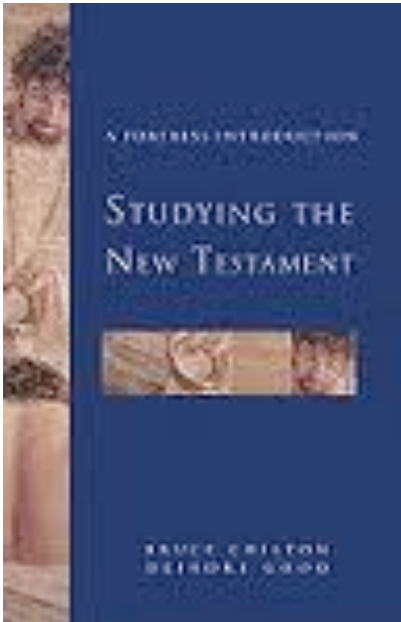


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Chilton, Bruce, and Deirdre J. Good

Studying the New Testament: A Fortress Introduction

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This book is a revision of the authors' earlier volume, *Beginning New Testament Study* (London: SPCK, 1986). Much has changed in New Testament study in the intervening quarter of a century. Consequently, Chilton and Good have embarked on a major revision of the text, supplementing both the contents of the book and enhancing its visual presentation to give this overview a much more modern style. However, the book is not (nor does it attempt to be) a comprehensive "introduction" in the manner of a German *Einleitung*. Instead, it is a short and serviceable guide to the study of the New Testament. Those looking for a compendious treatment of critical issues surrounding the twenty-seven writings that make up the New Testament corpus will have to look elsewhere.

This perhaps raises questions surrounding the purpose of the book and its assumed target audience. By itself, this book would not be the basis of an introductory course to the New Testament. The brief, punchy overview it provides means that the book is most likely intended to whet the appetite, perhaps serving as prereading for students prior to commencing the first year of a theological degree at university or seminary, or maybe designed to slot into a course on great literature as the accompanying volume to the New Testament to be read over two or three weeks; another possibility is that it might serve the needs of the (mythical?) well-read layperson seeking to supplement theological

knowledge. Whatever the precise purpose of this book, it is to be commended for packing much information into a short span.

The book contains an introduction to critical methods—source criticism, social-scientific theory, redaction and tradition criticism, reader-response criticism—and some bibliographical orientation to more advanced introductions (1–9). Surprisingly, given its importance in the development of modern New Testament studies, there is no explicit discussion of form criticism, although the method is hinted at under the rubric of tradition criticism (4). This is then followed by an explanation of scholarly tools, such as dictionaries, translations, commentaries, and websites (9–13). The final section of introductory material provides two lists of the New Testament writings. First is a listing of the writings in the presumed chronological order, 1 Thessalonians being the first and assumed to be written in 50 C.E. and 2 Peter the last, seen as written around 110 C.E. The second list of the New Testament writings presents the traditional canonical ordering (14–15).

The central part of the book is arranged into four chapters: (1) “Jesus and His Social World”; (2) “Paul and His Letters”; (3) “The Gospels”; (4) “Catholic and Apocalyptic Writings.” Overall, this arrangement is sensible and in some ways self-evident. In the first chapter, “background” issues are outlined. The main concern appears to allow readers to appreciate Jesus in his contemporary Jewish setting in the Galilean and Jerusalem contexts. This chapter is accompanied with maps, lengthy citations from Josephus, information concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a diagram of the Herodian family tree (36–37). As is the case with each chapter, this one concludes with a series of exercises (49–52) and further bibliographic material (53–54). Chapter 2 focuses on Paul and his letters. A simple chronology is given for Paul’s life and the composition of his letters (70). While this masks some of the complex issues that surround such a timeline, it usefully provides beginning students with a framework in which to understand this significant early believer in Jesus, his contribution to the formation of the emerging Christian movement, and the writings that were penned by him or others in his name. The exercises in this chapter appear to be driven more by contemporary issues surrounding equality, such as “Paul on Women and Slavery,” or dealing with human sexuality, “Paul and Same-Sex Relations,” or scholarly concerns about the authenticity of the Pauline letters, “Letters in Paul’s Name,” and, finally, the relationship between “Paul and Jesus” (85–90). While no one would deny the importance of these issues in recent ecclesiological debates and the interest they evoke in students, one perhaps wonders if the proverbial horse has not been placed before the cart in the quest to be relevant. It may have been better to probe Paul’s fundamental theological convictions to ascertain why equality is viewed as normative in the apocalyptically oriented communities he founded or to have considered Pauline major themes about participation in the body of Christ. Such avenues

of enquiry may have placed the focus of attention on the issues to which Paul devotes more of his theological reflection. However, maybe Chilton and Good consider that there are already sufficient studies that tackle Pauline theology.

The chapter on the Gospels likewise takes its own unique pathway. After a traditional discussion of sources and support for the two-source theory, the discussion ventures into territory not usually part of the vista of standard introductory treatments of the New Testament. Under the headings of James' teaching, Mary Magdalene's teaching, and Barnabas's teaching, the authors suggest that these three figures were in some sense transmitters of some early Jesus' traditions, or storytellers who related incidents that they remembered from their own experience of Jesus. The final chapter groups together the remaining New Testament writings, including the Catholic letters, 2 Thessalonians, Acts, and Revelation. While this chapter ensures that the book is complete in its treatment of the New Testament writings, it is the least coherent of the four.

This book has updated the earlier edition of this brief guide to the New Testament. Its strength lies in the unique arrangement of material, and the approach relates these texts to contemporary issues. In many ways there is no other volume that does quite the same job. As such it will be of value to those seeking to add something new to traditional New Testament introductory courses; alternatively, it might form the basis of a church study group seeking to relate scholarship on the New Testament to contemporary issues. The new edition has breathed new life into this book.