

Course Syllabus

TRB2610 – Living Tradition I: Reading the Gospels and Acts

Trinity College

Toronto School of Theology

Fall (September to December) 2026

Instructor Information

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Course Identification

Number: TRB2610H
Title: Living Tradition I: Reading the Gospels and Acts
Delivery Formats: In person, online synchronous (Zoom), and online asynchronous
Classroom: Larkin 212
Class Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/trinitydivinity>
Class Times: Mondays 9am to 11am

Course Description

This course is a survey of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in their historical and religious background with attention to hermeneutics, the patristic exegetical heritage, canonical approaches, and modern biblical studies. The Gospels and Acts will be read in their entirety, along with other early Christian texts and literature from the same period, commentaries by church fathers and writings by scholars and theologians through to our day, as part of the Church's ongoing engagement with Scripture. Students will explore these texts as among the most important literature of first-century Judaism, examining them within the wider corpus of Second Temple Jewish writings. The course will introduce critical tools and methodological approaches which make exegesis possible, encountering modern historical-critical methods as well as critiques and alternatives offered from narrative and other post-critical approaches. Patristic, mediaeval, Reformation, and contemporary interpretations will be placed in productive dialogue, allowing these diverse perspectives to inform and interpret one another and effectively resource preaching and ministry today. Recent "within Judaism" scholarship will inform the course throughout.

This course is designed in coordination with a companion course, *Living Tradition II: Reading the Epistles and the Apocalypse*. Together, they offer a complementary exploration of the New Testament, attending to both the narrative witness of the Gospels and Acts and the theological articulation found in the Epistles and Revelation. **Students may begin with either course.**

Course Resources

Required Study Bibles

The following NRSVue study Bible is required for the course:

- The SBL Study Bible: Including Apocryphal and Deuterocanonical Books (HarperOne, 2023)

This is an updated version — including the updated edition of the NRSV as well as with revised notes and essays — of the following, which remains an adequate substitute for students who already own a copy or do not mind using the online edition:

- The Harper Collins Study Bible: Including Apocryphal and Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance (HarperOne, 2006) [\[available online through the TST library system\]](#)

Also required is the following NRSVue New Testament with verse-by-verse commentary by Jewish scholars to contextualise these writings within first-century Judaism:

- *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Third Edition), Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. (Oxford, 2026)

This latest edition should be procured, if possible, though the earlier second edition (2017) [\[available online through the TST library system\]](#) will suffice.

Please ensure you have these Bibles with you (in hard copy or online on your laptop or tablet) for all class sessions.

Required Theological Text

The following work will be used throughout the course to guide theological interpretation of the New Testament within the life of the Church:

- John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (SVS Press, 2006)

Core Companion Texts (Strongly Recommended)

The following book is just short of required, and weekly recommended readings from it are provided throughout the course:

- NT Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament and Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Zondervan Academic, 2019) [\[available online through the TST library system\]](#)

We will also be reading extensively from the following commentary:

- *The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary*, Esau McAuley, Janette Ok, Osvaldo Padilla, and Amy Peeler, eds. (IVP Academic, 2024) [\[available online through the TST library system\]](#)

In this course, these resources will be used particularly to:

- situate the Gospels and Acts within the historical, cultural, and religious world of first-century Judaism and the early church
- explore how the identity and mission of Jesus Christ are revealed through narrative, proclamation, and encounter
- engage contemporary interpretations of the Gospel and the life of the church in light of Scripture

Course Readings

Students who wish to explore particular areas in greater depth—such as historical context, patristic interpretation, or modern biblical scholarship—are encouraged to consult additional works.

Rather than requiring the purchase of further books, the course will provide targeted excerpts and articles via Quercus, selected to support weekly topics and assignments.

Students preparing research papers may also wish to consult commentaries, dictionaries, and other resources available through the TST library system. The Instruction and Theology Librarian of Trinity College will be visiting the class to present on these resources and may be consulted for any research queries.

Course Website

- Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/>

This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701>. Students who have trouble accessing Quercus should ask Sydney Yeung (divinity@trinity.utoronto.ca) for further help.

As in the classroom, online communication must be carried out respectfully and civilly at all times. Writing within the online media of blogs, discussion forums is not an excuse for laziness, lack of proper reflection or uncivility. Arguments must be carefully crafted, respectfully presented and grounded in source texts and solid reflection. Students who fail to adhere to these guidelines will not succeed in this course.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students successfully completing this course will be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes.

