

Course Syllabus
KNB1501HF DRAFT
Understanding the New Testament
Knox College
Winter 2026

Instructor Information

Instructor: Bradley H. McLean, PhD, Full Professor
Office Location: Knox College
E-mail: bhm.mclean@utoronto.ca
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Identification

Course Number: KNB1501HS
Course Format: Online
Course Name: Understanding the New Testament
Class Times: Synchronous class (Mondays 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.) with additional asynchronous participation throughout the week*

**** Course Delivery Format***

This is a hybrid synchronous and asynchronous course. While the lecture component is synchronous (Mondays 9:00-11:00), additional asynchronous interaction is required throughout each week. This course is designed for collaborative learning, with each person taking an active role in group discussions.

Course Description

Exploration of the content of New Testament writings, especially the canonical gospels and Pauline corpus. Emphasis will be placed upon understanding these writings in their original socio-historical and literary contexts, and on methods of interpretation.

Additional Background of this Course

The 27 writings of the canonical New Testament can be interpreted from many different perspectives. Over the course of history, different Christian denominations have interpreted these texts through the lens of diverse and conflicting own theologies. This course will study the texts of the canonical New Testament on the basis of the *disciplinary methods* of New Testament studies, which interprets the texts of the NT on the basis of many different perspectives including historical, literary, socio-cultural, and narrative perspectives. Considered as a collection of texts, these writings tell the story of the long and complicated process by which Jewish followers of Jesus slowly differentiated themselves of other Jewish groups in the late Second Temple Judaism. A primary theme of this course that early Christian texts *do not*

have autonomous meanings apart from the specific socio-cultural and historical contexts in which they emerged.

Many people are accustomed to reading the New Testament as a *single* text (not as a collection of texts), through the lens of their own particular denominational theologies. Every denominational theology has arisen in particular historical circumstances and has undergone historical developments over time.

Depending on your previous experiences, these the disciplinary perspective of *this* course may be unfamiliar to you. As a result, you may experience a *cognitive dissonance* (mental stress) when exposed to information that is inconsistent with your own theological beliefs and assumptions. The experience of cognitive dissonance can take the form of strategies of avoidance, mood swings, and behaviours aimed at disrupting the class learning environment, can all be symptoms of religious trauma syndrome.

Trigger Warning

You are preparing for vocations (congregational ministry, spiritual care, psychotherapy, teaching, research, etc.) that, by their nature, present you with stimulating situations, including domestic violence, child sexual abuse, effects of addiction, and other very traumatic events. Your vocational preparation anticipates that you will meet such situations in the real world, that you will not be warned about the nature of the stimulus, and that you have to protect a person from your own reaction to situations that may “trigger” a response in you. Your faculty advisor, the registrar’s staff, and the Ecumenical Chaplains can direct you to resources for you to engage in care for your own self. In your studies you will likely not be warned about the kind of “triggering” event that you may encounter. If you or your colleague are concerned that you cannot regain control or are unduly distressed, you and your colleague should seek assistance from the Knox Registrar’s office. Staff there have access to immediate assistance. In the end, your emotional safety is your own responsibility.

Religious Trauma Syndrome

Try to aware of *your own* ability to be triggered by the course material. Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS) is a term used to describe the negative mental health effects of unhealthy or harmful past religious experiences. The symptoms of religious-based trauma include anxiety, depression, panic, and feelings of anger towards whatever causes feelings of cognitive dissonance. Other symptoms of religious trauma are strategies of avoidance, reactivity symptoms such as anger and defensiveness, and intense mood swings.

Religious Trauma Syndrome and Gender Diversity

Symptoms of religious-based trauma are sometimes triggered by the discussion of gender, when this topic arises in some NT texts. Knox College promotes a learning environment that affirms the intrinsic value of all people, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, or intersecting identities. As this course progresses, try to aware of *your own* reactions to the course material including the discussion of gender.

Course Resources

Required Texts and Bibliography: All readings are available online

- *A New Translation of the Septuagint: A New Translation of the Greek into Contemporary English*. Ed. Albert Pietermas, Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. (NETS)
- Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, Seventh Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics*. Oxford University Press, US. 2012.
- Eisenbaum, Pamela. *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.
- Horbury, William, and W.D. Davies, John Sturdy, *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Vol. 3 – The Early Roman Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Kloppenborg, John. *Q: The Earliest Gospel*. Louisville and London: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.
- Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds). *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, second revised and expanded edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Martin, Dale B. *New Testament History and Literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Rhoads, David, and Joanna Dewey, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

Course Website

- Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/>
- This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701> . Students experiencing difficulties accessing Quercus should contact the registrar's office of their college.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1

5-10 January What are the "Scriptures"?

