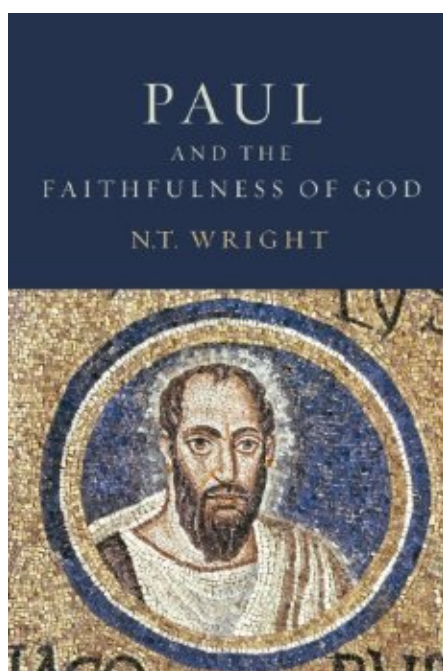




Paul and the Faithfulness of God

N.T. Wright

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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 apostles' 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 apostles' 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.

Paul and the Faithfulness of God Details

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From Reader Review Paul and the Faithfulness of God for online ebook

Zach Waldis says

I was slightly disappointed by this book. On the one hand, Wright's (and Paul's) undeniable brilliance shines through at points, making this a must read for all interpreters of Paul. Wright's writing is so clear and sometimes humorous (to me at least) that the moments of brilliance are undeniable. On the down side, he seems to have really bought into Eichrodt's view of OT theology, that covenant is the driving factor and that that was Paul's primary concern. It seems to me that the book could have been shortened significantly if he had not chosen to talk about covenant faithfulness and Abraham so much. Perhaps he's right, but after hearing it hundreds of times it just gets old. All of that aside, insight abounds here. Wright has gotten Paul right.

William says

Wright's magnum opus is excellent. I came to Wright rather late, reading only "What St. Paul Really Said" last summer and then, anticipating this volume's release, dove into the first three volumes of "Christian Origins and the Question of God". Having read all four volumes in (relatively) quick succession—they're all very large tomes—I've been very pleased. Wright does an excellent job of working with the existing and established scholarship to sift the wheat from the chaff and to synthesise a mature New Testament theology. Part I of "Paul and the Faithfulness of God" may be tedious for those who have recently read "The New Testament and the People of God". Wright begins with an inspiring exegetical treatment of Philemon, but spends the following 500 pages largely restating the key points of NTPG. Parts II and III are the real goldmines here, where Wright fleshes out in detail what he's been saying for years in much shorter and less detailed books. Part II develops Paul's "worldview": Jewish monotheism, election, and eschatology rethought and reoriented around Jesus the Messiah. Part III provides the detailed exegesis as it works through Paul's epistles. Part IV explores the implications of all this in terms of how Paul's theology interacts with Caesar's empire, Judaism, and Greco-Roman philosophy, ending with a final chapter on how Paul saw his faith and mission in light of the new creation and how that worked out in practical ways for him.

Chad Gibbons says

The fourth and largest volume in NT Wright's "Christian Origins and the Question of God" series. In this entry, there are four parts split across two volumes.

The first part examines the different "worlds" in which Paul lived: The world of 2nd temple Judaism, the world of the Greeks and their philosophy/religion, and the world of Imperial Rome. Here, Wright uses the techniques he has used in previous volumes - studying the various symbols, praxis, and stories of a culture - to examine their "worldview".

The way Wright does this will be familiar to readers of this series. He asks specific questions of the culture: "Who are we?", "When are we?", "What is wrong?", "What is the solution?" and by providing answers to these question from the point of view of the people of that culture, it helps us understand that culture's worldview. Wright then compares those answers with the answers of the apostle Paul to see how they differ

and how Paul would have interacted with the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures he was apart of.

The second section is where Paul himself really enters. Here, Wright shows what Paul's worldview was and the story Paul felt that he was living out of. Wright goes on Actantial analysis overload in this section (as with the other books in this series). There is some helpful fruit that comes from this, but many times the actants that Wright uses for the diagrams seem arbitrary. The conclusion is this: The basic story Paul lived and the one he preached is the story of Israel. But Paul (and the early church) had a unique understanding of this.

