

1 Cor. 15:29 and *Taharat Hamet*: Purification of the Dead as Proof of Resurrection?

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This article revisits¹ one of the NT's most enigmatic verses, 1 Cor. 15:29, and proposes that Paul's twin questions in this verse were directed to Jewish disciples of Yeshua. Paul brought up baptizing in relation to the dead, and he used this practice, whatever it was, as further evidence of the resurrection. Paul, then, may have referred to burial customs performed by Jews who wished to ensure that deceased loved ones were purified prior to burial, out of hope of resurrection. This would account for Paul's tacit sanction² of the practice, in contrast to preceding chapters where he barred aberrant practices, including those related to headwear.³ This Jewish custom was evidently performed for Tabitha (Acts 9:37), and is still performed, called today *taharah* (טהרה) or purification, and performed by groups bearing the name *Hevra Kadisha*. Paul expected a few among the Corinthians, those saying there is no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12), to understand his point. Shared knowledge between Paul, a Pharisaical Jew who lived as a Jew for the sake of Jews, and a few Corinthian Jewish disciples of Yeshua, would account for the verse's brevity, and for its opacity to those unfamiliar with Jewish customs. We first present recent proposals for 1 Cor. 15:29's solution, together with a review of the verse's main features in Greek, to determine if the verse can bear this interpretation.

βαπτίζόμενοι and βαπτίζονται: Proposing indirect middle with subject focus

Exegetes widely assume that the participle βαπτίζόμενοι and verb βαπτίζονται refer to subjects who are "being baptized" in some passive, or permissive middle way. Commenting on the verse, Brookins and Longenecker explain that "in this case a permissive middle is hardly different from a passive in effect."⁴ Regardless, no interpretation has found wide favor. Gordon Fee knows of forty proposed solutions and forthrightly states that in light of widely divergent opinion one must "finally admit to ignorance." Fee rendered the verse:

¹ The author expresses sincere thanks to Martin Culy, Adjunct Professor of New Testament and Greek at Briarcrest College and Seminary, Caronport, SK, CA, for suggesting the presentation of this idea in a paper.

² Despite lack of censure, many argue that Paul did not approve of the practice, or that it was aberrant. James Dunn, for example, says, "I take it to be an *ad hominem* argument referring to a practice of which Paul by no means approved." (James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* [London: SCM Press, 1970, 2nd ed., 2010], 104n); Anthony Cross says that 1 Cor. 15:29 was an "aberrant practice." (Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament, Baptisma Semper Reformandum* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013], 111).

³ "If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God." (1 Cor. 11:16).

⁴ Timothy A. Brookins, Bruce W. Longenecker, *1 Corinthians 10–16: A Handbook on the Greek Text, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 161.

Otherwise, what shall they do, those who are being baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why indeed are they being baptized for them?⁵

Anthony Thiselton agrees that innumerable solutions have failed to convince a majority, and he proposes his solution as least problematic. Thiselton adopted the reading of J. K. Howard, *et al*, in which the subjects were baptized, "not in order to remedy some deficiency on the part of the dead, but in order to be reunited with them at the resurrection" and added:

The linguistic force of ὑπέρ, for the sake of, is preserved, together with a convincing nonmetaphorical meaning for both τῶν νεκρῶν (the *Christian* dead) and the middle-voice force of οἱ βαπτίζόμενα, those who have themselves baptized.⁶

David Garland assumes the subjects are baptized, and adopts the Greek patristic view that "the dead" (οἱ νεκροί) is a metaphor for the condition of believers who receive baptism. For Garland and like-minded commentators, Paul refers to Christian baptism.⁷

Joel White rendered 1 Cor. 15:29 almost identically to Fee and says nothing close to a consensus has been reached, and that this has led to exegetical agnosticism about the verse for many. White argues that Paul wrote about Christian baptism in 1 Cor. 15:29 in relation to the divisiveness in 1 Cor. 1:13–17. Those rallying round various apostles are baptized on account of the dead, "that is, the dead, figuratively speaking; that is, the apostles," who are constantly dying in their apostolic service.⁸

Michael Hull says that advances in scholarship have left fewer readings vying for scholarly assent, and that opinions usually fall into two camps: the majority reading of vicarious baptism, or the minority reading of ordinary baptism.⁹ Hull argues that 1 Cor. 15:29 speaks of a unity of baptism and resurrection based on faith in the gospel that Paul preached in Corinth, and renders it:

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, general editor F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 760–767.

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC*, eds. I. Howard Marshall, Donald A. Hagner; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1240–1249.

⁷ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough, Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, ebook, 2013), 871–875.

⁸ Joel R. White, "'Baptized on Account of the Dead': The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in its Context," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 116/3 (1997), 487–499.

⁹ Michael F. Hull, "Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor. 15:29), An Act of Faith in the Resurrection," *Academia Biblica*, 22, eds. Steven L. McKenzie and Mark Allan Powell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 10.

Otherwise, what are they to do/doing, who have themselves baptized/are baptized for/or on account of the dead? If the dead are not really raised, why are they baptized for/or on account of them (the dead)?¹⁰

Joseph Fitzmyer writes: "The Corinthian practice to which Paul is alluding is mentioned only here, and not with sufficient clarity to understand precisely what the nature of the practice was." He renders the participle as a noun: "Otherwise what will people do who undergo baptism on behalf of the dead?" Fitzmyer lists the six most widely proposed solutions: proxy baptism, Greek patristic view, baptism accepted because of a Christian, Christian water baptism in various nuances, figurative martyrdom baptism, and Murphy-O'Connor's intricate proposal of Paul being destroyed for the unspiritual, or dead.¹¹

The recent Messianic translation of Scripture, *Tree of Life Version*, renders 1 Cor. 15:29 as:

Otherwise, what will they do who are immersed for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, then why are they immersed for them?¹²

Moreover, the modern Hebrew translation, *Habrit Hahadashah*¹³ renders both βαπτίζόμενοι and βαπτίζονται in 1 Cor. 15:29 as *nitbalim* (נטבלים), or passively immersed. All of these solutions have the subjects being baptized or immersed.

This article, in contrast, reads βαπτίζόμενοι and βαπτίζονται as indirect middles, emphasizing the subjects' special interest in the verb's action. Both βαπτίζόμενοι and βαπτίζονται are middle voice, also called middle-passive, so readings other than passive or permissive middle are possible. Indirect middle would read, effectively, as active, but with subject focus. A. T. Robertson described the subtle distinction between active and middle voices:

The only difference between the active and middle voices is that the middle calls especial attention to the subject. In the active voice the subject is merely acting; in the middle the subject is acting in relation to himself somehow. What this precise relation is the middle voice does not say. That must come out of the context or from the significance of the verb itself.¹⁴

Daniel Wallace contrasts active and middle voices:

¹⁰ Hull, "Baptism on Account of the Dead," 108.

¹¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, *The Yale Anchor Bible*, eds. William Foxwell Albright, David Noel Freedman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 577–581.

¹² *The Holy Bible, Tree of Life Version*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015).

¹³ See, מבוארת, מבושרת, הברית החדשה, *Habrit Hahadashah, Mevo'eret*, (Jerusalem: Bible Society in Israel, 1995).

¹⁴ A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 3rd ed., 1919), 804.

[I]n the middle voice the subject *performs* or *experiences the action* expressed by the verb in such a way that *emphasizes the subject's participation*. [...] The difference between the active and middle is one of emphasis. The active voice emphasizes the *action* of the verb; the middle emphasizes the *actor* [subject] of the verb. [...] For many middle voices (especially the indirect middle), putting the subject in *italics* would communicate this emphasis.¹⁵

Stanley Porter scoured Greek grammars for his discussion of middle voice in Acts 22:16 and observes, "the more persistent analysis of the middle voice in Greek among grammarians is to see it conveying some sort of personal involvement of the subject in the action."¹⁶

Grammarians, then, emphasize that middle voice is not simply reflexive, as in the subject acting on himself, but ranges in sense from passive¹⁷ to active in effect, while signifying subject focus. In light of this variety, Robertson says "nearly every grammarian has his own division of these 'uses' of the middle, none of which the Greeks themselves had."¹⁸ Daniel Wallace, for example, lists seven main categories in which to locate various middle senses.¹⁹ Wallace's third category, indirect middle, is particularly relevant for this article: "The subject acts *for* (or sometimes *by*) himself or herself, or in his or her *own interest*. The subject thus shows a special interest in the action of the verb."²⁰

Jews who purify their deceased loved ones for burial certainly have special interest in the action, aligning well with Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 15:29. As an example of middle in an active sense, Paul wrote of his evangelization of the Corinthians with an aorist middle of εὐαγγελίζω (1 Cor.

¹⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 414–415.; William Mounce likewise says that "the meaning of a verb in the middle voice can be difficult to define, partly because it is often an issue of nuance." (William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2nd ed. 2003], 151).

¹⁶ Stanley E. Porter, "Did Paul Baptize Himself? A Problem of the Greek Voice System," *Dimensions of Baptism, Biblical and Theological Studies*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 91–109. See pages 103–104 for a list of eighteen grammars that agree that middle voice expresses special connection or interest of the subject.

¹⁷ Mark 1:5 presents βαπτίζω in middle-passive. A middle understanding adds focus to repentant subjects as they seek to be baptized ὑπ' αὐτοῦ by John. The parallel in Matt. 3:6 has the identical form. Both verses of Mark 10:38–39 use a middle–passive present form of βαπτίζω in immediate conjunction with (v 38) an aorist passive infinitive, and (v 39) a future passive. The middle may emphasize the subject's volitional resignation to receive the verb's action.

¹⁸ A. T. Robertson, *Grammar*, 806.

¹⁹ Wallace, *Grammar*, 414–431. The seven categories are: A) direct middle (a. k. a. reflexive or direct reflexive), B) redundant middle (with a reflexive pronoun), C) indirect middle (a.k.a. indirect reflexive, benefactive, intensive, dynamic middle), D) causative middle, E) permissive middle, F) reciprocal middle, G) deponent middle.

²⁰ Wallace, *Grammar*, 419.

15:1–2). In fact, NT authors commonly used the middle voice for evangelizing, yet evangelists actively announce the gospel to others. Indeed, Rev. 10:7 and 14:6 are aorist active. Moreover, Luke 8:1 presents two similar activities in different voices: preaching (κηρύσσων) is an active participle, while evangelizing (εὐαγγελιζόμενος) is a middle participle. Other examples of middle participles conveying active senses include: *consoling* others (παραμυθούμενοι), in John 11:31; *throwing* wheat overboard (ἐκβαλλόμενοι) in Acts 27:38; *laying down* a foundation, (καταβαλλόμενοι) in Heb. 6:1.

Mark 7:4 presents βαπτίζω in aorist middle and the likely sense is direct middle, that of the subject baptizing himself. This sense is noticeably different from permissive middle. Judith 12:7 uses βαπτίζω in middle voice, which again is direct middle for Judith baptizing herself; Sirach 34:25 uses a middle participle as a permissive or causative middle, for defiled people ensuring that they are baptized; 2 Kings 5:14 LXX uses βαπτίζω in direct middle voice for Naiman baptizing himself. Acts 22:16 uses βαπτίζω in imperative aorist middle, and commentators express its sense as causative or permissive middle, so that Paul is ordered to "be baptized."²¹

In contrast to these usages, Mark 14:20 uses a present middle participle of ἐμβάπτω for a sense of actively dipping bread into a bowl, consistent with indirect middle and comparable to the proposed meaning for βαπτίζω in 1 Cor. 15:29. The Matt 26:23 parallel reads ἐμβάπτω in active form.

With this range of usage in view, an indirect middle sense for βαπτίζομενοι and βαπτίζονται in 1 Cor. 15:29 is plausible, even if unusual, and the sense would effectively be active. Paul's argument emphasizes the subjects' certainty of the resurrection, and this supplies a clear rationale for using middle voice verbs to stress subject focus, not active verbs that lack subject focus.

Both βαπτίζομενοι and βαπτίζονται in 1 Cor. 15:29 are inflections of βαπτίζω not found elsewhere in the NT. Both are present tense, but Paul used aorist for all his usages of βαπτίζω, except for one present infinitive. This suggests that whatever Paul describes in 1 Cor. 15:29 may be unrelated to faith in Messiah:

- Gal. 3:27—aorist passive
- Rom. 6:3—aorist passive (2)
- 1 Cor. 1:13–17—aorist passive (2), aorist active (3), a present infinitive
- 1 Cor. 6:11—ἀπελούσασθε, aorist middle
- 1 Cor. 10:2—aorist passive (middle?)
- 1 Cor. 12:13—aorist passive

Arguably, if 1 Cor. 15:29 concerned βαπτίζω in relation to faith in Messiah, then Paul likely would have framed his statement with an aorist passive participle and an aorist passive indicative. Present tense could suggest

²¹ Wallace, citing Robertson, says "the force of the voices here seems to be causative or permissive direct middle for βάπτισαι and permissive indirect middle for ἀπόλουσαι." (Wallace, *Grammar*, 426). But see Porter, "Did Paul Baptize Himself?" 2002.

something occurring regularly, and purification for burial would be as reasonable an explanation as any. The third person plural form would not exclude individuals known personally by both Paul and the addressees.

Also, Greek writers often implied an object for verbs. Wallace explains: "In keeping with its economical nature, Greek regularly implies an object that was already mentioned in the preceding context, rather than restating it."²² For example, in Acts 1:5 Yohanan baptized [people] with water. In Acts 19:4 Yohanan baptized [people] with the baptism of repentance. An obvious object in 1 Cor. 15 is "the dead."

Therefore, we offer the following version of 1 Cor. 15:29 for consideration. Both βαπτίζομενοι and βαπτίζονται are read in present tense, in indirect middle voice, which is effectively active with subject focus. Both verbs act on an implied object, the dead. The preposition ὑπέρ emphasizes reception of benefit by the dead.

Otherwise, what do they achieve, those, *who themselves* are purifying [the dead] for the benefit of the dead? If, actually, the dead are not arising, why, then, are *they themselves* purifying [them] for their benefit?

Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν	Otherwise, what do they achieve
οἱ βαπτίζομενοι	those, <i>who themselves</i> are purifying [the dead]
ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν;	for the benefit of the dead;
εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται,	If, actually, the dead are not arising,
τί καὶ βαπτίζονται	why, then, are <i>they themselves</i> purifying [them]
ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν;	for their benefit.

This rendering also preserves the force of ὑπέρ, for the benefit of, and obviates the need for metaphorical interpretations; τῶν νεκρῶν are Jewish dead who representatively stand in for all human dead, and those baptizing them are living Jews who believe in the resurrection.

In this light, Paul may have had in mind Corinthian Jews, known by both Paul and the deniers, who had buried their dead. Paul's rhetorical question asked the deniers why Jews baptize-purify the dead for their benefit, and the intended answer was that they, the living, are convinced of a general resurrection. This rendering by no means overstates any grammatical element, so there is good reason to continue this line of reasoning. We therefore proceed to a brief review of the semantic range of βαπτίζω familiar to the Corinthians.

Usage of βαπτίζω in Corinth, and Paul's use in 1 Corinthians

A recent search of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae digital Greek library for occurrences of βαπτίζω prior to the NT yielded more than fifty results, from Aesop in the sixth century BCE to Strabo in the first century. The diachronic semantic range of βαπτίζω is far-reaching, from sinking ships, to drowning people, to being drunk, to confused bewilderment, to adversely overwhelmed

²² Wallace, *Grammar*, 441.

minds and souls. To be sure, with many Roman colonists inhabiting Corinth in Paul's day, the average "Corinthian" would not know centuries of Greek literature, nor the entire diachronic and synchronic range of βαπτίζω. Yet, Paul referred to the sacred "writings" several times in 1 Corinthians, including four times in chapter 15 (1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 45, 54). Presumably he expected the Corinthian church's primary Scriptures to be those comprising the LXX.

Jews and disciples of Yeshua would, at the very least, be familiar with the LXX's four usages of βαπτίζω, of which at least two, Judith and Sirach, relate to Jewish purification:

- Judith 12:7: And Olophernes ordered the bodyguards not to hinder her. And she remained in the camp for three days, and she went out each night into the ravine of Baityloua and bathed at the spring of water. (NETS²³)
- Sirach 34:30: When one bathes due to a corpse and when one touches it again – what did he gain by his washing? (NETS)
- 4 Reigns (2 Kings) 5:14: And Naiman went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of Elisaie, and his flesh returned like the flesh of a small child, and he was cleansed. (NETS)
- Isaiah 21:4: My heart wanders, and lawlessness overwhelms me; my soul has turned to fear. (NETS)

Judith reads, ἐβαπτίζετο ἐν τῇ παρεμβολῇ ἐπὶ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος; Judith, then, baptized ἐπὶ τῆς πηγῆς, at the spring, not in the spring. Sirach reads, βαπτίζόμενος ἀπὸ νεκροῦ; one who baptizes from [the defilement of] the dead. The context of both Judith and Sirach is that of purification from defilement, accomplished by water or other purifying means.

Then too, Naiman's washing was for healing purification, even though the NETS translators render βαπτίζω narrowly as modal form, evidently assuming direct correspondence with the Hebrew *taval* (טבל).²⁴ Beyond that, the LXX text of Isaiah was quoted often in the NT, including twice in 1 Corinthians and fourteen times in Romans.²⁵ Readers could hardly mistake the metaphorical usage of βαπτίζω in Isaiah 21:4 where the referent is adversely overwhelmed by lawlessness (compare Luke 12:50).

Corinthian Jews also may have read Philo, who used βαπτίζω six times in three different ways: for drunkenness (Contemp 46); for various adverse quandaries of mind and soul (Alleg 3:18; Attack 176; Migrat 204; Prov 2:67);

²³ *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Of sixteen usages of the Hebrew *taval* (טבל) in the MT, fourteen are translated in the LXX with βάπτω (dip), one with μολύνω (stain), and 2 Kings 5:14 with βαπτίζω. Though dated and polemical, James W. Dale argued that the LXXs use of βαπτίζω in this verse was likely a Jewish interpretational choice to include the idea of a *purification washing* so as to heal Naiman from leprosy, which indeed was his desired goal. (James W. Dale, *Judaic Baptism*, [Philadelphia: Wm. Rutter & Co., 1870], 154–164).

²⁵ "Index of Quotations," *The Greek New Testament*, 5th Revised Edition, under the direction of Holger Strutwolf, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), 861–862.

and citing Zeno, "It would be easier to sink a bladder which was full of wind, than to compel any virtuous man whatever, against his will." (Free 97). Probably Apollos, originally from Alexandria and who visited Corinth, was familiar with Philo's works and his understanding of βαπτίζω.²⁶

For the Corinthians, then, βαπτίζω was not narrowly defined, neither in culture nor Scripture, and its senses included Jewish purification. Paul himself used βαπτίζω in four different contexts:

- 1 Cor. 1:12–17: Paul baptized Corinthians upon their faith in Messiah.
- 1 Cor. 10:1–2: Israel baptized into Moses.
- 1 Cor. 12:12–13: With [by] one Spirit believers are baptized into one body.
- 1 Cor. 15:29: Baptizing and the dead.

One ought not impose an artificial unity on Paul's four usages of βαπτίζω, as though he only wrote of Messianic baptism, especially in view of 1 Cor. 10:1–2. The prepositions in that passage point to an abstract sense.

	ὅτι οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν πάντες		That all our fathers
ὑπὸ	τὴν νεφέλην ἦσαν, καὶ πάντες	under	the cloud were, and all
διὰ	τῆς θαλάσσης διήλθον, καὶ πάντες	through	the sea passed through, and all
εἰς	τὸν Μωϋσῆν ἐβαπτίσθησαν	into	Moses were baptized
ἐν	τῇ νεφέλῃ καὶ	by	the cloud and
ἐν	τῇ θαλάσῃ	by	the sea.

In the first place, the Egyptians were directly beset by the cloud (Exod. 14:24–25) and explicitly immersed in the sea (Exod. 14:26–28) but they were not "baptized into Moses," they died. Paul, then, framed this reference abstractly, in parallel to being "baptized into Messiah," but, contrary to typical exegesis,²⁷ unrelated to direct physical effects. Instead, cloud and sea instrumentally caused Israel's change of mind toward Moses, in accord with Exod. 14:31: "So Israel saw the great hand, which things the Lord had done to the Egyptians [by cloud and sea]. And the people feared the Lord and trusted God and Moyses, his attendant." (NETS). This understanding strengthens the argument for the middle voice variant ἐβαπτίσαντο in that the Israelites *themselves* fully trusted Moses after witnessing the powerful acts of the cloud and sea.²⁸ Paul, then, did not confine βαπτίζω to Messianic baptism and he had no qualms about devising Israelite parallels to it.

Assuredly, the focus of Paul's life as an apostle of Messiah drove his choice of expression, and βαπτίζω was certainly part of his apostolic vocabulary. Yet Paul also described his apostolic life in Messiah as that of a

²⁶ Philo never used βαπτίζω for any of his descriptions of Jewish religious purifications.

²⁷ See, for example, Fee, *First Corinthians*, 441–446; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 717–725; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 376–382.

²⁸ Bruce Metzger thinks probably the middle was original and was replaced with a passive. (Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994, 1998, 2000], 493). Fee also thinks the middle was original, (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 441n2), as does Thiselton, (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 722).

Jew for the sake of Jews (1 Cor. 9:19–21). Arguably, then, Paul could have used βαπτίζω for Jewish purification in 1 Cor. 15:29 if Jewish disciples were his focus. There simply is no sufficient reason for *a priori* rejection of this possibility. The gospels of Mark and Luke were composed after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, and they show no reserve about using βαπτίζω and cognates for Jewish purifications (Mark 7:1–4; Luke 11:38; see also Heb. 9:10). All four gospels use βαπτίζω and cognates for Yohanan's activity, and for his very surname, the Baptist.

Accordingly, up to this point we see that 1 Cor. 15:29 can bear a translation consistent with Jews purifying their dead out of hope of resurrection, and that the semantic range of βαπτίζω is consistent with this possibility. We now review Jewish burial practices.

Jewish burial custom of purifying the deceased

Jewish disciples of Yeshua observed ancestral traditions of preparing their dead for burial. Preparation of Yeshua's body, indeed, is explicitly said to be "in accordance with Jewish burial customs" (John 19:40).²⁹ In most cases, a purification washing of the body was performed,³⁰ as was done for Tabitha (Acts 9:37). F. F. Bruce states, "Dorcas's body had been laid out, after being washed in accordance with the Jewish custom of purification of the dead."³¹ Bruce notes the Mishnah tractate, m. *Šabbat*, 23:5, which reads: "One performs all the necessary steps for the dead, anointing and washing him."³²

No early source directly links this final purification of the deceased with the resurrection. Yet, because belief in the resurrection became increasingly wide-spread among Jews in the late Second Temple, one may reasonably suppose that acts honoring the dead, including purifying them before burial, were understood as related to resurrection. Subsequent Jewish customs indeed actually stipulate recitation of Ezek. 36:25 while pouring about six gallons (nine *kabbim*) of water on the deceased, providing a more direct intimation of a purification washing for resurrection, in that Ezek. 37:1–14, the following chapter, tells of the valley of dry bones and resurrection.

²⁹ Compare Matt 27:59–60; Mark 15:46, 16:1; Luke 7:11–17, 23:53–56, 24:1, 12; John 11:38–44, 19:38–42, 20:6–7; Acts 5:6, 8:2.

³⁰ Rachel Hachlili states that preparation of the body for burial (usually the duty of women) consisted of bathing the corpse with water and anointing it (with oil and perfume). (Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period*, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 94, ed. John J. Collins [Leiden: Brill, 2005], 479–483).

³¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts, Revised, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, general editor, Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 200; Compare also Gempf, "The body of the dead woman was washed in line with rituals pertaining to the purification of the dead." (Conrad Gempf, *Acts, New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson, *et al*, Accordance electronic ed. [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 1080).

³² עוֹשִׂין כָּל צְרָכֵי הַמֵּת, סְכִין וּמְדִיחִין אוֹתוֹ

It seems likely that for many Jews in the late Second Temple, acts that honor the dead were tied to resurrection. That would certainly correspond with the account of Jewish hero Judah Maccabee who was said to believe in the resurrection and to have performed atonement for dead companions (2 Maccabees 12:43–45):

He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Hierosolyma [Jerusalem] to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead [ὕπὲρ νεκρῶν εὔχεσθαι]. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead so that they might be delivered from their sin. (NETS)

Jews of the late Second Temple certainly did perform a purification, for the benefit of their deceased (ὕπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν), and there is good reason to suppose that many associated the practice with the resurrection. We therefore now take a look at the Jewish community in Corinth.

Corinth's Jewish colony

Corinth was a famous Greek city-state in ancient times that was destroyed by Rome in 146 BCE and rebuilt as a Roman colony in 44 BCE by Julius Caesar. Brisk maritime trade and overland commerce ensured Corinth's prosperity, as well as all the associated achievements and woes. Gordon Fee suggests that "Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."³³ People from East and West were attracted, including Diaspora Jews. Philo of Alexandria included Corinth among the Jewish colonies of the Mediterranean world.³⁴ Archeological digs have uncovered remains of Corinth's synagogue.³⁵ Judaism was a recognized religion in the Roman Empire and Diaspora Jewish communities enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy.³⁶ Corinth's Jewish community enjoyed autonomy, such that Gallio, Roman proconsul of Achaia, had no interest judging what he considered an internal Jewish affair (Acts 18:12–17).

³³ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 3.

³⁴ Philo wrote that Jerusalem established Jewish colonies throughout the Mediterranean, in Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor, and "in the same manner into Europe, into Thessaly, and Boeotia, and Macedonia, and Aetolia, and Attica, and Argos, and Corinth and all the most fertile and wealthiest districts of Peloponnesus." (Gaius 1:281 Philo).

³⁵ Bruce notes: "A fragmentary door-inscription in Greek, found at Corinth, and dated variously between 100 B.C. and A.D. 400, evidently read when complete: 'Synagogue of the Hebrews.'" (Bruce, *Acts*, 361 n16).

³⁶ See Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987, 1989, 3rd ed. 2014), 103–106.

A primary goal of Diaspora Jewish communities was preservation and practice of basic Jewish identity markers. "The most central of these practices were avoidance of idolatry, observance of the dietary laws of Torah, observance of the Sabbath, and circumcision."³⁷ A Jewish community ensured performance of such life-cycle customs as circumcision at life's beginning, marriage ceremonies, and burial at life's end. During Paul's year and a half in Corinth he probably was aware of Jewish life-cycle events like circumcisions and funerals.

Richard DeMaris discusses 1 Cor. 15:29 in light of archeological finds in Corinth's ancient cemetery and, interestingly, says that in the first century inhumation became widespread, in addition to cremation. DeMaris, surprisingly, does not discuss Corinth's Jewish community, or its possible influence on burial practices, even though Jews certainly practiced inhumation. Yet, DeMaris notes that "in the case of the Corinthian Christians, Gerd Theissen's compilation of those known by name indicates a mixed community of Romans and Greeks. If differences in burial practices heightened concern about the disposition of the dead, such a preoccupation would have existed among the Christians of Corinth."³⁸ Yet some of Corinth's residents, known in the NT by either Latin or Greek names, were Jews from the Jewish community. Crispus (Latin) and Sosthenes (Greek) were synagogue rulers (Acts 18:8, 17). As leaders of the Jewish community, they practiced inhumation and other burial customs such as purifying the deceased. Whether or not Jewish burial practices impacted Greeks or Romans in Corinth, the fact remains, Jewish residents could have been the origin of Paul's reference to baptizing in relation to the dead as much as Greeks or Romans.

Corinthian Jewish believers in Yeshua

The NT offers clear evidence for a core of Jewish disciples of Yeshua in Corinth, however small their number compared to Greek and Roman believers. Paul initially announced the good news to Jews and Greeks in Corinth's synagogue (Acts 18:4). After encountering opposition, he moved to the house of a God-fearer next door, thus remaining physically near the heart of Jewish life in Corinth (Acts 18:7).

³⁷ In addition, appropriate worship to the Almighty also included tithes and support of Jerusalem's temple. David deSilva writes: "All male Jews between the ages of twenty and fifty paid the required half-shekel tax in support of the sacrifices performed at the temple, often paying tithes as well (Philo, *Legat.* 156– 57, 216, 291, 311– 16; *Spec.* 1.77– 78; Josephus, *Ant.* 16.162– 72; 18.312– 13). Far from regarding this as a burden, Diaspora Jews regarded it as a privilege and a duty to be guarded jealously." (David A. deSilva, "Jews in the Diaspora," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, eds. Joel B. Green, Lee Martin McDonald, [Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013], 272–290).

³⁸ Richard E. DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 114/4 (1995), 670–671.

Quite probably other Jews and God-fearers followed synagogue ruler Crispus and became disciples of Yeshua, even if, overall, Paul's message was rejected. Sosthenes also was a synagogue ruler (Acts 18:17) and Darrell Bock suggests he was "likely either a believer or one who sympathized with or attempted to protect Christians."³⁹ This Sosthenes may be the individual who accompanied Paul (1 Cor. 1:1). Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, recently expelled from Rome with all other Jews (Acts 18:1–3). Aquila is said to be Jewish. Apollos is said to be Jewish and had been in Corinth (Acts 18:24–28, 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4–6, 22; 16:12). Timothy, too, was brought into full covenant status as a Jew via circumcision, by Paul no less, and was involved with Corinth (Acts 16:1–3; 1 Cor. 16:10–11), as was Silas (Acts 18:5). It is hard to imagine that these Jewish workers serving the resurrected Messiah were completely fruitless among other Jews in Corinth.

The fact that Paul, Silas, Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos and Timothy were not native Corinthians suggests that other traveling Jewish disciples, including "false apostles," came to Corinth after Paul departed.⁴⁰ John Barclay describes Jewish travelers:

The international contacts of Diaspora Jews were, indeed, an important resource on several counts. On a personal level, the ability to find lodging and trading-partners for travelling Jews fostered an important sense of mutual dependence (e.g. Paul and two Jewish leather-workers in Corinth, Acts 18:2–3). In a Mediterranean world full of dealers, merchants, delegates and myriad other travellers, the ability of Jews to recognize one another as "fellow nationals" helped connect communities in widely separated locations.⁴¹

Paul certainly did address Jewish disciples directly in his letter, asking: "Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision." (1 Cor. 7:18). Here circumcision may not only designate the ancestral covenant, it also seems to be a metonymy for a Jewish lifestyle. Paul's remark implies that Jewish disciples, male and female, were not to abandon their ancestral heritage. Here Paul singled out of Jewish disciples, thus establishing a precedent for the possibility that 1 Cor. 15 also addressed Jews.

Paul stressed that his observance of Jewish Law in no way undermined his apostolic work (1 Cor. 9:19–20). On the contrary, in light of Paul's profound understanding of Yeshua's death and resurrection, and his life-giving

³⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds., Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 575–584. See also Fee, *First Corinthians*, 31.

⁴⁰ Compare Paul's questions in 2 Cor. 11:22–23, Are they Hebrews? Are they Israelites? Are they Abraham's descendants? Are they servants of Christ?

⁴¹ John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 423.

redemption, Paul's Torah practice was integral to his lifestyle.⁴² This approach also harmonizes with his admonition of giving no offense to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church (1 Cor. 10:32). Moreover, the church, according to Paul's metaphorical description of the body of Messiah (1 Cor. 12:12–13), consists of many members, whether Jews, whether Greeks, whether slaves, whether free (εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἑλληνας εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι). Jewish disciples, as Jews, constituted identifiable members of Messiah's body.

Furthermore, in 1 Cor. 16:1–3 Paul told the Corinthians to collect funds for the relief of saints in the Jewish capital, Jerusalem. Greeks and Romans contributed gladly.⁴³ Surely Corinth's Jewish disciples maintained their deep feelings toward Jerusalem and their fellow Jewish believers in Yeshua there as well. Moreover, Paul's order that the collection be made on the first day of the week may indicate respect for Jewish disdain of handling money on the Sabbath, in addition to the first day being the day all disciples of Messiah Yeshua worshiped together.

Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem

Diaspora Jews from around the world, presumably including Corinth, undertook pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship at the temple for the three yearly feasts commanded in the Torah: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Acts 2:5–11). Paul himself returned to Jerusalem a number of times, including at least once for Pentecost.⁴⁴ Other Jewish disciples of Yeshua very likely made pilgrimages to Jerusalem as well. Shaye Cohen elaborates on the centrality of Jerusalem's temple for Jews:

As the focal point of the religion, the temple was the central communal institution not just for the Jews of the land of Israel but also for those of the Diaspora. The annual half-shekel contribution and the festival pilgrimages bound together the entire Jewish community of both the land of Israel and the Diaspora. The ideology of the temple also served as a binding force: it represented oneness and exclusivity. Only one place was suitable for God's home on earth, and that place was the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. [...] Diaspora Jews respected the exclusive claims advanced by the temple of Jerusalem. It represented the unity of God and the unity of

⁴² See Panayotis Coutsoumpos, "Paul's Attitude towards the Law," in *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman*, Pauline Studies, vol. 5, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 39–50.

⁴³ Macedonia and Achaia (including Corinth) gladly contributed relief for Jerusalem saints (Rom. 15:25–27). "Indeed, they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings." Paul always emphasized that in Yeshua all have equal and direct access to the Almighty's throne of grace. Ancestral distinctions between Jewish and Gentile followers of Yeshua, important as they are, did not decide one's salvation status with the Almighty.

⁴⁴ Acts 9:26–30; 11:29–30; 12:25; 15:2–4; 18:22; 19:21; 20:16 hastening to Jerusalem, if possible, for Pentecost; 20:22; 21:13, 15–17.

Israel. "One temple for the one God," explains Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.23 § 193).⁴⁵

The *kohen gadol* (high priest) with fellow aristocratic priests, led the supreme Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, and also led the Sadducean party. Sadducean priests ruled Herod's temple, one of the largest known temples of that period, though Roman overlords kept Sadducean power in check and the Pharisees certainly influenced religious observance. Cohen says the Sadducees probably originated from the priestly line of Zadok and adds: "For Josephus and the New Testament, the Sadducees are high priests and aristocrats who deny the resurrection of the dead."⁴⁶ Cohen sums up the *kohen gadol's* status for the Jewish people:

All sources agree, however, that the Romans allowed the Jewish community a good deal of autonomy in their internal affairs. Josephus and the New Testament agree that the high priest was the chair of the Jewish polity and that the Sanhedrin served him, and this claim is probably correct.⁴⁷

The Sadducees, loved or hated, were among Israel's elites. Corinthian Jewish pilgrims might have been influenced by Sadducean teaching while at the temple, yet without becoming full-fledged Sadducees. Such Hellenized Jews might simply have accepted a view of afterlife, no resurrection, that was understood among the Greeks, and that was declared by Israel's national elite. B. R. McCane observes that "Jewish beliefs about the afterlife were, as most human conceptions of the afterlife tend to be, rather vague and fluid, but one concept was clearly defined: resurrection of the body. As part of a general apocalyptic worldview, many Jews during the NT period, including Yeshua and Paul, expected that the dead would be raised bodily on the last day."⁴⁸ This one concept of the afterlife, resurrection, so vigorously championed by Pharisees, was vigorously denied by Sadducees. A few Corinthian Jews may have accepted the denial.⁴⁹

Still, Jews who serve the Almighty and who recognize and praise his mighty deeds, could also agree that on occasion a chosen Jewish *tzaddik*, or righteous one, might merit ascension into heaven. J. M. Scott surveyed heavenly ascent literature and presents a variety of ideas that were percolating among Jews. The Enoch literature was stimulated by the figure in the Torah

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 105.

⁴⁶ Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 158–162.

⁴⁷ Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 106.

⁴⁸ Byron R. McCane, "Jewish Burial Practices," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 175.

⁴⁹ Israel's leadership, both Sadducee and Pharisee, rejected Yeshua two decades earlier, so neither party was better or worse than the other in that respect. Paul regularly mentioned his Pharisaical association, so perhaps other Jews, inclined to certain Sadducean ideas, came to faith in Messiah Yeshua without carefully thinking through their views.

who walked with God and was taken to heaven. Moses and the elders of Israel ascended the mountain for a direct encounter with the Almighty (Exod. 24), and this led to ideas of the *Merkavah* throne-chariot with divine-human encounters. Moses was said to have been resurrected. In the gospel tradition Moses and Elijah appeared with the transfigured Yeshua, and Jude recounts the argument over Moses's body. Evidently Egyptian Jews actually believed in Moses's ascension and apotheosis, including Philo (Life of Moses, 1:158). Psalm 110:1 also speaks in terms of ascension to the Almighty's right hand.⁵⁰

George Nickelsburg writes that recent scholarship is refocusing the view of Second Temple Judaism. "What is beginning to emerge is a picture of a variegated Judaism, a spectrum with many hues and blends, a religious and cultural phenomenon influenced by the specifics of the Jews' historical circumstances and inseparable from their non-Jewish environment."⁵¹ So, the confluence of the idea of a chosen righteous one's ascension, yet no resurrection, could conceivably be the basis for some in Corinth who could follow Yeshua as Messiah and resurrected from the dead, yet who would reject the general resurrection.

Paul argues the resurrection's reality

Many commentators see no clear evidence to support a partition theory of chapter 15.⁵² Others see chapter 15 as an abrupt change from previous chapters that signals an unforeseen addition to the letter. Hull adopted Martinus C. de Boer's analysis of the composition of 1 Corinthians,⁵³ in that Paul responds to three information sources: Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:11), a letter (1 Cor. 7:1), and the report of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17).⁵⁴ If so, then the report that some were denying the resurrection perhaps came from Stephanas and companions, not from Chloe's people nor the letter, and this report would have stimulated Paul to write chapter 15.

Regardless, the question remains, did Paul engage Jewish addressees in chapter 15? Ambiguous evidence prevents a decisive conclusion, and certainly Paul composed this crucial chapter in a form to instruct all Corinthian

⁵⁰ See J. M. Scott, "Heavenly Ascent in Jewish and Pagan Traditions," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 447–452.

⁵¹ George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins, Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 3.

⁵² See Fee, *First Corinthians*, 713; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 36–41, 1169–1172; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 539–540.

⁵³ Martinus C. de Boer, "The Composition of 1 Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 40/2 (1994), 229–245.

⁵⁴ Hull suggests that Paul responded to the report of Chloe's people in the first half of the letter, originally intending for that response to constitute a single letter. Stephanas and companions arrived, so Paul also responded to the letter they carried, together with their report on state of the Corinthian church. (Hull, "Baptism on Account of the Dead," 82–83).

Messianic believers.⁵⁵ Even so, several verses seem particularly impressive for Jewish disciples of Messiah, supporting the idea that they were the specific addressees. At the very least nothing in chapter 15 contradicts this proposal. If they were the addressees, then 1 Cor. 15:29 could refer to Jewish issues.

Messiah's death for sins was according to Scriptures and his resurrection on the third day was according to Scriptures.⁵⁶ Paul assumes his addressees revere Scriptures and he offers no elaboration of which Scriptures support his claims. While all who come to Messiah trust Scripture, Jews most certainly revered Scripture, having been entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1–2).

Then, after stating that Messiah appeared to Cephas, Paul states that Messiah appeared to "the twelve" without elaboration, and this term would resonate strongly with Jews, but less so with Greeks and Romans. Paul does not introduce James, but assumes the addressees know him. Craig Keener notes that "the claim that many of the over five hundred on one occasion remained alive probably constituted an invitation to consult them if one wished."⁵⁷ Jewish disciples planning a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would be disposed all the more to such an invitation.

Paul directly engaged the deniers: "Now if Messiah is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (πῶς λέγουσιν ἐν ὑμῖν τινες ὅτι ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν). The addressees evidently did believe that Messiah was raised from the dead. However, their vocal denial of resurrection sounds less like doubt about resurrection and more like a creedal declaration, plausibly suggesting a Sadducean inspired creed. While Greeks scoffed at resurrection (Acts 17:32), Sadducees evidently taught a well-formed denial.

- Matthew 22:23, "The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection." λέγοντες μὴ εἶναι ἀνάστασιν
- Luke 20:27, "There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection." οἱ [ἀντι]λέγοντες ἀνάστασιν μὴ εἶναι
- Acts 23:8, "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection."
Σαδδουκαῖοι μὲν γὰρ λέγουσιν μὴ εἶναι ἀνάστασιν

Quite conceivably, then, some Corinthian Jews could believe in Yeshua, a righteous *tzaddik* and the Messiah, raised from the dead and ascended to

⁵⁵ Evidently at different times Paul dealt with other misunderstandings about the resurrection. "Their talk will spread like gangrene. [Some] have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some." (2 Tim 2:16–18).

⁵⁶ Beyond Paul's two direct mentions of Scripture here, H. Williams surveyed 1 Corinthians and found that six of its eighteen Scripture quotations occur in chapter 15. (H. H. Drake Williams III, "Light Giving Sources: Examining the Extent of Scriptural Citations and Allusion Influence in 1 Corinthians," in *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman*, Pauline Studies, vol. 5, ed. Stanley E. Porter [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 7–37).

⁵⁷ Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, ed. Ben Witherington III (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 124.

heaven, yet, like the Sadducees, they saw no convincing evidence for a last-day resurrection.

Paul argues that his apostolic message was a false testimony of God if the dead are not raised: ψευδομάρτυρες τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor. 15:15). This terminology strongly echoes the ninth commandment that prohibits bearing false testimony: οὐ ψευδομαρτυρήσεις κατὰ τοῦ πλησίον σου μαρτυρίαν ψευδῆ. (Exod. 20:16, Deut. 5:20). Paul offers no elaboration. This allusion to the Decalogue, again, sounds particularly meaningful to those entrusted with the ten commandments, the Jewish people.

If there is no resurrection, warned Paul, "then those also who have fallen asleep in Messiah have perished" (1 Cor. 15:18), and almost certainly this pointedly refers to Corinthian disciples who had died (1 Cor. 11:30). Any Jewish disciples among these deceased would presumably have undergone purification prior to burial, and this might indeed have been the trigger for Paul's questions in 1 Cor. 15:29.

Paul wrote bluntly, "For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). One could probably excuse a Greek or Roman, new to faith in Messiah, for ignorance of God. But it would certainly be shameful for a Jew to be told that they have no knowledge of God.⁵⁸

Paul's preemptive remark, "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'" (1 Cor. 15:35), may reflect knowledge of Sadducean ridicule such as recounted in Luke 20:27–40. Paul's retort, "You foolish person!" could reflect an inter-Jewish response, Pharisee to Sadducee, in accord with the Torah's commandment, "in reproof you shall reprove your neighbor, and you shall not assume guilt because of him." (Lev. 19:17).

Conclusion

Scripture explicitly mentions Corinth's Jewish community, Jewish disciples of Yeshua, Jewish burial practices, and Sadducean denial of resurrection. While the content of 1 Cor. 15 speaks to any audience, it was evidently stimulated by certain people who denied the resurrection. Nothing prevents the deniers from having been erring Jewish disciples of Messiah. Circumstantial evidence supports this view. If Jewish disciples did stimulate Paul's resurrection chapter, then a plausible reason exists to consider 1 Cor. 15:29 in a Jewish light related to resurrection and Jewish burial customs, with βαπτίζω understood in indirect middle voice. Surely a Jewish burial practice that points to the resurrection is not aberrational, nor is it a hindrance to faith in Messiah. Rather, it is part of the very culture from which Messiah came. At the very least, this approach to 1 Cor. 15:29 is plausible, reasonable and is worthy of further study.

⁵⁸ Compare: "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced [...] rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths." (Titus 1:10–14).