

APPALACHIAN LOCAL PASTORS SCHOOL—MAY 2017

Course: COS 321—Bible III: Gospels
Dates: May 15-19, 2017
Location: Union College, Barbourville, KY
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Course Description

This course focuses on the content and message of the Gospels, as well as the theological perspectives of the Gospel writers. The practice of exegesis is emphasized.

Objectives

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.

Textbooks

**NRSV—New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003)
ISBN: 978-0-687-27832-9
**The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010)
ISBN: 978-0-687-33411-7
**Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011)
ISBN: 978-0-06-146906-0
Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009)
ISBN: 978-0-80-102868-7
Frederick Murphy, *An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005)
ISBN: 0-687-49692-6

* These are basic reference works which students use in all Bible courses in the Course of Study. Students should have these books from previous classes.

PRE-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS AND SUBSEQUENT PAPERS

Students write *three* exegetical essays, each a minimum of 750 words (3 typed pages, double-spaced), on topics related to the gospels. Papers may be longer than 750 words, but students are encouraged to write concisely and speak *directly* to the point of the essay topic. Students must cite textbook readings as they use material from them. These pre-class assignments are designed to prepare students for discussions in the class sessions. Pre-class papers must be submitted to the ALPS registrar before the deadline established for pre-class work. Students who wish to submit papers *directly* to the instructor *prior to this deadline* for review may do so. Instructions for submitting papers directly to the instructor will be sent out after the instructor receives a list of registered students.

Students write and submit a fourth essay (minimum 1000 words) due within *one week* of the last class session. Each pre-class essay counts 20% of the course grade; the fourth essay counts 40%.

Pre-Class Assignment 1: John the Baptist and Jesus in the Gospels

Readings: (1) Chapters 1-4 in the Powell textbook, (2) chapters 1-2 in the Murphy textbook, (3) articles on “John the Baptist” and “gospel” in *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, and (4) the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke in that order. Pay particular attention to Mark chaps. 1-8 and 11:27-33; Matthew chaps. 1-11; 16:13-20; 21:23-27; Luke chaps. 1-9 and Luke 20:1-8.

Paper: As a prophet, John announces the coming of one “mightier” than he, one who “will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (Matt 3:11; Mark 7-8; Luke 3:16). Also as a prophet, John has a message of his own and calls God’s people to repentance, not unlike Hebrew prophets before him. Matthew and Luke give more attention than Mark to John’s preaching and people’s reaction to it. In different ways, each expands upon Mark’s portrait of John and Jesus’ baptism. Write an essay on this theme in which you answer the questions below:

- (1) Analyze the parallel accounts of John’s appearance and his baptism of Jesus in Mark 1: 1-11; Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 3:1-22. How do Matthew and Luke each expand upon Mark’s account of John’s activity and his baptism of Jesus? How are these expansions of Mark similar and how are they different?
- (2) As you read further in the three gospels, where do Mark, Matthew, and Luke have similar reports or statements about John? Where do Matthew and Luke have reports or statements about John that are absent from Mark? In these subsequent accounts, what connection between John and Jesus is made either explicitly or implicitly?
- (3) All three gospels affirm John’s status as a prophet. John is seen as a prophet in the tradition of Elijah and his mission is described with citations of Isaiah. Where else in the three gospels are references made to these or other Hebrew prophets? (A concordance is helpful here.) How might John be seen as a link between Jesus and earlier Hebrew prophets?

Pre-Class Assignment 2: Jesus and Pharisees

Readings: (1) Articles on “Pharisees” and “Q” in HarperCollins Bible Dictionary and (2) “Contents of Q” (Box 4.8 in the Powell textbook), and (3) re-read Mark, Luke, and Matthew in that order, and identify passages where Jesus has controversies with Pharisees and Q traditions used by Luke and Matthew.

Paper: There is no question that Jesus encountered opposition from Pharisees. This is partly due to similarities between Jesus and Pharisees within the diverse Jewish religious culture of the first century—Jesus is addressed as “rabbi” as are Pharisees. As traditions about Jesus are transmitted orally and eventually written in the forms we have them in the gospels, Christians who had little contact with Pharisees understood them as a wholly negative type of religious figure, much as persons today use the term. That is to say, differences between Jesus and Pharisees sometimes may be exaggerated because Pharisees are a rival Jewish sect after the

destruction of the temple. Write an essay on portraits of Pharisees in the gospels in which you answer the following questions. Your essay should be 750-1000 words.

- (1) What types of arguments does Jesus engage in with Pharisees in the Gospel of Mark? How does Jesus differentiate himself from Pharisees in a way that wins him the support of his fellow Jews and *potentially* Gentiles? On the latter point, pay close attention to chap. 7 in Mark.
- (2) Read Mark's account of the Beelzebul controversy (3:22-30) and the Q account of the same (Luke 11:14-23 & Matt 12:22-30). Which elements of the Markan and Q accounts are similar and which are different? Note the sayings of Jesus which follows the Q account in Luke (Luke is generally thought to preserve the Q order of sayings). How do the Q sayings which follow the Beelzebul controversy support Jesus' response to the Pharisees in the Q account? How is a Gentile response to the teaching of Jesus envisioned? How do they set the stage for his condemnation of the Pharisees in 11:37-52?
- (3) Note how Matthew expands the Q account of Jesus' woes against the Pharisees (Matthew 23)—what elements of Matthew's "woes against the Pharisees" are absent from Luke's accounts. It is argued that Matthew's community had regular hostile encounters with Pharisees, whereas in Luke's community had few such encounters. Some describes the Pharisees in Luke (and Mark for that matter) as "straw figures. What aspects of Pharisee conduct in Matthew's account seem especially real? What is particularly Jewish in Jesus' response to them?

Pre-Class Assignment 3: "The Spirit of Truth" in John's Gospel

Readings: (1) Chapter 8 in the Powell textbook and chapter 6 in the Murphy textbook, (2) articles on "John" and "paraclete" in *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, and (3) John's Gospel.

Paper: In John 14:15-17, Jesus promises his disciples that God will send "an Advocate (*paraclete* in Greek), the spirit of truth." The work of this spirit is described here and in 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7-15. In 20:19-23, John recounts how the disciples receive this spirit when the resurrected Jesus mysteriously appears among them. This episode, followed by the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to Thomas, marks what many scholars believe is the original end of the gospel. (See textbooks for explanations of why chapter 21 is probably a later addition to the gospel.) If so, the gospel of John ends with Jesus giving a commission to his disciples, similar in some respects to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20. Write an essay on this theme in which you answer the questions below:

- (1) Note how Jesus' statements about "the spirit of truth" occur in the context of extended discourses on various topics. For example, the first statements follow the exhortation, "Let not your hearts be troubled" (14:1) and dialogues with Philip and Judas. What is the meaning of Jesus' statements about the spirit of truth in this context? Discuss what Jesus' other statements about the work of this spirit mean in the context of the discourses where they occur.

- (2) What is the relationship between the work of this spirit and the commission Jesus gives his disciples when he appears to them after his resurrection? Note the situation and disposition of his disciples when he appears to them. What is the work of the spirit in that context? What is its work as the mission that follows?
- (3) The gospel writer states the purpose of the work: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But *these* are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (20:30-31; NRSV). Some translations read, “that you may believe,” perhaps implying that reading the written gospel fosters *continued* belief and with it a deeper understanding of what it means to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. (Read the NAB online version and its footnote to this verse: <http://uscgb.org/bible/john/20>.) When read in the context of the sayings about “the spirit of truth” (*paraclete*) and the episodes directly preceding it—the disciples receiving the spirit and Jesus’ appearance and conversation with Thomas—is the gospel writer saying that one must receive “the spirit of truth” in order to understand more fully the meaning of the “signs” performed by Jesus in the *first half* of the gospel? (See Murphy’s analysis of the structure of the gospel.) How might this be the point of Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus in 3:1- 13?
- (4) Compare the commission Jesus gives his disciples in John 20:21-23 with the commission he gives at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. What are the notable points of similarity and difference?