
Master's Thesis
Religious Roots of Europe

**Resident Proselytes,
God-Fearers
and the
Seven Noahide Laws**

**- Making a case for an identification between the *ger toshav* in traditional
Judaism and the *sebomenos ton theon* in Hellenistic literature -**

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Preface

The beginning of wisdom is fear of the LORD
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding
(Proverbs 9:10)

A special thank from my innermost to my wife Judy, without you this present work would have been impossible to accomplish. That's to say, you make the impossible possible. A very special thank you also to our two daughters, Johanna and Susanna, without you I would have drowned a long time ago. Together, you three make my life better, sweeter and more colorful.

I also want to thank my mentor, professor Einar Thomassen, for reminding me to argue soberly. Without you I would be lost in the forest, so thanks for clearing the way, enabling me to write better. Also a special thanks to my fellow RRE student Lloyd Abercrombie, for our discussions and conversations, both off and on, the topic at hand. Your help has enabled me to speak better. I would also like thank the personnel who work at the University library here in Bergen for fulfilling my requests, you have been a highly valued resource. Your help has enabled me to think better.

Most importantly, this paper could not have been written if not for the fact that there exist a world, an arena where the soul and the body can come together as one, creating the individual that I refer to as «I». A world where we mortals can engage in the pursuit of truth and holiness, and where the outcome of our engagement with the forces of good and evil determine whether this world will be a heaven or a hell. Thanks to the Most High for giving me this opportunity, letting me have a go in this world. I pray that I am able to fulfill my potential and that my thoughts, speech and actions will be for the good.

All the mistakes in this master thesis is solely due to myself. It will be my intention that future studies will enable me to correct the present mistakes and thus they will be a source for good, enabling me to rise above my own limitations.

Longer than the earth is its
measure, and wider than the sea
(Job 11:9)

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Introduction - a double confusion

First confusion: προσήλυτος («proselyte»)

Danker, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich's lexicon of the New Testament¹ defines προσήλυτος (hebr. *ger*) as «**one who has come over from paganism to Judean religion and practice, convert**² (...) a designation for a gentile won for the Israelite community through missionary efforts (...). ... - They are to be differentiated fr. the σεβόμενοι τόν θεόν,³ who had obligated themselves only to follow certain commandments; in a mixed expr. ...»

As will be demonstrated during my master thesis, this lexical definition is misleading. Kirsopp Lake⁴ and later, Andrew Overman,⁵ have pointed to an often confused understanding of *ger*, where the nuances of its meanings are lost. Most importantly it fails to recognize the existence of two main groups of proselytes, 1) the circumcised proselyte who becomes a naturalized citizen and 2) the uncircumcised proselyte who is a foreigner residing with the Israelites, but without becoming a naturalized citizen. Traditional Judaism refers to these two categories of proselytes variously as the *ger tzedek* ('righteous proselyte') and the *ger toshav* ('resident proselyte').

Second confusion: σεβόμενοι τόν θεόν («God-fearers»)

Even though Lake and Overman warn against confusion in the understanding of the *ger* and they recognize the existence of different categories of *gerim*, they still accept the notion that goes back to Emil Schürer⁶ that the identification between the *ger toshav* and *sebomenoi* is anachronistic. This in turn has led to the current situation where there is much confusion «in the ranks of even the greatest scholars»⁷ concerning the *sebomenoi ton theon*. Among scholars there is a debate whether or not this

¹ BDAG 2000:880, 'προσήλυτος.'

² The emphasis is in the original text.

³ Most commonly translated as 'God-fearers', but also as 'God-worshippers'.

⁴ Lake 1933:82-84.

⁵ Overman 1988:18-20.

⁶ Schürer 1890:319.

⁷ Feldman 1950:200.

group was recognized by Judaism or if they were just a group of Gentiles who were friendly inclined towards their neighboring Jews.⁸

The way out of the confusion

It will be my aim to investigate whether both the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos* may be seen as Gentile adherents of the Seven Noahide Laws. Traditional Judaism teaches that these laws constitute the original covenant that God made with humanity. Thus, it is taught that there exist two covenants contained within the Torah. 1) The Mosaic Covenant, which is only binding upon the Jews in their role as priests and teachers for the Gentile nations, and 2) the Noahide Covenant, which is binding upon humanity at large.

The existence of the Noahide Code is the reason that traditional Judaism does not teach that all humans must convert to Judaism in order to have a relationship with the Creator, instead Judaism will encourage Gentiles to adhere to the Seven Noahide Laws.⁹ By viewing both the *ger toshav* and the *sebomons* as adherents of the Noahide Covenant, much of the confusion surrounding these groups disappears.

How to proceed

In order to attempt to clear up some of the confusion I will in part I begin with presenting the teachings of traditional Judaism concerning the two categories of proselytes, the *ger tzedek* and the *ger toshav*. I will also present the doctrine of the Seven Noahide Commandments and view the Jewish mission in the light thereof.

In part II I will investigate the use of the word *ger* in the Tanakh and in the Rabbinic literature. The aim will be to establish the difference between the circumcised *ger* and the uncircumcised *ger* and their different characteristics, rights and obligations, both as reflected in the Hebrew Bible and as taught in the Rabbinic literature.

In part III I will turn my attention toward the *sebomenoi ton theon*, the God-fearers. They were a numerous group of God-believing Gentiles who were somehow connected with Jewish life and communities, but without being circumcised. They are frequently met with in Hellenistic literature

⁸ See Part III. Chapter 2.

⁹ See Part I. Chapter 3 and Summary Part I.

and share some similar features with the *ger toshav*. After presenting some definitions and the most important sources for our knowledge about the God-fearers, I will continue with presenting the contemporary scholarly debate about them. I will then present the Rabbinic perspective concerning God-fearers. Thereafter I will investigate God-fearers in the Tanakh.

In part IV I will investigate of how the Hebrew word *ger* has been translated and used in Hellenistic literature, most notably in the LXX, Philo, Josephus and New Testament literature. This will show a correspondence between how the Hebrew word *ger* is translated in Hellenistic literature and how the rabbinic literature differentiates between different categories of *gerim*. I will also have a closer look the most important literary sources for the existence of the God-fearers as these are found in Philo, Josephus and the New Testament literature. This will enable me to draw a clearer picture of the God-fearers as these are portrayed in the investigated literature. The continual presentation of the characteristics of the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos* throughout my study will serve to demonstrate the similarities between these categories.

The above investigations will then enable me to engage in the scholarly debate. Thus, in part V I will critically go through the most important arguments against there existing any connection between the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos*. I will demonstrate the weaknesses of these arguments and I will also present arguments in favor of an identification of the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos*. In part VI I will summarize my study and in my conclusion I will advocate a reevaluation of the scholarly consensus.

My aim

It will not be my intention to conclusively prove the identity between the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos*, but I will use this perspective in an attempt to clear up some of the existing confusion. Consequently, my aim will be to attempt to justify the position that there might be a possible identification between the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos*. Thus, my underlying premiss will be that the terms of *ger toshav* and *sebomenos ton theon*, are complementary. Both terms denoting uncircumcised proselytes who adhere to the Seven Noahide Laws. The main difference being that the former is a specific legal category while the latter is a general, and non-legal, category.

In the following I will not limit myself to use just one translation of *ger*. Dependent upon context and different meanings I want to convey I will variantly use the translations ‘proselyte,’ ‘alien,’ ‘stranger,’ ‘sojourner.’

I will use the abbreviations in SBL-Handbook. Where I have not found an abbreviation in the SBL-Handbook I have written the titles out in full.

PART I. THE *GER TOSHAV* AND THE SEVEN NOAHIDE LAWS

Introduction.

The academic tradition views the *ger toshav* status as primarily a sociological status, comparable to the *metoikoi* in Athens,¹⁰ the *perioikoi* in Sparta, and the *paroikoi* or *katoikoi* in the Ptolemaic empire.¹¹ Traditional Judaism on the other hand views the *ger toshav* status as an independent religious status. Rabbi Benamozegh (1822-1900) states that,

The Mosaic Law accepts as legitimate the presence in the land of Israel of foreigners who do not adhere to the Mosaic religion. Such a «proselyte of the gate» [*ger sha'ar*] or resident stranger (*ger toshav*), fellow-citizen though not co-religionist, is to be distinguished from the «proselyte of the law» (*ger tzedek*), who has completely converted to Judaism. Not only are proselytes of the gate exempt from the dietary prohibitions in the Law, but Israelites, who cannot eat the flesh of an animal which has not been ritually slaughtered, are urged to give it to them rather than sell it to an ordinary stranger (Dt 14:21). This statute is valuable to us for two reasons: the charitable motive which inspires it, and its clear recognition of a legitimate though non-Mosaic category of religion.¹²

A non-Jew can either remain uncircumcised as a *ger toshav* and adhere to the seven Noahide laws or he can circumcise and become obligated to observe the full range of Mosaic law.¹³ Not only is the *ger toshav* entitled to certain civil rights such as to be protected from mistreatment and to receive sustenance if in need,¹⁴ but through his observance of the Noahide laws he is also entitled to

¹⁰ Millar 1986:169.

¹¹ Novak 2011:23.

¹² Benamozegh 1995:249.

¹³ Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, *Hilchot Melakhim* 8:10

¹⁴ *Sifra* (*Torath Kohanim* 25:71) [referenced in *Rashi* on Lev 25:35 (Herczeg 1999)].

merit a share in the world-to-come. The highly influential Jewish philosopher, and codifier of Jewish law, Maimonides (1135-1204) states that,

Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these seven mitzvot and is precise in their observance is considered one of «the pious among the gentiles» and will merit a share in the world to come.

This applies only when he accepts them and fulfills them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moses, our teacher, that Noah's descendants had been commanded to fulfill them previously.

However, if he fulfills them out of intellectual conviction, he is not a resident alien [*ger toshav*], nor of «the pious among the gentiles» [חסידים העולם].¹⁵

In the quote from Maimonides, *ger toshav* and «pious among the gentiles» are interchangeable terms.¹⁶ Even though Maimonides does not here use the term «God-fearer», instead he uses the term «pious among the gentiles», they are equivalent in meaning. To be pious denotes to be devoutly religious, just as to be a God-fearer denotes someone who is devoutly religious. Maimonides differentiating between the *ger toshav* and «the pious among the gentiles» (hebr. 'chassidei umot ha'olam', lit. 'the pious of the nations of the world'), underscores the distinction between the *ger toshav* category which is local, limited to pious Gentiles residing in Israel, and only valid when Israel is sovereign, etc.,¹⁷ and the «pious among the gentiles» (i.e. God-fearers), which is a universal category, applicable for all times and places.

Chapter 1. *Ger Tzedek* and *Ger Toshav* - Two Categories of Proselytes

The Talmudic rabbis differentiate between two main groups of גֵּרִים, 'proselytes', the גֵּר צְדִיק¹⁸ ('righteous proselyte') and the גֵּר תּוֹשָׁב¹⁹ ('resident proselyte'). These are also respectively known

¹⁵ *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melakhim* 8:11 (Maimonides 2001); See also, *t. Sanh.* 13:2; *b. Sanh.* 105a; Weiner 2011:38, «This ruling is based on the very early Rabbinic text *Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer*, section VI (ed. New York 1933, p. 121), as noted by Rambam himself in one of his responsa (*Teshuvot Ha'Rambam*, ed. Blau, vol. I, no. 148): 'The pious of the nations of the world are deemed pious if they observe the seven commandments enjoined upon the descendants of Noach, in all their details.'»; See also footnote 350.

¹⁶ Wolfson 1968: 373-374.

¹⁷ See chapter 2. The *Ger Toshav*.

¹⁸ Kuhn 1968:737, «The term occurs in the 13th Beraka of the Prayer of Eighteen Benedictions in the Pal. and Babyl. recension, and then commonly in Rabb. writings»; *b. Yebam.* 48b; *b. Sanh.* 96b; *b. B. Qam.* 113b.; Overman 1988:19, «In late rabbinic literature the term גֵּר takes on the more technical meaning of a full convert to Judaism (cf. e.g. *Mekhilta Mishpatim* 18: *Sifre Deut.* 307; *b. Shabbat* 31A).»

¹⁹ See *b. Sanh.* 96b where the Syrian general Na'aman (2 Kings chapter 5) is referred to as a *ger toshav* as opposed to Nebuzaradan who is referred to as a *ger tzedek*.

as the *גר בן ברית* (lit. ‘son of the covenant’), circumcised *ger*, and the *גר ערל*, ‘uncircumcised *ger*’.²⁰ The Talmudic dictionary by rabbi Alexander Kohut states that,

There is a *ger* who is a foreigner residing in Israel who has promised not to serve other gods. He is a *ger toshav*. There is also a *ger* who has become a convert in all respects and has become a Jew. This is the *ger tzedek*.²¹

The *גר צדק* are those proselytes who have accepted the whole Torah as opposed to the *גר תושב* who are proselytes who attend divine service and keep the Noahide commandments.²² The *גר תושב* is so called because he is permitted to reside together with the Jewish people in Israel, but without having to become an adopted member of the nation.²³

The Talmudic Rabbis also differentiates between what they call *גר שקר*, ‘false converts’ and *גר צדק*, ‘true converts’.²⁴

Chapter 2. *ger toshav*

The tractate *Avodah Zarah* 64b in the Babylonian Talmud defines who is a *גר תושב*.

Who is a *גר תושב*? Whoever accepted upon himself, before three *chaverim*, not to worship idols. The words of R’ Meir. But the Sages say: Whoever accepted upon himself the seven commandments that the descendants of Noah accepted upon themselves. Others say: These have not [yet] entered into the category of a *גר תושב*. Rather, who is a *גר תושב*? This is «the *גר* who eats *neveilos* (‘carcasses’).»²⁵

²⁰ Kuhn 1968: 741n149.

²¹ Kohut’s ‘*Aruch Completum*,’ quoted in Lake 1933:80.

²² *b. Avod. Zar.* 64b; Kuhn 1968:737.

²³ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Issurei Biah* 14:7.

²⁴ Kuhn 1968:736, «Gentiles who became Jews out of worldly or impure motives were called *גרי השקר* «false proselytes.» These included Gentiles who became Jews to be able to marry or to get the benefit of poor relief, also the *גרי אריות* lit. «lion proselytes» (those converted for fear of lions, 2 K. 17:25 f.), among whom are esp. converted Samaritans and those converted for fear of the Jews in the days of Mordecai and Esther, also *גרי החלומור* lit. «dream proselytes» (those converted as a result of dreams). Common, too, is *גרים גרורים* «proselytes who press in,» cf. the Gibeonites in Jos. 9.»

²⁵ *b. Avod. Zar.* 64b (ed. Goldwurm 2002).

The background for the discussion is an attempt to identify the criteria necessary for who may be granted the legal status of *ger toshav*. The accepted majority opinion is that the foreigner who is to be granted the legal status of *ger toshav* must adhere to the Noahide laws.²⁶ If so, he is granted the right to reside in the land of Israel and to receive support if in need.²⁷

This creates an intrinsic connection between the legal status of *ger toshav* and the seven Noahide laws (*sheva mitzvot benei Noach*). From the perspective of traditional Judaism, the two categories of גֵּרִים are connected with two different law codes which both are contained within the Torah (Oral and Written). The Mosaic code being national and the Noahide code being universal. The *ger tzedek* is the גֵּר who accepts upon himself to adhere to the Mosaic code of law, while the *ger toshav* is the גֵּר who accepts upon himself to adhere to the Noahide code of law.

Even though the legal status of *ger toshav* can only be formally granted to Gentiles who resides under Israelite jurisdiction when the Jubilee years are observed, the title of *ger toshav* can also be used informally about anyone who on his own accepts the Noahide Laws, regardless of time and place of residence.²⁸ Thus, the Syrian general Naaman is referred to as a *ger toshav* even though he did not settle under Israelite jurisdiction.²⁹ As a *ger toshav*, Naaman refrains from idolatry. «Naaman said, ‘At least let there be given to your servant a mule-team’s load of earth, for your servant will never again offer a burnt-offering or any sacrifice to other gods, but only to the LORD.’»³⁰ He also recognizes the Jewish concept of God, «Behold, now I know that there is no God in the whole world except in Israel.»³¹ Later we will see that these two characteristics, acceptance of Jewish monotheism and abstention from idolatry, is also central features of the God-fearers.³²

²⁶ See also, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Kochavim* 10:6.

²⁷ See footnote 14.

²⁸ Zevin 5739/1979: "Ger Toshav, Section 1."

²⁹ See footnote 19.

³⁰ 2 Kgs 5:17.

³¹ 2 Kgs 5:15.

³² See Part III, «God-Fearers»: Definitions and Sources.

Chapter 3. The Noahide laws³³

The closing chapters of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, *Hilchot Melakhim*, end of chapter 8-10, present the topic of Noahide laws in a codified manner. These chapters are followed by the topic of the Messianic era, thus linking these concepts. The Noahide laws consists of seven categories of laws³⁴ which according to traditional Judaism is universal and legally binding upon humanity.³⁵ The earliest Tannaitic reference is found in Tosefta, *Avodah Zarah* 8.4.

«Seven commandments were the sons of Noah commanded: (1) concerning adjudication, (2) and concerning idolatry, (3), and concerning blasphemy, (4) and concerning sexual immorality, (5) and concerning bloodshed, (6) and concerning robbery, (7) and concerning a limb torn from a living animal.»³⁶

The Biblical foundation is recorded in Genesis chapter 9, describing the covenant that God made with Noah and his descendants after the flood. The most extensive Rabbinic debate concerning these laws are found in the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56-60, and it is a topic that is discussed throughout the Talmud.³⁷

As taught by traditional Judaism this covenant between God and humanity goes originally back to Adam. Tractate *Sanhedrin* 56b explains that all the Noahide laws can be exegetically derived from Genesis 2:16.³⁸ The laws are named after Noah since they were given over to him and his descendants when the world was started anew after the flood. «Then God said to Noah and to his

³³ List of some relevant literature on the Noahide laws: Greenstone 1925; Palliere 1971; Lichenstein 1986; Clorfene & Rogalsky 1987; Novak 1989:26-41; Benamozegh 1995; Bindman 1995; Nahum 1998; Bockmuehl 2000:150-162.; Novak 2011; Weiner 2011.

³⁴ Weiner 2011:260, «*Sefer Ha'Hinuch*, section 416, «Do not err about the well-known enumeration of the seven precepts of the Children of Noah as sited in the Talmud. In truth these seven are like seven comprehensive principles which contain numerous particulars.» (ed. Chavel, section 424). Also note Tractate *Sanhedrin* 74b: 'Them [the seven precepts] and all that pertains to them.'; Lichenstein 1995:92.

³⁵ *t. Avod. Zar.* 8.4; *b. Sanh.* 56a-60b; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 9:1; Greenstone 1925:648, «Laws which were supposed by the Rabbis to have been binding upon mankind at large even before the revelation at Sinai, and which are still binding upon non-Jews.»

³⁶ Quoted in Novak 1989:27.

³⁷ Noahide laws discussed in Talmudic literature: *t. Avod. Zar.* 8.4; *t. Avod. Zar.* 9; *b. Erub.* 62a; *b. Pesach.* 22b; *b. Yoma* 28b; *b. Meg.* 13a; *b. Yebam.* 47b; *b. Yebam.* 48b; *b. Yebam.* 62a; *b. Ned.* 31a; *b. B. Qam.* 38a; *b. B. Qam.* 92b; *b. Sanh.* 56a-60b; *b. Sanh.* 71b; *b. Sanh.* 74b; *b. Sanh.* 91b; *b. Sanh.* 105a; *b. Avod. Zar.* 2b; *b. Avod. Zar.* 26a; *b. Avod. Zar.* 51a; *b. Avod. Zar.* 64b; *b. Avod. Zar.* 71b; *b. Mak.* 9a; *b. Mak.* 9b; *b. Chul.* 13b; *b. Chul.* 92a; *b. Chul.* 92b; *b. Chul.* 94a; *y. Avod. Zar.* 2:1.

³⁸ See also *Gen. Rab.* 16.6; *S. Olam Rab.* 5; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 9:1; Weiner 2011:27.

sons with him, ‘As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you.’» (Gen 9:8-9) This universal covenant thus predates the Mosaic covenant.³⁹

In addition to being observed by Adam and Noah and other righteous non-Jewish individuals mentioned in the Tanakh, it was the Noahide Code that was observed by the Patriarchs and their descendants up until the exodus from Egypt and the consequent receiving of the Torah at mount Sinai.⁴⁰ When the Torah was received it also contained the details of the Noahide laws, besides the specific commandments given to the Israelites.⁴¹ Thus, the Noahide laws are an intrinsic part of Torah. Traditional Judaism teaches therefore that the Torah consists of two covenants, the Noahide covenant which is binding upon the descendants of Noah (i.e. all non-Jews) and the Mosaic covenant which is binding upon the descendants of Israel/Jacob (i.e. all Jews).⁴² It is taught that the pre-flood generation were destroyed due to their transgression of these universal laws.⁴³ Later when the knowledge of the Noahide Covenant were in danger of being lost, Abraham, due to his recognition of God as the Creator, was deemed worthy of being the progenitor of a nation whose task was to preserve the knowledge of the Noahide laws and to teach them to the other nations.⁴⁴ Israel was to be a nation of priests⁴⁵ and a light unto the nations.⁴⁶ The Jewish commentator Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235),⁴⁷ known by the acronym Radak, says that Jews are to serve as «a Light unto the nations» by instructing Gentiles in observance of the Noahide Code. Rabbi Benamozegh (1822-1900),⁴⁸ in a letter correspondence to a Gentile interested in converting to Judaism, states that he does not need to convert, but that he can adhere to the Noahide laws. Rabbi Benamozegh

³⁹ Novak 1989:26.

