

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *Scripture and the Authority of God*

by  
N. T. Wright

1. In the preface, N. T. Wright says that Jesus does not say, “All authority in heaven and on earth is given to the books you are all going to write,” but instead says, “All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me” (p. xi). What is your experience with authority in your life, in your church life, and in how you view the Bible?
2. All post-Reformation traditions officially accord scripture a central place in their faith and liturgy. How does your faith community treat scripture? How were you raised to treat it? Were you encouraged to read, study, pray, or ignore scripture?
3. Wright discusses the notion of truth (p. 5). What is the difference between “Did it happen?” and “Is it true?”

How has your experience of scripture been affected by different understandings of truth? Do you understand why Nietzsche would declare that all claims to truth collapse into claims to power (p. 6)?

4. “Integrity consists not of having no presuppositions but of being aware of what one’s presuppositions are and of the obligation to listen to and interact with those who have different ones” (p. 13). Are you aware of your own presuppositions? How might you interact with those who see differently than you? To what extent does Wright appear to be aware of his own presuppositions?
5. Wright asks three underlying questions he attempts to answer in this book (p. 16). What would have been your initial response to these questions before reading the book? How do you answer them now?
6. Wright describes scripture as a story and asks, “How can a story be authoritative?” (p. 24). Is there an authoritative story in your life apart from scripture? Do you live your life according to a narrative that guides your actions? How might scripture be a part of that narrative?
7. “The biblical writers live with the tension of believing both that in one sense God has always been sovereign over the world and that in another sense this sovereignty, this saving rule, is something which must break afresh into the world of corruption, decay, and death, and the human rebellion, idolatry, and sin which are so closely linked with it” (p. 27). How is this apparent con-

tradition possible? How do you perceive this tension in your life? In your community? In your church?

8. Wright says that the biblical picture of God is “a present, albeit transcendent, God, celebrating with the rich dynamic life of his creation and grieving over its shame and pain” (p. 29). How does this picture of God correspond with your view of God? With the popular notion of God? With your church’s view of God?
9. Scripture does not merely reflect Israel’s experience, culture, and awareness of God; scripture was also a prophetic voice to Israel, “breaking into Israel’s own world of muddle and mistakes” (p. 35). How does scripture balance reflection and revelation? How do you discern the difference?
10. The early church viewed some parts of scripture as belonging to earlier parts of the story that, in Wright’s framework, have reached their climax and are now no longer necessary, in much the same way that a ship is no longer needed after reaching shore or a map no longer necessary once the destination is reached (pp. 57, 125). Are there parts of scripture that you believe belong to the earlier story and are no longer a part of the continuing story we find ourselves in now?
11. Wright talks about how “scripture came to be regarded as a ‘court of appeal,’ the source-book or rule-book from which doctrine and ethics might be deduced and against which innovations were to be judged” (p. 66). Do you see versions of this view of scripture today?

Have you used scripture this way or seen it used this way in your church? To what extent is this way of using scripture sometimes necessary?

12. Wright contrasts literalness as the Reformers intended it (“the sense that the first writers intended”) with how it is often used today, meaning plain or without context or interpretation (p. 74). How do you separate these understandings of the literality of scripture? How have you experienced the misunderstanding of literal readings of scripture in your life? In your church?
13. Wright says that many people have said, in effect, “a plague on all your scholarship; we just believe the Bible” (p. 91). How have you encountered that view in your life, your study of scripture, and your church? Did you ever approach scripture this way? What, if anything, changed?
14. “There is a great gulf fixed between those who want to prove the historicity of everything reported in the Bible in order to demonstrate that the Bible is ‘true’ after all and those who, committed to living under the authority of scripture, remain open to what scripture itself actually teaches and emphasizes” (p. 95). How do you think you might be able to bridge that gulf in your community or church? Is it possible? Is it worthwhile?
15. Wright uses the metaphor of a garden to discuss how an over-authoritarian church paves over the flowers and vegetables in an effort to prevent weeds, and the over-experiential church allows anything and everything to grow (p. 104). Have you found examples of

- both kinds of churches? How does one avoid using the idea of grace to “validate what is in fact an idolatrous and distorted form of humanness” (p. 105)? Compare this to the metaphor Jesus uses in Matthew 13:24–30.
16. Wright mentions the struggle that scripture has had with slavery (p. 108). How does one deal with the tension between Exodus and Philemon, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the verses encouraging slaves to be obedient to their masters?
  17. “Paying attention to tradition means listening carefully (humbly but not uncritically) to how the church has read and lived scripture in the past” (p. 118). How can you benefit from the tradition of scriptural interpretation, both ancient and modern? How can you become better informed about the Christian tradition?
  18. Wright tackles the role reason plays in our study of scripture (p. 120). How do you understand reason and its place in interpreting scripture? How can you work with your community, small group, or church in being attentive to tradition and reason and their proper roles in interpreting scripture?
  19. “It is equally important that we understand and appreciate our own [context], and the way it predisposes us to highlight some things in the Bible and quietly ignore others” (p. 129). Talk about your own context for reading scripture and the values that you bring to your reading and study. What do you instinctively highlight or ignore when reading the Bible? What do you think causes you to do that?

20. Wright says that the primary purpose of public scripture readings is to be “an act of worship, celebrating God’s story, power, and wisdom” (p. 131). Is this a part of your current church worship experience? Having interacted with Wright’s view of its authority, how might you better appreciate the corporate reading of scripture?
21. Authority is to be “a matter of *proclaiming the word in the power of the Spirit*,” according to Wright (p. 140). How has church leadership abused authority either in your experience or in the experience of others you know? How has church authority been explained to you in the past? How can church leaders exercise appropriate authority? How will you respond to church authority in the future?
22. Wright examines a biblical view of the Sabbath using the principles of authority discussed in this book (chap. 9). His conclusion is that since we live in the time when “heaven and earth have come together in Jesus Christ” (p. 167), we actually live in a perpetual Sabbath, a continual jubilee. What does that look like for you, practically speaking? How does it enhance your understanding of the Sabbath?
23. Wright then discusses monogamy (chap. 10). How does this discussion change or inform your views on sexuality as it is presented in scripture?
24. Wright looks at the current and often provocative topics of Sabbath and monogamy. Pick a third, more con-

troversial topic, and try to apply the aspects of faithful scripture reading to it. What happens? Do you discover something new? Something old? Does it lead you to further study or more impassioned worship? Did you find that *Scripture and the Authority of God* provided a useful blueprint for going forward with scripture as a part of your Christian faith?