

NT 511 New Testament I
Summer Quarter, 2006
Ashland Theological Seminary

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Course Description.

A systematic introduction to the Gospels in the context of present day biblical research. The study will concentrate on such areas as historico-religious backgrounds and methods of New Testament criticism, and the individuality and interrelationships of the Gospels.

Course Rational.

The main focus of the entire New Testament is the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whom Christians acknowledge as Lord and Messiah (or Christ). While Jesus did not leave written documentation of his own teaching, the traditions about Jesus' life and work are preserved in the Gospels, both canonical and non-canonical. In the judgment of this professor, the best resources for the study of the life and work of Jesus remain the four canonical gospels. While other resources, such as the Gospel of Thomas (also known as the "Sayings of the Lord") may present some additional information, especially with regard to the parables, these materials are too late and, in the case of Gnostic and infancy gospels, too tendentious to provide the understanding of Jesus' life and work that Christians need. Furthermore, the four gospels have, since the time of Irenaeus, the late second century church father, held pride of place in the Christian Church. Thus, for the teaching of our faith, the four canonical gospels are, in this professor's opinion, the best place to begin with the study of Jesus.

Yet, it is not enough to simply affirm the importance of the Gospels for Christian faith and life. As teachers and leaders of the church, we need to be able to read the gospel material critically. By critical reading, we do not mean a skeptical denial of the contents of the material. Rather, we mean a reading informed by a historical, literary, and social understanding of the Gospel writings. These issues include a discussion and knowledge of some of the following issues: (1) What is the literary genre of a gospel? (2) Which Gospel was written first? (3) What sources are used in the Gospels? (4) What is each Gospel writer's theological focus or agenda, and how has that framed the portrayal of Jesus? (5) What was the world of first century Palestine like? (6) Who were some of the contemporaries of Jesus? (7) How would Jesus' first hearers perceived his teachings? (8) What are the problems in the transmission of texts in the manuscript period? (9) What literary conventions or rhetorical devices are employed by the gospel writers?

Course Goals.

By the end of this course, students will: (1) know the basic outlines and contents of each of the Gospels; (2) know the theories of the relationships between the synoptic gospels,

particularly the so-called “two source” hypothesis; (3) be able to reflect critically upon the gospel material; (4) have a knowledge of the past and current state of Life of Jesus research, and, thus, be able to answer some of the most relevant questions of the laity, especially with regard to popular manifestations of scholarship, such as the “Jesus Seminar”; (5) be able to write a 7-10 page critical exegetical paper or project.

This course is not intended to answer all the questions about the four canonical gospels, nor will we be able to discuss in detail all the issues in life of Jesus research. It is the goal of this class to provide students with the tools for continuing their study of scripture and for developing the skills needed for critical reflection upon their faith.

Texts:

deSilva, David A. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Pilch, John J. *Cultural Tools for Interpreting the Good News*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002. This book does not deal with the Gospel texts themselves, but provides readers with valuable insight into the world of ancient Palestine, a world very unlike our own.

Powell, Mark Allan, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man From Galilee*. Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1998.

Enabling Activities.

Attendance and participation: 10% of grade. This includes attendance during discussion periods, including the discussion of the review of Powell’s, *Jesus as a Figure in History*.

Review of Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History*: 20% of grade. This review will be 3-5 pages in length and is a critical (not necessarily negative) analysis of Powell’s arguments. It should include: Overview of the contents; analysis of the argument (does Powell make his points successfully), what is useful or profitable in the book, what you disagree with. If you have questions, check reviews in the standard journals, such as *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, or *Review of Biblical Literature* (available online from the Society of Biblical Literature site at www.sbl-site.org).

Due last class day.

Final: 30% of grade. The exam will be in essay form. Students will answer four questions. Students are required to answer two questions. The first required question will be a discussion and analysis of the issues related to synoptic relationships (deSilva, pp. 159-174). The second required question will be drawn from Pilch. Students will then be asked to answer two of four remaining questions. Questions will be handed out the second Monday of class. The final is due **no later than the week following the last day of class.**

Paper: 40% of grade. This course will require a paper of 7-10 pages in length. It will focus on a short (10-15 verses) passage of interest from one of the Gospels. Minimal requirements are that students use three critical commentaries (Matthew Henry and devotional commentaries are not allowed), three Bible dictionary articles and three articles from peer reviewed scholarly journals (see in the preliminary bibliography).

