

NT 503 Reading the New Testament
Take-Home Final Exam
Revised 8/12/2020

This exam is designed to be a learning experience that helps you pull together the key components of our course, especially as it will relate to your ministry contexts. From this point on, you will be able to refer to your textbooks or commentaries for the content necessary in sermon preparation and teaching. Our focus is on how you integrate this content into your ministries.

You may use your books and notes. Try and enjoy the challenge and the opportunity to pull the course together.

A couple of observations:

1. **Historical-critical studies** help us to reconstruct the message as the original audience would likely have understood it. Contemporary analogies must grow out of a clear understanding of what the message meant, then allow the Spirit to guide us into what the message says now. It is our responsibility based on the call of God to do the hard work of using the best of the methods that are available to us. Every method is designed to ask only certain questions. For example, **textual critical** methods focus on the manuscript evidence in the attempt to reconstruct the most likely original words of the author. **Source critical** methods focus on the sources of information such as written documents (possibly the LXX or Hebrew OT, other synoptic gospels, sayings sources that were written down, etc.) or oral tradition (eyewitness accounts circulating among the churches). Each method has strengths and blind spots. No one method can faithfully address all the issues that arise in our text, especially since we are several millennia removed from the Christ event. The **best scholarship/interpretation** knows how to build on what is solid, even if it challenges our own position in conjunction with the Spirit. The **worst scholarship/interpretation** wants to destroy every other position but its own.
2. Having 4 different perspectives on the impact of Jesus in the lives of those first disciples who knew him (the Gospels are all based on eye-witness accounts) lends credibility to the Church's proclamation of the Gospel. There is only one Gospel and it originates with God, not the Church. The four perspectives show how the Gospel addresses the needs and deepening insights of people in ever-changing historical-critical contexts with the same Christ. **Important Note:** Society has a love-hate relationship with Jesus which goes in cycles. One of the most difficult challenges is the spirit of the age which tends to make Jesus into our own image. The simplest example of this comes in a quote I read several years ago: "We know we have created God in our own image when He hates all the same people we do." There are all kinds of reasons why this is so, and you will need to be alert to that tendency. Just remember, the Scripture is both a word of challenge as well as word of encouragement. I have found that by letting God be God, my understanding of Jesus has deepened through engaging different perspectives.
3. Letters are ad hoc documents addressed to the pastoral crises and needs of specific congregations by evangelists and pastor-teachers during the establishment and spread of the early Church in the age of Empire. The practical and spiritual issues are connected to socio-cultural and historical forces at work in these churches that challenged their discipleship and continue to guide the Church's response to living faithfully as the people of God. The Gospel had the capacity to cross barriers through contextualization, as the message of commitment, obedience, holiness, etc. challenged each church according to their unique issues. Once we

understand this phenomenon, we can competently draw analogies to our own contemporary situations without forcing the Scriptures to say only what fits our own emotional or denominational sensitivities. **A word of encouragement:** Working in a church context will be one of the most challenging experiences of your life. Balancing the needs of people with your own personal needs requires a level of commitment that brings us to the end of ourselves. People are messy. That is what makes them interesting. Guard your hearts against anything that creates an obstacle to you loving God or others wholeheartedly. And when you fail, remember you have an advocate with the Father. Failure is how humans learn, so be kind to yourselves, dust yourselves off, and with God's loving provision build on what is good.

4. The church gains strength and value from the presence of different and diverse voices to the Gospel message, from the concerns of the General/Catholic epistles to the warnings and exhortations of Revelation to the 7 churches. The consistency in the proclaimed message is addressed to the ever-changing temporal realities of humans throughout church history. Different books will sound different warnings at different times and different contexts. Contexts can change but the Gospel does not! Nothing could be more essential to competent interpretation of the NT in a post-truth culture than critical reflection on all these questions. **One comment about Revelation:** Revelation is one of the most misused books of the NT. Keep focused on the message of faithful witness that overcomes by the blood of the lamb and not on false teaching that suggests God overcomes evil with violence. Divine wrath is real, but nowhere does God ask His people to destroy by violent acts. Human nature being what it is can quickly cross from righteous indignation to sinful thoughts and actions. Judgment is God's prerogative, and He will execute it in His time and in His way. Note that even in Revelation, the bowls of wrath are prefaced by a holy scene in heaven that suggests this is an act of unprecedented solemnity. Up to that final act, there are countless instances within Revelation of God extending opportunities to humanity for repentance. That people choose not to repent is why these final acts take place. Until then, we live in a time of forbearance where divine grace grounded in the sacrificial love of Christ is the strongest force in the world.

