

Syllabus for New Testament Textual Criticism and Historical Backgrounds (Elective Course)

NT 6501 (2 Hr. Credit Course)

Textual Criticism and Historical Backgrounds to the New Testament

Fall Semester, 2025

Wednesday, 1:30-3:30 PM

Professor G. K. Beale

Email: gbeale@gmail.com

Reformed Theological Seminary

TA: Ethan Preston

Email: ejp0111@gmail.com

Course Description and Objectives

This course is a study of two important areas in New Testament study: textual criticism and historical backgrounds of the New Testament. With respect to textual criticism, there will be study of the history of the Greek New Testament text, the different kinds of approaches to doing textual criticism, the goals of textual criticism, and an examination of sample passages in order to illustrate the methods. The latter will be the focus of class lectures. Historical backgrounds will include a survey of the Jewish and Greco-Roman world within which the early Christian movement had its birth. This will focus on historical and religious movements (e.g., pagan and Jewish religion) and some geography. The focus of the lectures will be on especially the bearing of Greco-Roman and Jewish writings upon the New Testament. One year of Greek is required for the course, but there will not be a lot of Greek translation in the course, compared to Beale's exegesis courses.

The goals of the course are (1) to understand the methodology of New Testament textual criticism, (2) to understand the role and significance of Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds in interpreting the New Testament; (3) to attempt to determine the contemporary significance and application of these two areas of study.

Content and Structure of the Course

This course consists of a study of the methods and approaches of New Testament textual criticism and of New Testament historical backgrounds. As I have often noted in some of my exegesis courses, there is a circulating story about a wise man who wanted to help a hungry beggar. Instead of giving him a meal or money to buy food, he gave him a fishing pole. When he was asked why, he answered and said, "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a life-time." The assignments of this course are built around this principle. The course is primarily intended, not only to convey information for students' memories, but to impart methods, tools and skills so that students may be able to mine information from the original biblical text for themselves. Therefore, the student will be given opportunity to practice the use of the tools and methods of New Testament textual criticism and historical backgrounds. Such practice will come through two major assignments.

Approaches to textual criticism and to historical backgrounds is learned in two primary ways. First, by listening and observing others practice these methods. Second, and just as important, these methods are learned by repeated practice of exegeting texts by the students themselves, as long as the right methods are being practiced. This course will attempt to apply these two ways of learning. The assignments are designed to give students repeated practice. The grading of the assignments will evaluate how students are using the methods and will guide them into an increasing skill in using them.

Many of the goals of this course cannot be attained if students do not come to class sessions. Through lecture, questions, answers, debate, discussion, etc. we will all attempt to understand the meaning of the text better. Therefore, come prepared to participate in such discussions. Class participation will affect your grade. Indeed, the goals of the class cannot be met without attendance of, at least, 90% of the classes; petition for excused absences must be submitted to the professor.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(1) **Translation in Class:** Students should be able to follow along in the Greek text as best they can and be prepared to translate about two verses per class session (mainly for the first half of the semester). The only English translation referred to in class will be the NASB. I recommend the purchase of the Greek-English NT which UBS publishes, which has RSV on one page and NA²⁸ on the facing page. Students should be able to translate when asked (no interlinears, translation notes or references to English translations will be allowed when the student is translating orally in class).

(2) **Major Written Assignments:**

There will be two major written assignments in this course, one on textual criticism and one on historical backgrounds.

Textual Criticism Assignment

First part of the class assignment on textual criticism (due on Wed., Sept. 24):

Description of the assignment: on the forms entitled "Textual Support for Variants According to Date and Text-type" (pp. 119-120 in Beale's "Packet of Handouts on N.T. Exegetical Methods") fill in the textual data for these variants: Ephesians 1:1 (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ / ἐν Ἐφέσῳ omitted); Ephesians 4:9 (κατέβη / κατέβη πρῶτον). Use both **NA²⁷** and **UBS⁴** (**photocopies of these two apparatuses will be distributed**).

Assignment to be discussed in class. Students will be expected to translate Eph. 1:1 and 4:9 from the Greek.

Second part of the class assignment on textual criticism (due on Wed., Oct. 1):

Description of the assignment: on the forms entitled "worksheet for the Evaluation of a Textual Variant" (pp. 121-124 in Beale's "Packet of Handouts on N.T. Exegetical Methods") evaluate the variants for Ephesians 1:1 and 4:9. On a separate sheet of paper, briefly indicate which variant you think is original and why. Assignment to be discussed in class.

Historical Context Text Collection

Due: **Wed., Dec. 10, 2025** (no later than 1:00 P.M. at the mail basket outside the Professor's office).