⁴⁰ *b. Yoma 28b; b. Ned. 31a*; See also *Rashi's commentary* on Gen 20:12 and Gen 39:9.

⁴¹ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 8:11; Weiner 2011:28.

⁴² Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 8:10.

⁴³ *Rashi's commentary* on Gen 6:13; *Nachmanides' commentary* on Gen 6:2; Weiner 2011:29n10; See also *b. Sanh. 104b* which relate the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. «Due to the destruction of these cities it is clear that God demands moral conduct from mankind.» (Weiner 2011:29n10).

⁴⁴ Weiner 2011:28, «*Tosafot*, Tractate *Chagigah* 13a states that it is an obligation for the Jews to teach and inform the Gentiles of the Seven Noahide Commandments.»; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Kochavim* 1:3.

⁴⁵ Exod 19:6, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

⁴⁶ Isa 49:6, «He said: It is insufficient that you be a servant for Me [only] to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the ruins of Israel; I will make you a light for the nations (*le'ohr goyim*), so that My salvation may extend to the ends of the earth.», 42:6-7, 60:3.

⁴⁷ Radak on Isaiah 42:6.

⁴⁸ Palliere 1971:142; Lichenstein 1986:8.

explains that the Seven Noahide Laws never ceased to be in force, but since they were in danger of being lost due to negligence, Judaism was created in order to preserve the Noahide laws, to teach them and to spread them. He continues, «The Jews thus exercised, I repeat, the function of priests of humanity, and found themselves subject in this way to the priestly rules which concern them exclusively: the law of Moses.»⁴⁹

Here it can be informative to point out that Abraham was not designated to be the founder of a new religion, instead he was to become a father of a new nation through his descendants Isaac and Jacob.⁵⁰ A nation who was to serve a particular task. It has therefore never been the teaching of traditional Judaism that non-Jews must convert and become Jewish. From the perspective of traditional Judaism this is not a prerequisite for being a righteous human being and thus meriting the world-to-come. Friedenthal states,

We do not press the Gentile to enter the community of Abraham our father, but our sublime mission, inherited from the first patriarch, is to convert Gentiles to the religion of the «proselyte of the gate,» which consists of abjuring polytheism and observing the seven *mitzvot* of Noah.⁵¹

All humans, regardless of nationality, already have a binding covenant with God.⁵² It is only due to their priestly task that Jews are obligated in their particular ritual laws and dietary rules, laws that are not incumbent upon Gentiles. The task of the Jews are thus to remind and teach the other nations about the existence of God and their already existing code of law which primarily consists of upholding some basic moral laws.⁵³ Thus, Judaism consists of a particular blend of nationality and universality. It can therefore be stated that within the family of nations the Israelites, who are reckoned as the firstborn,⁵⁴ are to serve as priests, the other nations with all their different traits and characteristics, are to serve as the congregation. Those who so desires can become Jewish and take part of the particular Jewish task or they can remain within their already existing nationality and

⁴⁹ Palliere 1971:144.

⁵⁰ Gen 12:2, «I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.»

⁵¹ Friedenthal 1823:122,4 (in Hebrew) quoted in Benamozegh 1995:243.

⁵² *Hilchot Melachim* 8:11, 9:1; Weiner 2011:32-33.

⁵³ *Hilchot Melachim* 8:10, «Moses was commanded by the Almighty to compel all the inhabitants of the world to accept the commandments given to Noah's descendants.»

⁵⁴ Exodus 4:22

adhere to the Noahide Code.⁵⁵ This perspective thus require that the Jewish nation and the Gentile nations to work together within the framework laid down by the Torah. That the Jews fulfill their particular rules, the 613 commandments, and that the Gentiles fulfill their general laws, the 7 Noahide commandments. While Gentiles upholding the Noahide laws will ensure civilized societies to sprout, the Jews upholding of the Mosaic laws will make the world more attuned to spirituality. Rabbi Benamozeg states,

Mankind cannot rise to the essential principles on which society must rest unless it meets with Israel. And Israel cannot fathom the depths of its own Tradition unless it meets with mankind.⁵⁶

On the one hand Gentiles are forbidden to study Torah which does not relate to them, on the other hand if they fulfill their part of the Torah [i.e. the seven Noahide laws] they are as worthy as a Jewish high-priest.⁵⁷ This would indicate that a Gentile who lives within his covenant has an independent religious status. Jews and Gentiles are from this perspective viewed as two interdependent components that both must be adhere to their special covenant in order for the world to reach its completion, i.e. the Messianic age, an era where the entire world will open recognize the existence of God.⁵⁸

«All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and prostrate themselves before Thee, O Lord; and they shall glorify Thy name» (Psalms 86:9). That the other nations will not convert and become Jewish in the Messianic era is justified by all the references to other nations⁵⁹ in the prophetic passages that describe the future age where peace will reign and where the world will be full of the knowledge of God.⁶⁰ All nations will retain their nationality (i.e., they will not convert and become

⁵⁵ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 8:10.

⁵⁶ Palliere 1971:243.

⁵⁷ *b.Sanh.* 59a (ed. Goldwurm), «Rabbi Yochanan said: A gentile who studies Torah is liable for death as it says (Deuteronomy 33:4) "Moses commanded us Torah as a heritage." It is a heritage for us and not for them... Rabbi Meir would say: How do we know that even a gentile who engages in the study of Torah is like a Jewish high priest? As it says (Leviticus 18:5) "Which man shall do [i.e. study] and by which he shall live [in the afterlife]." It does not say "priests, Levites, and Israelites" but "man". We learn from here that even a gentile who engages in the study of Torah is like a Jewish high priest. [We answer the contradiction between Rabbi Yochanan's statement and Rabbi Meir's that] there [Rabbi Meir] is referring to their seven commandments.»

⁵⁸ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melakhim* 12:5.

⁵⁹ See f.ex. Isa 2:2, 4; Jer 16:19, Zech 2:15; Psalms 23, 67:5, 102:16, 117:1; and numerous other places.

⁶⁰ Isa 11:9.

Jewish), but they will recognize the existence of God and adhere to the Noahide covenant. The Jews will be great Sages and the nations will stream to Jerusalem for their guidance.⁶¹

Summary - The Jewish mission

The concept of Noahide laws in traditional Judaism helps to clarify the Jewish concept of mission and conversion. The mission understood from this perspective is not so much to convert the Gentiles to become members of the Jewish nation, but to educate the nations regarding the existence of God and the moral obligations that are incumbent upon them.

Rashi (1040-1104) quotes *Sifrei* in his commentary to the *Shema*,

The Lord, who is now our God and not the God of the other nations - He will be [declared] in the future «the one God,» as it is said: «For then I will convert the peoples to a pure language that all of them call in the name of the Lord» (Zeph 3:9), and it is [also] said: «On that day will the Lord be one and His name one» (Zech 14:9).⁶²

Goodman⁶³ contrasts between Judaism's general educational mission to enlighten humankind and the proselytizing mission of Christianity and Islam to convert all humans to membership of a specific religious group. Rashi specifies in his commentary to Tractate *Sotah* 10b that «I am a convert» means «I have abandoned idol worship.»⁶⁴ The Jewish mission is thus not to convert Gentiles to Judaism, but to convert them away from idolatry and toward a recognition of the existence of the One God,⁶⁵ and to make them adhere to the original covenant that existed between God and mankind.

⁶¹ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 12:5.; Isaiah 2:2.

⁶² *Rashi's commentary* to Deut. 6:4 (transl. Herczeg 1999).

⁶³ Goodman 1994:10.

⁶⁴ *b. Sotah* 10a, that before having the relations, Tamar told Judah, "I am a convert," and Rashi explains there that this means, "I have abandoned idol worship." [Quoted from Weiner 2011:520n139.]

⁶⁵ This mission also has its precedent in the mission of Abraham; *b. Avod. Zar.* 9a; *b. Ned.* 32a; *b. Sanh.* 99b; *Sifre* 2.32; *Gen. Rab.* 39:14; *Gen Rab.* 84:4; *Tanhuma Lekh Lekha* 12; see also; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah* 1:3, «he [Abraham] began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him» (quoted in Maimonides 1990).

Part II. *Ger* in the Tanakh and Rabbinic Literature

Introduction.

A reading of the Tanakh shows that the word גֵר has a variety of meanings dependent upon the context where it is used. In its most general meaning it can potentially denote any foreigner. It will also be demonstrated that the general category of ‘proselyte’ (*ger*) can be divided into two different subcategories of proselytes, i.e, the proselyte who becomes an adopted member of the Israelite nation and the proselyte who lives under Israelite jurisdiction but without becoming an adopted member of the Israelite nation. These will most commonly hereafter be referred to as respectively the ‘circumcised proselyte’ and the ‘uncircumcised proselyte.’ In Rabbinical language⁶⁶ the former is referred to as *ger tzedek*, ‘righteous proselyte’ and the latter as *ger toshav*, ‘resident proselyte.’

Ger in the Lexicons

Gesenius’ Hebrew lexicon⁶⁷ defines גֵר (masculin noun) as having the general meaning of «a sojourner, stranger, foreigner, a person living out of his own country.» The opposite meaning is the גֵרֵי אֶרֶץ, a native. Besides its primary meaning as ‘sojourner,’ the lexicon of Brown-Driver-Briggs⁶⁸ also uses the word «alien» and specifies the גֵר as a «temporary dweller, newcomer (no inherited rights)». Hebrew lexicography reckons that the root גֵר have three meanings, I, «to tarry as a sojourner,» II, «to attack, strive,» and III, «to be afraid.»⁶⁹ There is a discussion whether these are independent roots or if an original connection can be established between them.⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that none of the above lexicons list the meaning ‘proselyte.’

⁶⁶ See part II, chapter 2. *ger* in the rabbinic literature.

⁶⁷ Gesenius 1846.

⁶⁸ BDB 1907.

⁶⁹ Kellermann 1986:439-440; Gesenius differ, instead of «to attack, strive», he has the meaning of «to be gathered together».

⁷⁰ Ibid. 440.

Chapter 1. *Ger* in the Tanakh

Ger as an Alien⁷¹ [גַּר]

The first time the word גַּר is introduced as a noun in the Tanakh is in Genesis 15:13, «And He said to Abram, ‘Know well that your offspring shall be strangers [גַּר] in a land not theirs and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years’». In Gen. 12:10 the word is used as a verb, «There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn [לָגַר] there, for the famine was severe in the land.» Thus, by settling away from the place where one is considered as a native one becomes a sojourner (alien, foreigner, stranger), i.e. a *ger*. The word is used in this sense, either as a noun or a verb, extensively throughout the Tanakh. As pointed out by Kellermann, Abraham is described as a *ger*, as are Lot, Isaac, Jacob, Jacob and the brothers of Joseph, Jacob and Esau. The Jews in the Babylonian exile are also referred to as *gerim*.⁷²

It is significant that the designation *ger* is used extensively describing the Patriarchs and their families, but not their descendants, the Israelites, after they leave Egypt and enter the Sinai covenant.⁷³ This is also noted by Spina who writes, «Thus, for the most part the biblical tradition is remarkably consistent in portraying Israel as *gerim* only prior to the settlement in Canaan.»⁷⁴

Even though *ger* in its general meaning denotes a foreigner, it seemingly does not denote any kind of foreigner. Deuteronomy 14:21 differentiates between the foreigner (*ger*) who can be given gifts, and the foreigner (*nokri*) who must buy what can be given as a gift to the *ger*. Overman⁷⁵ points out that the Hebrew scriptures use two different terms for «foreigner», גַּר and נֹכְרִי. The גַּר are foreigners who in some way have become part of the Israelite community while the נֹכְרִי are

⁷¹ Alt. trans. «stranger», «sojourner», «foreigner», «proselyte».

⁷² Kellermann 1986:444-445; Gen 17:8, 20:1, 21:23, 21:34, 23:4 (Abraham as *ger*); Gen. 19:9 (Lot as *ger*); Gen. 26:3, 35:27, 37:1 (Isaac as *ger*); Gen. 28:4, 32:5 (Jacob as *ger*); Gen 47:4, 47:9 (Jacob and the brothers of Joseph as *ger*); Gen. 36:7 (Jacob and Esau as *ger*); Ezr. 1:4 (Jews in exile as *ger*).

⁷³ One exception is Ezra 1:4, but here the verb form is used, not the noun. The other exceptions are when the word גַּר is used to describe an essential human condition (see below).

⁷⁴ Spina 1983:322.

⁷⁵ Overman 1988:18-19

foreigners who are temporarily in the land, often for purposes of trade. Kuhn writes that «the *nokri* is outside the national and religious fellowship of Israel and is without rights or protection.»⁷⁶

The *ger hagar*⁷⁷ [הַגֵּר הַגֵּר]

Besides the general meaning where *ger* can denote any sojourner, the word also takes on a restricted technical meaning, referring to sojourners who have become full proselytes, i.e. who have been circumcised and become like Israelites. This is a meaning of *ger* that first becomes possible with the exodus from Egypt and the formation of the Israelite nation, following the first commandments given collectively to the Israelite nation from Exodus 12:2.⁷⁸ To become a proselyte in this sense is to become bound by the covenant that is established between God and the Israelite nation. The exodus from Egypt which leads to the revelation at Sinai is in this respect a defining feature for who is an Israelite and who is not an Israelite. That is, those who are bound by the commandments in the Mosaic covenant are Israelites, and this includes those foreigners who let themselves be circumcised and through this act attains full citizenship.

An example of this technical meaning of *ger* is Exodus 12:48-49,

If a *ger* [גֵּר] who resides [יָגֵר] 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 [כְּאֶזְרָח] of the land. But no uncircumcised [עֵרֵל] person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the *ger* who resides [לְגֵר הַגֵּר] among you.

Through circumcision this *ger* becomes a full proselyte, i.e., a citizen of the Israelite nation. He is thereby bound by the national law (i.e. the Mosaic law) just like the native. It is noteworthy that in all the places in the Tanakh where it is emphasized that there shall be one law for the native and the *ger* we find the double expression of the word גֵּר.⁷⁹ The double expression of a word is a common

⁷⁶ Kuhn 1968:728.

⁷⁷ Alt. transl. «the stranger who dwells», «the foreigner who sojourns», «the proselyte who resides», etc.

⁷⁸ The classic rabbinic commentator Rashi starts his commentary of Genesis with a discussion of why the Torah starts with the creation of the world and not with the words «This month shall be for you..» (Ex. 12:2) which is the first commandment given to the Jewish people (transl. Herczeg 1999).

⁷⁹ Double use of the word גֵּר together with the emphasis that there shall be one law for the native and the *ger*: Ex. 12:19, 12:49; Lev. 16:29, 18:26, 20:2, 24:22; Num. 9:14, 15:14, 15:15 [twice]; 15:26, 15:29, 19:10; Ezk. 47:22.

device used throughout the Tanakh to intensify and emphasize the meaning of a word.⁸⁰ Seemingly, by the double expression of the word גַּר, the meaning of sojourning becomes intensified, emphasizing that the sojourner becomes one with the people he is sojourning with,⁸¹ i.e. that he becomes a proselyte to Judaism, to the degree that he also is entitled to receive future inheritance in the territory of the tribe in which he settles down.⁸²

The *ger* in Exodus 12:48-49 is made distinct through being contrasted with the resident alien, the *toshav*,⁸³ and the *sakhir* (hired hand). These latter are in Exodus 12:45 explicitly forbidden to partake of the Passover meal.⁸⁴ This statement also makes it clear that the *toshav* and the *sakhir* are uncircumcised, in contrast to «the *ger* who sojourns.»

The following characteristics of the «*ger* who sojourns» can be made based on the above:

- 1) He is a full proselyte, i.e. he becomes a citizen of the Israelite nation with equal rights as the natives (one law for the *ezra* and the *ger ha'gar*).
- 2) He is identified in the text when there is a double expression of גַּר.
- 3) If male he must be circumcised, in contrast with the *toshav* and *sakhir* who remains uncircumcised.
- 4) Entitled to receive future inheritance in the land.

⁸⁰ F.ex. Gen 2:17 «you shall surely die» (repetition of the word for dying); Gen. 37:33, «Joseph has surely been torn to pieces» (repetition of the word for being torn). Also, "servant of servants" (Gen 9:25), "Sabbath of sabbaths" (Ex 31:15), "Vanity of vanities" (Eccl 1:2) or "Song of songs" (Song of Songs 1:1)

⁸¹ The following verses use the double expression of גַּר: Ex.12:48; 12:49; Lev. 16:29, 17:8, 17:10, 17:12, 17:13, 18:26, 19:33, 19:34, 20:2; Num. 9:14, 15:14, 15:15, 15:16, 15:26, 15:29, 19:10, 20:9; Ezk. 14:7, 47:22, 47:23.

⁸² Ezek 47:22-23, «You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe aliens reside, there you shall assign them their inheritance, says the Lord GOD.»

⁸³ Kuhn 1968:740, «In the OT (...) תושב means the non-Jew in Israel standing in the sociological relation of the resident alien...» .

⁸⁴ Exod 12:45, «A sojourner [תושב] or a hired hand [שכיר] may not partake of it.»

The *ger* in Your Towns⁸⁵ [גֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ]

Besides the above category of a *ger* who has to undergo circumcision (if male) and who is legally equal with the native, there evidently exists a category of a *ger* who is attached to the Israelite community without being circumcised and who is not obligated to adhere to the full range of Israelite law, but still enjoys a privileged and protected status. An example is Deuteronomy 14:21,

You shall not eat anything that has died of itself; you may give it to the aliens [גֵּר] residing in your towns⁸⁶ [אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ] for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner [נְכָרִי]. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.

The verse cannot refer to a circumcised *ger*, since a circumcised *ger* is as forbidden in the same way as an Israelite to eat a carcass.⁸⁷ Further, the *ger* in the above verse is also differentiated from the *nokri*.

The phrase «the *ger* in your towns» is also found elsewhere in the Tanakh.⁸⁸ Two of these occurrences concern Sabbath observance.⁸⁹ In Deuteronomy 24:14⁹⁰ the Israelites are commanded to not mistreat the «*ger* who are in your land in your cities». The *ger* is here contrasted with «your brothers» [אֶחָיִךָ] indicating that he might not be a circumcised *ger*.

The phrase «*ger* in your towns» is also used in Deuteronomy 31:12, «Assemble the people: the men, the women, and the children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns [וְגֵרֵךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ], so that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law [הַתּוֹרָה]»⁹¹

⁸⁵ Variantly translated as, «the stranger within your cities», «the proselyte at your gates», «the stranger within your gates», etc.

⁸⁶ Alt. transl.: «communities» (JPS), «cities» (Stone Tanakh).

⁸⁷ Cf. Lev. 17:15 which stresses that the native or the *ger* who eats a carcass must undergo purification.

⁸⁸ The phrase «גֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ» are found in Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14, 14:21, 24:14, 31:12.

⁸⁹ «Ger in your towns» and Sabbath observance: Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14.

⁹⁰ Deut 24:14, «You shall not withhold the wages of a poor or destitute hired worker, of your brothers or of your strangers who are in your land within your cities [מִמְגֵּרֵךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרְצְךָ בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ].» (Stone Tanakh)

⁹¹ See also Josh 8:35.

This verse is potentially significant since it points toward the Gentiles having a code of law, which is distinct from the Mosaic code, but which is still part of the Torah. The people listed; the men, the women, the children and the *ger* in your towns are obligated in different commandments. Men are obligated in commandments that women and the *ger* in your towns (i.e. uncircumcised *ger*) are not obligated to do. Women are obligated to do commandments that men and *ger* in your cities are not obligated to do, etc. Meaning that each group is by themselves unable to observe all the words of the Torah.⁹² Only with the full gathering of the men, women, and the uncircumcised *ger* can all the words of the Torah be observed. That is, without the presence of the «*ger* in your towns» (*ger asher bisharekha*) «all the words of this Torah» cannot be observed. Without them, only the words for the Israelite men and the Israelite women (including the circumcised *gerim*) could be observed, but not the words meant for the non-Israelites (i.e. Gentiles). Besides pointing toward the existence of a distinct code of law for Gentiles, it also implies that, only through the Gentiles attachment to the Israelite nation can they become educated in their obligations, in their «words of this Torah». Thus, the required presence of both Israelites and Gentiles points to their interdependency and their necessary cooperation enabling them in partnership to «observe to do all the words of this Torah.» The phrase «in your towns» is also used in connection with Levites, widows and orphans⁹³ and there are several other places where the *ger* is listed together with these groups.⁹⁴ In these passages the Israelites are explicitly forbidden to oppress the rights of the Levites, the widows, the orphans and the *ger*. The phrase «in your towns» might suggest that the uncircumcised *ger* is not allowed to buy land, which is a right reserved for the natives. The place of residence for the uncircumcised *ger* would therefore most likely be in the cities, where they also have the opportunity to acquire real

⁹² Children are not obligated in commandments, but are present in order to learn, see the following verse, Deut 31:13.

⁹³ See the following verses (my emphasises): Deut 14:29, «And the Levite because he has no portion or inheritance with you and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, **who are in your cities**, will come and eat and be satisfied.»; Deut. 16:11, «...and the Levite who is **within your cities**, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow...»; Deut. 26:12, «When you have finished tithing all the tithes of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give [them] to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, so that they can eat to satiety **in your cities**.» (Stone Tanakh transl.)

