PLEASE NOTE CAREFULLY:
The full set of school regulations and procedures is contained in the Undergraduate Student Handbook which is available online at your MyAberdeen Organisation page. Students are expected to familiarise themselves not only with the contents of this leaflet but also with the contents of the Handbook. Therefore, ignorance of the contents of the Handbook will not excuse the breach of any School regulation or procedure.
You must familiarise yourself with this important information at the earliest opportunity.

COURSE CO-ORDINATOR
Professor Grant Macaskill
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Office Hours: Mon: 3-4pm. Tues 11:00a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Discipline Administration:
Claire Hargaden
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TIMETABLE
Lectures: Mondays, 2pm–3pm, MacRobert, MR265; Thursdays 12pm–1pm, MacRobert, MR266

Tutorials: Tuesdays 9am–10am, MacRobert, MR265

*Students can view their university timetable at*


COURSE DESCRIPTION

The New Testament is a small library of 27 texts, produced by followers of Jesus in the period A.D. 30 to 120 or so, which has had a unique impact on Western civilization. This course explores such issues as these: the formation of the New Testament collection; the NT manuscripts that have reached us, and the problems of establishing the "correct" text and translation; criteria for establishing the authorship and chronology of the texts; what Paul’s letters reveal about both his self-understanding and that of other groups in the first Christian generation; what the gospels and Acts reveal about unity and diversity in the second generation and possibly later; what other NT writings and texts that did not find a place in this collection have to say about these issues. Since these texts hint at the complex relations between the new groups of Christ's followers, on the one hand, and both Jewish and Graeco-Roman society on the other, those questions also arise in a preliminary way.

INTENDED AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course provides a solid introduction to the first three generations of Christianity and the consequential texts it generated. The goal is to familiarize the student with the key primary texts from historical and literary perspectives. The course thus furnishes the student with a first set of reference-points and learning experiences, which will be valuable in its own right but might also serve as a foundation for further study in depth.

On successful completion of this course the student will:

- know how to bring standard historical questions to the New Testament texts
- understand the criteria for (and problems with) ascertaining the dates, authors, and locations of many New Testament writings, the manuscript evidence on which our texts and translations are based, and some central issues, debates, and anxieties that occupied the first, second, and third generations of Christ’s followers
- be able to distinguish, identify, and explain passages from different NT texts on the basis of themes and language
- read both primary and secondary texts more actively, with a curious and problem-solving mindset
- be aware of the most significant current debates in New Testament scholarship

**TEXTS AND READINGS**

The reading for this course is not extensive, but it requires thoughtful concentration each week. The goal is not to learn many scholars’ views about x and y, but for you to spend ‘quality time’ with some of the most important texts in Western civilization, to learn their contents and original contexts, so to acquire a confident grasp of this vital part of our heritage. Most weeks, we will consider blocks of text from the New Testament. If you do not have a copy of the New Testament, or if you wish to consult other versions, you will find the text at [http://www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

The recommended textbook for the module is the two-volume, *Exploring the New Testament*:


You are strongly advised to purchase the revised version listed above, which is available from Blackwells or online.

You may also wish to consult Steve Mason and Tom Robinson, *Early Christian Reader*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013, which is available in the library.

This is your course, and much of your learning will take place when you are alone, reading and thinking. The classroom is only a small part of the experience, where we highlight issues and work through some aspects of what you have been reading. If you have not been reading, you are not really taking the course.

**LECTURE/TUTORIAL PROGRAMME WITH READINGS**

The schedule calls for two lectures and one tutorial per week. This is not a rigid distinction: the lectures will be participatory and the tutorials will include explaining where necessary.

Lectures: The lecture material is broken into various areas, assigned to different weeks of the course. The outline that follows does not specify the material that will be covered in each meeting of the class, but rather broadly according to the weeks of the module.

Tutorials: each week, there are assigned texts from the New Testament and the linked sections from the textbook. The readings listed for each week must be done in advance of that class. In most cases, some basic questions have been provided to focus your preparation. You should also prepare a list of further questions that you
want to discuss. Prioritise reading the New Testament texts themselves: the textbook is merely to assist you in this primary task.

