

New Theology in Light of Old Testament Interpretation in the Pauline Epistles

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Abstract

The early Church Fathers, by reordering the Jewish sacred texts, placed the officially canonized Christian scriptures alongside the Hebrew scriptures in a manner that allowed the former to be perceived as a continuation of the latter. Thus, the religious authority of the Jewish scriptures remained intact and they became an integral part of the Christian theological worldview. Furthermore, the Gospels reference the fulfillment of prophetic promises made in the Hebrew Bible concerning the Jewish Messiah, aligning these prophecies with the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and thereby affirming the historical continuity of the Jewish texts. The Pauline Epistles, which constitute a foundational portion of the official Christian canon, occupy a distinct position in this context. While affirming the sacredness of Jewish scripture, Paul presents a conception of divine action in history that departs from earlier phases of human religious experience. Employing an allegorical method of interpretation rooted in the Jewish tradition, Paul articulates a philosophy of history that situates the advent of Jesus Christ, as the sacrificial Son of God, as a transformative turning point in human history. In this framework, although the Jewish texts are retained as the “former covenant” between God and humanity, they are reinterpreted as sources for articulating a novel theological vision. The legalistic orientation of those scriptures, however, is rendered obsolete. This study, through an analytical-descriptive approach, explores Paul’s use of allegorical interpretation of Jewish religious texts and the emergence of a new theological structure grounded in this hermeneutic.

Keywords: Pauline Epistles, Pauline Theology, Old Testament Interpretation, Allegorical Exegesis, Christian Philosophy of History.

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Introduction

The Christian sacred texts, compiled by the Church Fathers and inspired by Pauline theology, known as the *New Testament*, exhibit a fourfold structure: the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Each component plays a pivotal literary, doctrinal, and theological role in shaping Christian theology. The Gospels—despite stylistic and narrative variances—center upon Jesus of Nazareth as the prophesied Messiah, anchored in the Davidic lineage and the fulfillment of earlier prophetic predictions, thereby establishing continuity between Judaism and Christianity. The Acts of the Apostles focus on the missionary endeavors of Paul, illustrating how his teachings catalyzed the expansion of Christian faith within non-Jewish contexts. The Pauline Epistles hold a distinct position: historically some were composed before the Gospels, and far from being mere hortatory letters, they constitute the foundational theological corpus that enabled Christianity's emergence as an independent religion. The canonization process of Christian scriptures during the second to fourth centuries CE followed criteria such as doctrinal congruence with prevailing creed and baptismal practices—doctrines largely codified in Paul's letters and oral traditions (e.g., the Apostles' Creed). Texts consistent with Pauline theology gained canonical acceptance; others were sidelined or deemed apocryphal (Du Toit, *Canonization of the New Testament*, p. 127). Crucially, Paul's use of Jewish scriptures in constructing Christian theology warrants thorough examination. A Pharisee by heritage, Paul simultaneously affirmed continuity with the Hebrew covenant and employed a distinctive interpretive hermeneutic—**allegorical exegesis**—to promulgate a renewed narrative of human salvation, one that reframes fundamental doctrines of original sin, law, faith, atonement, the new creation, and divine-human union. In subsequent sections, this method will be introduced and analyzed in depth. This study is not a historical exegesis of Christian or Jewish scripture per se; rather, it aims to delineate how Paul, through his interpretive strategy, generated a theologically novel system—anchored in yet transcending Jewish tradition—with a redemptive-historical structure. The diverse composition and theological intertexts of Christian sacred writings provided fertile ground for a new theology, not through rupture, but via reinterpretation of Jewish scripture using allegorical hermeneutics. Within this transformation, Paul emerges as a central figure. Utilizing Jewish religious texts—especially through allegorical reading—he formulated a theological framework integrating original sin, law, redemption, and cosmic renewal.

Research Question

How did Paul, relying on Jewish scriptures and employing an allegorical

interpretive method, forge a theology fundamentally distinct from yet continuous with Jewish tradition? In other words, how did his allegorical readings of the Hebrew Bible engender a Christian teleological theology—one binding earlier scriptural motifs into a coherent redemptive philosophy? Paul adopted allegorical exegesis, a method with antecedents in Hellenistic, Gnostic, and Jewish-Hellenistic interpretations, to advance a philosophical-historical theology centered on Christ not just as fulfillment but as transformative pivot for law and redemption. A comprehensive understanding of Paul's intellectual innovations demands attention to the first-century CE sociocultural context—marked by Greco-Roman philosophical dominance, urbanization within the Roman imperial milieu, internal fragments within Jewish sectarianism, and the permeation of Hellenic philosophical paradigms into Jewish theological discourse (e.g., Stoicism). Indeed, Paul's personal confrontation with Jewish law, set against this backdrop, catalyzed his reconceptualization of salvation history and divine-human relationality (Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 75).

