

New Testament History and Literature – Course Introduction

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Abstract

This introductory lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson establishes the foundational framework and pedagogical approach for a survey course on New Testament History and Literature. The course adopts a "flyover" methodology, balancing broad overviews of all twenty-seven New Testament books with deep-dive examinations of key or problematic passages. Mathewson emphasizes interpreting the texts as both living, situation-specific first-century historical documents and as authoritative, abiding scripture for contemporary Christian life. Course logistics include requirements for three textbooks, unannounced reading quizzes, lecture-based exams, optional extra credit review sessions, and expectations for respectful classroom engagement.

Outline

I. Introduction and Opening Prayer

- A. Opening Remarks and Purpose of Lecture
 - 1. Welcome to New Testament History and Literature
 - 2. Review of course expectations, syllabus, and methodology
- B. Opening Prayer
 - 1. Gratitude for studying God's revelation in the New Testament
 - 2. Prayer for clear thinking, patience, perseverance, and practical application

II. Course Scope and Pedagogical Approach

- A. Comparison with Old Testament Survey
 - 1. Old Testament covers a much larger timeline and vast body of literature
 - 2. New Testament is significantly shorter and covers a much brief historical timeframe
- B. Two Extreme Survey Methods
 - 1. Super-broad overview: touches every book quickly (Matthew through Revelation) but misses textual depth and interpretative issues
 - 2. Micro-detailed approach: starts with Matthew and moves verse-by-verse (often never progressing past Acts)

C. The "Flyover" Hybrid Methodology

1. Primary mode: high-altitude aerial overview of all 27 books
2. Secondary mode: descending to ground level for detailed analysis of critical, problematic, or crucial passages
3. Focus: introducing every book while providing practical hermeneutical tools

III. Core Interpretative Framework: History and Scripture

A. Historical and Cultural Grounding

1. Documents arose in specific first-century historical and cultural situations
2. Occasional nature: authors addressed concrete church problems (e.g., Paul writing Galatians out of urgency)
3. Epistolary format: substitute for personal presence rather than abstract systematic theology textbooks
4. Example: re-examining the Christmas story through first-century context versus modern traditions

B. Theological Authority as Scripture

1. Recognized by God's people as authoritative Word of God
2. Addressing how ancient, culturally conditioned texts maintain abiding validity today
3. Bridging first-century intent with modern theological application

IV. Classroom Environment and Learning Expectations

A. Lecture and Interactive Discussion

1. Combination of instructor lecture and interactive dialogue
2. Student participation, questions, and respectful debate welcomed

V. Required Resources and Textbooks

A. Digital Resources on Blackboard

1. Course Syllabus (policing structure and reading schedule)
2. New Testament Notebook (essential lecture outline used for exams)

B. Primary Texts

1. Holy Bible (any standard translation; NIV or NRSV used by instructor; Greek permitted)
2. Introducing the New Testament (Primary textbook focusing on background, context, and dominant themes)
3. Making Sense of the New Testament (Focuses on historical reliability, origins from Jesus vs. Paul, and modern application)
4. The Lost Letters of Pergamum by Bruce Longenecker (Fictional epistolary historical narrative depicting first-century Christian life under Roman rule)

VI. Course Evaluation, Requirements, and Grading

A. Reading Responsibilities and Pop Quizzes

1. Weekly required readings from textbooks and New Testament books (Matthew to Revelation)

2. Six unannounced pop quizzes testing broad textbook comprehension for the specific week (administered Mondays or Wednesdays)

B. Major Examinations

1. Four major non-cumulative unit exams testing lecture notebook material and Bible reading
 - a. Exam 1: Backgrounds and the Gospels (around Week 5)
 - b. Exam 2: Acts and Pauline Epistles
 - c. Exam 3: General Epistles
 - d. Exam 4: Revelation
2. Comprehensive Final Exam based on material from the four previous unit exams

C. Extra Credit and Review Sessions

1. Four optional extra credit review sessions led by the Teaching Assistant prior to exams
2. Active participation required to earn cumulative extra credit added to final grade

D. Classroom Conduct and Technology Etiquette

1. Filming of lectures by Professor Ted Hildebrandt
2. Laptops allowed for note-taking only; off-topic activities (games, social media) prohibited to avoid distracting peers