

Wesley Theological Seminary
Course of Study: Online January-February, 2026
First Discussion Board posts due Jan. 5, 2026
Required Zoom Sessions Feb. 20 and 21, 2026

CS-321 Bible III: Gospels
Faculty: Katherine Brown, Ph.D.
email: 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. Analyze this form of literature using defined exegetical tools.
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.
- ◆ Articles/chapters (to be posted on Blackboard).
- ◆ A good study Bible with introduction and explanatory notes. Suitable NRSV study Bibles include:
 - ◆ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 5th Revised ed., 2018.
 - ◆ *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. New York: HarperCollins; Revised ed., 2006.
 - ◆ *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. Nashville: Abingdon Press; Revised ed., 2003.
- ◆ The NRSVUE study Bible is also acceptable:
 - ◆ *The SBL Study Bible: NRSVUE with the Apocrypha*. New York: HarperOne. 2023
- ◆ 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. Students must access Blackboard regularly in order to complete 'Modules' A-D during January, including readings, videos, and discussion boards. Students must participate in two 2.5-hour Zoom sessions: **9-11:30 a.m. Friday Feb. 20 and 9-11:30 a.m. Saturday Feb. 21**. If you have any questions about the syllabus or assignments, please email me.

Assignments and Assessment:

Fifteen (15) percent of your final course grade will be based on presence and participation at the two Zoom sessions (Friday February 20 and Saturday February 21).

Five (5) percent of your final course grade will be based on post for the Start-Your-Own Discussion Board (in preparation for Zoom session). Rubric and guidelines will be available on Blackboard.

Forty-five (45) percent of your final course grade will be based on posts/replies for the Prompted Discussion Boards. Each Module A-D will have one or more prompted discussion boards. Students must post/reply on *each* of these prompted discussion boards. Note: *each* discussion board bears a separate weight within this category, even if there are multiple boards within a single module. More detailed rubric and guidelines will be available on Blackboard.

Ten (10) percent of your final course grade will be based on your Luke assignment due *February 20, 2025*. This paper will be submitted on Blackboard. Rubric and guidelines will be available on Blackboard.

Ten (10) percent of your final course grade will be based on your John assignment due *February 21, 2025*. This paper will be submitted on Blackboard. Rubric and guidelines will be available on Blackboard.

Fifteen (15) percent of your final course grade will be based on your Final Synthesis Paper due *February 21, 2025*. This 4-5 page paper will synthesize the learning of the class with reference to the gospels' accounts of the crucifixion will be submitted on Blackboard. A detailed prompt, rubric and guidelines will be available on Blackboard.

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, 2nd ed., 141"). For Bible citations, provide book/chapter:verse and identify the translation (i.e. "Mark 1:1 [NRSV]"). 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. "*NOAB* Mark Introduction," "*NOAB* Mark 1:1 Introduction note," "*NOAB* Mark 1:2-8 note" or "*NOAB* Mark 1:2-3 note"). 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.

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

Schedule: The Blackboard course site will be open by Friday December 12, 2025. Introductory material and Module A will be available at that time. Modules B-D will open in subsequent weeks on a schedule that provides at least 10 days between the opening of the module and the first due date for discussion board postings for that module. Acquire the books, review the module schedule and prompts below, and start the assignments now.

Module A: Gospel Contexts — Posts due 11:59 p.m. Mon. Jan 5; Replies Thurs. Jan 8

- ◆ **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 January 5** to discussion boards A.1 and A.2 (prompts below and on Bb). **Post a reply by Thursday January 8** on discussion board A.1 *and* A.2. Your posts should engage specifically with the assigned material, including readings/videos. Your reply on each board (A.1 and A.2) (*75 words*) should ask a question about the analysis; add an idea to the 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? (*400 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? (*300 words; 15 points*).

