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NT 620 Exegesis of the Acts of the Apostles

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is intended to help the student begin to deal with the intricacies of our only canonical book on early Christian history. During the course we will be exploring several major subject areas: 1) the history of the period which Acts describes; 2) the social and cultural milieu in which early Christians lived; 3) the exegesis of key texts in Acts.; 4) questions of introduction about Acts (authorship, date, audience, structure, purpose, textual problems); 5) the rhetorical analysis of the speeches of Acts; 6) the theology of Acts; 7) the hermeneutical use Acts. In terms of the cognitive content of this course there are two major components: 1) the lectures; 2) the textbooks.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In this course I intend to introduce you to the major areas of the study of Acts: 1) the history, archaeology, and social milieu of the period in which Acts was written; 2) the practice of NT text criticism as it applies to Acts; 3) Questions of introduction this document (authorship, date, audience, structure); 4) exegesis and hermeneutics.

In this course I expect for you to: 1) begin to develop competence in reading the literature on Acts, and using basic commentaries and tools; 2) begin to explore the different areas and disciplines and aspects of Acts studies; 3) learn how to do basic research and writing in NT studies; 4) begin to gain an understanding of the crucial nature of studying Biblical texts in their original contexts; 5) begin to understand and develop skills in basic exegesis and hermeneutics so that sermons, teaching lessons, counseling material can be prepared.

The student who successfully completes this course and masters its material will be well prepared to enter upper level exegesis or theological courses. The student who completes this course will also be made more aware that the church even from its beginnings has been a global and multi-ethnic community, and the Gospel has been a message that could be implanted in various cultural contexts. The student will learn of the commitment of the early church to a cross-cultural ministry.

The book of Acts has in addition, been a prominent source for reflection on a series of Wesleyan concepts including: 1) the concept of subsequence, or post-conversion crisis experiences in the life of the Christian; 2) the concept of the universal scope of the Gospel and God’s desire that none should perish; 3) the concept of small groups and intentional communities that are committed to a sharing in the social as well as the spiritual Gospel (see Acts 2 and 4). Having completed this course the student will be able to appropriate the material in Acts for such discussions and practices in a modern Wesleyan setting.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be a term paper either exegetical or theological or historical in character which is to be no less than 20 pages of text in length (double spacing, plus notes and bibliography) on some subject related to the five areas covered in the course as listed above. Sample term papers are available in the library. I will expect you to follow one of the following standard formats for such papers-- APA style, MLA style sheet, Turabian, or Slade. This paper is due exactly one week after the last class session. You should be prepared to use eight to ten good sources for your paper. The Bible and Webster’s dictionary do not constitute sources. Resources listed in your text books as primary and secondary sources do. I would recommend your using 2-3 good articles and 4-5 good commentaries or NT monographs.

In an intensive class, attendance in all sessions is of paramount importance. A person who misses one class has in fact missed one fifth of the term! Therefore attendance in all sessions in mandatory.

In addition it will be expected that the student has read in advance most of the required textbooks so he or she can meaningfully interact with the lectures and discussions.
REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

4) B. Witherington, III History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts (Cambridge: C.U. Press, 1996) [n.b. this volume is recommended not required and can provide extra credit reading or term paper material]

READING SCHEDULE

It is very important that you keep up with the reading schedule. In fact I would encourage you to start early and get ahead. Basically you should begin by reading the articles in the Dictionary which have to do with Acts-- the book, its major figures, the major cities, rhetorical criticism, apostleship, women, missions, Christology and related matters. This should be followed by a careful working through the text itself in Greek coupled with a reading through of the commentary. Finally you should read the volume on Theology. If you read ahead, you can also begin your term paper on the basis of the bibliographies in these works.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Day One will be on history, archaeology, the social world, questions of introduction, struture, purpose, genre of Acts. The remainder of the lectures will involve a selected working through of key passages and themes seriatim.

WEB MANIA

There are a wide and wild variety of websites that you may find helpful for Biblical studies: 1) http://www.luthersem.edu/learnnet/biblepro/bible.htm; 2) if you want to test your Bible knowledge try http://www.spectra.net/~diana/webt2.htm; 3) http://www.americanbible.org;
4) http://www.gospelcom.net/ccmag/mags.html; 5) http://scholar.cc.emory.edu /scripts/highplaces.html

If you are looking for a major league search engine try: 1) http://www.findspot.com; or 2) http://argos.evansville.edu/.