



On-Campus Course Syllabus

NTS 350 L1

New Testament Backgrounds

Spring 2025

Class Information

Day and Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:15-1:30 pm

Room Number: E205

Contact Information

Instructor Name: Steven Sanders

Instructor Email: ssanders@criswell.edu

Instructor Phone: 214-818-1328

Instructor Office Hours: [Tuesdays 2-3 pm; Wednesdays 1:30-3:30 pm; Thursdays 2-3 pm](#)

Course Description and Prerequisites

An intensive study of the historical, social, and literary contexts of the New Testament. (Prerequisites: NTS 101, NTS 201)

Course Objectives

At the end of the course, the student should be familiar with:

1. The historical context of the New Testament and how it affects our understanding of the NT.
2. The literary context of the New Testament and how to use primary sources in NT exegesis.
3. A variety of cultural contexts that affect our understanding of earliest Christians' experiences.
4. The application of the course contents to specific New Testament passages.

Required Textbooks

Evans, Craig A. and Stanley E. Porter, eds. *Dictionary of New Testament Background*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000. (ISBN: 0-8308-1780-8)

Longenecker, Bruce W. *The Lost Letters of Pergamum: A Story from the New Testament World*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016. (ISBN: 9780801097966)

Recommended Reading

Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. (ISBN: 9780802822215)

Course Requirements and Assignments

1. Book Report (20%) – Students are required to read *The Lost Letters of Pergamum* and to write a 1100-2000 word, single-spaced book report. The first half of the report should summarize the contents of the book, and the second half should explain how the book has affected their understanding of New Testament backgrounds. The report is due by March 31.
2. Discussion Board (20%) – Students will have short weekly reading assignments involving primary texts and dictionary entries. They will be required to post a response to questions concerning the reading on Canvas.
3. Midterm Exam (15%) – Students will complete a midterm exam on Canvas by March 25. The exam will be posted on March 6 after class. The class session on March 6 will review the contents of the exam. Topics will include the contents of the class up to Spring Break.
4. Final Exam (15%) – Students will complete a final exam on Canvas by May 16. The exam will be posted on May 8 after class. The class session on May 8 will review the contents of the exam. Topics will include the contents of the class after Spring Break.
5. Research Paper (30%) – Students will write an 2400-3200 word, double-spaced research paper on a topic of their choice related to New Testament backgrounds. The paper must include a summary of the backgrounds area, direct interaction with at least one primary source, at least four additional secondary sources, and application of the backgrounds area to one New Testament passage. A student may turn his or her paper in at any time during the semester for evaluation and grading. He or she will be able to resubmit the paper if desired as long as the submission was made before April 30. Final submissions are due by May 16.

Course/Classroom Policies and Information

Class Attendance

Students are responsible for enrolling in courses for which they (1) anticipate being able to attend every on-campus class session on the day and time appearing on course schedules, or (2) participating in academically related activities as identified in online-course schedules including synchronous class sessions conducted remotely by video, and then making every effort to do so. When unavoidable situations result in absence or tardiness, students are responsible for acquiring any missed information. Professors are not obliged to allow students to make up missed work. Per their independent discretion, individual professors may determine how attendance affects students' ability to meet course learning objectives and whether attendance affects course grades. Professors apprise students of such information in course syllabi. *If a student misses more than 3 class periods in the semester, the professor may change the student's final grade at his discretion based on the amount of time missed.*

Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships must meet specified requirements of various departments at the college and should consult relevant sections of the *Academic Catalog*. To ensure such funds will not be forfeited, students are responsible for contacting the proper departments to ascertain any specific course participation requirements and consequences of not meeting such requirements. Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships should consult the Financial Aid office.

While Criswell College is a non-attendance taking institution, it nevertheless must demonstrate that students begin their courses in order to comply with Federal Aid regulations. Accordingly, students must participate in academically related activities during census periods. Failure to meet this requirement will result in students being administratively dropped from courses.

Academically related activity is defined as any course-related activity that may be used as evidence of attendance. Examples include:

- physical presence in a classroom during a class session with the instructor present,
- participation in a synchronous remote video class session with the instructor present,
- submission of an academic assignment, quiz, or exam,
- participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- participation in a study group or discussion board that is assigned by the instructor,
- documentation showing that the student and a faculty member corresponded about the academic subject of the course.

