

Crisis and Community

Introduction

FROM THE MOMENT THE text of the Didache found in *Codex Hierosolymitanus* (H) was published, scholars sought to determine its Jewish sources and its place and role within both nascent Christianity and Judaism. The degree of success has been varied. Much attention has been paid both to redactional and textual issues, but with a scarcity of data, not much attention has been paid to the reconstruction of the social situation of the Didachean community. Kurt Niederwimmer is representative of this in just very briefly asserting in his excellent commentary that the occasion for the Didache is unknown and that it was written “in a time of transition.”¹ Exactly what this transition entailed is not spelled out.

Once a first-century date was confirmed as feasible, the Didache’s Jewish origin began to receive further attention and it became increasingly significant as a Christian Jewish document composed prior to the so-called “parting of the ways.” This is enhanced by the fact that while it was complete by 85 CE, the Didache evidences both earlier and later strata, from different points in the history of the rapidly developing church. Further, whilst the earlier materials in Did. 1–6, and 16 are more individual in nature, the later materials in Did. 7–15 address matters of communal concern. While this study does not emphasize the redaction of the Didache, the evident developments in its social situation provide informative data and a basis upon which to examine its reception of the Torah.

In terms of methodology, this chapter will survey the literary evidence regarding the challenges the Didachean community faced. Abundant information is available not only from the New Testament but also early Jewish and Christian writings, not to mention the Didache itself.

1. Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 3.

These historical accounts provide much data regarding the situation of the Didachean community.

A point of comparison is Richard Horsley's examination of the historical context of Q, upon which the exploration of Q "depends."² Horsley's engagement with the context in which documents were composed is further relevant in terms of their oral composition and delivery, a compelling parallel as there is strong evidence that at least large portions of the Didache originated as orally presented teachings. Elsewhere in that respect Horsley also notes, "Performance of Q discourses before a community involved in a conflictual life situation meant that the text always had an immediate historical social context."³ As this chapter will show, the milieu the Didache addressed was characterized by various crises and difficulties, from without and within. As with the natural parallel in the sphere of New Testament interpretation, Horsley's approach is taken as instructive in his attempt to reconstruct, in his own words, "insofar as possible, the fundamental social structure and the corresponding social conflicts as a context for [the] actions and ideas evident in [the] literature."⁴ Furthermore, in the view of Stephen Barton in regard to the Gospels, it is still legitimate to search for their social location, for "it is an important act of the historical and social-scientific imagination."⁵

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part, "Socio-Political Conflict," describes the social and political situation in the eastern Mediterranean with a particular focus on how it affected Jewish-gentile relations in Antioch and the relationship between Christian Judaism and the wider Jewish community. The second part, "Divergent Agendas and the Didachean Community" will appraise the resultant stresses within the Didachean community itself, paying particular attention to the roles of the Didachist, the community, and the disciple, and their relationship to the rapidly growing Christian world and the gentile mission. Finally, "Transforming Crisis," will propose that against this background the Torah was a natural (if not the inevitable) paradigm for the Didache to address the problems raised by that mission in order to secure unity within the community.

2. Horsley, *The Historical Context of Q*, 46.

3. Horsley, *Introduction*, 8.

4. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*, 8.

5. Barton, *Can We Identify*, 194.

Socio-Political Conflict

Three related conditions during the time of the Didache's composition coalesced to bring social pressure on the Didachean community. These were 1. the troubled times in the Roman Empire at large; 2. the specific troubles in the city of Antioch and Syria as a whole due to Jewish unrest and revolt; and 3. the social troubles the community was experiencing in its relationship to the wider nascent Jewish and Christian communities.

A Troubled Empire

As the following paragraphs show, the years preceding the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE were difficult ones in the Roman Empire. Troubles for Christians and Jews both in Rome and Jerusalem were cause for concern, which had personal repercussions for Antioch, as it had connections both to Jerusalem's James and its own missionary, Paul, both of whom were killed during this time. Following this period, its aftermath was characterized by tension in western Syria.

