

**“WITH GENTLENESS AND RESPECT”:
PAULINE AND PETRINE STUDIES
IN HONOR OF TROY W. MARTIN**

EDITED BY

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WINE ABSTINENCE IN ROMANS 14:21 AND ANCIENT JEWISH DIETARY PRACTICE

Troy Martin has been a model of scholarly devotion to detail in ferreting out the sociocultural matrices that inform early Christian literature. He knows that details count, and I hope that I measure up to his example in offering him this exploration into a tangled subject about a very small thing that may, nonetheless, carry real significance for understanding conflicts among Jesus-following Jews and gentiles. I refer to wine-abstention, one of the self-regulating principles of the “weak” as they are called in Rom 14. Paul says that the weak observe certain days (v. 5), eat only vegetables (vv. 2 and 21), and do not drink wine (v. 21). Interpreters have devoted only modest discussion to the last of these, wine avoidance, and there is also no consensus about it.

Since Paul uses the terms *κοινός* and *καθαρός* in describing the dispute (14:14, 20), the weak are clearly operating within a Jewish dietary framework. Hence, they are likely Jewish Christians, but they may also include gentiles formerly attached to the synagogue.¹ The strong, then, are probably gentiles for the most part, but may include “liberal” Jewish Christians. We cannot be certain whether it was Paul or some of the Roman Christians who introduced the labels “weak” (in faith) and “strong.” The terms seem to express value judgments and are, therefore, perspectival; they may also be rhetorically calculated. More neutral labels might be proposed for the sake of even-handed historical reconstruction, but I will use Paul’s words for convenience and to avoid confusion.

The Jewish orientation of the weak has led interpreters to adduce a number of Jewish texts from the Second Temple period to document Jewish avoidance of wine. The examples are quite diverse, and not all of them entail the judgment that wine (or the specific wine in question) is unclean. Jews in

1. See Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 71.

different times and places varied widely in their attitudes to wine, and those who avoided it – whether as a blanket rule or circumstantially – did so out of a variety of rationales.

One suggestion is that the weak avoided wine because of its linkage with idolatry through libations.² That sounds plausible, but it has less support in Second Temple Jewish literature than one might suppose. Moreover, if wine's linkage with pagan idolatry was the issue for the weak, was it a general association of wine with idolatry (because gentiles used wine in libations) or something more specific, a direct connection between idolatrous acts and the specific wine a Jew might purchase or be served? Paul's opening statement in addressing the conflict – “Welcome the one who is weak in faith, but not for arguments about opinions” (Rom 14:1) – indicates that the two groups did meet together, whether on a regular basis or not.³ Unlike Paul's description of the conflict at Antioch (Gal 2:11–13), there is no hint that the weak were separating themselves from the gentile believers. It appears, then, that the weak avoided wine as a general rule, even when supping with other Christ-believers (the strong) and not as a situation-specific rule for, say, banquets hosted by pagans (assuming they would even have attended such). Was the basis of their abstention that they regarded all wine in Rome as εἰδωλόθυτον, analogous to pagan market meat (see that category in 1 Cor 8:1), or did some other concern motivate them? In fact, Jews did not treat wine as εἰδωλόθυτον, a relatively new word that referred especially to sacrificial flesh (see 4 Macc 5:2).⁴

Another suggestion is that the weak were ascetics of some sort.⁵ This has been most ably argued by Mark Reasoner, who also recognizes that the use

2. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, 2 vols., WBC (Dallas: Word, 1988), 2:827; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 3 vols., EKKNT (Zurich: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1978–1982), 3:96; Jewett, *Romans*, 869–70 (speaking of Jewish “ascetic” practice that might have been motivated by the association of wine with pagan religion); John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, WUNT 275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 39.

3. The references to disputes (14:1) and the overall description of tensions suggests that the weak and strong regularly or at least occasionally share common meals together. The use of the verb “welcome” (the middle form προσλαμβάνεσθαι) in Rom 14:1 supports this interpretation. See Jewett, *Romans*, 835–36; A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 49–50. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

4. Note also the following teaching from one of the Jewish Sibylline Oracles, which also assumes that εἰδωλόθυτον is food, not drink: “Do not impair your mind with wine and do not drink immoderately. Do not consume blood and do not eat what is offered to idols [εἰδωλόθυτον]” (Sib. Or. 2.95–96, drawing some or all of this from Pseudo-Phocylides).

5. Max Rauer, *Die “Schwachen” in Korinth und Rom nach den Paulusbriefen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1923), 164–69 (identifying the weak as former gentile gnostics who have retained their ascetic gnostic diet after embracing faith in Christ); see also Raoul Dederen, “On Esteeming One Day Better Than Another,” *AUSS* 9 (1971): 16–35, esp. 19–23; Heinrich Schlier,

