

**Gospels Introduction Lecture<sup>1</sup>**  
**NT 601 Gospels & Acts**  
Fall 2008  
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**I. COURSE INTRODUCTION**

A. Purpose of class

1. Make “specialists in the Bible” (Machen, *Shorter Writings*, p. 193 **READ**).

“Let it never be forgotten that a theological seminary is a school for specialists. We are living in an age of specialization. There are specialists on eyes and specialists on noses, and throats, and stomachs, and feet, and skin; there are specialists on teeth—one set of specialists on putting teeth in, and another set of specialists on pulling teeth out—there are specialists on Shakespeare and specialists on electric wires; there are specialists on Plato and specialists on pipes. Amid all these specialties, we at Westminster Seminary have a specialty which we think, in comparison with these others, is not so very small. Our specialty is found in the Word of God. Specialists in the Bible—that is what Westminster Seminary will endeavor to produce. Please do not forget it; please do not call on us for a product that we are not endeavoring to provide. If you want specialists in social science or in hygiene or even in ‘religion’ (in the vague modern sense), then you must go elsewhere for what you want. But if you want men who know the Bible and know it in something more than a layman’s sort of way, then call on us.” J. Gresham Machen, “Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan,” in *Selected Shorter Writings* (D. G. Hart, ed.; Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004), 193 (an address given on September 25, 1929).

2. What we will **not** be doing:
  - a. Not specialist in secondary opinions (esp. commentaries) or critical methods. We will survey or read about many, but not main focus.
  - b. Not my running commentary on texts.
  - c. Not comprehensive survey of all Gospels & Acts.
3. Specialize in Gospels and Acts through **selective** work:

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- a. Survey of history of exegesis of Gospels & Acts.
  - b. Survey of current state of Gospels study with focus on the most profitable. Especially, narrative criticism and stories.
  - c. Unit on the Kingdom of God as unifying theme of Gospels & Acts.
  - d. Unit on Jesus as teacher with focus on parables.
  - e. Survey of each with sample exegesis.
  - f. Guest lecturers:
    - i. September 11–12: R. B. Strimple on his book.
    - ii. October 30–31: Dennis E. Johnson on Luke-Acts.
4. Shapes assignments:
- a. Readings; esp. ones which survey and cover areas I will not.
  - b. Paper
  - c. Final exam

B. Course Syllabus (review)

**II. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Contrast Gospels & Acts with NT epistles or Revelation
- B. What is needed to interpret a pericope in a Gospel or Acts?
  1. General: NTI areas of inquiry
    - a. delineate a pericope
    - b. lexical work
    - c. Greek syntax
    - d. acquaintance with historical background

- e. place in redemptive-historical development;
  - i. KEY!
  - ii. Gospels represent the **end of the OT era** and only **dawn of NT era**
  
- 2. Particular features distinctive to Gospels & Acts
  - a. “Narrative”—διήγησις (Luke 1:1)
  - b. “What Jesus did and taught” (Acts 1:1; Matthew 28)
    - i. “did”—history (John 20:30; 21:25)
    - ii. “taught”—commandments, parables, etc.
  - c. Purpose:
    - i. Bring certainty (Luke 1:4)
    - ii. Signs, testimony, faith, life (John 20, 21)
  - d. Different elements require distinctive handling, particularly as they advance the teaching of the whole Gospel:
    - i. genealogies
    - ii. stories
    - iii. parables of various sorts
    - iv. symbolic actions; e.g., cleansing temple; cursing fig tree
    - v. encounters; e.g., healings in face of opposition
  - e. Theological narrative history
    - i. All history is interpretive; “objective” history is a myth
    - ii. OT background
    - iii. Kingdom of God as central theme

C. Greek style samples of Gospels & Acts

1. **Matt. 5:1–3**
2. **Matt. 11:10–11**
3. **Luke 24:3–5**

### III. LITERARY FEATURES OF THE GOSPELS

#### A. Select Bibliography

Bauckham, Richard, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006).

Byrskog, Samuel, *Story as History—History as Story* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002).

Carson & Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2d Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

Schleiermacher, Friedrich, *Hermeneutics and Criticism* (A. Bowie, ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge, 1998).

Shiner, Whitney, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003).

#### B. Genre (C&M, pp. 112–15)

##### 1. Lots of discussion in the past:

- a. K. Schmidt: popular literature (*Kleinliteratur*) vs. *Hochliteratur*.
- b. C. H. Dodd: Kerygma developed
- c. Others: No established genre
- d. C&M: Greco-Roman biographies is closest genre with qualifications to unique features (pp. 114–15).

##### 2. Response:

- a. Not the *sine qua non* for interpretation of a particular passage as sometimes claimed.
- b. You know what a gospel is by reading it.
- c. Contain “sub-genres”
  - i. genealogies
  - ii. historical narration
  - iii. speeches

iv. etc.

3. Foundational Theses:

- a. The Gospels and Acts are inspired *interpretations* of the words and works of Jesus. They were not newspaper accounts (which are themselves interpretive!).
- b. The writers of the Gospels and Acts were inspired theologians. They do have distinctive emphases.
- c. Why must the “Synoptic Problem” be a problem? You know how God would inspire four gospel accounts by reading them. Compare statement in Schleiermacher.

**READ:** Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, p. 17.

- d. Although we can discern distinctive emphases among the Gospel writers, their areas of “synoptic” agreement is massive and essential.
- e. The previous thesis does not mean that the inspired writers were not historians. The writing of any history is interpretation.
- f. The great themes of all the Gospels, center on the works and words of Jesus.
- g. The Gospels and Acts record a transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant eras and must be interpreted in light of this development in redemptive history.
- h. The Gospels and Acts must be interpreted in light of the Epistles, for there is development of revelation within the New Testament itself.
- i. To call the Gospels “stories” is not to prejudice them as not historical accounts of historical events.

