



Judaism for Gentiles

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**Anders Runesson: Judaism for Gentiles: Reading Paul Beyond the Parting of the Ways
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ANDERS RUNESSON

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In the epilogue to *Judaism for Gentiles: Reading Paul Beyond the Parting of the Ways Paradigm*, Anders Runesson declares his purpose for writing: “I want to contribute to improving through (non-denominational) historical discourse ‘the foundation of knowledge informing those vital conciliatory efforts’ that take place today between Jews and Christians” (335, citing Joshua Ezra Burns, *The Christian Schism in Jewish History and Jewish Memory* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016], 17). Toward that end, this book gathers thirteen of his essays in a single volume. Eleven were previously published; two (chapters 1 and 13) appear in print here for the first time. The essays have been edited for two purposes: they engage and cite scholarship since their original publication, and they present a co-herent analysis and synthesis of Paul and the reception of his thought. The result is a tightly focused and impressive foray backwards in time, from Pauline scholarship in the present to the historical figure from the past and then back again to the present.

Runesson structures *Judaism for Gentiles* in four parts. The four essays in Part I, “Approaching Paul,” examine fundamental concepts or categories undergirding—and potentially distorting—Pauline scholarship. These include the possibility of and challenges to knowledge of the historical Other (chap. 1); universalism versus particularism (chap. 2); mission, proselytism, and conversion (chap. 3); and whether Paul was a “Christian” whose converts formed “churches” (chap. 4). The past, as L. P. Hartley noted, is a foreign country, and Runesson’s analyses in these chapters expose the ways taken-for-granted features of the contemporary world can obscure the historical Paul. For example, Runesson notes the positive connotations of *universalism* and the corresponding negative connotations of *particularism*, so that these terms “are not applied neutrally or descriptively” by historians but rather “carry within them value judgments. Further, ‘universalism’ is almost always applied to Christianity (or Jesus, or the Jesus movement), and ‘particularism’ to Judaism (defined as something other than the Jesus movement)” (64). Rather than simplistically applying either label to Jesus, Paul, or any other ancient Jews, Runesson disambiguates different views of “the Other” in terms of ethnicity, salvation, and mission (69–72) and offers thicker descriptions of the various ways ancient Jewish groups (including followers of Jesus) differentiated themselves from or were open to others.

In part II, “Reading Paul,” Runesson locates Paul’s letters within first-century institutional contexts, especially the synagogue. In these chapters, “Paul material-izes not in contrast to [Jewish institutional spaces] but as a Jewish person participating in a Jewish discourse aiming at transforming the non-Jewish world” (7). Runesson differentiates public, semi-public, and private spaces; he also distinguishes two types of synagogues: “the public ‘municipal’ synagogue in the land, a civic institution, on the one hand, and Jewish associations, or association synagogues, which were primarily for members, on the other, the latter existing both in the land and in the Diaspora” (142). These two types of synagogues correlate to public (or civic) and semi-public space, respectively. In chapter 5 he places Paul within a decentralized network of association synagogues that lacked any central-izing authority defining the particulars of Torah-observance. Keeping Torah was, largely, locally defined. In chapter 6 he turns to questions of “women, men, and power” (155). Runesson examines the kinds of access to power different kinds of women (e.g., enslaved women, freed-women, free-born women) might have had at different levels of society (e.g., civic, semi-public, domestic). In chapter 7 he compares the activities of Jesus and Paul, the former proclaiming the kingdom of God in “public synagogues” (= public/civic space) and the latter engaging non-Jews in association synagogues in the Diaspora. He continues in chapter 8 placing Paul within association synagogues, now revisiting “the age-old question of a possible center in [Paul’s] writings” (195) by appealing to what Paul himself calls his “rule in all the *ekklesiai*,” namely, that each person ought to remain as they were when they were first “called” (1 Cor 7:17–24). Paul expounds this “remaining” in relation to circumcision (socio-ethnic identity) and to slavery (socio-economic identity). Runesson flips the “parting of the ways” paradigm on its head in chapter 9, finding in Paul a “joining of the ways” between “Jews as Jews and gentiles as gentiles under the umbrella of the overarching ‘in-Christ’ identity” (223; italics in the original).

