

NETE 70970 Special Topics in New Testament Studies:
Crime, Punishment, and Policing in the New* Testament World
Tu 8:15-10:45

Instructor: Prof. Jeremy L. Williams

Prerequisites:

Introduction to New Testament (preferred)

Description of Content:

This course examines how people in the Roman Empire during the first and second centuries CE experienced, described, and imagined criminal activity, judicial processes, and policing forces. The New* Testament writers were a part of this world. They both impacted and were impacted by imperial, provincial, and local understandings of crime. This course asks: what makes something a crime? Who determines what a crime is? Who regulates and has the power to punish? What is the appropriate penalty for certain violations? Must one commit a crime to be considered a criminal?

Examining these questions will shed light on the trial and execution of Jesus in the Gospels, the incarceration of Paul, the criminalization of the messiah movement in Acts, and even the Sanhedrin's forensic power in the Mishnah. Our exploration of crime will demonstrate how these texts grapple with questions of justice, especially when state agents' versions of justice contradict God's justice.

This course will tend to crime, punishment, and policing by closely analyzing ancient sources and by bringing them into conversation with more contemporary theoretical discussions on criminalization. This course engages an interdisciplinary approach for exploring New* Testament and Early Christian studies by applying resources from Roman legal studies, Jewish studies, critical criminology studies, Black studies and theology, and post-colonial theory.

Class Procedures:

This course meets once-a-week. Each session will be divided into two parts. The first part will feature a lecture on the topic and texts for the week. The second part anticipates vibrant, informed discussions of the week's assigned materials. Students will also make presentations throughout the semester and lead the discussion portion of the session.

Requirements:

- 1) Thoughtful, active participation

Participation involves coming to class prepared and with questions and comments anchored in specific references to the assigned readings. Participation will be measured by sharing in class and by posting biweekly responses to the readings. The responses serve two purposes. The first is to increase the number of voices in the class in order to foster a more egalitarian and cooperative learning environment that cultivates diversity of thought and collaboration. The second purpose for the response papers is for the students' learning and

retention. The responses can take a number of forms. They can take the form of a traditional 1-page reflection that offers a critical evaluation of the primary or secondary text for the week. Also, creativity is encouraged, so the responses can engage other types of media. For example, a student can provide a critical analysis in the form of 180-character tweet or an Instagram-styled photo with a caption. Students should be prepared to share their responses on the days that they submit them.

2) Presentation for a public audience

The goal of this assignment is to teach students how to convey a complicated topic to someone who is not a specialist. Students have the opportunity to work on this individually or in groups. Individuals have 10 minutes allotted, and groups have 20 minutes (regardless of how many people are in the group). In the case of groups, every member has to contribute equal work (writing, speaking, PowerPoint creating, etc.). For an individual, the presentation can be a sermon.

3) Mid-term draft

The major paper for this class is broken up into two stages. To ensure that the student is on the right track, halfway through the course, the student is to submit the first 3-5 pages of a draft of their final paper. Prior to this, the student should consult with the professor about a topic and potential thesis.

4) Final 3500-4500 word paper

Due to the vast subjects that we will cover in this course, students have several potential subjects on which they can write. Options include but are not limited to: an exegesis of a biblical passage or other primary text, an essay that draws connections between course themes in the ancient Mediterranean and contemporary society, an argument that critiques ancient judicial procedures, etc.

Texts: Electronic versions of materials will be provided to students.

Grading Procedures:

Participation: 30%

Class Participation: 20%

Presentation for a Public Audience: 20%

Mid-term Exercise: 15%

Final Paper: 35%

Contract grading is also an option. See professor for more details.