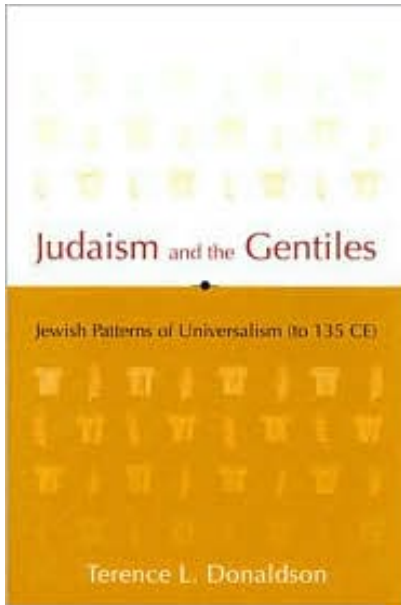


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Donaldson, Terence L.

Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)

Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007. Pp. xi + 563. Cloth. \$69.95. ISBN 978-1602580251.

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There was a time that Judaism in the Second Temple period was considered particularistic, as opposed to Christianity, which was universalistic. The former was taken in a pejorative sense, while the latter was, of course, positive.¹ During the course of time it became increasingly clearer that the characterization of Judaism was unfair and that Judaism at this time was in its own ways just as “universalistic” as Christianity. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate this aspect of Judaism by documenting and exploring various Jewish “patterns of universalism.”

Universalism versus particularism vis-à-vis Second Temple Judaism revolved around the religious status of non-Jewish nations and people in the Greco-Roman world. It also, of course, is connected to Jewish identity, whether self-identity or how others saw and identified Jews. The Jews, according to Donaldson, could not tell their story without

1. I do not make reference in this review to the issue of whether there even was something that might be defined as “Judaism” in the Second Temple period. See, e.g., Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512 who denies that there was a Judaism during Second Temple times. Rather, there were only ethnic “Judeans.” I disagree and in this review will relate to “Judaism” at this time, as indeed does, of course, Donaldson. For Donaldson, this is a *sine qua non* for his work.

reference to other nations, and this reality raised at the least questions about the relationship between nations and the God who had created them. If the relationship between Jew and Gentile was good, or at least correct, then the Jews might ask how these Gentiles might initiate a positive relationship with the God of Israel; if the relationship was bad, then the Jews might dream of a future world in which the Gentiles might recognize the truth and come to worship the God of Israel. The relationship was complex: on the one hand, many Gentiles were attracted to Judaism and even converted; on the other, there were those who were critical of the Jews and even despised them and their religion. For Donaldson, a positive attitude toward Gentiles that allows them to relate positively to the God of Israel and to share somewhat in Israel's destiny can be described as "universalistic."

The quest for universalism is meshed with the need to discuss and study a number of other difficult issues, each of which could produce independent full-length studies. Just to cite a few that Donaldson deals with while realizing that his discussion on these matters cannot be complete: Was Judaism a missionary religion? Was Jewish apologetic literature really addressed to the Gentiles or meant for internal consumption? Was there a class of Gentile sympathizers who adopted some aspects of Judaism without becoming full converts and who were granted some form of official recognition by the Jewish community? Do we relate to "Judaism" or to "Judaisms"?

To make sense of the universalism of the Second Temple period and the other issues mentioned above, Donaldson seeks to provide a thorough collection, with full introduction and commentary, of texts, including inscriptions, that provide evidence for this universalism from the Hellenistic period until the Bar-Kokhba Revolt. The chosen time parameters allow Donaldson to avoid dealing with most of the Hebrew Bible, which, although it contained the seeds of universalism, also reflected a reality in which religion was too firmly embedded in family, clan, or nation to allow for much universalistic movement. The Bar-Kokhba Revolt *terminus ad quem* makes it possible for him to avoid dealing with rabbinic literature and all the thorny matters of chronology that plague those who would learn history from it.

Donaldson divides universalism and its relevant texts into four broad textual categories or patterns. He is of course aware that the borders dividing categories are sometimes not clear and that his sources are at times enveloped in a cloud of "categorical fuzziness." Moreover, real life, in spite of what is written in a given source, may also not be translated exactly from source to reality (or vice versa). His four categories are: a spectrum of sympathizers; converts; ethical monotheists; and participants in eschatological redemption.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 contains texts and commentary and is by far the longer of the two. The texts are divided into pertinent chapters, beginning with (Hellenistic period) Scripture, Septuagint and Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Philo, Josephus, Greco-Roman literature, early Christian literature, and inscriptions. Part 2 deals with the patterns of universalism and is basically a synthesis and analysis of part 1.