In Part III, “After Paul,” Runesson offers reception-critical analyses that survey the route between the historical Paul (as reconstructed in Part II) and the contemporary situation, in which Christian and Jew are contrasting identities, and *church* and *synagogue* are mutually exclusive institutions. In chapter 10 he examines different kinds of interaction—conflict, competition, co-existence, cooperation, and conversion/attraction—between Jews and Christians chronologically between the first and fifth centuries CE at the three societal levels mentioned above (public/civic, semi-public, and private/domestic). He stresses the positive coexistence and interaction “on the ground” between Jews and Christians, such that social and theological authorities on both sides tried to clarify and enforce the boundary separating Jews from Christians and Christians from Jews. “[S]uch attempts at isolation by the leaders were unsuccessful among ordinary people” (250). He surveys the development of Christianity proper, a non-Jewish “religion,” in chapter 11. The increasing normativity of Rabbinic forms of Judaism and the rise of a “de-ethnized” “proto-Christianity” led to the creation of two mutually exclusive institutions: the synagogue and the church (284). Jewish communities that expressed their Jewish identity through devotion to Jesus as Israel’s messiah were excluded from both and, eventually, largely ceased to exist (256). In chapter 12 he examines “the rise of normative Judaism and Christianity” through a colonial lens, with non-Jewish Christianity appropriating the Jewish scriptures, the Jewish messiah, and the Jewish apostle to the nations for itself and displacing the Jews as the native heirs of this tradition (293).

Part IV, “Theologizing Paul,” comprises a single chapter aimed at recovering and reforming a genuinely “Lutheran” reading of the apostle in the twenty-first century. Such a reading must account for the non-denominational historiography of Second Temple Judaism and locate Paul within—rather than against—this historiography. What is “Lutheran” about such a reading? Perhaps only that it arises from “[h]eeding Luther’s call to return to the sources . . . the church’s holy scriptures, and there seek guidance for how to understand the present and the future” (326). Though Luther’s Paul was thoroughly and tragically non-, post-, even anti-Jewish, Luther’s epistemological and hermeneutical foundation ironically—and perhaps irenically—leads to the recovery of the Jewish Paul who proclaimed a Jewish messiah.

Both historians of the first century CE and theologians will benefit from this volume. In particular, Runesson’s emphasis on the historical Other as distinct from and independent of contemporary historians and theologians releases Paul from the burden of speaking to twenty-first-century concerns. Paul was a Jew who lived in the first century, was convinced that Jesus was Israel’s messiah, believed that Jesus’s resurrection heralded the final ticks of history’s clock, and understood himself called to summon “the nations” (*ta ethne*)—non-Jews—to join Israel in worshipping Israel’s God. At the same time, as Runesson acknowledges, contemporary Jews and Christians attribute significant, even revelatory authority to history, to the past. Paul may not have been “one of us,” but he is a load-bearing pillar supporting what it means to be “us” in the present.

Space prevents us from adequately engaging this important volume. Anyone interested in Paul as a historical figure, or in the development of a Jewish sect into the religion of the Roman and Byzantine empires, or in the integration of Jews into the vast, multiethnic Roman society that spanned the Mediterranean, or in Christian-Jewish relations will need to work through Runesson’s various proposals. As with any complex analysis of such contentious issues, readers will encounter controversial proposals and areas of disagreement. For example, I am not yet persuaded by Runesson’s claim that “the Judaism and Christianity of the modern period and the Middle Ages never ‘parted ways’ because they never belonged together in any of the three aspects mentioned earlier” (279). (The three aspects are “common theological or halakhic fundamentals,” shared ethnic identity, and shared institutional setting.) Christianity, according to Runesson, begins in the second century at the earliest (with Ignatius) but truly in the fourth century (with Theodosius I), while Judaism has its roots in the consolidation of authority by the Rabbis in the Late-Antique period. These are certainly key periods in Christian and Jewish history

(and the history of Christian-Jewish relations), but Runesson roots the *origins* of contemporary Christianity and Judaism in these periods. As a result, Runesson's narrative of Christian and Jewish origins neglects—not always, but still problem-atically—the different ways that emerging Christian and Rabbinic theology and practice claimed *continuity* with previous eras. Granted, neither the followers of Jesus (both Jewish and non-Jewish) nor the Rabbis preserved in amber forms of Jewish thought and praxis from the Second Temple period. But it matters whether the early Christians “de-ethnosized” the people of God in order to repudiate the Pauline gospel or to perpetuate it, and whether the Rabbis homogenized local ha-lakhic traditions to transform Torah or to stabilize it. While the “parting of the ways” model of relations between Jews and Christians (whomever we intend with these labels) is rightly coming into increasing disfavor, severing the two from the beginning strikes me as unhelpful.

Finally, there are a minimal number of minor technical errors in the manuscript. Most are negligible (e.g., “battel” on p. 305). Some, however, are more important. On p. 274, n. [3] to Figure 12, Runesson lists David C. Sim as co-editor of the 2021 BZNW volume, *Jews and Christians—Parting Ways in the First Two Centuries CE?*, in place of Benjamin A. Edsall. Such errors do not generally detract from the clarity and cogency of Runesson's arguments. This really is an impressive collection of essays that, thankfully, has been made available to readers free-of-charge through a Creative Commons license; see https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/buch/judaism-for-gentiles-9783161619960?no_cache=1.

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