

## **ACCESSING THE VIRGIN**

**ACCESSING THE VIRGIN: GENDER AND PURITY  
IN THE  
*PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES***

**By  
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**A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfilment of Requirements  
For the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**McMaster University**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2010)**

**McMaster University**

**(Religious Studies)**

**Hamilton, Ontario**

**TITLE:**                    **Accessing the Virgin: Gender and Purity in the *Protevangelium of James***

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**NUMBER OF PAGES:**    **vii, 318**

## Abstract

My dissertation brings literary approaches to the study of purity in one of the most influential “apocryphal” texts about Mary the mother of Jesus. Specifically, I explore the place and function of ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity in the portrayal and characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*. In the narrative, Mary’s exceptional ritual and sexual purity serves to set her apart as a woman unique and holy, but I argue that her ability to menstruate allows for reconnection with, and accessibility to, other women. Indeed, literary exploration into Mary’s menstrual purity reveals the author’s view that motherhood is to be praised alongside ascetic virginity. In addition, I also re-examine questions about the date and provenance of the text through its focus on purity, proposing that its narrative and ritual concerns are most fitting with a late second to early third century date and a West Syrian cultural context. By tracing the various ways purity is described and presented in the text, this study sheds light on early Jewish and Christian ideas about purity, representations of women in the ancient world, the early history of Mariology, and the place of non-canonical writings in the history of biblical interpretation.

## Acknowledgements

I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Annette Yoshiko Reed, whose expertise in the field taught me how to ask the right questions and whose passion for scholarship and undying enthusiasm for intellectual discourse pushed me to become a better writer and thinker. I consider it a privilege to have studied under Annette's tutelage during my studies as a graduate student and am thankful to her for sparking and holding my interest in issues surrounding ancient Jewish and Christian identity, Jewish-Christian relations, and the wonderful world of apocryphal literature.

I am also extremely thankful to the other members of my supervisory committee, Dr. Anders Runesson and Dr. Eileen Schuller, for their intellectual support and unwavering dedication and commitment to their students. Anders provided me with invaluable teaching and thoughtful insights to help strengthen some of my analyses and structuring. Also, Eileen's important questions and careful eye for detail helped me tighten my arguments and put them into context. I am very appreciative of their comments and suggestions.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Karen Torjesen who read my dissertation in its various stages and who provided important comments and shared critical insights into my work. I benefitted greatly from her support during my stay as a visiting scholar at Claremont Graduate University and my involvement with the School of Religion, Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, and the program for Women's Studies in Religion. I am most thankful for her guidance and friendship.

I would like to thank my family and friends without whose support this work would have been impossible. Many thanks go out especially to Eileen Jankowski, Sarah Pelton, and Kevin McGinnis for reading drafts of the complete work and for offering many helpful suggestions both in written form and in conversation.

Finally, I want to thank my loving husband James, who was there in the beginning and whose constant support, patience, and encouragement gave me the confidence to see this project through to the end. I dedicate this study to him.

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## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AC	<i>Ami di Clergé</i>
<i>AJS Review</i>	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>AnCl</i>	<i>L'antiquité classique</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i>
ANT	Apocrypha Novi Testamenti
<i>Apocrypha</i>	<i>Apocrypha</i>
B.	Babylonian Talmud
BAC	The Bible in Ancient Christianity
BAFCS	The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>BMC Review</i>	<i>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CA	Christianismes Antiques
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Coptic Church Review</i>
CQS	Companion to the Qumran Scrolls
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>EM</i>	<i>Ephemerides Mariologicae</i>
<i>Eranos</i>	<i>Eranos Jahrbuch</i>
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>Gesta</i>	<i>Gesta</i>
GP	Greek and Philosophy
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HB	Hebrew Bible
<i>HDB</i>	<i>Harvard Divinity Bulletin</i>
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Studies</i>
<i>Hugoye</i>	<i>Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCSSS	<i>Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Old Testament</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar
<i>Koroth</i>	<i>Koroth</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LD</i>	<i>Lectio Difficilior</i>
LHR	Lectures on the History of Religions
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
M.	Mishnah
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NOMO	Der Nahe Osten und der Mittlere Osten
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTR	New Testament Readings
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>Numen</i>	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
<i>ODCC</i>	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
PACE	Project on Ancient Cultural Engagement
PETSE	Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PHC	A People's History of Christianity

<i>Prooftexts</i>	<i>Prooftexts</i>
PS	<i>Patriologia Syriaca</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REA	<i>Revue des Études Anciennes</i>
RESAA	<i>RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics</i>
RFCC	Religion in the First Christian Centuries
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLABib	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLCA	Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Addresses
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SCHT	Studies in Christian History and Thought
SCSCO	Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
<i>SE</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica</i>
<i>SecCent</i>	<i>Second Century</i>
<i>Semeia</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
SH	Subsidia Hagiographica
<i>Signs</i>	<i>Signs</i>
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
<i>Spec</i>	<i>Speculum</i>
SS	Studia Sinaitica
StBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
StBP	Studia Post-biblica
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STTS	Semitic Texts and Translation Series
T.	Tosefta
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSB	The Scholars Bible
<i>TSK</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Altchristlichen Literatur
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## Introduction

As one of the most popular figures in Christian tradition, Mary has been the subject of much scholarship, especially in relation to claims about her status as a virgin and as the mother of the messiah. Primary attention has been given to the depictions of Mary in the Gospels of Matthew (Matt 1–2) and Luke (Luke 1–2).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, a great number of studies have explored the history of Mary’s characterization in Christian literature, art, and music from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Much less attention,

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<sup>1</sup> See further, e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 25–26; idem, ed., *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Fortress, 1978); Bertrand Buby, *Mary of Galilee: Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Alba House, 1994); C. T. Davis, “The Fulfillment of Creation: A Study of Matthew’s Genealogy,” *JAAR* 41 (1973): 520–35; M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (SNTSMS 8; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); X. Léon-Dufour, *Etudes d’évangile* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), esp. chapter entitled “L’Annonce à Joseph,” 65–81; K. Stendahl, “Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Mt 1–2,” in *Judentum Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für J. Jeremias* (ed. W. Eltester; BZNW 26; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 94–105; G. Graystone, *Virgin of all Virgins: The Interpretation of Luke 1:34* (Rome: Pio X, 1968); P. S. Minear, “Luke’s Use of the Birth Stories,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 111–30; S. Lyonnet, “Le récit de l’annonciation et la maternité divine de la Sainte Vierge,” *AC* 66 (1956): 33–48.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 2–3; Hilda C. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (2 vols.; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963, 1965); Thomas Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* (London: Burns and Oates, 1893); Rudolph Yanney, “Saint Mary and Eve in the Church Fathers,” *CCR* 25.4 (2004): 116–17; Robert B. Eno, “Mary and her Role in Patristic Theology,” in *One Mediator, the Church, and Mary* (ed. H.G. Anderson; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), 159–76. For an introduction to the Virgin in art see G. Schiller’s *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 1 (trans. J. Seligman; New York: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 13, 94–114; A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (Bollingen Art Series 35.10; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 13. Mary’s popularity in music and art is, arguably, unmatched by any other single figure in Western history. In art, the Virgin is often portrayed holding the Christ Child; the earliest representation of the Madonna and child may be the second century painting in the Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome. Other important representations include Cimabue’s thirteenth century painting entitled *Maesta of Santa Trinita Madonna* in Florence, Giotto’s ca. 1310 painting, *Ognissanti* or *Enthroned Madonna* in Florence, and Duccio’s early fourteenth century painting entitled *Maesta*. Among the most popular of Marian art is the collection of mosaics found in the church in Chora in Istanbul, at which the entire narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* is visually presented. In medieval Europe, the development of the typology of Eve, the disobedient and sinful mother of Cain, and Mary, the obedient and chaste mother of Christ was also enthusiastically explored not only in literature, but also within art. One of the most popular motifs, which became well known in the late twelfth

however, has been given to narratives about Mary in the so-called “New Testament apocrypha.”<sup>3</sup> Despite the influence of early “apocryphal” narratives on later literary and artistic representations of Mary, such texts have been relatively neglected until very recently.<sup>4</sup>

In this study, I hope to help fill this gap through an analysis of the depiction of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*. The *Protevangelium of James* dates from the second or third century CE<sup>5</sup> and is arguably the most ancient surviving source that exhibits profound and concentrated interest in the character of Mary for her own sake.

and early thirteenth centuries, is of Mary treading on the head of the serpent and reversing the sin of Eve. On the iconographic motif of Mary trampling the heads of snakes, dragons, and other like creatures, see Henry Kraus, “Eve and Mary: Conflicting Images of Medieval Women,” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard; Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982), 79–100; Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1988); Annette Y. Reed, “Blessing the Serpent and Treading on Its Head: Marian Typology in the S. Marco Creation Cupola,” *Gesta* 46.1 (2008): 41–58. With respect to Mary’s popularity in music, Giuseppe Verdi’s composition of *Ave Maria* in 1889 and *Stabat Mater* in 1897, Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Magnificat* in 1723, and Claudio Monteverdi’s *Vespro Della Beata Vergine* (Vespers of the Blessed Virgin) in 1610, are but a few examples of the vast array of music devoted to the Virgin.

<sup>3</sup> For discussions of the use of the term “apocrypha” for a category of writings and the problems that it raises, see Wilhelm Schneemelcher ed., *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (London: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 9–15; E. Junod, “La littérature apocryphe chrétienne constitue-t-elle un objet d’études?,” *REA* 93 (1991): 397–414; idem, “Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament: Une appellation erronée et une collection artificielle,” *Apocrypha* 3 (1992): 17–46; P. Piovanelli, “Qu’est-ce qu’un ‘écrit apocryphe chrétien,’ et comment ça marche? Quelques suggestions pour une herméneutique apocryphe,” in *Pierre Geoltrain ou comment “faire l’histoire des religions”?* *Le chantier des “origins,” les méthodes du doute, et la conversation contemporaine entre disciplines* (ed. S. C. Mimouni and I. Ullern-Weitè; Turnhout: Brepolis, 2006), 173–87.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Stephen Shoemaker, *The Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); idem “The Virgin Mary in the Ministry of Jesus and the Early Church according to the Earliest Life of the Virgin,” *HTR* 98 (2005): 441–67; see also idem, “Between Scripture and Tradition: The Marian Apocrypha of Early Christianity,” in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11–13 October 2006* (ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu; BAC 6; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2008), 491–510 and Enrico Norelli’s important survey on Marian Apocrypha; *Marie des Apocryphes: Enquête sur la mère de Jésus dans le christianisme antique* (CA 1; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2009). Cornelia Horn’s studies on the reception history of the *Protevangelium of James* (“Intersections: The Reception History of the Protevangelium of James in Sources from the Christian East and in the Qur’ān,” *Apocrypha* 17 [2006]: 113–50) also examine the various aspects of Marian apocrypha.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of the debates about its date.

She is, in fact, the text's protagonist, and the narrative provides an extensive account of her life, including the events surrounding her conception and birth (*Prot. Jas.* 1–5).<sup>6</sup> Although the *Protevangelium of James* is often cited as influential for later Christian reflection about Mary, gender, and virginity,<sup>7</sup> it has rarely been studied for its own sake. Specialist studies of the *Protevangelium of James*, moreover, have tended to focus on its complex textual-history and/or on the debated questions of its theological function and date.<sup>8</sup> What has been lacking, however, is a sustained analysis of its narrative and literary features, particularly as they contribute to its portrait of Mary.

Towards this goal, my study will investigate the *Protevangelium of James*' characterization of Mary by means of a focus on the theme of purity. A number of scholars have noticed the significance of this theme in the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>9</sup> Peter Brown, for instance, observes that the “narrative already presented Mary as a human creature totally enclosed in sacred space.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Beverly Gaventa notes that

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<sup>6</sup> As noted below, all citations of the *Protevangelium of James*, unless otherwise indicated, reflect the chapter and verse divisions in Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 32–77.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 273–74; Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 74; Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 100–125; Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 141–64.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Oscar Cullmann, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1, 421 on date, 423–24 on provenance; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11 on date, 12 on provenance; Émile de Strycker, “Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques,” in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 418; E. Cothenet, “Le Protévangile de Jacques: Origine, Genre et Signification d’un Premier Midrash Chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie,” *ANRW* 2.25.6 (1998), 4257 on date, 4267 on provenance; and Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 108.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g., Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 16; Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 425; H. R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 174; Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 141–64; and discussion below.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 273.

the “story itself abounds with the language of purity,” adopting the phrase “sacred purity” to describe the manner in which the *Protevangelium of James* portrays Mary.<sup>11</sup>

Although many scholars have thus pointed to the special interest in Mary’s purity in the text, few inquiries into this theme have gone beyond the motif of virginity. Even less has been done to investigate how the theme of purity operates in the narrative as a whole. In this study I suggest that purity is a unifying theme throughout the *Protevangelium of James*. The theme of purity is not limited simply to the events immediately surrounding Jesus’ birth; rather, it dominates the entire narrative and is central to its structure. The *Protevangelium of James* explores a variety of ideas concerning Mary’s purity, from both ontological and situational perspectives. From the homemade sanctuary created for Mary by her mother Anna (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4–5) to the sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4–6), Mary’s living spaces and arenas of social interaction are depicted as free from the common and unclean, and they are said to be maintained in this manner throughout her life. According to the *Protevangelium of James*, her status as a virgin also remains constant. In the text, Mary’s virginity is questioned three times and is twice tested publicly (*Prot. Jas.* 15:9–13; 20:1–4), and she proves that she is a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus (*Prot. Jas.* 11:5; 12–19; 20:1–4). The treatment of Mary’s pre-and post-partum virginity in the *Protevangelium of James* greatly influenced later Christian tradition, and this element of the text has been widely noted in modern scholarship.<sup>12</sup> I will propose, however, that the

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<sup>11</sup> Gaventa, *Mary*, 109–10.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 113–22, and the essays in Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins, eds., *The Feminist Companion to Mariology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005), especially

assertion of Mary's virginity is just one aspect of the text's broader attempt to celebrate Mary by depicting her as pure.

At the same time, I focus on the place of purity in the *Protevangelium of James* in order to shed fresh perspective on debates about the date and provenance of the text, and on the discussion of its relationships to other Jewish and Christian traditions. To expound upon Mary's purity, the *Protevangelium of James* draws multiple motifs and models from traditions about women, childbirth, and the Temple in the LXX, on the one hand, and from descriptions of Mary in Gospel traditions (esp., Matthew, Luke, and/or an early harmony combining them), on the other. Attention to such intertextual connections may help illuminate the text's portrayal of Mary and its characterization of female purity and sexuality, as well as the cultural contexts and literary conventions that may have informed them. In addition, a focus on the theme of purity may open the way for investigating the *Protevangelium of James* in relation to the Judaism of its own time (i.e., second to third century CE). Just as Mary's connection to Judaism is explored in the text primarily by means of the theme of ritual purity and in relation to the Temple, so an analysis of the narrative depiction of this connection may shed new light on the aims and context of the *Protevangelium of James* itself. In particular, such an approach may allow for a fresh perspective on the text's relationship to early rabbinic Judaism and Syrian Christianity,<sup>13</sup>

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John Dominic Crossan, "Virgin Mother or Bastard Child?," 37–55; Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sex, Birth, Purity and Asceticism in the *Protevangelium Jacobi*," 56–66; Foskett, "Virginity as Purity in the *Protevangelium of James*," 67–76; and George Themelis Zervos, "Christmas with Salome," 77–98.

<sup>13</sup> I have chosen to use the term "Syria" and "Syrian" to cover a broad geographical and cultural area extending beyond the boundaries of the Roman province of Syria in accordance with Kevin Butcher who writes, "Syria is an ill-defined, impure geographical notion which accords well with the complex and ill-defined social and religious identities..." which I consider in this dissertation. In doing so, references to Syriac Christianity specifically reference those sources or writings that were written in Syriac, all of which



which may in turn shed new light on long-standing debates about the narrative's date and provenance as well as its so-called "Jewish-Christian" character.

By exploring such connections, I hope to contribute not only to research on the *Protevangelium of James*, early Jewish/Christian relations, and the history of biblical interpretation, but also to research on the development of Mariology and the range of early Jewish and Christian attitudes towards gender, the body, purity, family, and sexuality. I propose, in particular, that the theme of purity may be pivotal for the text's presentation of Mary as a paradigm for other (Christ-believing)<sup>14</sup> women to follow. In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary seems to be depicted as exempt from all impurities except for one; the text, as we shall see, appears to imply that she menstruates (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3–5). Even as the assertion of Mary's extreme purity functions to set her apart as unique, this allusion to her menstruation may function as a way to allow her reconnection with, and accessibility to, other women. The text's concern for menstrual impurity, moreover, may help to shed light on the cultural context in which the text took form—pointing, in particular, to a Syrian Christian context with some cultural proximity to Jewish groups for whom issues of women's ritual purity were significant.

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are a subset of Syrian Christianity. See Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 10 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Particularly by virtue of the fluidity in the nature and range of biblically-based religious identities in the second and third centuries, it may be misleading to apply the term "Christian" to this text; see further discussion of the *Protevangelium of James* and Judaism in Chapter One and my note on terminology below.

## I.1 Textual History and Witnesses

Despite its exclusion from the NT canon, the *Protevangelium of James* survives in a large number of manuscripts and versions. In his 1956 dissertation, for instance, Boyd Lee Daniels describes the *Protevangelium of James* as one of “the oldest and most influential writings... [that] was more popular than most of the apocrypha.”<sup>15</sup> The text survives in multiple languages, including Greek, Syriac, Georgian, Latin, Armenian, Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Slavonic.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Oscar Cullman proposes that the *Protevangelium of James* may have been integrated into early liturgical collections.<sup>17</sup> Even as the wealth of textual witnesses attests the popularity of the *Protevangelium of James* in pre-modern times, it also poses a challenge for current scholarly attempts at literary analysis. There is, as Hans-Josef Klauck notes, much textual variation and fluidity among the witnesses: “we find abbreviations, expansions and paraphrases, and even the oldest textual witness, PBodmer V, displays traces of considerable interventions.”<sup>18</sup> Scholars generally accept that the *Protevangelium of James* was originally composed in Greek.<sup>19</sup> C. Tischendorf’s 1876 edition was based on the fifty Greek manuscripts of the

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<sup>15</sup> Boyd Lee Daniels, “The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Protevangelium of Jacobi” (2 vols.; PhD Diss., Duke University, 1956), 32.

<sup>16</sup> Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 421–38. For a list of the most important manuscripts, versions, and translations, in both ancient and modern languages, see J.K. Elliott’s *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 52–57. Note that Elliott’s translation there is based on Tischendorf’s reconstruction of the Greek text.

<sup>17</sup> Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 421–38.

<sup>18</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (trans. Brian McNeil; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2003), 65.

<sup>19</sup> Notably, two German scholars writing independently of one another at the end of the nineteenth century challenged this view. Ludwig Conrady (“Das Protevangelium Jacobi in neuer Beleuchtung,” *TSK* 42 [1889]: 728–84) and Alfred Resch (*Das Kindheitsevangelium nach Lucus und Mattaeus* [TU 10. Band, Heft 5; Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1897]) argued in favour of a Hebrew original instead. Resch

text known at the time.<sup>20</sup> Since then, approximately 90 additional Greek manuscripts have been identified.<sup>21</sup> Of the numerous manuscripts that have been unearthed, Bodmer Papyrus V is the earliest, dating to the fourth century; this manuscript is, accordingly, the most important for the study of the original Greek text.<sup>22</sup>

Before the discovery of this papyrus in 1952,<sup>23</sup> Tischendorf's critical edition of the text had been accepted as the standard edition.<sup>24</sup> In 1958, Testuz first published the text of this newly-discovered papyrus in *Papyrus Bodmer V: Nativité de Marie*. In 1961, de Strycker integrated the evidence of Bodmer Papyrus V into a new critical edition (*La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques. Recherches sur le Papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une édition critique du texte et une traduction annotée*), in a provisional attempt to reconstruct the most ancient recoverable form of the text.<sup>25</sup> In 1995, Hock published a

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went so far to claim that a Hebrew original was used, not only by the author of the *Protevangeliem of James*, but also by NT gospel writers like Luke. This theory, however, has not gained much credence.

<sup>20</sup> Daniels, "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 4.

<sup>21</sup> In his study of the Greek manuscripts of the *Protevangeliem of James*, Daniels provides a systematic list of MSS by number and location; "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 40–52. See also de Strycker, "Die Griechischen Handschriften des Protevangeliems Iacobi," in *Griechische Kodikologie und Textüberlieferung* (ed. D. Harlfinger; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 577–612. In this study, de Strycker investigates the Greek manuscript tradition and categorizes the various MSS into five families (see esp. 588–607).

<sup>22</sup> M. Testuz dates the Bodmer Papyrus V to the third century CE, in contrast to Cullmann and Klauck, who date it to the fourth century. See Testuz, ed. and trans., *Papyrus Bodmer V: Nativité de Marie* (Cologne-Geneva: Bibliotheca Boderiana, 1958), 23–26; Cullmann, "Protevangeliem of James," 421–38; Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> The Papyrus Bodmer V is one of the twenty-two papyri found at Pabau near Dishna, Egypt in 1952. Interestingly, these papyri vary in content ranging from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and early Christian literature to Homer's *Iliad* and Meander's comedies. All but two papyri are located at the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana in Cologny, Switzerland (near Geneva; P74 and P75 are at the Vatican Library). For an introduction to the Bodmer discovery, see Albert Pietersma, "Bodmer Papyri," *ABD* 1:766–77; James M. Robinson, *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri, the First Christian Monastic* (Nashville: Cascade, 1987, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> C. Tischendorf, ed., *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Avenarius and Mendelssohn, 1876), 1–50.

<sup>25</sup> See the introduction of de Strycker's critical edition of the Greek *Protevangeliem of James* in *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 13–63, and Cullmann, "Protevangeliem of James," 421–22.

translation of the *Protevangelium of James*, based mainly on de Strycker’s edition, albeit with some departures.<sup>26</sup> Most notably, Hock was able to make use of Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 3524, a sixth century Greek fragment discovered in 1896–7 that covers a portion of Chapter 25 of the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>27</sup>

The literary analysis in the present study is based on Hock’s edition of the Greek. Hock essentially uses de Strycker’s text based on the Bodmer Papyrus V,<sup>28</sup> which he admits is provisional, but still the standard edition. Rather than use Hock’s English translation, however, I provide my own renderings from his edition with reference to others where relevant. Hock’s translation is aimed at accessibility for a contemporary non-specialist audience. Although it is very readable, his translation is—as Elliott notes—“not always close to the Greek”; for example, “Biblicisms... [and] verbs of saying are sometimes avoided in the interest of raciness.”<sup>29</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, however, a more literal translation is apt, as literary analysis cannot be pursued apart from attention to the specific word choices in the Greek itself.

For this reason, I quote from both the Greek below and include English translations of the relevant passages. For both, I also consult Hock’s extensive textual notes, particularly when he departs from de Strycker’s determination of the earliest recoverable reading. In my citations of the *Protevangelium of James*, I follow Hock’s

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<sup>26</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 28–30.

<sup>27</sup> A. K. Bowman, et al, trans. and eds., “Papyri Oxyrhynchus. 3524: Protevangelium of James 25:1,” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 50 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1983), 8–12.

<sup>28</sup> For readings unique to the Bodmer Papyrus V, I have based my consideration on Testuz’ edition and translation.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., “behold” is variously translated as “there it was,” “right then,” “suddenly,” “abruptly”; while “woe” at 20:3 is translated as “I’ll be damned.” See Elliott’s review in *NovT* 39.3 (2006): 299–300. Note that the English version in Schneemelcher’s *New Testament Apocrypha* is an English translation of Cullman’s German translation (i.e., rather than a direct translation from Greek to English).

system of splitting the text by chapter and verse,<sup>30</sup> rather than de Strycker's use of the page and line numbers of the Bodmer papyrus.<sup>31</sup> Throughout this study, variants between major manuscript traditions will be noted only in cases where they affect the meaning of key passages pertaining to the theme of purity.

Next to the Greek original, the surviving fragments of the Syriac translation are among the oldest and most important witnesses to the text. The Syriac survives in four manuscripts, commonly referred to as Syr<sup>a</sup>, Syr<sup>b</sup>, Syr<sup>c</sup>, and Syr<sup>d</sup>.<sup>32</sup> The earliest of these Syr<sup>a</sup>, dates to the fifth century.<sup>33</sup> The Syriac translation first came to the attention of scholars in 1865, when William Wright published a sixth century fragment from the British Museum (Add. 14484) that contains portions of the second half of the *Protevangelium of James* (i.e., ch. 17 to end).<sup>34</sup> Wright suggested that this Syriac fragment, now known as Syr<sup>b</sup>, formed an important witness to the original Greek text.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hock has retained Tischendorf's chapter divisions but the numbering system there is his own.

<sup>31</sup> Hock's division of the text differs slightly from that used in Cullmann's translation published in Schneemelcher's *New Testament Apocrypha*.

<sup>32</sup> Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 422–23.

<sup>33</sup> De Strycker has argued that all four manuscripts (however fragmented) are from a single version, based on the fact that they all can be easily arranged in their proper sequence (*La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 353). In Agnes Smith Lewis' manuscript, Syr<sup>a</sup> is used as the base, with Syr<sup>b</sup> cited for its variants. P. Quecke has done the same work for Syr<sup>c</sup> and Syr<sup>d</sup>, respectively. See de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 35, 353–55, for specific details on each of the four Syriac manuscripts and n. 36 below on Lewis' work.

<sup>34</sup> William Wright collected, edited, and translated Syriac manuscripts from the British Museum in *Contributions to the Apocryphal Literature of the New Testament* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865).

<sup>35</sup> Wright dated this Syriac fragment to the second half of the sixth century; see *Contributions to Apocryphal Literature*, 6 of preface. See pages 1–5 of the main text for his translation of this Syriac fragment.

The manuscript fragment British Museum Add. 14484 was reprinted by E. Wallis Budge in 1899.<sup>36</sup>

In 1895, Agnes Smith Lewis purchased a collection of texts found on vellum palimpsest in Suez, which she would publish in 1902. On the surface of this particular manuscript lay a collection of writings on the works of Church Fathers (e.g., Athanasius, John Chrysostom) in Arabic script dating from the ninth or tenth century. Preserved underneath were sections from a Syriac version of the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Transitus Mariae*,<sup>37</sup> the latter treating the life of Mary with specific focus on the Assumption and Dormition.<sup>38</sup> This Syriac version of the *Protevangelium of James* was soon found to predate the fragment published by Wright; Lewis dated it “possibly to the latter half of the fifth century; or at the latest to the beginning of the sixth.”<sup>39</sup> In her translation of the manuscript, which is now known as Syr<sup>a</sup>, Lewis provides the variants of

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<sup>36</sup> E. Wallis Budge, *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the History of the Likeness of Christ* (London, 1899), reprinted as *History of the Blessed Virgin in English and Syriac* (STTS 4–5; New York: AMS, 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Agnes Smith Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca. The Protevangelium Jacobi and Transitus Mariae with Texts from the Septuagint, the Corân, the Peschitta, and from a Syriac Hymn in a Syro-Arabic Palimpsest of the Fifth and Other Centuries, and an Appendix of Palestinian Syriac Texts from the Taylor-Schechter Collection* (SS 11; London: C.J. Clay and Sons, Cambridge University Press, 1902), xviii. This collection of writings also includes portions of an Arabic text of the Qur’an, which can be dated between the late seventh and the middle of the eighth centuries.

<sup>38</sup> See esp. Cornelia Horn, “From Model Virgin to Maternal Intercessor: Mary, Children, and Family Problems in Late Antique Infancy Gospel Traditions and their Medieval Trajectories,” paper presented at Christian Apocryphal Texts for the New Millennium: Achievements, Prospects, and Challenges, Oct 1, 2006, University of Ottawa. For further studies on the *Transitus Mariae* literature, see also Shoemaker, *Mary’s Dormition and Assumption*, 49–51, for an introduction to earliest Dormition Traditions.

<sup>39</sup> Smith Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca*, x. See also Horn’s study on the history of transmission and the connection between the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Transitus Mariae* in respect to “recycled apocrypha.” Horn posits four stages of transmission for the History of the Virgin Mary and addresses questions concerning the manuscript history surrounding the sources for the tradition of the Lives of Mary; see her “Model Virgin,” 1–44.

Syr<sup>b</sup> in her footnotes. With respect to her translation, however, de Strycker noted already that “n’est pas toujours entièrement exacte.”<sup>40</sup>

The third Syriac manuscript, known as Syr<sup>c</sup>, consists of two unconnected leafs published by Eduard Sachau in 1899.<sup>41</sup> Though Sachau does not indicate the date, E. Nestle was able to provide more information on its content with notes on the Greek in a 1902 article.<sup>42</sup> The fourth and last manuscript, now called Syr<sup>d</sup>, is a Syriac fragment that is inserted in Budge’s *Vie Syriacque de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie*<sup>43</sup> and contains sections from 43:8 to 49:1, according to de Strycker’s numbering system.<sup>44</sup>

Modern studies of the Syriac text have been limited, particularly in comparison to the attention given to the Greek text. Recently, however, Cornelia Horn has investigated its development and reception history.<sup>45</sup> Although Horn examines the transmission of the *Protevangelium of James* in order to illuminate other Marian apocrypha (e.g., *Lives of Mary/The Life of the Virgin*), her work confirms the significance of the Syriac version, both for our understanding of the earliest recoverable text of the *Protevangelium of James* and for our knowledge of its rich reception-history.

The many surviving manuscripts and numerous translations of the *Protevangelium of James* confirm that its textual form was never wholly fixed. The rich evidence of its redaction-history and reception-history, however, also points to its continued popularity,

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<sup>40</sup> De Strycker, *La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 35–36; Émile Amann, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et Ses Remaniements Latins* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910), 65–67.

<sup>41</sup> Eduard Sachau, *Verzeichnis der Syrisches Handschriften der kgl. Bibliothek zu Berlin*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1899), 676.

<sup>42</sup> E. Nestle, “Ein Syrisches Bruchstück aus dem Protevangelium Jacobi,” *ZNW* 3 (1902): 86–87.

<sup>43</sup> Budge, *Vie Syriacque de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie* (London, 1899).

<sup>44</sup> De Strycker, *La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 35–36.

<sup>45</sup> Horn, “Intersections,” 113–50.

particularly among Christians in the Eastern Church. Traditions from the *Protevangelium of James* were so well-known among eastern Christian communities that when the text was rediscovered and made accessible to the West by the French Humanist Guillaume Postel in the middle of the sixteenth century, he assumed that it was canonical in eastern orthodox churches.<sup>46</sup> Its early acceptance in the East is also suggested by its adoption into the liturgical year. Already by the fifth century CE, December 8<sup>th</sup> was widely celebrated as the Feast of the Nativity of Mary; by the eighth century, this holy day seems to have been almost universally observed.<sup>47</sup> On such occasions, portions of the *Protevangelium of James* seem to have been read and incorporated into sermons.<sup>48</sup>

By contrast, the *Protevangelium of James*' transmission in western Christendom is more complex. There is only one extant Latin manuscript, which dates to the ninth century.<sup>49</sup> In the Latin West, the influence of the text seems to have been indirect, mostly mediated by other Marian apocrypha, like Pseudo-Matthew.<sup>50</sup> There are a number of possible reasons for the relative lack of popularity of the *Protevangelium of James* in the Latin West. During the fourth and fifth centuries, Jerome criticized the text because of its

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<sup>46</sup> On Guillaume Postel and his discovery of the *Protevangelium of James*, see Irena Backus, "Guillaume Postel, Théodore Bibliander et le 'Protévangile de Jacques,'" *Apocrypha* 6 (1995): 7–65; Daniels, "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 1–4; W. J. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel 1510–1581* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 16.

<sup>47</sup> Daniels, "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 12.

<sup>48</sup> Daniels posits that the popularity of this text was so great that it influenced other sacred observance days, including the Feast of Joachim and Anna (celebrated on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September) and the Feast of the Presentation of the Mary in the Temple (on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November); "Greek Manuscript Tradition," 11–13.

<sup>49</sup> De Strycker, "Une Ancienne Version Latine du Protévangile de Jacques avec des extraits de la Vulgate de Matthieu 1–2 et Luc 1–2," *AB* (1965): 365–402. On the Latin reception of the *Protevangelium of James*, see Jean-Daniel Kaestli, "Le Protévangile de Jacques latin dans l'homélie *Inquirendum est* pour la fête de la Nativité de Marie," *Apocrypha* 12 (2001): 99–153.

<sup>50</sup> De Strycker, "Ancienne Version Latine," 365–402; Amann, *Jacques et ses Remaniements Latins* for an introduction to, translation of, and commentary on the Latin version of the *Protevangelium of James*. Cf. also J. Gijssels, "Het Protevangelium Jacobi in het Latijn," *AnCl* 50 (1981): 351–66.



interpretation of the Gospels’ references to the “brothers and sisters” of Jesus (*Helv.* 11–16).<sup>51</sup> The *Protevangelium of James* refers to Jesus’ “brothers” as the sons of Joseph from a previous marriage—an interpretation that was also widely accepted by eastern Christians.<sup>52</sup> Jerome, by contrast, insisted that all early references to Jesus’ “brothers and sisters” should be interpreted as his cousins.<sup>53</sup> Convinced by Jerome’s assessment, Popes Damascus and Innocent condemned the *Protevangelium of James* in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, the so-called *Gelasian Decree* lists the book among *de libris... non recipiendis* (“books... not to be admitted”), along with other infancy gospels.<sup>55</sup> Continued attempts to suppress such traditions are suggested also by Pope Pius V’s removal of the office of Joachim from the Roman books of daily prayer and readings in the sixteenth century as well as by the suppression of the text of the Presentation of Mary.<sup>56</sup>

Despite such attempts to control the *Protevangelium of James* and related infancy gospels, apocryphal reflections on Mary’s life remained popular. Although the

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<sup>51</sup> Early references to Jesus’ “brothers and sisters” have been debated for centuries. As early as the fourth century CE, three distinct views emerged as possible explanations of such references. The Helvidian view held that Jesus’ brothers and sisters were in fact Mary’s and Joseph’s children (e.g., countered by Jerome in *Helv.* 11–17; cf. Matt 15:55–56; Mark 6:3); the third century North African Christian Tertullian, as well as a number of modern scholars, supports this thesis (*Carn. Chr.* 3). The second view was initially proposed first by the late fourth century heresiologist Epiphanius of Salamis, namely, that they were the children of Joseph from a previous marriage (*Pan.* 78.8.1; 78.9.6). Finally, the fifth century Jerome held that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were not Jesus’ siblings but rather his cousins; the children belonged to Mary, the wife of Alphaeus, and sister of the Virgin Mary. For a discussion on these three views, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 316–32; Richard Bauckham, “The Brother and Sisters of Jesus: An Epiphanian Response to John P. Meier,” *CBQ* 56 (2004): 686–700.

<sup>52</sup> Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65.

<sup>53</sup> See Jerome, *Helv.* 11–16; also Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65.

<sup>54</sup> Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65; also Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 423.

<sup>55</sup> Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 65. The irony, of course, is that the so-called Gelasian Decree is a sixth century forgery (perhaps penned in Gaul) that claims to have been penned by Gelasius, bishop of Rome in 492–96 CE. In other words, this text that condemns apocrypha is itself apocryphal.

<sup>56</sup> Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 418.

*Protevangelium of James* does not seem to have circulated widely in Latin translation, traditions from this work were integrated into Latin infancy narratives such as the Latin Pseudo-Matthew and the *Gospel of the Nativity*. By the sixteenth century, when Postel “re-discovered” the *Protevangelium of James* and reintroduced the text into Europe, elements of the text were already familiar from Christian art and literature.<sup>57</sup> Even Pius V’s removal of St. Joachim’s office and the Presentation of Mary from the breviary in the sixteenth century was eventually overturned and the prayers restored.<sup>58</sup>

## **I.2 The *Protevangelium of James* in Modern Scholarship**

Despite its apparent popularity in pre-modern times, the *Protevangelium of James* has not garnered extensive scholarly interest until relatively recently. In comparison to NT literature and Patristic writings, for instance, very little has been written about the *Protevangelium of James*. Moreover, as noted above, past research focused primarily on issues such as its transmission, versions, date, authorship, and provenance.<sup>59</sup>

Concurrent with the growth of scholarly interest in Christian apocrypha in the decades after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945, a new concern for the literary aspects of the *Protevangelium of James* has arisen.<sup>60</sup> Studies have explored the narrative’s themes and unique features as well as its use of literary techniques. François Bovon, for instance, has examined the literary trope of “suspension of time” in *Protevangelium of James* 18 as well as argued that its overall narrative structure conveys

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<sup>57</sup> For the influence of the *Protevangelium of James* on Christian art and literature, see n. 2 above.

<sup>58</sup> Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 418.

<sup>59</sup> This research will be surveyed in Chapter One below.

<sup>60</sup> See J.D. Turner and A. MacGuire, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) and review by K. Rudolph (trans. D.D. Walker) in *JR* 79 (1999): 452–57.

a coherent meaning.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, John L. Allen discusses questions about its literary genre challenging the traditional categorization of the text as an “infancy gospel” and suggesting *historia* may be a less anachronistic classification.<sup>62</sup>

Another area of recent research has been the text’s intertextual relationships. Scholars have long noted that the vocabulary found in the *Protevangelium of James* consists mainly of terms also found in the LXX.<sup>63</sup> In his *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary*, H. R. Smid pursues an extensive analysis of those instances in which the *Protevangelium of James* appears to cite the LXX and to borrow specific phrases. One example is the oath formula of “As the Lord God Lives,” which is a common Septuagintal phrase, found in LXX Ruth 3:13 and LXX 1 Sam 1:39, as well as in Judith 8:19 and 13:16. In the *Protevangelium of James*, this phrase is employed numerous times throughout the narrative (e.g., *Prot. Jas.* 4:2; 6:3; 13:10; 15:13, 15; 19:19).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> François Bovon, “The Suspension of Time in Chapter 18 of *Protevangelium Jacobi*,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester* (ed. B. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 393–405.

<sup>62</sup> John L. Allen, “The ‘Protevangelium of James’ as an ‘Historia’: The Insufficiency of the ‘Infancy Gospel’ Category,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 508–17.

<sup>63</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 9–12; See also, Amann, *Jacques et ses Remaniements Latins*, 62, 129, 180, 185, 229, 271; P. van Stempvoort, “The *Protevangelium Jacobi*: The Sources of its Theme and Style and their Bearing on its Date,” in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F. L. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964) 415–19; Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4261–62; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 21–22.

<sup>64</sup> Contrast W. S. Vorster, “The *Protevangelium of James* and Intertextuality,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A.F.J. Klijn* (ed. T. Baarda, et al.; Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1988), 262–75, which suggests we should re-evaluate our understanding of its intertextuality. He challenges Smid’s conclusion that there is a deliberately intertextual relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* and the LXX, as based on the former’s use of words and phrases that also occur in the latter. He proposes that the function of a source can vary. A source can be conceived simply as a body of knowledge available to the author or, more elaborately, as a pretext that the author “used, rejected, absorbed, and transformed” in order to produce meaning and creatively to retell his own story. Vorster attributes the many references common to the *Protevangelium of James* and the LXX to convention, since the content contained within the LXX, NT literature, and early Christian writings are very similar. He argues that the author did not simply rewrite a text, but rather created a text in response to the

Hock also notes that the author “drew on the Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, for historical analogies, turns of phrase, and information about Jewish life and practices.”<sup>65</sup> In accordance with Hock, Cothenet notes that, “Il est intéressant de repérer les passages bibliques qui sont réemployés.”<sup>66</sup> Anna’s lament over her childlessness, for instance, draws on the models of the despair of Sarah and Hannah because of their barrenness (Gen 16:1–6; 1 Sam 1:6–16), as well as Judith’s pain over her widowhood (Jdt 8:2–6). Even when Joseph returns home to find Mary pregnant, his initial reaction is to compare himself to Adam, who, upon returning to his wife Eve, found her alone, deceived, and corrupted (*Prot. Jas.* 13:5).<sup>67</sup> Minor characters are also absorbed and recreated in this narrative as seen with Euthine, who is brought into the story to taunt Anna over her childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 2:6) in a manner that recalls the role of Penninah, the second wife of Elkannah, in 1 Sam 1:6.

In his *Infancy Gospel of James*, Hock also notes parallels between the *Protevangelium of James* and Greco-Roman novels. Of particular interest for Hock are two novels composed between 50 and 250 CE, namely, *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Perhaps the particular style and motifs of these Greek romances sparked

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inadequacies of the canonical versions, which referred to other texts and thus developed interplay between them. As such, Vorster accounts for the similar words and expressions used by the author as simply a result of his language, which resembles biblical thoughts and expressions. He maintains that the motifs from stories such as that of Hannah (1 Sam 1:1–8) are the only cases in which we can speak of intertextual relationships.

<sup>65</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4261.

<sup>67</sup> The parallel between Joseph and Adam—and thus Mary and Eve—has been a primary focus of consideration for centuries. This idea interprets Mary as a “new” or “second” Eve. Justin Martyr was the first church father to advance the Eve–Mary comparison (*Dial.* 100), but it was Irenaeus of Lyons who was responsible for producing a critical discourse and analysis of the parallel (*Haer.* 3.21.4). See discussion in Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 39–52 for a survey of the issues surrounding this connection, especially as they lead up to the *Theotokos* controversy. See also Leena Mari Peltamaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 128–34.

interest in the author of the *Protevangelium of James*; Anna's lament scene, for instance, seems to convey an awareness of the numerous laments depicted in these and similar novels. Hock proposes that the parallels between these texts go beyond simply form. As with Daphnis in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, for instance, the *Protevangelium of James* places Anna's lament in a garden.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Joseph's reaction when he discovers Mary is pregnant (*Prot. Jas.* 13:1–5) echoes, both in content and language, Clitophon's lament in Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*.<sup>69</sup> Even the bitter water test to prove Mary's purity (*Prot. Jas.* 16:3–5) recalls the water test conducted on Leucippe for the same reason.<sup>70</sup>

Of special interest for the present study are parallels in the depictions of σωφροσύνη (self-control) and παρθενία (state of virginity). Hock notes that the theme of purity and virginity is a fundamental element in many Greco-Roman romances; in his view, these models may have influenced the ways in which Mary's exceptional state of purity is described in the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>71</sup>

Mary Foskett pursued further work in this area in her 2002 book, *A Virgin Conceived*, and subsequent papers.<sup>72</sup> In order to explore the multiple meanings and images that the term *parthenos* and virginity play in ancient literature, Foskett examines

<sup>68</sup> Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 4.28.2; cf. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 25–26.

<sup>69</sup> Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 5.11.3; cf. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 8.8.3; 6.1–5; 13.1–14.2; cf. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 25–27.

<sup>71</sup> Hock assesses purity as the underlying theme and purpose of the text in *Infancy Gospel of James*, 14–20. Both Gaventa and Foskett also stress that the *Protevangelium of James*' depiction of Mary's purity is one that stresses her exceptionality; Gaventa, *Mary*, 100–122, esp. 110, and Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 141–64; and discussion below.

<sup>72</sup> Foskett, "Virginity as Purity" 67–76; eadem, "Miriam/Mariam/Maria: Literary Genealogy and the Genesis of Mary in the Protevangelium of James," in *Mariam, The Magdalen, and The Mother* (ed. Deirdre Good; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 63–74.

several ancient narratives that feature virginal protagonists, including *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, OT pseudepigrapha like *Joseph and Aseneth*, and Christian apocrypha such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and *Acts of Peter*. Her examination of these sources also informs her analysis of the construction of Mary as “*parthenos*” in Luke-Acts and the *Protevangelium of James*.

With regard to *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Foskett suggests that the emphasis on virginity in these stories extends beyond simply presenting virginal protagonists. Like the *Protevangelium of James*, these stories are not only concerned with virginity and purity, but also with proving and maintaining this state. Accordingly, several scenes (*Prot. Jas.* 16:3; 20:1) are devoted to the questioning and public testing of a woman’s virginity.<sup>73</sup>

Foskett also draws attention to the importance of virginity in *Joseph and Aseneth*.<sup>74</sup> She reads this text as a first century CE narrative that responds to the report, in Gen 41:45, of Pharaoh giving Aseneth, the daughter of Pentephres, priest of Heliopolis, to Joseph for his wife.<sup>75</sup> Similarities between this story and the *Protevangelium of James* can be seen most clearly in the concern for maintaining a living environment free from

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<sup>73</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 81–98.

<sup>74</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 98–104.

<sup>75</sup> There is no consensus about when *Joseph and Aseneth* was written. In 1889 when A.D. Battifol produced the first critical edition from a Syriac version in the mid-sixth century, he dated the work to the fourth-fifth centuries and believed it was Christian in origin. Since the twentieth century, most scholars have affirmed the text as Jewish, with perhaps some Christian interpolations, and attribute it to a much earlier origin, probably in the first to second centuries CE. See C. Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (ed. James H. Charlesworth; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 187. However, Ross Kraemer, in her more recent book, *When Aseneth Met Joseph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) is inclined to push for a “late antique” date, and suggest that it perhaps was even written by Christians.

impurities.<sup>76</sup> Aseneth lives in a tower connected to her father's house. Like Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*, she is only allowed to socialize and interact with other virgins (*Jos. Asen.* 2:5);<sup>77</sup> Aseneth is waited upon by seven virgins, all of the same age and born on the same night (*Jos. Asen.* 2:6). Moreover, Aseneth's virginity is secured by her enclosed chambers, which are guarded from the outside by eighteen young men. In addition, the ornaments of her virginity hang in her room, which contains a bed in which she slept alone ("a man or woman never sat on it, only Aseneth alone"; *Jos. Asen.* 2:9).<sup>78</sup> The image of Aseneth's quarters thus recalls Mary's bedroom sanctuary in the *Protevangelium of James* (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4–5) and her mother's determination to keep her free from all things unclean and impure (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4–5).

As Foskett shows, the theme of virginity is similarly central to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Like the *Protevangelium of James*, this story features a leading character portrayed as pure and virginal. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla is persuaded by Paul's teachings and decides to reject her marriage and commit herself to a life of chastity (*Acts Paul Thec.* 7).<sup>79</sup> For Thecla, the preservation of her virginity remains her power and the key to her success and survival. In the novel, she is twice sentenced by the governor, twice condemned to death, and twice saved by divine intervention. Again the testing of

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<sup>76</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 145.

<sup>77</sup> This translation and thus numbering system is taken from Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," 204.

<sup>78</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 98–104.

<sup>79</sup> My citations are taken from the translation by Schneemelcher, "Acts of Paul and Thecla," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, vol. 2 (ed. W. Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; London: James Clarke & Co, 1992), 240.

virginity is a prominent theme. Yet, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla never yields to marriage,<sup>80</sup> in contrast to Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*.

When dealing with the narratives about Mary in Luke-Acts and the *Protevangelium of James*, Foskett suggests that both narratives exploit the multiple meanings of “virginity” in their representations and characterizations of Mary. She argues, however, that it is the *Protevangelium of James* that summons the potent connection between virginity and purity.<sup>81</sup> Foskett proposes that Mary’s virginity in the narrative becomes the expression of purity and holiness *par excellence*, resulting in purity so absolute and unique that she becomes a model no other woman can replicate.

In this assertion, Foskett builds on the insights of Beverly Gaventa’s 1999 book, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*. Gaventa here attempts to recover the various images of Mary by examining how she is characterized in multiple and differing literary sources (both canonical and extra-canonical). Gaventa’s task to retrieve the “real Mary” is primarily literary, and thus her exploration is heavily dependent upon addressing questions that deal specifically with the ways in which early Christian writers portrayed Mary as a character and the role(s) she played in their representations of the story surrounding Jesus. After exploring Mary’s role in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Gaventa devotes an entire chapter to the *Protevangelium of James*, whereby she examines how Mary functions as a character by means of her speech, description, and actions and interactions with other characters. Gaventa determines that the *Protevangelium of James* portrays Mary’s entire life (conception, birth, infancy, adolescence, and adulthood) as one

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<sup>80</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 104–8.

<sup>81</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 141ff. See also her “Virginity as Purity,” 67–76.



totally and completely enclosed in sacred space, embodying what she terms “sacred purity.”<sup>82</sup> Although Gaventa does not limit her understanding of Mary’s purity to simply her virginity,<sup>83</sup> she also compares the *Protevangelium of James*’ Mary primarily with Thecla, the virginal heroine in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. She argues that they share the status of a virgin, but they are significantly different; whereas Thecla’s actions are described in order to encourage and persuade other young women to a life of chastity and purity, Mary’s actions and interactions in the *Protevangelium of James* do not, in her view, provide any patterns for other women to follow. According to Gaventa, Mary’s purity sets her apart from others to the degree that she is no longer a model to emulate.<sup>84</sup>

Although neither book focuses wholly on the *Protevangelium of James*, the works of Foskett and Gaventa thus establish that this text depicts Mary’s purity as exceptional, as is particularly evident in her status as the “Virgin of the Lord.” They show, moreover, how the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* ensures that any typical ways of contracting impurities are not threats for Mary.

Neither scholar, however, addresses the question of ritual impurity in any detail. Gaventa notes that the assumptions of ritual purity enter the story when Mary reaches adolescence and is asked to leave the Temple; she does not comment further than to assert that “the purity of Mary in this story vastly exceeds the requirements of ritual purity.”<sup>85</sup> Although Foskett addresses ritual impurity in her analysis, she does so only through the lens of Mary’s status as a virgin, consistent with the focus in her book. Issues of ritual

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<sup>82</sup> Gaventa, *Mary*, 100–122, esp. 110.

<sup>83</sup> She does, however, note that the author often identifies Mary as such; i.e., as “virgin of the Lord,” or “virgin from the temple of the Lord,” (see *Prot. Jas.* 9:7, 13:3, 15:6, also 10:2, 19:18).

<sup>84</sup> Gaventa, *Mary*, 120–22.

<sup>85</sup> Gaventa, *Mary*, 110.

impurity and the question of the possibility of Mary's menstruation are addressed only secondarily and in broad terms.

### **I.3 Recent Research on Purity in Early Judaism and Christianity**

In this study, I intend to build on these insights regarding the importance of the theme of purity in the *Protevangelium of James*. I suggest, however, that the interest in purity goes well beyond a concern for Mary's virginity: the text's focus on purity may reflect engagement with biblical and early rabbinic ideas about ritual and menstrual purity and perhaps even moral and genealogical purity,<sup>86</sup> in addition to early Christian ideas about sexual purity. In order to place the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas into context and in conversation with a broader range of ideas on purity, my goal is to establish a "purity map" where I examine various views held on ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity in order to establish where the *Protevangelium of James* should be located on the "map." Since an important aim in this study is to explore our text's relationship with Judaism, my discussion draws upon biblical, Qumranic, rabbinical, and other early Jewish writings, including those of Philo and Josephus, as well as nascent Christian sources such as gospel material and Pauline literature. In doing so, my study will also consider recent works about purity and impurity in biblical, early Jewish and Christian writings, especially by Jonathan Klawans, Christine Hayes, Hannah Harrington, and Charlotte Fonrobert. Consequently, a detailed discussion of Greco-Roman influences on our text will not be

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<sup>86</sup> See discussion of Christine Hayes' contribution below.

included in this discourse.<sup>87</sup> A brief outline of the major contributions made by the scholars noted above will contextualize their significance for our study.<sup>88</sup>

### I.3.1 Jonathan Klawans

In his 2000 book, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, building upon the works of David Hoffmann, Adolph Büchler, Mary Douglas, Jacob Neusner, Jacob Milgrom, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David P. Wright,<sup>89</sup> Klawans considers biblical and Second Temple Jewish conceptions and terminology concerning ritual purity as distinct from moral impurity. He notes that in contrast to moral impurity, ritual impurity includes defilements delineated in Leviticus 11–15 and Numbers 19, which typically arise from unavoidable impurities such as birth, death, sex, disease and other circumstances. Ritual impurities thus reflect the conditions of normal life and, as such, are not sinful.<sup>90</sup> The consequence of this type of impurity is temporary exclusion from participation in certain ritual acts and lack of contact with the sacred and its precincts. These impurities are by nature impermanent and can be reversed through the passage of time and/or procedures of purification through water.<sup>91</sup> Most important, for our purposes, are the impurities related

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<sup>87</sup> Fortunately, Foskett's important 2002 study does precisely this in the context of virginity and is easily consulted.

<sup>88</sup> More detailed analysis will occur within the body of the chapters themselves.

<sup>89</sup> For a brief description of their contributions to this area of research see the beginning of Chapter Two and n. 2–8 therein.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed discussion on the differences between ritual and moral impurity practices held in ancient Judaism i.e., both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Second Temple period, see Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also my discussion in Chapter Two.

<sup>91</sup> The resolution for acts of moral impurity, by contrast, is much more difficult. Moral impurities are considered grave sins (i.e., idolatry, incest, murder) that affect and defile not only the sinner, but also the sacred land and sanctuary. Unlike ritual impurities, moral impurities cannot be removed by rites of purification and are long-lasting, if not permanent conditions. A return to moral purity is only achievable

to the female life-cycle (birth, menstruation, childbirth) and Klawans' ideas on the relationship between impurity and sin in various early Jewish sources including biblical, Second Temple, and Qumran sectarian sources.

Equally important for our studies is Klawans' 2006 contribution entitled *Purity, Sacrifice and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*.<sup>92</sup> In this compelling work, Klawans examines Jerusalem's temple cult and its connection to purity and sacrifice. Given that I suggest in my study that the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas about ritual purity are best represented in its persistent interest in the Temple and its sacrificial cult, Klawans' tandem study of ritual sacrifice and ritual purity, as well as his suggestion that they can both be understood socially and symbolically, works towards deciphering ideas on the presentation of the sacrificial cult in our text. Particularly significant is his proposal that the symbolism found in both purity and sacrificial rules is most meaningfully expressed in theological ideas surrounding the wish to imitate God (*Imitatio Dei*), and the concern to attract and maintain God's presence in the Temple.<sup>93</sup> The idea that God dwells in the sanctuary will be especially interesting in light of the *Protevangelium of James*' depiction of Mary's body as being akin to a sanctuary and as the chosen locale for the temporary dwelling of the Son of God.

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through punishment, atonement, exile, or by refraining from committing the morally impure act in the first place; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26–31.

<sup>92</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Ra'anan Boustan's review of this study in *AJS Review* 32 (2008): 169–72.

<sup>93</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 56–68 on *Imitatio Dei*; 68–73 on attracting and maintaining God's presence in the sanctuary.

### I.3.2 Christine Hayes

In her 2002 book, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*,<sup>94</sup> Christine Hayes contributes significantly to the discussion, particularly regarding understandings of biblical ideas on purity in Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity. In this context and in conversation with the works of Emil Schürer,<sup>95</sup> Adolf Büchler,<sup>96</sup> Gedaliah Alon,<sup>97</sup> and Jonathan Klawans,<sup>98</sup> Hayes examines the two traditional categories concerning Jewish purity laws (ritual and moral) and suggests a third category, namely, genealogical impurity.<sup>99</sup> In her concern for understanding early Jewish self-definition and the boundaries perceived between Jews and Gentiles, Hayes argues convincingly that the issue at stake for intermarriage in the OT Apocrypha, OT Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the works of Josephus and Philo is primarily genealogical and therefore not ritual, as past scholarship has traditionally assumed.<sup>100</sup>

In her treatment of the discourse on Gentile impurities in rabbinic Judaism, Hayes stresses that although rabbinic texts look to the Torah for allusions and analogies to guide their construction of Gentile ritual impurity, the rabbis never claim a biblical basis for their idea about such impurities. In this way, Hayes suggests that there was a self-

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<sup>94</sup> Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and review by Lily Vuong in *BMC Review* (2004).

<sup>95</sup> Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (2 vols.; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs), 1886–1890.

<sup>96</sup> Adolf Büchler, “The Levitical Impurity of the Gentile in Palestine Before the Year 70,” *JQR* 17 (1926): 1–81; idem, “Family Purity and Family Impurity in Jerusalem Before the year 70 C.E.,” in *Studies in Jewish History* (ed. I. Brodie and J. Rabinowitz; London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 64–98.

<sup>97</sup> Gedaliah Alon, “The Levitical Uncleaness of Gentiles,” in *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 146–89.

<sup>98</sup> Klawans, “Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism,” *AJS Review* 20.2 (1995): 285–312 and his *Impurity and Sin* book cited above.

<sup>99</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 8–11, 58–59.

<sup>100</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, esp. chs. 3–4.

conscious innovation on the part of early rabbis in terms of their understanding and interpretation of Gentile impurities, especially pertaining to ritual purity laws.

In addition, Hayes briefly discusses purity as it relates to the attitudes towards mixed marriages in early Christian sources such as Paul's letters and selected Patristic writings (e.g., writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Jerome). She argues for a shift in early Christian understandings of impurity, which she sees as already developing in Paul's writing, towards the development of a concept of what she calls "carnal impurity." The concept of "carnal impurity," according to Hayes, is an extension of moral impurity and can be transmitted physically to other persons as it is linked to the body, but may also have moral consequences. For the avoidance of this type of impurity, the maintenance of sexual purity (i.e., virginity, chastity, celibacy) is central.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, Hayes' discourse on "carnal impurity" may be particularly helpful for interpreting the presentation of Mary's virginity and sexual purity.

### 1.3.3 Hannah Harrington

In her 1993 published dissertation, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations*, Harrington examines ritual purity in the sectarian writings from Qumran and rabbinic sources and argues that the purity systems found in both are rooted in and shaped through Scriptural exegesis, thus challenging notions held by previous scholars, especially those of Jacob Neusner,<sup>102</sup> E.P. Sanders,<sup>103</sup> and Mary

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<sup>101</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 4–16.

<sup>102</sup> See e.g., Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill 1973); idem, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities: The Mishnaic System of Uncleaness, XXII* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

<sup>103</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990).

Douglas.<sup>104</sup> Based on a working definition of ritual purity as “a state of cleanness required for lay participation in the cult affected by physical purification rituals such as ablutions,”<sup>105</sup> Harrington provides important definitions, diagrams, and comparative charts in an attempt to reconstruct the purity systems envisioned by the Qumran sectarians (Part I) and the Rabbis (Part II).

After examining the seven sources of impurity together with their corresponding purification procedures (e.g., corpse, *mesora* or skin disease, discharges from genital organs [*zab, zabah, niddah, yoledet*], semen, carcasses, excrements, and outsiders), Harrington determines that all the Scrolls are characterized by the same basic notion of purity with the goal of extending the holiness of the Temple to the whole Temple city<sup>106</sup> and that this goal translated into a “stringent interpretation of Scripture.”<sup>107</sup> In her examination of rabbinic sources, she looks to their ideas concerning ritual immersion and the practice of *tebûl yôm* (waiting until sunset after purifying ablutions) and the *miqweh* (ritual bath), and argues that while such rituals were a way for the rabbis to better understand biblical ideas on contamination and purification, they were still rooted in Scripture. Based on the rabbis’ limitation of the range of contaminations to those specifically mentioned in the Bible, Harrington assesses the rabbinical system of purity as being significantly more lenient than its sectarian counterparts.

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<sup>104</sup> E.g., Mary Douglas, *Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973); eadem, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); see also eadem, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>105</sup> Hannah Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations* (SBLDS 143; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 2.

<sup>106</sup> Whether a single system of purity is in evidence in all these texts has been questioned by a number of scholars. See for instance, Ian C. Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 2–3 and Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, and idem, his review in *JR* 88.1 (2008): 127–28. Both contributions will also be examined more closely in our study.

<sup>107</sup> Harrington, *Impurity Systems*, 67.

In her more recent 2004 volume entitled *The Purity Texts*, from the Companion to the Qumran Scrolls Series, Harrington carefully collects, organizes, and analyzes the purity data contained in the Qumran sources (first thematically, then by source) and offers appealing suggestions for the meaning behind such regulations.<sup>108</sup> While some of Harrington's conclusions about the rationale for such purity rules raise questions concerning her assessment of the community, they are still valid for providing important conversations about the idea of purity at Qumran. Namely, Harrington proposes that purity was a prerequisite for holiness for [1] a community that consisted mostly of celibate priests;<sup>109</sup> [2] a community that needed divine help in the ultimate apocalyptic war against evil; and [3] a community that sought to receive ongoing revelation from God.<sup>110</sup> Drawing and building on the important contributions by Joseph Baumgarten,<sup>111</sup> and her mentors Jacob Milgrom<sup>112</sup> and Daniel Boyarin,<sup>113</sup> Harrington provides important

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<sup>108</sup> Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004).

<sup>109</sup> Harrington grants that the sectarians at Qumran were comprised of celibate males because sexual intercourse was considered to defile, but recent scholarship has questioned this idea. See e.g., Eileen Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What Have We Learned?* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 80–98.

<sup>110</sup> Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 36–42.

<sup>111</sup> Joseph M. Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977); idem, "The Qumran-Essene Restraints on Marriage," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L. H. Schiffman; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 13–24; idem, "The Purification Rituals of DJD 7," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* (ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 199–209; idem, "Zab Impurity in Qumran and Rabbinic Law," *JJS* 45 (1994): 273–78; idem, *Qumran Cave XIII: The Damascus Document (4Q266–273)* (DJD 18; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); and idem, "The Purification Liturgies," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years, II* (ed. P. Flint and J.C. Vanderkam; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 202–12, to name a few.

<sup>112</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3, 3A, 3B; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001); idem, "Rationale for Cultic Law: The Case of Impurity," *Semeia* 45 (1989): 103–9; idem, "The Scriptural Foundations and Deviations in the Laws of Purity of the Temple Scroll," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L. H. Schiffman; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 83–99; idem, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (ed. Jacob Neusner; SJLA 36; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), and idem, "The Purification Rule," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translation, I, Rule of the Community and Related Documents* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), 177–79, to name a few.

<sup>113</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).



insights on the issue of purity relating to its definition (in term of holiness and in distinction from moral impurity) and its setting within the literature (Second Temple Period), for helping us understand and accurately position the *Protevangelium of James*' views in relation to ideas expressed in these important sources.

### I.3.4 Charlotte Fonrobert

The comparison of early Jewish and Christian ideas about ritual purity has also been recently explored by Charlotte E. Fonrobert in *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (2000). She examines the gynaecological and physiological awareness embodied in the rabbinic laws of *niddah* as a way to understand better talmudic ideas about gender, purity, and sexuality.<sup>114</sup> In pursuit of this goal, Fonrobert engages a relatively limited number of sources; her treatment of the material, however, is detailed and thorough and thus produces new insights even into texts that have received much scholarly attention. Her aim is to examine the metaphorical construction of women's bodies by the masculine hegemony and what she calls the "dominant androcentric perspective of talmudic discussions."<sup>115</sup> This discourse is then countered by her analysis of early rabbis as experts and controllers of this knowledge of women's bodies. She looks to the moments of disturbance or rupture in the various genres of the talmudic discussion regarding menstruation. These ruptures in the rabbinic

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<sup>114</sup> Charlotte E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstruction of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) and review by Ishay Rosen-Zvi, "Blood, Identity, and Counter-Discourse: Rabbinic Writings on Menstruation," *Prooftexts* 23.2 (2003): 210–28.

<sup>115</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 8.

discourse of gender, which has been deemed basically androcentric, take form in parts of canonic texts that deviate from the dominant androcentric discourse.

Most relevant, for our purposes, is Fonrobert's treatment of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (DA), a third century Syrian Christian work that displays concerns that overlap with those in rabbinic literature in both her book and subsequent paper.<sup>116</sup> The evidence in the DA suggests that some Christian women were reluctant to discontinue their observance of purity laws related to menstruation. The conflict between those who want to uphold Jewish practices within the Christian community and those who want to maintain a Christian community apart from such practices is interpreted by Fonrobert as an issue between the Jewish practice of *niddah*-related water immersion and the Christian water immersion of baptism.<sup>117</sup> Fonrobert is able to show that menstrual laws followed by these newly-Christian women were instrumental in the establishment of not only their religio-ethnic identity as Jewish, but also their gender identity as women.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, Fonrobert's study also contributes significantly to understanding "Jewish-Christian" relations in the third century as remaining in a state of flux.

#### **I.4 The Scope, Aims, and Structure of this Study**

This study has two main interrelated goals: [1] to examine the characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* with a specific focus on the place and function of the theme of purity; and [2] to analyze the structure, concerns, and interests of the

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<sup>116</sup> Fonrobert, "The Didascalia Apostolorum: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus," *J ECS* 9.4 (2001): 483–509.

<sup>117</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 181.

<sup>118</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 11–12.

narrative so as to suggest its possible temporal and geographical milieu. In the course of focusing on these two aims, I also hope to shed light on the text's relationship and connection to Judaism, particularly the extent of the author's knowledge of Jewish traditions and customs, specifically related to the purity laws of his time; his use of other Jewish textual sources; and the possibility of a "Jewish-Christian" origin.

In order to examine the depiction of Mary, I employ a literary approach to the text and build on the studies offered by Beverly Gaventa and Mary Foskett in their literary quests for Mary and the place of purity in the narrative. Specifically, I mean to explore closely the presentation of Mary as a literary character and the roles she and others play in the narrative in order to highlight the text itself and the literary world that is created in the process. Inevitably, historical and theological inquiries will also be addressed since, as Gaventa has rightly observed, interpreting the literary aims of any early Christian text naturally evokes interest in the original audience and how they first read the narrative; in addition, theological issues are always found close at hand when dealing with questions surrounding the text's purpose and overall goal.<sup>119</sup> Thus history and theology will contextualize my primary focus, a literary analysis of how and in what ways the *Protevangelium of James* characterizes Mary. Proceeding inductively, I analyze the details of the narrative in the process of reading by focusing on aspects that reveal the characters. This process of "revealing the character" or paying attention to what Mary Foskett describes as "character indicators"<sup>120</sup> involves focusing on the character's choices, speeches, and descriptions, as well as motives, attitudes, and moral nature, which

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<sup>119</sup> Gaventa, *Mary*, 20.

<sup>120</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 6.

Robert Alter suggests can be revealed through actions, appearance, gestures, posture, costume; “one character’s comments on another; direct speech by the character; inward speech either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanation.”<sup>121</sup> I employ these literary aspects while carefully examining the text.

Additionally, I intend to place my discussion of Mary’s purity in context and in relation to other ideas concerning purity in ancient Judaism as discussed briefly above. By surveying various views held on multiple concepts of purity in early Jewish sources, I will be better able to situate the *Protevangelium of James*’ views on purity and highlight what concepts and practices found in our text seem to be influenced by or reflect an awareness of other early Jewish sources.

This focus on Mary’s portrayal in the narrative will also reveal an intense focus on the theme of purity, not only in terms of depicting Mary’s virginity, but also as a varying and multi-layered idea in the narrative that encompasses both the presentation of Mary and the structure of the narrative as a whole. Indeed, I maintain that the text’s interest in ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity emerges as literary “post-marks,” dividing the narrative into thematic parts with distinct purposes and goals. I suggest that the theme of purity is so significant that it may be used as a vehicle for revealing the text’s multi-faceted interests and for hinting towards its possible temporal and geographical setting.

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<sup>121</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 116–17.

The first chapter considers questions of date, provenance, and genre. In the process, I discuss the debate over the *Protevangelium of James*' relationship to Judaism and outline the method for my own analysis of the text.

The second to fourth chapters, the Purity Chapters, offer a close literary analysis of the *Protevangelium of James*, pursued with a focus on the theme of purity. The references to purity in the *Protevangelium of James* can be divided into three general categories, corresponding to the three sections of the text outlined above. Each Purity Chapter begins with a description of the type of purity in question and surveys a number of early Jewish and nascent Christian sources on the topic in order to better situate our text's views on purity. Chapter Two examines those references to purity that occur in the course of describing Mary's birth and early childhood. Here I seek to emphasize the importance of ritual purity in terms of the text's overarching interest in the Jerusalem Temple, its priests, and the Second Temple Jewish sacrificial system. Initially, the author focuses on the ritual purity of Mary's parents, emphasizing Jewish piety, proper sacrificial practice, and a commitment to Temple-centered purity. After Mary's birth, the focus shifts to her own exceptional ritual purity, as ensured by her mother Anna (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9; 6:3; 6:4–5; 6:10), and exemplified in the text by a description of Anna's transformation of her own home into a sanctuary for Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4). In this section of the *Protevangelium of James*, moreover, Mary is described in terms that evoke a Temple sacrifice. Chapter Two thus carefully considers ritual purity, particularly in relation to sacrifice and the Temple.

Chapter Three builds on the text's thematic emphasis on purity suggested in Chapter Two, but now examined in reference to purity during the transitional period of Mary's life—her adolescent years, during which she leaves the Temple and enters into marriage. Most significant here is *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, which describes how priests sought to have Mary removed from the Temple because she, at the age of twelve, threatens to defile the pure space that had been her home since the age of three. This passage raises many questions—is the fear of pollution connected, in particular, to menstruation? And, if so, what would this circumstance mean for the text's depiction of Mary? What does this say about its assumptions about ritual purity and the female life-cycle? This chapter concentrates on the issue of menstrual purity and the ways in which the allusion to Mary's possible impurity functions in the text's characterization of this figure.

Chapter Four analyzes the text's treatment of Mary's marriage and the birth of Jesus. Central to the *Protevangelium of James*' concern with Mary's purity in this context are the descriptions of Jesus at Mary's breast immediately after birth without any need for the usual purification rites (*Prot. Jas.* 19:16) and the declaration of Mary's innocence on all charges after she is forced to endure a physical examination to prove that she has remained virginal even after giving birth (*Prot. Jas.* 19:12–20:2). This chapter investigates the purity laws related to pregnancy and childbirth, particularly concerning virginity and post-partum pollution. Since this focus on sexual purity does not examine ideas on virginity and celibacy alone, but also within the context of marriage, I pay close attention to the author's description of Mary's relationship to Joseph as a commentary on Jewish ideas on marriages and betrothals.

Chapter Five re-visits questions regarding the *Protevangelium of James*' date, provenance, and relationship to Judaism in light of my findings. In particular, I argue for a Syrian provenance and late second or early third century date. I support this assertion by examining particular characteristics of Syrian Christianity, including the text's possible "Jewish-Christian" origins, and Marcionite and docetic influence on the one hand, and Syrian ideas on marriage, virginity, asceticism, and the role of women, on the other. Then, I situate the *Protevangelium of James*' interest in ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity in a West Syrian cultural context, with special reference to the *Didascalia Apostolorum*.

In my concluding chapter, I consider how the theme of purity contributes to the depiction of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*. What does it mean that the author characterizes her as exceptionally pure, both by the standards of biblical and Jewish law and by the standards of early Christian views of virginity, yet as potentially participating in menstrual impurity? My concluding comments explore the implications of the one impurity by which Mary continues to be bound in light of her characterization as exceptionally pure and considers how this portrayal of Mary's relationship to ritual purity contributes to important discussions on understanding women, gender, and sexuality in antiquity.

Before turning to the date, provenance, and genre of the *Protevangelium of James*, a note on terminology will prove useful.

### I.5 A Note on Terminology

Since my investigation of the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas on purity and suggestion of its possible provenance involve examining our text's relationship to Judaism, a note on terminology is necessary. When referring specifically to persons, groups, and sources associated with the NT Gospels and the Pauline corpus, I have chosen to use the term Christ-believers instead of Christians on its own, since this designation was not original for those who claimed Jesus to be the messiah and is an anachronistic application for a first century context,<sup>122</sup> despite its use three times in the New Testament.<sup>123</sup> I will, however, employ the terms “Jewish Christianity” and “Jewish-Christians” with the use of quotations to describe the relationship of Judaism to our text, when applicable, and the influence of Judaism on Syrian Christianity, especially in my fifth chapter when the identity of Jesus' followers becomes particularly important. I am aware that the term “Jewish Christianity” is a scholarly construct with which neither the authors nor the writings discussed in this study or elsewhere identify themselves; neither do they refer to any of the groups they mention as “Jewish-Christian.” In this regard the phrase is problematic inasmuch as it is anachronistic, inaccurate, imprecise, and misleading.<sup>124</sup> I maintain, however, that the terms “Jewish-Christianity” and “Jewish-

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<sup>122</sup> The term “Christian” is problematic in that our evidence from the mid-first century indicates that only those outside the movement referred to members of the church as “Christians.” Jerry L. Sumney argues that when it is first used in Acts 11:26, it seems that they accepted this language whether they “first coined it, reluctantly accepted it, or enthusiastically embraced it.” See his “Paul and Christ-Believing Jews Whom He Opposes,” in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 58 for further discussion.

<sup>123</sup> Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16. Cf. John Gager, “Paul, the Apostle of Judaism,” in *Jesus, Judaism, and Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament After the Holocaust* (ed. Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 56–76.

<sup>124</sup> See especially Jerry L. Sumney's and John W. Marshall's contributions in Matt Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis:



Christian” may still be useful for helping us understand the relationship between Judaism and Christianity during a time when the boundaries between these two traditions were still very much blurred, if we remember that these terms are exactly that, scholarly categories to help us understand these complex relationships.<sup>125</sup>

My goal is not to provide a comprehensive history of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and their so-called parting of the ways, nor is it to discuss the vast scholarship on terminology, categories and terms suggested to more accurately describe when Jewish and Christian identities became distinguishable from each other. Fortunately, we have excellent studies that provide not only critical discussions on this historical process(es),<sup>126</sup> but also important suggestions for alternative terminology.<sup>127</sup>

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Fortress, 2007) and Jackson-McCabe’s discussion on the various suggestions put forth for alternative terminology.

<sup>125</sup> See further Joan E. Taylor, “The Phenomenon of Early Jewish-Christianity: Reality or Scholarly Invention?,” *VC* 44 (1990): 313–34 and David Frankfurter, “Beyond ‘Jewish Christianity’: Continuing Religious and Sub-Cultures of the Second and Third Centuries and Their Documents,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 131–43.

<sup>126</sup> On when and where “Judaism” and “Christianity” “parted ways,” see the various models offered by James G.D. Dunn, *The Parting of Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), esp. 238; idem, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1992), 367–68; Lawrence Schiffman, “At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2 (ed. E.P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 155–56; and Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). For critiques of this “parting of ways” model, see for e.g., Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); idem, *Border Lines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Greek: Constructing Early Christianity* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002); Adele Reinhartz, “A Fork in the Road or a Multi-Lane Highway? New Perspectives on the ‘Parting of the Ways’ Between Judaism and Christianity,” in *The Changing Face of Judaism: Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (ed. I. Henderson and G. Oegama; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 278–329; and the contributions in Adam H. Becker’s and Annette Y. Reed’s edited volume, *Ways That Never Parted*.

<sup>127</sup> For recent studies on terminology, see the important contributions by Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. B. Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–92; Steve Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512; and the contributions in Matt Jackson-McCabe’s edited volume, *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*, especially

“Jewish Christianity” has often been understood as a tradition that combines, for the most part, Jewish observances with Christian faith. Scholars often use the term “Jewish-Christian” to designate [1] ethnically Jewish or Torah-observant persons who believe Jesus as Christ and his role in salvation history; [2] persons of any ethnicity that combine Jewish practices such as Torah-observance with Christian beliefs such as Jesus as Christ messiah; and [3] persons who use Jewish cultural or literary forms to express their Christianity.<sup>128</sup> Throughout this study, the use of the term “Jewish-Christian” draws heavily on, but is not limited to, the first definition above and is of particular importance for Chapter Five.

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Luomanen and Jones in this volume since both still argue that the term “Jewish-Christianity” may still be somewhat useful. See also Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Sean Freyne, “Behind the Names: Samaritans, Ioudaioi, Galileans,” in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson* (ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 389–401, for useful discussion on names and naming in the ancient world.

<sup>128</sup> J. Carleton Paget provides a good survey and discussion of scholarly attempts at defining this difficult term, of which the three possibilities listed above are discussed. See his “Jewish Christianity,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Early Roman Period*, vol. 3 (ed. William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 731–75, esp. 733–42 for definitions.

## **Chapter One: The Date, Provenance, and Genre of the *Protevangelium of James***

Before turning to a literary analysis of the *Protevangelium of James* and an examination of the theme of purity therein, a consideration of the date, provenance, and genre of the text is necessary. The *Protevangelium of James* is a pseudonymous work, which claims to have been written by James (likely, James the brother of Jesus; *Prot. Jas.* 25:1). Pseudonymous writings are notoriously difficult to situate and date, since they claim, from the start, to have been written by someone else and at another time.<sup>1</sup> The *Protevangelium of James* is no exception: the inferences about date, authorship, and provenance that can be extracted from the text are indirect, at best, and often ambiguous or inconclusive. These factors pose a challenge for scholarly attempts to reconstruct its precise aims and context. Accordingly, questions about its date, provenance, aims, and context have been hotly debated in modern research.

This chapter surveys the history of research on these questions in order to lay the groundwork for my literary analysis of the narrative in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. Thus, the primary purpose of this chapter will be to map out the possible cultural and historical contexts in which to understand the text's interests and concern with purity. In the process, however, I also hope to clarify further how the approach to the *Protevangelium of James* in this dissertation relates to previous studies. I propose, in particular, that a literary approach may help shed new light on the question of the aims, date, and genre of the text, and that the possibility of a Syrian provenance can be further

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars have assumed that James, the brother of Jesus, could not have authored the text since the material found in the story is dependent upon gospel traditions found in Matthew and Luke. On this, see Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 8–9. Cf. Boyd Lee Daniels, “The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*” (2 vols.; PhD diss., Duke University, 1956), 1.2–4.

illuminated through a consideration of its traditions about ritual and sexual purity in relation to contemporaneous rabbinic Jewish and Syrian Christian sources.

### 1.1 Dating the *Protevangelium of James*

A broad range of dates have been proposed for the *Protevangelium of James*, from as early as the mid-second century CE to as late as the fifth century CE. At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars tended to favour a later date. Current consensus, however, is that an earlier date is more probable, with most scholars favouring the late second century to early third century CE.<sup>2</sup>

A re-assessment of the date of the *Protevangelium of James* resulted from the discovery of the early fourth century Papyrus Bodmer V in 1952, which sets the *terminus ad quem* for the text.<sup>3</sup> Since this discovery, scholars have sought support for an early dating in the evidence of early Patristic literature, proposing that second and third century Christian authors may have been familiar with the *Protevangelium of James*.

