

Course of Study COS 321—Bible III Gospels  
*October 16-17 and November 6-7, 2015*  
Wesley Theological Seminary  
Dr. Carol B. Wilson

### ***Description***

This course is an introduction to the four canonical Gospels with special emphasis on each's teaching about Jesus' coming, ministry, death, and resurrection and on their particular call to discipleship, as well as theological perspectives of each Gospel writer. The Gospels will be examined in the context of the first-century Roman Empire as an ancient biographical narrative that explains what the Jesus event was about for each community giving us their Gospel and what they believed their response should be. The process of exegesis will be introduced as well as the various forms of literature in the Gospels (e.g., parables, miracle stories). We will also consider the process of moving from text and exegesis to application.

### ***Objectives***

To understand and be able to articulate in teaching and preaching some of the ways in which four early communities interpreted the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus through narratives about him, and how this interpretation informed them and informs us in the way of discipleship. At the end of the course, you will be able to

- Understand the origin, message, and purpose of each Gospel
- Exegete this form of literature
- Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day.

### ***Required Texts***

- Mark Alan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.
- Frederick Murphy, *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005.
- Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983.
- Tiffany, Frederick C., and Sharon H. Ringe. *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- A good study Bible with introductions and explanatory notes. Avoid "devotional" study Bibles, which are largely lightweight, and King James translations. A good one is *The Access Bible*, updated edition. eds Gail O'Day and David Petersen (ISBN 978-0199777532)

## *Supplemental Texts (for your library)*

We encourage students to begin building a library for their teaching and preaching. Add supplemental texts as your resources permit and depending on your interests.

- France, R.T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.
- Rhoads, David M., and Donald Michie. *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Ringe, Sharon H. *Luke*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.
- Burton H. Throckmorton. *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels, with Alternative Readings from the Manuscripts and Noncanonical Parallels*. NRSV Edition. Thomas Nelson, 5th edition, 1992.
- Carter, Warren. *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.
- Stegemann, Ekkehard, and Wolfgang Stegemann. *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*. 1st English-language ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999. [Despite its age, the work has excellent scholarship.]
- A good one-volume Bible dictionary; e.g., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2000) or *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*.
- Good one-volume Bible commentary (all the books of the Bible being treated in one volume). It is also good to be aware that there are many voices in Biblical studies and to get out of one's comfort zone. The first three suggestions below address different voices. Some options follow:
  - Patte, Daniel. *Global Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
  - Blount, Brian K., and Cain Hope Felder. *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007.
  - Newsom, Carol A., and Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley. *Women's Bible Commentary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012 [NB: Only deals with passages concerning women.]
  - *Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
  - *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Eerdmans, 2003.
  - *Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. Harper San Francisco, 2000.
- At least two or three good commentaries on each Gospel, especially if you plan to follow the lectionary. So what is a "good" commentary? It should be academically respectable and theologically oriented. At least one of these commentaries should have specific reflections on the text as God's word to us who read and hear it now. (BTW, the popular commentary by Matthew Henry is very dated and should not be taken as the first or last word on biblical interpretation.)

## *Written Assignments*

- The main written requirement for this class is the preparation and submission of two sets of papers of approximately ten (10) double-spaced pages for each set, in which you (a) respond to certain questions and/or (b) write about a New Testament text and/or (c) prepare one or more applications. A hard copy of the paper is due the first day of each weekend

session. If your printer has the capability, please print in two-sided format to conserve paper. Late papers are not accepted. Be sure your name is on every page.

- Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offense and will result in substantial penalties, including reduction of course grade and the possibility of dismissal. The faculty regards the following as forms of plagiarism or dishonesty:
  - Copying from another student's paper
  - Borrowing and presenting as one's own (that is, without proper attribution) the composition, ideas, or arguments of another. NOTE: This includes any material downloaded from the web.
  - Submitting as one's own work a paper written (or partially written) by another person.