Module B: Mark — Post due 11:59 p.m. Mon. Jan. 12; Reply due Thurs. Jan. 15

- ◆ **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 January 12** to discussion board B (prompt below and on Bb). Your post should engage specifically with the assigned material, including readings/videos. **Reply by Thursday January 15** to **two** classmates’ posts. Your replies (*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,” i.e. Mark 16:1-8 (‘ ... for they were afraid.’)]. (*400 words; 25 points*)

Module C: Matthew — Posts due 11:59 p.m. Mon. Jan. 19; Replies by Thurs. Jan. 22

- ✦ **Read:** The Gospel of Matthew; Powell, ch. 6 (“Matthew”).
- ✦ **Watch:** *Module C/Matthew* on Blackboard
- ✦ **Respond by Monday January 19** to discussion boards **C.1 and C.2** (prompts below and on Bb). **Reply by Thursday January 22** on both discussion boards, C.1 and C.2. Your reply (*75 words each*) should ask a question about the analysis; add an idea to the 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? (*350 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? Your post should discuss and analyze the two passages (do not provide a bullet list of similarities/differences). (*350 words; 15 points*)
 - ✦ Matthew 3:7-17//Mark 1:9-11
 - ✦ Matthew 12:9-14//Mark 3:1-6
 - ✦ Matthew 8:18-27//Mark 4:35-41

Module D: Luke and Exegesis (T&R) — Posts due Mon. Jan 26; Replies due Thurs. Jan. 29;
Start-Your-Own Post due Tuesday Feb. 17; Luke Assignment due Friday Feb. 20

- ✦ **Read:** Tiffany & Ringe ch. 1-5
 - ✦ **Read:** The Gospel of Luke; Powell, ch. 8 (“Luke”).
 - ✦ **Watch:** *Module D/Luke* on Blackboard.
 - ✦ **Respond by Monday Jan. 26** to discussion board **D** (prompt below and on Bb). **Reply by Thursday Jan. 29.** 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*).
 - ✦ **Zoom Preparation [due Tuesday Feb. 17]**
 - ✦ **Start-Your-Own Discussion — Post due Tuesday February 17. 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:** This discussion board post supports preparation for the Feb 20-21 Zoom sessions. Late posts will not be accepted. Material relating to Modules A-D will be reviewed, in part based on the texts/topics discussed on this board.

♦ **Luke Assignment: due Friday Feb. 20**

- ♦ Choose **ONE** of the following passages (below):
 - ♦ Luke 6:20-26,
 - ♦ Luke 15:1-10, **or**
 - ♦ Luke 19:1-10, **or**
- ♦ *In 200 words* 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 200 words* 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. For this reason, you might wait to finalize your analysis until after you have read all posts/replies (including instructor replies) on the Prompted Discussion Board D (T&R).

Friday Feb. 20: Zoom session 9-11:30 a.m. Link posted on Bb. ***Before*** Zoom session:

- ♦ **Review** Modules A-D (including discussion replies on all boards A-D).
 - ♦ **NOTE:** Friday Zoom will be devoted solely to review of A-D (Contexts-Luke)
- ♦ **Read** the gospel of John; Powell ch. 9 ("John")
- ♦ **Watch** *Module E/John* on Blackboard.
 - ♦ **NOTE:** Saturday Zoom will deal with John and Gospel Comparison.

Saturday Feb. 21: Zoom session 9-11:30 a.m. Link posted on Bb. ***Before*** Zoom session:

- ♦ **Read** Klink, 'Audience' in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, Estes and Sheridan, ed. (pdf posted on Bb).
- ♦ **Review** prompt for John and Synthesis Assignments (below) and start outlining your response.

John Assignment Due on Blackboard Saturday Feb. 21, by 11:59 p.m.

- ◆ Choose **ONE** of the following passages from John:
 - ◆ John 3:1-21 (Jesus and Nicodemus),
 - ◆ John 6:24-35 (Jesus and Bread), **or**
 - ◆ John 10:1-10 (“I am...” the Shepherd).
- ◆ *In 250 words* 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 150 words* 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’ Synthesis Paper Due on Blackboard Sat. February 21, by 11:59 p.m.

- ◆ 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 and why (i.e. why this point be important in your context).
- ◆ 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. You may choose whether to organize your analysis by each gospel in turn or by each element of sameness/difference. Consult the rubric on Bb for guidance on citation and formatting as well as criteria for grading.