(A) IN RESPECT OF GENERAL ACADEMIC SKILLS

- to critically analyse and synthesise primary and secondary sources in order to prepare thoughtful contributions to class discussion and written work
- to apply and evaluate a range of interpretive methods and analytical tools within contemporary biblical scholarship
- to develop and deliver clear, well-structured seminar presentations, and facilitate informed and respectful academic discussion
- to construct a sustained exegetical argument in written form, demonstrating clarity of thought, effective use of sources, and coherent organisation

(B) IN RESPECT OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENT OF ONE OR MORE THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES

- to analyse selected passages from the Gospels and Acts in their historical, literary, and cultural contexts
- to explain how the New Testament emerges from and engages with Second Temple Jewish thought and practice
- to evaluate major approaches to New Testament interpretation, including historical-critical, canonical, patristic, and contextual methods
- to interpret New Testament texts in conversation with patristic sources and the wider ecclesial tradition.
- to integrate multiple interpretive lenses into a coherent exegetical argument grounded in both scholarly and theological reasoning
- to articulate a critically informed understanding of what it means to read Scripture within a “living tradition” in contemporary contexts

(C) IN RESPECT OF PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- to manage their own learning
- to demonstrate behaviour consistent with academic integrity and social responsibility

(D) IN RESPECT OF MINISTERIAL AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

- to demonstrate qualities and skills necessary for ministry, further study, and community involvement
- to exercise initiative, personal responsibility, and accountability in both personal and group contexts
- to work effectively with others

Evaluation

The final grade for the course will be based on the following areas:

Class Participation (15%)

This course is structured around close reading and discussion of primary (New Testament) and secondary texts. Students are expected to come to each session having completed the assigned readings and prepared to engage thoughtfully in discussion.

Weekly participation will be assessed on:

- regular attendance and preparedness
- the quality of contributions to discussion
- the ability to engage respectfully and constructively with others

Leading Discussion (10%)

As part of their participation, each student will take responsibility for leading a portion of one class session. Each discussion leader should identify a key passage from the assigned readings and guide discussion by drawing attention to its historical and literary context, its relationship to Second Temple Judaism, insights from the patristic or ecclesial tradition, and contemporary or contextual questions raised by the text.

In-person and synchronous online students will be given 5-6mins of class time in the assigned class for this discussion. Asynchronous students can submit a brief summary and discussion prompts for posting to the portal in that week.

Short Response and Patristic Commentary Analysis (25%)

Students will complete two short written assignments based on a selected New Testament passage:

- a brief initial response (300 words maximum) submitted in week 2 identifying key interpretive questions in the passage
- a 1,000-word (maximum) analytical essay engaging a patristic commentary on the same passage, to be submitted in Weeks 4–11, corresponding to the New Testament text studied in that week

The second assignment will be accompanied by a brief recorded presentation (8 minutes maximum) summarising the student's analysis.

Exegetical Study Paper (50%)

Students will write a 3,000-word (maximum) exegetical study of a New Testament passage of their choice. They may select the same passage engaged in the earlier assignments.

This paper will integrate historical, literary, theological, and contextual approaches to interpretation, and will serve as the capstone assignment for the course.

Students will also submit a brief recorded presentation (5 minutes maximum) summarising the main argument of their paper prior to the final class.

Detailed descriptions of these assignments are in the appendix of this syllabus.

Grading System

Letter Grade	Numerical Equivalents	Grade Point	Grasp of Subject Matter	Other qualities expected of students
A RANGE: Excellent: Student shows original thinking, analytic and synthetic ability, critical evaluations, and broad knowledge base.				
A+	90-100	4.0	Profound and Creative	Strong evidence of original thought, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound and penetrating critical evaluations which identify assumptions of those they study as well as their own; mastery of an extensive knowledge base
A	85-89	4.0	Outstanding	
A-	80-84	3.7	Excellent	Clear evidence of original thinking, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound critical evaluations; broad knowledge base
B RANGE: Good: Student shows critical capacity and analytic ability, understanding of relevant issues, familiarity with the literature.				
B+	77-79	3.3	Very Good	Good critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; good familiarity with the literature
B	73-76	3.0	Good	
B-	70-72	2.7	Satisfactory at a post-baccalaureate level.	Adequate critical capacity and analytic ability; some understanding of relevant issues; some familiarity with the literature
FZ	0-69	0	Failure	Failure to meet the above criteria

Please see the appropriate handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades (e.g. SDF, INC, etc).

Late work. Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of exam week for the semester in which the course is taught, whichever is sooner.

No penalties apply to students with documented medical or compassionate difficulties or exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness); students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with their faculty adviser or basic degree director, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor and request an SDF. The absolute deadline for obtaining an SDF for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of examination week, whichever is sooner. An SDF must be requested from the registrar's office in the student's college of registration no later than the last day of exam week in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. If a student has not completed work but has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be submitted calculating a zero for work not submitted.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted to ACORN. Grades are not official until they are posted to ACORN. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy found at: <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university->

[assessment-and-january-1-2020](#), policies found in the TST conjoint program handbooks, or college grading policy.

