

# The Mission of the People of God to the Nations: Interpreting Acts & Paul's Letters Syllabus

**Course Coordinator: Dr. Rollin G. Grams**

**Online Access to this Course:** <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/biblejourney>

**Winter, 2012**

## Course Description

This 5<sup>th</sup> course of the *BibleJourney* program focuses our attention on the people of God's mission to the nations. We will be surveying Acts and Paul's epistles (except Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles) over nine class sessions. Each NT book will be examined in terms of 'behind-the-text issues' (authorship, date, situation, purpose; the Old Testament and literary context; geography and archaeology; the historical and social context), 'in-the-text' issues (structure of the work, arguments, theology, ethics), and 'in-front-of-the-text' issues (how the books have been understood and used; how we should use them today). The course will look at these books in terms of what they say about the story of God's people engaged in mission to the nations then and now. Assignments and lectures will also address how to interpret these books of the New Testament.

## Dates, Times, and Place

**Monday nights:** 9, (not 16), 23, 30 January; 6, 13, 20, 28 February; 5, 12 March.

**Special event:** 9-13 February, Cooley Center Lecture and Exhibit

**Preceptorial sessions** (only for credit seeking students): 6:15-6:45 or 8:45-9:15 pm.

**Class Sessions:** 6:45-8:45 pm.

**Place:** Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 14542 Choate Circle, Charlotte, NC 28273. Tel.: 704-527-9909 (front desk).

## About *BibleJourney* and This Course

This course is the *fifth* in a series of courses making up the *BibleJourney* Program.

1. The Formation of the People of God from Eden to Canaan: Interpreting the Five Books of Moses
2. The Mission of the People of God in the Promised Land: Interpreting the Historical and Poetic Books
3. The Exile & Return of the People of God: Interpreting the Prophetic Books
4. The Restoration of the People of God: Interpreting the Gospels
5. *The Mission of the People of God to the Nations: Interpreting Acts & Paul's Letters*
6. The Sojourn of the People of God among the Nations: Interpreting Hebrews through Revelation

## Objectives

1. Content: Students will be able to articulate the content of Acts and Paul's letters by reading them afresh, working through the workbook, and attending the lectures.
2. Analysis: Students will learn how to interpret Acts and Paul's letters through the workbook exercises and attending the lectures. In particular, students will gain exposure to:
  - a. primary sources and reading the New Testament writings covered in this course in terms of 'behind-the-text' issues (noted above);
  - b. reading Acts and Paul's letters in light of the Old Testament;
  - c. reading Acts and Paul's letters as literature (genre, structure, arguments);
  - d. reading Acts and Paul's letters in relation to one another;
  - e. reading Paul's letters in light of his theology, ethics, and mission;
  - f. reading Acts and Paul's letters with questions about how they speak to the church in our day.
3. Critique: Students will be introduced to some alternative perspectives on Acts and Paul and gain skills in critiquing these perspectives by working through the workbook exercises, through reading, and by attending the lectures.

## Registration

*Registration for courses is required.* Please visit [www.gordonconwell.edu/biblejourney](http://www.gordonconwell.edu/biblejourney) or call Dr. Alison Littauer at 1-704-940-5814 for more information. Teaching Assistant Mark Poe can be reached throughout the semester at [mpoe@gordonconwell.edu](mailto:mpoe@gordonconwell.edu). Participants will sign up either as auditors (those who sit in the class for personal enrichment) or for credit (those who turn in weekly assignments and may receive credit toward a certificate). Credit students will have first preference for the available seats in this course. *A 30 minute preceptorial session each week is required for those taking the course for credit. Options before or after the core presentation time may be offered, depending on class size.*

## Certification

Credit seeking students who meet all the requirements for the complete 6-course Bible sequence are eligible to receive a Certificate in Biblical Interpretation. This certificate will exempt those successfully admitted into any masters or other certificate programs at Gordon-Conwell from three courses (OT Survey, NT Survey, and Biblical Interpretation).

***Note: The cost of the 6-course sequence is the cost of one graduate level course. Therefore, students completing the Certificate in Biblical Interpretation will have taken three courses for the price of one!***

## Format

During each evening session, there will be two hours of presentation by the instructor. Credit students will engage in discussion about the lectures and assignments during a 30 minute preceptorial session offered from 6:15-6:45 and 8:45-9:15 led by teaching assistants. Those not taking the course for credit will only attend the class sessions. Class outlines and notes will be

available on *Sakkai*, on the course website ([www.gordonconwell.edu/biblejourney](http://www.gordonconwell.edu/biblejourney)), and as handouts in class. Ideally, the assigned readings for each week should be done before class. The written/typed assignments are designed to follow class.

## **Preparation**

### **Assignments**

Seven weekly assignments, each worth 10% of the final course grade, are associated with the weekly two-hour lectures (see course outline, below). The first assignment will be due on the second class meeting. There will be a quiz in place of an assignment on the last day of the course. They will guide students through reading and work that will prepare students for the lectures. So, they are designed to be completed prior to a class and will be discussed in the preceptorial sessions. Students should plan on about 10 hours each week for the reading and assignments.

Note that students will find online guidance on the *BibleJourney* website and *Sakkai* (which is password protected). Notes for the evening lecture, slides for the lecture, and assignments will be posted prior to the lecture each Monday and, if possible, they will be posted even earlier.