of the terms *κοινός* and *καθαρός* in the immediate context favors some kind of Jewish purity concern. This leads him to conclude that the weak seek to maintain *purity* through ascetic practice.⁶ The question of wine is only a small part of Reasoner's study, and he does not examine the broad range of Jewish texts that deal with it. He does note that Philo attributed wine abstinence to the Therapeutae (see *Contempl.* 74 with 34 and 37), that Josephus interpreted Daniel's austere diet in ascetic terms (*Ant.* 10.194), that certain imprisoned Jewish priests at Rome subsisted on figs and nuts in order to preserve their piety (Josephus, *Life* 14), that James abstained from wine and other intoxicating drink (according to Hegesippus, as quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.5), and that the Testament of Isaac describes the patriarch as a wine abstainer (4.5).⁷ These passages are of limited value. Philo interprets the wine-abstinence of the Therapeutae as an example of their self-control and their conception of themselves as priests serving in God's temple; the specific motivation of the priests at Rome is not stated. Nor does Hegesippus mention the motivation of James. The Testament of Isaac associates the dietary austerity of Isaac with his rigor in fasting and prayer, not with a purity concern. Reasoner also finds indications in Romans that the strong likely ate to excess (from the weak's point of view at least) and may have been sexually lax. The weak, he speculates, probably associated meat and wine not only with idolatrous acts (sacrifice and libations) but with the gluttony and sexual license of gentiles.⁸ As we will see, the idea that some Jews believed wine was an important part of the immoral lifestyle of gentiles, and for that reason was impure, has significant support in certain ancient Jewish texts.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The Holiness Code of Leviticus uses the same terminology for "purity" in its rules about inherently impure foods and those that concern transferable impurity (defilement) through touch. For example, Lev 11:8 classes the flesh of pigs (for eating) and their carcasses (for touching) as unclean (Hebrew טמאִים; Greek ἀκάθαρτα), and Lev 15:2–12 uses the same word in declaring that a man with a "discharge" is unclean. Ancient Israelites of the First Temple

Der Römerbrief, HThKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 403–6; Ernst Käsemann, *Romans*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 368; A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (London: T&T Clark, 1988), 32–34.

6. Mark Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1–15.13 in Context*, SNTSMS 103 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 73, 101, 129–31, 136–37.

7. Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak*, 129–31.

8. Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak*, 66–70, 72–73.

period may have recognized a difference between these kinds of uncleanness, but they did not work out separate terminologies for making that distinction. Nor is there full clarity in First or Second Temple sources about whether all creatures that are unclean for eating also transfer their uncleanness to the eater through contact.⁹ A division of types of uncleanness seems to be assumed by the rabbis, however, for they order transferable impurity but not unclean foods under *Tohorot* (טהרות). Also worth noting is that ancient Jews did not distinguish through their terminology (nouns or adjectives) between *physical* impurity and *moral* impurity, although the different contexts in which the language of purity is used suggest such a distinction to us. For example, the Hebrew Bible applies the language of impurity to what we think of as the moral realm, declaring that sexual transgressions, idolatry, and murder defile the people and the land (Lev 18; Lev 20:3–5 and Ezek 36:17–18; Num 35:30–34). We might classify such uses of purity language as metaphorical, but there is no indication that the ancients made that conceptual-linguistic distinction.

TESTIMONY FROM THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

Wine is connected explicitly with pagan libations in only two pre-Mishnaic texts. One is the expanded Greek version of Esther, in which the protagonist declares that she has “not eaten at Haman’s table,” or “honored the king’s feast or drunk the wine of libations” (Add Esth 4:17x [14:17]).¹⁰ The Greek version of Esther does not say whether someone like her would also have avoided wine sold in a gentile market as distinguished from wine served at a gentile’s table after a libation ceremony. The second text is in Joseph and Aseneth, where Aseneth, in an act of despair or renunciation, throws her entire supper and tableware out the window. The author-narrator calls the food “sacrifices” and speaks of “wine vessels for their libations” (10:13). This, too, is circumstantial and says nothing about how the author-narrator regards food and wine sold in the market. In both texts the focus is pagan *meals*.

9. There is some evidence of differentiation. In Lev 11, certain animals banned for consumption are called שקץ (an “abomination”), instead of טמא (“impure”), implying that they are banned for food but do not cause impurity. Yet there is no complete consistency. For a discussion, see Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67–69.

10. On this, see David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 35 with n. 11.

Daniel

Some pre-Mishnaic texts mention Jewish refusal of gentile foods. In the book of Daniel Jewish men turn down the Babylonian king's opulent foods and subsist on vegetables and water (1:12, 15–16). The question of foods permitted or forbidden according to Leviticus does not come up. The difference between what Daniel and company eat and what the royal court enjoys is a distinction between austerity and luxury, a minimal diet of water and vegetables versus the wine and the sumptuous courses of a royal dinner. Moreover, this difference is religio-moral. Daniel adheres to an "ascetic" diet because he does not want to be polluted – *μη ἀλισγγηθῆ* – by the royal food and wine (1:8). The uncommon verb *ἀλισγέω* can be used in a ritual sense (Mal 1:7, 12) but also a moral one, as in Sirach: "If a man looks at the table of another, his course of life is not well reasoned. He pollutes himself in the other's food" (Sir 40:29 LXX).¹¹ The pollution here derives from covetousness or some other fault in the man; it is not a fault in the food. The word *ἀλισγέω* is applied differently in Daniel, which implies that the food is a source of pollution, a threat to the moral purity of Daniel and company in a place of foreign temptations represented by the king's rich food and wine.¹² This interpretation is reinforced by evidence later in the narrative. The story of a royal festival in Dan 5 links wine as an intoxicant with sacrilegious and idolatrous behavior. If there is a connection between this story and Daniel's refusal of wine as a religio-moral pollutant, it is not that gentiles make libations from wine – libations are nowhere mentioned in Daniel – but that "under the influence of wine," the king commands that the gold and silver vessels from the temple in Jerusalem be brought in so that he and his corevelers can drink from these objects. And as they drink they praise the Babylonian gods. If there is a connection between this and wine as a polluting drink in chapter 1, it is the diaspora lesson that Jews should avoid drinking wine, lest they too be tempted into sacrilegious, even idolatrous, behavior.

