

**NT 503 Reading the New Testament
Take-Home Final Exam**

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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.**

The historical critical issues are important to give the reader the historical context and cultural context. Both explain the author and the recipient's actions. Authorship is important because we must know who this person was, their cultural background, experiences and circumstances during that period to understand their perspective. It helps us to understand the reason and purpose of the author's actions. For example, knowing the apostle's history with Jesus gives validity to the Scriptures and their purpose in spreading the Gospel. The authorship is also linked to the dates when it was written and the local situations of the period.

Paul is an example of both knowing his recipients and using specific literary moves to make his point to his audience. His letters or those written by his assistants have a clear structure that he used in addressing his audience. There was a greeting, prayer of thanksgiving, the body and the closing. The content of the letter addressed the specific situation during that time. The letter to the Galatians and others were with intentionality to address the tension between the Jews and Gentiles. Therefore, when we read texts in the New Testament, we must understand the context and nuances to make an informed interpretation of the texts.

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**

The four canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John respond to the question of some in the church that question Jesus' existence. First, they confirm the prophecies in the Old Testament specifically the coming of Jesus. They also affirm many of the principles of the Old Testament through Jesus' life. The four canonical gospels bring the events of Jesus' life to us with their own perspective in certain details but with the major events intact. They confirm Jesus' existence, his humanity and humility and example of how to live a life dedicated to the Lord. His examples of forgiveness through the events in the gospels, his sacrifice for us gives us faith to continue our lives through our trials. More importantly to live not as the world is but as Jesus clearly stated and John affirmed.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27.)

This is not something that happens immediately but rather by faith, true faith that leads us to know this world is full of troubles, but our faith gives us the same peace Jesus had when he uttered these words.

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.**

The church's context is important as we must understand their culture and history at that time. Paul is known for starting the Christian movement which means at the time and the places he traveled the roots of Judaism were still entrenched in the church. It is important to note that at the time of Christianity's beginning most of the worship took place in people's homes. This made for a strong ties and community relationships with the Jewish Community. Because of his Jewish background he understood the complexity of this transition from a law-based church to one based on love, faith, the Holy Spirit and individual responsibility. His letters addressed both the law especially the law of circumcision as a requirement to be part of God's kingdom and refuted it with his arguments that the Gospel is a circumcised-free Gospel for all.

- 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.**

The context of Paul's letter to the Galatians is in the religious laws and rites of the Jews and the pressure and importance of circumcision at that time. The Judaizers who were trying to bring division in the church made it clear that it was these laws that would bring their salvation. While Paul's own Jewish roots would not have allowed him to reject them, he pointed out to Gentiles they should accept the fact that Jewish traditions existed but they as Gentiles were to accept the "obedience of faith", be "slaves of righteousness" and "serve Christ in a way that is acceptable to man and God." These were the ways to salvation.

Paul's authority to bring the gospel was also questioned and he defended this by emphasizing his relationship with God. In the greeting of the letter in Galatians 1 Paul makes this point. "Paul, an apostle* not from human beings nor through a human being but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead," He defends his apostleship by describing his travels and confirmation by the other apostles but more importantly how he is justified by faith. He refers back to Abraham in Galatians 2:14 "that the blessing of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith".

Finally, Paul is very aware of the historical context, and he continues to appeal to the Gentiles to continue to be righteous by faith and to seek unity among each other and not division. Expressing their faith through love for each other, service and doing good.

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.**

The diversity of the New Testament should be embraced as it keeps the most important points of atonement, redemption and salvation intact. While the authors vary and we consider the context of their experiences, they are part of what we still look for today. We can clearly see the soul of humanity in each book and its connection to the Old Testament as well as now its connection to the contemporary church. We are all looking for a way to atone for our faults, to redeem ourselves and for the ultimate passage to salvation.

- 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.**

The steps I would take is to analyze the Scripture with the individuals through the historical context, authorship, audience and literary context in a way that is clear and simple. Confirming the historicity through different reliable sources. Asking if they are aware of the authors and their background, culture and circumstances would be an additional aspect. This would lead to emphasizing that scriptures were written for an audience and while they hold to be true today, it is important to know who the audience was and the purpose of the scripture for this audience. The literary structure of the text and its purpose would be another important aspect to point out. I believe that pointing out that Scripture is not as simple as most people think and its importance to critically analyze it would put me in a better position to handle a challenge.

5. **OPTIONAL:** "One thing I would like the professor and/or ATS to know about my experience in this course is:"

I would like you to know that this is my first semester in Biblical Studies. I decided to do this for my own lack of knowledge of the Bible which I feel will get me closer to God. And if I am closer to God, I can bring others to him.

The structure of your lessons is such that the content is internalized because of the different access points. As an educator, a principal of a school, in the South Bronx, I have tried to look for a structure for some students who do not retain the material well. I believe I have found it in the way you present the lesson in this course. The encouraging openings for each lesson, the Power Points with and without lecture, the additional videos and the variety, the required books which some contain points with questions, the quizzes and explicit explanations of expectations in midterms and finals allow all learners to access the material. I am going to attempt to try this structure at my school for the coming year. I say attempt because I must get buy in from my staff as it requires extensive preparation. Thank you for taking the time to prepare classes in this manner. I believe God put me in your class for a little more than the learning of the New Testament.

In terms of what I have acquired as far as knowledge of the New Testament, the course has enabled me to read Scripture in a critical manner. The course has given me an abundance of knowledge that I did not have before and more importantly that I can use in my ministry to guide others. This has been possible because of the manner this course is structured. Thank you. Many blessings to you and your family.