

Why Should a “Law-Free” Mission Mean a “Law-Free” Apostle?

PAULA FREDRIKSEN

augfred@bu.edu

The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 91905, Israel

“Law-free” is a phrase habitually used to describe both the Pauline mission itself, and Paul’s own personal repudiation of traditional Jewish practices. The present essay argues that the phrase misleads on both counts. Paul demanded of his gentiles a much greater degree of Judaizing than either the synagogue or the Jerusalem temple ever required or presupposed of theirs; and gentile involvements in Jewish community institutions, whether *ekklēsiai*, synagogues, or the temple, in principle can tell us nothing about Jewish levels of Torah observance within these same institutions. The essay concludes that much of the Pauline mission was Jewishly observant and traditional, and that Paul’s Judaizing demands of his gentiles are to be understood as an aspect of his absolute conviction that he lived and worked in history’s final hour.

“Law-free” is a phrase habitually used to describe the Pauline mission, even by scholars (like me) who think it is wrong.¹ The phrase *seems* historically useful because it serves to signal, economically, what long scholarly tradition has considered to be *the* identifying characteristics of Paul’s gentile mission: no to circumcision, no to “the works of the law” (Sabbath, food ways, circumcision), no to Torah, no to “Jewish ethnic pride.” For Paul and for his communities, as one of our colleagues has phrased it, the criterion of revelation and thus of salvation was “grace, not race.”² And not only did Paul promote this message (so goes this

¹Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul’s Gospel,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 232–52, esp. 249–51, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0028688509990294>. The present essay draws in part on my larger study on Paul and the problem of anachronism, “How Later Contexts Affect Pauline Content,” in *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History*, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Joshua Schwartz, *CRINT* 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 17–51; and on my forthcoming book, *Paul, the Pagans’ Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

²N. T. Wright’s unhappy sound bite; see *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 247. The idea that Paul worked to erase “ethnic difference” is gospel in a wide swathe of Pauline studies, uniting the work of scholars as different as John Barclay, Daniel Boyarin, James D. G. Dunn, Alan F. Segal, and Wright. For the contrary

interpretation), he himself embodied it. After the revelation of the risen Christ, Paul himself was “law-free,” dead to the law (see Gal 2:19).

This view of Paul’s personal rejection of Jewish ancestral custom has proved remarkably enduring, stretching from earliest patristic theologies to current modern and postmodern ones, uniting those scholars of the New Perspective with those of the “Two-Covenant” perspective. No matter how various their interpretive frameworks, all of these scholars hold that Paul himself, in pursuit of his gentile mission, had ceased to observe the “traditions of the fathers.”³

Finally, this idea of “law-freeness” serves as a cover theory to explain the history of the earliest postresurrection movement. Why the split between the Hellenists and the Hebrews? Hellenists were supposedly looser on the issue of Torah observance.⁴ Why did Paul persecute the ἐκκλησία in Damascus (Gal 1:13)? Because its Jewish members mingled too closely with uncircumcised Gentiles, an index of their own lax attitude toward the law. And why eventually did Paul get as well as give synagogue punishment—“five times forty lashes less one” (2 Cor 11:24)? Because his own law-freeness offended or enraged synagogue communities in the

argument (namely, that Paul’s resistance to gentile circumcision precisely preserves ethnic distinctions *κατὰ σάρκα*), see, e.g., Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations”; and Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³For patristic writers from Marcion to Justin, from Tertullian through Jerome and well beyond, Paul’s conversion is defined by his repudiation of Jewish law. For an overview of this terrain, specifically as it touches on readings of Rom 1–11, see Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter: Die altkirchliche Auslegung von Römer 1–11* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1956). Augustine, interestingly, presents a notable and singular exception: he maintained that Paul as well as the original disciples continued to live according to Jewish ancestral custom (e.g., *Ep.* 82.2.8–15), as had Jesus himself (*Ep.* 82.2.19, arguments incorporated into his anti-Manichaean magnum opus *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*; see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010], 298–319). Modern New Perspective scholars still hew to the patristic line: on Paul’s personal repudiation of Jewish practice, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 500 (in turning to Christ, Paul in effect turned from the law); James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), and the essays gathered in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn, WUNT 86 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996). *Sonderweg* scholars, despite holding that Paul’s negative remarks about Torah refer only to gentiles and nowhere to Jews, still maintain that he himself was no longer law observant; see, e.g., Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 76–79; John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 86; Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 156, 329.

⁴A leitmotif of Martin Hengel’s work when reconstructing the history of the movement, e.g., *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1983).

diaspora, just as, before his “conversion,” such laxness had offended and enraged him. To quote Alan Segal, Paul the apostle was Paul the apostate.⁵

This reconstruction, in my view, is utterly wrong. I argue here that the earliest movement’s energetic extension to pagans, while socially unprecedented, was in fact Jewishly traditional. I also argue that the main criterion for a pagan’s joining the movement was his or her commitment to a radical form of Judaizing. Additionally, I argue that scholarship’s traditional emphasis on “law-freeness” so focuses attention on synagogue resistance to Paul that it obscures the involvement of the many other ancient actors who likewise resisted Paul’s mission: irate pagans, Roman magistrates, and most especially the lower cosmic gods (2 Cor 4:4, 11:25–26). Finally, I argue that levels of pagan Torah observance in principle can tell us nothing about levels of Jewish Torah observance, whether within the Christ movement or outside of it. To make my case, I will ask you to bear two contexts in mind: that of the Greco-Roman city, and that of Jewish restoration theology.

