

Book Review:
**A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New
Testament¹**

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Gone are the days when the British evangelical Donald Guthrie could write a comprehensive thousand page *NT Introduction* combined with a companion massive *NT Theology*. Current NT research requires specialization for scholars to be able to keep abreast of the mountain of literature published in their field. With the growing information comes the need for a revised NT Introduction that is faithful to God's word and incorporates God honoring biblical-theological insights. It is into that gap that Michael Kruger (RTS Charlotte President and Professor of NT) has moved. From the deep teaching resources found at a multi-campus institution like Reformed Theological Seminary, Kruger was able to ask colleagues to contribute introductory material from their specialized fields. Thus, we have a multi-author text written by nine colleagues who have the same view of the inerrancy of God's word as well as the biblical precision to write from a distinctly reformed perspective. The best approach to review such a text is not to give a mini-summary of its contents but simply to highlight a few of the issues addressed in some of the sections as well as several of the advances proposed by the authors. Analysis will begin at the gospels and move through the NT.

The gospels, as a unique genre, will record Christ's life and work in a fashion that will be different from anything that had been written before.² Even though there are various gospels, since the whole Bible has one ultimate author, believing students can expect a similarity of message among the four.³ Concerning the first gospel, while the name Matthew appeared at his call (9:9), the gospel's author did not identify himself as such.⁴ Some evangelicals are not certain

¹ Michael J. Kruger (ed.), *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.

² While still unique, Benjamin Gladd, "Mark", in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 62, insightfully argues that it is good to see Mark fitting into a form of Greco-Roman biography which had the purpose of informing "the readers of the hero or protagonist and invite the readers to believe that same message." Thus, the four gospels are about Jesus the protagonist of the narrative.

³ *Ibid.*, 62-63 helpfully underlines the importance of "eyewitness testimony" which bridges the gap between the historical Jesus and the gospel narratives by cutting the supposed presupposition of long oral gospel development without such testimony. Such living testimony was highly valued in the ancient world.

⁴ The title, which ascribed the gospel to Matthew, appeared about 125 AD at the earliest- and is not inspired. Yet, Reggie M. Kidd rightfully argues that the gospel always circulated with the title and provides early patristic citations of the title. See Kidd, "Matthew", in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 30.

of the time of this gospel's composition, but a good estimate is around 63-66.⁵ There is no scholarly consensus on Matthew's structure.⁶ Matthew's purpose (proving that Jesus was the messianic Son of God) was also manifested in his writing style.⁷

Benjamin Gladd rightfully approaches Mark by underlining the importance of eyewitness testimony - which eliminates the need to find a long oral development of the gospels.⁸ The author, John Mark, who was not one of the twelve, had close interaction with a number of apostles. He was a companion of Peter and Paul and wrote his gospel in the early 60's.⁹

Robert Cara points out some of the unique aspects of Luke's Gospel, and determines that there is sufficient evidence to hold that it was written before 70, more likely by 62, when Paul was under house arrest in Rome.¹⁰ He also deals with the best way to relate Luke's gospel and the book of Acts, whether it should be Luke and Acts or Luke-Acts, and makes a good argument to view the two works separately with no contradiction between them.¹¹

Finally, Michael J. Kruger argues persuasively that John's Gospel (written by John the son of Zebedee) is a combination of eyewitness history and deep theological vision.¹² He rightfully places John's gospel in its historical setting- in reaction to Christian expulsion from the synagogue at the end of the first century.¹³ The Gospel is divided into four main sections and presents a Jesus who is messianic and kingly.¹⁴

Acts is a theological interpretation of the early church's history that is also historically accurate and closely related to both the gospels and epistles. As the author of Acts, Luke articulates the same main themes found in his gospel account. With the preaching of the gospel came a call to

⁵ Contemporary scholars conclude it was written after 70. Some have argued that it was best to leave the question open. However, Kidd, "Matthew", 31 rightly argues that it appears that temple practice was still continuing at the time of composition.

