

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

NT 624 Gospel of Mark (3 units) Fall, 2005

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Office Hours: By appointment (or drop by!)

Course meets Monday evenings, 6:00 – 9:00 pm, August 29 – Dec. 12, except September 5 (Labor Day) and 12 (professor out of town). Note that the class will meet October 10 (module week).

A. Objectives for the Course

1. To gain greater appreciation for the Gospel of Mark as a historical record, a literary document, and a theological interpretation of the significance of Jesus' life and teaching, death and resurrection.
2. To study key texts and themes in Mark's Gospel in order to determine the particular theological concerns of the writer of this Gospel.
3. To gain skills in interpreting the Bible.
4. To be motivated to greater faithfulness in following Jesus according to the discipleship norms advocated by Mark's Gospel.

Within the larger Seminary curriculum, this course aims to help Christians gain facility in interpreting Scripture, both for their own spiritual growth and so that they might be able to preach and teach the Scriptures with confidence, integrity and effectiveness. It is also designed to clarify biblical teaching on material that is central to Mark's Gospel (e.g. Christology, discipleship, the nature of the Reign of God, the passion and resurrection of Jesus, etc.)

B. Nature of the Course

Each class period will contain some input from the instructor and some class discussion and evaluation. Readings will supplement the material that is presented in class. Students will be expected to read textbooks and additional material as these will be assigned. Additional short reading assignments that may be made during the semester will count towards the total number of pages of assigned reading. After Nov. 24, students will be asked to do the final reading assignment (T. Geddert's commentary).

The interpretations given in class will not always match exactly the interpretations given in the literature. Students will be expected to read (and listen!) critically and exercise discernment as they reach their own personal convictions about the meaning of Mark's text and about the techniques by which that meaning can be uncovered.

The assignments are designed to help the students evaluate what they read and hear.

C. Textbooks for the Course

Required Reading:

Geddert, Tim. *Commentary on Mark*. (Believers Church Bible Commentary) Herald Press, 2001.
This commentary will be made available to students at a discounted price in time for the final reading assignment (after Nov. 24.) For those who already have access to this commentary, it is preferable to read it after November 24.

Swartley, Willard M. *Mark: The Way for all Nations*. Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Oregon, 1999.
Swartley does an inductive study of most of Mark (and mostly in textual order.) He has creative ideas for interpreting texts and creative ways of provoking the reader to consider them (even if they might not end up agreeing!) Swartley is convinced the central motif of Mark is "Mission". Since I think there are other more central motifs, I frequently disagree on minor points. But I have learned much from Swartley and agree with him often on his "interesting readings" and especially from his general inductive method.

Additional Recommended Books:

(a few copies may be available in the bookshop and all are available on reserve shelf in the library).

Anderson, Janice Capel and Moore, Stephen D. (eds.) *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

This book surveys the history of Markan interpretation and then looks in greater detail at five interpretative methods (Narrative, Reader-Response, Deconstructive, Feminist and Social Criticism). This book ranges from "pretty clear" to "pretty complicated" and also from "helpful" to "disturbing". Be prepared to read carefully, think carefully, and sift carefully between good biblical insight and serious scholarly heresy.

Fowler, Robert. *Let the Reader Understand*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991.

This book takes very seriously the literary techniques employed by Mark in writing his *narrative*. It pays attention to the "reading experience," noting the probable and/or intended effects of reading Mark's Gospel chronologically without taking into account the material not yet encountered in the Gospel. This is a fascinating book for those who believe that his agenda is worth pursuing (I do!). Though I disagree with Fowler on the narrative role of the disciples in Mark, I have learned a great deal from this book about how to read literature,

including Gospel literature. (Not very conservative!)

Juel, Donald H. *The Gospel of Mark*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.

This wonderful resource interprets a number of key texts and key themes in Mark's Gospel. It also helpfully discusses what "interpreting" a Gospel really means. And it does all this in less than 200 very readable pages.

Kingsbury, Jack D. *Conflict in Mark*. Minneapolis, PA: Fortress, 1989.

This book traces the main "story line" of Jesus through Mark's Gospel and then demonstrates how the "Jesus story" involves conflict both with the religious leaders and (often) Jesus' own often uncomprehending disciples. Kingsbury is a master of finding "narrative patterns". His book is "safer" than Juel and especially Anderson/Moore. You won't learn as much about interpretive method by reading this book, but you will get a good interpretation of some key themes in Mark.

Klassen, Steve. *Mark* (Word Wise Curriculum) Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000.

This is an adult education study guide, written to highlight the "discipleship training" which Mark presents and which can be used for Christian training today. A very straight-forward approach with concrete exercises and teaching ideas.

Other articles may also be made available by the instructor during the course.

