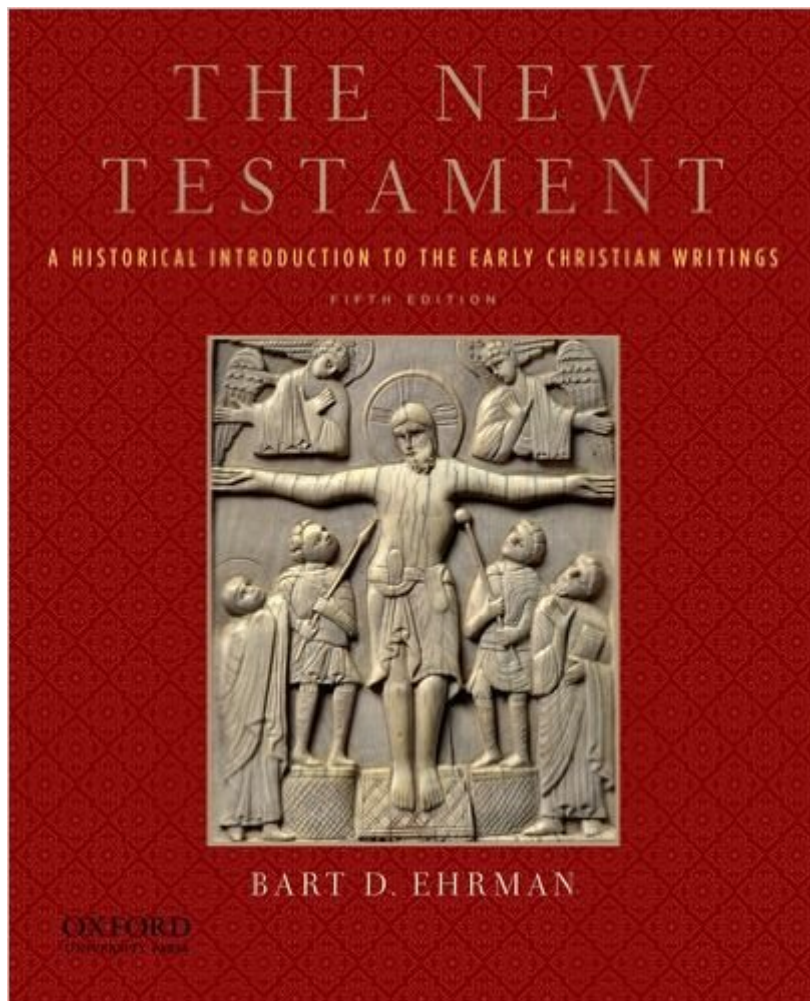


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# The New Testament: A Historical Introduction To The Early Christian Writings



## Synopsis

Featuring vibrant full color throughout, the fifth edition of Bart D. Ehrman's highly successful introduction approaches the New Testament from a consistently historical and comparative perspective, emphasizing the rich diversity of the earliest Christian literature. Distinctive to this study is its unique focus on the historical, literary, and religious milieu of the Greco-Roman world, including early Judaism. As part of its historical orientation, the book also discusses other Christian writings that were roughly contemporary with the New Testament, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the letters of Ignatius.

**FEATURES:**

- \* A uniquely accessible and engaging writing style that vividly brings the New Testament story to life
- \* Descriptions and models of various methods for studying ancient literature
- \* Time lines, illustrations, maps, and more than 100 photos, including three photo essays
- \* Five types of text boxes: "What to Expect," "At a Glance," "Another Glimpse into the Past," "What Do You Think?," and "Take a Stand"
- \* An extensive glossary of key terms, which appear in boldface type the first time they are used in each chapter
- \* An updated Instructor's Manual on CD containing a media resources section, chapter summaries, key terms, pedagogical suggestions, PowerPoint-based lecture outlines, and a test bank with essay and multiple-choice questions (not included with book, available separately)
- \* An updated Companion Website at [www.oup.com/us/ehrman](http://www.oup.com/us/ehrman) that provides students with links to media resources, chapter summaries, interactive multiple-choice self-quizzes, reading guides, flash cards, maps, and time lines
- \* A FREE 6-month subscription to Oxford Biblical Studies Online ([www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com](http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com))--a \$180 value--with the purchase of every new copy of this text.

