



Life and Teachings of Jesus BIB 620 WC

The mission of MB Seminary is to educate and equip men and women to help lead the church in reaching Canada and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Instructor: Mark Wessner, PhD
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Credit Hours: 3
Prerequisites: none
Course Term: October 12 - December 12, 2026

Course Instruction

Course Intensive Day 1	Thursday, November 19	6:30 pm - 9:00 pm
Course Intensive Day 2	Friday, November 20	6:30 pm - 9:00 pm
Course Intensive Day 3	Saturday, November 21	8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Online Colloquia	Monday, December 14	7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

Course Description

This course explores the life, mission, and theological identity of Jesus Christ through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, emphasizing final-text exegesis and canonical unity. Students will critically engage the Gospels as narrative and theological witness to Jesus, shaped by distinct literary and historical contexts yet converging around his identity as Messiah, Son of God, and inaugurator of God's kingdom. Through careful exegesis, guided readings, collaborative theological reflection, and Spirit-led interpretation within the community, students will grow in their ability to interpret Scripture and live as Christ-centred disciples in today's world.

Course Objectives

This course's theme and content are consistent with, and taught through the lens of, the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Exegete each of the four Gospels in light of their theological and literary structure.
- Articulate the distinctive portrait each Gospel presents of Jesus and how these portraits interact with and influence the life of Jesus' followers today.

- Evaluate the theological significance and ministry relevance of miracles, parables, and teachings within each Gospel.
- Engage critically with major scholarly perspectives, integrating these with personal theological convictions, discerned within the authority of Scripture and the community of faith.
- Practice communal discernment and Spirit-guided application of Gospel texts for leadership and discipleship today.

The most effective learning occurs as you carefully process information through higher-order thinking skills. Your performance and evaluation in this course will be based on demonstrating your engagement and learning, not simply repeating basic facts. In all that you do in this class, you should use higher-order thinking skills, as described below:

- Comprehension: demonstrates the ability to grasp meaning, explain, and restate ideas,
- Application: demonstrates the ability to use learned material in new situations,
- Analysis: demonstrates the ability to separate material into component parts and show relationships between the parts.
- Synthesis: demonstrates the ability to put together the separate ideas to form a new whole, to establish new relationships, and
- Evaluation: demonstrates the ability to judge the worth of material against stated criteria.

Required Texts

- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- The Bible. *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*.
- Heidebrecht, Doug, and Mark Wessner. "Interpreting Scripture Today: A Mennonite Brethren Model and Method." *Direction* 49, no. 2 (2020): 115–22.
- Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016.

Schedule of Assignments

Week	Due Date	Assignments	% of Grade	Cumulative
1		Course Intensive (schedule below)		
2	Nov 28	Reflection Paper #1	8%	8%
3	Dec 5	Discussion Group #1	2%	10%
4	Dec 12	Reflection Paper #2	8%	18%
5	Dec 14	Online Session		
5	Dec 19	Discussion Group #2	2%	20%
6	Dec 26	n/a		
7	Jan 2	Research Paper	34%	54%

8	Jan 9	Reflection Paper #3 Discussion Group #3	8% 2%	62% 64%
9	Jan 16	Ministry Curriculum Project	36%	100%

Schedule of Course Intensive

Thursday, November 19	6:30pm-9:00pm
Session 1	• Authority of Scripture • MB Interpretive Model and Method • Introduction to the Gospels
Friday, November 20	6:30pm-9:00pm
Session 2	• Introduction to the Parables • Contexts of the Gospels
Saturday, November 21	8:30am- 4:30pm
Session 3	• Chronology • Mark
Session 4	• Matthew • Luke • John
Session 5	• Birth and Beginnings • Message of Jesus
Session 6	• Miracles of Jesus, Messiah, Death, Resurrection

Note: Attending all in-person and online course sessions is required for passing the course.

Assignments and Evaluation

Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups: There are three sets of Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups, with grading based on two components for each Paper/Group set. During three weeks of the course (Weeks 2, 4, 7), you will write a three-page reflection paper in response to the instructional content and the required readings. Your reflection paper should answer the questions assigned to each of the three weeks (see below). The week after your reflection paper is due, you will meet in church-based discussion groups to discuss your responses to the questions and explore other related topics. The maximum length for each reflection paper is three pages.

1. **Reflection Papers** (3 reflection papers x 8% = 24% of final grade): The following are the questions you should address in your three reflection papers (there are three questions for each week, so aim for one page per question):
 - **Reflection Paper 1** - Given your understanding of the historical, cultural, and geographic settings of the four Gospels as described in the course content and textbooks, explain why knowing the background context is vital for interpreting Jesus' life and teachings accurately.
 1. How does understanding the religious and political environment of first-century Palestine shape the way you read the Gospels?
 2. In what ways do insights from Bailey and Strauss help you appreciate the unique settings of each Gospel?
 3. What is one background detail that has changed or deepened your understanding of a specific story or saying of Jesus?
 - **Reflection Paper 2** - Reflect on the nature and purpose of Jesus' parables as presented in the Gospels.
 1. According to Strauss and the course content, what role do parables play in Jesus' teaching ministry?
 2. Choose one parable and explain how its meaning depends on understanding its historical setting and audience.
 3. How can you apply the interpretive principles for parables to your own reading and teaching of Scripture today?
 - **Reflection Paper 3** - Reflect on the historical trustworthiness of Jesus and the Gospels.
 1. What are the strongest reasons you have for trusting the Gospels as accurate witnesses to Jesus' life and words? Describe why they are meaningful to you.
 2. How do the differences and similarities among the four Gospels strengthen or challenge your confidence in their reliability?
 3. In what ways does understanding the final-text exegesis approach help you address modern doubts about the Gospels' trustworthiness?
2. **Discussion Groups** (3 discussion groups x 2% = 6% of final grade): For the three Discussion Groups, you will meet in a church-based or virtual discussion group to discuss the questions you addressed in your reflection paper, explore other related topics, and contextualize ideas to your ministry setting. A designated leader from the church will facilitate the church-based discussion groups. The assessment of participation in discussion groups involves attendance and actual participation in the group sessions (both are worth 50% of the discussion group mark). The discussion group leaders will use the following rubric to assess each group member's participation:

Excellent participation	47-50/50	The group member consistently engaged in the group conversations. The person did an excellent job listening to other group members and consistently added meaningful content to the conversations.
Great participation	43-46/50	The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically.