Paul's take on this story is that Jesus is the culmination of the story of Israel. The idea is this: Humanity was created to be God's representatives in creation. This project went awry because of sin. Then, a specific people were called out - Israel - to reinstate this project of God redeeming humanity by restoring their vocation and ultimately, glorify God and be a 'blessing to the nations' (Wright would probably say these duties are one in the same). But the problem of sin is still there in the middle of his plan. Israel is not immune to it. As Wright puts it: God's rescue operation for the world (Israel) needed a rescue operation. Enter Jesus, The Messiah. The truly human one. The true Israelite. The true Israel. The Messiah accomplishes what God has always intended to accomplish and by being apart of Him, we are a part of the "new creation", ultimately doing what was always intended not only from God's people, but for all humanity (which were also supposed to have been the same thing).

So how does this fit in with Wright's larger project? The main theme of Wright's thesis - if I had to narrow it down - is the claim that Jews at the time of Jesus thought of themselves as being in "exile". And the main purpose of Jesus is to bring an end to this exile. Forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, salvation, and many of the other things we typically think of Jesus doing is summed up by Wright as saying that: "the exile is over in Jesus". This is a tough sell for many. I personally think that "exile" is a weird way of saying what the Jews would have thought about themselves. I have a hard time thinking that even after Ezra and Nehemiah, even after returning to the land, even after the rebuilding the temple, with the Jews back in their homeland, that they would be actively thinking "we're still in exile". Is their situation in the first century really the same as it was by the rivers of Babylon? I'm not so sure about that. But regardless of semantics, I think Wright's underlying point is profound: The Jews were expecting the return of YHWH to Zion.

This was a huge theme in the previous two books in the series, and in this one it's as strong as ever. In Jesus and the Victory of God, The point of Jesus' ministry - his life and death - was exactly the return of YHWH to Zion. In the Resurrection of the Son of God, this is vindicated by the raising of Jesus from the dead. But this book really sold me on this thought, because here's how Wright says Paul interacted with this theme: The Holy Spirit indwelling believers IS PRECISELY THE RETURN OF YHWH TO THE TEMPLE. Why is this? Because the "Messiah-people" (the church) are now the Temple and the Spirit of God is truly dwelling in His temple. What Israel has been waiting for since at least the time of Ezekiel and Jeremiah has now occurred, and it has occurred in the strangest way possible: the crucified and resurrected Messiah.

The third section (now in volume 2) is the largest and perhaps the central section of the whole work. Here, Wright takes Paul's "mindset" and elaborates on how this plays out in terms of his theology. Wright seems to think that Theology becomes important with Christianity, and Paul specifically, because of the fact that the "Jesus communities" didn't have specific cultural rituals to bind them together. So theology itself becomes the glue that must do it. I'm not too sure on this either. I think this conclusion is just a quirk of Wright's actantial analyzing.

The topics revolve around Paul's reworking of Monotheism, Election, and Eschatology, now that he understands Jesus to be Lord. This section became tedious. Countless times, Wright will mention what he sees as the several options other theologians have given to specific passages and themes, and then he gives a "both/and" conclusion with nuances about why he is right and everyone else is just a little bit off. Almost no topic on Paul is left untouched through this section.

The last section wraps up by putting Paul back into his three "worlds" (Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman) and answering again the questions that were asked in the first section.

The length of these volumes is prohibitive, and honestly the style is as well. The chiasmic structure and circular (Johannine?) writing gets repetitive. It's probably my least favorite in the series, although it was still a very good book(s). Wright really justifies himself (pun intended) on several areas concerning his version of the "new perspective". This topic, by the way, is never brought to the fore, but it's there throughout, lurking in the background.

It is certainly clear that in terms of "gospel", the Old Perspective seems especially lacking and actually focused on things that Paul and the gospel writers didn't think were central. Wright has clarified and answered so many objections at this point, it's hard to say if these volumes add to anything in that respect. I feel his discussion on "righteousness of God" was more helpful than any of his previous work though. Here, he really has room to discuss the differing ways Jews used the phrase "righteousness". One of the main ways of being righteous was to be "declared in the right" in terms of a law court (A complaint was brought against you and the judge declare you "righteous" by nullifying the claim against you). Perhaps this is the way we should be thinking of the phrase in many of these instances it appears in Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians.

When explaining the gospel, sometimes we use the imagery of a person sitting on trial and the judge - God - steps off the bench to pay our penalty himself so we can get let off. I think Wright would say that we come closer to what Paul is saying changing this image: Instead, the person put on trial is Sin. And in the act of condemning Sin in His Son, God the judge declares us righteous (in the right) because the power that once found us guilty has been destroyed.

