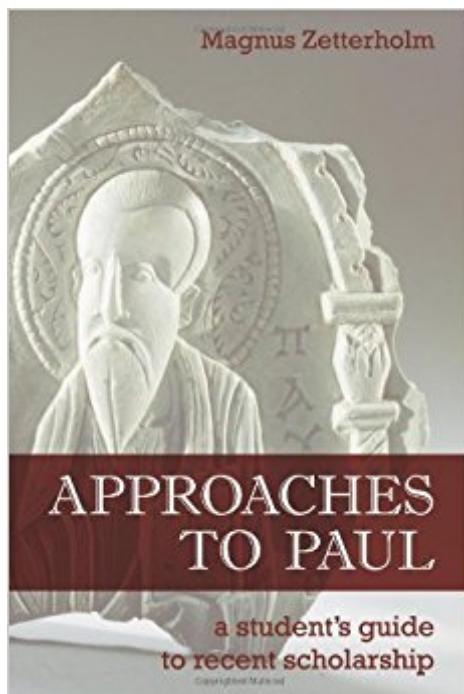


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Approaches To Paul: A Student's Guide To Recent Scholarship



Synopsis

What distinguishes" the perspective on Paul" and what lies beyond it? What are scholars saying about Paul and the Roman Empire or about the intersection between feminist and postcolonial interpretation of Paul? Magnus Zetterholm provides a clear and reliable guide to these and other lively issues in the contemporary study of Paul, surveying the history of the principal perspectives on Paul's relation to Judaism and the Jewish law and showing the relationships between answers given to those questions and the assumptions scholars bring to other issues as well. This is an indispensable handbook for the beginning student of the apostle and his thought.

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Customer Reviews

There is no doubt that next to Jesus, Paul is one of the most debated figures within Biblical scholarship. Though this book was written back in 2009, the publisher was gracious enough to send me a review copy. At this point, I have built quite a library on Pauline studies. However, in relation to Paul, I was looking for a book that highlights the history of Pauline thought. This book

doesn't disappoint. Zetterholm spends the first portion of the book discussing Paul's background as well as an analysis of key Pauline texts in relation to Philippians 3:4b-6 which is an autobiographical note that may confirm Luke's account. Paul writes: If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Zetterholm says: Besides referring to his Jewish identity in several ways, Paul here describes himself as a Pharisee. This agrees well with the statement given in Acts that he had studied under Gamaliel, who was a leading Pharisee. The Pharisees were a religious, and to a certain extent, political, party that emphasized the importance of continuous interpretation of the Torah. One problem that occupied the Pharisees was how to apply the Torah to new situations. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees accepted the oral Torah, that is, all interpretations and adaptations of the biblical text, which were considered divinely inspired and just as binding as the original precepts. In the Gospels, especially Matthew, the Pharisees are portrayed as the main opponents of Jesus, but the evangelist's presentation of them as hypocrites and exponents of a rigid, petrified religion must be viewed as a caricature. The Pharisees represented a pious movement. They enjoyed wide popular support and were dedicated to an interpretation of the biblical texts that was anything but rigid and literal. Kindle Location, 255-259. As the book progresses, Zetterholm summarizes the contributions of Bultmann, F.C Baur, and the Tubigen school and how these both shaped Pauline studies. Zetterholm then discusses one of the most heated debates in Pauline studies-The New Perspective on Paul. But before jumping into the NPP issue, he spends considerable time discussing the Reformation/ Lutheran view of Paul. Having taught some classes on the Jewish Roots of Christianity in local churches, there is no doubt that the majority of Christians hold to what Zetterholm says here: Regardless of the individuals behind the demands, Paul reacts most vehemently, and Galatians, as well as Romans, contains many Torah-critical statements. In Galatians 2:16a, Paul writes, we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. In Galatians 3:13a, he maintains, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, and in Galatians 5:4 he thunders: You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. Here the matter is clear-cut: Paul has dissociated himself from one of the most central tenets of Judaism, the Torah, and replaced it with Christ. Those who seek their righteousness in the Torah are foredoomed to failure and barred from grace. Paul really seems to have abandoned Judaism and instead created a new religion. This is exactly the way scholars have

