

Westmont College Spring Term, 2004

(Best viewed using Internet Explorer or Netscape 7.)



Life and Literature of the New Testament

RS 10 C



Instructor	Bruce N. Fisk [Contact: < fisk@westmont.edu >]
Location / Time	Porter Theater (PH 1): Tuesday and Thursday, 8:00 to 9:50 a.m.
Office	Porter Center 14. Phone/voice mail: 565-7369
Office Hours	Mon & Wed: 12:45 - 1:30; 3:15 - 4:30 PM and by appointment

[Evaluation](#)[Grades](#)[Schedule](#)[Links and Resources](#)[Bibliography](#)[Course Description \(top of page\)](#)

1. Catalog: Survey of the New Testament in the historical and cultural context of the Greco-Roman world. Special attention to literary forms and theological contents. (GE)

2. My Goals for You.

Why require an academic course in New Testament? Doesn't the Bible properly belong in church? Will this course strengthen, or undermine, my faith? Are there risks when the Word of God becomes an object of rigorous study? Shouldn't this course be an elective, rather than a GE requirement? Whether or not these are your questions, let me offer something of a course rationale and lay out a few of my goals for you.

At the heart of this course will be the **text of the New Testament**, which we will read and discuss together as much as possible. Even if you've grown up in the church, this book can still be quite foreign, since it is always easier to talk about it rather than read it carefully. To be a good reader, you'll need to develop your **skills of observation**, grasp various bits of the **historical context**, learn some **new vocabulary**, cultivate your **imagination**, and develop a knack for identifying your own **bias**--the way you tend to distort what you read to make it agree with you.

Good readers learn to dance between **strangeness and familiarity**. That is, they recognize that the text of the New Testament is very old and strange, from another world almost, and yet they cling to the conviction that this ancient text has something profound to say to us today. One more thing: the best readers don't go it alone. The scariest, safest place to read the New Testament is within the **Christian community**, alongside others who ask different questions and who can help keep you awake and honest.

Sound, responsible readers of the New Testament also know when to go for help. They dip into Bible commentaries and read books by the best biblical scholars, but they also seek help from a host of other disciplines, many of which you'll be exploring here at Westmont alongside your RS classes. It would be foolish to ignore the rich contributions--questions, methods, findings--of other fields of study. **Historians**, for example, study the ways history gets written down--historiography is what this is called--which helps big time when we turn toward historical texts like the four Gospels and Acts. Scholars of **literature** have a keen eye for the quirks and surprises of language, and help us listen for texts within other texts, something so critical for students of a book (the New Testament) so connected to another book (the Old Testament). **Social scientists** are experts at tracking social forces and dynamics (like poverty, war, taxation, patronage) that exert pressure on new movements, movements like the early church.

Archaeologists unearth and interpret ancient artifacts not because artifacts are intrinsically important, but because clay pots and stone walls reveal to us how ancient peoples (like 1st century Jews and Christians) lived, what they cared for, and how they organized their lives. **Philosophers** like to decode ancient world views and to get inside the heads of very important (but very dead) thinkers--Jewish maybe, or Greek--who have left their mark on the New Testament world. **Rhetoricians** understand the powers and the dangers of the spoken word, which means they can shed light on why preachers like Jesus and Paul captivated some but aggravated others. On and on we could go. You get the idea. To study the New Testament closely is to draw on almost every one of the liberal arts. Maybe all of them. As we do, we find our insights into Scripture bouncing back to enrich and

challenge the very disciplines that lent us help in the first place.

Interdisciplinary dialogue may be win-win, you say, but what about me? Will an academic course like this nudge me over the cliff into **spiritual crisis**? That depends. College is the time when we discover that some of the pat answers we've clung to won't sustain us for the long haul. You'll find that in *all* your classes, not just this one. The time has come for you to puzzle things out for yourself. I deeply hope that when surprises come in this class, and when questions loom large, you'll not escape into agnosticism or stoop to cynicism. Instead, I hope you'll allow your world to grow larger (and, I suppose, messier), and you'll find ways to enjoy **the journey** into a more thoughtful, reflective, sustaining faith. I may be a few steps ahead of you, but I'm on the same path.