Mary Fisher says

Only just started it. By his references to Pliny right at the beginning NT Wright fires his opening "salvo"...if we understand Jesus is Lord then Caesar is NOT. I would LOVE to be in a room where Wright and Stanley Hauerwas were dialoguing. Those two men clearly challenge the church to be the people of the Kingdom and hence subversive of so much that dominates in the communities claiming to follow after Jesus today. Truly Wright use of Pliny is stunning.

Matthew Colvin says

If you have read most of Wright's other work on Paul, you will not have any earthshaking revelations from PFG. Because I was in that category, having read his NIB Romans commentary, WSPRS, and Paul in Fresh Perspective, I was a bit frustrated by the length of this book. It opens with a scintillating reading of the epistle to Philemon by comparison with a letter of Pliny. I was hoping for more at this level, close up and personal with the text. But PFG spends much of its time at 3000 feet, surveying background, cultural context, and themes in Pauline theology. This will make it an incredibly useful seminary textbook, to be sure. But for those who already know Wright, this is simply not new information: yes, Paul was a Second Temple Jew, reading Israel's scriptures about exile and return, not dividing religion from politics. It is all conveyed with the usual Wrightian brilliance and literary allusions — to Shakespeare, to Robert Browning, to *Pride and Prejudice* — and accompanied by the refutations of erring scholars (F.C. Baur's History of Religions school, Bultmann's demythologizing, and Engberg-Pedersen's Paul as quasi-Stoic are all dealt with in a thorough and satisfying way). It's good, but it doesn't pack the punch of WSPRS or JVG.

Jon Sedlak says

As everyone knows, it is an exhaustively long book. But for those who can chug through it, it is well worth the time and effort. I read the first 'half' (volume 1) over a year ago for a group study, and I loved it as much then as I do with volume 2 now. I thought both volumes were easy to follow because I have read a lot of other works by Wright, and I'm familiar with many 1st century events.

I thought both volumes were well organized also, so as each chapter progressed I felt confident that I knew where he was leading his readers.

I anticipate that a common frustrating aspect of this work to his readers will be his use of prooftexts. Wright proves his interpretations of the text through long explanations of the narrative and cultural background, instead of what most laymen expect: short, simple, systematic and explicit proofs which require little background knowledge.

After reading this, I do feel like I understand Paul's letters better. However, I think Wright overstates his case. This book is not necessary to understand Paul's letters, but it is an essential tool for understanding Paul better than most neo-Reformed, fundamentalist-baptist, and postmodern-liberal commentaries.

M Christopher says

A long, long read, worthwhile but not without its flaws.

Although he denies it within the book, Wright has here presented the better part of a systematic theology of Paul, including theology, soteriology, and eschatology. He also provides a study of Pauline backgrounds in and the response of Paul to Second Temple Judaism, Greek and Roman religion, and Greek and Roman philosophy. This is a massive study, which could easily be the textbook for four seminary courses. Indeed, in both its editing and in its sheer physical printing, this two-volume set would have been easier to read, digest, and handle as four volumes.

Wright, as always, is an engaging writer. He is nearly always clear about his points and leavens his work with wry humor, literary allusion, and clever turns of phrase. His insistence on framing Paul's work in context, particularly within the context of Second Temple Judaism, is of vital importance to understanding the author responsible for much of the New Testament. His Biblical exegesis is careful and to the point. I definitely feel that I have a new and improved grasp on Paul thanks to Wright's work in these volumes. I am particularly impressed by Wright's well-developed point that Christ is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and all that flows from that assertion.

I do think, however, that Bishop Wright needs an editor who will curb his occasional tendency towards prolixity. As an intuitive learner, I don't need or appreciate 10 examples to make the same point. One or two will do. As with some of Wright's other books ("Justification" comes most to mind), I find his need to compare his own work to those of other scholars to their detriment to be uninteresting and, frankly, juvenile, although there was less "snark" in these matters in these volumes than in some others. I realize that both of these issues are likely a necessary part of being a professional theologian who writes for others in the field. But as a simple small-church, bivocational pastor, who reads theology for enjoyment and to help unlock the mysteries of faith so that I can pass the best ideas of our time on to my flock, I find the completism and competition tiresome. I will likely wait a while before tackling another of Wright's "great works."

Matt Pitts says

I remember the first time I pulled N.T. Wright's *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* off the shelf. It was probably not long too long after that when I got my own copy and started eagerly devouring it. I should say at the outset that though this is a fairly glowing review I do not agree with everything Wright says (particularly about justification). But I have come to appreciate him as one of the most fresh and comprehensive writers I have encountered. Words seem to flow from Wright's pen like they did from Dickens's and both men are alike masters of the English language. That alone makes Wright a delight to read.

