

NEW TESTAMENT LIFE and TIMES

Leander Church of Christ

Adult Bible Class

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Primary Sources

1. The New Testament in its World, by N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, “An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians”
2. Multiple Seminars, Sermons, and Classes, by Ray Vander Laan

Authors

1. Who is N. T. Wright?
 - a. Christianity Today magazine: People who are asked to write about N. T. Wright may find they quickly run out of superlatives. He is the most prolific biblical scholar in a generation. Some say he is the most important apologist for the Christian faith since C. S. Lewis. He has written the most extensive series of popular commentaries on the New Testament since William Barclay. And, in case three careers sound like too few, he is also a church leader, having served as Bishop of Durham, England, before his current teaching post at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. But perhaps the most significant praise of all: When Wright speaks, preaches, or writes, folks say they see Jesus, and lives are transformed. A pastor friend of mine describes a church member walking into his office, hands trembling as he held a copy of Wright's *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. "If this book is true," he said, "then my whole life has to change."
 - b. The Atlantic: N. T. Wright is one of those thinkers who fall into a binary: Either people have never heard of him, or they believe him to be one of the most influential figures of our time. The magazine *Christianity Today* has called him “the most prolific biblical scholar in a generation” and “the most important apologist for the Christian faith since C. S. Lewis.” The British theologian is credited with writing more than six dozen books, many about the apostle Paul, and has reached the stage of fame where publishers are repackaging his work into new volumes, akin to a pop star’s greatest-hits album. He’s spent a large portion of his career in academia, but his work has also reached far beyond the Ivy Tower: He served as the Anglican bishop in Durham, England, in the early 2000s, and on the 2004 Lambeth Commission, a body set up to provide guidance on contentious divisions within the Anglican Communion over same-sex marriage and homosexuality.

From the Preface to NTiiW (The New Testament in its World) –

The eminent British New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd (1884–1973) was once asked if, supposing all written copies of the Greek New Testament were either lost or destroyed, he could reproduce the whole thing from memory. Dodd replied that, having lived with the Greek New Testament for so long, he was confident that he could indeed remember it all. In one account of the same story, the questioner responded with utter amazement: how could someone possibly claim to be able to recall the whole thing, in Greek no less? ‘Well,’ Dodd is said to have replied, with a comical mixture of humility and coyness, ‘it’s only a little book.’

The New Testament might only be small, but it is a strange and powerful book. At one level, it tells the history of Jesus and the early church; at another level (and these two go closely together, as we shall see) it is regarded by churches around the world as inspired scripture, normative for the life of faith. For this to become a reality, for the New Testament to come alive, each generation of readers, and especially teachers and preachers, needs help, particularly in the form of thorough, user-friendly, and creative introductions to Jesus, his first followers, and the literature that emerged from that movement. That is what this book is hoping to provide.

NtiiW -- KEEPING HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND THEOLOGY TOGETHER

It is better, though riskier, to see history, literature, and theology as belonging together. To continue our whimsical biblical parallels, we might liken this to the three friends in Daniel 3 who testified together to God's kingdom in the face of a megalomaniac monarch. The New Testament *is* history *and* literature *and* theology, all at once, and we should not try to reduce it to any one of these at the expense of the others. A close reading and thick description of the New Testament will necessarily involve the messy business of history, the hard work of literary criticism, and the arduous task of theological reflection.

As such, an informed reading of the New Testament, especially for a believing audience, will involve pursuing three main questions. First, the historical one: how did Christianity begin, and why did it take the shape that it did? Second, the literary one: why did the early Jesus-followers write the way they did, and what does this tell us about their worldview? Third, the theological question: what did the early Christians believe about God and the world, and about humans in general and Jesus in particular within that, and what kind of sense might their beliefs make? This volume will not answer all those questions in full. But, as we survey the New Testament writings, the present book offers a first guiding step on how to think about them.

NtiiW – 1 Beginning Study of the New Testament ... WHY THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The New Testament, in other words, isn't there to tell us simply 'how to get to heaven'. Indeed, to the surprise of many people, that isn't what it's saying at all. That's why some theories about the New Testament and its authority don't work as well as they should. If you try to read it as a 'how-to' book, which sadly is how some people approach it, you may end up frustrated, thinking it would be better if the spirit had given us something more like a car manual or a railway timetable. No: the New Testament is designed to draw us into the story of God's plan, to rescue the world from chaos and idolatry and to launch his new transformative creation. This rescue, and this launch, have happened in Jesus; now, by the spirit, they are to be put into operation through people who are shaped by the biblical vision itself, by the stories of Jesus and his first followers, with ourselves joining in the movement those first followers began.

John Eldredge - EPIC - The Story (selected video clips)

- EPIC_02...0000 What Sort of Tale? (1.5 minutes) Hobbits, Something Larger
- EPIC_02...0135 Life Is a Story (1.5 minutes) Not like math problem, not like an IRS form. Tragedy, Comedy, Soap Opera. Daughter totaled the car.
- EPIC_02_0312 (0.5 minutes) Grandfather, Okinawa
- EPIC_02...0444 (1.5 minutes) We run into a problem, enter a movie 45 minutes late, what is the plot, earthquakes/divorce/heartache... need to know the rest of the story

- EPIC_02_0612 (1.2 minutes) Mall map "You Are Here," This Is The Big Picture, You Can Discover The Larger STORY! (It would be gold!)
- EPIC_02...1037 (0.5 minutes) Christianity is MORE... find yourself in the EPIC, your crucial role
- EPIC_02...1157 (2.5 minutes)

EPIC_02 Comments: Story is the nature of the world in which we live... this Story is the Most True thing in the world.

