

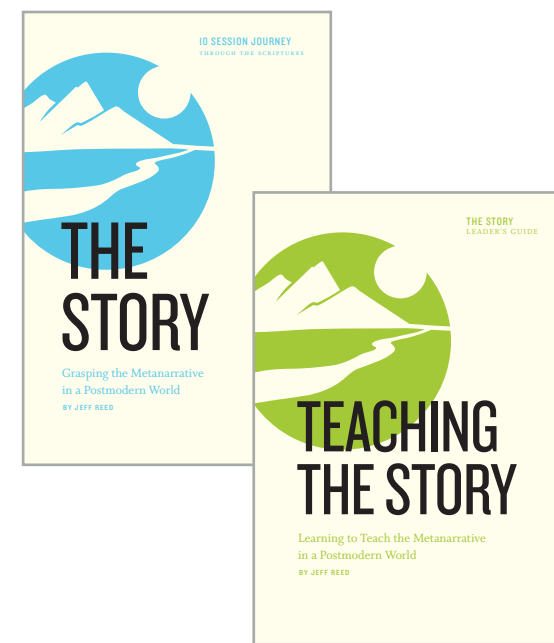
New Perspectives on Paul

Issue: New Perspectives on Paul

Questions:

1. What is the significance of Paul being a “coherent, but not systematic, thinker”?
2. Why did Paul give us his theology in letter form—situational letters in the form of conversations with his churches and his key “Timothies”?
3. What might happen if we ignore the form of his theology and, instead, treat his letters as mere containers of verses to be strung together as abstract topics?
4. What does Paul’s form of doing theology, in his churches and with his leaders, have to do with learning to think biblically?

New Perspectives on Paul



Kerygma
Early Acts
Apostles' Teaching
6 months
Paul: 3 years "night and day"



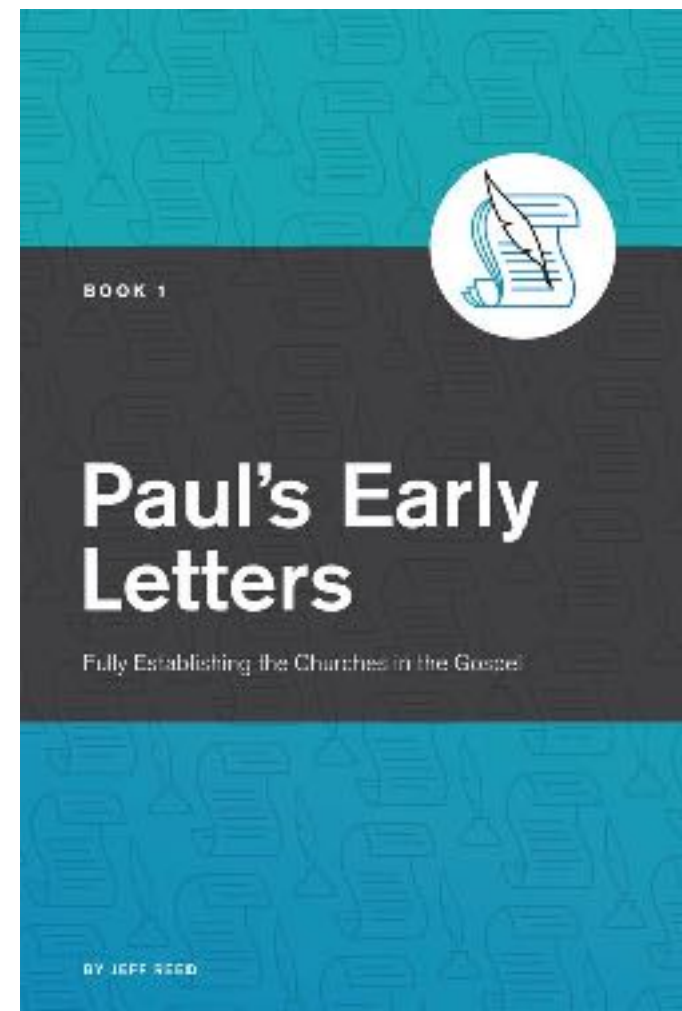
Didache
Body of Acts
Theology of Paul
1½ years



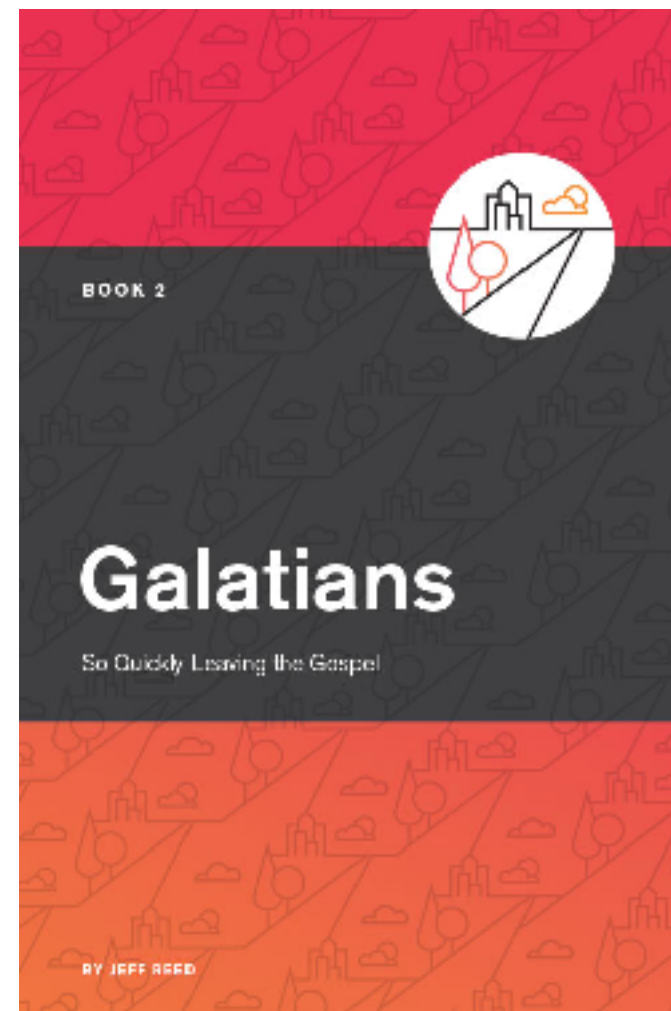
Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year



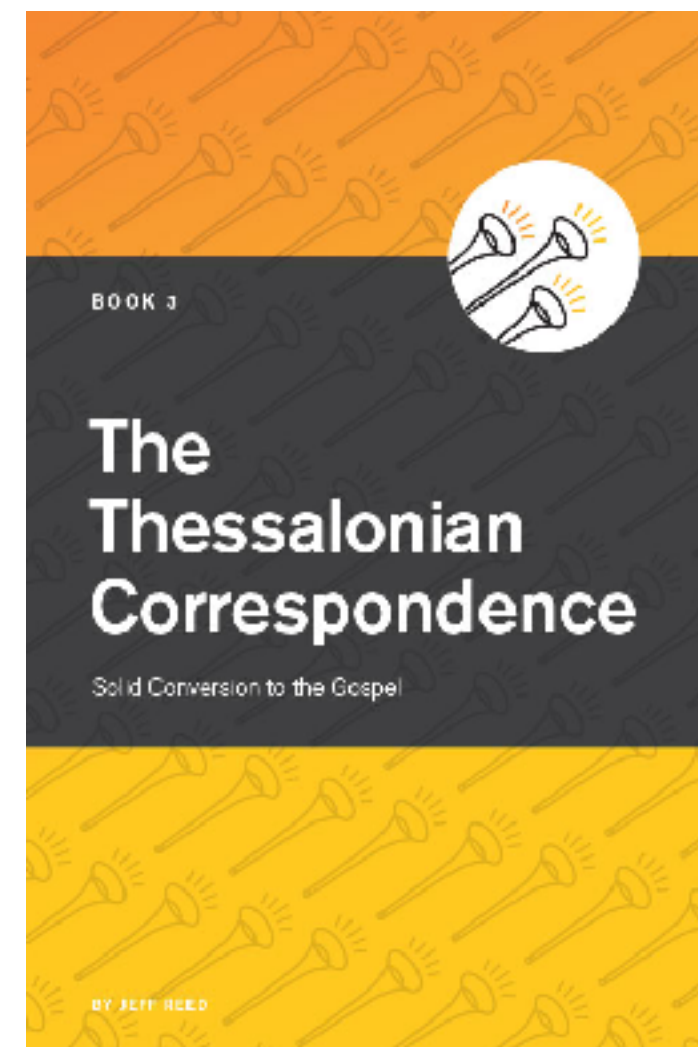
New Perspectives on Paul



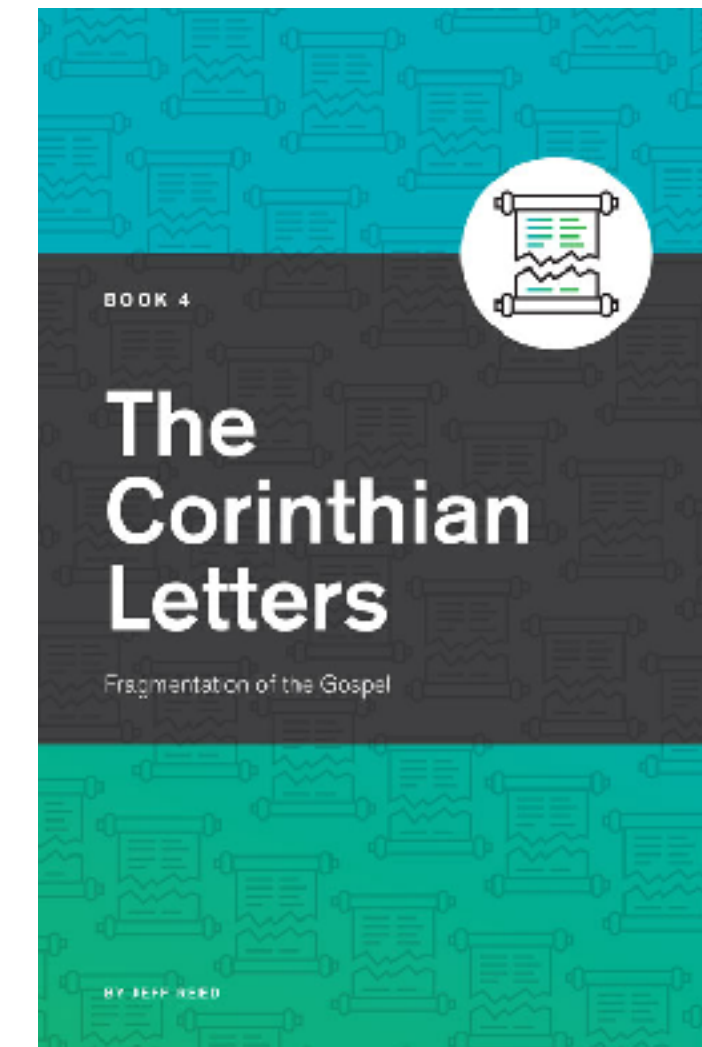
AD 49–56



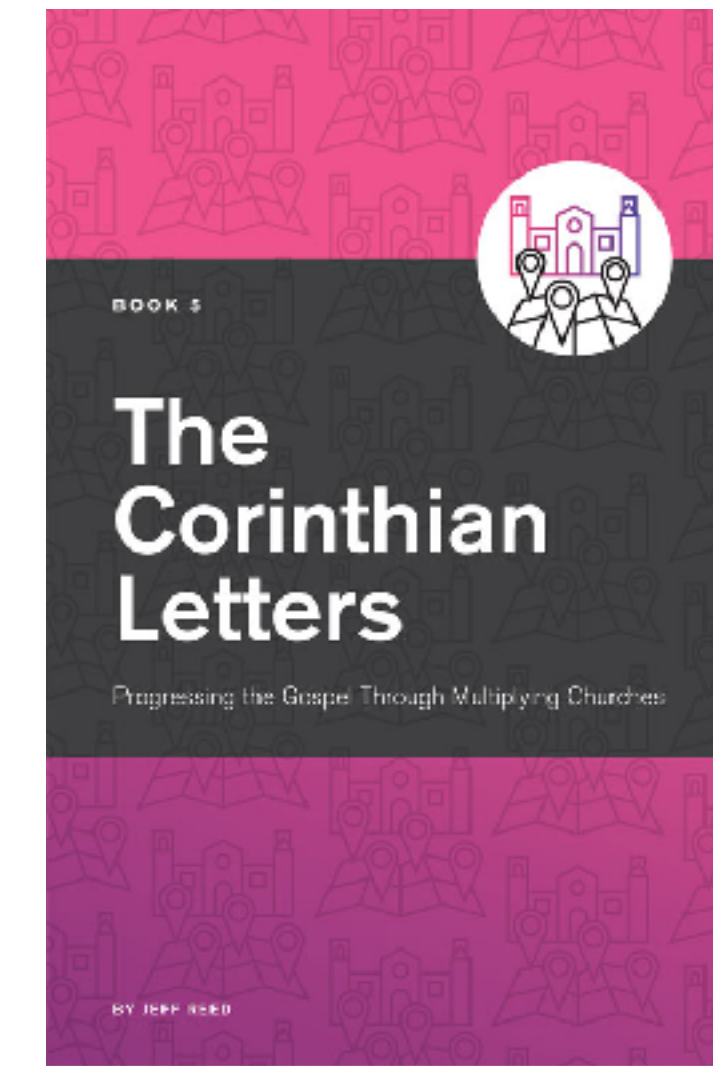
Autumn AD 49



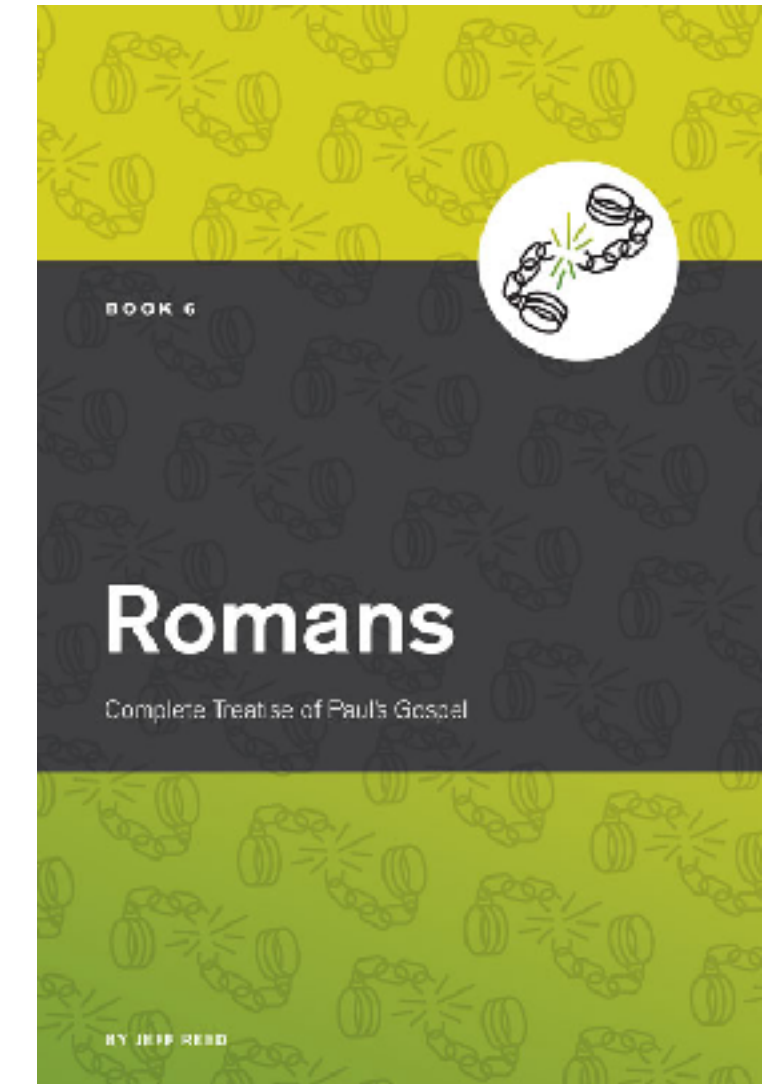
Winter/Sum AD 51



Sept. AD 53



June AD 56



Nov. AD 56

New Perspectives on Paul

The battle for the gospel went from Autumn AD 47 until the writing of Romans in the middle of November AD 56—10 years.

Paul's first confrontation with Peter—Autumn AD 47 (Gal. 2:1–10)

Peter in Antioch—Autumn AD 49 (Gal. 2:11–16)

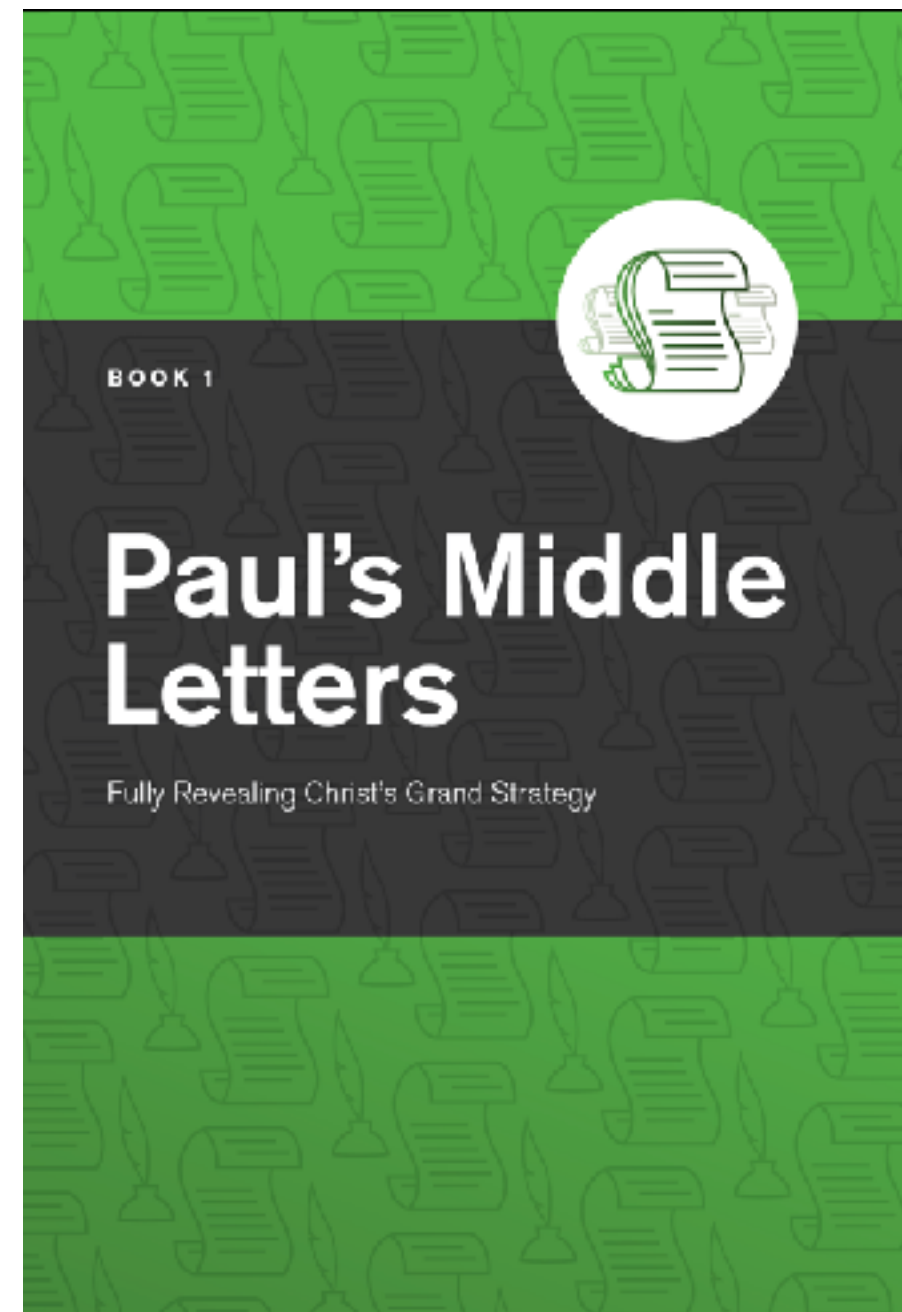
Jerusalem Council—Autumn AD 49

Then the early letters of Paul—Autumn AD 49 to Romans AD 56

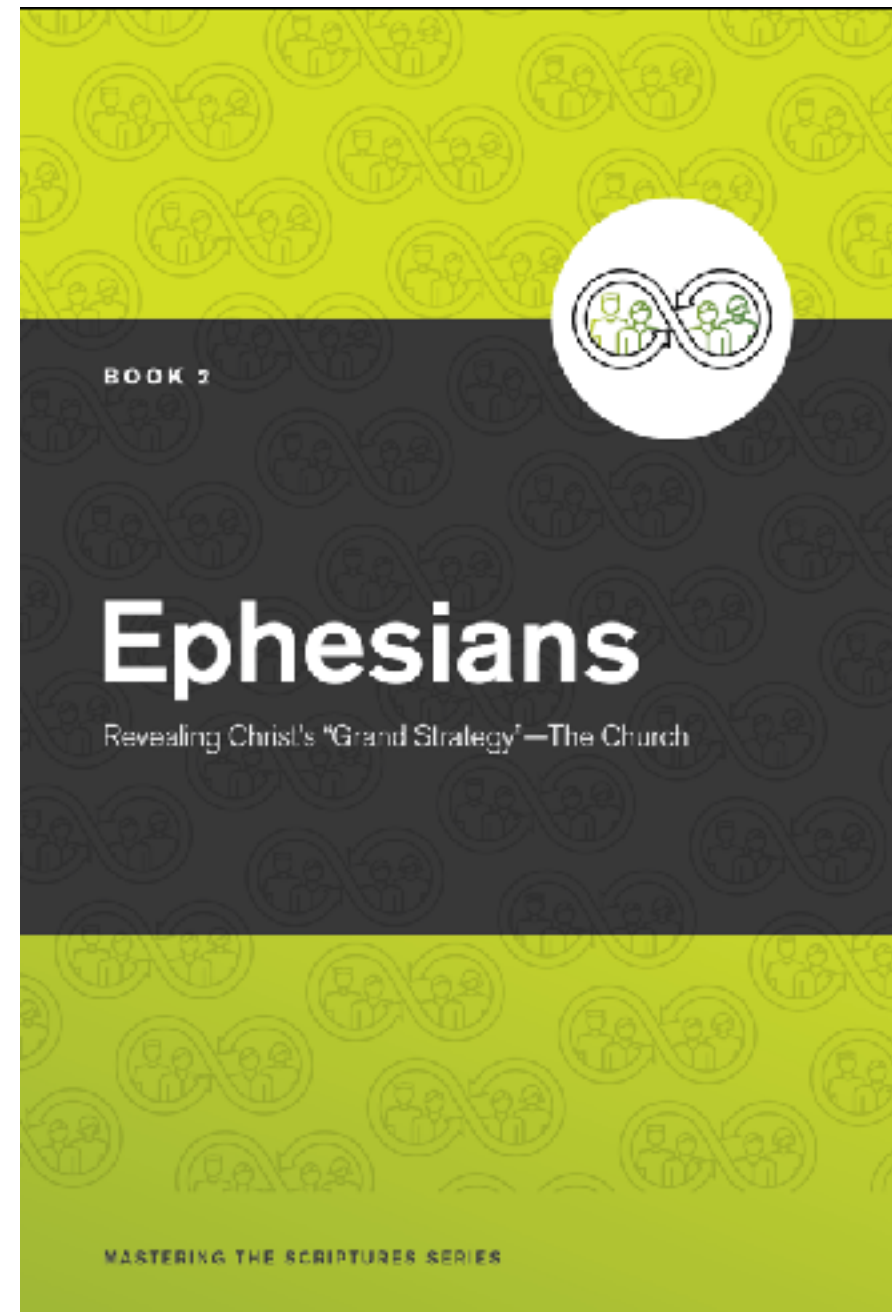
It took Paul a decade to win that argument, which he completed with his Romans manifesto on the gospel.

