

THE NEW TESTAMENT: Historical Background

Fall Term 2008

Course Number: R212

CRN#: 21471

Room Number: Benton Center 204

Time: 6:00-8:50 PM Wednesdays

Instructor: Jon Goman

How to Contact Me:

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My office is located at the intersection of Monroe St., 26th St. and Arnold Way, across 26th from the Monroe Street Beanery. In fact, if I'm not in my office, the Beanery is a good place to check before you give up.

Office Hours:

Wednesdays 4:00-5:30 PM

Mondays 10:00-11:00 AM

I'm glad to make appointments with students outside these hours. You are also welcome to drop in at my office. A call first will guarantee that I'm available. I do reserve evening and weekend time for LBCC students who cannot see an instructor during the day. So if you want to chat outside my stated office hours, don't hesitate to ask.

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE:

This course will introduce you to the contemporary academic methods of New Testament study and the results of those methods. We are concerned with what can be known of the New Testament by historical, literary, anthropological, archeological, and philosophical investigation.

Theological claims made in or about the New Testament will not concern us in this class, nor will the status of the New Testament as inspired scripture. I am willing to discuss such issues, but ask you to make an appointment to discuss them outside of class. In this class we will examine the New Testament as an historical, literary and cultural document using the same tools as would be used to investigate any other ancient document or document originating in a culture radically different from ours.

In this class you will be asked to keep an important distinction in mind: between understanding what the author of a New Testament writing meant by a word or an idea and

whether what he meant is true or not. Our class task is to understand what the New Testament authors meant, not to judge whether their understanding is correct or incorrect. The question is what did they think and why did they think it and what did it mean to their lives? Whether what they thought was true or not is another question.

TEXT-BOOKS:

The secondary source material for this class is found on the World Wide Web: **Frontline: From Jesus to Christ**. The web address is www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion.

If you do not have easy access to the Internet, computers are available for your use at the Benton Center Learning Center or in the Corvallis Public Library. If internet access is difficult for you, make arrangement with me for paper copies of the reading assignments.

The only required text book is a copy of the New Testament. Many different translations are adequate: Revised Standard, New Revised Standard, Jerusalem, New Jerusalem, The Authorized Version (the so-called King James), New International Version, The New English Version and the New English Version Revised. If you have questions about the adequacy of a particular version, ask me.

NOTE: Although the Authorized Version (King James) is adequate, it requires great care to use since shifts in the meanings of English words since the 16th century have changed the meaning of many passages. While I will allow you to use the Authorized Version, I encourage you to use a more contemporary translation.

Please avoid **The Book**, **The Message**, **The Good News Bible** and similar paraphrases. They are not translations and are not sufficiently accurate for use in this class.

GRADING and EVALUATION:

1. Pop Quizzes are always a possibility, but are not likely. I'm too lazy to correct them.
2. Specific assignments are listed in your class prospectus. They are due the following class period. I'm generally pretty lenient if there is a family emergency, illness or similar matter. Please make arrangements to meet any special needs with me.
3. Written material must conform to standard academic English usage. I reserve the right to refuse to grade any paper with more than three grammatical or spelling errors on a page. Refused work may be rewritten for credit, but must be handed in within a week of my refusal. So please, please, please proof read your work. Don't trust spell checkers. They were invented by the devil and lead you down the path to academic perdition. There is no substitute for the knowledgeable human eye. After you write your paper, let it sit for at least an hour then

read it again, looking for errors in spelling and grammar.

4. In studying religion the questions you ask are at least as important as the answers you give. In this class I will ask you to practice asking questions of your assigned readings. *Unless I specifically say otherwise, I do not want the answers to the questions you formulate.* You will need to ask yourselves – and maybe me – about what constitutes a sound and significant question.

5. I strongly recommend regular attendance. While I do not grade on attendance, participation in class is a good foundation for not making serious mistakes in your written work.

Helpful Information about LBCC

1. The Family Connections Center offers help with child care and similar needs. Luckiamute Center on the main campus, room 132, hone 917-4899.

2. The Diversity Achievement Center provides help locating needed services: counseling, tutoring, disability services, mentor location, help with scholarship applications, and financial aid forms. The Center is on the second floor of ther Student Union/Forum Building.

