

Solving the puzzle

Oxford scholar helps New Orleans Seminary students unlock mysteries of biblical times

By Paul F. South

In the cramped room, surrounded by glass cases containing copies of centuries-old Bibles and ancient texts, students fix their eyes on a copy of Greek text.

Some letters are clear, others nonexistent. Holes in the text give the document the appearance of moth-eaten fabric, like an old neglected sweater.

Deciphering the mystery of the holes, wrought by time, weather and ancient wars, is the goal of the students who work daily in the H. Milton Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

And it is that cross-disciplinary puzzle of language, history, archaeology, theology and science that, in part, drives Michael Theophilos.

Theophilos, a research scholar who earned his doctorate at Oxford University, spent the fall semester at NOBTS. He recently conducted a three-day workshop on papyrology offering hands-on experience which allowed students to come in contact with papyri, experience reading papyrus texts in the original languages as well as English, and examine what those texts – everything from ancient sales receipts to invitations to pagan feasts – mean for biblical interpretation.

Papyrology is the study of papyrus, aimed at deciphering ancient Greek and Latin texts written on papyrus or other easily portable material.



Michael Theophilos

The workshop's goal was to give students a deeper understanding of the historical context of biblical events.

"The goal for any student of the text is to appreciate that the text we are reading comes from a very definite historical period," Theophilos said. "It is not something that happened in the ambiguous distant past. It's not something that is some kind of abstracted philosophical system

we are reading in our text."

Along with the biblical text, students studied documents that helped weave the fabric of daily life – a receipt for imported wheat, a receipt for the sale of a donkey, an invitation to a pagan festival. Every document could unlock deeper understanding of biblical times and their context.

While at present, the only New Testament manuscripts available are from the mid-2nd century, scholars do have access to original documents which chronicle daily life in the New Testament times. These extra-biblical documents bring a greater reality to the biblical text.

"It gives the Bible a greater humanity and historicity in the sense that it isn't something that merely was manifested from thin air," Theophilos said. "This is something that was in conversation with other documents in the ancient world."

Trying to piece together ancient manuscripts is "like a big jigsaw puzzle," Theophilos said.

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Next Year in Chapel

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

TBA



THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

Dr. Jerry Rankin

President, International Mission Board

Calling All Preachers

2008 Lowndes Sermon Competition

Theme: The 2008 scripture text for this year's Lowndes Sermon Competition is Hebrews 4:1-13 with the theme, "Entering God's Rest." The competition is sponsored by the Lord's Day Alliance and the Boston Theological Institute.

Eligibility: Practicing ministers, retired ministers, ministerial students, and ministerial interns are all eligible to submit an entry. The sermon must be preached to a congregation during 2008.

Dates: Manuscripts and audio recordings of the sermon must be postmarked by Jan. 30, 2009. Prizes range from \$750 to \$1,250. Visit www.ldausa.org for more information.

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“There are going to be big gaps. One of the ways to piece things together is by understanding genre and context.”

“Understanding genre is just as important as understanding language,” the 29-year-old Australian scholar said. For example, students of children’s fairy tales might find a manuscript with the words “Once _ a time” and know that the missing word was “upon” based on wording common to fairy tales. Similarly, a missing word from an ancient text can only be reconstructed with the appropriate knowledge of the genre.

But for every closed gap, there are countless mysteries and variants in the ancient texts to solve, using a combination of science, art, history, archaeology, theology, language and old fashioned detective work.

Theophilos was drawn to the study of the ancient texts while teaching and preaching in Papua New Guinea. While doing outreach ministry in the outlying villages, Theophilos felt “a thirst to know more about the historical, political and religious history of Early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism.”

Thirsting for more, he returned to Australia and immersed himself in Greek, Hebrew, Coptic and Latin. As he studied, a light clicked on.

“I began to see the tremendous way the text just opened up through the study of ancient documents,” Theophilos said. “It’s very rewarding. There’s no greater joy than effort in a task and seeing the rewards from that.”

