

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

By Hanoch Ben Keshet

This article revisits one of the NT's most enigmatic verses, 1 Cor. 15:29, and proposes that Paul's twin questions were directed to Jewish disciples of Yeshua.<sup>1</sup> 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. Preceding chapters of 1 Corinthians contain Paul's reprimands for aberrant practices, including those related to headwear (1 Cor. 11:16), and they sharply contrast his tacit sanction of this baptismal practice.<sup>2</sup> Paul's lack of censure seems to point to an acceptable custom. Remarkably, the account of Paul's salvation in Acts 9:1–30 is followed closely by the purification of Tabitha's body in Acts 9:37.<sup>3</sup> 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.

### Recent proposals for 1 Cor. 15:29

Joseph Fitzmyer explains why this verse defies interpretation: "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." Fitzmyer lists six of the most widely proposed solutions<sup>4</sup> (with examples given for the first four solutions): 1) proxy baptism, 2) Greek patristic view, 3) baptism accepted because of a Christian, 4) Christian water baptism in various nuances, 5) figurative martyrdom baptism, and 6) Murphy-O'Connor's involved

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<sup>1</sup> The author expresses sincere thanks to Martin Culy, Adjunct Professor of New Testament and Greek at Briercrest College and Seminary, Carleton Place, ON, CA, for suggesting the presentation of this idea in a paper.

<sup>2</sup> 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> This Jewish custom of washing the deceased, today called *taharah* or purification, is performed by groups bearing the name *Hevra Kadisha*.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

proposal of an elitist Corinthian saying, mocking Paul for 'being destroyed' by his incessant labors for the unspiritual, or dead.<sup>5</sup>

- 1) Richard DeMaris suggests that Corinthian Christians, previously steeped in Greek and Roman religion, were preoccupied with death and the underworld and thus developed a local vicarious baptism for the dead.<sup>6</sup>
- 2) 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.<sup>7</sup>
- 3) Anthony Thiselton proposes his solution as least problematic, adopting 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."<sup>8</sup>
- 4) Joel 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.<sup>9</sup> In addition, 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. Hull argues that 1 Cor. 15:29 speaks of a unity of

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<sup>5</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Baptized for the Dead" (1 Cor. 15:29): A Corinthian Slogan? *Keys to First Corinthians, Revisiting the Major Issues*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 242–256.

<sup>6</sup> 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), 662, 674.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

baptism and resurrection based on faith in the gospel that Paul preached in Corinth.<sup>10</sup>

Translators also render the subjects passively baptized, such as the recent Messianic translation of Scripture, *Tree of Life Version*, 1 Cor. 15:29:

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?<sup>11</sup>

Then too, the modern Hebrew translation, הברית החדשה (*Habrit Hahdashah*)<sup>12</sup> renders both βαπτίζόμενοι and βαπτίζονται in 1 Cor. 15:29 as *nitbalim* (נטבלים), or passively immersed.

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:

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?<sup>13</sup>

The point to clearly note is that exegetes and translators widely assume that the participle βαπτίζόμενοι and verb βαπτίζονται refer to subjects who are "being baptized" in some passive, or permissive middle way.<sup>14</sup>

### **βαπτίζόμενοι and βαπτίζονται: Indirect middle and subject focus**

This article, in contrast, reads βαπτίζόμενοι and βαπτίζονται as indirect middles, emphasizing the subjects' special interest in the verbal 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

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> *The Holy Bible, Tree of Life Version*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> See, מבווארת הברית החדשה, *Habrit Hahdashah, Mevo'eret*, (Jerusalem: Bible Society in Israel, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Commenting on 1 Cor. 15:29, Brookins and Longenecker explain that 'in this case a permissive middle is hardly different from a passive in effect'. 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.

say. That must come out of the context or from the significance of the verb itself.<sup>15</sup>

Daniel Wallace contrasts active and middle voices:

[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.<sup>16</sup>

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."<sup>17</sup>

Grammarians, then, emphasize that middle voice is not simply reflexive, as in the subject acting on himself, but ranges in sense from passive to active in effect, while signifying subject focus.<sup>18</sup> 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."<sup>19</sup> Daniel Wallace, for example, lists seven main categories in which to locate various middle senses.<sup>20</sup> 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*

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<sup>15</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1919), 804.

