

EXPLORING THE NEW TESTAMENT

V o l u m e I

The Gospels and Acts

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His *Leadership and Lifestyle* (Cambridge University Press 2000) is a major study of Paul's Miletus speech and I Thessalonians.

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Exploring the New Testament

The Gospels and Acts by David Wenham and Steve Walton

The Letters and Revelation by Howard Marshall, Stephen Travis and Ian Paul

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V o l u m e 1

The Gospels
and Acts

Second Edition

David Wenham and Steve Walton

SPCK

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book has been a number of years in the making, and stems from our desire to provide a book which can provide the basis of an introductory course on the New Testament (NT) Gospels and Acts for first- or second-year students in a university, theological college or seminary; a companion volume is available on the NT Letters and the book of Revelation. Typically, we have in mind a one-term or one-semester course which is a mixture of lecture input and seminar-based discussion, and both of us have taught such courses in India, Oxford, Bedford, Nottingham and London. This section aims to help you, whether a teacher or a student, to get the most from our book.

This book is also intended for use by those reading and studying outside a college setting, whether as part of a distance-learning course or simply because you want to learn about the NT. There are various ways of approaching this book. You may like to work from beginning to end, or to dip into particular sections. Some will like to get into the NT text quickly, and if so we suggest that you may like to begin either

- with Chapter 9 on Mark's Gospel and then go on to Chapters 1 and 2 on the historical

and Jewish contexts of the Gospels and Acts; or

- with Chapters 1 and 2 on contexts before going on to Chapter 9 on Mark.

Either way, you will then be well placed to read other parts of the book. Sections B 'Approaching the Gospels' and C 'Understanding Jesus' can be read independently of each other, although the chapters within each section are designed to be read in sequence (B: Chs 3 to 5; C: Chs 6 to 8).

OUR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

We are particularly concerned to get students reading and engaging with the Gospels and Acts for themselves, rather than simply learning at second hand what these books say or merely absorbing a lot of interesting theories about them. So in our chapters we have endeavoured to provide enough references to the Gospels and Acts, and other pertinent ancient literature, so that students can read the texts alongside our discussion. We have also built into each chapter four sorts of further study for students to pursue, many of which we have used ourselves in the classroom.

What do you think? boxes provide questions and issues that we estimate will take 30-60 minutes for a typical student, and might then be used as the basis of a brief class discussion, perhaps in small groups if the class is too large to discuss all together.

Digging deeper boxes offer a piece of research which will take 2-3 hours of private study, and which could form the basis of a one-hour seminar class led by the teacher or by some of the students. Having two or three students lead such a discussion, in our experience, enables the student leaders to engage with the topic at greater depth, since they must set the agenda for the seminar, and also enables students to debate views with each other in a way that facilitates learning. Sometimes we have suggested how a seminar hour might be structured to handle the topic.

In this second edition of this book we have introduced boxes called **Focus on theology**. These boxes are varied in content and include summaries of key theological emphases of an NT book or section, reflection on the wider theological interpretation of a theme or topic, consideration of implications for faith and life today based on the NT material being studied, or questions to provoke readers to engage in this kind of reflection. These are designed both to model how the NT can be read theologically, and to encourage our readers to do their own theological reading of the NT (see pp. 118, 211, 232, 250, 269, 290).

Essay topics at the end of each chapter or section provide ideas on topics to research at more depth, which are to be presented in written form. They are intended to be about 2,500-3,000 words in length, although a number could be longer (or a little shorter)

if the course being taught required that. Some are identified as 'Introductory', and are intended for first-year students, and some as 'Intermediate', which are intended for second years.

In each case, there are too many for a student to do all of them, and the teacher will need to select those which best fit the particular aims and objectives of the course being taught, or to guide students in their choice of which to pursue. And we hope that our suggestions will stimulate teachers to add their own good ideas!

Further reading lists at the end of each chapter or section provide a basis for the research on the essay topics, as well as for further study in greater depth on particular issues within each section of the book, and we have chosen books which are generally available in European and North American college and university libraries. Within each chapter we have referred to books by the 'author and date' system (e.g. Wright 1996), and full publication details can be found in the 'Further reading' sections. Where a book has a British and an American edition, we have endeavoured to provide place of publication and publisher for both editions.

Because many students studying the Gospels and Acts are Christians, as we ourselves are, and will therefore want to ask about the relevance of their studies to living as Christians today, we have provided occasional sections called **Some issues for today** which sketch some of our thoughts in the light of our studies. These are designed to be jumping-off points and models to encourage students (and teachers) to make their own connections between then and now.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book falls into five sections: first, we set out the key contexts, historical and religious, within which the lives of Jesus and the early churches need to be seen. Here, we focus on the Jewish contexts; the companion volume on the NT Letters and Revelation will set the Graeco-Roman context, which is more relevant to those NT books.

Second, we outline methods of study used in approaching the Gospels, including the question of the kind of literature that they are, their origins and how to interpret the Gospels today.

Third, we focus on the main figure of the Gospels, Jesus himself. After surveying scholarly study of Jesus over the last 150 years or so and highlighting key issues, we outline what can be known of the life of Jesus from historical study, and then look at the major points of his teaching and his aims.

Fourth, we study each of the Gospels in turn, beginning with Mark. We start here because Mark is the shortest and is usually held to be the first; this allows our chapters on Matthew and Luke to focus on the distinctive contributions of these Gospels. The chapter on John is rather longer because John 'stands apart' from the others in his style and presentation of Jesus. Each chapter looks at the contents, structure, major themes and emphases of each Gospel, with a brief consideration of who wrote each book and when.

Finally, we study Acts, the continuation of the story into the life of the earliest Christians, again considering its contents, organization, major themes and emphases, as well as discussing modern debates about Acts, including its authorship and date.

A **glossary** at the end provides references to the main places in our book where key technical terms and words are introduced and explained, particularly in boxes within the chapters.

WHO WROTE WHAT?

We have planned this book together (and also with Stephen Travis and Howard Marshall, who have written the companion volume on the NT Letters and Revelation), and both of us have read and commented on the other's drafts of chapters and sections. So while we share responsibility for the whole book, the following chapters/sections were the particular responsibility of each of us:

David Wenham: Chs 1, 'What about other Gospels?' (part of 3), 5 (except pp. 89-109), 6, 7, 10 and 12.

Steve Walton: Chs 2, 3 (except for 'What about other Gospels?'), 4, 'Tools for interpreting the Gospels' and 'An approach to exegesis of the Gospels' (part of 5), 8, 9, 11 and 13.

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Both of us are very grateful to our students over the years, who have experienced much of this material at first hand, and whose feedback has led to it being better than it might have been. We have also valued our collaboration with Stephen Travis (in whose mind the two-volume project came to birth) and Howard Marshall, as well as the fine help of Robin Keeley, Ruth McCurry and Mary Matthews of SPCK. David Wenham would like to acknowledge the help of his former colleague in Oxford, Dr Jeremy Duff, and the constant support of his wife, Clare. We are very grateful to her for preparing the index for the book.

Steve Walton has valued the opportunity to teach alongside (and sometimes with) colleagues in Nottingham and London who have contributed to his thinking, particularly Stephen Travis, Colin Hart, Max Turner and Conrad Gempf: a number of their ideas are likely to have influenced my chapters. Prof. James Edwards of Whitworth College, Spokane, WA kindly commented on a draft of Ch. 9, and the Rev. Rob Bewley of the University of Cambridge on a draft of Ch. 8. Last, but by no means least, I cannot overstate the importance of the love, support and encouragement of Ali, my wife, without whom this book would never have come to birth.

ABBREVIATIONS

Generally, we have used the abbreviations in Patrick H. Alexander, John F. Kutsko, James D. Ernest, Shirley A. Decker-Kucke and David L. Petersen, eds. *The SBL Handbook of Style*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999, ch. 8. We list below the main abbreviations used.

- ABD* D. N. Freedman, ed. *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols). New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- AJT* *American Journal of Theology*
- Ag. Ap.* Josephus, *Against Apion*
- Ant.* Josephus, *Antiquities*
- DJG2* J. B. Green, J. K. Brown and N. Perrin, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, revised ed. Nottingham/Downers Grove: IVP, 2012.
- DLNTD* R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*. Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 1997.
- DNTB* C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background*. Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 2000.

- DPL* G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*. Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 1993.
- Hist. eccl.* Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*
- JW* Josephus, *Jewish War*
- LCL* Loeb Classical Library
- Life* Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*
- LXX* Septuagint
- NDBT* T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 2000.
- NIV* New International Version
- NRSV* New Revised Standard Version
- RSV* Revised Standard Version
- ZNW* *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

A NOTE ON JOSEPHUS REFERENCES

The works of Josephus have two widely used reference systems, one found in Whiston's translation (dividing his works into books, chapters and verses) and the other found in the Loeb Classical Library edition (dividing his works simply into books and verses). We have normally used the Loeb edition for our quotations, but we have given both types of reference when we have referred to Josephus, so that you should be able to find the reference whichever edition you use.

A NOTE ON FURTHER READING

A number of standard reference books can be recommended for following up most of the topics covered in this book. As a first step students are encouraged to look up the relevant articles on the NT documents in dictionaries such as *ABD*, *DJG2* and *DLNTD* (see Abbreviations above). On certain topics, *DNTB* and *NDBT* will be useful.