Most commonly cited in this regard are Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) and Origen (ca. 185–254).<sup>4</sup> Clement mentions details about the life of Mary absent from the

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar Cullmann, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1991), 423; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 1995, 11. Also Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 6–12 and 412–18; E. Cothenet, “Le Protévangile de Jacques: Origine, Genre et Signification d’un Premier Midrash Chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie,” *ANRW* 2.25.6 (1998): 4257; Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 108.

<sup>3</sup> See the Introduction above, as well as the detailed discussion in de Strycker, “Die Griechischen Handschriften des Protevangeliums Iacobi,” in *Griechische Kodikologie und Textüberlieferung* (ed. D. Harlfinger; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 579.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11; P. van Stempvoort, “The Protevangelium Iacobi: The Sources of its Theme and Style and their bearing on its Date,” in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F.L. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 415; Paul Foster, “The Protevangelium of James,” *ExpTim*

NT Gospels but included in the *Protevangelium of James*. These details center on Mary's *virginitas in partu* (*Prot. Jas.* 9:8; 19:18) and occur in the context of Clement's discussion of a midwife who attends Mary and claims that she is indeed a virgin in *Strom.* 7.16.<sup>5</sup>

Clement refers to this declaration made directly after Mary gives birth:

But, just as most people even now believe, as it seems, that Mary ceased to be a virgin through the birth of her child, though this was not really the case—for some say that she was found by the midwife to be a virgin [παρθένος] after the delivery (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.16.93).<sup>6</sup>

Whereas Clement is vague about his source (“some say”), his younger contemporary Origen is more explicit. In his *Commentary on Matthew* (*Comm. Matt.* 10:17),<sup>7</sup> Origen makes reference to Jesus' brothers as belonging to Joseph from a previous marriage, in

118.12 (2007): 574; idem, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 112–13; de Strycker, “Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques,” in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 418; W. Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und die Jakobustradition* (FRLANT 139; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 224 n. 69, to name a few.

<sup>5</sup> Other witnesses to Mary's *virginitas in partu* include the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Odes of Solomon* (Ode 19). Both texts attest to Mary's conception and birth as being miraculous and to her perpetual virginity after giving birth. See J.C. Plumpe, “Some Little-Known Early Witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in Partu*,” *TS* 9 (1948): 567–77. So also P.F. Buck, “Are the ‘Ascension of Isaiah’ and the ‘Odes of Solomon’ Witnesses to an Early Cult of Mary?,” in *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani IV* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1970), 371–99, esp. 379.

<sup>6</sup> Ἀλλ, ὡς ἔοικεν τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ μέχρι νῦν δοκεῖ ἡ Μαριὰμ λεχῶ εἶναι διὰ τὴν τοῦ παιδίου γέννησιν, οὐκ οὔσα λεχῶ (καὶ γὰρ μετὰ τὸ τεκεῖν αὐτὴν μαιωθεῖσαν φασί τινες παρθένου εὐρεθῆναι) (*Strom.* 7.16.93). Greek and English translations are cited from Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies Book VII* (ed. and trans. Fenton John Anthony Hort and Joseph B. Mayor; GP 9; New York: Garland, 1987), 164–65.

<sup>7</sup> Origen (c.185–c.254), probably born in Alexandria, was an active writer in biblical critique, exegesis and theology. The majority of his literary activity took place from c. 218 to 230. When conflict broke out in Alexandria in connection with the emperor Caracalla, he went to Palestine where he was ordained as a priest. When Origen was deposed of his priesthood, he found refuge in Caesarea (231), where he established his famous school and continued his literary work, which included his commentaries on Matthew and John. These commentaries seem to have been written in the last years of Origen's life as Decius' persecutions (250) prevented Origen from continuing and completing them. For an introduction to his life and writings, see Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1–62 and John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 1–24.

the context of discussing Jesus' brethren, and he names the "Gospel of Peter" or the "Book of James" as his sources:

As for the brothers of Jesus, some people pretend [i.e., the people in the synagogue in Jesus' hometown, cf. Matt 13:5], by leaning on a tradition in the Gospel according to Peter, or as it is entitled, the Book of James [τῆς βίβλου Ἰακώβου], that they would be the sons of Joseph, born from a former woman whom he would have lived with before Mary (Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10:17).<sup>8</sup>

Traditions about Joseph's sons by a previous marriage are found in *Prot. Jas.* 9:8, 17:2, 5. In fact, Joseph's protest against taking Mary as a wife at *Prot. Jas.* 9:8, even though he has been selected by God for this task, is based on the fact that he is old and already has children. In the context of registering his family for Augustus' census, Joseph again makes reference to his sons and Samuel is even named as one of them.<sup>9</sup> If Origen's reference to "the Book of James" does indeed refer to the *Protevangelium of James*, then it might be possible to place its *terminus ad quem* in the third century CE.

The most thoroughgoing attempt to suggest a precise date for the *Protevangelium of James*, by drawing on Patristic literature, has been that of P. A. van Stempvoort<sup>10</sup> who places the composition of the text between 178 and 204 CE, contemporary with Clement and Origen, as well as Tertullian (ca. 160–225).<sup>11</sup> To the commonly-cited parallels in Clement and Origen quoted above, he adds passages from Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*

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<sup>8</sup> Τοὺς δὲ ἀδελφοὺς Ἰησοῦ φασὶ τινες εἶναι, ἐκ παραδόσεως ὀρμώμενοι τοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένου κατὰ Πέτρον εὐαγγελίου ἢ τῆς βίβλου Ἰακώβου, υἱοῦς Ἰωσήφ ἐκ προτέρας γυναικὸς συνακηκίας αὐτῷ πρὸ τῆς Μαρίας; Origen, *Comm. Matt* 10:17 (SC 162, 216–17; English translations are my own, but the French translation by Robert Girod was also consulted).

<sup>9</sup> Note that although Origen makes reference to his source as either the Gospel according to Peter or the Book of James, there are no direct parallels between the two sources. The *Protevangelium of James* focuses mainly on Mary and her conception and birth of Jesus, whereas the Gospel of Peter is centered on Jesus' passion narrative.

<sup>10</sup> Van Stempvoort, "The Protevangelium Jacobi," 410–26.

<sup>11</sup> Van Stempvoort, "The Protevangelium Jacobi," 413–25.

(7.230), which describe Tertullian’s refusal to accept the possibility of Jesus’ brothers and sisters as belonging to Joseph’s previous marriage as well as his denial of the lasting virginity of Mary (*non virgo quantum a partu*).<sup>12</sup> These references, in his view, establish the wide circulation of the *Protevangelium of James* by the third century CE.

To argue for a *terminus a quo* of 178 CE for the dating of the *Protevangelium of James*, van Stempvoort appeals to the anti-Christian writings of the “pagan” author Celsus.<sup>13</sup> He speculates that our text was penned as a direct response to Celsus’ attacks on Mary,<sup>14</sup> reconstructing the aim of the *Protevangelium of James* with references to the statements of Celsus now preserved in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*.<sup>15</sup> In his *True Doctrine*, Celsus appears to have slandered Jesus’ mother on a number of counts. First, he sheds doubt on Mary’s reputation by questioning the circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth

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<sup>12</sup> On Mary’s *virginitas in partu*, Tertullian writes, “Consequently we recognize as a sign capable of being spoken against the conception and child-bearing of Mary the virgin, concerning which these Academics say, ‘She bare and bare not, virgin and no virgin.’ And yet, even though this expression were tolerable, it would be one more suitable for us to use: for she bare, seeing she did so of her own flesh, and she bare not, seeing she did so not of a man’s seed, a virgin as regards her husband, not a virgin as regards child-bearing: not however that the expression ‘bare and bare not’ implies that it was not of her flesh, or that ‘virgin and not virgin’ means that she was not from her own bowels a mother. With us, however, there is nothing doubtful, or that is twisted back into a plea that can recoil upon those who make it: light is light and darkness is darkness, and yea is yea and nay is nay, and what is more than this is on the side of evil. She bore which did bear: and if as a virgin she conceived, in her child-bearing she became a wife. For she became a wife by that same law of the opened body, in which it made no difference whether the violence was of the male let in or let out: the same sex performed that unsealing (*Car. Chr.* 23).” Translation is from Ernest Evans, ed. and trans., *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Incarnation [Q. Septimii Florentis Tertulliani: de Carne Christi Liber]: The Text Edited with an Introduction Translation and Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1956), 77. See my discussion on Mary’s eternal virginity in Chapter Five.

<sup>13</sup> Van Stempvoort also makes references to Justin Martyr’s writings (ca. 150 CE) as having possible connections to the *Protevangelium of James*, but he does not take these into consideration when determining his *terminus ad quem* for the text. The reference to the midwife for Mary in the *Odes of Solomon* (19:9) is also mentioned but not taken into account by van Stempvoort in his calculations for the dating of the text: “*Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 412. Compare the view of Zervos, on which see below.

<sup>14</sup> Van Stempvoort, “*Protevangelium of Jacobi*,” 413–14.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

(*Cels.* 1.28).<sup>16</sup> Second, Celsus writes that Jesus was not the son of a virgin, but rather born of a poor native woman from a Jewish, non-Greek village, who “spins for daily hire” (*Cels.* 1.28–32).<sup>17</sup> Finally, he asserts that Mary’s pregnancy should be considered a scandal, because she had committed adultery with a Roman soldier by the name of Panthera and was thus forced to give birth to Jesus in secret (*Cels.* 1.32 and 1.69).<sup>18</sup>

Van Stempvoort’s suggested dating is thus predicated on his theory that the *Protevangelium of James* was written as an apology. Specifically, he argues that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* directly addresses Celsus’ attacks on Mary’s character by clarifying her social status and virginal state: Mary is thus portrayed, in the *Protevangelium of James*, as a child born to wealthy and respected parents (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1) and her royal descent is confirmed (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4).<sup>19</sup> In addition, her virginity is tested and proven on multiple occasions (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8; 15:13; 20:1); various characters throughout the narrative doubt her virginity, but all are shown to be wrong (*Prot. Jas.* 13:6; 15:10; 19:19). For van Stempvoort, the parallel with Celsus even serves to explain the depiction of Mary as weaving; whereas Celsus dismisses her as a village spinner

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<sup>16</sup> For the specific attacks by Celsus listed above, see Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–28. See also Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11 and Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 145–49 and references therein.

<sup>17</sup> Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–32; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 11; Schaberg, *Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 145–49 and references therein.

<sup>18</sup> Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–32. On similar traditions in later Jewish writings, see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), esp. Chapter One entitled “Jesus’ Family” where Schäfer explores rabbinic parallels to the attacks made on Mary and Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud. *b. Shab* 104b and *b. Sanh* 67a describe in a distorted manner the Gospel stories of Jesus’ family background and parents. Unconcerned about Jesus’ actual identity (whom they refer to as “Ben Stada” or “Ben Pandera”), the sages discuss why this certain person is known by two different names. The answer is, of course, presupposed: his mother Miriam had both a husband (“Stada”) and a lover (“Pandera”).

<sup>19</sup> Van Stempvoort, “The *Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 413–15.



(*Cels.* 1.28), the *Protevangelium of James* celebrates her as among the virgins called to make a new veil for the Temple.<sup>20</sup>

Van Stempvoort proposes a *terminus ad quem* of 204 CE for the text, based on parallels that he sees with Hippolytus' homily on Susanna, which is incorporated in his commentary on the Book of Daniel (LXX Dan 10).<sup>21</sup> Van Stempvoort not only sees a literary relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* and Hippolytus' homily on Susanna whereby the former is dependent upon the latter, but also notes a concurrence in their themes; in his view, Hippolytus' characterization of Susanna displays remarkable parallels to the portrayals of both Anna and Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>22</sup> Van Stempvoort argues that Hippolytus' homily, as well as the multitude of liturgy and iconography devoted to Susanna, attests to her popularity among Christians in the first years of the third century,<sup>23</sup> suggesting that this regard provides an explanation for the parallels between Susanna and the characters of Mary and Anna. Moreover, van Stempvoort also proposes that the *Protevangelium of James*' literary borrowings from Susanna extended to patriarchal and matriarchal figures found in novelistic literature such as Tobit, Judith, and Esther.

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<sup>20</sup> Van Stempvoort, "The *Protevangelium Jacobi*," 413–15. For Celsus's dismissal of Mary as a village spinner, see Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 27–28.

<sup>21</sup> Van Stempvoort, "Protevangelium Jacobi," 413–15; for Hippolytus' homily on Susanna, see Brian Shelton, *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus: An Early Church Presbyterian's Commentary on Daniel* (SCHAT; Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 80–86 on Susanna.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, van Stempvoort notes that parts of sentences found in the Susanna homily are directly replicated in the *Protevangelium of James*: ἦν ἰωακεῖμ πλούσιος σφόδρα directly parallels Susanna 4. Other parallels he suggests include: Anna and Susanna both have maid-servants; the structure of Susanna's and Joseph's dilemmas are similar in formula and style; they share the common theme of initially being offended, but then later vindicated. See van Stempvoort, "Protevangelium Jacobi," 413–15.

<sup>23</sup> For other linguistic, structural, and thematic parallels between the *Protevangelium of James* and these three popular Second Temple Jewish narratives, see van Stempvoort, "Protevangelium Jacobi," 413–15.

Although van Stempvoort's investigation into the date of the *Protevangelium of James* has brought to light a number of important sources and issues, his attempt at narrowing to a precise date may be too ambitious. Hock, for instance, notes that van Stempvoort's arguments are based on his assumption that the text is apologetic in aim and orientation and that its sole purpose is to respond directly to Celsus' attacks on Mary.<sup>24</sup> While the *Protevangelium of James* may address some of these issues in the course of its narrative development, to limit the text's function in this manner dismisses crucial elements that are arguably more central to the work itself.

Another recent attempt at dating the *Protevangelium of James* has been pursued by George Zervos.<sup>25</sup> He proposes an earlier date of the text in its present redacted form, based on his argument that Justin Martyr was dependent upon the *Protevangelium of James*. In his study, Zervos takes up de Strycker's suggestion that the text should be dated to the second half of the second century. In his influential book *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, de Strycker investigated parallels with the writings of Justin Martyr, but dismissed the possibility of a direct parallel.<sup>26</sup> Zervos, however, re-

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<sup>24</sup> See Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12. In his dating of the *Protevangelium of James*, George Zervos also does not accept van Stempvoort's attempt to associate the *terminus ad quem* with Hippolytus; "Dating the Protevangelium of James: The Justin Martyr Connection," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 415–34.

<sup>25</sup> Zervos, "Dating the Protevangelium of James," 415–34.

<sup>26</sup> In his 1961 critical edition, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, de Strycker examines four possible concordances between the *Protevangelium of James* and the writings of Justin Martyr and concludes that there was no literary dependency between the two writings, nor a shared source; *La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 414. Specifically, he asserts: "...nous estimons que, de ces rencontres prétendues ou réelles entre les deux auteurs, on ne peut légitimement conclure à une dépendance littéraire ni de l'un à l'égard de l'autre ni des deux à l'égard d'une troisième source." In a later article ("Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques," 353), de Strycker again dates the *Protevangelium of James* to the second half of the second century; this time, however, he proposes that some connection does exist between the writings of Justin Martyr and the author of the *Protevangelium of James*—namely that the *Protevangelium of James* was

evaluates the four possible points of concordance outlined by de Strycker and proposes that Justin and the *Protevangelium of James* stand in a relationship of literary dependency.<sup>27</sup>

De Strycker's four proposed concordances are as follows:

- (I) Both *Prot. Jas.* XI, 3 and 1 *Apol.* 33, 5 join Matt 1:21 to the end of Luke 1:35 (κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ), where both replace θεοῦ with ὑψίστου;
- (II) Both *Prot. Jas.* XI, 2 and 1 *Apol.* 33, 6 identify the λόγος with the πνεῦμα ἅγιον and δύναμις ὑψίστου of Luke 1:35;
- (III) Both *Prot. Jas.* XII, 2 and *Dial.* 100, 5 contain the words χαρὰν λαβοῦσα;
- (IV) Both *Prot. Jas.* XVIII, 1 and *Dial.* 78, 5 contain the aching of the birth of Jesus in a cave outside Bethlehem.<sup>28</sup>

Even if we accept that these parallels are close enough to warrant a theory of direct literary dependence, it remains unclear how these sources could be connected. De Strycker and de Aldama conclude that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* may have had access to Justin's writings.<sup>29</sup> Zervos, however, suspects the opposite. He argues that the parallels found in Justin Martyr's writings can be explained by means of his access to a source of the *Protevangelium of James*. Based on his investigation of the four concordances,<sup>30</sup> Zervos proposes that it is possible to posit a third source, which was

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dependent upon Justin Martyr, having been convinced by Jose de Aldama's argument to this effect ("El Protevangelio de Santiago y sus problemas," *EM* 12 [1962]: 126–29).

<sup>27</sup> Zervos, "Dating the Protevangelium of James," 419.

<sup>28</sup> Cited from Zervos' discussion of de Strycker's four proposed concordances between the *Protevangelium of James* and Justin Martyr's works ("Dating the Protevangelium of James," 419). Note, though, that Zervos' citation for the *Protevangelium of James* is based on de Strycker's division of chapters and lines.

<sup>29</sup> Zervos, "Dating the Protevangelium of James," 419–32.

<sup>30</sup> See especially Zervos' arguments put forth for the second and fourth concordances. He maintains that in both cases there is indication of Justin Martyr's harmonization of the *Protevangelium of James* and other gospels to which he may have had access; more precisely, Zervos questions Justin

interpolated by a later redactor into certain sections of the *Protevangelium of James* and which Justin consulted; in other words, Justin's parallels are from an already redacted text of the *Protevangelium of James*. Zervos thus places the *terminus ad quem* for the *Protevangelium of James* at 150–160 CE, the period when Justin was actively writing. He places the *terminus post quem* at 80–90 CE, when the Gospels of Matthew and Luke discuss the virgin birth of Jesus.<sup>31</sup> Zervos' theory of a hypothetical source is intriguing, but the focus of this study will fall mainly on evaluating the *Protevangelium of James* in its present form, rather than its possible pre-history.

In past scholarship on the dating of the *Protevangelium of James*, the emphasis has been limited mainly to select details of the text and to parallels found within Patristic literature, while only secondary attention has been paid to non-canonical writings, like the *Odes of Solomon* and *Ascension of Isaiah*. Moreover, for the most part, the dating debate has been based on a limited handful of details from the *Protevangelium of James*, abstracted from their narrative context for the sake of comparison with references to Mary in Patristic writings. Although the Patristic parallels are important to consider, it may be valuable to approach the dating issue from a fresh perspective.

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Martyrs' synthesis of the use of λόγος and its connection with the annunciation, the cave, and its relationship to the nativity of Christ ("Dating the Protevangelium of James," 419–32).

<sup>31</sup> Zervos, "Dating the Protevangelium of James," 415–34. See also idem, "An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 664–91, whereby Zervos argues that the *Protevangelium of James* was composed from an original pre-existing document, generally known as the *Genesis Marias*; and idem, "Seeking the Source of the Marian Myth: Have we Found the Missing Link?," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 107–20, wherein he argues for the influence of the *Genesis Marias* sections of the *Protevangelium of James* as an earlier document on the Marian section in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 11.

In the course of my analysis of the theme of purity in the *Protevangelium of James*, I hope to shed light on the question of its date. My concern and approach to dating the text entails first pursuing a literary analysis in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, whereby I will try to determine what concerns are central to the text itself. In the course of this literary analysis, moreover, I hope to highlight its parallels with early Jewish and Christian writings (e.g., Mishnah; *Didascalia Apostolorum*) that have yet to be brought into the dating discussion. Only then will I return to the question of date, “testing” the various theories outlined above in Chapter Five.

## 1.2 Debates about the Provenance of the *Protevangelium of James*

Although the *Protevangelium of James*' date and history of transmission are notoriously complex, perhaps its provenance poses the most difficulty for scholars. Early investigations into the text resulted in a consensus among scholars that Palestine should be dismissed as a possible area of origin because of the author's ignorance of Palestinian geography<sup>32</sup> and his apparent lack of awareness of Jewish customs.<sup>33</sup> De Strycker, for instance, noted the author's confusion about the distance between Jerusalem, Judaea, and

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<sup>32</sup> J. Quasten was one of the first to argue that the author is not from Palestine based on the text's “astonishing ignorance of Palestinian geography”; see *Patrology: The Beginning of Patristic Literature*, vol. 1 (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1950), 121. So too W. Michaelis, *Die Apokryphen Schriften zum Neuen Testament* (2d ed.; Benmen: Carl Schunemann, 1958), 71; Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 423–24; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 49; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12–13. Some scholars reject Palestine as a possible locale in order to argue for other areas as more likely contenders; e.g., de Strycker, “Problèmes, Critiques et Exégétiques,” 353 and Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4267 for Egypt. Though H.R. Smid objects to de Strycker's reasons for dismissing Palestine as the place of the work's origin (see n. 35 below), he concludes for different reasons that “we must assume that the author did not live in Palestine and did not know the country personally” (*Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* [ANT 1; Assen: van Gorcum, 1965], 22). As noted below, Smid suggests Syria as a possible place of origin, even though he acknowledges problems with this hypothesis as well.

<sup>33</sup> See below for a discussion of the *Protevangelium of James* and Judaism.

Bethlehem,<sup>34</sup> especially in relation to the tales of Mary’s and Joseph’s travels between these locales.<sup>35</sup> De Strycker thus posits Egypt as a likely place of origin. He bases his argument on the author’s use of modest Greek and his incorporation of Coptic elements in his writing.<sup>36</sup> De Strycker’s other main argument is based on the author’s descriptions of the mountains and wilderness in the text.<sup>37</sup> In light of the alleged confusion between the mountain and desert in *Prot. Jas.* 22:5–7, as well as the description of the desert as being near the gates of Jerusalem in *Prot. Jas.* 4:4–5, he argues that the author was most likely an Egyptian ignorant of Palestinian geography. In support of de Strycker, Cothenet cites Patristic parallels, proposing that “La connaissance de l’oeuvre par Clément d’Alexandrie et par Origène plaide en faveur de l’Egypte comme lieu d’origine.”<sup>38</sup>

Smid, however, challenges de Strycker’s view of the mountains and wilderness of the *Protevangelium of James* as reflecting a distinctively Egyptian geography.<sup>39</sup> He follows Conrady in proposing Syria, specifically Antioch, as the locale in which the text originated.<sup>40</sup> Smid bases his suggestion on the use of the term *δαφνιδέα* in *Prot. Jas.* 2:8–

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<sup>34</sup> On the possibility of interpreting Jerusalem as being distinct from Judea, see below.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, de Strycker argues that the desert is located in close proximity to the gates of Jerusalem as evident in the fact that Joachim is able to return immediately to the city after having spent time in the desert after his rebuke (*Prot. Jas.* 4:4–5); that the mountains and desert seem to be identical in the narrative; that Joseph and Mary live in Jerusalem, though the census decreed by Augustus concerns Bethlehem alone (*Prot. Jas.* 17:1); and that Jerusalem, Judea and Bethlehem are used simply as indications in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 21:1–12); *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, esp. 419–21.

<sup>36</sup> Hock, in accordance with de Strycker, suggests that the Greek mainland, islands, and the cities of western Asia Minor should also be dismissed based on the simple Greek vocabulary and syntax of the text; *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12. In his study of the Greek manuscript tradition, however, Daniels argues that the Greek is, in fact, more sophisticated than usually assumed; “Greek Manuscript Tradition,” 13.

<sup>37</sup> De Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 419–21.

<sup>38</sup> Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4267.

<sup>39</sup> Smid grounds his challenge in the fact that Syria and Palestine also have identical mountains and deserts; *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 20–21.

<sup>40</sup> L. Conrady argues in favour of Syria as well in “Das Protevangelium Jacobi in neuer Beleuchtung,” *TSK* 62 (1889): 728–83.

a reference to laurel trees, which were very common in Syria. Syria was famous for its gardens and laurel trees; perhaps, as Smid posits, the author had this fact in mind while composing Anna's lament in the garden in *Prot. Jas. 2:7–8*, though he admits that the evidence is not conclusive.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Cameron suggests Syria as the most plausible location based on the text's harmonization of Gospel traditions, inasmuch as such harmonies flourished in this region.<sup>42</sup> In further support of Syria, Elliott and Zervos note the similar nativity accounts of the *Protevangelium of James* and *Ascension of Isaiah* (11),<sup>43</sup> the latter of which was written in the early second century.<sup>44</sup> Like the *Protevangelium of James*, Ignatius' *Letter to the Ephesians* (19) and *Odes of Solomon* (19) also seem to acknowledge Mary's

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<sup>41</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 175.

<sup>42</sup> Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 108–9. Though Cameron favours Syria as the place of origin, he also does not dismiss Asia Minor, Rome, or even Egypt as possibilities. I discuss the possibility that the *Protevangelium of James* may have been influenced by gospel harmonies, perhaps not unlike the one shared by Justin Martyr and his student Tatian. See my discussion in Appendix A for further details.

<sup>43</sup> The similarities between the two nativity accounts include the absence of a midwife in the nativity (*Prot. Jas.* 19:12–16 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:14) and Mary's *virginitas post partum* (*Prot. Jas.* 20:1–3 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:10). Elliott acknowledges the commonalities between the texts, but admits that dependence of one upon the other is difficult to prove and that the only suggestion that can be made is a common provenance, namely, Syrian; *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49. Zervos, however, notes several other similarities between the narratives; for example, the mention of Mary being of Davidic descent (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:2); the reference to Joseph as a carpenter, which is not a particularly Matthean concept (*Prot. Jas.* 9:1 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:2); and the reference to “portions” or lots (*Prot. Jas.* 9:7 cf. *Ascen. Isa.* 11:3) and argues for the *Protevangelium of James/Genesis Marias* (according to Zervos, the *Protevangelium of James* was composed from an original pre-existing document called the *Genesis Marias*) as an earlier document that may have influenced the Marian section in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 11 (“Seeking the Source of the Marian Myth,” 107–20).

<sup>44</sup> The general consensus for the provenance of the *Ascension of Isaiah* is Syria. See Jonathan Knight who argues that the “use of Isaiah traditions, the description of heavenly ascension in chs. 6–11, the reference to Tyre and Sidon in 5:13, and the possibility that the Isaiah traditions once circulated in Hebrew (mentioned by Knibb 1985: 146–47) all point to an origin in the Syro-Palestine area. The work testifies to the history of Christianity in that region in the period after the martyrdom of Ignatius”; *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 23.

virginity *in partu*.<sup>45</sup> Elliott and Zervos argue that these parallels support a Syrian provenance for the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>46</sup>

By contrast, in a 1981 article, Malcolm Lowe questions the traditional dismissal of Palestine as a possible provenance for the *Protevangelium of James*, a position based on the text's alleged ignorance of Palestinian geography. In his examination of the use of Ἰουδαίος, Lowe suggests that the unusual statement made by Joseph concerning his being “in,” “near,” or “around” Bethlehem, but preparing to ἐξελεθεῖν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ, “depart for Judea” or “go into Judea,” (*Prot. Jas.* 21:1) could simply be attributed to the author's mistaken imitation of John 3:22 (i.e., where Jesus is depicted going into Judaea from Jerusalem).<sup>47</sup> Lowe also cites passages from early Jewish writings, including numerous examples in the book of Ezra (e.g., Ezra 1:2, 1:3, 2:1, etc.) and the Mishnah (e.g., *m. Ket* 4.12), which imply that Jerusalem could be regarded as being distinct, in

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<sup>45</sup> Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49, and Zervos, “Annunciation Story,” 687–88. Although in Ignatius' letter *ad Ephesians* (19.1) Mary's *Virginitas in Partu* is only implied: “The virginity of Mary and her giving birth eluded the ruler of this age, likewise also the death of the Lord—three mysteries of a cry which were done in the stillness of God” (translation is from William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* [ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 87), the *Odes of Solomon* (19) offers a striking parallel to both the *Ascension of Isaiah* (11) and the *Protevangelium of James*. For instance, all three propose that Mary did not suffer pain and had no need of a midwife. See Darrell D. Hannah, “The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity,” *VC* 53.2 (1999): 184. So also Plumpe, “Some Little-Known Early Witnesses,” 567–77, esp. 574, whereby he examines the four aforementioned texts (i.e., *Protevangelium of James*, *Ascension of Isaiah* (11), *Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians* (19), and the *Odes of Solomon* (19) and adds a fifth witness: Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (54)). In this work, Plumpe sees an unmistakable allusion to *virginity in partu* in Irenaeus' interpretation of the prophetic words of Isaiah 7:14, “A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son” and “Before she that travailed gave birth, she escaped and was delivered of a man-child” cited at another place according to Irenaeus. Plumpe argues that Irenaeus understood this verse as messianic and that it spoke of the Virgin Mary who gave birth to the Christ-child in a manner unparalleled by others; that is without birth pangs or injury to her physical body, i.e., “she escaped.” And also Buck, “Witnesses to an Early Cult of Mary,” 371–99, esp. 379; and my discussion in Chapter Five.

<sup>46</sup> Zervos, “Annunciation Story,” 687–88 and Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Malcolm Lowe, “ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha: A Fresh Approach to the Gospels of James, Pseudo-Thomas, Peter and Nicodemus,” *NovT* 23.1 (1981): 62 n.24.



some fashion, from Judaea.<sup>48</sup> Countering de Strycker, Lowe also notes that the Judaeian desert does indeed start on the eastern slopes of the mountains bordering Jerusalem, if one considers the heavy rain that falls on the western slopes.<sup>49</sup> In his view, the conflation of mountains and desert does not rule out a Palestinian provenance.

As evident by the various suggestions put forth by scholars, locating the *Protevangelium of James*' place of origin has been a difficult and troubling task. In the past, arguments advanced for one locale over another have depended mainly upon geographical and environmental details (i.e., mountains, trees, desert).<sup>50</sup> In addition, discussions about the provenance of the text are sometimes based on the problematic assumption that knowledge of "Jewish tradition" would automatically imply a Palestinian provenance, while lack of such knowledge would necessitate a different setting.

I propose, however, that the question of provenance may perhaps be better addressed after a more detailed examination of the text itself, whereby special consideration of its concerns and interests may shed light on its geographical origins. In particular, a careful re-examination of the nature of the *Protevangelium of James*' connections with Jewish traditions, specifically those of which the author(s) may or may not have been aware, as well as a look at the possible spread and transmission of such traditions, even beyond Palestine, will contribute to the discussion of the text's provenance.

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<sup>48</sup> Lowe, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha," 62 n. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Lowe, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha," 62 n. 24.

<sup>50</sup> See above on the arguments put forth by de Strycker, Cothenet, Smid, Hock, Cameron, Elliott, Zervos, etc.

### 1.3 The *Protevangelium of James* and Judaism

As clear from the above survey, the scholarly debate about the provenance of the *Protevangelium of James* is closely related to the debate concerning its connections to Judaism. We have already discussed some cases in which scholars propose the author's lack of knowledge about Judaism, albeit mainly based on a purported lack of knowledge of Palestinian geography (see further below).

By contrast, van Stempvoort, Cameron, and Smid assume a relationship between the author and Judaism and/or “Jewish-Christianity” based on the text's extensive use of the Septuagint.<sup>51</sup> Above, we noted that the characters of Anna and Joachim in the *Protevangelium of James* seem to be patterned on Sarah and Abraham in Gen 18, 20–21 and, perhaps even more closely, on Hannah and Elkannah in 1 Sam 1–2. Van Stempvoort has further argued that biblical matriarchs provided the model for the *Protevangelium of James*' portrait of Mary.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Hellenistic Jewish sources such as Susanna (Dan 13:1–64), Tobit, and Judith also share many similarities with the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>53</sup> These similarities, van Stempvoort stresses, are not only based on tone and thought, but also on language, usage, and motifs.<sup>54</sup> Cameron makes a similar argument with appeal to the author's style. He writes, “The entirety of the *Protevangelium of James* is steeped in the language of the Septuagint...Not only are individual words, phrases, and

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<sup>51</sup> Van Stempvoort, “*Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 415–19; Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 108; Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, esp. 9–12. Other scholars who have also noted the *Protevangelium of James*' use and knowledge of the LXX but do not conclude a Jewish milieu for the text include: Pratscher, *Herrenbruder Jakobus*, 224; Cullmann, “*Protevangelium of James*,” 423–24; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 21–25.

<sup>52</sup> Van Stempvoort, “*Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 415–19; so too Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Parallels with so-called “OT pseudepigrapha,” such as *Joseph and Aseneth*, are noted above in the Introduction.

<sup>54</sup> Van Stempvoort, “*Protevangelium Jacobi*,” 415–19.

whole paragraphs reminiscent of the Septuagint; such discrete forms as the hymn and the lament of Anna also display conscious, direct ‘remembrance’ of the stories recorded in the scriptures.”<sup>55</sup> Both van Stempvoort and Cameron address the important parallels between the *Protevangelium of James* and the LXX in order to suggest a Jewish background, but neither attempt to explore this connection beyond the LXX.

Similarly, for Smid, the possibility of a Jewish background for the *Protevangelium of James* is strengthened by its literary dependence on the Septuagint.<sup>56</sup> Smid, like Cameron, reads the *Protevangelium of James* as couched in biblical thought and language, with the LXX as its primary source.<sup>57</sup> As noted above, Smid further shows all instances where a word in the *Protevangelium of James* is used in the same manner in the LXX; he points, in particular, to the text’s use of unusual phrases such as ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου ἡ μεγάλη (*Prot. Jas.* 1:4), the understanding and use of the πέταλον by the high priest (*Prot. Jas.* 5:1), and the reference to the drinking of bitter water test by Joseph and Mary to verify their innocence.<sup>58</sup> These language choices lead Smid to propose that the author was either of Jewish descent, born after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, or was, at the very least, someone who was strongly influenced by biblical tales in the LXX and/or acquired a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.

Ironically, though Smid criticizes de Strycker for not questioning the issue of whether or not “the author was of Jewish or pagan descent,”<sup>59</sup> Smid himself does not

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<sup>55</sup> Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 108.

<sup>56</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 9–12.

<sup>57</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 9–12.

<sup>58</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 21.

address the text's connection with Judaism apart from its dependence on the LXX and the author's knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. Problematic, in my opinion, is the view of "Judaism" assumed here, which is simply a concern for the Hebrew Bible—an interest arguably shared by most followers of Jesus in the first centuries of the Common Era.

Vorster's 1986 article on the annunciation in the *Protevangelium of James* may open the way for a more nuanced approach to the question of its relationship to Judaism, since he focuses on the representations of Jews within the text itself. He argues that Jewish leaders are portrayed in a surprisingly positive light, unlike the characterization given to them by the NT Gospels. He notes that the religious leaders "perform religious rites (cf. 6:2, 8:2, 3, 24:1 et al.), bless (17:3 et al.), pray (8:3 et al.), take care of the temple and determine the norms (cf. 10:1, 15:3 et al.)...They seek the will of God in prayer and reveal it (8:3ff)."<sup>60</sup> According to Vorster, the Jewish characters in the *Protevangelium of James* are helpers and, therefore, not opponents of the protagonists. Even when the Jewish leaders demand Joseph and Mary take the bitter water test in *Prot. Jas.* 16:3, the outcome is positive: Mary is deemed pure and Joseph's innocence is maintained. This favourable portrayal of Jewish leaders, Vorster proposes, may suggest a story written with Jewish interests in mind. As "the child [Jesus] is born *from Israel for Israel*,"<sup>61</sup> Vorster argues that the Jewish religious leaders can be convincingly read as positive co-operators

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<sup>60</sup> W.S. Vorster, "The Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus in the Protevangelium of James," in *A South American Perspective in the New Testament* (ed. J. Petzer and P. Hartin; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 41.

<sup>61</sup> Vorster, "Annunciation of the Birth," 41.

in his coming and may in fact mark a polemical move on the part of the author to address views held by Jews who were his contemporaries.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Malcolm Lowe examines the *Protevangelium of James*' use of the term Ἰουδαῖος. Based on his analysis of early Jewish writings, he concludes that the term's primary meaning is geographical, referring most often to the inhabitants of ἡ Ἰουδαία, (i.e., Judaeans). He concludes that Ἰουδαῖος seems to have been applied to all Jews by those living *outside* Palestine. By contrast, there was still a distinction made by the Jews who lived *inside* Palestine, who called themselves "Israel," but tended to refer to the inhabitants of the Jerusalem region as "Judaeans."<sup>63</sup> That the *Protevangelium of James* adopts this "insider language" has led Lowe to suspect a Jewish author.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast, Cullmann and Elliott both maintain that the content of the *Protevangelium of James* does not point us to a Jewish or "Jewish-Christian" origin, but rather to authorship by a non-Jew. Their arguments are much the same as have been advanced against a Palestinian provenance; they base their assertion on the author's "ignorance of the geography of Palestine and of Jewish customs."<sup>65</sup> Examples of the latter offered by Cullmann and Elliott include the rejection of Joachim's gift to the Lord because of his childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5); Mary's stay and upbringing in the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:1–9:10); and Joseph's travels from Bethlehem to Judea (*Prot. Jas.* 21:1).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> This presentation of Jewish religious leaders participating positively in the coming of the child will be brought even more to light in my own inquiry on the role of the Jewish priests and Temple as it pertains to Mary's depiction in Chapter Two.

<sup>63</sup> Lowe, "ἸΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha," 56.

<sup>64</sup> Lowe, "ἸΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha," 70.

<sup>65</sup> Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49 and Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 423–24.

<sup>66</sup> See esp. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49 and Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 424.

Elliott argues further that certain details seemingly Jewish at first sight, such as the bitter water conviction (*Prot. Jas.* 16:3), in fact, on a closer look, betray a misunderstanding of actual Jewish customs, namely because the accounts of the bitter water test in the Hebrew Bible do not correspond to the events detailed in the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>67</sup> As the depiction of the bitter water test is often cited as the strongest evidence against the Jewishness of the *Protevangelium of James*, it is noteworthy that Elliott’s assessment may be questioned on the same grounds as theories based on the text’s use of the LXX, namely, as viewing “Judaism” as consisting only of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, Michael Mach strongly opposes the idea that the *Protevangelium of James* attests any Jewish or “Jewish-Christian” elements. Upon analyzing the linguistic and *halakhic* motifs, he determines that there is no connection between the *Protevangelium of James* and Jewish traditions and customs of any sort and that the text also “lacks any evidence for characteristic Jewish-Christian beliefs.”<sup>69</sup> Mach, for instance, dismisses the idea that the author had any knowledge of Hebrew; he points to phrases that, on first glance, seem to be etymological word-plays, but that are, in his reading, simply expressions taken from the NT or LXX. Mach furthers his argument by examining

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<sup>67</sup> According to the Pentateuch (i.e., Num 5:11–31), the bitter water test was given only to the wife suspected of betraying her husband. In the *Protevangelium of James*, the bitter water is given both to Mary and Joseph to test whether they have committed a sin. For a literary investigation into the nature of the trial and the punishment of the suspected adulteress in Numbers 5, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah: Numbers 5:11–31,” *VT* 34.1 (1984): 11–26.

<sup>68</sup> Tim Horner has shown, however, that the bitter water test taken by Joseph and Mary may be closer to other forms of Judaism, namely, to the spirit of the Mishnaic teaching of *Sotah*; “Jewish Aspects of the *Protevangelium of James*,” *J ECS* 12.3 (2004): 314 (see further discussion below).

<sup>69</sup> Michael Mach acknowledges that there are two instances when the *Protevangelium of James* comes close to betraying a knowledge of Jewish traditions—namely in the traditions about Adam (*Prot. Jas.* 13:5) and Zechariah (*Prot. Jas.* 23–24). He attributes both, however, to later redactional activity; “Are There Jewish Elements in the ‘Protevangelium Jacobi’?,” in *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 220.

passages that seem to show an interest in Jewish *halakhah*. For instance, he looks at the details concerning the high priest's decision to make a new veil for the temple in *Prot. Jas.* 10:1. Some scholars, such as S. Lieberman and F. Manns,<sup>70</sup> maintain that this detail is influenced by *halakhic* formulations, stressing that Mary is remembered and chosen to weave the veil because of her virginity and state of purity.<sup>71</sup> By contrast, Mach argues that the emphasis on virginity and ritual purity required of those working in the Temple was not limited to the Jerusalem Temple alone; these requirements also held for the creation of the *peplos* for the Greek goddesses Athena and Hera in their temples in Athens and thus cannot be read as a Jewish characteristic.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, in Mach's view, no connections can be made to Judaism on the basis of the purity required for Temple weavers in *Prot. Jas.* 10:1–4.<sup>73</sup>

Especially in light of Vorster's insights into the text's presentation of Jews and Lowe's suggestion of its use of "insider" Jewish language, we might question Mach's complete rejection of the relevance of Jewish traditions for understanding the text. We also might ask whether the rejection of Jewish elements in the *Protevangelium of James* needs to be re-evaluated in light of recent research on the early formation and fluidity of Jewish and Christian identities in the late Roman period.<sup>74</sup> Again the problematic issue

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<sup>70</sup> S. Lieberman and F. Manns, "Une Ancienne Tradition sur la Jeunesse de Marie" in *Essays sur le Judeo-Christianisme* (AnBib 12; Jerusalem: Analecta, 1977), 106–14.

<sup>71</sup> Mach, "Are There Jewish Elements," 220 n. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Mach, "Are There Jewish Elements," 216–17.

<sup>73</sup> Mach, "Are There Jewish Elements," 216–17.

<sup>74</sup> E.g., Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); the contributions in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Jörg Frey, ed., *Jewish Identities in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

concerning the *Protevangelium of James*' connection with Judaism is the assumption made by past scholarship about what constitutes Jewish features in the text. In light of the complexity in defining Jewish identity in the first centuries of the Common Era, can knowledge of Palestinian geography and Hebrew language, interest in the LXX, and details concerning the accuracy and knowledge of the Temple stand as the only criteria by which to determine Jewish or non-Jewish origin? In my view, the assumption that Judaism consists simply of a concern for the Hebrew Bible is tenuous, especially given our knowledge of the various "Judaisms" that existed in and around the period when the text was first written.<sup>75</sup>

More promising, in my view, is the comparison with early rabbinic traditions. In a 1988 article, Cothenet argues for a Jewish milieu for the *Protevangelium of James* based on what he views as a focus on Jewish scriptures and stories and parallels with rabbinic traditions (e.g., the interpretation of Eve's error by Joseph at 13:5, cf. Targum Ps-

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<sup>75</sup> For a good introduction to the diversity of "Judaisms" being practiced during the Second Temple Period (515 BCE–70 CE) see James C. VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); also see W.S. Green, "Introduction: The Scholarly Study of Judaism and its Sources," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity. I. The Literary and Archaeological Sources* (ed. Jacob Neusner; HO 1; NOMO 16; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 1–5 and idem, "Ancient Judaisms: Contours and Complexity," in *Language, Theology, and the Bible* (ed. S.E. Balentine and J. Barton; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 295–97. There are ample sources that attest to the varying Jewish groups, movements, communities, and interpretations of Scripture living in close proximity, including primary sources ranging from Ezra and Nehemiah to Philo and Josephus to the Dead Sea Scrolls. George Nickelsburg provides an excellent source book to the intertestamental literature attesting to these diverse Jewish groups, movements and communities in his *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005); also Lawrence Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1998); idem *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994) and David Flusser, *Judaism and the Second Temple Period: Qumran and Apocalypticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) for specific work on Qumran.



Jonathan on Gen 4:1);<sup>76</sup> he suggests that the text can be understood as one of the “premier midrash chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie.”<sup>77</sup> With regard to the *Protevangelium of James*, Cothenet determines that the “auteur dépend surtout d'un grand nombre de motifs traditionnels dans la haggada.”<sup>78</sup> Moreover, he insists that it is “ces motifs haggadiques et l'étude de leur transformation revêt la plus grande importance pour fixer l'origine du Protévangile et préciser ses intentions.”<sup>79</sup>

In a 2004 article, Tim Horner takes a more cautious approach to investigating rabbinic parallels, limiting himself to tannaitic traditions. He begins by suggesting that the rejection of Jewish elements in the *Protevangelium of James* may be the result of understanding the text through the lens of later Christian tradition, which may not necessarily represent the true character of the document.<sup>80</sup> Specifically, Horner attributes this rejection of Jewish elements by past scholars (e.g., Elliott, Hock, Zervos) to the text's lack of references to elements common to Second Temple Jewish literature.

Horner suggests that there are instances in the *Protevangelium of James* that can be best understood when read against the background of second century Jewish sources, specifically the tannaitic traditions collected within the Mishnah. He proposes that the *Protevangelium of James* can be read as “a document that uses Jewish imagery to address

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<sup>76</sup> Renee Bloch has written significantly on rabbinic traditions concerning Moses, especially in terms of drawing parallels between Midrashic stories on the birth of Moses and the birth story of Jesus in Matthew; e.g., “Quelques Aspects de la Figure de Moïse dans la Tradition Rabbinique,” in *Moïse: Homme de l'Alliance* (ed. H. Cazelles, et. al.; Paris: Descl'É, 1955), 164–65.

<sup>77</sup> Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4252. Cameron suggests that the *Protevangelium of James* can also be understood as a “midrashic” exegesis based on its usage of other written documents (i.e., the harmonized infancy stories of Matt and Luke) in re-creating the story surrounding the infancy of Jesus; *Other Gospels*, 108.

<sup>78</sup> Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4261.

<sup>79</sup> Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4262.

<sup>80</sup> Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 316.

the concerns and criticisms that might have been important to people who understand Christianity within a predominantly Jewish matrix or those who were attempting to reinterpret the Jewish matrix in the light of Christian doctrine.”<sup>81</sup> In his view, the “Protoevangelium of James would have been best understood—perhaps only fully understood—within a community that was familiar with concerns and images of contemporary Judaism.”<sup>82</sup>

Significantly for our purposes, the aspects of the text that Horner deems distinctly Jewish include tannaitic traditions concerning childlessness, betrothal, and marriage, on the one hand, and purity and virginity, on the other.<sup>83</sup> He notes how the *Protevangelium of James* narrativizes Mary’s life in three stages: [1] from her birth to age three, [2] from age three to age twelve, and [3] from age twelve to adulthood. This specific division in age parallels the understanding of the female life-cycle in mishnaic *halakhot* concerning women. In addition, Horner suggests that portions of the *Protevangelium of James* hold significant meaning when read in concert with the Mishnah. For instance, *m. Nid* 5.4 and *m. Ket* 1.2–3 distinguish between a girl of three years and a day or younger, whose virginity is assured, and a girl older than three years and a day, for whom defilement is a possibility (i.e., a *Ketannah*).<sup>84</sup> In Horner’s view, this understanding of girlhood helps to make sense of the decision by Anna and Joachim, in *Prot. Jas.* 7:2, to dedicate Mary to the Temple at the age of three, despite their initial plan to have her sent at the age of two.

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<sup>81</sup> Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 314.

<sup>82</sup> Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 317.

<sup>83</sup> Horner also makes note of a Talmudic critique of the virgin birth. See *b. Pes* 110b–101a, which deals with the problem of affirming two gods; “Jewish Aspects,” 331.

<sup>84</sup> On this, see Chapter Three.

Horner's exploration of mishnaic parallels to the *Protevangelium of James* also points to the text's overarching aim of affirming the virginity and purity of Mary. Horner suggests, more specifically, that the text may respond to Jewish critiques surrounding the virgin birth of Jesus (see e.g., Origen, *Cels.* 1.32; *b. Sanh* 67a).<sup>85</sup> From the combination of its commonalities with the Mishnah and its apparent response to Jewish critiques of Mary's virginity, he concludes that the *Protevangelium of James* must have been a product of a cultural context marked by proximity to, and concern for, contemporary expressions of Judaism—and rabbinic/proto-rabbinic Judaism in particular.

Admittedly, Horner's investigation of Mishnaic parallels as a way to interpret what he views as a second century piece of literature (i.e., *Protevangelium of James*) is problematic given that the Mishnah is an early third century collection of traditions, but his assessment that the text may be better understood if read in this light may be especially promising considering the way ritual purity is presented in the narrative.<sup>86</sup> In this study, my concern for the text involves the place and function of purity as it pertains to the depiction of Mary, but also as it relates or is connected to Judaism. In my view, a special focus on ritual purity may allow for an examination of the influence of connections to the Hebrew Bible, on the one hand (e.g., Levitical law), and rabbinic traditions, on the other (e.g., tannaitic traditions about women and purity), thus allowing

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<sup>85</sup> Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 330–32.

<sup>86</sup> This is especially true given that Horner is clear that his goal is not to establish literary dependency between the *Protevangelium of James* and the Mishnah, but rather to understand the parallels between them as a way to help "deconstruct the assumption that *Protevangelium of James* had nothing to do with Judaism... and may have had more in common with contemporary Judaism, or at least one part of it, than is often assumed"; Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 314. Moreover literary dependency is not necessary to suggest that the *Protevangelium of James* contains elements that may have been better understood by readers who were familiar with contemporary Jewish teachings.

me to “test” the various theories outlined above about the *Protevangelium of James*’ relationship to Judaism. In the process, I hope to build on and extend Horner’s insights concerning the text’s link to Judaism by including analyses of rabbinic traditions formed at approximately the same time.

#### 1.4 The Aim and Genre of the *Protevangelium of James*

Before turning to an analysis of the depiction of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*, it is also necessary to consider its purpose and literary genre. This issue is tightly tied to the question of its overarching aims. As with its date, provenance, and relationship to Judaism, the question of its genre and purpose has been the subject of much scholarly debate.

Past scholarship generally characterizes the purpose of the work in one of three ways. First is to “fill in” the gaps left by the NT Gospels’ accounts of the life of Mary and birth of Jesus.<sup>87</sup> Most scholars assume that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* knows the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and sets out to expand and interpret them.<sup>88</sup> Others point to the production of Infancy Gospels as a parallel;<sup>89</sup> just as stories were circulating about Jesus concerning his adolescent years to adulthood (e.g., *Infancy Gospel*

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<sup>87</sup> E.g., Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 3; Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 414 and 416–18; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 46; and Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (trans. Brian McNeil; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2003), 64.

<sup>88</sup> Cothenet, “Protévangelie de Jacques,” 4260; Vorster, “The Protevangelium of James and Intertextuality,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A.F.J. Klijn* (ed. T. Baarda et al.; Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1988), 268–69, and Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 51, to name a few. Noteworthy is the fact that scholars have not seriously explored gospel harmonies (e.g., Tatian’s *Diatessaron*) as a possible source for the *Protevangelium of James*. See my discussion on this topic in Appendix A.

<sup>89</sup> E.g., Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 64 and Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 3.

of Thomas), so too were Christ-believers curious about Mary, her childhood, and the events leading up to her motherhood. By this logic, the *Protevangelium of James* and other Marian apocrypha grew out of a perceived need to provide some form of biography for Mary.<sup>90</sup> Understood in this way, the production of the *Protevangelium of James* can be seen as part of the broader growth of biographical literature in Late Antiquity dedicated to great and famous personalities.<sup>91</sup>

Another possibility, posited by a number of scholars including Smid, van Stempvoort, Cothenet, Klauck, Allen, Elliott, and Horner,<sup>92</sup> is that the writing was motivated, in part and whole, by apologetic aims. As noted above, the text has often been read as a response to Jewish and/or “pagan” polemics against Christian claims, especially with respect to the claim that Jesus was born of a virgin.<sup>93</sup> Above, we noted van Stempvoort’s theory that the *Protevangelium of James* was written specifically to respond to Celsus, who seems to have mocked the lowly social status of Jesus’ parents, Mary’s need to spin for a living, and the possibility of a virgin birth as well as suggesting that Mary bore a child to a certain soldier name Panthera. In addition, Horner has also pointed

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<sup>90</sup> Klauck warns us that though the writing was influenced by biographical literature of Late Antiquity and probably sprung from the need to provide Mary with her own biography, historically reliable information should not be expected from the narrative and that it adds nothing to our knowledge of Jesus’ human origins. For a discussion on reasons why the details provided in the *Protevangelium of James* concerning Mary cannot be regarded as authentic, see his *Apocryphal Gospels*, 64–72.

<sup>91</sup> For biographies of women in Late Antiquity, see e.g., *Vita Olympiadis* (SC 13bis, 406–49); (Gerontius), *Vita Melaniae Iunioris* (SC 90, 124–271); *Vita Syncreticae* (PG 28, 1488–1557); Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* (SC 178, 136–267). Jerome’s letter to and memorials of women also provide biographical information on women who were respected and praised by the author; see esp. letters 22, 23, 24, 38, 39, 54, 75, 79, 107, 108, 123, 127, 130.

<sup>92</sup> E.g., Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 15–17; van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 410; Cothenet, “Protévangile de Jacques,” 4268; Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 66; John L. Allen, “The Protevangelium of James as an ‘Historia:’ The Insufficiency of the ‘Infancy Gospel’ Category,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 515–17; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49–50; Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 330.

<sup>93</sup> See n. 92 above.

to the rabbinic tradition concerning “Yeshu ben Panthera.”<sup>94</sup> This name is first mentioned in the Tosefta (*t. Hull* 2.22–24) and may be a reference to Jesus. In later rabbinic sources (e.g., *b. Sanh* 106a), we also find a similar reference to an unnamed woman who “was the descendant of princes and governors, played the harlot with carpenters.” That the unidentified woman alluded to seems to be Mary, Jesus’ mother, is reinforced by the reference to her “playing the harlot with carpenters.” From her analysis of these rabbinic traditions, Hasan-Rokem proposes that “the story about the Messiah’s birth was thus a common tradition, a theme in which Jews in Palestine, beginning with the first century CE, told stories in several versions.”<sup>95</sup> If we follow her assessment, we might speculate that the connection between Jesus and Panthera was part of popular oral and/or folkloristic Jewish tradition already in the first century, and that the hints of traditions about the illegitimacy of Jesus and the critique of the virgin birth in later rabbinic writings represent traces of a larger tradition.<sup>96</sup>

For both Smid and Elliott, the polemics initiated by Celsus’ accusations coupled with scandalous versions of Mary’s conception and birth of Jesus in classical rabbinic literature may help explain why the *Protevangelium of James* depicts Mary’s parents as members of high society with royal lineage as well as promoting the view that her

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<sup>94</sup> Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 329–30.

<sup>95</sup> Galit Hasan-Roken, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (trans. Batya Stein; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 156.

<sup>96</sup> On this later tradition and its aims, see Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 15–24 where he examines the stories in *b. Shab* 104b and *b. Sanh* 67a as rabbinic parallels to the accusations made against Mary and Jesus (Miriam and Ben Stada or Ben Pandera according to the sages).

spinning confers an honour placed upon her for the sake of the Temple.<sup>97</sup> More importantly, her status as a virgin is repeatedly confirmed; in the *Protevangelium of James*, her virginity is verified by a number of different witnesses including the angel (*Prot. Jas.* 11:5–8), Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 14:5), the priest and the people of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 16:5–8), the unnamed midwife (*Prot. Jas.* 19:14), and Salome (*Prot. Jas.* 20:1–2, 10). These multiple narrative affirmations may have been meant, Smid and Elliott suggest, as a means of refuting claims that her pregnancy was the result of adultery and that Jesus was not therefore born in any miraculous fashion.<sup>98</sup>

Even if details of the *Protevangelium of James* can be explained as responses to such polemics, does this mean that the overarching aim of the text is apologetic? In contrast to van Stempvoort, Hock and Smid acknowledge the polemically-motivated nature of the work, but also argue that apologetic aims do not suffice to explain the whole narrative.<sup>99</sup> Instead, Hock specifically suggests an encomiastic purpose as the primary reason for the creation of the narrative.<sup>100</sup> In his view, even passages that show apologetic elements seem to do so only as a secondary function.<sup>101</sup> With regard to Mary's role as a spinner for the creation of the Temple veil (*Prot. Jas.* 10:7–8), for instance, Hock argues that this detail is employed not simply to refute the claim that she spun for a living, but

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<sup>97</sup> So also Pratscher, *Herrenbruder Jakobus*, 223; van Stempvoort, "Protevangelium Jacobi," 410; Cothenet, "Protévangile de Jacques," 4268; and Allen, "'Protevangelium of James' as an 'Historia,'" 515–17; Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 49–50.

<sup>98</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium of Jacobi*, 15–17 and Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 50.

<sup>99</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 15–20 and Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 14–19.

<sup>100</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 15.

<sup>101</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 15.

also as a means to emphasize her special purity and, thus, to praise her character.<sup>102</sup> Hock examines the Greco-Roman genre of the encomium by looking specifically at teaching manuals such as Hermogenes' *Progymnasmata*; on this basis, he argues that the defining elements of the genre of the encomium are present in the *Protevangelium of James*.

Hermogenes' *Progymnasmata* is a second century teaching manual with instructions and exercises on how to write various types of compositions, which seems to reflect common Greco-Roman pedagogical practices.<sup>103</sup> The manual defines the encomium as a formal expression of high praise and an exposition of the good qualities of a person or thing and lists the term among the various kinds of compositional exercises learned and practiced by students in antiquity.<sup>104</sup> In his handbook, Hermogenes outlines the components necessary for an encomium composed for a person. His list for encomiastic topics includes: national origin, family, marvellous occurrences at birth, nurture, upbringing, pursuits, and virtuous deeds of mind and body.<sup>105</sup> In addition, the amplification of the good features of the person being praised by means of comparison is the best source for strengthening one's argument in encomia.<sup>106</sup> Hermogenes continues by

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<sup>102</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 16 and Cullmann, "Protevangelium of James," 425. In addition, Beverly Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 100–122, who describes Mary as "sacred purity," argues that because Mary's purity so dominates the story, Mary herself becomes the function of that purity rather than the purity being a characteristic of Mary. Finally, Mary Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), 141–64, in accordance with Hock, supports his claims for understanding certain details in the narrative as encomiastic in style.

<sup>103</sup> For a description and introduction to the *Progymnasmata*, see George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 52–73, esp. 63; idem *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), xiii.

<sup>104</sup> Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

<sup>105</sup> Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

<sup>106</sup> Hermogenes also gives instructions on how to discuss such topics by proposing the student look at how long the subject lived and the manner in which s/he died, finishing with an epilogue rather fitting of



distinguishing between *encomion*, *hymns*, and *epainos*: “Encomion differs from *epainos* in that *epainos* can be short; for example, ‘Socrates is wise,’ while encomion is found in a longer passage... the encomia of gods should be called ‘hymns.’”<sup>107</sup>

Hock convincingly demonstrates that the *Protevangelium of James* follows closely the instructions for writing an encomium.<sup>108</sup> For instance, the narrative’s opening lines show a concern for demonstrating Mary’s national origins by looking to her ethnicity, nationality, ancestors and parents. The references to the “twelve tribes of Israel” (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1) as well as “Israelite children” (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5) immediately identify Mary’s ethnicity/nationality. The naming of Mary’s parents as Joachim and Anna and the author’s description of their wealth and political power as well as their piety all provide important information about her parents. Obvious references to Mary’s ancestors can be detected in the author’s mention of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17), but also in the names chosen for Mary’s parents: Anna’s name recalls Samuel’s mother’s name, Hannah, in 1 Sam 1–2 and Joachim’s name recalls the story of Susanna (Sus 4).

In addition, the events surrounding Anna’s conception of Mary also fit squarely within the category of “marvellous occurrences at birth.” Much like her foremothers, Anna’s conception is not without difficulty because despite Anna’s and Joachim’s prominent standing and wealth, they suffer from infertility. So when they are given separate, individual signs that God has blessed them with a child—Anna is greeted by an angelic messenger (*Prot. Jas.* 4:1), Joachim receives confirmation via a polished disc

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a prayer. See Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83 and idem, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 205.

<sup>107</sup> Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

<sup>108</sup> Especially according to the categories outlined by Hermogenes.

(*Prot. Jas.* 5:1)—the circumstances of this pregnancy move from the realm of the ordinary to extraordinary.

Mary's upbringing also receives special focus in the narrative as it relates specifically to the basis of her praise: Mary's purity. From the moment Mary is born, Anna makes special arrangements to ensure her daughter's purity is maintained (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9), which is only heightened during her childhood by monitoring not only Mary's physical environment, but also her actions and interactions with other people (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9–6:5). Thus, Mary's special upbringing results in extraordinary feats: Mary not only stands at six months, but also walks (*Prot. Jas.* 6:1–2). This exceptional upbringing is further enhanced when Mary takes up her home in the Temple of the Lord, is given access to the Holy of Holies, and is even fed by the hands of heavenly angels (*Prot. Jas.* 7:6–7; 7:9; 8:2). Mary lives, eats, and plays only among the pure.

Finally, the last two important conventions for an encomium concern the subject's virtuous deeds<sup>109</sup> and the use of comparisons to further enhance the character of the one being praised.<sup>110</sup> Mary's virtuous deeds are demonstrated in what Hock describes as her “σωφροσύνη” or “self-control,” especially in the context of her sexual purity,<sup>111</sup> which is consistently maintained despite the disbelief and questioning of others (e.g., Joseph, priests, and people of Israel; *Prot. Jas.* 13:6–8; 15:12; 20:1). Also, the coupling of Elizabeth and Zechariah functions as a positive comparison for Mary and Joseph. In Luke's narrative, many modern scholars have noted a step parallelism between Jesus and

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<sup>109</sup> Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

<sup>110</sup> Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 81–83.

<sup>111</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 19.

John, whereby the outcome reveals that Jesus is understood as being superior to John.<sup>112</sup>

In the *Protevangelium of James*, a similar parallelism is evident, involving more than one additional character to further highlight Mary's virtuous qualities. For instance, Zechariah's bravery to keep secret the whereabouts of his son in the face of Herod's threats and his ultimate martyrdom (*Prot. Jas.* 23:1–3) and Elizabeth's courage to escape to the mountains with her son John (*Prot. Jas.* 22:5) serve to enhance Mary's courage and bravery when she is forced to protect her son from the dangers of Herod's wrath (*Prot. Jas.* 22:3–4).

One difficulty that arises with understanding the *Protevangelium of James* as an encomium is the author's self-proclamation of the work as a *historia* or history (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1; 25:1; 25:3). In reaction to the author's claim, Hock suggests that the work is not an encomium as envisioned in the *Progymnasmata*, but rather a *historia* of a specific kind, namely, a διήγημα ἱστορικόν or "historical narrative."<sup>113</sup> Hock further suggests that during the development of the genre, historical narratives evolved in a way that encouraged and allowed for an encomiastic point of view. In his view, this development occurred precisely during the time period when the *Protevangelium of James* was being written and may have influenced the structure and purpose of the work.<sup>114</sup> In other words, though the author uses the term *historia* to describe the work, his literary practice is

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<sup>112</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 282–85 and Joseph E. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (AB 28; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 372–90 for a discussion on this "step parallelism" between Jesus and John the Baptist.

<sup>113</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 17.

<sup>114</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 17.

shaped by the genre and aims of the encomium, as they are described in rhetorical handbooks; thus, his writing does not make the conventions of an encomium irrelevant.<sup>115</sup>

In my estimation, Hock makes a strong case that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* adopted elements of the literary genre of the encomium,<sup>116</sup> shedding further light on the purpose of the text and drawing our attention to its efforts to provide praise for Mary. Arguably the *Protevangelium of James*' other aims—such as the impulse to expand on gospel traditions about Mary's life and the desire to answer anti-Christian polemics—may be best understood in relation to the overarching purpose of praising Mary.

Although Hock examines how the *Protevangelium of James* closely follows the instructions of writing an encomium, his survey does not examine the theme of Mary's purity beyond the observation that the text makes great efforts to elevate this characteristic and to maintain her virginity in the face of disbelief and adversity.<sup>117</sup> Building on Hock's work, I intend to explore how the *Protevangelium of James*' depiction of Mary and her purity further confirm Hock's suggestion that the text praises Mary using literary forms and models that its earliest readers might have recognized from other encomiums.

## 1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have limited our survey of past scholarship to the date, provenance, and genre of the *Protevangelium of James* as well as its relation to Judaism.

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<sup>115</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 17.

<sup>116</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 41.

<sup>117</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 18–19.

As for its possible date, although a broad range of dates have been suggested from the mid-second century to as late as the fifth century, the general consensus is that it is probably a product of the late second or early third century.<sup>118</sup> In respect to the narrative's provenance, three general areas have been proposed, based mainly on geographical details extracted from the text: Interior Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria.<sup>119</sup> Interconnected with the debate regarding its provenance is scholarly interest in the *Protevangelium of James*' connection to Judaism. As we have seen, arguments have been advanced both for and against Jewish influence and knowledge. We have also explored the text's literary genre, focusing on Hock's suggestion that it may stand in a close relationship to the Greco-Roman genre of the encomium.

In what follows, I hope to expand and contribute to the discussion concerning the text's provenance and relationship to Judaism and give credibility to a late second or early third century date, specifically by using a literary approach to examine the theme of purity. By focusing on the characterization of Mary in particular, we discover that purity functions on multiple and varying levels and is presented in several different forms throughout the narrative: ritual, menstrual, and sexual, but also possibly moral and genealogical as well. In my view, the *Protevangelium of James*' interest in purity is prominent enough throughout the text that analysis of this feature may help us to situate the text—geographically, temporally, and in relationship to Judaism.

Thus I frame my discourse on ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity in conversation with other Jewish and Christian ideas on each type of purity discussed. Accordingly, each

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<sup>118</sup> See n. 2 above for a list of scholars who have accepted this approximate date.

<sup>119</sup> See section on provenance above.

purity chapter that follows (2–4) provides a description and a general survey of various views held on the respective types of purity. I position our text’s views on the “purity map” throughout each chapter by pointing to where our text and other writings share similar features and views. Our text’s interest in menstrual purity, in particular, may recall similar concerns prominent in Syrian Christian writings like the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, as does the text’s emphasis on Mary’s *virginitas in partu* call to mind the Syrian writings of Ode 19 of the *Odes of Solomon*, *Ascension of Isaiah* and Ignatius of Antioch’s *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.1. Additionally, the text’s positive portrayal of Mary’s sexual purity, but also dual status as Ever-Virgin Mother, may very well draw on the religious trends in Syria such as the influence of Marcionism, Docetism, and the heated debates on ideas such as an “Ascetic versus married life.” As such, my focused discussion on the theme of purity as presented to us through the characterization of Mary as pure may lend further credence to the suggestion of its Syrian provenance by Smid, Cameron, Elliott, and others. We now turn our focus to the theme of purity.

## **Chapter Two: Mary, the Temple, and Ritual Purity in the *Protevangelium of James***

### **2.1 Aims of the Chapter**

In this chapter we now turn to the theme of ritual purity, since this type of purity dominates the first half of the narrative. In what follows, I hope to provide a general “purity map” of the various views held on ritual purity in order to help us pinpoint the *Protevangelium of James*’ views on the topic and enhance our interpretation of Mary as a character in the text. In addition, such a map will highlight the text’s relationship to Judaism and help clarify the aims of the text.<sup>1</sup> Following a general survey of biblical, Qumranic, rabbinic, and other early Jewish and Christian ideas concerning ritual purity, this chapter will then consider the text itself to explore the nature and purpose of ritual purity within our narrative, noting when applicable, where the *Protevangelium of James* fits in the overall picture that emerges.

### **2.2 What is Ritual Purity/Impurity?**

In order to examine the narrative’s presentation of Mary as ritually pure and to show that ritual purity is indeed a dominant theme in our narrative, we must be clear about what we mean by ritual purity and conversely, ritual impurity. A general description of ritual purity/impurity as articulated in the Hebrew Bible provides a

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<sup>1</sup> Since material on this topic is vast, my intention is not to provide a thorough discussion on the entire history of the study of ritual impurity in ancient Judaism, but rather to provide a general description of various views held on the subject to help situate the *Protevangelium of James*’ ideas on purity on the “purity map.” Thus I will not analyze every text or source that focuses on ritual impurity, nor discuss in detail the significant research and all the contributions to this important topic. For a survey on the history of contemporary scholarship on ritual impurity, see n. 2–7 below and Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4–20 and Susan Haber, “*They Shall Purify Themselves*”: *Essays on Purity in Early Judaism* (ed. Adele Reinhartz; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 9–71.

convenient starting point since this text forms the foundation of all ancient Jewish literature and remains the basis for understanding and interpreting other sources such as Philo, the proto-sectarian and sectarian writings from Qumran, tannaitic documents (early rabbinic sages), and the New Testament writings. Since this analysis of the *Protevangelium of James* focuses heavily on identifying precisely when Mary is in a state of ritual purity or impurity and describing the proper practice of sacrifice, two aspects of ritual purity/impurity in particular merit attention: [1] how it is often contrasted with moral purity/impurity and described in terms of its relationship to sin, or lack thereof; and [2] how it is closely related to sacrifice and accessing the sacred (e.g., the temple).

### 2.2.1 Ritual Purity/Impurity in the Hebrew Bible

What is ritual impurity? A number of important critical contributions increase our understanding of the systems of defilement in the Hebrew Bible. Among the most foundational are the works of David Hoffmann,<sup>2</sup> Adolph Büchler,<sup>3</sup> Mary Douglas,<sup>4</sup> Jacob

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<sup>2</sup> David Hoffmann, *Sefer va-Yikra Meforash* (trans. Z. Har Shefer and A. Liberman; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1952, 1953); trans. of *Das Buch Leviticus* (2 vols.: Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1913, 1922). Hoffmann is credited as the first modern scholar to clearly identify two kinds of defilement: [1] bodily defilement that stands in opposition to purity; [2] defilement that stands in opposition to holiness.

<sup>3</sup> Adolph Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928; repr., New York: Ktav, 1967). Building on the work of Hoffmann, Büchler distinguishes between a “levitical” defilement that arises from ritual activity and a “religious” defilement, which arises from sin.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge Classics, 1966; repr., London: Routledge Classics, 2002). As one of the most influential studies on pollution and social structure, Douglas’ anthropological work on impurity is credited for laying down the theoretical foundation for all important scholarly discussion and works on ritual impurity in the Hebrew Bible. For the purposes of this study, Douglas’ most important contribution is her systematization of cultural impurity practices. For Douglas, “where there is dirt, there is a system” and in this system of ordering and classifying matter, “dirt is simply ‘matter out of place.’” See also Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 1999) for further discussion on Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* study.



Neusner,<sup>5</sup> Jacob Milgrom,<sup>6</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky,<sup>7</sup> David P. Wright,<sup>8</sup> and Jonathan Klawans.<sup>9</sup> Since Klawans' interpretation of the Israelite impurity system is clear and concise, builds heavily on the aforementioned scholars, and focuses on the relationship between ritual and moral purity as well as the temple (key concerns in our text), the description of ritual impurity provided below will be informed by his study. In the Hebrew Bible, ritual impurity is classified as defilements arising from direct or indirect contact with natural sources such as childbirth (Lev 12:1–8), scale disease (Lev 13:1–14:32), genital discharges (Lev 15:1–33), the carcasses of certain impure animals (Lev 11:1–47), and human corpses (Num 19:10–22). Klawans argues that these impurities share three general characteristics: [1] they are natural, unavoidable, and even desirable

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1973). Neusner argues for two ideas about purity and impurity in ancient Israel. First, purity and impurity are related to the cult; those who are pure may participate in the cult whereby those who are impure may not. For the most part, cultic impurity concerns itself with purity laws in order to identify when one is in a state of purity or impurity, and how to move back from a state of impurity to purity. Second, purity and impurity are metaphors for moral and religious behaviour.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3, 3A, 3B; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001). Milgrom's massive three volume commentary on Leviticus provides important analysis and discussion of various details pertaining to the purity laws. Important to our study is Milgrom's discussion of the boundaries between purity/impurity and sacred/common.

<sup>7</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol L Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399–410. In Frymer-Kensky's interpretation of the Israelite impurity system, two categories are offered: "contagious pollutions" and "danger beliefs." For Frymer-Kensky, "contagious pollutions" can be major or minor depending on how long the defilement lasts. Conversely, "danger beliefs" carry the threat of divine punishment and condemnation.

<sup>8</sup> David P. Wright, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity," in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 150–81 and idem, "Two Types of Impurity in the Priestly Writing of the Bible," *Koroth* 9 (1988): 180–93; idem, "Unclean and Clean (OT)," *ABD* 6:729–41. Wright provides an alternative system for understating impurity in the Hebrew Bible. Unlike Büchler, Milgrom, or Frymer-Kensky, Wright's divisions of the purity laws are not as sharply marked and rather are presented more as a spectrum of categories. In his *Koroth* and *Anchor Bible Dictionary* contributions, Wright uses the terms "permitted" and "prohibited" to categorize the impurities, but in a later related article, "The Spectrum," Wright uses instead the term "tolerated" instead of "permitted" for one of his categories.

<sup>9</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*; and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See discussion in the body above.

since they reflect the conditions related to life (e.g., childbirth); [2] they are neither prohibited nor sinful;<sup>10</sup> and [3] they are impermanent contagions that can be reversed by ritual acts of purification (e.g., bathing, sacrifice, etc).<sup>11</sup> To be clear, generally speaking, ritual impurity in the Hebrew Bible does not result from sin and to be ritually impure is not sinful. Given that the *Protevangelium of James* describes the events surrounding Mary's birth, childhood, and adolescent years, concern for ritual impurity becomes especially relevant for our text since it uses in particular the impurities that arise from these experiences in Mary's life as plot points throughout the narrative.

Significantly, our text displays no real concern for moral impurity.<sup>12</sup> Like scholars before him,<sup>13</sup> Klawans notes that ritual impurity is often discussed in contrast with moral impurity and in relationship to sin. Moral impurity arises from immoral acts such as sexual sins (e.g., Lev 18:24–30), idolatry (e.g., Lev 19:31; 20:1–3), and bloodshed (e.g., Num 35:33–34).<sup>14</sup> In opposition to ritual impurity, moral impurity is [1] a direct result of grave sin; [2] avoidable, and is not contagious—one need not bathe if contact with an idolater or murderer is made; [3] long lasting and sometimes permanently defiles the sinner and even the land of Israel; and [4] not reversible through acts of ritual purification, but rather can be ameliorated by punishment, atonement, and avoidance of

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<sup>10</sup> There are two ways of ritual impurity that may lead to sin. The first way is to refuse to purify oneself after contracting corpse impurity. The second way is to enter the sancta or to have contact with the sacred in a state of ritual impurity. For why these two specific cases are exceptions, see my discussion in Chapter Three.

<sup>11</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–26 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56, which is almost identical to his earlier work.

<sup>12</sup> In Chapter Four on Sexual Purity, there are hints of a concern for Mary's moral purity, but it is directly linked to her sexual status as a virgin and whether or not she has remained one despite being married to Joseph. For more on this topic, refer to Chapter Four.

<sup>13</sup> See n. 2–7 above and *Impurity and Sin*, 21–26 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56.

<sup>14</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26–27 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56.

sinful acts.<sup>15</sup> Moral impurity is a result of sin, hence considered a significantly more severe kind of impurity. The distinction between ritual and moral impurity is especially important for our reading of the *Protevangelium of James* since the narrative expresses little concern for Mary's moral purity.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Mary's impurity is presented as a type that is relatively minor and unavoidable.

But why is being in a state of ritual purity important? In Leviticus, ritual purity is undeniably linked to sacrifice. Namely, being in a state of ritual purity allows one to enter the sanctuary to offer sacrifices, to access the divine, and *imitatio Dei*, thus becoming closer to God. For ancient Israel then, the requirement of ritual purity applied to three parties: those who offer the sacrifice (i.e., the Israelite); those who perform the sacrifice (i.e., the priests); and the sacrifice itself (i.e., the sacrificed animal), since all three parties access the sacred. Ritual impurity, by contrast, involves being in a state that prevents one from entering the sanctuary and from accessing the sacred.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, a return from ritual impurity to purity involves acts of purification that are closely connected to sacrifice and by extension the role of the Temple, the priests, and its cult.<sup>18</sup> As we will see, the theme of sacrifice, the temple and its cult as well as accessing the sacred from the perspective of offering, performing the offering, and being the offering, play an important role in the *Protevangelium of James*' presentation of Mary's purity.

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<sup>15</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 26–31 and idem, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 53–56.

<sup>16</sup> See n. 12 above.

<sup>17</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 58.

<sup>18</sup> On sacrifice and purity in Biblical Israel, see Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 3–49.

### 2.2.2 Ritual Purity/Impurity in other Ancient Jewish Literature

Is ritual purity/impurity in terms of its relationship to moral purity/impurity and sacrifice as outlined in other ancient Jewish literature expressed in the same way as it is in the Hebrew Bible? The idea that ritual purity is a prerequisite for sacrifice and access to the sacred is argued by Klawans to be reflected in “virtually every ancient Jewish literary treatment of cultic themes in ancient Jewish literature, from the Hebrew Bible through rabbinic literature....”<sup>19</sup> Since purity is inextricably linked to holiness, and access to God and his sacred things demand that one must be ritually pure, the crucial requirement of ritual purity continues as a consistent idea in other ancient Jewish literature.

One element that distinguishes other ancient Jewish writings’ ideas of purity from the Hebrew Bible, however, can be found in the relationship between ritual and moral purity. Although the Hebrew Bible makes a distinction between ritual and moral purity, it also juxtaposes ritual and moral impurity discussions without providing a clear explanation of their connection. Not surprisingly, this ambiguity resulted in questions concerning the connection between ritual purity, moral purity, and the defiling force of sin, for which various Jewish groups offered different answers.

#### 2.2.2.1 Philo

In accordance with Scripture, Philo, for instance, also understood ritual impurity to be natural, often unavoidable, and not sinful. Although Philo recognizes ritual purity to be the physical analogue of moral impurity (i.e., physical impurities that affect

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<sup>19</sup> Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 4.

the body serve as symbolic reminders of the moral sins that affect the soul), he was also clear about the distinction between the two—ritual impurity is resolved by ritual purification and moral impurity is resolved by sacrificial acts of atonement.<sup>20</sup> In terms of the relationship between ritual purity and sacrifice, Philo is clear that purity was necessary to make sacrifices, enter the sanctuary, and access God (*Spec.* 1.256–261).

