

COURSE SYLLABUS

NT510: The Epistle to the Hebrews

Course Lecturer: Dennis E. Johnson, PhD

About This Course



This course was originally created through the Institute of Theological Studies in association with the Evangelical Seminary Deans' Council. There are nearly 100 evangelical seminaries of various denominations represented within the council and many continue to use the ITS courses to supplement their curriculum. The lecturers were selected primarily by the Deans' Council as highly recognized scholars in their particular fields of study.

Course Description

To what extent does the New Covenant replace the Old? How should Jews regard their crucified Messiah? Learners discover answers to these and other important questions by studying the background, context, and content of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The course focuses on the key interpretive issues and theological contributions found in this rich, christocentric book. The goal of the course is to strengthen your confidence in the superiority of Jesus and the New Covenant, and to equip you to “encourage one another daily.”

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, you should be able to do the following:

(Cognitive)

- Reach informed conclusions regarding the epistle's authorship, original audience, and purpose
 - › List the identifications that have been proposed regarding the authorship of Hebrews.
 - › Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the argument for each proposal.
 - › Identify the evidence within the epistle that provides information concerning its original audience and their situation.
 - › Identify the proposals that have been offered regarding the identity and life situation of the epistle's original audience.
 - › Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the argument for each proposal.
 - › Integrate evidence concerning the audience's situation and the epistle's main themes into a statement of the epistle's purpose(s).
- Describe the genre, method of theological argument, and main themes of the Epistle to the Hebrews.
 - › Identify features within the epistle that indicate its genre.
 - › Infer interpretive principles and strategies appropriate to the genre.
 - › Outline the structure of the epistle, the main movements in its argument.

- › Describe and illustrate its method of Christological interpretation of Old Testament texts.
- Discuss significant questions in the interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, demonstrating acquaintance with alternative views and offering evidence and argumentation for the view that you prefer.
 - › Christology and the question of Jesus’ “being made perfect”
 - › Relationship of old covenant and new covenant
 - History of redemption
 - Mode of revelation
 - Covenant law
 - Typology: shadow and reality
 - Sacrifice for atonement
 - Worship and sanctuary
 - Land/City-inheritance promises
 - › Priesthood in the order of Melchizedek
 - › Wilderness-paradigm of the Christian community’s present experience
 - Wilderness generation
 - House of God
 - Priests of God
 - › Apostasy

(Affective)

- Glorify God for the superiority of Christ, the mediator of the new and eternal covenant.
- Approach God confidently in prayer through Christ our high priest.
- Respond to present trials with persistent faith and hope.
- Take initiative to encourage struggling fellow-Christians, with compassion and confidence.
- Rejoice in the superiority of new covenant worship, centered in the Son and the heavenly Jerusalem, versus the touchable “shadows” of old covenant worship.

(Performative)

- Explain and apply passages from Hebrews so as to make clear their meaning and relevance to late-twentieth century audiences.
 - › In writing
 - › In preaching or teaching
 - › In counseling
- Replicate the hermeneutical method of Hebrews in interpreting other Old Testament texts.

Course Lecturer



Dennis E. Johnson, PhD

Education:

- Fuller Theological Seminary, PhD
- Westminster Theological Seminary, MDiv and ThM
- Westmont College, BA

Teaching Career:

- Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary (since 1982)
- Teaching Assistant, Westminster Theological Seminary (1975-1976)
- Lecturer in Greek, Westmont College
- Taught and preached in Chad, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, Thailand, and the Ukraine

Publications:

- Writer of articles for *The Westminster Theological Journal* and the *Journal of the Evangelical Society*
- Numerous books, including *The Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation, Christ and Our Many Cultures*, and *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Contributor to the *New Geneva Study Bible*, *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, and the *English Standard Version Study Bible*

Course Texts

Required:

Lane, William L. *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC 47A); *Hebrews 9-13* (WBC 47B). Waco: Word, 1991.

Textbooks can be ordered through our online store at CUGN.org, through your local bookstore, or through your preferred eReader when available.