The amount of modern literature on the Gospels and Acts is enormous. This applies

especially to commentaries, where there is no way that we can list all the useful works on any of the NT books. What we have done is to mention those works that we happen to have found personally helpful without implying that those that we haven't mentioned are somehow inferior. In order to avoid repetition of the same comments it may be helpful here to list a number of commentary series and offer a brief characterization of each. 'Exegetical' and 'exegesis' refer to trying to understand what the text would have meant to its original readers; 'expository' and 'exposition' refer to trying to explain the significance that the text might have for readers today.

The descriptions below begin with the abbreviation for each series used in the rest of this book. More specialized, technical works and works that require a knowledge of Greek are marked with an asterisk both here and in the bibliographies.

- | | | | |
|-------------|---|---------------|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible Ongoing series of full commentaries using Greek in transliteration, generally providing detailed notes followed by explanatory discussion of each passage. Earlier volumes in the series were of unequal quality; more recent ones are very good but some tend to excessive length. | *BECNT | Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT Detailed commentaries working with the Greek, but generally accessible for those who do not have Greek. |
| ACCS | Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Valuable collections of verse-by-verse comment from the early Christian fathers, making their readings of biblical books more easily accessible. | BNTC | Black's NT Commentaries Middle-length, non-technical exegesis of high quality (this series is known in North America as Harpers NT Commentaries). |
| ANTC | Abingdon NT Commentary Intended to provide 'compact critical commentaries' catering to the needs of students and preachers. | BST | The Bible Speaks Today Expository commentaries with varying amounts of detail; useful for preachers. |
| | | EBC | The Expositor's Bible Commentary Multi-volume series on the whole Bible originally published some thirty years ago now appearing in a thoroughly revised new edition with many fresh treatments. |
| | | EC | Epworth Commentaries Short commentaries that have some concern for modern application. |
| | | *ECC | Eerdmans Critical Commentary New series offering detailed exegesis based on the Greek text. |
| | | HCNT | Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament Annotated collection of about 1,000 parallels from the ancient (mainly Graeco-Roman) world to NT texts, illustrating similarities and differences. |
| | | *Herm | Hermeneia Detailed technical commentaries on the Greek text. |
| | | *ICC | International Critical Commentary Full-scale treatments of the Greek text. Older, nineteenth- and twentieth-century volumes are now being replaced by fresh volumes. |

- Int Interpretation** Middle-length commentaries specifically designed to be helpful to preachers.
- IVPNTC InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentaries** Similar to BST in bringing out the contemporary relevance of the text, but with a greater emphasis on the basic exegesis.
- LCL Loeb Classical Library**
- NAC New American Commentary** Multi-volume series, aiming to be exegetical and expository; largely from a conservative and Baptist background.
- NBBC New Beacon Bible Commentary** Multi-volume series in the Wesleyan/Nazarene tradition with sections on 'Behind the Text', 'In the Text' and 'From the Text'.
- NCB New Century Bible** Very similar to BNTC but generally less detailed.
- NCBC New Cambridge Bible Commentary** Short commentaries using insights of rhetorical, narrative and socio-scientific criticism.
- NIB The New Interpreter's Bible** Vols. VIII-XII cover the NT with full-scale treatments providing 'overviews' and both 'commentary' (exegesis) and 'reflections' (help for preachers).
- NIBC New International Biblical Commentary** Entrance-level commentaries, some of which are more useful for out-and-out beginners while others contain good material for students.
- NIC New International Commentary** Middle-length exegesis with technicalities relegated to footnotes. Weaker, earlier volumes now replaced by first-class recent volumes.
- *NIGTC New International Greek Testament Commentary** Detailed commentaries on the Greek text; less technical than ICC.
- NIVAC NIV Application Commentary** Offering a combination of exegesis and application linked together by a 'bridge' between then and now.
- NTL New Testament Library** Good on cultural context and theological exposition.
- PNTC Pillar NT Commentary** Careful blend of exegesis and exposition.
- SP Sacra Pagina** Insightful commentaries by scholars from the Catholic tradition.
- THNTC Two Horizons NT Commentary** Interpretations in relation to concerns of systematic theology.
- TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentaries** Introductory-level commentaries providing the essential exegetical help.
- *WBC Word Biblical Commentary** Detailed commentaries using Greek quite widely; less technical than ICC.

Several reference works published by IVP are also available on a CD-ROM, *The Essential IVP Reference Collection* (separate editions for PC and Mac).

Several one-volume commentaries cover the whole Bible or the NT:

J. Barton and J. Muddiman, eds. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

J. D. G. Dunn and J. W. Rogerson, eds. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. (This and the previous title are two very similar works that attempt to express the state of biblical scholarship at the beginning of the new millennium.)

