

CH261-2 Texts in Context Spring, 2010

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Office Hours Posted on Office Door

Course Objectives:

1. To become aware of and knowledgeable about the contexts which affect the interpretation of Newer Testament Texts
2. To learn critical methods of reading biblical texts
3. To develop appreciation for the dynamic between sacred text and faith communities

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and participation in each class meeting. Because much of the learning in this course takes place in class discussion and lectures, more than two absences will affect your ability to pass the course. You will likely be assigned makeup work for more than one absence. Please let me know if you will be absent.
2. Complete reading assignments each week.
3. Complete written assignments and hand in on date due. If there are extenuating circumstances that make meeting the deadline difficult, let me know before the due date to arrange an extension. Papers turned in late will receive a failing grade.

Evaluations and Grades: Your grade for the course will be based primarily on the written assignments and final exam. Your written work will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria: addresses the questions asked; shows careful and critical reading of the texts; shows understanding of context; depth of insight; communication skills, including spelling, punctuation, organization, proper footnotes where required. Preparation and participation in class discussions will also be considered.

Required and Recommended Books:

HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV
Fredriksen and Reinhartz, eds., Jesus, Judaism & Christian Anti-Judaism
Hayes and Holladay, Biblical Exegesis
Juel, A Master of Surprise
Rensberger, Johannine Faith and Liberating Community, recommended
Rhoads, From Every People and Nation
Roetzel, Paul the Man and the Myth
Roetzel, The World That Shaped the New Testament
Salmon, Preaching Without Contempt, recommended
Throckmorton, ed., Gospel Parallels, fifth edition, recommended

Schedule of Assignments

2/11 Introduction; Bible Basics; Texts and Translations

2/18 Historical Contexts

Read: The World That Shaped the New Testament

I Maccabees 1:1-64

Luke 10:25-28

Preaching Without Contempt, pp. 17-27

Write: On the basis of your reading of I Maccabees, the first chapter, take the position of the author and explain why you are so opposed to having a gymnasium in Jerusalem. OR Take the point of view of the opponents of the author, the ones the author calls renegades, and explain why you think a gymnasium in Jerusalem is a good idea. Keep in mind that both author and opponents are Jews, belonging to the covenant people of Israel.

2/25 Perspective on Paul

Read: Paul the Man and the Myth, pages 1-92

Biblical Exegesis, chapter one, 5-32

Acts 9 and Galatians 1:11-2:14

Acts 15 and Galatians 2

Acts 16:1-5 and Gal 5:1-12

Prepared to Discuss: Compare the pairs of texts from Acts and Galatians (above). Note (make a list of) both the agreements and disagreements. When faced with contradictions in the Bible, what do you make of them? Do you try to reconcile them? Discount them? Attribute them to different perspectives of different writers? Question the reliability of the historical truth of the Bible? Choose one account as more reliable than the other?

3/4 Reading Letters

Read: Jesus, Judaism and Christian Anti-Judaism, Introduction, chapters 1, 3

I Thessalonians, 1, 4, 5

Galatians

Prepare to Discuss: What can you deduce about the community at Thessalonica that received Paul's letter? What were their questions? Concerns? What can you deduce about the communities of Galatia? What is the tone of this letter? Who has upset Paul and how? What is the main issue? How does Paul make his argument? What is the purpose of this letter?

3/11 Selected Pauline Texts

Read: I Cor 1:1-17;; I Cor 7; I Cor 8; I Cor 15; II Cor 5:11-6:10;

Rom 1:1-15; Rom 11; Rom 15-16

Paul the Man and the Myth, chapter 4

Prepare to Discuss: Drawing from the selected texts from I Cor, what can you say about the Corinthians? What is going on in this community? On the basis of the first chapter of Romans, what distinguishes this letter from the other Pauline letters?

Write: What is the story behind Galatians? Write the hypothetical letter to which Paul's letter to the Galatians responds. From the perspective of a person in a Galatian community, write a letter to Paul. Your letter should reflect what is happening in the community. What is the main conflict? What are the misunderstandings? This assignment asks you to use your imagination and to put yourself in the situation of one of the churches in Galatia. However, this is not a creative writing assignment. Your letter should demonstrate your understanding of the diversity of early Judaism, the diverse perspectives of the early missionaries of the Jesus movement among non-Jews, and possible misunderstandings among early gentile converts. The purpose of the assignment is to show your understanding of the context and occasion of Paul's letter to the Galatians. When I read your hypothetical letter, I should be able to imagine Paul's letter to the Galatians as a response to your letter. (about 500 words)

3/18 Paul and His Interpreters; Paul and Contemporary Issues

Read: James 2:14-26 (why didn't Martin Luther like James?!)

I Tim; Ephesians 5; Col 3; Gal 3:19-29; Phil 4:2-3; Rom 16:1-8;

I Cor 14:34-36 (these pertain to the role of women)

Rom 1:18 – 2:29; Gal 5:19-23; I Cor 6:9-11; I Tim 1:8-11 (these are the most often cited passages pertaining to same-sex relations)

Paul, chapter 6

Prepare to Discuss: What contexts inform how we interpret what Paul says about the role of women in churches, and about same sex relationships?

3/22-26 Reading Week: classes do not meet this week

4/1 Between Jesus and the Gospels

Read: Biblical Exegesis, chapter 6

Jesus, Judaism, & Christian Anti-Judaism, chapter 2

Mark 1; Luke 1:1-4

Mark 13:1-2; 14:1-9; Matthew 24:15-21; Luke 19:41-44; 21:5-6; 20-24

Prepare to Discuss: What do you learn from the first verses of Luke about the author, date of the Gospel, purpose of the author? What do the selected texts suggest about the dating of the Gospels? Also, note the differences among the endings of the Gospels.

4/8 Synoptic Gospels

Read: Biblical Exegesis, chapters 3, 8

The World That Shaped, chapter 5

Gospel Parallels, pericopes number: 2,3,5,6,18,19,53,69,70,122, colored

Prepare to Discuss: On the basis of coloring the parallels assigned, what do you observe about the relationships among the Synoptic Gospels? Are you more impressed by the differences or by the similarities? What similarities and differences do you think are most significant and why? How do you explain both similarities and differences?

4/15 Reading a Gospel

Read: Mark

Master of Surprise, chapters 1,2,3,4,8,9

Biblical Exegesis, ch 5

Prepare to Discuss: (1) Why do you think that the writer of the Gospel of Mark does not include an account of Jesus birth? What are possible reasons? (2) What do you think of Juel's interpretation of the baptism story in Mark? (3) Why do you think the writer quotes Israel's scriptures (what later becomes the Christian Old Testament)? What are possible reasons? What does this suggest about the writer's first audience?

4/22 Luke-Acts and Historiography

Read: Luke 1-2; 24, Acts 1-2; 28

Luke 6:1-11; 15:1-3, 25-32; 13:31-35

Acts 5:33-39; 15:1-19; 16:1-5; 23:6-8

Preaching Without Contempt, chapter 1

Prepare to Discuss: It has been observed that Luke-Acts presents Jesus within the Law and that Luke-Acts presents the Pharisees in a more positive light than other Gospels. What evidence do you see in support of this view? Why do you think the author presents the Pharisees more favorably? Possible reasons or motives?

Write: There are many "journey stories" in the Bible. Acts 8:26-40 is sometimes called the journey of every believer. What clues do you see that suggest the Ethiopian Eunuch represents the journey of "every believer?" How is every "Christian" in every time and place like the character in the story? What clues do you see that this is not the record of a historical event and is rather an invitation for the reader to enter into the story in a personal way? (600-700 words)

4/28-29 Convocation; no class

5/6 John; sectarianism
Read: Johannine Faith, chapters 1,2,5,6,7
John 1-4, 9,13,18,19,20,21

Prepare to Discuss: How might the context of a sectarian community affect the way we read John in our own communities today?

5/13 Revelation
Read: Revelation
From Every People, pages 19-27, chapters 1,3,6,8,10, and one chapter of your choice

Prepare to Discuss: What did you learn about different ways of reading Revelation? What was unique or a distinguishing characteristic of each? With respect to the chapter you chose to read, why did you choose it and what did you find compelling, or not, about it?

5/20 Final Exam
You will write on three or four questions in class. You will have some choice of questions. The questions will relate to material covered in class over the semester and will typically invite an essay of a few paragraphs. Bring a Bible, your own paper. You may bring one page of notes. Keep in mind, however, that the questions will ask you to integrate what you have learned. Detailed notes, either your own or those in your study Bible, will not give you the answers. You will have the entire class period to write the exam, but most of you will find about two hours sufficient time to complete it.

Policies:

Extensions

The faculty voted to approve the following policy on extensions in April, 1999:

The work for a course is terminated at the end of the final class session. The performance in the course is evaluated on the basis of the work submitted by that time, unless an exception is made by the instructor, in which case a formal petition for extension must be approved by the instructor by the end of the final class session. Extensions (of course work) beyond the end of the semester will be approved only under extraordinary circumstances. Each instructor will include this policy on each course syllabus as well as the criteria by which she or he will grant such an extraordinary exception.

For this course, extraordinary circumstances include: death in the family, hospitalization for illness or injury, or serious illness of self or family member. If you think you have an extraordinary circumstance which affects your ability to complete the course, please talk with me about it. Please note that all written work, including the final exam, must be completed in order to pass this course.

Plagiarism: See Student Handbook

Cell Phones: Turn cell phones off when you come to class.

Guide for Coloring Gospel Parallels

Color the parallel texts using the following color code:

Underline in Red	words found in Mt, Mk, Lk
Underline in Blue	words found in Mt and Mk but not in Lk
Underline in Green	words found in Lk and Mk but not in Mt
Underline in Black	words found in Mt and Lk but not in Mk
Underline in Brown	words in Mk only
Underline in Yellow	words in Mt only
Underline in Orange	words in Lk only