

**WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
COURSE OF STUDY  
SUMMER INTENSIVE TERM 1: JULY 10-20, 2017**

**CS-321**            **Bible 3: Gospels**  
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Please read this study guide *carefully*. We have split the previous pre-course work up into two parts. **Everyone will have one assignment due by June 1 submitted via Blackboard and one assignment due the first day of class, also submitted via Blackboard.** Please schedule time each week to work on your pre-course work. If you are able to do this you will have the opportunity to come to DC next summer and enjoy some Sabbath time with us. Please let Sara Sheppard or Doug Powe know if we can help you with this in any way.

## **I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course presents an exploration of the content, main characteristics, and message of the canonical gospels in light of their historical, political, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious environment, as well as their importance as literary expressions of the faith and history of the early church. The practice of exegesis will be emphasized.

### **Objectives**

1. Review the nature, scope, and purpose of the New Testament
2. Review the origin and formation of the New Testament canon
3. Description of the historical and social background out of which the New Testament emerged
4. Development and practice of an exegetical methodology that is appropriate and helpful to the study of the New Testament
5. Examination of some of the ways in which the early church interpreted the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and how this interpretation informed how its members lived out their faith in various social circumstances
6. Reflection on the meaning and significance of the message of the gospel accounts for the faith and mission of the church in its contemporary context

## **II. REQUIRED TEXTS:**

1. Culpepper, R.A., *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel : a study in literary design. Foundations and facets* : New Testament. 1983, Philadelphia: Fortress Press. xii, 266 p.
2. Murphy, F.J., *An introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. 2005, Nashville: Abingdon Press. xvi, 394 p.
3. Powell, M.A., *Introducing the New Testament : a historical, literary, and theological survey*. 2009, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic. 560 p.
4. Tiffany, F.C. and S.H. Ringe, *Biblical interpretation : a roadmap*. 1996, Nashville: Abingdon Press. 239 p.

### III. RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

1. Harrelson, W.J., *The new interpreter's study Bible : New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. 2003, Nashville: Abingdon Press.
2. Throckmorton, B.H., *Gospel parallels : a comparison of the synoptic gospels : with alternative readings from the manuscripts and noncanonical parallels*. 5th ed. 1992, Nashville: T. Nelson. xl, 212 p.

### IV. COMMENTARIES:

Students are encouraged to build a library of commentaries on the various books of the New Testament. There are many one volume and series commentaries in existence differing greatly in content, style, and level of difficulty. Suggested commentaries include:

*Harper's Bible Commentary*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988.

*Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1982 –

*New International Biblical Commentary*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992 –

*The New Interpreter's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994 –

*The Oxford Bible Commentary*. New York: Oxford U.P., 2001.

Please note: Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary is NOT recommended. Written almost three hundred years ago, it is of historical interest only, having been written before all the interpretive insights gained by biblical study in the intervening centuries. It is in the public domain and so is widely available online, but is not a scholarly reference.

### V. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRE-CLASS WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

If you are new to Course of Study at Wesley, please be sure to check Blackboard once you receive your logon information from our IT department. Some faculty will use Blackboard heavily and some will not, but it is up to you as the student to check and see what is posted. You should have access to your courses in Blackboard on or around May 15.

#### Format:

Papers should have **one-inch margins** on all sides, be **double-spaced**, and use a **12-point Times New Roman** font. Please proofread papers carefully, avoiding as much as possible spelling, typographical, and grammatical errors, which can easily diminish the effectiveness of your writing.

#### Grading:

Students should be clear from the start that good, solid work, fulfilling the assignments responsibly, deserves the "B" grade. The "A" is awarded for work that is excellent.

#### 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

If in doubt, ask in advance. Do not risk the possibility that your work will not be accepted due to an issue of plagiarism.