D. Outline of the Course

August 29

MAIN FOCUS: Introduction to the Course and to the Gospel of Mark

- Introduction to the course and syllabus
- The nature of Gospel studies
- Introduction to the book of Mark

EXEGESIS: "The Beginning of the Gospel" (Mark 1:1-15)

- The Christology and the narrative strategy of Mark
- What is the Gospel of Jesus? (1:1)
- Jesus, the CHRIST and SON OF GOD (1:1)
- When does the Gospel begin? (1:1-3)
- Preparing the people and the Messiah (1:4-13)
- Preparing "The Way" (1:14-15)

September 5 NO CLASS - Labor Day Holiday

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September 12 NO CLASS - Professor. out of town.

September 19

MAIN FOCUS: Discipleship and Ministry

EXEGESIS: Mark 1:16-45 (and additional texts)

- The call of the disciples (1:16-20)
- A day of ministry (1:21-45)

September 26

MAIN FOCUS: Conflict with Judaism and Jesus' New Family

EXEGESIS: Mark 2:1 – 3:34 (possibly additional texts like 7:1-23 and 10:28-31)

October 3

MAIN FOCUS: The Kingdom of God in Mark

EXEGESIS: Mark 4:1-34 (and additional texts)

- “Parables of the Kingdom”
- The Kingdom of God in Mark
- The call to have “hearing ears”
- “Outsiders” and “Arounders”
- The function of secrecy in Mark

October 10

MAIN FOCUS: Miracles in the Gospel of Mark

EXEGESIS: Mark 4:35 – 5:43 (plus additional miracles in Mark)

- “Jesus the Miracle-Worker”
- Survey of the miracles in Mark

October 17

MAIN FOCUS: The Mysterious Meaning of the Feeding Miracles

EXEGESIS: selections from Mark 6:30 – 8:21

- ALSO: “Three lessons from a boat” (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21)

October 24

MAIN FOCUS: Jesus as Healer and Savior

EXEGESIS: Mark 5:1 – 8:26 (excluding material already covered)

- Exegesis of selected texts
- Persecution and Mission
- Jewish ceremonies and the inclusion of Gentiles
- Seeing eyes and hearing ears

October 31

MAIN FOCUS: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark

EXEGESIS: Mark 8:27 – 9:13

- Christology and the passion (8:27-33)
- The Meaning of cross-bearing (8:34-38)

- “Seeing the Kingdom having come with power” (9:1-13)

November 7

MAIN FOCUS: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark (con’t)

EXEGESIS: Mark 8:22 – 10:52 (excluding material already covered)

- “The Way” and the disciples’ misunderstanding
- Videotape of Alec McCowan reciting the Gospel of Mark. (or another evening!)

November 14

MAIN FOCUS: Conflict and Disaster in Jerusalem

EXEGESIS: Mark 11-12

- The triumphal entry and the rejection of the temple
- Conflict with Jewish Leaders

November 21

MAIN FOCUS: The “so-called” signs of the End times

EXEGESIS: Mark 13 and related texts.

- “Watching”
- Signs
- The relationship between the fall of the temple and the end of the age.
- “You do not know when”
- Eschatology and the Passion

November 28

MAIN FOCUS: The Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus

EXEGESIS: Mark 14-15

- Eschatology and the Passion (con’t)
- The trials of Jesus and Peter
- King of the Jews
- The meaning of Jesus’ death

December 5

MAIN FOCUS: The Resurrection and New Beginnings

EXEGESIS: Mark 16

- the authentic ending of Mark
- the meaning of Mark 16:1-8
- how should the Gospel end?

December 12

Everything else that we did not get done in time!

Plus: In this class students will share with each other what they learned working on their research projects.

Note: this is a tentative schedule and may be modified during the semester.

E. Assignments for the Course

Option One: Memorize the book of Mark!

- This option will be discussed in class, including suggestions concerning effective methods and alternative grading for the course. Please seriously consider this option! In the past few years about 15 students have memorized all or major parts of Mark.

Option Two: (A More Traditional Approach!)

Reading: Students are required to read the three textbooks according to the following schedule:

Swartley (ca 200 pages): by Sept. 26

Geddert (ca 400 pages): between Nov. 21 and Dec. 12.

These two books have a total of about 600 pages. Students are required to do additional reading, as will be assigned from time to time during the course, plus additional reading taken primarily from the recommended books listed above, to bring the total number of pages read to 1800 pages.

Due Date for all reading: Dec. 12 (please keep track of books and articles read, indicating date and number of pages read and submit this list Dec. 8)

Estimated time for all reading: 1800 pages = 36 hours

NOTE: Students are also encouraged to read through the Gospel of Mark at least once in one sitting, plus an additional time by reading material in preparation for each class session.

Writing:

1. Write a 2-page response to each of the two required texts plus to one book on the recommended reading list: **(15% of course grade)**

In your response, focus on the interpretation of Mark and/or on the methods of interpretation utilized. *Briefly* summarize the content of the book, then focus on key insights you have gained and critical responses in areas where you did not agree.

Due date: same as due date for reading.

Estimated time for this assignment: 6 pages = 9 hours

2. A research essay on one text or issue in Mark: **(60% of course grade)**

Assignment Requirements: Your paper should be approximately 15 pages in length, plus bibliography. You are encouraged to do your own inductive study of the text, but you are also required to research commentaries and articles on the text. Your bibliography should contain no less than 15 good sources and your writing should include about an equal number of appropriate references to the research that you have done (direct or indirect quotes, etc.).