<sup>16</sup> 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2003], 151).

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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 Yohanan. 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.

<sup>19</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Grammar*, 806.

<sup>20</sup> 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.

*interest*. The subject thus shows a special interest in the action of the verb."<sup>21</sup> 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 and with indirect middle verbs.

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. 15:1–2). 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."<sup>22</sup>

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 βαπτιζόμενοι 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 βαπτιζόμενοι 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)

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<sup>21</sup> Wallace, *Grammar*, 419.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

- 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 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."<sup>23</sup> 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 βαπτιζόμενοι 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 βαπτιζόμενοι	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 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 resurrection 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 overstresses any grammatical element, so there is good reason to continue this line of reasoning. We

<sup>23</sup> Wallace, *Grammar*, 441.

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 simple 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 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 include those of 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. (NETS<sup>24</sup>)
- 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).<sup>25</sup> Beyond that, the LXX text of Isaiah was quoted often in the NT, including twice in 1 Corinthians and

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<sup>24</sup> *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> 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).

fourteen times in Romans.<sup>26</sup> 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); 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.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the Corinthian understanding of 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 θαλάσσῃ	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,<sup>28</sup> 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 the cloud and the 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

<sup>26</sup> "Index of Quotations," *The Greek New Testament*, 5<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition, under the direction of Holger Strutwolf, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), 861–862.

<sup>27</sup> Philo never used βαπτίζω for any of his descriptions of Jewish religious purifications.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Fee, *First Corinthians*, 441–446; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 717–725; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 376–382.



trusted Moses after witnessing the powerful acts of the cloud and sea.<sup>29</sup> 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 Jew for the sake of Jews (1 Cor. 9:19–20). 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.

Previous usage of *baptizō* in the context of Jewish purification, as in Judith 12:7 and in Sirach 34:30, probably explains Paul's use of *baptizō* in 1 Cor. 15:29 rather than *wash*, *louō*, which is found for Tabitha's washing in Acts 9:37. The gospels of Mark and Luke indeed were composed after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and Mark 7:1–4 and Luke 11:38 also use *baptizō* in the context of Jewish purification. All four gospels use *baptizō* and cognates for Yohanan's activity and for his very surname, the Baptist, as Josephus does later. Overlapping usage of *baptizō* and *louō* could make either word suitable in certain cases. For example, in 1 Cor. 6:11 Paul used the cognate *apolouō*, wash, for what most see as Christian baptism. In Titus 3:5 the cognate *loutron*, washing, is used for what most see as Christian baptism. In Hebrews 10:22 *louō* is used in the context of washing the body with pure water, and many take this verse to refer to Christian baptism.<sup>30</sup> So in this light, Paul's use of *baptizō* in 1 Cor. 15:29 may well refer to the burial custom described with *louō* in Acts 9:37.

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**

Various cultures in antiquity observed the custom of washing their dead. In Greece of the classical era, for example, bodies were washed and dressed for burial.<sup>31</sup> This Greek custom evidently continued into the Hellenistic era. Jewish

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<sup>29</sup> 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).

<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Heb. 9:10 has *diaphorōis baptismois*, *diverse baptisms*, for Torah rites, yet in the LXX Pentateuch no usage of *baptizō*, *baptisma*, or *baptismos* occurs. Instead, *louō* is used for purification rites. So, Hebrews evidently applies *baptismos* to the many Pentateuchal washings described by *louō*.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 24, 131, 138; See also, Francois Pieter Retief, Louise Cilliers, 'Burial Customs, the Afterlife and the Pollution of Death in Ancient Greece', *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 7 (2005), 53.

burial customs in the Hellenistic era probably developed with the give and take of neighboring cultural influence, but in whatever way customs converged, Jewish practice almost certainly was influenced by expectation of future bodily resurrection. In contrast, the one aspect of afterlife that Greeks were sure of was that there would be no future resurrection.<sup>32</sup>

