

SYLLABUS for BibSt-Fdn 1 (additions or changes possible)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT
PART ONE—THE GOSPEL AND THE GOSPELS:
EARLY CHRISTIANS TELL THEIR STORIES**

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Course Description

This course is designed to introduce and deepen your understanding of the part of the Bible that we commonly call the New Testament (NT), the collection of writings produced by early Christians that are derived from, and dependent upon, the Jewish scriptures commonly called the Old Testament. Although the biblical gospels were not the earliest NT writings (Paul's letters were the earliest), they stand at the beginning of the NT because they tell the stories about Jesus upon which the Christian faith is grounded. We will focus on learning how to read and interpret these gospels against the background of the cultural, intellectual, religious and political world of the first century in which the authors of the gospels lived. We will examine how the gospels reveal both the relationship to, and separation from, first-century Jewish religion and subsequent impact on Jewish-Christian relationships. Certain interpretive tools and methods of reading texts will be emphasized, particularly as they will be important for leading Bible studies or preaching in local church settings. We will also look briefly at the historical processes by which these particular writings ended up in our present Bible, and why other early Christian gospels and epistles did not. Class discussions and student presentations will combine both academic knowledge and practical use of the NT in ministry settings.

All class meetings will be by Zoom. You will be expected to have either a computer, tablet, or smartphone capable of connecting to the Internet and thus to Zoom. The Zoom app is downloadable for free from Zoom.com. I will be issuing the appropriate "invitations" using the Maine Conference's Zoom account. If you need assistance with the technical aspects of using Zoom, I can help you prior to the beginning of classes.

Class Meeting Dates: September 12, October 17, November 21, December 19

Required Books

These books will be used for both New Testament courses—Gospels and Epistles. Both are available from Amazon and/or Cokesbury.

1. A Study Bible, preferably hardcover. Currently, there are two excellent, ecumenically-oriented study Bibles. The standard one from which certain readings will be assigned is the (NRSV) *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. ed. Coogan, Michael D. (ed.), Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and PHEME PERKINS (assoc. eds.). *New Oxford Annotated Bible: NRSV with the Apocrypha*. 4th edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN-10: 0195289552. ISBN-13: 978-0195289558. Older editions of this are also acceptable if you already have one.

If finances permit, I urge you to consider owning a second study Bible, the CEB Study Bible *though it will not be required*. The Common English Bible (CEB) as well as the NRSV are both the work of a broad-based ecumenical team of scholars and translators. Since the CEB is the newest ecumenical translation, it has a different generation of scholarly contributors, and these two will serve in parish settings adequately for most preaching, teaching, and liturgical/worship preparation. The CEB Study Bible has even more extensive sidebar articles and textual apparatus than the NRSV. It's an impressive (though literally weighty) study Bible.

(CEB) *The CEB Study Bible with Apocrypha*, ed. CEB and Joel B. Green, Nashville, 2013.
ISBN: 978-1-60926-028-6

1. Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2nd ed. (2018) or 1st ed. (2009) if already owned.
2. Warren Carter & Amy-Jill Levine, *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-4267-4190-6
3. Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8006-0427-1.

Highly Recommended Books

Since the New Testament did not arise in a cultural and historical vacuum, it is important to understand the political, religious, cultural, and historical background out of which these writings emerged. The two books below will offer such context. While they will not be required reading, they are recommended for acquiring a deeper understanding of the origins of both the Christian faith and the writings produced by the first-century followers of Jesus. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (listed below) demonstrates how many Jewish scholars are also now engaged in and contributing to the study of the Christian scriptures.

1. John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Story of the World's Most Influential Book*, Viking Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-525-42877-0
2. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN: 507-0-19-512639-4
3. Charles Freeman, *A New History of Early Christianity*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2009.
4. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-19-046185-0.
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 is a useful in addition to a full study Bible that includes both testaments. Highly recommended.

5. Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*, Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1996.
6. Blair, Christine Eaton, *The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults*, (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001). ISBN 0-664-50148-6
7. Larry R. Kalajainen. *The Bible Says: How Good is the Good Book?* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013 ISBN: 978-1-62032-406-6. In light of the divisions within the Church over a variety of “hot button” issues, where each side claims to have the Bible on their side, the book examines what it means to make the claim, “The Bible Says. . .” This book grew out of an adult Sunday School class I taught at The American Church in Paris, France and First Parish Church, Brunswick, ME.

Supplementary Texts—Reference Books and Individual Commentaries: (to begin building a personal library; none will be necessary for this class.)

- A good one-volume Bible dictionary (e.g. Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, 2003, or HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, revised and updated, 2011)
- A good one-volume Bible commentary, particularly considering one which highlights different voices in biblical studies.
- Platte, Daniel. *The Global Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Blount, Brian K. And Cain Hope Felder. *True To Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
- Newsom, Carol, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley. *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 3rd Ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.
- Oxford Bible Commentary. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible. Eerdmans, 2003.
- HarperCollins Bible Commentary, rev. ed., 2000.

Individual gospel commentaries:

- Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995
- Leander Keck, *New Interpreters Bible Commentary: Vol 8: NT Articles, Matthew, Mark*, Abingdon Press, 1995; *Vol 9, Luke-John*, 1996.
- John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company. 1991.
- Paul Minear. *Matthew: The Teacher’s Gospel*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003.

