

# jewish commentary on the new testament

**jewish commentary on the new testament** represents a significant area of scholarly inquiry, reflecting a diverse range of perspectives that illuminate the complex relationship between Judaism and early Christianity. This field explores how Jewish scholars, theologians, and historians interpret the texts of the New Testament, often emphasizing historical context, linguistic nuances, and theological distinctions from a Jewish viewpoint. Jewish commentary on the New Testament contributes to a deeper understanding of the origins of Christian doctrine, the role of Jesus within Jewish tradition, and the broader implications for interfaith dialogue. The interpretations vary widely, from critical analysis of the text's historical reliability to explorations of shared themes and motifs rooted in Jewish scripture and thought. This article provides a comprehensive overview of Jewish commentary on the New Testament, examining its historical development, key themes, notable scholars, and contemporary relevance. The discussion will also highlight methodological approaches and examples of interpretative strategies used within this scholarly tradition.

- Historical Development of Jewish Commentary on the New Testament
- Key Themes in Jewish Interpretations
- Major Jewish Scholars and Their Contributions
- Methodologies and Approaches in Jewish Commentary
- Contemporary Impact and Interfaith Dialogue

## Historical Development of Jewish Commentary on the New Testament

The history of Jewish commentary on the New Testament is deeply intertwined with the evolving relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Early Jewish responses to Christian claims can be traced back to the first centuries CE, often characterized by polemical writings aimed at refuting Christian theological assertions. Over time, Jewish scholars began to engage with the New Testament texts more systematically, moving beyond confrontation to critical and scholarly examination. This shift became particularly pronounced in the modern era as academic research methods advanced and Jewish-Christian relations improved.

In the medieval period, Jewish commentary on the New Testament was relatively rare, primarily because of the socio-political pressures and religious tensions that limited open dialogue. Nevertheless, some Jewish thinkers produced works that indirectly engaged with Christian texts, often to clarify Jewish teachings or counter missionary efforts. The Enlightenment and the rise of historical-critical methods in biblical studies opened new avenues for Jewish scholars to study the New Testament with greater academic freedom and objectivity.

# Key Themes in Jewish Interpretations

Jewish commentary on the New Testament frequently addresses several recurring themes that reflect Jewish theological and historical perspectives. These themes help clarify the distinctiveness of Jewish thought while engaging with the content of Christian scripture.

## The Identity of Jesus

The figure of Jesus is central to New Testament studies, and Jewish commentary often focuses on his identity, role, and significance from a Jewish standpoint. Jewish scholars typically view Jesus as a historical Jewish teacher or rabbi rather than a divine figure, emphasizing his Jewish heritage and the context of Second Temple Judaism.

## The Messianic Expectations

Jewish commentary critically examines the New Testament's claims about Jesus fulfilling messianic prophecies. These interpretations highlight the differences between Jewish messianic expectations—such as the coming of a political and spiritual redeemer—and the Christian portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah who inaugurates a new covenant.

## Law and Covenant

Another important theme involves the interpretation of Jewish law (Halakha) and covenantal theology. Jewish commentators often analyze New Testament passages that discuss the Torah, commandments, and the relationship between the old covenant and the new covenant, emphasizing continuity and divergence within these theological frameworks.

- The historical Jesus as a Jewish figure
- Differences in messianic interpretation
- Perspectives on the Torah and commandments
- Jewish views on the concept of the "new covenant"

## Major Jewish Scholars and Their Contributions

Several Jewish scholars have made notable contributions to the study and commentary of the New

Testament. Their work has helped bridge gaps in understanding and fostered more nuanced perspectives on the intersection of Judaism and Christianity.

## **Geza Vermes**

Geza Vermes was a pioneering scholar in Jewish studies and the historical Jesus. His research emphasized the Jewish context of Jesus' life and teachings, presenting Jesus as a figure deeply embedded in Jewish culture and religious thought rather than a break from Judaism.

