

# Religion 307:91 Jesus (Online)

Spring 2014  
Rutgers University

Instructor Dr. Kathleen Gallagher Elkins      Phone 848-932-9641 (main Religion  
department number; leave a message  
with the administrative assistant)

Office      By appointment      E-mail kathleengallagher.elkins@rutgers.edu,  
Hours      (email is the best way to contact me,  
by far!)

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## **Texts:**

Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003.

Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. HarperOne, 2006.

*The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. (Or another version of the NRSV, like the New Oxford Annotated Bible; but please note, it should be an academic study bible. You may also use the online version of the NRSV [<http://bible.oremus.org/>], but the notes in the paper version are particularly helpful)

These books are easily purchased through Amazon.com or another online bookstore - also, all are available as eBooks, should you choose to do all of your reading on the computer or an eReader. The Prothero and Levine texts are available on reserve in the Douglass Library.

The eCollege site has a webliography with additional resources, which I update frequently. Please check back regularly during the course to see what has been added!

## **Description:**

The aim of this course is to study the various identity constructions of Jesus of Nazareth, both from the canonical texts and from non-canonical texts. We will examine how the earliest followers of Jesus, Jews and Gentiles living in the Roman Empire, understood and interpreted Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, resulting in the diverse portrayals of Jesus that we know as the canonical gospels. We will also engage other portrayals of Jesus (from an ancient apocalypse, from other ancient gospels, from non-Christian religious texts, from scholars, from modern films) and discuss the ways that these portrayals draw on, yet are distinct from, some of the earliest images of Jesus.

A significant focus of the course will be on the politics of these many different faces of Jesus: what might each portrayal tell us about the author/communities that revered each text? Why do some portrayals emphasize Jesus' humanity, while others portray him doing or saying superhuman things? How might we discern intergroup competition and struggle in and through these texts? Why do some scholarly reconstructions of the historical figure of Jesus contrast so strongly with others? The theological importance of Jesus images are obvious, but portrayals of Jesus are not politically, ethically, or socially neutral; these other facets of Jesus' legacy – and their implications – will be a persistent theme in the course.

## **Goals:**

- Become familiar with the various complex depictions of Jesus of Nazareth, both ones in the canonical New Testament and subsequent ones (in religious texts outside of the canon, film, novels, art, scholarship, pop culture, and so on)
- Compare and analyze diverse portrayals of Jesus, including their various identity constructions (that is, looking at issues of history, ethics, politics, theology, gender, race, and class)
- Reflect on how a person's social location affects his/her religious perspective
- Understand arguments and results of critical gospel and Historical Jesus research, including the stakes of such discussions
- Evaluate the various implications and effects of certain images of Jesus

## **Policies:**

### **Religious Holidays:**

It is University policy (University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B, formerly 60.14f) to excuse without penalty students who are absent from class because of religious observance, and to allow the make-up of work missed because of such absence. Examinations and special required out-of-class activities shall ordinarily not be scheduled on those days when religiously observant students refrain from participating in secular activities. Absences for reasons of

religious obligation shall not be counted for purposes of reporting. *Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.*

### **Learning Disabilities:**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAA) of 2008, and Sections 504 and 508 mandate that reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities. If a student has a disability and may require some type of instructional and/or examination accommodation, please contact the instructor early in the semester so that she can provide or facilitate in providing necessary accommodations. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. The student must register with the Office of Disability Services. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Students will be expected to adhere to the University policy on Academic Integrity (available online here: [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI\\_Policy\\_9\\_01\\_2011.pdf](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf)), regarding plagiarism, cheating, academic sabotage, etc.

### **Evaluation:**

Post weekly journals (20% of course grade): Read the assignments carefully. Some assignments include watching content online or listening to a podcast, so make you prepare ahead of time. There will be a question/prompt posted for each week that you should read, think about, and write a carefully thought out response by Thursday at 5p. These will be somewhat brief (about 350 words or so), but should reflect your interaction with the material for the week.

Post weekly discussion questions (20% of course grade): After completing the reading assignments, post two questions for discussion in the appropriate forum. These questions should be substantive and critical engagements with the week's reading and issues, not merely questions about the content of the reading or simple agree/disagree questions. For example, you might ask, "How do [scholar X]'s political commitments inform his portrayal of Jesus as a radical revolutionary, especially in terms of gender? And what are the possible implications of his hyper-masculine Jesus?" (Instead of "I like what [scholar Y] said. Do you?" or "What does the paragraph on page 13 mean?") If you also have clarifying questions, **you may post those in addition to the two critical, substantive questions.**) Please post questions by noon on Monday, and respond to your colleague's questions by Wednesday. This way, everyone has plenty of time to read over the questions and respond before the journals are due on Thursday. Late posts will only get half credit.

Write your own gospel (5% of course grade): Before we begin our study of Jesus, it is useful to consciously reflect on the different presuppositions that we each have. In that spirit, please write a brief (approx. 350 words) gospel (or, if you prefer, an autobiographical reflection on Jesus): who was Jesus? Why is he important (or not)? And to whom? Why should we study him? This is not intended to be a statement of faith, though it can include theological elements. Please be brave and post your gospel in the public forum – but if you are really uncomfortable doing so, email me and I will send instructions for a private Journal forum. (But really – be brave! ☺) Also, note that this is only 5% of your grade, because I don't want it to be something that is too stressful or requires extra research. It's really intended just to articulate our beginning points. Due: **Friday, January 24.**

An obituary for Jesus (10% of course grade): The death of Jesus is a crucial part of the gospels (and later Christian theology, modern biographies of Jesus, etc). Please choose a particular ancient person's perspective and write an obituary for Jesus from that person's perspective (it could also be a collective identity; i.e. the obituary could be written by Pilate or by the Sanhedrin). Approximately 350 words, due **Friday, March 14.**

Summary of a profile of the historical Jesus (10% of course grade): The Quest for the Historical Jesus is a major part of Jesus research since the Enlightenment. After reading one scholar's profile of Jesus (options posted on eCollege), please post a summary in the appropriate forum. Then, read over your colleagues' summaries to learn about other scholars' perspectives and post questions and responses to them. Post your summary by **Friday, April 4**; post responses by **Monday, April 7.**

Analysis of Jesus artifact (35% of course grade): The final project for this course will involve utilizing the analytical skills developed throughout the semester to engage a particular portrayal of Jesus. Please choose one portrayal of Jesus (either from a film, a novel, or an artifact, that is, a Jesus "object") and analyze it with the tools and perspectives we have developed in this course. Your analysis should include a description of the item (so, what is the general plot? Or how does the object look?), a well-articulated thesis statement, and a clear, logical argument about the portrayal of Jesus. You should include references to the canonical and non-canonical texts that we've read this semester, in addition to the secondary reading, as relevant. A more detailed description will be posted in the eCollege site; this assignment will be due in stages. Final project due: **Friday, May 9.**

### **Grading Rubric:**

A 90 and above  
B+ 87-89  
B 80-86  
C+ 77-79  
C 70-76  
D 60-69  
F 59 and below

## Course Schedule

The updated assignments/readings listed on eCollege always supersede the schedule below, so remember to check the course site!

Date	Topic	Assignment
January 21	Introduction to the course	
January 24		<b><i>Your Gospel due!</i></b> <i>Also, please post a brief introduction in the threaded discussion.</i>
<b>UNIT 1: Contextualizing Jesus</b>		
January 28	Greco-Roman World	<p>Read Harold Attridge and L. Michael White, "Hellenistic Culture" <a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/hellenisticculture.html">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/hellenisticculture.html</a></p> <p>Marianne Bonz, "Religion in the Roman World" <a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/religions.html">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/religions.html</a></p> <p>Listen to: These episodes of the History of Rome podcast: #56 <i>The King is Dead, Long Live the King</i> #86 <i>Wealth and Class</i> #87 <i>Thinking and Feeling</i></p> <p>Watch: The first hour of the PBS Frontline documentary "From Jesus to Christ" <a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/</a></p>
February 4	Judaism in antiquity	<p>Read Levine 1-52</p> <p>Listen to: These episodes of the History of Rome podcast: #66 <i>666</i> #67 <i>What an Artist The World is Losing</i> #83 <i>May His Bones Be Crushed</i></p> <p>Watch: Section on the Jewish Revolt, "From Jesus to Christ" <a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/</a></p>
<b>UNIT 2: Jesus in the</b>		

<b>Canon</b>		
February 11		Selections from Paul Prothero 1-42 Levine 53-86
February 18		Read: Gospel of Mark Daniel Boyarin, <i>The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ</i> , New York: New Press, pp. 25-70. Listen to: Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World - Podcasts 2.2 and 2.3 ( <a href="http://www.philipharland.com/">http://www.philipharland.com/</a> )
February 25		Gospel of Matthew Levine 87-117 Listen to: Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World - Podcasts 2.4 and 2.5 ( <a href="http://www.philipharland.com/">http://www.philipharland.com/</a> )
March 4		Gospel of Luke Suetonius on the birth of Augustus Listen to: Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World - Podcasts 2.6 and 2.7 ( <a href="http://www.philipharland.com/">http://www.philipharland.com/</a> )
March 11		Gospel of John Levine 119-166 Listen to: Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World - Podcasts 2.8 and 2.9 ( <a href="http://www.philipharland.com/">http://www.philipharland.com/</a> )
<i>March 14</i>		<b><i>Obituary due!</i></b>
March 25		The Revelation to John Moore, Stephen D. <i>God's Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible</i> . Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 173-200.
<b>UNIT 3: Beyond the Canon</b>		
April 1	Other ancient gospels	Gospels of Thomas and Mary Prothero 56-64, 87-123 Jane Schaberg with Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, <i>Mary Magdalene Understood</i> . Continuum, 2006, pp. 98-126.
<i>April 4</i>		<b><i>Historical Jesus summary due!</i></b>

April 8	Jesus in the Talmud and Qur'an	<p>Selections from the Talmud and Qur'an</p> <p>Peter Schafer, <i>Jesus in the Talmud</i>. Princeton University Press, 2007, pp. TBD.</p> <p>Tarif Khalidi, <i>The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature</i>. Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. 3-17.</p>
April 15	Identity politics: Gender, Race, Sexuality, Religion	<p>Prothero 200-228</p> <p>Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, <i>Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation</i>. New York: Continuum, 2000, pp. TBD.</p> <p><a href="http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-harvey/why-no-one-cares-about-the-white-jesus-of-mitt-romneys-mormonism_b_1864710.html">http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-harvey/why-no-one-cares-about-the-white-jesus-of-mitt-romneys-mormonism_b_1864710.html</a></p>
April 22	Jesus goes to the movies	<p>Read:</p> <p>Prothero 124-157</p> <p>Adele Reinhartz, <i>Jesus of Hollywood</i>, New York: Oxford, 2007, pp. 1-20, 251-256.</p> <p>Watch:</p> <p>Selections from <i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i>, <i>Life of Brian</i>, <i>Last Temptation of Christ</i>, and <i>The Passion</i> (posted)</p>
April 29	Course wrap-up	<p>Prothero 291-304</p> <p>Levine 215-228</p>
May 9		<b><i>Final project due</i></b>