Note that you must provide proper bibliographical citations for works you consult. If you are not familiar with how to do that, you should consult Turabian's guide, the *Chicago Manual of Style*, or an electronic bibliographic program such as that available at [www.endnote.com](http://www.endnote.com). *The method you employ is not as important as the fact that you clearly and consistently give credit where credit is due.*

## VI. PRE-CLASS WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

NOTE: In the pre-class assignment below, it is important that your work reflects engagement with the assigned readings in the texts as well as with the New Testament itself. Additional secondary readings (e.g. Bible commentaries) may be consulted and cited as appropriate, but such supplemental research is not *expected* for the sake of this particular assignment.

### A. First Pre-Class Assignment 8-10 pages total Due: June 1, 2017, via Blackboard

#### 1. Summary and Reflection

**Readings:** Read Powell, Chapter 2: "The New Testament Writings"; Murphy, Chapter 1: "Critical Study of the Gospels"

**Assignment:** In one page, summarize the key points made in the chapter. What are the implications for the examination of scripture? On a second page, address what some of the ways we might look at scripture are, in which we might gain a better understanding of it. Describe the kinds of "criticism" of Biblical texts that scholars use and how those can be helpful to us.

**Length:** 2 pages, double-spaced

#### 2. Understanding Context

**Introduction:** Understanding context is essential in being able to interpret a text. Understanding context helps us to understand what the text might have meant to its original readers. Lacking an understanding of context can lead to misinterpretation. Imagine, for example, how statements like "Dave Roberts stole home last night" and "Elvis is king" might look to someone who didn't know anything about baseball or who didn't know that America was a republic. Without understanding context, it is possible to come up with interpretations that meet the literal meaning of the words but miss the point altogether.

**Readings:** Powell, Chapter 1: "The New Testament World"; Murphy, Chapter 2: "Reconstructing Ancient Worlds: Gospel Contexts"

**Assignment:** As you review the readings, note points that seem to be especially important and informative. Compose a brief two-page essay on the subject "The Background of the New Testament." Assume that you are writing for a church adult-education publication. You want to provide a clear statement of what a reasonably well informed reader ought to know about the New Testament's context. What you write should help readers both to understand and to avoid misunderstanding the New Testament.

**Length:** 2 pages, double-spaced

#### 3. Sources of the Gospels

**Reading:** Powell, Chapter 4: "The Gospels"

**Assignment:** Look carefully at the following sets of passages or “pericopes” and pay attention to the ways the accounts are similar and different:

- (a) *John’s Preaching about the Coming One*  
Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-18 (Throckmorton §4, p. 13)
- (b) *Jesus in the Synagogue at Capernaum*  
Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37 (Throckmorton §10, pp. 20-21)
- (c) *The Beatitudes*  
Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23 (Throckmorton §19, p. 25)
- (d) *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*  
Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19 (Throckmorton §97, p. 78)

Now, reflect on the theories discussed on pages 92-99 of the text (“Composition of the Gospels: The Synoptic Puzzle”) looking at the Two/Four Source Hypothesis and the Griesbach/Two Gospel Hypothesis.

In **one page**, analyze how the similarities and differences in the above pericopes might be explained by someone advocating the Griesbach/Two Gospel hypothesis. What conclusions would you be likely to draw about the original form of each story? What specific details are hardest for that particular theory to explain? In a **second page**, take the side of a defender of the Two-Source Hypothesis and do the same analysis. We’ll review these pericopes in class and discuss our own conclusions there. For now, the point is to see how the pericopes look from both vantage points and to become more aware of the kinds of difficulties that various theories about the Synoptic Gospels are trying to explain.

**Length:** 2 pages, double-spaced

#### 4. Passages in Context: Mark’s Gospel

**Readings:** Powell, Chapter 6: “Mark”; Murphy, Chapter 3: “The Gospel of Mark”

**Assignment:** Pay particular attention to the broader themes in Mark’s Gospel. What is Mark’s distinctive argument, style, vocabulary, and emphasis? In other words, how is Mark different from the other Gospels? Next, select one of the following passages from Mark:

- *The Stilling of the Storm*, Mark 4:35-41
- *Peter’s Confession*, Mark 8:27-33

In one to two pages, explore the ways in which this particular passage is representative of the whole book (e.g. in its theology, themes, vocabulary, literary style, etc.). What is distinctive about this passage that is also distinctive about Mark’s Gospel? How does this particular passage advance Mark’s larger agenda? Be sure to cite specific examples both in the passage and in the rest of Mark. In other words, don’t just speak in generalities, but back up what you say with evidence.

