

## **JEW, PAUL THE (W. R. Stegner, IVP-DPL, 503–511)**

In recent years, a significant change has taken place in Pauline scholarship. During the first half of the twentieth century the dominant “history of religions” school emphasized a Hellenistic approach to Paul: Paul was understood to be a Hellenized Jew of the Diaspora. For example, R. Bultmann and his followers reasoned the syncretistic Judaism of the Diaspora and the popular philosophy of the time constituted the background of Paul’s thought (see *Paul and His Interpreters*). Today, however, NT scholarship finds more and more evidence for the Jewishness of Paul’s life and thought. Indeed, this change is part of a general movement in Christian scholarship to rediscover the Jewish roots of Christianity. Concurrently, Jewish scholarship shows a growing interest in reclaiming the Jewishness of Jesus and Paul. Accordingly, the following study emphasizes the Jewish dimension of Paul’s life and thought.

Much of the current emphasis on the Jewishness of Paul focuses on his social world. It attempts to go behind his thoughts and words to matters of lifestyle and behavior. For example, Paul shared the apocalyptic hope of primitive Christianity: what did that mean in terms of everyday life, in terms of a group that lived outside the mainstream of life in the Roman Empire? Since the social study of Paul is now a field in itself, it is not possible here to do full justice to this aspect of Pauline scholarship (see *Social-Scientific Approaches*).

A recent study by J. Neyrey, however, demonstrates how cultural anthropology sheds light on the Pauline letters and on Paul the Jew. According to Neyrey, Paul’s early upbringing, or socialization, as a strict Pharisaic Jew conditioned his view of the world and reality. Consequently, Paul had a passionate concern for such categories as order, hierarchy and boundaries in matters of purity (see *Purity and Impurity*). Paul’s concern for these categories was carried over to his postconversion (see *Conversion and Call*) perspective. Thus Paul was not an entirely new person after his conversion: his Jewish past continued to influence him. This continuity will be further illustrated in the following discussion.

1. Paul’s Autobiographical Statements
2. Paul’s Formal Education in Judaism
3. Paul’s Apocalyptic Worldview
4. Paul’s Self-Understanding as a Jew
5. Paul’s Mysticism
6. Paul and Torah

[p. 504]

### **1. Paul’s Autobiographical Statements.**

The proper place to begin a study of Paul the Jew is his own autobiographical statements. The most pertinent autobiographical passage is Philippians 3:4–6. This is a polemical passage in which Paul explicitly emphasizes his credentials as a Jew. “If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, 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." In this passage Paul makes the point that his Jewish credentials and his zeal for his religion could be matched by few other Jews or Jewish Christians.

Still haunted by a false dichotomy between Palestinian Judaism and that of the Diaspora, many Pauline scholars refuse to take such autobiographical statements at face value. The scholarship of a previous generation posited a pure, Torah -centered Judaism for Palestine and a syncretistic, Hellenistic Judaism for the Diaspora. And, since Tarsus was located in the Diaspora, Paul was subsumed under the category of syncretistic Hellenistic Jew.

In contrast to the older view, recent archeological and literary finds have demonstrated the rich variety in Palestinian Judaism both in adherence to the Law and in speaking languages other than Aramaic (see Hellenism). Much the same variety is true of Diaspora Judaism, although Greek was the predominant language spoken. While Greek was the language of Alexandrian and Egyptian Jewry, the language situation in Syria was different; Syria later produced an Aramaic literature. Geographically, Tarsus is quite close to Syria. Also, Jerome reports that Paul's parents came from Gischala in Galilee. If Jerome is correct, Paul could very well have spoken Hebrew or Aramaic in his home.

Philippians 3:4–6, however, reports far more about Paul's Judaism than the fact that he claimed Jewish identity. For example, he claims to be a Benjaminite. Precisely what Paul was declaring by this assertion is not clear. Nevertheless, the following may have been involved in Paul's boast. Jerusalem and the Temple were located within the tribal land of Benjamin. In the separation of the northern kingdom from Judah, Benjamin and Judah remained loyal to the Davidic kings. After the Babylonian exile, Benjamin and Judah were the center of the new community.

