

Wesley Theological Seminary  
Course of Study: Online June 22-July 3/In-Person July 6-10, 2020

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 (1st ed. 2009; 2nd ed. 2018)
  - ◆ NOTE you may use *either* the first or second edition of the Powell book. Identify which edition you are using because the pagination and prose are slightly different in each.
- ◆ Murphy, Frederick J., *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- ◆ Tiffany, Frederick C. 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.
  - ◆ *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.
  - ◆ *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 may be useful in addition to a full study Bible that includes both testaments.

**Assignments:**

Assessment will be divided between the online and in-person portions of the course.

**Thirty percent** of your final course grade will be based on the online portion (June 22-July 3) including:

- ◆ 15% based on your written response (3-4 pages) to **Question 1.1a-c**, below (**due on Bb Friday June 26, 2020**)
- ◆ 15% based on your discussion board posts and replies responding to **Question 1.2 (discussion board postings due on Tuesday June 30, 2020; replies due Friday July 3, 2020)**
  - ◆ NOTE: These deadlines effectively require you to have begun reading and responding the assignment questions in advance of the official ‘opening’ of the Bb course site on June 22, 2020. Do not finalize and submit/post your assignments until you have reviewed the Online Modules. Please be aware that the Blackboard Learn tracks each individual’s engagement with the course website, including time on the online modules and discussion boards.
- ◆ Grades will be reduced a step (i.e. from B to B-) for assignments posted 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. Pre-course assignments will **not** be accepted after July 6, 2020.

**Twenty percent** of your final course grade will be based on in-class work and participation (possibly including one quiz) (July 6-10, 2020).

**Fifty percent** of your final course grade will be based a post-course paper responding to **Question #s 2.1-2.4** (see below). This assignment is **due on Bb by midnight on Monday, July 27, 2020**.

- ◆ *Graduating students must complete work in advance of this due date; please contact me.*
- ◆ Grades will be reduced a step (i.e. from B to B-) for assignments posted 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. The post-course assignment will **not** be accepted after the July 31, 2020.

Format: Papers submitted via assignment window (i.e. not posted on a discussion board) should be double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, with one-inch margins on all sides. Both the traditional-styled papers and discussion board postings must be supported with citation. The citation for both may be informal so long as the information provided is sufficient to identify the reference (for example: Powell, 2nd ed., p. 100).

Grading: Pre- and post-course papers and discussion board posts will be graded based on

- ◆ whether the question(s) are fully answered, with a clear thesis and an argument that is logically developed and fully supported,
- ◆ whether the essay engages with the assigned readings, both biblical and secondary, 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. Parenthetical citations or footnotes are equally acceptable. For readings which have been assigned for this class, include author/page number(s) (i.e. "Powell, 1st ed., 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).

*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.*

**A. Online Assignments****Pre-course Essay [Online Module A]: Due on Bb by midnight Friday June 26, 2020****Question 1.1(a)-(c): 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”).
- ◆ Watch *MODULE A* on Blackboard.
- ◆ Answer questions 1.1(a)-(c) below and post your essay on the Assignment 1 Window on Bb. The assignment should be submitted as a single document (.doc or .pdf) with each question separately numbered, as below. The document name should include your name, CS321, and Assignment No 1; your name should also appear in the document itself.
  - ◆ **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? (*1-2 pages*).
  - ◆ **1.1 (b)** 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? (*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*).

**Discussion Board Postings [Online Module B/Mark] Due on Bb June 30 & July 3, 2020****Question 1.2 The Gospel of Mark**

- ◆ Read the Gospel of Mark (it can be read in one sitting in about 1 1/2 hours). Notice how it works as a story, i.e. how the events unfold, how the characters are depicted, etc. Read Powell, ch. 6 (“Mark”); Murphy, ch. 3 (“Mark”).
- ◆ Watch *Module B/Mark* on Blackboard.
- ◆ On the Module B/Mark Discussion Board [on Bb]; start a new discussion thread and post your answer (*approx. 400 words*) to the following:
  - ◆ 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].
- ◆ Your discussion thread must be posted by **midnight Tuesday June 30, 2020**.
- ◆ On the *Module B/Mark* Discussion Board [on Bb]; post your response (*100 words each*) to two other classmates’ answers to the above questions. Your response to classmates’ threads must be posted by **midnight Friday July 3, 2020**.

**B. In Preparation for July 6-10 Class Time:**

- ◆ Read the Gospel of Matthew. Notice how it works as a story, i.e. how the events unfold, how the characters are depicted, etc. Read Powell, ch. 5 (“Matthew”); Murphy, ch. 4 (“Matthew”).
- ◆ Read the Gospel of Luke. Notice how it works as a story, i.e. 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 about Acts).
- ◆ Read the Gospel of John. Notice how it works as a story, i.e. 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 about 1-3 John).
- ◆ Read Tiffany and Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation*, ch. 1-5; focus on chapters 2 (“Encountering the Biblical Text”), 3 (“A Close Reading of the Biblical Text”) and 4 (“Reading Contextually”).

**C. Post-Class Assignment #2: Due on Bb by midnight on Monday July 27, 2020.**

Answer questions 2.1-2.4 below and post your essay on the Assignment 2 Window. The assignment should be submitted as a single document (.doc or .pdf), each question separately numbered, as below. The document name should include your name, CS321, and Assignment No 2.

**2.1: The Gospel of Matthew** [read Matthew; Powell, ch. 5 (“Matthew”); Murphy, ch. 4 (“Matthew”); review class notes]:

- ◆ What are some of the chief characteristics of the “Kingdom of Heaven” in the Gospel of Matthew? Compare and contrast the “Kingdom of Heaven” in Matthew with the Roman Empire in which Jesus’ disciples (and the gospel writers) were living.
- ◆ The definition and historical comparison should be about 2 pages; in another 1/2 to 1 page explain what you would stress in preaching or teaching Matthew’s “Kingdom” theme in your context  
(2-3 pages total)

**2.2: The Gospel of Luke** [read Luke; Powell, ch. 7 (“Luke”); Murphy, ch. 5 (“The Gospel of Luke...”; skip the pages that are about Acts); review class notes]:

- ◆ Choose **ONE** of the following passages in Luke:
  - ◆ 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. 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 1/2 to 1 page explain what you would stress in preaching or teaching this text in your context.

(2-3 pages total)

**2.3 The Gospel of John** [read John; Powell, ch. 8 (“John”); Murphy, ch. 6 (“The Gospel of John...”); skip the pages that are about 1-3 John]; review class notes].

◆ 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. 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 John 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 1/2 to 1 page explain what you would stress in preaching or teaching this text in your context.

*(2-3 pages total).*

**2.4 Putting It All Together:** 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.

- ◆ NOTE: This question requires you to analyze, not just 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.

*(4 pages total).*