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Book Review II – "Paul The Jewish Theologian

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Brad H. Young writes a compelling history of the Apostle Paul in his book "Paul The Jewish Theologian A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles." Each chapter describes Paul and his role as a Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles. Some of the chapters in his book include: Paul as the Jewish Theologian (p. 6), Pentecost, the Nations of the World, and the Apostle Paul (p. 50), Judaism and Christianity: Diverse Perspectives on Torah (p. 61), The Torah: Roots of Grace and Faith in Paul' Message (p. 70), Torah: The Dead Letter or the Living Word (p. 86)? Young puts forth before the reader Paul's uphill battle to stay faithful to Christianity and Judaism. He shows how Paul was rejected in the synagogue and misunderstood by the church. The synagogue did not accept his style of Pharisaism. The Pharisees did not accept Paul's messianism based on his vision on the Damascus Road. Young's book gives the reader a broader insight into Paul as a Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles.

As we look at "Paul, the Jewish Theologian," chapter 2, asks the question, "Is it possible to describe Paul as a Jewish theologian?" Young makes the point that because Paul is most remembered as the Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles, it has caused much debate for those looking for a religious or political debate (p. 6). "As a pioneer theologian, Paul created problems for his own people – the Jews – as well as for the Gentiles" (p. 6). Paul never denied himself as a Pharisee, even when he went beyond his own culture and faith. Young providers the reader with Paul's background from being born in Tarsus but living and studying in Jerusalem. Young asks questions referencing Paul's relationship to Tarsus and Jerusalem. "Was Paul influenced more by Tarsus or Jerusalem? Was he authentically Jewish is his approach to his religious teachings and efforts to bear witness to his experience?" (p. 7). Paul worked primarily among the Gentiles. He challenged dominant religious views and preached against various forms of idolatry, beliefs, and practices. Young lets us know that Paul's mission was difficult. Despite the difficulty, Paul remained steadfast in his mission to the Gentiles and was deeply rooted in his Jewish way of thinking (p. 7). Young likens the Pauline epistles to the television game show Jeopardy. He

states studying Paul's letters is like reading answers without the questions. The reader of Paul's letters is forced to guess what the original questions surrounding his letters were (p. 8).

Young continues to explore Paul's background to gain greater insight into understanding his Jewish faith. Again, Young introduces his readers to questions only a more in-depth look into Paul's background may satisfy. "Was Paul a Hellenized Greek Jew from Tarsus?" "Or was he a Pharisee trained by Gamaliel in Jerusalem?" "Did he cancel the Torah once and for all?" "Have works of Torah lost significance because of faith?' "Did he exclude the Jewish people from the family of God by speaking of the church as the new Israel that completely replaced the old?" "Did he deny the teachings of Jesus and become the second founder of Christianity?" "What is crucial for Pauline theology?" Young explores all these questions as he looks at Paul the Pharisee among the Christians, Jews, and Gentiles. Young starts with Paul in Jerusalem, not like most scholars who start with Paul in Tarsus. Young acknowledges, "Paul never canceled Torah, but made the necessary distinctions between Jews and Gentiles in the mysterious plan of God" (p. 10). Paul underlines the teachings of Jesus as well as the authority of the law and the prophets. In Chapter 2, Young reveals important distinctions between Paul as a Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles. Some crucial distinctions include: A Pharisee Among the Christians (p. 16), Paul and Jerusalem (p. 18), Paul and Torah (p. 19), Law and Torah? (p. 22), Paul's Conceptual Approach (p. 24), Replacement or Engraftment? (p. 27), Marcion or Jesus? (p. 33), Paul's Conceptual Approach: A Jewish Way of Thinking (p. 40).

In Chapter 3, Young discusses "Pentecost, the Nations of the World, and the Apostle Paul." Young beautifully writes the connection between Paul's mission to the nations of the world and Pentecost. "Paul went out of Jerusalem to the world, but Pentecost brought the world to Jerusalem" (p. 50). First, Young gives us a history of Pentecost and its meaning. He compares and connects Pentecost between Christians and Jews. "During Pentecost, Judaism celebrates the giving of Torah – God's revelation to his beloved people" (p. 51). Pentecost for Christians means the divine empowerment for service. Young quotes Deuteronomy 16:16, which connects Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Pentecost is associated with Israel's wilderness experience. Young suggests that the house in Acts 2:2 and the upper room in Acts 1:13 are not one and the same. The Pentecost miracle was in the temple. Young goes on to say that the house in Acts 2:2 may have referred to the House of the Lord, which is where they

studied Torah. The temple was the meeting place for God's people for the Feast of Pentecost (p. 54). Young tells us of archaeological links between the Pentecost experience of the church and temple. When Torah was given to the people, and on the Day of Pentecost in Acts, both places were shaken with the presence of God. Young backs up his claim with 2 Chronicles 5:14.

