



Reformed Theological Seminary  
Washington, D.C.  
**Acts & Romans (NT5250-W1)**

## PROFESSOR

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goal of this course is to better understand the authorial purpose, historical context, and contemporary relevance of the book of Acts and the book of Romans.

We will pursue this goal by looking at each of these books as separate entities, as is proper since there is no obvious connection between the two. However, we will also have occasion to note an unanticipated relationship between them. The significance of and theology behind the Gentile mission is a common concern for both books, as is the redemptive-historical continuity of God's overarching plan for his people. The two books nicely coordinate and offer correlative perspectives on pivotal events in the early Church, and both flow from a common theological concern.

At the same time, they are very different. Acts, so grounded in historical events, can seem too "occasional" for modern readers and the modern church—how is what happened then relevant to us now? Should we seek to model our churches after the ancient pattern, or should we do what we think is best for our own culture and times? By contrast, Romans seems so abstract and theological—a treatise that is always applicable in all ages—that relevance is often regarded as a much simpler matter. But what was the situation that called forth this letter, and what was Paul's purpose in writing it? The particularity of Acts and the generality of Romans both present challenges to modern readers, and it will be part of the goal of this class to explore those challenges and make some suggestions for moving forward.

The goal of all of this is to serve God's church. That is why these books were given to us, and that is how we should read them—as pastors and servants of God who seek to build up God's people, the Jew first, and also the Greek.

## IN-PERSON LECTURES

We will meet Monday to Friday from 9:00AM – 4:30 PM on January 5 through January 9.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

The following readings are required and are a graded portion of the class. At the end of the term, you will fill out a “reading completion form,” stating on-your-honor the percentage of each reading that you completed. Partial credit will not be given for article-length readings.

Note: These readings are not being assigned to give you “the right answers” but rather to call you to engage in an ongoing dialog with Scripture and with those who interpret the Scriptures. Please read with humility and critical appreciation.

It is a good idea to get ahead in your readings. Those wanting to do so should start with the Bible reading, followed by the special introduction reading. Everyone should finish the Bible reading as soon as possible, as it will help you better engage with the lecture material. It is best to stay just ahead of the lecture material in the readings.

### ***Bible:***

- Reader's Bible (<https://www.crossway.org/bibles/esv-readers-bible-cob/>) or an audio bible (Acts and Romans, twice each)

### ***Special Introduction:***

- Kruger, Michael J., ed. *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016. (The chapters on Acts and Romans)

### ***The Earliest Christians in the Greco-Roman World:***

- Wright, N. T., and M. F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians. Illustrated edition*. Zondervan Academic, 2019. (pp. 142-169; optionally you can read the entire book)

### ***Acts:***

- Gaffin, Richard B., Jr. *Perspectives on Pentecost*. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1979. (pp. 13- 41)
- Thompson, Alan J. *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*. Downers Grove, NJ: IVP, 2011. (all)

### **Romans:**

- Bird, M. F. "‘Raised for Our Justification’: A Fresh Look at Romans 4:25." *Colloquium* 35, no. 1 (2003): 31–46. (all)
- Gaffin, Richard. "Eschatological Structure" in *In the Fullness of Time*. (pp. 245-299)
- Hays, R. B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. (pp. 34-83)
- Ridderbos, H. N. *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001. (pp. 44-60)
- ----- "Professor Ridderbos on Romans 11:25-32." In *Israel*, translated by R. B. Gaffin. Available online only. (all)
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993. (all)
- Seifrid, Mark A. *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2000. (all)
- Westerholm, S. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. (pp. 261-296)

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Your final grade will be determined by three factors: (1) your completion of the required reading, (2) a 10-15 exegetical paper on a text of your choosing, (3) a three-question final exam. *All assignments are due on the last day of the term, March 31, 2026.*

### **Bible Reading (18%)**

Read (or listen to) each book in a single sitting, preferably from a Reader's Bible (<https://www.crossway.org/bibles/esv-readers-bible-cob/>) or using an audio bible. *Please have this read before the start of the first class.*

Read through each book a second time, this time making a list of as many distinct textual, and exegetical questions as you can think of. You will turn in this list as part of

your reading report. (For the purposes of this assignment, aim for a minimum of 5-10 questions per “chapter”).

### ***General Reading (7%)***

On the day you take the final exam, you will also be required to fill out a form stating the percentage of reading that you completed. Each of your required reading assignments will be listed and you will be required to estimate, on your honor, the percentage of each you completed. I consider a book “read” if you have made every effort to understand its main points and the various justifications offered for that point. This usually requires reading and comprehending each paragraph, but not necessarily each word or sentence. In short: skimming is permissible at certain points and in certain cases but not skipping.

Partial credit will NOT be given for the Bible Reading assignments or for article/chapter-length material.

### ***Exegetical Paper (45%)***

#### *Overview*

You are required to write a 3,500 words (double-spaced) page exegetical research paper on a text of your choosing. You can choose any text in Romans or Acts. The paper should be submitted by email no later than midnight on the due date listed above.

#### *Text Selection*

Text selection can make or break an exegetical paper, so choose your text carefully. Your text needs to be short enough that you can do it justice in the space of 3,500 words, but long enough that it can stand on its own and has its own integrity. Aim for about a paragraph, maybe two if necessary. It is not always easy to determine where your paragraph begins and ends— different English translations and Biblical commentaries divide the text differently (there are no paragraphs in the “original,” at least not as we might consider them), so you will need to do a little research before coming to a final decision. I suggest you pick a section of Scripture (a verse or two) that seems interesting to you, then do a little research on those verses to determine the beginning and ending of the paragraph in which they occur. That final paragraph (or two) should be the center-point of your paper.

#### *How to Write an Exegetical Paper*

An exegetical paper, unlike a theological or thematic one, is centered upon one particular pericope of Scripture (a paragraph or two, depending on genre). That text is the heart of your paper, and your goal should be to explain what that text means in both its immediate and canonical context.

Once you have picked a text that interests you (see above), begin your research by reading your text (and its surrounding context) over and over again. Go verse by verse and ask yourself tons of questions (and write them all down). No question is too simple

(or too complex)! Sometimes the key to a text is found in the questions that seem “too obvious.” Make sure at least one of these questions is “What is the point?” or “Why is this here?”. In fact, several of your questions should be variations of those all-important ideas. Why does Peter say it that way? Why does John include this in his argument? Why does the author of Hebrews go there? These are all questions of purpose or intent, and they are the most important ones to ask.

Now start answering your questions. Don't pick up a book or a commentary quite yet. Answer your questions first by prayerfully and humbly looking at the text itself. You will need to look at the immediate context of your passage. How does it fit into the flow of the book as a whole? How does it further the author's main point? Outline your text and outline the book in which it occurs. These types of activities help you view the text as a small piece of a larger whole.

Once you have started to explore your text a little more a “main point” should begin to coalesce in your mind. Try to write down that main point in a sentence or so. Aim for a “tweetable” main point. Then broaden your horizons. What is the main point of this section of the book? What is the main point of the book as a whole? And how does this book contribute to our overall understanding of the canon, of redemptive history, and of the Christian life?

Only after you have at least preliminary answers to these questions are you ready to crack open a commentary. Start researching your passage in reliable commentaries and articles (the Word series of commentaries usually have excellent bibliographies you can consult). In the course of your research you will be able to refine and develop (or reject) the ideas you have already come to on your own.

Now it's time to start writing. Sketch up a preliminary outline. Your organization will of course be dependent on your passage and the main point you want to make, but I suggest you start narrow (that is, with the details of your text) and work your way out (that is, with the literary and then canonical context of your text). After a brief introduction, start by explaining the immediate concerns of the text you picked. Are there any translation issues to note? Any strange words? Describe the flow of the argument and tell us the main point being made. Next, describe how your passage fits into the broader context of the book—start with the immediate context and then increasingly “zoom out” until the whole book is in view. As a final concern, show how your passage deepens our understanding of the Bible as a whole, how it fits into the Gospel of our redemption (this is not the major emphasis of an exegetical paper, but it's good to do). Along the way, or at the end, you can feel more than free to make some “practical applications.”

### *Greek Requirement*

If you have taken Greek, please use it in your paper. Provide your own translation of the passage that you picked and justify that translation when appropriate. Use Greek when appropriate throughout. You do not need to be detailed here, but if you know Greek use it!

### *Format*

Your paper should be double spaced with 1-inch margins. Use Times New Roman or equivalent font, 12pt. Cite all your sources following the guidelines laid out in the SBL Handbook or the Chicago Manual of Style (I'm fine with either the "standard" method or the newer author-date format) You might want to consider using bibliography software, such as the free Zotero plugin for Firefox (<http://nerdlets.org/2008/11/20/setting-up-zotero-link-by-link/>) to make this process easier. Include a bibliography with all the works you cited in your paper as described in the aforementioned guides.

### ***Final Examination (30%)***

There will not be a traditional final exam for this class. Instead, you will be given the opportunity to respond to a series of technical or controversial matters related to this section of the canon. The prompts will require 1-3 page answers, each of which should follow all of the ordinary expectations of academic paper writing. The intent is to give you an opportunity to carefully work through some of the knotty problems we will encounter along the way and critically engage the issues. In essence these are position papers in which you provide an argument for your solution to critical and theological challenges posed by this section of the canon.

You can approach this assignment as an "open note, open book, take home exam," though, as mentioned above, it should be formatted like an academic paper. Good answers will reflect an integration and appropriation of material derived from lectures, course readings, and personal reflection and critique. Great answers will additionally utilize independent research. The use of independent research is not required, but it will assist you in working through the issues.

I will give you the list of questions on the first day of class.

### **GRADING SCALE**

Bible Reading	18%
General Reading	7%
Exegetical Paper	45%
Final Examination	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

A	97-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-96	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	59 ↓