### ***Paper Guidelines***

- Write your papers, including applications (e.g., homily = short sermon), with an audience of adults in your church in mind, unless otherwise directed.
- Prepare double-spaced papers with one-inch margins and 12-point Times Roman or Calibri font.
- Bearing in mind that language reflects, reinforces, and creates social reality, Wesley expects all session conversations and written work to employ language that respects the equal dignity and worth of all human beings. In particular, linguistic sexism and racism are to be avoided.
- Use good grammar and spelling. Proofread!
- Do your own work. Do not copy or otherwise plagiarize (steal) ideas or wording. If you cite one of the texts, or another book, put the cited words in quotation marks and then put the author's name, book title, and page number in parentheses after the quote. If you paraphrase another's ideas you also must give them credit in the same manner as a direct quote.
- Hand your paper in at the start of each weekend.

### ***Course Schedule***

#### ***First weekend session:***

***Content:***       What is a Gospel?  
                      Social Context  
                      Mark, Matthew

#### ***Preparation: What is Gospel?***

- Read Powell: preface and chapters 1 through 4 (NT world, NT writings, Jesus, Gospels).
- Read Murphy: chapters 1 and 2
- After (or as) you read each chapter in Powell, read the following online materials ("assets") at [www.IntroducingNT.com](http://www.IntroducingNT.com). Each of them is one to two pages usually and gives good and succinct explanations. To download all of their assets, go to the bottom of the page and click on Hyperlinks (All), which is over 500 PDF pages. To download just the references suggested

below, click on the appropriate chapter and find the links near the bottom of the page for that chapter in the box entitled *Assets*. The first number in the hyperlink reference is the chapter number (that is, 1.1 means chapter 1, first hyperlink).

- 1.10 Background Information for Understanding the NT
- 2.1 NT Canon: The Early Lists (pdf only)
- 2.3 Tradition and Framework: Composition of the Gospels and Acts
- 2.4 Source Criticism of the Gospels and Acts
- 2.7 Narrative Criticism of the Gospels and Acts
- 3.2 The Kingdom of Heaven in the Teaching of Jesus
- 3.5 References to Jesus in Non-Christian Literature
- 4.1 The Gospel: Four Stages
- 4.2 Literary Characteristics of Parables
- 4.4 What Happens When Jesus Dies
- 4.5 Proposed Solutions to the Synoptic Puzzle
- 4.9 The Q Source in Contemporary Scholarship
- 4.2 Box Characteristics of Ancient Biographies

### ***Preparation: Mark and Matthew***

- Read slowly the entirety of both Mark and Mathew, in that order. Pay attention to how the story is unfolding; i.e., do not read as a list of disjoint passages but as a narrative.
- Powell: chapters 6 and 5 (in that order)
- Murphy: chapters 3 and 4
- After (or as) you read each chapter in Powell, read the following online materials (“assets”) at [www.IntroducingNT.com](http://www.IntroducingNT.com).
  - For Mark: All EXCEPT 6.1, 11, 13-14
  - For Matthew: All EXCEPT 5.1, 12, 16, 22-24, 27-28

### ***Writing Assignments for First Weekend:***

The page length of each individual section is in parentheses.

- What chief differences do you see between the world of the first century and the world of the twenty-first century? (1 page)
- After the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the early followers were trying to make sense of what they had experienced and had heard about Jesus. What they were experiencing when they finalized their gospels colored how they interpreted this world-changing event. Consequently, the New Testament contains many different interpretations of Jesus. Do you think that having different interpretations of Jesus in the New Testament is a good thing? Why or why not? (1 page)
- What is a Gospel? Describe one or two **new** insights about the Gospels that should affect the way you preach or teach from them. (1 page)
- How are the disciples portrayed in the Gospel of Mark? How does Jesus treat them? Do they seem to mature as the Gospel progresses? How does Mark portray them at the end? (1 page)
- What are some of the chief characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven(s) in the Gospel of Matthew? What might distinguish this kingdom from the Roman Empire in which they were living? (1.5 pages)