### 2.2.2.2 The Scrolls

In the writings at Qumran, differing views held about the relationship between ritual and moral impurity have been distinguished among the collection.<sup>21</sup> For instance, whereas the proto-sectarian Temple Scroll's and 4QMMT's understanding of ritual impurity (as not the result of sin) reflect those found in Scripture,<sup>22</sup> the sectarian writings of 1QS, 1QM, and 1QH articulate the relationship between ritual and moral impurity as a single conception of defilement, having both ritual and moral implications. This combining of ritual and moral ideas of impurity stands in sharp contrast to the Hebrew

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<sup>20</sup> Philo, *Spec.* 1.256–61; for a discussion on this passage, see Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 64–65.

<sup>21</sup> In her study of the purity laws found at Qumran, Hannah Harrington argues that although there are a variety of views held on the issue of ritual purity in the texts, a common theme still connects the writings together, namely, “a stringent standard of ritual purity”; Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 45. Contra Harrington, Ian Werrett suggests that a clearer understanding of the purity laws at Qumran can be better attained if each document were looked at in isolation since he argues that the documents reveal “nearly as much explicit disagreement as they do agreement”; Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3. Since space does not allow for a full discussion of every Qumran document that deals with ritual purity, discussion of specific documents will be limited to those that may help shed light on ritual purity issues found in our text.

<sup>22</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 48–52, 72–75. As with the other documents connected to Qumran, each text displays a variety of ideas concerning ritual purity—some reflect biblical laws, but others do not. In the example above, the Temple Scroll and 4QMMT ideas concerning ritual purity's relationship to sin seem to reflect Torah, but other ideas concerning ritual purity are completely innovative and reflect beliefs found in other sectarian writings at Qumran such as the stringency of the ritual purity laws. For instance, in the Temple Scroll, new prohibitions are added, old ones are strengthened, purification rituals are intensified, and the locus of sanctity is expanded to include not only the temple, but also the entire city. See also Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 111 and 169–79; 182 and 203–9.

Bible where ritual and moral impurity are distinct.<sup>23</sup> For many sectarian writings of Qumran, sin was ritually defiling and required purification and those who became ritually impure required not only purification, but atonement as well, thus providing evidence of an amalgamation of the two purity systems outlined in Leviticus. In other words, for some Qumran sectarian documents, ritual impurity could be seen as somewhat avoidable (if extremely stringent purity laws were enforced) and linked with sin.<sup>24</sup>

Generally, given that the purity rules found at Qumran are somewhat stricter than the biblical and rabbinic purity laws (even for those documents that did not combine notions of ritual and moral impurity),<sup>25</sup> access to the sanctuary and to the sacred may have been more difficult.<sup>26</sup> This alternate view of purity, however, did not change the fact that purity requirements were needed to access the divine, but rather that different and more difficult purity rules were required. For instance, whereas biblical legislation forbids a man who has a seminal emission from the temple for only one day (Lev 15:16; Deut. 23:10–11), 11QT 45.7–10 states that he is barred from the temple and remains in a state of impurity for three days. These purity rules associated with access to the Temple and the practice of sacrifices will prove particularly helpful in our plotting of the *Protevangelium of James*' views of purity given that the temple, its priests, and the

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<sup>23</sup> Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 13; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 67–91.

<sup>24</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 79–91.

<sup>25</sup> See below and especially the beginning section of Chapter Three.

<sup>26</sup> This stricter view held by Qumranic literature is evident not only in asserting the longer periods of defilement for impurities already discussed in the biblical purity laws, but also in the inclusion of new sources of defilement. 11QT 45.12–14, for instance, seems to consider the blind to be ritually impure and prevent their access to the Temple. Citing 4QMMT B 49–54, Klawans notes, however, that it is possible to interpret the ban of the blind from the temple based not on the fact that they were ritually impure, but because they could accidentally defile the temple precinct; *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 73, 189 n. 32.

offering of sacrifices are frequently described and provide important hints about the kinds of purity rules practiced in our narrative.

### 2.2.2.3 Rabbinic Literature

For the early rabbis, although there are some significant differences between the ritual impurity legislation found in the Pentateuch and the tannaim, the general consensus is that by and large, the sources for ritual impurity in tannaitic law are the same as in the Pentateuch. Namely, like the Hebrew Bible, the tannaitic sources see ritual impurity as natural and unavoidable, generally not sinful, and as an impermanent contagion.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, ritual impurities in tannaitic sources are, much like biblical laws, not only unavoidable, but obligatory and desirable. Priestly performance of cultic rituals, for instance, necessarily caused ritual impurity for the priest, but was no less required of them by the Mishnah than they were in the Pentateuch (e.g., *m. Kel* 1.1; *m. Parah* 4.4).

Clearly, the mishnaic purity system is strongly based on Scripture, but there are discernable differences between the two systems. Two are noteworthy. First, tannaitic sources uniquely made great efforts to keep discussions dealing with sin and atonement separate from discussions about defilement and purification in order to be clear that sin and defilement are concerns separate from ritual impurity. In other words, not only do tannaitic sources maintain a distinction between ritual and moral impurity, but they also compartmentalize them, drawing boundaries specifically between ritual impurity and

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<sup>27</sup> See esp. Jacob Neusner who argues that the mishnaic purity system is based heavily on Scripture, but with equally as many innovations to and interpretations of the biblical system; *A History of Mishnaic Law of Purities* (22 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974–1977); vol. 3, 383; vol. 8, 221; vol. 16, 194; and vol. 18, 176 on the influence of Scripture; vol. 5, 230, 251–52; vol. 13 250–51; vol. 10, 207; and vol. 14, 195–97, 202–5 on mishnaic innovation to purity laws.

sin.<sup>28</sup> Since purity rules are important for accessing the sacred, the result has been that the purity laws offered by rabbinic literature tend to be less strict than, for instance, the purity laws outlined in documents associated with Qumran and even biblical law in terms of accessing the sacred. For instance, *m. Kel* 1.5 allows a man who has immersed to enter parts of the temple, even if that person’s state of ritual impurity technically lasts until sundown (cf. one day according to Lev 15:16; Deut 23:10–11; three days according 11QT 45.7–10). Second, as Jacob Neusner has noted, since the rabbis’ system of purity shifted from being temple-centered to table-centered,<sup>29</sup> rabbinic purity laws eventually became reinterpreted and applied to other sacred activities such as prayer and torah study.

#### 2.2.2.4 NT Gospels and Pauline Corpus

The idea of ritual purity and its relationship to moral impurity in the NT gospels and Pauline Corpus is also not straightforward and seems to reflect a position somewhere between Qumran sectarians and tannaitic views of ritual impurity. For instance, according to Mark, John the Baptist’s view of baptism as a means of removing moral defilement (literally “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” Mark 1:4) seems to suggest that moral impurity and ritual impurity were combined in some way since his practice of baptism can be seen as a “ritual of atonement.”<sup>30</sup> And yet at the same time, John did not

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<sup>28</sup> Klawans suggests that this compartmentalization is best illustrated in the structure, language, and content of the Mishnah itself since not a single tractate is devoted to the defiling force of sin nor is it discussed in any literature that involves ritual impurity, which is significant given that more than one-sixth of the mishnah is devoted to issues of ritual impurity; *Impurity and Sin*, 94–99.

<sup>29</sup> Neusner, *History of Mishnaic Law of Purities*, vols. 22, 99.

<sup>30</sup> On John’s baptism as a “ritual of atonement,” see G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 32–34 and John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 53–55.



fully merge the two and viewed sin as a source of ritual defilement.<sup>31</sup> Jesus' ideas on ritual impurity too seem to reflect a middle ground between the ideas held by Qumran sectarians and the tannaim since Jesus did not completely separate ritual impurity and sin, but neither did he merge the two concepts together. Klawans suggests in his interpretation of Mark 7:15 that Jesus prioritized moral purity over ritual purity.<sup>32</sup> Following John and Jesus, Paul seems to have viewed baptism as a ritual of atonement that could be an effective purification process for moral defilement, but he was also clear that the requirements for ritual purity laws differed for Jewish Christ-believers and Gentile Christ-believers (e.g., Acts 15, 21; 1 Cor 7).

This brief summary of the variety of views, biblical and otherwise, regarding ritual impurity paves the way for an examination of the *Protevangelium of James'* position on this central theme as the narrative unfolds and Mary's character emerges. The following analysis also enables us to position the text on the "purity map" in order to clarify the relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* and other religious texts of its time.

### 2.3 The View of Ritual Purity in the *Protevangelium of James*

Literary analysis allows an exploration of how the essential theme of ritual purity operates in the *Protevangelium of James* to depict Mary and inform the text as a whole. From the very beginning of the narrative, the stage is set for the author's presentation of

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<sup>31</sup> As evident by the fact that, unlike the Qumran sectarians, John and his followers did not separate themselves from outsiders nor did they have to purify themselves after making contact with sinners. On this argument, see Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 141.

<sup>32</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 143–50.

Mary as the “Virgin of the Lord” (τὴν παρθένον κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7). In order to investigate the significance of this initial as well as subsequent portrayals of Mary, I analyze how the language of purity is used and consider how questions about how Mary’s purity functions in the narrative, focusing on an examination of key words related to sacrifice and purity in the *Protevangelium of James* (e.g., ἀκάθαρτος, ἀμίαντος, καθαρός, κοινός, μιáνω, παρθένος, etc); parallels from the LXX will here prove particularly central.<sup>33</sup> This chapter will also discuss the ways in which the theme of ritual purity is communicated narratively, through the depiction of Mary’s and her parents’ relationship to the Temple and its priests, and metaphorically, through the use of terms related to sacrifice to describe her.

The overarching interest in ritual purity in the *Protevangelium of James* unfolds in two stages: [1] the events surrounding Anna’s conception of Mary, as described in *Prot. Jas.* 1:1–5:8, and [2] the events surrounding the birth and infancy of Mary, as described in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9–8:2. Accordingly, this chapter falls into two parts, the first analyzing the importance of the Temple and ritual purity in the description of Mary’s parents and the second analyzing how ritual purity and the Temple function in the description of Mary’s early life and how Mary herself is described in language that recalls Temple sacrifice.

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<sup>33</sup> See earlier discussion of the influence of the LXX on *Protevangelium of James* in Chapter One, esp. the section on the *Protevangelium of James* and Judaism.

### 2.3.1 Ritual Purity Expressed Through an Overarching Interest in the Temple and its Sacrificial Cult: Anna's Miraculous Conception of Mary

In the first eight chapters of the *Protevangelium of James*, the author provides information about Mary's parentage, conception, and birth. From the outset, we notice an interest in the Temple and Jewish sacrificial system; by referencing proper sacrificial practice and ritual purity, for instance, the *Protevangelium of James* establishes that Mary's parents are righteous and pious Jews. They are faithful in participating in the Temple cult and sacrifices according to what are presented, in the *Protevangelium of James*, as the Jewish laws and customs of their time.<sup>34</sup>

In the very first line (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1), the third-person narrator provides a striking depiction of Joachim as a wealthy and devout man, who follows the precepts of purification and atonement through Temple sacrifice even beyond what the law entails: in *Prot. Jas.* 1:1–3, Joachim is said to have given twice as many offerings (δῶρον) as were required,<sup>35</sup> some to atone for himself and the rest to atone for the sins of Israel. Just as Job is described, in the beginning of the biblical Book of Job, as giving extra offerings in case of any unintentional sins by himself or his family (Job 1:5), so too does Joachim guard against the possibility that any of his sins have gone un-atoned or any impurity un-cleansed. Indeed, Joachim's striking act of sacrificial generosity trumps even Job's

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<sup>34</sup> As my approach in this chapter is literary, oriented towards the narrative and its aims, my interest and questions concerning Judaism will be geared towards how Judaism is represented through the literary characterization of certain key figures. Inevitably, however, since historical inquiries concerning Jewish traditions, culture, and practices are bound to arise, they will also be considered so long as they offer important insights into our discussion.

<sup>35</sup> Likewise, 1 Samuel describes Hannah's husband Elkannah as going up regularly to worship and sacrifice to YHWH Sabaoth at Shiloh and as offering double portions for his wife Hannah (1 Sam 1:3–5).

righteous acts; whereas Job performs sacrifices for himself and his family, Joachim is also concerned to atone for the sins of the nation as a whole.

Although the reader is thus alerted to Joachim’s piety, the other characters in the narrative question it, given that he is childless. Indeed, the second fact that the reader learns about Mary’s parents is that they have not been able to conceive (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5). The narrative conveys this information by means of a statement attributed to Reubel; when Joachim comes to offer sacrifices on the “great day of the Lord,” Reubel tells him that he cannot offer sacrifices first, since he has “begotten no children in Israel” (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5). When Reubel reproaches Joachim, Joachim seeks the “record of the twelve tribes of Israel” (ἱστορίαῖς δώδεκα φυλῶν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ) for evidence of righteous Jews who have borne no children (*Prot. Jas.* 1:6–7); finding none, he assumes that his suffering is the result of his sins (*Prot. Jas.* 1:9).

Within the narrative world of the *Protevangelium of James*, everyone assumes—beginning with Reubel and Joachim—that childbirth is inextricably connected to righteousness, and that marriage and parenthood are positive and pious. But since at the outset the author establishes Joachim’s righteousness, the reader immediately recognizes that Reubel and Joachim have misread the situation: Joachim is not childless because he is unrighteous, but rather he is childless among the righteous. The reader is pointedly reminded of the biblical trope of the righteous but childless man by an explicit reference to Abraham. After Joachim searches through the “record of the twelve tribes of Israel,” he remembers “the patriarch Abraham that in his last days the Lord God gave him a son, Isaac” (καὶ ἐμνήσθη τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἀβραάμ, ὅτι ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ αὐτοῦ ἡμέρᾳ

ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς υἱὸν τὸν Ἰσαάκ; *Prot. Jas.* 1:8; cf. Gen 18:1–2). The reference to Abraham serves both to confirm that Reubel has misunderstood the meaning of Joachim’s childlessness and to emphasize the extreme righteousness of Joachim. Moreover, Joachim’s reference to Abraham suggests to the reader that he might still be able to have children with the help and power of God. Joachim’s reference to Abraham significantly serves to trigger the anticipation of the birth of a special and chosen child (cf. Gen 16:2; 20:18), and by extension, draw on the pattern of other biblical tales of barren women who ended up giving birth to special (male) children.<sup>36</sup>

Joachim then decides, however, to banish himself into the wilderness. The author offers two reasons: his extreme sadness and his desire to fast and pray to God (*Prot. Jas.* 1:9); in effect, fasting, petition, and prayer serve as ways for him to test his own righteousness. The references to prayer and fasting also function, from a literary perspective, to reinforce his characterization as a pious Jew. Significantly, Joachim is described as withdrawing in sorrow for “forty days and forty nights” (*Prot. Jas.* 1:10), which recalls a number of important scenes in Biblical history; the purpose of the stretch of time is to evoke the symbolic struggles and testing of an important figure, but also the

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<sup>36</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, seven women are said to be afflicted with infertility and later blessed with children by God’s will: Sarah (Gen 16–20), Rebecca (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:1), Samson’s mother (Judges 13), Hannah (1 Sam 1), and Michal (2 Sam 6:23). In the NT Gospels, the same is said of Elizabeth (Luke 1). Anna’s barrenness recalls these matriarchal figures—and especially Sarah (to whom the narrative explicitly references in *Prot. Jas.* 2:9) and Hannah (who bears the Hebrew version of Anna’s name). By modeling Anna’s situation after these tales, the *Protevangelium of James* seems to signal to the reader to anticipate another miraculous birth. See Paul Foster, “The Protevangelium of James,” *ExpTim* 118.12 (2007): 573–82, esp. 576, for further discussion on the parallels between Anna and other barren women in the Hebrew Bible; idem, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 113–16. Noteworthy is the fact that all of these miraculous children are male, which only heightens the importance of Anna’s conception of Mary: a female child from a miraculous birth, who will play an even more significant role than any male figure before her.

preparation time needed for the chosen person to do works sanctioned by God.<sup>37</sup> In particular, by fasting for this period in the wilderness, Joachim seems to pre-enact Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness, whereby he fasted and was tested by Satan (e.g., Matt 4:2).<sup>38</sup> The deliberate linguistic echoes of fasting symbolize and strongly suggest that Joachim too will be tested and shown to be unwavering; Joachim will not jeopardize his faithfulness and loyalty to God even for what he desires most.

At the same time, Joachim's sojourn in the wilderness is depicted as a symbolic death, given that Anna's response to her husband's mysterious absence is to act as if he has died and put on mourning clothes (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1; 2:7). In fact, Anna's reaction and her laments over her widowhood and childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1)<sup>39</sup> form our introduction to her, confirming at the outset, as with Joachim, her righteousness.

Given the dramatic irony established by the text's omniscient, third-person narrative voice, readers simultaneously anticipate the revelation of the truth and observe crucial evidence of Anna's righteousness as she reacts to the false information. Namely,

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<sup>37</sup> E.g., the period of 40 days and 40 nights recalls the story of Noah and the flood (Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6). After the covenant is sealed at Mt. Sinai, Moses is with God on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights (Exod 24:18). When the prophet Elijah is being pursued by Queen Jezebel, he flees for his life and travels 40 days and 40 nights until he comes to the mountain of God at Horeb (Sinai) (1 Kgs 19:8). The scene in Matt 4:2 that describes Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness for 40 days and nights reflects most potently the symbolic connection between the testing Joachim must endure while in the wilderness himself for the same length of time. Finally, Jesus' ascension to heaven occurs 40 days after the Resurrection (Acts 1:3).

<sup>38</sup> The linguistic parallel between Joachim's and Jesus' fasting further supports the theory that the text intends to invoke Jesus' stay in the wilderness when describing Joachim's self-banishment scene. *Prot. Jas.* 1:10: καὶ ἐνήστευσεν τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας τεσσαράκοντα cf. Matt 4:2: καὶ νηστεύσας ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσαράκοντα, ὕστερον ἐπέινασεν.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the reference to "widowhood and childlessness" in *Prot. Jas.* 2:1 (χρηροσύνη καὶ ἀτεκνία) is paralleled in LXX Isa 47:9 ("but now these two things shall come upon you in a moment in one day, the loss of children and widowhood shall come in a moment upon you"; Νῦν δὲ ἤξει ἐπὶ σέ τὰ δύο ταῦτα ἐξαίφνης ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ, ἀτεκνία καὶ χηρεία ἤξει ἐξαίφνης ἐπὶ σέ). In Isaiah, the phrase occurs as part of a description of the punishment God will lay on Babylon for its mistreatment of Israel and serves to convey an image of utter hopelessness. The *Protevangelium of James* may similarly seek to evoke hopelessness when depicting Anna's situation.

the narrator is able to depict Anna as a pious wife who, upon thinking that her husband has died, acts accordingly. Likewise, the author implies that she too, like Joachim, has misread her childlessness as an occasion for mourning rather than the portent of a miraculous birth.

Symbolically, the author demonstrates Anna’s righteousness by creating meaning through the gap between what the reader knows and what the characters know.<sup>40</sup> Upon seeing her mistress weep and lament over the loss of her husband and over the state of her childlessness, Anna’s maidservant Euthine reminds her that the great day of the Lord is not a time to mourn and offers her a headband (κεφαλοδέσμιον), which Euthine herself cannot wear because, as she reports, she is a “slave and it has a mark of royalty” (*Prot. Jas.* 2:4). The precise meaning of the term κεφαλοδέσμιον is obscure. From the narrative, however, it is clear that the object may carry some form of sin or involves some form of trickery or curse. The headband’s symbolic nature, however, clearly propels the narrative when Anna immediately rejects it (lit. Away from me!) (Ἀπόστηθι ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ; *Prot. Jas.* 2:5) and accuses Euthine of attempting “to make [her] share in [her] sin” (καὶ ἦλθες κοινωνῆσαί με τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ σου; *Prot. Jas.* 2:5). Anna’s strong reaction to the headband connects her with Joachim’s brand of righteousness in that she, too, will not accept any help to alleviate her barren state in any manner that might not be in accordance with God’s will.

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<sup>40</sup> For a discussion and an analysis of the use of gaps between first-person direct speech and third-person narrative statements to create meaning in the Hebrew Bible, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 186–229; 264–320.

Regardless of the precise nature of the headband, what is made abundantly clear is that Anna will not accept anything about which she is not certain. This characteristic speaks to her faith in God: Anna desperately wants to conceive a child, but she will not seek to do so at the risk of any possible sins against God or any possible association with any demon.<sup>41</sup>

Euthine's subsequent reproach of Anna parallels and recalls Reubel's earlier reproach of Joachim.<sup>42</sup> Euthine links Anna's barrenness to divine disfavour: "The Lord God has shut up your womb to give you no fruit in Israel" (ἀπέκλεισεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὴν μήτραν σου, τοῦ μὴ δοῦναί σοι καρπὸν ἐν Ἰσραήλ; *Prot. Jas.* 2:6). Ironically, while Euthine errs in claiming that Anna will produce "no fruit in Israel," she is correct in her assertion that childbirth lies in the hands of God, who alone has the power to give birth to the barren or to close the wombs of the fertile—as the rest of the narrative will show.<sup>43</sup> Like Reubel, however, Euthine misreads Anna's childlessness as a sign of sin. In her capacity as foil, then, Euthine increases the reader's sympathy for Anna by offering continued misinterpretations of her situation. By introducing both Anna and Joachim through their interactions with unskilled foil characters, the author carefully guides his

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<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Anna's rejection of the "headband" in *Prot. Jas.* 2:5 may also be related to what is engraved on it; the "royal mark" may be an indirect indication of Anna's Davidic lineage. This possibility is, of course, intriguing in light of the messianic overtones and the fact that both Anna's and her husband's actions show that they want their child to be authorized by God and the Temple.

<sup>42</sup> This passage also recalls the tales of Sarah and Hannah: Hagar mocks Sarah for her inability to conceive (Gen 16:4–5), and Penninah is described as provoking Hannah severely "to irritate her, because the Lord has closed her womb" (1 Sam 1:6). In the LXX version of 1 Samuel, Hannah's despondency is attributed solely to her inability to conceive; that is, the conflict between Hannah and Penninah is only attested in the Hebrew Bible, indicating that the *Protevangelium of James* may be closer in content to the Hebrew version of 1 Samuel than to the LXX.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the use of ἀποκλείω for Anna in *Prot. Jas.* (2:6: ἀπέκλεισεν...μήτραν) to refer to infertility or "closed/shut up womb" to the use of συγκλείω for Sarah (LXX Gen 20:18: συγκλείων συνέκλεισε...μήτραν) and Hannah (LXX Sam 1:6: συνέκλεισε...μήτραν) in the LXX.



readers to the proper method of assessing righteous behaviour: Joachim is generous, offers more than the necessary sacrifices, and prays and fasts, while Anna prays, resists any form of “magic,” and adopts the proper mourning practices when she thinks her husband is dead (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1).

After the discussion with Euthine, Anna removes her mourning clothes and dons her wedding dress, presumably in preparation for “the great day of the Lord” (ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου ἡ μεγάλη; *Prot. Jas.* 2:2). This change of clothing serves as a symbolic marker of Anna’s shift from barrenness to fertility, accompanied by the realization that God controls all. That this turn of events in the narrative is initiated by the fast approaching and very significant “great day of the Lord” requires further consideration. Namely, what is precisely the “great day of the Lord,” to which the narrator refers?

In his study on the impact of Yom Kippur on early Christianity, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra notes that there are three principal name forms used to refer to Yom Kippur based on the description of its purpose (i.e., atonement), its common practice (i.e., fasting), and its solemnity.<sup>44</sup> The third purpose may hint towards the *Protevangelium of James*’ allusion to this significant holiday. Stökl Ben Ezra notes that one of the biblical uses for the term Yom Kippur in Lev 16:31 is שבת שבתון, which the Septuagint translates as “the Sabbath of Sabbaths.” To underscore the importance of the holiday, Philo also refers to Yom Kippur as ἑορτῶν τὴν μεγίστην (highest holiday).<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the *Protevangelium of James*’ triple reference to “the great day of the Lord” (*Prot. Jas.* 1:4, 2:2, 2:3) may refer to Yom

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 16–17.

<sup>45</sup> Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 16–17.

Kippur given the text's clear emphasis on the solemnity of the festival. In my view, the identification of the "great day of the Lord" with Yom Kippur also makes sense in light of the multiple references to Joachim's sacrifices for atonement in *Prot. Jas.* 1:2, 5:1.

Writing against the grain, Neville Tidwell suggests a connection between the use of κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου "the Lord's Day of the Lord" in *Didache* 14.1 and the Hebrew use of שבת שבתון, "Sabbath of Sabbaths," in support of his argument that the community of the *Didache* observed Yom Kippur.<sup>46</sup> Tidwell's argument that "the Lord's Day of the Lord" is indeed used to refer to Yom Kippur and not simply to the weekly Lord's day is based on the use of the word κύριος without the definite article, which he sees as corresponding to the Septuagint's translations of a special superlative found in the Hebrew Bible using the tetragrammaton.<sup>47</sup> Just as *Didache* 14.1's use of "the Lord's day of the Lord" can be understood as being equivalent to "Sabbath of Sabbaths" or "Yom Kippur," so it is possible that the phrase "great day of the Lord" used at *Prot. Jas.* 1:4, 2:2, and 2:3 refers to the same important festival. If this assessment is correct, it may explain why Anna changes from mourning clothes to her wedding dress in *Prot. Jas.*

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<sup>46</sup> Neville Tidwell, "Didache XIV:1 (KATA KYPIAKHN ΔΕ KYPIOY) Revisited," *VC* 53 (1999): 197–207. Tidwell also bases his argument that the "Lord's day of the Lord" refers to Yom Kippur by considering similar thematic concerns. In his reading, Tidwell notes that *Didache* 14's concern for confession and reconciliation matches the concerns of *m. Yoma* 8.9. He also notes the importance of the role of the name of the Lord both in the *Didache* and in the Temple ritual associated with Yom Kippur in *m. Yoma*. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra acknowledges the "Lord's day of the Lord" as one of the names used to refer to Yom Kippur, and the themes of confession, reconciliation, and the significance given to God's names as being associated with Yom Kippur; he is not, however, convinced by Tidwell's argument based on when the sacrificial common meal takes place in *Didache* 14. Stökl Ben Ezra argues that this special meal seems to take place on the actual "Lord's day of the Lord," and therefore should be considered more closely linked to anti-ritual against Yom Kippur—similar to what he explains as "the pork barbeque that some secular Jews hold on the Day of Atonement in our times." He goes on to suggest that the lack of a specific date for the meal allows for the interpretation of other festivals, e.g., Easter (Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 213–18).

<sup>47</sup> Tidwell, "Didache XIV:1," 200.

2:7.<sup>48</sup> A tradition attributed to R. Simeon b. Gamaliel in *m. Ta'an* 4.8, for instance, states that the “daughters of Jerusalem used to go forth in white dresses” (ובנות ירושלים יוצאות בכלי לבנות שמלות) and danced in the vineyards (ובנות ירושלים יוצאות וחונות בכרמים) on Yom Kippur (וכיום הכיפורים). The striking contrast between this image expressing the inappropriateness of wearing mourning garments on the Day of Atonement<sup>49</sup> and the solemn image of this festival in biblical sources such as Leviticus 26 is noteworthy.<sup>50</sup> In Second Temple Literature like Jubilees and Qumranic writings such as the Damascus Document and liturgical fragments from Cave 4, the solemn view of Yom Kippur is more severe, proscribing a holiday full of grief and mourning.<sup>51</sup> If this reading of *Prot. Jas. 2:7* is correct, the *Protevangelium of James* may

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Rev 3:4–5, which describes those dressed in white robes that are still worthy and righteous. The reference to the Book of Life with those dressed in white robes shows clear eschatological overtones and the possibility for a connection between the “last days” with the reference to the “day of the Lord” in our text above. Cf. also Rev 16:15 and Matt 22:12 for further connections to the eschatological overtones to the “day of the Lord.” See also how clothes are used metaphorically in the NT, e.g., in Rev 19:8.

<sup>49</sup> The view that Yom Kippur should be understood as a day for rejoicing and celebration is also attested in *m. Yoma* 7.4 when the high priest is described as celebrating with his friends after completing the proper rites in the sanctuary unharmed: “And he made a festive celebration for his friends when he came out safely from the sanctuary.” In support of the fasting and atoning of sins as well as the joyous celebratory view of Yom Kippur, Philo reports that Yom Kippur serves both the need to atone through fasting but also celebrate festively (*Spec.* 1.186–87). For a good survey on the differing views held by the Qumran Scrolls and a variety of Second Temple Writings on the purpose and spirit of Yom Kippur, see Joseph M. Baumgarten, “Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls and Second Temple Sources,” *DSD* 6.2 (1999): 184–91, esp. 189–91 for the view that Yom Kippur should be regarded as a day of fasting and atonement, but also a joyous celebration.

<sup>50</sup> Although in Lev 26 the view of Yom Kippur is clearly one of solemnity, there is an instance in Lev 25:10 that describes Yom Kippur as a day for celebration since it was on this day (Yom Kippur) that the Shofar proclaimed that in this year of Jubilee property rights would be returned to their owners and Israelite slaves would gain their freedom. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1066 and Baumgarten, “Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls,” 185.

<sup>51</sup> In Jubilees, for instance, the writer interprets Yom Kippur as a day of mourning and self-affliction. Baumgarten argues that the Damascus Document supports the view that Yom Kippur should be associated with mourning and affliction based on the term *יום התענית* used for Yom Kippur, which he contends takes its roots from the biblical injunction *תענו את נפשתיכם* “you shall afflict yourselves” (Lev 16:29) (Baumgarten, “Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls,” 186). Baumgarten argues that the necessity of fasting and atonement for the Qumran community’s understanding of Yom Kippur had much to do with the ongoing struggle between good and evil and the view that acts of fasting and atonement served as a way to fight evil: “Yom Kippur was for them not only a day of self-affliction to purge the guilt inherited from the

be closer to Mishnaic rather than Levitical or Qumranic ideas concerning practices related to the celebration of Yom Kippur.

This connection also opens up other interesting possibilities for understanding the text's representation of—and relation to—Judaism. Significantly, the *Protevangelium of James* is unusual, among early Christian writings, in viewing Yom Kippur positively in relation to the Temple; Barnabas 7:3–5, for instance, explicitly argues against participation in the Yom Kippur fast inasmuch as this Jewish practice is seen to have been superseded by the death of Jesus and replaced by the Christian practice of the Eucharist.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, if the *Protevangelium of James* does indeed place the conception of Mary around Yom Kippur, the intention may be to evoke a symbolic connection: the messiah responsible for bringing final atonement for sin into the world would thus be born of a woman who was conceived on or near the Day of Atonement.

Whether or not *Prot. Jas.* 1:2, 2:2 and 2:3 refer to Yom Kippur, the text's language also evokes eschatological imagery—and, perhaps by extension, Mary's role in salvation-history. For example, the use of the phrase “great day of the Lord” recalls the phrase “day of the Lord” (ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου) in biblical prophecy to refer to the Last Judgment. Specifically, LXX Joel 2:4, Ezek 13:5, and Isa 2:12 all employ the phrase the “day of the Lord” (ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου) when referencing the end of days or the Last

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past, as it was in Jubilees. The fast was also a weapon in the struggle with the malevolent spirits threatening now to lead them astray” (Baumgarten, “Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls,” 188).

<sup>52</sup> Stökl Ben Ezra argues that despite the negative attitudes towards the Yom Kippur Temple rituals in the first century, these attitudes did not necessarily equate to the non-practice of other customs associated with Yom Kippur such as the fast. For further discussion on the abolition of Yom Kippur by first and second century Christians, see Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 219–23.

Judgment. A similar usage also occurs in 1 Thess 5:2 and 2 Pet 3:10–13.<sup>53</sup> As with the connections to Yom Kippur, it is not clear whether this passage in the *Protevangelium of James* intends to evoke the eschatological overtones of the phrase. The possibilities, however, are intriguing, particularly since the symbolic connection with the depiction of Mary as the mother of the messiah responsible for carrying out the ultimate atonement resonates with the double connotation of this phrase as denoting both the Day of Atonement and the Last Days.

The reference to Anna’s change of clothing (*Prot. Jas.* 2:7) is followed by an account of her prayer (*Prot. Jas.* 2:9). This prayer begins with a reference to Sarah and Isaac (*Prot. Jas.* 2:9), thus recalling Joachim’s reference to Abraham and Isaac after he is reproached by Reubel (*Prot. Jas.* 1:8). Specifically, Anna prays to God to “bless me and hear my prayer, just as you blessed our mother Sarah and gave her a son, Isaac” (εὐλόγησόν με καὶ ἐπάκουσον τῆς δεήσεώς μου, καθὼς εὐλόγησας τὴν μητέρα Σάραν καὶ ἔδωκας αὐτῇ υἱὸν τὸν Ἰσαάκ; *Prot. Jas.* 2:9). Here again, the reference to the miraculous birth of Isaac serves to trigger the reader’s attentiveness to the biblical trope of the righteous but barren woman—and to the very possibility of divine intervention and miraculous birth.

After her prayer, Anna laments in despair over her inability to procreate. This expression of grief consists of a line of laments that begin with “Poor me! What am I

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<sup>53</sup> See Anders Runesson, “Judgment,” *NIDB* 3:457–66, for a helpful survey on judgment discourse in OT and postexilic texts including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and NT literature. See esp. 459 for the use of phrase “day of the Lord” to refer to a final judgment in OT writings, and 463–64 for NT texts. This contribution is also helpful in examining the various understandings and interpretations of “judgment” such as the diverse views of judgment and final judgment, the judge(s) and the judged, the communication of divine judgment, and the criteria of judgment.

like?” (Οἱμοι, τίνι ὡμοιώθην ἐγώ; *Prot. Jas.* 3:4). First, Anna questions the nature of her own birth (*Prot. Jas.* 3:2) and then proceeds to provide details concerning her treatment by others for what she deems as being “born a curse among the children of Israel” ([ὅτι ἐγὼ] κατάρρα ἐγεννήθην ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ; *Prot. Jas.* 3:3). Anna reports that her condition has resulted in her being “reproached, mocked, and thrust out of the Temple of the Lord my God” (καὶ ὠνειδίσθην καὶ ἐμυκτήρισαν καὶ ἐξώρισάν με ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ μου; *Prot. Jas.* 3:3). This image, of course, is poignant as the first negative reference to the Temple in the *Protevangelium of James*; this depiction, as we will see, fits into a broader pattern entailing the introduction and resolution of misunderstandings related to the Temple staff.

Anna continues her lament by comparing herself to the birds of the sky, the domestic and wild animals of the land, and even the water and earth (*Prot. Jas.* 3:4–8). Unlike the rest of God’s creation, she alone is infertile. Although Anna’s statements are presented in the narrative as laments of despair, the content of her lament simultaneously serves to reinforce the blessedness of childbirth and motherhood, as part of the natural order of the divinely-created world. This positive view of childbirth, motherhood, and family is notable, particularly in light of the promotion of asceticism and the relatively negative views of marriage and sexuality in some NT texts and in many Patristic writings from the second and third centuries CE.<sup>54</sup> Paul, for instance, elevates virginity over a married life (e.g., 1 Cor 7); his preference for celibacy, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

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<sup>54</sup> Chapter Four examines in detail ideas on virginity, celibacy, and marriage in biblical and early Jewish and Christian literature. Since 1 Cor 7, in particular, is a highly discussed passage, it along with other views on the superiority of virginity over marriage in various early Christian writings will be discussed there.

notes, “disqualified married people theologically as less engaged missionaries and less dedicated Christians” insofar as their hearts would inevitably be divided between their husband and the church.<sup>55</sup> Peter Brown also argues with regard to Paul’s views on marriage and celibacy that the married person, “was almost of necessity a half-Christian ... the apostolic gift of celibacy was too precious a thing to extend to the church as a whole.”<sup>56</sup> In light of these views, Anna’s lament, by contrast, reinforces the idea of fertility and procreation as a celebratory and integral part of all elements in God’s created world.

Moreover, Anna’s recognition of the fruitfulness of all of God’s creations—not just the animal world but even the seas and earth—makes her eminently worthy of motherhood. Soon after her lament, in fact, a messenger of the Lord visits Anna to inform her that she will conceive and give birth to a child. Anna’s immediate response is a promise: “As the Lord my God lives, if I give birth whether male or female, I’ll offer it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it will serve him all the days of its life” (Ζῆ κύριος ὁ θεός· ἐὰν γεννήσω εἴτε ἄρσενά εἴτε θήλειαν, προσάξω αὐτὸ δῶρον κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ μου, καὶ ἔσται λειτουργῶν αὐτῷ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ; *Prot. Jas.* 4:2). The most striking feature about Anna’s promise to give her child as a “gift” (δῶρον) is that Mary, in effect, becomes Anna’s own personal sacrifice to the Lord. As the text later makes

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<sup>55</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1985), 226. On the superiority of virginity over marriage, see also Elizabeth Castelli, ‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub; New York: Routledge, 1991), 29–50; eadem, “Virginity and Its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity,” *JFSR* 2 (1986): 61–88 and Chapter Four on Sexual Purity and ideas regarding celibacy and marriage.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 56.

explicit, the giving of a gift to God is understood in terms of the Temple, to which Mary will later be dedicated (*Prot. Jas.* 7:1).<sup>57</sup> As with Joachim, then, Anna's faith in God is described as inextricably linked to the giving of offerings to the Temple.<sup>58</sup>

Much like Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam 1:28,<sup>59</sup> Anna's prayer for a child results in a vow, and the transaction involves not only receiving a child from God but also giving back to God: she both asks and gives sacrificially. What is also striking about Anna's vow is that although it thematically recalls biblical tales about barren women birthing special

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<sup>57</sup> This vow recalls the biblical stories of Samson (Judg 13:5) and Samuel (1 Sam 1:11), both of which feature (male) children for whom the Nazirite vow was made, by their mothers, even prior to their conception. The parallel proves especially interesting, since Nazirite vows were open to women, as well as men (e.g., 1 Sam 1:11) and entailed maintaining a level of purity beyond normal ritual purity: separation, abstention from wine and wine products, and regulation from cutting the hair for the Lord (Num 6:1–21). Note also that Luke seems to depict John the Baptist as a Nazir from birth (Luke 1:15; “for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit”). For a *Nazir* or *Nazirah*, the regulations for performing any sacrifices for the Lord are inextricably linked to their vows: all gifts/offerings to the Lord must be in accordance with the Nazirite law (Num 6:14, 6:21).

<sup>58</sup> In 1 Samuel, the Temple cult and sacrifices also play an important role in the narrative. According to 1 Chr 6:11–12, 19–20, Elkannah and Samuel have a priestly connection to the Kohathite family of Levites, among whose responsibilities included the care of the ark (cf. Num 3:31). In this account, however, Elkannah is an Ephraimite, who does not have a specified priestly connection; see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary* (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 58–59. Here, he goes up regularly (מימים ימימה; literally “from days to days”) to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to YHWH Sabaoth; Shiloh itself is an ancient cultic center and is the central sanctuary of the Israelite cult during the time of Samuel's birth; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 59. Eli, the Temple priest, though mistaken about Hannah's condition, acts as a witness to her vow; both Hannah and Elkannah actively participate in the Temple cult and are described as making the proper sacrifices; the Temple becomes Samuel's new home and all the proper preparations are made in order to prepare for the fulfillment of Hannah's vow. In this way, Anna's and Hannah's dedication of their children to God become aligned with the act of sacrificing itself, whereby both children become the reciprocated gift they once both requested (*Prot. Jas.* 2:9; 1 Sam 1:17).

<sup>59</sup> As noted above, the description of Anna's situation in the *Protevangelium of James* thematically parallels many elements of the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel. Both tales begin with the condition of infertility. For instance, Mary and Samuel are both born with the help of God to barren women who share the same name; both Anna and Hannah are taunted by their servants and express their bitterness and joy by means of song (*Prot. Jas.* 2:6, 3:2–8; 1 Sam 1:6; 2:10); both children are dedicated to the Lord before they are born (*Prot. Jas.* 4:2; 1 Sam 1:11); both women decide to wait a while longer before handing their child over to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:2; 1 Sam 1:22–23). Like Joachim, Samuel's father Elkannah is described as going up regularly to worship and sacrifice to YHWH Sabaoth at Shiloh, and when offering sacrifices, would offer double portions for his wife Hannah (1 Sam 1:3–5). Hannah's relationship with the Temple priest also resonates with Joachim's and Anna's experience in that in both stories Eli misinterprets Hannah's deep and heartfelt prayer as drunkenness (1 Sam 1:13–14), while Reubel thinks Joachim's childlessness is the result of his sin (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5).



children, it departs from such stories in a significant way; namely, it involves in particular the birth of a female child. In Hannah's case, a prayer is made specifically for a male child (LXX 1 Sam 1:11: σπέρμα ἀνδρῶν) whereas Anna makes a special point to include the fact that she welcomes a child of either gender (*Prot. Jas.* 4:2; ἐὰν γεννήσω εἴτε ἄρσενά εἴτε θήλειαν); whether male or female, the child will be offered as a gift to the Lord. Moreover, whereas the prayers of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, the mother of Samson, Hannah and even Elizabeth result in the birth of important male figures, Anna's prayer results in the birth of Mary—the birth of a female child, which is significantly but surprisingly looked upon positively by all, including Mary's father Joachim.

Importantly, the righteousness of Anna's reply to the angel is confirmed by the events that immediately unfold: two messengers (ἄγγελοι δύο) come to tell Anna that Joachim is alive and returning to her. Moreover, the messengers recount to Anna that an angel or messenger of the Lord (ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου) visited Joachim with the news that he will be blessed with a child. The author's decision to inform Anna about Joachim's visit with angels third-hand (i.e., via two messengers) is significant from a literary perspective on a number of levels. First, the indirect manner in which information about Joachim is revealed to Anna evokes the spreading excitement about this miracle among the people. Second, this information, which has been passed on by multiple figures, may also serve to help explain the variance between whether Anna has conceived already (perfect form) or will conceive (future form) (ἰδοὺ ἡ γυνή σου Ἄννα ἐν γαστρὶ

ἔιληφεν/λήψεται; *Prot. Jas.* 4:4). In light of the manner in which Anna is told, the critical phrase that has continued to concern textual scholars seems to favour the perfect form indicating that Joachim was not involved in the conception since everything is reported to him not by his own wife, but by unnamed messengers.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the author's decision to present Anna with the material in this way may also speak again to the text's representation of the priesthood and Temple; it is notable that the two anonymous messengers believe, without question, Joachim's claim to have been visited by an angel of the Lord given the pattern of testing and vindication of Mary's purity seen especially in the second half of the text.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the Jewish characters in the narrative may initially doubt Mary's purity and her family's righteousness and piety, but this representation is not simply an anti-Jewish trope on the blindness of the Jews or the like, as the same Jewish characters also consistently recognize and admit when they are wrong.

The news of Anna's pregnancy serves to initiate Joachim's return from the wilderness in *Prot. Jas.* 4:1. Symbolically, just as Joachim's sojourn in the wilderness was described in terms that recalled death, so his return is described in a way that resonates with themes of resurrection. Joachim's homecoming is victorious and free from the judgment once placed upon him by Reubel. More importantly, Joachim himself is described in joyous terms—he is alive and celebrates by offering sacrifices and embracing his wife. The language of death and resurrection is, of course, striking in that Joachim's actions foreshadow Jesus' own fate, and may also resonate with the forty days and nights

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<sup>60</sup> See Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 80 for a discussion of the MS variants on this phrase. De Strycker favours the perfect form, since the earlier Greek manuscripts contain the reading. Also, see Chapter Four for a discussion of the MS variants on this phrase.

<sup>61</sup> This pattern of testing and vindication is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

of the Flood (Gen 6–9, esp. 7:4), which can be interpreted as a symbolic death and resurrection of the world itself. Like the Flood, Joachim's isolation in the wilderness for forty days and nights without food or drink brings him near death, but like the renewal of the earth, God's answer of Joachim's and Anna's prayers for a child allows Joachim to return to his wife full of life and promise.

Upon finding that the Lord has answered his prayers and that his wife will give birth to a child, Joachim's first instinct is not to return directly home to Anna, but rather to ensure that the proper sacrificial offerings are made (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7). In other words, he engages in precisely the practice that Reubel dissuaded him from because of his childlessness (*Prot. Jas.* 1:5 cf. 4:5–7). As with his doubling of offerings for the atonement of his sins and the sins of Israel as a whole in *Prot. Jas.* 1:2, Joachim is here described as offering a generous gift—not only to God in thanks, but even for those who mistreated him and mistook him for a sinner: ten lambs without blemish for the Lord, twelve calves for the priests and council of elders, and a hundred goats for the whole people (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7). When Joachim finally does return home to his wife Anna, the scene capturing their reunion is poignant: for the first time readers see them together, despite their parallel experiences; barrenness may have kept them apart, but fertility brings them together.

The reunion of Anna and Joachim results in further demonstrations of their uprightness. Any remaining doubts concerning Joachim's pious character are dispelled when he is depicted as going to the Temple the next day to present his gifts (*Prot. Jas.* 5:1). In order to ensure his righteousness and to confirm the message given to him by the

angel, Joachim looks at the “leaf/disc”<sup>62</sup> (πέταλον; probably a leaf made of gold metal)

the priest wears to see if it discloses any sin.<sup>63</sup> This reference to the πέταλον seems to support repeated suggestions that the recent events (i.e., angelic visits to Anna and

Joachim and conception of Mary) may have occurred near or on Yom Kippur.<sup>64</sup>

According to *m. Yoma* 3.4–7, the high priest is described as changing into golden clothes in the Temple court and then later into white clothes, once he enters the Parwah chamber (i.e., holy ground) on this special day.<sup>65</sup> According to Lev 16:30, the high priest was also required to request forgiveness for the iniquities on Yom Kippur, including transgressions and sins committed by himself and by his whole house “as it is written in the Law of your

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<sup>62</sup> See Exod 28:31–43 on the vestments worn by the high priest. Along with the ephod and breastplate, a description of what is worn on the head includes an engraved rosette made of pure gold: “You shall make a rosette of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, ‘Holy to the Lord.’ You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron’s forehead.” See also Zech 6:11 on the high priest’s crown of silver and gold.

<sup>63</sup> Hock has suggested that the polished disc may have served as a mirror, used to obtain divine revelation. The mirror would show either a distorted or unaltered image, depending on whether one was sinful or sinless; Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 39. Timothy Horner has suggested an alternative reading for the function of the “leaf” on the priest’s headband; he proposes that the metal disc/leaf was used as a form of divine disclosure and is a reference to the oracular power of Urim and Thummim described in Exod 28:30. Described by Josephus as sardonyxes (Josephus, *A.J.* 3.215–16), this metal disc/leaf took shape in the form of stones mounted on the shoulder of the priest in order to indicate whether God was present during sacrifices. See further Horner, “Jewish Aspects of the *Protoevangelium of James*,” *JECS* 12.3 (2004): 319–20, and also Num 27:2; Josh 6:6; and 1 Sam 14:41 for references linking the high priests with prophetic powers. The possible references to Urim and Thummim may also resonate with images expressed in texts such as *Tongues of Fire* (1Q29, 4Q376) and passages from the Testament of Job. In 1Q29 and 4Q376, tongues of fire are depicted as coming from the stones identified as Urim and are specifically associated with the priesthood. In the Testament of Job, Job is described as giving each of his three daughters a string girdle “about the appearance of which no man can speak” because they were not the product of earthy works, but which contained “celestial sparks of light [that] flashed through them like the rays of the sun.” These heavenly objects may not have functioned in the same manner as what is known about the Urim and Thummim, but they are worthy of comparison given that they too are unearthly objects that contain the power to access the divine, i.e., access the heavens and witness what no other human may witness—Job’s soul carried up by the angel into heaven (*T. Job* 11–12).

<sup>64</sup> See my discussion above where I suggest that Anna’s change from her mourning to bridal garments (*Prot. Jas.* 2:7) could possibly be the result of her recognition and observance of Yom Kippur.

<sup>65</sup> The high priest is also described as wearing eight pieces of raiment while he ministers: tunic, drawers, turban, girdle, breastplate, apron, upper garment, and frontlet. According to *m. Yoma* 7.5, the Urim and Thummim were in these articles of clothing.

servant Moses, ‘For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord.’” If Joachim’s appearance at the Temple after learning of his wife’s pregnancy is meant to be understood as occurring near or on the Day of Atonement, his gift-offerings are doubly effective. In other words, if Joachim’s gifts are generous enough to atone for his own sins and those of his family, but also for all the people on any regular day, how much more effective are offerings made on or near the very auspicious day set aside for the very purpose of atonement? Whatever Joachim saw in the polished disc/leaf on the priest’s headband results in his claim that “he saw no sin in it” and that “the Lord has been merciful to me and has forgiven me all my sins” (*Prot. Jas.* 5:2–3).

Three important details emerge concerning Joachim’s test to confirm that he is free from sin. First, the disc and headband present interesting parallels with Anna’s rejection of the headband offered to her by her slave Euthine in *Prot. Jas.* 2:4 that may have had some power to remedy her barren state. The fact that Joachim seems to rely on an object with “magical” powers seems to support the view that Euthine’s headband also contains “magical” power<sup>66</sup>—albeit of the wrong sort, potentially from a deceiver rather than certainly from God. The contrast between the two thus serves to heighten the sense of Joachim’s complete trust in the Temple as the nexus of divine power.

Second, the reference to the leaf of metal (probably gold) used on the vestment worn by the high priest along with its possible association with Yom Kippur also alludes

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<sup>66</sup> That these two “magical” objects share some kind of connection is suggested by the fact that the two words used indicate objects worn on the body. Euthine offers Anna her κεφαλοδέσμιον, literally a band, which is used for tying around one’s head, and Joachim puts his trust in τὸ πέταλον τοῦ ἱερέως literally “leaf of the priest,” which may refer to a leaf of metal used on the vestment worn on the high priest (cf. Exod 28:1–39).

to the biblical trope of the connection between the high priest and prophecy.<sup>67</sup> For instance, *m. Sot* 9.12 seems to associate the cessation of prophesy with the dimming of the high priestly breast-plate (i.e., Urim and Thummim), an important factor in establishing the high priest's ability to glimpse beyond mundane realities. This power of prophesy is particularly relevant in that the high priest's second and third blessings for Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* (*Prot. Jas.* 6:2, 7:7) serve not only as blessings but also as predictions for her future.

Third, the last fact we are told about Joachim before Mary's birth is that the Lord has forgiven him of all his sins and that he has been acquitted for all his transgressions (*Prot. Jas.* 5:4). Joachim's double gift-offerings—along with their possible association with Yom Kippur—serve to ensure that any unknown sins or impurities belonging to him or the nation were cleansed (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7). Even more significantly, he also provides generous offerings after hearing of Mary's conception. These abundant offerings and attention to ritual ensure the reader, beyond any doubt, that Joachim is indeed righteous. Only at this point, when Anna's and Joachim's righteousness and ritual purity are firmly established and confirmed by Joachim's visit to the Temple, does the text move to a description of Mary's birth (*Prot. Jas.* 5:4).

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<sup>67</sup> E.g., in John 11:51, the high priest is described as having prophetic powers precisely because he is the high priest. In other words, the gift of prophesy is found not in the person, per say, but in the "office." On the development of the priesthood from early divination with the use of Urim and Thummim through the early priests at Shiloh, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 66–114. See also Runesson, "Judgment," *NIDB* 3:459 on the oracular medium of Urim and Thummim as tools for communicating divine verdicts. These two objects, kept in the breastplate of the high priest's ritual garments (Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8), were used not unlike divine revelations in dreams and prophetic utterances. As Urim and Thummim were administered specifically by the priests, their connection to oracles and prophesy belonged solely to them.

Significantly, then, the description of the events surrounding the birth of Mary focus heavily on the piety of Anna and Joachim and the righteousness they continue to uphold even in the face of adversity. But more importantly, the definition of piety for Mary's parents is articulated in terms of the Temple and the apparent assumption of the efficacy of sacrifice to cleanse sin. Joachim and Anna take an active role not only in ensuring that proper sacrifices are made for their own sins, but also that the sins of the entire nation are accounted for and cleansed.

As noted above, the plenitude of sacrifices described early in the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* offer intriguing suggestions concerning the possibility that the festival of Yom Kippur occurred very near to the events that unfold in the text. These associations resonate with the implication that all of Israel was cleansed and free of sin and impurity at the birth of Mary. Seen from this perspective, the pattern of Jewish doubting, displayed particularly by those associated with the priesthood and Temple, followed by tests and the realization of the truth may indeed help point towards a possible intended audience—namely, Jewish readers who themselves may doubt Mary's purity and virginal birth, but who are depicted in the *Protevangelium of James* as having the capacity to be convinced and redeemed nonetheless.<sup>68</sup> An examination of the events surrounding the birth and infancy of Mary will help further our investigation of the place

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<sup>68</sup> Given that Justin Martyr shows very close contact with some of the major ideas in our narrative (e.g., birth in the cave, Mary's Davidic lineage, etc.), it is interesting to note the contrast between the positive view of "the Jews" in the *Protevangelium of James* and Justin's views of "the Jews" as simply blind to the truth, beyond salvation except at the end of time, and sinful despite and because of their Law-observance (esp. *Dial.* 26:1–4). While Justin does not exclude *all* Jews from God's inheritance, he is clear that those who participated in the death of Christ and refuse to repent would indeed be disinherited. See Jeffrey Siker, *Disinheriting Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991) 184 and Annette Yoshiko Reed, "The Trickery of the Fallen Angels and the Demonic Mimesis of the Divine: Aetiology, Demonology, and Polemics in the Writings of Justin Martyr," *J ECS* 12.2 (2004): 141–71, esp. 155–59 for further discussion on this theme in Justin's works.

of ritual purity in general, the function of the Temple cult in particular, and perhaps even provide more hints towards an intended audience.

### 2.3.2 Mary as a Temple Sacrifice: The Birth and Infancy of Mary

After the confirmation of Joachim’s righteousness, the *Protevangelium of James* turns to describe Mary’s birth: “And so her pregnancy came to term, and in the seventh [or: ninth] month Anna gave birth” (*Prot. Jas.* 5:5). Although the MSS vary widely on the actual term of pregnancy, seven months is widely attested and supports a trope for significant births of all sorts.<sup>69</sup> P.W. van der Horst examines the motif of the “seven months child” and argues that it was usually reserved for “persons that were begotten by divine being or whose conception had been miraculous in one way or another.”<sup>70</sup> Like the miraculous stories surrounding the birth of Moses,<sup>71</sup> Anna’s miraculous seven month pregnancy would most likely prompt the reader to anticipate an extraordinary and important figure—and as later events will show, without disappointment.

The detail the narrator provides immediately after Mary’s birth increases the singular nature of this event. According to *Prot. Jas.* 5:9: “When the prescribed days were

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<sup>69</sup> The MSS attest widely to a number of different months of gestation; the most common include the seventh and the ninth month—although the sixth also appears quite often. See Boyd Lee Daniels, “The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*” (2 vols.; PhD diss., Duke University, 1956), 2.194–98. H.R. Smid argues that nine months is original; *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: van Gorcum, 1965), 47–48.

<sup>70</sup> P.W. van der Horst, “Seven Months’ children in Jewish and Christian Literature from Antiquity,” *ETL* 54 (1978): 346–60, esp. 359.

<sup>71</sup> Darrell Hannah notes that according to later rabbinic tradition, Moses’ conception and birth were painless (*Exodus Rabbah* 1.20), which was seen as proof that his mother Jochebed was a righteous woman not subject to the decree against Eve (*b. Sof* 12a); “The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity,” *VC* 53.2 (1999): 165–96, esp. 185. A similar tradition can be found in Josephus, *A.J.* 2.218, on which see Louis H. Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses,” *JQR* 82.3/4 (1992): 285–328. Although no description is provided about whether Anna shared the same experience of a painless birth, no details are given that she endured any pain either.



fulfilled, Anna cleansed herself of the flow of blood, and gave her breast to the child, and called her name Mary” (Πληρωθεισῶν δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἀπεσμήξατο ἡ Ἄννα τῆς ἀφ᾽ ἑδρου αὐτῆς καὶ ἔδωκε μαστὸν τῇ παιδί καὶ ὠνόμασεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς Μαρία; *Prot. Jas.* 5:9). The issue at stake here involves post-partum pollution and purification, an element central to early Jewish discussions of ritual purity in relation to the female life-cycle, impurity, and fertility. In her 2006 study on menstruation, childbirth, and impurity in the Hebrew Bible, Tarja Philip suggests that the emphasis on the impure nature of the parturient’s blood, in contrast to the positive fertility of the father’s seed, are signs of the Israelite priests’ ideology and intended, above all, to distinguish clearly between God and human beings. She explains the dynamic as follows:

In contrast to God, humans are sexually differentiated as male and female from the moment of their creation, and therefore God blessed their reproduction (Gen 1:27–28). One of the inherent components of human reproduction is its impurity. The otherness of God from humans may be called holiness, and holiness can’t dwell next to impurity. The priests had to guard the holy against the impure, through teaching the people the impurity legislation, or through sacrificing the proper offerings for them.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, the nature of a parturient’s blood may be deemed ritually impure but not sinful, serving, in fact, as a distinguishing marker between human beings and the divine. By this interpretation, the impurity caused by childbirth is involuntary and the contraction of impurity through this natural process is inevitable. The responsibility of performing the proper purification rituals after the impurities are complete still belongs, however, to the parturient and negligence to act accordingly does result in sin and offence against God.

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<sup>72</sup> Tarja Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* (StBL 88; New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 68–72, 121–22.

Seen from this perspective, Anna’s first action after giving birth to her child is to act in accordance with Levitical law.<sup>73</sup> She is described, more specifically, as following the precepts in Lev 12:5, which prescribe that when a woman conceives and “bears a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days.”<sup>74</sup> Levitical legislation (esp. Lev 12) states that the parturient is deemed ritually unclean for a limited amount of time during which she may not touch any holy thing or come into the sanctuary until the completion of her purification, but, significantly, does not proscribe feeding one’s child during this time period.

Unusually, however, the *Protevangelium of James* describes Anna as waiting to breast-feed and name Mary until after her post-partum impurity has passed. According to *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, it was only then that she offers her breast to the child (ἔδωκε μαστὸν τῆ παιδὶ) and gives her the name “Mary.” In this choice, Anna exceeds the requirements of Levitical law, which does not forbid feeding one’s child during the post-partum purification period.<sup>75</sup> If understood in juxtaposition to Leviticus 12, the *Protevangelium of James*’ account of Anna’s decision to wait the full number of prescribed days before feeding Mary evokes a perceived need to go beyond what is normally necessary to ensure the purity of this particular child, and in this case may

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Prot. Jas.* 19:16, where Mary is depicted as not needing to do this at her pregnancy and Luke 2:22, where Mary is explicitly mentioned presenting her son to the Lord only when the days for their purification according to laws of Moses were fulfilled. On the nature of the parturient’s blood and whether or not this translates into the impurity of the child that is covered in impure blood from the womb, see Philip’s discussion of the impurity of parturient in priestly law (*Menstruation and Childbirth*, 111–22).

<sup>74</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 742–68.

<sup>75</sup> For a full discussion on post-partum impurity and the process of purification, refer to Chapter Four.

reflect a view of post-partum impurity that more closely approaches the stringent laws found in the Scrolls.<sup>76</sup>

Gaventa further notes that the narrative reveals nothing about Anna feeding Mary prior to the completion of her purification rite; for any regular child, the result would have been death.<sup>77</sup> If we were to read this detail literally and biographically, the infant Mary would have demonstrated a miraculous feat. Gaventa suggests, however, that this feature of the text should not be read biographically, but rather serves to further demonstrate Mary's superior purity.<sup>78</sup> On the one hand, the possibility that Mary is so exceptional that she can survive without food is not a reading we should dismiss entirely, especially if we consider other miraculous and extraordinary activities in which the *Protevangelium of James* depicts Mary as participating. On the other hand, a more likely option is that Mary was, like infants in many wealthy families in the ancient world, simply fed by a wet-nurse during this time. Although the author leaves both alternatives open, the stress on Anna's delay in feeding Mary serves the narrative effectively by highlighting her mother's concerted attempt to ensure that this child remains ritually pure.

The narrative then moves to Mary's infancy years where her exceptional nature is reaffirmed. The narrator informs us that each day she "grew stronger" (κραταίωω); *Prot. Jas.* 6:1), in language parallel to that used of John the Baptist and Jesus in Luke 1:80 (κραταίωω) and 2:40 (κραταίωω), respectively. Mary excels and surpasses the expectations of even the most promising child. She is said, for instance, to walk at the age

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Four for a comparison between Anna's consistent need to go beyond what is necessary to ensure the purity of her daughter and the maximalist approach to post-partum impurity displayed in some sectarian literature connected to Qumran.

<sup>77</sup> Beverly Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 112.

<sup>78</sup> Gaventa, *Mary*, 112.

of six months: after Anna puts Mary down to see if she can stand, Mary walks seven steps and is then swept up into her mother's arms (*Prot. Jas.* 6:2).

Scholars have long noted that the number seven holds multiple and significant meanings in biblical, Second Temple, NT, and early Christian traditions—most notably in relation to the seven days of Creation (Gen 1–2).<sup>79</sup> In this case, the reference to seven steps may also be meant to recall Ezekiel 40. In Ezekiel's vision of the new Temple, seven steps are said to have led up to the gate of the outer court that faced both the north and south side.<sup>80</sup> This reference to Mary's seven steps serves to remind the reader of Anna's earlier promise to God to dedicate her to the Temple, to foreshadow Mary's childhood in the Temple, and to evoke her own adult status as akin to a new Temple, by virtue of her motherhood of the messiah.

Anna's remarkable vow as she sweeps Mary into her arms is particularly noteworthy: “As the Lord my God lives, you shall not walk on this ground (τῆ γῆ ταύτῃ) again until I take you into the Temple of the Lord” (*Prot. Jas.* 6:3). Anna again displays extraordinary concern for the preservation of Mary's purity, who walks seven steps on ordinary ground but will not walk again except on sacred ground. Here too, the ritual impurities of everyday life—which, by definition, are unavoidable and acceptable for all others—are precluded for Mary by means of Anna's efforts.

The reading of Mary's separation from ordinary ground in terms of purity is supported by the text's description of Anna's subsequent actions. According to *Prot. Jas.*

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<sup>79</sup> See Richard Samuëll, *Seven the Sacred Number: Its use in Scripture and its Application to Biblical Criticism* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kissinger, 2003); idem, *The Heptadic Structure of Scripture* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kissinger, 2005); idem, *The Use of the Number Seven in Biblical Criticism* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kissinger, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 45.

6:4, Anna turns Mary’s bedroom into a sanctuary (ἁγίασμα) and does not allow anything profane/common (κοινός) or impure/unclean (ἀκάθαρτος) to pass through it.<sup>81</sup>

Significantly, the terms κοινός and ἀκάθαρτος are each used only here in the *Protevangelium of James*. Although the term κοινός occurs about twenty times in the LXX and OT apocrypha, it is only used in terms of ritual impurity in 1 Macc 1:47 and 1:62, where it describes the sacrifice of unclean beasts and the eating of unclean food, respectively.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, in *Prot. Jas.* 6:4, the term may be intended to evoke the biblical laws concerning impurity inasmuch as it echoes the language of purity used in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9 with respect to Anna’s post-partum purification.

The term ἀκάθαρτος occurs over a hundred times in the LXX and OT apocrypha and always in reference to ritual impurity—for instance, in the contexts of the need to distinguish between the clean and unclean, laws on purification offerings, and instructions concerning sacrifices.<sup>83</sup> The term usually renders these Hebrew terms: 1. אלה 2. טהר 3. טמא 4. תועבה. In the NT Gospels, ἀκάθαρτος is used only for unclean spirits or demons (Matt 10:1, 12:43; Mark 1:26, 6:7; Luke 4:33, 6:18). Yet it does refer, at times, to ritual purity in other NT writings, such as the Pauline Epistles (1 Cor 7:14; 2 Cor 6:17), Revelation (18:2), and Acts (10:14, 28; 11:8).

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<sup>81</sup> Hock has taken the liberty of translating the pronoun αὐτῆς into “the child’s lips” based on the feminine gender of the pronoun, which has proved problematic for the traditional translation of “it” as a reference to her bedroom. His argument is also based on de Strycker’s observation (*La Forme La Plus Ancienne*, 91 n. 3), that Anna was closely monitoring Mary’s diet. I have left the translation of the pronoun simply as “it” because doing so conveys the sense of a careful monitoring of everything and anything that came into contact with Mary, not simply what passed through her lips.

<sup>82</sup> Most times that the word κοινός is used in the LXX, it translates into אהך or חבר. In the NT, κοινός is used 11 times in terms of ritual impurity (e.g., Mark 7:2, 7:5; Acts 10:14, 10:15, 10:28, 11:8; Rom 14:15 (3x); Heb 10:29; Rev 21:27).

<sup>83</sup> In every instance that ἀκάθαρτος is used in the LXX (approx. 137 times), it is used in reference to the laws of ritual impurity—i.e., to qualify certain foods, acts, diseases, bodily flows, etc., as rendering one impure, unclean, or defiled (see esp. Lev 11–15). In the NT, ἀκάθαρτος occurs 24 times (see below).

Of the NT parallels, perhaps most notable is the discussion of Gentile impurity in Acts 10–11, where the terms ἀκάθαρτος and κοινός are paired, as in *Prot. Jas.* 6:4. Most intriguing is the occurrence of this pairing in the context of debates on Gentile impurity; here, Peter is told by means of a vision to spread the message that what was once deemed “profane and unclean,” the Lord has now made clean (Acts 10:14, 10:28, 11:8). This command includes not only dietary laws but also contact with Gentiles. The *Protevangelium of James*’ concern for precisely the distinctions of ritual purity rejected in Acts 10–11 may suggest an author and/or audience concerned with keeping the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles intact.<sup>84</sup>

Within the narrative, the *Protevangelium of James*’ pairing of these terms effectively summarizes the impurities that Mary avoids because of Anna’s arrangements for her manner of living, eating, and so on. This avoidance of impurity even extends to her companions. Anna only allows the “undefiled daughters of the Hebrews” (θυγατέρας τῶν Ἑβραίων τὰς ἀμίαντους) to keep her company and amuse her (*Prot. Jas.* 6:5). The term ἀμίαντος is also noteworthy since it is repeated five more times throughout the narrative. On two occasions the text refers to the “undefiled daughters of the Hebrews” (*Prot. Jas.* 6:5; 7:4); the term is also used to describe the “undefiled virgins from the tribe of David” (τὰς παρθένους τὰς ἀμιάντους ἀπὸ τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυΐδ) in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2, as well as Mary’s condition as “pure (ἀμίαντος) before God” in *Prot. Jas.* 10:4. On one additional occasion, this term

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<sup>84</sup> The rejection of the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles in Acts is upheld at least in terms of ritual purity laws. Note how in Acts 15 and 21, the perspective is exactly to uphold the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

describes not a person, but an object: “undefiled (ἀμίαντος)” threads are used for the Temple veil in *Prot. Jas.* 10:7.

The term ἀμίαντος occurs five times in the OT apocrypha and three times in NT literature. There, the term is employed either as a specific reference to virgins or virginity (Wis 3:13; 8:20; Heb 13:4) or in the context of ritual purity (e.g., in the context of abstaining from the impure; Wis 4:2; 2 Macc 14:36; 15:34; Heb 7:26; 1 Pet 1:4).<sup>85</sup> The *Protevangelium of James* may here draw on both meanings. The reader may be meant to understand Mary’s companions as sexually pure in the sense of being virginal—the feature that later becomes most characteristic of Mary herself. But, just as Mary’s home is free from anything ἀκάθαρτος and κοινός, so her companions may also be “undefiled” in the broader ritual sense of the term, which may include in particular, menstrual purity.

When we read *Prot. Jas.* 6:5 in terms of the text’s own concern for the Temple and ritual purity, rather than only through the lens of later Christian views of Mary, the more plausible interpretation may be to understand Mary’s companions as “undefiled,” not just by virtue of being virginal, but also by virtue of not associating with Mary during the period of their own menstruation; following this reading, the reference to their undefiled status would evoke the earlier reference to Anna’s post-partum purification in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, wherein the intention is to also keep the infant Mary away from the ritual impurities of blood-flow.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. discussion of the related term μιάνω in Chapter Three.

<sup>86</sup> The suggestion that Mary’s female companions are not only sexually but also ritually pure and therefore menstrually pure is of particular significance especially in light of my discussion on the term μιάνω in the next chapter as it relates specifically to the events that unfold when Mary is asked to leave the Temple at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4.

But what does it mean that Mary is set apart in this fashion? On one level, the description of Anna’s concern to maintain the ritual and sexual purity of her daughter recalls her vow to dedicate her child as a “gift” (δῶρον) to God in *Prot. Jas.* 4:2. In a sense, she thus sacrifices her child to God. Indeed, Mary is described in language associated with the sacrificial gift, precisely as the narrator describes the extraordinary precautions taken by her mother to prepare her child to be a pure gift to God at His Temple.

On Mary’s first birthday, the people of Israel honour Anna and Joachim for their success in producing an offspring (*Prot. Jas.* 6:6). In response, Joachim decides to give a great banquet in Mary’s honour, using language that parallels Abraham’s announcement to throw a great feast on the day Isaac is weaned (Gen 21:8).<sup>87</sup> This occasion marks the second time in the narrative we encounter the Temple and its priests. Earlier, when Anna describes in her lament the ill treatment she believes she received for being childless (i.e., thrust out of the Temple of the Lord), the narrative implies that those associated with the Temple have mistaken the righteous Joachim and Anna for sinners (*Prot. Jas.* 3:3).<sup>88</sup> At the party, however, the high priests, priests, scribes, elders, and all the people of Israel are

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<sup>87</sup> The parallel is almost exact except Joachim’s name replaces Abraham’s. Compare LXX Gen 21:8 καὶ ἐποίησεν Ἀβραάμ δοχὴν μεγάλην and *Prot. Jas.* 6:6 καὶ ἐποίησεν Ἰωακείμ δοχὴν μεγάλην.

<sup>88</sup> At *Prot. Jas.* 1:5, Reubel reproaches Joachim for offering gifts first because of his childlessness, but it is not clear that Reubel is a Temple priest or associated closely with the Temple. Although some MSS attribute this role to Reubel, scholars such as Hock and Michaelis suggest that it is more likely that Reubel was simply a farmer with many children (Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 33 n. 1:5, W. Michaelis, *Die Apokryphen Schriften zum Neuen Testament* [Bremen: Carl Schunemann, 1958], 92). In my opinion, Reubel is indeed a priest given the emphasis placed on the Temple displayed throughout the narrative and his acute knowledge of the law that forbids Joachim from sacrificing first. Smid argues that “*ho archiereus* was added later in explanation” and that Reubel “held no priestly office” originally. But if I am correct that Reubel is in fact a priest, his dismissal of Joachim would represent the first negative encounter with those associated with the Temple. Given that the priesthood and Temple are seen in a positive light in the *Protevangelium of James*, the author’s omission of Reubel’s priestly identity may serve as a way to prevent tarnishing the view of the priests as good.



said to be present, celebrating Mary’s birth together with her parents. This communal celebration highlights the reversal of their previous mistake and their subsequent ready acceptance of Joachim, Anna, and the miraculously-born Mary.<sup>89</sup>

The acceptance of the priests, in particular, is reinforced by the fact that Mary is blessed twice throughout the night: first by the priests, when she is presented to them (*Prot. Jas.* 6:7), and then a second time by the high priests in particular (*Prot. Jas.* 6:9).<sup>90</sup> In the first blessing, the priests “give her a name renowned forever among all generations” (*Prot. Jas.* 6:7; καὶ δὸς αὐτῇ ὄνομα ὀνομαστὸν αἰώνιον ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γενεαῖς), which receives a response from all the people of “so be it, Amen” (Γένοιτο, ἀμήν; *Prot. Jas.* 6:8).<sup>91</sup> The seeming oddity of this first blessing’s request that God “give her a name” when Anna has already chosen the name Mary for her child may not come as such a surprise when we note that the hands of those associated with the Temple perform the “renaming” and blessing of Mary. In light of Anna’s promise to God to dedicate Mary to the Temple in *Prot. Jas.* 4:2, Mary already “belongs” more to the Temple than to her parents. The reader is reminded that Anna and Joachim function as

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<sup>89</sup> This positive view of Jewish priests, scribes, and elders stands in sharp contrast with the negative portrayal of Jewish leaders in the NT Gospels. See e.g., Sjef van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1972); Michael J. Cook, *Mark’s Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1978); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989); Donald A. Carson, “The Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel,” *JETS* 25.2 (1982): 161–74; Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflict Between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study,” *CBQ* 49.1 (1987): 57–73; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization,” *JBL* 108.2 (1989): 259–81.

<sup>90</sup> The theme of Mary’s blessedness also occurs in the NT Gospels. The Gospel of Luke is the most explicit in referencing Mary as blessed: “Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you” (1:28); “Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God” (1:30); “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (1:42); “Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (1:48).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Matt 27 when it is “all the people” λαός that reject Jesus.

temporary caretakers for Mary, who must protect her purity so she will remain fit to serve the Lord.

The second blessing, made by the high priests, asks God to “look on this child and bless her with the ultimate blessing, one which cannot be surpassed” (ἐπίβλεψον ἐπὶ τὴν παῖδα ταύτην καὶ εὐλόγησον αὐτὴν ἐσχάτην εὐλογίαν ἣτις διαδοχὴν οὐκ ἔχει; *Prot. Jas.* 6:9). The language of this blessing explicitly foreshadows Mary’s future role as the mother of Jesus; significantly, Mary is granted high priestly blessing and consent. The response of “So be it, Amen!” by all the people reconfirms that the entire Jewish nation stands as witnesses to Mary’s special blessedness.<sup>92</sup>

After receiving the double blessing, Mary is taken up to her bedroom-turned-sanctuary by Anna, who gives her breast to the child and then sings a song in thanks: “I will sing a holy song to the Lord my God because he has visited me and taken away the reproach of my enemies” (*Prot. Jas.* 6:11). The reference to “reproach” (ὄνειδισμος) reminds the reader of Anna’s initial inability to have children, her experience of being reviled by even her maidservant (*Prot. Jas.* 2:6), and banishment from the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 3:3). Accordingly, her song recalls her lament in the garden (*Prot. Jas.* 3:2–8).

This time, however, the song’s tone is exactly the opposite; Anna rejoices over the success of her pregnancy and the gift and blessing she has been given by God:<sup>93</sup> “And the

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<sup>92</sup> Compare the blessings given to Mary in Luke 1:42–44 by her relative Elizabeth: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42); “And Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Luke 1:44). In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary is given blessings while she is a child, whereas in Luke, the blessings are given to her when she herself has a child in her own womb.

<sup>93</sup> The reference to God taking away Anna’s disgrace (ἀφείλεν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ ὄνειδισμὸν) in *Prot. Jas.* 6:11 may be meant to recall Rachel’s statement about God taking away her reproach (ἀφείλεν ὁ θεὸς μου

Lord my God gave me the fruit of his righteousness, single but manifold before him.” The statement that Mary has come from the “fruit of his righteousness” (καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ; *Prot. Jas.* 6:12) is also significant. Righteousness begets righteousness, and in return for Joachim’s pious participation in the Temple cult and unshaken devotion to God, Anna has been blessed with a child from the “fruit of his righteousness.” As *πρῆξις*/ δικαιοσύνη is a term strongly associated with Abraham,<sup>94</sup> the intention may be to draw further parallels between Mary and Isaac, particularly with regard to their roles as sacrificial gifts (cf. Gen 22). As the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* unfolds, the author makes clear that God has given Mary to Anna and Joachim as a gift for their righteousness; yet it is also in their righteousness that they must offer Mary as a gift (δῶρον) back to Him.

The reader is again reminded of their promise to do so upon the arrival of Mary’s second birthday. Anna and Joachim discuss whether or not they should take Mary to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:1), and finally decide to wait until she is three years old before dedicating her to God (*Prot. Jas.* 7:2–3).<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, the impetus for bringing Mary to the Temple is based on the idea that she is a “gift” for God: “Let us take her up to the

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τὸ ὄνειδος) upon the birth of her son Joseph in LXX Gen 30:23 as well as the removal of disgrace endured by Elizabeth among her people (ἀφελεῖν ὄνειδος μου ἐν ἀνθρώποις) at the birth of her son John in Luke 1:25.

<sup>94</sup> E.g. R.W.L. Moberly, “Abraham’s Righteousness (Genesis 15.6),” in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (ed. John A. Emerton; Leiden: EJ Brill, 1990), 103–30.

<sup>95</sup> Horner has argued for the significance of the reference to Mary turning three years of age based on his re-examination of the *Protevangelium of James* and its parallels to *halakhot* in the Mishnah. Specifically, Horner concludes that Mary’s move to the Temple at the age of three corresponds to the age at which, according to *m. Nid.*, a girl is considered a *Ketannah* and therefore vulnerable to defilement (i.e., sexually) since her hymen can no longer regenerate, a privilege granted only to girls younger than three years of age; Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 321. See my discussion of the significance of Mary turning three and twelve years of age in Chapter Three.