**Week 1: Introducing the Introduction – Central Debates in New Testament Study**

Issues covered:

- What is the object of our study?
- The question of coherence: How do we explore it? How do we distinguish difference from division? Where do we start? How does this bear on method (including review of methods)?
- The Canon Debate and its Current Shape.
- Introducing the manuscript evidence and the practice of textual criticism.
- Roman Imperial Power
- Topography, Geography and religion: Galilee, Jerusalem, Rome
- Religious contexts: Judaism and the Roman world

**NOTE: THERE IS NO TUTORIAL IN WEEK 1, BUT READ EXPLORING THE NEW TESTAMENT, VOL 1, 3-44, AND VOL 2, 3-20.**

**Weeks 2-3: The Synoptic Gospels and the Jesus Tradition**

Issues covered:

- The genre and character of the gospels and methodological considerations.
- The Synoptic Problem
- Gospel-specific methods (form, source, redaction criticism and more recent critical methods)
- The outline of the gospel story and debates about authenticity of specific elements: the study of ‘the Historical Jesus’.
- The development of Christological beliefs and their relationship to the contents of the gospels.
- Preliminary comments on the Fourfold Gospel

**Tutorial, week 2:** Gospel synopsis and critical methods. A ‘synopsis’ will be distributed to the class, using which we will examine the correspondences and differences between the versions of the same story or teaching found in the three synoptic gospels. In preparation for the tutorial, study this and label what is unique to one version and what is shared with other versions (e.g., by colour coding). Read Exploring the New Testament, vol 1, 49-134.

**Tutorial, week 3:** Read all three gospels and the relevant introductions to each. In Exploring the New Testament, vol 1, 137-254. Identify some distinctive characteristics of each gospel. Be prepared to talk about these, pointing to specific passages that reflect these.

**Week 4: The Book of Acts, the Jerusalem Church and the Apostle Paul**

- The character of Acts and the major debates
- The storyline of Acts and the central themes:
  - The gospel proclamation: is Luke interested in the death of Jesus, or just ‘salvation history’?
  - The inclusion of the Gentiles (and displacement of Israel?)
- The Jerusalem Council.
- Pro-Roman agenda?
- The Christology of Acts?

- The representation of Saul of Tarsus/Paul in Acts and the historical problems associated.

- **Tutorial, Week 4**: Read all of Acts and the discussion of this in *Exploring the New Testament vol 1*, 283-317. Pay particular attention to the passages that describe the Spirit and to the account of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. Bring questions for discussion to the tutorial.

**Weeks 5-7: The Pauline Epistles**

Issues covered:

- The major debates:
  - Which letters are actually Paul’s?
  - Contingency or coherence. Is there a center to Paul’s theology?
  - The New Perspective and the Apocalyptic Paul.
  - The use of the Old Testament and the question of reader competency.
  - Paul and the Development of Christology

- Romans, Galatians and the New Perspective; Philippians and the Thessalonian Letters.
  - Paul’s account of salvation (history) in greater detail: what is the problem of sin and how does it relate to the law and to the promise (or the gift)?
  - How does this relate to ‘eschatology’?
  - Paul’s Christology: High, low or evolving?

- The Corinthian Correspondence
  - Major themes: the Church, the Spirit, The unity of the ‘Body of Christ’.
  - Major problems faced: Roman status; idolatry; division.

- Ephesians and Colossians; The Pastoral Epistles
  - Debates concerning authorship
  - Trends in interpretation.
  - Recent approaches drawing on Jewish mystical categories.

- **Tutorial Week 5**: Read Romans, Galatians and 1 Thessalonians and the *Exploring the New Testament, vol 2*: 47-74 and 111-157. If you have time, also read pages 201-219. Pay particular attention to how Paul uses the words ‘righteousness’ and ‘salvation’, and how he uses the images of adoption and judgment. How would you articulate Paul’s gospel in a few sentences?

