REL 150: New Testament

It is not so very important for a person to learn facts. For that he does not really need a college. He can learn them from books. The value of an education in a liberal arts college is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think something that cannot be learned from textbooks. (Albert Einstein, 1921, in response to Thomas Edison’s opinion that a college education is useless)

The growing precision of our understanding should enhance, and not diminish our sense of wonder. (Alfred Brendel)

In much wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase in sorrow. (Ecclesiastes 1.18)

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. (William Butler Yeats)

You must unlearn what you have learned. (Yoda, Star Wars V: Empire Strikes Back)

The unexamined life is not worth living. (Socrates [Plato, Apology, 38a])

ΕΝ ΟΙΔΑ ΟΤΙ ΟΥΔΕΝ ΟΙΔΑ. (= Ἐν οἴδα ὅτι οὐδὲν οἴδα. — Socrates)

ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ. (= Γνῶθι σεαυτόν. — Temple of Apollo at Delphi)

Welcome to REL 150: New Testament. This course is a general introduction to and an exploration of the New Testament. If you do the required work, by the end of the semester you will be able to:

- identify and explain what the New Testament is as well as its significance for Western culture, for the world, and for us
- identify and explain the main contents of the NT, e.g., major themes and issues
- read carefully and critically passages from a variety of NT books as well as from extra-canonical sources
- explain the meaning(s) of NT passages in their historical contexts (e.g., cultural, geographical, literary, political contexts) as well as in relation to other areas of knowledge and to contemporary thought
- define terms relevant to understanding NT texts as well as to understanding the study of the NT
- identify and explain methodological issues involved in NT interpretation
- demonstrate exegetical skills using modern methods of interpretation, especially historical-critical and literary approaches
- demonstrate an appreciation of NT texts that is both critical and creative

Achieving these goals will require hard work on your part, which will bring many challenging, enlightening, exciting, frustrating, and rewarding experiences.

Caveat

This course is designed so that anyone, religious or not, who does the required work can attain the goals mentioned above. This course is not designed to persuade you to a particular faith or religious point of view. Nor is it intended to build up or disparage existing faith, although an informed understanding of the New Testament can lead to a deeper appreciation of Judaism and Christianity. Students who consider themselves to be followers of any religion, or of no religion at all, are welcome on this semester journey to become better acquainted with the Bible, to learn to appreciate it better, and to become informed and responsible interpreters of it.
For my criteria for evaluation go to my Evaluation page and read the information carefully.

- If you have any questions about any assignment, ask in class or make an appointment to see me.
- If you have any questions about any evaluation or how you are doing in the course, make an appointment to see me.
- If you miss an assignment or exam, call or make an appointment to discuss any makeup work.

**Due dates for submitting assignments are on D2L (click on the “Dropbox”).**

**• assigned readings**

Assigned readings should be completed before the class for which they are assigned—use your best judgment to divide the readings evenly for each week. You must come to class with at least 2 written questions or comments in response to the readings (see Participation).

The primary focus throughout the course will be on the biblical texts and on cultivating the ability to ask informed questions about all the assigned readings based on the knowledge you gain along the way; the demonstration of your ability to formulate questions will affect the evaluation of your semester grade. Keeping notes on the readings is highly recommended. I would encourage you to use this form for the reading assignments (also on D2L).

Not all assigned readings may be covered in class or on exams, but they are assigned for your edification in achieving the goals of the course. The more you refer to them in class and in your work, the better your mastery of the readings will be. Your use of them in class discussion and in your work will affect the evaluation of your semester grade.

Occasionally I may assign additional readings, but these will ordinarily be short.

**• presentation**

You will give a 5-minute presentation of your reflection on the assigned texts consisting of:

- the main ideas or arguments of the reading assignments (see the schedule below for the texts to be presented)
- your critique or response to it (including references to previous readings)—this should be the focus and main portion of the presentation
  - Include critical questions, challenges, discoveries, insights, etc. that relate to something in recent history or news.
  - Avoid mere summaries or paraphrases of the assigned reading(s).