⁹⁴ The *ger* listed together with orphans and widows (and Levites - mentioned less frequently): Dt. 14:29 (to receive second tithe), 16:11 (rejoicing during Shavous), 16:14 (rejoicing during Succos), 24:17 (do not pervert their rights), 24:19 (gifts to the poor from the harvest), 24:20 (leave olives for the poor), 24:21 (leave grapes for the poor), 26:13 (gifts to the poor), 27:19 (do not pervert their rights); Jer. 7:6; (do not oppress the stranger), 22:3 (do not oppress the stranger); Ezek. 22:7 (the stranger has been oppressed), 22:29 (the stranger has been oppressed); Zech. 7:10 (do not oppress the stranger); Mal. 3:5 (do not oppress the stranger).

estate.⁹⁵ Additionally, several statements grant these groups the right to receive tithes and gifts from the harvest. They are also to be included in the observance of the Festival of Weeks⁹⁶ and Feast of Booths.⁹⁷ The fact that the circumcised *ger* is already included in the commandment to observe all the Israelite festivals⁹⁸ strengthens the thesis that these verses may refer to the uncircumcised *ger*. Further, the uncircumcised *ger* is more subject to poverty and in need of special protection, as is the case with the other groups who are dependent,⁹⁹ such as the Levites, the widows and the orphans.

The following characteristics of «the *ger* in your cities» can be made based on the above:

- 1) He lives primarily in the cities.
- 2) He is contrasted with «your brothers» (i.e. Israelites) and «the foreigner» (*nokri*).
- 3) He is the beneficiary recipient of gifts.
- 4) He is listed together with other dependent groups (Levites, widows and orphans).
- 5) He is secured certain basic rights, such as the right of protection from abuse and poverty.
- 6) He is a participant in some of the major Israelite festivals.
- 7) He is expected to learn and observe Torah and to fear God (Deut. 31:12).
- 8) He is not obligated to observe the full range of Torah law.

⁹⁵ All land that is sold will revert back to the Israelite owners during the Jubilee year. It seems as the uncircumcised *ger* can acquire property in the cities, due to these properties are exempt from the laws of the Jubilee years. See Lev. 25:29-31, which says that if a house in a walled city is sold and is not redeemed it stays with the buyer, this does not apply to a house in an open city, this house does revert back to the original owner.

⁹⁶ Deut. 16:10-11, «And you shall perform the Festival of Weeks to the Lord, your God, the donation you can afford to give, according to how the Lord, your God, shall bless you. And you shall rejoice before the Lord, your God, -you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite who is within your cities, and the stranger [גֵּר], and the orphan, and the widow, who are among you, in the place which the Lord, your God, will choose to establish His Name therein.» (Stone Tanakh transl.)

⁹⁷ Deut. 16:13-14, «You shall make yourself the Festival of Sukkoth for seven days, when you gather in [the produce] from your threshing floor and your vat. And you shall rejoice in your Festival - you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite, and the stranger [גֵּר], and the orphan, and the widow, who are within your cities.» (Stone Tanakh transl.)

⁹⁸ Lev 23.

⁹⁹ See Olyan 2000:75-80, where he writes about the *ger toshav* and 'dependent lists' in the Tanakh.

The *ger* in Your Land [גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם]

In contrast to the above phrase «*ger* in your towns», the Tanakh also uses the phrase «*ger* in your land». This phrase is only found in two places¹⁰⁰ which speak of rights and the protection that are to be granted the *ger*. One of the places is Lev 19:33-34,

When an alien resides with you in your land [וְכִי יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם], you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides [הַגֵּר הַגֵּר] with you shall be to you as the citizen among you [כְּאֶזְרָח]; you shall love the alien as yourself for you were aliens [גֵרִים] in the land of Egypt.

Considering the context it seems as if the «*ger* in your land» in this verse may be the circumcised *ger*. This is indicated by the double expression of *ger* and the emphasis on him being as one of your natives.¹⁰¹

The second place where the phrase «*ger* in your land» is used is in Deuteronomy 24:14, here it also appears in conjugation with «*ger* who is in your towns» which was discussed above.¹⁰²

The following characteristics of the «*ger* in your land» can be made based on the above:

- 1) He is entitled legal protection («shall not be wronged or cheated»).
- 2) He is to receive special care («love him as yourself»).
- 3) He lives with the natives (*ha'ger ha'gar*).
- 4) He is to be like one of the natives, i.e., a circumcised *ger*.

¹⁰⁰ «*ger* in your land» in the Tanakh: Lev. 19:33; Deut. 24:14

¹⁰¹ See argumentation above under the heading «the Sojourner who Sojourns».

¹⁰² See Part II. Chapter 2, 'Ger in the Rabbinic Literature,' where the phrase «*ger* in your land» will be discussed in light of Rabbinic commentaries.

The *ger toshav*¹⁰³ [גֵּר תוֹשָׁב]

Toshav, the nominal form of *yashav*, «to dwell», occurs 13 times in the Tanakh.¹⁰⁴ In many of these verses *toshav* is accompanying the word *ger*. This has led most academic scholars to regard the conjugation *ger w'toshav* as a hendiadys.¹⁰⁵ The phrase *ger w'toshav* is not then to be read as «the sojourner and the resident», as if they were two distinct groups. Instead, it should be read as «the sojourner (*ger*) who is (*w'*) a resident (*toshav*)», that is, the resident sojourner (*ger toshav*).

Ger and *toshav* are used in combination with each other a total of 10 times in the Tanakh,¹⁰⁶ although not all of these occurrences are necessarily to be regarded as instances of hendiadys.¹⁰⁷ Leviticus 25:47 is the only instance where *ger toshav* occur without the connecting *waw*,

If a resident alien [גֵּר תוֹשָׁב] among you has prospered, and your kinsman being in straits, comes under his authority and gives himself over to the resident alien [גֵּר תוֹשָׁב] among you, or to an offshoot of an alien's family.¹⁰⁸

This single occurrence is preceded earlier in the verse by the combination *ger w'toshav* which indicate that the two expressions are synonymous and that *ger w'toshav* therefore must be understood as a hendiadys. The expression *ger w'toshav* is used 3 times in the Pentateuch.¹⁰⁹ In Gen. 23:4 it is used as a self-description by Abraham when he wants to buy a burial site from the Hittites. The two other places are both in Leviticus 25 and are respectively commanding the

¹⁰³ Alt. transl. «resident alien» (JPS; NRSV); «a resident non-Jew» (Stone Tanakh); «resident stranger» (Kellermann 1986); «temporary resident» (Houten 2009)

¹⁰⁴ *Toshav* occurrences in Tanakh: Gen. 23:4; Ex. 12:45; Lev. 22:10, 25:6, 25:23, 25:35, 25:40, 25:45, 25:47 [twice]; Num. 35:15; Ps. 39:13; 1 Chr. 29:15; Kellermann 1986: 448.

¹⁰⁵ Kellermann 1986:448.

¹⁰⁶ *Ger* and *toshav* used in combination with each: Gen. 23:4; Lev. 25:6, 23, 35, 45, 47 [twice]; Num. 35:15; Ps. 39:13; 1 Chr. 29:15

¹⁰⁷ The following places are questionable as hendiadys; Lev. 25:6 («your resident [וְלִתְּוֹשָׁבֵיךָ] who lives [הַגֵּרִים] among you»); Lev. 25:45 («the residents who live among you [הַתְּוֹשָׁבִים הַגֵּרִים עִמָּכֶם]»); Num. 35:15 (cities of refuge for the *ger* and the *toshav* [וְלִתְּוֹשָׁבֵי בְּתוֹכָם]); Ps. 39:13 [כִּי גֵר אֶנֶכִי עִמָּךְ תוֹשָׁב] and 1 Chr. 29:15 [כִּי גֵרִים אֶנְחֶנּוּ לְפָנֶיךָ וְתוֹשָׁבִים] uses *ger* and *toshav* in parallelism. (These translations follows the Stone Tanakh.)

¹⁰⁸ JPS transl. Note that both *ger w'toshav* and *ger toshav* is translated as 'resident alien.'

¹⁰⁹ Gen. 23:4 (about Abraham); Lev. 25:35 (support the *ger w'toshav*); Lev. 25:47 (if an Israelite has become a slave for the *ger w'toshav* he must be redeemed).

Israelites to support the *ger w'toshav* if he becomes destitute (Lev. 25:35)¹¹⁰ and to redeem the Israelites who sells himself as a slave¹¹¹ to the *ger toshav* (Lev. 25:47). The slave is to be treated according to certain entitled rights, «Like a laborer [ke'sakir] or a resident [ke'toshav] shall he be with you» (Lev. 25:40). Seemingly, not only is the *ger w'toshav* entitled support if needed, and to be protected from mistreatment, but he can also advance in society, making a large enough fortune enabling (and allowing) him to acquire slaves from among the native Israelites. These slaves must then be redeemed by the Israelites following legal procedures, i.e. they cannot be taken illegally from the *ger w'toshav*.

When the word *toshav* occurs without the word *ger*, but in conjunction with the *sakir*,¹¹² it seems to be synonymous with the *ger toshav*. This occurs in two places,¹¹³ and especially in Exodus 12:45 the *toshav* cannot be an Israelite resident or a circumcised resident since the latter is allowed to eat of the Passover meal. *Toshav* is here likely used as a metonym referring to the category *ger toshav*.

The category of *ger toshav* may also be applied to Abraham who, technically speaking, was not an Israelite (i.e. not a Jew).¹¹⁴ As a newcomer who has taken up residence in the land (i.e. as a *ger toshav*), he asks the citizens of the land, the Hittites, the right to buy a burial site for his wife.

¹¹⁰ Lev 25:35 is variantly translated as «If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side» (JPS) and «If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him [whether] a convert or a resident, so that he can live with you.» (Stone Tanakh). These translations (and others) variantly translates *ger w'toshav* as one category (JPS - resident alien) or as two categories (Stone Tanakh - convert and resident). In the latter case the resident would still be equivalent to a *ger toshav* (resident alien), since this resident is distinguished from both the convert resident (*ger*) and the native resident (קָרֵן, 'kinsman', 'brother'). Further, as in Exod 12:45 the single reference to *toshav* (without the hendiadys *ger w'toshav*) would here be functioning as a metonym implying the *ger toshav*, i.e. the 'alien resident'.

¹¹¹ 'Slave' is to be understood as 'indentured laborer', see Lev. 25:48-54 (Lev. 25:53, «He shall be with him as an employee hired year by year; he shall not enslave him with rigor in your sight.»)

¹¹² Often translated as 'hired laborer' (JPS), 'hired hand' (Stone Tanakh), 'hired worker' (NIV), 'hired servant' (ESV).

¹¹³ *Toshav and sakir together in Tanakh*: Exod 12:45; Lev. 22:10, 25:6, 25:40; *Ger and sakir*: Mal. 3:5.

¹¹⁴ Living prior to the Sinai covenant he was not legally bound to follow the full range of Jewish law, which at this point had not been revealed. Jewish sources would still assert that through prophetic insights he knew and observed all of the commandments, even though he was not explicitly commanded to do so, instead he was obliged to adhere to the Noahide commandments (see footnote 135).

***Ger Toshav* and the Noahide commandments - Deduced prohibitions**

Prohibition against idolatry: The uncircumcised גֵר who was allowed to dwell under Israelite jurisdiction was prohibited from worshipping idolatry. This can be deduced from Exodus 23:33, «They [the Canaanites] shall not dwell in your land, lest they cause you to sin against Me, that you will worship their gods, which will be a snare for you.»¹¹⁵ Since the Canaanites lost their right to live in the land, there is no reason to think that other peoples, Israelites or Gentiles were allowed to practice idolatry while living in the land of Israel. Elsewhere the Israelites are explicitly warned against tolerating idolatry in the land of Israel.¹¹⁶ Prohibition against sexual immorality: As shown by Leviticus 18:24,¹¹⁷ all who were to live in the land of Israel were generally held accountable to a higher degree of morality than the Canaanites who due to their sexual immoral practices had forfeited the right to live in the land. This implies that certain practices are forbidden in the land, regardless of national status. Prohibition against cursing God: Leviticus 24:15 which speaks about the prohibition against cursing God, uses the double expression שׂוֹאֵל שׂוֹאֵל, *ish ish*, which is translated ‘anyone.’ Seemingly this expression denote that the prohibition against cursing God is not restricted to natives and proselytes, but to any who resides in the land, thus including the *ger toshav*. Prohibition against murder: Leviticus 24:17 continues with stating that if a man (not specifying wether a man is an Israelite or a proselyte) kills a man he will be put to death. This prohibition would most likely also include the *ger toshav*.¹¹⁸

The following characteristics of the category «*ger toshav*» can be made based on the above:

- 1) Implied when either the hendiadys *ger w'toshav* is used or just *toshav*.
- 2) Uncircumcised.
- 3) Entitled to receive sustenance if in need (Lev 25:35).
- 4) Can acquire wealth and slaves (Lev 25:47).

¹¹⁵ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Kochavim* 10:6, «Even a temporary resident or a merchant who travels from place to place should not be allowed to pass through our land until he accepts the seven universal laws commanded to Noah and his descendants, as [Exod 23:33] states: "They shall not dwell in your land" - i.e., even temporarily.» (in Maimonides 1990)

¹¹⁶ Deut 12:2, «You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree.»

¹¹⁷ Lev 18:24, «Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves.»

¹¹⁸ Cf. Gen. 9:6, «Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.»

- 5) Forbidden to worship idolatry (Exod 23:33; Deut 12:2).
- 6) Forbidden to commit forbidden sexual relations (Lev 18:24).
- 7) Forbidden to blaspheme (Lev 24:15).
- 8) Forbidden to commit murder (Lev 24:17).

Here we see demonstrated that most of the Noahide commandments can simply be deduced from the Biblical text. So either way, whether one accepts the notion of a Noahide code or not, it is still clear that a basic level of morality is required from those who are not Jewish in order for them to receive permission to reside in the land.

***Ger toshav* as a fundamental human experience.**

In a deeper and more fundamental sense all humans are *gerim w'toshavim* ('resident foreigners'), in the sense that we are just temporarily living a life here on earth.¹¹⁹ Psalms 39:13(12), «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 [גר], an alien [תושב], like all my forebears». ¹²⁰ 1 Chr. 29:15, «For we are aliens [גרים] and transients [ותושבים] before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.» A feeling of being estranged is conveyed.

In the Tanakh this idea is also expressed in Leviticus 25:23, «The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land belongs to Me, for you are resident strangers [גרים ותושבים] with Me.» Since the Israelites will inherit the land and become permanent residents (i.e. natives of the land), the description *ger w'toshav* ('resident aliens') will no longer apply to them.¹²¹ Still, with God they will always remain *geri toshav*. This also points toward the relative nature of the category *ger toshav*. The non-Israelites are *geri toshav* in relation to the native Israelites. The status of *ger toshav* is then a common denominator shared by the Patriarchs and the Gentiles, who are uncircumcised and dwell together with the native Israelites. As such it also denotes a devotional

¹¹⁹ References in the Tanakh to the *ger toshav* as a fundamental human experience: Lev. 25:23; Ps. 39:13; 119:19; 1 Chr. 29:15; Kellermann 1986:449.

¹²⁰ See also Psalms 119:19, «I am a stranger in the land [גר אֲנֹכִי בְאֶרֶץ]; do not hide Your commandments from me.»

¹²¹ Cf. Gen. 15:13, «And He said to Abram, "You shall surely know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years.» This also imply that after the four hundred years, they will no longer be 'strangers' (*gerim*).

relationship to God. This is noted by Schmidt, «dwelling with God, which is possible only for the righteous. It is much, indeed everything, to be God's guest.»¹²²

As will be shown, when Christianity becomes a religion, Christians reject the category of *ger toshav* understood as a recognized class of Gentiles who are obliged to stand in a relationship to Israel.¹²³ Instead Christians adopt the above allegorical understanding of being a *ger toshav*, a stranger and a sojourner, in the world.¹²⁴ With this rejection of the *ger toshav* as a social class with religious obligations and the adoption of the an allegorical understanding of the concept of *ger toshav*, the Christians identify themselves as the kin of the Israelite Patriarchs and as the true heirs of the promise made by God to Abraham (Gen. 15).

Summary

It has been the intention in this chapter to demonstrate that the Tanakh operates with different categories of *gerim*. Even though it is not always evident which category of *ger* the text is referring to, it is clear that the texts operate with different categories of *ger*, mainly the circumcised *ger* and the uncircumcised *ger*.¹²⁵ The category of *ger* is dependent upon the degree of attachment to the Israelite community, or, to be more precise, depends upon which code of law the *ger* is obligated to follow. The *ger* who becomes circumcised commits himself to adhere to the Mosaic code of law ('one law for the native and for the *ger* who lives in your midst'). This *ger* becomes like an adopted member of the Israelite community ('he will be like the native of the land'). The other category of *ger* is the one who also lives among the Israelites, but without being circumcised¹²⁶ and without having to adhere to the Mosaic code of law.¹²⁷

¹²² Schmidt 1968:844.

¹²³ See part IV, chapter 4.

¹²⁴ 1 Peter 2:11, «Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles [hebr. translation, גרים תושבים] to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.»

¹²⁵ Practically speaking, there could be the possibility of an uncircumcised *ger* who is actual circumcised, this could be due to a variety of reasons. In the case where such a *ger* is met, it would still make sense to refer to him as an uncircumcised *ger*, since he is not obliged by the Mosaic code of law to circumcise.; See also Weiner 2011:71, 71n72.

¹²⁶ Exod 12:45, cf. Exod 12:48.

¹²⁷ Deut 14:21, cf. Lev 17:15.

The rights of the uncircumcised *ger*:

- Receives protection from abuse (Deut 24:17; 27:19; Jer 7:6; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5).
- Receives support from the Israelite community if in need (Lev 25:35; Deut 14:21, 29; 16:11; 24:19, 20, 21, 26:12, 13).
- Can advance socially (Lev 25:47).
- Takes part in some of the major Israelite festivals (Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14; 16:11, 14).
- To be included among those who gather to listen to the reading of the Torah (Deut 31:12; Joshua 8:35).

The prohibitions of the uncircumcised *ger*:

- Forbidden to worship idolatry (Exod 23:33).
- Forbidden to commit sexual immorality (Lev 18:24).
- Forbidden to blaspheme (Lev 24:15).
- Forbidden to commit murder (Lev 24:17).

The option of being obligated to follow the Mosaic code of law becomes a possibility only with the birth of the Israelite nation. This birth takes place with the exodus from Egypt and the consequent reception of their special constitution, the Mosaic code of law. The Tanakh is therefore consistent in referring to the Patriarchs and their family members as *gerim* before the exodus, but their descendants are not referred to with the terms *ger* or *ger w'toshav* after the exodus but have entered into a new category.¹²⁸ Thus, the very first reference to the new category of circumcised *ger* is in Exodus 12:19, this is the first *ger* who is obligated to observe the Mosaic code. It is also significant that this event is said to have taken place about 400 years after Abraham is told by God that «Know with certainty that your offspring shall be *ger* [‘aliens’] in a land not their own - and they will serve them, and they will oppress them - four hundred years».¹²⁹ This would also imply that with the reception of the Mosaic code they leave the category of *ger toshav* and enter the category of Israelites. The Israelites are several times reminded of their former status as *gerim*.¹³⁰

Therefore, the *ger* which is referred to before Exodus 12:19 necessarily refers to either the *ger* as a recognised category, i.e., the *ger toshav* (‘the resident alien’) or it is used in its general meaning as

¹²⁸ The only exceptions are Ezra 1:4 where the Jews in the Babylonian exile are referred to with the verb גָּר, and Lev 25:35 where the word *gerim* is used in an allegorical sense.

¹²⁹ Gen. 15:13; Seder Olam chap. 3; Rashi’s commentary on Gen 15:13.

¹³⁰ The Israelites are reminded of their former status as *gerim [toshavim]*: Exod 22:20, 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19.

denoting any *ger* ('alien'), i.e. anyone who sojourns away from their native place. In either case, this *ger* is not obligated to observe the Mosaic code, since it has not yet been given. Considering this, even though there from now on exists a possibility of becoming a circumcised *ger*, it is still perfectly logical that the option of being an uncircumcised *ger* remains. Thus, the *ger* ('foreigner', i.e., non-Israelite) who wants to attach himself to the Israelite nation, has two options, either to become a circumcised *ger* who adheres to the Mosaic covenant or to remain an uncircumcised *ger*.

In summary, the general category of *ger* can denote any stranger, sojourner. This would also include *ger* as understood allegorically, i.e., man as sojourner on earth. Additionally, the general meaning of *ger* can be divided into two main subcategories:

- a) 'The circumcised *ger*' who is like an adopted member of the Jewish nation and who is obliged to adhere to the Mosaic code of law.
- b) 'The uncircumcised *ger*' who is attached to the Israelite community and who receives benefits from this relationship, but without being circumcised and without having to adhere to the Mosaic code of law. However, he must accept monotheism and reject idolatry and immorality.

As seen above, the different categories also implies different rights and obligations. The subcategories are therefore also to be regarded as legal categories. Which legal category the *ger* belongs to determines which benefits the proselytes are entitled to receive and which commandments he is obligated to follow. On the other hand, being a *ger* also refer to a common human status. Even if the Israelites become natives of the land, on a fundamental level they still retain the original status of being a *ger* in relation to God, as did their Patriarchal ancestors.

As we shall see next, in the LXX the difference between these different categories of *ger* are even clearer, since the LXX translate *ger* using different words dependent upon which category is meant.

Chapter 2. *Ger* in the Rabbinic literature¹³¹

My intention in the following will be to investigate how the *ger* which was discussed in the previous chapter is interpreted by the Rabbinic literature. Due to the extensiveness and complexity

¹³¹ Here I use the term «Rabbinic literature» in its broad sense, including also the literature of the Rishonim.

of the rabbinic material I will primarily, but not solely, use Rashi's¹³² commentaries and the references that are found there as my guide. In line with Rashi's method I will focus on the texts literal meaning, the *peshat*. Thus, I will not comment upon divergent meanings based upon the other methods of Rabbinic exegesis, like the *drush*. Rather, my focus will be whether the *ger* are identified as either *ger tzedek* (circumcised *ger*) or *ger toshav* (uncircumcised *ger*). In the end of the chapter I will summarize my findings. This will help us to gain a sharper picture of the *ger toshav* as he is defined by traditional Judaism.

Abraham and his descendants as *gerim* ('strangers')

The first time *ger* is used as a noun is in Gen. 15:13. Rashi¹³³ quotes *Seder Olam*¹³⁴ that the 400 years Abraham's descendants will be *gerim* are counted from Isaac's birth until the Israelites left Egypt. Prior to going down to Egypt, they were *gerim* in the land of Canaan, a land which then did not belong to them. Here *gerim* is used in its general sense, denoting their status as strangers. This general meaning is also implied when Moses names one of his sons Gershom (Ex 2:22; Ex 18:3.) and the passages where the Israelites are described as *gerim* when they were in the land of Egypt (Ex 22:20; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19). As *gerim* the Patriarchs were not obligated in the Mosaic covenant. Legally they were bound by the Noahide covenant.¹³⁵

The *ger tzedek* (the circumcised *ger*).

In Exodus 12:19 the *ger* is equally forbidden as the Israelites to eat leavening. Rashi quotes here from the *Mekhilta* which states, «since the miracle [of the Exodus] was performed for Israel, it was necessary to [explicitly] include the *ger*.»¹³⁶ This would then also refer to the future converts, that they would know with certainty that they are equally bound by the Passover commandments as the Jews even though their descendants did not leave Egypt. Evidently, the *ger* who is implied is the *ger*

¹³² The New Oxford Annotated Bible, p.2212, «Rashi's commentary, covering almost the entire Hebrew Bible, is a type of medieval Reader's Digest of classical rabbinic interpretation. Very little in Rashi is original; his brilliance, and extreme popularity (Rashi on the Torah was the first Hebrew book printed, before the Torah itself!) lay in his ability to select and rework rabbinic traditions...»

¹³³ *Rashi's commentary* on Gen. 15:13 (transl. Herczeg)

¹³⁴ *Seder Olam* chapter 3 (ed. Guggenheimer).

¹³⁵ *b. Yoma 28b* relates that even though Abraham were not obligated by the Mosaic covenant, he still fulfilled the whole Torah.; *b. Ned. 31a* says that Jews were originally descendants of Noah; See also *Rashi's commentary* on Gen 20:12 and Gen 39:9 (transl. Herczeg).

¹³⁶ *Rashi's commentary* on Exod 12:19 (transl. Herczeg).

tzedek who converts through circumcision. This can be deduced based on the *ger* being equally obliged as the native in Torah commandments.¹³⁷ As stated earlier, what differentiates the circumcised *ger* from the uncircumcised *ger* is that the latter is not obliged in fulfilling all the Torah commandments. Also, where the Rabbinic tradition just uses the word *ger* without any qualification, then the *ger* which is implied is the *ger tzedek*.¹³⁸

Based on the above we can more easily deduce which *ger* that are identified as *ger toshav* by the Rabbinic commentators. The *ger toshav* will be those *gerim* which are specifically specified as *ger toshav*. If there is no specification of what category of *ger* is meant, then we can assume that the *ger* is understood to be a full convert, i.e. a *ger tzedek*. Instead of discussing all the passages where the word *ger* is mentioned, I will instead discuss all the passages where the *ger* is identified as a *ger toshav*.

The *ger toshav* (the uncircumcised *ger*).

Genesis 23:4, where Abraham says he is a *ger w'toshav*, is read by Rashi as, «I am a *ger* ('alien') from another land and I have *toshav* ('resided') among you.»¹³⁹ Rashi's interpretation thus reads *ger w'toshav* as a hendiadys. That is, Abraham is an alien who has resided among the Hittites, i.e. he is a *ger toshav* ('resident alien').

The *toshav* in Ex. 12:45 who is forbidden to eat of the Passover meal is identified, by the *mekhilta* that Rashi quotes, as the *ger toshav*.¹⁴⁰ As discussed in the chapter «*who is a ger toshav?*» the majority opinion among the Sages define *the ger toshav* as a Gentile who «has accepted upon himself the seven commandments that the descendants of Noah accepted upon themselves.»¹⁴¹ All references to *ger toshav* is consequently also references to the Noahide commandments.

¹³⁷ Cf. Exod 12:49.

¹³⁸ Kuhn 1968:736, «In Rabb. literature גֵר always means a Gentile won over to Judaism [i.e. *ger tzedek*].»; ibid.:736n88, «Cf. esp. the Mishnah passages Sheq., 1, 3 and 1, 6, where we have Levites, Israelites and proselytes on the one side, women, slaves and minors on the other.»

¹³⁹ *Rashi's commentary* on Gen 23:4 (transl. Herczeg).

¹⁴⁰ *Rashi's commentary* on Exod 12:45 (transl. Herczeg)

¹⁴¹ *b. Avod. zar. 64b* (ed. Goldwurm).

The «*ger* in your towns» in Ex. 20:10 and Deut. 5:14, regarding the Sabbath commandment, is identified by Nachmanides (1194-1270)¹⁴² as the *ger toshav*. He points out that according to the *pshat* meaning the «*ger* in your towns,» *ger asher bisharekha*, is always referring to the *ger toshav*.¹⁴³ The *ger* who «may be refreshed» in Exod 23:12,¹⁴⁴ which also regards Sabbath rest, is by the *mekhilta* which Rashi quotes identified as the *ger toshav*.¹⁴⁵ Rashi stresses that the verse could not refer to Jews [and *ger tzedek*] since they have their own personal obligation to observe the Sabbath. The meaning of the verse is that since the Israelites together with the *ger tzedek* are commanded to rest, the *ger toshav* will as a consequence be refreshed.¹⁴⁶ The Rabbinic commentaries makes it thus clear that the *ger toshav* is not obligated in the commandment to observe the Sabbath. This information is relevant in regard to the God-fearers in Hellenistic times. One of the practices that was commonly observed by them was the Sabbath.¹⁴⁷ Most likely the God-fearers did not observe it according to the strict Jewish regulations, but more likely in accordance with the meaning conveyed by the Rabbinic commentaries, as a day to be refreshed.

Lev. 25:6, «... and for your hired worker and for one who resides with you [לְשִׂכְרֶיךָ וְלְתוֹשְׁבֶיךָ [הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ]].¹⁴⁸ This verse speaks about the Sabbath year. Rashi¹⁴⁹ comments that both the hired workers and the one who resides are non-Jews. The *Sifra*¹⁵⁰ specifies that «One may give the fruits of the seventh year only to ‘your hired worker, and one who resides with you,’ i.e., non-Jews whom you have an obligation to feed.» This would include the *ger toshav*.

¹⁴² *Nachmanides' commentary* on Exod 20:10 (Danziger 2010).

¹⁴³ I am specifying that this is according to the *pshat* meaning, because there also exist seemingly contradictory interpretations. According to the *drush* meaning that Nachmanides also mentions, the «*ger* in your towns» refers to the *ger tzedek*. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter I will not comment upon these divergent interpretations which are based upon different methods of exegesis.

¹⁴⁴ Exod 23:12, «Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien [*ha'ger*] may be refreshed.»; Note that the NRSV translation is here agreeing with the Rabbinic interpretation. Even though the Hebrew text just says «*ha'ger*,» and not «*ger toshav*.»

¹⁴⁵ *Rashi's commentary* on Exod 23:12 (transl. Herczeg).

¹⁴⁶ Sforino's (1475-1550) commentary to Exod 23:12, «And consequently ... the *ger* will also be refreshed.» (ed. Scherman 2007).

¹⁴⁷ See part III, «God-Fearers»: Definitions and Sources.

¹⁴⁸ Stone Tanakh translation.

¹⁴⁹ *Rashi's commentary* on Lev 25:6 (transl. Herczeg).

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in *Rashi's commentary* on Lev 25:6 (transl. Herczeg).

The *ger w'toshav* in Lev. 25:35 is by Rashi¹⁵¹ read as, «*ger* and *toshav*», i.e., as two persons. Rashi is saying that the Jew is equally obligated to support both the *ger* (i.e., the *ger tzedek*) and the *toshav* (i.e. the *ger toshav*). Rashi then defines the *toshav* as «any [non-Jew] who accepted upon himself not to worship idols, but eats carcasses.» This is the *toshav* that is «in your towns.»¹⁵²

*Sifra*¹⁵³ on Leviticus 25:47 explains that *ger* denotes a *ger tzedek* and *toshav* denotes a *ger* who eats non-kosher meat.¹⁵⁴ Rashi comments that the *toshav* is the *ger toshav* and that he is one person is proved in the latter part of this verse which uses the phrase *ger toshav* without the connecting *waw*. Rashi also states that the *ger toshav* is an uncircumcised *ger* as rendered by Targum Onkelos.¹⁵⁵

Numbers 35:15, «These six cities shall be a refuge for the children of Israel and for the proselyte and resident [תושב] among them, so that anyone who unintentionally kills a person can flee there.» This verse discusses the cities of refugees. Tractate *Makkot* 2:3 in the Mishnah states explicitly that the *ger toshav* can go into exile in a city of refuge. This also connects the *toshav* in Num. 35:15 with the *ger toshav*.¹⁵⁶

Deuteronomy 14:21 states that carcasses can either be given to «the *ger* in your towns» or be sold to a foreigner (*nokri*). Rashi comments here that «the *ger* in your towns» is a *ger toshav*.¹⁵⁷ This is based upon what has already been stated, that *gerim tzedekim* are obligated to observe all the laws of the Torah, and therefore this verse cannot be referring to this category.

Deut. 24:14, «You shall not withhold the wages of a poor or destitute hired worker, of your brothers or of your strangers who are in your land within your cities.»¹⁵⁸ According to Rashi does the phrase

¹⁵¹ *Rashi's commentary* on Lev. 25:35 (transl. Herczeg).

¹⁵² cf. Deut 14:21; *b. Avod. Zar.* 64b.

¹⁵³ *Sifra*, Behar, 110a quoted in *Rashi's commentary* on Lev 25:47 (transl. Herczeg); Lev 25:47, «If the means of a sojourner who resides [*ger w'toshav*] with you shall become sufficient, and your brother becomes impoverished with him, and he is sold to an alien who resides [*ger toshav*] with you, or to an idol of a sojourner's family [*mishpachat ger*].» (Stone Tanakh translation).

¹⁵⁴ cf. Deut 14:21.

¹⁵⁵ see *Tg. Onq.* on Lev. 25:47; *Rashi's commentary* on Lev. 25:47 (ed. Herczeg).

¹⁵⁶ It is significant to note that the Mishnah nowhere explicitly discusses the *ger toshav* per se. Thus, the existence of this category seems to be presupposed.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Sifrei* 104, referenced in *Rashi's commentary* on Deut.14:21 (ed. Herczeg).

¹⁵⁸ Stone Tanakh transl.

«of your strangers» refer to *ger tzedek*, while «in your towns» refer to a *ger toshav* who may eat unslaughtered carcasses.

Based on Nachmanides commentary to Ex. 20:10 we can deduce that the *ger asher bisharekha* ('ger in your towns') in Deut. 31:12 is the *ger toshav*. Also, Rashi's commentary to Deuteronomy 14:21 stated there that the «ger in your towns» is the *ger toshav*. Additionally, Ibn Ezra¹⁵⁹ in his commentary to Deuteronomy 31:12 states that the *ger asher bisharekha* is the non-Jew who observes the Noahide laws, i.e. the *ger toshav*.

Summary

The following *ger* are identified as *ger toshav* (i.e. uncircumcised *ger*) based on the above:

Gen 23:4,¹⁶⁰ *ger w'toshav* = *ger toshav* (Rashi) [Abraham].

Exod 12:45,¹⁶¹ *toshav* = *ger toshav* (*Mekhilta*; Rashi) [may not eat the Passover meal].

Exod 20:10,¹⁶² *gerkha asher bisharekha* ('your *ger* in your towns') = *ger toshav* (Nachmanides) [Sabbath rest].

Exod 23:12,¹⁶³ *ger* = *ger toshav* (*Mekhilta*; Rashi) [Sabbath rest].

Lev 25:6,¹⁶⁴ *toshav* = *ger toshav* (*Sifra*;¹⁶⁵ Rashi) [Can eat of the land during the Sabbath year].

Lev 25:35,¹⁶⁶ *toshav* = *ger toshav* (Rashi on Lev 25:35) [Entitled to receive support if in need].

Lev 25:47, *toshav* = *ger toshav* (Rashi on Lev 25:47) [Can own Jewish slaves].

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Scherman 2007:1096.

¹⁶⁰ Gen 23:4, «I am a stranger and an alien [*ger w'toshav*] residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight.»

¹⁶¹ Exod 12:45, «no *toshav* or hired servant may eat of it [i.e. the Passover meal]»

¹⁶² Exod 20:10, «But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or **the alien resident** [*ger*] in your towns.» (My italics.) Note here that the NRSV translation agrees with the *Mekhilta* in reading the *ger* as the *ger toshav*.

¹⁶³ Exod 23:12, «Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and **the resident alien** [*ger*] may be refreshed.» (My italics.) Note here that the NRSV translation agrees with the *Mekhilta* in reading the *ger* as the *ger toshav*.

¹⁶⁴ Lev 25:6, «You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath - you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you.»

¹⁶⁵ *Rashi's commentary* on Lev. 25:6, «Even non-Jews [*af goyim*]» (transl. Herczeg).

¹⁶⁶ Lev 25:35, «If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him - proselyte [*ger*] or resident [*toshav*] - so that he can live with you.» (Stone Chumash)

Lev 25:47, *ger toshav* = *ger toshav* (Rashi on Lev 25:47) [Jewish slaves must be redeemed].

Num 35:15, *toshav* = *ger toshav* (*m. Makkot* 2:3; Rashi on Exod 12:45; Lev 25:6, 35, 47)¹⁶⁷
[protection in a city of refugee].

Deut 5:14, *gerkha asher bisharekha* ('your *ger* in your towns') = *ger toshav* (Nachmanides on Exod 20:10) [Sabbath rest].

Deut 14:21, *ger asher bisharekha* = *ger toshav* (Rashi on Deut 14:21; Nachmanides on Eod. 20:10)
[Can eat carcasses which he receives for free].

Deut 24:14, *bisharekha* ('in your towns') = *ger toshav* (Rashi) [Entitled to be paid in time,
protection of worker rights].

Deut 31:12,¹⁶⁸ *ger asher bisharekha* = *ger toshav* (Ibn Ezra; Nachmanides on Exod 20:10; Rashi on
Deut 14:21) [To be included in the assembly of people when the Torah is publicly read].

The following characteristics of the uncircumcised *ger* can be made based on the above:

- Abraham is a *ger toshav* (Gen 23:4).
- Forbidden to partake of the Passover meal (Exod 12:45, 48).
- Synonymous with the *toshav* (Exod 12:45).
- May rest on the Sabbath (not as a commandment, but due to the Israelites observing the Sabbath) (Exod 20:10; 23:12; Deut 5:14).
- «*ger* in your towns» is always referring to *ger toshav* (according to the *pshat* meaning) (Exod 20:10; 23:9; Deut 5:14).
- Entitled to eat freely of the land during the Sabbath year (Lev 25:6).
- Entitled to receive support if in need (Lev 25:35).
- Can acquire wealth and rise socially (Lev 25:47).
- Property rights are protected¹⁶⁹ (Lev 25:47).
- Entitled to protection in a city of refugee (Num 35:15).
- Allowed to eat carcasses [i.e. not obliged to follow the Mosaic covenant] (Deut 14:21).
- Entitled to receive sustenance for free from Jews (Deut 14:21).
- Entitled to be paid in time, protection of worker rights (Deut 24:14).
- To be included in the assembly of people when the Torah is publicly read (Deut 31:12).

¹⁶⁷ Rashi identifies in the cited passages the reference to the *toshav* as the resident alien, it can therefore be assumed that the *toshav* in Num 35:15 is the *ger toshav*.

¹⁶⁸ Deut 31:12, «Assemble the people - man, women, and children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns - so that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law.»

¹⁶⁹ If the *ger toshav* owns Jewish slaves, these must be redeemed through legal means.

- Obligated to observe the seven Noahide commandments (*b. Avodah zarah* 64b; Ibn Ezra on Deut 31:12; Rashi; Nachmanides¹⁷⁰).

It is thus apparent that the Rabbinic tradition differentiates between two main categories of *gerim*, the *ger tzedek* and the *ger toshav*. Their existence is throughout the Rabbinic material presupposed. The *ger tzedek* is expected to adhere to the full range of Jewish law, while the *ger toshav* obligated to observe the Seven Noahide Laws. Along with the legal status of *ger toshav* follows rights and obligations.

Part III. «GOD-FEARERS»¹⁷¹

Definitions and sources

According to a most general definition the «God-fearers» were «gentiles who observed some of the practices of Judaism.»¹⁷² Salo Baron defines them as «people who sympathized with Judaism and enjoyed a recognized status upon the fringes.»¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Rashi and Nachmanides, who both are intimately familiar with the rabbinic tradition, makes explicit references to the *ger toshav*. As pointed out, the *ger toshav* is defined by the majority opinion in the rabbinic tradition as a Gentile who has accepted upon himself to uphold the seven Noahide commandments (*b. avod. zar.* 64b). It can therefore be assumed that Rashi and Nachmanides implicitly references the Noahide commandments, without them stating so explicitly.

¹⁷¹ Scholarly literature about the God-fearers: Cohen 1987; Finn 1985; Feldman 1950; Feldman 1986; Feldman 1989; Feldman 1993; Horst 1989; Kraabel 1981; Lake 1933; MacLennan and Kraabel 1986; Marcus 1952; Millar 1986; Murphy-O'Connor 1992; Overman 1988; Reinhold and Feldman 1996; Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987; Tannenbaum 1986; Williams 1988; Wilcox 1981.

¹⁷² Feldman 1986.

¹⁷³ Quoted in MacLennan and Kraabel 1986.

The «God-fearer» is thus to be distinguished from a full convert (i.e. a *ger tzedek*) to Judaism.¹⁷⁴ In Hellenistic times Greek, Latin,¹⁷⁵ Jewish¹⁷⁶ and Christian¹⁷⁷ writers, make numerous references to this group of Gentiles.

there is a significant volume of evidence to suggest that a body of «God-fearing» pagans was attached to many Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and thereby adopted the Jewish (i.e. monotheistic and imageless) form of worship. They attended Jewish synagogues, but as regards the observance of the Law restricted themselves to certain aspects, and so were not counted as belonging to the main body of each Jewish community.¹⁷⁸

Pauly-Wissowa, the classic reference work, wrote the following about God-fearers:

they frequent the services of the synagogue, they are monotheists in the biblical sense, and they participate in some of the ceremonial requirements of the Law, but they have not moved to full conversion to Judaism through circumcision. They are called ... *sebomenoi* or *phoboumenoi thon theon*.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Cf. BDAG definition of 'proselytos,' « They are to be differentiated fr. the σεβόμενοι τόν θεόν.»

¹⁷⁵ God-fearer evidence is found in the following Greek and Latin literature: Petronius, *fragment no. 37* (7.1 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993); Epictetus, cited by Arrian, *Discourses* 2.9.19-21; (7.2 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993); Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106 (no. 301 in Stern 1980); Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 67.14.1-2 (no. 406 in Stern 1980); Seneca, cited by Augustus, *City of God*, 6.11 (no. 186 in Stern 1976); Seneca, *Epis.* 95, 47 [on forbidding the lighting of Sabbath lights] (no. 188 in Stern 1976); Plutarch, *Cicero* 7.6.5 (no. 263 in Stern 1976); Suetonius, *Domitianus*, 12.2 (no. 320 in Stern 1980); Suetonius, *Tiberius* 32 [Millar 1986:161n50, "A remarkable illustration of the spread of the Jewish Sabbath at the beginning of the imperial period."] (no. 305 in Stern 1980); Horace, *Sat.* i 9, 68-72. [Schürer 1890:308n276, "...the person who observes the Jewish Sabbath is described as *unus multorum* 'one of many'"] (no. 129 in Stern 1976); Persius *Sat.* v. 176-84 [Williams 1988:109n68, "Persius' satirical description of an indigent proselyte celebrating the Sabbath in Sat v. 176-84 shows just how widespread knowledge of Jewish ritual had become at Rome even among non-practitioners like Persius himself. (no. 190 in Stern).

¹⁷⁶ God-fearer evidence is found in the following Jewish literature: Philo, *QE* 2.2 (7.4 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993); Philo, *Moses* 2.4.20-24 (in Yonge 1993); Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.12.42,44 (in Yonge 1993); *Embassy* 245 (in Yonge 1993); Philo, *Good Person* 72 (in Yonge 1993); Josephus, *Ant.* 14.110 (in Whiston 1987); Josephus, *Ant.* 20.41 (in Whiston 1987); Josephus, *J.W.* 2.454, 463 (in Whiston 1987); Josephus, *J.W.* 7.45 (in Whiston 1987); Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1:166-167 (in Whiston 1987); Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2:282 (in Whiston 1987); *Gen. Rab.* 28.6 (7.9 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993); *Lev. Rab.* 3.2 7.9 (7.10 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993); *Deut. Rab.* 2.24; *Mek. de Rabbi Ishmael* 18 [on Exodus 22:20]; *Mek. Mishpatim*, 312 (in Novak 2011:26); *Pesiq. Rab.* 43 (7.11 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993); *y. Meg.* 3.2.74d (7.8 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993); *b. Avod. Zar.* 64b (in Goldwurm 2002).

¹⁷⁷ God-fearer evidence is found in the following Christian literature: Justin Martyr, *Dialouge with Trypho* 10.2 (in Martyr 2003); Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, i 13, 3-4 [Millar 1986:161n50, "Tertullian is admittedly speaking here only of gentiles who observed isolated Jewish customs."]; Commodianus, *Instructiones* 1.24.11ff, 1.37; *Theodosian Code* 16.5.43 (7.18 in Reinhold & Feldman 1993).

