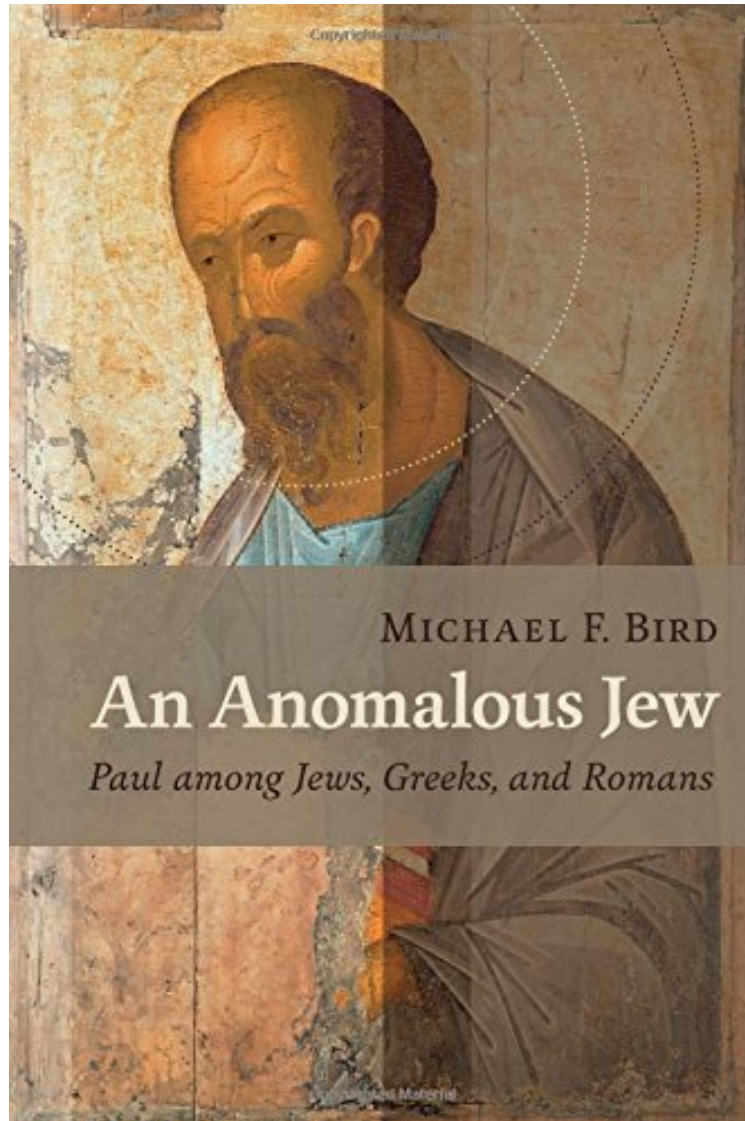


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An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans

Michael F. Bird

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Michael F. Bird : An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Anomalous Jew: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans:

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Book on the Anomaly That Was Paul By Ron Maness If you are a fan of Australian theologian Michael Bird, you won't be disappointed by his newest book: An Anomalous Jew: Paul Among Jews, Greeks and Romans. If you are not a fan, then you should be. He is a theologian who writes

