

Gentiles and Israel in 1 Peter's Ethnic Imagination

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Why is it that being a Malay in Singapore,” Isaiah F. asks, “you also take on a religious identity?”¹ According to a 2020 census, 15.6% of Singapore’s population identifies as Muslim, and that figure includes 95% of Malays – the second largest ethnic group in the country.² At the age of 15, however, Isaiah F. decided to renounce Islam and convert to Christianity, consequently suffering estrangement and death threats from friends and family members. In an article published in 2022, he reflects on what he found most challenging about this experience. “[It] is missing the Malay culture, the celebration of the festivities and being considered part of that Malay community,” he states, “after all, that is the community I grew up in.”³

What changes when a person follows Jesus? For Isaiah, being Malay in Singapore came with the expectation that he would be a Muslim, and his decision to become a Christian resulted in adjustments to his lifestyle, estrangement from his family, and dissonance with the culture within which he grew up. It was a far-reaching transformation of his identity which, from his perspective, fellow Christians from other ethnic backgrounds did not necessarily experience.⁴

Ethnicity, as we often define it, is closely connected to one’s culture and religion. “Gods run in the blood,” writes Paula Fredriksen concerning the ancient world,⁵ and although the categories “ethnicity” and “religion” are modern, the interconnectedness of peoplehood, worldview, and cultic traditions are well-attested across history. The act of conversion tends to throw this fact into stark relief, for it often entails a drastic reevaluation of one’s priorities and culture, along with a realignment of one’s social networks and family relations.

Many first-century followers of Jesus would have experienced such a transformation, and this research presents a detailed examination into how ethnic discourse was used in relation to Christian conversion. I have chosen to focus on the letter of 1 Peter as a case study, for it is a text with a relatively dense concentration of ethnic language, addressed to

¹ Lim 2022; surname abbreviated to preserve anonymity.

² Department of Statistics 2021:207.

³ Lim 2022.

⁴ This phenomenon is hardly unique to Singapore, of course. For instance, see studies on conversion in Finland (Syrjänen 1984), South Africa and Malawi (Mumisa 2002), and India (Karlsson 2002) which report similar experiences of estrangement and cultural dissonance suffered by converts from varying religious backgrounds.

⁵ Fredriksen 2006:232.

Christ-followers who have undergone some form of conversion and are suffering as a direct result of this decision. Two primary research questions thus guide this paper:

RQ1: Does the ethnic language of 1 Peter imply that the readers constitute a “new race”?

RQ2: How does 1 Peter conceive of the relationship between the letter's readers and the people of Israel?

These two questions overlap significantly. Several scholars have noted how early Christian writers from the second century onwards use ethnic language as a means of positioning Christians as a “new race” distinct from Jews and Greeks, with 1 Peter cited as a potential forerunner of this development.⁶ Similarly, it has been posited that the description of 1 Peter's readers as a “chosen race” and “holy nation” indicate that the “reality of Israel” has passed without remainder into the “new people of God” – the Church.⁷ This thesis will challenge both assumptions. I will demonstrate, in fact, that the ethnic language of 1 Peter emphasises the incorporation of non-Jews into the people of Israel, in a manner akin to the incorporation of non-Israelites into Israel in the Old Testament (OT).⁸

(1.1) Ethnicity, Then & Now

In much popular and scholarly writing, Judaism is seen as an “ethnic religion”, in contrast to a Christianity which transcends ethnicity. In his study on Paul, for instance, N.T. Wright outlines the reasons for the apostle's opposition to his circumcision-advocating interlocutors.

In that new creation the divisions of the human race that marked, and marred, the ‘present age’ are to be done away. [...] If the ‘new creation’ had still been in the future, Paul's opponents would have been right to insist on the ethnic boundary-

⁶ Buell 2005:45; Horrell 2011:134.

⁷ Achtemeier 1996:69; this thesis will generally use “church” when referring to local congregations which gather regularly in a certain place (e.g. “the church in Rome”), and “Church” when referring to the imagined community of Jesus-followers across time and space (e.g. “the early Church”). The distinction is admittedly blurry at times, but it is often useful in this dissertation to distinguish between the two concepts.

⁸ Throughout this thesis, I generally use the term “Old Testament” when referring to the collection of literature typically called *Tanakh* or Hebrew Bible. While I recognise the problems in referring to it as such, an alternative like “Hebrew Bible” would be an inaccurate label when referring to those texts in their Greek form, and as we will see in Chapter 5, “old” does not necessarily mean “worse” or “outdated”. All abbreviations are taken from *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd edition.

markers that kept the chosen people safe and sound (but also ‘under Torah’, with all the tensions of Romans 7) while awaiting the new day. Here as elsewhere, Paul’s real objection to those who would perpetuate such things was that they were *past their use-by date*.⁹

For Wright, Paul’s opposition to the necessity of circumcision could be understood as opposition to “ethnic boundary-markers” for God’s chosen people. Similarly, Guy Stroumsa opines that “ethnic terms were deeply irrelevant for the Christians.”¹⁰ Yet by the second century CE, Christians (and their opponents) used terms typically associated with ethnicity to define and describe the early Jesus movement.

For it is clear to us, O King, that there are three classes of men (τρία γένη) in this world; these being the worshippers of the gods acknowledged among you, and Jews, and Christians.¹¹

Since I see, most excellent Diognetus, that you are extremely interested in learning about the religion of the Christians... [who] neither recognizing those who are considered to be gods by the Greeks nor observing the superstition of the Jews... and why this new race or way of life (καινὸν τοῦτο γένος ἢ ἐπιτήδευμα) has come into the world we live in now and not before...¹²

We are indeed said to be the “third race” of men (*tertium genus dicimur*). [...] It is in respect of our religion, not of our nation, that we are supposed to be the third (*sed de superstitione tertium genus deputamur, non de natione*), the series being the Romans, the Jews, and the Christians after them.¹³

In your empire, greatest of sovereigns, different nations have different customs and laws; and no one is hindered by law or fear of punishment from following his ancestral usages, however ridiculous these may be. [...] But for us who are called Christians you have not in like manner cared; but although we commit no wrong.¹⁴

In her landmark study *Why This New Race*, Denise K. Buell therefore concludes that “many early Christians define Christianness as a membership in a people characterized especially by

⁹ Wright 2013:1938, emphasis his.

¹⁰ Stroumsa 1999:83.

¹¹ Aristides, *Gk. Apol.* 2.2; ANF 9:264; the Syriac recension lists four races, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

¹² Diogn. 1.1; trans. Holmes 2007:695.

¹³ Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.8.1, 11; ANF 3:117.

¹⁴ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 1.1-3; ANF 2:129.

religious practices, in contrast to historical reconstructions that portray Christianness as a category that transcends or dissolves ethnoracial difference.”¹⁵ In stressing the use of ethnic reasoning in early Christianity, Buell counters the common portrayal of Christianity as a “religion of belief” standing in contrast to “religions of traditional practice”, namely paganism and Judaism.¹⁶ For the early Jesus followers, she argues, framing Christianity in ethnic language was a useful means of self-identification.¹⁷ Furthermore, while Buell’s monograph focuses on the second and third centuries CE, she speculates that “the linking of religious practices with ethnoracial transformation and coherency appears in ‘Christian’ texts as early as 1 Peter,” adding that the “moral and religious change” experienced by the readers in this epistle is “portrayed ethnoracially”.¹⁸

While Buell was not the first to notice this phenomenon,¹⁹ *Why This New Race* has generated further discussions on ethnic language in early Christianity, including opposition from several quarters. In a collection of essays under the provocative title *Ethnicity in the Ancient World – Did It Matter?*, Erich Gruen answers the titular question with a confident “No”. After surveying an array of historical contexts, including the question of Jewish identity and the notion of Christians as a “third race”, he concludes:

The ancients could live with...ambiguity. Their sense of collective identity rested primarily on common customs, traditions, moral principles, and manner of life, rather than on birthright and blood-line [sic]. In the final analysis, the establishment of a distinctive ethnicity did not much matter.²⁰

Buell and Gruen, in some ways, represent the two poles in recent discussions about early Christian ethnic discourse. Was ethnicity a significant means of Christian self-identification or something that “did not much matter”? To arrive at an answer, we need to clarify what exactly we mean by “ethnicity”.

¹⁵ Buell 2005:35.

¹⁶ Buell 2005:59, responding to Keith Hopkins (Hopkins 1999:80); cf. Buell and Hodge 2004

¹⁷ Buell 2005:2-3.

¹⁸ Buell 2005:45

¹⁹ Earlier studies include Kinzig 1994:171-186 and Lieu 1995, 1998. See also the collection of essays in Brett 1996.

²⁰ Gruen 2020:218.

(1.1.1) Defining the Terms

“Ethnicity” is a modern concept, but it has ancient antecedents. Humans have long attempted to group themselves and others based on perceived commonalities and differences in homeland, ancestry, language, and culture. The historian and geographer Herodotus uses labels like “Persian” and “Phoenician” to categorise peoples, and he famously put forward a broad definition of “Greekness” in 8.144 which included characteristics like shared bloodline and common language. Genesis 10 offers a myth of origins for all the nations of the world – Cush, Egypt, Canaan, etc – tracing their respective family trees. Even the Jewish term “Gentile”, as we will later see, represents a form of ethnic discourse insofar as it homogenises all who are non-Jewish. Humans ancient and modern have sought to categorise themselves and others into ethnicities. However, the manner in which ethnic categories are conceived and policed *does* vary across time, cultures, and individuals. This matters when we think about the use of ethnic discourse in early Christianity.

Ethnicity has often been framed as a primordial category, determined by ancestry and heritage. In such a framework, it is fundamentally immutable. Hence, a person would be considered ethnically Indian if their parents are Indian, regardless of where and how they live. In everyday life, therefore, ethnicity is often presented in a primordialist or essentialist mode; it is innate, constant, and determined from birth. Yet social scientists largely agree that ethnic categories are far more unstable and malleable. From which ancestor does the group trace its lineage? Who determines the ethnicity of children in so-called “mixed marriages” between partners from different ethnic groups? Can the same ethnic category change over time? Consider, for instance, the notion of “English” ethnicity. It is widely accepted that the English people today descend from a dizzying admixture of other peoples – Celts, Romans, Normans, and Saxons, to name a few.²¹ The English share a common language, of course, but it is also the language spoken by the majority of North Americans and Australians today. As the newspaper *The Economist* recently remarked, “Englishness has a weak hold on Britain. This is no surprise when the concept is so poorly defined.”²² Moreover, a single person can be “English” in one context but labelled as “British”, “European” or “white” in another – an individual may belong to multiple ethnic categories depending on context and interlocutor. In other words, “ethnic identity” is typically a way of talking about people in relation to traits

²¹ Smyth 1998:24-26.

²² *Economist* 2023.

we regard as fixed (ancestry, place of birth, etc), but the categories themselves are mutable and contextual.

Since the 1960s, therefore, social scientists have approached ethnicity from an “instrumentalist” or “constructivist” perspective, noting how ethnicity is not innate but constructed. Fredrik Barth, for instance, focuses on the group’s boundaries, positing that the manner in which groups define and police membership offers greater insight into the ethnic group than “the cultural stuff that it encloses.”²³ Ethnic groups emerge precisely in the contexts where differing cultures interact and individuals need to establish difference and superiority, Barth suggests.²⁴ The instrumentalist approach towards ethnicity was further developed by the so-called “Manchester School”, such as Abner Cohen’s thesis on the Hausa and Yoruba communities in Nigeria. Cohen studies how the Hausa people intentionally adjust the borders of their ethnic group – including the adoption of a particular Muslim sect as a core aspect of Hausa identity – to control trading networks.²⁵ Cohen concludes that ethnicity is a “political phenomenon”, a category generated to serve political ends through the creation of groups.²⁶ Similarly, Ien Ang writes about “the racialized construct of the Malay as the region’s ‘native race’” as part of nationalist discourse in postcolonial Malaysia.²⁷ There is increased acceptance that ethnic categories are a means of uniting, dividing, and compartmentalising different peoples, often for political or economic reasons.

An interesting example of this comes from the Balkans at the turn of the twentieth century. The legitimacy of territorial sovereignty was determined, at the time, by the supposed ethnic make-up of the population, and one of the contested areas was Macedonia, a region claimed by Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece.²⁸ Each of these three nations conducted censuses of Macedonia’s ethnic composition between 1889 and 1905, yet arrived at wildly different results.²⁹ The census conducted by Serbia declared that 71.4% of Macedonia’s population was Serbian while just 2.0% were Bulgarian. By contrast, Bulgaria’s census reported that 52.3% of the population was Bulgarian – with Serbians constituting 0.0%. Attributing these discrepancies to simple fabrication, David Kertzer and Dominique Arel argue, “largely misses the point” for it assumes a “correct and objective method of counting

²³ Barth 1969:15.

²⁴ Barth 1969:10.

²⁵ Cohen 1969:151, 183-188.

²⁶ Cohen 1969:190.

²⁷ Ang 2022:764.

²⁸ Kertzer and Arel 2002:21

²⁹ Friedman 1996:85; Turkey subsequently conducted a census as well several decades later.

identities, whose process is then spoiled by political elements.”³⁰ Rather, the censuses show how the goal posts of “ethnicity” can move depending on perspective and situation. “The argument of the Bulgarian and Serbian nationalists,” Kertzer and Arel explain, “was that the Slavic language spoken in Macedonia was a dialectical version of their own language, and therefore Slav-speakers were Bulgarian or Serbian, respectively.”³¹ Moreover, neither census included “Macedonian” as a possible ethnicity.³² In other words, the censuses were not complete fabrications. Rather, they reflect attempts to include and exclude certain peoples through the malleable boundaries of ethnicity.

In addition, Rogers Brubaker invites us to question the very idea of “ethnic groups” as bounded, fundamental units. What we regard as “ethnic groups” typically comprise a huge number of individuals with diverse backgrounds and competing interests. If we define a group as “a mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concerted action,” Brubaker argues that many so-called ethnicities simply do not operate on such a collective level.³³ Rather, individuals or organisations claim to *represent* a given ethnicity, and thereby evoke the language of “ethnic groups” to lend clout to their position. Brubaker thus advises researchers to think of ethnicity as a “category” rather than “group”.³⁴ Ethnicity is a means through which people categorise themselves and others, not a fundamental unit with a corporate identity and common interests, even if that is how certain actors choose to portray ethnicity. For a similar reason, I generally avoid using the phrase “ethnic identity” in this dissertation, as the term implies that each individual has an inherent ethnicity, such as “Greek” or “Syrian”, that is absolutely static and representative of a homogenous culture. In reality, a “Greek” in one situation might be an “Athenian”, a “Roman”, or a “Gentile” in another. Individuals ascribe and are ascribed ethnic labels; sometimes they may choose to accept, reject, or qualify these labels depending on their situation, sometimes they have no choice in the matter.

Given the plural definitions of ethnicity and its messy intersections with culture, nationality, class, and other so-called “identity markers”, some question the value of ethnicity

³⁰ Kertzer and Arel 2002:21-22.

³¹ Kertzer and Arel 2002:22.

³² Kertzer and Arel 2002:22.

³³ Brubaker 2006:8.

³⁴ Brubaker 2006:12.

as a category altogether.³⁵ Yet humans across space and time have always attempted to categorise themselves and others based on perceived similarities and differences in physical appearance, language, practices, and homeland. As we shall shortly see, there is no escaping the fact that ancient writers used terms like “Jew”, “Galilean”, “Idumean”, and so on. In short, our conversations and writings carry all sorts of terms and ideas which people regard as “ethnic”. “Ethnic designations create a sense of bounded order by introducing distinctions between certain groups and relevant Others,” Katherine Southwood remarks.³⁶ Ethnicity is a tool, a means through which individuals establish similarities or differences with others based on seemingly fixed factors. Rather than avoiding it altogether, we can learn much about how humans understand themselves and the people around them through their use of ethnic categories.³⁷ Like the equally nebulous category “religion”, therefore, the researcher’s challenge is to study *how* and *why* the language of ethnicity is employed, recognising that the object of our study has fuzzy boundaries.

As a working definition, “ethnicity” in this paper will be described as a means of categorising people based on one or more of the six factors listed by Anthony D. Smith as ideas commonly associated with ethnicity.³⁸ These are:

1. A collective name
2. A common myth of descent
3. A shared history
4. A distinctive shared culture (e.g. language or religion)
5. An association with a specific territory
6. A sense of solidarity

As Smith clarifies, not all ethnicities exhibit these six features, but they are a helpful starting point that allows us to focus our discussion to the terms or ideas in 1 Peter which relate to one or more of these characteristics.³⁹ Importantly, however, “ethnic discourse” includes the *negation* of these characteristics and ethnic categorisation by *outsiders*. For instance, the label “Asian American” reflects the *negation* of commonality between Americans of Asian descent

³⁵ Ardener 2018:211-212; Carter and Fenton 2009:14-16.

³⁶ Southwood 2012:25.

³⁷ Banks 1996:186-187.

³⁸ Smith 1986:22-30.

³⁹ Katie Marcar suggests that all six characteristics can be found in 1 Peter (Marcar 2022a:10).

and Americans of European or African descent.⁴⁰ Similarly, labels like “barbarians”, “foreigners”, and “Gentiles” represent attempts to cast certain groups as ethnic *outsiders*.

At this point, let me reiterate an important distinction. In the preceding paragraphs I have been describing the study of ethnicity from the *researcher's* perspective. As historians, our task is to observe and analyse phenomena, including the development of ideas such as ethnicity. When we consider the diverse ways in which people at different times and places speak about ethnicity, most scholars agree that ethnicity is a category constructed by individuals and organisations to classify people into groups. From the perspective of actors and participants, however, ethnicity *can* be perceived as primordial and inflexible. Smith describes this as “participants’ primordialism”.⁴¹ A recent example would be the statement by former Taiwanese president Ma Ying-Jeou when visiting the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) in March 2023:

“People on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are Chinese people (华人), and are both descendants of the Yan and Yellow Emperors.”⁴²

For Ma, the locus of Chinese identity is putative descent from the Yan and Yellow Emperors, mythical figures in ancient Chinese history. Ma draws upon the seemingly immutable (and inscrutable) notion of common ancestry to bolster his political position concerning the unity of people in Taiwan and the PRC. At the same time, he downplays or ignores differences from the PRC in ideology, history, and culture, or the fact that the Vietnamese, for instance, also trace their lineage to the Yan and Yellow Emperors.⁴³ This is an example of how certain actors can construct ethnicity along primordial lines, presenting it as an immutable characteristic. Yet from the researcher’s perspective, Ma’s statements do not refute the constructivist understanding of ethnicity. Rather, they show that *one way* in which people construct the boundaries of Chinese identity is putative descent from the mythical Yan and Yellow Emperors.

⁴⁰ Ok 2019:417.

⁴¹ Smith 1998:157-158.

⁴² Chan 2023; Notably, Ma uses the term 华人 – a term which often includes overseas Chinese – rather than 中国人, which typically refers to Chinese citizens. In contrast, the Singapore-based news agency Channel News Asia reports the number of people in Taiwan who identify as “Chinese” has dropped from 25% to 2.5% over the past thirty years, reflecting a growing discomfort among Taiwanese with this label (Tham 2024).

⁴³ Yu 2006:62.

With this in mind, we can return to Gruen's claim concerning people in the ancient world that their "sense of collective identity rested primarily on common customs, traditions, moral principles, and manner of life, rather than on birthright and blood-line."⁴⁴ To what extent does this prove, as he suggests, that ethnicity did not much matter?

(1.1.2) Did Ethnicity in the Ancient World Matter?

In an oft-cited passage from Herodotus' *Persian War*, the Athenians reassure the Spartans that they will never side with the Persians due to their shared Greek heritage.

For there are many great reasons why we should not do this, even if we so desired; first and chiefest, the burning and destruction of the adornments and temples of our gods, whom we are constrained to avenge to the uttermost rather than make covenants with the doer of these things, and next the kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech (αὐτίς δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐὼν ὁμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον), and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common and the likeness of our way of life (θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἡθεὰ τε ὁμότροπα), to all which it would ill beseem Athenians to be false.⁴⁵

In this passage, Herodotus mentions several ethnic categories and the ways in which they were used. The historian appeals to a common Greek identity which unites the Athenians and Spartans, based (among other factors) on the perception of shared blood and speech. There is no clear distinction between purportedly mutable and immutable characteristics: "shared blood" (ὁμαίμος) is as much a determining trait of Greek kinship as "shared speech" (ὁμόγλωσσος) and "shared way of life" (ὁμοτροπία). As Herodotus presents it, these factors are common to all Greeks, revealing an ethnic affinity between Athenians and Spartans which should motivate a political alliance against the Persians. In doing so, he simultaneously constructs the category "Greek" and their other, the "Persian".⁴⁶

The geographer Strabo also mentions scores of ethnicities and their purported origins. In *Geog.* 12.1.2, Strabo notes the existence of two tribes in Cappadocia – the Cappadocians and the Cataonians. This latter group, Strabo writes, shared a common language with the Cappadocians but were nonetheless considered a "different nation" (ἑτεροεθνής) by earlier

⁴⁴ Gruen 2020:218.

⁴⁵ Herodotus 8.144; LCL 120:152-155.

⁴⁶ Hall 1989:56-100; Zacharia 2008:27.

writers, though no reason for this differentiation is given.⁴⁷ The Cataonians were eventually annexed by the Cappadocian king Ariarathes III (r. 255-220 BCE), and though once “distinct” (διωρισμένοι), Strabo writes that all signs of the Cataonians constituting a “separate nation” have disappeared.⁴⁸ This account highlights the transience of ethnic categories.⁴⁹ There is no indication that the Cataonians had been annihilated; rather, their cultural similarity with the Cappadocians and annexation under Ariarathes III led to “Cataonian” being no longer a meaningful ethnic category.

Strabo makes a similar point in his description of the Turdetanians, in southern Iberia, under Roman rule.

The Turdetanians, however, and particularly those that live about the Baetis, have completely changed over to the Roman mode of life, not even remembering their own language any more. And most of them have become Latins (Λατῖνοί τε οἱ πλεῖστοι γεγόνασι), and they have received Romans as colonists, so that they are not far from being all Romans (ὥστε μικρὸν ἀπέχουσι τοῦ πάντες εἶναι Ῥωμαῖοι). Moreover, all those Iberians who belong to this class are called “Togati” (τογᾶτοι). And among these are the Celtiberians, who were once regarded the most brutish of all.⁵⁰

“Turdetanians”, “Romans”, “Latins”, “Iberians”, “Celtiberians” – Strabo here uses at least five ethnic categories, even as he recognises their inherent fluidity. The Celtiberians, for example, are described as a subset of the Iberians, but they have largely assimilated into a Roman mode of life. Furthermore, Emma Dench remarks, “There is a particular emphasis here on the idea of becoming Roman, with a range of manifestations of this process, crossing our categories of cultural, institutional, and political change.”⁵¹ For Strabo, it was possible for someone of a different ethnic origin to “become Roman” through the adoption of language, dress, and culture.⁵² Such a transformation could even result in them being ascribed the label “Togati”, possibly describing those of non-Roman descent who had assimilated to Roman culture.⁵³

⁴⁷ “Καὶ αὐτῶν δὲ τῶν ὁμογλώττων οἱ παλαιοὶ τοὺς Κατάονας καθ’ αὐτοὺς ἔταπτον, ἀντιδιαίρουντες τοῖς Καππάδοξιν, ὡς ἑτεροεθνέσι” (LCL 211:344-345).

⁴⁸ “ἡφάνισται τελέως τὰ σημεῖα τῆς ἄλλοεθνίας” (LCL 211:344-347).

⁴⁹ Panichi 2005:203-204.

⁵⁰ Strabo, *Geog.* 3.2.15; LCL 50:58-61.

⁵¹ Dench 2010:266.

⁵² van der Vliet 2003:270-272.

⁵³ Bispham 2007:61-62; see Suetonius, *Julius* 48; Lucan, *Civil War* 9.238.

This brings us to the complex case of “Romanness”. Roman identity, Gruen argues, was primarily a legal or political category, and therefore should not be regarded as ethnic. The acceptance of foreigners into the citizen community, he writes, proves that “Romans did not employ ethnicity as a fulcrum for the evaluation of character or quality.”⁵⁴ The boundary lines between the political and the ethnic, however, are blurrier than they seem. Suetonius tells us that the emperor Augustus considered it “of great importance to keep the people pure and unsullied by any taint of foreign or servile blood (*ab omni colluvione peregrini ac servilis sanguinis*),” and was therefore “most chary of conferring Roman citizenship (*civitates Romanas*) and set a limit to manumission.”⁵⁵ On the one hand, this quote from Suetonius shows that Roman citizenship was connected to one’s ancestry, such that those with “foreign or servile blood” ought to be excluded from it by virtue of their descent. On the other hand, it remained a privilege that *could* be conferred upon those of differing ancestry, a practice which Augustus sought to limit but did not completely annul. Being considered “Roman” was partly, but not solely, influenced by one’s bloodline.⁵⁶

Concerning Claudius, Suetonius writes, “He allowed the people of Ilium perpetual exemption from tribute, on the ground that they were the founders of the Roman race.”⁵⁷ Suetonius is here acknowledging Rome’s mythological descent from the Trojans,⁵⁸ and Claudius apparently saw in this purported genealogical connection such import that the people of Ilium, while remaining distinct from Romans, should experience certain liberties within the empire *vis-à-vis* other ethnicities. Like Herodotus’ words about the Athenians and the Spartan, Suetonius implies that the Romans share an affinity with certain ethnicities based on purported bloodlines. Dench thus notes the fluidity of “Roman” as an ethnic category.

It is in fact interesting that, at this period, cultural markers tend not to be described as ‘Roman’ at all, but ‘Latin’ [...] This is perhaps because of two reasons that may appear to us to be contradictory: comparatively long traditions of ‘Latinity’ as an ethnic, descent-based identity, and equally long traditions of using ‘Latinity’ as a means of what one might think of as ‘franchising’ the Roman state, in the first place through colonization. The contradiction that appears to us is perhaps primarily a

⁵⁴ Gruen 2020:87-89.

⁵⁵ Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 40.3; LCL 31:210-211.

⁵⁶ See Section 3.4.1 for discussion on citizenship in relation to New Testament and Christian identity.

⁵⁷ “*Iliensibus quasi Romanae gentis auctoribus tributa in perpetuum remisit*” (Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25.3; LCL 38:50-51).

⁵⁸ Gruen 2020:72.

signal of the generally exclusive nature of ethnic identity in the modern world. In the ancient Mediterranean world, on the other hand, it is extremely common to use notions of ancestral kin as a loop to draw peoples in, rather than a fence to keep peoples out.⁵⁹

Dench identifies two overlapping labels which both imply belonging to the Rome's imagined community: "Roman" and "Latin". We saw Strabo, for instance, using both labels in *Geog.* 3.2.15, and we could say that these two terms are ethnic categories. Yet their boundaries were porous enough that a foreigner could become "Roman" or "Latin". Gruen is right to say that being Roman was a political or legal category. However, this does not mean that it cannot also be an ethnic one. Labels for grouping individuals are often polyvalent, and a single category could be "ethnic", "political", or "religious" depending on the speaker and their context.

These examples demonstrate that ethnicity mattered in the Graeco-Roman world. It mattered for Jewish writers too. The following three chapters will include more rigorous discussions about labels such as "Jews", "Israelites", and "Gentiles". For now, I will simply demonstrate that Jewish writings, contrary to Gruen's suggestion, cared about ethnicity and engaged in ethnic discourse, categorising peoples based on perceived similarities in bloodline, homeland, and culture. We can see this from the very first book of the Old Testament.

"These are the families of Noah's sons," writes the author of Genesis, "according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood (Gen 10.32)".⁶⁰ Ancestry mattered to the writer, and he describes in detail how various peoples and cities trace their lineage to Japheth, Ham, and Shem. Shared lineage to semi-mythological figures is presented as a determining factor in ethnicity; Canaan, for instance, was the progenitor of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and other nations (10.15-19). Shem, as the next chapter in Genesis narrates, was Abraham and Lot's ancestor (11.10-11), and is thereby the progenitor of peoples including the Israelites, Moabites, and Ammonites. Putative genealogies such as these had a direct impact on Israel's law and culture: "You shall not abhor any of the Edomites," the writer of Deuteronomy records, "for they are your kin" (Deut 23.7). Conversely, certain ethnicities were barred from joining the assembly of Israel.

⁵⁹ Dench 2005:137-138.

⁶⁰ All English translations of biblical passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise stated.

Deut 23.2 declares, “No Ammonite or Moabite shall come into the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation.”

Ethnicity also becomes a big issue with regard to intermarriage in the OT. The Pentateuch contains several prohibitions concerning marriage with the Canaanite peoples,⁶¹ but probably the starkest example comes from the postexilic period. Toward the end of the book of Ezra, several of Israel's leaders report to the eponymous narrator:

The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands (והתערבו זרע הקדש בעמי הארצות). (Ezra 9.1-2)

This report leads Ezra to take drastic action: He declares a period of national repentance, before forcefully separating the Jewish men from their wives. The passage explicitly lists the eight purported ethnicities of the foreigners whom the Jewish people had married. In so doing, it intentionally parallels the aforementioned lists of peoples in the Pentateuch whom the Israelites were forbidden to marry – some of whom had antagonised Israel in the past – even though only the Ammonites, Moabites, and Egyptians continued to exist in some form during the postexilic period.⁶² In fact, Hannah Harrington suggests that many of these “foreign women” may have been long-term residents in the land of Israel and may even have had Israelite ancestry.⁶³ This excerpt thus seeks to position the Jews who returned from exile as a distinct and “pure” people; commenting on the idea of the זרע הקדש in this passage, Southwood states that Ezra “transforms the language of holiness by applying it to ethnicity,” thereby defining Jewishness in an “exclusionary, polemical sense.”⁶⁴ Consequently, marriage with an ethnic outsider is inherently problematic.

The book of Nehemiah also discusses how the Jewish returnees married non-Jewish women but frames the episode slightly differently.

⁶¹ E.g. Exod 34.11-16; Deut 7.1-4.

⁶² Southwood 2012:140-141.

⁶³ Harrington 2022:151-153.

⁶⁴ Southwood 2012:127.

In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah but spoke the language of various peoples. (Neh 13.23-24)

Nehemiah offers a briefer list of ethnicities – retaining “Ammon” and “Moab” but adding “Ashdod” – and includes a remark about language. One problematic consequence of intermarriage, according to Nehemiah 13, is that a growing number of children could not speak the language of Judah, but instead spoke “the language of Ashdod”. This is presented as an indication that the offspring were losing their Jewishness. Once again, we see that ethnicity *did* matter to Jewish writers; not only did they use ethnic categories like “Canaanite”, but they also explicitly discussed the boundary lines of these categories. Were the children of mixed marriages Jewish? Was language a determining factor of Jewishness?

Ezra and Nehemiah provide some clear examples of how Jewish writers engaged in ethnic discourse, with both texts strongly favouring Jewish endogamy while castigating those it deems ethnically “other” – the Ammonites, Moabites, and so on. As we shall see over the course of this thesis, however, not all Jewish texts lean in this direction. Ruth the Moabite is portrayed positively as one who turns to Israel’s god (Ruth 1.15-17; 2.11-12) and eventually becomes the great-grandmother of Israel’s king David (Ruth 4.18-22). Furthermore, outsider perspectives can sometimes differ from the views of insiders. Writing in the second century CE, Dio Cassius offers several comments concerning the Jews.

The country has been named Judaea, and the people themselves Jews (ἡ τε γὰρ χώρα Ἰουδαία καὶ αὐτοὶ Ἰουδαῖοι ὀνομάδονται). I do not know how this title came to be given them, but it applies also to all the rest of mankind, although of alien race, who affect their customs (φέρει δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ὅσοι τὰ νόμιμα αὐτῶν, καίπερ ἄλλοεθνεῖς ὄντες, ζηλοῦσι). This class exists even among the Romans, and though often repressed has increased to a very great extent and has won its way to the right of freedom in its observances. They are distinguished from the rest of mankind in practically every detail of life, and especially by the fact that they do not honour any of the usual gods, but show extreme reverence for one particular divinity.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 37.17; LCL 53:126-127.

For Dio Cassius, the label Ἰουδαῖος could include those of foreign birth (ἄλλοεθνής) who adopted the Jewish way of life. From his perspective, a non-Jew could “become Jewish” through conversion.

There is also the complicated case of Herod, whose right to rule was questioned, Josephus tells us, because he was “a commoner and an Idumean, that is, a half-Jew (ιδιώτη τε ὄντι καὶ Ἰδουμαίῳ, τουτέστιν ἡμιουδαίῳ).”⁶⁶ Concerning the *hapax legomenon* ἡμιουδαῖος, Benedikt Eckhardt argues that the term reflects the contested boundaries of Jewishness in Josephus’ time.⁶⁷ It is expressed by Antigonus, who seeks to discredit Herod’s Jewish credentials but cannot dispute Herod’s claim to Jewishness on “religious” grounds, such as circumcision. Instead, Antigonus constructs the category “half-Jew” to denote that an Idumean like Herod was not fully Jewish.

We will discuss other instances of Jewish ethnic discourse in the following chapters. Suffice to say that Jewish authors, like their Greek and Roman counterparts, wrote about ethnicity as a means of including or excluding individuals in relation to certain perceived communities. Although they frequently connected ethnicity to purported bloodlines and ancestry, factors like language and religion also played a role in defining ethnic categories for many writers. Erich Gruen is therefore right to say that “common customs, traditions, moral principles, and manner of life” were important for ancient writers; however, this does *not* mean, as he proceeds to add, that “the establishment of a distinctive ethnicity did not much matter.”⁶⁸

Each of the ancient writers just examined had certain preconceptions of what it meant to be “Roman” or “Turdetanian”, “Moabite” or “Jew”. They may not have theorised about ethnicity on an abstract level as Barth and Brubaker have done, yet they either explicitly or implicitly define these ethnic categories based on factors such as putative ancestry, common homeland, similar languages, shared customs, and so on.⁶⁹ In other words, ethnicity *did* matter in the ancient world, but only if we recall that ethnicity, as our colleagues in the social sciences have demonstrated, is a malleable means of organising individuals based on perceived similarities and differences. As Jonathan Hall concludes in his influential book, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*:

⁶⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 14.403; LCL 365:214-215.

⁶⁷ Eckhardt 2011:93, 114-115; cf. Cohen 1999:114.

⁶⁸ Gruen 2020:218.

⁶⁹ Matlock 2012:310-312.

Like all ethnic groups, collectivities such as the Dorians, the Ionians, the Akhaians, the Pelasgians or the Dryopes should not be viewed as 'essential' categories. There is no evidence to suggest that any one of these groups can be traced by a direct and exclusive association with a certain type of pottery, a particular class of dress ornament, a distinctive form of burial ritual or a specific dialect. Nor is there any reason to suppose that they will ever be identified by running DNA tests on their skeletal remains. Ethnic identity is not a 'natural' fact of life; it is something that needs to be actively proclaimed, reclaimed and disclaimed through discursive channels.⁷⁰

Jonathan Hall's findings thus corroborate the conclusions of Barth and Brubaker – ethnicity in the ancient world was often associated with immutable factors like ancestry, but in reality the labels and categories used to demarcate ethnicities are pliable. Likewise, Edith Hall demonstrates that Greek writing about barbarians "is usually an exercise in self-definition," an attempt to simultaneously stereotype outsiders and construct a Panhellenic ideal based on democracy and egalitarianism.⁷¹ On a more quotidian level, Paula Fredriksen also comments that "changes in people-groupness (συγγένεια) in fact happened fairly routinely, whenever a woman married, or whenever a family adopted a son."⁷² Ethnicity mattered precisely because it was so intertwined with customs, traditions, principles, and manner of life.

Similarly, when Gruen states that "emphasis on fluidity and malleability makes it difficult to account for a powerful attachment to collective identification that manifests itself in almost all societies,"⁷³ he conflates the perspectives of the participant and the researcher. The constructivist approach does not assert – as Gruen seems to imply – that people *self-consciously* construct ethnic identities. We can acknowledge that people frequently perceive ethnicity as immutable, form powerful attachments to perceived ethnic identities, and often regard their ethnicity as a "group" with aligned and common interests. But the researcher's task is to recognise that such claims and perceptions are constructed, and to ask *why* and *how* these actors describe ethnicity in such a way. Writing in 1986, Anthony D. Smith illustrates this point with a more contemporary example.

⁷⁰ Hall 1997:182.

⁷¹ Hall 1989:1-13.

⁷² Fredriksen 2022:53.

⁷³ Gruen 2020:3.

...the Muslims of Bosnia have decided to adopt the name 'Muslim' as an ethnic designation in the Yugoslav census which requires everyone to name their nationality. This, in spite of the fact that many such Bosnian Muslims no longer adhere to the beliefs and practices of Islam. Yet they identified themselves, and were identified by others, by reference to their religious origins (the fact that they *had been* Muslims) in a society where nationality and religious affiliation were closely intertwined, preferring this identity as their emblem than the name of the province they had so long inhabited.⁷⁴

This anecdote regarding Bosnian Muslims illustrates how the malleability of ethnic categories can nonetheless be accompanied by strong and genuine attachment to such labels. Seemingly "religious" categories, such as "Muslim", can be used as an *ethnic* category by insiders and outsiders due to perceived similarities and differences in culture.

This overlap between "ethnicity" and "religion" was certainly true in the ancient world as well. As Steve Mason notes in his seminal study of Ἰουδαϊσμός, ethnicities in the ancient world were closely associated with the ancestral traditions of that particular people – including deities, festivals, and myths of origins.

This fundamental category of ἔθνη with their laws and customs includes important elements of our "religion," in what we separate out as "religious law," customs, and charter myths. In the case of the Judaeans, such laws and customs are often taken by scholars as equivalent to "the Jewish religion." But the political-ethnographic category of ἔθνος cannot simply be identified with "religion."⁷⁵

Mason subsequently observes that people in the ancient world consistently perceived "conversion" as a movement from one *ethnos* to another; it was "a change of ethnic-ancestral culture, the joining of another people."⁷⁶ Similarly, Benjamin Isaac writes, "In the Roman world, religion and ethnic loyalties were inseparable."⁷⁷ Although the Latin *religio* was sometimes used (e.g. Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 69), ancient writers typically referred to so-called "religious practices" as ancestral traditions.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Smith 1986:23.

⁷⁵ Mason 2007:484.

⁷⁶ Mason 2007:491.

⁷⁷ Isaac 2006:500.

⁷⁸ Fredriksen 2017:34; Novenson 2022:50.

Finally, there is an essential methodological consideration when discussing ethnicity in antiquity. Stepping back from the primary sources themselves, one significant wrinkle is that we frequently employ ethnic categories when speaking about the ancient world. It is almost inevitable that we use terms like “Greek”, “Syrian”, or “Macedonian”. Yet the manner in which we use them is not always consistent with ancient writers and with each other, and often reveal something about our own presuppositions. One poignant example is the phrase, common in both academic and popular writing, “Gentile Christians”. This expression has three interconnected consequences for our perception of early Christianity.

- 1) It places us within a particular Jewish worldview, within which humanity can be divided into “Jew” and “Gentile”. Prior to joining the Jesus movement, most believers from non-Jewish backgrounds would not have considered themselves “Gentiles”. In fact, this bifurcation of humanity into “Jew” and “Gentile” is not even widely attested in Jewish sources until the rabbinic period, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.
- 2) It homogenises non-Jewish Christians, depicting them as a singular entity and defining them solely by their non-Jewish ancestry whilst downplaying the cultural and linguistic differences they would have had.
- 3) It imposes a primordialist understanding of the ethnic marker “Gentile”; someone who is born as a “Gentile” will always be a “Gentile”. Conversely, it assumes a *non*-ethnic take on the term “Christian”, such that these two identity-markers can be held in conjunction. Would we use the phrase “Gentile Jew”, for instance, to describe a Roman who converted to Judaism?⁷⁹

In addition, the phrase “Gentile Christian” (ἔθνος Χριστιανός) is nowhere found in the New Testament or early Christian writings – we are importing our own understanding of these terms unto the ancient world. This in turn affects our reading of passages like 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3 which speak of ἔθνη, which I will address in Chapter 4. We of course need some form of shorthand to refer to Jesus-followers of non-Jewish origin (an admittedly cumbersome phrase) for it is a vital category in early Christian thought, but it is worth reflecting on how *our* understanding of ethnicity influences our view of the ancient world.

In short, ethnicity matters. It mattered for the ancients, who wrote about “Greeks”, “barbarians”, “Assyrians”, and “Hebrews”, and who sorted people, explicitly or implicitly,

⁷⁹ Joshua Garroay identifies this issue, and interestingly puts forward “Gentile Jews” as a way of describing non-Jewish Christ-followers in Paul’s mind (Garroay 2012:45-69), but his proposal has not gained much traction.

into these different categories. Furthermore, ethnicity matters for those of us who study the ancient world. We must recognise that the ethnic categories we use when describing people in the past reflect our own presuppositions of how they were organised and differentiated. Denise Buell is therefore right to draw our attention to the malleability of ethnic categories in antiquity. However, is she right to suggest that 1 Peter employs ethnic language to depict Christ-followers as a “new chosen *genos*”?⁸⁰

(1.1.3) Early Christian Ethnic Discourse

As we saw earlier, second-century Christians and their interlocutors applied ethnic vocabulary to the growing Jesus movement. Aristides not only describes Christians as one of three or four γένη, but he also explicitly contrasts them to Greeks and Jews – categories we would typically regard as “ethnic” (Gk. *Apol.* 2.2). Likewise, Tertullian was fending off comments from outsiders that Christians constituted a *tertium genus* (*Nat.* 1.8.1). In drawing attention to such texts, Buell’s *Why This New Race* has revitalised the study of ethnicity in early Christian texts, and other scholars have built upon her findings.

Caroline Johnson Hodge’s *If Sons Then Heirs* considers Paul’s letters and concludes that Paul employs various patterns of kinship construction to emphasise how non-Jews have been drawn into the family of Abraham.⁸¹ She writes:

...being in-Christ is not ethnically neutral; rather, it falls under the umbrella of Jewishness. Yet Paul does not imagine gentiles-in-Christ as Jews; in fact, he still calls them gentiles. Thinking in terms of multiple identities, we might imagine these gentiles as occupying a mixed or “hybrid” identity that is not completely “other” than what they were, but is certainly not identical to their previous status.⁸²

For Hodge, attending to the ethnic dimensions of Paul’s letters is fruitful for understanding his ecclesiology and the place of non-Jews in the Jesus movement. At the same time, she observes a curious ambiguity: being in Christ “falls under the umbrella of Jewishness”, but the readers have not become Jews. Cavan Concannon has likewise explored Paul’s use of ethnic reasoning, focusing on the Corinthian correspondence. He observes how Paul interpolates his audience into Israel’s story by describing the ancient Israelites as “our

⁸⁰ Buell 2005:46.

⁸¹ Hodge 2007:41-42.

⁸² Hodge 2007:149.

fathers” in 1 Cor 10.1, thus denoting that the readers are their descendants.⁸³ Both Hodge and Concannon explore how ethnicity is a useful lens for understanding Paul’s theology and ethics.

With 1 Peter specifically, we find important contributions from several scholars. David Horrell has published extensively on ethnicity in early Christianity,⁸⁴ and he suggests that 1 Peter displays probably the highest concentration of ethnic terms in the New Testament.⁸⁵ Applying social identity theory, he argues that Peter uses ethnic language to cultivate an “in-group identity” among his readers, equipping them to endure the negative criticisms they suffered from outsiders.⁸⁶ He highlights the importance of ἀναστροφή in 1 Peter,⁸⁷ a term which is used in 2 Macc 6.23 and Gal 1.13 to refer explicitly to the Jewish way of life.⁸⁸ 1 Peter thus uses ethnic language, Horrell suggests, in order to construct “a form of identity, without a focus on specific (geophysical) territorial attachment or biological (human) kinship links,” but which is instead modelled after Judaism.⁸⁹ However, Horrell remains ambiguous about the formation of this collective identity in relation to the Jewish people or Israel. “The author of 1 Peter does not explicitly say whether he sees his addressees as part of Israel, or as somehow separate from it,” Horrell observes, “nor does he state whether the identification of the readers as the chosen people of God implies any denial of that status to others.”⁹⁰ We therefore have “no access” to the author’s intentions regarding Israel’s status, Horrell suggests elsewhere, and it is the reader’s task to construct “a positive place both for the Church and for Israel.”⁹¹ He reiterates this position in his recent ICC commentary on 1 Peter, co-written with Travis Williams, where they claim that the author of 1 Peter is “simply not concerned with the relationship between Israel and the Church, but rather with the Christians’ existence and survival in a hostile society.”⁹² Yet I will demonstrate in this thesis that the epistle is not truly so ambivalent concerning Israel, and in fact seems to portray its non-Jewish readers as foreigners who have been incorporated into Israel.

⁸³ Concannon 2014:100.

⁸⁴ See especially Horrell 2020.

⁸⁵ Horrell 2011:124-125.

⁸⁶ Horrell 2011:142.

⁸⁷ Six of the thirteen uses of ἀναστροφή in the NT are in 1 Peter.

⁸⁸ Horrell 2016:453-454.

⁸⁹ Horrell 2011:141.

⁹⁰ Horrell 2013b:348.

⁹¹ Horrell 2008:105.

⁹² Williams and Horrell 2023:688.

Janette Ok's recent monograph, *Constructing Ethnic Identity in 1 Peter* has a similar issue. She too argues that Peter depicts Christianity "as an ethnic identity akin to the unique religious-ethnic identity of the Jews" in order to foster cohesion and solidarity among his readers in the face of social alienation and estrangement.⁹³ Ok's study focuses on two groups of passages in 1 Peter. In Chapter 3 she analyses Peter's use of familial imagery, such as the language of "rebirth" in 1 Pet 1.3 and 1.23, while in Chapter 4 she considers the use of stereotypes in 1 Pet 2.11-12 and 4.3-4 as Peter differentiates the readers from "Gentiles". Both chapters contain useful insights into how 1 Peter's ethnic language influences the letter's rhetorical strategy, but do not discuss the relationship between "Church" and "Israel" in great depth. Using "Israel" and "Judaism" almost interchangeably, Ok simply states that the writer of 1 Peter draws upon Judaism as an ethnic identity in order to "construct the same form of identity for his addressees."⁹⁴ Following Horrell, Ok's study of ethnicity in 1 Peter suggests that the letter is ambiguous regarding the relationship between non-Jewish Christ-followers and the people of Israel.

Katie Marcar has also drawn attention to 1 Peter's use of ethnic language. Though she regards it as "metaphorical", she argues that the use of familial and ethnic images in the letter, such as the description of being "begotten anew" (1.3, 23), has strong ethical ramifications due to the Graeco-Roman conventions of exemplarity.⁹⁵ Similarly, Marcar reads the metaphor of spiritual milk in 1 Pet 2.1-3 in light of breastfeeding as a figurative transmission of ethnicity and social status from mother to child.⁹⁶ "Ethnic identities are built up of family units," she writes, and explains how 1 Peter uses both paternal and maternal images to paint "a complex portrait of what it means for diverse people to become members of one divine people."⁹⁷ The descriptions of the readers' new communal status in the first half of the letter (1.1–2.10), Marcar suggests, thereby ground the ethical instructions in the remainder of 1 Peter. Marcar ultimately identifies three interconnected conceptual metaphors in the letter.⁹⁸

- 1) Christian membership is belonging to a sojourning nation.
- 2) Christian membership is being begotten anew and growing up in God's family.

⁹³ Ok 2021:1.

⁹⁴ Ok 2021:60.

⁹⁵ Marcar 2022b:253-254.

⁹⁶ Marcar 2022a:170-172; cf. Chapman 2012:3, 26.

⁹⁷ Marcar 2022a:269.

⁹⁸ Marcar 2022a:274.

3) God's family is an ethnic group.

Marcar has intentionally chosen to focus on familial metaphors in 1 Peter and it would be unfair to criticise her for the lack of engagement with material lying outside the scope of her project. Yet by speaking of Christian membership as “belonging to a sojourning nation” and describing God's family as “an ethnic group”, it begs the question of where Israel – an ethnic group often depicted as a sojourning nation – stand in relation to Peter's addressees.

These are some recent examples of how the study of ethnicity in early Christianity has facilitated useful discussions and insights, especially in relation to 1 Peter. Yet there are also gaps in the research, and this thesis seeks to address one such problem by examining in detail what 1 Peter's ethnic language reveals about the readers' relationship to Israel.

At the same time, the study of ethnicity in early Christianity has had several detractors, who argue that the idea of early Christian ethnic discourse is largely mistaken. Steve Mason and Philip Esler have sought to downplay the notion that Christianity regarded itself as an ethnicity or was viewed by outsiders as one. In a published response to Horrell, they contend that Pliny's description of former Christians renouncing their faith and the option given to the accused to recant (*Ep.* 10.96) indicate that Christianity was *not* an ethnic identity. “None of these attributes matches membership of an *ethnos* or *gens*,” they write, “from which people do not come and go.”⁹⁹

The explicit assumption that one cannot “come and go” from a given ethnicity is telling. First, it indicates a primordialist approach towards ethnicity, viewing it as an immutable category. They ignore the extent to which ethnicity can be performed or hidden, especially in life-threatening situations.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, the language of “membership” and the inability to “come and go” possibly also suggests that Mason and Esler equate “ethnicity” with “ethnic groups” – belonging to an ethnicity entails membership into a mutually interacting community with clearly established boundaries and collective interests. Yet recalling Brubaker's intervention that ethnicity typically functions as a categorical tool, Christianity could be styled as an ethnicity, without necessarily being a group with rigorously defined membership. When Paul writes in Gal 3.28, “There is no longer Jew or Greek (οὐκ ἔτι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλλην),” for instance, he uses “Greek” as a generic ethnic label for non-

⁹⁹ Mason and Esler 2017:508.

¹⁰⁰ The biblical story of Esther's decision to conceal her Jewishness being a prime example (Beal 1997). Other examples include attempts by Sephardic Jews to conceal their ethnicity to survive persecution (Albert *et al.* 2005; Jacobs 2002).

Jews, including people who may have been regarded in other contexts as “Italian” or “Egyptian”. Thus “ethnicity” does not necessarily entail membership (*pace* Esler and Mason). Most importantly, advocates of ethnic reasoning in early Christianity are not saying that Christianity was *unanimously* or *exclusively* conceived as an ethnicity by all insiders and outsiders. Rather, they typically suggest that the use of ethnic terminology and ideas was an important development in early Christianity as it sought to express what it meant to be Christian in relation to Jews and pagans. The second-century physician Galen describes Christianity as a philosophical school – alongside the school of Moses (*De pulsuum differentiis* 2.4; 3.3) – and it is possible that Pliny regarded Christianity as a kind of political association (*Ep.* 10.96).¹⁰¹ None of this should take away from the fact that many Christians and non-Christians *did* use ethnic language when describing the Jesus movement, and this is a phenomenon worth studying.

Horrell has already presented a fuller refutation of Esler and Mason’s critique, elaborating upon some of the ideas mentioned previously in this chapter, such as the presence of hybrid ethnicities, changes in an individual’s ethnicity, and the inconsistency of ethnic categories.¹⁰² On that note, Mason’s rebuttal of Horrell is particularly surprising given his own influential work on Judaism and the complexity of the term Ἰουδαϊσμός. “That adopting Judaeian laws involved a decisive shift from one *ethnos* to another is clear across the range of evidence,” Mason writes in his 2007 article, citing the story of King Izates in Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* 20.17-96 and Aseneth’s conversion in the *Joseph and Aseneth* romance.¹⁰³ Mason thus recognises that conversion to Judaism results in some form of ethnic change. Why discount the possibility that Christians, in having to depart from their former ancestral traditions as well, might likewise have engaged in ethnic discourse?

More pertinently for this dissertation, Gruen offers the following analysis of 1 Peter:

The language of “race” does appear in *1 Peter*. And it does so in revealing fashion. The author, speaking to Christian converts in the diaspora communities of Asia Minor, describes them as a “chosen *genos*, a royal priesthood, a holy *ethnos*, a *laos* as possession of God.” And he adds that, though “you were once no people (*laos*), you are now the *laos* of God.” The figurative language of ethnicity, juxtaposed as it is with the expression “a royal priesthood,” must be taken as metaphorical. The

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 6.

¹⁰² Horrell 2019:7-11.

¹⁰³ Mason 2007:508.

emphasis in *1 Peter* generally is on religious commitment and moral practices, with which this passage also coheres. [...] He had no intention of viewing Christians as a “third race”. Nor does the language possess any ethnic resonance.¹⁰⁴

Gruen's comments are worth reproducing in full, for it precisely represents the interpretation of ethnicity in *1 Peter* that this dissertation seeks to challenge. His dichotomy between “ethnicity” and “religion” leads him to conclude that, because *1 Peter* is concerned with “religious commitment and moral practices”, any language about ethnicity must be figurative and metaphorical. In contrast, I have demonstrated that ethnicity and religion intersect in myriad ways, and we are not confronted with a zero-sum game. As Gruen himself recognises, being a Jew, Greek, or Roman in the ancient world was not merely a matter of genealogy, but of customs, traditions, principles, and beliefs – spheres which we typically describe as “religious” today. Furthermore, even if the letter's ethnic language is figurative, it is surely worth asking why our author chooses this metaphor for the readers, given the close parallels with the OT's description of Israel.

A more salient critique of ethnic reasoning in early Christianity has been offered by John Barclay in his 2017 article, “An Identity Received from God”. Focusing on the Pauline letters, Barclay argues:

My aim is to show that in Paul's configuration of this [kinship] language his stress lies on a form of identity that is radically contingent on the creative action of God, and thus a *type of identity* which cannot be mapped onto the ethnic identities claimed or ascribed by human beings. An identity received from God neither enhances ethnic identities nor excludes them; in its non-exclusive difference it frames ethnicities (along with other forms of human identity), without replacing them or forming a new ethnicity of its own.¹⁰⁵

Unlike Gruen, Mason, and Esler, Barclay is not contesting the importance of ethnicity in the ancient world but emphasising the uniqueness of Israelite ethnicity in Pauline thought. Central to Barclay's argument is the hypothesis that “Israel is not a typical ethnic group for Paul”, but rather a “unique phenomenon” for it is a people “created and sustained by God through a merciful design that now, in Christ, includes Jews and gentiles alike.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Gruen 2020:202.

¹⁰⁵ Barclay 2017:356.

¹⁰⁶ Barclay 2017:371.

Barclay's assessment is helpful. It reminds us that Christian writers often use ethnic language to stress the uniqueness of Christianity in relation to other ethnicities, such as the poetic description of the Christian γένος in the *Epistle to Diognetus*. Moreover, Barclay emphasises the centrality of Israel in Paul's thought, a feature which also surfaces in 1 Peter and which will be a consistent theme in this thesis. Yet Barclay's assertion that the new identity received from God does not enhance, exclude, or replace former ethnic identities is questionable, and perhaps stems from a limited understanding of "ethnic identity". In 1 Cor 12.2, Paul writes to his non-Jewish readers, "You know that when you were Gentiles (ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε) you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak." One interpretation of this verse is that the readers *were* Gentiles but have since had this status revoked when they received Christ.¹⁰⁷ For Paul, "Gentiles" (ἔθνη) is an ethnic category. It may not have been an ethnicity which his non-Jewish readers would have used before they heard the gospel, and it is not as particular as "Greek" or "Egyptian", yet in Paul's mind – and in the minds of many first-century Jews – it was a perfectly functional ethnic category insofar as it marked out those who were non-Jewish and who thereby operated under a different set of regulations and customs (e.g. did not observe Jewish food laws, were denied entry into the Jerusalem temple, etc.). 1 Cor 12.2 suggests that this ethnicity, however, has been abrogated or replaced in some way, and it is precisely these contours of early Christian ethnic imagination – which often run contrary to our modern categories of "ethnic identity" – which will be the focus of this dissertation.

(1.1.4) Why "Ethnic Imagination"?

A few words about the titular phrase "ethnic imagination". Some scholars distinguish between "race" and "ethnicity", whilst others use the two terms interchangeably. Often this depends largely on the researcher's context and audience. A 2019 article by National Geographic on this topic, for instance, defines "race" as "a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits," whereas "ethnicity" is defined as "large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background."¹⁰⁸ From that writer's perspective, both are "social constructs used to categorize and characterize seemingly distinct populations," but "race" is more closely associated with

¹⁰⁷ Concannon 2014:115.

¹⁰⁸ Blakemore 2019.

physical appearance, whereas “ethnicity” takes into account both physical and cultural factors.¹⁰⁹ Ann Morning notes that this distinction between “race” and “ethnicity” is especially common in the United States, which is “virtually alone” in treating the two categories as different types of identity in national censuses.¹¹⁰

In my own context as a Singaporean, “ethnicity” and “race” both carry physical and cultural connotations, but ethnicity is sometimes perceived as a subset of race. For instance, a person’s race may be “Indian” whilst their ethnicity is “Tamil”, or another person’s race may be “White” and their ethnicity “Polish”.¹¹¹ Both terms are used often and our National Pledge – an oath recited by Singaporean students everyday – includes the words “regardless of race, language, or religion.” In practice, however, the two terms are often interchangeable and their boundaries are blurred.¹¹² Having lived in the UK for the past eight years, however, I detect a slight preference in this country for using “ethnicity”; until recently, it was common to speak of “Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic” groups, while many supermarkets have aisles with the label “ethnic foods”. As these examples indicate, “ethnic” often implies “foreign”, and I rarely hear of the English or Scottish described here as “ethnicities” – nor do they have their own dedicated food aisles. Yet this phenomenon is not unique to modern-day Britain, and the tendency to speak of foreigners as “the nations” has been practised for over 2000 years, as we will see in Chapter 4. In keeping with much of the scholarly discussion around ideas of peoplehood in early Christianity, therefore, I will generally use the term “ethnicity” and related cognates for consistency in this thesis, employing “race” occasionally to translate the Greek γένος and Latin *genus* to better reflect the verbal differences.

Many other scholars also use the phrase “ethnic reasoning” to describe the process through which the Christian writers employ ethnic language and ideas.¹¹³ However, in this thesis I prefer to speak of ethnic *imagination*. “Ethnic reasoning” is an appropriate description for the apologetic material found in Tertullian’s *Ad Nationes* and the *Epistle to Diognetes*, as the writers are indeed explicating their point of view. In contrast, much of

¹⁰⁹ Blakemore 2019.

¹¹⁰ Morning 2008:250-252, 260.

¹¹¹ Such a usage possibly reflects something of the desire to unite large, disparate people groups under a common identity-marker (e.g. “Indian”) despite significant differences between them, including language, cuisine, etc. Incidentally, some ancient writers do depict γένος or ἔθνος as a subset of the other, but it is often inconsistent. Herodotus, for instance, speaks of ἔθνος as a subset of γένος in 1.143, but does the opposite in 1.56 and 1.101 (Morgan 2018:25).

¹¹² Ang *et al.* 2022:586-597

¹¹³ Buell 2005:2-4.

1 Peter's ethnic discourse operates under the surface. The writer is not debating the appropriateness of the "third race" label. Rather, the writer holds several assumptions concerning the place of Gentiles, Israel, and the readers within his worldview. As Richard B. Hays writes concerning Paul's letters, the first-century Jesus followers were invited into "a sweeping reevaluation of their identities, an imaginative paradigm shift so comprehensive that it can only be described as a 'conversion of the imagination'."¹¹⁴ But if following Jesus engenders a conversion of the imagination, what does the converted imagination look like for 1 Peter?

In addressing this question, I also draw upon the work of Eugene Boring, Joel Green, and Abson P. Joseph, who refer to 1 Peter's "narrative world" – the story and symbolic universe which the writer creates through descriptions of his readers' past, present, and future.¹¹⁵ The writer of 1 Peter is reconfiguring his readers' story within the wider story of Christ and Israel, and it is this wider story which imbues meaning to who they were, who they are, and who they will be.

The notion of ethnic imagination is also an appreciative nod to Benedict Anderson's description of nation-states as "imagined communities". They are "imagined", writes Anderson, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹¹⁶ To some extent, the same is true for many so-called "communities" today, such as the "LGBT community" or the "academic community". According to Anderson, it was only possible to imagine the nation-state after the "great transcontinental sodalities" of imagined religious communities – Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and so on – began to disintegrate.¹¹⁷ Prior to that, these so-called "religious sodalities" played a key role in the individual's conception of society and belonging.

As I will argue in this dissertation, 1 Peter seeks to incorporate its readers into the imagined community of Israel. They are united not by legal systems nor passports but through a sense of common purpose, worldview, and way of life. The letter does not do this

¹¹⁴ Hays 2005:5-6; Wayne Meeks offers the term "resocialization", which rightly highlights the social dimensions of this transformation, but perhaps obscures the fact that the transformation was more than just social (Meeks 1986:13-14).

¹¹⁵ Boring 1999:183-201; Boring 2007:7-40; Green 2007:197-202; Joseph 2012:33-68.

¹¹⁶ Anderson 2006:6.

¹¹⁷ Anderson 2006:36.

through rationality nor argument, but by retelling the scriptural narrative and inscribing the readers within that story.

(1.2) 1 Peter in Place and Time

This dissertation is guided by questions of history, so a brief discussion about 1 Peter's background is necessary. The letter begins with the following introduction: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1.1). For most of Christian history, interpreters have taken this prescript at face value – the letter was written by the apostle Simon Peter, some time before his death under Nero (c. 68 CE),¹¹⁸ addressing Christians residing in the five named regions of northern and western Anatolia. Over the past century, however, this supposed historical context has been challenged.

(1.2.1) Date of Composition

Questions first began to be raised about the letter's *terminus a quo*. If the letter was composed in Rome, as many suppose, then it must postdate Peter's arrival there, approximately 60 CE.¹¹⁹ Yet many have argued for a later *terminus a quo* based on internal evidence. For instance, Reinhard Feldmeier suggests that the use of "Babylon" as a cipher for Rome in 1 Pet 5.13 requires a dating after 70 CE, because only after the fall of the Jerusalem temple do we find texts describing Rome as Babylon.¹²⁰ Feldmeier also believes that the use of the label "Christian" in 1 Pet 4.16 hints at a date of composition after Nero's reign, commenting that the tensions between Christians and non-Christians implied throughout 1 Peter seem to fit better with the last two or three decades of the first century.¹²¹ If these concerns are valid, they suggest an earliest date of composition of around 70 CE. Inasmuch as these are valid considerations, however, they are not watertight arguments. As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, there are no concrete reasons why 1 Peter's use of "Babylon" and "Christian" necessarily require a post-70 CE date of composition, though it might

¹¹⁸ An event recorded by Tertullian (*Scorp.* 15) and Jerome, (*Vir. ill.* 1).

¹¹⁹ See discussion on authorship and origins below.

¹²⁰ Feldmeier 2008:33; see discussion below on the letter's purported origins.

¹²¹ Feldmeier 2008:33-34.

challenge us to rethink our interpretation of certain passages in this letter. We cannot rule out 60 CE as a plausible *terminus a quo*.

The letter's *terminus ad quem*, leaving aside for now the question of authorship, has been a less thorny issue. Polycarp's letter to the Philippians (c. 120-130 CE) seems to echo expressions in 1 Peter, such as the phrase *χαρᾷ ἀνεκκλήτῳ καὶ δεδοξασμένῳ* in *Pol. Phil.* 1.3 (cf. 1 Pet 1.8).¹²² Given the widespread acceptance of 1 Peter's authority among the early Church and explicit citation of 1 Peter by Irenaeus around 180 CE (*Haer.* 4.9.2), a *terminus ad quem* of 120 CE seems reasonable.¹²³ In fact, some would push the date forward by several decades, to the mid-90s CE. Williams and Horrell argue for the literary dependence of 1 Clement on 1 Peter based on both "shared language" and "shared textual alteration" between the two documents.¹²⁴ 1 Clement 49.5 has the phrase *ἀγάπη καλύπτει πλῆθος ἁμαρτιῶν*, for example, which is the exact same expression we find in 1 Pet 4.8, where Peter is probably altering a Greek version of Prov 10.12.¹²⁵ Assuming that 1 Clement was written around 95–97 CE,¹²⁶ that would shift 1 Peter's *terminus ad quem* to the early 90s CE. Moreover, during his governorship of Bithynia and Pontus (c. 112 CE), Pliny mentions people who had been Christians for at least 20 years (*Ep.* 10.96), likewise suggesting that there were Christians in this area by the early 90s CE. For these reasons, many scholars generally support a *terminus ad quem* of 100 CE, with most favouring a date between 80-90 CE.¹²⁷

As a working hypothesis, a date of composition between 60 and 95 CE is most likely. To narrow our field of possible dates, we must address the question of authorship.

