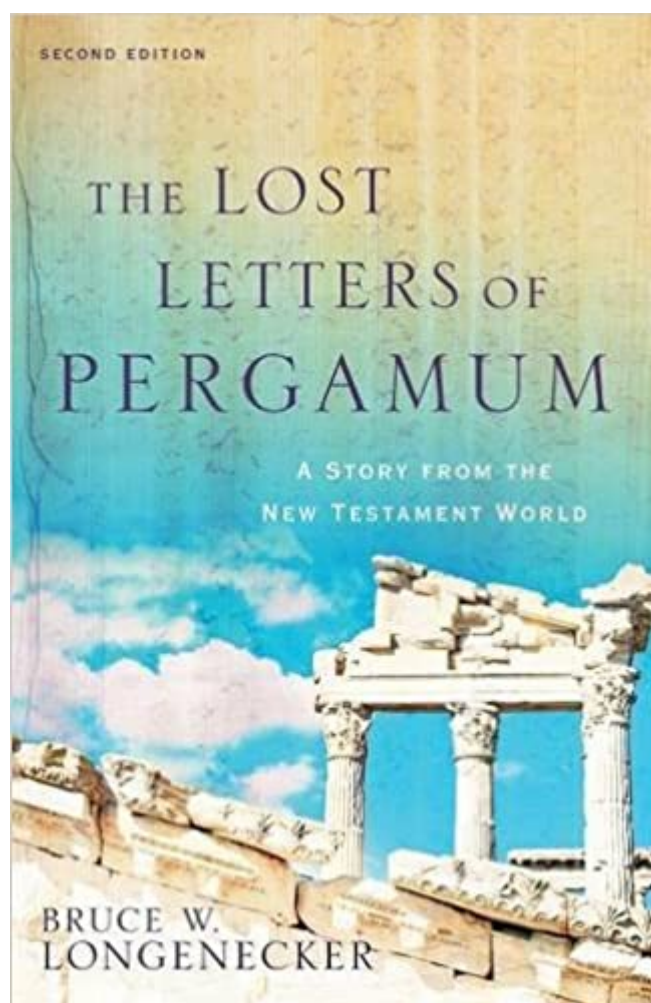


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The Lost Letters Of Pergamum: A Story From The New Testament World



Synopsis

A Fascinating Glimpse into the World of the New Testament Transported 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

The Lost Letters of Pergamum is another unique attempt at biblical fiction. Longenecker conjures an epistolary relationship between Luke and a figure from Revelation about whom little is known:

Antipas. A loyal Roman, Antipas is converted to Christianity through Luke's letters and becomes a martyr. The story's greatest charm, however, may be its careful scholarship on all things Roman, making it of great appeal to those amateur scholars who read Josephus and love to draw lessons from the Roman Empire. John Mort

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For people who look at Christianity in the western world today, it can be hard to understand the explosive growth of the early, living Christian church and also the way it rocked the boat and drew the anger of the establishment. This well researched book takes the reader back to the age when Christianity was still a new and virulent meme, overturning people's lives and values. The words are largely put in the pen of an imaginary Roman aristocrat and scholar who is exposed to these new ideas for the first time, and it follows his gradually increasing fascination with the message until it drives him to the choice between survival and acting on his newfound belief. It also shows some of the diversity that already existed in the young church, and the split between the faction that would become the historical Church and other groups that would fall by the wayside. The book is pretty clearly slanted to favor Christianity, and chances are that whatever your stance on this religion, you will come out of reading the book without any change of heart. But I believe that whichever side you are on, unless you are a history geek you will also gain a deeper understanding of early Christianity and the differences between society then and now.

This is a very well-done piece of historical fiction. The details are such that it's only significant (and not really "major") shortcoming, lack of a detailed bibliography, is easily overcome. Longenecker does a good job of making his characters seem real. Well-done, sir. Well done. I'm really very glad this book was assigned reading. I'd have likely overlooked this gem otherwise.

Exciting stories often incite the imagination of the reader. Yet sometimes, stories are vague in detail just as certain passages of scripture share no more than a name and place. Revelation 2:13 is the commendation to the angel of Pergamum, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." This verse is the inspiration for Longenecker as he creates a fictional account of an historical event. All that is certain is that a believer in Christ named Antipas lived in the city of Pergamum and was killed for the sake of the gospel. Longenecker's work is an inspiring account of the written correspondence between a roman business man Antipas in Pergamum and Luke in Ephesus, the author of the gospel and the new testament book of Acts. The Lost Letters of Pergamum follows Antipas as he is introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ by Luke under an imperial culture hostile to any different empire other than Roman. It is a story of friendship, truth, virtue and honor that leads to sacrifice. As all fictional

accounts of historical times attest, the story of Antipas is not intended to be factual. But one can honestly ask, "Did that really happen?" And Longenecker would reply as his mother often did to his same childhood question, "No, but it could have." (Author's Preface). The Lost Letters of Pergamum grabs the attention of the reader drawing the mind to be part of the first century roman empire. As one reads the correspondence between Antipas and Luke, Longenecker's character development of Antipas builds with each letter as a man certain of his identity as a loyal roman citizen. The gladiatorial games in Pergamum are his favorite recreational sport and these games serve as the means by which Antipas shows his changed and eventual identity as a loyal believer in Jesus Christ. Longenecker weaves historical and cultural knowledge of the first century roman world into the written correspondence between Pergamum and Ephesus. Roman and hellenistic pressures of the first century are shown to be no different than contemporary Western expectations. Pluralism now is no different than the imperial cult worship of first century roman culture. Loyalty to the state superseded any other form of loyalty and for Christians to pledge loyalty to any other kingdom than Rome meant certain death. The cost of discipleship for a first century Christian meant total loyalty to or total rejection of Christ. Longenecker depicts the struggles of first century Christians well. As Antipas seeks intellectual interaction with Luke over his biographical account of Jesus Christ, Longenecker weaves the narrative of two very different gatherings of Christians in Pergamum. The house of Antonius and the house of Kalandion host two very different gatherings of Christians. Longenecker's introduction of these two groups in the truth journey of Antipas is used to show that intellectual knowledge of Christ is incomplete without personal fellowship with others. Yet not all Christian groups are the same. Antipas even remarks, "Those at the two gatherings are so different in their outlook, values and lifestyle that seems strange to apply the label Christian to both gatherings. I must ponder these things more." (Letter collection 9, end of Antipas' digest 4). This statement by Antipas is a key theme by Longenecker in that the truth of the gospel can be difficult to apply and one must discern the truth of the gospel even among those who claim the name of Christ. The strength of Longenecker's work is very compelling. As fictional biblical accounts are meant to educate the contemporary reader of the issues and struggles faced by first century Christians, Longenecker has spun a tale of a Christian credited in scripture as one worthy of honor. Antipas' sacrifice in the arena, a place central to his imperial loyalty, is a great metaphor for the sacrifice required of all who hear the truth of Christ's gospel. Total submission to Jesus Christ requires great sacrifice on the part of the one responding to Christ's authority. Boldness for the faith is necessary in times of persecution. Longenecker rightly challenges the contemporary reader with the dangerous truth of the gospel. Sacrifice is required for salvation and Jesus' sacrifice for the

forgiveness of sin is inspiration for those who respond to the gospel message to willingly sacrifice all idols. As Antipas is gradually shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ and those who truly live out the gospel, as in the house of Antonius, the reader is reminded that nothing is more important than Christ. To give him full honor for his sacrifice requires that sacrifice is required of us as well. Antipas' story is an inspirational account that also tells the stark truth. Commitment to Jesus Christ requires death on the part of the faithful. This death can come in the sacrifice of wealth, comforts, social status, and cultural expectations. Yet, for too many Christian martyrs throughout church history, sacrifice also required their very lives. The Lost Letters of Pergamum is a superb insight into the evangelistic interactions of the first century church. Retold in contemporary language and style, the culture of Pergamum and the Roman Empire come alive in light of Christian history. All who read this book will be challenged to consider the seriousness of life with Christ. His death and resurrection are insulted when those who claim the Christian title pay lip service to an intellectual status. In contrast, his death and resurrection are glorified when total surrender, even of one's life, is willingly given without hesitation or weakness to boldly say that Jesus is Lord.

Gripping page turner that hypothesizes an example of what the conversion might have been like for the Antipas that is mentioned in Revelation. Besides a rather sobering outcome and ending, the book should be an encouragement to any of us to not shy away from sharing the gospel regardless of the audience's stature. Additionally, the historicity of Pergamum, Ephesus, and other such cities provides a very colorful "authenticity" to this work of historical fiction.

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