

BI 550-60 and -01

University of  
Dubuque  
Theological  
Seminary

Spring 2025

Online

Introduction to The New Testament



Christ in Glory (6th cent.)

## Course Thesis

The New Testament is a collection of texts of varying genres that exhibit the manifold ways that the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of a Galilean Jew named Jesus were theologically significant for the authors and audiences of these writings. Knowledge about the historical, cultural, and religious contexts in which New Testament texts were written is essential for understanding them.

## Instructor Information

### Instructor:

Dr. Nick Elder  
nelder@dbq.edu  
Van Vliet Hall 209

### Digital Student Hours:

Tuesdays and  
Thursdays  
10:00 AM–12:00  
PM  
(Link at top of  
course Moodle page)



## ✓ **Course Outcomes and Curricular Objectives**

**Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:**

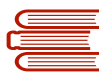
1. Explain what the New Testament is.
2. Articulate the various genres that New Testament texts represent and the constituent literary features of these genres.
3. Explain how the historical, theological, cultural, and religious contexts in which the New Testament texts were written are relevant to their interpretation.
4. Evaluate interpretive debates about specific New Testament texts.

### **Course Catalog Description:**

This course introduces the New Testament as a collection of ancient texts from varying genres. By the end of the course students will be able to articulate what the New Testament is, to identify the various ancient literary genres that New Testament texts represent, to explain how both modern and antique contexts shape interpretation of the New Testament, and to evaluate interpretive debates about specific New Testament texts.

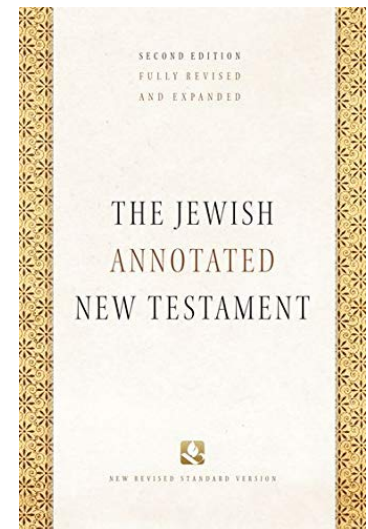
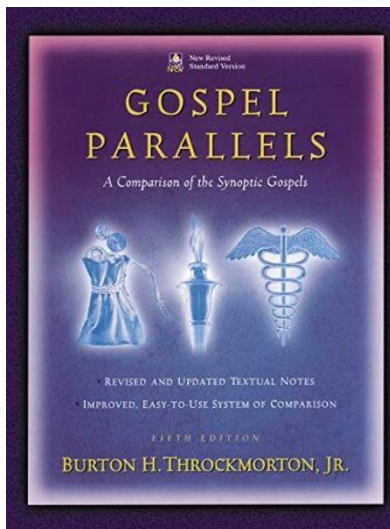
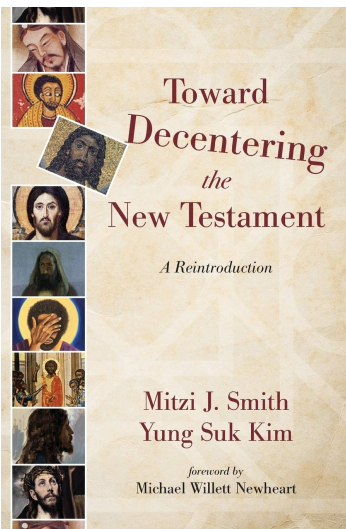
### **This course supports the following curricular objectives:**

- Be formed by, live in, and minister out of scripture and the historical and theological tradition of the church (MDiv)
- Interpret the Christian Scriptures through faithful exegesis and in light of the Christian tradition (MDiv)
- Preach the Word of God with faithfulness and clarity (MDiv)
- Articulate and reflect critically and constructively on the biblical and theological foundations of God's mission to the world (MAMD)
- Articulate and interpret key themes from the Christian scriptures in conversation with contemporary and ecclesial contexts (MAM)



## Required Texts

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Mitzi J. Smith and Yung Suk Kim, *Toward Decentering the New Testament: A Reintroduction*, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018. ISBN: 1532604653.