¹⁷⁸ Millar 1986:165.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Kraabel 1981:113.

The LXX¹⁸⁰ uses the phrase φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον, «those who fear the LORD». This latter term is also used in the Greek New Testament,¹⁸¹ together with the term *sebomenoi ton theon* «those who fear God».¹⁸² In Josephus' writings and in Greek inscriptions and literature we also find the term *theosebeis*, while Latin literature uses the term *metuentes*.¹⁸³

These terms are reckoned by most academic scholars to be translations of the Hebrew terms for «fearing God» and although various terms are used they are reckoned as synonyms of the basic meaning «fearing God».¹⁸⁴ The already discussed *ger toshav* fit the definition for being a God-fearer, with the important distinction that they were situated in Israel under Jewish jurisdiction.

Chapter 1. The Scholarly Debate.

Scholars from the latter part of 19th century and the first half of the 20th, like Emile Schürer¹⁸⁵ and Kirsopp Lake¹⁸⁶ have taken the historical existence of God-fearers for granted and that has also been, and remains, the consensus position. The main sources for this proposition is the literary evidence from Hellenistic times.¹⁸⁷ Also the so-called pseudepigraphical literature, such as the Sibylline Oracles¹⁸⁸ is used as evidence that there existed a Jewish mission to win proselytes, and that these proselytes did not have to accept the whole range of Jewish law.

¹⁸⁰ See Overman 1986:21; The phrase οἱ φοβούμενοι is used in the following passages in the LXX: 2 Chr 5:6; Pss 115:9-11; 118:2-4; 135:19-20; Mal 3:16.

¹⁸¹ Acts 10:2, 22, 34-35, 13:16, 26, 43, 50, 16:14-15, 17:4, 17:17, 18:7.

¹⁸² Alt. translations: «those who revere God», «those who worship God.»

¹⁸³ Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106 (no. 301 in Stern 1980).

¹⁸⁴ Overman 1988:2; Roberts 2008:57; Novak 2011:26, «The Septuagint renders the last as *toi phoboumenoi ton Kyriou*. Usually this group was known as the *sebomenoi*, a term with the same meaning as *phoboumenoi*.»

¹⁸⁵ Schürer 1890:291-319.

¹⁸⁶ Lake 1933:74-96.

¹⁸⁷ See footnotes 175, 176, 177.

¹⁸⁸ Schurer 1890:313, «Thus the fourth book of the Sibylline oracles, for example, which was composed about the year 80 of our era, and is in all probability of Jewish origin, contains an address to the Gentiles, in which prominence is given only to the worship of the true God and the belief in a future judgment, while instead of requiring the converted Gentile to be circumcised, all that is asked is a bath of purification. (*Orac. Sibyll. iv.* 164).»

Even though the existence of individual God-fearers as such is agreed upon by the majority of academic scholars there has been, and still is, disagreement and confusion about their connection to Judaism.

Did they have an official status recognized by mainstream Judaism, or were they a loosely connected group without any official status? If recognized, from where does this recognition stem from and to what degree were they connected? Does it go back to Biblical times, or did the concept evolve during the Hellenistic period?

Much of the debate still evolves around whether or not «God-fearer» is a technical term, but it is also common to regard «God-fearer» as «a catch-all term covering a wide spectrum of degrees of [Gentile] interest in Judaism - from the half-hearted to the fully committed - but short of actual conversion.»¹⁸⁹

The academic scholarship in the 18th century¹⁹⁰ assumed that a non-Jew interested in Judaism, i.e. a God-fearer (*sebomenoi*, etc), was identical with the uncircumcised proselyte, i.e. the *ger toshav/ger asher bisharekha*. Schürer however argued against the identification of God-fearers and *ger toshav* on the argument that the two concepts belong to different historical contexts.

For it is hardly likely that the Greeks and Romans who lived in Palestine would trouble themselves much about those Jewish regulations. So far then as practical life is concerned the so-called precepts for proselytes have no significance. They only represent a casuistical theory which was never reduced to actual practice. From this therefore it is evident that the גרי תושב have no connection with the σεβομενοι τον θεον, just as it is further certain that what we know from history regarding these latter is utterly incompatible with the Rabbinical requirements in regard to the גרי תושב.¹⁹¹

This argumentation was accepted by Lake¹⁹² and the majority of subsequent academic scholarship.¹⁹³ Even though the God-fearers lost, so to speak, a clearly defined connection to Judaism through the concept of the *ger toshav* and the associated Jewish teaching concerning the seven Noahide laws, their existence as such was not questioned.

¹⁸⁹ Tannenbaum 1986.

¹⁹⁰ Lake 1933:82.

¹⁹¹ Schürer 1890:319.

¹⁹² Lake 1933:81-82.

¹⁹³ Schürer's argumentation is repeated in the new revised edition of Schürer edited by Vermes, Millar and Goodman [See Millar 1986:171-172]; See also Moore 1930:339-341.

«The disappearance of the God-fearer?»

Thomas Kraabel is not convinced by the evidence in favor of the existence of God-fearers, which he sees as too heavily dependent on the information provided by the New Testament. Were it not for Acts, he argues, we would not know of the existence of the term «God-fearers».¹⁹⁴ He consequently questioned their very existence and argued that they were a literary invention made by Luke in order to serve as «a symbol in helping Luke to show how Christianity had become a Gentile religion legitimately and without losing its Old Testament roots.»¹⁹⁵ Kraabel also points to the unsatisfactory archeological evidence. «The synagogue inscriptions - over 100 of them - never use the term *phoboumenos* or *sebomenos*. *Theosebes* appears perhaps 10 times, but as an adjective describing Jews.»¹⁹⁶

Kraabel's argument is not that there did not exist individual God-fearers, but that the evidence that scholars have relied upon simply does not lend itself to the conclusion that the God-fearers were a substantial social sub-class.¹⁹⁷ Rather the term God-fearer is seen as a general reference to piety. This is a view he shares with Max Wilcox.¹⁹⁸

Overman¹⁹⁹ argues against Kraabel and claims that we would know of the term «God-fearers» independent of Acts. «The phrase οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν Κύριον [used in the LXX] is essentially the same as οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν in Acts.»²⁰⁰ Also, Luke would be familiar with the phrase «God-fearer» since he were steeped in the LXX.²⁰¹ Finally, he criticizes Kraabel (and other academic scholars) for being too narrowly focused on the specific phrase οἱ φοβούμενοι/σεβόμενοι τὸν Θεόν,

The specific name or title of a group of Gentile 'sympathizers' is far less important than the question concerning evidence from this period which might indicate that Jewish

¹⁹⁴ Kraabel 1981:118.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*:120.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*:116; Other scholars argue differently, that the inscriptions most likely refer to God-fearers, and not to Jews, see Millar 1986:166-168.

¹⁹⁷ Kraabel 1981:124n11.

¹⁹⁸ Wilcox 1981:102.

¹⁹⁹ Overman 1988:21-22.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*:21.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*:21.

communities of the diaspora had included such a group of Gentiles in their life and worship.²⁰²

Millar also finds it «premature to proclaim the disappearance of the God-fearers». Unlike Kraabel, Millar thinks the various Greek expressions found in Acts, Josephus and inscriptions «refer to a category of gentiles who were in some definite way attached to Jewish synagogues».²⁰³

In 1974 inscriptions were found in Aphrodisias²⁰⁴ which make references to Jews, proselytes and *theosebeis*. Besides contributing to a renewed interest in the subject, these inscriptions served for some as the final proof of the existence of «God-fearers» as a technical term. Feldman states,

the most important conclusion of the Aphrodisias inscriptions is, I believe, that it establishes, once and for all, that there was a special class, at least at the time of the inscriptions, known as *theosebeis*, since this group is clearly identified as such, in contrast to proselytes and presumed born Jews.²⁰⁵

For others, such as Kraabel and Wilcox, the question remains open. For them, the *theosebeis* might as well be non-Jews who had a good standing with the Jewish community, without necessarily being religiously attached. Kraabel and MacLennan says that, «It is quite possible that gentiles were friendly toward Jews simply as neighbors or fellow-townspople.»²⁰⁶ Considering the evidence which favors the existence of God-fearers most scholars think that Kraabel's position is untenable.²⁰⁷

Murphy O'Connor argues that Kraabel is wrong in treating the God-fearers as a Lukan invention and claims that «they are precisely what New Testament scholarship has traditionally considered God-fearers to be, namely, Gentiles who, without going through the rite of conversion, participate fully in the life of the synagogue.»²⁰⁸

²⁰² Ibid.:22.

²⁰³ Millar 1986:168.

²⁰⁴ Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987.

²⁰⁵ Feldman 1989:277.

²⁰⁶ MacLennan and Kraabel 1986.

²⁰⁷ See f.ex. Goldenberg 1998:141n68, «Kraabel (1981) has denied that such a group at the margins of the Jewish community officially existed, but an inscription found at Aphrodisias and other information make this position untenable.»; Roberts 2008:57, «Kraabel's conclusions have drawn their share of critics. Among the most notable, is John G. Gager who on some points uses Kraabel's own material evidence as support for the God-fearers.»

²⁰⁸ Murphy-O'Connor 1992:423.

God-fearers - the Rabbinic perspective

In the Hebrew Bible we meet the term, «those who fear the LORD» and «those who fear God».²⁰⁹ The term used in Talmudic and Rabbinic literature is יראי שמים (*yirei shamayim*), «Fearers of Heaven». The terms «Heaven-fearer» and «God-fearer» are interchangeable.²¹⁰

As demonstrated in part I. chapter 1, the category of *ger toshav* is legal and this status can only be granted in a time when the Jubilee years are observed, i.e. when the Jews are independent and all the Israelite tribes live in the land of Israel. Thus, since the time of the exile of the Ten Tribes the legal category of *ger toshav* cannot be granted to Gentiles.²¹¹ Beside the term *ger toshav*, the term Heaven-fearer is applied about Gentiles in the Rabbinic terminology. This latter term is wider in scope than the more restricted *ger toshav* status.

A Tannaitic source differentiates between four different categories of proselytes.

And so you find four groups who respond and say before Him-Who-spake-and-the-world-came-to-be, “I am for the Lord” (Is. 44:5) ... 1) Israelites, 2) Proselytes (*gerai tzedek*)... 3) repentant sinners 4) and fearers of God (*yirai Shamayim*).²¹²

From the viewpoint of traditional Judaism as expounded by the Rabbinic tradition, the God-fearers have status as a recognized category of monotheistic Gentiles. A modern rabbinic definition presents them as, «Gentile adherents to the One God of Israel, who directed their religious loyalty to the Jewish Sages and the Holy Temple.»²¹³ Thus, these proselytes correspond in meaning with the *ger toshav*. That is, they are both in the category of uncircumcised proselytes.

Even though adherence to the Noahide laws is not mentioned explicitly by the Talmudic material as a prerequisite in order to be referred to as a God-fearer, it can be inferred that it is implied. This is based on the reasoning that God-fearers accepts the authority of the Rabbinic tradition, and since

²⁰⁹ See below, ‘God-fearers in the Tanakh.’

²¹⁰ «Heaven» is a well known metonymy for «God». See Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987:48n167.

²¹¹ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Kochavim* 10:6 (in Maimonides 1990:194-196); *Hilchot Issurei Bi'ah* 14:8 (Maimonides 1998-2001).

²¹² *Mekhilta, Mishpatim*, 312 (quoted in Novak 2011:26); See also footnote 176; Bamberger 1968:135-138; Mcknight 1991:97-99.

²¹³ Weiner 2011:20.

the Rabbinic tradition teaches that all Gentiles are obligated to observe the Noahide laws,²¹⁴ it can therefore be assumed that God-fearers accept this teaching and live by it. Maimonides reckons as denier of the Torah anyone «who denies their [i.e., the Jewish Sages] accepted rulings».²¹⁵ Thus, if God-fearers were not accepting this central doctrine of the Rabbis, these Gentiles would most likely not be referred to by the term «God-fearers», which is a term that denotes being pious.

God-Fearers in the Tanakh

Besides the *ger toshav*, the Tanakh is full of references to Gentiles who are standing in some relation to Jewish life and belief but without being circumcised [i.e. not being Jewish]. King Solomon prays,

Likewise when a foreigner (*ha'nokri*), who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of Your name - for they shall hear of Your great name, Your mighty hand, and Your outstretched arm - when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house [i.e. the Temple in Jerusalem], then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear you, as do Your people Israel, and so that they may know that Your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.»²¹⁶

This shows that foreigners, who are not *ger toshav*, can come and pray towards the Temple in Jerusalem. Elsewhere it says that, «my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples».²¹⁷ Thus, the Temple is to serve a purpose for all peoples. Here, and below, we also see that the term «God-fearer», i.e. those who fear God, («so that all the people of the earth may know Your name and fear you») is more encompassing than the stricter legal status of *ger toshav*.

2. Kings 5:14-19 tells the story of the Syrian general Naaman, who comes to the recognition that «there is no God in the whole world except in Israel» and who abandons idol worship, «your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD.» Naaman is

²¹⁴ See part I, chapter 3. The Noahide Laws.

²¹⁵ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mamrim* 1:1-2, 3:3 (in Maimonides 2001).

²¹⁶ 1. Kgs 8:41-43.

²¹⁷ Isaiah 56:7.

still concerned, because he has to enter a house of idol worship in order to assist his master when he goes in to worship there. Elisha gives him allowance to do this.²¹⁸

2. Kings 17:27ff tells of the new Gentile inhabitants in Samaria. That they are being taught how to fear the LORD.

Then the king of Assyria commanded, «Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him go and live there, and teach them the law of the God of the land.» So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel; he taught them how they should worship (*yireu*)²¹⁹ the LORD.²²⁰

This indicates that it is a correct way, and a wrong way, to worship the LORD. Further, it says that they revert to their former practices and that,

they do not fear the Lord, neither do they practice according to their statutes and laws, nor according to the Law and the commandment that the Lord commanded the sons of Jacob, whose name He called Israel.²²¹

I find it significant that it says «according to their statutes and laws» and that these are differentiated from the Mosaic law. This could be indicative of the existence of two different covenants. One for the sons of Jacob and one for the descendants of Noah.

The book of Jonah is of special interest, because as a Jewish prophet he is sent to a Gentile city. This shows that Gentiles are being held responsible for their conduct. This was also the case with

²¹⁸ Cf. Acts 10:2 and the story of Cornelius. As a Roman Centurion immersed in an idol worship culture he could not completely avoid being involved in idolatrous rites. Still, he is referred to as a God-fearer.; Cf. *b. Chul.* 13b, “gentiles outside the land of Israel are not idolaters but simply follow their ancestral customs” (quoted from Goodman 2001:119); Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Kochavim* 9:2, «It is forbidden to send a present to a gentile on one of his holidays, unless one knows that he does not acknowledge or worship idols (in Maimonides 1990:170); Maimonides 1990:170n5, «[b.] *Avodah Zarah* 64b-65a mentions the examples of Rav Yosef and Ravva, two of the greatest sages of the Talmud, who sent presents to gentiles on their holidays because they knew that these individuals did not worship idols.»

²¹⁹ Here the NRSV translates *yireu* ‘fear’ as ‘worship’. I.e., to fear the LORD is to worship the LORD.

²²⁰ 2. Kgs 17:28-29.

²²¹ *Ibid.* 17:34 (Stone Tanakh translation).

the Flood and the destruction of Sodoma and Gomarrah.²²² In Jonah 1:16 it says that «Then the men feared the LORD even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.»

There is a rabbinic opinion that Job was a Gentile.²²³ In the book of Job he is being described as a God-fearer.²²⁴ What characterizes him as a God-fearer is that he is blameless and upright and he shuns evil. In Job 2:9 his wife tells him to «curse God and die.» This can seem to be indicative of blasphemy being a transgression that carries liability to death penalty.²²⁵

The Psalms are full of references both to those who already fear the LORD and with a universal call to fear God for those who do not. Psalms 112 is about «those who fear the Lord» (Psalms 112:1). Besides being blessed (v. 2), trusting the LORD (v. 7) and being righteous, they are specifically described as distributing their wealth and being generous towards the poor (v. 9). Psalms 103 relates that God-fearers will receive God's kindness (v. 11), God's compassion (v. 13) and God's love (v. 17). Psalms 145:19 says that «He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.»²²⁶

The book of Ecclesiastes has a general call to mankind to «Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone».²²⁷ And it continues, «For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil».²²⁸ If God is calling everyone to account for their actions, for good and bad, that would imply the presence of clear instructions of

²²² Weiner 2011:29, «Tractate Sanhedrin 104b relates the destruction of the metropolis of Sodom and Gomorrah. Even though the practice of idol worship and forbidden sexual relations was rampant in those cities, in outright rebellion against God, the Divine decree of their total destruction came because they banned any practices of charity and kindness, to the extreme (they punished any performer of good deeds with tortuous execution). Hence it is obvious that God demands moral conduct from mankind, even though it is not explicitly commanded. See Ramban on Genesis 6:2, explaining why the generation of Noah's flood was punished specifically because of theft, even though they violated all their commandments, because theft is a logical obligation that no one can negate by saying, 'we did not know that we were commanded.'»

²²³ See *b. B. Bat. 15*; Lichtenstein 1995:73; Bindman 1995:98.

²²⁴ Job 1:1, «There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.»; *ibid.* 1:8, «The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.'»

²²⁵ Bindman 1995:99.

²²⁶ See also Psalms 2:11, 5:8, 15:14, 19:10, 22:23, 26, 25:12-14, 31:20, 33:8,18, 34:8,10,12, 36:2, 40:4, 55:20, 56:5,12, 90:11, 61:6, 64:10, 65:9, 66:16, 67:8, 103:11,13,17, 111:5,10; 112, 115:11,13, 118:4, 119:63, 79,120,128, 135:20, 145:19, 147:11 and more. See also Proverbs 8:13.

²²⁷ Eccl 12:13.

²²⁸ *Ibid.* 12:14.

what they would be accountable for, and since Gentiles are not punished for transgressing specific Jewish commandments, such as eating the meat of a carcass (Deut. 14:21) and ritual laws, this would seem to imply an existing universal code of law applicable for Gentiles.

Summary

All this goes to show that according to the texts of the Tanakh also Gentiles can, and are expected to, have a relationship with God without having to circumcise themselves and becoming Jewish. Underlying this is a premiss that all humans are accountable to God and they will be punished for transgressions and rewarded for good deeds.

Summary God-fearer practices and characteristics in the Tanakh:²²⁹

- They can pray toward the Jewish Temple (1 Kgs 8:41-43; Isa 56:7).
- Accepts belief in the Jewish God (2 Kgs 5:15).
- Rejects idolatry (2 Kgs 5:17).
- They are being educated in how to worship God (2 Kgs 17:29).
- They have their own statues and laws which are distinct from the laws and commandments of the Jews (2 Kgs 17:34).
- Forbidden to blaspheme (Job 2:9)
- Abstains from evil practices, i.e. he is morally good (Job 1:1, 1:8).
- Distributes their wealth and gives money to the poor (Pss 112:9).
- Receives God's kindness, compassion and love (Pss 103:11, 13, 17).
- Will be saved by God (Pss 145:19).

God-fearers are generally described as being righteous humans who shuns evil and put their trust in God who will save them. The God-fearers, as they are portrayed in the Tanakh, fit the definition of the God-fearers of Hellenistic times. They «embraced its monotheism, frequented its services and contributed to its support.»²³⁰

²²⁹ This summary is not exhaustive.

²³⁰ Moore 1927:232.

PART IV. *PROSELYTOS* / *PAROIKOS* AND THE *SEBOMENOI* IN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Chapter 1. *Ger* translated in the LXX

The two main variant meanings of *ger* in the Tanakh, the circumcised *ger* and the uncircumcised *ger*, are reflected through its translations in the LXX. Lake²³¹ points out that most commonly *ger* is translated προσήλυτος and less frequently πάροικος. Kuhn²³² specifies that προσήλυτος is used 77 times,²³³ πάροικος is used 11 times,²³⁴ γε(ι)ώρας is used in two instances²³⁵ and ξένος²³⁶ once. Their comments elaborate upon the work of W.C. Allen²³⁷ who in 1894 did a thorough word study of how *ger* was translated in the LXX. This study was carried out in order to argue against the then prevailing opinion that *ger* was synonymous in meaning with πάροικος.²³⁸ Houten states,

The resulting evidence is surprisingly clear. It indicates that the translator(s) preferred the word προσήλυτος and only used the word πάροικος when the context indicated that it could not possibly mean proselyte [i.e. circumcised *ger*].²³⁹

²³¹ Lake 1933:82.

²³² Kuhn 1968:731.

²³³ Houten 1991:181n4, «Neither Allen nor K.G. Kuhn, 'προσήλυτος', pp. 727-44, discuss the three places where there is a discrepancy between the MT [Masoretic Text] and the LXX reference to the alien. In Lev. 17.3, Deut. 10.18 and Deut. 12.18, the LXX text has included a phrase referring to the alien (translated as προσήλυτος in all three cases) which is not found in the MT. In his survey, which is otherwise complete, Allen does not include Lev. 17.3 and Deut. 12.18. Kuhn does not discuss them, although when he claims that προσήλυτος is used seventy-seven times for the Hebrew גר, the three discrepancies are included. To be accurate, Kuhn should state that προσήλυτος is used seventy-four times for the Hebrew גר, and three times when there is no corresponding גר in the Hebrew text.»

²³⁴ πάροικος is translated for *ger* in the following passages: Gn. 15:13; 23:4; Ex. 2:22, 18:3; Dt. 14:21, 23:8; 2 Sam. 1:13; 1 Ch. 29:15; Ps 39:12, 119:19; Jer. 14:8

²³⁵ γε(ι)ώρας is translated for *ger* in the following passages: Exodus 12:19; Is. 14:1

²³⁶ ξένος is translated for *ger* in the following passage: Job 31:32.