**Length:** 1-2 pages, double-spaced

#### 5. Passages in Context: John’s Gospel

**Readings:** Powell, Chapter 8: “John”; Murphy, Chapter 6: “The Gospel of John”

**Assignment:** Read Pay particular attention to the broader themes in John’s Gospel. What is John’s distinctive argument, style, vocabulary, and emphasis? In other words, how is John different from the other Gospels? Next, select one of the following passages from John:

- *Jesus and Nicodemus*, John 3:1-21
- *The Healing of the Man Born Blind*, John 9:1-41

In one to two pages, explore the ways in which this particular passage is representative of the whole book (e.g. in its theology, themes, vocabulary, literary style, etc.). What is distinctive about this passage that is also distinctive about John’s Gospel? How does this particular passage advance John’s larger agenda? Be sure to cite specific examples both in the passage and in the rest of John. In other words, don’t just speak in generalities, but back up what you say with evidence.

**Length:** 1-2 pages, double-spaced

## B. Second Pre-Class Assignment

8-10 pages total

Due: July 12, 2017, In Class

### 1. Relating the Old Covenant and the New: Matthew and Luke

**Readings:** Powell, Chapters 5 and 7: “Matthew” and “Luke”; Murphy, Chapters 4-5: “The Gospel of Matthew” and “The Gospel of Luke”

**Introduction:** The Gospels of Matthew and Luke are generally seen as “divorce documents”, texts that come out of the turbulent period of separation between Judaism and Christianity. Each Gospel engages in polemic against opponents and each makes a case for the legitimacy of Christianity.

**Assignment:** Write an essay describing how the gospels of Matthew and Luke each make a case for the legitimacy of Christianity as the inheritor of the covenantal promises made to Israel. What methods does each author employ? How are their approaches similar? How do they differ? What do we need to know about each author’s audience to understand the approach each author takes?

**Length:** 2-3 pages, double-spaced

### 2. A Dialogue between Gospels

**Introduction:** Imagine two churches, one of which recognizes John but no other Gospel, and the other of which accepts only Mark. Imagine that the pastors of the two churches happen to sit together on a train one day. They begin talking and the subject turns to religion. Each has some passing acquaintance with the other’s Gospel. Both are curious to learn more but are skeptical about the orthodoxy and historical value of the other’s text.

The initial conversation might go something like this...

Pastor Mark: So, you’re a Christian, too. Have you always been one?  
Pastor Joan: No. Actually, I first responded to the Gospel as a teenager when I heard a sermon on Jesus’ words “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”  
Mark: Not meaning to be rude, but Jesus never said that.  
Joan: Of course he did; right here in John 14:6.  
Mark: Oh, I get it. You’re one of those. I’ve heard that there are people who believe that apocryphal gospel, but I hadn’t met one before.  
Joan: *Apocryphal* gospel?!? It is the very word of God.  
Mark: The word of God is contained in Mark.  
Joan: Not for me it’s not...

This goes on for a time and eventually curiosity takes over and the two begin to talk seriously about their differences.

**Readings:** Skim Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*

**Assignment:** Your assignment is to pick up the conversation at this point. What might each pastor find difficult to accept (or necessary to correct) in the other’s understanding of Jesus? Where could the two find common ground? What differences might they choose to disregard, thinking them unsubstantial? What differences might they not be able to accommodate? When all is said and done, could they still consider each other to be Christians?

Your work should do more than simply list the commonly known differences between John and the Synoptics. Explore especially the theological similarities and differences between the Gospels. What, in effect, does Markan Christianity have to teach Johannine Christianity and vice versa?