I recognize that a 1,500 page book on Paul is daunting for just about everyone. I had never read any book that long before (not even my Bible has that many pages!) and it took me a little over a year to read this one. But it was worth it.

If you are at all interested in reading this book, at least read the first chapter. Wright may be the only person who has ever started a book on Paul's theology with the letter of Philemon (he has good reason for doing so; see the end of his preface), but it was a brilliant move and probably remains my favorite part of the book.

If you read that far, then you might try reading the rest of part one where Wright describes the various 'worlds' in which Paul lived: Judaism, Greek philosophy, pagan religion, and the Roman Empire. This is the kind of material you do not often encounter (at least not to this extent) in works of NT theology but that forms the necessary background to understanding what Paul was writing and why.

And if you read that much, then you would probably enjoy part two as well. Part two is where Wright examines Paul's worldview (which he calls his "mindset" since it belongs to one person rather than a group) in light of the worldviews around him. I read these first two parts (which make up the first bound portion of the book) in just over 3 months. I almost wish that you could purchase this half of the book separately. It is well worth reading, even if you never get to the dense exegetical and theological chapters in part three.

Part three, which is longer than parts one and two combined, took me around nine months. This part of the book is a beast. Wright takes three chapters to explore how Paul has come to understand the Jewish categories of monotheism, election, and eschatology in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit (though in one of his odd moves, Wright does not capitalize Spirit). These chapters are long (the longest of the three is over 250 pages - a book in itself!) and filled with the exposition of multiple passages from Paul's letters. The chapter on eschatology devotes about 100 pages to Romans 9-11 alone.

Part four is where Wright puts all of this back together into a cohesive understanding of Paul in his context. This section took me less than a month to read and was probably the least helpful of all the sections. There are some new insights even at this point in the book, but at times it seemed merely to repeat what had been said before and felt longer than it needed to be.

A book of such length and breadth and depth cannot be easily summarized. But as one who has been immersed in it for some time, I can say that it is worth your time.

Daniel Wright says

I'm not going to presume to rate such a monumental and erudite work as this - if I ever find I've read as much as one tenth of the bibliography I will consider myself well-read - but in the interest of writing some of my thoughts about it, and given the impossibility of collecting them all at the end, I will here record some comments on each chapter as I go.

Update: I've now finished. A review of the whole book can be found at the end.

Part 1: Paul and His World The first part tells you very little about Paul directly, though Wright (usual disclaimer: no relation) continually hints at what is to come in Part 4.

Chapter 1: Return of the Runaway? As an introduction to the whole enterprise, Wright ostensibly starts with an analysis of the very shortest of Paul's surviving works. He uses confusions about this as a microcosm for confusions in Pauline studies more generally, outlining his methods and approach to the subject, and comparing it (for the sake of historical context) to a letter of Pliny. It is reasonably clear that there will be no surprises in this book - Wright's opinions about Paul, and his positioning in the 'new perspectives' movement, are already well-known and explained, if not at such great length as here. This book will not so much be a bombshell in a playground as an egregiously devastating bombshell in an already ferocious war. Wright, conscious of the difficulties, turns his reading of Philemon into an elaborate and somewhat whimsical allegory (for which he 'begs the reader's indulgence'). In this, Philemon becomes Theology (meaning religious beliefs about Paul), looking only at the weighty matters, while History (meaning historical context) is the runaway slave Onesimus. This is then inverted: Philemon becomes History, not wishing to be tainted with the frivolity of religious belief. Wright, in both cases, wishes (somewhat hubristically, imho) to take on the role of Paul, trying to effect a reconciliation between the two. Much as with the original, how successful he will be remains to be seen.

Chapter 2: Like Birds Hovering Overhead Taking his chapter title from a verse from Isaiah (31:5) about YHWH protecting Jerusalem, Wright proceeds to describe the worldview of Paul's contemporary Judaism in general and Pharisaism in particular (while acknowledging that these things may not be entirely separable from Hellenism in a post-Alexandrine world). The result: Saul of Tarsus was concerned with 'creational monotheism', a hope for God's people, and the study and practice of Torah. More to come, it would seem.

Chapter 3: Athene and Her Owl A survey of the main thinkers and schools of thought in Greek philosophy, skimping (consciously) on detail. Relevance not yet apparent.

Chapter 4: A Cock for Asclepius Taking his title from the incongruous dying words of Socrates, Wright explores the 'religion' and 'culture' of the pagan world in Paul's day, complete with scare quotes to note that they do not mean quite the same thing now as they did then. The sense one gets is of how overwhelmingly formidable the religious establishment was, entwined with and pervasive in almost every aspect of ancient life.

