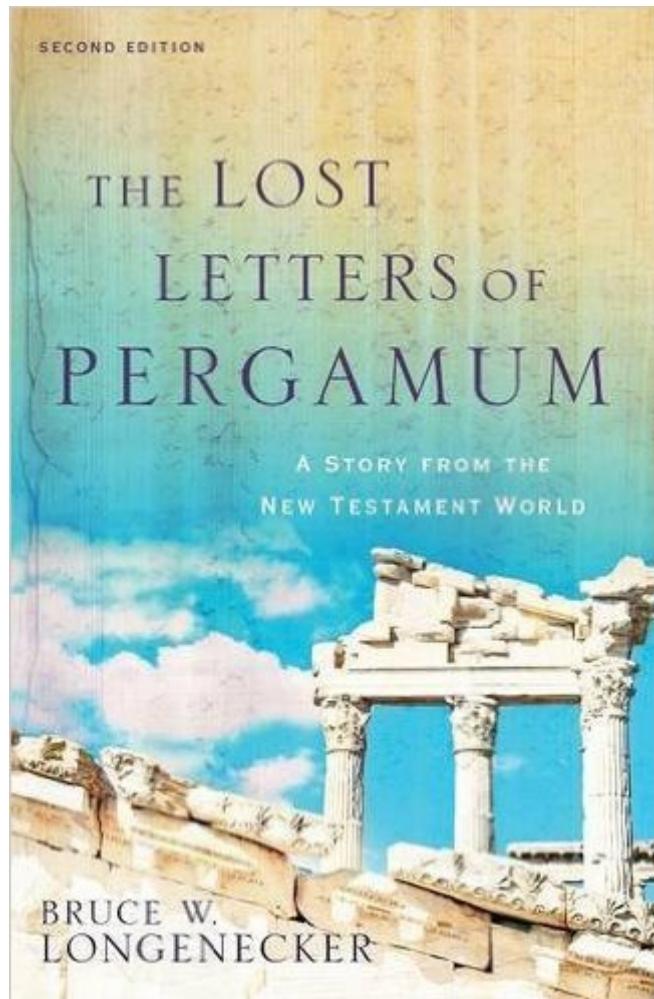


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The Lost Letters Of Pergamum: A Story From The New Testament World



Synopsis

A Fascinating Glimpse into the World of the New TestamentTransported two thousand years into the past, readers are introduced to Antipas, a Roman civic leader who has encountered the writings of the biblical author Luke. Luke's history sparks Antipas's interest, and they begin corresponding. While the account is fictional, the author is a highly respected New Testament scholar who weaves reliable historical information into a fascinating story, offering a fresh, engaging, and creative way to learn about the New Testament world. The first edition has been widely used in the classroom (over 30,000 copies sold). This updated edition, now with improved readability and narrative flow, will bring the social and political world of Jesus and his first followers to life for many more students of the Bible.

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Customer Reviews

Having a strong interest in New Testament history and being a fan of historical fiction, I was immediately interested in this book. I was a bit surprised to find it was not a narrative, but simply a fictional collection of ancient letters between Luke -- the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles -- and a Roman nobleman named Antipas. This format, though, is well used. Indeed, it is compelling. We follow Antipas' and Luke's correspondence, which begins with a chance introduction. As Antipas reads Luke's Gospel, he discusses it at first from a very Roman point of view. But as he reads more and begins to spend time with Christians of his city, Antipas gradually sees the faults in his Roman upbringing, his pagan worldview. He is drawn to Jesus both through

the writings of Luke and through the witness and lives of the Christians with whom he fellowships. Ultimately, he joins them and dies the truly noble death of a martyr. (The reference to the death of Antipas in Rev. 2:13 is the inspiration of the story). The value of this book is that it places the reader in the early Christian world like nothing else I have ever read. Longenecker has taken all the books about New Testament History, Jewish history, and the larger Roman world of the time, and used them to create an authentic exchange of late first century correspondence between a pagan and a Christian. Beyond the obvious monotheism v. paganism, Longenecker does an excellent job of bringing out the differing attitudes of Roman and Christian charity. Of Christian brotherhood and its foreignness to the Roman world. Of the worship of the emperor.

When judged by the standards of general fiction, this book isn't very good. Better than most non-Lewis Christian fiction, sure, but that bar is so low that the comparison means nothing. A reader interested in this work should approach it as a more engaging way for an historian to flesh out the cultural context of the early church in the Roman Empire, and it succeeds at that task. The structure of this book is certainly intriguing, as Longenecker writes a series of fictional letters that chronicle a nobleman of Pergamum as he begins a friendship with Luke (author of Luke and Acts, from the Bible) and seriously examines the question of who Jesus is. The letter-writers in this book deal with problems of the exclusivity of Christ, as well as church/state issues and basic questions about the divinity of Jesus and the literal nature of the Gospel of Luke. The story builds to a foregone conclusion (I have seen other reviews that treat the ending as a big spoiler, which I think misses the point, since the introductory pages give the one Bible verse mentioning Antipas, in the context of where his story ends, but I will respect other reviewers by adopting a similar stance to spoiling the ending). My main problem with this book is that the first two-thirds (if not more) are so exposition-heavy that they completely lack a believable voice. The letters, rather than being real conversations, are along the lines of, "Perhaps you don't know what a gladiator contest is like. Let me explain it in detail." "Thank you, perhaps you don't know anything about your emperor, let me explain him for you." "Thank you, perhaps you don't understand our polytheistic system or how honor functions within it, let me explain it for you."

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