Gospels

Lectures by

Robert J. Cara, Ph.D.

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Virtual Campus
The Virtual Campus of Reformed Theological Seminary offers students the convenience of home study with the quality of on-campus instruction. This course is based on classroom lectures using the GUIDE approach to learning.

Each lesson contains the following:

**Getting Started**  To prepare adequately for each lesson, a reading assignment and recording are listed.

**Understanding**  To maximize student learning, the purpose and objectives for the lesson are given.

**Investigating**  To integrate readings, the recordings, and the outline, students are encouraged to notate information in a manner that will prove beneficial for study and examination. The study guide allows space for notetaking to expand the outline.

**Developing**  To further develop the concepts presented, suggested readings and applications are offered.

**Evaluating**  To help students summarize and synthesize the material covered, study questions are provided.
Syllabus

Outline

Study Guide I,
Lessons 1-19

Study Guide II,
Lessons 20-34
COURSE SYLLABUS
Gospels, 0NT508, 3 hours
Dr. Robert Cara
Reformed Theological Seminary, Virtual

Professor
Dr. Robert J. Cara is Professor of New Testament at RTS-Charlotte and Chief Academic Officer for the RTS institution. Dr. Cara was an engineer for seven years before the Lord re-directed him toward seminary. In addition to the traditional New Testament topics, Dr. Cara’s academic interests include relating the New Testament to Reformed Theology, creeds, hermeneutics, creation, and narrative criticism. His commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians was recently published with Evangelical Press. As an ordained minister in the ARP Church, Dr. Cara has been very involved at both the presbytery and synod levels. He is a former vice-moderator of the denomination and for several years was the chairman of the denominational Inter-Church Relations Committee. He preaches regularly in the Charlotte area.

Course Description
Attention is given to each writer’s literary art, theological teaching, pastoral purpose, and message for today’s church and world.

Course Objectives
The over arching aim is to provide tools to the student in order that one might better interpret the Gospels to one’s self, the church, and the world.

• Learn the narrative content of the Gospels.
• Learn the major biblical-theological categories in the Gospels along with methodology to do further biblical-theological interpretation.
• Learn the best of Reformed & evangelical scholarship concerning the interpretation and application of the Gospels (e.g., parable theory).
• Learn enough about critical views to:
  1) Utilize common grace insights in critical commentaries.
  2) Provide an intelligent global critique of critical theories.

Required Textbooks
Holy Bible (Read each gospel twice)
COURSE REQUIREMENTS
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Online Student Handbook
The Online Student Handbook is a guide that contains information for participation in this course. Needed forms may be downloaded and printed from this handbook. You will find it located at the RTS/Virtual website.

Summary of Requirements
* Complete lessons, reading assignments, and listen to audio lectures.
* Participate in online discussion forums.
* Research paper.
* Midterm exam and final exam.
* Mentor report or course application paper.

Required Readings (10%)
Reading assignments are broken down week by week within the Virtual Classroom. As an assignment, the student will be asked to report the percentage of reading they have completed in the Virtual Classroom. The student will receive credit according to the percentage of reading completed.

Forum Discussion (10%)
The student is to participate in forum discussions in the Virtual Classroom. The student must respond to the four Topical Discussion Questions. The student may pose questions of their own to the Professor regarding either the research paper topic or course content in the Student to Professor forum. The student must then post five interactions with fellow students in the Student to Student forum.

Midterm Exam and Final Exam (25% each, 50% total)
There will be two exams for this course; the midterm covers Lessons 1-19 and the final covers Lessons 20-34. Many of the questions are closely related to the “Lecture Review Questions” and “Reading Questions” (see “Developing” and “Evaluating” in each lesson of the Study Guide). Others will be miscellaneous questions from lectures and all readings. Outlines will also appear on both exams. The exams will be 3 hours long and completely closed book. A proctor is required for this exam (cannot be a family member or someone else taking this course).

Research Paper (25%)
A research paper is required for this course. For more information and guidelines regarding the research paper, please see the relevant pages below.
Mentor Report/Course Application Paper (5%)
Each MA Distance student is required to have his mentor submit a report at the end of the course. This report will contribute to 5% of the student’s grade. For students who are not registered in the MA program, you are asked to write a 200 word summary of how you perceive what you have learned in this course will fit into the objectives you have for your ministry, your educational goals, or other objectives you wish to achieve in life.