Chapter 5: The Eagle Has Landed Referring to the Roman Eagle, on the nature of Roman imperial power in the first century. Anyone familiar with Wright's work knows that he thinks that Paul has a conscious anti-imperial subtext, though this is rather controversial among scholars. At any rate, there is nothing controversial in this chapter, which consists of a potted history of the republic-turned-empire, which is well-covered ground to say the least. Once again, one gets a sense of how formidable the institutions are which Paul is taking on.

Part 2: The Mindset of the Apostle This part is about context, i.e. the background thought behind what Paul actually says in his letters.

Chapter 6: A Bird in the Hand? This is where things start to get complicated. The chapter title is not very helpful for explaining what the chapter is about and the subtitle - 'the symbolic praxis of Paul's world' - does not help much either. Agonizing for a while about how I was going to summarise it, I realized that the reason that this task was difficult was that it was impossible. You might be able to express it in less than the hundred-odd pages Wright takes up, but not in one paragraph. What it is about, though, is the set of assumptions about words and symbols that form the background to everything that Paul says (or something like that). 'A bird in the hand' is worth two in the bush, and what we have in the hand (hopefully) is what Wright calls 'worldview' - it's what Paul feels is so obvious it doesn't need saying.

Chapter 7: The Plot, the Plan and the Storied Worldview I sometimes don't know if Wright is earnestly pretentious or if he indulges himself with frivolities such as in this chapter just because he knows he can get away with it (which he certainly can). He usually has a note begging the reader's forgiveness for such a thing, but not on this occasion, though I admit there is a note of self-parody in the introduction as he notes the concern of various exasperated critics that he manages to find a narrative in everything. Anyway, the substance of the chapter begins with an excellent albeit - I shall be frank - completely irrelevant analysis of the plot, various sub-plots, and hidden allusions in Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He then uses this as a paradigm to explore the underlying narratives and allusions of Paul's thought. The over-arching story, as he sees it, is one about God and his creation (corresponding to the story of Theseus and Hippolyta's marriage in the *Dream*), while those about Israel, Jesus and the church are sub-plots on top of it (thus Hermia, Helena, Lysander, Demetrius, Titania, Oberon, and Bottom and his crew). This is all, therefore, a presumed context to Paul's letters.

Chapter 8: Five Signposts to the Apostolic Mindset Taking his cue from Kipling's 'honest serving men', Wright tackles the basic 'worldview questions' to explore Paul's mindset: Who (who are we?), where (where are we?), what (what's wrong?), how (what's the solution), when (what time is it?). There is another question, the 'why', to be discussed later on. I will leave it to the reader's imagination to guess what Wright thinks Paul's answers to these questions are.

Part 3: Paul's Theology Stage 1 (page 610): 'I take as the framework the three main elements of [contemporary Judaism], namely monotheism, election and eschatology.' Stage 2 (page 612): 'in the case of each of these three... Paul rethought, reworked and reimagined them around Jesus the Messiah on the one hand and the spirit on the other.' Stage 3 (page 612): 'this... complex... was directed by Paul in three further ways, which we postpone to Part IV'.

Chapter 9: The One God of Israel, Freshly Revealed With a few key passages in mind, Wright argues cogently a number of points: that Paul was still a strong Jewish monotheist; that this was not compromised by his early and high Christology and Pneumatology; that he was an *eschatological* monotheist. This last is not a case of Paul taking the solution of Jesus and working out that there was a problem, nor is it a case of him having individual problems to which he discovered that Jesus was the only answer; rather, it was a case of him starting with the traditional problem of Judaism, discovering the solution that God had provided in Jesus and re-working what that problem meant for all of humanity.

Chapter 10: The People of God, Freshly Reworked This chapter is - there is no other way of putting it - monstrous; at 269 pages, it's a small book in itself, and its part of the contents takes up a whole page, a glance at which will reveal that it drills down all the way to sub-sub-sub-sections. The main theme is 'election' which is conceived (it is claimed) not - as is more traditional in Christian theology - as the choosing of individuals, but the choosing of a community: first Israel, now the church. Wright takes no prisoners of the somewhat ovine majority of Paul scholars who claim that Paul did not believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah, and that *Christos* was merely a proper name. Jesus is the 'remnant', the last faithful Israelite, who made the way for the new *ekklesia*. Then, finally, we get to the most anticipated and contentious subject of all, and the climax of the entire book: justification. Those who have read the whole way through my review to get to this point will be somewhat disappointed, as I don't have much to say about it, other than that it was

itself disappointingly brief (as far as Wright is even capable of being brief). His ability, though, to interpret texts minutely while holding the big theological picture in his head continues to impress.