In the preface to *Jewish War* Josephus states regarding the first Jewish revolt that "at the time when this great concussion of affairs happened, the affairs of the Romans themselves were in great disorder."⁶ These years were marred by at least two events that affected Christians.

The first of these was in 49 CE,⁷ when the Emperor Claudius (41–54 CE) drove the Jews out of Rome by edict, the event being reported in Acts 18:2 (= *Hist. eccl.* 2.18). The event was attributed to one "Chrestus" by Suetonius in the statement *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidu tumultuiantis Roma expulit*.⁸ From this cryptic comment, it is generally surmised that Suetonius was referring to conflicts over Christ among the Jews that aggravated the emperor to the point of expelling at least some of the community (this expulsion followed a previous expulsion under Tiberius in 19 CE).⁹ If that were so, one should not be surprised that just twelve years later (c. 61 CE) the Jewish community leaders in Rome desired "to hear from you [Paul] what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it

6. Josephus *War* 1.1.2 (Goold [LCL])

7. Following the accounting of Riesner, *Pauline Chronology*, 13–14.

8. Suetonius *Claud.* 25.4.

9. Suetonius *Tib.* 36.1; Josephus *Ant* 18.83–84. An extended treatment of Claudius' edict is provided by Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 18–20. An additional article argues that Claudius expelled the Jewish people from Rome on more than one occasion. See Slingerland, "Suetonius 'Claudius' 25.4."

is spoken against.”¹⁰ The last thing they would have wanted is more trouble ignited by the prisoner in Roman custody. This bolsters our interpretation of Suetonius’ comment and suggests that the event was likely a source of difficulty for Roman Jews, including Christian Jews.

The second event of note occurred during the same intervening period during Nero’s rule (54–68 CE). Tacitus relates that Christians were charged with the burning of Rome in 64 CE, Nero punishing them “with the utmost refinements of cruelty.”¹¹ Even centuries later, the effect of this injustice upon the Christian mindset is reflected in Eusebius’ comment regarding this event, based on a quotation from Tertullian, where he states that Nero was “the first of the emperors to be declared the enemy of the Deity.”¹² Eusebius makes this statement as if it is an established understanding. Certainly, he has Tertullian and Tacitus on his side as critics of Nero, but this is a specifically Christian accusation reflecting the effects of Nero’s actions upon the Christian consciousness.

Other events at a distance quite possibly also had a ripple effect upon the Didachean community. In 57 CE¹³ Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem¹⁴ and possibly after a period of freedom was executed in Rome, most likely in 67 or 68 CE.¹⁵ Further, as recorded in *Ant.* 20.200, another prominent Christian Jewish figure, James the brother of the Lord, was killed at the instigation of the high priest in the same year.¹⁶ While there is no record of James visiting Antioch, Paul states that James’ emissaries did visit the city.¹⁷ The high esteem in which James was held in Jerusalem, maybe even exaggerated in Eusebius’ quotation of Hegesippus,¹⁸ is arguably reflected in the influence his emissaries had in Antioch. As Paul was initially an emissary from Antioch, his death cannot have passed unnoticed, and as one who influenced the church there, James’ death must have been grievous for at least some.

A few years after this, and in an era for which Josephus claimed the affairs of the Romans were in “great disorder,” so much so that they created

10. Acts 28:17–22.

11. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.

12. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25

13. Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul*, 102.

14. Acts 21:33.

15. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 370–71.

16. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem*, 152.

