

Reading the Gospels with Wisdom

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Introduction:

Christianity stands and falls on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God has revealed this good news (*euangelion*) to us in four-fold form, the canonical books known to us as the gospels. So now that we have them, how do we interpret them? This is the question that is laid upon our shoulders during this course. My goal is that you go away from this course with the tools and abilities to interpret the gospels *in order to* preach them and in turn edify God's people. The gospels were written to change the lives of their readers, this is our task.

This course will give consideration to the four canonical gospels in the New Testament. It will pay close attention to issues of genre, narrative dynamics, theological development, Jewish and Roman backgrounds, and historical-critical matters. During this course, we will develop a responsible reading strategy that interacts with the four gospels and with the cultures in which they find themselves.

Learning Objectives:

- Strengthen *your* faith in Jesus. One of my primary objectives is that you leave with a passion for the biblical Jesus that can inform your ministry.
- Provide tools to see the gospels not as dry history but as engaging historical-literature so that this engagement will find itself in the pulpit and the hearts of God's people.
- Understand critical challenges to the gospels and the presuppositions that inform those challenges.
- Demonstrate engagement with the gospels in a constructive way that deals seriously with the texts but always has an eye on the present.
- Understand the gospels in their Jewish and Roman contexts. These two socio-historical worlds inform the gospel writers, therefore, we must see them couched within those contexts in order to experience the world-changing impact they had on the 1st Century.

Approach:

- This class will be a mix of close readings and guided discussions. During our Zoom meetings, the instructor will be guiding you through the leading questions for the week in order to open up a space of collective inquiry. It will be expected that each student completes the required readings prior to the Zoom meeting to allow for the most fruitful use of our time together.
- Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on a private discussion board.

Grade Breakdown & Assignment Due Dates:

- Final Exam (Online, Open Notes): 30%
- Final Paper (8-10 Pages): 40%
- Weekly one page analyses of the assigned passage and assigned reading theory: 30%

Required Reading:

Purchase These Books:

- Students will read through the *Gospel According to Mark* throughout the class. In the final week of class the student will be expected to read the entirety of Mark's Gospel in one sitting.
- *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, et. al, eds. IVP Academic, 2013 (Read articles listed below)
 - "Gospel, Genre", R. A. Burridge
 - "Gentiles", K. R. Iverson
 - "Apocalypticism and Apocalyptic Teaching", B. J. Pitre
 - "Christ", M. F. Bird
 - "Languages of Palestine", M. Graves
 - "Lord", B. Witherington III and K Yamakazi-Ransom
 - "Resurrection", K. L. Anderson
 - "Son of God", A. Winn
- The following articles, from the 1993 edition of the Dictionary are required readings and will be available as scans on the Google Classroom site.
 - "Gospels, Historical Reliability", C. Blomberg
- *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*, Jonathan T. Pennington. Baker Academic, 2012 (chs. 3, 5, 8- 10)

The Following *Required Readings* do not need to be purchased; I will provide scanned copies through Google Classroom:

- *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Hayden White. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986 (Pages 81-120) *
- *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Amy-Jill Levine, Marc Z. Brettler, eds. Oxford University Press, 2011 (Read articles below)
 - "Jewish History, 331 BCE-135 CE" by Martin Goodman, pgs. 507-513
 - "Judaism and Jewishness" by Shaye J. D. Cohen, pgs. 513-515
 - "Jewish Movements of the New Testament Period" by Daniel R. Schwartz, pgs. 526-530
- *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner, eds. Society of Biblical Literature, 2011 (Pages 19-43)
- *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds. Fortress, 2008 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009) (Pages 29-83)
- "Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew", Ulrich Luz. *Harvard Theological Review* 97:2 (2004), 119-37
- *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower*, Christopher Bryan. Oxford University Press, 2005 (Pages 11-76)
- *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, Richard A. Horsley. Fortress Press, 2002 (Pages 1-54)
- *The Living Text of the Gospels*, D.C. Parker, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), ch. 8

Course Outline (Subject to change before Course Start Date):

