

NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUNDS READING COLLOQUIUM (NTSR9301)

**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 “academic excellence” especially highlighted in this course. **Mission Focus** is the Core Value for this academic year.

The Ph.D. degree is an intensive program emphasizing specialization and research in the area of the degree major. This reading colloquium is a specialized study of the background to the New Testament.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Ph.D. reading colloquia in New Testament studies consist of assigned readings the faculty deems to be of special importance. Guided discussions of these works will comprise the bulk of class time.

This colloquium focuses on important works related to New Testament Backgrounds. Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period and to Greco-Roman history is emphasized. While students will read secondary sources, the colloquium will stress the importance of a careful reading of primary sources from the period.

OBJECTIVES:

Well-rounded New Testament scholars must be familiar with significant works in the field of New Testament studies even if these do not overlap with one’s area of specialization within the discipline. This breadth of knowledge is necessary to equip students for teaching at the university and seminary levels and prepares them to make important contributions through research and publication. In light of this overarching

reality, the objectives of this course include the following:

1. Students should understand the various historical backgrounds & sources for the study of the NT
2. Students should gain an increased appreciation for how the study of the historical background and original sources relate to the field of NT studies
3. Students should acquire the ability to utilize and analyze the background data for both information and research purposes

COURSE TEACHING METHODS:

This course will be taught via a combination of pedagogical methods, including but not limited to the following: group discussion, student papers and reviews, and student presentations.

READING LIST BOOKS: The required texts for this colloquium are in bold print.

Course Requirements:

The student will:

1. Read All Required Texts and Prepare Book Reviews for Each Session.

Read and review the required texts as stipulated in the schedule below. Please note the two types of reviews for the seminar.

The **Book Reviews on Background Literature textbooks** should be 3-4 pages single-spaced and consist of the following standard book review elements (see handout at the end of the syllabus):

Bibliographic data about the author

The thesis/purpose of the book

A summary of the development of the thesis

A critique of the book citing strengths and weaknesses, including significance for NT studies

A synopsis of 3 reviews of the book from scholarly journals.

The **Book Reviews on the Primary Literature** should be 2-3 pages single-spaced and need only to include a bibliographic entry of the sections and pages you review. Include a summary of the sections or chapters you choose to review. Note any impressions, significances for NT studies, or special discoveries you make in your readings.

The **Recommended Additional Readings** are not required, but will enhance your understanding of these areas. Any 2 page review of recommended readings will count as extra credit for the seminar.

2. Participate actively in the discussion of the readings.

Each student will participate in the discussion of selected texts for each session.

3. Attend every meeting.

Because of the nature of the course, no absences are allowed. If emergency situations dictate an absence, the student will schedule a make-up session with the professor. Work is still due the day scheduled even if the student is absent. Any student missing more than one meeting must repeat the colloquium.

Evans, Craig. *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies*. Baker Academic, 2012.

This required text serves as our guide to the literature in the colloquium. Read and prepare a review over the pertinent sections for each class meeting. You will only need to perform a full review of Evans for the first session. Thereafter, you may simply review the chapters in a 1-2 page, single spaced paper. That is, there will be no need to repeat his bio information and the 3 scholarly reviews.

DeSilva, David A. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*. InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Although this work is not required for this course, every serious NT student should own it. In the Recommended Readings sections, references to this text will help lay the background for the material covered for that session. Highly Recommended.

Session 1: OT Apocrypha, OT Pseudepigrapha, and The Dead Sea Scrolls

Review the Following:

A. Review the Background Literature: (Review each background work)
Evans, Introduction, and chapters 1-3.

deSilva, David A. *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

Helyer, Larry. *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Downer's Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2002.

B. Review the Primary Sources:

For the OT Apocrypha, choose any 3 from Tobit, Judith, Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel, 1-4 Maccabees, 1-2 Esdras, or Psalm 151. (2-3 pages)

For the Dead Sea Scrolls, review the introduction and choose any 3 from the Damascus Document, War Scroll, Enoch Literature, and calendar texts. Choose 2 additional reading from any area of your interest (total of 5 summary reviews). (2-3 pages)

The Old Testament Apocrypha. (See the NRSV for these texts)

Vermes, Geza. *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English.* 5th ed., Penguin, (most recent ed.)