C. Gospels as Oral History

1. Introduction

- a. Most treatments concerned with **origination** of the Gospels. E.g., source criticism
- b. We treat theories and history of scholarship on origination of Gospels in coming weeks, but not here.

- c. Separate out Gospel origination or oral sources from *Gospels as written documents for oral presentation*.
    - i. Somewhat *a priori* that these documents have oral function
    - ii. But oral presentation was common for virtually all documents (see Bauckham or Shiner for discussion)
  - d. We focus here only on the texts as instruments for oral presentation and see if that impacts how we treat the Gospel texts.
  - e. Suggestions for further reflection, not comprehensive treatment.
  - f. Use some example texts now that we will treat more fully later in class.
    - i. Especially under narrative criticism samples
    - ii. And grounding texts in flow of redemptive history
    - iii. Return to issues like Markan “sandwiches” later too
2. Key elements of oral texts.
- a. Repeated elements to anchor the story.
    - i. Compare formulae in Homer [give sample]
      - ☒ “Now when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, Telemachus rose and dressed himself. He bound his sandals on to his comely feet, girded his sword about his shoulder, and left his room looking like an immortal god.” (Book II)
      - ☒ “When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, Menelaus rose and dressed himself. He bound his sandals on to his comely feet, girded his sword about his shoulders, and left his room looking like an immortal god. (Book IV)
      - ☒ “Now when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, Nestor left his couch and took his seat on the benches of white and polished marble that stood in front of his house.” (Book III)

- ✧ “When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn; appeared, they again yoked their horses and drove out through the gateway under the echoing gatehouse.” (Book III)

ii. Also in 1 Kings of OT

- ✧ 1 Kings 2:10–12 “Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. [11] And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. [12] So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.”
- ✧ 1 Kings 11:43 “And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.”
- ✧ 1 Kings 14:31 “And Rehoboam slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. And Abijam his son reigned in his place.”

iii. See similar redundancy: E.g.,

- ✧ **Mark 1:32** Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης, ὅτε ἔδυν ὁ ἥλιος, ἔφερον πρὸς αὐτὸν πάντας τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας καὶ τοὺς δαιμονιζομένους.<sup>2</sup>

“That evening, when the sun had set, they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.”

- ✧ **Mark 2:20** τότε, ἐν ἐκείνῃ ἡμέρᾳ, “then, on that day”
- ✧ **Mark 2:25** χρείαν ἔσχεν καὶ ἐπείνασεν, “he had need and grew hungry”

iv. εὐθύς in Mark (ca. 40x)

v. καὶ ἐγένετο in Luke

vi. genealogy repetitions in Matthew

READ: Matthew 1 genealogy

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<sup>2</sup> But see Mark 4:35; 6:47; 14:17; and 15:42 where Ὁψίας γενομένης occurs without redundancy.

- b. Use of metaphor and simile
- c. Use of irony or other techniques of story telling (Luke 24 and Jesus unknown to two men but know to audience).
- d. Highlights characters
  - i. e.g. Peter
  - ii. Again, contrast Galatians 2
- e. Story elements; esp. **conflict**
- f. Pericope contributes to flow of macro-story of the Gospel
  - i. Peter's confession in Mark (see under Mark)
  - ii. Two feedings in Mark (cf. Shiner, p. 96)
    - a) **READ: Mark 6:30–44**
      - 1) Feeding of 5,000
      - 2) disciples puzzled over Jesus' command: "You give them something to eat" (v. 37).
    - b) **READ: Mark 8:1–10**
      - 1) Feeding of 4,000
      - 2) Now we expect disciples to be see that they can feed the crowd, but they don't
    - c) **Mark 8:14–21** Leaven of Pharisees —Jesus references the feedings.
    - d) **Mark 8:27–30** Finally Peter confesses Christ!
  - iii. Geographic location of narrated events and movement of story-line; e.g. Galallean location of
    - a) Contrast to Synoptics, in John much of the action and speeches of Jesus is *in Jerusalem, esp. at feasts*. (Exception: John 6:1–7:1 in Galilee.)

- b. Compare Mark where it is not until after Peter's confession at the end of chapter 8 that Jesus sets his fact toward Jerusalem. Mark has very little portrayal of the Jewish opponents of Jesus in Jerusalem.
- iv. Interlocking "sandwiches" in Mark (see under Mark)
- g. Actions versus words. Narration and the narrator's function.
  - i. See abrupt introduction to Mark in chapter 1. Compare narration of Gadarene demoniac in Mark which is longer than other synoptic Gospels.
  - ii. Heavy use of direct address versus indirect quotations
  - iii. Compare Paul in Galatians 2
    - a) **READ: Gal. 2:11–16**
    - b) Uncertain where Paul's statements to Peter breaks off
- h. More subtle: sounds of the words
- i. Other suggestions is Shiner:
  - i. Emotion (Shiner, p. 68)
  - ii. Delivery (Shiner, Chap. 4)
    - a) Voices of characters
    - b) Sound effects (e.g., storm)
  - iii. Gestures (Chap. 6)
    - a) Distinguish rhetoricians from actors
    - b) E.g., Jesus grasping hand of Peter's mother in law and raising her up
- READ: Mark 1:31**
- iv. Applause (Shiner, Chap. 8)
- v. Structure for memorization by "performer" (Shiner, pp. 114–17)

D. Sample: Luke 24