It may go without saying for Daniel's author and readers that to embrace gentile fare usually means eating and drinking with gentiles, with the accompanying risk of sliding down the slippery slope of assimilation. Hence, a number of specialists in ancient Judaism construe the reference to Daniel's

11. The verb appears in one other place in the Septuagint: in Malachi with reference to priests who defile both themselves and the altar by offering blemished sacrifices (Mal 1:7, 12). The verb's cognate noun appears in Acts 15:20 in the expression "pollutions of idols."

12. That the food is rich and sumptuous is implied not only by its being expressly the king's food but also by the test whereby the health of those who eat the king's food is compared with the health of Daniel et al., who consume only vegetables and water (Dan 1:10–16.).

diet as a literary means of expressing a general concern for preserving Jewish identity in a Hellenistic environment. Regulation of food marks a religio-moral boundary. It stands for social distance from gentiles and their lifestyle, and the book of Daniel sets forth young men who carefully and courageously keep themselves on one side of that boundary.¹³ There is no indication in Daniel of concerns like those of certain rabbis in late antiquity, who ruled that gentile wine should be shunned because libations are performed during its production or that certain gentile foodstuffs should be avoided because forbidden substances may have been incorporated into otherwise acceptable foods during processing by gentiles.¹⁴ The relevant passages in Daniel speak of the king's food but without any reference to libations or to the cooks, cooking, or any matters of preparation.

Before leaving Daniel, it is worth noting Josephus's interpretation. He finds an example of both moral purity and ascetic rigor in "the young men, their souls having been kept clean (*καθαρόων*) and also pure (*ἀκραϊφνῶων*) for learning and their bodies better toned for work" (*Ant.* 10.194). The accent in Josephus is on the diet's role in the training of mind and body. Nevertheless, Josephus is also alert to the purity concern in Daniel, a purity of soul, he calls it. Presumably, he uses the word *καθαρός* as a reflection of *μὴ ἀλλοσηθηῆ* in Dan 1:8. Since Josephus's purpose is not to build social barriers between Jews and gentiles, he does not treat the story as cause for a blanket rule against wine consumption, even in a diaspora setting. But that is clearly the interest of Daniel itself, and we can easily imagine how the book of Daniel would have been read by someone without Josephus's apologetic interest and accommodating stance toward Greco-Roman life, someone who regarded the gentile world as thoroughly corrupt.

Tobit

In the book of Tobit, the pious protagonist declares that when he was in exile in Assyria he avoided "the breads of the gentiles." He does not explain why, except to describe his habit as a matter of piety (Tob 1:10–13). Certainly the author does not mean that Tobit purchased no food from the gentile markets and ate only what he raised himself. Tobit is an exemplary character. If he avoided gentile food stuffs altogether, then the author would be

13. See John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 146; Jordan D. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37–38.

14. Regarding concerns about gentile food processing in later periods, such as in Tannaitic writings (m. Abodah Zarah in particular), see Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food*, 52–57.

suggesting that Jews should not purchase or consume any food sold or produced by gentiles, which would have been quite impractical in a diaspora setting.¹⁵ Hence “gentile foods” probably has a narrower sense. Fitzmyer assumes that only foods forbidden by biblical law are in view,¹⁶ but it may be that the author of Tobit was thinking about foreign contamination and assimilation along the same lines as the author of Daniel. This is suggested by the pairing of Tobit’s diet with his marriage in the passage. He did not eat gentile food, and he married a woman of his own kin (rather than a foreign wife).

Jubilees

The book of Jubilees forbids eating with gentiles and otherwise associating with them on the grounds that gentiles are unclean because of their idolatrous practices: “Separate yourselves from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs, and do not become associates of theirs; for their deeds are defiled, and all their ways are contaminated, despicable, and abominable. They slaughter their sacrifices to the dead. And to the demons they bow down ...” (Jub. 22:16–17).¹⁷ Jubilees says nothing about gentile food being unclean. Instead, the point is that one should not associate with gentiles because they are wicked. Likewise in the gospels, the Pharisees are depicted as criticizing Jesus for eating with sinners and tax collectors (Mark 2:15–16 // Luke 5:30 // Matt 9:10–11; Luke 7:34 // Matt 11:19; Luke 15:2). These persons are not gentiles, but their immoral lives (in the Pharisees’ opinion) make them unfit to eat with. It is important to note that nothing is said in the gospels or in Jubilees about food or wine posing a problem for Jews if it is produced, processed, or sold by gentiles.¹⁸

Judith

Dietary practice in the book of Judith presents special challenges for interpretation, owing to the complex way in which the references to food are integrated into the narrative and linked with a wider set of activities in

15. If Tobit was composed in Judea and not in the diaspora, then what the protagonist reflects is a Palestinian Hebrew’s idea of proper behavior in the diaspora.

16. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 113.

17. O. S. Wintermute’s translation in *OTP* 2:98.

18. In the same vein, the Jewish-Christian Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* proscribes eating food with gentiles not because their food is impure but because they are immoral (*Hom.* 13.4).

the camp of the enemy. Judith goes to the headquarters of the general Holofernes, even eats and drinks with him (Jdt 12:16–20); but she refuses the food he offers, calling it a *σκάναλον* to eat his food (12:2). To avoid this offense, she carries with her to his tent not only her own victuals but her own vessels (10:5; 12:2). The rationale for Judith's control of her food and dinnerware is not immediately apparent and admits more than one explanation. Moreover, since references to her dietary practice are confined to descriptions of her interactions with Holofernes, it is impossible to say whether Judith represents someone who would have scrupled at consuming gentile food or drink from a gentile market.

One explanation for Judith's refusal of Holofernes's food and serving ware is that she regards them as unclean because they belong to a gentile, the assumption being that gentiles are unclean and their impurity transfers to their things.¹⁹ But if physical contact with gentiles or things belonging to them is Judith's concern, how does she remain untainted by the other contacts with gentiles mentioned or implied by the story – being lifted up by Holofernes's slaves after she prostrates herself before him (10:23) and reclining in his tent on lambskins provided by his attendant (12:15)? An answer may be supplied by the following narrative detail: “She went out each night to the valley of Bethulia, and bathed at the spring in the camp. After bathing, she prayed.... Then she returned purified, and she stayed in the tent until she ate her food toward evening” (12:7–9 NRSV). One might infer that daily contact with the lambskin blankets and other objects in the tent have a polluting effect because they have been touched by gentiles and that Judith bathes in order to remove this uncleanness.

But it is also possible that she bathes as a matter of custom before her prayers and evening meal and not because she imagines that her contacts with gentiles and their things have polluted her.²⁰ Jews bathed after being rendered unclean by certain contacts or occurrences having nothing to do with gentiles. The Temple Scroll from Qumran prescribes bathing after certain activities mentioned in Leviticus as causing impurity (11Q19 XLV, 7–17), and this method for removing impurity was probably practiced by Jews outside of Qumran as well. Moreover, we have evidence of Jews bathing or washing their hands before praying and eating (Let. Aris. 304–306; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.106 and *War* 2.128–129; Sib. Or. 3.591–595).²¹ Mark 7:1–5 is of

19. So Monika Hellmann, *Judit – eine Frau im Spannungsfeld von Autonomie und göttlicher Führung* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), 130.

20. This observation is also made about Judith by Gedalia [Gedalyahu] Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 202.

21. On handwashing, see Tomas Kazen, *Issues of Impurity in Early Judaism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 113–35.

special interest here. The passage refers to Pharisees washing before eating, washing when they return from the marketplace, and cleansing “cups, pots, and bronze vessels” (v. 4). According to Mark, then, Pharisees believe that the ordinary physical contacts of daily life cause the hands to be “defiled” – at least for eating – as well as the vessels one uses. The Matthean parallel also speaks of unwashed hands being defiled for eating (Matt 15:1–20). And in Luke 11, when Jesus visits the house of a Pharisee for dinner, the host is shocked when Jesus does not first wash (Luke 11:38). It is difficult to reconstruct the precise rules and assumptions of the practices of handwashing and bathing in these texts, but the use of the term *κοιλός* in Mark indicates that the ablutions are ritual purifications, not efforts at simple hygiene. One can reasonably infer that Pharisees (and others especially devoted to purity) assumed that when they visited the market they knowingly or unknowingly came in contact with things capable of transferring impurity to them, such as the incidental touch of a menstruating woman. Likewise at home, their persons and their utensils occasionally came in contact with such pollutants. These contacts imparted no sinfulness and posed no threat to the recipient’s religious status, but some Jews thought they should cleanse themselves of such physical impurities before praying or eating. If Judith represents a practice of purity along these lines, she bathes in preparation for prayer and before her evening meal as a rule of life. She brings her own cooking utensils to ensure that she eats from purified (washed) tableware.

Judith also brings her own food to the tent of Holofernes. According to 10:5, this food consists of wine, oil, parched grain, dried fruit, and “pure breads” (*ἄρτων καθαρῶν*). The last expression may refer to the quality of the bread, but Thomas Hieke suggests that the expression “pure breads” is a way of associating her food with the Bread of the Presence, which is placed on a pure table (Lev 24:5–9).²² In that case, she goes to the camp of Holofernes as a kind of priest, representing the people of Israel and purifying herself for her special ritual task (more on this below).²³

Does Judith’s refusal of the king’s food represent the view that even to eat discriminatingly of food offered by gentiles – abstaining from pork, rabbit, shellfish, etc. – entails the risk that some permitted foods may happen to contain forbidden substances as a result of processing or preparation by gentiles, and that, to avoid this risk, a pious person simply avoids all gentile food as a matter of principle? This explanation would be more persuasive if

22. See Thomas Hieke, “Torah in Judith,” in *A Pious Seductress: Studies in the Book of Judith*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, DCLS 14 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 99.