NOTE: Logging into a Canvas course alone and logging into a Synchronous Online class session without active participation or with the camera off are not considered attendance.

NOTE: A census period begins on the first day of a semester/term and runs through the end of the last day to drop courses. During the census period, attendance data is collected in order to demonstrate compliance with Federal Aid regulations. There is no census period for winter terms since there is no last day to drop courses.

Campus Closure

To ensure the health and safety of students and employees, college administrators may decide it is necessary on rare occasions to close the campus. Once this decision is announced, instructors will contact students to provide further details regarding the campus closure's impact on those courses. Students are responsible to watch for communication from their instructors and respond appropriately. (Unless otherwise specified by the instructor in this syllabus, this communication will be sent to the student's Criswell College e-mail account.)

In order to make progress toward the courses' objectives, instructors have the freedom during most campus closures to require students to participate in activities as alternatives to meeting on campus. An instructor may, for example, hold class remotely (through Zoom) at the scheduled time, provide a recording of a class or presentation for students to watch independently, or assign other activities that students are to accomplish before returning to campus. Students are responsible for accomplishing these alternative activities as well as any course requirements listed in this syllabus during the period of the campus closure. If, during the period of the campus closure, personal circumstances prohibit a student from accomplishing these alternative activities or course requirements and assignment listed in the syllabus during the campus closure, the student is responsible for communicating with the instructor as soon as possible. Instructors will not penalize students who do not

have the means to accomplish the alternative activities during the period of the campus's closure and will work with students whose circumstances during the campus closure prohibited their timely completion of course requirements and assignments in the syllabus.

Grading Scale

A	93-100	4.0 grade points per semester hour
A-	90-92	3.7 grade points per semester hour
B+	87-89	3.3 grade points per semester hour
B	83-86	3.0 grade points per semester hour
B-	80-82	2.7 grade points per semester hour
C+	77-79	2.3 grade points per semester hour
C	73-76	2.0 grade points per semester hour
C-	70-72	1.7 grade points per semester hour
D+	67-69	1.3 grade points per semester hour
D	63-66	1.0 grade point per semester hour
D-	60-62	0.7 grade points per semester hour
F	0-59	0.0 grade points per semester hour

Incomplete Grades

Students requesting a grade of Incomplete (I) must understand that incomplete grades may be given only upon approval of the faculty member involved. An "I" may be assigned only when a student is currently passing a course and in situations involving extended illness, serious injury, death in the family, or employment or government reassignment, not student neglect.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructors prior to the end of the semester, plus filing the appropriate completed and approved academic request form with the Registrar's Office. The "I" must be removed (by completing the remaining course requirements) no later than 60 calendar days after the close of the term or semester in which the grade was awarded, or the "I" will become an "F."

Academic Honesty

Absolute truth is an essential belief and basis of behavior for those who believe in a God who cannot lie and forbids falsehood. Academic honesty is the application of the principle of truth in the classroom setting. Academic honesty includes the basic premise that all work submitted by students must be their own and any ideas derived or copied from elsewhere must be carefully documented.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- cheating of any kind,
- submitting, without proper approval, work originally prepared by the student for another course,
- plagiarism, which is the submitting of work prepared by someone else as if it were his own, and

- failing to credit sources properly in written work.

Institutional Assessment

Material submitted by students in this course may be used for assessment of the college's academic programs. Since programmatic and institutional assessment is done without reference to specific students, the results of these assessments have no effect on a student's course grade or academic standing at the college. Before submitting a student's work for this type of assessment, the course instructor redacts the work to remove anything that identifies the student.

Institutional Email Policy

All official college email communications to students enrolled in this course will be sent exclusively to students' institutional email accounts. Students are expected to check their student email accounts regularly and to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to all communications from faculty and administrative departments.

Students are permitted to setup automatic forwarding of emails from their student email accounts to one or more personal email accounts. The student is responsible to setup and maintain email forwarding without assistance from college staff. If a student chooses to use this forwarding option, he/she will continue to be responsible for responding appropriately to all communications from faculty and administrative departments of the college. Criswell College bears no responsibility for the use of emails that have been forwarded from student email accounts to other email accounts.

Disabilities

Criswell College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and similar state laws, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Criswell College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students, faculty, and employees with disabilities as required by applicable laws. For more information, please contact the Student Services Office.