"Pentecost possesses special significance for the Christian and Jewish communities of faith. Jerusalem is the city where the spiritual streams of Judaism and Christianity converge. The gift of Torah brings a challenge. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit calls for service" (p. 58). Young paints Pentecost as a backdrop for Paul's ministry as he travels throughout the world. God chose Paul to preach to the nations. Paul knew God as a God for all people. Young says of Paul, "A Pharisee educated in Jerusalem must bring the message of Israel's one God and his messiah to the Gentiles" (p. 59).

In Chapter 4, "Judaism and Christianity: Diverse Perspectives on Torah," Young introduces the reader to "Christianity's struggle to define itself apart from its Jewish roots" (p. 62). Marcion is presented as being influential in this struggle. He denied the validity of the Hebrew Bible. Marcion wanted to abolish the Hebrew Bible and its teachings for the Christian faith and its teachings. Unlike Jesus and Paul, Marcion diminished the value of Torah. Young examines the words of Jesus and Paul's the deep roots in Judaism. Young also explores how we as Christians overlook critical verses of Jesus and Paul, such as Matthew 5:17 and Romans 3:31. Young states that when these verses are overlooked, our opinions of the law get tainted by remnants of Marcion's influence. Marcion, claiming to be a disciple of Paul, only sought to change the teachings of Jesus to justify his apostasy and teach Paul's message as a message of anti-Jewish gospel. Young takes three words from Matthew 5:17, law, abolish, and fulfill. He gives us the background for each of these words in Hebrew and Greek. Young gives us a valuable lesson in connecting these words to Judaism and Christianity. If we misinterpret these words, we misunderstand and dismiss the true meaning.

"The Torah: Roots of Grace and Faith in Paul's Message." Chapter 5 explores the misunderstanding that there is a God of the Old Testament and a God of the New. God is God. There is only one God. He is the same God of the Old and New Testament. He is God being full of grace and mercy in both testaments. Young describes a distorted view of Jewish faith during the period of the New Testament and a misrepresentation of Torah contributing to this view.

Young offers subchapters to further understand God's grace and mercy in the Old and New Testament. "The rabbis and the sages who preceded them further cultivated the Old Testament idea of mercy and emphasized divine compassion" (pgs. 73-74). Young states if we, as Christians, misinterpret elements of Jewish theology from both the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism, we will fail to understand Paul's intent (p. 74). Paul believes faith, righteousness, and Torah go together as he says in Romans 3:31. Young goes on to write about Faith and Righteousness in the Dead Sea Scrolls and a letter was found linking salvation and redemption in the end time. He adds that there is a similarity to Paul's discussion in Romans and Galatians. Young provides other Dead Sea Scroll similarities. Young challenges the reader to read Paul without the influences of others' views, such as Martin Luther (p. 79). Young also challenges the reader to translate the scriptures with sensitivity to Paul's cultural context (p. 82).

Chapter 6 looks at "Torah: The Dead Letter or the Living Word?" Young analyzes Paul's relationship with Torah in light of his new faith in Jesus. Here he sees Paul reaching deep into his Jewish heritage to find a comparison to explain the impact faith in Jesus has had on his understanding of Torah and the sinfulness of the human condition (pgs. 86-87). Young focuses our attention on Romans 7:1-6 and specifically Paul's mention of the death of a husband. Young raises the question of whether Paul is using this metaphor for the death of the flesh or Torah. Young's belief is that Paul is speaking about the death of the flesh and not the sacredness of Torah (p. 87). Young seeks to establish the background of Romans 7:1-6 "to view Paul's approach to the law, the flesh, and analogy of the "dead husband" within the framework of first-century Jewish thought" (p. 88). Scholars suggest that the passage might betray the influence of Paul's teacher Gamaliel. "When a person dies, he is free from the law and the commandments." In Jewish thought, *halakic* was a well-known concept "that probably was almost proverbial in ancient Jewish thought" (p. 88). The marriage laws concerning man and wife were familiar among the Jewish people. Young also analyzes Romans 6 and Paul's thoughts on slavery and the flesh and whether it forces a person to obey God. Young shares observations from David Flusser and Shmuel Safrai on what Rabbi Simeon ben Pazzi says about Paul's thoughts in Romans 6 (p. 90).

"The Transcendence of Torah in Paul's Teachings" in Chapter 7, Young reveals how Paul's teachings and his belief in Torah "possess a transcendence that goes beyond systematic

theology and rigid dogma" (p. 95). He compares Paul's view of Torah with that of Jewish thinkers being alike. Young describes Paul's thinking on Torah and of Marcion's perpetual hatred for the Hebrew Bible. As we read in chapter 7, we see the similarities between Jesus and Paul. Both loved their Jewish heritage, and both possessed an understanding of Torah "that reflected the Jewish values of the first century" (p. 96). To suit their theology, Marcion's disciples changed words spoken by Jesus to perpetuate their hatred of Torah.