Class Sessions and Assignments

October 1

We'll Cover:

Administrative Stuff: Grading, class procedures, personal introductions

Ancient Books: Their physical structure, role in culture, reproduction techniques.

The sources materials for the text of the New Testament

Reading Assignments for Oct. 8: The Gospel of Mark Chapters 1:1 through 9:1.

From Jesus to Christ: A Portrait of Jesus' World

Judaism's First Century Diversity

The Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Galilee

John the Baptist

The Jewish Diaspora

Apocalypticism

Josephus, Our Primary Source

Jews and the Roman Empire

Temple Culture

Writing Assignment:

Option #1: Find five places in the assigned reading of Mark's Gospel where a knowledge of Jewish-Palestinian culture would be helpful in understanding the text. List the chapter and verse and give a sentence or two on why a knowledge of the background culture would be helpful.

Option#2: Find five places in your secondary readings assignment where you don't understand what the author is saying as well as you'd like, reference the location of the passage and describe what you don't understand.

October 8

We'll Cover

The Jewish Background to the World of Jesus

The Roman and Greek Background to the World of Jesus

Reading Assignments for Oct. 15: The remaining Chapters of The Gospel of Mark

From Jesus to Christ: A Portrait of Jesus's World

Religion in the Roman World – Marianne Bonz

Hellenistic Culture

The Empire's Religions

Portraits of Graeco-Roman Cities - Hendrix

Biblical Archeology: Cities (Click on the name of the city on the map)

Writing Assignment:

Option #1 What's Peculiar about the end of Mark's Gospel? (Be sure to read the footnotes. If your Bible doesn't footnote the ending of Mark's gospel, find one which does.)

Option#2 Choose either A or B.

A. Write out six questions raised but not answered by your readings in *From Jesus to Christ*

B. Write two pages or less on the differences between religion in the Roman World and what you read in Mark's gospel. (Be careful, don't read your present ideas into Mark.)

October 15

We'll Cover:

Summary of the Cultural Background of the New Testament

Reading Assignments for October 22:

From Jesus to Christ: The Story of the Storytellers

The Emergence of the Canon – Mellows, found in "An Overview of the Four Gospels of the New Testament"

The Emergence of the Four Gospel Canon

From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians

Jewish Scriptures: From Hebrew Bible to Christian Bible – Hamilton

Read at least one of the articles listed in the Supplemental Readings for this lesson.

Writing Assignment:

Option #1: If you had to create a canon of scripture, what criteria would you use to select the material you included? Why would you use or reject the criteria of selection used by the early church? Make sure you reference the article you read from the Supplemental Readings.

Option#2: From your supplemental readings material, identify two points the author makes and discuss why they are important for understanding the New Testament. (Don't forget to name the source to which you're responding.)

October 22

We'll Cover: The Canon – How the New Testament Came to Be (How the separate parts became a single whole.)

Reading Assignments for October 29:

Luke 6:17-7:1, Matthew 5:17-28; Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 20:1-16

From Jesus to Christ: Jesus' Many Faces

What Can We Really Know About Jesus?

The Historian's Task

He was born, lived and died a Jew

His Social Class

The Surprises of Sepphoris

The Complexity of His Religious Identity

Jesus's Ministry and Teaching

Arrest and Execution

Searching for Jesus

Jesus as Rabbi – Jaroslav Pelikan

The Parables – Madeleine Boucher

Writing Assignments:

Option#1: What differences do you find between the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (5- and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke?

Option#2: Identify three different approaches to the historical Jesus. Identify their differences and similarities.

October 29

We'll cover: The Historian Considers Jesus: What Can We Know About Him?

Reading Assignments for November 5:

From Jesus to Christ: The Story of the Storytellers

Importance of the Oral Tradition

What are the Gospels?

Q – the Hypothetical Gospel

The Four Canonical Gospels

The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of John

Death and Resurrection

Gnostics and Other Heretics

The Gospel of Thomas

More about Q, and the Gospel of Thomas

The search for a No-frills Jesus

Also read: Luke 1, John 20 and Matthew 1

Writing Assignment:

Option #1: What is different or the same about the opening of Matthew's gospel and the opening of Luke's gospel?

Option#2: What do we know and what don't we know about the people who tell us the story of Jesus?

