

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY COMPANION

In order to read the Bible with understanding, a book like *The Bible: An Introduction* (by Dr. Jerry L. Sumney) can serve as a thoughtful guide. My study companion (the book in your hands now) is designed to enhance your Bible study alongside Sumney's introduction. My hope is that this book will further your understanding of each of the books discussed by Dr. Sumney and to spark your critical thinking about the ancient world in which the Bible was composed. The guide is organized like the textbook. Each part (here referred to as "section" or "chapter") of the guide corresponds to a section in the textbook and typically includes a section summary, key terms with definitions, and questions for discussion or reflection.

Before you begin reading a section of the textbook, or after reading it to ensure you understood the main ideas, read the Sumney Summary. It offers a basic overview of the section's major themes and issues. Before you read a chapter, it might be useful to note the *Key Terms* and *Key Themes*. These are selected lists of concepts particular to a book of the Bible or group of books with the Bible, names of important episodes, or concepts and their definitions. You will want to be at least familiar with these concepts and terms by the time you have finished reading the section.

On occasion I will include a *Primary Text* passage with some discussion of that source. These excerpts from the Bible or other ancient texts are intended to provide additional context and insight for understanding a biblical topic. After you read a section in the textbook, these materials can help further your understanding of the topic or act as touchstones for class discussion or essays.

Immediately after you have read a chapter in the book, you might wish to go through the related *Questions for Group Discussion* and *Questions for Reflection*. You can use these questions to test your knowledge of the basic concepts explored in Sumney's textbook. Some of the questions are intended to focus on reading comprehension. Other questions encourage you to engage in class discussion. In asking these questions as you read, consider whether one of these might serve as a research paper topic.

Finally, this study companion also includes a guide to writing a research paper and a check list for completion. You may use this (in consultation with your professor) to determine an essay topic, monitor your progress, and check your work before you hand in your essay.