- Choose ONE of the following passages found in both Matthew and Mark:
  - Matt 3:7-17 || Mk 1:9-11      Baptism of Jesus
  - Matt 8:1-4 || Mk 1:40-45      The Healing of a Leper
  - Matt 12:1-8 || Mk 2:23-28      Plucking Heads of Grain on the Sabbath
  - Matt 12:9-14 || Mk 3:1-6      The Healing of the Man with the Withered Hand
- Look carefully at the similarities and differences in the accounts written by Mark and Matthew, noting not only the text itself but its location in each specific Gospel (what precedes and follows it, etc.). Describe what you have found, and how each account reflects and advances the message and the perspective of the particular Gospel. If you were preaching or teaching your story from Mark, what would you stress? If you were preaching or teaching from Matthew, what would you stress? (2.5 pages)
- Using your findings from the previous question, write a brief homily on EITHER the Mark or the Matthew version of your passage. (2 pages)

### ***Second weekend session:***

Content:      Exegetical Process  
                  Rhetorical Narrative Analysis  
                  Luke, John  
                  Other gospels

#### ***Preparation: Process***

- Tiffany and Ringe: chapters 1-5
- Culpepper: scan chapter 1; read chapter 2; and scan chapter 3 (these are technical discussions)

#### ***Preparation: Luke and John***

- Read slowly the entirety of both Luke and John, in that order. Pay attention to how the story is unfolding; i.e., do not read as a list of disjoint passages but as a narrative.
- Powell: chapters 7 and 8 (in that order)
- Murphy: chapters 5 and 6 (skip parts about Acts and 1-3 John)
- Culpepper: chapters 4 and 5
- After (or as) you read each chapter in Powell, read the following online materials at [www.IntroducingNT.com](http://www.IntroducingNT.com). See above for first weekend.
- For Luke: All EXCEPT 7.1, 5, 11,14, 15,17,18
- For John: All EXCEPT 8.1, 9, 10

#### ***Preparation: Other gospels***

- Murphy: skim chapter 7

### ***Writing Assignments for Second Weekend:***

The page length of each individual section is in parentheses.

- Choose ONE of the following passages in Luke to write a short exegetical paper: Luke 2:8-20; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 15:1-10; Luke 17:11-19; Luke 22:24-30. Consider the following questions as you decide what God's word is to and for us today:
  - Form and context: What kind of text is this (parable, etc.)? In what part of Luke's Gospel does this passage occur? What comes right before and after it, and how does that affect the interpretation of it? What do we need to know about history or customs to understand and appreciate the text?
  - Theme(s): What theme(s) that are important to Luke do you see in this passage? What is Luke telling us about God, Jesus, the Spirit, and/or discipleship in this passage?

At the end, discuss briefly what would you stress in preaching or teaching this text in your context? (3 pages)

- From your reading about the Gospel of John in the Culpepper book, how might his discussion of that Gospel impact the way you teach or preach from it? (1 page)
- Write a homily on John 10:11-20 ("I am" saying re the Good Shepherd). Make sure your homily shows an awareness of the context of the saying as well as the purpose and major themes of John's Gospel; i.e., exegetical underpinning. NB: consider the rhetorical narrative contrast of this passage with the treatment of the man born blind by the Temple "shepherds" in chapter 9. Use at least one good commentary in preparing your homily. (3 pages)
- The Gospels present differing accounts of Jesus' crucifixion: Matthew 27:32-54; Mark 15:21-39; Luke 23:26-47; and John 19:16b-37. Take each Gospel and discuss what you would emphasize in preaching on Good Friday if that were the Gospel reading for that particular Good Friday. Each account is connected strongly to the narrative emphases of its Gospel. As you prepare this assignment, note what is distinctive about each account. Further, consider how each account reflects and advances the perspectives (discipleship, Christology, theology) of its Gospel? (4 pages)

### ***For Clarification or Assistance of Any Kind***

Feel free to contact me by email ([cwilson@wesleyseminary.edu](mailto:cwilson@wesleyseminary.edu)) at any time if you have any questions or concerns.