

NT 123-3: Letters and Revelation

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Fall 2023

Course Information

Day: Tuesdays & Thursdays

Time: 1:30-2:50pm

Location: Nelson 118

Instructor: Anna Bowden

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Office: Schlegel 300

Course Description

The New Testament is a central and generative document of Christian faith and of Western culture, but it poses significant interpretive challenges because the world and worldview presumed by its authors and first readers were vastly different from our own. This course will offer students a broad orientation to historical, literary, and theological issues raised by critical interpretation of the New Testament (focusing on the Epistles and Revelation), and nurture skills for using it as a source for understanding early Christianity and for theological reflection.

Course Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course a student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the general content and organization of the New Testament
2. Analyze and exposit scriptural texts from the NT epistles, taking into consideration the world behind the text, the world within the text, and the world in front of the text.
3. Competently use major tools for the exegetical study of a passage from a NT epistle, including print and digital resources
4. Reflect critically on competing paradigms for biblical interpretation, with particular attention to the dismantling of racist, sexist, heteronormative and other oppressive readings of NT texts. [Many other institutionalized forms of oppression exist and could be listed here. A more complete list might include ableism, ageism, ethnocentrism, religious intolerance, nativism, and transphobia, among others.]

Relationship to Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

The primary SLOs for this course are:

1. SLO 1 for the MDiv and MAR degree programs: Students will gain knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the ability to use critical skills and educated imagination to interpret it in contemporary social and cultural contexts.
2. QEP/SLO: Describe strategies, grounded in their practice, for working toward racial justice appropriate to their particular vocational setting. Students can demonstrate competence with this SLO in many ways including, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Defining and using key terms in way informed by an understanding systemic racism
 - b. Identifying racism in its many manifestations (structural, personal, communal, etc.)
 - c. Critical reflection on the history and current contexts regarding race, racism, and antiracism

- d. Critical reflection on racist and antiracist practices and theologies
- e. Developing and implementing antiracist policies, practices, and theologies

Required Books

- Carter, Warren. *Seven Events that Shaped the New Testament World*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. ISBN: 9780801039164
- Marchal, Joseph A., ed. *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012. ISBN: 9780800698188
- One of the following NRSV study bibles: *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Coogan), *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (Attridge), or *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Levine)
- Library eBooks: <https://lpts.on.worldcat.org/courseReserves/course/id/19822828>

Recommended Book

- Mayfield, Tyler. *A Guide to Bible Basics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018). ISBN: 9780664263454.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation

The success of this class is dependent on your attendance, preparation, and participation. Please come to every class and come prepared. Preparation includes reading the assigned readings before coming to class and bringing either a digital or print copy of the readings with you to class. Participation looks different for different people, but may include things like active listening, taking notes, asking questions, sharing answers/mistakes with classmates, and engaging in classroom exercises.

Reading Journal (20%) – CO 1 & 4

For this assignment students will write short reflections (1-2 pages, double-spaced) on the assigned readings in Units 2 and 3. Think of the reflections as an academic diary. This is an opportunity for you to write whatever is on your mind. Maybe the reading reminding you of something in your life or maybe it brought up a lot of questions you want to explore. Maybe you loved the reading and want to think about other ways it might impact your studies or maybe you disliked the reading and want to complain. Whatever is on your mind is okay – just write! Because the point of the assignment is to get you thinking ahead of time about the readings we will discuss in class, journals are due at the beginning of class in hardcopy. There are 20 dates/opportunities to submit a journal. Grades will be assigned as followed:

Criteria	Grade
Submits at least 16 journals and submits all journals on time.	4
Submits at least 14 journals, mostly on time.	3
Submits at least 10 journals	2
Submits at least 5 journals	1

Reflection Paper #1 (15%) – CO 1

A short reflection paper on *Seven Events that Shaped the New Testament World* is due **September 17th**. For this paper I want you to reflect on the historical information presented in the book. How has it shaped your understanding of the New Testament and in what ways do you imagine using this information looking forward. Put differently, I want you to answer the question: What did you learn and why does it matter?

Some questions you might address in your reflection include (but are not limited to):

- Which event do you think is the most important? Or least important? And why?
- How does an understanding of these events inform your future ministries?
- Would you recommend this book to someone in your church or faith community?
- Did you read anything that surprised you? If so, how or why?
- How does the material in this book fit with your understanding of the NT prior to reading this book? Is it in line with what you learned previously or is it different? Give specifics.
- What did you find the most challenging from the reading? The most rewarding?
- Would others in your faith community find value in this book or would they find points of contention?
- Does understanding the events described in this book impact the way you read the NT? If so, how? If not, why?

Your paper should be 3-5 pages in length, double spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt. font, with 1-inch margins. Please submit your paper as either a Word document or a PDF to Canvas by the end of the day (11:59pm) on Sunday, September 17th. The assignment is worth four points and will be graded using the grading rubric on Canvas.

Reflection Paper #2 (15%) – CO 2 & 4

A short reflection paper on *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods* is due **October 15**. For this paper I want you to reflect on the methods of interpretation presented in the book, on the resulting interpretations of Paul's letters, and on what you came away with from the book. Note: This paper should be a *reflection on the reading*, *not* a summary of it. Tell me what you think!

Some questions you might address in your reflection include:

- Compare and contrast the methods of interpretation presented: What method did you find most valuable; what did you find the least valuable; and why?
- What did you appreciate; what did you dislike? What do you take away from these likes and dislikes?
- What methods do you imagine yourself using in the future and why?
- How does what you've learned from the book square with what you've learned in other classes, at church, or from your own general experience/knowledge?
- What surprised you; what disturbed you; and how do you learn from your own surprises and disturbances?
- Did anything you read lead you to think differently about the way you interpret Paul's letters or the Bible in general?

Your paper should be 3-5 pages in length, double spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt. font, with 1-inch margins. Please submit your paper as either a Word document or a PDF to Canvas by the end of the day (11:59pm) on Sunday, October 15. The assignment is worth four points and will be graded using the grading rubric on Canvas.

Discussion Leader (20%) – CO 2 & 4

Each student will sign up to be a discussion leader for one class period on the calendar. For this assignment students will lead the class in a discussion of the assigned reading for the day (about 25 minutes). Their leadership should provide a brief summary of the reading and its argument, highlight key passages in the reading, put forward questions or topics for further discussion, and facilitate meaningful conversation that assures space for the participation of all students. The student might wish to prepare a handout ahead of class to aid in the discussion, a PowerPoint presentation is not necessary. The assignment will be worth four points and graded according to the grading rubric on Canvas. Please consult the signup sheet for your due date.

Final Exegesis Project (30%) – CO 2, 3 & 4

A final exegetical research project is due at the end of the semester. This assignment is due by the end of the day on **December 14th**. For this assignment students will choose a biblical text from either the Epistles or Revelation to exegete. Students may choose to write an exegesis paper (10-12 pages, double-spaced) for this assignment *or* to do an exegetical project with a written analysis of the project (equal in total work/length to an exegesis paper). The opportunities for projects are endless, but examples include: a bible study, a series of prayers or devotions, a song, a piece of art, a sermon, a social media campaign, a children's book, a podcast, etc.).

The exegetical paper/project should include:

- a description and overview of the passage you are interpreting (Passage)
- explanation of why this passage is of interest to you (My Interests)
- engagement with at least one quality academic source that engages the world behind the text (World Behind the Text)
- engagement with at least one quality academic source that engages the world within the text (World within the Text)
- engagement with at least one quality academic source that engages the world behind the text (World in Front of the Text)
- your unique interpretation of the text given your exegetical work (My Interpretation)
- an explanation of how your exegetical work on the passage or final interpretation might inform your work or life (Conclusion)

Helpful Tip: To ensure you address each bullet point in an exegetical paper, you might choose to use the parenthetical words as headings in your paper.

This assignment is worth four points and will be graded according to the Grading Rubric on Canvas. Please upload a Word document or PDF to Canvas by the end of day (11:59pm) on Thursday, December 14.

Grading

In an attempt to make grading more transparent and equitable, this course adopts a 4-point grading scale and utilizes grading rubrics and assignments linked to course outcomes.

Why not use a traditional, 100-pt scale?

The 100-pt scale is a vestige of the early 20th century, in which the goal of education was to sort and compare students (decidedly not the goal of this class!). That alone makes me question the traditional practice. But there's more! According to the research cited in *Grading for Equity* by Joe Feldman (Corwin 2019), the 100-pt scale is prone to error and excessive variance. Perhaps the most compelling reason to use an alternative scale is that the 100-pt scale is also oriented toward failure: the scale has over sixty points dedicated to failure (0-59), while only twenty points dedicated to proficiency (B or above)! These divisions make it almost impossible for students to overcome a low grade.

Grading Scale

- 4 – Exceeding Outcomes
- 3 – Meeting Outcomes
- 2 – Approaching Outcomes
- 1 – Not Yet Met Outcomes
- IE – Insufficient Evidence

(Note: I may occasionally determine a student is between two categories and score accordingly. In these instances, it is possible to earn a 2.5 or a 3.5).

Final Course Grade

It is necessary to get a grade of at least 2 on the Final Exegesis Project to pass the class.

The final grade for this course will be calculated as follows:

- Reading Journal (20%)
- Reflection Paper #1 (15%)
- Reflection Paper #2 (15%)
- Discussion Leader (20%)
- Exegesis Project (30%)

Translation to Letter Grade

- 3.8-4.0 = A
- 3.4-3.7 = A-
- 3.1-3.3 = B+
- 2.8-3.0 = B
- 2.4-2.7 = B-
- 2.1-2.3 = C+
- 1.8-2.0 = C
- 1.4-1.7 = C-
- 1.1-1.3 = D+
- 0.8-1.0 = D

Course & School Policies

Late Policy & Re-dos

I understand that you have lives that are at times outside of your control and I understand that you have other classes with due dates that at times might compete with our class schedule. For this reason, I will always accept late work and allow unlimited re-dos of previous assignments. If you wish to resubmit an assignment, send me an email so we can make the necessary arrangements. There will be final deadlines for re-dos, though. While I care about students and I am happy to be flexible, I still need boundaries to keep my own personal and professional life healthy. I will give plenty of notice ahead of time when a re-do deadline is approaching.

Important: Please be aware that the class will be moving on should you miss an assignment. If you don't follow the suggested course schedule and complete your work on time, you're just piling it up for yourself for later.

Written Assignments

All written assignments must be typed, double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font, have 1-inch margins, and numbered pages. Your name, the course name/number, the assignment title, and date should be in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, in class discussions and in written and oral communication please use language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy, but when referring to God please use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site on "Inclusive and Expansive Language" (available [here](#)).

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Resources for Instruction, Learning, and Technology at LPTS

- To access the Library and its resources, visit: <https://lpts.libguides.com/Research/eBooks>
- To request a library laptop loan, contact the Online Help Desk – library@lpts.edu
- For general help with campus network access, Outlook (email), contact support@lpts.edu
- For assistance with Canvas, contact Carolyn Cardwell, ccardwell@lpts.edu
- For Academic Support for any of your studies, contact the ASC: Beth Herrinton-Hodge at bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu or Sherry Arconti at sarconti@lpts.edu

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructor is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language (including A.I. chatbots) or ideas from online resources is included in this policy and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Most courses at LPTS will require that you write papers. Some will be “journal type” writing, offering theological reflecting, and some will be research papers in which you incorporate the research and ideas of others to help support your points. Some of you will actually publish some of your papers in various theological journals. In all cases, your papers should be of professional academic quality.

In your research papers, you must document any information that is not “universally known” or that you did not know before your investigation of the subject. In academic papers and professional journals, you can make some assumptions about your readers since you know that you have some level of shared expertise. However, any use of information without proper documentation is considered plagiarism.

Sometimes students inadvertently use the works of others without correctly citing the source of the information. Remember, when you use someone's ideas you must give credit to that source. If you are using the author's exact words use quotation marks around the passage and then, using the appropriate documentation style, give the full citation information. These mistakes are usually unintentional but are nonetheless plagiarism.

Another problem occasionally arises when summarizing material. Even when you put the author's ideas in your own words, it is necessary to give the citation information. Sometimes, writers summarize and correctly document their sources, but the summaries are too similar to the original. Phrases and groups of words from the original text might not be rewritten in the writer's “language” but retain too much of the original author's style. This is often tricky but is still considered plagiarism.

A special form of plagiarism is self-plagiarism or “double-dipping”: reusing an assignment written for another course (whether at LPTS or elsewhere) or incorporating a substantial portion of work submitted for another course in an assignment submission. Assignments are course-specific and related to the distinctive pedagogical aims of a class. When a student attempts to recycle previous work, whether they intend to deceive or not, they frustrate the aims of teaching and learning in their course as well as the expectation that their submissions represent their fresh, original, and current understanding. In certain exceptional cases (for example, the MAR course Research Methods and Practices) “double-dipping” may be allowed when it serves the aims of two courses, ordinarily taken in the same term, but only with the understanding and express permission of the instructors of both courses. In most other cases, self-plagiarism (or “double-

dipping”) is academically dishonest practice and should be understood as a variety of plagiarism as defined in this policy. If you are uncertain about what “substantial” re-use of previous work means or whether an exception to this policy applies to your work for a course, you should speak to your instructor for clarification.

Plagiarism is not only unethical but also illegal. Ignorance is not an excuse.

When a professor judges a student’s work to have been plagiarized, or to be subject to academic dishonesty, the following steps will be taken:

1. The instructor and the student shall have a consultation in which the assignment in question and the issue of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be discussed.
2. If, in the instructor’s judgment, it is unequivocal that a student has plagiarized or used dishonest academic methods in preparing an exercise, the grade for that particular piece shall be judged an “F” or a numerical grade of zero. Any opportunity to redo the exercise is left to the discretion of the instructor.
3. The instructor shall promptly notify the Dean about the incident of plagiarism or academic dishonesty.
4. Such notification will be confidential written communication among the instructor, the Dean, and the student.
5. Two incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty by the same student shall be grounds for dismissal from the Seminary.
6. A student wishing to appeal the judgment of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may use the established procedures for appealing grades.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 7th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2020.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center. See also the library’s citation help center: <https://lpts.libguides.com/digitalresources/citingsources>.

Course Schedule

NT: 123-3 Letters and Revelation

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30-2:50pm

Unit 1 – An Introduction to the New Testament and its Letters

Thursday, Sept 7 – Introductions

Read: *Seven Events*, Chapters 1-3

Tuesday, Sept 12 – Seven Events

Read: *Seven Events*, Chapters 4-5

Thursday, Sept 14 – Seven Events

Read: *Seven Events*, Chapters 6-7

Due: Reflection Paper #1 due Sunday, September 17 by end of day (11:59pm)

Unit 2 – Paul, Paul’s Letters, and Early Christian Communities

Tuesday, Sept 19 – Introduction to Methods

Read: Joseph A. Marchal, “Asking the Right Questions?” (SPL)

Thursday Sept 21 – Thessalonians

Read: Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, “Historical Approaches: Which Past? Whose Past?” (SPL); Jeremy Punt, “Postcolonial Approaches: Negotiating Empires, Then and Now” (SPL)

Tuesday, Sept 26 – Galatians

Read: Davina Lopez, “Visual Perspectives: Imag(in)ing the Big Pauline Picture” (SPL); Pamela Eisenbaum, “Jewish Perspective: A Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles” (SPL)

Thursday, Sept 28 – Galatians

Read: Sze-kar Wan, “Asian American Perspectives: Ambivalence of the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner” (SPL); Joseph A. Marchal, “Queer Approaches: Improper Relations with Pauline Letters” (SPL); Angela Parker, “One Womanist’s View of Racial Reconciliation in Galtians” - CANVAS

Tuesday, Oct 3 – Romans

Read: Peter S. Oakes, “Economic Approaches: Scarce Resources and Interpretive Opportunities” (SPL)

Thursday, Oct 5 – Romans

Read: Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, “Feminist Approaches: Rethinking History and Resisting Ideologies” (SPL)

Tuesday, Oct 10 – Philippians

Read: Todd Penner and Davina Lopez, “Rhetorical Approaches: Introducing the Art of Persuasion in Paul and Pauline Studies” (SPL); Laura S. Nasrallah, “Spatial Perspectives: Space and Archaeology in Roman Philippi” (SPL)

Thursday, Oct 12 – Philemon

Read: Demetrius K. Williams, “African American Approaches: Rehumanizing the Reader against Racism and Reading through Experience” (SPL)

Due: Reflection Paper #2 due Sunday, October 15 by end of day (11:59pm)

Tuesday, Oct 24 – 1 & 2 Corinthians

Read: Barbara Rossing, “Prophets, Prophetic Movements, and the Voice of Women,” in *Christian Origins A People’s History of Christianity Vol 1* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 2010), 261-286 (261-274 required; 274-286 optional) - CANVAS

Unit 3 – Commemorative Figures & Early Christian Diversity

Deutero-Pauline: Pseudepigraphical Paul

Thursday, Oct 26 – Ephesians

Read: Elizabeth Johnson. “Ephesians” in *Women’s Biblical Commentary*. Revised and Updated. Twentieth Anniversary Edition. Louisville: WJK, 2012: 576-580 – Link to ebook on CANVAS

Tuesday, Oct 31 – Colossians

Read: Marianne Bjelland Kartzow. “Asking the Other Questions”: An Intersectional Approach to Galatians 3:28 and the Colossian Household Codes.” *Biblical Interpretation* 18 (2010): 364-389 – Link to article on CANVAS

Thursday, Nov 2 – 2 Thessalonians

Read: Robert Jewett. “Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church: The Implications of a Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10.” *Biblical Research* 38 (1993): 25-43 – Link to article on CANVAS

Pastoral Epistles & Domestic Paul

Tuesday, Nov 7 – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus

Read: Susan Hylen. “Women δίακονοι and Gendered Norms of Leadership.” *JBL* 138.3 (2019): 687-702. Link to article on CANVAS

Thursday, Nov 9 – Acts of Paul & Thecla

Read: *Acts of Paul and Thecla* – link on CANVAS

Tuesday, Nov 14 – James

Read: Margaret Aymer, *James: An Introduction and Study Guide; Diaspora Rhetoric of a Friend of God*. T&T Study Guides to the New Testament. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017, 66- 83 (chapter 5) – CANVAS

Judaism and Christianity

Thursday, Nov 16 – Hebrews

Read: Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006: 87-117; Anna M. V. Bowden, “Commentary 2: Connecting the Reading with the World,” 101-102 – CANVAS

Tuesday, Nov 21 – No Class (Professor at SBL)

Tuesday, Nov 23 – 1, 2, and 3 John

Read: Koester, Craig. “Antichrist Then and Now: The Johannine Epistles and Antichrist in Popular Culture.” *Word and World* 41.1 (2021): 3-10. – Link to article on CANVAS

Christian Responses to Imperial Order

Thursday, Nov 30 – 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude

Read: Barbara Rossing, “Hastening the Day When the Earth Will Burn? Global Warming, Revelation and 2 Peter 3 (Advent 2, Year B),” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35 (2008): 363-73; Edward Adams, “Retrieving the Earth from the Conflagration: 2 Peter 3:5-13 and the Environment” in David Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate and Francesca Stavrakopoulou, eds., *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (T & T Clark, 2010): 108-120. – Link to articles on CANVAS

Tuesday, Dec 5 – Revelation

Read: Warren Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John: Negotiating Empire in Revelation Then and Now” *Interpretation* 63.1 (2009): 32-47. – Link to article on CANVAS

Thursday, Dec 7 – Revelation

Read: Anna Bowden, “Taking on the Lamb” in *Taking on the Cross: Reimagining the Meaning of Jesus’ Life and Death* (Macon, GA: Nurturing Faith, 2022), 28-36. – CANVAS

Friday, December 8 – Final Deadline for all Re-dos and Journals

Thursday, December 14: Final Exegesis Paper Due (11:59pm)