

research are exemplary, and Furlong has done us a great favor in drawing our attention to such a rich collection of traditions. He writes clearly and engagingly, necessary corrections being “figure” rather than “finger” (12) and “have been merged” instead of “have had to merged” (185). His study is a valuable contribution to our understanding of tradition history relating to important early Christian figures.

Andrews University

CEDRIC VINE

Gupta, Nijay K. *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Studies: Understanding Key Debates*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020. xii + 196 pp. Softcover. USD 24.99.

Nijay K. Gupta is an associate professor of NT at Northern Seminary in Lisle, Illinois. A prolific author, Gupta has published numerous books and commentaries on the NT, the most recent being *The New Testament Commentary Guide: A Brief Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Lexham Press, 2020). In addition to his professional responsibilities, Gupta has a significant online presence through his popular blog *Crux Sola*, dedicated to the NT.

In *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Studies*, Gupta discusses thirteen topics. Starting with the Synoptic problem, Gupta takes a look at the historical Jesus, the writings of Paul, the interpretation of the book of Revelation, and the use of the HB in the NT, to mention a few. Not surprisingly, Paul's corpus takes up three chapters (“Jesus and Paul,” “Paul's Theological Perspective,” and “Paul and the Jewish Law”). Major thought leaders on each topic are discussed and their views summarized. Some chapters are divided into two or more “debated topics” (e.g., ch. 6, “Paul and the Jewish Law” presents two subtopics: “Why Was the Torah Given to Israel?” and “What is Paul's Problem With the Works of the Law?”). Chapters are intuitively organized, and subtopics are clearly titled and succinctly addressed, rarely running for more than one page per subtitle. Discussions move forward nimbly, and a final reflection recaps the main points. Further reading recommendations for both beginner and advanced readers are placed at the end of each chapter, along with the resources used.

As an example of the approach offered, one could mention the chapter titled “Interpreting the Book of Revelation,” which reflects the current renaissance in scholarly interest in Revelation. Gupta briefly lays out basic principles for the interpretation of Revelation (88–91), followed by a nine-part thumbnail sketch of the book (91–94) and a discussion of the four main schools of interpretation: preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist (94–99). A reflection section ties up the loose ends and helps the reader stay focused on Revelation's overall rhetorical thrust rather than getting lost in the details.

Similarly, I found Gupta's interest in the issue of women in the NT (ch. 10, "Women in Leadership in the New Testament")—an enduring controversy in many denominations—to be refreshing. He divides the issue of gender equality in the church into two main interpretative camps: the "hierarchical male authoritative leadership" and the "egalitarian authoritative leadership" camps. He then quickly peruses the formative biblical texts used to support each view, followed by the critical responses from each camp to the other's hermeneutical approach. Gupta suggests four methodological issues that will continue to impinge on this question: "culture and truth," protology vs. eschatology, "analyzing narratives," and "experience and hermeneutics." The dilemma plaguing both views, suggests Gupta, lies in "the tension in relation to how the testimony of Scripture is understood as a *product* of its culture and as a testimony that can *transcend* its ancient culture" (142, emphasis in the original). Due to the important contribution of women to the church, Gupta's perceptive call to let "grace flow from humility" (143) sets a charitable tone for both sides of the aisle.

Yet even if just a general guide, the book surprises, both for what the author chose to discuss as well as for what he left out. For example, there is no engagement with the important issue of textual criticism of the NT. The epochal Epistle to the Hebrews, deserving a separate chapter due to its understanding of the "Christ event" in light of the Israelite sanctuary typology and prophecies, gets a scant mention (163, 170). Surprisingly, Jesus Christ takes up only one chapter in the book, "The Historical Jesus," rendering the book's Christology somewhat lacking. The already excellent chapter "Jesus and Paul"—which discusses the perceived tension between the teachings of Jesus and those of Paul—would have been strengthened by a discussion of how Paul, as a Jew, understood Jesus's life, death, and resurrection in light of the HB. As a corollary of this discussion, especially in light of its philological and theological implications for a correct understanding of "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*), a core argument in the book, an overview of how Jesus's death effected atonement would have been desirable, framed mainly by the expiation vs. propitiation debate. In turn, a discussion of how righteousness is taken hold of by the Christian through Jesus Christ—either imputed (forensic justification) or imparted (through sanctification)—could have helped illuminate the chapter titled "Justification by Faith and Judgment According to Works." It was also surprising that the chapter "The New Testament and Empire" barely brings up the book of Revelation (124), considering how it is suffused with anti-empire language and imagery. All things considered, it would probably be unfair to expect a general guide to cover every single topic of scholarly debate, neither does Gupta propose to do so at the outset. Still, perhaps longer discussions could have been shortened to accommodate a few of these important points while still keeping the book concise.

An author index, followed by a Scripture index, ends the book. I would have appreciated a complete bibliography; some of the sources used are found in the reading recommendations at the end of each chapter, while others are relegated solely to the footnotes. I also think that a subject index would have been helpful, especially for a book with a beginner readership in mind, one with the potential to become a quick reference work. The chapter titled “The Old Testament in the New Testament” is the longest in the book, and Gupta rightly focused on the two main intertextual approaches revolving around the tension between respect vs. disregard for the original HB context by the NT authors. As such, I would have made it the first chapter in the book since the use of the HB by the NT authors colors the entire conceptual spectrum, from the Gospels to the book of Revelation, and is a topic of enduring interest in scholarship. Lastly, I think that adding a conclusion as a separate chapter (perhaps titled “Final Reflections”) could have served as a summary and pointed readers toward additional subjects to probe. This absence, however, does not diminish the value of the last chapter, titled “The Application and Use of Scripture,” which explores how Christians should read, interpret, and apply Scriptures today from two main points of view: “from the Bible” (as a wholly sufficient source of truth) and “beyond the Bible” (God’s will as ongoing revelation).

Despite these few observations, in *A Beginner’s Guide*, Gupta has successfully navigated the ancient waters of the NT, filled as they are with ageless warring factions, and not a few icebergs. Gupta stays in active dialogue with academia, attempting to make sense of what he calls “the cacophony in scholarship” (xii) to lay before the reader the core methodological issues, textual difficulties, and varied interpretations on each subject, all the while not trying to impose his own novel readings. His clever handling of the issues reflects the fast-paced dynamic of a classroom; he demonstrates a notable ability to summarize the issues without compromising on scholarship or foisting his solutions on the reader. Gupta’s writing style is free-flowing and accessible, and discussions do not assume prior knowledge or commitment to the various views presented. Chapters and sections are often introduced and interspersed with personal stories of how the issues have either shaped or were shaped by the author’s maturing understanding of the NT and Christianity. This style prevents the discussion from turning into dry perorations on technicalities, keeping the conversation relevant to readers.

In sum, *A Beginner’s Guide to New Testament Studies* is essential reading for beginner courses in NT and general college courses on religion, as well as for the layperson seeking to remain abreast of current scholarly debates.

Orlando, Florida

ANDRÉ REIS