Your paper should aim to interpret the text (or several texts related to one issue) and to carefully analyze the contribution of the text(s) you studied to larger issues in interpreting Mark (e.g. Christology, the nature of disciples, the meaning of the passion, etc.)

Topic Selection and Integration: In selecting your topic, you should keep in mind your own ministry goals and training needs. Work at areas that need to be strengthened. Work on a topic that contributes to your training for a specific ministry (e.g. study Jesus' communication methods, if you are training to preach; study Jesus' mentoring approach if you are working as a youth pastor; study Jesus' relationship to hurting people if you are training to be a counselor; study Mark's theology of the passion if you have theological questions about Jesus' death; etc.

Deadlines and Writing Stages: You are to submit your paper in three stages as follows:

- STAGE ONE: submit a one-page proposal for your paper to the prof. no later than **October 31** (E-mail is OK)
- STAGE TWO: submit your completed paper to the prof. on **December 5**. It must be submitted to the professor's by 6:00 pm (i.e. at the beginning of the class).
- STAGE THREE: distribute to the class a one-page summary of your paper to each person in the class on **December 12**. (During this last class you will share with the class what you wrote about and what you learned from the project.)

Estimated time: 15 pages = 30 hours plus 2 additional hours for proposal and summary (32)

3. A 5-page written careful response to the following statement: **(25% of course grade)**

“Mark’s Gospel is not merely a record of historical events. It is a literary work in which theological perspectives and even ‘hidden meanings’ are embedded in, but often not made explicit by, the narrative.”

- Indicate your agreement or disagreement
- If you agree, give examples of “subtle theological interpretations”
- If you disagree, provide alternative ways of assessing the material that is sometimes thought to support the above statement.
- In either case, point out some implications of either agreeing with or disagreeing with the statement given above.

Due Date: Dec. 12

Estimated time: 5 pages = 15 hours

Total estimated work load for the course: 92 hours (+ 39 hours class time = approx. recommended Seminary guideline for 3 unit course). Students who wish to take this course for fewer than 3 units should negotiate the appropriate workload with the professor.

F. Grading for the Course

Written Assignments:

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|--------------------------|------|
| - Three book responses | 15 % |
| - 15-page research paper | 60 % |
| - 5-page response paper | 25 % |

Grading:

Grading will be based on factors such as the following:

- appropriateness of topic and approach to the assignment
- comprehensiveness of relevant research
- logic and/or creativity of the presentation
- care and attention to accurate writing and typing
- form and style of the paper (title page, contents page, conformity to appropriate footnoting style, bibliography, etc.)

Note: A grade of “B+” should be considered a good grade. To achieve a grade higher than this, the paper needs to be especially good. If your grade is lower than this, I will explain how it could have been better. If you get a B+, please don’t ask “What was wrong with it?” The answer will be, “Nothing, or else you would have received a lower grade!”

Reading and Class Participation: Marks will be deducted from the above grade for reading not completed or not completed on time, and/or for inadequate attendance and participation. Please complete and submit the “assignment record sheet” attached to this syllabus.

G. Academic Policies

MBBS academic policies are described at www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies. These policies provide guidance regarding matters such as academic integrity and plagiarism, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and to follow them. You will be held responsible for following these policies. If you have questions about how these policies refer to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to the professor or consult the Registrar or Academic Dean.

H. Formatting specifications for research papers.

On questions of style and citation form, consult Carole Slade’s, *Form and Style: Research Papers, Reports, Theses*, 10th ed (or newer). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997 (or later). The preferred documentation format is the parenthetical citation style, either the MLA (pp. 210-34) or APA (pp. 235-60).

I. Bibliography

Standard commentaries include those by Achtemeier, Anderson, Cranfield, Evans, Geddert, Guelich, Gundry, Hurtado, Juel, Lane, Mann, Myers, Nineham, Schweizer, Taylor, and (for those who read German) Pesch. A number of monographs take into account advances in Markan research better than the commentaries do. See especially Ambrozic The Secret Kingdom; Rhoads and Michie Mark as Story; Williams Gospel Against Parable; and Fowler, Let the Reader Understand.

A helpful evaluation of scholarly work on Mark is to be found in books such as:

Best, Ernest: Mark the Gospel as Story, 1983.

Martin, R.P.: Mark: Evangelist and Theologian, 1972.

Matera, F.J.: What are They Saying About Mark? 1987.

More unorthodox interpretations of Mark are represented by Weeden: Mark--Tradition in Conflict; Kelber: The Kingdom in Mark; and McCowan: Personal Mark.

Studies and Commentaries on Mark's Gospel

Achtemeier, P.J. Mark. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.

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Ambrozic, A.M. The Hidden Kingdom. CBQMS 2 Washington DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1972.

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- Evans, Craig A. Mark 8:27-16:20. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.
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