

The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown:
An Introduction to the New Testament

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

FOR BELIEVERS WHO look to Scripture as the authority for their faith and practice, the NT, with its twenty-seven books, presents both a wonderful, God-given treasure trove of spiritual insights and a formidable challenge for faithful, accurate interpretation. To be sure, “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). To be so equipped, however, the student of Scripture must follow Paul’s exhortation to “[b]e diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).

The diligence required for a correct understanding of God’s “word of truth” involves a thorough acquaintance with the historical, literary, and theological aspects of the various NT writings. Ironically, the methodical study of these factors traces its modern origins back to the Enlightenment. We say “ironically” because the Enlightenment was also characterized by an antisupernatural bias and a critical—if not skeptical—spirit that emphasized studying the Bible just as one would approach any other book.¹ Clearly, for anyone who believes Scripture is *more* than just a piece of human literature, such an approach is unacceptable because it denies that Scripture is the product of divine inspiration.² But while Scripture ought not be reduced to a *mere* piece of

human writing, we can gain much by paying careful attention to the historical, literary, and theological dimensions of the biblical writings and, in our case, particularly the NT.

TITLE AND CONTENT OVERVIEW

Title

For this reason we present you, the serious student of the NT, with *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*. The title attempts to capture the essence of NT theology: (1) *the cradle*, that is, Jesus's virgin birth and incarnation, which are narrated at the outset of the NT canon (Matt 1:18-25); (2) *the cross*, narrated in the Gospel Passion Narratives and explained in the NT epistolary literature; and (3) *the crown*, that is, the triumphant return of Christ and our eternal reign with him. Within this framework we advocate a holistic reading of the NT, and of the entire body of Scripture, along the lines of a salvation-historical framework that traces the story of God's progressive revelation and provision of redemption in the promised Messiah and Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Nature of Scripture

The first part of this book attempts to set the stage for the ensuing study by presenting a discussion of the most critical foundational issues for NT interpretation: (1) the nature and scope of Scripture (chap. 1); and (2) the political and religious background of the NT (chap. 2). It is vital for all students of Scripture to have a proper understanding of the *doctrine* of Scripture, so chapter 1 discusses the formation of the NT canon, its inspiration and inerrancy, the preservation and transmission of the Bible over the centuries, and issues pertaining to the translation of Scripture.

Unfortunately, this kind of doctrinal instruction is increasingly neglected in many current publications on the topic.³ But we judge it absolutely vital because only by understanding Scripture as divine revelation, in keeping with its own claims, will we be able to pursue our study all the way to its intended goal: the application of the “word of truth” to our personal lives and our relationships with others.⁴ God has revealed himself in his inspired, inerrant Word; and because the Bible is the Word of God in written form, it is therefore without error, trustworthy, authoritative, and requires obedience and personal application.⁵ James says it well:

... humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does (1:21-25).

Indeed, the purpose of Scripture is “training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

In this regard, it is our desire that this present volume be more than a dry, academic compilation of various dates and facts. To be sure, the study of Scripture requires diligence—in other words, work!—but what ought to motivate our efforts is the payoff at the end of our research: a better understanding of the history, literature, and theology of the NT writings for the purpose of cultivating, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a deeper spiritual life within ourselves, our

families, and our churches. This, in turn, will result in a more authentic and authoritative proclamation of the biblical message so that God's kingdom may be advanced in this world and so others may be subjected to his reign in their lives.

The Background of the New Testament

As we approach our study of the NT, we need to acquaint ourselves with the political and religious background of the NT (the contents of chap. 2). This ingredient is sometimes missing in standard NT introductions, an omission that when teaching NT survey courses in the past has sent us scrambling for other resources to prepare our students adequately for entering the world of the NT. In this chapter we cover the end of OT history (the exiles of Israel and Judah, the last prophets); the period between the Testaments (the Greeks, the Maccabees, and the Romans); and the political environment of Jesus's ministry (the Jewish sects, the Herodian dynasty, etc.). We also provide a survey of Second Temple literature and discuss relevant theological and philosophical issues.