Temple of the Lord, in order that we may fulfill the promise we made; lest the Lord send [some evil] upon us and our gift be unacceptable” (Ἀνάξωμεν αὐτὴν ἐν ναῶ κυρίου ὅπως ἀποδῶμεν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν ἣν ἐπηγγειλάμεθα, μήπως ἀποστείλῃ ὁ δεσπότης ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀπρόσδεκτον ἔσται τὸ δῶρον ἡμῶν; *Prot. Jas.* 7:1). Here, Joachim is quite clear that Mary has been brought up in order to fulfill the promise that Anna made to God, reinforcing the idea that their daughter belongs more to God and specifically the Temple than to themselves. He fears, moreover, that the “Lord will be angry” and that their “gift will be unacceptable.” In other words, Mary’s parents are described as being concerned, above all, with completing their vow and thus maintaining their personal righteousness as well as contributing to the maintenance of Israel’s covenantal obligations.

Joachim’s reference to Mary as a “gift” (δῶρον) picks up on the language used of Joachim’s sacrificial offerings in *Prot. Jas.* 7:1 as well as Anna’s initial vow in *Prot. Jas.* 4:2. At the beginning of the narrative, Joachim is described twice as offering proper sacrifices to the Lord, the same term used to indicate both offerings (*Prot. Jas.* 1:2; 5:1). This language choice is in keeping with the use of the term δῶρον in the LXX. In LXX Leviticus and Numbers alone, the term is used 81 times,<sup>96</sup> all in relation to sacrificial offerings. When providing instructions on how to prepare various kinds of sacrificial offerings, both Leviticus and Numbers often use the term ἄμωμος (“unblemished”) to describe the manner in which the gifts should be made ready.<sup>97</sup> However, some instances

<sup>96</sup> I.e., 42 times in LXX Leviticus and 39 times in LXX Numbers.

<sup>97</sup> The term δῶρον is also used to mean sacrifice or is associated with sacrifice in LXX Gen 4:4, Deut 12:11, 1 Chr 16:29, Neh 13:31, Job 20:6, Sir 7:9, Isa 18:7, 66:20, Jer 40 (33):1. In Matt 5:23, 5:24,

occur when the term καθαρός (“pure”) is used in association with sacrificial gifts.<sup>98</sup> If we read the *Protevangelium of James*’ description of Mary’s childhood in this context, we discover a new level of symbolic meaning in the careful manner in which Mary is prepared and protected before she is offered to the Temple: Mary is pure and must have no blemish upon her in order to be fit as an offering to God.

In *Prot. Jas.* 7:4, the narrative reinforces the themes of ritual purity and sacrificial gift by describing the unusual measures taken to ensure that Mary’s purity is not compromised when she travels between her home and the Temple. Lest she is tempted or unintentionally defiled by anything along the way, Joachim sends for “undefiled daughters of the Hebrews” (θυγατέρας τῶν Ἑβραίων τὰς ἀμιάντους; *Prot. Jas.* 7:4). They are described as carrying lamps to prevent Mary from looking back at the life she must leave behind. Even when she is outside of her home sanctuary, Mary is completely surrounded by the pure; her path is clean and her destination is the Temple. Mary literally transitions from one sacred space to another without any lapse that might subject her to any impurity.

Just as her home was made into a sanctuary, so a sanctuary now becomes her home. At the Temple, Mary is welcomed, kissed, and given another blessing (*Prot. Jas.* 7:7). As noted, Mary has been blessed on two other occasions (*Prot. Jas.* 6:7; 6:9),

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8:4, 23:18, 23:19, δῶρον is used by Jesus to explain or make reference to the laws concerning making sacrifices and offerings on the altar for the Lord.

<sup>98</sup> In Gen 8:20 this connection is especially noteworthy in that the burnt offerings involve clean birds and animals. LXX Num 19:9 (on the red heifer rite), Lev 4:12 (on purification offerings) and Lev 6:11 (on burnt offerings) all employ the word καθαρός in the sacrificial process; in these three cases, the ashes of the sacrificial gift are required to be disposed of by a clean person and into a clean place. See also LXX Lev 14:4, 49 (on purification of lepers) where καθαρός is also used to refer to the clean birds that are sacrificed in the purification ritual used to cleanse lepers.

enhancing the reader's awareness of the importance of her role and position in the world. The multiplicity of priestly blessings precludes any questioning of this girl's sojourn in the Temple and, rather, prepares the reader to expect just such a holy space as appropriate. Only after Mary is blessed three times by priests, in a manner witnessed and accepted by the people of Israel, is she accepted into the Temple.

As with the second blessing (*Prot. Jas.* 6:9), the third blessing foreshadows her role as mother of the messiah: "The Lord God has exalted your name in all generations. In you, upon the end of days, the Lord will reveal his redemption to the children of Israel" (Ἐμεγάλυνεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸ ὄνομά σου ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γενεαῖς. Ἐπὶ σοὶ ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν φανερώσει κύριος τὸ λύτρον τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ; *Prot. Jas.* 7:7). This striking language of redemption recalls traditions surrounding child-sacrifice, the redemption of the first-born,<sup>99</sup> and the death and resurrection of the beloved son in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Jewish literature, and NT writings. Jon Levenson has shown how the story of the near-sacrifice of the beloved son Isaac and the story of Jesus, who accepts death according to his Father's will and is raised to life, can be read in terms of a shared pattern of death and resurrection.<sup>100</sup> More specifically, Levenson argues that child sacrifice was not eliminated from the worship of the God of Israel, but was rather transformed.<sup>101</sup> In this transformation, the *Aqedah*, for instance, was reinterpreted by Second Temple and rabbinic literature so that Isaac was no longer understood as a child

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<sup>99</sup> In fact, the term used for "redemption" (λύτρον) here is parallel to the term used in LXX Num 3:12, 46, 48, 49, 5 and 18:15 to refer to redemption of the first-born son to the Lord.

<sup>100</sup> Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child-Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). He makes this argument, not only for the binding of Isaac, but also for all the beloved sons in Genesis from Abel to Joseph.

<sup>101</sup> See chapter 15 in Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, esp. 218–19.

victim, but rather a self-sacrificing son who provided redemptive grace to Israel, a role that only becomes further defined and exemplified by the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, Levenson notes in his exploration that the beloved son is marked for both exaltation and humiliation.

In my view, these traditions of child-sacrifice, redemption of the first-born, and death and resurrection of the beloved son also resonate with Mary's life as it is told in the *Protevangelium of James*. First, Mary is depicted as herself a gift to God—and in language that is strikingly sacrificial: significantly, Mary's experience as her mother's Temple offering both foreshadows and becomes the foundation for the sacrifice of her own son, Jesus. Second, in her role as her mother's sacrifice, Mary too will experience exaltation (i.e., as the mother of the Lord), but also humiliation (i.e., she will be accused and publicly tested). Moreover, through this third blessing the *Protevangelium of James* also makes clear its understanding of salvation through Jesus, as resulting in the salvation of Israel as a whole.<sup>103</sup> In this way, Mary becomes an active participant in bringing about the redemption of her people.

The narrative continues by describing Mary's stay in the Temple, again reinforcing her unique nature. Immediately after she is welcomed into the Temple and

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<sup>102</sup> Note that the transformation of child-sacrifice also becomes transformed into ritual practices among both Jews and Christians, i.e., Levenson writes that the tradition behind the death and resurrection of the Beloved Son are often understood to be the origins for the daily lamb offerings (the *temidim*) and the Passover sacrifice in Judaism, and the paschal Eucharist in Christianity; Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, 174–75.

<sup>103</sup> This view that Jesus would make salvation possible to the whole of Israel is also expressed in the second century CE by *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. For instance, in *T. Levi* 18:1–11, God's anointed priest Levi is told by an angel that he will be the agent of redemption by “announcing the one who is about to redeem Israel.” In *T. Benj.* 9:2, God is said to have “sent forth his salvation through the ministration of the unique prophet”; cf. *T. Dan.* 5:10; *T. Gad* 8:1; *T. Benj.* 4:2. See discussion in M. de Jonge, “The Future of Israel in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,” *JSJ* 17.2 (1986): 196–211; idem “The Transmission of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs by Christians,” *VC* 47. 1 (1993): 1–28.

blessed for the third time, the narrator reports that the priest sat Mary down on the third step<sup>104</sup> of the altar (Καὶ ἐκάθισεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τρίτου βαθμοῦ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 7:9) and that all the house of Israel loved her. The author’s careful emphasis on the love of the people reaffirms her worthiness to live in the Temple, while Mary’s joy serves as a poignant expression of her acceptance of her new life in holy seclusion.

For Cullmann and Elliott,<sup>105</sup> this passage stands as a sign of the author’s ignorance of Jewish practices; they note that only priests could approach the altar of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>106</sup> When we consider this detail from a literary perspective, however, we might suggest that the intention lies not in accurately recording common Temple practice in pre-70 Judaism, but rather in underscoring Mary’s exceptional nature and her absolute purity. Indeed, precisely because it was not common for women to live in the Temple and have access to the altar,<sup>107</sup> the text is able to use this detail to emphasize, yet again, that Mary is no ordinary child.

At this point in the narrative, Mary’s exceptional purity and character have been demonstrated multiple times, and the acceptance and approval of her role in God’s plan placed in the mouths of Temple priests as well as the people of Israel. Yet the narrator continues his affirmation of her status within the Temple when he describes how she was “fed there like a dove, receiving her food from the hand of an angel” in *Prot. Jas.* 8:2

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<sup>104</sup> The reference to the “third step” may also be meant to recall the description of the altar in Ezek 43:13–17.

<sup>105</sup> E.g., J.K. Elliott’s *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 49 and Oscar Cullmann, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1991), 423–24.

<sup>106</sup> On access to the Temple altar, see also Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Services in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 16, 58–76.

<sup>107</sup> On our evidence for the presence of women in the Temple, refer to Chapter Three.



(ὥσει περιστέρα νεμομένη καὶ ἐλάμβανε τροφήν ἐκ χειρὸς ἀγγέλου).<sup>108</sup> Lest the reader be shocked by the image of a female child sitting so near the altar, the appeal to her angelic diet serves to underline her special purity and the divine approval of her dwelling in the Temple.

The image of Mary being fed like a dove (περιστέρα) merits consideration. First, the reference to the dove seems to strengthen the metaphor of Mary as a sacrificial gift, as doves/turtledoves were the only birds allowed to be offered in sacrifice according to Pentateuchal law. The Greek term περιστέρα, for instance, occurs ten times in the LXX in the context of Temple sacrifices, rendering the Hebrew גּוֹזַל or יוֹנָה. The term περιστέρα also plays a special role in NT Gospels, where it is associated with innocence (e.g., Matt 10:16) and with the descent of the Holy Spirit (e.g., John 1:32; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22) or Spirit of God (e.g., Matt 3:16) during Jesus' baptism.<sup>109</sup>

This wonderful scene of Mary fed by angels firmly establishes her acceptance as a holy child residing in a holy space. In fact, once Anna and Joachim offer Mary to the Temple, this is the last we hear of them. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Mary's parents only served as temporary caregivers to their child, whose duties lay solely in the protection of her purity and in preparing her for the role of "Virgin of the Lord."

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<sup>108</sup> The comparison of Mary to a dove underscores Mary's absolute purity inasmuch as doves are commonly used to symbolize purity and peace in the NT (cf. Matt 9:6). It may not be coincidental then that the dove also serves, in *Prot. Jas.* 9:6, as the sign that God uses to determine the widower of Israel who is worthy to act as a guardian for Mary. See discussion below.

<sup>109</sup> Compare the references to the Holy Spirit in the context of Mary in the NT Gospels: "She was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18); "the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:20); "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).

## 2.4 Conclusion

As noted in the Introduction, a number of scholars have stressed the importance of purity for the depiction of Mary in *Protevangelium of James*, but have tended to read this interest in purity in terms of later Christian understandings of female purity, namely, as being interchangeable with virginity and chastity.<sup>110</sup> When we examine the *Protevangelium of James*' narrative about the events surrounding Anna's conception and the birth and infancy of Mary, however, ritual purity emerges as a central theme. I would like to suggest, more specifically, that the beginning of the narrative can be read in terms of an overarching interest in the Temple and its sacrificial system. Although only few terms related to purity and impurity appear in the early chapters, they occur at critical points in the narrative. In addition, the text establishes purity as an important theme narratively, particularly through the depiction of Mary's relationship to the Temple and its priests, as well as her portrayal as akin to a pure sacrifice. Moreover, within the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary is consistently located in sacred spaces; even her childhood bedroom is analogous to the Temple in its purity (*Prot. Jas.* 6:4), as is her path to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4–5).

The text's pointed interest in the Temple is clear from the first section of the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1–5:5) that conveys Anna and Joachim as pious and righteous Jews, conforming to the laws and customs of the time, through descriptions of their various interactions with the Temple and with those associated with the Temple cult. As a result, the theme of childbearing emerges early in the narrative as a pious activity and is

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<sup>110</sup> The *Protevangelium of James*' views on virginity and chastity will be discussed in Chapter Four.

brought into relation with the Temple and sacrifices. The author affirms this connection on two different levels. First, Anna and Joachim offer the proper sacrifices to atone (*Prot. Jas.* 1:2) and give thanks (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7), both before and after Mary's conception. Second, Anna and Joachim sacrifice what is most important to them: their child, Mary.

Interestingly, the *Protevangelium of James* depicts Mary as vastly exceeding the ritual purity requirements demanded from any ordinary person. Mary is portrayed as having been protected from even these normal impurities by Anna's efforts (e.g., with respect to her living arrangements and in relation to contact with only undefiled people). Her ability to dwell in the Temple, as well as the priests' acceptance of her sitting in proximity to the altar, serve to suggest that she remained ritually pure at all times, at least as a child. While in the Temple, Mary's continued ritual purity is even ensured by an angel, who feeds her heavenly food. The implication is clear: her ritual purity surpasses even that of the Temple priests, who must refrain from approaching the altar at the times when they contract the normal ritual impurities that arise from daily life (*Prot. Jas.* 7:9).

As with the Temple, the role of the priests becomes a central concern for the narrative. Initially, the priests are shown to be incorrect in their interpretation and understanding of certain circumstances. As events unfold, however, the priests are described in an unusually positive fashion, featuring their blessings of Mary as well as their prediction of her future position. The priests, in other words, realize that she is special and fated for a special role in (Jewish) salvation-history. Arguably, in fact, the *Protevangelium of James*' depiction of the child Mary cannot be wholly understood apart from some awareness of biblical and early Jewish ideas about ritual purity.

Specifically, I suggest that this interest in the Temple extends familiarity and concern with the system of ritual purity related to it, particularly as laid out in Leviticus more so than any other view of ritual impurity discussed at the beginning of this chapter. First, the text betrays little interest in Mary's moral purity, providing no evidence that ritual purity is in any way combined with moral impurity as expressed in some sectarian writings. Second, ideas of ritual impurity in the text are conveyed by a concern for the Temple and sacrificial system whereby ritual impurity is reversed precisely through the participation in ritual purification (e.g., Anna's post-partum purification) and Temple sacrifice. As noted above, although purity laws concerning the Temple are featured in some rabbinic writings (e.g., *m. Kel* 1.8 and *b. Yoma* 16a discuss women's access to the temple), they are limited to their remembrance of pre-70 Jewish Temple practices, and so ideas relating to purification and cleansing are often interpreted in the context of the torah, rather than the temple. This shift from temple to torah is clearly not represented in our narrative. In fact, the Temple and the physical practice by our characters of offering sacrifices to achieve ritual purity functions in the narrative as major themes and agents for presenting Mary's purity.<sup>111</sup> In terms of other Jewish traditions and customs as expressed in the *Protevangelium of James*, however, mishnaic ideas and practices seem to be the most fruitful for providing meaningful interpretation of our text; specifically, the possible references to Yom Kippur and the reason Mary is sent to the Temple at the age of three instead of two.

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<sup>111</sup> While the representation of the Temple and the laws regarding its entrance reflect more closely the ideas presented in Leviticus, there are some kinds of ritual impurity that may be closer to the ideas held by other groups as our discussion of menstrual and sexual purity will show.

In the following chapter, we will consider an important transition in the narrative and explore its implications for the depiction of Mary and the approach to ritual purity in the *Protevangelium of James*. According to the text, Mary's special privilege and access to the Temple changes when she turns twelve years of age and is sent from the protection of the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3–4) into the home of a certain man named Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 9:11). At this pivotal point in the narrative a shift takes place: I will argue that the text maintains its interest in ritual purity and that the Temple and priesthood remain central to the description and elevation of Mary; however, the text's interest in ritual purity becomes articulated in terms of questions about menstrual purity in particular.

## **Chapter Three: Mary and Menstrual Impurity in the *Protevangelium of James***

### **3.1 Aims of the Chapter**

The *Protevangelium of James*' prevailing interest in purity continues as the narrative moves from Mary's childhood to her adolescence. The text's views on menstrual purity/impurity provide further dimensions to Mary's character, especially in light of the focus on ritual purity/impurity in the last chapter. Specifically, I suggest the concern for Mary's menstrual impurity serves as a signal for her role as a mother, but also as the catalyst for transitioning her role from temple sacrifice to Virgin of the Lord. Additionally, by focusing on menstrual purity/impurity we are able to shed light on the text's interest in and relationship to Judaism. I propose, for instance, that the presentation of Mary's menstrual impurity is aligned closely to mishnaic ideas concerning the female body and the transition from girlhood to womanhood and possibly motherhood, but that the text's views on the impurity of menstrual blood are more closely linked to biblical ideas of impurity. An analysis of these issues will highlight the text's persistent concerns and thus continue to provide hints towards suggesting a likely milieu for our narrative.

### **3.2 What is Menstrual Purity/Impurity?**

Since menstrual impurity is a type of ritual impurity, the Hebrew Bible is an apt starting point for our survey. Accordingly, this discussion on menstrual purity/impurity will prove helpful for situating our text's views on the topic.

### 3.2.1 Menstrual Purity/Impurity in the Hebrew Bible

What is menstrual purity/impurity? Leviticus provides four important facts about these terms. First, what it is: Lev 15:19 describes menstrual impurity as “when a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body.” Second, what it means in the context of purity: Lev 19–20 states that “she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening” and that everything that she lies or sits upon shall also be deemed unclean. Third, what is prohibited when she is in this state: Lev 15:31 tells us that those in this state of impurity must not come in contact with the sacred (i.e., the sanctuary) lest they defile it. Fourth, what she must do to return to a state of purity: although Lev 15:19–23 proscribes that even those who touch her bed or anything upon which she sits must wash their clothes, bathe, and wait until evening in order to return to a state of purity, it is not explicitly stated that she must bathe to return to a state of purity. Thus, after waiting the prescribed time of seven days, a woman may be deemed menstrually pure.

In the *Protevangelium of James*, we know that Mary is raised in the Temple, but is asked to leave at the age of twelve because of the priest’s fear that she may defile it (*Prot. Jas.* 8:4). In accordance with the majority of scholars, I read Mary’s removal from the Temple precinct as the result of her impending menstruation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a brief survey of varying purity laws regarding menstrual purity/impurity will focus not only on the different ideas and views held on menstrual impurity by religious groups in ancient Judaism, but also its relationship to the Temple and to the purity laws laid out specifically

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion on this below and the evidence that menstrual impurity is most likely the impurity about which the temple priests seem to be concerned at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4.

for menstruants with regard to accessing the sacred. Such analysis will provide a crucial context for understanding the *Protevangelium of James*' views on purity. As with our investigation into ritual purity, I proceed by first surveying different views held on menstrual impurity and then return to our text for an examination of its specific concerns regarding the issue of Mary's menstrual purity.

### 3.2.2 Menstrual Purity/Impurity in the Qumran Scrolls

The first selection of texts that I consider to help map the *Protevangelium of James*' views on menstrual purity/impurity from the Scrolls include the Damascus Document, Temple Scroll, and *Tohorot* (Purities).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps one of the most complicated questions concerning the Scrolls today is their relationship to one another. As Eileen Schuller succinctly puts it, “Do all these documents pertain to or originate from the same group within Palestinian Judaism?”<sup>3</sup> Although this question is important and aims at providing a more comprehensive picture of the Qumran community and its beliefs and practices, the goal of this survey will be limited to providing a general sense of the views held on menstrual purity/impurity by the Scrolls.

#### 3.2.2.1 The Damascus Document

In the Admonition section of the Damascus Document (CD 4.12–5.11), the author labels sexual intercourse with menstruants as one of the three “nets of Belial,” which are

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<sup>2</sup> I have selected these three texts because although sometimes difficult to interpret, they provide important clues on how menstrual impurity was viewed and the practices related to this type of impurity.

<sup>3</sup> Eileen M. Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What have We Learned?* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 86.



used by the Damascus Document author to distinguish his community from the rest of Judaism who continue to participate in such corrupt practices.<sup>4</sup> Like biblical law, the Damascus Document author rebukes Jews and priests who have sexual intercourse with menstruants since such an act is linked to sin and results in the defilement of the sanctuary (CD 5.7; cf. 4Q266 6 ii 2). Leviticus, for instance, also asserts that sleeping with a menstruant constitutes a direct violation of the law (Lev 15:24; cf. also Ezek 18:6) and incurs the penalty of *karet*, i.e., God’s divine intervention to “cut off from their people” those who defile themselves by continuing to participate in such abominations (Lev 18:19 and 20:18). Significantly, the polluting power of menstruation in this context (i.e., in conjunction with intercourse) has the ability to defile the temple without actually being physically in it.

Although both Leviticus and the Damascus Document attest to the connection between menstruation and the defilement of the tabernacle/temple,<sup>5</sup> differences become evident between this text and its biblical and Pharisaic/rabbinic counterparts when we note that the Damascus Document’s purity rules regarding menstrual impurity are almost always stricter. The Damascus Document’s inclusion of sexual relations with a menstruant as one of three ways that distinguishes their community from other Jews seems to indicate the severity of the impurity that menstruation produces. This increase in severity can also be seen in the Damascus Document’s definition of menstrual impurity.

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<sup>4</sup> In CD 4.12–5.11, the author defines his community in contrast to other Jews who are referred to as the “builder of the walls” and are described as corrupt since they are participants in the “three nets of Belial.” Schuller notes that the three nets are not always clear, but that it can be deciphered that the first “net” deals with those who practice improper marriage (i.e., marrying one’s niece); the second net concerns those who remarry and divorce; and the third net refers to the practice of sexual intercourse with menstruants; *What have We Learned?*, 89.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. rabbinic views on this in more detail below.

Given the Damascus Document's goal to "separate impure from pure and differentiate between holy and common" (CD 12.19–20), its understanding of menstrual impurity can be interpreted as more stringent than both biblical and rabbinic law since it considers any blood discharged outside the regular seven-day menstrual period to be abnormal.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the woman who is defined as a menstruant until "many days" outside her normal period by Lev 15:25, at which time she will be deemed a *zabah*, is considered by the Damascus Document to be a *zabah* the moment her seven day period has ended. In other words, *zabah* is an inclusive term used in the Damascus Document to indicate both regular and irregular female discharges; thus, the menstruant is considered a much more impure person in this context (4Q266 6 ii 2–4).<sup>7</sup>

By considering linguistic evidence we discover additional aspects of the Damascus Document's views on menstrual impurity. Werrett notes from the Damascus Document's largely restored and extremely fragmented discussion of the *zabah*/ זבה (4Q272 1 ii 7b 17), for instance, that the Damascus Document seems to use this term only when describing a woman who has experienced a normal bodily discharge; that is, what Leviticus refers to as the *niddah*/ 51 veL) נדה:19–24).<sup>8</sup> Additionally, whereas Leviticus does not mention the requirement to bathe after a woman has stopped menstruating, Baumgarten suggests that the possible interpretation of מקיץ דם as "cessation of the flow of blood" coupled with מקיץ's close proximity to the references made to "water" (המים), "waters of sprinkling" (ובמי הנדה) and "livin[g waters]" ([המים] ההיי[ים]) only a few lines

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 102; Cecilia Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document* (SBLABib 21; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 49–53.

<sup>7</sup> Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 52.

down may indicate a ritual cleansing rite at the end of a woman's discharge, thus reflecting the Damascus Document's desire to fill the gap in Leviticus by applying the requirements for a male with an abnormal discharge (Lev 15:13) to a woman with a normal discharge.<sup>9</sup> Werrett proposes that the desire in the Damascus Document to include a ritual cleansing law for a menstruant (where Leviticus does not), if Baumgarten's insights are indeed correct, may be linked to the conceptual connection between the loss of certain fluids and death.<sup>10</sup> As Milgrom argues, "the loss of vaginal blood and semen, both containing seed, meant the diminution of life and, if unchecked, destruction and death."<sup>11</sup> In other words, if a woman's menstrual impurity is not cleansed by undergoing a proper cleansing by water (Baumgarten's suggestion), the result could be contamination of the land, including the Holy of Holies (Lev 15:31).<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, Cecilia Wassen suggests the likelihood that the fragmentary text of 4Q272 1 ii 7–10 contains clarification on the biblical laws regarding the transmission of impurity by including specific reference to the defiling touch of a menstruant and *zabah*, where Levitical law does not.<sup>13</sup> The Damascus Document's more stringent definition of menstrual impurity and its possible reference to an additional step required by the menstruant to return to a state of purity as well as the likelihood of an explicit reference to a menstruant's or *zabah's* ability to transmit impurity may indicate that the Damascus

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph M. Baumgarten, *Qumran Cave Four XIII: The Damascus Document (4Q266–273)* (DJD 18; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 191. Contra Werrett who argues that although the close word association connection offered by Baumgarten is possible, so too is the likelihood that the references to מִן הַזָּבָח are simply meant to be understood in relation to the cleansing of people who made contact with the menstruant and objects that had been contaminated by her (cf. Lev 15:21–22), 54; *Ritual Purity*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 767.

<sup>12</sup> Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Lev 15:11 clarifies that a *zav* is defiling, but does not do the same for the *niddah* or the *zabah*; Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 50–51.

Document's ideas concerning the impurity of a menstruant is more severe than its biblical counterpart. Given that access to the sacred depends heavily on a person's state of purity, a menstruant, according to the Damascus Document, would have greater difficulty accessing the temple and sacred places since its views of menstrual impurity seem to be stricter than those offered in biblical law above and rabbinic *halakhah*, discussed below.

### 3.2.2.2 The Temple Scroll

11QT's views on menstrual impurity can be discerned from what it does not tell us as much as from what it does. Given that the fundamental principle underlying the Temple Scroll's purity laws was the maintenance of the sanctity and protection of the Jerusalem Temple and the Israelite cities from contamination, it should not be surprising that menstrual impurity is often discussed in the context of the Temple. For Israelite cities, the 11QT author writes that places of quarantine were built outside the cities for menstruants and parturients, but also those with skin disease and other bodily discharges.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, no indication is provided about how long those who were quarantined should remain there, nor is any information given about purification procedures for returning to a state of purity. What is reasonable to assume then is that the defiling force of menstruation was deemed so powerful as to necessitate that menstruants be physically removed in order to prevent the contamination of the city and those "in their midst" (11QT 19 48.13–17).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, cf. 153–54; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 101.

<sup>15</sup> Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 154.

The increased severity in 11QT's views of menstrual impurity as they relate to the Temple and the city of Jerusalem is particularly interesting. Like the laws outlined for regular cities, Jerusalem is also specifically given a list of those who should be quarantined. Menstruants and parturients are mentioned again, but interestingly no places outside of Jerusalem are provided for them.<sup>16</sup> Yigael Yadin suggests that since no descriptions of quarantines outside the Jerusalem walls were provided and that sexual intercourse was not permitted in the city, women were probably not allowed to live in the city.<sup>17</sup> B.A. Levine has challenged Yadin, arguing that those who posed the threat of ritual defilement (e.g., the menstruant and women) were only excluded from the *temenos* and the Temple Mount, but not the entire holy city.<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Schiffman argues that it is difficult to imagine that the entire city of Jerusalem was to be free of women, even if, according to Yadin, the Scroll's community was indeed Essene, and that 11QT 40.6 indicates that while women were barred from the Middle Court, they were allowed into

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<sup>16</sup> Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 154; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 101.

<sup>17</sup> Yigael Yadin, *Temple Scroll I* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and The Shrine of the Book, 1977), 277–85. See also Harrington; *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis* (SBLDS 143; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 287–88; eadem, *Purity Texts*, 99–103, 136–37, who follows Yadin's assessment. Although the purity laws regarding menstrual impurity may be more severe in 11QT, other bodily fluids pertaining to a man which continue to threaten contamination are argued by Werrett to be less severe. Citing 11QT19 45.15–17, Werrett argues that the laws concerning those suffering from running issues are the same as they are in biblical law: Lev 15:13 and 11QT19 45.15–17 both require the person who has been healed to wait seven days and to launder and bathe. The only difference here is that 11QT is specific that the laundering and bathing must take place on the seventh day, whereas Leviticus simply states that it must be done. Leniency on the part of 11QT can be determined given the absence of a requirement that the *zab* must provide two turtle doves or two pigeons to offer as atonement, whereas Lev 15:14–15 demands that this must be done. See Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 155.

<sup>18</sup> B.A. Levine, "The Temple Scroll: Aspects of its Historical Provenance and Literary Character," *BASOR* 232 (1978): 5–23, esp. 14 f. Cf. Milgrom, "'Sabbath' and 'Temple City' in the Temple Scroll," *BASOR* 232 (1978): 25–27 and Yadin, "Is the Temple Scroll a Sectarian Document?," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book* (ed. G.M. Tucker and D.A. Knight; SBLCA; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1980), 153–69, esp. 157–62.

the Outer Court.<sup>19</sup> Although the views differ regarding those who were to be excluded from certain areas relating to the “city of the Temple,”<sup>20</sup> what seems to be consistent in Yadin’s, Levine’s, and Schiffman’s assessment is the belief that women were not allowed near the sacred space of the Temple. Thus we learn of the severe attitudes held towards the defiling power of the menstruant and the desire of the 11QT author to safeguard not only the Temple, but proximities immediately near the Temple (e.g., anywhere beyond the Outer Court for the 11QT author) from the impurity that a menstruant produces.

Importantly, Schiffman reminds us that 11QT is “not a description of an actual cultic rite as practiced in the Jerusalem Temple”<sup>21</sup> since the temple described in 11QT was idealistic and utopian in nature: designed by God, built by the Israelites in the period before the end of days (11QT19 29.7–10), but never actually built. Although Werrett is also in agreement with Schiffman’s argument on the reality of the Temple in the Scroll, he reminds us that even though these laws regarding menstrual impurity and the Temple may not have been practiced in social reality, these purity laws were not necessarily invalid for the community itself.<sup>22</sup> This idea is perhaps most evident in the view that the

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence H. Schiffman, *The Courtyards of the House of the Lord: Studies on the Temple Scroll* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 386–87 and 395.

<sup>20</sup> Schiffman suggests a solution for the Yadin and Levine debate over the “city of the sanctuary” whereby both are technically correct if one reads 11QT’s idea of the camp of Israel as an “ideal structure, a court of the Temple, not a residential area in Jerusalem.” For more on this, see *Courtyards of the House of the Lord*, 398–401.

<sup>21</sup> Schiffman, “Exclusion from the Sanctuary and the City of the Sanctuary in the Temple Scroll,” *HAR* 9 (1985): 315 and *idem*, *Courtyards of the House of the Lord*, 398. See also Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 112.

<sup>22</sup> Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 112 and 174. See also Baumgarten’s review of Yadin’s assessment of the applicability of the Temple Scroll’s laws to the existing Jerusalem Temple. Baumgarten argues that there is good reason to believe that certain purity rules (e.g., barring those who have had sexual relations from the “city of the sanctuary” for three days) described by 11QT were applied by the sect to contemporary Jerusalem, even if they continue to believe that its Temple and priesthood were tainted; “Review of Yadin’s Temple Scroll,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 588.

city of Jerusalem and its temple were seen to embody a higher degree of holiness than other cities; thus, 11QT's view of the impurities that threatened to defile the holy city and temple, such as menstrual impurity, increase in severity as a danger as well.

### 3.2.2.3 QTohorot (Purities)

Although *Tohorot* deals specifically with ritual purification and contamination, its views on menstrual impurity in particular can be found in only a few fragmentary texts. 4Q274 1 i 4–6, for instance, tell us that menstruants are not to mingle with other people during this week of impurity because they will contaminate “the camps of the holy ones of Israel.”<sup>23</sup> The contaminating power of a menstruant is not a new concept. Frymer-Kensky argues that in the biblical system of ritual impurity, menstrual blood is to be considered a potent contaminate since it represents death and is in opposition to life, and therefore God.<sup>24</sup> What is an innovation on the part of *Tohorot* is the level of contamination a menstruant's impurity produces compared to a *zabah*. Harrington argues that *Tohorot* homogenizes the contamination level of a menstruant with that of the *zabah* since 4Q274 1 i 7–8 interprets the blood of menstruation to be like the flux and the one touching it. In Leviticus, the *zabah* was considered to be a significantly more severe kind of impurity than the *niddah*.<sup>25</sup> If *Tohorot* indeed suggests that the contamination level of a

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<sup>23</sup> Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 102–3.

<sup>24</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol L Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 401.

<sup>25</sup> Harrington notes, however, that the comparison of blood and flux can probably only be applied to the contamination power of the discharge and that other restrictions concerning the *zabim* may not have necessarily been applied to the menstruant. For instance, whereas the *zabim* are forbidden from the camp (Num 5:2) and their time of purification does not begin until their fluxes stop and a sacrifice must be

menstruant is equivalent to that of a *zabah*, then it, like the Damascus Document and the Temple Scroll, seems to present for the most part a view of menstrual impurity as a more potent impurity than its biblical and rabbinic counterparts.

### 3.2.3 Rabbinic Literature

Generally speaking, rabbinic laws concerning ritual impurity have often been interpreted as taking a middle position between biblical and Qumranic legislation: they are often more lenient in their rules than the Scrolls, but either on par or more stringent than the biblical laws. Rabbinic views on menstrual impurity, however, are almost always more rigorous than the Hebrew Bible and can be interpreted as either on par with the Scrolls or slightly more or less rigorous. Klawans attributes this stringency to the selective focus and treatment of menstrual impurity in the mishnah (tractate *Niddah*) and the talmuds, whereby an enormous amount of intellectual and spiritual energy has been devoted to understanding the menstruant and her impurity.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps where this severity on the part of the rabbis becomes most apparent is in its prominent deviation from biblical law concerning the bloodstains of a menstruating woman as discussed in tractate *Niddah*. Leviticus 15 makes no distinction between blood types or where or when it is found on the menstruant. The only distinction Leviticus makes is when blood is found when a woman is menstruating and when she is not

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offered at the end of that week (Lev 15:29), the menstruant is not forbidden from the camp and her time of purification begins with the first day of her bleeding (Lev 15:19); *Purity Texts*, 102–3.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 104.



menstruating; in other words, menstrual impurity is based on a time line.<sup>27</sup> As Charlotte Fonrobert has argued, the purpose of mishnaic and especially talmudic discussions on blood types is to distinguish between blood that is issued from a woman's body (i.e., blood flow) and blood that is found on her clothes and/or body (i.e., bloodstain whose origins is unknown). Simply put, not all blood is menstrual blood and it is important to distinguish between the two to determine ritual purity (non-menstrual blood present) or ritual impurity (menstrual blood present).<sup>28</sup>

Citing the story of rabbi Akiva's declaration of a woman with a bloodstain as pure (*m. Nid* 8.3), Judith Hauptman interprets rabbi Akiva's distinction between blood flow (unclean) and bloodstain (possibly clean) as a lenient decision since it appears to limit cases of menstrual impurity only to those who are accurately identified as menstrually impure and not to every woman who may find blood on her body or clothes.<sup>29</sup> Also writing from a feminist perspective, Fonrobert rightly notes, however, that rabbi Akiva's story and decision, whether lenient or not, is still about a woman who must go to a rabbi to get his "expert" opinion about whether her bloodstain constitutes placing her in a state of ritual purity or impurity.<sup>30</sup> Fonrobert interprets the laws of *Niddah* in terms of power and knowledge over women's bodies, which, as the complicated systems concerning blood colour, texture, shape, and locations offered by the rabbis suggest, belong to the

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<sup>27</sup> Charlotte Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 104–5.

<sup>28</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 105.

<sup>29</sup> Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998), 158; 153, on her section entitled "Akiva's Intentional Leniencies."

<sup>30</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 103–27.

rabbis over and above the women themselves.<sup>31</sup> While Fonrobert’s conclusions are framed by her questions surrounding gender construction, they effectively point out that the rigidity of rabbinic ideas concerning menstrual impurity is apparent in the very fact that an entire thoroughly detailed tractate is devoted to attempting to determine when a woman is in a state of menstrual impurity.

The laws regarding the ritual purification of a menstruant furthers this position. Although *m. Miqw* 8.1, 5 requires the menstruant to bathe only after her week of impurity and not bathe and launder her clothes as specified in 4Q514 5–6, it is still more stringent in its requirement than biblical law where no ritual ablution is required at all for a menstruant to return to a state of purity (Lev 15:19).<sup>32</sup>

Mishnaic literature pertaining to the menstruant may possibly be as stringent as the Scrolls in its view that women should be secluded during this time of impurity. The isolation of menstruants in rabbinic literature has been hotly debated among scholars and is centered on the reference to *בית הטמאות* in *m. Nid* 7.4 which, depending on how it is vocalized, means either “house of impurities” or “house of impure women.”<sup>33</sup> Shaye Cohen,<sup>34</sup> E.P. Sanders<sup>35</sup> and Jacob Neusner<sup>36</sup> argue that too much emphasis has been

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<sup>31</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 108–9 on blood colour; 112–15 on bloodstain, etc.

<sup>32</sup> This severity is also evident even in the definition of a menstruant. If we compare the rabbinical definition and the laws that describe when this state of impurity falls into the more severe ritual impurity category of *zabah*, for instance, rabbinical law is less stringent than the 11QT, but more stringent than Leviticus. According to the later *Sifra mesora zabim* on *parah* 5.9, a menstruant does not fall into the category of *zabah* until she has had abnormal menstruation for at least three successive days, whereas 4Q266 6 ii 2–4, as mentioned above, defines a menstruant as a *zabah* anytime after her regular seven day period; Lev 15:25 says that this switch in categories takes place after “many days.”

<sup>33</sup> See Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis*, 170–71, n.7 and Harrington, *Impurity Systems*, 271.

<sup>34</sup> Shaye Cohen has argued that stringencies placed on menstruants, such as isolation and access to the sacred, are medieval in origin and thus cannot be traced back to these ancient sources. He suggests specifically that the earliest Jewish text (post 70 CE) that prohibits menstruants from coming into contact with the sacred is the sixth or seventh century text *Beraita de Nidda*. For further details on this argument,

placed on *m. Nid* 7.4 without clear evidence for the isolation of menstruants from society. Although Klawans does not refute Cohen’s claims, he readily admits that the *m. Nid* 7.4 reference is “hardly unambiguous,” and acknowledges that rabbinic literature assumes menstruants will stay at home and continue their domestic duties; he also argues that at “different times, and in various places, the concern for menstrual impurity has led some Jewish communities to demand the physical isolation of the menstruant and even her exclusion from the synagogue” and to assume that these “practices did not develop over time is naïve.”<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2.4 Early Christian Sources

The idea that menstrual blood is incompatible with sacred spaces (i.e., the Temple) is widely attested not only in early Jewish sources, but Christian ones as well, as exemplified in Luke 2:21–24, which gives a description of Mary acting in accordance to the Law that forbids her entrance into the sacred space of the Temple after she is identified as being in a state of ritual impurity (e.g., post-partum). Although Christ-believing communities in antiquity did not find it necessary to precisely define menstrual impurity or the menstruant herself for that matter, we know that various groups that identified themselves as Christ-believing practiced the isolation of menstruants from the sacred. That Christ-believing communities turned to Judaism and Leviticus in particular

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see “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History* (ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 278. Cohen’s conclusions on the sanctity of the synagogue have been questioned by a number of scholars. See discussion in Chapter Five.

<sup>35</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM, 1990), 156.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Purity in Rabbinic Judaism, A Systematic Account: The Sources, Media, Effects, and Removal of Uncleanness* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 115.

<sup>37</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 104.

to help interpret the menstruant as impure should not be surprising. In accordance with Cohen, Joan Branham argues that the early church's reinterpretation and appropriation of temple sacred space resulted in the specific incompatibility of sacrificial blood (i.e., the Eucharist) with reproductive blood (menses) inasmuch as Christianity regarded its ritual, institutions, and clergy as the permanent replacements of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>38</sup> In order to position the *Protevangelium of James'* views of purity on the purity map more accurately, the three earliest Christian references to the seclusion of menstruants from the sancta will be discussed briefly below. As it happens, they all were written in the third century CE.

### 3.2.4.1 The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus

Written in Rome, Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* records that female catechumens who are menstruating on the day they are to be baptized are required to choose another day for this ceremony and be separated from the other catechumens (*Trad. ap.* 20.6).<sup>39</sup> Since Hippolytus does not explain this rule and, as Cohen points out, there is no rabbinic parallel to this law, it is not illogical to interpret Hippolytus' rule as based on the Levitical law that deems menstruants impure and therefore unfit to make contact with the sacred because of the possibility of defilement.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Joan Branham, "Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces," *HDB* 30.4 (Spring 2002): 15–22; eadem "Blood in Flux, Sanctity at Issue," *RESAA* 31 (Spring 1997): 53–70. On the belief that menstrual blood defiles and is incompatible with sacred spaces continued long into the Middle Ages and beyond, see Albert Demyttenaere, "The Cleric, Women, and the Stain," in *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1990), 144–65 and Charles T. Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought," *Spec* 56.4 (1981): 710–27.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus* (London: SPCK, 1937; repr. 1968), 32.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred," 288.

### 3.2.4.2 The Letter of Dionysius of Alexandria

Written from Alexandria, Dionysius, a disciple of Origen, uses the story of the woman with a twelve-year flow to explain why a menstruant should not enter “the house of God,” “the holy table,” or the “body and blood of Christ” since even she “touched not him but only his fringe” (*Patrologia Graeca* 10.1281–2).<sup>41</sup> Cohen claims that “the transference of temple terminology to the church is unmistakable” since the menstruant’s ban from the altar and thus participation in communion, the sacrifice, is essentially the same restriction placed on the menstruant regarding accessing the holy and the holy of holies.<sup>42</sup> What is interesting about Dionysius’ interpretation of the woman with the twelve-year flow of blood is that he conflates the idea of a *zabah* with a menstruant—neither one should touch the temple replacement—i.e., the body of Christ, the Eucharist, the sacrifice. Comparatively, Dionysius’ understanding of menstrual impurity may be interpreted as the most severe since he draws no distinction between the impurity of the menstruant and the much more severe impurity of the *zabah*.

### 3.2.4.3 Didascalia Apostolorum (DA)

Written in Syria, this document describes a polemic against the observance of menstrual separation as well as a number of other Jewish practices including the Sabbath, dietary regulations, and purity laws. Uniquely, the argument to continue the practice of menstrual separation is made by the women themselves against the DA author.

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<sup>41</sup> Charles L. Feltoe, *The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 102–3.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred,” 288–89.

Interestingly, the DA women believe they are void of the Holy Spirit (which they received at baptism) during their seven days of impurity.<sup>43</sup> The argument to continue to observe menstrual separation by these women will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five, especially as it may help in establishing a possible provenance for the *Protevangelium of James*, but for the purpose of understanding the DA's views of purity, it will suffice to say that Jewish purity laws were still extremely influential in Christ-believing communities even in the third century since the women are clear that they abstain from prayer, the Eucharist, and Scripture study precisely because these actions are considered holy, and hence should not be done in a state of ritual impurity.

With this general overview of the more significant ideas held on menstrual impurity let us now turn to the *Protevangelium of James* and its presentation of ritual impurity in order to situate its position on the “purity map.”

### 3.3 The View of Menstrual Purity/Impurity in the *Protevangelium of James*

The *Protevangelium of James*' description of the events surrounding Mary's departure from the Temple hint at the onset of ritual impurity at the age of twelve, particularly in a key verse, *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, which I argue alludes to Mary's menstruation. This verse serves as a pivot in the narrative, signalling an important transition in the depiction of both Mary and the Temple. A literary analysis of both *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 and the resulting depiction of Mary as susceptible to menstrual impurity will reveal additional facets of her characterization in the text as a whole, particularly in light of the previous

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<sup>43</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 172–79.

focus on her ritual purity. Throughout this chapter, laws about the female life-cycle in the Pentateuch and Mishnah will be used to illuminate this important detail in the *Protevangelium of James*.

### 3.3.1 Does Mary Menstruate? The Problem of *Protevangelium of James* 8:4

Above, we noted how the first half of *Prot. Jas.* 8:1 depicts Mary's parents as leaving her at the Temple, at which point they disappear from the narrative. Their role in the story is complete upon the deliverance of their child to this holy place, and their departure thus serves to highlight the appropriateness of Mary's new home. In the second half of *Prot. Jas.* 8:1, moreover, it is noted that Mary does not even look back at them.

Directly after this description, however, the narrative suddenly shifts forward to a time nine years later, which is worth quoting in full here:

8:3 When she was twelve years old, there took place a council of the priests, saying, "Behold, Mary has become twelve years old in the Temple of the Lord. <sup>4</sup>What, therefore, shall we do with her lest she defile the sanctuary of the Lord, our God?

8:3 Γενομένης δὲ αὐτῆς δωδεκαετούς, συμβούλιον ἐγένετο τῶν ἱερέων λεγόντων· Ἰδοὺ Μαρία γέγονεν δωδεκαετῆς ἐν τῷ ναῶ κυρίου· <sup>4</sup>τί οὖν αὐτὴν ποιήσωμεν, μήπως μιάνη τὸ ἅγίασμα κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν;

Scholars have read these words as a reference to the onset of menstruation.<sup>44</sup> The precise cause of the potential pollution, however, is never stated outright in the text.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 47; Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 113–14; Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 148–49; Wood, "Doctor's Dilemma," 722, to name a few.

<sup>45</sup> In Genesis, the terms used for menstruation are אֵרָה כְּנָשִׁים (Gen 18:11) and דָּרַךְ נָשִׁים (Gen 31:35); these terms are not connected to impurity. In Leviticus, Ezekiel, Zachariah, Lamentations, Ezra, and Chronicles, however, the term used for menstruation is *niddah*, which is associated with impurity. Scholars

One hint that the text may be alluding to menstrual impurity is the use of the term  $\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\omega$  (“to pollute” or “to defile”).<sup>46</sup> Of the 134 times that this verb occurs in the LXX and OT Apocrypha, it is used 96 times in reference to ritual impurity (i.e., in contexts where the people, land, or sanctuary become polluted because of bodily discharges, etc.) and 38 times in reference to sexual and/or ritual impurity (i.e., in contexts where people are defiled by rape and other acts of sexual deviance). Of the 96 times  $\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\omega$  is used in a

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have explained the origins of the term in various ways. Milgrom argues that the word is derived from the root  $\pi\delta\eta$  (*Qal* – to depart, flee, or wander; *Hiph'il* – to cause to flee, to chase away, expel) or  $\pi\delta'$  (*Pi'el* – to chase away, to put aside). He suggests that term originally had the meaning of eliminating menstrual blood, later took on the meaning menstrual impurity as well as impurity in general, and eventually became synonymous with the menstruant; see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 745. Similarly, Levine and Philip derive *niddah* from the root  $\pi\delta'$ . Levine suggests that the word itself cannot denote “impurity,” since impurity is the result of *niddah*; Levine, *Numbers 1–20* (AB 4; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 463–64. Philip links the Hebrew root  $\pi\delta'$  to the Akkadian *nadû*, the meanings of which are more closely linked to bodily discharges and pregnancies (e.g., to spit out, to excrete or discharge saliva, mucus, tears, blood); Tarja Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* (StBL 88; New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 32–34. By contrast, Greenberg considers the Targumic Aramaic and Peshitta Syriac renderings of *niddah* and related terms, as well the Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents of Syriac *niddah*. He argues that *niddah* should be derived instead from the Hebrew root  $\pi\delta\eta$ , the base meaning of which concerns distancing, both physical and moral. Greenberg also notes that, with Ezekiel, we see a shift in meaning of Hebrew ( $\pi\delta\eta$ ) *niddah*, from meaning “menstrual impurity” in Biblical Hebrew to meaning “menstruant” in Mishnaic Hebrew. See Moshe Greenberg, “The Etymology of Niddah ‘Menstrual Impurity,’” in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (ed. Z. Zefit; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 69–77. Philip similarly points to the range of meanings in the semantic field of *niddah* in biblical literature: within early priestly writings (i.e., Leviticus and Ezekiel), there is an emphasis on its impurity, whereas in the later texts (i.e., Zechariah, Lamentations, Ezra, Chronicles) impurity becomes synonymous with *niddah*, which does not occur with other words used for menstruation (cf. mishnaic writings, which also use the term *niddah* to refer to the menstruant herself); *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 32–37. Greenberg, Harrington, and others note that in the non-legal texts of Qumran, the term *niddah* is used to indicate impurity in general, but that in the legal writings, *niddah* is used to refer to the state of menstrual impurity. Harrington writes that menstruants in the Scrolls are often referred to by the term *davah*, meaning “woman with a flow”; see Greenberg, “Etymology of Niddah,” 75; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 101; J. Licht, “Qodesh, Qadosh, Qedushah,” in *Entsyclopedia Mikra'it VII* (eds. E. Sukenik and M.D. Casuto; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1965): 44–62; Yadin, *Temple Scroll I*, 192–93. In the LXX, the Hebrew *niddah* is often rendered by the Greek term  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$  (lit. “separation”); see Lev 12:2; 18:19; Zach 13:1; 3 Mac 3:4. The term  $\acute{\alpha}\phi\epsilon\delta\rho\varsigma$  (“menses”) is also used; see Lev 12:2, 5, 15:19, 20, 25, 26, 33; Ezek 18:6, 36:17. Neither one of these words is used in the *Protevangelium of James* specifically and directly to indicate menstruation as the source of Mary’s potential pollution, but the latter ( $\acute{\alpha}\phi\epsilon\delta\rho\varsigma$ ) indeed occurs in the context of Anna’s post-partum purification at *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, thus hinting strongly towards the impurities that are associated with the female life-cycle, including menstruation.

<sup>46</sup> In the LXX,  $\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\omega$  is used to render Hebrew  $\pi\delta\eta$  (hi. to reject),  $\pi\delta\eta$  (hi. to be at fault),  $\pi\delta\eta$  (ni. to profane)  $\pi\delta\eta$  (qal. to defile),  $\pi\delta\eta$  (qal. to defile, to pollute, to profane).



context of ritual impurity, it is twice used in specific reference to menstruation as ritually polluting to the Temple. In Lev 15:31, for instance, menstruants are instructed, along with those affected by other bodily discharges, to stay away from the Tabernacle, lest they cause it to be defiled.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in the *Pss. Sol.* 8:12, menstrual blood is described as defiling the Temple of the Lord and the sacrifices.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, other early Jewish texts attest the prohibition against menstruating women in the Temple and the fear of defilement related to it. As mentioned earlier, some interpretations of the purity laws in the Temple Scroll, for instance, even go so far as to state that women should be isolated during their menstruation and prohibited from living in Jerusalem (11Q19 48.13–17).<sup>49</sup> In *A.J.* 3.261,<sup>50</sup> in his retelling of Moses' purity laws, Josephus reports that menstruants were shut out of the Temple and only allowed to associate with the community after their days of purification; in *B.J.* 5.226–7,<sup>51</sup> he further claims that they were barred from the Temple, even after they were deemed pure. In *m. Nid* 7.4, we also find hints of a concern to seclude women during their time of

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Lev 15:29, where a *zaba* can enter the court of the sanctuary and have the priest offer atonement in the form of sacrifices on her behalf on the eighth day, once she has been deemed clean from her irregular discharge.

<sup>48</sup> In the NT, *μίαινω* is also used four times to denote “defilement.” Of the four cases, there are two instances whereby the term is used explicitly for ritual impurity: John 18:28 and Titus 1:15.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., following Yadin, Harrington suggests this possibility based on 11Q19 45.7–10; CD 12.1–2. See also discussion above.

<sup>50</sup> *A.J.* 3.261: “He expelled from the city both those whose bodies were attacked by leprosy and those with spermatorrhoea. He segregated until the seventh day women whose secretion occurs for them in accordance with nature, after which he permitted them, as already pure, to associate with the community”; Louis H. Feldman, trans., *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (ed. Steve Mason; Leiden: Brill, 1999, cited from PACE).

<sup>51</sup> *B.J.* 5.226–7: “Sufferers from venereal disease or leprosy were debarred from entering the City at all; from the Temple women were excluded during their monthly periods, and even when ceremonially clean they could not go beyond the barrier already described. As for the men, those not thoroughly sanctified were not admitted to the inner court, nor were priests during their time of ceremonial cleansing”; G.A. Williamson, trans., *Josephus: The Jewish War* (ed. E. Mary Smallwood; London: Penguin Books, 1981).

menstruation, due precisely to the fear of ritual pollution.<sup>52</sup> Even long after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the idea that menstruants must be kept from polluting the Temple can be seen in texts such as *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (Tg<sup>Ps.-J.</sup> Lev 12.2) and *'Abot de-Rabbi Nathan* (ARN<sup>A</sup> 2.3). Although our textual evidence differs with regard to pre-70 Jewish practices concerning how long a menstruant should be barred from sacred spaces and the requirements needed to return to a state of purity, what seems to remain constant is the sharp sense of the polluting power of menstrual blood and the particular fear that menstruants will pollute the sacred spaces of Jerusalem and its Temple.

Read in this context, it does seem plausible that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* meant to evoke the spectre of menstrual impurity, rather than any broader view of women as polluting. Indeed, from the repeated stress on Mary's ritual purity in the first part of the narrative, the possibility that the problem at hand involves her approaching menstruation and not with her gender *per se* seems like a more likely possibility. In other words, the reader gets no sense, for instance, that the problem might lie instead with the sexual temptation that Mary might pose to the priests. The former interpretation is reinforced further by the reference to Mary's age.

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<sup>52</sup> *m. Nid* 7.4: "All blood-stains wheresoever they are found are deemed clean excepting those found in rooms or round about places of uncleanness" (All translations from the Mishnah are from Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974]). The reference to "places of uncleanness," seems to indicate the possibility that women should be isolated during their menstrual impurity. Cf. e.g., *m. Kel* 1.8; *b. Yoma* 16a which attest, according to rabbinic remembrances and/or representations of pre-70 Jewish Temple practice, women were allowed to live in Jerusalem and worship at the Temple, albeit only within the confines of the Court of the Women. On the segregation of menstruants in the Mishnah and other rabbinic literature, see discussion above.

Significantly the text informs us twice that Mary has turned twelve, the precise moment when the priests suddenly began to express deep concern that her continued stay might defile the Temple. The first time, her age is noted by the third-person narrator, as marking the turning-point in her life in the Temple. In the speech attributed to the “group of priests,” this detail is reiterated (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3), making clear the importance of Mary’s age for her ritual status vis-à-vis the Temple.

Timothy Horner explains the significance of the age of twelve with specific reference to traditions in the Mishnah (esp. *m. Niddah* and *m. Ketuboth*) about the process by which girls become women and how they are passed from fathers to husbands.<sup>53</sup> The laws governing menstrual purity in *m. Niddah*, for instance, are based on a tripartite division of the female life-cycle: [1] from birth to the age of three, [2] from the age of three until twelve (*q<sup>e</sup>tannah* [קטנה]), and [3] after twelve (*na‘arah* [נערה]) (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.4<sup>54</sup>; 5.7–8<sup>55</sup>). As Horner shows, these divisions correspond to the different stages in Mary’s life as described in the *Protevangelium of James*.<sup>56</sup> Up until the age of three, Mary lives at home with her parents (*Prot. Jas.* 7:2). At the age of three, she is given to the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4), and spends the time from the ages of three to twelve living in

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<sup>53</sup> Tim Horner, “Jewish Aspects of the *Protoevangelium of James*,” *J ECS* 12.3 (2004): 313–35.

<sup>54</sup> According to *m. Nid* 5.4, “a girl three years old and one day may be betrothed by intercourse...[but] if she is younger than this, it is as one that puts a finger in the eye.” According to the Mishnah, indication of one’s loss of virginity was based on rupture of the hymen. However, if one’s virginity were lost before the age of three years and a day, it is assumed in the Mishnah that the hymen would somehow reconstruct itself. Thus, as Horner has rightly assessed, the loss of one’s hymen before the age of three years and a day would be equivalent to putting a finger in one’s eye—temporary pain and discomfort, but not permanent physical damage; “Jewish Aspects,” 321.

<sup>55</sup> According to *m. Nid* 5.6 “A girl eleven years old and one day—her vow must be examined; if she is twelve years old and one day her vows are valid, but must be examined throughout the twelfth year...”

<sup>56</sup> Horner, “Jewish Aspects,” 320–25.

the Temple (*Prot. Jas.* 7:4; 8:3). Finally, at the age of twelve, she must leave the Temple, because of the onset of potential impurity (*Prot. Jas.* 8:4).

That the age of twelve is associated specifically with puberty and thus menstruation in the Mishnah can be shown not only by specific references to *na'arah* (נערה), defined as a stage when a girl transitions into being a pubescent woman (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.7 writes that this is the age of twelve to twelve and a half), but also by the Tannaitic discourse on determining the signs for when a girl is past her girlhood. The latter involves discussion of the physical differences between a person who has not reached puberty and one who has—the physical differences between a female child and a woman (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.8).<sup>57</sup> In the Mishnah, then, puberty is defined by the appearance of two pubic hairs early in her thirteenth year, and for that reason, maturity is regarded as beginning legally at the age of twelve years and one day (e.g., *m. Nid* 5.6–7).<sup>58</sup>

If we read the detail of Mary turning the age of twelve at the point when she is asked to leave the temple in light of the importance of that particular age as marking a transition period between girlhood and womanhood as the discussion of mishnaic sources indicates, the *Protevangelium of James* suggests Mary's potential pollution is the result of her menstruation. This reference to her age along with the use of the term μιᾶνω to describe her pollution, and the attestation of various Jewish sources (e.g., Levitical, Qumranic, Josephus, and rabbinical as discussed above) that prohibit menstrually impure

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<sup>57</sup> *m. Nid* 5.8: “What are the tokens in her [that she is passed her girlhood?] R. Jose the Galilean says: When the wrinkles appear beneath her breasts. R. Akiba says: When the breasts hang down. Ben Azzai says: When the ring around the nipple turns dark. R. Jose says: [When the breast is so grown] that if the hand is put on the ring around the nipple it sinks and slowly returns.”

<sup>58</sup> Peter van der Horst examines Mary's sexual purity in this context and in these terms; “Sex, Birth, Purity and Asceticism in the *Protevangelium Jacobi*,” *Neot* 28.3 (1994): 205–18.

women in the Temple for fear that they may pollute it, support the idea that the cause of pollution is indeed the result of Mary's menstruation.

Considering our assumption valid, we might ask why the *Protevangelium of James* includes a passage depicting Mary's removal from the Temple. For instance, if the text intends to imply that menstruation is the cause of pollution and the reason that Mary can no longer live in the Temple, how does this detail contribute to the image of Mary in the text as a whole? Is it meant to attenuate the earlier celebration of Mary's purity and piety? The literary decision to omit an explicit reference to menstruation raises questions as well. Why does the text never state that Mary actually menstruates, but rather leaves open the possibility that she does? Is the reader meant to read this possibility as merely the unfounded worries of the priests or as evidence that Mary indeed menstruated?

### 3.3.2 Menstrual Impurity and the Image of Mary

In our attempt to address these questions, we might begin by noting that until this point in the narrative, the *Protevangelium of James* presents Mary as embodying unparalleled purity. As we saw in Chapter Two, the first part of the *Protevangelium of James* depicts her as eminently "pure" in the technical Levitical sense of the term—she is fit to approach the Temple. Furthermore, Mary's exceptional character increases in intensity due to her constant state of ritual purity, whereby she can not only dwell in the Temple, but even play near the altar. That she is protected from being polluted through contact with blood, in particular, is suggested both by the reference to Anna's post-partum purification in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9 and to the stress on the "undefiled" (ἀμίαντος)

character of her maidservants in *Prot. Jas.* 6:5 and 7:4. Thus when Mary is asked to leave the Temple at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 because of the fear that she may pollute it, readers are forced to reconsider their view of this heretofore purest of the pure character.

How, then, to interpret this new development in the narrative? The first possibility is that the inclusion of an allusion to Mary's menstruation represents an equivocation of her high status, serving to downplay the elevation of this woman. This is the interpretation Foskett proposes. Foskett suggests that the narrative's motives to establish Mary as the embodiment of purity serve to signal her role as a holy child and thus her pure lifestyle in the context of holiness.<sup>59</sup> Foskett's interpretation of Mary's purity in terms of holiness, however, does not prevent her from interpreting the reference to Mary's menstruation as signalling a concern for her sexual status and gender, concurrent with her adolescence. She admits that, up to this point, the text "celebrated Mary's female identity and presented gender as a significant and positive Marian character indicator."<sup>60</sup> In her view, however, the allusion to menstruation in *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 shows that the *Protevangelium of James* ends up following the traditional biblical rhetoric concerning purity and impurity and what she sees as its marginalization of women; Foskett asserts that by "implicitly identifying Mary's approaching menarche as a problem, the *Protevangelium of James* indeed follows the rhetoric of biblical precedence."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, she writes that "Mary's identity as a pubescent *parthenos* renders her nonetheless as threatened and threatening as any other female. Thus the very narrative that praises Mary

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<sup>59</sup> Foskett's interpretation of Mary's exceptional purity in terms of holiness builds on Saul Olyan's assessment that "the notion of uncleanness has no meaning apart from the notion of holiness; pollution is only a consideration vis-à-vis the holy"; *Virgin Conceived*, 148–49.

<sup>60</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148.

<sup>61</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 149.

perpetuates an andocentric assessment of its heroine...even for one who formerly embodied exceptional holiness....”<sup>62</sup>

In my view, this answer cannot suffice if we take into serious consideration the broader literary context of *Prot. Jas.* 8:4. Mary’s impending menstruation initiates concern among the priests for maintaining the purity and holiness of the Temple; in that sense menstruation, and by extension female gender, are associated with ritual uncleanness in this passage. Yet it does not seem plausible, in my view, that the author wishes to signal a fault in Mary’s character—particularly when the rest of text, both before and after this point, so emphatically celebrates her. Hence, we might ask: could Foskett be misguided by the assumption that mention of menstrual impurity always signals a negative view of women? Especially in light of the differences between moral impurity and ritual impurity in biblical and Mishnaic law, must impurity always be interpreted negatively?

Another possible explanation for the inclusion of the detail of Mary’s menstruation in the *Protevangelium of James* is the attempt to signal her maturation and, therefore, her transition to the status of a potential mother. As we noted in Chapter Two, motherhood is depicted in extremely positive terms throughout by the text beginning at the outset with Anna’s lament (*Prot. Jas.* 3:2–8). That passage stresses that childlessness is contrary to nature (esp. *Prot. Jas.* 3:4–8); a childless woman is unblessed, “cursed, reproached, mocked, and thrust out of the Temple of the Lord” (*Prot. Jas.* 3:3). Although this view may contrast with some early Christian celebrations of celibacy and

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<sup>62</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 149.

denigrations of sexuality (e.g., 1 Cor 7),<sup>63</sup> it is consistent with views of fertility and childbirth in the Hebrew Bible, where motherhood is often described as the expression of divine blessings (e.g., Gen 1:28; 20:18; 21:1; 25:21; 1 Sam 1:5, 6).

The reference to Mary's menstruation in *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 may make sense when read against the background of the poignant tension in biblical traditions about childbirth: motherhood is blessed since God is responsible for fertility, pregnancy, and life, but the laws concerning birth as an event associate it with ritual impurities.<sup>64</sup> According to Milgrom:

Persons and objects are subject to four possible states: holy, common, pure, and impure, two of which can exist simultaneously—either sacred or common and either pure or impure...one combination is excluded in the priestly system: whereas the common may be either pure or impure the sacred may not be impure.<sup>65</sup>

Milgrom notes that the nature of ritual impurity is associated with those elements of human life that are uniquely creaturely and not shared with God (although they are all God-given)—birth, sex, death. In contrast to the category of moral impurity, the category of ritual impurity speaks less to good and bad elements of human life, but rather to the very differences between human and divine, just as the category of ritual purity describes those specific conditions under which humans can approach God and His sacred spaces.<sup>66</sup> To be human—male or female—is to be ritually impure at some point or another in one's life; it is unavoidable, according to the biblical purity system, but it is not sinful<sup>67</sup> and

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<sup>63</sup> On the negative views of sex, marriage, and the body in NT and early Christian literature, see my discussion in Chapter Four.

<sup>64</sup> Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 32–37.

<sup>65</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 616.

<sup>66</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 615–16; see also beginning of Chapter Two for a description of the distinction between ritual and moral impurity.

<sup>67</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 23–24.



represents an impermanent state.<sup>68</sup> In this context, the act of restraint in not approaching the divine in certain states, and the recognition of the ritual state one must adopt in order to enter certain holy spaces, are understood as pious acts.

Menstruation and childbirth are, of course, closely connected. Childbirth cannot occur until the female body matures, and menstruation is the physiological (as well as cultural and social) sign of such maturation. Not surprisingly then, the menstruant and the parturient are often discussed together. In Leviticus, for instance, the impurity of a parturient is defined in relation to menstruation (Lev 12:1–2); in both cases, the associated blood is polluting.<sup>69</sup> Being ritually impure, however, does not equate to being sinful, especially given the divine command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). To be a pious woman, by the logic of Levitical law, does not entail refraining from sex and childbirth; rather, it is to observe menstrual separation and to observe the proper days and ritual needed for post-partum purification.

I suggest that this more nuanced understanding of menstrual impurity may help us understand the seemingly anomalous attribution of pollution to the adolescent Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*. In my view, given the broader narrative context of *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, it seems unlikely that the acknowledgement of Mary’s menstrual impurity is meant to reflect any animosity towards women. Within the realm of the Temple, Mary’s

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<sup>68</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 23. There are, as Klawans notes, some biblical narratives that view the contraction of ritual defilement (particularly scale disease or leprosy) as a punishment for moral shortcomings. For instance, Moses’ sister Miriam was afflicted with leprosy when she spoke against her brother’s Cushite wife (Num 12), and the Judean King Uzziah also contracted a similar affliction because of his pride and apostasy (2 Chr 26). Klawans stresses, however, that there is nothing within the legal traditions that indicate that the contraction of ritual impurity such as scale disease is the result of transgression; that is, “though the leper is ritually impure, he is not guilty”; *Impurity and Sin*, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 32–37.

menstruation may be polluting, and Mary may be ritually impure, in the sense of no longer being fit to spend all her days within the Temple precincts. Yet the author gives the reader no reason to believe that anyone in the text thinks of Mary's maturation or ability to menstruate as denigrating to her character. No hint is given that this possibility takes away from Mary's extraordinary character. In fact, her special status is re-confirmed directly after her departure, in *Prot. Jas.* 8:5, by the description of the way that the priests go about trying to find her an apt husband/protector, discussed in detail below. Mary's continued worthiness in the eyes of the priests is also emphasized by the account of her selection as a Temple weaver later in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4).

Most notably, as we shall see, Mary's departure from the Temple allows her to take on her new role as a potential mother. The implication of her menstruation, in other words, is precisely what serves to open the way for her chosen role as mother of the messiah. Seen from this perspective, the attempt to elevate Mary may even be evident in the avoidance of words for menstruation that might possibly evoke impurity in a negative sense; as in the description of Sarah in Gen 18:11, the reference to Mary's menstruation in *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 is implied and communicated only indirectly.

A related reason for the allusion to Mary's menstruation is the intention of demonstrating Mary's adherence to Jewish laws about menstrual separation. Earlier in the narrative, explicit reference is made to Anna's post-partum purification (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9). Anna immediately and deliberately performs the proper purification rituals and completes the prescribed days, thus firmly establishing her piety and further demonstrating her concern for observance and maintenance of ritual purity.

In the Hebrew Bible, menstruants are only condemned when they do not observe the attendant laws for separation (e.g., as outlined in Lev 15).<sup>70</sup> They are not condemned for menstruation per se, because it is a natural process and positively associated with childbirth; it does not fall into the category of a prohibited act of the sort that causes moral impurity (e.g., murder, idolatry, and incest).<sup>71</sup>

Klawans notes two ways that ritual impurity can lead to moral impurity, according to the biblical purity system. Failure to purify oneself from corpse impurity results in the defilement of the Temple. Corpse impurity is not sinful in the sense that direct contact with a ritually impure person defiles the sanctuary; rather, the conscious decision to refuse purification results in moral impurity and thus defiles the Temple.<sup>72</sup> Num 19:13 and 19:20 specify that such refusal is a transgression punishable by *karet* (being cut off from the people). The resolute second way in which ritual impurity can lead to moral impurity applies both to priests and lay Israelites should either enter the sancta or come into contact with holy foods when in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 7:20–21; 15:31; 22:30). The concern again is with the conscious decision to ignore such warnings, which is sinful and defiles the Temple even apart from any direct contact. For this particular transgression, the punishment is not specified.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Lev 15:31: “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.”

<sup>71</sup> Though sexual relations may render one ritually impure, they do not necessarily render one impious if the proper purification rituals are observed. According to Lev 18:24–30, however, there are particular sexual relations that do render one both ritually and morally impure and are recognized as sins. These include: incest, sexual relations during the time of a woman’s menstrual uncleanness, homosexuality, and bestiality. See Chapter Four for more on sexual sins.

<sup>72</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–25.

<sup>73</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–25.

As these two examples help to highlight, there is—according to Levitical law—nothing inherently sinful about being ritually impure, as long as one observes the relevant prohibitions. If we read the *Protevangelium of James* from this perspective, Mary’s acceptance of the priestly decision that she must leave the Temple takes on another level of meaning: by agreeing to leave the Temple at a time when she could potentially be polluting, she acts as a good Jew, who—like her parents—is attentive to the laws related to ritual purity and the Temple.

This explanation may also help us understand why Mary, after leaving the Temple, continues to stand in such a positive relationship with the priests. With regard to the biblical understanding of ritual impurity, Klawans suggests that:

the primary concern incumbent upon the priests is not to avoid ritual impurity, but to safeguard the separation between ritual impurity and purity (Lev 10:10). Thus the priests are sternly warned against eating sacred food or entering sacred precincts when in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 7:20–21). Practically speaking, the obligation incumbent upon priests is not avoidance of ritual impurity, but awareness of ritual impurity.<sup>74</sup>

Earlier in the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James*, Reubel is shown misinterpreting Joachim’s situation when he decides to turn away Joachim’s gifts. But in the case of the priests, they are shown to be correct, according to biblical law, in pursuing their obligation to safeguard the separation between ritual purity and impurity. In Mary’s case, they are depicted as accurately identifying her approaching menstruation as a concern. Consistent with the positive view of the priests and the stress on their knowledge of Mary’s special status in *Prot. Jas.* 1–7, they are here depicted as exercising the proper actions to prevent the defilement of the Temple by having her leave the Temple.

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<sup>74</sup> Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–25.

Their subsequent concern for Mary's personal safety and keen awareness of the need to keep this special girl away from any possible defilement supports my argument that her pending menstruation marks a positive point in her journey towards becoming the mother of the messiah. Immediately after Mary is asked to leave the Temple, the narrator describes the priests' panic concerning any potential defilement or lack of protection (*Prot. Jas.* 8:5–8). We will discuss this key passage in more detail below, only noting here that the priests are depicted once again as acting properly with regard to Mary even when they expel her from the Temple. Although the text never tells us whether or not the priests are correct in assuming that Mary will soon begin to menstruate, the author also gives us no reason to doubt the priests' assessment of the situation.

In a sense, the *Protevangelium of James* may depict Mary in a manner akin to the priests who, according to Leviticus, have specific obligations to be aware of their ritual states, lest they accidentally come into contact with the sacred while in a state of impurity (Lev 31).<sup>75</sup> Just as Anna demonstrated acute awareness of the dangers of impurity during the text's description of Mary's infancy (esp. *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, 6:4–5), so this allusion to Mary's menstruation serves as a means to confirm her recognition of her own ritual state. The priests' decision and Mary's acceptance to depart the Temple thus speak to her piety. Rather than assuming that Mary's menstruation prevents the assertion that she is unequivocally pure, this alternate interpretation offers Mary's menstrual separation as an additional sign of her piety within the narrative world of the *Protevangelium of James*.

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<sup>75</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 615.

In other words, the view of ritual impurity in the text seems akin to the biblical laws pertaining to the Temple and sacrifice, whereby ritual impurity is not interpreted negatively. Even pious acts can pollute. As discussed earlier, within the Hebrew Bible, some acts of ritual impurity are celebrated, encouraged, and even demanded by God.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, in the *Protevangelium of James*, the allusion to menstruation may be tightly tied to Mary's impending transition into motherhood, on the one hand, and to the faithfulness of her Torah-observance, on the other.

Lastly, it should also be stressed that menstruation is treated as a relatively minor impurity in Levitical law. This impurity does not require an elaborate purification ritual to return to a state of cleanliness, particularly compared to other ritual impurities, such as that caused by seminal emissions. Indeed, although Foskett and others assume that the association of impurity with menstruation is a mark of the biblical authors' animosity towards women, we should recall that men too were deemed to be in increased danger of polluting the Temple upon the onset of sexual maturation. The laws surrounding seminal emissions are arguably more severe than those surrounding menstruation. According to Lev 15:19–20, when a woman has a regular discharge from her body (i.e., menstruation), the requirement for purification is simply to wait seven days; at nightfall on the last day

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<sup>76</sup> Klawans argues that there seems to be no indication that acts that are ritually defiling (such as sex, contact with the mother of a newborn child, or even contact with the dead) are in any way discouraged—such acts, in fact, are not only proper but also obligatory. Biblical law contains no warnings against contracting these kinds of impurities, nor any advice on how to reduce contact with impurities, as might be expected if these types of ritual impurities were indeed discouraged. This absence of regulation seems to indicate that these acts, though they may be the source of pollution, were simply not looked down upon; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24–26.

she is deemed clean, with no requirement for any ritual ablutions.<sup>77</sup> This automatic cleansing, by simply waiting for the appropriate amount of time to pass, is similarly applicable to the impurity contracted by people whom the menstruant touches; they are only unclean until nightfall.<sup>78</sup> The ritual impurity conveyed by seminal emissions, by contrast, requires additional efforts in order to return to a state of cleanliness. According to Lev 15:16–18, if a man has a seminal emission, he is required to bathe his whole body in water, then wait for nightfall, in order to be deemed clean again. This extra step of washing is also necessary for any object made of cloth or skin that is touched by semen; all must be washed with water before they can be purified by the passing of time. Ritual impurity, in other words, is hardly limited to women.<sup>79</sup>

If I am correct in suggesting that the *Protevangelium of James* draws its picture of the Temple and first century Jewish life not just from the LXX versions of biblical tales about barren women, but also from biblical laws concerning ritual purity, then we should

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. interpretation of Leviticus 15 by the 4Q514 5–6 author who suggests that menstruants must both wash with water and launder their clothes in the same manner as all temporarily impure persons. Cohen and Tirzah Meacham have both argued that menstruants were simply sprinkled with water in order to fulfill the requirement of purification. See Cohen, “Purity, Piety, and Polemic: Medieval Rabbinic Denunciation of ‘Incorrect’ Purification Practices,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall; Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 82–100 and Meacham, “An Abbreviated History of the Development of Jewish Menstrual Laws,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall; Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 28.

<sup>78</sup> The same holds for objects touched by a menstruant. It is only when someone touches her bed or something upon which she sat that there is a requirement to wash one’s clothes and bath in water; Lev 15:21–23.

<sup>79</sup> That the concern for maintaining ritual purity in sacred spaces (i.e., the Temple) was not limited to women, but also included men can be seen in comical rabbinic stories about the various way in which the high priest was kept awake during his overnight stay in the Temple before Yom Kippur lest he become ineligible by having a nocturnal emission while sleeping: *m. Yoma* 1.1; “Seven days before the Day of Atonement the High Priest was taken apart from his own house unto the Counsellors’ Chamber and another priest was made ready in his stead lest aught should befall him to render him ineligible [by becoming unclean or by suffering certain bodily defects].” Some of these rabbinic “tricks” employed for keeping the high priest awake include limiting his food intake because eating too much may induce sleep (1.4), having young members of the priesthood snap their middle fingers at him, and making him walk on the cold pavement to drive away the temptation to sleep (1.8).

be wary of assuming, like Foskett, that references to the ritual impurities unique to women must imply their patriarchal oppression. Just as the *Protevangelium of James* strikingly departs from negative views of sex, marriage, and the body found in some Pauline and early Christian literature, so it seems to resist the interpretation of menstruants and menstrual impurity as significantly more impure (i.e., comparable to a *zabah*) and connected to sin in more ascetic streams of early Judaism. Its view of menstruation may be closer to the Pentateuch, for instance, than to the views expressed by Josephus and the Qumran sectarians.

### **3.3.3 The Literary Function of *Protevangelium of James* 8:4**

From a literary perspective, one must further ask: How significant is the possible reference to Mary's menstruation in the *Protevangelium of James* as a whole? A close reading of the text's treatment of the events leading up to Mary's departure from the Temple, as well as of the reactions immediately following, will help us "test" the various suggestions outlined above regarding the author's purpose in alluding to Mary's menstruation.

The previous chapter established the text's key thematic interest in the importance of ritual purity connected specifically to the Temple and its sacrificial system. Mary and her family's conformity to the laws and customs of their day emerge as central motifs in the development of crucial aspects of character and plot as the text traces the family members' various interactions and encounters with the Temple, either through its sacrificial system or those that represent it (i.e., the priests).



From the outset, the author establishes the Temple as the center-point with which all characters relate and from which all plot development evolves, thus linking a number of pivotal scenes throughout the text. For example, when Anna receives news of her pregnancy, her first instinct is to offer her child to the Lord as a gift (*Prot. Jas.* 4:2). When Joachim is finally able to participate in the proper rituals upon learning that Anna is pregnant, he offers sacrifices both to the Lord and for the priests, elders, and people (*Prot. Jas.* 4:5–7, 5:1). When a banquet is held in honour of the infant Mary, the Temple priests confirm the child’s special status by means of their blessings (*Prot. Jas.* 6:6). Mary’s childhood, moreover, culminates with her arrival at the Temple to live, an event also accompanied by priestly blessings predicting her future role in salvation-history (*Prot. Jas.* 7:7–9).

In fact, we find only one negative comment about the Temple in the first seven chapters of the *Protevangelium of James*, during Anna’s lament. Like her husband who is turned away by Reubel, Anna describes herself as being “thrust out of the Temple of the Lord, my God (ἐξώρισάν με ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ μου; *Prot. Jas.* 3:3)” because of her barrenness (*Prot. Jas.* 2:1). That the text depicts both Joachim and Anna being turned away from the Temple seems, at first sight, to set up and foreshadow the scene at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 when Mary, too, is sent away.

But how does the text actually describe what happens to Mary at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4? Notably, unlike her parents, she is never said to be thrust out of the Temple or rejected by its priests; rather, God decides that it is time for her to leave. Once she has been identified at the age of twelve as potentially polluting, she becomes the center of concern for a

group of Temple priests who react immediately by sending the high priest to stand at the altar of the Lord to pray concerning her, and to do whatever the Lord God shall reveal should be done. In other words, the priests recognize that they must leave decisions about this special girl's fate to God. As in the account of Joachim's confirmation of his sinlessness in *Prot. Jas.* 5:1–3 and in the high priestly blessings in *Prot. Jas.* 6:7 and 6:9, the high priest is again associated with special access to divine knowledge. He takes the twelve bells, enters the Holy of Holies, and receives an immediate response by means of a visit from another messenger of the Lord. This time the angelic messenger instructs the high priest—now identified as Zechariah<sup>80</sup>—to assemble the widowers of Israel and to have each of them bring a staff (ῥάβδος); God will send a sign (σήμειον) indicating which of them he deems fit to take Mary as his wife (καὶ ᾧ ἐὰν ἐπιδείξη κύριος ὁ θεὸς σημεῖον, τούτῳ ἔσται γυνή; *Prot. Jas.* 8:8).

An important detail in the description of the messenger's instructions for finding an appropriate husband for Mary is the image of the staff (ῥάβδος). This detail evokes Numbers 17, whereby a staff (ῥάβδος) is also used to determine the priestly line worthy to serve and be responsible for the Temple (Num 17:1–5). In other words, the selection of Mary's husband is described in a manner that recalls the selection of Aaron's line as the caretakers and servants of the Temple: Mary, who was earlier described in terms resonate

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<sup>80</sup> Noteworthy is the high priest here who is given the same name as the father of John the Baptist in Luke 1:5–20. Like the Zechariah in the *Protevangelium of James*, Luke's Zechariah is also privy to angelic visits. While serving as a priest for God, he is chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. At this moment an angel of the Lord is sent to Zechariah to inform him of his blessings. It is interesting that in the case of Zechariah and Joseph, the events that unfold before them are dependent upon their selection by lots. This parallel of receiving angelic visits while in the temple is also attested in the *Diatessaron*, whereby Zechariah is also visited by Gabriel who informs him of the upcoming birth of his child.

with a sacrifice, is now increasingly likened to the Temple itself. Mary leaves the Temple but, in one sense, she becomes like the Temple; the text begins now to hint at her emerging status as a pure vessel for God's presence on the earth.

The selection of Mary's husband unfolds in this sequence: heralds are sent forth to all widowers of the people living in the surrounding countryside of Judea; instructions are sent to have all widowers assemble before the high priest; each man is told to bring a staff; after collecting the rods, the high priest enters the temple again and prays; after returning the rods to their proper owners, a dove appears from Joseph's rod and perches upon his head (*Prot. Jas.* 8:9–9:6). What is striking about this description is the high priest's two-fold prayer: once, in order to figure out what to do with Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 8:5); twice, when he takes the rods of all the widowers and prays (*Prot. Jas.* 9:3). The author makes it quite clear that God's will is again expressed by means of the high priest and the Temple is again depicted as the locus of divine presence and prophesy. Not surprisingly, then, just as Aaron's staff buds in Num 17:8, so Joseph's staff too receives a sign—in this case, in the form of a dove (περιστερά).

In Chapter Two, we noted how the symbol of the dove is associated both with sacrifice and with the Holy Spirit. At this point in the narrative, the dove also gains a symbolic connection to Mary herself, by virtue of the description in *Prot. Jas.* 8:2 of Mary being fed like a dove, by the hands of a heavenly messenger. Inasmuch as the dove evokes innocence and purity, the symbol here serves not only to underscore Mary's

virginity, but also to allude to the sexual purity of the relationship between her and Joseph,<sup>81</sup> particularly important for Mary’s coming role as the Temple of the messiah.

This theme is further explored by means of the high priests’ reaction to the miraculous sign on Joseph’s staff: “you have been assigned by lot to receive the virgin of the Lord into your care” (σὺ κεκλήρωσαι τὴν παρθένον κυρίου παραλαβεῖν εἰς τήρησιν σεαυτῶ; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7). This verse represents the first time the narrative refers to Mary as a virgin—and not just any virgin, but “the virgin of the Lord” (τὴν παρθένον κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7).<sup>82</sup> On one level, we can read this reference in terms of the text’s aim of underscoring Mary’s continued purity, even after her departure from the Temple. Significant, however, is a shift in the understanding of this purity: the focus is no longer on her ritual purity, as it was in *Prot. Jas.* 1–7, but rather on her sexual purity, as understood in terms of virginity in particular.

Foskett proposes that we read the *Protevangelium of James*’ understanding of Mary’s virginity as an important point of contact and contrast with Roman traditions about Vestal Virgins.<sup>83</sup> In her study of the sexual status of Vestal Virgins, Mary Beard discusses how the holiness of these priestesses was directly linked to their virginity and purity.<sup>84</sup> Like the Vestals, Mary is pure and holy and fulfills the requirement of being of

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<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, περιστέρα also occurs six times in LXX Genesis (LXX Gen 8:8, 9, 10, 11, 12; 15:9, where it is used to describe the bird that Noah sends out after the Flood; just as the dove is listed among the clean animals in Lev 11:13–19, so it serves here to confirm that the earth has been purified of the sins that led to the Flood. The term περιστέρα also occurs eight times in the Song of Songs (LXX Songs 1:15; 2:10, 13, 14; 4:1; 5:2, 12; 6:8). Here, it is a symbol of love and purity.

<sup>82</sup> A description of *parthenos* /*betulah* as well as a discussion of Mary’s role as the “virgin of the Lord” and the theme of sexual purity will be provided in the beginning of Chapter Four.

<sup>83</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148.

<sup>84</sup> M. Beard, “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins,” *JRS* 7 (1980): 12–27.

honourable lineage and sound physical condition. In addition, Mary is also like the Vestal virgins in that she belongs to both the deity and to the people.<sup>85</sup>

Despite these similarities, however, Foskett points to important distinctions. Mary neither performs any priestly duties, nor is she ascribed to the privileges and obligations of the priesthood.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, whereas the Vestal Virgins are granted permission to stay at their temples as long as they maintain their virginal state, the situation with Mary is the opposite: it is only after Mary is asked to leave the Temple that the text first emphasizes that she is a virgin.<sup>87</sup> In this case, as we have seen, the *Protevangelium of James* seems to draw more on biblical and early Jewish understandings of the female life-cycle than on Greco-Roman traditions about virginity. Specifically, Mary's virginity links to her maturation signalled by menstruation.

### 3.3.4 *Protevangelium of James* 8:4 as a Narrative Pivot

Our literary investigation into the events that lead up to *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 highlights the importance of the events that transpire at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, especially in terms of the development of Mary's character. In other words, Mary is consistently shown to surpass other women of her time in that she is specifically chosen by God based on her unique ritual purity and protected by God as evident by the divinely inspired actions of the priests to find her an apt husband. Equally significant about the events that lead up to

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<sup>85</sup> That Mary does not belong to her parents, for instance, is suggested by the fact that Anna and Joachim disappear from the narrative after Mary is dedicated to the Temple; note also the stress on the people's love for Mary in *Prot. Jas.* 7:10.

<sup>86</sup> One exception to this example may be her ability to live within the Temple and to come in proximity to the altar; Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148–50.

<sup>87</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148–50.

*Prot. Jas.* 8:4 is the emphasis placed on Mary's sexual purity after this point in the text. Earlier in the narrative Mary's ritual purity dominated the author's concerns, but his focus changes at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 when Mary's menstrual impurity produces a scenario in which her sexual purity is questioned. That is, the identification of Mary's menstrual impurity at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 serves as a catalyst for why she leaves the Temple and takes up the role of Joseph's "wife" at *Prot. Jas.* 9:7; later, as we shall see, she is questioned by Joseph and the high priests regarding her suspected participation in sexual relations at *Prot. Jas.* 13:6 and 15:10, respectively, a questioning only possible given the author's establishment of her development through the female life-cycle. Thus the events of *Prot. Jas.* 13:6 and 15:10 hinge on Mary's identification as menstrually impure at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4.

For this reason I would also like to suggest that *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 marks a broader shift in the text as a whole. After Mary leaves the Temple, we find less emphasis on ritual purity and more emphasis on sexual purity. Whereas the beginning of the *Protevangelium of James* narratively depicts the Temple as central for purity and piety, the focus increasingly falls, from *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 onwards, on Mary's own body as the locus of a piety conceived in terms of sexual purity. When read from this perspective, we see how the reference to Mary's possible pollution of the Temple serves to open the way for her embrace of a new situation and status, namely, as a virgin who can be pure even in common or impure spaces. During her childhood, she was set apart from others by virtue of her physical association with sacred environments (i.e., her bedroom-sanctuary; the Temple). From now on, what defines her and sets her apart from others is her unique status as the "virgin of the Lord."

In what follows, I would thus like to explore further the significance of *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 as a narrative pivot within the *Protevangelium of James* by considering how Mary is portrayed in relation to her marriage, on the one hand, and the Temple, on the other. Particular attention will be paid to points of continuity and difference in the depiction of Mary in *Prot. Jas.* chapters 9–10, as compared to her depiction in *Prot. Jas.* chapters 1–7.

The nature of Mary’s marriage is made clear in *Prot. Jas.* 9:7. Upon receiving Mary, Joseph is instructed by the high priest to take her in as a guardian under his “care” (τήρησις). Although it is mentioned earlier that the purpose is to make Mary the wife (γυνή) of the one to whom the Lord God shows a sign (σημεῖον); (*Prot. Jas.* 8:8), the text thereafter refrains from depicting Mary as Joseph’s wife in the normal sense of the term. Efforts are made to make the marital relationship between the couple ambiguous. The old and sexually unthreatening Joseph is specifically chosen by the Lord to be Mary’s “husband,” yet he is simultaneously instructed not to act as Mary’s husband in the sense of fathering her children, but rather to “take her under your care” (παραλαβεῖν εἰς τήρησιν σεαυτῶ; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7).

That our narrative intends readers to interpret the marriage of Mary and Joseph as platonic and similar to the relationship between a father and daughter can be reinforced by comparing their betrothal to what we know of Jewish betrothals and marriage laws. Most helpful are the laws and ideas from proto-rabbinic and rabbinic circles since there is little about Jewish marriages in post-biblical literature that is distinguishable from other ancient marriage practices. Michael Satlow argues that like their Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman counterparts, Jewish women were typically viewed as being under male

guardianship (e.g., father or brother) and notes that the rabbis were particularly interested in the moments when a woman was passed from one male to another (e.g., from a father to a husband).<sup>88</sup>

Michael Berger notes in particular that marriage contracts served as a way to ensure the protection (both physical and in terms of material support) of a woman who could be transferred from her father's care.<sup>89</sup> For a woman who is a minor, her father (if alive)<sup>90</sup> holds full control and is responsible for making marriage contracts for his daughter and for "handing over" responsibility to her husband.<sup>91</sup> The goals of marriage have much to do with procreation, creating a household, and participating in an activity that is harmonious with God's plan (e.g., Gen 1:28: Be fruitful and multiple).<sup>92</sup> Berger notes specifically, that Jewish nuptials were a process that consisted of several parts and

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<sup>88</sup> Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 78. Note that being betrothed in particular was considered to be a vulnerable position for a woman since she was neither fully under the guardianship of her father nor her husband until the marriage was complete, but rather was stuck in "legal limbo." For Mary, this time of heightened vulnerability occurs the second the priests identify her as turning the age of twelve and decide they can no longer care and protect her until her "marriage" with Joseph is complete.

<sup>89</sup> Michael S. Berger, "Judaism," in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* (ed. Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte Jr.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 6–7.

<sup>90</sup> Note that there is no indication in the narrative that Mary's father has passed away. In fact, both Joachim and Anna make the decision to transfer their protection over her to the priests, even though she is not of age and they are still capable of caring for her. The oddity of this detail heightens the interpretation that Mary's relationship with Joseph will also be unique.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. According to *m. Nid 5.7*, a girl who is twelve years and one day old is no longer considered a minor. She has transitioned into the next stage of life, namely, as a pubescent girl (*Na'arath*). The status of a *Na'arath* lasts six months, after which time she enters womanhood (*Bogereth*). When a girl is twelve years, six months, and one day old, she is a full woman who can make her own decisions; she can choose her own husband and may refuse a vow made by her father on her behalf. The concern for finding Mary a suitable husband occurs precisely when she is identified as turning the age of twelve, strengthening the reading of her age in the narrative as reflecting mishnaic concerns. See discussion of Horner's argument above for understanding Mary's specific age references in the narrative in light of mishnaic concerns. See also Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20–39 for a detail discussion of the minor daughter in Mishnaic literature, especially as it pertains to defining the various points of the female life-cycle and their status in each stage. Wegner also provides a dialogue for understanding the legal rights and duties of a female person in each stage.

<sup>92</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 26–27.



required certain documents; [1] a betrothal; [2] a later wedding ceremony; [3] a dowry and list of obligations; and [4] a wedding feast.<sup>93</sup> Since only the betrothal is explicitly mentioned in the *Protevangelium of James*, we will focus on this stage of the marriage process. Regarding Jewish marriage proposals, Satlow argues in his discussion of rabbinic marriage laws that there are three ways to establish a marriage betrothal: money, contract, and intercourse.<sup>94</sup>

If we compare these marriage goals and betrothal laws with the arrangement made between Mary and Joseph, the picture that emerges is hardly one of a common marriage arranged for the purpose of procreation. First, Mary's betrothal to Joseph is a decision made not by her father, but by the temple priests and God.<sup>95</sup> Perhaps the transfer of Mary from her father's home to the temple precinct is meant to set a precedent for her transfer from the guardianship of the priests to Joseph, a circumstance arranged simply for the purpose of protection since Mary is portrayed not only as the daughter of the priests, but even as God's daughter since she dwells in his house. Second, the traditional betrothal laws are not followed: no money or dowry is mentioned, no contract is made, and no sexual intercourse is assumed. In fact, Joseph initially objects to the marriage. He stresses that he already has sons and is too old for Mary: "I have sons and I am elderly, and she is a girl, lest I become a laughing stock to the children of Israel (Υἱοὺς ἔχω καὶ πρεσβύτης εἰμι· αὕτη δὲ νεάνις μήπως ἔσομαι περίγελος τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραήλ; *Prot. Jas.* 9:8) What is significant about the transfer of Mary from her father's house to the

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<sup>93</sup> Berger, "Judaism," 5.

<sup>94</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 79.

<sup>95</sup> It is God who decides that Mary should be under the care and protection of Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 8:7; 9:7).

temple priest's house (i.e., temple) and from the temple priest's house to Joseph's house is that Mary is still granted protection and guardianship under these three male figures.<sup>96</sup> Given that Mary is passed into the care of Joseph in a way that is unfamiliar in regular Jewish marriages, it is clear that the “marriage” between Mary and Joseph is not the traditional sort.

We note additional support for this non-traditional view of their marriage in that despite the divinely-guided nature of the decision, Joseph agrees to the proposal only out of fear. Of particular interest is the basis for the fear that causes Joseph to reconsider his first reaction; namely, the high priest reminds Joseph of Dathan, Abiram, and Korah, the three sons of Levi who offer “strange fire” and are eaten by the earth in punishment in Num 16:1–35. In other words, the text likens the possibility of Joseph's rejection of Mary to the offering of an impure sacrifice. Significantly, in Numbers the actions of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram are what necessitate the limitation of the priestly duties to a single line, which reinforces the parallel between Aaron and Joseph: just as God chooses Aaron and his descendents, by means of a sign on rods, to perform the duties of caretaker over the Temple, Joseph is similarly chosen to care for Mary, who is described in terms similar to both sacrifices and the Temple itself.

Not surprisingly then, not once in the narrative does Joseph himself make reference to Mary as his wife (γυνή).<sup>97</sup> Immediately after agreeing to take her in, Joseph

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<sup>96</sup> On the notion of marriage as a “transference” and detailed discussion of the necessary steps needed for a Jewish marriage, see David Novak, “Jewish Marriage: Nature, Covenant, and Contract,” in *Marriage, Sex, and Family in Judaism* (eds. Michael J. Broyde and Michael Ausubel; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 65–83.

<sup>97</sup> In fact, on two occasions Joseph struggles with her role in his family. In *Prot. Jas.* 17:2–4, Joseph questions out loud by what title Mary should be given when they are forced to enroll in Emperor

makes his intentions quite clear. He tells her that despite receiving her from the temple of the Lord, he needs to leave her to care for herself in his home, while he is away building houses. Before Joseph leaves, he reassures her that “the Lord will protect you”<sup>98</sup> (κύριός σε διαφυλάξει; *Prot. Jas.* 9:12), the first and only words spoken by Joseph to Mary before he leaves. Consequently, the *Protevangelium of James* makes it abundantly clear that Mary does not belong to Joseph, but rather to God.

In *Prot. Jas.* 9:11–12, Joseph’s recognition and acceptance of Mary’s role and importance are highlighted by the fact that he follows the instruction of the high priest to care and protect Mary by leaving her under divine protection. Perhaps the reader is meant to imagine that Joseph hopes that the protection granted to Mary, when she lived under the Temple, will be extended to her under his roof. As Mary and her state of purity are now defined in terms of her designation as “virgin of the Lord,” the reader might also assume that Mary will be protected by the One to whom she really belongs. Her virginity, moreover, is vouchsafed in narrative terms by the description of Joseph’s immediate departure; the *Protevangelium of James* leaves no room for any questions concerning their engagement in any sexual acts.

The next scene, moreover, returns the action of the narrative to the Temple—the place that has served, thus far in the narrative, as the major nexus for the description of Mary and her special status. In *Prot. Jas.* 10:1, we learn of a meeting of the priests, whereupon they decide to make a veil (καταπέτασμα) for the Temple of the Lord

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Augustus’ census and at *Prot. Jas.* 19:5–8, Joseph is questioned directly by the Hebrew midwife regarding Mary’s identity.

<sup>98</sup> Note that the reference to the “Lord will protect you” or “keep a close watch on you,” is a common biblical motif. See LXX Gen 28:15, 28:20, LXX Ps 40:3, 41:2, 90:11 and Luke 4:10 are but a few examples where the term διαφυλάσσω is used in conjunction with the Lord.

(τῶ νᾶϊ κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 10:1).<sup>99</sup> The narrator does not signal how much time has passed since Mary’s departure.<sup>100</sup> The plan, however, involves summoning “undefiled virgins from the tribe of David” (παρθένους τὰς ἀμίαντους ἀπὸ τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυίδ; *Prot. Jas.* 10:2), which recalls the undefiled maidservants of Mary during her youth (especially evoked by the word ἀμίαντος at *Prot. Jas.* 6:5).

In *Prot. Jas.* 10:3, we are told that seven such virgins are found. Then, however, the high priest also remembers Mary and recalls “that she was of the tribe of David and was undefiled in God [’s sight]”<sup>101</sup> (ὅτι ἦν τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυίδ καὶ ἀμίαντος τῶ θεῶ; *Prot. Jas.* 10:4). In effect, the priests who decided that Mary must leave the Temple are precisely the priests who invite her back. In this manner the author makes clear that Mary’s purity does not cease when she changes her dwelling place from the Temple to Joseph’s home; rather it shifts in focus, concurrent with her own maturation into a woman.

Therefore, Mary’s selection for the special task of weaving implies her sexual status as a virgin as well as assumes, moreover, her identification as a descendent of

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<sup>99</sup> On the veil that protects the Holy of Holies, see Exod 26:31, 36; 35:25; 36:35; 2 Chr 3:14; this is the connection made by Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51 n.10:1; H. R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 76–77. In the LXX, the Greek term used for this veil is καταπέτασμα, the identical word used in the *Protevangelium of James*. In addition, Paul Foster points to biblical references to other veils that protect parts of various sanctuaries in the Israelite/Jewish cult, such as the curtains of blue, purple and scarlet used to make the tabernacle in Exod 26:1 and the curtain that shields the ark in Exod 30:6. Foster sees this detail as creating an intertextual link with the references to the torn Temple veil of the Passion narratives in the NT Gospels (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45); Foster, “The Protevangelium of James,” *ExpTim* 118.12 (2007): 577–78; idem, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 116–18.

<sup>100</sup> Directly after Joseph’s words to Mary—“The Lord will protect you” (9:12)—the next line begins with Ἐγένετο and describes the discussion among the priests that will lead to Mary’s return. Some translators have rendered this proximity as a description of simultaneous action (e.g., Hock adds “meanwhile”), although the Greek does not signal how much time has passed.

<sup>101</sup> Literally, “undefiled to God.” The dative case here is being used as a dative of interest, thus expressing the person interested in or concerned with the statement made.

David—an affirmation of the passing reference to her royal lineage earlier in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 10:2).<sup>102</sup> In depicting Mary as Davidic, the *Protevangelium of James* offers quite a different view of Jesus’ lineage than those found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke; there, for instance, Mary’s genealogy is traced through the line of Aaron (Luke 1:5, 36), and it is her husband Joseph who is from the Davidic line (Matt 1:20; Luke 2:4).<sup>103</sup> Consistent with the diminished role of Joseph in the *Protevangelium of James*, here Mary becomes responsible for transmitting a Davidic—and, hence, messianic—pedigree to Jesus.<sup>104</sup>

Despite her marriage to Joseph, however, Mary is referred to as a “child” (παῖδίσκη) by the priests in *Prot. Jas.* 10:4. As with the description of the unusual circumstances surrounding her marriage in *Prot. Jas.* 9:11, this detail seems designed to deny her status as Joseph’s wife in any traditional sense of the term. The priest also

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<sup>102</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51 n.10:2, reads the reference to the “tribe of David” as problematic, since the Hebrew Bible does not describe a tribe of David among the Israelite tribes. In this instance, however, he may take too literal an approach. The phrase could mean the “tribe of David” in the sense of the Israelite tribe to which David belonged (i.e., Judah) and/or simply stand as shorthand for Davidic lineage. In any case, the point is clearly to stress again Mary’s royal lineage, as earlier noted in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2. The messianic connotations of Davidic lineage make this connection especially important.

<sup>103</sup> My comparison of the *Protevangelium of James* to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke here does not necessarily assume direct dependence. The Diatessaron, for instance, identifies Mary both through Aaron’s line via her relative Elizabeth who is identified as being one of the “daughters of Aaron” (Diat. 1:6, 27), but also through the Davidic line by means of her husband Joseph. On five different occasions, the Diatessaron cites Joseph as belonging to the house of David (Diat. 1:27, 27, 68, 2:3, 9), but re-emphasizes the fact that though engaged to Joseph, and before they came together, Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit (Diat. 2:1).

<sup>104</sup> The *Protevangelium of James* is, of course, not alone in making this claim as other Christ-believers of the second century similarly assert Mary’s Davidic ancestry, especially in light of the fact that Joseph does not really pass on his lineage to Jesus except in the indirect sense of an adopted father; see, e.g., Ignatius (*Eph.* 18.2), Justin (*Dial.* 43, 45, 100, 120). In light of Ignatius’ location in Syria (i.e., Antioch) and Justin’s association with Palestine (i.e., Samaria), there perhaps may be an echo here of early rabbinic discussions of Jewish ethnicity as passed on through the mother rather than through the father; i.e., according to rabbinic law from the second century CE to the present, the status of the offspring of intermarriage is determined by the mother: a Jewish mother bears a Jewish child, a non-Jewish mother bears a non-Jewish child, regardless of the status of the father in either case. On this, see e.g., Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), esp. chps. 9 (263–308) and 10 (308–40).

describes Mary as “undefiled in God[’s sight]” (ἀμίαντος τῶ θεῶ; *Prot. Jas.* 10:4). But what precisely is meant by this phrase? What does “undefiled” mean in the context of this narrative, especially in light of the fact that Mary is pure enough to return to the Temple after she is deemed no longer pure enough to live there full time? A number of scholars have translated this phrase to read “pure in the eyes of God,”<sup>105</sup> “pure before God,”<sup>106</sup> “uncontaminated before God,”<sup>107</sup> or even “sans tache devant Dieu.”<sup>108</sup> In each translation, the range of meaning for the word ἀμίαντος and the use of the dative to render the meaning “before” are limited to Mary’s sexual purity, i.e., her virginity. In my translation of “undefiled in God[’s sight]” I suggest that the reference to “undefiled” cannot simply be limited to her virginity if we take into consideration the range of meaning ἀμίαντος is given elsewhere in the narrative.

The author employs this term in reference to a variety of situations in the *Protevangelium of James*. Above, we noted the use of the term ἀμίαντος to describe Mary’s companions in *Prot. Jas.* 6:5 and 7:4 and the use of the phrase παρθένους τὰς ἀμιάντους to describe the weavers in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2. In Chapter Two, we discussed the fact that the term ἀμίαντος appears in the OT apocrypha and NT

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<sup>105</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51.

<sup>106</sup> Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 114; Oscar Cullmann, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1991), 430; David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, “The Gospel of James,” in *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 111; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 61.

<sup>107</sup> Robert J. Miller, ed., “The Protevangelium of James,” in *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1992), 381.

<sup>108</sup> Albert Frey, “Protévangelie de Jacques,” in *Écrits Apocryphes Chrétiens I.* (ed. F. Bovon et P. Geoltrain; Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 91.

literature, used there to refer to virginity,<sup>109</sup> but also in the context of ritual purity,<sup>110</sup> and suggested that the three scenarios listed above (*Prot. Jas.* 6:5, 7:4, and 10:2) draw on both meanings.

Likewise, most translators have read the phrase παρθένους τὰς ἀμίαντους in *Prot. Jas.* 10:2 as a hendiadys, so that the two words used mean the same thing, but whereby the repetition serves to intensify the meaning. Hock, for instance, translates the phrase as “true virgins,” thus rendering a meaning that speaks only to their sexual purity as virgins.<sup>111</sup> While a sexual connotation undoubtedly can be attributed to the word “virgin” (παρθένος), in my view, the adjective ἀμίαντος may actually have a different function beyond simply intensifying the status of these girls as virgins, which is why I have suggested that the phrase παρθένους τὰς ἀμίαντους at *Prot. Jas.* 10:2 be translated as “undefiled virgins.”

Given the text’s emphasis on pollution and the female life-cycle two chapters earlier (i.e., *Prot. Jas.* 8:4) and its sensitivity towards the purification of female-specific impurities already signalled by the account of Anna’s post-partum purification (*Prot. Jas.* 5:9), a better reading might be that the adjective ἀμίαντος is actually used by the author to evoke a sense of menstrual purity. In other words, these girls are not only sexually pure, but also menstrually pure. This interpretation would also explain, for instance, why the high priest is described as having such a difficult time finding girls who meet all the requirements to weave the Temple veil in *Prot. Jas.* 10:3, as it would be necessary that

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<sup>109</sup> E.g., Wis 3:13; 8:20.

<sup>110</sup> E.g., in the context of abstaining from the impure; Wis 4:2; 2 Macc 14:36; 15:34; Heb 7:26; 1 Pet 1:4.

<sup>111</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51.

those chosen were not only virgins and Davidic in lineage, but also not menstruating at the time that they serve as weavers. If ἀμίαντος evokes for Mary's companions both a concern for their sexual and ritual/menstrual purity, how much more would the term ἀμίαντος in its various connotations be appropriate to describe Mary's purity before God?

The text makes very clear that Mary's ritual and menstrual purity surpasses all others and makes her an attractive and uniquely qualified candidate to be chosen by God as his virgin.<sup>112</sup> This fact is expressed even in the way Mary and seven other virgins are chosen for the important task of weaving the Temple veil;<sup>113</sup> they are taken into the Temple of the Lord and lots are cast for the various colours. The description of the casting of lots recalls the parallel manner in which staffs were used earlier to determine Mary's husband. In each case, the message rings clearly that God ultimately decides the outcome (and not simply random selection), resulting in a choice that is, from a narrative as well as theological perspective, much more significant. This device of casting lots is also employed in the selection of the high priesthood at the very end of the narrative when Simeon is chosen by lot to succeed after news spreads of Zachariah's murder (*Prot. Jas.*

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<sup>112</sup> As discussed above, the term ἀμίαντος used to describe Mary's companions/virgins at *Prot. Jas.* 6:5, 7:4, and 10:2 may be interpreted as reflecting their status both as virgins and as ritually pure. That is, Mary only had contact with virgins who were also ritually pure (not menstruating). Although we are told that seven virgins are worthy enough to be chosen to weave the temple veil, it is unlikely that they too underwent the same conditions as Mary to maintain their purity. Mary may have only been exposed to ritually pure virgins, but this fact does not mean that these companions in turn only associated and made contact with ritually pure virgins themselves. Mary's purity is clearly presented in the narrative as being superior to all others which is why she, and not any other virgin, is selected as the Lord's virgin.

<sup>113</sup> Noteworthy also is the significance of Mary as the eighth weaver and the one added to what appears, at first sight, to be an already whole contingent of seven.



24:12).<sup>114</sup> In this way, Mary’s appointment by lot to “the scarlet and true purple threads” (Καὶ ἔλαχε τὴν Μαρίαν ἢ ἀληθινὴ πορφύρα καὶ τὸ κόκκινον; *Prot. Jas.* 10:8) is significant. Scarlet (κόκκινον) is often used in the Hebrew Bible and NT writings to refer to blood atonement and sacrifice and is regularly cited in association with cleansing and purification (e.g., Lev 14:4, 52; Num 19:6; Heb 9:19). In Prov 31:21, scarlet is symbolically associated with a virtuous woman.<sup>115</sup> Thus Mary’s connection with the colour scarlet appears particularly fitting given the narrative’s efforts to present her as “pure and pious,” and, as demonstrated in the last chapter, very much likened to a sacrifice. In addition, the colour purple (πορφύρα) and its association with royalty and riches is equally appropriate given Mary’s identification as descended from both a wealthy family as well as the royal line of David (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1; 10:4).<sup>116</sup> In other words, Mary’s allotment of the scarlet and purple threads signifies that she alone is chosen to be responsible for the royal segments of the veil; even among a group of other Davidic virgins, she emerges as the most royal.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The practice of casting lots is mentioned seventy times in the Hebrew Bible, most often in connection with the division of land under Joshua (Josh 14–21). To be sure, various offices and functions in the Temple, especially in relation to the duties of the priests, are also determined by lot; i.e., 1 Chr 24:5, 31; 25:8–9; 26:13–14. The use of lots is also attested in the NT seven times: lots are cast to determine who will replace Judas (Acts 1:26) and who will take possession of Jesus’ garments (Matt 27:35). See further, William Beardslee, “The Castings of Lots at Qumran and in the Book of Acts,” *NovT* 4.4 (1960): 245–52.

<sup>115</sup> Other references to the use of scarlet include: a scarlet cord around Zerah (Gen 38:28–30); scarlet used in the tabernacle (Exod 25:4); a scarlet cord hung from Rahab’s window (Josh 2:18); indication of prosperity (2 Sam 1:24; Prov 31:21); Jesus’ robe is scarlet (Matt 27:28); scarlet is the colour of the beast ridden by the harlot by Babylon (Rev 17:3).

<sup>116</sup> Other references to the colour purple include: used in the tabernacle (Exod 26:1; 27:16); and the temple (2 Chr 2:14); used in royal robes (Judg 8:26); used in garments of the wealthy (Prov 31:22; Luke 16:19); clothes worn by a harlot (Rev 17:4); the robe placed on Jesus (Mark 15:17, 20).

<sup>117</sup> Smid argues that Mary’s superiority over the other seven virgins is further exemplified by the fact that when a temple veil is ordered by the priests, seven virgins are selected to weave seven different colour threads: a complete group is made. However, when Mary is remembered as the most important of these virgins, she cannot be left out and in fact is allotted by God’s decree not one, but two of the most important colours. Although the narrator does not provide details on how the other seven virgins are to

Having entered the Temple to receive her threads, Mary returns home to weave them (*Prot. Jas.* 10:8). Again, we see Mary's purity described by means of her movement between different literary spaces. The common space of her new home contrasts with the status of her childhood home as akin to a sanctuary as well as with the Temple in which she once dwelt. In her new home, Mary is no longer fed by the hand of heavenly angels, but rather must go out in the open to retrieve her own water (Καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν κάλπιν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν γεμίσαι ὕδωρ; *Prot. Jas.* 11:1). Mary's purity shifts its dependence from being defined by sacred places, and by the association with only pure food, ground, and people, to a purity that can be centered outside the Temple, in her own body.

Although Mary's purity becomes increasingly defined outside the Temple after *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, her intimate connection with the Temple remains intact when the description of Zechariah becoming mute and being temporarily replaced by Samuel as high priest (*Prot. Jas.* 10:9) is awkwardly inserted between the description of Mary receiving the purple and scarlet threads and her actually taking up the threads to spin them. Hock suggests that the awkwardness of this detail at *Prot. Jas.* 10:9 should be attributed to the author's attempt to place his narrative within the framework of Luke's canonical account,<sup>118</sup> but I would argue that the place of this peculiar yet evocative reference to Zechariah and Samuel may serve another purpose. This notice, indeed, interrupts the description of Mary's weaving, thus implying some connection. First, this correlation recalls the circumstances surrounding and leading up to Zechariah's muteness;

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divide the five additional coloured threads, evident in this scene is Mary's special role as God's chosen; Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 78–79.

<sup>118</sup> Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 51 n. 10:9.

namely, as part of the priestly line, Zechariah is not elected, but chosen by lot in God's providence akin to the manner that Mary is chosen by lot and God's will to perform the sacred task of weaving the temple veil. And second, this scene may serve to imply in yet another way that the link between Mary and the Temple remains mysteriously close, in a manner that will not become fully evident until after her motherhood of the messiah.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The *Protevangelium of James*' description of the events surrounding Mary's withdrawal from the Temple along with a literary analysis of the key verse at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 suggests that the text alludes to Mary's menstruation as the reason she must leave the temple precinct. The text's continual stress on ritual purity early in the narrative coupled with the use of the term μίανω make clear that the concern here is with ritual purity and not, for instance, Mary's gender *per se* or any broader view of women as polluting. The priests in the narrative, for instance, continue to treat her as a special and pure girl, as clear from the events surrounding the choice of her husband in *Prot. Jas.* 9:6–7. Moreover, her re-entrance into the Temple in *Prot. Jas.* 9:2–8 is by priestly invitation.

From a narrative standpoint, *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 may be viewed as a narrative pivot in the text. In other words, whereby ritual purity in terms of the Temple and sacrifices (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1–8:3) helped anticipate and foreshadow the concern for menstrual impurity in the text, the identification of Mary's impending menstruation as the likely cause for defilement at *Prot. Jas.* 8:4 in turn functions as a turning point for an interest in a new kind of purity in the narrative: sexual purity. Significantly, only when Mary leaves the

walls of the Temple is she first identified as a virgin and designated the title “virgin of the Lord.” Mary’s new role and the narrative’s shift in concern from ritual purity and menstrual purity to sexual purity raises questions concerning relevant terms such as *parthenos/betulah*, our next topic for discussion.

## **Chapter Four: Mary and Sexual Impurity in the *Protevangelium of James***

### **4.1 Aims of the Chapter**

The present chapter reassesses the influential and much-discussed references in the *Protevangelium of James* to Mary as the “Virgin of the Lord” (τὴν παρθένον κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 9:7). I propose that the characterization of Mary’s purity takes a new turn after *Prot. Jas.* 8:4, shifting away from a general concern for ritual purity towards a more focused interest in sexual purity, i.e., Mary’s sexual status as a virgin or *parthenos*. Additionally, I also explore allusions to Mary’s moral purity introduced during the questioning of her sexual status, as well as consider the references to Mary’s Davidic lineages as commentaries on her genealogical purity, with the goal of examining what contributions, if any, are made to her characterization as a result of these references. Moreover, this final purity chapter also considers how the theme of sexual purity contributes to the characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* as a whole, especially in light of my previous findings concerning the place of ritual and menstrual purity in the first half of the text.

### **4.2 What is Sexual Purity/Impurity?**

In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary holds the unique status as both Mother and Perpetual Virgin. What is more, Mary’s maintains her position as Virgin Mother despite her marriage to Joseph. Given that Mary’s sexual purity is understood especially in terms of her virginity and continual practice of celibacy and continence, I propose to survey a variety of sources and their ideas on these related topics in contrast and relation to

marriage. Additionally, since Mary simultaneously takes on the role of mother, I also examine ideas surrounding the impurity that is produced by parturients, especially in my discussion of chapters 19 and following where the details surrounding the birth of Jesus at *Prot. Jas.* 19:16 will be compared to Mary’s own birth at *Prot. Jas.* 5:9.

### 4.3 Ideas on Virginitly and Celibacy in Early Jewish Sources

#### 4.3.1 *Betulah* and *Parthenos*

The Hebrew term *betulah*/ בתולה is often translated as “virgin,” but is also commonly used to mean simply “young woman,” which places emphasis only on age and not physical characteristics (e.g., Deut 32:25; Isa 23:4, 42:5; Jer 51:22; Ezek 9:6, etc.). The phrase “who has not known a man” is often added to the word in order to emphasize her virginitly (e.g., Judg 19:39, 21:12; Gen 24:16: “a man has not known her”).<sup>1</sup> The plural term *betulim*, however, is almost always used to refer to virginitly.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Protevangelium of James*, the Greek word *parthenos* is used to describe Mary’s sexual status as a virgin. As Mary Foskett rightly notes, the term *parthenos* has been problematic for Christian interpreters since it corresponds roughly to the Hebrew term *betulah* and can render multiple connotations<sup>3</sup> including one’s sexual status, age, or both; i.e., both may be translated to mean “virgin” or “young woman.”<sup>4</sup> While both

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<sup>1</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Virginitly in the Bible,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. V. Matthews, B. Levinson, and T. Frymer-Kensky; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Frymer-Kensky, “Virginitly in the Bible,” 80.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginitly* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 16.

definitions are relevant to this discussion, this chapter draws primarily on Mary's virginity.

#### 4.3.2 Ideas of Virginity, Celibacy, and Marriage in the Hebrew Bible

In the Bible, the laws concerning the accused bride (Deut. 22:13–21) and the unmarried virgin who is forced into intercourse (Deut. 22:28–29) establish clear views on chastity and virginity: unmarried girls are to remain virgins until they are married to a man chosen for them by their father. Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that the expectation that young girls should remain virgins is embedded in the Hebrew language since the term *betulah* allows for various connotations: virgin, young girl, young girl of marriageable age.<sup>5</sup> In other words, virginity and chastity in the Hebrew Bible are often understood in the context of marriage in that virginity is interpreted as a prized and expected possession for young unmarried girls as illustrated in the story of Lot and his daughters (Gen 19), but if lost before marriage, considered a sign of dishonour and disgrace as presented in the story of Dinah (Gen 34). As expected, these ideas about virginity and celibacy are directly linked to the divine command to be “fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28), such that virginity and the practice of celibacy are promoted only as a way of life up until the opportunity of marriage arises.

In terms of biblical ideas on marriage, Michael Berger argues that large agrarian patriarchal families were encouraged by the goal of achieving legitimate heirs; thus, strict rules of endogamy and exogamy, especially concerning incest were enforced. The process

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<sup>5</sup> Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” 79.

of marriage perhaps undergoes greater formalization as evident by the fragmentary papyri from Elephantine,<sup>6</sup> which includes one of the earliest known written contracts and set dowries.<sup>7</sup> These ideas concerning virginity in the context of marriage and the formalization of the marriage procedure are especially interesting in light of Mary's arranged "marriage" to Joseph (since her virginity is questioned not before, but after she is already living in his home and is technically Joseph's wife) and to the process by which they are "married."

#### 4.3.3 Virginity, Celibacy, and Marriage in the Scrolls

Although the Scrolls do not discuss virginity explicitly on its own terms, the practice and view of celibacy for the Qumran community have been long questioned and debated by scholars. The practice of celibacy for the whole community was assumed based on the belief that the Qumran community were in fact the Essenes, a male-only celibate community.<sup>8</sup> However, no explicit statement appears anywhere that indicates that celibacy was the practiced norm or that the community was comprised only of male members. Eileen Schuller and Cecilia Wassen both note that the burial sites excavated surrounding the settlement preserved the bones of relatively few women and children

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<sup>6</sup> See B. Porter and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt: Contracts*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989), doc. B2.6.

<sup>7</sup> Michael S. Berger, "Judaism," in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* (ed. Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte Jr.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2–4.

<sup>8</sup> Eileen Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What Have We Learned?* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 81; Geza Vermes, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 2–3, 12.



compared to the male remains, but both maintain no definitive conclusions can be made.<sup>9</sup> One passage in the Damascus Document, however, hints towards the community's beliefs and practices on celibacy. CD 6.11–7.9 describes two groups: the first group “will walk according to these precepts in perfect holiness, according to all the teaching of God,” while the second group will “live in the camps according to the rule of the land, marrying and begetting children.”<sup>10</sup> The first group thus seems to reflect those who practiced celibacy and other forms of asceticism, while the second group participated in marriage for procreative reasons.

Persuaded by the idea of a community of male celibates, Louis Ginzberg, among others, suggests that the reason for such practices can be attributed to purity regulations and the attempt to achieve a level of purity comparable to Temple priests.<sup>11</sup> Namely, since the group occupies “a sanctuary built by the sect in the land of Damascus,” purity rules, including forbidding sexual intercourse in the city of the temple and other sexual prohibitions, were required to prevent its defilement; thus celibacy was thought to be a good defence.<sup>12</sup> Scholars like Lawrence Schiffman and Joseph Baumgarten, who oppose

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<sup>9</sup> Schuller, *What Have We Learned?*, 98; Cecilia Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document* (SBLABib 21; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Schuller, *What Have We Learned?*, 98; Translations are from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds. and trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997). Also cf. Matt 19:17, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *An Unknown Jewish Sect* (ed. and trans., Ralph Marcus et al.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1976), 32–33; Elisha Qimron, “Celibacy in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Two Kinds of Sectarians,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress*, 1:290–94; Matthew Black, “The Tradition of Hasidean-Essene Asceticism: Its Origins and Influence,” in *Aspects du Judéo-Christianisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 23–25 Avril 1964* (ed. Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg. Centre de Recherches d'histoire des Religions; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 19–33; A. Marx, “Les Racines de Célibate Essénien,” *RevQ* 7 (1970): 323–42, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Ginzberg, *Unknown Jewish Sect*, xiii. The precise meaning of “Damascus” has been hotly debated and although Ginzberg's assumption that the sect's final place of settlement was Damascus has been rejected by scholars, his evidence for the practice of celibacy at Qumran is widely accepted. See

the Essene identity of the community, often reject the idea that celibacy was practiced exclusively. Schiffman argues instead, for instance, that the Qumran complex served as a male-only study center for men for whom studies were required for membership, but who were nonetheless husbands and fathers.<sup>13</sup> Baumgarten argues that celibacy in the community existed only as a practice after gaining membership; that is, after already having been married and fathered children.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Baumgarten and Wassen also consider the possibility of celibate women as members of the community.<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of our study we will consider the Damascus Document's concept of celibacy as "perfect holiness," understood as a higher road for living one's life according to God's will in light of Mary's dualistic role as Virgin Mother.

#### 4.3.4 Virginitly, Celibacy, and Marriage in Rabbinic Sources

Much like biblical law, rabbinic ideas concerning virginitly and celibacy are very much understood in the context of marriage; that is, virginitly is prized before marriage and celibacy in marriage occurs at specific times and for specific purposes. In rabbinic literature, however, the idea that marriage entails a legal contract between two individuals takes on new meaning as evidenced by the sheer volume of literature devoted to specific

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Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Damascus," in *Encyclopaedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L. Schiffman and J. VanderKam; 2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:165–66.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 53, 135; cf. idem, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony and the Penal Code* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983), 214–15.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Baumgarten, "The Qumran-Essene Restraints on Marriage," in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York Conference in Memory of Yigael Yadin* (ed. Lawrence Schiffman; JSPSup 8; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 13–24.

<sup>15</sup> Baumgarten, "Qumran-Essene Restraints on Marriage," 13–24 and Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 8. Cf. Ross Kramer who has argued for the unlikelihood of women at Qumran; "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides," *Signs* 14 (1989), 365.

obligations and responsibilities for those who engage in such contracts.<sup>16</sup> For men, these obligations included providing protection and material support; for women, their responsibilities were linked to providing assistance in the household and in procreation.<sup>17</sup> In addition to interpreting Genesis 1:28 as a divine commandment,<sup>18</sup> the rabbis also interpreted Exodus 21:10 as establishing conjugal relations between a husband and wife as obligatory and greatly encouraging sexual relations for the purpose of procreation (*b. Yoma* 72 b; *b. Pes* 112b, *b. Men* 110b, *b. Ta'an* 16a; *b. Qid* 29b).<sup>19</sup> Sex is even presented in rabbinic literature as the husband's conjugal duty to his wife.<sup>20</sup> For our purposes, obligatory sexual relations within marriage is an idea we will look at in more detail especially with regard to the description of Mary's and Joseph's marriage as it may speak to the reality of their relationship since such an obligation is not demanded of the couple and, in fact, is the reason they are accused and must stand trial before the high priest.

While rabbis clearly promoted marriage and sexual relations for the purpose of procreation, they did not do so without regulations. In accordance with biblical law and as discussed in Chapter Two, for instance, sexual intercourse with a menstruant, regardless of whether done within the boundaries of marriage, was strictly forbidden (Lev 18:19 and 20:18). Additionally, though celibacy was not common in rabbinic thought, we do possess documentation that some individuals practiced celibacy. Eliezer Diamond

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<sup>16</sup> E.g., in the Mishnah, four of the seven tractates within the Order of the Women are devoted to marriage and divorce. On this, see Berger, "Judaism," 6–8.

<sup>17</sup> Berger, "Judaism," 6–8.

<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Cohen argues in his exhaustive discussion of this verse that the rabbis might be motivated to interpret Gen 1:28 as having legal force. See his *"Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": the Ancient and Medieval career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), esp. 158–65.

<sup>19</sup> Eliezer Diamond, "And Jacob Remained Alone": The Jewish Struggle with Celibacy," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions* (ed. Carl Olson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>20</sup> Berger, "Judaism," 6–8.

suggests that such cases occurred most often among the religious elite.<sup>21</sup> In *t. Yeb* 8.7, rabbi b. Azzai is the only sage explicitly presented as a celibate.<sup>22</sup> Although rabbi b. Azzai, in a conversation with his colleague, does not deny that being celibate is sinful and likened to murder, he also admits that his soul lusts for Torah so much that there is little emotion left for a relationship with a woman.<sup>23</sup> While rabbi b. Azzai may be the exception to the rule, Daniel Boyarin argues that this impulse for study and devotion to the Torah was also present in many of the rabbi's peers so much so that the story of rabbi b. Azzai can be used as an "index of how much energy was required to combat the attractiveness of celibate life"<sup>24</sup> since at one point or another, most discipleships required the practice of celibacy for a significant period of time to study Torah.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4.4 Ideas on Virginity, Celibacy, Asceticism, and Marriage in the NT and Early Christian Sources**

##### **4.4.1 Jesus**

Although celibacy in the NT shows significant points of contact with practices of sexual renunciation found in the sources discussed thus far, sexual restraint took on a different form unique from its predecessors and contemporaries. This new form is shaped by the idea that virginity, celibacy, and ascetic practices explicitly offered a higher road to

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<sup>21</sup> Diamond, "And Jacob Remained Alone," 41–42.

<sup>22</sup> Diamond, "And Jacob Remained Alone," 52–53.

<sup>23</sup> For this reason Daniel Boyarin describes the Torah as "the other woman"; *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 134.

<sup>24</sup> Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 136.

<sup>25</sup> This being said, it is important to remember that the kind of celibacy practiced by rabbi b. Azzai and possibly his colleagues was not endorsed as a form of spiritual discipline as it was for some Christian ascetics who practiced celibacy and even virginity as a way to withdraw from the world as we will see below.

salvation than married life.<sup>26</sup> This attitude is especially apparent in Jesus' more radical exhortations on the requirement of discipleship and in Paul's views on sexual purity that can be illuminated by understanding his concept of the body and his ideas on the superiority of the path of virginity and celibacy over marriage (even legitimate marriages).<sup>27</sup>

According to Mark, in his proclamation on the imminent arrival of the Kingdom, Jesus demanded a response from those who followed him. Since the evidence seems to indicate that Jesus himself was unmarried and celibate, the response to his message often involved precluding marriage and other everyday responsibilities.<sup>28</sup> Jesus also taught on issues of sexual morality and restraint as demonstrated in his prohibition of divorce (Mark 10:1–9), and his call for those to forsake voluntarily what is natural in regards to sexuality (e.g., marriage and sexual intercourse for procreation) in order to follow him (cf. Mark 6:4–6, Matt 10:37–39, Luke 9:59–62), providing evidence of his priority for his followers over his own family (cf. Mark 3:20–21, 31–35).<sup>29</sup> Additionally, since Jesus' resurrection was not for the purpose of continuing his mortal life, but rather his eternal spiritual life as

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<sup>26</sup> Glenn Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions* (ed. Carl Olson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 65–66.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g., Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 44–57; Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 68–70. See also Elizabeth Castelli, "I Will Make Mary Male": Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub; New York: Routledge, 1991), 29–50; eadem, "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity," *JFSR* 2 (1986): 61–88.

<sup>28</sup> Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 67–68 and Luke Timothy Johnson and Mark D. Jordan, "Christianity," in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* (ed. Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte Jr.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 79.

<sup>29</sup> Note that some apostolic missionaries, who spread the gospel after Jesus' death, seem to continue to live closely according to Jesus' teachings on marriage, but that other missionary apostles including Peter are said to have been married and to have traveled with their wives (1 Cor 9:4–7). See Johnson and Jordan, "Christianity," 80–81.

God's son and because Jesus offered the opportunity to participate in his eternal spiritual life via the Holy Spirit, for Jesus' earliest followers participation in earthly activities that reflected the body such as marriage and procreation was held in much less esteem than the spiritual path that offered eternal heavenly rewards.

#### 4.4.2 Paul

For Paul, since the body served as the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19) and functioned as members of Christ and belonged to the Lord (1 Cor 6:15), having sex especially outside of marriage and with prostitutes and unbelievers was sacrilegious and resulted in *porneia*, sexual immorality (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *zenut*).<sup>30</sup> Drawing on the belief that a husband and wife become one flesh (Mark 10:8) in sexual intercourse and that the holy body of a believer is joined to the holy body of Christ, Paul believed that the impurity contracted from such a union resulted in the defilement of not only the believer, but also of Christ himself.

According to the Corinthians, Paul preached that “it is good not to touch a woman” (1 Cor 7:1), that continence and sexual renunciation stood as the true calling from God, and that he “wished all men were as I myself am,” but qualifies this statement immediately by also acknowledging that not everyone would receive the specific gift of continence, as he had from God (1 Cor 7:7).<sup>31</sup> Paul is clear that sexual purity in terms of virginity and the practice of celibacy constituted a higher path than marriage, but that

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<sup>30</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 54–57. See also Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92–93.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 54.

only a select few are given the gift to follow through with such a calling. Although Paul did not believe that the whole of society should adopt his practice of celibacy, he also had no intention of praising marriage either.<sup>32</sup> Marriage for Paul was directly linked to the dangers of *porneia* and the potential sexual immorality caused by sexual frustration. Marriage was no more than a way to control desire and a safer option than unconsidered celibacy against sexual immorality.<sup>33</sup> In sum Paul instructed the following: [1] sex outside of marriage is a serious problem (1 Cor 6:12–21); [2] if one cannot practice self-control, it is better to marry than to be distracted by passion (1 Cor 7:1–7); [3] a celibate life is better and simpler than a married life because marriage is a distraction from higher pursuits (1 Cor 7:8–9); [4] those who are married should remain married, but if they do divorce not of their own accord, they should remain unmarried (1 Cor 7:10–16); [5] virgins should remain virgins since there are advantages (e.g., no distractions from marriage) for those who are able to follow it, but do not sin if they are married (1 Cor 7:25–35); [6] betrothed virgins and widows should marry if they have no self control, but if they can control themselves, then it is better not to get married (1 Cor 7:36–40).<sup>34</sup>

For the purposes of our study, Paul’s thoughts on the relationship between sexual immorality and moral impurity and how the latter is decisively different than the

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<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 54–55; Johnson and Jordan, “Christianity,” 82–83.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 54–55; Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 93–94.

<sup>34</sup> On the vast literature on 1 Corinthians 7, see e.g., Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 61–72; Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Virgins, Widows, and Wives: The Women of 1 Corinthians 7,” in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (eds. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 148–68; Gillian Beattie, *Women and Marriage in Paul and his Early Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2005), 15–36; Annemarie S. Kidder, *Women, Celibacy and the Church: Toward a Theology of the Single Life* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 40–51. On understanding the motivation behind Paul’s views on celibacy, see Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (SNTSMS 83; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

impurities we have discussed thus far remain relevant, in addition to his views on the superiority of celibacy over marriage. Moral impurity for Paul is directly connected to sexual sins and the misuse of the body. That Paul intended this connection is evident in the juxtaposition of “impurity” with *porneia* in Gal 5:9.<sup>35</sup> Christine Hayes designates this kind of impurity as “carnal impurity” because it involves a defilement of the flesh that is transferrable to another flesh by means of sexual activity. In this way, carnal impurity can be interpreted as a conflation between the features of moral and ritual impurity as discussed in Chapter Two since it is a moral impurity, but has the ability to remain on the flesh and may be contracted to others physically.<sup>36</sup>

Most interesting is Hayes’ suggestion that a shift is apparent in the focus from genealogical<sup>37</sup> to carnal impurity in early Christian understandings of impurity, beginning with Paul’s writings. In the context of understanding early Jewish self-definition and the perceived boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, Hayes refines the two-fold understanding of impurity (ritual and moral) to include a third category, namely genealogical impurity that she defines as a concern for the purity of blood and an intrinsic impurity that cannot be removed.<sup>38</sup> Although Hayes’ argument is suggested in relation to understanding intermarriage and conversion, I would like to test Hayes’ notions regarding this shift from genealogical to carnal impurity in the context of our discussion of Mary’s sexual purity and in light of our narrative’s concern for Mary’s Davidic lineage.

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<sup>35</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 93.

<sup>36</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 96.

<sup>37</sup> For Hayes’ definition of genealogical purity, see *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 27 ff.



#### 4.4.3 Virginit, Celibacy, Asceticism, and Marriage in the Second and Third Centuries

Before proceeding further, however, we must consider some general views held on virginit, celibacy, asceticism, and marriage in the second and third centuries, the approximate date of the *Protevangelium of James*’ composition. Not only will such a discussion help situate our narrative’s ideas on sexual purity against the views held in the sources discussed thus far, but may also provide insight into the kinds of beliefs about sexual purity that potentially influenced our narrative.

What scholars have learned about virginit, celibacy, and asceticism is that by the end of the first century small groups of men and women among the Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean and in the Near East participated in ascetic practices among which celibacy was the most common discipline. Glenn Holland suggests three reasons for such practices: [1] in expectation of the end of days; [2] in preparation for the Kingdom and things of the spirit in contrast to this world and things of the flesh; and [3] for self-definition and to distinguish themselves individually and as a community from other believers and religious movements.<sup>39</sup> Peter Brown argues that many were attracted to a celibate lifestyle because they believed that this form of self-denial elevated and refined their receptivity to the Holy Spirit and served as a higher form of devotion to the Lord.<sup>40</sup> Celibacy became the most popular form of self-denial because

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<sup>39</sup> Holland, “Celibacy in the Early Christian Church,” 66–67.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 77; see also his chapter on the Desert Fathers 213–40.

it was the only natural appetite that could be completely suppressed. Hunger and thirst by contrast, although also practiced by ascetics, could only be suppressed until a point.<sup>41</sup>

In terms of purity, the idea of lifelong celibacy took its greatest form in the shape of female virginity and was promulgated through literary works like the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Presented as a virgin heroine, Thecla is celebrated because of her choice of eternal virginity over marriage. Church Fathers like Clement of Rome, Tertullian, and Cyprian supported the idea that celibacy and especially virginity should be praised and revered because practitioners attempted to live a life in imitation of Christ. In fact, towards the end of the second century sexual renunciation became commonplace so that two distinct ways of Christian life could be discerned: the life of a common Christian living in the world and the life of the ascetic living to enhance the spirit over the body.<sup>42</sup> By the third century sexual continence became so popular that virginity emerged as the ideal way to practice whole-hearted devotion to God, and celibacy was understood as a way for those who were previously married to renew their lives and purify themselves of past sins. In other words, sexual restraint both inside and outside of marriage became the dominate form of self-discipline and the ideal way to express one's commitment to God.<sup>43</sup>

While the idea that in Christian practice a superior way of life could be achieved through virginity and celibacy over marriage can be traced to some of Jesus' teachings and Pauline thought, the practice of extreme asceticism, especially practices surrounding sexual renunciation, probably had its apex in the East, most notably in Syria.<sup>44</sup> In Syria,

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<sup>41</sup> Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 71.

<sup>42</sup> Castelli, "Virginity," 68ff; Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 70–71.

<sup>43</sup> Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 73–75.

<sup>44</sup> Sebastian Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1973): 1–19.

Marcion's teaching of asceticism, for instance, was so rigid that it has often been dubbed encratite since it involves not only abstinence from sexual intercourse, eating flesh, and drinking wine, but also the total rejection of marriage and the understanding of all sexual unions as defiling the world.<sup>45</sup> In accordance with the appeal to ascetic practices in Syrian culture, Tatian is also known for his promotion of the practice of asceticism, denouncing marriage as defilement and fornication, even condemning procreation.<sup>46</sup> Mani, who also gained much support in Syria, was also known for his promotion of sexual abstinence along with other ascetic practices such as vegetarianism, avoidance of wine, avoidance of certain kinds of work, and even extended periods of fasting.<sup>47</sup>

The Egyptian desert also served ascetics as an ideal place to combat the material world and deal with struggles between the flesh and spirit. The late third century desert father Anthony,<sup>48</sup> for instance, lived as a hermit in the Egyptian desert and sought to reduce the physical demands of life by living in harsh conditions and following a strict diet in order to aid in the suppression of sexual urges that were present in the civilized

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<sup>45</sup> Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 6; see also discussion in Chapter Five and references and notes therein.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (New Jersey: Gorgias, 2004), 11–12. Hans Drijvers sees the *Apocryphal Acts of Judas Thomas* (i.e., *Acts of Thomas*) and other writings under the name Judas Thomas such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, as rooted in Tatianic Asceticism and theological concepts, suggesting that all the Thomas Writings betray a Syrian provenance. The "bizarre Gospel quotations," Drijvers argues, are related to Tatian's Diatessaron and confirm his considerable influence; Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; New York: Routledge, 1992), 132–33. Cf. also Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East, The Origin of Asceticism Early Monasticism in Persia*, vol. 1 (Louvain: SCSCO, 1958), 35 ff.

<sup>47</sup> For a good treatment of Mani's thoughts and practices see Samuel N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1985), 5–54.

<sup>48</sup> See Robert C. Gregg, ed., *Athanasius: The Life of Anthony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (New York: Paulist, 1980) for notes and a clear translation.

and very material world.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, expressions of asceticism in the form of monasticism gained great prestige in Egypt (e.g., the popularity of cenobitic monasticism in Egypt), but so too did the desert fathers in Syria develop an esteemed reputation for practicing celibacy, fasting, and diligent prayer. Sebastian Brock argues that the Syrian practice of asceticism actually held precedence over its Egyptian counterpart, even if it did not gain the same popularity.

Citing Luke's Beatitudes and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man as two of the earliest contributors to the Syrian ascetic tradition, Brock argues they provided the ascetic a plan for attaining discipleship; that is, literally renouncing all material possessions.<sup>50</sup> Brock suggests that, while not an explicit teaching, Luke 20:35–6, with parallels in Matt 20:30 and Mark 12:25, was extremely influential regarding ascetic ideas concerning marriage; namely, the passage deals with Jesus answering questions posed by some Sadducees about resurrection. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus says, "At the resurrection men and women do not marry; they are like angels in heaven." Luke's parallel passage is significantly different; he writes, "Those who have been judged worthy of a place in the other world, and of the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, for they are not subject to death any longer. They are like angels; they are sons of God, because they share in the resurrection." In other words, Luke implies in his version that those who

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<sup>49</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 213–16 and 223–26; Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," 75.

<sup>50</sup> Four guidelines are explicitly provided by Luke for followers of Christ: [1] no material possessions; [2] no permanent residence; [3] no attachment to family; and [3] one must bear his daily cross. Interestingly, no ascetic teachings or guidelines concerning one's diet or marital life are clearly or explicitly expressed in this gospel; Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 3–4.

are worthy of resurrection already participate in the unmarried life in this world and are in this way made equal to angels.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps what is most distinguishable about Syrian asceticism and perhaps most interesting in light of Mary's role as "virgin," "mother," and "wife"<sup>52</sup> is its close juxtaposition of the "profane world of the married and the 'angelic life' of the ascetics."<sup>53</sup> Brown writes that in distinction from the Greek world, which saw the body as a "Platonic echo of an ever-distant spiritual reality," Syrian thought positioned the spiritual and physical world side by side, separated only by a "thin veil."<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, through extreme self-mortification, the ascetic could assert the "physical freedom of the body from the restraints of normal living" and thus bring the "energy of the angels through the half-translucent curtain that separated the unseen hosts of Heaven from the present world. Robed in the Holy Spirit, human flesh could do on earth what the angels did in heaven."<sup>55</sup>

Brock argues that extreme mortification was common practice for Syrian ascetics and unique to their version of asceticism. According to Ephrem, Syrian asceticism was so extreme that it bordered on the extravagant in that the ascetic not only rejected worldly material possessions (e.g., clothing, housing, etc.), but also eagerly participated in activities that physically degraded themselves such as chaining themselves to rocks, yoking their necks with heavy chains, or having themselves imprisoned in cages or cells.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 5–6.

<sup>52</sup> While Mary is never explicitly referred to as Joseph's wife, she is betrothed/married to him. Refer to the discussion in this chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 330.

<sup>54</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 330–31.

<sup>55</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 331.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., Simeon Stylite, probably the best known and best documented of the Syrian ascetics. For more details on Simeon's ascetic life and religious practice, see Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, vol. 2, 208

In fact, Brock argues that these extravagancies were in complete contrast to the situation in Egypt, where physical denigration was a rarity. In other words, while asceticism was not a unique practice to Syria nor was it where it gained the most popularity (i.e., Egypt), its very extreme and excessive form was very distinctive and may be represented in our text through Mary's extreme forms of asceticism to maintain her purity (i.e., Mary's eating and living habits).

Equally important for our study is the emphasis writers placed on virginity as the ideal form of asceticism and its connection to holiness, particularly in light of Mary's characterization as the "Virgin of the Lord," as we will see below. For instance, Aphrahat, like Ephrem, confirms that marriage is a lawful and legitimate form of religious expression, but himself practiced and promoted virginity (*btûlâ* or *btûltâ*) or "single one" (*ihîdāyâ*) life as the highest form of consecrating one's life to Christ.<sup>57</sup> Specifically, Aphrahat argues in his *Demonstrations* 18<sup>58</sup> that although marriage and childbirth are both good, celibacy and virginity are simply more holy and worthy and that God prefers them to marriage; for Aphrahat "virginity" is synonymous with "holiness."<sup>59</sup> Although

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ff; Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," 13–17; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Stylite's Liturgy: Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity," *J ECS* 6.3 (1998): 523–39.

<sup>57</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> In his reply to a Jewish critic who accuses him and his fellow Christians of being impure because they "do not take wives, but claims for himself and other Jews purity and superiority because they do procreate," Aphrahat describes the superiority of celibacy over marriage in terms of the hierarchy of creation and explains that although everything in the world is good because it is made by God, some things are more worthy than others: "And [God] created the heavens and the earth and they are very good, but the heavens are better than the earth. And [God] created the darkness and the light and this is very good, but the light is better than darkness... And [God] created marriage—namely procreation—and this is very good, but virginity is better than it" (Dem 18; 18.8/836.20–837.11). For notes and translation, see Naomi Koltun-Fromm, "Sexuality and Holiness: Semitic Christian and Jewish Conceptualizations of Sexual Behavior," *VC* 54 (2000): esp. 375–76. The citation format is also taken from Koltun-Fromm who follows Parisot's text "Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes," in PS 1.1–2.

<sup>59</sup> On how Aphrahat builds his argument for equating virginity with holiness, see especially Koltun-Fromm, "Sexuality and Holiness," 383–85.

this connection between virginity and holiness is not made explicit until the fourth century with the Syrian writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem,<sup>60</sup> it is not difficult to see that these connections were already taking shape in the second century since, as Brock puts it, virginity “was not only an ideal in the literal sense, but also as a term that could be used in a symbolic way with someone who had preserved himself uncontaminated by the exterior world as a whole.”<sup>61</sup>

#### 4.5 The View of Sexual Purity/Impurity in the *Protevangelium of James*

These cultural and religious views regarding virginity, celibacy, and marriage help locate our narrative’s shift in interest from ritual purity to sexual purity, particularly in light of Mary’s new identification as the “Virgin of the Lord.” Her designation as the *parthenos* at *Prot. Jas.* 9:8 indicates how the treatment of her sexual purity serves to anticipate the text’s claims about her virginal conception and pregnancy as well as her role as Virgin Mother. Especially provocative are the text’s account of three tests of virginity endured by Mary (once privately [*Prot. Jas.* 13–14] and twice publicly [*Prot. Jas.* 15–16; 20]) and its apologetic function in arguing for her continued status as sexually pure, despite her motherhood.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 11. See further my discussion of Ephrem and asceticism in Chapter Five.

<sup>61</sup> Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 11.

<sup>62</sup> Although the tests Mary endures serve to prove her sexual purity, the concern for her moral purity is also evoked by the accusations made about her pregnancy. The act of participating in sexual relations allows for the possibility for Mary to be associated with sin, and therefore moral impurity. It is only in the context of Mary’s sexual purity that an interest in moral purity is addressed throughout the entire narrative. As such, moral purity will be discussed below in relation to sexual sin and impurity only where applicable, but not as a section on its own.

#### 4.5.1 Establishing Mary's Sexual Status and her Role as the Virgin of the Lord

As noted, the identification of Mary's menstrual impurity marks a shift in the narrative whereby the presentation of her purity transitions from being associated with ritual purity and the Temple to being identified by her sexual status as the Lord's virgin. In order to establish Mary's sexual status as a *parthenos*, we must return to the narrative's first depiction of Mary wherein she is described in terms of her virginity, offered to its readers after she is asked to leave the Temple because of her impending menstruation. The narrative establishes a scenario whereby Mary's sexual purity will continue to be safeguarded, despite her removal from the Temple precinct, by presenting Joseph, an elderly widower, as her chosen caretaker. At this critical point in the narrative Mary is described to Joseph as a Virgin of the Lord by the high priest. This explicit characterization of Mary advances the narrative on two accounts: first, the designation is given to Mary by those who are associated with the Temple, thus bestowed on her from those who know her best and with whom she really belongs;<sup>63</sup> second, the description marks Mary's transition into her new role and thus foregrounds her virginity as the purity with which she will now be most closely associated.

Prior to her designation as the Virgin of the Lord, Mary's purity was dependent upon the protection of the sacred walls created by her mother and the holy sanctuary itself. In this way, the literary space in which Mary dwelled provided her protection as long as she remained within those boundaries. The moment the narrative shifts to the high priest's description of Mary based on her sexual status as a *parthenos*, however, the

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<sup>63</sup> See discussion on how Mary is described in terms of a Temple sacrifice and how the narrative sets up the reader not to question Mary's sojourn in the Temple, but rather to expect it, in Chapter Two.



sacred walls symbolizing the boundaries of safe and unsafe grounds expand to include all narrative spaces; that is, Mary is protected by God simply by her new role as His Virgin. Just as these geographic boundaries previously enclosed her, the literary language and structure of the text also serve to define a protective barrier from sexual pollution as long as she carries with her the title bestowed upon her by the priests. A close examination of Mary's actions and the events that occur immediately after she is given this new status reinforce this idea.

After the narrative describes Mary as the Virgin of the Lord and given into the care and protection of Joseph, despite his reluctance (*Prot. Jas.* 9:7), the first dialogue between them presents Joseph's announcement that he plans on leaving her alone, but under the protection of the Lord (*Prot. Jas.* 9:11). This exchange may strike the reader as odd since Joseph is specifically charged with her care by the high priest. As discussed in Chapter Three, since women are always under male guardianship and the purpose of Jewish marriages in antiquity involve the transference but also protection of a father to a husband,<sup>64</sup> Joseph's actions betrays not only his commitment to the priests but more importantly, the reality of his relationship with Mary. In other words, this marriage is not real in the traditional sense or for the traditional purpose in accordance with biblical law.

Though Joseph's stated intention to leave her alone at first is, of course, a bit unnerving, the reader is immediately comforted by the fact that Joseph's last words to Mary transfers responsibility for her care to the Lord. The author carefully replaces the physical protection of her bedroom-turned-sanctuary, the sacred walls of the Temple, and

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 78. See also discussion in Chapter Three on the nature of Mary's and Joseph's marriage.

Joseph's humble home with the ultimate referent, that of safety in the Lord. In fact, as the language physically and metaphorically pushes her from Temple and home, it simultaneously opens a new linguistic space for her by invoking the powerful concept of the Virgin of the Lord. In fact, Mary's new status as the Lord's Virgin may explain the setting of the next episode. Outside the sanctuary of her own home, the sacred space of the Jerusalem Temple, or even Joseph's house, Mary is described in the foreign space of the outside world fetching some water: "And she took her pitcher and went out to fill it with water" (Καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν κάλπιν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν γεμίσει ὕδωρ; *Prot. Jas.* 11:1), an almost unimaginable occurrence earlier in the text.

In ancient literature, as Foskett rightly observes, the outside environment offers the greatest threat to women; hence those who have something to jeopardize (i.e., their virginity) are safer when kept indoors.<sup>65</sup> For Mary to be outside on her own leaves her vulnerable and unprotected not only from the impurities of the outside world, but also from physical danger, especially for one designated as a *parthenos*. The major threats at hand are, of course, rape, seduction, and the loss of one's virginity. For instance, Susanna finds herself in the middle of sexual harassment and blackmail when she bathes outdoors in the privacy (or lack thereof) of her own garden (*Sus* 15–17). *2 Macc* 3:19 and *3 Macc* 1:18 both attest to the necessity of keeping virgins indoors and thus out of view of sexually dangerous men, since even gazing upon a virgin body could evoke male uncontrollable sexual desire. In his *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian too confirms the

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<sup>65</sup> Foskett also cites popular Greco-Roman novels from the Second Sophistic era (50–250 CE) including *Leucippe and Clitophon* and *Daphnis and Chloe* that also attest to the danger placed on girls, especially virginal ones, when situated in an outside environment. See Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 50–51, 152.

power of the virgin body to induce sexual desire, even by means of a gaze, by defending strongly the requirement that virgins must be veiled both in the public arena and during Christian worship (*Virg.* 2). Clearly, for any other *parthenos*, being exposed to the outside world is risky, but fortunately for Mary, no threat exists because, as the author makes clear, she is the “Virgin of the Lord,” free from dependence upon the physical protection of sacred walls.

The author further foregrounds the significance of Mary’s new status by presenting a heavenly voice that greets her and signals that all is safe (*Prot. Jas.* 11:2). Mary’s reaction to the unknown voice, however, is fright, immediately followed by a decision to return home. Although the reader fully understands the kind of protection afforded one designated as the Lord’s Virgin, the *Protevangelium of James*’ Mary is presented by the narrator as still being unsure. Such uncertainty seems to reflect the author’s desire to reinforce Mary’s earthly qualities; although special, she is still very much human and reacts as most would to strange voices speaking to them.

Only within the comfort of her own home, then, Mary again encounters not only a heavenly voice, but the arrival of a heavenly messenger who informs her that she is the favoured one, that God is with her, and that she “will conceive by means of his word” (*Prot. Jas.* 11:5 συλλήψει ἐκ λόγου αὐτοῦ.) In other words, if there were any question concerning what Mary’s role as “Virgin of the Lord” will entail, the messenger leaves no room for doubt. However, before Mary commits to her new role, she expresses concern and once again reveals the author’s intention to emphasize her normality just as the language seeks to lift her to an unprecedented height as potential mother of God. Like the

Mary in Luke who is doubtful (cf. Luke 1:34),<sup>66</sup> the Mary of the *Protevangelium of James* also questions the messenger: “Mary doubted in herself, saying, “Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God, and give birth as all women give birth?”

(Μαρία διεκρίθη ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγουσα· Εἰ ἐγὼ συλλήψομαι ἀπὸ κυρίου θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ γεννήσω ὡς πᾶσα γυνὴ γεννᾷ; *Prot. Jas.* 11:6).

Mary’s direct discourse here, as she questions the messenger, marks a significant moment since this is the first time in the text we are privy to the protagonist’s voice. Up until this point Mary’s character has been determined by altero-characterization—by descriptions provided by other characters closest to her—so when Mary speaks, the narrator breaks his pattern, providing information about Mary by allowing her to self-characterize.<sup>67</sup> She thus emerges as a thinking character at this moment as the narrator presents her wondering about how she is like—and unlike—ordinary women. Although the reader anticipates the messenger’s response that Mary will conceive by no ordinary means since her own birth seemed to occur under miraculous conditions, the dialogue between Mary and the heavenly messenger complicates a seemingly simple narrative in two ways. First, the messenger’s response clarifies for Mary that though she is a woman and able to contract ritual impurities in the way other women do (i.e., menstrual impurities force her to leave the Temple), she will in fact not give birth in the expected

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<sup>66</sup> For a discussion and commentary on Mary’s questioning of the angelic messenger on her condition in Luke’s account, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 289; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 348–49; François Bovon, *Luke: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 51–53.

<sup>67</sup> Gerald Prince, “Narratology,” *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 524. See also Manfred Jahn, *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative* (May 28, 2005): 53 (N7 Characters and Characterization).

manner. Instead, the messenger informs Mary that the conception will take place in this way: “for the power of God will overshadow you” (δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐπισκιάσει σοι; *Prot. Jas.* 11:7).

The messenger confirms that because Mary has been blessed among women and has been chosen to conceive by the Lord, the child whom she will name Jesus, which means “he will save his people from their sins,” (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν) will be called “son of the most high” (κληθήσεται υἱὸς ὑψίστου) (*Prot. Jas.* 11:7–8).<sup>68</sup> Second, the dialogue establishes an opportunity for Mary to respond directly to this news in the manner that only a Virgin of the Lord would, that is, by instantly accepting the heavenly message and declaring herself to be the Lord’s servant. Although the attributes that make Mary worthy of such an important role are only portrayed to the reader by means of her behaviour and by the testimony of secondary characters thus far, Mary’s emphatic verbal acceptance of her new role as the Lord’s Virgin strengthens the idea that she is indeed special. The direct speech between Mary and the heavenly messenger makes clear to the reader that Mary is no ordinary woman and that she will conceive and give birth to a child unlike any other. In other words, the narrative implies that since all conceptions and pregnancies involve sexual intercourse, and thus, sexual impurities, Mary’s experience with conception and giving birth will not involve any of the aforementioned requirements.

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<sup>68</sup> This verse is an exact quotation from Matt 1:21, but with the important difference of being addressed to Mary instead of Joseph. In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary, not Joseph, is instructed to name the child Jesus. As a narrative completely devoted to praising Mary and making her the center of attention, it is only fitting that Mary takes on the active role as recipient of such heavenly messages.

Mary's sexual status as a virgin becomes increasingly important hereafter in the text as demonstrated by her identification as the Virgin of the Lord and her direct speech with the Lord's messenger. The narrative's shift in focus from Mary's ritual purity to sexual purity is further demonstrated by the emphasis placed on presenting Mary as maintaining as well as proving her sexual purity in the second part of the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 12–20), especially since she has been specifically told that her experience with conception and childbirth will not be like any other. Mary's virginity tests occupy and dominate all the major plot points of the second half of the narrative, foregrounding the narrative's new focus: Mary's sexual purity and status as a *parthenos*.

The narrative's shift in focus, however, is not unwarranted. The narrator obviously provides hints about the importance of Mary's sexual purity by alluding earlier to her awareness and observance of ritual purity, but not so obviously by the actions of her parents who also conceive Mary in a miraculous fashion.<sup>69</sup> Before Mary's sexual purity can be discussed by looking to the three tests that she must endure, an analysis of the manner in which Mary herself is conceived is worth investigating in order to shed light on the significance of her own sexual purity. Namely, if Mary's own conception involved the miraculous—that is, her birth was not the result of a sexual union between her mother and father—how much more significant, meaningful, and even explanatory would Mary's conception of her child as a virgin be. In other words, Anna's sexless conception of Mary

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Foster, "The Protevangelium of James," *ExpTim* 118.12 (2007): 576; idem, "The Protevangelium of James," in *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (ed. Paul Foster; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 113–16.

is continued by Mary's sustained virginity before, during, and after the conception and birth of her child Jesus.