23. The expression “pure breads” (*ἄρτων καθαρῶν*) appears in the description of Judith’s personal provisions in 10:5, but in a list of other foodstuffs that are not so categorized. The adjective may mean no more than bread made from very fine, pure flour.

the narrator had given us some definite clue that devotion to the Levitical food laws is what Judith models. But in 12:2 she does not call the king's food an "abomination" (βδέλυγμα) or something "unclean" (ἀκάθαρτος) – these being the categories of Lev 11. She uses the word σκάνδαλον, a strong word but not a Levitical term for forbidden food. Moreover, had a concern about food preparation been operative for the author of the Judith story, that could have been signaled through a reference to the king's cooks or the cooking, etc. The Epistle of Aristeas contains a reassuring stipulation about that with reference to its royal banquet (Let. Aris. 181–182), but there are no explicit or even subtle allusions in Judith to preparation of the food as the concern.

The Greek word σκάνδαλον carries the sense of a trap or temptation, as well as a fault or stain. In the Septuagint it is used to translate both מִקְשָׁל ("snare," "trap") and מִכְשׁוֹל ("stumbling-block"), sometimes with a moral connotation. These words overlap in meaning and either would have been evocatively multivalent of a kind of trap or temptation in the Judith narrative, particularly given that the book of Judith is a story of sex and assassination. The general wants to possess her sexually; she intends to kill him. Readers can imagine the king interpreting Judith's word σκάνδαλον to mean that if she eats his food and consumes his wine, she is liable to give herself to him. Readers can also imagine that Judith uses this word with her own meaning – that the food is a trap because to accept his hospitality would morally obligate her not to harm him (at least while she is his guest). Moreover, the expression "his delicacies" (12:1) can symbolize more broadly the enticements of the gentile world as threats to Jewish identity. If it has that connotation here, Judith's refusal of those delicacies marks a social boundary between herself and the world of foreigners. She models the boundary-maintenance that protects against assimilation. All of these meanings can operate at the same time.

There is still another way to frame Judith's self-regulation in the story. As we have noted, the expression "pure breads" may suggest that Judith is not only a model of strict Jewish piety in a foreign environment but also a kind of priest. This interpretation has been set forth in two variations, the one by Hieke already mentioned and another by Amy-Jill Levine. Levine observes that ablutions were made by priests before they performed their duties in the temple (Exod 29:4; 30:18–21). If we understand Judith's killing of Holofernes as a kind of priestly act of sacrifice, then her bathing, prayer, care in her diet, and use of her own utensils can be viewed as part of her ritual preparation for that act. This is how Levine understands the story. Weaving together Judith's actions with other features of the narrative, she argues that

the initial ritualized killing, which included the purification and festive garbing of the celebrant, her sexual abstinence, the painless slitting of the victim's throat ... the aid of the assistant in disposing of the parts, the retention of a portion of the sacrifice for the community [the general's head], and the efficacy that such an offering brings to Israel as a whole is given its full value only when the account – and the vessels, the canopy, and the general's head – become part of the communal celebration [in ch. 16].²⁴

This does not mean that Judith is a priest in any literal sense, only that her *actions* are given a priestly coloring to enhance the sense of killing as a sacred ritual act.

Given the multiple possibilities for interpreting Judith's behavior, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the attitude toward gentile wine reflected in the book of Judith, particularly when it comes to the significance of this story for Jewish dietary practices in diaspora settings. Specifically, it is impossible to say whether Judith stands for a refusal to consume food or wine of gentiles or only the food or wine of the enemy, and whether purity concerns are attached to her dietary care. One thing we can say: she does not stand for abstention from wine *per se*, for she drinks wine.

THE RABBIS

Peter Lampe infers that the weak at Rome abstained from wine in a precautionary way because they could not be confident that the wine they purchased in the market did not come from wine makers or wine merchants who had performed libations from a vat or amphora.²⁵ Now, in the only two places where "libation wine" is specifically mentioned in Second Temple sources, it is connected with pagan *meal* contexts, not pagan markets or wine production. Therefore, it appears that the plausibility of Lampe's interpretation rests entirely on rabbinic evidence – specifically rabbinic accuracy or realism in Abodah Zarah about gentile practice.

Before turning to the relevant section of that tractate, I will first describe the interesting suggestion of Peter Tomson that the rabbis regarded gentiles as inherently impure, making their lands impure. On these assumptions, Tomson argues that rules regarding transferred impurity did not apply in

24. Amy-Jill Levine, "Sacrifice and Salvation: Otherness and Domestication in the Book of Judith," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 208–23, esp. 221.

25. Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*, 2nd ed., WUNT 2/18 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 57.

the diaspora because purity was regarded as impossible in gentile territories.²⁶ Diaspora Jews avoided foods designated by Leviticus as inherently unclean, of course, such as pork and shellfish; but, Tomson says, they made no effort to regulate themselves for transferred impurity because they were in a perpetual state of uncleanness by virtue of living among gentiles.