with keen insight and clarity, as well as his characteristic wit. This is the third Bird book I have read this year, the other two being his Romans commentary in the Story of God Bible Commentary series, and What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine Through the Apostles Creed. In addition, I have been reading sections of his Evangelical Theology. The title of this new book informs us of the subject: Paul as an anomalous Jew. We know Paul was a Jew, but what kind of Jew was he? What was distinctive about his Jewishness? What changed after his Damascus road experience? How did Paul posture himself with an approach that both affirmed and transformed his Jewish heritage? The title of the Introduction gives us hints of Bird's perspective: Paul the Jew of Sorts. In answering the question of what sort of Jew Paul was, Bird sets forth the five primary options: 1) a former Jew, 2) a transformed Jew (the view of the New Perspective), 3) a faithful Jew, 4) a radical Jew, or 5) an anomalous Jew. Now as you might have guessed from the book's title, Bird opts for Paul as an anomalous Jew. However, he says the problem in arriving at that conclusion is that there is something right about each of the proposals. Nevertheless, he believes that the best option for characterizing Paul is that of an anomalous Jew, which flowed from his messianic eschatology as he attempted to create a social space for a unified body of Jewish and Gentile Christ-believers worshipping God. In brief: God had launched the new age through the cross and resurrection of Christ, which meant the launch of the new creation and the renewal of Israel, of which his assemblies were the vanguard (page 28). What we call Paul's anomaly, he would probably call the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12) that he received, which discloses how faith in Christ without Torah was the instrument that brings Jews and Gentiles into reconciliation with God and into the renewal of all things (page 28). This apocalyptic interpretation of the Messiah's death and resurrection forced Paul into a rereading of Scripture with the story and symbols of Judaism now being redrawn around Jesus the Messiah and his followers, who constitute the renewed Israel of an inaugurated eschatology. So, if that sounds simple, well, it wasn't. The religious claims of Paul the anomalous Jew had the result of making him a marginal Jew as well. And his position was full of tensions and ambiguities that required theological answers and pastoral responses which needed to be worked out in actual practice. And we get a running blow-by-blow account in Paul's epistles and the book of Acts. So then Bird tests his hypothesis of an anomalous Jew on the margins in five different areas, each of which constitutes a chapter of the book. Chapter 1: Salvation in Paul's Judaism Chapter 2: Paul: Apostle to the Jews and Gentiles? Chapter 3: An Invasive Story: An Apocalyptic and Salvation-Historical Rereading of Galatians Chapter 4: The Incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14): The Beginnings of Paulinism Chapter 5: The Apostle Paul and the Roman Empire (he does this through a section-by-section analysis of Paul's epistle to the Romans) While I thoroughly enjoyed the whole book, I must say my favorite chapter was chapter 4 on the Incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14), for Bird says that it was in this incident that the anomaly that is Paul first appeared. To me, that chapter just rolled, and after I finished the book I went back and typed up five pages of my notes and highlights from that chapter alone. Some of the key insights from that chapter: 1) Although a mediating position had been agreed upon at the earlier Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), that position did not envision table fellowship between circumcised and uncircumcised believers; 2) Therefore the Council inadvertently permitted the existence of two parallel theologies; 3) The problem was not the food itself, but the company in which it was consumed (with uncircumcised Gentiles); 4) Paul would not accept a separate but equal position (shades of the Jim Crow South); 5) The Council had probably not even considered integration into a single church; 6) The underlying issue was circumcision (Gentiles did not need to be circumcised unless of course they wanted to share in table fellowship on an equal basis); 7) The church in Jerusalem was experiencing severe persecution from the Jews, and the men from James hoped to prevent further persecution by insisting on social separation between circumcised and uncircumcised believers in Antioch; 8) Paul saw this as a betrayal of the Jerusalem Council agreement (at least of its spirit), a rebuke to his apostolic authority, and an affront to the truth of the gospel; 9) It appears that the majority sided with Peter instead of Paul; 10) The result was not a complete break with Jerusalem; it was a parting IN the ways, not a parting OF the ways; 11) Afterward, Paul became an outsider to the very assemblies he had helped establish, grow and defend; 12) He therefore had to seek another base of mission operations, and was left with only the Gentile-majority churches in Galatia and Cilicia. There are of course numerous other highlights scattered throughout the other chapters, including: 1) A discussion of the New Creation and New Israel on pages 162-168 of chapter 3. 2) The discussion in chapter 3 of whether Galatians 2:16 should be rendered the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (subjective genitive), or faith in Jesus Christ (objective genitive) in pages 140-144. He concludes that a better solution is somewhere in the middle ground, whereby it directs us to human faith in the whole apocalyptic saving reality wrought by God in the faithfulness, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (Note: Bird does accept the subjective genitive for Galatians 2:19). 3) His understanding of justification as the act whereby God creates a new people, with a new status, in a new covenant, as a foretaste of the new age (chapter 3, page 140). 4) On page 179, he cites Richard Bauckham on Acts 15:16-18 (based on Amos 9:11) to show that the eschatological temple is not a literal building, but is the eschatological people of God composed of both Jews and Gentiles, a key distinction differentiating dispensational from non-dispensational interpretations of Scripture. But those are just a few of the many highlights of an excellent and very thorough discussion of Paul as an anomalous Jew. And of course the book includes many zingers, the very tweetable pithy one-liners that Bird is known for. For example: Paul would not adhere to the demand of anyone who wanted to use the foreskins of Gentiles to save their own skins from the sword. Justification is forensic,

