



## **B260 Synoptic Gospels (3 credits)**

Prerequisites: B115 Introduction to New Testament

**March 17–April 25, 2015**

**Term D**

**Mon-Thurs: 1:15–2:45 pm**

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### **Course Description**

This course will examine the life, the ministry and the teaching of the historical Jesus as presented in the Synoptic Gospels. During this course, we will consider the society in which Jesus lived, as well as the religious context in which he taught. We will also ask questions like, “What is a Gospel?” and “Why are the Gospels so different?” In addition to these things, we will also engage with several scholars who seek to de-harmonize the Synoptic Gospels by questioning their authenticity. This course will not only equip the student to think critically about the Synoptic Gospels, but will also provide an opportunity to reflect on the teachings of Jesus for Christian faith and practice.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course students will better:

1. Describe the basic content of each of the Synoptic Gospels and their relationship to history and faith.
2. Understand the Gospels’ relationship to history and faith.
3. Explain the “Synoptic Problem” and the reasons for it.
4. Utilize the tools for historical and New Testament research.
5. Identify the distinct characteristics of each Gospel by use of a synopsis.
6. Demonstrate appreciation of the Gospels’ contribution to the life and thought of the Church.

## Required Readings:

Craig A. Evans, "Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels" (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Press, 2006)

Anne Rice, "Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt" (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

David Wenham, "The Parables of Jesus" (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Press, 1989).

\*\*On reserve in the library: Selected readings from *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, *Birth of Jesus* (Arundel manuscript), and *Protoevangelium of James*. (These are also available online, though translated into 19th-century English.)

## Additional Recommended Resources:

Craig L. Blomberg. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. B&H, 2009.

## Course Assignments and Evaluation:

1. *Online Discussions:* Use the Discussion section of Populi to enter and respond to posts on assigned course readings. To post on Populi, select "Lessons," select the appropriate discussion topic, then select "Discussion" on the top right corner. All posts are due before class begins. Although you may certainly continue discussions beyond the due-date for any given reading, **you will not receive credit for late posts**. Therefore, **post early enough that you can respond to others' posts and they can respond to yours**. You will be assessed on the depth and quality of both your initial posts and your (respectful) responses to others.
  - a. Read Anne Rice's novel and make two different discussion posts on the book, as well as respond to at least two posts made by your classmates. Ideas for discussion include: What do you make of Rice's use of the canonical Gospels? Is she faithful to the biblical witness? Do you detect evidence of non-canonical infancy narratives? How valid is her depiction of Joseph's and Mary's relationship, and Jesus' relationship with his siblings? Jesus' supposed Egyptian education and his family's social status? What about Rice's use of non-canonical Gospels to tell stories of Jesus' childhood miracles (e.g., Gospel of Thomas)? What do you make of Rice's portrayal of 1st-century Judaism under Roman occupation? Does this affect how you read the Gospels? Your understanding of what might be expected of a "Messiah" or "saviour"? What do you make of Rice's decision to tell her story from Jesus' own perspective? Is her Jesus too human, or does her portrayal align with Christian Trinitarian doctrine? When commenting on the novel, be sure to give page numbers.

Also identify whether you are using the hard- or soft-covered version of the book since the page numbers are different for each. **Each entry is worth 7.5% for total of 15% and are due March 25th and April 1st.**

- b. A Discussion Post on the Childhood and Infancy of Jesus. Read the narratives of Jesus' birth and childhood in the biblical and non-canonical Gospels: Matthew 1-2, Luke 1-2 and in the selections from The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, Birth of Jesus (Arundel manuscript), and Protoevangelium of James. Post your reaction to these readings. Areas for discussion might include: What is your initial impression of these various portrayals of Jesus' nativity? How do the canonical Gospels compare with one another – similarities and differences? How do they compare with the non-canonical Gospels? How do the non-canonical Gospels compare with one another? Are these written by groups with the same ideas about Jesus, or do they represent different theologies? Do the noncanonical Gospels tell us anything about the historical Jesus? What might they tell us about how different Christian groups developed differently in their understanding of Jesus? **This post is worth 10% and due April 7th.**
- c. Five Discussion Posts on Wenham's *Parables of Jesus*. Post 100-150 words for each of the sections of Wenham's book given below. For each entry, identify the major theme Wenham discusses in each chapter. Further areas for discussion include: What have you learned from Wenham about parables generally, about particular parables of Jesus, about God's Kingdom? How has your thinking been challenged? How would you challenge Wenham's interpretations? How does Jesus' teaching through parables challenge believers today, individually and as the church? How have you been challenged? Whenever referring to something Wenham states, be sure to note the page number. Be sure also to respond to the posts of other students and to student responses to your posts. **Each entry is worth 5% for total 25%.**

Wenham Sections:

**March 20th** by 1:14:59pm.....Chs 1-2 + Appendix 1  
**March 27th** by 1:14:59pm.....Chs 3-4 + Appendix 2  
**April 3rd** by 1:14:59pm.....Chs 5-6 + Appendix 3  
**April 10th** by 1:14:59pm.....Chs 7-8  
**April 17th** by 1:14:59pm.....Chs 9-10

**Total Value for Online Posts: 50% Date due: Before the start of class on the due dates listed above.**

- 2. *Gospel of Mark Reading Assignment.* Prior to coming to class, read through Mark twice. It is important that you read through the entire gospel in one sitting. The first time through, use the version that you normally read. Listen for the overall message of the book and write a

brief summary (one page maximum, double spaced) of the message that focuses on the most important themes (e.g., portrayal of Jesus or others, theological emphasis, etc.). For the second reading, choose an idiomatic translation, or modern version, such as the New Living Translation, New Century Version, Today's English Version, or Contemporary English Version. Again, focus on the overall message and make any necessary revisions to your summary. **Note:** You are only required to write one summary (based on your two readings). **In a footnote, please confirm that you read 100% of Mark's Gospel twice (or note the percentage completed) and identify the versions you used.** Come to class prepared to submit your summary and share your thoughts. You will be graded on the quality of your summary and your discussion in class.

**Value: 15% of Total Grade Date**

**Due: April 14th in Class**

3. *Major Project on a Gospels Pericope.* Identify a self-contained, workable section of one of the Synoptic Gospels – no more than 10-15 verses. Examine and research the passage closely using your Synopsis and a minimum of five **relevant** secondary sources. **Check first with your instructor both about your pericope and your sources.** Your research should include a clearly written **thesis statement** in the introduction. A good thesis statement should explain what you are going to argue in your paper in one sentence. For some tips on writing thesis statements, see:

[http://www.chicagohistoryfair.org/2\\_how\\_to\\_write\\_a\\_thesis\\_statement%20easy.pdf](http://www.chicagohistoryfair.org/2_how_to_write_a_thesis_statement%20easy.pdf)

Your research should then argue and defend your thesis statement in a logical, point-by-point fashion. For some help on how to do this, see:

<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/collegewriting/index.htm>

You may choose to write-up your research as:

- An 8-page formal paper – follow proper procedures and conventions for paper-writing. Use full and proper referencing of all sources.
- A fully scripted sermon – use full sentences – no point-form. Include also full and proper referencing of all sources. Even if you will not be communicating those references orally to a “congregation,” they must appear visibly in your written sermon.
- A clearly structured Bible study – use full sentences to develop your outline. Design leading questions for group discussion that will help you lead the group along the points of your argument. Include full and proper references to your sources that support your points, even if you would not share these references directly with your Bible study group.
- Other: I am open to any creative expression of your research – a song, visual art; whatever. As with any of these formats, you will be assessed on the quality of your

research and how well you demonstrate your argument, showing your competency as a close reader of the text.

**Value: 35% of Total Grade**

**Date due: April 24th in Class**

**Course Outline:**

This course is a 6-week intensive. Please make note of the due dates for each assignment listed above. The following is a tentative outline for the lectures. Please note that they may be subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

Week 1 (March 17–20):	Course Introduction What is a “Gospel?” Who wrote the Gospels? Where were the Gospels written? When were the Gospels written? Why were the Gospels written?
Week 2 (March 24–27):	The Birth of the Messiah The Sermon on the Mount The Parables of Jesus
Week 3 (March 31–April 3):	The Structure and Themes of Mark’s Gospel
Week 4 (April 7–10):	The Structure and Themes of Luke’s Gospel
Week 5 (April 14–17):	The Death of the Messiah The Death of the Messiah according to Mel Gibson
Week 6 (April 22–24):	The Structure and Themes of Luke’s Gospel

## Attendance and Late Policies

Assignments are due before midnight on their due-date. Overdue assignments incur the following penalties:

- 1-3 days late: 10% penalty
- 4-6 days late: 20% penalty
- After 6 days: an automatic “F”

Sundays and statutory holidays are not counted in assessing penalties for late submission.

## Horizon College/University of Saskatchewan Grading System\*

The College employs the percentage system for marking tests and final examinations. Letter grade equivalents, according to the following scale, may be used in grading assignments. The student’s final grades are given in percentages. A mark of less than 50% is a failing grade.

90-100	A+	4.0
85-89	A	4.0
80-84	A-	3.7
77-79	B+	3.3
73-76	B	3.0
70-72	B-	2.7
67-69	C+	2.3
63-66	C	2.0
60-62	C-	1.7
57-59	D+	1.3
53-56	D	1.0
50-52	D-	0.7
0-49	F	0.0

**90-100% [Exceptional]** – a superior performance with consistent strong evidence of:

- a comprehensive, incisive grasp of the subject matter;
- an ability to make insightful critical evaluation of the material given;
- an exceptional capacity for original, creative and/or logical thinking;
- an excellent ability to organize, to analyze, to synthesize, to integrate ideas, and to express thoughts fluently.

**80-89% [Excellent]** – an excellent performance with strong evidence of:

- a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter;
- an ability to make sound critical evaluation of the material given;
- a very good capacity for original, creative and/or logical thinking;

- an excellent ability to organize, to analyze, to synthesize to integrate ideas, and to express thoughts fluently.

**70-79% [Good]** – a good performance with evidence of:

- a substantial knowledge of the subject matter;
- a good understanding of relevant issues and a good familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques;
- some capacity for original, creative and/or logical thinking;
- a good ability to organize, to analyze and to examine the subject material in a critical and constructive manner.

**60-69% [Satisfactory]** – a generally satisfactory and intellectually adequate performance with evidence of:

- an acceptable basic grasp of the subject material;
- a fair understanding of the relevant issues;
- a general familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques;
- an ability to develop solutions to moderately difficult problems related to the subject material;
- a moderate ability to examine the material in a critical and analytical manner.

**50-59% [Minimal Pass]** – a barely acceptable performance with evidence of:

- a familiarity with the subject material;
- some evidence that analytical skills have been developed;
- some understanding of relevant issues;
- some familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques;
- attempts to solve moderately difficult problems related to the subject material and to examine the material in a critical and analytical manner, which are only partially successful.

**Under 50% [Failure]** – an unacceptable performance

## **Bibliography**

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