

HOW NEW IS THE NEW TESTAMENT?

First-Century Judaism
and the Emergence of Christianity

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Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2018 by Donald A. Hagner

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hagner, Donald Alfred, author.

Title: How new is the New Testament? : first-century Judaism and the emergence of Christianity / Donald A. Hagner.

Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018010827 | ISBN 9781540960412 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible. New Testament—History. | Church history—Primitive and early church, ca. 30–600. | Judaism—Relations—Christianity—History. | Christianity and other religions—Judaism. | Christianity—Origin.

Classification: LCC BS2315 .H28 2018 | DDC 225.6—dc 3

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018010827>

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18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



To my students at Wheaton College
and Fuller Seminary,
whose love and hunger for the word of God
have blessed me for more than four decades

Every scribe trained for the kingdom of
heaven is like a householder who brings out
of the treasure box new things and old things.

Matthew 13:52 AT

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PREFACE

Matthew stands at the beginning of the New Testament as the first of the four Gospels, not because it was the earliest to be written, but probably because of its strong emphasis on the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Matthew stands as a kind of bridge between the Old Testament and the New. Along with many others, I regard the evangelist's interest in the words of 13:52 as of special significance to the correct understanding of "the gospel of the kingdom": "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old [*kaina kai palaia*, lit. "new things and old things"]." Matthew's Gospel is above all the announcement of something dramatically new, and it is no accident that he refers to what is new first and emphatically. New and old are both important to Matthew, but it is the new that captivates him, and it is above all the new that he writes about in his Gospel. I was intrigued by Matthew's emphasis on the *kaina*, the "new things," and published an essay on 13:52 ("New Things").

The more I looked at the whole New Testament, the more I began to realize the pervasiveness and great importance of the theme of newness. Although the subject of newness is often treated in passing, I was surprised to find that not much had been written specifically about newness in Matthew or in the New Testament itself for that matter. The only comprehensive study of the subject I could find

was Roy Harrisville's Princeton doctoral dissertation (*The Concept of Newness*).

Meanwhile a trend has emerged that downplays the newness of the New Testament in favor of stressing the continuity of the New Testament with the Old Testament, together with the full Jewishness of the New Testament. There is, of course, no question about the Jewishness of the New Testament nor of its underlying continuity with the Old Testament. But these facts should not be allowed to cancel out or mute the assertion of the New Testament concerning the dramatic newness that has dawned in history through the coming of the Anointed One and his kingdom. Exploration of that newness is the purpose of the present study.

The core of this book originated as a week of lectures (the annual William Menzies lectures) given in January 2016 at the Asian Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio, Philippines. I remain grateful to the administration, faculty, and staff of the seminary for the gracious hospitality and kindness shown to my wife and me during our visit to that beautiful mountain setting. We will long remember the infectious enthusiasm of students and staff from various parts of East Asia, united by a common faith and Christian commitment. It was a blessing to be in their midst.

ABBREVIATIONS

General and Bibliographic

AT	author's translation
BDAG	Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
ed(s).	editor(s), edition
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
ET	English translation
Heb.	Hebrew <i>or</i> Epistle to the Hebrews
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
KJV	King James Version
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint, Greek Old Testament
MT	Masoretic Hebrew text
NB	<i>nota bene</i> , note carefully
no(s).	number(s)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
REB	Revised English Bible
rev.	revised
RSV	Revised Standard Version

TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76.

v(v). verse(s)
vol(s). volume(s)

Old Testament

Gen. Genesis
Exod. Exodus
Lev. Leviticus
Num. Numbers
Deut. Deuteronomy
Josh. Joshua
Judg. Judges
Ruth Ruth
1 Sam. 1 Samuel
2 Sam. 2 Samuel
1 Kings 1 Kings
2 Kings 2 Kings
1 Chron. 1 Chronicles
2 Chron. 2 Chronicles
Ezra Ezra
Neh. Nehemiah
Esther Esther
Job Job
Ps(s). Psalm(s)
Prov. Proverbs
Eccles. Ecclesiastes
Song Song of Songs
Isa. Isaiah
Jer. Jeremiah
Lam. Lamentations
Ezek. Ezekiel
Dan. Daniel
Hosea Hosea
Joel Joel
Amos Amos
Obad. Obadiah
Jon. Jonah
Mic. Micah
Nah. Nahum

Hab. Habakkuk
Zeph. Zephaniah
Hag. Haggai
Zech. Zechariah
Mal. Malachi

New Testament

Matt. Matthew
Mark Mark
Luke Luke
John John
Acts Acts
Rom. Romans
1 Cor. 1 Corinthians
2 Cor. 2 Corinthians
Gal. Galatians
Eph. Ephesians
Phil. Philippians
Col. Colossians
1 Thess. 1 Thessalonians
2 Thess. 2 Thessalonians
1 Tim. 1 Timothy
2 Tim. 2 Timothy
Titus Titus
Philem. Philemon
Heb. Hebrews
James James
1 Pet. 1 Peter
2 Pet. 2 Peter
1 John 1 John
2 John 2 John
3 John 3 John
Jude Jude
Rev. Revelation

1

THE QUESTION OF CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

Among the several paradigm-shifting changes in NT scholarship over the past century, none is more important than the new positive emphasis on Judaism as a religion of grace—a change that has begun to erase the common perception of Judaism as the antithesis of Christianity. Rather than having opposing theologies, Jews and Christians are now increasingly perceived as members of the same family of faith, albeit different branches.