OR

Wise, Michael, Abegg, Martin, and Cook, Edward. *A New Translation: The Dead Sea Scrolls.* Harper, 2005.

C. Recommended Additional Reading for Session 1: (not on orals)

*deSilva, David. Introduction to the New Testament. (Introduction through p, 55)

Introductions to all Old Testament books from *Anchor Bible Dictionary.* (6 vols.)
Doubleday, 1990. (Recommended)

Evans, Craig A. *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation.*
Hendrickson, 1992. (Recommended)

VanderKam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today.* 2nd Edition. Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 2010. (Recommended)

Session 2: The Jewish World - Versions of the OT, Philo & Josephus, Targums, and Rabbinical Literature

Review the Following:

A. Review the Background Literature: (Review each background work)

Evans, *Ancient Texts.* (chapters 4-7)

Sanders, E. P. *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE - 66 CE.* Trinity, 1992.

B. Review the Primary Literature:

Choose any 3 chapters of Josephus' *Wars* to review. (2-3 pages)

Review Neusner's introduction to the Mishnah and then select 1 reading from each of the
6 Divisions of the Mishnah for your review. (2-3 pages)

Read Yonge's introduction to Philo and choose any 5 treatises for review. (2-3 pages)

Josephus, Flavius. *The Wars of the Jews.*

Neusner, Jacob. *Mishnah: A New Translation.* New Haven: Yale University,
1988.

Yonge, C. D. Translator. *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged..*
Wipf and Stock, 1993.

C. Recommended Additional Resources for Session 2: (not on orals)

*deSilva, David. Introduction to the New Testament. (pp. 74-111)

Jobes, Karen H. and Moisés Silva. *Invitation to the Septuagint*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. (Recommended)

Mason, Steven M. *Josephus and the New Testament*. Hendrickson, 2003. (Recommended)

Anchor Bible Dictionary for articles on topics for this session.

Session 3: The Roman World - Plus, New Testament Apocrypha, and the Early Church Fathers

A. Review of Background Literature: (Review each background work)

Evans, (chapters 8 & 9)

Jeremias, Joachim. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Fortress, 1969.

Schneemelcher, Wilhelm, Editor. R. M. Wilson, Translator. *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*. Vol. 1. Revised Ed. John Knox Press, 1991.

(Review Schneemelcher's Introduction (pp. 1-88) and perform the full review of his 2 vol work, including abstracts)

B. Review of the Primary Literature:

Review the Introduction to the Church Fathers and then review Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and any 2 additional Fathers of your choice (5 total). (2-3 pages)

Review any 3 readings from Schneemelcher Vol 1 in sections 1-8. (2-3 pages)

Review any 3 readings from Schneemelcher Vol 2 in sections 13-15. (2-3 pages)

Write a review of the 12 Caesars giving a short description and dating of each Caesar (for orals) and any distinguishing characteristics for each. (2-3 pages)

Lightfoot, J. B. Edited and completed by J. R. Harmer. Edited by M. W. Holmes. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*. Revised Edition. Baker, 1999.

Schneemelcher, R. M. Wilson, Translator. *New Testament Apocrypha: Writings Relating to the Apostles, Apocalypses, and Related Subjects*. Vol. 2. Revised Ed. John Knox Press, 1992 (or most recent ed.).

Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Michael Grant, Penguin Classics, Viking Press, 1991.

C. Recommended Additional Reading for Session 3: (not on orals)

deSilva, David. *Introduction to the New Testament*. (pp. 111-145)

Carcopino, Jerome. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. New York: Yale University, 1968. (Recommended)

Jefford, Clayton N. *The Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament*. Hendrickson, 2006. (Recommended)

Anchor Bible Dictionary for articles on topics for this session.

Session 4: Gnosticism and Other Miscellaneous Writings

A. Review of the Background Literature: (Review each background work)

Evans, (chapters 10-12, plus the Appendices)

Logan, Alistair and A. J. M. Wedderburn, eds. *The New Testament and Gnosis*. London: T. & T. Clark, 2004.

B. Review of the Primary Literature:

Write a review of Schneemelcher on any 3 readings from Vol 1, sections 9-12. (2-3 pages)

Write a review of Schneemelcher on any 3 reading from Vol 2, sections 17-21 (2-3 pages)

Schneemelcher, Wilhelm, Editor. R. M. Wilson, Translator. *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*. Vol. 1. Revised Ed. John Knox Press, 1991.