- **Tutorial Week 6**: Read 1st and 2nd Corinthians and *Exploring the New Testament, vol 2*: 77-109. Pay particular attention to 1 Cor 10-12 and to the relationship between the discussion of the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper) and the representation of the Church as the ‘body of Christ’. What part does the Eucharist play in influencing Christian morality/ethics?
• **Tutorial Week 7:** Read Ephesians and Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy and *Exploring the New Testament*, vol 159-199. What are some of the similarities and differences between this material and the undisputed Pauline letters?

**Weeks 8-9: Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles (excluding Johannine letters)**

Issues covered:

- When and why was the Epistle to the Hebrews written?
- What is the genre of the epistle?
- What are the major claims of Hebrews about Jesus and about the character of salvation?
- Is Hebrews Platonic?
- How does Hebrews relate to Jewish traditions and texts of the Second Temple period?

- Who is the author of the Epistle of James?
- What kind of Christianity is represented by the Epistle of James and how does it relate to the wider New Testament?
- How do 1 and 2 Peter relate to one another and to the wider New Testament?
- Questions of conflict and persecution.
- F.C. Baur and the Tübingen school.
- How does Jude relate to other New Testament writings and to earlier Jewish writings?
- The use of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible in the Catholic Epistles

- The canon debates and the Catholic Epistles.

• **Tutorial Week 8:** Read the Epistle to the Hebrews and *Exploring the New Testament*, vol 2: 243-260. Pay particular attention to the representation of Jesus as ‘heavenly high priest’. How is salvation represented by means of this image? How does this role relate to the identity of Jesus? Is the theology here compatible with what we have encountered in other parts of the New Testament?

• **Tutorial Week 9:** Read James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter and Jude, along with *Exploring the New Testament*, vol 2: 261-304.

**Week 10: The Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles**

- Differences between John’s Gospel and the Synoptics.
- Was there a Johannine community and does this explain the distinctive character of the Fourth Gospel?
- Recent discussions of the authorship of John
- Themes and structures in the Fourth Gospel: signs, sayings, passion.
- Is John a unified composition or a collation of sources?
- The Fourth Gospel and the Historical Jesus
- Johannine Christology and theories of Christological development.
- The relationship between the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles.
- The theology of the Johannine Epistles.
• **Tutorial Week 10:** Read John’s Gospel and the three Epistles of John, along with *Exploring the New Testament, vol 1:* 257-279 and *vol 2:* 305-318. Focus particularly on the prologue to John’s Gospel (John 1:1-18) and on the ‘I am’ sayings. A list of these sayings will be distributed to students ahead of the seminar (there are more of them than you may think). How is the identity of Jesus represented in these texts and how does this relate to the author’s representation of salvation?

**Week 11: The Apocalypse of John (Revelation).**

Issues covered:
- The geographical association of the Apocalypse with the eastern empire.
- The apocalypse in the canon.
- The character and referents of the apocalyptic imagery: future or present?
- Roman imperial imagery and the re-use of biblical imagery.
- The Apocalypse and the question of end-time expectations.
- The ‘problem’ of violent imagery in the Apocalypse.

**Tutorial Week 11:** Read the Apocalypse of John and *Exploring the New Testament, vol 2:* 303-325. See also the links to online articles listed on the MyAberdeen page for the course. There is no specific task for this week, other than to reflect on how Revelation would have been read by its first audience: how would they have understood the imagery it contained?

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**ASSESSMENT**

This course is assessed in two ways. The essay (for 50% of the mark) offers the chance to explore a relevant question in some depth. The one-hour final examination (50%) tests knowledge of the course material in general.

**PLEASE NOTE:** In order to pass a course on the first attempt, a student must attain a Common Grading Scale (CGS) mark of at least E3 on each element of course assessment. Failure to do so will result in a grade of no greater than CGS E1 for the course as a whole.

*Click to view the University Level Descriptors (ANNEX A).*

*Click to view the University Assessment Scale Band Descriptors (ANNEX B).*

**ESSAYS AND TOPICS**

Essays should be between 1500 and 2000 words in length, not counting any footnotes and bibliography.