In making his case, Tomson relies in part on Gedalia Alon, who maintains that the rabbis regarded gentiles as inherently unclean.²⁷ Alon points to rabbinic opinion about the impurity of objects belonging to gentiles, for example, the requirement that even unused vessels purchased from gentiles should be cleansed before use (t. Abod. Zar. 8.2).²⁸ He also notes rabbinic prohibitions of gentile foodstuffs that, through processing, were liable to contain things prohibited by Levitical law. Alon believes that originally gentile bread, oil, wine, preserved and stewed edibles, and certain other prohibited food items were disallowed “only on account of gentile uncleanness,” but he notes that the prohibition “did not extend to all articles of food and drink capable of absorbing uncleanness and that the Halakha was not completely consistent.”²⁹ To the extent that such a view prevailed before the destruction of Jerusalem, as Alon maintains (but without any direct evidence), it is difficult to imagine that it was adhered to by Jews in diaspora settings where they did not have their own sources of food.

Alon himself does not go into the question whether Jews traveling or residing outside of Israel suspended their purity practices. That is Tomson’s inference. As we have seen, some Jews in diaspora settings did separate themselves from commensality with gentiles as a matter of moral purity. But Tomson’s point is that Jews in the diaspora did not guard against physical contacts with gentiles and gentile objects, and they did not purify themselves after such contacts, because purity rules did not hold in the diaspora. Hence, if they abstained from wine it was not because it was handled by gentiles but only for some more specific reason, such as a connection with idolatry. That said, Alon’s thesis that the rabbis regarded gentiles and their lands as inherently impure has not been widely embraced by other specialists, and the whole question remains much debated.

As far as available evidence informs us, consuming fruits and vegetables acquired from gentiles did not carry any risk of transferred impurity. Moreover,

26. Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*, CRINT 3/1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), 228–29.

27. Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World*, 146–65 (dealing with the idea and its pre-70 provenance).

28. Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World*, 153, 181.

29. Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World*, 181–82.

even if the articles were regarded as transferring impurity, this would not have imposed any special problem; it would have meant no more than that purification was required before one could perform certain ritual acts. Yet at some point, probably well after the end of the first Jewish war, Palestinian rabbis – at least some of them – adopted a blanket rule against Jewish consumption of gentile wine. The earliest reference to this view is in a story in *Sipre Numbers* about the dangers of drinking with gentiles, which begins by observing that there was a time when “wine of non-Jews was not yet forbidden to Jews” (*Sipre Num.* 131). We are not told when the blanket prohibition was adopted. *Sipre Numbers* dates to perhaps the late third or early fourth century.

The rabbis seem to contemplate three categories of wine according to source: wine produced by gentiles, wine produced by Jews with gentiles, and wine produced solely by Jews. Rabbinic opinions in the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta* focus on the conditions that must obtain in the second category in order to permit use of the wine by Jews. The discussions proceed under the assumption that gentiles are prone to make libations at any time and from any bit of wine that happens to be at hand. For example, section 4.10 of *m. Abodah Zarah* treats questions of gentile connections with a vat of wine that an Israelite might wish to purchase or use. Such a vat is prohibited for Jews in the following cases: if a gentile is standing near a vat of wine on which he has a lien; if a gentile falls into the vat and climbs out; if a gentile measures it with a reed; if a gentile uses a reed to remove a hornet from it; and if a gentile pats down the froth on the mouth of a jar of wine. In all these situations – so the rabbis theorize – a gentile might touch the wine, spill a bit of it, say a prayer, and in that way effect a libation. Other sections of the tractate deal with the same concern under other circumstances that might occasion the same activity (see *m. Abod. Zar.* 4.8–11; 5.3–6). Thus, the rabbis distinguish between the juice of the grapes before it drips into the vat during processing and after it drips into the vat. Juice in the vat counts as wine that can be the subject of a libation, and on the basis of this distinction the rabbis work out rules pertaining to the supervision of gentiles in wine presses. Specifically, a Jew is not to use wine produced under circumstances where a gentile has been left alone with the juice in the vat because one must assume that the gentile made a libation and thus tainted the whole vat.³⁰

30. This view is nicely summarized in Jacob Neusner, *The Comparative Hermeneutics of Rabbinic Judaism*, vol. 3: *Seder Neziqin* (Binghamton, NY: Academic Studies of the History of Judaism, 2000), 385. He supplies the relevant *Abodah Zarah* passages from the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*.

Some rabbinic opinions express a more liberal view and prohibit wine only if an Israelite has knowledge that a libation was in fact made. We can also imagine a stricter view, one that prohibited Jewish use of any wine processed or handled by gentiles, even under continual Jewish supervision, on the grounds that the Jewish consumer could not be certain that supervisors were always sufficiently vigilant or perceptive. But we have no specific evidence of that stricter opinion. Nor do we know when the idea first arose that a whole vat of wine was prohibited if some little libation was made from it during production.