G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/ Nottingham: Apollos, 2007. (Very detailed, at times technical, treatment of the quotations from, allusions to and echoes of the OT in the NT.)

D. A. Carson *et al.*, eds. *The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. Leicester/ Downers Grove: IVP, 1994. (Introductory level with more emphasis on explanation of the text than the Eerdmans and Oxford counterparts; unlike them does not include Apocrypha.)

ONLINE RESOURCES

Since the production of the first edition of this book web-based resources have mushroomed. There is a mass of valuable material that can easily be accessed, as well as some unreliable material that should be treated with caution. In our bibliographies there will be reference to some of the resources available. One of the most useful sites is Dr Mark Goodacre's New Testament Gateway, <<http://www.ntgateway.com>>.

In addition, the Tyndale House library catalogue <<http://www.tynccat.com>> provides links to published books which are available online – many of the books in our bibliographies can be accessed this way.

S e c t i o n A

SETTING THE SCENE

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

This chapter:

- describes the historical sources that we can draw on;
- outlines the history of the 'intertestamental period' (i.e. the period between the OT and NT) until the Roman takeover of Palestine in 63 BC, and then to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, drawing attention to particular significant events;
- does the same for the Roman period until the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70;
- highlights some of the key ingredients in Jesus' context.

FROM THE PERSIAN PERIOD TO THE JEWISH WAR

Stained-glass windows are often beautiful, and express a deep piety. But the picture of Jesus and the early Christians which they portray is usually as remote from historical reality as it is from the contemporary reality of the modern observer or worshipper.

To understand the NT we need to transport ourselves into the world of first-century Palestine, and to see Jesus in his historical, social and religious context. In that context he becomes a credible flesh-and-blood person, not a romantic religious icon.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

How do we know about Jesus' context?
What sources of information have we?

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

The Old and New Testaments are hugely informative – the NT directly since it comprises writings of the earliest Christian movement, and the OT indirectly, since it was the basis of the Jews' understanding of themselves, their history and their religion.

JEWISH SOURCES

There is a substantial body of Jewish literature deriving from the so-called 'Second Temple' period (approximately 538 BC to AD 70). Solomon's temple was the first, the 'second' was that built in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah, as described in the OT, and then restored by Herod the Great. Historically, most important are:

The books of Maccabees

These four books were written over a period of years (from about 100 BC onwards) by a number of different authors, and describe the period when the 'Maccabees' were Israel's leading family, i.e. from 167 BC. The

What do you think? boxes provide questions and issues that we estimate will take 30-60 minutes for a typical student, and might then be used as the basis of a brief class discussion, perhaps in small groups if the class is too large to discuss all together.

Digging deeper boxes offer a piece of research which will take 2-3 hours of private study, and which could form the basis of a one-hour seminar class led by the teacher or by some of the students. Having two or three students lead such a discussion, in our experience, enables the student leaders to engage with the topic at greater depth, since they must set the agenda for the seminar, and also enables students to debate views with each other in a way that facilitates learning. Sometimes we have suggested how a seminar hour might be structured to handle the topic.

In this second edition of this book we have introduced boxes called **Focus on theology**. These boxes are varied in content and include summaries of key theological emphases of an NT book or section, reflection on the wider theological interpretation of a theme or topic, consideration of implications for faith and life today based on the NT material being studied, or questions to provoke readers to engage in this kind of reflection. These are designed both to model how the NT can be read theologically, and to encourage our readers to do their own theological reading of the NT (see pp. 118, 211, 232, 250, 269, 290).

Essay topics at the end of each chapter or section provide ideas on topics to research at more depth, which are to be presented in written form. They are intended to be about 2,500-3,000 words in length, although a number could be longer (or a little shorter)

if the course being taught required that. Some are identified as 'Introductory', and are intended for first-year students, and some as 'Intermediate', which are intended for second years.

In each case, there are too many for a student to do all of them, and the teacher will need to select those which best fit the particular aims and objectives of the course being taught, or to guide students in their choice of which to pursue. And we hope that our suggestions will stimulate teachers to add their own good ideas!

Further reading lists at the end of each chapter or section provide a basis for the research on the essay topics, as well as for further study in greater depth on particular issues within each section of the book, and we have chosen books which are generally available in European and North American college and university libraries. Within each chapter we have referred to books by the 'author and date' system (e.g. Wright 1996), and full publication details can be found in the 'Further reading' sections. Where a book has a British and an American edition, we have endeavoured to provide place of publication and publisher for both editions.

Because many students studying the Gospels and Acts are Christians, as we ourselves are, and will therefore want to ask about the relevance of their studies to living as Christians today, we have provided occasional sections called **Some issues for today** which sketch some of our thoughts in the light of our studies. These are designed to be jumping-off points and models to encourage students (and teachers) to make their own connections between then and now.