¹²² See also *Phil.* 8.1 (cf. 1 Pet 2.22, 24) (Williams and Horrell 2023:88; Merkt 2014:169).

¹²³ Elliott 2000:135. Representing a minority position, Marlis Gielen is one of the few scholars to argue for a date of composition after 120 CE (Gielen 2013:161-183), her hypothesis leaning heavily on a connection between Hadrian's travels and the provinces mentioned in 1 Pet 1.1b. However, the supporting evidence is weak and the argument has not convinced many.

¹²⁴ Williams and Horrell 2023:90.

¹²⁵ Williams and Horrell 2023:90.

¹²⁶ Holmes 2007:36-37.

¹²⁷ Achtemeier 1996:49; Elliott 2000:136; Feldmeier 2008:40; Goppelt 1993:47; Williams and Horrell 2023:115.

(1.2.2) Authorship

Eusebius and Jerome regarded the apostle Simon Peter as the author of 1 Peter,¹²⁸ a claim which went entirely unchallenged in the early Church, despite the questions surrounding authorship of the other so-called Catholic Epistles. If true, however, then 1 Peter must have been composed before Peter's death in 68 CE.¹²⁹ However, if scholars are right to suggest a date of composition after 70 CE, that naturally leads us to question whether Peter really wrote this letter. Moreover, two additional factors suggest pseudonymous authorship:

1. The letter's elevated level of Greek seems contrary to what we read elsewhere concerning Simon Peter as an uneducated fisherman (Acts 4.13).
2. The citation of the OT exclusively in the Septuagintal translation and never from the Hebrew Bible is atypical for an Aramaic-speaking Galilean.¹³⁰

These reasons, alongside the factors pointing to a post-70 CE date of composition, lead many scholars to posit that Simon Peter was not the letter's actual author.¹³¹ "The best working hypothesis," Paul Achtemeier proposes, "is anonymous authorship of a pseudonymous letter that, in its intent to be apostolic, drew on traditions historically associated with Simon Peter."¹³² However, the evidence remains inconclusive. Based on her analysis of the letter's syntax, Karen Jobes has argued that, despite the high quality of Greek, there is nonetheless a degree of "Semitic interference" which suggests that the author was a native Semitic speaker.¹³³ It is not implausible, after all, that Simon Peter could have developed an excellent command of Greek by the end of his life; the second-century satirist Lucian of Samosata, for example, was most probably a native Aramaic speaker, but exhibits stellar Greek in his literary works.¹³⁴ Moreover, the perception of Simon Peter as an uneducated fisherman comes solely from the Gospels and Acts, and the description of him and John as ἀγράμματοί and ἰδιῶται in Acts 4.13 may reflect the author's desire to contrast them with Jerusalem's religious elite. Elsewhere, Peter is presented as an eloquent spokesperson (e.g. Acts 2.14-39;

¹²⁸ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.19.9; Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 1.

¹²⁹ William M. Ramsay has argued that Peter was not executed by Nero, and instead believes that Peter wrote this letter around 80 CE (Ramsay 1893:283); the theory receives very tentative support from J.R. Michaels (Michaels 1988:lxix), but has otherwise failed to convince.

¹³⁰ Feldmeier 2008:33-34.

¹³¹ Bechtler 1998:46; Boring 1999:30; Elliott 2000:118-130; Feldmeier 2008:38-39; Williams and Horrell 2023:162-163.

¹³² Achtemeier 1996:43.

¹³³ Jobes 2022:443-457.

¹³⁴ Jones 1986:7.

3.12-26). Unfortunately, given the contested origins of 2 Peter, we do not have any undisputed writings from Simon Peter with which to compare 1 Peter's literary style. One additional possibility is that the author was helped by an amanuensis who had a better command of Greek, such as the Silvanus mentioned in 1 Pet 5.12. For these reasons, some scholars argue that 1 Peter was indeed authored by the apostle Peter, possibly with a secretary's assistance.¹³⁵

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to resolve these questions of authorship and dating, though I hope to shed greater light on several key issues, such as the question of Gentile inclusion or the use of "Christian" in 1 Pet 4.16, which are sometimes touted as reasons for or against particular dates of composition. My findings may strengthen or weaken the pillars which others use in reconstructing 1 Peter's historical context. For now, my working assumption is that 1 Peter was written around 60-95 CE, either by Simon Peter or one of his associates. For convenience, I will use "Peter" when speaking of the implied author. Where a difference in authorship or date of composition significantly influences my interpretation, I will acknowledge the various possibilities in my argument.

(1.2.3) Origins & Destination

In contrast to the stormy debates concerning the dating and authorship of 1 Peter, there is greater concord over the letter's geographical origins and destination. As noted earlier, most suppose that the letter was written in Rome, due to three interconnected reasons:

- 1) 1 Pet 5.13 mentions greetings from "the co-elect in Babylon". This συνεκλεκτὴ probably refers to a Christian community, and "Babylon" functions as a cipher for Rome in several other early Christian texts (e.g. Rev 17–18).¹³⁶
- 2) The other possible referents for "Babylon" are unlikely candidates for the letter's origins. Babylon in Mesopotamia, though a thriving city with a flourishing Jewish population by the fourth century CE, is described by authors in the first and second centuries as a deserted and decaying place.¹³⁷ Moreover, the city only came under Roman rule in 116 CE, so 1 Peter's injunction to "honour the emperor" (2.17) seems odd if writing from Parthia to Anatolia's Roman

¹³⁵ Jobses 2022:52; Keener 2021:25; Reese 2022:19.

¹³⁶ Hidalgo 2018:216; see Section 2.4 of this thesis for further discussion on 1 Pet 5.13.

¹³⁷ Strabo, *Geog.* 16.1.5; Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 6.121-122; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 2.9.9 (cf. Boiy 2004:76).

provinces. The other option, Babylon in Egypt, was built by Nebuchadnezzar and subsequently developed by later rulers, especially Trajan (Claudius Ptolemy, *Geog.* 4.5). Yet we find no mention of Peter ever residing there. The silence is all the more surprising given the subsequent growth of Christianity in Egypt by the late second century.

- 3) In contrast to Babylon in Mesopotamia and Babylon in Egypt, early Christian tradition overwhelmingly associates Simon Peter with Rome, especially in his final years. As Markus Bockmuehl notes, “there are simply *no competing localities* for Peter’s tomb, during this period or indeed later, East or West, orthodox or heretical, Jewish, pagan, or Christian.”¹³⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons writes of Peter and Paul founding and organising the church in Rome (*Haer.* 3.3.2), and Clement of Alexandria, according to Eusebius, likewise writes about Peter preaching in Rome (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.6). As noted above, if Peter spent some time in Egyptian Babylon, it would be odd if even the Alexandrian theologian betrayed no knowledge of this and instead associates the apostle with Rome.

For these reasons, it has been largely accepted that the letter was likely composed in Rome, whether by Peter or an anonymous author.¹³⁹ This has been the standard position at least from the time of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.15.1-2).

Most commentators likewise assume that the letter’s destination was the five provinces mentioned in 1 Pet 1.1 – Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.¹⁴⁰ There are no strong reasons to doubt this claim. We know from Paul’s letters and the Acts of the Apostles that the early Christian movement had spread to parts of Galatia and Asia Minor by the middle of the first century.¹⁴¹ Pliny’s aforementioned correspondence with Trajan likewise informs us that there had been Christians in the province of Pontus and Bithynia at least since the 90s CE (*Ep.* 10.96). It is thus entirely plausible that a letter might be addressed to Christians there in the latter half of the first century. Although Simon Peter, to our knowledge, had not travelled to these regions,¹⁴² he may have felt compelled to encourage believers there given his prominent role within the Church, or his associates may have written

¹³⁸ Bockmuehl 2010:131, emphasis his.

¹³⁹ Goppelt 1993:373-375.

¹⁴⁰ A few manuscripts omit either “Asia” or “Bithynia”.

¹⁴¹ Goppelt 1993:3-4.

¹⁴² Eusebius’ statement that Peter had preached to believers in these regions in *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.1 seems to be an inference drawn from the list of addressees in 1 Pet 1.1 and from the desire to show the geographical extents to which the apostles had travelled.

in his name for the same reason. As Lutz Doering has argued, 1 Peter bears many similarities with Jewish diaspora letters, documents that “involve attribution (factual or fictitious) to an authoritative addressor and communication with Judeans or Jews resident outside the Land of Israel or on its fringes.”¹⁴³ I will explore the implications of this generic similarity in the next chapter; suffice to say that a letter from Rome addressing communities of believers in Anatolia, attributed to one of the Church's main leaders, is historically plausible.

Will Robinson and Stephen Llewelyn, however, have offered an alternative hypothesis, speculating that the prescript in 1 Pet 1.1 is part of the narrative fiction of a deceased apostle addressing remote Christian communities, and that the letter's real destination was in fact Rome. Robinson and Llewelyn recognise that pseudepigraphy was not widely accepted by early Christians; in fact, both Tertullian and Eusebius censure this practice.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, were a church in Pontus or Galatia to receive a letter purportedly from the apostle Peter some twenty years after his death, such a letter would probably have been rejected as inauthentic. Robinson and Llewelyn thus propose that a pseudonymous author listed the five provinces in 1 Pet 1.1 to give the impression that the letter had indeed been sent by Simon Peter to these distant regions in the 60s CE but was only recently recovered. Thus the “real audience”, whose situation the writer(s) sought to address, was the church in Rome.¹⁴⁵ Yet this hypothesis suffers from several problems. For one, it remains unclear why the Church in Rome would unquestioningly accept as authentic a letter allegedly written by Peter while he resided among them, which was then “rediscovered” several years after his passing. The hypothesis perhaps assumes that none of the Roman Christians in 65 CE were around by 90 CE. Moreover, Anatolia is surely not as remote as Robinson and Llewelyn suggest. Believers travelled and communicated with each other across the eastern Mediterranean, and if they wanted to ascertain the veracity of the document the Roman Christians could have asked believers in Asia, Pontus, and Galatia if a Petrine letter had indeed been sent to them in the 60s CE. Nonetheless, in attempting to offer a plausible historical reconstruction, Robinson and Llewelyn have rightly highlighted a weakness with the theory of pseudonymous authorship: if the letter was composed a few decades after Peter's death, the addressees in Anatolia would probably have doubted the epistle's authenticity. Yet this does not explain the general acceptance of 1 Peter in the early Church (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1).

¹⁴³ Doering 2009:225.

¹⁴⁴ Tertullian, *Bap.* 17.2; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.12.1-6; Robinson and Llewelyn 2020:945.

¹⁴⁵ Robinson and Llewelyn 2020:945-946.

What else do we know about the letter's readers? There has been some debate about whether the letter addresses "Jewish Christians" or "Gentile Christians". The former view finds support from Eusebius, who wrote:

From the Epistle which we have spoken of as indisputably Peter's, in which he writes to those of the Hebrews in the Dispersion of Pontus and Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, it would be clear from his own words in how many provinces he delivered the word of the New Testament by preaching the Gospel of Christ to those of the circumcision.¹⁴⁶

A modern proponent of this position is Ben Witherington III, who argues that the external and internal evidence of the letter points towards a Jewish audience. He argues that letter's description of its addressees as "elect exiles of the diaspora" (1 Pet 1.1), for instance, reveals "the language of the Jewish Diaspora."¹⁴⁷ Similarly, he posits that the injunction to live honourably "among the Gentiles (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν)" (2.12) must imply that the readers were non-Gentiles; for Witherington, this can only mean Jews.¹⁴⁸ We also know from archaeological and literary sources that there was a significant Jewish population in the regions mentioned in 1 Pet 1.1, with Acts 2.9 telling us that Jews from Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia had travelled to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost and had heard Peter's speech.¹⁴⁹ It is possible that some Jews from this area became Christians, with Acts 18.2-3 mentioning the believer Aquila as a Jew from Pontus. In addition, a variant of this position was proposed by W.C. van Unnik, who argued that 1 Peter's readers were Jewish proselytes who later converted to Christianity, though this position has found scant acceptance.¹⁵⁰

In contrast, several passages in 1 Peter suggest that the intended readers include a substantial number of non-Jews. Peter reminds them, for example, of their former "ignorance" of God (1.14) and the "futile way of life inherited from your ancestors" (1.18),

¹⁴⁶ "ἐκ τῶν Πέτρου δὲ λέξεων ἐν ὁπόσαις καὶ οὗτος ἐπαρχίαις τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς τὸν Χριστὸν εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὸν τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης παρεδίδου λόγον, σαφὲς ἂν εἴη ἀφ' ἧς εἰρήκαμεν ὁμολογουμένης αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολῆς, ἐν ᾗ τοῖς ἐξ Ἑβραίων οὖσιν ἐν διασπορᾷ Πόντου καὶ Γαλατίας Καππαδοκίας τε καὶ Ἀσίας καὶ Βιθυνίας γράφει"

(Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.4.2; LCL 153:194-195); cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.2; Jerome *Vir. ill.* 1.

¹⁴⁷ Witherington III 2007:24.

¹⁴⁸ Witherington III 2007:66; see Chapter 4 on why the derogatory statements concerning "Gentiles" in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3 need not imply that the readers are Jews.

¹⁴⁹ Trebilco 1991:189; While the writer of Acts may be exaggerating the diversity of Peter's audience, he clearly expects his reader to find his claim plausible; all the other regions mentioned are places where we might expect to find Jews.

¹⁵⁰ van Unnik 1980:81.

expressions which suggest a pagan past.¹⁵¹ Similarly, 1 Pet 4.3-4 reminds them that they “have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do.” It thus seems unlikely that the readers would have consisted exclusively of Jews, and most commentators currently posit that the intended audience would likely have included both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁵² As John Elliott notes, this would be “consistent with the heterogeneity of the populations of Asia Minor in general and with the constituencies of the Christian communities described throughout the NT.”¹⁵³ Furthermore, Ramsay Michaels cautions us against assuming that Peter was familiar with the actual situation and historical context of his readers – whom our writer *imagines* as his readers may be quite different from the first readers who heard or read this letter. All said and done, we must admit that we are engaging primarily with the *imagined audience* of 1 Peter, while employing historical data about first-century Anatolia to shape our understanding of how a writer in Rome might have imagined Christian communities in these regions.¹⁵⁴

At any rate, our tendency to speak about “Jewish” or “Gentile” audiences belies an assumed separation between these categories. The evidence in fact suggests a significant degree of mutual engagement between Jews and non-Jews.¹⁵⁵ Josephus writes, for example, that the Jews in Antioch “were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, I have already explained the potential pitfalls concerning “Gentiles” as a label.¹⁵⁷ For one, we tend to use it as an immutable category – once a Gentile, always a Gentile – whereas the boundaries of this term may actually be rather porous. Furthermore, the label often masks the huge cultural diversity in this region. Writing a history of Asia Minor, Christian Marek titled his book *In the Land of a Thousand Gods*, and it is a title that aptly captures the religious plurality of this region.¹⁵⁸ Anatolia’s geographical location between Europe and Asia made it a significant site of both trade and conquest – the Hittites, Phrygians, Cimmerians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans all occupied Anatolia in the centuries before Christ, not to mention smaller polities which occupied parts of this region,

¹⁵¹ Elliott 2000:96.

¹⁵² Elliott 2000:95-97; Horrell 2008:48; Seland 2013:55.

¹⁵³ Elliott 2000:96-97.

¹⁵⁴ Seland 2013:44-46.

¹⁵⁵ Donaldson 2007:469-482.

¹⁵⁶ “...προσαγόμενοι ταῖς θρησκευταῖς πολὺ πλῆθος Ἑλλήνων” (Josephus, *J.W.* 7.45; LCL 210:320-321).

¹⁵⁷ See Section 1.1.2.

¹⁵⁸ Marek 2016.

such as the Celtic settlers in Galatia and the Pontic kingdom along the Black Sea. The monolithic label “Gentiles” does not do justice to the region’s cultural diversity.

Alongside Jewish communities in many cities, therefore, we thus find a varied admixture of deities and rituals. For instance, Strabo tells us that Cappadocia in his day had many Persian temples (*Geog.* 15.3.15).¹⁵⁹ At the same time, we find in the city of Comana, a marble inscription with a dedication from “the sacred synod of Apollo”, dated to 130 – 137 CE.¹⁶⁰ Margherita Cassia also observes a significant degree of syncretism, such as the cult of the Ὑψιστάρριοι (“Hypsistarians”).¹⁶¹ According to Gregory of Nazianzus, his own father was once part of this cult, which denounced idolatry and observed the Sabbath, but also rejected circumcision and revered fire and lights (*Or.* 18.5). The Hypsistarians are possibly related in some way to the cult of θεός ὕψιστος, concerning which we find numerous inscriptions in the Bosporan region from the third century, but also a first or second century inscription in Sinope, Pontus:

To good fortune. The vowing brothers, Aelius Threption Pontianus and Severus Macer, dedicated this to god Hypsistos.¹⁶²

According to Stephen Mitchell, “the worshippers of Theos Hypsistos were already widespread and well-rooted in the first and second centuries AD” and can be considered, from a historical perspective, “as a serious competitor with early Christianity.”¹⁶³ In summary, the “Gentiles” of Anatolia comprised numerous different cultures.

One religious phenomenon of particular significance for 1 Peter is the rise of the Roman imperial cult. The practice of ruler veneration in Anatolia predates Roman rule; during the Hellenistic period, the peoples in this region worshiped human rulers alongside the more traditional deities.¹⁶⁴ J.D. Mikalson, however, draws a useful distinction between the veneration of Hellenistic rulers and the veneration of “real gods”:

At times, a ruler might even identify himself with a god, with, for example, both Demetrios Poliorketes and Ptolemy XII claiming to be the ‘new Dionysos’. The cults

¹⁵⁹ Panichi 2005:200.

¹⁶⁰ “ἡ ἱερὰ σύν[ο]δος τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος”; Baz 2007:123.

¹⁶¹ Cassia 2019:32-37.

¹⁶² “ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ | θεῷ Ὑψίστῳ | Αἴλιος Θρεπτίων || Ποντιανὸς Σεου|ῆρος Μάκερ οἱ | ἀδελφοὶ εὐξάμενοι” (ISinope 117, trans. Ascough et al.).

¹⁶³ Mitchell 2010:197.

¹⁶⁴ Martin 2020:86-89.

of these rulers and their family members were added to the cities' panthea and became part of their calendars of sacrifices and festivals, but these rulers were never quite 'real' gods on a par with the established deities of the state. They were given god-like if not truly 'divine' honors of sanctuaries, altars, priests, and festivals, but they did not receive from individual devotees, as real gods did, prayers and dedications, two fundamental forms of divine worship, nor were they expected to perform miracles.¹⁶⁵

The Roman emperor Octavian continued the practice of emperor veneration in Anatolia. Dio Cassius records this in his *Roman History*:

Caesar [Octavian]...gave permission for the dedication of sacred precincts in Ephesus and in Nicaea to Rome and to Caesar, his father, whom he named the hero Julius. These cities had at that time attained chief place in Asia and in Bithynia respectively. He commanded that the Romans resident in these cities should pay honour to these two divinities; but he permitted the aliens, whom he styled Hellenes, to consecrate precincts to himself, the Asians to have theirs in Pergamum and the Bithynians theirs in Nicomedia.¹⁶⁶

As Dio Cassius proceeds to explain, the degree of emperor veneration was more pronounced in Anatolia than in Italy. Wan Wei Hsien thus rightly draws attention to the "heterogenous character" of Roman imperial cults, stressing that the form of emperor veneration differed depending on one's time-period and location.¹⁶⁷ Against such a backdrop should we read 1 Peter's injunction to "honour the emperor" (2.17) and to endure the "fiery ordeal" (4.12) suffered by the readers. Peter was writing at a time when worship of Christ could be perceived as disloyalty to Rome's emperor, though the exact pressures and penalties suffered by believers are difficult to deduce from the letter alone.

(1.2.4) Literary Dependence: Peter, Paul, and the Canon

We now have a probable date of composition, a possible author, and a likely provenance and destination of this letter. How then should we locate 1 Peter within the history of the Jesus movement and to what extent should we lean on other early Christian writings to support our analysis?

¹⁶⁵ Mikalson 2006:214-215.

¹⁶⁶ Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 51.20.6-8; LCL 83:56-59.

¹⁶⁷ Wan 2019:52-53.

In modern New Testament scholarship, scholars are often urged to resist the temptation to read the documents as part of a canon. Conversely, there has been the accompanying tendency to regard each letter as a product of a specific “community” in early Christianity, with John Elliott, for instance, suggesting that 1 Peter was composed by a “Petrine community” in Rome, a *Schule* of Peter and his disciples with distinct theological leanings.¹⁶⁸

Recent decades, however, have witnessed a growing appreciation for a canonical approach towards the Catholic Epistles, led by scholars such as Darian Lockett, Margaret Mitchell, David Nienhuis, and Robert Wall. Despite differences in interpretation and methodology, the underlying assumption is that the Catholic Epistles constitute, in some form, an attempt to rebut, clarify, or buttress other early Christian texts which now constitute the New Testament. As Mitchell posits in her article, “The Letter of James as a Document Within Paulinism”, perhaps the author of James is “playing the essential role of steering the reading of Paul’s letters in the right direction.”¹⁶⁹ From a historical perspective, it seems very likely that the writers of the different documents engaged with each other and with other early Christian texts. This is more than hinted at in 2 Pet 3.15-16, where the writer explicitly appeals to Paul’s letters.

In the case of 1 Peter, if the writer of the text is Simon Peter, then the Pauline writings, the Acts of the Apostles, and early Christian memory all attest to numerous interactions between Peter and the other NT writers even after Jesus’ resurrection.¹⁷⁰ If 1 Peter was written pseudonymously and composed around 90 CE, we have even greater reason to assume some familiarity with early Christian literature. Operating around the same period in Rome, the author of 1 Clement clearly knows of Paul’s letters to Corinth (1 Clem 47.1). Within such a framework, Peter may have been ascribed as the letter’s putative author due to his symbolic significance as a unifying leader of the Church.¹⁷¹ Even if 1 Peter was not directly influenced by the other NT texts, they nonetheless represent documents which emerged from a similar social milieu.

At the same time, the idea that 1 Peter is part of a “collection” remains questionable. As Williams and Horrell have commented, two of our earliest copies of 1 Peter – the Bodmer

¹⁶⁸ Elliott 1976:248.

¹⁶⁹ Mitchell 2007:76.

¹⁷⁰ E.g. Acts 15.6-21; Gal 2.6-14.

¹⁷¹ Wehr 1996:214.

Miscellaneous Codex (BMC) and Crosby-Schøyen Codex (CSC) – do not situate this letter with the remaining Catholic Epistles.¹⁷² In the BMC, 1 Peter does feature alongside 2 Peter and Jude, but without James or the Johannine Epistles, while 1 Peter is the only NT text included in the CSC. Moreover, unlike the letter of James, we find very early attestation of 1 Peter (see above). If the letter was composed between 60–95 CE, as is commonly accepted, this would have predated the impulse to create a non-Pauline collection of letters, for Nienhuis proposes that such a movement arose only in the middle of the second century.¹⁷³

For these reasons, the notion that 1 Peter is part of a “canonically significant collection” may be misleading, insofar as it leads us to imagine that our author was somehow cooperating with the writers of James, Jude, 2 Peter, and the Johannine epistles to form a coherent collection of texts. Andreas Merkt is right to instead suggest that 1 Peter and 1 John were probably the first of the seven Catholic Epistles to be written, providing the nucleus around which the eventual collection later formed.¹⁷⁴ Yet the underlying assumption within this methodology, that the authors of these texts may have been consciously engaging with the ideas and works of other believers, is crucial. We should not be compelled to assume that 1 Peter always *agrees* with the other New Testament writings. But we must allow the possibility that differences in opinion or expression between early Christian writers do not necessarily imply the existence of distinct “communities” or “schools” with conflicting theologies.¹⁷⁵ Rather than regarding 1 Peter as the “product of a Petrine tradition transmitted by Petrine tradents of a Petrine circle,” as Elliott suggests,¹⁷⁶ I find little reason to suppose that the letter is the product of a specifically *Petrine* community.

With regard to Paul's letters specifically, similarities between 1 Peter and Ephesians and Romans have long been noted. Examples include the use of ἐν Χριστῷ in 1 Pet 3.16; 5.10, and 5.14 – the only NT document to include this phrase apart from Paul's letters. Yet we also encounter numerous differences, many of which will be discussed in this dissertation.¹⁷⁷ I thus propose that 1 Peter's author engaged with both Pauline and non-Pauline sources,¹⁷⁸ concurring with Leonard Goppelt's assessment: “But though this tradition

¹⁷² Williams and Horrell 2023:15-16; cf. Lockett 2017:108-109.

¹⁷³ Nienhuis 2007:235-237.

¹⁷⁴ Merkt 2015:15-31.

¹⁷⁵ Horrell 2013a:43-44.

¹⁷⁶ Elliott 1976:248.

¹⁷⁷ See the Appendix on the relationship between 1 Peter and Romans.

¹⁷⁸ Horrell 2013a:42.

has been influenced by Paul, it was not determined by him. It contained Pauline components but it did not derive from him directly.”¹⁷⁹

(1.3) Framing this Study

Anthony D. Smith's six criteria for the construction of ethnic identity provide us a framework for identifying and assessing ethnic language in 1 Peter, and this dissertation seeks to address all such instances in the epistle, as well as passages implying the negation of shared ethnicity. I could steer this investigation in various possible directions, such as an analysis of the writer's rhetorical strategy, but I have chosen to focus our attention on the historical and theological question of the relationship between “Church” and “Israel” within 1 Peter. Does the letter's ethnic language imply that the readers constitute a “new race”, and what does it imply more broadly about Israel in the writer's ethnic imagination?

In the next chapter, therefore, we examine the idea of Israel in 1 Peter, focusing especially on 1 Pet 2.9-10. Horrell describes this passage as a “uniquely dense collocation of ethnic identity language,” and it is a fruitful place to begin asking how and why Peter uses terms like γένος, βασιλείον, ἔθνος, and λαός to describe the readers.¹⁸⁰ All four epithets carry notions of peoplehood and are almost certainly drawn from Jewish Scripture concerning Israel (Exod 19.5-6; Isa 43.20-21). Why does 1 Peter apply to its readers titles which are proper to biblical Israel? Is Paul Achtemeier right to suggest that “the language and hence the reality of Israel pass without remainder into the language and hence the reality of the new people of God”?¹⁸¹ Moreover, the following verse (1 Pet 2.10) alludes to Hos 2.25 (= LXX 2.23), with Peter telling his audience, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people (οἱ ποτὲ οὐ λαός, νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ).” According to 1 Peter, who are the people of God?

In the very next verse, the readers are then addressed as πάροιχοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι (1 Pet 2.11) The NRSV's translation of this phrase as “aliens and exiles” captures the view among many commentators that the verse portrays the readers as “foreigners” to their native cultures. “This self-designation,” Reinhard Feldmeier argues, “implies a clear distance to

¹⁷⁹ Goppelt 1993:30; also Kelhoffer 2013:264-265.

¹⁸⁰ Horrell 2011:125.

¹⁸¹ Achtemeier 1996:69.

society, not just to its values and ideals, but also to its institutions and politics.”¹⁸² Chapter 3 examines this claim, critiquing some assumptions regarding foreignness, and instead proposing a different mode of interpretation which takes into account Jewish conceptions of “resident foreigners” in relation to Israel.

Chapter 4 builds upon this by looking at the term τὰ ἔθνη (“the Gentiles”), found in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3. As Paul Trebilco has shown, the New Testament writers had many labels for the movement’s outsiders, such as οἱ ἄπιστοι and οἱ ἁμαρτωλοί.¹⁸³ Yet in these two verses, 1 Peter uses the designation τὰ ἔθνη, a label found in Jewish writings to mark *ethnic outsiders*. Karen Jobes suggests that Peter is appropriating and redefining this label, such that it no longer denotes non-Jews but non-Christians.¹⁸⁴ In this chapter we will examine this claim, asking why 1 Peter speaks so derogatorily of “Gentiles” when many of his readers would have been non-Jewish by birth.

In Chapter 5, I will explore the use of familial metaphors in the letter. Both Katie Marcar and Janette Ok have rightly drawn attention to the language of kinship in 1 Peter as an example of ethnic discourse, including the interconnected metaphors of rebirth, inheritance, and spiritual milk in 1 Pet 1.3–2.3.¹⁸⁵ This chapter will examine some of their findings, and also touch on other passages which exhibit kinship language, such as 1 Peter’s reminder to its readers that they are “children of Sarah” in 3.6 and a worldwide “brotherhood” in 2.17 and 5.9.

Finally, in Chapter 6 we consider the “collective name” χριστιανός used in 1 Pet 4.16. This verse is one of only three occurrences of χριστιανός in the New Testament, and as the *Preaching of Peter* and *Apology of Aristides* indicate, this label *could* be used in ethnic discourse to signify a people distinct from Jews and pagans. Does the use of χριστιανός in 1 Peter indicate that the readers constitute a “new race”?

Chapter 7 offers a summary of the preceding arguments and situates this thesis within the study of early Christianity more broadly. I also consider important theological implications, including how our reading of 1 Peter impacts the doctrine of election in relation

¹⁸² “Die Selbstbezeichnung als πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι impliziert also – zumal dann, wenn sie zur zentralen Selbstbezeichnung wird – in jeder Hinsicht auch eine deutliche Distanz zur Gesellschaft, zu ihren Werten und Idealen, aber auch zu ihren Institutionen und zu ihrer Politik” (Feldmeier 1992:22, emphasis his, translation mine).

¹⁸³ Trebilco 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Jobes 2022:246, 366.

¹⁸⁵ Marcar 2022a:256-257; Ok 2021:35-60.

to Israel's status. Finally, I reflect on how ethnicity continues to be an important consideration for the Church today. As the opening story from Isaiah F. illustrates, all of us are shaped by our surrounding culture and community; the Church cannot "transcend ethnicity", but it can think deeply about how *all* believers – whether representing perceived minorities or majorities in a given society – undergo a holistic transformation when they turn to Christ. I suggest in this paper that such a transformation, in 1 Peter's imagination, is like that experienced by non-Israelites who join the people of Israel.

Returning, therefore, to our opening question: What changes when a person follows Jesus? Some argue that the early Christians had joined a "new chosen race" – formed into a people distinct from Jews and Gentiles.¹⁸⁶ Others argue that such language about ethnicity, especially in the New Testament, is purely "metaphorical", and insist that our writers conceived of the Jesus movement primarily as a *religious* movement.¹⁸⁷ The two research questions guiding this study will address this issue, offering an in-depth analysis of 1 Peter as a historical document reflecting the concerns and strategies of Jesus-followers in the first century CE.

¹⁸⁶ Buell 2005:45-46.

¹⁸⁷ Gruen 2020:202.

Chapter 2

Israel's Titles for a Gentile Audience

And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people forever, and you, O Lord, became their God. (2 Sam 7.24)

Who are YHWH's chosen people? For many Old Testament writers, the answer was Israel. 2 Sam 7.24 states that Israel has been established as God's people forever. Likewise, Deuteronomy chimes, "Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph!" (Deut 33.29). Even as Isaiah rebukes Israel for their disobedience, he prophesies, "On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no longer lean on the one who struck them but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (Isa 10.20). The children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it seems, were specially loved by God and remained in covenantal relationship with him despite protracted histories of idolatry, civil war, and eventual exile.

But who are YHWH's chosen people according to the New Testament? For many today, the answer is equally clear: the Church. The followers of Jesus, it is widely held, constitute the *new* people of God.¹⁸⁸ Is 1 Peter not addressing Christians when it states, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (2.9)?

How can both claims be true? Did YHWH revoke his commitment to Israel, transferring the gift of election unto the Church? Or are Israel and the Church running in parallel, both chosen and elect by God yet separate and distinct?

This is a thorny theological issue. In Protestant theology the so-called "covenantalist" and "dispensationalist" schools have emerged partly as an attempt to address this question. The Roman Catholic Church has not produced conflicting schools on this topic in like manner, but paragraph 877 of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.) states that Jesus instituted the twelve disciples as "the seeds of the new Israel." All parties rightly recognise that one's answer to this question has ramifications on wider issues such as Christian relationships with Jewish people today and the interpretation of OT prophecy.

The biblical scholar has every right to wade into waters theological, and we will dive deep into this issue with regard to 1 Peter, asking, "Who are YHWH's chosen people in 1 Peter's ethnic imagination?" As we will see, this question is intrinsically connected to

¹⁸⁸ Achtemeier 1996:69; Richardson 1969:173.

Peter's use of ethnic language and the imaginaries of peoplehood that the letter constructs. In keeping with the method and scope of this project, this is primarily a historical inquiry – we seek to understand the theology of a first-century text on its terms, without assuming that it necessarily coheres with other early Christian texts and recognising that it is a letter rather than a work of systematic theology. At the same time, the NT writers were theologians – people who believed they had encountered the divine, and sought to explore the ethical, soteriological, and ecclesiological ramifications of what God had done through Christ. It is only reasonable to suggest that they too cared about who God's chosen people are. Our study of 1 Peter must account for how the implied first-century author may have addressed this question, and in the conclusion of this dissertation I will reflect on the possible implications for modern-day theology.

Conversely, we will notice how our theological presuppositions often influence our reading of the text. Because 1 Peter is regarded by Christians as Scripture, for instance, there is often an impulse from commentators to interpret the text in a manner which conforms to societal values. Hence, we generally see from the second half of the 20th century a warmer attitude toward Jews and Israel compared to studies written from 1910 to 1950.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, we will encounter in this chapter loaded terms such as “Christian” and “Church”, used frequently in modern publications as shorthand for the imagined community of Jesus-followers around the world. Such terms can be problematically anachronistic; although we find *χριστιανός* in 1 Peter and *ἐκκλησία* elsewhere in the New Testament, the modern-day usage of “Christian” and “Church” differs significantly from that of the first century. With respect to the secondary literature, however, I will continue to use these terms, even as we interrogate and clarify their appropriateness over the course of this dissertation. Likewise, “Israel”, “Israelite”, “Jew”, “Judean”, and “Judaism” are key terms which are used inconsistently by many scholars. Are the terms “Israelite” and “Jew” synonymous? How should we translate *Ἰουδαϊσμός*? This chapter will begin to address some of these questions, and in the following two chapters we will continue to probe into the place of Israel in 1 Peter's ethnic imagination. 1 Pet 2.9, however, is an appropriate place to begin this inquiry.

¹⁸⁹ Horrell 2013b:345-347.

(2.1) “You Are A Chosen People”

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.¹⁹⁰

1 Pet 2.9 is one of the most pertinent passages for this project, as it draws together several terms which have strong ethnic connotations and which, in the Old Testament, were applied to the people of Israel. David Horrell writes that “the significance of 1 Pet 2.9 for the use of ethnic categories in constructing Christian identity may lie primarily in the simple fact of its having taken the terms γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός, and, drawing on established Jewish traditions, applied them to the Church.”¹⁹¹

Horrell is right to highlight the use of at least three words denoting ethnicity in quick succession. Γένος had a relatively wide semantic range, with the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* proposing five different definitions. It could, for instance, simply denote a “group” or “class”, such as Plato's mention of the “philosophical class” (τὸ φιλόσοφον γένος).¹⁹² However, it most often refers to a “nation” or “race”, as Telemachus expresses in Homer's *Odyssey*: “I am of the people of Ithaca (ἐξ Ἰθάκης γένος εἰμί).”¹⁹³ This notion of γένος is especially true in the LXX where it frequently refers to Israel, translating the Hebrew עַם in many verses.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, 1 Pet 2.9 probably borrows the phrase γένος ἐκλεκτόν from LXX Isa 43.20.¹⁹⁵

...for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people (עַמִּי בַחֲרִי / τὸ γένος μου τὸ ἐκλεκτόν), the people whom I formed for myself (עַמִּי יִצְרָתִי / λαόν μου ὃν περιποιήσάμην), so that they might declare my praise. (Isa 43.20-21)¹⁹⁶

In this passage, YHWH is addressing the exiled people of Israel, promising to rescue them from Babylon (43.14-19). 1 Peter therefore is applying to its readers one of the “honorific

¹⁹⁰ “ὁμοῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγεῖλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς κατέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φωτός” (1 Pet 2.9; NA²⁸). All NT passages are taken from NA²⁸ unless otherwise stated.

¹⁹¹ Horrell 2011:143.

¹⁹² Plato, *Rep.* 501e; LCL 276:66-67.

¹⁹³ Homer, *Ody.* 15.267; LCL 105:96-97.

¹⁹⁴ E.g. Exod 1.9; Lev 20.17; Est 2.10; see Horrell 2011:144.

¹⁹⁵ Doering 2013:103; Reese 2022:123; Vahrenhorst 2016:108.

¹⁹⁶ All quotations of the LXX are from the critical edition of the Septuagint edited by Alfred Rahlfs. While a variety of Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible were in circulation during the Second Temple period and beyond, Karen Jobes and Martin Vahrenhorst have shown that Rahlfs' critical edition of the LXX is largely similar to the Greek text which 1 Peter used (Jobes 2006; Vahrenhorst 2013).

titles of Israel” (*Ehrentitel Israels*).¹⁹⁷ The belief that 1 Peter adopts the γένος ἐκλεκτόν expression from Isaiah is further substantiated by the phrases λαόν μου ὃν περιεποιήσαμην and τὰς ἀρετάς μου διηγῆσθαι in Isa 43.21, which echoes other aspects of 1 Pet 2.9, as we will see shortly.

The second epithet in 1 Pet 2.9 is βασιλείον ιεράτευμα. It is most likely drawn from Exod 19.6 where YHWH speaks to Israel from Mount Sinai, but the meaning and interpretation of this phrase are contested.

...you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples (לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים / μὴ λαὸς περιούσιος ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔθνων). Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom (מַמְלַכַּת כֹּהֲנִים / βασιλείον ιεράτευμα) and a holy nation (וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ / ἔθνος ἅγιον). (Exod 19.5-6)

In Hebrew, the two nouns are joined in a construct state (מַמְלַכַּת כֹּהֲנִים), thus implying a “kingdom of priests” (ESV, NIV) or “priestly kingdom” (NRSV). However, in translating מַמְלַכַּת with the adjective βασιλείον, the LXX appears to offer a different interpretation of this phrase. The most common reading of LXX Exod 19.6 is that βασιλείον modifies ιεράτευμα, thus signifying a “royal priesthood”, an idea reflected in many modern English translations of 1 Pet 2.9 (ESV, NIV, NRSV).¹⁹⁸ An interesting alternative is Patrick Egan’s suggestion that βασιλείον be read as a substantival adjective meaning “kingdom” or “realm” in apposition to ιεράτευμα, with the phrase thus signifying “a kingdom which is a priesthood.”¹⁹⁹ Although grammatically unusual, it retains the sense of the Hebrew construct phrase and would more closely follow the pattern in the other three epithets in 1 Pet 2.9 where the noun precedes the adjective. It would also suggest that the readers constitute a “kingdom”, an idea which complements the use of γένος, ἔθνος, and λαὸς in this verse as terms signifying peoplehood. In the context of this thesis, Egan’s suggestion would therefore heighten the effect of 1 Pet 2.9 as a form of ethnic discourse, but regardless of how one translates this phrase, the most salient factor is that the author intentionally draws from a description of Israel in Exod 19.6.

Peter continues this theme in the third epithet, with ἔθνος ἅγιον immediately following βασιλείον ιεράτευμα in the LXX of Exod 19.6, translating וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ. Ἐθνος could

¹⁹⁷ Williams and Horrell 2023:663.

¹⁹⁸ Reese 2022:125.

¹⁹⁹ Egan 2017:109.

refer to a “nation”, as per the Philistines, Egyptians, or generalised “foreign peoples”.²⁰⁰ It is not often used in the LXX for Israel, but we do find a few instances in the OT apart from Exod 19.6,²⁰¹ and in Gen 25.23 we see it used in parallel with λαός. In the case of 1 Peter, the writer probably felt content to follow the LXX of Exod 19.6, plus using ἔθνος allows for a rhetorically emphatic collection of different titles. In describing the readers as ἅγιον, the letter not only follows the characterisation of Israel in Exod 19.6 but echoes its earlier injunction for them to be holy (1 Pet 1.15-16), a command substantiated with a quote from Lev 21.8.

Finally, the epithet λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, could allude to either Exod 19.5 or Isa 43.21; as we have just seen, both passages contain similar expressions. Indeed, our author might be gesturing toward both passages, although the latter text may hold a stronger connection as Isa 43.21 also speaks of God's people proclaiming his excellence (LXX: τὰς ἀρετάς), which the final portion of 1 Pet 2.9 seems to echo. Λαός was a very common translation for עַם in the LXX and frequently referred to Israel, especially when paired with περιούσιος and its cognates.²⁰²

While Exod 19.5-6 and Isa 43.20-21 probably provide the main source of inspiration for 1 Pet 2.9, we see a similar parallel in Jubilees, which states, “No sin is greater than the sexual impurity that they commit on the earth because Israel is a holy people (יִשְׂרָאֵל עַם קְדוֹשׁ) for the Lord its God. It is the nation that he possesses (וְעַם נְחֻלָּה לֵאלֹהֵי); it is a priestly nation; it is a priestly kingdom; it is what he owns (וְעַם מַמְלַכְת כֹּהֲנִים וְסֻגּוּלָה)”.²⁰³ The people of Israel are once more described as a “holy people”, a “priestly kingdom”, and “the nation that he [YHWH] possesses”. All this leaves us with a small problem: Why is 1 Peter applying the *Ehrentitel Israels* to an audience probably comprised of Jews *and* non-Jews?

The letter does not give us an easy answer. As Christoph Gregor Müller notes, “the classic themes of conflict which dominate the Pauline literature (Sabbath, circumcision, food laws...) play no role in 1 Peter.”²⁰⁴ Lutz Doering likewise observes how Ἰσραήλ is never explicitly mentioned in 1 Peter, and thus for him the “precise relation to Israel of those addressed as elect remains open.”²⁰⁵ Similarly, Horrell reflects on 1 Peter's purported silence

²⁰⁰ See Chapter 4 for additional discussion on τὰ ἔθνη in 1 Pet 2.12; 4.3, and in Jewish and Christian literature.

²⁰¹ E.g. Gen 46.3; Exod 23.11.

²⁰² Deut 14.2; 26.18.

²⁰³ *Jub.* 33.20; trans. VanderKam 2020:120; cf. Marcar 2022a:238-240.

²⁰⁴ “Klassische Konfliktthemen, die in paulinischer Literatur dominieren (Sabbat; Beschneidung; Speisefragen; ...) spielen in 1 Petr keine Rolle” (Müller 2022:218, translation mine).

²⁰⁵ Doering 2016:276.

regarding Israel, and concludes that we “can have no access” to the author’s intentions regarding Israel’s status, and it is up to the reader to construct “a positive place both for the Church and for Israel.”²⁰⁶

I disagree with this notion that 1 Peter’s perceived silence forces – or allows – us to take such an agnostic approach. Failure to mention Israel directly may stem from other factors, such as the author’s assumption that the readers already share with him a common understanding of this topic. Perhaps Peter did not think that the issue was contested, so he did not address it. The deuterocanonical *Letter of Jeremiah*, for instance, does not directly mention Israel, but that is because it assumes the readers remain part of Israel despite the exile. Hence, although Ἰσραήλ is not explicitly stated in 1 Peter, we can look at the numerous references to Jewish Scripture and figures from Israel’s history to reconstruct the underlying theological framework of the letter. If anything, the author’s silence regarding Israel creates “gaps” within his narrative world which need to be filled if his message is to make sense, and Kelly Liebengood has pointed out how readers of 1 Peter consciously or unconsciously fill in these gaps based on our presuppositions regarding the text.²⁰⁷

I believe these attempts to “fill in the gaps” of 1 Peter’s perceived silence regarding Israel can be grouped into four possible methods of interpretation. Each of these constitute a worldview which may coherently account for the use of Israel’s titles in a letter addressed to Christ-followers. While they do not represent established schools of thought, I would argue that they rest on mutually exclusive assumptions, and any study of 1 Peter either explicitly or implicitly falls into one of these camps.

(2.1.1) The Church as Israel’s Replacement

The first method of interpretation posits that the Jesus movement replaces Israel as God’s chosen people. Paul Achtemeier’s 1996 *Hermeneia* commentary on 1 Peter has been a major contribution to the study of this letter, and his conclusions on this topic are worth reproducing in full.

Yet there is more to this use of the OT than simply seeing in the people of Israel the model for, or the forerunner of, the Christian community as chosen people. In a way

²⁰⁶ Horrell 2008:105; cf. Horrell 2013b:348; Williams and Horrell 2023:687-688.

²⁰⁷ Liebengood 2023:209-211.

virtually unique among Christian canonical writings, 1 Peter has appropriated the language of Israel for the Church in such a way that Israel as a totality has become for this letter the controlling metaphor in terms of which its theology is expressed. Unlike Paul, who finds a continuing place for Israel in God's plan of salvation, 1 Peter has no references at all to Israel as an independent entity, either before or after the advent of Christ. Nor is Israel explicitly understood as a forerunner to the more perfect covenant realized through Jesus Christ, as is the case in Hebrews. In 1 Peter, the language and hence the reality of Israel pass without remainder into the language and hence the reality of the new people of God.²⁰⁸

The final line of this excerpt best sums up the “replacement” school of thought. For Achtemeier, Peter's lack of references to Israel equates to a lack of relevance for Israel. The “reality of Israel” recedes and is replaced by the “new people of God.” The assertion echoes Peter Richardson's statement that the epithets in 1 Pet 2.9 represent “a conscious attempt...to appropriate the *Ehrentitel Israels* for the new people of God.”²⁰⁹ Norbert Brox arrives at a similar conclusion, stating that Israel's titles were not transferred typologically from Israel to the Church, but were said about the Christian community originally and about no one else.²¹⁰ “It is now the church formed around and through the work of Jesus Christ,” writes Ruth Ann Reese, “that has become the chosen race and the holy nation.”²¹¹

Achtemeier's confident assertion rests on Peter's perceived silence concerning Israel as an “independent entity”. However, the argument cuts both ways – the letter also contains no such references to the Church as an independent entity nor as “the new people of God.” Moreover, while Israel does not appear as an abstract category, unlike Paul's letter to the Romans, the plethora of references to Jewish Scripture figures from Israel's history show that 1 Peter is interested in historic Israel and its connection to the readers. As we discussed earlier, the deuterocanonical *Letter of Jeremiah* makes no explicit reference to Israel, but it would be absurd to suggest the reality of Israel has “passed without remainder” in the author's worldview.

²⁰⁸ Achtemeier 1996:69.

²⁰⁹ Richardson 1969:173.

²¹⁰ Brox 1981:492.

²¹¹ Reese 2022:127.

This method of interpretation, of course, is influenced by our retrospective view of 1 Peter as a *Christian* document.²¹² Because later readers see in this document a forerunner of a movement which eventually diverged from Judaism, we are predisposed to assume discontinuity from other Jewish texts in the late Second Temple period which drew upon Jewish Scripture, rather than accept that our writer may share with them a similar theological worldview. Thus Betsy Bauman-Martin, for instance, offers a more critical reading of 1 Peter's perceived silence regarding the (non)status of Israel. She argues that 1 Peter represents a form of supersessionism, insofar as it "posits an 'other' to better delineate one's own group, plunders the resources of a marginalized group to delineate the self in relation to the colonial power and leaves that other group in a position of no value or status."²¹³ Through the appropriation of Israel's titles and Scriptures, 1 Peter presents the Church superseding the Jews as "God can have only one chosen people," writes Bauman-Martin.²¹⁴ Hence, 1 Peter presents for her a problematic replacement of Israel's status by the Church.

However, Bauman-Martin's argument has several weaknesses. According to her, 1 Peter is not Jewish because it differs from all other known representations of Second Temple Judaism.²¹⁵ However, our knowledge of this period is incomplete – much remains unknown about the beliefs and practices of the everyday Judean, the Jews living in the diaspora, or smaller groups such as the Therapeutae. Secondly, several sects within Second Temple Judaism saw themselves as distinct from the so-called mainstream. The sectarian documents from Qumran reveal a host of unique ideas: belief in a "teacher of righteousness" (CD 1.8-11), a conflict between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness" (1QM; 4Q491-497), and so on. Likewise, *1 Enoch* narrates how the "watchers" married and had children with human women (6.1–8.4). We do not, for this reason, consider these texts "un-Jewish", but rather expand our boundaries of what Jewishness was and could be in this period. Lastly, Bauman-Martin focuses only on the distinctives of 1 Peter's theology, ignoring the numerous points of overlap with other Jewish sources, such as the reverence towards Jewish Scripture and the use of τὰ ἔθνη to signify outsiders.²¹⁶ Despite her attempts to engage with Daniel

²¹² See Chapter 6 for discussion of χριστιανός in 1 Pet 4.16 and the extent to which 1 Peter is a "Christian" document distinct from Judaism.

²¹³ Bauman-Martin 2007:149-150.

²¹⁴ Bauman-Martin 2007:156.

²¹⁵ Bauman-Martin 2007:154-156.

²¹⁶ On the author's regard for Jewish Scripture, see the aforementioned statement concerning the prophets in 1 Pet 1.10-12, the quotation of Lev 11.44-45 and 19.2 in 1 Pet 1.16, and the lengthy citation of Ps 34.12-16 in 1 Pet 3.10-12 (Guttenberger 2013:124-129). On the use of τὰ ἔθνη for outsiders, see 2 Macc 8.9, with further discussion in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Boyarin, she does not convincingly respond to the growing consensus in biblical scholarship that the boundary lines between “Judaism” and “Christianity” remained porous in the first century CE.²¹⁷ In short, I agree that 1 Peter can be liable to supersessionist readings, but I would argue that the letter is *not* inherently supersessionist in the manner postulated by Bauman-Martin.

Bauman-Martin's critique may even be problematic from a postcolonial perspective. If we take seriously the possibility that the writer of 1 Peter was Jewish by birth, Bauman-Martin is imposing a particular vision of “Jewishness” when she writes, “1 Peter cannot be legitimately called a ‘Jewish’ text, but must be acknowledged to have moved past Judaism to something new and not Jewish.”²¹⁸ On what basis can one declare that a first-century Jewish person is not authentically Jewish? For that matter, can she tell the thousands of Jewish people today, who affirm 1 Peter as Scripture and follow its teachings about Christ, that their worldview is “not Jewish”? Recalling our discussion in the previous chapter on the malleability of ethnic categories, it seems that Bauman-Martin is policing “Jewishness”, equating any deviance from that standard with supersessionism and consequently “something new and not Jewish.” Bauman-Martin's critique is therefore a form of exclusion; it sets boundaries on who may be considered a Jew, and those who fail to fit in are no longer Jewish, regardless of their ancestry or shared customs. This strikes me as problematic, especially in the case of 1 Peter, which nowhere appears to renounce its Jewish heritage.

(2.1.2) The Church as Israel's Copy

Silence about Israel's status does not equate to the cessation of that status, and many other interpreters are unwilling to suggest that the reality of Israel has passed “without remainder” into the Church. Supporters of this second system of interpretation use a variety of metaphors, but generally envisage the Church as a *copy* of Israel, rather than its replacement, and either suggest that Israel continues as God's people in some way, or that 1 Peter simply leaves the question unresolved.

Janette Ok argues that Israel “serves as the backdrop or template for Peter's understanding of what it means to be a people of God for those who cannot claim to belong to Israel by natural blood ties but can claim to be part of God's people through supernatural

²¹⁷ Bauman-Martin 2007:153.

²¹⁸ Bauman-Martin 2007:155.

means.”²¹⁹ For her, this explains why Peter is “appropriating” the ethnic language of Jews and applying it to Gentile Christians.²²⁰

When Peter ascribes his beleaguered addressees with the community- and ethnic identity-forging titles and dignities of Israel in 2.9 drawn from Jewish Scriptures, he does not do so in order to replace Israel as the ‘people of God’ (2.10) or to incorporate them into the legacy of Israel or to transpose the status and identity of Israel unto the Church. Rather, as [David] Horrell explains, Peter draws on the specific traditions of Judaism because they are ‘a form of ethnic identity with religio-cultural practices at its heart’ that make it possible for him to construct the same form of identity for his addressees ‘without recourse to a specific territorial attachment or to biological (human) kinship links.’”²²¹

In Ok’s understanding, the Jewish people form the best parallel for the kind of community which 1 Peter envisions for its readers. The epithets in 1 Pet 2.9, and the letter’s use of the OT in general, allow the writer to construct an “ethnic identity with religio-cultural practices at its heart,” like that of the Jewish people. Similarly, Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer writes, “It is not that they are a replacement of Israel, but rather that the elect Christian community stand on the same level as the children of Abraham and the chosen people.”²²² Abson P. Joseph also posits that the readers have not replaced Israel, but that Israel functions as a “case in point” for the Church in the writer’s mind. Employing a narratological study of 1 Peter informed primarily by the work of literary theorist Mieke Bal, Joseph posits that the writer retells the story of Israel, Christ, and the letter’s addressees using a four-part fabula around the themes of Election, Suffering, Faithful Response, and Vindication. He writes, “The author of 1 Peter locates his message in the Old Testament and uses the experience of Israel as a case in point to help the suffering communities that constituted his audience make sense of their own situation.”²²³ Consequently, Israel serves as a model of God’s dealings with his people: if the readers respond faithfully in the face of their present suffering, they too will be vindicated as Israel was.

²¹⁹ Ok 2021:52, n.107.

²²⁰ Ok 2021:61.

²²¹ Ok 2021:60, citing Horrell 2011:161.

²²² “Dabei geht es ihm nicht um eine Ersetzung Israels, sondern darum, dass die auserwählte christliche Gemeinde auf derselben Ebene steht wie die Kinder Abrahams und wie das erwählte Volk” (Ostmeyer 2021:51; translation mine).

²²³ Joseph 2012:30.

Like the first stream of interpretation, advocates of this position assume that “Church” and “Israel” constitute separate entities. While recognising the element of continuity between the Jesus-followers addressed in this letter and the historic people of Israel, the latter mainly serves as a “case in point” or “model” for the former – believers can look to Israel for encouragement but remain fundamentally distinct as a community from Israel. Hence, while this method of interpretation seeks to avoid the charge of supersessionism that dogs the preceding hypothesis, it nonetheless stands upon similar assumptions. It too assumes that 1 Peter is “silent” regarding Israel. It ignores the fact that the author “appeals to Israel’s scriptures, epithets, privileges, and prerogatives in order to draw the readers into an implicit narrative that is organically connected to both the God of Israel as well as to the hopes and expectations of the people of Israel.”²²⁴ Moreover, Ok’s claim that Peter is drawing on “the specific traditions of Judaism” assumes a clear separation between Judaism and the Jesus movement while conflating Judaism with Israel. Both these assertions will be scrutinised over the course of this thesis.

(2.1.3) Readers as Jewish Christians

The shortcomings in the preceding hypotheses have been noted by other scholars. Moreover, some are wary of a “theology of replacement” in 1 Peter, recognising that such an interpretation has historically led to negative portrayals of Jews in the past and the present. Some scholars thus regard the letter’s intended recipients as *Jewish Christians*. Hence, the descriptions proper to biblical Israel throughout the letter are indeed applied to ethnic Israelites and are not appropriated to Gentiles. As Jim R. Sibley argues, “If 1 Peter...was addressed to Jewish Christians, then in 2:9-10, Peter is saying that the remnant of Israel (i.e. Jewish Christians) have entered into the role God announced for the nation in Exodus 19:5-6.”²²⁵

This proposal is not widely accepted, but it admittedly sidesteps some of the pitfalls encountered by the earlier hypotheses. For instance, it does not assume that “Church” and “Israel” constitute distinct categories in 1 Peter’s thought. Moreover, it takes seriously the view among some early Christian writers that 1 Peter was addressed to “Hebrews” (Eusebius,

²²⁴ Liebengood 2023:211.

²²⁵ Sibley 2016:73.

Hist. eccl. 3.4.2).²²⁶ The reasons for this belief are probably due to Simon Peter's historical association with evangelism among the circumcised (Gal 2.8), but it is at least plausible that the ancients saw in 1 Peter's application of Israel's titles grounds for assuming that the readers were ethnically Jewish. Yet this suggestion has its own set of stumbling blocks.

I have already noted in Chapter 1 the longstanding debates concerning the ethnic background of the letter's intended recipients, and why it seems likely that we have a culturally diverse set of addressees, most of them probably non-Jewish by birth. Additionally, Sibley's argument rests on some shaky claims. For instance, he asserts that "the church is never referred to as a 'race' or a 'nation'," ²²⁷ thus ignoring early Christian texts like the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and *Apology of Aristides* which do explicitly describe Christians in such language.²²⁸ Sibley also notes how 1 Peter refers to the community's outsiders as "Gentiles" (2.12; 4.3) and infers, "the clear implication is that [1 Peter's] audience is comprised of Jewish believers."²²⁹ Yet Sibley does not recognise the malleability of ethnic labels or the fluid use of "Gentile" in the New Testament writings, which we will address in Chapter 4.

In short, Sibley operates within a purely essentialist understanding of ethnicity, which prevents him from recognising how early Christians, including 1 Peter's author, used ethnic language to redraw the boundaries of insiders and outsiders. He is beholden to this assumption: If the readers are described as though they are Israelites, they must be Israelites *from birth*. This dissertation proposes an alternate reading.

(2.1.4) Incorporation into Israel

The fourth method of interpretation affirms that the Jesus community has been incorporated into Israel. John Elliott writes in his 2000 *Anchor Bible Commentary* on 1 Peter:

No reference is made here or elsewhere in 1 Peter to a "new people"... Here in 1 Peter (2:9-10), the point is that, through the mercy of God and their belief in Jesus Christ,

²²⁶ Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.2; Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 1; see also discussion in Section 1.2.3 concerning the 1 Peter's readers as "Jewish Christians".

²²⁷ Sibley 2016:68.

²²⁸ See Chapter 6.

²²⁹ Sibley 2016:66.

the believers are incorporated into God's ancient covenant people and share the heritage of ancient Israel.²³⁰

Elliott rightly observes that 1 Pet 2.9 nowhere speaks of a *new* chosen people (*pace* Achtemeier and Richardson). As we will see, however, "incorporation" is an ill-defined concept and some of Elliott's remarks concerning 1 Peter's use of "Gentiles" may suggest that the believers' alleged incorporation into God's covenant people comes at the exclusion of those who were Israelites by birth.²³¹ Focusing on a slightly earlier section of the letter, Gudrun Guttenberger likewise believes that 1 Peter's non-Jewish readers are incorporated into Israel. "The honorary titles of Israel are attributed to the addressees, not *instead* of Israel, but rather as *part* of Israel, as new members of the group," she writes.²³² Guttenberger suggests that 1 Peter's readers do not constitute a distinct entity from Israel but have been incorporated into Israel; they are new members of an *existing* group. "It is not that Israel has been superseded by gentile followers of Jesus," Liebengood writes, but rather, "their gentile heritage (narrative self-understanding, hopes, way of life, values, etc.) has been replaced with that of 'Israelhood'."²³³ Unlike the first two frameworks, this hypothesis does not view "Church" and "Israel" as separate categories in Peter's mind. Rather, Peter's readers are conferred the epithets of Israel in 1 Pet 2.9 because *they are part of Israel*, even those who are non-Jewish by birth. Though this is currently a minority position, I will demonstrate in this chapter why it is in fact a compelling method of interpretation.

Some would contend that my division of Petrine scholarship into these four main methods of interpretation regarding Israel is unfair. In particular, critics might argue that this idea of the Church being *incorporated* into Israel and the idea of the Church as a *copy* of Israel are not mutually exclusive. In his recent monograph *Narrative, Calling, and Missional Identity in 1 Peter*, for instance, David Shaw writes concerning 1 Pet 2.9 that "the church is grafted, indeed, they are *transported* into the narrative history and identity of Israel...Christian believers are incorporated into Israel's story and share in her renewed identity as understood in terms of the Christ event."²³⁴ Shaw explicitly uses the language of incorporation and his conclusion seems to cohere with Guttenberger's position. However, just

²³⁰ Elliott 2000:443 (emphasis his).

²³¹ See Chapter 5.

²³² "Von hier aus erscheint die Identitätskonstruktion von 1 Petr 2,4–6 in einem anderen Licht: Zugeschrieben werden die Ehrentitel Israels den Adressaten nicht *anstelle* Israels, sondern *als Teil* Israels, als neuen Gruppenangehörigen" (Guttenberger 2013:135; emphasis original, translation mine).

²³³ Liebengood 2023:214.

²³⁴ Shaw 2023:93-94 (emphasis his).

a few pages earlier, Shaw writes concerning the epithet βασιλειον ιεράτευμα that “within the OT...there was a missional aspect to the priestly function,” as God’s representatives to those who do not know him.²³⁵ He then adds, “It is these same functions that carry over to the NT church.”²³⁶ This statement supposes that “the NT Church” constitutes a discrete category in Peter’s mind, with an implied translation of functions from the priesthood to the Church. The underlying assumption that “Church” and “Israel” constitute separate entities is echoed by other conclusions in his book, such as 1 Peter’s use of the Israel motif as a means “to reinforce the church’s new superordinate identity as ‘elected rejected’,”²³⁷ and the idea that the readers’ story “paralleled Israel’s story.”²³⁸ For Shaw, Israel’s story has effectively concluded and the NT Church has taken over their mantle.

I mention Shaw’s work because, while his analysis of 1 Peter is excellent in many ways, it exemplifies how a slippage between “incorporated into Israel” and “modelled after Israel” can easily occur.²³⁹ If we think of Israel’s story as a *completed* story, one which is bound within the OT writings, then we can possibly conceive of “the NT Church” – to borrow Shaw’s phrase – as an organic continuation of that story. The Church continues where Israel left off, so to speak. It is in *that* sense, I believe, that Shaw speaks of incorporation. However, what if the story of Israel is *incomplete* and *ongoing*? What if Jewish writings continue to depict Israel, in spite of Roman occupation and the seeming dissolution of the northern kingdom, as a dispersed but united people with an eschatological future? I believe this is a more accurate description of Israel in the first-century Jewish imagination, and for the purpose of this thesis I will therefore define “incorporation into Israel” as the full inclusion of 1 Peter’s readers – even those non-Jewish by birth – into the imagined community of Israel in a manner which does not replace nor exclude native Israelites. Paul’s metaphor of Gentile believers being grafted into Israel like wild olive shoots (Rom 11.17-21) exemplifies this perspective. Contrary to Shaw’s suggestion, this metaphor does not imply that non-Jewish Christ-followers “parallel” Israel’s story, but they are drawn *into* that story alongside native Israelites. Although some of the original branches were broken off, Paul states that Gentiles were “grafted among the others to share the rich root of the olive tree”

²³⁵ Shaw 2023:91.

²³⁶ Shaw 2023:91.

²³⁷ Shaw 2023:86.

²³⁸ Shaw 2023:215.

²³⁹ See also, for instance, Lutz Doering’s statement that 1 Pet 2.4-10 contains “a massive transfer of Israel epithets” (Doering 2016:253) followed by the claim that “Israel is appropriated without being expropriated...the addressees somehow stand in connection with Israel” (Doering 2016:276).