⁶ Matthew was dependent upon Mark- 90% of Mark appears in this gospel. However, Matthew writes in a more concise (and correct) Greek and was less concerned with chronology than either Mark or Luke. One way to analyze that structure is to start with the sermon on the mount (Chapters 5-7), then move to Jesus' address to his disciples (Chapter 10), followed by the parables of the kingdom (Chapter 13), then discipleship or life in the Church (Chapter 18), and finally the eschatological discourse (Chapters 23-25). See Kidd, "Matthew" 29-32.

⁷ His writing style grants that there are variations among the three synoptic gospels. While each represent either direct or indirect eyewitness accounts, there are different presentations of Christ's temptations and the timing of cleansing the temple. See *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁸ Gladd, "Mark", in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 62-64.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰ Robert J. Carra, "Luke" in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, makes a good argument for dating earlier than did I. Howard Marshall- in the 50's or early 60's. See "Luke" 93-96.

¹¹ Cara, "Luke", 97-99 also demonstrates the historical development of the Luke-Acts interpretation.

¹² Michael Kruger, "John", in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 115-17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 117-20. Kruger carefully steers the reader through the morass of skewed interpretations like J. Lewis Martyn's notion of the gospel written as an account of the Johannine community.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121-23. The four sections are a prologue, book of signs, book of the passion, and epilogue. Kruger nicely organizes John's presentation of Jesus under three headings: Christ as only God, Christ as bringer of life, and Christ as fulfillment of the OT.

repentance.¹⁵

Turning to Paul's writings, from internal evidence, the Roman Church appears to have been composed predominantly of Gentiles, but included some Jewish Christians as well.¹⁶ While there is scholarly debate as to the place of this Prison Epistle's composition, there is sufficient justification to state that they are authentic Pauline letters.¹⁷

Moving to James and Jude, if James the Just wrote the epistle, then it would probably be very early- perhaps written even before Paul's epistles.¹⁸ The issues involved in dating Jude relate to its relationship to 2 Peter (twenty of twenty-five verses in Jude are similar to 2 Peter) and the opponents identified in the letter.¹⁹

Internal evidence from the book of Hebrews does not appear to be decisive regarding the epistle's audience.²⁰ Concerning the time of composition, both the earlier (before the destruction

¹⁵ Cara, "Acts," 144 summarizes these themes under two heads, a primary purpose being to confirm readers in the faith by giving an account of God's special providence over the early church and secondarily to: "emphasize the one, unified church that, by God's Word, expands geographically, ethnically, and redemptive-historically."

¹⁶ The contents of Rom. 1 is related to the question of his audience. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and the Roman Christians seem to fall into that category. Other internal evidence for a Gentile character to the church is: Rom. 1:13; 9:3ff, 10:1f; 11:13, 23, 28, 31; and 15:15ff. Waters, "Romans", in Kruger (ed.) *Introduction to the NT*, 172-73 makes a compelling argument that explains the nature of the congregation. First, Claudius made a decree expelling the Jews from Rome. However, Claudius died in 54 and under Nero the Jews (and Jewish believers) were able to return. Thus, there had been a considerable influx of Jewish Christians three to four years before Paul's epistle. This interpretation helps to explain Paul's concern for the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers. Another problem connected to ascertaining the audience is that some see Rom. 16 as possibly part of an epistle that was sent to Ephesus.

¹⁷ Composition place options are Caesarea, Rome, and Ephesus. The highest probability for Col., Eph. and Phil. is Rome. Bruce A. Lowe, "Philippians" in Kruger (ed.) *Introduction to the NT*, 291 mentions that Paul's imprisonment may have been in Ephesus, Caesarea, Rome, or, less likely, Corinth. Waters, "Ephesians", in Kruger (ed.) *Introduction to the NT*, 269-70 correctly argues that while there are numerous problems they are not sufficient to overthrow the traditional position relative to authorship.

¹⁸ If none of those three James' was the author, then it could be dated much later. While some scholars choose a late date, probably written during Domitian's reign (around 90), a better option is Lowe's estimate of the 40's or 50's. See Lowe, "James", in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 439-40.