Choose any one of the following essay topics/questions. A folder on the MyAberdeen page for the course will contain bibliography and links to online resources relevant to
the topic. In each case, the essay will lead you into matters of debate in New Testament scholarship and the task requires you to demonstrate critical awareness of these.

1. What kind of literature are the Synoptic Gospels and what implications does the answer to this question have for how we read and interpret them?  
   Suggested areas for exploration: the genre of the synoptic gospels; the relationship to prior sources; evidence for reliance on eye-witness accounts; the validity of different critical methodologies, such as form and redaction criticism.

2. Should we consider the four ‘canonical gospels’ to be more reliable than the ‘non-canonical’ gospels of which we are now aware?  
   Suggested areas for discussion: the significance of canonical status; the (debated) value of early church evidence; the character of the content of non-canonical texts; evidence of association with different movements within early Christianity (e.g., Gnosticism); what is meant by ‘reliable’?

**ASSESSMENT DEADLINES**

Essays are due on **Friday, 27th November 2015 at 3pm** (see next section for details). In fairness to everyone, unexcused late submissions will be penalised by one CGS level for every two working days the essay is late, beginning at 3:01 p.m. on 27th November. Obviously, it would be hazardous and unwise to leave submission to the last possible minute.

A student who has extra time to complete an essay has an unfair advantage over others in the same marking group. Therefore, outside of standard provisions for medical and other unforeseen emergencies, as a matter of fairness individual extensions will not be granted. You are of course free to ask, before the deadline, if you feel you have some extraordinary need (not due to work overload or conflicting due dates, which everyone faces). But you should understand that an extension is unlikely. Instructor’s tip: Give yourself a mock deadline, a week or more earlier than the actual due date, and commit yourself to meeting it. Then you can breathe easily when the real deadline approaches.

**SUBMISSION ARRANGEMENTS**

Submit **one paper copy** to the drop boxes in CB008 in 50-52 College Bounds and **one electronic copy** to Turnitin via MyAberdeen. Both copies to be submitted by 3.00pm on the due date.

Please note: Failure to submit both an electronic copy to TurnitinUK and an identical paper copy, with the digital receipt attached, will result in a deduction of marks. Failure to submit to TurnitinUK will result in a zero mark.
EXAMINATION
The examination in this course tests for breadth of knowledge. It comprises two parts: (a) an integrative essay question and (b) a selection of terms to identify. In (a) you will be asked to choose one essay topic from three. All will deal with relatively large questions, allowing you freedom to use examples from throughout the course to develop your case. You should take about half an hour to write a brief, three-to-five paragraph essay reflecting on the question. In part (b) you will be given six words or phrases (e.g., a significant person, place, event, or text) and asked to choose three for brief discussion. Taking about ten minutes for each, write a paragraph that shows your understanding of the term in question and its relationship to the origins of Christianity.

RESIT INFORMATION
The resit is a two-hour written examination (100%).

Access to the resit is provisional on:

- All submitted coursework having been submitted and graded at CGS E3 or higher.
- New Coursework can be submitted in agreement with the course co-ordinator. It is the student’s responsibility to contact the co-ordinator if the student has failed a course. The final date for resubmission of coursework is the Thursday of Revision week in the half-session in which the course is taught.
- Student having a valid Class Certificate. Students with C7s are not eligible for resits.

Past exam papers can be viewed at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/learning-and-teaching/for-students/exam-papers/.

DIGITAL RESOURCES
There is a vast and rapidly increasing amount of good material for serious study on the internet, though the signal : noise ratio remains relatively tiny. In all areas related to Christian origins the web is dominated by people with too much spare time and axes to grind. Their sites won’t kill you, but they are a waste of precious time. Credible sites for the academically curious, which tend to open-ended gateways to other tools and resources, include these:

http://www.ntgateway.com — best and fullest
http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/new.htm
http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/index.html
http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Geography.htm
http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Jewish_Groups.htm
There are several outstanding commercial packages for NT-related study, for PC and Mac. Their basic versions are affordable, though they can become expensive with the addition of modules. If you have questions about their range and capabilities, the instructor may be able to help.