NT 508 – Introduction to the Gospels
3 Credit Hours
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Location: Reformed Theological Seminary / DC Campus
Time: January 6 – 10, 2014; 8:30 AM – 5:30 PM
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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 function as a lecture with some hybrid elements of seminar format. Each day will end with one hour of discussion on the pre-course reading. For this reason, it is absolutely vital that you complete ALL of the ‘pre-course’ readings prior to the start of class. The success of the class depends upon this! . . . and so does your grade 😃
• Our focus will be on reading the gospels as intentional readers. We will consider the implications the gospels had on the 1st century audience and the implications they have for us.
• The Kingdom of God, as presented to us by Ridderbos, will be the general theological paradigm through which the gospels will be understood. We will take time understanding the view of the Kingdom of God present in the Old Testament and the minds of the early readers. We will give consideration to this paradigm as we look at our various contexts.

• Because this class is only one week of face to face time, we cannot look in depth at each gospel. Instead I will provide short lectures on the fundamental differences between the gospels, as well as history of gospel reception; then, we will use the gospel according to Mark as the ‘test-case’ for our interpretive model.

Grade Breakdown:
• Final Exam (Take Home, Open Notes): 20%
• Final Paper (12-15 Pages): 30%
• Individual Online Presentations and Responses: 30%
• In Class Participation: 20%

Required Reading:
(Selections highlighted and marked with an asterisk * must be read before meeting in class)
I expect that all students will have read the required pre-course material before seminar discussion begins. This is VERY important to your grade

Purchase These Books:
• Students must read through the Gospel According to Mark and the Gospel According to John in any Translation three times. Once before class begins, once during the week of class, and once following the lectures.
• The Coming of the Kingdom, Herman N. Ridderbos. P&R Publishing, 1962 (Pages 3-527)
• Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Joel B. Green, et. al, eds. IVP Academic, 1992 (Read articles listed below – Total: 117 Pages)
  o “Gospels (Historical Reliability)“, C. L. Blomberg *
  o “Gospel (Genre)”, L. W. Hurtado
  o “Gentiles”, S. McKnight
  o “Apocalyptic Teaching”, T. J. Geddert *
  o “Christ”, L. W. Hurtado
  o “Historical Jesus, Quest of”, C. Brown
  o “Languages of Palestine”, M. O. Wise
  o “Lord”, B. Witherington III
  o “Parable”, K. R. Snodgrass
  o “Preaching from the Gospels”, S. Greidanus
  o “Q” G. N. Stanton *
  o “Resurrection”, G. R. Osborne
  o “Son of God”, D. R. Bauer

• Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction, Jonathan T. Pennington. Baker Academic, 2012 (chs. 3, 5, 8, 9, 10)
The Following *Required Readings* do not need to be purchased; I will provide scanned copies through Self-Service:

  - “Jewish History, 331 BCE-135 CE” by Martin Goodman, pgs. 507-513
  - “Judaism and Jewishness” by Shaye J. D. Cohen, pgs. 513-515
  - “The Synagogue” by Lee I. Levine, pgs. 519-521
  - “Jewish Movements of the New Testament Period” by Daniel R. Schwartz, pgs. 526-530
  - “The Septuagint” by Leonard Greenspoon, pgs. 562-565
- **Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect**, Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner, eds. Society of Biblical Literature, 2011 (Pages 19-43) *
- **Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower**, Christopher Bryan. Oxford University Press, 2005 (Pages 11-76)

**Recommended Resources, but not required:**

- **Interpreting the Parables**, Craig Blomberg. IVP Academic, 2012
Course Outline:

Monday, January 6th, 2014
8:30 – 10:00 – Introductory Matters / Dating / Authorship
10:00 – 10:20 - Break
10:20 – 12:00 – Framing a Reformed Approach / Critical Questions
12:00 – 1:00 - Lunch
1:00 – 2:40 – Questions of Genre and Dependency
2:40 – 3:00 - Break
3:00 – 4:20 – 1st Century Historiography / Why Presuppositions Matter
4:20 – 4:30 – Break
4:30 – 5:30 – Seminar discussion on Historiography and the Gospels
   [Required Readings: Tropics of Discourse selections; “Gospels (Historical Reliability)” Dictionary entry]