It is worth noting that the rabbis do not raise questions about the agricultural products of pagans even though every product of gentile agriculture that a Jew might purchase in the market had been dedicated to pagan deities through a harvest celebration. Likewise, small private gardens were thought to be under divine care, and the appropriate religious rites were performed to the deities of the fields, arbors, and gardens. The wine festival known as the *Vinalia Urbana* held on April 23 honored Venus, as well as Jupiter. But Venus was also regarded as protectress of gardens. Hence, at the wine festival known as *Vinalia Rustica* (celebrated on August 19), vegetable gardens were dedicated to Venus. We have explicit testimony about this from Varro, who states that during the *Vinalia Rustica* a temple was dedicated to Venus, gardens were dedicated to her, and vegetable gardeners held a festival, apparently as part of the larger *Vinalia* (*Ling.* 6.20). Moreover, Pliny, citing Plautus, says that “gardens are under the care of Venus” (*hortos tutelae Veneris; Nat.* 19.19).³¹

The rabbis were surely aware of these things in a general way, yet they saw no problem with Jewish consumption of gentile produce. It seems likely, then, that rabbinic regulation of wine-drinking moved backward, so to speak, from a rule against consuming wine at a pagan dinner party (because of the ceremonial libations) to ideas about sneaky gentiles making surreptitious libations when working in Jewish wine production. For had the reasoning started from a reflection on connections between wine production and pagan religion, we would expect to see discussion of grape harvest festivals, too, and also parallel discussions of other agricultural products. But what appears

31. The idea that Venus was a goddess of vegetables was not indigenous to the Romans. See P. T. Eden, “Venus and the Cabbage,” *Hermes* 91 (1963): 448–59, esp. 451. One might infer from the fact that Pliny finds it necessary to cite Plautus (third/second century BCE) that it was not widely known that vegetable growers regarded Venus as their divine patroness. In view of the other evidence, however, it is more likely that Pliny is simply giving the earliest source he knows for the association of Venus with the garden, the implication being that it is an old and well-founded tradition that gardens belong to Venus.

to have happened is that the rabbis began from the question of wine at a pagan dinner party, assumed that libations were always made (which was probably not as common as they assumed), applied this assumption to cases where gentiles were guests of Jews and had to be watched lest they should make a libation from the wine, then worked backward to the prior question of wine production.³² For practical reasons no doubt, the rabbis did not extend the logic further back to libations at harvest festivals, for if a whole harvest of grapes could be tainted by a libation, then the entire harvest of any agricultural product could be tainted by a libation or other dedicatory act, making all gentile produce off limits for Jews, a completely impractical rule. It is not surprising, then, that consuming fruits and vegetables sold by gentiles was never prohibited in any Jewish legal opinion.³³

It is to be emphasized that there is no mention in Greek or Roman sources of libations being made in connection with wine-making, such as the dedication of a vat of wine to a deity. The rabbis assume such practices in their case examples, but the rabbinic rules about wine-making were formulated when Jews were no longer dealing with paganism as a significant problem and had little or no first-hand knowledge of pagan practices.³⁴ This would explain why they make the outlandish assumption that gentiles are obsessed with libations and will make a libation at the drop of a hat from the least bit of wine. It is also possible that the cases to which the rules are applied are meant not realistically but only hypothetically and for the sake of a legal logic that has taken on a life independent from practical cases.

Before leaving the rabbis, we should note the more general prohibition of “gentile wine” in the story in Sipre Num. 131, mentioned above. To the extent that this cautionary tale implies a rationale for the prohibition, it does not suggest that gentile wine is inherently unclean or tainted by idolatry. Wine in the story stands for drinking with gentiles, which leads to marrying them, which in turn leads to abandoning the God of Israel for pagan gods.³⁵

32. On the frequency of libations, see Charles H. Cosgrove, “Banquet Ceremonies Involving Wine in the Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity,” *CBQ* 79 (2017): 299–316.

33. See Günter Stemberger, “Forbidden Gentile Food in Early Rabbinic Writings,” in *Jewish Identity and Politics between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba*, ed. Benedikt Eckhardt, *JSJSup* 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 220.

34. Gary G. Porton, *Goyim: Gentiles and Israelites in Mishnah-Tosefta*, BJS 155 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 242. Whether the rabbis themselves mean to be giving abstract hypotheticals or practical rules is a separate question. Neusner thinks the latter (Neusner, *Seder Neziqin*, 385).

35. On the topic, see David Kraemer, “Problematic Mixings: Foods and Other Forbidden Substances in Rabbinic Legislation,” in *Review of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* 8 (2005), 35–54, esp. 50; Stemberger, “Forbidden Gentile Food in Early Rabbinic Writings,” 223.

THE WEAK AT ROME

Paul implies that the weak abstained from wine as a general rule of life, not a situation-specific rule dependent on particular circumstances, such as a dinner party where libations were made. From what we have seen, the category of impurity in Paul's day included different varieties. Certain foods proscribed by Leviticus were impure, and to consume them was a violation of God's law. Wine, however, was not among these proscribed substances.