Assignments
Best practice for your time management is for you to submit all assignments at the end of the week in which they fall in the Virtual Classroom, using the upload links provided. All work must be submitted by midnight of the course end date, per your course start letter. You are responsible for turning in all assignments on time. No late submissions are permitted. Any student who needs an extension must get approval from the Registrar prior to that time.

Contact Information
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Lesson 1
   Class Introduction

Lesson 2
   Theological Categories

Lesson 3
   Mini-Hermeneutics

Lesson 4
   Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 5
   Matthew 1-2: Jesus’ Genealogy and Hermeneutics

Lesson 6
   Matthew 4-10: Jesus’ Galilean Ministry

Lesson 7
   Matthew 5: Anitheses

Lesson 8
   Matthew 16: A Turning Point

Lesson 9
   Matthew 16: The Rock

Lesson 10
   Matthew 16-20: Servanthood and Church

Lesson 11
   Matthew 21-28: The Great Commission

Lesson 12
   Synoptic Problem: Part 1

Lesson 13
   Synoptic Problem: Part 2

Lesson 14
   Critical Methodologies
Lesson 15
Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Lesson 16
Mark 1: The Son of God

Lesson 17
Mark 2-3: Jesus’ Early Ministry

Lesson 18
Mark: The Messianic Secret

Lesson 19
Mark: The Olivet Discourse

Lesson 20
Introduction to the Gospel of John

Lesson 21
John 1: Prologue

Lesson 22
John 2: Signs

Lesson 23
John 6: Sacraments

Lesson 24
John: The “I Am” Statements

Lesson 25
John: Jesus as Example

Lesson 26
The Son of Man

Lesson 27
The Kingdom of God

Lesson 28
Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

Lesson 29
Luke: John and Jesus, and the Virgin Birth

Lesson 30
Luke: Jesus as Preacher, Healer, Prophet
Lesson 31
  Luke: Parables, Part 1

Lesson 32
  Luke: Parables, Part 2

Lesson 33
  Luke 9-19: Famous Parables

Lesson 34
  The Quest for the Historical Jesus
OUTLINES FOR MEMORIZATION
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See the outlines for memorization of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These outlines will appear on the relevant exam.

MATTHEW OUTLINE
Birth Narratives 1-2
Baptist and Temptation (desert) 3:1-4:11
Galilean Ministry 4:12-16:20
Journey to Jerusalem 16:21-20:34
Triumphal Entry through Resurrection 21:1-28:15
Great Commission in Galilee 28:16-20

MARK OUTLINE
John and Baptism in Judea 1:1-13
Galilean Ministry 1:14-8:30
Journey to Jerusalem 8:31-10:52
Triumphal Entry through Resurrection 11-16

LUKE OUTLINE
Preparation: Jesus & John 1:1-4:13
Galilean Ministry 4:14-9:50
Journey to Jerusalem 9:51-19:27
Triumphal Entry through Ascension 19:28-24:53

JOHN OUTLINE
Prologue 1:1-18
John the Baptist 1:19-51
Public Ministry 2-12
Upper Room through Resurrection 13-20
Peter in Galilee 21
**PAPER TOPIC OPTIONS AND GUIDELINES**

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**PAPER TOPIC OPTIONS**

* **General Comments**

  * This should be a serious research paper, using at least six to eight serious commentaries (including both critical and conservative) and a few BT’s. You must also footnote at least one journal article. Take advantage of the helpful annotated bibliographies in Appendix A.

  * You must theologize! Connect the dots on the original and modern levels. Solve a problem, draw attention to something neglected, make an interesting or unique point, explain modern relevance, etc.

  * 10-15 pages typed.

  * Use secondary sources, but primarily it is *your* study. Please “theologize” and have a “point” (i.e., thesis) to your paper.

  * Due at course end date.

  * Three paper topic categories (choose one).

* **Gospels Term Paper Options**

  1. BT study on any major or minor theme in one of the gospels. You cannot choose a theme Dr. Cara covers in the course lectures.

  2. Exegesis of a pericope highlighting (in a BT way) its (or one aspect in the pericope) relationship to the rest of that Gospel.

  3. Comparison of synoptic triple tradition. This paper must be done with a knowledge of Greek.
GOSPELS COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

General Gospels Background


Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3d ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. An up to date, well regarded work by an evangelical who is most well known for his work in the early church fathers. This work includes information for both NT studies and early church fathers.


Introductions

Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1997. Brown is a critic, but one who is tempered by his Roman Catholicism. This may become the standard introduction for most seminarians at critical schools. Tries to appeal to both college students and fellow professors which produces some unevenness.


Powell, Mark Allan. *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998. Up to date, readable, brief discussion of all types of questions (more than “introductory” questions) concerning the Gospels. Powell is a well-rounded critic, who is especially interested in narrative questions. Good for papers as, for example, the Matthew section is only twenty-four pages.


**Biblical Theologies**

Ashton, John. *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991. Traditional critical scholar with a low view of narrative criticism—diachronic analysis is essential. This book is a becoming a standard for scholars of this type. Well recognized as a good summary and critique of Bultmann. His *Sitz im Leben* is similar to Smith below. Also see his 1994 *Studying John*.


Dodd, C. H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*. Cambridge, CUP, 1953. The classic critical work. First half covers background of Johannine ideas (Hellenistic perspective) and second half, BT of John.

Guthrie, D. *New Testament Theology*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1981. Different than other BT’s in that it is arranged per topic first and then biblical author. Eg, “Messiah,” Guthrie looks at what synoptics, John, Paul, rest of NT say, and then summarizes. Very useful along w/ a traditional BT book. Guthrie is very conservative.


Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology*. Translated by O. C. Dean, Jr. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995. Schnackenburg is a famous German critic who feels we can really know little about the historical Jesus. Hence, this books looks at each of the evangelist’s view of Christ (reading audience). Very good for papers as he does numerous BT studies of miscellaneous topics in each Gospel.


Commentaries with Narrative Criticism Emphasis


Traditional Commentaries

Matthew


Dickson, David. A Brief Exposition of the Evangel of Jesus Christ According to Matthew. Geneva. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981 [1647]. Dickson was a famous Reformed Scottish professor. This commentary was purposely written at a popular level and has tons of “application” for each verse! Recommended.

Gundry, Robert H. Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. Gundry is a left-wing evangelical with this commentary virtually being from a pure critical perspective. This is a redaction criticism commentary assuming Markan priority trying to prove the title. The goal of this commentary is to find the theology of the redactor Matthew.

Hagner, Donald A. Matthew 1-13 and Matthew 14-28. WBC. vol. 33a-b. Dallas: Word, 1993-1995. Hagner is a left-wing evangelical. A disciple of Matthew the Apostle used insights from the Apostle and the written sources of Mark and Q to write Matthew. Sticks to text and does not want to discuss historical questions. Good bibliographies and discussion of Greek words.


Mark


Calvin, J. [See Matthew section.]


Guelich, Robert A. *Mark 1-8:26*. WBC. vol 34a. Dallas: Word, 1989. Although Guelich calls himself an evangelical, this commentary is written from a critical perspective. He tries to delineate the sources, forms and redactions of each pericope. Good bibliographies.


**Luke**


Calvin, J. [See Matthew section.]


**John**

Barrett, C. K. *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. 2d ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978. Barrett is a British critic w/ conservative leanings. This was the critical commentary in the English world. Barrett believes that Mark was a source and that Hellenistic gnosticism significantly influenced the Gospel of John. Both of these views are currently unpopular in critical scholarship. Good for Greek words. Many good insights. If one wanted to get just one critical commentary, this is the one to get.


Parables


Kistemaker, S. *The Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980. Although a “one pointer,” his interpretations are very similar to Cara’s. Recently retired from RTS-J. Probably the best for individual interpretations of the parables.


Stein, R. *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981. One point and evangelical. This is the standard introduction if one believes in one point theory.

Young, Brad H. *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998. Emphasizes Rabbinic parable background (assumes extant later Rabbinic parables existed in days of Jesus) as the way to understand Jesus’ parables. Jesus’ parable methodology was common among other Rabbis of the time.