¹⁹ Simon J. Kistemaker, "Jude", in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 509-12 argues that there is insufficient evidence to determine which writing is dependent upon which. If 2 Peter is dependent upon Jude then Jude was written in the mid-60's; and if Jude copied from 2 Peter, then it was written from the mid-60's to the 70's or 80's. There is also insufficient evidence to determine who the opponents were except that they held to antinomianism.

²⁰ While some evangelicals argue that no one can reach a dogmatic conclusion, Kistemaker, "Hebrews", in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 416 cogently argues that it was written to Christians who lived abroad and greets friends back home in Italy.

of the Temple) and later schools (some time in the 80's) make strong arguments.²¹

Turning to the last book of the NT, the “historic” and the “literal” parts can refer to actual historical places and circumstances, but the text is meant to communicate more than simple chronological history.²² For example, the great city of Babylon can refer to a historical metropolis located in the Middle East. Yet, “Babylon” can also represent more than a particular city existing in the first century. Babylon is thus a “symbol”.²³ However, the visions themselves must be understood as symbolic. What objects John saw in his visions (whether a lamb, a prostitute, or locusts) were presented to him in symbol form, not in the form of historical persons or events.²⁴ Some sections of Revelation double back and cover the same ground from different perspectives.²⁵ Hill capably deals with the four major interpretative approaches to Revelation, siding with what he terms the “idealist” approach- which views the text as having to do with principles and historical conditions that are meaningful in every age.²⁶

In conclusion, Kruger and his team of scholars should be congratulated for a job well done. The book should prove to be a standard textbook in colleges and seminaries but is written in a style that will hold the interests of laymen as well.

²¹ The early date argues that Hebrews had to have been written while there was still sacrificial worship in Jerusalem- that is, before the Temple was destroyed in 70. Other scholars think that its composition was perhaps as early as 70, but more likely between 80-85. Related to the epistle's dating, it appears that the persecution that had occurred has now past, but a war was looming in the near future. It is possible that the looming conflict is the Bar Cochba war during which time Jerusalem was renamed and Jews were not allowed to enter the city. In his most recent writing, Kistemaker acknowledged that most commentators argue for a date prior to 70, but “Hebrews”, *Introduction to the NT*, 415: “a somewhat later year is not unrealistic and may even be preferred. Undoubtedly, it would be safer for the author to write a letter on the priesthood of Jesus in a place away from Jerusalem and in a time after the demolition of the temple than in a time when it was still standing.”

²² Charles E. Hill, “Revelation”, in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 520-21: “It is an ‘apocalyptic’ prophecy, employing symbolic visions and extended symbolic narratives.” Chapters 2 and 3 also use an epistolary form and the book is an epistle addressed to seven churches. “...it is probable that seven were chosen as a symbol of universalism, making the book relevant for all churches.” “Characteristics of such writings include heavy use of visual symbolism, the appearance of heavenly visitors, otherworldly journeys, depictions of the end of the world or of postmortem existence, stark dualism, periodization of history, and use of pseudepigraphy.”

²³ Some of the symbols are interpreted within the book of Rev. itself, for example the stars and lampstands, the harlot and the fine linen. See Hill, “Revelation”, 522.

²⁴ Thus, the detailed description of the locusts (9:9-7), says Hill, “Revelation”, 523: “may simply be for the sake of building up the image of monstrous, hideous, hellish beings or influences and may not correspond in a one-to-one way to some nonsymbolic referent.”

²⁵ This recapitulation, says Hill, “Revelation”, 524: “prevents us from assuming that everything in the book happens in chronological succession.”

²⁶ The historicist approach, held by most of the protestant reformers, saw events in Revelation unfold in chronological order. The preterist approach requires early authorship and limits Revelation's message to the first century. The futurist premillennial approach argues from a literal and linear standpoint that after the introductory chapters the book concerns only the last generation on earth. The most helpful interpretation, the idealist approach, avoids ahistorical abstractions. Hill, “Revelation”, 521-22.