



GRACE COMMUNION
SEMINARY

BI522 The Gospels

Short Syllabus

Instructor: Michael Morrison

Course Description

This course examines the four canonical Gospels to see what each of these four portraits of Jesus tells us. Students will explore the literary and theological relationships between the Gospels, and the major themes each one presents. Students will describe how the teachings of Jesus can be used in our very different circumstances today.

Required textbooks

Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007. ISBN: [031022697X](https://www.zondervan.com/978031022697X). Approximate price for a new book: [\\$28-\\$32](#). 500 pages. A good introduction to basic information about the Gospels –author, date, primary themes, and other foundations for interpretation. A new edition came out in 2020; it’s about 100 pages longer, but I haven’t read it yet. Either edition is OK.

Wright, N.T. *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*. New York: HarperOne, 2011; paperback, 2018. ISBN [978-0062084408](https://www.harpercollins.com/9780062084408). Approximate price: [\\$9](#). 256 pages. See also his interviews in the *You’re Included* series, <https://www.gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=58>.

Links on the ISBN go to bookfinder.com, where you may find lower prices.

Recommended resources

Green, Joel B., Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd edition. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013.

You can view parts of the first edition at <http://goo.gl/9R7cbI>.

Stein, Robert. *New Testament Survey – Gospels*. 20 audio lectures, originally given at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Now posted at

<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/new-testament-survey-1/robert-stein>.

You have to create an account and enroll in the course, but it's free.

Student learning outcomes for BI522

Students will be able to:

1. Describe scholarly proposals about the literary relationships between the Synoptic Gospels.
2. List the distinctive teachings of each of the four Gospels, and describe how each contributes to a more complete picture of who Jesus was, and what he said and did.
3. Explain the challenges involved in using the Gospels as sources of historical information, and give a reasoned response to the challenges.
4. Analyze a passage in the Gospels in light of its historical and literary setting, to describe its message for the original readers.
5. Describe the cultural and theological differences between Jesus' circumstances and our own, and explain how his teachings are useful in the church today despite those differences.

Requirements

1. **Ten lectures.** Lectures will be posted each Monday for the first ten weeks. See the *Academic Catalog*, section VI, for study suggestions. <https://www.gcs.edu/mod/book/view.php?id=4830>. If you read the lectures carefully, and take notes, the quizzes will be easy. The lectures average about 24 pages each week, and we expect that you will spend about 2 hours on each lecture.
2. **Six forum discussions:** In six weeks, a question will be posted on Monday; students must make an initial comment by Thursday, and they must reply to at least one other student by the end of Sunday.
3. **Three quizzes.** There will be three short open-book quizzes, about the lectures and assigned readings.
4. **Two textbooks.** The textbooks total about 700 pages; we expect the average student to take about 45 hours to read the books – that’s about 4½ hours each week.
5. **Four Gospels.** Read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in a scholarly translation, not a paraphrase.¹
6. **Three papers:** Students may choose one of four passages for the focus of these papers; the options will be listed in the website document “How to Write the First Paper.” Some students need the detailed instructions more than others do, but please follow the instructions. It will help you analyze the passage in a systematic way, and it will help me read and grade the papers in a consistent way.
 - a. First, a 5-page paper on the historical and literary setting of the passage. Students must consult and interact with at least two

¹ Although Eugene Peterson was a good scholar, *The Message* was not designed for scholarly study. Nor is the Voice, the Passion, the New Living Translation, etc.

modern² scholarly books, not counting the assigned textbooks for this class. Students may need to obtain these books through an interlibrary loan, so they should select a passage and identify potential resources as soon as the class begins.

- b. Second, a 5-page paper analyzing the key words and original message of the passage. Students must consult and interact with at least three modern scholarly books, not counting the textbooks for this class, including at least two modern, major³ commentaries. Significant portions of some commentaries can be read online. See the document “How to Write the Second Paper” for further details.
- c. Last, a 4-page paper discussing how the passage is relevant in our own context, either in theology and/or in ethics. Outside research is permitted but not required for this paper. See the document “How to Write the Third Paper” for further details.

² “Modern” means written within the last 25 years. This does not mean that older books are bad. They can often be very helpful. However, new information or analyses will sometimes help us see that a new interpretation is better. If we do not consult more recent commentaries, we may be unwittingly perpetuating a mistake. The newer books often retain the best of the older ones, but occasionally introduce new errors.

³ Major means at least 15 pages for each chapter in the Gospel you are studying. See lists posted at <https://sites.google.com/view/biblestudyresources/gospels>.

Assignments, estimated hours, and grade weighting

Assignment	Hours ⁴	Percentage of grade
Reading the website documents	22	
Reading discussions and making responses	6	15
Taking quizzes	3	10
Reading the textbooks	45	
Studying for the quizzes	3	
Writing first two papers	50	50
Writing third paper	8	25
Total – about 12 hours each week	137	100

Weekly Topics and Assignments

Week	Dates in 2020	Lecture topics	Reading assignments (highest priority first)	Forum or quiz
1	May 11	What is a Gospel? What is the Synoptic Problem?	Strauss, chapters 1-2; Wright, chapters 1-3	F
2	May 18	The Gospel of Mark – its structure, features, and its secret	Strauss, chapters 7, and 3-4	Q
Quiz 1 should be taken before the end of Sunday.				
3	May 25	How do we interpret and use parables?	Strauss, pp. 447-51, and chapters 5-6; Wright, chapter 4	F
4	June 1	The Gospel of Matthew – a Jewish anti-Jewish Gospel	Strauss, chapters 8, 13-14	
The first paper is due by the end of Sunday.				

⁴ This is an estimate for the “average” student. Some students will complete the course requirements in less total time, and some will take more time.

5	June 8	What is the kingdom of God/heaven?	Strauss, pp. 438-40 Wright, chapters 5-8	F
6	June 15	Luke's Gospel, and his ethics	Strauss, chapters 9, 15; Wright, chapter 9	Q
Quiz 2 should be taken before the end of Sunday.				
7	June 22	The historical Jesus	Strauss, chapters 11-12, 17-18	F
8	June 29	Gospel of John – why so different?	Strauss, chapters 10, 19-20	
The second paper is due by the end of Sunday.				
9	July 6	The theology of John	Wright, chapters 10-13	F
10	July 13	Using the Gospels today: ethics	Strauss, pp. 441-47 Wright, chapters 14-15	F
Quiz 3 should be taken before the end of Sunday.				Q
The final paper is due by the end of August 9.				