

Paul's Non-Jews Do Not Become 'Jews,' But Do They Become 'Jewish'? Reading Romans 2:25–29 Within Judaism, Alongside Josephus

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Paul's "*Jewish Assemblies*" rather than "Paul's *Gentile Churches*"? "Paul's *Jewish non-Jews*" instead of "Paul's *Christian Gentiles*"? Paul bringing non-Jews into "Judaism" rather than into "Christianity"? Am I really going to argue that these are more accurate labels for discussing the non-Jews whom Paul brought to faith in Jesus Christ and the gatherings of them with Jews sharing that conviction, as well as the communal ways of life into which Paul sought to enculturate them? Yes—and no.

Being and Becoming Jews and/or Jewish

It is generally agreed that the term "Jew" is a noun that refers to people who claim to be such according to the norms for defining identity as a "Jew," although the parameters have been and continue to be a moving target among and between different groups of Jews, and even from the perspectives of different groups of non-Jews.¹ From Paul's perspective, which parallels the views of most Jews of Paul's time of whom we have evidence, being a Jew involved being born to parents who are Jews, being circumcised if a male (on the eighth day of life),² and, ideally, behaving according to the standards that define that identity (Rom 2; 9–11; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 1:13–14; 2:15–16; Phil 3:4–6).³

¹ Defining who is a Jew and who is not is both simple and complex, just as it was during the first century C.E. There are countless studies of the topic. Likewise, defining what is Jewish and what is not is also both simple and complex. Here we are concerned specifically with these issues as they relate to Paul and his influence—not that this is without complexity, but it does provide some limits.

² Phil 3:5; cf. Gen 17:9–14; Lev 12:3; David A. Bernat, *Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Priestly Tradition* (Ancient Israel and Its Literature 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical

Being identified as a Jew and behaving like a Jew are readily recognized as two related yet not identical matters. The adjective “Jewish” is used both to refer to those who are Jews ethnically and to the behavior generally associated with the way that Jews live, albeit variously defined, such as by different interpretations of Scripture and related traditions, different views of who represents legitimate authority, and different conclusions about what is appropriate for any specific time and place. This behavior can be referred to by the adverb “Jewishly,” and as the expression of “Jewishness.” In colloquial terms,

Literature, 2009); Matthew Theissen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³ For the appropriateness of the choice of “Jew/Judaism” and cognates over “Judean/Judeanism” and similar cognates when discussing Paul and the texts from Josephus referred to herein (Rom 2:17–29; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.17–96; *War* 2:463; 7.45; and see 2 Macc. 6:1–11; 9:13–17; cf. Philo, *On the Special Laws* 1.186), see Daniel R. Schwartz, “Judaean’ or ‘Jew’? How should we translate *ioudaios* in Josephus?,” in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World = Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt*, ed. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz and Stephanie Gripentrog (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 3–27; Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?,” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark Douglas Given (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), 117 n. 2 (117–60); Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (HCS 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 69–106. Related to this matter is how to identify those who are not Jews; the terms “non-Jew/s” rather than “Gentile/s” are used herein to correspond to the way that Paul and Jews of his day generally used the terms, which involved seeing them as “*ethne*,” literally, “nations” or “peoples,” and an individual *ethnos* would be “a member of the peoples other than Israel/people who are not Jews” (Paul uses Israel/Jews interchangeably; see e.g., Rom 9–11). See Terence L. Donaldson, “‘Gentile Christianity’ as a Category in the Study of Christian Origins” *HTR* 106, no. 4 (2013): 433–58, although he concludes to use the term Gentile/s with qualification; in this essay and generally I conclude from the same evidence that it is better to use “non-Jew/s” (for problems Paul was encountering with this category as well as terminology, see Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007], 55; idem, “The Question of Social Interaction: Gentiles as Gentiles—but also Not—in Pauline Communities,” in *Paul Within Judaism*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming]). “Christian” and “church” are also avoided herein as anachronistic, and, perhaps more importantly, as misrepresentative of the context for conceptualizing the concerns and viewpoints of Paul and his communities; see e.g., Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, ed. Bengt Holmberg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–92; Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Real Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

one who practices a Jewish way of life according to the ancestral customs of the Jews, which is also referred to as practicing “Judaism,” might be called a “good” Jew. But a Jew can also behave in ways that are not considered to be Jewish—un-Jewishly or gentilely, goyish or goyishly, or even to practice cult to other gods like a Greek—and thus perhaps be regarded as an “apostate” Jew, or worse, a Jew who destroys other Jews (such as Antiochus, who did these un-Jewish, even anti-Jewish things; Josephus, *War* 7.46–53), without thereby becoming something other than a Jew in the genealogical ethnic sense of the term.⁴

Circumcision raises an interesting element for defining identity as well as behavior. It is an identity marker for males that does not signify precisely the same thing as do other elements of Jewish behavior, such as observing days and diets, which, while ethnic, do not determine whether one is a Jew or not.⁵ Jewish males are circumcised as eight-day-old infants to mark them as Jews;⁶ whether

⁴ Cf. *Sanhedrin* 44a for the later rabbinic view to this effect; Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (AGJU 23; Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994). See David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 11–27. Jews who willfully renounce their identity and apostatize completely are rarely referred to in the texts from Paul’s time, at most representing exceptions that prove the rule; see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 79–83.

⁵ This is a distinction within Judaism between a rite marking identification (of males) and the behavioral practices incumbent upon those so marked that Pauline interpreters, and New Testament interpreters in general, do not seem to grasp, lumping them together. They thus fail to see that, e.g., in Galatians, Paul is opposing the transformation of non-Jews into Jews, signified by circumcision, but that is not the same thing as opposing the adoption of Jewish behavior by these non-Jews, which Paul’s letter assumes that they have begun to do and promotes that they should do, while adamantly upholding that they must nevertheless remain non-Jews (i.e., not be circumcised). In Galatians, Paul does not oppose Torah or Torah-defined behavior (i.e., Judaism) for Jews—or for non-Jews(!)—but only circumcision for non-Jews. In other words, opposing the transformation of non-Jews into Jews does not equate to opposing the adopting of Jewish norms, thoughts, and behavior—it is not the same as opposing the observance of Judaism! See Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002); idem, “Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the *Shema*,” in *Celebrating Paul. Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.*, ed. Peter Spitaler (CBQMS 48; Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2012), 62–80.

⁶ However, a Jew does not (normally) decide to be circumcised; it is decided by his parents, thus it signifies that his parents practiced Jewish behavior.

they will later decide to behave Jewishly, including having their own sons circumcised, remains to be seen.⁷ We thus can distinguish, albeit not without overlap, between the genealogical or ethnic identity of Jews as Jewish people and behavior that characterizes Jews (and is thus ethnic), ideally at least, which is also referred to as behavior that is “Jewish,” i.e., behaving “Jewishly,” in a way characteristic of “Jewishness,” or as practicing “Judaism.”

Could non-Jews become Jews? According to some Jews, including Paul (Gal 2:11–14; 5:2–3, 11–12; 6:12–13), they could.⁸ There were also Jews who did not approve of or promote such policies and would not accept the identity transformation claimed, or at least that it was as complete as others supposed it to be.⁹ Some informed non-Jews also recognized that non-Jews could become Jews.¹⁰ In the texts from Paul's time it is generally clear that circumcision

⁷ If one born to Jewish parents (in rabbinic terms, to a Jewish mother) is not circumcised but decides later in life to undertake the rite, that is closer to the question of choice discussed below for non-Jews.

⁸ In addition to the brief discussion of Izates below, for more detail see Mark D. Nanos, “The Question of Conceptualization: Qualifying Paul's Position on Circumcision in Dialogue with Josephus's Advisors to King Izates,” in Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul Within Judaism*. For why *ioudaïzein* in Gal 2:11–14 indicates becoming a Jew, see Mark D. Nanos, “What Was at Stake in Peter's ‘Eating with Gentiles’ at Antioch?,” in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation*, ed. Mark D. Nanos, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 306–12 (282–318). For somewhat different conclusions, see Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 146–62, 175–97. For a later rabbinic statement affirming the change of ethnic identity, see *b. Yeb.* 47b; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 198–238, 342.

