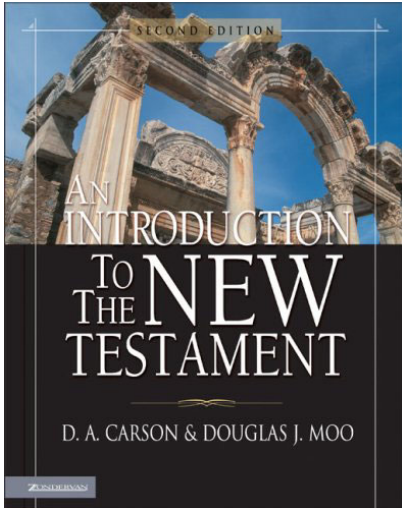


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Carson, D. A., and Douglas J. Moo

An Introduction to the New Testament

2nd edition

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005. Pp. 781. Hardcover.
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This volume claims to be a “special introduction” to the writings of the New Testament. It is a “special” introduction in the sense that its primary focus is on such traditional historical issues as authorship, date, sources, purpose, destination, and so forth. It is thus not as concerned as other New Testament introductions with issues more directly related to exegesis, such as literary form, rhetorical criticism, and historical parallels. It does, however, contain a brief summary of the content of each New Testament document, a brief account of current studies on it, and its theological contribution to the canon.

First- and second-year students of seminaries and theological colleges are the intended readers for this introduction. An effort has been made to limit its length in order to enhance its value as a textbook for classroom use. Nevertheless, the book is quite substantial, containing 781 pages. The detail of its discussions and nature as a “special introduction” would seem to render it more suitable for graduate rather than undergraduate students.

The book is an updated revision of an earlier version published in 1992 by Carson, Moo, and Leon Morris. Carson and Moo divided the chapters originally written by Morris between them for this new edition, as well as revised and updated their own work. In this new volume the chapter on Paul contains an analysis of the current debate on the “new perspective.” A new preliminary chapter provides a brief history explaining how Christians moved from the reading of the first hand-written documents of the New

Testament to contemporary study of the New Testament. The treatment of “pseudonymity” has been removed from the chapter on the Pastoral Epistles, expanded, and placed within a new, separate chapter on New Testament letters. More substantial summaries of the content of each New Testament document have been added to this new version, along with brief discussions of more recent literary and social-science methods.

There are a total of twenty-six chapters. An introductory chapter entitled “Thinking about the Study of the New Testament” is followed by a chapter on the Synoptic Gospels. In the next twenty-three chapters each New Testament document is discussed in its canonical order. In addition to the new chapter on New Testament letters, there is a separate chapter entitled “Paul: Apostle and Theologian.” The final chapter is devoted to the canon of the New Testament. Each of the chapters dealing with the New Testament writings contain sections on content, author, provenance, date, destination, purpose, text, adoption into the canon, the writing in recent studies, and the contribution of the writing.

Although both authors admit to being evangelical, they have tried to remain as unbiased and objective as possible. They present a sampling of the various viewpoints in the current literature, sometimes trying to suggest a fresh way of looking at an issue. But they tend to argue, often in new ways and with new evidence, for more traditional stances on issues of authorship and date. They generally date the New Testament writings as early as possible. Further, with good reasoning they totally reject pseudonymity as a solution to questions of authorship in the New Testament.

Indeed, in this reviewer’s opinion, the section on pseudonymity and pseudepigraphy (337–50) is one of the more enlightening and convincing discussions in the book. They perceptively point out that, although there certainly were pseudonymous writings circulating at the time of the New Testament, none were letters. The authors thus maintain that the historical Paul, in one way or another, that is, with perhaps varying degrees of collaboration with others, is the “author” of all of the letters attributed to him. Similarly, Peter is the author of both letters attributed to him, despite their quite different characters. James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem community, is the author of the letter attributed to him, and so forth.

With regard to the view of some scholars that the original audiences of the New Testament writings would have known which ones were pseudonymous and fully understood this, so that they were not in any way deceived, the authors conclude: “In short, the search for parallels to justify the view that the intended readers of some New Testament documents would have understood them to be pseudonymous, so that no deception took place, has proved a failure. The hard evidence demands that we conclude either that some New Testament documents are pseudonymous and that the real authors

intended to deceive their readers, or that the real authors intended to speak the truth and that pseudonymity is not attested in the New Testament” (350). This conclusion about no pseudonymity in the New Testament is supported by other recent discussions that were not yet available to the authors. For example, Terry L. Wilder writes: “Though the case against the traditional authorship of some of the disputed Pauline letters is sometimes strong, several scholars today believe that no pseudonymous works exist in the New Testament. Scholars hold this view with good reason because (a) the greatest weakness of pseudepigraphic theories is the number of assumptions upon which they rest, and (b) they have been encouraged by recent studies which focus on Paul’s use of a secretary, a co-author, and tradition when writing his letters. A resort to pseudonymity is not necessary” (*Pseudonymity, the New Testament and Deception: An Inquiry into Intention and Reception* [Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2004], 265 n. 52). Likewise, Ben Witherington notes that, “although there may be pseudepigrapha within the New Testament, the burden of proof falls squarely on the shoulders of those who make that claim” (*Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume 1: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 38).

Another noteworthy feature of this new edition is the section on the “New Perspective” in understanding Paul’s relation to Judaism (375–85). Central to this new viewpoint, initiated by E. P. Sanders in 1977 and furthered since by James D. G. Dunn and others, is the soteriological notion of “covenantal nomism.” According to this notion, God has chosen Israel, and Jews at the time of Paul believed that that gracious choice was the basis for their salvation. They did not have to keep the law to be saved; they were already saved. They obeyed the law in order to maintain their covenantal status. After pointing out several problems with “covenantal nomism,” the authors conclude with their own views that in Paul there is “a key antithesis between human doing and human believing as the means of accessing God’s salvation” and “that, contrary to advocates of the new perspective, justification by faith was an important component of Paul’s gospel from the beginning” (385).

This reviewer finds most of the argumentation for the more conservative and traditional views quite balanced, fair, and judicious. Indeed, their views seem to be in accord with an apparent trend in recent New Testament research that is at least open to if not supportive of many of these views on historical issues. There are a few points with which to quibble: the authors hold that Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians were most likely written from a Roman imprisonment. However, it may be more likely that they were written and sent together from a Caesarean imprisonment, all three carried and delivered by Tychicus, as argued persuasively by Bo Reicke, E. Earle Ellis, and others. The view of this introduction that the apostle John authored both the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation may

be the most questionable. To be sure, the authors make a valiant argument for at least a possibility of this, but the question remains: Although it may be possible, is it likely?

For the most part this introduction is very up-to-date on recent research. But since it was published in 2005, it was not able to take advantage of significant recent work on some important issues, such as that of the situation at Colossae (see Allan R. Beverly, *Sharing in the Inheritance: Identity and the Moral Life in Colossians* [JSNTSup 226; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003]; Michael Dübbers, *Christologie und Existenz im Kolosserbrief: Exegetische und semantische Untersuchungen zur Intention des Kolosserbriefes* [WUNT 2/191; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005]; Ian K. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle Paul's Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae* [LNTS 326; London: T&T Clark, 2006]).

This “special introduction” can be highly recommended. With its very careful, keenly nuanced, and extensively researched discussions, it may well be considered “special” in a way not originally intended by its authors. It deserves to be read not just by students but by all scholars of the New Testament. It will prove to be welcome support for those tending toward more traditional views on historical issues involving the writings of the New Testament. While it may not convince others, it may require them to reconsider, refine, and redefend their views.