You are expected to have read the text(s) thoroughly and be able to share the penetrating questions or issues you dealt with in your reading, preparation, and further research. You do not have to understand everything before class, but you should demonstrate that you prepared and that you can discern and are familiar with the major issues in the text(s). Remember that questions are more valuable than answers.

All students are expected to do the preparatory work described above, not just the presenter.

See my Evaluation page under Presentations for evaluation criteria (do not be concerned about the “Communication Skills” section of the presentation evaluation page). If you wish to use a PowerPoint presentation or any AV equipment, let me know in advance.

**• map paper**

You will submit on D2L a map of the Roman Empire at the end of the second century and a paper on one of the places on the map.

- You must draw (or trace) the map by hand (on a letter-size paper). How colorful or artistic the map is will not affect the grade.
  - The map must show important boundaries, territories, and cities of the Roman Empire, as well as the most significant places in Palestine, including the main areas of Jesus’ ministry.
  - Include at least the following: Alexandria, Antioch, Athens, Jerusalem, Rome.
  - The paper is the main part of this assignment and should consist of 500–800 words on one of the places on the map (e.g., area, body of water, city, province, etc.). If you wish to improve the quality of your paper, you are strongly encouraged to make appointments for feedback on your drafts (bring a hard copy). See update xxx.
  - Include basic or notable facts about the place and reasons for its significance for the Roman Empire or for understanding the New Testament, or for both.
  - Avoid mere summaries or paraphrases of biblical narratives. Do not report merely where or how many times in the NT the place is mentioned.
  - Use footnotes or endnotes to document your sources following the Chicago Manual of Style. Learn the automatic footnote (and endnote) function of your word processor. No bibliography or works cited.
- Follow all the instructions given on my Evaluation page under Written assignments.
- Besides the textbook, the Oxford Bible Atlas is a good place to start.
Scan and insert the map at the end of your paper file.

**exegesis paper option**

You may choose to write an exegesis paper instead of the final exam (written or oral—see below). You must meet with me **as soon as possible before March 15** to discuss this option. If you decide to write the paper, follow the directions below:

You will submit on D2L an exegesis paper on one of the NT passages assigned in the schedule below. If you wish to work on a different passage, make an appointment to discuss your passage of choice. In choosing a specific part or theme within the passage of your choice, consult critical commentaries and academic journals, i.e., scholarly books and articles with lots of (foot)notes. For help with exegesis, see my Exegesis guidelines page. You may also find the Tips for writing papers helpful.

Make an **appointment as early as you can** in the semester to discuss (1) your paper idea and (2) your preliminary bibliography (bring a hard copy). The narrower and more specific your **thesis**—i.e., the argument you plan to make in your paper—the better.

- The paper should consist of 1,000–1,300 words.
- Include at least a historical-critical understanding of the text(s) and present possible meanings in it (them).
- If possible (or appropriate) include an analysis of the structure of the text(s).
- The paper should represent original work (i.e., **your own thoughts**), not a mere digest of other people’s opinions. Your own reading and re-reading of the relevant texts, as well as review of other materials, are fundamental to the task. I want to know what you discover in your engagement with the biblical text, whether or not you agree with the assigned readings, commentaries, or opinions presented in class, including mine.
  - Focus on honing your ability to **argue** for your opinions and conclusions by **supporting them with evidence** from texts (especially primary texts) and other relevant sources.
- Your final bibliography (not just “works cited”) must contain at least 8 sources used in your paper, including at least 4 academic journal articles (articles in newspapers or magazines are acceptable if appropriate for your paper).
  - Electronic sources count only if you provide evidence that they are scholarly sources (usually in print).
- Use footnotes or endnotes to document your sources following the **Chicago Manual of Style**—for help: NoodleTools. Learn the automatic footnote (and endnote) function of your word processor.
- Follow all the instructions given on my Evaluation page under Written assignments.

**terms**

Throughout the semester, you will be responsible for learning significant terms used in our texts or in class (see the “terms” file on D2L). You will be responsible for finding the definitions. Your knowledge of significant terms may constitute a part of a quiz or exam.

