

**Wesley Theological Seminary Course of Study School  
Syllabus for COS 32—Bible III: Gospels**

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**Location/Date:** First United Methodist Church, 703 Essex Street, Bangor ME 04401,  
September 19-20, October 18-19

**Required Texts:**

- ❖ Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2018) or 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (2009) if already owned.
- ❖ Frederick J. Murphy, *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- ❖ Warren Carter & Amy-Jill Levine, *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings*. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2013.
- ❖ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- ❖ Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*, Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1996.
- ❖ A good study Bible with introduction and explanatory notes. Suitable study Bibles include
  - *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*. Nashville: Abingdon Press; Revised ed., 2003 or earlier version.
  - *The CEB Study Bible with Apocrypha*. Nashville: *The Common English Bible*. 2013
  - *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*.
  - Oxford: Oxford University Press; 4th Revised ed., 2010 or earlier version.
  - *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. It is not a sufficient resource on its own but is useful in addition to a full study Bible that includes both testaments. Highly recommended.

**Supplementary Texts—Reference Books and Individual Commentaries:** (to begin building a personal library)

- 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.

Individual gospel commentaries:

- Sharon H. Ringe, Luke, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995
- Leander Keck, *New Interpreters Bible Commentary: Vol 8: NT Articles, Matthew, Mark*, Abingdon Press, 1995; Vol 9, Luke-John, 1996.
- John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company. 1991.
- Paul Minear. *Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003.
- Robert C. Tannehill. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Vols. 1 (1986) and 2 (1994).
- Ched Myers. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991.
- D. Moody Smith. *John*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1999.
- Larry R. Kalajainen. *The Bible Says: How Good is the Good Book?* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013. In light of the divisions within the Church over a variety of "hot button" issues, where each side claims to have the Bible on their side, the book examines what it means to make the claim, "The Bible Says. . ." This book grew out of an adult Sunday School class I taught. (*Though I don't expect you to purchase this, you will have opportunity to examine it and, if desired, to purchase it at my own cost (\$10).*)

**Pre-Course Assignments:**

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

**Due dates:** Students are to turn in their first written assignment by midnight Thursday, September 19, 2019.

Students are to turn in their second written assignment by midnight Thursday, October 17 2019. (i.e. the night before the first class). Assignments are to be submitted on Blackboard.

Grades will be reduced a step (i.e., from B to B-) for assignments handed in after due date and time. Grades will be reduced a full letter (i.e. from B to C) for assignments handed in more than 72 hours (3 days) late. *Assignments will not be accepted after the last date of class ( October 19, 2019).*

**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) or topics are fully addressed,
- 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:**

**Week 1:** The New Testament world; What is a gospel? The Synoptic Puzzle; To Q or Not to Q, The gospels of Mark, Matthew.

**Week 2:** Exegetical process; literary and rhetorical 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 midnight Thursday, Sept. 19, 2019.**

**Each of the two assignments should be submitted as a single Word document with each question separately numbered, as below. The document name should include your name, CS321, and Assignment Number (i.e. Kalajainen CS321 #1); 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”)
- Carter-Levine, *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings*, Intro, Matthew, Mark, pp.1-53.

**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; 10 points).

**1.1 (b)** What is a “gospel?” How does the term “gospel” relate to the New Testament writings specifically titled “Gospel?” Pay particular attention to the discussion in the readings about “genre.” Of the various options (biography, history, etc.), which do you feel best characterizes the Gospels in our

New Testament? Why? How do these insights about the development, use and meanings of the term “gospel” affect the way you would preach or teach from the New Testament Gospels? (1 page; 10 points).

**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; 10 points).

## **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. As you read, see if you agree with German scholar Martin Kähler’s description of Mark as “a Passion narrative with an extended introduction.” Also notice the number of times Jesus enjoins secrecy about his identity on his disciples or other people. Read Powell, ch. 6 (“Mark”); Murphy, ch. 3 (“Mark”); Carter-Levine, Intro, pp.1-16, ch. 3, (Mark), pp. 36-53.

How are the disciples portrayed in the Gospel of Mark? How does Jesus treat them? Do their characters develop (change? mature?) or remain more-or-less constant as the story unfolds? What might the portrayal of the disciples tell us about Mark’s own agenda and/or literary concerns? [Your answer should focus on the “original ending” of Mark, i.e. Mark 16:1-8. If you wish, you may add reference to the later shorter and longer endings to comment on why later scribes/church leaders might have felt it necessary to add them.] (1.5 pages; 15 points).

