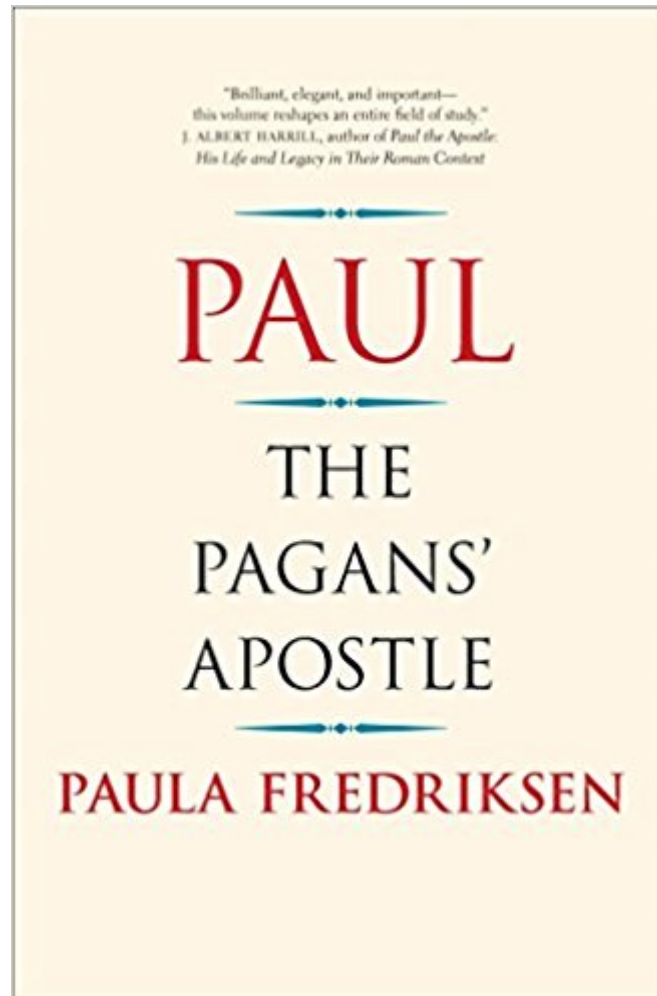




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Paul: The Pagans' Apostle



Synopsis

A groundbreaking new portrait of the apostle Paul, from one of today's leading historians of antiquity. Often seen as the author of timeless Christian theology, Paul himself heatedly maintained that he lived and worked in history's closing hours. His letters propel his readers into two ancient worlds, one Jewish, one pagan. The first was incandescent with apocalyptic hopes, expecting God through his messiah to fulfill his ancient promises of redemption to Israel. The second teemed with ancient actors, not only human but also divine: angry superhuman forces, jealous demons, and hostile cosmic gods. Both worlds are Paul's, and his convictions about the first shaped his actions in the second. Only by situating Paul within this charged social context of gods and humans, pagans and Jews, cities, synagogues, and competing Christ-following assemblies can we begin to understand his mission and message. This original and provocative book offers a dramatically new perspective on one of history's seminal figures.

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Customer Reviews

"Brilliant, elegant, and important—this volume reshapes an entire field of study. Here stands the finest history of the Apostle Paul to appear in generations."—J. Albert Harrill, author of *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in Their Roman Context* (J. Albert Harrill) Praise for *Augustine and the Jews*: "A masterpiece of passionately argued Augustinian scholarship."—Peter Brown, *New York Review of Books* (Peter Brown) "This book is one of those rare works that is both

accessible to the general educated reader and of value to experts. — Paul R. Kolbet, *Religious Studies Review* 38 (Paul R. Kolbet) — “Fredriksen’s work is a marvelous product of interdisciplinary scholarship. . . . Even in the massive field of Augustinian studies, this work stands out.” — Robert McEachnie, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2014 (Robert McEachnie)

Paula Fredriksen, Aurelio Professor of Scripture emerita at Boston University, is a member of the Humanities Faculty of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, she has published widely on the social and intellectual history of ancient Christianity, and on pagan-Jewish-Christian relations in the Roman Empire. Her books include *From Jesus to Christ*; *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*; *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*; and *Sin: The Early History of an Idea*.

Why is it so important to think of the earliest non-Jewish members of Paul’s churches as pagans, and not simply as gentiles? Paula Fredriksen’s engaging book-length answer to this question has amounted to one of the most exhilarating reads I’ve ever experienced on any topic, and the repercussions for understanding Paul’s own writings as well as for assembling a Pauline theology are enormous. It is amazing what Fredriksen accomplishes in this number of pages. She finds a way to weave very fine points about complicated ideas (that even stretch our available vocabulary at times) into a nicely ordered, flowing progression of new understandings about the relationship between Jews and pagans (and the new “Christian” ex-pagans), law, faith, righteousness, etc. One of this book’s main contributions is its revelation of just how much *ethnicity* has to do with Paul’s gospel. The insights which result are surprising, intriguing, and should have significant impact on how Paul is read from now on. As of right now, I do not agree with every point made, but Fredriksen definitely has forever changed the way I will encounter Paul’s letters. Indeed, I will have to read them over again for greater clarity, but the main arguments make too much sense of what Paul writes and the realities of his world to be far off. More than any of her other books, this is a more technical book geared at least for a highly educated audience and ideally for those with training in biblical studies. As one example, oddly enough, I couldn’t discern a pattern for how Paul’s original Greek is represented. Sometimes it is transliterated into English letters, but sometimes it is left in the Greek alphabet. (Turns out, it’s what came out of Fredriksen originally using Greek text in her manuscript and the publisher suggesting some transliterations.) Ultimately, I can’t think of any other work in biblical studies right now that calls for as much critical engagement (and even revisions in

Christian theology) as this one. If you're like me, you'll read it, dive immediately back into Paul's letters, and then turn around and read it all over again.

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