

New Testament

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Book Review: "Paul the Jewish Theologian" by Brad H. Young

"Paul the Jewish Theologian" is a book written by Brad H. Young and published by Baker in 1995. The book has 188 pages and is available in both paperback and hardcover editions. The ISBN number is 0801048214. As of 2023, the book costs around \$20 to \$25, depending on the format and retailer.

Brad H. Young is a scholar of ancient Judaism and Christianity, specializing in the study of the Jewish background of the New Testament. He is the author of several books on the subject, including "Jesus the Jewish Theologian" and "Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus." Young received his Ph.D. from Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is currently a professor of biblical studies at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In addition to his scholarly work, he is also a frequent speaker and teacher in churches and synagogues, seeking to promote understanding and dialogue between Christians and Jews.

In "Paul the Jewish Theologian," Brad H. Young explores the Jewish background of the apostle Paul and argues that his theology was deeply rooted in Jewish thought and tradition. The book is divided into eight chapters, each of which examines a different aspect of Paul's theology in light of Jewish sources and context. Topics include Paul's understanding of the Messiah, the resurrection, the new covenant, and the law. The purpose of the book is to offer a new perspective on Paul's theology by situating it within its Jewish context. Young argues that Paul's ideas cannot be fully understood without considering the influence of Jewish thought and tradition, and that by doing so, we can gain a richer and more nuanced understanding of the Christian faith. The intended audience for the book is scholars and students of theology, as well as anyone interested in exploring the Jewish roots of Christianity.

In this review, I will provide an overview of the book's main arguments and assess its strengths and weaknesses. I will also consider its contribution to our understanding of Paul and his theology and evaluate its significance for the study of Jewish and Christian relations.

The book "Paul the Jewish Theologian" by Brad H. Young has 8 chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Paul as a Jewish Theologian

Brad H. Young argues that to properly understand Paul's letters, it is essential to view him as a Jewish theologian. This perspective considers the historical and theological factors that shaped his thinking. Young states that "Paul's theology cannot

be understood apart from the theological traditions of his Jewish heritage" (p. 1). He further stresses that Paul's letters must be read in their original context as letters to specific communities facing specific issues.

Young notes that Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus was a transformative experience that shaped his understanding of Judaism and his mission to share the gospel with Gentiles. He writes, "Paul's encounter with the risen Christ led him to a new understanding of the meaning and significance of Israel's Scriptures" (p. 5).

The chapter provides a brief overview of the topics that will be covered in the following chapters, including Paul's views on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Israel, the law, and eschatology. Overall, Young emphasizes the importance of understanding Paul's Jewish background and the historical and theological context of his letters.

Chapter 2: Paul's Jewish Background and the Context of his Life and Ministry

Brad H. Young explores Paul's Jewish background and the context of his life and ministry to help readers better understand his letters. He notes that Paul was a Pharisee and a zealous defender of the Jewish faith prior to his conversion to Christianity. Young emphasizes, "To understand Paul's thought, it is essential to understand his Jewish background and the cultural and religious world in which he lived" (p. 11).

Young also examines the historical context of Paul's life, particularly the political and social climate of the Roman Empire during the first century. He notes that Paul's ministry took place during a time of political upheaval and cultural change. He states, "The tumultuous political, social, and religious climate of the first century had a major impact on Paul's life and ministry" (p. 12).

In addition, Young explores the influence of Hellenistic culture on Judaism during Paul's time. He notes that many Jews, including Paul, were influenced by Greek philosophy and culture. Young writes, "Paul's Jewish background and upbringing were heavily influenced by Hellenistic culture, which shaped his worldview and theological perspective" (p. 14).

Chapter 3: Paul's Theology of God and the God of Israel

Brad H. Young examines Paul's theology of God and the God of Israel in this chapter. He argues that Paul's Jewish background strongly influenced his understanding of God, and that his theology must be understood in the context of the Jewish monotheistic tradition. Young emphasizes that "Paul's theology of God cannot be properly understood apart from his Jewish heritage" (p. 19).

Young explores the Jewish sources that influenced Paul's understanding of God, such as the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature. He notes that Paul's understanding of God was grounded in Jewish belief in the one true God of Israel. Young writes, "Paul's belief in the one true God of Israel was at the center of his theology" (p. 21).