We are so used to knowing that “gentiles,” in order to join this new messianic movement, had to foreswear the worship of “pagan” gods, that we easily fail to see what an odd idea this was, both in the wider context of the ancient city and in the narrower context of the resident diaspora Jewish community.

Our very vocabulary undermines us in this effort. Modern English uses two words, *gentiles* and *pagans*, where the Greek upon which both rest has only one, τὰ ἔθνη, “the nations.” These two English words have different connotations. *Gentile* refers to ethnicity: the person referred to is not a Jew. *Pagan* refers to religion: the person referred to is neither Jewish nor Christian. But the distinction between ethnicity and religion, conjured by these two words *gentile* and *pagan*, is not native to ancient Mediterranean cultures, when gods and humans formed family groups. Relations between heaven and earth were configured precisely along ethnic—that is, notionally genealogical—lines. What we think of as “religion” ancient people accordingly construed as an inheritance, “ancestral custom”: τὰ πάτρια ἔθη, *mos maiorum*, οἱ πατριολί νόμοι, παραδόσεις τῶν πατρικῶν (cf. Gal 1:14). Humans were born into their obligations to their gods.⁶

Further, *gentile* versus *pagan* masks the degree to which not only households but also cities were family-based religious institutions.⁷ From the micro-level of

⁵ Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 205.

⁶ Accordingly, in the present essay I will frequently translate ἔθνη as “pagans” rather than “gentiles,” to emphasize this intrinsic connection between peoples and their gods. On Paul’s use of this term, see further Ishay Rosen-Zvi and Adi Ophir, “Paul and the Invention of the Gentiles,” *JQR* 105 (2015): 1–41, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jqr.2015.0001>.

⁷ On family cult, see Jonathan Z. Smith, “Here, There, and Anywhere,” in Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 323–39; and

one's family to the macro-level of one's city, these ancient gods ran in the blood. The notional ties of "blood" relations bound the citizens of a city together both with each other and also with their gods.⁸ It was upon this conceit of shared blood that intercity kinship diplomacy functioned and flourished, whereby discrete civic lineages were traced back to a common divine ancestor. The notional kinship that resulted was then put to practical political use. So concretely did ancient people construe these relationships that Hellenistic Jews had to scramble to get into the system: for this reason, Abraham's granddaughter was pressed into service, marrying Heracles, and thus establishing *συγγένεια* ("kinship") between Sparta and Jerusalem.⁹

Other data support this picture of diaspora Jews' cultural embeddedness. Both inscriptional evidence and the vast production of Hellenistic Jewish literature, for example, situate Hellenistic Jews in the gymnasium. As ephebes, thus citizens-in-training, such Jewish youths would have been somehow involved in honoring the city's gods. Jews also served as soldiers and generals in foreign armies, and as town councillors in their cities of residence. They funded pagan liturgies and, when manumitting slaves, they dedicated inscriptions to their own god while invoking Greek gods as well.¹⁰ Simply by living in the diaspora city, in brief, Jews lived *within*

the essays in John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan, eds., *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, Ancient World—Comparative Histories (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444302974>. Michael Peppard explores the ways that the emperor Augustus, in positioning himself as *paterfamilias* of empire, constructed a family relationship between himself and others in the Roman world, thereby spreading abroad the worship of his *genius* (*The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011], 60–67). In this way, the empire itself became a family-based religious institution. On the civic construction of blood ties, see esp. Christopher P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World*, Revealing Antiquity 12 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁸Hence Apion's complaint, in the wake of the turmoil of 39 CE: "If the Jews wish to be Alexandrian citizens, why don't they worship the Alexandrian gods?" (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.65); cf. the similar complaints from cities in first-century Asia Minor (Josephus, *A.J.* 12.126). Hence, too, the intriguing incoherence of Acts 18:24, where Apollo is described both as a *Ἰουδαῖος* (which is its own *γένος*) and also as "an Alexandrian by *γένος*." In a period when connections between heaven and earth were configured precisely along ethnic lines, Apollo *qua* Jew could not also be a member of this other *γένος*: his theological commitments would preclude that, as Apion notes.

⁹"After reading a certain document," announces a Spartan king to the Jewish high priest, "we have found that Jews and Lacedaemonians [Spartans] are of one *γένος*, and share a connection with Abraham" (1 Macc 12:21). This *συγγένεια* appears also in 2 Macc 5:9 and in Josephus, *A.J.* 12.226; for Heracles's union with Abraham's granddaughter, see *A.J.* 1.24–41. See the analysis of this tradition in Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 72–80; see also Erich Gruen, "Jewish Perspectives on Greek Ethnicity," in *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*, ed. Irad Malkin, Center for Hellenic Studies Colloquia 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 347–73, esp. 361–64. Paul will also avail himself of this idea of Abraham as "the father of many nations" (Rom 4:11–18, Gal 3:7–14; cf. Gen 17:5); see Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 227–50.