For this assignment you are to cite important and helpful primary texts (in English translation), which are important for understanding one of the texts to be chosen below (does the background material show how unique the NT text is or, perhaps, how similar it is? In the latter case, how do the similarities of the background material help you gain a better understanding of the NT passage?). For further help on this assignment see the relevant handouts mentioned in Beale's "Packet of Handouts on N.T. Exegetical Methods" (also see D. Scholer's samples on pp. 192-194 for models of what the assignment is to look like). Students should realize that OT and NT citations are "live candidates" for the Text Collection along with Jewish and Greco-Roman texts, but they should not dominate the collection. In order to make an "A" on this assignment, the student needs to include a minimum of twenty good separate citations (if this necessitates the paper being longer than formally required, then that is permissible). If students so desire, they may include additional citations at the conclusion of the paper. The student should read the entire section on "Historical Backgrounds" in Beale's "Packet of Handouts on N.T. Exegetical Methods," pp. 184-

206c. Some of this material is so important that we will go over some of it in class.

Part 1

- List 20 historical background citations
 - Reference according to the ***Scholer*** examples in the Historical Backgrounds Packet (about 3 sentences to each citation).
- Use only **one** OT citation from the Greek Old Testament, if necessary (though up to three might be permissible).
- Additional citations, of primary or secondary importance, may be included in an appendix at the end of the paper. This will **not** be evaluated and will not count towards the 1800 words required in the paper (though this is a somewhat flexible limit). These may be valuable to the student for reference and discussion in Parts 2 and 3 of the paper.

Part 2

Discuss and **summarize** in one or two paragraphs what has been cited in Part 1:

1. Observe patterns and trends in the parallel citations.
2. Similar uses/similar ideas that you have observed.
3. Contrasting, antithetical or dissimilar trends or patterns of the parallel material.

Part 3

Evaluate these texts as to their usefulness in understanding the biblical passage.

Compare and contrast the historical background citations with the chosen NT passage.

- Does the background material show the chosen NT passage to be unique or exceptional in some way?

- Does the background material show the chosen NT passage to be similar to the concepts found in the OT or Jewish background citations? Do some of the citations serve as a kind of “commentary” on the Old Testament passage or concept referred to in the NT passage, providing insight positively to the NT passage or showing how unique the NT passage is? Is the NT passage specifically dependent on some (even one) of the Jewish background citations or is it reflecting the common stock of the way Judaism understood the OT reference or concept that is in the NT passage under focus?
- How do the similarities help you gain a better understanding of the NT passage?
- In this section additional NT or OT texts (not listed in the initial collection) but listed in the appendix may be discussed if relevant.
- It is always possible that the relation of the parallel background material to a NT passage may be unclear.
- There should be some clear conclusion about how you see the Jewish citations relating to the NT passage under focus.

The topics for your collection are as follows:

Gal. 3:19 (the mediation of the Law through angels)

I Timothy 2:14 (women's role and especially views of Eve)

1 Tim. 4:1 and 2 Tim. 3:1 (the concept of the end-time tribulation to come in "the latter days;" students should seek help from the professor about this if they have questions)

John 5:29 (resurrection [when possible focussing on the OT background of Jn. 5:29]).

Galatians 6:15 (destruction of the old world and new creation)

*The student can propose other possible topics for the historical background assignment; this has to be done in consultation with the professor for permission.

(3) Class Notebook Assignment:

Each student will prepare a "class notebook" (loose-leaf in form), consisting of (1) all graded assignments, (2) lecture handouts from class, and (3) the student's own notes from class lectures. The purpose of this notebook is to provide a means in which the student can later review the subject matter of the course. A final evaluation of these notebooks will also be done at the end of the term. These notebooks will be graded on the proper organization of the "notebook" and mainly by focusing on the quality of the class lecture notes taken by the student (students may take notes on computers if they wish, but during oral translation, all computers should be closed). The "exegetical notebooks" are due: **Wed., Dec. 10, 2025** (1:00 p.m.; to be submitted outside the professor's office at the mail basket by the door).

Required Reading (total of 870 pp.):

Philip S. Alexander, "Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament," *ZNW* 74 (1983), pp. 237-246.

Norman Anderson. *Tools for bibliographic and backgrounds research on the New Testament*. 2nd ed. South Hamilton: Gordon-Conwell, 1987, pp. xvii-xxii, 22-35.

Terry L. Donaldson. "Parallels: Use, Misuse, and Limitations. *The Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): pp. 193-210.

G. D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis, A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Third Edition. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. **Pp. 81-91; 41, 114-123.**

Bruce H. Grigsby. "A Proposed Guide for Citing Rabbinic Texts." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (1981): 83-90 (not to be counted in overall page count).

Larry R. Helyer. *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002, **pp. 75-111, 180-275, 311-377, 449-484.**

James F. Jeffers. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999, **pp. 11-18, 48-109, 180-323.**

Bruce M. Metzger. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford, 1992. **310 pp.**

Samuel Sandmel. "Parallelomania." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962), **1-13.**

The introduction to the textual apparatus of the of the NA²⁷ (**pp. 44-83**)

Highly Recommended Reading

Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. Third edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, pp. 1-4, 40-47, 55-581.