November 5

The Four Gospels and Their Authors

Reading Assignments for November 12:

The Letter to the Galatians

Material on Paul in *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians*

Paul's Mission and Letters

Paul's Congregations

Wrestling with their Jewish Heritage

Begin Reading the Essays On Pauline Ethics – Found on the Instructor's Website under ***Class Material***

Writing Assignment: Select three key **passages** from the above *secondary sources* and comment on why you believe them to be important. Come to class prepared to defend your decisions orally. Your papers will be handed in.

November 12

On Paul – An Introduction

Reading Assignments for November 19:

Finish Reading the Essays on Pauline Ethics

1 Corinthians chapters 1-6

Writing Assignment:

In what ways does Paul's ethical structures agree or disagree with the one with which you were raised?

November 19

The New Person and the Freedom of the Christian

Reading Assignment for November 26:

From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians

Diversity of Early Christianity

The Roles for Women

The Collision with Paganism

In the Catacombs

Women in Christianity: the New Discoveries – Karen King

Kingdoms in Conflict

Found in the The Symposium section: Magic, Miracles and the Gospel

No Writing Assignment for this Session – I'll probably need it to catch up with correcting your papers.

November 26

The Revelation to John and Movements in the Post-Pauline Church

Reading Assignment for December 3: Browse the Revelation to John (also called the Apocalypse and the Book of Revelations.) It's the final book of the New Testament.

December 3

An introduction to apocalyptic literature

No assignment for the final class period, December 10th

December 10

(OK. It's finals week and some of you will prefer to study for other exams or finish papers. But you paid for my time, you might as well take advantage of it.) Class will be held at the Episcopal Campus Ministry House at 2615 NW Arnold Way. It's on the corner of Arnold, Monroe and 26th St.

Supplementary Readings Organized by Lecture

Books marked by an asterisk (*) are easier reading or especially accessible for some other reason.

Possible Readings for Lecture #1 Textual Criticism

Dictionary Articles and Encyclopedia Essays

- *Cowell, E.C. "Text and Ancient Versions of the New Testament," Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1, pp. 72-83.
- Epp, Eldon J. The Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol. 6 pp. 412-435
- Skehan, McRae and Brown, "Texts and Versions," Jerome Bible Commentary Essay #69 pp.561-589.
- Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol. 4, pp. 594-613.
A fairly dry but relatively easy to understand introduction.

Articles and Essays

- Birdsall, J.N. "How the New Testament Came to Us" in Understanding the New Testament ed. O. Jessie Lace pp. 121-144.
- *Collins, Raymond F. Introduction to the New Testament See chapter #3 "Textual Criticism" pp.75-114
- Westcott, B.F. and F.J.A. Hort, The New Testament in the Original Greek Cambridge-Macmillan, 1881. See the introductory essay and forget the Greek!.

Books

- Finegan, Jack Encountering New Testament Manuscripts: A Working Introduction to Textual Criticism Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.
- Metzger, B.M. The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration ----- The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations

Possible Readings for Lectures #2 & 3: Roman and Jewish Background

- *Bouquet, A.C. Everyday Life in New Testament Times, Scribner's, 1954.
The best simple introduction, recommended highly for those who want to get their bearings
- Bultmann, Rudolf Primitive Christianity
Has extensive sections on the Jewish and Greek backgrounds to the New Testament.
This book is a classic.
- *Davies, W.D. Invitation to the New Testament Chapter #3 "The Background in First Century Judaism" and Chapter #2 "The Background in the Graeco-Roman World"
- Kee, Howard Clark and Francis Young, Understanding the New Testament Part 1, "The Community Emerges" pp. 7-45. Covers both Greek and Jewish background.
- *Lace, O. Jessie, "The Historical Background of the New Testament" Chapter #2 in Understanding the New Testament, Cambridge Bible Commentaries Series
- Perkins, Pheme Reading the New Testament Chapter #2 "The World of Jesus" pp. 23-50.
- *Pilch, John J. The Cultural World of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday, Cycle A, Cycle B and Cycle C. The Liturgical Press, 1995. A good, easily read, scholarly introduction to a multitude of important topics.

Possible Readings for Lecture #4: The Formation of the Canon

Dictionary Articles and Encyclopedia Essays

Brown, Raymond "Canonicity" in The Jerome Bible Commentary

Metzger, Bruce "Canon of the New Testament" in the Revised edition of Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible

Sundberg, Albert C. "The Making of the New Testament Canon" in The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary

"Canon" in The Anchor Bible Dictionary Volume 1, pp. 852-861

* "Canon of the New Testament" in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol. 1, pp. 520-532.