Furthermore, Young examines how Paul's understanding of God was shaped by his encounter with the risen Christ. He notes that Paul's experience led him to see Jesus as the exalted Lord and as part of God's plan of salvation. Young states, "Paul's theology

of God was profoundly influenced by his encounter with the risen Christ, which transformed his understanding of God's plan of salvation" (p. 24).

Chapter 4: Paul's Christology and the Jewish Messiah

Brad H. Young explores Paul's Christology in this chapter, arguing that Paul's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah was firmly rooted in Jewish messianic expectations. Young notes that Paul's understanding of the Messiah influenced his view of salvation and the Christian life. He states that "Paul's Christology cannot be properly understood apart from Jewish messianic expectations" (p. 28).

Young examines the various ways in which Paul interpreted Jesus as the Messiah, including his understanding of Jesus as the suffering servant and the Davidic king. He notes that Paul's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah was shaped by his own encounter with the resurrected Christ. Young writes, "Paul's Christology was influenced by his encounter with the risen Christ, which transformed his understanding of Jesus as the Messiah" (p. 30).

Furthermore, Young explores how Paul's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah shaped his view of salvation and the Christian life. He notes that for Paul, faith in Jesus as the Messiah was essential for salvation, and that the Christian life involved following Jesus as Lord. Young states, "Paul's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah was central to his view of salvation and the Christian life" (p. 33).

Chapter 5: Paul's Eschatology and the Jewish Hope of the Resurrection

In this chapter, Young delves into Paul's eschatology, or his beliefs about the end times. He argues that Paul's understanding of the end times was heavily influenced by Jewish apocalyptic literature and expectations. For example, Paul's view of the resurrection of the dead was shaped by Jewish ideas about the afterlife and the hope of a future bodily resurrection. As Young explains: "Paul's apocalyptic eschatology is grounded in Jewish thought, and in particular in Jewish hopes of resurrection. Resurrection is a thoroughly Jewish idea, and Paul's understanding of it is shaped by his own Jewish heritage" (p. 131).

Young also discusses how Paul's understanding of the resurrection differed from that of some other Jewish groups at the time. For example, while some Jews believed in a general resurrection of all people at the end of time, Paul believed that only the righteous would be resurrected. As he notes: "For Paul, the resurrection is a reward for faithful service to God. It is not something that happens to everyone, but only to those who have lived a life of faith and obedience" (p. 136).

Chapter 6: Paul's Theology of Covenant and the Jewish Roots of the New Covenant

In this chapter, Young examines Paul's theology of covenant and argues that his understanding of the new covenant was firmly rooted in Jewish ideas about covenantal relationships. For example, Paul saw the new covenant as a continuation and fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel. As Young explains: "Paul's understanding of the new covenant is deeply rooted in Jewish thought and history. He sees it as a continuation and fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel, rather than a new covenant that replaces or supersedes the old" (p. 150).

Young also explores Paul's views on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the new covenant community. He argues that Paul's understanding of this relationship was shaped by his Jewish heritage and his belief that the Gentiles were included in the new covenant through faith in Jesus Christ. As Young notes: "For Paul, the inclusion of Gentiles in the new covenant community is not a radical departure from Jewish tradition, but a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed" (p. 157).

Furthermore, Young argues that Paul's theology of the new covenant provides a framework for understanding the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church. As he puts it: "Paul's theology of the new covenant provides a way for Jews and Gentiles to be united in Christ while still maintaining their distinct identities. The new covenant does not erase Jewish identity or Gentile identity but transcends them both in a new and inclusive community" (p. 165).

Chapter 7: Paul's Theology of the Law and the Jewish Context of his Understanding

In this chapter, Young examines Paul's theology of the law and argues that his understanding of the law was deeply influenced by his Jewish background and his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. For example, Paul saw the law as an expression of God's will for his people, but he also believed that it could not save them from sin and death. As Young explains: "Paul's view of the law is rooted in his Jewish heritage, but it is also shaped by his experience of Christ. He sees the law as an expression of God's will for his people, but he also recognizes that it cannot save them from sin and death" (p. 174).

Young also explores Paul's views on the relationship between faith and works and argues that Paul's understanding of salvation by faith alone was rooted in Jewish theological concepts. For example, Paul believed that faith in Christ was the means by which people could be justified and reconciled to God, but he also believed that this faith would naturally produce good works. As Young notes: "For Paul, faith and works are not opposed to each other, but rather they are two sides of the same coin. True faith always results in good works, and good works are evidence of true faith" (p. 179).