Literature Review

Research on the Apostle Paul and the theological structure of his epistles has, in recent centuries, become one of the central foci in New Testament studies. Among the key concerns of scholars is Paul's engagement with Jewish religious texts and the manner in which he reinterpreted them to shape a new Christian theology. One of the most important contributions in this area is James D. G. Dunn's *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, where he categorizes the theological architecture of Paul's thought and examines concepts such as faith, law, righteousness, and salvation within a unified framework (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, vol. 1, p. 82). Similarly, N. T. Wright, in his magisterial work *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, offers a comprehensive analysis of Paul as a thinker who reinterprets history around Christ, placing Jewish scriptures in service of a renewed covenantal and soteriological structure (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 134). Within the field of scriptural interpretation, scholars such as Francis Watson and Richard B. Hays have given particular attention to Paul's exegetical methods, especially his use of **allegorical interpretation**. Watson, through a comparative analysis of Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions, demonstrates how Paul rereads Old Testament texts in a symbolic and non-historical manner (Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 56). Hays, in turn, explores the intertextual structure of Paul's epistles, highlighting the echoes of Hebrew Bible themes within Pauline theology (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, p. 93). In the Iranian academic context, Dr. Ahmad Pakatchi's article *The Role of Pauline Interpretations in Christian Theology* analyzes, in a descriptive-analytical

manner, the evolution of key theological concepts such as the “New Covenant,” “sacrifice,” and “justification by faith” in the Pauline corpus (Pakatchi, *The Role of Pauline Interpretations in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, p. 87). Reza Gholami, in his article *Old Testament Theology and Its Role in the Formation of Early Christianity*, emphasizes that Pauline interpretations were among the principal factors in the gradual divergence of Christianity from its Jewish, law-centered foundations (Gholami, *Old Testament Theology and the Formation of Christianity*, p. 61). Further, Sadeghnia, focusing on Paul’s position within the semantic structure of the early Church, argues that Paul’s approach to the Law was not so much negational as universalizing—laying the groundwork for an ecclesiastical and theological framework distinct from the earliest Jewish-Christian communities (Sadeghnia, *Paul and the Formation of Christian Theology*, p. 104). Despite the richness of existing scholarship, what remains relatively underexplored—or treated in isolation—is the integration of three core elements that this article seeks to address:

- 1) A conceptual and genealogical analysis of **allegorical interpretation** as employed by Paul;
- 2) The construction of a **philosophy of history** within Pauline theology; and
- 3) The strategic use of **Jewish scriptures** to formulate this theology.

This article thus aims to systematically and analytically investigate these three foundational axes:

- 1) What is allegorical interpretation, and what are its historical-philosophical origins within hermeneutical traditions?
- 2) How does Paul’s theology of history develop through the use of this exegetical method?
- 3) In what ways does Paul draw upon Jewish sacred texts to extract and articulate this theological vision of history?

This framework enables a more precise understanding of how a novel Christian theology emerged through the reinterpretation of prior scriptures and within a distinct hermeneutical paradigm. The intellectual diversity of Paul’s era was a crucial factor in shaping his exegetical and theological system. First-century Judaism was neither homogenous nor monolithic but comprised various sectarian groups such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and early Gnostic communities (Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, p. 23). Moreover, in the Jewish Diaspora, Stoic philosophy, Middle Platonism, and Hellenistic thought significantly influenced Jewish conceptions of Law, salvation, and divine knowledge (Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World*, p. 118). Within this intellectual milieu, Pauline thought was shaped both by Rabbinic exegetical traditions and by the philosophical and cosmopolitan concerns of the Greco-Roman world.

1. The Nature of Allegorical Interpretation and Its Origins in Philosophical and Religious Traditions

Allegorical interpretation, or symbolic exegesis, is a hermeneutical approach to religious or philosophical texts that posits the existence of two levels of meaning: the *literal* (external) and the *symbolic* or *esoteric* (internal). In this framework, words, events, and characters in the text are not merely vehicles of surface meaning; rather, they function as signs pointing to deeper, non-literal realities that must be uncovered through semantic reinterpretation, symbolic correspondence, and conceptual convergence (White, *Sacred Tropes*, p. 14). Unlike literalist or historicist readings, this mode of interpretation is multilayered and directs the reader toward a symbolic semantics in which truth is located not in the words themselves, but in their interpretive potential.

