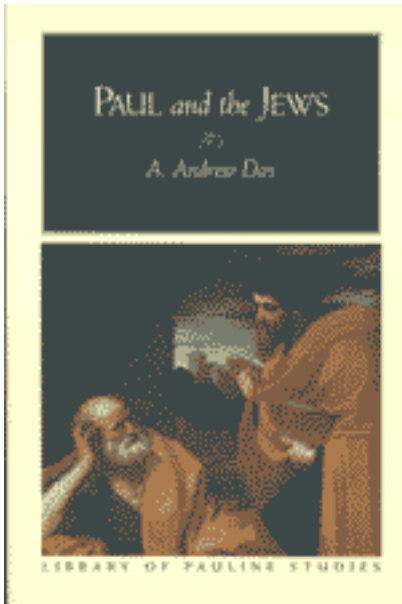


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**Das, A. Andrew**

***Paul and the Jews***

Library of Pauline Studies

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Andrew Das is highly qualified to offer an introductory text to the tangled problems associated with Paul, the Mosaic law, and the Jewish people, as his published doctoral dissertation, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (2001) was well received as a substantive contribution to Pauline scholarship. The present work, appearing in the Library of Pauline Studies published by Hendrickson, is focused on the issue of Israel and the Jews in Paul's letters. Das also covers much of the discussion regarding the Mosaic law in Paul, with a view to drawing conclusions from this material for Paul's thought on the Jewish people. This book might have been more accurately entitled, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, but this would have potentially confused readers with his previous publication, along with at least one of the books by E. P. Sanders. Future offerings in Pauline studies undoubtedly will require more creative authors and editors, since all the really useful titles will have been snapped up.

This book is pitched as an introductory text for undergraduate and seminary courses in New Testament or Pauline studies, though it will be read with great profit by graduate students as well. Das begins by catching readers up to speed on the state of the discussion, and his easy and accessible writing style make his review of literature the best available. He begins his discussion with Ferdinand Weber, a nineteenth-century figure

who codified the “Lutheran” reading of Paul and bequeathed this tradition to his students, such as W. Bousset, who, in turn, handed it on to R. Bultmann. He then charts the rise of “the new perspective” and succeeds in telling the story without partisanship or caricature, which is no mean feat. He also rightly notes the shortcomings of some responses to new perspective approaches; for example, that it simply is not sufficient to argue that the appearance in Jewish texts of the notion of judgment according to works or of the necessity of obedience indicates the presence of legalism (12, n. 22). He raises penetrating questions that new perspective critics have failed to appreciate. He notes that in Phil 2 Paul points to “the divine origin of human works in relation to salvation” and asks whether Jewish authors are capable of similar reasoning. Further, if legalism is detected in every Jewish text that emphasizes obedience, then what is to be done with Pauline texts that have a similar emphasis? And if there are theological moves to explain why Paul does not espouse legalism, then why cannot that same reasoning be applied to Jewish texts? While Das appreciates the recent work edited by Carson, O’Brien, and Siefrid, he maintains that “[g]reater sophistication in the analyses of these matters would have been helpful” (12, n. 22).

Das advocates a “newer perspective” on this issue, claiming that Paul came to realize “that Judaism did not offer a viable path to salvation; the path to a right relationship with God was only in Christ.” The Mosaic law never offered salvation in and of itself, apart from the death and resurrection of Christ. Since this is the case, “the denial of any saving value in the Law’s works will provide a crucial plank in reconstructing Paul’s view of the Jewish people. In other words, while the Jews did not approach the Law legalistically, Paul’s critique of the Law as based on works is a consequence of the transition in his thinking from one conception of grace to another” (12–13). In staking out this position on Paul’s theology of the Mosaic law, Das basically follows Calvin, whose subtlety and sophistication in these matters are too often under-appreciated.

Das may have left himself open, however, to the salvation-historical question of the salvation of the pre-Christian people of God: How were they saved? Did not the Scriptures of Israel teach that salvation was found by walking according to the law of the Lord? What, for Paul, has changed so that this is no longer the case? How, and at what point, did the Mosaic law come to have the character of merely “demanding works,” instead of having the capacity to grant righteousness? Greater attention to these potential objections would have strengthened his case.

Das initiates his investigation with Galatians, seeking to discern what Paul’s discussion in that letter reveals about his thinking regarding his Jewish heritage. He presents a well-argued traditional reading of the letter, advocating a more or less Calvinistic reading. He identifies the agitators as Jewish Christians—though he recognizes the anachronism

inherent in such a conception—who were urging the Galatians “to consider the works prescribed by the Mosaic Law as the key to unleashing the power and possession of God’s Spirit” (19). He emphasizes that this was an intra-Christian struggle, though it will have implications for relations between Jews and Christians (29). In Das’s view, Paul was delivering a stinging critique of the law, especially in 3:10. He deals with other readings of Gal 3:10, including the “exile-restoration” approach, arguing that they each fail to account for Paul’s logic. He then claims that the argument is built upon an implied premise that humans “simply are not capable of doing all that the Law requires and thus fall under its curse. This fundamental human inability is central to Paul’s critique of the Law” (37). Das defends this position against recent objections that this is a misunderstanding of the Mosaic Torah—that the law did not teach the impossibility of human obedience to all that was required. He claims that Paul viewed the Mosaic law “as a series of mere demands and obligations with no provision for failure” (46).

Das also devotes a few pages to explaining Paul’s apocalyptic perspective and how it is employed in Galatians. He notes its background in the thought-world of Judaism and how Paul’s gospel is configured against such a backdrop, including how recent interpreters have deployed this category to understand Paul’s thought. This discussion, which is concise and clear, further increases the value of Das’s work for students.

In his third chapter Das moves on to Paul’s letter to the Roman churches, reviewing the discussion of the situation that this letter was intended to address. Again, Das does not push the boat into uncharted waters but remains fairly traditional in his historical reconstruction—though not uncritically so. He interacts with the most recent important works on the “strong” and the “weak,” along with Mark Nanos’s important proposal, to which he devotes six pages (69–74). According to Das, Paul argues that Jewish dietary practices do not define the boundaries of the Christian community (75), thereby relativizing Judaism (76).

Following the logic of Paul in Romans, Das takes the natural step of answering the question of the election of Israel by the God of Israel: What is the status of Israel vis-à-vis the new multiethnic people of God (78)? How can Paul claim that God is faithful when his people have been rejected (82)? Das argues that Paul’s thought in Rom 9–11 is thoroughly christocentric, and, though he affirms Israel’s elect status, he holds that alongside the necessity of faith in Christ (113). Arguing against a supersessionist reading of Rom 11, Das highlights the priority of Israel among the nations, claiming that “God’s eschatological plan revolves entirely around Israel” (118).

In a chapter called “The Curse of the Mosaic Law,” Das attempts to provide a rationale for Paul’s negative statements about the Mosaic law. It is here where Das’s “newer

perspective” shows itself most clearly. True to his “traditional perspective” orientation, he claims that the first problem with the Mosaic law is its demand for perfect obedience. On the other hand, Das also claims, giving a nod to recent contributions to the discussion, that Paul finds fault with the law because of its ethnic exclusivity (149). In this Das reflects the “both-and” position occupied by other Pauline scholars such as Bruce Longenecker. Lastly, recognizing the importance of Paul’s apocalyptic worldview for his thought, Das states that Paul found the law to be an enslaving power (151).

In his conclusion Das sums up Paul’s hopeful convictions regarding the Jewish people. He notes that one must be careful in reading Paul’s highly charged and striking polemical language in reference to Jews who threatened the churches he had founded, calling them “dogs” and “mutilators” (188). While such language appears inflammatory and seems to indict Judaism and Jews, Das reminds readers that these are “intra-Jewish” or “inter-Christian” disputes and ought not to be read as the Christian Paul’s condemnation of Jews or Judaism *per se*. Further, “[n]ever did Paul condemn the Jewish people as a whole or leave them without any hope in God’s final plan” (189). Though a new chapter in salvation-history had been inaugurated, it was not meant to exclude Jews in any sense. To the contrary, the “mystery” that had been revealed to Paul involved “God’s eschatological plan to save ethnic Israel” (190). The apostle Paul, therefore, is grossly misunderstood if he is thought to be anti-Semitic in any way: “Paul would have been appalled by the treatment of his fellow Jews over the course of time. He would have viewed the persecution of Jews as a flagrant violation of the Law of love expressed in the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8–10), worthy of God’s condemnation and punishment (Rom 2:6–11)” (194).

Das succeeds brilliantly in providing a thorough introduction to the discussion of Israel and the Mosaic law in Paul’s letters. Not only is the book clearly written and accessible to a wide range of readers, but Das manages to represent viewpoints with which he disagrees fairly—something that is all too rare where matters related to Paul and the law are concerned. Das is also discerning in his use of footnotes, avoiding overly technical discussions that might overwhelm undergraduates but indicating where readers might go to pursue certain discussions further. This book makes for enjoyable reading and is highly recommended for use in undergraduate and seminary classrooms, but also for anyone looking for a helpful introduction to the discussion of Paul, Israel, and the Mosaic law.