

Wesley Theological Seminary  
Weekend Course of Study: March 16-17 and April 20-21, 2018

CS-321        Bible III: Gospels  
Faculty:        Katherine Brown  
email:         [kbrown@wesleyseminary.edu](mailto:kbrown@wesleyseminary.edu)

**Objectives:**

This course focuses on the content and message of the Gospels and the theological perspectives of gospel writers. This will include an overview of the social, historical and cultural matrix of the early followers of Jesus, the literary styles and genres used in the texts, and the gospels' multi-faceted portraits of Jesus, discipleship, and community. The practice of exegesis will be emphasized.

**Goals:**

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

**Required Texts:**

- ◆ Powell, Mark Allen, *Introducing the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009
  - ◆ Supplemental resources for the Powell text are available online at [www.IntroducingNT.com](http://www.IntroducingNT.com). Click on the chapter number then on the “Assets” box to access these useful summaries (pdf and hyperlink).
- ◆ Murphy, Frederick J., *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- ◆ Culpepper, R. Alan *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- ◆ Tiffany, Frederick C. and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- ◆ A good study Bible with introduction and explanatory notes. Avoid “devotional” study Bibles and King James translations. Suitable study Bibles include
  - ◆ *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*. Nashville: Abingdon Press; Revised ed., 2003.
  - ◆ *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
  - ◆ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 4th Revised ed., 2010.
  - ◆ *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. This particular edition of the New Testament focuses on issues of 1st and 2nd century Judaism relevant for understanding the Jewish background of the NT.

**Supplemental Texts:** Although not required for this class, you should consider having available in your (personal or church) library

- ◆ Individual gospel commentaries such as Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995; Leander Keck, *New Interpreters Bible Commentary: Vol 8: NT Articles, Matthew, Mark*, Abingdon Press, 1995; Leander Keck, *New Interpreters Bible Commentary: Vol 9, Luke-John*, Abingdon Press, 1996
- ◆ A good one-volume Bible dictionary (e.g. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 2003, or *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, revised and updated, 2011)
- ◆ A good one-volume Bible commentary, particularly considering one which highlights different voices in biblical studies.
  - ◆ Platte, Daniel. *The Global Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
  - ◆ Blount, Brian K. And Cain Hope Felder. *True To Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
  - ◆ Newsom, Carol, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley. *Women's Bible Commentary*, 3rd Ed. Lewisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.
  - ◆ *Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
  - ◆ *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Eerdmans, 2003.
  - ◆ *HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 2000.

### **Assignments:**

Two written assignments (each approximately 10 pages) will constitute 80% of the final course grade (40% each); class participation will constitute the remaining 20% of the final course grade.

Due dates: Students are to turn in their first written assignment by 1 p.m., Friday March 16, 2018. Students are to turn in their second written assignment by 1 p.m., Friday April 20, 2018. Assignments are to be submitted via Blackboard. Grades will be reduced a step (i.e. from B to B-) for assignments handed in after due date and time (1 p.m.). Grades will be reduced a full letter (i.e. from B to C) for assignments handed in more than 24 hours late.

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

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.

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offense and will result in substantial penalties, including the possibility of academic dismissal. The faculty regard 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 citations or footnotes are equally acceptable. For readings which have been assigned for this class, include author/page number(s) (i.e. "Powell, 91"). For Bible citations, provide book/chapter:verse (i.e. "Mark 1:1"). For purposes of this class, introductions, footnotes or other scholarly information from your study Bible may be cited simply giving the study Bible abbreviation and the note verse number (i.e. "NISB Mark Introduction," "NISB Mark 1:1-13 note," or "NISB Mark 1:1 note"; this example is given to make plain the importance of giving the note number; these are two different notes in the *NISB*). 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).

**Course Outline:**

- ◆ March 16-17: "What is a gospel?"; the New Testament world; the gospels of Mark, Matthew.
- ◆ April 20-21: Exegetical process; rhetorical and narrative analysis; the gospels of Luke and John.

*Guidance based on feedback from students during prior COS classes: When writing your essays, please be attentive to the wording of the questions and answer what is asked, engage with the assigned readings by specific reference to them (appropriately cited), and demonstrate understanding of the material by putting it into your own words. You may find it helpful to read the questions first and use them to guide your reading of the assigned texts so that you can notice relevant sections or phrases which you will then reference when writing your responses.*

*If you have any questions about the syllabus or assignments, please feel free to email me.*

**Assignment #1:** To be posted on Blackboard by 1 p.m. Friday March 16, 2018. The assignment should be submitted as a single document with each question separately numbered, as below. The document name should include your name, CS321, and Assignment No 1 (i.e. Brown\_CS321\_No1); your name should also appear in the document itself.

**1.1 Background: Gospel contexts; What is a gospel; Gospel variety. [3 parts]**

Read Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, preface and ch. 1-4 (“NT World,” “NT Writings,” “Jesus,” “Gospels”); Murphy, *Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*, ch. 1-2 (“Critical Study of the Gospels;” “Reconstructing Ancient Worlds”).

**1.1 (a)** Describe the first century background of the New Testament, including the religious, political, geographic, and cultural contexts. What are the main differences you see between the world of the first century and the world of today? How does understanding the world of the first century help you understand the gospel writings? How does understanding the world of the first century help you interpret the gospel writings for the world of today? (1.5 pages)

**1.1 (b)** What is a “gospel”? How does the term “gospel” relate to the New Testament writings specifically titled “Gospel”? How is the term “gospel” broader than the specific writings titled “Gospels”? How do these insights about the development, use and meanings of the term “gospel” affect the way you preach or teach from the New Testament Gospels? (1 page)

**1.1 (c)** The four gospels vary in their presentations of the Jesus’ life, death and resurrection as they interpret the meaning of that experience for the life of Jesus’ followers. Is having different interpretations of Jesus in the New Testament a good thing? Why or why not? (1 page)

**1.2 The Gospel of Mark**

Read the Gospel of Mark as a whole story (it can be read in one sitting in about 1 1/2 hours). Pay attention to how it works as a story, that is how the events unfold, how the characters are depicted, etc. Read Powell, ch. 6 (“Mark”); Murphy, ch. 3 (“Mark”).

How are the disciples portrayed in the Gospel of Mark? How does Jesus treat them? Do their characters develop (change? mature?) as the story unfolds? If yes, then how? How does Mark portray the disciples at the end of the gospel? [Your answer should focus on the “original ending” of Mark, i.e. Mark 16:1-8, although you may add reference to the shorter and longer endings if you wish.]. (1.5 pages)

### 1.3 The Gospel of Matthew

Read the Gospel of Matthew as a whole story (it can be read in one sitting in about 2 1/2 hours). Pay attention to how it works as a story, that is how the events unfold, how the characters are depicted, etc. Read Powell, ch. 5 (“Matthew”); Murphy, ch. 4 (“Matthew”).

What are some of the chief characteristics of the “Kingdom of Heaven” in the Gospel of Matthew? Compare and contrast the Kingdom of Heaven with the Roman Empire in which Jesus’ disciples (and the gospel writers) were living. *(1.5 pages)*

### 1.4 Comparing Gospel Passages [2-part question]

Choose **ONE** of the following pairs of passages found in both Matthew and Mark:

- ◆ Matt 3:7-17//Mark 1:9-11                      Baptism of Jesus
- ◆ Matt 8:1-4//Mark 1:40-45                      Healing of a Leper
- ◆ Matt 12:1-8//Mark 2:23-28                      Plucking Heads of Grain on the Sabbath
- ◆ Matt 12:9-14//Mark 3:1-6                      Healing a Man with a Withered Hand

**1.4 (a)** Compare and contrast the passages, noting similarities and differences in the particular text itself (i.e. the particular words used, the order of events told, what words/events are included or omitted) *and* in the passages’ locations in each gospel (i.e. what precedes each passage, what follows it, etc). How does each version reflect the perspective and message of the gospel in which it is located? If you were preaching or teaching Mark’s version of the story, what would you stress? If you were preaching or teaching Matthew’s version of the story, what would you stress? *(2.5 pages)*

**1.4 (b)** Based on your analysis (1.6 (a)), write a **brief** homily on **either** the Mark or the Matthew version of the story. *(2 pages)*.

**Assignment #2:** To be posted on Blackboard by 1 p.m. Friday April 20, 2018. The assignment should be submitted as a single document. The document name should include your name, CS321, and Assignment No 2 (i.e. Brown\_CS321\_No2). Each question should be separately numbered, as below, and answered in the number of pages listed.

## 2.1 Exegetical Process and Analysis

Read Tiffany and Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation*, ch. 1-5; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, ch. 1-3 (focus on chapter 2, “Narrator and Point of View”).

Summarize the Tiffany/Ringe chapters 2 (“Encountering the Biblical Text”), 3 (“A Close Reading of the Biblical Text”) and 4 (“Reading Contextually”). (1.5 pages, about 1/2 page per chapter).

## 2.2 Luke

Read the Gospel of Luke as a whole story (it can be read in one sitting in about 2 1/2 hours). Pay attention to how it works as a story, that is how the events unfold, how the characters are depicted, etc. Read Powell, ch. 7 (“Luke”); Murphy, ch. 5 (“The Gospel of Luke...”; skip the pages that are about Acts).

Choose **ONE** of the following passages in Luke:

- ◆ Luke 2:8-20,
- ◆ Luke 6:20-26,
- ◆ Luke 15:1-10,
- ◆ Luke 17:11-19, **or**
- ◆ Luke 22:24-30.

Write a short exegetical paper on your chosen passage. The paper should consider the following questions:

- ◆ Form and context: What kind of text is this (parable, etc.)? (You may find a review of Powell ch. 4 helpful). In what part of Luke’s gospel does this passage occur? What comes right before and after this particular passage? How does this framing affect the interpretation of the passage? What do we need to know about first century context in order to understand the passage?
- ◆ Theme(s): What theme(s) important to Luke is present in this passage? What is Luke telling us about God, Jesus, the Spirit and/or discipleship in this passage?

The exegetical portion of your answer should be about 2 pages; in another half-page explain what you would stress in preaching or teaching this text in your context. (2.5-3 pages)

### 2.3 John (two parts)

Read the Gospel of John as a whole story (it can be read in one sitting in about 2 hours). Pay attention to how it works as a story, that is how the events unfold, how the characters are depicted, etc. Read Powell, ch. 8 (“John”); Murphy, ch. 6 (“The Gospel of John...”; skip the pages that are about 1-3 John). Re-read Culpepper, particularly ch. 2.

**2.3 (a)** Compare and contrast the gospel of John and the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Identify distinctive aspects of John’s story (narrative details/plot, characters), vocabulary, style, symbology, and/or theme(s)? *(1 page)*

**2.3 (b)** Choose **ONE** of the following passages from John:

- ◆ John 3:1-21 (Jesus and Nicodemus),
- ◆ John 4:1-42 (Jesus and the Samaritan Woman),
- ◆ John 9:1-41 (The Healing of the Man Born Blind), **or**
- ◆ John 10:1-11 (“I am...” the Good Shepherd).

Write a short exegetical paper on your chosen passage. The paper should consider the following questions:

- ◆ Form and context: What kind of text is this (parable, etc.)? (You may find a review of Powell ch. 4 helpful). In what part of John’s gospel does this passage occur? What comes right before and after this particular passage? How does this framing affect the interpretation of the passage? What do we need to know about first century context in order to understand the passage?
- ◆ Theme(s): What theme(s) important to John is present in this passage? What is Luke telling us about God, Jesus, the Spirit and/or discipleship in this passage?

The exegetical portion of your answer should be about 2 pages; in another half-page explain what you would stress in preaching or teaching this text in your context. *(2.5-3 pages)*

### 2.4 Putting It All Together

Each gospel recounts Jesus’ crucifixion differently. Compare and contrast

- ◆ Matthew 27:32-54,
- ◆ Mark 15:21-39,
- ◆ Luke 23-26-47, **and**
- ◆ John 19:16b-37.

What is distinctive about each version? How do those distinctions relate to the overall perspective or theme of the larger narrative as related to discipleship, Christology, or other particular emphasis of the particular gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John). For each passage, explain what you would emphasize if you preached on that passage on Good Friday. *(3-4 pages)*