1-1. Philosophical Roots in Ancient Greece

Allegorical interpretation can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy, especially within Platonic and Stoic thought. Plato's theory of Forms viewed the material world as a mere shadow of a higher, intelligible reality. Consequently, mythological and religious texts were not understood simply as narratives but as symbolic conduits of metaphysical truths (Plato, *Republic*, Book VII). His disciples, especially those in the Athenian Academy, employed allegorical methods to interpret the works of classical poets such as Homer and Hesiod, aiming to shield these texts from accusations of impiety or moral inconsistency (Tate, *Plato and Allegory*, p. 37). The Stoics, too, adopted this method, asserting that the gods and mythological elements in literary texts symbolized cosmic forces or rational principles. For instance, Zeus was understood as a representation of natural law and rational order, while Aphrodite symbolized natural attraction and the cohesion of elements (Long, *Stoic Readings of Myth*, p. 62).

1-2. The Hellenistic-Jewish Tradition: Philo of Alexandria

Among the most influential figures who introduced allegorical interpretation into Jewish religious thought was **Philo of Alexandria**. Deeply influenced by Platonic philosophy, Philo sought to present the Torah not merely as a legal or historical text, but as a symbolic and philosophical document. According to Philo, the words, laws, and events of the Hebrew Scriptures possessed hidden meanings accessible only through symbolic interpretation. For example, he interpreted the story of Adam and Eve's fall not as a literal historical event but as a metaphor for the soul's descent into the material world (Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations*, vol. 1, p. 33). In his system, Abraham represents the *active intellect*, Sarah symbolizes *virtue*, and Hagar, as a servant, denotes *empirical knowledge*, which must remain subordinate to reason (Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, p. 49).

1-3. Gnosticism and the Evolution of the Allegorical Paradigm

Gnosticism—a complex mystical-philosophical movement of the early centuries CE—played a pivotal role in advancing a radically symbolic approach to sacred texts. Departing from literalist or historical readings, Gnostic thought emphasized a fundamental dichotomy between the spiritual and material realms, thereby framing religious texts as systems of *ontological symbolism*. In this view, words and events were tools for transmitting salvific, esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*), which, according to Gnostic belief, was accessible only to a spiritual elite through inner revelation (Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, pp. 58–63). In this context, allegory was not merely a hermeneutical device but a *pathway to ultimate reality*. Creation narratives, the Exodus story, and prophetic accounts were interpreted as allegories of the cosmic conflict between light and darkness, spirit and matter, knowledge and ignorance. The Fall of Adam, for instance, was not a story of sin and punishment, but a metaphor for spiritual awakening—eating the forbidden fruit marked the beginning of awareness and the exit from primordial ignorance (Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 43). Moreover, in Gnostic cosmology, the God of the Old Testament (YHWH) was often identified as a *lesser deity* or **Demiurge**—a secondary being who created the material world and obscured human knowledge of its divine origin. Thus, the interpretation of sacred texts in Gnosticism was tantamount to uncovering the hidden intentions and epistemological structures suppressed by institutional theology (Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, p. 77). Here, allegorical meaning served not just philosophical reconciliation but *soteriological liberation*. Unlike Hellenistic or Philonic traditions, which utilized allegory to reconcile faith and ethics, Gnosticism employed symbolic interpretation as a means of *salvific recovery*—a rediscovery of the forgotten human identity concealed within the metaphorical strata of sacred texts, accessible only through *gnosis*. Thus, long before its entrance into Christian discourse, allegorical interpretation had already developed rich precedents within Greek philosophy, Hellenistic-Jewish thought, and Gnostic mysticism. What Paul accomplishes in his writings—explored in the next section—is an innovative appropriation of this long-standing tradition to serve a new purpose: the articulation of a theology of salvation centered on Jesus Christ. Paul's interpretive method is therefore not a mere extension of Jewish exegetical practice but rather a *creative synthesis* of diverse hermeneutical systems, calibrated to meet the epistemic and theological challenges of early Christianity.