More careful research, based on a fairer estimate of the available evidence, has shown that the negative view of Judaism typically held by Christians for centuries rests on traditional assessments of Judaism that are unjustifiable and unwarranted. To be sure, some of this negativism can be traced back to the NT itself. On the other hand, there is much in the NT that supports a more positive appreciation of Judaism.¹

1. See my discussion in “A Positive Theology of Judaism from the New Testament.”

Judaism: A Religion of Grace

It was primarily the work of E. P. Sanders in his 1977 book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* that moved scholars to this new assessment of first-century Judaism.² Sanders portrays Judaism as a “covenantal nomism,” a law-based religion *within an assumed context of covenant grace*, rather than a legalism where salvation is earned by works. This basic understanding conflicts with the common view of Judaism assumed by the so-called Lutheran view of Paul. Sanders’s insight was hardly novel; it was notably adumbrated a half century earlier by several scholars, for example, by George Foot Moore,³ who already in 1921 lamented that legalism “for the last fifty years has become the very definition and the all-sufficient condemnation of Judaism.”⁴ Even earlier, Jewish scholars such as Solomon Schechter, Arthur Marmorstein, and especially C. G. Montefiore had stressed that Judaism was not a religion where salvation was earned through good works.⁵ Other scholars—such as R. Travis Herford, James Parkes, and Krister Stendahl,⁶ as well as more recent Jewish scholars focusing on Paul⁷—took the same line and argued that Judaism was a religion of grace that depended on God’s sovereign election of Israel.

The New Perspective on Paul

The insights of Sanders were elaborated and applied to Pauline theology especially by James D. G. Dunn, producing a new understanding of

2. This book was followed by his *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (1983). See now his *Paul: The Apostle’s Life, Letters, and Thought* (2015).

3. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*.

4. Moore, “Christian Writers on Judaism,” 252.

5. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1909); Marmorstein, *Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinical Literature* (1920); Montefiore, “On Some Misconceptions of Judaism and Christianity by Each Other” (1896); Montefiore, “Jewish Scholarship and Christian Silence” (1902–3); Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching* (1930).

6. Herford, *Judaism in the New Testament Period* (1928); Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (1934); Parkes, *Jesus, Paul and the Jews* (1936); Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (1976), which includes his influential 1963 essay, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” (Swedish, 1960).

7. E.g., Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (1943); Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (1951); Leo Baeck, “The Faith of Paul” (1952); and Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (1961).

Paul, the so-called new perspective on Paul.⁸ The new emphasis on Judaism as a religion of grace and salvation by election is accompanied by a denial that the doctrine of justification by faith is unique to Christianity. To quote Dunn, “Justification by faith is not a distinctively Christian teaching. Paul’s appeal here [Gal. 2:15–16] is not to *Christians* who happen also to be Jews, but to *Jews* whose Christian faith is but an extension of their Jewish faith in a graciously electing and sustaining God.”⁹

Contrary to the traditional Lutheran reading of Paul—where the law is problematic, to say the least, serving primarily as a propaedeutic to the gospel (a *paidagōgos*, lit., “child-guide,” a role of the law stressed by Paul in Gal. 3:24)—in the new perspective the law retains a positive function of enabling the achievement of righteousness. What then does Paul polemicize against when he speaks negatively of the law and works of the law, as he so often does? “Works of the law” are understood by Dunn and others not as general observance of the law, but very specifically as referring to “Jewish badges of identity” (or “national righteousness”) that mark out the Jews from the Gentiles, especially circumcision, Sabbath observance, and kashruth (the dietary restrictions). Since Paul was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, it is fully understandable that he would have been very much against “works of the law” in this sense, distinguishing the Jews, as the people of God, from the Gentiles. Given the understanding of Judaism as a “covenantal nomism,” where, from the start, grace is an experienced reality, N. T. Wright’s quip is appropriate: the issue for Paul is not grace but race.¹⁰

Yet an examination of the Pauline texts shows that Paul has a more fundamental problem with the law, one that applies equally to Jews and Gentiles.¹¹ It is well known that Paul makes both negative and positive statements about the law. Negatively he can write:

8. See Dunn’s collected essays on the subject, *The New Perspective on Paul*. For a full critique of the new perspective, see Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul*; and S. Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*. See too Hagner, “Paul and Judaism.”

9. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 98.

10. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 168.

11. The problem of Paul and the law is discussed below in chap. 6, beginning with the section “All Things Are Lawful.” For a helpful discussion, see Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*. See too my “Paul’s Quarrel with Judaism.”

“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law” (Gal. 3:11). “For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law” (3:21); “For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20); “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (3:28). “For Christ is the end¹² of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (10:4). “You are not under law but under grace” (6:14); “But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (7:6); “Before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian” (Gal. 3:23–25).

It is evident that the issue here is not merely sociological but also soteriological and thus an issue of universal significance, for both Jews and Gentiles. The law had only a temporary role to play in the pursuit of righteousness, and that role has come to an end with the coming of Christ. As in so much of what the NT has to say, a key turning point has now been reached in the history of salvation. We are in a new situation. Righteousness clearly remains the goal of God’s people (e.g., Rom. 8:4), who are God’s people by grace, and *in that sense* Paul’s gospel upholds the law. The radical difference in the new situation is the dynamic by which righteous living is now possible, namely, the empowering of the Holy Spirit, which so characterizes the remarkable newness that arrives with the coming of the Christ. The Holy Spirit thus accomplishes what the law could not.

