

Wesley Theological Seminary  
Course of Study: Orientation May 27 11 a.m.-12 noon  
Asynchronous June 1-30; on Zoom July 7-11 1-3:15 p.m.

CS-321        Bible III: Gospels  
Faculty:     Katherine Brown, Ph.D.  
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**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 (2nd ed. 2018)
- ♦ Tiffany, Frederick C. and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- ♦ Three articles/chapters (to be posted on Blackboard).
- ♦ 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.
  - ♦ *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. New York: HarperCollins; Revised ed., 2006.
  - ♦ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 5th Revised ed., 2018.
  - ♦ If you have a Bible other than one listed above, please contact me to discuss its suitability for this course.

**Online Access:**

This course will be entirely online. Orientation will be May 27, from 11-12 p.m. Between June 1-30, students must access Blackboard regularly in order to complete **Modules A-D**, including readings, videos, and discussion board components. July 7-11, students must participate in Zoom sessions between 1:00-3:15 p.m. daily. If you have any questions about the syllabus or assignments, please email me.

**Assignments and Assessment:**

**Forty-five percent** of your overall grade will be based on posts/replies for the Discussion Boards. Students must post/reply on *each* of the prompted discussion boards for Modules A-D. (Each discussion board bears a separate weight within this category, even if there are multiple boards within a single module.).

**Five percent** of your overall grade will be based on post on the Start-Your-Own discussion board. No reply is due on this board.

*The discussion board schedule is posted below. More detailed guidelines will be on Blackboard.*

**Ten percent** of your overall grade will be based on your Luke assignment due July 7, 2025.

**Ten percent** of your overall grade will be based on your John assignment due July 11, 2025.

**Twenty percent** of your overall grade will be based on your Final Paper due July 11, 2025.

This five-page paper will synthesize the learning of the class with reference to the gospels' accounts of the crucifixion.

*These three papers (Luke, John, Final) will be submitted on Blackboard. More detailed guidelines will be on Blackboard.*

**Ten percent** of your overall grade will be based on presence and participation at the Zoom sessions July 7-11, 2025 (1:00-3:15 p.m. daily).

Assignments in this class require you 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. On discussion boards and in the final paper, you must properly cite your sources. For readings which have been assigned for this class, include author/page number(s) (i.e. "Powell, 141"). 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).

**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

**Use of AI Resources (including ChatCPT, etc.)**

All work, including discussion posts and papers, must be your own or must clearly and appropriately acknowledge its source (see *Plagiarism* above). Use of generative AI (including ChatGPT, Caktus, Grammarly) is prohibited in this course and will result in substantial penalties.

**Schedule:** The Blackboard course site will be open and Module A available by Monday May 5. The first discussion board posts (A.1 and A.2) are due by 11:59 p.m. Monday June 2, with replies due by 11:59 p.m. Thursday June 5. *Carefully review the schedule for posts/replies.*

**Module A: Gospel Contexts — Posts due Monday June 2; Replies due Thursday June 5**

- ♦ **Read:** Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, preface and ch. 1-5 (“NT Background: Roman World”; “NT Background: Jewish World”; “NT Writings,” “Jesus,” “Gospels”).
- ♦ **Watch** *MODULE A* video on Blackboard.
- ♦ **Respond by Monday June 2** to discussion boards **A.1 and A.2** (prompts below and on Bb). **Post a reply by Thursday June 5** on discussion board **A.1 and** a reply on discussion board **A.2**. Your reply on each board (A.1 and A.2) (*50-75 words each*) should ask a question about their analysis; add an idea to their analysis; or make a new connection between posts.
  - ♦ **A.1** Describe the first century background of the New Testament, including the religious, political, geographic, and cultural contexts. What are the main similarities and 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? (*250-300 words; 15 points*)
  - ♦ **A.2:** What is “gospel”? How does the term “gospel” relate to the New Testament writings specifically titled “Gospels”? How is the term “gospel” broader than the New Testament 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? (*250-300 words; 15 points*).

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**Module B: Mark — Posts due Monday June 9; Replies due Thursday June 12**

- ♦ **Read:** The Gospel of Mark. Notice how it works as a story, i.e. how the events unfold, how the characters are depicted, etc. Read Powell, ch. 7 (“Mark”).
- ♦ **Watch** *Module B/Mark* on Blackboard.
- ♦ **Respond by Monday June 9** to discussion board B (prompt below and on Bb). **Reply by Thursday June 12** to *one* classmate’s post. Your reply (*50-75 words*) should ask a question about their analysis; add an idea to their analysis; or make a new connection between posts.
  - ♦ **B:** 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. 16:1-8 (‘ ... for they were afraid.’)]. (*350 words; 25 points*)

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### Module C: Matthew — Posts due Monday June 16; Replies due Thursday June 19

