Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to build a fundamental understanding of the historical and theological significance of the life and teachings of Jesus. To this end, the course focuses on three elements. First, we study the history of interpretation of the Quest for the Historical Jesus. This illuminates what has shaped current approaches to the Gospels and to Jesus, and allows us to learn from the past so that we avoid repeating missteps and build upon gains in our own study. Second, we learn and evaluate the methodology scholars have used for investigating the life and teachings of Jesus. This helps us to verify the approach we take in class. Finally, the bulk of the course focuses on the study of the complementary portraits of Jesus in the four Gospels in order to determine the events of his life, the content of his message, and his understanding of his own person and mission. Throughout the course, we focus on the essential question, “to what extent should the Christian engage in a quest for the historical Jesus?” The goal of this question is to compel students to explore and articulate the relationship between history, theology and faith.

Course Objectives:

In this course students will do the following:

• resolve significant hermeneutical issues involved in reading an ancient text in a modern world, particularly the relationship between history and faith (articles 1-3, 6 of the GCTS mission statement).
• explain the extent to which engaging in historical Jesus research is relevant for Christians today (articles 1-2, 4-5 of the GCTS mission statement).
• synthesize the events of Jesus’ life, the content of his message, and his understanding of his own person and mission according to the Gospel accounts (articles 1-2 of the GCTS mission statement).
• articulate the theological significance of Jesus’ life and teachings (articles 1-2 of the GCTS mission statement).
• explain the ways that their lives, theologies and ministries are informed by the life and message of Jesus and the Gospels (articles 5-6 of the GCTS mission statement).
Required Textbooks:


Required Readings (on CAMS):


Primary sources as listed in syllabus.

Gospel passages as listed in syllabus.

Recommended Reading:


**Course Requirements:**

1. Each student is required to complete all reading and study questions as indicated on the syllabus. The instructor will assume knowledge of this material and will draw on it during class.

2. Each student is expected to be present in class. Unexcused tardiness or absence from class will be reflected in the final grade for the course.

3. All written assignments must be turned in at the end of the class for which they are due.

4. All work must be submitted on time. Late assignments will receive a 10% drop in grade. All work for the course must be submitted in order to receive a passing grade.

**Course Evaluation:**

1. Readings and study questions – 30 % of final grade
   Students will prepare written responses to questions based on the assigned readings and key texts for each class. Each set of study questions should be answered in 1 typed, single-spaced page. Each assignment will be posted on CAMS two weeks before it is due.

2. Final Exam – 35% of final grade
   Students will sit for a final exam during which they will answer multiple choice and short answer questions based on the material covered during the course of the semester. Guidelines for the final exam will be given in class and posted on CAMS.
3. Essay – 35 % of final grade
Students will prepare a 6-8 page, double-spaced paper in which they answer the essential question for the course: “To what extent should the Christian engage in a quest for the historical Jesus?” This is not a research paper; however, students may draw upon outside materials in answering this question. There is no “right” answer to the question, and it may be approached in a number of ways. Students will be graded primarily how well they define the terms of the argument, the coherence of their argument, and the clarity of their presentation. The essay is due on the last day of written work, but students are encouraged to think about and develop their answer to the question throughout the course of the semester.

Final semester letter grades will be assigned as follows:

- A 93% and up
- A- 90
- B+ 86.6%
- B 83.3%
- B- 80
- C+ 76.6%
- C 73.3%
- C- 70
- D+ 66.6%
- D 63.3%
- D- 60
- F below 60

All work for the course will be graded according to the policies outlining performance expectations in the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Catalog. In this class, grades are based on the student's actual performance in a course judged against the criteria for grading stated in the course syllabus. The following letter grades and the accompanying description are used:

- A Reserved for outstanding work of exceptionally high quality that reflects a creative appropriation of course material and practices.
- B Work that meets all of the stated course requirements and reflects a firm grasp of course material and practices.
- C Work that shows a basic grasp of the course materials and practices.
- D Work that shows serious deficiencies but meets the minimal requirements of the course.
- F Work that fails to meet the minimal requirements of the course. No credit is given.