This situation is true for both Jews and Gentiles. The conclusion of some that Paul’s view of the law applies only to Gentile converts, not to the Jews, is unjustifiable. Neither the language nor the logic of these passages supports any such idea. Although Paul allows the specialness of Israel because of election, his argument (especially in

12. The word “end” [NRSV], *telos*, can also be translated “goal,” but it is difficult here to rule out the notion of the law coming to an end.

Romans) applies to all of humanity, including the Jews. Therefore it is necessary that the gospel be preached to Israel—indeed, first to them—as well as to the Gentiles.

But were there really any Jews in the first century, like those Paul seems to criticize, who were attempting to earn God's acceptance by their righteousness? It is admitted by more and more scholars that Sanders overstated his conclusion that the Jews universally recognized the foundation of their salvation as resting on covenant grace. There is a fair amount of evidence that some, even many, Jews thought of their salvation as dependent upon their obedience to the law. Even Sanders had to take note of 4 Ezra, with its emphasis on works of the law, as an exception to the pattern of religion he presented from the literature of Second Temple Judaism.¹³ The situation in the rabbinic sources is anything but clear and consistent. Thus it is not difficult to find legalistic-sounding passages in the rabbinic literature. The argument of Sanders and others is that the grace of the covenant is the underlying assumption of such passages. What we appear to have in first-century Judaism is a classic instance of synergism, where grace and merit were held together in tension. In this paradoxical situation, we have an antinomy, famously articulated by Rabbi Akiba: "The world is judged by grace, and yet all is according to the amount of work" (Mishnah, Avot 3.16).¹⁴

The balance between covenant grace and works of the law was lost in postexilic Israel. The experience of the exile understandably drove the Jews to observance of the law with a renewed dedication and energy. The result appears to have been a legalism that became dominant and all but obscured the reality of covenant grace. Under these circumstances, it should not be surprising to discover that many or even most Jews of Paul's day were de facto legalists, in contradiction to a proper understanding of covenant grace. Paul is not necessarily arguing against straw men, as many scholars claim.

13. "In 4 Ezra, in short, we see an instance in which covenantal nomism has collapsed. All that is left is legalistic perfectionism" (E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 409). Second Baruch, probably dependent on 4 Ezra, contains a similar perspective; see, e.g., 4 Ezra (2 Esd.) 7:70–74; 2 Bar. 24.1–2.

14. After citing this text, Abrahams adds, "The antinomy is the ultimate doctrine of Pharisaism." *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, 146.

Law and Gospel

Although the contexts were decidedly different, Paul’s argument against works-righteousness is similar to Luther’s, who after all is dependent on Paul. Both writers are concerned with salvation, how sinners can stand justified before God. For Paul and for Luther, all of humanity, both Gentiles and Jews, are under judgment as sinners. The law, as Paul argues, followed by Luther, has no answer to this universal problem, neither for the Jews nor the Gentiles. The solution to humanity’s common plight is found in one way only: by faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross.

Paul’s view of the role of the law in the life of Jewish believers in Jesus is not totally clear. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, he agrees with the plan of the Jewish-Christian leaders to show that he does not teach “all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and . . . not to circumcise their children or to observe the customs,” and that “all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law” (Acts 21:21, 24). Paul is willing to go along with this plan, not because it necessarily reflects his personal perspective, but rather for the sake of the unity of the church.¹⁵ His own view of law observance is articulated in his own words in 1 Cor. 9:19–23, that he is deliberately inconsistent, depending on his context. That Paul can say “I myself am not under the law” (9:20) indicates that he has undergone a major transition since his days as a Pharisee. It is Christ’s “law” that now holds sway over Paul, not the law of Moses (9:21).¹⁶ The argument that Paul himself continued to be a faithful observer of the law is not convincing.¹⁷ He observed it not consistently, but when it was useful for his mission. Christ has become the center of Paul’s existence, no longer the Torah. This displacement of Torah by Christ is critical to understanding the difference between Judaism and Christianity.

15. See further discussion below under “Paul in Jerusalem” in chap. 4.

16. See below under “All Things to All People” in chap. 6.

17. Wright concludes, “I find myself in agreement with those who have maintained that Paul did not himself continue to keep the kosher laws, and did not propose to, or require of, other ‘Jewish Christians’ that they should, either.” *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1:359.

The recent emphasis on the Jewishness of Christianity is a welcome development. In its less radical forms it will surely continue to produce a more adequate understanding of Christianity. Especially important is the rejection of the all-too-common stereotyping of Judaism as a legalism empty of grace and the new emphasis on Judaism as a covenantal nomism. That remains a correct understanding of Judaism even if in practice, as we argue, the covenantal framework was often overshadowed by the consuming demands of obedience to the law.

The Jews are God's covenant people. In the NT we are taught that the Gentiles are full members of the people of God, alongside Israel. The claim of some that Christianity too can be understood as a covenantal nomism is not convincing. There is, of course, a similarity in the fact that the writers of the NT, including Paul, never abandon the importance of the quest for righteousness. As we have already noted, however, this quest for righteousness is not by the instrumentality of the law, but by a new dynamic, the power of the Holy Spirit. The difference is great. By definition nomism is a matter of law-centeredness. Christianity by contrast is Christ-centered.

New Testament Christianity: A Jewish Sect?

The thorough Jewishness of the NT, and of Paul too, can make it possible to think of early Christianity as simply another sect of Judaism. This trend of thinking began with an increasing realization and appreciation of the Jewishness of Jesus, which led to what came to be called "the Jewish reclamation of Jesus."¹⁸ It was Jewish scholars in the early twentieth century who began this movement to fit Jesus completely within the boundaries of Judaism. Jesus, it was argued, belongs to Judaism, not Christianity. Paul, instead of Jesus, came to be regarded as the founder of Christianity.

