

Syllabus for  
**The Acts of the Apostles**  
NTL661

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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 basic grasp of the 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.

Gaventa, Beverly. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.

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.

Keck, Leander. *The New Interpreters Bible*, Volume 10. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.

Longenecker, Bruce. *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003.

### 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 six 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 60 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.**

**\*\*Note Carefully\*\*** **To save time**, as you read Acts, you should keep a running master list of *critical* questions and insights of comprehensive or theological significance that arise from a careful reading of the narrative. These questions and comments should not only note the scriptural context of the concern, but what matter of importance is at stake. These questions will later become a part of requirement 5 described below.

**2. Longenecker Reflection Paper:** Read Bruce Longenecker's novel, *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*. Then read Acts carefully (this will count as your **second** reading of Acts). Assume for now that Longenecker's historical novel captures the socio-historical, cultural, and especially the **political** feel of the first century setting in which the narrative of Acts would have been first heard. Write a 750-1,000 word (3-4 pages) paper, typed, and double-spaced, answering the following question: How does understanding Acts in light of this background change the way I read Acts? Give **specific examples from the text of Acts** which sound different to you after reading Longenecker and **explain why they now sound different**. You may earn up to 60 points for this essay. Post this paper to the Digital Drop Box by 11:00 PM, Friday, September 24.

3. **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."
4. **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).
5. **Critical Reading Responses (CRR) to Acts and to the Commentary Reading.** You will prepare two critical reading responses of **5-6 pages** each in which you critically engage a portion of Acts and the commentary reading associated with it. For the specific content and due dates of these CRR's, see the Class Master Schedule below.

These responses should have three sections: (1) *Critical* questions and insights of comprehensive or theological significance that arise from a careful reading of Acts itself **prior to** reading the selections from Gaventa and Wall. These questions and comments should not only note the scriptural context of the concern, but what matter of importance is at stake. These questions should be an **edited version** of your running master list of *critical* questions and insights that you generated during your prior readings of Acts. (2) *Critical* questions and observations that your reading of Gaventa and Wall (and Johnson in CRR1) raises in your mind about the biblical text and/or vice-versa, critical questions and observations that reading the biblical text raises in your mind about the claims of Gaventa and Wall (and Johnson in CRR1). (3) A comparative section noting any significant disagreements or inconsistencies between Gaventa and Wall **as to how they address specific critical issues**. An example of an "A" quality CRR will be available in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder. It will be called "Model CRR."

Post your first CRR as an attached Microsoft Word file into the Digital Drop Box in Blackboard by no later than 11:00 PM on Friday, October 8 and your second in the Drop Box by 11:00 PM on Friday, November 5. You may earn up to 75 points for each CRR making them worth a total of 150 points. My assistant, Kara Lyons, will be grading your CRRs.

6. **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.
7. **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.

60 Points	Reading Acts
60 Points	Longenecker Reflection Paper
50 Points	Green Insights Assignment
80 Points	Cavanaugh Fishbowl
150 Points	Critical Reading Responses
350 Points	Synthetic Essay Exam
250 Points	<b>Optional Paper</b>

**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)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic for Class</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
09/15	Intro to class/Acts	
09/16	Luke-Acts Prologues	
09/17	Luke-Acts Prologues	1 <sup>st</sup> Acts Reading
09/22	Acts	
09/23	Acts	
09/24	Acts	2 <sup>nd</sup> Acts Reading Longenecker Reflection Paper
09/29	Acts	
09/30	Acts	
10/01	Acts	3 <sup>rd</sup> Acts Reading
10/06	Acts	
10/07	Acts	
10/08	Acts	Critical Reading Response 1 (Scripture: Acts 1:1-14:28; Gaventa: 25-210; Wall: 3-206; Johnson, 146-62)
10/13	Acts	Insights from Green
10/14	Acts	
<b>10/15</b>	<b>Not a class Date</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> Acts Reading
10/27	Cavanaugh Fishbowl	Cavanaugh Fishbowl
10/28	Possible Cavanaugh FB	
10/29	Acts	5 <sup>th</sup> Acts Reading
11/03	Acts	
11/04	Acts	
11/05	Acts	Critical Reading Response 2 (Scripture: Acts 15:1-28:31; Gaventa: 210-370; Wall: 206-365)
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	6 <sup>th</sup> Acts Reading
12/02	Acts	
12/03	Acts	
12/08	Acts	Synthetic Essay Exam
12/09	Acts	
12/10	Acts	