

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 4, Judaism and Social Values Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 4, Judaism and Social Values, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture explores the historical, religious, and cultural environment surrounding the New Testament. It highlights the interconnectedness of religion and politics in the Greco-Roman world and then shifts focus to cultural trends and social values, such as avoiding shame and the patron-client relationship, that influenced interactions during that era. **The lecture examines key Jewish literature including the Mishnah, Targums, and Dead Sea Scrolls, which can provide insights into Jewish thought during the New Testament period.** Dr. Mathewson emphasizes the importance of understanding the original context and cultural codes of the first century to avoid interpreting biblical texts through a modern lens. **He illustrates this with examples, like the parable of the Good Samaritan and the message to the church of Laodicea.** Lastly, the lecture revisits the Christmas story in the Gospels, challenging traditional interpretations by re-examining historical and cultural context of the era.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 4 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



Mathewson_NTLit_Session04.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 4, Judaism and Social Values

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts, along with direct quotes where appropriate:

Briefing Document: Dr. Mathewson's Lecture 4 - Judaism and Social Values

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson focuses on the historical, religious, and cultural background of the New Testament, particularly examining Judaism and its social values. The lecture emphasizes the importance of understanding the context in which the New Testament was written to properly interpret its meaning. Dr. Mathewson argues against reading ancient texts through a modern lens, advocating for a deeper understanding of the cultural codes and values of the first century.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Contextualizing the New Testament:

- The New Testament emerged from specific historical, religious, and cultural circumstances. Understanding these circumstances is crucial for interpretation.
- "Again, realizing that the New Testament grew out of very specific historical, religious, and cultural circumstances influenced by them, responding to them, critiquing them, etc."
- Religion and politics were intertwined in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds.

1. The Literature of Judaism:

- The New Testament is not an isolated text but part of a broader body of Jewish literature from the period.
- "When I was growing up, I used to think that the New Testament was the only book that was ever written in the first century. But actually, the New Testament is just part of a whole body of literature that grew up leading up to during and even after the time of the New Testament."
- Several key texts provide insight into Jewish thought and life:

- **Mishnah:** A written record of oral law and traditions that developed alongside the written law of Moses. Though codified around 200 AD, it reflects first-century Jewish thought.
- **Targums:** Aramaic paraphrases and translations of the Old Testament, used in synagogues as Aramaic became the common language.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** Documents from the Qumran community (Essenes), including commentaries on Old Testament passages, community rules, and insights into their beliefs (e.g., about the Messiah). They illustrate how some Jews interpreted scripture and lived during that era.
- These texts, the Mishnah, the Targums, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, "help us paint a picture of the Jewish religion and Judaism and the people of God, what they thought, what they taught, how they lived in the first century during the time when the New Testament emerged."

1. **Dominant Cultural Values:**

- First-century society had distinct cultural codes that governed social interactions. Understanding these is critical to avoid misinterpreting New Testament texts.
- "The importance of this is that at times their cultural values were very, very different and distinct from our own."
- Key values include:
- **Avoiding Shame:** Conformity to societal norms was paramount. Actions were judged based on whether they brought honor or shame to oneself and one's family.
- "If you lived in the first century, it was incumbent upon you to act in a way that was honorable and did not bring shame upon yourself or your family at all costs."
- **Group Identity:** The group (family, community) was more important than the individual. "More important than who you were as an individual was the group that you belonged to."
- **Patron-Client Relationship:** Wealthy patrons provided benefits to clients (those with less resources) in exchange for loyalty, support, and public praise. Failing to show gratitude was considered shameful. "In exchange for financial benefits, the client was expected to basically speak well of that person and support that person, perhaps politically, because of what he had done."

1. Social Classes:

- First-century society was highly stratified.
- Key classes:
- **Wealthy Elite:** A small minority holding most of the wealth.
- **The Poor:** The majority (around 70%) struggled daily for survival, often peasant farmers. "Literally, roughly 70% of the population during that time were persons just struggling to eke out an existence, living day to day, and sometimes often wondering where their next meal was coming from."
- **Slaves:** Slavery was widespread, with conditions varying from relatively good to extremely harsh. Slavery wasn't based on race.

1. Interpreting Scripture in Context: Examples

- Cultural and geographical context is imperative to understanding texts.
- **The Good Samaritan:** The parable is often interpreted as simply a call to be a good neighbor, but in the first century, Samaritans were despised. Jesus' choice of a Samaritan as the hero would have been shocking, highlighting that even one's enemies can be neighbors. "He was taking a person that, not himself, but many in that day despised and saw as disgusting and making that person the hero."
- **Laodicea (Revelation 3:15-16):** The lukewarmness is often interpreted as spiritual apathy. However, Laodicea lacked a good water source and had to pipe in water that was lukewarm and unpalatable. Nearby Hierapolis had hot springs with medicinal value, and Colossae had cold, refreshing water. Jesus is likely criticizing the Laodicean church not for being "in the middle" spiritually, but for being like their disgusting water supply, unlike the desirable hot or cold water of the other cities. "So don't read this in light of our experience with hot being on fire for Christ, cold being against him, and lukewarm in the middle. No, hot and cold are good things in this context, and lukewarm is a bad thing. It's the complete opposite."
- **The Christmas Story:** Many details are often filled in with modern assumptions. The wise men likely visited Jesus in a house, perhaps a year or two after his birth, not at the manger. The "inn" was likely a guest room in a relative's house.