⁹ E.g., Jubilees 15:26 indicates that only those circumcised on the eighth day qualified as “the sons of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham,” by definition ruling out the transformation of non-Jews into Jews as adults; see Matthew Theissen, *Contesting Conversion*, 67–86. E.g., there were mixed opinions about whether those who were constrained to be circumcised and observe Jewish customs under Hasmonean rule (like Idumeans, and thus Herod's lineage), even if called thereafter *ioudaioi*, were in fact fully or only partially *ioudaioi*, or *ioudaioi* of a different kind (*Ant.* 13.257–58; 14.403); see Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 109–39; Theissen, *Contesting Conversion*, 87–110. For later rabbinic controversies, see Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (CSHJ; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (CSJH; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Horace, *Sat.* 1.9.68–70; Petronius, *Sat.* 102.14; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.13.137; Epictetus, *Discourses.* 2.9.19–21; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96–106; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.1–2; Seutonius, *Domitian* 12.2; see Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 29–49.

represents a decisive rite for a (male) non-Jew to undertake to become a proselyte, a Jew by choice rather than from their family of origin. Otherwise, a (male) non-Jew remains merely a non-Jew who is in some way affiliated with or attracted to Jews or Jewish beliefs and practices, such as those recognized as “fearers of God [*theosebeis*].”¹¹ They may behave Jewishly and even be considered “Jewish,” but they are generally recognized as non-Jews, certainly if known to have been born non-Jews and not undertaken the transformative rites (circumcision usually most explicitly) involved in becoming Jews. The matter is far more ambiguous where non-Jewish women becoming Jews or not is concerned, but it does not seem to have been a topic of argument among Jews that a woman born to Jewish parents was a Jew.¹²

In other words, “Jewish” is an adjective used sometimes to refer to a Jew or group of Jews: he or she is Jewish, they are the Jewish people. But “Jewish” can also modify references to the thoughts, behavior, gatherings, and institutions of those who are “Jews,” a complex known as the practice of “Judaism,” and, as the texts discussed below indicate, it can also refer—on grammatical and logical grounds—to the thoughts, behavior, gatherings, and institutions of those who are “not Jews” when they think, behave, gather, or in other ways reflect norms and values that are generally associated with the thoughts, behavior, gatherings, and norms and values of Jews. In short, non-Jews can think and behave in ways described as “Jewish” (for which I will use the lower case form to distinguish this from Jewish when describing those who are ethnically Jews); non-Jews can practice many of the elements of Judaism, the Jewish way of life developed by and for Jews; and they can do so without being or becoming Jews, just as Jews can choose not to think or behave in these ways.

Because ethnic identity (Jew/s) and ethnic thinking and behavior (Jewish/Jewishly/Jewishness/Judaism) are clearly related, but not synonymous, interchangeable terms, an interesting phenomenon arises when seeking to describe groups as Jewish. Although “Jewish” can be and is most often used to refer to Jews specifically, and thus gatherings of Jews—they are Jewish, the Jewish people, a Jewish service, and so on—as we will see, “Jewish” can also refer to groups or activities that include non-Jews among Jews: that group is Jewish, although it includes non-Jews who appear to think and behave like Jews. What if a group mostly made up of non-Jews with some Jews in leadership behaves Jewishly? What if it is made up exclusively of non-Jews yet founded or advised

¹¹ Discussion below of the case of King Izates; cf. Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 156–74.

¹² Cf. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?: Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

by Jews? What if it consists of only non-Jews and functions independent of any Jews yet bases its thinking and behavior on Jewish Scriptures, traditions, and ways of life? Would any of these cases fall within the adjectival descriptive “Jewish,” or, as suggested above to distinguish this from ethnic Jews, “jewish”?

At this point there is an issue that arises especially for discussing Paul. It is widely recognized that Paul opposed non-Jews becoming Jews after they became followers of Christ. He often referred to this as “circumcision,” the rite that signified completion of the process for males (Rom 4:9–12; 1 Cor 7:17–20; Gal 2:3; 3:3; 5:2–3, 11–12; 6:12–13). When writing to non-Jews to dissuade them from becoming Jews or to combat the otherwise obvious advantage of being a Jew when entering this movement within Judaism, Paul argued that these uncircumcised non-Jews were full and equal members of the family of God alongside of the Jewish members, indeed, equally children of Abraham and co-heirs of the promises made to him and his seed, and not simply welcome guests. This was based upon the chronometrical claim of the gospel that the day when all of the nations will join the Israelites to worship the One God of all humankind had dawned with the resurrection of Jesus as Messiah (Rom 3:29–4:25; Gal 3:6–4:7, 28).¹³ When calling both Jews and non-Jews who believed in Jesus as Christ to respect each other as equals, he stated that “being circumcised or foreskinned” is not to serve as the basis for discrimination among themselves any more than should differences that remain in terms of gender and status as slave or free (Rom 3:29–4:12; 1 Cor 7:17–20; Gal 3:26–29; 5:2–6; 6:15). These highly contextualized arguments have often been interpreted to mean that Paul no longer regarded circumcision, and thus covenantal identity for Jews, to hold any significance, that he regarded these as *adiaphora* (indifferent things) for Christ-followers, including himself.

This deduction has led some Pauline scholars to conclude that he also abandoned even the identity of being a Jew, although most believe that Paul remained a Jew ethnically even if he no longer ascribed value to that identity.¹⁴ Few, however, uphold that Paul is best described within Judaism.¹⁵ It is instead widely held that Paul left behind the practice of Judaism, that he no longer

¹³ Nanos, “Paul and the Jewish Tradition.”

¹⁴ This is ubiquitous in traditional treatments of Paul, recently Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (LNTS; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009); it is regularly expressed by New Perspective interpreters, albeit inconsistently; see James D. G. Dunn, “Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish-Christian Identity” *NTS* 45 (1999): 179 vs. 192 (174–93).

¹⁵ A new volume, *Paul Within Judaism* (ed. Nanos and Zetterholm), will challenge this legacy.

behaved Jewishly or intentionally expressed Jewishness (he remained Jewish ethnically but not religiously, if you will). Obviously, it follows that such a Paul would not promote Judaism or form Jewish communities, and one does not read Pauline scholars referring to Paul bringing non-Jews into a Jewish way of life, into Judaism, into Jewish synagogues or communities or even into Jewish subgroups. In fact, one often encounters descriptions of Paul opposing the conversion of non-Jews “into Judaism.” The discourse generally proceeds as if the terms “becoming a Jew” (being circumcised) and “becoming Jewish” or “practicing Judaism” are completely interchangeable—which, as just discussed, is not actually the case. The texts to which they refer seek to dissuade Christ-following non-Jews “from becoming Jews” (i.e., undertaking the rite of circumcision), which is not the same thing as opposing non-Jews thinking or behaving in Jewish ways, Jewishly, or practicing Judaism. An ironic twist is revealed when many of these same interpreters (joined by some of those who deny Paul remained a Jew, or at least that it no longer held value for him) maintain that he viewed non-Jews who believed in Jesus to have become “spiritual” or “true” Jews, usually by appealing to Rom 2:25–29,¹⁶ to which we will turn after a survey of a few texts from Josephus. These will help us discuss the ways to conceptualize and describe similar dynamics from the viewpoint of another first-century Jewish author who primarily addressed non-Jewish readers. We will look at several texts that describe the phenomenon of non-Jews who practice Jewish ways of life while remaining non-Jews, or who even became Jews, various levels of interaction they had with Jews and Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and different reactions to these decisions by both Jews and non-Jews who constitute their non-Jewish family, neighbors, and civic authorities.

