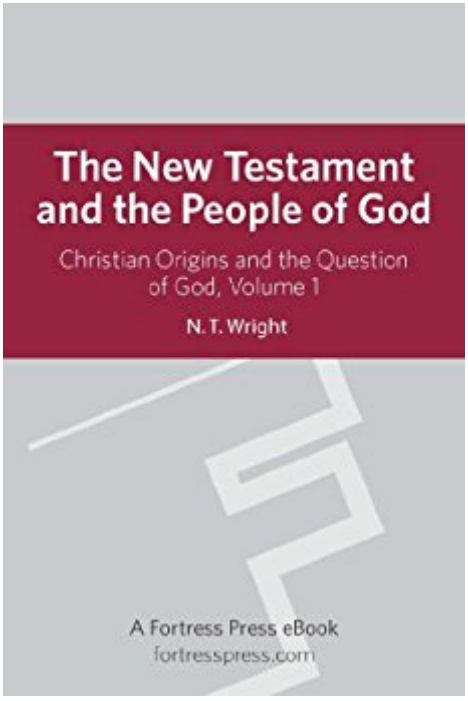
New Testament People God V1: Christian Origins And The Question Of God



Synopsis

This first volume in the series Christian Origins and the Question of God provides a historical, theological, and literary study of first-century Judaism and Christianity. Wright offers a preliminary discussion of the meaning of the word god within those cultures, as he explores the ways in which developing an understanding of those first-century cultures are of relevance for the modern world.

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Customer Reviews

The book The New Testament and the People of God by N. T. Wright, published in 1992, is volume 1 in a proposed 5 volume series entitled ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Christian Origins and the Question of God.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• In this series WrightÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s hope is ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“to offer a consistent hypothesis on the origin of Christianity, with particular relation to Jesus, Paul and the gospels, which will set out new ways of understanding major movements and thought patterns, and suggest new lines that exegesis can follow upÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (xiv). Two basic questions serve as the driving force behind WrightÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s entire project: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“How did

Christianity begin, and why did it take the shape that it did? andÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|What does Christianity believe, and does it make sense?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (10). In answering these questions, Wright attempts a creative synthesis of literary, historical, and theological approaches to the study of Christian origins: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“We must try to combine the pre-modern emphasis on the text as in some sense authoritative, the modern emphasis on the text (and Christianity itself) as irreducibly integrated into history, and irreducibly involved with theology, and the post-modern emphasis on the reading of the textÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (26-27). In short: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Literary, historical and theological exploration of the New Testament, and particularly of Jesus and Paul, is our goalÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (144).This first volume is ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“basically an exercise in ground clearing, designed to enable [Wright] to engage in further work on Jesus, Paul and the gospels without begging quite so many questions as [he] would have done had [he] tried to squeeze this material into the early chapters of other booksÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (xvi). Wright contends, however, that that NTPG is not merely introductory, but also stands by itself:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“[NTPG] argues for a particular way of doing history, theology, and literary study in relation to the questions of the first century; it argues for a particular way of understanding first-century Judaism and first-century Christianity; and it offers a preliminary discussion of the meaning of the word ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœgodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ within the thought forms of these groups, and the ways in which such historical and theological study might be of relevance for the modern worldÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (28)The 476-page book is divided into five parts that together house an introduction, sixteen chapters, and a conclusion. Following his introduction to the series and the book in Part 1 and chapter 1, Wright moves in Part II (chapters 2 through 5) to lay out his ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“tools for the task.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• In these four chapters Wright sketches his basic methodological approach, which can be succinctly summarized as follows: oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s understanding of the literature, history, and theology of the NT can be greatly clarified by studying the worldviews through which the NT people of God perceived reality. These worldviews are comprised of (1) the implicit stories the people of God believed themselves to be a part of, (2) their answers to the basic questions of human existence, (3) the cultural symbols that express the basic stories and questions, and (4) the particular praxis that the people of God engaged in. New Testament theology tells a story that offers a set of answers to the major questions of life, all of which is expressed in a variety of cultural symbols and issues in a particular type of praxis. Wright argues that a more coherent and complete account of Christian origins emerges with the study of each of these four worldview functions.Part III houses chapters 6 though 10, where Wright applies his worldview methodology to a study of the key aspects of first-century Judaism within the