¹⁰The first-century CE inscription listing the ephebes' names in Cyrene (Jesus son of

a pagan religious institution. They evidently found ways to negotiate between their own god’s demand for exclusive worship and the regular requirements of ancient Mediterranean friendship, loyalty, patronage/clientage, and citizenship wherever they lived.¹¹ (Indeed, Paul’s advice about eating meat offered to idols could well reflect an established *Jewish* *modus vivendi*.)¹²

Pagans living with Jews could, in turn, encounter the Jewish god and variously find ways to show respect to him. The most extreme way (and for that reason, probably the most rare) was by becoming an “ex-pagan,” what moderns call

Antiphilos and Eleazar son of Eleazar) is dedicated to the gods of the gymnasium, Hermes and Heracles, as noted by John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117CE)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 235; on Jewish ephebes and participation in civic life, see further 235–31. On the Moschos Ioudaios inscription in the temple of two local gods, see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Matthew Black, and Martin Goodman, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987), 3:65 (hereafter cited as *HJP*). Pothos son of Strabo opens the inscription recording the manumission of his slave Chrysa “in the prayer-house” by invoking “the most high god almighty, the blessed one,” and closes on “Zeus, Gaia, and Helios.” What is the ethnicity of this donor, Jewish or pagan? See Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, BAFCS 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 111–16, with full text of the inscription on p. 239; and see also Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: Its First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 113–23. On Jews as ephebes, town councillors, and officers in pagan armies, see further Margaret H. Williams, *Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 107–31. On Jewish funding of pagan liturgies, see *HJP* 3:25 (Niketas); on Herod’s largesse to pagan activities, see Josephus, *A.J.* 16.136–49; and further discussion in Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 232–52, esp. 236–37. On the endowment of Glykon, whose inscription mentions Unleavened Bread and who directs distributions to be made on Pentecost (Shavuot) and Kalends, see Walter Ameling, *Kleinasien*, vol. 2 of *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, TSAJ 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), no. 196, pp. 414–22. (Was Glykon a Jew or perhaps a pagan sympathizer? Either identification is plausible [p. 422]. For a longer consideration of this issue of ambiguity, see Philip A. Harland, “Acculturation and Identity in the Diaspora,” in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, ed. J. A. North and S. R. F. Price, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 387–418). The complaints of classical ethnographers notwithstanding, diaspora Jews were hardly uninvolved with the gods.

¹¹A late-second-century Roman law explicitly excused Jewish decursions from liturgies that “transgress their religion [*superstitionem eorum*],” Dig. 50.2.3.3; see Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 103–6. No doubt there was a great degree of diversity: arrangements likely would have varied across different communities and probably to a degree between individuals within a given community—or, to look at Philo’s case, between individuals within a given Jewish family.

¹²Thus, in 1 Cor 8:10, Paul mentions problems with eating such meat specifically in a temple, that is, in a setting of public cult; cf. 10:14, his absolute interdiction of *λατρεία* to idols (public cult again) but acceptance of such eating in a private setting (10:25–27) unless it troubles another community member who is also present (v. 28); cf. Rom 14:19–22, on the priority of community over individual freedom. These issues would have affected diaspora Jewish communities long before the birth of pagan Christ-following ones.

“conversion.” In view of a divinity’s ethnic embeddedness in antiquity, the term—and the phenomenon—scarcely make sense. To change gods fully, to make an exclusive commitment to the Jewish god and to Jewish ancestral practices was tantamount to changing ethnicity: a pagan’s “becoming” a Jew in effect altered his own past, reconfigured his ancestry, and (as Tacitus complained, *Hist.* 5.5.2) cut his ties to his own pantheon, family, and *patria*. For this reason, what we call “conversion,” ancients saw as deserting ancestral customs for foreign laws.¹³ Roman analogues nonetheless existed: both adoption and marriage ritually created a bond of (legal but fictive) kinship. The adoptee, or the wife, like the “convert,” was also obligated to new deities, rituals, and ancestors.¹⁴ In sum, “Jews” could be not only begotten but made; and with varying degrees of lack of enthusiasm, most pagans seem to have tolerated such transitions most of the time.

More conventionally, however, pagans could simply “visit with” Jews, and thus with their god. Before 66 CE, if pagans traveled to the temple in Jerusalem, they collected in its largest courtyard.¹⁵ In their own cities, they could and did appear in their Jewish neighbors’ “ethnic reading houses.”¹⁶ Free to take on as much or as little of Jewish custom as they chose—free, indeed, to continue worshiping their own gods—these pagan drop-ins ranged across a broad spectrum of activity, from occasional contact to the voluntary assumption of some Jewish ancestral practices, to major benefaction and patronage.¹⁷ The first point, for the present purpose, is to

¹³ Philo speaks of what we call “conversion” as political affiliation, a non-Jew’s entering the Jewish πολιτεία (*Spec. Laws* 1.51); so too Justin describes conversion to Judaism as a person’s entering τὴν ἐννόμον πολιτείαν (*Dial.* 46–47). Cf. Celsus, who criticizes those who have “abandoned their own traditions and professed those of the Jews” (Origen, *Cels.* 5.41). Domitian executed some members of the Roman aristocracy for “atheism,” that is, for spurning their own gods on account of treasonable loyalty to “the customs of the Jews” (Dio, *Roman History* 67.14.1–2). On the problems of anachronism in using the term “conversion” for this period, see further Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” *SR* 35 (2006): 231–46.