The assignments will guide students in research of the following kinds:

- geographical awareness and internet research;
- historical research;
- literary interpretation of Paul's letters;
- theological interpretation of Paul's letters;
- Paul's use of the Old Testament;
- reflection on the relevance of Paul's letters for the Church and its mission today.

### **Bible Reading**

The following sections of the New Testament need to be read during this course: Acts and the letters of Paul (except Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus). Students are requested to read these books both devotionally (with prayer and listening to God speak through His Word to you) and academically, paying careful attention to what is said, where stories appear, what the issues giving rise to Paul's letters are, how Paul argues a point, the unique characteristics of each book, what is said about each book by the text by Burge *et al.*, etc. Students will find that reading each of Paul's letters *in one sitting* will be greatly rewarding and are encouraged to do so.

Students are directed to use one of the following English translations: New Revised Standard Version, English Standard Version, New International Version (2011 revision recommended). Any other version should be checked with the instructor.

*To pass this course the student must have completed this Bible reading.*

### **Textbook Reading**

G. D. Fee & D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (Zondervan, 2003).  
Gary Burge, Lyn Cohick, and Gene Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

The book by Fee and Stuart will be used for all OT and NT courses in *BibleJourney*. The book by Burge, Cohick, and Green will also be used for all NT courses.

Credit seeking students will complete a reading assignment statement for the course. Reading will be marked 'pass/fail.' Failure to complete all the reading by 100 pages or so will mean a reduction in the final grade by a full grade level. Failure to complete 50% of the reading will result in an 'F' for this assignment. The reading assignment is worth 15% of the final grade.

### **Quiz**

The quiz, worth 15% of the final grade, will be given in the final preceptorial. It will examine the student's knowledge of the content of NT books covered in this module: (1) Acts and (2) Paul's letters (except Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles—1 & 2 Timothy, Titus). Students should take the quiz after a careful, fresh reading of these New Testament book/s. The quiz will not cover the lectures or textbooks.

### **Research Paper**

Courses 4, 5, and 6 of *BibleJourney* cover the entire New Testament. At the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> course, a research paper on the New Testament will be required of credit seeking students. Topics will be listed in the syllabus for the 6<sup>th</sup> course, and the paper needs to be passed in order to receive credit for courses 4, 5, and 6.

### **Attendance and Missed Classes**

Credit students will need to be in attendance at least seven of the nine weeks. Students may download audio recordings of missed classes to maintain their pace with the course assignments.

### **Discounts and Refunds**

Gordon-Conwell has significantly reduced the tuition for these courses to make them affordable to our community. We assume that churches may further subsidize this outreach for their members if hardship exists. Full refunds will be provided through the second week of the course for any reason.

## Course Outline

|               | <b>Topic</b>   | <b>Reading, Assignments, Quizzes</b>   |
|---------------|--|--|
| 9 January     | Acts   | Burge, Cohick, & Green, ch. 12; Fee & Stuart, ch. 6; Acts; no assignment   |
| 16 January    | NO CLASS   |  |
| 23 January    | Paul and His Mission   | Burge, Cohick, & Green, chs. 4, 13; assignment; geographical awareness and internet research   |
| 30 January    | 1 Thessalonians<br>2 Thessalonians   | Burge, Cohick, & Green, ch. 13; Fee & Stuart, chs. 3 and 4; 1 Thessalonians; assignment: historical research                                     |
| 9-13 February | <i>Cooley Center Lecture and Exhibit</i> (you are invited to register to attend for free online) |  |
| 6 February    | 1 Corinthians  | Burge, Cohick, & Green, ch. 16; 1 Corinthians; assignment: literary analysis   |
| 13 February   | 2 Corinthians  | Burge, Cohick, & Green, ch. 17; 2 Corinthians; assignment: theological word study  |
| 20 February   | Galatians  | Burge, Cohick, & Green, ch. 14; Galatians; assignment: readings from <i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , with discussion in preceptorial |
| 28 February   | Romans   | Burge, Cohick, & Green, ch. 18; Romans; assignment: NT use of the OT   |
| 5 March       | Romans, continued<br>Philippians   | Preceptorial discussion of previous assignment   |
| 12 March      | Colossians, Philemon<br>Paul's Theology and Ethics   | Burge, Cohick, & Green, chs. 19, 20; Philippians, Colossians, Philemon; Quiz   |

## Credit Seeking Student Completion Form

Please turn in this signed form to your teaching assistant on the last day of class.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

| <i><b>Assignment</b></i>                     | <i><b>Completion</b></i> |
|--|--------------------------|
| Reading of Burge, Cohick, & Green            | Chapters Completed:      |
| Reading of Acts                              | Percentage Read On Time: |
| Reading of 1 and 2 Thessalonians             | Percentage Read On Time: |
| Reading of 1 Corinthians                     | Percentage Read On Time: |
| Reading of 2 Corinthians                     | Percentage Read On Time: |
| Reading of Galatians                         | Percentage Read On Time: |
| Reading of Romans                            | Percentage Read On Time: |
| Reading of Philippians, Colossians, Philemon | Percentage Read On Time: |
| Assignments for Class 2                      | Date Completed:          |
| Assignments for Class 3                      | Date Completed:          |
| Assignments for Class 4                      | Date Completed:          |
| Assignments for Class 5                      | Date Completed:          |
| Assignments for Class 6                      | Date Completed:          |
| Assignments for Class 7                      | Date Completed:          |
| Assignments for Class 8                      | Date Completed:          |
| Quiz   | Date Taken:              |

‘I certify that I completed all the reading of Acts and Paul’s letters.’

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature