

# **Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 1, Course Introduction**

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This is New Testament History and Literature by Dr. David Mathewson. Lecture 1, Course Introduction. Dr. David Mathewson.

All right, let's go ahead and get started. What I want to do today is simply talk a little bit about this class as far as what is expected from you and kind of what we'll be doing and how we'll do it and talk a little bit about the syllabus and a couple of other things and where you can find that information.

But let's open in prayer first and then we'll do that. Father, thank you for the opportunity and the privilege and responsibility of studying what is nothing less than your very word and revelation to us in the form of the New Testament. I pray that we will be challenged as a result of this class to look at it in different ways and ask different questions. Father, help us to be challenged to relate it to the other disciplines that we pursue in life and here at college.

And Father, I pray now for patience as we work through this material, for perseverance, and Lord, the strength to get through this semester and to think clearly about the New Testament and the different issues that revolve around understanding and reading it and applying it to our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, so welcome to the New Testament. What I want to do is, the first thing I'll do is talk very generally about kind of what this class is about and how we'll approach New Testament and then say a couple of detailed things as far as specific responsibilities and requirements and then where you can find information such as the syllabus and there is a notebook that goes along with this course as well. I'll say something like about that in just a moment.

The way I want to cover the New Testament, as I was walking over here, I was thinking about the way survey courses such as this are often treated. The New Testament, in comparison to the Old Testament, I have a much easier task because the Old Testament both historically and literary-wise covers a much larger group of writings over a longer period of time. The New Testament is more abbreviated, and covers a very shorter period of time, at least the time in which it was written, and the events it was referring to.

And just in comparison, all you have to do is flip through an English Bible in the English translation and you soon realize that the New Testament is so much shorter

than the Old. So, my task is a little bit easier in that respect. However, whenever you're dealing with a survey class, there are two things I could do.

First of all, I could be so general and cover every book rather quickly to ensure that we get through the entire New Testament, Matthew through Revelation, and introduce things like the main author of the book, the time it was written, and the main background and the main theme and simply move through the books that way. And as I said, that would ensure that you get something about every book and you get an introduction to every single book. The problem is that you're not really introduced to any of the specific texts or the specific issues or interpretive issues in some of the books.

You move through it rather quickly. The other option on the other end of the scale is probably more common, and that is just to start with Matthew and work through and see how far you get through the New Testament. I've known a number of people who teach New Testament survey courses like this that have never gotten past the book of Acts in the whole time they've taught it.

So that's not very desirable either because then you get about a fourth of or fifth of the New Testament and don't get exposed to anything else. I've chosen to kind of do a combination of the two so that for the most part, since it is a survey course, we will remain rather broad and move through the books rather quickly. I do intend to touch on all of the books to some extent, from Matthew through Revelation, but we will at times move rather quickly, at other times we will slow down in certain books and take more of a detailed look at problematic texts or passages that are going to be perhaps of some interest to you or passages that are crucial for understanding the book or something like that.

So again, most of the time it will be kind of like flying over in a plane and looking at the entire landscape of the New Testament books, but at times we'll dive down rather close to the ground and take a detailed look before we go back up. So hopefully, we can combine the best of both worlds, giving you at least something, an introduction to every book so you have an idea of what each of the books is about and what they're doing in the New Testament, but at the same time giving you a flavor of some of the texts, again, that are problematic or that are interesting or crucial for you to understand. I often, usually every time I teach this class, the biggest complaint, there's probably a lot of complaints I get, but the biggest one I get is that I don't treat enough New Testament texts in detail, that I don't go into some of the passages in detail.

If that's your complaint, I have an answer, and that is to become a biblical studies major, and then you can take all the classes you want that focus on specific books, but that's not the purpose of this class. Again, I do want to get specific at times to give you a flavor of how I interpret books and how to approach books, but again, if

you're looking for a detailed study of text, then either use some of your electives for biblical study or double major or add it as a minor or become a biblical studies major, because that's where you'll be able to go into specific biblical text in New Testament and Old Testament in much more detail than we are allowed to or enabled to in this class. Again, short of just starting with Matthew and seeing how far we get, but instead I want to, again, give you a flavor of, a little bit of flavor of, give you something from everything in the New Testament.