(11.17). They do not constitute a new people but join an existing people. I will argue in this chapter that the ethnic language of 1 Peter supports this position.

(2.2) Hosea's Prophecy

1 Pet 2.9 is followed by another OT reference, albeit one which is more indirect and allusive than Israel's four epithets. 1 Pet 2.10 is not a direct quotation of any Old Testament passage, but a paraphrase of Hosea 2.23 (LXX 2.25).²⁴⁰ The idolatry and sinfulness of Israel's northern kingdom had provoked YHWH to the point where he tells the prophet Hosea, as an illustration of God's relationship with his unfaithful people, to marry a promiscuous woman, with whom he has three children, named by YHWH as Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah ("No mercy"), and Lo-Ammi ("Not my people") (Hos 1.4-10). Yet God assures Hosea that, after some time, he will have mercy on Israel and will restore them (2.14-23), culminating in the following declaration in 2.23:

And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'" (ESV)²⁴¹

1 Peter is most likely alluding to this passage in 2.10, where it states, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."²⁴² Apart from minor morphological changes, the most significant variation is the reversal of order, with Peter mentioning "not a people" before "not received mercy". We find this same order in Rom 9.25, where Paul uses ἀγαπάω instead of ἐλεέω. It is not clear whether these variations are due to a different Greek text of Hosea or the creativity of the New Testament writers. It is also debated whether 1 Peter's writer knew Romans, in which case 1 Pet 2.10's order may be derived from Rom 9.25. I have included a more detailed discussion on the literary relationship between 1 Peter and Romans in the Appendix. For the moment, we need to ask *why* 1 Peter is alluding to Hos 2.23, ascribing to its readers a prophecy concerning Israel's northern kingdom.

²⁴⁰ The LXX and MT have different verse enumerations; to avoid confusion, I will follow the MT unless otherwise stated.

²⁴¹ ἐλεήσω τὴν Οὐκ ἡλεημένην καὶ ἐρῶ τῷ Οὐ λαῷ μου Λαός μου εἶ σύ, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐρεῖ Κύριος ὁ θεός μου εἶ σύ (LXX).

וּרְחַמְתִּי אֶת־לֹא רַחֵם וְאָמַרְתִּי לֹא־עַמִּי עַמִּי־אֶתָּה וְהוּא יֹאמַר אֱלֹהִי (MT)

²⁴² "οἱ ποτὲ οὐ λαός, νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, οἱ οὐκ ἡλεημένοι, νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες"; Elliott 2000:441; Williams and Horrell 2023:680; Vahrenhorst 2016:109.

This verse is particularly relevant for the present research question for two reasons. First, Hos 2.23 is an OT statement concerning *Israel*. Unlike Jesus' citations of Ps 110, it is not a prophecy about the Messiah, nor an ethical instruction based on Old Testament law like Paul's quotation of Deut 25.4 in 1 Cor 9.9. Rather, Peter is directly applying to his readers a divine promise concerning the northern tribes who had been deported to Assyria. The second reason why this verse is interesting is because it is an *unfulfilled* prophecy. "On that day," YHWH declares, "I will answer...and I will sow him for myself in the land" (Hos 2.21-23).²⁴³ Yet that day, it seems, had not arrived. The ten tribes who constituted Israel's northern kingdom and to whom Hosea's message is addressed had not returned from their exile. Although some of their descendants had remained in the land after the Assyrian conquest and may have been the biological ancestors of the Samaritans,²⁴⁴ many Jewish texts seem to indicate that the ten tribes remain in some form of exile. In 2 Bar. 78.1, for instance, Baruch pens a letter to "the nine- and one-half tribes." Similarly, Josephus states that "until now there have been ten tribes beyond the Euphrates—countless myriads whose number cannot be ascertained."²⁴⁵

Several texts not only indicate that the ten tribes of Israel's northern kingdom remain in exile, but also anticipate their eventual restoration by YHWH. According to the prophet Zechariah, YHWH will "save the house of Joseph", and "the people of Ephraim shall become like warriors" (Zech 10.6-7). YHWH pledges to "bring them home from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria" (Zech 10.10). The story Tobit also anticipates Israel's restoration. Though probably written in the third or second century BCE, the tale is told through the eyes of a Naphtalite deported to Nineveh following the Assyrian conquest (Tob 1.1-2).²⁴⁶ Richard Bauckham describes the narrative as "a parable of Israel's story from exile to restoration," one which includes in its eschatological expectation "the return of the exiles of the northern tribes to the land of Israel and their reconciliation to Jerusalem as the national and cultic centre."²⁴⁷ As Tobit addresses the dispersed "children of Israel" near the end of the

²⁴³ Both "Jezreel" and "I will sow" are based on the root זרע (Stuart 1987:56).

²⁴⁴ Knoppers 2013:42-44; Tobolowsky 2022:66-106.

²⁴⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 11.133; LCL 326:376-379.

²⁴⁶ Hicks-Keeton 2013:97; The textual history of Tobit is complex owing to the variety of manuscripts (see Weeks *et al.* 2004:1-60). I follow here the Greek text from Codex Sinaiticus (Littman 2008)

²⁴⁷ Bauckham 2006:140-141; cf. Hicks-Keeton 2013:102.

book (13.3), he reassures them that God “will show mercy to all of you out of all the nations wherever you have been scattered.”²⁴⁸ In the next chapter, Tobit then adds from his deathbed:

God will pity them again and God will restore them to the land of Israel and they will again build the Temple, and not as the first, until the time of the appointed age has been fulfilled (οὗ ἂν πληρωθῇ ὁ χρόνος τῶν καιρῶν). And after these things (καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα), all of them (πάντες) shall return from slavery and will honorably settle Jerusalem and the House of God will be built in it, just as the prophets of Israel said about it. And all the nations in the whole earth (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐν ὅλῃ γῇ), everyone shall turn and revere God in truth and shall turn away from their idols which falsely have led them into error. (Tob 14.5-6)²⁴⁹

John Goodrich identifies in this passage two stages of fulfilment. We first see a “partial restoration” in 14.5a – *some* Israelites return to the land and the temple is rebuilt. With the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple under Ezra and Nehemiah, this partial restoration had become reality for the book of Tobit’s author. But in 14.5b Tobit adds that, “after these things”, *all* (πάντες) shall one day return from slavery and settle in Jerusalem. This represents Israel’s complete restoration, and in it all the nations will glorify God as well.²⁵⁰ Jill Hicks-Keeton states that “Tobit’s answer to the apparent problem that the prophets’ hopes have not been realized is that these expectations have already begun to be fulfilled.”²⁵¹ The return of the Jewish people from Babylon and the reconstruction of the Second Temple substantiates Tobit’s belief that God will fulfil his promise, as expressed through prophets like Hosea and Zechariah, to one day restore *all* Israel, including the northern tribes, and inaugurate the worldwide worship of YHWH by all nations.

While Tobit depicts the eponymous narrator as a Napthalite dwelling in Nineveh, some other Jewish texts are more ambiguous about the whereabouts of Israel’s northern tribes even as they anticipate their future deliverance from exile. For instance, 2 Esdras states:

And as for your seeing him gather to himself another multitude that was peaceable, these are the nine²⁵² tribes that were taken away from their own land into exile in the days of King Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser, king of the Assyrians, made captives; he

²⁴⁸ “πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐλεήσει ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν, ὅπου ἂν διασκορπισθῇτε ἐν αὐτοῖς” (Tob 13.5; trans. Littman 2008:36-37).

²⁴⁹ Littman 2008:38-39.

²⁵⁰ Goodrich 2016:49-51; cf. Bauckham 2006:154.

²⁵¹ Hicks-Keeton 2013:117.

²⁵² Some manuscripts have “ten” or “nine and a half”.

took them across the river, and they were taken into another land. But they formed this plan for themselves that they would leave the multitude of the nations and go to a more distant region, where no human beings had ever lived, so that there at least they might keep their statutes that they had not kept in their own land. [...] Then they lived there until the last times, and now, when they are about to come again, the Most High will stop the channels of the river again, so that they may be able to cross over. (2 Esdras 13.39-42, 46-47)

Unlike Zechariah and Tobit, 2 Esdras speaks of the northern tribes going to a “more distant region, where no human beings had ever lived.” This hints at the possibility that, from the writer’s perspective, the northern Israelites no longer constituted a distinct entity within Assyria. Like Josephus, 2 Esdras imagines the northern tribes to dwell beyond the Euphrates in some enigmatic, uncontactable state. Yet 2 Esdras still expects their eventual deliverance in “the last times”. It is true that this expectation of eventual return was not universally shared. One counterpoint comes from *b. Sanhedrin* 110b, which records Rabbi Akiva stating that the exiled tribes will never return, though this opinion is refuted by Rabbi Eliezer in the same passage. Nonetheless, we can reasonably conclude that, for most Jews around the time of 1 Peter, the ten tribes of northern Israel had not returned from their exile, with several writers still anticipating their eschatological restoration.

For these reasons, 1 Pet 2.10 is not merely another OT allusion in a letter replete with OT allusions. It forces us to reflect on why a purportedly Jewish author in the first century CE alludes to an unfulfilled prophecy concerning Israel’s northern tribes when writing to Jewish and non-Jewish readers in Anatolia. Several methods of interpretation have been proposed.

(2.2.1) A Hermeneutic of Discontinuity

One possibility is that 1 Peter has little concern for the literary or historical context of Hosea. Benjamin Sargent writes, “Peter shows no interest in Hosea’s relation to Israel in the past,”²⁵³ arguing that 1 Peter employs a “hermeneutic of discontinuity” akin, in his view, to the *pesharim* of the Dead Sea Scrolls. 1 Peter’s Jesus-following readers are the true referents of Hosea’s prophecy, and Israel in Hosea’s time is unimportant. Reflecting a similar position,

²⁵³ Sargent 2015:123.

Richardson states, “1 Peter begins to approach the position of some early apologists who imply that the Old Testament and the prophets belong especially (only) to Christians.”²⁵⁴ Karen Jobes posits that “Israel had broken covenant with Yahweh” and “was no longer his special possession in that it had forsaken its role as a royal priesthood and a holy nation.”²⁵⁵ Hosea’s prophecy thus indicates that “God would again constitute a people for his special possession,” with 1 Peter regarding its Gentile readers as the fulfilment of that promise, according to Jobes.²⁵⁶ The implicit assumption is that historic Israel is irrelevant for the author of 1 Peter and Sargent’s hypothesis thus fits well with the *replacement* interpretive method discussed earlier.

Sargent is right to observe that the *pesharim* use other Jewish writings in an allegorising manner. In *Pesher Nahum*, for instance, the tribes Ephraim and Manasseh represent the Qumran community’s opponents, probably the Pharisees and Sadducees respectively (4QpNah 3-4.iii; 3-4.iv.4).²⁵⁷ Similarly, the lion of Nah 2.11-12 comes to represent Alexander Janneus (4QpHos^b 2.2). While the possible similarities with the *pesharim* are interesting, however, the connection with 1 Peter is rather speculative. In terms of literary genre, there is little to suggest that 1 Peter stands in the same tradition as any of the *pesher* texts. 1QpHab 7.1-2 provides a good example:

...and God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but He did not make known to him when time would come to an end. And as for that which He said, *That he who reads may read it speedily*: interpreted (פֶּשֶׁר) this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the Prophets.²⁵⁸

As seen here, a characteristic of the *pesharim* is the expression that an interpretation (פֶּשֶׁר) is being offered, yet 1 Peter offers no such indication. In the case of 1 Pet 2.10, the writer simply assumes that the prophecy applies to the readers. Moreover, Peter’s underlying perspective on prophecy appears to be slightly different from most of the *pesher* writers. 1QpHab 7.1-2 indicates that God did *not* reveal to Habakkuk the timing by which his prophecies would be realised. On the contrary, only to the Teacher of Righteousness did God

²⁵⁴ Richardson 1969:175.

²⁵⁵ Jobes 2022:236.

²⁵⁶ Jobes 2022:237.

²⁵⁷ Bernstein 2008; Berrin 2008.

²⁵⁸ 1QpHab 7.1-2; trans. Vermès 2011:334-335.

make known “all the mysteries” of the prophets. This is a subtle but significant contrast with 1 Pet 1.10-12, a passage which Sargent cites in support of his position.²⁵⁹

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace intended for you made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the time and circumstances that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings intended for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you (οἷς ἀπεκαλύφθη ὅτι οὐχ ἑαυτοῖς, ὑμῖν δὲ διηκόνουν), in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look! (1 Pet 1.10-12)

The author certainly perceives a temporal separation between the “then” of the prophets and the “now” of the letter’s readers. However, 1 Peter states that God revealed to the prophets that they were “serving not themselves” but the readers. The “time and circumstances” may have remained a mystery, but Peter implies that the prophets, in some sense, knew that they were serving the letter’s implied readers, unlike what 1QpHab 7.1-2 suggests about Habakkuk. Contrary to Sargent’s hypothesis, therefore, the parallel with the *peshar* texts is not strong. Moreover, even if the *pesharim* propose an allegorical reading of Scripture, it does not necessarily imply that the historical sense of those texts is invalidated. Sargent’s proposal of a “hermeneutic of discontinuity” with regard to 1 Pet 2.10 is thus unconvincing.

(2.2.2) Reenactment

The second possible method of interpretation is reenactment. In the words of J.R. Michaels, “these gentile Christians are reenacting a chapter of Israel’s own history.”²⁶⁰ This implies that the salvation of 1 Peter’s readers is analogous to the restoration of Israel in Hosea; just as the northern kingdom had been rescued despite their disobedience and exile, Peter’s Gentile readers were saved through Christ and had thereby become God’s people. This interpretation also fits with Abson P. Joseph’s narratological model of 1 Peter, which

²⁵⁹ Sargent 2015:18-49.

²⁶⁰ Michaels 1988:112.

proposes that the letter intentionally draws a parallel between the story of Israel and the story of the letter's recipients.²⁶¹

However, this method of interpretation has one main shortcoming: You cannot “reenact” that which has not happened. As we discussed earlier, numerous Jewish writings from this period believed that the restoration of Israel's northern tribes was not yet fulfilled.²⁶² For Michaels' interpretation of reenactment, therefore, this presents a major problem. How could 1 Peter's readers be “reenacting” a chapter of Israel's history which had yet to take place?

(2.2.3) Gentiles as Israel's Northern Tribes

The third option is that 1 Peter sees salvation of Gentiles as the fulfilment of God's promise to restore Israel's northern tribes. This method of interpretation stems from a hypothesis proposed by Jason Staples in relation to Romans 9.

As noted earlier, Paul mentions Hosea's prophecy as well when he reflects sorrowfully upon the state of his fellow Israelites, his own “flesh and blood” (Rom 9.3-4). He speaks of God revealing his glory to those who are “objects of mercy”, referring to those whom God has called – both Jews and Gentiles.²⁶³ To drive home this point, Paul then explicitly cites Hosea in Rom 9.25-26.

As he also says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” “And in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they shall be called children of the living God.”²⁶⁴

Commenting on this passage, Staples argues that Paul sees in the salvation of Gentiles, the salvation of “all Israel” (Rom 11.26). Staples points to Hos 7.8, which states that Israel had become “mixed” (יְתִיבֹלֶל) with the nations, and Hos 8.8 where Israel is “swallowed up” (נִבְלַע) among the Gentiles.²⁶⁵ According to Staples, these passages indicate that the Israelites'

²⁶¹ Joseph 2012:172.

²⁶² E.g. 2 Esd 13.39-47; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.133; 2 Bar. 77.17–78.4; *b. Sanh.* 110b.

²⁶³ “...ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς οὐ μόνον ἐξ Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν” (Rom 9.24).

²⁶⁴ “ὥς καὶ ἐν τῷ Ὡσηὲ λέγει· καλέσω τὸν οὐ λαόν μου λαόν μου καὶ τὴν οὐκ ἡγαπημένην ἡγαπημένην· καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ οὗ ἐρρέθη αὐτοῖς· οὐ λαός μου ὑμεῖς, ἐκεῖ κληθήσονται υἱοὶ θεοῦ ζῶντος” (Rom 9.25-26).

²⁶⁵ Staples 2011:381; Staples 2024:203-205; cf. Fredriksen 2017:105.

conquest by Assyria and cultural assimilation with their surrounding pagan cultures had made them indistinguishable from Gentiles. For subsequent Jewish writers, this posed a problem: How will YHWH's promise to save Israel in Hosea 2.14-23 be fulfilled?

Staples posits that Paul responds to this conundrum by implying that the redemption of Gentiles is the fulfilment of YHWH's promise in Hosea to restore Israel's northern tribes. Not that Paul imagines all non-Jewish Christians to literally be the biological descendants of Israel's ten tribes. Rather, "Gentile inclusion is the means of Israel's promised restoration," Staples writes, "since Ephraim's seed was mixed among the Gentiles – thus God's promise to restore Israel has opened the door for Gentile inclusion in Israel's covenant."²⁶⁶ For God to fulfil his promise in Hosea, some of those deemed "Gentiles" must also be restored. An important rabbinic text which Staples cites to substantiate his argument is *b. Pesachim* 87b. Devorah Schoenfeld describes *b. Pesachim* 87a–88 as "the most in-depth discussion" of Hosea in the Babylonian Talmud,²⁶⁷ and in *b. Pesachim* 87b the text presents the insights of Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yohanan, figures from the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods respectively.

And Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations only so that converts would join them, as it is stated: "And I will sow her to Me in the land." [...] Rabbi Yohanan said that this idea may be derived from here: "And I will have compassion upon her that had not received compassion."²⁶⁸

The quotation here is from Hos 2.23, and according to this passage, Israel's exile allows ethnic outsiders to become "converts" (גרים), and for Staples it demonstrates how the assimilation of northern Israelites among the nations facilitates the inclusion of those deemed "Gentiles".²⁶⁹

How convincing is Staples' interpretation of Romans 9–11 and can it be applied to 1 Peter? His hypothesis remains contested for two reasons. First, it rests on a debatable reading of Rom 11.25-26. "A hardening has come upon part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in," Paul writes, "and in this way (καὶ οὕτως) all Israel will be saved." In Staples' proposal, the inclusion of Gentiles is the salvation of all Israel; a justifiable

²⁶⁶ Staples 2011:380.

²⁶⁷ Schoenfeld 2024:415.

²⁶⁸ ואמר רבי אלעזר: לא הגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא את ישראל לבין האומות אלא כדי שיתוספו עליהם גרים, שנאמר: "וזרעתיה לי בארץ" [...] "ורחמתי את לא רחמה" (*b. Pesachim* 87b; trans. Sefaria).

²⁶⁹ Staples 2024:208-209.

interpretation of οὕτως and a valid reading of this passage, but certainly not the only one. According to Robert Jewett, for instance, Paul here claims that the inclusion of Gentiles will “provoke” the conversion of Israel.²⁷⁰ This suggestion finds support in Rom 11.14, where Paul admits his desire to make his “own people jealous and thus save some of them” through his ministry to Gentiles. For Jewett, Rom 11.25-26 implies that the inclusion of Gentiles will *cause* the salvation of all Israel, but the two events are not identical. Moreover, the fact that Paul continues to use “Gentiles” and “Israel” as separate categories in Rom 11.25-26 suggests that believing non-Jews cannot yet be equated with “Israel” in the apostle’s mind. In fact, in Rom 11.28 Paul speaks of Israel, at the present time, as “enemies” (ἐχθροί), hinting once again that believing Gentiles have not completely assumed the mantle of “Israel”.

The second issue with Staples’ hypothesis is the lack of historical support for his interpretation of Hosea. We simply do not find Jewish writers from this period regarding the “mixing” of Israelites with the nations in Hos 7.8 and 8.8 as a sign that “Gentiles” have somehow become “Israelites”. Indeed, these two verses from Hosea imply the opposite: Israel’s assimilation with the nations had caused the Israelites to become like Gentiles. Moreover, as we saw with 2 Esdras, Josephus’ *Antiquities*, 2 Baruch, and *b. Sanhedrin* 110b, most Jewish writers believed the northern kingdom remained a culturally distinct entity; their exile had not caused the pagans to become Israelites. Even in *b. Pesachim* 87b, cited by Staples, the text does not imply that Israelites have *become* גרים, but that Israel’s exile facilitates the inclusion of גרים. Yet with certain adjustments, I believe that Staples’ insights can be fruitfully applied to 1 Peter.

(2.2.4) Gentile Participation in Israel’s Restoration

One implicit assumption for many scholars is that “Israel” in the OT refers exclusively to native-born Israelites. On the contrary, I will argue that God’s miraculous acts of deliverance in Israel’s story often lead to foreigners recognising his power, turning to him, and even joining the people of Israel as “non-native insiders”. Thus, although Hosea’s prophecy was directed to Israel’s northern tribes, non-Israelites will also be caught up in God’s act of deliverance. In alluding to Hos 2.23, 1 Peter is drawing from this wider spring of Jewish thought which envisions the ingathering of native-born Israelites *alongside* YHWH-worshipping foreigners. Our writer is not engaging in a “hermeneutic of discontinuity”, nor

²⁷⁰ Jewett 2007:701.

projecting a reenactment of an event that had not yet occurred, nor conflating Gentiles and northern Israelites. Rather, the incorporation of non-Jews into Israel through Christ's redemption represents the fulfilment of Jewish expectations concerning Israel's restoration. Furthermore, I suggest that the incorporation of foreigners is a consistent theme in Israel's story. We can see the beginnings of this already in the Exodus narrative.

When Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, the writer of Exodus tells us that he was accompanied by a “mixed multitude (ערב רב)” (Exod 12.38). According to G.I. Davies, the phrase “presumably means non-Israelites who also took the opportunity to leave Egypt.”²⁷¹ Similarly, according to Deut 1.16, Moses told the judges of Israel at Mount Horeb to “judge rightly between one person and another, whether kin or resident alien (בין-איש) (ובין-אחיו ובין גר).” This passage distinguishes between the “brother” (אח) and the “resident alien” (גר). We just saw in our discussion on *b. Pesachim* that the latter term could denote a “convert” in rabbinic literature, but in the OT it often describes a person of foreign ancestry who is a “permanent fixture” in an ethnically different society.²⁷² Thus Exod 22.21 states, “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien (גר), for you were aliens (גרים) in the land of Egypt.” Among the different terms used to denote foreignness in the OT, גר often implies a level of permanence and acceptance that distinguishes it from other labels, such as נכרי. YHWH tells Moses and Aaron that no “foreigner (בן-נכר)” shall eat of the Passover (Exod 12.43), for example, but “if an alien (גר) who resides with you wants to celebrate the Passover to the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land” (Exod 12.48-49).

The גר in the OT is thus a category of “resident foreigner”, distinct from the native Israelite and occasionally subject to different legal provisions. Deut 14.21, for instance, permits the גר to eat meat from a carcass, whereas the Israelite is forbidden from doing so. But Carly L. Crouch overstates this distinction when she suggests that the גר is therefore “excluded from activities relating to Israelite self-definition.”²⁷³ Her argument hinges on the fact that גרים are not explicitly mentioned in the instructions concerning Passover in Deut 16.1-8, despite being included in the Festival of Weeks (16.11) and Festival of Booths (16.14). In contrast, I would argue the opposite: the inclusion of גרים in the Festival of Weeks and Festival of Booths implies the inclusion of גרים in the Passover as well, especially since

²⁷¹ Davies 2020b:115.

²⁷² Rendtorff 1996:78; cf. Ebach 2014:39; Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:28-29; Ramírez Kidd 1999:28.

²⁷³ Crouch 2014:219; Crouch's argument focuses primarily on Deuteronomy.

Deut 16.1-8 nowhere mentions who can or cannot participate in the Passover, and Exod 12.48-49 and Num 9.14 explicitly speak of the גר taking part in the meal. The general picture of the גר which emerges from the OT is a category of “non-native insider” in Israelite law who participates in Israelite society and is subject to YHWH’s commands, despite several differences in *halakha*. There is some debate about whether the meaning of the label shifts over the composition of the OT, and Mark Glanville has argued that the גר may not always denote a “foreigner” but could identify “a vulnerable person who is from outside the core family,” particularly in Deuteronomy.²⁷⁴ Glanville is right to observe that Deuteronomy often depicts the גר alongside the widow (אלמנה) and the orphan (יתום),²⁷⁵ representing people in precarious situations. Yet the גר is nonetheless mentioned in apposition to the “brother” (אח): “You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers,” Deut 24.14 commands, “whether your brother or your resident foreigner (מאחיק או מגרך) who resides in your land in one of your towns.”²⁷⁶ The Deuteronomic material sees the גר as someone “other” than the native-born Israelite and thereby retains the connotation of foreignness.

Overall, the mention of a “mixed multitude” leaving Egypt and the presence of גרים at Horeb (Deut 1.16) implies that, according to the OT, foreigners were travelling among the people of Israel in the wilderness. From its very inception as an ἔθνος, the people of Israel included individuals of foreign birth. They too would have stood at the foot of Sinai when YHWH called Israel a ממלכת כהנים and a גוי קדוש (Exod 19.6). Forty years on, they remain part of Israel’s community as they renew the covenant at Moab (Deut 29.11) and prepare to enter the land of Canaan. Similarly, when Joshua renews the covenant once more at Ebal, the writer tells us that “all Israel” (כל־ישראל) participated, the גר as well as the אזרח (Josh 8.33). Moreover, the significant amount of legal material concerning the גר in the Pentateuch substantiates the belief that, within the Jewish myth of origins, the people of Israel consisted of “resident foreigners” as well as “native Israelites” – a term I will use in this thesis to describe those whom the OT refers to variously as the בני ישראל, the אזרח, or the אח. That is, regardless of the factuality or compositional history of Israel’s story in the OT, later readers of the text would gain the impression that those led by YHWH through the wilderness were not an ethnically homogenous entity.

²⁷⁴ Glanville 2018:604.

²⁷⁵ E.g. Deut 10.18; 14.29; 16.11; 24.19-20; 24.21; 26.12-13; 27.19.

²⁷⁶ Translation mine; cf. Deut 1.16.

In the next chapter of this dissertation, I will further develop the connection between Israel's גרים and the letter of 1 Peter, and I will also relate this category of “non-native insiders” to discussions about Jewish conversion. At present, I wish simply to highlight that YHWH's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt led to foreigners joining Israel and becoming part of their community. The people of Israel were not ethnically homogenous. This remains true over the course of Israel's story, and the OT even identifies some of these non-native insiders, without always explicitly calling them גרים. Perhaps the most famous is Ruth from Moab, who pledges to Naomi, “your people shall be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1.16) and is subsequently included in King David's genealogy (Ruth 4.18-22). We also have characters like Ittai the Gittite – a Philistine by birth – who is described by David as a “foreigner” (נכרי) (2 Sam 15.19).²⁷⁷ Yet Ittai remains loyal to David and accompanies the king in fleeing from Jerusalem. We do not know whether Ittai underwent circumcision, but he swears by YHWH (15.21) and is later appointed as one of David's three generals (18.2). Other individuals could be cited, such as Rahab from Jericho (Josh 6.25), Ebed-Melech the Cushite (Jer 38.7-13), and Achior the Ammonite (Jdt 14.10).

One interesting case study are the Gibeonites described in Joshua 9, for we here have a whole group of people who join Israel yet retain their distinctive ethnicity. YHWH had instructed the people of Israel to make no treaty with the Canaanites and to destroy them (Deut 7.1-2; 20.16-18). Yet the Gibeonites, having allegedly heard of YHWH's mighty acts on Israel's behalf (Josh 9.9-10, 24), trick Israel's leaders and form a treaty with them (Josh 9.14-15). When this ruse is discovered, however, Joshua curses the Gibeonites and makes them “woodcutters and drawers of water for the congregation” (Josh 9.27). Interestingly, these two tasks are used to describe the גר in Deut 29.11 who participated in the covenant renewal at Moab. This suggests that the book of Joshua is intentionally depicting the Gibeonites as גרים, a notion supported by the rabbinic text *b. Yevamot* 79a. Moreover, the people of Israel come to the Gibeonites' rescue in Josh 10.1-15, and the city of Gibeon is made a Levitical city in the territory of Benjamin (Josh 18.25; 21.17). It is even implied that king Saul descended from a Gibeonite (1 Chr 9.35), while Nehemiah and Ezra list the descendants of “Gibeon” (or its variant “Gibbar”) returning to Israel from Babylon (Neh 7.25; Ezra 2.20).²⁷⁸ Yet they remain sufficiently distinct enough that Saul could target and kill the Gibeonites, according to 2 Sam 21.2, an incident leads to writer to clarify, “Now

²⁷⁷ Sweeney 2023:270.

²⁷⁸ Dozeman 2015:414-415.

the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites" (2 Sam 21.3). The Gibeonites' amazement at God's miraculous acts on behalf of Israel led to them joining the Israelites yet remaining distinct from them.

In short, the incorporation of foreigners into the people of Israel as "non-native insiders" is a recurring and significant aspect of Israel's story. For many Jewish writers, it would also be a significant aspect of Israel's future. For example, the prophet Isaiah declares, "But the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel and will settle them in their own land, and aliens will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob (ונלוה הגר עליהם ונספחו על־בית יעקב)" (Isa 14.1). This is sometimes portrayed as a novel phenomenon. But if the Exodus narrative depicts foreigners leaving Egypt with the Israelites, and the legal material of the Pentateuch attests to the presence of גרים in pre-exilic Israelite society, the inclusion of foreigners in Israel's deliverance described in Isa 14.1 is entirely consistent with YHWH's miraculous dealings toward Israel in the past. When God rescues Israel, foreigners will want to join in. This is especially true since the Exodus is, for Isaiah, the archetype of YHWH's deliverance. As Isa 11.16 expresses, "There shall be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that is left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt." The turning of foreigners to YHWH described in Isa 14.1 is not a *new* phenomenon, but the expected consequence of Israel's deliverance, just as it was when Israel left Egypt.

We see a similar dynamic in Ezekiel. Although the book of Ezekiel does not contain explicit references to the Exodus event, several scholars have observed parallels between Moses and Ezekiel as characters, such as experiencing a vision of God's sanctuary while on a high mountain.²⁷⁹ "Moses and the exodus become a type for Ezekiel and the new exodus," writes Rebecca Idestrom.²⁸⁰ Moreover, Idestrom notes that "throughout Ezekiel's oracles against the foreign nations (Ezek 25–32, 35, 38–39), we learn that these nations will come to know that Yahweh is God through his divine acts, just as the Egyptians did."²⁸¹ It is therefore unsurprising that, in Ezekiel's vision of Israel's restoration, the גרים settle alongside native Israelites.

So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you

²⁷⁹ McKeating 1994:100; cf. Idestrom 2009:492–495; Patton 1996:85–89.

²⁸⁰ Idestrom 2009:491.

²⁸¹ Idestrom 2009:497.

(ולִהְיִימָם הַגֵּרִים בְּתוֹכְכֶם) and have fathered children among you. They shall be to you as native-born of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe aliens reside (בְּשֵׁבֶט אֲשֶׁר־יִגֵּר הַגֵּר), there you shall assign them their inheritance, says the Lord GOD. (Ezek 47.21-23)

In some ways, this represents a development from the treatment of גֵּרִים in the Pentateuch, which does not speak of them inheriting the land of Israel. Yet the underlying theme is the same: YHWH's miraculous activity on Israel's behalf leads to foreigners worshipping him and joining his people.

Many other Jewish writings include similar sentiments concerning foreigners joining Israel, though they sometimes differ in terminology and do not necessarily use the language of גֵּרִים.²⁸² However, this expectation was not ubiquitous. We saw in the previous chapter how Ezra and Nehemiah advocate a policy of endogamy which seems to preclude the inclusion of foreigners into Israelite society, despite the positive portrayals of Cyrus (Ezra 1.1-11) and Artaxerxes (Neh 2.1-10). Similarly, *Psalms of Solomon* states, "He [God] will distribute them [Israel] upon the land according to their tribes. The stranger and the foreigner will no longer live with them (πάροικος καὶ ἀλλογενὴς οὐ παροικήσει αὐτοῖς ἔτι)."²⁸³ This suggests a vision of Israel's eschatological restoration which does *not* include non-native insiders. Interestingly, however, the Syriac manuscript offers the opposite view: instead of stating that the stranger and foreigner will "no longer live with them," it states that they "will live near them."²⁸⁴ Moreover, the Greek text goes on to speak of "nations" (ἔθνη) coming from the ends of the earth to see God's glory and bearing gifts to Israel's scattered children (Ps. Sol. 17.31), before adding that God "will be merciful to all the Gentiles (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) that fearfully stand before him."²⁸⁵ Even as it seems to diminish the significance of foreigners in Israel's restoration, the psalm in fact provides a complex and nuanced view concerning their future inclusion.

Overall, it is reasonable to suggest that most Jewish writings from this period anticipated Gentile inclusion in Israel's future restoration. Contrary to Staples' hypothesis, these Gentiles do not *replace* the northern tribes of Israel. Rather, their inclusion is consistent with the inclusion of Gentiles in Israel's past – just as גֵּרִים joined Israel following the Exodus,

²⁸² E.g. Isa 2.2-4; 66.19; Jer 12.14-16; Mic 4.1-3; Zech 8.22.

²⁸³ Ps. Sol. 17.28; trans. Wright 2007:190-191.

²⁸⁴ Wright 2007:191.

²⁸⁵ Ps. Sol. 17.34; Wright 2007:194-195.

settled in the land of Israel, and contributed to Israelite society, so will גרים likewise participate in Israel's future restoration and return to the land.

Turning back to 1 Pet 2.10 and its use of Hos 2.23, I argue that the writer of 1 Peter sees in Hosea's prophecy the possibility that Gentiles may also join in Israel's restoration. After all, Hosea explicitly perceives Israel's future deliverance from exile through the lens of Israel's previous deliverance from Egypt. "There she [Israel] shall respond as in the days of her youth," Hos 2.15 states, "as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt." Hos 1.11 also speaks of the people of Judah and Israel appointing for themselves "one head", with Yair Hoffman suggesting that this passage calls to mind Moses leading Israel out of Egypt.²⁸⁶ Moreover, although 2 Kgs 17.6 records that the Israelites were deported to Assyria, several passages in Hosea speak of the northern kingdom being banished to Egypt. "Now he [YHWH] will remember their iniquity and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt" (8.13). "They shall not remain in the land of the Lord, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food" (9.3). "They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me" (11.5). As the passages from 9.3 and 11.5 indicate, Hosea is not implying that the Israelites have gone to Egypt *instead* of Assyria, but intentionally likens Assyria and Egypt as places of oppression. The banishment of the northern tribes is portrayed as a reversal of the Exodus, a return to servitude.²⁸⁷ Conversely, their eventual deliverance is like a *new* Exodus, as Hos 2.15 illustrates. In other words, the book of Hosea itself engages in a form of typology. Like Isaiah and Ezekiel, the Exodus from Egypt is the paradigmatic example of YHWH delivering his people out of oppression. This display of divine power causes foreigners to join the people of Israel. Consequently, although Hosea does not explicitly speak of Gentiles turning to YHWH, the book's clear parallels between the Exodus event and Israel's future deliverance could cause a later reader, such as Peter, to conjecture that the restoration of northern Israel will also include Gentiles turning to YHWH. Indeed, our earlier discussion concerning *b. Pesachim* 87b supports this hypothesis, as we saw in that rabbinic discussion of Hosea how Israel's exile will allegedly lead to גרים joining the people of Israel.

Similar arguments have been proposed in relation to Paul's use of Hosea in Romans. David Starling observes in that letter "a pattern in which he [Paul] asserts the correspondence (in both plight and solution) between the distinct paths of Israel and the Gentiles and their

²⁸⁶ Hoffman 1989:173.

²⁸⁷ Beale 2012:703-708.

eventual, eschatological convergence.”²⁸⁸ The restoration of all Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles are connected, but not identical. Likewise, William S. Campbell writes:

...the Hosea citation is taken by Paul to apply *primarily* to Israel and thus the three citations [in Rom 9.25-29] all have the same point of reference, Israel. Rejected Israel, like the northern tribes, will be restored. This is Paul's primary thesis, but in and with the restoration, another “non-people”, the Gentiles, will also be blessed.²⁸⁹

Consequently, if 1 Peter is engaging in a similar mode of interpretation, our writer sees the restoration of Israel envisioned by Hosea as a continuation of Israel's story, a story which has – right from Israel's beginnings as a nation following the Exodus – included native-born Israelites as well as foreigners.

How could 1 Peter ascribe to its readers a prophecy spoken by the prophet Hosea concerning the northern tribes of Israel? In the light of Israel's story, I propose a simple solution: YHWH's mighty acts on behalf of Israel repeatedly lead to foreigners turning to him and joining his people. In 1 Peter's ethnic imagination, the people of Israel are not an ethnically homogenous group. YHWH's promise to restore the people of Israel includes native Israelites as well as people of foreign birth who have joined Israel and worship its god. While Hosea does not explicitly state that גרים will join Israel in its restoration, the inclusion of foreigners in many of the prophetic writings suggests that the participation of Gentiles in Israel's restoration was a common aspect of Jewish expectation. Moreover, Hosea directly likens the restoration of northern Israel with the Exodus from Egypt, a story which features foreigners joining the people of Israel (Exod 12.38) and later participating in the renewal of the covenant (Deut 29.11). It would have been very plausible that the author of 1 Peter anticipated Gentiles participating in the fulfilment of Hosea's prophecy, and thereby addressed the prophet's words to an audience comprised of both Jews and non-Jews. In the subsequent chapters I will further elaborate upon the place of גרים and גויים in 1 Peter, and comment on other areas where the epistle alludes to the Exodus story. At present, I will turn to a few other passages which strengthen my thesis that the readers of 1 Peter are neither a *replacement* nor *copy* of Israel but are incorporated into Israel as non-native insiders.

²⁸⁸ Starling 2011:199 (emphasis his).

²⁸⁹ Campbell 2000:199; cf. Campbell 2023:262-263.

(2.3) Diaspora

In the letter's opening line, the readers are addressed as "foreigners of the diaspora (ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς)". While διασπορά could function as an attributive genitive (e.g. "dispersed foreigners"), its usage by Jewish and Christian authors around the first century CE was mostly in a technical sense, referring to the Jewish people residing outside Palestine.²⁹⁰ For some scholars, therefore, 1 Peter uses this term figuratively to compare the social situation of the readers to the experience of exile which the Jewish diaspora faced as a marginalised minority among pagan neighbours. J.R. Michaels states:

The genitive διασπορᾶς implies not that his readers belonged to the Jewish diaspora or were living as strangers among dispersed Jews, but that they themselves constituted a diaspora, the only diaspora, in fact, that Peter gives evidence of knowing. He sees them not in relation to the Jews (not even as displacing the Jews in the plan of God) but (like the Jewish diaspora itself) always in relation to 'the Gentiles' (cf. 2.12; 4.3).²⁹¹

Such an interpretation is problematic, however, due to the absence of "diaspora" in early Christian writings to signify the Church. While figurative descriptions of the Christian life as a kind of pilgrimage towards a heavenly home can be found in some writings, such as Heb 11.13-16 and Diogn. 6.8, these never describe the Christian life as one of διασπορά. Rather, διασπορά refers most frequently to the scattered Jewish people and is often associated with divine punishment.²⁹² This strongly suggests that no metaphorical nor spiritualised notion of a "Christian diaspora" arose in early Christianity.

Admittedly, the verb διασπείρω may occasionally carry missional undertones in the NT. Acts 8.1 and 8.4 describe how, following the persecution of the church in Jerusalem, the believers were "dispersed" (διεσπάρησαν) throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, where they preached the word. Within the wider narrative arc of Acts, this is a pivotal moment where Jesus' promise in Acts 1.8 about the gospel spreading out of Jerusalem begins to be fulfilled. Similarly, Acts 11.19 speaks of "those who had been scattered" (Οἱ...διασπαρέντες) due to persecution bringing the Gospel to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Several decades later, this use of διασπείρω to describe the fruitful scattering of believers is taken up by Irenaeus: "The church, dispersed throughout the world to the ends of

²⁹⁰ Dubis 2010:2.

²⁹¹ Michaels 1988:8.

²⁹² Guttenberger 2013:130-134; van Unnik 1983:101.

the earth..."²⁹³ In all these instances, however, we are dealing with the verb διασπείρω, and never διασπορά; Christians might be "dispersed", but they never constitute a "diaspora". "It is highly improbable," W.C. van Unnik thus concludes, "that *diaspora* in 1 Peter 1:1 is meant to describe the Christian Church," and he instead proposes to translate this verse as "those of the Diaspora (of the Jews) who lodge..."²⁹⁴

The closest parallel to 1 Pet 1.1 is the epistle of James' salutation to "the twelve tribes of the diaspora (ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ) (1.1)." Concerning this verse, Dale Allison arrives at the same conclusion as van Unnik concerning the absence of "diaspora" in early Christian writings to describe the Church, and thus argues that the epistle of James is *not* using διασπορά metaphorically. Instead, James seeks to "encourage and stir up the dispersed tribes" of Israel, Allison suggests.²⁹⁵ Similarly, Doering writes concerning 1 Pet 1.1 that the epistle resembles the Jewish diaspora letters, "letters than involve attribution (factual or fictitious) to an authoritative addressor and communication with Judeans or Jews resident outside the Land of Israel or on its fringes."²⁹⁶ Although not a clearly defined literary form, diaspora letters implied a sense of common Jewish identity across disparate regions. The archetypal diaspora letter is probably Jeremiah 29.1-23, as evidenced by the presence of many texts which appear to mimic the Jeremiah-Baruch correspondence, such as the *Letter of Jeremiah*, 2 Baruch 78-86, and the correspondence between the two men in *Paralipomena Jeremiae* (P.J. [4 Bar.] 6.17-23; 7.23-29), with additional examples including 2 Macc 1.1-10a, 2 Macc. 1.10b-2.18.²⁹⁷

In describing his readers as members of a διασπορά, the writer of 1 Peter is copying a Jewish literary style, whereby a Jewish leader encourages and instructs his kinsmen who are dwelling among pagans. Rather than indicating that the readers constitute a diaspora distinct from the Jewish diaspora (*pace* Michaels), 1 Pet 1.1 serves to inscribe the readers within a Jewish worldview. Because they have been incorporated into the people of Israel, they too share in Israel's status as a διασπορά.

²⁹³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1; trans. Grant 1997:53.

²⁹⁴ van Unnik 1983:102.

²⁹⁵ Allison 2013:133.

²⁹⁶ Doering 2009:225.

²⁹⁷ Doering 2005:43-72

(2.4) The Co-Elect in Babylon

Complementing the mention of “diaspora” in the epistle’s opening line, our writer concludes his letter by conveying greetings from “the co-elect in Babylon” (ἡ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι συνεκλεκτή) (5.13). While συνεκλεκτή could hypothetically refer to a person residing in “Babylon”,²⁹⁸ most scholars believe that it refers here to a Christian congregation.²⁹⁹ As I have already argued in Chapter 1, “Babylon” in this passage is most probably a cipher for the city of Rome, an interpretation adopted already by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.15.1-2).³⁰⁰ The other alternatives – Babylon in Mesopotamia and Babylon in Egypt – are improbable given the historical context. Additionally, several Jewish and Christian texts use “Babylon” to describe Rome after 70 CE,³⁰¹ and it is possible that Rome became associated with Babylon even before 70 CE. We see hints of this in Jesus’ discourse concerning the fall of the temple in Mark 13.3-27, where Jesus states, [T]he sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (Mark 13.24-25). This passage is an allusion to Isaiah 13.10, which is part of the prophet’s “oracle concerning Babylon” (13.1).³⁰² In describing the impending destruction of the temple by Rome, Jesus borrows Isaiah’s language concerning Babylon, drawing a parallel between the two empires.³⁰³ If we assume (with most scholars) that Mark was written before 70 CE, and that he incorporates sayings which originate from Jesus himself, then there is reason to believe that parallels were drawn in the Jewish imaginary between Babylon and Rome even before the destruction of the temple.

Moreover, Leonhard Goppelt notes that “‘Babylon’ had become a symbolic name for the world power that placed into conflict situations those who belonged to the people of God” as early as the book of Daniel.³⁰⁴ For instance, in Dan 7.2-8 the prophet receives a vision of four beasts representing four empires. While Daniel mentions differences between the beasts, the passage nonetheless invites us to view them in parallel as oppressive threats to Israel.

²⁹⁸ Applegate 1992:587-604.

²⁹⁹ Horn 2013:12; Reese 2022:310-311; Vahrenhorst 2016:201; moreover, several manuscripts (8, Vulgate, and Peshitta) supply ἐκκλησία, indicating an early understanding that 1 Peter refers here to a congregation (Goppelt 1993:373, n.28).

³⁰⁰ See Section 1.2.3.

³⁰¹ E.g. Rev 17.1-18; 2 Bar. 11.1; 79.1; 4 Ezra 3.1-5.20; Sib. Or. 5.137-138; Elliott 2000:883-884.

³⁰² The reference to stars falling from heaven may derive from Isa 14:12 (Wright 1996:354-355) or Isa 34.4 (France 2002:532).

³⁰³ France 2002:497-546; Wright 1996:339-366; see Mann 1986:500-504 for a comprehensive list of Old Testament allusions in Mark 13 and its parallel passages in Matthew and Luke.

³⁰⁴ Goppelt 1993:374.

Several other texts likewise suggest that the “spectre” of Babylon – to borrow Jacques Derrida’s expression – continued to haunt the Jewish people even after the return from exile and represented pagan empire in general. In an account of admittedly questionable historicity, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai refers to Isaiah 10.34 (“Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one”) in his interview with the then-general Vespasian (*b. Gittin* 56b), thereby comparing the future Roman emperor to Babylon, the “mighty one” in Isaiah’s prophecy. In short, the mention of “Babylon” in 1 Pet 5.13 is almost certainly a reference to Rome, whether the letter was written before or after 70 CE, and the expression likens Rome to the pagan empires that oppressed Israel.

At the same time, the use of “Babylon” weaves the audience into Israel’s story. For most of 1 Peter’s non-Jewish readers the Babylonian empire would probably have held little significance. Even at the height of its power, the Babylonians never stretched into the regions mentioned in 1 Pet 1.1, and it had collapsed six centuries prior to 1 Peter’s composition. It is hard to say what the average Anatolian would have associated with Babylon at this time, but Strabo (who was born in Pontus) may provide some indication. His account of Babylon in *Geog.* 16.1.5 is one of faded glory: “Babylon is so deserted,” he writes, “that one would not hesitate to say what one of the comic poets said in reference to the Megalopolitans in Arcadia: ‘The Great City is a great desert’.”³⁰⁵ The significance of Babylon in 1 Peter thus lies precisely in Babylon’s place in the Jewish imagination – the place of exile, of oppression, and of eventual deliverance.³⁰⁶ In other words, 1 Pet 5.13 once again invites the reader to step into *Israel’s* shoes, identifying with Israel’s people and reconceptualising their situation through Israel’s story.

(2.5) Conclusion

How can 1 Peter describe its audience, probably comprising a significant number of non-Jews, with epithets proper to Israel? What does it mean that the addressees are now God’s “chosen people”?

In this chapter, I surveyed four possible ways of resolving this conundrum. While these are not commonly perceived as discrete schools of thought, I have demonstrated how they reflect underlying assumptions regarding “Israel” and “the Church” which are mutually

³⁰⁵ Strabo, *Geog.* 16.1.5; LCL 241:200-201.

³⁰⁶ Wan 2019:167-168.

exclusive. In particular, I drew attention to how several scholars regard the story of Israel as a *completed* story which 1 Peter's readers are re-enacting. On the contrary, I argue that the story of Israel remains *incomplete* for many Jewish thinkers, and that Peter's non-Jewish readers have been incorporated into an *ongoing* story where Israel's promised restoration is being fulfilled.

The allusion to Hos 2.23 in 1 Pet 2.10 helped us to see how Gentiles have consistently featured in Israel's story. YHWH's mighty acts on Israel's behalf leads to foreigners recognising his supremacy, with many turning to him and joining his people. This was a feature of the Exodus story, and is also a feature, for many Jewish writers, in Israel's eschatological restoration. Importantly, while we can think of such persons as "converts", the OT texts do not state that they "become Jews" nor are they identical to native-born Israelites. Instead, an expression frequently used to describe these non-native insiders is גרים, and this idea will be the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Πάροικος και Παρεπίδημος and 1 Peter's Resident Foreigners

We saw in the previous chapter that the גרים were a category of people that feature regularly in the Old Testament. They were foreigners by birth who joined the people of Israel and worshipped YHWH yet remained distinct from native-born Israelites. In this chapter, I argue that non-Jewish Christ-followers have a status akin to the גרים within 1 Peter's ethnic imagination. They have been incorporated into the people of Israel and share in Israel's covenantal relationship with YHWH despite being non-Jewish. For at the time of 1 Peter's composition, the language of Jewish "conversion" was evolving, and one category used to describe such foreign-born adherents was גר-תושב. There are good reasons to believe that this category of "non-native insider" shapes 1 Peter's ethnic imagination, stemming from a verse in the middle of the letter: "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul" (1 Pet 2.11).³⁰⁷

(3.1) Status Quaestionis

For centuries, many have interpreted the phrase "aliens and exiles" in 1 Pet 2.11 as a reference to some kind of *spiritual* displacement. Commenting on this verse, Augustine writes that believers occupied a "middle ground...between the people of heaven and those of earth."³⁰⁸ Francis Beare makes a similar point: "The thought that the true homeland of Christians is in heaven and that on earth they are in a foreign territory, is now made the basis of a moral appeal."³⁰⁹ According to this method of interpretation, believers in Christ are πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι in relation to the material world. About forty years ago, however, this hypothesis was challenged through an appeal to the Graeco-Roman context of this expression.

In his 1981 monograph *A Home for the Homeless*, John H. Elliott argues that the terms πάροικος and παρεπίδημος in 1 Pet 1.1 and 2.11 refer literally to the civic status of 1 Peter's readers and the marginalisation they suffered as a result of that status. The πάροικος

³⁰⁷ "Ἀγαπητοί, παρακαλῶ ὡς παροίκους καὶ παρεπίδημους ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἵτινες στρατεύονται κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς."

³⁰⁸ Augustine, *Sermons* 400.2; trans. Bray 2000:91.

³⁰⁹ Beare 1947:135; also Davids 1990:95; Goppelt 1993:68-70, 155-156.

in Graeco-Roman society, Elliott explains, was a socio-legal category best described as a “resident alien”, occupying a liminal space between a transient foreigner (ξένος) and a full citizen (πολίτης).³¹⁰ Such persons experienced “political and economic exploitation, continued disdain and suspicion by the citizenry, and competition and envy from those below [them].”³¹¹ The παρεπίδημοι, on the other hand, were “temporary visitors...who have no intention or opportunity to establish permanent residence where they currently live,”³¹² and they too experienced stigma due to their transient status. According to Elliott, these terms reflect the actual social situation of 1 Peter’s readers even before they became Christians: they were “resident aliens” and “temporary visitors” who found themselves “estranged from any place of belonging.”³¹³

Elliott’s hypothesis provoked a quick response. Reinhard Feldmeier and Steven Bechtler observed that πάροικος and its cognates in Graeco-Roman writings did not always denote a foreigner, but could also refer to a native resident who was not a full citizen.³¹⁴ More recently, Travis Williams and David Horrell have pointed out that Elliott uses two different definitions for πάροικος, one focusing on geographical displacement and the other focusing on non-citizenship.³¹⁵ This inconsistency supports Feldmeier’s and Bechtler’s observation that the *legal* use of πάροικος in Graeco-Roman society did not necessarily denote foreignness.

Feldmeier thus proposed a metaphorical reading of the terms πάροικος and παρεπίδημος in 1 Pet 2.11. They imply “a clear distance to society,” he suggests, “not only to its values and ideals, but also to its institutions and politics.”³¹⁶ This disenfranchisement from their surrounding culture happened *as a result* of following Christ; it does not describe their pre-conversion status. Along similar lines, Christian Münch posits: “The metaphor of being a stranger is an expression of a certain distance from the world, of not belonging, of

³¹⁰ Elliott 1981:26.

³¹¹ Elliott 1981:26.

³¹² Elliott 1981:36.

³¹³ Elliott 1981:49; Karen Jobes has proposed a variant of this hypothesis, suggesting that the addressees were Jewish Christians who had been deported from Rome (Jobes 2022:63-82). However, her theory has found little support.

³¹⁴ E.g. Strabo 1.1.10; Dio Chrysostom 40.27; *SIG* 398.37; see Bechtler 1998:73; Feldmeier 1992:12-17.

³¹⁵ Williams and Horrell 2023:697, n.23; Elliott’s contrasting definitions are from Schmidt 1967:841-853 and Schaefer 1949:1695-1707.

³¹⁶ “Die Selbstbezeichnung als impliziert also – zumal dann, wenn sie zur zentralen Selbstbezeichnung wird – in heder Hinsicht auch *eine deutliche Distanz zur Gesellschaft, zu ihren Werten und Idealen, aber auch zu ihren Institutionen und zu ihrer Politik*” (Feldmeier 1992:21; translation mine, emphasis his).

insecurity,” which Münch believes can be linked to “the experience of limitation, flightiness, or failure of human existence itself, but can also be linked to exclusion from the community.”³¹⁷ Numerous other examples could be cited. Achtemeier writes, “It was precisely the precarious legal status of foreigners that provided the closest analogy to the kind of treatment Christians could expect from the hostile culture in which they lived.”³¹⁸ The readers’ description as foreigners, suggests Thomas Popp, “emphasises their suffering as a positive sign of their alien existence.”³¹⁹ Likewise, Janette Ok states, “The terms *parepidemos* and *diaspora* in 1.1 give a glimpse of the social alienation and marginalization experienced by the addressees as a result of their divinely chosen status.”³²⁰ Even Elliott seems to change his mind when he writes in his 2000 Anchor Bible commentary that “the experience of many as actual strangers and resident aliens provided an existential basis for the depiction of all believers as strangers and resident aliens in a metaphorical sense.”³²¹ For all these scholars, *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* in 1 Peter signify the experience of social exclusion suffered by the readers, alongside an encouragement to distance themselves from their surrounding culture.

This seems to make sense. Peter’s readers were certainly experiencing some sort of persecution, a situation described in 1 Pet 4.12-14, and possibly corroborated by the letters exchanged between the emperor Trajan and Pliny the Younger in the early second century (*Ep.* 10.96-97).³²² Given the sufferings of many forcibly displaced persons today and throughout history, it seems reasonable to assume that the phrase *πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος* in 1 Pet 2.11 thus denotes social alienation. But perhaps this assumption suffers from a flawed understanding of these terms and the place of so-called “foreigners” in antiquity.

³¹⁷ “...die Metapher der Fremdlingschaft Ausdruck einer gewissen Distanz zur Welt, eines Nicht-Dazugehörens, eines Nicht-Geborgenseins. Sie kann an die Erfahrung von Begrenztheit, Flüchtigkeit oder Verfehltheit des menschlichen Daseins an sich anknüpfen, aber auch mit Ausgrenzung aus der Gemeinschaft verbunden werden” (Münch 2009:140; translation mine).

³¹⁸ Achtemeier 1996:174; also Reese 2022:55-56.

³¹⁹ “Die Erwählten, denen die Anerkennung seitens der Gesellschaft versagt wird, gestalten ihr Leben selbstbewusst als „Fremde“ (*παρεπίδημος* 1,1; vgl. 2,11; vgl. auch *παροιμία* 1,17; *πάροικος* 2,11). „Petrus“ stärkt ihre Gruppenidentität und prononciert ihr Leiden als positives Zeichen ihrer Fremdlingsexistenz” (Popp 2013:199; translation mine).

³²⁰ Ok 2021:57.

³²¹ Elliott 2000:482.

³²² As Pliny’s letters may postdate 1 Peter by up to 50 years, depending on 1 Peter’s date of composition, commentators disagree over the nature and degree of Christian persecution suffered by 1 Peter’s readers, though almost all scholars affirm that there must have been some level of anti-Christian sentiment (see Kinzig 2019; Williams 2012a, 2012b).

(3.2) Israel's Non-Native Insiders

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the motif of “welcomed foreigners” in Jewish Scripture. As a childless widow, Ruth the Moabite arrives in Bethlehem with Naomi in a precarious position. But she receives a surprise: having heard about Ruth’s care for Naomi, Boaz pledges to protect her and provide for her, prompting her astonished response, “Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2.10). Ruth expects to be marginalised, but is instead welcomed and protected by Boaz, who later marries her, an act which the narrator presents favourably (Ruth 4.13).

Foreigners in both ancient and modern times are often vulnerable to exploitation. Yet for this very reason, hospitality was and is an esteemed virtue in many societies, including the biblical people of Israel.³²³ “You shall not oppress a resident alien (גר),” Exod 23.9 states, “[because] you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” Likewise, Boaz tells Ruth, “The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge” (Ruth 2.12). Ruth’s courageous decision to follow Naomi and embrace Naomi’s god makes her worthy of the protection of YHWH and his people. This notion of the welcomed and protected foreigner is a common theme in the Old Testament.

(3.2.1) Πάροικος και Παρεπίδημος in the LXX

Πάροικος and παρεπίδημος appear together twice in the LXX, and these are the only two verses in the LXX which use παρεπίδημος, which is otherwise a very uncommon word in Greek literature. Williams and Horrell thus note the “decisive influence of the LXX on the author’s language.”³²⁴ We will therefore discuss the use of these terms in Graeco-Roman society more generally in a later section, but it makes sense to first consider πάροικος and παρεπίδημος within the Jewish context. The first of the two LXX passages comes from the Abraham narrative in Genesis.

I am a stranger and an alien (πάροικος και παρεπίδημος / גֵּר־וְתוֹשֵׁב) residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

³²³ Jipp 2013:131-170.

³²⁴ Williams and Horrell 2023:696; Feldmeier 1992:8; see below for uses of παρεπίδημος and cognates in non-Jewish writings.

(Genesis 23.4)

In this passage, Abraham describes himself as a *πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος* as part of his request for land to bury Sarah. Here, *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* are used together as a phrase, sometimes described as a hendiadys, in which two terms refer to a single object or person. In other words, Abraham is not a *πάροικος and παρεπίδημος*, but the two terms come together to signify a foreigner. Importantly, the Hittites respond positively to his petition, acknowledging him as “Lord” (κύριος / יְדֹנָה) and offering him use of the best of their tombs (23.6).³²⁵ Abraham is not marginalised. Rather, his very status as a foreigner provides the basis of his request, and the expression *πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος* is a recognition of his humble status as a non-native resident who nonetheless hopes to receive hospitality. Contrary to Elliott’s assessment that 1 Pet 2.11 “links [the readers’] experience of social estrangement to that of their spiritual ancestors Abraham and Sarah,” Gen 23.4 in fact portrays no such estrangement.³²⁶ Abraham is a *welcomed* foreigner.

The second occurrence of *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* is in Psalm 39.12, listed as 38.13 in the LXX.³²⁷ Once again, we see the terms used to denote a perceived “foreigner” who seeks hospitality.

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears.
For I am your passing guest, an alien (ὅτι *πάροικος ἐγὼ εἰμι παρὰ σοὶ καὶ παρεπίδημος* / *כי גר אני עמך תושב*), like all my forebears.

(Psalm 39.12 = LXX 38.13)

Here in Psalm 39, the psalmist describes himself as YHWH’s *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος*. Like Abraham in Gen 23.4, this is an admission of vulnerability – the psalmist is dependent on his host’s hospitality and goodwill – but not exclusion nor marginalisation.³²⁸ The psalmist is not implying that he has been ostracised by YHWH but that he is YHWH’s “guest”. It is precisely on this basis, as one seeking refuge, that he appeals to YHWH for help, trusting that YHWH will respond kindly, as he has to the psalmist’s ancestors.³²⁹

³²⁵ Wenham 1994:126-128.

³²⁶ Elliott 2000:460; cf. Feldmeier 1992:9.

³²⁷ To avoid confusion, I will follow the MT enumeration in this thesis.

³²⁸ Böhler 2021:715-716.

³²⁹ Dieter Böhler detects here a possible allusion to Abraham in Genesis 23 but acknowledges that, as we shall shortly see, *גר* and *תושב* are also found in other OT passages (Böhler 2021:716).

In both Genesis 23 and Psalm 39, moreover, the terms *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* are associated with divine favour. Abraham is a *πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος* as a direct result of his obedience to YHWH in leaving Haran, while in Ps 39.12 the psalmist's self-description as a *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* emphasises his dependence on YHWH. Consistent in both these texts is the depiction of foreignness as a characteristic of God's favoured people. Hence, the suggestion that *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* in 1 Peter signify alienation and estrangement runs contrary to their actual usage in the LXX. While these terms indicate that the speaker is a foreigner, they do not signify animosity with one's hosts. This is unsurprising when we look at *גר* and *תושב*, the Hebrew terms which *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* translate in the LXX.

(3.2.2) Foreigners in the Old Testament

We saw previously that there were different types of foreigners in Jewish thought. At one end of the spectrum, we have the *נכרי*, which denotes “foreignness, estrangement, or alienation” and is typically translated in the LXX as *ἀλλογενής*,³³⁰ *ἀλλότριος*,³³¹ or *ξένος*.³³² As we saw in Exodus 12, the *נכרי* is generally portrayed in the OT as the outsider in relation to God's people.³³³ Deut 15.2-3 states that the debts owed by a “brother” (*אח*) must be cancelled after every seven years, for instance, but the same privilege is not extended to the *נכרי*. Occasionally the term is used for figures who are otherwise depicted positively, such as Ruth the Moabite and Ittai the Gittite (Ruth 2.10; 2 Sam 15.19). However, in both cases the characters either do not receive the treatment typically dealt to the *נכרי* or act in a manner which defies their *נכרי* status; thus David expects Ittai to abandon him because he is a *נכרי*, but Ittai subverts that expectation by choosing to accompany David. The label *נכרי* is thus the OT's most typical moniker for non-native *outsiders* in relation to the people of Israel.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have the *גר*, often denoting a foreigner who is a “permanent fixture” in a given society and who has integrated into the local community to some extent.³³⁴ I have already discussed how the regulations for the Passover distinguish between the *נכרי*, who may not participate in the Passover, and the *גר*, who may participate in

³³⁰ E.g. Exod 12.43; Lev 22.25; Ezek 44.7-9.

³³¹ E.g. 2 Sam 22.45-46; Neh 9.2; Ps 144.7.

³³² E.g. Ruth 2.10; 2 Sam 15.19; Ps 69.8; Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:25.

³³³ Ebach 2014:62-64; Zehnder 2005:283-284.

³³⁴ Rendtorff 1996:78; see Section 2.2.4.

the celebration along with his household, if the men are circumcised (Exod 12.43, 48-49). Israel's cities of refuge are open to the "children of Israel" (בני ישראל) as well as to the גר (Num 35.15), and the Israelites are instructed in Lev 19.34, "treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you," and to "love him as yourself" (ESV).³³⁵ In Israel's laws, the גר often refers to the "non-native insider" – the foreigner who is welcomed into the people of Israel and shares many of Israel's covenant obligations and blessings. As Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi note:

[...] the *ger* is not only subject to the same prohibitions as the Israelite (Lev. 16:29; 17:8-16; 20:2-7), but may also perform positive commandments like celebrating Passover and bringing sacrifices. The repeated slogan is thus 'there shall be one law (*hukah*) for you and for the *ger*' (Exod. 12:49; Num. 9:14, 15:15), or, in the shorter form: 'resident alien (*ka-ger*) as citizen (*ka-ezrah*)' (e.g., Lev. 24:16, 22).³³⁶

Moreover, the גר will share in Israel's inheritance in the age to come, as we already discussed with regard to Ezek 47.22-23 and Isa 14.1. Yet they remain a distinct category – they belong to Israel but are not identical to the native Israelite.