Theophilos has high praise for the students he’s encountered at NOBTS and for the H. Milton Haggard Center. There, scholars labor over ancient texts, trying to solve the puzzle of the ancient world. And those discoveries have been shared with biblical scholars across the globe.

“At the basic level, [the center] is providing a very concrete tool to help people realize that the text that we have when we pick up our English versions has a very rich and complicated – but very interesting – textual history,” Theophilos said. “It’s a

tremendous lesson to learn. I think it’s a very helpful way for people to get into the issue and see the aspects involved in this sort of study.”

Dr. William Warren, Director of the Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies and Professor of New Testament and Greek at NOBTS, praised Theophilos’ contributions to scholarship at the seminary during his semester here.

“In-depth understanding of the setting in which the biblical events took place requires studying the data from the time periods of the events,” Warren said. “Having a [visiting] specialist in some of that data has enhanced the experience of many students and faculty at NOBTS since he is an expert in the early papyrus manuscripts.”

Warren added: “He has opened windows into the world of Jesus and the early church by presenting and explaining the importance of letters, documents and New Testament fragments in lectures and a special workshop. His work is on the cutting-edge of accessing the data that undergirds our understanding of the Biblical world, with current work including the analysis of several additional New Testament papyrus fragments from the Oxyrhynchus finds in Egypt. His level of scholarship combined with his evangelical faith has provided a great example of how we can love God with all of our mind in the best possible sense.”

Because of the cross-disciplinary nature of papyrology, there are only a handful of universities at the head of the field. The academic standards and demands are high. Knowledge of Greek must be impeccable. And, students of the ancient texts must have Job-like patience.

“One of the things I’ve tried to communicate to students here is that when you get into this



A papyrus-making display in the H. Milton Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies.

area, there’s no need to rush. When you do rush, you’re going to make some errors. It’s almost a tedious type of patience you need to have. Sometimes, that can be very frustrating. It’s not like you spend a half-hour then get an article published.”

Theophilos recalled one of the first manuscripts he studied.

“I spent at least two weeks reading five or six lines under the microscope. It requires language skills and a lot of patience. The things we’re looking at are not printed texts. They have a history of their own. They’re crumpled. They’re in dirt. They’re in sand.”

There is another virtue that comes into play when wrestling with ancient manuscripts that have survived time and war and weather and sand and silt.

“All learning and scholarship has to have an element of humility in the sense that ‘this is the best sense of the text that we have,’” Theophilos said. “It’s not being a relativist. It’s not being a postmodernist in any regard. One person has called it critical realism. We believe that there is something real there and we’re being critical about how we interact with that because we’re human beings. We bubble with emotions and hormones and all sorts of things that make us human.”

He added: “We’re not robots. We’re not scanning bar codes. It’s something more than that. That makes it interesting.”

Upcoming Latin Classes

Dr. Gary Nolan will teach Part II of Latin courses in the upcoming Spring 2009 semester. The classes will be Tuesday and Thursday nights from 6 to 9 p.m., beginning on Jan. 27.

To learn more, contact J.P. Cox in Providence Learning Center on the second floor of the William Carey building, at jpcox@nobts.edu or by phone at ext. 8442.

Register for Rec Lab 09

Do you like to play sports or hunt? Maybe your hobby is crafts. All of these interests can be used to minister others. Plan to attend Rec Lab 09 and discover how to turn your interests into a ministry focus. Rec Lab 09 will be in San Antonio, Texas, Jan. 25–29, 2009. For more information on the conference or earning seminary credit, contact Dr. Judi Jackson at ext. 3223 or jjackson@nobts.edu.

Spring Campus Life Fair

The Spring 2009 Campus Life Fair will be Jan. 15, 2009, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. in the HSC Atrium. Campus offices, student organizations, and local churches, businesses, and ministries are invited to reserve a table. The Campus Life Fair is a great opportunity to meet and reconnect with students. Call the Campus Life Office at ext. 8427 or email campuslife@nobts.edu to make reserve a table.