All right, so that's kind of where we're going. The focus as we work through each of the books will be, and I want you to understand that the New Testament documents and understanding them, and similar to the Old Testament, is to understand them as a combination of historical documents. That is, we'll see that no biblical writer simply sat down and started writing for the sake of writing a book.

They were more often than not addressing rather specific problems that arose in the church in the first century. And so, when Paul sat down and wrote a book like Galatians, he didn't just sit, and feel inspired one day and he sat down because Christians 2,000 years later needed to read this book that we call Galatians. Paul became aware of a very specific problem that had him rather upset and even angry, and in response to that, he sat down and used a very common way of writing in the first century, when you could not be present to speak to someone, the next best thing was to write a letter.

So, Paul writes a letter to the Galatians. So, in one sense, we want to understand the New Testament in its historical context. These are living, breathing documents written in specific historical context to very specific needs, problems, and situations that the author is aware of, and he writes to address those.

None of the New Testament books even come close to being a theological textbook that tells you, here's everything Paul thinks about the Lord's Supper. Here's everything Paul thinks about spiritual gifts. Here's everything Paul thinks about Jesus and everything he thinks about the Holy Spirit.

Instead, again, Paul is addressing, yes, he's writing theological ideas and thoughts, but he's addressing very specific circumstances and situations. So, part of what we want to do is look at the New Testament, and maybe that'll be our primary focus, in fact, is look at the New Testament in its historical and cultural context. What was it like, in a sense, to read these letters as first-century Christians? Why were they produced in the first place? Again, why did Matthew write his gospel, and why did Mark write one? Why did Luke write a third one, and then a fourth one, John? What's up with having four different gospels in the New Testament that all attest to the life of Christ? Well, it's because all four of them were writing for very specific circumstances, and they're trying to do something different in the way they write.

So hopefully at the end of this class, you will have a sense of the New Testament and the documents as, again, living, breathing documents produced in a very specific environment, culturally and historically. And so, it'll be my task, in a sense, to trace this kind of environment, to construct it for you, and to try to help us to see together what was going on in the first century, and why some of these books were written. How do we understand some of the references to them? One of the first texts we'll look at before we ever get into the New Testament to show you how putting it in its broader context makes a difference is the Christmas story.

More often than not, our understanding and conception of the Christmas story, the picture or conceptual framework that we've painted, has probably been more informed by our modern tradition and some of the stories about Christmas that we pass on than it has been informed by the first-century historical context. So that's one way to look at the New Testament, looking at them as historical documents produced in a specific environment in response to specific problems written by historical persons to other historical persons, and to try to understand the New Testament in that light. However, at the same time, the New Testament comprises what God's people have always held to as nothing less than the Scriptures or the Word of God.

And so, we have to understand how is it that these historical documents continue to have abiding validity. How do they still function as Scripture, as the Word of God for God's people today? So, although our main task and our main emphasis will be on constructing the historical background and understanding the historicalness and cultural background of these documents, I don't want us to be unaware of the fact that these, how do these historical documents still function as Scripture? How do they still function as the Word of God? How are they still God's Word for God's people today? Because they're not only historical documents. If that was so, we could just look at the historical background and drop it at that. But because they're theological documents as well, the church has always believed that these are the Word of God-inspired Scripture.

How do they continue to speak to us as God's Word? What is the abiding theological message of these historically rooted texts? So that's kind of where this class is going. Before I talk about any specific requirements, any questions? The other thing too is I hope, although a class this size and of this nature, being a survey class, there's a certain amount of lecture that's necessary. Hopefully, this is not, I'm not, you're not going to come and listen to me talk for an hour.

I welcome questions. I welcome people disagreeing with me or comments, and sometimes I will ask you questions about what you've read or about the text or about something I've said, or a specific, sometimes a specific problem in the text. We will work through it together, but hopefully, this won't simply end up being me

standing up here for an hour and talking to you about the New Testament, as much as I would love to do that.