Of the 26 occurrences of πάροικος in the LXX, the word translates גר in 13 instances, including Gen 23.4 and Ps 39.12, as discussed earlier. In another 11 passages it translates תושב. In Markus Zehnder's estimation, תושב denotes a foreigner who is included in the society but has either not been integrated to the same extent as the גר or occupies a different economic position.³³⁷ Importantly, except for three verses where it appears alongside שכיר ("a hired worker"),³³⁸ all the other nine occurrences of תושב in the OT also mention גר. As we saw with Gen 23.4, it is possible that גר-תושב functions in many instances as a hendiadys, rather than two separate categories of persons. We see this phrase used especially in Leviticus 25. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity," Lev 25.23 states, "for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants (כִּי־גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי)." As in Psalm 39, the Israelites are described as גֵּרִים־תוֹשְׁבִים in relation to God – they are dependent on his goodwill and hospitality. But the expression is also used in relation to other humans. Lev 25.35 states, "If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens (גֵּר וְתוֹשֵׁב)." Here גר-תושב is used

³³⁵ כאזרח מכם יהיה לכם הגר הגר אתכם ואהבת.

³³⁶ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:28-29.

³³⁷ Zehnder 2005:283.

³³⁸ Exod 12.45; Lev 22.10; 25.40.

figuratively to denote the decent standard of care a family member should receive if they become destitute.

All this already challenges the view that *πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος* in 1 Pet 2.11 denotes social exclusion or marginalisation. It is widely accepted that this phrase in 1 Peter is drawn from the LXX of Gen 23.4 and Ps 39.12 [38.13], where the words translate *גר* and *תושב* respectively, yet I have demonstrated that the context in which these words are used in Genesis 23 and Psalm 39 denote the expectation of goodwill and hospitality, and have further shown that *גר* and *תושב*, when used in the Old Testament, likewise often denote the welcomed foreigner. Such a characterisation is not absolute – we saw in Lev 19.34, for instance, that *גר* could both refer to the foreigner who had been accepted into Israelite society as well as the Israelites' status in Egypt. In the rabbinic writings, however, we see the terms *גר* and *גר-תושב* being used as more formal categories.

(3.2.3) The Resident Proselyte in Rabbinic Literature

The rabbinic text *Tractate Gerim*, composed several centuries after 1 Peter, asks the following question: “What is a ‘resident proselyte’ (*גר תושב*)? Whoever undertakes to abstain from idolatry, in the view of R. Meir; R. Judah said: Whoever undertakes not to eat flesh that has not been ritually slaughtered.”³³⁹

Tractate Gerim's provenance remains disputed. On the one hand, Shaye Cohen claims that “it is almost certainly post-Talmudic (i.e. post-500 C.E.).”³⁴⁰ On the other hand, M.B. Lerner posits that it is a product of the Tannaitic period, citing the style of classical Mishnaic Hebrew, the relative uniqueness of many *halakhot*, and the fact that almost all the Sages mentioned are *Tannaim*.³⁴¹ Adopting a middle position, Moshe Lavee describes the tractate as a “late Palestinian development”, predating the Babylonian Talmud and possibly originating from the third century CE.³⁴² Lavee's position seems to me most convincing, as he identifies several differences between *Tractate Gerim* and the Babylonian Talmud which suggest that the tractate probably predates the *Bavli*. Moreover, this passage cites figures from the

³³⁹ “איזהו גר תושב כל שקבל עליו שלא לעבוד ע"ז דברי רבי מאיר רבי יהודה אומר כל שקבל עליו שלא להיות אוכל נבילות” (*Tractate Gerim* 3.1; trans. *Sefaria*).

³⁴⁰ Cohen 1999:211.

³⁴¹ Lerner 1987:400-401.

³⁴² Lavee 2018:183, 190-191.

Tannaitic period, and may therefore reflect earlier traditions regardless of the tractate's final composition.

Tractate Gerim 3.1 reveals an attempt to define the גר-תושב. From the context, the phrase clearly refers to one who is non-Jewish by birth, yet Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Judah – two figures who were active around the middle of the second century – offer slightly different interpretations. Does a גר-תושב refer to a non-Jew who has abandoned idolatry, or one who abides by (some) Jewish dietary requirements? While this ambiguity is not resolved in this passage, the remaining lines proceed to list his legal standing and privileges, including the right to settle “in a pleasant district in the centre of the Land of Israel.”³⁴³ Furthermore, other rabbinic texts shed greater light on the status of the גר-תושב.

The Mishnah mentions the גר-תושב in several instances, and although it does not offer a precise definition of this term, it generally denotes a foreigner who is part of Israel's society and has some legal protection. For instance, *m. Bava Metzia* 9.12 states that the גר-תושב is subject to the commandment, “Give him his wages on the same day”, but not the commandment, “You shall not keep the hired worker's wages until the next morning.”³⁴⁴ This suggests that, around the second century CE, the גר-תושב was a conceptual category of “resident foreigner” in Jewish thought, subject to some commandments but not others. Later rabbinic texts explicated this term more directly, depicting the גר-תושב as a kind of “pious Gentile” – a non-Jew who remains uncircumcised but observes Jewish *halakha* to some extent.³⁴⁵ At the minimum, as expressed by Rabbi Meir in *Tractate Gerim*, the גר-תושב has denounced idolatry, though other texts emphasise adherence to the six or seven Noachide commandments. “Who is a *ger-toshav*?” asks *b. Avodah Zarah* 64b, before giving the following answer from the rabbis: “Anyone who has accepted upon himself observance of the seven mitzvot that the descendants of Noah accepted upon themselves (כל שקיבל עליו שבע מצות) (שקבלו עליהם בני נח).”³⁴⁶ This was one of several conceptualisations of the גר-תושב as a category of “resident foreigner” by the time of the *Bavli*'s compilation in the 5th-6th centuries CE.

Generally, rabbinic literature presents a degree of legal difference between the גר-תושב and the גר-צדק or גר. The גר-צדק or גר usually refers to a full convert – someone who has

³⁴³ *Tractate Gerim* 3.4; trans. Sefaria.

³⁴⁴ Cf. *m. Bava Metzia* 5.6; other Midrashim which mention the גר-תושב as a category of foreigner include *m. Makkot* 2.3 and *m. Negaim* 3.1.

³⁴⁵ *b. Keritot* 9a:12-13; *b. Bava Metzia* 111a:19–111b:13; *b. Avodah Zarah* 64b:2–65a:2; *b. Gittin* 44a:8; *Mishneh Torah, Forbidden Intercourse* 14:7.

³⁴⁶ *b. Avodah Zarah* 64b; trans. Sefaria; see also *b. Sanhedrin* 56a.

fulfilled a greater degree of ritual requirements than the גר-תושב, including circumcision.³⁴⁷ In contrast, *Avodah Zarah* 64b states that the גר-תושב is a גר who observes all the Torah requirements *except* for the prohibition against eating unslaughtered animals. According to a *baraita*, Naaman the Aramean was a גר-תושב whereas Nebuzaradan was a גר-צדק.³⁴⁸

The boundaries are neither watertight nor consistent and instead indicate that these are mostly *conceptual* categories rather than clearly defined groups. However, despite the differences drawn between the גר and the גר-תושב, much halakhic material concerning the גר-תושב is explicitly drawn from Old Testament passages regarding the גר. We find a good example of this in *b. Yevamot* 48b and its discussion concerning Sabbath regulations. The text asks whether the גר in the Exod 23.12 refers to a גר-תושב or a גר-צדק and answers this query by stating that Deut 5.14 already extends the Sabbath prohibition to “the resident alien in your gates (וגרך אשר בשעריך)” (*b. Yevamot* 48b). According to *b. Yevamot* 48b, this means that the גר in Exod 23.12 must refer instead to the גר-תושב. In addition, we find similar slippage in the rabbinic use of תושב. In a debate about whether all Gentiles – include proselytes – can defile an idolatrous object, the Jerusalem Talmud states, “A slave may be a *toshav*; a *ger-toshav* is like a Gentile in every respect,” the writer using תושב interchangeably with גר-תושב.³⁴⁹ In other words, while the גר and the גר-תושב were distinct categories in rabbinic thought, the latter was shaped by biblical material concerning the גר and the תושב, not just the explicit descriptions of גר-תושב in the Old Testament. Given this discussion in the *Yerushalmi*, it is reasonable to suggest that this conceptual development had arisen by 4th century CE.

For the purpose of our study, *Tractate Gerim* 4.3 presents a remarkable statement as it explains that the גרים are loved by God.

Our father Abraham called himself a *ger*, as it is stated, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you. Similarly David, king of Israel, called himself a גר, as it is stated, For I am a stranger with Thee.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ E.g. *b. Shabbat* 137b; *b. Yevamot* 45b; *Tractate Gerim* 1.6.

³⁴⁸ See also *b. Gittin* 57b; *b. Sanhedrin* 96b.

³⁴⁹ “עבד תושב לעולם. גר תושב הרי הוא כגוי לכל-דבר” (*y. Yevamot* 8.1.8; 8d; trans. *Sefaria*). When citing the Jerusalem Talmud, I first present the notation reflected on *Sefaria.org*, followed by the page and column of the Venice edition.

³⁵⁰ “קרא עצמו גר שנאמר (בראשית כ"ג:ד') גר ותושב וגו' דוד מלך ישראל קרא עצמו גר שנאמר (תהילים ל"ט:יג)” (*Tractate Gerim* 4.3; trans. *Sefaria*).

To substantiate God's concern and acceptance for the גר, the writer of this passage draws from Gen 23.4 and Ps 39.12 – the very two passages where the LXX translates גר and תושב with πάροικος and παρεπίδημος respectively, and to which the writer of 1 Peter is most probably alluding in 2.11. Having seen how the language of גר and תושב is so closely connected to the inclusion “non-native insiders” within Jewish thought, we must therefore consider if a similar dynamic underlies Peter's use of πάροικος and παρεπίδημος in 1 Pet 2.11.

(3.3) 1 Peter's Pious Gentiles

Could the author of 1 Peter have conceptualised a category of “non-native insider” which he articulated as a גר-תושב, similar to the rabbis, and translated as πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος? We just saw that there are good reasons to commend this hypothesis. In using this phrase to describe his readers in 2.11, Peter is not using terms which more directly express alienation, such as ξένος. Instead, he employs a phrase which denotes a welcomed foreigner in the LXX of Gen 23.4 and Ps 39.12. The Hebrew *Vorlage* of this expression further strengthens this thesis: גר and תושב in the Hebrew Bible frequently describe the “resident alien” who has settled among the people of Israel and shares, to varying degrees, in Israel's obligations and blessings. Indeed, the biblical conception of the sojourner “provided the raw materials” for Jewish understandings of converts and their status already by the Second Temple period, Terence Donaldson suggests.³⁵¹

I therefore argue that 1 Pet 2.11 is *not* emphasising the experience of social exclusion the readers are suffering when he describes them as πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι. Rather, the label underlines their inclusion into God's people, in a manner akin to the resident foreigners who settled among Israel and who will participate in Israel's restoration (Ezek 47.22-23; Isa 14.1). Importantly, within this framework, a foreigner who turns to the god of Israel does not “become a Jew” – their ethnic category is that of a גר or a גר-תושב. While both Hebrew phrases could refer to a “resident foreigner” among the people of Israel, by the time of *Tractate Gerim's* composition we see a desire to draw *halakhic* distinctions between these categories. The גר refers most often to a *circumcised* foreigner, a notion which finds support from Exod 12.48-49. For this reason, 1 Peter perhaps likens its readers to the גר-תושב instead, a category which the rabbinic writings frequently use to describe a “pious Gentile” who has

³⁵¹ Donaldson 2007:508.

forsaken idolatry and keeps elements of Jewish custom, such as the Noachide commandments, without necessarily undergoing circumcision.

My proposed interpretation of 1 Pet 2.11 is not entirely novel. Several decades ago, J.R. Michaels broached the idea that 1 Peter's readers were "Noachians", described by Michaels as Gentile Christians who were subject to the Jerusalem Decree which may have been influenced by the Noachide commandments.³⁵² However, he quickly downplays this possibility, rightly acknowledging that the mention of Noah in 1 Pet 3.20-21 is not a strong supporting argument. More recently, Torrey Seland has argued that the terms *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* "belong to the semantic field 'proselyte / proselytism'."³⁵³ Although Seland does not incorporate the rabbinic writings into his study, he too notes how *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* in the LXX translate גר and תושב, terms which often refer to foreigners who settled among the Israelites. Moreover, Seland sees some similarities between 1 Peter's descriptions of the readers and Philo's description of proselytes, such as the verse discussed in the previous chapter concerning the addressees being "called out of darkness" into God's light (1 Pet 2.9).³⁵⁴ In this regard, I largely agree with Seland's argument.

I disagree, however, with Seland's conclusion. Although he affirms that *πάροικος* καὶ *παρεπίδημος* in 1 Pet 2.11 resembles the descriptions of proselytes, Seland concludes that Peter chooses this label to shed light on "the social estrangement of the Christian converts in the Graeco-Roman societies of Asia Minor as understood by the author."³⁵⁵ Facing hostility from former friends and family, "their social situation had become similar to that of Jewish proselytes."³⁵⁶ In short, he believes that the term primarily emphasises the marginalisation suffered by the readers, without considering that Peter uses this phrase to express something about their new identity as "resident foreigners" welcomed into the people of Israel. His rationale is that the recipients of 1 Peter were probably not "actual former proselytes" – a hypothesis raised by van Unnik but generally rejected – and his lack of engagement with rabbinic sources perhaps leaves him unaware of how גר-תושב had developed into a category of "pious Gentile".³⁵⁷ Indeed, Seland's suggestion draws our attention to the language

³⁵² Michaels 1988:lii-liii.

³⁵³ Seland 2005:40.

³⁵⁴ Seland 2005:64-67.

³⁵⁵ Seland 2005:40.

³⁵⁶ Seland 2005:61.

³⁵⁷ van Unnik 1980:81.

surrounding Jewish conversion around the time 1 Peter was written, and why גר-תושב would have been a suitable term for non-Jewish Christ-followers.

(3.3.1) Conversion in the Late Second Temple Period

One reason why this hypothesis has not been seriously considered is our narrow understanding of Jewish “conversion”, which in turn limits the way we believe early Christians could have conceptualised the turning of Gentiles to Christ. “Conversion” in a Jewish context is typically regarded as “becoming a Jew”. As we discussed in Chapter 1, the second-century writer Dio Cassius writes about this phenomenon (*Hist.* 51.20.6-8), while Epictetus states that an individual who “vacillates” (ἐπαμφοτερίζοντα) is “not a Jew, but only acting as one (οὐκ ἔστιν Ἰουδαῖος, ἀλλ’ ὑποκρίνεται)” whereas a person who has completely adopted Jewish practices is “a Jew in fact and is also called one (ἔστι τῷ ὄντι καὶ καλεῖται Ἰουδαῖος).”³⁵⁸ Josephus also refers to this in the story of Izates (*Ant.* 20.17-97). Within this framework, a Jewish proselyte or convert is effectively regarded as a “Jew”. Thus Paula Fredriksen writes, “the Gentile who converts is no longer a Gentile, but a Jew.”³⁵⁹ This is often compared to other degrees of religious affiliation, such as the “godfearers” or “sympathisers”, an ill-defined category of Gentiles who are warmly disposed to the Jewish people but do not entirely forsake their ancestral customs and, in the case of males, do not undergo circumcision.³⁶⁰ Yet as Katell Berthelot points out, the question of integrating an “outsider” into a given group looks radically different depending on whether the group in question is a dispersed minority within a larger society, or if the group represents a perceived ethnic majority living sovereignly on its own territory.³⁶¹

I therefore propose that the incorporation of גרים within Israelite society is a *form* of conversion, albeit one that looks different from the kind of conversion described by Dio Cassius and Josephus.³⁶² The גרים are people of foreign birth who turn to the god of Israel – unlike “godfearers”, they have abandoned their ancestral customs, but unlike our usual

³⁵⁸ Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.9.21; translations mine.

³⁵⁹ Fredriksen 1991:537; cf. Cohen 1999:140; Donaldson 2007:483-484; but see also Paula Fredriksen’s criticism of “conversion” as a term (Fredriksen 2006:232-236).

³⁶⁰ Fredriksen 1991:540-543; Lieu 1995:483-484; as Judith Lieu notes in this article, however, the most notable example of “godfearers” being used for Gentile sympathisers comes from a third-century inscription in Aphrodisias.

³⁶¹ Berthelot 1999:176.

³⁶² Moreover, as pagans, Dio Cassius and Epictetus reflect an outsider’s perspective on Jewish conversion, which may differ from how Jews themselves viewed converts.

portrayal of proselytes, the גרים do not become “Jews” or “Israelites” but retain a special status as גרים. Even after undergoing circumcision, the גר in Exod 12.48-49 remains a distinct from the אזרה as a category while sharing the same privilege of participation in the Passover. Importantly, it seems that this category of “non-native insider” is reflected in texts from the late Second Temple period like the *Damascus Document*.

vacat וסרך מושב כל המחנות יפקדו כלם בשמותיהם הכהנים לראשונה
והלויים שנים ובני ישראל שלשתם והגר רביע ויכתבו בשמותיהם
איש אחר אחיהו הכהנים לראשונה והלויים שנים ובני ישראל
שלושתם והגר רביע

And the rule for the meeting of all the camps. They shall all be mustered by their names: the priests first, the Levites second, the Israelites third, and the proselyte(s) fourth. And they shall be inscribed by their names, each man after his brother: the priests first, the Levites second, the Israelites third, and the proselyte(s) fourth.³⁶³

The text indicates that the גרים are members of the camp distinct from the בני ישראל, with Berthelot describing them as the “stranger integrated into Israel” (*étranger intégré à Israël*).³⁶⁴ There is some debate about whether the גרים in the *Damascus Document* are merely “rhetorical and legal fictions,” owing to the more negative treatment of גרים in other texts from Qumran,³⁶⁵ but CD 14.3-6 nonetheless provides evidence that some Jews around the first century BCE had a conception of a “non-native insider” which they labelled as a גר.³⁶⁶ Here is a “convert” who is part of the camp yet different from the native “Israelite”.

On a related note, a possible counter-argument to my hypothesis is the fact that 1 Peter does not use προσήλυτος to describe the readers. After all, the LXX also translates גר-ותושב as προσήλυτος καὶ πάροικος, with W.C. Allen suggesting, in an old but influential article, that the LXX generally prefers προσήλυτος as a translation for גר and uses it in contexts where the individual is probably a proselyte, and only employs πάροικος instead

³⁶³ CD 14.3-6; trans. Fraade 2021:116. This section of the *Damascus Document* is reconstructed from fragments 4Q267, 4Q268, and 4Q269. While Steven Fraade’s critical edition does not reflect all the uncertainties in the fragments, in the context of this thesis the presence of גר in the text is most pertinent, and the word is attested in 4Q267 and 4Q268 (Wacholder 2007:96-97).

³⁶⁴ Berthelot 1999:177, 185.

³⁶⁵ Gillihan 2011:300-301; but see Kengo Akiyama’s response, especially regarding Gillihan’s assumption that the sectarian writings from Qumran share a common outlook regarding the גר (Akiyama 2016:123-124).

³⁶⁶ Berthelot writes concerning CD 14.3-6 that the date of composition is uncertain, but most likely 150–100 BCE (Berthelot 1999:188).

when the text in question cannot be referring to a convert.³⁶⁷ Though Allen's article is now in its 130th year, it continues to hold sway. Christiana van Houten, for instance, approvingly cites him and concludes, "The translators of the Pentateuch came to the text with a notion of the proselyte, and took גר to refer to the proselyte except in the cases where the meaning proselyte was impossible."³⁶⁸ If Allen and van Houten are right, then Peter's choice to use πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος instead of προσήλυτος καὶ πάροικος may suggest that he is intentionally avoiding the language of conversion. However, there are three possible factors which could explain why Peter chooses not to use προσήλυτος.

- 1) Προσήλυτος was not the only Greek term denoting conversion, and first-century Jewish writers had a range of descriptions for proselytes. Philo, for instance, recognises that one who turns to YHWH is called a προσήλυτος (*Spec.* 1.51), but elsewhere prefers the terms ἔπῃλυς, ἐπῃλύτης, and ἐπῃλυτος to describe converts.³⁶⁹ Moreover, Torrey Seland and Matthew Thiessen have argued that the strict semantic demarcation drawn between πάροικος and προσήλυτος in the LXX is somewhat misleading.³⁷⁰ Seland and Thiessen highlight the interchangeability of these two terms, such as the fact that the Israelites are called προσήλυτοι in Egypt,³⁷¹ and variant readings of 1 Chr 29.15 and 2 Sam 1.13 which have προσήλυτος instead of πάροικος. Overall, it appears that πάροικος and παρεπίδημος still belong to the semantic field of conversion and may denote a type of convert distinct from the προσήλυτος.
- 2) The second possible reason is related: by the time 1 Peter was composed, it is likely that προσήλυτος was already an established category of Jewish convert. The writer of Acts, for instance, indicates that the visitors from Rome at Pentecost included both Ἰουδαῖοι and προσήλυτοι (2.11), and a certain Nicolaus is identified as a προσήλυτος from Antioch (6.5). This category had relatively clear boundaries, and one rite of passage for men to become προσήλυτοι was circumcision.³⁷² Likewise, according to *Tractate Gerim* 1.6, a man is only a גר if he has undergone circumcision, whereas a גר־ותושב need not be circumcised. To avoid giving the impression that circumcision

³⁶⁷ Allen 1894:264-275.

³⁶⁸ van Houten 1991:181.

³⁶⁹ Seland 2005:56-57.

³⁷⁰ Seland 2005:54-56; Thiessen 2013:333-350.

³⁷¹ Eg. Exod 22.21; 23.9; Lev 19.34; Deut 10.19.

³⁷² Josephus, *Vita* 113; *Ant.* 20.38-48; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.2; Cohen 1999:157.

was necessary, the writer of 1 Peter may have intentionally chosen *πάροικος* καὶ *παρεπίδημος* to highlight the readers' status as uncircumcised members of Israel instead of *προσήλυτος*.

- 3) Finally, we saw in *Tractate Gerim* that Gen 23.4 and Ps 39.12 seem to have been particularly influential in rabbinic thought concerning the status of the *גר־ותושב* and God's special love for them, especially due to the fact that Abraham and David, in those two passages, describe themselves as *גר־ותושב*. By describing his readers as *πάροικοι* καὶ *παρεπίδημοι*, he not only connects them to the people of Israel, but specifically associates them with two of Israel's most significant figures.

Ultimately, 1 Peter is borrowing the language of conversion but does not depict the readers as "Jewish proselytes". Rather, they are like the "pious Gentile" who is often labelled as *גר־ותושב*, someone who has rejected idolatry, turned to YHWH, and possibly adheres to the Noachide commandments in some form. This idea finds additional support in the broader literary context of 1 Pet 2.11.

(3.3.2) The Trouble with Desire

A few literary factors also support my interpretation of *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* in 1 Peter. In 1 Pet 2.11, our writer describes the readers as *πάροικος* καὶ *παρεπίδημος* as part of an ethical injunction. "Abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul,"³⁷³ he writes. However, if *πάροικοι* καὶ *παρεπίδημοι* primarily signifies the readers' sense of estrangement from their pagan neighbours, this statement seems unusual – why should the experience of social estrangement compel them to abstain from fleshly desires?

In *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, Philo ruminates on the command in Exod 22.21 that the Israelites must not oppress a *גר*, for they were *גר־ים* in Egypt. He then provides the following reflection: "It is evident that the proselyte is one who circumcises not his foreskin, but the pleasures, desires, and other passions of the soul."³⁷⁴ For Philo the defining trait of the *προσήλυτος* is the metaphorical circumcision of pleasure (*ἡδονή*), desire (*ἐπιθυμία*), and

³⁷³ "ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἵτινες στρατεύονται κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς."

³⁷⁴ "Εμφανέστατα παρίστησιν ὅτι προσήλυτός ἐστιν, οὐχ ὁ περιτμηθεὶς τὴν ἀκροβυστίαν ἀλλ' ὁ τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάθη τῆς ψυχῆς" (Philo, *QE* 2.2; translation mine). For Philo's more positive defence of physical circumcision, see *Spec.* 1.2-7.

passions of the soul (πάθη τῆς ψυχῆς). This closely resembles the injunction in 1 Pet 2.11 to abstain from “fleshly desires”. 1 Peter was probably not influenced directly by Philo, but perhaps shares a similar notion of Israel’s עַמּוּל being principally characterised by their renunciation of ἐπιθυμία. If so, that strengthens the possibility that the phrase πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι is a reference to the readers’ new status as members of Israel.

Early Christian writings concerning Gentile inclusion also support this theory. There are five other occurrences of the verb “abstain” (ἀπέχεσθαι) in the NT.³⁷⁵ In 1 Tim 4.3, the writer warns of false teachers who encourage others to “abstain from certain foods (ἀπέχεσθαι βρωμάτων)”. Gerald Bray believes that the prohibition was likely “rooted in Greek philosophical concepts” – possibly a Platonic separation between the spiritual and the physical – as the writer here makes no mention of Moses or the law.³⁷⁶ It is in Acts and 1 Thessalonians, however, where we find the remaining four occurrences, which parallel the use of ἀπέχεσθαι in 1 Pet 2.11 and offer an insight into the reasons for this injunction.

Acts 15 tells us that the apostles had gathered in Jerusalem, where they wrestled with the issue of Gentile inclusion and whether circumcision was necessary for non-Jews to be included within God’s people. As we discussed in the previous chapter, they ultimately draft a letter which seems to resemble the “diaspora letter type” present in some Jewish writings,³⁷⁷ with the following instructions:

[...] to the brothers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia (τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν καὶ Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς ἐξ ἐθνῶν) [...] it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication (ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνικτῶν καὶ πορνείας).³⁷⁸

Within the narrative of Acts, this was a key development for the early Church, presenting an agreement among all the major leaders concerning the inclusion of non-Jews. Interestingly,

³⁷⁵ The others being Acts 15.20, 29; 1 Thes 4.3; 5.22 and 1 Tim 4.3.

³⁷⁶ Bray 2019:212-213.

³⁷⁷ Doering 2009; See Section 2.3 for the similarity between 1 Peter and Acts 15.22-29 as “Christian diaspora letters”.

³⁷⁸ Acts 15.23, 28-29; This passage has a few text-critical issues, the most significant of which is the omission of “what is strangled” by several Western texts, which is replaced instead by a negative formulation of the Golden Rule, both here and in 15.20. However, Metzger has convincingly argued that these are later alterations, and that the original text prohibits the consumption of strangled animal meat (Metzger 1994:432).

scholars have noted strong parallels between the four prohibitions in Acts 15.28-29 and the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17-19. In Lev 17-19, there are four instructions which apply not only to native Israelites, but also to “the foreigner who resides among you” (הגר בתוכם):

- 1) Prohibition against sacrifices which are not offered to YHWH at the Tent of Meeting (17.8-9)
- 2) Prohibition against the consumption of blood (17.10-12)
- 3) Requirement to drain out an animal's blood when slaughtering it (17.13)
- 4) Prohibition against sexual immorality (18.24-26)

Richard Bauckham therefore argues that these four prohibitions in Acts 15.28-29 parallel the four prohibitions in Lev 17–18 directed towards גרים in content and sequence.³⁷⁹ These injunctions in turn shaped the later formulation of the so-called Noachide Commandments.³⁸⁰ For the early Church, the privileges and obligations of גרים in the Hebrew Bible became a fruitful way of understanding how non-Jewish believers might be included within the people of God.

We will return to Acts 15 shortly. For now, we turn to 1 Thessalonians, a letter ostensibly written by the apostle Paul.³⁸¹ Like the readers of 1 Peter, the Thessalonians were experiencing some degree of hardship due to their faith (2.14; 3.3). Amidst these persecutions, however, Paul encourages them to continue living distinctly among their pagan neighbours.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification (ὁ ἁγιασμός ὑμῶν): that you abstain from fornication (ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας); that each one of you knows how to control your own body in holiness and honour, not with lustful passion (μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας), like the Gentiles who do not know God (καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν); that no one wrongs or exploits a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. (1 Thess 4.3-6)

³⁷⁹ Bauckham 1995:459-461; cf. Bockmuehl 2000:152-153; while the prohibition against eating a strangled animal (Acts 15.29) is not identical to the requirement to drain out the animal's blood (Lev 17.13), Bauckham suggests that the command in Acts is the negative corollary to the command in Leviticus (cf. Philo, *Spec.* 4.122).

³⁸⁰ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:195.

³⁸¹ While some consider the letter pseudepigraphic (Crüsemann 2019:161-186), the arguments seem to me unconvincing, and the Pauline authorship of this letter is more persuasive (cf. Bockmuehl 2001:3-5; Boring 2015:91).

In Andrew Bowden's monograph on ἐπιθυμία, he suggests that the Jerusalem letter in Acts 15 may have influenced Paul's instructions to Gentile believers, and he cites 1 Thess 4.3-6 to illustrate this point.³⁸² According to Bowden:

[T]he phrase ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας is a reference by Paul to the instructions he and his coworkers received from James on behalf of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15:20 and 29 [...] In 4:1-8 Paul explains that for Thessalonian believers, holiness implies they should abstain from sexual immorality...which, among other things, includes avoiding the emotion of desire.³⁸³

For Bowden, 1 Thess 4.3-6 and Acts 15 represent early Christian ethical instructions particularly addressing non-Jewish believers. Interestingly, there are several similarities between 1 Thess 4.3-6 and 1 Pet 2.11-12. First, there is the command to abstain (ἀπέχεσθαι) from inappropriate behaviour, and although 1 Thess 4.3 urges the reader to abstain from "fornication" (πορνείας), in 4.4 he seems to elaborate upon this by censuring "lustful passion" (πάθει ἐπιθυμίας), which is similar to 1 Pet 2.11 in its warning against ἐπιθυμία. Second, the direct result of abstaining from such inappropriate behaviour in both 1 Thess 4.5 and 1 Pet 2.12 is that the believers will then be distinct from Gentiles (also 1 Pet 4.2-4). Third, ἐπιθυμία is connected to ignorance (cf. 1 Pet 1.14-15; 4.1-2).³⁸⁴ While these similarities are not strong enough to suggest that 1 Thessalonians influenced 1 Peter (or vice versa), it suggests that both passages are addressing similar issues – how formerly-Gentile believers are to live in the light of the Jerusalem council's decree in Acts 15, abstaining from immorality and thereby distancing themselves from Gentiles. A connection between 1 Peter and Acts 15 has been proposed by Friedrich W. Horn who speculates that, by mentioning Silvanus' involvement in the writing of this letter (5.12), 1 Peter's author presents the epistle as a document similar to the Apostles' Decree from Acts 15, for which Silvanus was also a messenger (15.23).³⁸⁵ It is therefore plausible that 1 Peter 2.11, like 1 Thess 4.3-6, is an example of early Christian paraenesis for formerly Gentile believers as they negotiate their new ethnic identity as members of God's people following the decisions of the Jerusalem council described in Acts 15.

³⁸² Bowden 2020:371-382.

³⁸³ Bowden 2020:381-382.

³⁸⁴ According to the LSJ, ψυχή can refer to "the conscious self or personality as centre of emotions, desires, and affections," including "the moral and intellectual self".

³⁸⁵ Horn 2013:13-14; cf. Herzer 1998:69. Incidentally, Silas is also listed as one of the authors of 1 Thessalonians, though Horn does not press this point.

If this hypothesis is accurate, then the description of the readers as *πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι* – the stimulus for the injunction to abstain from desires of the flesh – has more to do with their new ethnic identity as non-Jews who have been included into God's people than with the experience of social alienation. Like Philo's description of Israel's converts, Gentile Christians must also circumcise the desires of their soul.

(3.3.3) Literary Unity of 2.9–2.12

An additional supporting argument for my thesis concerns the literary unity of 1 Pet 2.11 and its preceding passage. 1 Pet 2.11 marks, for many scholars, a pivot in the epistle. “First Peter 2:11 is the beginning of a new major unit that extends through 4:11,” writes Ruth Anne Reese.³⁸⁶ This new major unit, Reese suggests, is primarily concerned with countering negative stereotypes which outsiders may have had against the Jesus movement, and it is widely believed that this tension with unbelievers inspires Peter to address his readers in this verse as “aliens and exiles”.

This is a reasonable conjecture. After all, 2.4-10 speaks primarily about who the readers *are* – their status as God's people being built into a spiritual house – whereas 2.11 to 3.7 seems especially concerned with how they should *live*, especially in social interactions with outsiders (2.12), human authorities (2.13), slave-masters (2.18), husbands (3.1), and wives (3.7). Yet this thematic pivot should not be overstated, and we should instead recognise the significant levels of continuity between 2.9-10 and 2.11-12. “Verses 11 and 12 are key for what follows,” Craig Keener remarks, “but they also relate to the preceding section.”³⁸⁷ For instance, 1 Pet 2.9 urges the readers to “proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvellous light,” with Peter then returning to this theme in 2.12 when he writes, “have noble conduct among the Gentiles, so that...they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.”

If *πάροικοι* and *παρεπίδημοι* in 2.11 denote not the readers' estrangement from society but their inclusion into Israel, then the connection with 2.9-10 becomes clearer. Wan Wei-Hsien insightfully notes that throughout 1 Peter, “the antithesis to the readers' identity as *πάροικοι-παρεπίδημοι* is not those who are residents, but ‘Gentiles’, who are in turn defined

³⁸⁶ Reese 2022:130.

³⁸⁷ Keener 2021:49.

not by their political status but rather by their ethical conduct.”³⁸⁸ The readers are called to live distinctly among Gentiles (2.12) and are described as former Gentiles (4.3), not former “citizens” (πολῖται). The best explanation for this is that πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος conveys something about the believers’ new ethnic identity, a topic which we will continue to discuss in the following chapter as we examine the letter’s use of “Gentiles”.

This hypothesis also finds marginal support (literally) from one of our earliest manuscripts of 1 Peter, the Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex VIII (P72), likely copied around the third or fourth century.³⁸⁹ The codex includes “marginal headings” which offer insights into the scribe’s hermeneutic, and the scribe has grouped 1 Pet 2.9–3.17 under the heading *περι γένος ἐγλεκτον βασιλῖον ἱερατεῦμα ἔθνος ἅγιον λαὸς περιποίησιν*.³⁹⁰ While the precise intentions of our scribe cannot be discerned, we may possibly surmise that 1 Pet 2.11 did not represent for him the beginning of a “new major unit” (*pace* Reese) so much as a continuation of an idea starting with 2.9. This train of thought may arise from reading πάροικοι and παρεπίδημοι in 2.11 as a reference to the readers’ status as non-native insiders who now rightly belong to God’s “chosen people”, rather than an indication of their marginalised status.

(3.4) Πάροικος and Παρεπίδημος in the Ancient World

Within the New Testament, 1 Peter is the only text which uses πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος as a phrase. Πάροικοι and παρεπίδημοι rarely appear together in Greek writings, so the LXX and rabbinic literature, as discussed earlier, provide the most fruitful bases for comparison due to their lexical similarity.³⁹¹ At the same time, 1 Pet 1.1 calls the readers παρεπίδημοι and 1 Pet 1.17 describes the present time of παροικία. The use of πάροικος and παρεπίδημος in other texts thus merits attention.

(3.4.1) Early Christian Writings

Several early Christian writings use either πάροικος or παρεπίδημος. Like 1 Peter, the letter to the Hebrews is a document which seeks to encourage beleaguered believers,

³⁸⁸ Wan 2019:164.

³⁸⁹ Nongbri 2016; Wasserman 2005.

³⁹⁰ Wiefel 1973:301.

³⁹¹ Reese 2022:132.

appealing explicitly to Jewish Scripture in order to strengthen their confidence in Jesus' person and activity. Hebrews thus emerges from a similar milieu to 1 Peter, although questions about authorship and dating remain notoriously unresolved.³⁹² In Hebrews 11, the writer recalls several exemplars of faith from Israel's history, with verses 8-19 focusing on the characters Abraham and Sarah. In the middle of this section, the author reflects on the experience of foreignness.

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth (ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοί εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland (πατρίδα). (Heb 11.13-14)

The motif of pilgrimage, as Ernst Käsemann notes, runs through the letter.³⁹³ Yet Käsemann's theory that the writer is drawing upon Gnostic ideas has largely been rejected, and scholars today typically read this theme of "wandering" in light of the Exodus story and the author's interpretation of Ps 95.³⁹⁴ Here in Heb 11.13, παρεπίδημος is paired with ξένος. Our author may be alluding here to Gen 23.4 but drawing from a different Greek translation, though we have no evidence of ξένος καὶ παρεπίδημος being used to describe Abraham or the patriarchs. Another possibility is that the author of Hebrews recognises that πάροικος may imply a relatively settled status, and therefore chooses to describe the patriarchs as ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι to emphasise their life as nomads.

On one level, this passage seems to run contrary to my hypothesis concerning 1 Peter. Here παρεπίδημος certainly does not denote inclusion into Israel. However, neither does it denote any social marginalisation experienced by the patriarchs from their neighbours. In this regard, its use of παρεπίδημος is consistent with what we find in other Greek texts from this period, as we shall shortly see. Heb 11.13 spiritualises the nomadic and transient status of Israel's progenitors without using παρεπίδημος to imply exclusion.

We find a similar language of "spiritual foreignness" in the *Epistle to Diognetus*. The writer seeks to expound "the mystery of the Christian's own religion,"³⁹⁵ stating that they are

³⁹² Following Harold Attridge and Luke Timothy Johnson, I believe Hebrews probably originated in the second half of the first century, perhaps between 60 and 95 CE (Attridge 1989:9; Johnson 2006:38-40).

³⁹³ Käsemann 1984:18-19.

³⁹⁴ Mason 2008:56.

³⁹⁵ Diogn. 4.6; trans. Holmes 2007:701.

undistinguishable from non-Christians in matters of language, dress, and food (5.1-4). Yet they are noticeable for the “character of their citizenship (τὴν κατάστασιν τῆς ἑαυτῶν πολιτείας).”³⁹⁶ The writer then adds, “They live in their own countries, but only as non-residents (πάροικοι); they participate in everything as citizens (πολῖται), and endure everything as foreigners (ξένοι). Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign.”³⁹⁷ This description of Christians as πάροικοι in their own countries seems to support Elliott’s hypothesis, denoting their liminal status in their own homeland. The passage uses πάροικος to emphasise the believer’s detachment from their own countries, rather than their incorporation into Israel. Yet even here the metaphorical use of πάροικος implies full participation in the life of their society; they are not *outcasts*, but pilgrims.

While these uses of πάροικος and παρεπίδημος are different from 1 Pet 2.11, they are not incompatible. As we saw previously with Lev 25.23, גֵּר־וְתוֹשֵׁב could refer to a category of “resident alien” within Israel, while concurrently reflecting the status of *all Israelites* as tenants in YHWH’s land. Similarly, I believe that 1 Peter could refer to Christ-followers of Gentile origin as πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι with regard to their status as non-native insiders, while concurrently conceiving of all believers as “resident foreigners” in relation to God. The former meaning guides the latter – the notion of πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι as welcomed foreigners, rather than marginalised outsiders, undergirds the metaphorical understanding of believers as temporary residents in God’s world. Their life on earth is fleeting, but they are not unwelcomed.

The letter to the Ephesians provides a different case study. In seeming contradiction to 1 Pet 2.11, the writer of Ephesians tells the readers that they are *no longer* πάροικοι. “So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens (ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι), but you are fellow citizens (συμπολῖται) with the saints and also members of the household of God,” Eph 2.19 declares. Though they used to be ξένοι and πάροικοι, the readers are now “fellow citizens” (συμπολῖται) with the saints and members of God’s household. The primary sense of πάροικος, here paired with ξένος, is “non-citizen” in relation to Israel. Earlier in this letter, the writer makes this point concerning the new ethnic identity of the formerly Gentile believers.

³⁹⁶ Diogn. 5.3; trans. Holmes 2007:702.

³⁹⁷ Diogn. 5.5; trans. Holmes 2007:702-703.

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth (ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί) [...] remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραήλ), and strangers to the covenants of promise (καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας), having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2.11-13)

As in 1 Pet 2.11, the primary issue in this passage is the relationship of non-Jewish believers to the people of Israel. Both writers are addressing the question of Gentile inclusion into Israel, and both seek to emphasise the privileges and obligations that non-Jewish Christ-followers now have. However, they differ in terminology, with Ephesians choosing *not* to call the readers πάροικοι.

This difference is understandable for three reasons. First, the “resident alien” in Israel – whether referred to as πάροικος, προσήλυτος, גֵּר־תּוֹשֵׁב, or גֵּר – remains a “second-class citizen” to some extent in some Jewish texts. While Num 15.15-16 stresses the equal treatment of native Israelite and resident alien and Ezek 47.21-23 envisions a future where both partake in the divine inheritance, other passages like Deut 14.21 indicate occasional differences in legal matters between the two categories. Similarly, *m. Bava Metzia* 5.6 allows Jews to charge interest to the גֵּר־תּוֹשֵׁב when lending money, but not to fellow Jews. The writer of Ephesians, in emphasising Christ’s redemptive work of creating “one new humanity” (2.15), perhaps sought to stress the equality of status that all believers in Jesus now enjoy, and thus described the readers as συμπολιταί rather than πάροικοι.

This leads to the second reason why Ephesians employs πάροικος differently from 1 Peter. Unlike 1 Peter, Ephesians depicts Christian identity using the language of citizenship. This is a relatively unusual move. Katell Berthelot notes that civic institutions are generally absent from the Old Testament, as the people of Israel were generally ruled by monarchs or by a priestly class.

[T]he terms *politeia*, *politeuma*, and *politeuomai* are completely absent from the Septuagint... Most conspicuously, the term *ezrah*, which means ‘citizen’ in modern Hebrew but refers to someone who dwells in the land in the Hebrew Bible, is never translated as *politēs* in the Septuagint. Instead, the translators chose the words

autochtōn and *enchōrios*, both of which refer to people's connection to the land. As a matter of fact, there is no Hebrew equivalent to 'citizen' in the biblical books.³⁹⁸

It is thus hardly surprising that we find no civic terminology in 1 Peter. However, Berthelot observes an important development in the Roman period. "Philo, Josephus, and the author of 4 Maccabees use the words *politeuma*, *polites*, and *politeuomai* extensively," she remarks, with the idea that Jewishness could be construed as a form of citizenship that united Jewish people regardless of where they lived.³⁹⁹ This was chiefly a metaphorical or conceptual construct, rather than an actual political development. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, "only cities in the political sense bestowed citizenships."⁴⁰⁰ Yet Jewish writers in the Roman period, perhaps adopting the language of their interlocutors, began applying civic language to the people of Israel. Thus Josephus, near the beginning of his *Antiquities*, speaks of Moses addressing "his fellow-citizens (τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ πολίτας)."⁴⁰¹

Importantly, the privilege of metaphorical citizenship extended even to converts. Thus Philo states that the προσήλυτοι have "joined the new and godly commonwealth (προσεληλυθέναι καινῇ καὶ φιλοθέῳ πολιτείᾳ)," and have thereby been given all the privileges given to "the native born (τοῖς αὐτόχθοσι)."⁴⁰² Along similar lines, Josephus writes that the Gibeonites "craved to become their [Israel's] fellow-citizens (πολίτας ἀξιοῦν αὐτῶν γενέσθαι)."⁴⁰³ By describing the addressees of Ephesians as συμπολιταὶ in Israel's πολιτεία, the letter's writer seems to lean in a similar direction, applying civic language to Israel in a manner akin to Philo and Josephus.⁴⁰⁴ In so doing, Ephesians avoids depicting conversion to Christ in ethnic terms. This can be seen most clearly in its use of "Gentiles" (τὰ ἔθνη). As we will discuss in the following chapter, 1 Peter speaks of τὰ ἔθνη as outsiders (2.12; 4.3), people who slander the community of Jesus followers and from whom the readers have severed ties of friendship. In 1 Cor 12.2, Paul tells his readers that "when you were Gentiles

³⁹⁸ Berthelot 2023:534.

³⁹⁹ Berthelot 2023:538; Jews could still be active citizens of other polities, such as Rome or Alexandria (Pearce 1998).

⁴⁰⁰ Berthelot 2019:112.

⁴⁰¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 1.21; LCL 242:10-11.

⁴⁰² Philo, *Spec.* 1.51; LCL 320:126-129.

⁴⁰³ Josephus, *Ant.* 5.54; LCL 490:186-187; however, Josephus notably does not refer to the Idumeans nor Itureans as πολῖται (Berthelot 2019:114-115). At the same time, several scholars have suggested that the conversion of the Idumeans was modelled after the Roman policy of granting citizenship to former enemies (Goodman 1994:76-77; Schwartz 2001:40; Smith 1978:1-7).

⁴⁰⁴ We see a similar idea in Philippians 3.20, where the writer speaks of "citizenship in heaven" (τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς).

(ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε) you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak,” implying that they were once τὰ ἔθνη, but are no longer so.⁴⁰⁵ In contrast, Ephesians has a more complex understanding of τὰ ἔθνη as a category, at times suggesting that the readers *remain* τὰ ἔθνη (e.g. 2.11; 3.1, 6).⁴⁰⁶ To some extent, Ephesians accepts the salvation of Gentiles *as Gentiles*; the readers have not undergone an *ethnic* transformation but a *civic* one. Hence, the letter adopts a different rhetorical strategy from 1 Peter and tells the readers that they are *not* πάροικοι.

Our final case study from early Christian literature is 1 Clement, which uses cognates of πάροικος and παρεπίδημος. Clement writes on behalf of “the church of God that sojourns (παροικοῦσα) in Rome” and addresses “the church of God that sojourns (παροικουμένη) in Corinth”, using παροικέω to speak of the believers dwelling in a city.⁴⁰⁷ In the context, it is not clear whether Clement is adopting a spiritual notion, akin to Hebrews and *Diognetus*, that believers are merely transient visitors on earth, or using παροικέω to simply mean “to reside” in a place. I lean towards the second option as nothing in the literary context suggests a longing for a “heavenly” dwelling. Either way, παροικέω in this verse does not imply conflict with or stigmatisation by one’s pagan neighbours. Shortly thereafter, Clement rhetorically asks the church in Corinth, “Has anyone ever visited (παρεπιδημήσας) you who did not approve your most excellent and steadfast faith?”⁴⁰⁸ Here παρεπιδημέω signifies a visit characterised by hospitality, not hostility. In summary, Clement’s usage of παροικέω and παρεπιδημέω does not support the hypothesis that these terms denote social alienation, but rather, they often imply that one “resides” or “visits” a given locality respectively. In this regard, 1 Clement’s use of παροικέω and παρεπιδημέω is similar to the usage of these terms in Graeco-Roman society more generally.

(3.4.2) Graeco-Roman Society

As noted earlier, Reinhard Feldmeier and Steven Bechtler have shown that πάροικοι in Graeco-Roman society could refer to native non-citizens. Such persons did not have the rights of full citizens but were nonetheless incorporated into the local community. One

⁴⁰⁵ Concannon 2014:115.

⁴⁰⁶ Dunning 2006:8-13.

⁴⁰⁷ 1 Clem, *Prol.*; trans. Holmes 2007:45; this style of greeting was echoed by other early Christians, such as Polycarp (*Letter to the Philippians*, *Intro.*).

⁴⁰⁸ 1 Clem 1.2; trans. Holmes 2007:45.

interesting example is an inscription from Pagai (c. 64–56 BCE) recording the celebration of a feast. Food was to be provided, reads the inscription, to “all the citizens and resident foreigners and to the visiting Romans (τοὺς πολεῖτας πάντ[ας κ]αὶ παροίκους καὶ τοὺς [παρεπιδ]αμοῦντας Ῥωμαίων)” (IG 7.190).⁴⁰⁹ Here we find *πάροιχοι* probably used alongside a cognate of *παρεπίδημος* – the only extant use of *πάροιχος* alongside *παρεπίδημος* in a pagan context – yet neither denote *excluded* individuals. On the contrary, they are invited to the feast, together with full citizens.

In several contexts, *πάροιχος* could simply denote one who dwells beside a people or place, without any clear implications concerning citizenship. Diodorus Siculus, for instance, speaks of the Athenians possibly becoming “neighbours” of the Ambraciotes should they successfully occupy Ambracia, using *πάροιχοι*.⁴¹⁰ Appian the historian uses the term to describe six Greek towns bordering Mysia.⁴¹¹ Most humorous of all, the writer Aelian invites the reader to ask “the neighbouring Thracians (οἱ πάροιχοι Θρᾷκες)” about a river in Thrace where sheep change their colour!⁴¹² For these writers, a *πάροιχος* was simply one who dwelled beside another people or place, without any implied marginalisation.

John Elliott also substantiated his thesis concerning the liminal status of *πάροιχοι* by appealing to similar terms denoting “resident aliens” in Graeco-Roman society. For instance, he discusses the precarious situation of Jews residing as *κάτοικοι* in Egypt during Caligula's reign (c. 39/40 CE).⁴¹³ Elliott cites Edith M. Smallwood, who writes:

Flaccus attacked the rights of the Jewish *πολίτευμα* by issuing a proclamation in which he declared that the Jews were ‘aliens and foreigners’ in Alexandria.⁴¹⁴ By this measure he apparently degraded them from their legal position of *κάτοικοι* (resident aliens) to that of *ξένοι*. Presumably this constituted an attack on the Jews' *πολίτευμα* in that its development had depended on the Jews' status as *κάτοικοι* and that its existence was subsequently jeopardized when that status was lost.⁴¹⁵

⁴⁰⁹ See also IG 7.2712 which describes provisions being given to *πᾶσι τοῖς πολεῖταις καὶ παροίκους*.

⁴¹⁰ “οἱ δ' Ἀκαρνᾶνες φοβούμενοι μὴ τῆς πόλεως Ἀθηναῖοι κυριεύσαντες βαρύτεροι *πάροιχοι* γένωνται τῶν Ἀμπρακιωτῶν, οὐκ ἔφασαν ἀκολουθεῖν” (Diodorus Siculus, 12.60.5-6); cf. Thucydides, 3.113.6.

⁴¹¹ “ἔνθα εἰσὶν Ἑλληνίδες ἐξ πόλεις Μυσοῖς *πάροιχοι*” (Appian, *Roman History* 9.2.30; LCL 3:352-353).

⁴¹² “...καὶ τὸν ἐν Θρᾷκη, οὗ τὸ ὄνομα ἐροῦσιν οἱ *πάροιχοι* Θρᾷκες” (Aelian, *On Animals*, 8.21; LCL 448:206-207).

⁴¹³ Elliott 1981:26.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Philo, *Flacc.* 53-54 (“...ξένους καὶ ἐπὶ ἡλῶδας ἡμᾶς ἀπεκάλει”).

⁴¹⁵ Smallwood 1961:20.

Leaving aside for now the question of whether κάτοικοι can be equated with πάροικοι,⁴¹⁶ this passage suggests that the κάτοικοι were *not* an inherently ostracised group in Graeco-Roman society. On the contrary, the Jews' status as κάτοικοι allowed them to participate as members of Alexandrian society; it is the potential loss of that status which threatens the Jewish πολίτευμα and prompts Philo's response. Similarly, Plutarch figuratively uses the language of resident foreigners to speak about aptitude in philosophy. Those who have been brought up in contact with philosophy from a young age, Plutarch writes, are like μέτοικοι who have "been brought up under our laws and grown to be well acquainted with them," whereas others are like ἄλλοδαποί and ξένοι who struggle to adapt to the new way of life.⁴¹⁷ In short, when πάροικοι, κάτοικοι, and μέτοικοι refer to "resident foreigners" in Graeco-Roman society, they typically denote foreigners who are afforded several privileges and have adjusted, to some extent, to the culture of their host. Once again, the idea that 1 Pet 2.11 denotes marginalisation seems unlikely given that our author does not use terms like ξένος, ἔπηλυσ, or ἄλλότριος which more consistently signify liminality in ancient writings.

Παρεπίδημος, which many English translations render as "exile" (e.g. NRSV, NIV, ESV), has generally received less attention, possibly due to the relative paucity of attestations.⁴¹⁸ Most scholars agree with Elliott that it denotes a "visiting foreigner". Yet as our earlier discussion of 1 Clem 1.2 has demonstrated, this includes persons who were welcomed as guests, and a closer look at this term and its cognates from 200 BCE to 100 CE indicates that this term never denotes a *marginalised* figure. On the contrary, the παρεπίδημος is often welcomed despite being a foreigner.

- 1) In Polybius' *Histories*, the Greek historian uses παρεπίδημος, παρεπιδημέω, and παρεπιδημία to refer to Macedonians residing in Rome (*Hist* 27.6), Greeks living in Rome (*Hist* 32.6), foreign soldiers from Boeotia visiting Sparta (*Hist* 13.8), and Dorimachus' temporary residence in Mesene (*Hist* 4.4). With the possible exception of *Hist* 32.6, where it is unclear whether the Greek residents (τοῖς Ἑλλήσι τοῖς παρεπιδήμοις) in Rome had been expelled by Charops or were already living in the city for some time, the παρεπίδημοι have voluntarily moved into a new city. In all four cases, the παρεπίδημοι are welcomed as guests, even though *Hist* 4.4 and 13.8 subsequently present them as troublemakers.

⁴¹⁶ Philo seems to differentiate between κατοικέω and παροικέω in *Agr.* 65.

⁴¹⁷ Plutarch, *On Listening to Lectures* 37F; LCL 197:206-207.

⁴¹⁸ In the NT only Heb 11.13; 1 Pet 1.1; 2.11; in the LXX only Gen 23.4; Ps 38.13 (see above).

- 2) In an inscription concerning the Athenian participants in the Pythais of 128/7 BCE, we find the following:

Since Alkidamos son of Euphanes, an Athenian citizen [...] has conducted himself during his residence excellently, as is appropriate (τὰν τε παρεπιδαμίαν [καὶ] ἀναστροφὰν ἐποίησατο ὡς ἐνδέχεται κάλλιστα); therefore with good fortune it is resolved by the city of Delphi to praise Alkidamos of Athens, the son of Euphanes, for his piety towards the god and his goodwill towards the city. (SIG 697 L)

In this instance, *παρεπιδαμίαν* is used to describe the visit and participation of a certain Alkidamos in the Pythais, an event characterised by mutual respect and goodwill.

- 3) In a text ascribed to Plato but probably written around the first century BCE, Socrates states, “Life is a brief stay in a foreign land (*παρεπιδημία* τίς ἐστὶν ὁ βίος), and...it’s necessary for those who spent it reasonably well to meet their destiny cheerfully.”⁴¹⁹ *Παρεπιδημία* merely denotes temporary residence, without any connotation of exile or estrangement. Echoing our earlier discussion of Hebrews and *Epistle to Diognetus*, *παρεπιδημία* here refers to earthly transience, but not exclusion nor exile.

Contrary to Elliott’s hypothesis, these examples provide little evidence that *παρεπίδημος* signifies marginalisation. This also challenges the common English translation of *παρεπίδημος* as “exile”. Exile denotes banishment and homelessness, and while it is sometimes a temporary situation, it more often implies a long-term expulsion; exile is sorrowful because one *cannot* go back. Yet none of these uses of *παρεπίδημος* depict the subject as one forcibly displaced from their homeland for an extended duration. Moreover, we saw earlier how *y. Yevamot* 8.1.8 uses תושב interchangeably with גר-תושב. We may therefore suggest that, when 1 Peter uses *παρεπίδημος* in isolation in 1 Pet 1.1, the writer may be evoking a similar idea of Israel’s “welcomed foreigners” as he does in 2.11.

For all these reasons, the Graeco-Roman context of *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* does not support the notion that these terms denote social exclusion in 1 Pet 1.1 or 2.11. In many

⁴¹⁹ Plato, *Axiochus* 365b; trans. Hershbell 1981:30-31.

instances, the *πάροικος* or *παρεπίδημος* was in fact a *welcomed* foreigner. Moreover, this survey also challenges any easy bifurcation between “native” and “foreigner”, or “citizen” and “non-citizen” in Graeco-Roman society. Not all foreigners were stigmatised, and in a culture where hospitality was a prized virtue, there were categories of non-natives who had been welcomed and incorporated into the host nation.

(3.5) Conclusion

The Jewish worldview had ways of incorporating foreigners into the people of Israel as non-native insiders. In the pre-exilic and post-exilic writings of the Old Testament and in rabbinic literature, we find numerous examples of how such persons, often called *גרים* and occasionally *גרים-תושבים*, are fully included among the people of Israel despite several differences in *halakha*. The people of Israel are not comprised solely of native-born Israelites.

In this chapter, I argued that Peter's use of *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος* in 2.11 indicates that he is tapping into this well-attested aspect of the Jewish worldview. These terms echo Gen 23.4 and Ps 39.12 (LXX 38.13), and it is no coincidence that rabbinic thinkers alighted on these same two passages when reflecting on the status of “pious Gentiles” in Jewish society, people who were non-Jewish by birth but had chosen to renounce idolatry and conform, in some way, to the Noachide commandments. I thus demonstrate that Peter likewise conceives of his readers as “resident aliens” among Israel, using a familiar Old Testament category to conceptualise how non-Jewish Jesus-followers might have a share in the inheritance of YHWH's chosen people.

What are the implications of this hypothesis for our reading of 1 Peter more broadly? One notorious point of contention between David Balch and John Elliott was whether 1 Peter inclined towards conformity towards or resistance against the Roman empire and society. Balch argued that the domestic code of 1 Peter represents an attempt to enhance the respectability of Christians and lessen the criticism they received from pagan family members and neighbours due to their perceived social deviancy.⁴²⁰ Elliott, as we saw earlier, instead focused on the description of the readers as *πάροικοι* and *παρεπίδημοι* to posit that 1 Peter encourages resistance to the social norms of surrounding culture.⁴²¹ Yet as Benjamin Dunning observes, these so-called “foreigners and exiles” are urged to be law-abiding folk

⁴²⁰ Balch 1981:81-121.

⁴²¹ Elliott 1981:73-84; cf. Elliott 1986:72-73.

who respect Roman governors, honour the emperor, and submit to pagan husbands.⁴²² Whatever *πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος* means, it does not ultimately urge complete *withdrawal* from Roman society. If these terms signify the incorporation of non-Jews into the people of Israel, this further undermines Elliott's argument. At the same time, it does not denote disinterest in human institutions and society. Rather, it reminds the readers that they have undergone a change of peoplehood; like Ruth, the people of Israel have become their people, and Israel's god their god (Ruth 1.16). This change of perspective may not constitute a full-frontal assault against the empire, but presents an alternative narrative of belonging which directs their values and expectations away from Rome and towards Christ.⁴²³

On that note, an important observation from Wan discussed in this chapter was that the readers' characterisation as *πάροικοι-παρεπίδημοι* in 2.11 is not contrasted with "residents", but with "Gentiles" in 2.12, and later in 4.3. The believers are urged to conduct themselves honourably, not among *πολῖται*, but *τὰ ἔθνη*. In the next chapter, we examine this label, which further underlines the reconceptualisation of ethnic boundaries in 1 Peter.

⁴²² Dunning 2009:12.

⁴²³ Horrell 2013a:237; Wan 2019:179-182.

Chapter 4

Malleable Ethnicity: Τὰ ἔθνη as an Outsider Label

When I came to the UK for my university education, I was given a label that I had hitherto never received: “International”. In the UK, this appellation marks one as “non-British”, and it can often be a totalising label which carelessly groups together thousands of individuals from diverse cultures and backgrounds whose only common factor is the lack of British citizenship. At the same time, it is a practical category, identifying all those who fall under a particular set of rules concerning immigration, housing, tuition fees, and so on.

A similar label emerged in Jewish thought: “Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη / גוֹיִים). Like the term “International” in modern-day UK, this was a catch-all category for everyone who was “non-Jewish”. It was an ethnic label with legal and theological implications, and the Jesus movement adopted this language, but in various ways. Matthew and Luke disparagingly describe as Gentiles those who chase after worldly possessions (Matt 6.32; Luke 12.30). Paul sometimes refers to his non-Jewish readers as Gentiles (Rom 11.13) but describes them at other times as *former* Gentiles (1 Cor 12.2). As we shall shortly see, this would have been a novel category for many of Paul’s non-Jewish readers – like the label “international”, a non-Jew would not have regarded herself as a “Gentile” until she had stepped into a Jewish community or worldview.

1 Peter uses this label too, and the question lying at the centre of this chapter is simple: If most of 1 Peter’s implied readers were Gentiles, why then does our author refer to their critics and opponents, whose lives are characterised by idolatry and debauchery, as “Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη) in 2.12 and 4.3? One of the primary goals of this chapter is to demonstrate how the readers’ status as “non-native insiders” in relation to Israel, like the גר-תושב in rabbinic literature, explains the pejorative use of τὰ ἔθνη in this letter. Furthermore, I will show that the τὰ ἔθνη appellation was not “neutral” – that is, it did not merely mean that a person is genealogically non-Jewish, but also implied something about their character and relation to God. In studying this ubiquitous term, therefore, we seek to understand how early Christians perceived “insiders” and “outsiders”, and better appreciate the role of ethnic labels like τὰ ἔθνη in framing Christian identity.

(4.1) Who Are τὰ ἔθνη?

The meaning of τὰ ἔθνη varies between different writers and contexts. In its most basic sense, ἔθνος describes a putative kinship-group with shared customs, homeland, and myth of origins, and could thus refer to Athenians, Libyans, Indians, etc.⁴²⁴ Thus in the LXX, Israel may be described as YHWH's ἔθνος (Exod 19.6), or as one ἔθνος among many (Deut 32.8-9; Ps 33.12). We saw earlier that Peter uses ἔθνος in this sense when he describes the readers as a ἔθνος ἄγιον (1 Pet 2.9), echoing Exod 19.6. However, over time ἔθνη also came to refer to “foreign nations”, a shift perhaps first attested by Aristotle, who writes:

Hence even though with most peoples most of the legal ordinances have been laid down virtually at random, nevertheless if there are places where the laws aim at one definite object, that object is in all cases power, as in Sparta and Crete both the system of education and the mass of the laws are framed in the main with a view to war; and also among all the non-Hellenic nations (ἔτι δ' ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσι πᾶσι) that are strong enough to expand at the expense of others, military strength has been held in honour, for example, among the Scythians, Persians, Thracians and Celts.⁴²⁵

The editor H. Rackham here translates τοῖς ἔθνεσι as “non-Hellenic nations”, recognising that Aristotle refers specifically to non-Greek peoples with this phrase, in contrast to the Hellenic peoples of Sparta and Crete. A similar move was later adopted by Jewish writers to describe non-Jewish nations. For example, 1 Macc 1.13-14 states, “Some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorised them to observe the ordinances of the nations (τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἐθνῶν). So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to the customs of the nations (τὰ νόμιμα τῶν ἐθνῶν).” In both instances, ἔθνη implies foreign, non-Jewish nations.

Beginning around the second century BCE, however, the term ἔθνος and its Hebrew counterpart עַם underwent a significant semantic shift, referring not merely to non-Jewish *nations* but also to non-Jewish *individuals*.⁴²⁶ This began as a distinctly Jewish category – non-Jews did not refer to themselves as ἔθνη,⁴²⁷ nor in Greek literature do we find descriptions of individual outsiders as ἔθνη.⁴²⁸ We do not know for certain when this Jewish

⁴²⁴ Mason 2007:483-486.

⁴²⁵ Aristotle, *Pol.* 1324^b 10; LCL 264:542-543.

⁴²⁶ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:117-118.

⁴²⁷ At least not until Christian writers began doing so in the second century (see below).

⁴²⁸ Βάρβαρος being the most common term for non-Greeks, e.g. “Homer...nowhere uses this name [Hellenes] of all, or indeed of any of them except the followers of Achilles of Phthiotis, who were in fact the first Hellenes,

usage of ἔθνη emerged, but one of the earliest extant examples is 2 Macc 8.9, which states that Ptolemy made Nicanor the commander of “at least twenty thousand Gentiles of all nations (παμφύλων ἔθνη οὐκ ἐλαττους τῶν δισμυρίων).” Clearly, Nicanor was not commanding 20,000 nations but 20,000 *non-Jewish individuals*.⁴²⁹ As we noted earlier, this was a totalising label – the writer of 2 Maccabees recognises that these non-Jews belong to various φύλα, but nonetheless describes them all as undifferentiated ἔθνη.