- *** 11:57 - 14:28

RVL - Granbury, East vs West, how read the Bible

- Students, come see our frogs, go to lab, frogs pinned down
 - I ask its name, i.e., Boy or Girl. If boy, "Which frog was its girlfriend?"
 - When did it become impossible to know? When removed from pond.
 - But some things are impossible to know while still in pond, e.g., number of chambers in heart, its last meal, etc.
 - There is TRUTH in both methods, i.e., observational vs propositional.
- BIBLE: Take a passage out of its book, out of its chapter and, verse - take it out of its story - and some things become impossible to know. What you do learn is true, but at the moment you take it out of its cultural context, there are some things you will never know or understand.
- The WEST prefers a Rational Concept, propositional Truth, and Definitions. The EAST refers story, metaphor, word pictures, etc., to describe Truth.
- EXERCISE
 - Finish this sentence: GOD IS _____.
 - In Israel may see a Christian or Muslim classroom, or a Jewish hiking group. Stop and ask them. GOD IS ??????
 - Bread of Life
 - Has Eagle's Wings
 - My Shepherd
 - A Shade in the Desert
 - A Rock
 - A Fortress
 - Living Water
- The Bible was written in particular times, in particular cultural settings, to people who thought in a certain way. They prefer a Story over Definitions or Systematic Explanations. If you ignore all that and read the Bible with only Western eyes, there will be Truth in it which you never see.

2. NTiiW – 2 The New Testament as History ... Reading the New Testament as a Historical Document

a. VIDEO 1m51s -- NTiiW_v02x_0006-0158_HistoryIntro

- i. 0059 -- Sadly some will object to this historical enterprise, like a teenager complaining about being made to catalogue the boxes of parental memorabilia in the basement. For many grumblers the historical task seems irrelevant to their own situation: historical events might have provided the foundations for the church, they think, but no-one invests much time inspecting the foundations when there are prayers to pray, sermons to write, the elderly to visit, and services to prepare. Others will complain, not so much about the time-consuming nature of the task, but about the contents they have to pick through. How can Iron Age texts possibly be relevant in the Internet Age? Whatever people think the texts once 'meant', it is mostly irrelevant to the 'meanings' that we ascribe to them now—or the fresh insights we believe we possess in our own day. The flaws in arguments should be obvious. Foundations are important. If you can make the text mean what you want, chaos has come again.

- b. Yet in counter-point to such recalcitrance, the reason why we engage in a study of the history of the New Testament is because of the conviction that Jesus and the apostles constitute the basis for normative Christianity.

c. VIDEO 1m00s -- NTiiW_v02x_0334-0433_ImportanceOfNT

- i. This belief gained adherents as a result of Protestant Reformation. Sola Scriptura. First century mattered. Not Traditions. NT is where the Christian must start. Study... within historical context... Christian discipleship.
- d. As a result, many Christians are somewhat afraid of history, frightened that if we really find out what happened in the first century our faith might collapse. The problem is that without historical enquiry there is no check on Christianity's propensity to remake Jesus, never mind the Christian 'God', in its own image. Equally, much Christianity is afraid of scholarly learning, and insofar as the Enlightenment programme was an anti-dogma venture, Christianity has often responded by retreating into the safe space of a 'confession', a self-reinforcing church circle. But, granted that learning without love is sterile and dry, enthusiasm without learning can easily become blind arrogance.

e. VIDEO 2m40s -- NTiiW_v02x_0555-0835_ModernityPostModernityCriticalRealism

- i. Historical Knowledge and Culture -- To give an analogy, consider three windows. Modernity liked to think of itself as looking through a transparent window that allowed one to see perfectly through to the other side as long as it was sunny (that is, truth is easily found if you have good sources and good methods). Postmodernity is basically saying that the window is really a mirror and all you see is little more than your own reflection, though you may get lucky if you unconsciously peer through one of the cracks and catch a glimpse of something behind the mirror (that is, truth may be out there, but you'll have a hard time telling it apart from your own reflection). Critical realism says that the mirror has a dark tint caused by the gaps in our knowledge and the shading of our own location, and that part of our own reflection does indeed appear on the window, but we really can see something through it that is not ourselves, nor part of our own making (that is, truth can be seen, but never crisply or perfectly). Modernity

exalted itself in claims of incorrigible certainty (and claimed that what you couldn't have certainty about either didn't matter or didn't exist). Postmodernity basked in ambiguity and irony. **Critical realism aims to provide clarity and sobriety to the historical task.**

- ii. CR – “There is something in the text to be known. Something in history to be found. Even if the Knowing and Finding is never infallible or complete. Not absolute nor Archaic, but Adequate.”
- iii. CR – “One can believe in a thing called history without believing one has full possession of it.”

f. (mcm – Which era did Alexander Campbell live in? Was he a proponent of it?)