Standard TST Policies

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook* and the Graduate program Handbooks linked from <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2025>. A student who plagiarises in this course will be assumed to have read the document "Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing" published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges: <https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/>

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2025>.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of essays before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. Students should check utoronto email regularly for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

Email communication with the course instructor. The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for

students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

Policy Statement on Generative AI Tools for this Course

Generative AI represents a significant technological shift whose long-term effects on learning and theological thinking are still being debated. While these tools are now widely available, their use in theological education requires careful discernment. This policy aims to help you navigate these tools thoughtfully while prioritising the formation of your own theological capacities and critical thinking skills.

The goal of this course is not simply to produce polished written work, but to cultivate curiosity, critical thinking, theological reflection, and deep engagement with primary sources and lived experience. Any use of generative AI tools must support, not replace, this formative journey.

When AI Use May Support Learning

You may choose to use generative AI tools when they help you engage more deeply with course material, but only after you have begun your own theological work:

- Initial brainstorming to organise preliminary thoughts after you have already engaged with relevant theological sources
- Clarifying complex concepts to better understand readings, provided you then develop your own theological response to those concepts
- Research organisation to help map connections between sources you are already reading and analysing yourself
- Structural assistance in organising your thoughts, particularly if you have learning differences that affect writing organisation
- Language support for improving grammar, clarity, and coherence after you have developed and expressed your own theological arguments

When AI Use Undermines Learning

In order to support your learning journey, AI should not be used to bypass the intellectual and spiritual struggles that build theological understanding:

- Generating theological arguments without your own prior engagement with source materials
- Producing counterarguments or alternative perspectives without first wrestling with opposing viewpoints yourself
- Using AI to simulate intellectual processes (such as considering multiple perspectives or analysing texts) rather than developing these capacities
- Summarising readings you haven't actually read and grappled with yourself
- Creating content about theological ideas you haven't personally wrestled with
- Producing substantial portions of final drafts without demonstrating your own understanding of the material

A Note on Confidence and Formation

Be mindful that over-reliance on AI tools may undermine confidence in your own theological thinking abilities. The struggle of working through complex ideas independently—while often difficult—is itself formative for developing as a theological thinker. If you find yourself feeling less capable or more

anxious about your own thinking when using these tools, this may be a sign to step back and focus on developing your own capacities first.

Assessment and Accountability

Rather than policing AI use through detection software, this course emphasises authentic forms of engagement:

- Oral discussions about your engagement with primary sources as well as your own written work will be a regular part of the learning process
- Reflection assignments will ask you to explain your research journey and thinking development
- You will be expected to demonstrate genuine familiarity with the sources and ideas in your written work through class discussion and follow-up questions

Decisions about appropriate AI use will consider your specific learning context. Students with learning accommodations may find certain AI applications particularly helpful for accessing course content. If you're uncertain whether a particular use case supports or undermines your learning goals, please discuss it with your instructor.

Important Considerations

You remain fully responsible for your learning and the theological positions you develop. Unlike language, culture, or theological tradition—which are integral to human communication and thinking—AI tools are commercial products designed for profit, not educational goals or human flourishing. Their use is a choice that should be made deliberately based on educational value.

Please note that AI tools are not vetted by the university and might not meet university guidelines for privacy, intellectual property, security, accessibility, and records retention. They may produce inaccurate information or false citations, and are subject to service changes without notice.

Ethical Considerations

Your use of AI tools in this course should align with broader ethical principles that reflect Christian values and care for creation. Consider these dimensions when deciding whether and how to use AI:

Human Dignity and Flourishing: Does your use of AI support or undermine human dignity? Avoid uses that devalue human creativity, expertise, or the inherent worth of intellectual struggle. Consider whether your AI use might contribute to the devaluation of human skill and thoughtful work more broadly.

Authentic Relationships: AI tools can create an illusion of relationship or understanding that lacks the authenticity central to Christian community. Be transparent about AI use to avoid inadvertent deception, and ensure that AI does not substitute for genuine engagement with classmates, instructors, or theological conversation partners.

Care for Creation: AI systems have significant environmental costs, including substantial energy consumption and fresh water usage for data centre cooling. Consider whether your use serves a purpose significant enough to justify these environmental costs. Ask yourself: Is this use necessary or merely convenient? Could I accomplish this task through less resource-intensive means?

Justice and Equity: Be aware that AI development often involves exploitation of labour in the Global South, mining of rare earth minerals on Indigenous lands without consent, and unequal distribution of both benefits and environmental costs. The communities most harmed by AI's environmental impact often have the least access to its benefits. Consider how your use participates in or challenges these systems of inequality.

