

Introduction to the New Testament

RGB 1501HF



Fall 2016
Tuesday 7-9 PM
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Welcome to *Introduction to the New Testament*! The focus of this course is on the various methodologies for reading and analyzing the New Testament rather than theology and spirituality. Why is an introductory course necessary? Can't we just open the New Testament and read the text as it is? The sad events of our own world illustrate some of the dangers of superficial and overly literal readings of religious writings. Biblical literacy should not be the privilege or duty of a select few, but the right and responsibility of all Christians. The purpose of our study is to provide the tools necessary for an in-depth reading of the New Testament utilizing a variety of methodologies. No one methodology is definitive or exhaustive; each one examines the text from a different perspective and reveals another aspect or layer of the passage in question. Although the material might seem technical and esoteric at times, providing the people of God with a biblical message that is rich, life-giving, and based on a sound understanding of the text is an eminently pastoral undertaking.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the evolutionary nature of the composition and transmission of the New Testament
- To be aware of the various sources that comprise the four gospels
- To be aware of the differing theologies present in the gospels, Pauline corpus, and various pastoral letters
- To be familiar with the various genres present in the New Testament
- To understand the influences of culture, political and historical events, and religious environment on the composition of the New Testament
- To understand and demonstrate competence in the various reading strategies used in New Testament exegesis
- To have a nuanced and theologically current understanding of 'inspiration' and 'Word of God'
- To be sensitive to the pastoral implications of New Testament exegesis
- To be able to make intelligent and informed observations on New Testament passages

These goals will be addressed in the 12 lectures. To assess the progress of the course participants in achieving the above goals, the following requirements will constitute the grading for the course.

- There will be some online work. This will consist of 1 or 2 passages from the parallel gospels with a set of questions to be addressed in light of what has been covered in class and in the readings. This will be worth 20% of the total grade.
- A 2-3 page book review of *The Meaning of Jesus. Two Visions*, by Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright. This review will be more than descriptive and will address the relevance of New Testament scholarship for theology and pastoral practice. It will comprise 30% of the overall grade.
- A two-hour final take-home exam worth 50% will conclude the course. This exam will consist of 3-4 passages from the parallel gospels with a set of questions. This will measure the student's ability to apply the reading strategies that have been studied and to make observations based on the lectures and readings. Reaction to the Gerd Theissen book will also be part of the assignment. It will also include pastoral strategies for dealing with difficult passages. **The assigned passages will be posted online on December 7th and not before.**
- The questions in the syllabus for each section are there to guide your reading and study. They need not be written out or handed in. The professor may address some of those questions to the students during the lecture.

Texts and Readings:

Please be sure to have read and prepared the material before coming to class. The study questions are merely to guide your reading and reflection and do not have to be handed in.

The texts we will be using are:

- *Introducing the New Testament. A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* by Mark Allen Powell. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).
- *The Meaning of Jesus. Two Visions* by Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright. (HarperOne, 2007).
- *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form* by Gerd Theissen. (Fortress Press, 2007).
- *The Bible* (with the Apocrypha / Deuterocanonical Books). **RSV or NRSV** versions. Oxford Annotated Edition or SBL Study Edition preferred.
- *Gospel Parallels: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels* (**5th edition**, Nashville: Nelson, 1992).

All of these books are available at the Crux Book Store (Wycliffe College). Any additional readings will be posted on the Blackboard page.

These documents relating to biblical studies can be downloaded from:

<http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/>

- *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Pontifical Biblical Commission. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993).

- The Pontifical Biblical Commission. *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. 2001.

Class assignments and announcements are posted on Blackboard. You access this with your UTORid at portal.utoronto.ca. Since this will be the primary means of communication outside the classroom, it is important that you logon as soon as possible. You will need a University of Toronto email address (only!) and your UTORid. See attached sheet for details. Note that I will not provide assistance for internet, UTOR, or email problems. My website contains links to other websites helpful for biblical studies: www.newtestamentworld.org

Course Schedule – Fall 2015

September 13. *Introduction: Reading the Gospels*

Readings:

1. Mark Allen Powell, *The New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, pages 47-61.
2. Robert J. Miller, “The Gospels That Didn’t Make the Cut,” *Bible Review*, August 1993, pp. 14-25.
3. Begin reading *The Shadow of the Galilean* by Gerd Theissen – continue reading for semester.