Cafe New Orleans Sale

Come by Cafe New Orleans to check out the 20 percent off sale. From fresh ground coffees, t-shirts and travel mugs, Cafe New Orleans has many great gift ideas for the holidays.



Scholarship Deadlines Are Coming Soon

Applications are in the Financial Aid Office for the following scholarships:

Georgia Students: Georgia Baptist Foundation Scholarship, must be a full-time master's, doctoral, or Ph.D. student, application deadline is Jan. 20, 2009, go to www.gbfoundation.org for more information.

Tennessee Students: Tennessee Baptist Foundation (WMU), must be a full-time student, application deadline is Jan. 10, 2009, go to www.tnbaptist.org for more information.

In addition, The Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship is available for Leavell College seniors with a 3.5 GPA and plan to begin graduate level work next Fall. An Undergraduate Fellowship is available for Leavell College sophomores or juniors (less than 30-years-old) with a 3.0 GPA and exceptional ministry experience and potential. A Ministry Fellowship is open for a student who is in the first year of graduate work, has a 3.3 GPA, is under 35-years-old, and has an impressive "ministry project" to work toward. Up to \$10,000 is available this fellowship from the Fund for Theological Education.

Spring Semester Student Wives Classes

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary student wives have the opportunity to take classes free of charge. These courses are a part of the Ministry Wife Certificate.

Campus Class

"Spiritual Disciplines," taught by Mrs. Chuck (Rhonda) Kelley in HSC 216, will be offered on Tuesday evenings (January 20 through March 10) from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Registration for the Tuesday night class will take place on January 20 and January 27.

Free child care is available to student wives who attend the Tuesday night class.

Childcare reservations can be made by contacting the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary preschool at 504.816.8585 by the Friday before class.

Students will need to meet the immunization requirements according to state law.

Shots are administered free of charge to student wives who want to take these courses through the campus clinic.

Contact Christian Parrish, coordinator of women's student programs at NOBTS, at cparrish@nobts.edu or 282.4455, extension 3334, before class begins to get more information.

Online Class

"Healthy Church Relationships," taught by Mrs. John (Christi) Gibson will be offered online from January 20 to March 9.

The registration deadline for the online course is January 16.

Registration forms for the online course are available at <http://www.nobts.edu/LeavellCollege> under the title "Student Wives."

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Other

Full-time

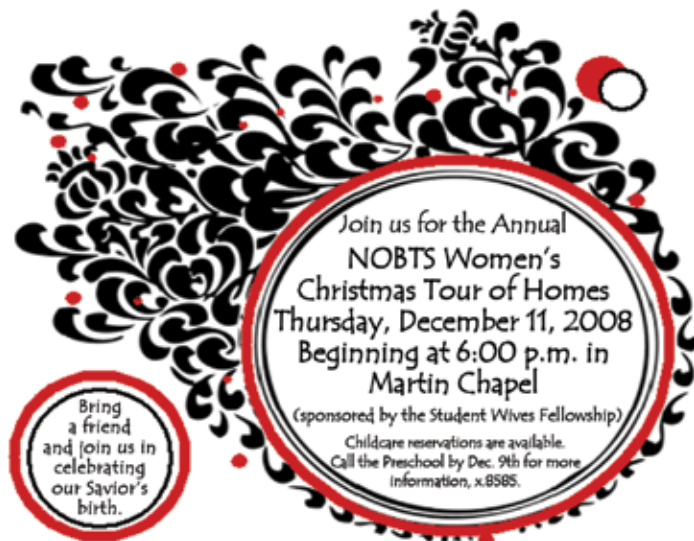
- Ogletown BC, Newark, Del.; administrative pastor
- Northcliffe BC, Spring Hill, Fla.; Education
- Trinity BC, McAllen, Texas.; Associate Pastor (Mandarin Speaking)
- Stewartsville BC, Laurinburg, N.C.; Christian School Administrator
- Clear Creek Baptist Association, Anna, Ill.; Associational Executive Director
- Meadville BC, Meadville, Miss.; Minister of Education
- Calvary BC, Lilburn, Ga.; Church Evangelist
- FBC, Roanoke, Va.; Senior Adult Minister

Picayune Church Seeks Interim Youth Minister

Roseland Park BC in Picayune, Miss., is hiring an interim youth minister. The job involves 20-30 hours a week and pays \$400-500 per week plus mileage. For more information, please contact Pastor Kriss Haymes at 601.798.5620.

Bogalusa Church Seeks Ministry Support

Main Street Baptist Church in Bogalusa, La., is seeking someone to help the church in any capacity. The church has a home available and will provide a monthly stipend. Contact Pastor Charlie New at 985.735.8184 or 985.294.1847 or thegoodnews@bellsouth.net.



IMB President Jerry Rankin to speak in Leavell Chapel Jan. 22

International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin will speak in chapel at New Orleans Seminary Jan. 22. Rankin has been president of the IMB for more than 15 years. Prior to becoming the board's 11th president, Rankin and his family served as church planters in Indonesia. Rankin later became associate to the area director and then area director for Southern Asia and the Pacific areas.

Along with Rankin, a group of International Mission Board missionaries will be on campus Jan. 22. The Global Missions Center at NOBTS is partnering with missionaries to host a "Global Missions Day." At the Global Missions Day, students can plan to have opportunities to interact with missionaries. Call the Global Missions Center at ext. 8124 for more information.

Church-Minister Relations

Ministry Opportunities

The following are a few of the ministry positions received by the Church-Minister Relations office. Churches are listed according to the type of ministry position needed and whether the position is classified as part-time or full-time. All positions within a 2-hour radius of New Orleans are listed separately with the approximate distance in parentheses. To contact any of these churches, or to have your resume sent to other unpublished ministry opportunities, visit the CMR office (second floor, Frost Building) or contact them at 504-282-4455 or 1-800-662-8701, ext. 3291, or cmrconsultant@nobts.edu.

New Orleans Area

Full-time

- FBC, Plaquemine, La.; Pastor (88)
 - Steep Hollow BC, Poplarville, Miss.; Music and Education Minister (70)
 - Roseland Park BC, Picayune, Miss.; Youth Minister (49)
 - FBC, Kenner, La.; Minister of music (16)
 - FBC, Franklinton, La.; Minister of Music/Worship (71)
 - Memorial BC, Bogalusa, La.; Minister of Music (68)
 - FBC, Greensburg, La.; Pastor (89)
 - Baker FBC, Barker, La.; Pastor (93)
 - Harmony BC, Picayune, Miss.; Pastor (48)
 - The Lord's Church, Kentwood, La.; Youth and Music (88)
 - Escatawpa BC, Escatawpa, Miss.; Minister of Youth and Music (104)
 - FBC, Biloxi, Miss.; Associate Pastor, Students (81)
 - Martin Bluff BC, Gautier, Miss.; Pastor (100)
 - Hope Church of Waldheim, Covington, La.; Pastor (48)
- ##### Part-time
- Thompson BC, Smithdale, Miss.; Music minister (123)
 - Hebron BC Soso, Miss.; Youth Minister (145)
 - Calvary BC, Slidell, La.; Minister of Music (26)
 - Seminary BC, Seminary, Miss.; Minister of Music; Youth (127)
 - FBC, Hammond, La.; Minister of Music or combination including music (60)
 - Big Level BC, Wiggins, Miss.; Youth director (96)