With the writing of the documents which eventually formed the New Testament, this use of ἔθνη (always in the plural) for non-Jewish individuals became increasingly commonplace, even as writers continued using ἔθνος to signify “nation” or “people-group”. In Acts 13.48, Luke narrates how the ἔθνη in Pisidian Antioch listened to Paul and responded positively to his message.⁴³⁰ In Mark 10.33, Jesus explains that the chief priests and scribes will condemn the Son of Man and hand him over to the ἔθνη, referring to the Romans. Matthew makes particularly disparaging use of ἔθνη and its cognate ἔθνικοί, observing that τὰ ἔθνη pursue worldly possessions (Matt 6.31-32) and the ἔθνικοί greet only those who greet them (5.47), with the latter statement echoed in *Did.* 1.3. Likewise, Jesus declares in Matt 18.17 that the unrepentant believer should be treated as a ἔθνικός and τελώνης (NRSV: “a Gentile and a tax collector”), though the saying is absent in the other Gospels. While not every reference to ἔθνη and ἔθνικοί in Matthew’s Gospel is pejorative, the Gospel-writer frequently uses these terms to denote something about the perceived immorality or undesirability of non-Jews.⁴³¹ These polemical references to Gentiles are often cited as evidence that Matthew’s Gospel “derives from a largely Jewish Christian community”, for whom these unflattering portrayals of Gentiles reflected pre-Christian idiom.⁴³² Luke’s presentation of ἔθνη, by contrast, is more mixed. Like in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges the disciples not to worry about worldly possessions in Luke 12.30, stating that

but designates them in his poems as Danaans and Argives and Achaeans. And he has not used the term Barbarians, either, for the reason, as it seems to me, that the Hellenes on their part had not yet been separated off so as to acquire one common name by way of contrast...” (Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.3; LCL 108:6-7); see also Strabo, *Geog.* 1.4.9; 14.2.28.

⁴²⁹ Trebilco 2017:153; see also 1 Macc 4.12-15.

⁴³⁰ Based on Acts 13.26 and 13.43, it is possible that many of these “Gentiles” were so-called “Godfearers” or even converts to Judaism.

⁴³¹ Matt 5.47; 6.7; 10.5; 20.19, 25. While all references to ἔθνικοί in Matthew are negative, there are several “neutral” or “positive” references to ἔθνη (4.15; 10.18; 12.18, 21; 28.19), though it is uncertain in some instances whether the writer implies Gentile individuals or Gentile nations.

⁴³² France 2007:73-74.

“all the ἔθνη of the world” chase after such things. Yet when Jesus urges his disciples to love their enemies in 6.32-36, the negative example he cites are not ἔθνικοί but ἁμαρτωλοί.

In short, the Gospels do not present a consistent use of “Gentiles” as a label, but the depiction is often negative, possibly as a reflection of Jesus’ own speech among other Jews, or perhaps due to the Gospel-writer’s engagement with a Jewish Christian audience, in Matthew’s case. Yet in the study of early Christianity, our understanding of τὰ ἔθνη has probably been shaped most by the apostle Paul.

According to Jonathan Hall, the development of a group’s ethnic identity often leads to the creation of an “outgroup” against which the ethnic group can define itself through some degree of intergroup comparison.⁴³³ Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi argue that Paul is the first writer to systematically employ τὰ ἔθνη in such a manner, using the term as a discursive representation of the Jew’s “other”, a category which is later used and developed by rabbinic sources.⁴³⁴ This discursive use of τὰ ἔθνη may not have been *pioneered* by Paul – especially since many of his writings stress God’s favour towards both τὰ ἔθνη and Ἰουδαῖοι – yet the relationship between “Jews” and “Gentiles” is undoubtedly central to Paul’s theology.⁴³⁵ Hotly contested, however, is the nature and significance of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

As with Matthew, τὰ ἔθνη for Paul sometimes carries a moral quality. In an impassioned address to the church in Galatia – possibly repeating a speech against Peter – Paul writes, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners (ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί)” (Gal 2.15). Paula Fredriksen remarks that, even when acting as an advocate for Gentile believers, Paul nonetheless “refers to them, quite unselfconsciously, as ‘sinners’.”⁴³⁶ Elsewhere, Paul instructs the Thessalonians that they must not let their bodies be controlled by “lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God (τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν)” (1 Thess 4.5), and if we allow for Pauline authorship or influence on Ephesians, the believers are told to “no longer walk as the Gentiles walk (καθὼς καὶ τὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖ), in the futility of their minds” (Eph 4.17).⁴³⁷ Three different letters

⁴³³ Hall 1997:32, 47.

⁴³⁴ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:141-167.

⁴³⁵ See Hayes 2019 for a critical assessment of Ophir and Rosen-Zvi’s book.

⁴³⁶ Fredriksen 1991:534.

⁴³⁷ If Ephesians was not written by Paul, then this position is attested not only by the apostle but also by a “Pauline school” writing under his name. In other words, the castigation of Gentiles features in both the disputed and undisputed texts.

within the Pauline corpus thus portray Gentiles as immoral, with the latter two examples signalling that τὰ ἔθνη are *outsiders* to the Christian community, in a manner akin to Matthew's Gospel.

In several other passages, however, Paul describes the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of Israel. As we saw in Chapter 2, the most obvious example is Romans 9–11, where Paul likens Gentile believers to a wild olive branch grafted into the cultivated olive tree representing Israel (11.17). Paul here also affirms that “Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it” (9.30), whereas “a hardening has come upon part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ)” (11.25). Ephesians 3.6 likewise states “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετόχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου).”

In light of these observations, an important question in Paul's use of τὰ ἔθνη is whether non-Jewish believers remain as “Gentiles” following their conversion to Christianity. In other words, does Paul use τὰ ἔθνη strictly in a biological sense, referring to all who are non-Jews *by birth* including those in Christ? Or does the appellation carry a theological or religious element, referring to those who stand outside YHWH's covenant people? Should a so-called “Gentile-in-Christ” still be called a Gentile?

On the one hand, several passages imply the believers' continued status as Gentiles. In Rom 11.13, for instance, Paul writes, “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles (Ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς ἔθνεσιν),” and similarly Eph 3.1 states, “This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles (ὕπερ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν).” In both verses, Paul uses ἔθνη to refer to his Christian recipients in the present, suggesting that they remain as Gentiles even after conversion. In addition, Paul speaks of τὰ ἔθνη sharing in Israel's spiritual blessings (Rom 15.27) and of the gratitude which “the churches of the Gentiles (αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἐθνῶν)” have for Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16.4). These passages both suggest that non-Jewish Christians should still be called “Gentiles”. Gal 2.12 may also tend in this direction: “[F]or until certain people came from James,” Paul writes, “he [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles (μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν).” Most commentators believe that τὰ ἔθνη here refers

to non-Jewish Christ-followers.⁴³⁸ If they are correct, then τὰ ἔθνη remains an operative category in Paul's mind for non-Jews who have been included into early Christian community.

A few other passages, on the other hand, suggest that Paul sees non-Jewish believers as *former* Gentiles. “You know that when you were Gentiles (ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε),” he states in 1 Cor 12.2, “you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.” Being ἔθνη belongs to the readers' past and is characterised by idolatry. This is similar to Paul's earlier outcry in 1 Cor 5.1 where he deplores the reports of sexual immorality taking place among the Corinthian believers that is “not found even among Gentiles (τοιαύτη πορνεία ἥτις οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν)”. Ἐθνη in this verse refers to those *outside* the Christian community, denoting the depravity of unbelievers. Likewise, Eph 2.11 states the readers *were* Gentiles: “So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth (ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί)...”

This seeming inconsistency in Paul's use of τὰ ἔθνη cannot be easily attributed to different audiences, dates, or authors. Notably, Eph 2.11 and 3.1 – two passages from the same letter – seem to espouse contrasting views on whether non-Jewish believers remain as “Gentiles”. Similarly, Paul recollects Peter's table-fellowship with Gentile believers in Gal 2.11-12 shortly before referring to Gentiles as ἁμαρτωλοί in Gal 2.15. The concurrent appearance of apparently conflicting attitudes towards Gentiles within individual letters complicates any attempts to compartmentalise these approaches into “Pauline” and “deutero-Pauline” groups.

Moreover, τὰ ἔθνη are not the Jews' sole “other” in Paul's thought. In four different letters, Paul seeks to emphasise the unity of the Christian community through the overcoming of social divisions. Each time, Ἰουδαῖοι are *not* contrasted with ἔθνη, but rather with Ἕλληνες.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἑλλήνος); the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. (Rom 10.12)

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks (εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες), slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12.13)

⁴³⁸ Betz 1979:107; de Boer 2011:132; Fredriksen 2017:96; Longenecker 1990:73; but see Bühner 2024 for an opposing position.

There is no longer Jew or Greek (οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλλην); there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3.28)

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew (οὐκ ἔνι Ἕλλην καὶ Ἰουδαῖος), circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free, but Christ is all and in all! (Col 3.11)

In other words, Paul never claims that there is in Christ “neither Jew nor *Gentile*”, but that there is “neither Jew nor *Greek*”.⁴³⁹ Because of this slight but significant variance, it would be wrong to suggest that Christ has removed *all* ethnic distinctives in Paul’s theology. In fact, Ophir and Rosen-Zvi suggest that Paul intentionally downplays the distinctions between Jews, Greeks, and barbarians *in order to* introduce “the one distinction that has theological meaning – that between Jews and non-Jews.”⁴⁴⁰

It is not in the scope of this present research to analyse, explain, or resolve Paul’s multifaceted use of τὰ ἔθνη.⁴⁴¹ Rather, this brief survey serves to highlight the complicated and unstable place of “Gentiles” in early Christian thought, and insofar as 1 Peter represents one stream in this tradition, provides us with a framework for understanding how and why the letter applies this label in two key passages.

(4.2) The Gentile Outsiders of 1 Peter

Paul’s extensive references to Gentiles and the prominence of their inclusion in his theology has, to a large extent, eclipsed the significance of τὰ ἔθνη in the rest of the New Testament; Paul is, after all, the self-declared “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11.13-14), and almost all the letters attributed to him explicitly mention Gentiles.⁴⁴² In contrast, the seven so-called Catholic Epistles include just three occurrences of ἔθνος in total. Yet all three appear

⁴³⁹ The examples cited here include three passages from the undisputed letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians) and one passage from the disputed letter to the Colossians, making it difficult to attribute this terminology to a pseudo-Pauline author.

⁴⁴⁰ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:156-157.

⁴⁴¹ More detailed discussions can be found in Fredriksen 2017; Hodge 2015; Thiessen 2016; Watson 2007.

⁴⁴² The exceptions are Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, and Titus; Pauline authorship of all three texts has been disputed, perhaps suggesting that the “Gentile question” had become a less pressing issue in the deuterio-Pauline corpus. However, the centrality of Gentiles in Ephesians, and the singular passing mention of Gentiles in the undisputed letter of 2 Corinthians (11.26), make me reluctant to posit any clearcut distinction of theological interests between the disputed and undisputed letters.

in 1 Peter,⁴⁴³ and when considered alongside the other forms of ethnic discourse in the letter, their significance should not be underestimated.

We have already encountered the first occurrence of ἔθνος in the letter in 1 Pet 2.9. Several verses later, however, we see Peter using ἔθνος in a very different sense. After reminding his readers of their new collective identity in Christ as living stones built into a “spiritual house” (2.5) who now constitute “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (2.9), Peter proceeds with a series of injunctions. He urges the readers to “abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul” (2.11), before stating, “conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge” (1 Pet 2.12).

In this passage, τὰ ἔθνη are the readers’ opponents and critics. Peter does not refer to a particular subgroup or faction among the Gentiles but writes as though Gentiles *in general* oppose and slander the Christian community. Despite this opposition, it is nonetheless taken for granted that the readers continue to live among them; the Gentiles are watching (ἐποπτεύοντες) the believers’ lifestyle, and the label probably refers to the readers’ neighbours, colleagues, and even spouses (cf. 1 Pet 3.1). This assumption of daily interactions with “the Gentiles” recurs in Peter’s second use of this label in 4.3-4:

You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do (τὸ βούλημα τῶν ἐθνῶν κατεργάσθαι), living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. (1 Pet 4.3-4)

This passage indicates that τὰ ἔθνη not only oppose the readers but are indeed characterised by sinful lifestyles which are antithetical to the Christian way of life, echoing the disparaging use of this label in Matthew. Moreover, Peter clearly implies that the readers *used to* behave in such a Gentile-like manner, remarking that ἀρκετὸς...ὁ παρεληλυθὼς χρόνος when they acted in such a way. However, following their redemption through Christ they have begun living differently, earning them the ire of former friends. Thus in 1 Peter we find two assertions which are critical for our understanding of 1 Peter’s ethnic imagination:

⁴⁴³ 3 John 7 also features the cognate ἔθνικοί.

- 1) The readers are former Gentiles or, at the very least, formerly behaved in such a way that made them indistinguishable from Gentiles.⁴⁴⁴
- 2) “Gentiles” as a term refers unequivocally to outsiders, who slander the Christian community and continue to live sinfully; the ethnic label no longer applies to the readers.⁴⁴⁵

As Travis Williams and David Horrell note, 1 Peter is redrawing the symbolic map of the readers' sense of peoplehood and identity; they have gone from being “outsiders” to “insiders”.⁴⁴⁶ Peter could have used a range of possible descriptors to denote this transition; Paul Trebilco lists four additional groups of terms which the NT writers and early Christians used for their opponents: Unbelievers (οἱ ἄπιστοι), Sinners (οἱ ἁμαρτωλοί), Outsiders (οἱ ἔξω, οἱ ἔξωθεν, and ἰδιῶται), and Jews (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι).⁴⁴⁷ Elsewhere in his letter, Peter occasionally uses some of these designations. For example, in 2.7 he writes, “To you then who believe (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν), he is precious; but for those who do not believe (ἄπιστοῦσιν), ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner.’”⁴⁴⁸ Similarly, in 1 Pet 4.18 the writer describes outsiders as ἁμαρτωλοί when he quotes Prov 11.31: “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners (ὁ ἀσεβὴς καὶ ἁματωλὸς)?”

From a literary perspective, therefore, I suggest that Peter *could* have described the community's outsiders in different ways but chose to call them τὰ ἔθνη in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3. In writing to an audience comprising a significant number of non-Jews, our writer could have used a different moniker for their opponents but adopts the ethnically loaded term τὰ ἔθνη. Who is Peter referring to, and what does this label imply about the readers and their community in his ethnic imagination?

⁴⁴⁴ Elliott 2000:720-721.

⁴⁴⁵ Feldmeier 2008:149-150, 214.

⁴⁴⁶ Williams and Horrell 2023:701-702.

⁴⁴⁷ Trebilco 2017.

⁴⁴⁸ Some manuscripts have ἀπειθουσιν instead of ἄπιστοῦσιν, further showing the variety of descriptors for the movement's outsiders.

(4.2.1) Name-Calling: Building Distance Between Past and Present

For many commentators, Peter's use of τὰ ἔθνη in 2.12 and 4.3 simply offers an insight into the ethnic background of the implied readers. For instance, Horrell appeals to 1 Pet 4.3 and remarks, "While it is perhaps not impossible that the author depicted Jewish converts in these ways, it seems highly unlikely, and much more likely to refer to people who have converted from a gentile way of life."⁴⁴⁹ Most scholars concur with Horrell's assessment that Peter's readers were mostly non-Jewish by birth, as we saw in Chapter 1, with the caveat that 1 Peter was addressed to a large and culturally diverse region, and the epistle's readership may consequently have included several Jews. Yet this assessment scratches only the surface and does not ask *why* Peter uses this term for outsiders when writing to a mostly non-Jewish audience. Unfortunately, attempts to address this question have tended to be hazy and imprecise. For instance, Craig Keener writes:

In 4:3, Peter contrasts his audience with gentiles; he probably writes at a fairly early period when gentile converts still recognize that they are joining a Jewish movement (as in 1 Cor. 5:1; 1 Thess. 4:5). These gentiles have become a new people in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9), and thus should no longer live like gentiles (i.e., with the forms of immorality illustrated here; cf. 2:12).⁴⁵⁰

Keener initially states that these Gentile converts "recognize that they are joining a Jewish movement", but provides little detail about what is entailed by this joining – have they become Jewish proselytes? Godfearers? In his next line, Keener claims that they have become "a new people in Christ" citing 1 Pet 2.9, but the verse makes no mention of the readers becoming a "new people" and it is unclear what Keener implies by this phrase. Do the readers constitute a distinctly new group of people or are they simply "new" in relation to their former pagan lives? Also commenting on this passage, Patrick Egan suggests that 1 Peter's use of "Gentiles" and the preceding epithets for Israel (2.9) are simply "metaphors for insiders and outsiders without any apparent reference to the ethnic problems such metaphors raise."⁴⁵¹ These suggestions sidestep the possibility that Peter may *intentionally* have described outsiders with the ethnic label τὰ ἔθνη.

⁴⁴⁹ Horrell 2013a:120-121.

⁴⁵⁰ Keener 2021:291.

⁴⁵¹ Egan 2017:11-12.

Janette Ok provides a more compelling explanation for Peter's use of this label. Ok recognises the fluidity of ethnic categories and draws special attention to the conceptual instability of τὰ ἔθνη in Jewish and Christian literature from this period. Unlike Paul, Peter does not assert that believers are "neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal 3.28), but instead stresses that the readers are *no longer Gentiles*. According to Ok, ethnic categories like τὰ ἔθνη are "fluid enough for him [Peter] to adapt and reimagine" but stable enough to "fix or concretize the ways in which Gentile Christians are to cohere with one another and adhere to the behaviour and values that imitate Christ."⁴⁵² Aiding this process is the fact that, as with outsider labels like "barbarian", non-Jewish readers would not have perceived themselves as "Gentiles" prior to following Christ.⁴⁵³ Peter is not urging them to repudiate an ethnic label which they may have formerly embraced, such as Phrygian, Scythian, or Greek, but redrawing their ethnic imagination along Jewish lines, such that humanity is divided into "God's people" and "not God's people". Within 1 Peter's narrative world, Christ's redemption has transferred the letter's non-Jewish readers from the first camp to the second; they have experienced a change in ethnic category.

1 Peter underlines this point by not only describing outsiders as Gentiles, but also stereotyping Gentile behaviour as utterly debauched (4.3-4) and opposed to Christianity (2.12).⁴⁵⁴ 1 Pet 4.3 provides a list of sinful behaviour associated with τὸ βούλημα τῶν ἐθνῶν including "debauchery" (ἀσελγείαις) and "lawless idolatry" (ἀθεμίτοις εἰδωλολατρείαις), while 1 Pet 2.12 speaks of a day of visitation (ἡμέρα ἐπισκοπῆς) when even these Gentiles will glorify God. Such pejorative stereotyping of pagan behaviour is not uncommon in Jewish and early Christian writings. In an impassioned diatribe against idolatry, *Wisdom of Solomon* speaks of "a day of visitation upon the idols of the nations (ἐν εἰδώλοις ἐθνῶν ἐπισκοπή)" (Wis 14.11) before launching into a critical description of pagan lifestyle: "All is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favours, defiling of souls, sexual perversion, disorder in marriages, adultery, and debauchery (Wis 14.25-26)."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² Ok 2021:55.

⁴⁵³ Trebilco 2017:156; though τὰ ἔθνη was also used by Greek writers to refer to other nations (see above).

⁴⁵⁴ Ok 2021:66-67.

⁴⁵⁵ For other examples of so-called "vice lists" in Jewish and early Christian writings, see 2 Bar. 73.4; 1QS 4.9-11; T. Jud. 16.1; Philo, *Sacr.* 32; Rom 1.29-30; 13.13; 1 Cor 6.9-11; Eph 5.3-5; 1 Tim 1.9-10; 6.4-5; 2 Tim 3.2-5; Tit 3.3; Rev 21.8; Did. 5.1-2; Herm. Mand. 8.3 (Williams 2014:234).

Both 1 Peter and *Wisdom* negatively stereotype pagan behaviour and speak of God's eventual ἐπισκοπή, a term often associated with judgment.⁴⁵⁶ As we saw earlier, ethnicity in the ancient world was closely associated with one's "way of life" (ἀναστροφή).⁴⁵⁷ Part of 1 Peter's ethnic discourse is the "construction of a sense of being a people who share a common set of customs and practices,"⁴⁵⁸ and here the letter constructs, in extremely negative terms, the ἀναστροφή of τὰ ἔθνη. Ok thus rightly identifies the use of τὰ ἔθνη in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3 as a means through which 1 Peter's encourages the readers to disidentify from their pagan past and instead adopt a ἀναστροφή ἐν Χριστῷ (3.16).

One shortcoming in Ok's conclusions, however, is a limitation which she openly recognises. After demonstrating how the label τὰ ἔθνη both demonises "the other" and distinguishes the readers' past from their present, Ok confesses in a footnote, "While it is not entirely clear whether or not Peter intends for Jews to be included in the category 'Gentiles', his failure to mention 'Jews' at all in his letter remains very puzzling to me."⁴⁵⁹ The ethnic transformation undergone by Peter's readers mean that they are no longer "Gentiles", yet they are also not "Jews". What are they instead, and where do the Jews fit in 1 Peter's theological geography?

(4.2.2) Can Jews Be Gentiles?

Some writers posit that, because 1 Peter is purportedly a "Christian" document, the outsider label "Gentiles" must include *all* "non-Christians", including unbelieving Jews. Listing several instances of "appropriation" by 1 Peter, Betsy Bauman-Martin suggests that "perhaps the most aggressive" example is "the use of the term 'Gentile' to refer to anyone who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, including, or especially, Jews."⁴⁶⁰ John Elliott adopts a similar position:

[In] some cases, as here in 1 Peter, when *ta ethnē / hoi ethnikai* is a foil to followers of Jesus, it becomes a designation for all non-Christians who 'disobey' (2:7; 3:1), who have rejected Jesus as Messiah and malign his followers, including pagans and

⁴⁵⁶ See LXX Isa 10.3; 23.17; Jer 6.15; 10.15; Luke 19.44. Occasionally it had positive connotations of deliverance or protection, but chiefly in relation to God's people (e.g. Gen 50.24-25; Job 10.12).

⁴⁵⁷ Horrell 2016:253-255.

⁴⁵⁸ Horrell 2016:254.

⁴⁵⁹ Ok 2021:88, n.23.

⁴⁶⁰ Bauman-Martin 2007:170.

mainstream Israel alike. Inasmuch as Israelite elites had allied with pagans against Jesus and his followers...it was only a matter of time before the sectarians included the Israelite parent body as well in the generic term for 'outsiders'.⁴⁶¹

Reinforcing his point, Elliott adds, "It is clear...that 'Gentiles' denotes all who are opposed to the will of God as taught and carried out by Jesus Christ – that is, all non-Christians, including not only pagans but Israelites as well."⁴⁶² This interpretation of 1 Peter appreciates the fluidity of ethnic terms, especially generic labels like "Gentiles", and suggests that 1 Peter redefines this category to include non-Christian Jews. Karen Jobes also makes this clear in her analysis of these verses.

The apostles used terms, familiar to the Jewish tradition, that divided all humanity into God's covenant people and the rest of humanity, who were referred to as *ethnē*, the nations, or Gentiles. The Christian apostles kept the language but redrew the line, redefining God's covenant people to be those who believe in Christ and referring to all others as 'Gentiles'. In this letter Peter writes to Christians *as if they were Jews* who are now scattered among the nations (Gentiles), as the ethnic Jews had historically been in the Diaspora (1 Pet. 1:1).⁴⁶³

Key to Jobes' stance is this idea that 1 Peter "kept the language but redrew the line" concerning the label "Gentiles". No longer does the label refer to "non-Jews" but to "non-Christians".

Several other writers share a similar outlook even when it is not articulated quite so directly. For instance, Ruth Ann Reese equates τὰ ἔθνη with "those who are not followers of Christ," and later explains, "First Peter has no indication of tension between Jew and Gentile but instead sets up a contrast between the church (now, God's people), and Gentiles, all those outside God's household."⁴⁶⁴ Likewise, immediately after acknowledging that τὰ ἔθνη typically referred to non-Jews, Martin Vahrenhorst asserts that, if members of the Church are God's chosen people, then all others must automatically be "Gentiles".⁴⁶⁵ Implicit within these arguments is the assumption that the Jesus community constituted a discrete group

⁴⁶¹ Elliott 2000:466-467.

⁴⁶² Elliott 2000:721.

⁴⁶³ Jobes 2022:366 (emphasis hers).

⁴⁶⁴ Reese 2022:133, 234.

⁴⁶⁵ "Wenn die Gemeindeglieder Gottes auserwähltes Volk sind, dann sind alle anderen automatisch "Völker"" (Vahrenhorst 2016:111-112); Other scholars who adopt similar positions include Achtemeier 1996:177; Michaels 1988:117; Richard 2004:417.

which stood in distinction from the Jewish community. Consequently, all who have rejected Jesus have become “Gentiles”, even those who were Israelites by birth.

When we look more closely at the letter's historical background, however, this assumption stands on shaky ground, especially with regard to Peter's use of τὰ ἔθνη. There are four main reasons why this assertion should be questioned.

- 1) No New Testament passage unambiguously uses τὰ ἔθνη as a means of referring to non-Christian individuals *including* Jews. In the passage cited above, Elliott attempts to strengthen his argument by footnoting Eph 4.17 and 3 John 7. While both passages speak pejoratively of ἔθνη / ἔθνικοί, neither text implies that this category includes Jews. The writer of Ephesians urges his readers in 4.17 to “no longer live as the Gentiles live” (μηκέτι ὑμεῖς περιπατεῖν καθὼς καὶ τὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖ), but as we saw earlier, negative stereotyping of pagan behaviour was common in Jewish literature. Like 1 Pet 4.3, the injunction in Eph 4.17 to “no longer live as the Gentiles live” is most probably hearkening to these established stereotypes about pagan behaviour. There is no clear indication that unbelieving Jews are included in this category.

The situation in 3 John 7 is slightly different, as it speaks of itinerant believers who commendably choose not to receive help from οἱ ἔθνικοί. The label here probably refers to those whom the believers were evangelising, suggests Judith Lieu, perhaps reflecting “the need for a new term once Gentiles were also to be found among believers.”⁴⁶⁶ 3 John's use of a different term from τὰ ἔθνη already weakens Elliott's argument, and Lieu's suggestion implies that τὰ ἔθνη would *not* have been an appropriate term for the community's outsiders. At any rate, we saw earlier how the pejorative use of both οἱ ἔθνικοί and τὰ ἔθνη in Matthew's Gospel, where they do *not* include Jews, demonstrates that early Christians could use these terms to refer negatively to pagans. Once again, we find no indication that unbelieving Jews are included among οἱ ἔθνικοί in this passage.

- 2) Second, when early Christian writers speak of their Jewish opponents, they are consistently referred to as Ἰουδαῖοι, never as ἔθνη nor ἔθνικοι. Acts 14.1-5 is an interesting case-study in the use of ethnic labels. The writer first states that “a great

⁴⁶⁶ Lieu 2008:272.

number of Jews and Greeks (Ἰουδαίων τε καὶ Ἑλλήνων)” believed Paul’s message (14.1) but goes on to say that the “unbelieving Jews (ἀπειθήσαντες Ἰουδαῖοι)” incited the minds of the Gentiles (τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐθνῶν) (14.2). Similar to some of the Pauline passages discussed earlier, Acts prefers to speak of the believers comprising both Jews and Greeks, but uses ἔθνη to characterise the Gospel’s non-Jewish opponents. Yet the ἔθνη are never conflated with Ἰουδαῖοι despite their joint opposition to Paul and his colleagues. Thus in 14.5 the writer describes how “both Gentiles and Jews (τῶν ἐθνῶν τε καὶ Ἰουδαίων)” oppose the apostles, but he does not group them under a collective name.

Another example comes from the second-century *Martyrdom of Polycarp* which depicts a similar situation of joint opposition against Christians by both Jews and non-Jews.⁴⁶⁷ “When this was proclaimed by the herald,” the narrator tells us, “the entire crowd, Gentiles as well as Jews living in Smyrna (ἅπαν τὸ πλῆθος ἐθνῶν τε καὶ Ἰουδαίων τῶν τὴν Σμύρναν κατοικούντων), cried out with uncontrollable anger and with a loud shout.”⁴⁶⁸ Commenting on this passage, Frederick Weidmann notes the narrator’s emphasis on the unity of Jews and Gentiles in their opposition to Polycarp. The Jews and Gentiles “dwell” (κατοικέω) in Smyrna (Mart. Pol. 12.2), for instance, whereas the Christians are “sojourning” (παροικέω) in their places of residence (Mart. Pol. preface).⁴⁶⁹ Mart. Pol. 12.3 also states that the Jewish and Gentile opponents shouted at Polycarp “in one accord” (ὁμοθυμαδόν). “The Jews are immediately and directly associated with pagans,” Weidmann remarks, “while the Christians stand apart from both.”⁴⁷⁰ Yet even as the narrator seeks to depict the unity of Jews and Gentiles, he maintains the distinction these two groups, not conflating them into a “generic term for outsiders” (*pace* Elliott). The *Martyrdom* does subsequently use labels which may possibly conflate Jews and Gentiles, such as οἱ ἄνομοι and οἱ ἄπίστοι (16.1), but he never uses ἔθνη in such a manner.

⁴⁶⁷ While Candida Moss has recently dated the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* to the third century CE (Moss 2010:574), a date of composition in the latter half of the second century is more commonly accepted (Holmes 2007:301; Lieu 1995:485).

⁴⁶⁸ Mart. Pol. 12.2; trans. Holmes 2007:318-319.

⁴⁶⁹ Weidmann 2002:30.

⁴⁷⁰ Weidmann 2002:33; see Chapter 6 for further discussion on Χριστιανός in *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

- 3) In the second and third centuries, non-Jewish Christian writers acknowledged that they were “Gentiles”. This represents a significant shift from the pejorative use of the label in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3, but ultimately reflects the fact that they could not conceive of τὰ ἔθνη including unbelieving Jews. It was easier for them to include themselves in this category than to apply it to non-Christian Jews. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin writes:

By making reference to the sacrifices which we Gentiles (ἡμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν) offer to him in every place, namely, the bread of the Eucharist and the chalice of the Eucharist, [Malachi] predicted that we should glorify his name, but that you should profane it.⁴⁷¹

By these words [Deut 32.43] he indicates that we Gentiles (ἡμᾶς τὰ ἔθνη) rejoice with his people, I mean, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, and quite simply all those from that people who are pleasing to God.... But we know that these words do not apply to all members of your race (οὐ πάντας τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους ὑμῶν ἀκουσόμεθα).⁴⁷²

Justin proceeds to explain that those of every nation who are believers in Christ are called “Jacob” and named “Israel” (ὅν καὶ Ἰακώβ καλεῖ, καὶ Ἰσραὴλ ὀνομάζει) – a point he makes in *Dial.* 125 – with the result that God “gives them a share in a similar legacy and attributes to them a similar name, but by calling them *Gentiles*, and stating that they rejoice with his people, he does so as a reproach to your nation.” We may even detect a slight embarrassment regarding the pejorative statements about Gentiles in the Gospels; when Justin quotes Matt 6.32 / Luke 12.30 in *1 Apol.* 15.14-15, he omits Jesus’ statement, “the Gentiles seek these things.”⁴⁷³ For Justin, non-Jewish Christians share in the legacy and name of Israel while retaining their status as “Gentiles”, and despite his assertion that not all of Trypho’s race are pleasing to God, the unspoken assumption is that at least *some* Jews do still belong to God’s people.

Writing several decades later, Tertullian too embraces his status as a “Gentile” and almost equates “Gentiles” with “Christians”:

⁴⁷¹ Justin, *Dial.* 41.3; trans. Falls 2003:63.

⁴⁷² Justin, *Dial.* 130.2; trans. Falls 2003:196.

⁴⁷³ An omission also attested in the recently published P. Oxy. 5575.

[God] promised to Abraham that in his offspring all the tribes of the earth would be blessed and that from Rebekah's womb two peoples and two clans were about to come forth. They are, of course, the Jews – that is, Israel – and the Gentiles – that is, us (*utique Judaeorum, id est Israel; et Gentium, id est noster*). [...] Without doubt, according to the decree of the divine utterance, the first, the elder people, namely the Jewish (*id est Judaicus*), inevitably will serve the younger. The younger people, namely the Christian (*id est Christianus*), will rise above the elder.⁴⁷⁴

Like Justin, Tertullian uses the term “Gentile” (*gentium*) to refer to non-Jews, not to non-Christians.⁴⁷⁵ For both writers, “Gentiles” had become a term for *insiders*, not outsiders, representing a stark contrast from 1 Peter. Yet the underlying logic remains the same – “Gentiles” retains its meaning of “non-Jews”. We find no support for the theory that early Christians “redrew the line”, as Jobes suggested.

- 4) No Jewish text from this period refers to other individual Jews as τὰ ἔθνη or גויים. The sectarian writings from Qumran had many negative things to say about their Jewish opponents, calling them names like דורשי חלקות (“interpreters of smooth things”) and בני בליעל (“sons of Belial”),⁴⁷⁶ but never גויים. Conversely, when texts from Qumran do mention גויים, it refers quite unambiguously to non-Jewish peoples (e.g. CD 11.14-15; 12.8-9).⁴⁷⁷ The same is true for rabbinic writings, which employ disparaging labels like אפיקורוס for Jewish opponents (e.g. *m. Sanh.* 10.1), but not גויים.⁴⁷⁸

Returning to Justin Martyr's *Dialogue*, it is true that Trypho the Jew should be regarded as an “invented character” to some extent.⁴⁷⁹ Nonetheless, this imagined character offers a glimpse into the kinds of Jewish critique that a Christian might receive, and one such allegation is that Christians “do not observe a manner of life different from that of the Gentiles (οὐδὲ διαλλάσσετε ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν τὸν ὑμέτερον βίον).”⁴⁸⁰ Trypho expects Justin to live differently from τὰ ἔθνη, even though he, like

⁴⁷⁴ Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 1.3, 5; trans. Dunn 2004:47.

⁴⁷⁵ Outside Christian sources, the use of the Latin *gens* for referring to foreign individuals is rare, although several writers employed it for foreign nations (e.g. Tacitus, *Germania* 33).

⁴⁷⁶ Dimant 2011:238, 242.

⁴⁷⁷ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:117.

⁴⁷⁸ Hayes 2007:244-253.

⁴⁷⁹ Rajak 1999:63; Setzer 1994:215.

⁴⁸⁰ Justin, *Dial.* 10.3; trans. Falls 2003:163.

many other Christians, was a non-Jew by birth. Moreover, Trypho substantiates the need for Christians to observe circumcision by adding that “this precept was for stranger and purchased slave alike (περὶ τῶν ἀλλογενῶν καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀργυρωνήτων διέσταλται).”⁴⁸¹ Once again, we should not assume that Trypho's words are the words of an actual Jewish interlocutor, but as Justin presents it, one reason why Jews may have insisted on Christians undergoing circumcision is that this was mandated even for foreigners living among Israel.

These pieces of evidence do not necessarily disprove the assertion made by Jobes and Elliott that the label “Gentiles” in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3 includes non-Christian Jews but should cast serious doubts on their claim. While Elliott posits that “it was only a matter of time before the sectarians included the Israelite parent body as well in the generic term for ‘outsiders’,” we in fact find no so-called “sectarian” group using the term “Gentiles” in such a way. This would make 1 Peter the first, and possibly only, text from the first three centuries CE to use τὰ ἔθνη in this manner. For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss a more fruitful alternative.

(4.2.3) The Ill-Defined Ἰουδαῖος

The excerpt from Tertullian, quoted earlier, is a good place to start. The two peoples whom Rebekah bore represent, he writes, “the Jews – that is, Israel – and the Gentiles – that is, us.”⁴⁸² Tertullian equates “Jews” with “Israel”, an assumption shared by many ancient writers as well as modern scholars. Fredriksen writes, for example, that the apostle Paul “thinks that he is a terrific Jew,” citing Phil 3.4-6.⁴⁸³ However, she refers here to a passage which does not actually mention Ἰουδαῖος; in fact, the whole letter to the Philippians does not once include Ἰουδαῖος. What instead does Paul say?

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Phil 3.4-6)

⁴⁸¹ Justin, *Dial.* 10.4; trans. Falls 2003:163.

⁴⁸² “...utique Judaeorum, id est Israel; et Gentium, id est noster” (Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 1.3; trans. Dunn 2004:47).

⁴⁸³ Fredriksen 2006:238.

The ethnic categories which Paul explicitly embraces here are being “of the people Israel (ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ)”, “of the tribe of Benjamin (φυλῆς Βενιαμείν)” and “a Hebrew born of Hebrew (Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων)”. Make no mistake: Paul is what we would call a Jew, and he does believe that his genealogical lineage is excellent, but when describing his ethnic heritage to the Philippians, he does not use the label Ἰουδαῖος. This is particularly relevant given that the label Ἰουδαῖος did not have a clearcut and stable meaning. While Shaye Cohen has argued that the term developed from a strictly genealogical definition to an ethnoreligious one,⁴⁸⁴ others have pointed out that the reality was far more uneven.⁴⁸⁵

Jason Staples, therefore, invites us to question the idea that “Jew” and “Israelite” are interchangeable terms.⁴⁸⁶ While the two expressions overlap in many ways, Staples argues that ancient writers used them in different contexts. In Josephus’ retelling of the Nehemiah story, the historian narrates that οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι prepared to rebuild Jerusalem’s wall, before explaining the origins of this label: “This name, by which they have been called from the time when they went up from Babylon, is derived from the tribe of Judah; as this tribe was the first to come to those parts, both the people themselves and the country have taken their name from it.”⁴⁸⁷ Ἰουδαῖοι, it seems, refers just to the tribe of Judah. In contrast, when referring to all twelve tribes, Josephus tends to use Ἰσραήλ. As we saw in Chapter 2, Josephus makes this distinction in *Ant.* 11.132-133. Although Ezra and many Jews left Babylon for Jerusalem, “the Israelite nation as a whole (ὁ δὲ πᾶς λαὸς τῶν Ἰσραηλιτῶν),” Josephus tells us, “remained in the country.”⁴⁸⁸ Staples thus reads in Josephus a relatively consistent distinction between “Jew” and “Israelite”, with the former being used specifically for the southern kingdom and their descendants. Staples also suggests that a similar distinction is found in Philo, noting, for instance, that the Alexandrian philosopher never uses both Ἰσραήλ and Ἰουδαῖος in the same treatise (with the exception of *Embassy to Gaius*), and he never refers to contemporary kinsmen as Israel or Israelites.⁴⁸⁹ However, Philo does not only speak of Israel when referring to the historic twelve tribes, but also when referring to his people in the eschatological future (*Praem.* 44).

⁴⁸⁴ Cohen 1999:69-106.

⁴⁸⁵ Baker 2011:170-180; Furstenberg 2020:187-189; Schwartz 2011:236-238.

⁴⁸⁶ Staples 2021:25-53.

⁴⁸⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 11.173; LCL 326:396-397.

⁴⁸⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 11.132-133; LCL 326:376-379.

⁴⁸⁹ Staples 2021:252.

Ellen Birnbaum adopts a slightly different take even as she too observes an important distinction between Ἰσραήλ and Ἰουδαῖος in Philo's writings. "Israel" does not emerge as a clearly defined social group, she argues, but rather as a class that represents the ideal of seeing God. The Jews, on the other hand, are an acknowledged community, whose members share in common either their origins or a constitution of laws, or both.⁴⁹⁰ Unlike Staples, Birnbaum believes that the difference between "Jew" and "Israelite" in Philo's mind is a difference of *category*, not *chronology* – the Jews are a this-worldly polity, whereas Israel refers to a class of people marked by their piety. Yet these two positions are not mutually exclusive. The redeemed Israel is both eschatological *and* idealised in their restored relationship with God.

The categories "Jew" and "Israelite", in other words, were not identical. There *was* a difference between these two terms, at least for many writers who reflected on Jewish history and peoplehood. Staples is therefore right to postulate that one way of picturing the ethnic imagination of Jews in the Second Temple period is to see "Jews" as a subset of "Israel".⁴⁹¹ At the same time, such a conceptual framework may not have been shared by all Jews. As we saw in Chapter 1, for instance, Ezra and Nehemiah seem to imply that *only* the Jews who returned from the exile continue to be God's chosen seed and betray no sense of a wider "Israel". For the authors of those texts, the two categories may essentially collapse into one. Nonetheless, Staples and Birnbaum have rightly demonstrated that several writers from the first century CE, like Philo and Josephus, regarded "Jews" as a subset of "Israel".

This leads us to ask: Where do Gentiles fit within this conceptual framework? Does the term refer to all non-Jews, including those in the category "Israel", or does it refer to all outside "Israel"? The evidence suggests that the latter option is more likely. An example of this comes from rabbinic writings concerning Samaritans, typically called כּוּתִּיִּם. In a discussion concerning garments stained by menstruation, *m. Nid.* 7.3 offers the following guidance: "Those coming from among the Gentiles are pure. From among Israel and from among the Samaritans, Rabbi Meir declares them impure."⁴⁹² The issue at hand is the interpretation and practice of the purity requirements described in Leviticus 12–15. As this passage indicates, the Samaritans are distinguished from Gentiles but grouped together with

⁴⁹⁰ Birnbaum 1996:223.

⁴⁹¹ Staples 2021:52.

⁴⁹² "הבאין מבין הגוים, טהורין. מבין ישראל ומבין הכּוּתִּיִּם, רבי מאיר מטמא" (*m. Nid.* 7.3; translation mine).

Israel with regard to *halakha*, a phenomenon we also see elsewhere in the Mishnah.⁴⁹³ Sacha Stern describes them as an “interstitial category, neither Jewish nor non-Jewish.”⁴⁹⁴ “The ways of the Samaritans are sometimes like those of idolaters, sometimes like those of Israel, and mostly like those of Israel,” states *Tractate Kutim* 1.1.⁴⁹⁵

This classification of Samaritans as a group distinct from Gentiles is not consistent across all rabbinic writings but is particularly characteristic, Emmanuel Friedheim and Moshe Lavee suggest, of the first to third centuries CE.⁴⁹⁶ Interestingly, Justin Martyr provides support for this position. “For all the other human races are called Gentiles by the Spirit of prophecy,” Justin writes, “but the Jewish and Samaritan races are called the tribe of Israel, and the house of Jacob.”⁴⁹⁷ As we saw earlier, Justin regards himself as a “Gentile”, thereby differing from 1 Peter in his use of this label. Yet even he includes the Samaritans among “the tribe of Israel, and the house of Jacob”, rather than among the Gentiles. This corroborates the impression given by the rabbinic passages, and pictured by Staples, where one may belong to Israel without being a “Jew”. Admittedly, the terminology is inconsistent – *Mishnah Niddah* seems to differentiate between “Samaritans” and “Israelites”, for instance. This also reflects the fact that “Israel” is primarily a conceptual category; whether it refers to Israel’s ten northern tribes or to those who attain Philo’s ideal of “seeing God”, Jewish writers do not speak of Israelites as a clearly defined entity, nor do pagan authors from this period use this label. Yet overall, the evidence suggests the existence of an interstitial category between “Jew” and “Gentile”.

Interestingly, this liminal category is not determined by bloodline alone. Returning to *Mishnah Niddah*, the rabbis offer a curious example with regard to Sadducee women: “The daughters of the Sadducees, as long as they resolve to walk in the ways of their fathers, are regarded as Samaritan women. If they separate themselves [from these ways] in order to walk in the ways of ‘Israel’, they are considered like ‘Israel’.”⁴⁹⁸ Leaving aside the question of whether the Sadducees survived after 70 CE, Charlotte Fonrobert identifies this passage as an

⁴⁹³ E.g. *m. Ber.* 7:1, 8:8, *m. Dem.* 3:4, *m. Ket.* 3:1, *m. Git.* 1:5.

⁴⁹⁴ Stern 1994:100; cf. Fonrobert 2001:405; Schiffman 1985:326-349.

⁴⁹⁵ “דרכי כותים פעמים כעובדי כוכבים פעמים כישראל ורובן כישראל”, cf. *Tosefta Terumot* 4.12.

⁴⁹⁶ Friedheim 2010:195-199; Lavee 2010:153-156.

⁴⁹⁷ “Τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλα πάντα γένη ἀνθρώπεια ὑπὸ τοῦ προφητικοῦ πνεύματος καλεῖται ἔθνη · τὸ δὲ Ἰουδαϊκὸν καὶ Σαμαρειτικὸν φύλον, Ἰσραὴλ καὶ οἶκος Ἰακώβ κέκληνται” (Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 53.4; ANF 1.180).

⁴⁹⁸ “בנות צדוקין, בזמן שנהגו ללכת בדרכי אבותיהן, הרי הן ככותיות. פרשו ללכת בדרכי ישראל, הרי הן כישראליות” (*m. Niddah* 4.2; trans. Fonrobert 2001:404).

example of boundary-construction in relation to “Israel”. The “daughters of the Sadducees” cannot refer to ethnic outsiders – there is no indication that their lineage disqualifies them from inclusion in Israel. Yet by walking “in the ways of their fathers” (i.e. following Sadducean teachings), they are regarded as “Samaritans” – neither fully Israelite nor fully Gentile. Fonrobert therefore argues:

The mishnah's hypothetical statement allows for ambiguity concerning the Sadducean women's inclusion in 'Israel' depending on their choice of paths. The contrast between 'the ways of *their fathers*' and 'the ways of Israel' is notable. It is not 'their' fathers and 'our' fathers, a pair that would have indicated the equality of the two groups. It is the abstract category of universal Israel that is contrasted with the ways of 'their fathers,' a contrast that sounds almost tribal, and deliberately so.⁴⁹⁹

In summary, the notion that the Jewish worldview divided humanity solely into “Jew” and “Gentile” is not strongly attested. On the contrary, Staples and Birnbaum have illustrated that many Jewish writers conceived of a category of people who were partial insiders – they may not have been “Jews”, but they were certainly not “Gentiles”. While the precise definitions and boundaries of this interstitial category are not clearly nor consistently established, one class of people who seem to fall into this perceived group are “converts”.

(4.2.4) Converts as Non-Gentiles

The relatively straightforward explanation toward which this thesis has been building is that 1 Peter's non-Jewish readers belong to this interstitial category of “Israel”, where they are neither “Jews” nor “Gentiles”. “Gentiles” is a malleable ethnic category. It refers to those who are outsiders to the people of Israel, and insofar as Israel is not determined solely by bloodline, neither is the category “Gentiles”. Through conversion, one can cross this boundary and become a member of Israel.

⁴⁹⁹ Fonrobert 2001:409-410.

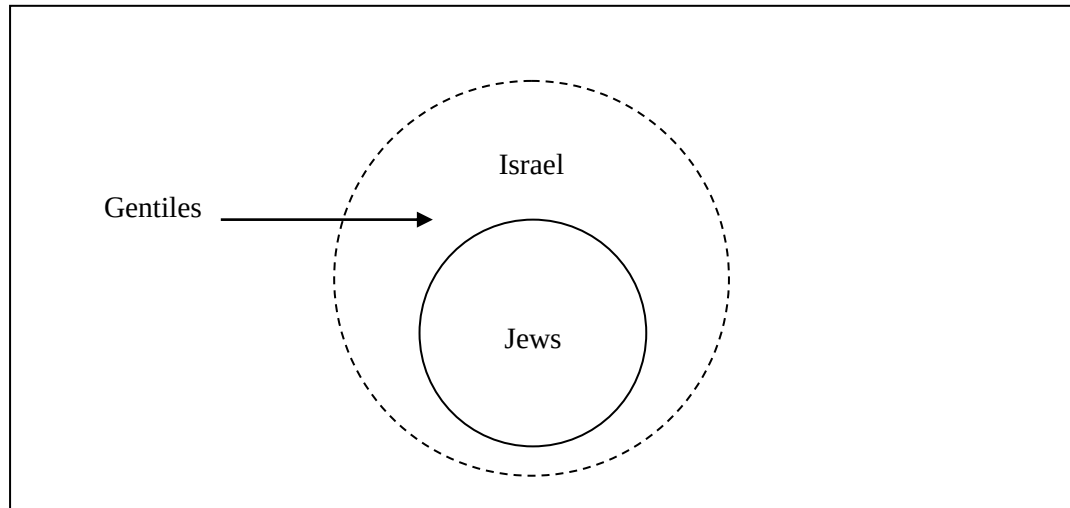


Figure 1

The above diagram is thus a simplified take on the space “Gentiles” occupy within a Jewish ethnic imagination.⁵⁰⁰ They are indeed non-Jews, but it would be more precise to say that they are “outsiders to Israel”. It is possible for one to cross over into this category, with the dotted lines around “Israel” reflecting the fuzziness of this perceived ethnicity. Staples describes it as “an aspirational identity deeply tied to eschatology,” and some Jews may not have used that term at all.⁵⁰¹ Yet it signifies that interstitial space inhabited by those who, within the Jewish imagination, are partial insiders. In Jewish writings from this period, the גרים are often presented in this manner.

As Ophir and Rosen-Zvi have argued, aside from Christian texts the rabbinic writings provide the earliest explicit reflection on גוי as a category for the individual non-Jew.⁵⁰² They thus provide the clearest examples of a categorical distinction between the גרים and the גויים, a distinction which again appears in *m. Niddah* 7.3: “All the stains that come from Rekem are pure. Rabbi Yehuda declares them impure, because they are converts and err. Those that come from among the Gentiles are pure.”⁵⁰³ This passage reveals a *halakhic* distinction between the גר and the גוי. Christine Hayes explains, “They [the rabbis] assert that *according to Torah law* only God’s covenantal partners – Israelites and converts – are subject to ritual

⁵⁰⁰ Adapted from Staples’ diagram in Staples 2021:52.

⁵⁰¹ Staples 2021:255.

⁵⁰² Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:179.

⁵⁰³ “כל הכתמין הבאים מרקם, טהורין. רבי יהודה מטמא, מפני שהם גרים וטועין. הבאין מבין הגוים, טהורין” (*m. Niddah* 7.3, translation mine).

impurity from the physical states detailed in Lev 12-15.”⁵⁰⁴ Rekem was a town on the east of Israel's borders (*b. Gittin* 2a), later associated with the area of Kadesh by several *targumim*,⁵⁰⁵ and the parties in this discussion accept that the town's inhabitants are not native-born Jews. From a primordialist understanding of ethnicity, they were “Gentiles”. Yet Rabbi Yehuda does not describe them as such – they have the same halakhic status as Israelites because they are not גויים but גרים. We see this clear contrast again in *m. Demai* 6.10.

[In the case of] a convert and a Gentile who inherited their Gentile father's estate, the convert can say, ‘You take the idols and I will take the money; you take the wine and I will take the produce.’ However, if they have already come into the possession of the convert, it is prohibited.⁵⁰⁶

Here we have two siblings. By bloodline, therefore, they should both be “Gentiles”, and the Mishnah explicitly speaks of them having a “Gentile father” (אביהם גוי). Yet only one of the two children is described as a גוי, the other is a גר. In creating a clear bifurcation between “Israel” and its “other”, the “Gentile”, the rabbis consistently placed converts in the former category, despite their non-Jewish origins.⁵⁰⁷ The גר is no longer a Gentile.

Later rabbinic writings echo this perspective. According to *b. Berakhot* 47b, Rabbi Yohanan reportedly states, “One is never considered a proselyte until he is circumcised and immerses himself. As long as he did not immerse himself, he is a Gentile.”⁵⁰⁸ The implication is that a person who has been circumcised and undergone immersion is no longer a Gentile, with the same sentiment expressed in *b. Avodah Zarah* 59a and *b. Yevamot* 46a.

While the rabbinic texts offer some of the earliest theoretical reflection on גויים as a category of individual non-Jews, writings from the Second Temple period also suggest that converts to Judaism occupied an interstitial state as partial insiders. In the previous chapter we saw how the גר is included among the members of the camp in CD 14.3-6. Although distinguished there from the “son of Israel” (בני ישראל), the גר is viewed as a partial insider.⁵⁰⁹ Likewise, προσήλυτοι have “joined the new and godly commonwealth (πολιτεία),” according

⁵⁰⁴ Hayes 2002:107 (emphasis hers).

⁵⁰⁵ Safrai 2018:155-156, 187.

⁵⁰⁶ “גר וגוי שירשו את אביהם גוי, יכול הוא לומר, טל אתה עבודה זרה ואני מעות, אתה יין ואני פרות. ואם משבאו לרשות הגר, אסור” (*m. Demai* 6.10, translation mine).

⁵⁰⁷ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018:180-185.

⁵⁰⁸ “לעולם אינו גר עד שימול ויטבול, וכמה דלא טבל גוי הוא” (*b. Berakhot* 47b, trans. Sefaria).

⁵⁰⁹ Berthelot 1999:177, 185, 191-193.

to Philo, receiving all the privileges given to “the native born (τοῖς αὐτόχθοσι).”⁵¹⁰ Elsewhere, Philo writes that converts “must be held to be our dearest friends and closest kinsmen (φιλάτους καὶ συγγενεστάτους),” for they have shown “the godliness of heart which above all leads up to friendship and affinity (φιλίαν καὶ οἰκειότητα).”⁵¹¹ For Philo, the convert should be regarded as an “insider” sharing all the privileges of native-born Jews.

The place of converts in the Jewish ethnic imagination was not merely an abstract issue. With the Hasmonean conquest of Idumea and conversion of the Idumeans around 110 BCE, differing views emerged on the extent to which they should be reckoned as “Jews”. In *Ant.* 13.257-258, Josephus narrates the forced conversion of the Idumeans under Hyrcanus, stating that they “submitted to circumcision and to making their manner of life conform in all other respects to that of the Jews,” and consequently “from that time on they have continued to be Jews (ὁ χρόνος ἦρχεν ὥστε εἶναι τὸ λοιπὸν Ἰουδαίους).”⁵¹² In this passage, Josephus implies that the Idumean convert “becomes a Jew”, and indeed we see them playing a leading role in the Jewish revolt of 66–70 CE.⁵¹³

At the same time, we noted briefly in Chapter 1 that Herod's right to rule was questioned by Antigonus because he was “a commoner and an Idumean, that is, a half-Jew (ιδιώτῃ τε ὄντι καὶ Ἰδουμαίῳ, τουτέστιν ἡμιουδαίῳ).”⁵¹⁴ This report, Benedikt Eckhardt suggests, reflects the contested boundaries of Jewishness in Josephus' time.⁵¹⁵ Antigonus seeks to prioritise ancestry as the defining factor of Jewishness, yet the conversion of the Idumeans means that Antigonus cannot simply brand Herod as a “non-Jew”; he was at least a partial insider.⁵¹⁶ Antigonus has to posit a liminal category of ἡμιουδαῖος – acknowledging that the Idumeans have “become Jewish” to some extent, but remain distinct from (and implicitly inferior to) native-born Jews. Martin Goodman also comments that “it was no accident that the Idumaeen leaders who were involved in the great revolt from A.D. 68 never won any power as national leaders in the independent Jewish state despite their leading military role.”⁵¹⁷ Although the category “Gentile” does not appear in Josephus' writings, his descriptions of the Idumeans suggest that their conversion made them no longer ethnic

⁵¹⁰ Philo, *Spec.* 1.51; LCL 320:126-129.

⁵¹¹ Philo, *Virt.* 179; LCL 341:272-273.

⁵¹² Josephus, *Ant.* 13.257-258; LCL 365:256-257.

⁵¹³ Josephus, *J.W.* 4.272-282.

⁵¹⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* 14.403; LCL 365:214-215.

⁵¹⁵ Eckhardt 2011:93; Thiessen 2011:87-110.

⁵¹⁶ Eckhardt 2011:114-115; cf. Cohen 1999:114.

⁵¹⁷ Goodman 1989:42.

outsiders, even as they remained somehow distinct from Jews. They too occupy that interstitial space between “Jew” and “Gentile”.

We therefore find across several Jewish writings the existence of a “non-native insider” who is neither “Jew” nor “Gentile”. I propose that 1 Peter’s readers occupy precisely this interstitial space in the writer’s ethnic imagination. As גרים, they were no longer גויים. Kelly Liebengood writes:

...the author of 1 Peter is claiming that their gentile heritage (narrative self-understanding, hopes, way of life, values, etc.) has been replaced with that of ‘Israelhood’. Or to borrow from Willie Jennings, these gentile followers of Jesus, as a new-born people, have been displaced and now must learn to participate in Israel’s story as guests.⁵¹⁸

This hypothesis offers a more historically defensible rationale for the pejorative use of τὰ ἔθνη in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3 than the alternative theories. Contrary to Elliot’s and Jobes’ hypothesis, the writer of 1 Peter does not redraw the boundary line in an utterly unique manner. “Gentiles” retains its meaning, referring to those who are not part of Israel. However, Peter repositions his non-Jewish readers within a Jewish theological map. Their new position within this ethnic imagination means that, like the גרים of the Old Testament and rabbinic literature, they are counted among the people of Israel, while their opponents may be labelled as “Gentiles”.

(4.3) Conclusion

In her influential book *Paul: The Pagan’s Apostle*, Fredriksen argues that the salvation of Gentiles as *Gentiles* was a crucial element in Paul’s theology. “Gentiles are included in Israel’s redemption,” she writes, “but they are included as gentiles.”⁵¹⁹ Commenting on Paul’s understanding of Gentiles-in-Christ in relation to the eschaton, Fredriksen writes:

...the Kingdom’s pagans were a special and a purely theoretical category: they were ex-pagan pagans, or...ex-pagan gentiles. *Like* god-fearers, these eschatological pagans would retain their native ethnicities; *unlike* god-fearers, these pagans would no

⁵¹⁸ Liebengood 2023:9-10; citing Jennings 2010:250-288.

⁵¹⁹ Fredriksen 2017:75.

longer worship their native gods. *Like* proselytes, these pagans would worship exclusively the god of Israel; *unlike* proselytes, these pagans would preserve their own ethnicities and – another way of saying the same thing – they would not assume the bulk of Jewish ancestral custom (such as, for males, circumcision).⁵²⁰

As she later clarifies, in using the deliberately odd phrase “ex-pagan pagans” Fredriksen seeks to emphasise how *outsiders* to the Christian movement would have perceived these non-Jewish believers. They were “deviant members of the city’s γένος, its resident body, still responsible to the city for keeping its presiding gods in a good mood,” she writes.⁵²¹

Although Fredriksen’s arguments have been challenged, there is still little consensus about the category “Gentiles” in Paul’s thought. Denys N. McDonald, for instance, argues for an “ethnic reconfiguration” resulting in Paul’s readers no longer being “Gentiles”,⁵²² but subsequently supports “Gentile-Israelite” as a viable description of non-Jewish Christ followers.⁵²³ Along similar lines, Joshua Garroway proposes the paradoxical phrase “Gentile-Jews”.⁵²⁴ These varying perspectives reflect the diverse uses of this ethnic label in Paul’s letters, sometimes as a description of the readers’ *present*, sometimes strictly of their *past*. “I have long puzzled over how to understand the gentiles in Paul,” admits Caroline Johnson Hodge, “they are not Jews and, in my view, they are not Christians; and they are not really gentiles any longer either.”⁵²⁵

This ambiguity is not present in 1 Peter. In 2.12 and 4.3, our author clearly uses “Gentiles” as a label for the community’s outsiders. These “Gentiles” are slanderers characterised by godless lifestyles; they provide a negative example for the believers of how *not* to live. However, despite strong similarities with the negative stereotyping of Gentiles in Matthew’s Gospel and the disparaging descriptions of idolators in other Jewish literature, 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3 are initially puzzling due to the majority view that the letter’s audience included many non-Jews. This has led scholars like Elliott and Jobes to suggest that 1 Peter is repurposing the label “Gentile” to signify non-*Christians* rather than non-Jews. Yet I have demonstrated how this view is founded on weak assumptions and finds few parallels in early Christian or Jewish literature. In contrast, a more viable alternative is that Peter continues

⁵²⁰ Fredriksen 2017:74.

⁵²¹ Fredriksen 2022:61.

⁵²² McDonald 2022:23-25.

⁵²³ McDonald 2022:47.

⁵²⁴ Garroway 2012

⁵²⁵ Hodge 2015:153-154.

using τὰ ἔθνη in a manner consistent with the rest of Second Temple Jewish literature and early Christian writings – namely, that it refers to non-*Israelites*, those who are outsiders to God's covenant people. But this category was not determined by bloodline alone, and like the converts in the Old Testament and in subsequent Jewish writings, 1 Peter's readers have transitioned from Israel's "outsiders" to "non-native insiders". They are no longer τὰ ἔθνη.

This study thus invites further reflection on the use of ἔθνη and ἔθνικοὶ in the New Testament. Is 1 Peter the *only* early Christian text which negatively characterises "Gentiles" though writing to a non-Jewish audience? Could a similar form of ethnic discourse be found in Matthew and the Didache, for example? While a thorough examination of this question lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, 1 Peter's use of "Gentiles" invites us to reexamine whether this term merely signifies those who are non-Jewish by birth.

Chapter 5

Kinship and Conversion: Family Imagery in 1 Peter

*Above all else...it must be the myth of shared descent which ranks paramount among the features that distinguish ethnic from other social groups.*⁵²⁶

Thus concludes Jonathan Hall in his influential study of ethnic identity in the Hellenistic world. At first glance, this seems to be a reasonable conclusion – our conception of ethnicity is frequently connected to notions of family and genealogy. When I remark that someone is Japanese, for instance, I typically mean that one – usually both – of their parents is Japanese, and if we were to genetically trace the person's lineage, we would discover a shared ancestor(s) with others who identify as Japanese. In the case of ancient Judaism, the notion of shared descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob signals the importance of ancestry in the construction of Jewish identity.

The familial imagery of 1 Peter has thus been the rightful focus of attention for many scholars interested in the ethnic imagination of this letter. Janette Ok, for instance, approvingly cites Hall, arguing that “what makes shared descent ‘true’ is the recognition and consensual agreement of *putative* shared ancestry.”⁵²⁷ This provides the basis for her discussion of familial imagery in the letter, supporting her thesis that ethnic discourse serves to construct for his readers “an ethnic identity akin to the unique religious-ethnic identity of the Jews.”⁵²⁸ Likewise, in her *Divine Regeneration and Ethnic Identity*, Katie Marcar suggests that “perceived common descent...is perhaps the *sine qua non* of ethnicity,”⁵²⁹ and her monograph is largely framed around the familial metaphors of regeneration (1.3, 23), seed (1.23), newborns (2.1-3), and the household (2.4-10). “Though many Jewish identities existed in the Second Temple period,” she writes, “membership by birth was generally accepted as the entrance for most members into the community.” While Marcar acknowledges the permeability of Jewishness through conversion, 1 Peter's familial imagery is for her the primary starting point for reflection upon the letter's ethnic imagination.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ Hall 1997:25.

⁵²⁷ Ok 2021:37 (emphasis hers).

⁵²⁸ Ok 2021:1; see especially Ok 2021:35-60.

⁵²⁹ Marcar 2022a:12.

⁵³⁰ Marcar 2022a:264.

Focusing less on birth metaphors, Shively T.J. Smith argues that Peter constructs an alternative vision of God's household within which God is their father and the readers are all siblings, connected to a wider worldwide "brotherhood" (1 Pet 2.17; 5.9). She concludes:

First Peter acknowledges, even assumes, the coethnicity of its readers. [...] Since a common physical natal origin is not shared among the diverse Christian groups, the letter leverages something else in order to hold together its constructed Christian diaspora. It cements the proposition that its readers are a distinct ethnoreligious people by issuing a theological myth. The primary function of the myth is to bind readers – who have mixed backgrounds and different originations – together with a common story that imbues their new 'Christian' identity with a meaningful continuity.⁵³¹

1 Peter issues a "theological myth" of kinship and common ancestry, according to Smith, buttressing the Christians' identity as a "distinct ethnoreligious people". This seems to support the idea that 1 Peter is a forerunner to the ethnic discourse found in texts such as *Epistle to Diognetus* which position Christians as a "new race".