Any questions so far just generally on what we're doing in this course? All right, if not, the second thing is the specific requirements. The first thing obviously is, well, let me back up. There are two important documents that, besides your textbooks and the Bible, which we'll talk about in a moment, there are two other important documents that you need for this class, a syllabus, and then there is a notebook, a New Testament notebook that I will follow in our class lectures and discussion.

Both of those you can download from Blackboard. The syllabus is already up there. The notes are not.

I'm still doing a little bit of tweaking, but they will be on the Blackboard site for this class under content before Monday's class period. So hopefully I'll have them up Sunday night sometime. So, Sunday night, but at least before this class on Monday, check the Blackboard to download the notes for this class.

The notes are very important. Again, that's what I will follow in our lecture-discussion. The exams that we'll talk about in a moment will be based on the notebook as well.

And again, that will be on Blackboard. So, make sure I'm going to talk about the syllabus a little bit today, but hopefully without referring it to it, but hopefully it'll help you make sense of it when you actually download and read it. So please go to Blackboard, and look at the syllabus.

And again, the notes and the notebook will be up before class on Monday. Now, having said that the first thing, obviously, that you need to bring to class is a Bible. This is New Testament history.

So please bring a New Testament of any translation that you like. I will usually follow either the NIV or a new revised standard version, but it really doesn't matter. I'm not going to be doing a lot of reading of the text, but I do want you to make sure that you have a New Testament with you.

If you read Greek, you can bring a Greek New Testament too. That's fine. But as long as you have a New Testament with you, please bring that.

We will refer to it and utilize that in our class discussion and in discussing the different New Testament books, obviously. The other thing, as far as reading material, there are three primary textbooks for this class. The main textbook, kind of your main textbook, is *Introducing the New Testament*.

This is the first time I've used this textbook, when I first, I didn't intend to change textbooks this semester, but when I picked it up, I found out that it followed very closely the way I handle each New Testament book, in that it has a discussion of the background and why the book was written, and then it touches on the dominant themes and ideas and movements of each book. So, this will kind of be our primary textbook. You'll find it under Introducing in the syllabus.

On each week, I have listed what you are required to read, Introducing will be the main textbook, and you'll read the chapters corresponding to what we're discussing that day. And by the way, please keep up with the textbook reading. I get this question every time, every semester, please keep up with the textbook reading in the syllabus, despite where we are in the class.

If we get a little bit behind, don't think that you can take a break. Keep up with the syllabus no matter where we get. Usually, I'm pretty good about, if I do get behind, at least catching up in a week or so, but keep up with the textbook.

This, with the syllabus, this textbook has, the other thing about it, has a number of helpful charts and things like that that summarize important features of the book. So again, this is your main and primary textbook that actually is arranged according to the New Testament books. There are two other books I'm going to have you read.

One of them is called Making Sense of the New Testament. What it does is, it's not a survey of the New Testament. It's a series of chapters, or three or four chapters, on issues related to how, as Christians, we read and apply the New Testament.

So, for example, the first main chapter is on whether the New Testament is historically reliable, or is the New Testament largely fictional, is, were the New Testament writers so concerned with theology and what they believed about Christ that they weren't interested at all in the historicity of events? So the question is, Ken, when we read the New Testament, what is it we're reading? We've already said, yes, we're reading theology, but to what extent are the New Testament documents also to be trusted historically? We'll talk more about that issue as well. There are a number of questions to raise in regard to that because obviously none of the New Testament books intend to write history in the way we think of it. If you pick up a history book whose intention is just, to some extent, however much it's colored by the perspective of the person writing it, it's mainly to relate historical events in some framework.

The New Testament documents are not primarily meant to comprise a history book type of approach. They are theology, but in writing theology, to what extent is the New Testament to also be trusted historically? The first question deals with that. There's another question that this book raises, and that is, does Christianity go back to Jesus himself? One of the main ideas that is still fairly common surrounding the

New Testament is that what we know as Christianity, what we call Christianity, and what we believe about Christ and the Church, etc., comes from the Apostle Paul, the guy who wrote most of the New Testament, Romans, Galatians, etc.

But Jesus never really envisioned the Church. Jesus never envisioned what we know as Christianity. That was something that came much later, so that you have, in a sense, two or three or more religions in the New Testament.

And Paul, what we know as Christianity, is only one of them. Well, the second chapter addresses the question, of what we know as Christianity, is that an invention by Paul that came later, or does it indeed go back to Jesus? Is it something that Jesus, to some extent, himself prepared for? And then the last one, the last chapter is, how do we apply the New Testament? For example, as we said, the New Testament is not meant to be a list of theological beliefs. That would be a lot easier if we had that.

Instead, God has chosen to reveal himself in very historical and culturally conditioned text, as we've already said. So, what does that mean for us today? Living 2,000 years later in a very different culture, speaking a different language, how do we make sense of those ancient texts? How do we apply them as God's people today? For example, this kind of brings in the Old Testament as well, but when you read the Old Testament law in relationship to the New Testament, how do I apply some of those laws? When I go back to the Old Testament and read the law that tells me I shouldn't wear a garment sewn of two different types of cloth, how in the world do I apply that? Can I ignore that, or does that have something to say to me? Or when the Old Testament law says to build a parapet or a fence around the roof of your house, what does that mean, and how do I apply that? Or why don't we offer animal sacrifices anymore? For example, why don't some of us wear shawls or caps or head coverings in worship service, besides hats and things like that, which is kind of common? But in Corinthians, Paul tells women to wear some kind of a head covering.

Is that something we should follow or not? So, the last chapter deals with how we go about applying the New Testament, a document that on the one hand is very historically and culturally conditioned, produced in a very different environment and culture and historical setting than our own, yet we still believe it is the abiding Word of God. So how do we apply it? How do we read it? The last chapter will help us answer that. The last textbook that I've asked you to get is a book called *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*.

This is probably the only book that I still have required since starting with the very first time I ever taught this class, and it's usually the one that gets the best reviews from students. *The Lost Letters of Pergamum* by Bruce Longenecker. What this book is, the name itself sounds kind of ancient, but what this book is, just so you know, is this book is entirely fictional.

Although it is based on actual events and actual places and names, actual persons, the main characters are entirely fictional, as far as I know, but you will see references to actual characters like Luke and Matthew and Domitian, some of the Roman Caesars. You'll find references to actual places and actual events and actual customs in the first century. But this, what this is, this is not a, it's not a narrative.

What it is, it's a collection of fictional letters that Bruce Longenecker himself wrote. And what it is, it's simply a dialogue or correspondence in fictional letter form between two or three fictional, one of them is, I think one of them actually is actually Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke, and Acts is one of the figures, but the letter here is fictional. It's not something Luke actually wrote.

But what Longenecker is doing, is simply trying to come up with an interesting and compelling way to relate to you important historical and cultural information. What was it like to live as a Christian in a culture dominated by Roman rule? And dominated by pagan religion and pagan religious practices, et cetera, et cetera. And so, what, I think you'll find this very fascinating and very interesting.

Again, please understand it's entirely fictional, but it's relaying and relating what it is, again, actual events and actual cultural situations, actual cultural and geographical and historical references, the portrayal of the religious beliefs and systems, and the athletic events are based on actual research and categories. So, this is just a different kind of book. It's not meant to be academic.

It's not meant to be just relating historical facts. Again, it's entirely fictional, but a very intriguing way and helpful way to introduce you to the most important cultural historical, and religious factors of the New Testament. And so, we'll talk about this once in a while, but this will be the third textbook that you will read.

And you'll find in the syllabus the reading schedule for each week. For each week, the reading is due on the first day of the first-class period of the week, which is usually Monday. But in case we have a holiday or snow day or something, it would obviously be the next day we meet.

But usually Monday, your reading from the textbooks is due, and you'll find the schedule on the course schedule on your syllabus. So that's the first thing, your textbook reading. The other reading is back to the mention of bringing a New Testament with you.

You will also be required to read the New Testament, and you will find a schedule in your syllabus as well. You will actually start next week, week two. This is week one, and so I didn't expect you to have anything read for today.

But by next week, week two, you will have read, I think it's like Matthew or Matthew and Mark, I can't remember. But you'll find the New Testament reading where you're reading through the actual New Testament books, Matthew through Revelation, in the course syllabus. Now, please understand those books may not necessarily correspond to what we're covering each week.

We may be just a little bit behind that, which is fine. It's better that you've read ahead, and you've already read the material before we talk about it in class. But starting next week, you will start with Matthew and just follow, it's based on the weeks of this semester, just follow through each week and read, along with your textbooks, the required New Testament books for that week.

So that's the first thing you're reading from the New Testament and from your textbooks. The second thing to help you read this, or not just this one, but all three of your textbooks, is there will be six unannounced or pop quizzes on your textbook reading. These quizzes are not meant to fail you or stump you.

I'm trying to make them, as much as possible, I'm trying to make them so that if you've done your reading, you won't have any problem with these quizzes. They're just meant to see if you've read the material. And I'm not going to ask you something like, in introducing on the chart on page 45, in the right-hand corner of the chart, what word did the author, I'm not going to ask you that kind of stuff, or what was in the footnote in the bottom of the page, or the fifth line down of paragraph three.

I'm going to ask you broad, in other words, when the author spends time on something or seems to emphasize something, that's the kind of thing I'm going to ask. But there will be six quizzes scattered throughout the semester, unannounced, on the reading material. Generally, those quizzes will be Monday, on Monday.

Once in a while, I might wait till Wednesday, but I will not give them Friday. The reason I would do that is because if I was taking a quiz on something I read for Monday or Wednesday, I wouldn't remember it by Friday either. So, I'll do it when it's fresh in your mind.

So usually it will be Monday, but once in a while, it could be Wednesday as well. So, although you will complete your reading by Monday, I will review it and go over it again before Wednesday. But I won't give you a quiz on a Friday.

Because again, if you've read all your material by Monday, if you're like me, you will have generally forgotten the material by that time. No, not this class. You won't forget that material.

That's too valuable, right? So six unannounced quizzes. The other requirement is there will be four exams in this class that cover the material from your Bible reading.

Again, I'm not going to ask specific questions from the Bible reading as far as what verse 16 of Matthew chapter 5 says.

I'm not going to ask stuff like that. But your Bible reading, and mainly, primarily the lecture material. That's where your notebook comes in.

As I said, the lecture and class discussion will follow the notebook that is on Blackboard that you are to download. And that is primarily, and your Bible reading is what the exams will be taken from. I know I just ended the sentence with a preposition, but that's okay.

I'm seeing that more and more in academic writing. So, I think I can do that. So, the exams will be taken primarily from the lecture-discussion material that comes from the notebook that you are to download.

It will not cover the textbook reading. So, there will, at least I will not intentionally, only in the sense that some of this overlaps with what we say in class, I am not intentionally taking any exam questions from the textbooks. That's what the quizzes are for.

And by the way, another thing about the quizzes, the quizzes are only for that week. So, if we don't have a quiz for about three weeks, you're not responsible for all that material. The quiz will only be over the reading for that week.

That's another question I get about a hundred times, even though I think I explained it clearly. So, does everyone understand that? The quizzes are only over the reading for that week, not any other week. So, if there's no quiz in week two, then you will not be responsible for that reading on a quiz.

When you come to class, if I give you a pop quiz, it will be over the reading for that week, not any prior weeks. Okay, so four exams that roughly cover the main parts of the New Testament. The first one will be in the Gospels and some of the background material.

In the first week of this class or two, mainly we'll be talking about the background of the New Testament. The New Testament did not arise in a vacuum but was produced kind of at the tail end of a lot of historical and cultural and religious movements and religious currents that helped give rise to it, or at least that the New Testament often responded to. So, we'll spend a couple of weeks talking, kind of setting the stage for working through the New Testament books.

But the first test will be generally over that material in the Gospels, and then working through Acts and Paul's epistles, and finally ending up in the book of Revelation. You can find it in your syllabus, again, I have the week. I don't have a precise date.

A lot of it depends on how quickly we get to the material, whether we have snow days or anything like that, whether I get behind, or how much you want to talk and ask questions. But generally, I at least have the week in which you can expect the exams. The first one will be probably at the tail end of week five over a background and the Gospels.

So, you have five, roughly five weeks before you can expect an exam. And then we'll go several more weeks, work through more material, then we'll have another exam covering that. So, there'll be four of those in the class.

There will also be a final exam that is comprehensive over those four. Although it is based on those four, the final exam does not introduce new information or new material that was not on any of the prior exams. So, if you don't have any problem with the four exams, you should not have any problem whatsoever with the final.

So again, the bulk of the grade will depend on your four exams on the six, and also on the six quizzes, and then your reading will inform that and help that. There's one more thing I want to say about this class. Every year I have people asking me about extra credit.

I don't give extra credit as far as extra reading, extra writing, or anything like that. But one thing I am doing that I've done for a couple of years is I have a couple of TAs for this class that are to help me do some grading and other things. One of the TAs is going to hold four extra credit review sessions.

Now those extra credit sessions are to be determined. I have to meet with her and I will let you know well ahead of time when those are going to occur, where they will be. What they are is generally they will occur about a week or at least a few days before each of the four exams.

So again, there will be four of them. And what they are is basically they can be used for whatever you want. They can be a review session in studying for the exam or they can be utilized to discuss in more detail certain topics that you have questions about or to debate or whatever you want to talk about.

But often in the past they've kind of morphed into a review session for each of the exams. So, you're welcome to use it for that. But there will be four of those and those will be your extra credit.

You can go to one of them and get extra credit for that or you can go to all four and get more extra credit. The other thing about the extra credit, again I want to make it clear, I will announce the times and let you know. They usually occur in the evening or at night.

Obviously, during the day it doesn't work out. But I'll keep you up to date as to when those will be and where so you can plan your schedule. One other thing that people ask, if you choose to attend those, is you are expected to participate in some way.

Don't show up and sit and read a book, take a nap or play on your computer as you will not get credit for that. You must participate in the class, in discussion or raising questions, or not in the class but in the discussion session to get extra credit. So that extra credit will appear on your final grade.

So, I had a lot of students in the past, who'd take an exam and get it back and there would be no extra credit and they'd be upset wondering where their extra credit. I will add up all the extra credit you get at the end of the semester and factor it into your grade. So don't be looking for it on your exam if you choose to attend.

Again, they're completely optional but if you want extra credit, don't ask me to read or write extra, go to those review sessions, that's the extra credit for this class. One other thing, kind of on a more serious note, you'll see our class is being filmed by Professor Hildebrandt, that's actually a mechanism to keep in check the problem I want to talk about and that is playing on your computer in class. I know I can't, that's why Ted, is making sure that doesn't happen.

Actually, there are other reasons why he's filming this. But again, sometimes I walk around a little bit, sometimes I don't and I can't keep track. But I always get, every semester I get students coming and saying they've been bothered because someone is playing on the computer.

Obviously, you're going to bring your computers to class to take notes and things like that. If you want to play games or things like that, go ahead and do it, just stay in your room, don't do it here. And please be respectful to myself and to your peers.

If you're playing a computer game, there's someone right behind you that's trying to pay attention. So please if you want to play games or email or play on Facebook or whatever, go ahead and do it but just stay in your room, don't do it here in class. So those who do want to pay attention and are paying attention aren't distracted by that.

Otherwise, please do bring your computers to download the information, the notes and to take notes and things like that. All right, any other questions? That's pretty much all I want to say unless you have a specific question about, hopefully, what I've said now, you can go back and read the syllabus and it will make sense.

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