

NT 131-3: Gospels & Acts

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Spring 2023

Course Information

Day: Tuesdays & Thursdays
 Time: 4:30 – 5:50 pm
 Location: Schlegel 122

Instructor: Anna Bowden

Email: abowden@lpts.edu
 Office: Schlegel 300
 Student Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-4:00 pm, or
 by appointment

Course Description

The New Testament is a central and generative document of Christian faith and of Western culture, but it poses significant interpretive challenges because the world and worldview presumed by its authors and first readers were vastly different from our own. This course will offer students a broad orientation to historical, literary, and theological issues raised by critical interpretation of the New Testament (focusing on the Gospels and Acts), and nurture skills for using it as a source for understanding early Christianity and for theological reflection.

Course Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course a student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the general content and organization of the Gospels and Acts.
2. Analyze and exposit scriptural texts from the Gospels and Acts, taking into consideration the world behind the text, the world within the text, and the world in front of the text.
3. Competently use major tools for the exegetical study of a passage from the Gospels or Acts, including print and digital resources
4. Reflect critically on competing paradigms for biblical interpretation, with particular attention to the dismantling of racist, sexist, heteronormative and other oppressive readings of NT texts. [Many other institutionalized forms of oppression exist and could be listed here. A more complete list might include ableism, ageism, ethnocentrism, religious intolerance, nativism, and transphobia, among others.]

Relationship to Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

The primary SLOs for this course are:

1. SLO 1 for the MAR degree program: Students will be able to interpret Scripture critically and imaginatively.
2. SLO 1 for the MDiv degree program: Students will gain knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the ability to use critical skills and educated imagination to interpret it in contemporary social and cultural contexts.
3. QEP/SLO: Describe strategies, grounded in their practice, for working toward racial justice appropriate to their particular vocational setting. Students can demonstrate competence with this SLO in many ways including, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Defining and using key terms in way informed by an understanding systemic racism

- b. Identifying racism in its many manifestations (structural, personal, communal, etc.)
- c. Critical reflection on the history and current contexts regarding race, racism, and antiracism
- d. Critical reflection on racist and antiracist practices and theologies
- e. Developing and implementing antiracist policies, practices, and theologies

Required Books

- Carter, Warren. *Telling Tales about Jesus: An Introduction to the New Testament Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4514-6545-7
- Smith, Mitzi J. *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation*. Eugene: Cascade, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4982-8886-6.
- One of the following NRSV study bibles: *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Coogan), *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (Attridge), or *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Levine)

Recommended Book

- Mayfield, Tyler. *A Guide to Bible Basics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018). ISBN: 9780664263454.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation

The success of this class is dependent on your attendance, preparation, and participation. Please come to every class and come prepared. Preparation includes reading the assigned readings before coming to class and bringing either a digital or print copy of the readings with you to class. Participation looks different for different people, but may include things like active listening, taking notes, asking questions, sharing answers/mistakes with classmates, and engaging in classroom exercises.

Reading Journal (20%) – CO 2 & 4

For this assignment students will write short reflections (1-2 pages, double-spaced) on the assigned readings. Think of the reflections as an academic diary. This is an opportunity for you to write whatever is on your mind. Maybe the reading reminded you of something in your life or maybe it brought up a lot of questions you want to explore. Maybe you loved the reading and want to think about other ways it might impact your studies or maybe you disliked the reading and want to complain. Whatever is on your mind is okay – just write! Because the point of the assignment is to get you thinking ahead of time about the readings we will discuss in class, journals are due at the beginning of class in hardcopy. There are 19 dates/opportunities to submit a journal. Grades will be assigned as followed:

Criteria	Grade
Submits at least 16 journals and submits all journals on time.	4
Submits at least 14 journals, mostly on time.	3
Submits at least 10 journals	2

Submits at least 5 journals	1
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Interpretation Papers (40%) – CO 2, 3, & 4

For this assignment you will choose a passage from the Gospels to interpret. Be sure to pick something that interests you as you will write two interpretation papers on the same text.

- **Primary Source Paper (20%)** - The first paper (4-6 pages) is an interpretation of the text based only on the primary source (the New Testament). This is meant to be your interpretation of the text based on the text itself. Do not assume that you know what the text says, make sure it is really there! This paper is due **Tuesday, March 21**.
- **Secondary Sources Paper (20%)** - For the second paper (5-7 pages) you will engage at least three interpretations of the text from secondary sources (biblical commentaries, monographs, journal articles, chapter from edited volume, etc.). Your paper will consist of critical analysis and personal reflection on the quality and validity of the secondary sources' interpretations of the text that you are writing about. This paper is due **Thursday, May 11**.