#### 4.5.2 The Miraculous Conception of Mary: Anna's and Joachim's Sexual Purity

Concerning Mary's conception, we are told that despite their wealth and prominence in the community and their constant display of righteousness and piety, Mary's parents fail to produce an Israelite child, but that in the absence of her husband and after a deep hearted lament, Anna is visited by a messenger of the Lord with the news that her prayers have been heard and that "You will conceive and give birth, and your offspring will be spoken of in the whole world" (συλλάψει καὶ γεννήσεις καὶ λαληθήσεται τὸ σπέρμα σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ; *Prot. Jas.* 4:1).

The two verbs "to conceive" (συλλαμβάνω) and "to give birth" (γεννάω) merit further consideration. Both verbs are in the future tense and allow the possibility for Joachim to be a participant in Anna's conception. The logic is simply that Anna *will* conceive when she and her husband Joachim are together in the future. The details surrounding this event, however, seem to suggest otherwise and support the idea of a miraculous conception.<sup>70</sup> Immediately after Anna is given the news that she is with child,

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<sup>70</sup> For a contrary position, see Beverly Gaventa who argues for reading the conception of Mary as one that developed out of a sexual union between Anna and Joachim (*Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 112). Gaventa does not base her argument on the conflicting manuscripts that testify to different tenses for the word "conceive"; that is, whether Anna will conceive in the future tense or has conceived in the perfect tense. She argues that since the perfect tense can connote both an event that has just passed (Anna has conceived) and a present action (Anna conceived), determining the proper meaning cannot be dependent upon tense. Gaventa continues to argue that it is more likely that Anna and Joachim engaged in marital relations and that the birth of Mary occurred in a normal and usual fashion based on the interpretation that Anna and Joachim endured a long period of childlessness and shame from their own people. I argue, however, that though it is likely Anna and Joachim had sexual relations in the past, Mary's birth was not the result of this union, but rather the will of God. The narrative seems to

the narrator informs us that two messengers approach her informing her that Joachim is coming with his flocks because an angel of the Lord came down to him with the news that the Lord had heard his prayer. Joachim is told specifically by the messenger the following: “Behold, your wife Anna has conceived/is pregnant” (ἰδοὺ ἡ γυνή σου Ἄννα ἐν γαστρὶ εἴληφεν/λήψεταί; *Prot. Jas.* 4:3).<sup>71</sup> The manuscripts differ whether Joachim is told that Anna *will* conceive λήψεταί (future tense) or that she *is* pregnant or *has* conceived εἴληθεν (perfect tense). Smid argues that those who side with the possibility of a future tense meaning do so based on the description of Joachim’s actions when he finally returns home: And Joachim “rested” (ἀναπαύω; *Prot. Jas.* 4:10) the first day home.<sup>72</sup> The sexual connotation of the word “rested” has convinced some that Joachim indeed is a physical participant in his wife’s pregnancy, but the textual evidence appears to favour the perfect form, since the earlier Greek manuscripts attest to this reading.<sup>73</sup> The idea that Anna was already pregnant by miraculous means is also

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emphasize that the marital relations in which Anna and Joachim engaged in the past could not and did not result in the birth of their child. Instead, the miraculous birth that would be bestowed on the couple was based on their righteousness, ritual purity, and piety. This idea is supported in the chronology of the news; namely, Anna is reported to have been pregnant before she has any physical contact with her husband. It is also reinforced again with Joachim’s constant references to having been forgiven for all his sins and Anna’s complete need to embody everything that affects Mary in terms of purity. In addition, the textual evidence seems to support the perfect form, since the earlier Greek manuscripts also attest to this reading.

<sup>71</sup> Following Hock, who follows de Strycker, I have selected the form εἴληφα over Tischendorf’s λήψομαι.

<sup>72</sup> For a contrary opinion see H.R. Smid, *Protevangeliium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: van Gorcum, 1965), 41, who argues “nothing in the context points in the direction of εἴληθεν (perfect tense)...so that λήψεταί (future tense) is to be preferred.” This reading, though possible, seems unlikely because when this word “rested” is used a second time in the narrative in 15:2 in reference to Joseph and Mary, there is no sexual ambiguity in its meaning. In support of the perfect tense, Hock has suggested that it is likely that the author understood Mary to have also been the product of a miraculous conception based on his unwavering description of Mary’s purity; *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 39 n. 4:4. See also Foster, “Protevangeliium of James,” 576.

<sup>73</sup> Foster, “Protevangeliium of James,” 576 and Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 80.



supported by the author’s emphasis on Mary’s purity, and by association, her parent’s purity.

Examining the order in which the events unfold further supports the idea that Anna’s pregnancy was also the product of a miraculous conception. In this sequence of events, Joachim is given the news that his wife is pregnant before he returns to her from the wilderness (*Prot. Jas.* 4:3–4). His reaction upon hearing this announcement is revealing, offering narrative evidence of his non-participation in Anna’s conception. Even before Joachim returns to Anna, he gathers his shepherds and instructs them to prepare the gift offering for the proper sacrifices as a reaction to the news of his already pregnant wife. If Joachim did not believe that his wife was already with child, his actions would be considered premature. Celebrations do not occur until there is confirmation that there is something to celebrate. But Joachim’s initial response to the news is not in vain as his first meeting with his wife confirms that she is indeed already pregnant. After Joachim returns with his flocks, Anna is described running to him with this news: “Now I know that the Lord God has greatly blessed me. For behold, the widow is no longer a widow, and behold, she who was childless has conceived” (Νῦν ὀίδα ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεὸς εὐλόγησέν με σφόδρα· ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ χήρα οὐκέτι χήρα, καὶ ἡ ἄτεκνος ἰδοὺ ἐν γαστρὶ εἴληφα; *Prot. Jas.* 4:9). The gifts once rejected by the childless Joachim now become the accepted and celebrated offerings of a fruitful father to all the people of Israel.

Interestingly, upon relaying the angelic message of being pregnant to Joachim, Anna announces that, “the Lord God has greatly blessed me” (κύριος ὁ θεὸς εὐλόγησέν

με σφόδρα; *Prot. Jas.* 4:9). If the miraculous pregnancy indeed involved Joachim, Anna’s response should have involved a blessing that was given to both her and Joachim. But as the text stands, Anna alone has been given the blessing of the Lord to conceive a child “who will be talked about all over the world” (*Prot. Jas.* 4:1). Joachim functions only as an observer in the events concerning the birth of Mary. Unlike Elkannah who is explicitly said to have “known his wife Hannah (1 Sam 1:19)” when the Lord remembered her and blessed her with a child, there is no mention of Joachim “knowing his wife Anna” when she is given news that her prayers have been answered.<sup>74</sup> The angelic messenger only visits Joachim after Anna is given the news that she is already pregnant. Although Joachim may share in Anna’s blessing, he is not himself directly responsible for Anna’s pregnancy.

Also significant is the *Protevangelium of James*’ use of συλλαμβάνω meaning, “to conceive,” which is also used in the birth story of Isaac (Gen 21:2–3), Samuel (1 Sam 1:20), and Luke’s version of Mary’s conception. The term used to render the meaning of “giving birth” in Gen 21:2–3, 1 Sam 1:20, Isa 7:14, Matt 1:23, and Luke 1:31, however, is the word τίκτω, but the *Protevangelium of James* instead uses the word γεννάω for both Anna’s and Mary’s announcements.<sup>75</sup> γεννάω is often the term used in genealogies to describe a family line and usually renders the meaning, “begat.” This word is also most

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. the ninth or tenth century homily *Inquirendum est*, a Latin text composed for the feast of the Nativity of Mary which transmits the first eight chapters of the *Protevangelium of James*. In the Latin transmission of the *Protevangelium of James* the manner in which Anna conceives Mary is problematized by being explicit about Joachim’s participation in Anna’s conception of Mary and by emphasizing that it was done in a natural way. See Jean-Daniel Kaestli, “Le Protévangile de Jacques latin dans l’homélie *Inquirendum est* pour la fête de la Nativité de Marie,” *Apocrypha* 12 (2001): 142–44.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Prot. Jas.* 14:6 where the word τίκτω is used by the messenger to describe to Joseph the circumstances of Mary’s pregnancy.

commonly used for describing a family line through the father, and very rarely denotes lineage through a mother, as illustrated even in the genealogies offered by Matthew (1:1–17).

In the Septuagint, γεννάω is used 276 times and in 263 cases it renders a “begat” connotation.<sup>76</sup> Of the 276 times the term is used, there are 239 cases in which it is employed to describe a family line through the father. Significantly, then, when the angel delivers the news to Anna of her conception, he uses the word γεννάω instead of τίκτω. If Joachim is not physically responsible for his wife’s pregnancy, then Mary’s family line must come from her mother. If this is the case, the use of γεννάω to describe Anna’s conception only reinforces the idea that her conception and birth of Mary was miraculous and done so without Joachim’s help, thus confirming the idea that Mary’s subsequent extreme sexual purity was first initiated by the sexual purity<sup>77</sup> maintained by her mother Anna during her conception. The reference to γεννάω may also suggest why the detail of Mary being of Davidic descent is repeatedly referenced throughout the narrative, making clear that the child Jesus is born of a virginal woman directly of the

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<sup>76</sup> The 13 cases in which γεννάω does not render the meaning “begat” is when there are variants in the Codices on which the Septuagint is based (i.e., Codex Alexandrinus; Codex Vaticanus’ Codex Sinaiticus; Sixtine Edition of 1687). The word more commonly used is γίγνομαι meaning “to become,” though there are instances such as the 13 cited above, whereby a variant word is attested, which in this case is γεννάω, the causal of γίγνομαι. The Hebrew terms that γεννάω typically translate into include: ברא= makes, shape, create; גדל = to grow up, become great, bring up children; היה = to become; הררה= to conceive, become pregnant; הול = to be brought forth; ילד = to beget, bear, bring forth; קנה= to acquire, get; שם= to put, place, set.

<sup>77</sup> By “sexual purity,” I refer specifically to the case of Anna’s conception of Mary; that is, Joachim and Anna did not participate in sexual intercourse to bring about the birth of their child. This is not an argument, however, that Anna was a virgin or that she practiced celibacy.

Davidic line.<sup>78</sup> In this way, Mary's genealogical purity is as important as her ritual, menstrual and sexual purity for determining her selection by God as the mother of Christ.

### 4.5.3 Pre-Testing

Anna's miraculous conception of Mary then aids in affirming the case for Mary's sexual purity throughout the text. Once Mary is given the status of being the Lord's Virgin, however, the narrative's focus becomes increasingly occupied with establishing and proving Mary's virginity, by describing a series of tests to prove that Mary is indeed sexually pure and has in fact been impregnated by the Holy Spirit. I suggest that these tests are designed to question whether Mary has remained true to her status as the "Virgin of the Lord" despite taking on the role of "wife" to Joseph, and has remained a virgin before, during, and after giving birth. I contend that the text employs a strategic narrative device to set up Mary to be tested (once privately [*Prot. Jas.* 13–14] and twice publicly [*Prot. Jas.* 15–16; 20]) in order for her to announce in her own voice her state of sexual purity. As noted, the first time the author allows Mary to verbalize her own thoughts (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6), the issue at hand is whether she will conceive as other women, i.e., her sexual status as a virgin. So when Mary is again given the opportunity to further her own characterization by means of direct discourse at critical plot points, the significance of Mary's sexual purity for the narrative becomes even more emphatic.

Before the first test is conducted to confirm Mary's virginal condition, the author inserts two short scenes, one describing the high priest praising Mary for finishing her

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<sup>78</sup> Church Fathers who, like the *Protevangelium of James*, attributed to Mary a Davidic origin include Ignatius (*Eph.* 18.2) and Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 45.4).

spinning of the purple and scarlet threads, and the other recounting Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. These two scenes serve to prepare the reader for Mary's triple testing on several levels. First, both scenes cast an even brighter light on the circumstances of Mary's condition and the importance and significance of the child who dwells within her. In particular, the two scenes remind the reader that Mary is indeed blessed, but also honourable as spinning was the traditional role for the virtuous woman.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, both blessings also serve to recall to the reader that Mary is most deserving of praise due to her extreme purity as exemplified by her new status as the Lord's Virgin. Second, the author's positioning of the two blessings immediately before Mary's first accusation sets up a literary confrontation whereby Mary's reputation must be defended. The reader's privileged knowledge about Mary's condition, still unbeknownst to the other characters, allows the narrator to evoke from the reader an accurate assessment of unfolding events—namely, the accusations made against Mary are false. But, more importantly, the combination of blessings and repeated appeals to Mary's virginity offered by the two short scenes discussed above, positioned immediately before accusations claiming otherwise, results in a perfect scenario for Mary to defend herself and, significantly, in her own voice.

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<sup>79</sup> Hock also notes the dangers of being “outside” and assesses Mary's quick return home to her work of weaving scarlet and purple threads as a need to return quickly to a “posture of purity and innocence”; Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 26, 53 n. 11:4.

## 4.6 The Virginité Tests

In what follows, I hope to show that the narrative's focus on Mary's sexual purity can succinctly be read in what I have called Mary's three virginité tests below. Notably, it is in the context of defending her sexual purity that Mary's voice is significantly heard in the text. It is to these three "virginité tests" that we will now turn to further demonstrate the *Protevangelium of James'* overarching interest in purity in its multiple and various forms.

### 4.6.1 Test One: Joseph Questions Mary's Pregnancy

Only after the narrator provides sufficient data for his readers to bring together, assess, and construct an accurate impression of Mary's character does the testing of Mary's virginité begin. After spending three months with Elizabeth,<sup>80</sup> Mary decides to return to her home in order to hide her swelling womb from the people of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 12:7). The narrator reports that Mary was sixteen years of age when these mysterious occurrences begin happening to her.<sup>81</sup> At home, Joseph, Mary's own protector and

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<sup>80</sup> The precise date of three months is most likely adapted from Luke's description of Mary's stay for three months (Luke 1:56).

<sup>81</sup> There has been much discussion and debate regarding the age given for Mary when these events were unfolding before her, since the manuscripts differ considerably. Smid notes that the majority of manuscripts put Mary at the age of sixteen, which, if taking into consideration Mary's age at *Prot. Jas.* 8:3, places Joseph away from the home for four years. The ages of twelve, fourteen, fifteen and seventeen have also been attested and argued based on differing opinions on what was deemed a marriageable age. Smid admits that the exact time Joseph is away from Mary is difficult to assess (namely how much time has passed between *Prot. Jas.* 9:3 and 13:1), but that the time period could not have been earlier than six months or later than four years based on Mary's visit and stay with Elizabeth according to Luke's records; Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 92. In order to make sense of why the author attests to the age of sixteen, de Strycker suggests that the author simply forgot that he had mentioned Mary's age earlier in the text (*Prot. Jas.* 8:3). See de Strycker, "Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problèmes Critiques et Exégétiques," *SE* 3 (1964): 411. Hock claims that twelve or even fourteen is the most logical age for Mary at this time in her life based on his understanding of the charges that will be later made against Joseph in *Prot. Jas.* 15:3–18; *Infancy Gospel of James*, 55.

guardian, first pursues a disclosure of Mary's guilt. Upon returning home to find Mary pregnant, Joseph begins to cry bitterly because he is sure that the priests and people of Israel will hold him responsible (*Prot. Jas.* 13:1). Although Joseph handed over responsibility for Mary to the Lord before he left to build houses, he now admits that there is no prayer he can say to remedy the situation as he received her as a "Virgin of the Temple of the Lord God" and has failed in his promise to protect her (*Prot. Jas.* 13:3). Joseph's concern with being held responsible for Mary's condition is noteworthy and reinforces the irregularity of their relationship. Joseph's source of panic is based solely on his failure to protect Mary; he shows no signs that his reaction is the result of Mary's possible infidelity in his absence. In this way, Mary's pregnancy functions not as evidence as a breach in their marriage, but rather his breach in his promise to the priests. Comparing himself to Adam, Joseph suspects the worst of Mary and confronts her, but Mary continues to plead her innocence (*Prot. Jas.* 13:5). The analogy, of course, intends to encourage the interpretation that just as the serpent came and found Eve alone, then deceived and corrupted her, so too has a similar temptation been visited upon Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 13:6 cf. Gen 3:1–20).<sup>82</sup> Readers are fully aware, however, that this is not the case. In fact, Joseph cannot be blamed for his lack of protection because Mary does not in actuality belong to him, but rather to the Lord as demonstrated by Joseph's quick decision to abandon Mary the moment she is passed to him from the Temple priests. Although

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<sup>82</sup> The comparison between Mary and Eve evokes the very popular and much discussed theme of Mary as the Second Eve. Irenaeus of Lyons in his treatises *Against Heresies*, and especially his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, discusses most thoroughly the parallelism of Eve and Mary and his understanding of these two women as the most important women in human history: Eve as the "mother of all living"; Mary as the "mother of Christ." On this see, Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 39–52 and notes therein.

Joseph seems to want to accept blame for what he thinks has happened to Mary, he clearly knows that she is not really his responsibility, which explains why he hands over the onus of Mary's protection to the Lord as soon as he officially receives her from the temple. Joseph's decision to take Mary home originally is based on the high priest's threat and Joseph's desire to please him and the community (*Prot. Jas.* 9:11). Since from the start the text establishes that Joseph knows that Mary belongs to the Lord, when he arrives home and reacts harshly to her condition, he does so to accomplish the author's purpose of providing an occasion in the text for a test to show that she is truly innocent and has still maintained her state of purity, more specifically her virginity. A full citation of the three tests will prove useful, starting with Joseph's questioning of Mary, which unfolds as follows:

13:6 And Joseph stood up from the sackcloth and called her [Mary] and said to her, "You who God cared for, why have you done this? Have you forgotten the Lord your God? Why have you humbled your soul, you who were brought up in the Holy of Holies and who received food from the hand of an angel?"

13:6 Καὶ ἀνέστη Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τοῦ σάκκου καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· Μεμελημένη θεῶν, τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; ἔπελάθου κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου; τί ἐταπείνωσας τὴν ψυχὴν σου, ἢ ἀνατραφείσα εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τροφὴν λαμβάνουσα ἐκ χειρὸς ἀγγέλου;

The irony of Joseph's harsh questions, of course, is that all the reasons he supplies regarding why Mary should not have committed any acts against God (i.e., God cared specifically for her, etc.) are the precise reasons why Mary has not participated in any of these activities. More importantly, the questions posed involve a concern not only for her sexual purity but for her innocence as well, thus suggesting the fear that her moral purity is also in danger. In this way, Mary's virginity tests involve what Hayes has coined



“carnal impurity” since the accusation entails not only ritual and moral impurity, but also an impurity of the flesh caused by the sexual act itself.

As the Virgin of the Lord, Mary is under the Lord’s care and protection, so when faced with these accusations, her initial response is to claim her innocence: “I am pure, and I do not know a man” (καθαρά εἰμι ἐγὼ καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; *Prot. Jas.* 13:8). καθαρός is one of the most common Greek terms for “purity,” and although used only three times throughout the entire narrative, it appears at extremely critical points in the text. Mary’s self-spoken declaration that she is indeed pure (καθαρά εἰμι ἐγὼ) marks the word’s first appearance in the narrative.<sup>83</sup> Oddly enough, when questioned by Joseph concerning the origin of the child, Mary again forgets her visit from Gabriel (see also *Prot. Jas.* 12:6) and claims that she does not remember (*Prot. Jas.* 13:10). The reason for Mary’s forgetfulness is not quite clear,<sup>84</sup> but on two different occasions, Mary is unable to

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<sup>83</sup> Of the 158 times καθαρός is cited in the Septuagint, 72 times is it used in reference to ritual purity; namely, it deals with being ceremonially and sacrificially pure and clean; only twice is καθαρός employed to denote sexual impurity (Lev 5:28; Wis 14:24). Other usage for the term “pure” is in the metaphorical sense; that is, it is used as a synonym for “good” (i.e., Job 4:7), “innocent” (Gen 20:5), “holy” (Isa 65:5), and even “righteous” (i.e., Job 4:17). καθαρός is also used to indicate the quality or perfection of material goods i.e., “pure gold,” “pure oil,” or “pure brass,” etc. Although this meaning of the term involves measurements, it also applies to ritual purity in that certain materials are deemed worthy and ritually pure to be used in the making of sacred objects, i.e., the inside and outside of the ark of the covenant is made with pure gold (Exod 25:11). Interestingly, of the 11 times καθαρός is cited in the NT, seven times is it used as a synonym for “good,” whereas only twice does it relate to ritual purity; i.e., certain items need to be clean. As the term καθαρός has a variety of connotations, it is not surprising that it tends to translate into a number of different terms. Such Hebrew terms include: בר = pure; טָהוֹר = pure or clean in a moral sense; טוֹב = good; טָהוֹר = to be ceremonially clean and pure; יָשָׁר = to be upright, straight, pleasing to God; מַכְלֵה = perfection i.e., gold; מָרַק = cleansing (away evil); נָקֵא clean or empty; נָקִי = exempt from guilt or innocent; קָדוֹשׁ = holy, cleansed; תָּם = perfection, completeness, etc. Noteworthy is the fact that καθαρός more often than not translates into purity in a ritual sense. But in Mary’s first declaration of her purity (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8), the technical language of ritual purity gets transferred to connote a sexual sense, as is the case with the only other two times this term is employed in the narrative (*Prot. Jas.* 15:13; 15:15).

<sup>84</sup> Although Mary’s “forgetfulness” can also be interpreted as a way for the author to stress Mary’s humanness in that it is often human nature to forget what we should remember, it seems that the purpose of Mary’s lapse in memory here and in the earlier scene at *Prot. Jas.* 12:6 reflects the author’s desire to have her declare her innocence, since the placement of Mary’s forgetfulness occurs significantly before a test.

provide an explanation for her condition, which is particularly telling especially when revealing Gabriel’s message would easily clear her name. That these times of “memory lapses” occur before the actual tests seems to suggest that the narrator sought to sustain suspense by building up to the questioning that transpires. If Mary simply remembered Gabriel’s words she would have no need to declare her complete innocence.<sup>85</sup> Mary’s response that “I am pure” (καθαρά εἰμι ἐγὼ; *Prot. Jas.* 13:8) is her declaration that she is innocent of the charges laid before her concerning her virginity. Thus, Mary’s memory lapse seems to be a narrative device used with the purpose to allow for further confirmation of her sexual purity.

In addition, though Mary is the *Protevangelium of James*’ sole protagonist, she ironically speaks only on five different occasions throughout the entire narrative. More often than not, Mary is the object of the sentence and is regularly “moved around”<sup>86</sup> by the narrator and other characters; the narrator repeatedly describes her actions and interactions with other characters and thus her voice is only heard through the mouths of others. The first time Mary speaks, however, is when she is questioning the manner in which she will give birth (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6). Ironically, Mary’s voice is active, unreserved, and very much in control—and quite the opposite of what one would expect given her previously passive presence in the narrative. The second time Mary speaks, she accepts Gabriel’s message, affirms and accepts the role he proclaims, and declares that she is indeed, “the servant of the Lord” (ἡ δούλη κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 11:9). The third time

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<sup>85</sup> Indeed, if Mary could simply remember, she could move beyond simply stating her innocence to offering real testimony. The author’s decision to declare her innocence plainly, however, seems to be motivated by his desire to make Mary’s words emphatic.

<sup>86</sup> E.g., Mary is often described in the passive or past tense, rather than showing her own agency in controlling her actions.

Mary's voice is heard is when she declares her purity before Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8–10). These rare moments of direct discourse assure that each utterance takes on special significance; for example, Mary's questioning and then acceptance of Gabriel's message clearly demonstrate her active involvement in discovering and understanding her condition.

Though Mary may have “forgotten” the mysteries that the heavenly angel Gabriel spoke to her, the narrator provides hints that Mary does indeed comprehend her situation, which is why she is able to fully and faithfully attest to her sexual purity and innocence. This idea is supported further by two different details in the narrative. First, when Mary speaks for the fourth time in the narrative, she again declares her innocence and her maintained state of sexual purity, but this time before the high priest: “as the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I do not know a man” (Ζῆ κύριος ὁ θεός καθότι καθαρά εἰμι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; *Prot. Jas.* 15:13). Second, when Joseph is pondering what to do with her, he concludes there are only two options before he finally decides to divorce her quietly: [1] to hide her sin; and [2] to show her to the children of Israel. Joseph fears both options since the former will place him in opposition to the law of the Lord (τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου), but the latter risks the possibility that the child inside of her is angelic (ἀγγελικόν ἐστὶν τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ) and that “I will be found handing over innocent blood to the judgment of death” (εὐρεθήσομαι παραδιδούς ἀθῶνον αἷμα εἰς κρίμα θανάτου; *Prot. Jas.* 14:2).

Mary gives no hints to Joseph that the child is in fact heaven-sent and that it was the angel Gabriel who delivered this message. So when the narrator presents Joseph

considering the possibilities of Mary's sin or angelic intervention, he either coincidentally posits the latter reason for her pregnancy or he actually knows of Mary's innocence, but must question her so that she can declare her innocence and purity before the world. Of course, when Joseph decides that he will divorce Mary quietly, another angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream to tell him not to be afraid because the child she carries is in fact the doing of the Holy Spirit. Only after receiving confirmation of Mary's innocence is Joseph willing to protect her and the child (*Prot. Jas.* 14:8).

The author's careful structuring of Mary's character as pure make her very few examples of direct discourse of "I am pure" (καθαρά εἰμι ἐγὼ; *Prot. Jas.* 13:8) emphatic. For example, this purity is emphasized by means of the setting (e.g., sacred space of her home-made sanctuary to the sacred Temple); plot (e.g., Mary's maintained purity during her immaculate upbringing to her interactions with the Temple priests to her living arrangements with Joseph); action (e.g., Anna's decisions to prevent Mary from walking on common ground, or from touching, eating, or contacting anything or anyone profane or unclean, and Anna's participation in post-partum pollution to prevent ritual pollution from making contact with her daughter); and speech i.e., character traits attributed to Mary through the mouths of other characters (e.g., the priests' blessings and description of her as being "pure in the eyes of God" (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4)). Indeed, as the author makes quite clear, Mary's purity serves as the foundation for her characterization and the focal point of the narrative as a whole as the language of purity continues to dominate the text.

#### 4.6.2 Test Two: The High Priest Questions Mary's Pregnancy

The references to sexual purity embodied in the language of the text continue to serve as a reminder of Mary's sexual purity especially in her second test that occurs almost immediately after she is first accused by Joseph. Here, both Joseph and Mary are challenged when Annas, one of the scholars of their assembly, questions Joseph's absence and notices Mary's condition (*Prot. Jas.* 15:1–4). Joseph's response to Annas' question is "because I was weary from the travels and I rested for one day" ("Ὅτι ἔκαμον ἐκ τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ ἀνεπαυσάμην τὴν μίαν ἡμέραν; *Prot. Jas.* 15:2).<sup>87</sup> Annas' reaction to Joseph's answer is noteworthy. When reporting to the high priests of Mary's pregnant state, Annas refers to her as the "virgin (παρθένος) Joseph received from the Temple of the Lord" (*Prot. Jas.* 15:6) and when describing her condition in order to retrieve her for interrogation and testing, as a "virgin with child" (παρθένον ὄγκωμένην; *Prot. Jas.* 15:8). Interestingly, though Annas' accusations of Mary are based on the assumption that she is no longer a virgin, the author insures that the scholar addresses Mary as such on both occasions, perhaps to point out that the paradox of a pregnant virgin is indeed true.

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<sup>87</sup> Scholars have debated the author's exact intention for including this piece of information (e.g., Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 41). It is clear that Joseph's response that "he rested" his first day home could have sexual connotations, which is why Annas' reaction is suspicion. The Greek term used here as in *Prot. Jas.* 4:10 is ἀναπαύω meaning "to rest," but it can also be used to indicate "lying down." The sexual connotation is possible, but very unlikely given our evidence of its non-sexual meaning at 4:10 and the emphasis on Mary's purity and her platonic relationship with Joseph as made explicit by the high priest's designation of Joseph as "protector." It is my interpretation that the extensive questioning of Mary beforehand is a technique employed by the author to build up the big test made public by the high priest. In support of interpreting Joseph's "rest" as non-sexual is the fact that the last thing we are told of Joseph after he hears directly from the angel that Mary has conceived by the Holy Spirit is that he "began to protect her." This action reminds us about the earlier scene when Joseph is chosen via a sign from God, i.e., a dove rests on Joseph's staff to indicate that he has been chosen to care and protect Mary. The fact that the author alerts us again to Joseph's recommitment to his promise to care and protect Mary seems to dismiss the possibility that he "rested" in a sexual way.

Moreover, Annas' concern for Joseph's serious offence is based on his belief that Joseph defiled Mary, consummated the marriage in secret, and did not reveal his action to the children of Israel (Τὴν παρθένον ἣν Ἰωσήφ παρέλαβεν ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου, ἐμίανεν αὐτήν καὶ ἔκλεψεν τοὺς γάμους αὐτῆς καὶ οὐκ ἐφάνέρωσεν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ; *Prot. Jas.* 15:6). Annas' second accusation is particularly interesting since it is based on the idea that the marriage between Mary and Joseph is not technically complete since no formal marriage is ever discussed in the narrative (nor is it in any other source as far as I am aware). According to Satlow, in the Hebrew Bible betrothals were understood as inchoate marriages that had legal consequences, so that once the betrothal became formally concluded (probably with a payment), the betrothed woman was considered, in some respects, to be married.<sup>88</sup> The marriage itself and the transfer of the bride from the father's house to the husband's house legally "completed" the marriage. Satlow also notes that if there were a delay between the betrothal and the marriage ceremony (as there usually was) so that it required the bride to continue living at her father's home, she would still be considered a married woman.<sup>89</sup>

How are we then to understand Mary's and Joseph's relationship? Is Mary merely betrothed or is she indeed married? And what does it mean to be betrothed or married? I suggest that the narrative is deliberately ambiguous to reinforce the irregularity of their relationship and to set up Mary's testing. On the one hand, although no marriage ceremony is described, Mary has already been transferred to Joseph's home and is specifically instructed by the messenger of the Lord to be Joseph's wife (*Prot. Jas.* 8:8).

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<sup>88</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 69.

<sup>89</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 69.

Additionally while the author may present the betrothal of Mary and Joseph as a form of inchoate marriage, it is clear that Mary is understood to be fully married so that only divorce or death is required to terminate the marriage, which is precisely what Joseph is said to contemplate after he finds her pregnant (*Prot. Jas.* 14:4). On the other hand, this marriage is obviously not of the traditional sort as discussed in the previous chapter. Mary is not betrothed to Joseph by means of money, contract, or intercourse as the first mishnah in tractate *Qiddushin* states for determining betrothals, nor is she transferred to Joseph's care by her father. Instead Mary's marriage arrangement to Joseph is decided by God via lots and she is transferred to Joseph's home by the Temple priests without any compensation; Joseph actually only agrees to the arrangement out of fear. Most importantly here, sexual relations between Mary and Joseph are clearly not expected—indeed, suspicion of carrying out the sexual act is the reason they must stand trial. Joseph is specifically instructed by the high priest to take Mary into his “care and protection” (*Prot. Jas.* 9:7). Additionally, we are also told in the scene where Joseph must register his family (*Prot. Jas.* 17:2–4) and in his conversation with the Hebrew midwife (*Prot. Jas.* 19:6–8), that he does not know how to refer to Mary and has difficulty identifying her as his wife.

Thus Annas' accusations function to reinforce the unique marriage of Mary and Joseph as well as to set up Mary's test since, as a result, Joseph and Mary are summoned by the high priest to be interrogated. At the court, a series of questions are first directed at Mary alone:

15:10 And the high priest said to her, “Mary, why have you done this? Why have you humiliated your soul and <sup>11</sup>forgetting the Lord your God, you who were

brought up in the Holy of Holies and received food from the hand of an angel?  
<sup>12</sup>You who heard their [the angels] hymns and danced for them, why have you done this? <sup>13</sup>But she wept bitterly saying, “As the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I do not know a man.”

15:10 Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ ἀρχιερεύς· Μαρία, τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; τί ἐταπείνωσας τὴν ψυχὴν σου; <sup>11</sup>Ἐπελάθου κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου, ἡ ἀνατραφέϊσα εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων καὶ λαβοῦσα τροφὴν ἐκ χειρὸς ἀγγέλων; <sup>12</sup>σὺ ἡ ἀκούσασα τῶν ὕμνων αὐτῶν καὶ χορεύσασα ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν, τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; <sup>13</sup>Ἡ δὲ ἔκλαυσε πικρῶς λέγουσα· Ζῆ κύριος ὁ θεός καθότι καθαρὰ εἶμι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω.

Although the purpose of the investigation is to question why Mary has supposedly committed a sexual act, the manner in which the questions are posed simultaneously reminds the reader not only who Mary is and what she has experienced, but also of Mary’s purity because the author has already established for his readers that her answer to all these questions is that she is sexually pure and innocent. Not surprisingly, then, when Mary speaks out for the fourth time in the narrative it is to proclaim outright her innocence and purity: “As the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I do not know a man” (Ζῆ κύριος ὁ θεός καθότι καθαρὰ εἶμι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; *Prot. Jas.* 15:13).

Significantly, her statement includes the second use of the term καθαρός in the narrative as evidence of the language of purity, again placed directly in Mary’s mouth. As noted above, καθαρός can take on various meanings in addition to “purity” as the standard translation; the term has also been used to indicate innocence. In this way, Mary’s declaration that “I am pure,” not only affirms her sexual purity, but also her innocence against the accusation of participation in sexual impurity and sin.



Unable to respond to Mary's declaration of innocence, the high priest turns to Joseph and asks why he has done this. In the same manner and style as Mary, Joseph's response is that, "As the Lord lives, I am pure regarding her" (Ζῆ κύριος καθότι καθάρως εἶμι ἐγὼ ἐξ αὐτῆς; *Prot. Jas.* 15:15). In this third and final time that καθάρως is employed in the narrative, the word is now put on Joseph's lips in his denial of the accusations made against him concerning Mary's sexual purity. Earlier in the narrative when Annas first discovers that Mary is pregnant, the serious offence for which Joseph is charged is threefold: that he defiled the Virgin, that he consummated the marriage in secret, and that he did not disclose it to the people of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 15:6).

Interestingly, before the high priest, Joseph's offence becomes fourfold: again there is a concern that Joseph defiled Mary, has had his way with her, and that he did not disclose his action to the people of Israel, but a fourth part is included—namely, that he did not humble himself before God's mighty hand so that the child might be blessed (καὶ οὐκ ἔκλινας τὴν κεφαλὴν σου ὑπὸ τὴν κραταιὰν χεῖρα ὅπως εὐλογηθῆ τὸ σπέρμα σου; *Prot. Jas.* 15:17). This curious addition to the list of offences involves the lack of blessings for Mary's child, since much time is spent early in the narrative testifying and affirming that Mary is blessed and that her child is indeed already holy.

The high priest's response to Joseph's silence only heightens in strangeness: "Give back the virgin you received from the Temple of the Lord" (Ἀπόδος τὴν παρθένον ἣν παρέλαβες ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου; *Prot. Jas.* 16:1). The obvious question to be asked of the high priest is where is Mary to be returned? To the Temple from which she was once asked to leave? As the "Virgin of the Lord" from the Temple of the Lord, is

Mary to reside with the high priest? Though the high priest's intentions by this statement are not clear, his comment remains striking in that he refers to Mary as the Virgin from the Temple of the Lord. Does the priest in fact believe that Mary is still a virgin? The scene contains built-in contradictions since the high priest's intention is to accuse Mary for no longer maintaining her state of sexual purity and yet, without hesitation, he continues to refer to her as a virgin, and not just any virgin, the virgin from the Temple of the Lord. One must question then whether the high priest's true intention lies in actually passing judgement on Mary or simply questioning and testing Mary so that she is afforded the opportunity to declare and publicly prove her innocence and maintained purity and virginity.

This latter possibility is reinforced by the fact that after telling Joseph he must return the virgin, the high priest decides to submit them to “the Lord's drink test”<sup>90</sup> with the purpose of disclosing *their* sins: “I will give you to drink the water of the Lord's testing, and it will make your sins manifest in your eyes” (Ποτιῶ ὑμᾶς τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς ἐλέξεως κυρίου, καὶ φανερώσει τὸ ἀμάρτημα ὑμῶν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ὑμῶν; *Prot. Jas.* 16:3).<sup>91</sup> If the point of the drink test is to disclose Mary's and Joseph's guilt to the high priest and to the public, why does the high priest say that *their* sin will be disclosed to

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<sup>90</sup> The *Protevangelium of James*' reference to the Lord's drink test immediately brings to mind the bitter water test cited in Numbers 5:11–31, whereby a drink test is administered to a woman to determine whether she has been unfaithful to her husband. When Mary's and Joseph's plea of innocence does not convince the high priest, they are instead accused of perjury and forced to undergo a test to verify their culpability. This test involves a drink, which must be consumed by the accused, followed by banishment into the wilderness. If unharmed upon their return, their innocence will be proven. As expected, Joseph and Mary return unharmed, which satisfies the high priest and the people of Israel. As a result, they are publicly vindicated and are sent home together. This scene has caused much discussion in terms of its evidence against knowledge of Jewish customs and therefore of the narrative's Jewish origins. See Chapter One for further discussion.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Tischendorf's text which has “sin in them.”

Mary and Joseph? Mary and Joseph know already of their innocence, as does the reader, so this insistence upon the drink test operates narratively for the sole purpose of reinforcing their innocence by means of a public test.<sup>92</sup>

Again, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Levitical and mishnaic understandings of virginity are almost always interpreted in the context of marriage. That is to say, virginity is praised as a virtue for young girls and becomes only an issue of shame if lost outside of marriage. Understood in the context of marriage, Mary's testing scene is very much out of the norm and reinforces the idea that the tests were constructed by the author for the purpose of allowing Mary to declare her sexual purity in her own voice. What is also noteworthy about this test is the explicit involvement of "carnal impurity." In the first test, the concern for Mary's sexual and moral purity is only hinted at in Mary's response that she is both a virgin and innocent. Here, Mary's test surrounding her continued virginity is discussed explicitly in terms of sin, thus directly linking Mary's sexual impurity with an impurity that defiles morally. In this way, Mary's affirmation that she is pure can also be interpreted as her declaration that she is "carnally pure."

Finally, in terms of literary structure, up to this point in the narrative Mary has defended her status twice. Joseph's private questioning of her condition, which is quickly

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<sup>92</sup> Given that earlier in the narrative Mary's purity is affirmed by everyone (priests, people of Israel, etc.), the reaction of surprise by all seems to indicate the author's need to address a number of concerns. First, the surprised reaction of the people heightens the dramatic effect of Mary's self-proclaimed purity and innocence. Second, the author also addresses the obvious paradox of Mary's virginal yet physically pregnant body, which probably weighed heavily on the minds of the people in the narrative as well as the readers. Perhaps for this reason the author confirms Mary's innocence several times, i.e., by having her and Joseph publicly announce it, by depicting them passing any test conducted on them, and by repeating over and over that Mary is blessed and chosen by God.

dismissed when the angel is able to confirm Mary's pregnancy as being holy, sets up the reader for a second test before the high priest with the expectation that she will again pass and proclaim her innocence. When the test before the high priest is conducted, the seriousness of the situation heightens because the interrogation now becomes public and Mary and Joseph must prove physically that they have not sinned. After successfully passing the drink test, readers anticipate a third and final test that Mary must face to prove her innocence and maintained purity.

By carefully designing a narrative that supports Mary's characterization as pure and holy (via plot, setting, action, speech, and character traits, etc.), the author provides the reader with the necessary textual clues to assess and construct trustworthy impressions of Mary's character. In other words, the author has constructed a series of scenes whereby the desired reader-response<sup>93</sup> is to expect the best of Mary during each test, despite the harsh accusations by religious leaders that she has violated her sexual purity. With each passing test, Mary's "character indicators"<sup>94</sup> continue to support the evidence for her characterization as exceptionally pure. These textual clues to accurately determine Mary's true character and thus purity become increasingly important as the virginity tests she is

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<sup>93</sup> In the reading process, Iser explains that "gaps" are perceived by the reader when holes or blanks are developed that need "filling in." The result of such "filling in" is connected patterns of reading to develop a narrative whole. In Mary's case, when the reader "fills in the gap" concerning whether Mary will be deemed pure or not, he or she does so by connecting Mary's past actions to the narrative patterns set out thus far. On this and the literary theory of "reader-response" or what Iser refers to as the "implied reader," see, Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction and from Bunyan and Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 237, idem, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978) and Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 236.

<sup>94</sup> See Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 4–6 on character indicators. See also Iser, *Implied Reader*, 237; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186–90 for the process of reading and the purpose of gaps, blanks and ambiguities.

forced to endure become significantly more difficult and serious. From a literary perspective, the goal of the author is clear: continue to strengthen the impression of Mary as pure by providing more and more textual clues to her character in order to ensure that there be no doubt in the reader's mind of her absolute innocence and purity, no matter what impossible test may lie ahead with the goal to prove otherwise.

#### 4.6.3 Test Three: Salome Questions Mary's Pregnancy

Initiated immediately after she completes her second test successfully, Mary's third and final test begins when the emperor Augustus orders a census for all those living in Bethlehem of Judea (*Prot. Jas.* 17:1).<sup>95</sup> The narrative commences with the journey to Bethlehem, undertaken not only by Joseph and Mary, but also by all of Joseph's other sons (*Prot. Jas.* 17:5).<sup>96</sup> In anticipation of enrolling his family, Joseph ponders how he should identify Mary, rejecting both the ideas of wife and daughter as suitable options, and thus reinforcing their unique marriage (*Prot. Jas.* 17:2–4). Though Joseph cannot decide, the text establishes that Mary has clearly not played the role of his wife despite

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<sup>95</sup> This section of the narrative may be familiar to the reader because it recalls and elaborates the infancy stories offered by the gospels of Matthew and Luke since it includes events such as the journey to Bethlehem for the census, the birth of Jesus and the astrologers' visit, and finally Herod's slaughter of the children, but of course with its own twists.

<sup>96</sup> The reference to "Joseph's sons" is explained in *Prot. Jas.* 9:8 as belonging to him from a previous marriage: "I already have sons and I'm an old man..." The *Protevangelium of James'* explanation for Joseph's other sons seems to support the Epiphanian solution to the problem of Jesus' siblings, i.e., both Mark (6:3) and Matthew (13:55–56) speak without explanation about the brothers and sisters of Jesus. See John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 316–32 and Richard Bauckham's response to Meier's conclusion that champions a Helvidian view over an Epiphanian in his article, "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus: An Epiphanian Response to John P. Meier," *CBQ* 56 (2004): 686–700. For a specific discussion on James, the brother of Jesus, and his historical connection to the figure of Jesus, see Wilhelm Pratscher, *Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und die Jakobustraditionen* (FRLANT 139; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); Pierre-Antoine Bernheim, *James, Brother of Jesus* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1997); Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (NTR; New York: Routledge, 1999), and John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

the angelic message to take on precisely this role (*Prot. Jas.* 8:8). Joseph places Mary on the saddled donkey led by his unidentified son and followed by another of Joseph's sons named Samuel (*Prot. Jas.* 17:5). Halfway through the trip (at the three mile marker), Joseph questions Mary's unusual mood since she is described as both laughing, but also gloomy.<sup>97</sup> Most significantly, Mary responds directly to Joseph's question in her own voice: "Joseph, because I see two peoples with my eyes, one weeping and mourning and one rejoicing and glad" (Ἰωσήφ, ὅτι δύο λαοὺς βλέπω ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μου, ἕνα κλαίοντα καὶ κοπτόμενον καὶ ἕνα χαίροντα καὶ ἀγαλλιῶντα; *Prot. Jas.* 17:9).

As mentioned earlier, Mary speaks in her own voice only five times throughout the entire narrative.<sup>98</sup> In her response to Joseph concerning her unusual mood, Mary speaks prophetically for the fifth and final time about the significant role her unborn child will play in the world and therefore her own role as the mother of the Lord (*Prot. Jas.* 17:9). Without a doubt, Mary is well prepared for any test to prove her identity as the Virgin of the Lord and her state of purity. At this halfway point in the text Mary informs Joseph that her condition has progressed and the child is ready to arrive (*Prot. Jas.* 17:10). Joseph helps her down from her donkey and finds a nearby cave where she can

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<sup>97</sup> Various interpretations of Mary's statement have been put forth. The two most popular include: [1] Jesus' ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins; and [2] the rise of believers (i.e., "Christianity") and fall of unbelievers (i.e., "Judaism"); P. van Stempvoort, "The Protevangelium Jacobi: The Sources of its Theme and Style and their bearing on its Date," in *Studia Evangelica III* (ed. F.L. Cross; TUGAL 88; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1964), 421–22.

<sup>98</sup> As a reminder, the first and second time Mary speaks, she questions the manner in which she will have her child and accepts her role as the servant of the Lord (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6, 11:9). The third and fourth time she speaks is to declare without hesitation or reservation that she is innocent and has maintained her state of purity (*Prot. Jas.* 13:8, 15:13).

deliver the child in privacy.<sup>99</sup> After instructing his sons to stand outside the cave, Joseph leaves in search of a midwife to assist in the birth (*Prot. Jas.* 17:11–18:2).

While Joseph is away, an extraordinary event occurs that affects not only the content of the narrative but also the style in which it is written: addressed in the first person, Joseph has a vision in which he sees everything suspended in time, signifying the exact moment Jesus is brought into the world (*Prot. Jas.* 18:3–11).<sup>100</sup> After a detailed description of this experience, the suspended time breaks, thus allowing Joseph to continue his search for a midwife. After finding one, the nameless midwife questions the circumstances of their situation by asking Joseph if the one having the baby in the cave is his wife (*Prot. Jas.* 19:1–11). Strategically, the author situates this conversation just before Mary undergoes her final test to remind his readers, just one more time, that Mary is indeed filling her role as the virgin and mother of the Lord.

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<sup>99</sup> The reference to the cave is another detail that is unique to the *Protevangelium of James* and thus departs from Luke 2:7, which depicts the birth in a manger or inn, and Matt 2:11, which describes Mary in her home. Both Justin Martyr and Origen of Alexandria attest to a cave as the place of Jesus' birth (*Dial.* 78.5: "And Joseph, the spouse of Mary, who wished at first to put away his betrothed Mary, supposing her to be pregnant by intercourse with a man, i.e., from fornication, was commanded in a vision not to put away his wife; and the angel who appeared to him told him that what is in her womb is of the Holy Ghost...But when the Child was born in Bethlehem, since Joseph could not find a lodging in that village, he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger, and here the Magi who came from Arabia found Him"; *Cels.* 1.51: "In regards to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, if anyone, after studying Micah's prophecy and the history recorded in the sacred writings by the disciples of Jesus. If needing to have additional sources of evidence, Let him be aware that the Scriptures are confirmed and the Gospel involving his birth, for there can be seen the cave located in Bethlehem where He was born and the manger where He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. And this site is talked about with great interest in all the surrounding countries. Even among the enemies of our faith it is being said that in this cave Jesus was born, the One who is worshiped and revered by the Christians"). On the imagery of the cave or "from a rock," being in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, see Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 125–26.

<sup>100</sup> For a detailed discussion on the form and function of Joseph's suspension of time scene, see François Bovon's, "The Suspension of Time in Chapter 18 of *Protevangelium Jacobi*," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester* (ed. B. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 393–405.

When questioned about Mary’s identity, Joseph provides an awkward explanation, which is worth quoting in full:

19:6 And I said, “my betrothed.”<sup>7</sup> And she said to me, “Is she not your wife?”<sup>8</sup> And I said to her, “She is Mary who was brought up in the Temple of the Lord, and I received her by lot as my wife,<sup>9</sup> but she is not [really] my wife, and she has conceived by the Holy Spirit.”

19:6 Καὶ εἶπον ἐγώ· Ἡ μεμνηστευμένη μοι. <sup>7</sup> Καὶ εἶπε μοι· Οὐκ ἔστι σου γυνή; <sup>8</sup> Καὶ εἶπον αὐτῇ· Μαρία ἐστίν, ἡ ἀνατραφείσα ἐν ναῶ κυρίου. καὶ ἐκληρωσάμην αὐτὴν γυναῖκα, <sup>9</sup> καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν μου γυνή, ἀλλὰ σύλλημμα ἔχει ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου.<sup>101</sup>

The nature of their relationship reaches its apex in Joseph’s most awkward and cumbersome explanation of Mary’s identity to the Hebrew midwife. Here Joseph describes Mary as his “betrothed” (the word used here is from *μνηστεύω*), but immediately complicates that statement by explaining that he received Mary as his wife but that she is actually not his wife. Though Joseph’s explanation is anything but clear, his intentions ironically are: in title, Mary may be Joseph’s wife, but she does not play the role of a wife in terms of being obligated to engage in sexual relations. Most interesting about the reference to Mary as Joseph’s betrothed is the interpretation suggested of an inchoate marriage since, though “betrothed,” they are understood as married. As Satlow suggests, the idea of a betrothal as a legal act is an established principle unique to biblical and rabbinic law since we have little evidence that Jews practiced inchoate marriage outside Palestine<sup>102</sup> or within the more cosmopolitan areas within Palestine.<sup>103</sup> As

<sup>101</sup> Note that the conversation between Joseph and the midwife is significantly shorter in the Bodmer Papyrus. In accordance with Hock, I also follow Tischendorf’s text here instead of de Strycker’s.

<sup>102</sup> Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 69–73.

<sup>103</sup> Satlow contends that the only concrete evidence for the practice of inchoate marriages among Jews comes from Matt 1:18, where Mary is said to be “betrothed” to Joseph, though he does admit that first century Jews in rural Galilee may have practiced this biblical form of betrothal; *Jewish Marriage*, 73. Cf.



presented in the narrative, the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas on marriage reflect most closely those offered in biblical and rabbinical literature (esp. *m. Qiddushin*).

Though somewhat doubtful of the circumstances, the midwife seems convinced that Mary's and Joseph's relationship is an inchoate marriage, so follows Joseph to the cave. Upon arrival at the cave, which had been overshadowed by a dark cloud, they find that they are too late as Mary has already given birth (*Prot. Jas.* 19:13). In an instant, the narrator describes how the dark cloud withdraws from the cave and an intense light appears inside, which after a short time recedes to make visible a child, feeding from the breast of his mother (*Prot. Jas.* 19:15–16). Mary's feeding of Jesus recalls Anna's feeding of Mary earlier in the narrative, but, of course, with one important difference: in accordance with Lev 12:2–6 that interprets a new mother as being contagious and ritually impure in the same way a menstruant is impure,<sup>104</sup> Anna waits the prescribed days and then cleanses herself of the flow of blood before she nurses her child. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Levitical law does not proscribe feeding one's child during a new mother's post-partum period. Anna's decision to do so, however, can be interpreted as her belief

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Tal Ilan's study on a marriage contract from the Babatha archives discovered in the Judean desert, which attests to the practice of premarital cohabitation in ancient Judea; "Premarital Cohabitation in Ancient Judea: The Evidence of the Babatha Archive and the Mishnah (Ketubboth 1.4)," *HTR* 86.3 (1993): 247–64.

<sup>104</sup> A parturient is deemed impure like a menstruant for seven days if she gives birth to a boy and fourteen days if she gives birth to a girl, after which she remains a threat only to the sancta for 33 days for a boy or 66 days for a girl. According to *m. Nid* 3.1, a woman who is deemed unclean as a result of post-partum impurities, even those women who suffer miscarriages or abortions, are only deemed unclean for the prescribed number of days (7 and 33 for males; 14 and 66 for females) if there is blood; otherwise, she may be deemed clean. In addition to the prescribed days for post-partum purification, a tradition attributed to R. Meir states that if a woman was in hard travail, she may be deemed clean even forty or fifty days, to which is added a tradition attributed to R. Judah that "it is enough for her that the blood be deemed clean that issues during her ninth month." R. Jose and R. Simeon are depicted as both agreeing that her blood remains clean only up to two weeks after she has been deemed unclean for the prescribed days (*m. Nid* 4.4–6). In any case, although these Tannaim expand Levitical discussions on the impurities of parturients and even deem some post-partum blood as clean in specific cases, they say nothing about banning women from feeding their children during this time of purification.

that the impurity of a parturient can be conveyed to a newborn. The idea that a parturient's impurity is transferable to her child is an interpretation suggested precisely by the Damascus Document (4Q266 6 ii 11).<sup>105</sup> Whereas Levitical and rabbinical legislation suggest two levels of impurity for a parturient (e.g., the first 7/14 days are more severe than the second 33/66 days)<sup>106</sup> and say nothing about prohibiting breast-feeding until a state of ritual purity can be attained, the Damascus Document implies only one severe time of impurity of 40/80 days and also considers both newborn child and mother as impure during this period since a "wet nurse" is mentioned for the child.<sup>107</sup> The Damascus Document (4Q266 6 ii 11) explicitly forbids the mother from nursing during the period of her impurity in fear that she will pass on her impurity to the child.<sup>108</sup> A

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<sup>105</sup> See Lev 12:2–6. Cf. the Damascus document (4Q266 6 ii 11), which states that a new mother is ritually contagious for the whole 40/80 days. See Hannah Harrington, *The Purity Texts* (CQS 5; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 99, 136–37 and Ian Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; STDJ 72; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 55–58.

<sup>106</sup> According to the rabbis, the two stages for the new mother are different in that the first stage, the mother is restricted from making contact with a number of different items as in the time of her menstruation. These restrictions include contact with food, people, cooking utensils, etc., since the result will be the contamination of such items. In the second stage, the mother is only restricted from entering sacred spaces and making contact with holy items; contact with people and things in the common sphere are no longer susceptible to contracting impurities from her; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 99.

<sup>107</sup> Werrett, *Ritual Purity*, 56–57. Werrett describes the Damascus Document's reference to wet-nurses as an example of gap-filling for the silence of the biblical material regarding the ability of a newborn to be contaminated by its mother.

<sup>108</sup> Harrington argues that the belief in the human condition as being inherently unclean even at birth as found in the Damascus Document 4Q266, 4QMiscellaneous Rules 4Q265 and other Qumran texts may suggest a Qumranic theological principle: that along with birth comes impurities; *Purity Texts*, 62. Joseph Baumgarten suggests that this same rule concerning the impurity associated with birth applied even to Eve and Adam. In his examination of 4QMiscellaneous Rules 4Q265, Baumgarten determines that Adam and Eve did not enter into the Garden of Eden immediately because they too were waiting the proper days (40 and 80 days respectively) before entering the Holy Garden. Using the book of Jubilees to restore the gaps in lines 11–13, Baumgarten argues that Adam and Eve did not participate in any holy activities until the prescribed days were complete because as a prototype of the sacred Temple, the Garden of Eden is understood as Holy and therefore subject to the same purity laws regarding the maintenance of its holiness (cf. Jub 3:12; 1QH<sup>a</sup> 16.10–13); "Purification after Childbirth and the Sacred Garden in 4Q265 and Jubilees," in *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris, 1992* (ed. G.J. Brooke; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 3–10. Harrington has argued that since neither Eve nor her newborn child enter the Holy Garden before waiting the proper days 4Q265 seems to indicate that both were considered unclean; Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 62. For a contrary

noticeable difference between the Damascus Document and our narrative, of course, is that no wet-nurse is ever mentioned in the *Protevangelium of James*.

Mary, on the other hand, immediately provides her breast to Jesus, emphasizing a purity that is so exceptional it no longer requires the ritual practice of post-partum purification. The narrator's depiction of Mary's ability to bypass the required purification rituals whilst still maintaining the purity of her child emphatically underscores Mary's exceptional purity, but also her status as the Lord's Virgin. As discussed earlier, all previous references to enclosed places of purity are utterly exploded in this scene when a simple cave in the wilderness, potentially offering the most danger, is transformed by Mary's mere presence into the safest of spaces solely through her much-affirmed purity, so safe that the Lord's son can be born here and fed immediately with the Virgin's milk without the performance of the proper rituals for purification (*Prot. Jas.* 19:16 cf. 5:9). In this way, Mary's new status allows her purity to follow her wherever she goes; Mary is not only pure, but holy.

The midwife's immediate and complete recognition of the situation as a miracle, which she interprets as "salvation born to Israel" (σωτηρία τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γεγένηται; *Prot. Jas.* 19:14), reinforces Mary's special status and also allows the midwife to acknowledge her privileged status as a witness to such an event. The narrator reports that after leaving the cave, the midwife relays these events to a woman named Salome, who acts as a foil character to the midwife who has just indicated her immediate belief that the

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position to Baumgarten's and Harrington's interpretation, see Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, 56-58.

baby was born of a virgin (*Prot. Jas.* 19:18). After Salome indicates her refusal to believe a virgin could give birth to a child (παρθένος ἐγέννησεν; *Prot. Jas.* 19:19), both women return to the cave with the intention of testing Mary for the third and final time.<sup>109</sup>

Upon entering the cave, Salome demands that Mary position herself so that she can perform a gynaecological examination (literally, “unless I put my finger and examine her [natural] condition”; ἐὰν μὴ βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου καὶ ἐρευνήσω τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς; *Prot. Jas.* 19:19).<sup>110</sup> Unlike the two previous tests Mary is forced to endure, the intrusive test performed by Salome is the most intense and serious because the author has constructed a situation whereby Mary must prove that she is physically a virgin and has maintained an absolute state of purity despite the fact that she has just given birth. The results of this last test, however, are not unexpected. Without hesitation, God punishes Salome for her disbelief and unfaithfulness by causing her hand to be consumed by flames<sup>111</sup> the moment she inserts her finger into Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 20:2–4).<sup>112</sup> After

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<sup>109</sup> The details concerning the cave scene are unique to our narrative and do not have parallels in other infancy narratives, e.g., Matthew and Luke. Note that instead of reading of shepherds and magi learning of the birth of Christ, the *Protevangelium of James* introduces two humble female characters who first receive the news.

<sup>110</sup> Hock notes that the reference to Salome inserting her finger into Mary recalls “doubting Thomas” in John 20:25, when Thomas insists that he will not believe that the One who has appeared before the twelve is indeed Jesus until “I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side.” Both Salome and Thomas may doubt, but they are eventually persuaded to believe. Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 69 n. 19:19.

<sup>111</sup> Since Mary literally carries within her the most pure of spaces, unviolated, even after giving birth, Salome’s actions certainly represent the most intrusive violation of that space. That her hand burns is an interesting metaphor for the fires of hell as punishment for sin, but also for the “light” or heat of God’s protection of Mary becoming extremely literal. Mary’s proclamation “As the Lord God lives, I am pure,” are not just words here—they become Salome’s reality. In addition, Harrington argues that in Jewish tradition, holiness is composed of two major facets: “Consuming Fire,” and “Ethical Goodness.” She describes “Consuming Fire” as holiness that is a “separate ultimate power which reacts violently when coming into contact with any impurity or imperfection.” See, Harrington, *Purity Texts*, 9 and *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World* (RFCC 7; London: Routledge, 2001), 12–13. It is symbolic that Salome’s hand is literally consumed with fire at the touch of Mary; in other words, Mary’s holy body reacts violently to the impurity of Salome’s hand.

realizing that this punishment is a direct result of her transgression, Salome calls out to the God of her ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for forgiveness (*Prot. Jas.* 20:5). As soon as the words of her prayer leave her lips, the narrator describes how a messenger of the Lord descends from on high to tell Salome to pick up the child if she wants to receive salvation and joy. After picking up the child, Salome's hands are immediately healed and her position towards the child is changed; Salome recognizes Mary not only as a virgin mother, but also Jesus as child born to be king of Israel (*Prot. Jas.* 20:11).

From a literary perspective, the author's structuring of three tests to determine Mary's virginity reinforces her character as pure at a number of levels. First, the repetition of the tests and Mary's success at passing one after another strengthen the idea that Mary is indeed both sexually (and morally) pure.<sup>113</sup> Success at one or two tests may pass as coincidence, but three seems to indicate confirmation both for the other characters in the narrative, but most importantly for the reader. Second, the repetition of the tests,

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<sup>112</sup> Salome's prayer to God for forgiveness is also interesting and may also serve to underscore Mary's purity. After calling upon the God of her ancestors, Salome prays that God will remember her and request that she not be made an example of because she has been "healing people in your name and have been receiving my payment from you (*Prot. Jas.* 20:7)." Salome's qualifications as a legitimate Hebrew midwife leave no room for doubt that the test Mary endures leaves her purity unaffected and untainted.

<sup>113</sup> Sternberg argues that "patterns of similarity," or "structures of repetition," are all based on the principal of analogy, whereby analogy is "essentially a spatial pattern, composed of at least two elements (two characters, events, strands of action, etc.) between which there is at least one point of similarity and one of dissimilarity: the similarity affords the basis for the spatial linkage and confrontation of the analogical elements, whereas the dissimilarity makes for their mutual illumination, qualification, or simply concretization." Sternberg goes on to state that these instances of repetition can take several different forms including [1] on the level of Sound and Linguistics; [2] on the level of Plot; [3] on a Thematic level; and finally [4] on a Generic level. The structure of repetition displayed in our narrative by means of the three purity tests manifests itself on several levels. Mary's verbatim response that she is indeed pure to the charge made against her by Joseph, the high priests, and Salome uses repetition on a sound and linguistic sense. On the level of plot and theme, the equivalences and contrasts between events, characters, and situations is also expressed in our narrative by means of Mary's purity testing ordeals, by the different characters who conduct the tests, and the testing scenes themselves. See Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 365–68.

but with variance, allows the author to depict the acceptance of Mary's purity as exceptional to a variety of audiences.<sup>114</sup> The first test satisfies the concerns of Joseph, her human protector; the second, the priestly leaders and her community; and the third, all the people of Israel as represented by the characters of the midwife and Salome. Third, although the goal of each test is the same, i.e., to determine Mary's sexual status, the tests also provide the reader with crucial information about Mary's character and actively progress the storyline. For instance, Mary proves that she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit; that she has not had any sexual relations with Joseph; and finally that she is the embodiment of purity since she is physically a virgin with child and the Virgin of the Lord. Finally, the author's employment of the three tests also serves to coach readers to the appropriate response to the details laid before them—namely to confirm Mary's sexual status as a virgin and thus her extreme purity. In this way, the tests significantly increase in severity and make all the difference in eliciting the proper reader-response. In other words, the reader is given numerous textual hints about Mary's character up until the "first test," and so the task of confirming Joseph's belief that Mary's conception was of the Holy Spirit comes not as a surprise, but as an expectation. Mary's successful passing of the second test is dependent upon her ability to pass the first, just as the success of her final test is dependent on the outcome of the second. If Mary's physical test administered by Salome was presented as the "first test," the author would risk having too large of a "gap" for his readers to fill. The author's structured increase in difficulty from test to test ensures the proper characterization for his protagonist.

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<sup>114</sup> On the importance of variances and differences in the use of repetition, see Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 366.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we turned to the much discussed portrayal of Mary's sexual status as a *parthenos* expressed in the chapters following her identification as the "Virgin of the Lord." When focusing on Mary's virginity, we find that once she is given the title "Virgin of the Lord," Mary's purity no longer is characterized exclusively by her associations with the Temple and its priests and described in terms likened to a Temple sacrifice. Instead, Mary transitions into being a symbolic Temple replacement herself.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, under the protection of the Lord, Mary's purity ensures that she can even give birth in a cave because divinity now accompanies her everywhere she goes. In this way and in accordance with Foskett who argues that Mary's characterization as pure must be understood in the context of holiness,<sup>116</sup> Mary's exceptional purity sets her aside for God and her body, which is not only pure, but holy, transforms into a sacred Temple suitable for the Son of God.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Although the Temple no longer functions as the center point in the narrative after Mary's new designation, note, however, that the image of the Temple does appear one last time at the end of the narrative at chapters 23–24, when John's father Zachariah is depicted serving at the altar when Herod's henchmen come to ask him about his son's whereabouts. The confrontation results in the shedding of Zachariah's blood at the entrance of the Lord's Temple and the defilement of the sacred Temple. In this way, the final scene portraying the Temple as defiled and no longer a locale for the sacred reinforces the Temple and its sacrificial system as being obsolete and superseded for understanding and practicing purity; Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) esp. chapter seven, "The Last Supper, the Temple Incident, and the 'Spiritualization' of Sacrifice in the New Testament." This idea is reinforced by the fact that innocent bloodshed and the consequent contamination of the Temple was considered the primary pollutant of the land and the most severe sin in early Judaism precisely because it was the earthly locale for God's presence when kept holy—the consequence of an unholy temple is the departure of God; Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (eds. Carol L Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 401.

<sup>116</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 148.

<sup>117</sup> As the sacred Temple is often described as God's holy residence on earth, the image of Mary's body as a holy Temple is most fitting since it is in the womb of her body that the Son of God will dwell.

Additionally, this specific treatment of Mary's virginity also serves to explore and confirm her ever-virgin status at the conception, pregnancy, and birth of her child as well as her role as Virgin Mother. In particular, I suggest that three tests are used to confirm her status as the Lord's virgin and her dualistic role as Virgin Mother in several ways throughout the narrative: [1] to allow Mary to speak in her own voice about the nature of her status; [2] to reinforce the peculiarity of Mary's and Joseph's marriage, but also establish that marriage is a legitimate way to express devotion to God; and [3] to express a connection between virginity and holiness, and thus to present Mary as both pure and holy.

While Mary speaks so seldomly in the narrative, her voice is heard at extremely critical points making her words strikingly emphatic. Of the five times Mary speaks, three times are specifically related to her status as a virgin (*Prot. Jas.* 11:6, 13:8–11, 15:13). Likewise, even though καθαρός is the most common term for “purity,” its use only three times throughout the entire narrative reinforces its importance. That the word καθαρός is placed in Mary's mouth two out of the three times it is used and two out of the five times Mary speaks, highlights precisely its significance: Mary is indeed a virgin despite taking on the role of mother.

To further establish Mary's ever-virginity, we find that biblical and rabbinical ideas on betrothals and marriages reinforce the extremely ambiguous relationship between Mary and Joseph. The narrative's reference to Mary functioning as a “wife” at *Prot. Jas.* 8:8, her transfer from the Temple priests to the house of Joseph at *Prot. Jas.* 9:11–12, and Joseph's need to “divorce” her quietly alongside his difficulty in identifying



her relationship to him at *Prot. Jas.* 17:2–3 and 19:6–9 and the manner in which Joseph receives Mary at *Prot. Jas.* 9:7, reflect the author’s intention of blurring the idea of a traditional Jewish marriage between them. While the text expresses marriage as a positive form of religious expression since Mary is to be understood as Joseph’s wife, she is also not to be associated with the obligations (i.e., sexual relations) expected in all other Jewish marriages since, as her title of the Virgin of the Lord makes clear, in actuality she belongs exclusively to the Lord.

The focus on Mary’s sexual purity as expressed in our examination of her new designation and endurance of three virginity tests also strengthens the connection between virginity and holiness and the value and prestige of the virginal or celibate life. Though Mary’s virginity in the narrative indeed reflects the kind of elevation associated with this practice as expressed in many early Christian ideas surrounding virginity and celibacy, the *Protevangelium of James* also does not place it as a superior road to follow over marriage and childbirth since Mary is described as participating honourably in both. On the other hand, its importance for attaining holiness should not be underestimated either as evident in the crisis and panic it brings when Mary’s virginity is questioned. Assuredly Mary’s virginal state alongside her exceptional ritual purity sets her aside for the Lord and makes her holy. Interesting for our studies is the close juxtaposition between the “angelic” life of virginity and the “profane” world of marriage and the positive portrayal of both ways of life as legitimate forms of devotion in the *Protevangelium of James* since it recalls quite significantly Syrian Christian ideas on virginity, celibacy, and married life.

Additionally, what our examination of Mary's sexual purity also allowed us to do is test Hayes' categories of impurity. Mary's three tests in particular reflect an interest not only in Mary's virginity, but also her innocence. In other words, the accusations put forth by Joseph, Annas, and then by the Hebrew midwife against Mary involve a concern for her guilt in addition to the loss of her virginity and purity. While the accusation of guilt is not made explicit, the options are either that Mary herself was seduced and gave in to temptation as the analogy to Adam and Eve evokes, or that by exposing herself beyond the walls of Joseph's home, her virginity was taken from her by force. Either way, the issue at hand involves both Mary's ritual impurity and sexual immorality, or what Hayes has coined as "carnal impurity." With regard to genealogical impurity and in contrast to Hayes, we note that Mary's Davidic lineage still remains important to her presentation as pure and the reason for her chosen role as the mother of God despite the prominent interest in carnal impurity.

In the chapter that follows, we change course and examine not a category of impurity being represented in the *Protevangelium of James*, but rather focus on the clues provided by our examination of the purity issues discussed thus far in order to help shed light on the question of provenance for our text. To anticipate, I suggest that the ideas concerning purity in the *Protevangelium of James*, especially its interest in ritual and menstrual impurity as well as ideas on Mary's dualistic role as Virgin Mother and the text's connection to Judaism, are concerns consistent with the kind of religious activity occurring in and around Syria.

## Chapter Five: The *Protevangelium of James* in Early Jewish and Christian Contexts: The *Protevangelium of James*' Provenance and Relationship with Judaism Revisited

### 5.1 Jews and Christians in Syria

Having now considered the theme of purity with the *Protevangelium of James* in some detail, we can return to questions about the text's date, provenance, and relationship to Judaism. Disagreements among earlier studies, particularly on the question of provenance, result in several proposed locations such as Syria,<sup>1</sup> interior Asia Minor,<sup>2</sup> and Egypt.<sup>3</sup> The reference to the laurel tree Anna sits beneath to lament her life's woes, for instance, has convinced some of a Syrian Antioch locale since Antioch in particular was known for its laurel trees (*Prot. Jas.* 2:7).<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the positing of Egypt as the most likely location has also been offered because of its geographical landscape of mountains and wilderness, similar features cited in the narrative.<sup>5</sup> Hock contends that perhaps the only answers possible for the question of provenance must be negative ones. In accordance with Quasten, Michaelis, de Strycker, Cothenet, Cullmann, and Elliott, Hock

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., H.R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; Assen: van Gorcum, 1965), 22; L. Conrady, "Das Protevangelium Jacobi in neuer Beleuchtung," *TSK* 62 (1889): 728–83; Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 108–9; J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 49; George Zervos, "Seeking the Source of the Marian Myth: Have we Found the Missing Link?," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 107–20; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt; 2d ed.; London: Routledge: 1993), 291, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 11. Hock also proposes Egypt and Syria as possible contenders.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Émile de Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 419–21 and E. Cothenet, "Le Protevangile de Jacques: Origine, Genre et Signification d'un Premier Midrash Chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie," *ANRW* 2.25.6 (1998): 4267.

<sup>4</sup> Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 22.

<sup>5</sup> De Strycker, *La Forme la Plus Ancienne*, 419–21.

acknowledges the widely held negative answer of “not-Palestine” based on the author’s supposed ignorance of “Palestinian geography.”<sup>6</sup> To this Cullmann adds, “and Jewish customs,”<sup>7</sup> but also recognizes the problem of such a conclusion, since he admits the validity of the recent challenges made to this assessment by Lowe.<sup>8</sup>

In Chapter One, I proposed that such arguments remain unconvincing, since they are largely based on isolated geographical details with little consideration of textual evidence for the concerns of the work as a whole. I thus suggested that perhaps a more fruitful way to shed light on the text’s provenance and thus “test” what scholars have previously proposed may be to focus on the concerns and interests of the text itself in order to see if they hint towards a likely locale or milieu. In this way, a determination of provenance based on the text’s governing concerns may confirm what others have suggested as a locale based on geographical details.

The goal of this chapter will be to review the main concerns of the text in order to suggest a possible provenance or milieu. In this study, we have examined the *Protevangelium of James*’ concern for ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity, its connection to Judaism especially as it pertains to the promotion of the Jewish Temple and the continuation of ritual practices, and its interest in the promotion of both ascetic and family life. What I suggest is that these interests are most compatible with a Syrian

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<sup>6</sup> See Hock, *Infancy Gospel of James*, 12 and references therein.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Cullmann, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, vol. 1 (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1991), 424.

<sup>8</sup> See Malcolm Lowe, “ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ of the Apocrypha: A Fresh Approach to the Gospels of James, Pseudo-Thomas, Peter and Nicodemus,” *NovT* 23.1 (1981): 59–62, esp. 62 n. 24 and the discussion on his challenges in Chapter One.

provenance.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, I argue the following: [1] the concern for all three types of purity described in the text is more marked in Syrian traditions than elsewhere; [2] the continued Jewish practices and attention to Jewish purity laws in the text may reflect the heavy Jewish influence in Syrian Christianity; and [3] the tension between ascetic versus family life displayed by Mary's dualistic role as Virgin Mother and the emphasis placed on her physical and real body as a virgin may echo and respond to precisely the same concerns found in Syria, where arguments over celibacy versus a married life and anti-docetic conversations dominated much of the literature, especially in the second and third centuries.

In order to propose a Syrian Christian context for the *Protevangelium of James*, I proceed in two stages and use evidence solely from Antioch and Edessa with the hope that between the two,<sup>10</sup> we may achieve a broader sense of trends in the region. In order to explore what Christianity looked like in Syria from its beginnings to the early third century, this first stage involves focusing on questions about Syrian Christianity's relationship to Judaism whereby Antioch serves as a test case. We will ask: what is the

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<sup>9</sup> On my use of "Syria" and "Syrian," see Introduction, n. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Why Antioch and Edessa? There are a number of reasons. First, as the main center of Christianity in Syria, Antioch served as the main administrative and cultural center and the starting point of military and commercial activity to the east. Along with Rome, Antioch was considered the most important city for the development of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Edessa's significance for Christianity, on the other hand, can be found in its contribution to language and education. Syriac, the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa, was the official language of Syriac-speaking Christianity and served as the language used for writing down Christian works. Second, there are a good number of sources from the first to the third centuries that can be linked to either Antioch or Edessa. Third, Drijvers writes that Antioch and Edessa can be considered the "two poles of Syrian Christianity as it developed during the first centuries AD in the Roman province of Syria." If this is true, then examining both Antioch and Edessa will provide us with a broad picture of Syria and its culture, history and traditions; Hans Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; New York: Routledge, 1992), 124–29.

relationship between Judaism and “Jewish-Christianity”<sup>11</sup> in Antioch, and what precisely was perceived as “Jewish” in Syrian Christianity? In the second stage of our inquiry into a likely locale or milieu for our text, we explore sources from Syria in order to draw comparisons and demonstrate shared interests between our text and Syrian Christian literature. This investigation involves a general discussion of the role of women in Syria, but also more specifically focuses special attention on the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, since it shares with the *Protevangelium of James* a sharp concern for menstrual and ritual purity and for the importance of family life. Additionally, I examine other elements characteristic of Syrian Christianity found especially in Edessa, such as the major issues and conflicts that arose in the early church with special attention paid to the roles of so-called “heretical” figures, ideologies, and traditions.

## 5.2 Jews, “Jewish-Christians” and Christians in Syria

In this focused section on Syrian Christianity in Antioch, I examine the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the influence of Judaism on Syrian Christianity. The Jewish influence I discuss below can take on a number of forms and may include, but is not limited to, the continued importance of Torah observance, interactions and connections with contemporary Jewish communities, and even self-identification as Jewish. For some, these Jewish influences were perceived to be negative as often expressed by enemy accusations of being “too Jewish” or “Judaizing.” For others, Jewish influence provided legitimization of and foundation for their traditions.

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<sup>11</sup> The use of quotations is intentional. See discussion on my use of this term in my Introduction under “A Note on Terminology.”

### 5.2.2 Jews, “Jewish-Christians,” and Christ-believing Gentiles: Antioch, A Test Case

Located on the Orontes River in Syria, Antioch was one of the most important centers for the early Christian movement since at this specific location the followers of Jesus were first referred to as “Christians” (Acts 11:26),<sup>12</sup> a distinct sect within Judaism.<sup>13</sup> That Judaism successfully spread throughout the area for some centuries and that the earliest Antiochene Christians were predominantly Jewish should not come as a surprise. Josephus notes twice that when Seleucus Nicator founded Antioch in 300 BCE, Jews were among the original settlers and were especially numerous there (*C. Ap.* 2.39; *A.J.* 12.119),<sup>14</sup> and that much of Antioch’s attraction for the Jews had to do with its close proximity to Jerusalem (490 km) and geographical position as the stopover city between Palestine and Asia Minor, as well as its function as an important commercial and administrative center.<sup>15</sup> Given the extremely influential presence of Judaism in Syria, our goal is to consider to what extent Syrian Christianity still remained Jewish and how it adopted features that scholars have now come to refer to as “Jewish-Christian” once it began to distinguish itself from its Jewish roots. Such an examination will shed an

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<sup>12</sup> Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken contend that the reference to “speaking the Word to no one except to Jews alone” in Acts 11:19 was Luke’s way of avoiding the impression that Hellenists were responsible for the beginnings of Gentile Christianity, but rather that it was initiated by Greek speaking “Jewish-Christians” (i.e., Cypriots and Cyrenaeanes); *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (SBLSPS 13; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1978), 14–16.

<sup>13</sup> That *christianos* used here should be understood as referring to a branch of Judaism in the same way Pharisees and Sadducees were considered to be within Judaism, see e.g., Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation between Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. chp. five and Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. B. Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–92.

<sup>14</sup> John Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 242.

<sup>15</sup> Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 1.

important light on the Jewish elements attested in our so-called Christian apocrypha, specifically the *Protevangelium of James*.

In particular, I have selected three important sources to examine that provide significant and unique information about the development of Christianity in Antioch and its relationship to Judaism: Paul, Matthew, and Ignatius. Interestingly, all three sources attest to conflicts that arose between and among Jews, “Jewish-Christians,” and Gentile Christ-believers in the first and early second century. These conflicts confirm the continued practice of and value placed on Jewish observances (e.g., Levitical laws concerning circumcision, dietary and purity laws, but also Second Temple Jewish *halakhah* including issues of divorce or Sabbath) by certain “Jewish-Christians,” albeit indirectly and mostly from the perspective of those wishing to pull away from maintaining traditional Jewish practices. The purpose of this section is to highlight the major issues and conflicts recorded in these three sources to show evidence of the continued influence of Judaism on Syrian Christianity.

