

history will detract from an otherwise important investigation.

SUSAN ACKERMAN  
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE  
HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

## **Telling Tales about Jesus: An Introduction to the New Testament Gospels**

by *Warren Carter*

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. 304 pp. \$39.00.  
ISBN 978-1-4514-6545-7.

WARREN CARTER ADDRESSES the theological student who is engaging the Gospels for the first time. His popular style will appeal to the contemporary student, as it includes colorful phrases (like “Jesus’ wobbly followers”; p. 59), analogies to the game show *Jeopardy!* (p. 151), and humor (e.g., the abbreviation Q “has nothing to do with James Bond”; p. 41). Before tackling the canonical Gospels directly, Carter provides two preliminary chapters, one situating the Gospels within the genre of ancient Greco-Roman biography, with one major twist: the Gospels do not concentrate on an “elite” character (p. 18). In the second, more technical chapter, Carter takes up the issue of the oral tradition that preceded the written Gospel stories.

Carter then devotes two chapters to each of the canonical Gospels. In chs. 3, 5, 7, and 9 he takes a literary approach, describing “the tale” each Gospel “tells.” He concentrates on differences and why such narrative distinctions matter to the thematic presentation and underlying historical context likely addressed. A few (debatable) surprises emerge: there was no widespread expectation about the Messiah in the first century (p. 51); the first major narrative segment of Mark ends at 8:30, rather than at 8:21 or 8:26; and the term “sinners” was a cultural slur for “anybody someone did not like” (p. 186).

In chs. 4, 6, 8, and 10, Carter applies a different methodological approach to each Gospel in order to identify its key themes: social history to

Mark (ch. 4); redaction to Matthew (ch. 6); and intertextuality to John (ch. 10). The “thematic” approach he utilizes on Luke’s Gospel (ch. 8) overlaps with his literary discussion in ch. 7. As in prior publications, Carter highlights the Roman world as a constant in the story: “the language of ‘good news’ is also empire talk” (p. 52). Yet Carter also recognizes irony when “God out-Romes Rome” (p. 203). In chapter eleven, Carter addresses two final concerns: how these four Gospels became part of the canon, and the relationships between the Gospels and the historical Jesus.

Carter considers each Gospel story “a word on target” that performs “pastoral work among followers of Jesus” (p. 76). With this in mind, I highly recommend this volume to teachers who offer introductory courses on the canonical Gospels in seminary settings and theologically-engaged college classrooms. Sidebars enhance the chapters—especially discussions comparing one Gospel’s narrative structure to another’s. More “color” images, charts, and graphs would have been useful for some classroom settings. Questions at the end of each chapter will help facilitate classroom discussion and reflection.

EMERSON B. POWERY  
MESSIAH COLLEGE  
MECHANICSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

## **Discovering Matthew: Content, Interpretation, Reception**

by *Ian Boxall*

Discovering Biblical Texts. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 215 pp. \$22.00.  
ISBN 978-0-8028-7238-8.

IN THIS MASTERFUL INTRODUCTION to the Gospel of Matthew, Ian Boxall modestly aims “to open up some of the questions posed by, and to, this multifaceted text, and some of the different strategies interpreters have used to provide some answers” (p. 175). He more than succeeds in this endeavor, providing one of the best