Chapter 11: God's Future for the World, Freshly Imagined Another monstrous, book-length chapter, though a mere 224 pages this time. A lot of the ideas have been re-hashed from the book's predecessor, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Additionally, there is a verse-by-verse analysis (Wright bizarrely refuses the term 'commentary') of Romans 9 - 11, involving a chiasmus within a chiasmus and more sub-sub-sub-sections. Wright is painfully conscious of (what some would see as) the political implications of some of what he says, though appropriately disdainful of those who anachronistically read back 21st century geopolitics and post-Holocaust ideology on to the 1st century letters. He insists he has moved beyond simple 'replacement' theology, which is not strictly true - he has only shaken it up a bit and made it a bit more nuanced. On one thing, though, he is quite clear and correct: that Paul wished to convert Jews to Christianity, and this was not 'ant-semitism' (as indeed for modern Christians). He wanted to include them in this new hope precisely because he loved them.

One more thing. Towards the end of the chapter, Wright gives an apparently inadvertent clue to answering the perennial question of why he is so controversial among evangelicals. 'I have come to see Paul's letters,' he writes on page 1258, 'not so much as themselves the means by which he was developing his thought... as small windows on to a larger, richer and denser world of belief and life, of exegesis and prayer, of faith and love and, yes, hope.' Innocent this may appear, but traditional Protestantism sees the scriptures as 'sufficient for salvation', a direct revelation of God to His people. Therefore, they are the theology themselves, in their entirety with no gaps; to suggest anything else is to insult God's Providence. And that is the issue with which I am currently wrestling.

Part 4: Paul in History Part 1, which was essentially a mirror image of this one, was highly promising. But as it turns out. This chapter was a bit of a let-down. He engages very little with either primary or secondary sources - which makes one wonder if the latter are simply non-existent or if he simply hasn't bothered, which would be seriously unimpressive from a book whose bibliography is the length of a small book in itself. The point is that there is an enormous scope for further study in the area of Paul's engagement with ancient philosophy especially, of which this part has not even scratched the surface.

Chapter 12: The Lion and the Eagle: Paul in Caesar's Empire After a blisteringly vociferous argument that Paul really, really cared about the Roman Empire and hated it with a passion, Wright suddenly retreats into claiming that his view is actually quite nuanced and beats a middle path between extremes, as is normal. The result, sadly, is somewhat incoherent.

Chapter 13: A Different Sacrifice: Paul and 'Religion' ...complete with scare quotes, as before. Wright expresses disdain at views which try to separate Paul from 'religion', but does not come up with any interesting alternative views himself, choosing to take us on a brief tour of Christian practice as seen in Paul's letters, with all but no engagement either with primary historical-theological sources or with secondary anthropological ones. The result, after the epic scope of Part 3, is rather lame, and his conclusion is write to note that there is room for a whole new project in this area, but one cannot help but wonder whether it is there and Wright simply hasn't seen it.

Chapter 14: The Foolishness of God: Paul among the Philosophers Considering the excellent engagement with primary and secondary sources in the original chapter that introduced this one (3), this is a bit of a let-down. After making a few general points about philosophy, Wright proceeds to debunking the recently expressed views of the Danish philosopher Engberg-Pedersen, making it feel as if the entire thing is just an excuse to allow him to do so. I have more to say about this, but I think it applies to the whole of Part 4, so will have to wait until I've finished.

Chapter 15: To Know the Place for the First Time This chapter just felt like a summary of the arguments of

Part 3 but with more engagement with other (recent) scholars. The conclusion is quite simple: that Paul now identified as a 'Messiah-person' before being Jewish.

Chapter 16: Signs of the New Creation: Paul's Aims and Achievements A summary of the whole book. Nothing surprising.

Overall impression

So, I've finally got to the end. Indeed, you, dear reader, have finally got to the end of this review. If you've actually read the whole thing, then - well, firstly, thank you; I'm flattered. Secondly, you probably ought to find something better to do with your time, for example, go for a walk, make a new friend, or read this much better review by Professor John Barclay, who is a friend of Wright's, once taught me Greek for a term, and, most importantly, knows far more about the subject than I do.