Given that conclusion, together with the dominant reading of Paul vis-à-vis Judaism, it was rather surprising when the Jewish

18. See Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*. See further discussion below under "The Swinging Pendulum: From Discontinuity to Continuity" in the present chapter.

reclamation of Paul began.¹⁹ There is currently a trend underway among a growing number of scholars to place *Paul* comfortably *within Judaism*.²⁰ It is not only Jewish scholars who have begun to read Paul in this way. Indeed, encouraged to an extent by Jewish-Christian dialogue, there are some for whom the goal seems to be *the Jewish reclamation of the NT and early Christianity itself*. This approach puts all stress on continuity and ignores or avoids speaking of discontinuities or newness; at least it empties them of any significance. These scholars have invented new vocabulary to describe what they believe they encounter in the NT, such as “NT Judaism,” “Apostolic Judaism,” and even “Christian Judaism.” For them the NT represents a form of Judaism. The separation of Christians and Jews, the “parting of the ways,” is now put as late as the fourth century, and it is denied by some as happening at all.

The traditional reading of Paul has regularly put him in considerable tension with, sometimes even in opposition to, Judaism. So it is no surprise that these revisionist scholars have focused their efforts on Paul, pursuing an understanding of him that they describe as being “beyond the new perspective,” or as “a radical new perspective.”²¹ Essential to this new perspective or new paradigm is the denial of any “dichotomy” between Paul and Judaism.

A substantial recent treatment of the subject appears in Pamela Eisenbaum’s book *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle*.²² Here we find practically all of the

19. See already Markus Barth, “St. Paul—A Good Jew,” who mentions before him the Jewish scholars Joseph Klausner, Martin Buber, Leo Baeck, Hans-Joachim Schoeps, Michael Wyschogrod, and Schalom Ben-Chorin.

20. The title of a recent representative volume is Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*; see also the earlier essay by Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?” See too Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*; Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*; Nanos, *Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter*; Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context*; Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*, 95–164; Ambrose, *Jew among Jews: Rehabilitating Paul*; Boccaccini and Segovia, *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism*.

21. They project an image of themselves as interested only in “scientific historiography,” not “faith commitments.” See Nanos, “Introduction,” 4, in Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul within Judaism*; Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*.

22. The subtitle reminds one of Levine’s book on Jesus, *The Misunderstood Jew*. Also see two books by Boyarin: *Radical Jew* and *Jewish Gospels*.

emphases made by the “Paul-within-Judaism” movement: there was no “Christianity” when the NT was written; believers in Jesus constituted a sect within Judaism; Paul continued to obey Torah; Paul did not preach justification by faith; an important key to understanding Paul’s Letters is that he wrote them not to Jews but to Gentiles; Paul’s negative statements about the law therefore apply only to Gentiles; Paul was called rather than converted; and he rejected none of the fundamental tenets of Judaism.

These conclusions flow from the a priori starting point that Paul is to be understood as within Judaism, indeed as a good representative of Judaism. This exegesis of the Pauline texts is no less dominated by an a priori than is that of the “traditional” understanding of Paul within Christianity and as a representative of Christianity. Furthermore, as Magnus Zetterholm frankly admits, “the radical new perspective” is “neither neutral nor objective” and is affected by “ideological factors” such as “involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogue” and “a general consciousness about the connection between the traditional anti-Jewish theology of the church and the Holocaust, in some cases leading to a wish to contribute to the development of theological alternatives.”²³

The so-called “historical” readings of the Paul-within-Judaism scholars can often make sense of the Pauline texts only by means of a tortuous exegesis.²⁴ Quite remarkable is the fair-minded comment of Zetterholm: “It is, of course, fully possible that the theological interpretation of Paul that has developed over the centuries represents an accurate reconstruction of the historical Paul’s thought world.”²⁵ To my mind, the traditional understanding of Paul is indeed highly probable and makes by far the best sense of Paul. The understanding

23. Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*, 232–33.

24. Eisenbaum frankly admits that there are “a few stubborn passages” and that the meaning of some texts is debatable owing to exaggeration and rhetoric. *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 251.

25. Zetterholm, “Paul within Judaism: The State of the Question,” 42, in Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul within Judaism*. The comment, however, simply reflects Zetterholm’s postmodern hermeneutical conviction that there is no way of knowing Paul’s intentions in the texts (see Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul*, 237). Unfortunately, Zetterholm thinks that “the fundamental assumption” in the traditional understanding of Paul is “the vile character of ancient Judaism,” and thus he finds it unacceptable. The traditional view of Paul, however, in no way requires such hostility toward Judaism.

of Paul-within-Judaism can hardly account for the vast amount of newness in the Pauline Letters.

The discussion of this subject has been seriously hindered by the frequent use of simplistic dichotomies on the part of those arguing for Paul-within-Judaism. Thus Paul affirmed Judaism *or* Paul opposed Judaism; Paul was a Jew *or* Paul was a Christian; Paul affirmed Torah *or* he rejected Torah; Paul's views involve absolute continuity *or* discontinuity with Judaism and the OT. Historical reality is usually more complicated, especially within a period of gradual transition.

The challenge is to make coherent sense of not just some of the Pauline texts—but *all* of them together, unless we are content with the conclusion that Paul was hopelessly confused and made numerous irreconcilable statements about important matters. The advocates of the Paul-within-Judaism perspective give insufficient consideration to the complexity of reality. They confront their readers with a kind of rigid either/or mentality that fails to allow tensions, nuances, and subtleties in Paul's affirmations. There is often a sense in which both sides of an either/or can be true and when it is necessary to conclude both/and. This is especially so in the present case, where we are dealing with the genealogical relationship of promise and fulfillment, the new flower growing out of the old seed.

