

# THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND ACTS (BI611DE – Fall 2019)

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## Course Description

This course introduces students to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and the Acts of the Apostles. Special attention is devoted to appreciating the inter-relatedness of the gospels, the distinctive witness of each, and how Luke and Acts form one continuous narrative.

## Learning Objectives

Successful completion of this course will result in the following outcomes:

- **Identify** the distinctive ways in which each evangelist narrates the life of Jesus and presents his teaching
- **Understand** the synoptic problem and its implications for reading and interpreting Matthew, Mark, and Luke
- **Appreciate** how the theology of each gospel contributes to the faith of the church

## Materials and Access

We will be referencing the second (2017) edition of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (JANT) throughout the course. You need to have access to the notes and essays of this volume in order to fully participate in the course.

## Coursework and Grading Procedures

There are two types of graded coursework, each of which will contribute to your final grade.

- **Quizzes (30%):** Each module of the course is accompanied by a quiz worth 2.5% of your overall course grade (2.5 x 12 modules = 30%). The questions are objective rather than interpretive and are designed to assess your understanding of key concepts of the module lecture and major elements of the reading. Quiz study guides can be found on the course management page. **Quiz study guides accompany each module of the course management page.**
- **Forum Posts (48%):** The central learning activity of the course is online interaction with your peers. Each module contains a discussion prompt for you to reflect on and respond to. Discussion will be within small groups assigned by the facilitator and will be conducted in the forums on the course management page. Each set of forum posts is worth 4% of your overall course grade (4 x 12 weeks = 48%). **Forum posting guidelines are available on the “Resources” section of the course management page.**
- **Forum Summaries (21%):** One member of the group will be responsible for writing up a summary of the group’s discussion. Responsibility for writing the summary will rotate with each module so that each group member will write three summaries over the course of the semester. Each summary is worth 7% of your overall course grade (7 x 3 summaries = 21%). Please download the discussion guidelines from the “Resource Materials” tab at the bottom of the course management page and review them for expectations and grading standards. **Forum summary guidelines are available on the “Resources” section of the course management page.**

## Course Schedule

### PART ONE: The Gospel according to Mark

#### MODULE 1: Introduction

- **Listen:** Module 1 Lectures
- **Read:** *Dei Verbum*; Mark 1:1-15

- **Assess:** Module 1 Quiz
- **Discuss:** How does Mark 1:1-15 illustrate Saint Augustine’s dictum that “the books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the Gospel, acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament and in turn shed light on it and explain it” (*Dei Verbum*, Article 16)?

## **MODULE 2: From Galilee to Jerusalem**

- **Listen:** Module 2 Lectures
- **Read:** Mark 1:16-10:52
- **Assess:** Module 2 Quiz
- **Discuss:** Which “hearers of the word” within Mark 1:16-10:52 illustrate one of the four soil types described in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:14-20)? Explain your reasoning for each identification.

## **MODULE 3: From Temple to Tomb**

- **Listen:** Module 3 Lectures
- **Read:** Mark 11:1-16:20
- **Assess:** Module 3 Quiz
- **Discuss:** Extend your application of the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:14-20) to Mark 11:1-16:20. Do the dysfunctional soil types in the parable help us to analyze what happens in Jerusalem? How might the different endings of Mark be analyzed in terms of the parable?

# **PART TWO: The Gospel according to Matthew**

## **MODULE 4: A New Moses**

- **Listen:** Module 4 Lectures
- **Read:** Matthew 1:1-7:29
- **Assess:** Module 4 Quiz
- **Discuss:** How do the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) align the person praying with the types of people who belong to the kingdom (Matthew 5:3-12)? When we pray this prayer, are we praying for Beatitude?

## **MODULE 5: Scribes Trained for the Kingdom**

- **Listen:** Module 5 Lecture
- **Read:** Matthew 8:1-20:34
- **Assess:** Module 5 Quiz
- **Discuss:** Can Matthew’s narrative of the Twelve’s formation provide models (or principles) for the formation of ecclesial leaders today? Which aspects of this narrative (i.e., insertions expansions, relocations, deletions) do you find to be most valuable in this regard?

## **MODULE 6: A New David**

- **Listen:** Module 6 Lectures
- **Read:** Matthew 21:1-28:20
- **Assess:** Module 6 Quiz
- **Discuss:** How does the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46) align with the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11)? (How do the specific behaviors listed in the parable correspond to the dispositions that identify those who belong to the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount?)

# **PART THREE: The Gospel according to Luke**

## **MODULE 7: The Prophet of Liberation**

- **Listen:** Module 7 Lectures
- **Read:** Luke 1:1-9:50
- **Assess:** Module 7 Quiz

- **Discuss:** What can Luke’s portrayal of prophetic inspiration teach us about the church’s prophetic vocation? How does prayer fit into this (since most inspired persons in the story prophesy before, during, or after praying)?

### **MODULE 8: The Teacher of Mercy**

- **Listen:** Module 8 Lecture
- **Read:** Luke 9:51-19:28
- **Assess:** Module 8 Quiz
- **Discuss:** How does one of Luke’s unique parables (pick one of the ten to write about) illustrate the major themes of Jesus’ teaching in the Big Interpolation (Luke 9:51-19:58)?

### **MODULE 9: The Suffering and Ascendant Messiah**

- **Listen:** Module 9 Lecture
- **Read:** Luke 1:29-24:53
- **Assess:** Module 9 Quiz
- **Discuss:** What are the implications of the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-32) for how we proclaim the Gospel today, both to the faithful as well as to those who do not yet recognize Jesus to be the Christ?

## **PART FOUR: The Acts of the Apostles**

### **MODULE 10: The Birth of the Church**

- **Listen:** Module 10 Lecture
- **Read:** Acts 1:1-9:31
- **Assess:** Module 10 Quiz
- **Discuss:** How does Acts 1:1-9:31 illustrate the four “Marks of the Church” (one, holy, catholic, apostolic)?

### **MODULE 11: Israel and the Gentiles**

- **Listen:** Module 11 Lecture
- **Read:** Acts 9:32-15:41
- **Assess:** Module 11 Quiz
- **Discuss:** If the Holy Spirit declared avoidance of blood and strangled meat to be necessary for salvation (Acts 15), why does the Church no longer require this?

### **MODULE 12: From Jerusalem to Rome**

- **Listen:** Module 12 Lecture
- **Read:** Acts 16:1-28:31
- **Assess:** Module 12 Quiz
- **Discuss:** How might the ending of Acts be interpreted in light of the whole story of Luke-Acts?