Wayland Baptist University San Antonio

School of Religion and Philosophy

Wayland Baptist University exists to educate students in an academically challenging, learning-focused and distinctively Christian environment for professional success and service to God and humankind.

Course: RLGN 1302 VC01 – New Testament History

Term: Fall 2018

Instructor: Steven Spivey, Ph.D.

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Catalogue Description: an introductory survey of the historical literature with special attention to the background and origins of Christian beliefs and practices, and to the life of Jesus Christ and the early Christian community.

Prerequisites: None

Required Textbook: NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible

Course Outcomes/Competencies:

1. To introduce students to the religious, historical, and cultural background of the Christian Scriptures commonly known as the New Testament.
2. To introduce students to the text and literary types of the New Testament books.
3. To introduce students to the content and selected theological themes found in the New Testament, with particular focus upon the person and work of Jesus the Christ, as interpreted from a moderate, evangelical perspective.

Attendance Requirements: The university attendance policy states that a student who misses 25% of scheduled class meetings may be in danger of failing the course. For a Virtual Campus course, attendance must be handled differently. For this course, weekly discussion boards will be used both to check attendance and as a tool for class interaction and discussion. If a student fails to complete the weekly discussion boards assignment (as described later in this syllabus), it will be considered the equivalent of missing a class meeting, and as such, as an absence. Students who fail to participate in the discussion boards for three or more weeks will be considered subject to failing the course on the basis of attendance alone. If a student is going to miss a week’s activities, he/she must notify the instructor of the reasons for non-participation as early as possible.

Statement on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Wayland Baptist University has a zero-tolerance policy regarding academic dishonesty. Per university policy as described in the academic catalogue, all cases of academic dishonesty (e.g. using unauthorized materials on exams, or plagiarizing the work of others on assignments, such as the extra credit essay) will be reported to the appropriate academic dean, and a second offense will result in suspension from the university.

Disability Statement: In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is the policy of Wayland Baptist University that no otherwise qualified person with a disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity in the university. The Coordinator of Counseling Services serves as the coordinator for students with a disability and should be contacted concerning accommodation requests at (806) 291-3765. Documentation of a disability must accompany any request for accommodations.

Course Requirements and Expectations:

1. Assigned Readings: As seen below, there are assigned readings scheduled for each week. Some will be notes posted in Blackboard by the instructor. Others will be found in the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible. For readings in the New Testament, students are expected to read all maps, charts, and articles related to the texts assigned. Students are strongly encouraged to read the study notes printed below the biblical text to enhance your understanding of New Testament history and thought. Discussion board questions will be based upon all notes and assigned readings, so it is important not to fall behind in your reading.
2. Discussion Boards: Beginning in week two, at least two questions will be posted in Blackboard for your consideration and responses. Each student will provide a response of at least 50 words to each question, AND a response of at least 50 words to a classmate’s answer to the relevant question. If there are two discussion questions in a given week, you will have a minimum of a response to EACH question and at least one response to a classmate for each question. Remember that these boards are opportunities for mutual learning, NOT for ad hominin criticisms or “flame wars”. Your responses will constitute a weekly grade, and the ten weeks of discussion board responses will constitute 25% of the final course grade (equal to one major exam).
3. Examinations: Three proctored exams will be given during the term, based on assigned readings and notes posted in Blackboard. The exams will be objective in format, involving multiple choice, true-false, and short answer questions. Each exam will count 25% toward the student’s course grade. The final exam will include selected questions from the previous two exams. A student who scores lower than a 50 on the final exam will automatically fail the course, regardless of earlier test scores. Review sheets will be posted prior to the exam, but students will not be permitted to use the review sheet, notes, or the textbook when taking the exam. Instructions on securing a proctor are found on the Blackboard site.
4. Extra Credit Essay: Students may prepare an essay of 6-7 pages in response to one of the questions listed below. Grades will be based on the following elements: organization, logic, clarity, original thought, and the strength of any supporting material provided. All non-original, secondary information must be appropriately documented, and proper credit given. The grade received on this essay will replace the student’s lowest exam grade. The completed essay may be emailed directly to the instructor, and the due date is provided in the course schedule. Late essays will not be accepted for any reason, however regrettable or unforeseen. A student may submit only one extra-credit essay per term. Essays may be written on any of the following topics/questions:
5. How did Jesus respond to the poor?
6. Why does the resurrection of Jesus really matter?
7. What does the New Testament say about women serving as ministers?
8. What does the New Testament say about undeserved suffering?
9. Why is the institution of the Church still necessary today?
10. What is the “unforgivable sin” and why is it considered unforgivable?
11. Why does the New Testament consider Jesus the exclusive way to God?

