

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 1A, Approaches to the Historical Jesus Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 1A, Approaches to the Historical Jesus, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This document is a lecture transcript from a Synoptic Gospels course taught by Dr. Robert C. Newman. The lecture provides an overview of various historical and theological perspectives on Jesus, ranging from religious views like atheism and Islam to allegedly historical views rooted in deism, rationalism, idealism, romanticism, and skepticism. Newman also discusses the "present situation" in Jesus scholarship, examining Post-Bultmannian approaches, plot theories like *The Passover Plot* and *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, and controversial figures like Morton Smith. Finally, he critiques the methods and conclusions of the Jesus Seminar, highlighting their skeptical approach to Gospel accounts and their minimal estimation of Jesus' authentic words. The lecture concludes with a summary of the viewpoints discussed along with a number of suggested responses to the viewpoints. The lecture provides a summary of critical scholarship on the historical Jesus and is presented in a balanced manner.

**2. 27 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 1A – Double click icon
to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (New Testament → Gospels → Synoptic Gospels).**



**Newman_Synoptics
_Session01.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 1A, Approaches to the Historical Jesus

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Robert C. Newman's "Synoptic Gospels, Lecture 1, Historical Jesus Survey":

Briefing Document: Historical Jesus Survey

Main Theme: This lecture provides an overview of the diverse and often conflicting views surrounding the historical Jesus, contrasting religious perspectives with allegedly historical ones that have emerged over the past 200 years. The lecture sets the stage for a deeper dive into the Synoptic Gospels by examining the lens through which various scholars and movements have interpreted Jesus.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Course Overview:** The Synoptic Gospels course will cover 12 major topics, beginning with an examination of the historical Jesus and progressing through the Intertestamental Period, exegesis, authorship and dating of the Synoptic Gospels, interpreting parables and miracles, the geography of Palestine, biblical theology, controversial accounts, and finally, form and redaction criticism. "Lord willing, we're going to try to cover about 12 big topics here."
- **Diversity of Views on Jesus:** Newman emphasizes the wide range of opinions about Jesus, influenced by religion, worldviews, and claims of historical analysis. "Unless you've lived a very sheltered life, you're aware that people have enormously diverse views about Jesus."
- **Religious Views of Jesus:**
- **Biblical View:** Jesus is "somehow fully God and fully human."
- **Atheism:** Jesus was "at best only human" and potentially fictional. "In fact, this idea of the fictional Jesus was at one time the standard communist view."
- **Islam:** Jesus was a true prophet, born of a virgin, and a miracle worker, but not God. "Allah is strictly one, and he has no son."
- **Old Liberalism:** Gospels contain legendary material due to the rejection of miracles. Jesus was an ethical teacher with more of God in him than others. "God only worked providentially through Jesus, but somehow people misunderstood him, and he was deified by the early Gentile Christians."

- **Neo-Orthodoxy:** The Christ of faith is more important than the Jesus of history. "This seems to be an attempt to rescue, if you like, religious values while accepting the so-called scientific history in which miracles do not occur."
- **Jehovah's Witnesses:** Jesus is a "small g-god," possibly a reincarnation of the archangel Michael.
- **Mormonism:** Jesus was the firstborn spiritual son of God, became a god after his ascension, and humans can become gods. "Jesus was merely a man at the time he was on earth, though he was unusual in that he was the firstborn spiritual son of his father and his spiritual mother in heaven."
- **New Age Movement:** Jesus is one of the "ascended masters" – those who have achieved spiritual enlightenment. The term "Christ" represents a level of spiritual enlightenment, not a unique office held only by Jesus.
- **Allegedly Historical Views (Liberal Reconstructions):** These views generally assume that miracles do not occur and selectively accept/reject Gospel material. "These attempts regularly assume that miracles do not occur...proponents of such views accept some of the Gospel material and reject the rest, and they differ on which they accept and which they reject, though they agree in rejecting miracles."
- **Deism (Reimarus):** Jesus claimed to be a Jewish messiah but failed to overthrow Rome. The disciples stole his body and invented the resurrection story to start a new religion. "So, they stole Jesus' body from the tomb, claimed he had risen from the dead, and claimed that he had sent them out to preach this new religion."
- **Rationalism (Paulus):** Miracles were misunderstood natural events. Jesus healed with spiritual power and natural medicine. The Resurrection was a coma revival. "Namely, he claimed the miracles really did happen, but they weren't miraculous. They were misunderstood as non-supernatural events."
- **Idealism (Strauss):** The life of Jesus is colored by mythological interpretation. Myths are timeless religious truths clothed in historical form. "Strauss defines myth here as a timeless religious truth clothed in historical form." Strauss separated historical truth from religious value and he favored a Christ of faith approach."