See *Week 1: Overview* (in Quercus)

Synchronous Class: 5 January, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Critical self-reflection paper #1 (due Wednesday, 6 January)

Week 2

12-17 January The Diversity of Second Temple Judaism under Roman Rule and the Jesus Movement

See *Week 2: Overview*

Synchronous Class: 12 January, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Week 3

19-14 January Paul, an apocalyptic and messianic Jew (37-54 CE)
2 Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philemon

See *Week 3: Overview*

Synchronous Class: 18 January, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Week 4

26-31 January Inter-Jewish Conflict prior to the Destruction of the Second Temple
Philippians, Galatians, Romans (54-68 CE), and the Epistle of James

See *Week 4: Overview* (Quercus)

Synchronous Class: 26 January, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Week 5

2-7 February Trauma following the First Jewish Revolt and the Destruction of the Second Temple:
First-generation Christians and Jewish Leaders Compete

Book of Revelation, 1 Enoch, Book of Jubilees, Apocalypse of Peter

See *Week 5: Overview* (Quercus)

Synchronous Class: 2 February, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

[Thanksgiving: 14 October]

Week 6

9-14 February A Gospel as a Life of Jesus: The Gospel of Mark
See *Week 6: Overview*
Synchronous Class: 9 February, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

[16-20 February – Reading Week]

Week 7

23-28 February The Literary relationship of Mark's 'Life of Jesus' and the Q Sayings Gospel to
the Gospels of Luke and Matthew

See *Week 7: Overview*

Synchronous Class: 23 February 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Critical Self-reflection Paper #2 (due Monday, 4 November)

Week 8

2-7 March

Gospel of Matthew: A Life of Jesus as the New Moses (79-96 CE)

See *Week 8: Overview*

Synchronous Class: 2 March, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Week 9

9-14 March

Gospel of Luke: A Life of Jesus, Prophet of God
Acts of the Apostles

See *Week 9: Overview* (Quercus)

Synchronous Class: 9 March, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Week 10

16-21 March

Growing Inter-Jewish Conflict
Gospel of John, Epistle to the Hebrews, Epistle of Barnabas (79-100 CE)

See *Week 10: Overview* (Quercus)

Synchronous Class: 16 March, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Week 11

23-28 March

Conflict over the Role of Women in Second-generation Christ groups:
Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, 1 Timothy, Life of Adam and Eve, Testament of
Reuben, Jude, Acts of Paul and Thecla, Gospel of Mary

See *Week 11: Overview* (Quercus)

Synchronous Class: 23 March, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Week 12

30 Mar. – 4 Apr.

Diversity and Conflict among Second-generation Christ Groups in the years leading up
to the Second Jewish Revolt

See *Week 12: Overview* (Quercus)

Synchronous Class: 30 March, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Critical Self-reflection Paper #3 (due Wednesday, 11 April)

Evaluation

Requirements

The final grade for the course will be based on evaluations in three areas:

(1) Participation (10%) — In addition to participating in the regular activity of the class, including the reading of the required texts, students are expected to contribute positively to the weekly learning environment of the class

(2) Weekly online activities (50%)

40% - Based on your first postings Wednesday

10% - Based your responses to the postings of others (Thursday to Saturdays, due by Saturday 11:00 p.m.)

(3) Three graduated *critical* self-reflection papers (40%)

pass/fail - Critical self-reflection paper #1

20% - Critical self-reflection paper #2

20% - Critical self-reflection paper #3 (including content for Week 12)

Grading System - Basic Degree Students

1000, 2000 and 3000 level courses use the following numerical grading scale:

90-100 (A+)	Exceptional
85-89 (A)	Outstanding
80-84 (A-)	Excellent
77-79 (B+)	Very Good
73-76 (B)	Good
70-72 (B-)	Acceptable
0-69 (FZ)	Failure

Please see the appropriate Conjoint Degree handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades (e.g. SDF, INC, etc.).

Policies

Class attendance. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner congruent with the vocation they are seeking to enter and in which they desire to give leadership. To that end, it is a regulation of Knox College that a minimum of approximately 80% attendance at courses (10 of 12 weeks) is required for credit; 100% attendance is expected at seminar courses. Habitual lateness for class will be counted as absence.

Teaching and learning are interactive, not passive, activities. Therefore, students may not “attend” an in-person class through unauthorized audio or video streaming or by watching or listening to a recording; instructors are not obligated to record or permitted to stream their in-person classes. Online classes that include a synchronous video component require the same level of attendance as an in-person course, and students may not “attend” by watching or listening to a recording. Online classes that include an asynchronous component require participation in all the activities for each week or module to meet the attendance requirement. Students requiring accommodations to attend class must present medical and/or Accessibility Services documentation that outlines the type and duration of accommodation(s) required.

Class recording. Much of the learning that goes on in the virtual or in-person classroom is founded upon mutual disclosure that takes place between instructor and student, and between students. Parties outside of this learning community have not committed themselves to this relationship of trust. A student without an approved accommodation who wishes to make an audio recording of an in-person class must secure the agreement of the instructor and all classmates; livestreaming and video recordings are not permitted. Online video-streamed classes may be recorded at the discretion of the instructor. Personal recordings may be used only by the student who made the recording; no recording may be reproduced, posted, or distributed without the written permission of the instructor.

Late work (BD). Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. *Students who fail to post in the online discussion board by the appointed deadlines will receive a grade of 0 (zero).* Students who do not submit the critical self-reflection paper by the deadline will be marked down 5% per day that the assignment is late. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of exam week for the semester in which the course is taught, whichever is sooner.

This penalty is not applied to students with documented medical or compassionate difficulties or exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness); students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with their faculty adviser or basic degree director, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor and request an SDF. The absolute deadline for obtaining an SDF for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of examination week, whichever is sooner. An SDF must be requested from the registrar’s office in the student’s college of registration no later than the last day of exam week in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. If a student has not completed work but has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be submitted calculating a zero for work not submitted.

Late work (Graduate). The prima facie deadline for the completion of work in a course is the last day of the examination week for the trimester in which the course is taken. Students are expected to meet the course deadlines of the instructor offering the course and are advised to plan their research projects accordingly. Students who find themselves unable to meet deadlines for completing coursework can, under certain conditions, receive extensions for completing the work after the dates set by the college in which the course is offered.

The authority to grant an extension for the completion of work in a course beyond the original TST or college deadline (whichever is earlier) for that course rests with the student’s college Graduate Director, not the instructor of the course. Nevertheless, the instructor’s signature is required for course extension

requests to be processed. Students will petition their college Graduate Director for extensions, using a standard form provided by TST on its website. See Section 7.11 of the Conjoint Graduate Degree Handbook.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted to ACORN. Grades are not official until they are posted to ACORN. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy found at <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university-assessment-and-january-26-2012>, policies found in the TST conjoint program handbooks, or college grading policy.

Inclusive Language. Knox College has an inclusive language policy, available at https://knox.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Knox-College-Policy_Use-of-Language-Policy-and-Glossary_221003.pdf.

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to their head of college or delegate according to the Graduate program Handbook linked from <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>. A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document "Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing" published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges: <https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/>

Use of Generative AI, e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Claude. You may use generative artificial intelligence tools for learning and practicing the concepts in this course, but these tools may **not** be used for completing assignments in this course. That is, you may use these tools in the same ways you might discuss course content and assignments with your peers, but just as you may not collaborate with your peers to complete assignments, you may not use these tools to complete any assignment or exercise. If you use a GenAI tool, you should use the version of Microsoft Copilot licensed to the University of Toronto, which doesn't retain data for training purposes. Other tools may and do use data entered by users to train the AI, and unless you hold the rights to the prompts you use, you may be entering copyrighted material without the rights-holder's permission.

All of this said, I encourage you to think about the moral, ethical, and pedagogical implications of using GenAI. A first step is to complete the University of Toronto's "[Coursework and GenAI: A Practical Guide for Students](#)" in Quercus. Another step is to read the University of Alberta Library's "[Ethical Considerations for Using Generative AI](#)." You might also read this research paper, "[Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt when Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Task](#)," which reports on experiments showing that using GenAI literally makes students stupider.

This is a graduate-level research course. Any responses by a GenAI tool to questions you may pose are unlikely to be sufficiently complex or nuanced to meet the outcomes of the course; they may not even be factually correct. Reading sophisticated prose, writing, translating, and presenting are how we learn and how we learn to think creatively. There's no short-cut.

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of assignments before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. Students should check utoronto email regularly for messages about the course. Forwarding your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from me may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

Email communication with the course instructor. The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address. Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Basic Degrees – Knox and TST

<i>This course has the following course-level learning outcomes</i>	
Outcome	Evaluation

1. Describe the ancient historical and literary contexts in which early Christian texts emerged	discussion board
2. Demonstrate the ability and willingness to learn and understand the culture of people who are different from oneself.	discussion board
3. Discuss interactions between diverse socio-cultural and historical contexts and the varied theologies of individual early Christian texts	discussion board
4. Demonstrate the willingness to assess one's own learning.	critical self-evaluation papers

<i>A student successfully completing this course has made progress towards the following Knox College degree program learning outcomes:</i>		
MDiv	MTS	MPS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interprets Scripture and Christian tradition (Reformed), using a variety of methods, sources, and norms, to preach, teach, write, and to provide care and witness. <i>Evaluation:</i> Discussion board	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge at a basic level in various theological disciplines. <i>Evaluation:</i> Discussion board	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge at a basic level in various theological disciplines, in the Reformed or another tradition. [* the student may come from another tradition] <i>Evaluation:</i> Discussion board
<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates skills in creative, faith-centred, adaptive, and innovative leadership for current and emerging communities of faith. <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.	<input type="checkbox"/> Finds, selects, reads, and appropriately integrates theological information. <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge and skills in spiritual care and therapy, grounded in appropriate theories, for professional practice and leadership in community and institutional settings. <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/> Enhances the vocational and spiritual development, practices, and well-being of self and others. (See Professional and Critical Competencies.) <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engages respectfully and constructively in a theological community of scholarship. <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates an appropriate spiritual and professional identity formation in relation to specialized practice. <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/> Analyzes and evaluates social, cultural, and community contexts to enable communities of faith to participate in God's work and justice in a diverse and changing world. <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writes and speaks in English sufficiently well to engage in theological discourse. <i>Evaluation:</i> Discussion board	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writes and speaks in English sufficiently well to engage in professional practice. <i>Evaluation:</i> Click or tap here to enter text.

TST BASIC "DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS"	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES (see college outcomes above)	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
EXPECTATIONS: <i>In this course students are expected to demonstrate the following:</i>		
1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge	Describe the ancient historical and literary contexts in which early Christian texts emerged	discussion board
2. Knowledge of methodologies		
3. Application of Knowledge	Discuss interactions between diverse socio-cultural and historical contexts and the varied theologies of individual early Christian texts	discussion board
4. Communication Skills		
5. Awareness of Limits of Knowledge	Demonstrate the ability and willingness to learn and understand one's culture, and culture of people different from oneself.	critical self-evaluation papers
6. Autonomy and Professional Capacity	Demonstrate the willingness to assess one's own learning.	critical self-evaluation papers

Critical Self-evaluation Papers

Instructions for this assignment will be posted in Quercus.

Due dates:

- Critical self-reflection paper #1 (due 13 September)
- Critical self-reflection paper #2 (due 4 November)
- Critical self-reflection paper #3 (due 11 December)

Online Participation

The weekly online activities will provide an opportunity for you to participate in a community of learners, to explain your ideas and respond to the ideas of others. Active participation requires that each student be ready to articulate and support his or her own ideas and to respectfully engage the ideas of others.

Expectations:

- By Sunday evening, read the assigned readings in each chapter
- Participate in the synchronous class on Monday mornings (9:10-11:00 a.m.)

- By Wednesday evening, 11:00 p.m., answer the assigned questions in the Discussion Area for the week
- By Saturday evening, respond thoughtfully and substantively to at least *two* posting of your fellow students.

Please take care to enter your messages under the *heading for the appropriate week*. Otherwise, your message will not be read by anyone.

Your participation grade will be based on your weekly ‘postings’ (comprised of your main contribution to the discussion and your responses to other students). Your grade for your online participation will reflect the extent to which you make relevant, informed, thoughtful and clear contributions to the discussions, as well as respond appropriately to the postings of others. Your participation will be graded according to the following criteria, as appropriate:

- familiarity with weekly content and readings
- appropriate use of relevant terminology
- reasonableness of contributions (i.e., your statements are supported by appropriate textual references and explicit reasoning, and not merely asserted)
- respectfulness of other's ideas, opinions, and beliefs. (It's fine to disagree with someone, but please respect their right to think differently.)
- build on ideas of others or ideas found in the readings by adding details, examples, a different viewpoint, or other relevant information.

Criteria also include your ability to:

- explain or elaborate on factual information
- provide examples when making a point
- demonstrate understanding of key themes and principles
- compare and contrast concepts
- relate new knowledge to previously known ideas and concepts and to organize information
- integrate newly acquired knowledge within a broader and deeper perspective
- apply new concepts and principles to relevant issues

Note: it is expected that all students will interact with other students in a respectful manner.

Please be aware that *this course is not self-paced*. It is imperative that you *keep up* with the assigned course work and do not fall behind. This is of particular importance in the case of the Discussion Board, which is organized on a week-by-week basis. Do fall behind and make comments in the previous week's Discussion Board. *Late postings will not be counted towards your participation mark.*

If you are unable to participate fully in a given week, you must receive the permission of the instructor. If you do not receive permission to miss a week, you will be counted as ‘absent’ from

the course. Interaction between students is a fundamental component of the learning process of this course.