¹⁴ “It is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only those gods whom her husband esteems” (Plutarch, *Mor.* 140D). On the protocols of Roman adoption and the ways that the new son becomes involved with his adopted pantheon, now see Peppard, *Son of God*, 50–60.

¹⁵ On the layout of Herod’s temple and the ways in which it could accommodate a vast number of visitors, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, 63 B.C.E.–66 C.E. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 55–76: the wall demarcating the largest outer court ran for nine-tenths of a mile. On the pagan presence in the temple precincts, see further *HJP* 1:176, 378; 2:222, 284–85.

¹⁶ This is Frances M. Young’s nice formulation, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

¹⁷ Terms translated as “god-fearer” (θεοσεβής and the like) might sometimes simply mean “pious” and thus have nothing to do with the specific type of cross-ethnic activity that I focus on here: see J. M. Lieu, “The Race of the God-fearers,” *JTS* 46 (1995) 483–501, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jts/46.2.483>; more recently Ross Kraemer, “Giving up the Godfearers,” *JAJ* 5 (2014): 61–87. I thank Professor Kraemer for sharing with me a prepublication version of her article,

note that such arrangements were ad hoc, voluntary, and probably not that unusual: Mediterranean culture was religiously commodious, and the Jewish and pagan foot traffic (through the gymnasium, the theater, the stadium, the town council, and the baths, as well as through the synagogue) went both ways. The second point is that such a mutual arrangement—pagans (and, eventually, gentile Christians) in Jewish places, and Jews in pagan places—was both extremely widespread and extremely socially stable: centuries after Paul, well into the post-Constantinian period, ideologies of separation—Christian literati, bishops, emperors and rabbis—all still complain about it.¹⁸

which includes a valuable review especially of the epigraphical evidence. Kraemer seems concerned to refute “god-fearing” as a “sweeping, static” and “technical category,” a term with “precise technical meaning”—which is not its current usage. As Levinskaya observed in 1996, pagan god-fearing was a wide and loose category, *not* a technical designation for a clearly demarcated or defined group (*Book of Acts*, 75–79). Its various ancient usages should not, in my view, empty the term of its utility in referring to ancient pagan Judaizers, and that is how I use it here. See also Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 237–40 and notes; Fredriksen, “Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2,” *JTS* 42 (1991): 541–43, 547; Fredriksen, “If It Looks like a Duck, and It Quacks like a Duck . . . : On Not Giving Up the Godfearers,” in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al., BJS (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, forthcoming).

¹⁸ Pagan complaints about pagans going to Jewish gatherings are collected in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols., FRJS (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1974–1994); see especially his long note on Juvenal and god-fearing, vol. 2, no. 301. Gentile Christians later complain about pagan Judaizing: Tertullian: some pagans keep Sabbath and Passover but also worship at their own altars (*Nat.* 1.13.3–4); Commodian: the *medius Iudaeus* runs between synagogue and altar, behavior that the Jews are wrong to tolerate (*Instruct.* 1.37.10); Cyril of Alexandria (fifth century) complains about men who call themselves θεοσεβείς while following consistently neither Jewish nor Greek custom (*De adoratione* 3.92.3). On the subject of complaints about synagogues’ allowing gentile Christians to co-celebrate, Origen (ca. 230, Caesarea) tells Christians not to discuss in church questions they heard raised the day before in synagogue, and not to eat meals in both places (*Hom. Lev.* 5.8; *Sel. Exod.* 12.46); John Chrysostom, notoriously before the high holidays in 387 in Antioch, complained that Christians fast, keep Sabbath, go to synagogue, take oaths in front of Torah scrolls, co-celebrate Passover and Sukkot (“When did they ever feast on Epiphany with us?” *Adv. Iud.* 4.3.9). Church canons forbid such co-celebration on through the Visigothic and Byzantine period in the seventh century: see primary material gathered in Amnon Linder, *Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997). Levine collects and analyzes epigraphical and archaeological evidence for pagan presence in Jewish communities in *Ancient Synagogue*. Finally, the redating of the famous Aphrodisias inscription from the third to the fifth century raises the interesting possibility the some of the “god-fearing” town councillors might be not pagans but Christians; see Angelos Chaniotis, “The Jews of Aphrodisias,” *SCI* 21 (2002): 209–42; Fergus Millar, “Christian Emperors, Christian Church and the Jews of the Diaspora in the Greek East, C.E. 379–450,” *JJS* 55 (2004): 1–24. For rabbinic complaints about Jews in pagan places (especially recreational venues, such as baths, theaters and hippodromes), see, most recently, Zeev Weiss, *Public Spectacles in Roman and Late Antique Palestine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 195–226; p. 211 and n. 63 discuss first-century Jewish actors, mimes, and gladiators.