## **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”) Carter-Levine ch. 2 (Matthew), pp. 17-35.

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; 15 points).

## **1.4 Comparing Gospel Passages (2-part question)**

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

- Mark 1:9-11// Matt 3:7-17 Baptism of Jesus
- Mark 1:40-45 Healing of a Leper// Matt 8:1-4
- Mark 8:27-33// Matthew 16:13-23

**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. the events/stories/sayings that precede and follow each passage. (This is seeing each individual story in its literary context.)

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? (1.5 pages; 15 points).

**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; 15 points).

**1.5** Read Mark's story of the healing of a blind man in 8:22-26. Consider that this story is omitted by both Matthew and Luke. Why do you think that might be? Also read the story of the healing of "Blind Bartimaeus" in 10:46-52. Together, these two stories, neither of which appears in Matthew or Luke, form brackets around the middle section of Mark's gospel. What idea(s) do you have about Mark's use of these stories in light of he portrays the disciples and what he might be saying about how one actually comes to understand who Jesus is. (1.5 pages; 10 points).

## **Assignment #2: To be posted on Blackboard by midnight Thursday, October 17, 2019**

### **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"). Read my own guide for Bible Study Method (on Blackboard).

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; 10 points).

If you have any helpful comments to make about my own guide, please do; it will help me perfect it for future students. These will not count toward your grade either positively or negatively.

### **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, what major themes or overall theological purpose Luke has, 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 6:17-26
- Luke 15:1-10
- Luke 22:24-30 or
- Luke 1:26-38; 2:8-20 (and Matthew 1:18-2:23)

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, miracle story, 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 pgs; 25 points).

### **2.3 John** (3 part question)

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 the epistles 1-3 John); Carter-Levine, ch. 4 “John;” re-read Culpepper, particularly ch. 2.

**2.3 (a)** It has long been observed that the Jesus who speaks in John’s gospel has a very different “voice” than the Jesus who speaks in the synoptic gospels. Using passages such as 6: 35-71 and 8:12-9:59 as examples, (you may also use others that illustrate this), explore this phenomenon. What is different about the Jesus whose “voice” we hear in this gospel? What does this different “voice” reveal about John’s understanding of Jesus? (1-2 pages; 15 points)

**2.3 (b)** John employs a kaleidoscopic array of images that recur again and again throughout his gospel:

- Word
- Glory, glorified, glorification
- World
- Witness
- Send, sent
- Where (where Jesus is, where his disciples are)
- Lifted up
- Coming and going
- Light/darkness
- Believe

Choose any TWO of these image complexes and trace them through the Gospel of John. Focus your thoughts on the question of how John’s use of each of the images you have chosen communicates his view on who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciple? In a half to one page, show how you would approach these images in either a sermon(s) or a Bible study. (2-3 pages, 30 points)

**2.3 (c)** Although many Christians have long been troubled by the almost hammer-like way John employs the phrase “the Jews,” tragically, many other Christians have seen this usage of “the Jews” as a justification for anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic attitudes. One New Testament scholar (Burton Mack) has put it dramatically: “The holocaust was also a gospel event.”

In 1-2 pages, explore John’s use of this phrase “the Jews.” Does he mean all Jews? some Jews, residents of Judea (as opposed to Galilee or the Mediterranean/Mesopotamian diaspora), only Jewish religious leaders who opposed Jesus? a combination of the above? Often this phrase occurs in the lessons from John assigned in the lectionary. How can you determine? How you would go about addressing this issue in your congregation, e.g. in sermons, Bible studies, discussion groups, newsletters, etc., so that negative stereotypes which are still very much present in our current culture, will not be perpetuated by the very texts that we call “good news.” (20 points).

## **2.4 Putting It All Together**

Each gospel ends differently; each recounts Jesus’ resurrection and its aftermath differently. Remembering that both Matthew and Luke used Mark as one of their primary sources, and that Luke also used Matthew in addition to Mark, and that John may or may not have known the Synoptics, compare and contrast the way each ends his gospel. In the space available, you will not be able to do a detailed item-by-item comparison. *So focus on the main similarities and differences, particularly as to how those similarities or differences advance the writer’s own theology and understanding of Jesus.* What is distinctive about each version? What has been added or omitted from Mark’s story? How do those differences 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 in a sentence or two what you would emphasize if you preached on that passage on Easter or the Sundays after.

- Matthew 27:55-28:20
- Mark 15:42-16:1-8
- Luke 23:50-24:53
- John 19:38-31.

(3-4 pages; 35 points).