2. The Philosophy of History in Pauline Theology

2-1. The Historical Perspective in the Old Testament and Its Relation to Paul

In the Jewish religious tradition, the concept of history is intricately bound to

the nature of God. It is not merely a linear narrative or a sequence of events, but rather a domain in which God's will is revealed through covenants, judgment, salvation, and promises. The God of the Old Testament is not a deity that exists solely in transcendence, detached from time; rather, He is an active historical agent who enters history at specific moments, forms covenants with humanity, tests and promises them, and realizes His promises within the course of time (Childs, *Old Testament Theology*: p. 68). In this view, time is sacred, beginning with "Creation" and culminating in the "establishment of the Kingdom of God." Within this timeline, events such as "the calling of Abraham," "the Exodus from Egypt," "the covenant at Sinai," "the entry into the Promised Land," and "the Babylonian Exile" all represent instances of God's intervention in history. This history is neither abstract nor universal, but rather deeply national, social, and rooted in the relationship between God and the people of Israel. This framework perceives time as the "arena of covenant fulfillment," in which history serves as the pathway for the covenant people to either uphold or break their vows, and consequently, to experience divine reward or punishment (Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*: p. 435). Paul the Apostle, having been shaped within this tradition, did not discard the Old Testament's historical perspective but rather reinterpreted it with a novel approach. The fundamental difference between Paul's view and traditional Jewish thought lies in the fact that Paul transcended the national scope of history and redefined it as a global and ontological framework. In other words, while the history in Jewish tradition focuses on the interaction between God and a specific people, in Pauline thought, history becomes the stage for God's salvific plan for all of humanity. This is why Paul, unlike the prophets of the Old Testament who emphasized "the memory of salvation" (such as the Exodus from Egypt), focuses on "the beginning of salvation in the present" and its "future fulfillment" (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*: vol. 2, pp. 355–360). In Pauline theology, God remains the active agent in history, but this history is no longer defined by the law but by the revelation of a new cosmic reality in the person of Christ. Therefore, Paul shifts the emphasis from the Jewish tradition's focus on "keeping the covenant" through "obedience" to the new covenant, which is entered through "faith." For Paul, history is not the arena for the human confrontation with the law; rather, it becomes the scene of divine, salvific intervention for the redemption of humanity. The key redefinition here is the displacement of the historical axis from the events of the Israelite people to the event of the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. In this event, Paul sees not just a divine occurrence, but a decisive rupture in the entire history of humankind. From this perspective, Pauline historiography, though rooted in the covenantal framework of Judaism, is transformed into a universal theology

based on grace and faith. This new history inaugurates a fresh ontological order, wherein humanity is no longer defined by ethnicity or law, but by its relationship to Christ and faith in Him (Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*: pp. 92–97).

2-2. The Dialectical Structure of History: Two Adams, Two Covenants, Two Worlds

In Pauline theology, history is not merely a continuous temporal narrative with scattered events, but rather a dialectical arena of ontological and theological contrasts. These contrasts, rooted in his philosophical and hermeneutical foundations, form a conceptual framework that divides history into polar dualities, providing a transformative view of history as a journey from a fallen state towards a new creation. This process reaches its zenith with the coming of Christ.

1) The Contrast Between the First Adam and the Last Adam: Adam and Christ

One of the most fundamental dualities in Paul's understanding of history is the contrast between the "first Adam" and the "last Adam" (Christ), which is especially elaborated in 1 Corinthians 15:45–49. Here, Paul refers not merely to historical figures but uses Adam and Christ as archetypal representatives of humanity and two cosmic orders. Adam symbolizes the old humanity; through his disobedience, he introduced death, sin, and separation from God into human history. In contrast, Christ is not only the bearer of spiritual life but also the manifestation of the new human, the second creation, and the restoration of humanity's connection to the divine source (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*: pp. 101–112). For Paul, this contrast signifies more than just similarity or influence; it represents a complete redefinition of human history from the perspective of salvific theology. All human beings are either "in Adam" and remain in death, or "in Christ" and stand on the verge of new life. This interpretive structure creates the possibility for transforming history from a narrative focused on a specific people into a universal, salvific story.

2) The Contrast Between the Two Covenants: The Law and Grace

The second dialectical contrast in Paul's historical theology lies in the relationship between the "Old Covenant" and the "New Covenant." However, this contrast is not merely temporal but epistemological, relating to how God interacts with humanity. The first covenant is based on the law; a collection of divine commands whose obedience marks the entrance into the covenantal community. The second covenant, inaugurated by Christ, is based on grace and faith. In Romans, Paul explicitly emphasizes that the law could not grant salvation because it lacked the power to achieve true divine justice: "What the

law was powerless to do... God did by sending His Son" (Romans 8:3). For Paul, the difference between the two covenants lies in the basis of the legitimacy of salvation: under the first covenant, salvation was conditional upon actions; under the second, salvation results from divine forgiveness. Thus, for Paul, the history of covenants reflects the transition of humanity from a works-based system to a grace-centered system, a transition marked by the Cross of Christ, which serves as its culmination (Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*: pp. 120–121).