Good participation	40-43/50	The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically.
Fair participation	35-39/50	The group member did not often engage in group conversations. The person seemed out of touch with the group conversation and would rarely add relevant content.
Poor participation	<35/50	The group member rarely, if ever, engaged in the group conversations. The person seemed distant and uninterested in the group discussion and even other group members.

3. **Research Paper** (34% of final grade): A 15-18 page paper on either a key teaching or a miracle of Jesus. You can choose any text you would like to study, provided that Dr Wessner has approved both the passage and your draft bibliography prior to writing the paper. At a minimum, the paper will consist of:
 - The identification of the passage (where it starts/stops, its placement within the Gospel, etc), giving specific reasons for each of your conclusions (5 points),
 - An analysis of the literary style and characteristics of the passage (5 points),
 - A detailed and thoughtful application of the appropriate interpretive approach described during the course (15 points),
 - A concluding section on its theological significance for the original audience and its relevance for contemporary discipleship (8 points), and
 - Specific references from at least five sources, in addition to the Required Texts (1 point)
 - All conclusions and opinions must be supported and documented with relevant and appropriate evidence and/or examples.

4. **Ministry Curriculum Project** (36% of final grade): Using the Research Paper as the foundation, you are to create either a small group study guide or a classroom curriculum based on the Research Paper passage. The study guide/curriculum must reflect the content and principles discussed in this course, and it must include a section on life and ministry application for the participants. You are to work through the study guide/curriculum with a small group of at least four people (one meeting).
 - A thorough and detailed study guide/curriculum (22 points), and
 - A 2,000 word summary of your small group/classroom experience (14 points).

Course Evaluation

Near the conclusion of this course, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Because feedback is very important to us, the course evaluation is a required part of the course and is tied to the submission of your last assignment. The course evaluation will be integrated into the Populi classroom in Week 7.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	Superior	4.30	Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight, critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable.
A	Excellent	4.00	Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use.
A-	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skillful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage.
B+	Proficient	3.30	Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage.
B	Good	3.00	Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
B-	Average	2.70	Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
C+	Adequate	2.30	Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style.
C	Acceptable	2.00	Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar.
C-	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision or references and resources not taken fully into account or examples are basic or not completely convincing or barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies.
F	Below Standard	0.00	Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level.

Important Academic Notes

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire MB Seminary community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship at MB Seminary. Instances of academic misconduct are taken seriously at MB Seminary, and appropriate consequences for plagiarism and academic fraud will be applied.

Artificial Intelligence

The inappropriate use of artificial intelligence tools is also a form of Academic Misconduct. Generative AI, when properly cited, may support a student's work, but it may not be used to transform it. Therefore,

When students use generative artificial intelligence tools to **research** any course-related work, the generated material must be clearly and correctly indicated and cited using the Chicago/Turabian referencing style for generative AI. Additionally, students must also cite the exact prompts used.

Citation is not required to document the use of simple proofreading. However, generative **AI tools may not be used to translate, paraphrase, or increase the fluency of a student's original work**. Therefore, if the AI tool's results produce material changes to your wording, structure, phrasing, language, or style, you are in contravention of this policy.

Failure to clearly indicate and reference AI-generated material or any use of AI paraphrasing tools that alter syntax, originality and/or clarity will be considered a violation of academic integrity and reported as academic fraud.

For specific issues related to your course, students are encouraged to contact their course professors directly.

Late Assignments

Manage your time well. Review the required assignments for the course and write out a realistic schedule for completing each assignment's research and writing.

- Assignments can be submitted before their due dates (and it is better time management to do so).
- Late assignments will be deducted 10% per day, to a maximum of five days. Any assignment submitted more than five days late will not be accepted.
- Please note that any assignment submitted after the last day of class will not be counted toward your final grade – there will be no exceptions. It is your responsibility to ensure that all assignments are submitted on time. If you have requested and been approved for a formal

course extension, it is your responsibility to submit all assignments before the expiry of the extension.

Paper Formatting

Students are required to adhere to the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format for all papers. Please consult the [Turabian Citation Quick Guide](#) for information or:

Turabian, Kate, L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Thesis, and Dissertations*, 9th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Assignment Grade Appeals

Students can appeal an assignment's grade to the course instructor by stating their reasons for contesting the grade in writing. The deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has received their grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made directly to Dr. Brian Cooper, Director of Student Development, briancooper@mbseminary.ca. These must be submitted in writing within 14 days of the grade being posted.

Web Support-Student Portal — <https://mbseminary.populiweb.com>

All students at MB Seminary will receive an MBS-Populi username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application. If you have any difficulty with your password or your login credentials, please contact Keith Reed, Director of Church Equipping, keithreed@mbseminary.ca.

Course Intensive/Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate class cancellation information to your church host and contact. You should also check the Populi classroom for updates.

Equity of Access

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the MB Seminary Director of Student Development (briancooper@mbseminary.ca) of this fact **before the start of a course** so that necessary arrangements can be made to support the student's learning. Medical documentation is required, along with a description of the accommodation the student is seeking. Students are encouraged to have any accommodations granted in place well before the start of their course.