History, Literature, and Theology

With this foundation laid, we analyze each NT book using the same pattern, which is called a "hermeneutical triad" in Köstenberger and Patterson's *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*: (1) *history* (including a book's authorship, date, provenance, destination); (2) *literature* (genre, literary plan, outline, unit-by-unit discussion); and (3) *theology* (theological themes, contribution to the canon).⁶ In keeping with the three major divisions of the NT canon, the material in the body of this book is then organized into the following three parts:

•*Part Two: Jesus and the Gospels*, which features a chapter on Jesus and the relationship among the four Gospels as well as introductions to each of the four Gospels.

•*Part Three: The Early Church and Paul*, which includes chapters on the book of Acts; the ministry and message of the apostle Paul; and the thirteen canonical Letters of Paul in likely chronological order of writing: Galatians; 1-2 Thesalonians; 1-2 Corinthians; Romans; the Prison Epistles; and the Letters to Timothy and Titus.

•*Part Four: The General Epistles and Revelation*, which are discussed in canonical order (except that Jude is kept with the Petrine Letters because of the missive's close relationship with 2 Peter): Hebrews; James; 1-2 Peter; Jude; 1-3 John; and Revelation.

The book closes with a chapter on unity and diversity in the NT and an epilogue tracing the biblical story line, concluding the volume as it began: with an emphasis on a holistic reading of Scripture.

RATIONALE AND DISTINCTIVES

Rationale

It is our belief, borne out of years of teaching on both undergraduate and graduate levels, that the pattern of organizing the material described above best reflects the organic growth of the NT material. It allows the classroom teacher (1) to cover the foundational material, that is, the doctrine of Scripture, the NT background, and Jesus and the Gospels; and (2) to use the template provided by the book of Acts as the basis for a study of the ministry and writings of the apostle Paul and the other NT witnesses.

While the NT is a collection of writings—a body of literature—to be appreciated in the sequence in which it is given,

it also reflects a historical plan. It moves from God's promise of a Messiah, as described in the OT, to the coming of that Messiah, as depicted in the Gospels, to the growth of the early church as narrated in the book of Acts and the NT letters, and to the consummation of human history at the return of Christ as anticipated in Revelation.⁷

To give but one example, it will be helpful for the student to understand that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians several years prior to his letter to the Romans so that the "Judaizing controversy" surrounding circumcision (discussed in Galatians) can be seen to provide the backdrop to the later, more general formulation of the gospel in the book of Romans. It will also be helpful to relate both Galatians and Romans to events in the book of Acts and to other events in early Christian history and in the ministry of Paul.

Distinctives

With this in mind, we aimed to produce a volume with the following distinctives.

1. *User-friendly*. We have written with the teacher and the student in mind. This book is scholarly, yet accessible; it is useful as a text for one- or two-semester NT survey classes. One could cover all the material in one semester or go over the introduction and Jesus and the Gospels in semester 1 and the early church, covering Paul and the rest of the NT, in semester 2. User-friendly features include listings of Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Knowledge at the beginning⁸ and Study Questions and Resources for Further Study at the end of every chapter. An extensive glossary is found in the back of the volume.

2. *Comprehensive*. This book covers the entire NT canon, background, Jesus, the Gospels, the early church, and Paul's writings in order of composition, the General Epistles and

Revelation, and the unity and diversity of the NT. Studying Paul's Letters in the order in which they were written helps integrate them with the historical framework of Acts. The second edition also includes discussions of how to interpret the various genres of Scripture (Gospels-Acts, parables, etc.) and an epilogue on the story line of Scripture, both OT and NT.

3. *Conservative*. All three writers of this book affirm that all twenty-seven books in the NT were written by the persons to whom they are ascribed (the four Gospels, the Letters). We have included a strong defense of the apostolic authorship of Matthew and John and a rebuttal of the alleged pseudonymity of the letters written by Paul and Peter, especially those to Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter.

