

COS 521–Bible V: Acts, Epistles, and Revelation

Instructor: Russell B. Sisson, Ph.D.

Location: Union College

Date: May 21-25, 2018

This course focuses on the content and context of Acts, selected New Testament epistles, and Revelation. Particular attention is given to the theological emphases of their writers.

Learning Objectives:

- Distinguish these genres of biblical literature and understand the major theological themes in these writings.
- Faithfully exegete biblical passages based on analysis of historical and literary context.
- Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day.

Textbooks

Required:

- *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (Abingdon, 2003)*
- Warren Carter & Amy-Jill Levine, *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings* (Abingdon, 2013)
- Jouette Bassler, *Navigating Paul* (Westminster John Knox, 2007)

Recommended:

- Victor Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul*
- N T Wright, *Revelation*
- Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Baker, 2009)*
- *The New Interpreter's Bible One Volume Commentary* (Abingdon, 2010)*
- *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Harper One, 2011)*

*Students should have these books from a previous COS class or Licensing School.

Students write three exegetical essays prior to the May class meetings. These essays must be submitted prior to the deadline set by the registrar. Prior to the first class meeting, students should read all the New Testament writings studied in the course and the textbooks or portions of textbooks related to them.

Preclass Assignment 1: Christ's Apostles as Agents and Interpreters of God's Plan of Salvation

Read the Book of Acts and sections on Acts in the textbooks for the course. Notes and excursuses in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* are insightful.

The narrative of Acts traces the movement of the early church from Jerusalem out into broader Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. What is the significance of the following events in the development and movement of the church: Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem and Peter's address to the crowd, Stephen's address to the Council in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia and Paul's address, and Paul's speech at his trial before Felix? How do the

speeches of these persons at these points in the narrative of Acts interpret what is occurring in terms of God's purpose for Jews and Gentiles? What role does Paul play at the Jerusalem Conference (Act 15)? Compare Acts' account of Paul's relation to the Jerusalem church with Paul's own account in Gal 1:11-2:10. Note the similarities and differences in the two accounts. What lessons does Acts' account of the early church's formation and spread have for churches today?

Incorporate your answers to these questions in an essay on the topic, Christ's Apostles as Agents and Interpreters of God's Plan of Salvation. Length: 750-1000 words (3 to 4 pages, double-spaced).

Preclass Assignment 2: Paul as Foundation-Builder and the Church as a Temple

Read 1 Corinthians and sections on this letter in the textbooks required for the course. Notes and excursuses in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* are insightful.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses a variety of issues which are causes of division within the city's Christian community. At points, his own authority and status as an apostle appears to be an issue of contention. Before addressing a range of issues, Paul establishes a basis for doing so in 1:10-4:21. Part of this opening section of the letter is a passage where Paul employs a building analogy (3:10-17), culminating in the statement, "For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." Two things to note here. One, "you" is plural (Greek has different pronouns for "you" singular and "you" plural) and temple is singular. Two, the Greek word translated "temple" (*naos*) signifies a structure suitable to being a dwelling place for God. The structure becomes a "holy" (*hagios*) space when God dwells in it. What is the significance of Paul speaking of the collective body of the church being a temple, as opposed to the church being a collection of individual temple-bodies? Note J. Bassler's discussion of the indwelling of the Spirit in chapter 4 of *Navigating Paul*. How is this passage foundational for the instruction Paul subsequently provides on various issues in the remainder of the letter? Offer specific examples to illustrate what you say.

Incorporate your answers to these questions in an essay on the topic, Paul as Foundation-Builder and the Church as a Temple. Length: 750-1000 words (3 to 4 pages, double-spaced).

Preclass Assignment 3: James and Paul on Faith and Righteousness

Read the Epistle of James and sections of Paul's letters discussed in chapter 3 of *Navigating Paul*. Read sections on these letters in the textbooks required for the course. Notes and excursuses in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* are insightful.

James 2:14-26 sometimes is interpreted as a refutation or correction of Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone. However, this section of James may be a correction of a *misunderstanding* of Paul on the topic of faith and righteousness, particularly if one focuses on what Paul says about *the obedience of faith*. Note what J. Bassler says about Paul's understanding of faith in chapter 3 of *Navigating Paul*. What important similarities and differences do you see between Paul and James on the subject of faith and works? Compare how each uses Abraham as an example of an ancestor whose faith "was reckoned as righteousness." What understanding of "God's righteousness" is presumed in what Paul says about Abraham

(see chapter 5 of *Navigating Paul*)? Does this same understanding of “the righteousness of God” found in James? If so, where?

Incorporate your answers to these questions in an essay on the topic, James and Paul on Faith and Righteousness. Length: 750-1000 words (3 to 4 pages, double-spaced).