

RELIGION 840:202:02
JEWISH STUDIES 563:223:02
NEW TESTAMENT

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Office hours: Monday noon to 2 p.m.; **appointments available at other times—just ask!**

General Description of the Course

In this course, we will study the origins and development of the New Testament, which is historically important for two major reasons. First, it is the fundamental book of faith for a world religion, Christianity. Second, it is an important source for understanding the history of the time in which it was written. We will learn about the background of early Christianity, the history of the various writings in the New Testament, and the questions and debates that occupy scholars who study the history of early Christianity.

Our questions will be along the following lines: What methods do scholars use when studying the origins of a religion? What can we know about Jesus of Nazareth and his earliest followers? Can we sort historical fact from myth in accounts of his life, death, and resurrection? What happens to stories and ideas about Jesus of Nazareth in the first three centuries after his death? Who wrote the New Testament books? When? Why? Where? In response to what needs? Given its origins in a Jewish land, its foundation by a Jewish teacher and his Jewish followers, and its early roots in the synagogues of the Mediterranean world, how does Christianity come to be a separate religion from Judaism? What does the New Testament tell us about politics, social issues, Jesus and society, the church(es) and the rest of society? What is the relationship between Christianity and Greco-Roman religion? Greco-Roman philosophy? What is unique about Christianity and what is shared with other religions or philosophies?

That, of course, is a lot to chew. We cannot comprehensively cover a large body of scholarship and a profoundly important set of historical sources in one term, but we will survey many issues. The fundamental aim is to give students a sense of the great variety of New Testament texts and the great variety of approaches to them, with the hope that some students will be intrigued enough to delve deeper. Perhaps most importantly: everyone in the course will read big chunks of the New Testament (assuming, of course, that everyone follows the syllabus).

In a world where Jesus is continually invoked, everyone should at the very least have done that.

This course counts toward the following SAS core curriculum requirements:

Social and Historical Analysis

- h. Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.
- i. Explain and be able to assess the relationship among assumptions, method, evidence, arguments, and theory in social and historical analysis.

Historical Analysis [HSt]

- k. Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time, including the history of ideas or history of science.
- l. Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors.

Course Goals and Assessment:

The **goals** of this course are as follows:

1. Content: Students will learn the history of the New Testament texts, the history of the New Testament canon, the scholarly consensus about the dating and composition of the texts, the Jewish and Greco-Roman context of early Christianity, and the basic theological messages of a variety of early Christian movements.
2. Approach 1: Students will become familiar with the ways that secular scholars of religion approach questions of theology and religious evolution; they will learn some of the terminology scholars use to describe religious movements and the religious convictions of individuals; they will learn what kinds of proof are acceptable in scholarly circles and why.
3. Approach 2: Students will learn the excitement and caution with which historians approach textual evidence. They will learn to read a text carefully for what it says and what it does not say. They will learn to use internal evidence to place a text chronologically, theologically, and geographically. They will learn to use external evidence to give a text a context, and then to use that context to deepen understanding of the text.

Assessment of students' progress in these three areas will be measured in two ways:

1. Students' progress in all three areas will be measured in three multiple-choice exams and an extended assignment of exegesis culminating in a paper.
2. Students' ability to read New Testament texts carefully and analyze them, their ability to put text and context together, and their overall understanding of the joys and pitfalls of studying a religiously important text will primarily be assessed by the instructor on the basis of student contributions to discussions. **Participation is therefore a crucial component of this course. At the end of this syllabus is a description of the criteria used for judging participation—please read them carefully.**

Required Books

(available at the Barnes & Noble RU Bookstore):

- *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with Apocrypha/deuterocanonical Books*. **ISBN 0-06-065580-1** [You may already have a Bible, and you may use it if you wish. Nevertheless, this particular Bible is especially valuable. It contains all of the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books, extra commentary, maps, and a canon table. If at all possible, you should buy and use it.]
- Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). **ISBN 978-0-19-975753-4**
- Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, **ISBN-10:** 0679724532 **ISBN-13:** 978-067972453

Grading:

- 3 Exams @ 15% = 45%
- Assignments # 1 and #2 @ 5% = 10%
- Assignment #3 (Exegesis paper) = 25%
- Participation = 20%

Attendance:

Self-Reporting of Absences

In accordance with University policy, if you expect to miss a class, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Such reporting does NOT EXCUSE your absence.