Burton H. Throckmorton Jr., ed., *Gospel Parallels, Fifth Edition*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992. ISBN: 0840774842.

Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament (NRSV)*, 2nd Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2017. ISBN: 0190461853.



## Optional Book Report Texts

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Students may choose from one of the following texts (or another with the professor's permission) to complete a book report on.

Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2022. ISBN: 1540961808.

Paula Fredricksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation*, New Haven: Yale University Press. ISBN: 0300248407.

Matthias Henze, *Mind the Gap: How the Jewish Writings between the Old and New Testament Help Us Understand Jesus*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017. ISBN: 1506406424

Candida Moss, *God's Ghostwriters: Enslaved Christians and the Making of the New Testament*, New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2024. ISBN: 0316564672.

Love Lazarus Sechrest, *Race and Rhyme: Rereading the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. ISBN: 0802867138.

Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine, editors. *The Pharisees*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN: 0802879292.

Matthew Thiessen, *A Jewish Paul*. Grand Rapids: Baker. 2023. ISBN: 1540965716.

Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021. ISBN: 1540964876.

If you are interested in another book not on this list, feel free to consult with me about it!



## Choose An Additional New Testament Introduction

The required introductory textbook for this class, *Toward Decentering the New Testament*, is “overtly interested in contemporary and justice issues.” In this way, it is not strictly a “traditional” New Testament textbook. I ask that, in addition to Smith and Kim’s book, you acquire your choice of one (or more) of the “traditional” New Testament introductory textbooks from this list. [In this video](#), I provide a brief overview of each one.

There are two reasons why I ask you to acquire an additional textbook. First, it allows you to compare and contrast approaches to the New Testament generally and to the respective books in it. Second, it helps to bring in a variety of viewpoints to course discussions and forums.

Additional Textbooks:

Achtemeier, Paul J., Green, Joel B., and Thompson, Marianne Meye. ***Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology***. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Bird, Michael F. and Wright, N.T. ***The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians***. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019.

DeSilva, David A. ***An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation***. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018.

Ehrman, Bart. ***The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings***. 7th edition (or a previous edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Martin, Dale B. ***New Testament History and Literature***. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

Perkins, Pheme. ***Reading the New Testament: An Introduction***. New York: Paulist Press, 2012.

Powell, Mark Allan. ***Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey***. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.

Spivey, Robert A., Smith, D. Moody, Black, C. Clifton. ***Anatomy of the New Testament*** 7th edition (or a previous edition). Minneapolis: Fortress: 2013.

If there is another introductory New Testament textbook that you are interested in using, I am happy for you to do so, but would like to know what it is to ensure that it will work for the purposes of the course. Do not hesitate to send me an email to ask about another option you might be interested in!



Additional required course readings will be provided through the course page on Moodle.



# Specifications Grading and Categories

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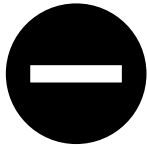
This class uses what is called specifications or "specs" grading. Final grades are **not** determined by the collective score of weighted items. Rather, they are determined by the number of grade items that you successfully complete. Each grade item is pass-fail and contains detailed specifications. If these specifications are met, then the item is passed. The rationale for using this grading system is that it removes much of the subjectivity of grading, restores rigor to academic work, and it is learning-outcome oriented.

There are several different kinds of grade items that are included under two categories for the purpose of the grading system used in the class.

## "Minor" Items

There are two different kind of minor grade items for this class: lecture pauses and course community engagement. Each week of the course there is the opportunity to complete at least one of each of these.

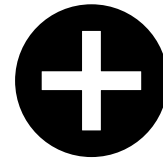
While these assignments are labeled "minor," they are not minor in importance. Learning best occurs in small increments, and these minor items are meant to facilitate this. Moreover, the course community assignments serve as the basis for establishing course community, which is also imperative for learning.



## "Major" Items

There are a variety of different major grade items throughout the course of the semester: two exams, the Synoptic Marking Assignment, a book report, and a presentation on a New Testament book.