Josephus’s Report of ‘Judaizing’ Syrian Non-Jews Viewed with Ambivalence and Suspicion by Their Syrian Neighbors

Josephus chronicles a series of events in Syria that took place in approximately 66 C.E. Groups of Syrian non-Jews attacked and massacred Syrian Jews, who retaliated similarly in partnership with certain Judean Jews. What is of interest

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (COQG 4; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), on 1436 writes, “*Being a ‘Jew’ was no longer Paul’s basic identity*” (emphasis his), just pages after writing, “Paul can refer to spirit-led, Messiah-believing Gentiles and Jews together as ‘the Jew’; ‘the circumcised’; and even on occasion as ‘Israel’ . . .” (1432).

here is the way that Josephus refers to a group of Syrian non-Jews spared during these attacks as “judaized”:¹⁷

They [the majority population Syrian non-Jews] passed their days in blood, their nights, yet more dreadful, in terror. For though believing that they had rid themselves of the Jews, still each city had its Judaizers, who aroused suspicion [ἐκάστοι τοὺς ἰουδαΐζοντας εἶχον ἐν ὑποψίᾳ]; and while they shrunk from killing offhand each ambiguous one [ἐκάστοις ἀμφίβολον] in their midst, they feared those being mixed together as if really of another tribe [μειμιγμένον ὡς βεβαίως ἀλλόφυλον; or: aliens/foreigners]. (*War* 2:463; Loeb, trans. Thackeray, with alterations where the Greek is provided)¹⁸

The identity—and thus loyalty—of these Syrian non-Jews is captured by referring to them as “each ambiguous one in their [the majority Syrian non-Jews’] midst.” They were spared, yet suspect.

Josephus’s description of these Syrian non-Jews is far from clear. He does not identify them as having become circumcised or (proselyte) Jews “really/certainly [βεβαίως],” such as he does identify some elsewhere (2.454; *Ant.* 3.318; 14.403; 20.38–43 [Izates]; *Ag. Ap.* 2.210; cf. *Tobit* 1:8). The level of distrust and concern about them could suggest that they were regarded as proselytes, or on the path to becoming such. It was as if they were not fully Syrians but “really of another tribe”; that is, they feared that the loyalties of these non-Jews were with the Syrian Jews (perhaps Syrian Judeans is helpful here) more so than would be expected of Syrians who were merely practicing some ways of life characteristic of Jews, including assembling with them to do so. Are they

¹⁷ This term was used to refer to the actions of non-Jews when they adopt Jewish behavior or become Jews; it is not used to describe Jews who seek to persuade non-Jews. See Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 175–97; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 115–19.

¹⁸ It is unclear to what the participle “being mixed” refers, but it seems here to connote the mixing of the non-Jewish identity of these Syrians with their practices of Judaism among Jews, who are of another tribe, i.e., with ancestry not from Syria but Judea and thus different ancestral customs and cult practices that Syrian non-Jews would not normally be expected to observe; hence, their ambiguous identity and uncertain loyalties arise because of religious practices and associations that are not natural or traditional for them from birth. Cf. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 294–96. Cohen, *Beginnings*, 184, suggests the last clause read: “and it was feared as if it were truly foreign, although it was mixed.”

regarded as close friends of the Jews, or as if they are now family members? Given the way that these violent riots and massacres by the mob were proceeding, the nuanced, reasoned restraint towards them makes it unlikely that they had become proselyte Jews and were no longer in any way celebrating family and civic cult. More likely, these Syrians were in some ways still identifiably observing normal Syrian practices in addition to mixing with Jews and observing certain Jewish customs, at least when among the Jewish communities, if not also in certain ways when among their non-Jewish families and neighbors. If they were suspected of having become Jews, it seems to follow that the same level of hostility and concomitant actions taken against Jews would have been taken against them—perhaps even more so, since they would be regarded as traitors by choice rather than birth.

The questions I want to pose are these:

1) Are they not “jewish non-Jews,” who are spared but nevertheless suspect, their ultimate loyalties “mixed” in such a way that they cannot be completely trusted? Is not their own level of Jewish behavior or Jewishness a salient issue, as well as their close affiliation with Jews?

2) Would we expect Josephus to refer to the gatherings of these ambiguous ones with Jews as “Gentile assemblies” or as “Jewish assemblies” that included “judaizing non-Jews”? Does not their identification as “judaizers” suspected of being loyal to “another tribe” more than their own from birth indicate that they assembled with groups under the authority of Jewish leaders and conducted according to Jewish norms, thus that these were “Jewish” groups and that they participated in the practice of Judaism?

Another Account of Syrian Non-Jews Participating in Jewish Ceremonies and Jewish Communal Life by Josephus

In *War* 7.41–62, when relating events shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., Josephus refers back to earlier developments in Syria similar to those he related in the text just discussed (2.462–63; cf. 559–61). While engaged in explaining the good relations between and mixing (*ἀναμείγνυμι*) of Judeans among Syrians for many years following the hostile events that took place under Antiochus Epiphanes (7.73–74),¹⁹ Josephus presents a number of Syrian non-Jews (which

¹⁹ In this case, Josephus refers to the geographical proximity of Judea and Syria and to the Judean nation (*Ἰουδαίων γένος*) being dispersed among the inhabitants of the earth, thus highlighting the Judeanness of these Jews, which remains salient throughout this account of the hostilities that includes the dynamics resulting from the high level of integration as well as the incorporation of Syrians among the Jews/Judeans.

he calls “a great multitude of Greeks [πολὸν πλῆθος Ἑλλήνων]”) in a way that suggests that they remained recognizably non-Jews who have been socialized into the religious life of the communities of Syrian Jews:²⁰

Moreover, they [the Jews of Syria] were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies [προσαγόμενοι ταῖς θρησκευαίαις: or: cult practices]²¹ multitudes of Greeks, and these they had in some measure incorporated with themselves [κάκεινους τρόπῳ τινὶ μοῖραν αὐτῶν πεποιήντο: or: and also they had made them, in a way, a part of themselves]. (*War* 7.45, Loeb; trans. Thackeray)

Some interpreters have understood this to indicate active recruiting of non-Jews, yet Josephus's language need not indicate more than that Jewish communities were welcomingly leading (προσαγόμενοι) interested non-Jews, whom they generously also “incorporated” with themselves, to participate in their communal life.²² The ambiguity in Josephus's description allows for various levels of involvement, from attraction to Jewish customs and the ideals and actions attributed to their God and ancestors, to affiliation resulting from employment or marriage. Some may have become proselytes, but his language does not require this. Whatever the precise details, Josephus's description suggests that the identity of more than a few Syrian non-Jews was intimately linked with that of the Jewish people, but they still remained distinguishable from Syrian Jews and Judeans.

It is unclear how many non-Jews he had in view, but even if many, the questions it poses for us remain similar to those of the text discussed above, although they might arise in the opposite order:

²⁰ Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1994), 87, refers to them as God-fearers, which seems warranted here; so too Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 294–96, 305–7. However, Cohen, *Beginnings*, 159, interprets them to be proselytes.

²¹ The Greek word *thrēskeia* can refer to religious worship, rituals, and cult. Josephus uses *thrēskeia* to refer to general religious observance (*War* 2.198, 391; 7.45), general temple worship (*War* 4.324; 5.198, 199; 6.100, 442), and particular observances (Sabbath in 1.146; 2.456; Passover in 2.10; Pentecost in 2.42; temple sacrifice in 1.148, 150; 4.275; 5.229; 6.427); from Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 298 n. 33; and see also 307 n. 46.

²² Cf. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 306–7.

1) How likely is it that Josephus, or his readers, including us, would refer to these communities or their *gatherings* by the adjectives “Gentile” or “non-Jewish” rather than “Jewish”? Once again, would not what he describes almost certainly be better categorized as “Jewish groups” with non-Jews integrated to various degrees among them?

2) Does not the description of these non-Jews as “in some manner/measure/way” participating in Jewish communal life betray the fact that they remain distinguishable from Jews/Judeans in Syria? At the same time, they are distinguishable from other Syrian non-Jews by their *jewishness*, by their participation in Jewish communal religious activities; i.e., by behaving *jewishly*, practicing Judaism. Are they not *jewish* non-Jews?

Josephus’s Narrative of King Izates of Adiabene and His Mother Helena: Jewish Non-Jews Who Become Jews?