- **Romanticism (Renan):** Jesus was an ethical teacher, then a revolutionary, then a martyr. Mary Magdalene hallucinated the resurrection. "As Ernest Renan sees it the gospel picture of Jesus doesn't make sense with the miraculous removed."
- **Skepticism (Wrede):** It's impossible to reconstruct the life of Jesus. Mark invented the Messianic Secret. "Wrede's answer is that Mark invented the Messianic Secret because Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, but Mark and his circle thought that he was."
- **Present Situation:** Characterized by diversity, with modern theories often being combinations of older ones.
- **Post-Bultmannians:** Former students of Bultmann who feel he was too skeptical. They use a "method of dissonance" to determine authentic sayings of Jesus, focusing on what is incompatible with both Judaism and Christianity. "Thus, any features of Jesus' reported teachings that look Jewish might go back to the Jews rather than Jesus...So only that which is incomparable with both Judaism and Christianity likely goes back to Jesus."
- **Schoenfield (The Passover Plot):** Jesus' ministry was an elaborate plot to fulfill Old Testament prophecies, including faking his death. "According to Schoenfield, Jesus' ministry is an elaborate plot to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, especially his death and resurrection."
- **Allegro (The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross):** Jesus, Christianity, and Judaism never existed. The Bible is a coded expression of a mushroom fertility cult. "Jesus never existed. Christianity never existed. Judaism never existed, at least in this part of the first century."
- **Smith (The Secret Gospel):** Jesus was a libertine Gnostic magician. The Secret Gospel of Mark contains lewd material. "Smith sides with the Carpocratians in claiming that Jesus really is a libertine Gnostic magician and that this explains his miracles, his personal claims to deity, his secrecy, and his statements about the law."
- **Jesus Seminar:** A group that seeks to provide a scholarly presentation of Jesus, rejecting the miraculous and deeming most of the Gospels as non-historical. "The Jesus Seminar is a group of radical New Testament researchers who've been meeting for 20 years or so to produce a scholarly presentation on Jesus that, in their view, will blow traditional Christianity out of the water." They operate under

seven "pillars of scholarly wisdom," including the assumption that the Gospels are non-historical unless proven otherwise.

- **Responses to Liberal Lives:** Newman mentions several works that challenge liberal reconstructions of Jesus, including "Jesus Under Fire" by Wilkins and Moreland and "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels" by Craig Blomberg.

Significance: This lecture provides a foundational understanding of the various approaches to studying the historical Jesus, highlighting the challenges of separating historical fact from religious belief and philosophical assumptions. It emphasizes the importance of critically evaluating sources and methodologies when studying the Gospels.

4. Study Guide: Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 1A, Approaches to the Historical Jesus

Synoptic Gospels: A Study Guide

I. Study Guide Outline

This study guide is designed to assist in understanding the key concepts and figures discussed in Dr. Newman's lecture on the Synoptic Gospels, with a focus on the historical Jesus and various interpretations of his life and teachings.

A. Course Overview:

- Familiarize yourself with the 12 topics to be covered in the Synoptic Gospels course.
- Understand the course's progression from the historical Jesus to exegesis, literary analysis, and critical approaches.

B. The Historical Jesus:

- Examine the diverse modern views on Jesus, distinguishing between religious and allegedly historical perspectives.
- Understand the various interpretations of Jesus, including:
- **Religious Views:** Atheism, Islam, Old Liberalism, Neo-orthodoxy, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, New Age Movement.
- **Allegedly Historical Views:** Deism, Rationalism, Idealism, Romanticism, Skepticism.

C. Key Figures and Movements:

- Understand the core beliefs and contributions of key figures within each philosophical movement:
- **Deism:** Hermann Samuel Reimarus
- **Rationalism:** Heinrich Paulus
- **Idealism:** David Friedrich Strauss
- **Romanticism:** Ernest Renan
- **Skepticism:** Wilhelm Wrede

D. The Present Situation:

- Examine the views of post-Bultmannians, noting their methodology and conclusions.
- Understand the Passover Plot (Hugh Schoenfield), the Sacred Mushroom and the Cross (John Marco Allegro), and the theories of Morton Smith.
- Analyze the approaches and results of the Jesus Seminar.