The notion, then, that Paul (and the officers of his community in Damascus) would have “persecuted the ἐκκλησία to the utmost and tried to destroy it” (Gal 1:13) because Christ-following Jewish missionaries did *not* demand that Christ-following pagans observe Torah—or, more specifically, receive circumcision—founders on this foregoing, extremely well-attested social fact: pagans qua pagans came and went within the larger framework of diaspora synagogue communities. Why then should the synagogue be disturbed by the much smaller ἐκκλησία’s adopting the very same practice?

Furthermore, just as the pagan presence in the temple precincts tells us nothing about levels of Torah observance among the Jews also gathered there, and just as the pagan presence in diaspora synagogues tells us nothing about the level of Torah observance among synagogue Jews, so also the pagan presence within the early ἐκκλησία tells us nothing *eo ipso* about the level of Torah observance among Jewish apostles.¹⁹ Finally, if the larger synagogue community accommodated pagans, whence its supposed offense²⁰ at a small Jewish subgroup’s doing exactly the same thing, especially given that the ἐκκλησία’s pagans were more “kosher”?

More “kosher” how? What exactly *was* being demanded of Christ-following pagans? According to Paul, three things: first and foremost, no more λατρεία to other, lower gods (δαιμονία; στοιχεῖα). These pagans were to abandon the gods native to them, and to worship exclusively Paul’s god, the god of Israel—a much more radical form of Judaizing than diaspora synagogues ever requested, much less required. Second, no “switching” ethnicities—that is, not “becoming” Jews (for males, by receiving circumcision). These people had to remain ἔθνη, albeit ἔθνη with a difference. This was because, third, since they had received holy spirit, they were to live as ἅγιοι, “holy” or “sanctified” or “separated” ἔθνη, according to standards of community behavior described precisely in “the law” (Gal 5:14; 1 Cor 7:19; Rom 2:13, 25–27 on doing the law; 13:8–10, specifically referencing the Ten Commandments; 15:16 on gentile sanctification)—another radical form of Judaizing never demanded by the temple or by the synagogue.²¹

¹⁹ Oftentimes, these Jewish apostles are simply assumed to be lax about Torah observance because of a presumption that Jesus of Nazareth had himself taught against the law. This presupposition founders particularly against the argument described in Gal 2:11–12: if the historical Jesus had taught against the food laws (Mark 7:14–15 is pressed into service here), apparently his disciples knew nothing about it. On the question of Jesus and the law, see now esp. John P. Meier, *Law and Love*, vol. 4 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

²⁰ An alternative explanation of such religious offense—an all-but-ubiquitous tradition of NT scholarship—holds that since Jesus died by crucifixion, he would have been perceived to have died a death “cursed by the law” (Gal 3:13, by way of Deut 21:23): such a death, so goes the argument, would have been deeply offensive religiously to pious Jews. For a survey of all the counterevidence against this so-called tradition, see Fredriksen, “Circumcision of Gentiles,” 548–58. Against this overblown reading of the curse in Deuteronomy, see esp. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 25–27.

²¹ Paul’s larger polemic in Galatians and his particular condemnation of Peter (ἰουδαίειν,

Why did the apostles make such extreme demands? Here we have to think with our other context, Jewish restoration theology. While this tradition is far from univocal, a strong theme—one emphasized by the first generations of the Jesus movement no less than in later rabbinic tradition—is the turning of the nations to the god of Israel at the end of the age.²² “Turning” is not “conversion,” and these end-time pagans do not thereby “become” Jews. Rather, they enter God’s kingdom *as* ἔθνη—think of Paul’s closing catena of scriptural quotations in Rom 15²³—they just do not offer cult to their own gods anymore.

Like converts, in other words, such eschatological pagans would make an exclusive commitment to Israel’s god; *unlike* converts, these pagans would not assume the bulk of Jewish ancestral customs. *Like* god-fearers, these pagans would retain their native ethnicities; *unlike* god-fearers, these pagans would not retain their native gods. Christ-following pagans, in other words, are neither προσήλυτοι nor god-fearers. Within this Jewish tradition, they were a theoretical construct—an apocalyptic trope, and an apocalyptic hope. In the first generation of the Jesus-movement in the diaspora, born of the apostles’ conviction that the kingdom was at hand, they begin to become a social reality.

Allow me to recapitulate this argument by closing with a series of propositions:

1. By severing the ἔθνη from their gods in this way, Jewish apocalyptic traditions likewise severed antiquity’s normal and normative correspondence of ethnicity and cult. Put differently: Israel’s god—himself an ethnic god—becomes in these

Gal 2:14) prevent us from perceiving clearly how much what he himself teaches is also, and no less, a form (indeed, a more radical form) of Judaizing; see Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 250–51; also n. 28 below.