There are many striking elements in Josephus’s account about Izates, the king of the Parthian client territory of Adiabene, and his mother, Helena, who were not born Jews and ruled a non-Jewish/non-Judean people (*Ant.* 20.17–96). The events overlap with Paul’s ministry in the 40s and 50s C.E. (20.15–17), and include interesting parallels to elements of Paul’s approach to and instructions for non-Jews in the Roman Empire. Several scenes warrant discussion.

Before Izates was crowned king, his parents sent him to live in Charax Spasini for protection (20.22). While there, according to Josephus, a Jewish merchant, Ananias, taught several women of the royal family with whom Izates was staying “to worship God [the Deity] according to the Jewish ancestral traditions [ὡς Ἰουδαίους πατριῶν]” (20.34). When Izates learned of this, he too was successfully “persuaded/urged [συνανέπεισεν]” to do the same (20.35). Josephus specifically identifies them as women, and makes no mention of any other Jewish figures present, or of a Jewish community there. These non-Jews seem to have taken up several ideas and behaviors recognizably Jewish, presumably adding these to the practices of their other native customs. It seems *unlikely* that their gatherings represent Jews’ gatherings or would be properly called synagogues or Jewish assemblies; rather, they apparently represent the assembling of non-Jews to observe certain Jewish customs. It does seem likely that others in their family and from their people, as well as they themselves, would recognize that these meetings involve non-Jews behaving *jewishly/practicing Judaism in some ways/at some times*.

When Izates returned to the kingdom of Adiabene to assume the crown following the death of his father, he learned that his mother had simultaneously

begun to observe certain Jewish customs under the direction of a different Jew, who remains unnamed (20.35–38). Izates is described as becoming aware of Helena's "rejoicing in the Jews' customs [τοις Ἰουδαίων ἔθεσιν]" (20.38), referred to also as "their laws/conventions [νόμους]" (20.35). Izates thus resolved to go beyond merely adopting the ancestral traditions observed in Charax while remaining a non-Jew; instead, he "hastened to also change/cross over/convert [μεταθέσθαι] into them [ἐκείνα] himself" (20.38). Izates is presented to reason that he would not be "definitively/genuinely a Jew [βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος] if he has not been circumcised, which he was ready to do" (20.38).

It remains unclear whether Izates supposed heretofore that he had become a Jew, or if he was simply unaware of the distinction between adopting (some) Jewish behavior, most likely adding such behavior to the rest of the customs and cult practices of his people as well as those of the people among whom he was residing, and becoming a Jew. Since the matter of circumcision with its signification of identity transformation does not pertain to Helena, it is also unclear if she is still a non-Jew or is recognized to have become a Jew. Izates's sudden interest in undertaking to be circumcised at this point might suggest that Helena's teacher has raised this matter directly, or perhaps Izates just inferred it, maybe from the way that she articulated her commitment or experience.

Upon learning of Izates's plan to become circumcised, Ananias, who has accompanied him to Adiabene, and his mother both vehemently oppose this step for him (20.39–42). They argue that his subjects, who are not Jews, will rebel against such a change of identity for their king. They did not, however, oppose him observing certain Jewish beliefs and behavior! But becoming a Jew by way of undertaking circumcision would send a very different message, one involving rejection of their native gods and customs, which they (correctly) anticipate will lead to rebellion against his rule.

Before we get to the introduction of the next Jewish figure, it is worth pausing to ask whether Helena and Izates at this point represent *jewish* non-Jews. They are in some ways behaving *jewishly*, and their *jewishness* is observably different from that of other nobles and their subjects, except some other female members of the royal household of Helena. There is still no mention of any Jewish community in Adiabene,²³ or of them participating in

²³ Elsewhere Josephus mentions many Jews in Babylon and in the major cities of Parthia, and their collection, treasury, and transportation of the tax for the Jerusalem temple (*Ant.* 18.310–13, 314–79).

meetings with Jews other than the two Jews who have been instructing them in Jewish customs, which they have done independently of each other.

1) Thus, unless Helena is regarded to be a Jew, are not their gatherings to practice Jewish customs (whatever they were, and however often observed) still best described as *gatherings of non-Jews/Gentiles*?

2) Although they behave in and thus think in some ways associated with Jews, i.e., *jewishly*, practicing Judaism, do they not do so as *non-Jews*, hence, are they not *jewish non-Jews*?

The next development in Josephus's story is of interest in many ways. Here we will focus on the change of identity for Izates that the new Jewish person on the scene in Adiabene, Eleazar, explicitly promotes (20.43–45). In contrast to the opposition to circumcision upheld by Helena and Ananias, Eleazar argues that to piously conform to the teachings of Torah that Izates has been reading for guidance he must become circumcised; otherwise, he is guilty of impiety for failure to act according to what he has learned! Hearing this logic, Izates calls for the physician in order to be circumcised and “complete what was commanded [τὸ προσταχθὲν ἐτέλει],” thereby accomplishing “the act/rite” that will render him genuinely a Jew. The rest of the story develops around how God comes to Izates's rescue, because of his “faithfulness alone” to do that which God instructed in Torah (20.48, 89–91) in the face of the negative reactions from his fellow nobles and the people of his kingdom, who seek to overthrow Izates's rule because he rejected their gods and customs for those of a foreign people, just as Helena and Ananias anticipated (20.75–91). As you can see, there are many interesting dynamics to explore, not least for those interested in understanding Paul.²⁴

Remaining on topic, and recognizing that there are no larger or even other Jewish communities explicitly mentioned, or any involvement in them by Izates and his mother (or after his death, by his brother, who follows his example and wants to practice Judaism),²⁵ the taxonomical issues nevertheless become more taxing. They seem to be Jews behaving *jewishly*, known by others for their *jewishness*, for their Jewish beliefs and behavior, even at the cost of significant social pressure, rather than to have remained non-Jews who simply added Jewish customs and beliefs to those they already upheld according to Adiabene traditions. After Izates has undertaken circumcision in order to be completely faithful to what Torah prescribes according to Eleazar, is he not a Jew? In the case of Helena, there is no such marker to identify her transformation, yet she

²⁴ See Nanos, “The Question of Conceptualization.”

²⁵ The decision of his brother(s) and a few stories of their rule are related in 20.75–76, 92–96.

may well be regarded to have become a Jew also. In either case, based on Izates's change of identity, is he not a Jew after choosing to adopt the identity, beliefs, and practices of the Jews, i.e., Judaism? The salience of judeanness is also raised: Helena goes to Judea with alms (probably during the same famine that Paul reportedly responded to with alms), and she wants to be and is buried there (as also is Izates); moreover, several of Izates's sons go to school in Jerusalem (*Ant.* 20.49–53, 71, 95).²⁶

1) Rather than “jewish” *non-Jews*, is Izates (if not also Helena) now not a *Jew*, indeed, a *Jewish Jew*? Is he not a Jew practicing Judaism?

2) Once they are recognized as Jews, when they meet together, are their gatherings not *Jewish assemblies* or *synagogues*?²⁷

Paul's Non-Jews, with Special Attention to Romans 2:25–29

Paul prohibited non-Jews who turned to God in Christ from becoming Jews, yet at the same time he also instructed them not to practice one of the most basic ways of being non-Jews in the Roman world of Paul's time, namely, family and civic cult (Rom 3:29–4:25; 6; 1 Cor 7:17–22; Gal 4:8–10; 1 Thess 1:9–10).²⁸ Their turning to the worship of Israel's God under the influence of a Jewish teacher of non-Jews would almost certainly suggest to many of their family members and neighbors that they were acting Jewishly, practicing Judaism, the way of life developed by Jews—and that is indeed what Paul promoted that these non-Jews should do, although insisting they do so while remaining non-Jews. If they were attending subgroup meetings of local Jewish groups defined around allegiance to

²⁶ Additional stories, including in the rabbinic material, are discussed in Tessa Rajak, “The Parthians in Josephus,” in *Das Partherreich un seine Zeugnisse: Beiträge des internationalen Colloquiums, Eutin (27. - 30 Juni 1996)*, ed. J. Wiesehöfer (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 309–24; Lawrence H. Schiffman, “The Conversion of the Royal House of Abiabene [sp] in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources,” in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 293–312; Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 328–31.