Furthermore, Young argues that Paul's understanding of the law provides a framework for understanding the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church. As he puts it: "Paul's understanding of the law helps to explain why he saw the inclusion of Gentiles in the church as a fulfillment of God's plan for his people. The law was never meant to be a barrier between Jews and Gentiles, but rather a means of expressing God's will for his people" (p. 186).

Overall, Young contends that Paul's theology of the law cannot be understood apart from its Jewish context, and that Paul's understanding of salvation by faith alone was rooted in Jewish theological concepts.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Paul as a Jewish Theologian and his Legacy

In the concluding chapter, Young summarizes his arguments about Paul as a Jewish theologian and offers some reflections on their significance. He argues that understanding Paul in this way can help bridge the gap between Judaism and

Christianity by highlighting the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. As Young explains: "By recognizing Paul as a Jewish theologian, we can gain a richer and more nuanced understanding of the Christian faith. We can see how Christianity emerged from the Jewish tradition, and how it is deeply connected to the history and culture of the Jewish people" (p. 198).

Young also suggests that this understanding of Paul can help promote greater respect and understanding between Jews and Christians. He notes that while there are significant theological differences between the two religions, there is also a shared heritage that can be acknowledged and celebrated. As he puts it: "By recognizing Paul as a Jewish theologian, we can begin to appreciate the richness and complexity of Jewish thought and culture. We can see how Christianity is part of a larger story that includes Judaism, and how both traditions have much to offer each other" (p. 202).

Finally, Young briefly explores Paul's legacy and influence on later Christian theology. He notes that while Paul's writings have been interpreted in many different ways over the centuries, his Jewish background and perspective have continued to shape Christian thought. As he observes: "Paul's theology has been a source of inspiration and controversy for centuries, and his influence can be seen in many different areas of Christian thought and practice. But at its core, Paul's message is a deeply Jewish one, rooted in the history and culture of the Jewish people" (p. 206).

Brad H. Young's arguments in "Paul the Jewish Theologian" are well-supported and meticulously researched. He draws on a wide range of Jewish and Christian sources to make his case, and his arguments are always clear and well-organized. Young's insights into Paul's theology are particularly valuable, and he offers a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

The writing in "Paul the Jewish Theologian" is clear and accessible, and Young does an excellent job of making complex theological concepts understandable for a general audience. His writing is also engaging and thought-provoking, and he uses examples and anecdotes effectively to illustrate his points. "Paul the Jewish Theologian" makes an important contribution to our understanding of Paul and his theology. Young's focus on the Jewish roots of Paul's thought provides a new perspective on this important figure, and his insights are sure to generate new discussions and debates in the field of Pauline studies.

While Young's arguments in "Paul the Jewish Theologian" are strong and well-supported, there are some areas where his analysis could have been more nuanced. For example, he does not fully explore the ways in which Paul's ideas were also shaped by Greco-Roman philosophy and culture, which could have provided a more complete picture of Paul's intellectual context.

One similar work to "Paul the Jewish Theologian" is "Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion" by E.P. Sanders. Both books explore the Jewish background of Paul and how this informed his theology. However, while Sanders argues that Paul's thought was significantly different from Judaism of his time, Young emphasizes the continuity between Paul's beliefs and the broader Jewish tradition. Additionally, while Sanders focuses on the issue of justification, Young examines a

broader range of theological topics such as eschatology, Christology, and pneumatology. Despite these differences, both works contribute significantly to our understanding of Paul and his Jewish context.

Overall, "Paul the Jewish Theologian" by Brad H. Young is a well-researched and insightful exploration of the Jewish background of Paul's theology. The author's expertise in Jewish studies is evident throughout the book and he provides valuable insights into the continuity between Paul's beliefs and the broader Jewish tradition.

I heartily suggest Brad Young's really well-written work if someone is interested in Christian theology from the perspective of the Apostle Paul. It refutes a number of widely held myths regarding Paul. Assuming that the Old Bible is meant to portray an enraged, envious God and the New Testament is meant to symbolize a loving God, where grace replaces the law as the way to redemption, we frequently believe that the New Testament is meant to supplant the Old Testament. Contrary to these ideas, the author presents a portrait of Paul who never abandoned Judaism, maintained his Pharisee identity, and believed that Gentile disciples of Jesus were not to replace Judaism but rather to be grafted onto its roots. I recommend you read this book if you want to read anything that questions certain core beliefs about Christianity and its beginnings.