Young continues to show how Jesus' words were misinterpreted. For example, in Matthew 5:17, reads, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them." Young compares Jesus' words *"abolish"* and *"fulfill"* to Paul's *"overthrow"* and *"uphold"* in Romans 3:31 to give better insight. Young says, "One upholds the law by giving it the proper interpretation, which brings about the actualization of Torah in daily living" (p. 97). Paul upheld the law by his faith in Jesus. As Young looks at Torah in action, he references Paul in Romans 8:2, speaking of the law as spiritual. Young goes on to write about Moses, The Light, and The Divine Spirit. He also writes about Slaves of Righteousness. In this subchapter, even though Marcion continued to distort Paul's teachings, Paul was never against the law. He continued to preach righteousness as a way of life. He continued to see the power of God through righteousness. Young writes, "The light of Torah can be seen in the good works of Jesus' disciples. It is also be seen in Paul's epistles. Jesus and Paul possess high esteem for Torah as revealing divine grace" (p. 105).

Here in chapter 8, as he does in chapter 2, Young asks questions in "Love as the Foundation of Christian Ministry: The Model of 1 Corinthians 13." Young starts out calling 1 Corinthians 13 a so-called love chapter. Young now begins his questions: Did Paul write 1 Corinthians 13? Did Paul rewrite it for his own purposes? Was it written earlier and adapted by Paul to fit between chapters 12 and 14? To answer these questions, Young focuses on Paul's Jewish heritage and looks at the background of 1 Corinthians 13. To help answer these questions, Young breaks the chapter down into subchapters as he does throughout his book. Young looks at the Prophecy and the Holy Spirit, Giftings of the Spirit at Corinth, Moses and the Prophets, and The Mirror or Lens for Prophecy. Young writes that 1 Corinthians 12-14, "were meant to be studied together, not as independent units" (p. 107). Young's references to supernatural gifts, ministries of the Holy Spirit, and prophecy was spoken in 1 Corinthians 12

and 14 and asks what 1 Corinthians 13 primary concern? Paul's primary concern in 1 Corinthians 13 is love. Young lets us know that the nexus between chapters 12 and 14 is Paul's message in chapter 13. "Without love, the most powerful spiritual manifestations are entirely meaningless" (p. 112).

"The Essence of Paul's Jewish Faith" rests in chapter 9. Young captures the essence of Paul's Jewish faith through an illustration of a wild olive shoot that is grafted into a tree. We cut off a limb and sit on it. Young says we must not "sever ourselves from the tree into which we have been grafted contrary to nature" (p. 114). The essence of Paul's Jewish faith rests on the root that supports him. Young says the root of Jewish belief was taught throughout the New Testament. Within chapter 9, Young explores the Jewish concept of God and what the New Testament teaches about the nature of the one God from Hebrew Scriptures. Young's use of subchapters reveals to the reader The Power of God's Reign, God in Jewish Thought, The Doctrine of the Resurrection, The Soul and The Body, The Kingdom and The Spirit, and Righteous Living in The Kingdom. These subchapters give greater insight into Paul's love for Jesus and his love for his Jewish roots. Paul stresses a life of righteous living pleasing to God. Young points out Paul's high moral, and ethical standard in the churches he established. His ethics were based upon his training as a Pharisee and his love for Torah (p. 131).

Young concludes in chapter 10, "Seven Pillars of Paul's Jewish Theology." Each pillar contains an overview of chapters 1-9. Young speaks to the Christian church to reject their display of arrogance concerning God's people, the Jews. We should study Torah and Jewish approaches to the Bible more seriously. He asks Christian to walk in love with their brothers and sisters dedicated to Jewish faith and practice (138).

Works Cited

Young, Brad H. "Paul The Theologian A Pharisee Among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles"

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"Paul The Jewish Theologian A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles" by Brad H. Young is a book worth reading. It is not only worth reading but worth studying. It puts Paul into historical context. At the beginning of each chapter, Young provides quotes from different scholars. After each chapter, he gives notes with explanations and works cited. At the end of the book, Young provides us with a bibliography and study aids, an index of ancient sources, and an index of names and subjects. Mr. Young's book made me look through a new lens at Paul as a Jewish theologian. There are many legitimate insights into the divine connection between Christianity and Judaism. It is an important book to read in understanding Paul's epistles. The book is 164 pages and costs $17.99 on Amazon.

Brad H. Young, Ph.D. Hebrew University studied under David Flusser and is the author of *Jesus The Jewish Theologian*, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables* and *The Jewish Background to the Lord's Prayer*. He is the president and founder of the Gospel Research Foundation, which is committed to exploring the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Dr. Young is one of the founding scholars of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Studies having worked closely on Gospel research with Prof. David Flusser, Dr. Robert L. Lindsey, and Prof. Shmuel Safrai. He has contributed to scholarly journals and spoken at many academic, church, interfaith, and civic gatherings. His most popular books focus on the life of Jesus and on the comparative study of Gospel and rabbinic parables. He is currently working on the soon to be published Hebrew Heritage Bible Translation of the Newer Testament.