3) The Ontological Contrast: The Old World and the New Creation

The third foundational contrast in Pauline historiography is the opposition between the "old world" and the "new creation." This contrast is thoroughly ontological and spans both the most basic human experience and cosmic structures. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In this view, entering into Christ is not merely a moral or spiritual transformation, but a participation in a new ontological order that began with Christ's resurrection and will culminate in the realization of God's Kingdom. In the old world, humanity is bound by the laws of decay, death, and sin; in the new world, humanity becomes part of a fresh creation where the Spirit, grace, and life are the defining measures of meaning. This contrast also alters the concept of time: the "old time" is condemned to death, while the "new time" moves toward eternal life. From this perspective, Paul's philosophy of history is dynamic and transformative; it is a history where the old is not continued but replaced with a timeless power, fundamentally renewing creation (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*: vol. 2, pp. 378–385).

2-3. Pauline Temporality: The Now, Not Yet, and the Future of Salvation

In the foundational development of his philosophy of history, one of the most innovative and profound layers of Paul's historical interpretation is his complex, threefold conception of time. This view distinguishes Paul from the historical-theological tradition of Judaism and situates his soteriological system within a new interpretive framework. In the Hebrew tradition, time was primarily understood in two poles: the "saving past" (e.g., the Exodus from Egypt) and the "promised future" (the coming of the Davidic Messiah), with the present merely being the domain of faithfulness to the law and the expectation of promises (Childs, *Old Testament Theology*: p. 211). However, in Paul's thought, this paradigm is completely transformed. Paul emphasizes the "now of salvation," presenting the present moment as the entry point for divine reality into history, realized through the death and resurrection of Christ. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

This "now" is not just a moment in time but a salvific, cosmic moment that divides all of human history into two sections: before Christ and after Christ. However, this "now" in Pauline theology is not the end of history nor the full realization of promises; rather, it marks the beginning of their fulfillment. Therefore, Paul, with theological ingenuity, adopts a unique temporal dialectic called the "now and not yet" (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*: vol. 2, pp. 432–435). In this framework, salvation has begun but is not yet completed. In fact, believers are already saved in Christ (Romans 8:1), but this salvation has not yet been fully realized in their existence (Romans 8:23–24). The key aspect of this vision is Paul's particular understanding of the future. In his philosophy of history, the future is not merely a continuation of the past but an "eternal destination" toward which humanity is heading. This future is defined by the second coming of Christ, the final judgment, and the full realization of God's Kingdom. Consequently, for Paul, time does not follow a linear structure but forms a kind of "open loop," a history in which the end is already implied in the beginning.

Thus, time in Pauline theology is threefold:

- 1) The initial time marked by the sin of Adam and the fallen structure of the world;
- 2) The time of the initial realization of salvation, namely, the coming and resurrection of Christ;
- 3) The future time of final salvation, realized in the return of Christ and the new creation.

Therefore, Pauline historiography is neither a mere repetition of "history as memory" nor "history as passive expectation"; instead, it views history as the ongoing process of salvation, lived in the present and completed in the future. This vision forms the foundation of Pauline eschatology, while simultaneously providing the grounds for the concept of believers' participation in the fulfillment of God's salvation promises—a participation in which humanity is both the recipient of grace and the bearer of hope (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*: pp. 120–127).

3. Paul's Engagement with Jewish Sacred Writings

3-1. Paul's Interpretive Methodology in Relation to Jewish Scriptures

It is important to note that although **allegorical interpretation** (ta'wīl) and **typology** share surface similarities, they fundamentally diverge in methodology and purpose. Allegory treats narrative elements as symbolic repositories of non-historical and ontological meaning; thus, the explicit storyline conceals an independent, spiritual significance (Tate, *Plato and Allegory*, p. 37). Typology, by contrast, relies on **semantic continuity**, seeing Old Testament persons or

events as historical "types" whose ultimate antitypes are fulfilled in the New Testament (France, *Typology in Paul's Hermeneutics*, p. 204). In Paul's letters, Scripture is not treated as a static, closed text but as a dynamic matrix that, in light of Christ's arrival, yields new and living meaning. Scripture is not merely quoted but **reinterpreted**—an act of rediscovering salvific truth within the text itself. By employing intertextual readings, allegory, typology, and semantic recalibration, Paul reconstructs Jewish tradition from within to serve his Christ-centered theological vision. Key methods include:

1) Intertextual reading: Unlike rabbinic exegesis, which treats individual verses in isolation, Paul adopts an integrated, intertextual approach. He invokes scriptural **echoes**—partial or allusive references that are recontextualized within his theological framework. Richard Hays describes these as “echoes of Scripture” underlying a new semantic order, wherein Old Testament texts resonate with the “under-voice” of Christ's salvific narrative (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, pp. 12–19). For instance, Romans 1:17 cites Habakkuk 2:4—“the righteous live by faith”—but reappropriates it as foundational proof for justification by faith.

