

Preface

This book has been written over a long stretch of time. When I finished *Judaism: Practice and Belief* in 1991 (published 1992), I had published a book a year for four years: *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (with Margaret Davies) in 1989; *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* in 1990; *Paul: Past Master* in 1991; the aforementioned *Judaism: Practice and Belief* in 1992. I planned to write a book on Jesus and one on Paul for the elusive “ordinary reader.” I managed to complete *The Historical Figure of Jesus* in 1993 (published 1994), and I promised the publishers a similar book on Paul in the near future.

I knew that I was tired, but I was used to working hard when tired, and so for a while it seemed possible. But I was thoroughly used up; my brain did not want to work properly; my back resented my sitting at the keyboard for hours on end; and my energy declined. I reluctantly decided to save the “little” book on Paul until I retired, as I expected to do in the next two or three years.

I wrote little bits of the book from time to time. In 2005, when I finally retired, I sat down to write it. My brain still resisted. I went into a post-retirement slump, lacking ambition and vitality. A series of health issues arose in 2008, a year spent mostly in doctors’ offices—or so it seemed at the time. I considered asking a former student to finish the book, but I found that giving it up was even

harder than working on it. Finally, in 2013, I regained enough of my energy to make my brain work and to sit at the keyboard for several hours a day.

This long tale helps to explain some of the book's peculiarities. Because I thought of a book for undergraduates, I had originally intended not to debate with other scholars and not to use a lot of footnotes or endnotes—just the bare necessities. I believe that I succeeded fairly well on the first goal, not debating with other scholars. In any case, I could not conceivably do justice to the academic literature on Paul for the twenty years during which the book was “in the works.”

I could not resist, however, paying some attention to scholarly *positions* in order to set my own off more clearly. This has led to sporadic and probably eccentric footnoting. There is no academic principle by which I decided to cite this work and not to refer to that work, and my neglect extends to supporters and allies as well as to opponents. I discussed other literature on the Great Apostle when my memory (rather than systematic searching) brought something so forcefully to mind that I had to mention it. Because of the principle of memory called “first in, last out,” I usually remembered older literature rather than recent literature. I have avoided giving a “roll call” of the scholars who have held certain opinions, though in one or two cases I refer to originators or major early contributors of specific issues, such as the Ephesian imprisonment.

Most of the notes provide either more detail, cross-references to related discussions elsewhere in the book (since topics repeat throughout Paul's letters), or to my own lengthier discussions in other publications. I have learned enormously from others, especially in debates with them, but in the notes there are only occasional clues that this is the case.

Though I have learned from others, I must admit that the book

primarily rests on my own previous work on Paul and my continued rereading of the letters since my last publication. The newest aspect of the present book is its completeness. Previously I have written on selected themes and aspects of Paul, but this book includes everything I know (or think I know) about his life, his mission, his letters, and his thought. It is “the complete Paul”—as complete as I can make it.

The book falls into two halves: introductory essays on Paul’s life and environment, and **exegesis**¹ of the text of his letters. The amount of detail varies, depending on the level of difficulty of the text and what I perceive to be especially important and interesting. Some passages are summarized briefly, while in other parts of Paul’s correspondence the explanation of Paul’s meaning becomes a word-by-word commentary.

Because there are comments on parts of the text that are not quoted, the reader will need to have a Bible close at hand. There are numerous discussions that will make much more sense if one reads the biblical passages along with the book.

My first conception of the book (with no academic debates, few footnotes) was that it should be fairly brief. But another conception grew in importance as I wrote. I had long wished that I could cover Paul thoroughly in undergraduate lectures, and so I said to myself that I would put into the new book all of the material that I would have put into lectures and classes for undergraduate students if there had been “world enough and time.” These two aims came into conflict, and the desire for completeness won. Thus the book is longer and denser than I had originally hoped. When I counted the pages, I was amazed at the length of the book; but, having explained everything about Paul that I could, I was not going to delete sections.

I believe that there is nothing in the book that an “ordinary reader”

1. Technical terms appear in boldface and are defined in the glossary.

cannot comprehend. On the other hand, the book's length and my insistence on explaining passages in detail will require a good deal of determination on the part of a non-expert who wants to read it all.

The "ideal reader" will be someone who has a fair bit of knowledge about Christianity and religion in general. Undergraduates who are specializing in Christianity or biblical studies and beginning graduate students in New Testament and related fields should find the book especially useful. Perhaps needless to say, I hope for reactions from my scholarly colleagues in New Testament studies.

A main theme of the work is that one must distinguish Paul's arguments from his conclusions, and that it is the arguments that give Paul the reputation of being difficult to understand. He argued like what he was: a first-century Jew. We are not accustomed to those forms of argumentation, and so they are difficult.

Not infrequently, readers will mistake an argument, or even a part of an argument, as the main point, and miss or downplay Paul's own conclusion. I have tried to explain how the arguments work. That is why the book is denser than I originally intended. One cannot explain 1 Cor. 10:1-14 without going into details, and details can be tedious.

Thus the beginning student or the non-academic reader will find that parts of the book are heavy going. It will take diligence and a lot of interest in Paul to go through them all. I do not think that Paul's arguments are too difficult for a university undergraduate to understand, but he or she may think that understanding them is more effort than the result is worth. I hope that some will accept the challenge. And I comfort myself with the thought that readers can skip some of the details and read the conclusions.

I am indebted to several people for advice and assistance. Conversation with Richard Hays clarified a few points, for which I

am grateful. I also wish to thank Dr. Jane Dysart, who served as non-professional reader, and whose comments were useful at many points.

In the final days of preparing the typescript for the press, Megan Chobot typed the draft of the subject index with remarkable speed and accuracy, which saved me dozens and dozens of hours of work, and I thank her heartily.

The staff at Fortress were unfailingly helpful, and they were considerate of my difficulties, which include poor eyesight and limited working hours.

I wish to single out Dr. Neil Elliott, Acquiring Editor in Biblical Studies, for help far above and beyond what one ordinarily expects. He made dozens of improvements to the manuscript, both of style and content. His knowledge of Paul's letters and issues of interpretation came to my rescue time after time. He proofread the final text so thoroughly that I had very little to do. I am deeply indebted to him, and without his assistance I would still be re-reading and re-writing.

My main advisor and assistant, however, was my much beloved wife, Dr. Rebecca Gray, who, in addition to holding down a full-time job, read the typescript twice and made copious notes. Discussion of her remarks and suggestions always led to greater clarity. She composed and inserted all of the headings and sub-headings—which, of course, required reading the manuscript one more time. She edited a difficult subject index, which allowed us almost to meet the publisher's deadline. In these and other ways Becky made the book quite a lot better than it would have been without her efforts.

In fact, without her I could not get along at all.

Becky kept my spirits up when I thought that I would never be able to finish the book, and in this task she had an assistant, whom I also wish to thank, though she will never be able to read these

PAUL

words: Our Little Daisy, a dog of Beagle/Corgi/Dachshund mix, who bucked me up whenever I was glum. (With apologies to Alan Jay Lerner.)

E. P. Sanders

Durham, North Carolina, October 2015