

# EXPLORING THE NEW TESTAMENT

## V o l u m e 2

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### The Letters and Revelation

Howard Marshall has spent most of his career teaching in the University of Aberdeen, where he is now Emeritus Professor of New Testament. He is a former President of the British New Testament Society and a former Chair of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research. He has written a book on New Testament theology (*New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*. Leicester: IVP, 2004), and commentaries on the Greek text of the Gospel of Luke and the Pastoral Epistles as well as on the English text of Acts, 1–2 Thessalonians and 1–3 John. He has a preaching ministry in the North of Scotland Mission Circuit of the Methodist Church and elsewhere. He has four married children.

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The Letters and  
Revelation

Second Edition

Howard Marshall, Stephen Travis  
and Ian Paul



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# Contents

## THE LETTERS AND REVELATION

<b>List of illustrations</b>	x	Other New Testament letters	28
<b>How to use this book</b>	xi	Further reading	29
<b>A. SETTING THE SCENE</b>			
<b>1 The world of first-century Christians</b>	3	<b>3 Paul, his letters and his life</b>	31
<i>How do we know what we know?</i>	3	Where can we learn about Paul?	31
The emergence of Roman power	4	<i>Material from outside the New Testament</i>	32
<i>A century of civil conflict</i>	4	<i>The Acts of the Apostles</i>	32
Augustus' successors	6	<i>The letters of Paul</i>	34
<i>The Julio-Claudian dynasty</i>	6	Difficulties in the Pauline letters	34
<i>The Flavian dynasty</i>	6	<i>Were the letters all written by Paul?</i>	34
Government of the empire	8	<i>Do we have the letters in their original form?</i>	36
<i>The provinces</i>	8	<i>Is Paul a reliable informant about himself?</i>	36
<i>Client kingdoms</i>	9	Early days	36
<i>Cities and colonies</i>	9	Paul's call and conversion	38
<i>The power of propaganda</i>	9	Paul as a missionary	39
The army	10	Paul the captive	41
<i>The legions</i>	10	Problems of chronology	42
<i>Auxiliaries</i>	10	Essay topics	44
<i>The praetorian guard</i>	10	Further reading	44
Roman society	10	<b>4 The letter to the Galatians</b>	47
<i>Citizenship</i>	10	What led to the writing of the letter?	47
<i>Classes</i>	11	The structure of the letter	49
<i>Women</i>	12	Paul's argument in the letter	50
<i>Patrons and clients</i>	12	<i>'New Perspective' readings of Paul</i>	52
<i>Language and culture</i>	13	Was the letter effective?	53
<i>Entertainment</i>	13	To whom was the letter sent?	55
Religion and philosophy	14	When was the letter written?	57
<i>Traditional religion</i>	14	<i>Consequences for the date of the letter</i>	60
<i>Healing cults</i>	15	For today's Galatians	60
<i>Mystery religions</i>	15	Essay topics	61
<i>Fate, astrology and magic</i>	16	Further reading	61
<i>The imperial cult</i>	16	<b>5 The letters to the Thessalonians</b>	63
<i>Cynics, Stoics and Epicureans</i>	17	Paul and Thessalonica	63
<i>Romans, Jews and Christians</i>	18	The contents of 1 Thessalonians	65
Essay topics	20	The contents of 2 Thessalonians	69
Further reading	20	Problems in 2 Thessalonians	72
<b>B. PAUL AND HIS LETTERS</b>		For today's Thessalonians	74
<b>2 Letters in the New Testament</b>	23	Essay topics	74
Ancient letter-writing	23	Further reading	74
The format of letters	24		
The format of Paul's letters	25		
<i>Letters of recommendation or introduction</i>	28		