- i. John Mark Hicks -- Hermeneutic

g. VIDEO 1m15s -- NTiiW_v02x_1356-1512_JewishHopeFulfilledInJesusStory

- i. The relevance of this for our historical enquiry into the New Testament is that we find ourselves describing a certain group of first-century Jews, namely the ‘early Christians’, who held one particular variant of the first-century Jewish worldview. This strange group was saying in effect, ‘The hope which characterize es our worldview has been fulfilled in these events.’ And they chose to say this in the most natural and most obviously Jewish way they knew, by telling a *story*—from gospel to apocalypse—encoding in a narrative the sum of their worldview and beliefs. Therefore, a chief task of New Testament study is to construct a hypothesis which explains the story of the first Christians within the storied world of Jews, Greeks, and Romans. This critical-realist theory of story and hypothesis accordingly acknowledges the essentially ‘storied’ nature of human knowing, thinking, and living, within the larger framework of worldviews. It affirms, in fact, that all knowledge of realities external to oneself takes place within a worldview-framework, within which stories form an essential part. In the end, our task is to construct a hypothesis, a story encompassing the beliefs, aims, identity, praxes, and hopes that constituted the early church’s own story, and to show that this hypothesis makes good sense of the evidence and does so in a clear and coherent way, with such simplicity as is appropriate for the dense subject-matter of actual human life.
- h. What does all this mean for the student who wants to wrestle with the New Testament? Several things. (1) Remember that the study of the New Testament as history is not an optional extra. It is a crucial part of any course in ‘biblical studies’. (2) You need to be aware of the complexities of what it means to ‘do history’ (it isn’t simply about ‘looking up facts in a book’), and critical realism is a way of attempting to acknowledge the possibility of historical retrieval while fully recognizing the limitations of the historical enterprise. (3) The past is a very different place. You cannot just jump from Atlanta to Antioch or leap from Rochester to Rome without doing some serious historical, hermeneutical, cultural, and social studies along the way. You will need to roll up your sleeves and **be prepared to get your hands dirty.**

3. NTiiW – 3 The New Testament as Literature

- a. The New Testament is literature, not simply a pile of propositional nuggets waiting to be ordered into a systematic theology, nor an inchoate sequence of words designed to activate religious feelings. We must therefore enquire, in general terms at least, what literature does, how it works, and how best to treat it. <...> A proper place to start is with the idea of 'meaning' itself.² What do we mean when we say that biblical texts have meaning? What are we looking for? Where do we find it? Here we enter into the morass of debate about where 'meaning' resides: is it ultimately with the author, or with the text, or with the reader, or some combination of all three?
- b. *** VIDEO 1m25s -- Share the A.I.M. of Bible study, by Mark Moore -- [AIM_AuthorIntendedMeaning_Moore_1m25s](#)
- c. But it gets even worse for those who prize authorial intention. Texts can carry surplus meaning beyond the author's consciousness. Any writing can become more significant as it enters new social, political, and religious spaces. So, what if authors wrote about things that took on a life of their own, long after they were gone? What if people attribute meanings to a text that at one level appears to be based on that text but at another level obviously exceed the author's original intention? <...> This is akin to what is called in patristic exegesis the *sensus plenior* ('fuller sense') of scripture, by which an 'inspired' text actually says more than the author realized at the time. The recognition of such a sense, and the possibilities for allegorical and theological exegesis that it opens up, have at various stages of the church's reading of scripture been ways of allowing for the experience of Christians who affirm that the biblical text 'speaks' to them in ways that the author might not have imagined. Along this line we find Augustine, for whom the truth of scripture was not simply a matter of detecting authorial intention; the author is not directly available for interrogation, and, even if he were, we have no way of knowing whether to believe him. So for Augustine, 'meaning' also derives from the 'inward Truth' arrived at by spiritual study, which hopefully accords with an author's intention but is not bound to it.¹⁰ Let us not forget either that C. S. Lewis, the great Christian apologist and literary critic, said, 'An author doesn't necessarily understand the meaning of his own story better than anyone else.'¹¹ Theologians have been looking for biblical meaning beyond the cusp of an author's mind for centuries.
- d. Taking those conclusions into account—the problems of authorial distance and the failings of a two-stage 'meant-to-means' scheme—we must concede that 'meaning' is not restricted to authorial intent. It is shaped by wider factors like contexts, texts, and communities. If, in reading Isaiah 53, one's context is the canon and creeds of the early church, then readers will naturally identify Jesus in the text so that 'this' (Isaiah's 'Servant') is really 'that' (Jesus)—while again recalling that Paul could cheerfully apply 'servant' texts like Isaiah 49 to his own work. He was, after all, 'a man in the Messiah'.
 - i. Paul applies the Suffering Servant language to himself. See Rom. 10.14–16; 15.21; 2 Cor. 6.2; Gal. 1.15–16; 2.2; Phil. 2.16; 1 Thess. 3.5
- e. When we apply this principle to all three components of the reading process, it will be possible to make a number of simultaneous affirmations and denials. First, we need to do justice *both* to

the fact that texts do not represent the whole of the author's mind *and* to the fact that they nevertheless do tell us quite a bit about him or her. Second, we need a theory that will do justice *both* to the fact that the author intended certain things *and* that the text may well contain other things—echoes, evocations, structures, and the like—that were not consciously present in the author's mind. Third, we need a theory that will do justice *both* to the fact that the reader is deeply involved in the communicative event *and* to the fact that the text is an entity on its own, not a plastic substance to be moulded to the reader's whim. If that is the case, then we should acknowledge that the author must be resurrected but not deified; that texts genuinely carry meaning like a hard-working mule, yet a text also inspires meaning like an iconic muse; and, while readers have rights, this does not license anarchy. Until we grasp the place of the author, text, and reader in the formation of 'meaning', most of the present battles about reading the New Testament will be dialogues of the deaf, doomed to failure. In sum, this hermeneutic of love is a *lectio catholica semper reformanda* (a reading of and for and in the whole church, but a reading which is always in need of revising and reforming, even as such readings themselves should revise and reform the church). Such a reading seeks to be faithful to what is received, while always open to the possibility of challenge and correction.

4. NTiiW – 4 The New Testament as Theology

- a. ...the nature, scope, and tasks for New Testament theology have been in constant dispute. According to Wayne Meeks, New Testament scholars should 'erase from our vocabulary the terms "biblical theology" and, even more urgently, "New Testament theology" '. Meeks argued strongly that whatever 'contribution these concepts may have, we have come to a time when they can only blinker our understanding'. The objection is not new. The idea is that to do a theology of the New Testament will mean subscribing to the authority of these holy books and the institutions that venerate them. Instead, such writers urge, one should pursue a 'theology of early Christianity' and attempt to profile the texture of 'early Christian religion' as a more secular enterprise. We could respond by saying that there are very good reasons for pursuing New Testament theology, over and above a detached theological analysis of 'early Christian religion'.
- b. VIDEO 2m14s -- NTiiW_v04x_0130-0345_UltimateAuthorityGodNotText
 - i. First, if the New Testament is in some sense 'authoritative', as virtually all churches acknowledge, then this 'authority' has been deemed to lie in the theology that it contains. The caveat we must offer is that the ultimate authority is God, the creator, and since God has revealed himself in Jesus, then Jesus is the one who holds all authority. Jesus did not tell his disciples that all authority is vested in the books that they would write; he insisted that it was vested in his own person.⁵ And yet Jesus' authority operates through the New Testament message, as it testifies about and on behalf of the risen lord. Knowing that, we must therefore wrestle with what this message is about, how it works, and what its demands might be for followers of Jesus.
- c. The problem of ignoring the historical context of the New Testament is that one can impose other narratives and schemes which become the controlling backdrop for understanding the New Testament's message. If we take seriously the contingent historical nature of the New Testament, its 'back-then-ness', the fact that while it was written for us it was not written to us, then we will recognize the essential need to situate the New Testament in its social, religious, and historical context. For a case in point, we will struggle to grasp the basic thrust of the incident at Antioch narrated by Paul in Galatians 2.11-14 if we don't have a working knowledge of Jewish social boundaries, food taboos, and debates about fraternizing with gentiles. Discerning the theological claims of the text frequently follows from reconstructing the social context behind the text. Rather than imposing the structure and questions of later systematic theology (which has often ignored those original contexts), we must allow the text to speak for itself, in its own words, from its own context, on its own terms, so that its theological and missional significance can then be more accurately gauged.
- d. VIDEO 2m33s -- NTiiW_v04x_0438-0712_MustUnderstandHistoryAndTheology
- e. Thus, theological study of the New Testament, within the spirit-driven and prayerful life of the whole church, is meant, ultimately, to enable us to love God with our minds, in order to be constantly stirred up to love him with our heart and soul. That way, our mission—

loving God with all our strength, for the benefit of the whole world—will be shaped by the cataclysmic foundational events concerning Jesus. Rooted in history, we are shaped by theology—not least the theological claim that God will put all things right at last—as our lives effect real transformation, in real history, today and tomorrow, and on until God himself, in the ultimate act of creative sovereignty, does for the whole creation what he did for Jesus when he raised him from the dead.

5. NTiiW – 5 History of Jews between Persian and Roman Empires

- a. The story of second-Temple Judaism is one of tension and tragedy. The Babylonians had conquered Judea and destroyed the first Temple in 587 BC and taken a large part of the populace into exile in Babylon. The destruction of the Temple and the removal of the Jews from the land had placed a great question mark against their pre-exilic faith. Had their God forsaken them? Although it seemed like that, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had spoken about a future day when God would bring them back from exile, a time when God would deliver them through a new exodus, with a new king, a new Temple, and the renewal of the covenant, with God himself returning to dwell in the new Temple. Just over fifty years later, this promise came (partly!) true. The Babylonian army was routed by the Persians in 539 BC, led by their king, Cyrus. The Persians were generous overlords to the Jews. They permitted them to return to their homeland and to rebuild their Temple. But the Persians remained their overlords.
- b. Timeline
 - i. 597-539 BC - Babylonian
 - ii. 538-323 BC - Persian/Greek
 - iii. 320-200 BC - Egyptian
 - iv. 200-142 BC - Syrian
 - v. 142-xxx BC - Hasmonean Dynasty
- c. But although the Judeans were now back in the land, the full, glorious sweep of prophetic promises about Israel's restoration had not yet materialized
- d. Alexander the Great and his Greek army swept through the old Persian empire and beyond, changing the cultural landscape, and imposing Greek culture
- e. The two subsequent overlords, first by the Egyptian Ptolemies in the third century and then by the Syrian Seleucids in the second century, make the history more complex in terms of military control of Palestine, but do not alter the basic fact that the world was now Greek.
- f. But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfilment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth . . . All the Israelites who are saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in

safety for ever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice, but those who commit sin and injustice will vanish from all the earth. (Tob. 14.5-7 NRSV)

- g. By the time of the first century, in fact, there were three times as many Jews living outside Palestine as in it, and their main language was Greek, not Hebrew. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, only a few miles from Sepphoris, a Galilean city with Greek influences.
- h. Even with the ascent of the Latin-speaking Romans, the east remained linguistically and culturally Greek until the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries.
- i. The megalomaniac Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV [mcm - Beam audio?], wanting to use Judea as a buffer state against Egypt, tried to cement his hold on the country, politically and religiously, through a process of forcibly hellenizing it and eliminating the Jewish religion entirely. Antiochus decided to ensure the Jews' loyalty by changing the function and direction of their central religious symbol, the Temple, so that it ceased to make them think independently and turned them in the direction of service to himself. He took over the Temple on 25 December 167 BC, deliberately desecrating it so that the Jews would no longer think of it as the place where they were reaffirmed as a unique people. He established worship of himself there instead.
- j. Judas Maccabaeus and his companions accomplished the unthinkable, and organized a protracted insurgency that routed, and eventually wore out, the Seleucid forces. Antiochus IV abandoned the campaign against the Judean rebels, rescinding the ban on traditional Jewish worship, and turned his attention to recovering lost provinces beyond the Euphrates. Then, three years to the day after the Temple's desecration (25 December 164 BC), Judas cleansed and reconsecrated it (see box: 'Judas Maccabaeus rededicates the Temple'). A new festival (Hanukkah) was added to the Jewish calendar to celebrate the event. The Maccabean revolt became classic and formative in the same way as the exodus and the other great events of Israel's history. It powerfully reinforced the basic Jewish worldview...
- k. The ambiguity of the Hasmonean dynasty, in which the heirs of the successful revolutionaries ruled as priest-kings, initially under Syrian auspices but later independently, did not dim the Jews' sense of the victory of their God, but created the same sort of puzzle that was left after the so-called 'return from exile'. A great vindication had occurred, but it now seemed as though there must be yet another one still to come. The great prophecies had not, it seemed, been fulfilled. There had been no blaze of divine glory returning to Jerusalem and transforming the world. By no means were all Jews happy with the new situation. Getting rid of the tyrant and his idolatrous practices was one thing, but was the new Hasmonean regime what God actually wanted? Was it not in its turn heavily compromised with Hellenism?
- l. JEWS UNDER ROMAN RULE (63 BC - AD 70)
 - i. Roman power had been building for centuries, especially after the defeat of the Carthaginians in the late third century which had left Rome as the unrivalled power in the western Mediterranean.

- ii. The Romans' arrival in Judea in 63 BC coincided with the confusion of a civil war between rival Hasmonean brothers. Pompey's ability to simply wander into Jerusalem, without anyone putting up much of a struggle, and to then violate the sanctity of the Temple left people with a lot of questions.
- iii. After the death of Agrippa I, Judea again reverted to direct Roman rule, with a procurator based in Caesarea and under the supervision of the Syrian governor. The situation deteriorated as the procurators overseeing the province between AD 44 and 66 were largely corrupt, incompetent, and brutal. <...> Soon after, Eleazar, the captain of the Temple and son of the high priest, persuaded a group of rogue priests to cease accepting the sacrifices offered daily on the Roman emperor's behalf. Acceptance of this sacrifice had been the token gesture of Judea's submission to Roman authority in lieu of worshipping Roman gods and participating in the imperial cult. Stopping the imperial sacrifice—refusing, in other words, to pray for Rome—was an open act of defiance, marking the beginning of the war with Rome.
- iv. Titus initially tried to starve the city. But then, hoping eagerly for a significant victory that would bring glory to the new imperial regime headed by his father, he launched an all-out assault on Jerusalem (AD 70). It worked. The Temple precincts were gradually taken over; the Temple itself was burned; most of the rebels were either killed on the spot or captured and crucified.
- m. The JEWISH WORLD RECONSTRUCTED (AD 70 - 135)
 - i. THEORY -- Pharisee, Johanan ben-Zakkai, emperor, Jewish academy, modified twelfth clause in "eighteen Benedictions" invoking a curse on Christians - Stopped meeting in synagogues at this time.
 - ii. It is more likely, in fact, that the destruction of the Temple created not one single reaction, but a variety of reactions. It is over-simplistic to think that all forms of 'Judaism' were wiped out except a particular type of Pharisaism, which then, transmuting itself into rabbinism...
 1. the anguish apparent in the writings of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, whose authors lament the fall of the Temple as if their hearts would break;
 2. the pragmatism of Johanan ben-Zakkai, calmly recognizing that Hosea 6.6 had long ago spoken of Israel's God as desiring deeds of loving-kindness rather than sacrifice;
 3. the smouldering fire of rebellion, crushed once again by pagan might but seeking nevertheless the way by which to reverse the catastrophe and build the true Temple.
 - iii. We should note that one of the results of the events of AD 70 was the complete disappearance of the Sadducees, focused as they were on the old Temple hierarchy. In addition, the Romans seem to have destroyed the Essene movement; Qumran was uninhabited thereafter.) To what extent these three main points of view might have overlapped in the post-70 period, and to what extent they stood in continuity

with various movements from before the destruction, must remain in question for the moment. What matters is that we recognize the non-monolithic nature of the new situation in the Jewish world following the disaster of AD 70.

- iv. We might also include a fourth strand in the Jewish world at this time: (4) the young Christian church, still thinking of itself as the fulfilment of Israel's great story, following Israel's true Messiah, and interpreting the fall of Jerusalem in terms of the divine vindication of Jesus' claims. Since Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the early second century, speaks of Jews attending churches and Christians attending synagogues, it looks as though whatever happened at Javneh did not result in total separation.
- v. We should not forget that early Christianity, claiming the high ground of Israel's heritage, was first and foremost a movement that defined itself in opposition to paganism, and only secondarily in opposition to the Jewish movements whose adherents refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah.
- vi. This period of transition came to an abrupt and bloody end with the Jewish rebellion against the emperor Hadrian in AD 132-5 (see box: 'Chronology of Roman emperors and prefects'). Hadrian had passed a law forbidding circumcision as a barbaric practice (the Jews were not the only people who practised the custom, but the ban struck them especially due to the centrality of circumcision within their worldview). He had also founded a pagan city, Aelia Capitolina, on the site of ruined Jerusalem, with an altar to Zeus on the site of the Temple itself. These provocations, more serious still than those of the procurators in the 50s and 60s, and comparable to those of Antiochus Epiphanes much earlier, called forth rebellion. Simeon ben-Kosiba began a revolt which quickly roused the whole land. He himself was hailed as Messiah by the great rabbi Akiba, among others, and given the title Bar-Kochba, 'Son of the Star' (referring to the prophecy of Num. 24.17).
- vii. Despite inflicting heavy losses on Hadrian's army, the Judeans were massively defeated. Many who survived were sold into slavery in large numbers. Jerusalem became a fully pagan city, with the ban on Jewish customs strictly enforced. Not until the twentieth century could the idea of a self-governing Jewish state in the middle east be spoken of as anything other than the remotest possibility.

6. NTiiW – 6 Jewish Context of Jesus and the Early Church

7. NTiiW – 7 Greco-Roman Context of the Early Church

8. NTiiW --

APPENDIX I

Video Notes

0. NTiiW v00 - EXCELLENT OVERVIEW OF BOOK. 13 Minutes. Here are some nuggets:

- a. 2:20 - Why should anyone be interested in the New Testament?
 - i. An explosive book
 - ii. 3:15 - Jesus the place where Heaven and Earth came together.
 - iii. 4:16 - Matters because Jesus matters.
- b. 5:00 - We have to know what was going on as the NT was being written.
 - i. 5:29 - Danger! We assume NT people are the same as us.
 - ii. 6:00 - Armies in and out of Jerusalem
 - iii. 6:20 - Unless you know that story, you're not in a position to
 - iv. 6:40 - Something NEW is happening →6:49
- c. 7:15 - Must understand the Greco-Roman world
 - i. First century Judaism. Anachronistic assumptions.
 - ii. 7:45 - What did Jesus teach about himself. Kingdom at hand?
- d. 8:15 - Resurrection. Did not mean the same to them as to most today.
 - i. Not just "life after death." -- 9:05

1. NTiiW v01 - 24 minutes "Beginning Study of the New Testament"

- a. 00:19 - Own many sorts of books.
 - i. History, short stories, plays, poetry, biographies
 - ii. Also atlases, dictionaries, how to play golf, car maintenance, gardening
 - iii. 2:05 - How does the NT fit? For some people, like car maintenance, or an atlas. ("Ultimate Authority")
- b. 2:50 - NT doesn't look like that kind of book
 - i. 3:30 - Live under authority of NT
 - ii. 4:00 - Part of a play, the whole bible, creation, covenant, spoiled and restored, comes in to land in the NT COME UP ON STAGE Your story, my story. -4:55
- c. 5:40 - The larger whole should be our consideration
 - i. 6:06 - How do we find out own parts to play them?
 - ii. 6:40 - Must learn to study for all we're with - Hearts, minds, strength
- d. 7:30 - Early Christians taught people to read. NT for Everyone.
 - i. Seen as educational institution instead of a "religion."
 - ii. 8:30 - Christians developed a new kind of codex.
- e. 9:00 - The reason there is a NT is because of Jesus Himself.
- f. 10:00 - Most early Christians not from Jewish world. Messianic references had to be explained to them. Four gospels. Letters. Vision.
 - i. WELCOME TO THE NT
- g. 11:00 - Two things happening when read NT
 - i. Drawn into a life of WORSHIP and prayer. Jesus is central.
 1. What really counts? THE WHOLE STORY. GOD'S STORY.

2. 13:50 - Study is VITAL
 - a. Especially the PLAY? What part are we called to play in it. → 14:15
 - ii. 15:42 - NT equips us for MISSION
- h. 15:53 - NT not there SIMPLY to tell us "how to get to heaven." Not at all
 - i. Not a railway timetable.
 - ii. But a story for how to launch transformation → 16:50
- i. 17:16 - As we get to know the first Christians, we find ourselves called and equipped. Manual of Worship and Mission.
- j. 18:50 - God's Purposes for the world can be misunderstood. It happened in First Century, and it has happened over and over again. STUDY IS VITAL. Every generation. Every part of the church needs to understand its part in the story.
- k. 19:27 - ERIC BIRD. Dodd, could you reproduce NT Greek if all NT was lost. "It's only a little book." It's a strange and powerful little book. It has shaped Western civilization more than any other book in the world.
- l. 21:20 - What IS the NT? Religion, theology, myth, divine revelation, etc., etc. History/Literature/Theology
- m. Three questions:
 - i. How did Christianity begin, and take the shape it did?
 - ii. What is the world view in the text?
 - iii. What does Christianity begin, and... does it make sense?

2. NTiiW v02 - New Testament as History (18 minutes)

- a. We claim that God has revealed Himself in the life and death of Jesus Christ. God has acted within what we call "History." To know God, we need to understand history.
- b. 1:07 - Some object to spending huge amounts of time inspecting foundations when there is work to be done. Some turn their noses up. Some think the original meanings are not relevant. Some think "They were primitive." If you can make the text mean anything you want now, then chaos has come.
- c. NTiiW_v02_0006-0158_HistoryIntro.mp4
- d. 2:03 - Some object that historical knowledge is partial.
- e. 2:33 - The reason we study the history of the NT is that Jesus and disciples constitute normality.
- f. 3:16 - From early times, Christians have believed their lives need to be in conformity with the NT.
- g. 3:40 - Sola Scriptura, Protestant Reformation, toss out traditions.
 - i. Reading the NT is where the Christian must start.
- h. NTiiW_v02_0334-0433_ImportanceOfNT.mp4
- i. 4:37 - Critical Realism, approach to reading the NT as history.
- j. 5:58 - Affected by the cultural moves of our own world
 - i. Modernity - Transparent window
 - ii. Post-Modernity - Window is a mirror; see your own reflection.

- iii. Critical Realism - Windows has a dark tint caused by gaps in knowledge and we see part of our own reflection, but insists there is something that we can see THROUGH the window..
- iv. Critical Realist says there is something to be found.
- v. Jerusalem destroyed in AD 70.
- vi. Jesus died on a Roman cross.
- vii. We can believe in history, without having full possession of it.
- k. NTiW_v02_0555-0835_ModernityPostModernityCriticalRealism.mp4
- l. 9:08 - Need interpretative framework, an hypothesis
 - i. New scroll, new coin, etc., can force us to reconsider what we have understood.
 - ii. What counts as justified hypothesis in history?
 - iii. History is not a matter of psychology.
- m. 10:30 - Why Roman needed stable Middle east - not psychology, but history - needed to protect the grain shipments from Egypt.
- n. 10:40 - Why Herod was rebuilding the temple - not psychology, but history - an attempt to legitimate himself as the true king of the Jews.
- o. 11:30 - Several more examples
- p. 11:48 - This is then how history works... Historians attune to the issues of the day.
- q. 12:30 - Story is key.
 - i. Passover - "My father was a wondering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people..."
 - ii. The Jews thought of themselves in Jesus's day as Exodous people.
- r. 13:50 - Historians are story tellers
- s. 14:00 - How does this relate to our study of NT?
 - i. This group of Jews and non-Jews lived in a certain time, believed hope had been fulfilled, chose to tell this in a story. See this in the four gospels, the letters, and in the revelation of John.
- t. NTiW_v02_1356-1512_JewishHopeFulfilledInJesusStory.mp4
- u. 15:24 - We are called to know the historical Jesus. Not derail into self-deception.
- v. 15:59 - People in every age act based on their world view. Story, symbols, praxis, etc. Be aware of OUR OWN WORLD VIEW also.
- w. 16:35 - Three implications
 - i. Study of first century history is not an optional extra, but CRUCIAL.
 - ii. There are complexities in "doing" history. Reflect on critical realism capabilities and limitations.
 - iii. The past is a VERY DIFFERENT PLACE. Can't just go from Rochester to ancient Rome.
 - iv. History means thinking into the minds of people who thought quite differently from ourselves.
- x. 18:12 - If that's where God revealed Himself, that's where we need to go.

3. NTiiW v03 - New Testament as Literature (19 minutes)

- a. Bird
- b. 0:48 - What do we mean by "meaning," as in, "what is the meaning of that verse?"
- c. 1:01 - Meaning in Author, Text, or the Reader?
- d. 1:15 - Authorial Intent
 - i. Different language, different culture, understood universe differently
 - ii. *** Share the A.I.M. of Bible study, by Mark Moore --
AIM_AuthorIntendedMeaning_Moore_1m25s
 - iii. 2:30 -- Text can carry surplus meaning beyond the author's thoughts.
 - iv. 3:45 - One way to get around this seeming disparity between Isaiah's intention and a Christian's theological interpretation is to differentiate between what a text 'meant' (that is, the empirical and descriptive analysis of a text) and what it 'means' (the creative and responsive appropriations of a text).
 - v. 5:20 - Early Christian readers did not assume authorial intent, but read based on knowing Jesus Christ.
 - vi. 6:35 - Meaning not restricted by Authorial Intent
- e. 7:00 - Does the meaning then reside in the literary text. Task of interpretation is to adopt the proper reading strategies. Treat text as self-enclosed entity.
 - i. Narrative Criticism - Some say "read as story and not history." This is a problem.
 1. 11:34 - Text is historically referential.
 - ii. 12:28 - Role of the Reader Meaning not in AIM or literature but the reader.
 1. Meaning is not retrieved from the text, but created by readers using the text. Determined by socialized context of the reader.
 2. 13:57 - One must play with the text for oneself. No "right" or "wrong" reading - only your reading and my reading.
 3. 14:42 - Multiple issues with this approach.
 4. 15:25 - If texts have no fixed meaning, they are only a mirror of the reader.
 - iii. 16:11 -- Fusing the Horizons of Author, Text, and Reader
 1. All three components are involved. It appears that authors *intend*, texts *signify*, and readers *understand*; and that 'meaning' occurs in the fusion of all three.
 2. 17:00 - Hermeneutic of Love

4. NTiiW v04 - New Testament as Theology (14 minutes)

- a. Wright
- b. 00:35 - Focus on what the first Christians believed? Is the historical Jesus part of New Testament Theology? Corpus by corpus? Deal with books in order written? Find a "Canon within the Canon?" Elevate one theme and marginalize others?
- c. NTiiW_v04x_0130-0345_UltimateAuthorityGodNotText

- d. 1:45 - If NT is authoritative, its authority lies in theology. But the ULTIMATE authority is God, who revealed Himself in Jesus, who holds all authority - not in the books His disciples wrote.
- e. 2:51 - The church's perceived task is to offer the world the message of God. Its job is to know it and live by it and make it known.
- f. 3:54 - God promised to put the world to rights. Disciples thought they were responsible for following through, until Jesus returned to finish it.
- g. 4:40 - NT is both history and theology. Challenge is to do justice to both.
 - i. If ignore history, you can insert other themes.
 - ii. NTiiW_v04x_0438-0712_MustUnderstandHistoryAndTheology
 - iii. 5:17 - NT was written for us, but not to us.
 - iv. 5:32 - Galatians 2:11, Paul confronted Peter as to whom to eat with. If approach without realizing the context of food taboos, Jewish debates, etc. To discern theological claims, you must understand history. Theology needs history.
- h. 7:15 - NT study is two-pronged: theology and historical.
- i. 8:17 - Christian reader of NT is committed to these two tasks.
- j. 10:00 - To the Christian reader... NT carries prescriptive force for mission and life of church.
- k. 11:28 - The NT can be seen as the first scene of the final act of God's great narrative. Early Christians saw themselves within a much longer story.
 - i. 12:09 - Fifth Act: New Creation
 - ii. 12:30 - The actors have to understand the "story so far." We, the actors, must understand the story we are in.
- l. 13:32 - Rooted in history, we are shaped by theology... as our lives effect real transformation, in real history.

5. NTiiW v05 - Jewish History from Persia to Rome

- a. 0:00 -- Three biggest events?
 - i. Alexander the Great - Greek culture
 - ii. Antiochus Epiphanes (Syrian) - Desecrated Temple
 - 1. Maccabean Revolution - Hasmoneans
 - iii. Romans - 63BC
 - iv. 2:33 - They want their God to come back and enable them to flourish. Want their God to be KING
- b. 3:02 - To understand NT must understand the Jews of the day
 - i. Assyria Takes the Northern Tribes in 722 BC
 - ii. Babylonians capture Jerusalem in 587 BC
 - iii. New Persian king restores Jerusalem - 539 BC (Post-Exilic)
- c. 5:22 - Antiochus Epiphanes and Maccabean Revolt - HUGE IMPACT
 - i. Maccabean house established as royal for next century
- d. 6:49 - Herod the Great

- i. Romans gave the title "King of the Jews" (local warlord)
- ii. Died
- iii. Jesus until 30 AD
- e. 7:30 - Paul and Peter died
- f. 8:00 - Roman/Jewish war - Temple destroyed in 70 AD, Masada in 73 AD
- g. 8:19 - Judaism tried to reconstitute itself
- h. 9:27 - Early Church starting to discover its mission

6. NTiiW v06 - Jewish Context of Early Church

- a. 0:22 - 4th Century at Capernaum Synagogue (Greek word for "coming together")
 - i. Jesus' home during public career
 - ii. Herod/Philip territory boundary near
- b. 1:32 - Rome had been there a year
 - i. "Something is wrong." We have not been fully restored.
 - ii. How would God's promises come true? Different approaches resulted in various movements and sects.
 1. Revolutionary Groups
 2. 2:50 - Pharisees (personal purity)
 3. 3:20 - Sadducees (aristocracy)
 4. Essenes - Waiting for God to act
 5. Jesus began teaching in a place like this.
- c. 4:08 - Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God
 - i. Jesus had a different approach
- d. 4:29 - **BIRD** - Ancient Judaism and its Diversity
 - i. 5:08 - Judaism not a "religion" like we use the word. More of a way of life.
 - ii. 5:30 - Toray, Temple, Land, Calendar
 - iii. 5:55 - Real core Jewish beliefs
 1. Monarchism and election, ONE GOD and ONE PEOPLE
 - iv. 8:23 - Judaism 101
 1. Their God was the CREATOR God, not a local God
 2. He called Israel to be his special possession
 3. God would deliver Israel, and bring about a new Exodus, and a new World.

7. NTiiW v07 - Greco-Roman Context of Early Church

- a. BIRD
- b. 00:24 - World of Jesus was dominated by Greek culture
 - i. Melbourne - Second largest Greek city in the world!!! (4th century BC)
 - ii. Alexander created CITIES and TEMPLES, with Constitutions, etc., Philosophy
 - iii. 2:00 - Spread of Hellenistic culture caused the Jews problems
 1. Some accepted the ideas gladly
 2. Others considered it pagan, and fundamentally against God

3. 3:00 - First Christians had similar issues
- iv. WRIGHT
- v. 3:24 - By Jesus' birth, whole of known world controlled by Rome
 1. Rome city-state continued gradual expansion
 2. Greek culture, if not rule, seeped into the culture
 3. Rome was more brutal/direct
 4. But Rome tried to be ~democratic, two consuls, etc.
 5. Julius Caesar assassinated
 6. Octavian emperor brought "peace" "Son of deified Julius"
- vi. 6:50 - Roman symbols all over the world, colonies, "We want this to be like, look like, feel like... Rome!"
 1. 7:25 - Paul declared Jesus was Son of God. This was IN YOUR FACE to the Roman system.
- vii. BIRD - Greco-Roman World
 1. 8:33 - Ancient world did not have "religion" as we normally use the word.
 2. Not even a word in the ancient world which means what we mean today.
 3. Rome - scruples "duty to gods"
 4. Greek - piety, worship - Practice of cult and ritual. NOT a web of beliefs or world view
 5. Religion in ancient world - nothing to do with after life, but deeply connected with economy, politics, etc.
 6. 10:30 - How obtain peace from gods via cultic practices.
- viii. BOTH - 11:04 -
 1. Culturally Greek, Politically Roman - Challenges?
 2. Wright - Christianity did not look like a "religion," but they did some things which bound them with Jesus (baptism, Lord's supper). More like ancient philosophers. Would have clashed with other philosophers of the day. In the Roman empire there was GREAT suspicion of people meeting behind closed doors. SUBVERSIVE!
 3. 12:41 - Be loyal to Jesus, but do so in such a way that shows this is a NEW way of "being human" - not retreat from the world, but transform the world.
 - 4.

APPENDIX II

RVL-Recommended Reading Material

- Reading the Bible Contextually: Introductory Sources
- Lois Tverbert
 - Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus
 - Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus
 - Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus
- Sandra Richter
 - Epic of Edin
- Marvin Wilson
 - Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage
 - Our Father Abraham