Gurry, Peter J. "How Your Greek NT is Changing: An Introduction to the Coherence Based Genealogical Method (CBGM)." *JETS* 59 (2016): 675–89.

Hixson, Elijah and Peter J. Gurry, eds., *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019.

Hurtado, Larry W. *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Jongkind, Dirk. *An Introduction to the Greek New Testament*, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019.

Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994. [this volume must be consulted for the very end textual criticism project]

Miller, Timothy E. “Text-Criticism and the Pulpit: Should One Preach about the Woman Caught in Adultery?” *Themelios* 45.2 (2020): 368–84.

Wallace, Daniel B. “The Majority Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique.” Pages 711–44 in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*. Edited by Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes. 2nd ed. NTTSD. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Wasserman, Tommy and Peter J. Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method*. Atlanta: SBL; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2017.

Select Websites:

[Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts](http://csntm.org) (csntm.org)

[Encyclopedia of New Testament Textual Criticism](http://skypoint.com/members/waltzmn)

(skypoint.com/members/waltzmn)

[Evangelical Textual Criticism](http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com)

(evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com)

[Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung](http://egora.uni-muenster.de/intf/index_en.shtml) (http://egora.uni-muenster.de/intf/index_en.shtml)

[Resources for New Testament Exegesis: Textual Criticism](http://resourcesfornewtestamentexegesis.com)

<http://www.viceregency.com/TextCrit.htm>)

A Comment on the Required Reading for All Students

The reading should be completed outside of class. The required commentary reading will help students better understand the goals and approaches of the course. The schedule of class sessions will show when many of these readings should ideally be completed for various class sessions.

There is a reading checkoff box at the end of the syllabus for all students to report on their reading and to hand in at the end of the course **(Wed., Dec. 10, 2025)**.

Students reading less than 90% of the reading will receive a grade of no higher than a B.⁺ Students reading less than 80% of the reading will receive a grade of no higher than a B⁻. Less than 65% of the reading will result in a grade of no higher than a C. Less than 50% of the reading will result in a grade of no higher than a D. Students will fail the course if, at least, 40% of the reading is not completed.

A Comment on the Daily Participation Grade for All Students:

Class roll may be taken at the beginning of each class. Class attendance will form a significant part of the “Daily Participation Grade.” Students must not miss more than 90% of classes, since the goals of the class cannot be met without attendance of, at least, 90% of the classes; petition for excused absences must be submitted to the professor.

*The professor reserves the right to adjust a student's grade lower or higher dependent on their overall performance in the class, especially in light of class participation, demonstrated comprehension of required reading, etc.

Grading Percentages

- (1) Textual Criticism Assignment. **43%**
- (2) Historical Background Text Collection Assignment **42%**.
- (3) Daily Participation Grade (which includes Greek translation) **5%**.
- (4) Exegetical Notebook **10%**

COURSE GRADING SCALE

For the grading scale for this course consult the online RTS catalogue:

Student Reading Checkoff List to Be Submitted on Wed., Dec. 10, 2025 (total of approx. 870 pp.)

Name: _____

The following required readings are taken from the syllabus and listed in alphabetical order. Please check off the readings when each is completed, and hand these in at the end of the semester at the time of the final exam. The total amount of required reading below is approx. **870 pp.** (this page count does not include the reading of the essay by Grigsby). Some of these readings may be required to be read at the time of particular class sessions; the other readings should be read at the student's own pace. Students reading less than 90% of the reading will receive a grade of no higher than a B⁺. Reading less than 80% of the reading will result in a grade of no higher than a B-. Less than 65% of the reading will result in a grade of no higher than a C. Less than 50% of the reading will result in a grade of no higher than a D. Less than 40% of the reading will result in a grade of no higher than a F.

- ☐ Philip S. Alexander, "Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament," *ZNW* 74 (1983), pp. 237-246.
- ☐ Norman Anderson. *Tools for bibliographic and backgrounds research on the New Testament*. 2nd ed. South Hamilton: Gordon-Conwell, 1987, **pp. xvii-xxii, 22-35.**
- ☐ Terry L. Donaldson. "Parallels: Use, Misuse, and Limitations. *The Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): **pp. 193-210.**
- ☐ G. D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis, A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Third Edition. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. **Pp. 81-91; 41, 114-123.**
- ☐ Bruce H. Grigsby. "A Proposed Guide for Citing Rabbinic Texts." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (1981): pp. 83-90 (not included in the overall page count).
- ☐ Larry R. Helyer. *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002, **pp. 75-111, 180-275, 311-377, 449-484.**
- ☐ James F. Jeffers. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999, **pp. 11-18, 48-109, 180-323.**
- ☐ Bruce M. Metzger. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford, 1992. **310 pp.**
- ☐ Samuel Sandmel. "Parallelomania." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962), **pp. 1-13.**
- ☐ The introduction to the textual apparatus of the of the NA²⁷ (**pp. 44-83**)

***If 100% of the reading (or translation) is not completed, then write in the percentage that has been completed.

Lectures and Class Sessions

There are thirteen two-hour class sessions [= 26 hours] for which are scheduled the following. Roughly the first half will be on textual criticism and the second half on historical backgrounds

1. (Wed., Sept. 3) Introduction to the course; what difference does textual criticism make to NT exegesis?
- 2.. (Wed., Sept. 10) Introduction to Textual Criticism

*Metzger, pp. 1-92: Explanation about how to read the whole of Metzger. In particular, try to discern the major historical events affecting textual criticism and pay attention to sections discussing methodology, i. e., how to do textual criticism today. Follow Hafemann's summary of Aland/Aland in the section on "Textual Criticism" in my "Packet."
3. (Wed., Sept. 17) Introduction to Textual Criticism (continued)

Read and familiarize yourself with the introduction to the textual apparatus of the of the NA²⁷ (pp. 44-83); or students can read the comparable section in the NA²⁸ (pp. 46-88). Students may also peruse the introduction to the textual apparatus in the UBS,⁴ but it is not required.

*Ask questions about whatever symbols in the apparatus of the textual variants for Eph. 1:1 and 4:9 which you do not know (for the assigned variants for these passages see below). Metzger, Text on NT, 36-66 may be helpful here.

*Metzger, 95-185

Immediately after this class session, students should begin work on the first class assignment on textual criticism due on the next class session (class session # 4)
4. (Wed., Sept. 24) pt. a.) Textual Criticism (continued)

*Metzger, Textual Commentary, xiii-xxxi
 *Fee, Handbook, 29-30, 51-60 (old edition); 81-91 (third edition)
 *Metzger, 186-297

Due: first class assignment on textual criticism

Description of the assignment: on the sheets entitled "Textual Support for Variants According to Date and Text-type," fill in the textual data for these variants: Ephesians 1:1 (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ/ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ omitted); Ephesians 4:9 (κατέβη / κατέβη πρῶτον). Use both NA²⁷ and UBS⁴.

Assignment to be discussed in class. Students will be expected to translate Eph. 1:1 and 4:9 from the Greek.

pt. b.)Textual Criticism (continued)
5. (Wed., Oct. 1) Textual Criticism (continued)

Due: Second class assignment on textual criticism

Description of the assignment: on the sheets entitled "worksheet for the Evaluation of a Textual Variant," evaluate the variants for Ephesians 1:1 and 4:9. On a separate sheet of paper, briefly indicate which variant you think is original and why. Assignment to be discussed in class.

*****No Class on Tuesday, October 8 (Reading Week)*****

6. (Wed., Oct. 15) Textual Criticism (continued)

7. (Wed., Oct. 22) Introduction to the Jewish Historical-Cultural Context

*Fee, Handbook, 32, 93-101 (old edition); 41, 114-123 (third edition)

*There will be sessions to instruct students about how to become acquainted with the necessary tools and sources needed for the Historical Context Text Collection. For a method of understanding the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural and historical background to a passage see *Fee, Handbook, 93-101 (old ed.); 114-123 (3rd ed.); see the end of the syllabus and Anderson, Tools for Bibliographical and Backgrounds Research on the New Testament, xvii-xxii, 22-35. The professor can also be consulted for help in becoming acquainted with these tools.*

8. (Wed., Oct. 29) Jewish Historical-Cultural Context

*G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 446-453 ("Silence") and 1109-1111 ("The Worldwide Extent of the Paradisal City").

9. (Wed., Nov. 5) pt. a.) Greco-Roman Historical-Context

*A. J. Malherbe, "'Gentle as a Nurse.' The Cynic Background to 1 Thess ii."

pt. b.) Further discussion of the Jewish Historical-Cultural Context 12

10. (Wed., Nov. 12) Library tour on the Use of Jewish and Greco-Roman Primary Sources (location of the library to be discussed: either at DTS or Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology.

NO CLASS ON WED., NOV. 19: PROFESSOR IN BOSTON FOR THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND INSTITUTE FOR BIBLICAL RESEARCH CONFERENCES

11. (Wed., Nov. 26) Case studies in Jewish and Greco-Roman Backgrounds

12. (Wed., Dec. 3) Case studies in Jewish and Greco-Roman Backgrounds

12. (Wed., Dec. 17) Seminar on Results from the Student Assignments; Conclusion to the Course (at Beale's home library; followed by pizza dinner.