**Length:** 2-3 pages typed, single spaced (as it is a dialogue)

### 3. Canon Formation

**Readings:** Powell, pp. 50-53; Murphy, Chapters 7 & 9: “Other Gospels” and “Canonization”

Review Powell and Murphy's material on the formation of the canon. In **one page** identify the factors that went into the formation of the canon. Comment on which factors you found the most helpful to your understanding of the Bible and which you found the most surprising. In a **second page**, respond to the concerns of a parishioner who has heard that the Bible was formed as a result of a conspiracy by the church to keep out the truth. How do you use what you know about canon formation to help her to understand the scriptures in a new way?

**Length:** 2 pages, double-spaced

#### 4. The Historical Jesus

**Readings:** Powell, Chapter 3: "Jesus"; Murphy, Chapter 8: "The Historical Jesus"

**Assignment:** You have received a letter from a parishioner who recently saw a program on the History Channel that suggests that Jesus may never have existed, or that if he did, almost nothing can be known about him and that everything we claim to know about him has been made up by the church for its own ends. Write a response to this parishioner addressing his concerns. What can be known about the Jesus of history? What relation does the Historical Jesus have to the Jesus of Faith?

**Length:** 2 pages, double spaced

## VII. IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT WITH PRE-CLASS READING

### A. Biblical Exegesis (to be completed during the class)

**Prior to your arrival next summer** at Wesley, please read Tiffany and Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*, Chapters 1-5 (pp. 13-125). We will discuss the book at some length in class, and it will be the basis for a **second written assignment**, the exegesis of an assigned biblical text, to be completed by the second Wednesday of class. This is not something that can be done prior to class since it must take into account the in-class work. Nevertheless, it is important that you become acquainted with the Tiffany & Ringe text in advance so that you are not attempting to catch up once the writing assignment is given.

#### Grading:

The instructor assumes that everyone in the class is capable of the work required to receive a "B" grade for each assignment. The following interpretations of the meaning of each grade have been developed to help class members review their work to identify strengths and problems.

A "B" means that the basic elements of the assignment have been faithfully included, the argument is internally coherent, and clearly articulated.

A "B+" means the assignment is also well crafted.

An "A-" means that the assignment is not only well crafted, but it also probes the issues with considerable insight.

An "A" means the assignment is well crafted, reveals considerable insight, and moves beyond the range of the student's prior knowledge to begin to construct new perspectives and meanings for the subject. In other words, it shows the student's imagination at work; it has a creative edge.

A "C+" means that the assignment lacks clarity or focus, tends to reveal more the writer's opinions than the results of the writer's analysis, and lacks reflective insight into the issues being discussed.

A “C” means that the assignment does not move beyond the reporting of information from readings and/or class discussions to engaging them with issues being discussed; it may indicate inappropriate or misuse of data and readings.

A “C-“ means that despite some moments of focused discussion and insight, major gaps exist in the development of the argument or discussion.

An “F” means the individual needs to see me immediately.

**Grades will be reduced a step (e.g. from B to a B-) for assignments handed in after the start of class,** and a full letter grade for any assignments 24 hours past due. Assignments over 48 hours past due will be lowered two letter grades. We need to talk if an assignment is over 72 hours past due. Please note only two unexcused absences are allowed before grade is lowered one step.

Final course grades are mailed to the student, GBHEM in Nashville and the student’s conference representative by September 30. Grades are not posted on-line.

### **Inclusive Language**

In both oral and written contributions to the course, students are expected to be conscious of the power of language in theology. Inclusive language respects both gender and racial diversity, and students should demonstrate awareness that language about persons and God expresses values and impacts theological ideas in the details of race and gender connotations. Both gender and race are socially-constructed categories, and changing language is part of bringing justice to theological discourse.

### **Academic Policies**

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all classes in their entirety. Faculty member have the authority to set attendance policies for particular courses and those policies will be included in the course syllabus. Deviation from the attendance policy may result in reduction of grade or loss of credit for the course.

**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 form of plagiarism or dishonesty:

- Copying from another students paper
- Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance to or from another student during an examination
- Using unauthorized material during an examination
- Borrowing or presenting as one’s own (i.e. without proper attribution) the composition or ideas of another.

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