Books

Kümmel, Werner Georg. Revision of Feine-Behm Introduction to the New Testament. See Part II, "The Origin and Canon of the New Testament"

Metzger, B.M. The Canon of the New Testament, Oxford, 1987.

*Moule, C.F.D. "How the New Testament Came into Being" in Understanding the New Testament, ed. O. Jessie Luce. Pp. 64-120.

Perrin, Norman The New Testament: An Introduction Appendix #3 pp. 325-335.

Campanhausen, Hans Freiherr von The Formation of the Christian Bible Fortress, 1972.

Articles

Dungan, David "The New Testament Canon in Recent Study" Interpretation 29(4,'78)339-351.

Kalin, Evertt "The Inspired Community: A Glance at Canon History" Concordia Theological Monthly 42 ('71)541-549.

Sundberg, Albert C. "The Bible Canon and the Christian Doctrine of Inspiration Interpretation 29(4,'75)352-371.

Wainwright, Geoffrey "The New Testament as Canon" Scottish Journal of Theology 28('75)551-571

Possible Reading for Lecture #5: The Historical Jesus

Marcus Borg Jesus, A New Vision, Harper, 1987.

Rudolf Bultmann Jesus Christ and Mythology, Scribner's, 1958.

Challenging, but absolutely fundamental to understanding thinking about Jesus in the twentieth century. Fortunately, also short (only 85 pages.)

*Henri Daniel Rops Daily Life in the Time of Jesus New York: Hawthorne, 1982.

Designed for the reader without specialist knowledge of the New Testament. Written from a decidedly Roman Catholic perspective but full of sound scholarship.

G.S. Sloyer Jesus in Focus: A Life in Its Setting Mystic, CN: Twenty-third Publishers, 1983.

*Gerd Theissen The Shadow of the Galilean Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987.

This is a fascinating book, presenting a sociology of the time of Jesus in the form of a

number of fictional snapshots of people. Theissen is one of the foremost New Testament scholars of the last half of the 20th century and writes with an immense knowledge of the time.

-----See also Theissen's other book: *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. It is a classic.

John Dominic Crossan *The Historical Jesus* San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

A relatively advanced book, but full of a sense of the cultural background of the time of Jesus. Just dip in several chapters, don't try to read the entire book.

*W. Barnes Tatum *In Quest of Jesus: A Guide Book* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.

This is one of the simpler as well as one of the better introductions to the times and life of Jesus.

Hans Kung *On Being a Christian* Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1976.

See especially sections B.II "The Real Christ" and Section C.I "The Program"

Gunther Bornkamm *Jesus of Nazareth* New York: Harper, 1960.

See especially chapters 1-3. This is one of the classic modern expositions of Jesus.

Rudolf Bultmann *Jesus and the Word* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

Sections I and II are particularly important.

*Morton Scott Enslin *Christian Beginnings Part I* Harper, 1956.

Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, Crossroad Press, 1979.

A massive and challenging work, not for the faint hearted, but immensely rewarding to those who don't mind diving into the cold water.

Reginald H. Fuller. *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus Studies in Biblical Theology*, Series 1, number 12.

Possible Readings for Lecture #6: the Gospels

*Davies, W.D. *Invitation to the New Testament Especially Part II, "The First Three Gospels" and Part IV "The Fourth Gospel"*

Kee, Howard Clark and Francis Young *Understanding the New Testament Chapter 15, The Hope According to the Synoptics*, pp. 445-448.

Mays, J.L. ed. *Interpreting the Gospels* Fortress, 1981.

Perkins, PHEME *Reading the New Testament Part Four "The Gospels -- Four Portrayals of Jesus"*

Rhoads, David and Donald Michie *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* Fortress, 1982.

*Tatum, W. Barnes *In Quest of Jesus: A Guidebook Chapter 3 Gospel Portrayals*, p.37-59.

Possible Readings for Lecture #7 and #8: On Paul

Bornkamm, Gunther *Paul*, Harper, 1971. The companion volume to this author's *Jesus of Nazareth*. A very helpful book, and only moderately challenging to read.