- ♦ **Read:** The Gospel of Matthew; Powell, ch. 6 (“Matthew”).
- ♦ **Watch:** *Module C/Matthew* on Blackboard
- ♦ **Respond by Monday June 17** to discussion boards **C.1 and C.2** (prompts below and on Bb). **Reply by Thursday June 20** on *each* discussion board, C.1 *and* C.2. Your reply (50-75 words *each*) should ask a question about their analysis; add an idea to their analysis; or make a new connection between posts. (*Reply on C.2 to a classmate who compared a **different** set of texts.*)
  - ♦ **C.1:** What are some of the chief characteristics of the “Kingdom of Heaven” in the Gospel of Matthew? How does the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ described Matthew compare to the Roman Empire in which Jesus’ disciples (and the gospel writers) were living. How does it compare to the world in which Jesus’ disciples live today? (250-300 words; 15 points)
  - ♦ **C.2:** Choose ONE of the sets parallel passages from Matthew and Mark (below). Compare and contrast the passages: What words are used to tell the story? Who are the characters? What do they do/say? In what part of each gospel does the passage occur? What comes before and what comes after? How does each passage exemplify the larger themes of the particular gospel in which it’s found? Your post should discuss and analyze the two passages (do not provide a bullet list of similarities/differences). (250-300 words; 15 points)
    - ♦ Matthew 3:13-17//Mark 1:9-11
    - ♦ Matthew 12:9-14//Mark 3:1-6
    - ♦ Matthew 8:18-27//Mark 4:35-41

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### Module D: Luke and Exegesis — Posts due Mon. June 23; Replies due Thurs. June 26; Start-Your-Own Post due Thurs. July 6; Luke Assignment due Monday July 8;

- ♦ **Read:** Tiffany & Ringe ch. 1-5
- ♦ **Read:** The Gospel of Luke; Powell, ch. 8 (“Luke”).
- ♦ **Watch:** *Module D/Luke* on Blackboard.
- ♦ **Respond by Monday June 23** to discussion board **D** (prompt below and on Bb). **Reply by Thursday June 26.** Your reply (50-75 words) should ask a question about their analysis; add an idea to their analysis; or make a new connection between posts.
  - ♦ **D: Tiffany & Ringe:** Identify the main points of ch.s 2 (“Encountering the Biblical Text”), 3 (“Close Reading of the Biblical Text”) and 4 (“Reading Contextually”) (2-3 sentences per chapter). Which of these points seems most significant, surprising, helpful, or challenging? Why? (2-3 sentences to analyze whichever point you select.) (250 words; 15 points).
- ♦ **Start-Your-Own Discussion — Post due Thursday July 3. No reply required.**
  - ♦ What confused/surprised/challenged/delighted you most in the material covered in Modules A-D [Gospel Contexts; Mark; Matthew; Luke; T&R]. Your post must be specific in identifying the material referenced and describing the confusion/surprise/challenge/delight.
  - ♦ **NOTE:** The goal of this discussion board post is to support preparation for the July 7-11 Zoom sessions. Material relating to the synoptic gospels will be reviewed, in part based on the texts/topics discussed on this board.

♦ **Luke's Gospel [3 pages total; due on Blackboard Monday July 7]:**

- ♦ Choose **ONE** of the following passages (below):
  - ♦ Luke 7:1-10
  - ♦ Luke 11:5-13, **or**
  - ♦ Luke 17:11-19
- ♦ *In 1.5 pages* describe the form and context of the passage you chose. (What kind of text is this (miracle, parable, etc.)? 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?)
- ♦ *In 1.5 pages* explain 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?)
- ♦ NOTE: Your paper should demonstrate that you have completed the readings for Luke (the gospel and the Powell chapter) and watched the video on Bb. Your analysis should also be informed by the insights gained from the Tiffany & Ringe chapters assigned.

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**July 8-12: Zoom sessions 1-3:30 p.m.** Link to be posted on Blackboard site.

- ♦ **For Mon Review:** Modules A-D (I will have posted discussion replies on all boards A-D).
  - ♦ *By 11:59 p.m. Monday submit your Luke assignment in the window provided.*
- ♦ **For Tues Read:** McCauley, 'The Bible and the Pursuit of Justice,' ch.4 of *Reading While Black: African-American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (pdf on Bb).
- ♦ **For Wed. Read:** The Gospel of John; Powell, ch.9 ("John").
  - ♦ Review the prompt for the Final Papers (below) and start outlining your response.
- ♦ **For Thurs. Read:** Klink, 'Audience' in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, Estes and Sheridan, ed., and Hylan, 'Seeing Jesus John's Way...' (pdfs on Bb)
- ♦ Show up on Zoom prepared to participate!

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**Final Papers Due on Blackboard Friday July 11, by 11:59 p.m.**

**John's Gospel [3 pages total]**

- ♦ Choose **ONE** of the following passages from John:
  - ♦ John 2:1-11 (Jesus at Cana)
  - ♦ John 3:1-21 (Jesus and Nicodemus), **or**
  - ♦ John 10:1-10 ("I am..." the Shepherd).
- ♦ *In 1.5 pages* describe the form and context of the passage you chose. (What kind of text is this (miracle, parable, etc.)? 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?)
- ♦ *In 1.5 pages* explain what theme(s) important to John is present in this passage (What is John telling us about God, Jesus, the Spirit and/or discipleship in this passage?)

**‘Putting It Together’ [5 pages total]**

- ◆ Each gospel recounts Jesus’ crucifixion differently. Analyze the similarities and differences between
  - ◆ 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.
- ◆ This question requires you to *analyze* (not list) the similarities and differences. Analysis requires both identification and discussion of the comparison with particular focus on the ways each version relates to the perspective and message of the gospel in which it is located.
- ◆ Consult the rubric on Bb for guidance on citation and formatting as well as criteria for grading.