Next, Paul claims to be "a Hebrew born of Hebrews." Again, certainty is elusive in defining this phrase (cf. 2 Cor 11:22). He may have meant his blood was pure in that he had no Gentile ancestry. More probably, he was contrasting himself with Hellenists or Greek-speaking Jews. Thereby, he was saying that he was taught to speak Hebrew in the home. According to R. N. Longenecker, this interpretation gains in probability if Philippians is read in the light of 2 Corinthians 11:22. There Paul matches his qualifications against those of other Jews or Jewish Christians: "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I" (Longenecker, 22).

As a further cause for boasting in Philippians, Paul claims to be a Pharisee. Here the term was defined with precision. The expression "as to the Law a Pharisee" refers to the oral Law. The Sadducees held that only the written Law was binding, while the Pharisees believed God had revealed the oral Law as well as the written Law. In Galatians 1:14 Paul writes that he was "extremely zealous ... for the traditions of the elders." The Greek for traditions is a technical expression (*paradosis*) for the oral law. The same Greek word occurs in Mark 7:5 where the Evangelist speaks of the "traditions of the elders." According to E. Rivkin, Paul thereby understood himself as a member of the scholarly class who taught the twofold Law. By saying that the Pharisees sit on

Moses' seat (Mt 23:2), Jesus was indicating they were authoritative teachers of the Law. Consequently, the Pharisees claimed to believe that they were the true Israel who knew God's will for the world.

Another basic Pharisaic belief was the resurrection of the dead. If a member of the covenant community (a Jew) or a Gentile convert obeyed the oral and written Law, that person could anticipate being raised to eternal life.

In summary, Paul was saying that he was a Hebrew-speaking interpreter and teacher of the oral and written Law.

A further point should be made in reference to Paul's statement "as to righteousness under the Law blameless" (Phil 3:6). The uneasy, guilt-ridden conscience of the West, as seen particularly in Martin Luther and his age, should not be read back into Paul's psyche (see Stendahl). The anxieties of one age are not those of another. Paul's biographical statements are best taken at face value—like the Pharisees in the Gospels he understood himself as zealous and righteous (see Jealousy, Zeal).

## 2. Paul's Formal Education in Judaism.

According to Acts 22:3 Paul received formal education in the Judaism of the time "at the feet of Gamaliel." This famous Gamaliel was either the grandson or son of the renowned Hillel who was instrumental in drawing up the exegetical methods (*middô?*) by which Scripture [p. 505] should be studied (cf. *t. Sanh.* 7.11; *'Abot R. Nat.* [A] §37). Recently, some scholars have questioned the claim that Paul was trained under Gamaliel. The dispute cannot be recapitulated here, but a brief consideration of Jewish education in Paul's day illuminates the setting of Paul's early years (see Hengel, 1.78–83).

From the early Hellenistic period we have the renowned Ben Sira's description of his "school" which was designed to teach wisdom to upper-class young men (*Sir* 51:23–28). Sometime later and well into the Hellenistic period there arose a movement to instruct the whole Jewish population in the Law (*b. B.Bat.* 21a). This movement attempted to preserve Judaism from assimilation to Greek learning and language. Even later the attempt to instruct the whole people became a primary goal of Pharisaism. In Paul's generation a network of elementary schools taught the Hebrew Bible, primarily the Pentateuch, to boys who began school at the age of six or seven (*y. Ketub.* 32c, 4). More advanced schools taught young men to interpret the text of the Bible and to explain contradictions and problems found therein. The exegetical methods drawn up by Hillel were applied both to interpreting the text of the Bible as well as to applying Pentateuchal laws to the contemporary needs of Jewish society.

Some insight into Paul's formal education is gained by considering his exegetical skills in a passage such as Romans 9:6–29, where Paul utilizes Hebrew Scripture, midrashic techniques and the exegetical traditions of his day (see Old Testament in Paul). In this passage Paul is struggling with a problem faced by early Christians: Why have the majority of Jews rejected their own Christ? He states the issue in Romans 9:6: "But it is not as though the word of God had failed." He then turns to the Pentateuch for primary passages which address this issue. The initial text to which Paul appeals is Genesis 21:12: "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named" (Rom 9:7). A second

supplementary text is cited from Genesis 18:10: “About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son” (Rom 9:9). In the argument that follows, Paul cites other subordinate texts from the OT. These subordinate quotations are linked to the initial and secondary texts by the use of three catchwords: “descendants” (*sperma* translated “children” in verse 29), “named” (*kaleō*) and “son” (*huios* see Adoption, Sonship). E. E. Ellis has outlined the pattern of the use of Scripture in the following manner (Ellis, 155).