## **Amy-Jill Levine**

Amy-Jill Levine is a prominent Jewish New Testament scholar whose work focuses on interpreting the New Testament through a Jewish lens. She advocates for understanding the Jewish background of the Christian scriptures to promote respectful interfaith dialogue and correct common misconceptions.

## **Joseph Klausner**

Joseph Klausner was an early 20th-century Jewish historian who produced influential works on the historical Jesus and early Christianity, emphasizing the Jewish origins of Christian beliefs and practices while maintaining a critical stance toward Christian theological claims.

# **Methodologies and Approaches in Jewish Commentary**

Jewish commentary on the New Testament employs various scholarly methodologies, combining historical, linguistic, theological, and literary analysis. These approaches provide a multifaceted understanding of the texts and their implications.

## **Historical-Critical Method**

This method involves examining the historical context in which the New Testament was written. Jewish scholars use this approach to assess the authenticity of gospel accounts, explore the socio-political environment of Second Temple Judaism, and understand the interactions between early Jewish and Christian communities.

## **Comparative Textual Analysis**

Comparative studies between New Testament texts and Jewish scriptures (Tanakh) or rabbinic

literature are common. This approach identifies shared motifs, interpretive traditions, and theological contrasts, enriching the understanding of both religious traditions.

## **Theological Reflection**

Jewish scholars often engage in theological reflection to articulate Jewish perspectives on New Testament teachings. This includes critique and reinterpretation of key doctrines such as the messiah, covenant, and law, emphasizing Jewish continuity and identity.

1. Historical-critical examination of gospel texts
2. Comparison with Tanakh and rabbinic writings
3. Theological critique and reinterpretation
4. Interdisciplinary approaches involving linguistics and archaeology

## **Contemporary Impact and Interfaith Dialogue**

Jewish commentary on the New Testament plays a significant role in contemporary religious scholarship and interfaith relations. By providing historically grounded and theologically informed perspectives, these commentaries contribute to mutual understanding between Jews and Christians.

In modern interfaith dialogue, Jewish interpretations help clarify misunderstandings and foster respect for religious differences. They also encourage Christians to appreciate the Jewish roots of their faith, promoting a more informed and empathetic engagement.

Moreover, academic institutions and religious organizations increasingly incorporate Jewish scholarship on the New Testament into curricula and discussions, reflecting its growing importance in both religious and secular contexts.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the Jewish perspective on the New Testament?**

The Jewish perspective on the New Testament generally views it as a Christian religious text that is not part of the Jewish canon. Jewish commentary often analyzes the New Testament from a historical and theological standpoint, emphasizing differences in beliefs about Jesus and the interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures.

## **Are there traditional Jewish commentaries on the New Testament?**

There are no traditional Jewish commentaries on the New Testament in the way there are on the Hebrew Bible. However, modern Jewish scholars and commentators have produced analyses and critiques of the New Testament, often focused on its portrayal of Jewish law and figures.

## **How do Jewish scholars view the portrayal of Jews in the New Testament?**

Jewish scholars often critique the New Testament for its portrayal of Jews, noting that some passages have been interpreted in ways that contribute to negative stereotypes and anti-Judaism. They advocate for contextual understanding to prevent misinterpretations that fuel prejudice.

## **What role does Jewish commentary play in interfaith dialogue regarding the New Testament?**

Jewish commentary on the New Testament plays a crucial role in interfaith dialogue by providing perspectives that promote mutual understanding, respect, and correction of misconceptions about Judaism and Christianity.

## **Can Jewish commentary on the New Testament help in understanding early Christian texts?**

Yes, Jewish commentary can provide valuable insights into the historical and cultural contexts of early Christian texts, as many New Testament writings interact with Jewish traditions and beliefs prevalent at the time.

## **Who are some notable Jewish scholars who have commented on the New Testament?**

Notable Jewish scholars who have engaged with the New Testament include Amy-Jill Levine, Daniel Boyarin, and Geza Vermes. Their works often explore the Jewish context of Jesus and early Christianity.

## **How does Jewish commentary interpret references to the 'Law' in the New Testament?**

Jewish commentary often interprets references to the 'Law' (Torah) in the New Testament by emphasizing its central role in Jewish life and pointing out that critiques of the Law in Christian texts may reflect theological disputes rather than objective descriptions.

## **Is the New Testament studied in Jewish academic settings?**

In some Jewish academic settings, particularly in universities and seminaries focused on religious studies or interfaith education, the New Testament is studied from a scholarly perspective to understand its historical and theological impact.

# How do Jewish commentators address the figure of Jesus in the New Testament?

Jewish commentators typically view Jesus as a historical Jewish figure but do not accept the Christian claims of his divinity. They analyze his teachings and actions within the context of first-century Judaism.

## What impact does Jewish commentary on the New Testament have on modern Christian-Jewish relations?

Jewish commentary on the New Testament fosters greater dialogue and understanding by clarifying misunderstandings and promoting respect for Jewish traditions, which has positively influenced modern Christian-Jewish relations.

## Additional Resources

### 1. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*

This comprehensive volume offers the New Testament text alongside extensive Jewish commentary from leading scholars. It provides historical, cultural, and religious insights that illuminate the Jewish context of the New Testament writings. The annotations help readers understand the Jewish concepts and traditions that shaped the early Christian texts.

2. *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* by Brant Pitre  
Brant Pitre explores the Jewish background of the Eucharist by examining the Last Supper within the context of Jewish rituals and traditions. This book sheds light on how Jewish customs influenced the development of early Christian practices. It is an important resource for understanding the continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

### 3. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* by Daniel Boyarin

Daniel Boyarin challenges traditional Christian interpretations by emphasizing the Jewishness of Jesus and the New Testament. The book explores how early Christian texts reflect Jewish thought and identity. It provides a fresh perspective by situating the New Testament within the Jewish cultural and religious milieu.

### 4. *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* by E.P. Sanders

E.P. Sanders, a leading scholar in Jewish studies, examines Paul's writings through the lens of Jewish law (Halakha). The book offers insights into how Paul's teachings were rooted in and responded to Jewish legal traditions. It is essential for understanding the complex relationship between early Christianity and Judaism.

### 5. *The Jewish Context of Jesus' Last Supper* by Amy-Jill Levine

Amy-Jill Levine provides a scholarly exploration of the Last Supper by situating it firmly within the Jewish Passover tradition. The book emphasizes the importance of Jewish ritual and symbolism in understanding this pivotal event. Levine's expertise as a Jewish scholar enriches the interpretation of New Testament narratives.

### 6. *Reading the New Testament with the Dead Sea Scrolls* by James H. Charlesworth

This work investigates the connections between the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls,

uncovering shared themes and ideas. Charlesworth highlights the Jewish background of early Christian writings through comparative analysis. The book is valuable for those interested in the intersection of Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament.

*7. Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash* by Jacob Neusner

While not focused solely on the New Testament, this book provides essential background on Jewish interpretive methods that influenced early Christian scripture interpretation. Neusner explains the principles of Rabbinic Midrash and how these shaped scriptural commentary. Understanding these methods aids in grasping Jewish commentary traditions relevant to the New Testament.

*8. Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish View of the New Testament* by David H. Stern

David H. Stern offers a perspective on the New Testament from a Messianic Jewish viewpoint, bridging Jewish tradition and Christian faith. The book explores how Jewish readers can engage with New Testament texts while maintaining their Jewish identity. It serves as a resource for interfaith understanding and dialogue.

*9. From Jesus to the Mishnah: The History of the Jewish Law* by E.P. Sanders

This book traces the development of Jewish law from the time of Jesus through the formation of the Mishnah. Sanders examines how the legal environment influenced New Testament writings and early Christianity. The work is key for appreciating the legal and religious context of the New Testament era.

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