4. *Balanced*. We have attempted to follow sound hermeneutical procedure, modeling the study of each NT book in its historical, literary, and theological context. Hence, this volume is more (though not less) than just a NT introduction dealing with the introductory issues of authorship, date, provenance, destination, and so on. As mentioned under point 2 above, the second edition includes special discussions on how to interpret various NT genres.

5. *Up to date*. This volume includes comprehensive scholarly interaction with both older and more recent scholarship, with a primary focus on English-language sources. Where appropriate we draw on recent advances in the literary study of Scripture, following a narrative or discourse analysis approach in tracing the contents of various NT books. The second edition brings scholarly interaction up-to-date with regard to all matters of NT introduction.

6. *Spiritually nurturing and application oriented*. The style of writing consistently seeks to nurture the student's spirituality and encourages application of what is learned rather

than giving an arid presentation of facts to be mastered merely on a cognitive level. This is reflected especially in the unit-by-unit discussions, in the theological themes sections, and in the Something to Think About sidebars (a unique ingredient for NT introductions).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW TESTAMENT INTRODUCTION

The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Before commencing our study, we need to take a moment to set the larger context of the science of NT introduction. In fact, students of the NT may not always realize this field of research has a pedigree spanning centuries. Perhaps the first modern NT introduction was produced by the French Roman Catholic scholar Richard Simon, who in 1689 wrote *A Critical History of the Text of the New Testament*.⁹

Several decades later one of the most prolific Pietist scholars, Johann Bengel, wrote his massive *Gnomon of the New Testament*, though his work is written in commentary style rather than conforming to the conventional format of a NT introduction.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, J. D. Michaelis (1717-1791), professor at the University of Göttingen, produced his *New Testament Introduction*, in which he questioned the inspiration of non-apostolic NT literature.¹¹

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

One of the most influential NT introductions in the nineteenth century was the massive two-volume *Introduction to the New Testament* by Heinrich Holtzmann. In it the author articulated the emerging critical consensus: the two-document hypothesis; the theological rather than historical character of John; the questionable reliability of Acts; the pseudonymity of Ephesians and the letters to Timothy and Titus;

the problematic authorship of the General Epistles; and the importance of Hellenistic backgrounds for Paul and John.¹²

The early twentieth century saw the publication of Theodor Zahn's 1,100-page *Introduction to the New Testament*.¹³ Zahn affirmed the traditional authorship of all four Gospels. He reconstructed the order of writing of the NT letters as James, Galatians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Corinthians, Romans, the Prison Epistles, and the Letters to Timothy and Titus. Zahn argued for the authenticity of both 1 and 2 Peter and believed the apostle John wrote not only the Gospel and the three Letters bearing his name but also the Apocalypse. Thus, Zahn provided a conservative counterpoint to Holtzmann and others representing the critical consensus, and his work became an important point of reference for subsequent conservative scholarship on matters of NT introduction.

Recent Contributions

More recently the British scholar Donald Guthrie (1990) and North Americans D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo (with Leon Morris, 1992; 2nd ed. Carson and Moo, 2005) have produced major evangelical NT introductions that set a high standard of scholarship while affirming conservative conclusions with regard to authorship, date, and other aspects of the NT literature.¹⁴ Less conservative is the NT introduction by the Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown (1997).¹⁵ Also noteworthy is the work of Donald Hagner, who does, however, frequently affirm critical positions regarding the authorship of NT books.¹⁶ Several other NT introductions written from a more critical perspective in the last decade or two are available as well.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

As this brief survey of the history of NT introductions shows, the present volume stands in a long line of efforts by scholars with a variety of perspectives that range from conservative to critical. As mentioned at the outset, to a large degree this is a function of scholars' larger presuppositions with regard to the nature of Scripture. Nevertheless, we believe it is possible to meet on the common ground of the biblical text and of the available sources and evidence and to engage in scholarly work and dialogue. It will become apparent that the present work operates more closely in the conservative Zahn-Guthrie-Carson/Moo tradition than in the more critical vein of the Simon-Michaelis-Holtzmann-Brown trajectory.