Romans 9:6–7      Theme and initial text: Genesis 21:12

Romans 9:9    A second, supplemental text: Genesis 18:10

Romans 9:10–28    Exposition containing additional citations (Rom 9:13, 15, 17, 25–28) and linked to the initial texts by the catchwords *kaleō* (name) and *huios* (son) (Rom 9:12, 24–26, 27)

Romans 9:29 A final text alluding to the initial text with the catchword *sperma* (descendants and children)

Paul employed a number of midrashic techniques in composing this unit. The use of a parallel secondary text to supplement and elucidate the primary text is frequently found in later classical midrashim. Also common is the use of a key term in both the initial text and the conclusion of the composition, thereby forming a correspondence of beginning and ending in a discussion (*inclusio*). The use of key words to pull in other passages of Scripture is also well known. In Paul’s composition the key word is not always found in the texts that have been quoted. Nevertheless, the key word is always found in the context of the quotation if not in the quotation itself. Similarly, later rabbis did not always quote the key word.

Other elements of midrashic form found here are introductory or citation formulas for Scripture, breaks in thought caused by dealing with an incorrect inference or an imaginary opponent (also found in the diatribe), and the use of words from the initial text in the exposition.

Perhaps the most significant element in this midrash -like unit is Paul’s use of contemporaneous exegetical traditions which are preserved for us in later rabbinic works. An example from outside Romans 9:6–29 is found in 1 Corinthians 10:4 where Paul wrote: “For they drank from the supernatural rock which followed them. ...” The biblical narrative contains no hint that the rock was mobile. How did Paul know this? As Conzelmann states (Conzelmann, 166–67), Paul was making use of a Jewish haggadic tradition that appears in a later work (*t. Sukk. 3.11*; cf. *b. Ta'an. 9a*; *Bib. Ant. 11.14*; Philo *Leg. All. 2.86*).

In Romans 9:6–29 the initial text (Gen 21:12) Paul employs was used in two different ways in later rabbinic works. First, the Babylonian Talmud quotes Genesis 21:12 in several places. The following passage from *Sanhedrin* 59b is typical: Circumcision was from the very first commanded to Abraham only. ... If so, should it not be incumbent upon the children of Ishmael (Abraham’s son)? For *in Isaac shall thy seed be called*. Then should not the children of Esau be bound to practice it?— *In Isaac but not all Isaac.* (Soncino edition)

Both Paul and the later Babylonian Talmud use the same text to show who belonged to Israel, and both [p. 506] associated Esau with this text. However, unlike Paul, the Talmud ties “in Isaac” to purely physical descent from Jewish parentage.

But what is even more striking is the way both Paul and the later *Genesis Rabbah* exegete this same text. Here another factor in addition to physical descent is associated with the phrase “in Isaac.” (In order to understand the following passage the reader needs to know that in the first century Hebrew letters also had a numerical equivalent: since *bêt* is the second letter of the alphabet, it was also the symbol for the number two.) In *Midrash Rabbah* Genesis 53.12 we read:

AND GOD SAID UNTO ABRAHAM: LET IT NOT BE GRIEVOUS IN THY SIGHT ...  
FOR IN ISAAC SHALL SEED BE CALLED TO THEE (xxi, 12): R. Judan b. Shilum said: Not ‘Isaac’, but IN ISAAC is written here. R. ‘Azariah said in the name of Bar Ḥuṭah; the *beth* (IN) denotes two, i.e., [thy seed shall be called] in him who recognizes the existence of two worlds; he shall inherit two worlds [God says]; ‘I have given a sign [whereby the true descendants of Abraham can be known] viz. he who expressly recognises [God’s judgments]: thus whoever believes in the two worlds shall be called “thy seed”, while he who rejects belief in two worlds shall not be called “thy seed.”’ (Soncino edition, 471)

In the above midrash the true descendants of Abraham believe in two worlds. This is precisely Paul’s stance in Romans: physical descent alone is not enough; those who have a certain belief or type of faith are children of Abraham. In commenting on Romans 9:6–29 Paul writes the following in Romans 9:30–32:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on Law did not succeed in fulfilling that Law. Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith.