Implications for New Testament Study:

- A contextual approach helps readers understand the original intent of the biblical authors.
- By recognizing cultural differences, modern readers can avoid imposing their own values and assumptions on the text.
- Historical, geographical, and cultural background research can illuminate the meaning of specific passages.
- "Understanding a little bit about the background and culture of a text often can have a profound effect on the way we read it and may end up, helping us to understand in a way that's very different from the way we might understand it if we read it in light of our own cultural background and historical background and values."

This briefing document provides a comprehensive overview of the main themes, ideas, and facts discussed in the lecture excerpts. It highlights the importance of understanding the historical, religious, and cultural context of the New Testament for accurate interpretation.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 4, Judaism and Social Values

Judaism and Social Values in the New Testament Era: A Study Guide

I. Short Answer Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the Mishnah, and why is it helpful for understanding the New Testament era, even though it was written down later?
2. What are the Targums, and why were they created?
3. Why was the Qumran community upset with Jerusalem? What is significant about the Dead Sea Scrolls?
4. Why is it important to understand the cultural values of the first century when reading the New Testament?
5. Explain the cultural value of "avoiding shame at all costs" in the first century.
6. Describe the patron-client relationship in the first century and the expected behavior of each party.
7. What were the three dominant social classes in the first century, and what characterized each?
8. According to the lecture, what is the proper approach to understanding and applying culturally specific biblical texts today?
9. How does understanding the historical context change our understanding of the parable of the Good Samaritan?
10. How does understanding the geography of Laodicea and its surrounding cities change our understanding of Revelation 3:15-16?

Answer Key

1. The Mishnah is the written record of the oral law that was passed down in Judaism alongside the written law given to Moses. It is helpful because it contains information that was passed on orally, reflecting how Jews were thinking about issues in the first century, even though it was codified around 200 AD.

2. The Targums are Aramaic paraphrases and translations of the Old Testament. They were created to meet the needs of people in Palestine who spoke Aramaic and needed to understand the Bible as it was read and explained in synagogues.
3. The Qumran community was upset with what they saw as corruption in Jerusalem and the temple. The Dead Sea Scrolls are significant because they reveal how some Jews during that time interpreted the Old Testament, what they believed about the Messiah, and how they lived within their community.
4. It is important to understand the cultural values of the first century because their values differed significantly from our own, and we risk misinterpreting the text through our modern lenses. Understanding their values helps us grasp the original meaning and intent of the text.
5. Avoiding shame at all costs was a key cultural value, emphasizing conformity to societal norms and acting honorably. Bringing shame upon oneself or one's family was to be avoided, and restoring honor was paramount if one's character was questioned.
6. In the patron-client relationship, the patron was a wealthy individual who provided financial benefits to the client, who was less well-off. In exchange, the client was expected to show extreme gratitude and support the patron politically.
7. The three dominant social classes were the wealthy elite, the poor, and the slaves. The wealthy elite held most of the wealth, the poor struggled to survive daily, and slaves experienced a wide range of conditions, from relatively good to brutally harsh.
8. The proper approach involves first understanding what God intended to communicate to the original readers in their specific context, and then considering how that message continues to speak to God's people today in a different environment. It's important not to apply the text incorrectly by reading and understanding it incorrectly if we have not understood it in light of its original context.
9. Understanding the historical context reveals that the Samaritan was a despised figure, making him the most unlikely hero. This challenges our domesticated view of the parable and suggests that our neighbor is often our worst enemy.
10. Understanding the geography reveals that Laodicea lacked a good water supply, relying on lukewarm and distasteful piped-in water. This suggests that Jesus was

criticizing the church for being useless and disgusting, like their own water supply, rather than being spiritually indifferent.

II. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the Mishnah, Targums, and Dead Sea Scrolls for understanding the social, religious, and political context of the New Testament. How do these documents illuminate the beliefs and practices of various Jewish groups during this period?
2. Analyze the cultural value of "avoiding shame at all costs" in the first century. How did this value influence social interactions, legal proceedings, and religious practices? Provide specific examples from the New Testament to illustrate your points.
3. Explain the dynamics of the patron-client relationship in the first century and its influence on social and economic life. How did this system affect the distribution of resources and the exercise of power, and how is it reflected in the New Testament writings?
4. Compare and contrast the social and economic conditions of the wealthy elite, the poor, and the slaves in the first century. How did these conditions shape the lives and experiences of individuals in each class, and how are they reflected in the teachings and actions of Jesus?
5. Evaluate the lecture's interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the message to the church in Laodicea. How does considering the historical, cultural, and geographical contexts of these passages change our understanding of their meaning and significance?

III. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Mishnah:** A written record of the oral law that was passed down in Judaism, codified around 200 AD.
- **Targums:** Aramaic paraphrases and translations of the Old Testament.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** A collection of ancient Jewish texts discovered in caves near the Dead Sea, including commentaries on Old Testament passages and documents related to the Qumran community.
- **Essenes:** A Jewish sect that withdrew from society to form the Qumran community, believing that Jerusalem and the temple were corrupt.
- **Shame/Honor Culture:** A cultural system where social interactions are governed by the desire to maintain honor and avoid shame.
- **Patron-Client Relationship:** A social and economic system in which wealthy patrons provide benefits to less well-off clients in exchange for support and gratitude.
- **Wealthy Elite:** The small percentage of the population that held most of the wealth in the first century.
- **The Poor:** The majority of the population in the first century who struggled to make a living and often wondered where their next meal was coming from.
- **Slaves:** Individuals held in servitude in the Greco-Roman world, with varying degrees of living conditions and opportunities for freedom.
- **Laodicea:** An ancient city in Western Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) known for its lack of a good water supply.
- **Hierapolis:** An ancient city near Laodicea known for its hot springs with medicinal value.
- **Colossae:** An ancient city near Laodicea known for its cold, refreshing water supply.

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5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 4, Judaism and Social Values, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ

- **Why is it important to understand the historical, cultural, and social context of the New Testament?**
- Understanding the historical, cultural, and social context is crucial because the New Testament emerged from specific circumstances. The New Testament authors were influenced by, responded to, and critiqued the religious, political, and cultural environment of their time. Recognizing the differences between our cultural values and those of the first century helps us avoid misinterpreting the text through our modern lenses and allows us to more accurately understand what God intended to communicate to the original audience.
- **What were some of the major social values in the first century that influenced life and relationships?**
- Three major social values included: 1) avoiding shame at all costs, where conformity to societal norms was prioritized to maintain honor and avoid dishonor; 2) the importance of the group, emphasizing that one's family and community were more important than individual identity; and 3) the patron-client relationship, where wealthy patrons provided benefits to less fortunate clients in exchange for loyalty and public praise.
- **What is the significance of the Mishnah, Targums, and Dead Sea Scrolls in understanding the New Testament?**
- These are examples of Jewish literature that help us understand the context of the New Testament. The Mishnah is a written record of oral laws and traditions that may reflect Jewish thinking in the first century. The Targums are Aramaic paraphrases and translations of the Old Testament that reveal how Jews interpreted the scriptures. The Dead Sea Scrolls offer insights into the beliefs and practices of the Qumran community and their interpretations of the Old Testament, providing a glimpse into the diversity of Jewish thought during that period.

- **How did the patron-client relationship work in the first century, and why is it important for interpreting the New Testament?**
- In the patron-client system, wealthy patrons provided financial or other benefits to clients (those less fortunate). In return, clients were expected to show extreme gratitude, support the patron, and speak highly of them. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for interpreting certain passages in the New Testament, such as those in 1 Corinthians, where Paul addresses issues related to social status and obligations within the church.
- **What were the main social classes in the first century, and how did they influence society?**
- The main social classes were the wealthy elite (a small minority holding most of the wealth), the poor (the majority struggling daily to survive), and the slaves (who experienced a wide range of conditions). This economic disparity affected daily life, influenced social interactions, and shaped the way people understood and related to power and authority.
- **How does understanding the geography and water sources of Laodicea change our interpretation of Revelation 3:15-16?**
- Traditionally, Revelation 3:15-16 is interpreted to mean that the Laodicean church was lukewarm in their faith, neither hot nor cold for Christ. However, considering that Laodicea lacked a good local water source and had to pipe in water that was lukewarm and unpleasant to drink, the passage takes on a different meaning. "Hot" water from Hierapolis was medicinal, and "cold" water from Colossae was refreshing. Thus, being "lukewarm" was a negative, indicating that they were as disgusting and useless as Laodicea's own water supply.
- **Why does the traditional depiction of the Christmas story often differ from what the Gospels actually say?**
- The traditional depiction of the Christmas story often fills in gaps with our own assumptions, traditions, and cultural understandings. For example, the Gospels do not mention an innkeeper, or that Jesus was born the same night Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, and while the Bible mentions the wise men bringing three gifts, it never indicates how many of them there were.

- **According to the source, what are common misconceptions about the nativity story and the birth of Jesus?**
- Common misconceptions include the idea that the wise men were present at the manger scene (they arrived later at a house), the existence of an innkeeper turning Mary and Joseph away (the text likely refers to a crowded guest room in a relative's home), and the assumption that Mary gave birth immediately upon arriving in Bethlehem (the Gospels don't specify how long they were there before Jesus was born).