²⁷ *Synagōgē* was used during Paul's period not only to refer to the space where assemblies took place, which included homes and other spaces adopted for certain activities, but also to the assembly or gathering itself, being in each of these uses synonymous with usage of the term *ekklēsia*; see Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-historical Study* (CBNTS 37; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

²⁸ Cf. Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 56 (2010): 232–52; idem, “The Question of Worship: Gods, Pagans, and the Redemption of Israel,” in Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul Within Judaism*; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 257–71.

Jesus as Christ/Messiah, even if small and marginalized by some other Jews, that inner-group dynamic would probably be unrecognized among non-Jewish observers of this phenomenon: they would most likely (and correctly) perceive that these fellow non-Jews gathered within Jewish groups and practiced Jewish ways of life and cult. When they began to substantiate their ways of thinking and living by appeal to Jewish Scriptures and traditions—as does Paul, whom presumably they would imitate— they would almost certainly (and rightly) be considered to be behaving like Jews.²⁹

Instead of a survey of the many ways that Paul instructed Christ-following non-Jews to behave Jewishly,³⁰ I want to briefly look at a text that seems to most Pauline scholars to close the door to a Paul who continued to value his Jewish covenantal identity by behaving according to Torah-defined ways of life, and all the more to one promoting Judaism in the way he proclaimed the gospel and instructed the non-Jews attracted to his message. That text is Rom 2:25–29.

Paul's Message in Romans 2:25–29

The chapter within which this text appears begins with a challenge to anyone judging others, based on the argument that the very act of knowing there is a standard to which the other is held logically involves knowing that one has also failed to achieve it. Realizing that God is the judge who is fully aware of both one's own intentions and actions as well as those of one's neighbors, the message Paul drives home is to focus on one's own responsibilities to do what is required of one, to judge oneself and leave the judging of others to the Judge, rejoicing in the knowledge that God is kind and forgiving toward those who err along the way when they make proper amends. Paul completes the argument of verses 1–11 by asserting that God is impartial, both kind and just with the Jew first, and also with the non-Jew.³¹

In the next argument (vv. 12–16), Paul makes it plain that God judges according to faithful behavior, which is not expected to represent precisely the same standards for Jews and non-Jews; instead, each is held to the standard of what they know to be proper behavior. God knows both what they do and what

²⁹ Cf. Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space-Between* (London, et al: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³⁰ This is available in various publications; see www.marknanos.com.

³¹ Additional details of this reading are provided in Mark D. Nanos, "Romans," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York, et al: Oxford University Press, 2011), 257–61 (253–86).

they intended for that action to achieve, including when they have exploited the very laws and principles that were designed to guide them to do right rather than to justify the doing of wrong by, for example, legal loopholes. The real intentions behind one's actions do not escape God's notice anymore than actions that run contrary to the behavior publicly known. Each is judged by what they know to be right—a just God would have it no other way. That means Jews are judged first just as they are forgiven first, because they have been given the gift of God's "Guidance" (Torah), but non-Jews will also be judged and can be forgiven according to that which the created order revealed and society's *nomos* (laws/conventions) recognized to be proper and improper, which is not always the same as that of which one's peers approve (a point that reaches back to the argument in 1:18–32, that there are conventions developed around improper behavior too).

This leads to the argument in verses 17–24, which introduce a fictive character: "But if you name yourself [or: are being named] a Jew, and . . ." (v. 17).³² The continuation of the sentence following "and" is paramount to following the critique Paul mounts to this one, but it is often not sufficiently appreciated by commentators. Paul's critique is "if" he would announce his identity publicly [or is announced publicly to be such] "and rely on *nomos* [law/convention/Torah] and glory in God, and know the will and approve the things that matter, instructing (or: being instructed) from the *nomos* [Torah], so [that] you persuaded yourself to be a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, an instructor of foolish ones, a teacher of children, having the shape of the knowledge and the truth in the *nomos* [Torah]: You, therefore, teaching others, will you not teach yourself?" (vv. 17–21a).³³

³² The verb can be passive. On the diatribal features throughout this section, see Stanley Kent Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Neil Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (JSNTSup 45; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990). On 2:17ff. in particular, see Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 143–58; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Paul's Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography* (CBNTS 40; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003).

³³ Cf. *m. Avot* 1:12–17 (Neusner trans.): "Hillel says, 'Be disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and drawing them near to Torah.' He would say, 'A name made great is a name destroyed. . . . If I am not for myself, who is for me? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?' Shammai says, 'Make your learning of Torah a fixed obligation. Say little and do much. . . .' Simeon his [Rabban Gamaliel's] son says, 'All my life I grew up among the sages, and I found nothing better

Paul proceeds to indict the one presuming to teach, but it is not for any of the motives listed, which are all praiseworthy, including the impulse to teach the nations, which Paul makes central to what it means to be a Jew and to be circumcised in 3:2—for the Jew is the one entrusted with the oracles of God! Moreover, the teaching of the nations as a spokesperson from Israel is precisely Paul’s own purpose, which he makes plain throughout the letter, and in several cases Paul specifically invokes his own credentials as a Jew, and related claims to authority with respect to those to whom he writes (Rom 11:1–14; 15:15–32; 2 Cor 11:21–12:21; Gal 3:14–16; Phil 3:3–6). The critique is for such a fictive teacher “if” he does not *also* first of all hold himself to the very standards that he promotes to others. The specific elements, including stealing, adultery, and robbing temples, represent behavior that any teacher of reputable laws, and all the more Torah, would agree are egregious sins; but for a teacher of the values they transgress, these are hypocritical. Verse 24 wraps up the accusation with a citation from Isaiah 52:5 (LXX; bearing witness to an ancient Israelite tradition concerned with this matter), that such failure to live according to the values that one proclaims others should adopt would give the nations cause to blaspheme the God to which such a teacher called attention!³⁴

The criticism is not of boasting, as so often stated, or of bigotry;³⁵ what is circumscribed is *hypocrisy*, claiming to represent norms that others should embrace that one has not internalized to guide their own aims and behavior. There is nothing wrong with boasting (glorying) in God—Paul appeals to it later

for a person than silence. And not the learning is the main thing but the doing. And whoever talks too much causes sin.” Also consider: “Abba Saul b. Nanos said: There are four types of scholars: . . . ‘He who taught others but did not teach himself—how is this? A man learnt an Order or two or three [of the Mishnah] several times and taught them to others, but he did not occupy himself with them so that he forgot them—he is one who taught others but did not teach himself. . . .’; *Abot de-Rabbi Nathan* (A) 29.3; A. Cohen, and Israel Brodie, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud: Massektoth Ketannah* (Vol. 1; London: Soncino Press, 1966), 140.

³⁴ Although the original context for Isaiah concerned the state of Israel in captivity, the idea is similar in that instead of bearing witness to being indeed God’s chosen instrument, such a state of hypocrisy betrays that witness from the perspective of the outside observer.

³⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 222–37; if presuming it is Israel’s role to declare these things to the nations constitutes “cultural exceptionalism” and “bigotry,” then Paul is equally guilty of these by his own argument here and throughout his letters—indeed, by the presumption of his ministry as a representative of God and Israel by definition.

in this letter and he boasts/glories in Christ!³⁶ There is something terribly wrong, however, “if” one would glory in God “and” then proceed to make himself God’s spokesperson without *also* making it his first order of business to behave in accordance with what he teaches. Instead of bringing glory to God, it creates disgust—for a God presumed to endorse such behavior is hardly to be praised.