Because students learn more and retain more when they attend class, **students are required to attend lectures and discussions.** Aware, however, that illnesses, family crises, and such can make even the most diligent student miss class, **the professor allows 3 absences without penalty.** The 3 absences are not recommended, should be used only when you NEED to, and are NOT negotiable. Do not use up three absences just because they seem like a free pass and then expect a fourth absence to be excused when you are ill or have an emergency.

For every absence beyond three, your total grade for the course will drop 1/3 of a grade-point (e.g., from A to B+, from B+ to B, from B to C+, and so on).

Promptness:

Being late is rude. It interrupts the professor and your classmates, inconveniences those who must move to let you sit down, and generally causes problems for other people. Because all of us run late sometimes, you are allowed to be *moderately late up to three times during the semester without penalty.*

Your fourth late arrival will be treated as an absence, as will any subsequent late arrivals. Please note that **I will not make exceptions for late arrivals caused by work schedules, campus bus schedules, or parking problems.** If you arrive after the roll has been called, you must talk to me after class is over. If you arrive more than 40 minutes after the class begins you are welcome to attend but you will be marked down as absent rather than late for that class.

IF, BECAUSE OF OTHER COMMITMENTS, YOU CANNOT MAKE IT TO CLASS ON TIME, YOU SHOULD DROP THE COURSE.

Schedule of Readings, Examinations, and Assignments

Please go through this syllabus as soon as possible and put the due dates for exams, assignments, and paper on your calendar!!!! While the professor will try to remind you about deadlines, the professor is herself absentminded about such things and relies on a DETAILED, WRITTEN calendar. She recommends that you do the same.

NOTE: ALL READING ASSIGNMENTS ARE TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE CLASS PERIOD FOR WHICH THEY ARE ASSIGNED.

The New Testament does not lend itself to equal distribution as reading assignments. Different books are of vastly different lengths. You will notice, then, that some weeks have many, many pages of reading, while others have very little. I highly recommend that you use the weeks with less reading to get ahead in reading for future weeks.

We will often discuss the assigned readings in class. The standards by which I grade participation are attached to the bottom of this syllabus. Please familiarize yourself with these standards. Participation is an active and rewarding process which requires more than mere attendance.

Sept. 3: Introductory class; no reading. But it wouldn't hurt to get started on the Gospel of Mark.

Sept. 8 ALTHOUGH THIS IS A TUESDAY ON ALL NORMAL CALENDARS, AT RUTGERS THIS IS A Monday. Follow your MONDAY class schedule: READ THE SYLLABUS and bring any questions you have to class. Ehrman, Chapters 1 and 2 and the section "Ancient Manuscripts of the New Testament" that follows chapter 2.

Sept. 10: Ehrman, Chapter 6; Gospel of Mark chapters 1-6

Sept. 14: Ehrman chapter 7; Gospel of Mark chapters 7-11.

Sept. 17: Gospel of Mark chapters 12-16.

Sept. 21: Ehrman chapter 8; Gospel of Matthew chapters 1-7.

Sept. 24: Ehrman chapter 9; Gospel of Matthew chapters 16, 22, 24, 26-28.

Sept. 28: Ehrman chapter 10; Gospel of Luke chapters 1-4, 9-11, 14-16, 21-24.

Oct. 1: CLASS WILL NOT MEET. Review synoptic gospels and synoptic problem for exam.

October 5: First in-class examination

October 8: Ehrman chapters 3-4

October 12: Ehrman Chapter 5.

October 15: Ehrman chapter 11, Acts of the Apostles chapters 1-8

October 19: Acts of the Apostles chapters 9-28

Assignment #1 due on Sakai before noon.