<b>6 The 'first' letter to the Corinthians</b>	77	<i>The results of justification (Rom. 5:1–11)</i>	118
Paul's mission	77	<i>Christ contrasted with Adam</i>	
The 'previous' letter	78	(Rom. 5:12–21)	119
Getting behind the second (first) letter	79	<i>No longer under sin and under the law</i>	
<i>Continuing immorality</i>	80	(Rom. 6:1–23)	120
<i>Party squabbles in the congregation</i>	80	<i>The law is good – but impotent (Rom. 7:1–25)</i>	121
<i>The rich and the poor</i>	81	<i>New life by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–39)</i>	122
<i>'Strong' and 'weak' believers</i>	82	<i>The problem of Jewish unbelief in the gospel</i>	
<i>Spiritual superiority and inferiority</i>	83	(Rom. 9–11)	123
<i>Questions about the resurrection</i>	84	<i>Practical implications of the new life</i>	
Surveying 1 Corinthians	84	(Rom. 12–13)	126
<i>Party spirit</i>	85	<i>Jews and Gentiles living together in the same</i>	
<i>Immorality and litigation</i>	86	congregation (Rom. 14:1–15:13)	126
<i>Sexual and marital issues</i>	87	<i>Paul's mission – to Rome and beyond</i>	
<i>Food offered to idols</i>	88	(Rom. 15:14–33)	127
<i>Congregational meetings</i>	90	<i>Closing greetings (Rom. 16:1–27)</i>	127
<i>Spiritual gifts</i>	91	Scribes do strange things	128
<i>The resurrection</i>	92	Again – the purpose of the letter	130
<i>In conclusion</i>	92	The composition of Romans	130
For today's Corinthians	93	The problems of Romans 16	132
Essay topics	93	<i>Two versions of one letter</i>	132
Further reading	94	<i>Two separate letters</i>	133
		For today's Romans	134
		Essay topics	134
		Further reading	135
<b>7 The 'second' letter to the Corinthians</b>	95	<b>9 The letter to the Philippians</b>	137
An overview of the problems	95	Paul and the congregation at Philippi	137
The events leading up to 2 Corinthians 1–7	96	Paul's situation	138
Identifying the tearful letter	97	The situation and needs of the church	141
Survey of 2 Corinthians 1–7	99	<i>Attacks on the church</i>	141
<i>Thanksgiving (Berakah)</i>	99	<i>Tensions within the church</i>	141
<i>The rift with the congregation</i>	100	<i>A rival version of the gospel</i>	141
<i>The nature of apostleship</i>	101	The structure of the letter	142
Resuming the story	102	<i>Philippians as a letter</i>	143
2 Corinthians 8 and 9	103	<i>Philippians as an example of rhetoric</i>	143
<i>More fragmentary letters?</i>	104	The development of the message	145
The problem of 2 Corinthians 10–13	104	Philippians – one letter or several	
The occasion of 2 Corinthians 10–13	107	fragments?	147
For today's Corinthians	108	For today's Philippians	148
Essay topics	108	Essay topics	149
Further reading	109	Further reading	149
<b>8 The letter to the Romans</b>	111	<b>10 The letter to Philemon</b>	151
The purpose of the letter	111	Paul, Philemon and Onesimus	151
The nature of the argument in the letter	114	The structure of the letter	155
An overview of the letter	115	The outcome	155
<i>The opening (and the closing)</i>	115	For a twenty-first-century Philemon	156
<i>(Rom. 1:1–15; 15:14–16:27)</i>	115	Essay topics	156
<i>The text is announced! (Rom. 1:16–17)</i>	116	Further reading	157
<i>Universal sin and guilt (Rom. 1:18–3:20)</i>	116		
<i>The main proposition (Rom. 3:21–31)</i>	117		
<i>Abraham as an example of faith (Rom. 4:1–25)</i>	118		

