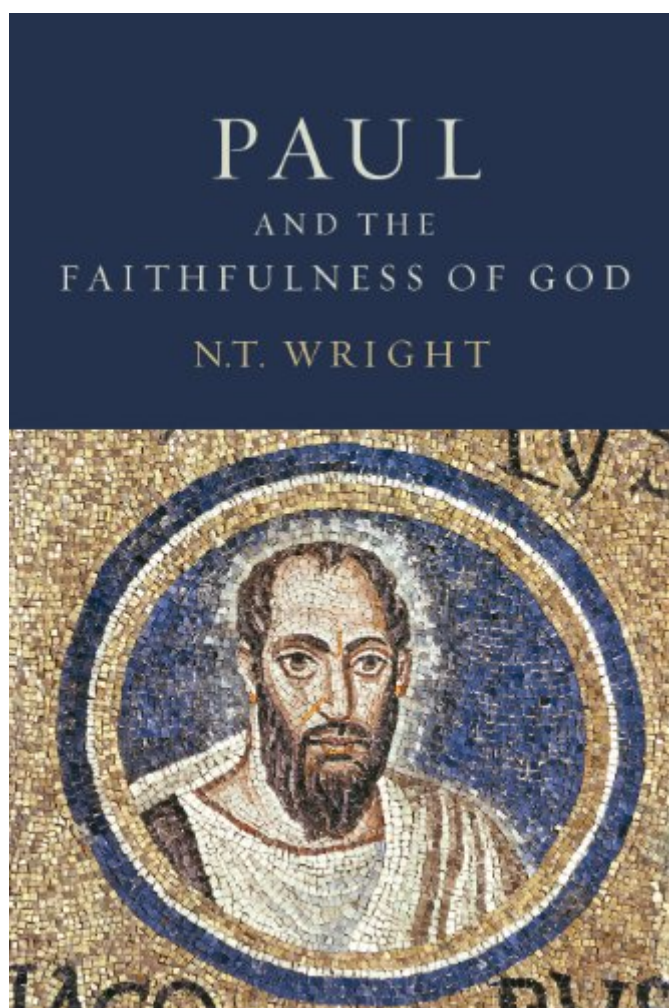


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Paul And The Faithfulness Of God: Two Book Set (Christian Origins And The Question Of God 4)



Synopsis

This highly anticipated two-book fourth volume in N. T. Wright's magisterial series, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, is destined to become the standard reference point on the subject for all serious students of the Bible and theology. The mature summation of a lifetime's study, this landmark book pays a rich tribute to the breadth and depth of the apostle's vision, and offers an unparalleled wealth of detailed insights into his life, times, and enduring impact. Wright carefully explores the whole context of Paul's thought and activity—Jewish, Greek and Roman, cultural, philosophical, religious, and imperial—and shows how the apostle's worldview and theology enabled him to engage with the many-sided complexities of first-century life that his churches were facing. Wright also provides close and illuminating readings of the letters and other primary sources, along with critical insights into the major twists and turns of exegetical and theological debate in the vast secondary literature. The result is a rounded and profoundly compelling account of the man who became the world's first, and greatest, Christian theologian.

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Customer Reviews

I have said it before and I will say it again that NT Wright is the Martin Luther of the 20th century. His understanding of Paul surpasses anything that I know of Pauline studies. NTW makes Paul and the scripture come alive and the interesting thing, to me, is that once we understand what NTW is doing it is not complicated but very logical. His breakdown of the Bible as a narrative with subplots greatly helps to understand not only Paul but the whole Bible. First: God's dealing with mankind, Second: Israel as the instrument to bring God's blessing to the world and Third; Jesus as the Messiah through whom the other sub plots as well as the main plot find their climax and resolution. With the main plot stretching from Genesis to Revelation providing the great overarching story of the redemption, renewal, re-creation, rescue of all of God's creation. NTW shows us that Paul took Jewish traditions, symbols and rituals and developed Christian Theology based on the Jewish traditions of Monotheism, election and eschatology. This also explains the so called Paul's misuse of the OT. Paul knew exactly what he was doing. I look forward to his next two books to complete the series

This masterwork by Tom Wright completes the series of four volumes which addresses the issue of "Christian Origins and the Question of God), written over the space of 20 years. The other volumes in the series includes "The New Testament and the People of God," "Jesus and the Victory of God," and "The Resurrection of the Son of God." Combined, their pages number a whopping 3,753. Bookshelves can sag under such weight. But it's worth it! Never, to my knowledge, has so much valuable interpretation been assembled in one organized collection. That said, there are similarities and differences between the volumes. All together they each provide one seamless proclamation from the beginning of the Bible to its end. Too often the Old Testament (a.k.a. Hebrew Bible) is treated by Christians as the prelude to the real revelation: the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the early years of the building of the Christian Church. Nothing could be farther from the truth, Wright time and again reminds us in this volume, as Paul very forcefully says in chapters 9-11 of Romans. The Hebrew Bible, and Jewish faith, are the roots upon which our faith is built (11:18) -- cut that root off and we risk being cut off from YHWH (pronounced Yahweh), the creator God and the source of Jewish and Christian faith. To help us make this seamless transitions between the two testaments, Wright uses several powerful, yet subtle, symbolic words. For instance: 1. He rarely uses the word "Christ" when speaking of Jesus, but instead uses the Jewish term, "the Messiah." Christ comes from the Greek, and Messiah comes from the Hebrew. Both mean the same, "the anointed." 2. When quoting texts from the Hebrew Bible Wright uses the name of God, "YHWH" instead of LORD as it is most often translated. This is important because YHWH

means "I am what I am" or "I will be what I will be." both meanings are correct. There is no better definition of God than that! 3. When he uses the generic word "God" he capitalizes the first letter in this volume, whereas he left all in lower case in the previous volumes. He made this change because he assumes his readers understand by now that he is speaking of the one creator God of the universe, and the God of Israel. In the previous volumes he explained that people have so many variations of the god they believe in that he wouldn't be sure what god they had in mind. For me, one of its greatest values, however, is Wright's introducing us to the worldview of Paul, which consisted of the culture and worldview of Ancient Greece, Rome, and Israel. All three were instrumental in shaping Paul's theology and mission. Also his description of Paul's Pharisaic life is the best I've seen. Yes, it's long, far too long for my taste, but it is precise and detailed (sometimes to a fault). Yet I recognize that his massive work is aimed primarily not at the general reading public, but for academics to pour over its pages, and enter them into their debates among themselves. If that is your primary complaint, you haven't read many academic treatises. If you want to catch the other side of Tom Wright, read some of his books which are aimed primarily at the general public: "Paul in Fresh Perspective," "Surprised by Hope," "Simply Jesus," "How God Became King," etc. You might think they were written by some other person! Not so. Just a different style of writing, by a master scholar and storyteller. Yes, I'll skip the parts that are too wordy and look for Wright's conclusions along the way. Some reviewers believe that he does not reflect Reformed/Reformation theology. Must we be stuck with 500 year old dogma, doctrine and interpretation? The world has come a long way since then. We don't burn witches anymore either. We are in the midst of a revolution in biblical studies which may, in the end, prove more important than the Reformation. One reviewer gives the book one star because it doesn't agree with his 17 proof texts and apparently believes those trump the hundreds, nay thousands, of texts cited by Wright. It's sad. If the price of the Kindle edition is so close to the paperback edition, shell out a few bucks more for the print edition -- it'll be easier to read and highlight the great passages (which are many).

For over 30 years, N.T. Wright has been researching and writing about the apostle Paul and the historical-social context from which his epistles sprung from. Also, over the past two decades, Mr. Wright has been working on a series of academic works known collectively as Christian Origins and the Question of God. This book is the culmination, the climax, both of that series and Mr. Wright's lifelong work on Paul. It is also a crowning achievement, combining history and theology, as it clearly articulates his views on Paul, the early church, and the question of God. The structure of the book is pretty interesting. Parts I and IV deal with Paul's world and how his message interacted with

that world. This includes brief overviews of pagan religion and philosophy, the Judaism of the time, and the imperial ideology of the Roman Empire, particularly Caesar worship, which was beginning to take off in the East in Paul's time. This shows that Paul was not just a product of his times, but also an influencer of those times. But the real meat of this book is in parts II and III, which deal with Paul's worldview and theology. Mr. Wright contends that Paul's theology was important because it was meant to help believers of the time both unify and work out for themselves the meaning of the salvation they (and Christians even today) had found in Jesus Christ. He also argues that his worldview and his theology, while still featuring key characteristics of his Jewish upbringing, were radically re-centered and refocused around the crucified and resurrected Messiah. It is an absolutely fascinating thesis that has many implications, particularly about the importance of works (to use a blunt word) as marking out those who had been saved by Jesus Christ. My favorite quote from this book will help clarify what I am saying: "That is why, among other things, the intermediate state between initial justification and the final verdict is to be marked, again as in Romans 8, by the Messiah-shaped cruciform life of holiness and suffering, by the spirit's transforming work, including the famous 'groaning' in prayer ([Romans] 8.26-27).... Justification is the divine declaration, creating the new status of 'righteous', 'adopted child', because of which the believer can move forward in the Christian pilgrimage. At every stage it utterly presupposes the one-off decisive work of the Messiah; at every stage it utterly requires the work of the spirit. This is the beating heart of redefined election." (p. 960) The only thing that I have against this book is that, in spite of its humongous length, it still feels rather packed. There are points where Mr. Wright says he wishes there was more space to discuss certain things, meaning that there is plenty more that the 1,600 pages he could've said about this topic (I suppose that's why there are two supplemental books for this volume)! This also means that there is a lot crammed into this book and, if you are not careful, you may miss out on some pretty important things. It took me two months to make it through this behemoth and I know that I missed some things. Thus, this is not a book that you want to approach lightly. Indeed, you will want to approach this respectfully and thoughtfully, ideally after reading the previous volumes in this series beforehand and with a Bible next to you to keep looking at the different verses he keeps quoting. I also don't like how he didn't rely on some of Paul's other epistles because of the academy's belief that some of them possibly weren't written by Paul. Of course, I don't know much about Biblical literary criticism and the criteria used by the academy to label some letters as probably written by Paul and others probably not, so I was willing to give Mr. Wright the benefit of a doubt here. However, I believe that careful study of this book and even more careful study of the Bible will have great benefits for all serious students of Christianity and the apostle Paul.

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