E. Methodological Issues:

- Understand the problems associated with plot theories.
- Be aware of the challenges in determining the historical reliability of the Gospels, particularly in light of miracle accounts and the differing perspectives of the Gospel writers.

II. Short-Answer Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How does Islam view Jesus, and what are some key differences between the Islamic view and traditional Christian theology?
2. Describe the central claim of Old Liberalism regarding the Gospels and the nature of Jesus.
3. Explain neo-orthodoxy's view of the relationship between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith."
4. How do Jehovah's Witnesses understand Jesus' divinity?
5. According to Reimarus, what were the original aims of Jesus, and how did his disciples alter those aims after his death?
6. What was Heinrich Paulus's approach to the miracle accounts in the Gospels?
7. Describe David Friedrich Strauss's concept of "myth" and its application to the Gospels.
8. How does Ernest Renan divide Jesus' life into three phases, and what are those phases?
9. What is the "Messianic Secret," and how does Wilhelm Wrede explain it?

10. Briefly describe the "method of dissonance" used by post-Bultmannians to find the "historical Jesus".

III. Answer Key to Short-Answer Quiz

1. Islam views Jesus as a true prophet, born of a virgin, and a miracle worker who will return as Messiah. However, Islam strictly adheres to monotheism, rejecting the Trinitarian concept and denying Jesus' divinity as the Son of God. They also believe that Jesus was snatched to heaven and that a substitute died on the cross in his place.
2. Old Liberalism believes that the Gospels contain legendary material due to a rejection of miracles. They claim that God worked providentially through Jesus, but he was misunderstood and deified by early Gentile Christians. Jesus is seen as an ethical teacher who had more of God in him than others.
3. Neo-orthodoxy asserts that the "Jesus of history" is less important than the "Christ of faith." They share a similar view of the Gospels to old liberalism, however, neo-orthodoxy feels that Christians should focus on the religious values and the Christ of faith rather than attempt to establish the historical Jesus. This approach aims to reconcile religious belief with scientific history, in which miracles are dismissed.
4. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is a "small g-god" and not the almighty God. They often equate him with the archangel Michael, who was the agent through whom Jehovah God created all things. Thus, they see him as a divine being but not as part of the Trinity and not worthy of worship.
5. Reimarus argued that Jesus aimed to be a Jewish Messiah who would liberate Israel from political oppression and restore them to God. After Jesus' failed revolt and subsequent death, Reimarus claims, his disciples stole his body, invented the resurrection, and created a new religion centered on a second coming and the claim that they were sent by him.
6. Paulus employed a rationalistic approach, arguing that the miracles in the Gospels were based on natural or misunderstood events. He claimed Jesus' healings were due to spiritual power or natural medicine, and he provided rational explanations for events like walking on water and the feeding of the 5,000. He saw Jesus' resurrection as a coma from which Jesus recovered and appeared for a while before leaving them to die.

7. Strauss defines myth as a timeless religious truth clothed in historical form. He argued that the entire life of Jesus, not just the birth and resurrection accounts, had been colored by mythological interpretations, meaning that events described in the Gospels were not necessarily historical but symbolic representations of religious ideas. He thought that the religious ideas expressed in the life of Jesus are what is true, but the events didn't really happen.
8. Renan divides Jesus' life into three phases: an ethical teacher, a revolutionary, and a martyr. He argued that Jesus started as an optimistic ethical teacher, then became a revolutionary when rejected by the rabbis, and finally chose to be a martyr to preserve his teachings. Renan states that all three phases of this view were historical, but were somehow mixed together in the gospel accounts, which were mixed up chronologically.
9. The "Messianic Secret" refers to Jesus' apparent practice of telling people not to reveal that he was the Messiah. Wrede argued that Mark invented this idea because Jesus never actually claimed to be the Messiah. Wrede believed that Mark and his circle thought that Jesus was the Messiah and invented the Messianic Secret to account for the fact that the Gospels do not directly state as much.
10. The "method of dissonance" involves identifying features of Jesus' reported teachings that are incompatible with both Judaism and Christianity. By using this technique, post-Bultmannians attempted to isolate the "authentic" sayings and actions of Jesus, assuming that anything easily attributable to either Jewish or Christian influence was likely not original to Jesus.

