Biblical purity laws command that holy food should be eaten in a state of purity. Such are the heave-offerings and portions of the hattat and shelamim sacrifices, namely, food that is closely related to the Temple and the priests (Lev. 7:19-21; 21:1-8; Num. 18:8ff.). However, beginning the Second Temple period, the Jewish purity system contained an additional concept which we shall term "non priestly purity". The best-known practice that illustrates this concept is the phenomenon of eating ordinary food in purity, which both Rabbinic sources and the New Testament ascribe to the Pharisees. According to this perception, every daily food should be kept from the same causes of the biblical levitical impurity which threatened sacred food. This practice is called in Rabbinic sources hullin (literally, profaned or non-sacred) purity.

G. Alon has discussed the practice of eating ordinary food in purity with the regulations of purification before prayer, and reading the Torah in the Synagogue. Alon considered these three precepts of purity as transference of the priestly bounds of purity to the daily life of the lay people, as a concept of common holiness. His observation is fundamental for our research, since, as we shall see, these three different purity practices derived from the same religious perception. J. Neusner has stressed that one of the major characteristics of the Pharisees was the

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1 G. Alon, "The Bounds of the Laws of Levitical Cleanliness," in: idem, 
Jews, Judaism and the Classical World (tr. I. Abrahams) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977) 190-234. Alon was preceded by Büchler, who minimized this phenomenon and argued that most of the sources deal with the priestly purity of the heave-offering. See: A. Büchler, Der Galiläische 'Am-Ha'ares des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts (Wien 1906; repr. Hildesheim 1968).
eating of ordinary food in purity. A. Oppenheimer examined the estrangement of the Pharisees and Sages from those who disregarded non-priestly purity—the 'Am-ha'aretz. Lately, E.P. Sanders argued that not all the Pharisees ate ordinary food in purity, and those who did so were less strict than the priests. The works of Neusner and Sanders have stimulated debate regarding the extent and character of the phenomenon of "table fellowship," or, using our term, non-priestly purity.

However, in spite of the intensive scholarly interest in the subject, several issues remained unclear. Accordingly, we suggest conducting a historical survey of the written evidence, with the use of new testimonies from Qumran, and especially from archaeological excavations, and a new approach to the religious and social characteristics of this well-known phenomenon. These may provide new understanding concerning a few major questions that still require explanation: First, who were those who observed non-priestly purity? Was it characteristic of the Pharisees alone? Secondly, how did people observe it in their daily life? Here we should use archaeological finds of stone vessels and ritual baths. Thirdly, why did Jews observe non-priestly purity? Were there any religious motivations or social causes for imposing the levitical purity system on daily life outside the realm of the Temple and the priests? In examining this problem we will use theories from other fields, such as sociology and anthropology, in order to understand the place of bodily purity in Jewish religious and social life. Fourthly, following our conclusions, we will suggest a new interpretation for Jesus' attitude towards the Pharisees' observance of non-priestly purity.

The Historical Evidence

The first appearance of the concept of non-priestly purity is in the Apocrypha. Tobit, from the tribe of Naphtali, purified himself by water

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4 E.P. Sanders, "Did the Pharisees Eat their Ordinary Food in Purity?" in: idem, Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishna (London and Philadelphia: SCM and Trinity, 1990) 134-254.