

Introduction to the New Testament and Early Christianity

SPRING 2017

Meeting Time: M/Th 12:35 – 1:55

Meeting Location: RAB 208

Professor Kocar
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Office Location: 112 Loree Building
Office Hours: Th 9 – 10:30 or by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces students to the history and literature of the earliest followers of Jesus. Our focus will be the various documents now collected together in the New Testament, the second section of the Bible. The course's approach is historical, not theological. We will not evaluate whether or not it was *true* that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God or was raised from the dead; instead, we will consider the empirical remains of his earliest followers, their social and political circumstances, and why they wrote what they did. We will contextualize the interests and commitments of these earliest followers of Jesus against the backdrop of contemporary Jewish and Greco-Roman beliefs and practices. By critically examining the texts of the New Testament, we will pursue a range of historical and methodological questions, e.g., how do scholars use the same sources yet produce radically different reconstructions of the historical Jesus? Why were some books included while others were not? What is the social and historical significance of recurrent apocalyptic sayings, such as “the current world is passing away”? Throughout this course, we will pay special attention to the diversity of voices and views contained in the New Testament as well as those preserved outside the New Testament.

Plan for the Course

Each class will be organized around a particular theme and a primary or series of primary (ancient) readings in translation. We shall discuss together the major issues found in these readings. There will be five short (1 – 2 pages) written assignments throughout the semester. There will be a midterm just prior to Spring Break and a final exam during exam period; both exams will be cumulative. Please always bring your Bible to class; much of our time will be spent re-reading important passages together and sorting out what these texts are saying.

Policies and Requirements

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class. It will be difficult for you to complete the written assignments and perform well on the exam if you do not attend class. I would be happy to discuss missed material in office hours provided that class was missed due to illness of some personal emergency.

Readings: The amount of reading varies from week to week. Try to plan ahead. The lectures and class discussion will be far less useful if the material has not been read beforehand, especially the primary sources.

Class Participation: Debate and disagreement are to be expected in class on the New Testament. Ideally we will have opportunities to disagree and debate one another on issues as they arise

throughout the course. I expect, however, that students will remain civil and collegial in their comments, questions, and debates.

Final Evaluation

Class participation (unannounced quizzes and discussion prep.)	20%
5 Writing assignments	25%
Midterm	25%
Final Exam	30%

All written assignments will be penalized a grade for being late and another for every day after that until they are handed in. No extensions without medical reasons or serious personal disasters. Please do not email assignments without prior approval.

NB: *Significant improvement and/or excellent class participation can lift the final grade by up to 1/3 (e.g., from a B to a B+)*

Required Textbooks and Readings

The New Oxford Annotated Bible

B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 6th edition

John Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (OUP: Oxford and New York, 2000)

Additional readings listed, marked with **, will be provided by the instructor online.

Class Topics and Reading Assignments

Introduction

Week 1:

Jan 19: What is the New Testament?

Assignment #1 given out – The Different Endings to the Gospel of Mark

Week 2:

Jan 23: History of the Ancient Mediterranean world

Ehrman, 30 – 60

Jan 26: Judaism in the Greco-Roman World

2 Maccabees

Ehrman, 61 – 81

Paul the Jew, the Letter Writer, and the Missionary

Week 3:

Jan 30: NO CLASS TODAY

Feb 2: 1 Thessalonians and Philemon

1 Thessalonians

Philemon

Ehrman, 353 – 67; 396 – 400

Recommended: Daniel 7 – 12

Week 4:

Feb 6: 1 Corinthians and Philippians

1 Corinthians

Philippians

Ehrman, 368 – 79; 392 – 96

Feb. 9: 2 Corinthians and the collection(s) of Pauline letters

2 Corinthians

Ehrman, 379 – 83

Week 5: Paul and Judaism

Feb 13: Galatians

Galatians

Gager, *Reinventing Paul*, 3 – 75

Feb. 16: Romans

Romans

Gager, *Reinventing Paul*, 77 – 152

Assignment # 2 given out

The Legacy of Paul: Fighting for and Over Paul

Week 6

Feb 20: 3 Corinthians and 2 Thessalonians

3 Corinthians

2 Thessalonians

Ehrman, 434 – 41

Feb 23: Deutero-Paulines

Colossians

Ephesians

Ehrman, 442 – 48

Week 7:

Feb 27: Christians: A Gentile, not Jewish Movement

Hebrews

Ehrman, 474 – 83

Recommended: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* (selections)**

March 2: Marriage or Celibacy? The Pastorals v. Thecla

Review: I Corinthians 7

1 and 2 Timothy

Acts of Paul and Thecla **

Ehrman, 449 – 59

Week 8

March 6: Paul the Jew or Paul the Christian? Different Pauls and What is at Stake

Review: Philippians 3; Galatians 1- 2; 2 Corinthians 10 – 11

Acts 9 – 15

John Gager, “Paul the Apostle of Judaism,” in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* **

March 9: **Midterm**

Spring Break

Retelling the Story of Jesus

Week 9:

March 20: Mark

Mark

Ehrman, 103 – 19

Recommended: War-Scroll **

March 23: The synoptic problem:

Mark

Ehrman, 120 – 28

Assignment # 3 given out – The Fig Tree

Week 10:

March 27: Matthew

Matthew

Ehrman, 129 – 48

March 30: Luke
Luke
Ehrman, 149 – 68

Week 11:

April 3: Gospel of John
John
Ehrman, 169 – 91

Assignment #4 given out – Jesus' Baptism

Jesus in History

April 6: Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas
Gospel of Thomas**
Ehrman, 214 – 34

Week 12:

April 10: Historical Jesus – problems and methods
Infancy Gospel of Thomas **
Gospel of Peter**
Secret Gospel of Mark **
Ehrman, 235 – 50

April 13: Historical Jesus – The Modern Debate
Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* **
Stephen Davies, *Jesus the Healer* **
Dale Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth* **
Assignment #5 given out – Whose historical Jesus?

Early Christian Controversies

Week 13:

April 17: Johannine letters: Early Christian Expansion and Diversity
John 1, 2, and 3
Ehrman, 195 – 213
*Thunder, Perfect Mind***
*Gospel of Judas***

April 20: Women and Authority:
Gospel of Mary **
Review: 1 and 2 Timothy and *Acts of Paul and Thecla*
Ehrman, 460 – 73

Week 14

April 24: Martyrdom and Persecution

1 Peter

Trajan Pliny correspondence **

Recommended: Ignatius (selection)**

Recommended: Celsus, *On the True Doctrine* **

Ehrman, 493 – 512

April 27: Revelation

Revelation

Ehrman, 529 – 46

Week 15: How does the New Testament become a collection?

May 1: Canonization

James

2 Peter

Jude

Ehrman, 4 – 19; 513 – 28

Final Exam May 4th 8:00 AM