Course Requirements

1. **Time:** The student must complete the course requirements within a 6-month period unless the particular institution requires the completion of all work within the framework of the semester or quarter. During this time, the student is expected to devote a minimum of 120 hours to the completion of the course.
2. **Recorded Lectures:** The student is required to listen to all 24 audio lectures recorded by Dr. Dennis E. Johnson.
3. **Reading:** Read the entire textbook, William L. Lane's two-volume commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series. Read the appropriate section(s) of the commentary in advance of each lecture.
4. **Exegetical Paper:** Research and write a **4,500-word** (15 pp.) exposition of a text in Hebrews, consulting the textbook and other commentaries, lexical and grammatical resources, and, if appropriate and feasible, journal articles and other monographs. The exposition should give attention to the situation of the readers (particularly the specific nature of their need for exhortation/encouragement as reflected in your text), the role of the text in its literary contexts (the argument of the epistle, the Old Testament, other New Testament writings), the author's purpose, and the structure and movement of thought by which the text advances toward that purpose. It is recommended that you consult and interact with, *in addition to Lane*, at least one other modern evangelical commentary (F. F. Bruce, P. Ellingworth, D. Hagner, P. E. Hughes), a critical commentary or two (H. Attridge, H. Montefiore, G. W. Buchanan, J. Moffatt) and at least one classic Protestant commentary (J. Calvin, J. Owen, W. Goudge). *Your objective is to produce not a narrowly-focused research paper, but a balanced, informed, well-reasoned explanation of the message of the text as a whole, as a foundation for preaching or teaching the text in a church or Bible study setting.* (Nevertheless, observe standard academic conventions by identifying quotations, footnoting, and including a bibliography of works consulted.)

5. Study Guide: Answer the questions in the Study Guide and submit to your proctor. These questions are designed to assist you in note taking and in achieving higher levels of interaction and learning. Your proctor will tell you how often you are to submit your answers.

6. Spiritual Formation Project

RATIONALE: Ministry preparation and the Christian life require more than academic exercises. Learners also need personal, spiritual formation, which involves theological reflection and critical thinking on their current practices and assumptions. This process occurs as learners engage in self-reflection and interaction in a community of learning. With this in mind, CUGN includes in all courses a capstone project addressing these issues and facilitating interaction beyond the formal learning environment (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 4.1.1; 10.3.3.3).

Write a **five-to-six page reflective essay** and **interview a mentor**, discussing the spiritual impact of this course on your life. Identify your mentor early in the course, and submit the essay to your grader when you take the final exam. This last project should not be a summary of course content, but an application of course principles. Complete the following:

A. Personal Reflection and Evaluation: Reflect on the course – To integrate your academic studies with your walk of faith, reflect on the content of the course and evaluate your life in light of what you learned.

vii. Follow these steps in your reflection:

Step 1: What one theme, principle, or concept in the course is the most significant to you personally? Why is it significant?

Step 2: What portion(s) of the course brought this theme/principle/concept to light?

Step 3: Think about your past. Why is it vital now for you to deal with and apply this theme/principle/concept?

Step 4: How should this affect your thoughts and actions, and what specific steps should you take to concretely apply what you have learned?

viii. Write your answers to the above questions in full paragraph form. (Recommended length for this reflection: approximately three pages)

ix. Give a copy of this reflection to your mentor (see #2).

B. Community Reflection and Interaction: Interview a mentor – Since the Holy Spirit uses the input of others to guide and form His people, interview a mentor according to the following guidelines:

i. Who should you interview? (1-3 are required; 4-6 are recommended)

1. Someone with whom you have a reasonably close relationship.

2. Someone who is a mature Christian ministry leader (i.e. a pastor).

3. Someone who is not your grader or a family member.
4. Someone who values the spiritual formation process.
5. Someone who is familiar with and values the subject of the course.
6. Someone who has experience using the content of the course in ministry.

NOTE: Identify your mentor early in the course, and give him/her the page entitled “Guidelines for Mentors.”

- ii. Focus of the interview – Your interview should focus on the issues and questions you raise in your essay. For example:
 - What feedback can your mentor give in response to your essay?
 - In light of the course content, are the conclusions you made appropriate? Why or why not?
 - What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications might he/she suggest from his/her own life and ministry?

NOTE: Conduct this interview either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc). Suggested length: 45 minutes.