IV. Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the views of Jesus presented by Old Liberalism and Neo-orthodoxy. How did each movement attempt to reconcile faith and historical criticism?
2. Discuss the impact of philosophical movements like Deism, Rationalism, and Idealism on interpretations of the historical Jesus during the 18th and 19th centuries.
3. Analyze the approach of the Jesus Seminar to the Gospels. What are the strengths and weaknesses of their methodology, and how have their conclusions been received?

4. Evaluate the "plot theory" approach to interpreting historical events, using Hugh Schoenfield's "Passover Plot" as an example. What are the inherent challenges and limitations of this method?
5. Trace the evolution of skepticism towards the historical reliability of the Gospels from Reimarus to Wrede to Bultmann. How did each figure contribute to the questioning of traditional accounts?

V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Atheism:** The disbelief in the existence of God or gods.
- **Deism:** The belief in a creator God who does not intervene in the universe after its creation.
- **Eschatology:** The study of the end times or final events in history.
- **Exegesis:** Critical interpretation of a text, especially of scripture.
- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that analyzes the structure and content of individual units in the Gospels to determine their origin, transmission, and purpose.
- **Idealism:** The philosophical view that mind or ideas constitute the fundamental reality.
- **Messianic Secret:** The motif in Mark's Gospel in which Jesus repeatedly commands his followers not to reveal his identity.
- **Neo-orthodoxy:** A theological movement that emerged in the 20th century as a reaction to liberal theology, emphasizing the transcendence of God and the limitations of human reason.
- **Old Liberalism:** A theological movement that arose in the late 18th and 19th centuries, emphasizing reason, ethics, and the historical Jesus while downplaying miracles and traditional doctrines.
- **Q (Quelle):** A hypothetical source believed by many biblical scholars to have contained sayings of Jesus, used by Matthew and Luke in addition to Mark.
- **Rationalism:** The philosophical view that reason is the primary source of knowledge and justification.

- **Redaction Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that analyzes how the Gospel writers (redactors) edited and shaped their sources to convey their theological perspectives.
- **Romanticism:** A movement in art and literature emphasizing emotion, intuition, and individual experience.
- **Skepticism:** A philosophical attitude of doubt towards knowledge claims, especially those based on tradition or authority.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so called because they share a similar structure and content.
- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God exists as three co-equal persons: Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit.

5. FAQs on Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Session 1A, Approaches to the Historical Jesus, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Synoptic Gospels and the Historical Jesus: An FAQ

Here's an FAQ based on the provided lecture excerpts, covering key themes and ideas related to the Synoptic Gospels and the search for the historical Jesus.

- **What is the central focus of the Synoptic Gospels course, and what major topics will be explored?**
- This Synoptic Gospels course focuses on understanding the life, teachings, and significance of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. Major topics include:
- Examining the historical Jesus and various theological and allegedly historical interpretations.
- Exploring the intertestamental period and its relevance to the context of Jesus' ministry.
- Studying Gospel exegesis, including narrative, parable, and miracle account interpretation.
- Analyzing authorship, dating, literary aspects, and the Synoptic Problem of the Gospels.
- Delving into the biblical theology of the Synoptic Gospels, with a focus on Jesus' teachings about the kingdom.
- Applying form and redaction criticism to understand Gospel development.
- **What are some key alternative religious views of Jesus, as opposed to the traditional Christian view?**
- Several religious perspectives offer alternative views of Jesus' nature and role:
- **Atheism:** Jesus was merely human, possibly even a fictional character.
- **Islam:** Jesus was a prophet born of a virgin and performed miracles, but is not God nor the son of God. He will return as Messiah but is subordinate to Allah.
- **Old Liberalism:** Jesus was a great ethical teacher who was misunderstood and deified by early Christians. Miracles are rejected as legendary.

- **Neo-orthodoxy:** The "Christ of faith" is more important than the "Jesus of history." Accepts the liberal view that miracles didn't happen.
- **Jehovah's Witnesses:** Jesus is a "small g-god", a created being (possibly a reincarnation of the archangel Michael) and God's agent in creation, but not the almighty God and not to be worshipped.
- **Mormonism:** Jesus is the virgin-born Messiah and miracle worker, but humans can become gods as Jesus did.
- **New Age Movement:** Jesus is one of many "ascended masters," enlightened individuals who achieved a high level of spiritual development. The term "Christ" refers to a level of enlightenment, not an office unique to Jesus.
- **What philosophical movements have influenced attempts to reconstruct the "historical Jesus," and how?**
- Several philosophical movements have significantly shaped efforts to reconstruct the historical Jesus:
- **Deism:** God is a "watchmaker" who doesn't intervene in the world, so miracles are impossible. *Reimarus* saw Jesus as a failed Jewish Messiah whose disciples invented the resurrection and a new religion.
- **Rationalism:** Moral truth can be deduced through reason alone, making revelation unnecessary. *Paulus* attempted to explain Gospel miracles as misunderstood natural events.
- **Idealism:** Mind and ideas are the basic reality, not matter. *Strauss* viewed the Gospels as largely mythological, expressing timeless religious truths in historical form.
- **Romanticism:** Emotions and intuition provide insights that reason cannot. *Renan* saw Jesus' life as evolving through phases of ethical teacher, revolutionary, and martyr, with the Gospel accounts being chronologically mixed up.
- **Skepticism:** It's impossible to reconstruct the life of Jesus. *Wrede* argued that Mark invented the "Messianic Secret" because Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, rendering Mark's narrative unreliable.
- **How did Hermann Samuel Reimarus's work impact later liberal reconstructions of Jesus' life?**
- Reimarus's "Wolfenbüttel Fragments" had a significant impact:

- Opened the way for later, less drastic liberal reconstructions.
- Set a precedent for ignoring the New Testament epistles and emphasizing Jesus' eschatological (end times) teachings (which liberals generally dislike).
- Established the idea that much of the Gospel material was created by the apostles or later church, rather than originating with Jesus.
- **What are some examples of rationalistic explanations for Jesus' miracles, according to Heinrich Paulus?**
- Paulus offered rationalistic interpretations of miracles such as:
- Walking on water: Jesus was actually walking on the shore or a sandbar.
- Feeding the 5,000: People had substantial lunches hidden and were shamed into sharing after a boy offered his loaves and fishes.
- Transfiguration: The disciples were half asleep on a mountain as the sun rose behind Jesus, making him appear to shine.
- Resurrection of Lazarus: Lazarus was in a coma, and Jesus woke him up.
- Jesus' own resurrection: Jesus went into a coma on the cross, was revived by the cool tomb and spices, and left later to die elsewhere.
- **What are some key themes in the "present situation" regarding the study of the historical Jesus, particularly in the post-Bultmann era?**
- The present situation is marked by diversity, with modern theories often combining previously noticed possibilities. Some key developments include:
- **Post-Bultmannians:** Former students of Rudolf Bultmann sought a middle ground between Bultmann's skepticism and traditional views. They were anti-supernatural but more interested in the historical Jesus than Bultmann was. They used a "method of dissonance" to identify authentic sayings and incidents.
- **The Passover Plot (Schoenfield):** Jesus' ministry was an elaborate plot to fulfill Old Testament prophecies, faking his death and resurrection.
- **The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross (Allegro):** A super plot theory claiming that Jesus never existed. Christianity and Judaism never existed either; their texts are code words for a mushroom-based fertility cult.

- **The Secret Gospel (Smith):** Claims the discovery of a letter from Clement of Alexandria revealing a secret, longer version of Mark, portraying Jesus as a libertine Gnostic magician.
- **What were the "Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom" of the Jesus Seminar, and how did they approach the Gospels?**
- The Jesus Seminar operated on specific principles:
 1. **Jesus of History vs. Christ of Faith:** Prioritizing the historical Jesus over the theological interpretation.
 2. **Jesus of the Synoptics vs. Jesus of John:** Favoring the Synoptic Gospels as more reliable sources.
 3. **Mark's Priority:** Believing that the Gospel of Mark was written first and used by Matthew and Luke.
 4. **Existence of Q:** Postulating a hypothetical document (Q) containing sayings of Jesus used by Matthew and Luke.
 5. **Eschatological vs. Non-Eschatological Jesus:** Choosing between a Jesus focused on end-times prophecies or one with a more present-day message.
 6. **Oral Culture vs. Print Culture:** Emphasizing the role of oral tradition in transmitting Gospel material.
 7. **Skeptical Principle:** Assuming the Gospels are non-historical unless proven otherwise.
- **What were the Jesus Seminar's main conclusions about the authenticity of Jesus' sayings in the Gospels?**
- The Jesus Seminar concluded that only a small percentage of the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were actually spoken by him:
 - Only 18% of the words ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels were considered authentic.
 - In Mark, only one saying was deemed authentic ("Pay the emperor what belongs to the emperor and God what belongs to God").
 - The Gospel of Thomas was rated more authentic than John and Mark.

- Their approach involved voting using colored marbles (red, pink, gray, black) to assess the likelihood of authenticity for each saying.