Greco-Roman world. Wright argues that first-century JudaismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s basic story is one of creational monotheism, election, and eschatology: Israel is the chosen covenant people of the creator god. However, Israel is at present suffering in an extended ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“exile,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• with the wrong pagan and Jewish leaders leading them. What Israel needs is for its god to act decisively again to give the nation the right sort of rule; in the meantime, Israel must be faithful to the covenant god has made with them, which reveals the true people of god in the present and will result in the salvation and justification of the true people of god on the day when this decisive action takes place. This basic Jewish worldview was represented and reinforced by four key symbols (the Temple, the Land, the Torah, and Jewish ethnicity) and key practices (worship at the temple, attending the festivals, studying Torah, and practicing the TorahÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •especially circumcision, Sabbath, and kosher food laws). The major story, symbols and praxis of Israel in the first century both expressed and resulted in passionate theology and hope on the part of second Temple Jews.Part IV encompasses chapters 11 through 15, where Wright addresses early Christianity. In chapter 11, Wright provides a historical reconstruction of Christianity between 30 and 150 CE around nine ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“fixed pointsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• of historical evidence (e.g., ClaudiusÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 49 and the fall of Jerusalem in 70). This is followed in chapters 12-14 with an examination of the story, question, symbol and praxis elements of the early Christian worldview, similar in approach to the study of first century Judaism in Part III. Wright draws all of this together in chapter 15 with a preliminary sketch of the aims, community, development, variety, theology, and hope of the early Christians. Wright argues that the early Christians embraced the same basic creational, covenantal, and eschatological framework of first-century Judaism, but reorganized this framework around Jesus and the spirit.Part V contains chapter 16, the final chapter of the book, entitled ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The New Testament and the Question of God.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• In this concluding chapter Wright focuses attention on the notion that towards the end of the first century, Judaism and Christianity were ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“each making more or less the same claimÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (467). Judaism claimed that the one creator god would remain faithful to the covenant made with their patriarchs, as the Hebrew Scriptures bear witness. Christianity claimed that its followers were the true heirs of the promises made by the one creator god to the Jewish patriarchs and that the Hebrew Scriptures were now to be read in light of their fulfillment in Jesus. The Jewish and Christian communities were two communities with one common root. In order to probe the implications of what this means, Wright proposes that one must examine three focal points: Jesus, the New Testament, and the question of god. Brief discussions of these three focal points serve as

trajectories for the subsequent volumes in the series.

Tom Wright is a leading New Testament scholar and retired Anglican priest and bishop in Europe. His works have had considerable influence in New Testament scholarship in recent decades. This book is the first of his multivolume work on New Testament history and theology. This first book in the series deals mostly with setting the stage for the later volumes by laying the foundational groundwork by which Wright will proceed. Wright makes his aim for this volume (and the whole series) clear when he suggests that the New Testament ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Must be read so as to be understood, read within appropriate contexts, within an acoustic which will allow its full overtones to be heard.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (6) This aim is clear throughout, as Wright seats the New Testament within its historical context. The book is broken into five parts consisting of sixteen total chapters. Part I is only one chapter long and serves as an introduction to the task at hand. In this chapter Wright discusses the four main ways the New Testament has been read in recent centuries: pre-critical, historical, theological, and post-modern, noting key characteristics of each. Wright determines that New Testament history and theology should not be separated and he aims to unite the two in this work. Part II consists of four chapters in which Wright attempts to lay out the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Tools for the Task.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• He argues for what he calls a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœcritical-realist epistemologyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ which tries to take seriously the premodern sense of the New TestamentÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s authority, the modern insistence on the value of history, and the postmodern emphasis on critically understanding the reading process itself and the reader. Wright says that his epistemological position acknowledges the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower, while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known. (35 italics excluded) Wright critiques the common idea of a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœneutral ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ or ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœobjective ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ observer, noting that this is actually impossible and that everyone writes (and lives) within a certain worldview. Wright describes story as the basic category and characteristic of worldview. Worldview narratives compete for subversion of one another. Christianity as a public proclaimed worldview story aims to subvert other world views, begging the question of which worldview is best? Since everyone operates within a worldview, presuming their worldview to be right, we must abandon the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœhard and fast ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ distinction between the subjective and objective. The two are always combined and we therefore ought to hear other worldviews and try to determine which one is right. It