apocalyptic, covenantal, and transformative. Jesus is raised AS Israel and FOR Israel Galatians exhibits Paul in his most raw and radical state Christ terminates the Mosaic dispensation in order to fulfill the Abrahamic hopes (or promise) In conclusion, a highly recommended book which will give you insights into Paul and biblical Christianity that will stay with you and greatly enhance your reading of the relevant Bible passages. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. This is an important, extremely relevant book that deserves a wide audience By J. Roslyn Theologian Michael F. Bird has taken on the herculean task of answering certain questions that religious scholars have debated for millennia: Who was Paul? Where in Judaism should we situate Paul? What kind of Jew was he? And how did he relate to contemporary Judaism as a Christ-believing Jew? "[W]as Paul an anomalous Jew on the margins of Judaism? Bird admits that this is a difficult task, writing a "whole industry of scholarship has attempted to map Paul in relation to Judaism and to show where he fit into the spectrum of Jewish beliefs and practices. Placing this debate in the historical context, Bird notes that Pauline religious scholars in the twentieth century were forced to reassess and "even recast" the Jewish nature of Paul's thinking as a result of: 1. "scholarly recoil at the horrors of the European Holocaust, coupled with the observation that the grotesque evils of the Holocaust were at least partly perpetuated by a specifically Christian anti-Semitism [which] required a radical rethink of Paul and the Jewish people," and 2. "the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Bird makes clear that with this book, he intends to test this hypothesis of Paul as an anomalous Jew on the margins in a number of areas that will highlight the jarring nature of Paul's thought and clarify the meaning and limits of Paul's Jewishness. In so doing, Bird examines, among other things, Paul's concept of salvation, whether Paul thought that salvation was attainable within Judaism and whether Paul was more involved in Jewish evangelism than previously thought. This is an important, extremely relevant, scholarly book. Most emphatically, this is a book that deserves a wide audience. *Michael F. Bird is lecturer in theology at Ridley Melbourne Mission and Ministry College in Australia. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. What could be better? Scholarship that's intelligent and orthodox By Jeri I just finished reading and reviewing a book by Bart Ehrman, whose specious logic was matched only by his silly dogmatic assertions. One of Ehrman's main planks was that, by the time the Gospels were written, the Christians were all Gentiles, so of course they had no knowledge scripture was sacred. Yes, really. So you can imagine my relish when I started reading Bird, one of whose main contentions is that "Paul's missionary career appears to have included periods of missionary activity oriented to Jews" (p 64). Bird points out that Paul states in Rom 15:19 that he "has proclaimed the gospel 'from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum'" (p 89). The evidence suggests that Paul's "early ministry in Arabia, Damascus, and Jerusalem was oriented to Jews" (p 90). This would be proven by Paul's own words, claiming that for the Jews he became a Jew. At the starting point of his ministry, Paul began missionary activity to other Jews. Over time, there was a gradual process in which the early, Jewish mission became a mission to both Jews and Gentiles, "a process...replicated by other Christ-believing Hellenists (Philip, Acts 8:4-40) and paralleled by other analogous happenings (Peter and Cornelius, Acts 10) (p 91). Where is the evidence that Paul continued to interact with Jews and synagogues? First, as scholar Richard Bell noted, "'Paul's theology demands a mission to the Jewish people'" (p 99). The message of Christ must be preached to everyone. Also, Acts reveals Paul working with both Jews and Gentiles. Paul's travels in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens "all commenced in synagogues" (p 99). In Corinth, Paul began teaching in the synagogue, but had to eventually take the new Christians elsewhere. The evidence cast in concrete is the fact that Paul received the thirty-nine lashes from the Jews five times. He must have been interacting with the local synagogues to have roused Jewish ire to the point of having him whipped. And five times. So it seems that Jewish synagogues were outraged by what Paul had to say, and what else could have so outraged them as the claim that Jesus Christ was God? Even as he was being tossed out of synagogues and whipped, Paul's new belief in Jesus Christ "cannot be constructed as repudiation of Israel's covenant promises and its salvation history" (p 133). Christ's crucifixion and resurrection 'to be the great leap toward the climax of Israel's covenantal history and the fulfillment of prophetic hopes" *p 126). Paul does not reject his Jewish identity. Even as he argued against circumcision for the new converts, Paul considered this not a rejection of Jewish covenant but a new, inclusive covenant that transformed multiple identities under the "meta-identity marked by Christ" (p 53).

Lively, well-informed portrait of the complex figure who was the apostle Paul Though Paul is often lauded as the first great Christian theologian and a champion for Gentile inclusion in the church, in his own time he was universally regarded as a strange and controversial person. In this book Pauline scholar Michael Bird explains why. An Anomalous Jew presents the figure of Paul in all his complexity with his blend of common and controversial Jewish beliefs and a faith in Christ that brought him into conflict with the socio-religious scene around him. Bird elucidates how the apostle Paul was variously perceived as a religious deviant by Jews, as a divisive figure by Jewish Christians, as a purveyor of dubious philosophy by Greeks, and as a dangerous troublemaker by the Romans. Readers of this book will better understand the truly anomalous shape of Paul's thinking and worldview.

Joshua W. Jipp Trinity Evangelical Divinity School "This is vintage Bird, perhaps with a noticeable tinge of N. T. Wright thrown in as well. In this book we find historically informed, strong readings of the Pauline texts, a deep

awareness of the scholarly debates and positions on Paul and first-century Judaism, and overall a substantive and important contribution to situating Paul in his first-century context."Francis Watson Durham University "Michael Bird argues persuasively that Paul did not cease to be a Jew when he became Christian and yet his previous Jewish convictions were shaken to the core and transformed. Paul remained a Jew, but he became an anomaly to his Jewish contemporaries."Nijay K. Gupta George Fox Evangelical Seminary "Even though contextualizing Paul is necessary in order to understand him, Bird argues that Paul nevertheless defies categorization. He was a maverick apostle, an inimitable thinker, and an anomalous Jew. Bird cogently sets Paul within his world, not to domesticate him, but to draw out his peculiarity. This is engaging reading, peppered with fresh insight into the historical Paul."