<b>11 The letter to the Colossians</b>	159	Evaluating the evidence	197
The planting of the congregation	159	<i>Not by Paul?</i>	197
Why was the letter written?	159	<i>Written or dictated by Paul?</i>	198
The 'philosophy'	160	<i>A middle way?</i>	198
The structure of the letter	162	For today's congregational leaders	199
Paul's teaching in the letter	162	Essay topics	199
Paul's circumstances	166	Further reading	199
<i>Other possible places of origin</i>	166		
Did Paul write Colossians?	167	<b>14 Paul – the missionary theologian</b>	201
<i>Arguments against Pauline authorship</i>	167	Paul as an apostle	201
<i>Arguments in favour of Pauline authorship</i>	168	Humanity and its need	202
For today's Colossians	168	<i>Creation</i>	202
Essay topics	169	<i>Human nature</i>	202
Further reading	169	<i>Sin</i>	203
		Getting right with God	204
<b>12 The letter to the Ephesians</b>	171	<i>Justification by works</i>	204
To whom was the letter sent?	172	<i>Covenantal nomism</i>	204
What is the letter?	173	<i>The marks of belonging</i>	204
<i>The unity of the church</i>	174	<i>Paul's radical alternative</i>	205
<i>'Power' language</i>	174	The language of salvation	205
The structure of the letter	175	<i>Sacrifice</i>	205
A quick survey of the letter	175	<i>Justification</i>	205
Who wrote the letter?	177	<i>Redemption</i>	206
<i>Arguments against Pauline authorship</i>	177	<i>Reconciliation</i>	206
<i>Arguments for Pauline authorship</i>	179	<i>Salvation</i>	206
<i>Weighing the probabilities</i>	179	Faith	206
For today's Ephesians	180	The new life of believers	207
Essay topics	181	<i>God as Father</i>	207
Further reading	181	<i>'In Christ'</i>	208
		<i>The work of the Spirit</i>	210
<b>13 The letters to Timothy and Titus</b>	183	Theological implications for Paul's understanding of God	211
Letters that are somehow different	183	The community of believers	212
The problem of non-Pauline authorship	184	Ministry and the functions of the church	213
To whom were the letters written?	185	What principles shape Christian behaviour?	215
When were the letters written?	186	<i>Five general principles</i>	215
What are the letters about?	187	<i>The new way of life</i>	216
The structure of the letter to Titus	187	Some specific areas of concern	217
An overview of Titus	187	<i>Relations between men and women</i>	217
The structure of 1 Timothy	188	<i>Slavery</i>	217
An overview of 1 Timothy	189	<i>The state</i>	217
The structure of 2 Timothy	191	<i>Money and possessions</i>	217
An overview of 2 Timothy	191	The future for the world and believers	217
What is the situation reflected in the letters?	193	The missionary obligation	219
<i>Opposition and heresy</i>	193	Essay topics	219
<i>The development of church order</i>	194	Further reading	219
<i>Christian living and pastoral care</i>	195		
<i>Language and style</i>	196	<b>15 New Testament letters – interpretation and authorship</b>	221
<i>The theology and the way it is expressed</i>	196	Understanding what we read in New Testament letters	221



<b>20 The letters of John</b>	305	Theological perspectives	331
1 John – background and authorship	305	<i>God</i>	331
<i>Is the author of 1 John the same as the</i>		<i>Jesus</i>	331
<i>author of the Fourth Gospel?</i>	306	<i>The Spirit</i>	332
<i>The location of the author and his readers</i>	307	<i>The followers of the Lamb</i>	332
The circumstances addressed in 1 John	308	Mythological context and	
<i>The nature of the false teaching</i>	308	emperor worship	333
John’s response to the false teaching	310	Use of the Old Testament	335
The purpose and shape of 1 John	311	<i>Some examples</i>	336
Some issues for today	313	Structure and composition	337
2 and 3 John – their relation to 1 John	313	Numbers and their meaning	338
The context and content of 2 John	314	<i>Phrase repetition and word</i>	
<i>Hospitality to missionaries</i>	314	<i>frequencies</i>	338
The context and content of 3 John	315	<i>Numerology</i>	339
3 John – evidence of an emerging pattern		<i>Words and their numbers</i>	340
of church leadership?	316	<i>The decoding of 666 (Rev. 13:18)</i>	341
Essay topics	318	Interpretative issues	342
Further reading	318	<i>Traditional approaches</i>	342
		<i>Image, symbol and metaphor</i>	342
<b>D. APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE</b>		Some issues for today	344
<b>21 The Revelation to John</b>	323	Essay topics	344
Language and genre	324	Further reading	345
Historical context and dating	326	<b>Glossary</b>	347
<i>Dating</i>	326	<b>Index</b>	351
<i>Authorship</i>	328		
<i>Context</i>	328		

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# ILLUSTRATIONS

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## MAPS AND DIAGRAMS

---

Roman provinces at the death of Claudius (AD 54)	8
Roman empire	39
Roman provinces in Asia Minor	56
The seven churches of Asia	329

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## CHARTS AND TABLES

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Dates and events in Roman history	7
Gods of Greece and Rome mentioned in the New Testament	14
A possible chronology of Paul's life	44
Roman leaders/emperors	327

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# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

On 17 July AD 180, seven men and five women stood trial in Carthage, North Africa. Boldly professing their faith in Jesus, they were condemned to die by the sword. During the trial the governor asked, ‘What do you have there in your bag?’ One of the twelve, named Speratus, replied, ‘Books, and letters of Paul, a good man.’