Questions:

1. How do you define the “Word of God”?
2. What does it mean to say that the Bible is ‘inspired’?
3. What sort of information can be derived from such ‘lost gospels’ as the Gospel of Judas? What do they tell us about Jesus?
4. Of what value for Christianity are those works that were excluded from the canon?
5. The present canon reached its finished state after a long period of development. Some that were initially excluded were eventually included and vice versa. What lesson can we draw from this?

September 20. *The Gospels in their Political and Historical Context*

Readings:

1. Powell, pp. 9-41.
2. Richardson, Peter, *Herod. King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999, pp. 1-10.

Questions:

1. What were the chief sects in first century Judaism? What role did they play in Palestinian society?
2. Are there critical problems in taking the portrait of the Pharisees found in the New Testament at face value?
3. Describe the ways in which (1) the Maccabean revolt and its aftermath and (2) the Roman occupation and Jewish resistance to it, which culminated in the war of 66-70 CE, helped to shape the world of Jesus and the early church.

September 27. *The Bible at the Turning of the Ages: Jewish Biblical Exegesis and Extra-Biblical Literature and its Impact on Christianity*

Readings:

1. Handout (see Blackboard page).

Questions:

1. In light of the reading material, how might Matt 1-2 be interpreted?
2. What is occurring in Mark 7:14-23 and 12:18-27? What sort of literature is it?
3. How does knowledge of Jewish literature and exegetical techniques affect our understanding of the New Testament?

October 4. *The Gospels – Relationships, Dependency, and Literary Genres*

Readings:

1. Powell, pp. 81-101.
2. Throckmorton, vii-viii.
3. *The Synoptic Problem* by Mark Goodacre, pp. 13-32 (Blackboard)

Questions:

1. What are the reasons that one must assume a literary relationship between the first three gospels?
2. Examine §§ 6 and 188 in Throckmorton following the pattern we used in class. In other words, identify all of the agreements and disagreements between all three gospels and

between each combination of two. Explain the patterns of similarity and difference using the two-document hypothesis (2DH). Assuming the 2DH, how do you account for the Matt-Luke agreements against Mark?

October 11. *Gospel of Mark*

Readings:

1. The entire Gospel of Mark, preferably at one sitting.
2. Powell, pp. 125-147.

Questions:

1. Look at the prologue (Mk 1:1-15). What narrative themes are foreshadowed here?
2. Define the messianic secret as the term is used in scholarship and list the passages where you see evidence for this theme.
3. What are the arguments for and against 16:8 being the original ending of the Gospel?

October 18. *Gospel of Matthew* Book Review Due!

Readings:

1. Gospel of Matthew
2. Powell, pp. 103-125.

Questions:

1. Compare Matthew's text to the parallel in Mark in the following examples:
 - a) Matt 3:13-17 (§ 6, Throckmorton)
 - b) Matt 16:5-12 (§ 120, Throckmorton)In each case make a note of every change that Matthew makes to his source. What effect do these alterations have on the stories? What might these changes say about Matthew's interests and concerns?
2. Reflect on the portrayal of Peter in this gospel, especially in Matt 14:22-33 (§ 113, Throckmorton) and 16:13-23 (§ 122, Throckmorton). Use the tools of redaction criticism to reflect on Matthew's portrait: How does Matthew's portrayal of Peter differ from Mark's? What is Peter's overall function in this gospel?

November 1. *The Gospel of Luke*

Readings:

1. Read the Gospel of Luke and then skim the Acts of the Apostles, paying careful attention to chapters 1-3 and 27.
2. Powell, pp. 147-169; 191-215.

Questions:

1. Do you find an overall purpose and structure in Luke 9:51 – 19:44? Do the stories, parables and teachings in this section display a distinctive theology? Are they present in the other Gospels? What sources is Luke using?
2. In what ways is Luke 4:16 – 30 and 24:13 – 35 a summary of Lucan theology?
3. What symmetry or structure do you find in Luke 1 – 2? What OT allusions do you find and what purpose do they serve?
4. Compare the account of the crucifixion of Jesus in Luke with the other Gospels. In Luke, how do the words of Jesus differ? The words of the centurion at the foot of the cross? How does Luke express his theology in his redaction of the crucifixion?
5. In the Book of Acts, Luke describes Paul's conversion three times (9:1 – 19; 22: 1 – 21; 26: 12 – 18). Do these three accounts differ in any way? If they do, to what purpose?

November 8. *The Gospel of John*

Readings:

1. Read the entire Gospel of John.
2. Powell, pp. 169-191; 493-509.
3. R. Allan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* [IBT] (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 62-86; 109-120.

