



Gary M. Burge (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is professor of New Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. Among his many published books are *Theology Questions Everyone Asks* (with coeditor David Lauber), *The Evangelical One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (general editor with A. Hill), *John: The Gospel of Life* and the award-winning *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians*. Burge is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and holds memberships in the Institute for Biblical Research, the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research and the Society of Biblical Literature.

www.garyburge.org

You can find Gary Burge on Twitter: @garyburge1

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Traveling Back To Roman Times

*Whether it's teaching the New Testament to undergraduates at Wheaton College or publishing commentaries on the Gospels, accomplished New Testament scholar Gary Burge is passionate about helping people understand the context of the Middle East and the unique world of ancient Judaism in order to read their Bibles better. In pursuit of these same goals, Burge recently tried his hand at writing *A Week in the Life of a Roman Centurion*, a fictional account of a Roman centurion during the time of Jesus. He gives insight into this experience in the interview below.*

What compelled you to take this fictional approach?

Gary Burge: My interest in the book came from the need to explain the cultural assumptions that are always at work within the New Testament. We do this frequently in our textbooks, but this is a modality that is a lot more fun.

How did this experience differ from your nonfiction writing?

Burge: I have written extensively about the Gospel of John, and in my teaching I specialize in the Gospels and the history and culture of first century Galilee. For the past few years, I have been interested in bringing to more popular audiences the things we scholars read and discuss regularly. There is a huge gap here. Regular readers of the New Testament do not know the things we take for granted. And when we fill in the picture for them, suddenly they see that the New Testament has real life in a real living context.

Was writing fiction easier or harder for you?

Burge: I found that the genre of fiction was reasonably challenging. Those of us who write non-fiction descriptions of the Biblical world or theology don't think about story arcs or the development of characters.

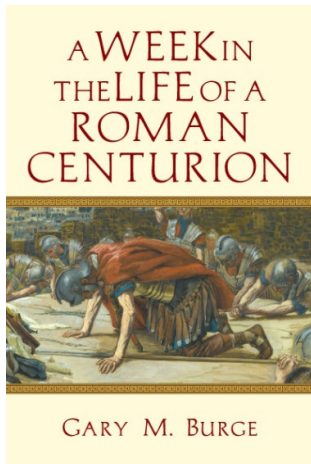
What were your goals with the story?

Burge: In this case, I wanted the main character, a centurion, to seem real: he is a violent man, he drinks heavily, he has a concubine, and he doesn't mind visiting a brothel. And yet there is loyal side to him — not just to his legion but to those in his *familia*. And the narrative brings a slave into his *familia*. It is this relationship that I wanted to explore — and it is in this relationship that I wanted to present a difficulty that needed resolution.

Above all I did not want to write Christian fiction that converted the centurion. That would be too easy. This is a complicated man. And he wouldn't simply become a "Christ follower" overnight. He is skeptical, he is suspicious of the Jews he controls, and he's been disappointed by religion many times.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW CONTACT:

Krista Carnet, broadcast publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kkcarnet@ivpress.com
 Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com
 Adrianna Wright, online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or awright@ivpress.com
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A Week in the Life of a Roman Centurion

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Who do you hope will read this book?

Burge: My intended audience is a Christian who has some acquaintance with the New Testament and would like to know more about the background of its story. Or the reader may be someone who is fully acquainted with the New Testament and has read little that is new for a long time. My hope is that this will surprise both of them.



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Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com
Adrianna Wright, online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or awright@ivpress.com
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