17. Gal 2:12.

18. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.1.6; 2.23.

conditions conducive to “invention,”¹⁹ the first Jewish Revolt began. Roman oppression in Jerusalem and Galilee combined with Jewish apocalyptic speculation to embolden such a rebellion. It has to be noted however, as Martin Goodman points out, that the motivations for revolt were more complex than simply a search for “religious tolerance in Jerusalem.”²⁰ As Josephus noted in a reflective passage, “what did most elevate them in undertaking this war, was an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how, ‘at that time, one from their country would become ruler of the world.’”²¹

The 66–70 CE revolt itself was disastrous, not only for the Jews of Jerusalem and Galilee, but also throughout the region of western Syria, which from the towns Josephus lists included trans-Jordan as well as the areas north and east of the Galilee. Eusebius (heavily dependent upon Josephus and Hegesippus) passed on his understanding that during the revolt the Jerusalem Christian community fled to Pella,²² to the east of the Dead Sea. Whether this is correct or not, a sequence of events was in place such that, as S. T. Katz observes, leadership of the early church began to move from Jerusalem to “non-Palestinian centers, for example, Antioch and the cities of Asia Minor.”²³ This may well be the context behind Did. 3.10, “Welcome the things that happen to you as good, knowing that apart from God nothing happens,” for gentiles were liable to be lumped in with the Jews they had joined as Christians.

The effect of the revolt upon Christian Jews in Jerusalem and its environs was of concern to Christians elsewhere. Even prior to the revolt, Paul’s own collection for the Jerusalem community²⁴ speaks of such concern for the community during a time of hardship. When the war came to its conclusion, Vespasian made a search for royal pretenders and descendants of David who might claim the loyalty of his Jewish subjects.²⁵ It would be remarkable if Christians had so disassociated themselves from the family of Jesus that the emperor’s inquisition caused them no consternation. In fact, quoting Hegesippus, Eusebius records both this event and a further search for descendants of David by Vespasian’s son Domitian decades later. Hegesippus’ record of their trial and release²⁶ demonstrates that their fate was

19. Josephus, *War* 1.1.1.

20. Goodman, *The Roman World*, 174.

21. Josephus, *War* 6.3.12.

22. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3–5.

23. Katz, “Judaism and Christianity after 70,” 44.

24. 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:26–31.

25. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.13.

26. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.20.

indeed a matter of concern to Christians across a wide geographical area. It is thus evident that the nascent church was not isolated from the changes taking place in the Levant.

Following these events, despite the restoration of order in the Empire, unrest continued among the Jewish population. 2 Esdras 10 deals at length with the grief of the Jewish people after the destruction of the Temple whereby in 10.23 “the seal of Zion—for she has now lost the seal of her glory, . . . has been given over into the hands of those that hate us.” Gedaliah Alon has therefore argued that in this transitional period the destruction of the Temple neither eradicated resistance nor necessarily broke the spirit of the Jewish people.²⁷ Thus it was that only six decades later a yet greater Jewish revolt broke out. This second Jewish revolt, long after the Didache was complete, ultimately resulted in the leadership of the Jerusalem church being assigned to gentile bishops.²⁸

In summary, this review has shown that the years during which the Two Ways portion of the Didache was first taught were years in which Christians in the Roman Empire suffered a number of troubling injustices. Closer to Antioch, they were not only affected by the general political disorder but by concern for the fortunes of Jerusalem’s Christian community.

A Troubled City

A number of observations made by early historians confirm that while the city of Antioch did not suffer directly from the regional problems and those of the Empire in general it was yet deeply affected. Information regarding the political and social situation in Antioch comes largely from the writings of Josephus, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio. Josephus’ account is the most important and needs to be read in light of a few caveats. As Pauline Allen observes, “on one level Josephus’ *Jewish War* needed to concur with the Flavian commemoration of the war, reflecting the glory of the Roman victory by the new ruling family. At the same time, the text was also constructed to provide a counter narrative.”²⁹ In that narrative, Josephus demonstrated guarded sympathy for the Jewish people and their religion, as seen in his martyrology of Jews willing to suffer for their laws, and his exaltation of the Torah.³⁰ Perhaps, as Allen says, this is because in the face of an overwhelming Roman victory, personally and keenly felt by Josephus himself, he

27. Alon, *The Halacha in the Teaching*, 41.

28. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.6.4.

29. Allen, *The Jewish War*, 27.

30. e.g. Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.232–35; *War* 2.152–53.

needed to vindicate the God of the Jews. For “how does a person continue to honour and worship a deity that allegedly is now under the power of the Roman deities?”³¹ Viewed in contrast with his record of events elsewhere during the Jewish war however, there is no reason to doubt his basic perception of the situation of Jews in the region of Antioch.