After all the time and effort put into this, why such a low rating? Because I have quite serious doubts about it. I'm not in a position to judge the quality of the scholarship, but the strident, even combative, tone that he takes with his opponents is quite unprofessional. More to the point, he engages very little with the enormous body of historical reactions to Paul, preferring to deal only with scholars of the last century or so, and even those also get dismissed by being lumped inside -isms and larger schools of thought rather than criticized directly. This is deeply unfair, and only contributes to the dislike that many traditional protestants hold for his views. He is all too conscious of it, but will not attempt to fight them on their own traditional-historical ground. 'Fuller integration, fuller reconciliation,' he writes in the last chapter, 'is always the Pauline aim, and I hope we have gone a good way towards achieving it.' Tragically, I think we have not.

(By the way, the previous volume in this series, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, remains, in my opinion, Wright's magnum opus, a triumphant artifice of history and theology that will stand the test of time. If you haven't read it, read it instead).

John says

1660 pages is a lot to read. I was patient enough to read it, but not patient enough, nor competent enough, to give it the kind of review that this work warrants.

There is some great stuff in this book, as most anyone would expect. The middle of the book is where the meat of Wright's most controversial interpretations of Paul's theology are located. It is really good, and very helpful.

I have two primary criticisms. First, the book is too long. Wright has a tendency to be very wordy, and could have really used a more assertive editor.

My second criticism is a bit unfair, as it could also be construed as a strength. Wright spends a lot of the book interacting with theologians that are seemingly on the margins of orthodoxy. These interactions tend to make the book almost an apologetic for an orthodox reading of Paul. This is likely very instructive for many, but for those already convinced, these long stretches of prose get to be a bit much.

In the end, I expect that few readers will choose to read this book the way I did--namely cover to cover. It is too long for most to take the time necessary for such a reading, and for most, it won't really be worth it. By writing such a long book, Wright has possibly out-written the patience of his readership.

Wyatt Houtz says

Excellent book on Paul. It's very accessible to the lay reader, and anyone could read this book without too much background in theology but even those people who are well read would appreciate the many layers in this book. This book may have been written with half as many words, but then the text may not be as accessible to so many people. Loved reading it, and although there is more that I wish was said, and there's more to be said, but I was sad when the book was finally done. Something understood.

Graham says

An epic (ie needlessly long) 2 volume set on Pauline theology. I've been chipping away at this one for years, and don't think I'll ever actually read every single page, but will likely go back to sections as I need to when looking at certain texts or topics related to the letters of Paul. Overall, it's good, but at times a bit overreaching.

David says

It is probably not surprising for a thirty-something pastor type of an evangelical background proclaim his enjoyment of NT Wright's dozens of books. Like many in my profession, NT Wright is one of my favorite writers. His work has done more to shape my understanding of Jesus and Paul than that of any other writer or scholar. Even better, many of his works are completely readable for any Christian, you don't need a seminary education to get what he is writing. I'd love to see more people pick up an NT Wright book.

That said, he is also a brilliant scholar. His big books on the New Testament are amazing. First was The New Testament and the People of God. Then came Jesus and the Victory of God, which is probably my favorite of his books, as it examined the life and ministry of Jesus. Third was The Resurrection of the Son of God which has a following among those who do apologetics, since Wright defends a literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus. But it is much more than that, not just defending that the resurrection happened but talking about what it means.

Last fall Wright released the long-awaited fourth book in this series, Paul and the Faithfulness of God. Perhaps "book" is the wrong word to use, for it is a two volume tome clocking in at over 1700 pages (well, 1519 is the last page before you get to bibliographies and such). My lovely wife got me this book for Christmas, figuring the \$50 price tag made more sense as a gift than it would for me to just buy it myself. Since then I've read the book in chunks. It is broken into four parts. Parts 1 and 2 take up the first volume and after reading them I took a long break. I took another long break after finishing the chapter in part three on election (not coincidentally, this was days before my son was born). A little while later I took it up and managed to finish the whole thing just before my wife's maternity leave ended and I put my "at-home-dad" hat back on.

What can I say about a 1500 page book on the Apostle Paul? If you want a summary of the book, you can find one easily. I'll just say it is amazing in both depth and breadth. It is not a book just for scholars, Wright writes in such a way as to deserve (and he does receive) wide readership. Overall, it is a fantastic book.

To some degree, if you've read Wright's other works you may know the direction some of this would take. Wright places Paul solidly in his Jewish context. This meant that Paul, or Saul of Tarsus as he was before

meeting Jesus, was a Pharisee in the first century, living under the rule of Rome in a culture infused with Greek thinking. As a first-century Jew, Paul lived at the end of a long story, the Hebrew Bible, that had not yet been finished yet. And it was his encounter with Jesus that led him to realize that Jesus truly was the Jewish Messiah who brought this grand narrative to a fulfillment.

