



McMaster Divinity
College

GOSPEL OF MARK

NT 3XM3 (BS/CW/PS)

McMaster Divinity College
Dr. Christopher D. Land
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Winter 2024
Wednesday 4:00–5:50pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Gospel of Mark tells a whirlwind story about the coming Kingdom of God and the role that Jesus of Nazareth is playing in its coming. The book has significantly shaped the church's understanding of Jesus and of discipleship. This course is primarily an exegetical study of the Gospel of Mark. It will examine the book's historical, literary, and theological qualities, and will situate these within relevant first-century contexts. It will also involve a sustained discussion of how the message of Mark's Gospel can be heard, considered, and integrated into the life of the church today.

SPECIALIZATIONS

NT 3XM3 is available as a Biblical Studies (BS), Christian Worldview (CW), or Pastoral Studies (PS) specialization.

≈ Students taking 3XM3 as a Biblical Studies (BS) course will be encouraged to explore the historical and cultural settings of Mark, as well as recent discussions surrounding the interpretation of its contents.

≈ Students taking 3XM3 as a Christian Worldview (CW) course will be encouraged to explore Mark from a sociological perspective, to better understand how its teachings relate to the ideas and practices that characterize different ancient and contemporary groups.

≈ Students taking 3XM3 as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course will be encouraged to explore how the Mark is relevant for Christian faith and practice in the 21st century, with special emphases on discipleship, conflict, and the endurance of suffering.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through their active participation in this course, students will:

KNOWING

- Remember the story told in the Gospel of Mark;
- Become familiar with introductory issues and scholarly debates concerning the Gospel of Mark;
- Understand the major theological themes of the Gospel of Mark;

BEING

- Appreciate the importance of participating in respectful discussions about biblical texts;
- Become self-aware as a modern reader of the Bible, recognizing both the antiquity of the texts and the various ways in which contemporary life influences our understanding of it;
- Embody the life of discipleship that is so central to the Gospel of Mark;

DOING

- Have the ability to quickly locate reliable scholarly resources that discuss a particular NT book or passage;
- Have the ability to ask key questions in order to explore the meaning of a NT book or passage;
- Have the ability to reflect canonically, theologically, and contextually so as to explore how people can/should understand the New Testament today.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. Failure to complete an assignment will serve as grounds for failure of the course. All assignments must be formatted according to the MDC Style Guide (i.e. standard page layout, appropriate citation formatting, proper spelling, etc.). Written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as Word documents (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf). Unless alternative arrangements are made in advance, a penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Late assignments (even ones with an extension) will not receive detailed comments from the professor and may not be returned at the same time as papers submitted on time. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 5th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (mdcreg@mcmaster.ca).

CLASS PREPARATION & PARTICIPATION (10% PRIMARY + 10% SECONDARY = 20% TOTAL)

Before each class, you will read assigned materials in preparation for our class discussions. These will be posted to Avenue to Learn (A2L). They will include excerpts from the Gospel of Mark (you will read the entire book multiple times) as well as scholarly discussions relevant to the class topics (e.g. dictionary entries, articles, book chapters, etc.).

During our class sessions, we will have some time for small group and large group discussions, regarding both the primary and secondary readings. It is expected that you will show diligence in completing the reading and engaging in the discussions, and that you will take the time to clearly articulate a genuinely thoughtful assessment of something important that you have learned.

Following each class (before the end of the day), you will email the professor two brief paragraphs. In your first paragraph, you must convey (1) whether you completed the assigned primary reading prior to class; and (2) the most helpful thing that emerged from this reading and the follow-up discussions in class. In your second paragraph, you must convey (1) whether you completed the assigned secondary reading prior to class; and (2) the most helpful thing that emerged from this reading and the follow-up discussions in class. Each of these two paragraphs will be graded each week as a simple pass/fail.

REFLECTION PAPERS (5% INITIAL + 15% CONCLUDING = 20% TOTAL)

At the beginning of the semester, each student will describe (in 750 words) how they view the Gospel of Mark and how they understand the book's relevance today. Please note the first person is an integral part of these assignments. You should not just talk about Mark; the goal is to self-reflect on the state of *your understanding of Mark*.

At the end of the semester, the self-reflection assignment will be repeated but with greater detail and length (now 1,500 words). Your concluding reflection need not offer a totally changed perspective on Mark, but it should somehow convey the influence that the course has had on your understanding. To prepare for your concluding reflection, I suggest that you re-read or re-watch your original reflection. Then, take a moment to reflect on your own learning, to observe how you have matured in your understanding, and to ponder how you might continue your learning after the conclusion of the course. Please point to specific areas of (past, present, or future) growth in your understanding of the Gospel of Mark and its implications for today.

MAJOR REPORTS (20% EACH = 60% TOTAL)

The main assignments in this class will be a series of research reports.

Before submitting each report, you have the option of emailing the professor a draft outline to obtain feedback from your instructor(s). Your draft outline must contain an opening thesis statement, a heading for each main section of your report, a sentence or two describing each section's main contributions, an overall concluding statement, and a bibliography. Initial drafts received after the dates listed in the calendar below may not receive feedback quickly enough to help you with your final submission.

Each written report should be approximately 2,500 words in length. It must contain a bibliography of at least 10 suitable academic sources.

“BEHIND THE TEXT” REPORT (20%)

In your first report, you will investigate the world “behind” the narrative of Mark. This includes the general sociocultural environment of the first century (e.g. first-century Galilee), particular historical or geographical facts relevant to your specific passage (e.g. the Pharisees and their status in Galilee), and the specific events depicted in Mark (e.g. conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees). Your goal is to better understand the story of Mark by better understanding the geographical, social, and historical world in which the events of Mark unfold. *Your thesis statement should state how exactly your study of the ancient world clarifies the meaning of Mark.*

“WITHIN THE TEXT” REPORT (20%)

In your second report, you will investigate the world “within” the narrative of Mark and “within” the Bible more generally, including not only its content but also its origins and social function. Key details include the immediate literary context of your passage (e.g. Jesus's early ministry in Galilee), the wider literary context (e.g. the overall plot of Mark's Gospel), any oral or literary sources that might underlie it (e.g. Peter's memories, widely circulated stories about Jesus), the social function of the narrative (e.g. Mark's purpose in telling these conflict stories in the way that he does, their relevance to him and to his

audience), and the canonical context of the Bible as a whole (e.g. the way these stories compare with other biblical stories in which godly protagonists experience conflict with established religious groups). Your goal is to better understand the story of Mark as a voice that speaks from a certain perspective, offering a certain way of making sense of God, Jesus, discipleship, etc. *Your thesis statement should state how exactly your study of the text clarifies the meaning of Mark.*

“IN FRONT OF THE TEXT” REPORT (20%)

In your third report, you will investigate the world “in front of” the narrative of Mark. This is *your* world. You will be investigating sociocultural and history factors that influence how modern people hear the story of Mark (e.g. the so-called “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity, notions of purity in North America today, etc.) as well as particular biographical factors that influence how you yourself hear the story (e.g. theological doctrines regarding Mosaic laws, experiences of denominational conflict, etc.). Your goal is to think about the established convictions, questions, and concerns that you and your communities bring into the reading of the Gospel of Mark. *Your thesis statement should state how exactly your study of the twenty-first century clarifies the meaning of Mark.*

GRADING SUMMARY

Initial Self-Reflection	5%
Primary Reading & Discussions	10%
Secondary Reading & Discussions	10%
“Behind the Text” Report	20%
“Within the Text” Report	20%
“In Front of the Text” Report	20%
<u>Concluding Self-Reflection</u>	<u>15%</u>
Total	100%

TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess the following:

An English translation of the New Testament.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Class Meeting Topics	Reading Due (before class)	Assignments Due (Friday @ 11:59pm)
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Jan 8–12	Introduction to the Course Introduction to Biblical Research Introduction to the Gospels	Syllabus	Initial Reflection
Jan 15–19	Mark's Socio-Historical & Theological Setting Mark's (Non-)Ideal Audience	A2L Materials	
Jan 22–26	Scriptures & Traditions Jesus as a Teacher of the Law Conflict Stories The Pharisees		Report Draft (optional)
Jan 29–Feb 2	Apocalyptic Unveiling Parables The Role of Surprise		
Feb 5–9	Evil & Oppression Exorcism & Liberation The "Reign" of God		"Behind the Text" Report
Feb 12–16	Purity Healing Gentiles		Report Draft (optional)
Feb 19–23	Reading Week (No Class)		
Feb 26–Mar 1	Blindness & Confusion Disciples & Discipleship Failure & Forgiveness	A2L Materials	"Within the Text" Report
Mar 4–8	The Transfiguration Mark's Christology "Secret" Identity		Report Draft (optional)
Mar 11–15	The Temple Establishment An Inevitable Collision The Temple's Destruction Mark & "Judaism"		
Mar 18–22	The Passion Predictions The Passion The Mystery of Suffering		"In Front of the Text" Report
Mar 25–29	The Resurrection Predictions Mark's Future Hope		
Apr 1–5	Summary and Implications		Shorter & Longer Endings (16:9ff)

EXAMPLE TOPICS FOR FIRST REPORT

- A specific Jewish custom or belief (e.g. dietary restrictions, Sabbath, circumcision);
- The place of the early Jesus movement within early Judaism;
- Palestinian or Galilean society;
- First-century synagogues;

- Specific Jewish groups (e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.);
- The life of a particular early Christian leader (e.g. Peter);
- Rome’s system of governance;
- Social structure and/or class in the Greco-Roman world;
- Food and social dining;
- Jewish beliefs and practice (e.g. views of Torah observance, status of prophetic writings, role of ceremonial washings, Jewish festivals, etc.);
- Greco-Roman “religious” systems (e.g. imperial cult, ethnic religions, mystery cults, freelance religious experts, philosophical schools, etc.);
- Ideas and practices surrounding the structure of the cosmos;
- Ideas and practices surrounding health and healing;
- Ideas and practices surrounding magic;
- Ideas and practices surrounding visionary experiences;
- Ideas and practices surrounding spirits/demons;
- The preservation of memories/traditions concerning Jesus;
- The extent to which Mark can be regarded as historically reliable;
- Etc.

EXAMPLE TOPICS FOR SECOND REPORT

- The date of Mark;
- The author of Mark;
- The genre and purpose(s) of Mark;
- The original audience of Mark;
- The composition of Mark as compared to other written traditions (e.g. Synoptic parallels);
- The structure of Mark;
- The place of your chosen passage within Mark;
- The message of Mark regarding Jesus and the “Christian” movement;
- The message of Mark regarding the Jewish Scriptures and the Jewish people;
- The message of Mark regarding the mission of God;
- The message of Mark regarding political or spiritual powers;
- The role that exorcisms and miracles play in Mark;
- Etc.

EXAMPLE TOPICS FOR THIRD REPORT

- Contemporary views/experiences regarding the existence of god(s);
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding Jesus;
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding spirits/demons;
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding suffering;

- Contemporary views/experiences regarding divine judgement;
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding religious establishments;
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding sickness and healing;
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding Judaism and the modern nation of Israel;
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding persecution and (non-)violence;
- Contemporary views/experiences regarding despair and hope;
- Etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Marcus, Joel. *Mark 1–8*. Anchor Bible 27. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

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Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

Rhoads, David M., Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie. *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Stein, Robert H. *Mark*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Taylor, Vincent. *The Gospel According to St Mark*. London: Macmillan, 1952.

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Voelz, James W. *Mark 1:1–8:26*. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2013.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. For more information, please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty at:

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

In this course, we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) for plagiarism detection and the student's continuation in the course represents his or her consent to the use of this service.

A useful guide to avoiding plagiarism is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses:

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

This syllabus is for information only and remains the property of the respective professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course.