It is of course occasionally possible to understand the same texts in different ways, which is one reason why one's starting assumptions are so important. Starting with the a priori convictions of the Paul-within-Judaism movement, certain texts can be taken as supporting their viewpoint. The question arises, Given the totality of the Pauline texts, which interpretations are the most plausible? The argument of the chapters that follow is that the preponderance of relatively clear texts favors the traditional understanding of Paul and indeed makes the Paul-within-Judaism reading of the NT far less than convincing. So too is the understanding of Christianity as a sect within Judaism.²⁶

The sheer volume of material in the NT stressing the new, to be surveyed in the following chapters of this book, indicates the importance of newness for early Christianity. The argument is cumulative and shows the inadequacy of any assessment of Christianity as

26. See further Hagner, "Matthew: Apostate, Reformer, Revolutionary?"

simply another Jewish sect that reflects a variant form of first-century Judaism. Newness in fact pervades the NT.

Did the early Christians think of their faith as in continuity with or as a departure from Judaism? Not even Paul, who most often approaches Judaism in a radical way, thought of his faith in Jesus as something in opposition to Judaism.²⁷ Paul's Christianity is *fulfilled Judaism*. It therefore is incorrect to say that Paul left Judaism for Christianity. For Paul, Christianity is the goal of Judaism. But Paul's fulfilled Judaism is not adequately described as simply one Jewish sect among others. Far from being one form of Judaism among other equally acceptable forms, Christianity for Paul has an absolute character as the expression of the true Judaism of the end time, an eschatologically fulfilled Judaism. "What God was creating through Paul's mission was not another form of 'Judaism,' but something different and new."²⁸

Continuity and Discontinuity

The present book examines the issue of continuity and discontinuity between formative Judaism and early Christianity. The question encompasses not a single issue, such as law and gospel, but a complex of interrelated issues, including Israel and the church, the Old and New Testaments, as well as prophecy and apocalyptic, Christology and eschatology. Because we will proceed through the NT canon more or less in order, we will not consider any of these topics independently or with the thoroughness they deserve. Which aspect of continuity and discontinuity is in view at any point should be clear from the context; even if not, the discussion will be pertinent due to the interconnection of the various issues. Because of our interest in the subject of newness, our focus will be on *discontinuity*. The *New Testament* depends on the movement from one age to a new, penultimate one. The NT assertion of the dawning of eschatology is the primary basis for all newness. At the same time, however, that basis rests squarely

27. Dunn's comment is apropos: "Certainly we must be careful about defining Pauline Christianity simply as a kind of Judaism (continuity); but equally we must beware of falling into the old trap of thinking that Christianity can only define itself in opposition to Judaism (discontinuity)." Dunn, "How New Was Paul's Gospel?," 385.

28. Barclay, "Paul, Judaism, and the Jewish People," 199.

upon the promise and expectation of the OT, and thus the fulfillment recorded in the NT is the climax of what has preceded and hence is a fundamental manifestation of continuity. Discontinuity and continuity accordingly belong together.

The interrelation between what we call the Old and New Testaments (i.e., the old and new covenants)²⁹ is of special importance to our subject. As the early Jewish believers in Jesus struggled to understand and interpret the events that brought the new reality of the church into existence, they turned to their Scriptures, what Christians have commonly come to call the “Old Testament.” It is a familiar fact that the NT frequently quotes the OT and even more frequently alludes to it. The authors of the NT constantly stress the fulfillment of the OT promises, and this conclusion is of absolutely fundamental importance for them in understanding the newness they encountered in Jesus and the gospel.³⁰

These facts inevitably raise the challenging question of *continuity* and *discontinuity*: the extent to which the NT can be regarded as simply a continuation or extension of the OT, and the extent to which it can be regarded as breaking new ground, taking us to a new reality that necessarily transcends the OT, although anticipated by it.³¹ A part of this large question—indeed, the key issue—is the relation between Judaism and Christianity, the interface of church and synagogue, and the eventual parting of the ways.

It is basically this theme of newness and the problematic of continuity and discontinuity that will occupy us in the chapters that follow. In particular we will explore what is presented as new in the NT and observe in passing what is implicitly, if not explicitly, left behind. We will trace the theme of newness through the whole of the NT, drawing conclusions as we go, and conclude with some final observations.

29. The words “covenant” and “testament” translate the same Greek word, *diathēkē*. The expression “new covenant” (*hē kainē diathēkē*) is drawn from Jer. 31:31 (Heb., *berit ḥādāšā*) (= 38:31 in the LXX); cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:13; 9:15; 12:24.

30. As evidence of the ongoing vitality of this subject, see esp. these works by Hays: *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*; *Conversion of the Imagination*; *Reading Backwards*; *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*.

31. Discussion of these issues is anything but new. See the helpful, if dated, survey by Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology*, esp. 10–144.