The first disciples of Yeshua observed ancestral Jewish 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).<sup>33</sup> In most cases, a purification washing of the body was performed,<sup>34</sup> 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."<sup>35</sup> Bruce notes the Mishnah tractate, m. *Šabbat*, 23:5, which reads: "One performs all the necessary steps for the dead, anointing and washing him."<sup>36</sup>

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 Second Temple, one may reasonably suppose that acts honoring the dead, including purifying them for burial, were understood to be related to resurrection.<sup>37</sup> That would certainly agree with the Maccabean literature then in circulation that highlighted Jewish hero Judah Maccabee's belief in the resurrection, and his actions to ensure the atonement of 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

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<sup>32</sup> Moyer V. Hubbard, 'Greek Religion', *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, eds. Joel B. Green, Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 105–123.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> 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).

<sup>35</sup> 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).

<sup>36</sup> עוֹשֵׂין כָּל צְרָכֵי הַמֵּת. סְכִין וּמְדִיחִין אוֹתוֹ

<sup>37</sup> Subsequent Jewish customs stipulate recitation of Ezek. 36:25 while pouring six gallons (nine *kabbim*) of water on the body, providing a direct intimation of purification for resurrection, since Ezek. 37:1–14, the following chapter, recounts the valley of dry bones and resurrection.

had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead [ὑπὲρ 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 Second Temple certainly did perform a purification washing for the benefit of their deceased. There is good reason to suppose that many Jews associated the practice with the resurrection, and this conforms well with Paul's remark in 1 Cor. 15:29. Conversely, the Greek denial of resurrection seems to preclude Paul's remark from any association with Greek funerary washings.

### Corinth's Jewish colony

First century Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria included Corinth among the Mediterranean cities with a Jewish colony,<sup>38</sup> which accords well with the fact that Judaism was a recognized religion in the Roman Empire. In antiquity Corinth had been a famed Greek city-state, but it was destroyed by Rome in 146 BCE and then 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'.<sup>39</sup> It is no surprise that people from around the Mediterranean were attracted to Corinth, including Diaspora Jews sufficient to form a Jewish community. Like other Greco-Roman Jewish communities, the Corinthian community enjoyed a degree of autonomy,<sup>40</sup> such that Gallio, Roman proconsul of Achaia, had no interest in judging Paul's preaching about the Jewish Messiah. Gallio considered that an internal Jewish affair (Acts 18:12–17).

The primary goals of Diaspora Jewish communities were 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.'<sup>41</sup> Building on this foundation, a

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<sup>38</sup> 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).

<sup>39</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987, 1989, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2014), 103–106.

<sup>41</sup> David deSilva writes that Diaspora male Jews between twenty and fifty paid the half-shekel tax in support of temple sacrifices, often paying tithes as well. '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).

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, and he was probably aware of purification customs performed for the deceased.

Richard DeMaris approaches 1 Cor. 15:29 from a different angle, discussing the verse in light of archaeological work in Corinth's ancient cemetery.<sup>42</sup> DeMaris suggests that Corinthian Christians, previously steeped in Greek and Roman religion, were preoccupied with death and the underworld and thus developed a local vicarious baptism for the dead. This scenario, however, seems unlikely if one accepts biblical chronological data.<sup>43</sup> Regardless, DeMaris says that inhumation was widespread in the Corinthian cemetery, in addition to cremation that was typical for Romans. DeMaris, however, fails to mention archaeological finds of Corinth's ancient synagogue reported in Acts 18:4, 7–8,<sup>44</sup> nor the associated Jewish community and its possible influence on burial practices, even though Jews certainly practiced inhumation. While DeMaris argues that proposed interpretations of 1 Cor. 15:29 can be tested against the context of a reconstructed Roman Corinthian religion based on archaeological data, he seems to have overlooked clear archaeological evidence for the contemporary Jewish community. 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.'<sup>45</sup> 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 in Corinth actually impacted Greeks or Romans, 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.

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<sup>42</sup> DeMaris, 'Baptism for the Dead . . . Archaeology and Anthropology', 661–682.