Note, too, that it is not a list of the fictive teacher’s motives that are exposed as hypocrisy, but, importantly, it is his activities that are listed as self-condemning. The way that he (hypothetically) behaves undermines the values that he should stand for based on what he teaches, and supposedly, the reasons that he teaches these values—specifically, if known to be a Jew. Paul’s appeal to the title of “Jew” is apparently based upon assuming awareness among his readers of a widely held stereotype that Jews by definition served as the model for practicing what one preaches.³⁷ Paul thus develops a rhetorical gambit to illustrate a principle that he wants his readers as non-Jews to grasp for themselves by employing a fictive Jew, much like the prophet Nathan employed the example of a rich man exploiting the poor man to teach David what his own actions would look like if he could rightly see himself from a distance (2 Sam 12). Paul wants to censure hypocrisy among the non-Jews to whom he writes, not among Jews, in this case, the fictive Jew whom he constructs toward that end.³⁸ (Unfortunately, after followers of Christ were no longer part of Judaism and the movement had no Jews, Paul’s original rhetorical character was subverted and served as a foil for negative Christian portrayals of and policies toward Jews and Judaism, seemingly in concert with Jesus’ critique of Pharisees as self-righteous hypocrites.³⁹) This argument leads us up to verses 25–29, on which I wish to focus. But before we turn to that, it is also worthwhile to briefly mention the way that Paul’s argument continues thereafter, in chapter 3.

Following the argument at 2:29, the diatribe question raised in 3:1 is whether there is thus any value—in the literal sense—in being a Jew or

³⁶ 5:2, 3, 11; Phil 3:3.

³⁷ Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.9.19–22; 2.19.19–28, provides an example from a non-Jew philosopher; Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 144–48, lists several others.

³⁸ Cf. Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 103–5.

³⁹ The Gospels’ Jesus is critical but it is in terms of intra-Jewish group hyperbole with a close and feared rival, and its impact would only be successful if Pharisees actually decried hypocrisy also, and would, for example, agree with Jesus that doing things that are public if not also done for the right reasons are empty, although this contextual qualification has been largely overlooked in the history of interpretation. Cf. Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 143–44.

circumcised. The reply in verse 2 is an emphatic, “Much, in every way!” Why? Because “they have been entrusted with the oracles of God.” It is thus apparent that Paul means to undermine neither the value of literal circumcision nor genealogical descent for Jews, nor the impulse to teach those from the nations the words of God, yet he recognizes that these could be inferred from his argument, so he directly denies that they should be. That the question is raised about “them” (not “us” non-Jews) indicates that Paul did not anticipate the later interpretive tradition’s deduction that his argument in 2:29 meant that these non-Jews had become in fact Jews in some way, often labeled “spiritual” or “true” or “real” or “reconfigured Jews,” or that they had replaced ethnic Jews and the rite of circumcision in the flesh, rendering the literal Jews and circumcision superfluous. The way that the argument proceeds demonstrates that being a Jew and being circumcised remain literally of value for Jews, which sets them apart, as Jews, to be especially entrusted with God’s words among the nations. What Paul has found fault with is the failure “if” one so identified is inclined to speak to the nations but not concomitantly dedicated to live according to the ideals to which that person’s teaching points, but instead behaves contrary to that teaching.

Within this contextual frame, we can return to examine Paul’s argument in 2:25–29. The translation suggestions, including the explanatory phrases inserted, assume that Paul is still addressing the hypothetical one who would publicly declare himself (or: be declared) to be a Jew who teaches non-Jews without first of all intentionally observing that which he teaches them.

In verse 25, Paul writes: “For indeed circumcision is valuable (or: helpful) if you would be observing Torah, but if you would be one who [is circumcised yet intentionally] sidesteps Torah, then your circumcision has become [of no more value than if you still had] foreskin.”⁴⁰ The translation proposed does not differ much from that offered in the NRSV. The changes bring out the conditional element present in the verbs, in keeping with the hypothetical person constructed for the diatribe to do its inductive teaching. The phrases inserted seek to capture the thoughts between the lines. It is one who is circumcised that is in view if they would not live according to Torah, to which circumcised identity sets them apart from those of the other nations, who are not under Torah. Paul is playing circumcised and foreskinned identities against each other here; circumcised identity is only of value if the one so marked as set

⁴⁰ Περιτομή μὲν γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἐὰν νόμον πράσσης· ἐὰν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ᾖς, ἡ περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν. NRSV: “Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.”

apart to God actually seeks to behave accordingly; otherwise, such a one is no different from the rest of humankind.⁴¹ The implied value is that by definition those who are circumcised should be different, set apart to behave according to the Guidelines (Torah) God has given to the people of the covenant God made with Israel that circumcision signifies. The value of circumcising flesh is not intrinsic but imputed, it is the value of setting apart one's (usually, one's male child's) body, and thus whole being, to God, thereafter procreating within the family that God has chosen to bring blessing to all humankind. This is an argument with which any circumcised Jew, much less one proposing to enlighten non-Jews to the ideals of Jewish identity and Torah-defined behavior, would be expected to agree.⁴² The one Paul describes here could be labeled "an un-Jewish-like Jew."

In verse 26, Paul turns the point around: "Therefore, if the foreskinned one protects the righteous requirements of Torah, will his foreskin not be valued as [equivalent to] circumcision?"⁴³ Paul works from the propositional premise that the requirements/claims/judgments of Torah are righteous/just (*δικαιώματα*: a detail that the NRSV translation "requirements" fails to communicate). Thus one who would seek to "watch out" that these are kept (hence: protect/guard/keep) would in effect be behaving as the circumcised should by definition behave. Circumcision sets the covenant people apart to God's Guidance; it is thereafter their covenant obligation to protect it by living

⁴¹ Paul's argument is not against this hypothetical Jew supposing that being circumcised "saves" him, as commentators regularly assert (e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975], 1.172), and moreover, the supposed error of "complacent reliance upon circumcision" hardly makes sense of the effort attributed to this hypothetical teacher; it is not an issue for the fictive Jew, or for Jews and Judaism generally, unlike for later Christian interpreters.

⁴² Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Contraversions 1; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 86–95, makes the same point—that Jews would have generally agreed with these values—although he follows Dunn in supposing that Paul is actually seeking to attack Jews who rely upon being Jews apart from proper actions, rather than that this is a fictive example Paul creates in order to show non-Jews what it would be like *if* they would not turn their focus to doing what is now right and leave justice up to God. Like most Pauline scholars, Boyarin understands Paul to be universalizing Jewish identity in verse 29, applying it to non-Jews as well.

⁴³ *ἐὰν οὖν ἡ ἀκροβυστία τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσσει, οὐχ ἡ ἀκροβυστία αὐτοῦ εἰς περιτομὴν λογισθήσεται*; NRSV: "So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?"

accordingly. Within the contrast being developed, as well as the rest of the letter and Paul's arguments against Christ-following non-Jews undertaking literal circumcision, it is illogical to suppose that Paul means that the non-Jew actually becomes circumcised. He has in view how his body is "valued/regarded [*λογισθήσεται*]" similarly, that it is dedicated to doing God's will in the way that the person with a circumcised body should be.⁴⁴ When such righteous concern to live in genuine faithfulness to God rather than hypocrisy is demonstrated by a non-Jew it represents the equivalent of acting like a Jew should—protecting the righteous ideal of Torah-defined behavior for the circumcised—and, indeed, it represents how all humans should behave. Paul appeals to the theoretical "Jewish-like non-Jew" in contrast to the theoretical "un-Jewish-like Jew" of the previous verse.⁴⁵

Verse 27 draws out an inference from the previous two verses: "And the one foreskinned from birth [i.e., the non-Jew] yet fulfilling Torah will judge you who through [or: notwithstanding (having)] letter and circumcision [or: literal circumcision] sidestep Torah."⁴⁶ It is unclear if Paul meant to appeal to the attendant circumstances of having these gifts yet disregarding the help or value they offered ("notwithstanding/in spite of [having]"),⁴⁷ and also whether he meant to indicate the hendiadys, "literal circumcision,"⁴⁸ or two different elements, "letter" and "circumcision." By adding letter to circumcision he might be simply indicating the additional possession of Scripture or Torah. Paul could be implying the exploitation of these gifts (if *διὰ* is understood as causative: "by means of"), but the fictive Jew has been theoretically guilty of failing to act in keeping with what their knowledge of Scripture and marking as one set apart to God should guard above all, whereas if one not circumcised and without Torah

⁴⁴ This is a scriptural value among the literally circumcised Israelites and later Jews to which Paul's argument appeals (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25–26; 38:33; Ezek 44:7; 1QS 5.5; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.6; *QG* 3.46–52).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Sifra* 86b: "Also a Gentile, if he practices the Torah, is equal to the High Priest"; such rhetoric, like Paul's, is not proposing that he becomes the High Priest, but is reckoned/valued as if equivalent in standing. Consider too that one might refer to someone exemplifying American values as more American than (some) Americans, without thereby inferring that they have thus become Americans (having U.S. citizenship).