October 22: Ehrman chapter 12, Gospel of John chapters 1-12

October 26: Gospel of John 13-21; Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, pages xiii-69.

October 29: Ehrman chapter 13; 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John; Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, pages 70-152.

November 2: 2nd in-class exam

Nov. 5: Ehrman chapters 19-21, 1 Thessalonians

Nov. 9: Ehrman chapter 22, sections on 1 and 2 Corinthians; 1 Corinthians

Nov. 12: Ehrman chapter 22, sections on Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon;
Galatians

Galatians is short. Romans, assigned for next week, is very long. You might want to start reading Romans after you have finished Galatians.

Nov. 16: Ehrman chapter 23, Romans chapters 1-11.

Assignment #2 due on Sakai before noon.

Nov. 19: Romans chapters 12-16; *Gospel of Mary* pp. 119-127

Nov. 23: Ehrman chapter 24, James

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov. 30: Ehrman chapter 25, 2 Thessalonians

Dec. 3: Ehrman chapter 26, *Gospel of Mary* pp. 83-90, 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus

Dec. 7: Ehrman chapter 27, Hebrews

Assignment #3 (Exegesis Paper) due before noon, December 7, on Sakai

Exam #3 during University Final Exam Period as posted at

finalexams.rutgers.edu

December 16, noon-3 p.m.

Standards for Grading Student Participation in Class Discussions

One big hint: There are suggested discussion questions at the end of most chapters in the textbook. Read them. Think about them.

A:

A student who receives an **A** for participation in discussion typically comes to every class with questions about the readings in mind. An **A** discussant engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

B:

A student who receives a **B** for participation in discussion typically does not always come to class with questions about the readings in mind. A **B** discussant waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some discussants in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.

C:

A student who receives a **C** for participation attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant. S/he may also fail to show respect for the contributions of others, fail to listen carefully to others, or be discourteous in other ways.

D:

A student who fails to attend regularly and prepare adequately for discussion risks the grade of **D**

Or even F

[These standards are adapted only slightly from those officially adopted by the Princeton University Department of History in 1998. They were authored primarily by Andrew Isenberg (thanks, Drew).]

General Instructions for Exegesis

Assignments #1, 2, and 3

Exegesis refers to the systematic analysis of a text—in this case a passage from the New Testament. For scholarly purposes, a complete exegesis will include discussion of the form of the text, its sources, its context, and its relation to other texts.

In a devotional context, exegesis also means interpreting the text’s moral and theological meaning, based not only on contemporary texts but on later Christian teaching and theology. This is NOT what we are doing for this class. Do not make statements that you cannot support from the text alone. If you use terms later central to Christian theology—such as Son of God, salvation, redemption, atonement—you must define what they mean to you and to the text’s author. I recommend that you simply do not use such terms in the context of a scholarly exegesis.

If you are worried about this, talk to Professor Kolbaba!

First, select ONE of the following passages from the New Testament. This passage is going to be with you for the whole semester, so try to pick the one that interests you most.

Mk 5:21-43.

Lk 10:25-37

Mk 8:22-33.

Lk 14:15-23

Mk 13:1-27

Lk 23:26-48

Mk 16:1-20

Jn 6:26-59

Mt 2:1-23

Jn 9:1-34

Mt 5:1-48

Jn 10:1-21

Mt 15:1-28

Jn 19:16-37

Mt 21:33-46

Mt 23:1-39

Lk 2:1-21

Lk 6:17-36

Assignment #1, due by noon, on Sakai, **OCTOBER 19**

This assignment has **TWO** parts—filling in the chart below AND paraphrasing your passage. Please read the instructions for BOTH carefully.

Assignment #1, Part 1 (of 2 parts): Fill in the chart below¹ as much as you can. Most passages will NOT have all the elements in the chart.

The chart is also available for download on Sakai.

Try to answer them from the texts alone; the idea is to see what YOU can get out of the text, not to cite the commentaries of others. Be aware that many commentaries are written for Christians and presuppose the whole body of centuries of Christian teaching; you want to talk about THIS text, not later Christian interpretation.