<sup>43</sup> Many agree that Paul departed Corinth c. 51, dated to Gallio's Achaean proconsul posting c. 51–52 (Acts 18:12), and that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in c. 54–55 after three years in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:5–9; Acts 20:31) [see, Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 29–32]. In Paul's absence, former synagogue ruler, Crispus, would likely oppose a baptismal practice tied to Greek and Roman afterlife beliefs, as would Apollos, who was in Corinth after Paul departed (Acts 19:1). The Corinthians even argued over legitimate baptisms (1 Cor. 1:12–17), precluding a unified religious front sufficient to develop a new rite in such short a time. Above all, why would Paul tacitly accept this heterodox new rite in 1 Cor. 15:29?

<sup>44</sup> 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).

<sup>45</sup> DeMaris, 'Baptism for the Dead . . . Archaeology and Anthropology', 670–671.

## Corinthian Jewish disciples of Yeshua

David Garland observes that the church Paul founded was diverse and socially stratified. 'It would have had a Jewish component (1 Cor. 7: 18) along with Gentile proselytes and God-fearers partial to Judaism [. . .], and former devotees of idols and folk religion (1 Cor. 8:7).'<sup>46</sup> After Paul encountered opposition to his message in Corinth's synagogue (Acts 18:4–6), he moved to a God-fearer's house next door, maintaining a location at the heart of Jewish life in Corinth (Acts 18:7).

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'.<sup>47</sup> 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), and Aquila is said to be Jewish. Apollos had been in Corinth and is said to be Jewish (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.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

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

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<sup>46</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> 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.

<sup>48</sup> 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 Messiah?

<sup>49</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 423.

remove the marks of circumcision.' (1 Cor. 7:18). In this case circumcision may not only designate the ancestral covenant, it probably also is a metonymy for a Jewish lifestyle. Paul's remark implies that Jewish disciples 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 Jewish disciples.

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 redemption, Paul's Torah practice was integral to his lifestyle.<sup>50</sup> Paul was no longer 'under the Law' for salvation, but he did bear witness to the righteousness of God by observing its precepts. This approach also harmonizes with his admonition to the Corinthians 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 Ἕλληνας 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.<sup>51</sup> Surely Corinth's Jewish disciples maintained deep feelings toward Jerusalem and fellow Jewish believers in Yeshua there as well. Moreover, Paul's order for the collection 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.

Jews of local and distant origin evidently made up the core of Jewish disciples of Yeshua in Corinth, and it is possible that they held various views about resurrection, perhaps even before Paul arrived to preach the good news.

### **Jews who believe Yeshua is Messiah, but who deny a general resurrection**

George Nickelsburg explains that recent scholarship is demolishing any idea of a monolithic 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'

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<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>51</sup> 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.

historical circumstances and inseparable from their non-Jewish environment.<sup>52</sup> In a similar way, B. R. McCane remarks that Jewish beliefs about the afterlife were generally vague and varied, though one controversial 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.'<sup>53</sup> At the same time some influential Jews, like the Sadducees, firmly denied a general resurrection. Shaye 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.'<sup>54</sup>

The Sadducean party was centered in Jerusalem and ruled Herod's temple, one of the largest temples of that period, though Roman overlords kept Sadducean power in check and the Pharisees certainly influenced religious observance. Cohen sums up the high priest'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.<sup>55</sup>

The Sadducees, loved or hated, were elites who ruled over the very heart of Jewish worship, and who were led by Israel's high priest. They did not hide their vigorous, probably reactionary denial of the resurrection under a bushel. Almost certainly Diaspora Jews making pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the three yearly Torah feasts, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Acts 2:5–11) would learn of Sadducean views, and among the pilgrims would be Jewish disciples of Yeshua.<sup>56</sup> A few Corinthian disciples of Yeshua may have adopted the Sadducean denial, again, perhaps even before they ever heard the gospel.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, Jews who serve the Almighty could also agree that on occasion a chosen Jewish *tzaddik*, or righteous one, might merit ascension into

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<sup>52</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins, Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 3.

<sup>53</sup> 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.

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 158–162.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Maccabees to Mishnah*, 106.

<sup>56</sup> Paul himself returned to Jerusalem a number of times, including at least once for Pentecost: 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.

