

**Final Exam**

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NT504: Greek Bible and the Western Mediterranean World: OA

Alliance Theological Seminary – Dr. Shawn Craigmiles

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### **Primary Document 1 – Bel and the Dragon.**

**Brief Description:** It depicts Daniel as an antagonist to the pagan gods of the Persians, who shows the God of Israel as supreme among all gods. Daniel is seen as a private investigator of sorts. It portrays Daniel’s character to be somewhat arrogant and smug, which is the complete opposite of the Daniel of Scripture.

**Significance for studying the background to the NT:** It shows me that the writers that crafted works like Bel and the Dragon had many bones to pick with their adversaries. For the Jew, commitment to YHWH coincided with the humiliation of their enemies. Therefore, the concepts that Jesus reminded Israel of such as forgiving those that sin against you, and loving your enemy, would have caused more emotional turmoil to a 2<sup>nd</sup> temple Jew than a Levite that declined to approve someone’s sacrificial lamb for Passover.

### **Primary Document 2 – Epistle of Enoch**

**Brief Description:** The sons of God are to remain faithful to the one true God of Israel. They will be rewarded for doing so. Those that oppose the God of Israel will be destroyed.

Faithfulness to YHWH is the true sign of an Israelite. No wavering allowed.

**Significance for studying the background to the NT:** The people of Israel desperately wanted their identity as a nation back, but their identity as God’s people was significantly different than what the Torah had explained for them to be. They were longing for a Messiah and a king that would vindicate them. They wanted God to reign down his wrath and justice on all pagan rulers and unfaithful Israelites. Jesus came into this kind of hostile setting. A setting that abhorred the Romans. The Israelites clearly had the deepest disdain for their “rulers” and wanted nothing more than to have them removed. Jesus’s command to love the enemy, and bless those that curse would have fallen on deaf ears for most.

### **Primary Document 3 – Community Rule (Qumran)**

**Brief Description:** The life and ways of the men that lived in the Qumran community. Believed by many to be the Essenes, this writing covers it all: their rituals, expectations, rules of engagement, piety, and purity. Incredible!

**Significance for studying the background to the NT:** It gives me a really good idea of the separateness of the people of Israel. So many groups viewed themselves as truly devoted to God, but they all differed in opinion on it. Seeing people like John the Baptist in Scripture can now be more clearly understood in light of the writings of the Qumran group. It is not that hard to imagine someone like John being so committed to God and seen as so odd in the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple period.

**Impactful Reading and/or Content.** The writings of Josephus were extremely insightful to me. I could not believe the amount of description he gave. One point in particular that Josephus brought up was his description of the Pharisees as those that dealt with the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. Josephus showed that the Pharisees wrestled with this tension and taught it in their time. Knowing that, I now read Romans in an entirely different light. Also, the writings of 1 and 2 Maccabees. They have shed a lot of light on the Israelite perspective of being elected by God and chosen for his purposes. I now read the New Testament and see the words “chosen”, elect, royal priesthood etc. in a new light. The seriousness of those concepts to the Jews were deep and rich. The fact that the apostles used these concepts in their letters points to a very real and deep Jewish identity that they held even as followers of Jesus. It seems the apostles saw Judaism and Christianity as one in the same; the latter being a continuation of what God had started with Abraham and completed in Jesus. Also, the text of the pagan visiting the temple and his astonishments at the temple’s grandeur showed me that I really do miss the mark when I

think about the power of the presence of temples among ancient people groups. That text also showed me how wealthy the small nation of Israel really was in light of their circumstances. One other particular point that stood out to me was the incantations of magicians and their work during the second temple period. People used these incantations for a plethora of reasons. This shined a lot of light on the book of Acts when Paul faced tension in new towns and when we see the people of Ephesus burning their expensive books on magic and the dark arts. (this took exactly 5 minutes to type – I am a slow typist...sorry).

**Correlation with the New Testament.** Romans 9 has come to life for me. Knowing now, from Josephus' writings and the writings of Enoch, as well as Maccabees, I see Paul's concepts of election through that lens and am now convinced that Hyper Calvinism's concept of election misses the essence and heart of what Paul is thinking and feeling. Paul saw the election of God as that of the Israelite identity and the free will of man completely in tune with the sovereign hand of God's election. It was not as Hyper Calvinists claim, God elects whom he wants to save and sends to hell those he does not. The concept that seems so clear to me is that Paul, as an Israelite, especially a second temple Israelite, and a Pharisee at that, would have placed the entire section of Romans 9 in his letter for the disenfranchised Jew. Both believing and non-believing. The Jews that were not yet convinced of Jesus as Messiah would hear the words as piercing reminders of God's intent for Israel. And those that were disciples of Jesus, who were trying to make sense of their identity as Jews, would have found it soothing to know that Christ was part of the election plan from the beginning for them. Romans 9 seems to have nothing to do with salvation; not in the sense that Calvinists argue that it does. It seems to have to do with Israelite identity in group think and the politics of Israelite faith.

**Personal Impact.** *Describe your feelings (whether positive or negative) as to the impact this course material has had on you personally. My feelings from this course are all good. I feel far more equipped as a pastor. I feel far more connected to the text. I feel far more competent in scripture. I feel much closer to Jesus. Not just relationally. I mean I feel closer to the Jesus of the Bible and not the western Jesus I was raised on. It has deeply impacted how I teach, study, and think about the Bible as a whole. Were there areas of frustration or excitement, etc.? Document what you did or experienced while you were engaging this perspective or material, and any lasting results in your life and ministry resulting from this course material. (Length: Around a paragraph).* I was both excited and frustrated by *Bel and the Dragon*. More so with that text than any other. When I first read *Bel and the Dragon* I was taken aback by the tenacity of the author and their low view of the pagans. I knew they held the pagan gods in disdain, but this was different. It made me wonder what their thoughts of Jonah were, and how YHWH handled that. I can now easily see how Jonah would have held so much resentment for the Assyrians. The depiction of Daniel in *Bel and the Dragon* still does not settle well with me. The depiction of his character has stuck with me and made me realize that everyone must be careful not to change history or even rewrite the nature of truth in order to meet a political end. Daniel was a man of God, humble in all his ways, and yet for the sake of political gain and influence the writer of *Bel and the Dragon* made him out to be a satirical protagonist. I see from the writings of this course that people of any faith want so bad to be right and stand on the promises that often times seem to have failed them. I see Christ more clearly now as the fulfillment of humanities longing for significance and as the desire met for Israel and all nations who are in constant turmoil over their earthly identity.

**Intended Use.** *Discuss how you intend to use the information you acquired during this course.* I have already begun to use it. I teach from a far more historical approach now. Rather than simply jumping right into a text, I take a good chunk of time to familiarize myself with what was being said in the culture of that time. I look at what the customs and beliefs were. I look at the writings of the times before to get an idea of any emotional feelings towards groups and those that were in power. Once I have all that pretty well nailed down, I begin to unfold the text and find what grammatical structure was used, and what words were used, and why they were used in that way in light of the historical zeitgeist of the that time.

**Feedback.** *What one thing would you like the professor to know about your experience in this class?* This was the most Christ centered scholarly approach to Biblical Studies I have ever seen or have been a part of. I will forever be impacted by it. I am very blessed to have finished my time at ATS with this class. Phenomenal!

Thank you, Dr. Craigmiles.