

God blesses God's people in unexpected ways. Reminded of their blessedness, they then hear Jesus' instruction on how to live as his disciples in the world. In the six antitheses, Jesus reminds them that he is the fulfillment of the law, and that living as disciples entails a life of abundance and a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. He condemns the outward hypocrisy of public acts of piety and encourages his disciples to practice their piety in a manner that will ensure a greater, heavenly reward. Jesus summarizes his teaching on the practice of greater righteousness by encouraging them not to be anxious (Matt 6:35) and to live by what is now known as the "Golden Rule" (Matt 7:12).

Matera's interpretation has many strengths. He consistently holds to the theme that the Sermon on the Mount calls disciples to single-minded devotion to God. Each section summarizes and emphasizes the centrality of this calling in Jesus' teaching. Matera's treatment is solidly supported by various cross-references to other biblical texts. Finally, his study is accessible to anyone in the church who seeks to have a faith and life informed by this central and most meaningful sermon of Jesus.

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Paul: Apostle to the Nations—An Introduction

by *Walter F. Taylor*

Fortress, Minneapolis, 2012. 384 pp. \$39.95.
ISBN 978-0-8006-3259-5.

WALTER F. TAYLOR HAS written a compelling introduction to the study of Paul and his letters that provides a framework and a foundation to equip students to critically engage Paul's letters.

In paying as much attention to pedagogy and structure as to content, he has produced an eminently useful resource for students and teachers of Paul's letters. In the opening chapters, Taylor introduces the most recent methods and trends in Pauline scholarship, and then demonstrates how they are appropriated in close readings of the letters themselves.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first is devoted to the question, "Who was Paul and what did he do?" In the opening pages, Taylor challenges and reframes the tendency to interpret Paul's letters in the light of more than 2000 years of Christian history by explaining why certain key terms, such as "Christ-believer" rather than "Christian," should be translated in a way that reflects their Judean and pre-Christian context. He then succinctly deals with questions about the various hermeneutical perspectives used in the study of Paul, sources, and the political, cultural, and sociological contexts in which Paul operated.

In "What did Paul do?" (ch. 5), Taylor discusses Paul's apostolic practices and strategies, which include developing social networks, nurturing congregations, fostering a fictive family, and using rhetoric to shape the identity and practice of believers. He is especially attuned to the Mediterranean cultural and Roman political implications of Paul's gospel and mission for the communities to which Paul writes and his own self-identification as a Judean and Greco-Roman Christ-believer.

The second part of the book, "What did Paul write?," deals with the letters themselves. Taylor dedicates a chapter to each of the non-disputed letters of Paul. A final chapter, "How did people develop what Paul wrote?," deals with the deuter-Pauline and non-canonical developments of the Pauline tradition in subsequent generations. One of the book's many strengths is the manner in which Taylor guides students through the main exegetical issues by means of a close reading

of each letter. After examining the historical context, occasion, rhetorical genre, and what he regards as the primary purpose of the letter, Taylor deftly involves students in navigating the critical interpretative issues.

This is a well-written, student-friendly introduction to Paul's letters that includes study questions and suggested readings at the end of each chapter. My appreciation for and endorsement of *Paul: Apostle to the Nations* is such that I have adopted it as the textbook for my own seminary-level course on Paul.

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Seven Events That Shaped the New Testament World

by Warren Carter

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2013. 162 pp.
\$21.99. ISBN 978-0-8010-3916-4.

IN THIS EXCELLENT, pleasantly written introduction to what we sometimes call historical “backgrounds” or “contexts,” those who teach and preach the NT have received a great gift. Church leaders should know everything in the book and can recommend it without worry to those they serve. It deserves serious consideration from professors who assign textbooks to undergraduates and seminarians.

Seven chapters describe seven events (some are fluid processes rather than discrete moments). Each event provides a gripping “focal point” that allows Warren Carter to explain “larger cultural dynamics and sociohistorical realities” (p. xvii) that matter for understanding the NT. These include Alexander the Great's death; the creation of the Septuagint; the rededication of the Seleucid-defiled temple; the Roman occupation of

Judea; Jesus' crucifixion; the writing of the NT documents; and the emergence of a NT canon. The events themselves and their major players do not dominate the discussion. Carter directs attention where it belongs: to related, pervading cultural phenomena and how everyday people experienced them. As one might expect, Carter helps readers consider what it meant to negotiate the sociopolitical landscapes of empires.

Carter describes events, influential historical figures, and pertinent sources in an informative and energetic style without tilting into overkill. Readers do not lose sight of how the historical developments and corresponding cultural dynamics matter for interpreting the NT. For example, the treatment of Alexander and Hellenism spotlights the ancient Mediterranean world's multiculturalism and construals of masculinity, with reference to the import of these topics for specific biblical passages and themes. The chapter on the temple's rededication and the Maccabean era considers developments in Jewish eschatology, the diverse nature and limited scope of messianic expectations, and Jewish views on Torah that are relevant for navigating the new perspective on Paul.

Any manageably-sized introduction to a massive amount of material inevitably invites quibbling about topics that might warrant greater notice. I would have appreciated more attention to slaves' and women's experiences in antiquity, as well as poverty's causes and consequences. The temple's destruction—a greatly significant event—may have mattered for the christologies, eschatologies, and ecclesiologies of the Gospels and Acts more than the chapter on early Christian writings lets on. The best way to neutralize criticisms about underdeveloped details is to write compellingly and to enliven curiosity about the biblical material's inextricable relationship to particular, complex cultural currents. Carter has done exactly this; his book