Paul’s view of faith is closely related to what we have observed in the *Midrash Rabbah*. As a Pharisee Paul had believed in the two worlds, that is, not only in this present world but also in the resurrection —the world to come. When Paul met the resurrected Christ on the Damascus Road, he interpreted Christ as the “first-fruits” of the general resurrection to follow. From that point on his belief in a general resurrection became concretized in a specific person through whom he had experienced reconciliation with God and all that the term “faith” meant for him.

Before drawing any conclusions, however, another piece must be added to the picture. *Genesis Rabbah* is not the only later rabbinic work in which belief in two worlds is associated with Genesis 21:12. Much the same interpretation is also found in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Nedarim* 2:10. Here also the *b?* means “two” and points to a Jew who believes in two worlds.

These two late Palestinian sources raise the possibility of the existence of a Palestinian exegetical tradition which associated the belief in two worlds with Genesis 21:12. As we have seen, the Babylonian Talmud does not know this tradition and construes Genesis 21:12 to mean physical descent alone.

Still, the question remains: How could Paul and this exegetical tradition (if such it was), found in sources “published” hundreds of years after Paul, have interpreted the same verse in such a remarkably similar manner? G. Vermes points us toward a solution (Vermes, chap. 6). He first rejects various possibilities: that the NT depends on the Talmud and *Genesis Rabbah* (they did not exist in NT times); that the later

exegetical tradition was learned from Paul; and that the similarities are purely coincidental (there is too much overlap). Rather, he holds open the possibility that the NT and the later rabbinic exegetical tradition both had a common source, namely, traditional Jewish teaching. Exegetical traditions “lived” for hundreds of years. Here Vermes would say that Paul knew the exegetical tradition associated with Genesis 21:12. This tradition “lived” in the schools of Palestine and later resurfaced in the Jerusalem Talmud and in *Genesis Rabbah*. And, of course, this opens the possibility that a Palestinian exegetical tradition was one source of Paul’s doctrine of justification through faith.

In addition, another exegetical tradition was apparently associated with Paul’s second text: “About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” Genesis 18:10 and the figure of Sarah herself were associated with the theme of the steadfastness of God’s work in *Genesis Rabbah* and in other places (see Stegner, 47).

Paul’s use of Scripture, of midrashic techniques and of contemporary exegetical traditions in Romans 9:6–29 yielded a highly sophisticated composition. It cannot have been the product of an uneducated mind. If he was not trained by Gamaliel, then he was taught by some other Jewish master. In any case, it seems clear that Paul received a formal education in the Judaism of the time.

### **3. Paul’s Apocalyptic Worldview.**

Did Paul’s apocalyptic (see Apocalypticism) worldview constitute a central motif in his thinking and theology? In answering this question scholars sometimes begin by defining the term, then match their definition with passages from Paul and, thereby, conclude that apocalypticism did or did not constitute a central focus in his thinking. However, since definitions vary from one [p. 507] scholar to another, it is better to start with the centrality of Paul’s belief in the resurrection of Jesus and work outward from there.

W. Pannenberg is surely correct in pointing out that in first-century Judaism the resurrection could be expressed only in the language of the apocalyptic tradition (Pannenberg, 96). Indeed, the belief in a resurrection was part of the apocalyptic hope and worldview. For example, the disciples already had to have an understanding of resurrection before they could identify Jesus’ empty tomb and appearances as constituting a resurrection. The hundreds of ossuaries (receptacles holding bones of the dead) discovered by archeologists in the environs of Jerusalem may be material evidence of this first-century Jewish hope in a future resurrection.

That the resurrection was a central element in Paul’s message is a truism. 1 Corinthians 15 alone illustrates the point, and Paul again and again mentions resurrection: Christ’s saving death and resurrection seem to have been the focus of his preaching.

Moreover, Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruits (see First Fruits) that foreshadows and authenticates the resurrection of all those who belong to him (1 Cor 15:23). This resurrection will involve a transformation like the transformation that Jesus’ body underwent in the tomb. Paul makes this point in Philippians 3:20–21: “We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.” In

apocalyptic fashion Paul is speaking of a “bodily” resurrection and transformation in so far as one can speak of a “spiritual body” as a body (see Immortality).

Further, the resurrection of Jesus as first fruit of the eschaton heightened the expectation for the general resurrection at the end of this age and the accompanying transformation of all creation (see Eschatology). Thus Paul believed the end of this age was very near. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Paul expected to be alive (1 Thess 4:15) to see Jesus return. Then two related events would occur: first, the “dead in Christ will rise” and, secondly, the living will be transformed (so also 1 Cor 15:51). This raising of the dead and transformation of the living was to be accompanied by the transformation of nature and all creation: “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). This is clearly apocalypticism.