The Swinging Pendulum: From Discontinuity to Continuity

Although a priori it seems clear enough that somehow both continuity and discontinuity are true and must be affirmed, the pendulum nevertheless has swung back and forth to extremes in the history of NT scholarship, depending on the climate of the times. It is hardly surprising that *through most of the history of the church, the emphasis has been on discontinuity*. As the church became increasingly Gentile, its Jewish roots became less understood and appreciated. At the same time, the church began to work out the ramifications of its faith with more clarity. The distance between the church and the synagogue gradually increased, and the ways of the two began to part. Jewish believers in Jesus, meaning Jewish Christians, were apparently able to bridge the gap for some decades, but the emerging differences between Christians and Jews were too conspicuous to ignore. It finally became impossible to participate fully in the two camps at the same time. The result was that the perception of discontinuity became dominant, and with it, regrettably but inevitably, enmity between the two groups became more common.

Within the NT itself, as we shall see, we already find abundant evidence of the disagreement and enmity caused by the discontinuity with Judaism that is intrinsic to the unique affirmations of the early church. This began very early. As real and painful as this theological disagreement was, it makes little sense to characterize it as “anti-Judaism”—a word that, although not without an element of truth, is simply not the most appropriate description, given the substantial continuity between Christianity and Judaism. It is an even worse mistake to describe the disagreement as “anti-Semitism.”³²

In the second century, after the NT, we begin to encounter an increasingly strong anti-Judaism (i.e., theological disagreement), and hence stress on discontinuity, especially in the Apostolic Fathers

32. It is important to make this distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. The former refers to theological disagreement with Judaism, while the latter is a much broader term referring to racial hatred and prejudice against Jews. See Evans and Hagner, *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity*. Anti-Judaism can lead, and in the past has led, to anti-Semitism. Christian disagreement with Jewish theology is understandable and unavoidable, but the very idea of a “Christian” anti-Semitism violates the Christian confession of Jesus the Jewish Messiah as Lord.

Barnabas and Ignatius. In the middle of the second century, Marcion posed the problem in the starkest terms by his rejection of the OT writings as Scripture and the differentiation of the God of the OT, the Demiurge, from the God of the NT. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the early church had the wisdom to resist Marcion and to affirm the OT as a vital part of its canon. Further to be mentioned in the second century are Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* and the anti-Judaism of Melito of Sardis's *Paschal Homily*, and then Tertullian in the third century. Particularly grievous is the *Adversus Judaeos* literature of the following centuries, represented by such fathers as Ambrose, Cyprian, Cyril of Alexandria, and especially John Chrysostom's homilies against the Jews.³³ Christian polemic against the Jews continued through the Middle Ages down to Martin Luther's venomous treatise *On the Jews and Their Lies* and beyond.

As to be expected, there was a corresponding polemic from the Jewish side stressing discontinuity, although not nearly of the same volume as the Christian polemic. First, we may mention the liturgical alteration known as the Birkhat ha-Minim, the "blessing of the heretics."³⁴ This twelfth of the so-called Eighteen Benedictions of the synagogue prayer service was introduced in Palestine at Yavneh (Jamnia) near the end of the first century, in order to keep Jewish converts to Christianity from attending the synagogue (cf. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 16, 96). In a somewhat later form it reads: "For the apostates let there be no hope. And let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the *minim*³⁵ [heretics] be destroyed in a moment. And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant."³⁶

Also influential was the scandalous Toledoth Yeshu ("generations of Jesus," i.e., "life of Jesus"), written down before the tenth century

33. For an informative survey and analysis, see McDonald, "Anti-Judaism in the Early Church Fathers."

34. For full discussion, see Horbury, "The Benediction of Minim."

35. Sometime later the word *nozerim*, "Nazarenes," i.e., specifically Christians, was included.

36. This reading reflects that of a siddur (prayer book) manuscript found in the Cairo Geniza toward the end of the nineteenth century but going back to a much earlier time. See Horbury, "Benediction of Minim," 68.

but based on much earlier oral sources, including material from the Talmud and midrashim. Although there is no standard version of the story, the basic plot runs like this:

Miriam, the mother of Yeshu, is seduced by one Joseph Pandira [alternatively, by a Roman soldier named Panthera]. The illegitimate Yeshu, who fails to show respect to the Sages, steals the ineffable name of God from the temple, by which he is able to work a variety of miracles, even the raising of the dead, proclaiming himself to be the Son of God and Messiah of Israel. In reality, he was a sorcerer and deceiver. He was stoned, and his body was hung on a cabbage stalk, because no other tree would consent to bear it. After his burial, a gardener took the body from the tomb and threw it into a ditch, leaving an empty tomb for the disciples to find.³⁷

For centuries, on into the late medieval period and later, this was the only source of “information” about Jesus readily available to ordinary Jews. If we look at the big picture, however, it remains true that the Jews were apparently more content to ignore Christianity than the Christians were to ignore Judaism.

With the coming of the Enlightenment and the emancipation of the Jews, beginning in the late eighteenth century, the climate begins to change. Now we encounter the beginnings of a *gradual movement from stress on discontinuity to stress on continuity*. For the first time, a more positive Jewish approach to Jesus became possible. This new, open attitude, exhibited almost exclusively among Reform Jews, not among Orthodox Jews, gave rise in the twentieth century to what we have already noted as “the Jewish reclamation of Jesus”³⁸ and subsequently “the Jewish reclamation of Paul.” With these developments the pendulum swings away from discontinuity to emphasis on continuity. Given the hitherto common and seemingly self-evident understanding of Paul as having in some sense broken with the law and Judaism—a view prevalent from Luther and earlier—the emphasis

37. On the *Toledoth*, see the essays in Schäfer, Meerson, and Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu*.

38. See above under “New Testament Christianity: A Jewish Sect?” in the present chapter.

had always been on the discontinuity between Judaism and Paul's Christianity.³⁹

These developments stressing the full continuity of early Christianity and Judaism are consonant with the emerging view that Christianity from the beginning was and remained a sect within Judaism and that consequently there never was a parting of the ways between synagogue and church.⁴⁰ This extreme view is not shared by many, but an increasing number of scholars would place the parting no earlier than the fourth century.⁴¹

In summary, it is clear that nowadays for an increasing number of both Jewish and Christian scholars the pendulum is swinging completely to the side of *full continuity between Judaism and Christianity*. This development accords not only with the relativistic spirit of our age, but especially with the concerns of post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian dialogue.⁴²

The Truth of Both Continuity and Discontinuity

The recent, remarkable stress on continuity between Judaism and Christianity raises the question of whether and to what degree the NT is to be regarded as new at all,⁴³ and to what extent, if any, this newness creates an appreciable discontinuity.