Before actually discussing the book, it is necessary briefly to relate to its format. One might legitimately ask: Why a sourcebook? Why not just write a book in a conventional manner? Donaldson chose the present format due to some degree of dissatisfaction with the format of his previous book, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Conventional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), written along traditional lines. He felt that often the texts he studied needed much more discussion than he could devote to them in a traditional work and that in such studies too often the texts are treated in isolation without proper attention to the larger context in which they appear. The model for his present sourcebook volume was the late Menahem Stern's three-volume *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism I-III* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974-1984). The difference was, however, that the need to assemble a collection of Greek and Latin literature relating to Jews and Judaism was recognized since the early nineteenth century, and this need was acted upon a number of times even before Stern produced his work. The detailed, in-depth study of the sources relevant to "universalism" in Judaism does not seem to be as pressing or as important as the topic that occupied Stern and his predecessors and perhaps could have been presented in a shorter monograph. However, Donaldson's methodology does have some benefits, such as being able to apply to his sources a form of study known as "multiple attestation," that is, where a similar viewpoint is attested in multiple sources, especially if those sources differ in form and provenance, allowing one to conclude that the viewpoint expressed is indeed possible. This also could have been done, perhaps, without the sourcebook and commentary format, but Donaldson's format provided him with a map, as it were, making his way much easier. In addition to this, of course, there is also the author's sweeping commentary and incisive analysis. His mastery of the sources is impressive, and he has read vast amounts of secondary literature. Ultimately, though, because of the format, this will not be a book that is read but rather one that will be studied, probably piecemeal.

Due to the enormous amount of source material that Donaldson presents, it does not seem very beneficial in the course of a relatively brief review to discuss this or that source chosen at this or that level of randomness. It is quite possible to quibble over any number of attributions to one or another of the four categories or patterns or to disagree with some of his interpretations of a source. But in light of the vast amount of material presented, as mentioned above, this would be a drop in the (research) bucket, as it were. Rather, it would seem much more beneficial briefly to present the conclusions of

Donaldson's methodology, particularly in light of the use of "multiple attestation" mentioned above.

Regarding the pattern of Gentile sympathizers, the sources show that there is less of a "pattern" than one might imagine (or perhaps that Donaldson might have hoped for). Just how much did one have to do, practice, or believe in order to be a "righteous Gentile" or "God-fearing Gentile"? Donaldson shows that there is little indication of the degree to which Jewish observance had to be adopted. Nor, as he shows, was there any clear articulation of the rationale that might be used to determine this. Were the Gentile sympathizers accorded any particular status in the Jewish community, or did they constitute a defined class? It is hard to tell. A pattern did exist, but it was not as clearly defined as one might have hoped for. "Ambiguous" is a word often used to describe the sources.

Conversion was for those non-Jews who abandoned the gods of the Gentiles and devoted themselves to monotheistic worship, who identified fully with the Jewish community, and who committed themselves to the way of life prescribed by Jewish law. The three axes that opened the door were monotheism, identification with the Jewish community, and Torah observance. Accept this and act accordingly, and theoretically one might become a full member of the Jewish people. This was quite a revolutionary idea, displacing the earlier concept that only birth provided the way into the fold. Not surprisingly, literature of the Second Temple period provides less evidence for conversion rites than the later rabbinic material.

The third pattern, ethical monotheism, seems the least Jewish of all the patterns and rather more like an attempt to make Judaism palatable to those for whom understanding what was good in the world derived from Greek philosophy in one form or another. The Torah was perceived as a formulation of natural law written into the fabric of the universe. The Torah and human reason and/or philosophical teaching are seen as paths to the same transcendent goal. This pattern would effectively allow for Gentiles to acquire an adequate knowledge of God without any real knowledge of Judaism or association with the Jewish community. The law of Moses represents an articulation of a monotheistic ethic that is accessible to humans generally. True, there is the thorny issue of Jewish law and particularly those laws that might mark out the Jewish people as being distinct, but rational explanations might be found for all of this.

Finally, in the end of time there would be vindication and redemption for Israel, and when God's glory was established in Jerusalem, the Gentiles would join the Jews there, abandon their gods, and join Israel, devoting themselves to the worship of the true God.

The final establishment of God's glory required that the nations be included, the true and ultimate universalism.

Is it possible, then, to make sense out of the almost chaotic varieties of Jewish life and religion, particularly regarding non-Jews? Were there patterns in real life and not just in the study of source material? According to Donaldson, there were, and these patterns might provide us with a helpful map to understanding the terrain of Second Temple Judaism in general and the relationships with non-Jews in particular. I am not sure that everyone will agree with him, since the ambiguity of many of the sources can allow for different interpretations and categorization, but Donaldson has provided us with an important work that should be studied in its details and read for its interesting and fruitful formulations of Second Temple-period Judaism.