I especially hope that "**biblical scholarship**" becomes one of your favorite terms--no longer an oxymoron (like "jumbo shrimp") nor a fire swamp to be avoided. In my experience, untethered biblical scholarship can be destructive, but it can also raise exciting new questions, supply useful reality checks, introduce fresh ways of reading, ground private faith in public reality, and supply a roadmap to get past the glib cliches we sometimes mistake for **thinking Christianly**.

So, with all that, I'm hoping this course will help you. . .

- know your way around the New Testament, and associate its major ideas, themes and arguments with particular NT works or authors
- enter imaginatively into the world of the New Testament, as you show increasing respect for its social context while refusing to read the NT in a historical vacuum
- appreciate the complex and compelling portrait of Jesus depicted in the Gospels, and discover the importance of contemporary debates about the historical Jesus
- situate Paul's epistles within the historical context of his ministry and of the emerging NT church
- discover some of your own presuppositions and biases in Biblical interpretation
- develop life-long habits of reading and studying the NT, particularly in the context of the Christian community
- make connections between the New Testament and the rest of your studies in history, science, literature, philosophy, psychology, sociology, you name it
- grow as a Christian (or maybe even become one), as your character, heart and mind are transformed by a sustained, thoughtful encounter with Jesus.

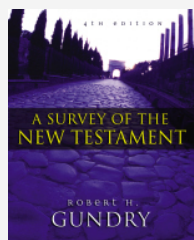
Thought you'd like to know.

3. Course Format: In addition to lectures, we'll emphasize large and small group discussion of assigned readings, small group study, periodic video screenings, web-based interaction, and quizzes on reading assignments.

Evaluation (top of page)

1. Texts and Readings (20%)

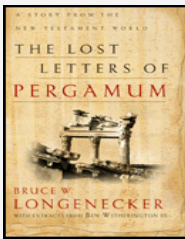
The schedule for daily readings is listed **below**. Follow it carefully. Readings are due **BEFORE** class time. Take separate notes or mark up your books with hi-lighting, questions and comments. Bring to every class your Bible, study notes and relevant texts, and be prepared to raise your questions and discuss your issues in class. **Expect a brief quiz.** You might find helpful my **Survival Tips for Academic Reading**. If you read this Washington Post article about **how Americans who can read are choosing not to**, let me know what you think. I'll assume you have carefully read, *re-read* and *studied* assigned materials prior to class, so we won't spend class time repeating what you have already encountered in print. That will allow us to use class time for discussion, studying NT texts, debating issues, screening video clips as well as supplementary lectures.



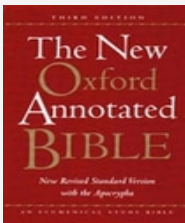
Gundry, Robert H. **A Survey of the New Testament**. 4th ed. Zondervan, 2003. Dr. Gundry taught at Westmont from 1962 until his retirement from the classroom just a few years ago. This book distills years of scholarship into an concise introduction and summary for each book of the New Testament. It is especially helpful to those who want to fill gaps in their Biblical knowledge and who want a trustworthy guide through many puzzling issues and passages. The 4th edition, just out this year, is spiffier and more helpful than ever. Readings in Gundry are indicated below in the Schedule.



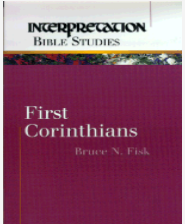
Theissen, Gerd. **The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form**. Fortress, 1987. This novel, set in first century Roman Judaea and Galilee during the time of Jesus, is about a Jewish merchant forced to become a spy for the Romans. As he travels the land on assignment he discovers a wild diversity of opinions about Jesus of Nazareth. But was Jesus a threat to the Empire? With what other known groups and figures might Jesus be compared? Why did he attract followers, and why did Jewish and Roman officials want him executed. I suspect this book will challenge a few of your ideas about Jesus. For discussion questions on this book, go **here**.