One thing Wright emphasizes over and over is that Paul was Jewish. Setting Paul up as the founder of Gentile Christianity, opposed to Judaism, is a false start that has been taken by many. Instead, we see Paul doing just what we would expect if he believed Jesus was the Jewish Messiah - Paul rethinks his entire worldview, specifically monotheism, election and eschatology. It is these three topics that take up part three of the book. In terms of monotheism, Paul rethought the Jewish belief in one God in light of Jesus. This chapter could be seen as a sort of argument for Jesus' identification with God. I find Wright's argument makes a lot more sense, though it is not just a simplistic "Jesus = God" in the way we think of it. For Wright, Paul saw Jesus doing things that Israel's God was expected to do. From this Paul wrote things that may have put later Christians on the road to the Council of Nicea and the Trinity, but he was not there yet himself. In other words, to simply ask Paul, as people ask today, "Was Jesus God?" is to form the question somewhat wrongly. For Paul Jesus was not a mere man, but Paul was not writing a fully developed Trinitarian theology.

Early in the book Wright argues that the ancient world was dominated by Stoic philosophy, similar to pantheism, while our world is more Epicurean, similar to Deism. So Paul is answering Stoics and our challenge is to apply this to an Epicurean world. All that to say, Wright is not giving us apologetic fodder to win arguments, he is giving us a picture of a first century Jew rethinking his tradition about God with Jesus now at the center of that tradition.

Election is another topic that Wright has some great things to say. Too often "election" has been taken to mean that God chooses some people to save and go to heaven while everyone else can burn. Wright argues that election was always a choosing for the benefit of the world, Abraham and Israel were chosen to bring blessing. Paul rethinks this in light of Jesus, seeing the Christian church, made of Jew and Gentile, as chosen to bring this blessing to the world.

Here is a place where people may want Wright to write more. What about those who never heard or who reject? What view on hell does Wright have? He does address that a bit in another book, but he leaves it here. Why? Because that was not the question Paul is asking, and this book is about Paul!

Ultimately, Wright argues that in all this Paul is creating Christian theology that will feed the church in its mission. Jesus did what God would always do, open the door to relationship with God to all peoples. This point is made through various images, for example, Jesus is the rebuilt temple through whom any and all people can know God. There is no replacing of Jews by non-Jews, instead in Jesus all people, both Jew and Gentile, can know God. But in leaving behind Jewish traditions, as Paul did, there was a hole in the life of God's people. Paul's work filled this hole. He created an understanding of Jesus, a theology, that would carry the people onward into the future.

There is so much more to say about this book. I thought it was interesting how we see Christianity as a religion, but most in Paul's day would have seen him doing philosophy. First century pagans did not go to religion to learn ethics, that was what philosophy was for (not counting the Jews). The beginning and end of Wright's book where Wright delves into this first century world and how Paul was responding to it is fantastic.

Overall, its a great book. I can't recommend it enough for pastors, teachers or anyone who wants to spend a lot of time learning about Paul.

Nic Don says

With this book, Wright has moved utterly beyond any of the debates that have characterized public reception of his work in the last decade. As a characterization of Paul's writing, ministry, theology and vision, this book is a monument to breadth, depth, clarity, judiciousness and (in particular) method. From the brilliant humility of its opening comparison of Philemon to other letters of appeal of the era, it is clear that Wright is considering Paul and his writings within his whole milieu.

The inclusion of Greco-Roman philosophical and religious context is a much needed and valuable corrective to the sometimes too fraught world of post-Sanders Second-Temple Judaism studies, while Wright's decision to organize the work as a whole chiastically is well-advised, and extremely useful and enlightening as an orienting device. This does, as every reader will notice and as Wright himself admits, lead to some repetition of theme and passage consideration, but the gain in clarity far outweighs any drawbacks. This is a volume that will belong on the pastor-scholar's shelf for decades to come.

Richard Heyduck says

The most extensive discussion of Paul I've yet come across. Some of the chapters are books in themselves (over 200 pages). At some points in these chapters I thought the work could use some more editing (for sake of conciseness).

Overall, Wright frames the work in terms of Paul's reworking of Israel's Monotheism, Election, and Eschatology in light of Jesus. Beyond engaging with the Judaisms (yes, that's supposed to be plural), Wright also considers Paul in the context of his engagement with Greco-Roman religion, philosophy, and politics. If you're interested in Paul, or Paul's world, check this out.