- Memorial BC, Bogalusa, La.; Minister of music (68)
- Bogue Falaya BC, Folsom, La.; Youth Minister (51)
- Immanuel BC, Hammond, La.; Minister of Music (62)
- Oak Grove BC, Prarieville, La.; Youth Minister (68)
- Lake Martin BC, Prarieville, La.; Youth and Music (65)
- Bridge City BC, Bridge City, La.; Children's Minister (21)
- Macedonia BC, Holden, La.; Pastor (81)
- FBC, Port Allen, La.; Youth Director (87)

Pastor

Full-time

- Pineview BC, Barnesville, Ga.
- Arboles BC, Arboles, Colo.
- Eagles' Nest BC, Fruitland Park, Fla.
- Wagarville BC, Wagarville, Ala.
- Northwoods BC, Shreveport, La.
- Black Creek BC, Darlington, S.C.
- FBC, Coushatta, La.
- FBC, Franklin, N.C.
- FBC, McAllen, Texas
- Portico, Joplin, Mo.
- First Southern BC, Salina, Kan.
- Casey FBC, Casey, Ill.
- Red Oak BC, Baxley, Ga.
- Barstow FBC, Barstow, Calif.
- Grace Southern BC, Virden, Ill.
- Tremont BC, Tremont, Ill.
- Bethlehem BC, Kings Mountain, N.C.

Part-time

- Expressway BC, Freeport, Pa.
- Tennille BC, Tennille, Ga.
- Lakeside BC, Battle Creek, Mich.
- Choteau BC, Choteau, Mont.

Music

Full-time

- Central BC, Brookhaven, Miss.
- FBC of Battlefield, Battlefield, Mo.
- FBC, Willow Park, Texas
- Central BC, Waycross, Ga.
- Lakeview BC, Selmer, Tenn.
- Calvary BC, Florence, S.C.
- Mathiston FBC, Mathiston, Miss.
- Immanuel BC, Lebanon, Tenn.
- FBC, Lebanon, Mo.
- FBC, Vidalia, La.
- FBC, Artesia, N.M.

Part-time

- Crestview BC, Shelby, N.C.
- Midtown Bridge Church, Atlanta, Ga.
- Fellowship Church of Henry County, McDonough, Ga.
- Forest Heights BC, Tallahassee, Fla.

Youth

Full-time

- Chillicothe Baptist, Chillicothe, Ohio
- Mt. Vernon BC, Columbus, Miss.
- Mountain View BC, Hickory, N.C.
- Jubilee BC, Daphne, Ala.
- Beallwood BC, Columbus, Ga.
- FBC, Middleburg, Fla.
- Florida Gardens BC, Lake Worth, Fla.
- Sale Street BC, Lake Charles, La.
- FBC, Clarksville, Ark.

Part-time

- Glory Fellowship BC, Jasper, Ala.
- Teamon BC, Griffin, Ga.
- St. Claire BC, Boyce, La.

Children and Preschool

- FBC, Crestview, Fla.; Children's Minister
- Hickory Grove BC, Charlotte, N.C.; Children's Minister
- FBC, Fairhope, Ala.; Minister to Children
- Jubilee BC, Daphne, Ala.
- FBC, Roswell, N.M.; Children's Pastor
- Shiloh BC, Saraland, Ala.; Children's Ministry

Combination

Full-time

- Sans Souci BC, Greenville, S.C.; Associate Pastor of Music and Education
- East Thomaston BC, Thomaston, Ga.; Associate Pastor of Youth and Young Adults
- Mount Calvary BC, Albertville, Ala.; Youth and Children Minister
- FBC, Odessa, Texas.; Junior High Student/Recreation Pastor
- Eden BC, Brooksville, Fla.; Associate Pastor/Minister to Youth
- Parkway BC, Houston, Miss.; Minister of students/ Associate Pastor
- High View BC, Woodland Park, Colo.; Children and Youth Minister
- Iron City Baptist, Anniston, Ala.; Minister to Students/Associate Pastor
- FBC, Wedowee, Ala.; Minister of Youth and Family Life
- FBC, Artesia, N.M.; Associate Pastor of Administration and Education

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NEW ORLEANS
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY