

Introduction to the New Testament HPRS4904

Introduction and Overview

Aim of the Module

To explore the origins of Christianity (ca. 30-150 CE).

To examine the history, literature and theology of the early Christian movement.

To demonstrate the contribution of the NT writings to the development of early Christianity.

To consider some of the distinctive emphases of the NT writings.

The 'New Testament Story'

- Jesus of Nazareth starts preaching in Galilee (ca. 30 CE).
- His followers continue to preach after his death. The movement at this time is a Jewish sect in Roman Palestine.
- Admission of Gentiles (non-Jews) by Jewish Christian missionaries (especially Paul).
- The movement receives the name 'Christians' (Acts 11:26); cf. 'sect of the Nazoreans' (Acts 24:5; 24:14; 28:22).

Content of the New Testament

27 writings (by ca. 12 writers).

Narratives about the life of Jesus.

Narrative about the development
of the Early Church.

Letters offering guidance to early
Christian faith communities.

Dating the NT Writings

All the writings date from the first century CE (with some possibly composed in the early decades of the second century CE)

Jesus' death (30-31 CE)

Letters of Paul (55?-64 CE)

Gospels and Acts (68?-95? CE)

Exploring the New Testament from Different Perspectives

Historical Perspective

Literary Perspective

Theological Perspective

From a Historical Perspective

Record(s) of customs, social structures, and cultures belonging to a distant past.

Knowledge required of movements, languages, geography, customs in the first-century Mediterranean region (particularly within the context of late Second Temple Judaism).

NT letters deal with particular circumstances arising in individual communities.

From a Literary Perspective

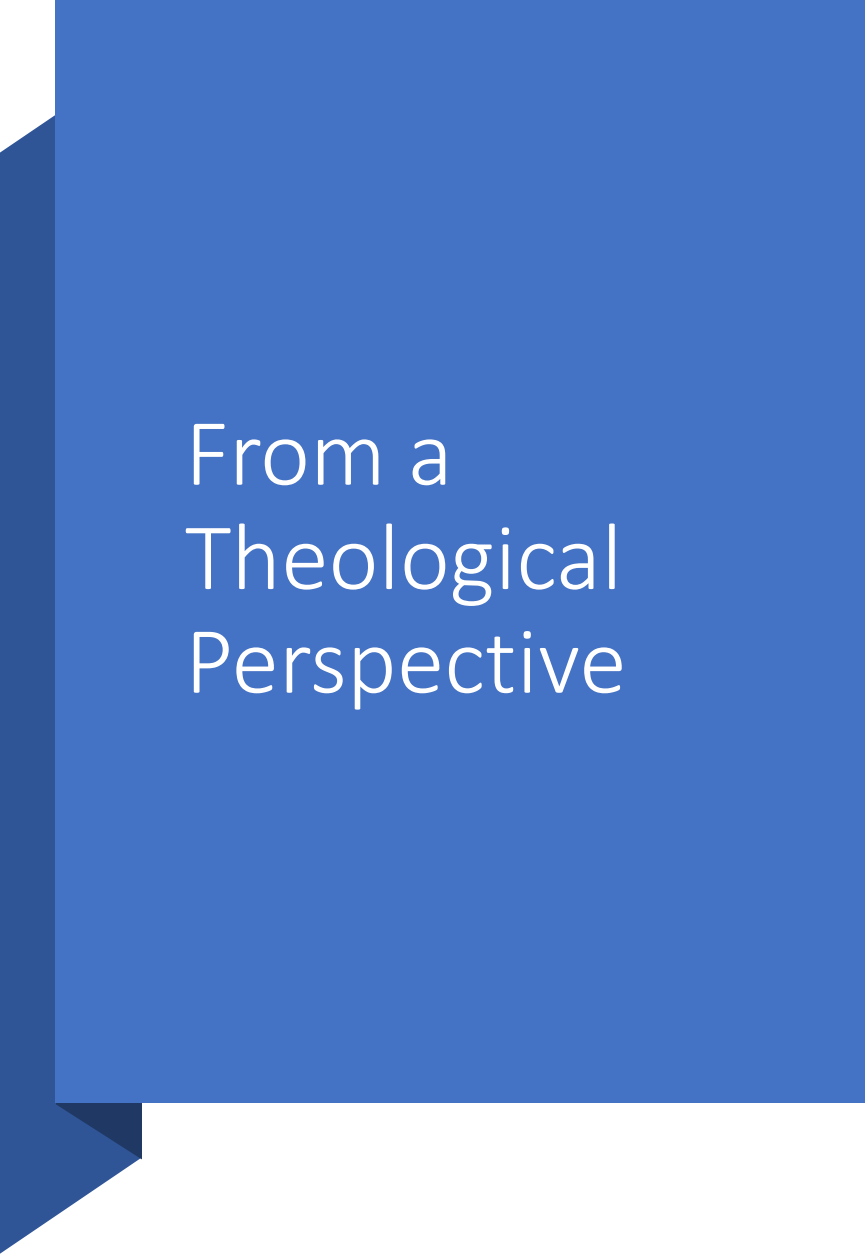
Four literary types in the NT:

Gospel (*euangelion*) - stories about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and many 'apocryphal' Gospels.

Acts - a historical narrative about the beginning of the Early Church.

Letters - written by early Christian leaders to offer instruction and encouragement.

Apocalypse - disclosure of the divine mysteries (the Book of Revelation).



From a Theological Perspective

The faith documents of a religious movement, written by and (primarily) for members of the community.

Exploration of beliefs and practices.

Documents about a God-centred life (= theology) which seek to present the true identity and significance of Jesus.

New 'Testament' or 'Covenant'

- Hebrew Scriptures - the 'Old Testament'
- Testament = covenant (an agreement between two parties)
- God made a covenant with Israel (cf. Exodus 19:5; 24:10)
- God enters into a new covenant with Jesus; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-33: 'The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day when I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt'.