

Syllabus for
The Acts of the Apostles
GRK861

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I. Course Description and Objectives

Description:

This course is “a consideration of the literary genre of the book followed by an examination of its theological emphases as indicated by a study of representative passages” (NTS catalogue).

Objectives: At the end of the course you will have:

1. Demonstrated a grasp of the original language, content, literary features/movement, and theology of Acts.
2. Demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of the historical, socio-rhetorical, and literary background against which Acts is best understood.
3. Demonstrated an ability to argue a coherent thesis on theological issues associated with the study of Acts *and* to clearly articulate the implications of your thesis for the contemporary Church.

II. Textbooks and Other Required Materials (Other material may also be made available through the library or through Blackboard.)

Cavanaugh, William T. *Torture and Eucharist*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

Green, Joel. B. *Salvation*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2003.

Johnson, Andy. “Resurrection, Ascension, and the Developing Portrait of the God of Israel in Acts,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57:2, 2004.

Witherington, Ben. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

III. Helpful Websites

<http://www.ntgateway.com/lukeacts/>

This is the Acts section of the NT Gateway site. It is one of the best sites on the Web for generally reliable information on Acts and the rest of NT studies.

<http://www.torreys.org/bible/>

This is another one of the best overall websites for NT studies in general.

<http://www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/JDTABOR/indexb.html>

This is a website by James Tabor containing a variety of helpful info on the Jewish and Roman backgrounds of the first century context.

IV. Requirements

- 1. Reading Acts.** You must read Acts through (preferably in one sitting, but **in no more than two** sittings) at least three times this semester, **including once before class this Friday morning, September 17.** By class time (9:00 AM) on the due date of the reading, you must have posted a statement in the Reading Acts Forum in Blackboard saying that you have completed that day's reading of Acts. Each reading counts 10 points toward your final grade, making all six readings count 30 points toward your final grade. **You cannot "make up" any of this reading. You can only get credit for what you actually read by the due date listed on the Schedule of Topics and Assignments below. Since these are basically "give away" points, this is an all or nothing assignment. You do not get credit for partial reading.**
- 2. Insights from Green's, *Salvation*.** After carefully reading Joel Green's, *Salvation*, briefly describe 25 insights you gained from the book that you consider to be significant. The book has 5 chapters (not counting the Introduction). Make sure you draw at least 4 insights from each chapter (5 x 4 = 20) **noting the chapter and page number from which you are drawing the insight.** The remaining 5 may come from anywhere in the book. You may earn up to 50 points for this assignment. You must post it to the Digital Drop Box in Blackboard as an attached Microsoft Word file by 11:00 PM on Wednesday, October 13. My assistant, Kara Lyons, will probably be grading this assignment. An example of an "A" quality "Insights" assignment from another course will be available for you in Blackboard under the under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder. It will be called "Model Insights Assignment."
- 3. Fishbowl Discussion of Cavanaugh's, *Torture and Eucharist*.** You may earn up to 80 points by actively participating in a "fishbowl" discussion of this book. The "fishbowl" will consist of a class discussion/critical analysis of the book. I will provide you with questions to help you focus your reading. They will be located in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder and will be called "Fishbowl Focus Questions for Cavanaugh." I would strongly encourage you to take careful notes, making use of these to guide your reading. **I will not simply give these points away because you show up in class that day.** You must make regular contributions during this discussion period in a way that demonstrates an understanding of, **and a critical engagement with**, the book. This discussion will occur in one or two class discussions, the first on Wednesday, October 27 and the second on Thursday, October 28 (if I determine we need a second day).
- 4. Original Translation of Acts 1-5, 9:1-31; 10:1-11:18; 17; 22:1-21; 26:1-23.** You will prepare an original translation of these passages. It should contain your own translation of the text, footnotes on significant textual problems and footnotes on unusual and/or theologically significant grammatical constructions. In addition to this, you should read the commentary by Witherington and engage in some dialogue with it in your footnotes, particularly when there is a significant issue that arises from the translation of the text.

Your translation of chapters 1-5 should be placed in my mailbox at NTS by no later than 4:00 PM on October 8 and your translation of all the other passages should be placed in my box by 4:00 PM on November 5. You may earn up to 120 points for each translation making them worth a total of 240 points.

5. **Synthetic Essay Exam.** There will be one exam during the semester. It will be a take-home essay exam, synthetic in nature. On it, you will be responsible for the material we've covered in class as well as the assigned reading. I will give you the exam 2 weeks in advance of the day it is due. You may earn up to 350 points on this exam. It must be posted as an attached Microsoft Word file to the Digital Drop Box in Blackboard by 11:00 PM on Wednesday, December 8.