These scholars rightly highlight the variety of familial metaphors in 1 Peter and their possible implications for the letter's ethnic imagination. We find numerous examples of such language, especially in the early parts of the letter (1.3–2.3), and some images are unique among the NT writings. Yet the language of fictive kinship in antiquity is not exclusive to Christians, and indeed is not necessarily an indicator of ethnic discourse, with Philip A. Harland pointing out the use of familial metaphors among Graeco-Roman associations.⁵³² Is 1 Peter's familial imagery necessarily a form of ethnic discourse? Moreover, does the purported theological myth of common descent denote that the readers constitute a "distinct ethnoreligious people", as proposed by Smith? These are the primary issues tackled in this chapter.

Verses relating to family and kinship are spread across the letter. For the sake of coherence, this chapter will broadly follow 1 Peter's "narrative world", a concept used by Eugene Boring and Joel Green to describe the story and symbolic universe of the readers in

⁵³¹ Smith 2016:35.

⁵³² Harland 2009:63–81; "Fictive kinship" is a term often denoting social relations which resemble families but are not grounded upon biological relations; the non-biological nature of these connections does not necessarily mean that they are less real or strong, as the adjective "fictive" sometimes implies.

the author's mind.⁵³³ The writer of 1 Peter envisions his readers as members of a wider, theological story, and this wider story imbues meaning to who they were and who they are, individually and communally. Within this narrative world, the letter's addressees were formerly in dire straits due to their "ancestral traditions."

(5.1) The Futility of Ancestral Traditions

For the readers of 1 Peter, their story begins with a picture of sinfulness and ignorance. Peter writes, "Do not be conformed to the desires you formerly had in ignorance (ταῖς πρότερον ἐν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ ὑμῶν ἐπιθυμίαις)" (1.14). Shockingly, however, he then connects this image of former depravity with their ancestral traditions, stating in 1 Pet 1.18-19:

You know that you were ransomed from the futile conduct inherited from your ancestors (ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαράδοτου), not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.

The relatively rare word πατροπαράδοτος was used to describe something handed down from one's ancestors. Diodorus Siculus, for example, calls Alexander's leadership over the Greeks as a mandate "inherited from his father" (τὴν πατροπαράδοτον ἡγεμονίαν).⁵³⁴ The adjective could also qualify tangible assets, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus' glowing description of the general Publius Valerius, who lived a frugal lifestyle and confined himself to "the small estate he had inherited from his ancestors (τῇ μικρᾷ καὶ πατροπαράδοτῳ διέμεινεν οὐσίᾳ)."⁵³⁵ Πατροπαράδοτος thus referred to tangible or intangible qualities inherited from one's forebears, and here in 1 Pet 1.18 it modifies ἀναστροφή, a term commonly translated as "way of life", "conduct", or "behaviour". Of the thirteen occurrences of ἀναστροφή in the NT, six are in 1 Peter, and David Horrell identifies a close connection between this term and the customs of a people or nation. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, for instance, the apostle speaks of his "earlier life in Judaism" (τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφήν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ) (Gal

⁵³³ Boring 1999:183-201; Boring 2007:7-40; Green 2007:197-202; Abson P. Joseph also engages in a narratological study of 1 Peter, engaging with the work of literary theorist Mieke Bal (Joseph 2012:33-68). While Francis Watson has critiqued the use of narrative criticism in studying epistles (Watson 2002:231-239), the idea of a "narrative world", referring to an implied story underlying the letter, is less hotly contested.

⁵³⁴ Diodorus, *Bib. hist.* 17.4; LCL 422:126-127

⁵³⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Rom. Ant.* 5.48; LCL 357:140-141; cf. van Unnik 1969:132-133.

1.13), while 2 Maccabees contrasts the Eleazar's "excellent way of life" (καλλίστης ἀναστροφῆς) with the "foreignness" (ἀλλοφυλισμός) represented by Hellenism, including the eating of pork and abandonment of a Jewish lifestyle.⁵³⁶ Horrell thus suggests that ἀναστροφῆς encapsulates "one key feature of ethnic identity, namely what is perceived to be a 'common culture', usually including such things as 'religion, customs, or language.'"⁵³⁷ A person's ἀναστροφή πατροπαράδοτος represented the culture of one's people group, the way of life which characterised "Jewishness", "Greekness", or any other ethnicity.

1 Pet 1.18 boldly describes the readers' ἀναστροφή πατροπαράδοτος as "futile" (ματαία). In the LXX and early Christian writings, μάταιος and cognates not only signified uselessness but often represented idolatry and disobedience. "What wrong did your ancestors find in me," asks YHWH, "that they went far from me and went after worthless things and became worthless themselves (ἐπορεύθησαν ὀπίσω τῶν ματαίων καὶ ἐματαιώθησαν)?" (Jer 2.5). Using a very similar expression, 2 Kgs 17.15 states that Israel "went after false idols and became false (ἐπορεύθησαν ὀπίσω τῶν ματαίων καὶ ἐματαιώθησαν); they followed the nations that were around them." Concerning Israel's neighbours, Jer 10.3 states, "The customs of the nations are vanity (τὰ νόμιμα τῶν ἐθνῶν μάταια)." Likewise, Paul in Acts implores the people of Lystra to "turn from these worthless things (τούτων τῶν ματαίων) to the living God" (Acts 14.15).⁵³⁸ By describing the readers' previous way of life as "futile", 1 Peter unambiguously frames their ancestral culture as sinful and idolatrous. This recalls Peter's earlier statement in 1.14 urging the readers to no longer conform to the desires they formerly had in "ignorance" (ἄγνοια), with the coupling of ἄγνοια and ματαία echoing several descriptions in the LXX of Gentile idolatry.⁵³⁹ As Reinhard Feldmeier explains:

With ἄγνοια, 1 Peter takes up a term that in Hellenistic Judaism already described the ignorance of God on the part of the 'gentiles'. [...] the ignorance of God does not primarily describe a noetic deficiency, but an existential reserve – and thereby also a perverted orientation of being and behaving.⁵⁴⁰

1 Peter's readers did not simply live sinful lives individually; the cultural waters within which they once swam were inherently polluted. Notably, Peter does not specifically criticise the

⁵³⁶ Horrell 2016:453-454; ἀλλοφυλισμός is also used in 2 Macc 4.13 to describe Antiochus Epiphanes' policy of Hellenisation.

⁵³⁷ Horrell 2016:454.

⁵³⁸ Other examples include Lev 17.7; 1 Kgs 16.2, 13; Jer 8.19; Ezek 8.10; and Jon 2.8.

⁵³⁹ E.g. Lev 17.7; Jer 8.19; 10.15; Wis 13.1.

⁵⁴⁰ Feldmeier 2008:105.

Anatolian culture or any particular customs which the implied readers may have practised. We have already seen in Chapter 1 that the regions addressed in 1 Pet 1.1 were culturally diverse with a variety of religious practices. Yet the critique of ancestral customs seems patterned after more generalised indictments of non-Jewish culture as inherently ignorant and futile.⁵⁴¹ It was not the ancestral customs of Bithynians or Cappadocians *specifically* which was a problem, but the way of life characteristic of all Gentiles. Without explicitly describing the readers' ethnicity or using a cognate of ἔθνος, 1 Pet 1.18 implies that, by birth, the peoples they belonged to lived in a manner opposed to God.

Peter reminds them of this, Ok argues, because he wants his readers to “disidentify” from their former ways of life.⁵⁴² She means by this that the readers formerly adhered to the dominant values and culture of Graeco-Roman society, but now as Christians must instead shun many aspects of the lifestyle they once had, not only abstaining from them but disavowing them entirely. J.R. Michaels provides a useful insight: “One of the major concerns of 1 Peter is to claim for Gentile Christians a heritage (i.e. the heritage of Judaism as reinterpreted through Christ), but πατροπαράδοτος represents instead the heritage they already have but wish to disclaim, the heritage of Graeco-Roman paganism.”⁵⁴³ Before the readers can claim the heritage of the nation of Israel, they must first be transferred out of their former heritage, which not only pales in comparison but is also inherently sinful.

The shock behind 1 Pet 1.18's critique of ancestral tradition is sometimes lost on some modern audiences, for whom “out with the old and in with the new” is a common mantra, and moving on from ancestral customs is often perceived as a necessary step towards progress. In contrast, it is well-attested that Graeco-Roman and Jewish societies in antiquity (and many cultures today) highly esteemed inherited traditions.⁵⁴⁴ Josephus describes his work *Against Apion*, for example, as a defence of the Jewish people's antiquity (1.1), and Dio Cassius instructs, “Do not only yourself worship the Divine Power everywhere and in every way in accordance with the traditions of our fathers (κατὰ τὰ πάτρια), but compel all others to honour it.”⁵⁴⁵ “The greatest fruit of piety,” according to Porphyry, “is to worship the gods according to the traditions of our ancestors.”⁵⁴⁶ These are just some examples of the great

⁵⁴¹ On the negative characterisation of τὰ ἔθνη in 1 Pet 4.3, see Section 4.2 of this thesis.

⁵⁴² Ok 2021:71.

⁵⁴³ Michaels 1988:64.

⁵⁴⁴ Young 1999:92-104.

⁵⁴⁵ Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 52.36.1-2; LCL 83:172-173.

⁵⁴⁶ Porphyry, *Marc.* 18; trans. Zimmern 1896:67.

esteem which most writers in antiquity had for ancestral traditions.⁵⁴⁷ Calling them “futile”, as Peter does in 1.18, would have been very provocative. Moreover, Porphyry’s quote reminds us of the porous boundary between the modern categories of “religion” and “ethnicity”; as we noted previously, most first-century people did not have specific names for the assortment of beliefs and practices we now call “religions”, but commonly referred to these as “ancestral traditions”.⁵⁴⁸ That is, what we conceive of as “religion” – beliefs concerning deities, celebration of festivals, avoidance of certain foods, etc. – was woven within a wider fabric comprising one’s ethnicity and family relationships.

One of the major gripes which anti-Christian polemicists had against Christianity in the first few centuries of the Common Era, therefore, was its rejection of ancestral customs. The pagans of Anatolia *could* embrace new customs and rituals; the Roman imperial, for instance, was well-received in the cities of Asia Minor following its introduction in the first century. But it did not *replace* the ancestral customs of the people there. The offensiveness of Christianity lay in its perceived newness *at the expense* of older, ancestral traditions. As recorded by Origen, the pagan critic Celsus states, “The practices done by each nation are right when they are done in the way that pleases the overseers;⁵⁴⁹ and it is impious to abandon the customs which have existed in each locality from the beginning (παράλυσιν δὲ οὐχ ὅσιον εἶναι τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ τόπους νενομισμένα).”⁵⁵⁰ Celsus then accuses Christians of impiety due to their abandonment of their ancestral customs. The Christian’s perceived abandonment of ancestral customs and the seeming novelty of Christianity was thus a significant bone of contention for pagan writers.⁵⁵¹ Nor was this merely a discursive matter; both pagan and Christian sources record how conflicts often arose between new Christian converts and their own biological family members. Celsus writes elsewhere:

But whenever they [Christians] get hold of children in private and some stupid women with them, they let out some astounding statements as, for example, that they must not pay attention to their father and school-teachers (ὥς οὐ χρὴ προσέχειν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τοῖς διδασκάλοις), but must obey them...⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁷ Elliott 2000:370-371; see also Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 93; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 8.24; Josephus, *Ant.* 19.283, 290; *Ag. Ap.* 2.154-156; Justin, *1 Apol.* 44; Tertullian, *Apol.* 47.14.

⁵⁴⁸ Mason 2007:480-488.

⁵⁴⁹ Celsus probably has in mind divine spirits or local deities when he speaks of “overseers” (see *Cels.* 5.32).

⁵⁵⁰ Origen, *Cels.* 5.25; trans. Chadwick 1980:283.

⁵⁵¹ See other examples in Keener 2021:178; Elliott 2000:370-371.

⁵⁵² Origen, *Cels.* 3.55; trans. Chadwick 1980:165.

Likewise, the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* recalls the strained relationship between the twenty-two-year-old Perpetua and her father (Mart. Perp. Fel. 3), which eventually leads to her execution. While the story may be the embellished product of an imaginative hagiographer, it nonetheless bears witness to the familial tensions which early Christians expected to face.

Finally, an early fourth-century inscription from Lycia and Pamphylia reflects some of the opposition that Christians faced from pagans due to their perceived disregard for ancestral traditions:

. . . O most divine emperors, since the gods of our race (τῶν θεῶν τῶν ὁμογενῶν ἡμῶν) have given recompense to humankind in their every act of goodwill, for which their worship is practised on behalf of the perpetual safety of our emperors, who are most victorious in all things, we think it good to have recourse to [your] immortal imperium and petition that the Christians who have for a long time been demented in adhering to this sickness be stopped, and that they no longer be allowed to transgress [the worship] that is owed to the gods by means of their dubious and novel cult. It would be conducive to this, if it were decreed to everyone by your divine and perpetual assent . . . that all people should devote themselves to the cult of the gods of our race, in the interest of our eternal and incorruptible empire . . .⁵⁵³

This inscription, written around 311 CE, depicts Christianity as a “novel cult” in conflict with “the gods of our race”. The idea of leaving one’s ancestral traditions implied that one was turning against the deities of one’s own people.

Early Christian writers responded to their critics in different ways.⁵⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, for instance, claims that the Greek philosopher Plato was influenced by Moses, thus asserting Jewish and Christian antecedence (1 *Apol.* 59). To some extent, Peter may be adopting a similar tactic when he writes, “He [Christ] was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake” (1.20), stressing Christ’s pre-eminence.⁵⁵⁵ In contrast, Origen upholds the necessity of overturning ancestral customs when those customs are objectively bad. “Let Celsus inform us how it is impious to break ancestral laws which allow men to marry their wives and daughters,” he asks, “or which say that it is

⁵⁵³ *CIL* 3, no. 12132 and 13625b; trans. Trombley 2007:190.

⁵⁵⁴ For a more comprehensive treatment, see Kinzig 1994.

⁵⁵⁵ Ignatius expresses a similar idea in *Eph.* 19.2-3, and we will examine in Chapter 6 of this dissertation other attempts to defend Christianity’s perceived “newness”.

blessed to depart this life by being strangled.”⁵⁵⁶ Origen critiques Celsus' assumption that ancestral traditions are inherently good.

1 Pet 1.18 leans closer to this latter position, with Peter frankly reminding his readers that their ancestral traditions were so sinful that they had to be rescued from them. Such criticism of ancestral traditions, however, was not unique to Christianity, and bears close resemblance with Jewish portrayals of conversion. One notable example comes from the story of Abraham and his family. While the Genesis account has little to say about Terah,⁵⁵⁷ *Jubilees* devotes a significant amount of space to Abraham's childhood and his father's idolatry. “The child [Abraham] began to realize the errors of the earth – that everyone was going astray after the statues and after impurity. [...] When he was two weeks of years, he separated from his father in order not to worship idols with him.”⁵⁵⁸ While the language may not be as pointed as Origen's, *Jubilees* here implies that the ways of Abraham's ancestors were idolatrous and sinful. A key aspect of Abraham's story is this recognition that the culture in which he grew up was “polluted”, and he later pleads with his father to forgo idolatry, citing the helplessness of images (*Jubilees* 12.1-5). Drawing upon a similar tradition, Philo thus hails Abraham as “the standard of nobility for all proselytes” (οὗτος ἅπασιν ἐπηλύταις εὐγενείας ἐστὶ κανὼν),⁵⁵⁹ and in the same treatise addresses the virtue of repentance:

Moses convokes such people...to rise in rebellion against the mythical fables impressed on their yet tender souls from their earliest years by parents and nurses and tutors and the multitude of other familiars, who have caused them to go endlessly astray in their search for the knowledge of the best.⁵⁶⁰

It is a mark of wisdom and virtue, Philo states, to recognise the folly of the “mythical fables” learnt in one's youth and embrace instead “the creed of one instead of a multiplicity of sovereigns.”⁵⁶¹ Such persons exemplify the “godliness of heart which above all leads up to friendship and affinity,” and should be regarded as “dearest friends and closest kinsmen

⁵⁵⁶ Origen, *Cels.* 5.27; trans. Chadwick 1980:284.

⁵⁵⁷ cf. Gen 11.31-32; Josh 24.2-3.

⁵⁵⁸ *Jubilees* 11.16-17; trans. VanderKam 2020:48.

⁵⁵⁹ Philo, *Virt.* 219; LCL 341:296-297.

⁵⁶⁰ Philo, *Virt.* 178; LCL 341:272-273.

⁵⁶¹ Philo, *Virt.* 179; LCL 341:272-273.

(φιλάτους καὶ συγγενεστάτους ὑποληπτέον).”⁵⁶² Disidentification from one's ancestral customs is depicted as a necessary step for converts into Judaism.

Another text which critiques ancestral customs is the tale of *Joseph and Aseneth* (henceforth *Aseneth*). The story is about Aseneth, the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Gen 41.45), who falls in love with Joseph and chooses to worship his god. Much about *Aseneth's* provenance is still debated, especially the question of whether it is a Jewish or Christian text, and its date of composition. In this thesis I follow Angela Standhartinger, who argues that it was probably a Jewish composition which originated between 150 BCE and 100 CE, but later underwent minor Christian interpolation.⁵⁶³ It therefore represents a stream of Jewish thought, but it is difficult to say if 1 Peter's author knew the *Aseneth* story. In addition, Patricia Ahearne-Kroll invites us to reflect on *Aseneth* as a tale which may have circulated in various renditions, but with a core *fabula*, before becoming text.⁵⁶⁴ Even if *Aseneth* in its present form was composed after 1 Peter, it is possible that elements of the story are part of this core *fabula*, such as Aseneth's prayer to Joseph's god.⁵⁶⁵

And therefore my father and my mother and my whole family
have come to hate me and said, “Aseneth is not our daughter
because she destroyed our gods.”⁵⁶⁶

For Aseneth, turning to the God of Israel led directly to separation from her family – they have come to hate her. Interestingly, Nathan Hays draws attention to the motif of orphanhood in the text, with Aseneth claiming that she has been or will be orphaned (11.3, 13, 16), even though her biological family never explicitly renounce her. Hays writes, “the motif of Aseneth's being orphaned rhetorically emphasizes how Aseneth metaphorically leaves one family tree,” presented by the author as a necessary step for the pagan who wishes to be incorporated into the family of Israel.⁵⁶⁷ Like 1 Pet 1.18, *Aseneth* underlies the necessity of “disidentifying” from the culture of one's birth, and we shall shortly consider further similarities with regards to Aseneth's inheritance and the fatherhood of God.

In critiquing the readers' ancestral traditions and highlighting the ignorance and futility of their former way of life, 1 Peter echoes the language and rhetoric of Jewish

⁵⁶² Philo, *Virt.* 179; LCL 341:272-273.

⁵⁶³ Standhartinger 2014:367-370; cf. Burchard 1996:307.

⁵⁶⁴ Ahearne-Kroll 2020:124-125, 132-133.

⁵⁶⁵ Ahearne-Kroll 2020:147.

⁵⁶⁶ Jos. Asen. 11.5; OTP 2:218.

⁵⁶⁷ Hays 2017:46.

writings concerning converts. Our writer wants his readers to realise, like Abraham and Aseneth did, that they had grown up in an idolatrous culture. This process of disidentification was not confined to legendary converts from Israel's past but continued into the first and second centuries CE. As Tacitus writes in an indictment of the Jews, "the earliest lesson they [Jewish converts] receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account."⁵⁶⁸ It indicates that Jews in his time continued to disassociate themselves from their ancestral customs, a process which probably led to fractures in familial relationships.

Within 1 Peter's narrative world, the cultures within which the readers once lived was inherently sinful. Through faith in Christ, Peter reminds them, they have been redeemed from their ancestral way of life in a manner akin to converts like Abraham and Aseneth. This is a form of ethnic discourse. Like the disparaging depictions of Gentile behaviour in 1 Pet 4.3-4, discussed in the previous chapter, Peter wants his readers to recognise the futility and sinfulness of their native cultures in order to relocate them, within his ethnic imagination, among God's people. In his worldview, the redemption described in 1.18 is not merely a "spiritual" matter, but a transferral of peoplehood.

(5.2) Redemption as Transfer

The New Testament includes numerous references to the overlapping ideas of "redemption" and "ransom".⁵⁶⁹ Jesus describes himself in Mark 10.45 as a "ransom (λύτρον) for many" (cf. Matt 20.28). 1 Tim 2.6 calls him "the one who gave himself as a ransom for all" (ὁ δοὺς ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων). When Peter reminds his readers, therefore, that they have been "ransomed from the futile conduct inherited from your ancestors" (ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου), he participates in a wider Christian discourse surrounding the salvation achieved through Christ's death and resurrection. Unlike Mark's Gospel and 1 Timothy, however, Peter uniquely posits that his readers have been ransomed – not from sin nor demonic power – but from their ancestral customs.

⁵⁶⁸ Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.1-2; LCL 249:180-181.

⁵⁶⁹ Both "redeem" and "ransom" have been offered as valid English translations of λυτρόω, reflecting the variety of contexts in which this word is used.

“Redemption” and its cognates (λυτρώω / פדו / גאל)⁵⁷⁰ are derived from the language of commerce and ownership, and in the LXX it describes the manumission of slaves, animals, and property.⁵⁷¹ It also figuratively portrays the rescue of one who is in danger,⁵⁷² and was applied frequently to depict YHWH’s liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt as well as his subsequent deliverance of the Jewish exiles from Babylon.⁵⁷³ “You were sold for nothing,” YHWH declares in Isa 52.3, “and you shall be redeemed without money” (LXX: οὐ μετὰ ἀργυρίου λυτρωθήσεσθε), with Reinhard Feldmeier and J.R. Michaels both suggesting that the redemption described in 1 Pet 1.18 echoes this passage due to the recurrence of ἀργύριον and λυτρώω, thereby linking the salvation of 1 Peter’s readers with the liberation of the Jewish exiles.⁵⁷⁴

While the recurrence of ἀργύριον and λυτρώω might point in this direction, the movement of 1 Peter’s argument seems almost to be in reverse. For Peter, the readers’ redemption has not led them *out* of exile; on the contrary, the letter implies that the readers enjoyed the company of their pagan peers *prior* to their conversion (4.4), and it is only as a result of following Jesus that they enter into a *present* state of παροιμία (1.17). Moreover, 1 Pet 1.18 mentions both ἀργύριον and χρυσίον, leading me to suggest that a more likely point-of-reference than Isa 52.3 are the descriptions of idols as mere objects of silver and gold in many Jewish texts.⁵⁷⁵ Unlike metallic idols which cannot save, YHWH has saved the readers through Christ’s precious and imperishable blood (1.19). Therefore, while redemption certainly carries the connotation of being rescued by YHWH, the notion of leaving exile is less prominent in 1 Peter.

A fuller understanding of redemption in 1 Peter and the NT arises when we understand λυτρώω not only as “rescue” but also as “transfer of ownership”. We see this in the many quotidian uses of λυτρώω concerning slaves and property in the LXX cited earlier, and this aspect of λυτρώω colours the Old Testament’s description of YHWH redeeming Israel as his people. For instance, David prays in 2 Sam 7.23:

⁵⁷⁰ The Hebrew Bible uses two words to express the idea of redemption. For the purpose of this argument, however, the differences are minor; both פדו and גאל are used to describe the claiming of items and land, while also being applied to YHWH’s deliverance of individuals and the nation.

⁵⁷¹ E.g. Lev 25.25, 48-49; 27.13-20; Ps 49.7; see Unterman 1992:650-651.

⁵⁷² E.g. Ps 7.2; 34.22; 59.1.

⁵⁷³ E.g. Exod 6.6; 15.13; Deut 7.8; Isa 43.1, 14; 44.23-24; Mic 4.10; 6.4.

⁵⁷⁴ Feldmeier 2008:117; Michaels 1988:63.

⁵⁷⁵ E.g. Ps 115.4; 135.15; Isa 46.6; Jer 10.4-9; Jos. Asen. 2.2; 10.2.

And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people (אֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ־אֱלֹהִים לְפָדוֹת־לּוֹ / ὁ θεὸς τοῦ λυτρώσασθαι αὐτῷ), making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods?

YHWH's redemption of Israel in this passage not only entails deliverance from slavery, but more importantly, the claiming of Israel as YHWH's people and the inception of Israel as a nation.⁵⁷⁶ Similarly, in Deut 9.26 Moses prays, "Do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed (LXX: ἐλυτρώσω) in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand." In these passages, redemption entails a transfer of ownership, applied figuratively to YHWH bringing the Israelites out of Egypt.⁵⁷⁷ Importantly, within the biblical narrative it is the Exodus event where YHWH first calls the people of Israel his son (Exod 4.23-24), an appellation never conferred upon the patriarchs.⁵⁷⁸ In redeeming Israel, God also establishes with them a father-son relationship.

Building upon my findings in Chapter 2, I argue that 1 Peter imagines Christ's redemption as a new Exodus, an event which led to a "mixed multitude" leaving Egypt (Exod 12.38).⁵⁷⁹ In 1 Pet 1.18, God's redemption was not primarily a "deliverance from exile" nor merely a "rescue from danger" but an extraction from the ancestral customs and way of life within which they had previously been enmeshed so that they might now constitute God's people. This idea is reinforced by Peter's description of Christ's blood as that of "a lamb without defect or blemish" (1 Pet 1.19), most likely an allusion to the Passover lamb described in Exod 12.4-5.⁵⁸⁰ Christ's sacrifice allows those who lived in a culture of futility and ignorance to take on a new collective identity as YHWH's people, just as those who lived in Egypt during Moses' time – both Israelites and non-Israelites – were redeemed from Pharaoh to come under YHWH's ownership. We see a similar theme reflected in Titus 2.15 which states that Jesus "gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and

⁵⁷⁶ cf. 1 Chr 17.21.

⁵⁷⁷ Michaels also draws attention to the Roman practice of sacral manumission, whereby a slave could pay money into a temple treasury and thus become the god's "property" (Michaels 1988:64). Though suggestive, it is unclear to what extent this pagan practice shaped 1 Peter's narrative world; the connection to the Exodus seems stronger.

⁵⁷⁸ Davies 2020a:359; Medved 2016:204; cf. Deut 1.31; 8.5; 14.1; 32.6; Hos 11.1-4.

⁵⁷⁹ Liebengood 2014:135-136; see Section 2.2.4 in relation to 1 Pet 2.10.

⁵⁸⁰ Goppelt 1993:116.

purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2.14).⁵⁸¹ Christ’s redemption causes believers to be *his* λαός.

(5.3) Divine Fatherhood and Regeneration

1 Peter not only reminds its readers of what they have been redeemed *from*, but also what they have been invited *into*. Complementing the metaphor of redemption, therefore, are the images of divine fatherhood and regeneration. Peter opens his epistle with an effusive eulogy of praise, thanking God for his past, present, and future acts of grace towards the readers (1.3-12). He interweaves two related images to illustrate the readers’ new beginning in God’s family. “Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he writes, “By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope (ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1.3).

Peter’s readers have been given the readers a “new birth” through Christ’s resurrection, a motif which is repeated in 1.23. The verb ἀναγεννάω is rare – within the NT writings, it unique to 1 Peter – but the imagery of “new birth” would have been familiar to early Christians.⁵⁸² Possibly the most well-known example is John 3.3-8, where Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one may enter the kingdom of God unless they are γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν, with similar expressions in Titus 3.5 and Matthew 19.28 (παλιγγενεσία), James 1.18 (ἀποκυέω), and 1 John 2.29 (ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται).⁵⁸³

Leonhard Goppelt argues that the concept of new birth “is absent from the earliest strata of NT documents and from Palestinian Judaism,” suggesting instead that Palestinian Jews favoured the language of “new creation”,⁵⁸⁴ and that later NT writers transposed this concept for the sake of their increasingly Hellenistic audiences.⁵⁸⁵ In contrast, Craig Keener suggests that this language of rebirth may be partly derived from an image of conversion which was already circulating in first-century Judaism.⁵⁸⁶ He appeals to rabbinic texts such as

⁵⁸¹ “ὃς ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα λυτρώσῃται ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀνομίας καὶ καθαρίσῃ ἑαυτοῦ λαὸν περιούσιον, ζηλωτὴν καλῶν ἔργων.”

⁵⁸² It was formerly popular to interpret 1 Pet 1.3, 23 as a reference to baptism, but this hypothesis has largely fallen out of favour (Kaiser 2018:293-295).

⁵⁸³ While it is possible – even likely – that some of these examples postdate 1 Peter, it seems plausible that the language of “rebirth” was circulating in Christian circles even before these texts were composed.

⁵⁸⁴ E.g. Isa 51.6; 66.22; 2 Bar. 32.6; 44.12; 1QH 3.19-23

⁵⁸⁵ Goppelt 1993:81-83; but see Feldmeier’s critique of Goppelt’s position in Feldmeier 2005:78-79.

⁵⁸⁶ Keener 2021:79; cf. Hoenig 1965:54.

b. Yevamot 22b, which compares a proselyte to a “newly born child”, and *Tractate Gerim*, which states that a proselyte is “like a babe one day old”, citing Rabbi Yehuda (c. 150 CE).⁵⁸⁷ Keener posits that these texts, though written a few centuries after 1 Peter, may reflect traditions originating in the first century or earlier.

While it is possible that Peter is borrowing a Jewish image of conversion, I concede that the connection is merely suggestive. After all, the rabbinic texts just cited speak of *new birth*, not *rebirth*. Moreover, Nicodemus the Pharisee is told that he must be “born again” in John 3.3-8. Nicodemus is clearly no Gentile, and the passage indicates that the metaphor could be applied to Jews by (natural) birth. Furthermore, the implied author Peter includes himself among those who have been born again in 1.3, using the collective ἡμᾶς. As such, rebirth seems to be a process that *all* Jesus followers experience, regardless of whether they were born Jewish or non-Jewish. Nevertheless, the thematic similarities with the rabbinic literature should not be completely ignored. After stating that a proselyte is like a “newly born child”, *b. Yevamot* explains that they are like newborns for they are “not so well acquainted with the details of the commandments as the Israelites.” We find a similar concern in Peter’s statement in 1.14 that, as “obedient children” (τέκνα ὑπακοῆς), the believers must no longer be shaped by the lusts of their former ignorance, and his encouragement to them as “newborn infants” (ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη) to drink “pure, spiritual milk” (2.2). In other words, the metaphor of new birth and related images of newborn children reflect the recipients’ need to “unlearn” their old patterns of behaviour and to instead adopt the ways of their new community. Ursula U. Kaiser thus affirms that the metaphorical use of ἀναγεννάω in 1 Peter serves to define a new relationship for the addressees, who have been alienated from their former world and networks through faith in Christ but are instead drawn into a new relationship with God and Israel.⁵⁸⁸

Furthermore, 1 Pet 1.23 reminds the readers that they have been reborn “not of perishable seed but of imperishable (ἀναγεγεννημένοι οὐκ ἐκ σπορᾶς φθαρτῆς ἀλλὰ ἀφθάρτου).” In Jewish writings, seed language was used to describe genealogy and ancestry.⁵⁸⁹ As such, 1 Pet 1.23 reminds the readers that they are *God’s* offspring. It was also believed that parents endow their properties unto their children, with Marcar stating, “The

⁵⁸⁷ Hammer 2012:145.

⁵⁸⁸ Kaiser 2018:297.

⁵⁸⁹ E.g. Gen 13.15; Num 25.12-13; 2 Sam 7.12-16; 2 Kgs 11.1; see Marcar 2022a:119-121; Paul likewise uses this terminology in Gal 3.16, 29 when referring to Abraham’s offspring.

kind of seed something is determines the kind of thing it will be.”⁵⁹⁰ Having been reborn by the same imperishable seed, 1 Peter's readers are now “a new kind of person” and each individual is connected to another as God's offspring.⁵⁹¹ The idea of regeneration in 1 Peter thus invites the reader to reimagine their familial relations, perceiving fellow believers as family members through God. With regards to ethnicity, however, the seed motif is only suggestive. Kaiser posits that the metaphor of rebirth in 1 Peter emphasises, through allusions to Israel and the covenants, the incorporation of the non-Jewish readers into the people of God.⁵⁹² Such a reading complements many of our preceding observations but is difficult to prove through 1 Pet 1.3 – 2.2 alone.

The language of being begotten anew connects to another important familial image in 1 Pet 1.3: God as father. While Jewish conceptions of God sometimes depict him as a universal “father of all”,⁵⁹³ he was more commonly portrayed as the father of Israel as a nation,⁵⁹⁴ or of the Davidic king.⁵⁹⁵ 1 Pet 1.3 describes him as the God and father of Jesus Christ, but 1.17 subsequently speaks of the readers invoking God as *their* father. Together with 1 Pet 1.3 and 1.23, the images of begetting and God's fatherhood also echo Old Testament passages concerning YHWH's relationship with Israel.

Is not he your father (אֱלֹהֶיךָ / σου πατήρ) who created you,
who made you and established you? (Deut 32.6b)

You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you (אֱלֹהֶיךָ / γεννήσαντά σε);
you forgot the God who gave you birth. (Deut 32.18)

These words from the Song of Moses also emphasise the fact that YHWH's status as Israel's father is, as we saw earlier, connected to the story of their redemption.⁵⁹⁶ Israel's deliverance from Egypt signified both their *redemption* as well as their *conception* as YHWH's offspring,

⁵⁹⁰ Marcar 2022a:167-168; Marcar 2022b:260; see Cicero, *Rab. Post.* 3-4. Within the Aristotelian school of thought, it was believed that the father alone endowed his properties to his offspring, whereas the Hippocratic school believed that the mother too contributed her properties. However, while Kaiser rightly notes that God assumes both paternal and maternal roles in 1 Peter's metaphorical language (cf. 1.3; 2.2), the letter only explicitly describes God as “father” (1.3, 17) and not “mother” (Kaiser 2018:318).

⁵⁹¹ Marcar 2022a:168.

⁵⁹² Kaiser 2018:333.

⁵⁹³ E.g. Philo, *Cher.* 13.44; *Virt.* 179.

⁵⁹⁴ E.g. Exod 4.22; Deut 32.5-6; Hos 11.1.

⁵⁹⁵ E.g. 2 Sam 7.14; Ps 2.7; 89.26.

⁵⁹⁶ Exod 4.22-23; Hos 11.1.

the point at which they became God's "son".⁵⁹⁷ In invoking God as their father (1 Pet 1.17), the readers have entered into the same relationship with YHWH as the people of Israel.⁵⁹⁸

Turning once again to *Joseph and Aseneth*, we find a similar theme surrounding Aseneth's conversion. Though she feels orphaned by her biological family, Joseph's God is repeatedly likened to and addressed as "father". "For (just) as a little child who is afraid flees to his father...Likewise you too, Lord, stretch out your hands upon me as a child-loving father."⁵⁹⁹ YHWH is thus depicted as the father of converts, in contrast to Aseneth's earthly father, Pentephres, who features in Aseneth's soliloquy as her persecutor. Thus 1 Peter's description of God as father complements the other instances of familial language in Jewish literature concerning converts. It reminds the readers that they have been redeemed from former ancestral loyalties and have come under the protection of a new household leader; having been reborn through God's imperishable seed, they are called to live according to his standards (1 Pet 1.14-16).

The familial images of fatherhood, begetting, and seed lead Janette Ok to posit that Peter is employing a "logic of patrilineal descent". She writes, "Peter constructs a new logic of kinship that in turn enables his Gentile readers to disidentify with the way of life passed on to them from their ancestors, so that God the Father is their progenitor and they can trace a new line of patrilineal descent to Jesus Christ, God's Son."⁶⁰⁰ Ok is here building upon an idea suggested by Caroline Johnson Hodge in her work on Paul as a way of understanding the metaphor of sonship; both Ok and Hodge cite Philo's statement that the patriarchs of Israel's twelve tribes were "connected not only by membership of the house or family but by a still more real affinity...they were brothers with the same father."⁶⁰¹ This notion of a common putative ancestor becomes the basis for Israel's claim to nationhood. Building upon this observation, Ok suggests that Peter conceives of God as the readers' father, thus replacing their pagan ancestors as their progenitor.⁶⁰² Like Hodge, she mentions Caesar's claim to

⁵⁹⁷ Ok 2021:50.

⁵⁹⁸ M.R. Malcolm suggests that these images reflect a "renegotiation" of a Gospel schema; just as Israel went from "Suffering" to being "Made Alive" through the Exodus, 1 Peter's readers experience the same transition through the image of regeneration (Malcolm 2018:531).

⁵⁹⁹ "ὥσπερ γὰρ παιδίον νήπιον φοδούμενον τινα φεύγει πρὸς τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ... οὕτω καὶ σύ, κύριέ μου, ἔκτεινόν σου τὰς ἀχράντους καὶ φοδεράς χειρας ἐπ' ἐμέ ὡς πατὴρ φιλότεκνος" (Jos. Asen. 12.8; OTP 2:221).

⁶⁰⁰ Ok 2021:48.

⁶⁰¹ Philo, *Rewards* 57; LCL 341:346-347; cf. Hodge 2007:21; Ok 2021:49.

⁶⁰² Ok 2021:48.

descend from Venus, as recorded by Suetonius, as an example of how this logic of patrilineal descent could be creatively employed.⁶⁰³

The family of my aunt Julia is descended by her mother from the kings, and on her father's side is akin to the immortal Gods; for the Marcii Reges go back to Ancus Marcius, and the Julii, the family of which ours is a branch, to Venus. Our stock therefore has at once the sanctity of kings, whose power is supreme among mortal men, and the claim to reverence which attaches to the Gods, who hold sway over kings themselves.⁶⁰⁴

This example shows that ancient writers *could* lay claim to descend from divine figures as a means of enhancing their status. However, I believe Hodge and Ok too easily elide myths of human descent and divine descent. Certainly, humans in the ancient world could claim putative descent from deities, but this took two forms. As *Divus Julius* 6 demonstrates, one approach was to posit that one's human ancestors had divine progenitors. In tracing his genealogical history to the mythical Aeneas, supposed son of Venus, Caesar is not *replacing* his Julian ancestry, but presenting it as a human family with divine ancestry. Such a construal is possible in a Graeco-Roman context where divine beings could bear human children. In Jewish writings, we find a second possible approach: non-competitive fatherhood. YHWH's status as the Israelites' father does not *replace* the notion of human descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nor does Aseneth's conversion mean that Pentephres is no longer her father. Put simply, in Jewish thought divine fatherhood is metaphorical.⁶⁰⁵ The Israelites could call upon YHWH *and* Jacob as "father"; both these facets are recurring and important ideas in the Israelite myth of origins, but neither notion replaces the other.

This distinction is important, because the "logic of patrilineal descent" proposed by Ok in 1 Peter is categorically different from Caesar's. YHWH is not mythologised as the divine progenitor of their biological ancestors, as Julius Caesar expresses with regards to Venus.⁶⁰⁶ YHWH is therefore not the progenitor of a *new* race. Rather, the readers' willingness to abandon their ancestral cults, and instead embrace Christ, have led to a process of redemption and regeneration whereby they can relate to God as "father", just as the people

⁶⁰³ Ok 2021:48-49

⁶⁰⁴ Suetonius, *Divus Julius* 6; LCL 31:42-43.

⁶⁰⁵ Marcar 2022a:47.

⁶⁰⁶ Furthermore, Julius Caesar here traces divine descent through his *mother*, thus problematising the idea of *patrilineal* descent as an appropriate concept.

of Israel related to him as divine “father” whilst tracing biological descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moreover, Ok observes that the readers of 1 Peter are not addressed as God’s υἱοί, an important familial metaphor in Paul’s letters.⁶⁰⁷ Ok explains this omission by suggesting that Peter seeks to maintain a difference between Gentile Christians and Jews.

Peter may avoid using ‘sons’ to refer to his addressees in order to apply ethnic reasoning and language to Christians without equating Gentile Christians with Jews. Israel’s unique relationship with God can be traced along putative patrilineal bloodlines of their great patriarchs. Gentile Christians, however, cannot claim to share the same ancestors or belong to the same people group. Thus, Peter constructs for his addressees a new lineage and common descent through the blood of Christ in order to help them understand themselves as the children, people, and household of God.⁶⁰⁸

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, I agree with Ok’s suggestion that 1 Peter does not equate so-called “Gentile Christians” with Jews. However, Ok’s assessment deserves further scrutiny. First, Paul uses the language of sonship *without* equating Gentile Christians with Jews. Could Peter not have done the same? Second, while 1 Peter’s readers are indeed not addressed as “sons”, the passages just surveyed demonstrate Peter’s willingness to refer to God as their “father” who has “begotten” them, and they are consequently his “children”. It is not clear why the language of sonship would have conflated Gentile Christians with Jews more than any of these other metaphors. Lastly, 1 Pet 3.6 tells us that believing women have become “Sarah’s children”, clearly interpolating these non-Jewish readers into the story and family tree of Israel. This final point deserves closer consideration.

(5.4) Becoming Children of Sarah

God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. [...] I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations (וְהָיְתָה לְגוֹיִם / ἔσται εἰς ἔθνη); kings of peoples shall come from her.” (Gen 17.15-16)

⁶⁰⁷ E.g. Rom 8.14; Gal 4.4-7.

⁶⁰⁸ Ok 2021:52.

Sarah is well-known for several attributes. She is praised for her beauty,⁶⁰⁹ her virtue,⁶¹⁰ and her faithfulness to God.⁶¹¹ Most of all, however, she is remembered as Israel's ancestor. As the prophet Isaiah declares, "Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah, who bore you" (Isa 51.2). In this regard, Peter's statement in 3.6 is interesting: "... as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening" (ESV).⁶¹²

The ethical challenges posed by this text are well-known. On a hermeneutical level, the OT includes only one instance where Sarah calls Abraham her "lord" (κύριος / אֲדֹנָי), but when it is used in Gen 18.12, Sarah's implied tone is not submissive but sarcastic.⁶¹³ Even though Sarah acquiesces to Abraham in several instances, most notably when she goes along with his plan to be called his sister, this act of submission puts her in a perilous position and reflects Abraham's distrust in God's promise and protection (Gen 12.10-12; 20.1-13).⁶¹⁴ Moreover, 1 Peter's injunction for wives to submit has too often been used to justify violent or oppressive behaviour against women even in modern times.⁶¹⁵ In light of this, scholars often emphasise that Peter is addressing women in life-threatening situations, as Christians married to unbelieving husbands were particularly vulnerable.⁶¹⁶ In advocating submission, 1 Peter "strategized survival" for its readers, Shively T.J. Smith argues, in a context where keeping alive was, in itself, a form of resistance.⁶¹⁷ Bringing together these hermeneutical and ethical concerns, Caryn Reeder suggests that Peter intentionally presents Sarah as an unlikely exemplar of obedience. "Christians should live according to cultural expectations but at the same time be holy nonconformists," she posits.⁶¹⁸

Without ignoring these ethical questions, we should recognise that 1 Pet 3.6 does more than just encourage emulation of Sarah. 1 Peter not only instructs its readers to live like

⁶⁰⁹ Gen 12.11; *Genesis Apocryphon* 20.2-9; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.162-163.

⁶¹⁰ Philo, *Spec.* 3.244; *Cher.* 40.41.

⁶¹¹ Heb 11.11.

⁶¹² "ὥς Σάρρα ὑπήκουσεν τῷ Ἀβραάμ κύριον αὐτὸν καλοῦσα ἣς ἐγενήθητε τέκνα ἀγαθοποιοῦσαι καὶ μὴ φοβούμεναι μηδεμίαν πτόησιν" (1 Pet 3.6). Because 1 Pet 3.1-6 is directed towards women, some English translations render τέκνα here as "daughters" (NRSV, NIV). I prefer the ESV's choice of "children" as a translation which retains the gender-neutral quality of τέκνα.

⁶¹³ Reese 2022:177-178.

⁶¹⁴ Reese 2022:178.

⁶¹⁵ Reeder 2015:519-520; for a more critical assessment of 1 Pet 3.1-7, see Bird 2011:143-144.

⁶¹⁶ Balch 1981:92, 109; cf. Reeder 2015:521-530.

⁶¹⁷ Smith 2016:165.

⁶¹⁸ Reeder 2015:537.

Sarah but adds the additional encouragement: ἡς ἐγενήθητε τέκνα.⁶¹⁹ In so doing, the writer is inscribing them into her family. For 1 Peter's non-Jewish addressees, this would have been an entirely fictive ancestry; prior to their conversion, they would have had no reason to conceive of themselves as Sarah's children.⁶²⁰ Unlike the preceding description of the readers as newborn children begotten by God, however, their descent here is traced not to God but to Israel's progenitor.

An important aspect of Paul's ethnic reasoning, according to Cavan Concannon, was his depiction of Israel's ancestors as the *Corinthians'* ancestors. "I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters," Paul writes in 1 Cor 10.1-2, "that our ancestors (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν) were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and the sea." While the letter's addressees may have included a significant number of Jews (cf. Acts 18.1-27), most commentators agree that the majority of Corinthian believers would have been non-Jewish.⁶²¹ Hence, Concannon writes concerning this passage:

Paul appeals to kinship to present the Israelites as ancestors of the Corinthians, ancestors whose history becomes a potential site for imitation or rejection. [...] Its purpose is to encourage the Corinthians to emulate the good behaviour of their new ancestors and reject the bad. In what follows, Paul holds the Corinthians to a new standard of behavior rooted in the antiquity of their community and its ancestors.⁶²²

By referring to biblical Israel as "our fathers", Paul is interpolating his Gentile readers into the story of Israel. Being in Christ means being in Israel's family tree. Joseph Fitzmyer concurs, commenting that Paul "is including the predominantly Gentile Christian community of Roman Corinth in 'our', because Christians are for him in a new sense 'the Israel of God' (Gal 6.16)."⁶²³ Admittedly, we could debate whether the ἡμῶν in 1 Cor 10.1 includes the readers or if Paul, as a Jew, is referring to the Jewish people when he writes οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν.

⁶¹⁹ Though the ESV's translation seems to imply that their status as Sarah's children is *conditional* upon their good works and fearlessness, there is no conditional clause in the text and Greg Forbes has in fact demonstrated that the readers' status is the grounds from which flow the imperatives to do good and to be unafraid (Forbes 2005:105-109; cf. Michaels 1988:166).

⁶²⁰ While Jewish literature occasionally ascribes to several non-Israelite nations genealogical descent from Abraham (e.g. the Spartans in 1 Macc 12.21), no such tradition exists regarding the varied peoples in northern Anatolia mentioned in 1 Pet 1.1.

⁶²¹ Dunn 2003:16-17.

⁶²² Concannon 2014:102-103.

⁶²³ Fitzmyer 2008:380.

Yet we see another example in 1 Clement, when the writer prays, “Give harmony and peace to us and to all who dwell on the earth, just as you did to our ancestors (τοῖς πατράσιν ἡμῶν) when they reverently called upon you in faith and truth.”⁶²⁴ While little can be said with certainty about the letter’s author, early traditions identify “Clement” as a non-Jew, with the implied addressees in Corinth likewise being predominantly non-Jewish.⁶²⁵ One aspect of early Christian ethnic discourse, therefore, was the assimilation of non-Jews into the family tree of Israel.

We could compare this with similar discussions in rabbinic literature concerning converts. According to *m. Bikkurim* 1.4, for instance, the גר cannot say “The Lord has sworn to our fathers” when presenting the offering of first-fruits, but should instead say “The God of *your* fathers,” unless his mother is an Israelite.⁶²⁶ Yet the Jerusalem Talmud reflects at least one voice of dissent on this notion, with Rabbi Jehuda apparently stating that the convert *can* speak of Israel’s ancestors as their ancestors because of God’s promise to make Abraham “the father of nations” (*y. Bikkurim* 1.4.5; 63d). The discussion of this topic in the Mishnah, along with the explicit mention of Rabbi Jehuda in the *gemara* of the Jerusalem Talmud on this passage, suggests that the inclusion of converts within the imagined family lineage of Israel was a debated issue in the second century CE.

This notion of Abraham as father to both Jews and non-Jews is also expressed by Paul, of course. “There is no longer Jew or Greek,” Paul declares in Gal 3.28, “for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” He then immediately states, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring (σπέρμα), heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3.29). For Paul, being in Christ does not render Israel’s history and ancestry irrelevant; rather, Christ is the means through which all may enter Abraham’s family. Commenting on this passage, Hodge writes, “Baptism into Christ repairs the rift [between Jews and non-Jews] by making gentiles into descendants of Abraham.”⁶²⁷ This does not denote the expulsion of those who were

⁶²⁴ 1 Clem 60.4; cf. 30.7; trans. Holmes 2007:126-127

⁶²⁵ He is sometimes regarded as a freedman of the household of the emperor’s cousin, the consul Titus Flavius Clemens, or the Clement mentioned in Phil 4.3 (Holmes 2007:33-36). The Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* depict him as the son of a certain Faustus and Mattidia, the latter being a relative of Caesar (*Hom.* 12.8; *Rec.* 7.8).

⁶²⁶ אלו מביאין ולא קורין, הגר מביא ואינו קורא, שאינו יכול לומר אשר נשבע ה' לאבותינו לתת לנו (דברים כ"ו:ג'). ואם היתה אמו “מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מביא וקורא” (*m. Bikkurim* 1.4).

⁶²⁷ Hodge 2007:67.

Abraham's descendants by birth. "The gentiles become like sons in the household," states Hodge, "not to replace those who are there, but to share the inheritance with them."⁶²⁸

By describing the readers as Sarah's τέκνα 1 Pet 3.6 moves in a similar direction, connecting them to the ancient lineage of Israel. But the readers are not described as *Abraham's* τέκνα but as Sarah's. This may be partly explained on literary grounds – the writer is addressing Christian wives in this section, after all – but Sarah's significance in Jewish thought may also be a contributing factor.

As we saw in Gen 17.16, the OT already depicts Sarah as the mother of nations (גוים / ἔθνη). Similarly, Sarah asks rhetorically in Gen 21.7: "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children (בְּנִים)?"⁶²⁹ These verses posed an interpretive puzzle for later readers: the Genesis narrative records Isaac as Sarah's only child, so why does the text imply that she will nurse *children*? Later Jewish writers responded to this difficulty by portraying Sarah as the mother of proselytes.⁶³⁰

The nations of the world (אומות העולם) brought their children to Sarah, in order to nurse them, to uphold what is said: *Sarah would nurse children* (Gen 21:7). Some of them in all sincerity brought their children for Sarah to nurse, some brought their children only to check her. Neither the former nor the latter suffered any loss. R. Levi said: Those who came in sincerity became proselytes (אילו שבאו באמת נתגיירו). This is what it says: *Sarah would nurse children* — What is the meaning of nurse children? That they became children of Israel. What happened to those who came to check out Sarah?

Our Rabbis said: They received promotions. All proselytes in the world (וכל גרים) and all God-fearers in the world (וכל יראי שמים שיש בעולם) descend from the children who drank Sarah's milk. Therefore, *a joyous mother of children* (Ps 113:9) is Sarah.⁶³¹

Here we find a very creative reconstruction of proselyte origins from *Pesikta Rabbati*, admittedly written about seven centuries after 1 Peter. According to the writer, Sarah is the nurse mother of all proselytes. This image echoes a peculiar story from *Genesis Rabbah* 53.9:

⁶²⁸ Hodge 2007:77.

⁶²⁹ Perhaps recognising this difficulty, the LXX translates בְּנִים in Gen 21.7 with the singular παιδίον.

⁶³⁰ Elliott 2000:572-573.

⁶³¹ *Pesikta Rabbati* 43:13-14; Ulmer 2017:2.508-209.

Our mother Sarah was extremely modest. Said Abraham to her: “This is not a time for modesty, but uncover your breasts so that everyone may know that the Holy One, blessed be He, has begun to perform miracles.” He uncovered her breasts and they began gushing forth as two fountains, and noble ladies came and suckled their children saying, “We are not worthy to suckle our children with the milk of this righteous man.”⁶³² The Rabbis said, whoever came for the sake of heaven became a God-fearer (רבנן אמרי כל מי שבא לשם שמים נעשה ירא שמים).⁶³³

Like the text from *Pesikta Rabbati*, this story seeks to explicate some of the ambiguities in Gen 21.6-7, especially the statement that “Sarah would nurse children”.

These two anecdotes from *Genesis Rabbah* and *Pesikta Rabbati* highlight the idea of breast milk as a “kinship forging substance”.⁶³⁴ According to Cynthia Chapman, the act of nursing a child represented the transmission of “ethnicity and social/ritual status from the mother to child.”⁶³⁵ Thus Genesis intentionally comments that *Sarah* nursed Isaac, despite her age, to avoid any sense that he had been nursed by Hagar the foreigner.⁶³⁶ As a parallel, Chapman cites the interesting example of Naomi nursing Obed in Ruth 4.16-17: “Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom and became his nurse (ותהי־לו לאמנת). The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’”⁶³⁷ Obed was not Naomi’s son, nor even her grandson, but by presenting the Israelite Naomi as his nursing mother, the writer of Ruth attempts to “acknowledge and correct David’s Moabite ancestry”.⁶³⁸ Obed’s Israelite credentials are safeguarded by the notion of him being nursed by Naomi. In a similar manner, the rabbinic accounts of Sarah nursing those who later become “fearers of God” represents the inclusion of outsiders into the family of Israel. Although 1 Pet 3.6 does not directly associate Sarah with nursing, the above excerpts recall Peter’s instruction in 2.2 to “long for pure spiritual milk”. But of course, there is a key

⁶³² “Concerning the speech of the noblewomen, there is an interesting split in the manuscript traditions: while the better manuscripts speak of ‘the milk of the righteous man’ others record ‘the milk of the righteous woman.’” (Levinson 2000:352 n.31).

⁶³³ *Genesis Rabbah* 53.9; *Sefaria* and Levinson 2000:352.

⁶³⁴ Chapman 2012:1-41; Marcar 2022a:170.

⁶³⁵ Chapman 2012:26; cf. Maher 1992:21-25; Marcar 2022a:171.

⁶³⁶ Chapman 2012:26-30.

⁶³⁷ Chapman 2012:34-39; see also her defence here of אמן in this context to mean “breastfeed” or “nurse”. In addition, the editors of the LXX translate the phrase as ἐγένθη αὐτῷ εἰς τιθηνόν, supporting the idea that Naomi was Obed’s nursing mother.

⁶³⁸ Chapman 2012:39.

difference: the milk which Peter's readers should desire is not *Sarah's* milk but the "spiritual milk" (τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα) which, inferring from 1 Pet 2.3, is "the Lord" (ὁ κύριος).

More broadly speaking, however, the rabbinic passages cited earlier portray Sarah as the mother of proselytes. The noble ladies' statement "we are not worthy", writes Joshua Levinson, echoes the language of conversion,⁶³⁹ and this passage concludes with the Rabbis' declaration that "whoever came for the sake of heaven became ירא שמים.⁶⁴⁰ We need not postulate a connection between the ירא שמים and the synagogue-going θεοσεβείς, regarded by some as a category of "Gentile sympathisers",⁶⁴¹ to see that this passage implies a positive reorientation of the individual's relationship to the divine. Those who bring their children to Sarah are blessed, and *Pesikta Rabbati* ultimately depicts all "proselytes" (גרים) and "Godfearers" (יראי שמים) as descendants of those who drank Sarah's milk, thereby making Sarah "a joyous mother of children" (43.14).

Could 1 Peter have been drawing upon similar ideas by mentioning Sarah in 1 Pet 3.6? While *Genesis Rabbah* in its present form probably comes from the fifth century, Rami Schwartz argues that its depiction of Sarah is "a development of the Amoraic era" and represents traditions from the third to fifth centuries.⁶⁴² It is thus plausible, though certainly not provable, that these notions of Sarah as the mother of proselytes would have been circulating by the time of 1 Peter's composition. More importantly, we already see in the NT similar ideas of Sarah as imagined mother of believers. In Gal 4.21-31, Paul does not explicitly name Sarah but contrasts Abraham's two wives and their offspring. A possible reason for this contrast, Martinus de Boer posits, is that the "new preachers" in Galatia were using the Genesis narrative to claim that the Galatian believers, as non-Jews who did not practise circumcision nor observe the law, did not have the status of God's people and were like "Gentile Ishmaelites".⁶⁴³ Countering this interpretation, Paul tells his readers that they, "are children of promise, like Isaac" (Gal 4.28) and that the free woman is "our mother" (Gal 4.26). While there are significant differences with *Pesikta Rabbati* and *Genesis Rabbah*, there is also an underlying similarity: Joining the people of God means becoming children of Sarah.

⁶³⁹ cf. *b. Yeb.* 47a; *Gen. Rab.* 82.14.

⁶⁴⁰ Levinson 2000:354.

⁶⁴¹ Lieu 1995:484.

⁶⁴² Schwartz 2021:63-65.

⁶⁴³ de Boer 2011:286-287; cf. Longenecker 1990:201.

Reflecting on 1 Pet 3.6 in light of these Jewish parallels concerning Sarah helps us to better recognise that the idea of becoming “Sarah’s children” is a form of ethnic discourse. The readers are being inscribed into Israel’s family tree. With the figure of Noah also mentioned in 1 Pet 3.20, Wan Wei-Hsien suggests that Peter seeks “to root his readers in a past out of which they emerge as the fulfilment of God’s blueprint for history” by connecting them to Israel’s ancestors.⁶⁴⁴

In summoning these forerunners, the author situates his readers in a genealogy based on spiritual kinship into which they are incorporated by virtue of their new birth. [...] The readers do not merely belong to the new family in some vague or analogous sense. They have been ransomed from the futile ways of their Gentile ancestors and have truly become members of God’s own family.⁶⁴⁵

Within 1 Peter’s ethnic imagination, the readers have traded the futile customs of their biological ancestors for the right to belong in Israel’s family instead. Hence, although Jeremy Punt claims that “Sarah’s role as the mother of the Jewish race is subverted” in the New Testament, in fact it is *expanded* to include those who are Jewish by birth and those who are not.⁶⁴⁶ This transferral not only allows them to invoke God as “father” and Sarah as “mother” but accords them access to Israel’s inheritance.

(5.5) The Inheritance of Israel

Entering God’s household comes with an eschatological promise, and one of the foremost privileges of being God’s children, writes Peter, is that the readers will receive a heavenly inheritance.

[H]e has given us a new birth...into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (εἰς κληρονομίαν ἄφθαρτον καὶ ἀμίαντον καὶ ἀμόραντον), kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1.3-5)

Commenting on this passage, Paul Achtemeier claims that Peter is making a contrast between OT Israel and the Christ-movement. Focusing on the letter’s description of the inheritance as “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading”, Achtemeier suggests that the reader is implicitly

⁶⁴⁴ Wan 2019:115-116.

⁶⁴⁵ Wan 2019:116.

⁶⁴⁶ Punt 2007:465.

contrasting the readers' inheritance with *Israel's* inheritance, the land of Canaan which had been defiled by pagan worship and was presently occupied by Rome.

[T]he consistent pattern of our author's use of the language of Israel to describe the Christian community would tend to point to a more direct and intentional use of that language in this verse, the point of which is the total certainty of that inheritance in contrast with any other, including the inheritance of land promised to Israel.⁶⁴⁷

In other words, 1 Peter depicts the readers' inheritance as *better than Israel's inheritance* – namely, the promised land of Canaan. However, this argument runs into several problems.

Numerous Jewish writings after the exile, while recognising that Israel's land had been defiled by idolatry, nonetheless project into the future an expectation that Israel will once again inherit that land from YHWH.⁶⁴⁸ One clear expression of this longing comes from Ezekiel 47–48, where the writer maps out the land which Israel's tribes will once again receive from YHWH as their eschatological inheritance. First-century Jewish writers could still expect to receive the land as an “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” inheritance, where they will live alongside the גרים, as we saw earlier (Ezek 47.21–23). As such, 1 Pet 1.4 need not be read as a critique of the Israel's inheritance; on the contrary, it seems consonant with Jewish expectations that, when God once more restores his people Israel, they shall return to the land and live in it alongside foreigners who turn to worship him.

We can strengthen this claim by turning again to *Joseph and Aseneth*, the only other extant text from our period which describes an inheritance as ἄφθαρτος.⁶⁴⁹ This expression comes from the lips of Aseneth following her conversion: “For behold, all the gifts of my father Pentephres, which he gave me as an inheritance, are transient and obscure; but the gifts of your inheritance, Lord, are incorruptible and eternal.”⁶⁵⁰

Aseneth celebrates her conversion, contrasting the incorruptible and eternal inheritance that she has received as a Jewish proselyte against the “transient and obscure” inheritance of her biological family. From a Jewish perspective, the inheritance they received

⁶⁴⁷ Achtemeier 1996:96.

⁶⁴⁸ E.g. Mic 4.7; Zech 14.10–11; Sir 36.13, 16; Ps. Sol. 8.28; 2 Macc 2.18; 4Q509, etc. (Chazon 2007:161–166).

⁶⁴⁹ In the LXX the adjective describes God's spirit (Wis 12.1) and “the light of the law” (Wis 18.4). Paul uses it to describe God (Rom 1.23; 1 Tim 1.17), the Christian's eschatological crown (1 Cor 9.25), and the bodies of the dead who have been raised at the eschaton (1 Cor 15.52). None of these passages, however, imply that the object is an “inheritance”.

⁶⁵⁰ “...τὰ δὲ δώματα τῆς σῆς κληρονομίας, κύριε, ἄφθαρτα εἰσι καὶ αἰῶνα” (Jos. Asen. 12.15; OTP 2:222).

as YHWH's people is "incorruptible" when compared to the inheritance of their pagan past. I posit that 1 Pet 1.4 reflects a similar approach – the writer is contrasting that the readers' newfound inheritance with the inheritance they had as *pagans*, not the inheritance of Israel. This coheres well with our preceding observation concerning 1 Pet 1.18, where the readers are reminded that Christ has redeemed them from their ἀναστροφή πατροπαράδοτος, with the adjective πατροπαράδοτος often referring to tangible or intangible objects inherited from one's forbears.⁶⁵¹ Thus 1 Pet 1.4 emphasises the greatness of the believers' inheritance *vis-à-vis* their ancestral customs, not Israel's land.

(5.6) Belonging to a Worldwide Brotherhood

Discussions about kinship in early Christianity often turn to the idea of "brotherhood". In Halvor Moxnes' important volume on *Constructing Early Christian Families*, for instance, we find two essays with the titles "Brotherhood in Plutarch and Paul" and "Brotherhood in Christ".⁶⁵² In this regard, 1 Peter contributes to a wider discourse about so-called "fictive kinship" in early Christianity but offers an important nuance. "Love the brotherhood (τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀγαπᾶτε)," the writer urges in 1 Pet 2.17, before reminding the readers toward the end of the letter to "resist him [the devil], firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (τῇ ἐν κόσμῳ ὑμῶν ἀδελφότητι)" (ESV) in 5.9.⁶⁵³ 1 Peter thus portrays the Christ movement as a worldwide family, bound together by mutual love and the experience of persecution, and it is the only NT text to describe the Jesus movement as an ἀδελφότης.⁶⁵⁴ While other NT writers like Paul and James speak of believers having a sibling relationship with one another as ἀδελφοί, 1 Peter is the only NT text to speak of believers constituting an ἀδελφότης.

Ἀδελφός was indeed a very common term in early Christian writings.⁶⁵⁵ It typically signified one's biological brother but, like the Hebrew *אָח*, was commonly applied to people

⁶⁵¹ See Section 5.1.

⁶⁵² Aasgard 1997; Fatum 1997.

⁶⁵³ Feldmeier 2008:250; following the ESV, I have chosen to translate ἀδελφότης as "brotherhood" to emphasise the verbal similarity between ἀδελφότης and ἀδελφός. While a gender-inclusive translation of ἀδελφότης could be used instead, such as "family" (NIV), the connection between ἀδελφότης and ἀδελφός is important for this chapter.

⁶⁵⁴ Although 1 Clement uses ἀδελφότης as well to speak of the Corinthians' struggle "on behalf of the all the brotherhood (ὑπὲρ πάσης τῆς ἀδελφότητος) in 1 Clem 2.4.

⁶⁵⁵ Horrell lists some 124 instances in the Pauline epistles alone (Horrell 2001:311), and the early Christians continued this practice (e.g. 1 Clement 14.1; Ignatius, *Poly.* 5.1; *Smyr.* 12.1; 13.1; *Eph.* 16.1; *Rom.* 6.2).

with whom the speaker shared a sibling-like bond.⁶⁵⁶ In Jewish writings, ἀδελφός / ἀδελφός often referred to fellow Israelites, perhaps reflecting the belief in a shared ancestor.⁶⁵⁷ In the NT texts, H.F. von Soden posits that “ἀδελφός is one of the titles of the people of Israel taken over by the Christian community.”⁶⁵⁸ Wayne Meeks concurs, suggesting not only that the early Christians took over the usage of this term from the Jews, but highlighting the sectarian nature of this label, citing numerous texts from Qumran.⁶⁵⁹

Meeks and von Soden rightly note the similarity with Israelite terminology but overstate its uniqueness. The use of ἀδελφός and other terms denoting so-called “fictive kinship” was not exclusive to Christian and Jewish groups but was used to varying degrees by Graeco-Roman associations.⁶⁶⁰ Philip A. Harland cites the following example of a funerary inscription in Cilicia, dated to before 69 CE:

But if some brother wants to sell, let the other brothers purchase it. But if the brothers so wish, then let them receive the coins mentioned above and let them depart from the association.⁶⁶¹

As Harland notes, the members of this κοινός were not biologically related but regarded one another as ἀδελφοί.⁶⁶² Harland concedes that such clear examples of sibling-language are not plentiful, attributing this paucity to the mostly epigraphic nature of the extant sources, but nonetheless demonstrates that the early Christian usage of ἀδελφός may not be entirely derived from Jewish sources.⁶⁶³

In the context of this thesis, Harland's observation discourages us from assuming that Christian writers' use of ἀδελφοί represents a form of ethnic reasoning. We therefore should not read too much into Peter's description of Silvanus as a “faithful brother” (πιστός

⁶⁵⁶ Horrell 2001:296-297; as is widely recognised, the plural ἀδελφοί could refer to both men and women.

⁶⁵⁷ e.g. Exod 2.11; Lev 25.35; Deut 15.7; 2 Macc 1.1; etc.

⁶⁵⁸ von Soden 1964:145-146.

⁶⁵⁹ Meeks 1983:87-88; cf. 1QS 6.10, 22; 1QSa 1.18; CDC 6.20; 7.1; 20.8; 1QM 13.1; 15.4.

⁶⁶⁰ Ascough 2015:235-236.

⁶⁶¹ ἐὰν δέ τις ἀδελφός | θελήσει ἀποπωλῆσαι, ἀγοραζέσθωσαν οἱ | ἕτεροι ἀδελφοί. εἰ δὲ μὴ | θέλωσιν οἱ ἀδελφοί τό | τε λαμβανέτωσαν τὸ πρὸς γεγραμμένον κερ[μ]άτιον καὶ ἐκχωρεῖτω[σαν] ἐκ τοῦ κοιν[ο]υ.
(*IKilikiaBM* II 201 b).

⁶⁶² Harland 2009:68-69; Harland 2014:415-416.

⁶⁶³ “We have personal letters pertaining to early Christian groups (reflecting personal interactions), but rarely have any literary or epistolary evidence for the internal life of other associations. Instead, we have monuments, including honorary inscriptions and epitaphs on graves” (Harland 2009:67). J.S. Kloppenborg, in contrast, posits that the extensive use of kinship language among Christians distinguished them from Graeco-Roman associations (Kloppenborg 2009:1069).

ἀδελφός) in 1 Pet 5.12. Moreover, in their response to David Horrell's article on 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Peter 3, Philip Esler and Steve Mason have suggested that "many early Christ-followers viewed themselves and were seen by others as a voluntary association," a hypothesis which explains the "trans-ethnic" character of the Christian movement.⁶⁶⁴ Harland's observation regarding the use of ἀδελφός in Graeco-Roman society seems to support their position.⁶⁶⁵ Indeed, Peter's single use of ἀδελφός is somewhat surprising. The letter of James uses it 17 times, consistently addressing the implied readers as ἀδελφοί, and the term appears 18 times in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, both texts of similar length to 1 Peter.⁶⁶⁶

Yet Esler and Mason gloss over 1 Peter's use of ἀδελφότης. Compared to the frequent occurrences of ἀδελφός in Greek literature, ἀδελφότης was relatively rare in this period.⁶⁶⁷ Graeco-Roman associations overwhelmingly use φράτρα and its cognates when describing the bonds between members. On his online database of associations in the ancient world, Harland lists 41 sources which, in his translation, mention "brotherhood". All of them use φράτρα, or occasionally σπεῖρα, to describe the association – none use ἀδελφότης. The excerpt below is representative. It comes from a marble grave in Troas and Mysia, dated by Harland to 1-50 CE.

Eukarpos and Synpherousa set this up in memory of their child, Zosimos. The brotherhood of the Pegasians (φράτρα Πηγάσ|ων). Brotherhood of the friends of Caesar (φράτρα || Φιλοκε|σαρέω|ν).⁶⁶⁸

Harland is right to suggest that Graeco-Roman associations shared numerous similarities with the early Christian movement, including the use of familial terminology. However, Peter's use of ἀδελφότης to describe the worldwide brotherhood of believers is a small but marked difference from the familial language of associations.⁶⁶⁹

To better appreciate Peter's use of ἀδελφότης, we should turn instead to one of the few attestations of this word from this time: 1 Macc 12.10 and 12.21. There is no evidence

⁶⁶⁴ Mason and Esler 2017:515.

⁶⁶⁵ Mason and Esler 2017:506-508.

⁶⁶⁶ But note that this is not representative of *all* of Paul's letters; the letter to the Ephesians, for instance, only has 2 occurrences of ἀδελφός, and the term is absent in Titus.

⁶⁶⁷ Examples include Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 38.15; Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 24. No attestations in papyri before 300 CE.

⁶⁶⁸ PHI 288492 = AGRW 11288; Harland 2013.

⁶⁶⁹ Mitchell 2023:311; However, Mitchell ascribes to Paul the notion of Christians constituting a "brotherhood" (Mitchell 2023:336-339), even though 1 Peter is the only NT text to use ἀδελφότης.

that Peter knew 1 Maccabees, but they are both documents from the Second Temple period and worth comparing, especially given the paucity of ἀδελφότης in other texts. 1 Macc 12.6-18 provides a copy of a letter purportedly sent from Jonathan to the Spartans. It begins with a greeting from “the high priest Jonathan, the council of the nation, the priests, and the rest of the Jewish people to their brothers the Spartans (Σπαρτιάταις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς)” (1 Macc 12.6). The letter then adds, “We have undertaken to send to renew our family ties and friendship (ἀδελφότητα καὶ φιλίαν) with you, so that we may not become estranged from you.” Interestingly, 1 Maccabees then includes a reply from King Arius of the Spartans, which states, “It has been found in writing concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brothers and are of the family of Abraham (εἰσὶν ἀδελφοὶ καὶ ὅτι εἰσὶν ἐκ γένους Ἀβρααμ)” (12.21), a discovery which prompts a sense of mutuality between the Spartans and Jews (12.22-23).

The historicity of this account does not presently concern us so much as the way kinship is constructed through the use of ἀδελφός and ἀδελφότης. 1 Maccabees 12 demonstrates the potential for ethnic language to reframe group boundaries. Concerning this passage, Daniel R. Schwartz writes that it is “a self-serving Jewish myth meant to provide the Jews with an honorable genealogy in Greek and Roman eyes,”⁶⁷⁰ and while that is true to some extent, the Spartans’ response in 12.19-23 affirms the claim to brotherhood by stating that they too descend from Abraham; within the context of the story, it is the *Spartans* who are ennobled by their putative descent from Israel’s patriarch.⁶⁷¹ In speaking of an ἀδελφότης between the Jews and Spartans, 1 Maccabees turns the notional outsider into an ally – one who remains distinct in terms of ethnicity, but regarded as a kinsman with whom the Jews should share bonds of affinity.⁶⁷²

This passage also demonstrates that the separation between “fictive kinship” and “biological kinship” is not neat. The ἀδελφοὶ in Graeco-Roman associations were not literally sons from the same parent and the term may rightly be called “fictive”. Yet genealogical myths allow people to employ kinship language based on shared ancestry; it is not entirely “fictive” in the manner of Graeco-Roman associations, but also not strictly “biological” in terms of provable bloodlines. A similar example would be the OT characterisation of the Edomites, putative descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau. The Edomite is “your brother” (ἑνὶ ἑαυτοῦ)

⁶⁷⁰ Schwartz 2022:349.

⁶⁷¹ A similar account is recorded by Josephus in *Ant.* 12.226, though he does not use ἀδελφότης and instead states that the Jews and Lacedaemonians are of one γένος.

⁶⁷² Ehrensperger 2017:391.

/ ἀδελφός σου) the writer of Deuteronomy tells Israel (Deut 23.7), and it is this notional kinship which provokes the prophet Obadiah to decry the Edomites' violence against Judah (Obad 1.8-12). Yet the kinship between Israelites and Edomites is based upon a genealogical myth stretching back centuries. 1 Maccabees posits a kind of "secondary kinship" between Spartans and Jews in like manner using ἀδελφότης; they remain as distinct ethnicities, yet part of a wider family. We also see a similar use of אחוה in Zech 11.14 – the only occurrence of אחוה in the Hebrew Bible – where Zechariah recounts how he annulled "the brotherhood between Judah and Israel (את־האֶחֻוָּה בֵּין יְהוּדָה וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל)."⁶⁷³ By the post-exilic period the people of Judah and Israel constituted separate peoples (Zech 8.13; 10.6), yet their shared status as YHWH's people and common myth of origins as Jacob's descendants ties them into a bond of brotherhood.

How does ἀδελφότης in 1 Peter contribute to the letter's ethnic imagination? 1 Maccabees shows how the term could be used to establish bonds of secondary kinship – the Spartans retain the ethnic label "Spartans" but are depicted as kinsmen of the Jews through a genealogical myth. As we discussed earlier, Peter does not set up a common human ancestor for his readers, but by labelling Christ-followers around the world as an ἀδελφότης, he projects a form of kinship which allows the readers to retain a degree of ethnic difference. Like the Spartans in 1 Maccabees, Peter's readers do not need to "become Jews" in order to be ἀδελφοί with the people of Israel. According to Shively T.J. Smith, the worldwide reach of this brotherhood recalls Peter's earlier reference to "diaspora" (1.1), depicting the readers as members of a wider community who "choose to embrace their identity as scattered yet related kinship groups."⁶⁷⁴ Yet the kinship language presented here differs in small but significant ways from that found in Graeco-Roman associations, among whom ἀδελφότης was never used in our extant sources. This suggests that 1 Peter's author was not seeking to portray the Christ-movement as a Graeco-Roman association.

(5.7) Conclusion

According to John H. Elliott, a "major coordinating ecclesiological symbol" in 1 Peter is the image of the Church as "the household of God."⁶⁷⁵ This chapter has demonstrated that

⁶⁷³ Rahlfs' LXX has "τοῦ διασκεδάσαι τὴν κατάσχειν ἀνὰ μέσον Ἰουδα καὶ ἀνα μέσον τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ", differing slightly from the language of the MT.

⁶⁷⁴ Smith 2016:26.

⁶⁷⁵ Elliott 1981:200.

notions of kinship and family indeed appear frequently in 1 Peter, especially from 1 Pet 1.3 to 2.3. Many of these metaphors are interconnected, such as the notion of regeneration and inheritance, which both occur in 1 Pet 1.3, but our findings may be summarised in four points.

First, the idea of being “redeemed from the futile way of life inherited from your ancestors” (1.18) strongly denotes that the readers, in 1 Peter’s ethnic imagination, have experienced a transferral of peoplehood. They have been rescued from the culture of their native peoples and are called to embrace the culture and inheritance of YHWH’s people.

Second, while being “born again” plays an important role in the letter, we have reason to question whether it denotes a “logic of patrilineal descent” whereby God replaces the readers ancestors as progenitor (*pace* Ok). On the contrary, the language of “rebirth” was used in early Christian circles without any direct connotation of ethnogenesis. I instead suggest that the metaphors of divine fatherhood and begetting were significant motifs in the OT describing YHWH’s special relationship with Israel and its king, and the force of these images in 1 Peter lies precisely in how Israel’s privileges are applied even to those who are non-Jewish by birth.

Third, complementing this suggestion, the notions of an “imperishable inheritance” (1.3) and being “children of Sarah” (3.6) echo Jewish language of conversion from *Joseph and Aseneth* and rabbinic literature. Philo’s *Virt.* 179 likewise illustrates how converts, in abandoning their ancestral traditions, enter the commonwealth of Israel and should be embraced as συγγενέστατοι. This supports our preceding findings that 1 Peter envisions its readers as גרים in relation to Israel.

Fourth, the description of the worldwide community of believers as a “brotherhood” in 5.9 represents a slight difference in kinship language between 1 Peter and extant inscriptions of and from voluntary associations. While associations frequently referred to their co-members as ἀδελφοί, the term ἀδελφότης never appears. This suggests that the writer of 1 Peter did not primarily conceive of the Jesus movement as an association.

The readers have been redeemed from the culture of their forefathers and been inscribed into the story and family of Israel. They can call on YHWH as “father” and Sarah as “mother” and will enjoy the imperishable inheritance that is Israel’s birthright. Our analysis of family and kinship language thus supports my hypothesis that the language of ethnicity in 1 Peter does not serve to depict the readers as a “new Israel”, but rather to

position them as non-native insiders within the people of Israel, sharing with native Israelites the privileges and obligations of YHWH's covenant.

Chapter 6

A Collective Name: Were Christians a “New Race”?

In his oft-cited criteria of ethnic markers, Anthony D. Smith gives pride of place to the presence of a *collective name*. “This is the identifying mark of an *ethnie* [sic] in the historical record,” he writes, adding that “the mythic quality of a name is far more important to the study of ethnicity than any sober account of its origins and practical uses would suggest.”⁶⁷⁶ As Katie Marcar has noted, the growing band of Jesus-followers eventually coalesced around a collective name which we find in 1 Pet 4.16: Χριστιανός.⁶⁷⁷

But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name. (1 Pet 4.13-16)⁶⁷⁸

This final substantive chapter will consider the extent to which 1 Pet 4.16 contributes to the letter's ethnic imagination. First, we will consider the origins of Χριστιανός as a label, before examining its usage in 1 Peter in relation to other Christian and non-Christian sources from this period. Finally, I will conclude that the moniker itself does not contribute greatly to the letter's ethnic imagination but does demonstrate a separation between Ἰσραήλ and the Ἰουδαῖοι in early Christian thought.

⁶⁷⁶ Smith 1986:22-23.

⁶⁷⁷ Marcar 2022a:10.

⁶⁷⁸ ἀλλὰ καθὼς κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ χριστοῦ παθήμασιν χαίρετε, ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ χαρῇτε ἀγαλλιώμενοι. εἰ ὀνειδίξεσθε ἐν ὀνόματι χριστοῦ, μακάριοι· ὅτι τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται. Μὴ γάρ τις ὑμῶν πασχέτω ὡς φονεὺς ἢ κλέπτης ἢ κακοποιὸς ἢ ὡς ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος· εἰ δὲ ὡς χριστιανός, μὴ αἰσχυνέσθω, δοξαζέτω δὲ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ (THGNT); There is a text-critical discussion surrounding the end of 4.16, with the editors of the most recent Nestle-Aland amending the text to read “μέρει” (NA²⁸) instead of “ὀνόματι” (NA²⁷, THGNT). However, many early sources have ὀνόματι (e.g. P⁷², Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus) and Jarrett W. Knight has offered a persuasive critique of the underlying methods justifying the NA²⁸ amendment (Knight 2019). For a defence of the text in NA²⁸, however, see Mink 2004:13-85 and Wasserman 2013:579-612. While some commentators on 1 Peter use μέρει (e.g. Michaels 1988:257), most choose to translate ὀνόματι (e.g. Elliott 2000:796; Feldmeier 2008:227; Reese 2022:256). I believe that ὀνόματι is probably original and have presented the THGNT critical edition here. The variant readings result only in minor interpretive differences in this thesis.

(6.1) Χριστιανός and Christian Identity

In 1 Peter's opening sentence, the readers are addressed as ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς (1.1). As the letter progresses, they are likened to πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι (2.11) and called Sarah's τέκνα (3.6). We have already seen over the course of this dissertation how such labels reflect something of Peter's worldview, and sometimes even shed light on how notions of ethnicity shape his thinking. What does Χριστιανός imply about the readers in Peter's mind?

(6.1.2) Origins of the Label

Acts 11.26 offers a useful starting point for interrogating the origins of Χριστιανός. "It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'," the writer of Acts tells us.⁶⁷⁹ This verse comes immediately after Barnabas and Paul purportedly ministered in Antioch for a year, likely around 40-44 CE,⁶⁸⁰ but this does not necessarily mean that the label was used *at that time*. The passage seems to stress the location *where* the label was coined (see below), without necessarily claiming that it originated while Paul and Barnabas were there.⁶⁸¹ Notably, Paul never uses Χριστιανός in any of the thirteen canonical letters (disputed or undisputed), despite Acts 11.26 associating the term with his ministry. Yet within Acts' narrative, the term Χριστιανός had achieved a level of notoriety by 59-62 CE such that, during the procuratorship of Porcius Festus, Herod Agrippa II could pose to Paul the rhetorical question, "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?"⁶⁸² While Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer are perhaps over-confident in their belief that Luke, the purported author of Acts, is reporting the dialogue objectively as an eyewitness, it is nonetheless plausible that a man in political office was well-acquainted with troublesome movements and the names ascribed to them.⁶⁸³ Indeed, we will shortly discuss Tacitus' famous account of Nero blaming the *Christiani* for the fire of Rome in 64 CE (*Ann.* 15.44), which suggests that they constituted an identifiable group in the capital by this time.⁶⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Acts records Festus telling Agrippa that Paul's Jewish accusers "had certain

⁶⁷⁹ "χρηματίσαι τε πρώτως ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τοὺς μαθητὰς Χριστιανούς" (Acts 11.26).

⁶⁸⁰ Wilkins 1992:925-926.

⁶⁸¹ Horrell 2007:365; Lüdemann 1989:138.

⁶⁸² "ἐν ὀλίγῳ με πείθεις χριστιανὸν ποιῆσαι" (Acts 26.28).

⁶⁸³ Hengel and Schwemer 1997:226.

⁶⁸⁴ Though contested, the appearance of *Christianos* in a graffito in Pompeii (*CIL* 4.679), dated between 62 and 79 CE, would support this claim (see Cook 2024:204-219).

points of disagreement with him about their own religion (τῆς ἰδίας δεισδαίμονίας)” (Acts 25.16). Either Festus had not heard of the Χριστιανοί, or did not think that the label could refer to a Jewish religious sect. We will see in this chapter why the second option is quite plausible, but the general picture provided by Acts is that the Χριστιανός moniker had been coined by the early 60s CE but was not widely used.

Overall, it is difficult to precisely pinpoint when a word enters a society's vocabulary, especially since there is still uncertainty regarding the date of composition of Acts, upon which so much of the early evidence rests.⁶⁸⁵ Nonetheless, it seems reasonable that Χριστιανός would have been coined by the time of Paul's audience with Agrippa (c. 60 CE), assuming Tacitus accurately reports Nero's targeting of the *Christiani*. With Χριστιανός appearing in 1 Pet 4.16, such a timeline is credible whether 1 Peter was authored by Simon Peter (c. 64-66 CE) or written pseudonymously after his death. However, knowledge of this term and *what* exactly the Χριστιανοί were may have varied considerably across the Roman empire at least until the start of the second century; even a man as erudite as Pliny the Younger seems to have had only a superficial understanding of the group until he investigated it first-hand (*Ep.* 10.96).

Acts 11.26 also implies that the term began as an exonym – a label used by outsiders to describe a given group – before being embraced by the Jesus-following community. The verb χρηματίζω, Erik Peterson explains, often referred to official classification,⁶⁸⁶ and it is widely accepted that Χριστιανός is a Latinism, with the ending -ιανός a Greek transliteration of the Latin *-ianus*, denoting the “followers, supporters, adherents, or partisans of a person.”⁶⁸⁷ Examples from this period include the *Pompeiani* and Ἡρωδιανοί in Mark 3.6; 12.13 and Matt 22.16. By and large, the figure after which these adherents were named was of political prominence. Although Justin Martyr refers to several heretical sects such as the *Marciani* (Μαρκανοί), *Valentiniani* (Οὐαλεντινιανοί), *Basilidiani* (Βασιλιδιανοί), and *Satorniliani* (Σατορνιλιανοί) in relation to their respective founders (*Dial.* 35), these are almost certainly modelled on the earlier form of Χριστιανοί.⁶⁸⁸ The suffix could sometimes be used pejoratively to mark one as a lackey or sycophant of the figure, like Tacitus' use of the label *Augustiani*.

⁶⁸⁵ A range of dates between 80–150 CE is commonly suggested (Peterson 2009:4); see also Acts' complicated textual history and the existence of the “Alexandrian” and “Western” readings (Barrett 2004:26-29).

⁶⁸⁶ Peterson 1959:67-69.

⁶⁸⁷ Horrell 2007:362; cf. Bickerman 1949:116-117; Hengel and Schwemer 1997:228-229; Mattingly 1958:27.

⁶⁸⁸ Hengel and Schwemer 1997:229.

Now, too, for the first time was enrolled the company of Roman knights known as the *Augustiani*; conspicuously youthful and robust; wanton in some cases by nature; in others, through dreams of power. Days and nights they thundered applause, bestowed the epithets reserved for deity upon the imperial form and voice, and lived in a repute and honour, which might have been earned by virtue.⁶⁸⁹

Tacitus does not hide his disdain for these so-called *Augustiani*, an opinion shared also by Suetonius.⁶⁹⁰ It is not clear whence the *Augustiani* label originated, but clearly the *-ianus* suffix is not always a positive depiction of the adherent and his/her allegiance.

The Latin roots of Χριστιανός may also suggest that the label was not initially coined in majority Jewish areas, and instead lend credibility to Acts' statement that the label originated in Antioch. It would have been precisely in a major, cosmopolitan city like Antioch, John Elliott argues, that the first-century Jesus-followers would have been "singled out from other Israelite factions and Gentile groups by pagan outsiders...and designated 'partisans of Christ'."⁶⁹¹ Similarly, Hengel and Schwemer note that the Χριστιανός label "appears predominantly in texts which either...refer to Syria (and Palestine) or come from there."⁶⁹² This does not prove that the term originated in Antioch but makes it a plausible option in the absence of more compelling alternatives. Regardless, Acts 11 not only states that the epithet was first coined in Antioch, but hints at a possible reason for this several verses prior.

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews (εἰ μὴ μόνον Ἰουδαίοις). Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks⁶⁹³ also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. (Acts 11.19; edited from NIV)

Antioch was not just culturally diverse, but within Acts' narrative, it was the first city where Jesus-followers were intentionally spreading the gospel among Greeks. The writer

⁶⁸⁹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.15; LCL 322:132-133.

⁶⁹⁰ Suetonius, *Nero* 20.3.

⁶⁹¹ Elliott 2000:790.

⁶⁹² Hengel and Schwemer 1997:226.

⁶⁹³ NA²⁸ has Ἑλληνιστάς, typically translated "Hellenists" (NRSV, NIV), which usually refers to Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora (Martin 1992). However, several early manuscripts have Ἑλληνας instead (κ², A, D*, P⁷⁴), implying native-born Greeks. Given the preceding statement that most of those scattered spread the word "only among Jews", the use of Ἑλληνας in the following sentence (i.e. "non-Jews by birth") seems more logical (Barrett 2004:550).

underscores this development by situating Acts 11.19-26 immediately after Peter narrates the conversion of Cornelius and his family, prompting his hearers to exclaim, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11.18). For Acts, the label “Christian” is associated with movement’s transition from a predominantly Jewish community to the emergence of non-Jewish Jesus-followers. Insofar as the movement remained predominantly Jewish, pagan outsiders probably either disregarded it or considered it an intramural Jewish dispute.⁶⁹⁴ Yet with increasing numbers of non-Jews joining the movement without undergoing the usual rites of Jewish conversion, it is likely that the moniker Χριστιανός emerged to describe these “Greeks” who had abandoned their ancestral traditions.

Agrippa’s question in Acts 26.28 reminds us, however, that the term was not applied exclusively to non-Jews. His incredulous query implies both that Paul is a Χριστιανός and that Agrippa could technically become one too, with the apostle’s response in 26.29 doing nothing to correct that assumption. Yet in Acts 24.4-5, a certain Tertullus, representing the high priest Ananias, calls Paul a “a ringleader of the Nazarene sect” who stirred up riots among the Jews around the world (Acts 24.4-5).⁶⁹⁵ In describing Paul as a leader of the “Nazarene sect”, Tertullus adopts a moniker favoured by Jewish sources when referring to Christ-followers.⁶⁹⁶ Thus Χριστιανός is not the only group label that the writer of 1 Peter could have encouraged his readers to embrace.

(6.1.2) Neither Jew Nor Gentile?

Peter extols his readers to be unashamed of being called a Χριστιανός and to instead glorify God for this name. Even though the term’s Latin origins may have denoted membership into a politically seditious group, Peter implores the readers to *embrace* this label. David Horrell therefore recognises the importance of this move in the formation of Christian identity.

⁶⁹⁴ Hengel and Schwemer 1997:225-226.

⁶⁹⁵ “πρωτοστάτην τε τῆς τῶν Ναζωραίων αἰρέσεως”; despite its etymological connection to the English word “heresy”, αἵρεσις in this period simply denotes a “sect marked by common ideas and aims”, rather than a “false religious movement” (Boyarín 2001:439).

⁶⁹⁶ E.g. Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.8.1; see Hengel and Schwemer 1997:227; the label continued to be used in Hebrew and Arabic writings, e.g. Mishneh Torah, *Repentance* 3.8; *Foreign Worship* 9.4; Quran, *al-Baqara* 2.62, 111, 113; *at-Taubah* 9.30; etc. (Broadhead 2010:163-164; Steenbrink 2002:201-222).

The label Χριστιανός is a stigmatizing label associated not with a facet of personal identity...but with a feature of social identity deriving from group membership. [...] The attempt to make allegiance to Christ the central and all-defining reference point for members of the early Christian movement had already been undertaken by insiders. Paul provides the clearest examples of an insistence that it is belonging to Christ, being in Christ, that is all-defining and all important and renders other facets of a person's identity – ethnic-religious, social, and sexual – insignificant, nothing. [...] The outsiders' hostile labelling of believers as Χριστιανοί...confirms and increases the salience of this aspect of the insiders' shared social identity...⁶⁹⁷

Though the moniker probably originated among outsiders, Χριστιανός is presented by 1 Peter as an appropriate collective name for the followers of Jesus and, Horrell posits, thereby provides a form of shared social identity which relativises other identity-markers.⁶⁹⁸ Janette Ok echoes this view when she writes that 1 Peter's author "shapes and defines what it means to be Christian using ethnic reasoning in order to help his addressees make Christian identity primary, all-encompassing, superordinate to all other identities."⁶⁹⁹

At the same time, we have already seen how the label Χριστιανός *could* be used as a form of "ethnic reasoning", with second-century texts such as the *Apology of Aristides* and *Epistle to Diognetus*, for instance, employing the label as a means of distinguishing Jesus-followers from Jews and Greeks.⁷⁰⁰ Does this suggest that being a Χριστιανός is incompatible with being a Ιουδαῖος? Moreover, Kelly Liebengood argues that an underlying assumption in many interpretations of 1 Peter is that Christians constitute for the author a "third category" distinct from Jews and Gentiles.⁷⁰¹ We saw this previously in John Elliott's and Karen Jobes' analysis of τὰ ἔθνη in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3, for example, where they suggested that 1 Peter had appropriated the designation to refer to those "outside the community of Christian faith" including Jews.⁷⁰² Even Horrell's detailed study of 1 Pet 4.16 belies some of this tension when he writes, "The outsiders' hostile criticism, which also indicates that they have come to identify Christians as distinct from Jews in general, plays its part, then, in forging and

⁶⁹⁷ Horrell 2007:377.

⁶⁹⁸ Horrell 2007:377.

⁶⁹⁹ Ok 2021:9.

⁷⁰⁰ See Section 1.1; cf. Buell 2005:2-4.

⁷⁰¹ Liebengood 2023:214.

⁷⁰² Jobes 2022:246, 366; cf. Elliott 2000:466.

fostering a sense of shared *Christian* identity.”⁷⁰³ On the one hand, Horrell suggests that the Χριστιανός label contributes to a process whereby other forms of identity, including ethnicity, are made relatively insignificant. Yet he acknowledges, on the other hand, that it is a moniker which distinguishes Christ-followers from Ἰουδαῖοι.

In the context of this dissertation, therefore, 1 Pet 4.16 raises two questions. First, does Χριστιανός denote a “new ethnicity” in the writer’s mind? Second, in embracing this label, does the writer approve of the emerging separation between “Christians” and “Jews”? These questions also serve as a useful test case of my thesis. If it can be shown that Χριστιανός in 1 Peter *does* denote that the readers constitute a distinct ethnicity or imply clear separation between “Church” and “Israel”, then my preceding arguments concerning the letter would be significantly weakened. Conversely, my thesis will be strengthened if early Christian writers employed the Χριστιανός label without denoting that the followers of Jesus have replaced Israel or copy Israel, for it suggests that 1 Peter may not have done so either.

(6.2) Χριστιανός from Outsider Perspectives

Given the likely origins of Χριστιανοί as an exonym, it is unsurprising that some of our earliest extant uses of this term outside the NT come from the movement’s outsiders. Within a few decades of Jesus’ crucifixion, his followers had achieved a small level of notoriety within the Roman empire, thus entering a few official accounts of the empire’s history.

(6.2.1) Tacitus

The senator Tacitus mentions how Christians were famously blamed by Nero for the fire of Rome in 64 CE. Tacitus writes:

Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians (*Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat*). Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition (*superstitio*) was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not

⁷⁰³ Horrell 2007:377-378

merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.⁷⁰⁴

For Tacitus, the *Christiani* could be singled out as a distinct group with loathsome vices. However, they are not compared to any other ethnicity nor does Tacitus attribute their perceived vices to any ancestral traditions. He describes them as a *superstitio*, a term which could occasionally refer to knowledge of hidden things in a neutral sense (e.g. Plautus, *Curculio* 397), but often denoted a group of people who “submit themselves to exaggerated rituals...adhere in credulous fashion to prophecies, and...allow themselves to be abused by charlatans.”⁷⁰⁵ It stands in contrast to the more virtuous pursuits of *religio* and *pietas* which Cicero defines respectively as “the fear and worship of the gods” and “obligations to our country or parents or other kin.”⁷⁰⁶ Yet like the English terms “superstition” or “cult”, *superstitio* was a subjective and polemical category. Elements of Stoicism could be branded as *superstitiones* as could the Jewish religion.⁷⁰⁷ One man's *religio* could be another's *superstitio*. Unlike some later critics, however, Tacitus does not directly accuse Christians of atrocities like cannibalism and incest.⁷⁰⁸ He simply states that the Christians were convicted “not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race (*odio humani generis*).”⁷⁰⁹

Tacitus writes that the label *Christiani* was ascribed to this sect by the *vulgus*, corroborating the earlier suggestion that the term was coined by outsiders, and implying that the moniker was already coined by 64 CE. Tacitus not only speaks of *Christus* as the movement's founder, but even connects his death to the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate in Judea. However, there is no explicit description of *Christus* or his adherents as Jews. Indeed, John Barclay points out that “there is no link back to motifs found in the excursus on *Iudaei*” in *Hist.* 5.1-13.⁷¹⁰ In that passage, Tacitus reports extensively on the purported origins and practices of the Jews, including the rite of circumcision, Sabbath-observance, and dietary laws, which are also recorded by other Roman writers in this period.⁷¹¹ Tacitus describes

⁷⁰⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; LCL 322:282-283.

⁷⁰⁵ Scheid 2016.

⁷⁰⁶ “*Religionem eam quae in metu et caerimonia deorum sit appellant; pietatem, quae erga patriam aut parentes aut alios sanguine coniunctos officium conservare moneat*” (Cicero, *De inventione rhetorica* 2.66; LCL 386:230-231).

⁷⁰⁷ E.g. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.52, 92; Ulpian, *Digest* 50.2.3; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.8; cf. Martin 2004:127-128.

⁷⁰⁸ See Tertullian, *Apol.* 2.5; Justin, *1 Apol.* 26.2 (Moss 2021:344-346).

⁷⁰⁹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; LCL 322:284-285.

⁷¹⁰ Barclay 2014:317-318.

⁷¹¹ E.g. Petronius, *Sat.* 102.14; Juvenal, *Sat.* 3.10-18; 6.542-547; 14.96-106.

them as “a people prone to superstition and opposed to religion.”⁷¹² He is even aware of some non-Jews who scorn the religion of their homeland and send tribute to Judea (*Hist.* 5.5.1) but draws no connection to *Christiani*. “It seems that Tacitus has *Iudaei* and *Christiani* mentally in two different boxes,” Barclay concludes, “despite the common geographical origin and a few general traits common to a large number of ‘unRoman’ phenomena.”⁷¹³ Similarly, Hermann Lichtenberger states that “the difference between Christians and Jews must have continued to be perfectly clear to the Roman authorities.”⁷¹⁴ Tacitus’ writings indicate to us that the *Christiani* were distinct from *Iudaei*, but do not suggest that he regarded them as an ethnicity.

(6.2.2) Suetonius

Writing around the same period as Tacitus, Suetonius likewise narrates how Nero punished the Christians, appearing amidst an enumeration of Nero’s legal policies. Unlike Tacitus, Suetonius does not explicitly set this punishment in the context of the fire in Rome, nor does he make any mention of Judea or *Christus* in this passage.⁷¹⁵ Instead, he describes Christians as a kind of *genus*. “Punishment was inflicted on the Christians,” he writes, “a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.”⁷¹⁶

Erich Gruen rightly points out that the Latin *genus*, like the Greek γένος, could “designate a group identified by their beliefs and practices, rather than by blood or kinship.”⁷¹⁷ I have already demonstrated that beliefs and practices *did* play a big role in ethnic discourse in antiquity, but here the Christian *genus* is associated with a novel *superstitio*, rather than ancestral traditions or connection to a homeland. Moreover, Suetonius does not contrast the *Christiani* with other *genera* and does not offer any explanation concerning their origins. In this sense, Gruen is correct to suggest that *genus* here does not have evidently ethnic undertones and that *Nero* 16.2 does not portray Christians as a “new race”.

⁷¹² “...gens superstitioni obnoxia, religionibus adversa” (Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13.1; LCL 249:196-197).

⁷¹³ Barclay 2014:318.

⁷¹⁴ Lichtenberger 1996:2173.

⁷¹⁵ It is not clear whether Suetonius had access to Tacitus writings and/or sources (Power 2014:205-225).

⁷¹⁶ “afflicti supplicii *Christiani*, genus hominum superstitionis novae ac maleficae” (Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2; LCL 38:106-107).

⁷¹⁷ Gruen 2020:204.

Like Tacitus, Suetonius certainly knows of the Jews and includes them in his historical accounts but makes no explicit connection between them and the *Christiani*. This is especially surprising given Suetonius' famous description of Claudius' edict expelling the Jews from Rome. He recounts, "The Jews he expelled from Rome, since they were constantly in rebellion, at the instigation of Chrestus."⁷¹⁸

It is possible that this "Chrestus" could be a Jewish historical figure about whom we know nothing, but it is more likely a corruption of "Christus", referring to Jesus.⁷¹⁹ It seems that Suetonius had heard from his sources of a certain "Chrestus" who was present in Rome and had instigated some form of disturbance within the Jewish community.⁷²⁰ However, he does not connect this with the *Christiani* in *Nero* 16.2. As Jean Mottershead comments, Suetonius' remark in *Nero* 16.2 "reads as though it is the first reference to Christianity in Suetonius and notice of the first official contact between the Roman authorities and the sect."⁷²¹

One likely reason is that *Christiani*, in Suetonius' mind, did not include Jews. For the Roman historian (and probably his sources), *Christiani* was a category used to describe a certain group of people who had abandoned their ancestral traditions and instead followed some novel superstition. This did not include, for Suetonius, the Chrestus-following Jews whom Claudius expelled. Like Tacitus, Suetonius seems to regard the *Christiani* as a *non-Jewish* religious sect. There is no explicit mention of this group being ethnic or political in nature.

(6.2.3) Pliny and Trajan

The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan offers us helpful contextual information on early Christians and specifically on 1 Peter, as we have already observed in this dissertation, given Pliny's governorship over Bithynia and Pontus. We noted earlier how

⁷¹⁸ "*Claudius Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit*" (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; LCL 38:50-51).

⁷¹⁹ Cook 2010:15-22; Smallwood 1965:236; Numerous texts render Χριστιανός as Χρηστιανός, including some early manuscripts of 1 Peter, perhaps based on the positive connotation of χρηστός ("kind") and its popularity as a name. Tacitus likewise refers to Jesus followers as *Chrestianos* despite clearly knowing that the movement's originator is *Christus* (see above), and we find some wordplay surrounding χρηστός in early Christian texts (e.g. Justin, *1 Apol.* 4.5).

⁷²⁰ Cook 2010:21.

⁷²¹ Mottershead 1978:453; cf. Barclay 2014:317.

one of Pliny's concerns is the punishment concerning the *nomen ipsum* – should Christians be punished simply for bearing the name “Christian”, apart from any other provable crimes? Pliny presents to Trajan his usual practice up to that point.

For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians (*qui ad me tamquam Christiani deferebantur*). I have asked them in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished.⁷²²

For Pliny, repeated affirmation that one was a Christian resulted in severe punishment. Paul Trebilco comments that Pliny “does not want to execute ‘Christians’ *merely* for the name in and of itself” but for their obstinance, a position which Trajan supports, argues Trebilco (*Ep.* 10.97).⁷²³ However, I suggest that Pliny and Trajan *do* ultimately punish Christians for the *nomen ipsum*. In the above passage, Pliny does not find the accused guilty of any crime other than their adherence to the name. Towards the end of his letter, Pliny explains that he consults Trajan on this matter because these Christians claim to “abstain from theft, robbery and adultery” – and are thereby innocent of any crimes other than affirming their status as Christians – prompting the governor to investigate the movement further.

...they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind; but they had in fact given up this practice since my edict, issued on your instructions, which banned all political societies (*quod ipsum facere desisse post edictum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hetaerias esse vetueram*). This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave-women, whom they call deaconesses. I found nothing but a

⁷²² Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96; LCL 59:286-287.

⁷²³ Trebilco 2012:291.

degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths (*Nihil aliud inveni quam superstitionem pravam et immodicam*).⁷²⁴

Pliny concludes that these Christians are not guilty of any crimes and had given up their regular assemblies following his ban on political societies (*hetaeria*); he decides that they are nothing but “a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths.” In spite of this, Trajan replies, “If they [those accused of being Christians] are brought before you and the charge against them is proved, they must be punished,” unless they recant.⁷²⁵ One does not have to be guilty of any other crimes to be executed, nor is one convicted for simply being *labelled* a Christian, but for choosing to *embrace* that label.⁷²⁶ This recalls the injunction in 1 Pet 4.16 to glorify God even as one suffers for being a “Christian”. Peter urges the readers not to suffer as a criminal (κακοποιός) (4.15), but recognises that, even though innocent of crime, they may nonetheless suffer as a Χριστιανός because resolute affirmation of the name itself could lead to persecution.

The above passage from Pliny also offers an insight into how the label “Christian” was understood by outsiders. In Pliny’s mind, Christians initially resembled a *hetaeria*, a political society serving a common interest, and a source of potential trouble which the governor was charged with stamping out (*Ep.* 10.33-34).⁷²⁷ This was because Christians lacked the “characteristic marks of a religion”, Paul Achtemeier explains, such as temples, ancestral deities, and priests, and they also met regularly for meals and comprised members of varied ethnic backgrounds, traits often shared by such guilds.⁷²⁸ However, when the Christians stopped meeting together following Pliny’s ban, the governor realises that they were *not* acting like a typical *hetaeria*. His subsequent investigation leads him to conclude that they were nothing more than a degenerate *superstitio*, echoing the language used by Tacitus and Suetonius.

For the purpose of this dissertation, Pliny’s confusion is revealing. It indicates that, at least until 112 CE, there was uncertainty about *what* exactly Christians were, with some political elites regarding it as a *hetaeria*, an opinion reflected also in the *-ianus* suffix often signifying allegiance to a political leader, as noted earlier. While Tacitus, Suetonius, and

⁷²⁴ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.7-8; LCL 59:288-289.

⁷²⁵ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.97; LCL 59:288-289.

⁷²⁶ We can see a slightly different approach towards Christians, for instance, in the alleged letter by Hadrian to Minucius Fundanus recorded in Justin 1 *Apol.* 68.5–70.4.

⁷²⁷ Wilken 2003:12-13.

⁷²⁸ Achtemeier 2010:239.

Pliny all eventually identify Christianity as a *superstitio*, Pliny's correspondence suggests that, at the time of 1 Peter's composition, pagan outsiders may have perceived Christians as members of a political sect. Nevertheless, being merely a *superstitio* did not make Christianity any less suspect in the estimation of Rome's rulers, as Trajan's response in *Ep.* 10.97 indicates. *Superstitioes* represented foreign customs following non-Roman deities and were sometimes viewed with distrust as a threat to the Roman way of life.⁷²⁹ In other words, even if Christians were not regarded as members of a politically seditious sect, their perceived disloyalty to Rome – reflected in their unwillingness to make offerings and invocations to Rome's gods and emperor – would have nonetheless caused pagan outsiders to regard them as a dangerous entity.

Significantly, Pliny makes no connection between the Christians and the Jews. While he does not explicitly mention the Jews in his extant writings, it is highly unlikely that he is ignorant about them entirely.⁷³⁰ Moreover, Trajan likewise does not refer to the Jews in his reply. A reasonable conjecture is that, like Suetonius and Tacitus, neither Pliny nor Trajan conceived of Christians as a movement originating among the Jews or inclusive of many Jews.

(6.2.4) Josephus

We now turn to the Jewish historian Josephus, whose *Jewish Antiquities* famously includes a single mention of Christians, but in a passage engulfed in controversy. *Ant.* 18.63-64, sometimes called the *Testimonium Flavianum*, is the text in question.

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks (πολλοὺς μὲν Ἰουδαίους, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἐπηγάγετο). He was the Messiah (ὁ χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν). [...] On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not

⁷²⁹ Martin 2004:131-139.

⁷³⁰ His uncle, Pliny the Elder, mentions the Jews multiple times (*Hist.* 7.98; 12.113; 13.46; 30.11); and Pliny the Younger seems to have been personally acquainted with Suetonius (*Ep.* 10.95).

disappeared (εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὀνομασμένον οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φύλον).⁷³¹

Is this text authentic? On the one hand, Origen cites five passages from book 18 of Josephus' *Antiquities* but does not mention the *Testimonium*.⁷³² Moreover, he writes concerning Josephus that he "disbelieved in Jesus as Christ"⁷³³ and "did not admit our Jesus to be Christ."⁷³⁴ Both statements seemingly contradict Josephus' claim in *Ant.* 18.63 that Jesus was ὁ χριστὸς. More generally, some doubt that a Jew from a priestly family like Josephus could express such admiration about Jesus. Writing in 1928, Solomon Zeitlin claims that "the language is too appreciative of Jesus' uniqueness and superhuman character to have come from anyone who was not a Christian."⁷³⁵ It is possible that the *Testimonium Flavianum* is entirely a Christian fabrication authored, Louis Feldman suggests, by Eusebius of Caesarea.⁷³⁶

On the other hand, studies on Josephus' literary style have noted the similarity between the *Testimonium* and the rest of his writings.⁷³⁷ In addition, *Antiquities* later mentions James, "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ."⁷³⁸ The authenticity of this passage has been less hotly contested and it reflects Josephus' knowledge of Jesus, while implying that Jesus had already been introduced prior to Book 20, as Feldman admits.⁷³⁹ Recent scholarship has also warmed to the idea that a Jew from a priestly family *could* write favourably concerning Jesus of Nazareth and even describe him as ὁ χριστὸς without necessarily being "Christian",⁷⁴⁰ just as rabbinic writers could portray Simeon bar Kochba as a messianic figure.⁷⁴¹ Furthermore, all our extant manuscripts of *Antiquities* contain the *Testimonium*, though they admittedly come from Christian scribes and the earliest is from the eleventh century. Many now believe that the *Testimonium Flavianum* is not a complete

⁷³¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.63-64; LCL 433:48-51.

⁷³² Josephus, *Ant.* 18.4, 55, 110, 130, 116; Feldman 2012:15.

⁷³³ Origen, *Cels.* 1.47.

⁷³⁴ Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.17.

⁷³⁵ Zeitlin 1928:247.

⁷³⁶ Feldman 2012:26-28; cf. Olson 1999:322; Zeitlin 1928:240.

⁷³⁷ Whealey 2003:141.

⁷³⁸ "τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ" (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.200; LCL 456:108-109).

⁷³⁹ Feldman 2012:23.

⁷⁴⁰ Whealey 2016:353.

⁷⁴¹ Reinhartz 1989:178-181.

fabrication but has undergone some degree of interpolation.⁷⁴² For the purpose of this dissertation, let us assume that there may be an authentic core written by Josephus.

The section of the *Testimonium* which presently interests us is “the tribe of the Christians (τῶν Χριστιανῶν...τὸ φύλον).” The phrase does not feature in any extant writings until Eusebius, who uses it twice in a single section in *Ecclesiastical History* (3.32.2-3). Moreover, Feldman states that, based on a search through the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, the phrase εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν only occurs in this order in Eusebius.⁷⁴³ These verbal similarities may suggest that the phrase is the result of Eusebian redaction.⁷⁴⁴ However, apart from *Hist. eccl.* 3.32.2-3, τῶν Χριστιανῶν φύλον appears nowhere else in Eusebius’ writings. In this passage, furthermore, he is recounting Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan, with the phrase “the tribe of the Christians” purportedly a reproduction of Trajan’s decree. In short, it is possible that “the tribe of the Christians” in *Ant.* 18.64 is a Eusebian redaction, although it might reflect the language of Trajan’s time. Moreover, John Curran reminds us to consider the *Antiquities* within its historical context, as a document composed and possibly orally delivered in Rome.⁷⁴⁵ Assuming we are right to say that Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, and Trajan do not associate the Christians with the Jews, their collective ignorance on this matter would be remarkable if Josephus here declares that Jesus “won over many of the Jews and many of the Greeks,” with his followers later being called Χριστιανοί. Either our other Roman sources failed to hear of Josephus and his work altogether, or significant elements of this text – such as the description of Χριστιανοί or Jesus’ Jewish and Greek followers – are later redactions. The latter option seems more likely.

Given the contested historicity of this text, therefore, we should not rest too much weight on this piece of evidence, even though it implies that Χριστιανοί comprise both Jews and Greeks. If the Χριστιανοί is an interpolation then Josephus does not use the term as an epithet despite recording the execution of James in Jerusalem in 62 CE. If so, then Josephus was either “unaware of ‘Christians’,” suggests James Dunn, “or did not think them worthy of note as a significant or troublesome sect within or related to Judaism, even in Rome.”⁷⁴⁶

In summary, pagan authors by the early second century recognised Christians as a sect, known especially for their adherence to a novel and dangerous *superstitio*. By

⁷⁴² Bermejo-Rubio 2014:327-329.

⁷⁴³ Feldman 2012:26.

⁷⁴⁴ Olson 1999:312; Zeitlin 1928:240.

⁷⁴⁵ Curran 2017:82-92.

⁷⁴⁶ Dunn 2009:56.

implication, they have abandoned the “proper” customs of their homeland and kin. Furthermore, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, and Trajan – four well-informed Roman elites – saw no conflation between Jews and Christians. Even Tacitus, who acknowledges Christianity’s geographical origins in Judea, draws no connection with the Jewish *people*. A possible caveat is that Celsus, one of the earliest pagan critics of Christianity, does explicitly connect Christians with the Jews, implying that pagan ignorance about the relationship between the two groups in the second century was not uniform. However, Celsus’ *The True Word* probably comes from the latter half of the second century.⁷⁴⁷ It seems that, at least until 120 CE, the time when Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny were active, Rome’s elites regarded Christians as a *non-Jewish* sect. Virtually all scholars agree that 1 Peter was written before this time, so it is very likely that the readers’ accusers who branded them as Χριστιανοί used the label in that sense.

(6.3) Χριστιανός in Christian Ethnic Discourse

While the New Testament only includes three occurrences of Χριστιανός, the second century witnessed a wider use of this term as well as explicit reflection on what the label means. This included descriptions of Christianity as a *genus*, γένος, or other terms which could denote ethnicity, as well as comparisons between Christians and groups typically regarded as “ethnicities”, such as Jews and Greeks. Though postdating 1 Peter by several decades, these descriptions may offer useful insights into what it meant to be a Χριστιανός.

(6.3.1) Apology of Aristides

An important text in this discussion is the *Apology of Aristides*, but much about its background remains unknown. Its textual history is complex, and at present it survives in a few different recensions.⁷⁴⁸ According to Eusebius, it was originally delivered as a defence to the emperor Hadrian (*Hist. eccl.* 4.3.3), a notion supported by the heading of the Armenian recension, but the Syriac recension dates it to the reign of Antoninus Pius.⁷⁴⁹ Despite these uncertainties, most scholars accept that it was probably first composed in Greek between 120

⁷⁴⁷ Lona 2005:54-55; Niehoff 2013:152; James C. Paget notes that Celsus’ reference to the cult of Antinoos (*Cels.* 3.36 and 5.63) likewise suggests a *terminus a quo* of 138 CE (Carleton Paget 2017:202, n.6).

⁷⁴⁸ See Harris and Robinson 1891:67-82; Kinzig 1994:147-148; Rutherford 2013:84-87 for discussions concerning textual history.

⁷⁴⁹ Gruen 2020:208.

and 160 CE.⁷⁵⁰ Our earliest Greek recension, however, is preserved only in the eighth-century *Barlaam and Joasaph*. This recension depicts Christians as one of three γένη. It states, “For it is clear to us, O King, that there are three classes of men (τρία γένη) in this world; these being the worshippers of the gods acknowledged among you, and Jews, and Christians.”⁷⁵¹

As we discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, γένος and its cognates had a wide semantic range and could denote, as the ANF editors suggest, a “class” or “category” of a given object. It does not necessarily have ethnic or racial connotations. However, the objects of comparison can offer us an insight into the author’s use of this term. For instance, we could say, “There are two types of people: the conservative and the adventurous,” or “There are two types of people: the conservative and the liberal.” In the first instance, the “types of people” refers to personality traits (i.e. risk appetite and boldness) whereas the second example probably refers to political or religious position. It is therefore notable here that Aristides contrasts Christians with “the worshippers of the gods acknowledged among you” (οἱ τῶν παρ’ ὑμῖν λεγομένων θεῶν προσκυνηταί) and “Jews” (Ἰουδαῖοι). The latter category could be regarded as ethnic, but the former category is more ambiguous. Rather than contrasting Christians with Greeks (like the *Epistle to Diognetus*) or Romans (like Tertullian’s purported interlocutors), in this introductory section Aristides opts for a category that lacks a collective name and instead shines the spotlight on their religious practices. For Aristides, humanity can be divided into three γένη defined primarily by the god(s) they worship and their manner of worship.

We see this in the *Apology*’s exposition. In the Greek recension, Aristides sub-divides the first group into a further three γένη – the Chaldeans, Greeks, and Egyptians – not describing them by any purported ancestry, homeland, or culture except for their understanding of the divine. “The Chaldaeans,” he states, “not knowing God went astray after the elements and began to worship the creation more than their Creator.”⁷⁵² He then continues at length concerning the absurdity of worshipping the elements, and concludes, “Great therefore is the error into which the Chaldaeans wandered, following after their own desires. For they reverence the perishable elements and lifeless images, and do not perceive that they themselves make these things to be gods.”⁷⁵³ Similarly, the Greeks and Egyptians are

⁷⁵⁰ Bockmuehl 2000:202; W.H.C. Frend suggests 145 CE (Frend 1965:248).

⁷⁵¹ Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 2, ANF 9:264.

⁷⁵² Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 3; ANF 9:265.

⁷⁵³ Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 7; ANF 9:268.

characterised solely by the gods they worship and the manner of their worship. Aristides thus summarises this section by saying, “all these polytheistic objects of worship (πολύθεα σεβάσματα) are the works of error and perdition.”⁷⁵⁴ In Aristides' tripartite division, the first γένος of humankind is characterised primarily by their polytheism, notwithstanding the minor differences (all deemed erroneous) between them.⁷⁵⁵ The Syriac recension divides humanity into *four* γένη, essentially splitting the polytheists into “barbarians” and “Greeks”. While there are numerous differences between the recensions, the Syriac ultimately adopts a similar characterisation of pagans, describing them solely by their idolatry.

The Greek and Syriac recensions do diverge more notably in their descriptions of the Jews. Judith Lieu suggests that the Syriac's fourfold division of humanity allows the author to link “the barbarians and Greeks together on the one hand and the Jews and Christians on the other,” thereby “aligning” the Jews and Christians and facilitating a more “conciliatory attitude to Judaism.”⁷⁵⁶ While Lieu's suggestion has merit, an arrangement of the four γένη into two pairs would also present Jews as the antithesis of Christians in the same way barbarians are the antithesis of the Greeks. The text itself also does not clearly support such an arrangement of the γένη, and the Syriac editors may, like the Greek editors, be presenting a linear scale of increasing knowledge of the truth, beginning with barbarians and culminating in the Christians. In this scale the Jews are the penultimate γένος thanks to their monotheism and noble practices such as burial of the dead, but Christianity nonetheless represents the fullest knowledge of the truth.

Both the Greek and Syriac recensions state that Jews descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gk. *Apol.* 14; Sy. *Apol.* 2), with the Syriac recension adding that “they were called the nation of the Hebrews, by him who made their laws; and at length they were named Jews.”⁷⁵⁷ Despite witnessing God's wonders and signs, however, the Greek recension narrates that “they proved stubborn and ungrateful, and often served the idols of the nations (πολλάκις ἐλάτρευσαν τοῖς τῶν ἐθνῶν σεβάσμασι),” and eventually handed over “the Son of God” to Pilate for execution.⁷⁵⁸ “To this day they worship the one God Almighty,” Aristides remarks, “but not according to knowledge (ἀλλ' οὐ κατ' ἐπίγνωσιν)...and they are much like

⁷⁵⁴ Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 13; ANF 9:275; *Apol.* 14 in J.A. Robinson's critical Greek text (Robinson 1893:109).

⁷⁵⁵ Rutherford 2013:64-65.

⁷⁵⁶ Lieu 1996:166.

⁷⁵⁷ Aristides, Sy. *Apol.* 2; ANF 9:264.

⁷⁵⁸ Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 14; ANF 9:275-276.

to the heathen (εἰσὶ παρόμοιοι τῶν ἐθνῶν).⁷⁵⁹ The Syriac recension, by contrast, offers a more positive appraisal of the Jewish people. “They appear to approach the truth more than all the nations,” observes Aristides here, “and they imitate God by the philanthropy which prevails among them.”⁷⁶⁰ Yet they err, the Syriac suggests, in believing that several practices – observing sabbath, the feast of unleavened bread, circumcision, and so on – are offered to God when in fact it is “to the angels” and which “they do not observe perfectly,” the meaning of the latter being ambiguous.⁷⁶¹ In both the Greek and Syriac recensions, Aristides presents the Jews as a γένος that has failed to fully grasp the truth and does not practise customs pleasing to God.

The *Apology* then turns to Christian history, stating that Christians “trace their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ,” with the Syriac recension adding that he “was born of the tribe of the Hebrews” and came “from a Hebrew virgin.”⁷⁶² This acknowledgement of Jesus’ Hebrew lineage reflects a general openness by Christian writers towards the ethnic label “Hebrew” rather than “Jew” as a way of referring to purported descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob while remaining neutral about religious practice. We noted earlier, for example, that Paul describes himself in Philippians 3.5 as “a Hebrew of Hebrews” without stating that he is a Jew.⁷⁶³ Likewise the Epistle to the Hebrews; this title had been attributed to the letter by the time Clement of Alexandria, which suggests a preference for the ethnic marker “Hebrews” as a label for Jesus-followers of Jewish origin.⁷⁶⁴

While there are many differences between the Greek and Syriac recensions in their descriptions of Christians, they are similar in essence. Christ had twelve disciples, the Greek tells us, who travelled the world following his ascension “proclaiming the doctrine of truth,” and Christians are those “who still observe the righteousness enjoined by their preaching.”⁷⁶⁵ Likewise, the Syriac mentions Christ’s disciples and explains that “those of the present day

⁷⁵⁹ Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 14; ANF 9:276.

⁷⁶⁰ Aristides, Sy. *Apol.* 14; ANF 9:275.

⁷⁶¹ Aristides, Sy. *Apol.* 14; ANF 9:276.

⁷⁶² Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 15; ANF 9:276; Sy. *Apol.* 2; ANF 9:265; cf. Harris and Robinson 1891:36.

⁷⁶³ See Section 4.2.3 of this dissertation. Most scholars now believe in Pauline authorship of Philippians (e.g. Hawthorne 2004: xix; Reumann 2008:8) but even if the letter is deutero-Pauline (Baur 1867:69), this verse reflects yet more clearly an attempt by his followers to downplay the idea that Paul should be described as a “Jew”.

⁷⁶⁴ Recorded in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.4; cf. Attridge 1989:10.

⁷⁶⁵ Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 15; ANF 9:276.

who believe that preaching are called Christians,”⁷⁶⁶ with both recensions including lengthy descriptions of Christian virtue (Gk. *Apol.* 15; Sy. *Apol.* 15).

In Aristides' *Apology*, humanity can be divided into three or four categories based primarily on their proximity to the “truth” about God. Little is said about ancestry, and nothing at all about each people's homeland. What distinguishes Christians from Jews, Greeks, and barbarians is not a difference in purported ancestry, but their virtuous way of life. This leads Erich Gruen to remark, “It is not easy...to take this jumbled genealogy as a serious expression of racial distinctions.”⁷⁶⁷ However, this ignores the fact that customs, for Aristides, *could* define the boundaries of ethnicity; what makes Greeks “Greek” is precisely their veneration of gods like Zeus and Aphrodite who, in Aristides' mind, are guilty of intolerable vices. Conversely, Aristides uses both “Jew” and “Hebrew”, but the former term for him foregrounds religious adherence and practice. Hence, Aristides' *Apology* reflects for Denise Buell the mutability of ethnic categories, a notion understood and employed by writers, including the author of 1 Peter, in framing “Christian” identity.

While this *genos* is understood to be real, membership in it is fluid to the extent that one can become a member of the *genos* by adopting the piety of the Christians. This argument plays upon familiar appeals to *ta patria*, or ancestral customs, where the identifying practices of a group are linked to a common ancestor (as we have also seen in Judith and 1 Peter).⁷⁶⁸

For the argument Aristides is making, *bloodline* does not matter as much as *custom* in determining ethnic categories. Hence, as the apologist nears his conclusion, he proclaims, “great and wonderful are the sayings and deeds of the Christians...but the rest of the nations go astray and deceive themselves (τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ ἔθνη πλανῶνται καὶ πλανῶσιν ἑαυτούς).”⁷⁶⁹ Here all non-Christian peoples are homogenised as other ἔθνη who deceive and are being deceived. Furthermore, the phrase “rest of the nations” suggests that “Christians”, for Aristides, constitute one of several ἔθνη. Wolfram Kinzig thus remarks:

It immediately becomes clear that the Pauline universalism, which aimed precisely at overcoming and abolishing traditional categories, has now given way to a more

⁷⁶⁶ Aristides, Sy. *Apol.* 2; ANF 9:265

⁷⁶⁷ Gruen 2020:208.

⁷⁶⁸ Buell 2005:46.

⁷⁶⁹ Aristides, Gk. *Apol.* 16; ANF 9:276.

particularistic understanding of Christianity. As the *new* people, Christianity is one “people” among others.⁷⁷⁰

Leaving aside the question of supposed “Pauline universalism”, Kinzig’s assessment justifiably highlights the particularity of Aristides’ ethnic discourse. Aristides’ *Apology* presents Christians as a most remarkable ἔθνος – but an ἔθνος nonetheless. As we shall see, however, most other Christian writers do *not* present Christianity as one “people” among others.

(6.3.2) Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr is one of the most influential second-century writers and many of his texts, fortunately, have survived. A comprehensive discussion of his background and theology lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, but we will focus on several passages where he speaks of Christianity in ethnic terms. The *Dialogue with Trypho* presents an extended conversation with an interlocutor who is described as “a Hebrew of the circumcision” and “a resident of Greece”.⁷⁷¹ Trypho may be an “invented character”,⁷⁷² but the *Dialogue* nonetheless represents a piece of second-century Christian apologetic aiming to convince the reader of Christianity’s validity in relation to Judaism.⁷⁷³ In Chapter 5, we saw how Justin embraced the label “Gentile” as a description for Jesus-followers of non-Jewish origin. In the *Dialogue*, he also speaks of Jesus-followers constituting a “people” (λαός).

And after that Just One was put to death, we blossomed forth as another people (ἡμεῖς λαὸς ἕτερος ἀνεθήλαμεν), and sprang up like new and thriving wheat... But we are not only a people, but a holy people (Ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐ μόνον λαὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ λαὸς ἅγιος ἐσμεν), as we have already shown: And they shall call it a holy people, redeemed by the Lord.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁰ “Es wird dabei unmittelbar deutlich, daß der paulinische Universalismus, der ja gerade auf die Überwindung und Aufhebung traditioneller Kategorien abzielte, nun einem stärker partikularistischen Verständnis von Christentum Platz gemacht hat. Das Christentum ist als das neue Volk eben doch nur ein Volk neben anderen” (Kinzig 1994:148, translation mine).

⁷⁷¹ Justin, *Dial.* 1.3; trans. Falls 2003:4.

⁷⁷² Rajak 1999:63; Setzer 1994:215.

⁷⁷³ Allert 2002:61.

⁷⁷⁴ Justin, *Dial.* 119.3; edited from Falls 2003:178-179.

Although Justin does not use Χριστιανοί in this passage, he claims that followers of Jesus are a λαὸς ἕτερος. Along with the *Apology of Aristides*, therefore, this represents one of the clearest affirmations from an early Christian writer that believers are a “people”. Interestingly, Justin also states that believers are a “holy people”, an idea similar to 1 Pet 2.9, though Justin uses λαὸς ἅγιός rather than ἔθνος ἅγιον. Justin goes on to explain, however, that Christians are not just a “people” like any other.

Wherefore, [not only] are we not a contemptible people, nor a tribe of barbarians, nor just any nation as the Carians or the Phrygians, but God even chose us and appeared to those who did not seek him. [...] For, this is really the nation promised of old to Abraham by God, when he told him that he would make him a father of many nations...⁷⁷⁵

Christians are a people (λαός), but a people different in kind from the barbarian φύλα or the Carian and Phrygian ἔθνη. In a slightly confusing twist, in fact, Justin claims that Christians are the ἔθνος promised to Abraham, when God told him that he would be the father of many ἔθνη; Justin switches from the singular to the plural. For Justin, ethnic language is a way of showing that God has fulfilled his promises in the OT, not to indicate that Christians are a “new ethnicity”. Justin here asserts that Christians are a people *sui generis*, not one ethnicity among many.

