



Grace Communion Seminary

NT01 Background of the New Testament

Short Syllabus

Instructor: Michael Morrison, PhD

Phone: 626-650-2363

E-mail: michael.morrison@wcg.org

Course Description

This course explores the cultural background of the New Testament, including Jewish history, literature and religion, and Gentile culture and religion, so that students might interpret the writings in their original context. This course also covers matters that involve the entire New Testament: canonization, textual transmission, chronology, and study methods.

Required Textbooks

Bruce, F.F., updated by David F. Payne. *Israel and the Nations: The History of Israel From the Exodus to the Fall of the Second Temple.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Jeffers, James S. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will be given an opportunity to:

1. Understand important aspects of Jewish history and culture that provide the setting in which the events of the New Testament occurred.
2. Understand basic features of Greco-Roman religion and culture, in which the early church sought to communicate the message of Jesus.
3. Understand more about the New Testament itself, the way in which its various parts were canonized and copied, and the major ways in which

it is studied by scholars.

4. Gain and overview of the chronology of New Testament events.
5. Analyze how this background information can lead to a better understanding of the New Testament and its message.

Requirements

1. **Reading:** Read both textbooks and the lectures. The lectures will be posted one each week for ten weeks.
2. **Three quizzes.** There will be a short quiz after lecture 2, a slightly longer quiz after lecture 6, and another quiz at the end. These are open-book quizzes.
3. **One final paper,** on a topic you choose relevant to this class, such as: How the cultural context helps us understand the New Testament. Or, how the cultural context helps us understand [pick your passage of scripture] . Or, How the canonization of the New Testament can affect our faith. Or, Why I would recommend this class to other pastors. This paper must refer either to the textbooks or other supplementary reading.
4. **Participation:** Part of the learning that occurs in traditional classrooms comes informally, through discussion and interaction of the students. In an online class, this has to be done by email sent to all the students.

Weekly Topics and Assignments – schedule for summer 2009

Week 1	Introduction: why we need to study the cultural background	Bruce, chapters 11-16, and Keener article posted on class website
Week 2	The formation of the New Testament canon, and preservation of the text	Bruce, chapters 17-28 – read before Lecture 3
Week 3	History of the Jewish people from the Persians to the Romans; Quiz 1 posted	Jeffers, chapters 1 and 10

Week 4	The “other” Scriptures – the Apocrypha and their relevance	Jeffers, chapters 2-3
Week 5	Other Jewish literature – Dead Sea Scrolls, Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, etc.	Jeffers, chapters 4-5
Week 6	Judaism and the importance of the Law	Jeffers, chapters 6-7
Week 7	The NT use of quotes from the OT; Quiz 2 posted	Jeffers, chapters 8-9
Week 8	Greco-Roman culture, religions, and literature	Jeffers, chapters 11-12 and Appendix B
Week 9	Chronology of NT events	Jeffers, chapter 13 and Appendix A
Week 10	Scholarly methods used in NT studies; Quiz 3 posted	
Week 11	Quiz 3 is due	
Week 12	Final paper is due	

Grading Standards

Reading counts for 10 percent of the grade; quizzes count for 40 percent; the paper 40 percent, and email participation counts for 10 percent.