According to Josephus, in Antioch itself the Jewish population was large and had dwelt in “undisturbed tranquility” since the days of Antiochus Epiphanes (c. 175–164 BCE). Jews were not only “particularly numerous” but were very much intermingled with the general population.³² In an indication of their general integration with the social fabric of the region, Josephus claimed that the Jews were “perpetually” active in proselytizing, thereby “in some measure” incorporating the general populace with themselves.³³ The overall picture he gives then is one of generally favorable relationships between the Jews in the region and their neighbors. Consequently, according to Josephus, Sidon and Apamea (thus the particular region for which the *Didache* was composed) and the city of Antioch, along with the Jewish population, remained relatively safe and secure as the Jewish revolt took hold.³⁴

There is reason to suppose that relations could not have remained as harmonious as Josephus made out. Syria was far from being isolated from events in the Empire and region at large. Shortly after the Jewish revolt began in 66 CE. Cestius Gallus had taken his entire twelfth legion out of Antioch itself, with thousands from other legions, to confront the rebellion.³⁵ The disastrous outcome of this campaign was recorded by Josephus himself, who as a retired soldier derisively claimed that Cestius’ siege of Jerusalem was lifted “contrary to all calculation” and recorded that his enemies seizing their chance, inflicted heavy losses on his fleeing forces.³⁶ It therefore follows that upon the decimated forces’ return to Antioch the population would have been most aware of the legion’s humiliating defeat. Yet whereas the city of Antioch was therefore affected by this episode, it was elsewhere—Damascus—that an enraged population turned on the Jewish people.³⁷

The rapid succession of emperors that followed Nero’s death in 68 CE ended with a particular contribution from Antioch. In the midst of the war

31. Allen, *The Jewish War*, 17.

32. Josephus, *War* 7.43.

33. Josephus, *War* 7.45.

34. Josephus, *War* 2.479.

35. Josephus, *War* 2.500.

36. Josephus, *War* 2.540.

37. Josephus, *War* 2.559–61.

to suppress the first Jewish revolt at Jerusalem, Vespasian left the Roman legions under his son Titus' direction and successfully acquired power in Rome, being elected Emperor at the end of 69 CE. This was in part due to the support of Mucianus the governor of Syria. This was a major event for Antioch, which welcomed its governor's support of Vespasian.³⁸

Rather than improving matters, Vespasian's accession to power and the end of the revolt exposed the underlying tensions between Antioch's Jews and the rest of the city's population. Josephus records that after the war "the Jews who remained at Antioch were under accusations, and in danger of perishing, from the disturbances that were raised against them by the Antiochians."³⁹ In a subsequent series of events, Antiochene Jews were betrayed and falsely accused by one Antiochus, a Jew who had turned against them. As a result many were slaughtered by other Antiochenes, but ultimately public order was restored.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, "the Jews were under great disorder and terror."⁴¹ This was an inevitable consequence of Titus' policies following the war, as he did not shy from "making his Jewish captives serve to display their own destruction" in "costly spectacles" throughout Syria.⁴² Thus, while the region surrounding Antioch may well have been more stable than elsewhere, persecutions of the Jewish people were nevertheless endemic and the relationship between the Jews and the rest of the populace fraught with danger.

Nevertheless, despite the Antiochian appeal to do so following his successful suppression of the Jewish revolt, Titus, now general of the victorious Roman army, refused to diminish the status of the Jews of Antioch.⁴³ Wayne Meeks and Robert Wilken have argued that "there is no evidence that the war and its aftermath produced any substantial change in the status of the Antiochene Jews."⁴⁴ In the long term, this was largely the case. However, as has been seen, highly disturbing events did occur within the Jewish community there and it would be highly remarkable if Jews were not put in a prejudicial situation.

In summary, the record left by early historians demonstrates the underlying tensions present within Antiochian society. Furthermore, with a church comprising both Jews and gentiles, the Christians of Antioch were inevitably

38. Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.76–80.

