

**Christopher Stroup**  
***The Christians Who Became Jews:  
Acts of the Apostles and  
Ethnicity in the Roman City***

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Luke's attitude toward and portrayal of Jews and Judaism in Acts remains a contested topic in the history of interpretation. The pendulum swings across a wide range of studies arguing that Acts is pro- or anti-Jewish (or for some, even antisemitic). Christopher Stroup's *The Christians Who Became Jews* complexifies this debate by arguing that Luke identifies "all Jesus followers, both Jews and non-Jews, as Jewish" (2). Stroup thus seeks to avoid this debate, with its assumption that Luke stands outside the Jewish community, by assessing Luke's posture toward Jews and Judaism as if he was involved in an intra-Jewish dispute. Indeed, for Stroup, "followers of Jesus do not make up just another Jewish community; rather, being a Jesus follower is a better way of being Jewish..." (2).

To substantiate this thesis Stroup offers a methodology that is both sophisticated and generative. First, Stroup draws heavily on Denise Kimber Buell's pioneering work on "ethnic reasoning" to animate how ethnic, religious, civic, and cultural identities shape Luke's rhetoric of peoplehood. Here, Stroup's work is exemplary in pushing back against generations of scholars who understood Christian identity as strictly religious and non-ethnic. Second, Stroup effectively draws on a recent trend among scholars of Acts (such as Laura Nasrallah, Drew Billings, and myself) to bring material culture into conversation with Luke's discursive world. Because both worlds "participate in the same ethnic discourse," Stroup moves the discussion beyond literary culture and considers the impact of materiality on everyday life in Greco-Roman civic space (11). The cumulative impact of this methodology is seen in all three goals of the book: (1) to bring Acts into conversation with the ways Roman-era urban religious activity functioned to classify ethnic identity; (2) to show that Acts portrays Jews in hybrid and complex ways rather than as an ethnically homogenous group, "the Jews"; and (3) to demonstrate how Acts portrays Paul's "movements through Roman civic landscapes in ways that

privilege Christians as a unified and legitimate embodiment of Jewishness within the *polis*" (3).

In chapter one, Stroup presents his views on the authorship, date, purpose, and provenance of Acts. Here he follows an increasing number of scholars who date Acts near the beginning of the second century. While Stroup acknowledges the narrative continuity of Luke-Acts, he also acknowledges the different contexts in which the books were written. For example, the Gospel Luke uses the word Ἰουδαῖος five times (which Stroup translates as "Jew" rather than as "Judean" [12]), while in Acts he uses the word seventy-nine times. The prominence of Jews in Acts, according to Stroup, reflects the author's concern with framing Jewish identity in the diaspora, where Stroup believes "Jewishness" was "more hotly contested" than in the land of Israel (19). Drawing parallels to elite Greeks during the Second Sophistic, Stroup argues that a major purpose of Acts is to legitimate Christians' place in the city based "on the way that they honored the God of Israel" (20). In this sense, Acts is profoundly urban and a discourse embedded in the interrelated and overlapping relationship between subjects' religious piety, ethnic identities, and the city's prosperity (22). The chapter concludes with a lively research history on Jews and Judaism in Acts from Hans Conzelmann (who reads Acts as anti-Jewish) to Jacob Jervell (who reads Acts as pro-Jewish) (23-35). Stroup argues forcefully that scholars between these poles reduce Christianity and Judaism to a theological / religious activity divorced from ethnic reasoning and civic identity. The result is a minimization of the ways Luke uses religious activities to legitimate Jesus followers' place within Judaism (see 35-39 for examples of this ethnic reasoning within Acts).