Now on to his rather compact, full unveiling of the church.

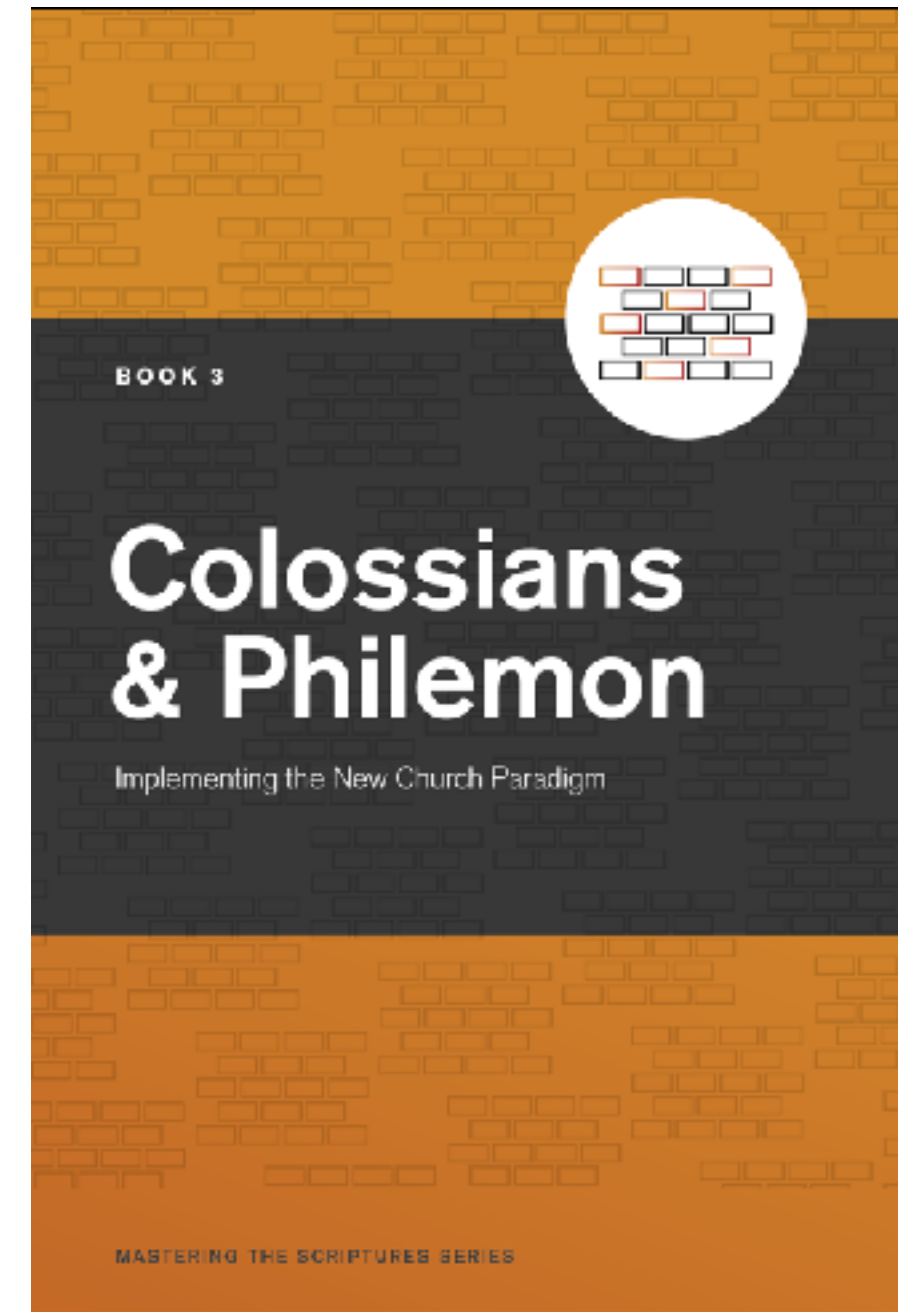
New Perspectives on Paul



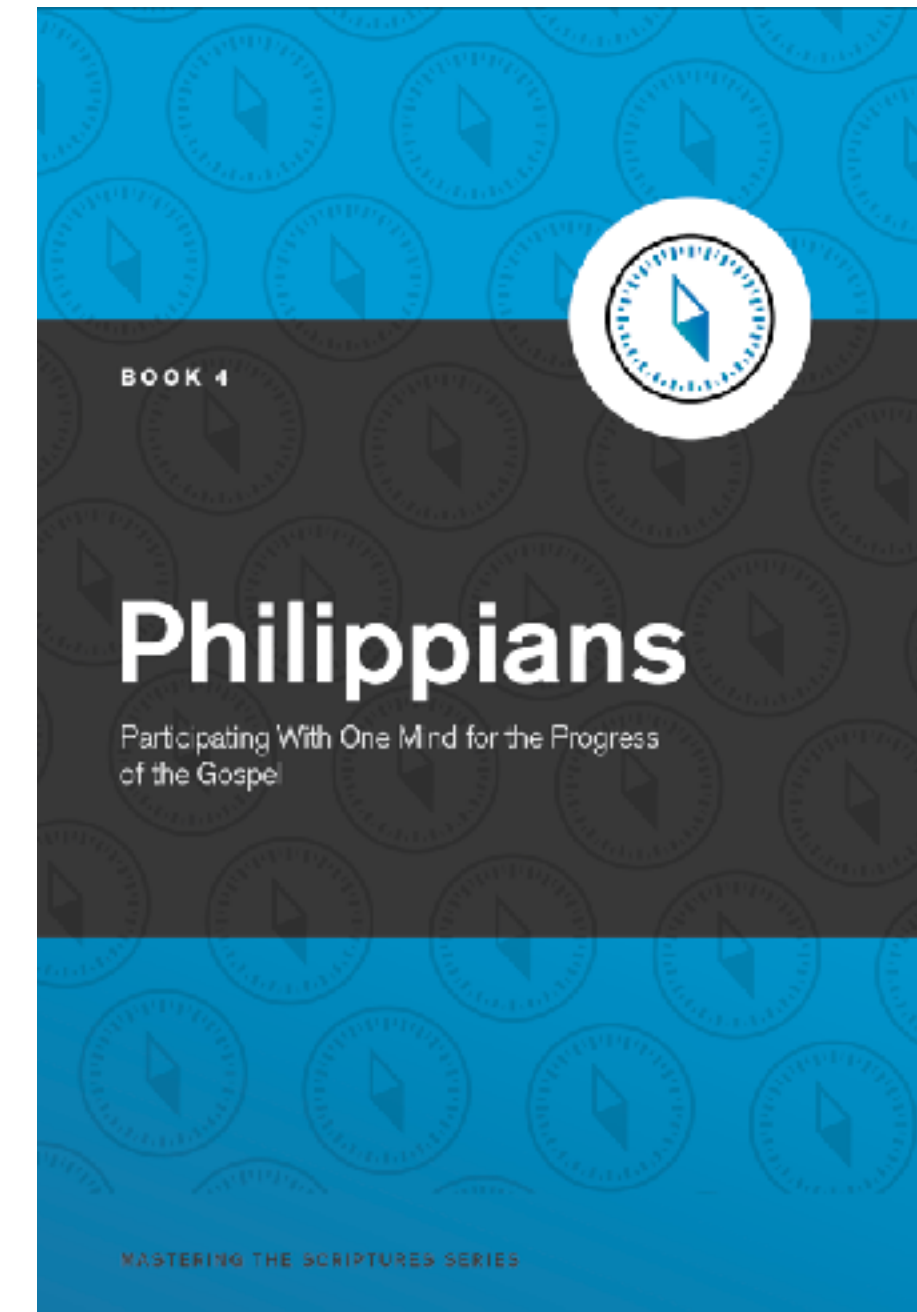
Feb. 60 to March 62



Autumn 60



Autumn 61



Spring 62

New Perspectives on Paul

These letters were all written close together (at the end of Acts—20:30), during the 2 years Paul was under house arrest—from February 60, to March 62. Most likely...

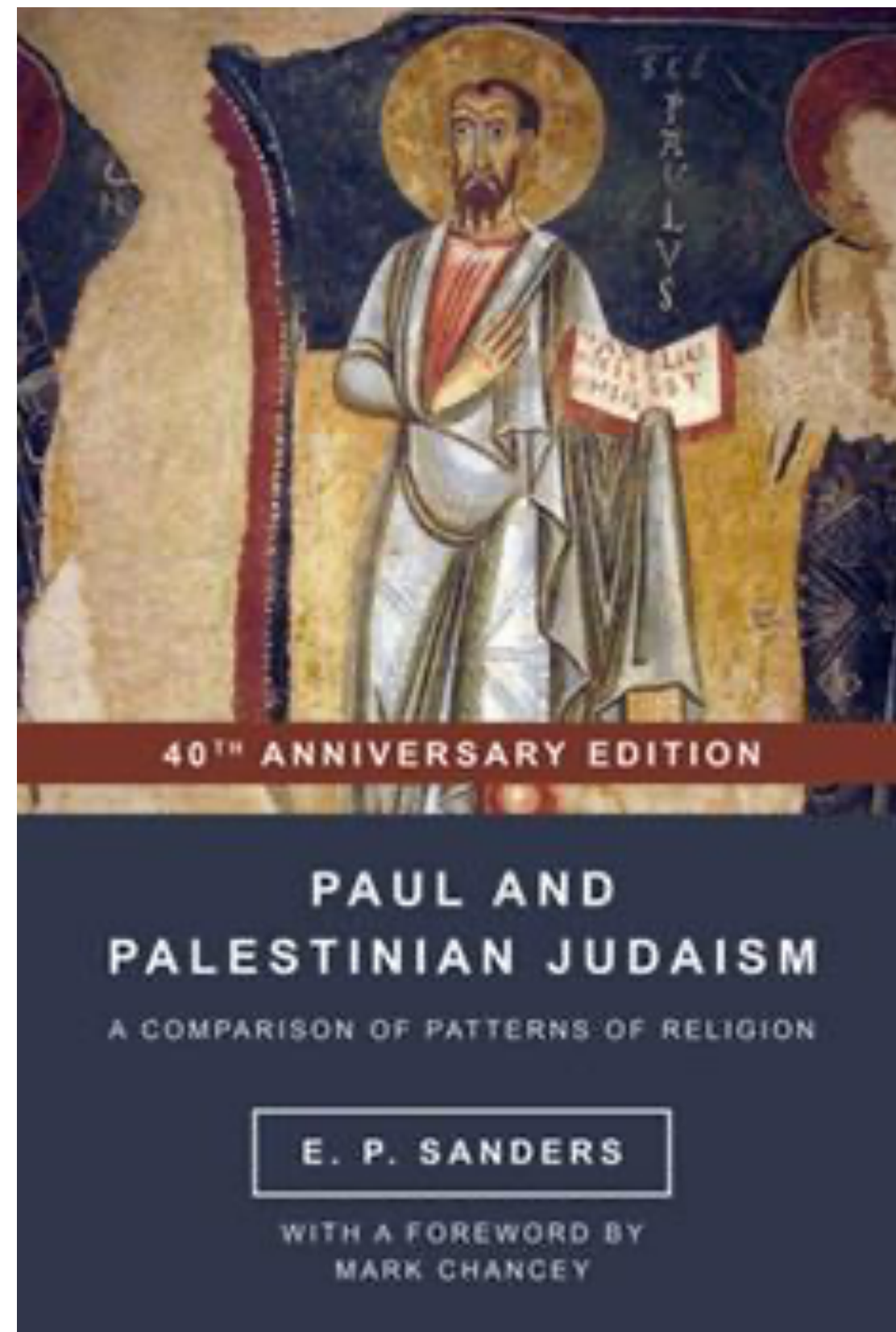
Ephesians was written Autumn 60

Colossians and Philemon—Autumn 61

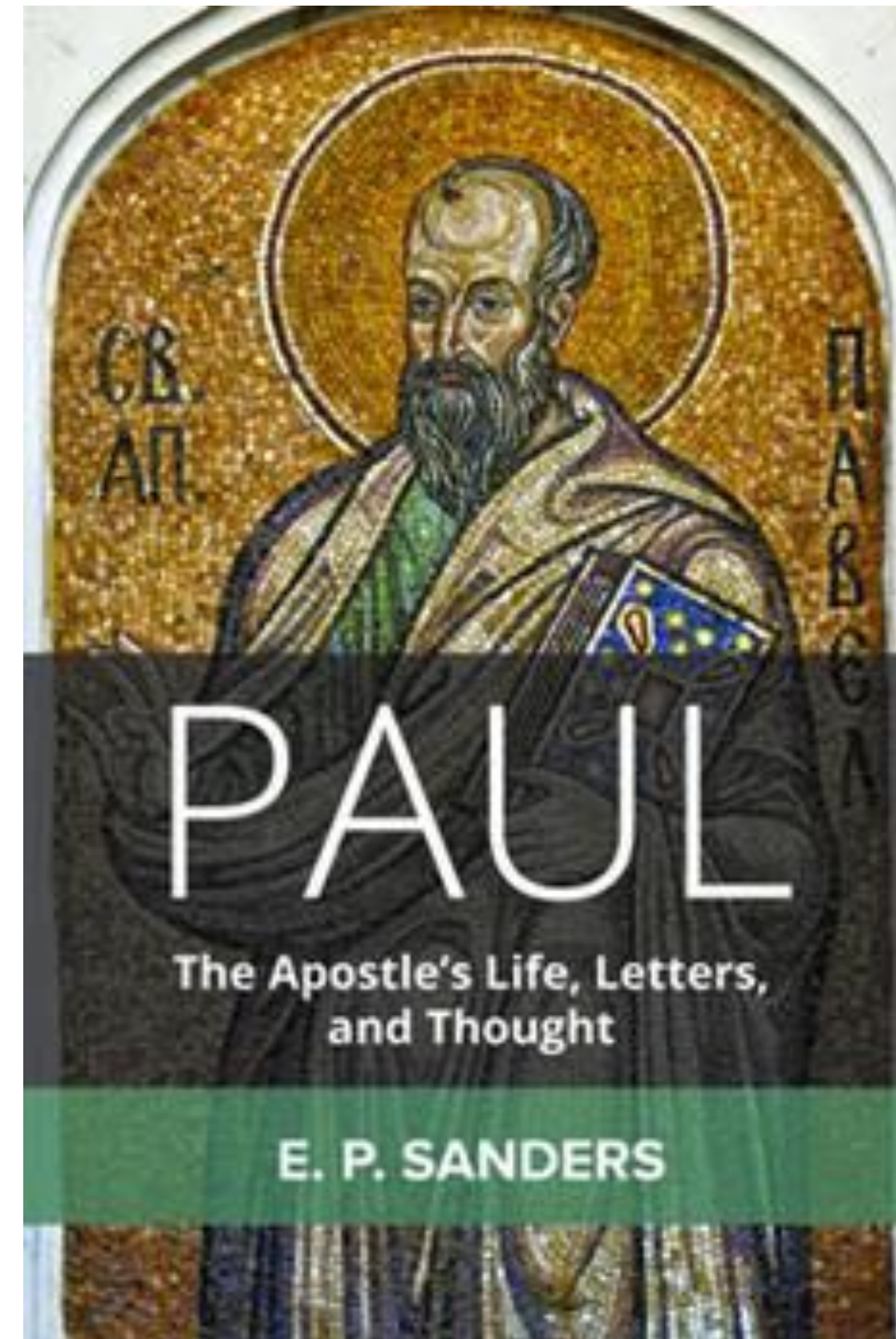
Philippians—early Spring 62

These letters give us the full revelation of the church. But think of the battles that were fought before this.

New Perspectives on Paul



1977

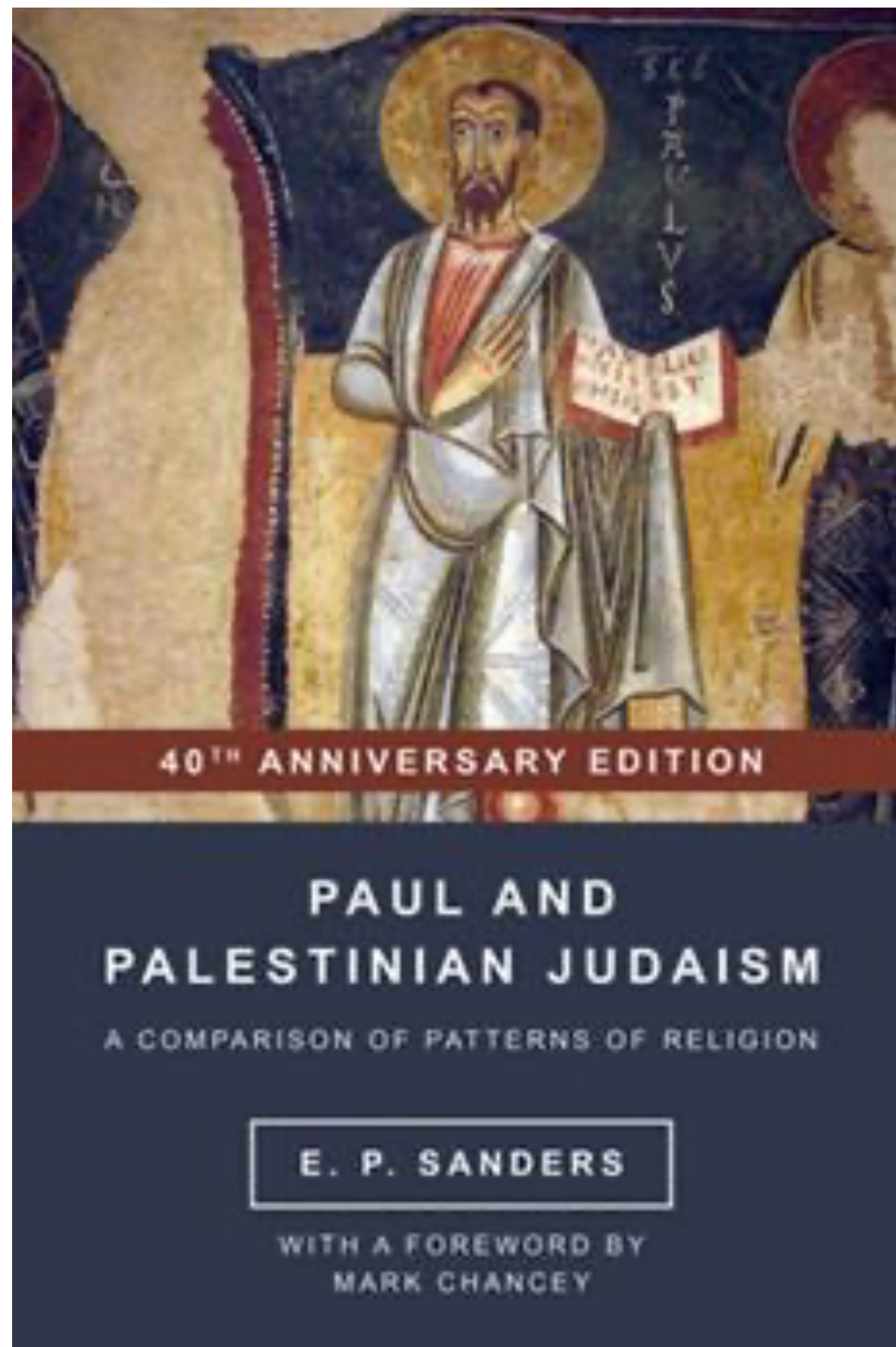


2015

Over 40 years ago, Sanders' work, —some of the first— shifted the “Pauline paradigm in Western Christendom,” bringing forth what is referred to as the “New Perspective on Paul.”

This has paved the way for massive research, leading the way for such scholars as N. T. Wright.

New Perspectives on Paul

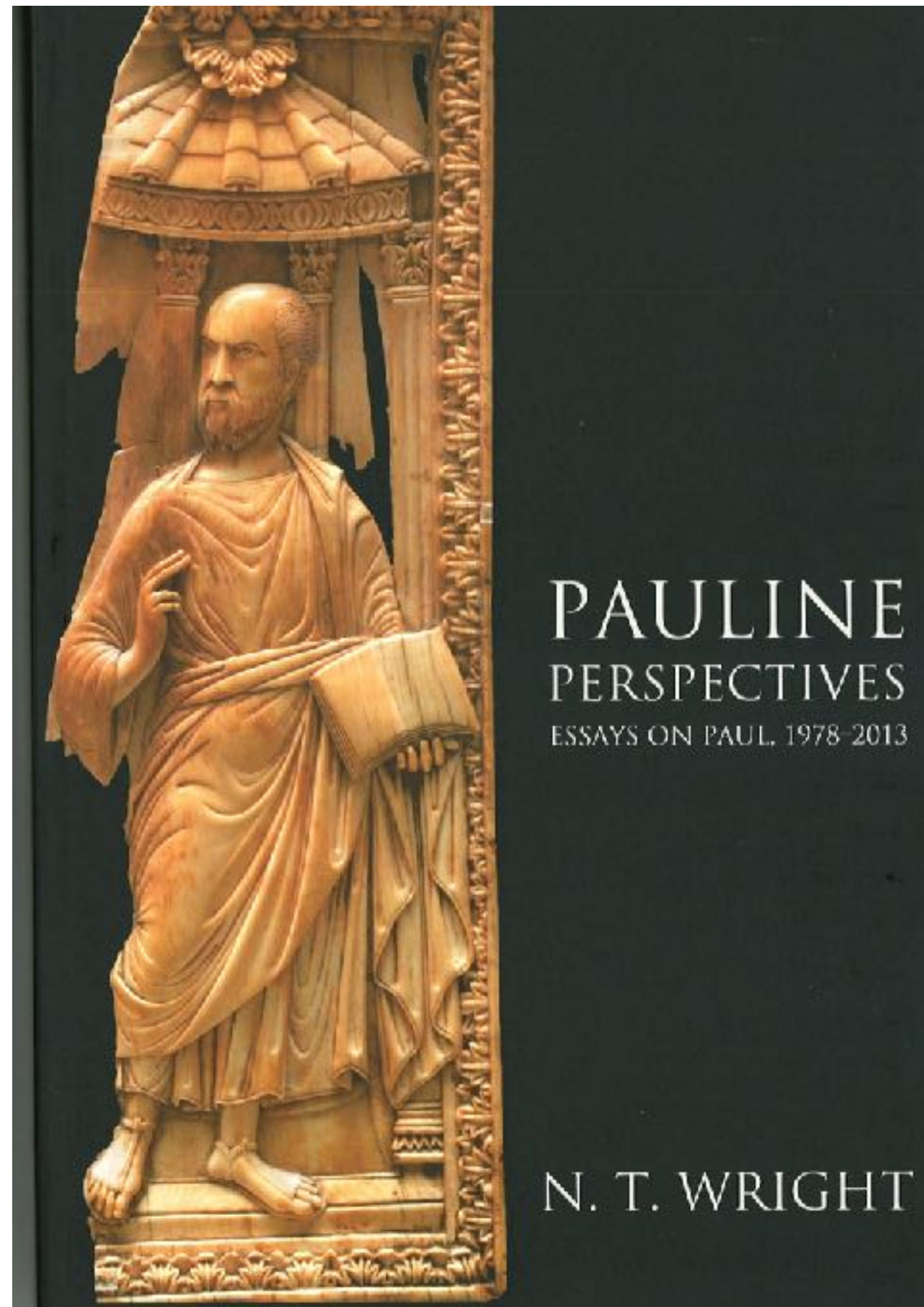


1977

“In taking the position that **Paul was a coherent, but not systematic, thinker**, we are taking the position most common among exegetes, and it needs little defence.¹ That Paul was a thinker is readily seen in the way he tried to work out solutions to problems by re-thinking the Christian tradition. This can be seen most clearly in the Corinthian correspondence, where Paul dealt with a succession of problems. He never simply answers with a formula or with a biblical quotation, although he makes use of both.... The rigour of the conclusion, again, marks **Paul as a theological thinker with a coherent viewpoint.**”

Sanders, E. P.; Paul and Palestinian Judaism: 40th Anniversary Edition (p. 665). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition available.

New Perspectives on Paul

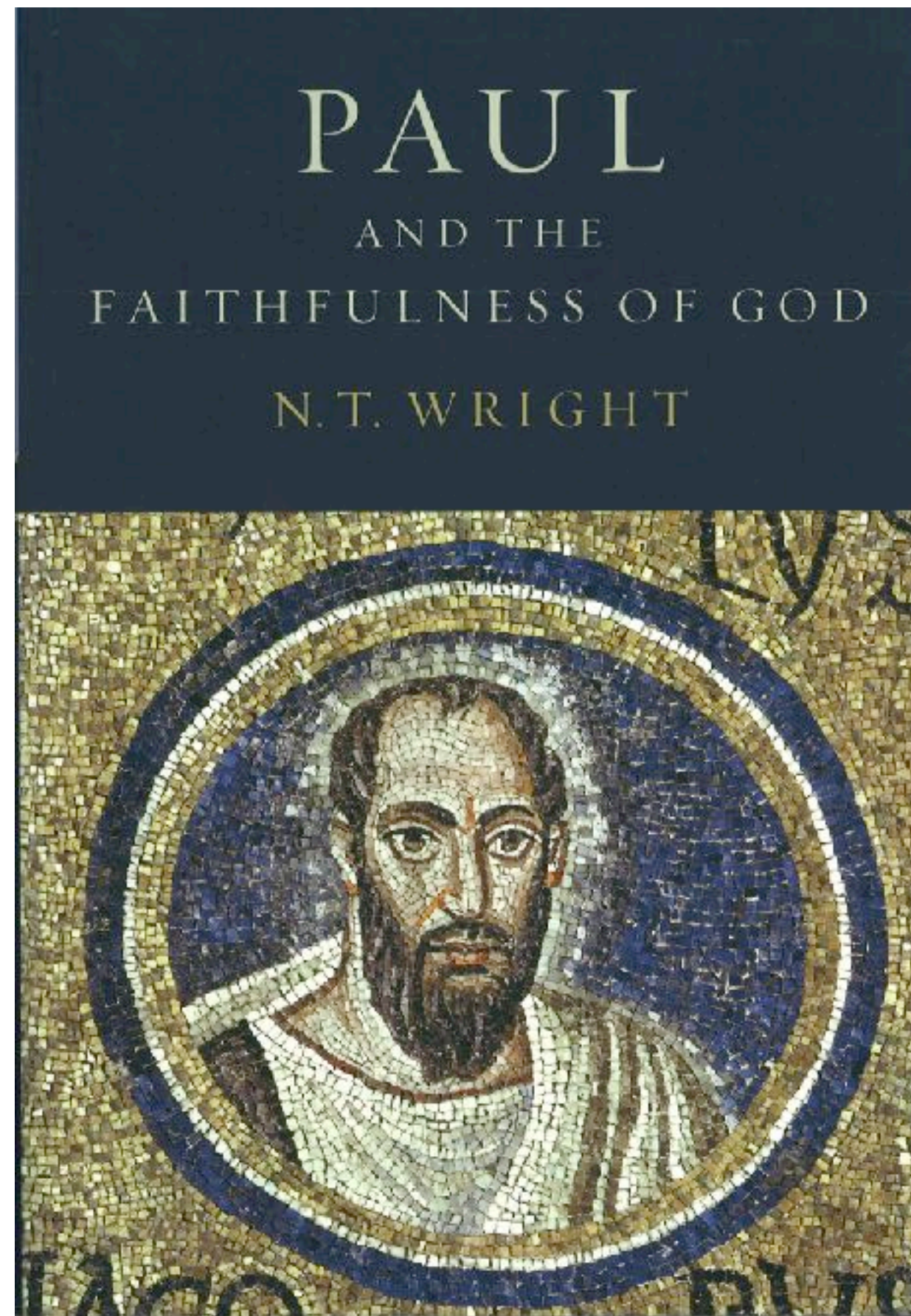


1978–2013, 2014

“Ultimately, the best argument for any exegesis ought to be the overall and detailed sense it makes of the letter, **the coherence it achieves**. Solutions that leave the letter in bits all over the exegetical floor do not have the same compelling force (as hypotheses) as does a solution that offers a clear line of thought all through, without squashing or stifling the unique and distinctive contribution of the various parts.”

Wright, N. T. (2013-11-01). Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013 (p. 94). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition available.

New Perspectives on Paul

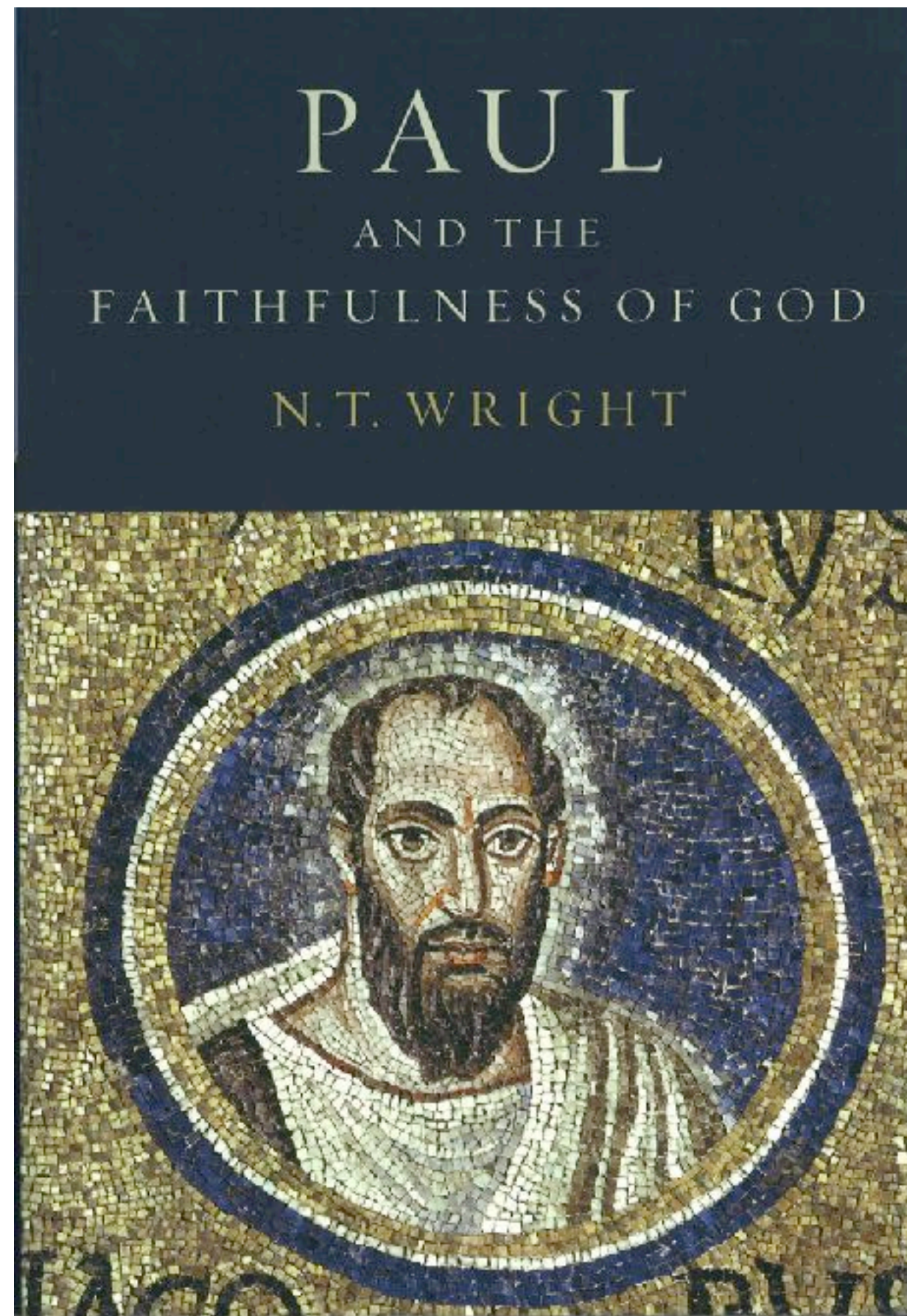


2014

“It is a truth insufficiently acknowledged that a sensible worldview equipped with appropriate symbolic praxis must be in want of a story.... Symbols and actions mean what they mean within a worldview, and until that worldview has been expressed in terms of its underlying story **it will not be clear what the meaning is.**”

Wright, p. 456

New Perspectives on Paul



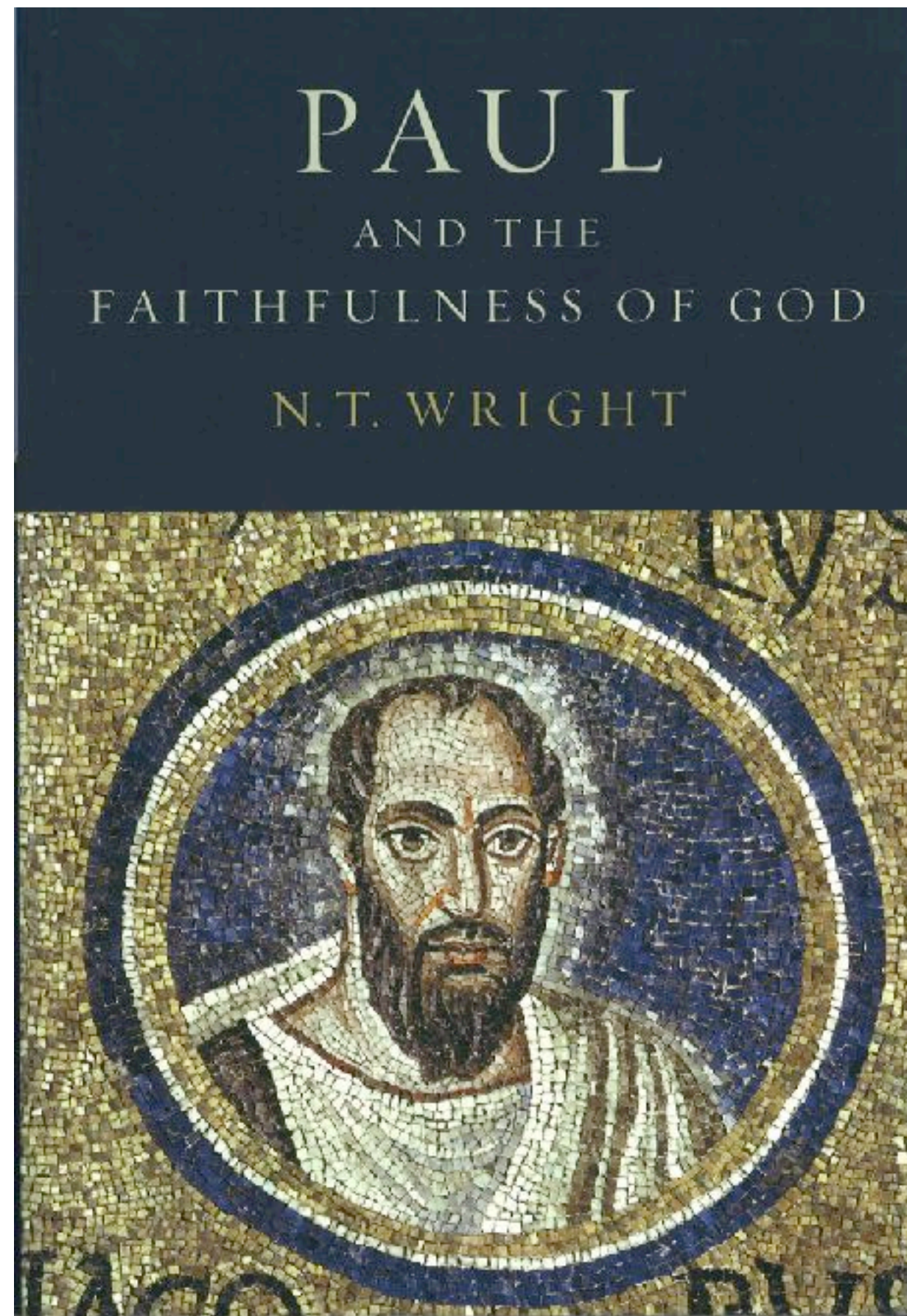
2014

“...we may comment that a great number of today’s debates about the first two centuries of Christian history boil down to this question: were the early Christians aware, or were they not aware, of living within a narrative that was larger than that of their own sin, salvation or spirituality?”

“This, I suggest, is the deep underlying point at which we can discern what the so-called **“new perspective on Paul”** might really have been all about.”

Wright p. 460

New Perspectives on Paul

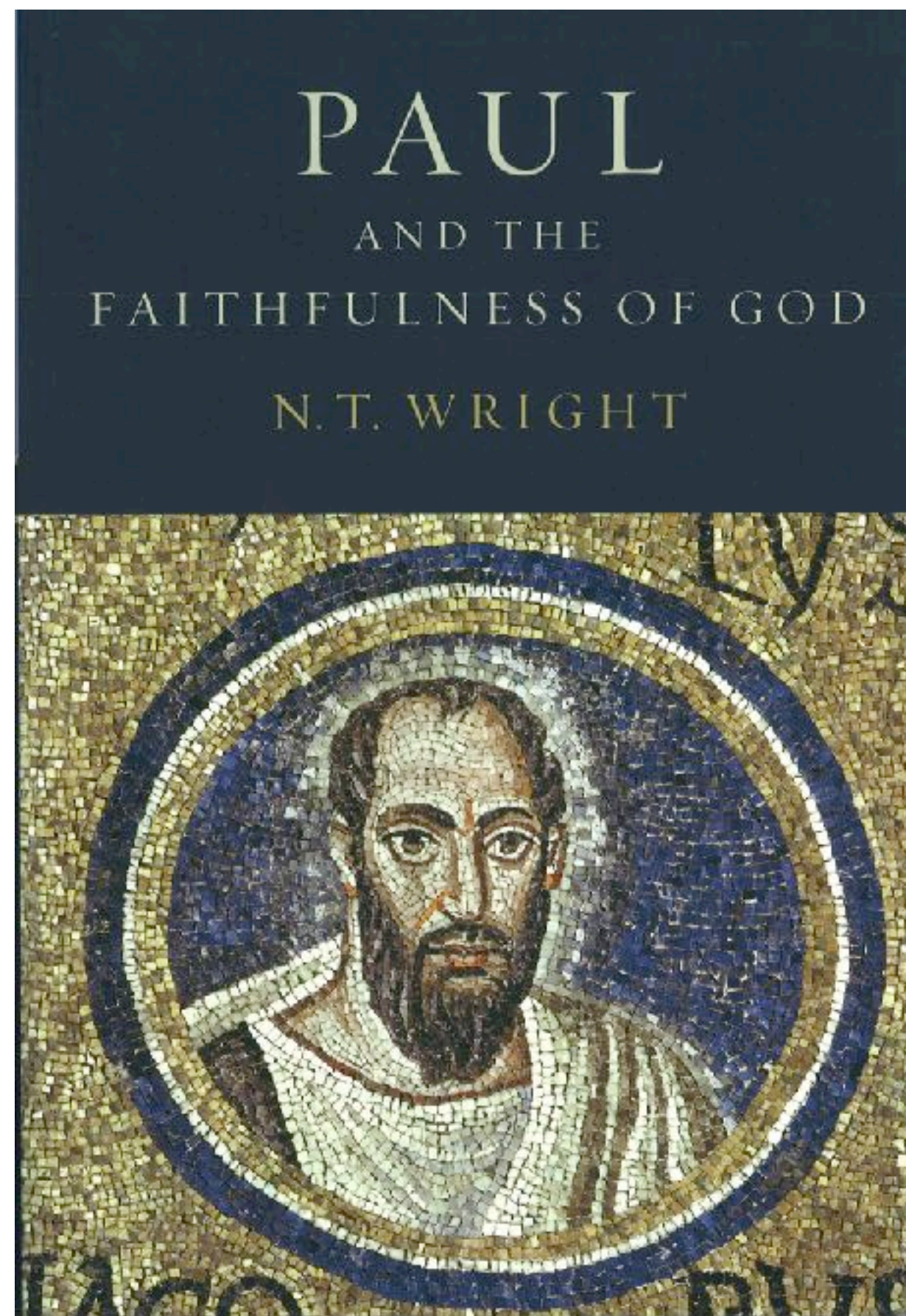


“...I insist that it is possible in principle, and not actually difficult in practice, to discover within the larger worldview and mindset, to which we have remarkably good access, **what implicit story Paul is telling,** behind, above, underneath, in and through (whatever spacial metaphor you like) the particular things he says in this or that letter.”

Wright p. 466

2014

New Perspectives on Paul

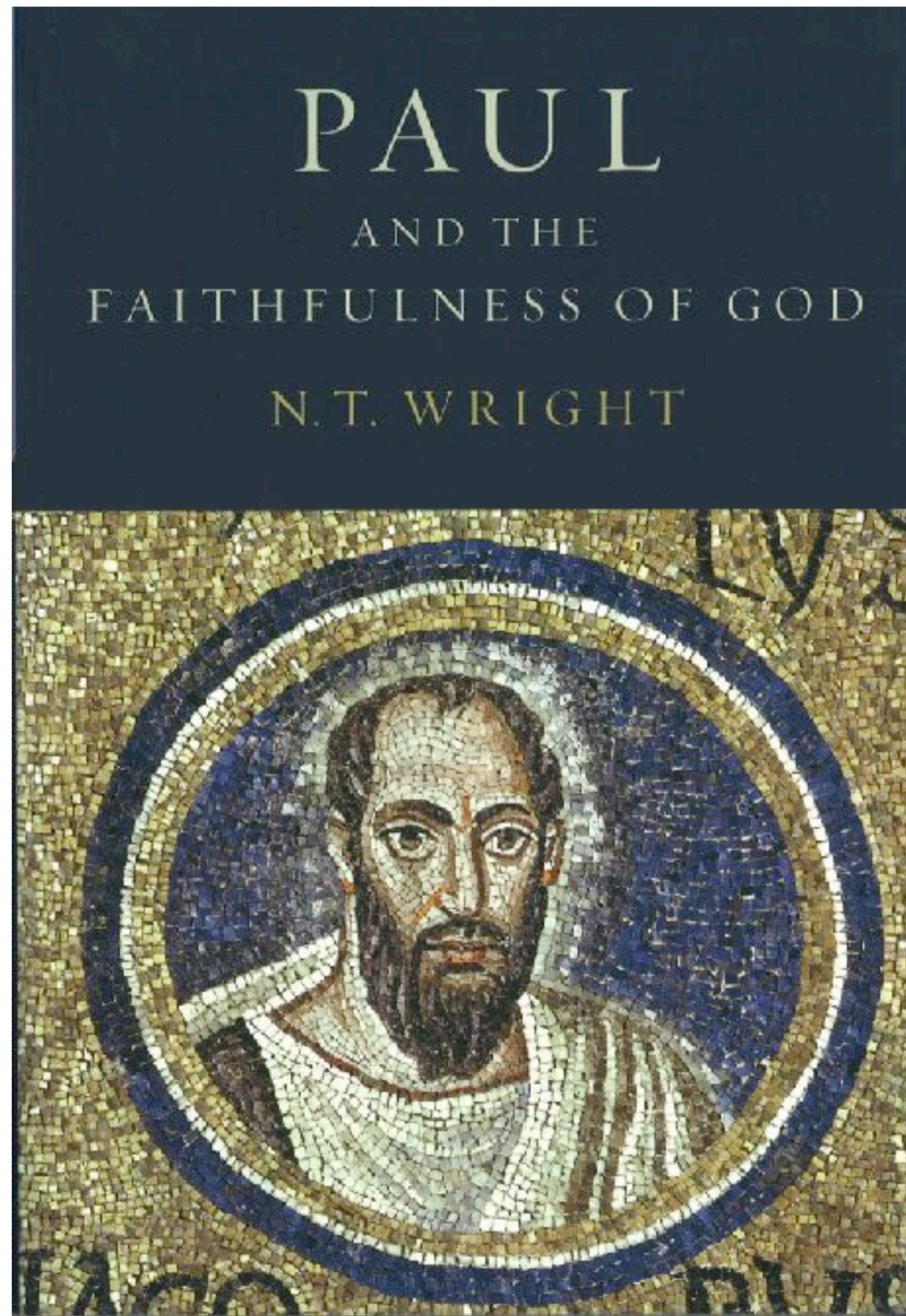


“And so we return to the texts themselves, **to argue a coherent and careful case** for the comprehensible, and indeed comprehensive, narrative, and then, within that, for a set of coherently comprehensibly interlocking narratives, that form an inalienable part of Paul’s own mindset.”

Wright p. 468

2014

New Perspectives on Paul

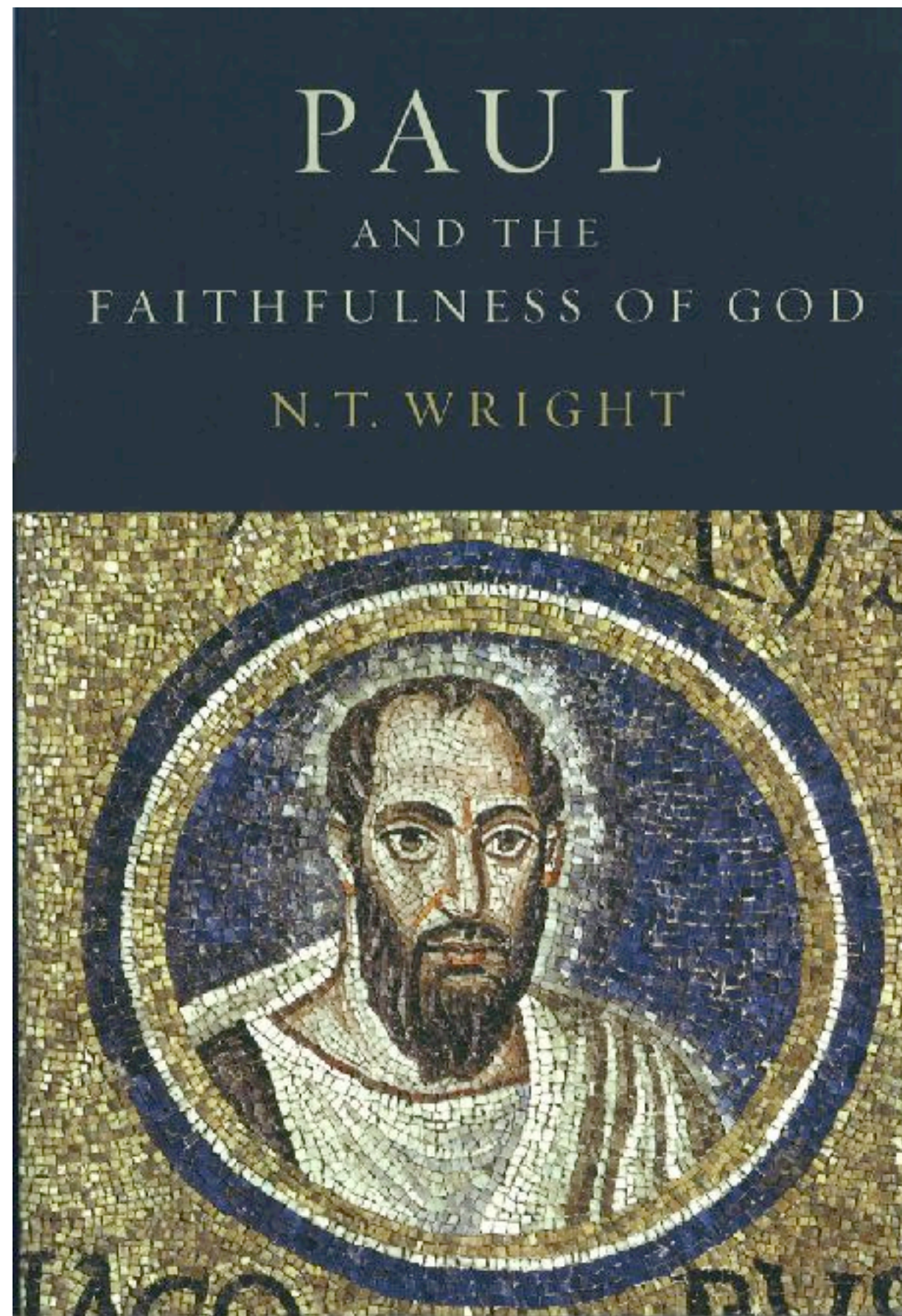


“There are, after all, several “stories” which are commonly thus detected within the implicit worldview of the Apostle Paul.... Others have suggested three or four or five, that dominate Paul’s understanding: a threefold account might highlight the story of Israel, the story of Christ and Paul’s own story (including that of his followers); all these plus a larger one about the world might be a fourfold set: we could turn this into five by separating out the story of Paul himself from the various stories of other believers both before and after him.”

Wright p. 474

2014

New Perspectives on Paul

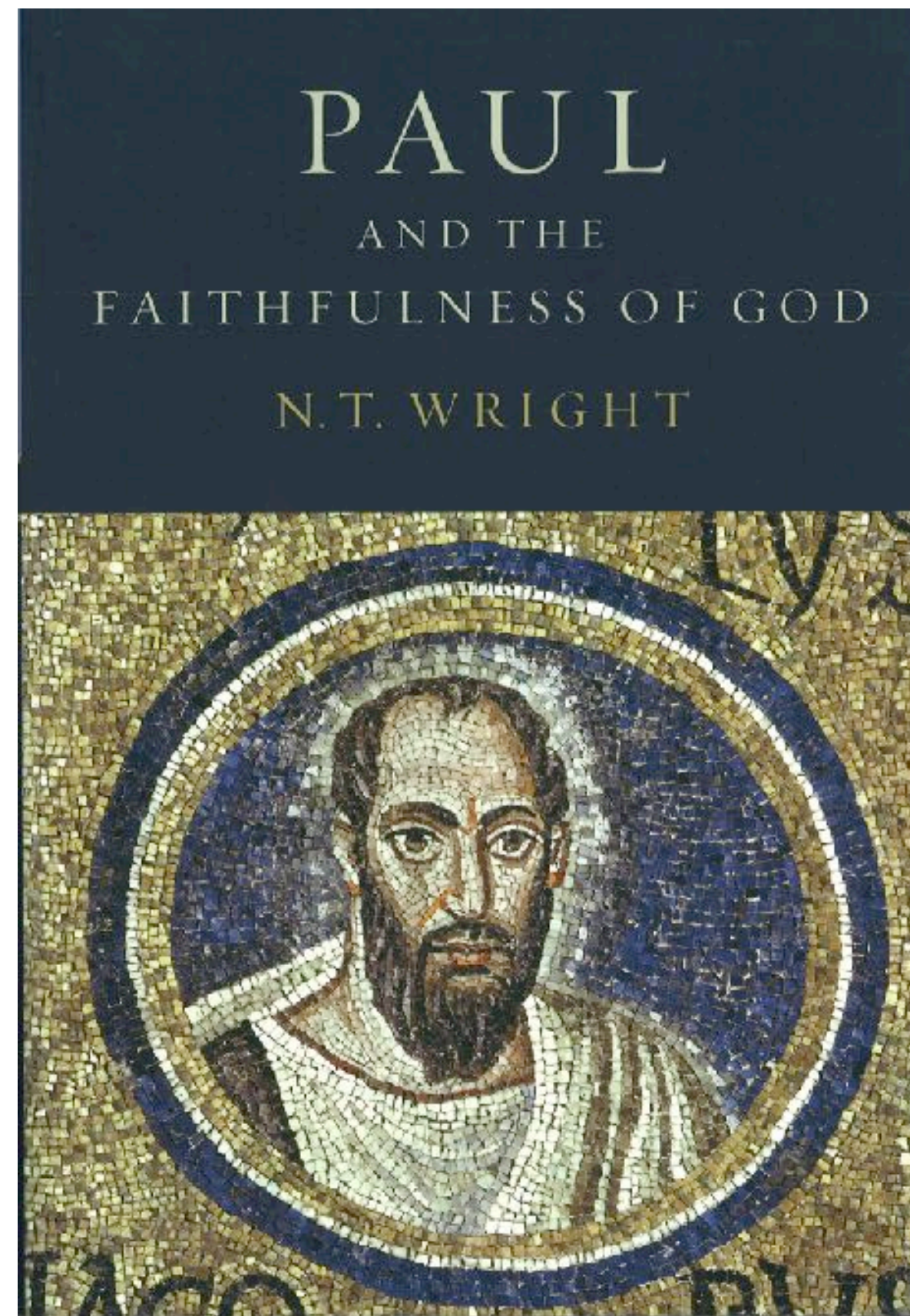


2014

“I shall now suggest that these various stories do actually have **a coherent interlocking shape**, nesting within one another like subplots in a play (I said like not in exactly the same way). And, if anything more important, I shall begin to show (the rest of the book will continue this demonstration) that looking at Paul’s worldview with the aid of narrative analysis **sheds a positive flood of light...on passage after passage** of tricky exegesis, and **problem after problem** in the **theological coherence of the letters.**”

Wright p. 474

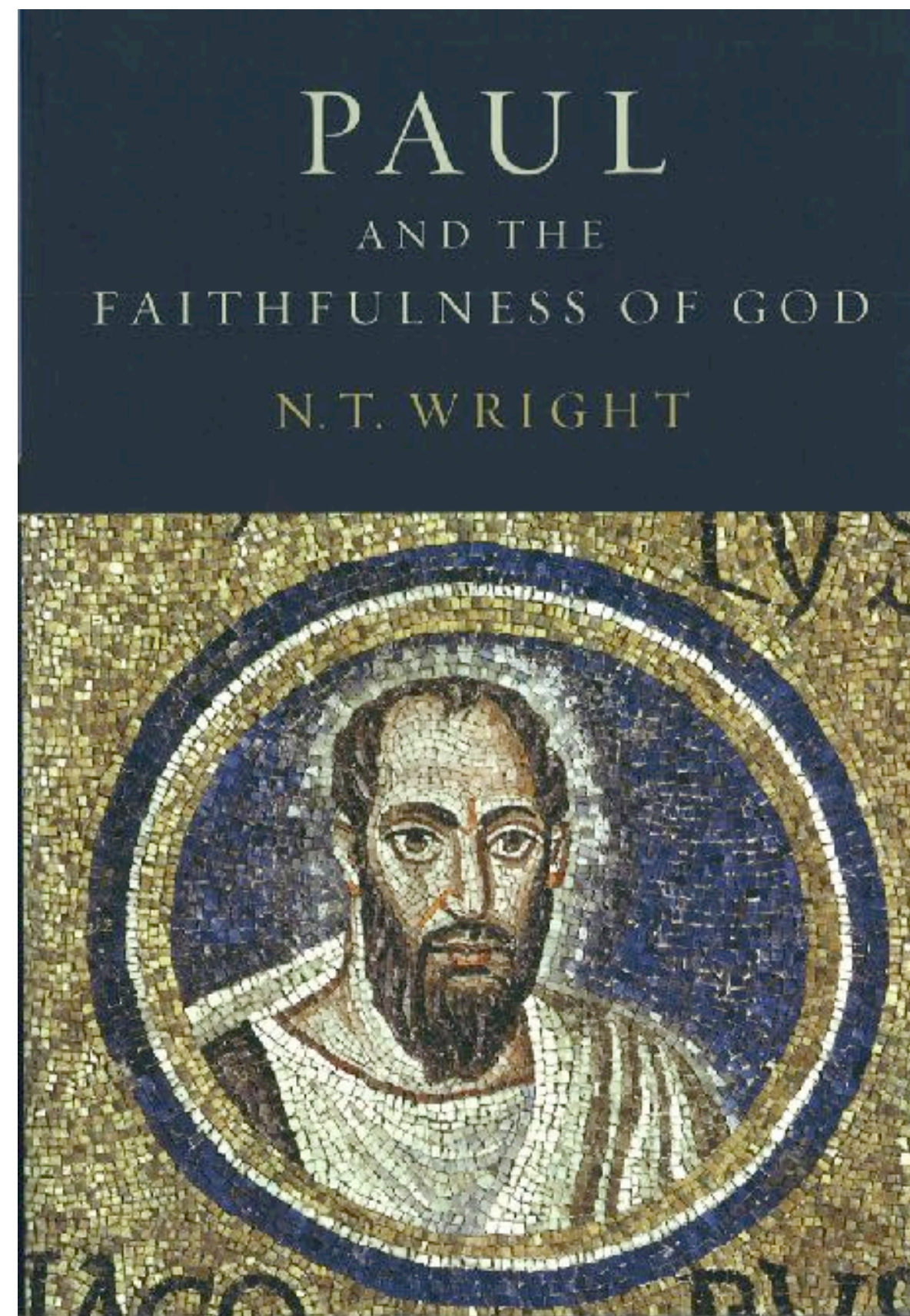
New Perspectives on Paul



2014

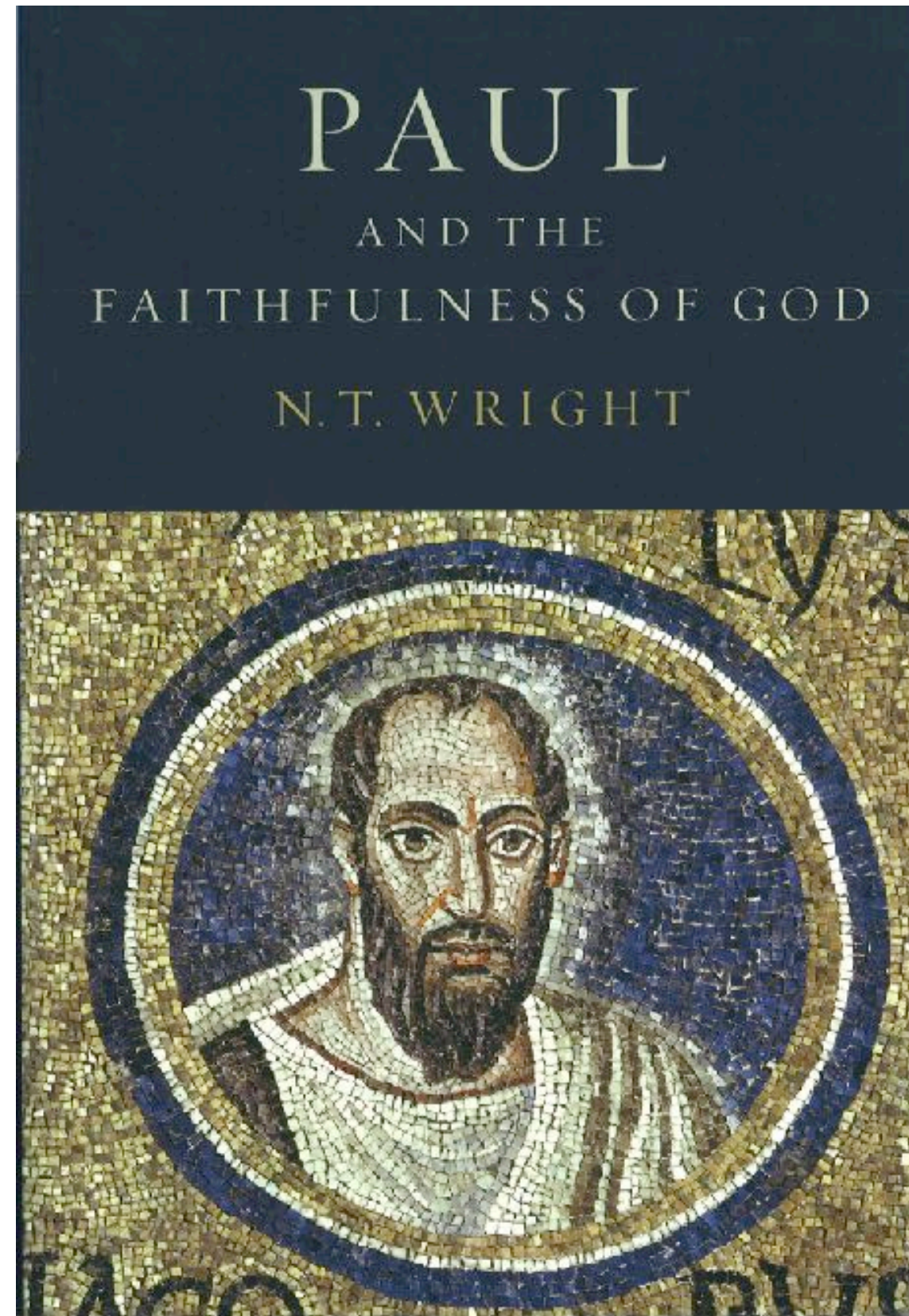
“I take it as axiomatic, on the contrary, that **Paul deliberately laid out whole arguments, not just bits and pieces, miscellaneous topoi** which just happen to turn up in these irrelevant “contingent” contexts like oddly shaped pearls on an irrelevant string. In any case, the point is that a thematic analysis of Paul’s theological topics in themselves, and in their mutual interrelation, ought to enhance our appreciation of the flow of thought in his letters and their component parts, while also demonstrating **coherence** among themselves.”

New Perspective on Paul



“So when people say, as they often do, that Paul **‘was not a systematic theologian,’** meaning that ‘Paul didn’t write a medieval Summa Theologica or a book that corresponds to Calvin’s Institutes,’ we will want to say: Fair enough. So far as we know, he didn’t. But the statement is often taken to mean that Paul was therefore just a jumbled, rambling sort of thinker, who would grab odd ideas out of the assortment of junk in his mental cupboard and throw them roughly in the direction of the problems presented to him by his beloved and frustrating *ekklēsiai*.”

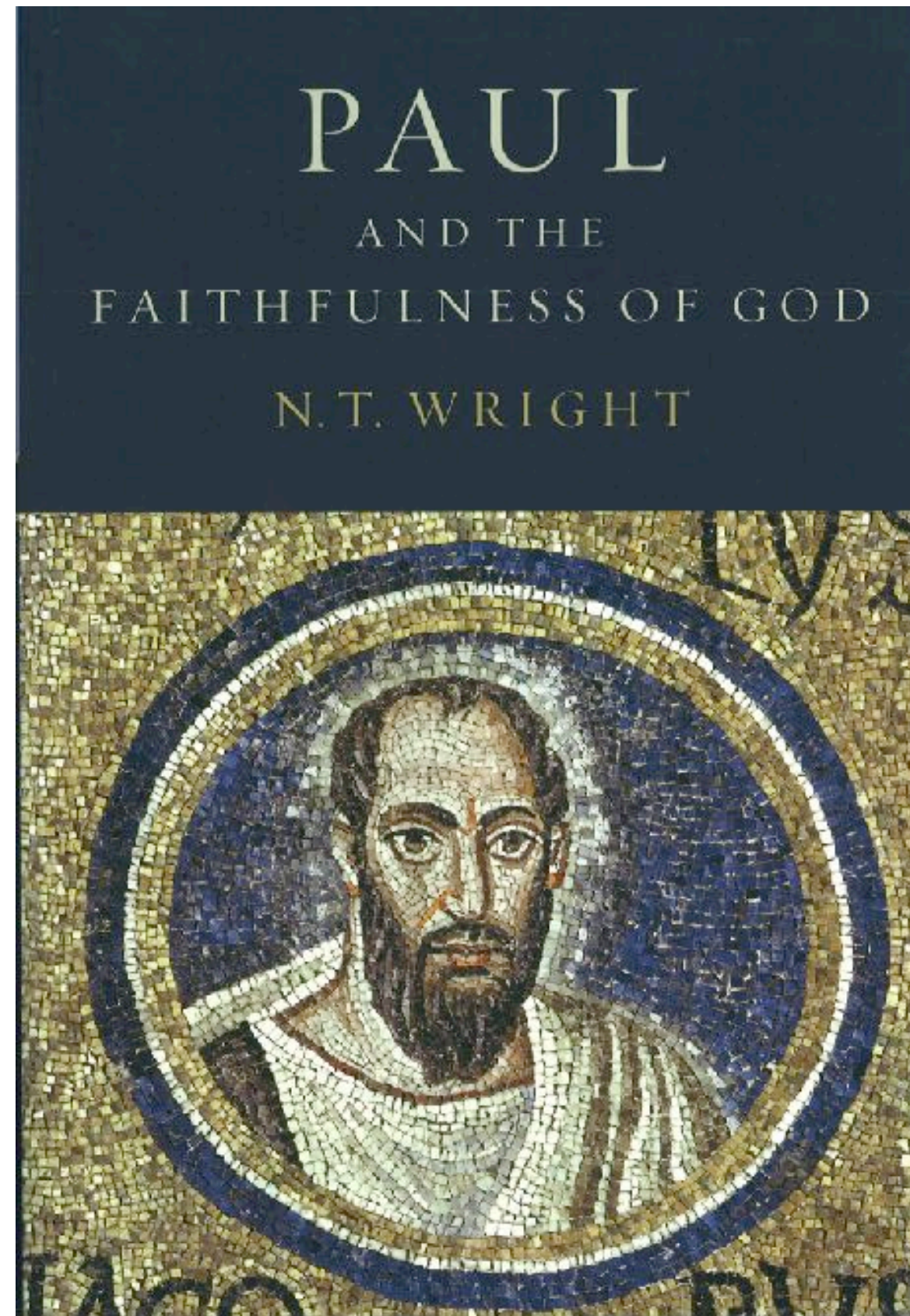
New Perspective on Paul



“And that is simply nonsense. The more time we spend in the careful reading of Paul, and in the study of his worldview, his theology and his aims and intentions, the more he **emerges as a deeply coherent thinker**. His main themes may well not fit the boxes constructed by later Christian dogmatics of whatever type. They generate their own categories, precisely as they are transforming the ancient Jewish ones, which are often sadly neglected in later Christian dogmatics. They emerge, whole and entire, thought through with a rigour which those who criticize Paul today (and those who claim to follow him, too!) would do well to match.”

p. 568

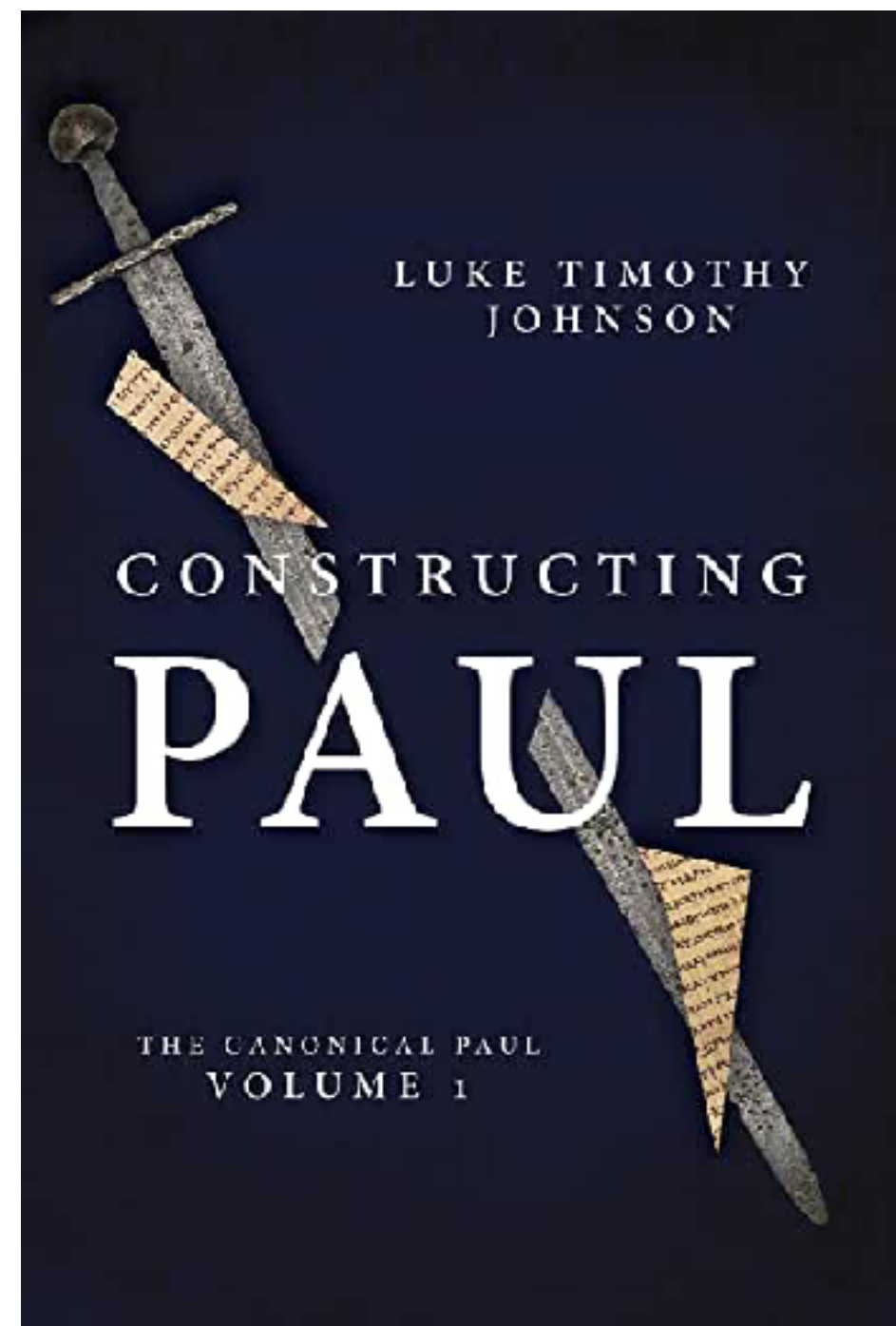
New Perspective on Paul



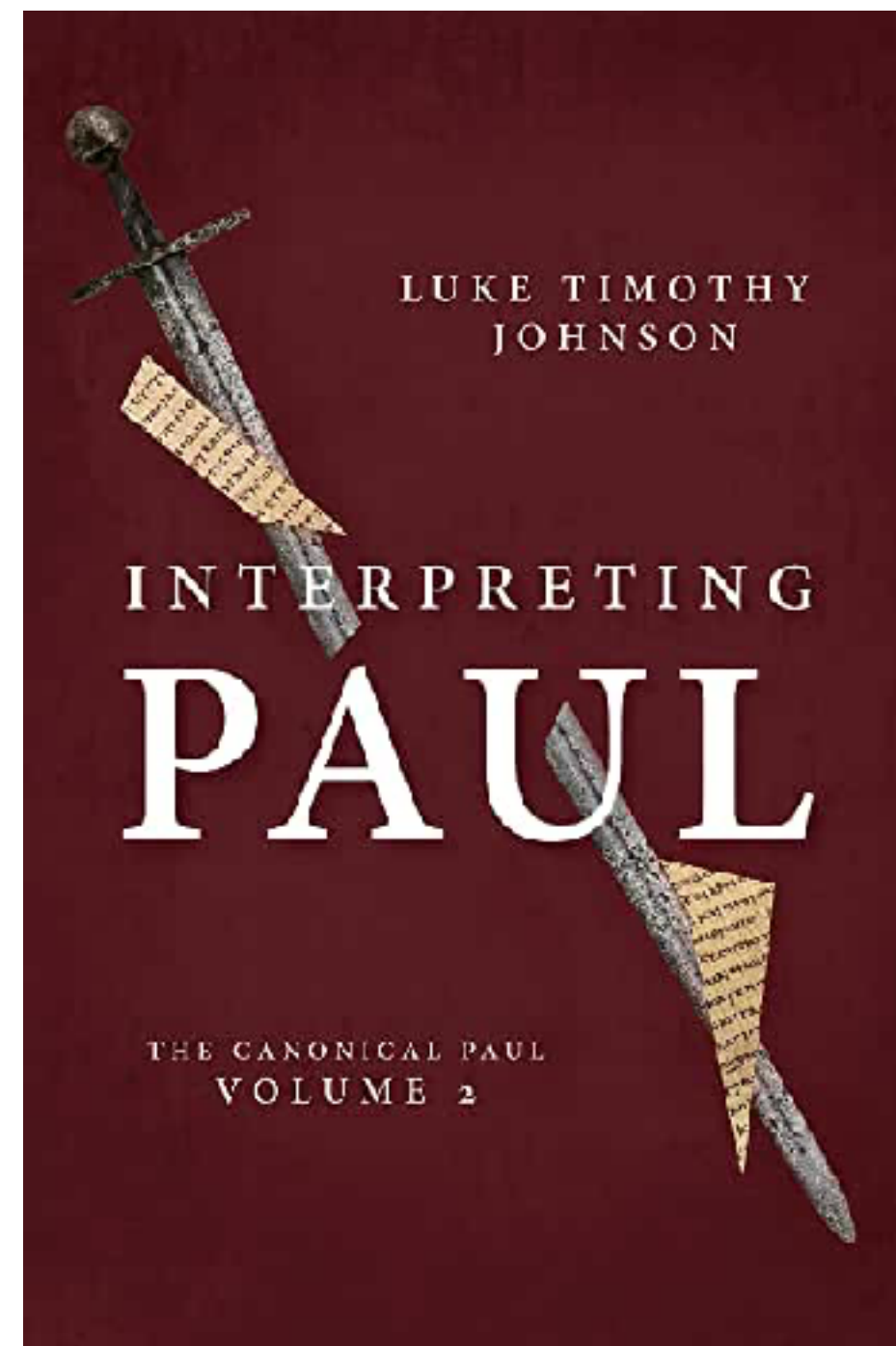
“What is more, the reason **Paul was ‘doing theology’** was not that he happened to have the kind of brain that delighted in playing with and rearranging large, complex abstract ideas. He was doing theology because the life of God’s people depended on it, depended on his doing it **initially for them, then as soon as possible with them, and then on them being able to go on doing it for themselves.** All Paul’s theology is thus pastoral theology, not in the sense of an unsystematic therapeutic model which concentrates on meeting the felt needs of the ‘client’, but in the sense that the shepherd needs to feed the flock with clean food and water, and keep a sharp eye out for wolves.

pp. 568–569

New Perspectives on Paul



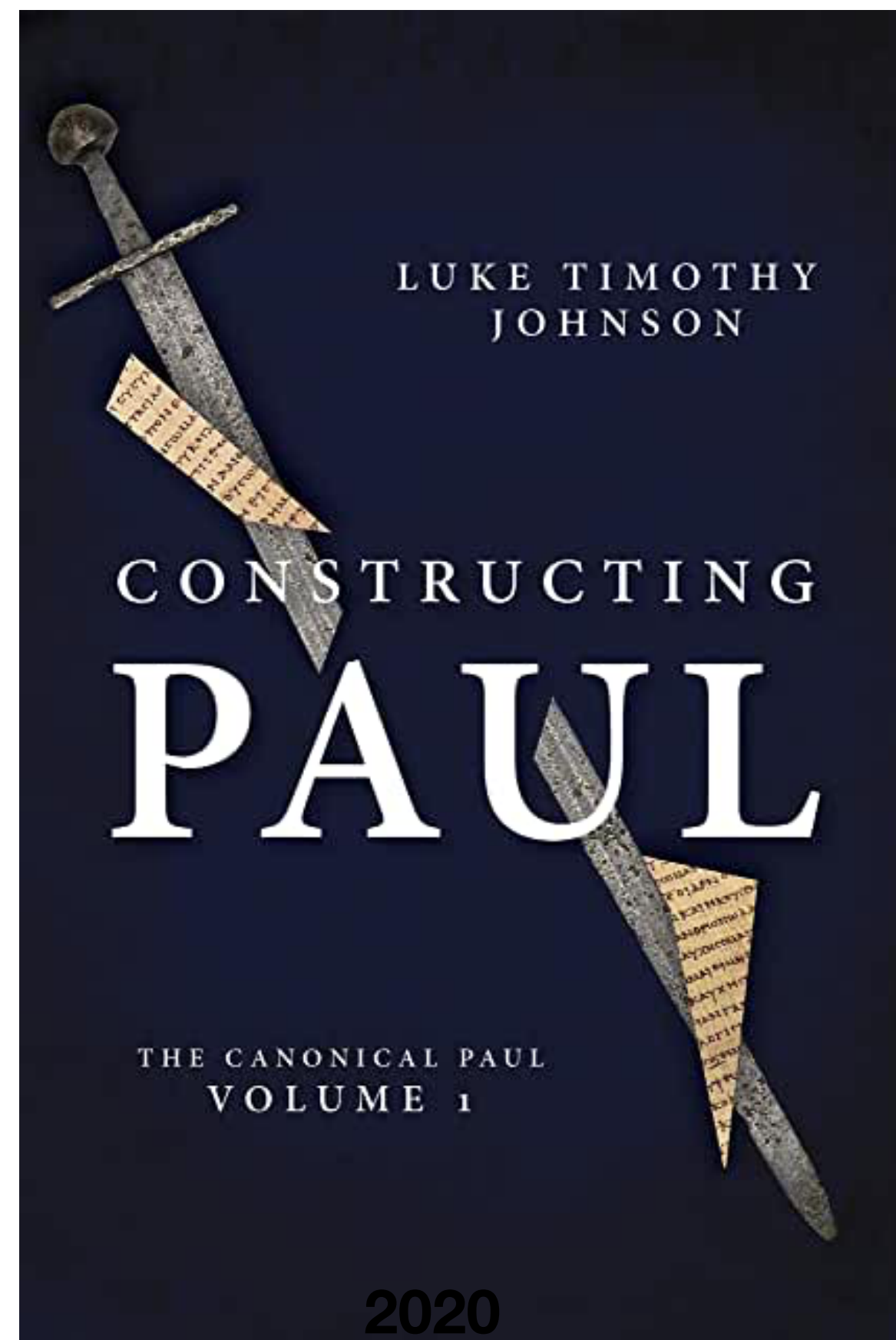
2020



2021

The key author is Luke Timothy Johnson, who has influenced my thinking more than anyone by far. I am working through 14 of his books, but the key three are the following:

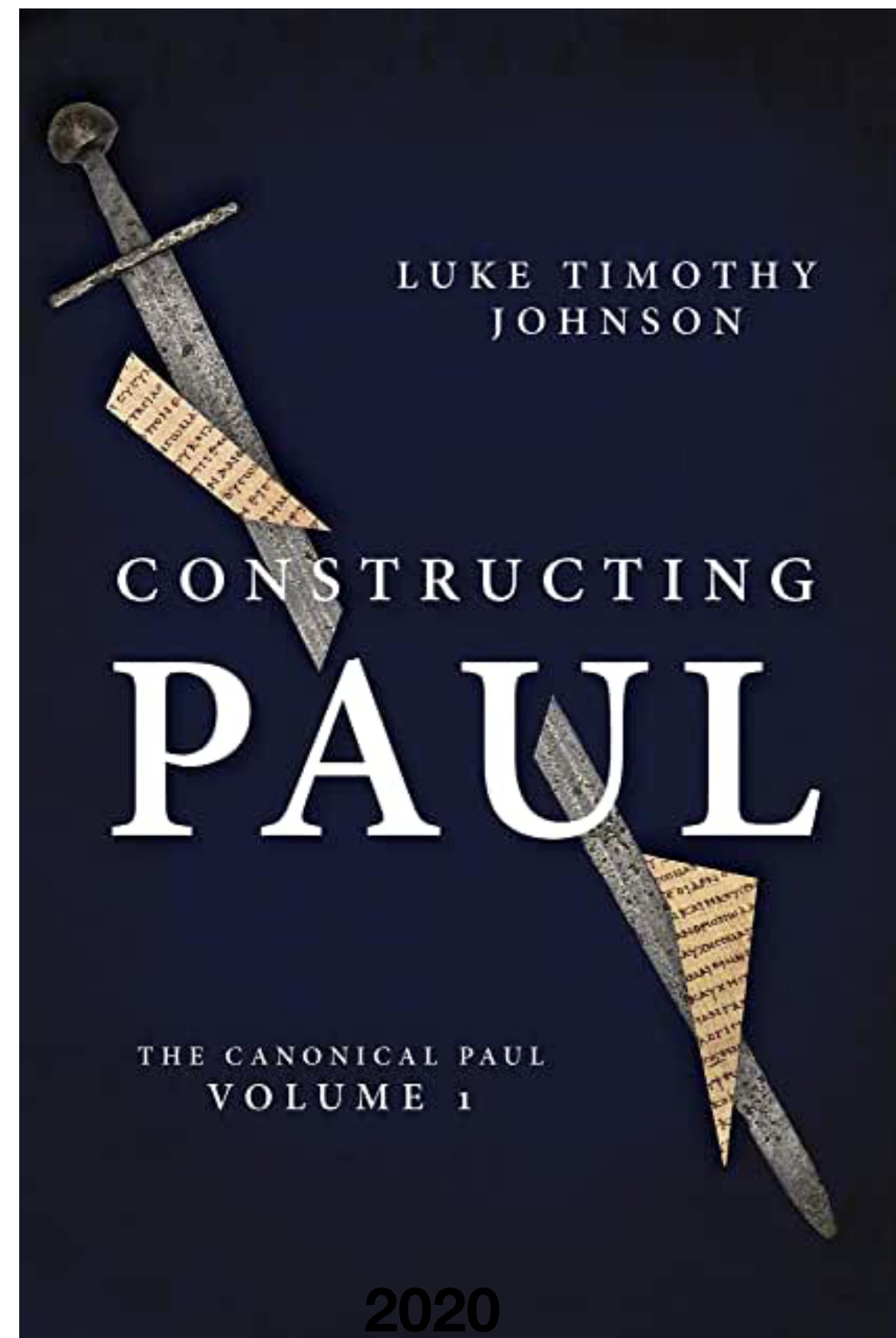
New Perspectives on Paul



2020

“And just as my approach resists reducing the Pauline corpus to a subset of letters or reducing the elements of Paul’s symbolic world to a single explanatory key, so does it resist elevating one theme within his letters to singular significance. My effort throughout will be to argue for a **polythetic rather than monothetic** approach to these compositions. I hope to provide the conditions for a fresh and vigorous engagement with each of the letters in the canonical collection, an engagement that will lead to **new discoveries** and **new questions**. I emphatically do not seek to replace such an engaged reading of the letters with a synthesis of my own that already determines what can be found in the letters and answers all questions.”

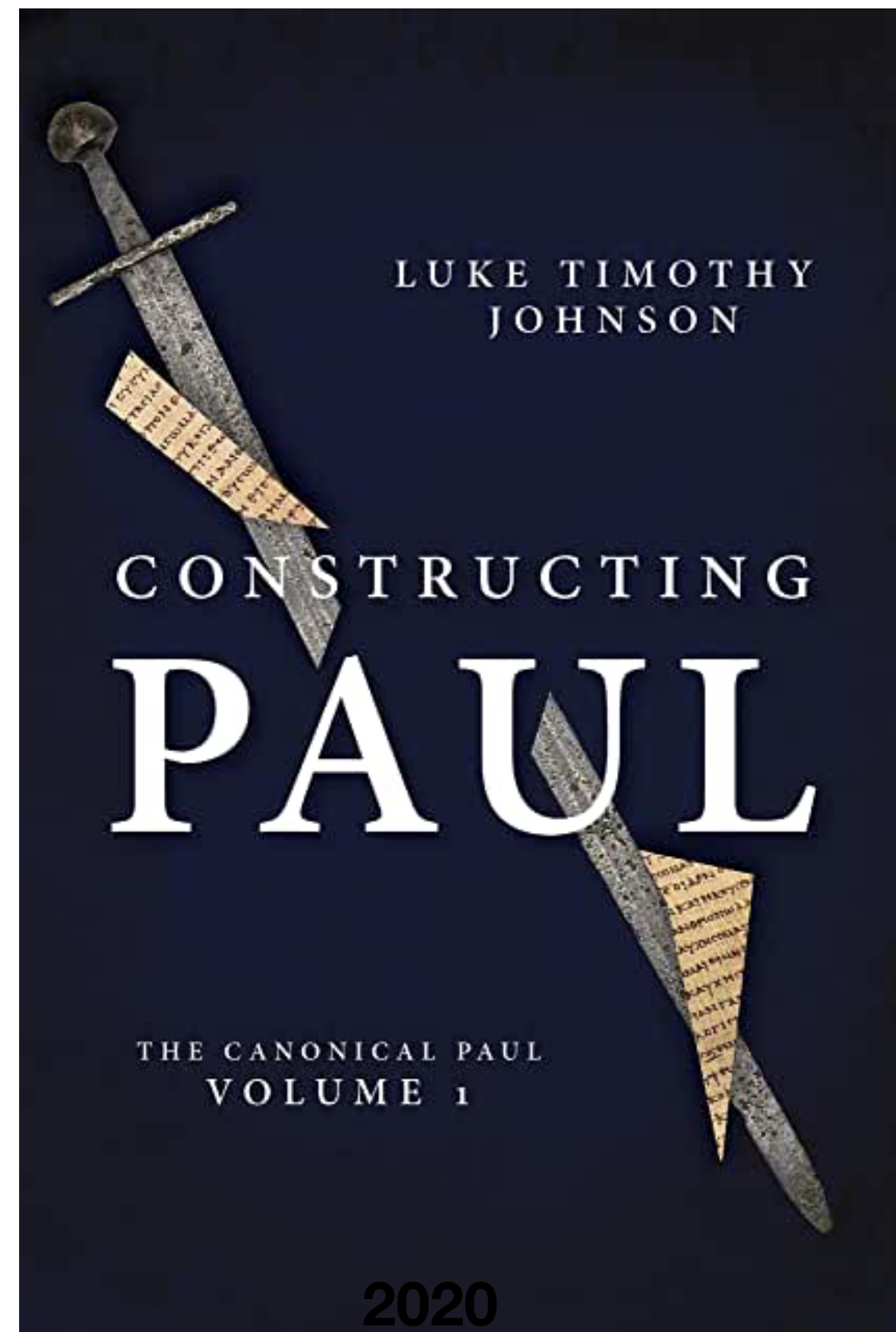
New Perspectives on Paul



2020

“An analogy can be drawn to the study of the ancient **philosopher Plato**. Any number of college students have been exposed in philosophy classes to something called ‘Platonism,’ which is defined in terms of certain categories (epistemology, cosmology, metaphysics, ethics, politics), and which can be compared to other philosophical schools on the same points. But the few students who decide to push past their **class notes and textbook to an actual reading of the dialogues** attributed to Plato discover, usually with some surprise, that it is difficult to find that synthetic ‘Platonism.’”

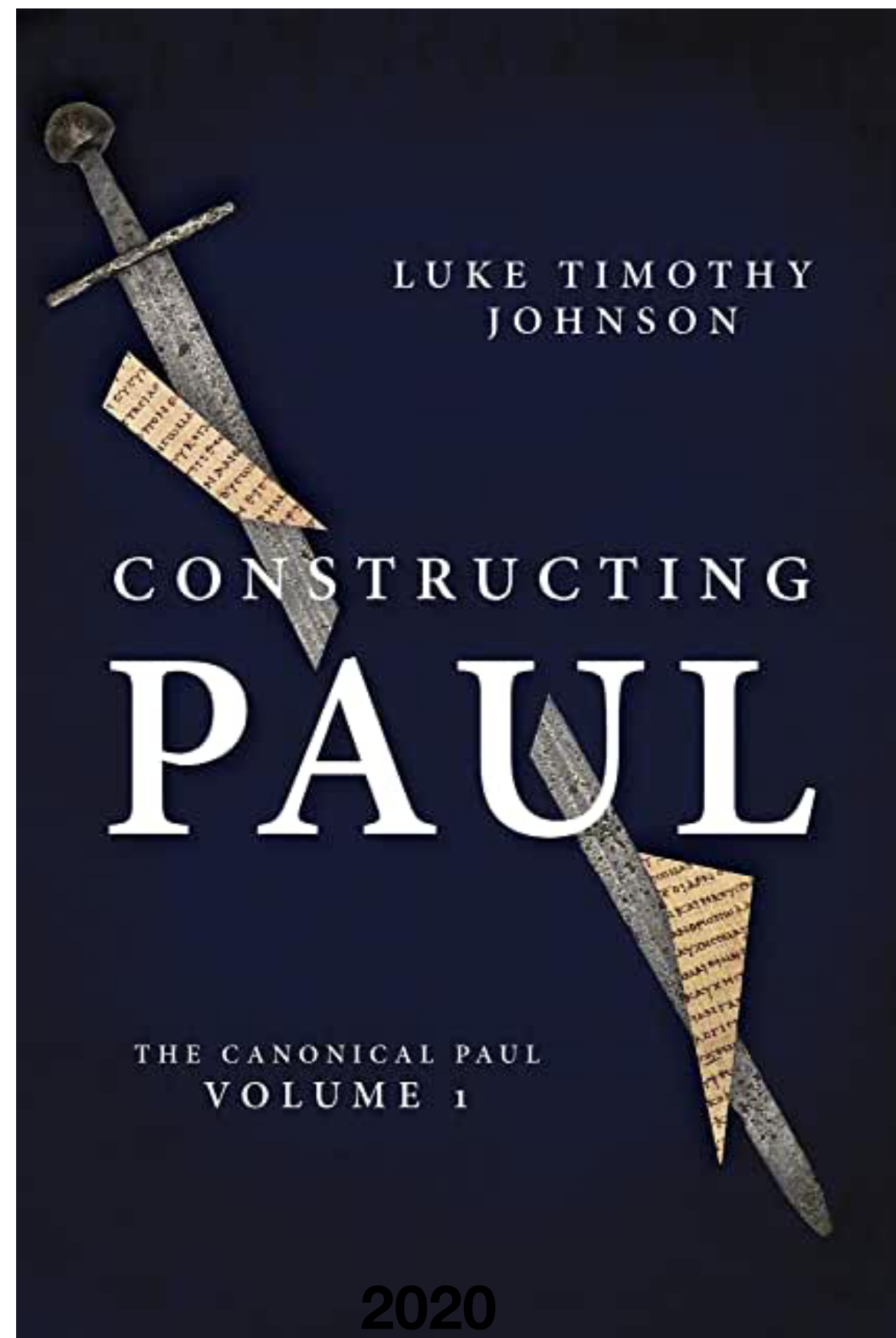
New Perspectives on Paul



2020

“They begin to realize that the ‘Plato’ **they have been taught has been abstracted from certain dialogues and arranged into a logical system that is nowhere to be found as such in the dialogues themselves.** More than that: when they actually begin to read the dialogues in all their particularity and complexity, they begin to discover how much exciting and challenging thought has escaped the usual categories; above all, they find that the true significance of the dialogues lies not in their containing certain doctrines but in their capacity to challenge the mind and give rise to thought.”

New Perspectives on Paul



2020

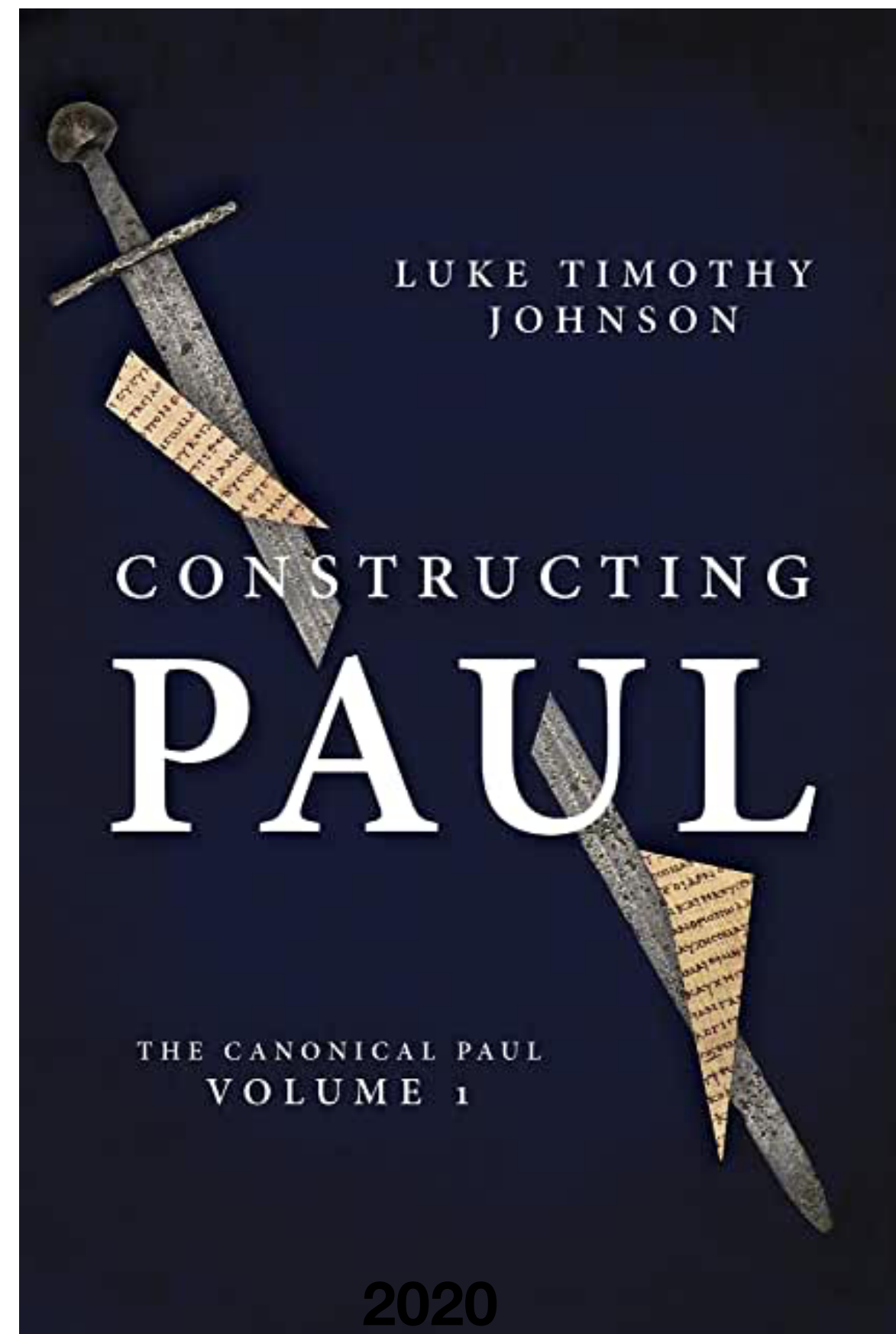
Monothetic

“Pertaining to or based on a single basic idea or principle; describing a classification that is defined by the presence of all of a set of attributes; in mathematics, a monothetic group is a topological with **a dense cyclic subgroups.**” Wikipedia

Polythetic

“(of a class of things) Having many, but not all properties in common.”

New Perspectives on Paul



2020

Monothetic

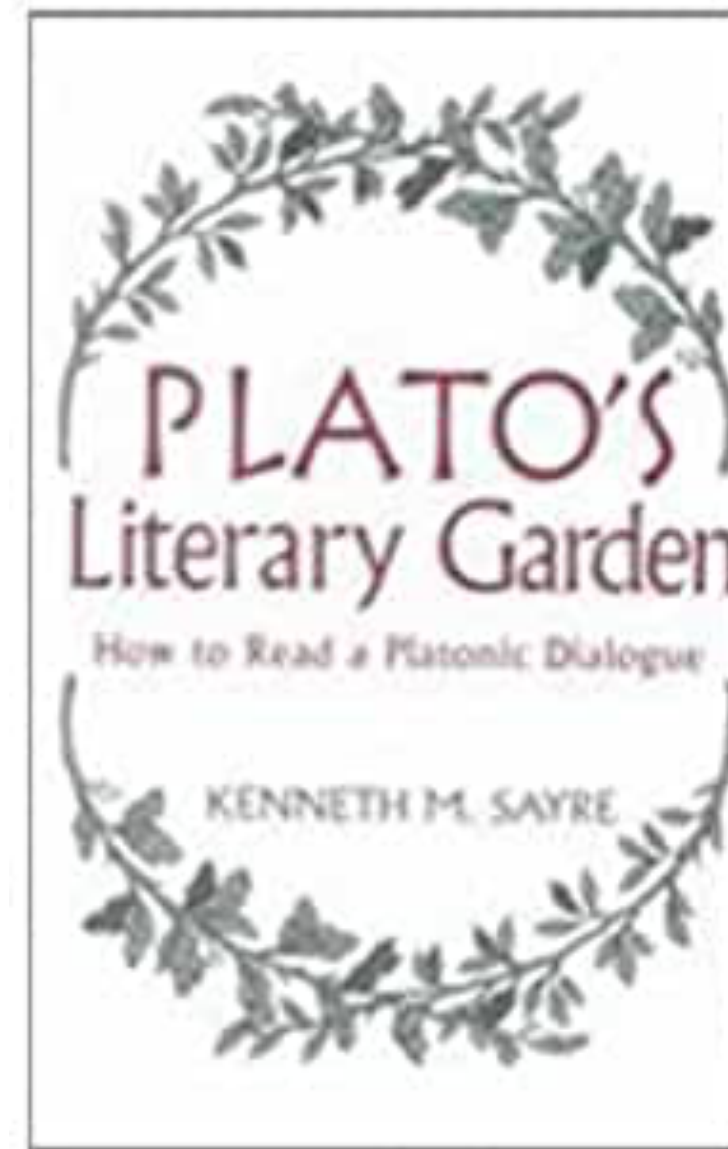
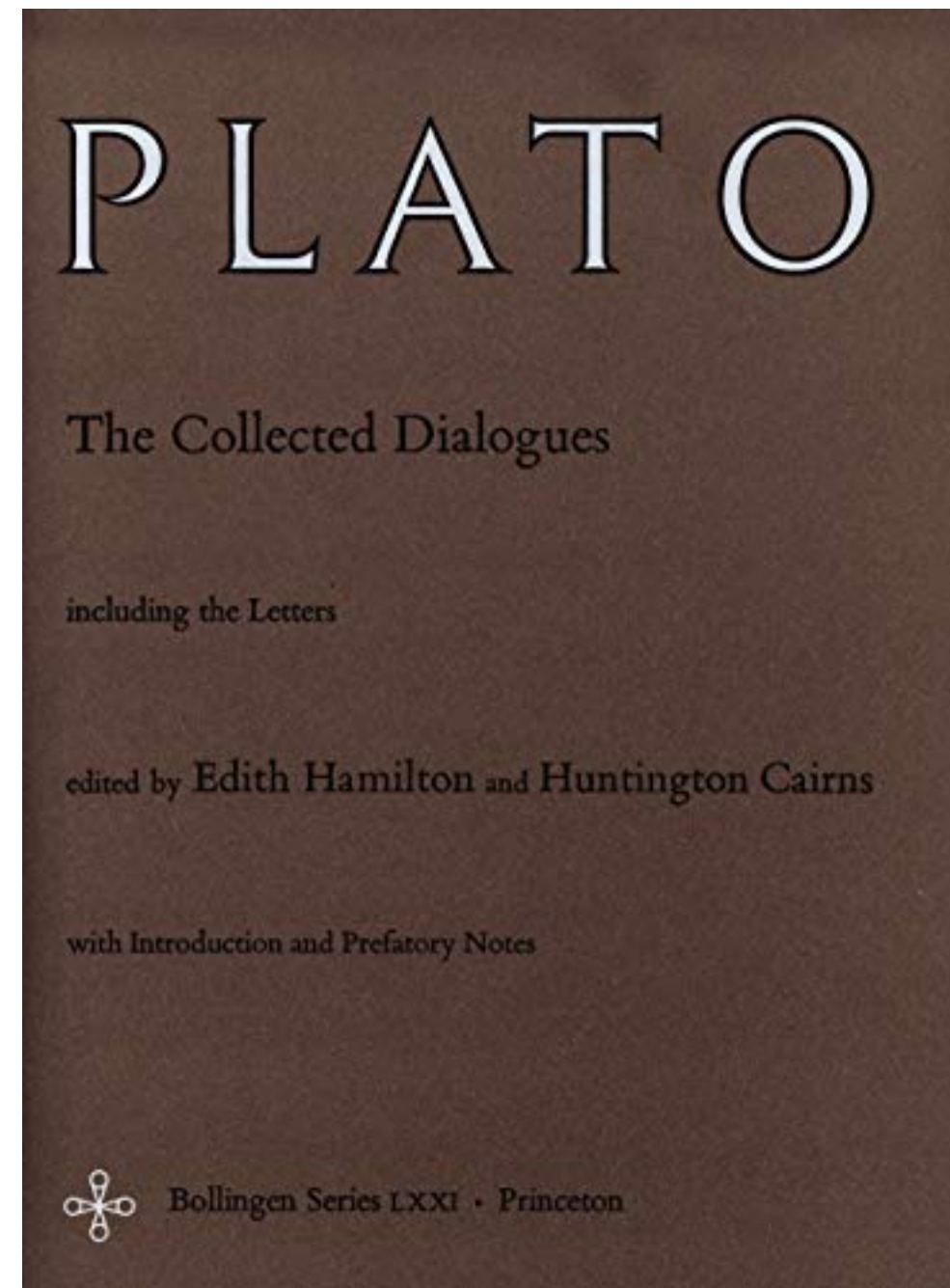
a monothetic group is a topological with a dense cyclic subgroups [Wikipedia](#)

Paul was not writing letters to lay out a set of topics, oftentimes unrelated (systematic theology).

Significance: if they are not all part of each other, then we can construct our own “mind of Christ.”

“dense cyclic subgroups” like *the Gathering* and *the Household* (family of families); without these “cyclical subgroups”

New Perspectives on Paul



Socrates to Plato to Aristotle

Socrates — dialogues only

Plato — The Dialogues

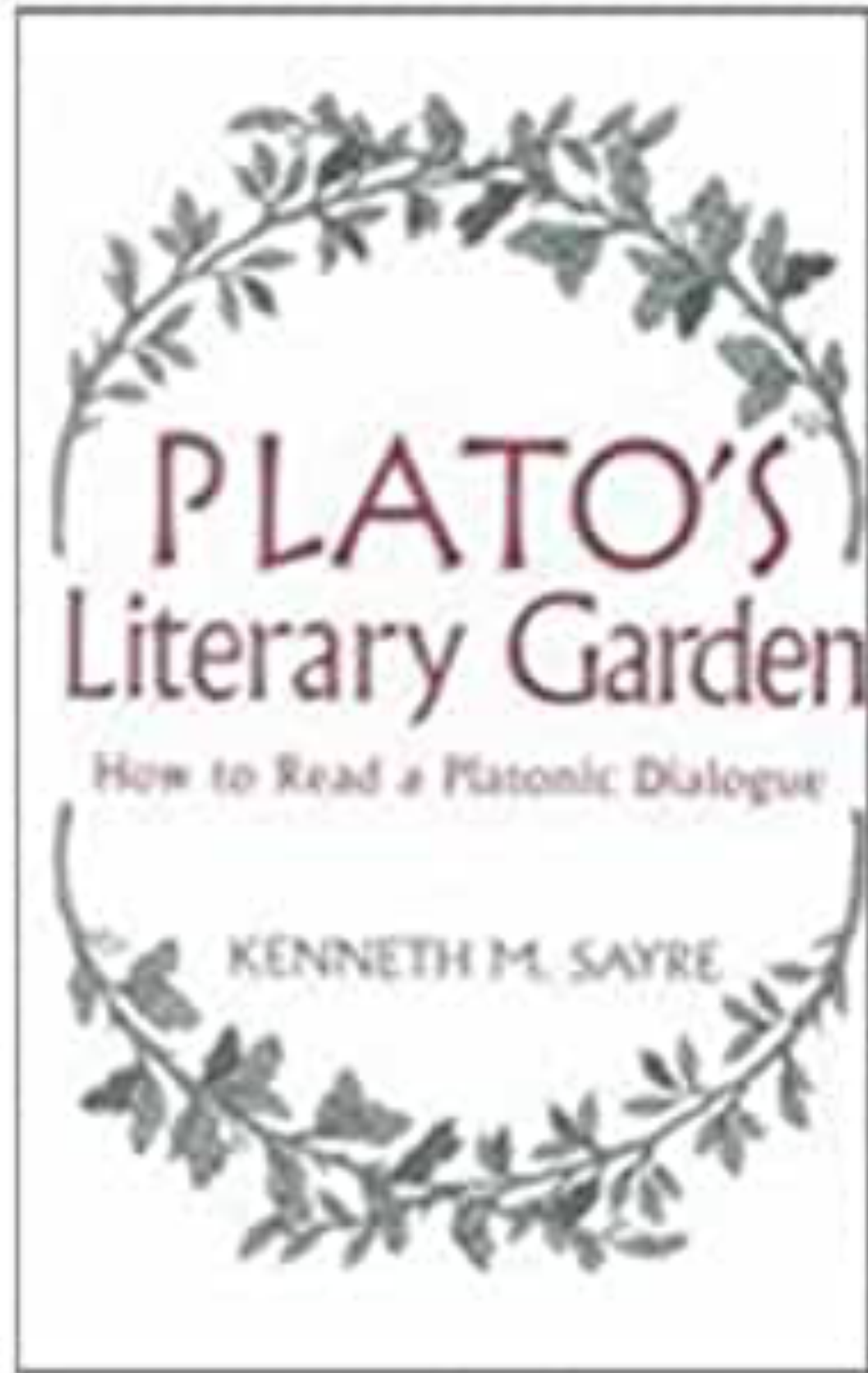
Aristotle — volumes of systematic topics

The first university

Plato's Gardens — The Academy, 390 BCE

Aristotle — The Academy, 20 years later

New Perspectives on Paul



Process

1. Refutation and Irony: Preparing the Ground
2. Reflection and Example: Sowing the Seeds
3. Love and Philosophy: Nourishing the Growth
4. Dialect and Logos: Training the Shoots
5. The Good and the Beautiful: Reaping the Fruits

Paul's Process

Kerygma and Didache (embedded as foundation)

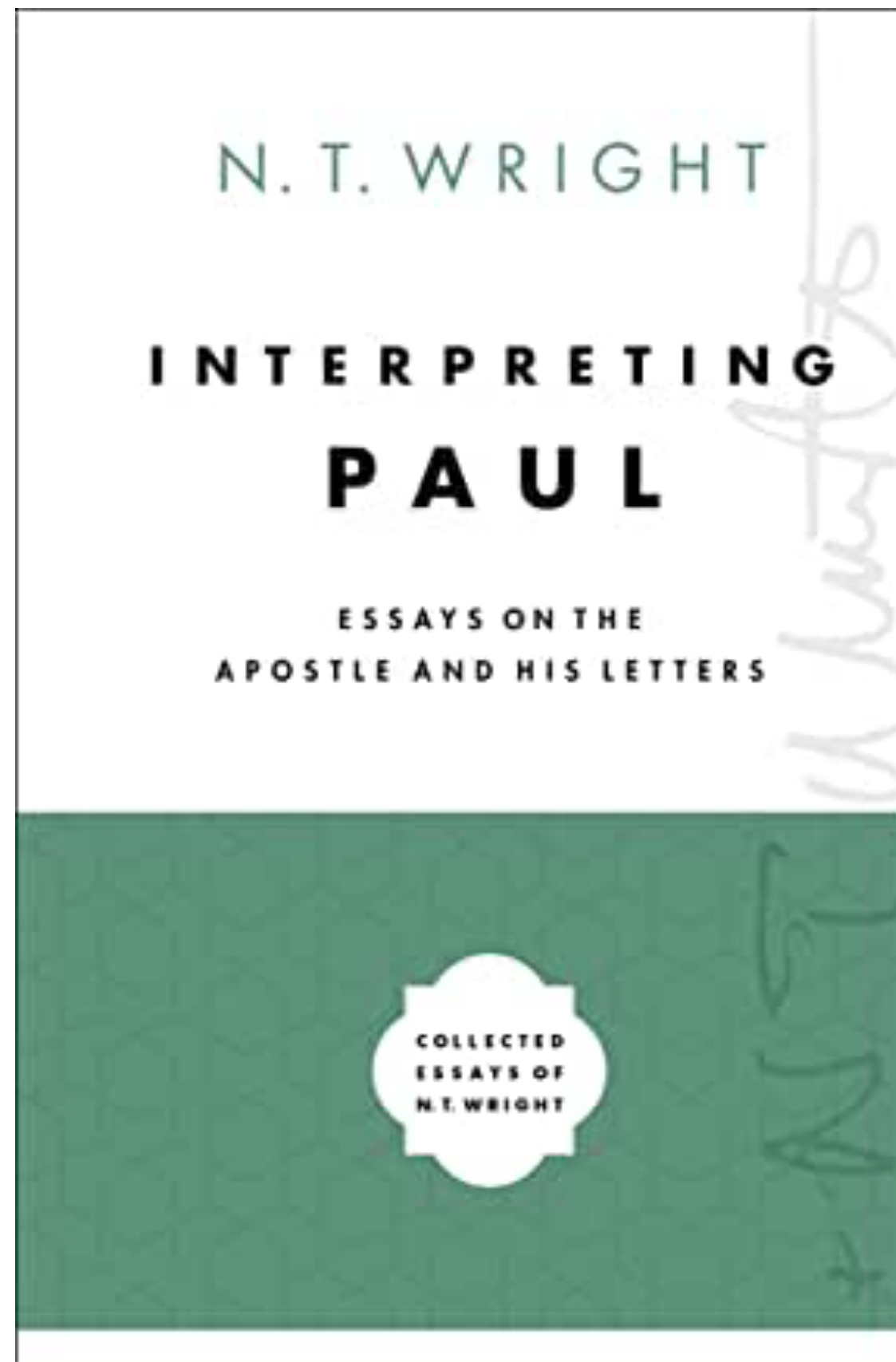
Dialogues

Progressing the Gospel

Establishing Churches and Believers

Training Leaders

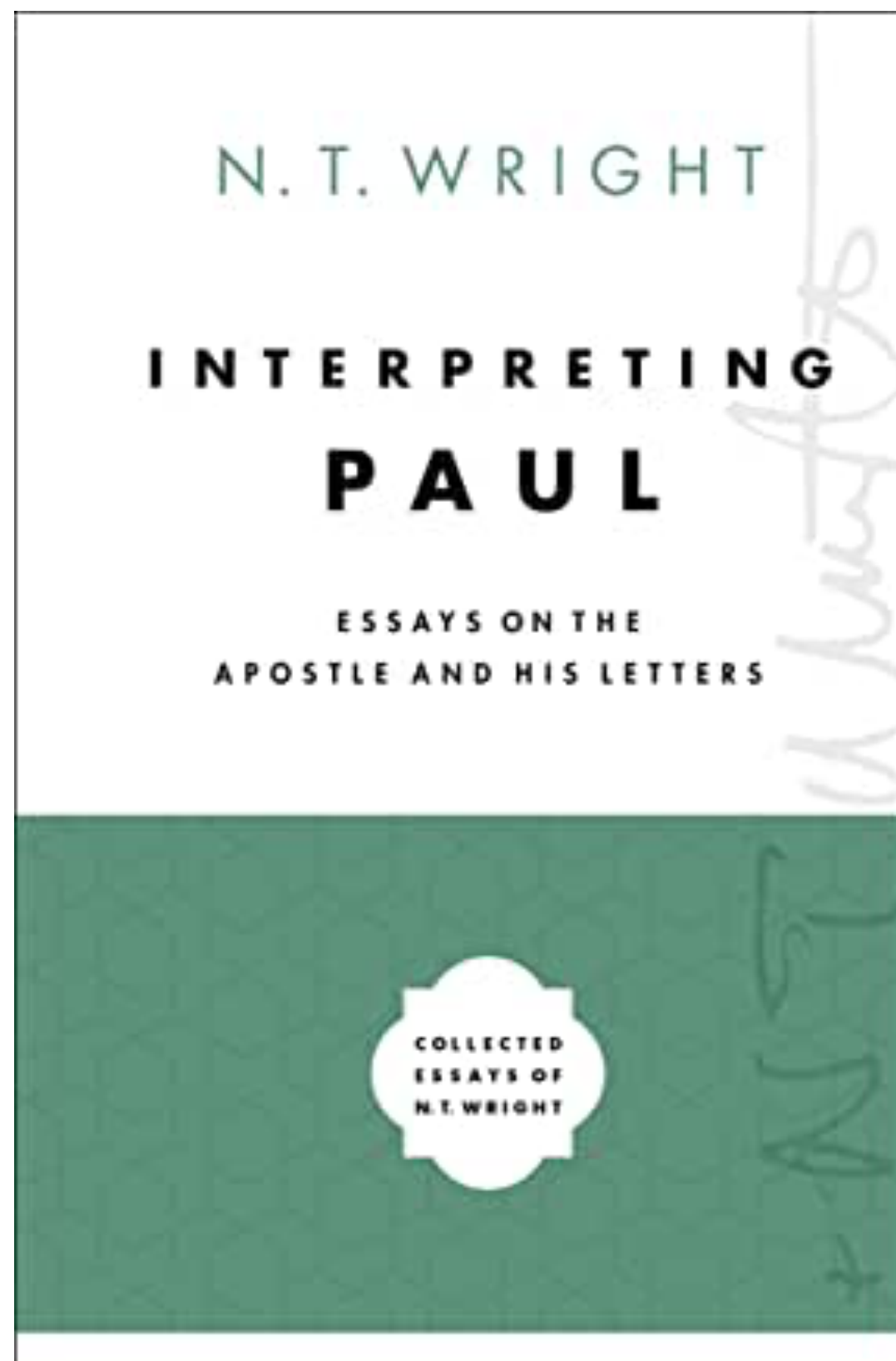
New Perspectives on Paul



2020

But the point was not simply that these topics needed to be worked out – as though a couple of generations might do the hard work, write the books, and leave all subsequent generations to put their feet up and look the answers up when they needed them. No: this theological task is, for Paul, **the ongoing task to which the whole community**, and every member of it, must be devoted.

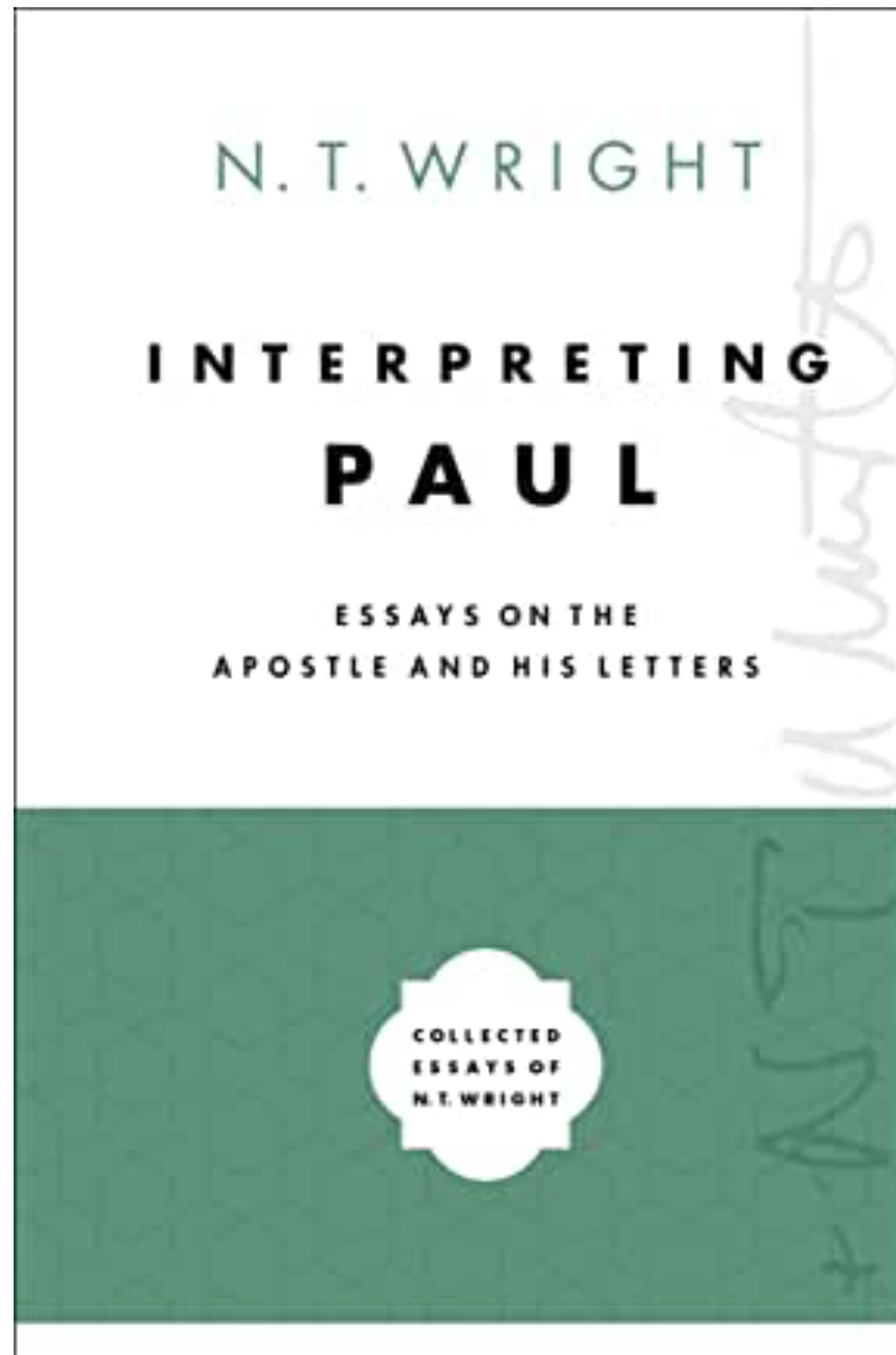
New Perspectives on Paul



2020

Here is the **genius of Paul's vision**: as he says in Colossians, to warn everyone and teach everyone in all wisdom, in order to present everyone mature in the Messiah. Or, in 1 Corinthians: be babies when it comes to evil, but in your thinking be grown-ups. Or, in Romans: do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. For Paul, theology was the task of the whole church, each one contributing his or her particular gifts. It was constantly rooted and grounded in worship and prayer, and we can see that going on in Paul's letters themselves, as some of his greatest theological formulations look very much like prayers and hymns.

New Perspectives on Paul

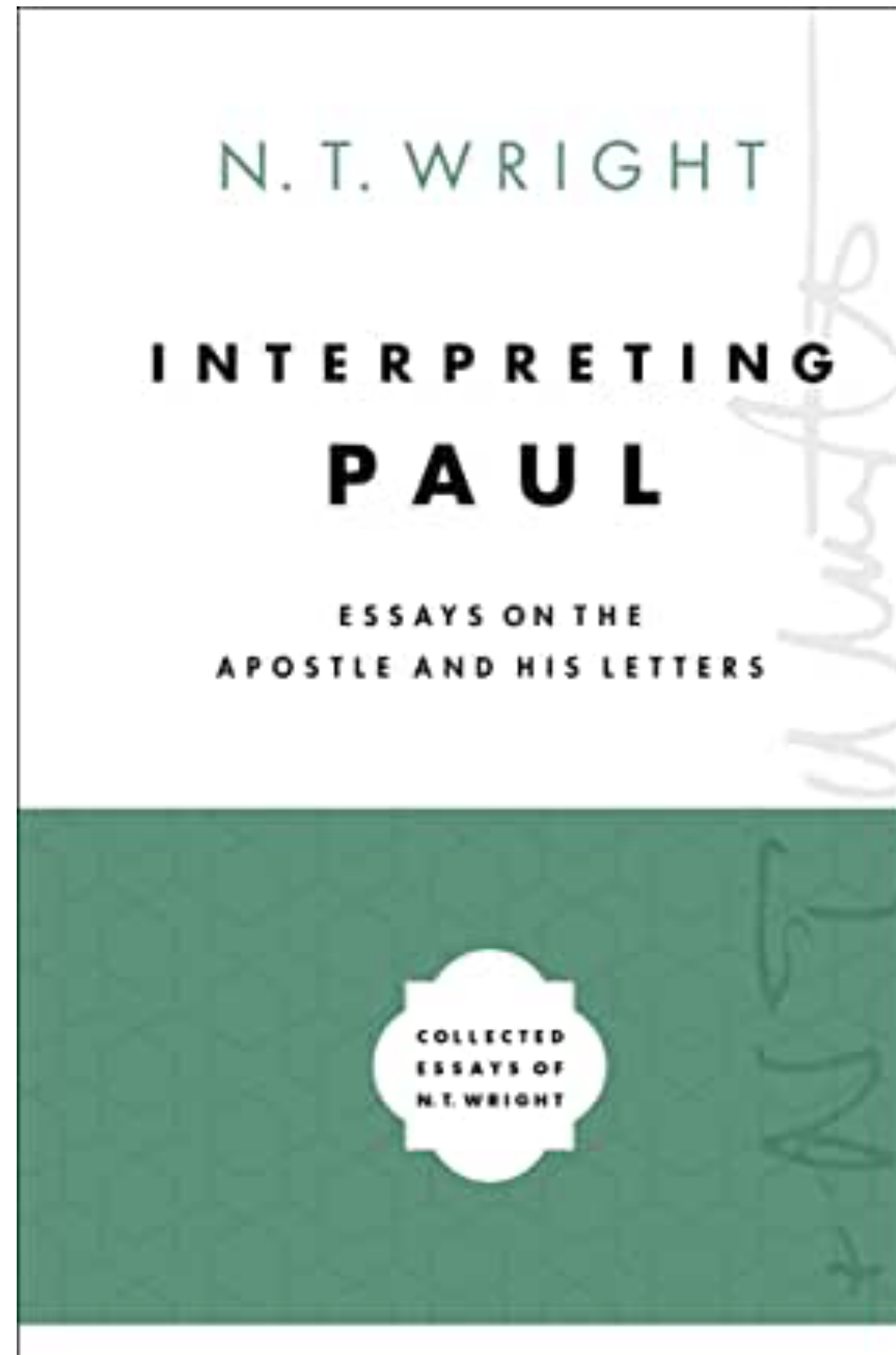


2020

Each community, then, and each generation, has to engage in the same exercise, the same discipline, the same activity; because this activity, this theologizing, is [156] what will enable the central symbol to stand firm. It's hard enough trying to get a Christian community to be both united and holy. Trying to do so without prayerful, scriptural theology is simply impossible. If you don't believe me, look around the western world today.

“Historical Paul and “Systematic Theology””: To Start a Discussion” ch. 7

New Perspectives on Paul



2020

- 1 A New Perspective on Käsemann? Apocalyptic, Covenant, and the Righteousness of God
- 2 Justification by (Covenantal) Faith to the (Covenantal) Doers: Romans 2 within the Argument of the Letter
- 3 How and Why Paul **Invented 'Christian Theology'**
- 4 How Greek Was Paul's Eschatology?
- 5 Paul's Western Missionary Project: Jerusalem, Rome, Spain in Historical and Theological Perspectives
- 6 The Glory Returns: Spirit, Temple and Eschatology in Paul and John
- 7 Historical Paul and 'Systematic Theology': **To Start a Discussion**
- 8 Paul and Missional Hermeneutics
- 9 God Put Jesus Forth: Reflections on Romans 3.24–26
- 10 A Poem Doubled: Pauline Reflections on Theology and Poetry
- 11 The Challenge of **Fraternity in Paul**
- 12 Learning from Paul Together: How New Insights into Paul's Teaching Can Help Move Us Forward in Mission

New Perspectives on Paul

The Process of Building Strong Churches



**Paul's Early
Letters**

**Strong in the
Gospel**

**Paul's Middle
Letters**

**Strong in the
Mission/Vision of the
Church**

**Paul's Later
Letters**

**Strong Mature
Households and
Leaders**

1986

New Perspectives on Paul

In these 10 long years and 6 letters we get a full understanding of the gospel, with all of its major implications.

The organizing center of these letters:

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel, the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, in accordance with the unveiling of the mystery kept hidden for long ages ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings, according to the command of the eternal God, for the obedience of faith among all the nations —²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus the Messiah, to whom be the glory to the coming ages! Amen. Romans 16:25–27 (N. T. Wright)

New Perspectives on Paul

Paul wants to add to their understanding of the gospel by bringing them a complete proclamation,

which will secure, clarify, or build a comprehensive defense of the gospel for them—thus establishing them completely.

New Perspectives on Paul

In these 2 compact years and 4 small letters we get a full revelation of Christ's Church, which had never before been fully revealed.

The organizing center of these letters:

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3:7–10

New Perspectives on Paul

Paul lays out his job description very clearly

Paul's 2-fold job description:

1. Preach the gospel to the Gentiles (a 10-year battle for the gospel)
2. Fully reveal the heart of Christ's grand strategy—the Church

New Perspectives on Paul

In these final letters to his key men and 3 small letters we get a completion of the process and guidelines for fully establishing churches as a family of families.

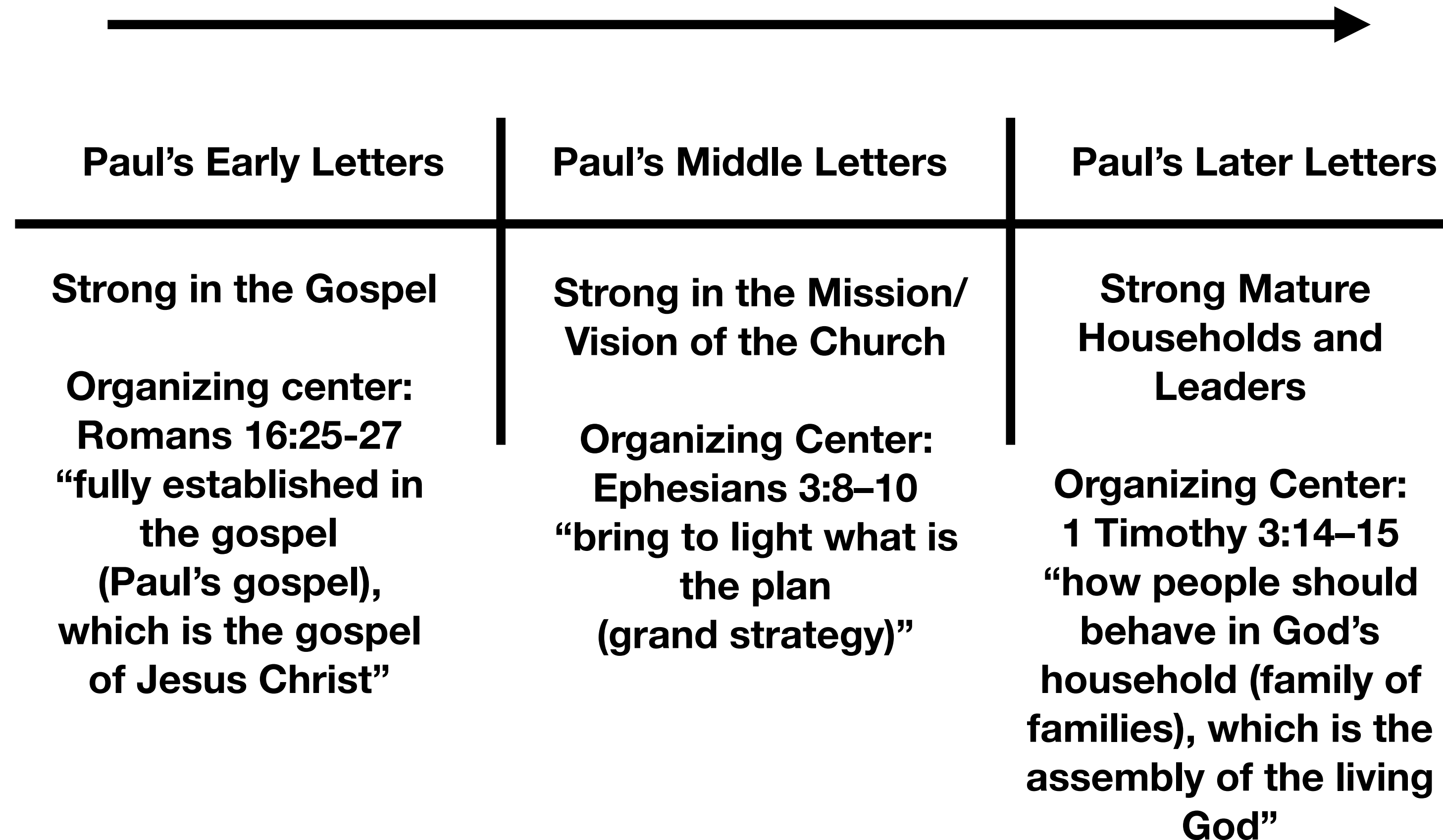
The organizing center of these letters:

¹⁴ I'm writing this to you in the hope that I'll be able to come to you in the near future. ¹⁵ But, if I'm delayed, this will help you to know how people should behave in God's household, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and firm foundation of the truth.

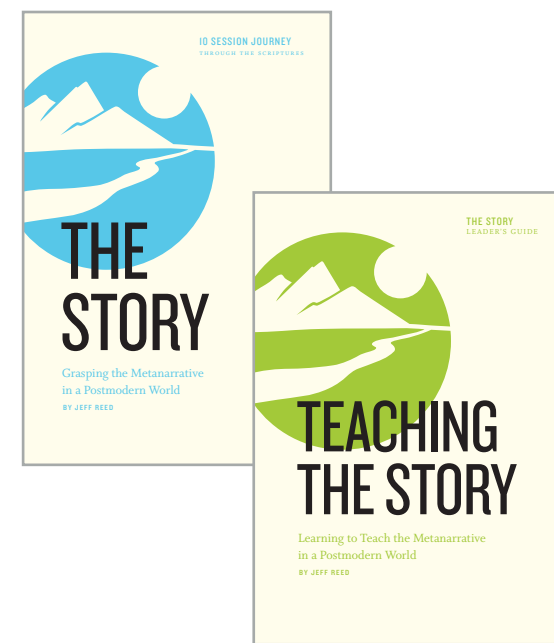
1 Timothy 3:14–15

New Perspectives on Paul

The Process of Building Strong Churches



New Perspectives on Paul



Kerygma
Early Acts
Apostles' Teaching
6 months
Paul: 3 years "night and day"



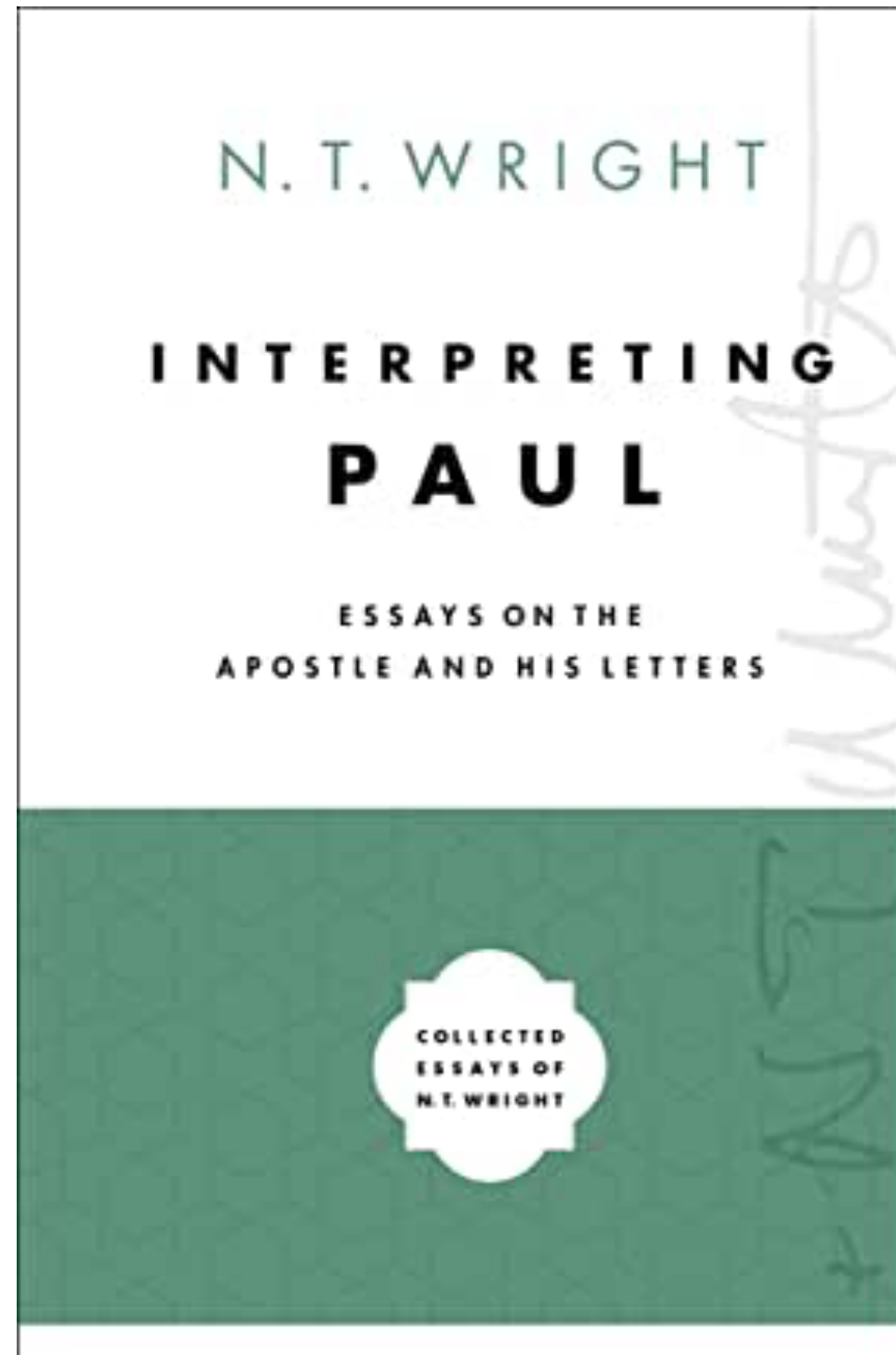
Didache
Body of Acts
Theology of Paul
1½ years



Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year



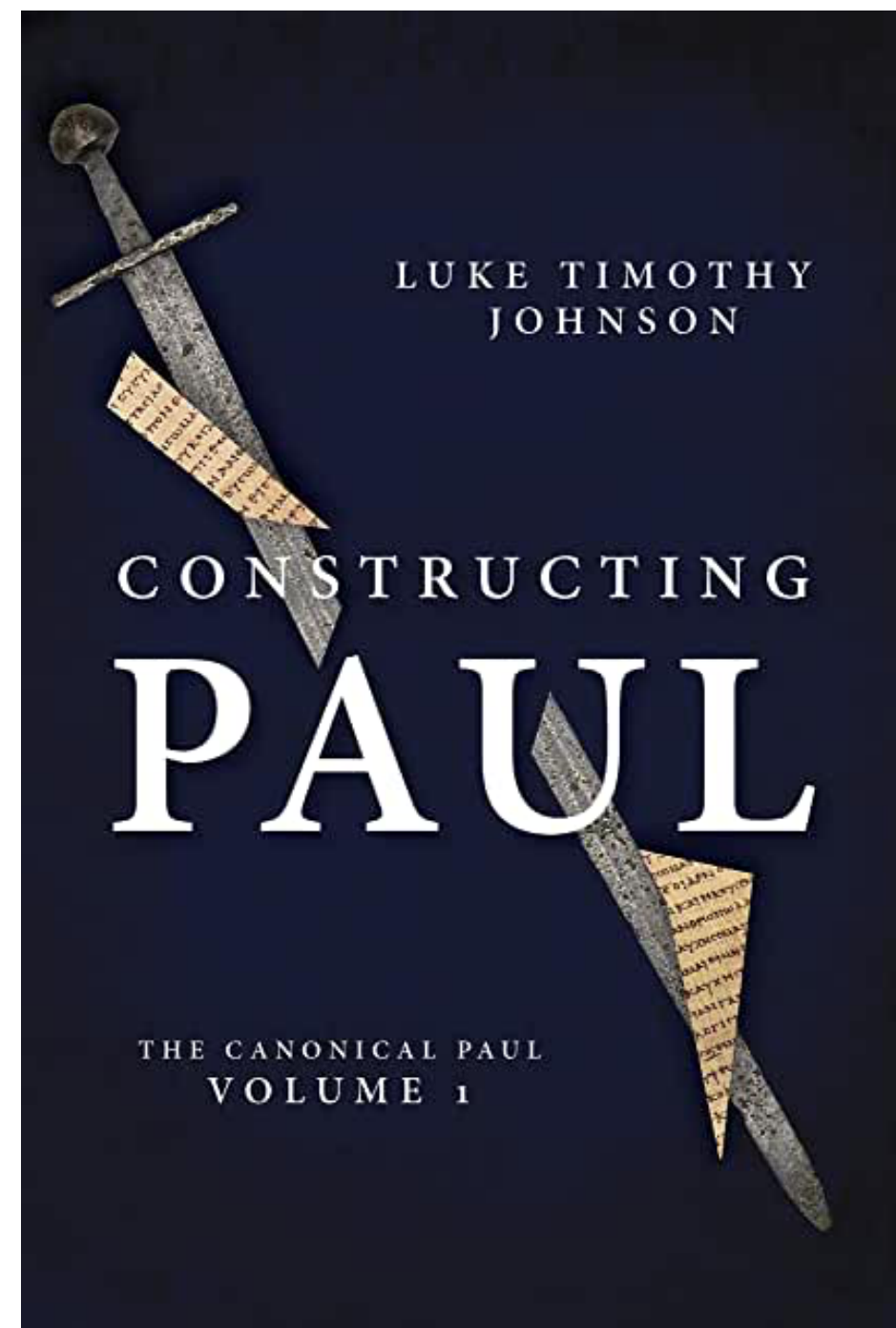
New Perspectives on Paul—Evangelical



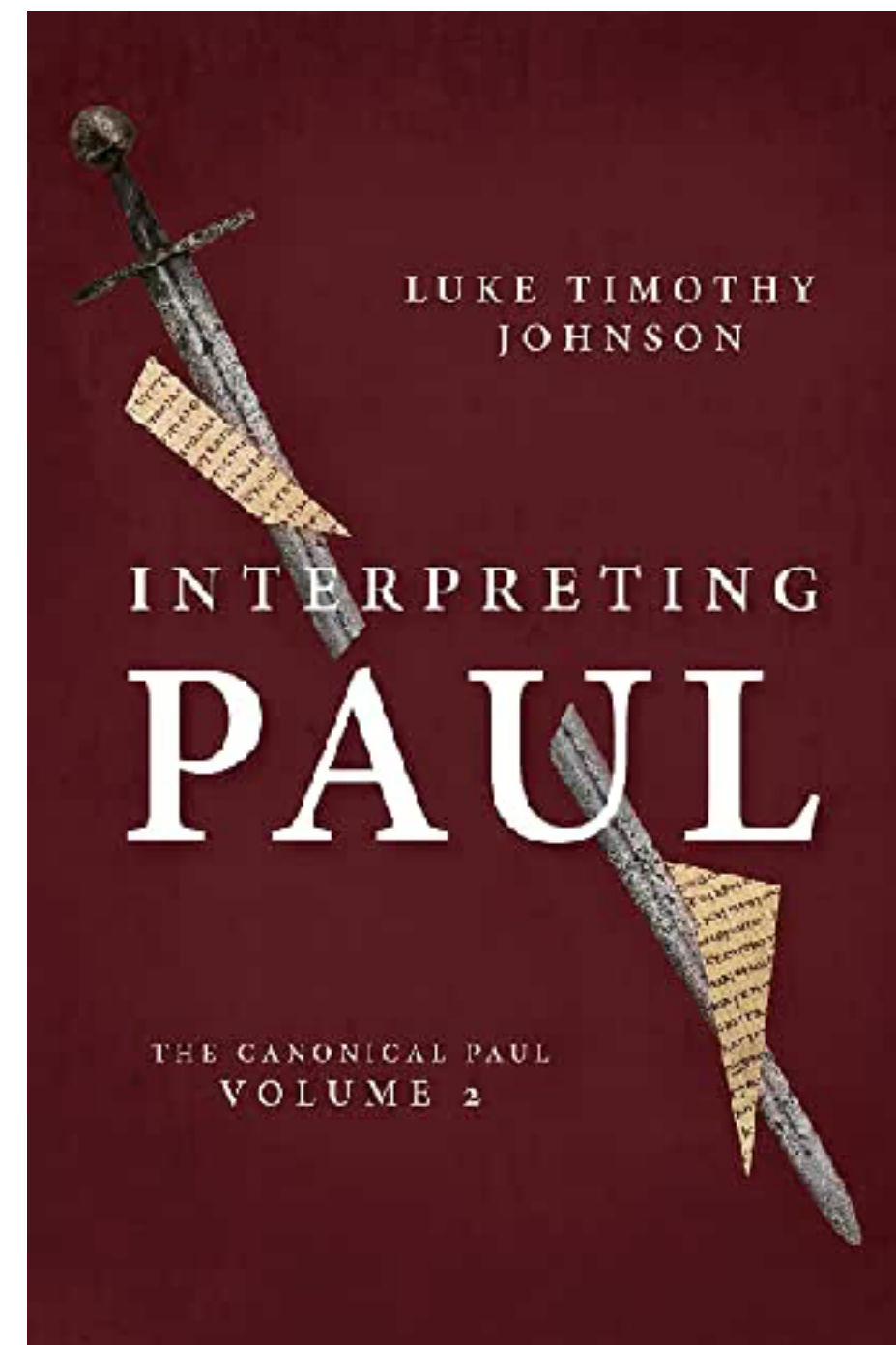
2020

- 1 A New Perspective on Käsemann? Apocalyptic, Covenant, and the Righteousness of God
- 2 Justification by (Covenantal) Faith to the (Covenantal) Doers: Romans within the Argument of the Letter
- 3 How and Why Paul **Invented** ‘Christian Theology’**
- 4 How Greek Was Paul’s Eschatology?
- 5 Paul’s Western Missionary Project: Jerusalem, Rome, Spain in Historical and Theological Perspectives**
- 6 The Glory Returns: Spirit, Temple and Eschatology in Paul and John
- 7 Historical Paul and ‘Systematic Theology’: **To Start a Discussion****
- 8 Paul and Missional Hermeneutics**
- 9 God Put Jesus Forth: Reflections on Romans 3.24–26
- 10 A Poem Doubled: Pauline Reflections on Theology and Poetry
- 11 The Challenge of Fraternity in Paul
- 12 Learning from Paul Together: How New Insights into Paul’s Teaching Can Help Move Us Forward in Mission**

New Perspectives on Paul—Catholic



2020



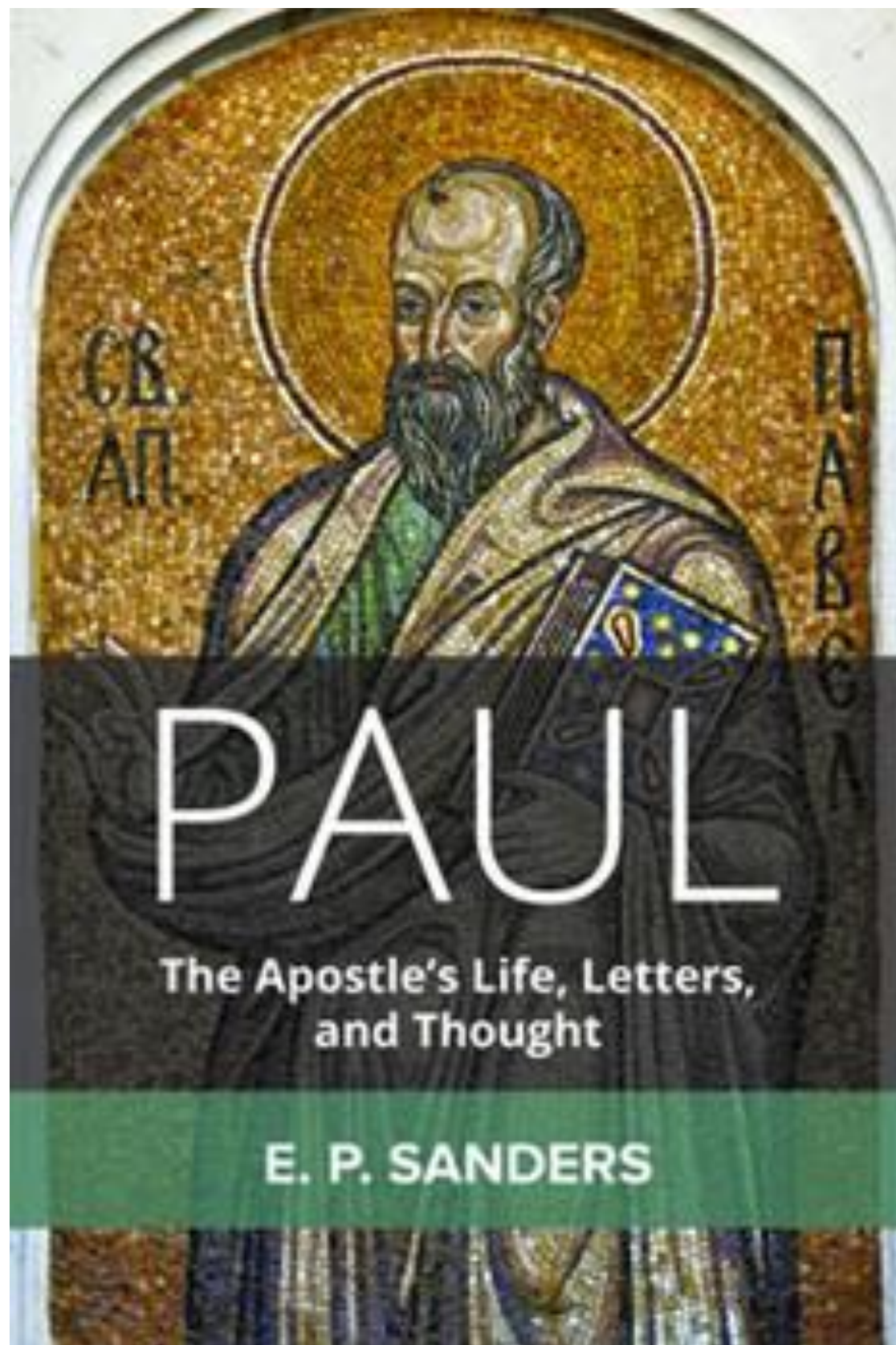
2021

His second book has 23 examples of “doing theology in Paul’s letters.”

It raises a very refined process of doing biblical or Pauline theology.

Incredible example.

New Perspectives on Paul—Liberal



2015

Two amazing chapters open the future for a more in-depth treatment of Paul's theology and design with many more issues:

6. On Reading Paul's Letters: Introductory Remarks
7. 1 Thessalonians: Part I: A Tutorial on Analyzing Paul's Letters

24 chapters on doing theology in Paul's letters

New Perspectives on Paul

Foundational to entire New Testament

- Written before all other letters and Gospels
- Not a set of systematic theology topics, which fragment
- In fact, his *collection of letters* is a *topoi*—they are a series of topics that are always integrated with any given topics in his letters.
- We have to get our minds around the entire Pauline corpus.
- If we do, we are on our way to possessing the mind of Christ and developing the ability to think creatively, as Paul did, in our cultural situations (hermeneutically-trained judgment, theology in community).
- New insights, new questions
- NextGen and 3rd Gen leaders will visit this, every new series.

New Perspectives on Paul

Teaching the Next 5 years (Crow's nest)_

- Tight, 30–40 minutes
- No intro or conclusion
- Michael and I, introduction
- Michael and I, conclusion
- Very different style
- Core video for global partners
- Designed to discuss in churches
- Next 9 months: over 100 leaders, mostly in this room, must become solid as we start these 5 years

Paul's Letters

Issue: New Perspectives on Paul

Questions:

1. What is the significance of Paul being a “coherent, but not systematic, thinker”?
2. Why did Paul give us his theology in letter form—situational letters in the form of conversations with his churches and his key “Timothies”?
3. What might happen if we ignore the form of his theology and, instead, treat his letters as mere containers of verses to be strung together as abstract topics?
4. What does Paul's form of doing theology, in his churches and with his leaders, have to do with learning to think biblically?