These major items are intentionally of various types and are meant to engage different learning styles at different points in the semester.



## Minor Items

**Lecture Pauses:** Each week a document will be made available for lecture pauses. Most course lectures will have one or more "pauses" built into them that ask you to engage the video in some way. Active participation facilitates learning better than does passive reception. That is, by doing something you are more likely to remember the content from a video than if you simply watch it. I ask that you turn in your lecture pauses for two reasons: (1) so that I have a sense as to how you are engaging the videos and (2) to keep you accountable for completing the lecture pauses.

**Community Engagement:** Learning happens in community. For residential students, community engagement primarily comes in the form of attending weekly classes. For distance students, community engagement primarily comes in the form of forum participation or synchronous "Book Club" meetings. On many occasions there will be short assignments to be completed before offering your forum post or attending Book Club (for distance students) or coming to class (for residential students).

## Major Items

**Exams (x2):** There are two possible exams for this class. The first covers materials from the beginning of the course through Acts. The second covers material from Paul to the end of the semester. To pass either, a student must receive an 80% on it. Both exams consist of multiple-choice, short answer, and essay sections.

**Synoptic Marking Assignment:** This assignment involves analyzing a passage from the Synoptic Gospels and producing a color-coded synopsis of it. Students will analyze the relationship between the texts, articulate how various answers to the Synoptic problem explain the relationship, and address how the differences between the texts reflect the concerns of each evangelist.

**Book Report:** This assignment asks you to read and evaluate one book related to the New Testament. Students will identify and restate the book's central argument, its strengths and weaknesses, and how it relates to other content introduced in the course.

**Presentation on a New Testament Book:** In the second half of the semester, students will have the opportunity to teach one New Testament book to their peers. This introduction will be to one of the following books that are not explicitly addressed by the professor during the semester: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, Jude, 1–3 John.



## Final Grade Requirements

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To earn a specific letter grade, you must complete the minimum number of items in each of the categories. The minimum number you complete in any category will ultimately determine your final grade.

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### **Who are you?**

I'm glad you asked. I am Dr. Elder. I am originally from Kansas City, but also consider Denver, Milwaukee, and Dubuque home. I am the Associate Professor of New Testament here at UDS. I did my PhD at Marquette University (Catholic, Jesuit), my MA at the Iliff School of Theology (United Methodist), and my BA at Colorado Christian University (evangelical). I'm married to my better half, Beth, and we have four children: Brooks, Kit James, and Lucy and Nettie (identical twins).

### **How much time do you expect me to spend on this class?**

Per the Department of Education's guidelines for credit hours, you should spend approximately 152 hours total on a three-credit UDS course. This works out to just over 10 hours per week (including our "reading weeks" and finals week.) I have attempted to set the schedule in such a way that you will usually be doing about 7-10 hours of work per week on the class. Of course, some weeks will be heavier and some will be lighter. But about 10 hours a week on average is a good rule of thumb.

### **How should I contact you if I have a question about class?**

The first thing that you should do is consider the type of question that you have. If it is about course content then you should post it in the "Questions and Curiosities" forum for the week. That way, if another student has the same question, they will also acquire the answer to it. Also, if another student has an answer to the question, they can offer it. This provides further opportunity to build community within the class. Even if another student answers the question (rightly or wrongly) I will answer your question in that public forum so that others can see the information.

If the question is of a more private or personal nature, you are free to e-mail me at [nelder@dbq.edu](mailto:nelder@dbq.edu), or we can talk digitally in another format.

### **What should I call you?**

I prefer to be called Doctor Elder or Professor Elder.

### **Are the exams difficult?**

Not if you have completed all of the readings and watched all of the lectures. You should find no surprises on the exams, especially if you regularly engage the "Study Questions and Content" document provided for each week.

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### **What is the “course thesis”?**

This class is an introduction to the New Testament. Thus the central question that it seeks to answer is “What is the New Testament?” The answer to this question is the course’s thesis. Throughout the course we will engage the various parts of this thesis. By the end of this semester you will be able to explain and defend this thesis yourself and will be asked to do so.