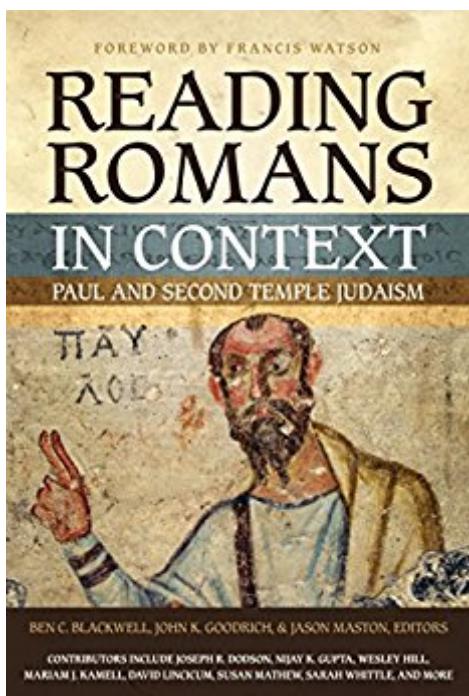


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Reading Romans In Context: Paul And Second Temple Judaism



Synopsis

Readers of Paul today are more than ever aware of the importance of interpreting Paul's letters in their Jewish context. In *Reading Romans in Context* a team of Pauline scholars go beyond a general introduction that surveys historical events and theological themes and explore Paul's letter to the Romans in light of Second Temple Jewish literature. In this non-technical collection of short essays, beginning and intermediate students are given a chance to see firsthand what makes Paul a distinctive thinker in relation to his Jewish contemporaries. Following the narrative progression of Romans, each chapter pairs a major unit of the letter with one or more thematically related Jewish text, introduces and explores the theological nuances of the comparative text, and shows how these ideas illuminate our understanding of the book of Romans.

Book Information

File Size: 2874 KB

Print Length: 187 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Up to 5 simultaneous devices, per publisher limits

Publisher: Zondervan (July 28, 2015)

Publication Date: July 28, 2015

Sold by: HarperCollins Publishing

Language: English

ASIN: B00PFCPQ7A

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #77,482 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #12 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > New Testament Study > Paul's Letters #22 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Religion > Christianity > Biblical History & Culture > Biblical History & Culture #38 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Bible Study > New Testament

Customer Reviews

In a word, this book is brilliant. The writing is cogent and engaging, the content is relevant and

useful, the organization and flow of the essays is seamless, and the overall result is an accessible, valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about how we can more fully appreciate Paul's writings under the illumination of his religion and culture. Although the book is a collection of 20 relatively short (seven or eight page) essays written by separate authors, it doesn't read that way. There is remarkable consistency in the organization, rhetorical approach, logical flow, and even the illustrations among the various chapters. Each essay addresses a small section of Romans, in canonical sequence; comparing and contrasting that section with a religious or historical text from the Second Temple era that contains similar themes and ideas, and ultimately helps us understand better how Paul incorporated those familiar elements in his premises, arguments, and conclusions. The pattern of each essay is regular. First, the author(s) states the basic theme of the section and describes how it fits into the surrounding context. Next, the extra-biblical text is introduced and analyzed for relevance, and then compared and contrasted with Paul's writing to see how he used familiar vocabulary and cultural context as connection points for his argumentation. In each case there is considerable overlap, but Paul eventually makes a rhetorical turn to demonstrate or highlight how the Christ event changed, or even reversed, our understanding of God's work and objectives in history and eschatology. In addition to providing deeper insight into Paul's writing in its cultural context, the book serves another valuable purpose. It provides a broad, nontechnical introduction to the important and ongoing dialog about the relationship between Paul and Second Temple Judaism. Delving into this topic by engaging directly with the writings of Wright and Sanders starts the initiate down a long and daunting path that stretches back to Schweitzer, Luther, Augustine, and even Plato, with numerous rabbit chases along the way. The opening introductory chapter and successive collection of essays in this book shortcut that path significantly, and it serves as an effective launching pad for this journey. Additional resources listed at the end of each chapter provide even further help in that regard. There is also a comprehensive glossary of potentially unfamiliar terms that are common to this subject at the back of the book, and when those words occur in the running text they are highlighted in bold font. A corollary benefit of this approach to putting Paul in context is the interaction with a wide range of important apocryphal, apocalyptic, and historic texts that are not commonly read or studied by nonspecialists. During the course of the book, the reader encounters books that include the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Jubilees, Sirach, The Epistle of Enoch, the Greek Life of Adam and Eve, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the writings of Philo and Josephus. The contributors to this work are an emerging group of Pauline scholars from Durham University and it is exciting to see them standing on the shoulders of their masters, helping us peer further into the mind of Paul. This book is definitely not some esoteric rehashing of previous

material. It is obvious that they have not only learned well, but they are challenging their teachers and starting to surpass them. We can look forward to some fresh advances from them in this field. In summary, this book provides a framework for deeper understanding of the book of Romans at multiple levels of discourse by introducing readers to, and then examining, Paul's use of cultural semaphores that would connect implicitly with his audience. And further, it does it in a way that is interesting, informative, balanced, and readily understandable even to those who are new to the subject. Beyond its value for personal study, I think it would also make an excellent study guide for the book of Romans in a group setting.

"Reading Romans in Context" is an essay collection that looked at various themes found in Romans and in Second Temple Jewish literature. Paul sometimes counters an argument that he apparently believes will be brought against his teachings, but it's not always clear what that argument is. By looking at Second Temple Jewish literature (like the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the writings of Philo or Josephus), we can discover what other Jews around that time were teaching. The authors compare these to Romans to find similarities and where the teachings diverge. The authors had a good understanding of Paul's teachings and used the comparison to add insights and nuances to our understanding of Romans (not to reinterpret them). I found the essays interesting, especially the one on distinctive food habits. I didn't have any trouble following their arguments. There was a glossary in the back, but the terms were defined well enough in the text that I never needed to use it. I'd recommend this book to those interested in this topic. Phrases and themes that were studied were: "son of God," God's wrath and divine justice, circumcision and covenant identity, "works of the law," "righteousness of God," the faith of Abraham, suffering of the righteous, death through Adam, slavery to sin or to righteousness, the Law's role, evil desires, human glorification linked to death, why God blesses or curses a person, righteousness by law vs. by faith and one's ability to keep the Law, Gentile inclusion, right living--self mastery vs. divine enabling, how one should interact with the government, distinctive food habits, God's role in our giving to the poor, and women in church ministry and leadership. I received an ebook review copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley.

This book is a sane, careful analysis of Paul's relationship to the Jewish literature of his day filtered the themes of the book of Romans in a series of brilliant essays. All of the important Second Temple literature is judiciously discussed. Although some of the history in the introduction is weak (which isn't a huge point because numerous books treat the subject quite thoroughly) the further

bibliographical resources are extremely strong, just about all that could be desired. The real meat of the book is the essays, which follow the outline of Romans. Each essay sets a Jewish text and its themes in comparison and contrast with Paul. Paul virtually always brings a significant change to the table. The danger is the essays being too long and boringly technical, or being too short and superficial. Further texts on the same topic are noted. The essays all strike the perfect balance to make an extremely useful book which is accessible both to the interested layman and the scholar, and the book succeeds marvelously at demonstrating exactly why this literature is so important for really understanding Paul.

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