

Book Review

Charles L. Quarles and L. Scott Kellum.
*40 Questions About the Text and Canon
of the New Testament*

Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2023.
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In the latest volume of the *40 Questions* series, authors Charles L. Quarles and L. Scott Kellum address the most frequently posed questions in the field of New Testament Textual Criticism and New Testament Canon Studies. In their own words, the purpose of this volume is to answer the ultimate question, ‘What is the New Testament?’(15). This singular, overarching question is then broken down into the forty questions for which this series is known. Each question is given a surprisingly thorough, albeit brief, response, generally occupying no more than ten pages each. The final page of each question also offers a set of ‘reflection questions’ based on the material addressed. This additional feature gives the text a feel similar to a study guide or reference work to be used in small group or classroom settings. The work is divided into two parts, the first addressing text critical material and the second, canonical inquiries. As might be suspected given the series title, there are twenty questions provided for each part.

Part One addresses questions aimed at the field of textual criticism and is subdivided into four sections, divided thematically—The Transmission of the New Testament Text, The New Testament Manuscripts, Textual Criticism, and The Practice of Textual Criticism. Though all chapters in the book can be quickly read and

digested, this further subdivision establishes helpful boundaries to the conversation and enables the reader to mentally categorise the material. It also allows the reader to isolate those sections deemed most useful for them, at any given moment—an important feature in any reference work. The evangelical tenor of the overall work is evident throughout but is most notable in the first two sections when responding to questions about the preservation of the text, reliability of manuscripts, theological changes to the New Testament text, and the subjects of inspiration and inerrancy. While this evangelical substratum may be disagreeable to some readers, the authors should be credited for their efforts to draw from a surprisingly eclectic amount of source material, citing the earlier work of Kurt and Barbara Aland, Bart Ehrman, and B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort alongside the current research of Tommy Wasserman, Alan Taylor Farnes, and Peter J. Gurry. This alone is a welcome change in survey texts aimed at the field of New Testament Textual Criticism which often rely too heavily, if not solely, on the work of Bruce Metzger and D. C. Parker—both highly esteemed text critics, but whose work no longer reflects the changes made to the field within the last decade. Additionally, it is primarily in evangelical communities that questions about textual preservation, reliability, inspiration, and inerrancy circulate, and these questions deserve detailed answers for those communities from

members of those communities.

This work moves beyond the standard text critical survey with questions devoted to the history of New Testament Textual Criticism, recent changes within the field, the differences between major Greek editions currently circulating, and the underlying text behind theologically motivated text critical positions within evangelicalism such as King James Only and Textus Receptus Only perspectives. This first Part concludes with brief discussions on the textual history of the two most widely known variant units in the New Testament: The Longer Ending of Mark (Mk 16:9–20) and the Pericope Adulterae (Jn 7:53–8:11). These are then followed by a brief explanation of the most recent advancements in the field. In general, this portion of the book offers a very helpful and concise overview of New Testament Textual Criticism in a way that distils a vast amount of information into its most essential components for the novice reader.

Part Two shifts the attention of the book toward the New Testament canon. In recent years, no less than three books have been published on the origins, arrangement, and purpose of the New Testament canon.¹ This area of study had lain dormant for many years following the publication of works from the likes of F. F. Bruce and Bruce Metzger but has seen a resurgence, from various corners of the academic world. This burgeoning interest may have been an underlying impetus for the

publication of this Part but, even if not, it has created a need for a similar distillation of past and present scholarship on the New Testament canon for the unfamiliar reader. This part is divided into three sections—Definitions and Theories of Canon, The Physical Evidence of Canon, and The Literary and Theological Dimensions of Canon.

The first section addresses questions on defining ‘canon’ more generally, along with various models employed currently in defining both the impetus and boundaries of the New Testament canon. The remaining questions orbit these two themes, asking how the early Christians understood the Hebrew canon, what role ecclesial councils played in the formation and reception of the canon, and what forces—internal and external—impacted the recognition and rejection of writings as canonical. Section two (B in the volume) provides answers to questions related to the artefactual features of books within the New Testament canon. These features involve the gathering of the individual books together into a codex and the circulation of sub-collections like the Four Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, and Acts/Catholic Epistles as collections independent of each other. The final section is less coherent than the previous two, addressing questions related to the book of Revelation’s exclusion from the canon in the Greek church, how the canon was used in liturgical settings, the concept and significance of a closed canon, and theological/hermeneutical implications of having a New Testament canon. While the questions addressed in these chapters are welcome and important, the diversity of subject matter makes this section feel more like a gathering of outstanding questions than one carefully planned. In spite of this, the authors have, again, drawn from a broad spectrum of

1 J. D. Meade and P. J. Gurry, *Scribes and Scriptures: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022); W. E. Glenny and D. Lockett, *Canon Formation: Tracing the Role of Sub-Collections in the Biblical Canon* (London: T & T Clark, 2023); D. Trobisch, *On the Origins of Christian Scripture: The Evolution of the New Testament Canon in the Second Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023).

sources, including Lee Martin McDonald, and David Trobisch, as well as Michael Kruger and Edmon L. Gallagher, among others.

At its most fundamental level, this text is an introductory work. It is thorough in the breadth of its questions and the answers provided, but its depth is necessarily limited to its being a survey of both fields. The book will be most useful in seminary and university settings wherein students are unfamiliar with these fields and require a general awareness of the directions of study. This could be part of an introductory course on the New Testament, a seminary course on New Testament Exegesis, or other course of this kind. For those already working in the field, this text offers no new information, but its condensing of the material makes it a worthwhile pedagogical tool. The evangelical thrust of the work is potentially its greatest strength but also its weakness, depending on

the reader. For evangelical institutions, the approach to this material from a definitive faith perspective will likely be seen as needed and be well received. For other communities, the book's lack of objectivity will be understood to necessarily colour the conclusions of each question, leading to an uneven presentation of the data. For this reason, it is important for readers to be aware of the preconceived convictions underlying the book. The inquisitive reader will be best served by carefully combing the footnotes of each chapter and reading the cited works in greater detail, particularly the works which hold to positions opposed to those of the authors. The reader that does this will benefit both from the introductory material of this text and the deeper study of the issues it addresses.

