

Review – Carson, Moo - An Introduction to the New Testament

This is a “special introduction” dealing with historical questions, authorship, date, sources, purpose, destination, etc. (9). This book was written for 1st and 2nd year seminary students (9). This 2nd edition replaces the 1992 version which included Leon Morris. His chapters have been divided between Carson and Moo in this new edition, which is expanded and updated.

The first chapter, “Thinking About the Study of the New Testament,” sketches a brief history of the treatment of the NT, and its doctrines, from the writing of the NT to the present age. He also gives a brief discussion of different schools of criticism, be they literary, rhetorical, sociological, or deconstructionist. He concludes that atheistic methods can only get so far in NT study, a certain level of knowledge is only available to insiders (76). He proposes that one address the NT historical questions in a way which is relevant to the current age, and takes history into account (76).

Chapter 2 deals with the Synoptic Gospels. He begins with a discussion of form criticism (Dibelius, Bultmann, Taylor). After presentation he levels several criticisms against this approach, before moving to a presentation of source criticism. Carson/Moo conclude that the 2 source hypothesis is the best solution to the Synoptic Problem (Mark and Q, 103). They favor a tempered redactional-critical approach that maintains historicity while allowing unique authors to shape the presentation of those events (112). Next, they discuss chronology, acknowledging that the Synoptics do not give all the data. Jesus was 'about thirty at the beginning of his ministry'; ministered for at least 2 years; and likely died in AD 30 (contra Hoehner).

Chapter 3 deals with Matthew's Gospel. He modifies the 5 fold theory, adding 2 more sections, for a total of 7, based on perceived literary markers. Noting the more critical views of authorship, Carson/Moo accepts Guthrie's argument based on Papias' evidence. He suggests Syria as the place of authorship, though admits this is uncertain. They choose a time before AD 70. The book was written to *all* Christians, for the purpose of catechizing the church (158). Matthew contributes a new perspective on the law, and about 14 OT uses not in other gospels.

Chapter 4 deals with Mark. They find no compelling reason to reject traditional Markan authorship (177). It was likely written in Rome in the late 50's to early 60's, because Paul's epistles do not seem to know of it, and the book of Mark does not seem to know of the sacking of Jerusalem. The book was written to Gentile Christians, probably in Rome, in order to present who Jesus is/was, and what real discipleship involves. He does not think the ending to Mark is original.

Chapter 5 deals with Luke. They follow the traditional authorship, but are open on the matter of provenance. It was written before AD 70, because Luke doesn't mention several things which happened in the late 60's, and is favorable toward Rome. Luke writes to anyone who might fit into the category of “lover of God,” though he maintains *Theophilus* could be a real person. He agrees with the embedded purpose statement in the book. The book contributes a central idea of God's overarching plan for the world.

In Chapter 6, they argue for the traditional authorship of John – mainly by pointing out the weaknesses in other arguments, though some space is given to their own positive argument. The authors conclude that several arguments for provenance are equally compelling, and choose to side with tradition, that the book was written in Ephesus. They think it was written between AD 80-85, because of the apparent concern with nascent Gnosticism. They think it was written to Diaspora Jews (271). John contributes a distinct Jewish-ness to the gospel picture of Christ.

In dealing with Acts, as mentioned above, they choose traditional authorship, and a date not long after AD 62. They call it a sort of history, written to the same audience as that of Luke. He concedes that the speeches may be paraphrases, but considers them an accurate rendering of their contents (320).

Chapter 8 deals with the whole of the New Testament Letters. He places them in the context of their Greco-Roman background. They comment that even Guthrie's theory of Timothy as the collector of Paul's letters is speculative, and avoid similar conclusions. Instead, they argue that the question is

open, and that 1 Clement (AD 96), may imply the works had been collected (336). They evaluate the evidence for pseudonymity and find it wanting. Then Chapter 9 moves to discuss Paul. They construct a chronology based upon internal evidence in Paul's writings and Acts. Then they look for external confirmations so as to calibrate the dating. Then the discussion turns to the New Perspective on Paul. The authors are ultimately critical of the New Perspective, preferring to nuance an understanding so that justification by faith is understood to be a part of Paul's teaching from the beginning (385).

Chapter 10 deals with Romans, which was written to Gentile Christians in Rome (398). They think all the material is Pauline, even the doxology. The letter was written from Greece ca. AD 57. Its theological content is a great example of the early 1st century church.

Discussion of 1 and 2 Corinthians makes up chapter 11. The traditional author, and destination are espoused. It addressed factionalism and immaturity. The authors envisage 2 Cor 1-9 written, then a break and a new report before 2 Cor 10-13. They conclude 1 Corinthians was written early in AD 55, and 2nd Corinthians in within the next 2 years.

Chapter 12 deals with Galatians, by Paul, likely to South Galatia (though they are not certain, 461). They feel that the tone of the letter reflects a date before the Jerusalem council, so sometime before AD 48. The occasion was that he felt the Galatians were accepting something which meant they were rejecting Christ in some way.