39. Josephus, *War* 7.41.

40. Josephus, *War* 7.47–60.

41. Josephus, *War* 7.62.

42. Josephus, *War* 7.96.

43. Josephus, *War* 7.110–11.

44. Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 13, 5.

affected by these events. While the city of Antioch was a somewhat amenable environment for Jews who lived in peace with their gentile neighbors, the situation was tense and disrupted by events in the region as a whole, and in the city it resulted in occasional anti-Jewish disturbances.

A Troubled Society

Evidence that the Didachean community experienced difficulty in its relationships with both nascent Jewish society and wider nascent Christianity becomes apparent in its use of two terms: “hypocrite” and “Christian.” In terms of Jewish society, Luke’s account substantiates the view that a strident, assertive Jewish community⁴⁵ occasionally made things difficult for the early church. The ability of the Jewish community to do so was precisely because the early Christian community was still within its own orbit. At the same time, the Didachean account is one of differentiation. This is largely what gives rise to Jürgen Zangenbergs characterization of the Didache as a document of “alienation.”⁴⁶ Certainly, the Didache evidences a conflictual relationship with parties close to it. That conflict is reflected in the use of the designation “hypocrite” in the Didache.

If it is right, as many scholars suppose, that the Didachean milieu had much in common with that of Matthew, David Sim’s view that conflict with formative Judaism was the “most serious crisis facing the Matthean community” is instructive. Matthew prominently warns his readers of the “hypocrites,” especially in Matthew 6 and 23. As Daniel Harrington says, in the Matthean movement the term “hypocrites” for the scribes and Pharisees is “one of Matthew’s favorite designations for the opponents of Jesus and (by extension) of the Matthean community.”⁴⁷ Throughout the Didache, hypocrisy is also decried and denounced.⁴⁸ In the Two Ways section, it is identified with a kind of behavior, but in Did. 8.1–2 it is identified with a particular party who “fast on Mondays and Thursdays,” which were (and are) the traditional days of fasting in the Jewish world. To identify the “hypocrites” of the Didache with the scribes and Pharisees of Matthew has been difficult to confirm with certainty however.

In the early days of Didache studies, George Allen took the Didache’s designation of hypocrites as “obviously” borrowed from Matthew 6.⁴⁹ More

45. Acts 9:1–2; 13:45; 15:1,5; 17:5, 13; 21:27–28.

46. Zangenbergs, *Social and Religious Milieu of the Didache*, 65.

47. Harrington, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 166.

48. Did. 2:5; 4.12; 5.1; 8.1, 2.

49. Allen, *The Didache*, 15.

recently, Draper reviewed the evidence and concurred with “most scholars” that as in Matthew, the Didache does indeed have the Pharisees in view. In this, he acknowledged that he differs from Harnack, Audet, and Niederwimmer, but does so in view of the likelihood that the Didache refers to “the Pharisees in particular.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the consensus remains that it is not simply the Pharisees who are called hypocrites. Willy Rordorf revisited the issue shortly after, concluding that the hypocrites were certain Judaeo-Christians who remained attached to Jewish ritual practices, but not the Pharisees.⁵¹ Aaron Milavec, adding among other points the observation that the Pharisees were not distinguished by fasting, therefore confirmed the view that the hypocrites of the Didache were not specifically Matthew’s Pharisees.⁵² The discussion confirms the view that whether or not it is the Pharisees or some other group or party within the Jewish world, in both Matthew and the Didache there is an attempt to disparage a party with similar ideals but with less-than-ideal execution of them.

After 70 CE, the difficulties of the Didachean community with the Jewish world did not improve along with the relative restoration of peace to the Empire and region. Jewish sectarianism had indeed in some ways abated in the wake of the Temple’s destruction, yet while “after 70 the rabbis tolerated and preserved different opinions”⁵³ the tolerance did not extend to “heretics” who refused to accept the majority opinion.⁵⁴ Christian Jews were no exception to this intolerance, thus the use of an isolating term such as “hypocrites” for others in Jewish society should be no surprise.

