

I have nearly finished making all the revisions for the sixth edition of my textbook, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. It has taken me a lot longer than I thought it would, much to my chagrin. But it is soon over. I hope to have it sent off next week.

Several readers have asked what I've changed this time around. Here is (part of) my new Preface, that explains how I originally imagined the book and what I've done differently in this iteration.

Preface

When I started doing research on the first edition of this textbook, twenty years ago now, I had very clear ideas about what I wanted it to be. First and foremost, I wanted to approach the New Testament from a rigorously historical perspective. It is not that I had any difficulties at the time, either professionally or personally, with introductions that were more geared toward theology, or exegesis, or literary criticism. But I wanted my book to be different. I wanted to situate the writings of the New Testament more thoroughly, than was typically done, in the historical, cultural, social, political, literary, and ideological worlds from which they emerged; I wanted it to plow deeply to find clues not only about such traditional issues as authorship, sources, and dates, but also about what was then still a vibrant field of study, social history. I wanted to ask historical questions of the texts and of the events that they either narrated or presupposed. I was interested in the history of the text and the formation of the canon of the New Testament. In the historical Jesus. In the historical Paul. In the history of the Johannine community. In the historical realities lying behind Matthew, and 2 Corinthians, and Revelation.

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