Intellectual Property Rights

Unless otherwise specifically instructed in writing by the instructor, students must neither materially nor digitally reproduce materials from any course offered by Criswell College for or with the significant possibility of distribution.

Research and Writing Standards

The default writing style for written assignments in Criswell College Courses is the latest edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian. However, instructors are free to require alternative writing styles in their courses. These styles include but are not limited to the American Psychological Association (APA), Chicago Manual of Style, Modern Language Association (MLA), and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) writing guides.

Resources and Supports

Canvas and SONIS: Criswell College uses Canvas as its web-based learning tool and SONIS for student data. Students needing assistance with Canvas should contact the Canvas Help Support line at (844) 358-6140. Tech support is available at this number, twenty-four hours a day. Students needing help with SONIS should contact the Campus Software Manager at studenttechsupport@criswell.edu.

Student Services: The Student Services Office exists to foster and encourage success in all areas of life—physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance by contacting the office at 214.818.1332 or studentservices@criswell.edu. The Student Services Office also works with local counseling centers to ensure that every student has access to helpful mental health resources. More information is located on the college website at [Criswell College Mental Health Resources](#), and students may contact the Director of Student Services if they have any questions.

Wallace Library: Students can access academic resources and obtain research assistance by contacting or visiting the Wallace Library, which is located on campus. For more information, email the Wallace Library at library@criswell.edu. Login credentials are emailed to students near the beginning of the semester.

Tutoring Center: Students are encouraged to consult with tutors to improve and enhance their skills and confidence. Tutors have been recommended by the faculty to ensure that the tutor(s) are qualified to serve the student body. Every tutor brings experience and expertise in an effort to provide the proper resources for the subject matter at hand. To consult with a tutor, students can schedule an appointment through Calendly (<https://calendly.com/criswell-tutoringcenter>) or by visiting the Tutoring Center located on the second floor in room E203. For questions, call 214.818.1373 or email at tutoringcenter@criswell.edu.

Course Outline/Calendar

Date	Topic	Recommended Reading
Jan 21	Syllabus	
Jan 23	Literary, Historical, and Theological Lenses	
Jan 28	Primary Sources - Jewish Literature 1	Ferguson, 432-474
Jan 30	Primary Sources - Jewish Literature 2	Ferguson, 475-513
Feb 4	Alexander the Great	Ferguson, 1-15, 399-404
Feb 6	Antiochus Epiphanes	Ferguson, 15-20, 404-411
Feb 11	Pompey	Ferguson, 20-31, 411-420
Feb 13	Jewish-Roman Wars	Ferguson, 31-40, 420-430
Feb 18	Second Temple Jewish Beliefs	Ferguson, 537-562
Feb 20	Second Temple Jewish Hope	Ferguson, 513-537
Feb 25	Traditional Greco-Roman Mythology	Ferguson, 148-173
Feb 27	Mystery Religions	Ferguson, 251-277, 297-300
Mar 4	Public Greco-Roman Religion	Ferguson, 182-199
Mar 6	Private Greco-Roman Religion	
Mar 11	Using Backgrounds (Dr. Fantin)	Ferguson, 213-251
Mar 13	Roman Imperial Cult (Dr. Fantin)	Ferguson, 199-213

Mar 25	Philosophy: Traditional Foundations	Ferguson, 319-346
Mar 27	Philosophy: 1 st c Stoicism, Epicureanism	Ferguson, 246-382
Apr 1	Major Cities	Ferguson, 40-47
Apr 3	Honor and Shame/Social Hierarchy	Ferguson, 97-113
Apr 8	Patronage/Recommendation	Ferguson, 66-69
Apr 10	Reciprocity/Challenge-Riposte	Ferguson, 55-66
Apr 15	Households and Slaves	Ferguson, 82-97
Apr 17	Households and Women	Ferguson, 69-82
Apr 22	Households and Children	Ferguson, 583-592
Apr 24	Greco-Roman Household Codes	Ferguson, 592-608
Apr 29	Literary References to Christianity	Ferguson, 300-318
May 1	Apostolic Fathers	Ferguson, 608-616
May 6	NT Apocrypha	Ferguson, 616-620
May 8	Processing and Exam Review	
May 12-16	Exam Week; No class; Final Papers due	