**exams**

The midterm exam will cover all the materials in the course we will have covered by the time of the exam (e.g., the reading assignments and terms). The final exam will cover the entire sweep of the course. There may be pop quizzes, the results of which will affect the evaluation of your participation. See my Evaluation page under Quizzes and examinations.

In lieu of the final exam (or the exegesis paper), you may take an oral exam (30–45 minutes). You must meet with me **as soon as possible before March 15** to discuss this option.

**grades**

Grades will be determined as fairly as possible. See my Evaluation page under Grades for more information. The final grade for the course will consist of the following:

- final exam / exegesis paper — 35%
- midterm exam — 25%
- map paper — 20%
- presentation — 10%
- participation (including pop quizzes) — 10%

Participation is a significant part of this course. See my Evaluation page under Participation for more information and instructions.

**extra credit**

You may earn extra credit any time during the semester.

- Submit a paper consisting of 700–1,000 words relating something from popular culture (e.g., movie, play, TV show, book, any performance) to a NT text or theme (consult the instructor).
- The paper should be mostly critique (not mere description or summary).
The instructor reserves the right to make the final determination concerning any extra credit. You can earn a maximum of 5% toward the final grade. You may write more than one, if you wish, but you will not receive more than 5% total in extra credit.

Required books

A Bible of your choice.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (NOAB) using the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) will be the common text for class assignments and discussions. N.B.: the table of contents, introductions, essays, tables, glossary, maps, etc. are all very helpful. In all cases, you are encouraged to use (1) other English translations besides the NRSV, e.g., NIV, and (2) Bibles in other languages. The NRSV and other Bibles in English are available free online (also under “Resources to consider” below or via D2L). See also online resources that come with the Ehrman textbook.


Recommended books (* = highly recommended)


Resources to consider

Online resource for Bart Ehrman’s introduction to the Bible (self-quizzes, flash cards for terms—for NT-relevant chapters)

My Resources page, e.g., esp. The NT Gateway, online Bibles, parallel translations

Course materials on D2L; online resources, e.g., study guides

Bible concordances (also in McGill library)


Keeping in touch

During the semester check your e-mail regularly for messages regarding course matters (e.g., changes in the syllabus). Visit D2L regularly to see updates to the syllabus; see also my home page for other information and resources related to the course. Please feel free to make an appointment any time about any course matters.

Tips from former students

For some practical advice from former students, see the tips page.

One last word . . .

Regardless of how demanding all of this is, I promise to be as fair as possible. I recognize that you will be very busy this semester pursuing various obligations and passions. I understand. I have my passions too, e.g., my family, music, philosophy, nature, mountain biking, fixing things, food. But I am also very passionate about education, both yours and mine—I mean not just the business of acquiring knowledge but more importantly the total development of honorable human beings. I do not require you to share my excitement about all the things we will cover, but I do expect you to do your best to complete the requirements for the course. To help you do that, I will make myself available outside the class time and the office hours. I will be glad to help you when you are struggling with an assignment. Or if you have any questions, concerns, complaints, and even compliments, I will do my best to take the time to listen and offer my response. Keep in mind that I am here to help you learn.


Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Jan 16 T, 18</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>General orientation:</strong> terms, concepts, approaches</td>
<td>What is the Bible? What is the New Testament?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Course syllabus (including Evaluation link; review requirements, expectations, and criteria for grading—ask Qs, if you have any)</td>
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<td>• Westminster College: Mission statement</td>
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<td>• Fisher: Effective Learning</td>
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<td>• University of Chicago: letter to the class of 2020 (2016)</td>
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<td>• R. Brown: Preface; Introductory Background Material (skim attentively); chs. 1–3</td>
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<td>• Translation comparison</td>
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<td>• Remember: bring your written Qs &amp; Cs to each class (see Participation).</td>
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<td>&gt; notes in class</td>
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<td>&gt; Copy all relevant Web pages and resources to your hard disk or flash drive, etc. for easy access. Keep the copies updated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; Memorize the books of the Protestant canon in order (learn correct spelling). [also: comparison chart; canons; some early NT canons]</td>
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<td>&gt; Christmas Quiz</td>
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<td>&gt; Christmas Carol Quiz</td>
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<td>&gt; M. Brown: Prolegomena; ch. 1</td>
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<td>&gt;+ R. Brown, Responses, Q1–4: Translations of the Bible</td>
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<td>&gt; Brooks &amp; Collins: “Introduction” to Hebrew Bible or Old Testament?</td>
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<td>&gt; NOAB: introductory notes</td>
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<td>&gt; Greek NT: 1st page</td>
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<td>&gt; Manuscript</td>
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<td>&gt; Interpreting Ancient Manuscripts (very helpful)</td>
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<td>&gt; Transmission errors</td>
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<td>&gt; Bible Contradiction &amp; Responses</td>
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<td>&gt; Calendar</td>
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<td>&gt; Do you know how to think? (a self-exam)</td>
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<td>&gt; maps and world(views): also this</td>
<td>update 2/1</td>
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Week 2 | Jan 23 T, 25 |

| NT world: Greeks, Romans, and Jews | stories and histories | anachronism |

Feb ????: movie night at the Nas’ 7:47 PM-ish

Feel free to bring DVDs of movies you think your classmates should see. For directions click here.

• R. Brown: chs. 4–5
• 1 Macc 1–4: Jews dying for the faith
• 1 Macc 1–2; 4.36–61 (Hanukkah)
Review the books of the Protestant canon in order (learn correct spelling).

- Easter Quiz (n.b.: take this "quiz" before reading the following)
  - 1 Cor 15.3–10
  - Mk 15.40–16.8
  - Mt 27.55–28.20
  - Lk 23.48–24.53
  - Jn 19.25–21.25
  - Acts 1.1–2.4
  - Gos Pet (n.b. Q10 on “Easter Quiz”)

- Translation comparison
- Reminder: bring your Qs & Cs to each class (see Participation)

- 1 Macc (skim slowly)

> R. Brown: Rule of Thumb 1–10

> R. Brown, Responses, Q5–10: Genuine and apocryphal books of the Bible

> R. Brown, Responses, Q11–14: How to read the Bible

> Transmission errors

> The Greeks (interactive site): read about Socrates, Plato, etc.

> Hazony: “The God of Independent Minds”

> What we think we know: the (hi)story of the thumb.

> Myth

> Blogging the Bible (an interesting viewpoint that might resonate with your life)

> What we think we know: the (hi)story of the thumb.

Week 3  Jan 30 T,  Feb 1

The Synoptic Gospels

- R. Brown: ch. 6
- Brown: Intro to NT Christology, 155–61 (“A Brief History of the Development of the Royal Messianic Hope in Israel”)
- Sanders & Davies: Synoptic Gospels, 51–119 (skim; n.b. diagrams)
- feeding 5K folks (all week):
  - Mk 6.30–44 (cf. 8.1–10; 19–20)
  - Mt 14.13–21 (cf. 15.32–39; 16.9–10)
  - Lk 9.10–17
  - Jn 6.1–15
- Inf Gos Thom
- M. Brown: Rule ofThumb 11–20

++ R. Brown, Responses, Q15–17: Church guidance; Q18–22: Why read the Bible

> Nicene Creed; also here and here and here

> Apostles’ Creed; also here

> synoptic texts online

> coloring scheme for the Synopsis

> some synoptic solutions

> PBS, Frontline: From Jesus to Christ (helpful videos, esp. part 2 & lots of resources)

> Redaction & hermeneutics (funny, interesting & instructive)

Week 4  Feb 6 T, 8

Mark (a trend-setter?): suffering Messiah

- R. Brown: ch. 7
- Mk 1.1–16.8 (–16.20):
  - Mk 1.1–15 (esp. vv. 9–11, 12–13, 14–15) & ||
  - Mk 4.1–20 (esp. vv. 11–13), 33–34 & ||: purpose of parables?
  - Mk 4.35–41 & ||: power over nature (cf. Gen 1.1–3)
  - Mk 6.1–6a & ||: unable or unwilling to do mighty works? (cf. Mk 3.31–35: Jesus’ family)
  - Mk 8.1–9.1 (esp. 8.27–33, 9.1) & ||
  - Mk 15.33–16.8 (–16.20) & ||: What really happened?

