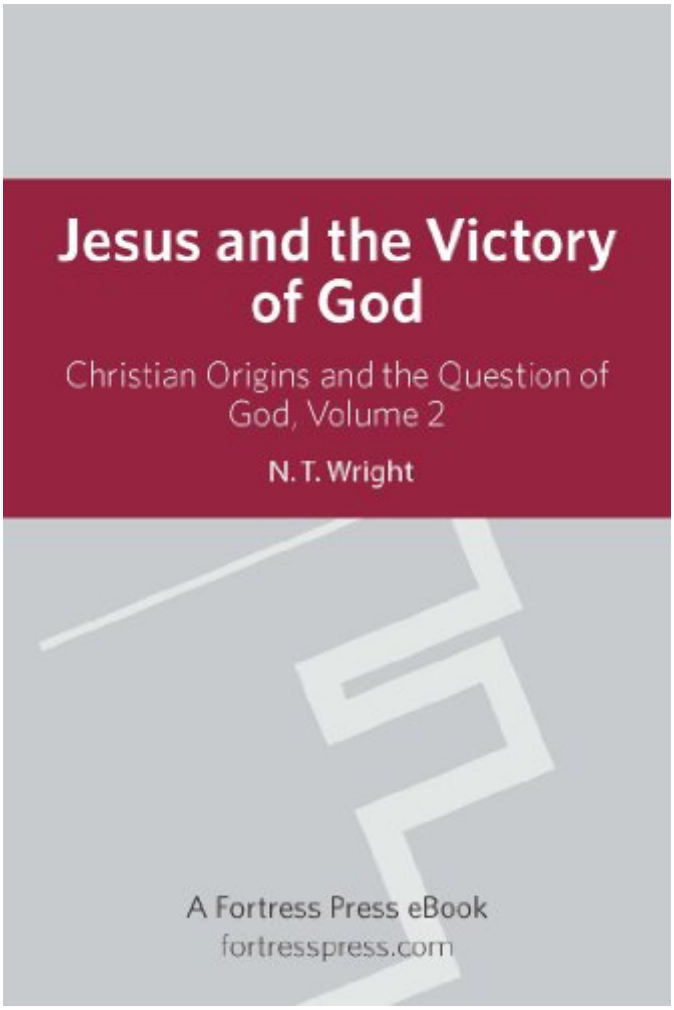
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Jesus Victory Of God V2: Christian Origins And The Question Of God



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Synopsis

In this highly anticipated volume, N. T. Wright focuses directly on the historical Jesus: Who was he? What did he say? And what did he mean by it?Wright begins by showing how the questions posed by Albert Schweitzer a century ago remain central today. Then he sketches a profile of Jesus in terms of his prophetic praxis, his subversive stories, the symbols by which he reordered his world, and the answers he gave to the key questions that any world view must address. The examination of Jesus' aims and beliefs, argued on the basis of Jesus' actions and their accompanying riddles, is sure to stimulate heated response. Wright offers a provocative portrait of Jesus as Israel's Messiah who would share and bear the fate of the nation and would embody the long-promised return of Israel's God to Zion.

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Customer Reviews

N.T. Wright has been described as one of the premier New Testament scholars of our time. If you've read any of his popular works like the recent The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are

Essential or Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues, you probably already know how good he can be. But in his scholarly series Christian Origins and the Question of God, of which this is the second volume, Mr. Wright's intellectual prowess is given free reign. In this work, Mr. Wright builds off his first volume, The New Testament and the People of God, and examines the historical Jesus. After some introductory chapters on the history of historical Jesus scholarship from Albert Schweitzer to the present, Mr. Wright tries to answer five main questions and a sixth implied question: 1. How does Jesus fit into the Judaism of his day?; 2. What were his aims?; 3. Why did he die?; 4. How did the church come into being and why did it take the shape it did?; 5. Why are the gospels what they are?; and 6. So what? To that end, Mr. Wright does a tremendous job of building upon the foundations he had laid in his first volume and bring Jesus into the context of the times he lived in rather than trying to bend Jesus to the world views of today. By doing so Jesus is revealed to be an ingenious man, fully confident in his calling, who took the cultural symbols, stories, and practices of his time and bent it back to point towards himself as Israel's long-awaited Messiah, if not the one that many first-century Jews were expecting or even hoping for. It is an incredibly three-dimensional historical-theological portrait of Jesus and an incredibly complicated one too. There is a lot technical jargon and citations of apocryphal writings like the Wisdom literature of the intertestamental period and the apocryphal gospels that even many devout lay Christians have probably never read. This was a difficult read for me and I would suggest that you tackle this book after you've familiarized yourself with the major teachings of your church. Aside from its difficulty, I also had two other problems with this work. First, Mr. Wright follows the conventions of past scholars on the topic of the historical Jesus and uses only the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) as his foundational texts with the book of John playing a greater supporting role and the apocryphal gospels less so. Although I recognize that the stark differences in John's gospel compared to the synoptic gospel accounts plus the late date in which John was probably written does mean that John may not have as much to say about the HISTORICAL Jesus and more about the THEOLOGICAL Jesus, I personally find it to be a silly convention and that, if John was good enough for the church fathers to fully include it with the other gospel accounts, who are we to say otherwise? The other problem I had was with Mr. Wright's characterization of Jesus' self-awareness, which occupies chapter 13 of this work. If I understood his point, Mr. Wright contends that Jesus had a notion of himself being called to be Israel's Messiah, but that didn't necessarily mean Jesus thought of himself as the second person of a triune God. Mr. Wright strains himself to declare that that does not mean that Jesus wasn't a part of the Trinity, which would be a breach of one of the foundational teachings of mainstream Christianity since the early church, but by

staking out this position it feels like the beginning of a slippery slope that could lead to a denouncing of the divinity of Christ and the triune God. Plus, when the synoptic gospels are examined in the light of the gospel of John, it does seem to me that Jesus must have thought of himself as in some way divine (which, brings me back to my first criticism above). Some of his self-statements are too bold for him to be anything else (unless Jesus was a liar or insane, the old C.S. Lewis axiom). Of course, New Testament history and theology isn't my primary field of study, so I could very well have misunderstood Mr. Wright's argument. In spite of these concerns, I believe that Mr. Wright has captured the fulness of Christ in the context of his times. This book also provides one of the best historical explanations for why Jesus was crucified (i.e. why did the Sanhedrin hand him over to the Romans to be executed, why did the Romans execute him, and why did Jesus let himself be executed?) If you have the time and the intellectual and spiritual gumption for New Testament scholarship, I highly recommend this book.

An essential book for anyone interested in the historical Jesus; he carefully avoids metaphysical assumptions, either atheistic or Christian, almost buries you in documentation, offers one of the few coherent interpretations of Jesus's life and answers what he thinks are the five basic questions about Jesus: what were his goals, what was his relationship to Judaism, why did he die, what was his relation with the scriptures and with the early church. I know that he has a high reputation among Jesus scholars, deservedly so, and I think that, as far as I'm concern, he is like the Keynes of the study--you can argue for him or against him but not without him. The only criticism, and it's really not one, is that his attempt to place himself in the context of other Jesus scholarship was a bit tedious; necessary, but tedious.

I am refraining from a very lengthy treatment of the topics in Wright's book largely because other reviewers have treated them in such depth. Overall, Wright sets forth an extremely well supported argument, placing Jesus's work in a context of the Jewish prophetic tradition which is completely orthodox yet far from what most would consider "conventional" devotional approaches. He well refutes "Jesus Seminar" types, though his tendency to dismiss prestigious scholars in a few sentences does seem a bit smug at times.My difficulty was in being left with some rather puzzling questions, which is why I withheld a "fifth star." Much of Wright's thesis is built on Jesus's message having been highly grounded in an apocalyptic tradition (which Wright explains clearly and in depth), and on its being quite revolutionary (in the sense of "going against the grain," not inciting to violence.) Wright develops two points in this category - first, that Jesus's message greatly used

familiar images yet presented them in a fashion which was shocking because it "re-wrote" the underlying tales of exodus and vindication and applied them to Himself. Secondly, Wright sets forth that these messages had to be carefully cloaked or they would have incited the people to riot. He particularly uses the parables' messages to illustrate both themes.Unless the first-century hearers had read Tom Wright's work, there are several, glaring loose ends in this argument. However familiar images of exodus, exile, and restoration may have been, and however well embedded in the thought of scholars at Qumran, it does not seem credible that an audience of fishermen, carpenters, and tent-makers would have immediately connected the parable of the Prodigal Son with the images of Israel and Jesus as the deliverer King which Wright develops. Indeed, the Temple scholars may have seen the subtle message, but how would this cause a general riot, particularly if the message was deliberately obscure?Many sections of the book are true "eye openers," particularly those dealing with the prophetic and apocalyptic aspects of Jesus's ministry. It is generally a brilliant work, well-suited for personal reading but also for use as a university or adult education text.

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