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Discuss the following when approaching the Gospels for teaching, preaching, and discipleship. Be sure to support your answer with evidence and analysis.:

1. Why is it important to understand historical-critical issues, such as authorship, recipients, and dating (even if we cannot determine these details definitively)? **1 to 2 paragraphs.**
2. Present a well-reasoned argument for your ministry context as to what is significant for people's faith and interpretation of a Gospel for spiritual growth about the phenomenon that the Church has 4 canonical gospels? **1 paragraph**
3. When reading the letters of Paul, one must consider the relationship between the Church's context (the recipients) and the argument Paul makes in a specific letter.

- a. Explain the reason why this is an essential step in reading Paul’s different letters with competence. **1 paragraph.**
 - b. Focusing on Galatians, discuss the relationship between the context and the theological points emphasized. Be sure to be specific about the context and explain why these theological issues best addressed them. **1 to 2 paragraphs.**
4. By the end of this course you should be more aware of the diversity of the New Testament, as well as how the message of each book complements God’s overarching purpose of reconciliation with humanity. Diversity is a hot-button issue today and education is often construed as the domain of elitists, and that includes Seminary educated pastors and teachers. It is important you are clear about the extent and limitations of diversity.
- a. Is diversity a problem for interpretation, or do you see a value to these different voices for the proclamation and ministry of the contemporary Church? Explain. *Remember the unique presentations of the Catholic or General epistles.* **1 paragraph.**
 - b. Describe what steps you would take if an interpretation on a passage of Scripture was not the same as yours, and what you would do if a commentary or denomination challenged what you have always understood. **1 paragraph.** *This question goes to method more than content, which is a graduate level focus of critical thinking. It helps to think about how you would handle an issue ahead of time so that you are prepared to respond wisely and opened to the Spirit’s guidance (1 Timothy 3:16-17).*
5. **OPTIONAL:** “One thing I would like the professor and/or ATS to know about my experience in this course is: _____.”

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Criteria	A Exceeds Expectations	B Meets Expectations	C Approaches Expectations	D Minimal Expectations	F Misses Expectations
Clarity and Organization of Argument	Organizes the content in an exceptional manner. Articulates ideas with exceptional clarity, logic, and supporting evidence.	Organizes the content in a reasonable manner. Ideas are clearly and logically expressed, supported well by relevant	Organization of the content is difficult to follow. Has a basic understanding of the question, but	The essay is disjointed. Was unable to present his/her answers clearly,	Poorly written

		investigation and literature.	is unable to articulate ideas clearly, logically, or with adequate supporting reasons.	logically, or with persuasive evidence.	
Mastery of the Content of a NT Book	Demonstrates comprehensive mastery of the significant, distinctive content.	Demonstrates competent control of the distinctive content.	Demonstrates some knowledge of the content.	Has significant gaps in knowledge of the content.	Has no indication of knowledge of content
Mastery of the Critical Issues of a NT Book	Demonstrates comprehensive mastery of the critical issues of a NT book	Demonstrates competent control of the critical issues of a NT book	Demonstrates some knowledge of the critical issues of a NT book	Has significant gaps in knowledge of the critical issues of a NT book	Has no indication of knowledge of critical issues
Mastery of the Distinctive Theology of a NT Book	Demonstrates comprehensive mastery of the distinctive theology of a NT book	Demonstrates competent control of the distinctive theology of a NT book	Demonstrates some knowledge of the theology of a NT book	Has significant gaps in knowledge of the distinctive theology of a NT book	Has no indication of the distinctive theology of a NT book
Ability to Think Carefully through Issues Raised within a NT Book.	Demonstrates an exceptional grasp of the interrelationship of critical and faith issues as they apply to a	Demonstrates a competent grasp of the interrelationship of critical and	Demonstrates some grasp of the interrelationship of issues, some awareness of how to apply	Has an insufficient awareness of the interrelationship between issues and how one	Has no clear awareness of the interrelationship between issues and how one reads a NT book

	competent reading of a NT book.	faith issues.	them to a specific NT book.	reads a NT book.	
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