Here were twelve people ready to die for the faith expressed in those documents. ‘Books’ almost certainly refers to the four Gospels, dealt with in *Exploring the New Testament*, volume 1. Volume 2 takes up the letters of Paul, together with those other writings of early Christian leaders which complete the New Testament. It is designed to form the basis of an introductory course on the Letters and Revelation for first- and second-year students in a university, theological college or seminary. This section aims to help you, whether a teacher or a student, to get the most from our book.

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## OUR AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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We are particularly concerned to get students reading and engaging with the NT documents for themselves, rather than simply learning at second hand what these

books say or merely absorbing a lot of interesting theories about them. So we have provided frequent references to the text of the NT and to other relevant ancient literature – excerpts from the latter often being quoted for easy access. In order to give ample space to exploration of the context, purpose and theological message of the books, we have limited the amount of space given to issues such as authorship and date – though of course guidance is given about where such questions can be followed up in more detail.

To aid active learning, we have built into each chapter several sorts of further study for students to pursue, many of which we have used ourselves in the classroom. We do not expect students to have time to do all of them. With the teacher’s guidance they will need to select those that are appropriate for the aims of the particular course being taught. And we hope that our suggestions will encourage teachers to add their own ideas.

**What do you think?** boxes provide questions and issues, which may take 15–30 minutes for a student to work at, and might then be used as the basis of a short class discussion or small group discussion.

**Digging deeper** boxes suggest a piece of research which may take a rather longer period of private study and could form the basis of a one-hour seminar 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 length, 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.

**Focus on theology** boxes (in most chapters). A new feature of this revised edition, 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.

**Essay topics** at the end of each chapter (except the brief Chapter 2) provide ideas on topics to research in greater depth, which are to be presented in written form. They are intended to be about 2,000–3,000 words long, although some could be rather longer or shorter if the course being taught required that. Some are identified as ‘Introductory’ (intended for first-year students), others as ‘Intermediate’ (for second-year students). Some topics invite students to write for a particular audience or to design material that will relate the biblical text to today’s world, rather than writing a traditional academic essay.

**Further reading** lists at the end of each chapter provide a basis for the research on the essay topics, as well as for further study in greater depth on particular issues within the chapter. We have chosen books that are generally available in British and North American college and university libraries. Within each chapter we have usually referred to books simply by author, or author and date, and full publication details can be found in the ‘Further reading’ sections.

Many students studying the NT are Christians, as we ourselves are, and will therefore want to ask about the relevance of their studies to living as Christians today. So we have concluded most chapters with a section in which we make suggestions or ask questions designed to stimulate the making of connections between then and now. We hope they will encourage students to reflect further for themselves along these lines.

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## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

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The book falls into four sections. First, we sketch the historical, religious and social context in which the writers and first readers of the NT letters lived. We do not repeat here the material in the first chapter of vol. 1, which concentrates on the experience of Jews in Palestine, though some of that is relevant to some of the letters discussed in this volume. The focus here is on the Greco-Roman world in which the church’s mission to Gentiles developed.

The second section deals with Paul the apostle and his letters. Between a chapter sketching Paul’s life and mission and a chapter summarizing his theology, his letters are studied in their probable chronological order of writing. The section begins with a brief chapter on the nature of ancient letter writing,

and ends with a chapter on two questions that have gradually been brought into focus through the study of the letters. These are, first: What problems and methods are involved in the process of understanding and interpreting NT letters for today? And second: How might we react to the proposal that certain letters were not written by the authors to whom they are attributed? Both the first and final chapter in this section of course relate not merely to Pauline letters but to others also, and might therefore have been placed at other points in the book. But it makes practical sense to include them at these points – though readers are of course free to read these and other chapters in any order that suits them!

The third section is devoted to what have traditionally been called the General or Catholic Epistles (because they do not name a specific church as recipients and hence have been thought to be addressed to Christians in general). The title is misleading since most of them do address specific audiences, though in some cases they were in several churches rather than a single community, and it may remain quite unclear to us where they were located.

Finally, we study the book of Revelation, the single example in the NT of ‘apocalyptic’ literature.

A **glossary** at the end provides definitions of certain technical terms, and references to the main places in the book where they are introduced and explained, particularly in boxes within the chapters.

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## WHO WROTE WHAT?

