

Grace Wells

New Testament

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Paul the Jewish Theologian

Paul the Jewish Theologian was written by Brad H. Young in 1997. There are two forwards in the book, one by Cheryl Anne Brown and the other by Burton Visotzky. The book contains ten chapters about the character Paul, Judaism, Christianity, and the Torah. It is a total of 139 pages long. It costs 18 dollars on amazon. This book reviews Paul and the author's observations of him.

Paul the Jewish Theologian is a very important piece of theological writing that Young has written since he earned his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Judaism and Early Christianity at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel. It took him ten years to complete both of his degrees. Some of the books he has also written are “The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation”, “The Jewish Background to the Lord’s Prayer”, and “Jesus the Jewish Theologian”. Young is a professor at Oral Roberts University for New Testament Studies at the Graduate School of Theology. Along with being a published author and professor, Young is also the President and founder of the Gospel Research Foundation, located in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As well as a founding member of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research. His doctoral dissertation was supervised by Professor David Flusser. David Flusser is another author and important member of the academic community surrounding the New Testament. Although Young’s dissertation is very intriguing , this review will look over Young’s observations of Paul throughout the New Testament. The review was written for scholars and students that want to

learn more about Paul and how he connected his philosophy to his heritage.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to what the book is about. It says how the New Testament describes Paul and how they say that he is “a Pharisee who comes to faith in Jesus as the Messiah, boldly proclaiming the gospel as the power of the God of Israel.” Chapter one speaks of Paul’s life and how he used to be Saul. Saul was a man that was a persecutor of Christians, he thought that he was doing right in God’s eyes. He was soon met on the road to Damascus by God and soon became Paul. This chapter is short because it is mainly used as an introduction to what the rest of the book holds. They end with saying that Paul is a bridge builder from different people groups. He argues over ideas that the people have of God and gains awareness and insight.

Chapter two “Paul the Jewish Theologian” begins with saying that Paul was both Jewish and a theologian but they raise the question if he was considered a Jewish theologian. This chapter went more into the linguistics of Paul’s life. One idea it goes into is what makes Paul so difficult to understand? They say that there are a lot of key questions that come up concerning Paul’s life. I think that this is understandable. Paul wrote a decent number of books in the New Testament and has a lot of interesting content to dive deeper into. They say that Paul can be misunderstood because we don’t understand his Judaism. This chapter is quite long covering a lot of concepts about Paul; what Paul was really like, his background, the Torah, places he visited, things he went over, and a lot more. I think that this chapter is one of the most important ones because it provides a good base for the rest of the book and provides a ton of good information for the readers.

Chapter three “Pentecost, the nations of the world and the apostle Paul” speaks of Christianity spreading throughout the world. One of the main things talked about in this chapter

is the Passover as well as the Pentecost. In Christianity, the passover is a Jewish celebration when the early followers of Jesus came together and were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Passover is a celebration of how God delivers. Pentecost is the “divine empowerment of service”. The beginning of the chapter reviews over the two holidays and what they mean to people. The chapter later goes into Israel and the people of Israel as well as the Torah. A lot of this chapter is really focused on the book of Acts because that is the beginning of when Christianity really started spreading. The chapter ends with saying that the words of Jesus are not only for one people group but for multiple and that it must spread.

Chapter four “Judaism and Christianity: Diverse Perspectives on Torah” begins with a quote by Abraham Joshua Heschel from “The Insecurity of Freedom”. It then goes into how Jesus came to fulfill the law that was said and how the Torah can be a firm foundation for both people in Judaism and Christianity. Another person it speaks about is Marcion. He denied the Hebrew faith as well as Christianity. He fought the validity of many things that Jews and Christians believe and was able to gain a good amount of followers. Jesus and the apostle Paul both valued the Torah while Marcion did not. This chapter was able to go more in depth with the differences with what they believed and why. It talks about the meaning of fulfill, law, and abolish. The chapter ends with how Jesus and Paul were for the Torah and Marcion was not. But some modern Christian teachings separate Jesus’s message from the Jewish beliefs and heritage they have.

Chapter five “The Torah: Roots of Grace and Faith in Paul’s Message” begins with saying that Christians have a tendency to believe that the law of the old covenant is not important because of the new testament. It mentions the law and the grace that is mentioned in the Bible and how God did not change from the old testament to the new testament. He is still the same

God, there are just different people. It speaks of the grace that is involved in Judaism as well as the grace that is there for all the sinners. Paul made sure that people know that Jesus wanted them to be saved so that they could spend eternity with him. This chapter also reviewed that to be a Christian you need to have works not just say you are a christian but it differs because you are not saved by works alone. A person is saved by God's grace but in order to show that you are a christian to others you should live how God wants you to live and to show others with your words and actions. I think that this chapter is one of the important ones because it speaks a lot on salvation and grace.