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics	Reading
1	9/28	Mark 1; Socio-Cultural Backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• (3) <i>Jewish Annotated NT</i> articles• <i>Dictionary</i> selections: (Gentiles, Apocalypticism and Apocalyptic Teaching, Languages of Palestine)
2	10/5	Mark 2:1-3:6; A history of Biblical Criticism	NO assigned reading this week to provide you time to spread out your large chunk of reading for next week.
3	10/12	Mark 3:7-35; Narrative Criticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Mark as Story</i> selections; <i>Mark and Method</i> selections; <i>Reading the Gospels Wisely</i> selections
4	10/19	Mark 4:1-34; Kingdom of God in the Gospels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Render to Caesar</i> selections• <i>Jesus and Empire</i> selections• <i>Dictionary</i> selections (Christ, Lord, Resurrection, Son of God)
5	10/26	Mark 4:35-6:6a; Gospel Issues (dating/authorship/genre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Dictionary</i> selection: Gospels, Genre
6	11/2	Mark 6:6b-8:26; The Q Question	NO assigned reading this week to provide you time to spread out your large chunk of reading for next week.
7	11/9	Mark 8:27-10:52; Historiography and the Gospels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Tropics of Discourse</i> selections• <i>Dictionary</i> selection: Historical Reliability
8	11/16	Mark 11:1-13:37; Intertextuality and the Gospels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Luz article
9	11/30	Mark 14:1-16:8; The ending of Mark	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Living Text of the Gospels</i> selection
10	12/7	Mark 16:9-20; Concluding Narrative read and Q/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the Gospel according to Mark in one sitting

Assignment Requirements:

Final Exam: The final exam will be an open notes/open book exam. The exam will be available on Google Classroom and will have a three-hour time limit. It will consist of two sections – section one will have 10 terms/concepts from which you must pick 7 and provide a short answer/definition for. Section two will have 5 essay questions from which you will pick 2. Your answer for each essay question should be no less than one paragraph, but no greater than one page.

Final Paper: The final paper will be a 8-10 page paper analyzing a chosen pericope in one of the four gospels. The goal of the paper is to show how your pericope fits into the narrative context of the gospel, and how that pericope contributes to the Gospel's narrative purpose.

Final Paper Guide

- Paper must be 8-10 pages excluding title page, bibliography, etc. The 8-10 pages must be original research.
- The paper must be uploaded to Google Classroom by the deadline listed on page 2 of the syllabus. Submit the paper as *either* a PDF or Microsoft Word file (preferably a Word file).
- Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic words must be typed out, not transliterated.
- Paper should include an introduction with a clearly-stated thesis statement.
- Paper should be clearly argued and articulated.
- Paper should deal fairly with secondary literature. In other words, you should thoroughly engage both liberal and conservative scholarship. I strongly suggest you engage the *Hermeneia* commentary of the gospel you are working with.
- Paper should have at least five total references. References of the following kind are acceptable:
 - Academic monographs
 - Articles in scholarly journals
 - Academic commentaries
 - Reformed literature (academic)
 - Literature from any century is fine (i.e. early Christian, reformation, medieval, enlightenment, or modern literature); however, at least 3 sources must be newer than 1950.
 - *DO NOT* use popular level literature
- Paper should employ footnotes that are single spaced and 10-point font.
- Each page (after title page) should be numbered according to SBL style guide.
- Paper must employ 12 point font, 1 inch margins on each side, and ½ inch indentation. DO NOT include a space after each paragraph; be aware that MS Word does this automatically.
- All documentation must be done according to the standards in the *SBL Handbook of Style*, both the footnotes and the bibliography.
- Proofread your paper. Ensure all typographical, spelling, and grammatical errors have been corrected.

Final Test Guide

- The final test will consist of two sections.
 - Section one will be a list of (10) terms from which you will pick (7) and provide a definition. Your definition should demonstrate that you have read and critically engaged with all of the required course readings.

- Section two will be a list of (5) essay questions from which you will pick (2) and provide an answer. Your answer should demonstrate that you have read and critically engaged with all of the required course readings.
- Because this is an open-book / open-notes test, I expect you to interact with the various views that were presented by both me and your readings. Quotations are not expected, but will be looked upon favorably. The authors you interact with should be fairly treated.
- Grammar and logic will be important in this exam.
- There is a final exam study guide available on Google Classroom. All questions on the final exam can be found on the study guide.