++ R. Brown, Responses, Q23–27: Is the Bible literally true; Q28–30: Biblical criticism

Week 5  Feb 13 T, 15

Matthew: teacher par excellence

- R. Brown: ch. 8
- Matthew (all):
  - Mt 1.1–17 & ||: the begat list (cf. 1 Chr 1–9)
  - Mt 1.18–2.23 & || (?): where did Joseph & Mary live?
  - Mt 5.1–7.27 & || (?): Sermon on the Mount (walk this way; talk this way)
  - Mt 5.3–12 & ||: Beatitudes
Week 6    Feb 20 T, 22

• R. Brown: ch. 9
• Luke (all):
  • Lk 1.46–55: radical song?
  • Lk 3.23–38 (cf. Mt 1.1–17): significance?
  • Lk 4.1–13: when will the devil return? (see 22.3)
  • Lk 4.14–30: why are they outraged? (cf. 1.46–55; 4.14–30)
  • Lk 6.17–38, esp. 24–26: cf. Mt
  • Lk 10.25–37: who’s the neighbor?
  • Lk 10.27 & ||s; Dt 6.4–5; Lev 19.18; Rom 13.9; Gal 5.14; Jas 2.8
  • Lk 10.38–42: women disciples?
  • Lk 11.1–4 (cf. Mt 6.1–11): which Lord’s Prayer should Christians pray?
  • Lk 15.11–32: lost & found?
  • Lk 16.1–9: huh? fair?
  • Lk 22.7–23 & ||s: Last Supper (when was it? which was first: bread or wine?)

• Cotton Patch: Lk 10.25–37
• Cotton Patch: Lk 15

++ Brown, Responses, Q31–33: Biblical fundamentalism; pp. 137–42; Q34–37: How literally true is the NT

Week 7    Feb 27 T, Mar 1    Mar 3–11 (break)

• Acts: the early church, from Jerusalem to Rome
• R. Brown: ch. 10
• Acts (all):
  • Acts 2: 8.26–40; 10–11; 15.1–35: the spirit moves in mysterious & blasphemous ways
  • Acts 9.1–22; 22.4–16; 26.9–18: reports of Paul’s conversion
  • Acts 17.16–34: apostle among philosophers in Athens
• Course syllabus (including Evaluation link; review requirements, expectations & criteria for grading—ask Qs, if any)
  > Ancient romance (e.g., Paul’s so-called conversion, shipwrecks & near-death experiences)
  ++ Brown, Responses, Q52–53: Jesus’ resurrection; Q54–60: Jesus’ birth
  > Redaction & hermeneutics (funny, interesting & instructive)

Week 8    Mar 13 T, 15

Feb 15: midterm exam

• John: love divine
• Course syllabus (including Evaluation link; review requirements, expectations, and criteria for grading—ask Qs, if you have any)
• R. Brown: chs. 11–14
• Logos (“the Word”) in English: note all the English definitions; also here (tip: look for the breaks or spaces)
• KoG & KoH
• John (all):
  • Jn 1.1–18: Logos Christology
  • Jn 3.1–21: 4.1–42; 6; 10; 20
  • Jn 6.22–71: eat what?
  • Jn 13.1–20: eat or feet?
  • Jn 13.31–35: how would others know?
  • Jn 18.2–11: cf. ||s: the arrest
• **Jn 20.19–29** (esp. vv. 22, 28); cf. Lk 24.36–43
• 1–3 Jn (cf. language of the Gospel According to John)

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**Gospels in retrospect**

- Jesus in the Synoptics & Jn
- Bring notes on the exciting, interesting, puzzling, or even upsetting thing you discovered in your study of the Gospels.

> Brown, Responses, Q61–68: Mary (esp. of interest to Roman Catholics); Q69–76: Jesus' knowledge

Helpful video (very good for review):

> From Jesus to Christ,” pt.3: Jesus in the Gospels

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**Week 9**

**Mar 20 T, 22**

• **Mar 20:** presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)
• **Mar 22:** presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)

Paul: second founder of Christianity?

