian Nazirites and accompanying them, Paul would make very public not only his own careful observance of the Law, but also his positive encouragement of such observance by others, even at personal cost" (Baukham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," 478). Jervell concurs, "The story in Acts 21:23ff. of Paul and the (Nazirite) vow, is therefore never meant as accommodation, pragmatism, or tactics, but gives us theological consistency. The vow story in Acts 21 emphasizes that Paul is a Jewish Christian, and as such is a venerator of the Mosaic torah. According to 21:22-24 the story of the vow illustrates not only what Paul personally could do, but also what he teaches Jews and Jewish Christians in the Diaspora, namely, to circumcise their children and observe the law (Jacob Jervell, *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984], 71). For a critique of Jervell, see Max M. B. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 116-23; Mark A. Seifrid, "Jesus and the Law in Acts," *JSNT* 30 (1987): 39-57; Joseph B. Tyson, *Luke, Judaism and the Scholars: Critical Approaches to Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) 91-109.
- 42 Koet, 139.
- 43 Koet, 139. Cf. King Agrippa (Josephus, *Ant.* 19:294). "James, whose authority as a law-abiding Jew is not questioned in the early church, can serve as witness to Paul's faithfulness to the law" (Salo, 266).

Messianic Jew who is zealous for the Torah and encourages fellow Messianic Jews to be likewise. He is a Nazirite among Nazirites. His participation in the Temple is motivated out of a desire to prove his orthodoxy and dispel the false rumor that had circulated in Jerusalem. There is no indication in the text that ritual Torah observance is a matter of *adiaphora* in Paul's mind or his purification a concession to the Jerusalem leadership.⁴⁴ On the contrary, all the evidence in Acts suggests that

44 It has been classically argued that Paul's participation in the Temple was a concession to the Jerusalem leadership on the basis of Paul's principle (1 Cor. 9:19-23), a view defended by Jerome in his correspondence with Augustine of Hippo (Jerome, *Saint Augustine Letters* 1.81 [FC 12:353]). In recent scholarship, Dunn has argued that Paul's actions were the outworking of his "policy of compromise" or "principle of flexibility and adaptability (James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, [Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996], 285). Bruce (1988), Stott (1990), Bornkamm (1980), Marshall (1980), Fitzmyer (1998) and Witherington (1998) agree. The Jeronian view, however, is ethically suspect. It suggests that Paul gave the public impression that he led a Torah observant lifestyle when, in fact, this was not true. As Augustine put it, this would mean that Paul ritually purified himself and offered up sacrifices in the Temple as part of a "crafty intent to deceive" (Augustine, *Saint Augustine Letters* 1.82 [FC 12:412-15]). Barrett correctly states that the question is "whether Paul was prepared to use a special occasion such as the one described in order to suggest something that was not true...Readiness to do this is not covered by 1 Corinthians 9" (C. K. Barrett, *A critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles II* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998], 1013). Dean adds, "Jews would not have listened to a Jew who obeyed Torah when he was with Jews but who forsook Torah when he was with Gentiles" (Lester Dean, "A Response to Gerard Sloyan from Lester Dean," in *Bursting the Bonds? A Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Jesus and Paul* [New York: Orbis Books, 1990], 174). Watson concurs, "Occasional conformity to the law is entirely alien to the Jewish way of life, and could never have helped him to 'win those under the law'" (Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 29). The argument rests on a caricature of Jews as simpletons and fails to honor the faith dimension of Judaism. All streams of Second Temple Judaism would have regarded such behavior as disingenuous. Knox concludes, "...this interpretation of the passage is impossible. S. Paul could not both behave as a Jew when dealing with Jews and as free from the Law when dealing with Gentiles, since apart from the moral dishonesty of pretending to observe the Law in Jewish society and neglecting it in Gentile society, it would be impossible for him to conceal from Jews whom he hoped to convert the fact that he disregarded the Law when not in Jewish company. Obviously no Jew would be in the smallest degree influenced by the fact that he observed the Law when it suited his purpose to do so; obedience to the Law was a lifelong matter" (Knox, 122). From the modern Jewish perspective (an invaluable point of reference), the classic reading suggests that Paul engaged in "deceit and pretense" (Gerald Sigal, *The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity* [New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1981], 272, 290). I would like to suggest that Paul was not a hypocrite and did not put on/put off Torah observance like a pair of clothes. Paul opposed all manners of deception in preaching the gospel (2 Cor 4:1-2; 10-12; cf. Acts 24:16; cf. Gal. 2:11). A more likely meaning of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 is that Paul became, in empathy, all things to all people. Augustine argues for the empathy interpretation by analogy, "For a person who nurses a sick man becomes, in a sense, sick himself, not by pretending to have a fever, but by thinking sympathetically how he would like to be treated if he himself were sick" (Augustine 1.40 [FC 12:174]). He adds, "Paul became 'all things to all men that he might gain all,' not by pretending to be what he was not but by showing compassion" (Augustine 1.82 [FC 12:415]). An "empathetic mindset" interpretation of 1 Corinthians is reasonable. Moreover, as Thiselton has noted, "Paul is not alluding to behavior among Jewish Christians, but the Jews whom he is seeking to win." (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 702. Cf. 1 Cor. 9:14-18. See also David Daube, "Missionary Maxims in Paul," in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1956), 336-351. Augustine's interpretation exonerates Paul's ethics and suggests that his ritual Torah observance in the Temple was a con- victional statement.

Paul regarded circumcision, the ritual purity system, Temple sacrifices and festival pilgrimages as a matter of covenant faithfulness for Messianic Jews. Rather than teaching apostasy from Moses, the Lukan Paul endorsed Messianic Jewish lawabidingness in the New Covenant era.⁴⁵

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45 Cf. Jeremiah 31:31-37, esp. v. 36.

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