Calculation of Grades:

Examinations 25% each

Discussion Boards 25%

Extra Credit Essay 25% (replaces lowest exam score)

The Wayland grade scale will be used:

90 – 100 A

80 – 89 B

70 – 79 C

60 – 69 D

0 – 59 F

For course grade averages that border between two values, rounding up will happen only if the fraction is .75 or more. For example, a course average of 79.75 will be rounded up to an 80 (B). An average of 79.50 will not be rounded up, and will remain a C.

Students shall have protection through orderly procedures against prejudices or capricious academic evaluation. A student who believes that he or she has not been held to realistic academic standards, just evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading may appeal the final grade given in the course by sing the student grade appeal process described in the academic catalogue. Appeals may not be made for advanced placement exams or course bypass exams. Appeals are limited to the final course grade, which may be upheld, raised, or lowered at any stage of the appeal process. Any recommendation to lower a course grade must be submitted through the Executive Vice-President/Provost to the Faculty Assembly Grade Appeals Committee for review and approval. This committee may instruct that the course grade be upheld, raised, or lowered to a more proper evaluation.

Miscellaneous: This class represents a wide spectrum of knowledge and experiences, and so there are multiple degrees of familiarity with the Bible. For some, this will be the first time the New Testament is studied from an academic or historical perspective. For others, it will be the first time the New Testament has been studied at all. Accordingly, questions of any kind, whether on the discussion boards or by email are appropriate. There are no “dumb” questions, and a student is not foolish or shameful for asking. Given that this is a learning venue, both students and instructor must be open and patient with questions raised by others. Feel free to contact me as needed.

It should also be understood that this course is not a church service or Sunday School/Bible study group. Nor are university classes to devolve into indoctrination sessions. We will approach the New Testament from a historical perspective and try to understand its ideas in light of their literary, historical, and cultural contexts. We may find that we have brought assumptions to our study which turn out to be inaccurate. For anyone who might fear their faith be threatened by such an approach, consider this course part of learning to love God with one’s mind as well as with one’s heart.

Course Schedule

(Any syllabus/course schedule is an expression of hope. This schedule is subject to the instructor’s modification if necessary.)

Week of:

Aug 19 Historical and Literary Backgrounds of the New Testament

Read: pp. 1577-1603, 1658, 1696-1697, 1732-1735

Aug 26 Jesus’ Birth, Baptism, Temptation; Miracles in the Gospels

Read: Matthew 1-4, 8-9; Luke 1-4

Sep 2 Jesus’ Parables and the Sermon on the Mount

Read: Matthew 5-7, 13, 21-22; Luke 6, 15-18

Sep 9 Examination #1

The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus

Read: Mark 14-16; Matthew 26-28; Luke 22-24

Sep 16 Acts

Read: Acts 1-18

Sep 23 Paul’s Early Letters

Read: pp. 1986-1987; Galatians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians

Sep 30 Paul’s Letters to Rome and Corinth

Read: Romans; 1st Corinthians; 2nd Corinthians

Oct 7 Examination #2

Paul’s Prison and Pastoral Letters

Read: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus,

and Philemon

Oct 14 Hebrews and the General Letters

Read: Hebrews 1-5, 7-12; James, 1st and 2nd Peter, Jude

Oct 21 Extra-Essay Credit Essays Due!

The Writings of John

Read: John 1-6, 9-21; 1st John; Revelation 1-5, 18-22

Oct 28 Examination #3