²³⁷ Allen 1896:264-275.

²³⁸ Houten 1991:180.

²³⁹ *ibid.*:180.

The translation of *ger* by two different main words thus corresponds with the use of the concept of *ger* in the Rabbinic literature, where the *ger* is specified as either the *ger tzedek* (the circumcised *ger* - προσήλυτος) or the *ger toshav* (the uncircumcised *ger* - πάροικος).

It is significant that the word προσήλυτος has not been found in pre-Jewish or pre-Christian literature.²⁴⁰ Houten notes that the Greek translators of the LXX could have used «Greek words meaning sojourner, stranger or alien which the translator/s chose not to use.»²⁴¹ Since they did not use these words it stands to reason that these words were not used because they were not considered precise enough. As such it is a term that seemingly is coined in order to convey the meaning of a unique concept found in the Tanakh.

With this in mind, I go on to take a closer look of how the translations of γλ as προσήλυτος and πάροικος have been used in the LXX.

***Ger* translated as προσήλυτος in the LXX.**

Generally speaking, γλ is translated προσήλυτος in the places where it is not translated πάροικος.²⁴² It can be assumed that most of these passages refer to the circumcised *ger*, since the LXX uses the distinct word πάροικος to denote the uncircumcised *ger*. Most of these places it can also be deduced based on context that the *proselytos* that is intended is the circumcised *ger*. This would apply in the instances where there is specified that there shall be one law for the native and the *proselytos*. The exceptions would be where it can be deduced that προσήλυτος most likely refer to the *paroikos*. The *proselytos* «who will be refreshed», due to the Israelites observing the Sabbath in Exodus 23:12, is not specified as a *paroikos*. Still, it can be deduced that he is. This can be decided since the corresponding *ger asher bisharekha* in Exodus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 5:14, concerning the Sabbath commandment, are there specified as προσήλυτος ὁ παροικῶν. Accordingly, the NRSV translate the *ger* in Exodus 23:12 as «resident alien». This is also in correspondence with the Targum and the Rabbinic commentary of Rashi and Nachmanides.

²⁴⁰ Allen 1894:265; Kuhn 1968:728.

²⁴¹ Houten 1991:183.

²⁴² Except the three noted places where it is translated as γε(ι)ώρας and ξένος.

Also, Allen²⁴³ notes that the four instances where the Israelites in Egypt are described as προσήλυτοι is an exception to his rule that *proselytos* denotes circumcised proselytes.²⁴⁴ Lake²⁴⁵ likewise points out that this usage of προσήλυτος seems to contradict Allen's conclusion, since the Israelites should here rather be addressed by the term πάροικος since they at this point are uncircumcised. Overman resolves this apparent contradiction, «The four exceptions to this noted by Allen do not conflict in this respect. προσήλυτος speaking of Israel is technically correct because while in Egypt, Israel was a 'sojourner,' not a convert.»²⁴⁶

***Ger* translated as πάροικος in the LXX.**

When *ger* is translated by πάροικος in the Pentateuch, it is on one side used about Abraham and his descendants until the exodus from Egypt.²⁴⁷ On the other side, when πάροικος is used after the exodus, when the new option of becoming a circumcised προσήλυτος is available, it denotes uncircumcised non-Jews who live among the Israelites and who are not obliged to adhere to the Mosaic covenant.²⁴⁸

The first use is demonstrated when God says to Abraham in Gen 15:13 that his offspring will be πάροικος for four hundred years, after which they will inherit the land of Israel. Consistent with this Abraham describes himself as a πάροικος in Gen 23:4.²⁴⁹ Twice is πάροικος used in connection with Moses prior to the exodus from Egypt.²⁵⁰ The second use is seen most prominently in Deut 14:21, «You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to aliens [παροίκῳ] residing in your towns for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner [ἄλλοτριῷ]».

²⁴³ Allen 1894: 269.

²⁴⁴ The four instances where the Israelites are described as προσήλυτος (where one could have expected them described as πάροικος): Exod 22:20, 23:9; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19.

²⁴⁵ Lake 1933:84, «He [Allen] is, however, obliged to force the meaning a little in some instances, especially those in which *ger* is used of the Israelites in Egypt. They were certainly not 'converts' but quite definitely 'sojourners'; nevertheless in these passages *ger* is sometimes rendered by *προσήλυτος* and not by *πάροικος* (Exod. xxii. 20, xxiii. 9; Lev. xix. 34; Deut. x. 19).»

²⁴⁶ Overman 1988:25n15.

²⁴⁷ πάροικος used before the exodus from Egypt in the Torah: Gn. 15:13, [17:8 exclusive in the LXX], 23:4; Exod 2:22, 18:3.

²⁴⁸ πάροικος used after the exodus from Egypt in the Torah: Deut 14:21, 23:8.

²⁴⁹ See also Gen 17:8 where the word παροικεῖς is used for 'residing as a foreigner'.

²⁵⁰ Exod 2:22, 18:3.

Use of *ger* translated as πάροικος elsewhere in Tanakh:

2. Sam 1:13, «And David said to the youth who told him, "From where are you?" And he said, "I am the son of an Amalekite stranger [πάροικος]."»

Jer 14:8, «O hope of Israel, his Savior at time of trouble, why should you be like a stranger [πάροικος] in the land, and like a wayfarer who turns aside to lodge?»

Pss 39:13, «Hear my prayer, O Lord, and hearken to my cry. Be not silent to my tears, for I am a stranger [πάροικος] with You, a dweller as all my forefathers.»

Pss 119:19. I am a stranger [πάροικος] in the land; do not hide Your commandments from me.

1 Chr 29:15, «For we are strangers [πάροικος] before You, and inhabitants like all our forefathers; as a shadow are our days on the earth, and there is no hope.»

It is thus significant that all the 11 passages in the LXX where *ger* is translated as πάροικος the meaning of ‘proselyte’ as someone who is circumcised and who follows Mosaic law is excluded by the context.²⁵¹

***Toshav* translated as πάροικος in the LXX.**

While גר is most commonly translated as either προσήλυτος or πάροικος, the word בְּשִׁיט, ‘resident,’ is always translated as πάροικος.²⁵² This could seem to imply that where the Hebrew text refers to the בְּשִׁיט²⁵³ and the LXX correspondingly uses the term πάροικος, the person who is referred to is the uncircumcised proselyte who resides with the Israelites.²⁵⁴ As such he is not obliged to adhere to the Mosaic law.²⁵⁵ This would be in correspondence with the Rabbinic reading.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ Allen 1894:264-275; Lake 1933:84.

²⁵² *Toshav* is always translated as *paroikos* in all its 13 instances in the Tanakh: Gen 23:4; Exod 12:45; Lev 22:10, 25:6, 23, 35, 40, 45, 47; Num. 35:15; Psalms 39:13; 1 Chr 29:15.

²⁵³ F.ex. in Exod 12:45, «a *paroikos* ... may not eat it [the Passover-offering].»

²⁵⁴ Houten 1991:182, «The meaning of πάροικος as temporary resident or sojourner is made clear by the fact that not only is גר sometimes translated by πάροικος, but that תושב is always translated by πάροικος; K.L. and M.A Schmidt 1967:844.

²⁵⁵ cf. the *paroikos* in Exod 12:45.

²⁵⁶ Cf. *Rashi's commentary* on Lev 25:35 (Herczeg) where he writes that *toshav* denotes a *ger toshav*.

πάροικος in the LXX - a summary

πάροικος being both a translation of *ger* and *toshav* underscores their synonymy.²⁵⁷ In the following I will therefore survey all the occurrences of πάροικος²⁵⁸ in the Pentateuch in the LXX and treat them as referring to the *ger toshav*. In the Hebrew Bible it is not always clear whether the term *ger* refers to the circumcised or the uncircumcised *ger*. The use of the term πάροικος with its seemingly unambiguous reference to the uncircumcised *ger* thereby enables us to get a sharper image of the *ger toshav* and his rights and obligations within the Israelite community.

The hendiadys *ger w'toshav* is translated as προσήλυτου ἢ τοῦ παροίκου. The *ger asher bisharekha* ('aliens residing in your towns') is translated as προσήλυτος ὁ παροικῶν in Exod 20:10 and Deut 5:14 and as παροίκῳ τῷ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν in Deut 14:21. All these are grammatical variants of the term *paroikos*. Accordingly these passages will also be included in the below.

ger - Gen 15:13, «Then the LORD said to Abram, «Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens [גַּל = πάροικον] in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years.»

ger/toshav - Gen 23:4, «I am a stranger [גַּל = πάροικος] and a resident [בְּשֵׂוֹת = παρεπίδημος] with you. Give me burial property with you, so that I may bury my dead from before me.»

ger - Exod 2:22, «She bore a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, 'I was a stranger [גַּל = πάροικός] in a foreign land.»

toshav - Exod 12:45, «A sojourner [בְּשֵׂוֹת = πάροικος] or a hired hand may not partake of it [the passover sacrifice].»

ger - Exod 18:3, «and her two sons, one of whom was named Gershom, because he [Moses] said, "I was a stranger [גַּל = πάροικος] in a foreign land,"

gerkha asher bisharekha - Exod 20:10, «But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, you male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns [גַּרְיָגֵרִיבְּשֵׂוֹת רֶשֶׁתְּ גַּל = προσήλυτος ὁ παροικῶν].

toshav - Lev 25:6, «And [the produce of] the Sabbath of the land shall be yours to eat for you, for your male and female slaves, and for your hired worker and resident [גַּרְבְּשֵׂוֹתָי = παροίκῳ] who live with you.»

ger w'toshav - Lev 25:23, The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land belongs to Me, for you are strangers [גַּרְיָגֵרִי = προσήλυτοι] and residents [גַּרְבְּשֵׂוֹתָי = πάροικοι] with Me.»

²⁵⁷ See Gesenius above («*Ger* in the lexicons») where he points out that *ger* and *toshav* are synonyms. Likewise, Kellermann 1968:448, points toward the difficulty in differentiating between the *ger* and the *toshav*.

²⁵⁸ I have excluded Lev 22:10 since this does most likely not refer to the category of πάροικος, but instead refers to someone who resides at the Kohen's place. Also, it seems like any non-Kohen are not permitted to eat holy things, this prohibition would therefore also include Israelites (who are not Kohanim).

ger w'toshav - Lev 25:35, «If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him [whether] a convert [גֵּר = προσηλύτου] or a resident [בְּשֵׁוֹתִי = παροίκου], so that he can live with you.»

toshav - Lev 25:40, «Like a laborer or a resident [בְּשֵׁוֹתִי = πάροικος] shall he be with you; until the Jubilee Year shall he work with you.»

toshavim ha'garim - Lev 25:45, «Also from among the children of the residents [בְּיַבְשֵׁוֹתֵי = παροίκων] who live [בְּיָגְרֵי] with you, from them you may purchase, from their family that is with you, whom they begot in your Land; and they shall remain yours as an ancestral heritage.»

ger w'toshav/ger toshav - Lev 25:47, «If a resident [גֵּר = προσηλύτου] stranger [בְּשֵׁוֹתִי = παροίκου] gains wealth with you, and your brother becomes destitute with him and is sold to a resident [גֵּר = προσηλύτω] stranger [בְּשֵׁוֹתִי = παροίκω] among you or to an idol of the family of a non Jew.»

toshav - Num 35:15, «These six cities shall be a refuge for the children of Israel and for the proselyte [גֵּר = προσηλύτω] and resident [בְּשֵׁוֹתִי = παροίκω] among them, so that anyone who unintentionally kills a person can flee there.»

gerkha asher bisharekha - Deut 5:14, «But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work - you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns [גֵּרֵי גְוֵרִים וְשֵׁוֹתֵי גֵרִים = προσήλυτος ὁ παροικῶν], so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.»

ger asher bisharekha - Deut 14:21, «You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to aliens residing in your towns [*ger asher bisharekha* = παροίκω τῷ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσίν] for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner.»

ger - Deut 23:8(7), «You shall not despise an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not despise an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner [גֵּר = πάροικος] in his land.

The following characteristics of the «πάροικος» can be made based on the above:

- The Patriarchs and their descendants had the status of πάροικος until the exodus from Egypt²⁵⁹ (Gen 15:13, 23:4; Exod 2:22, 18:3).
- A πάροικος may not eat of the Passover sacrifice (Exod 12:45).
- The πάροικος can eat of the produce in the Sabbath years (Lev 25:6).
- The πάροικος is entitled support if in need (Lev 25:35).
- The πάροικος is not to be mistreated (Lev.25:40).²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ That they left the status of πάροικος during the exodus from Egypt, and not at Sinai or when they entered the land of Canaan, can be deduced from the commandment that the πάροικος are forbidden to eat of the Passover sacrifice (Exod 12:45).

²⁶⁰ The context of Lev 25:40 is that Jews who are sold as slaves to other Jews are not to be mistreated (cf. Lev 24:43, You shall not work him with rigor»), but are to be treated like indentured laborers, that is, they are to be treated as πάροικος and they are to be released during the Jubilee year, if not redeemed earlier.

- The πάροικος is not to be acquired as slaves (Lev 25:45).²⁶¹
- The πάροικος is given trade opportunities in the land which enables him to acquire wealth, including Jewish indentured labourers, and his rights of property is protected (Lev 25:47).²⁶²
- The πάροικος have equal access as the Israelites to protection in a city of refuge (Num 35:15).
- The πάροικος is not obliged to follow the full range of Jewish law (Deut 14:21).
- Compared with the foreigner the πάροικος receives special privileges (Deut 14:21).
- The πάροικος is synonymous with the «ger who is in your towns» (Deut 14:21).
- The πάροικος are to be treated sensitively, since the Israelites have also been πάροικος (Deut 23:7).

This demonstrates that the *ger toshav*, the *toshav* and the *ger asher bisharekha* are all in the same category of *paroikos*, i.e. uncircumcised proselytes.

Ger translated in the Targums

Allen²⁶³ notes that the Targums seem to follow the LXX. The «גַּר in your cities» in Deut 14:21, which the LXX renders as πάροικος is rendered by the Targums as עַרְל תּוֹתֵב, ‘uncircumcised stranger.’ The גַּר תּוֹשָׁב in Lev 25:47 is likewise rendered as עַרְל תּוֹתֵב, ‘uncircumcised sojourner.’

The Targum differ from the LXX when it renders the גַּר in Deut 28:43²⁶⁴ not as προσήλυτος, but as עַרְל תּוֹתֵב. This does not necessarily conflict. As mentioned above, when προσήλυτος is used unqualified it could potentially carry both technical meanings of proselytes. In this respect both the LXX and the Targum could be referring to the uncircumcised proselyte, but that the Targum chose to use the more specific term.

²⁶¹ Lev 25:45 is stating that the children of the πάροικος can be acquired as slaves. This seems to imply that the πάροικος themselves are exempt. It could additionally imply that if the children of the πάροικος do not adhere to their obligations as πάροικος they lose their status of πάροικος and with that they lose the special protection and privileges that follows this status. This is also indicative of the πάροικος (i.e. *ger toshav*) status is not automatically inherited.

²⁶² If a Jew is sold as an indentured labourer (cf. Lev 25:53, «He shall be with him as an employee hired year by year») to a πάροικος he must be redeemed following legal procedures, he cannot just be confiscated without legal ground. This shows that the property rights of the πάροικος were protected.

²⁶³ Allen 1894:271.

²⁶⁴ Deut 28:43, «The stranger [*ha'ger*] who is among you will ascend above you higher and higher, while you will descend lower and lower.»

In any matter, it is noteworthy that also the Targums use specific words to differentiate between the ‘circumcised proselyte’ and the ‘uncircumcised proselyte.’ Further, the Targums could be seen as equating the «גַּל in your cities» with the גַּל תּוֹשֵׁב. That these are merely two different terms referring to the same category of proselyte, namely the «uncircumcised proselyte».

In exodus 12:48 the circumcised *ger* is rendered by the Targum as גַּלִּי. The Targum seems to be preferring this latter term when it understands the *ger* to be the full proselyte. On the other hand the Targum prefer the term גַּל תּוֹשֵׁב when it decides the *ger* to be ‘the uncircumcised sojourner.’

Summary

προσήλυτος has the general meaning of denoting any alien. It also has a technical meaning denoting an alien who attaches himself to the Israelites, either as an adopted member or as a foreign citizen. Thus, the technical meaning can be divided up into two subcategories; (a) προσήλυτος, circumcised proselyte, (b) πάροικος, an uncircumcised proselyte.

Further, it may be argued that when προσήλυτος is used unqualified it must be decided based on context which meaning is intended. An example is seen in Exod 23:12 as demonstrated above.²⁶⁵ This goes to show that the meaning of *proselytos* (and *ger*), when it is used unqualified in the Biblical text, cannot automatically be translated as intending the circumcised *ger*, but that its meaning has to be decided based on its context. In most instances *proselytos* unambiguously is referring to the circumcised גַּל.²⁶⁶ Other places the meaning is somewhat ambiguous, and either the circumcised or the uncircumcised meaning of גַּל can be argued.

In any matter, what has been shown, is that the LXX in the overall differentiates between different categories of proselytes, namely the circumcised and the uncircumcised. This is consistent with the Tanakh and the Rabbinical literature including the Targums.

²⁶⁵ See page 50 and 34.

²⁶⁶ For instance, Exod 12:48-49, and all other places in the Septuagint where it is emphasised that there shall be one law for the native and the προσήλυτος.

Chapter 2. προσήλυτος and God-fearers in Philo

Proselytos

Kuhn²⁶⁷ asserts that the understanding of προσήλυτος as a Gentile who has converted to Judaism is fully developed in Philo. The term προσήλυτος is used by Philo²⁶⁸ to denote a full convert to Judaism, but he also uses other terms. This is presumably due to the unfamiliarity of the term by his non-Jewish readers.²⁶⁹ He defines the term «as one who has left country, friends and relatives, also patriarchal customs, and set himself under the Jewish constitution.»²⁷⁰

Philo also attests that the term προσήλυτος can refer to an uncircumcised proselyte. In his commentary on Exodus 22:20²⁷¹ he understands the use of the word $\text{D}\gamma\lambda/\text{προσ}\eta\lambda\text{y}\tau\text{o}\varsigma$ as clearly referring to the uncircumcised *ger*, since the Israelites at the time when they were living in Egypt were not circumcised.²⁷² Philo comments on the verse, «for you know the souls of the $\text{D}\gamma\lambda$ »,²⁷³ that «what is the mind of the proselyte if not alienation from belief in many gods and familiarity with honoring the one God and Father of all».²⁷⁴ The proselyte, according to this meaning, «is one who circumcises not his uncircumcision but his desires and sensual pleasures and the other passions of the soul.»²⁷⁵ The $\text{D}\gamma\lambda$ mentioned together with the widows and the orphans are according to Philo in this latter category, they are those who «are sincerely attached to the truth and converted to piety.»²⁷⁶ The uncircumcised *ger*, as Philo portrays him, is thus one who rejects idolatry and immorality and who embraces the Jewish idea of monotheism.

²⁶⁷ Kuhn 1968:731.

²⁶⁸ Philo, *Dreams* II, 273; *Spec. Laws* I, 51; I, 308.

²⁶⁹ Kuhn 1968:731.

²⁷⁰ Philo, *Spec. Laws* I, 52, 309 (in Kuhn 1968:732).

²⁷¹ Philo, *QE* 2.2 (7.4 in Reinhold & Feldman 1996).

²⁷² Cf. *Rashi's commentary* to Exod 24:6 (Herczeg), where he cites the Sages who says that from this verse it is learned that all the Israelites mass converted before entering the Sinai covenant, the males by collectively undergoing circumcision in addition to immersion in a mikvah and sprinkling of blood on the altar [From *b. Yebam.* 46b, *b. Ker.* 9a].

²⁷³ Exod 23:9

²⁷⁴ Philo, *QE* 2.2 (7.4 in Reinhold & Feldman 1996).

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, *QE* 2.2 (7.4 in Reinhold & Feldman 1996).

²⁷⁶ Philo, *Spec. Laws* I, 309 (in Yonge 1993).

God-fearers

Life of Moses 2.4.20-24 describes how the laws of Moses have affected many nations and influenced them to honor the Sabbath, Rosh Chodesh, Yom Kippur and to pray to God.

Special Laws 1. 309 speaks about Gentiles who are «attached to the truth and converted to piety».²⁷⁷

Every Good Man is Free 2.72 describes Gentiles, although very few, who are «prudent, and just, and virtuous.»²⁷⁸

Overman²⁷⁹ sees Philo's use of **ⲓⲛⲉⲓⲛⲓⲛⲓ** as a confirmation that **προσήλυτος** is not identical in meaning with the circumcised proselyte, but that they are the resident aliens, i.e. **גֵּר תושב**. Wolfson sees Philo's use of **προσήλυτος** as a reflection of «the actual existence at his time of a class of Gentiles who, while uncircumcised, had renounced idolatry and otherwise led a virtuous life.»²⁸⁰

Summary God-fearer practices and characteristics in Philo²⁸¹

- Uncircumcised (*QE* 2.2).
- Abstains from idolatry (*QE* 2.2).
- Monotheist (*QE* 2.2).
- Controls «his desires and sensual pleasures and the other passions of the soul» (*QE* 2.2).
- Honors the Sabbath by relaxing from labour²⁸² (*Moses* 2.4.21).
- Honors some of the Jewish festivals (Rosh Chodesh and Yom Kippur) (*Moses* 2.4.23).²⁸³
- Prays to God (*Moses* 2.4.24).

²⁷⁷ transl. Yonge.

²⁷⁸ transl. Yonge.

²⁷⁹ Overman 1988:19.

²⁸⁰ Wolfson 1968: 372-373.