In addition to a difficult relationship to Jewish society, the churches addressed by the Didache also had problems related to the Jesus movement as a whole. Here too we are alerted to the situation by terminology, in particular their apparent adoption of the word Χριστιανός. It is in Did. 12.4 that the word first appears in the non-canonical record after its initial occurrence in Acts 11:26. In the Acts context it is with reference to Barnabas and Saul teaching “a great many people” in Antioch with the result that, according to Luke, their new “disciples” were first called Χριστιανούς. The Didache’s usage points to similar acceptance of the term. In this they were to be identified with the Jesus movement.

Χριστιανός is used in Did. 12:4 without explanation, suggesting that by that time the term was well known. Its use in the Didache thus parallels

50. Draper, *Christian Self-Definition*, 233.

51. Rordorf and Tuilier, *La Doctrine Des Douze Apôtres*, 224. “Il est donc clair que les hypocrites évoqués par le didachiste au ch. 8 désignent principalement certains judéo-chrétiens qui restaient attachés aux pratiques rituelles du judaïsme.”

52. Milavec, *The Didache: Faith*, 302–3.

53. Magness, *Sectarianism*, 71.

54. Magness, *Sectarianism*, 71–72.

that of Acts 11:26 in respect to there being no suggestion of the opprobrium evident in the later texts and 1 Peter. The origin of the term is a matter of some discussion. David Horrell indicates that “there is a good deal to be said for the thesis that it was first coined in Latin, in the sphere of Roman administration, arising from the encounter between Christianity and the imperial regime (in the provinces?).”⁵⁵ In this case, the term would have borne a somewhat negative connotation, as the new Jesus movement was hardly likely to have come to Roman attention as a commendable development.

The use of the term “Christian” in a deprecatory sense is seen in 1 Pet. 4:14, 16 which attests to a Christian attempt to transform the insult into a badge of honor. Certainly this was Ignatius of Antioch’s approach to the term in the early second century⁵⁶ and by the late second century Theophilus of Antioch expresses the very same sentiment. Theophilus writes “you call me a Christian, as if this were a damning name to bear, I, for my part, avow that I am a Christian.”⁵⁷ None of this is demonstrable from the Didache however. If the term did have negative connotations, those connotations were not so severe in Antioch to warrant comment.

A difficulty with the term was that there were those who used it for their own advantage. The Christian in Did. 12.4 is an outsider, someone who comes to join the community and needs employment. A picture emerges of a community accustomed to absorbing others, quite possibly others in difficulty and need.⁵⁸ A further adaptation, *χριστέμπορος* (Christ-monger), in Did. 12.5 implies that among the genuine, there were those who would abuse the hospitality of the well-meaning Christians. The term was possibly a “neologism”⁵⁹ yet relied upon the assumption that this derivation from *Χριστός* was comprehensible, which evidently it was. Its use in the Didache suggests an internal threat in terms of the need to defend the community from those who would seek benefit from it without contributing. As part of the Christian world, the Didachean community was subject to those who would scurrilously use their Christian identity to their advantage.

55. Horrell, “The Label *Χριστιανός*,” 364.

56. Ign. *Eph.* 11.2; Ign. *Magn.* 4.1; Ign. *Rom.* 3.2.

57. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 1.1.

58. Stephen Patterson suggests that these were refugees from the Jewish war, in *The Legacy of Radical Itineracy*. Milavec argues strongly against this on the basis that the time frame of a war would indicate only a short-term problem *The Didache: Faith*, 450–52. Since the war lasted from 66–70, and had precursors and after-effects as well, Patterson’s thesis can not be so easily dismissed. In addition, other circumstances such as the famine in Jerusalem and possible periodic persecution of Christians in the city might also have resulted in Christians seeking shelter in other communities such as in Antioch.

59. Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 187.