²² Traditions about the fate of pagans at the end vary from author to author, and some authors—like Isaiah and like Paul—inconsistently voice both negative/exclusive and positive/inclusive expectations. See Fredriksen, “Circumcision of Gentiles,” 543–48, with many references; Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 C.E.)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), esp. 499–512. On the pagans’ eschatological “turning” (ἐπιστρέφω) to God—not “converting,” that is, to Judaism—see also Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 242–44. In *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), and frequently elsewhere, Donaldson has refuted these biblical “eschatological pilgrimage” traditions as fundamental to Paul’s mission, insisting rather that Paul both pre- and post-Damascus had been intensely committed to proselytizing gentiles. The normal ethnicity of “religions” in antiquity, however, combined with the total absence of evidence for Jewish missions to gentiles to turn them into Jews, weighs against this reconstruction. On the nonexistence of such putative Jewish missions, see further Paula Fredriksen, “What Parting of the Ways?” in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 35–63, esp. 48–56.

²³ Romans 15:9–12: The ἔθνη glorify God for his mercy; the ἔθνη rejoice *with* God’s people, that is, Israel; the ἔθνη praise God; the ἔθνη are ruled by the coming “root of Jesse,” that is, by the Davidic messiah, Christ (cf. 1:3); the ἔθνη hope in him. See also below, p. 647 and nn. 28–30.

traditions the sole focus of *all* worship, that of Israel and of the nations. More radically still, the gods of the nations will be unavailable for worship because they too, at the end, acknowledge the god of Israel (in the Pauline iteration of Jewish apocalyptic thought, because of the cosmic victory of the returning Christ).²⁴ Is this vision “universalist” or “particularist”? The answer is, “Yes.”²⁵

2. Paul’s configuring pagan inclusion in the ἐκκλησία (and, ultimately, in the “kingdom”) via pneumatic adoption draws fundamentally on *Roman* cultural models of “making sons” through υἰοθεσία. This is another measure of its distinctiveness from contemporary Jewish and pagan views of (what we call) “conversion,” which was seen as federating to a different *nomos* or *politeia*. But Paul’s adoption model is ultimately traditional in terms of the broader pan-Mediterranean construction of divine–human relations: gods and their humans formed family groups. If the nations, through an eschatological miracle, now worshiped Israel’s god alone, said Paul, then even though they remain *ethnically* distinct, distinct κατὰ σάρκα (as is biologically the case with all human adoption), they are *spiritually* rendered ἀδελφοί, absorbed into the family κατὰ πνεῦμα. Thus they, like Israel, can now call God “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:7, Rom 8:15).²⁶ What does Paul’s commitment to this mission, and to this construction of “adopted” eschatological family, tell us about his own personal level of law observance? Absolutely nothing at all.

3. Paul integrates pagans into the ἐκκλησία by thinking also with two other biblical traditions that he molds to his apocalyptic timetable: the protocols of Levitical sacrifice, and the Table of Nations. Now that his pagans have received spirit through baptism, Paul likens them to suitable temple sacrifice: they have now been made both καθαρός/τᾶῆδὲρ and ἄγιος/qādōš.²⁷ And by conjuring the Table of Nations in Rom 11:25–26 (the Incoming of the πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν and of πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ once the Redeemer comes from Zion), Paul suggests for them yet another, broader biblical lineage, this one reaching back to Noah.²⁸ By Paul’s day, this word package—“the

²⁴On the returning Christ’s cosmic victory over these gods, see 1 Cor 15:24 (they are “destroyed”); cf. Phil 2:10 (they kneel in acknowledgment) and Rom 8:18–39 (they groan while awaiting redemption).

²⁵On “particularistic” codes for “Jewish” and “universalistic” for “Christian,” see Anders Runesson, “Particularistic Judaism and Universalistic Christianity? Some Critical Remarks on Terminology and Theology,” *ST* 54 (2000): 55–75; David Brakke, “Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria,” *J ECS* 9 (2001): 453–81, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/earl.2001.0055>.

²⁶The “father” who matters eschatologically is God, not Abraham. This means that Paul thinks most fundamentally with divine sonship (cf. Rom 9:4), rather than with the lineage constructed via Christ back to Abraham (Gal 3, Rom 4).

²⁷Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations,” 244–49, and notes, regarding esp. 1 Thess 4:4–7, 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, Rom 15, esp. vv. 16–27.

²⁸James M. Scott’s *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul’s Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*, WUNT 84 (Tübingen:

full number of the nations and all Israel"—was long traditional, standing for "all humanity."²⁹ Not only does it give us the scope of Paul's idea of redemption; it also ties Romans' finale in ch. 15, especially the details of Paul's intended itinerary, more tightly to Paul's christological proclamations in 1:3 (God's son "descended from David according to the flesh") and in 15:12 ("The root of Jesse will come, he who rises to rule the nations; in him shall the nations hope"; par. Isa 11:10). Paul's concentration on those gentiles in the arc originating in Jerusalem and passing on through Rome to Spain might also recapitulate the imagined territory of Noah's son Japhet.³⁰ Abraham's seed, Levitical sacrifice, the Table of Nations—whatever his social improvisations, Paul's sheet music is purely scriptural. The content of his convictions, his urgent messianic apocalypticism, is novel; his resources for expressing it, entirely and traditionally Jewish.