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We have planned this book together (and also with David Wenham and Steve Walton,

authors of the companion volume on the Gospels and Acts), and have commented on each other’s drafts of chapters. So while we share responsibility for the whole book, the following chapters/sections were the particular responsibility of each of us:

**Howard Marshall:** Chapters 3–14, and the section of Chapter 15 on ‘interpretation’.

**Stephen Travis:** Chapters 1–2, 16–20, and the section of Chapter 15 on ‘authorship’.

**Ian Paul:** Chapter 21, and the section on ‘Critical methods in the study of the New Testament’ in Chapter 15.

**Michael B. Thompson,** Vice-Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge, contributed the feature on ‘The New Perspective on Paul’ in Chapter 4.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We are grateful to our students in the University of Aberdeen and St John’s College, Nottingham for the encouragement and stimulus they have given to us as teachers. This book is the fruit of our work with them over many years. We have also gained much from our collaboration with David Wenham and Steve Walton on this project, and from their pioneering of the format of the two books in volume 1. We would like also to thank Ruth McCurry, our skilful and supportive editor at SPCK.

Biblical quotations are normally from the New Revised Standard Version. Quotations from Latin and Greek authors are normally from the Loeb Classical Library editions, published by Harvard University Press/Heinemann.

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**ABBREVIATIONS**


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Generally, we have used the abbreviations in P. H. Alexander, J. F. Kutsko, J. D. Ernest, S. A. Decker-Kucke and D. L. Petersen, eds, *The SBL Handbook of Style*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999, Ch. 8. We list below the main abbreviations used.

<i>ABD</i>	D. N. Freedman, ed., <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols). New York: Doubleday, 1992.
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	Josephus <i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
AV	Authorized Version
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DLNTD</i>	R. P. Martin, P. H. Davids, eds, <i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments</i> . Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 1997.
<i>DNTB</i>	C. A. Evans, S. E. Porter, eds, <i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 2000.
<i>DPL</i>	G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, D. G. Reid, eds, <i>Dictionary of Paul and his Letters</i> . Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 1993.
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
ET	English translation
<i>HCNT</i>	M. E. Boring, K. Berger, C. Colpe, eds, <i>Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament</i> . Nashville: Abingdon, 1995. Annotated collection of about 1,000 parallels from the ancient (mainly Greco-Roman) world to New Testament texts, illustrating similarities and differences.
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JTS ns</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> (new series)
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MG.	Marginal note
<i>NDBT</i>	T. D. Alexander, B. S. Rosner, eds, <i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> . Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 2000.
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OT	Old Testament
<i>OTP</i>	J. H. Charlesworth, ed., <i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (2 vols). Garden City, NY: Doubleday/London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985.
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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**A NOTE ON FURTHER READING**


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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 New Testament documents in dictionaries such as *ABD*, *DPL* and *DLNTD* (see Abbreviations above). On certain topics *DNTB* and *NDBT* will be useful.

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

J. D. G. Dunn, 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, 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.

(More introductory level with emphasis on explanation of the text than the Eerdmans and Oxford counterparts; unlike them does not include Apocrypha.)

The amount of modern literature on the New Testament letters and Revelation is enormous. This applies especially to commentaries, where there is no way that we can list all the useful works on any of the New Testament 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 characterisation 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 specialised, 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.

**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.

**ANTC** **Abingdon New Testament Commentaries** Intended to provide 'compact critical commentaries' catering to the needs of students.

**BECNT** **Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT** Thorough exegesis, with attention to context and theological message.

**BNTC** **Black's NT Commentaries** Middle-length, non-technical exegesis of high quality (this series is known in North America as Harper's NT Commentaries).

**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.
- \*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 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.
- NAC The New American Commentary** Multi-volume series. Aiming to be exegetical and expository; largely from a strongly 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 New Testament 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** Interpretation 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 in transliteration; less  
technical than ICC.

**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*, <[www.ntgateway.com](http://www.ntgateway.com)>. Resources on Paul which relate to all his letters are given at the end of Chapter 3.

A large range of resources for biblical studies is available through  
<[www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/online-resources](http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/online-resources)>  
and <[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)>.



S e c t i o n A

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# **SETTING THE SCENE**

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# ILLUSTRATIONS

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## MAPS AND DIAGRAMS

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Roman provinces at the death of Claudius (AD 54)	8
Roman empire	39
Roman provinces in Asia Minor	56
The seven churches of Asia	329

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## CHARTS AND TABLES

---

Dates and events in Roman history	7
Gods of Greece and Rome mentioned in the New Testament	14
A possible chronology of Paul's life	44
Roman leaders/emperors	327