

# REL 513.01: The Synoptic Gospels

Seaver College, Pepperdine University  
Spring, 2002      MTh 12:00 - 1:50      AC 245

Dr. Randy Chesnutt  
AC 200      Phone: x4180  
E-mail: [chesnutt@pepperdine.edu](mailto:chesnutt@pepperdine.edu)

Office Hours:  
Monday 9:30 - 11:00  
Wednesday 1:30 - 3:00  
Thursday 9:30 - 11:00  
Other times as needed

**A. Course Description:** A study of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with emphasis on the origin and development of the synoptic tradition and the purpose and theology of the Gospels within their historical and socio-cultural contexts. Intensive exegesis of selected pericopes.

## B. Textbooks

1. B. H. Throckmorton, ed., *Gospel Parallels: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Nashville/New York: Nelson, 1992). Earlier editions of this standard work are also acceptable. The 1992 edition is based on the NRSV text; earlier editions (which are actually preferable for purposes of synoptic comparisons) are based on the RSV. Students competent in Greek should consult K. Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (Stuttgart: Würtembergische Bibelanstalt, 1967).
2. R. H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001).
3. B. B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1989).
4. L. T. Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).

## C. Requirements

1. Be regular and prompt in class attendance, participate in class discussions, and keep careful notes.

2. Carefully read assigned materials according to the schedule below. Be prepared to discuss them in class on the scheduled dates.

- **Feb. 4:** Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*
- **Mar. 28:** Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*
- **Apr. 15:** Johnson, *The Real Jesus*

3. Written Assignments

a. Analysis/critique of Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*. No more than one third of this review should be devoted to summarizing the book; at least two thirds should be a critical evaluation of the author's approach to the synoptic problem and the value and limitations of that approach in interpreting the synoptic Gospels. Evaluate the author's assumptions and methods as well as his conclusions. Approximate length: seven typed, double-spaced pages. **Due Jan. 31.**

b. Term paper.

(1) Graduate Students: Exegesis paper on a pericope found in two or more of the Gospels and representative of the broad range of issues in synoptic studies. The paper must demonstrate careful analysis of the text itself as well as utilization of pertinent secondary sources and critical methodologies. Thorough footnote documentation and an extensive bibliography are essential. Follow the sample forms on the attached pages. Work closely with the professor to select a pericope, refine a methodology appropriate for it, and assemble resources.

Due dates:

- **Jan. 28** - one-page description of text/topic
- **Feb. 11** - tentative bibliography
- **Mar. 7** - comprehensive bibliography
- **Apr. 11** - final paper

(2) Undergraduates: Analysis/critique of Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*.

A brief summary of the book is appropriate, but most of your attention should be given to a critical evaluation of the author's assumptions, methods, and conclusions. In addition to evaluating Scott's overall approach, choose one parable for which you find his treatment to be especially insightful or especially flawed. Compare Scott's approach to this parable with other interpretations in commentaries and other published studies, and explain why you consider his explanation better or worse than these others. Include footnotes and a bibliography, following the sample forms on the attached pages. Approximate length: ten to twelve typed, double-spaced pages, divided roughly equally between the general analysis and the analysis of the one parable you choose.

Due dates:

- **Feb. 18** - one-page description of the parable chosen for investigation and the major issues to be addressed
- **Mar. 7** - tentative bibliography

- **Mar. 21** - comprehensive bibliography
- **Apr. 11** - final paper

Note: Content, rather than style, is of primary importance in these written assignments. Nevertheless, careful attention should be given to style of writing. Complete the research early enough to allow ample time for planning and writing a clear and coherent paper. Footnotes and bibliographical entries should follow the sample forms on the attached pages. Proofread to eliminate errors of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. See the “Grading Pyramid” on p. 4.

#### **D. Exams**

1. **Mid-term: Feb. 21** (covers all lecture materials and reading assignments on historical background, the synoptic problem, methodology, and the Gospel of Mark)
2. **Final: Thursday, Apr. 25, 1:30 - 4:00 p.m.** (covers all lecture materials and reading assignments on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, historical Jesus research, and specific textual and topical studies)

#### **E. Grades:** For purposes of assigning a grade for the course, the various assignments and exams will be weighted as follows:

1. Review of Stein, *The Synoptic Problem*, 15%
2. Mid-term exam, 25%
3. Final exam, 25%
4. Research paper, 35%

#### **F. Policies on Attendance and Due Dates**

1. **Attendance.** Failure to attend class regularly and promptly is irresponsible, foolish, and self-destructive. Unfortunately, experience proves that a few students need additional incentive to attend class. Therefore, the following (regrettably legalistic!) policy will apply:
  - Every student is expected to attend every class. If illness or emergency necessitates one or two absences, you can minimize the damage by copying someone’s notes, keeping up with the readings, and asking for supplementary readings. In the event of additional absences, you should withdraw from the course. For anyone who continues in the course in spite of excessive absences, the final course average will be reduced by five points for each absence beyond the third.
  - Similarly, arriving late for class once or twice because of an emergency is understandable; habitual tardiness is not. Therefore, if the combined number of absences and late arrivals reaches four, each additional late arrival will count as an absence.

2. **Due Dates.** All written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified. Absence from class does not exempt one from a deadline. For late papers (including the preliminary proposal and bibliographies for the term paper described under “C3b” above), a penalty of five points per day or any part of a day will be assessed. With rare exceptions for medical emergencies, no paper that is more than a week overdue will be accepted.

## GRADING PYRAMID

### A

The essay gives imaginative treatment to a significant and striking central idea. The plan of the essay evidences a strategy for persuasion. Generalizations are carefully supported. Details show originality, freshness and concreteness. Sentences show variety of pattern and are rhetorically effective. Style is authentic and demonstrates that ideas have been interiorized.

### B

The essay's central idea is interesting and significant. The organization of the essay demonstrates careful planning. Details are specific and sharp; there is a concern for showing rather than just telling. Sentences show variety of purpose and pattern. Diction is chosen with awareness of audience and purpose.

### C

The essay has a clear central idea. The plan of the essay is clear with an identifiable introduction and conclusion. Generalizations are supported by details. Paragraphs are unified and coherent. Transitions are clear. Sentences make sense and conform to conventional patterns. Subjects and verbs agree. Pronouns agree with antecedents. Verb tenses are consistent. Punctuation is conventional. Words are spelled correctly.

### D / F

Central idea is weak or confused. Organization is poor. Paragraphs lack unity and coherence. Generalizations are unsupported by evidence. Sentence structure is confused. Errors in usage, grammar, spelling or punctuation are frequent or serious.

## Sample Forms for Bibliographical Entries

### Book:

Kingsbury, Jack D. Matthew as Story, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

Rhoads, David, and Donald Michie. Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

### Commentary or other book in a series:

Hagner, Donald A. Matthew, 2 vols. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word Books, 1993-95.

Harrington, Daniel J. The Gospel of Matthew. Sacra Pagina. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991.

Soards, Marion L. The Passion According to Luke: The Special Material of Luke 22. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, no. 14. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987.

### Article in a book of collected essays:

Trites, Allison A. "The Prayer Motif in Luke Acts." Perspectives on Luke Acts, ed. Charles H. Talbert. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1978. Pp. 168-86.

Robinson, William C., Jr. "On Preaching the Word of God (Luke 8:4-21)." Studies in Luke Acts, eds. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966. Pp. 131-38.

*[Use "ed." for a single editor and "eds." for two or more.]*

**Journal article:**

Keck, Leander E. "Mark 3:7-12 and Mark's Christology." Journal of Biblical Literature 84 (1965) 341-58.

Weber, Kathleen. "The Image of Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46." Catholic Biblical Quarterly 59 (1997) 657-78.

*[Note that book titles and journal titles are underlined or italicized. Titles of articles within books or journals are placed in quotation marks.]*

**Primary Sources:**

Danby, Herbert. The Mishnah. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933.

Thackeray, H. St.-J., et al. Josephus, 9 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926-65.

*[Use "et al." ("and others") when there are more than three authors or editors.]*

## Sample Forms for Footnotes

### General:

<sup>1</sup>Daniel A. Harrington, The Gospel of Matthew, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>Kathleen Weber, "The Image of Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 59 (1997) 670-71.

*[Note that the specific page numbers are cited, rather than the total page numbers as in the bibliographical entry. Use "p." for a single page and "pp." for multiple pages.]*

<sup>3</sup>William C. Robinson, Jr., "On Preaching the Word of God (Luke 8:4-21)," Studies in Luke Acts, eds. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>Donald A. Hagner, Matthew, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993-95), vol. 1, pp. 121-23.

### Subsequent reference to a source cited earlier:

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

*[Use "ibid." only when referring to the same source as in the footnote immediately preceding. For all other subsequent references, use the author's last name and a shortened title as in the following.]*

<sup>2</sup>Harrington, Matthew, pp. 116-17.

<sup>3</sup>Weber, "Sheep and Goats," p. 658.

### Primary Sources

<sup>1</sup>Josephus Antiquities 13.11.3.

<sup>2</sup>Mishnah Pesachim 8.8.

*[Note that it is not necessary to give the publication data here; this information is available in the bibliography. Give only the primary source reference.]*

**Multiple works that make the same point can be cited together in one note:**

<sup>1</sup>Jack D. Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 16; Leander E. Keck, “Mark 3:7-12 and Mark’s Christology,” Journal of Biblical Literature 84 (1965) 352; and Weber, “Sheep and Goats,” p. 659.

**“Content” Footnotes: Supplementary argumentation or subsidiary discussion can be carried on in footnotes in order to keep the main text flowing smoothly.**

<sup>1</sup>The singular “sign” is most likely original. The variant reading “signs” probably arose by scribal assimilation to the plural in verse 2. So Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 211. However, Raymond Brown, The Gospel of John, 2 vols., The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 234, 249, favors the plural reading and suggests that verses 14-15 are only loosely connected to the particular “sign” of verses 1-13.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh Montefiore, “Revolt in the Desert?” New Testament Studies 8 (1962) 135-36. Montefiore is aware of theories which separate out verses 30-34 as Markan redaction, but he finds the case unconvincing and argues that these introductory verses are continuous with the traditional feeding story which follows.