The papers are to be one of the following forms:

1. Traditional research paper, focusing on a single issue, and attempting to prove a specific point. Students with knowledge of Greek should try and incorporate language skills into the paper.
2. Counseling students may plan a counseling session, using a short passage from the Gospels as point of departure, and apply it to the counseling situation.
3. A Christian education session, teaching one of the Gospel stories to either adults or children.
4. A sermon, focusing on a short Gospel passage.

All students must follow established exegetical practices, and be true to the text. All papers must have notes and bibliographies. Notes may be either parenthetical or Turabian footnote and bibliographical form. If the student chooses to use parenthetical references, for the purposes of this class the reference list should include all materials consulted, and not just those cited in the paper or project. **Encyclopedia or dictionary articles should be cited by author of article, title of article, as well as by encyclopedia or dictionary and editor.**

Due three weeks following last class session.

Suggested topics include:

A parable of Jesus.

A miracle narrative.

A Johannine discourse.

A short section of the Sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain.

A short section of one of the passion narratives.

The resurrection account of either Matthew, Luke or John.

The Johannine appendix (Jn 21).

Policy on Late Work.

Except in extraordinary circumstances (family emergency, illness, etc.) **late work will not be accepted.**

Statement on AU Provisions for Students with Disabilities

For students who have specific physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let the professor know early in the quarter (preferably the first week) so that your learning needs can be appropriately met. In order to receive accommodations, documentation concerning your disability must be on file with Classroom Support Services, 105 Amstutz Hall, Ashland University, 419-289-5953. Please contact them with any questions you may have.

Ashland Theological Seminary Academic Integrity Statement

Ashland Theological Seminary seeks to model servant leadership derived from biblical standards of honesty and integrity. We desire to encourage, develop, and sustain men and women of character who will exemplify these biblical qualities in their ministry to the church and the world. As members of the seminary community, students are expected to hold themselves to the highest standards of academic, personal, and social integrity. All students, therefore are expected to abide by the academic integrity standards outlined in the Student Handbook.

Ashland Theological Seminary Grading scale.

A	97-100%	C+	80-82%	D-	65-67%
A-	92-96%	C	77-79%	F	0-64%
B+	89-91%	C-	74-76%		
B	86-88%	D+	71-73%		
B-	83-85%	D	68-70%		

Preliminary Schedule

Before first class session, students are expected to read :

deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 23-193.

While remaining open to the possibility that events, unforeseen and otherwise, may require modification of the below schedule, our aim is to cover the following topics.

August 7, 2006: Introductory issues. (Pilch, pp. 1-20).

Introduction to textual critical issues.

What is a gospel? Is it a biography?

Introduction to the history of the study of the Gospels

Synoptic problem.

Markan priority.

Two source hypothesis.

August 8, 2006: Introduction to the Gospel of Mark. (deSilva, pp. 194-233, Pilch, pp. 21-37).

Authorship.

Structure

Contents

Distinctive characteristics

August 9, 2006: Gospel of Mark, cont'd (Pilch, pp. 38-55).

Message of Mark.

August 10, 2006: Gospel of Matthew, Introduction. (deSilva, pp. 234-269; Pilch, pp. 56-73)

Authorship

Use of Mark and Q

Structure

Contents

Distinctive characteristics.

August 11, 2006: Gospel of Matthew, cont'd. (deSilva, pp. 270-297).

Message of Matthew

August 14, 2006: Gospel of Luke, Introduction. (deSilva, pp. 298-324)

Authorship

Use of Mark and Q

Structure.

As volume 1 of 2 volume composition (Luke/Acts).

Contents.

Distinctive characteristics.

August 15, 2006: Gospel of Luke, cont'd. (deSilva, pp.324-347.)

Message of Luke

August 16, 2006: Introduction to John. (deSilva, pp. 391-417).

Authorship

Johannine community

Structure

Distinctive characteristics

August 17, 2006: Message of John (deSilva, pp. 417-448).

August 18, 2006: Summary of class.

Why is the study important?

How do we apply what we have learned?

Review of Powell due.

Discussion of Powell .