4. In the work of this first generation of Jewish apostles in the diaspora, we find the unprecedented social expression of this apocalyptic trope of the nations' turning to God at the end of the age in those pagans who commit themselves to the *ἐκκλησία*. Their very existence indexes the strength of the movement's eschatological conviction: the messiah has come, and will shortly come again. It is this conviction alone that accounts for the apostles' rejection of the diaspora synagogues' long-lived and socially stable practice of allowing pagans qua god-fearers to worship Israel's god while continuing in their own native cults. These apostles (not only Paul) and their ex-pagan pagans were not worried about long-term problems of social instability, because they were not worried about a long term at all. But it did roil their two larger social contexts, the synagogue communities and the pagan cities. Why?

Mohr Siebeck, 1995) is the fundamental study of Paul's appropriation of this tradition, whereby the apostle refracts Gen 10 (the first occurrence of *gōyim*/ἔθνη in the Bible) and Deut 32:8 through soaringly eschatological passages about Israel's renewal in Isaiah (e.g., Isa 66:18–20).

²⁹Despite this, many NT scholars continue to insist that by "all Israel" Paul really meant only "some of ethnic Israel, and only the ones who, like the saved Gentiles, follow Christ": see, most recently, N. T. Wright's monumental defense of this traditional supersessionism, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), *passim*. For a review of these interpretive options, see Christopher Zoccali, "And so all Israel will be saved": Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship," *JSNT* 30 (2008): 289–311. Cf. Scott, who also notes that in Paul's vision of universal human redemption, this "full number" of gentiles is no abstraction but rather a precise invocation of the biblical reckoning of seventy or of seventy-two nations (*Paul and the Nations*, 121–34, 135 n. 3). "All Israel," in turn, signals all twelve tribes. See also Scott, "And Then All Israel Will Be Saved (Rom 11:26)," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott, *JSJSup* 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 489–527.

³⁰See Scott, who points out that the "sons of Japhet" in the Table of Nations traditions is code for (various sorts of) Greeks, the particular focus of Paul's mission (*Paul and the Nations*, 136–62).

5. Because of the divine anger of the insulted gods, Paul complains long and loud about these gods' hostility: they harass him with bad weather and heavy seas (the lower gods' domains), and they seek to frustrate his mission (2 Cor 4:4, 11:25–26). He looks forward to their submission to the returning Christ (1 Cor 15:24–27, Phil 2:10, Rom 8:38–39). Their active anger in turn provides the motive for the movement's human resistance: Who wants to face off with an angry god? Disrespect—foreswearing *λατρεία*—was bound to anger the gods; and gods, when angry, acted out. Earthquake, flood, and famine; shipwreck, storm, and disease: these were the normal repertoire of divine anger. When apostles, out of apocalyptic conviction, urged pagans to cease their traditional worship and to honor Israel's god alone, they urged that these people assume that public behavior associated universally and solely with Jews. Both the local Jewish community—easily seen as the source of such a message—and the larger host pagan city were thereby put at risk. Alienating the gods put the city at risk; alienating the pagan majority put the synagogue at risk. Put differently: angry gods might target the city; anxious pagans might target the synagogue.

This real and serious threat—aggressive pagan anxieties caused by fear of divine anger—gives us the fundamental reason both for Paul's getting a maximal synagogue punishment, thirty-nine lashes, when he was an agent of the mission (2 Cor 11:24), and earlier, for his giving synagogue punishment (again, up to the maximum thirty-nine lashes, *καθ' ὑπερβολήν*, Gal 1:13) when he was an agent of the community in Damascus: synagogues tried to rein in an *εὐαγγέλιον* that unsettled their place in their cities.³¹ Further, this fear (or, rather, this traditional piety, the fear of heaven) also explains Paul's receiving rough handling from Roman magistrates and from irate and alarmed pagans (2 Cor 11:25–27).³²

In other words, the reasons for each phase of Paul's intra-Jewish "persecutions" had nothing to do with "apostasy," his or anyone else's. Our attachment to the rhetoric of the "law-free" paradigm, however, drags this idea of apostolic

³¹ For the full argument, framing Paul's "persecutions," both giving and getting, with ancient *pietas*, see Fredriksen, "Paul, Practical Pluralism, and the Invention of Religious Persecution in Roman Antiquity," in *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspectives from Religious Studies and Theology*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Jonathan S. Ray (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 87–113.

³² Such responses are well caught in Acts' depictions: itinerant apostles were actively repudiated by their host synagogues, run out of town by irate gentile citizens, and occasionally punished by cautious Roman authorities attempting to keep the peace. See Acts 13:50; 14:2, 4–6, 19; 16:20–24 (in v. 21, pagans complain to magistrates about Paul and Silas: "They are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us to adopt or observe"); 17:5–9; 18:12–17 (before Gallio in Corinth); 19:23–41 (the tumult in Ephesus). On further correspondences between Paul and Acts, especially on this issue of the social complications of Paul's mission, see Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2016). So too the woes that Mark's Jesus "predicts," which fit the diaspora context: "They [unspecified] will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings . . . and [they will] bring you to trial" (Mark 13:9, 11).

apostasy along with it. Were we to let it go, perhaps we could see more clearly the degree to which the early Christ-following pagans were in fact enjoined, even by Paul, to Judaize. And perhaps we could see Paul himself more clearly: the traditionally observant Jew; the apostle who continued to frequent synagogue communities (2 Cor 11:24); the member of a movement whose pagans continue, for as long as their host communities will let them, to frequent the diaspora synagogue as well.