²⁸¹ See also footnote 176 for complete list of God-fearer references in Philo.

²⁸² Cf. Exod 20:10, 23:12; Deut 5:14; Cf. Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106; Seneca, *Epis.* 95, 47 [on forbidding the lighting of Sabbath lights]; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 32 [Millar 1986:161n50, "A remarkable illustration of the spread of the Jewish Sabbath at the beginning of the imperial period."]; Horace, *Sat.* i 9, 68-72. [Schürer 1890:308n276, "...the person who observes the Jewish Sabbath is described as *unus multorum* 'one of many'"]; Persius *Sat.* v. 176-84 [Williams 1988:109n68, "Persius' satirical description of an indigent proselyte celebrating the Sabbath in Sat v. 176-84 shows just how widespread knowledge of Jewish ritual had become at Rome even among non-practitioners like Persius himself.

²⁸³ y. *Meg.* 3.2.74d, [Heaven-fearers observing Yom Kippur] (7.8 in Reinhold & Feldman 1996).

- «attached to the truth and converted to piety» (*Special Laws* 1. 309).
- «living in a blameless and irreproachable manner, determining not to do any injustice» (*Special Laws* 2.12.44).
- «Prudent, just and virtuous» (*Every Good Man is Free* II, 72).

It can be asserted that Philo's use of προσήλυτος attest to it referring to two technical meanings, i.e. the circumcised proselyte and the uncircumcised proselyte. The Gentiles he describes, even though he does not use the specific term «God-fearer», fits the definitions that was presented of this group in Part III. Compared with «the God-fearers in the Tanakh»²⁸⁴ we see that Philo's God-fearers also would fit their description. They are described as pious and upright persons who abstains from idolatry, shuns evil and who put their trust in God. We will also see that they fit the description of the God-fearers that are met in Acts, especially the Roman Centurion Cornelius.²⁸⁵ He is in Acts 10:2 described as being devout and fearing God, and it says about him that he give alms to the poor and prays to God constantly.

Chapter 3. προσήλυτος and God-fearers in Josephus

Like Philo, also Josephus avoided the term προσήλυτος since he wrote for an audience unfamiliar with the word.²⁸⁶ Even though Josephus does not use the word προσήλυτος,²⁸⁷ I would like to highlight a sequence in his *Antiquities*²⁸⁸ where we see displayed the two options of becoming either a full convert, i.e. circumcised *ger*, or to remain uncircumcised and still being able to serve God. The non-Jewish king Izates becomes attracted towards Judaism and wants to undergo circumcision in order to become a full convert. He is at first persuaded by a Jew named Ananias that it is not necessary to undergo circumcision in order to worship God, while later another Jew by the name Eleazar persuades the king to circumcise and hence to become a full convert, i.e. *ger tzedek*. Elsewhere Josephus makes references to God-fearers who contributes to the Temple in Jerusalem,

²⁸⁴ See above, «God-fearers in the Tanakh,» pp. 45-48.

²⁸⁵ See below, «*Sebomenoi* in New Testament Literature,» pp. 64-65.

²⁸⁶ Kuhn 1968:732.

²⁸⁷ See *Ibid.* 1968:732 for references to Josephus using the verb προσέρχεσθαι in describing the Roman lady Fulvia who converted to Judaism.

²⁸⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 20:17–48.

But no one need wonder that there was so much wealth in our Temple, for all the Jews throughout the habitable world, and those who worshipped God (σεβομένων τὸν θεὸν), even those from Asia and Europe, had been contributing to it for a very long time.²⁸⁹

Feldman²⁹⁰ regards this as a key reference to the God-fearers. The distinction that Josephus draws between Jews on the one hand and God-fearer on the other hand is evident. In *Against Apion* Josephus mentions several Jewish practices being spread among non-Jews.

The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed.²⁹¹

The implication being that they have not converted. They are instead Gentiles who somehow are attached to the Jewish synagogues and ritual life, but without being circumcised.

Summary God-fearer practices and characteristics in Josephus²⁹²

- Can worship God without being circumcised (*Jewish Antiquities* 20:41).
- Gives donations to the Temple in Jerusalem (*Jewish Antiquities* 14.110).²⁹³
- Abstains from work on the Sabbath (*Against Apion* 2.282).²⁹⁴
- Lights candles on the Sabbath (*Against Apion* 2.282).²⁹⁵
- Observes some of the Jewish fasts (*Against Apion* 2.282).²⁹⁶
- Observes some of the food prohibitions (*Against Apion* 2.282).²⁹⁷

Also in Josephus it is clearly reflected that it is not necessary for Gentiles to circumcise in order to have a relationship with God. The God-fearers in Josephus are described as standing in some

²⁸⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 14.110 (transl. Whiston).

²⁹⁰ Feldman 1986.

²⁹¹ Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2.282 (transl. Whiston).

²⁹² See also footnote 176 for a complete list of God-fearer references in Josephus.

²⁹³ Cf. Pss 112:9; Cf. inscription in Aphrodisias; Cf. the God-fearers in Luke 7:1-5 and Acts 10:2, see below.

²⁹⁴ Cf. footnote 282.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106; Seneca, *Epis.* 95, 47 [on forbidding the lighting of Sabbath lights]; Cf. Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.4.20-24.

²⁹⁶ Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.4.20-24

²⁹⁷ Cf. Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106; Petronius, *fragment no.* 37; Plutarch, *Cicero* 7.6.5.

relation with the Jews, while at the same time being clearly distinguished from them. They share some of the features of the God-fearers that are met in Philo, in the Tanakh and elsewhere in Hellenistic literature. Most notably they contribute to the Temple and they observe some Jewish practices.

Chapter 4. *proselytos/paroikos* and God-fearers in New Testament literature

Introduction

In the New Testament the προσήλυτος are understood by some lexical writers to be synonymous with the full convert to Judaism. They are to be differentiated from the σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν.²⁹⁸

It is significant that this definition rejects the two technical meanings of προσήλυτος/דִּיג which has been demonstrated in the Tanakh and the LXX, and which also is prevalent in traditional Judaism as expressed in the Rabbinic literature. This rejection could be said to be consistent with Christianity's rejection of a differentiation between Israelites and the circumcised *ger* on the one side and the uncircumcised *ger* (i.e., *ger toshav/ger asher bisharekha*) on the other side. As will be discussed, the letter to the Ephesians seem to assume that this differentiation was valid before, but that after Christ this differentiation is no longer valid. The new emphasis is that there is no longer a «dividing wall»²⁹⁹ and there is now «one new humanity in place of the two».³⁰⁰ Through the abolishment of the law³⁰¹ also the category of *ger toshav* have been abolished. You are no longer strangers and aliens (i.e. *gerim w'toshavim*) but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God».³⁰²

Instead of differentiating between the circumcised and the uncircumcised proselyte, the definition in BDAG differentiates between the (circumcised) proselyte and the *sebomenoi ton Theon*. The latter seemingly having replaced the category of *paroikos/ger toshav*. That both categories are

²⁹⁸ BDAG 2000:880, 'προσήλυτος,' «**one who has come over from paganism to Judean religion and practice, convert** (...) a designation for a gentile won for the Israelite community through missionary efforts (...). ... - They are to be differentiated fr. the σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν, who had obligated themselves only to follow certain commandments; in a mixed expr. ...»

²⁹⁹ Eph 2:14.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 2:15.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 2:15.

³⁰² Ibid., 2:19.

differentiated from the circumcised proselyte indicate a similarity between the categories of *sebomenoi* and *paroikos/ger toshav*. The most important similarity is that both the *paroikos/ger toshav* and the *sebomenoi* follow some commandments, but not the full range of Mosaic law. This is in contrast to the circumcised proselyte. Both groups also stand in some relationship to Jewish communities and religious life.

First I will take a look at how the words *proselytos* and *paroikos* are used in the New Testament writings, then I will briefly discuss the letter of the Ephesians chapter 2:11-22. Thereafter I will move on to the *sebomenoi*.

προσήλυτος in the New Testament

The word *προσήλυτος* has four occurrences in the New Testament. Matt 23:15, Acts 2:11, Acts 6:5 and Acts 13:43. The first three instances most likely refer to the circumcised proselyte, but this cannot be stated unambiguously. When it comes to Acts 13:43 it may be argued that *προσήλυτος* refers to the uncircumcised *ἄλλοι*,

When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts [*σεβομένων προσηλύτων*]³⁰³ to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

Overman³⁰⁴ who has pointed toward an often confused understanding of the word *προσήλυτος* discusses in this regard the translation of *προσήλυτος* in Acts. He emphasizes that in Acts 2:10 and 13:43 the Jews [*Ἰουδαίων*] are mentioned together with the *προσήλυτοι*. He then argues that Luke would be speaking nonsense if these *προσήλυτος* are to be understood in their technical sense as full converts to Judaism, since according to this meaning the *προσήλυτος* are Jews.³⁰⁵ He concludes his argument with stating that «in Acts the *προσήλυτοι* are Gentiles closely allied with the synagogue and the Jewish people, yet are a group distinct from the *Ἰουδαίοι*.»³⁰⁶ Overman thinks that *προσήλυτος* as used by Luke in Acts has the «same general meaning that one finds in

³⁰³ 'devout converts' [*σεβομένων προσηλύτων*] have been variantly translated as 'God-fearing proselytes' (NAS), 'religious proselytes' (King James), 'foreigners who were worshipers of God' (Aramaic Bible in plain english), 'the strangers who served God' (Douay–Rheims Bible).

³⁰⁴ Overman 1988:18-20.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 20.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 20.

Philo and the LXX.³⁰⁷ Overman then goes on to point toward the striking similarities between the προσήλυτοι in Acts and the φοβούμενοι/σεβόμενοι τόν θεόν.³⁰⁸ Thus, according to Overman, the προσήλυτοι that is encountered in Acts 13:43 is equivalent to the uncircumcised *ger* (i.e. the *paroikos/ger toshav*).

Based on the above I would argue that just as the גל in the Tanakh and the προσήλυτος in the LXX can denote either the circumcised or the uncircumcised גל, so is also the case in the New Testament. As demonstrated by Overman, Acts 13:43 most likely refer to the uncircumcised גל. The major difference between an uncircumcised *ger* living in Biblical times and an uncircumcised *ger* living in the Hellenistic period is that the latter cannot be granted the formal status of *ger toshav*.³⁰⁹

πάροιχος in the New Testament

The term πάροιχος occurs 4 times in the New Testament, πάροιχία twice, πάροιχέω twice.³¹⁰ The term stands out as a restricted technical term, except in Luke 24:18.³¹¹ The close connection with ideas present in the LXX is shown through the fact that all the references in the New Testament has either direct quotation of it or allusions to it.³¹²

Ephesians 2:19 - «you are no longer resident aliens [*gerim w'toshavim*]»

Ephesians 2:19 is of special interest, since this verse seems to be clearly referring to the Jewish institution of *ger toshav*. The author argues that from now on there is to exist only one category of proselytes.³¹³ This is also consistent with a shift in meaning of the whole concept of being a *proselytos*. Whereas this denoted in Judaism a turning away from idolatry and accepting the Jewish

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 20..

³⁰⁸ Ibid. 20.

³⁰⁹ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Kochavim* 10:6.

³¹⁰ K.L. and M.A. Schmidt 1985:851; Luke 24:18 (παροικεῖς); Acts 7:6 (πάροιχον); 7:29 (πάροιχος); 13:17 (παροικία); Heb. 11:9 (παρώκησεν); Eph. 2:19 (πάροιχοι); 1 Pet. 1:17 (παροικίας); 2:11 (παροίκους).

³¹¹ Ibid. 851.

³¹² Ibid. 851.

³¹³ See Eph 2:19, «Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household»; Cf. Col 3:11, «Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.»; Gal 3:28, «There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.»

concept of monotheism,³¹⁴ in Christianity it denotes becoming a member of their specific religious group.³¹⁵

The Greek text in Eph. 2:19, «ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι» is likewise equivalent with the Hebrew term *ger w'toshav*. This is based on ξένοι being synonymous with προσήλυτος [Hebrew: *ger*] and *toshav* being synonymous with πάροικοι. Thus, ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι = *ger w'toshav*.³¹⁶

***Sebomenoi* in New Testament Literature**

In Luke 7:1-5 we meet the Roman centurion who is said to love the Jewish people, and that he has contributed to building a synagogue. Acts 8:27-28 is describing the Ethiopian eunuch, who «had come to Jerusalem to worship». While he was traveling he was «reading the prophet Isaiah.» These two passages does not use the term *sebomenoi*, but they fit the definition of a God-fearer.

Acts 10:2 tells about Cornelius, a Roman centurion. «he was a devout (εὐσεβῆς)³¹⁷ man who feared (φοβούμενος) God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.» He is further described as «a righteous (δίκαιος) and God-fearing man (φοβούμενος τον θεον)»³¹⁸

The God-fearers are frequently found in the synagogues, together with Jews, where they are being addressed by Paul. Acts 13:16, «You Israelites, and others who fear (φοβούμενοι) God, listen.» Acts 13:26, «descendants of Abraham's family, and others who fear (φοβούμενοι) God.» Acts 13:43, «Jews and devout (σεβομένων) converts (προσηλύτων)³¹⁹ to Judaism.» When Paul was in

³¹⁴ In tractate *Sotah* 10a Tamar tell Judah, «I am a תרתי (‘proselyte’),» Rashi explains there that this means, «I have abandoned idol worship.»; *Rashi's commentary* on Gen. 12:5 (Herczeg), «the souls that they made in Haran» quotes *Ber. Rab.* 39 which says that the «souls they made...» are proselytes. This being before the birth of the Israelite nation, the proselytes cannot refer to Gentiles who become Jews, but are referring to Gentiles who abandons idolatry and who are brought near God; Schürer 1986:160, «This literature did not of course aim at winning pagans over to a full acceptance of the Law and to joining the Jewish community. Its purpose was often only conversion to the fundamental viewpoints of Judaism.»

³¹⁵ Goodman 2001:10.

³¹⁶ See also Gnllka 1982 on Ephesians 2:19 (Der Epheserbrief).

³¹⁷ This verse combines the words εὐσεβῆς (similar to σεβομένοι) and φοβούμενος, establishing their synonymity. This could help explain way Luke interchangeably uses the words φοβούμενοι and σεβομένοι.

³¹⁸ The phrase ἀνὴρ δίκαιος, ‘righteous man,’ is reminiscent of the description of Noah in Gen. 6:9 in the LXX - νωε ἀνθρωπος δίκαιος, ‘Noah was a righteous man’.

³¹⁹ See discussion above on p. 62, «προσήλυτος in the New Testament», where Overman argues that *proselytos* in Acts 13:43 is to be understood as the uncircumcised proselyte.

Athens «he argued in the synagogue with the Jew and the devout (σεβομένους) persons».³²⁰ In Corinth, «Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks».³²¹

Acts 13:50 talks about «the devout (σεβομένας) women of high standing and the leading men of the city.» Acts 17:4, «the devout (σεβομένων) Greeks and not a few of the leading women.»

Acts 16:11-15 describes Lydia. She was «a worshipper of God (σεβομένη τον θεον).» (v. 14). In v. 13 it tells how Paul met Lydia at a place of prayer.³²²

Summary God-fearer practices and characteristics in Luke and Acts

- Donates to Jewish causes and gives alms (Luke 7:1-5; Acts 10:2).³²³
- Worships in Jerusalem (Acts 8:27).³²⁴
- Reads Jewish Scriptures (Acts 8:28).
- Prays to God (Acts 10:2, 16:13).³²⁵
- Attends synagogue services together with Jews (13:26, 43, 17:17, 18:7).

The God-fearers met with in Luke and Acts show some of the same similarities as the God-fearers that are met with in the Tanakh, Philo, Josephus and elsewhere in Hellenistic literature. Since the term «God-fearer» is used to describe them, this in itself denotes that they are pious. The God-fearer Cornelius is described as praying constantly. He would also fit the God-fearer description used by Philo, that they are «living in a blameless and irreproachable manner, determining not to do

³²⁰ Acts 17:17.

³²¹ Acts 18:7.

³²² See also footnote 177 for a complete list of God-fearer references in New Testament literature.

³²³ Cf. Inscription in Aphrodisas which most likely is a list of Gentile donors (God-fearers) to a Jewish building. See Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987; See also Psalms 112:9 and Josephus, *Ant.* 14.110.

³²⁴ Cf. 1 Kgs 8:41-43 which tells that Gentiles may pray towards the Temple in Jerusalem. See «God-fearers in Tanakh» above.

³²⁵ Cf. Philo, *Moses* 2.4.24

any injustice.»³²⁶ This is consistent with the description in Psalms of «those who fear God» and the description of Job,³²⁷ as well as Noah.³²⁸

Most distinguishably the God-fearers in Acts frequent the Jewish synagogues where they can be assumed to be involved in learning Torah. This is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 31:12 where the *ger toshav* are together with the Israelites (including the full converts) in order to learn Torah and to learn how to fear (i.e. worship) the LORD.³²⁹ The Roman Centurion Cornelius (Acts chap. 10) share some features with the Syrian general Naaman (2 Kgs chap. 5). Both recognize the Jewish concept of God, but through their offices they cannot completely avoid idol worship. Seemingly they are both being allowance for this practice, likely on the grounds that as God-fearers they are not devotionally involved in idolatry. Another important shared feature is the description of God-fearers as contributors to Jewish causes and the giving of alms to the poor.

³²⁶ Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.12.44.

³²⁷ Job 1:1, 8.

³²⁸ Gen 6:9, «Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.»

³²⁹ Cf. also 2 Kgs 17:28-29.

PART V. A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE SCHOLARLY CONSENSUS

Introduction.

In scholarly debate a variety of terms has been used to refer to what may be Gentile adherents to the Seven Noahide Laws: «God-Fearers»,³³⁰ «Sympathizers»,³³¹ «semi-proselytes»,³³² «spiritual proselytes»,³³³ «adherents»,³³⁴ «Judaisers»³³⁵, «honorary Jews»,³³⁶ and «religious heathen/religious person».³³⁷

This variety in itself attests to the debate and confusion this group has caused «in the ranks of even the greatest scholars».³³⁸ This confusion is also connected with the confusion concerning the term *proselytos*. In the following I will attempt to critically go through the main arguments which scholars have used against the compatibility between the categories of *ger toshav* and the God-fearers.

³³⁰ See f.ex. Moore 1927:326-327; Lake 1933:74.

³³¹ See f.ex. Feldman 1950:200n2

³³² See f.ex. Marcus 1952:247; Simon 1986:337-338.

³³³ Wolfson 1968:369.

³³⁴ In Cohen, S. J. D 1987 as opposed to «converts».

³³⁵ In Williams 1988:99, where she uses the term «Judaisers» interchangeably with the term «sympathizers»

³³⁶ Referenced in Feldman 1989:274.

³³⁷ Lake 1933:76.

³³⁸ Feldman 1950:200.

Chapter 1. Arguments against an identification between *gerei toshav* and the *sebomenoi ton theon*

The God-fearers viewed as semi-proselytes.

There is a tendency to view the God-fearers as semi-converts,³³⁹ even though such a concept does not exist within Jewish law.³⁴⁰

The God-fearers viewed from the perspective of the New Testament definition of proselyte.

As already demonstrated, from the viewpoint of traditional Judaism any human is obligated either by the Mosaic covenant or by the Noahide covenant. Even though Moore rightly dismisses the concept of a semi-convert as something non-existent from the viewpoint of Jewish law, he also dismisses the concept of the uncircumcised proselyte.

It may, therefore, be said at the outset that Jewish law knows no semi-proselytes, nor any other kind of proselytes than such as have, by circumcision and baptism, not only become members of the Jewish church but been naturalized in the Jewish nation.³⁴¹

A similar view is also held by Kirsopp Lake who asserts that «A proselyte is within the covenant, a non-Jew is without it, and fractional [i.e. semi-proselytes] proselytes are impossible.»³⁴² It is correct that non-Jews are outside the Mosaic covenant, but from the viewpoint of traditional Judaism they are within the Noahide covenant.³⁴³

Seemingly Moore's and Lake's faulty judgement is based on the assumption that the concept of the *ger toshav* is purely a civil and social category without any religious significance. They are thus applying the «confused» definition of a proselyte³⁴⁴ which bases itself upon the LXX preferred translation of *ger* as *proselytos*. As shown above, this definition is found in BDAG's lexical

³³⁹ See footnote 332.

³⁴⁰ Moore 1927:326; Lake 1933:76.

³⁴¹ Moore 1927:326-327.

³⁴² Lake 1933:76.

³⁴³ See Part I. Chapter 2. «The Noahide Laws».

³⁴⁴ Overman 1988:18-20.

definition of *proselytos*. As stated in my introduction³⁴⁵ Lake himself warned against a confused understanding of the word *proselytos*, but then he seemingly equate the meaning of a proselyte as solely referring to a circumcised convert (i.e. *ger tzedek*). He thus recognizes the two categories of proselytes, but regards the category of *paroikos/ger toshav* as a purely social and civil category which was replaced by the full convert category (i.e. *ger tzedek*). He says, «Thus *ger* completely changed its meaning; instead of being a foreigner living among Israelites but not converted to their religion, the *ger* came to be the name of a foreigner who was converted.»³⁴⁶ Moore did likewise. He says,

This change in the meaning of *ger* from an *advena* (newcomer) in Jewish territory to an *advena* in the Jewish religion is significant at once of the change in the situation of the Jews in the world after the fall of the kingdom and of the changed conception of the character and mission of their religion - the metic has given place to the proselyte.³⁴⁷

This is also due to them not recognizing the doctrine of the Noahide laws as being connected with the status of *ger toshav/paroikos*. Further, they seemingly do not acknowledge that the two statuses of *ger toshav* and *ger tzedek* can exist simultaneously.