As we release this second edition, we are well aware of the limitations associated with producing such a work. In this age of unprecedented proliferation of scholarly literature, who is adequate to such a task? Nevertheless, we believe it is a risk worth taking since the task of helping to equip another generation of Bible students with a portion of the knowledge of "the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15) must not be left undone. On this side of heaven, our knowledge will of necessity be preliminary and incomplete: "For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror," and long for the day when we will see Jesus "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). In the meantime we invite you to join us to press on to full Christian maturity (Phil 3:12-14) as we grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). May God be pleased to use this volume as a small tool toward that worthy and glorious end.

¹ See especially W. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 3 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992, 2003, 2013).

² See the reference to the Scriptures as “inspired by God” in 2 Tim 3:16.

³ The reason for this, at least in part, may be the continued hegemony of an approach to Scripture that holds doctrine—including the doctrine of Scripture—in abeyance and favors a primarily historical or literary mode of investigation. But this unduly neglects the third vital component of biblical interpretation, that is, theology. See A. J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, EBS, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 14-15.

⁴ See the classic article by W. A. Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 19-59.

⁵ See the [doctrinal base of the Evangelical Theological Society \(ETS\)](#) (accessed April 11, 2016).

⁶ See A. J. Köstenberger and R. D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011); idem, *For the Love of God’s Word: An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2015); cf. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).

⁷ See the chapter “Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypse: The Fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New,” in Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*.

⁸ We recommend that for one-semester courses and in Bible college settings, teachers aim for imparting (at least) what is identified as Basic Knowledge. If the NT survey sequence spans two semesters, especially in seminary settings, our recommendation is to make the Intermediate Knowledge listed at the beginning of each chapter the standard for learning and testing. The Advanced Knowledge is provided for particularly motivated

students who, in some cases, may be called to pursue further study or even an academic career.

⁹ R. Simon, *Histoire Critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Reinier Leers, 1689). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 1:17-25, who calls Simon “the founder of modern biblical criticism” (p. 17).

¹⁰ J. A. Bengel, *Gmonon Novi Testamenti*, 3rd ed., M. E. Bengel and J. Steudel, eds., 2 vols. (Tübingen, Germany: L. F. Fues, 1850); English translation *Gnomon of the New Testament*, trans. J. Bandinel and A. R. Fausset, ed. A. R. Fausset, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1866); reissued as *New Testament Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 1:69-80.

¹¹ J. D. Michaelis, *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes*, 4th rev. ed., 2 vols. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1788); English translation *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. Marsh, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (London, England: F. and C. Rivington, 1802). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 1:127-38, who called Michaelis “[a]nother wunderkind [*sic*; German for “child prodigy”] of the Aufklärung” (German for “Enlightenment”).

¹² H. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Mohr Siebeck, 1886; this work has not been translated into English). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:111-22, who considered him to be an important figure moving NT research “toward critical consensus” (heading on p. 111).

¹³ T. Zahn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, Germany: A. Deichert, 1897, 1899; repr. Wuppertal: R.

Brockhaus, 1994); English translation *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Fellows and Scholars of Hartford Theological Seminary, ed. M. W. Jacobus, 2nd ed., three vols. in one (New York, NY: Scribner's Sons, 1917; repr. Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1971). See the discussion in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:367-73; see the discussion of Zahn's contemporary (and relative) A. Schlatter in *ibid.*, 373-83. While Schlatter did not write a NT introduction as such, his two-volume *New Testament Theology* makes an important contribution to the understanding of the theological message of the New Testament. See A. Schlatter, *New Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. A. J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997, 1999); and A. J. Köstenberger, "T. Zahn, A. von Harnack, and A. Schlatter," in *Pillars in the History of New Testament Interpretation: Old and New*, ed. S. E. Porter and S. A. Adams (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).

¹⁴ D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990); D. A. Carson, L. Morris, and D. J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); 2nd ed., D. A. Carson and D. J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

¹⁵ R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ABRL (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997).

¹⁶ D. A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012).

¹⁷ See, e.g., D. Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For a recent survey of NT introduction from a German perspective, see F. W. Horn, "Einleitung in das Neue Testament 2001-2011," *TRu* 79 (2014): 294-327.