One could also enter a state of impurity through physical contact with certain objects, such as a corpse or menstrual blood. Removal of this kind of impurity was accomplished through a bath, which implies that the stain was conceived as physical. Acquiring this kind of transient impurity was not a sin or a threat to one's identity. There was also an impurity contracted through associations with people and activities deemed sinful, and this impurity was indeed seen by some as a danger to one's Jewish identity and devotion. Among the things that posed this danger were certain foods: meat offered to idols (εἰδωλόθυτον), wine dedicated to a foreign god through libations (the "wine of libations" in the Greek Esther), and, for Jews like Daniel, gentile food and wine as enticements to assimilation.

A word about εἰδωλόθυτον is in order at this point. In both Jewish and Christian sources, εἰδωλόθυτον refers specifically to animal flesh from a temple sacrifice. Jews and Christians do not place pagan wine in the category of εἰδωλόθυτον.³⁶ Also, no Christian writer of the first several centuries suggests that Christians should not drink wine purchased from pagans because wine production entails libation ceremonies. This silence is telling. Indeed, there is no mention of gentile wine as a problem for Jews in the sole text from the diaspora that addresses the question of gentile handling of banquet food to be consumed by Jews. According to Letter of Aristeas, the king saw to it that his cooks prepared the banquet victuals for the Jewish scholars in accord with Jewish requirements. Since there were toasts at this banquet, wine was consumed; but it did not occur to the Jewish author of this fictional story to say anything about this gentile wine or to suggest that the Jewish guests drank water because wine supplied by a pagan king had been the subject of libations during production. That is a rabbinic fancy, not a diaspora Jewish belief. Apart from the rabbinic hypotheticals in m. Abod. Zar. 4.8–11; 5.3–6, there is no mention in ancient sources of libations in connection with production of wine.

36. For the Jewish conception of εἰδωλόθυτον, see 4 Macc 5:2–3, which shows that Hellenistic Jews understood εἰδωλόθυτον specifically in terms of *eating* (μιαροφαγῆσαι). On the Christian uses of the term, see Cosgrove, "Ceremonies Involving Wine," 315.

It is perfectly consistent with this that in the two prerabbinic texts where Jewish authors link wine with libations, the connection is not with wine per se but with wine served at a meal where, the author assumes, it was customary to make libations: the “wine of libations” at the king’s feast in Greek Esther, and the “wine vessels for libation” among Aseneth’s supperware. Prohibitions against consuming libation wine were situation-specific, applicable to wine at a meal where libations were poured. Since adherence to a situation-specific prohibition would not explain the general abstinence from wine observed by the weak at Rome, Tomson concludes that they must have “refrained from eating with gentile brethren who had meat or wine, even though the latter did not consider these sanctified to the gods” because “as long as the gentiles did not abstain from meat and wine, these Jews were unable to accept that idolatry was really excluded.”³⁷ This assimilation of the Romans situation to that of the Antioch church of Gal 2 assumes that the weak at Rome refused to eat with the strong/nonabstaining gentile believers, which Paul does not say or imply about the Roman situation. In fact, he implies the opposite.

The view of wine expressed in Daniel would explain the position of the weak at Rome, who did sometimes meet with the strong in community meal settings where no one was pouring libations, and who abstained from wine in general as a rule of life. It would also explain why Paul does not interpret their reason for abstinence from meat as a concern about εἰδωλόθυτον, a word he uses in 1 Corinthians but nowhere applies to the concern of the weak in Romans. Their meat abstinence was general, like their abstinence from wine. And a further clue to its meaning is the diet they choose instead: vegetables and water. Their avoidance of meat and wine expressed an ascetic diet, but this asceticism was motivated by the view that meat and wine are *unclean*. That is the Danielic view.

The Danielic model may also provide the most plausible explanation of the diet of the imprisoned Jewish priests at Rome who subsisted on figs and nuts in order to preserve their piety (Josephus, *Life* 14). It is unlikely that the Romans were feeding them meat, a luxury good, or were performing libation ceremonies before giving them their wine. More likely, the priests interpreted their situation according to its nearest biblical analogue – Daniel and the other Jewish men in captivity in Babylon – and on that basis adopted a comparable diet. Whether the Danielic model also influenced James’s abstinence from wine (Hegesippus *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.5) or that of the Therapeutae (*Contempl.* 34 and 74), or informed the representation of the

37. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 244.

patriarch in Testament of Isaac (4:5), is difficult to say, since these instances of wine abstention may reflect ascetic views of bodily appetites and have nothing to do with marking practical or symbolic boundaries with gentiles and gentile ways. Of course, the two types of rationale are not incompatible, since marking a boundary with the world can entail ascetic control of the appetites as lures into worldly desires and associations.

If something like the Danielic model motivated the dietary rigor of the weak, then Paul confronted a novel diaspora situation in which Jewish believers in Jesus did in fact socialize (eat) with gentiles – at least with gentile Christ-followers – but abstained from meat and wine as a rule of life in order to preserve their religio-moral purity. This would explain why Paul affirms that the weak “honor the Lord” when they avoid meat and wine (Rom 14:6) but declares that the Jewish believers at Antioch were not behaving in line with the gospel when they stopped eating with the gentiles (Gal 2:11–14). In Paul’s eyes, refusing to eat *with* gentiles violates the gospel; refusing to eat *what* they eat does not.