6. The phrase "law-free," finally, reinforces our failure to perceive how much of what Paul is doing is actively Judaizing. We can hold him partly accountable. He angrily accuses Peter of trying to "Judaize" Christ-following pagans in Antioch, and he condemns him for it. "To Judaize" normally indicated either fully assuming Jewish ancestral custom (that is, what we call "converting") or god-fearing (adding Israel's god to one's native pantheon). Paul explicitly condemns both of these options. Yet Paul's core message was not, "Don't circumcise!" It was, "No more *λατρεία* to lower gods!" He insisted that his pagans conform their new behavior precisely to the mandates of Jewish worship, the first table of the law: no other gods, and no idols. Further, he explicitly urges the law's second table on the community at Rome (Rom 13:9–10): no adultery, no murder, no theft, no coveting; loving the neighbor fulfills the law's second table, *δικαιοσύνη*. Paul's gospel is a Judaizing gospel. Small wonder: kingdom of God is a Jewish message.³³

7. Finally, and I think most fundamentally, we must always weigh seriously Paul's own firm conviction that he lived and worked in history's final hour. His intense eschatological orientation is absolutely foundational, shaping everything that Paul says. Moreover, his conviction is all the more remarkable when we consider that, by the time that we hear from him, mid-first century, the kingdom is already late.

We easily lose sight of this fact. We look backwards and, for good reason, see Paul's letters as early, a mere couple of decades after Jesus's execution. But our view is not Paul's view. He lived his life forward, one day at a time. When the god of Israel had revealed his son to Paul (ca. 34? Gal 1:14), Paul had understood what it meant: the onset of the general resurrection, thus the establishment of God's kingdom,

³³Paula Fredriksen, "Paul's Letter to the Romans, the Ten Commandments, and Pagan 'Justification by Faith,'" *JBL* 133 (2014): 801–8. Barclay states that my use of "Judaizing" in connection with Paul's own mission "concedes that [my] categories are etic and not emic, i.e., dependent on our definitions of 'Judaism' and 'Judaizing', not those current in antiquity" (Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, WUNT 275 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 18 n. 48). But I concede no such thing. In antiquity, "to Judaize" meant a non-Jew's assumption of Jewish ancestral practices, just as *μηδίξειν* meant for a non-Persian (most pointedly, for a Hellene) voluntarily to assume some Persian customs; see discussion in Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 46–50, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300154160.001.0001>. See, earlier, Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, HCS 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 175–97.

could not be far behind. But Paul gives this interpretation in a letter written some twenty years after the fact (1 Cor 15:12–52). Why—how—can he still be so sure? In another letter, written even later, we find him again asserting the nearness of the end: “You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to awake from sleep. *Salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed.* The night is far gone; the day is at hand” (Rom 13:11–12). Why—how—can he still be so sure?

This is the context—Paul’s unwavering apocalyptic conviction—within which we should set his equally unwavering insistence that gentiles-in-Christ need not, indeed *must* not, be circumcised. Such “eschatological gentiles” had long been an imaginative construct, their exclusive commitment to the god of Israel only one of any number of anticipated end-time events. Through the mission of the Jesus-movement, they were becoming a social reality.

Various scholars have attributed Paul’s position on circumcision to Paul’s seeing “the works of the law” as antithetical to grace, or to the gospel, or to salvation in Christ. These theological descriptions then easily transmute into biographical ones: Paul the Pharisee becomes Paul the ex-Pharisee, Paul the renegade apostle vis-à-vis Jerusalem, indeed, Paul the full-blown apostate.

But suppose that Paul’s insistence that Christ-following ἔθνη not be circumcised had nothing to do with his personal practice of Jewish ancestral custom, and nothing to do with any principled antagonism between the ἐκκλησία and the synagogue? Suppose, instead, that it had everything to do with his vision of the risen Christ, with his call to be an apostle to the nations, and with his sense of his own mission? The very existence of such gentiles who had turned from their idols and who had made an exclusive commitment to the god of Israel was a profound and an *ongoing* validation of Paul’s work. They confirmed him in his conviction that he did, after all, know what time it was on God’s clock. These “righteoused” pagans were the reason why he could assert, despite decades after joining the movement, that salvation was indeed “nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom 13:12). Paul’s furious impatience with the circumcisers in Galatia measures the importance of these gentiles to his entire worldview and to his own sense of self.

What does his twinned commitment to the fast-approaching end-time and to these uncircumcised Christ-following pagans tell us about Paul’s own level of Jewish observance? Absolutely nothing at all.