39. See Hagner, "Paul's Quarrel with Judaism"; Hagner, "Paul as a Jewish Believer in Jesus"; and Hagner, "Paul in Modern Jewish Thought."

40. See Becker and Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted*. For a defense of a gradual parting of the ways, underway almost from the beginning, see Hagner, "Another Look at the 'Parting of the Ways.'"

41. Much depends on how one defines the "parting(s)." If one thinks merely of the cessation of contact and discussion between Jews and Christians, then of course there may never have been a parting of the ways. But if one thinks of irreconcilable differences that made it impossible for a person to belong to both camps at the same time, then we must conceive of a parting that began very early and continued at different speeds in different areas.

42. The impact of Jewish-Christian dialogue on the conclusions of NT scholarship is worth pondering. It has become increasingly difficult for Christian scholars to say anything negative about Judaism for fear of being labeled anti-Semitic.

43. Here I must mention a book by my Fuller Seminary colleague and OT scholar John Goldingay: *Do We Need the New Testament? Letting the Old Testament Speak for Itself*. While I appreciate Goldingay's opposition to Marcionism and his desire to value the OT on its own terms, I think he underestimates the extent

From the start it is important to insist that there is no doubt about the extensive and substantial continuity between Christianity and Judaism. This is not at all in question. There is hardly much need to document or review the vast discussion that supports this conclusion. I accept continuity as a given. Both Jesus and Paul are of course intensely Jewish, as indeed is the entire NT, and so too the earliest church and its theology. A church that is truly biblical, therefore, cannot affirm Marcionism. For the Christian the OT and the NT belong together. What happens in Jesus and the coming of the kingdom of God through him is part of the one great metanarrative of the Bible: the history of salvation. Christianity is the goal and culmination of the story of Israel. In and through the church the story of Israel continues. So thought all the writers of the NT. Herein lies the *continuity*. The extensive discontinuity we encounter in the NT itself presupposes this continuity.

We therefore need to deal with *both* old and new. This point is famously made by Jesus, according to Matthew (13:52): “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (*kaina kai palaia*, lit., “new things and old things”). The unexpected order of new things mentioned before old things places an extra emphasis on the new. For this reason, the biblical word “fulfillment,” one of Matthew’s favorites, is the perfect term to describe what we encounter in the NT. The concept of fulfillment reaches both ways, back to the promises of the past and forward to future (and present) realization of the promises. The word “fulfillment” captures *the unity of the realization together with its promise*, and it is thus no surprise that it becomes such an important word in the vocabulary and conceptuality of not only Matthew but also all the NT writers.

and importance of the newness of the NT. His answer to the question posed in his title seems to be something like this: Yes, but just barely. Goldingay emphasizes continuity and downplays discontinuity between the Testaments. There are some good things and some important correctives to gain from reading Goldingay’s book, but the idea of the NT as little more than an extension of the teaching of the OT fails to appreciate the radical newness that so captivated the authors of the NT.

“Judaism” and “Christianity”

Since the Judaism and Christianity we know and speak of in our day were only in the gradual process of formation in the first century—hence scholars speak of “formative Judaism” and “early Christianity”—the terms are obviously anachronistic in the discussion of our subject, and thus can be more of a hindrance than a help. It is of course clearly wrong to read the content of the fully developed Judaism and Christianity of later centuries into our first-century sources. It is also clear that there was much more variety within each of the two groups at the beginning than was the case in later centuries.

At the same time, however, it seems impossible, given the evidence we have, to deny that there *is* an identifiable Judaism and an identifiable Christianity in the first century. It is obvious from the NT that there were distinctive things believed by the Jews who followed Jesus and those Jews who did not. Virtually all Jews held to a set of core beliefs such as monotheism, the election of Israel, the covenant and Torah, the temple and land.⁴⁴ On the other hand, from the NT itself it is clear that already in the first century the earliest believers in Jesus shared core Christian beliefs, such as confession of Christ as Lord, his atoning death, belief in his resurrection from the dead, belief in the dawning of a new age, and salvation by faith in Christ. That there was also some variety in the beliefs of the two groups is hardly to be denied. But at the same time, it is not difficult to see considerable stability in both groups, easily sufficient enough to establish the identity of one over against the other.⁴⁵ It therefore seems more appropriate to speak of varieties of or within Judaism than of “Judaisms” in the plural—so too to speak of Christianity rather

44. See Dunn, *Partings of the Ways*, 18–36. Cf. E. P. Sanders’s notion of “Common Judaism,” in *Judaism: Practice and Belief* and in *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 31–49, 125–38; see also Hare, *Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians*, 3–18.