Responsible Stewardship: When you do use AI tools, minimise environmental impact by:

- Using smaller, task-specific models when possible rather than large general-purpose models
- Crafting precise prompts to avoid unnecessary back-and-forth
- Reusing generated content rather than regenerating similar material
- Batching multiple questions into single requests
- Considering whether existing resources (open educational resources and materials licensed under creative commons, or previously created content) could serve your needs

The Bottom Line

Most importantly, over-reliance on these tools will almost certainly prevent you from developing the deep theological reflection and critical thinking skills you'll need as a minister, scholar, lay church leader, or thoughtful Christian. The formation of theological wisdom requires personal engagement with Scripture, tradition, and contemporary questions—work that cannot be delegated to any tool or technology.

Course Schedule

Readings Legend

- **JANT** = *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Third Edition), Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. (Oxford, 2026)
Page numbers are given first according to the Third Edition. Second Edition page numbering is marked after each entry in *red italics*.
- **NTIW** = NT Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament and Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Zondervan Academic, 2019)
- **NTIC** = *The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary*, Esau McAuley, Janette Ok, Osvaldo Padilla, and Amy Peeler, eds. (IVP Academic, 2024)

The course is structured to move from foundational questions of interpretation to sustained engagement with the Gospels and Acts, culminating in a synthetic account of reading Scripture within the life of the Church.

COURSE PART I — FOUNDATIONS OF READING (Weeks 1–3)

WEEK 1 — What is the New Testament? What is “Living Tradition”?

Themes

- Scripture as a unified witness to Christ
- Reading “from the end”: the cross and resurrection as interpretive key
- Canon, authority, and the formation of Scripture
- The New Testament as proclamation within the Church

New Testament

- Luke 24
- John 20

Required Readings

- John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ*: Preface and “Through the Cross” (chapter 1)

Recommended Readings

- NTIW, “Introduction to reading the New Testament” (pp 38-85), “Textual criticism of the New Testament” (pp 850-865), and “The canonisation of the New Testament” (pp 866-875)
- JANT, Prefaces
- NTIC, “Introduction” (pp 8-13)

WEEK 2 — The New Testament within Judaism

Themes

- Second Temple Judaism as the matrix of the New Testament
- Messianic expectation, Temple, and covenant
- Genealogy, identity, and fulfilment
- Continuity and tension between early Christianity and Judaism

New Testament

- Matthew 1–2, 5–7
- Luke 1–2
- Mark 7

Required Readings

- JANT: AJ Levine, “Bearing False Witness: Common Errors about Early Judaism” (pp 650–655 / **501-504**), Martin Goodman, “Jewish History, 331 BCE – 135 CE” (pp 658-665 / **507-513**), Daniel Schwartz, “Jewish Movements in the New Testament Period” (pp 694-703 / **526-530**), David Levenson, “Messianic Movements” (pp 706-716 / **530-535**)
- JANT commentary on Matthew 1-2, 5-7 / Luke 1-2 / Mark 7

Recommended Readings

- JANT: Shaye Cohen, “Judaism and Jewishness” (pp 668-672 / **513-515**), Jonathan Klawans, “The Law” (pp 748-752 / **515-518**), Maxine Grossman, “The Dead Sea Scrolls” (pp 809-813 / **569-572**)
- NTIW: “The world of Jesus and the early church” (pp 86-170)
- NTIC commentary on Matthew 1-2, 5-7 / Luke 1-2 / Mark 7

WEEK 3 — Methods: Historical, Narrative, and Patristic Reading

Themes

- Historical-critical approaches (source, form, and redaction criticism) and their limits
- Narrative and literary approaches to the Gospels
- Patristic exegesis and theological reading
- Scripture as interpreted within the life of the Church
- Is this a *method* or a *way of seeing*?

New Testament

- Mark 1–8
- Selected Synoptic Parallels:
 - Baptism of Jesus: Mark 1:9–11 / Matthew 3:13–17 / Luke 3:21–22
 - Calling of the first disciples: Mark 1:16–20 / Matthew 4:18–22 / Luke 5:1–11
 - Healing of a paralytic: Mark 2:1–12 / Matthew 9:1–8 / Luke 5:17–26
 - Parable of the sower: Mark 4:1–20 / Matthew 13:1–23 / Luke 8:4–15
 - Feeding of the 5,000: Mark 6:30–44 / Matthew 14:13–21 / Luke 9:10–17
 - Peter’s confession: Mark 8:27–30 / Matthew 16:13–20 / Luke 9:18–21

Required Readings

- Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*: “The Rationale of a Canonical Approach” (pp 34–47) and “Methodology of Canonical Exegesis” (pp 48–53)
- John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ*: “Search the Scriptures” (chapter 2)
- St John Chrysostom, “Homily 1 on the Gospel of Matthew”

Recommended Readings

- Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: "The Canon as an Historical and Theological Problem"* (pp 16-33)
- NTIW: "The New Testament as literature" (pp 60-74) and "Study of the historical Jesus" (pp 172-186)

COURSE PART II — THE FOURFOLD GOSPEL (Weeks 4–8)

WEEK 4 — Matthew: Jesus and Israel

Themes

- Fulfilment of Scripture and the Law
- Jesus as the new Moses and teacher of righteousness
- Kingdom of heaven and covenant identity
- Continuity and transformation within Israel
- Student-led discussion of passages from Matthew

New Testament

- Matthew (entirety)

Required Readings

- JANT: Aaron Gale, "The Gospel according to Matthew" (introduction and commentary)
- JANT: David Stern, "Midrash and Parables in the New Testament" (pp 841-844 / **565-569**)

Recommended Readings

- NTIW: "Gospel of Matthew" (pp 578-603)
- JANT: Martha Himmelfarb, "Afterlife and Resurrection" (pp 801-805 / **549-551**)
- NTIC commentary on Matthew

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- Matthew 1 (St Jerome)
- Matthew 5.1-16 (St John Chrysostom)
- Matthew 5.14, 6.1 (St Augustine)
- Matthew 7.1-20 (St John Chrysostom)
- Matthew 11.2-19 (St Augustine)
- Matthew 22.1-14 (Origen)

WEEK 5 — Mark: Narrative and Discipleship

Themes

- The "messianic secret" and hidden identity
- Discipleship, misunderstanding, and failure
- Suffering and the way of the cross
- Urgency and narrative movement
- Student-led discussion of passages from Mark

New Testament

- Mark (entirety)

Required Readings

- JANT: Lawrence Wills, "The Gospel according to Mark" (introduction and commentary)

Recommended Readings

- NTIW: "Gospel of Mark" (pp 554-576) and "Jesus and the victory of God: Profile and praxis of a prophet & Who did Jesus think he was?" (pp 188-240)
- JANT: Geza Vermes, "Jewish Miracle Workers in the Late Second Temple Period" (pp 794-797 / **536-537**)
- NTIC commentary on Mark

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- Mark 1 (St Bede the Venerable)
- Mark 9 (St Bede the Venerable)
- Mark 14 (St Bede the Venerable)

WEEK 6 — Luke I: Narrative, Structure, and Margins

Themes

- Salvation history and narrative unfolding
- Reversal: the poor, the outsider, and the marginal
- The role of the Temple and continuity with Israel
- Mercy, justice, and divine compassion
- How does narrative reveal Christ?
- Student-led discussion of passages from Luke 1-12

New Testament

- Luke 1–12

Required Readings

- JANT: Amy-Jill Levine, "The Gospel according to Luke" (introduction and commentary on Luke 1-12)
- John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: "For This We Were Created"* (chapter 3)

Recommended Readings

- NTIW: "Gospel of Luke" (pp 604-627)
- JANT: Michael Fagenblat, "The Concept of Neighbour in Jewish and Christian Ethics" (pp 731-736 / **540-543**)
- NTIC commentary on Luke 1-12

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- Luke 2:1-7 (St Cyril of Alexandria)
- Luke 4:1-13 (Origen)
- Luke 8:4-15 (St Gregory the Great)

WEEK 7 — Luke II: Passion, Resurrection, and Transition

Themes

- The necessity of the Passion (“it was necessary...”)
- Resurrection as the opening of Scripture
- Recognition and revelation (Emmaus)
- Transition from Gospel to Church (Luke to Acts)
- Student-led discussion of passages from Luke 13-24

New Testament

- Luke 13-24

Required Readings

- JANT: Amy-Jill Levine, “The Gospel according to Luke” (commentary on Luke 13-24)

Recommended Readings

- NTIW: “Jesus and the victory of God: The death of the Messiah” (pp 242-262)
- NTIC commentary on Luke 13-24
- Peter Scaer, “The Glorious Dying of the Son: The Gospel of Luke and Jesus’s Noble Death” from *Touchstone*

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- Luke 18:31-43 (St Gregory the Great)

WEEK 8 — John I: Signs and Identity

Themes

- Signs as revelation of Christ’s identity
- Belief, misunderstanding, and response
- Symbolism and theological narrative
- Festivals, Temple, and fulfilment
- Does John contradict the Synoptic Gospels?
- Who are the *Ioudaioi*?
- Student-led discussion of passages from John 1-12

New Testament

- John 1-12

Required Readings

- JANT: Adele Reinhartz, “The Gospel according to John” (introduction and commentary on John 1-12)
- JANT: Daniel Boyarin, “Logos, a Jewish Word: John’s Prologue as Midrash” (pp 791-794 / 546-549)

Recommended Readings

- NTIW: “Gospel of John” (pp 648-678) and “Making of the Gospels” (pp 680-700)
- JANT: Joshua Garroway, “Ioudaios” (pp 691-694 / 524-526)

- NTIC commentary on John 1-12

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- John 3:11-16 (St John Chrysostom)
- John 5:25-29 (St Augustine)
- John 10:1-11 (St Cyril of Alexandria)

WEEK 9 — John II: Glory, Cross, and Resurrection

Themes

- The cross as glorification
- Love, unity, and divine life
- Birth of the Church (water, blood, Spirit)
- Knowing Christ through death and resurrection
- What does it mean to *know* Christ?
- Why is the cross *glory*?
- Student-led discussion of passages from John 13-21

New Testament

- John 13-21

Required Readings

- JANT: Adele Reinhartz, “The Gospel according to John” (commentary on John 13-21)
- John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: “The Virgin Mother”* (chapter 4) and “Glorify God in Your Body” (chapter 5)

Recommended Readings

- NTIW: “The New Testament as theology” (pp 76-84)
- NTIC commentary on John 13-21

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- John 21:1-14 (St Gregory the Great)

COURSE PART III — ACTS & THE LIVING CHURCH (Weeks 10–12)

WEEK 10 — Acts I: Scripture, Spirit, and Community

Themes

- Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit
- Scripture proclaimed in light of Christ (Scripture being *used*, not *analysed*)
- Formation of the apostolic community
- Worship, fellowship, and common life
- Student-led discussion of passages from Acts 1-7

New Testament

- Acts 1–7

Required Readings

- JANT: Gary Gilbert, "Acts of the Apostles" introduction and commentary on Acts 1-7

Recommended Readings

- Mark Kinzer, *Jerusalem Crucified, Jerusalem Risen: The Resurrected Messiah, the Jewish People, and the Land of Promise*: "Introduction: Jesus, Israel, and the Prophetic Euangelion" (introduction) and "The Resurrected Messiah and Jerusalem" (chapter 1)
- Cyprian Hutcheon, "God Is With Us: The Temple in Luke-Acts," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*
- NTIW: "Acts of the Apostles" (pp 628-646)
- NTIC commentary on Acts 1-7

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- Acts 2:1-47 (St Bede the Venerable)

WEEK 11 — Acts II: Inclusion, Conflict, and Discernment

Themes

- Expansion beyond Israel (Samaria, Gentiles)
- Crisis and discernment (Jerusalem Council)
- Identity, law, and belonging
- Authority and decision-making in the Church
- Mission to the nations
- Student-led discussion of passages from Acts 8-20

New Testament

- Acts 8–20

Required Readings

- JANT: Gary Gilbert, "Acts of the Apostles" commentary on Acts 8-20

Recommended Readings

- NTIW: "Story of Paul's life and ministry" (pp 336-364)
- NTIC commentary on Acts 8-20

Patristic Commentaries (Recorded Student Presentations)

- Acts 10:1-33 (St Augustine)
- Acts 17:16-34 (St Augustine)

WEEK 12 — Acts III: Mission and the Church in the World / Synthesis: What Is Living Tradition?

Themes

- Cultural encounter and adaptation
- Witness, suffering, and perseverance
- The Church in relation to empire
- Student-led discussions of passages from Acts 21-28

Review and Synthesis

- Scripture as the living Word in the Church
- Christ as the centre and fulfilment of Scripture
- Continuity and development of interpretation
- Reading Scripture faithfully today

New Testament

- Acts 21–28
- Luke 24 (revisited)
- John 20–21 (revisited)

Required Readings

- JANT: Gary Gilbert, “Acts of the Apostles” commentary on Acts 21-28
- John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: “A Premodern Faith for a Postmodern Era”* (postscript)

Recommended Readings

- NTIC commentary on Acts 21-28

Please note that this syllabus is subject to change in accordance with the regulations in the TST *Basic Degree Handbook*.

Assignment Details: Class Participation (15%)

This course is structured around close reading and discussion of primary (New Testament) and secondary texts. Students are expected to come to each session having completed the assigned readings and prepared to engage thoughtfully in discussion.

Participation will be assessed on:

- regular attendance and preparedness
- the quality of contributions to discussion
- the ability to engage respectfully and constructively with others

Rationale

This component of the course is intended to develop the ability to read Scripture in a way that is attentive, critical, and theologically responsible. In particular, it encourages students to:

- resist reductionist readings (whether purely historical or purely personal)
- hold together multiple dimensions of interpretation in creative tension
- begin to make informed theological judgments about the meaning of the text

Participation Guidance

You may positively affect your participation grade by:

1. Attending class and actively participating in a meaningful way
2. Preparing for each class
3. Making effective comments that raise overall level of discussion (comments that are off-task and disruptive will negatively affect your grade)
4. Assisting and helping other classmates during active class work and staying on task
5. Asking thoughtful questions that will enhance discussion and engage peers
6. Asking questions when you don't understand or would like a second explanation (often there are others who will benefit as well)
7. Listening carefully to, supporting, and engaging your peers in discussion (this will improve others' learning experiences and your own)
8. Taking care never to make negative, offensive, and/or disrespectful comments during discussion
9. Being respectful and kind towards every person in the class

Assignment Details: Leading Discussion (10%)

As part of their participation, each student will take responsibility for leading a portion of one class session. Each discussion leader should identify a key passage from the assigned readings and guide discussion by drawing attention to:

- its historical and literary context
- its relationship to Second Temple Judaism
- insights from the patristic or ecclesial tradition
- contemporary or contextual questions raised by the text

The goal is not to cover everything exhaustively, but to help the class see how different approaches to interpretation illuminate the text and raise new questions. Discussion leaders are encouraged to help the class attend to how these different lenses both illuminate and challenge one another.

Assignment Details: Short Response

Due: Week 2

Purpose

This brief assignment serves as an initial diagnostic exercise. It is designed to help you begin engaging a New Testament passage closely and to identify how you instinctively approach the interpretation of Scripture. It will also form the starting point for your ongoing work in the course, as you will continue working with the same passage for the patristic commentary essay (and perhaps for the exegetical study paper).

Instructions

Choose one passage from the list provided. In no more than 300 words, offer an initial response that:

- identifies one central theme, question, or tension in the passage
- offers a provisional interpretation of the text
- reflects briefly on how at least one of the following lenses might shape your reading:
 - historical context
 - Jewish context
 - the interpretive tradition of the Church
 - contemporary context

This is an informal but focused exercise. You are not expected to do any external research at this stage. Instead, attend carefully to the text itself and to your own initial observations, questions, and assumptions.

Guiding Prompts (Optional)

You may find the following prompts helpful in shaping your response. Select one or two in order to remain focused:

- What is a central theme or tension in this passage?
- What questions does this passage raise for you?
- What assumptions are you bringing to the text?
- What aspects of the historical or cultural context do you think would be important to understand more fully?
- How might this passage be read within the life of the Church?
- What connections do you see with other New Testament passages?
- What elements of the passage resonate with or challenge your own experience?

Evaluation

This assignment will be graded on a pass/fail basis. You will receive brief comments intended to guide your development in subsequent assignments.

Rationale

This exercise is meant to establish a baseline for your work in the course. Over time, you will revisit this passage using additional tools, methods, and perspectives, allowing you to reflect on how your interpretation develops.

Assignment Details: Patristic Commentary Analysis (25%)

Due: Weeks 4–11 (aligned with the assigned New Testament text)

Presentation: 8-minute recorded audio or video submission

Purpose

This assignment asks you to engage a patristic commentary as an example of Scripture being read within the life of the Church. Building on your initial response paper, you will analyse how an early Christian author interprets your chosen passage and assess the strengths and limitations of that approach.

The goal is not simply to summarise the commentary, but to recognise and evaluate a distinct mode of reading Scripture—one that integrates exegesis, theology, and pastoral concern.

Instructions

Refer to the assigned patristic commentary on the same passage you chose for your short response paper.

In no more than 1,000 words, write an argumentative essay that:

- identifies and defends a clear thesis about the patristic interpretation
- analyses the exegetical strategies employed by the author (this is required)
- situates the reading within its theological framework
- engages in comparison with modern approaches to interpretation
- offers a critical assessment of the commentary's enduring value

Your essay should be written in continuous prose (not bullet points) and should move well beyond summary.

Key Areas of Analysis

Your essay should address, in an integrated way:

1. Exegetical Strategy (required)

- How does the author interpret the passage?
- What methods are employed (e.g., literal, figural, moral, typological)?

2. Theological Framework

- What assumptions about Christ, Scripture, and the Church shape this reading?
- What does the author understand the passage to reveal about Christ?

3. Context and Genre

- What is the genre of the commentary (e.g., homily, treatise, pastoral reflection)?
- Who is the intended audience, and how does this shape the interpretation?

4. Comparison with Modern Approaches

- Where does this reading differ from historical-critical or other modern methods?
- Where might it converge with them?

5. Critical Reflection

- What does this patristic reading illuminate that modern approaches may overlook?
- What questions or limitations remain?

These areas should not be addressed as a checklist, but woven together into a coherent argument.

Integration of Course Resources

Your essay should make explicit reference to:

- The *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (at least once)
- A modern scholarly perspective (e.g., *The New Testament in Its World* or SBL Study Bible notes)
- A theological perspective (e.g., *The Mystery of Christ* or equivalent)

These references should support your analysis, not simply be appended.

Presentation Component

You will submit an 8-minute recorded presentation (audio or video) summarising your argument.

In your presentation, you should clearly address the question: *Why does this patristic reading still matter—or not—for the Church today?*

You may read your essay or present a more informal summary, but clarity and focus are essential.

Submission Timing

The written essay and presentation are due before the class session in which the relevant New Testament text is discussed (Weeks 4–11).

Rationale

This assignment marks a shift from initial observation to analytical and comparative work. It prepares you to:

- engage deeply with the Church's interpretive tradition
- evaluate differing approaches to Scripture
- develop a more self-aware and theologically grounded practice of exegesis

Model and Rubric

Please refer to the assignment information on Quercus for a model patristic commentary and a detailed grading rubric.

Assignment Details: Exegetical Study (50%)

Due: End of term

Presentation: 5-minute recorded audio or video summary

Purpose

This paper is the capstone assignment for the course. It asks you not simply to explain a New Testament passage, but to demonstrate what it means to read that passage faithfully, critically, and within a living tradition.

Building on your earlier assignments, you will produce a polished scholarly essay that integrates the major interpretive lenses and exegetical tools introduced during the term. The goal is not to choose one method over another, but to bring historical, Jewish, patristic, ecclesial, and contemporary perspectives into thoughtful and critical conversation.

Passage Selection

You will write on a New Testament passage of your choice, which can be the same passage selected for the short response and patristic commentary analysis.

Instructions

Write a 3,000-word (maximum) exegetical study that presents a clear thesis, engages substantial outside research, and offers a well-argued interpretation of your passage.

Your essay should demonstrate:

- close attention to the biblical text itself
- substantial engagement with modern scholarship and ancient sources
- awareness of the historical, literary, and theological dimensions of interpretation
- a coherent and persuasive argument, not simply a collection of observations

The strongest papers will move beyond description and comparison to show how different interpretive approaches illuminate, challenge, and refine one another.

Required Structure

Your paper should include the following elements, woven into a coherent argument:

1. Historical and Literary Context

Situate the passage within its literary setting, historical context, and larger argument or narrative. Attend to structure, key themes, and major exegetical questions.

This section should engage resources such as:

- the SBL Study Bible
- *The New Testament in Its World*
- other modern scholarly works as appropriate

2. The New Testament within Judaism

Examine how the passage participates in the world of Second Temple Judaism. Consider its relation to Jewish Scripture, themes, institutions, expectations, and interpretive traditions.

This section should engage:

- *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*

- other relevant Jewish or Second Temple materials where appropriate

3. Patristic and Ecclesial Interpretation

Analyse how the passage has been interpreted within the tradition of the Church, especially through one or more patristic sources. Consider what theological assumptions about Christ, Scripture, and the Church shape this reading.

This section should engage:

- patristic commentary
- theological reflection such as John Behr or equivalent sources where appropriate

4. Contemporary and Contextual Interpretation

Engage at least one contemporary reading of the passage that raises questions of context, social location, lived experience, or ecclesial application.

This section should engage:

- *The New Testament in Color*
- or another approved contemporary contextual source

5. Synthesis: Reading within Living Tradition

This is the most important part of the paper. Bring the preceding sections into conversation and address the question: *What does it mean to read this passage faithfully today?*

This final section should not merely summarise the paper. It should identify tensions as well as convergences, show how the different lenses inform one another, and make a clear theological claim about the interpretation of the text.

Possible Approaches

There is no single correct way to frame the paper, provided that it remains scholarly, focused, and integrative. Depending on your passage and interests, you may choose to emphasise questions such as:

- How has the passage been interpreted from antiquity to the present, and what does that reception history reveal?
- How do patristic and modern approaches differ in their assumptions and aims?
- How do Orthodox, Anglican, or other ecclesial readings of the text compare?
- How has the passage functioned liturgically, doctrinally, or pastorally?
- How does attention to Jewish context alter or deepen interpretation?
- How do contemporary contextual readings illuminate dimensions of the text that other approaches may overlook?

These are suggestions only. You are welcome to develop your own approach, or to combine several of these lines of inquiry, so long as the paper remains coherent and argumentative.

Expectations

A successful paper will:

- present a clear thesis from the outset
- integrate multiple interpretive lenses rather than treating them as separate mini-essays
- engage sources critically rather than simply summarising them
- identify genuine tensions or differences between approaches
- move toward theological and exegetical insight, not just description

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Common weaknesses in this assignment include:

- treating the paper as four disconnected sections
- delaying the real argument until the conclusion
- summarising scholarship without analysis
- reducing Jewish context to background only
- forcing all approaches into superficial agreement
- rushing or under-developing the final synthesis

The strongest papers will be those that see most clearly, not those that simply say the most.

Research Milestones

To support the development of the final paper:

- In Week 8, you will submit a proposed topic along with a minimum of five scholarly sources for feedback.
- In Week 10, you will submit a thesis statement and essay outline.

Presentation Component

Before the final class, you will submit a 5-minute recorded presentation (audio or video) summarising the main argument and findings of your paper.

Model and Rubric

Please refer to the assignment information on Quercus for a model outline for an exegetical study paper and a detailed grading rubric.