

NT 503 Reading the New Testament
Take-Home Final Exam
Matt Rosenberg
Spring 2023

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.**

I find the discussions around authorship, audience and dating of each of the Gospels fascinating even when we cannot determine details definitively. The discussions around the historical-critical issues of the four Gospels adds so much color to the understanding of these important texts. When it comes to authorship, Powell, in his chapter on the Gospels, presented the idea of reading the Gospels in the genre of ancient biographies. Each Gospel has a variety of literary genres within the ancient biographies and being familiar with the different literary styles of the day is crucial to understanding each author's reasons for writing. He also points out a rather obvious point that ancient biographies are not modern biographies. I found this helpful because each Gospel writer was not interested in the facts and insights that we would expect from modern biographies. This simple thought helps us to read, within our understanding, each Gospel from a more nuanced and intelligent manner. It is often said in our time "the Devil is in the details" but the Gospel writers, and understanding them in their own historical context, show more perfectly that God is the one in the details.

It is so important to try to understand who the intended recipients of each Gospel were, the potential dates they were written, and the potential influence they each had in writing on each other. These discussions add the humanity to each author and so much color to the story they told about Jesus and his impact on the world He lived in. To the best of our ability, when we engage in the discussions of historical-critical issues, we can better interpret the text for our time and culture.

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**

I am the Rabbi of Restoration, a Messianic Congregation in Seattle, Washington. In my preaching and teaching there is a heavy emphasis on the historical context of the New Testament as first century Jewish writings. I believe my perspective is important but not meant for everyone. I find that people who respond to my preaching are people who are generally interested in historical context in every area of their lives. People that are not interested in historical context will most likely find my preaching uninteresting and that's ok with me. In church history, as Powell notes, the four writers of the four Gospels have been called "the four evangelists." Each one, like preaching a sermon, wrote about the same Jesus but through their

unique perspective and with their unique reasoning. Each Gospel not only told the story of the extraordinary person and life of Jesus but the way His life, death and resurrection would change the course of human history. In our day, the same is still true in preaching and telling people about Jesus. It's the uniqueness of the God-man through the lens and uniqueness of the story in each one who tells His story. The design is the Holy Spirit means to speak through us, layered with our understanding and experience, to tell the story of Jesus that will speak to different people in different ways. That is true for every person when we consider the significance of having four different Gospels accounts and how God wants to use each of our stories and personalities for the proclamation of the Gospel today.

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.**

Understanding the relationship between what Paul is saying to specific congregations and people and why he makes certain arguments to them in his letters is crucial. One example of this was a video we watched by Dr. Gary Hoag on 1 Timothy 2:9-15 ("why women must learn in quietness and submission: Xenophon of Ephesus and 1 Timothy 2"). This video opened up a new paradigm for me in my understanding of these verses. All of my life I have heard and read that 1 Timothy was either for or against woman preaching and taking leadership roles. Hoag asserts that Paul words in these few verses spoke to specific issues in theology and practice as these women were turning to Jesus from the cult of Artemis. These women, being trained from a young age to serve Artemis, had certain beliefs and ideas that now had to shift in light of Jesus. With that in mind Paul is writing to Timothy, an elder of the congregation in Ephesus, speaking to these very specific issues that related to women who as they turned to Jesus from the Artemis cult in Ephesus. As always there are universal ideas in Paul's words that could apply everywhere but only if the specific local needs and understanding are understood by modern readers. This is only one small sample of the importance of understanding the relationship between a specific church's context and the arguments Paul makes in his correspondence with his readers. Missing that relationship causes us to all fall into the trap of turning the words of Paul into things he did not mean or intend in a context he did not mean or intend and then applying that misinterpretation into our time and culture.

- 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.**

Galatians is significant because it deal with the contextualization of the Gospel message to Gentiles with practical and spiritual issues connected to socio-cultural and historical reality that these communities were facing in the first century. I argue that the first time that Paul preaches to a fully Gentile crowd is in the city of Lystra in Acts 14. These people had no connection to Israel, the God of Israel, the Hebrew prophets or the Torah. Paul's uses his skills as an orator and his knowledge of the Greco-Roman world as a Roman and preaches, for the first time, in a

way that speaks to Gentiles without any formal connection to Israel. This event sets the tone for his preaching to Gentiles and effects his eventual writing of Galatians in the region of Galatia, of which Lystra is a part.

The question in Galatians is often presented by scholars as “should Gentiles be circumcised?” It seems to me that the deeper question is one of identity for Gentiles and the contextualization of the Gospel for what was understood as outsiders of Israel. The real question is, “what must Gentiles do to be including in the people of God?” Of course this question is not only being asked in the region of Galatia but also throughout of all of first century Judaism in the Roman Empire. While circumcision is one part of that question it is not the whole question (pun intended). Galatians presents a group of agitators which Paul accuses of preaching “another Gospel.” Who are these people, where do they come from, and what exactly is their purpose? These are only some of the questions we have to ask to understand the context of this important letter. How we answer those questions has tremendous effect on the conclusions we make regarding Paul, these agitators, and the preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles. Digging further into first century Greco-Roman context helps us understand the specific needs, questions, and understanding of the original recipients of the Paul’s letters and then how to apply that understanding to our current culture. We must be careful, as Paul warns the people of Galatia, to not pervert the true Gospel or forget that from the beginning God’s intent was to bring all mankind back to Himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

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.*

Generally speaking, diversity is not a problem for interpretation but rather of great value for the proclamation and ministry of the contemporary Church. In the same way it took a diverse group of voices and perspectives in the writing of the New Testament so it takes a diverse group of voices and perspectives in the proclamation of the Gospel in the ever changing context of the culture in which we live. The danger, for all perspectives, is when we miss valuable original historical context of the authors and recipients of the letters of the New Testament and create modern views of the text to fit our own purposes and goals. We put ourselves and our listeners in danger of misrepresenting Jesus and resurrection. At the same time, there is tremendous value in how other places and cultures, outside of our own, have understood and applied the text in their context that can have a positive effect on how we understand the application of a text in our lives. Jesus did not come to save us to a more right theology, He

came to save us from sin and death. The beauty of the New Testament letters is that they still speak to our culture with the same overall warnings and encouragements as they did among their original hearers!

- 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 (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

In the process of studying, reading Scripture and commentaries regarding Scripture I often find interpretations of the text that challenge my own reading and understanding. For me, this is key to growth in knowledge and understanding of any topic. That does not mean that all interpretations are equal in value. When I come across an interpretation that challenges my own understanding I weigh what they are saying against the text itself. Who is the author of the text in question, what did they mean to express? Who are the recipients and what social issues or cultural understudying did they have or not have? How did the original recipients understand what they heard? Are my views missing some key components that a different view has to offer? Is their view missing key component that my perspective has to offer? What is background and culture of the commentator and how does that affect their interpretation? The goal in asking these questions is not to try to dismantle every position other than my own. The goal is to build on solid foundations of interpretation to see things that I couldn't see in my own perspective. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul wrote, "All Scripture is inspired by God and useful..." but he did not say that all interpretations are inspired by God, including my own. For that reason I attempt to hear out other positions on the text because I want to "...fully equipped for every good deed" and be in agreement with the Spirit of the text not just my opinion of the text.

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

That I really enjoyed this course, the books, the lectures, the videos and the format. This was my first class that was fully online and I was skeptical of learning in different way than I have learned before. But I enjoyed the flexibility of the schedule and the fullness of the content in the scholarship around the New Testament.