Questions:

1. Describe the plot of the Fourth Gospel. Note the significance of the 'journey motif, the role of conflict, belief and unbelief as well as recognition scenes.
2. The Johannine Prologue (1:1-18) contains a number of themes that are played out in the rest of the gospel. Identify as many of these as you can. Are there features of the Prologue that do not appear subsequently in the gospel?

3. How does an understanding of narrative criticism explain the dualism of the Fourth Gospel and its negative portrayal of 'the Jews' and those deemed to be opponents of Jesus?

November 15. *The Social and Cultural World of the First Century*

Readings:

1. Malina, Bruce J. Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Ed. Jerome H. Neyrey. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991, 25-65.
2. Moxnes, Halvor. "Patron-Client Relations and the New Testament Community in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Ed. Jerome H. Neyrey. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991, 241-268.
3. Powell, pp. 41-45.

Questions:

1. What does the statement "ancient religion was embedded in kinship and politics" mean? What are the implications of this for the study of the New Testament?
2. Explain how the social experience and customary thinking associated with honour/shame is part of the meaning of the following texts: Matt 16: 13 – 20, Mark 6: 1 – 4, cf. Matt 5: 3 – 12; challenge/response: Matt 4: 1 – 11, 22: 15 - 22, Mark 2: 1 – 12; purity/pollution: Matt 8: 2 - 4; Mark 7: 1 - 13.
3. Explain how the social experience and customary thinking associated with the patron-client system is part of the meaning of the following texts: Mark 9:14 – 28, Luke 7: 1 – 10.

November 22. *What Did the Evangelist Actually Write? Textual Criticism*

Readings:

1. Throckmorton, pp. ix-xxxvi.
2. Handout

Questions:

1. Be able to describe the 3 major text types, Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine (*koine*), and be prepared to give the approximate date and text type of the following papyri, codices, and versions: (P⁷⁵, P⁴⁵, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Bezae, Old Latin (*italica*)).

2. Explain how the principles of the ‘shorter reading’ (*lectio brevior*), the ‘more difficult reading’ (*lectio difficilior*), and the ‘non-harmonistic reading’ are used to decide which variant more likely represents the better reading.
3. Be prepared to describe the textual witnesses and apply the principles of textual criticism to the following variants:

Mark 1:2 (“s” in Throckmorton §1)
 Luke 11:11 (“x” in Throckmorton §38)
 Matt 8:13 (“c” in Throckmorton §46)
 Mark 2:22 (“n” in Throckmorton §54)
 Luke 5:39 (“o” in Throckmorton §54)
 Matt 6:13 (“f” in Throckmorton §146)
 Matt 24:36 (“m” in Throckmorton §221)
 Matt 27:49 (“s” in Throckmorton §250)

November 29. *Building the Community of the New Age: Paul’s Letters*

Readings:

1. Powell, pp. 215-231; 231-255; 273-293; 307-323; 371-387; 415-427.
2. Romans chapters 1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4-5; Galatians; 1 Corinthians; Philemon

Questions:

1. Who is the intended reader (audience) of Philemon? What is Paul’s rhetorical strategy? What are the communal issues?
2. What is Paul’s rhetorical strategy in Galatians? What type of rhetoric is it? How does this influence how we read the letter?
3. Answer the same question for Romans 1-4.

December 6. *The Historical Jesus. New Testament Research and the Life of the Church: preaching, liturgy, proclamation.*

Readings:

1. Powell, pp. 63-79.
2. “Using Scripture in Pastoral Settings,” John Shea, *Chicago Studies*, August 1984, pp. 131-139. (Blackboard)

Questions:

1. Apply all the relevant criteria of historical authenticity to the following passages and make a determination about their historical reliability. Where two gospels disagree

explain which version would be considered more authentic than the other.

a) Matt 5:3-12//Luke 6:20-23 (Throckmorton § 19)

b) Luke 12:49-53//Matt 10:34-36 (Throckmorton § 160)

c) Luke 17:20-22 (Throckmorton § 183)

2. Look at §24, 176, 187 – the sections on divorce. How many independent witnesses are there? Using the criteria for historical research, would you consider this an authentic teaching of Jesus?
3. What do you see as the most important contribution of historical Jesus' research? What is your greatest concern with this field of study? Try to provide specific examples of gospel texts that illustrate these contributions and concerns.

December 12 – Final Take-Home exam due – NO LATE PAPERS!