traditionally assessed it, and there is a good deal of truth in Brad Young's description of the situation: "The consensus of scholarship has come to view [Paul] as a Hellenistic Jew who departed radically from his Judaism. Scholars view him as being influenced by his upbringing in the Stoic environs of Tarsus and various streams of thought flowing forth from paganism, Greco-Roman culture, popular Hellenistic philosophy, mystery religious cults, and Gnostic systems. Seldom is the origin of Paul's faith seen as rooted in Pharisaism." Paul is commonly thought to have left Judaism because he had realized that the Torah represents a person's ambition to become righteous by means of his or her own efforts. Such an endeavor is not only impossible, as no one can keep the entire Torah all the time, but it also represents the cardinal sin-self-righteousness. On this view, when Jesus appears to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9), Paul is struck by the insight of the basic fault of Judaism and converts to Christianity. "The one who is righteous will live by faith," has often been regarded as the all-embracing conflict between Jewish self-righteousness obtained by keeping the precepts of the Torah, and Christian faith in Jesus as a basis for an attributive, undeserved righteousness, on the other. Strangely enough, Paul quotes a Jewish text, in fact from the prophet Habakkuk, who wrote: "Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith." (Hab 2:4). When Paul formulates what would later become the cornerstone of the Protestant churches-righteousness by faith alone-he accordingly refers to the very Jewish tradition with which he is presumed to have broken. Righteousness, forgiveness, and atonement are, of course, all central Jewish concepts, and when Paul attempts to explain how this righteousness by faith alone functions (Romans 4), he selects one of the prominent figures of Judaism, Abraham, as an example.- Kindle Location, 148-164. To read entire review, go here: [...]

APPROACHES TO PAUL is a comprehensive, but concise overview of the last thirty or so years of Protestant scholarship in the study of St. Paul's soteriology. Being only an amateur in New Testament theological studies, this book finally provided me the "big picture" of the debate between E.P. Sanders's New Perspective on Pauline theology and its critics. Prior to reading this book, I had to piece together, as best as I could, what the terms of that debate were from the works of partisan authors. APPROACHES TO PAUL filled in the gaps and objectively clarified where each of the major contributors to the debate (Sanders, Wright, Dunn, Gathercole, etc.) stood. APPROACHES TO PAUL also convinced a Catholic like me (I won't hazard to say what other readers will take away from this book) that Protestant Pauline theology - at least among academics - is slowly converging with Orthodox, Catholic, and even Jewish soteriological views.

The author offers a wide angle view of Paul that goes beyond the man, his efforts, doubts and enemies. He includes how Paul was used and manipulated by the early church and later Protestant propagandists. Readers can implicitly grasp that once the Jesus movement is launched, the question whether Jesus existed or not becomes subsidiary. And once the Church is launched, it's Paul's turn to become a symbol and be used to support orthodoxy, internal splits and segregating from Judaism. The author shows how the reformed Church will use grace as a divinely offered righteousness to oppose self-righteousness by works of the law and condemn Judaism. The tug of war using Paul explains that few agree on what he really said or meant to say. The initial message and intentions are presently boomeranging back into Pauline studies, attempting to see more honestly his indelible Jewish outlook and the meaning of the Jesus movement. The author shows the meanders of the scholarly paths that are leading to a revised Paul. What the man really meant and the reasons for his dedication to the cause he initially scorned will however not be fully accessible until the background of the gospels is correctly cleared. Future developments, not presented here, to which students may be more receptive than scholars will take into account the non historical Jesus. With Jesus messiah standing for a strongly opinionated community group, Mark's gospel was written as a reaction against Essene traditionalists. The early gospels related community history supported by a symbolic messiah. It then becomes clearer that Paul's commitment consists in propagating a Jewish messiah-mediated revival cult and not the deeds and words of a contemporary man. Accordingly, Paul has to invent suitable answers to unforeseen problems. In the course of his messiah proselytizing, Paul necessarily stumbles, contradicts himself, and by the time he gets his arguments better sorted out, they don't really matter any more: Messiah Jesus has an audience and the story will expand well beyond Paul's wildest dreams. Alongside to E.P. Sanders "Very Short Introduction" this brief and well exposed book offers a useful general approach to Paul.

This book is really about recent scholarship concerning the question of whether Saint Paul left Judaism, remained a Jew, or simply wanted Christ-believing Gentiles not to become Jews. It is really good, but it is not a comprehensive analysis of all things Pauline. That being said, the book is easy to read and insightful. The author admits that he's bias. He thinks Paul never left Judaism. Nevertheless, he does present both sides of the argument well. The book is essentially a summary of important scholarship concerning the Jewish question and Paul. The bibliography is wonderful. It will definitely serve as a starting point for further research. Enjoy.

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