Longenecker, Bruce, W. **The Lost Letters of Pergamum**. Baker, 2002. From inside the cover: an "introduction to the New Testament world, disguised as a collection of 'lost' letters between Luke and several well-positioned members of Roman society. The genius of the book lies in its fusion of current New Testament scholarship with a very plausible, personal narrative: the sobering story of one man's shift in allegiance from Caesar to Jesus. Along the way we overhear pagan reactions to Jesus' message and endearing stories from household churches; we sense the perils of sea travel and witness the horrors of the Roman games; we identify with privileged benefactors and hurt for subsistence farmers. . . . a reliable, if not always comfortable, guide to the dangerous world of the first-century Roman Christianity."



New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (NRSV). Oxford, 1991, 1994. This is one of the better study Bibles available, in a version that may be new to you: the *New Revised Standard Version*. More formal than the *NIV* or the *NLT*, smoother than the *NASV*, less antique and opaque than the *KJV*, it is widely used in the academy, in part because it aims to be ecumenical and it seeks to employ gender-inclusive language when possible. You'll find the notes and maps helpful but not overwhelming, and the inclusion of the *Apocrypha* is helpful, especially for Protestants many of whom know little about these "extra" books. See the essay on pages AP iii-xv for a valuable introduction.



Recommended: Fisk, Bruce N. **First Corinthians**. Interpretation Bible Studies; Geneva, 2000. First Corinthians depicts some of the earliest Christians trying to figure out how to do and be the church in a very pagan world. This book is an accessible introduction to one of Paul's letters, or at least key texts selected from it. Think of it as a test case in Pauline interpretation and a chance to journey (cautiously) from ancient text to contemporary application.

This text will provide the basis for an **optional** small group Bible study that will meet ten times during the term, outside of class time. See further details **below**.

2. Web Postings using WebCT (10%)

- participate in **four** web-based discussion groups during the course of the term, using WebCT:
 - the **New Testament** (what kind of book is it? inspired? authoritative? why were certain books included?)
 - the **social world** of the New Testament (what was life like in 1st century Judea? in the Roman Empire? as a Jew? a Gentile?)
 - the **Historical Jesus** (what sort of person was he? how do the Gospel portraits differ? what can we know about his birth, life, message, self-understanding, arrest, death, resurrection? why did some people follow him and others take offense?)
 - **theological topics** in New Testament studies of interest to you (e.g., politics, sexual ethics, violence, money, gender, discipleship, the return of Christ)
- contribute to *each* of these by posting comments on class discussions and readings (of the NT, class texts), by raising New Testament-related questions, and by responding to other postings. Please do NOT use this space to jump on your favorite soap box, to preach your favorite sermon, or to wonder outloud about things only remotely related to this course. Think before you write. We can tell when you haven't. Show courtesy and respect for other posters, but don't stifle lively debate and disagreement.
- Grading Details:
 - minimum **length** of each post: approximately 150 words
 - minimum **number** of posts: **five** (more is great, though aim for quality over quantity)
 - **timing** to receive full credit:
 - post your comments **throughout the semester**
 - posts from the **final weeks** of term are of little help to others and will be down-graded accordingly
 - **binge-posting** (multiple posts back-to-back on the same day) should be avoided
- when you are ready to get started:
 - be sure your browser is **Internet Explorer** (for PCs) or **Safari** (for Macs); *Netscape* doesn't seem to work with WebCT
 - follow **THIS LINK** to Westmont's WebCT log-in page
 - **log in** using your Westmont e-mail *user name* (e.g., *jsmith*); your password is your **student i.d. number**
 - **click on Discussion Groups**, and then on the topic that interests you. Browse through the comments of others
 - to **post** a new comment or reply, click on **Compose Message**, type your message, and click on **Post**
 - to **reply** to a message, open it (by clicking on the magnifying glass) and click on **Reply** and then **Post**
 - if you want your comments to be noticed, be sure to supply a specific and interesting subject

3. Web site evaluations (5%)

The web has much to offer students of New Testament but it is also full of fluff. Anyone can upload nonsense and make it appear respectable, even when it isn't based on solid research or credible scholarship. To help you sort the wheat from the chaff, the Westmont Library Reference & Instruction staff have developed an on-line tool for evaluating web sites. You'll need to evaluate a set of websites according to instructions spelled out **here**. (If the link doesn't work, paste this URL into your web browser: <http://library.westmont.edu/bibinst/Modules/RS10web_eval.html>.) You'll find the instructions clear and easy to follow. **NOTE:** be sure to save a copy of your work to your own computer *before* submitting it on the web (e.g., by pasting your comments into a Word file), since your computer will not automatically save a copy. Submissions lost in cyberspace will receive no credit. To receive credit, the assignment must be posted by 5:00 p.m. on February 24.

