

Wesley Theological Seminary
Winter 2016 – Hybrid Course

Course: CS-321 Bible 3: Gospels
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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. The course is delivered in a hybrid format in which half of the course is taken strictly online and the other half is in person. The online portion of the class takes place in January 2017 with a focus on the introduction to the gospels and Mark and Matthew. The second portion, taking place in person for a weekend, will focus on the gospels of Luke and John and introduction to exegetical tools.

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. Murphy, F.J., *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. 2005, Nashville: Abingdon Press. xvi, 394 p.
2. Powell, M.A., *Introducing the New Testament : A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*. 2009, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic. 560 p.
3. Harrelson, W.J., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible : New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. 2003, Nashville: Abingdon Press.

4. 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.

III. COMMENTARIES and DICTIONARIES:

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 as well as dictionaries. Here are some suggested commentaries and dictionaries to consider for building your library:

Commentary Options

- 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.

Dictionary Options

- Achtemeier, Paul J. et al. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. Rev. ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
- Freedman, David N., ed. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Freedman, David N. et al. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Sakenfeld, Katherine D., et al. *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006
- Green, Joel B., Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992.
- Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Series: New Testament. Zondervan, 2002.

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.

Moreover, Blackboard is important for this course given the first month is online. There will be writing, posting, and reading assignments occurring all January during the online portion. In preparation for that online learning, it will help if students take this pre-course time to read the chapters and sections below. Paying attention to some of the key terms and questions posed. The course will continue to be developed over the next 6 weeks in preparation for the online component for the course. More information on the kinds of writing and engagement assignments online to follow. No written work is due prior to the start of class, but all questions, terms, and concepts listed below will be discussed and engaged in the January 2017 online classroom experience.

NOTE: In the pre-class reading below, it is important that your thinking and comprehension reflect 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 as appropriate, but such supplemental research and reading is not expected for the sake of this particular assignment.

Reading 1: Summary and Reflection of the Gospels

[Readings: Read Powell, Chapter 2: “The New Testament Writings”; Murphy, Chapter 1: “Critical Study of the Gospels”]

Study Questions:

1. What are the key points made in the chapter?
2. What are the implications for the examination of scripture?
3. Describe the kinds of “criticism” of Biblical texts that scholars use and how those can be helpful to us.
4. Compare the ancient use and views of authorship (use in a local community, anonymity, writing in the style of another previous author) with contemporary views of authorship (publicity, copyright laws, citation, plagiarism) (text pp. 48–49).
5. Compare and contrast the modern concerns of historiography (dates, “facts,” confirmation of events, eyewitnesses, and archeological confirmation) with ancient concerns for preserving church tradition (text pp. 49–53).
6. What are the criteria for including a writing in the canonical lists? What did the early church mean by “apostolic Christianity” (text p. 53)? Why did church leaders begin constructing lists of Christian writings?

Key Words:

Testament, apostolic, catholic, canon, criticism, exegesis, hermeneutics,

Reading 2: Understanding Context:

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”]

Study Questions:

1. As you review the readings, note points that seem to be especially important and Informative for an informed reader of the New Testament to know about its context.
2. What historical events, situations, and conditions might account for the diversity within Judaism in the first century?
3. What do Jews living in Palestine have in common? What made Jews different from one another, or what might cause divisions among them? Be sure to consider social and economic conditions, as well as cultural, historical, and geographical differences.
4. Create a grid or table listing the different kinds of Jewish groups and their convictions, practices, and examples from the NT.
5. What is meant by “patronage” in this chapter (text p. 44)? How does patronage use honor and shame as a kind of social currency?
6. What are the basic convictions and practices that all Jews of the first century shared?
7. Name some distinctions of the Roman Empire of the first century.

Key Words:

BCE/CE, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Apocrypha, Maccabees, Hasmonean Dynasty, Pentateuch, God-fearers, Hellenism, Diaspora, Septuagint, deuterocanonical writings, apocalypticism, Gnosticism

Reading 3: Sampling the Gospels: Mark and Matthew

One of the ways to get a sense of how the Gospels are both the same, yet different is to compare/contrast the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The Gospel of Mark is the first Gospel, serving as the foundation for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Together, the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke make up what is called the Synoptic Gospels. In contrast, the Gospel of John shares some features of the Synoptic Gospels, but is ultimately a wholly different Gospel account altogether. By paying attention to the storyline of Mark and Matthew respectively, readers can get a sense of one of the two major storylines shaping the gospel account. During the month of January, we will focus on the shape of the Synoptic storyline as understood through the Gospel of Mark and Matthew. During our meeting together in February, we will look at the Gospels of Luke and John.

In preparation for our month long study, read the following chapters about Mark and Matthew from your textbooks.

[Readings: Powell, Chapters 5 and 6: "Matthew" and "Mark"; Murphy, Chapters 3-4: "The Gospel of Mark" and "The Gospel of Matthew"]

Study Questions

1. What stories does the Gospel of Matthew include that Mark does not? How does that new material shape Matthew's version of Jesus' life, death and resurrection?
2. Who is Mark's Jesus and who is Matthew's Jesus? Resist the desire to harmonize.
3. Get familiar with the layout of your Throckmorton Parallel. What are the different sections and columns representative of?

Key Words:

Messianic Secret, kingdom of God, inclusion, Sermon on the Mount, Papias, Q-Source, Immanuel, M-Source, Synoptic Problem

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.

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

B+ means the assignment is also well crafted.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

F means the individual needs to see me immediately.

Technical Support:

Students are responsible for meeting course deadlines. If you experience technical problems, please exercise one or all of the following options:

- Blackboard Support at blackboardsupport@wesleyseminary.edu
- By phone at (202) 885-6091
- Blackboard/E Support Ticket at <http://blackboardsupport.wesleyseminary.edu> or <http://www.wesleyseminary.edu/MyWesley/eSupport.aspx>

Please let me know when you contact Blackboard support as well so I will be aware you are having technical problems.

Technical Considerations:

Blackboard site requires use of:

- An Internet connection. A high speed Internet connection is highly recommended
- An Internet browser (supported browsers include: Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Safari).
- An appropriate web browser configuration.

Any computer capable of running a recently updated web browser should be sufficient to access our Blackboard site. However, bear in mind that processor speed, amount of RAM and Internet connection speed can greatly affect performance. Those using dial-up connections will experience longer page load times and much slower performance.

For Blackboard Support: (202) 885-6091 or blackboardsupport@wesleyseminary.edu