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BIB201: Introduction to New Testament Literature

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### Paul The Jewish Theologian

The literary work entitled "Paul the Jewish Theologian" is written by Brad H. Young and is a scholarly exploration of the theological perspective and teachings of the apostle Paul from a Jewish viewpoint. Young's discourse commences with a meticulous evaluation of the cultural and religious milieu that shaped Paul's upbringing, including the Jewish tradition and the Hellenistic world. He then delves into Paul's interactions with Jesus, his conversion, and his ministry. Young analyzes the Jewish underpinnings of Paul's teachings, such as his understanding of the Torah, the Law of Moses, and his emphasis on the resurrection, which was the core of the Jewish belief system. The author also sheds light on the centrality of the Jewish faith to Paul's teachings, as the apostle was rooted in the Jewish tradition and culture, yet his teachings also exhibit an in-depth awareness of the Greco-Roman world (Young, p.124). Hence, Paul's theology was not merely a synthesis of two cultures, but rather a distinctive combination of two cultures that facilitated the emergence of Christianity as a distinct religion.

A professor of Judaic-Christian Studies at the Graduate School of Theology, Brad H. Young founded the Gospel Research Foundation to advance scholarship pertaining to the Jewish roots of Christianity. Given his extensive expertise in this field, Young's authorship is well suited for this book. Its prime benchmarks are its fidelity to Paul's teachings in Jewish context and its

ability to enhance our awareness and comprehension of Pauline theology. Paul's theology emerges as the primary focus of this book when investigated through the lens of his Jewish identity. To understand concepts such as grace, faith, and righteousness as espoused by Paul requires an appreciation for their deep-rooted context within Jewish thought and customs. The text examines the ways Paul incorporated insights drawn from Jewish Scriptures into his thoughts as well as how he remained engaged with other significant figures in Judaism (Ware). To thoroughly grasp these aspects of his theology, it is important to examine specific areas where it contrasts compared to other prominent doctrines in Judaism. The discussion revolves around the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of Paul's teachings by later Christian theologians. The author identifies and corrects these misunderstandings by contextualizing them within Judaism.

The review of the book will analyze various themes and ideas presented in the book by the author along with analyzing the summaries of various chapters for evaluating the strengths and weakness of the book. The overall perspective of this review is to provide an overview for the scholar interested in Jewish roots of Pauline theology. Hence the intended audience include researcher, scholar and students interested in learning about the Judaism and Christianity. The book is comprised of ten chapter and each chapter examines a different aspect of Jewish roots and teachings. The first chapter is the introduction of the main idea of Paul as a Jew who remained faithful to his traditions despite encountering Jesus. In this chapter, the author argues that Paul's theology is important to understand the context of his Jewish heritage. In the second chapter, the author explores Paul's understanding and apprehension regarding the Torah and Jewish law. According to the author, Paul did not outrightly reject the Torah; rather, he

interpreted it according to his beliefs in Christ. The chapter also explained the idea of covenantal nomism, which is the belief that the Jews are saved by God's grace through their participation in the covenant with God. The author argues that Paul's theology is consistent with covenantal nomism, but with the addition of faith in Christ as the means of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. The third chapter explores Paul's understanding of the Messiah, or the promised deliverer of Israel as mentioned in the book '...for him the faith in Jesus as Messiah brought deeper conviction and enrichment' (Young, p.48). The author argues that Paul saw Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish messianic expectations, and that his theology was based on the belief that the Messiah had come and brought salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. In the fourth and fifth chapter, the author argues that Paul saw the Spirit as the agent of God's grace, and that the reception of the Spirit was a sign of salvation that was a blessing from God as quoted in book "Salvation is the gift of God that cannot be earned..." (Young, p.54). In chapters six and seven, the author examines Paul's view of the Messiah and the Holy Spirit, respectively. The final chapters summarize the book's main points and provide an overall evaluation of Paul's Jewish theology based on Christian views as mentioned 'The Jewish background of early Christianity provides an enriched perception of the significance of God's oneness in Christian faith and practice' (Young, p.173).

The book is insightful for readers as it helps in providing a comprehensive overview of the Jewish background of Paul and its influence on his teachings. Moreover, the use of Hebrew Scriptures by Paul shows his deep engagement with such themes and the use of different resources to support his argument. For example, the writer explained the concept of

righteousness with respect to Jewish law as well as in light of Jesus's teachings. The righteousness is normally understood as adherence to laws and norms. However, Paul interpreted the concept of righteousness as something that can be obtained through faith rather than just by adhering to the norms and law. Another strength of the book is its detailed examination of Paul's views on the Messiah and the Holy Spirit. While the book is an excellent resource for those seeking to understand Paul's teachings in their Jewish context, it may not be suitable for those who are looking for a general overview of Paul's theology. The main reason is that the book assumes a certain level of familiarity with both Paul's teachings and Jewish thought hence, there is an extensive use of specialized terminology and concepts that is not immediately accessible to a general reader. Therefore, it is an excellent resource for scholars, and researchers, with relative background in both Pauline theology and Jewish thought, it may not be the best choice for those who want to learn about the general introduction to Paul's teachings.

One similar book entitled *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction* by Kent L. Yinger also explored the Jewish roots of Paul's theology. It also challenged traditional interpretations of Paul's writings (Yinger). However, while Young mainly focused on the specific Jewish concepts that influenced Paul's thought, Yinger took a broader approach and discussed how recent scholarship has re-examined Paul's writings in light of the historical and cultural context.

To conclude, the book is an invaluable resource for understanding Paul's theology in its Jewish context and is recommended for scholar and researchers. The book's strengths lie in its comprehensive examination of Paul's Jewish background, its insightful discussion of his use of the Hebrew Scriptures, and its detailed examination of his views on the Messiah and the Holy Spirit.

**Work Cited**

Ware, J. Patrick. The Mission of the Church: in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism. Vol. 120. Brill, 2005.

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