2) Allegorical and symbolic exegesis: Paul elevates certain Old Testament narratives beyond their literal or historical meaning into symbolic paradigms. The clearest example occurs in Galatians 4:21–31, where Hagar and Sarah function typologically as representations of the two covenants: Hagar symbolizing slavery under the law, Sarah embodying the freedom of the new covenant. Whereas Philo used allegory for philosophical harmonization, Paul uses it to assert Christ's superiority over the entire salvific history (Watson, *Paul and Hermeneutics*, pp. 137–141).

3) Typological methodology: Paul interprets Israel's history as a typological prefiguration of Christian reality. In 1 Corinthians 10, the Exodus across the Red Sea prefigures baptism and participation in Christ, while manna anticipates communion. This approach is not merely about superficial narrative parallels but represents a deeper cognitive structure in which time, history, and truth cohere under a Christological horizon (France, *Typology in Paul's Hermeneutics*, pp. 204–216).

4) Semantic reinterpretation of key terms: Paul redefines core Jewish theological terms like "law," "righteousness," "circumcision," "people of God," and even "sacrifice." In Galatians 3, "law" becomes pedagogical (*paidagogos*) and obsolete upon Christ's arrival. Circumcision transitions from covenantal signifier to a non-essential symbol devoid of salvific relevance (Gal. 5:6). These semantic shifts enable Paul to create a theological narrative that transforms Israelite tradition from within.

5) Deliberate departure from midrashic methods: Unlike midrash, which

enlarges the significance of the law and perpetuates Jewish interpretive tradition, Paul **subverts** Torah-centered exegesis to argue for liberation from the law and creation of a transnational identity. This contrast has led scholars like Boyarin to characterize Paul as a “Jewish anti-midrashist.” Far from negating Jewish scripture, Paul preserves and reinterprets it within a newly defined ecclesial context (Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of the Law*, pp. 45–50).

3-2. Interpretive Deployment of Old Testament Figures and Symbolic Motifs

Paul’s theology, though pivoting from Jewish law, remains deeply rooted in Old Testament scripture—reappropriating its figures to articulate a Christ-centered salvific history. He employs hermeneutical strategies that reframe these characters not merely by retelling their stories but by recasting them within typological, allegorical, and polemical frameworks:

1) Adam: In Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul contrasts the “first Adam”—the archetype of sin and death—with the “last Adam,” Christ, who inaugurates resurrection life: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). This typological pairing is central to Paul’s narrative of salvation history (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 104–113).

2) Abraham: In Romans 4 and Galatians 3, Abraham reemerges not as law-keeper but as the prototype of salvation by faith: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3). Paul thus universalizes Abraham’s call, positioning him as the father of believers—both Jew and Gentile (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, pp. 88–95).

3) Moses: In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul portrays Moses with the “veil,” symbolizing the obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant and its fading glory. While Moses once embodied divine revelation, he now represents a fading covenant superseded by the new, spiritual covenant through Christ—a quasi-Gnostic transcendence of law (Watson, *Paul and Hermeneutics*, pp. 145–152).

4) Hagar and Sarah: Galatians 4:21–31 features one of Paul’s most overt allegorical interpretations. Sarah represents the covenant of freedom, while Hagar symbolizes the bondage of Sinai. By explicating the story in this symbolic context, Paul asserts that Christ’s arrival does not reject Jewish tradition—but fulfills it by liberating believers from the spell of the law (France, *Typology in Paul’s Hermeneutics*, pp. 209–213).

5) David: Romans 1:3 explicitly traces Christ’s descent from David. Yet Paul’s intertextual allusion goes deeper: by referencing the Davidic promise of an eternal kingdom, he locates Jesus within the grand trajectory of Jewish eschatological hope, now fulfilled in him (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 372–376).

6) Circumcision: In Galatians 5, Paul declares that in Christ “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” This radical reevaluation transforms circumcision—a central ethnic and covenantal marker—into a negligible symbol, effectively undermining identity-based exclusivity grounded in ancestry (Boyarin, *Intertextuality and Christian Identity*, pp. 53–59).