45. The subject of identity has received much attention over the last decade. See, e.g., Holmberg, “Jewish *versus* Christian Identity in the Early Church?”; Holmberg, *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, esp. the essay by Holmberg, “Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity”; Holmberg and Winninge, *Identity Formation in the New Testament*; Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*; Byrskog, Zetterholm, and Holmberg, *The Making of Christianity*.

than “Christianities.” There is enough of a common core within the actual varieties to justify speaking of singular entities within which some (limited) variety existed.⁴⁶

Given the great variety of Judaism and the Jewishness of the authors of the NT, one may be forgiven for wondering whether it is really possible that anything in the NT can be considered absolutely “new.” After all, everything in the NT is at a minimum *related* to the OT and hence can also perhaps be *related* to a variant of Judaism manifested somewhere at sometime.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the umbrella of Judaism cannot be made so large as to include everything under the sun! The newness we will be focusing on here concerns matters that are of central importance to most, if not every, manifestation of Judaism, matters that caused great consternation among the Jewish authorities and revealed to their minds the unacceptability of what the Jewish believers in Jesus were preaching.

The frequently heard red herring that one cannot meaningfully speak of “Christianity” until the second century at the earliest because the actual word is not found until Ignatius is clearly a non sequitur. In addition to the obvious fact that *our* knowledge of the first use of a word is hardly proof that the word was not used earlier, it is perfectly possible for the reality to exist before the minting of the word. Already in the NT we have the word “Christian” (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16), and the Pauline designation of being “in Christ” also functions as a clear identity marker. Therefore, I do not think it is necessary, with the qualifications just noted, to avoid speaking of “Judaism” and “Christianity” in the first century.⁴⁸

46. For a refutation of Walter Bauer’s unduly influential book *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, see Köstenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*. Also see Marshall, “Orthodoxy and Heresy.”

47. There are, to be sure, intriguing similarities between the eschatological excitement of the Qumran community and that of the NT writers. The Qumranites believed they too were the people of Jeremiah’s new covenant, perched on the brink of the eschaton, having in their leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, an authoritative interpreter of the Scriptures. Yet for the Qumran covenanters the end is only near, even if very near. But it is not yet present, and the Messiah is still awaited, whereas the NT writers believed that the Messiah was present with his people, even if, as it turns out, he was a paradoxical Messiah who came in the first instance to give his life as an atoning sacrifice.

48. So too Holmberg, “Understanding the First Hundred Years,” 3–5.

Christianity as the Fulfillment of Judaism

Christianity is not *other* than Judaism: it is the *fulfillment of Judaism*. The early church was at first entirely Jewish; although it remained a sect within Judaism for a very short time, Christianity is to be understood as a *fulfilled Judaism* and can be described as a Judaism coming to its divinely intended goal: the accomplishment of salvation through the Messiah's death and the full inclusion of believing Gentiles in the people of God.

While there is plenty of continuity here, at the same time the extent of newness in the Gospels—and indeed the whole of the NT—is such that an unavoidable *discontinuity* with Judaism is created. Fulfillment includes forward movement and thus inevitably involves discontinuity. It is the eschatological/apocalyptic character of what the Gospels announce in the coming of Jesus⁴⁹ that marks the pivotal turning point in salvation history. Roy Harrisville's conclusion remains valid: "That which is concealed and only intimated here [in Matt. 13:52] is that the new which Jesus embodies is not merely the chronologically new, but above all, the *eschatologically new*. The element of continuity between new and old is indeed present, but it is a continuity which must not be allowed to deprive the new of its uniqueness (its contrast with the old), its finality, and its dynamic, i.e., its eschatological character."⁵⁰ The nature and extent of this newness makes it impossible to describe Christianity as merely a sect or a reform movement within Judaism.⁵¹ As C. F. D. Moule has said: "But it is the positive note of fulfilment that, ironically, constitutes the real offence—the *skandalon*. Christianity is undoubtedly new wine."⁵²

49. "Paradoxically, therefore, the greatest discontinuity is in the coming of Jesus. From one perspective he fulfilled the promises and hopes of the Old Testament, and yet from another he surpassed all expectations so that his coming inaugurated a new and final stage in the history of salvation." Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 223–24.

50. Harrisville, *The Concept of Newness*, 28, emphasis added; cf. 108: the concept of newness "with its attendant aspects of continuity, contrast, finality and the dynamic is central to the New Testament literature as a whole."

51. Thus rightly, Hooker, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 23.

52. Moule adds, "What, in the light of the facts, are we really saying about those wineskins?" (Barclay and Sweet, *Early Christian Thought*, 6). This is from Moule's "Introductory Essay" to the Festschrift written in honor of Morna Hooker, which

I am well aware that to speak of Christianity as “the fulfillment of Judaism” will be taken negatively by most Jews as both insensitive and potentially anti-Semitic. I do so because, to my mind, this is the most accurate and effective way to describe the issue before us. I mean it, however, in a highly positive sense. I mean it in the sense expressed, according to Luke, by Simeon, a man “righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel” who, holding the infant Messiah in his arms, refers to the salvation he will accomplish as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:25, 32). The fact that God has brought salvation to the world through Israel is meant to be *Israel’s glory*. This is Israel’s service to God in fulfillment of the servant passages in Isaiah (cf. Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 55:5). There could be no greater service.

But, of course, it must always be remembered that for the full story, we must turn to Paul in Rom. 11, who assures us that God has not simply used his people only then to abandon them without regard for his covenant promises. Israel remains special in God’s eyes, and “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). In the end, the God of the Bible is the God of an enduring continuity of grace and covenant.

is entirely dedicated to our subject, namely, “continuity and discontinuity between early Christianity and its Jewish parent” (i).