<sup>57</sup> Israel's leadership, Sadducee and Pharisee, rejected Yeshua two decades earlier, so neither party was better or worse than the other. Paul regularly mentioned his Pharisaical association, so perhaps other Jews, inclined to Sadducean ideas, came to faith in Yeshua without thinking their views through carefully.

heaven. J. M. Scott surveyed heavenly ascent literature and showed that a variety of such ideas were percolating among Jews.<sup>58</sup> For example, the Enoch literature then circulating was stimulated by the figure in the Torah 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.

Within this spectrum of Second Temple Judaism, therefore, the confluence of a chosen righteous one's ascension, yet no general resurrection, could conceivably be the basis for a few in Corinth who could follow Yeshua as Messiah, yet who would reject the general resurrection.

### **Paul argues the resurrection's reality**

Scholars have discussed whether 1 Cor. 15 was planned by Paul as an integral part of his epistle, or whether it was an unforeseen addition, which is described as the partition theory. Many commentators argue that there is no clear evidence to support the partition theory.<sup>59</sup> Others, to the contrary, argue that chapter 15 is an abrupt change from previous chapters, and among such exegetes Michael Hull adopted Martinus C. de Boer's analysis of the composition of 1 Corinthians,<sup>60</sup> in which Paul responds to three information sources: from 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).<sup>61</sup> If so, then the report from Corinth that some were denying the resurrection perhaps came from Stephanas and companions, not from Chloe's people, nor the letter, and this later report would have stimulated Paul to write chapter 15.

Regardless of the partition theory, 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

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<sup>58</sup> J. M. Scott, 'Heavenly Ascent in Jewish and Pagan Traditions', in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 447–452.

<sup>59</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 713; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 36–41, 1169–1172; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 539–540.

<sup>60</sup> Martinus C. de Boer, 'The Composition of 1 Corinthians', *New Testament Studies* 40/2 (1994), 229–245.

<sup>61</sup> 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).



instruct all Corinthian Christians.<sup>62</sup> 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 burial issues.

Messiah's death for sins was according to Scriptures and his resurrection on the third day was according to Scriptures.<sup>63</sup> 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 the resurrected Messiah appeared to Cephas (i.e. the transliterated Aramaic for *Kefa*, rather than the Greek *Petros*, Peter), Paul states without elaboration that Messiah appeared to 'the twelve'. Both the Aramaic name and the collective apostolic term would resonate strongly with Jews, but less so with Greeks and Romans. Paul's brief mention of James includes no introduction, he simply assumes the addressees know him. Regarding Paul's mention of the five hundred witnesses of the resurrected Messiah, 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'.<sup>64</sup> 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.

- Mark 12:18: And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. (λέγουσιν ἀνάστασιν μὴ εἶναι)
- Matthew 22:23: The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. (λέγοντες μὴ εἶναι ἀνάστασιν)

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<sup>62</sup> Paul dealt with other resurrection misunderstandings: '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).

<sup>63</sup> Beyond Paul's two direct mentions of Scripture here, H. Williams's survey of 1 Corinthians finds 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).

<sup>64</sup> Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, ed. Ben Witherington III (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 124.

- 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)

Regarding the chronology of Paul's activity, we note that he dealt with Corinthian denial of the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15, and then a few years later while testifying before Sanhedrin officials in Jerusalem he refers to the resurrection (Acts 22:30–23:11), and this required Lukan commentary to supply his rationale: 'for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection.' Sadducean denial, then, was well-known to both Paul and to Luke. Sadducean-inspired Corinthian denial is thus consistent with the data, even if there is no explicit proof for it.

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). Almost certainly this remark refers pointedly to Corinthian Christians who had died (1 Cor. 11:30). Any Jewish disciples of Yeshua among these deceased would presumably have undergone the traditional purification prior to burial. These funerals might indeed have been the *specific trigger* for Paul's remark in 1 Cor. 15:29.

Some lines later 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.<sup>65</sup>

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).

Chapter 15 also contains imagery of Messiah as firstfruits, and Messiah as the spiritual Adam, as well as biblical quotations. But these examples were

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<sup>65</sup> 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).

almost certainly intended for all the Christians of Corinth, even if they would be readily understood by Jewish disciples of Messiah.

### **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.