⁴⁶ *καὶ κρινεῖ ἢ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα σὲ τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου*. NRSV: "Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law."

⁴⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 234, approvingly notes many commentators who choose this option.

⁴⁸ Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.174, recognizes this option.

to guide them actually behaved in a manner that did protect the righteous aims of Torah, that one would naturally stand in judgment of such a Jew.

The entire chapter has censured judging of others, so it seems that Paul means here that their behavior will naturally stand as a witness against the behavior of the other, rather than that he is endorsing judging them, or even the impulse to want to judge them at some future time. Paul's approach veers close to playing on the temptation to envy (begrudge); in this case, to enjoy the fall of one's social superiors, giving one the sense of increased self-worth at the expense of the other's experience of being brought down (leveled). It is obvious from the way that criticisms of Jews and Judaism are indulged in the commentary tradition on this passage—often building implicitly when not explicitly on the trope of the self-righteous Pharisee, although apparently without recognizing that commentators themselves are probably “guilty” of seeking to practice the right way to please God—that Paul's approach is a dangerous one. In spite of the impulse to judge that Paul's argument has fueled for many commentators, it seems more likely that his conscious goal for this rhetorical gambit was not to encourage his audience to embrace the role of judging (which is so contrary to the message of 2:1 and the chapter overall), but to convince them to recoil from behaving in a similar way themselves (i.e., to judge themselves). Whatever the case might be, Paul argues that a non-Jew behaving Jewishly (“a Jewish non-Jew”) would logically represent the righteous judgment (by God) of a Jew who did not behave Jewishly (“a non-Jewish Jew”) in spite of having the help of Scripture and circumcision (or: in spite of being literally circumcised).

In verses 28–29 Paul completes this thought in the argument: “For the Jew is not [seeking validation] in the public acknowledgement⁴⁹ [i.e., calling himself or being called the Jew], nor is [the validation by] circumcision in the visible display in the flesh,⁵⁰ But the Jew [is validated] in that which is concealed,⁵¹ even as circumcision of heart is in spirit not letter [or: literal (in

⁴⁹ Cf. Bultmann/Lürhmann, “φανερως,” *TDNT* 9.2.

⁵⁰ οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερωῖ Ἰουδαϊὸς ἐστὶν οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερωῖ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομῆ; NRSV: “For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical.” Note that “true” is not in the manuscripts.

⁵¹ Paul uses *κρυπτός*, an adjective usually referring to something “concealed,” hidden behind that which is seen (such as results when a rock is rolled over a cave opening), that which is behind the façade. Paul is probably seeking to contrast the public/visible credentials (of the Jew who teaches non-Jews) and that which remains impossible to see even in visible behavior (whether that Jew seeks to exemplify the values to which those credentials point).

flesh)]; the praise [valued] is not from humans, but from God.”⁵² The prevailing translations and interpretations of this passage proceed from the conviction that Paul devalues Jewish ethnic identity and the ritual of circumcision (as well as Jewish ritual identity and behavior overall, and Judaism). They give the reader the impression that Paul is here calling for inward spirituality and attributing both the identity “Jew” and the mark of circumcision, when idealized in spiritual terms, to Christ-followers in general, and non-Jews who follow Christ in particular (i.e., to “Christians” as the “real” or “true” or “spiritual Jews”), while also denying that they any longer belong to Jews (since they are deemed to be like the fictive Jewish hypocrite by definition if they have not become Christ-followers, and thus without circumcised hearts, faith, or spirituality, etc.). It is obviously possible to translate and interpret the passage in these ways, but that does not sit well with the message of the passages within which it is embedded. Moreover, if Paul continued to value his Jewish identity and Jewish behavior, and if he presumed his audiences to know that, then such choices are unwarranted.

I have made several suggestions for the literal components here to try to capture what seems to be the spirit of the message. Based upon the preceding concern with what is valued, which is precisely what the question following in 3:1 poses as well, it seems appropriate to read this terse summary statement as an affirmation of what the one who is in fact a Jew ethnically by descent and circumcised in the flesh—which are indicated by reference to “letter/literal”—should be expected to value. He wants to be recognized by the conduct of his life, “of heart in/by spirit,” that is, motivated by faithful service to God and neighbor, per Torah, with God’s assistance. The Jewishness a Jew values is the praise of God for a job faithfully performed rather than the accolades of fellow humans, particularly if gained, as Paul qualifies the alternatives here (although, obviously, they do not need to be bifurcated into contrary indicators), by gaming the system. The argument has not been to strip the literal (identity/behavior/teaching) of Jews of their value, but to affirm that their value for a Jew is in that which they signify, a heart and thus actions set apart to God and the best interests of one’s neighbors, just as Torah describes what ought to occupy those in the covenants made with the fathers; these are the ideals of Jewishness. This is the ideal Jew who is teaching those from the nations because of his

⁵² ἀλλ’ ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαίος, καὶ περιτομῇ καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι, οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. NRSV: “Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.” Note that “real” is not in the manuscripts.

dedication to God's words, which have been entrusted to him; he first of all seeks to obey them faithfully, in contrast to the atypical hypothetical Jew who theoretically would teach those from the nations but not practice what he preaches. Verses 25–29 champion the ideal of faithful service for empirical Jews in contrast to the fictive, uncharacteristic hypocritical Jew portrayed in verses 17–24. It makes little sense to suppose that Paul is thus seeking to inform non-Jews that they are instead the ideal Jews, or circumcised in heart in contrast to Jews who are circumcised in flesh. One must be circumcised in flesh to be a Jew, and circumcised also in heart to represent the Jewishness that being a Jew signifies, or should.⁵³

Paul is appealing to a well-know trope in Greek and Roman as well as Jewish cultures, the difference between legal credentials and the spirit of the ideals to which those credentials should point. What I have tried to bring out is how this passage can be read to affirm the value of Jewishness being raised for the audience of non-Jews, to whom Paul writes a letter to encourage dedication to “obedience of faithfulness.” The entire argument is about this Jewish ideal versus the example of a theoretically hypocritical (a-stereotypical!) Jewish teacher. Thus it makes sense for Paul to conclude that the ideal Jew is the ethnic Jew who understands the real purpose of the visible signs of being the historical people of God and teacher among the nations. The contrast is not between the outward and inward per se, but about the motive for undertaking the outward behavior, based upon the conviction that the one who undertakes to teach others these actions should conduct himself according to that which is taught as a matter of dedication to God, not simply the fulfilling of an office without the spirit of seeking to do so in order to serve the neighbor sincerely. One behaving from such motivation wins approval from God even if the neighbor might remain unaware of the level of dedication such service requires.⁵⁴ The argument can be read as an expression of Judaism's concern with faithful action rather than as a call to faith or an inner life or spirituality in contrast to action or service, with the latter negatively valued as representing merely the outward,

⁵³ Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, et al.: Doubleday, 1993), 323: “the real Jew is an Israelite with a circumcised heart.”

⁵⁴ This is attested among non-Jew philosophers too: e.g., Epictetus, *Diss.* 4.8.17–20: “. . . whatever I did well, I did so, not on account of the spectators, but on my own account . . . it was for myself and for God. . . . And what harm was there in having the philosopher that I was, recognized by what I did, rather than by outward signs?” Note that here too the outward actions express the unseen intentions, but are distinguished from outward credentials per se. See Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 146–49, for additional examples.

ritualistic, carnal, and so on. Paul is thus trying to portray the Jewishness of the Jew so that the non-Jews will internalize this ideal for themselves, becoming non-Jews who exemplify Jewishness although remaining non-Jews.