7) Exodus and wilderness traditions: In 1 Corinthians 10:1–4, Paul typologizes the Red Sea crossing as baptism and the manna as spiritual sustenance for the church. Such midrashic reinterpretation universalizes Israel’s historical experiences into cosmic-salvific paradigms for all believers (France, *Typology in Paul’s Hermeneutics*, pp. 215–216).

3-3. Paul’s Critical Distance from Jewish Tradition: Critique of the Law and Rejigging “People of God”

Paul creates a new theological paradigm rooted in—but radically diverging from—Old Testament tradition. He maintains textual continuity even as he reorients its theological function:

1) Law as transitional pedagogue rather than final authority: Paul does not nullify Torah but reframes it as a guardian or tutor (*paidagogos*) that brings one to Christ. In Romans 7, he exposes it as a mechanism that reveals sin but offers no liberation. The law becomes a stepping-stone, exposing human frailty and ushering in the necessity of Christ (Watson, *Paul & Hermeneutics*, pp. 156–161).

2) Ethnicity redefined as faith-based inclusion: Paul radically recasts the identity of Israel. “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (Rom. 9), and, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring and heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). Here, covenantal belonging is uncoupled from lineage or law and rooted in faith in Christ (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 403–408).

3) Dismantling traditional demarcations and forging a new community: Galatians 3:28 functions as a structural manifesto: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” It envisions the church as the “new body of Christ”—a post-ethnic, grace-based spiritual entity transcending conventional boundaries (Boyarin, *Intertextuality and Christian Identity*, pp. 61–68). Paul’s interpretive revision both emerges from Jewish scripture and dismantles its exclusive social and ritual boundaries (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 105).

In sum, Paul’s project is not a wholesale rejection of Jewish scripture, but a transformative exegesis that integrates its narrative into a Christo-centric theological vision. As some Persian scholars have noted, his reinterpretation

is less abolition than a radical civilizational reordering—transforming the relationship between humanity, revelation, and covenant from ethnicity-based identity to faith-based inclusion (Izadi, *Paul and the Reinterpretation of Torah in Early Christianity*, p. 89).

4. Challenges and Critiques of Pauline Theology

As demonstrated in the preceding sections, Pauline theology presents a powerful and coherent interpretive framework for understanding the Old Testament from a Christian perspective and shaping the early Church. Nevertheless, this theological system has been accompanied, since its inception, by a series of fundamental questions, doubts, and oppositions. These critiques can be broadly categorized into three domains: (1) fidelity to Jewish tradition, (2) intra-Christian consistency, and (3) contemporary hermeneutical and theological re-evaluations. Each category targets specific aspects of Paul's thought and opens the door to critical reconsideration of his theological project.

4-1. Criticism from the Perspective of Jewish Tradition

One of the most enduring and foundational challenges to Pauline theology concerns its perceived rupture from Jewish hermeneutical and theological tradition. Many Jewish scholars, both classical and modern, argue that Paul, through a selective appropriation of sacred texts, undermined the authority of Torah and rendered the covenantal structure of Judaism theologically obsolete. This critique appears in the writings of Josephus, the Babylonian Talmud, and in the works of modern Jewish thinkers such as Jacob Neusner and Abraham Joshua Heschel. These scholars emphasize that, within Judaism, the Torah is not a means to salvation, but rather a faithful response to God's gracious covenant. Thus, by framing the law as an impediment to salvation, Paul is seen to have performed a “semantic inversion” of the Jewish tradition (Boyarin, 1994: 76–83). Daniel Boyarin, a contemporary Jewish theologian, in his influential work *A Radical Jew*, argues that Paul's interpretation—though textually grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures—is essentially rooted in a supra-legal, personal experience of Christ rather than in the inner logic of Hebrew tradition. Boyarin characterizes this move as an effort to “de-ethnicize” religion—a universalizing theological project that fundamentally clashes with the ethnic-covenantal spirit of the Old Testament.