In summary, the two terms “hypocrite” and “Christian” show two types of difficulties the churches addressed by the Didache faced. With the Jewish community, they found themselves at odds with a party with whom they also had something in common, and in certain respects needed to be differentiated from. With the wider Christian community, they found themselves burdened with transients who were sometimes less than willing to pull their own weight. In having surveyed the community’s place in the Empire, in Antioch, and in the Christian and Jewish worlds, a rationale for the Didache as a document written in response to that situation can be countenanced. As set out in the next pages, these external challenges were matched by challenges internal to the community. The chart below accentuates major political upheavals during the time of the Didache’s composition.

Timeline of Events During the Didache’s Composition

Local Events		Foreign Events
	49	Jews expelled from Rome
Jerusalem Council	50	
Paul arrested	57	
James killed	62	
	64	Great Fire of Rome
Jewish Revolt begins	66	12th Legion defeated
	66	Paul, Peter killed
	67	Nero Dies
	68–69	Year of the Four Emperors
	69	Vespasian becomes Emperor
Temple destroyed	70	Titus affirms Jewish status in Antioch
Didache redacted	70–85	
Jewish Revolt ends	73	

Divergent Agendas and the Churches of the Didache

The external circumstances for the churches of the Didache are reflected in the divergent agendas of its parties: the Didachist, the churches “he” addressed, and the Christian world. A clearer depiction of these makes it possible to construct a framework for the Didache’s reception of the *Torah*, which is a key to understanding how the Didachist intended it to be implemented in the Didachean community.

The Disciple

The background of the disciple and the disciple’s affinity to “Judaism” is not stated, but he or she is reasonably presumed to be of pagan origins. There are various indicators of this, the most prominent being the Didache’s title. Arguably authentic, as discussed in chapter 2, the title explicitly addresses the Didache to the “gentiles.” Van de Sandt and Flusser propose that “the ethical catechesis incorporated in the Didache (the Two Ways *plus* Did. 6:2–3) and the Didache itself envisage converts to Christianity from paganism.”⁶⁰ The task and agenda of the Didachist’s disciple was thus to renounce the Way of Death, associated with his or her pagan background, and conform to the Way of Life.

The Two Ways section of the Didache addresses the inductee regarding what seem to have been Jewish notions of “gentile” vices. Such notions can be seen in the Pauline epistles,⁶¹ although in the broader context of all those “outside Christ.”⁶² 1 Peter 4:3 epitomizes this, contrasting living “for the will of God” with living as the “gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.” Matthew also reveals such conceptions, 5:47 and 6:32 betraying the assumption that Jews should live by a higher moral code than others. That such attitudes were not peculiar to Christianity, or Christian Jews, is plain from the Qumran literature. Thus, Peter’s concern with idolatry, similar to Did. 3:3, 5:1, and 6:3, is echoed in 4Q395, which likens it to fornication. Without belaboring the point, gentile attitudes towards Judaism were sometimes also characterized by “not so much hatred as aversion.”⁶³ Suffice to say that despite the inductee’s attraction to Judaism, in this case Christian Judaism, the two parties came from different worlds.

60. Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 32.

61. E.g. Rom 1:18–32; 1 Thess 4:5.

62. López, “Pauline Passages with Vice Lists,” 302.

63. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People*, 3.1, v. 3.1, p. 153.

The disciple was being brought into a community of believers by different criteria and procedures than converts to Judaism. While the *Didache* was written for the very purpose of inducting non-Jews into the Christian community, circumcision is not even alluded to in its pages. As one of its goals is to encourage the inductee to bear as much of the “yoke” of the Lord as possible (*Did.* 6.2) this is all the more remarkable. In common with the early church in general, the *Didachist* demonstrates a motivation to induct non-Jewish converts despite cultural disparities and Jewish opposition. In his survey of evidence regarding Jewish-Christian relations before 70 CE, Jack Sanders demonstrates that the Christian Jewish readiness to accept gentiles into their community without the need for circumcision or conversion to Judaism was a key cause of friction between Christian Jews and those of the mainstream. “What seems certain is that Paul, himself, and others contemporary with him and perhaps prior to him were flogged in synagogues for allowing Gentiles to become Christians without at the same time becoming converts to Judaism (by being circumcised).”⁶⁴