_____ **R. M. Wilson, Translator. *New Testament Apocrypha: Writings Relating to the Apostles, Apocalypses, and Related Subjects*. Vol. 2. Revised Ed. John Knox Press, 1992 (or most recent ed.).**

C. Recommended Additional Readings for Session 4: (not on orals)

Barnstone, Willis and Meyer, Marvin. *Essential Gnostic Scriptures*. Shambhala Books, 2010. (Recommended)

Robinson, James. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978. (Recommended)

Anchor Bible Dictionary for articles on Gnosticism for this session.

REQUIREMENTS AND SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS:

The colloquium will convene on the following dates. Late penalties will be assessed for work not turned in on time.

Writing Book Reviews¹

This handout offers a process and suggests some strategies for writing book reviews. The most important element of a review is that it is a commentary, not merely a summary. It allows you to enter into dialogue and discussion with the work's creator and with other audiences. You can offer agreement or disagreement and identify where you find the work exemplary or deficient in its knowledge, judgments, or organization. You should clearly state your opinion of the work in question, and that statement will probably resemble other types of academic writing, with a thesis statement, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion. See our [handout on argument](#).

Typically, reviews are brief. In newspapers and academic journals, they rarely exceed 1000 words, although you may encounter lengthier assignments and extended commentaries. In either case, reviews need to be succinct. While they vary in tone, subject, and style, they **share some common features**:

- First, a review gives the reader a concise summary of the content. This includes a relevant description of the topic as well as its overall perspective, argument, or purpose.
- Second, and more importantly, a review offers a critical assessment of the content. This involves your reactions to the work under review: what strikes you as noteworthy, whether or not it was effective or persuasive, and how it enhanced your understanding of the issues at hand.
- Finally, in addition to analyzing the work, a review often suggests whether or not the audience would appreciate it.

Develop an Assessment *Before* You Write

There is no definitive method to writing a review, although some critical thinking about the work at hand is necessary before you actually begin writing. Thus, writing a review is a two-step process: developing an argument about the work under consideration, and making that argument as you write an organized and well-supported draft. See

¹ Source for this handout: University of North Carolina Writing Center:
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/files/2012/09/Book-Reviews-The-Writing-Center.pdf>

our [handout on argument](#). What follows is a **series of questions to focus your thinking** as you dig into the work at hand. While the questions specifically consider book reviews, you can easily transpose them to an analysis of performances, exhibitions, and other review subjects. Don't feel obligated to address each of the questions; some will be more relevant than others to the book in question.

- What is the thesis—or main argument—of the book? If the author wanted you to get one idea from the book, what would it be? How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? What has the book accomplished?
- What exactly is the subject or topic of the book? Does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the subject in a balanced fashion? What is the approach to the subject (topical, analytical, chronological, descriptive)?
- How does the author support her argument? What evidence does she use to prove her point? Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does any of the author's information (or conclusions) conflict with other books you've read, courses you've taken or just previous assumptions you had of the subject?
- How does the author structure her argument? What are the parts that make up the whole? Does the argument make sense? Does it persuade you? Why or why not?
- How has this book helped you understand the subject? Would you recommend the book to your reader? Beyond the internal workings of the book, you may also **consider some information about the author and the circumstances of the text's production:**
- Who is the author? Nationality, political persuasion, training, intellectual interests, personal history, and historical context may provide crucial details about how a work takes shape. Does it matter, for example, that the biographer was the subject's best friend? What difference would it make if the author participated in the events she writes about? Include a short paragraph on the background of the author.
- What is the book's genre? Out of what field does it emerge? Does it conform to or depart from the conventions of its genre? These questions can provide a historical or literary standard on which to base your evaluations. If you are reviewing the first book ever written on the subject, it will be important for your readers to know. Keep in mind, though, that naming "firsts"—alongside naming "bests" and "onlys"—can be a risky business unless you're absolutely certain.

Writing the Book Review

Once you have made your observations and assessments of the work under review, carefully survey your notes and attempt to unify your impressions into a statement that will describe the purpose or thesis of your review. Check out our [handout on thesis statements](#). Then, outline the arguments that support your thesis. Your arguments should develop the thesis in a logical manner. That logic, unlike more standard academic writing, may initially emphasize the author's argument while you develop your own in the course of the review. The relative emphasis depends on the nature of the review: if readers may be more interested in the work itself, you may want to make the work and the author more prominent; if you want the review to be about your perspective and opinions, then you may structure the review to privilege your observations over (but never separate from) those of the work under review. What follows is just one of many ways to organize a review.

A. Introduction

Since most reviews are brief, many writers begin with a catchy quip or anecdote that succinctly delivers their argument. But you can introduce your review differently depending on the argument and audience. The Writing Center's [handout on introductions](#) can help you find an approach that works. In general, **you should include:**

- The name of the author and the book title and the main theme.
- Relevant details about who the author is and where he/she stands in the genre or field of inquiry. You could also link the title to the subject to show how the title explains the subject matter.
- The context of the book and/or your review. Placing your review in a framework that makes sense to your audience alerts readers to your "take" on the book. Perhaps you want to situate a book about the Cuban revolution in the context of Cold War rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union. Another reviewer might want to consider the book in the framework of Latin American social movements. Your choice of context informs your argument.
- The thesis of the book. If you are reviewing fiction, this may be difficult since novels, plays, and short stories rarely have explicit arguments. But identifying the book's particular novelty, angle, or originality allows you to show what specific contribution the piece is trying to make.
- Your thesis about the book.

B. Summary of content

- This should be brief, as analysis takes priority. In the course of making your assessment, you'll hopefully be backing up your assertions with concrete evidence from the book, so some summary will be dispersed throughout other parts of the review.
- The necessary amount of summary also depends on your audience. Graduate students, beware! If you are writing book reviews for colleagues—to prepare for comprehensive exams, for example—you may want to devote more attention to summarizing the book's contents. If, on the other hand, your audience has already read the book—such as a class assignment on the same work—you may have more liberty to explore more subtle points and to emphasize your own argument. See our [handout on summary](#) for more tips.

C. Analysis and evaluation of the book

- Your analysis and evaluation should be organized into paragraphs that deal with single aspects of your argument. This arrangement can be challenging when your purpose is to consider the book as a whole, but it can help you differentiate elements of your criticism and pair assertions with evidence more clearly.
- You do not necessarily need to work chronologically through the book as you discuss it. Given the argument you want to make, you can organize your paragraphs more usefully by themes, methods, or other elements of the book.
- If you find it useful to include comparisons to other books, keep them brief so that the book under review remains in the spotlight.
- Avoid excessive quotation and give a specific page reference in parentheses when you do quote. Remember that you can state many of the author's points in your own words.

D. Conclusion

- Sum up or restate your thesis or make the final judgment regarding the book. You should not introduce new evidence for your argument in the conclusion. You can, however, introduce new ideas that go beyond the book if they extend the logic of your own thesis.
- This paragraph needs to balance the book's strengths and weaknesses in order to unify your evaluation. Did the body of your review have three negative paragraphs and one favorable one? What do they all add up to? The Writing Center's [handout on conclusions](#) can help you make a final assessment.

Finally, a few general considerations:

- Review the book in front of you, not the book you wish the author had written. You can and should point out shortcomings or failures, but don't criticize the book for not being something it was never intended to be.
- With any luck, the author of the book worked hard to find the right words to express her ideas. You should attempt to do the same. Precise language allows you to control the tone of your review.
- Never hesitate to challenge an assumption, approach, or argument. Be sure, however, to cite specific examples to back up your assertions carefully.
- Try to present a balanced argument about the value of the book for its audience. You're entitled—and sometimes obligated—to voice strong agreement or disagreement. But keep in mind that a bad book takes as long to write as a good one, and every author deserves fair treatment. Harsh judgments are difficult to prove and can give readers the sense that you were unfair in your assessment.

Further Reading on Writing Book Reviews:

A great place to learn about book reviews is to look at examples. *The New York Times Sunday Book Review* and *The New York Review of Books* can show you how professional writers review books. See also: Drewry, John. *Writing Book Reviews*. Boston: The Writer, 1974. *Literary Reviewing*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987. Teitelbaum, Harry. *How to Write Book Reports*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1998. Walford, A.J., ed. *Reviews and Reviewing: A Guide*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1986.

Source for this Book Review handout: University of North Carolina Writing Center:
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/files/2012/09/Book-Reviews-The-Writing-Center.pdf>