Chapter six "Torah: The Dead Letter or the Living Word?" talks a lot about exactly what it mentions in the title, the Torah. It begins with the question: "Is Paul against the law?" The torah is something that was good for Paul. It helped him with his thinking and how he was going to share his word with the people. This chapter again mentions how christians should know the importance of jewish heritage and teaching. It can help them understand the Bible better as well as what Paul was saying in many of his books. It goes over the question are we a slave to sin or to God. Christians can not live any life they want once they accept Christ, they have to be living proof of God. They can't wander around in sin like they used to in their old lives. It mentions how the Torah is the problem but it also isn't the solution. The problem with everything is sin. Paul was able to demonstrate a principle to get a deeper understanding of the torah. He thought it was important for us to further understand it and its teachings.

Chapter seven "The Transcendence of Torah in Paul's Teachings" speaks of how Paul's teachings go beyond systematic theology. His view of what the Torah is isn't like anyone else in his time. Marcion is again mentioned and it says how he believed that the Torah was "dark teachings of the creator God." Unlike jews who thought that the torah was a "powerful force of

goodness”, Paul showed the torah as more mysterious. This chapter reviews the Judaism of both Paul and Jesus. There was also a part of the chapter that went into Moses. Moses was a good example of obedience and he was able to make disciples. The last part of the chapter is slaves of righteousness. This goes over righteousness and how Paul believed that it is a way of life. The Torah can be seen as many things but it is limitless.

Chapter eight “Love as the Foundation of Christian Ministry: The Model of 1 Corinthians 13” speaks about the love chapter of the Bible. This is often read at many weddings. This chapter answers the questions about if Paul was the one that wrote it, if it was originally placed where it is, was it written earlier and Paul just adapted it, and many others. It then looks at the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is a very important topic in Christianity, a lot of the Bible is filled up with God performing miracles. But love is the main theme of this chapter. Paul’s love chapter is a very important point in his message. He stresses faith, hope, and love. Being a christian means you have to love others. Love is one of the most important things in our lives, you can’t live without it. Paul says to “make love your aim and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.” This is such an important point to be made to the church to focus on love and what you can do for God and others.

Chapter nine “The Essence of Paul’s Jewish Faith” reviews the roots of our faith as well as around Jesus and Paul's time. This chapter attempts to answer two questions: “What is the Jewish concept of God? And what does the new testament teach about the nature of the one God from the Hebrew Scriptures?” Next it goes into the power of God’s reign and how the parables that the rabbis taught were proof of that. It went into more things that the pharisees taught such as the resurrection and their concept of it. There was also their belief that the soul as well as the body would rise again. They believe that there is something called an eternal unity between a

person's earthy body and their soul. It also pointed out the rabbi's parable of the figs being stolen. One of the last ideas this chapter touches on is righteous living in the kingdom. Paul encourages people to live a life full of righteousness to God. Paul also expressed the need that people need to experience the power of God with his divine sovereignty. When people experience God in their own special ways they will be more willing to obey him.

Chapter ten "seven pillars of Paul's Jewish Theology" is the last chapter in this book. One was that Paul was a Pharisee. This states that he never went from one religion to another. Two is Paul's view of the Torah was always positive. He saw that Torah as something that is good and is used for God's plan. Number three is Paul's mission separated him from the historical Jesus. They both shared a common bond but Paul worked among pagan gentiles and Jesus was more around the Jews. Four is Healing love must characterize the Christians' life of ministry to others. This emphasizes the importance of love as Christians. Number five is the grace of God is revealed through Jesus the Messiah. This allows everyone who wants to be forgiven to have fellowship with God. Number six is the resurrection of Jesus is the first fruit. You have to die to the flesh in order to live a holy life. Lastly number seven is Jesus is coming again to complete the work of redemption. This is to make sure that we are prepared for when Jesus is coming back to earth.

I have not read many books that review over characters in the Bible. I have read other Christian books but they were based more on the Christian faith and living than in depth analysis of Bible characters. So the main book that I can compare this to would be the Bible. That is the basis of where Young got his information on Paul and I think that if someone was to read this book they should read the Bible first so that they would have a better understanding of what

they're reading.

I enjoyed this book and I liked that it was not too long. I think that this was more directed at people who have an understanding of who Paul is, but are searching for more on his background and philosophies. I liked that the language throughout the book was simple enough to understand but still sounded educated. This can be seen as a strength because it is written for everyone, but it can also be seen as a weakness because it might be seen not as serious of a piece of academic writing by other professors or doctors. I would recommend this book to students who want to learn more about Paul, and who want to understand his teachings and background better. I think that it can be very helpful to those who want to learn more about the Bible, especially the New Testament and Paul's life.

Work Cited

Young, Brad H. *Paul, the Jewish Theologian: a Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles*. Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2012.