Involving internal disagreements amongst “Jewish-Christians,” the major dispute between Peter/Cephas and Paul over circumcision and dietary laws as recorded in Acts and parts of Galatians provides important information about the influence of Judaism in earliest Antiochene Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Acts 15 includes an account of the events surrounding

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Hann argues that when Christianity was first brought to Antioch in the mid 30s, it seems to have been brought by refugees who were seeking asylum from the persecutions in Jerusalem (Acts 11:19). On the first charismatic leaders, see Hann, “Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Antioch: Charisma and Conflict in the First Century,” *JRH* 14 (1987): 341–60. Cf. Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 11–20; see also Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1983, repr. 2003), 32–33 and Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 9–10, who describes the earliest leadership as “wandering



the issue of circumcision: contrary to Paul's teachings, some Jewish Christ-believers preached that circumcision was required for all those wishing to be saved. Richard Bauckham writes precisely that the controversy involves only two views: "that of Peter, with which Barnabas and Paul agree, and that of the group who require the circumcision of Gentile converts. There is no indication of a middle way that might envisage two separate Christian communities."<sup>17</sup> These supporters of James appealed to the council in Jerusalem (i.e., Apostolic Council) and a decision was made by James himself to no longer "trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19).<sup>18</sup>

The conflict concerning dietary laws the year after, however, does not run as smoothly. Paul's language in Galatians reveals the following: [1] Cephas and some other "Jewish-Christians" were eating with Christ-believing Gentiles and sharing table-fellowship with them, which most likely included Eucharistic communion;<sup>19</sup> [2] Cephas is condemned by Paul for having been persuaded by James' representatives to keep Jewish dietary laws for Gentile Christ-believers. Specifically, Cephas and the others give up their table-fellowship with Christ-believing Gentiles when representatives of James arrive;<sup>20</sup>

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charismatics." On the setting and background of Acts 15, see Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (ed. Richard Bauckham; BAFCS 4; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 462–67. John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 48–57, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, "James, Peter, and the Gentiles," in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tension in Early Christianity* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; Brill: Leiden, 2005), 117.

<sup>18</sup> See Bauckham, "James, Peter, and the Gentiles," 91–142 for a recent discussion on the Acts 15 and Gal 2 controversy and the position of James and Peter, but also on Acts 10 and 11 on the "impure" and "profane" state of Gentiles, the core of the Acts 15 and Gal 2 debates.

<sup>19</sup> Among those who argue that the sharing of the Eucharist is also implied include: Justin Taylor, "The Jerusalem Decrees (Acts 15:20, 29 and 21:25) and the Incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11–14)," *NTS* 46 (2001): 379; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Eerdmans, 1982), 129; Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (KEK; 12<sup>th</sup> ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 83–84.

<sup>20</sup> In accordance with Marcus Bockmuehl, Taylor is convinced that at Gal 2:12, Paul clearly implies that this was precisely what James was demanding since James' intention was to prevent Gentile

[3] Cephas is accused of compelling Christ-believing Gentiles “to live like Jews” (Gal 2:14),<sup>21</sup> and [4] Paul calls Barnabas and others who follow in Cephas’ footsteps “hypocrites.”<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, Hann argues that Paul’s unusual term to describe Peter’s actions (“to live like Jews”), which is also used elsewhere by Paul to mean “circumcised,” may hint at the possibility that Antiochene non-Jewish Christ-believers were being persuaded to adhere not only to Jewish dietary laws, but the necessity of circumcision as well.<sup>23</sup> James D.G. Dunn has argued that “to live like Jews” or to “judaize” involved different degrees of Jewish observances, of which circumcision was the most severe.<sup>24</sup> For Jerry Sumney, the issue at stake described at Galatians 2 has everything to do with the identity of the Christ-believer.<sup>25</sup> Since Paul understood the death of Christ as the basis for righteousness

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and Jewish association; “Jerusalem Decrees,” 379 and Bockmuehl, “Antioch and James the Just,” in *James the Just and Christian Origins* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; NovTSup 97; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 155–98, esp.181. cf. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 108–9 who suggests that Cephas’ decision to cease sharing table-fellowship was based on the imposition of the Jerusalem decrees. Also James D.G. Dunn who supposes that the decision was based on an even stricter observance; see “The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–18),” *JSNT* 18 (1983): 3–57, esp. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor suggests that what Paul takes issue with when he accuses Cephas of “judaizing” is his insistence on Jewish observances for Christ-believing Gentiles even though he himself was no longer observant. Taylor writes, “Cephas no longer had any right to demand Jewish observances of the Gentiles. But now—far worst—he had bowed to James’s demand to cease table-fellowship with them altogether”; “Jerusalem Decrees,” 380.

<sup>22</sup> Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” 116–30.

<sup>23</sup> Hann, “Judaism and Jewish Christianity,” 346. Cf. Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” 126.

<sup>24</sup> Dunn, “Incident at Antioch,” 3–57, esp. 26. Cf. C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles 2* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) and Taylor “Jerusalem Decrees,” 380, who argue that the real issue at the heart of the Jerusalem decree disagreement was a concern for the status of Christ-believing Gentiles by Jewish believers in Christ. Taylor suggests specifically that the crisis that occurred in Antioch involved two very different ways of interpreting the Jerusalem decree and thus two very different ways of viewing the status of Gentile believers in Christ in relation to Jewish believers in Christ.

<sup>25</sup> Jerry L. Sumney, “Paul and Christ-believing Jews Whom He Opposes,” in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 66.

for a Christ-believing community, anything that competed in importance had to be rejected, which for Paul included the separation of Jews and Gentiles at the church table since this separation seemed to compete as a way to gain salvation.<sup>26</sup> Following Holmberg, Sumney notes that table fellowship and the identity of those with whom one eats in particular addresses social boundaries since excluding someone from the table excludes them from the group and draws a clear statement about their group identity.<sup>27</sup> Mark Nanos specifically interprets Paul's frustrations with "Jewish-Christians" as the result of prioritizing their Jewish identity over their Christ-believing identity.<sup>28</sup> In accordance with a number of scholars who have ruled out the possibility that Cephas went so far as to demand the practice of circumcision,<sup>29</sup> it seems likely that the question at hand was how Jewish identity should be related to the identity of the Christ-believer.

At the very least, what the disputes at Antioch reveal for us then is that the leadership in Antioch consisted of "Jewish-Christians" (e.g., Peter and later Barnabas who were both influenced heavily by James) who observed Jewish practices and who compelled certain Jewish observances (e.g., not circumcision, but dietary laws) for the Gentile Christ-believing community over and against Paul, and that these observances were being practiced by Antiochene non-Jewish Christ-believers to some degree in the first century.

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<sup>26</sup> Sumney, "Paul and Christ-believing Jews," 69.

<sup>27</sup> Sumney, "Paul and Christ-believing Jews," 68; cf. Bengt Holmberg, "Jewish Versus Christian Identity in the Early Church?," *RB* 105 (1998): 397–425.

<sup>28</sup> Mark D. Nanos, "What was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with the Gentiles'?" in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (ed. Mark Nanos; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 317; idem, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 108–9. So too Bockmuehl, who argues that James' intervention was not "in any sense designed to promote the circumcision of the Gentiles"; "Antioch and James the Just," 181; and the scholars discussed above.

The conflicts evident among the community in the Gospel of Matthew,<sup>30</sup> written a decade or two after the destruction of the Temple,<sup>31</sup> may also shed significant light on the influence of Jewish traditions on Syrian Christianity.<sup>32</sup> I am aware that a provenance for the gospel of Matthew is still hotly debated in scholarship. However, in accordance with David C. Sim who argues convincingly for an Antiochene provenance for this Gospel based on the likelihood that the “Christian Jewish opponents of Ignatius of Antioch were members of the Matthean community some two decades or so after the composition of the Gospel” and Magnus Zetterholm who writes that “while it is not certain that the Gospel

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<sup>30</sup> Several places have been suggested for its provenance: Palestine, Caesarea Maritima, Phoenicia, Alexandria, and east of the Jordan, Edessa and Antioch. The dominant opinion for Matthew’s locale is still Antioch, supported by scholars including Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 172), Brown (*Introduction*, 172), and Sim (*Matthew and Christian Judaism*), 53–62, to name a few. Some scholars have proposed two locations: Palestine and then Antioch after the Jewish war to account for the tensions within the text. Wim Weren, for instance, argues for the area between Lower and Upper Galilee (e.g., Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida) for the first stage of his reconstruction of Matthew’s community, and Syria for the second stage, when tension between “Jewish-Christians” and Pharisees were extremely high; “The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community,” in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (ed. Huub van de Sandt; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 51–62. The most serious alternative to Antioch as the most likely locale is Galilee. Scholars advocating this position include, J.A. Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 158–59 and idem, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1996), 16–19; A. J. Saldarini, “The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in Galilee,” in *Studies on Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee I. Levine; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 23–28; Anders Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict,” *JBL* 127.1 (2008): 95–132, and A. M. Gale, *Redefining Ancient Borders: The Jewish Scribal Framework of Matthew’s Gospel* (London: T&T Clark Intl., 2004), 41–63.

<sup>31</sup> General scholarly consensus is that the Gospel of Matthew was written by a “Jewish-Christian” in the decade(s) following the fall of the Temple (80–90 CE); Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 172 and W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998; repr. 2000), 138–47. Recent scholars who argue for a date prior to 70 CE include R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 599–609, and J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 14–17. For a detailed discussion, see D.C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 31–40.

<sup>32</sup> In accordance with Davies and Allison, Brown, Sim, and Weren (see n. 30 above), I also favour Syria as a possible locale since Antioch especially seems to have provided a social setting consistent with the various tensions expressed in the gospel.

originated in Antioch, it is a historical fact that Ignatius not only knew but also used the Gospel of Matthew in some form in the situation in which he lived,”<sup>33</sup> my opinion is that Ignatius knew Matthew and that the version he used was most likely Matthew and not a pre-Matthean tradition.<sup>34</sup>

If at the very least we place the reception of Matthew in Antioch, then his community still attests to the internal debates with Pharisaic Jews that were characteristic of Antiochene Christianity. Jacob Neusner suggests that whatever success Pharisaic Judaism achieved at conversion is perhaps what triggered conflict between Jews and “Jewish-Christians,” since both groups seem to have drawn from the same pool of conversion candidates.<sup>35</sup> Wim Weren, however, has argued in his study of the history and social setting of Matthew’s community that conflicts between some Pharisees and Matthew’s “Jewish-Christians” seem more the result of two parties that adhered to the same basic values, but nevertheless disagreed on the most profound parts of their tradition.<sup>36</sup> In other words, although both groups were interested in *halakhic* issues concerning divorce and marriage (Matt 5:27–32; 19:3–9), the purity rules (15:1–9), and

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<sup>33</sup> See Sim, “Matthew and Ignatius of Antioch,” in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries* (eds. David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski; LNTS 333; New York: T&T Clark Intl., 2008), 140–41 and Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 211. It is for this reason that I will proceed with my discussion of Antiochene Christianity on the basis that Matthew’s community most likely came from Antioch, and therefore may attest to Jewish and “Jewish-Christian” conflicts in Antioch.

<sup>34</sup> See J.P. Meier, “Matthew and Ignatius: A Response to William R. Schoedel,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (ed. D. L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 178–86.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob Neusner suggests that rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, which both have their roots in Palestinian Judaism, competed to win over the Jews of the oriental Diaspora and that arguments between these two new groups was often the result of battling for the loyalty of the Jewish masses; *A History of the Jews in Babylonia I* (StPB 9; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), 166–69; idem, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Jewish-Christian Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (StPB 19; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 1–2; idem, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2003; repr., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 77.

<sup>36</sup> Weren, “History and Social Setting,” 54–55.

the other observance of Sabbath (12:1–14) as well as the importance of appealing to Scripture to justify their views (9:13; 12:3–7; 19:4–5, 7–8), they disagreed vigorously over the role of Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

The debates that occurred between these Antiochene Christians and Pharisaic Jews are noteworthy, especially as they relate to their understanding of Judaism. Weren argues that the “Jewish-Christians” of Matthew’s community saw themselves as continuous with the Jewish community and thus were still *intra muros*,<sup>38</sup> but that it was only later on (80–90 CE) that they gradually separated themselves from this social framework and developed into a “Jewish branch within a Jesus movement that was not exclusively linked to a particular people.”<sup>39</sup> In accordance with Weren, Anders Runesson also argues for the *intra muros* status of Matthew’s community, but takes this concept one step further by arguing in his study on the “Jewish-Christian”<sup>40</sup> identity of Matthew’s community that the conflicts between Matthew’s community and Judaism were not directed at Jewish society in general (tensions were low both before and after 70 CE), but rather specifically at other Pharisees.<sup>41</sup> According to Runesson, Mattheans were initially

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<sup>37</sup> For “Jewish-Christians,” Jesus had special authority as God’s son (Matt 7:29; 8:8–9; 21:23–27), whereas for *some* Pharisees, Jesus was an imposter (Matt 27:63) whose powers were from Beelzebul (Matt 9:34; 12:24, 27; cf. 10:25); Weren, “History and Social Setting,” 55–56. Note, however, that not all Pharisees would have felt this way since the NT cites several self-proclaimed Pharisees who were also Christ-believers, e.g., Nicodemus (John 3:1–21), Paul (Acts 23:6), and other self-identified Christ-believing Pharisees (Acts 15:5) attest to being both Pharisees but also believers in Christ.

<sup>38</sup> For a list of scholars who view the Matthean community as either *intra muros* or *extra muros*, see Runesson’s extensive list in his “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 97 and notes therein.

<sup>39</sup> Weren, “History and Social Setting,” 58.

<sup>40</sup> Note that in his aim at a more precise term, Runesson uses the word “Apostolic Judaism” to indicate a common religio-cultural and ethnic focus for the “religion” displayed in Matthew’s gospel. Accordingly, members of this community or group are referred to as “Apostolic Jews.” See Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity,” 62–75, esp. 72–73.

<sup>41</sup> On this intragroup conflict, which ultimately results in their separation, see Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 95–132.

part of the Pharisaic association, but they ultimately separated when conflict and tensions became increasingly worse after the war.<sup>42</sup> What the “Jewish-Christians” represented in Matthew’s community confirm for us is an internal Jewish conflict: the “Jewish-Christians” in Matthew did not understand themselves as arguing against Judaism; rather, they simply saw themselves as better Jews than the Pharisees and therefore the authentic representatives of Jewish scriptures.

In the beginning of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch’s writings provide us with further evidence of the influence of Judaism on Antiochene Christianity. Like the information offered to scholars through Paul’s letters and the gospel of Matthew, Ignatius’ letters attest to a third set of major conflicts in Antioch, now involving “Jewish-Christians” and Gentile Christians. The number of groups of opponents to which Ignatius refers in his letters has been much debated in scholarly circles. Ignatius’ critiques of his opponents can be generally divided into two categories:<sup>43</sup> the “heretical” groups themselves (e.g., docetists; here Ignatius may describe his opponents as “atheists” and those who say that Jesus only “appeared” to suffer [*Tr.* 10.1]),<sup>44</sup> and those who participate in improper practice (e.g., those who profess Christ but still maintain Jewish practices [*Mag.* 8.1–10:3]).

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<sup>42</sup> Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 120–32.

<sup>43</sup> On whether or not these two categories represent a single group or two individual groups see Sumney who argues that it depends on whether one reads the letters together or as separate letters; see his “Those Who ‘Ignorantly Deny Him’: The Opponents of Ignatius of Antioch,” *J ECS* 1.4 (1993): 347–49.

<sup>44</sup> Ignatius strongly affirms the balance of the divine/human duality of Christ (*Eph.* 7.2; *Sm.* 1.1–2; *Pol.* 3.1).

What is most interesting for our inquiry is Ignatius' attitude towards Judaism.<sup>45</sup> Of his seven authentic letters, his letter to the Philadelphians and Magnesians may shed light on his view of Jews and Judaism and its relationship to Christianity. In *Phd.* 6.1–2

Ignatius writes:

But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from a man uncircumcised; both of them, if they do not speak of Christ Jesus, are to me tombstones and graves of the dead on which nothing but the names of men is written. Flee, then, the evil arts and plots of the ruler of this age, lest, wearied by his scheming, you grow weak in love; but all of you, come together with undivided hearts.<sup>46</sup>

Ignatius' passage raises two important questions: [1] What is the identity of the two men?—i.e., the circumcised man who preaches Christianity and the uncircumcised man who preaches Judaism; and [2] What does Ignatius mean by Judaism and conversely, Christianity? Focusing on these two important questions may shed light on “Jewish Christianity” in second century Antioch and its surrounding areas. C.K. Barrett, Eduard Schweizer, and Jacob Speigl among others have argued that the “uncircumcised man who preaches Judaism” most likely was a member of the Jewish community.<sup>47</sup> In other words, this certain man may have represented a non-Christian Jewish community that welcomed converts who had not been circumcised. R.M. Grant has also proposed that Ignatius may

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<sup>45</sup> For Ignatius' views against docetism, see discussion on docetism below.

<sup>46</sup> All translations of Ignatius are drawn from William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> Barrett, “Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius,” in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies* (ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 220–44; Eduard Schweizer, “Christianity of the Circumcised and Judaism of the Uncircumcised,” in *Jews, Greeks, and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies* (ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 245–60; Jakob Speigl, “Ignatius in Philadelphia: Ereignisse und Anliegen in den Ignatiusbriefen,” *VC* (1987): 360–76, esp. 370. See also Robert Hall, “Epispasm and the Dating of Ancient Jewish Writings,” *JSP* 2 (1988): 80 and Peder Borgen, *Philo, John, and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity* (BJS 131; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987).



have had in mind Gentile converts to “Jewish Christianity,” “not unlike those who Paul describes as not keeping the law but advocating circumcision (Gal 6:13).”<sup>48</sup>

In opposition to both possibilities, Shaye Cohen argues that since the “Judaism” being preached to Ignatius’ opponents only took place within the context of Christianity and not Judaism, it is more likely that the “uncircumcised preacher of Judaism” was a Gentile Christian who gave too much authority to Jewish scriptures.<sup>49</sup> In accordance with Cohen, Paul Foster suggests that those whom Ignatius describes were not ethnic Jews or even proselytes to the Jewish faith, but rather were “Gentiles who held to a form of Christian faith that promoted Jewish observance without the necessity of circumcision.”<sup>50</sup> In accordance with Sim and Zetterholm, the identity of the latter group as “Gentile Jesus-

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<sup>48</sup> R.M. Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: Ignatius of Antioch*, vol. 4 (Camden, N.J.: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1966), 103.

<sup>49</sup> Shaye Cohen, “Judaism without Circumcision and ‘Judaism’ without ‘Circumcision’ in Ignatius,” *HTS* 95.4 (2002): 397. Note that when Meeks and Wilken first proposed that Ignatius’ issue with Judaism seems to involve Christ-believing Gentiles adopting Jewish practices and not necessarily ethnic Jews who believed in Christ (*Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 20), their interpretation of Ignatius’ frustrations with Christ-believers relied on the ethnic distinction between “Jew” and “Gentile” and thus did not consider converts to Judaism or “god-fearers” who may or may not have been “ethnically Jewish.” This point is significant given that our sources rarely tell us about the ethnicity of people such that one is left to guess as to what born-Jews might or might not do that differs from Godfearers, Gentiles, etc. On the problems with connecting evidence of Torah-observance with ethnic Jews, see Charlotte Fonrobert, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Christian Anti-Judaism,” in *Late Ancient Christianity* (ed. Virginia Burrus; PHC 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 234–54.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch,” in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. Paul Foster; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007), 91. Cf. Schoedel, who believes that Ignatius had two groups in mind whereby the latter group was most likely uncircumcised Gentile Christ-believers and the former group circumcised “Jewish-Christians.” He proposes that perhaps “no one was actually recommending circumcision, and that the issue had probably been injected into the debate under the influence of Pauline models”; Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 203. Clearly, the identity of Ignatius’ opponents has been hotly debated in scholarship. In addition to the works cited in the discussion above, other recent views include: Schoedel, “Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch,” *ANRW* 2.27.1 (1993): 301–30; Charles Munier, “Où en est la question d’Ignace s’Antioche?,” *ANRW* 2.27.1 (1993): 404–7 on judaizers and 407–13 on Docetists; Sumney, “Opponents of Ignatius of Antioch,” 345–65; Mark Edwards, “Ignatius, Judaism, and Judaizing,” *Eranos* 93 (1995): 69–77; Judith Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 23–56; and Michael Goulder, “Ignatius’s ‘Docetists,’” *VC* 53 (1999): 16–30.

believers cloaked as Jews” and the former as “Jesus-believing Jews,”<sup>51</sup> is probably the closest to the truth.

But what did Ignatius mean by “Christianity” and “Judaism”? And to what kind of “Judaism” did he warn his followers not to listen? Three passages in Ignatius’ letter to the Magnesians in particular may provide us with a better understanding of Ignatius’ use of these terms:

[1] *Mag.* 8.1: Be not deceived by erroneous opinions nor by old fables, which are useless. For if we continue to live until now according to Judaism, we confess that we have not received grace.

[2] *Mag.* 9.1: If, then, those who lived in old ways came to newness of hope, no longer keeping Sabbath, but living in accordance with the Lord’s day...

[3] *Mag.* 10.1–3: (10.1) Let us not be insensible to his goodness! For if he imitates us in our actions, we no longer exist! Therefore let us become his disciples and learn to live according to Christianity. For one who is called by any name other than this, is not of God. (10.2) Set aside, then, the evil leaven, old and sour, and turn to the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted with him to keep anyone among you from being spoiled, since you will be convicted by your odor. (10.3) It is ridiculous to profess Jesus Christ and to Judaize; for Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, into which every tongue that has believed in God has been gathered together.

For Ignatius, Judaism and Christianity are two traditions that should be kept separate, since the latter is superior and has replaced the former and a mixing of the two leads to an incorrect expression of Christianity.<sup>52</sup> Equally true of Ignatius’ understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is his belief that they are still connected, albeit in a one way direction (*Mag.* 10.3); one can move from Judaism to Christianity, but

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<sup>51</sup> Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 205. For a complete discussion on why this scenario is the best option, see his argument on pages 204–11.

<sup>52</sup> Cohen suggests that Ignatius’ understanding of Judaism and Christianity can be described as antithetical categories since (good) Christianity is often contrasted with (bad) Judaism (e.g., Judaism is “the evil leaven, old and sour” and Christianity is “the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ”); Cohen, “Judaism without Circumcision,” 398.

not the other way around. His anger towards the Magnesians reveals that some Christians have turned the “one way street” relationship between Judaism and Christianity into a “two way highway,” which, for Ignatius, has caused a sort of “identity traffic disaster.” Namely, as Judith Lieu interprets, “judaizing” is incompatible with having “received grace” and as a failed way to “live according to Jesus Christ.”<sup>53</sup> More specifically, Ignatius is frustrated with Christians who have not kept Judaism apart from their understanding and practice of Christianity, but instead have practiced judaizing even though they continue to “profess Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup> As Cohen precisely defines, “‘to judaize’ does not mean ‘to be a Jew’ or ‘to convert to Judaism’; it means ‘to adopt the beliefs and manners of the Jews even though one is not a Jew oneself.’”<sup>55</sup> In this way, Ignatius’ problem is not with Judaism per se, but rather with Christians who continue to practice Jewish traditions and beliefs.<sup>56</sup>

Unlike Paul who addressed questions about how Gentiles should relate their beliefs in Jesus to Judaism from a position within Judaism,<sup>57</sup> and unlike Matthew’s

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<sup>53</sup> Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 30–31.

<sup>54</sup> Based on his use of the “long recension” of Ignatius, Cohen also argues that the statement “for one who is called by any other name other than this, is not of God” is an indication that some Christians in Magnesia not only participated in Jewish practices, but also called themselves Jews and their beliefs Judaism even though they continued to believe in Jesus Christ as saviour; Cohen, “Judaism without Circumcision,” 399. On the “long recension” corpus, see Jack Hannah, “The Setting of the Ignatian Long Recension,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 221–38 and James D. Smith III, “The Ignatian Long Recension and Christian Communities in Fourth Century Syrian Antioch” (PhD diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1985). For a more recent discussion on the long recension, see Paul Foster, “Ignatius of Antioch,” 81–84.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, “Judaism without Circumcision,” 398.

<sup>56</sup> Although Ignatius is not clear exactly which Jewish traditions he wishes his followers to shun, as *Mag.* 9.1–2 suggests, the observance of Sabbath in place of or alongside the Lord’s Day (Sunday) may very likely have been one of the reasons for Ignatius’ annoyance. See Cohen, “Judaism without Circumcision,” 402 and n. 23 on the same page.

<sup>57</sup> Lieu argues that although Ignatius’ own language of “judaizing,” circumcision and Judaism may evoke comparison with Paul, especially his letter to the Galatians, it does not require us to demand a parallel or continuing situation, since Ignatius is clear that he is not interested in the law or justification; see *Image and Reality*, 42.

“Jewish-Christian” community who debated with Jews, again within the boundaries of Judaism, Ignatius takes a clear position outside Judaism, with the purpose of condemning those who believe in Christ, but who still continue to observe what he considers to be Jewish practices. As Runesson argues, Ignatius’ issues with Judaism have everything to do with being “outsiders” and interpreting Paul’s letters not from the ethnic aspect of Judaism which Paul, himself did, but from a “Greco-Roman socio-religious perspective” that clearly understood Christ-belief as having nothing to do with Judaism or any specific ethnic identity.<sup>58</sup> For Ignatius, “judaizing” is not only an indication of misunderstanding the Gospel, but placing oneself outside the reach of the salvation it offers (cf. *Mag.* 10.1). As Lieu rightly observes, “Ignatius opposes not law and grace, but Judaism and grace.”<sup>59</sup>

What do Ignatius’ issues with Judaism attest for us then? Lieu reminds us that exploring Ignatius’ position on Judaism requires exploring in and behind the letters to help distinguish between the “world of the letters” and reality. According to Lieu, Ignatius’ understanding of Judaism is limited. He shows no awareness of the Jews or their Judaism<sup>60</sup> beyond its role as a system that is in proper relationship with Christianity. But in terms of whether Ignatius’ letters actually reflect reality is quite a different story. When Ignatius urges both the Philadelphians and the Magnesians to keep their Christianity separate from Judaism, he likely does so because many still continued to observe

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<sup>58</sup> Runesson goes on to explain that this disinterest in converting to the Jewish ethnos placed Christ-belief in the context of other Greco-Roman cults and associations whereby ethnic identity no longer mattered. This “re-categorizing” as Runesson puts it, moved the identity of Christians “from the religion of Jewish ethnos to a Greco-Roman mystery religion, or a philosophy.” On this argument and description of the problem as being an issue of “re-categorization,” see Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity,” 83–84.

<sup>59</sup> Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Ignatius only uses the term “the Jews” once in his opening letter to Smyrna (1.2) and only in two of his letters does the question of Judaism in relation to Christianity arise. See Lieu’s thorough discussion of these references for understanding Ignatius’ view of Judaism; *Image and Reality*, 26–35.

practices he deemed Jewish even though they professed Jesus Christ. Although Ignatius argues that the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity should be clear and that the two traditions share no common ground, the vehement nature of his argument demonstrates that this was precisely what was going on not only in Philadelphia and Magnesia, but probably even more intensely in his hometown of Antioch. Sim and Zetterholm both argue that while the letters refer to the local situation in Magnesia and Philadelphia, “Ignatius’ concept of the relation between Christians and Jews is no *ad hoc* solution, but emanated from the local situation in Antioch.”<sup>61</sup>

In the *Protevangelium of James*, Torah observance and Jewish practices, especially those relating to the Temple, are presented as positive and pious, and thus may reflect the kind of continued Jewish presence in Antiochene Christianity fought both by Paul and Ignatius. But as Lieu’s study on imagined and real interactions between Jews and Christians encourages us to consider, do these references to Jews and Judaism presented in our text reflect knowledge of “real Jews” and “real Jewish-Christian interactions” or are they literary reconstructions based on images in the Hebrew Bible or simply the result of early Christian imagination and rhetoric? Scholars who reject the idea that the *Protevangelium of James* has real moorings in Judaism often attribute references to Jewish practices in the text, especially those that have been argued to “betray an ignorance of Jewish customs” (e.g., upbringing of Mary in the Temple at *Prot. Jas.* 8:2; bitter water test at *Prot. Jas.* 16:3, etc.) to exactly Lieu’s concerns—the product of

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<sup>61</sup> Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 204. So too Meeks and Wilken who suggest that Ignatius’ references to Judaism in his letters represent almost certainly his experience of “Jewish-Christians” in Antioch; *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 20.

Christian imagination and rhetoric. I suggest that there may be more to these Jewish references and that they may still provide us with some reality of “Jewish-Christian” relations and practices in the late-second or early third century. This possibility is especially apparent in our text’s understanding and presentation of ritual purity.

In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary and her parents are regularly depicted as being acutely aware of their state of purity, especially when they are required to be in the presence of the Lord or in sacred spaces as exemplified by Mary’s living arrangements and her leave-taking from the Temple precinct, all of which are in line with biblical ideas about ritual purity. Additionally, Anna and Joachim in particular are often described offering proper sacrifices to the Lord as required by Levitical legislation in order to return to a state of ritual purity. Ideas concerning purity in the text clearly reflect those found in Leviticus (that is religious law) and Second Temple Jewish *halakhah* and are presented in positive terms, particularly in the case of the *Protevangelium of James*’ treatment of ritual purity, as it pertains to distinguishing between clean and unclean and being aware of one’s ritual state. This concern recalls the description of the conflict over dietary laws in Acts (i.e., as introduced in Acts 11–12), where the concern for the distinction between clean and unclean becomes the push button for the broader issues of distinguishing Jews from Gentiles and of determining the necessary requirements for attaining Christian membership.

The pairing of the terms ἀκάθαρτος and κοινός at *Prot. Jas.* 6:4 is particularly noteworthy since it parallels the use of these same terms in Acts to describe how Peter explains why, as a Jew, he is now able to eat with the uncircumcised (Acts 10:14, 10:28,

11:8). As discussed in Chapter Two, the *Protevangelium of James*' emphasis on ensuring precisely the distinction between clean and unclean may reflect attitudes towards the continued relevance of those biblically-ordained observances that Paul and others held unnecessary and even against God's will for Gentile Christ-believers. In this way, what the *Protevangelium of James* may present here is not simply a desire to include another Jewish feature in order to establish some legitimacy for its writings, but rather reflect a real commitment to the Jewish Scriptures as an important component to our narrative's traditions as a Christ-believing text.<sup>62</sup>

Significantly, the debate between the Pharisees and Matthew's "Jewish-Christians" may also be reflected in the *Protevangelium of James*' presentation of Judaism, especially in its understanding of laws related to female purity. In addition to being heavily influenced by the Hebrew Bible/LXX and Torah observance, our discussion in Chapter Three of the text's presentation of Mary's menstrual purity shows that the *Protevangelium of James*' ideas were not only very much aligned with rabbinic, especially tannaitic notions about female purity, but could really only be fully understood within this context. This possible awareness of a rabbinic/proto-rabbinic Judaism of its time is, of course, extremely interesting in light of the undeniable (though admittedly, complicated) relationship between the Pharisees and their so-called successors, the rabbis. Although the traditional depiction of Pharisaism as a coherent social movement after 70

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<sup>62</sup> This possibility is, of course, extremely intriguing in light of suggesting a "Jewish-Christian" milieu for our text since the kind of "Jewish Christianity" described above is best represented in James' leadership and the *Protevangelium of James* itself attributes its authorship to the very same James.

CE is no longer supported, and scholars like Martin Jaffee,<sup>63</sup> Shaye Cohen,<sup>64</sup> Seth Schwartz<sup>65</sup> and Catherine Hezser<sup>66</sup> convincingly argue that the smooth transition from Pharisaism to rabbinism and the traditional belief that the rabbis became the sole leaders of Jewish society is hardly an accurate depiction of Judaism and the rabbinic movement, they do not deny that there is an important connection between the Pharisees and the rabbis and that there is little doubt that the Pharisees participated to some degree in the shaping of what ultimately became second and third century rabbinism. Jaffee reminds us, for instance, that while “there is no universally accepted account of how the diverse intellectual communities of pre-70 Palestine coalesced by the late second century into the rabbinic community led by Rabbi Yehudah, the Patriarch...it is most likely that at least some Pharisees were included in the post-70 coalition of scribal scholars, priests, administrative officers whose early-third-century CE heirs had begun to form the early literary traditions of rabbinic Judaism.”<sup>67</sup> Additionally, Cohen notes in his discussion of the religious association of the *haburot*, who pay strict attention to the ritual status of food, that this “table fellowship” was probably a relic of the Pharisaic element of rabbinic Judaism.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 39–61, esp. 31, 52–61.

<sup>64</sup> Cohen, “The Rabbis in Second-Century Jewish Society,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Early Roman Period*, vol. 3 (ed. William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 922–23.

<sup>65</sup> Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 103–4.

<sup>66</sup> Catherine Hezser, “Social Fragmentation, Plurality of Opinion and Nonobservance of Halacha: Rabbis and Community in Late Roman Palestine,” *JSQ* 1 (1993–4): 234–51.

<sup>67</sup> Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 177 for the first half of the quotation; 41 for the second half.

<sup>68</sup> Cohen, “Rabbis in Second-Century Jewish Society,” 956–57.



Given that the rabbinic tradition of interpretation and debate are in some way connected to Pharisaic Judaism, albeit complicatedly, is it possible that the rabbinic parallels observed in the *Protevangelium of James* are remnants of these interactions? If so, from what stage are they remnants? In the past, scholarly consensus held that Pharisaic Judaism continued to grow after the Destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba Revolt into what is known as the Rabbinic movement and that the Pharisees/rabbis not only put an end to the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, but also to sectarian disputes among Jews so that they stood alone as the sole leaders of Judaism after 70 CE.<sup>69</sup> On the flip side, the Jesus movement, which was characterized by its relationship to Jews and Judaism in the first century after the Destruction, became dominated by Gentile Christianity, which aligned itself with Pauline theology and was embraced by non-Jews. After the Jerusalem church's alleged flight to Pella, "Jewish-Christianity" no longer held any authority and so the Christianity that emerged was one that was "self-defined as non-Jewish in its theology, its ritual practice, and the ethnicity of its adherents."<sup>70</sup> In this traditional scenario often referred to as the "Parting of the Ways" model, Pharisees were equated with Rabbis, who became prominent immediately after 70 or 90, and all contact with Christians was thus placed as early as possible, with connections deemed unlikely thereafter. In light of more recent research,<sup>71</sup> the situation

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<sup>69</sup> Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed, "Introduction: Traditional Models and New Directions," in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Becker and Reed, "Introduction," 4–5 and references therein.

<sup>71</sup> For important critiques of the "Parting of Ways," see the studies offered by Boyarin, "Semantic Differences; or, 'Judaism'/'Christianity'," in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 65–86; Judith Lieu, "'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality," *JSNT* 17.56 (1995): 101–19; Philip S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians:*

may actually be reversed whereby there was possibly continued contact between Jews, Christians, “Jewish-Christians,” and Judaizers or even more points of intersection and interaction between these religious groups not only after the first century, but much later into Late Antiquity and even into the Middle Ages. The *Protevangelium of James*’ awareness and seeming acceptance of rabbinic/proto-rabbinic ideas (esp. *m. Niddah* and *m. Ketuboth*) especially in its presentation of Mary’s menstrual purity<sup>72</sup> may confirm for us another point of interaction between Jews and Christians possibly into the early third century, a time when both traditions continued to impact one another in meaningful ways.

Although scholars repeatedly acknowledge how little we know about the history of Christianity in Syria during the early period, many indicators point to the fact that elements particular to “Jewish Christianity” such as biblical regulations concerning purity, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath observance as well as day to day *halakhic* issues concerning divorce (e.g., Matt 5:27–32; 19:3–9), for instance, remained influential in Syria until as late as the seventh century.<sup>73</sup> Hann suggests, for example, that this influence

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*The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135* (ed. James D.G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1–26; Steven Katz, “Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 43–76; Martha Himmelfarb, “The Parting of the Ways Reconsidered: Diversity in Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations in the Roman Empire, ‘A Jewish Perspective’,” in *Interwoven Destinies: Jews and Christians through the Ages* (ed. Eugene Fisher; New York: Paulist, 1993), 47–61; John G. Gager, “The Parting of the Ways: A View from the Perspective of Early Christianity: ‘A Christian Perspective’,” in *Interwoven Destinies*, 62–73; Paula Fredriksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways?’ Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City,” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 35–64; and Adam Becker, “Beyond the Spatial and Temporal Lines: Questioning the ‘Parting of the Ways’ Outside the Roman Empire,” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 373–92.

<sup>72</sup> Specifically, Cohen notes that although the rabbis claimed judicial authority over various areas of life, they were most often consulted about the laws of purity, tithing, marriage, and divorce. In certain situations, the Jews took the rabbis’ opinion to be authoritative, but in other matters there was no use for them. For women in particular, Cohen writes that the rabbis were often consulted and deemed authoritative over marriage contracts, menstruation, and purity laws. Menstruation and purity laws are precisely discussed in our text and the rabbis’ value on family life is reinforced on several occasions throughout the text; “Rabbis in Second-Century Jewish-Society,” 946–47 and 976.

<sup>73</sup> Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 18.

is evident in Hegesippus' attestation that certain Christians in Syria were using a Gospel of Hebrews in the mid-second century<sup>74</sup> and that the "Jewish-Christian" Gospel of Peter was well known by the Antiochene Christians by the end of the second century.<sup>75</sup>

Throughout the third century, too, evidence indicates that *Kerygmata Petrou* traditions were being circulated throughout Syria.<sup>76</sup> In particular, Bockmuehl's study on Syrian memories of Peter examines, alongside Ignatius (early second century) and Justin (mid-second century), Serapion, the bishop of Antioch c 190–211 (the end of the second, beginning of the third century) who confirms that the Gospel of Peter was being read by some groups, even though Serapion himself seems not to have read it until it was brought to his attention in Cilicia.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, Sebastian Brock argues for four main areas of Syriac literature that continue to incorporate Jewish traditions. They include: [1] the Peshitta, especially the Pentateuch and Chronicles;<sup>78</sup> [2] the targumic traditions known to

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<sup>74</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.22–28; Hann, "Judaism and Jewish Christianity," 357.

<sup>75</sup> Our knowledge of this use is based on its rejection by Bishop Serapion around 200 CE as attested by Eusebius in *Hist. eccl.* 4.12; Hann, "Judaism and Jewish Christianity," 358.

<sup>76</sup> Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 211.

<sup>77</sup> Ironically, the use of Peter in Syria at the end of the second/ beginning of the third century is only known to us because Serapion writes that he must retract his earlier permission to this group to read this gospel because he has discovered that it is now heretical. This document is partially preserved by Eusebius' address in his letter addressed to the church nearby Rhossus in Cilicia (*Hist. eccl.* 6.12.3–6). On influence of the Gospel of Peter and Peter traditions in Syria, see Bockmuehl, "Syrian Memories of Peter: Ignatius, Justin and Serapion," in *The Image of Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (ed. Peter J. Tomson and Dorris Lambers-Petry; WUNT 158; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 124–42.

<sup>78</sup> Referencing the Peshitta as evidence of the continued influence of Judaism in Syrian Christianity in support of our suggestion of a Syrian provenance for our text is, of course, tricky in that it ironically raises an important question; namely, why might the *Protevangelium of James* use the LXX and not the Peshitta if it is indeed Syrian in provenance? To this, I offer two possible explanations. First, Syrian culture was known to be thoroughly bilingual. According to Drijvers, Greek was widely spoken and understood, especially in urban centers like Antioch, but so too was Aramaic as the evidence of the Greek and Aramaic inscriptions from Palmyra show. Secondly, we know that since most Syrian schools (this is especially true of Edessa) read Greek works of philosophy and rhetoric in Greek, but taught mainly in Syriac, that there existed, as Drijvers has argued "a continuous process of translation from Greek into Syriac and the other way around" so that "every one of the Christian works written in the religion between

early Syriac writers that are not from the Peshitta; [3] apocrypha and pseudepigrapha of Jewish origins; and [4] commentaries, poetry, chronicles, and OT “hagiography.”<sup>79</sup>

The evidence cited above suggests that the picture of Antiochene Christianity in the first three centuries of the Common Era was influenced by Judaism in terms of its concern for biblical law (especially concerning purity regulations and dietary restrictions), its interest in early Jewish *halakhah*, its interactions and close association with Pharisaic/proto-rabbinic groups, and even possibly in the self-identification of some believers in Jesus as Jewish (cf. *Mag.* 4.1 and Cohen’s argument above). Indeed, when Christianity first came to Antioch it drew converts from among the mass of Jews who had already settled on the land centuries before and who seem still to have valued the practices and customs of their past tradition. The conflict among “Jewish-Christians” described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2, the disputes between Matthew’s “Jewish-Christian” community and the Pharisees/proto-rabbis, and Ignatius’ frustrations with judaizing Christians attest that throughout the first and into the second century, Syrian Christianity continued to be influenced by both biblical theology, belief, and ritual practice as well as early Jewish *halakhah* despite its transition in membership that consisted mainly of “Jews who practiced Judaism, but believed in Christ” to “Gentiles who believed in Christ but practiced certain forms of Judaism.” As Ignatius’ letters denouncing the practice of

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Antioch and Edessa during the second and third centuries is known in a Greek as well as in a Syriac version. It is often hard to tell which version has priority....” This was true of Bardaisan’s treatises and is evident in the gospel harmony known as the Diatessaron, a single woven account of the Greek Gospels in Syriac. The bilingual character of Syrians may also supplement the evidence for the *Protevangelium of James*’ origins in this area since the next earliest attestation to our text after the Greek original is Syriac. See Drijvers, “Syrian Christianity and Judaism,” 125–26; on the Syrian translation of the *Protevangelium of James*, see Chapter One.

<sup>79</sup> Sebastian Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” *JJS* 30 (1979): 212–32.

Jewish observance by Gentile Christians (e.g., *Pld.* 6.1; *Mag.* 8.1; 9.1; and 10.1–3) suggest, Judaism continued to play an important role in the formation of Christianity even despite the belief by some (i.e., Ignatius) of its separation from Judaism, which as recent research and our discussion has shown did not occur until much later. To continue building our case for a Syrian provenance for our text, we will now turn to other aspects common to Syrian Christianity.

### 5.3 The *Protevangelium of James* and Syrian Christianity

In this section, I re-examine the interests and concerns of the *Protevangelium of James*, but this time in light of other features characteristic of Syrian Christianity such as the role of Marcionism and Docetism on the one hand, and Asceticism and Marriage, on the other. This inquiry will be followed by an important examination of the established Syrian source of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* in order to draw specific parallels between it and the *Protevangelium of James*, especially their concerns for ritual and menstrual purity. Finally, I consider Mary and the view of women in Syrian Christianity to help further support the possibility of a Syrian provenance.

#### 5.3.1 “Marcionism and Docetism:” Edessa

H.W.J Drijvers argues that by the second and third centuries, Christianity in Edessa was heavily influenced by the leadership of dominant figures such as Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani.<sup>80</sup> Given that Marcionism enjoyed extreme success in second

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<sup>80</sup> Drijvers, “Jews and Christians at Edessa,” *JJS* 36 (1985): 88–102, esp. 96.

century Syria, it is perhaps most appropriate to start with Marcion and his teachings to show what his contemporaries and future adversaries refuted so vigorously and more importantly, to see if his ideas were influential in our text.<sup>81</sup> Marcion's *Antitheses*, his only work known to us, is accessible from what we can deduce from Tertullian's five volumes against Marcion.<sup>82</sup> Fortunately, we are also able to decipher other important Marcionite teachings and ideas from other early Christian leaders, among whom Bardaisan (154–222 CE)<sup>83</sup> and Ephrem (306–373 CE)<sup>84</sup> are the most important for our purposes, since their writings reflect Marcion's teaching in an Edessene setting.<sup>85</sup>

The opposition to Marcion in the works of Bardaisan, the philosopher from the court of King Abgar of Edessa, appears to confirm Marcion's success in Edessa in particular. Probably best known for his *Dialogue on Fate*, which later was renamed *The Book of the Law of Countries*, Bardaisan's theology, which can be described as an amalgamation of Christianity, astrology, cosmology and classical and Persian philosophy,

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<sup>81</sup> Although he never took up residency there, Marcion and his church became so influential that the Chronicles of Edessa record "in the year 449 [of the Seleucid era, i.e., 137/138 C.E.] Marcion left the Catholic Church" (quoted from Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics," *SecCent* 6 [1987–88]: 153). Justin writes in his apology in the year 150 that Marcion's false teachings have already spread to the whole human race (*1 Apol.* 26.5–6). Tertullian, too, claims that Marcion's heretical tradition has influenced the whole world (*Marc.* 5.10).

<sup>82</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origins, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 90–91; Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 195–96.

<sup>83</sup> Sidney Griffith, "Christianity in Edessa and the Syriac-Speaking World: Mani, Bar Daysan and Ephraem; The Struggle for Allegiance on the Aramean Frontier," *JCSSS* 2 (2002): 5–20.

<sup>84</sup> On Ephrem, see n. 131 below.

<sup>85</sup> Hippolytus writes in *Haer.* 7.31, for instance, that the Marcionite Prepon, an Assyrian, wrote against Bardaisan; and according to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.30), Bardaisan in turn wrote dialogues against Marcionites. Additionally, Ephrem's *Hymni contra Haereses* and *Prose Refutations* against Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani make clear that the leaders who dominated the religious scene in second century Syria continued to be influential even into the fourth century when Ephrem was writing.

was extremely popular in Edessa evidenced by his large following.<sup>86</sup> Bardaisan's questioning of the oneness of God hints strongly towards his intention of producing an anti-Marcionite response to Marcion's ideas concerning his notions of two different Gods.<sup>87</sup> In opposition to Bardaisan who argued that there is only one God who is Creator and Saviour, Marcion preached a distinction between the Creator God of the "Old Testament" and the Jews, and the Supreme God of the "New Testament" and his messenger Christ. Specifically, Marcion's understanding of the two Gods involved a belief that the Creator God was imperfect and jealous and that the Supreme God was an unknown and good God. Against this belief, Bardaisan defended the existence of one God who was at the same time good and the Creator of the world; he preached instead that the other powers of lower rank were responsible for evil and deficiencies in the world made from matter (material world).<sup>88</sup> This concept of evil matter is extremely important to Ephrem's interpretation of Marcion's theology as evident by the fact that it is allotted significant space in Ephrem's writings.

Although Ephrem's polemical writings against Marcion reflect the afterlife of his teachings, they contain, as Drijvers puts it, "unique and precise information" that has "not yet been fully exploited in reconstructing and characterizing Maricon's original doctrine

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<sup>86</sup> According to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.30), Bardaisan was first attached to the school of Valentinus, but after his conversion to Christianity refuted and fought against the group. On Bardaisan's ideas on cosmology and soteriology, see Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966); idem, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," 131–32.

<sup>87</sup> In his *Dialogue on Fate*, Bardaisan's opening sentence has a certain Awida ask "If God is one." For commentary and translation, see Drijvers, ed., *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 4–5 and Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria," 154.

<sup>88</sup> Drijvers argues that the anti-Marcionite tendency of Bardaisan's dialogue also appears in two other sources: *The Vita of Abercius of Hierapolia* and the *Grundschrift* of the *Pseudo-Clementine* as recorded in *Recognitions* 9:19–29. On how these two sources testify to the anti-Marcionite character of Bardaisan's dialogue, see Drijvers' discussion in his "Marcionism in Syria," 155.

and its later developments.”<sup>89</sup> According to Ephrem (*Hymn c. Haer.* 3.7), Marcion ascribes to not two, but three principles: [1] the Stranger, God of perfect goodness and grace; [2] the Creator, God of jealousy; and [3] Hyle, evil matter that stands for the visible and created world. In *Hymn c. Haer.* 48, Ephrem deals explicitly with Marcion’s ideas concerning cosmology that credit the Creator and the evil Hyle for the creation of the world and mankind.<sup>90</sup>

While Bardaisan and Marcion disagree on the concept of God as one good Creator God or two opposite Gods, it seems clear that they agree on the view of matter as evil.<sup>91</sup> For this reason Marcion’s beliefs on the phenomenon of Jesus have been interpreted by many as docetic.<sup>92</sup> Clement of Alexandria who is the first to use the abstract noun δόκησις (*Strom.* 3.17.102) describes “docetism” as related to those who claim that birth is evil and for those whom the body of Christ was psychic.<sup>93</sup>

Marcion’s docetic ideologies are only known to us from the writings of his opponents. According to Tertullian (*Marc.* 4.10.6–7), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 433.2.5), and Hippolytus (*Haer.* 10.19), Marcion seems to have taught that Jesus’ historical and bodily

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<sup>89</sup> Drijvers, “Marcionism in Syria,” 156–57.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed discussion on Marcion’s religious doctrines especially as they relate to the three roots and to his ideas concerning cosmology, refer to Drijvers’ “Marcionism in Syria,” 161–72.

<sup>91</sup> For this reason Ephrem determined that Bardaisan himself was the author of a formidable system of thought, even though he did compose polemical works against Marcion. On Ephrem’s views on Bardaisan and Marcion, see Griffith, “Christianity in Edessa,” 5–20, esp. her section on “Edessa’s Early Christian Teachers.”

<sup>92</sup> While docetism has been labeled as one of the major Christian “heresies,” Guy G. Stroumsa notes that its origins are still very much unknown. Stroumsa asserts that “docetism” does not reflect a fixed set of doctrines, a clearly definable sect, or even a precise body of beliefs. Rather, “docetism” should be defined as an “attitude shared by various individuals and movements at the origins of Christianity”; Ronnie Goldstein and Guy Stroumsa, “The Greek and Jewish Origins of Docetism: A New Proposal,” *ZAC* 10.3 (2007): 423. So too, Stroumsa, “Christ’s Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered,” *JECS* 12.3 (2004): 267–68, which covers the same material.

<sup>93</sup> Goldstein and Stroumsa, “Origins of Docetism,” 424.



existence was not true reality but semblance and that his human existence and suffering was also not real, but an illusion, since for Marcion, Christ was not human, but wholly divine. Convinced that Marcion's canon consisted of Pauline letters and a mutilated version of the canonical gospel of Luke,<sup>94</sup> Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus among others all insisted that since Marcion's gospel only began with Luke 3:1 ("In the fifteenth year of Tiberius"),<sup>95</sup> Marcion's "omission" of significant sections of the first four chapters, which highlight Jesus' birth and details concerning his nativity, genealogy, and even his baptism and temptation, was his way of rejecting Jesus' human attributes by denying his birth and restricting his resurrection to only his soul (*Tert. Marc.* 4.10.6–7).<sup>96</sup> If according to Hippolytus and Irenaeus, Marcion believed "that he [Jesus] was revealed as a man, though not a man, and as being in a body when not in a body, manifest in appearance only, subject to no nativity or passion, except only in appearance" (*Hipp. Haer.* 10.19), and "was a man merely in appearance" (*Iren. Haer.* 4.33.2.5), Jesus for Marcion could not have been born of a woman if his humanity was only semblance.

Indeed, Irenaeus tells us that Marcion believed and taught that Jesus had passed through

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<sup>94</sup> E.g., *Iren. Haer.* 27.2.6: "Besides all this he [Marcion] mutilated the Gospel according to Luke, discarding all that is written about the birth of the Lord, and discarding also many of the Lord's discourses containing teaching in which it is most clearly written that the Lord confessed His Father as the Maker of the universe."

<sup>95</sup> For a helpful list of Marcion's omissions and alterations of Luke's gospel and Paul's Epistles, see Ernest Evans, ed. and trans., *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem: Books VI–V*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 643–46.

<sup>96</sup> In his recent inquiry into Marcion's gospel and its relationship to the gospel of Luke, Joseph B. Tyson reminds us that we should be wary of Marcion's opponents' accusations that he simply selected one of the four canonical gospels and excised large sections from it and elevated it above the other three. Given that Marcion lived at a time when Christian thought and practice were still marked by great diversity, especially in the East, Tyson insists that it would be anachronistic and misleading to assume the gospels were part of an authoritative canon at this time. Rather Tyson suggests that since it is plausible that Marcion did in fact choose one gospel out of several that were known to him (probably a version of Luke that was known in his region, since there is significant overlap between the two gospels), it is better to think of this gospel not as "formal collections of gospels [but as] books in various editions, with unstable texts"; *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 39–40.

the body of his mother “as water through a tube” (*Haer.* 2.24.4: *quasi aquam per tubum* [SC 211, 146, 19 ff. Rousseau/Doutreleau/ καθάπερ ὕδωρ δια σωλήνος [147, 64f. Rousseau/Doutreleau])).<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, what many of our sources of Syrian provenance tell us is that a significant portion of them can be interpreted as writings either against Marcion specifically, or against the promotion of docetic ideas, in general. For our purposes, perhaps the docetic stance that denied Jesus’ physical body is most relevant for our interest in Mary, especially as she is portrayed in the *Protevangelium of James*. More than any other Christian writer, Tertullian strongly stressed the relationship between the flesh of Mary and the flesh of her son Jesus to the extent that he denied that Mary remained a virgin in giving birth; although he recognized Mary’s virginity in the sense of not having sexual intercourse, he argued that she no longer remained a virgin when she gave birth.<sup>98</sup>

In his rhetorical reexamination of Tertullian’s *De Carne Christi*, especially chapter 23, Geoffrey D. Dunn argues that Tertullian’s motive in denying Mary’s virginity *in partu* was directly connected to defending, against docetic adversaries, the reality of

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<sup>97</sup> While anti-Marcionite writings provide us with important information on docetism in Syria, other important witnesses to docetism in Syria are Ignatius’ opponents in his letters. Earlier, we determined that Ignatius’ opponents could be characterized by [1] heresy: those of schism and wrong belief who conflict over the reality or unreality of Jesus’ human body and experiences; and [2] practice of Judaism. Lieu questions succinctly, “Were there two separate (heretical) patterns of belief or do they represent a single ‘judaizing docetism’?” Michael D. Goulder argues for the latter interpretation; for Goulder, the evidence for docetism in Ignatius’ writings is directly connected to “Judaism” and “Judaizers.” Goulder cites, for instance, Ignatius’ letter to Magnesia to make his point. He writes that when Ignatius attacks those who continue to observe Sabbaths in addition to or over the Lord’s Day in *Mag.* 9 and then reproaches those who continue to “Judaize” in *Mag.* 10, he follows with a “sugarcoated” warning in *Mag.* 11 to the very same opponents who question Jesus’ birth, suffering and resurrection, thus arguing that they are one in the same; for Goulder, Ignatius’ anti-docetic warnings are directly connected to Jewish praxis and belief. For more on this topic, see Lieu, *Image and Reality*, 26 and Goulder, “Ignatius’ ‘Docetists,’” 16–30 and earlier discussion.

<sup>98</sup> Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin in Patristic Thought* (trans. Thomas Buffer; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 65.

Jesus' flesh and human nature and the theological notion that salvation must come through him. For Tertullian, establishing Jesus' flesh at his birth proved the resurrection of Jesus' body and thus allowed the possibility for the resurrection of the dead.<sup>99</sup>

Tertullian's refutation of Marcion meant an emphasis not only on Jesus' flesh, but also the reality of his nativity since Mary provided the flesh with which Jesus was born (*Carn. Chr.* 20.3), reinforced by the fact that Jesus had an umbilical cord and nursed at his mother's breast. Tertullian argued that since Jesus had both human flesh and divine spirit (*Carn. Chr.* 18.1b–2), the first from his mother and the second from God, a normal birth alongside a miraculous conception was necessary to guarantee the true divinity *and* humanity of Christ and thus to actively refute docetic ideology that claimed otherwise.

Can the *Protevangelium of James* also be read as an anti-docetic or more specifically, as an anti-Marcionite response? I suggest that this interpretation is a real possibility on two levels. First, given the detailed description of Mary's physical, pregnant body and the child Jesus nursing at her breast along with the text's emphasis on details surrounding Mary's genealogy, childhood, and adolescent years, and interactions with the Jewish Temple, the *Protevangelium of James* can be convincingly read, on one level, as a possible response to docetic claims about the body of Jesus. Perhaps the one questionable aspect attested in our text that would tell against this reading is Mary's *virginitas in partu* and *post partum*. For Tertullian, while Mary's virginity *ante partum* could be confirmed, her virginity *in partu* had to be forfeited to argue effectively for

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<sup>99</sup> Dunn, "Mary's Virginitas in Partu and Tertullian's Anti-Docetism in De Carne Christi Reconsidered," *JTS* 58.2 (2007): 468–69. On various readings of *De Carne Christi* as a response to Marcion's, Apelles', and Valentinus' ideas on the reality of Christ's flesh, see 470–76.

Jesus' humanity and thus against docetic claims that his body was not real. In the *Protevangelium of James*, the conception and birth of Jesus are both presented as miraculous in the narrative (e.g., Mary conceives through the Holy Spirit; there is no pain mentioned during the birth; and she remains a virgin before, during, and after the birth), and yet there is nothing in the text that suggests docetism–miraculous happenings, yes, but not docetism. Indeed, the narrative even tells us of the discomfort Mary feels before she is about to give birth, and a very physical gynecological examination is performed on her after the birth.

Significantly, the idea of Mary's miraculous (i.e., *virginitas in partu*) birth is also attested in four other early sources of probable Syrian provenance,<sup>100</sup> two of which may also support Mary's *virginitas post partum* and may help strengthen our argument that our text can be read, at least on one level, as an anti-docetic document: Ode 19 of *Odes of Solomon* and the *Ascension of Isaiah*.<sup>101</sup> Darrell Hannah suggests that although the language of Odes 28 and 42 as well as similar passages may indicate that the author of the Odes was influenced by docetic ideology, the birth of Jesus described in Ode 19 depicts a birth that is miraculous but still very much human:<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Joseph C. Plumpe examines five little-known early witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in partu*: [1] Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 54; [2] Ignatius' *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.1; [3] *The Ascension of Isaiah*; [4] the *Protevangelium of James*; and [5] Ode 19 of the Odes of Solomon. Among the five examined, three are of probable Syrian origin, which strengthens the possibility that our text (the fourth witness) may be of Syrian origin. See Plumpe, "Some Little-Known Early Witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in Partu*," *TS* 9.4 (1948): 567–77.

<sup>101</sup> Admittedly, for both writings, there is little consensus as to whether a docetic or "proto-orthodox" Christology is represented.

<sup>102</sup> Darrell D. Hannah cites Lactantius's use of Ode 19 at the end of the third century as a proof-text for the virgin birth and as an indication that it was accepted by mainstream Christianity. He argues that it would be unlikely that Lactantius would have cited this Ode if he thought it was a witness to a docetic birth; "The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christology," *VC* 53.2 (1999): 165–96, esp. 185. So too Drijvers who also proposes that there is a connection between Ode 19 and the Diatessaron viz., "Ode 19 is

The womb of the Virgin caught [it],  
 and she conceived and gave birth.  
 And the Virgin became a mother in great compassion  
 and she was in labor and bore a son.  
 And she felt no pains/grief,  
 because it was not useless/for no reason.  
 And she did not require a mid-wife,  
 because he [viz., God] kept her alive / like a man.  
 She brought forth by/in the will [of God]  
 and brought forth by/in [his] manifestation  
 and acquired by/in [his] great power  
 and loved by/in [his] salvation  
 and guarded by/in [his] kindness  
 and made known by/in [his] greatness.  
 Hallelujah. (Ode 19:6–11).<sup>103</sup>

Like the *Protevangelium of James*, Ode 19 depicts Mary's pregnancy as miraculous since she does not need a midwife and suffers no pain,<sup>104</sup> but also as real since she still "conceived and bore" and "was in labour." Plumpe also suggests that the references to Mary's virgin birth, the painlessness, and the non-necessity of a mid-wife along with her giving birth "like a man" with her own desire or will,<sup>105</sup> alludes to Mary's *virginitas in partu* and possible *virginitas post partum*.<sup>106</sup>

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therefore based on exegetical and theological traditions that are found in the Diatessaron and the structure and wording of Ode 19 are comprehensible only through the underlying Diatessaron"; "The 19<sup>th</sup> Ode of Solomon: Its Interpretation and Place in Syrian Christianity," *JTS* 31.2 (1980): 337–55, esp. 351.

<sup>103</sup> Translation from Matthew Lattke, *The Odes of Solomon* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009), 268–84. James H. Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (ed. James H. Charlesworth; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 752–53 was also consulted.

<sup>104</sup> Hannah argues that the painless birth motif may be connected to Jewish traditions of a painless birth attributed to Moses. He questions whether this tradition was originally Jewish and then transferred to Christ and suggests that it is not difficult to image that this Jewish tradition was taken up by "Jewish-Christians" and applied to Jesus. Hannah suggests an interesting connection between the painless childbirth tradition he sees in the three writings discussed above (*Ode 19*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, and *Protevangelium of James*) and the Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch*, which was roughly contemporary with the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Namely, the *Apocalypse of Baruch* asserts that in the messianic age the curse of Eve will be reversed and women will no longer endure pain at childbirth; "Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity," 186.

<sup>105</sup> Specifically, Plumpe argues that in the verse where the word "man" in Syriac corresponds not to ἄνθρωπος (*homo*), but to ἀνὴρ (*vir*), that the conception was the result of Mary's own will in cooperation with God's will since "human births ordinarily are dependent on the will and the initiative of

In the *Ascension of Isaiah*'s description of the event, the birth happens so quickly that K. Froehlich refers to it as a “miraculous appearance” rather than a birth, since the text describes Mary being astounded by the sudden manifestation of the child:<sup>107</sup>

And he (Joseph) did not approach Mary, but kept her as a holy virgin, although she was pregnant. And he did not live with her for two months. And after two months of days, while Joseph was in the house, and Mary his wife, but both alone, it came about, when they were alone, that Mary then looked with her eyes and saw a small infant, and she was astounded. And after her astonishment had worn off, her womb was found as (it was) at first, before she had conceived (*Ascen. Isa.* 11:5–14).<sup>108</sup>

The *Ascension of Isaiah*'s attestation of Mary's virginity and the allusion to her remaining a virgin following the delivery since “after her astonishment had worn off, her womb was found as (it was) at first, before she had conceived” deserves special note. Along with the *Protevangelium of James* and *Ode 19*, the Syrian *Ascension of Isaiah* serves as another important witness to Mary's *virginitas post partum*, an interest seemingly prevalent in Syria.

Hannah argues that although the description is indeed miraculous, a real birth is still being depicted and cites several reasons why. First, Mary is pregnant and her womb is described as returning to its normal size after the birth. Second, the text mentions twice that Mary “is with child.” Third, Mary's conception is discussed by the author.<sup>109</sup> What these two Syrian sources attest for us then is that Mary's *virginitas in partu and post*

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the man, the father; but Mary bore her Son independent of the antecedent will of a man or human father.” See Plumpe, “Some Little-Known Early Witnesses,” 576.

<sup>106</sup> Plumpe, “Some Little-Known Early Witnesses,” 576.

<sup>107</sup> Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 276. The chapter in which this observation is cited is based on a discussion that was led by E. Pagels and K. Froehlich. The first draft of the chapter in question was written by K. Froehlich.

<sup>108</sup> Translation from M.A. Knibb, “Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 174–75.

<sup>109</sup> Hannah, “Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christianity,” 181–84.

*partum* can be convincingly read as miraculous rather than docetic. In this way, the *Protevangelium of James* affirms a reading that emphasized both Jesus' humanity (e.g., his mother's physical pregnancy and his genealogical connections) and his divinity (e.g., Mary's miraculous conception and status as *virginitas in partu* and *post partum*), and thus a writing that could be readily interpreted as a response to docetism.

Second, I suggest that the text's massive expansion of the infancy chapters in Luke (and Matthew) and its presentation of the Jewish characters and traditions in the narrative as positive can also be interpreted as a direct response to Marcion's rejection of Luke's infancy chapters and complete denial of Matthew's gospel as a whole specifically. As mentioned earlier, Marcion's gospel is only accessible to us through the works of his adversaries. Adolf von Harnack's reconstruction of Maricon's gospel based on these accounts is probably the most well-known and cited, and although it has been heavily criticized,<sup>110</sup> still remains an unsurpassed resource.<sup>111</sup> Although Tyson warns us that determining the wording of Marcion's gospel in Harnack's reconstruction should be approached with some hesitancy,<sup>112</sup> he also insists that "we can be reasonably confident

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<sup>110</sup> Adolf von Harnack's reconstruction is considered maximalist and has been frequently criticized for various reasons including his less than critical acceptance of Tertullian's criticism and that he was influenced by his belief that Marcion used a canonical Luke as his source. On other important criticisms, see David S. Williams' six point criticism of Harnack's reconstruction in "Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel," *JBL* 108 (1989): 377–96.

<sup>111</sup> Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche* (2d ed.; TU 45; Leipzig, Hinrichs 1924).

<sup>112</sup> In his reconstruction of Marcion's gospel, Harnack, like Tertullian, uses the canonical Luke as a base and thus his reconstruction follows its order. Using John Knox's list of verses in the Gospel of Marcion that overlap with Luke (*Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942], 86), Harnack argues that the two gospels overlapped 60 percent of the time (75 percent of the time if one were to count Knox's 184 additional verses that were unattested by earlier witnesses). He also notes, though, that of the most significant differences between the two gospels, Maricon's account has nothing comparable to Luke 1–2 and very little from Luke 3:1–4:15 so that the only verse shared between Luke and Marcion (i.e., 3:1) becomes the beginning verse of his gospel; *Marcion*, 165–222.

about the inclusion or exclusion of the larger discourses and narratives” and notes that the “most certain observation to be made about the Gospel of Marcion is that it lacks an account of Jesus’ birth and infancy.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, Marcion’s gospel provides no information about the predictions of the birth of Jesus or John, of Jesus’ parents, of the circumstances of his birth, of his circumcision and presentation at the temple, of the infancy narratives or of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. Even John the Baptist’s imprisonment, the baptism of Jesus, and the genealogies are not attested.

If we remember our discussion above concerning the characteristics of Marcion’s theology that conception and birth were considered evil and were associated with the Creator God and material world, Marcion’s rejection of the material found in Luke 1–2 is not difficult to imagine since it would separate Jesus from the Creator God and its associations. Indeed these “omissions” from Luke 1–2 also served specifically to distance Jesus from his Jewish heritage, since his relations to John the Baptist, his own father, and Zechariah the priest are not mentioned, nor are his mother’s observance of post-partum purification or the practice of circumcision discussed. In accordance with Tyson, I maintain that these “omissions” agree with what we know of Marcion’s theology, which aimed at separating Christianity from its Jewish roots more generally.

The *Protevangelium of James*’ presentation of Jesus’ Jewish roots via his parent’s and grandparent’s Davidic lineage and their participation in the Jewish traditions and customs of their time seems to be a direct response to many of Marcion’s teachings. Instead of distancing Jesus from his Jewish heritage, the Torah, and the Hebrew

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<sup>113</sup> Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts*, 43.



Scriptures, our text celebrates it all. Indeed our text expands not only the infancy details offered by Luke, but also those offered in Matthew: Jesus' lineage is not only represented, but his Davidic lineage is traced directly through his mother Mary; circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth and infancy are accounted in our text, but so is a detailed description of his mother's birth and her infancy; Zechariah the priest is only one of the many priests and Jewish characters described who are all portrayed in a positive light and are associated with the Temple and its sacrifices; finally, post-partum purification and the general concern for ritual purity and purity laws outlined in Leviticus are not only represented in our text, but are the unifying and dominant theme in the *Protevangelium of James* as I have argued throughout this study. To be sure, these details in the *Protevangelium of James* would have given Marcion much cause for distress to say the least.

Can the *Protevangelium of James* be considered a product of the same Syrian milieu? Its description of the miraculous but very real birth of Jesus seems to fit well with the other witnesses to his birth in Syrian texts as does its overall focus on providing an argument for Jesus' humanity via the historical account of Mary's life,<sup>114</sup> if it indeed was influenced by the docetic presence in Syria. But does our text show signs that it was also influenced by other strong forces that were present in Syria during the second and early third centuries so as to strengthen the possibility of its Syrian provenance?

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<sup>114</sup> Whether the *Protevangelium of James* is in fact an historical account of Mary's life is of secondary importance to the fact that it claims to be so as evidenced by the text's own use of the term *historia*. Cf. discussion on its genre in Chapter One.

### 5.3.2 Asceticism and Marriage

Syrian asceticism has often been described as reaching its apex in the fourth and fifth centuries and as a movement that owed many of its ideas and inspiration to ascetic and monastic life found in Egypt. Sebastian Brock claims, however, that these Syrian ascetics were actually the heirs of a “remarkable ascetic tradition that went back to the very beginnings of Christianity.”<sup>115</sup> As discussed in Chapter Four, Brock cites Luke’s Beatitudes and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man as two of the earliest contributors to the Syrian ascetic tradition since they promoted the idea that riches can hinder one’s devotion to Christ. Brock argues that it is not surprising that Luke’s passage would significantly impact the rigid view of marriage in Syria and notes that although such attitudes were common in many early Christian communities, Syria-Mesopotamia was an area where this rigorist attitude towards marriage was particularly prevalent, especially in the second century as evidenced by the teachings provided by the influential religious leadership in Syria, e.g., Marcion, Tatian, and Mani.<sup>116</sup> A harsh attitude towards marriage can also be detected in the two pseudo-Clementine epistles *de Virginitate*, which survive only in Syriac and are from a similar geographical provenance.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Brock notes that many of the sources that credit Mar Awgen, a disciple of Pachomius, for introducing monasticism into Syria and Mesopotamia do not mention him in any sources earlier than the ninth century either in Syriac or Greek, which allows Brock to conclude that Syrian monks must have simply “forgot their genuinely native heritage under the influence of the immense prestige that Egyptian monasticism gained, through works like Palladius’ *Paradise*”; Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” *Numen* 20 (1973): 2–3. Murray also suggests in his discussion of Marcion that it was his promotion of severe asceticism that especially appealed to the Syrians and helped challenge the apostolic tradition of Christianity, since extreme sexual asceticism in particular was already well-known and accepted in Syrian paganism; *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (New Jersey: Gorgias, 2004), 11.

<sup>116</sup> Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 6. See subsection “Virginité, Celibacy, and Asceticism in the Second and Third Centuries,” in Chapter Four for further discussion.

<sup>117</sup> Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 7.

The severe rigidity of Syrian asceticism is perhaps best demonstrated in the requirement of celibacy for baptism for some communities in the early Syrian church. Brock notes that while this practice only marginally survived in the fourth century, it was common practice in the third century for almost the entire area of the Syriac-speaking churches.<sup>118</sup> Another important source for providing information on ascetic ideas in early Christian communities in Syria is the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, especially the Acts of Thomas. That this text in particular was extremely popular among Marcionites and Manichaeans<sup>119</sup> reinforces its ascetic character since it too maintains a harsh view of marriage; namely, it prohibits baptized converts from marrying and understands marriage as a road block for salvation.<sup>120</sup> Barnard contends that an ascetic emphasis can be found in all the various Syrian *Thomas* cycles. The Gospel of Thomas, for instance, also stressed virtues like “childlikeness, singleness and simplicity, abstinence and world-renunciation.”<sup>121</sup> What is clear from this quick survey of early Syrian Christian teachings is that asceticism was a widely accepted and encouraged practice in early Syrian churches.

But is this the kind of practice reflected in the *Protevangelium of James*? In terms of abstinence from sexual intercourse, drinking of wine, and eating of flesh, the portrayal of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* is aligned with the extreme form of asceticism

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<sup>118</sup> Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 7; Arthur Vööbus, *Celibacy, A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (PETSE 1; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951); cf. F. Crawford Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London: John Murray, 1904), esp. 118–54.

<sup>119</sup> Albertus F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (2d ed.; SNT; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 20–21.

<sup>120</sup> Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 9.

<sup>121</sup> L.W. Barnard, “The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa During the First Two Centuries, A.D.,” *VC* 22.3 (1968): 165. Interestingly, Barnard notes that the Gospel of Thomas, like so many other identified “Jewish-Christian” documents, exalts the position of James the Just or brother of Jesus. Whether the *Protevangelium of James* was indeed written by James as the text so claims (scholarly consensus is that he did not), what is significant is that the author wanted to associate his story with James, which strengthens the argument of a “Jewish-Christian” influence on this text.

being practiced in Syria as demonstrated by the restrictions placed on her diet and her interactions by her mother, as well as her self-disciplined attitude towards her sexual purity, i.e., maintaining her virginity. As discussed in Chapters Two to Four, Mary's participation in such activities is presented as a sign of her extreme purity and thus her direct connection to holiness. Even Mary's parents are shown to be extremely aware of their own state of purity because of their responsibility to their daughter. This vivid portrayal of Mary's purity and holiness very likely may represent the special kind of purity to which Brock, Barnard and Vööbus refer concerning the ascetic practices of the Syrians.

Undoubtedly, Mary's purity dominates the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* and the practices that are put into effect by her parents to keep her pure and holy reflect practices deemed ascetic, but undeniable and striking differences remain. First, Mary is married to Joseph in the narrative. Although the relationship between Mary and Joseph is clearly depicted as parental rather than conjugal, the text does not present marriage in any negative light and even promotes it. Mary's parents are, of course, married and childbirth is portrayed as positive and even as a reward for being pious and loyal to God. Second, the text focuses heavily on Mary's ritual purity, which is distinguished from moral purity and is aligned with biblical, especially Levitical ideas about this quality. Finally, the extreme ascetic practices observed by Mary are simply that—practiced solely by Mary. Although Mary's parents are portrayed as pious Jews, they are never described as participating in the same kinds of restrictions placed on their daughter, nor are any other characters in the text portrayed in this manner. Indeed, Mary's

purity is described as so exceptional that replication of such acts in order to achieve the same level of purity would be impossible—it would be difficult, for instance, to find an angel to monitor one’s eating habits or to be granted housing in the holy temple (*Prot. Jas.* 8:2). Such extraordinary events deliberately convey the precise purpose of the narrative—to show that Mary is, in fact, a unique child.

Does the *Protevangelium of James*’ positive portrayal of marriage then point away from Syria? Not necessarily. Murray asserts that although most Syrian Christian teaching was, at its core, severely ascetical, marriage and marital intercourse were still deemed good and were upheld by most Syrian Christians,<sup>122</sup> especially when chastity in marriage was practiced.<sup>123</sup> Bardaisan, unlike Marcion and Tatian, did not advocate asceticism and is known for having a positive view of sex and marriage.<sup>124</sup> Given the strong evidence of the influence of Judaism in Syria, many Syrian Christians who still valued Jewish traditions and practices would have continued to understand marriage and the marriage-bed as pious and childbirth as blessed by God. As we will discuss further below, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (3<sup>rd</sup> c; Syria), for instance, strongly affirms the holiness of marriage<sup>125</sup> as do the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* (often termed

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<sup>122</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 11–12.

<sup>123</sup> The Pseudo-Clementine in particular understood marriage, practiced in chastity, as an important form of religious expression. Notably, chastity in marriage is not celibacy in marriage; it considered proper sexual practices in accordance with the law, e.g., abstaining from intercourse with one’s menstruant wife or with a wife who is still deemed impure because of her menstruation. Cornelia Horn argues that the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies in particular appeal to sexual chastity as a way to promote traditional family structures and the well-being of children. For instance, she cites PsClem. *Hom.* 19, which features Peter drawing a connection between improper sexual conduct and the health of one’s child. See “The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and the Challenges of the Conversion of Families,” *LD 2* (2007): 9.

<sup>124</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 11; so too Drijvers, “Syrian Christianity and Judaism,” 132.

<sup>125</sup> E.g., Arthur Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac I and II* (Louvain: CSCO, 1979) [with English Trans.], 23–24.

“Jewish-Christian”),<sup>126</sup> which attest to a less negative attitude towards sex and marital relations as a whole.<sup>127</sup>

Clearly then, Syrian Christianity in the first few centuries CE can be characterized by the struggle between highly ascetical ideas of chastity and traditional views of the sanctity and blessedness of marriage and childbirth. As the writings of Aphrahat<sup>128</sup> and Ephrem<sup>129</sup> discussed in Chapter Four indicate, the struggle concerning how best to demonstrate one’s closeness to God (i.e., asceticism vs. married life) continued to characterize early Syrian Christianity beyond the second century.

Of course, we must ask if our text shows any signs of awareness of the issues, conflicts, and concerns in Syria during this time period. We have already addressed the text’s relationship with Judaism and concluded that a strong Jewish influence is apparent and that a “Jewish-Christian” origin for the text is a highly likely possibility.

Additionally, the portrayal of Mary’s extreme and almost excessive purity and the

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<sup>126</sup> E.g., PsClem. *Hom.* 11.28–30 and 1.13–19 on marriage; PsClem. *Hom.* 19.21 and 20.4 on sexual desire as good since it is given by God.

<sup>127</sup> Significantly, the sanctity of marriage was adamantly defended by the Great Church both in the East and West. Although a bit later, the local council of Gangra in Cappadocia (ca. 340s) was also formed to forcefully oppose encratic ascetics and to reinforce the positive view of marriage and sexuality held in early Syrian Christianity, at least by some; Murray, *Symbols of Church*, 12–13.

<sup>128</sup> Aphrahat was a Syriac-speaking Persian Christian sage and is best known for his writings collectively called the *Demonstrations*. For Aphrahat’s ideas and connection to Judaism, cf. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*; Neusner argues that the Judaism known to Aphrahat was that of an Adiabenean converted to Judaism, 212–32.

