

NT2022 — New Testament I: Gospels and Acts
Birmingham Theological Seminary
2200 Briarwood Way, Birmingham, AL 35243

SYLLABUS

Semester:	Fall 2020	Course:	NT2022 New Testament I
Day & Time:	Thursdays, 9–11am	Room:	Video Conference
Professor:	Dr. Johnathan Harris	Credits:	2
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this course is to introduce the students to the four canonical Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — and the Acts of the Apostles. Students will become familiar with the historical, literary, and theological background to the New Testament and first century Christianity; the key critical issues pertaining to the Gospels and narrative study in general, and each Gospel and Acts in particular; and the relation between the Gospels. Focus will be directed especially to the historical, exegetical, and theological content of the Gospels and Acts with a view toward using the Scriptures well in life and vocation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of the course, students will:

- Have grown in their familiarity with the content of the Gospels and Acts.
- Be able to discuss critical issues pertaining to the Gospels and Acts.
- Be able to discern the unique witness of each Gospel (and Acts) and its contribution to one's articulation of the single gospel.
- Be able to summarize and articulate the theological witness of the Gospels and Acts and their importance for the church today.

COURSE TEXT(S)

Required Text:

Köstenberger, Andreas J., L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles. *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016. Denoted throughout the syllabus as *CCC*.

Recommended Reading:

Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus Remembered*. Vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Dunn, James D. G. *Beginning from Jerusalem*. Vol. 2 of *Christianity in the Making*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING

1. **READING/PARTICIPATION (25% of total grade; roughly 2% for each class):** In preparation for each class, each student will complete the assigned reading *before the beginning of class*. Please email the professor at the beginning of each class with the following statement (filling in your name and approximate percentage read):

I, [fill in your name], have completed ___% of the assigned reading in preparation for class today.

A few tips for reading: You can see from the course schedule that we will spend two weeks in each Gospel and in Acts. You will note that the reading load is strikingly disproportionate between these two weeks. This is intentional. My goal is for us to immerse ourselves in the text during the first week, absorbing as much as possible of the text, its context, and its content. The second week will then be spent, both individually (note this is when your papers are due) and together, reflecting on the text, its theological truth, and the way the text ought to shape our lives and the life of the church.

With that said, understand the purpose of our reading. This is not the time for deep exegesis of every other word in a text. Whereas it will be necessary in some cases to discuss the details of key texts, our primary goal is much broader. We want to track with the narrative as a whole, focusing on larger narrative movements and theological themes. Therefore, I would encourage you to:

- Set aside an evening every other week to read through the assigned scriptural text in one or two sittings. Besides being a healthy practice in general, this will best facilitate our goals and respect your time.
- Read at a brisk pace while still being able to comprehend. This is not to degrade the text. Again, it is a certain kind of reading with certain goals. And many of you are probably familiar with much of the text already.
- Read the scriptural text in conjunction with the literature section in CCC. This could look several different ways. You may choose to read CCC first in order to read the scriptural text with (one possible!) literary frame in mind. You may,

alternatively, read the scriptural text first, creating your own initial sense of the literary flow, then compare to that offered in *CCC*. Or third, you could read the two side-by-side, following the section-by-section discussion in *CCC* as you read through the scriptural text—though this may inhibit slightly your sense of the narrative flow of the scriptural text.

- Keep the history section in *CCC* in perspective. On the one hand, do not ignore these sections; on the other hand, do not get bogged down too much in them. Depending on your personality type and interests, some of you may find this section wholly useless while others may find in it endless grounds for discussion and debate. Though the various topics (e.g., author, date, destination) can have varying degrees of relevance for the interpretation of the scriptural text, they are all *background* and *context-setting* discussions. However important it may or may not be to determine, for example, precisely who wrote the Gospel of John, our primary goal will be to understand the message and theological witness and truth-value of the Gospels and Acts.

2. **REFLECTION/ENGAGEMENT PAPERS (75% of total grade; 15% each):** Each student (excepting certificate students, who are not required to do the papers) will write a total of five short papers over the course of the semester—one for each of the Gospels and Acts. These should be *no more than 2 double-spaced pages long* (Times New Roman, 12 point font) and should be emailed to the professor as a word document by the beginning of class for which it is due. Give your paper an appropriate title that captures the thrust of your message. Because of the short length of the paper, you shouldn't need any other headings. These papers are not very long—indeed, they will feel even shorter once you read the next paragraph! So your thoughts must be clear, your articulation concise, and your word choice intentional. It is much easier to write a mediocre long paper than a quality short paper. But writing is thinking, and this kind of writing is intended to build your own skills with logic, critical reasoning, and argument.

