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Synoptic Gospels
NT 500
Fall Term 2026
Office Hours: Wednesday 12-1 PM

PURPOSE:

To introduce students to a critical study of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and related literature (for example, the Gospel of Thomas) and the issues entailed in interpreting them in their ancient context and appropriating their meaning for multiple contemporary contexts. Students will begin by addressing the critical and theological issues that arise from reading the Synoptic Gospels as historically-rooted texts. They will gain an acquaintance with various literary genres that constitute the Synoptic tradition, be introduced to the characteristic theology of each Gospel and begin to demonstrate an ability to engage the Gospels critically. They will learn to grow in awareness of their own pre-understanding and how contemporary context shapes interpretation of biblical texts as well as the ways in which biblical texts invite us to interpret and live in our contexts. Additionally, class time will be given to a brief introduction and resources to learn the Greek alphabet with a view to working with lexicographical and exegetical tools. By the end of term students will be able to identify and distinguish the characteristic features of each Gospel, articulate a theology of critically informed biblical study, and demonstrate skill commensurate with an introductory graduate level of scholarly engagement in the uses of tools of exegesis and interpretation. As this is not a course in the quest for the historical Jesus, the main focus of the course is on the appropriation of memories associated with Jesus as well as traditions arising from him to recognize the various uses of history, memory, tradition, and theology in the complex social matrices in which earliest Christianity began to emerge. The course invites us to consider the ways in which the Gospel portraits of Jesus become avenues for the proclamation, life and witness of the church, and for those outside the Christian tradition, the ways that these Gospels can function as resources for other religious traditions.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

1. An ability to reflect theologically on the Synoptic Gospels and their contemporary relevance.
2. Growing awareness of how one's cultural and social location results in a particular pre-understanding of the Bible and a developing ability to be self-critical in the recognition of one's pre-understanding.

3. A developing awareness of the ways in which the Synoptic Gospels invite us to interpret the contexts in which we find ourselves.
4. An ability to recognize and define and the various genres that constitute the Synoptic Gospels and their traditions as exemplary of early Christian literary culture, practice, and social life.
5. An awareness of the differing theological, historical, and sociological voices of the Synoptic Gospels and their constituent traditions and the ability to identify and discuss the chief themes that constitute each Gospel.
6. Demonstration of exegetical skill in a critical examination of one Gospel genre and the ability to use contemporary critical tools of exegesis and biblical interpretation in a critical examination of a Synoptic Gospel passage.
7. A growing awareness of the historical and social factors that resulted in the production of the Synoptic Gospels and their place in the development of earliest Christianity.
8. An ability to transliterate a text from ancient Greek to the Latin alphabet (English).
9. A capacity to use the critical tools discussed in the course in the critical examination of Synoptic texts.
10. Demonstrated ability to use Aland's Synopsis in comparing parallel passages.
11. Demonstration of an elementary ability to define and use Source, Form, Redaction, Historical, and Literary Criticism.
12. An elementary acquaintance with the tools of historical Jesus scholarship, their working assumptions, and the strengths and weaknesses of their application.
13. An ability to use library resources (paper and e-resources) in the formulation of bibliography for the task of informed exegesis and interpretation.
14. A knowledge of the map of Roman Palestine and environs, a knowledge of basic terms relevant to the study of the Synoptic Gospels and related literature; an ability to create a timeline of figures, events, movements, and writings associated with the Synoptic Gospels

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FORMAT:

One 3-hour class weekly with discussion.

CONTENT:

Introduction to Hermeneutics and New Testament Interpretation

Introduction to the Synoptic Problem (Source Criticism)

Introduction to identification of and critical engagement with genres constituting the Synoptic tradition and their theologies (Form Criticism)

Introduction to the Birth, Passion and Resurrection Narratives (Historical Criticism)

Introduction to the characteristic theology of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Redaction Criticism; Literary Criticism — Reader Response; Post-Structuralist, etc.)

EVALUATION:

Always bring Aland's Synopsis (see below) and assure that you either own your own copy or you have borrowed one you can annotate. It is preferable that you bring you a hard copy of a Bible that you can annotate. For acceptable Bibles, see below.

Please note that use of social media (texting, social media, email, etc.) is strictly prohibited during class time except for family reasons.

Protocols for indigenous students follow guidelines adopted for study at VST and include possibility for oral rather than written evaluation of the paper and final exam assignment.

1. 80% class attendance; class participation. This means that absence for more than two sessions, in whole or in part, will constitute a Not Approved for the course. In the case of absences, students will submit a full 2-page single spaced précis of the prior week's lecture, submitted at the start of the following class. More than two late submissions will constitute a Not Approved for the course. Non-indigenous synchronous students are required to be visible on screen.
2. Students who are normally physically present in class and have not paid the extra fee to access the class remotely are allowed to be present via Canvas two times in the term.
3. Asynchronous learners will submit a 2-page single spaced précis of the prior week's lecture, submitted by the start of the following class. More than two late submissions will constitute a Not Approved for the course.
4. Viewing of the recordings introducing the syllabus, the paper assignment, and the journal reflection assignment, including the 10 Email Commandments by the start of the second lecture of the course.
5. Weekly, one-page journal reflection exercises focusing on the use of the synopsis. These are due at the end of each class. They will not be graded, but submission will be recorded. In order to gain credit for this course assigned exercises must be handed in on each meeting date and any missed assignments must be completed by the last day of class in order to gain credit for the class. E-mail submissions are required and paper submissions will not be accepted. Please attend to the rubrics

outlined in the guide to email submissions, which will be distributed early in the term. More than two late submissions will constitute a Not Approved for the course.

6. One 3000-3750 words (+ or – 10%/ 12-15 page word paper (Text-to-Interpretation) that uses at least 10 scholarly, i.e. academic (not popular [e.g. Borg; Spong; etc.]) and recent (published since 1975) bibliographical entries beyond the course texts as research resources on either a parable, a miracle story, a pronouncement story, or on legendary material (birth, passion, resurrection, transfiguration narrative), as that pericope relates with primary reference to one Gospel narrative. This is to be a graduate level research paper; students are strongly encouraged to use resources available at Regent College and Koerner Library, UBC. All electronic resources must be properly cited and annotated. The paper is due Friday, December 4.

Students are encouraged to begin their work on their papers early in the term and to familiarize themselves with the Academic Calendar in requesting extensions. Email submissions are required and must conform to protocol regulations defined by the instructor. Only Microsoft Word versions will be accepted. No PDF version will be accepted. The paper must follow the Chicago Manual of Style in its citations. Citations of footnotes or bibliography that do not conform to the style will result in the paper being returned for emendation. Papers that are less than or more than 10% of the required length will be returned for revision.

7. Map exercise (due Sept 25); short identification exercise (due Sept 23); timeline exercise (due Oct 9).
8. Certificate Students are required to submit the weekly précis and a 1000 word reflection paper based on a theme taken up in the course, in consultation with the instructor due Friday, Dec 4.
9. A posting to the course-dedicated website listing 4 library resources related to further study of the focus of the lectures, 2 before Reading Week and 2 before Exam Week.
10. A final exam during exam week that will comprise Greek alphabet recognition, map identification, Synoptic passage identification, definitions, and short essay questions from a list of optional questions: Tuesday, Dec 15, 2-5 PM.
11. Remediation of Not Approved Work is Due Feb 8.

PREREQUISITES: None

Bibliography (In some instances students may secure used copies of these books by on-line distributors). Books will be available for purchase in the UBC bookstore.

It is strongly advisable especially for a/synchronous international students to order the Aland textbook at your earliest convenience since we will be using this textbook in class in every class.

******Please note that Aland's Synopsis is required for the first day of class and students must bring their synopsis as well as their Bible to every class.******

REQUIRED:

A Bible – preferably a critical study Bible in a translation of choice (for example, NRSV; NIV; New English Bible; etc.), but no paraphrases and no pocket-sized editions. While students can use electronic version, I *strongly recommend* a print version to be able to make notes and mark the text.

Aland, Kurt. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. Hendrickson, 2006. ISBN 978-1585169429; if students find an older edition they may purchase that.
(Students may elect to purchase the Greek-English version, which I recommend, but is not required. ISBN 978-3438054050). **Please assure you have secured a copy of this book before the start of the first class.**

Fredriksen, Paula and Reinhartz, Adele. *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism" Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002. ISBN 978-0664223281

Pregeant, Russell. *Engaging the New Testament: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998. ISBN 978-0800631154

Schussler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 2nd ed. New York: Crossroad, 1999. ISBN 978-0334026396.

Theissen, Gerd. *Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest for the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. ISBN 978-0800639006

RECOMENDED:

Byassee, Jason. *Surprised by Jesus Again: Reading the Bible in Communion with the Saints*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN 978-0802871688

Levine, Amy Jill and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. ISBN 978-0190461850

Soulen, Richard N. and R. Kendall Soulen. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 4th ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011. ISBN 978- 0664235345

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