Over the course of the *Dialogue*, Justin lays claim to Christians being *verus Israel*: “the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham.”⁷⁷⁶ “As our whole people was called after that one Jacob, surnamed Israel,” Justin tells Trypho, “so we who obey the precepts of Christ, are, through Christ who begot us to God, both called and in reality are, Jacob and Israel and Judah and Joseph and David and true children of God.”⁷⁷⁷ Passages like these lead Peter Richardson to speak of a “complete transposition from Israel to Christianity” in Justin’s thought.⁷⁷⁸ While this is true, the language used by modern writers can be imprecise. Matthijs den Dulk, for instance, states that “Justin saw the Christian

⁷⁷⁵ “οὐκ εὐκαταφρόνητος δῆμός ἐσμεν, οὐδὲ Βάρβαρον φύλον, οὐδὲ ὁ ποῖα Καρῶν ἢ Φρυγῶν ἔθνη · ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς, καὶ ἐμφανὴς ἐγενήθη τοῖς μὴ ἐπερωτῶσιν αὐτόν. [...] Τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἔθνος ὃ πάλαι τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὁ θεὸς ὑπεσχετο, καὶ πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν θήσειν ἐπηγγείλατο” (Justin, *Dial.* 119.4; Falls 2003:179).

⁷⁷⁶ Justin, *Dial.* 11.5; Falls 2003:21.

⁷⁷⁷ Justin, *Dial.* 123.9; Falls 2003:186; cf. Lieu 2005:34.

⁷⁷⁸ Richardson 1969:1.

community as the continuation and indeed as the replacement of Israel.”⁷⁷⁹ Yet *continuation* and *replacement* are not identical. Justin still sees “Israel” as a valid and operative category, but one which is not defined solely by ancestry.

By these words [Deut 32.43] he [God] indicates that we Gentiles rejoice with his people, I mean, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, and every one of those people who is pleasing to God (τοὺς ἀπ’ ἐκείνου τοῦ λαοῦ πάντα εὐαρεστοῦντας τῷ θεῷ), as we have already agreed. But we know that these words do not apply to all members of your race (οὐ πάντας τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους ὑμῶν ἀκουσόμεθα)...⁷⁸⁰

For Justin, being a Jew by birth does not mean that one is automatically a member of Israel, but this does not mean that “Israel” has been replaced nor have the Jews been excluded from Israel.⁷⁸¹ Rather, “Israel” for Justin does not signify “Jews” but represents those who are “pleasing to God”. This echoes our earlier discussion about Philo’s understanding of Israel being an imagined community of those who truly see God, consisting of both native-born Israelites and “converts”. In a similar manner, “Israel” signifies for Justin those who are God’s people, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets, but now includes Christians who were Gentiles by birth. For Justin, the Christian community is the continuation of Israel, not its replacement.

(6.3.3) Clement of Alexandria and the Preaching of Peter

The *Preaching of Peter* is a second-century text which survives only in excerpts from Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Not much is known about it. It must have been written by the time Clement was active (c. 180 CE) as he approvingly cites it as his source.⁷⁸² Origen, for his part, does not seem to share his teacher’s enthusiasm for the *Preaching*, remarking only that the text was quoted by the Gnostic Heracleon, before expressing doubt about its authenticity (*Comm. John.* 13.104). Eusebius of Caesarea likewise acknowledges it as one of the writings attributed to Simon Peter but asserts that “no orthodox writer of the ancient time

⁷⁷⁹ den Dulk 2018:53.

⁷⁸⁰ Justin, *Dial.* 130.2; edited from Falls 2003:196.

⁷⁸¹ Allert 2002:59-60; see also *Dial.* 80.1.

⁷⁸² Ernst von Dobschütz dates it to the first quarter of the second century (Dobschütz 1893:67).

or of our own" has used it,⁷⁸³ and Jerome mentions the *Preaching* in *Vir. ill.* 1 but also reckons it pseudonymous.

Ernst von Dobschütz likens the *Preaching of Peter* to the apologetic literary genre with its efforts to distinguish and defend the nascent Christian movement, but he regards it as "more original and naïve" (*ursprünglicher und naiver*) than the *Apology of Aristides*.⁷⁸⁴ Robert E. Aldridge observes "a certain amount of common material" between the *Preaching of Peter* and the Ebionite *Gospel to the Hebrews*, and even opines that they may be different titles for the same text, but the theory is highly speculative.⁷⁸⁵ In addition, we cannot always discern how closely Clement or Origen are reproducing their source-text; our understanding of the *Preaching of Peter* is shaped by their interpretation. For our purposes, the relevant portion lies in Clement's *Strom.* 6.5. He writes, "He [God] made a new covenant with us; for what belonged to the Greeks and Jews is old. But we, who worship him in a new way, in the third form, are Christians (οἱ καινῶς αὐτὸν τρίτῳ γένει σεβόμενοι Χριστιανοί)." ⁷⁸⁶

Like the Greek recension of the *Apology of Aristides*, Christians are here depicted as one of three γένη, after the Greeks and Jews, but based on extant material there are no genealogies of the different groups or other topics relating to ethnicity.⁷⁸⁷ Origen's quotation of the *Preaching* in his *Commentary on John* differs slightly and does not include the phrase "third race" (*Comm. John.* 13.106). Nonetheless it follows a similar theme, with the *Preaching* urging its readers not to worship as the "Gentiles" and "Jews" do. Crucially, however, Origen counters this instruction by stating, "I do not understand how the heterodox deny the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers of the Jews."⁷⁸⁸ In other words, Origen betrays unease concerning the ethnic discourse of the *Preaching of Peter* – at least as Heracleon interpreted it – insofar as it denied the validity of God's relationship with Israel's patriarchs.

As we read this section of Clement's *Stromata*, however, he expands further on the *Preaching of Peter*'s ethnic discourse. We realise that, for Clement, the *Preaching of Peter* does not simply posit Christians as one of several ethnicities. Rather, Clement believes that

⁷⁸³ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.3.2; LCL 153: 192-193.

⁷⁸⁴ Dobschütz 1893:66; Harris and Robinson speculate that Aristides may have known the *Preaching of Peter* (Harris and Robinson 1891:86-91).

⁷⁸⁵ Aldridge 1999:255.

⁷⁸⁶ Clement, *Strom.* 6.5, ANF 2:489.

⁷⁸⁷ Lieu 1996:167-168.

⁷⁸⁸ Origen, *Comm. John.* 13.106; trans. Heine 1993:90.

all who follow Jesus, though from different backgrounds, will be gathered into a single γένος in Christ.

Accordingly, then, from the Hellenic training, and also from that of the law are gathered into the one race of the saved people those who accept faith (εἰς τὸ ἓν γένος τοῦ σωζομένου συνάγονται λαοῦ οἱ τὴν πίστιν προσιέμενοι): not that the three peoples are separated by time (οὐ χρόνῳ διαιρουμένων τῶν τριῶν λαῶν), so that one might suppose three natures, but trained in different Covenants of the one Lord.⁷⁸⁹

Greeks, Jews, and Christians are “three peoples” (λαοί) within Clement’s ethnic imagination. Yet faith in Christ leads to the ingathering of “one race” (ἓν γένος), from those who have been trained in Hellenism and in the Torah. This one γένος – which Clement does not explicitly describe as Χριστιανοί – consists of those who may have originally been Greek or Jewish by birth, but who have now been gathered into a single entity. This echoes an argument Clement makes in his *Protreptikos*. The Phrygians, Arcadians, and Egyptians all boast of being the oldest race, he acknowledges, “yet none of these at least existed before the world”, whereas those who are in Christ “date from the beginning.”⁷⁹⁰ According to Buell, Clement thus perceives Christians as the “one authentic race.”⁷⁹¹ Though it is difficult to determine to what extent Clement is here reproducing ideas found in the *Preaching of Peter* or introducing his own, he concludes *Strom.* 6.5 with an additional excerpt from the *Preaching*, explaining that through the Jewish law and Greek philosophy, Jews and Greeks too may perceive the kindness of this one God.

Wherefore Peter says, that the Lord said to the apostles: “If any one of Israel then, wishes to repent, and by my name to believe in God, his sins shall be forgiven him, after twelve years. Go forth into the world, that no one may say, ‘We have not heard.’”⁷⁹²

In this context, “Israel” cannot refer solely to the Jewish people; the preceding focus on Jews and Greeks, along with the injunction to “go into the world”, suggest that the *Preaching of Peter* has Jews as well as non-Jews in mind. “Israel” here represents all who believe in the one true God, and it is noteworthy that the text here does not use Χριστιανοί despite earlier

⁷⁸⁹ Clement, *Strom.* 6.5, ANF 2:489-490.

⁷⁹⁰ Clement, *Prot.* 1.6; ANF 2:173.

⁷⁹¹ Buell 2005:74.

⁷⁹² “Διὰ τοῦτο φησὶν ὁ Πέτρος εἰρηκέναι τὸν Κύριον τοῖς ἀποστόλοις · Ἐὰν μὲν οὖν τις θελήσῃ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ μετανοῆσαι, διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου πιστεύειν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ἀφεθήσονται αὐτῷ αἱ ἁμαρτίαι μετὰ δώδεκα ἔτη. Ἐξέλθετε εἰς τὸν κόσμον, μὴ τις εἴπῃ · Οὐκ ἠκούσαμεν” (Clement, *Strom.* 6.5; ANF 2:490).

presenting Christians as one of three γένη. One possible explanation, suggested by Trebilco, is that Χριστιανοί was an acceptable outsider-designation but an inadequate insider-designation. Given the political overtones of the label as partisans of a human leader, comparable to the *Augustiani*, perhaps Χριστιανός simply did not sufficiently describe the believer's relationship with the risen Christ.⁷⁹³

Recalling our discussion from the previous chapter, therefore, Clement appears to engage in two levels of ethnic discourse. On one level are the divisions of people into visible and widely accepted categories – Greeks, Jews, and Christians. The visible differences in custom between these three groups mean that they can be rightly perceived by Clement and his interlocutors as three γένη, a categorisation reflected in the *Preaching of Peter*. Yet both the *Preaching of Peter* and Clement also perceives a subliminal category of “Israel”, representing “the one race of the saved people” drawn from Greeks and Jews. Clement therefore does not depict the followers of Jesus as one race among many but as the “one authentic race”, a people *sui generis*. Yet the label he ascribes to this new entity in *Strom.* 6.5, following the *Preaching of Peter*, is not “Christian” but “Israel”.

(6.3.4) Epistle to Diognetus

Like the *Apology of Aristides*, the *Epistle to Diognetus* has an enigmatic provenance. Any attempts to identify the text's unnamed author are speculative, as are attempts to link the Diognetus addressed in the epistle's opening line (1.1) with a historical figure.⁷⁹⁴ These uncertainties around the epistle's author and recipient reflect a lack of consensus regarding its date of composition; no other early Christian writer cites or mentions it, and our earliest manuscript is the 13th or 14th century Codex Argenteratensis Graecus ix, now lost. Reflecting the majority view, Judith Lieu believes it belongs to the late second century.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹³ Trebilco 2012:291-292.

⁷⁹⁴ Suggested authors of the epistle include Justin Martyr, Aristides, Tatian, Melito of Sardis, Theophilus of Antioch, Pantaenus of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, Quadratus, and Polycarp (Bird and Mackerras 2021:311). As for the letter's addressee, two plausible options include a tutor of Marcus Aurelius and the procurator Tiberius Claudius Diogenes of Alexandria (Bird and Mackerras 2021:312), but as Bird and Mackerras have observed, the name was relatively common in antiquity and the attribution could be fictive.

⁷⁹⁵ Lieu 2005:192.

“From a narrative perspective,” Michael Bird and Kirsten Mackerras rightly note, “the implied reader is an educated pagan interested in learning about Christianity.”⁷⁹⁶ We see this in the opening lines of the text.

Since I see, most excellent Diognetus, that you are extremely interested in learning about the religion of the Christians and are asking very clear and careful questions about them – specifically, what God they believe in and how they worship him, so that they all disregard the world and despise death, neither recognizing those who are considered to be gods by the Greeks nor observing the superstition of the Jews; what is the nature of the heartfelt love they have for one another; and why this new race or way of life (καινὸν τοῦτο γένος ἢ ἐπιτήδευμα) has come into the world we live in now and not before...⁷⁹⁷

The author is full of praise for the courage and piety of Christians but recognises a possible concern that Diognetus may have. We noted in Chapter 2 how Christianity's perceived newness was sometimes the subject of criticism by pagan critics. The writer projects onto Diognetus a kind of engaged curiosity, however, instead of caustic mockery. Diognetus is “extremely interested” to learn about the Christian religion but finds its newness a cause for confusion. Why is this noble movement also so novel? This is a major concern which the *Epistle to Diognetus* seeks to address.

Unlike the *Apology of Aristides*, therefore, the *Epistle to Diognetus* does not describe Christianity as a “third race” but a “new race”, and this theme of newness carries over into Diogn. 2.1, with the writer inviting Diognetus to become a “new person” (καινὸς ἄνθρωπος) hearing a “new message” (λόγου καινοῦ). From a narrative perspective, the remarkable thing about Christianity in the *Epistle to Diognetus* is not that it is a γένος or ἐπιτήδευμα but that it is καινός. This brings into our discussion a vital consideration – early Christian ethnic discourse as a *response*. For the *Epistle to Diognetus*, the notion of Christians as a new γένος may not be a label which the author seeks to introduce, but a notion ascribed to Christianity by outsiders against which the apologist is reacting.

This impression is further reinforced as the epistle unfolds. Like the preceding sources discussed in this chapter, the writer of *Diognetus* does not suggest that Christians differ from Greeks and Jews in terms of bloodline and ancestry. Moreover, the epistle explicitly adds that

⁷⁹⁶ Bird and Mackerras 2021:312.

⁷⁹⁷ Diogn. 1.1; trans. Holmes 2007:695.

“Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom (οὔτε γῆ οὔτε φωνῇ οὔτε ἔθεσι διακεκριμένοι)” (5.1) – features which typically form the boundary markers of ethnic categories. The isolation of Christians as a distinct class of people, in the writer’s mind, is not the work of Christians but their opponents. “By the Jews they are assaulted as foreigners,” he writes, “and by the Greeks they are persecuted” (5.17). Kinzig thus argues that the *Epistle of Diognetus* does not support an ethnic reading of γένος, insofar as the writer insists that Christians do not differ from other people “ethnically” or “culturally”.⁷⁹⁸ Likewise, Juan Chapa states that attempts to read γένος in an ethnic sense are difficult to resolve.⁷⁹⁹ However, these conclusions need to be slightly qualified. I argue that the notion of Christians as a new γένος was a perspective held by *outsiders*, and *Diognetus* seeks to correct that idea. This notion *did* have ethnic connotations, which is precisely why the writer of *Diognetus* tries so thoroughly to show that Christians are *not* just another “new race”. He wants to maintain the difference between Christians and Jews or pagans, but intentionally does *not* locate this difference in the factors which typically distinguish ethnicities, and apart from Diogn. 1.1 the writer does not subsequently describe Christians as a γένος. Yet he does not offer a straightforward category of what Christians *are*. They are not one γένος among many, nor are they merely a human philosophy (Diogn. 7.1), but a people unlike any other.

The *Epistle to Diognetus* regards Jews as better than Greeks on account of being monotheists (3.2). However, the writer is still extremely critical of Jewish custom, and in fact does not make any positive reference about Jewish Scripture nor admit that the Christian movement emerged among Jewish people. Instead, “Christians are right to keep their distance from the common silliness and deception and fussiness and pride of the Jews,” states Diogn. 4.6. The Χριστιανοί are categorically different, in the writer’s mind, from the Ιουδαῖοι. *Diognetus* also makes no explicit reference to Israel, which is unsurprising given that the purported interlocutor is pagan.

⁷⁹⁸ “Entscheidend ist dabei für den Verfasser, dass sich die Christen trotz ihrer speziellen Ethik weder ethnisch, noch kulturell in irgendeiner Weise von den übrigen Menschen unterscheiden. Das ethnische Verständnis von *genos* ist somit für den Diognetbrief nicht anzunehmen” (Kinzig 1994:158).

⁷⁹⁹ “Así pues, el intento de comprender γένος en sentido étnico presenta tensiones difíciles de resolver” (Chapa 2019:335).

(6.3.5) Athenagoras

Little is known about Athenagoras of Athens, though he was purportedly the first director of the influential Alexandrian school.⁸⁰⁰ In his *Plea for the Christians* (*Legatio Pro Christianis*), Athenagoras purportedly presents a defence of Christianity to Rome's rulers. According to the prescript of the Arethas Codex, our principal manuscript, the embassy was addressed to emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (r. 161-180 CE) and Lucius Aurelius Commodus (r. 177-192 CE), and T.D. Barnes dates it to 176 CE.⁸⁰¹ Yet P. Lorraine Buck argues that no Christian ambassadorial speeches were actually delivered in the second century and the *Legatio* is probably a "literary fiction".⁸⁰² Buck nonetheless agrees with a likely date of composition around 176 CE.⁸⁰³

Recalling our earlier discussion concerning Pliny, Trajan, and the persecution of Christians on account of "the name itself", Athenagoras in the *Legatio* protests against accusations relating "merely to our name (μέχρις ὀνόματος ἢ κατηγορία)." ⁸⁰⁴ In the face of this perceived injustice, Athenagoras presents Christians as a people fighting for social and political recognition, contrasting the treatment received by Christians with the treatment of other peoples.⁸⁰⁵ "The people of your empire keep their own customs and laws (ἄλλος ἄλλοις ἔθεσε χρῶνται καὶ νόμοις)," he begins, "and no one is prevented from upholding their own ancestral traditions (τὰ πάτρια), even if they seem ridiculous."⁸⁰⁶ Athenagoras then offers several examples of such tolerance, such as the reverence shown towards cats, crocodiles, and serpents as gods among Egyptians (1.1). "But for us who are called 'Christians'," he remarks, "you have not in like manner cared."⁸⁰⁷ The logic of Athenagoras' argument, as Buell points out, is that Christians deserve the same rights as Egyptians, Lacedaemonians, and Athenians to worship their own god in their own way.⁸⁰⁸ Like the *Epistle to Diognetus*, however, Athenagoras does not justify the peoplehood of Christians through appeal to shared ancestry, homeland, or language, but through common doctrine and a distinctly righteous way of life. "Among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women," Athenagoras

⁸⁰⁰ Barnard 1972:14-17; Rankin 2009:5-6.

⁸⁰¹ Barnes 1975:111-114.

⁸⁰² Buck 1996:225-226.

⁸⁰³ Buck 1996:226.

⁸⁰⁴ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 2.1; ANF 2:130.

⁸⁰⁵ Young 1999:92.

⁸⁰⁶ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 1.1; translation mine.

⁸⁰⁷ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 1.3; ANF 2:129.

⁸⁰⁸ Buell 2005:50.

states, “who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth.”⁸⁰⁹ Athenagoras never asserts that Christians are a γένος or an ἔθνος. Rather, just as the various peoples in the Roman empire have the right to follow their particular beliefs and customs, Athenagoras asserts, so should Christians, especially when the charges against them are spurious.

Frances Young argues that the *Legatio* “presupposes a situation analogous to that of Philo when he pleaded on behalf of the Jews of Alexandria” by presenting Christians as “a distinct people with its own *politeia*, which deserves the same rights as other peoples.”⁸¹⁰ Despite this supposed similarity with Philo’s embassy to Gaius, however, Athenagoras does not explicitly compare Christians to the Jewish people. The omission is understandable when we consider the embassy’s stated objective – Marcus Aurelius was allegedly no great supporter of the Jewish people,⁸¹¹ and Athenagoras may have strategically chosen to avoid any direct comparison between Jews and Christians as a result. In summary, Athenagoras’ *Legatio* employs Rome’s tolerance of other religious customs as a basis to tolerate Christianity, without explicitly comparing Christians to any other people or nation. Being a Χριστιανός lies primarily in knowledge of the truth and an upstanding way of life, with no reference to Israel nor to the Jews.

(6.3.6) The Martyrdom of Polycarp

The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, encountered in the previous chapter, engages in a form of ethnic discourse which differs slightly from the preceding sources. This reflects an important difference in literary genre. The *Martyrdom* is not an apologetic text, but “a letter integrating narrative and pastoral elements” addressed to fellow believers.⁸¹² As we saw previously, the narrator distinguishes Christians from “Gentiles” and “the Jews”. One way it does so is by describing believers as “the race of the Christians.”

⁸⁰⁹ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 9; *ANF* 2:134.

⁸¹⁰ Young 1999:103.

⁸¹¹ See Ammianus Marcellinus’ account, though written in the fourth century, of Marcus Aurelius’ comments in Palestine: “For Marcus, as he was passing through Palestine on his way to Egypt, being often disgusted with the malodorous and rebellious Jews, is reported to have cried: “O Marcomanni, O Quadi, O Sarmatians, at last I have found a people more unruly than you” (*Hist.* 22.5).

⁸¹² Holmes 2007:298.

So after this the whole multitude, marveling at the bravery of the God-loving and God-fearing race of Christians (θεοφιλοῦς και θεοσεβοῦς γένους τῶν Χριστιανῶν), began shouting, “Away with the atheists (τοὺς ἀθέους)! Find Polycarp!”⁸¹³

The depiction of this scene is ironic – the allegedly “God-loving and God-fearing” Christians are decried as “atheists” by the crowd after the martyrdom of Germanicus. This irony also places the spotlight on the defining trait of the Χριστιανοί: though misunderstood as atheists, they are a γένος characterised chiefly by their love for and devotion to God. Once again, Χριστιανοί are not framed as a people sharing any common ancestry, homeland, or language. Moreover, while the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* uses the term γένος, it does not describe Christians as a *new* or *third* γένος, unlike the *Epistle to Diognetus* or *Apology of Aristides* respectively. There is no sense of the Χριστιανοί being one of many ethnicities.

The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* also twice refers to Christians as “the race of the righteous” (τοῦ γένους τῶν δικαίων) (14.1; 17.1). Lieu argues that this language is not original to the *Martyrdom* but finds antecedents in Second Temple Jewish literature. The Sibylline Oracles, she observes, “speak of the Jewish people as ‘the race of the most righteous’ or ‘of the pious’, distinguishing them by their virtues and divine favour from all other peoples.”⁸¹⁴ Lieu thus suggests the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* lays claim to Israel’s heritage of monotheism and the rejection of idolatry through this use of γένος.⁸¹⁵ We thus have a late second-century text which, through the use of γένος and Χριστιανοί, presents followers of Jesus as a group distinct from Jews, yet heirs nonetheless of Israel’s status as a people who love and fear God.

(6.3.7) Tertullian

The final text under consideration in this section is Tertullian’s *Ad Nationes*. As the name suggests, it is a treatise countering the arguments of pagans, probably written in 197 CE.⁸¹⁶ One of these allegations, Tertullian records, is that Christians “are called a ‘third race’ (*tertium genus dicimur*)” (*Nat.* 1.8.1), a phenomenon which Tertullian also reports in *Scorp.* 10.10, with both Jews and pagans allegedly chiming, “Death to the third race!” These

⁸¹³ Mart. Pol. 3.2, Holmes 2007:310-311.

⁸¹⁴ Sib. Or. 3.219; 3.573; 5.249; Lieu 1995:492.

⁸¹⁵ Lieu 1995:501.

⁸¹⁶ Barnes 1971:55; Dunn 2017:963-964.

passages provide strong evidence that the notion of Christians constituting a “third race” was an insult levied by outsiders. Concerning this moniker, Tertullian adds in *Nat.* 1.8.11 that “It is in respect of our religion, not of our nation, that we are supposed to be the third, the series being the Romans, the Jews, and the Christians after them.”⁸¹⁷ This statement leads Erich Gruen to conclude, “There could be no clearer statement that *genus* can be employed without ethnic or racial significance.”⁸¹⁸ In my view, this misses the mark. From the lips of critics, the *tertium genus* label *did* have ethnic significance, hence Tertullian’s sarcastic discussion about whether Phrygians should be reckoned the first *genus* in *Nat.* 1.8.2-8. Even if Phrygians are the first *genus*, Tertullian asks, how can Christians be the third *genus* when many other nations have come after the Christians?⁸¹⁹ This line of argument assumes that *tertium genus* may imply that the Christians were an ethnicity just like the Phrygians, only more recent. Tertullian therefore tries to discredit the *tertium genus* label by reasoning that we cannot even establish the first and second *gentes*, let alone the third. The moniker *tertium genus* thus had ethnic connotations when used by outsiders as a disparaging label for Christians, an implication which provokes Tertullian’s response. As he states in his rebuttal, that which makes Christians “third” is their supposed *superstitio* and its marked difference from the beliefs and practices of Romans and Jews, not any sense of nationhood (*Nat.* 1.8.11).

Moreover, Tertullian expresses discomfort not only with the notion of Christians as a *genus*, but in the fact that the numbering implies *inferiority*.

Take care, however, lest those whom you call the third race should obtain the first rank, since there is no nation indeed which is not Christian. Whatever nation, therefore, was the first, is nevertheless Christian now. It is ridiculous folly which makes you say we are the latest race, and then specifically call us the third.⁸²⁰

Standing behind the description of Christians as a third race is the notion that they are the newest (*nouissimos*) race. The label *tertium genus*, it seems, was an attempt to emphasise the relative *novelty* of Christians. This novelty, as we saw in our discussion concerning the *Epistle to Diognetus*, was often perceived as a discrediting feature of the movement.

⁸¹⁷ “...sed de superstitione tertium genus deputamur, non de natione, ut sint Romani, Iudaei, dehinc Christiani” (Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.8.11; ANF 3.117).

⁸¹⁸ Gruen 2020:213.

⁸¹⁹ “Quantae enim aliae gentium series post Phrygas” (Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.8.9).

⁸²⁰ “Verum recogitate, ne quos tertium genus dicitis, principem locum optineant, siquidem non ulla gens non Christiana. Itaque quaecumque gens prima, nihilominus Christiana. Ridicula dementia nouissimos dicitis et tertios nominatis” (*Nat.* 1.8.9; ANF 3.117).

Tertullian thus proceeds to shake off this accusation by affirming that Christianity had spread to all nations, such that even the *gens prima* is now Christian. Christianity is not one *natio*, *gens*, nor *genus* among many, but a *superstitio* (1.8.11) – a label which Tertullian may have borrowed from outsiders but does not explicitly refute – which had spread to all nations.

Tertullian rejects the *tertium genus* label as a description for Christians. Christians are not a “race” or “nation” comparable to Greeks and Jews, and certainly not inferior to them by virtue of being “new”. Tertullian seems to accept the idea that Christians constitute a *superstitio*, thus characterising the movement chiefly by its religious beliefs and practices, without attaching any strong connotations to ancestry, homeland, or other markers typically associated with ethnicity.

(6.4) Being a True Χριστιανός

From the sources surveyed thus far, the label “Christian” primarily denotes that one is a member of a larger group, typically understood as “Christianity”; Tacitus defines Christians as adherents to a *superstitio* founded by Christus, while *Preaching of Peter* regards Christians as those who worship God in a “new and third” way.

Several early writers, however, stress that being a “Christian” entails not merely membership into a group, but a virtuous way of life. For example, Ignatius of Antioch expresses his desire to “not merely be called a Christian but actually prove to be one,” in relation to his impending execution (Ign. *Rom.* 3.2). J.C. Eurell argues that the label “Christian” could therefore function for Ignatius as a title of honour.

It appears that he does not speak of Christianity as an organisation, but rather as an ideal lifestyle/ethic. To Ignatius, Christianity, or to be a Christian, is the fulfilment of the highest ideals and is certainly not thought of as a hostile designation by outsiders, but rather as an internal title of honour.⁸²¹

At the same time, being a “Christian” can include more mundane matters of virtue. As Ignatius tells his readers in Magnesia, “It is right, therefore, that we not just be called Christians, but that we actually be Christians, unlike some who call a man bishop but do everything without regard for him.”⁸²² Similarly, the *Didache* contains instructions

⁸²¹ Eurell 2020:70.

⁸²² Ignatius, *Magn.* 4.1; trans. Holmes 2007:204-205.

concerning those who “come in the name of the Lord” (12.1). If such a person is not a craftsman, the text states, the believing community must “decide according to [their] own judgment how he shall live among you as a Christian (πῶς...μεθ’ ὑμῶν ζήσεται Χριστιανός), yet without being idle.”⁸²³ In these latter two examples, being a “Christian” does imply more than mere affiliation with a community but denotes obedience and usefulness rather than martyrdom. Ignatius also introduces the idea of Χριστιανισμός – the first extant writer to use this term. In his letter to the Magnesians, he writes, “It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism (ιουδαῖζειν). For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity (ὁ γὰρ Χριστιανισμός οὐκ εἰς Ἰουδαϊσμόν ἐπίστευσεν, ἀλλ’ Ἰουδαϊσμός εἰς Χριστιανισμόν).”⁸²⁴

In Ignatius’ mind, Χριστιανισμός and Ἰουδαϊσμός constitute discrete movements, and a person cannot rightfully belong to both. Judaism is “presented as something sharply distinct from Christianity,” writes Philip Alexander.⁸²⁵ Indeed, the very formulation of Ἰουδαϊσμός possibly represents an attempt at Christian self-definition. The term was not coined by Ignatius, and it did not previously refer to the beliefs and practices of the Jewish people, as we often understand “Judaism”. Rather, it implied “hanging on (zealously) to the customs (traditions of the ancestors) of the Judeans,” argues Daniel Boyarin.⁸²⁶ Yet as Boyarin also notes, Ignatius’ statements not only reflect a “normative separation” between Χριστιανισμός and Ἰουδαϊσμός but betrays “the actual lack of such clear separations ‘on the ground’.”⁸²⁷ The bishop’s ire against those who ιουδαῖζειν while following Jesus strongly suggests that some people in his day were doing just that.

(6.5) 1 Peter’s Christians

Returning to 1 Peter, our preceding survey has given us little reason to believe that the use of Χριστιανός in 4.16 implies that believers in Jesus constitute a “new ethnicity” united by a collective name. “Christian” as a label was used in various senses in the first two centuries CE. It probably began as an exonym with political connotations, used by outsiders to label these “partisans of Christ”, and Pliny’s initial surprise that the Christians did not

⁸²³ *Did.* 12.4; trans. Holmes 2007:364-365; see Rothschild 2017:175-189 on the integrity of this passage.

⁸²⁴ Ignatius, *Magn.* 10.3; Holmes 2007:208-209.

⁸²⁵ Alexander 2021:39.

⁸²⁶ Boyarin 2018:50.

⁸²⁷ Boyarin 2018:112.

behave like a typical *hetaeria* supports this notion. However, Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius soon recognised that these *Christiani* could be best described from their perspective as a *superstitio*, a foreign and potentially antisocial cult.⁸²⁸ The Christians' unwillingness to pay homage to the emperor's image certainly did them no favours in this regard, and by the second century Christians were being mocked as a *tertium genus* (cf. Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.8.1), distinct from and inferior to the Romans and Jews. As Tertullian notes, this was not a rigorous attempt to categorise Christians as a "nation", but rather a form of mockery emphasising the novelty of Christians as a perceived group characterised by a new and strange religion.

Early Christians responded to this allegation of Christianity as a distinct *genus* or γένος but displayed mixed feelings toward this characterisation. Several affirm the contrast between Christians, Jews, and Greeks, but of the texts just surveyed only the *Apology of Aristides* seems to take pride in this notion of Christians as a distinct γένος alongside pagans and Jews. Aristides does so in order to shine the spotlight on *religious* beliefs and practices – or one's understanding of "the truth", as he describes it – as the primary lens through which all humanity can be filtered into three or four groups. The *Preaching of Peter* and *Epistle of Diognetus*, though they use γένος and compare Christians to Greeks and Jews, seem to qualify this language of ethnicity in their respective writings, as though they are responding to the ethnic discourse used by others. *Diognetus* extensively argues that the distinctiveness of Christianity lies *not* in the attributes which typically distinguish ἔθνη, such as language or dress, but by a peculiar way of life which, in the mind of *Diognetus'* writer, transcends categories of "Greek", "barbarian", or "Jew" (Diogn. 5). In addition, Ignatius of Antioch and the writer of the *Didache* knew that "Christian" could simply be a label for members of the Jesus movement, but both urged their readers to not merely be *called* a Christian, but to *act* as one. For them, the label "Christian" ought to denote a devout follower of Jesus, reflected in one's obedience to the bishop, the willingness to suffer martyrdom, and being a contributing member to the believing community.

Does Χριστιανός in 1 Pet 4.16 therefore denote that Christians are a new race? As we saw in Chapter 2, 1 Peter does describe its readers as a γένος (2.9), most probably borrowing the term from Isa 43.20 where it describes the people of Israel. Contrary to the positions taken by Paul Achtemeier and others, I argued that there is no reason to see the Church as a

⁸²⁸ Martin 2004:131-139.

γένος that has *replaced* Israel. Instead, the readers are a chosen γένος because they have been incorporated into Israel in a manner akin to the incorporation of non-Israelites in the OT. Our findings from this chapter corroborate that position. For instance, the *Preaching of Peter* and Clement's discussion of it in his *Stromata* describes Jesus-followers as "Christians" but more positively refers to them – of Jewish and non-Jewish origin alike – as "Israel" (*Strom.* 6.5), which as John Barclay expresses, is not a "typical ethnic group" for early Christians, but a category which is both "ethnic" and "theological".⁸²⁹ Being a member of Israel is not merely "another form of human ethnicity" but assuming a kind of identity which "reconfigures the significance of...other identities but does not erase them."⁸³⁰ In addition, 1 Peter does not return to this language of γένος in 4.16 when it speaks of suffering as a Χριστιανός. Rather, the writer associates being a Χριστιανός with bearing Christ's name (4.14, 16), participating in his sufferings (4.14), and membership in God's household (τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ) (4.17).

This connection between Χριστιανός and οἶκος invites us to briefly reexamine the origins of this label. Earlier, we noted that Χριστιανός is probably a transliteration of the Latin *-ianus* suffix denoting partisans of a political figure. Elias Bickerman, however, encourages us to examine this connection more critically. Bickerman notes that the Latin plural nouns designating political adherents were *not* transliterated directly into Greek with an *-ιανος* suffix, as Greek had alternative means of describing a notable figure's adherents.⁸³¹ Thus the *Ciceroniani*, for instance, are rendered in Greek as Κικερώνεοι (Appian, *Bellum Civile* 3.50-51). Likewise, when Josephus describes Herod's partisans, he does not use Ἡρωδιανοί but Ἡρωδαιοί (*J.W.* 1.319) or οἱ τα Ἡρώδου φρονούντες (*Ant.* 14.450). Indeed, in the extant literature only four Greek terms transliterate the *-ianus* suffix: Ἡρωδιανοί, Καισαριανοί, Πομπειανοί, and Χριστιανοί,⁸³² and Bickerman suggests that these terms have been transliterated in this way to not merely denote political supporters, but include those connected with the figure's household in some way – servants, blood relations, etc.⁸³³ The strongest support for his argument comes from Καισαριανοί, used by Epictetus (*Disc.* 3.24.117) and Appian (*Bellum Civile* 3.91) to refer to Caesar's household. This observation reminds us that the political and familial spheres did overlap and that a figure's adherents could also be the members of their household. Conversely, a leader's closest followers might

⁸²⁹ Barclay 2017:371.

⁸³⁰ Barclay 2017:370.

⁸³¹ Bickerman 2007:666; cf. Meier 2000:741-742

⁸³² Meier 2000:742.

⁸³³ Bickerman 2007:667-668; cf. Barrett 2004:1.556; Hengel and Schwemer 1997:228

also be described as members of his/her “house”, especially in Hebrew or Aramaic idiom. Thus the disciples of Shammai and Hillel are known as the *בית שמאי* and *בית הלל* respectively, and Joan Taylor likewise notes that the Syriac versions of Mark's Gospel translate Ἡρωδιανοί into “people from the house of Herod”.⁸³⁴ One possible reason why Peter embraces the Χριστιανός label, therefore, is that it signified for him not simply *support* for Christ, like the fanatical support of the *Augustiani* for Nero, but *belonging to* Christ – indeed, being part of his household just as the Καίσαριοι were part of Caesar's.

While the Χριστιανός label could denote some kind of kinship, however, we find little ethnic resonance in its historical origins nor in the letter's literary context. What characterises the οἶκος of God, according to Peter, is not human ancestry but a life of “righteousness”. Alluding to Prov 11.31, Peter explains:

For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And “If it is hard for the righteous (ὁ δίκαιος) to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner (ὁ ἀσεβής καὶ ἁματωλός)?” (1 Pet 4.18-19)

For 1 Peter, being a Χριστιανός ultimately entails a righteousness of behaviour which stands in contrast to ungodliness and sin, rather than membership into an “ethnic group”.

At the same time, outsiders to the Jesus movement seem to regard “Christians” and “Jews” as discrete categories.⁸³⁵ Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny all speak of *Christiani* without associating them with Jews, except for Tacitus' remark that the movement began in Judea. Importantly, however, this does *not* mean that the Jesus movement had totally separated from what we today regard as “Jewish people” – i.e. those who trace their lineage to Jacob. Rather, it suggests that by the early second century, the term Ἰουδαῖος signified for Christian writers a person adhering to a way of life characterised by observing Sabbath, practising circumcision, and so on (Aristides, *Sy. Apol.* 14). These were regarded as incompatible with the way of life of a Χριστιανός. If a person was a descendant of Jacob and followed Jesus, it seems like other labels were preferred – “Nazarene”, “Hebrew”, or “Israelite” for instance, with this vocabulary emerging already in Phil 3.5.

⁸³⁴ Taylor 2012:129-130.

⁸³⁵ Josephus, as we saw earlier, does seem to include “the tribe of the Christians” among the Jewish peoples, but in a text of disputed authenticity. Even if authentic, however, it would be a first-century composition.

Corroborating our discussion in earlier chapters about Peter's readers as non-native insiders among the people of Israel, this perhaps explains why 1 Peter does not use the term "Jew". Jesus-followers of non-Jewish origins had not "become Jews" just as the גר does not become an אורח. Moreover, Ἰουδαῖος signified for Christian writers a way of life which, by the early second century, was seen as antithetical to the Christian way of life.⁸³⁶ The situation may be compared to the word "Hindu", used initially by Persian, Greek, Arab, and eventually English writers to refer to anyone from the Indian subcontinent, but later acquiring a primarily religious sense.⁸³⁷ Such a distinction may have been one-sided: Jews themselves may not necessarily have agreed with Christian portrayals of Ἰουδαῖοι and Ἰουδαϊσμός, but for early Christian writers the Ἰουδαῖος provided a useful foil to construct the Χριστιανός. However, we must qualify this assertion by recalling that this was a period of great flux in early Christian identity-formation. For instance, almost all the ancient sources surveyed in this chapter can be confidently dated after Nerva's reforms of the *fiscus Judaicus* in 96 CE, seen by some as a key turning point in the so-called "parting of the ways" between Jews and Christians.⁸³⁸ If 1 Peter was composed before 96 CE, as many believe,⁸³⁹ the sharp distinction between "Christians" and "Jews" as categories in second-century writings may not accurately reflect 1 Peter's ethnic imagination. In short, any attempts to reconstruct our author's conceptualisation of the relationship between "Jews" and "Christians" as categories from 1 Pet 4.16 alone are speculative. At the very least, however, the emergence of the label "Christian" by the time of 1 Peter's composition suggests that outsiders began to see the movement as something unrelated to the Jews.

(6.6) Conclusion

What does 1 Peter's use of Χριστιανός reveal about our author's ethnic imagination? We did not find strong evidence to regard Χριστιανός as a distinct ethnic category. The literary context of 1 Pet 4.16 does not support such a hypothesis, and apart from the *Apology of Aristides*, no second-century Christian text seems to endorse the idea of Christians as one ethnicity among many. Yet the use of this label in 1 Peter indicates that, by the time of the

⁸³⁶ This bifurcation may have been especially sharpened by the leaders of the Christian movement whose writings we still possess; the boundaries between Ἰουδαῖος and Χριστιανός may not have been so apparent to the average believer, as Ignatius' *Magn.* 10.3 suggests.

⁸³⁷ Jha 2009:15-19.

⁸³⁸ Goodman 1989; Heemstra 2010.

⁸³⁹ See Section 1.2.1.

letter's composition, Jesus-followers constituted a group that was recognisable by pagan contemporaries and which, as Acts, Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius seem to imply, was regarded by outsiders as a movement with little relation to the Jewish people. In other words, those who were called Χριστιανοί were probably non-Jews by birth. That 1 Peter should encourage its audience to embrace this title thereby supports the notion that most of the implied readers were of non-Jewish origin. However, it is possible that Peter would also have encouraged readers of Jewish origin to embrace the label of Χριστιανοί insofar as the term signified allegiance with Christ, as the conversation between Paul and Agrippa in Acts 26.28-29 indicates.

Peter's positive attitude towards the Χριστιανός label may indicate a willingness to see the Christian movement as something distinct from "Judaism" – that is, the way of life of the Ἰουδαῖοι – but such a hypothesis would be debatable. Ignatius of Antioch certainly buttressed this distinction in his letter to the Magnesians, while Clement, Tertullian, and Aristides likewise speak of Christians as a separate *genus* or γένος from Jews. In short, for many writers one cannot concurrently be a Ἰουδαῖος and a Χριστιανός. If we favour a late dating of 1 Peter (around 90 CE), these second-century sources may accurately reflect the letter's historical context and the use of Χριστιανός and Ἰουδαῖος as labels for opposing movements, at least by Christian writers. However, if an early dating of 1 Peter is preferred (before Peter's presumed execution in 66 CE), the epistle would then predate the earliest of these sources by at least 40 years. Such a chronological gap would reduce the relevance of sources like the *Epistle of Diognetus*, probably written in the late second century, especially since 1 Peter does not explicitly contrast being a Χριστιανός with being a Ἰουδαῖος. At the same time, this chapter has shown that the bifurcation between Ἰουδαῖοι and Χριστιανοί does *not* indicate separation from those whom we would today call "the Jewish people", nor does it indicate that the Church has replaced Israel. Like Philo, there was a conceptual difference between Ἰσραήλ and the Ἰουδαῖοι. Christian writers constructed the Ἰουδαῖοι as an intentional foil to the Χριστιανοί, while maintaining a positive attitude (at least in principle) to those of Jewish descent who follow Christ, whom they preferably call "Hebrew" or "Israelite". Jesus comes from "the tribe of the Hebrews", Aristides tells us (*Sy. Apol.* 2), while the *Preaching of Peter*, as communicated through Clement, tells us that the call to repentance is offered to "any one of Israel", including people trained in Hellenism as well as those trained in Jewish law (*Strom.* 6.5).

Ultimately, 1 Pet 4.16 does not play a significant role in 1 Peter's ethnic imagination, contrary to the suggestion by Katie Marcar that the letter confers upon believers a "collective name", thereby conforming to Anthony Smith's six criteria in the formation of an ethnicity.⁸⁴⁰ This further proves that 1 Peter is *not* constructing a new ethnicity. Rather, the process of "becoming Christian" can be most closely described as a process of incorporation into Israel – abandoning the ἀναστροφή of one's ancestors in order to join the chosen γένος that had always been open to people of all ancestries.

⁸⁴⁰ Marcar 2022a:10.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Wikipedia – the crowd-sourced, online database that is probably still the first port-of-call for many knowledge-seekers – defines Judaism as “an Abrahamic monotheistic ethnic religion.”⁸⁴¹ This description finds support in many scholarly studies in early Christianity, who argue that first-century Christ-followers, in contrast, rejected ethnic boundary-markers and deemed ethnicity “irrelevant”.⁸⁴² Compared to Judaism, Christianity is viewed as a universal religion which transcends ethnicity.

In response, critics like Denise Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge have argued that early Christians *did* engage in ethnic discourse.⁸⁴³ Paul “constructs his arguments within the scope of ethnoracial discourse,” they suggest, “but shifts the terms of membership and the relationship between existing groups – Greek and Judean – such that they can be brought into an ethnoracial relationship with one another.”⁸⁴⁴

While supporting the general position taken by Buell and Hodge, this thesis approaches the question from a different angle: what if the people of Israel were *not* ethnically exclusive in the first place? I argue that, within the Jewish imagination, the people of Israel comprised both native Israelites and non-native insiders – people like Ruth, Rahab, and the Gibeonites. They were “converts”, but they did not necessarily become “Israelite” nor “Jewish”. Rather, the OT often speaks of such persons as גֵּרִים, foreigners who are welcomed into Israel and share in its covenantal relationship with YHWH. They are an important aspect of Israel’s eschatological future (Isa 14.1; Ezek 47.21-23), and despite semantic changes over time, the גֵּרִים continue to feature in Jewish writings from the Second Temple and the rabbinic periods. I argue in this thesis that 1 Peter, a first-century text purportedly written by a Jew, reflects this worldview where foreigners could be admitted into the people of Israel, thereby earning the right to be called a “chosen people”, a “royal priesthood”, a “holy nation”, and “God’s own people” (1 Pet 2.9). I developed this argument over seven chapters covering the range of ethnic language in 1 Peter.

⁸⁴¹ Wikipedia 2024.

⁸⁴² Stroumsa 1999:83; cf. Wright 2013:1938.

⁸⁴³ Buell and Hodge 2004:235-237.

⁸⁴⁴ Buell and Hodge 2004:238.

(7.1) Summary

After contextualising 1 Peter within the study of early Christian ethnic discourse in **Chapter 1**, we examined the use of Israel's epithets and scriptures in **Chapter 2**. The four titles describing the readers in 1 Pet 2.9 are almost certainly drawn from OT passages referring to Israel (Exod 19.5-6; Isa 43.20-21) and writers such as Paul Achtemeier and Betsy Bauman-Martin, for instance, believe that these epithets indicate the replacement of Israel by the Church, whilst Abson Joseph and others posit that Israel simply serves as a "case in point" for the Church. I highlighted the difficulties in both methods of interpretation, arguing instead that the readers have been *incorporated* into Israel, a minority position adopted by a handful of scholars, such as Gudrun Guttenberger and Kelly Liebengood. The people of Christ are not, in 1 Peter's ethnic imagination, a *new* people nor a *new* nation, but non-native insiders among the people of Israel who share in Israel's covenantal relationship with YHWH without replacing native Israelites. This is not a theological innovation on Peter's part; on the contrary, within the Jewish imagination foreigners have joined in Israel's story even from the nation's inception in the Exodus event. It is therefore unsurprising that Jewish writings concerning Israel's future deliverance, often perceived as a "new Exodus", foresee foreigners caught up in that eschatological restoration, including the restoration of Israel's northern tribes. It is in this context that 1 Pet 2.10 alludes to Hos 2.25 (= LXX 2.23), regarding the redemption of Jews and non-Jews in Christ as the fulfilment of YHWH's promise to Israel.

This idea was further developed in **Chapter 3**, where I discussed the use of *πάροικος* καὶ *παρεπίδημος* in 1 Pet 2.11. Most scholars today assume that the phrase metaphorically denotes social exclusion and alienation. Without denying that 1 Peter's readers experienced stigmatisation because of their faith, I argue that this reading of 1 Pet 2.11 is not strongly supported by Jewish or Greek writings. I instead propose that Peter is here invoking a conceptual category similar to that of the *גר-תושב* in the Old Testament and rabbinic literature – a "resident foreigner" who is non-Israelite by birth but lives as a welcomed member of Israel's community. I show how *Tractate Gerim* appeals to Gen 23.4 and Ps 39.12, the two OT passages where the LXX translates *גר* and *תושב* with *πάροικος* and *παρεπίδημος*, thus strengthening the possibility that 1 Peter is engaging in Jewish streams of thought concerning conversion. I further demonstrate in this chapter why such a reading makes better sense of 1 Pet 2.11 within its literary and historical context, including the fact that other NT texts, such as Acts 15.22-29 and Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, may have been influenced by the Levitical instructions concerning the *גר*.

Chapter 4 adds an important layer to this discussion as we consider the use of “Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη) in 1 Pet 2.12 and 4.3. In a letter addressed mainly to non-Jews, why does our writer disparagingly refer to outsiders as τὰ ἔθνη? Contrary to the arguments put forward by Betsy Bauman-Martin, John Elliott, and Karen Jobes, there are no convincing reasons to believe that 1 Peter has “redefined” τὰ ἔθνη to signify all non-Christians *including Jews*. Instead, I posit that τὰ ἔθνη in this context refers to all those who stand outside God’s covenant people, rather than merely those who are non-Jewish by birth. Such an interpretation makes sense if, as I have argued in the previous chapters, 1 Peter’s readers are imagined as non-native insiders, “resident foreigners” among God’s people. Like the גרים in rabbinic literature, they are not numbered among the גויים and may rightly speak of “Gentiles” as outsiders.

In **Chapter 5**, we examined the connected familial motifs found in 1 Peter. The author reminds his readers that they have been redeemed from a “futile way of life” inherited from their ancestors (1.18), thus introducing a jarring indictment of their ancestral customs similar to Jewish criticisms of idolatry. Given the close relationship between ethnicity and ancestral tradition, this is a form of ethnic discourse which disidentifies the readers from their former cultures. Moreover, in speaking of Christ’s redemption (1.18), Peter reminds them that they have been transferred into the people of God. They thereby enjoy the benefits of Israel’s inheritance (1.3-5) and the privilege of calling God their father (1.3, 17). This theme of new beginnings is supported by the metaphors of rebirth (1.3, 23; 2.2), seed (1.23), and milk (2.2), but I have argued that these images do not imply that the readers constitute a *new* ethnicity. Rather, they have been drawn into an *existing* family, as implied by the reminder in 1 Pet 3.6 that they are “Sarah’s children”. Furthermore, while the language of fictive kinship can be found among Graeco-Roman associations, the denigration of ancestral traditions (1.18), connection to Sarah (3.6), and sense of belonging to a worldwide ἀδελφότης (2.17; 5.9) go beyond the kinship language of associations and indicates that the writer is interpolating believers into Israel’s story and family tree.

Finally, we turn in **Chapter 6** to the label Χριστιανός in 1 Pet 4.16. The moniker probably began as an exonym, used by pagan outsiders when a noticeable number of non-Jews abandoned their ancestral traditions to join this growing movement. Though Pliny momentarily regarded Christians as a *hetaeria*, he and other Roman elites eventually perceived it as a kind of *superstitio*. Even until 120 CE, however, it seems like most pagan writers did not directly associate the Χριστιανοί label with Jews. Indeed, apologetic writings

from the second century suggest that Χριστιανοί and Ἰουδαῖοι remained discrete categories, and although many engage in a form of ethnic discourse, only the *Apology of Aristides* seems to support the notion of Christians constituting a γένος comparable to Jews and Greeks. On the contrary, texts like the *Preaching of Peter* and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* embrace the label Χριστιανοί while revealing a commitment to the idea that Christians nonetheless belong to Israel, a people *sui generis* which includes Greeks and Jews alike. Building upon our findings from our previous chapter, the conceptual distinction drawn between “Israelites” and “Jews” – even in Jewish writers like Philo – makes it possible for early Christians to claim that they belonged to Israel without becoming Ἰουδαῖοι nor excluding Ἰουδαῖοι from Israel altogether.

(7.2) Implications

This is not the first (and hopefully not the last) analysis of 1 Peter's ethnic vocabulary. My research is built upon the foundations of others, even as it queries and refines some of their preceding analyses and proposes new avenues of interpretation. Like Janette Ok and Katie Marcar, I have discussed 1 Peter's familial imagery, but have sought to examine passages which lay beyond the scope of their respective monographs, such as the use of πάροικος και παρεπίδημος in 1 Pet 2.11 and Χριστιανός in 1 Pet 4.16. Similarly, David Horrell's numerous publications on ethnicity and 1 Peter have supplied much of the material used in this project. Unlike Ok, Marcar, and Horrell, however, I have argued that 1 Peter's ethnic language serves to incorporate its readers into Israel's *ongoing* story and imagined community. Within 1 Peter's ethnic imagination, Jesus-followers do not constitute an entity separate and distinct from Israel but have joined the people of Israel as non-native insiders, an idea already envisaged in passages such as Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 47. This method of interpretation has been proposed by scholars including Gudrun Guttenberger and Kelly Liebengood, but I have sought to provide a more expansive study of 1 Peter than what Guttenberger or Liebengood have thus far published.

I was asked by a friend and colleague if this project could be described as “1 Peter Within Judaism”. In some ways, the label would be appropriate. After all, my research builds upon the work of scholars widely perceived as advocates of the “Paul Within Judaism” school, like Paula Fredriksen and Caroline Johnson Hodge, particularly in their rejection of

the idea that Christianity (in contrast to Judaism) somehow “transcends” ethnicity.⁸⁴⁵ On one level, therefore, this project has sought to present 1 Peter as a product of Jewish thought, suggesting that the process of “joining Israel” in biblical and rabbinic literature may inform early Christian thinking about conversion.

However, this thesis has also highlighted some issues with a label like “1 Peter Within Judaism”. There is no indication that 1 Peter’s readers have “become Jews” or even “become Israelites”. My reading of 1 Peter is therefore “within Judaism” so far as it means that the letter seeks to establish continuity with Israel’s story, including the incorporation of non-Israelites into the people of YHWH. But I would not suggest that the writer regarded his readers as “Jews” nor saw his message as a continuation of “Judaism”. This dissertation therefore invites continued reflection on some of the labels we frequently use in biblical scholarship, such as “Jew”, “Gentile”, and “Israel”, recognising that such ethnic categories are often remarkably fluid.

Other implications of this project extend beyond the history of the early Christianity. The relationship between Church and Israel, which is central to my thesis, matters not only to biblical scholarship but also to systematic theology. Perhaps one example in Protestant circles is the question of “dispensationalism”, a theological movement which, among other key characteristics, upholds an ongoing distinction between Israel and the Church.⁸⁴⁶ It is often contrasted with “covenantal theology”, which imagines an “old covenant” before Christ being superseded by the “new covenant” of the Gospel, with the Church consequently taking Israel’s place as the people of God.⁸⁴⁷ Thus far I have only mentioned these movements in passing for they each represent a number of theological views which lie beyond the scope of this project, including stances on millenarianism and Zionism. From a biblical perspective, this thesis ultimately challenges both positions, critiquing the notion that “Church” and “Israel” constitute separate entities in 1 Peter. In particular, this thesis invites further reflection on the doctrine of election in Christian theology. There is no doubt that, according to the New Testament, those who place their faith in Christ are God’s elect. Yet YHWH’s

⁸⁴⁵ Both Fredriksen and Johnson Hodge, for instance, contributed chapters to the 2015 volume *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First Century Context to the Apostle* edited by Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Nanos and Zetterholm 2015). Admittedly, the supposed “Paul within Judaism school” contains a variety of different and sometimes conflicting positions, as Matthew Novenson points out (Novenson 2022:132-139), but the phrase nonetheless remains a useful shorthand for the growing body of scholarship with shared methodological assumptions that Paul’s thought can be understood entirely “within Judaism”.

⁸⁴⁶ Bock 2023.

⁸⁴⁷ Ladd 1964:206.

election of Israel as his chosen people was never based on any achievement or potential Israel had nor contingent on their righteousness, and YHWH promises to keep his covenant despite Israel's continued disobedience.⁸⁴⁸ Similarly, God's promise in Hosea to restore northern Israel remains unfulfilled; by assuming that 1 Peter is appropriating that promise to so-called Gentile Christians we imply that the recipients of God's promises can be reassigned. A theology which proposes that God could jettison Israel in favour of the Church, in short, takes a low view of election and of God's faithfulness. This thesis avoids that trap. Followers of Christ have become members of Israel because Israel was never confined strictly to the biological descendants of Jacob. Through Christ, God maintains his covenant faithfulness to Israel, a category which includes those who are Jewish by birth and those who are not.

(7.3) Reflections and Praxis

For millions of people, 1 Peter is not merely a first-century document, but a timeless and inspired message with resonance for people today. As I conclude a study which has been guided chiefly by historical questions, I reflect now briefly on modern-day praxis.

Diversity and inclusion are increasingly popular buzzwords in globalised, modern societies. Many churches today are asking how congregations can welcome and include members of different cultural backgrounds, recognising that Christian Scripture repeatedly speaks of God's love for all peoples of all nations. However, genuine inclusion is hard work. Culture is not only about the food we eat and the clothes we wear, but also the values we uphold, the aspirations we cherish, and the worldviews we live by. While the interconnectedness of ethnicity and religion is a salient feature of the ancient world, the same phenomenon is still true today, albeit expressed in different forms.

Growing up in Chicago with Peruvian heritage, Alberto La Rosa Rojas shares the following reflection:

The church had formed me to understand that my identity was rooted singularly in Jesus Christ, and that meant that I needed to surrender any belonging to place or people here in this earthly realm. The tacit claim here was that a sense of belonging to a people, a land, and a culture did not matter to God because as Christians we were all called to be pilgrims whose true home lies not in any earthly place but in the heavenly

⁸⁴⁸ cf. Gen 17.4-8; 1 Chr 16.15-18; Jer 32.36-41; Ezek 16.59-63; Kaminsky 2007:193-194.

city of God. The only kind of culture that mattered was Christian culture. [...] It meant forgetting about our native homes and therefore denying a crucial aspect of our identities.

But only for non-Americans. The US flag in the corner of the sanctuary; the services around the Fourth of July and Veterans Day; the cultural traditions expressed each day, like those delicious Midwestern casseroles and Easter hams; the very language we spoke—all these things made it painfully obvious that we were in a US church practicing a US kind of Christianity. [...] The notion that one could embrace an identity in Christ and leave behind one's sense of place and cultural identity was, in the end, a delusion.⁸⁴⁹

My own experience in Great Britain has been similar. Whether it was the Remembrance Day services or reminiscing about Good King Wenceslas in Christmastide, local churches naturally reflect their local culture.

This is not a challenge only for migrants in Europe and North America. I began this dissertation with the story of Isaiah F., a Malay Singaporean who converted from Islam to Christianity. This decision, he admits, resulted in a disconnect from Malay culture and community. As a Chinese Singaporean, choosing to follow Jesus requires far less cultural adjustment for me as the majority of Christians in Singapore are Chinese. 1 Peter reminds me that this is not necessarily a good thing. It encourages me to place myself in Isaiah F.'s shoes and reflect on how certain aspects of my Chinese culture – attitudes toward money, notions about success, and so on – may need to be reevaluated if my sense of collective identity lies foremost in being a member of God's people. Conversely, do I see people like Isaiah F. as family? Am I making it as easy as possible for people from non-Chinese backgrounds in Singapore to feel welcomed into churches where most congregants are Chinese?

It is normal for us to feel proud of our ethnicity, especially in contexts where aspects of our culture have been repressed by external forces. But where this leads to tribalism or exclusivism, 1 Peter reminds us that *all* believers in Christ have been incorporated into Israel. The Church today must rediscover the wonder of being God's elect γένος, a priestly βασίλειον, a holy ἔθνος, and a chosen λαός.

⁸⁴⁹ La Rosa Rojas 2024.

Appendix: 1 Peter and Romans

In Chapter 2, I noted how Romans and 1 Peter both cite Hos 2.23. At the same time, the two NT passages contain verbal dissimilarities. Given these considerations, to what extent should Rom 9–11 colour our reading of 1 Peter? Do we have good reason to believe that the writer of 1 Peter interprets this Old Testament passage in a manner similar to Paul?

As I noted in my first chapter, John Elliott championed the “liberation of 1 Peter from its ‘Pauline bondage’,” emphasising the distinctive character of this epistle viz-a-viz Paul’s writings.⁸⁵⁰ Since then, several scholars have argued against the notion of direct Pauline influence on 1 Peter, notably Kazuhito Shimada and Jens Herzer.⁸⁵¹ Similarities between these writings, according to them, can be ascribed to a “broadly varied (liturgical, parenetic, and catechetical) tradition.”⁸⁵² However, others have demonstrated the weaknesses in some of these arguments, such as Shimada’s overly stringent set of criteria.⁸⁵³ With regard to 1 Pet 2.10 specifically, the fact that this verse and Rom 9.25 both diverge from Hos 2.23 in the same manner suggests some degree of influence, but some verbal dissimilarities, such as the use of οὐ λαός (1 Pet 2.10) instead of οὐ λαός μου (Rom 9.25) and οὐκ ἡλεημένοι (1 Pet 2.10) instead of οὐκ ἡγαπημένην (Rom 9.25), indicate that 1 Peter was not simply mimicking Paul. In agreement with Horrell, therefore, I believe that 1 Peter was influenced by Pauline discourse, while remaining a distinctive text which should not be grouped under a “Pauline school”. As was discussed previously, scholars such as Margaret Mitchell, David Nienhuis, and Darian Lockett have drawn attention to how early Christian writings like 2 Peter and the epistle of James engaged with Paul’s writings while retaining their individual voices.⁸⁵⁴ We can free 1 Peter from its supposed “Pauline bondage” while recognising that its writer probably inhabited the same ecosystem as Paul and many of the other New Testament writers.

With regard to Romans in particular, we have additional historical reasons to believe that the writer of 1 Peter would have been familiar to some degree with its contents. As demonstrated in my first chapter, many believe that 1 Peter was composed in Rome, and any date of composition after 60 CE would mean that the implied author was in the city after

⁸⁵⁰ Elliott 1976:247-248.

⁸⁵¹ Herzer 1998; Shimada 1993.

⁸⁵² Elliott 1976:246.

⁸⁵³ Horrell 2013a:17; Tsuji 2019:212-214.

⁸⁵⁴ See Section 1.2.4.

Paul's epistle had been delivered to the believers there.⁸⁵⁵ Even if Peter was not physically present in Rome when Paul's letter was being read, he would likely have interacted with people who had seen or heard it, and if 1 Peter is a pseudonymous document composed in Rome during the 90s CE, then the probability of our writer being entirely ignorant of Romans is slim indeed. Other historical data suggests that 1 Peter and Paul's letters were viewed as complementary in their content. Silvanus and Mark, whose names are tagged to the end of the letter (5.12-13), were also known associates of Paul (e.g. 1 Thess 1.1; Col 4.10). Even if their inclusion is entirely fictitious, it nonetheless represents an attempt to align 1 Peter with Paul. 2 Peter likewise regarded both 1 Peter and Paul's letters as authoritative (3.1, 15), standing not in competition but in concord. Even Ferdinand C. Baur, who famously postulated a division between Jewish (Petrine) and Gentile (Pauline) groups in his reconstruction of early Christianity, regarded 1 Peter as an attempt to mediate and unify the two camps.⁸⁵⁶ Most of all, nothing in 1 Peter suggests a direct reaction to Paul's letter(s).

Ultimately, my argument does not rest on 1 Peter's textual or literary dependence on Paul's letters, but on the thematic and theological similarities between 1 Peter and Romans. I believe that 1 Peter has its own manners of expression and specific issues to discuss, but it does so within a broad theological framework that it shares with Paul (and probably many other early Christians). Even if 1 Peter merely inhabits common Christian traditions with Romans (as Elliott and Shimada have argued), it is noteworthy that many of these shared traditions are theologically aligned. We have to ask ourselves, "Is the worldview of 1 Peter similar enough to Romans that we might credibly believe that our writer could arrive at an interpretation of Hosea's prophecy which is similar to Paul's?" The answer, I believe, is yes.

It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that 1 Peter viewed the inclusion of non-Jews into the Jesus movement as a form of incorporation into Israel, akin to Paul's metaphor of ingrafting in Romans. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, Peter uses slightly different expressions but swims in the same theological waters as Paul. For both apostles, the redemption of so-called "Gentiles" presages the fulfilment of Hosea's prophecy that those who were once "not a people" had become the people of God.

⁸⁵⁵ Most scholars posit a date of composition for Romans before 60 CE (see Jewett 2007:18).

⁸⁵⁶ Baur 1966:143-144.

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All abbreviations are taken from *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

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