

Essay Rubric – New Testament Theology and History

(The highlighted comments apply to your essay. Note that the various sections are not weighted by a set formula, but balanced based on their significance for the essay at hand.)

	Writing	Research	Argument	Interpretive Method	Depth of Insight/Creativity
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No errors in spelling or grammar. Style flows smoothly. Essay is clearly structured, with smooth transitions from one section to the next. Correct SBL (Chicago style) format is used throughout. A pleasure to read. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 10 good-quality academic sources. At least 3 are academic journal articles. At least 1 is an entry from an academic bible dictionary. At least 4 recent academic commentaries consulted. Sources are well understood and are used thoughtfully and critically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear thesis stated in introduction and conclusion. All aspects of interpretation are well supported by evidence from the biblical text and/or historical record. Argument for the interpretation is coherent and compelling. Possible objections are anticipated and effectively countered. Various sections of the essay are balanced well in terms of length. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insightful observations made about the details of the passage. Thesis clearly summarizes the passage's impact on (a) a first-century audience member; and (b) the essay-writer her/himself Sketch of a first-century audience member is historically plausible and touches on several significant aspects of the book's historical and social context. Description of the passage's impact on the first audience is clearly based on an insightful analysis of the details of the passage. Description of the passage's possible impact on the essay-writer draws an insightful analogy with its impact on the first-century audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of significant independent, critical thought. Research is synthesized very well. A significant interpretation presented in an engaging way. Description of first-century audience member is particularly creative (without sacrificing accuracy or becoming overly long)
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only a few errors in spelling or grammar (1-2 per page). Style may be awkward in places, but is generally readable. Essay is clearly structured, with logical transitions from one section to the next. Only a few errors in SBL (Chicago style) formatting of footnotes and bibliography. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 8 good-quality academic sources. At least 1 is an academic journal article. At least 1 is an academic bible dictionary entry. At least 3 recent academic commentaries consulted. The research has been understood well and all sources are used significantly in the paper. In a few places sources may simply be repeated without critical engagement. No major scholarly views on the book or passage are missed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear thesis stated in introduction and conclusion. All aspects of interpretation supported with some good evidence from biblical text and/or historical record. Some evidence used is weak. A significant attempt made to address possible counter-arguments or alternative interpretations of the passage, though these responses may not always be convincing. Various sections of the essay are balanced reasonably well in terms of length. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good attention given to the details of the passage. Good attention given to the passage's surrounding context in the book and the significance of that context for the passage at hand. Good attention given to OT allusions or references in the passage. Thesis clearly summarizes the passage's impact on (a) a first-century audience member; and (b) the essay-writer her/himself Outlines a first century audience member fairly accurately, touching on some significant features of the book's historical and social context situation. Clearly outlines the passage's possible impact on the essay-writer him/herself. Description of the passage's impact on the first audience is clearly based on an insightful analysis of the details of the passage. Description of the passage's possible impact on the essay-writer is clearly drawn by analogy from its impact on the first-century audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some evidence of independent, critical thought. Does not simply repeat the views of research sources. Presentation is fairly interesting. Some creativity displayed in description of first-century audience member.
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequent errors in spelling or grammar (3-10 per page). Style may be quite awkward in places. Structure is awkward in places. It is sometimes unclear why one topic or observation follows another. Format does not follow SBL (Chicago style) guidelines consistently. In a few places these problems interfere with the reader's understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 6 good-quality academic sources. At least one recent academic commentary consulted. Some sources may not be reliable or are not relevant to the topic. Sources may not be balanced to represent a range of scholarly views. Some sources are not used significantly in the paper or are not understood well. Understanding of the subject may be superficial. Some scholarly views or aspects of the subject may be missed. A few factual errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thesis is unclear. Some aspects of the interpretation are not supported with sufficient evidence from biblical text. Comments about the biblical book or the passage may not be supported by chapter/verse references. Scholarly opinions may be cited uncritically and not supported by evidence from the biblical text or historical record. Little effective response to possible counter-arguments. Some discussions of background or of passage details are not clearly related to the final interpretation of the passage. Some problems with the logic of the argument. Various sections of the essay are not balanced well in terms of length. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient attention given to the details of the passage. Insufficient attention given to the passage's surrounding context in the book. Discussion of the passage's context and/or relevant cultural background may not be connected significantly to the passage's final interpretation. Insufficient attention given to OT allusions or references in the passage, the meaning and background of significant words or phrases, or relevant social/cultural background of the passage. Thesis may not summarize a change in the audience (either ancient or contemporary). An attempt is made to sketch out a first-century audience member. Fictional first-century character may display traits or experiences that are atypical of that historical and social context. Fictional ancient character may not display any of the distinctive features of the book's historical audience. Description of the passage's ancient or modern interpretation is not related sufficiently to the details of the passage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A basic presentation. Little evidence of independent, critical thought. May simply repeat the views expressed in research sources.

D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many errors in spelling or grammar (more than 10 per page). • Style is poor. • Structure is poor. It is often unclear why one topic or observation follows another. • Both grammar and style often interfere with the reader's understanding. • No apparent attempt to use SBL (Chicago style) formatting of footnotes and bibliography. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer than 6 good-quality academic sources. • No recent academic commentaries consulted. • The student's understanding of the sources and the topic is poor. • References or citations are often missing. • Page numbers are not provided in citations. • Frequent factual errors. • Major aspects of topic or issues in interpreting the passage are not addressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No focused thesis. • Central aspects of the interpretation are not supported by evidence from the biblical text. • Little clear over-arching argument for the interpretation. • Several topics discussed are not clearly related to the overall interpretation of the passage. • Evidence of some familiarity with the details of the biblical passage and scholarly approaches to it. • Key objections to the interpretation or common alternate interpretations (easily available in recent academic commentaries) are not acknowledged. • Major problems with the logic of the argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several observations made about the passage's likely impact on an ancient audience and a contemporary audience, but these are not focused or summarized. • Little or no attention given to OT allusions or references in the passage. • Little or no attention given to the meaning and background of significant words or phrases. • Little or no attention given to relevant social/cultural background of the passage. • Fictional character (ancient or contemporary) may be obviously anachronistic or unrepresentative. • Description of the passage's ancient or modern interpretation seems unrelated to the details of the passage. • No clear analogy between the first-century impact described and the proposed contemporary impact. • No consideration of similarities and differences between the first-century audience member and the contemporary audience. • Either the ancient or contemporary audience may be treated as a general group rather than being represented by a fictional individual (ancient) or the essay-writer (contemporary). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A poor presentation. Problems with the writing and/or argument make it difficult to understand the paper. Thought seems confused.
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper is effectively unreadable due to major problems in grammar and style. • No bibliography provided. • No footnotes or references. • Footnotes only given for direct quotations (not for ideas re-phrased in the essay-writer's words). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 3 good-quality academic sources. • The student does not demonstrate any grasp of the material read. • This grade is also reserved for papers which only provide references for direct quotes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper contains no argument and does not demonstrate significant understanding of the passage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no attention to the details of the passage. • No visible attempt to sketch out a representative member of the first-century audience. • No visible attempt to propose a contemporary interpretation of the passage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of interest and/or creative thought is impossible to judge because the argument or writing are incoherent.