- *Davies, Invitation to the New Testament Part III "Paul"
- Dodd, C.H. The Meaning of Paul for Today Meridian, 1957.
- *Hooker, Morna D. , A Preface to Paul Oxford University Press, 1980. A clear introduction to Paul's thought.
- Kasemann, Ernst Perspectives on Paul Fortress, 1969. A difficult and immensely rewarding work.
- W.A. Meeks, The Moral World of the First Christians, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1986.
- *Moule, C.F.D. "How the New Testament Came into Being" pp. 85-102 In Understanding the New Testament ed. O. Jessie Luce
- Nock, Arthur Darbey St. Paul. Harper, 1938. An older book but so lucid and clear that it is still very much worth reading.
- Perkins, Pheme Reading the New Testament Part Three, "Paul, Missionary to the Gentiles"
- Scroggs, Robin Paul for a New Day, Fortress Press, 1977. Short and clear but very important work explaining the general direction of Paul's thought and his life.
- Stendahl, Krister Paul among Jews and Gentiles Fortress, 1976. One of the fountain heads of the contemporary scholarly reassessment of Paul. A profound and not particularly difficult book -- Stendahl writes clearly.

Readings for Lecture 10: The Revelation to John, Movements in the Post Pauline Church

- Rowley, H.H. The Relevance of Apocalyptic Attic Press, 1980.
- Pilch, John J. What are they saying about the Book of Revelation? Paulist Press, 1978.
- Minear, Paul S. New Testament Apocalyptic Abington, 1978.
For a more advanced set of essays see, Journal for Theology and Church ed. RobertW. Funk, #6 "Apocalypticism" Herder and Herder, 1969.

VARIOUS COMMENTARIES AND COMMENTARY SETS

The Pelican Gospel Commentaries. Four paperback volumes, one devoted to each gospel. Mark is by D.E. Nineham, Luke by G.B. Caird, John by John Marsh and Matthew by John Fenton.
These are introductory level, cheap and scholastically solid. Worth having as reference books.

Bruce Vawter, The Four Gospels: An Introduction. Doubleday Image, 1967. Another easily read and illuminating introduction.

Among commentary series I recommend: The Cambridge New Testament, and The Torch Commentary series. Image Books has published a series of commentaries on the text of the Jerusalem Bible called Invitation to . . ., and then followed by the name of the book commented on. It is a good serious, competent, elementary introduction for

those with the Jerusalem Bible. Harper's New Testament Commentaries series is a little more advanced but still much worth consulting.

The Hermania Series is for advanced students, but the very best that there is in the shop. The volumes of The Anchor Bible are also somewhat advanced but give much information on the history of the text and on cultural background.

Non-Canonical Writings, Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Stuff

Millar Burrows, The Dead Sea Scrolls, Viking Press, 1955. An older but still lucid and excellent account of the discovery and meaning of the scrolls by a person who was involved in the process.

Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, Pelican, 1968. It never hurts to read the originals. Just reading about something doesn't really let you know it.

Hennecke, Edgar and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (eds.) New Testament Apocrypha, 2 vol. The Westminster Press, 1963.

The standard source for texts and discussion on apocryphal gospels, acts, letters etc.

There are a number of translations of the Gospel of Thomas: See The Gospel of Thomas by Marvin Meyer. There is also a translation in the back of the Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum ed. Kurt Aland and one of the Coptic text by Guillaumont, Puech, Quispel, Will and Al Masih.

There is a good web-site on New Testament Apocrypha:

www.ntgateway.com/noncanon.htm It has a great set of links to both texts and commentary.

Studies Dealing with Special Areas:

The Sociology of the New Testament World:

J. Stambaugh and D. Balch, The New Testament in Its Social Environment, Westminster, Philadelphia and SPCK, London, 1986.

Bruce J. Malina, The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology Westminster, Louisville, Kentucky, 2001.

Women in the New Testament World:

E. Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her. A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins, SCM, London, 1983.

Russell, Letty M. Ed. Feminist Interpretation of the Bible Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1985.

The Parables of Jesus:

Jeremias, Joachim The Parables of Jesus New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

Jeremias, Joachim Rediscovering the Parables New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966.

Dodd, C. H. The Parables of the Kingdom New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961.

Finally, on a topic of great contemporary interest, a work by one of the best American Biblical Scholars:

Robin Scroggs, The New Testament and Homosexuality Philadelphia: fortress Press, 1989.