Each paper should articulate a clear thesis statement that makes a theological claim based on the scriptural text under consideration. It may further explore a theme from *CCC* or be something from your own reflection. There is a bit of freedom in the scope of the text chosen. You may focus on a single passage (i.e., generally speaking between a paragraph and a chapter in length) from the assigned biblical reading or choose a theme from either a larger section within the book (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, the passion narrative in Mark, the Book of Signs in John) or from the book as a whole. Whatever the scope of your chosen theme, you should treat the relevant texts within their literary context in light of the whole book. Show me in the text why I should believe what your thesis claims is true. Give Scripture references, though because of the length of the paper reserve fully cited passages for only the most important texts. Using supporting paragraphs, offer a reasoned argument with evidence based on the text that goes beyond simply, “The Bible says so.” Do any research (word studies, commentaries, theologies, etc.) necessary for your claim. Then provide an appropriate concluding paragraph that both summarizes your thesis and argument and offers your audience reason for Christ-exalting affection, action, and hope.

Your paper should engage Scripture on three levels: theology (i.e., what does this text teach us about God, the person/work of Christ, the nature of the world and humans, etc.); ethics (i.e., how ought one live because of the truth to which this text witnesses); and the Christian hope (i.e., in what way does this text drive one to hope and encourage one on to perseverance). The paper should not be structured woodenly around those topics; they are not intended as paper headings. Rather, you should think of this paper more as a brief homily without many of the (otherwise necessary!) homiletical “extras” (e.g., lengthy introductions, illustrations, stories, jokes, etc.). Rooted in, dialoging with, and growing out of the chosen text, your paper should teach the head (theology), direct the hands (ethics), and spur on the heart (hope) of your readers/hearers. Hence, I have called these “reflection/engagement papers.” They should articulate theology not simply for the sake of theology, but for the sake of the church, her life, and her hope.

An example may be helpful. From reading Luke 10:17–22 with Luke 11:14–28, I could argue the thesis: Jesus’s ministry to those who suffer under the brokenness of the present world is itself the advancement of his kingdom into the world and is continued by his followers in his name. My paper would need to establish several things. First (paragraph 1), that I am justified in expanding the phenomenon of demon possession in the text to “those who suffer under the brokenness of the present world.” Second (paragraph 2), that Jesus’s ministering to this demographic of people constitutes the advancement of the kingdom. Third (paragraph 3), that the ministries of Jesus’s followers are a continuation of his own kingdom-advancing ministry. Then in a final paragraph or two, I can ground the contemporary church’s ministry to the needy in Christ’s kingdom-advancing ministry and say a brief word about how our continued hope for the fullness of this kingdom relates to and spurs us on in the midst of a broken, disintegrating world that seems to only be getting worse.

*****CERTIFICATE STUDENTS** will only complete the reading of *CCC* and Scripture.

BTS FORMAT AND STYLE STANDARDS

BTS uses the Turabian style of formatting as a standard for papers. However, students should regard individual professor preferences if they communicate any variance in outlining their requirements for papers. Professors retain discretion in determining how “formal” a paper must be. In this technological age, information is readily available; make sure that you understand about giving reference sources the proper recognition. Please refer to the BTS Student Handbook section on plagiarism for guidance.

COURSE CALENDAR

Class number and date	Class topic	In preparation for class
Class #1 (9/10)	Class Introduction and the Political and Religious Background of the NT	Read <i>CCC</i> pp. 63–113
Class #2 (9/17)	Who Is This Man? Reading the Gospels Together as a Witness to the Remembered Jesus	Read <i>CCC</i> pp. 116–221
Class #3 (9/24)	The Gospel of Mark: History and Literature	Read the Gospel of Mark and <i>CCC</i> pp. 272–95
Class #4 (10/1)	The Gospel of Mark: Theology and Life	Read <i>CCC</i> pp. 296–304 and prepare paper on Mark
Class #5 (10/8)	The Gospel of Matthew: History and Literature	Read the Gospel of Matthew and <i>CCC</i> pp. 222–59
*** (10/15)***	***FALL BREAK***	***NO CLASS***
Class #6 (10/22)	The Gospel of Matthew: Theology and Life	Read <i>CCC</i> pp. 259–71 and prepare paper on Matthew
Class #7 (10/29)	The Gospel of Luke: History and Literature	Read the Gospel of Luke and <i>CCC</i> pp. 306–33
Class #8 (11/5)	The Gospel of Luke: Theology and Life	Read <i>CCC</i> pp. 334–43 and prepare paper on Luke
Class #9 (11/12)	The Acts of the Apostles: History and Literature	Read Acts and <i>CCC</i> pp. 390–430
Class #10 (11/19)	The Acts of the Apostles: Theology and Life	Read <i>CCC</i> pp. 430–36 and prepare paper on Acts

*** (11/26)***	**THANKSGIVING BREAK**	***NO CLASS***
Class #11 (12/3)	The Gospel of John: History and Literature	Read the Gospel of John and CCC pp. 344–73
Class #12 (12/10)	The Gospel of John: Theology and Life	Read CCC pp. 373–87 and prepare paper on John

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