- Robert C. Tannehill. *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Vols. 1 (1986) and 2 (1994).
- Ched Myers. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991.
- D. Moody Smith. *John*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1999.

Course Requirements

General Requirements:

The course will be run in seminar fashion, rather than a lecture-only format. In each class, I will introduce the material in a lecture/discussion format, where questions and exchanges are welcome. After enough introductory information has been acquired, the main emphasis, will be on engagement with the assigned readings and the texts of the gospels and conversation about those texts. The first class will be focused primarily on two main topics— a) setting the NT in its “world,” b) looking at the fact that we have four gospels each of us telling us their story about Jesus, which are in some ways very similar, and in others very different. I will also hand out a step-by-step approach to studying the Bible that you may find helpful both in your own study and in leading studies in local churches.

1. You are expected to read the assigned readings from the required books *in advance* of the class in which they will be discussed. E.g., reading the assigned pages from Powell’s *Introducing the NT* and Carter-Levine’s *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings*, along with your written responses should be prepared prior to the first class, as mentioned above. Since there will be extensive readings, you should allow at least 3-4 weeks prior to the class to begin your work.
2. You will be responsible for preparing a 3-5 pp. reflection on a particular aspect of the gospels or a particular gospel text, which I will assign for each class. You will send that to me by email no later than two days prior to the next class. This written assignment should consist of
 - a. Any historical/literary context that you feel is important for understanding the text.
 - b. Your personal assessment of what the text may have meant to its original author/audience.
 - c. Your sense of how that meaning might translate into your/our/the church’s/the world’s current setting.
 - d. Any questions it raises for you personally or theologically
3. Two 15-20 minute sermons on an assigned text, the first due on the date of Class 3 and the second on the date of Class 4. The sermon will be written out completely, as you would intend to preach it. The language may be less formal than a term paper—but it should be the language you would use for preaching in worship. (The usual double-spaced, 12-point serif font, e.g., Times Roman).

Before the First Class

Assigned Readings:

1. Read the Introductory pages at the *beginning of the New Testament* section in the NRSV New Oxford Study Bible (Roman numeral pages)
2. Read Powell, pp. 1-117 (this book has a lot of pictures and art, and the pages have ample whitespace, so the reading is not as long as it appears.)
3. The Introduction to the Carter-Levine book (pp.1-16). For all readings, make a note of any insights that you find illuminating, or questions you find troubling, confusing, or intriguing.
4. Reflect on these readings in 4-6 pages. What new information or insights did you discover? What questions did the authors provoke in your mind? What did you find difficult to understand or accept, and why? Your reflections are **due Thursday, September 17**. (There is a possibility that we will use Google Classroom if we can get it together in time. If so, there will be a place for you to post your papers there. If not, you can send them to my email.)

Class Topics:

Class One—September 19

Introductions of students and instructor to one another

Some time for discussing proposed outline of the course

Lecture/Discussion—The New Testament in Its World and Christian Beginnings

Lecture/Discussion—The Gospel of Jesus and the Jesus of the gospels.

Lunch Break

Lecture/Discussion-- Four and More: The Gospel and the gospels; the “Synoptic Problem,” etc.

Reading Assignments for next class session—October 17

Read the entire Gospels of Mark and Matthew. Read Mark first, and at a later point, read Matthew. Read each of them in one sitting (not at the same time) so that you get the impact of the whole story each is telling. Write 2-4 pages of reflections on your reading of Mark and Matthew. What overall impression do you have? What problematic passages (for you) did you find? What did you find particularly intriguing or challenging? Notice the places where Matthew uses Mark’s gospel as his source and any interesting points about the parallels.

Read NRSV Study Bible (New Testament, p. 47 for Mark, p. 1 for Matthew.)

Carter-Levine, pp. 36-53 for Mark, pp. 17-35 for Matthew

Powell, pp. 141-159 for Mark, pp. 119-139 for Matthew. Write 2-3 pages of your reactions to what you read in these authors—new insights or information, difficulties in understanding, questions raised, etc.

due Thursday, Oct. 15.

Assignment of specific Markan and Matthean texts will be given out in class.

Class Two—October 17

Student sharing on Markan texts
Lecture/Discussion— *The Gospel of Mark*
Lunch break
Sharing of reflections on Matthean texts
Lecture/Discussion—*The Gospel of Matthew*

Reading Assignment for next class session:

Read the entire Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Read each of them in one sitting (though not necessarily at the same time—each will take 45 minutes to an hour, depending on reading speed.

The Introductions to Luke and Acts in the NRSV Study Bible.
The chapters on Luke and Acts in Carter-Levine, pp. 54-71 and pp. 91-111.
Powell pp. 161-181 and 205-229.

Assignment: Reflection on selected Lukan/Acts texts will be announced in class

Class Three—November 21

Sharing of Reflections on Lukan texts
Lecture/Discussion—*The Gospel of Luke*
Lunch Break
Sharing of reflections on Acts
Lecture/Discussion— *Luke's Volume Two: The Acts of the Apostles*

Reading Assignment for next class session:

Read Anderson (I am currently working through this volume myself, and will announce the reading assignments to those registered before September 1.)

Assignment: Reflection Johannine texts: to be announced in class.

Class Four—December 19

Sharing of Reflections on Johannine texts
Lecture/Discussion—*The Gospel of John*
Lunch break
Discussion on John continued as necessary
Wrap-up time, including time for course evaluation