4. Theater Screening: Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. (5%)

Gibson's film, [reviewed here](#), is scheduled to hit the theaters on Ash Wednesday this term (Feb. 25). Assuming it shows in the general area, each student will need to attend the film and produce a 2-page, typed response paper (12 pt font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins) responding to one of the following three statements:

1. This film caters to the modern obsession with graphic violence and "reality" programming, and distracts viewers from the true significance of the cross.
2. The film's portrayal of Jesus' Jewish opponents (Jewish crowds, priests) is inflammatory and borders on anti-Semitism.
3. The film is less concerned with historical accuracy than it is with promoting Roman Catholic traditions.

If local theaters opt not to screen it, Plan B will be to screen together the newly released [The Gospel of John](#). Students who want to earn up to 5% *extra credit* may screen **both** films and submit a 4-page paper (same format) comparing and contrasting the portrait of Judaism in the two films. [The Gospel of John](#) is currently showing at Plaza de Oro (963-9503).

5. Unit Tests (10, 15, 15 = 40%)

- Three **Unit Tests** will be based heavily on class notes, readings in Gundry, and either Theissen's *Shadow* or Longenecker's *Pergamum*.
 - #1: Gundry chapters 1 to 4: Historical Backgrounds, Social World, Canon and Text
 - #2: Gundry chapters 5 to 10: Jesus and the Gospels **AND** Theissen, *Shadow of the Galilean*
 - #3: Gundry chapters 11 to 15: Acts and Paul's Letters **AND** Longenecker, *Pergamum*, 9-98
- questions will be objective (multiple choice, true/false, matching, maps, etc.). Pay attention to the lists and bullets at the end of each chapter in Gundry, but also expect questions that go beyond those lists.
- anyone caught giving or receiving information, or using study notes, during a test will receive an **F** for the assignment and probably for the course

6. Final Exam (20%)

- the Final will include material from Unit #4 (Gundry chaps. 16 to 18: Hebrews, General Epistles and Revelation and Longenecker, *Pergamum*, 99-182)
- the Final will also invite you to select two topics from a short list on which to write thoughtful, well-formed essays. Questions will require you to think more holistically about the New Testament, its themes, major teachings, interpretive puzzles, etc. [Click here for the questions.](#)

Optional Assignment: Form a small group to **study 1 Corinthians** using [Fisk's Guide](#)

This optional assignment may be used to enhance your grade. Follow instructions very carefully. No extensions or exceptions.

- value: up to 5%
- form a group of five members, including an elected coordinator who will arrange meeting time and place
- the coordinator shall send an e-mail reminder to other members **and to me** the day before each meeting
- do not join a group if your schedule (class, sports, extra-curriculars, work, etc.) does not permit attendance at all group meetings
- you may not jump from group to group
- each member must bring a Bible and a copy of the Guide to every session
- by Thursday, Jan. 22, the coordinator shall **submit to me by e-mail** a list of group members and the time/location of the group's first meeting
- **after each meeting**, the coordinator shall **submit to me by e-mail** a record of preparation and attendance

	Name	Attendance	Tools	Preparation
SAMPLE	Paul Saint	P (present), L (late), A (absent)	B (Bible), G (Guide)	% of readings completed

- meet a total of 10 times throughout the term, *no more than* once per week, for *no less than* 40 minutes per meeting
- follow the sequence of studies in Fisk's Guide
- prior to each meeting, read the assigned chapter in the Guide along with the corresponding section of 1st Corinthians
- come prepared to discuss the text and your ideas about it; take turns leading the discussion; avoid letting discussion ramble
- don't restrict yourself to the discussion questions at the end of each chapter

Grading Scale (top of page)

	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69		
A	95-100	B	84-86	C	74-76	D	64-66	F 0-59
A-	90-94	B-	80-83	C-	70-73	D-	60-63	