The disciple was highly motivated. The *Didache* makes it clear that she or he was seeking a costly way of life that would divorce him from his presumably pagan background. The disciple sought to avoid such practices as *περικαθαίρων*, or ritual cleansings (*Did.* 3:4) which were pagan “rites intended to remove the contagion of sin or ritual impurity.”⁶⁵ The disciple’s motivation is indicated in his willingness to risk being hated (*Did.* 1.3). Further, without having to speculate as to the social situation as does Milavec,⁶⁶ the disciple is indisputably motivated enough to accept an ethos that accepts abuse from others and “turns the other cheek” (*Did.* 1.4). From the milieu from which he may have come as a God-fearer, he is required to separate from “hypocrites” as in *Did.* 8.1–2.

While it will be argued later that the Two Ways comprised a Torah for gentiles, regardless of the outcome of that discussion the disciple was willing to undertake a radical and demanding discipleship program and at the very least assent to it as an ideal and not deviate from the teaching given (*Did.* 6.1; 11.2); to seek to bear the “whole yoke” of the Lord (*Did.* 6.2); avoid idolatry (*Did.* 6.3); and upon baptism adopt a life integrated with that of the community (*Did.* 7–15). The disciple was making a substantial change in life that would allow full participation in a community that prayed together, ate together, celebrated the Eucharist together, and had a rudimentary welfare system to which all members contributed and all

64. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians*, 9.

65. Knox, “*περικαθαίρων* (*Didache* iii 4),” 146–47.

66. Milavec, *The Didache: Faith*, 743–68.

could potentially benefit. Lastly, in view of the eschaton, the inductee had the potential to be found “perfect” in the Eschaton (Did. 16.2). Whereas the Didachist’s agenda was to regulate the community, the disciple’s agenda ultimately involved personal benefit even at great personal cost. While the two agendas coincided, in this they also potentially diverged.

In summary, the disciple had taken a daunting choice to adopt a new and costly way of life that would divorce him from his past, requiring significant motivation. This would, at least on a temporary basis, require that his agenda was a personal one as he sought acceptance in his new community.

The Community

As much as the Didachist had an agenda, so did the Didachean community. Following the Two Ways material of the Didache there is a notable switch from singular to plural in Did. 7.1 which signifies that the Didachist is now addressing the community in general. As a major literary feature of the Didache, it is to this change of voice that we now turn.

As seen in chapter 2, the Didachean community was more than a sole congregation and not limited to the city of Antioch. Thus, the Didachist’s instructions regarding liturgical form, appointment of leaders, and rules regarding migrants all lend themselves to adoption by multiple groups. In this regard, the community addressed in the Didache fits well with the New Testament picture, which portrays the early Jesus movement as a network commonly meeting in houses. This is seen in Luke’s account in Acts 5:42; 8:3; 12:12; 16:40; 18:7; 20:20; as well as in Rom 16:3–5; Col 4:15; and Phlm 1–2. Various writers have come to this conclusion. As Bradley Blue writes, this “was the period of the ‘house church’: a domestic residence used by the Christian community *before* any physical alterations were made to the building itself in order to better facilitate the communities (sic) specific needs.”⁶⁷ Shaye Cohen also finds little evidence that synagogues were very common in this time.⁶⁸ It is therefore reasonable to doubt that the Didacheans would have had many, if any of their own facilities. More likely, in addition to homes as Edward Adams’ research bears out on the basis of “literary references and/or ecclesiastical archaeology” they used places such as “shops and workshops, barns and warehouse cells.”⁶⁹

67. Blue, *Acts and the House Church*, 2, 188.

68. Cohen, *Evidence on the Ancient Synagogue*, 161.

69. Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 156. Representing the traditional view, Roger Gehring in his recent study on house churches suggests that “we can assume a plurality of house churches in Antioch” *House Church and Mission*, 112–13.