Character(s) List all of the characters in your passage.	
Audience Can you tell from the passage what audience the author was writing for? To whom is the passage addressed, if anyone?	
Narrator Can you tell from the text who the narrator is?	
Speaker (if there is one). Who is speaking in the text, if anyone? Is someone making a speech? Is there dialogue?	

¹ This chart is adapted from the following website, accessed January 6, 2014:
<http://apu.libguides.com/content.php?pid=494201&sid=4088437>

<p>Genre What is the genre of the text? Yes, it is an excerpt from a gospel, which is a genre in itself. But can you be more specific about your particular passage? Examples of genre-within-the-gospel-genres include speech, parable, hymn, prophecy, dialogue.</p>	
<p>Setting Where is the passage set? Indoors or out? On a hill, in a valley, by the seashore? In a town, in a city, in the temple, in a synagogue?</p>	
<p>Time When is the passage set? Time of day, time of year? Is it a holy day, such as the Sabbath or Passover?</p>	
<p>Key words, phrases, or terms Are some words or phrases repeated or emphasized in other ways?</p>	

<p>Words that need defining</p> <p>Are there terms in your passage that the average person who had not read the New Testament before would not know? For example, Samaritan, Pharisee, scribe, Sanhedrin?</p>	
<p>Historical background</p> <p>Is there any historical background necessary to understand your text? For example, the history of Roman rule in Judea or the history of the temple in Jerusalem in Jesus' time?</p>	
<p>Socio-cultural background</p> <p>Is there anything that you need to know about the social context to understand this passage. For example, the roles of women and men, the importance of family, the distinctions between rulers and ruled or between rich and poor.</p>	
<p>Synoptic parallels and other references to the rest of the Bible</p> <p>Are there synoptic parallels for your passage? What are they? Are there other Scriptures (for example, the Hebrew prophets) cited in your passage? What are they? Compare your passage to these parallels: What are the similarities and differences? Are any of them significant for your understanding of when your passage was written? Or for understanding the author's ideas and emphases? Or for understanding the Synoptic Problem?</p>	

REMEMBER: *Some questions will not be relevant for some passages.*

Assignment #1, part 2: describe your passage.

Assume that you have to explain the content of the passage you have chosen to someone who knows little or nothing about the New Testament. Tell that person what your passage says, in your own words, and in less than 500 of those words. Use your best writing style. Although this is not quite a real paper, it should be clear, organized, grammatical, and thorough.

Rubric for grading essay section of Assignments #1 and 2:

	A	B	C	D or F
Content	Thoroughly and clearly describes the content of the passage.	Describes most of the content of the passage, but may omit minor details or be unclear in places.	Describes the passage in a very general way. Omits important details or is unclear.	Fails to describe the passage accurately. Gives no clear sense—or gives a misleading sense—of the passage’s meaning.
Context and definition.	Thoroughly and concisely explains historical or social context necessary for understanding of the passage, including any names of rulers. Defines or explains words that are not common in English, such as Pharisee, Samaritan, or centurion.	Mentions historical or social context necessary for understanding the passage. Defines some words that are not common in English, such as Pharisee, Samaritan, or centurion.	Omits significant social or political context OR shows only partial understanding of the context and its significance. Fails to define words that are not common in English.	Does not mention social or political context OR misrepresents that context in ways that are misleading. Fails to define words that are not common in English.
Style	Uses a varied vocabulary and sentence structure. Omits needless words.	Sentence structure and vocabulary show some variation. Mostly free of wordiness.	Sentence structure and vocabulary are basic. There may be some wordiness.	Sentence structure and vocabulary have errors. There may be some wordiness.
Grammar	Grammar is flawless.	Grammar is mostly flawless.	Grammar has a few errors that do not obscure meaning.	Grammar has many errors and/or errors that obscure meaning.
Mechanics	Text is free of typos and misspellings.	Text has very few typos or misspellings.	Text has typos or misspellings in several places.	Text has typos or misspellings in nearly every sentence.