In chapter two Stroup brings Luke's list of nations in Acts 2:5-13 (the gathering at Pentecost) into conversation with Roman-era lists by Jews and non-Jews of other nations. Stroup animates the Roman imperial dimensions of Pompeiian and Augustan lists, wherein literary and material representations of conquered *ethnē* are portrayed as pacified and subordinated to Roman power. He discusses Virgil's *Aeneid* but oddly omits the list of nations in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Such ethnic reasoning could also be employed by subordinates, such as Philo of Alexandria, who remap the empire around Jerusalem in the *Legatio ad Gaium* in order to promote Jewish piety toward ancestral tradition throughout the diaspora (45-46). The Sebasteion complex at Aphrodisias, on the other hand, lists conquered nations to legitimate its own perceived privileged place in the empire, along with its shared piety toward its ancestral god. Indeed, this "hybrid model of ethnic reasoning ... was at the same time pro-Roman and pro-Aphrodisian" (51). Similarly, Stroup argues that Luke's list of nations presents Jews in a hybrid way in order to illuminate ethnic difference among Jews while simultaneously legitimating "the Jewishness of Christian non-Jews later in Acts" (54).

In chapter three Stroup argues that the Jerusalem council's ethnic reasoning affirms the Jewishness of Christian non-Jews by employing similar logic to that of the Salutaris Foundation inscription at Ephesus. He justifies this comparative analysis by noting that the inscription was composed within a decade or two of Acts' composition and that both texts take place in an urban context, including Ephesus

(71; see Acts 19:1-41). Salutaris, a wealthy Roman benefactor, uses Artemis, the Ephesian council, and the tribal system (even adding a Roman tribe to the Ephesian tribal structure) to “situate himself as simultaneously Ephesian and Roman” (80). With similar ethnic reasoning, Stroup writes, Luke appeals to the authority of Israel’s God, the concept of a Jewish proselyte, the Spirit’s movement, and the authority of James to show that Christian non-Jews “can be both Jewish and whatever else they once were. Like the proselytes, their identity is hybrid, but Jewish nonetheless” (80).

Stroup’s final chapter focuses on the relationship between ethnic reasoning and geographical movement through the Greco-Roman city. To legitimate the power of Rome, the Salutaris Foundation commissioned twenty-nine statues of Artemis, Ephesian tribes, and Roman Sebastoi, which were used to regulate Artemis’s movement through the city during regular processions. In this way, Roman benefactors were able to assert “a visual link between Ephesus and its mythic history that emphasized the present power of Rome” (101). Stroup then turns to Acts, and to Paul’s travels through Lystra, Thessalonica, and Corinth, wherein Paul’s ethnic reasoning asserts the Jewishness of Christians while positioning certain Jews as a destabilizing force in the city. These polemics are both intra-Jewish and apologetic, legitimating Christian Jewishness as the ideal Jewish community for the Roman-era polis.

*The Christians Who Became Jews* represents a sophisticated and genuinely innovative approach to understanding Acts’ literary representation of Jews and Judaism. Stroup successfully undermines the pervasive binary between ethnic Jews and universal / non-ethnic Christians, along with the pro- / anti-Jewish dichotomy regarding Luke’s views by showing that “One can be both Jewish and Carian, both Jewish and Cretan, both Jewish and Roman, or a non-Jewish *Jewish proselyte* ... and still qualify for the label ‘Jew’ in ancient civic space” (129). More provocatively, so-called “‘Christian universalism’ should be understood as a particular form of ‘Jewish universalism’” (132). The study will also serve as a helpful conversation partner for those doing work on ethnic reasoning in the Roman world and for those who use material culture and the epigraphic record for comparative analysis with literary texts from antiquity.

I have three minor criticisms. First, I wish Stroup would have provided a translation of parts of the inscription from the Salutaris Foundation. Second, Stroup acknowledges the wealth of Salutaris and Roman immigrants at Ephesus but does not interrogate how that privilege allowed them to manipulate their social status and ethnic identity. I would like to have heard Stroup reflect more on the impact of power, privilege, and social status on ethnic reasoning in the Greco-Roman world, including its presence or lack thereof in Acts. Finally, while Stroup acknowledges “an incipient supersessionist impulse” in Acts, I was left wondering at what point intra-Jewish invective materializes into a form of anti-Judaism (2, 132)? More nuance is needed here, especially since, as Stroup acknowledges, Acts is routinely used in the history of interpretation for supersessionist purposes. Indeed, ethically speaking, can we separate reception history from Luke’s portrayal of Jews and Judaism in Acts?

Stroup is to be commended for this learned book. All future studies of Jews and Judaism in Acts must engage with it.