4-2. Intra-Christian Critiques of Pauline Theology

Paul's theological vision was not uncontroversial within the early Christian tradition itself. Some New Testament texts—particularly the Epistle of James—seem to offer a corrective to Paul's emphasis on justification by faith. James explicitly states: “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26), which directly

challenges Paul's affirmation that "a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Romans 3:28). This tension reflects a broader early Christian dispute between two tendencies: one oriented toward continuity with Jewish tradition, and another oriented toward a Christ-centered reconfiguration of covenantal identity. Furthermore, several medieval Christian theologians—such as Origen and John Chrysostom—while affirming the basic structure of Pauline thought, voiced reservations regarding Paul's often polemical tone against the Mosaic law. During the Reformation, Martin Luther radicalized Pauline theology by making *sola fide* (faith alone) the cornerstone of his soteriology. However, this extreme emphasis on justification by faith was later challenged by Catholic theologians, especially at the Council of Trent, for reducing the doctrine of salvation to an oversimplified formula.

4-3. Contemporary Hermeneutical and Theological Critiques

In the modern era, Pauline theology has not only been reexamined from historical and theological angles, but also from philosophical, psychoanalytic, feminist, and political perspectives. Scholars such as Alan Segal and E. P. Sanders argue that Paul's reading of the Torah was not derived from a careful exegetical engagement with Jewish Scripture but was shaped largely by his personal and transformative encounter with Christ. The so-called "**New Perspective on Paul**", developed by James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, and others, seeks to reframe Paul not as a critic of Jewish legalism, but as a critic of ethnic exclusivism. According to this view, Paul opposed the Torah not as a works-based system of salvation, but as an instrument of ethnic boundary-marking (Wright, 2013: vol. 2, pp. 519–530). His critique, therefore, targets Jewish ethnocentrism rather than the law per se. Feminist theologians have also raised serious concerns regarding the gendered language, hierarchical structures, and patriarchal assumptions embedded in certain Pauline texts—particularly in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians 11. These passages are seen as codifying gender inequality under the guise of divine order. Post-structuralist thinkers such as Alain Badiou have reinterpreted Paul as a philosopher of the "event," with salvation functioning as a radical rupture in history. Yet this view, too, has been criticized for its absolutist logic and its tendency to marginalize alternative theological narratives.

Conclusion

This study, by focusing on the interpretive readings and theological architecture of Paul's epistles, has demonstrated that biblical interpretation in the early Christian tradition was not merely a reflection of preexisting doctrines, but rather a foundational and critical process. In this process, Paul—drawing

upon the Hebrew tradition—formulated a new theological meaning and a distinctive salvific system. This system, grounded in allegorical exegesis, typological hermeneutics, and the redefinition of covenantal categories, functioned not merely as an interpretive method, but as a comprehensive *philosophy of salvation history* and a theology of cosmic scope. Within this framework, the sacred text was no longer confined to narrating ethnic history; it became a dynamic medium for the disclosure of a universal truth—a truth realized in the person of Christ, yet awaiting eschatological fulfillment. By reappropriating Old Testament figures and themes—such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Sarah—and by constructing polarities such as *law vs. grace*, *ethnos vs. ecclesia*, and *old creation vs. new creation*, Paul sought to articulate a new horizon for salvation, identity, and religious community. In this vision, faith replaces ancestry, and grace supplants legal systems. This article has argued that Paul was not merely a faithful interpreter, but a *constructive transgressor*—a theologian who, from within tradition, engineered a new theological paradigm. Through an eschatological lens, he reimagined history as a dynamic interplay of human agency, divine time, and redemptive promise. Yet, this theological innovation also exposed him to substantive critiques—especially regarding his fidelity to Jewish tradition, the coherence of his soteriology, and his engagement with issues of identity, ethnicity, and social formation. **Methodologically**, the novelty of this study lies in its approach to Pauline interpretation of the Old Testament—not as mere textual selection, but as a systematic process in the construction of a theology of salvation and the reconstitution of a believing community. It shows that Paul’s hermeneutic is fundamentally *oriented toward the future*—a future in which history is not static but open to the realization of divine promise, and the human person is no longer confined by the boundaries of ethnicity but invited into a unified body. In terms of **future research**, intertextual explorations between Pauline interpretation and **Midrashic tradition** may yield a new comparative framework for understanding hermeneutical methods and soteriological paradigms in Jewish and Christian systems. Further, investigating the **social role of Pauline theology** in shaping multiethnic and transnational Christian communities in the early centuries may illuminate the institutional and identity-forming impact of his theological vision. Additionally, a comparative analysis between Paul’s soteriology and that of **Philo of Alexandria** could provide insights into the convergences and divergences between Jewish-Hellenistic and early Christian thought. Moreover, revisiting Paul through the lens of **contemporary theories of religious identity**, **postcolonial critique**, and **critical religious studies** offers a promising avenue for uncovering neglected dimensions of his theology, especially in light of the ethical, cultural, and epistemological challenges of the modern world.

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