Tuesday, January 7th, 2014
8:30 – 10:00 – The Quest for the Biblical Jesus
10:00 – 10:20 - Break
10:20 – 12:00 - The Kingdom of God as Foundation: The Coming of the Kingdom
12:00 – 1:00 - Lunch
1:00 – 2:40 – The Kingdom of God as Foundation pt. 2: The Present Kingdom
2:40 – 3:00 - Break
3:00 – 4:20 – The Kingdom of God as Foundation pt. 3: The Future Kingdom
4:20 – 4:30 – Break
4:30 – 5:30 – Seminar discussion on the Gospels in the setting of Empire
   [Required Readings: Jesus and Empire selections; “Apocalyptic Teaching” and “Q” Dictionary entries]

Wednesday, January 8th, 2014
8:30 – 10:00 – Gospel as Narrative: Mark as Paradigm
10:00 – 10:20 - Break
10:20 – 12:00 – The Kingdom/Empire of God and the Empire of Rome
   Seeing the Gospels as Roman History
12:00 – 1:00 - Lunch
1:00 – 2:40 – The Kingdom of God and the Old Testament.
   Seeing the Gospels as Jewish History
2:40 – 3:00 - Break
3:00 – 4:00– Understanding the use of the Old Testament in the Gospels
4:00 – 4:10– Break
4:10 – 4:30 – Lab – Interpreting the Gospels – Mark 6:17-29
4:30 – 5:30 – Seminar discussion on Intertextuality
   [Required Readings: Palimpsests selections; Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality selections]
Thursday, January 9th, 2014

8:30 – 10:00 – Elements in the Gospels (Parables)
10:00 – 10:20 - Break
10:20 – 12:00 - Elements in the Gospels (Parables)
12:00 – 1:00 - Lunch
1:00 – 2:40 - Elements in the Gospels (Conflicts)
2:40 – 3:00 - Break
3:00 – 4:00 – Elements in the Gospels (Miracles/Resurrection)
4:00 – 4:10 – Break
4:30 – 5:30 – Seminar discussion on gospel narratives.

[Required Readings: Mark as Story selections]

Friday, January 10th, 2014

8:30 – 9:30 – The distinguishing character of Matthew
9:30 – 9:40 - Break
9:40 – 10:20 – Lab – Interpreting the Gospels Wisely – Mark 16:1-8, or 20?
10:20 – 12:00 – The distinguishing character of Mark
12:00 – 1:00 - Lunch
1:00 – 2:40 - The distinguishing character of Luke
2:40 – 3:00 - Break
3:00 – 5:30 – The distinguishing character of John / Closing Comments

Assignment Requirements:

Final Exam: The final exam will be a take home exam. I will provide the exam to you on the last day of class and you must return it to me via mail or scanned file by the last day of the winter semester. You will have two hours to complete the exam. The exam will consist of a series of 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. Following the essay questions there will be a list of terms from the lectures that you must define. You are allowed to use notes and readings for the exam.

Final Paper: The final paper will be a 12-15 page paper dealing with a chosen pericope in one of the four gospels. The paper must consist of two elements: 1) an exegesis of the passage using the tools developed in this class (and others that you have developed in your seminary training); and 2) a narrative analysis of how the passage that you chose fits into the ‘big picture’ of the gospel it is found in. For example, if you pick Mark 7:1-23, you will need to first (in roughly 6 pages) analyze the pericope. You could provide a historical/textual analysis of how purity rules and structures were being used by Jesus, or show how Intertextuality illuminates the way Jesus deals with the 5th Commandment. Then (in roughly 6 pages) you must show how the concept dealt with in the pericope that you chose (purity or the 5th Commandment) fits within the larger narrative of Mark’s gospel. We will spend time in class demonstrating how this is done through three separate ‘labs’ on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. I will also provide an example.
Individual Presentations: In my experience, presenting on a topic is the best way to learn the ‘ins and outs’ of that particular topic. Because we are limited in our time together, we are going to do electronic-presentations and discussions. You will be required to pick one topic below and prepare a 15 minute presentation on that topic, accompanied by a handout. Your presentation should include an analysis of the topic/problem, a fair summary of scholarship that has been done on that topic, and your resolution of the topic/problem with a defense of that resolution.

