

Book Reviews

Brad H. Young, *Paul, The Jewish Theologian: A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentile*. Baker Academic edition 2012. Pp. 1-164. ISBN 1-56563-248-6

Paul, the Jewish Theologian: A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentile by Brad H. Young, according to his acknowledgments, is the product not only of his own writing and research but also conversations with his friends and colleagues. Based on the foreword addressed by Rabbi Dr. Burton Visotzky, who is an Appleman Chair of Midrash and Interreligious Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Brad Young has offered his vision of what Jesus and Paul had to teach. Offering his vision which he schooled himself to Pharisaic Judaism, much as Paul, before him, Jesus did. He also preaches a gospel that has a place of pride for Jews and Judaism. He writes for both the Jewish and the Christian communities to show that Christianity and Judaism differ profoundly on many issues but spring from common ground.

The Foreword claims that the book offers extremely well-informed, insightful study of Paul as a Jewish Theologian. Starting from Jewish Theologian to the Pauline texts and brings wealth of background knowledge of both Judaism and early Christianity. The general focus of this book is to present deep conviction that there is nothing in the teaching of Paul that did not come to him from authentic Judaism.

The book begins with a different set of presumptions. According to the introduction, there is no evidence anywhere in the New Testament that he departed from his firm convictions as a Pharisee. Paul, who is a Jewish Theologian, anchored his beliefs in the Hebrew Bible and the teachings of his eminent mentors in the Jerusalem. He is a Hebrew of the Hebrews rather than a Hellenist of the Greeks. For another thing, Paul is a Pharisee who has been rejected by the synagogue and misunderstood by the church. The synagogue could not accept the profile of Paul's style of Pharisaism. The early church largely rejected the Jewish heritage of Paul by denying his Pharisaism. For the church, Paul is a former Pharisee. But Paul, however, considered himself to be a Pharisee throughout his entire life. He was proud of his Judaic heritage and his upbringing in Jerusalem (pp.1-2).

Today people long to understand Paul and his teaching. The time has come for a reevaluation of the foundation pillars of Paul's thought (p.3)

Chapter 2 deals with a question with Paul describing as a Jewish Theologian, his background and physical appearance. Paul is remembered as a Jewish apostle to the Gentiles. Such a career is doomed to stir up debate. Paul created problems for his own people, the Jews, as well as the Gentiles. He goes beyond his own culture and faith, and yet he still referred to himself as a Pharisee (p.6). Paul's work among the Gentiles and our unfamiliarity with ancient Judaism make understanding his Jewish theology difficult. In addition, on page 9, a number of key issues can be resolved only by correctly identifying the questions Paul was answering, although the major difficulty in grasping Paul's thought is really context. We misunderstand Paul because we do not understand his Jewish faith. So the Judaism of Jerusalem, rather than the paganism of Tarsus, seems to be the foundation for Paul's approach to the problems besetting the early Christian congregations to whom he directed his correspondence.

In continuation, while we learn something about Paul's background and upbringing from the New Testament, it does not reveal the way Paul looked. Probably the earliest physical description of Paul is found in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*: A man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining, and nose somewhat hooked, full

of grace: for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.⁶ (p.12) It is also from the book of Acts that we learn that Paul was born in Tarsus (Acts 9:11). Paul's background in the book of Acts is very informative for a careful reading of his epistles.

In the preceding Chapter, we have seen the crucial significance of Chapter 4, diverse perspectives on Torah for the foundation of Judaism and Christianity. Christianity and Judaism define themselves largely on the basis of how they characterize Torah. The significance of Torah for both Jesus and Paul emanate from Judaism. Jewish faith views the giving of Torah as a supernatural event at utmost import. This perspective, to a certain degree, has been influenced by Christianity's struggle to define itself apart from its Jewish roots. At the forefront of that struggle have been influential figures such as Marcion (ca.85-159 CE), who denied the validity of the Hebrew Bible for Christian faith and practice. Marcion certainly did not share Jesus' attitude toward the Judaism of his day. Neither did he share Paul's view, despite the fact that he claimed to be a disciple of Paul (pp. 62-63).

Moreover, Torah means teaching or instruction that is true and straight, as if words of Torah are shot in a direct path like an arrow, with power and force for living life to the fullest. God gave Torah. He is to be revered. Neither Jesus nor Paul was against Torah (pp. 65-67). On Chapters 5 and 6, the Torah is the roots of grace and faith in Paul's message. For Paul, the way of righteousness is indeed God's highest salvation, because it is the liberation of the flesh into the life of the Spirit; and that holy life is characterized by joining God in his redemptive outreach to a hurting world. In the final analysis, the conceptual values of grace and faith in Paul's teachings are riveted in Torah. Faith leads to righteousness. Grace opens the door for the individual to experience God in the dynamics of everyday life (p. 83). Paul did not compare Torah to a corpse. On the contrary, he used a well-known legal principle to illustrate the deeper meaning of Torah. Torah, then, is not evil. Torah is spiritual and good, revealing the divine plan for all peoples. Through Paul's eyes, Jesus is revealed in Torah (p. 92) Furthermore, Chapter 7 emphasizes in Paul's teachings of Torah's transcendence that goes beyond systematic theology or rigid dogma. It is a mysterious transcendence that reaches beyond finite human comprehension to the very essence of the divine nature and God's will for humankind.

The last verse in the book of Acts describes the Apostle Paul as "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered". In the New Testament, Paul is last remembered as teaching everyone the kingdom of heaven. People need to experience God's power as it is demonstrated in the divine sovereignty. The kingdom of heaven is here in full force. God is one. He reigns in supreme authority and power, on page 131 of Chapter 9.

At the 10th Chapter of this book, discusses the seven pillars of Paul's Jewish Theology. First, Paul is a Pharisee. He never converted from religion to another. Second, Paul's view of Torah was always positive. It was an expression of divine grace. Third, Paul's mission separated him from the historical Jesus. Paul and Jesus shared a common bond in their positive view of Torah (Matt 5:17; Rom 3:31), but Jesus' work among the Jewish people and Paul's missionary efforts among pagan Gentiles made each distinctive in the development of early Christianity. Fourth and fifth, healing love must characterize the Christian's life of ministry to others. God's presence is experienced through Holy Spirit's empowerment to bring healing and help to people in need, which was written in Chapter 8. The grace of God is revealed through Jesus the Messiah. The people involved in sinful activity will not inherit the kingdom of God. But all may be forgiven and restored to fellowship with God. Sixth, the resurrection of Jesus is the first fruit. And lastly, Jesus is coming again to complete the work of redemption.

The Christian church of today is in desperate need of Brad Young's outstanding ability to contextualize New Testament texts within their rabbinic contexts. Paul has been viewed by many academics as the precise tipping moment of Judaism. Young, however, demonstrates unequivocally that this is entirely not true. Paul possessed the education necessary to contextualize what this meant within a first-century Jewish framework or Gentile. In this book, Dr. Young makes this point very plainly. I totally recommend this and Dr. Young's other books.

C. Lukanob
Alliance University