Paul shared the apocalyptic belief in the two ages: this present evil age will be transformed by an act of God into the age to come, or kingdom of God (see Kingdom of God). Thus Paul says that “the whole creation has been groaning in travail” (Rom 8:22) and waiting “with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rom 8:19).

Perhaps the key ingredient in apocalypticism was the category of revelation. Most apocalyptic writings reveal the future. Paul also reveals the future.

In describing God’s purpose for the future, Paul, like other apocalypticists, used the word *mystery* (*mystērion* e.g., Rom 11:25). Paul’s use of the term is both Jewish and apocalyptic in background. Generally speaking, the Jewish apocalypses portrayed God’s purposes for history as well as the nearness of the end of this age. They used the term *mystery* to designate a purpose or secret of God which could not be known by human reason, but had to be revealed by God.

According to the “mystery” that Paul is revealing, God has formed a new people in Christ and the unbelief of the Jewish people has caused the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles. However, in the end time “all Israel,” presumably the Jewish people who do not believe in Christ, will be drawn to faith in him by God.

Many interpreters conclude that Paul was speaking of a secret or revelation that he had received from God. Others are not sure. Regardless of how Paul received the “mystery,” this term was the common currency of apocalyptic language.

Nevertheless, in the use of traditional apocalyptic language and imagery there is a difference between Paul and other apocalypticists. In Paul the sharp separation between this age and the age to come is lacking. The resurrection of Jesus, more specifically, his crucifixion and resurrection, introduced a new factor into the equation. There is an overlap between the two ages: the new age is proleptically present in Christ’s work of reconciliation. Indeed, the transformation of believers is secretly taking place within them: “And we all ... beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18).

#### **4. Paul’s Self-Understanding as a Jew.**

The previous discussion of the term *mystery* and its surrounding context in Romans 9–11 introduces another dimension of Paul’s Jewishness, namely, his ongoing Jewish

self-understanding. Romans 9–11 enables us to enter into Paul's self-understanding as a Jew better than any other Pauline passage.

In introducing his discussion in Romans 9:2–3 he shares his feelings for his “own people,” his “kindred according to the flesh.” He agonizes over the unbelief of the Jews as only a fellow Jew could (see Israel). Troubled by the general Jewish rejection of “the Christ,” Paul rejects the possibility that “the word of God has failed” (Rom 9:6). In Romans 11:1 Paul also rejects [p. 508] the proposition that God has “rejected his people.” The solution is simple: the unbelief of the Jews has caused the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles, who in turn believed. While Paul was “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13), he cannot forget his own people. Indeed, the turning of the Gentiles to Christ causes the Jews to become jealous: “Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them” (Rom 11:13–14). The very vigor with which Paul pursued his Gentile apostolate has suggested to some interpreters that Paul thought he was entering into the very eschatological purpose of God in saving all Israel. Paul not only had “unceasing anguish” for his “kinsmen by race,” but he gave himself for their salvation, a side effect of his Gentile mission being the conversion of Jews.

At this point, recent scholarship has tended to take divergent paths. Some hold that Paul is advocating a two- covenant people of God: the Gentiles approach God through faith, while the Jews approach him through Torah (Gaston, Gager, Stendahl). Surely, the majority of NT scholars are correct in holding that any two- covenant approach founders on the rock of Romans 10 (see Israel; Law).

If the Jews must come to faith in Christ in order to be saved, how will God accomplish this? Paul knows the election of the Jews still holds (Rom 11:28–29), and he knows the secret plan (mystery) of God (note the elements of self-understanding implied here). After “the full number of the Gentiles come in,” then “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25–26). Will jealousy over the “full number of the Gentiles” turn the Jews to faith? Will the Second Coming of Jesus occasion such faith? Paul reveals God’s overall purpose for Israel, but not the details. Paul continued to understand himself as a (believing-in-Christ) Jew, privy to the plan of God.

Even the notion of the ingathering of the Gentiles at the end of the age was a part of Paul’s Jewish heritage. In some apocalyptic scenarios the Gentiles would be converted in the end time and make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (see Collection). This expectation for the ingathering of the Gentiles seems to lie behind Romans 11:25. However, in the “mystery” that Paul is sharing, God has formed the Jewish Christians and the Gentile converts into a new people of God in Christ. As we have seen, the unbelief of the Jewish people had caused the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles.

## 5. Paul’s Mysticism.

Contemporary scholarship is just beginning to explore Paul’s mysticism (see Visions, Ecstatic Experience). Paul’s mysticism is Jewish mysticism and derives from Palestinian Judaism. It must be defined with care.

Paul’s mysticism is as well defined by what it is not as by what it is. The attempt of a previous generation to identify Paul with the mystery religions (see Religions) of the

Hellenistic world on the basis of his use of the Greek term *mystērion* was a failure (see Paul and His Interpreters). Further, the older discussion of Paul's "Christ mysticism," related to his repeated use of the phrase "in Christ" (see In Christ; Mysticism, is not the issue contemporary scholars are addressing. Rather, Paul's mysticism is best defined by (1) the experience he describes in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4 and (2) his knowledge of God's eschatological plan (described above in connection with the term *mystery*). In 2 Corinthians 12:1 Paul boasts of "visions and revelations of the Lord." He goes on to describe his being "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor 12:2) and then "into Paradise" (2 Cor 12:3; see Heaven, Heavenlies, Paradise) where "he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Cor 12:4).

What is the background for this kind of experience? An emerging scholarly consensus posits Merkabah mysticism (related to Ezekiel's vision of the throne chariot, or *merkābâ*, of God) as the background for Paul's experience (see, e.g., Bowker, Segal). G. Scholem (*EncJud*) associates early Merkabah mysticism with certain circles of Pharisees, and particularly with Johanan ben Zakkai, who flourished around a.d. 70, and with the later Akiba.

Today, scholars are dating Merkabah mysticism earlier than Scholem supposed. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls (see Qumran and Paul) fragments of a so-called *Angelic Liturgy* were found (4Q400–407 = 4QShirShab). These fragments describe the divine throne chariot—a central theme of early Jewish mysticism. This find shows that Paul could have been acquainted with Merkabah mysticism, especially since he was Johanan ben Zakkai's contemporary.

This early Jewish mysticism was centered in Palestine and found expression in apocalyptic literature such as the Enoch tradition (e.g., 1 *Enoch* 70–71; 2 *Enoch* 22; 3 *Enoch*). Certain Pharisaic circles focused on the first chapter of Ezekiel which tells of the throne chariot (the *merkābâ* of God. Scholem also reports that the early literature speaks of an "ascent to the Merkabah" (Scholem 1961, 46).

This form of early Jewish mysticism fits together with Paul's autobiographical statements. In Philippians 3:5–6 Paul tells us that he was a zealous Pharisee and blameless "as to righteousness under the Law." In 2 Corinthians 11:22 (a passage immediately preceding his description of his visions), Paul emphasizes his descent from Abraham: "Are they descendants of [p. 509] Abraham? So am I." Early Jewish mysticism was practiced in certain Pharisaic circles. Nevertheless, not every Pharisee was permitted to study Ezekiel 1 because of the dangers involved (cf *m. Hag.* 2:1). If the exegete should see again the vision of the throne chariot and not be in a state of ritual purity, he might die: "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Ex 33:20). Hence Johanan ben Zakkai taught mystical contemplation only to "his most favored pupils." J. W. Bowker has emphasized the importance of the Jewish credentials of the exegete, such as his direct descent from Abraham (Bowker). Paul's credentials well fit these requirements.

However, even more important than Paul's credentials for establishing a connection with Merkabah mysticism are the words he uses in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4. Three expressions stand out: being "caught up" (*harpazō*), "the third heaven" (*tritos ouranos*) and "paradise" (*paradeisos*). J. D. Tabor has shown that these words belonged

to the vocabulary of Jewish mysticism and cites the first-century *Life of Adam and Eve* (25:3) as an illustration:

And I saw a chariot like the wind and its wheels were fiery. I was carried off into the Paradise of righteousness, and I saw the Lord sitting and his appearance was unbearable flaming fire. And many thousands of angels were at the right and at the left of the chariot (*OTP* 2.266–8).

In this excerpt the mystic is not talking about the future, but the dwelling of God in paradise, perhaps in the seventh heaven. Other visions associate paradise with the third heaven.

Finally, the book of Acts records that Paul experienced visions. While all visions are not the same, the overlap in vocabulary plus Paul's credentials indicate that his vision in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4 was the kind associated with Merkabah mysticism. Furthermore, Paul's apocalyptic worldview and his concept of "mystery" (revelation of God's future plan) are additional indications of his orientation to mysticism.

There is a fascinating interplay between the facets of Paul the Jew that we have examined so far. His autobiographical statements disclose his Pharisaism, his zeal and his righteousness under the Law. His writings reveal his exegetical prowess and his appropriation of the exegetical traditions by means of which he interpreted the passages of the Septuagint. All this is evidence of his formal training in the Judaism of his day. Of course, this formal training was a precondition for his instruction in Merkabah mysticism. Moreover, his mysticism and his apocalyptic worldview fit together like hand in glove. Since revelation of God's plan for the future is an essential ingredient in apocalypticism, the one depends on the other.

Two striking observations emerge from the above summary. The first concerns how well Paul fits into the first-century, pre- a.d. 70 (Palestinian) Judaism that we know from other sources. For example, the same combination of zeal for the Law, apocalyptic worldview and mysticism characterized the Qumran sectarians. While not an Essene, Paul stands forth as a devoutly religious Pharisee of the time. The second striking observation concerns how well the pieces all fit together into a harmonious whole. Heretofore Paul has been pictured as a marginal man, living uncomfortably in two worlds—the Hellenistic and the Jewish. Heretofore Paul has been pictured as a man characterized by conflicting goals and serious internal contradictions. This is not the picture that emerges from the above study.

Now we are ready to examine the element that shattered the unity of his preconversion synthesis—his relationship to Torah. Still, nothing more cogently depicts Paul the Jew than his continuing preoccupation with Torah. On the one hand, he cannot reject Torah altogether and, on the other hand, he cannot accept it as he formerly did.

## 6. Paul and Torah.

The literature on the subject of Paul and Torah, or Law, is immense. Our purpose here is not to review this literature (see, e.g., Dunn, Sanders), but to outline the significant issues in the contemporary debate (see Law; Works of the Law. Indeed, a new perspective on Paul and the Law is coming into focus out of the contemporary debate.

The dilemma for scholarship is posed by Paul's apparently contradictory statements about the Law. On the one hand, Paul appears to have had a positive view of the Law: "So the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12). "Do we then overthrow the Law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary we uphold the Law" (Rom 3:31). On the other hand, Paul wrote negatively about the Law and appears to have attacked the Law itself: "By works of the Law shall no one be justified" (Gal 2:16). "For Christ is the end (in the sense of termination) of the Law, that every one who has faith may be justified" (Rom 10:4). Did Paul contradict himself?

According to the traditional view Paul made a radical break with the positive OT view of Law. Paul rejected the Law and saw Christ as the termination or end of the Law. The traditional view is best articulated by R. Bultmann and other German Lutheran exegetes. The Jews obeyed the Law to accumulate merit for themselves and thereby earn salvation. Indeed, [p. 510] the Pharisee was a worse sinner than most because the Pharisee best exemplified the human striving to assert independence from God and to be free of dependence upon God's grace.

E. P. Sanders has challenged this traditional interpretation of Law in the name of covenantal nomism. After an exhaustive examination of the Jewish literature of the period, Sanders has challenged Bultmann's understanding of first-century Judaism: Bultmann has read Luther's conflict with Catholicism back into the first century. The covenant, the Law, the special status as elect people of God (hence the term *covenantal nomism*) were all gifts of God's grace to Israel. The Jews did not have to earn what they already had: the Law was simply the means of maintaining their covenantal status.

What then was Paul condemning when he spoke of "works of the Law"? In answering this question, J. D. G. Dunn, who accepts Sanders's understanding of first-century Judaism, carries the argument further than Sanders. Dunn points out that the phrase "works of the Law" occurs three times in Galatians 2:16. More importantly, the issue is table fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians: in this context Paul was opposing Jewish Christians who insist on maintaining the food laws (see Food). The heart of the matter for Paul is the inclusion of Gentiles in the messianic community on an equal footing with Jewish Christians. The Jewish Christians, on the other hand, wanted the Gentiles to become Jews before they could share in the table fellowship with observant Jewish Christians. Thus, the issue was not merit-based righteousness so much as racial exclusiveness. According to Dunn, the problem for Paul was those observances of the Law that set Jews apart from Gentiles.

For Dunn the issue Paul addressed was not how one was saved: the issue was sociological. The "works of the Law" were circumcision, purity and food laws, and Sabbath observance. In the ancient world the pagan writers regarded these very practices as distinctly Jewish. These "works of the law" marked "the boundaries of the covenant people" (Dunn, 193). Paul was saying no to the Law inasmuch as it set boundaries for the covenant people. Thus Paul was saying both no and yes to the Law at the same time. According to Dunn, Paul said no to the Law where it reinforced Jewish nationalism and exclusiveness, but yes to the Law where it expressed the will of God.

How could Paul the Jew do this? How could he say no to some provisions of the Law and yes to other provisions of the same Law? The answer seems to lie in Paul's apocalyptic worldview. A shift had taken place from the old age to the new age in Christ. Law or Torah was superseded by Christ. Paul's statement in Romans 10:4 is crucial: "For Christ is the end of the Law, that everyone who has faith may be justified." Paul was not speaking of "the end" as termination of the Law, but as the goal or fulfillment of the Law. While the Law still defined God's will, it no longer functioned salvifically. The new age had arrived, and the Law had been superseded by God's new gift: Christ. Thus Paul can write in 1 Corinthians 15:20–22:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

The new perspective first advanced by Sanders and then furthered by Dunn does not answer all questions concerning Paul and Torah. But it does answer some. It tends to solve Paul's so-called contradictory attitude toward the Law, as stated above. This new perspective also allows for some continuity between the generally positive attitude toward the Law in the OT and Paul's attitude. Paul opposed the more nationalistic and exclusivistic parts of the Law because God's new act in Christ had extended the covenant to Gentiles: Grace had superseded ritual and race.

Dunn's observation that Paul affirmed the Law where it expressed the will of God is strikingly confirmed by the recent research of P. Tomson. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 Paul writes about a man who "is living with his father's wife." The issue is forbidden sexual relationships according to Leviticus 18:1–18 (see Sexuality). Paul tells the church to excommunicate the man. Tomson discovers point-by-point agreement between Paul's discussion and later Jewish legal tradition that explicates forbidden sexual relationships. This is only one example of the continuity between Paul's ethical teachings and Jewish legal tradition.

Finally, this new perspective enables us to see Paul more clearly as a first-century Jew. Jewish scholars have long argued that Paul misunderstood Judaism and his view of the Law differed from that of most first-century Jews. Actually, according to Dunn, the German-Lutheran portrayal of Paul has been the problem. Paul was an authentic first-century Jew; there was no serious discontinuity between Paul and his Jewish past. He was a son of Abraham who objected to narrowing the covenant to the Jewish nation: Abraham was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (see Universalism).

Among other questions that still remain is Paul's teaching directed toward Jewish Christianity. Was Paul asking Jewish Christians to abandon the boundary [p. 511] markers of the Law in their own practice? Did he teach that they should cease circumcising their sons and observing the dietary laws in their homes? Or was he speaking about fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in such places as Antioch and other mixed congregations? The question can be asked more pointedly: Did Paul entirely abandon the boundary markers ("works of the Law") for himself? Or did he continue to observe them in so far as they did not interfere with his

Gentile apostolate? At this point, there does not seem to be a clear answer to this question.

Only a few Jewish-Christian voices have survived to tell us how Jewish Christianity reacted to Paul's views concerning the Law. Whether those surviving voices are representative of the various groups composing Jewish Christianity, we do not know. However, these few voices, while they stressed the Jewishness of Jesus, regarded Paul as a villain (Flusser, chap. 13). Some Jewish Christians looked upon Peter as their leader and others preferred James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Do these few muffled Jewish-Christian voices constitute the last Jewish pronouncements about Paul the Jew? We hope not. With the scholarly rediscovery of the Judaism of Paul's day, perhaps some Jewish voices contemporary with Paul will offer a more positive evaluation of Paul the Jew.

See also APOCALYPTICISM; CIRCUMCISION; CONVERSION AND CALL OF PAUL; DIASPORA; HELLENISM; ISRAEL; LAW; MYSTERY; MYSTICISM; OLD TESTAMENT IN PAUL; PAUL IN ACTS AND LETTERS; PURITY AND IMPURITY; QUMRAN AND PAUL; RESTORATION OF ISRAEL; VISIONS, ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE; WORKS OF THE LAW.

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