

NS500 “New Testament 1: Introduction to the Gospels” (Fuller Online) Course Preview!

Even if you have already enrolled in the online version of NS500, access to the course itself will not be available until the first day of the quarter. So, what can you do meanwhile, if you want to get a jump on things? This brief set of suggestions is intended to help you get that jump, and to do it “effectively”!

- First, once your advisor has registered you, you will be set up in the Online system by the Fuller Online Coordinator, Chris Nelson. Chris will send you an email informing you that you are now a registered Fuller student in NS500 online.
- If you have any questions about your login information please contact Chris at magl@fuller.edu
- Next, once you have logged into the online system, open and “take” the “Student Orientation Tutorial.” Make sure you understand how the eCollege environment works and how the courses are set up. There may be questions about this preliminary information on quizzes in NS500!
- On the Extended Course Description for NS500, you’ll find the course described in various ways, including *a list of the required textbooks*. ***Purchase, order, or otherwise obtain copies of all required textbooks now! Do not delay!*** We plunge right in with them from day one, so any delay in your getting them will only hinder you in the course.
- One good way to get a head start on the course work is to begin reading the required material. For the most part, we will work through the books little by little, so it will not be especially useful to read any of them start-to-finish before the course gets going. However, things you can do now are the following, which cover most of the reading assigned for the first two weeks of the course.
 - Preliminarily examine each of the required books by reading the cover blurbs and preface for each one, and by studying its table of contents.
 - Read Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels*, pp. 1-37, 139-143.
 - Read Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 3-17.
 - The instructions on the next two pages are lifted right out of the website; they concern the “primary texts” assignment. Read them through carefully, and then feel free to get going on this particular assignment now. It’s due the third week of class.

Once the quarter begins and you have access into the course itself, let your first act be to read very carefully through *all* the material posted under the button labeled “Course Home.” This material is essential to understanding this particular course and its design, and all of it is subject to random quiz questions!

Instructions for Your Response to Reading "Primary" Texts (Week 3):

GOALS FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT:

- Introduce students first-hand to the wealth of relevant material surviving from antiquity
- Encourage students to make a habit of immersing themselves sympathetically in the historical-cultural world of the New Testament Gospels, as a way of improving their understanding of the Gospels
- Foster an appreciation of the fact that events narrated in the Gospels, and the writing of the Gospels themselves, "occurred" in real human history
- Promote the skill of listening with integrity

Read at least 100 pages selected from any of the ancient documents listed below. If you wish to read something that is not on this list, clear it with me first by telling me *in writing* (a) what you wish to read and (b) why you wish to read it instead of a document from the list.

BEFORE you begin work in a particular ancient document, read a brief introductory essay *on that document* to orient yourself to its presumed historical setting and its main concerns. You are entering what is for most of us *terra incognita*. You can find this sort of orientation in Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and introductions to the edition you are reading from, as well as in separate monographs. For example, if you choose to read the apocalyptic book of 1 Enoch (part of the Old Testament writings known as "pseudepigrapha"), do not start by just beginning to read 1 Enoch. Get some information about it — its origins, its "argument," its place in the scheme of ancient things. Likewise, read up a little on 1 Maccabees, if you happen to select it from among the works of the OT Apocrypha; the NRSV, for example, introduces it with a short and helpful essay. ***This orientational reading is not to be reckoned among the required 100 pages of primary text, however.***

If you wish to focus your essay on just one document, say the Book of 1 Maccabees, or the Book of Fourth Ezra, even though it does not cover the minimum 100 pages, that is perfectly fine. Just be sure to list for me the other documents you read in addition as part of the 100 pages, so that I have a basis on which to give you full credit for your reading.

As you read, keep track of surprises, new information, and insights that come to you in connection with the world of the early church and the canonical Gospels. Remember that passages bringing *direct* illumination

to biblical texts are fairly rare; that is, references to specific events and characters in the New Testament, such as the Jesus' crucifixion or Simon Peter, hardly ever occur. What you will be gathering most of the time is a sense of the "life and times," of "being there," of seeing first-hand what was important to the people who lived and died very close to the place and time of the events recorded in the NT Gospels. Gradually, this kind of discipline will increase your ability to hear the Gospels as their first hearers heard them, an extremely important skill for hearing them yourself on their own terms. Do not use this exercise to relate these documents to the world we ourselves live in today. That's an interesting subject, but it's not the point of this assignment.

BUT NOTE WELL: you are *not* asked to critique these documents for orthodoxy. If you use this assignment for showing me how far from biblical truth your selected documents have strayed, you will get *no credit* for the assignment. Your job here — as with reading the Gospels themselves or discussing a touchy subject with your spouse — is to listen sympathetically, not to judge. By all means, read and listen *critically*, but do so in order to understand, not in order to conduct an inquisition. The goal here is to understand how the world looked to the people Jesus first came to and to the people the Gospels were first written to. Use this assignment to peer through a window into the ancient world of the early church and the writing of the canonical Gospels.

In a maximum 2000-word essay, summarize what you learned from this exercise, what new perspective(s) it provided you, either in reference to the Gospels generally or to some specific passage or passages. Cite your sources, but don't fill your paper with long quotations from them. (If you want to preserve long quotations for your own sake or for my reference when I read your paper, you may place them in an appendix *outside* the page limit.)

Choose your minimum 100 pages from the following list (click here to go to the [Course Bibliography](#), a.k.a. the Recommended Reading list in the **Syllabus**, under the heading "Editions of Recommended Primary Texts," at the end of the list):

- The Dead Sea Scrolls
- The Mishna
- The Old Testament Apocrypha (included in many Bibles)
- Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (books 11-20)
- Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*
- The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

Editions of Recommended Primary Texts

- Charlesworth, J. H., ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols.; Doubleday, 1983-1985.
- Danby, H. *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew, with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes*. Oxford, 1933.
- Neusner, J. *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. Yale, 1988.
- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (NRSV). Oxford, 1991, 1994.
- Vermes, G. *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*. Fortress, 2000.
- Wise, M., M. Abegg, Jr., and E. Cook. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.
- *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Trans. W. Whiston; Hendrickson, 1987.