Paul's argument is constructed to encourage non-Jews to avoid making the same mistake they are quick to recognize in this diatribal caricature. Paul calls them to concentrate on being faithful to what they are responsible to do in service of instead of judgment toward the other, including toward the one who may be judging them to be making inappropriate claims to have joined the righteous ones of God apart from becoming Jews, and if males, apart from completing the rite of circumcision. That is a marker for Jews, not for non-Jews. But the ideals for which it stands—belonging to God and serving the other, leaving judgment of others to the God to which one belongs—should inspire and restrain everyone equally, whether Jew or non-Jew. Paul's next point arises from making just that case about equal responsibility: this does not abrogate difference and therefore nullify that there are some different advantages and responsibilities for Jews than there are for non-Jews, even those who belong to God through Christ. But the general principle remains nevertheless true, that each is fully responsible to be completely devoted to that to which each is called, to behave "genuinely," intentionally (from the heart) with their whole being (with their bodily behavior) both toward God and all others, at all times, convinced that God is aware, just, and merciful toward all, just as one hopes God is toward oneself.

Read this way, Rom 2 helps us to see that Paul wrote this letter to call Christ-following non-Jews to behave Jewishly, to strive for the ideals of Jewishness, to faithfully practice Judaism (as Christ-following non-Jews). They were, from Paul's perspective, *Jewish* non-Jews. Likewise, their groups were most likely seen by their peers as Jewish, at least Jewish-like, as behaving Jewishly in ways associated with Jews and Judaism and Jewishness. In fact, Paul's arguments assume that they were non-Jews who gathered with Jews who shared their convictions about Jesus within the auspices of the larger Jewish community and gatherings, where many Jews and guests who were non-Jews did not understand or share those convictions.⁵⁵ They assembled in what might best be referred to as Jesus or Christ-following *Jewish* subgroups rather than *Gentile* churches. Hence, we would be closer to the historical context to refer to Paul's *Jewish* subgroups or

⁵⁵ Mark D. Nanos, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283–304; idem, "To the Churches within the Synagogues of Rome," in *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. Jerry L. Sumney (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 11–28.

Paul's *Jewish* assemblies. When seeking to refer specifically to the non-Jews therein, who were the target of Paul's extant rhetorical addresses, it would be useful to refer to the non-Jews of the Christ-following *Jewish* gatherings or subgroups.

Conclusion

What some Christians today refer to as “the *Christian* thing to do,” we see Paul in Rom 2 instead still calling “the *Jewish* thing to do.” In contrast to Käsemann's negative valuation of Christians discovering “the hidden Jew” within themselves, which for him represents the temptation “to validate rights and demands over against God,”⁵⁶ Paul was exhorting non-Jews turning to God in Christ to seek to discover within themselves the noble values of Jewishness, what being a Jew ideally signifies. They should learn to internalize Jewishness as the highest value for themselves, albeit remaining non-Jews because of the propositional claims of the gospel that members from the nations, which they represent, are now turning to the One God of the Jews, as expected at the arrival of the age to come. Just as a Jew knows (or should know) that the highest value of the circumcised body is that it signifies being set apart to God, who by spirit circumcises the heart of the faithful, so too these non-Jews should dedicate their bodies and hearts to faithful service to God, even though the circumcision of body—and thus the circumcision of heart⁵⁷—does not apply (literally, and thus figuratively) to themselves.

Paul's opposition to these non-Jews undertaking proselyte conversion to *become Jews* ethnically (circumcision signifying the completion of that ethnic “conversion” rite) should not be mistaken as opposition to these non-Jews beginning to observe *Judaism*, which *he actually promotes*. His letters consist precisely of instruction in the Jewish way of life for non-Jews who turn to Israel's God as the One God of all the nations; he enculturates them into God's Guidance (Torah) without bringing them under Torah technically, since they do not become Jews/Israel. They are non-Jews who are learning, by way of Paul's instructions, to practice Judaism!

⁵⁶ Ernst Käsemann, “Paul and Israel,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Translated by W. J. Montague, The New Testament Library; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 186; see discussion in Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 209–14.

⁵⁷ The idea of cutting off part of the heart is itself strange if taken literally, and apart from the literal act of circumcision continuing to be practiced, does not seem to be a useful way to conceptualize the dedication of those who are not circumcised in body (which women have no doubt long recognized).

I have argued that it is logical and relevant to speak of Paul's *jewish* non-Jews, just as it seemed appropriate to describe some of the non-Jews about whom Josephus wrote as *jewish* non-Jews in distinction from other non-Jews, such as Izates. He was a non-Jew who adopted some Jewish practices in the earliest part of the narrative but eventually undertook circumcision in obedience to Torah's commandment for those who seek to be faithful to Israel's God (as interpreted by Eleazar), which changed him into a Jew. Moreover, Josephus represents this step approvingly as an expression of faithfulness alone, at the same time acknowledging that there are other interpretations of what represents faithfulness for a non-Jew, given certain particular considerations. Developing this kind of specificity for discussing Paul and his communities is important if we are to avoid the long-standing tradition of referring to Paul's audiences and others within these movements as Christians and Christian Gentiles or Gentile Christians, among other advantages, such as advancing the discussion of the different views on virtually any topic that arose between Jews and Jewish groups (including Paul and his groups) without supposing that any group was seeking to express something other than faithfulness to God within Judaism and thus according to Torah, variously interpreted. Nevertheless, applying the terms "Jewish" and "Judaism" and various other cognates to non-Jews can create a new set of problems, since these are generally reserved for describing Jews and the behavior of Jews. This strategy, therefore, could create confusion instead of introducing defamiliarization that informs, helping us to think, ask questions, and pursue historical accuracy in new ways. The use of the lowercase "j" is thus suggested, for example, to help raise awareness that the phenomenon is not best imagined as "Christian" in contrast to "Jewish," and also to reflect that these non-Jews have not become Jews.

I do not have similar reservations about referring to "*Jewish* communities/assemblies," "subgroups within the *Jewish* communities," or "subgroup assemblies of the *synagogues*" to describe the groups to which Paul wrote, and besides Romans, for the groups that he founded. Again, just as was the case for discussing the groups of non-Jews about whom Josephus wrote, these descriptive phrases represent the communal situations of the non-Jews Paul addressed better than the anachronistic paradigm perpetuated in phrases like "Paul's *Christian* churches" or even "Paul's *Gentile* churches/assemblies," and so on, which continue to characterize discussions even when it is explicitly recognized that this was not yet Christianity but a nascent movement within Judaism. This change in terminology can help facilitate the development of new approaches to familiar texts in ways more likely to discover and represent their

original meaning, for the author and his audiences, within Greco-Roman Judaism.

From Paul's perspective, Christ-following non-Jews were not to become Jews, and Rom 2:25–29 does not indicate that Paul wanted them to believe that they became Jews in some alternative sense because of their faith in Jesus. Yet they had been brought into the practice of Judaism, the way of life developed by and for Jews, which was taking place within Jewish subgroups formed around the conviction that Jesus was the awaited Messiah, just as was the case in the groups that Paul founded. It was precisely as non-Jews that they were to learn to live in the ways that being a Jew exemplified—or should exemplify, because God established this special identity in the service of reconciling all humankind to the Creator. In order to demonstrate the chronometrical-based propositional truth claims of these groups—that the awaited age had dawned within the midst of the present age through the resurrection of Christ—these non-Jews were to be “jewish” (“jewish-like” or “jewishish”) non-Jews; they were to behave “jewishly,” to exemplify “jewishness,” to practice “Judaism.” Paul's bold reminder and intended trip to Rome were designed to “establish” their understanding of “obedient faithfulness” within this cultural milieu (Rom 1:5, 11–12).