

**INTRODUCTION TO THE NARRATIVE WRITINGS  
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (BS 522)**

Fall 2002

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Lexington Theological Seminary, Mandrell Hall, Rm. 208  
Class Meetings: Tuesday, 6:00-8:45  
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This course seeks to help you understand and interpret the New Testament Gospels (and book of Acts) so that you may use these sacred texts in knowledgeable, meaningful, faithful, and creative ways in your congregations and communities. Scripture stands at the heart of the Christian tradition, and you need to feel at home in its language, historical contexts, plot lines and characters, poetry and literary beauty, ethics, and theology. In particular, with their various renditions of the life of Jesus, the Gospels furnish many of the stories and quotations that form the core of Christian preaching and teaching.

Since parishioners and local residents will look to you for expertise on biblical interpretation, you must become a competent and effective interpreter of the Bible, understanding it in its original setting and knowing how to convey its compelling message with integrity and discernment.

Throughout the course, we will explore the significance of the figure of Jesus by examining his life as expressed in the Gospel genre. We will attempt to examine Jesus first as a subject of interpretation, and then as an historical figure. We will follow the life of Jesus, beginning with stories about his relationship to John the Baptist, continuing with his activity in Galilee and then in Judea and Jerusalem, and finishing with his arrest, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. In addition, we will examine sayings, parables, and miracles attributed to him, as well as stories of his birth and childhood.

**\*\*CLOSE READING is the key phrase that describes our classroom approach.** By “close reading,” I mean the interpretation of texts with care, attention to detail, and appreciation for nuance. Learning to read in this way is the most important **GOAL** of this course. If students can read NT texts with an awareness of their complexity and richness (historical, literary, linguistic, spiritual, etc.), we will have achieved our major goal.

In doing this, we will explore **source questions**, including the relationship between the various Gospels and the putative sayings source, “Q.” Historical and cultural contexts hold particular importance for the interpretation of the Gospels. Consequently, we will place the stories of Jesus in the context of early Judaism, the Near East, and the Graeco-Roman world (what some call **historical criticism**). We will also have the opportunity to test a variety of other beneficial tools: **redaction criticism**--discerning the points of view of different Gospel writers; **form criticism**--determining the original literary shape of discrete units, such as parables and pronouncements; **textual criticism**--comparing and studying different readings found in manuscripts); various kinds of modern **literary criticism**--studying NT texts as literature and story so that we understand their art, structure, rhetoric, and poetry (including narrative/reader response criticism and rhetori-

cal criticism); **advocacy criticism**--using the insights gleaned from the oppressed and neglected (Feminist, Liberation, African American, Latina/o and Third World, etc.). We will also explore ancient literary approaches such as **midrash** (an interpretive tool used by Jesus and other Jews to discover non-literal meanings in the Hebrew Bible in order to draw out the full significance of a passage); **rhetoric** (a tool used as a form of persuasion, and later for missionizing); **biography** (a genre used to tell the life stories of significant individuals); **tragedy** (a genre used to describe the pain of human existence in order to evoke a cathartic experience); **novels** (a genre used to enlighten and entertain an audience through storytelling); **history** (a genre used to describe events of the past so as to elucidate the present). etc.

NT Narrative will combine the formats of a seminar and a lecture course. Ideally, we will have relatively brief lectures, followed by extensive class discussion. **A good portion of our time will consist of examining NT texts in class through CLOSE READING.** I expect students to read the background materials (such as the Brown introduction) prior to class so that we do not have to repeat covered material in class and can focus our classes instead on carefully examining the NT texts themselves. Attendance and informed student participation are crucial to the success of the course.

### Books

- A. The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1990. **OR**, if you have studied Greek, the UBS (4th ed.) or the Nestle-Aland (27th ed.).
- B. **EITHER** Synopsis of the Four Gospels, English ed. **OR** Synopsis of the Four Gospels, Greek and English.
- C. A translation of the entire Bible--including the Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version)
- D. Documents for the Study of the Gospels, ed. D.R. Cartlidge and D.L. Dungan, revised and enlarged ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.
- E. The New Testament Background: Selected Documents. Ed. C.K. Barrett. Revised and expanded ed. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.
- F. **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED: BIBLE DICTIONARY. EITHER** The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 6 vols. D.N. Friedman ed. New York: Doubleday, 1992. **OR** Mercer Dictionary of the Bible, ed. W.E. Mills. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990
- G. One-volume Bible commentary. **EITHER** Mercer Commentary on the Bible, ed. W.E. Mills, *et al.* Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995. **OR** Harper's Bible Commentary, ed. J.L. Mays. If you are a Roman Catholic, you may want to choose The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, ed. R.E. Brown, *et al.* As an **alternative** to a one-volume commentary, you may buy the volumes on the Gospels and Acts in the New Interpreter's Bible.
- H. Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the New Testament. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1997.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### IF YOU HAVE NOT HAD A NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS COURSE:

1) A primary goal of this class is that you learn to exegete a passage in the narrative portion of the New Testament.

1a) You may do this paper **EITHER** individually or in TEAMS. If you choose to form a team, it should contain no more than three members.

Some preliminary steps in the process of exegesis may be turned in by the dates indicated. You are strongly encouraged to give me drafts of these sections, but I leave it up to your discretion to decide whether you do this or not. Those who do give me drafts that show real effort will receive an extra weighting in the final grade (amount left to my discretion). However, it is the final paper that matters most.

End of September -- Identification of the boundaries of the passage, outline of the passage, and comparison of translations. Identification of the most useful exegetical tools.

End of October-- Comparison of your passage with its synoptic parallels. If there are none, speculate as to why this might be so, presupposing Markan priority. Give some preliminary analysis, using the exegetical tools you have identified as important. Discuss how your passage fits into the larger section of which it is part.

End of November -- Preliminary discussion of your word studies. Detailed exegetical analysis of at least one topic using two exegetical tools. Discussion of possible uses for sermons.

**December 13**--Final paper due. You will include several exegetical tools (more details to follow). This should be an essay that hangs together in a coherent, logical, and literate way. In other words, I expect that you will write with organization, skill, and some style. If you have not yet learned to write effectively or if you need any kind of help with your writing, I strongly encourage you to consult the writing tutor, Ann Gregory.

The final paper accounts for **40%** of your final grade.

### 1B) IF YOU HAVE ALREADY TAKEN A NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS COURSE:

You will write two exegesis papers of approximately ten to twelve pages each. Each paper will deal with a passage from a different Gospel of the New Testament. For students training for congregational ministry, this is the sort of research that should go into your sermon preparation. For those planning on other kinds of ministry and for other careers, this exercise should help you to use the New Testament in ways that are both beneficial and well-informed.

You may do this paper, **EITHER** individually or in TEAMS. If you choose to form a team, it should contain no more than three members, all of whom have done an exegesis paper in another previous course.

You will employ all the tools used in your former, larger exegesis paper. However, you will report on your findings more selectively. That is, you will discuss something only when it has a significant bearing on the meaning of your passage and shows how the point you are making contributes to your interpretation. You will need to consult both commentaries and periodicals to receive grades in the higher ranges. These papers are due on **October 29** and **December 13**. Together they will account for **40%** of your final grade.

2) Map and Alphabet tests (closed-book). There are two map tests and a test on the Greek alphabet. All three of these must be completed no later than October 30. These will be available in the Faculty Secretaries Office during the semester, and you may take them as soon as you are ready. More details about these to come. Each test accounts for **5%** of your final grade for a total of **15%** of your final grade.

3. Mid-term exam, worth **15%** of your final grade.

4. Every week I expect you to write a brief response paper of approximately three pages two to four pages that responds to a question that the instructor gives beforehand. These should be organized, and you should make an effort to write well. They are due at the specified time. These constitute **15%** of your final grade.

5. At the conclusion of the term, you will each have the opportunity to make a dramatic recitation of a section of the gospel from memory. This will constitute **5%** of your grade.

6. Class participation and effort constitute **10%** of the final grade.