C. Synthesis and Application: Draw your final conclusions – Having reflected on the course and the discussion with your mentor, synthesize what you have learned in these three sections:

- i. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from #1 above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.
- ii. Section 2: Comment on your interview, explaining what you discussed and the insights you gained from your mentor. Include the following:
 - What were the mentor’s comments regarding your essay?
 - What advice did he/she give?
 - How did his/her comments expand or correct your application of the course?
 - Include the person’s name, occupation, and the length of the interview.
- iii. Section 3: Conclude with a synthesis of what you have learned. Answer the following:
 - If your mentor corrected any thoughts in your “Personal Reflection and Evaluation”, how do you feel about these corrections? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - Synthesizing your thoughts from section one and your mentor’s insight in section two, what final conclusions have you reached? How is this different from section one?
 - In light of the interview and further reflection, what additional, specific changes need to occur in your life and what concrete steps will you take to implement them?

NOTE TO STUDENTS: Your effort in this assignment will determine its benefit. If by the end of this course you have not yet reflected critically on your life in light of what you have studied,

allow this assignment to guide you in that process. The instructor for this course will not score your essay based on the amount of spiritual fruit you describe; so do not exaggerate (or trivialize) what you have learned. The primary grading criteria is that you have thoughtfully considered the principles of the course and realistically sought to apply them to your life. If you have done this and met the minimal requirements (as noted above), you will earn the full points for this assignment.

Note on confidentiality: Perhaps the Holy Spirit is dealing with you in some very personal areas of your life. Because of this, your grader will keep your essay entirely confidential and either return or discard it.

Objective: to stimulate reflection and interaction on course principles in order to enhance personal spiritual formation.

Course Grading

Your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Completion of the Reading	10% of Course Grade
Exegetical Paper	40% of Course Grade
Study Guide Questions	30% of Course Grade
Spiritual Formation Project	20% of Course Grade
Total	100%

Student Name: _____ Course: _____ Interview
Date/Time: _____

Guidelines for Mentors

(Students, give this sheet to your mentor for the Spiritual Formation Project.)

Thank you for your involvement in this student's CUGN coursework. We believe the Christian life is more than an academic exercise, so we encourage students to critically reflect on their life in light of what they learn and then apply those insights to the daily life of faith.

Therefore, students taking CUGN courses are required to complete a final assignment called the "Spiritual Formation Project." This assignment involves two parts: an essay and an interview:

The ESSAY: After completing their coursework, students reflect on the content of the course, evaluate their lives, and discuss the one theme, principle or concept that is most significant to them and why. Students are to identify specific ways this theme/principle/concept should apply to their lives and what action steps they plan to take in order to make these changes a reality.

The INTERVIEW: After writing this reflection, students give a copy to their mentor and meet with him/her to discuss their thoughts and get feedback. The goal of this interview is to facilitate the student's growth through interaction with a mature believer.

NOTES ON THE INTERVIEW:

- You do not need to be familiar with the course to participate in this interview. You will primarily respond to the thoughts of the student. (However, general knowledge of the subject matter of the course and/or experience applying it to ministry is valuable.)
- Prior to meeting with the student, read his/her "Personal Reflection and Evaluation" and prepare to discuss the following:
 1. What feedback can you give the student in response to his/her essay?
 2. Are the student's conclusions from the course appropriate? Why or why not?
 3. What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications would you suggest from your own life and ministry?
- Meet with the student either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc.).
- Suggested length of the interview: 45 minutes

Thanks again for participating in this project! You have a real opportunity to guide this student in the application process and to help him/her connect academics to life – *a valuable process for all who wish to grow in Christ.*

NOTE: If the student's school makes any changes to this assignment, their requirements should replace those described here.

Course Bibliography

Recommended Resources (or works referred to in the lectures)

- Attridge, H. A. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia). Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989.
- Barrett, C. K. "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in W. D. Davies and D. Daube, edd. *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956. pp. 363-93.
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- Davidson, Richard M. *Typology in Scripture*. Andrews University Press, 1981. pp. 280-316, 388-424.
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- Hughes, John J. "Hebrews IX 15ff. and Galatians III 15ff.: A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure," *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1979): pp. 27-96.

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- Kline, Meredith G. *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963.
- Lane, William L. *Call to Commitment: Responding to the Message of Hebrews*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985.
- Lampe, G. W. H., and K. J. Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 22). Naperville: Allenson, 1957.
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