As Presenter: Your presentation must be done on Microsoft Powerpoint, Keynote, Prezi or like software. Create your slides with relevant information, then record lecture material using the device’s sound record function. Save the powerpoint as a recorded presentation and post it to the group page along with your handout. The presentation should be no less than 10 minutes and no more than 20 minutes.

As Observer: View 5 presentations and provide a response to each one that furthers the conversation in some way in the comments section. A simple statement like “good job” or “I agree” will not result in credit. Your conversation must show that you engaged the presentation in some way. The goal of this project is to foster a conversation about significant issues in Gospel Studies that helps you think critically about the scholarship.

Individual Presentation Options:

• The Secrecy of Jesus in the gospel of Mark
• The Synoptic ‘Problem’
• The question of ‘Q’
• What do the gospels mean when they say that Judas ‘betrayed’ Jesus?
• The fulfillment of Redemptive History according to Matthew
• Was Jesus’ earthly ministry really three years?
• What is historiography and how does it shape our reading of the gospels?
• What is Intertextuality and how does it shape our reading of the gospels?
• What is Rhetorical Criticism and how does it shape our reading of the gospels?
• Explain the Herodian dynasty in light of the Gospel texts.
• Why is it important to understand the Imperial reign of Rome to understand the gospels?
• Others to be added later.

In Class Participation: I expect that all students will have read the required pre-course material before the commensurate seminar discussion. This is VERY important to your grade. Unfortunately, due to the structure of the course we cannot discuss each individual reading the week after it is assigned; however, I still need you to be conversant with the material so that our discussions can be fruitful. Therefore, I recommend you keep a reading log to jot down notes, thoughts, or important quotes that you may want to bring up in class. This will also provide you with a reference to look back on as well as a means of interacting with the text in a more thorough manner.
Final Paper Guide

• Paper must be 12 – 15 pages excluding title page, bibliography, etc. The 12-15 pages must be original research.
• The paper must be submitted electronically to patrick.stefan@du.edu no later than the final day of the Winter Semester. The document must be sent as a PDF.
• 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 seven references of the following kind:
  o Academic monographs
  o Articles in scholarly journals
  o Academic commentaries
  o Reformed literature
  o Literature from any century is fine (i.e. early Christian, reformation, medieval, enlightenment, or modern literature); however, at least 5 sources must be newer than 1950.
• 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 a series of (5) questions from which you will pick (2). These questions will gauge your ability to critically interact with the material that has been both read and discussed in class.
• 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.
• Using 12 point font and 1 inch margins, each essay question should be answered in no less than one paragraph and no more than one page. The purpose of these restrictions is to get you to cogently define and argue your position.
• A sample question might be: “Given your interaction with material on the historical reliability/unreliability of the gospels and the philosophy of historiography, how do you reconcile the gospels as history, and the gospels as narrative?”
• Following the essay questions I will ask you to define roughly 10-15 terms.
• These definitions should take up no more than three sentences. I will not give you the answer I am looking for. I want to hear your understanding of the subject.
• On the first day of class I will give you 25 terms that may be included on the test. From this list, I will ask you to define 10-15.
• A sample question might be: “Define Rhetorical Criticism”

In Class Participation Guide
• For in class participation I expect you to be engaged in the lectures and discussions.
• During the lectures, I will mark you down if you are checking e-mail, facebook, or any other website during the class.
• Computers/electronic devices are allowed, but I expect your wi-fi connection to be turned off.
• During the seminar discussion, I expect everyone to contribute to the conversation. You must make at least one productive comment.
• I expect all students to have read the pre-course material and interact with that material during the seminar discussion.