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**NEW TO THIS EDITION:**

- \* A completely reworked chapter (2) on textual criticism, which now appears at the beginning of the book
- \* "Take a Stand" boxes that are designed to help students synthesize the material in each chapter
- \* Expanded bibliographies featuring the most up-to-date research available
- \* New boxes on "Jesus and the Woman Taken in Adultery," "The Ending of Mark," and "The Laughing Jesus"

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## Customer Reviews

Bart Ehrman's 'The New Testament' is a superb work for teachers seeking to assign their students a readable, reliable, and challenging introduction to the history of earliest Christianity and its literature. Incidentally, it would also be a fine first stop for intelligent readers who want to know what historians of early Christianity are saying about the birth of this religion and the origins of the New Testament. The work is engagingly written, with an occasional and not inappropriate first-person, and it has the merit of representing balanced, critical positions in the much debated-territory of New Testament studies. Ehrman's disinclination to accept a variety of trendy and dubious by-ways in New Testamental studies can be seen in his treatment of three areas. First, while not neglecting the Greco-Roman context, he positions Jesus squarely in the Jewish context and sees him as an apocalyptic teaching bent on internal reform of Judaism. Miracles are part of the picture, as they were for other charismatic Jewish teachers of the time (cf. the work of Geza Vermes). Ehrman declines to follow the scholars who with zeal and imagination claim to sort out editorial levels (and the communities or theological trajectories) in the hypothetical 'Q' document ('Q' = German 'Quelle' or 'source', i.e., the hypothetical sayings source lying behind the commonalities in Matthew and Luke and not in Mark). Thirdly in this regard, Ehrman refuses the common move of positing the existence of gnostic Christianity (or any 'gnosticism') prior to the first hard evidence for it in the late first or early second century. So this is a book that you can trust to pass on the generally accepted theories and to reject the more speculative moves of the field.

In my view, Bart Ehrman writes with more clarity and strength than any other New Testament scholar. I have heard him speak, listened to his tapes and read his books. He exudes competency, frequently reminding us that his conclusions are those of a historian - then spends a little time explaining what that means. In the case of "The New Testament," it means he will examine authorship issues, content and relevancy of the various gospels, letters and apocalypses - inside or

outside of the canon - differently than they might be examined from the pulpit. For example, issues of dogma are extensively discussed, but not endorsed nor advocated. Instead, they are examined for consistency within the whole context of the other books and the political setting in which the early church solidified its views. As a matter of fact, he is so non-committal it is impossible to tell exactly where he stands - although it is obvious he takes a liberal stance of some sort. I had more than my share of fundamentalist preaching, yet values at home were those of inquiry and evidence toward the world in general. Ehrman's approach is more to my liking than reiteration of a dogma I've already heard, documented by passages from scripture pre-selected to prove a certain view. He compares the gospels, discusses the nuances of their differing themes and considers their probable authorship. The letters are treated similarly and the book of Revelations is subjected to a fascinating analysis. Consider the New Testament subjected to the kind of scrutiny one of Shakespeare's plays might receive from a college professor of western world literature - in which speculation is kept to a minimum and explanation is made as to the historical context of the story.

This book is well written and closely argued, but as an introduction to the subject matter it fails on at least one important level: Unlike, say, John Drane's "Introduction to the New Testament" or Raymond Brown's more detailed overview from the Catholic perspective, Ehrman does not introduce us to a representative sample of scholarly thought. Instead it mainly argues the case for Ehrman's own position, and in the process it takes for granted certain assumptions that are more widely contested than he seems willing to admit. In other words, there is a tendency to cite opinions that other equally reputable scholars would contest as though they were established fact. Another difficulty with using this book as an introduction to the subject is that Ehrman does not give the reader enough assistance in investigating his influences and antecedents. He makes some quite radical assertions (e.g. challenging the traditional view that the oral traditions of pre-literate societies tend to be transmitted reliably) without the conventional footnotes quoting authorities and sources. Apart from some general further reading suggestions at the end of chapters, Ehrman's assertions along the lines that "recent research has shown" or "it is now accepted" have to be taken on his say-so alone. Actually, Ehrman's antecedents are fairly obvious to anyone who has read theology - he continues the tradition of 19th century liberals like Wrede (and their 20th century disciples like Bultmann) who drew a sharp distinction between (i) the Jesus of history and (ii) the Christ of the Church's faith, and assumes that the Bible can only inform us about the latter.

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