is with the view of human writing as worldview articulation through story that Wright proceeds to a discussion of history. Wright points out that history is neither bare facts nor ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœsubjective interpretationsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ but rather ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the meaningful narrative of events and intentions.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (82) History writing always is by its very nature selective and interpretive. Ancient historians knew about being critical with their writing but did not share the impossible intention to be ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“objective.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• For theses reasons the subversive stories of the New Testament should be evaluated comparatively with other worldviews. The bottom line here is that all history is in fact interpretive history. Most scholars want to dismiss the history of the gospels because the eighteenth century rationalist/enlightenment worldview excludes the possibility of other worldviews. (92) Wright states that worldviews involve ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The presuppositional, pre-cognitive stage of a culture or society.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (122) A worldview is the lens through which every individual and society views anything. Further, all worldviews have theological elements embedded in them, highlighting the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœGod-dimensionÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ of the worldview. The theology of the Christian worldview sets forth a comprehensive and subversive worldview about all of reality as public truth. Wright goes on to argue that we need to approach the New Testament using the historical method and on the basis of hypothesis and verification. A good hypothesis should 1) get all the data, 2) be (relatively) simple, and 3) help to explain other related issues and problems. (100) The best hypothesis encompassing all the data of early Christianity and remaining fairly simple in relation to other hypotheses should be chosen. Part III is the largest part of the book and contains five chapters dealing with first century Judaism. Though Wright recognizes the great diversity found within first century Judaism, he still finds much to be characteristic of the vast majority. He discusses these similarities by looking at the stories, symbols, practices, beliefs and hopes of Israel. Wright posits that the all encompassing worldview of the first century Jew expected to see the purposes of the covenant God for his people realized. Since the Babylonian exile Israel had always had some type of overlord, leading to the expectancy of some type of full liberation from exile yet to come. These Jews did not expect some Western-type heavenly disembodies bliss, but longed for a real deliverance on their land and a liberation akin to the Exodus or Maccabean revolt. (170) The average Jew was waiting for a conclusion to their story. The primary symbols of the worldview were Temple, Land, Torah, and Racial Identity. The main practices of Torah observance were circumcision, Sabbath and kosher laws. Monotheism, election and eschatology are considered by Wright to be the three major beliefs central to the first century Jewish worldview. The average Jew would have also hoped for salvation (defined as rescue from oppression), resurrection, and

idealized life under the proper reign of God. In part IV Wright finally spends five chapters looking at the first Christian century, reading their story(s) in the light of the second temple Jewish context laid out in part III. After laying some historical groundwork Wright evaluates the practices, symbols and stories of the early Christian movement. The three main practices of the early movement were missionary work, baptism, and the Eucharist. All three of which were firmly established in the middle of the first century. Early Christianity did not share the same symbols as their pagan and Jewish neighbors, but had as its major symbol the cross. WrightÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s evaluation of the early Christian stories includes discussion of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul. He locates all of them firmly in the first century Jewish milieu but yet sees them as having redefined the central Jewish beliefs due to understanding Christ as the climax and continuation of IsraelÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s story. All five are telling a subversive version of the larger Jewish story which the world is to hear. Wright also discusses ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœshorter storiesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ which is essentially a discussion of form criticism. Wright then provides a preliminary sketch of the early Christian movement, noting the missionary nature, symbols, familial and socio-political aspects of the community, and broad diversity. He also notes the nature of Christian theology as Jewish theology redrawn around Jesus and the divine spirit, with the hope of the return of Christ, resurrection and a new heavens and new earth to dwell in. This book is very dense and detailed and contains so many smaller arguments embedded within the large arguments that it would be difficult to discuss them all. The book seemed to me to be well argued and very thoughtful. It was unique how Wright proceeded on almost ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœsecularÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ type historical grounds and still worked his way to very conservative conclusions. The analysis of Judaism was very helpful and illuminating for New Testament study. His early chapters focusing on history writing as interpretation of events through a particular worldview lens provide an excellent foundation for New Testament studies which should have to be reckoned with. Though this book is somewhat laborious to wade through, I think it was well worth the effort and serious students of the New Testament should probably put in the hours to get through it.

This was a game changer for me not because it convinced me that the New Testament is reliable, but because it showed me how it is to be read if I am to be able to show why it is reliable. This has also set me on a path of investigation of the New Perspective on Paul and claims that the New Testament and first century Christianity was in fact more Jewish than Hellenistic.

(Christian Origins and the Question of God (Paperback)) New Testament People God V1: Christian Origins And The Question Of God Paul and the Faithfulness of God: Two Book Set (Christian Origins and the Question of God 4) Resurrection Son of God V3: Christian Origins and the Question of God Jesus Victory of God V2: Christian Origins And The Question Of God The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity (Companions to the New Testament) PANCE and PANRE Question Book: A Comprehensive Question and Answer Study Review Book for the Physician Assistant National Certification and Recertification Exam QBQ! The Question Behind the Question: Practicing Personal Accountability at Work and in Life Loving God: Krsna and Christ: A Christian Commentary on the Marada Sutras (Christian Commentaries on Non-Christian Sacred Texts) Interlinear Greek-English New Testament : With Greek-English Lexicon and New Testament Synonyms (King James version) Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament A Workbook for New Testament Syntax: Companion to Basics of New Testament Syntax and Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics New Testament Greek Listening Materials: For the Elements of New Testament Greek NAB, First Communion Bible: New Testament, Imitation Leather, White: NAB New Testament NAB, First Communion Bible: New Testament, Imitation Leather, Black: NAB New Testament GNT, First Communion Bible: New Testament, Imitation Leather, Black: GNT New Testament (Good News Translation/Children's Bibles) GNT, First Communion Bible: New Testament, Imitation Leather, White: GNT New Testament The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Context The Untold Story of the New Testament Church: An Extraordinary Guide to Understanding the New Testament Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament