

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BIB820 Cultural Backgrounds of the Bib. World
Spring, 2008

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I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION

A thematic course focusing on various aspects of the multiple cultural settings of both the Old and the New Testaments. Its purpose is to provide students with insight into the cultural conditions and conditioning of the biblical text.

II. COURSE RATIONALE

All Christians view the Bible as instructional and authoritative, especially in matters of faith and living by faith. However, a complicating factor arises in our efforts to interpret and appropriate the instruction of the Bible to the modern life of faith. The Bible in its various parts was written in (and originally for) at least three other cultural settings, namely, ancient Israel/Judah of the Divided Monarchy, the Exilic/Post-Exilic Jewish community, and the early decades of the church's existence as it established itself in the Greco-Roman/Jewish world of the First Century.

How do we understand these vastly different cultural worlds and their impact on the content and message of the Bible? How do we "translate" its content and message to the several cultural milieus in which we live and serve? These and related questions provide the rationale for offering, and taking, a course in cultural backgrounds. In addition, the study of cultures is fun and interesting because, in the end, cultures are about people, created in the image of God and the objects of God's infinite love and redemptive purpose. As C. S. Lewis said in another context, there is serious joy here!

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize items of cultural significance in the biblical text;
2. Express a general understanding of the salient features of the various biblical cultures;
3. Use an expanding array of the many resources available for cultural understanding;
4. Interpret effectively, to today's cultures, the various biblical cultures.

IV. COURSE TEXTS

1. Bauckham, Richard, (ed.). *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, Vol. 4: Palestinian Setting*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1995.
2. King, Philip J., and Lawrence E. Stager. *Life in Biblical Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
3. Meyers, Carol. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

V. STUDENT EVALUATION

Your course grade will be determined by the following:

1. One absence from class will not affect your course grade; two or more absences almost certainly will lower it.
2. Ten six-hundred-word exegetical essays will be assigned. On issues of mechanics, etc., the Seminary follows Turabian's guide.
3. For students desiring to work for a course grade of "A," an end-of-semester exegetical paper or other project will be assigned.

VI. COURSE SCHEDULE

- Feb. 7 – Course introduction and organization
Feb. 14 – The book of Ruth, explored culturally
Feb. 21 – No class session; work on final paper/project
Feb. 28 – Meyers, chapters 1-5
Mar. 6 – Meyers, chapters 6-8
Mar. 13 – King/Stager, chapters 1-2
Mar. 20 – Reading and Research Week
Mar. 27 – King/Stager, chapters 3-4
Apr. 3 – King/Stager, chapters 5-6; Epilogue
Apr. 10 – Bauckham, chapters 1-4
Apr. 17 – Bauckham, chapters 5-8
Apr. 24 – Bauckham, chapters 9-12
May 1 – Bauckham, chapters 13-15
May 8 – Presentations of final papers/projects