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**Week 10**

**Mar 27**

• **Mar 27:** presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)

Faith (*pistis*) & freedom: Galatian problems with freedom

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**Week 11**

**Apr 10, 12**

• **Apr 10:** presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)
• **Apr 12:** presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)

Paul & Paul revisited (revised?)

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**Week 12**

**Apr 17 T, 19**

• **Apr 17:** presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)
• **Apr 19:** presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)

The church in conflict: false (?) teachers & alternatives to Paul

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Course syllabus (including Evaluation link; review requirements, expectations & criteria for grading—ask Qs, if any)
The early church organizes: on the way to “orthodoxy”?  •  orthodoxy, heterodoxy, heresy

Who’s in charge?: the masculinization of the church & gospel of freedom
• 1 Cor 11.3–16
• Eph 5.21–6.9
• Col 3.18–4.1
• 1 Tim 2.8–15

Brown, Responses, Q101: How much has the church changed; 137–42 (esp. of interest to Roman Catholics)

Week 13  Apr 24 T, 26

Apr 26: last date for the exegesis paper option (in lieu of the final exam)
• Apr 24: presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)
• Apr 26: presentation: name, name (bolded Bible passage OR Brown)

Other NT Writings: faith under fire
• R. Brown: chs. 32–36 (skim attentively)
• Heb (all)
  • Heb 2.1–4; 3.1–6 (cf. Mt); 5.7
  • Heb 2.14–18; 4.14–16: Christology
• 1 Pet (all)
  • 1 Pet 2.11–4.11 (esp. 2.13–17, 18–25): faith & societal issues
• Jas (all)
  • Jas 2.14–26: not quite Paul (cf. Mt)
• Jude & 2 Pet (all of both, in this order)
  • 2 Pet 3.1–18: the delay of the Parousia
  • bring your Qs & Cs (esp. on the distinction between biblical theology & dogmatic theology)
  • bring some NT examples that illustrate the issues discussed by Gabler (esp. on the distinction between biblical theology & dogmatic theology)

Week 14  May 1 T, 3

May 4: last date for extra credit
Revelation: the church under persecution (apocalyptic & eschatology)
• R. Brown: ch. 37
• Rev (all)
  • Rev 1.1–3
  • Rev 5.6; 12.3–9; 13.11–18: portrait of good & evil
  • Rom 13.1–7, 1 Tim 2.1 & 1 Pet 2.13–17: faith & the empire
  • Revelation collage
  • The End Is Always Near (skim)

The historical Jesus?
• R. Brown: Appendixes 1–2
• beginnings of the Gospels (review)
• Mt 10.2–4 & ||s: who were the disciples? (n.b. the order)?

The question: So what? (faith, history, text)

Final thoughts (Or: Anything and everything you wanted to ask Prof. Na but were too afraid or busy to ask)

> Nicene Creed; also here and here and here
> Apostles’ Creed; also here
> Gos Thom
> Sec Gos Mk
> Gos Pet
> Inf Gos Thom
> Prot Jas
> C. S. Lewis: historical Jesus
  • bring your Qs & Cs (esp. on synthetic judgment, analytic judgment, and language game)
• bring some NT examples that illustrate the issues Meyer discusses (esp. the 3 interpretative patterns and Meyer’s proposal)

> See the movie “Fallen” (cf. Tobit)

> **Gabler:** “On the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each” (Scottish Journal of Theology 33 [1980]: 133–58)

> **Meyer:** “Faith and History Revisited” (Princeton Seminary Bulletin 10

> Gabler & Meyer: bring your Qs & Cs (esp. on the distinction between biblical theology & dogmatic theology)

> + Brown, Responses: Q1–10, 19–27

> **O Little Town of Nazareth?**

> Xmas Carol Quiz

> Xmas Quiz

> What is this?

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**Final week**  **May 9 W**  **08:00–10:30**

**Final exam**

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exegesis guide • evaluation • resources • Na home • D2L

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Without education we are in a horrible and deadly danger of taking educated people seriously. (G. K. Chesterton)

Health is merely the slowest possible rate at which one can die. (Anonymous)

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**N.B. check regularly for updates** (15 Jan. 2018)