6. **Optional Research Paper on Soteriology and Ecclesiology in Acts.** If you decide to try for an A in this class, you must write the following paper. **Note carefully: Writing this paper will not guarantee you an A. It will simply enable you to earn an A if, in my judgment, your overall work in this class is A quality.** In order to have a chance at earning an A, you will write a paper that **argues a thesis** with regard to the following question: **On the basis of a "theologically interested" reading of Acts, how are soteriology and ecclesiology related to each other?**

You should begin your paper with a specific thesis statement that explicitly answers the above question. You should then carefully argue for your thesis in light of the historical/political, social, inter-textual, literary, and theological information that may be relevant to understanding Acts. You should utilize both Green and Cavanaugh. Your use of Green will probably be more explicit but you should also take some account of Cavanaugh's ecclesiological proposal. However, this is a research paper, and as such, **it requires additional research over and above your class resources.**

As general guidelines for the paper, follow the instructions given by Joel Green in the document, "Some Comments on Research Papers." It is located in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder. I will assume you have read and followed Green's directions when I grade your paper. The paper should be *succinctly written*, approximately 2,500 to **no more than 3,500 words.**

While the paper should generally follow Turabian style, you may consult the *SBL Handbook of Style* for proper form for footnotes, abbreviations, etc. You may use the document entitled "Ripples and Luke 24HBT.doc" located in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder as a general guide as to how this paper should look in terms of style. You may earn up to 250 points for this assignment. You must post it as an attached Microsoft Word file to the Digital Drop Box in Blackboard by Wednesday, November 17 at 11:00 PM.

V. Summary of Grading Policy

A Word about Grading: Evaluation in this kind of course, by its very nature, involves an element of subjectivity. It involves someone who is an expert in the field making a judgment on the kind of work you produce. That is a part of what you are paying for in this class. The primary factors I take into account in assessing “good solid graduate work,” the sort of work to which I assign a “B” are (1) ability to demonstrate a breadth and depth of understanding of the material engaged; (2) ability to engage this material **in a critical way**; (3) ability to exhibit how the material is related to a larger theological and ecclesial context. If you demonstrate a **consistent** ability to do these things in all your coursework, you can expect to receive a B. If you demonstrate consistent ability to do them **incisively and with excellence**, you can expect to receive an A (assuming you are doing the optional paper). If you demonstrate an ability to do these things **often, but not consistently**, you can expect to receive a C. (Hence, I assume that a C means “average,” or “satisfactory” work. It does **not** mean “bad” or “unsatisfactory.”) If you **seldom** demonstrate an ability to do these things, you can expect to receive a D.

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|------------|---------------------------|
| 30 Points | Reading Acts |
| 50 Points | Green Insights Assignment |
| 80 Points | Cavanaugh Fishbowl |
| 240 Points | Translations |
| 350 Points | Synthetic Essay Exam |
| 250 Points | Optional Paper |

The following 750 point scale will determine letter grades for those aiming at a maximum grade of B:

| | |
|---|---------|
| B | 750-600 |
| C | 599-525 |
| D | 524-450 |
| F | 449-0 |

The following 1,000 point scale will determine letter grades for those aiming at a maximum grade of A:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| A | 1,000-900 |
| B | 899-800 |
| C | 799-700 |
| D | 699-600 |
| F | 599-0 |

VI. Policy on Attendance and Tardiness

You are expected to attend class regularly and participate in the daily discussions. Attendance will be taken daily. I will abide by any attendance policy set by the NTS catalogue. An absence will only be excused in accordance with the guidelines established in the NTS catalogue.

VII. Class Master Schedule (Subject to change at my discretion)

| Date | Topic for Class | Assignments Due |
|--------------|-------------------------|---|
| 09/15 | Intro to class/Acts | |
| 09/16 | Luke-Acts Prologues | |
| 09/17 | Luke-Acts Prologues | 1 st Acts Reading |
| 09/22 | Acts | |
| 09/23 | Acts | |
| 09/24 | Acts | 2 nd Acts Reading |
| 09/29 | Acts | |
| 09/30 | Acts | |
| 10/01 | Acts | |
| 10/06 | Acts | |
| 10/07 | Acts | |
| 10/08 | Acts | First Translation (Acts 1-5) |
| 10/13 | Acts | Insights from Green |
| 10/14 | Acts | |
| 10/15 | Not a class Date | |
| 10/27 | Cavanaugh Fishbowl | Cavanaugh Fishbowl |
| 10/28 | Possible Cavanaugh FB | |
| 10/29 | Acts | |
| 11/03 | Acts | |
| 11/04 | Acts | |
| 11/05 | Acts | Second Translation (see passages above) |
| 11/10 | Acts | |
| 11/11 | Acts | |
| 11/12 | Acts | |
| 11/17 | Acts | Optional Paper |
| 11/18 | Acts | |
| 11/19 | Acts | |
| 11/24 | Acts | |
| 12/01 | Acts | 3 rd Acts Reading |
| 12/02 | Acts | |
| 12/03 | Acts | |
| 12/08 | Acts | Synthetic Essay Exam |
| 12/09 | Acts | |
| 12/10 | Acts | |