<sup>129</sup> Ephrem was born in Nisibis and is best known for his commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron and Syrian Hymns. Cf. English translation and commentary in Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). His *Hymns on the Nativity* are especially intriguing for our studies concerning Mary and women in Syrian Christianity below. On Syrian homilies and hymns, Susan Ashbrook Harvey’s study on women’s prominent verbal role in Syrian homilies and hymns where Mary is given special attention is especially useful (“Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition,” *J ECS* 9.1 (2001): 105–31) and discussion below. See also Kristi Upson-Saia’s work in Syrian Dialogue hymns for descriptions of the genre and its unique function as biblical interpretation in Syria; “Caught in a Compromising Position: The Biblical Exegesis and Characterization of Biblical Protagonist in the Syriac Dialogue Hymns,” *Hugoye* 9.2 (2006): 1–27. For an English translation of the homilies, see Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist, 1989).

practices she engages in to ensure that purity exhibit definite parallels with the severe kind of asceticism being described in Syria, but so too can the positive presentation of marriage and theme of the blessedness of childbirth in the text be seen as a reflection of the arguments for family life. To continue building our case for the possibility of a Syrian provenance, we now turn specifically to the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a source with a clear Syrian provenance, in order to note parallels and shared interests with our text.

### 5.3.3 Ritual and Menstrual Purity: The *Didascalia Apostolorum*

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (DA) was written in the early third century CE, some decades after the formation of the Mishnah, but approximately contemporary with the formation of the Tosefta.<sup>130</sup> As a product of Syrian Christianity,<sup>131</sup> its “Jewish-Christian” character or what Arthur Vööbus has called “its Semitic Christian Traditions”<sup>132</sup> has been extensively discussed by scholars.<sup>133</sup> Although the work is pseudonymous, Johannes Quasten suggests that the work was most likely written by a Christian authority (such as a bishop) who had converted from Judaism.<sup>134</sup> Although the text in its entirety is addressed to readers in varying stages of life (e.g., married persons, widows and deacons) and deals with a range of subject matter (e.g., duties of a bishop,

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<sup>130</sup> Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 166 n. 18 and references and notes therein.

<sup>131</sup> For a discussion on the dating of the DA, Arthur Vööbus provides a good overview in the introduction to his translation of the Syriac edition; *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 1–23.

<sup>132</sup> Vööbus, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 5.

<sup>133</sup> Fonrobert notes that “Jewish Christianity” is usually studied as Christian texts and therefore as a witness to the diversity of Christian identities. In her study of the “Jewish-Christian” character of the DA, she proposes the validity of looking at this text as a witness to the diversity of Jewish identities as well; “The *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Mishnah for the Disciple of Jesus,” *J ECS* 9 (2001): 483–509.

<sup>134</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: The Ante-Nicene Literature After Irenaeus*, vol. 2 (Allen, Tex.: Christian Classics, 1995), 147–48. See also F.L. Cross, “*Didascalia Apostolorum*,” *ODCC* 397–98.

penance, liturgical worship, etc.), this text displays a special interest in reinforcing the problem with Christ-believers who continue to regard the Jewish laws (including menstrual separation) as still binding and Torah-observance as valid.<sup>135</sup>

Much like the conflicts attested in Acts and Galatians among “Jewish-Christians” over the value of continuing Jewish practices for those who already “turned to God,” the DA, too, provides important information about Jewish, “Jewish-Christian,” and Gentile-Christian relations, but this time the discussion is set in the early third century. In fact the DA’s literary framework is based on the Apostolic Council and the conflict evident in Acts 15<sup>136</sup> (Vööbus, 7–8).<sup>137</sup> This literary framework is, of course, interesting since the events that transpire in the NT literature also occur in Syria. Like Acts 15, the DA explains that the twelve apostles assembled in Jerusalem in order to discuss what was to be done with various communities who continued to observe holiness, dietary restrictions, and other unspecified biblical regulations and observances of practices based on biblical legislation (Vööbus, 14).<sup>138</sup> Given that the DA is not simply another account of the Acts 15 events, but rather a description of the conflicts within its own community, not surprisingly there are changes and additions reflective of its contemporary concerns; thus whereas circumcision and dietary practices were at the center of the conflict in NT literature of the first century, the DA’s more prominent discussion on menstrual

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<sup>135</sup> Cross, “Didascalia Apostolorum,” 397–98.

<sup>136</sup> Fonrobert notes that the DA relies exclusively on Acts 15 and ignores Paul’s account in Gal 2 for its retelling of the events surrounding the Apostolic Council (parts of the conflict are, of course, mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2). On the pseudepigraphic function of the title of DA and the strategy of retelling the Apostolic Council to gain authority for its own work, see Fonrobert, “Didascalia Apostolorum,” 489–90; eadem *Menstrual Purity*, 170–72.

<sup>137</sup> Text citations are based on Vööbus’ edition in CSCO; both Syriac and English translations have been consulted, but the citation will reflect the English translation only. Note that the citations in the body reflect page numbers, not chapter numbers.

<sup>138</sup> Fonrobert, “Didascalia Apostolorum,” 490.



separation and the keeping of Shabbat reflects its own contemporary situation (Vööbus, 216).

Although the DA confirms the continuance of a number of Jewish observances still practiced by this community, the DA's concern for menstrual separation offers the most promising evidence for suggesting a Syrian milieu for the *Protevangelium of James*. The DA attests to a group of women who are identified as having recently converted from Judaism to "believe in God our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Vööbus, 223), but who nevertheless continue to practice menstrual separation despite being encouraged by a Christian authority to forsake their old observances.<sup>139</sup> Only through the arguments put forth by the author of the DA do we learn of the conflict, namely that the choice to observe menstrual separation assumes identification with and a return to Jewish customs over and above the new traditions of Christianity.

Undoubtedly, menstrual separation has its roots in biblical law<sup>140</sup> and is connected to the purity rules related to the Jerusalem Temple, but in his study of the menstruant and her access to the sacred, Cohen argues that "Christianity excluded menstruants from the church long before Judaism excluded them from the synagogue."<sup>141</sup> Building his case on the problematic assumption that the rabbis were the dominant religious and social force within Jewish society post-70, Cohen utilizes the Mishnah and the Talmudim to argue for the synagogue's lack of inherent sanctity. Cohen suggests that since the purity

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<sup>139</sup> The phrase used for menstruation is *הַמַּחֲוֹת שֶׁבַע יָמִים* (literally "seven days of your flux" (Vööbus, 256).

<sup>140</sup> See Chapter Three on these laws.

<sup>141</sup> Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity," in *Women's History and Ancient History* (ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 287.

requirements associated with the temple after its destruction simply were not transferred to the sacred activities of studying Torah, reciting liturgical benedictions, or public or private prayer,<sup>142</sup> the purity rules required to enter the temple did not apply to the synagogue since even lepers were allowed in (*m. Neg* 13.12; *t. Neg* 7.11).<sup>143</sup> In this way, even menstruants, according to Cohen, would have had access to the synagogue.

By contrast, scholars like Runesson,<sup>144</sup> Binder,<sup>145</sup> Levine,<sup>146</sup> Fine,<sup>147</sup> Lawrence,<sup>148</sup> and Haber<sup>149</sup> argue against Cohen's assessment of the holiness of the synagogue and instead make a case for the sanctity of the synagogue in the Diaspora and even its

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<sup>142</sup> E.g., *m. Ber* 3.4–6 places restrictions on the ejaculant concerning reciting aloud the benedictions of the liturgy after meals, but nowhere restricts the *zab*, the menstruant, or any other impure person.

<sup>143</sup> In fact, Cohen argues that the earliest Jewish text (post 70 CE) that prohibits menstruants from coming into contact with the sacred is the sixth or seventh century text *Beraita de Nidda*. The *Beraita de Nidda* explicitly prohibits menstruants from entering the synagogue and touching holy books and implies that they are banned from reciting benedictions and reciting the name of God. Parturients are also banned from entering synagogues or schools. Only in this document is recorded a striking change in the status of not only the menstruant, but also the sancta; Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred," 284–85; but see also Chaim Horowitz, ed. "Beraita de Nidda," in *Tosfata Atiqata*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main, 1890), 26 on menstruants; 31–33 on parturients.

<sup>144</sup> See e.g., Runesson, "Water and Worship: Ostia and the Ritual bath in the Diaspora Synagogue," in *The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies* (ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht, and Olof Brandt; ActaRom 40 57; Stockholm: Paul Åströms, 2001), 115–26.

<sup>145</sup> E.g., Donald Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (SBLDS 169; Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 200 on synagogues in Palestine; 336–37 on synagogues in the Diaspora.

<sup>146</sup> Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2d ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), e.g., 108–9 on the use of *proseuche* in Delos.

<sup>147</sup> E.g., Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). See also idem, "From Meeting House to Sacred Realm: Holiness and the Ancient Synagogue," in *Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World* (ed. Steven Fine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 27–49.

<sup>148</sup> Jonathan D. Lawrence, *Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006).

<sup>149</sup> Susan Haber, "Common Judaism, Common Synagogue? Purity, Holiness, and Sacred Space at the Turn of the Common Era," in *"They Shall Purify Themselves": Essays on Purity in Early Judaism* (ed. Adele Reinhartz; SBLEJL 24; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 161–79.

possible holiness in the land of Israel as early as the first century.<sup>150</sup> Specifically, water facilities such as mikvaot, cisterns, and basins constructed adjacent to synagogues raise questions concerning its holiness.<sup>151</sup> Utilizing archaeological and epigraphical evidence, Runesson and Haber in particular, interpret the water basins found inside the assembly halls at Jericho and Gamla as requiring ritual hand-washing after the handling of Torah Scrolls and the presence of water facilities adjacent to the synagogues for the purpose of ritual washing. For the synagogues located in the Diaspora (e.g., Delos and Ostia)<sup>152</sup> the connection between purity, holiness, and the synagogue are more strongly reinforced not only by the presence of a cistern, water basin, or fountain near the entrance of the synagogue, which was most likely used by Jews to wash before entering, but also terminology used in inscriptions (i.e., *proseuche*/ προσευχή) that identified Jewish institutions as having “temple-status.”<sup>153</sup>

While Cohen’s assessment concerning the sanctity of the synagogue is problematic, he is correct in his assertion that Jewish ideas (Levitical and possibly proto-rabbinic) concerning purity taught early Christians that menstruants were impure.<sup>154</sup> The practice of separating menstruants from the sacred was followed very early on by some strands of Christians, especially those groups that saw their rituals, institutions, and clergy as permanently replacing the Jerusalem temple, its cult, and priests. Along with the

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<sup>150</sup> The archaeological and inscriptional evidence is clearer in the Diaspora than for Israel. Levine suggests that this is the case for the Diaspora, but remains unconvinced for the sanctity of the synagogue for the land of Israel. See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 74–78.

<sup>151</sup> Namely, does close proximity to water facilities suggest a connection between purity practices and synagogues or do they simply reflect the regular use of purification facilities by Jews who also attended synagogue regularly?

<sup>152</sup> Runesson, “Water and Worship,” 115–29, esp. 126–28.

<sup>153</sup> Haber, “Common Judaism, Common Synagogue?,” 175.

<sup>154</sup> Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred,” 287.

Roman *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus and the Alexandrian *Letter of Dionysius*, the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum* offers some of the earliest evidence for Christian references to the separation of menstruants from the sancta.<sup>155</sup> But what makes the DA so utterly unique from the Roman, Alexandrian, and all other witnesses to the practice of menstrual separation in pre-modern history is that it is, as Fonrobert puts it, “the only document in premodern history of Judaism and Christianity in which we find women developing an argument for why they wish to practice menstrual separation.”<sup>156</sup> In other words, the argument for menstrual separation and the interest in the practice of keeping such observances specifically made *by women* is a concern unique to the DA; thus until we unearth another document of its kind with clear origins to another locale, this concern can be linked directly to Syria.

While the DA is the earliest document in Syria to show an interest in menstrual purity laws for its Christian community, it is certainly not the only one. The Syrian Pseudo-Clementine Homilies in particular place great emphasis on “keeping oneself pure” as a proper way to worship God. Specifically, Peter instructs that men should not have intercourse with their wives when they are menstruating and to avoid sexual relations with women who have been rendered impure by their menstruation in accordance with the laws of God’s commands (Ps. Clem. *Hom.* 11.28.1). He also insists that washing one’s body is necessary since “to keep one’s self pure is truly worth aspiring after not because purity of the body preceded purity of the heart, but because purity follows goodness” (Ps. Clem. *Hom.* 11.28.2–3). Although the Pseudo-Clementine

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<sup>155</sup> Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred,” 287–90.

<sup>156</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 168.

Homilies date to the fourth century, they show that the interest in menstrual purity laws held particular appeal for Christian communities in Syria.

The arguments for maintaining menstrual separation offered by the women in the DA merit further analysis since this practice also appears in the *Protevangelium of James* and is, like the DA, presented in a positive light by those who wish to practice it. My attempt to understand the practice of menstrual separation held by the women in the DA is informed by Fonrobert's extensive study on menstrual purity in Jewish and Christian literature. The DA's discussion of menstrual separation by the women of this community can be divided into two parts: information about what such separation entails (Vööbus, 329) and the arguments used by the women for why these practices should be kept (Vööbus, 238–239; 241–42).<sup>157</sup> The text specifies that for “seven days of their menstrual period” (Vööbus, 238) the women of this community refrained from prayer, study (of Scripture) and participation in the Eucharist, and that the women themselves chose to separate themselves from these activities that were central to the religious life of the Christian organization (Vööbus, 238). The women present two distinct arguments in support of such separation, one based on the relationship between women's bodies and the Holy Spirit (Vööbus, 238–239), and the other based on the validity of scriptural legislation that deems their bodies to be in a state of impurity (Vööbus, 241–242).<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Fonrobert rightly notes that we may also learn of the arguments put forth by the women for menstrual separation, but that we should do so with caution since it is impossible to know for certain whether these women really made these arguments or if the arguments extracted from the DA author's writings are simply constructed to express the author's own theological interests; *Menstrual Purity*, 174.

<sup>158</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 174–85.

The first argument centers on what Fonrobert calls “uterine pneumatology.”<sup>159</sup> Fonrobert argues that although the DA women’s seven-day period of menstrual separation connects their practice to biblical legislation (i.e., Lev 15), the argument itself is based on pneumatological reasoning. According to the DA author, the women believe that during the period of those seven days, they are void of the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot participate in the three central works of the Holy Spirit (i.e., prayer, study, and Eucharist) (Vööbus, 238). Although the DA argues with the women that the Holy Spirit is always in them because of their baptism which granted them right of entry into the discipleship of Christ and gave them affiliation with God (Vööbus, 239–42), the women’s understanding of the Holy Spirit is that it is subject to the cyclical habits of their physical bodies.<sup>160</sup>

Although the DA author’s refutation of the women’s argument is illogical and inconsistent, his conclusions are interesting: he argues that since the women believe that the Holy Spirit leaves during their menstruation, such thoughts allow the spirit of impurity to enter (Vööbus, 239–242).<sup>161</sup> In other words, the concern here seems to be with spiritual impurity, which often denotes an unclean spirit or demon given that a clean spirit is associated with the Holy Spirit. The DA author’s assessment is interesting in light of the Pseudo-Clementine’s understanding of “unclean spirits” and demons, which also references ideas concerning “unclean spirits,” but in order to argue exactly the opposite view held by the DA author on the need for ritual purity. For instance, Annette Reed

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<sup>159</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 205.

<sup>160</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 174–79.

<sup>161</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 178–79.

notes that Peter connects the practice of ritual impurity such as improper worship (e.g., Ps. Clem. *Hom.* 9.2–7) with demonic control in his explanation to non-believing Gentiles concerning why they experience suffering and disease.<sup>162</sup> In order to be free from enslavement by demons, Peter argues that by taking up baptism (which involves regular ritual ablutions, both for the remission of sins and for the purification of the body; Ps Clem. *Hom.* 11.26–11) and abandoning idols, Gentiles can be more like Jews since demons “do not appear to the Jews” and even cower before them because of their superior way of worshipping.<sup>163</sup> In other words, freedom from demonic control involves participating in acts of ritual purification and by being in a state of ritual purity. Perhaps this connection between the “unclean spirit” and “ritual impurity” is what the DA women had in mind when arguing their case for menstrual separation based on the belief that they were “void of the holy spirit” during this time (Vööbus, 241).

The second argument put forth by the women is that their reading and adherence to the biblical legislation of Lev 15 compels them to continue practicing menstrual separation (Vööbus, 241–42).<sup>164</sup> According to this argument (Vööbus, 241–42), the women believe that during the time of their menstruation, they are in a state of impurity since Lev 15 is explicit about placing them into this category and provides them with the requirements needed to return to a state of purity, e.g., she must wait seven days to achieve cleanliness, regardless of how many days she actually bleeds. Fonrobert suggests that the women’s argument based on biblical legislation was supported by the fact that

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<sup>162</sup> Reed, “‘Jewish Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways’: Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementine,” 218 in her *Ways that Never Parted* volume.

<sup>163</sup> Reed, “Historiography and Self-Definition,” 219.

<sup>164</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 179–85.

they were previously Jewish women who converted and that in their conversion to Christianity the Scripture still maintained a fundamental role in Christianity, a circumstance probably particularly true for the DA community.<sup>165</sup> If we accept this argument, then the fundamental issue here again is impurity, but this time it is concrete and based on concepts and texts that are inherently priestly where the critical concern is being able to distinguish between the pure and impure and determining when one can and cannot enter into sacred spaces or participate in sacred activities as outlined, for instance, in Leviticus.

A similar interest in menstrual separation and purity also appears in the *Protevangelium of James*. Specifically, the DA women's second argument exhibits the closest correspondence to ideas in our text. In Chapter Three, our investigation identified menstrual impurity as the most likely cause for Mary's departure from the Temple precinct and showed how her leaving, initiated by the Temple priests, but recognized and agreed to by Mary, reinforced her characterization as a pure and pious Jew. Mary's practice of menstrual separation reveals the narrative's concern for biblical legislation and acknowledgement of the laws regarding ritual purity as valid. The text's concern for one's state of purity does not start and end with Mary's removal from the Temple, but begins with the first lines of the story and remains the constant theme throughout the entire narrative. Ritual purity dominates the first half of the *Protevangelium of James*, especially in terms of interactions the characters have with the Temple and its sacrificial cult. In other words, Mary and her parents are depicted as acutely aware of their ritual state at all

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<sup>165</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 180.



times, including, of course, Mary’s menstrual purity. This awareness is demonstrated by their ability to distinguish between the pure and impure and the holy and common, but also by their knowledge of and participation in the required ritual practices necessary to move between these four states.<sup>166</sup>

Recognizing why the DA women believe that menstrual separation should be practiced, we might fruitfully examine what it is about the practice that so upsets the DA author that he becomes, as Fonrobert puts it, somewhat abusive in his rejection of the women’s observances connected to menstrual separation.<sup>167</sup> These rites include refraining from certain activities associated with the sacred, but also the practice of ritual immersion to mark the end of a separation period. As discussed above, the women’s arguments center around issues concerning purity and impurity. This concern for purity then may shed light on precisely why the DA author reacts so harshly towards the women. Since the DA considers baptism to be the only form of purification for Christians, Fonrobert proposes that the DA interprets the ritual immersion practiced at the end of the menstrual period as a “rival to baptism and not merely as a possible supplemental ritual.”<sup>168</sup> Thus, the issue here is not simply about whether the women are pure or impure, but who (i.e., the Christian DA author or the women influenced by their Jewish customs) has the authority to determine when one is in a state of purity or impurity.

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<sup>166</sup> For a full discussion of the four categories stated above (pure, impure, holy, common) according to Leviticus, see Jacob Milgrom’s chart in his important study; *Leviticus 1–16* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 616.

<sup>167</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 166.

<sup>168</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 181; cf. e.g., the promotion of ritual ablution as multiple baptisms in Ps. Clem. *Hom.* 11.26–30 and discussion above. Cf. Cohen’s discussion of the sanctity of the synagogue after the destruction of the Temple; “Menstruants and the Sacred,” 281–87 and discussion above.

In her concluding remarks, Fonrobert imagines two possible scenarios for how these women of the DA came to practice menstrual separation. In the first scenario, the women simply continued what they practiced before entering the Christian community: abstaining from sacred activities when in a state of menstrual impurity, but now applying this belief to the church and its central activities. In this case, these women probably came to the DA community from a Jewish community that “was not (yet?) regulated by mishnaic halakhah” since the rabbis in the Tosefta attest to permitting menstruant women to study.<sup>169</sup> The second scenario imagines the women of the DA practicing menstrual separation only after joining the DA community because they understood the church and the Eucharist as a substitute for the Temple and its sacrificial cult whereas this was not the case for their view of the synagogue.<sup>170</sup>

Although I am in agreement with Fonrobert that the second option is less likely, both scenarios reinforce the idea that menstrual separation continued to be valid for the women of the DA and a problem for the DA author because they understood it to be important to their religious identity as Christians. Importantly, Fonrobert also reminds us that although the controversy in the DA has almost exclusively been treated as an issue between “Jewish-Christians” and Gentile Christianity, the women in the DA clearly understand themselves to be Christians, not a “separate syncretistic group of Jewish Christians.”<sup>171</sup> This Christian identity, of course, also applies to the DA author as evident in his choice to address these women as baptized members of the community. The

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<sup>169</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 204. Fonrobert cites specifically *t. Ber* 2.13 on p. 173 as evidence that rabbis in the Tosefta allowed women who menstruate to study.

<sup>170</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 205.

<sup>171</sup> Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 207.

conflict arises, then, precisely because both the women and the DA author hold different understandings of what it means to live a Christian life. Indeed Fonrobert is correct in her assessment that the issue at the heart of the menstrual separation conflicts described in the DA is one of identity formation—by choosing to continue menstrual separation in the context of Christianity, the women of the DA unconsciously attempted to contribute to the formation of the Christian identity of the community, to the evident dismay of the DA author.

It is impossible to state definitively whether the *Protevangelium of James*' inclusion of Mary's observance of menstrual separation in the narrative reflects the same concerns for scriptural interpretation and identity formation as expressed in the DA. However, what can be determined with certainty is that Mary's ability to menstruate and her participation in menstrual separation (i.e., Mary leaves the sacred precinct of the Temple) are consistent with the goals of the *Protevangelium of James* and are presented, much like in the DA, as a positive action by those who wish to practice it. Mary's ability to menstruate reveals her potential role as the mother of the messiah while her participation in Levitical laws concerning menstruants reinforces her characterization as pure and holy. Although the *Protevangelium of James*' presentation of general customs and traditions as well as practices such as menstrual separation and Temple and sacrifice activities are described in the context of "Judaism," the text presents these ideas as consistent with views concerning Mary as the mother of the messiah and Jesus' role as Saviour and Christ. Given the strong parallels that can be drawn between our text and the DA, especially based on their shared interest in practices deemed Jewish (menstrual

separation in particular), I suggest that until other evidence comes to light or another text showing the same interest in menstrual purity as expressed in the DA is unearthed, the *Protevangelium of James*' shared concerns with this text is another strong arrow that points to the possibility of a Syrian milieu. As a final stop, we will now turn to the views held on Mary and women in Syrian Christianity in order to provide some concluding observations in support for our case of a Syrian milieu.

### 5.3.4 Mary and Women in Syrian Christianity

Syrian devotion for Mary probably flourished primarily in the fourth century due to the massive contributions of Ephrem.<sup>172</sup> In his *Hymns on the Nativity*, Ephrem devotes a substantial amount of space to Mary's voice, thought, and unique character.<sup>173</sup> Mary sings praise to God for his mighty works and for choosing her to conceive and give birth to Him (HNat 2.7; HNat 5.19–20; HNat 15); she sings songs to her son about his role in salvation history (HNat 6.1–4; HNat 8.3, 7; HNat 16); she sings about the cosmic role of Christ and her role as the new Eve (HNat 17); she sings about the historical link between Isaiah's prophesy of the birth of Emmanuel and her son (HNat 19); she even sings about being tired of singing and prays that He "Permit your mother to be silent about you, for her mouth is weary" (HNat 19.18–19).<sup>174</sup> Clearly, under Ephrem, Marian devotion was significantly developed and more sophisticated than its contemporary Western

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<sup>172</sup> Ephrem's homilies and poems also explored feminine imagery, the role of women, and female metaphors to describe the deity. He is also well known for his writings and thoughts on asceticism, virginity, and sexuality. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 1–3.

<sup>173</sup> Harvey, "Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choir and Sacred Song in Ancient Syrian Christianity," *Hugoye* 8.2 (2005): 2–3.

<sup>174</sup> Text citations are based on McVey's edition cited above.

counterpart. Susan Ashbrook Harvey argues that it was not until the fifth century under Cyril of Alexandria (most likely) that we have a comparable expression of Marian devotion in Greek orthodox churches and that we would have to wait centuries after that for Catholicism in the Latin west to express similar interest.<sup>175</sup> Although Harvey credits Ephrem for celebrating Mary's invaluable and inseparable role in Christ's work<sup>176</sup> and for her massive veneration and following in Syria, she also argues that "he could hardly have introduced her cult in such profound proportions to the Syrian church—it had to be there already."<sup>177</sup>

As discussed briefly above, the second century Syrian Ode 19 is an important document for Marian ideologies in Syria and may in fact testify to the significant following of Mary before the time of Ephrem. In it, Mary, as Harvey puts it "is hailed in concise and dazzling terms."<sup>178</sup> She is described as the "virgin mother with great compassion... who bore... and felt no pains/grief" and who "did not require a midwife," and "she loved by/in [his] salvation, and guarded by/in [his] kindness, and made known by/in [his] greatness."<sup>179</sup> Harvey argues that the themes offered by Ode 19 along with Ephrem's Marian hymns "may add weight to the theory that the Protevangelium of James

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<sup>175</sup> Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291. See also Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (2d ed.; Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, 1999).

<sup>176</sup> Harvey argues that Ephrem's portrayal of Mary as indispensable to her son's redemptive role (she too is presented in the Eucharist since the body of Christ received in the Eucharist is the one he was given by Mary) has contributed much to her veneration among the Syrian people; "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291.

<sup>177</sup> Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 291.

<sup>178</sup> Harvey, "Women in Early Syrian Christianity," 290.

<sup>179</sup> Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 268.

... is the work of Syrian origins”<sup>180</sup> since it is the single most important and influential document on the Virgin Mary in the second or early third century.

Another feature that is characteristically Syrian Christian is the practice of integrating asceticism and family devotion. Harvey argues in her study of mothers and daughters in early Syrian Hagiography that family bonds could be sustained in an ascetic context and that the joining of familial and ascetic bonds were distinctive features of Syrian Christianity.<sup>181</sup> Although Harvey’s hagiographical literature dates a good deal later than our text (fifth and sixth century), we see these practices of “chastity in marriage” in other Syrian documents like the Pseudo-Clementine, where family life and chastity are extremely important expressions of religious life in Syrian Christianity.<sup>182</sup> This unique feature of Syrian Christianity may perhaps explain why the *Protevangelium of James* gained so much popularity in the Syrian Orient. We see evidence of this popularity in that the earliest veneration and significant following of Mary took place in the Syrian Orient, the text itself was extremely well-received among Syrian Christian communities, the earliest translation of the text was in Syriac,<sup>183</sup> and the abiding popularity it received in Syria is well attested.<sup>184</sup> Doubtless, the *Protevangelium of James*’ portrayal of Mary’s extreme practices to ensure the maintenance of her purity alongside the text’s presentation

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<sup>180</sup> Harvey, “Women in Early Syrian Christianity,” 291.

<sup>181</sup> Harvey, “Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography,” *J ECS* 4.1 (1996): 27–56. On the role of the “daughters of the Covenant,” see also eadem, “Revisiting the Daughters,” 1–28.

<sup>182</sup> Horn, “Challenges of the Conversion of Families,” 1–35.

<sup>183</sup> That Syrian culture was thoroughly bilingual and our text’s earliest translation is in Syriac may serve as supplementary evidence for our case for a Syrian milieu. For more on this, see n. 78 above.

<sup>184</sup> Harvey, “Women in Early Syrian Christianity,” 291.

of the importance of family life, devotion, and obligation must have appealed to the ascetic and familial proclivities of Syrian Christianity.

### 5.3.5 Some Final Thoughts for a Syrian Provenance for our Text

In our case for suggesting Syria as the most likely milieu for the *Protevangelium of James*, we first looked to the continued influence of Judaism on Antiochene Christianity and suggested that its likely “Jewish-Christian” origins seem to be reflected in our text’s concerns for maintaining Jewish customs and laws especially surrounding issues of purity. Various sources from Syria further demonstrate a shared interest between our text and the writings characteristic of Syrian Christianity, including a concern for docetism and anti-Marcionite rhetoric, Syrian ideas concerning asceticism and marriage, and even Syrian views on Mary specifically as well as women in general. I suggest that the *Protevangelium of James* in its portrayal of Mary’s physical birth and very fleshy body as well as her presentation as Virgin Mother might safely be interpreted as an anti-docetic and anti-Marcionite responses and as a commentary on both practices of virginity and motherhood as legitimate forms of religious expression, respectively, and thus as important arrows pointing to the possibility of a Syrian provenance.

Additionally, Marian devotion, veneration, and popularity in Syria is second to none and other witnesses to Mary’s *virginitas in partu* and *post partum* such as Ode 19 the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.1 continue to strengthen the likelihood of a Syrian provenance. Most importantly, the Syrian documents *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the Pseudo-Clementines *Homilies* indicate that the

*Protevangelium of James* shared with these texts an interest in menstrual purity laws and in the case of the former source, a unique perspective on the practice of menstrual separation.

Admittedly, each characteristic of Syrian Christianity discussed in this chapter alone may not be persuasive of a Syrian provenance. Egypt, too, served as a hub for ascetic practices and anti-docetic rhetoric, and virginity remains a praised virtue in numerous communities that span various geographical locations. Additionally, the practice of menstrual separation in and of itself is not a unique concern to Syria. As discussed above, the Letter of Dionysius from Alexandria also attests to the incompatibility of menstrual blood with the sacred. For just these reasons Egypt still stands a contender for the *Protevangelium of James*' provenance. But what makes Syria a more probable locale over and above any other scholarly suggested milieu for the *Protevangelium of James*, including Egypt, is that in addition to the characteristics listed above, which both share, Syria demonstrates a unique history for the earliest veneration of Mary and is home to two important texts that share a deep concern for ritual purity (*Didascalia Apostolorum* and *Pseudo-Clementines Homilies*); both issues are reflected meaningfully in our text. Indeed the DA is the only extant text where we find an argument made for the validity of menstrual separation and the desire to continue this practice *by the women themselves*. Additionally, Syriac remains the next earliest extant manuscript of our narrative. My hope is that while each individual characteristic discussed thus far may encourage scholars to entertain the possibility of a Syrian



provenance, the summation of these characteristics form the most convincing argument for a Syrian milieu for the *Protevangelium of James*.

## Conclusion

### C.1 Mary's Purity and Characterization in the *Protevangelium of James*

My point of departure for reading the *Protevangelium of James* has been to pay attention to its narrative design with the aims of shedding light on the text's characterization of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and of contributing to scholarly discussions about the work's provenance. In Chapters Two, Three, and Four, I focused on Mary's ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity. Examining the literary devices and common literary tools used to flesh out the characterization of Mary and her parents in the *Protevangelium of James*, I argued that narrative details concerning her purity play a significant role in the portrayal of Mary herself. Chapter Five returned to questions about the text's date and provenance; there, I suggested that its narrative and ritual concerns are most fitting with a late second or early third century date and a West Syrian cultural context. By means of conclusion, I would like to return to the theme of purity, highlighting what I consider to be my main findings and offering some final insights on the characterization of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*.

As noted above, this study has been informed by the approaches to literary characterization in the works of Beverly Gaventa and Mary Foskett, and has thus asked "how the character of Mary emerges from a narrative text to reside in the imagination of a reader."<sup>1</sup> By working inductively and paying close attention to the text's depiction of Mary and the other characters' choices, speeches, and descriptions as well as their

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginit* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 4 and Beverly Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 23.

motives, attitudes, and moral nature, we analyzed the textual clues—what Foskett terms “character indicators”—to assess the whole character of Mary.<sup>2</sup> So what can we conclude about Mary’s characterization in the *Protevangelium of James*?

As we have seen, Mary is here characterized primarily by her purity. This quality dominates every plot, action, discourse, and setting of the *Protevangelium of James*’ narrative world. Although Mary is the protagonist, she speaks so seldomly that much of her characterization is conveyed by words attributed to other characters and to the third-person narrator’s descriptions. While the narrator provides the most substantial details concerning Mary as pure, figural representations of Mary (i.e., those offered by other characters) are often embedded within the narrator’s descriptions to reinforce and heighten her characterization. For instance, in the description of Mary’s infancy years at *Prot. Jas.* 6:1–4, the narrator describes Anna as preventing Mary from making contact with the profane or unclean. Anna is then depicted as declaring that Mary “will never walk on this ground again until I take you into the Temple of the Lord,” thereby reinforcing the narrator’s portrayal of the exceptionally pure child.

For the majority of the narrative, Mary’s portrayal is achieved explicitly by means of verbal statements providing descriptions, traits, and properties for her character. For instance, at *Prot. Jas.* 10:4, Mary is explicitly said to be “undefiled before God” by the narrator.<sup>3</sup> Particularly significant in this instance is the decision to exclude a block characterization for Mary or a general statement about her in order to introduce her. The

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<sup>2</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion on this phrase.

reader is never given a description of Mary's physical appearance nor of the way she is dressed.

In her comparative study of ancient Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian narratives that feature virgin protagonists, Mary Foskett notes the common interest in the physical body and beauty of the *parthenos* (e.g., Chloe of *Daphnis and Chloe*, Leucippe of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Aseneth of *Joseph and Aseneth*, and Thecla of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*) and their association with erotic power.<sup>4</sup> Foskett argues that this connection between the *parthenos*, the beautiful, and control of erotic power often leaves the *parthenos* vulnerable to violation and male possession.<sup>5</sup> In this context, the omission of any reference to Mary's physical beauty or her sexual desirability in the *Protevangelium of James* is unusual and perhaps unique. In its presentation of Mary as exceptionally pure, no room is left to interpret Mary's sexual status as anything but a sign of her complete purity and holiness.

Setting, however, takes on even more importance in establishing and contributing to Mary's characterization in the *Protevangelium of James*. The accounts of Mary's move from her home sanctuary to the sacred Temple and finally to the protected walls of Joseph's home serve repeatedly to remind the reader that her purity is always safeguarded even if such protection is not always needed (e.g., when Mary is made the Lord's Virgin she is no longer in need of any physical protection). As argued in Chapter Four, Mary's literary environments reinforce and replicate the nature of Mary's purity.

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<sup>4</sup> Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 82–84, e.g., in the case of Leucippe and Clitophon.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion on this.

That Mary is often positioned and moved by other characters (e.g., escorted into the Temple by her parents, escorted out of the Temple by the priests, etc.) in contrast to moving by her own volition into different settings and scenarios allows us to view Mary as a flat character for a considerable portion of the narrative. The presence of a flat protagonist seems counterintuitive, but given that Mary speaks only on five occasions throughout the entire text, such a conclusion may be warranted. I suggest, however, that this narrative structure is deliberate and significant. The contrast between when Mary is being described by the narrator and the other characters and when she self-characterizes via her five spoken statements is striking and serves to heighten the importance when she does speak. In her own voice, Mary is shown to be a thoughtful individual who displays remarkable traits of loyalty and faithfulness (to God), courage (to stand up to accusations made against her sexual status), and even strength (to declare her innocence unwaveringly). When Mary speaks in her own voice, she transforms from a flat to a round character and exposes the complexity of her character as she becomes a more forceful example for, in particular, women who maintain their innocence and purity even when questioned by the highest male authorities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The traditional view held for characters of ancient literature has primarily been, in the words of literary scholars Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, ‘flat,’ ‘static,’ and quite ‘opaque’ (*The Nature of Narrative* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966], 164). Scholars such as David Gowler, Fred Burnett, and Robert Alter show, however, the complexity of biblical characters and the possibility for even type-characters to have moments of roundness during the reading process; Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy, and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (ESEC; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 173–74; Burnett, “Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels,” *Semeia* 63 (1993): 1–28; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Additionally, Gaventa writes that “the character becomes known to the reader in a variety of ways, primary among which are the choices made by the character.” Quoting Aristotle, Gaventa argues that the most significant and “basic thing that a character must do is to be seen to make a choice.” In Mary’s five powerful speeches, she declares herself to be innocent and self-characterizes herself as pure, thus demonstrating the range of complexity in her character;

In addition to exploring *how* Mary is portrayed in the the *Protevangelium of James*, we must return to the question concerning *what* she is here characterized as being. Although Mary is often described as the Virgin of the Lord and as a *parthenos*, this study has shown that it is inadequate to conclude that the *Protevangelium of James* renders Mary simply by her sexual status. Gaventa argues that even the term “purity” itself may be misleading and does not provide an accurate sense of the text’s portrayal of Mary.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Gaventa adopts the phrase “sacred purity” to refer to the way the *Protevangelium of James* personifies Mary, based on Peter Brown’s description of her as a “human creature totally enclosed in sacred space.”<sup>8</sup> In my view, Gaventa’s use of “sacred purity” or even “holy purity” accurately describes the kind of purity that envelops Mary throughout the text. The terms “sacred” and “purity” describe both her character and function in that Mary’s extreme purity sets her aside for God and thus makes her holy.

Throughout this study, I have argued that it is not sufficient to understand the depiction of Mary’s purity in the *Protevangelium of James* solely in terms of her virginity. The text’s characterization of Mary as pure involves not only her sexual purity and therefore her moral purity, but also a concern for her ritual, menstrual, and even genealogical purity. In Chapter Two, I attempted to show how the *Protevangelium of James* depicts Mary’s ritual purity in terms of an overarching interest in the Temple and practice of sacrifice, by providing a literary setting and framing a storyline that revolves

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Mary, 21. The relevant passages in Aristotle are 2.1.11 and 2.1.9–13 in *The Eudemian Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 240–42, 304–7.

<sup>7</sup> Gaventa argues that the term purity is misleading because of its associations with “moral behaviour or the conventions of ritual purity”; *Mary*, 109.

<sup>8</sup> Gaventa, *Mary*, 110. Cf. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (LHR 13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 273.

around the ritual practices of Anna and Joachim and their deep concern to prevent their daughter from contracting the ritual impurities of everyday life. In this way, Mary and her parents are characterized both by their understanding of biblical ideas about ritual impurity and by their interaction with the Temple and its priests. In Chapter Three, I further argued that the text's reference to menstrual impurity serves as a narrative pivot, while simultaneously providing a new dimension to Mary's character. Mary's ability to menstruate triggers her transition from childhood into adulthood and signals her potential status as a mother, thus reminding the reader of the importance of her humanity and opening the way for motherhood to be praised alongside ascetic virginity.

In our tripartite discussion of Mary's purity, our fourth chapter explored Mary's sexual status as a *parthenos* and designated role as the "Virgin of the Lord," but also her genealogical purity as evident by the emphasis on Mary's Davidic lineage. No longer characterized exclusively by her associations with the Temple and its priests and described in terms likened to a Temple sacrifice, Mary transitions into becoming a symbolic Temple replacement herself. Indeed, under the protection of the Lord, Mary's purity ensures that she can even give birth in a cave because divinity now accompanies her wherever she goes. In this way, and in accordance with Foskett who argues that Mary's characterization as pure must be understood in the context of holiness,<sup>9</sup> Mary's concern for and maintenance of ritual, menstrual, sexual/moral and genealogical purity allows her not only contact, but actual affiliation with the divine. Mary's exceptional purity sets her aside for God and her body, which is not only pure, but holy, transforms

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<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Foskett writes that she "emerges as a holy child," and that "in the portrayal of Mary, purity signals nothing less than holiness"; *Virgin Conceived*, 148–49.

into a sacred Temple suitable for the Son of God.<sup>10</sup> Mary is best characterized as sacredly pure.

### **C.2 What are We to Make of Mary's Participation in Menstrual Impurity?**

Why does the author present Mary as susceptible to menstrual impurity when the entire narrative is devoted to extolling her exceptional purity? In this study, I proposed and discussed four main reasons for this inclusion. First, as shown in our inquiry into the place and function of menstrual purity in the *Protevangelium of James*, the allusion to Mary's ability to menstruate serves as a literary pivot in the narrative. Secondly, it provides as a way to confirm Mary's continued observance of the laws concerning menstrual separation: by accepting her removal from the Temple precinct, Mary shows that she is indeed a good Jew who is attentive to her ritual state. Thirdly, attention brought to Mary's ability to menstruate signals her transition from girlhood into motherhood and her important role as the mother of the son who will provide redemption for "all the children of Israel." Finally, though Mary's extreme purity functions to set her apart as unique, her ability to menstruate makes her role as Virgin mother accessible to other women in a meaningful way.

As such, our investigation of Mary's characterization in the *Protevangelium of James* may contribute to notions of purity in early Judaism and Christianity, as well as the early history of Mariology and the representation of women, gender, and sexuality in ancient literature. Moreover, attention to the concern for and presentation of purity in the

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<sup>10</sup> As the sacred Temple is often described as God's holy residence on earth, the image of Mary's body as a holy Temple is most fitting since it is in the womb of her body that the Son of God will dwell.



work may help to shed light on the *Protevangelium of James*' much debated provenance and date. Although significant for the culture of early Christendom, Syrian Christianity is an area of research that has often been overlooked for its significant role in the history and development of Christianity and Mariology. The *Protevangelium of James* provides us with much information and important steps towards achieving a complete picture of Mary; our challenge now is to try to comprehend its place among other documents that deal with similar themes from the same milieu and to utilize the understudied resources from Syrian Christian traditions to enhance even further our understanding of Mary.

## Appendix A: The *Protevangelium of James* and Gospel Harmonies

It is clear that the *Protevangelium of James* stands in a close relationship to the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Yet, in my view, it is important to ask how the author of our text encountered Gospel traditions of the sort also found in Matthew and Luke. Were they oral traditions passed down or written gospels? Scholars such as Hock assume without question that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* used the gospels of Matthew and Luke in their written canonical forms. But a closer look at our text reveals a harmonization of and at times even a conflation of the stories told by Matthew and Luke, perhaps achieved by referencing an existing harmonized gospel such as the second century Diatessaron<sup>1</sup> or even the gospel harmony<sup>2</sup> of Justin Martyr.<sup>3</sup>

In his translation of the *Protevangelium of James*, Ron Cameron argues that as a composite document, our narrative derived its sources from oral and written tradition, the Jewish Scriptures, and the gospels of Matthew and Luke.<sup>4</sup> Most interesting are his comments on the relationship between the *Protevangelium of James* and the gospels of

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<sup>1</sup> The status of the Diatessaron is particularly interesting because unlike other gospel traditions, it quickly became the standard gospel text for Syriac speaking Christianity, and so until it was suppressed and substituted for a revision of the Old Syriac Canonical Gospels by Rabbula, the bishop of Edessa (411–35), it remained well-known and used in Syria. For more on this, refer to William L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 1–2 and L.W. Barnard, “The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa During the First Two Centuries, A.D.,” *VC* 22.3 (1968): 169.

<sup>2</sup> Given that Tatian was a student of Justin, scholars have long suggested the possibility that Tatian knew Justin's harmony and even used it when creating the Diatessaron. In his comparative study between Justin's gospel citations and their parallels in the Diatessaron, Petersen argues that there are textual agreements both in the sequence of harmonization and in variant readings, some of which are unique. For this reason, Petersen concludes that there are only two possible explanations for their connection: “either Tatian knew and used Justin's harmony, or both relied on the same pre-existing harmonized source”; *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 29.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview and discussion of Justin Martyr's various sources including quotations from Matthew and Luke and a possible gospel harmony source of Matthew and Luke, see Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: SCM, 1990), 360–402. See especially Arthur Bellinzoni, *The Sayings of Jesus in Justin Martyr* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 108.

Matthew and Luke. Although other scholars have hinted at the possibility of the influence of gospel harmonies for our text, Cameron is the only scholar to suggest explicitly that the respective passages in these gospels are harmonized into a single story in the *Protevangelium of James* and that “it is by combining the composite traditions with a harmony of the synoptic infancy stories that the *Protevangelium of James* has constructed the dramatic scene of its gospels.”<sup>5</sup>

For our purposes, the possibility of dependence on a gospel harmony proves particularly significant, in light of the above arguments for the work’s Syrian provenance and the prominence of the Diatesseron in that region. This possibility is also intriguing in light of the discussions held by de Strycker, de Aldama and Zervos on the connection between Justin Martyr and the *Protevangelium of James*. As discussed in Chapter One, de Strycker and de Aldama both suggest that the author of the *Protevangelium of James* may have had access to Justin’s writings, but neither argue for literary dependency between the sources. Their assessment is based on four concordances found between our text and Justin’s *First Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho*.<sup>6</sup> Zervos, however, proposes that a literary dependency not only exists between Justin’s writings and our text, but also that Justin’s work is actually based on the *Protevangelium of James*. Most interestingly, Zervos observes that in one of the concordances “Both *Prot. Jas.* XI, 3 and 1 *Apol.* 33:5 join Matt 1:21 to the end of Luke 1:35 (κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ), where both replace θεοῦ with ὑψίστου.” Can this “joining” of Matt 1:21 to the end of Luke 1:35 by both

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<sup>5</sup> Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 108.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter One under “Dating the *Protevangelium of James*” for a fuller discussion of these four concordances.

authors in fact suggest not only a literary connection between the *Protevangelium of James* and Justin Martyr as Zervos proposes, but also familiarity with a shared gospel harmony source? Another possibility for our author’s use of Matthew and Luke is that he used whatever version<sup>7</sup> he had of the two gospel traditions to create his own harmonized version of the story.

Accordingly, this Appendix explores some of the evidence for the harmonization of gospel traditions in the work. To my knowledge, this topic has not been pursued in any detail in any earlier study. Although my investigation is thus tentative, and firm conclusions must await further research, a schematic comparison of these texts reveals striking evidence for both harmonization and originality in the *Protevangelium of James*.

**Table 1: Comparisons of the Annunciation in Various Sources\***

Passages with corresponding letters (A–W) are meant to be compared. Italicized passages indicate parallels between two or more sources.

Protevangelium of James	Luke	Matthew	1 Apology	Dialogue
<p><b>11:2</b></p> <p>(A)</p> <p><i>Hail, highly favored one! The Lord is with you.</i> <i>Blessed are you among women</i></p>	<p><b>1:28</b></p> <p>(A)</p> <p><i>Hail, highly favored one! The Lord is with you.</i> <i>Blessed are you among women</i></p>			

<sup>7</sup> Petersen argues that there was no set canon in the second century based on the many gospel quotations found in second century sources that appear to quote an earlier version of the canonical gospels. While I am in agreement with Petersen that we cannot determine exactly what version of the gospel of Matthew and Luke our author would have had access to create his own harmony, I maintain, however, that there is validity in comparing our text to the gospels of Matthew and Luke as we have them today and Justin’s writings, since studies in gospel harmonies all align themselves with Matthew and Luke and contain variations. Since the goal of my study of gospel harmonies is heuristically motivated, the purpose of these charts is to get a sense of the range of options that may have been available to our author and to serve as a preliminary basis for further study.

<p><b>11:3-4</b></p> <p>(B) And she looked around on the right and on the left to see where the voice came. And trembling, she went home.</p> <p><b>11:5</b></p> <p>(C) <i>Do not fear Mary, for you have found grace</i></p> <p>(D) in the sight of the Lord of all.</p>	<p><b>1:29</b></p> <p>(B) But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.</p> <p><b>1:30</b></p> <p>(C) <i>Do not fear Mary, for you have found grace</i></p> <p>(D) with God.</p>			
<p><b>11:5</b></p> <p>(E) <i>You will conceive</i> (συλλάψει from συλλαμβάνω)</p> <p>(F) by means of his word.</p>	<p><b>1:31</b></p> <p>(E) And behold, <i>you will conceive</i> (συλλάμψη from συλλαμβάνω)</p> <p>(F) <i>in the womb</i></p>	<p><b>1:20-1:21</b></p> <p>(E) the child conceived (γεννηθέν from γεννάω) in her is</p> <p>(G) <i>from the Holy Spirit.</i></p>	<p><b>33:5</b></p> <p>(E) Behold, <i>you will conceive</i> (συλλάψει from συλλαμβάνω)</p> <p>(F) <i>in the womb</i></p> <p>(G) <i>from the Holy spirit</i></p>	
<p><b>11:7</b></p> <p>Shall be called holy,</p> <p>(J) <i>Son of the Most High.</i></p>	<p>and</p> <p>(H) <i>bear a son</i> (τέξῃ from τίκτω),</p> <p>and</p> <p>(I) <i>you shall call his name Jesus.</i></p> <p><b>1:32</b></p> <p>He will be great and</p> <p>(J) <i>be called Son of the Most High.</i></p>	<p>She will</p> <p>(H) <i>bear a son</i> ( τέξεται from τίκτω),</p> <p>and</p> <p>(I) <i>you are to name him Jesus,</i></p>	<p>and</p> <p>(H) <i>bear a son</i> (τέξῃ from τίκτω)</p> <p>and he</p> <p>(J) <i>be called Son of the Most High.</i></p>	

<p><b>11:8</b></p> <p>(K) <i>And you will call his name Jesus</i></p> <p>(L) <i>because he will save his people from their sins</i></p>			<p>(K) <i>And you shall call his name Jesus,</i></p> <p>(L) <i>because he will save his people from their sins.</i></p>	
<p><b>11:7</b> And the messenger of the Lord said, “Not so, Mary, for</p> <p>(N) <i>the power of</i> God</p> <p>(O) <i>will overshadow you; therefore,</i> also that</p> <p>(P) <i>holy one that is born</i> will be called</p> <p>(Q) <i>Son of the Most High</i></p> <p><b>11:9</b> And Mary said, “Behold, (I am)</p> <p>(R) <i>the servant of the Lord</i> before him.</p>	<p><b>1:35</b> The angel said to her,</p> <p>(M) <i>The Holy Spirit will come upon you,</i> and</p> <p>(N) <i>the power of the Most High</i></p> <p>(O) <i>will overshadow you therefore</i> the</p> <p>(P) <i>child to be born will be holy;</i> he will be</p> <p>(Q) <i>called Son of God</i></p> <p><b>1:38</b> Then Mary said, “Here am I,</p> <p>(R) <i>the servant of the Lord;</i></p>			<p><b>100:5</b> ... that</p> <p>(M) <i>the spirit of the Lord would come upon her</i> and</p> <p>(N) <i>the power of the Most High</i></p> <p>(O) <i>would overshadow her;</i> <i>therefore</i> the</p> <p>(P) <i>holy one that is born</i> from her should be</p> <p>(Q) <i>called Son of God</i> She answered,</p>

<p>(S) <i>Let it be with me according to your word</i></p>	<p>(S) <i>let it be with me according to your word."</i></p>			<p>(S) <i>let it be to me according to your word.</i></p>
<p><b>14:5</b> And the night came upon him, and</p> <p>(T) <i>behold, an angel of the Lord appeared before him in a dream (ὄνειρου), saying,</i></p> <p>(U) "Do not fear this child,</p> <p>(V) <i>for that which is in her is from the Holy Spirit.</i></p> <p><b>14:6</b> (W) <i>She will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus; because he will save his people from their sins.</i></p>		<p><b>1:20</b></p> <p>(T) <i>behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream (ὄναρ) and said,</i></p> <p>(U) Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,</p> <p>(V) <i>for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit</i></p> <p><b>1:21</b> (W) <i>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins</i></p>		

\* Translations of the *Protevangelium of James* cited above are my own based on Hock’s edition; translations of Justin’s *First Apology* and *Dialogue* are quoted from Helmut Koester’s *Ancient Christian Gospels* (p. 380); translations of Luke and Matthew are from NRSV.

The *Protevangelium of James*’ description of the annunciation to Mary at *Prot. Jas.* 11:2 begins with language identical to Luke’s version of the announcement: “Hail, highly favored one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women” (A) and is

followed by a short description of Mary visibly attempting to locate the voice's source, then becoming frightened and returning home from the well (*Prot. Jas.* 11:4; cf. Luke 1:29 who describes Mary being perplexed about the message) (B). Mary's agitated reaction prompts the angel's instructions to "not fear" because "you have found grace" (*Prot. Jas.* 11:5) (C). Note one slight difference from Luke's simple phrase "with God": the more expansive "in the sight of the Lord of all" (D). The more significant difference between the two versions, however, occurs in the order of events. In Luke's version, the heavenly messenger's greeting of Mary (Luke 1:28) is immediately followed by instructions to be not afraid because she will conceive and give birth to a son of the Most High, etc. (Luke 1:30–33). Only later, when Mary visits her kinswoman Elizabeth, does Luke use the phrase, "Blessed are you among women," (Luke 1:42), but these words are spoken by Elizabeth who is given the wisdom to know that she is in the presence of divine works. In contrast, in the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary is told that she is "blessed among women" (*Prot. Jas.* 11:2) within a context quite distinct from Luke's version: [1] it is spoken to Mary immediately after she is greeted by the angel; and [2] it is spoken to her by God's heavenly messenger himself. The *Protevangelium of James*' intentional placement of this phrase at the moment of the Annunciation reveals the clear focus of the author: to remind his readers that Mary is indeed blessed and therefore a suitable candidate for her chosen role as the mother of Jesus. This sequence is unique to our text. Since there is no parallel scene in Matthew, and Justin does not quote it, we can conclude that our author used Luke and that his addition of "in the sight of the Lord of all" (D) is either ad hoc or more likely influenced by the Septuagint since the phrase "in



the sight of the Lord” is common in the LXX, but the addition “of all” is unique to the *Protevangelium of James*.

Mary’s annunciation continues in the second half of *Prot. Jas.* 11:5 when the messenger of the Lord informs her that she “will conceive” (E). This phrase has parallels in Matthew and Luke, but it is more likely that our author followed Luke since both he and Luke employ the term συλλαμβάνω where Matthew uses γεννάω to render the meaning “conceive.” The *Protevangelium of James* deviates drastically, however, in the description of how Mary will conceive. *Prot. Jas.* 11:5 says she will “conceive by means of his word” (F), whereas Luke says she “will conceive in the womb” (F). (We will hold off on an explanation for this variant for now). The *Protevangelium of James*’ deviation from Luke continues in terms of sequence as well. Immediately following this scene, Mary is described in *Prot. Jas.* 11:6 as doubtful about the conception and questions the exact manner of this birth; thus the *Protevangelium of James* comments on and expands Luke’s doubtful Mary scene at Luke 1:34, but with no literary parallels. Mary’s question at *Prot. Jas.* 11:6 is followed immediately by the messenger’s answer in the following sequence: the angel tells Mary [1] the power of God (N) will overshadow her (O) (*Prot. Jas.* 11:7); [2] the child to be born will be holy (P); [3] he will be called the “Son of the Most High” (Q) (*Prot. Jas.* 11:7); [4] his name will be Jesus (K); and [5] because he will save them from their sins (L) (*Prot. Jas.* 11:8). This sequence ends with Mary declaring herself to be the servant of the Lord and “to let it be with me according to your word” (S) (*Prot. Jas.* 11:9).

In Luke, after Mary is told that she “will conceive in the womb” (E and F) at 1:31, the author immediately follows with the detail that she will “bear a son (H) and [you shall] call his name Jesus” (I) and that “he will be great and be called Son of the Most High” (J). In the *Protevangelium of James*, the order is reversed; the child is called the “Son of the Most High” (J) first and then named Jesus (K) because our author connects Jesus to the explanation of his name (cf. Matt 1:21). Since Luke does not make reference to the meaning of Jesus’ name, he moves directly from the reference to Jesus to “Son of the Most High” (J). Additionally, the reference to the child being called “Son of the Most High” (J) in the *Protevangelium of James* only occurs after the description of the conception, whereas in Luke, he is called the “Son of the Most High” (J) before the explanation of the conception process. This strategy is easily explained by the fact that in both cases, the question (i.e., how will this birth happen?) must come before the answer (i.e., the power of God/Most High will overshadow you). In the *Protevangelium of James*, Mary’s question immediately follows the angel’s report that she will conceive. In Luke, Mary does not question the angel until after he has informed her of all the details concerning the child. The *Protevangelium of James*’ sequence of events is obviously different than Luke’s, but so are some of the details. Where the *Protevangelium of James* uses “the power of God” (N) as the overshadowing component, Luke uses “the power of the Most High” (N). Our author agrees with Luke that “the child to be born will be holy” (P), but changes Luke’s “he will be called Son of God” (Q) to he “will be called Son of the Most High” (Q). Two possible explanations may account for these variants. Either our author simply decided to switch around the names: “God” for the “Most High” in the first

half of *Prot. Jas.* 11:7 and the “Most High” for “God” in the second half of *Prot. Jas.* 11:7, or in his use of “Son of the Most High” he pulled from Luke’s reference to “Son of the Most High” at 1:32 instead of consciously altering Luke’s reference to the “Son of God” at 1:35.

Although our author relies more heavily on Luke, the *Protevangelium of James* also seems to draw on Matthew in select instances. Like Luke, Matthew also uses the phrase “you are to name him Jesus” (W) at 1:21, but adds a passage not attested in Luke: “because he will save his people from their sins.” Our author likely used Matthew’s version of the reference to naming the child Jesus (1:21) instead of Luke’s (1:31) since the *Protevangelium of James* also connects the name Jesus with “save his people from their sins” (L) in the exact same sequence and almost identical wording at *Prot. Jas.* 11:8. Interestingly, Matt 1:21 is repeated at *Prot. Jas.* 14:6 while additional parallels from Matthew can also be detected in our text. In the angelic announcement to Joseph in Matthew at 1:20 (before the reference to Jesus and the explanation of his name), Matthew tells us that “an angel of the Lord appears to him [Joseph] in a dream” (T) to tell him to “not be afraid” (U) because what is “in her is from the Holy Spirit” (V). The order of the angelic appearance to Joseph in Matthew 1:20–21 is identical to the sequence in *Prot. Jas.* 14:5–6. However, although the sequence is the same, the details are not. Where Matt 1:20 makes an explicit reference to Joseph, the son of David (U), *Prot. Jas.* 14:5 does not. This change is easily explained by the fact that the *Protevangelium of James* ties the Davidic line to Mary rather than Joseph (cf. *Prot. Jas.* 10:2, 4). Yet even more significantly, in Matthew the angel tells Joseph to “not be afraid to take Mary as your

wife,” whereas in the *Prot. Jas.* the angel tells Joseph to “not fear this child” (U). Since the *Protevangelium of James* avoids references to Mary as Joseph’s wife whenever possible and makes clear throughout the text that despite being married, the relationship between Joseph and Mary is not sexual, it is likely that his alteration to Matthew in this passage is his own invention.

The annunciation scene in the *Protevangelium of James* draws on traditions in both Matthew and Luke; here, it appears that details unique in both traditions have been incorporated and conflated to produce one fluid story. Elements from Luke’s version are more dominant, although there are several instances when Luke’s chronology appears to have been altered in order to allow for Matthew’s interpolation (e.g., Matt 1:21 at *Prot. Jas.* 11:8.) What we have here then is a harmonization of the two angelic announcements. Indeed, this harmonization is most evident when our author presents two or more versions of the same material as separate incidents in the narrative (i.e., doublets) as he has done at *Prot. Jas.* 11:8 and 14:6.<sup>8</sup>

Determining whether the harmony detected in the *Protevangelium of James* is the author’s creation or attributable to the influence of and access to a gospel harmony requires further investigation. Scholarly consensus holds that Justin used a gospel harmony source and that there is a high possibility that his student Tatian also knew and

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<sup>8</sup> According to Luke 1:31–32, Mary is addressed by the angel and told that she is to name her child Jesus and that he will be great and be called Son of the Most High, whereas in Matt 1:20–21, Joseph is addressed in a dream by an angel concerning the naming of Jesus and the meaning of his name. In order to preserve both accounts, our narrative attends to this issue by providing both Mary (*Prot. Jas.* 11:8) and Joseph (*Prot. Jas.* 14:6) with angelic visits, informing them verbatim of their special situation and the naming and meaning of their child Jesus.

used this source when producing his Diatessaron.<sup>9</sup> Helmut Koester argues that gospel writings such as those of Matthew and Luke and a harmony of the synoptic Gospels were among the materials Justin worked with to write his *Apologies* and *Dialogue*.<sup>10</sup> In his study of *First Apology* 33.5 and *Dialogue with Trypho* 100.5, Koester convincingly shows that when Justin quotes Matthew and Luke for these two passages on the annunciation, he does so from a harmonized gospel.<sup>11</sup> If the *Protevangelium of James* draws on a gospel harmony similar to the one employed by Justin and possibly Tatian, then there may be hints left behind such as textual agreements in the sequence of harmonization and possibly even in variant readings.

Let us reexamine the harmony evident in the *Protevangelium of James*, but this time in light of Justin's writings. *Prot. Jas.* 11:5 and *1 Apol.* 33.5 display their first parallel with the phrase "you will conceive" (E). Whereas *1 Apol.* 35.5 harmonizes Luke's "in the womb" (F) and Matthew's reference of "from the Holy Spirit" (G) to render "you will conceive in the womb from the Holy Spirit" (E, F, and G), our author takes up Luke's use of "conceive" (the same term συλλαμβάνω is used), but adds on the extra phrase "by means of his word" (F). Since there are no other parallels in Luke, Matthew, or Justin for this change, we must consider the following possible explanations for our author's use of "the Word": [1] he combines the quotation with ideas from other gospels (e.g., The Word is a well known Johannine theme) through memory or an actual

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<sup>9</sup> See n. 4 and 5 above.

<sup>10</sup> Koester also argues that along with these gospel writings and gospel harmony of the Synoptic Gospels, Justin also worked with traditional collections of scriptural prophetic passages related to Jesus and improved texts of the Greek translation of at least some of the books of the Hebrew Bible; *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 378.

<sup>11</sup> Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 378.

source; [2] his source uses this quotation; [3] other materials he worked with aided in this invention; or [4] a combination of two or more of the above possibilities.

*1 Apol.* 33.5 continues the narration by agreeing with Luke almost completely about “bearing a son” (H) and being called “Son of the Most High” (J), but refers to Matt 1:21 for the explanation of Jesus’ name. Significantly, the *Protevangelium of James*’ sequence of harmonization for the “Son of the Most High” (J) with the explanation of Jesus’ name, “because he will save his people from their sins” (L), is identical to Justin’s sequence. Koester argues that Justin had a very special interest in the explanation of Jesus’ name as evident by the fact that Justin comments later that Jesus in Hebrew translates into “saviour” in Greek and because he quotes Matt 1:21 a second time at *1 Apol.* 33.7–8. Our author may feel as strongly about the explanation behind Jesus’ name since his sequence of harmonization is verbatim. Additionally, our author also repeats this quotation from Matthew at *Prot. Jas.* 14:6, when he harmonizes Matthew’s angelic appearance to Joseph into his narrative.

In *Dial.* 100.5, Justin again takes his lead from Luke. The sequence of [1] “the Holy Spirit will come upon you” (M); [2] “the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (N and O); [3] “therefore the child to be born will be holy (P); he will be called Son of God (Q); and [4] and Mary’s response of “let it be with me according to your word” (S) is followed exactly by Justin. The only alteration made by Justin is his omission of Mary’s declaration as “the servant of the Lord” (R) before she responds to the angel. As discussed above, the *Protevangelium of James* also relies heavily on Luke since Matthew does not provide a parallel. Given that Justin’s quotation in *Dial.* 100.5 is almost verbatim

of Luke, the differences between the *Protevangelium of James*’ and Justin’s quotations are the same variances between Luke and the *Protevangelium of James*, viz., the use of “power of God” and “Son of the Most High” by our author and “power of the Most High” and “Son of God” by Luke and Justin. Since our author, like Luke, does include a reference to Mary’s role as “the Servant of the Lord” (R) it is more likely that he used Luke in this passage rather than Justin’s source.

Before we move on to some conclusions about whether our author employed a gospel harmony similar to the one used by Justin or was the creator of his own harmony, two other examples in the *Protevangelium of James* betray a harmonization of the infancy gospel material found in Luke and Matthew: the example of Augustus’ Decree and Mary hiding Jesus in an ox-manger. Since Justin provides no parallel to either passage, it is impossible to determine whether the parallels found between the *Protevangelium of James* and Luke and Matthew reflect our author’s use of a gospel harmony or is the work of a skilled harmonizer. What can be determined is that both examples clearly use Matthew and Luke and that their accounts are combined to create one seamless story.

**Table 2: Comparisons of the Decree of Augustus in Various Sources\***

Passages with corresponding letters (A–F) are meant to be compared. Italicized passages indicate parallels between two or more sources.

Protevangelium of James.	Luke	Matthew
<p><b>17:1</b> (A) Now there came a <i>decree</i> (Κέλευσις) from the king <i>Augustus</i> all who were in Bethlehem of Judea to be <i>registered</i> (ἀπογράψασθαι from ἀπογράφω)</p>	<p><b>2:1</b> (A) In those days a <i>decree</i> (δόγμα) went out from the Emperor <i>Augustus</i> that all the world should be <i>registered</i> (ἀπογράφεσθαι from ἀπογράφω).</p>	

<p><b>21:1</b></p> <p>(B)</p> <p>And behold, <i>Joseph</i> prepared to go forth into Judea. Now there arose a tumult in <i>Bethlehem of Judea</i>. (βηθλεέμ τῆς ἰουδαίας)</p>	<p><b>2:4</b></p> <p>(B)</p> <p><i>Joseph</i> also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to <i>Judea</i> (εἰς τὴν ἰουδαίαν), to the city of David called <i>Bethlehem</i> (βηθλέεμ) because he was descended from the house and family of David</p>	
<p><b>21:2</b></p> <p>(C)</p> <p>For there came <i>wise men</i> (μάγοι/μάγος) saying,</p> <p>(D)</p> <p><i>Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?</i></p> <p>(E)</p> <p><i>For we saw his star in the East,</i> (εἶδομεν γὰρ τὸν ἀστέρα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ)</p> <p>(F)</p> <p><i>and have come to worship him</i> (καὶ ἦλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ)</p>		<p><b>2:1</b></p> <p>(C)</p> <p>...<i>wise men</i> from the East came to Jerusalem (μάγοι/μάγος)</p> <p><b>2:2</b></p> <p>(D)</p> <p><i>Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?</i> (ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν ἰουδαίων).</p> <p>(E)</p> <p><i>For we saw his star in the East</i> (εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ)</p> <p>(F)</p> <p><i>and have come to worship him</i> (καὶ ἦλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ)</p>

\* Translations of the *Protevangelium of James* cited above are my own based on Hock's edition; translations of Luke and Matthew are from NRSV.

*Prot. Jas.* 17:1 offers a description of the enrollment of Mary and Joseph in Augustus' census. The details of the enrollment are as follows: [1] the decree is sent out by King Augustus and [2] the purpose of the decree is to register all inhabitants in Bethlehem of Judea (A). Only after three long chapters does the plot return to Augustus' decree. At *Prot. Jas.* 21:1, Joseph is depicted getting ready to make the trip to register (B). Luke also opens the story of the birth of Jesus with Augustus' decree at 2:1 and agrees with our author on these details: that there is a decree; that it is made by Augustus; that its purpose is to register inhabitants (A); that Joseph is planning on journeying to register; and that



Bethlehem of Judea is mentioned as the registration location (B). Although both Luke and the *Protevangelium of James* share these important details, their accounts are hardly identical. Instead of “King Augustus,” Luke names him “Emperor Augustus” (A); where our author employs Κέλευσις to render “decree,” Luke uses δόγμα (A). Perhaps the most significant difference between the two accounts is the issue of geography. The *Protevangelium of James* writes that all those who were “in Bethlehem of Judea” (B) require registration, which we can infer by Joseph’s preparations includes Joseph, his family and everyone else in the narrative. Luke, on the other hand, writes that the decree is to apply to “all the world” (A), but only provides the detail that Joseph traveled “from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem” at Luke 2:4 (B). Two items bear noting here. First, since our author includes the reference to “Bethlehem of Judea” already at *Prot. Jas.* 17:1, he must have made a decision to pull the reference from Luke 2:4 and simply combine the two details. Second, our author’s omission of “Nazareth,” “Galilee,” and “city of David,” seems intentional rather than the result of careless referencing. The locales of Bethlehem and Judea are only mentioned at Luke 2:4 in conjunction with Joseph in order to remind the reader that Joseph went “to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David” (B). Since the *Protevangelium of James* makes it quite clear that it is Mary and not Joseph who is a descendent of David (*Prot. Jas.* 10:4), our author’s decision to pick and choose specific details to include (i.e., the locales of Bethlehem and Judea) and exclude (i.e., connection to Joseph) in his story may serve to reemphasize the Davidic line of Mary.

The second half of *Prot. Jas.* 21:1 reports that there is a tumult in Bethlehem of Judea in order to explain the next passage (B). *Prot. Jas.* 21:2 says that the uproar is caused by three wise men who are looking for a “child who has been born King of the Jews” (D). They explain that they “saw his star... and have come to worship him” (E and F). *Prot. Jas.* 21:2 shows parallels in Matthew 2:1–2. Indeed, the parallels are identical in sequence and the wording is almost verbatim. Matthew accounts for the wise men, but adds that they “from the East came to Jerusalem” (C). Additionally, Matthew and our author both report verbatim that the magis “saw his star in the East (E).<sup>12</sup>

*Prot. Jas.* 17:1, 21:1–2 clearly betrays use of Matthew and Luke for its account of Augustus’ decree and birth of Jesus and shows strong signs of harmonization. This weaving is most evident after the description of the enrollment. When Joseph and Mary are preparing to head into Bethlehem of Judea (*Prot. Jas.* 21:1) as they are in Luke 2:4, our author describes an uproar that arises in Bethlehem initiated by the arrival of the wise men. Since there are no parallels to this uproar either in Matthew or Luke, likely this addition is an invention by our author. The details of the wise men, including their questioning of the location of the child, observance of his star, and their desire to worship him in our narrative, are taken directly from Matt 2:1–2, but they are used to explain the events described in Luke 2:1. As a result, the episode of the decree of Augustus as provided by our narrative is a combination of the events described in Luke 2:1, 2:4 and Matt 2:1–2.

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Hock thinks that it is striking that the author chooses not to quote Micah 5:1 as it is done in Matt 2:6. Note that Hock’s observation is based on his assumption that the *Protevangelium of James* used the gospels of Matthew and Luke in their canonical forms when creating his narrative; Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (TSB 2; Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 1995), 71 n. 21:5.

**Table 3: Comparisons of Mary’s Hiding of Jesus to Escape Herod’s Wrath in Various Sources\***

Passages with corresponding letters (A–C) are meant to be compared. Italicized passages indicate parallels between two or more sources.

Protevangelium of James	Luke	Matthew
<p><b>22:2</b> and sent his henchmen and commanded them</p> <p>(A) <i>to kill all the children</i> (ἀνελεῖν πάντα τὰ βρέφη)</p> <p>(B) <i>who were two years old and under</i> (ἀπὸ διετίας καὶ κάτω).</p> <p><b>22:3</b> When Mary heard that <i>the children were being killed</i> (τὰ βρέφη ἀναιρεῖται) she was frightened</p>		<p><b>2:16</b> and he sent out and</p> <p>(A) <i>killed all the children</i> (ἀνεῖλεν πάντας τοὺς παῖδας)</p> <p>in and around Bethlehem</p> <p>(B) <i>who were two years old or under</i> (διετοῦς καὶ κατωτέρω).</p>
<p><b>22:4</b> and took her child,</p> <p>(C) <i>wrapped him in swaddling cloth, and put him in an ox-manger</i> (feeding trough) (ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἔβαλεν ἐν φάτῃ βοῶν)</p>	<p><b>2:7</b></p> <p>(C) <i>and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger</i> (ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτῃ)</p>	

\* Translations of the *Protevangelium of James* cited above are my own based on Hock’s edition; translations of Luke and Matthew are from NRSV.

*Prot. Jas.* 22:2–3 describes Herod’s wrath and Mary’s decision to hide Jesus in an ox-manger. The details include Herod sending out his henchmen with the command “to kill all the children who were two years old and under” (A and B) and Mary being frightened after hearing that “children were being killed” at *Prot. Jas.* 22:3. Matthew takes up the story of Herod’s wrath and makes specific references at 2:16 to the children being killed. Matt 2:16 also includes the detail that these murders happened “in and around

Bethlehem” to children “who were two years old and under” (A and B). At *Prot. Jas.* 22:3, the reference to the “children...being killed” is repeated, the extra detail of being “in and around Bethlehem” by Matthew is omitted, and a phrase unique to the *Protevangelium of James* is added. Our author includes a description of Mary’s emotions: “She was frightened” at the end of *Prot. Jas.* 22:3. This addition connects verses *Prot. Jas.* 22:3 and *Prot. Jas.* 22:4 together. *Prot. Jas.* 22:4 writes that Mary “took the child, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and put him in an ox-manger (feeding trough)” (C). *Prot. Jas.* 22:4 has a parallel in Luke 2:7: Mary “wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him a manger” (C).

*Prot. Jas.* 22:2–4’s unique use of the information found in Matthew and Luke to create this new story strongly suggests that what we have here is a harmony. The difference between this passage and the two passages previously discussed is that the result is not simply a harmony of two parallel episodes, but rather a harmony of unrelated episodes fused together to create a new event. *Prot. Jas.* 22:3 describes Mary being afraid because of the news that Herod has ordered the murder of all infants two years old and younger, which has its parallel in Matt 2:16. In order to remedy Mary’s situation, the author describes her hiding her child by wrapping him in swaddling cloth and placing him into a feeding trough or ox- manger.<sup>13</sup> This language of wrapping up the child and placing him into a manger has its parallel in Luke 2:7, but in Luke the event is placed in a

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. the description of Mary giving birth in a cave at *Prot. Jas.* 19:15–16. The mention of the cave is also cited by Justin in *Dial.* 78.5–6, “he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger...” which seems to be derived from the reference in Isa 33:13–19 (“he shall dwell in a high cave of a strong rock”). Although the reference to the cave is unique and provides a special connection between Justin Martyr and our author, I am not suggesting literary dependence between these two writers, but perhaps a shared source.

completely different context, occurring immediately after she gives birth. This action has nothing to do with Herod's decree nor does it involve Mary fearing for her child's life because according to Luke, the child is not in any danger. Only in Matthew's gospel is Herod's wrath felt by Mary when there is reason to believe Jesus is in danger, but the conflict is settled at Matt 2:16, when Mary and Joseph are told to flee to Egypt to escape. *Prot. Jas.* 22:2–4 is clearly an innovative fusion of two unrelated events from Matthew and Luke.

So what can we conclude about the *Protevangelium of James'* relationship with gospel harmonies? Examining the parallels found between the *Protevangelium of James* and Justin Martyr in the example of the Annunciation reveals, on the one hand, important parallels in harmonization sequence. The *Protevangelium of James'* sequence of harmonization for the "Son of the Most High" with the explanation of Jesus' name is identical to Justin's harmonized quotation of the same passage. This evidence seems to point towards the possibility that our author had access to a gospel harmony not unlike the one Justin and perhaps even Tatian used. On the other hand, this particular harmonization constitutes but one example, insufficient evidence upon which to base a strong case. Even if the Annunciation example were to convince us that a gospel harmony was used as a source, such a conclusion would have to include the caveat that it was used loosely. The *Protevangelium of James* makes omissions, additions, and changes as our examination of the three above examples reveal. Given that some of these changes are so significant, a case can be made that the materials used were pulled from memory since they are somewhat free and sometimes summarized. An important point, however, is that

unlike Justin whose writings took the form of apologies and descriptive dialogues, the *Protevangelium of James* is a narrative that demands a style of writing that requires inventive language in order to keep the plot moving forward. In other words, alongside the difficulty of determining if and how gospel harmonies were being used by our author, there is the complicated task of deciphering when loose quotations and parallel summaries found in the *Protevangelium of James* are simply the result of its narrative structure.

Finally, we can confirm that the *Protevangelium of James* in its telling of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus used the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Although we do not know the exact form of these gospels when our author accessed them, or precisely how he used them (e.g., a written source in front of him, memorized oral traditions, etc.), we do know that they must be considered alongside other influential material (e.g., LXX traditions, other gospel material like John or Mark,<sup>14</sup> etc.), when examining the *Protevangelium of James*. It is difficult to imagine that when creating the *Protevangelium of James* our author simply sewed together pieces of gospel traditions with his creative needle, adding and inventing phrases with the purpose of telling an important story. But it

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<sup>14</sup> There are five references in the *Protevangelium of James* that may betray some knowledge of the gospels of Mark and John. Some are very vague hints, while others show a stronger resemblance to Mark and John. The six possibilities are: [1] *Prot. Jas.* 15:16 has the priest demand of Joseph “not to give false witness” to the accusation made against him concerning Mary’s virginal state. This motif which has its roots in the Ten Commandments, may originate with Mark 10:19, but it is more likely taken from Matthew 19:18 and Luke 18:20; [2] *Prot. Jas.* 17:3 refers to Joseph’s “sons.” Again this reference may have its base in Mark 6:3, but it also appears to have been taken from Matt 13:56; [3] *Prot. Jas.* 19:18 identifies the Hebrew midwife by the name of Salome. This name appears in Mark 15:41 and may have been lifted from this source; [4] *Prot. Jas.* 16:7’s statement “neither do I condemn you” seems to be taken from John 8:11; and [5] *Prot. Jas.* 19:19 describes a skeptical Salome in the same language John 20:25 uses to describe doubting Thomas: “unless I insert my finger.” Although these references do not help us determine one way or another about our author’s use or knowledge of a gospel harmony source, they do provide us, however, with information about other possible materials with which he worked when creating this text.

is also difficult to picture him sitting down with an established harmonized source while producing this work. Although both possibilities require further research and investigation, our tentative foray into the issue of harmonization in the *Protevangelium of James* suggests that a middle ground between both possibilities may be most plausible.

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