These assignments should be typed, double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins. Your name, the course number, the assignment title, and date should be in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Number all pages in the upper right-hand corner and include your last name with the page number. Please upload assignments as a Word or Google document to Canvas by the end of their respective due dates. These assignments are worth four points and will be graded using the grading rubrics on Canvas. Note: Students must get at least a 2 on both interpretations papers to pass the course.

Gospels Reflection Paper (20%) – CO 1

For this assignment you will write a reflection paper (4-6 pages) on the Gospels. Now that we have studied all four gospels, what do you think? Do you have a favorite? A least favorite? Do you think one of them is particularly strange? Did you enjoy reading them? Hate them? Etc. The only requirement for the paper is that you support your reflection with evidence from the Gospels themselves. For example, don't just tell me Mark was your favorite gospel. Explain why Mark is your favorite and support your explanation with examples from the text. Hint: This paper should have a lot of scriptural references!

Your paper should be 4-6 pages in length, double spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt. font, with 1-inch margins. Please submit your paper as either a Word or Google document to Canvas by the end of the day (11:59pm) on **Thursday, April 27**. The assignment is worth four points and will be graded using the grading rubric on Canvas.

Gospels in Popular Culture Presentation (20%) – CO 2, 3, & 4

For this assignment you will prepare a presentation on something from popular culture that references Jesus, the Gospels, or a passage from the Gospels. Examples include: a newspaper article, a television program, a novel, song lyrics, a movie, a social media post, etc.

Your presentation should include:

1. *Detailed description*: describe in detail the use/reference you will discuss. What type of media is it? What part of the Gospel is used or referenced and how? In other words, what does your audience need to know to understand it? Include a picture, copy, clip, or link.
2. *Critical Analysis*: Present your own unique and informed critical analysis of the use/reference using our assigned readings and at least two secondary sources (i.e., biblical dictionary, commentary, journal article). For example, you might ask: Is it a fair representation? Are there any underlying assumptions in the use/reference? Is it positive or pejorative in nature? Does it utilize a historical understanding of the NT? Does it represent a majority or minority viewpoint in terms of its interpretation? Does the interpretation exclude or cause harm?
3. *Personal Reflection*: Offer personal reflection on the use/reference. Tell me what you think of the use/reference. How does it make you feel? What do you like or dislike about it? Would you be comfortable sharing this with your friends? Does it reflect your interpretation, or does it differ?

Students will present their work to class on their assigned dates. Presentations should be 20-25 minutes in length and may include audio/visual materials. Please submit any audio/visual materials to me ahead of class and include a bibliography for your secondary sources. The assignment is worth four points and will be graded according to the grading rubric on Canvas. Please consult the signup sheet for your due date.

Grading

In an attempt to make grading more transparent and equitable, this course adopts a 4-point grading scale and utilizes grading rubrics and assignments linked to course outcomes.

Why not use a traditional, 100-pt scale?

The 100-pt scale is a vestige of the early 20th century, in which the goal of education was to sort and compare students (decidedly not the goal of this class!). That alone makes me question the traditional practice. But there's more! According to the research cited in *Grading for Equity* by Joe Feldman (Corwin 2019), the 100-pt scale is prone to error and excessive variance. Perhaps the most compelling reason to use an alternative scale is that the 100-pt scale is also oriented toward failure: the scale has over sixty points dedicated to failure (0-59), while only twenty points dedicated to proficiency (B or above)! These divisions make it almost impossible for students to overcome a low grade.

Grading Scale

- 4 – Exceeding Outcomes
- 3 – Meeting Outcomes
- 2 – Approaching Outcomes
- 1 – Not Yet Met Outcomes
- IE – Insufficient Evidence

(Note: I may occasionally determine a student is between two categories and score accordingly. In these instances, it is possible to earn a 2.5 or a 3.5).

Each student will receive an invitation to a Google Sheet for tracking their grades. I will not use

the gradebook in Canvas because it is not equipped to handle this kind of grading. If you misplace the invitation or link to your grades in Google Sheets, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I'd be happy to send another invitation.

Final Course Grade

The final grade for this course will be calculated as follows:

- Reading Journal (20%)
- Gospels Reflection Paper (20%)
- Interpretation Paper - Primary Sources (20%)
- Interpretation Paper – Secondary Sources (20%)
- Gospels in Popular Culture Presentation (20%)

Translation to Letter Grade

3.8-4.0 = A

3.4-3.7 = A-

3.1-3.3 = B+

2.8-3.0 = B

2.4-2.7 = B-

2.1-2.3 = C+

1.8-2.0 = C

1.4-1.7 = C-

1.1-1.3 = D+

0.8-1.0 = D

Course & School Policies

Contacting the Professor

If you have a question, concern, or just want to connect, let's talk. I am available by email, student hours, or by appointment (virtual or in-person). Scheduled student hours are from 2:00-4:00 pm on Tuesdays. If you'd like to meet with me and are not available during the student hours, please send me an email so we can set up another time. I check email frequently and generally respond within 24 hours.

Late Policy & Re-dos

I understand that you have lives that are at times outside of your control and I understand that you have other classes with due dates that at times might compete with our class schedule. For this reason, I will always accept late work and allow unlimited re-dos of previous assignments. If you wish to resubmit an assignment, send me an email so we can make the necessary arrangements. There will be final deadlines for re-dos, though. While I care about students and I am happy to be flexible, I still need boundaries to keep my own personal and professional life healthy. I will give plenty of notice ahead of time when a re-do deadline is approaching.

Important: Please be aware that the class will be moving on should you miss an assignment. If you don't follow the suggested course schedule and complete your work on time, you're just piling it up for yourself for later.

Written Assignments

All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font, have 1-inch margins, and numbered pages. Your name, the course name/number, the assignment title, and date should be in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.

Expectations for Students

In addition to the obvious - reading chapters before they are discussed in class, completing assignments thoroughly and on time, and contributing to classroom activities - I appreciate straightforward feedback from you regarding how well the class is meeting your needs. Let me know if the material is not clear or when its relevance to the student learning outcomes for the course is not apparent (or when you're bored out of your mind!). It is also expected that you will treat your classmates with respect, avoid gratuitous arguments, and observe rules of confidentiality regarding personal information shared in class.

Expectations for the Instructor

I will follow the course outline as closely as possible and will notify you of modifications in the outline if they happen. I will attempt to create and maintain a class atmosphere in which you feel free to both listen to others and express your views and ask questions to increase your learning. Please make an appointment to talk with me if there is anything you want to discuss or about which you are unclear. I want to be supportive of your learning and growth throughout the semester.

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, in class discussions and in written and oral communication please use language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy, but when referring to God please use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site on "Inclusive and Expansive Language" (available [here](#)).

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Resources for Instruction, Learning, and Technology at LPTS

- To access the Library and its resources, visit: <https://lpts.libguides.com/Research/eBooks>
- To request a library laptop loan, contact the Online Help Desk – library@lpts.edu
- For general help with campus network access, Outlook (email), contact support@lpts.edu
- For assistance with Canvas, contact Carolyn Cardwell, ccardwell@lpts.edu
- For Academic Support for any of your studies, contact the ASC: Beth Herrinton-Hodge at bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu or Sherry Arconti at sarconti@lpts.edu

Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructor is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language (including A.I. chatbots) or ideas from online resources is included in this policy and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Most courses at LPTS will require that you write papers. Some will be "journal type" writing, offering theological reflecting, and some will be research papers in which you incorporate the research and ideas of others to help support your points. Some of you will actually publish some of your papers in various theological journals. In all cases, your papers should be of professional academic quality.

In your research papers, you must document any information that is not "universally known" or that you did not know before your investigation of the subject. In academic papers and professional journals, you can make some assumptions about your readers since you know that you have some level of shared expertise. However, any use of information without proper documentation is considered plagiarism.

Sometimes students inadvertently use the works of others without correctly citing the source of the information. Remember, when you use someone's ideas you must give credit to that source. If you are using the author's exact words use quotation marks around the passage and then, using the appropriate documentation style, give the full citation information. These mistakes are usually unintentional but are nonetheless plagiarism.

Another problem occasionally arises when summarizing material. Even when you put the author's ideas in your own words, it is necessary to give the citation information. Sometimes, writers summarize and correctly document their sources, but the summaries are too similar to the original. Phrases and groups of words from the original text might not be rewritten in the writer's "language" but retain too much of the original author's style. This is often tricky but is still considered plagiarism.

A special form of plagiarism is self-plagiarism or "double-dipping": reusing an assignment written for another course (whether at LPTS or elsewhere) or incorporating a substantial portion of work submitted for another course in an assignment submission. Assignments are course-

specific and related to the distinctive pedagogical aims of a class. When a student attempts to recycle previous work, whether they intend to deceive or not, they frustrate the aims of teaching and learning in their course as well as the expectation that their submissions represent their fresh, original, and current understanding. In certain exceptional cases (for example, the MAR course Research Methods and Practices) “double-dipping” may be allowed when it serves the aims of two courses, ordinarily taken in the same term, but only with the understanding and express permission of the instructors of both courses. In most other cases, self-plagiarism (or “double-dipping”) is academically dishonest practice and should be understood as a variety of plagiarism as defined in this policy. If you are uncertain about what “substantial” re-use of previous work means or whether an exception to this policy applies to your work for a course, you should speak to your instructor for clarification.

Plagiarism is not only unethical but also illegal. Ignorance is not an excuse.

When a professor judges a student’s work to have been plagiarized, or to be subject to academic dishonesty, the following steps will be taken:

1. The instructor and the student shall have a consultation in which the assignment in question and the issue of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be discussed.
2. If, in the instructor’s judgment, it is unequivocal that a student has plagiarized or used dishonest academic methods in preparing an exercise, the grade for that particular piece shall be judged an “F” or a numerical grade of zero. Any opportunity to redo the exercise is left to the discretion of the instructor.
3. The instructor shall promptly notify the Dean about the incident of plagiarism or academic dishonesty.
4. Such notification will be confidential written communication among the instructor, the Dean, and the student.
5. Two incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty by the same student shall be grounds for dismissal from the Seminary.
6. A student wishing to appeal the judgment of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may use the established procedures for appealing grades.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 7th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2020.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center. See also the library’s citation help center: <https://lpts.libguides.com/digitalresources/citingsources>.

Course Schedule
NT: 131-3 Gospels & Acts
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4:30-5:50pm

Introduction to Gospels

Thursday, Feb 2
 Read: Syllabus

Tuesday, Feb 7
 Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapters 1-2

Mark

Thursday, Feb 9
 Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 3

Tuesday, Feb 14
 Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 4

Thursday, Feb 16
 Read: *Womanist Sass*, Chapters 1 & 3; Kathleen E. Corley, "Slaves, Servants, and Prostitutes: Gender and Social Class in Mark," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*. Amy-Jill Levine, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2001): 191-221 (CANVAS).

Tuesday, Feb 21
 Read: Jaime Clark-Soles, "Mark and Disability" *Interpretation* 70.2 (2016): 159-171 (CANVAS); Warren Carter, "Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark's Jesus: Legion Enters the Pigs (Mark 5:1-20)" *JBL* 133.1 (2014): 139-155 (CANVAS).

Matthew

Thursday, Feb 23
 Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 5

Tuesday, Feb 28
 Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 6

Thursday, March 2
 Read: *Womanist Sass*, Chapter 5; Barbara Reid, "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 237-255 (CANVAS).

Tuesday, March 7
 Read: Jin Yong Choi, "Weren't You with Jesus the Galilean? An Intersectional Reading of Ethnicity, Diasporic Trauma, and Mourning in the Gospel of Matthew," in

Minoritized Women Reading Race and Ethnicity: Intersectional Approaches to Constructed Identity and Early Christian Texts, eds Mitzi J. Smith and Jin Young Choi (Lanham: Lexington, 2020): 1-16 (CANVAS); Anna Bowden, "Extracting the Lives of Marble-workers from NT Texts," unpublished draft (CANVAS).

Thursday, March 9

NT in Popular Culture Presentations

Tuesday, March 14 & Thursday, March 16

No class; Research & Study

Luke

Tuesday, March 21

Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 7

Due: Interpretation Paper #1

Thursday, March 23

Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 8

Tuesday, March 28

Read: Shelly Matthews, "The Lynching Tree and the Cross: James Cone, Historical Narrative, and the Ideology of Just Crucifixion (Luke 23:41)," in *The Narrative Self in Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Judith Perkins* (Atlanta: SBL, 2019):147-170 (CANVAS).

Thursday, March 30

Read: Diana Butler Bass Sermon, "All the Marys" (CANVAS); Warren Carter, "Getting Martha out of the Kitchen: Luke 10:38-42 Again," *CBQ* 58.2 (1996): 264-280 (CANVAS).

Tuesday, April 2

NT in Popular Culture Presentations

Thursday, April 6

No Class; Holy Week

John

Tuesday, April 11

Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 9

Thursday, April 13

Read: *Telling Tales*, Chapter 10

Tuesday, April 18

Read: *Womanist Sass*, Chapter 2; Benjamin Perkins, “Coming Out, Lazarus’s and Ours,” in *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible*, Robert E. Goss and Mona West, eds. (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000): 196-205 (CANVAS).

Thursday, April 20

Read: Susan Hulen, “The Jews,” in *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: WJK, 2009): 113-134 (CANVAS); David G. Burke, “Translating Hoi Joudaioi in the New Testament” *Explorations* 9.2 (1995): 1-7 (CANVAS).

Tuesday, April 25

NT in Popular Culture Presentations

Thursday, April 27

NT in Popular Culture Presentations

Due: Gospels Reflection Paper

Tuesday, May 2

Read: Richard Pervo, “Chapter 2: Enigmas of Acts” in *The Mystery of Acts: Unraveling its Story* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2008): 17-37 (CANVAS); Shelly Matthews, “Acts and Empire: Security in Roman Terms” in *The Acts of the Apostles: Taming the Tongues of Fire* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2013): 45-57 (CANVAS).

Thursday, May 4

Read: *Womanist Sass*, Chapter 4

Friday, May 5 – Deadline for all Re-Dos and Late Work

Thursday, May 11: Interpretation Paper #2 Due (11:59pm)