[Schedule \(top of page\)](#)**Unit One: Historical Backgrounds, Social World, Canon and Text**

Date	Topic	Gundry	Other
1-13	Introduction & Syllabus. Outsiders Weigh In: Tacitus & Pliny on the Cult of Christians Historical Background: Greeks and Romans, War and Peace	3-22	Handout
1-15	Historical Background, continued; Secular Settings Jesus on the Big Screen: Neeley & Chapman	25-43	NOAB: 2 Chron.36:11-23; 2 Kings 25:25-30; 1 Maccabees 1-5 (AP 201) Browse History & Politics links below
1-20	Religious and Philosophical Settings	44-75	Skim: Intro to the Apocrypha (AP iii-xii in NOAB) Read: Tobit (AP1 in NOAB) or Judith (AP 20)
1-22	-- class cancelled --		
1-27	Canon and Text of the NT Jesus on the Big Screen 2: Dafoe & Sisto	79-89	NT Apostolic Fathers: Ignatius to the Romans
1-29a	Unit Test #1: Historical Backgrounds, etc.	Review: 3-89	

Unit Two: Jesus and the Gospels

Date	Topic	Gundry	New Testament	Theissen
1-29b	Overview of Jesus' Life	111-122		
2-3	Other Candidates on the Ballot (Popular figures in Jesus' day) Jesus in the Academy: Latter Day Prophet, Wandering Peasant, Subversive King	91-108	Mt 16: 13-20; Acts 5:33-42	Shadow 1-27
2-5	No Room at the Inn: Bethlehem and the Birth of Jesus <i>The Search for Jesus: Peter Jennings Reporting</i>		Mt 1:18-2:23; Lk 1:26-38; 2:1-40	Shadow 29-55
2-10	Mark's Gospel Jesus and John the Baptist; Jesus' Baptism The Qumran Community and the Dead Sea Scrolls	125-157	Lk 1:1-80 Mt 3; Mk 1:1-13; Lk 3:1-22; Jn 1:1-42; 3:22-36; Mt 14:1-21; Mk 6:14-32; Lk 9:7-17	Shadow 57-74
2-12	Wilderness Temptations The Parables of Jesus		Mk 1:12-13; Mt 4:1-11 (Lk 4:1-13) Mt 13; Mt 19:30--20:16; 21:33-46	Shadow 75-95
2-17	No class: Presidents Holiday			
2-19	Matthew's Gospel ; Jesus as National Savior Magic and Miracle	159-173 115, 174-190 190-204	Mt 1-4, 8-9	Shadow 96-127
2-24	Luke's Gospel ; Lukan Historiography; Messianic Manifesto Women, the Poor, Table Talk, Entry into Jerusalem	116-118 207-241	Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-30 Lk 2:36-38; 7:11-17; 18:1-8; 21:1-4 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 7:36-50; 8:43-48; 13:10-17 16, 19 (cf. Mark 11)	Shadow 129-164
2-26	Trial, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension John's Gospel ; In the Beginning was the Word; Images of Jesus in John	242-250 255-295	Luke 22-24 Jn 1, 6, 10, 11, 15	Shadow 165-195
3-2	Unit Test #2: Jesus and the Gospels	Review: 91-295		Shadow ALL

Unit Three: Acts and Paul's Letters

Date	Topic	Gundry	New Testament	Longenecker
3-4	Orientation to Acts ; The Last Days	299-306	Acts 1-2	Pergamum 9-30
3-9	Life in the Earliest Christian Community	306-312	Acts 3-8	
3-11	Paul's Conversion; Paul on the Road: Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece	312-331; 51-52	Acts 9-18 <i>4 Macc 1, 5-8 (NOAB AP 341)</i>	Pergamum 31-48
3-16	SPRING RECESS			
3-18	SPRING RECESS			
3-23	Paul's Arrest, Trial and Journey to Rome Paul's Early Epistles; Galatians (Christianity as Jewish)	331-360	Acts 18-28 Galatians (esp. 3, 5)	Pergamum 49-72
3-25	Paul's Early Epistles; 1 Thessalonians (Not Left Behind)	360-371	1 Thessalonians (esp. 4-5)	

3-30	Major Epistles; 1 Corinthians (Table Fellowship)	373-391	1 Corinthians (esp. 1, 8, 11)	Pergamum 73-98
4-1	Major Epistles; Romans (God's Faithfulness)	391-411	Romans (esp. 1, 5, 9-11)	
4-6	Prison Epistles; Ephesians 5-6 (Household Codes) and Philippians 2-3 (They Emptied Themselves)	413-437	Ephesians (esp.5-6) Philippians (esp.2-3)	Pergamum 99-132
4-8	Pastoral Epistles; 1 Timothy 2-3	439-454	1 Timothy (esp.2-3)	
4-13	Unit Test #3: Acts and Paul	Review: 299-454		Pergamum 9-132

Unit Four: Hebrews, General Epistles and Revelation

Date	Topic	Gundry	New Testament etc.	Longenecker
4-15	Hebrews : Sober Warnings	457-471	Hebrews (esp. 1, 6, 10)	
4-20	James : Faith, Works and Wisdom; The James Ossuary 1 Peter : Suffering and Hope; The House of Peter at Capernaum	473-492	James & 1 Peter Sirach 5, 13 (NOAB AP 86)	Pergamum 133-160
4-22	Orientation to Revelation ; Visions and Letters; Lamb, Lion and Lord	505-518	Rev 1-5	
4-27	Seals, Trumpets and Bowls	518-524	Rev 6-16	Pergamum 161-182
4-29	Y1K (A 1,000-Year Reign); Last Things as the First	524-525	Rev 17-22	
5-3-6	FINAL EXAM: Hebrews, Gen. Epistles, Revelation + Comprehensive Essays	Review 457-492, 505-525		Pergamum 133-182

CLICK HERE FOR EXAM QUESTIONS

Links and Resources ([top of page](#))

Jesus and the Gospels: Parallels to [John's baptism?](#) . . . [Another prophet](#) who drew a crowd. . . What was [Roman crucifixion](#) like? . . . Crucifixion according to [Josephus](#). . . [Shroud of Turin](#): Jesus' burial cloth? . . . [Van den Broeck's Resurrection of Christ](#) . . . [Excerpts: Monty Python's Life of Brian](#) . . . [Genealogy of Jesus site](#). . . [Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls](#). . . Useful [DSS site](#). And [another](#). . . [A Synoptic Problem home page](#). . . Problems with [the Q hypothesis](#). . . [Dan Wallace on the Synoptic Problem](#) . . . [A Synoptic Gospels Primer](#) . . . [The Gospel of Thomas](#). . . [The Lindisfarne Gospels](#)

Acts, Paul and the Early Church: PBS project on [Paul in Corinth](#). . . [Mealtime in a Roman household?](#) . . . Links page to [internet resources on ancient Greece](#). . . Large collection of [ancient Gnostic texts](#). . . [Star Wars](#) as modern Stoicism. . . Christian communities: [JPUSA](#); [Taize](#); . . . The Stoic [Epictetus](#). [Stoicism](#) web site. . . "[Intelligent design](#)" in Acts 14:17?

General Epistles and Revelation: [Religious persecution](#) in our world. . . [PBS site on apocalyptic](#). . . [Michelangelo's Last Judgment](#). . . [Five ways to read Revelation](#). . . Was [David Koresh](#) the Christ?

History and Politics: A four-part historical outline to Second Temple Judaism: [Part 1](#). . . [Part 2](#). . . [Part 3](#). . . [Part 4](#). . . [Pillars of Judaism, Rituals, Festivals](#). . . [Overview of Jewish history](#). . . [Summary of Jewish history](#) . . . [Jewish festivals](#) . . . PBS site on [Pharisees & Sadducees](#). . . The [synagogue](#) at Gamla (early evidence for synagogues in Palestine). . . [Alexander the Great](#). . . PBS site on the [ancient Greeks](#). . . Sketches of [the later Seleucids](#). . . The crimes of [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#). . . [Josephus](#)--Jewish historian. . . List of [Roman emperors](#). . . [Profiles of the Roman emperors](#).

Geography: A [clickable map of Israel](#). . Map: [Roman empire under Augustus](#).