

*Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions.* By David A. Croteau. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015, 246 pp., \$14.99, softcover. ISBN 97814336801200.

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How many times has a congregation member cringed while hearing a doubtless well-intentioned preacher rehearse the old chestnut concerning the "eye of a needle" in Mark 10? Supposedly, Jesus was referring to an enigmatic gate that was both short and narrow in a city wall. If a traveler were riding a camel, and sought to enter the city through that gate, he would have to force his camel onto its knees to get it through the "Needle Gate."

In his new book, *Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions*, David A. Croteau puts this misinterpretation, along with 39 others, under the microscope, using Greek, archaeological and contextual evidence to demonstrate why he thinks forty well-known interpretations of New Testament teaching or events are wrong. Croteau, professor in New Testament and Greek at Columbia International University, received graduate and doctoral degrees from Gateway Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, respectively. Having written a number of books and articles, he has made something of a name for himself as one of an increasing number of conservative evangelicals who rejects the view that the New Testament commands the tithe. Indeed, he has written or contributed to three books on the topic: *Tithing After the Cross*, *Perspectives on Tithing*, and *You Mean I Don't Have to Tithe? A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Tithing*.

When one considers how often preachers and Bible teachers repeat what they have heard or read, it comes as no surprise that the number of resources helping correct misconceptions proliferates. John MacArthur's "Grace to You" ministry blog produced a series of posts called "Frequently Abused Verses" in 2015. In 2012, Trinity College professor Eric J. Bargerhuff published *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible: Surprising Ways God's Word Is Misunderstood*.

An urban legend is "a commonly circulated myth repeated throughout the culture as common knowledge, but which isn't true" (xiii). His book divides into forty chapters, falling into two main categories: "Urban Legends in the Gospels" and "Urban Legends in The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and Revelation." The number of misconceptions breaks between the two parts—16 and 24, respectively.

In the first section Croteau aims at tropes like Jesus being born in a stable, Matthew's Great Commission's imperative being "make disciples" instead of "go," and Gehenna referring to Jerusalem's town dump, along with the aforementioned "Needle Gate" matter. From Acts to Revelation, Croteau explains why Jesus is not saying He would rather a person be cold than lukewarm in Revelation, that Paul was not likening the gospel to dynamite in Romans 1:16, and that Philippians 4:13 is not Christian-ese for "You can do anything you set your mind to."

Many Bible-believing Christians will receive most of Croteau's conclusions with surprise and perhaps embarrassment at having long misinterpreted passages the real meaning of which was not at all obscure. It stands not quite right, though, to call all the topics Croteau writes about "urban legends," if one defines "urban legend" as Croteau defines it above. For example, he argues at one point that Paul does not forbid a divorced man from being a pastor in 1 Timothy 3:2. Perhaps some in Christendom have concluded based on tradition that divorced men are ineligible for the pastorate, but many others who are masters of Greek, theology, and hermeneutics have concluded similarly. Their belief, then, is not based on *misinterpretation*, but rather simply *different* interpretation.

Likewise with Croteau's assertion from his chapter on Hebrews 7:1-10 that Christians are not commanded to tithe. Indeed, some Christians have a conviction on tithing that they cannot defend using Scripture—at least New Testament Scripture. Yet, many other Christians believe tithing to be entirely appropriate for the follower of Jesus, and they have not wrested Hebrews 7:1-10 from its context nor misunderstood the differences between the Old and New Covenants. Croteau is guilty at times of blurring the line—or perhaps crossing over the clear line—between the New Testament's "urban legends" and the

places in the New Testament where Christians with eyes wide open to background, language, and context genuinely disagree on interpretation.

Nevertheless, on the whole, Croteau's book provides a valuable tool, especially for the Christian who will not be persuaded that because Croteau is able to correct some misconceptions that he is necessarily right on everything. Laudably, Croteau takes the Bible at its word, and correctly understands that it comes entirely from God and is free from error. If a person disagrees with some of his conclusions, and this reviewer does, he must at the same time acknowledge that Croteau does not make any argument haphazardly. He presents cogent cases, informed by a conviction that Scripture is authoritative and divinely-inspired and ought to be handled carefully with the best hermeneutical tools and principles at a person's disposal.

Only a person who believes the Bible is a treasure that ought to be mined would take the time and put forth the work to write a book like this one. Moreover, he very helpfully warns the reader not to use the book as a sledgehammer with which to correct the misinformed preacher when he hears him trot out one of the views Croteau corrects.