

Wesley Theological Seminary
Weekend Course of Study
October 14-15 and November 4-5, 2016

CS-521 Bible V: Acts, Epistles and Revelation

Faculty: Katherine Brown

Course Description:

This course focuses on the content and context of these writings, and the theological emphases of their writers. In addition to Acts and Revelation, Romans, 1 Corinthians, James, and 1 John will receive special attention. Students will articulate a theology of scripture.

Objectives:

1. Distinguish these genres of biblical literature and understand the major theological themes in these writings.
2. Faithfully exegete these forms of biblical literature
3. Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day.
4. Articulate the unity and authority of Scripture as a whole.

Texts:

- ◆ Carter, Warren and Amy-Jill Levine, *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013.
- ◆ Bassler, Jouette, *Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007.
- ◆ Wright, N.T., *Revelation [Bible for Everyone series]*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009
- ◆ Powell, Mark Allen, *Introducing the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. [Students should have this book from CS 321 Bible III: Gospels.]

Assignments:

Due dates: Students are to turn in their first assignment by 1 p.m., Friday October 14. Students are to turn in their second assignment by 1 p.m., Friday November 4, 2016. Assignments are to be submitted via Blackboard.

Format: Papers should be double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, with one-inch margins on all sides.

Include your name, course number and annual conference on each page of your paper.

Grading: Papers will be graded based on

- ◆ whether the question(s) are fully answered,
- ◆ whether the student engaged with the assigned readings, demonstrating understanding and critical thinking, and
- ◆ whether the written work has few, if any, errors of spelling, grammar or punctuation.

Please note that work which fulfills these expectations will be given a “B” range grade. The “A” grade is awarded only for work that is excellent.

The two written assignments will constitute 80% of the final course grade (40% each); class participation will constitute the remaining 20% of the final course grade.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offense and will result in substantial penalties, including the possibility of academic dismissal. The faculty regards the following as forms of plagiarism or dishonesty:

- ◆ copying from another student’s paper
- ◆ giving or receiving unauthorized assistance to or from another person
- ◆ using unauthorized material during an examination
- ◆ borrowing and presenting as one’s own (i.e. without proper attribution) the composition or ideas of another; this includes direct quotation and/or paraphrasing of others’ words/ideas

Assignments in this class do not require you to do additional research but to engage with the readings assigned. You may choose but are not required to consult other resources (commentaries, dictionaries) such as those you may be familiar with from prior COS courses. Whether you are drawing on the assigned readings or on other resources, you must properly cite your sources. I do not require any particular format - parenthetical citation or footnotes are equally acceptable. For readings which have been assigned for this class, you need only include author/page number(s) (i.e. Carter/Levine, 91) or, for Bible citations, book/chapter: verse (i.e. Acts 1:1); for any additional resources you choose to use, you must include author/title/publisher/publication date/page number(s).

Please refer to your Wesley COS Student Handbook (on-line) for more information about Wesley’s academic policies or contact the Course of Study office (202-885-8688).

Assignment #1: To be posted on Blackboard by 1 p.m. Friday October 14, 2016. The assignment should be submitted as a single document. Each question should be separately numbered, as below, and answered in the number of pages listed.

1.1 3 pages.

Read the Book of Acts; Powell chapter 9; Carter/Levine chapter 5.

Powell suggests that Acts of the Apostles “could almost be called ‘Acts of the Holy Spirit’ or ‘Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ’ (Powell, 192; see also Carter/Levine, 105). Explain why these might be appropriate titles. You must reference and discuss at least three separate passages from the book of Acts in addition to whatever references you include from the Powell and Carter/Levine readings.

1.2 2 pages.

Read the Book of Acts; Powell chapter 9; Carter/Levine chapter 5.

The author of Luke-Acts tends to use geography symbolically. For instance, the geographic movement of the gospel of Luke centers on Jerusalem, as foreshadowed early in the gospel (see Luke 2:22, 9:31) and made explicit when Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) where the climactic passion and resurrection appearances occur (compare Luke 24, which is in Jerusalem, and Matthew 28:16-20, which takes place in Galilee). What is the geographic structure of Acts? Using Acts 1:8 as a start point for your discussion, explain the symbolic function of geography in the Acts narrative? Give at least three geographic references from the text and explain their significance.

1.3 5 pages.

Read the Book of Acts (focus on Acts 9:1-31; 10:1-11:18; 15; 22:3-21; 26:4-23); Galatians 1:11-2:14; Powell chapters 9 (Acts), 10 (Letters), 11 (Paul) and 15 (Galatians); Carter/Levine chapters 5 (Acts), 7 (Romans) and 9 (Galatians).

Powell points out “discrepancies between the book of Acts and Paul’s letters” (Powell, 197) on issues of Paul’s biography and theology (compare Acts 9:1-31; 22:3-21; 26:4-23; Gal 1:11-24) as well as characterizations of the early Jesus movement’s mission to the Gentiles (compare Acts 10:1-11:18; 15; Gal 2:1-14). First, in 1-2 pages define the similarities and differences between these texts (you might find it useful to group your analysis by reference to Paul’s own biography and then to the mission to the gentiles). Second, in 1-2 pages explain how these similarities and differences you have observed might arise from differences in the history, purpose or literary genre of the book of Acts as compared to the Epistles (you do not need to limit your discussion to Galatians but may reference other of Paul’s letters). Last, in 1 page, explain which version you find more reliable and why.

Assignment #2: To be posted on Blackboard by 1 p.m. Friday November 4, 2016. The assignment should be submitted as a single document. Each question should be separately numbered, as below, and answered in the number of pages listed.

2.1 2 pages.

Read 1 Corinthians; Powell chapter 13; Carter/Levine chapter 7.

The picture of the early church in Acts is one of overall unity (see Acts 2:43-47) which is not overcome by tension and disagreement (see Acts 11:1-18; 15). Paul's letters tell a different story, of disagreements between leaders and divisions within churches.

Focusing on 1 Corinthians, identify divisions or disagreements which Paul addressed, analyze the factors that may have created these divisions, and define the overarching theme of Paul's response.

2.2 3+ pages.

Read Galatians, Romans, James; Powell chapters 12, 15 and 24; Carter/Levine chapters 7, 9 and 17. (Note that some of this reading was previously assigned.)

Supplementary reading: Bassler chapter 3 ("Faith").

Compare and contrast Paul's discussion of faith and works of the law with James's discussion of faith and works. What does each mean by "faith"? What does each mean by "works"? (Be sure to reference specific biblical texts to support each definition.) How do these terms/definitions relate for Paul and for James? For instance, to what extent does each define faith as a matter of belief/thought and to what extent as a matter of action? (Powell pp. 454-57 and Carter/Levine pp. 284-86 focus on these issues.) In a final half-page, discuss the significance of this issue for church life today.

EXTRA CREDIT: in an *additional* half-page, compare James's teaching to Jesus' teaching.

2.3 4+ pages.

Read Revelation (focus on Rev 1-6; 19-22); Powell chapter 29; Carter/Levine chapter 21. Supplementary reading: Wright, chapters 1-6 and 19-22.

First, in 1-2 pages, explain how understanding the genre and context of Revelation helps the reader understand the content and message of Revelation. Second, in 1-2 pages, discuss the difference between reading Revelation as prediction or as proclamation and suggest how these two are most appropriately balanced (including if one or the other should be primary). (You may find Powell, pp. 525-30 and Carter/Levine, pp. 342-51 particularly useful discussions.) Last, in 1-2 pages, identify the central message (or messages) of the letters to the seven churches. What of this message is specific to its first-century context? What of this message is meaningful across time?