A “minus” or “plus” indicates work that falls just short of the stated descriptions.
Course Outline

Introduction to the course

1/26  no assignment due – get ahead on required reading

Understanding Our Location: History of Interpretation

1/28  Background of the Three Quests for the Historical Jesus
      The First Quest

      Due: Study Questions on Blomberg, 83-126; Reimarus, Fragments, 135-200; Strauss, Life of Jesus, 95-107; WSJ article, “Man vs. God”

2/2   The New Quest
      The Third Quest / reNEWed Quest


2/4   NO CLASS: finish L. T. Johnson, The Real Jesus

2/9   The Relationship between History, Theology and Faith
      The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

      Due: Study Questions on L. T. Johnson, The Real Jesus (all); Blomberg, 424-46

Understanding Jesus’ Location: The First-Century Context

2/11  The Political Context

      Due: Study Questions on Blomberg, 7-28

READING WEEK
2/16 & 2/18 – No Classes

2/23  The Religious Context
      The Socio-economic Context

      Due: Study Questions on Blomberg, 29-81
            Josephus, Ant. 18.11-23
Understanding Jesus’ Life, Ministry and Teaching

2/25  The Birth and Childhood of Jesus

Due:  Study Questions on Blomberg, 127-203 + 232-49
      Matt 1-2; Luke 1-2; John 1:1-18

3/2  The Preparation for Jesus’ Ministry

Due:  Study Questions on Blomberg, 250-69
      Mark 1:2-13 pars.; Luke 3:7-18 par.; John 1:19-51; John 2-4
      [note: see table of Gospel parallels in “resources” on CAMS]
      Josephus, Ant. 18.116-119

3/4  Jesus’ Early Galilean Ministry

Jesus preached and gathered followers

Due:  Study Questions on Blomberg, 270-98
      Mark 1:14-20 pars.; Mark 3:7-19; Luke 6:12-16

3/9  Jesus performed exorcisms and healed people

      Barrett, New Testament Background, 31-7
      11QapocrPs (11Q11); 4QShir\^ab (4Q510-11)
      Josephus Ant. 8.45-48; Testament of Solomon 1-3

3/11  Jesus engaged in conflict

Due:  Study Questions on Mark 2:1-3:6 pars.

3/16

Due:  Study Questions on Blomberg, 299-355
      Matt 5-7; Luke 6:20-49; Mark 4 pars.

Jesus taught (part 1)

through the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus’ Later Galilean Ministry

Jesus taught (part 2)

by means of parables
3/18

about the Law

Due: Study Questions on Mark 7:1-23 par.; 8:14:21 par.; 10:2-12 pars.
Josephus, War 2. 162; Ant. 13. 297-98
Community Rule (1QS) 1-6; Damascus Rule (CD) 5.20-6.11
M. Abot. 1:1; Sipre Deut 351

READING WEEK
3/23 & 3/25 – No Classes

3/30

about discipleship

Due: Study Questions on Mark 8:27-10:45 pars.

4/1 Jesus Performed Miracles (excluding exorcisms and healings)

Due: Study Questions on Mark 4:35-6:56 pars.

4/6 Jesus’ Judean Ministry

Due: Study Questions on Blomberg, 356-82
John 11:55-12:11; Mark 14:3-9; Mark 11-12 pars.

4/8 The Olivet Discourse

Due: Study Questions Mark 13; Matt 24-25; Luke 21:5-38

4/13 Jesus’ Passion and Crucifixion

Due: Study Questions on Blomberg, 383-421
Mark 14:1-15:47 pars.; John 14:1-17:26
Josephus, Ant. 18:63-64

4/15 Jesus’ Resurrection

Due: Study Questions on Mark 16; Matt 28; Luke 24; John 20-21

4/20 The Theology of Jesus

Due: Blomberg, 447-82

4/22 OPTIONAL SNOW DAY: no class unless make-up needed

Final Exam during exam week, Apr. 28-30 – TBA