The *geri toshav* and the God-fearers viewed as catechumens.³⁴⁸

Tchernowitz, and later his famous student Yehezkel Kaufmann, both viewed the transition from Gentile to Jew as a process.³⁴⁹ This process started with being a *ger toshav* and ended with becoming a *ger tzedek*. From this Novak³⁵⁰ goes on to argue that the Biblical *ger toshav* as well as the Hellenistic God-fearers, can be regarded as catechumen statuses. Thus, he does not recognize the uncircumcised proselyte as an independent category on its own terms, but as a transitory category intended to lead to a full conversion.

³⁴⁵ See page 5.

³⁴⁶ Lake 1933:81.

³⁴⁷ Moore 1930:329.

³⁴⁸ See f.ex. Kuhn 1968:741-742; Novak 2011:27

³⁴⁹ Referenced in Novak 2011:24.

³⁵⁰ Novak 2011:25.

This view is seemingly based on a faulty reading of the Talmudic teaching³⁵¹ that says that if a *ger toshav* does not circumcise himself (i.e. to become a *ger tzedek*) within twelve months he is considered as an idol worshiper. The Gemara which makes this statement continues however with saying that this only applies in a case where a *ger toshav* has accepted to be circumcised (i.e. to become a *ger tzedek*), but in the end did not do so. It is clear from this context, that if no such commitment has been made, the *ger toshav* is not regarded as an idolator. Based on this, Maimonides later makes it clear that a Gentile basically has two options, either to have himself circumcised and become a Jew and thereby obligated to adhere to the Mosaic covenant, or to remain within his Noahide covenant.³⁵²

Nowhere in Jewish law does it say that a Gentile has to undergo circumcision.³⁵³ On the same note, among those who were God-fearers there were probably a proportional portion that actually did become *ger tzedek*. This is indicated by the famous quote by Juvenal,

Some who have had a father who reveres the Sabbath, worship nothing but the clouds, and the divinity of the heavens, and see no difference between eating swine's flesh, from which their father abstained, and that of man; and in time they take to circumcision. Having been wont to flout the laws of Rome, they learn and practice and revere the Jewish law, and all that Moses handed down in his secret tome, forbidding to point out the way to any not worshipping the same rites, and conducting none but the circumcised to the desired fountain. For all which the father was to blame, who gave up every seventh day to idleness, keeping it apart from all the concerns of life.³⁵⁴

Even though some certainly became circumcised converts, it still was no obligation to become so, as is the case with the fathers who chose to remain in their status of God-fearers and to worship God as uncircumcised. Similar was also the case with the conversion of Izates of Adiabene.³⁵⁵ He was taught by the Jewish merchant Ananias that he could worship God without being circumcised, but he himself chose to have himself circumcised. This goes to show that worshipping of God itself

³⁵¹ *b. Avod. Zar.* 65a (ed. Goldwurm 2002); *y. Yeb.* 8:1 (8d), quoted by Novak 2011:25.

³⁵² Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melakhim* 8:10.

³⁵³ *ibid.*: *Hilchot Melachim* 8:10 presents the view that is a prohibition of Jewish law to force someone to become a *ger tzedek*; The forced circumcision of the Idumeans and the Itureans by the Hasmoneans are generally condemned by the Rabbis.

³⁵⁴ Juvenal, *Saturae*, XIV, 96-106, Latin text: «Quidam sortiti metuentem sabbata patrem nil praeter nubes et caeli numen adorant, nec distare putant humana carne suillam, qua pater abstinuit, mox et praepudia ponunt; Romanas autem soliti contemnere leges Iudaicum ediscunt et servant ac metuunt ius, tradidit arcano quodcumque volumine Moyses: non monstrare vias eadem nisi sacra colenti, quaesitum ad fontem solos deducere verpos. Sed pater in causa, cui septima quaeque fuit lux ignava et partem vitae non attigit ullam.» (no. 301 in Stern 1980).

³⁵⁵ See above, «*proselytos* in Josephus,» p. 59.

does not require circumcision, but if the Gentile God-fearer chooses to undergo circumcision he becomes a *ger tzedek* and is thereby obligated to fulfill the whole range of the Mosaic covenant. This is also attested by Paul, «I solemnly warn every man that gets himself circumcised that he is under obligation to fulfill the whole law.»³⁵⁶ Elsewhere Paul, according to the author of Acts, who is trained as a Pharisee, makes it clear that the non-Jews who are turning to God do not have to circumcise.³⁵⁷ Instead they must refrain from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.³⁵⁸ Some scholars have seen these obligations set forth by Acts as referring to the Noahide laws. W.D. Davis writes, «Now, that Paul was familiar with the Noachian commandments cannot be doubted...»³⁵⁹

We also know that in Talmudic times the Rabbis made it difficult for non-Jews to convert to Judaism, i.e., to become naturalized members of the Jewish nation. The Rabbi would say to the prospective convert that he is not doing himself any favors by becoming Jewish. If he converts, he will be obligated to observe the 613 commandments as they apply and will receive Divine Punishment when he backslide.³⁶⁰ If he remain as a Gentile and dedicates himself to the seven Noahide laws, he will have a place in the World To Come.³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ Gal 5:3.

³⁵⁷ Acts 15:19.

³⁵⁸ Acts 15:20.

³⁵⁹ Davies 1955:155; Bockmuehl 2000:165ff.

³⁶⁰ *b. Yebam. 47a*; cf. Gal 5:3; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Issurei Biah* 14:1, «"Why did you choose to convert? Don't you know that in the present era, the Jews are afflicted, crushed, subjugated, strained, and suffering comes upon them?" (Maimonides 1998-2001); Bamberger 1940:38-41.

³⁶¹ *t. Sanh. 13:2*, «R. Joshua b. Hanaiah reported in *t. Sanh.13.2* that 'the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come'» (quoted in Goodman 2001: 115); Goldenberg 1998:84, "One early authority was said to have disagreed [about gentiles having the ability of being righteous]: R. Eliezer says, "No gentile has a place in the World to Come, as it is said, 'Let the wicked return to Sheol, all the nations who have forgotten God.' (Psalm 9:18)". "Let the wicked return to Sheol": this means the wicked of Israel [who are thus associated with "all the nations" who have forgotten God]. R. Joshua said to him, "If Scripture said 'Let the wicked return to Sheol and all the nations' and fell silent, I would interpret as your words. But now that Scripture says 'who have forgotten God' [which implies that some among the nations have not forgotten God], this means that there are righteous ones among the nations who have a place in the World to Come." [*t. Sanh. 13:2*]; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melakhim* 8:11, «Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these seven mitzvot and is precise in their observance is considered one of 'the pious among the gentiles [lit. 'nations'] (Maimonides 2001:582); *Ibid.*:582n67, «This principle can be derived from the Mishnah's statement (*Sanhedrin* 90a) that Bilaam will not receive a share in the world to come. It can obviously be inferred that the righteous of the gentiles will be granted a portion in that eternal good.»

This shows that Judaism allows Gentile participation in the worship of God, without requiring them to convert to Judaism. On the contrary, Gentiles are encouraged not to convert to Judaism, instead they are encouraged to observe the seven Noahide laws.

God-fearers and *geri toshav* viewed as anachronistic.

An important reason for rejecting the connection between God-fearers (*sebomenoi*, etc) and the *ger toshav* is that these categories seem to belong to different time-periods. Schürer states, «it is evident the the גרי תושב have no connection with the σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν.»³⁶²

This statement, which later became the academic consensus,³⁶³ overlooks the difference between *ger toshav* as a legal term and «God-fearer» as a non-legal term.

The Noahide laws represented only a legal theory which never became a reality.

Schürer³⁶⁴ also argued that the Noahide laws³⁶⁴ never had practical significance, due to the improbability of Greeks and Romans living in Palestine subjecting themselves to Jewish law. Still, as demonstrated by the historic existence of Gentile God-fearers who were attached to the Jewish communities, it is widely attested that many Gentiles attended synagogue services and observed some Jewish customs and that they contributed donations to the Temple and to Jewish causes.³⁶⁵ If this was true in the Diaspora, there is no reason it should not be true in Palestine. Since the Noahide laws are formulated negatively, «you shall not», it is difficult to prove that the God-fearers were observing the Noahide laws.

Also, from the viewpoint of traditional Judaism, the Noahide laws were being observed in the earliest times before the non-Jewish nations almost completely forgot about them. They were again being observed by the legal category of *ger toshav* living under Jewish jurisdiction while the Jubilee year was observed. The Noahide laws have also been observed by Gentiles in Palestine and throughout the Diaspora, where Gentiles have lived in proximity to Jews. This stopped gradually as it became increasingly difficult for Jews to teach their Gentile neighbors about the Noahide laws,

³⁶² Schürer 1890:319.

³⁶³ Millar 1986:172, «*sebomenoi*, etc., are wholly distinct from the גרי תושב, and belong in a quite different historical context.»

³⁶⁴ Schürer 1890:319; Millar 1986:172.

³⁶⁵ See references in part III, «God-fearers»: Definitions and sources.

due to proselyting restrictions laid upon them by their host nations.³⁶⁶ It is only in our time and age with increased religious freedom that Jews again are actively spreading the teaching of the Noahide laws.³⁶⁷ Still, not until the Messianic era will the Noahide laws be observed by all Gentiles. So, from the viewpoint of traditional Judaism, even though most of the time the Noahide laws have been a legal theory without practical relevance, it is of outmost importance that the laws are ready at hand when the Messianic time is approaching.

«The Noahide laws were not seriously thought out.»

Schürer asserts that, «the theory was thrown together only in an off-hand way, it was not seriously thought out.»³⁶⁸ A weakness with Schürer's argumentation is that it seems to be made based on faulty premisses. In *avodah zarah* 64b, which Schürer refers to, the Rabbis are not discussing the Noahide laws per se. They are instead discussing the prerequisite for someone qualifying for being entitled the legal status of *ger toshav*. The rule in Jewish law is that the majority opinion is the opinion that becomes basis for *halacha*.³⁶⁹ That the sages opinion, who defines a *ger toshav* as someone who observes the Noahide laws, became the *halacha* is later demonstrated by Maimonides,³⁷⁰ who in his codification of the Talmud, presents this majority opinion of who is a *ger toshav* as the legal definition.

Schürer is elsewhere criticized by George Foot Moore on basing his description of Judaism, not on knowledge, but on ignorance. «Schürer was never widely read in the literature of the school and the synagogue, and that he paid the least attention to precisely those parts of it from which most may be learned about religious feeling and the inwardness of Jewish piety.»³⁷¹

³⁶⁶ Weiner 2011:20.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 2011:21.

³⁶⁸ Schürer 1890:319n298.

³⁶⁹ Shilo [2013], «In the Talmud the phrase *aharei rabbim le-hattot* was converted into a decisory canon: "where there is a controversy between an individual and the many, the *halakhah* follows the many" ([*b.*]Ber. 9a). The sages of the Talmud explained the existence of this rule as a practical necessity, for if the Torah had been given in the form of an exhaustive codex, "the world could not have existed" (TJ, Sanh. 4:2, 22a; cf. Mid. Ps. 82:3)»

³⁷⁰ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Issurei Biah* 14:7 (Maimonides 1998-2001)

³⁷¹ Moore 1921:240.

Summary - Arguments against identification between the *geri toshav* and the *sebomenoi ton theon*

As demonstrated in this chapter, all the above arguments have some weaknesses. This in itself should warrant a reconsideration of the scholarly consensus. These weaknesses are to a large extent being uncritically reproduced by the majority of scholars writing on the subject of the God-fearers. At least that is the case in the literature I have been reading and which are referenced in the bibliography. There are some noted exceptions. The arguments of these scholars will be reviewed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2. *Ger toshav* viewed as synonymous with the *sebomenos*

The close connection between the *ger toshav* and the “God-fearers” may be illustrated from a *baraita*³⁷² which describes Naaman³⁷³ as a *ger toshav*. Naaman, a Syrian general, was not a *ger toshav* according to the strict legal criteria.³⁷⁴ He was a foreigner who accepted Jewish monotheism, but living outside the land of Israel, and consequently he was a «fearer of Heaven.»³⁷⁵ This shows that the term *ger toshav*, when used informally, can be applied to a Gentile who would fit the Rabbinic definition of a God-fearer. Thus, it demonstrates the interchangeability of these terms and thereby their synonymity.

Among scholars there are also some who sees similarities between the categories of *ger toshav* and the «Heaven-fearer». Braude³⁷⁶ acknowledges that the *ger toshav* is a legal category which cannot be applied in Hellenistic times due to the criteria that is laid down in Jewish law. Instead he views the respective categories as spiritual kinsmen. Novak also recognizes that, «For all practical

³⁷² *b. Gittin* 57b; *b. Sanh.* 96b.

³⁷³ 2. Kings chapter 5.

³⁷⁴ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Kochavim* 10:6 (Maimonides 1990).

³⁷⁵ Bamberger 1939:137.

³⁷⁶ Braude 1940:136-137; The laws of the Jubilee year not being observed, etc. see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah* 10:6.

purposes the *sebomenoi* seem to be the same as the Palestinian *gerai toshav*, lacking only the political connotation of the latter.»³⁷⁷

Wolfson suggests that the «Heaven-fearers» are probably identical with the *ger toshav* who observe the Noahide laws. He also note that Maimonides³⁷⁸ identifies the חסידים אמות העולם ('pious of the nations') with *ger toshav*. Wolfson writes,

These “God-fearers” in that Tannaitic passage, in so far as they are distinguished from the full proselyte, are probably identical with the “resident alien” who observes the seven Noachian laws, or, at least, they belong to the same class of gentiles who have adopted certain Jewish beliefs and practices. Identical with these “God-fearers” and “resident aliens” are probably also what the rabbis call “righteous gentiles” or “pious gentiles,” concerning whom they say that they have a portion in the world to come. Maimonides identifies the “pious of the nations” with the “resident alien”³⁷⁹

Jacob Agus is suggesting that Noahide law is what connects the *sebomenoi* and the *ger toshav*.

The doctrine of the Noahide commandments was actually a legal application of the prophetic principle that the pagan nations might contribute to the advancement of the kingdom of God, even while they retained their own customs and rituals ... The vast number of «God-fearers» on the fringe of the Jewish community in the first century of the common era attests to the wide acceptance of this doctrine.³⁸⁰

In Novak's words, «*Sebomenoi* and *phoboumenoi*, therefore, are taken as the diaspora equivalents of *ger toshav*.»³⁸¹ Further, he also relates that earlier Michael Guttman³⁸² argued similarly. Novak³⁸³ himself argues against any identification between the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenoi* based on the grounds that there is no solid historical proofs to back up such a conclusion. Similarly, also Goldenberg³⁸⁴ states that it remains to be demonstrated any connection «between the Noahide Laws and the lives of the ‘God-fearers’ .» This argument works both ways, neither positions can be proved

³⁷⁷ Novak 2011:26

³⁷⁸ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melakhim* 8:11.

³⁷⁹ Wolfson 1968: 373-374.

³⁸⁰ Agus 1959:68.

³⁸¹ Novak 2011:26.

³⁸² Ibid.:248n99, «*Das Judentum und seine Umwelt*, 110. Guttman argued that the absence of a specific doctrine of seven Noahide laws in Hellenistic Jewish literature was the result of a philosophically influenced rationalization of the Palestinian doctrine found in Jub. 7:20.»

³⁸³ Novak 2011:28.

³⁸⁴ Goldenberg 1998:161n47.

historically based on academic criteria. Rather, it is a question of which position can best argue its case.

Summary - Arguments in favor of an identification between the *gerei toshav* and the *sebomenoi ton theon*

Throughout this study we have seen the similarities between the Biblical *ger toshav* and the Hellenistic *sebomenos*. I have also throughout this study demonstrated the similarities between the God-fearers that are met with in the Tannah and the Rabbinic literature and the God-fearers that are met with in Hellenistic literature. Regardless of what names they are labelled with, they all fit the definition of someone who fears God (i.e. someone who worships and believes in the existence of God) and who stand in some relation with the Jewish community, but without being circumcised, i.e., they have not converted and become Jewish. Thus, both the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos* fit the description of being an uncircumcised proselyte. This latter designation encompasses both the strict legal category of *ger toshav* and the general, non-legal, category of God-fearer. Also, it can be formulated that all *gerei toshav* are God-fearers, but not all God-fearers are *gerei toshav*.

Even though this connection cannot be proven historically, it is no reason to dismiss the identification altogether. As I see it, it takes stronger arguments to justify the disconnection between the *gerei toshav* and the God-fearers, then to justify the connection. I base this on the many similarities that exists between them, similarities that have been demonstrated in the various summaries throughout this study.

When these similarities are seen together with the doctrines of traditional Judaism, the picture of the *ger toshav* and the God-fearer becomes clear and their relation to the Jewish communities are readily understood. On the other hand, the arguments of the prevailing scholarly consensus creates a confusing picture of the God-fearers, where their relationship to the Jewish communities is not readily understood. This in itself should favor the arguments that views the *gerei toshav* and the *sebomenos* as identical.

PART VI. SUMMARY

A reconsideration of the scholarly consensus

My aim in this master thesis has been to find support for the thesis that there exist an identification between the *geri toshav* in the Biblical period and the *sebomenoi ton theon* in the Hellenistic period. As such it has been necessary to argue against the existing scholarly consensus that there is not an identification between the mentioned categories. It has not been my aim to historically prove this identification, rather I have intended to demonstrate the faulty arguments of Emil Schürer and the consequent scholarship who regard these groups as unrelated. This disconnection has created much confusion concerning the «proselytes» and regarding «God-fearers».

In an attempt to clear up the confusions, my approach has been to demonstrate how traditional Judaism, which bases itself upon the Tanakh (the Written Torah) and the Rabbinic tradition (the Oral Torah), differentiate between the circumcised proselyte and the uncircumcised proselyte. The circumcised proselyte is obligated to adhere to the Mosaic code of law, while the uncircumcised proselyte is obligated to adhere to Noahide code of law. According to traditional Judaism, both codes of law are contained within the Torah (Written and Oral).

The differentiation between two different categories of proselytes is also reflected in Hellenistic literature, such as the LXX, Josephus, Philo, the Targums and the New Testament literature. This I have attempted to demonstrate together with a presentation of the sources for the God-fearers in the same literature. This has enabled me to investigate the similarities between the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos*.

It has further been demonstrated that the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos* fit well into the picture as recipients of the Jewish teachings concerning the seven Noahide laws. In this respect the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos* are both to be reckoned as proselytes, but not as proselytes as defined by the New Testament lexicon,³⁸⁵ but rather as a proselyte defined by Rashi,³⁸⁶ i.e., as someone who has abandoned idol worship.

³⁸⁵ BDAG 2000:880, 'προσήλυτος.'

³⁸⁶ Cf. *b. Sotah* 10a.

By applying this understanding, the Jewish mission is more readily comprehensible. Their mission is not to make proselytes to Judaism, but rather to proselyte mankind back to the original covenant that, according to traditional Judaism, exist between God and mankind, i.e. the Noahide Covenant.

Conclusion

I have throughout this thesis demonstrated the similarities between the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos*. Their main difference being that the former is a legal term, while the latter is a non-legal term. I have also argued in favor of the view that the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos* are adherents of the Seven Noahide Laws. Even though this position cannot unambiguously be historically proven, this is also the case with the opposite position. In that respect it becomes a question of which argumentation is better and which argumentation that is most suited to clear up the prevalent confusion. Viewed in light of the doctrine of the Seven Noahide Laws, the relation between the *gerei toshav* and the *sebomenoi ton theon* to each other and to Judaism is more readily understood and the existing confusion disappears altogether. This is in itself a strong argument in favor of viewing the *ger toshav* and the *sebomenos* as related terms. This would also comply with the «Principle of Economy», that among competing hypotheses, the hypothesis with the fewest assumptions should be selected, i.e., that the best theory is the simplest one.

In summary, all the above favors a reconsideration of the scholarly consensus.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The *gerei toshav*, resident proselytes, are met in the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature. They are defined by the sages of the Talmud as Gentiles who accepted upon themselves the seven Noahide commandments. These laws are taught as being the original covenant that God established between Himself and Mankind. After the Flood they were given over to Noah and his descendants, and are therefore known by his name. These laws consists of an obligation to recognize the existence of God and to observe basic moral laws. The Jews, in their role of being a «nation of priests» and «a light unto the Nations», have the task of educating mankind about their seven Noahide laws.

The *sebomenoi ton theon*, God-fearers (or God-worshippers), are met in Hellenistic literature and in inscriptions. They are by scholars defined as Gentiles who frequent the synagogues, they are monotheist in the biblical sense, and they observe some Jewish practices, but they have not moved to full conversion to Judaism through circumcision. This group of pious Gentiles who somehow is connected to Jewish life has created much confusion in the ranks of scholars, and the debate about them concern wether or not they had an official status recognized by mainstream Judaism.

The aim of the Master's thesis is to view these *sebomenos* as adherents of the seven Noahide laws and as such related to the *ger toshav*. The strength of this theory is its ability to explain the relationship between the God-fearers and the Jewish communities. It also explains the confusion that surrounds an often confused understanding of the Hebrew word *ger*. The lexical definition of *proselytos* (hebr. *ger*) undermines the existence of different categories of proselytes, namely the circumcised proselyte who becomes a naturalized member of the Israelite nation and the uncircumcised proselyte who is a foreigner residing with the Israelites, while retaining his own nationhood.

This master's thesis attempts to reach its aim through an investigation of texts and doctrines of traditional Judaism as these are expressed in the Tanakh and rabbinic literature, and through an investigation of Hellenistic literature, such as the Septuagint, Philo, Josephus, and New Testament writings.

Keywords:

God-fearers, Sympathizers, Proselytism, Proselytos, Ger Toshav, Sebomenoi ton theon, Jewish Gentile relations, Noahide laws.