

THE SOCIAL SETTING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (NTGK 9410)

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
New Testament Department, Biblical Studies Division
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NOBTS MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

COURSE PURPOSE, CORE VALUE FOCUS, AND CURRICULUM COMPETENCIES:

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has five core values: Doctrinal Integrity, Spiritual Vitality, Mission Focus, Characteristic Excellence, and Servant Leadership. These values shape both the context and manner in which all curricula are taught, with “doctrinal integrity” and “academic excellence” especially highlighted in this course. The seminary is emphasizing the core value of doctrinal integrity this year and encourages all at the seminary to focus especially on this emphasis.

NOBTS has seven basic competencies guiding our degree programs: Biblical Exposition, Christian Theological Heritage, Disciple Making, Interpersonal Skills, Servant Leadership, Spiritual & Character Formation, and Worship Leadership. This course addresses the “Biblical Exposition” competency by helping the student learn to interpret the Bible accurately.

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this seminar is to involve the student in an extensive study of various social, political, religious, and economic backgrounds that can serve as aids for understanding the message of the New Testament. An introduction to the study of social settings and the social-science methodology is followed by an analysis of the various social backgrounds based upon extensive study of the historical documents from the New Testament time period.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS:

Rohrbaugh, Richard, ed. *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*
Lawrence, Louis & Mario Aguilar. *Anthropology & Biblical Studies*
deSilva, David. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*
Pilch, John & Bruce Malina. *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*
Pilch, John. *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*
Stegemann, W., Bruce Malina, & Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*
Bailey, Kenneth. *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*
Esler, Philip, ed., *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the NT & Its Context*
Adkins, Lesley, & Roy Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome*
Skarsaune, Oskar, and Reidar Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus*
Johnson, William, & Holt Parker, *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece & Rome*
Girard, Rene. *The Scapegoat*

III. SEMINAR OBJECTIVES:

- A.** Students will become knowledgeable with respect to the primary and secondary literature that deals with the NT social setting
- B.** Students will understand and be able to apply various social-science models
- C.** Students will gain skills for developing the materials studied in the seminar into formats suitable for use in classroom teaching
- D.** Students will gain skills for researching and writing
- E.** Students will come to appreciate the NT books and their messages more as the texts are studied in their original context
- F.** Students will gain an appreciation for understanding both other cultures and their own in light of the specific culture's social systems and settings

IV. REQUIREMENTS IN THE COURSE:

- A.** All seminar members are to read the required texts and bring a brief review to class on the day set for discussion of the book. The review should include the following items: bibliographic data, statement of the purpose and thesis of the book, a summary of the argument or social-science models, and a list of 2 to 3 published reviews on the book. (2-3 pages, single-spaced)
- B.** Students will read one or more background works as assigned by the professor. The works will generally include major historical writings of the Greco-Roman and Jewish settings from 100 BC to AD 200. A brief presentation of the work/s will be presented in class with a 2 to 3 page selection of passages from the writing noting the importance for understanding the related social context, with copies of the review distributed to seminar members.
- G.** Students will pick a social context topic from the course for their major paper, have it approved by the professor, and submit a preliminary bibliography on the theme (3 to 5 pages). Some sources in other languages are both encouraged and expected. The bibliography should include the following divisions: ancient sources related to the topic, methodological studies, application studies, and periodicals. These papers are due on Oct. 22 and will be submitted electronically.
- H.** Each student will prepare a teaching outline on the topic selected above for seminar discussion. The outline should be about 2-3 pages in length and copies should be made for the seminar members. The student will be expected to lead the seminar in a 10-minute discussion of the topic, using the outline to guide the discussion. The outline will detail the history of research on the topic, the major approaches to the topic, an overview of the dominant view of the topic as related to NT studies, and two examples of how the topic can be used in the exegesis of specific NT passages. These papers will be due on Nov. 5.
- I.** Each seminar member will present a book review on one of the works assigned by the professor. The review will include the bibliographical info, a clear presentation of the organization/approach and thesis of the work, and a lengthy critique of how well the thesis was supported. A copy of the table of contents of the book should be attached. Copies should be made for all seminar members.
- J.** Each seminar member will present a formal paper on an approved theme in relation to a NT text or texts. The problem statement and outline must be approved by the professor by Oct. 22, with the papers being driven by a falsifiable hypothesis. The papers will be distributed in advance of the presentation date, with copies for all seminar members (hard copy = professor).

K. Each seminar member will serve as the primary reviewer for one of the other papers. Assignments will be made when the paper dates are assigned. All seminar members are required to submit a 2 page review of each paper, with the following issues addressed: form/style/grammar, bibliography, organization, logic flow, and quality of research/content. A copy goes to the paper's author and to the professor.

V. CLASS SCHEDULE

- Week 1:
Aug. 20 Introduction to the course and the study of the social setting of the NT
Methodology for studying the social setting of the NT
Reading: R. Rohrbaugh, *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*
Review: David Scholer, ed., *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*
Review: E. Randolph Richards & Brandon O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*
- Week 2:
Aug. 27 Topic #1: Honor and Shame
Readings: Louis Lawrence & Mario Aguilar, *Anthropology & Biblical Studies*
Reading: David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*
Review: J. Peristiany & Julian Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*
Review: J. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World*
Review: Neyrey, Jerome H., *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*
- Week 3:
Sept. 3 Topic #2: Kinship
Readings: John Pilch & Bruce Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*
Reading: John Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*
Review: Carolyn Osiek & David Balch, *Families in the NT World*
Review: Joseph Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*
- Week 4:
Sept. 10 Topic #3: Interpersonal Behavior
Reading: Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce Malina, & Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*
Review: Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*
Review: Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 B.C. to A.D. 284*
Review: Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*
- Week 5:
Sept. 17 Topic #4: Purity Laws, Purity Systems, and Worship
Reading: Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*
Review: Malina, Bruce J., and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality*
Review: Jeffrey Brodd & Jonathan Reed, eds., *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*
- Week 6:
Sept. 24 Topic #5: Patron-Client Relationships
Reading: Philip Esler, ed., *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the NT and Its Context*
Review: Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*
Review: Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*

- Week 7: Topic #6: Boundary Markers, Cultural Mapping, and Social Relationships
 Oct. 1 Reading: Lesley Adkins & Roy Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome*
 Review: John Fitzgerald, ed., *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*
- Week 8: Topic #7: Jewish Christianity
 Oct. 8 Reading: Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus*
 Review: Matt Jackson-McCabe, *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*
 Review: Oakes, Peter, ed. *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*
- Week 9: Topic #8: Literacy and Sacrifice
 Oct. 22 Reading: William Johnson and Holt Parker, *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*
 Reading: Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat*
Submission of Bibliographies
- Week 10: Oct. 29 No class meeting, time to work on Major Papers
- Week 11: NT Interpretation in light of Social Science Criticism: Strengths and Limitations
 Nov. 5 History of the Early Church in light of Social Science Criticism
 Presentations of Teaching Outlines
- Week 12: Nov. 12 Presentations of Teaching Outlines
- Week 13: Nov. 19 No class meeting: ETS/SBL meetings
- Thanksgiving Break, Nov. 26
- Week 14: Dec. 3 Presentations of Major Papers (**MEETING = 9:30-3:30, 5 papers**)
- Week 15: Dec. 10 Presentations of Major Papers (**MEETING = 9:30-3:30, 5 papers**)

Original Sources for Passages on Selected Themes

Greco-Roman Sources: Dio Chrysostom; Pliny the Elder, Dio Cassius, Suetonius, Tacitus, Quintillian, Pliny the Younger

Jewish Sources: Dead Sea Scrolls; Josephus; Philo; OT Apocrypha; Rabbinic selections, Talmudic selections

Early Christian Sources: Ignatius, Polycarp, 1 Clement, 2 Clement, Barnabas, Didache, Shepherd of Hermas (Pastor), NT Pseudepigrapha selections

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