Assignment #2, due by noon on Sakai, NOVEMBER 16

Carefully read the footnotes for your passage, as well as the introduction in your Bible to the gospel in which your passage appears. Take notes on anything that helps you understand your passage better.

Refresh your memory by skimming the chapter in Ehrman that deals with the gospel in which your passage appears. Take notes on anything that helps you understand your passage better.

Read at least two scholarly commentaries on your passage. Take notes on anything that helps you understand your passage better.

Examples of such commentaries:

The Oxford Bible Commentary

The HarperCollins Bible Commentary

Mercer Commentary on the New Testament

The Jerome Biblical Commentary

NOTE WELL: THIS PART OF THE ASSIGNMENT WILL PROBABLY REQUIRE A TRIP OR EVEN TWO TRIPS TO ONE OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES!!! ALLOW TIME FOR THAT.

COMMENTARIES AVAILABLE ONLINE ARE ALMOST ALL OUT-OF-DATE AND LACKING SCHOLARLY OBJECTIVITY.

Write no more than 500 words (about 2 pages) summarizing what you have learned about your passage. Like Assignment #1, this is not quite a real paper. You do not have to have a thesis. But you should use your best writing style, and your summary should be clear, organized, grammatical, and thorough.

This assignment will be graded by the same rubric as Assignment #1.

Assignment #3, due by noon, on Sakai, **DECEMBER 7**

A paper, 1200-1500 words in length, on your passage.

The work you did for assignments 1 and 2 was the preparation, note-taking, and research for this paper. The paper will build on the work you have done so far, but it need not use every bit of that work or answer all of those questions.

Instead, the paper will develop an **argument** that you have formulated after doing all of this preliminary work. EXAMPLES—*not* the only possible examples—of such arguments:

Although Luke's account of the birth of Jesus is historically improbable, and therefore not much help in constructing a historical biography of Jesus, it has several elements that shed light on the concerns of early Christian communities.

In Mt 5 the author represents Jesus as the new interpreter of the Jewish law and the Pharisees as his main competitors; this presentation is more a reflection of the context in which the gospel was written than of Jesus' own time.

Luke's version of the texts known as the Beatitudes and the Woes reflects the author's special concern—in contrast to the other synoptic gospels—with social and economic injustice.

See the following website for help developing strong thesis statements:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/1/>

By the way, EVERYTHING at this website is pretty useful:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu> It's worth exploring.

Assignment #3 will be graded by the following criteria:

An **A** or **A-** paper or exam is one that is good enough to be read aloud in class. It is clearly written and well-organized. It contains a perceptive, central argument that shows intellectual originality and creativity, is sensitive to historical context, and is supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples. It demonstrates that the writer has conducted a close and critical reading of texts, grappled with the issues raised in the course, synthesized the readings, discussions, and lectures, and formulated a compelling, independent argument. That is, **it is HARD to get an A.**

A **B+** or **B** paper or exam demonstrates many aspects of A-level work but falls short of it in either the organization and clarity of its writing or the formulation and presentation of its argument. Some papers or exams in this category are solid works containing flashes of insight into many of the issues raised in the course. Others give evidence of independent thought, but the argument is not presented clearly or convincingly.

A **B-** paper or exam demonstrates a command of course material and understanding of historical context but provides a less than thorough defense of the writer's independent argument because of weaknesses in writing, argument, organization, or use of evidence.

A **C+**, **C**, or **C-** paper or exam offers little more than a mere summary of ideas and information covered in the course, is insensitive to historical context, does not respond to the assignment adequately, suffers from frequent factual errors, contains unclear writing, is unclearly organized, or presents some combination of these problems.

Whereas the grading standards for written work between **A** and **C-** are concerned with the presentation of argument and evidence, a paper or exam that belongs to the **D** or **F** categories demonstrates inadequate command of the course material, often accompanied by some of the deficiencies noted for **C-range** papers.

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