Ephesians is said to have been written by Paul, meaning that they give little credence to the idea that a comparison between Colossians and Ephesians proves authenticity (486). Provenance for Ephesians seems to be the same as Colossians. It was written in the early 60's AD (487). They feel that the question of destination is too difficult to be dogmatic about, but still suggest Ephesus based upon tradition (490).

Chapter 14 deals with Philippians, which is written by Paul (499). They are not sure if Paul wrote the hymn, but say that the emphasis should be upon how it is used (503). They are not sure if it was written in Ephesus or Rome, but lean toward Ephesus (506). If written in Rome, then it was in AD 61-62, if in Ephesus, then in 59-60. The purpose was to deal with the Epaphroditus situation and the gifts. The contribution is that this is a letter to a church with which Paul is well pleased, and not correcting (512).

Chapter 15 shows that Colossians is Pauline, and written in Rome, in the early 60's AD. This letter was written to combat false teaching, though he is generally satisfied with the Colossians. He concludes that 1:15-20 may be a hymn used by Paul. This letter contributes the truth that believers should not merely go along with the philosophy of the time.

Dealing with 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the authors choose Pauline authorship for both – citing that the pseudonymous alternative argument is weak. Based upon the familial tone of 1st Thessalonians, they recommend its priority (AD 50-51), then 2nd Thessalonians was written shortly after (544). The general purpose is to strengthen the faith of new converts. Because of the early date of these letters, modern scholars tend to compare the theology of these letters to the theology of the latter letters (548). These letters contribute a detailed eschatological teaching.

Chapter 17 deals with the Pastoral Epistles. Pauline authorship of these letters has been attacked on the grounds of vocabulary and rhetorical style. Carson and Moo discount these arguments, and propose that the false teaching argued against in the letter is consistent with what is faced in Pauline times. They suggest 1 Timothy was written in Macedonia, following a release from Rome, during the early 60's – but still under Nero's reign. It was intended as private communication to Timothy. They opt for 2 Timothy being written during the 2nd Roman imprisonment, in AD 64-65. Titus was written between the two Roman imprisonments, in AD 63-64. Philemon occupies chapter 18. As expected, they submit Paul wrote it to deal with the Onesimus situation. It was written in Rome in the early 60's .

Hebrews is the subject of Chapter 19. They conclude one cannot be certain who wrote the letter, or where it was written. They favor a date before AD 70 (608). The purpose is to prevent Christians from the apostasy of going to Judaism – which is recognized by Rome (612).

James (chapter 20) is the first of the Catholic Epistles. Based upon internal evidence and Early Christian history, they authors choose James the brother of Christ as the author. It was probably written in Jerusalem, **in the early 40's**, arguing the letter makes more sense if James has never heard of Paul or his letters. It was written to Jews in Diaspora.

1 Peter was written on the occasion of suffering. Though a complex issue, Carson and Moo suggest that the arguments against Petrine authorship are not compelling (646). It was written in Rome, in AD 62-63. 2 Peter (Ch. 22) was written to deal with false teaching (658). They accept the letter's claim to Petrine authorship, and a dating before AD 64. The letter was written to a specific group dealing with false teaching, but their local cannot be determined.

Discussion of 1, 2, and 3 John makeup Chapter 23. They accept Johanine authorship (John son of Zebedee, apostle). They date the epistles after the fourth gospel, ca. AD 90, written in Ephesus. The documents combat heresy of the time.

Jude (chapter 24) was written by Jude the brother of Christ, to combat false teaching (692). It should be dated in the mid-late 60's. Provenance, destination and audience cannot be decided with certainty.

Discussion moves to Revelation in chapter 25. Carson and Moo accept John the apostle as the author of the book. It was written from Patmos, shortly after Nero (ca. AD 70). It was written to the churches identified in the letter. They advocate a futurist approach to Revelation – that is that the events after chapter 4 are assigned to the “last days.” The contribution of this book in their opinion is God's sovereignty, as this book presents that theme more powerfully than any other.

Chapter 26 deals with the NT canon. They mention that the NT viewed all the OT books as scripture, and the works known as outside the OT canon that are used are not quoted as scripture (e.g. “it is written...”). Athanasius' easter Letter (367 AD) mentions all 27 NT books, as does the third council of Carthage (AD 397). So it seems by the late 4th century, the canon was closed. Though, the argue for a much earlier authoritative, and in a sense canonical, message (such as what Christ presents). This would mean that the criteria for accepting a document to the canon would be its conformity to that idea of kerygma, the canonical message.

The book is certainly aimed at beginning students. It gives an introduction to most advanced concepts. Yet, it does list ample bibliography to show that the authors are conversant with a wide scope of material. It has been noted before (DeSilva) that the book does not present opposing views as strongly as it could – I suspect that this is because it is aimed at less advanced students and intended to be used as a textbook supplemented by lectures. The book leaves out a discussion of Greco-Roman and Early Jewish background. These issues are usually brought to bear in interpreting the New Testament, and in discussing the New Perspective on Paul – to which he gives a cursory treatment. One strength of the book is that it lays out a good summary and outline of each book before discussing the critical issues. The book is certainly conservative, and since it does not devote as much space to opposing views as Guthrie, it would need to be supplemented if one wished to provide a balanced presentation to an advanced class.