

Introduction to the New Testament

Religious Studies 112

Fall 2003

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Description

The stories about Jesus, the letters of Paul and the visions of the seer John are widely known. However, only few people who read the New Testament on a weekly or even daily basis ever think about the fact that these stories, letters and visions are 2000 years old. They speak to us from a world that has hardly anything in common with our own world. In this class, we will examine the New Testament writings with a historian's eye, starting from the point that the "fear of false familiarity is the beginning of historical wisdom." (*P. Fredriksen*). Emphasis will be laid on questions of the writings' individual profiles and original historical settings in the Hellenistic-Roman world of Palestine and the Jewish diaspora respectively. The ancient authors and the communities for which they were writing will be studied against the background of the contemporary religious, historical, social, and literary developments. It will become apparent how diverse already the earliest documents which attest to Jesus as the Messiah were and how much they owed to the Hellenistic-Jewish environment in which they were first formulated.

Objectives

—> For a general orientation about the purpose of the academic study of religion see: <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel100mccutch.htm>, Introductory Handout (PDF).

- Get introduced to methods and aspects relating to the scholarly interpretation of ancient literature as well as to different forms of in-class learning —
- Learn to differentiate between the writings that form the NT canon and determine their individual literary profiles by means of historical analysis —
- Gain historical knowledge of the Hellenistic-Roman world within which these writings are to be situated —

Texts

The following books are mandatory for this course and can be obtained at the University Bookstore:

B.D. Ehrman, *The New Testament. A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed., 2000.

W.A. Meeks (ed.), *The HarperCollins Study Bible. New Revised Standard Version*, 1993.

Please make sure you have permanent access to a copy of the HarperCollins Bible (purchase or otherwise) for the duration of the class since this Bible edition provides you with valuable scholarly information besides the Biblical texts.

Further recommended for interested students, but not indispensable are:

C.K. Barrett (ed.), *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, 2nd ed., 1989.

P. Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, 2nd ed., 2000.

Assigned readings for the class which are not chapters from Ehrman's textbook will be provided for you online at the course reserve for REL 112 (click on the "Course Reserves" link on our course's webpage).

You will find the following books on reserve at the Gorgas Library throughout the semester:

D. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment*, 1987.

BS 2361. 2. A 96 1987

C.K. Barrett (ed.), *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, 2nd ed., 1995.

BS 2410.B28 1987a

R. E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1997.

BS 2330.2. B76 1997

D.R. Cartlidge and D. L. Dungan (eds.), *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 1980.

BS 2555. 5. D62 x

B.D. Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity*, 1999.

BR 63. E 37 1999

B.D. Ehrman, *The New Testament. A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed., 2000.

BS 2330.2.E36 2000

P. Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, 2nd ed., 2000.

BT 198.F82 2000

L.I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in antiquity: conflict or confluence?* 1998.

BM 536.G7 L49 1998

J.C. Vanderkam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism*, 2001.

DS 121.65.V36.2001

Grades, attendance and special arrangements

Grades will be based on the following: one homework assignment, two in-class tests, a study group assignment, class attendance and participation. For those who want to improve their final grade, there will be an option for writing a final essay towards the end of the semester. The tests, assignments and also in-class participation will count towards the final grade differently depending on whether you decide to write a final essay or not. Please check the chart below:

without final essay		with final essay	
homework assignment	10%	homework assignment	5%
test 1	25%	test 1	20%
test 2	25%	test 2	20%
study group assignment	15%	study group assignment	15%
participation	25%	participation	20%
		final essay	20%
	100%		100%

The following is the standard grading scale which I will use except in cases where a curve seems warranted:

A+	99 – 100	points
A	92 – 98	“
A -	90 – 91	“
B +	88 – 89	“
B	82 – 87	“
B -	80 – 81	“
C +	78 – 79	“
C	72 – 77	“
C -	70 – 71	“
D +	68 – 69	“
D	62 – 67	“
D -	60 – 61	“
F	anything below 60 points	

Final Essay

The essay will be written on one topic of your choice from a choice of a few different topics which the instructor will propose in the second half of the semester. The goal of the voluntary essay assignment is to document that you are able to systematically explore and present a given topic in the area of New Testament studies, using the tools and methods you have become familiar with in this class. You will have the chance to demonstrate awareness of different aspects and scholarly problems associated with your topic. This assignment is meant not just as a chance for those who are not satisfied with their grades in class but also for everyone who seeks the challenge of practicing her / his scholarly skills. For help with your writing skills you can address the UA Writing Center (125 Morgan Hall, phone: 348-5049. Monday - Thursday 8 a.m - 8 p.m.; Friday 8 a.m. – 2 p.m.) which offers free assistance in all matters related to essay writing.

Note: Plagiarism is a serious scholarly offence which will not be tolerated. Proper quotations, citations and acknowledgements are expected. In accordance with the department's policy, the instructor will refer any suspicion of plagiarism to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Class attendance is required throughout. Unexcused absences, if occurring repeatedly, will affect the final grade: After three unexcused absences each additional unexcused absence will reduce the final grade by one increment (average grade of B will become B- after the fourth unexcused absence, C+ after the fifth, and so on). If you have to miss a class for serious reasons, inform the instructor *immediately*. There are no automatic make-ups for any missed assignment due to unexcused absences. You have to contact the instructor and explain your absence immediately.

Students with documented physical and / or learning disabilities please contact the Disability Services (348-4285) for special accommodations and afterwards inform the instructor of the arrangements.

Tentative Schedule

*Reading assignments in parentheses. Note: Assigned readings for a particular class date should be read prior to that day. Reading assignments with * are to be found at the online course reserves.*

Part I: Introduction to the World of the New Testament writings

- Aug 20 Introduction to the course
 Aug 22 The world of the first Christian generations I (*Vanderkam*, pp. 11+16-49 *)
 Aug 25 II (*Levine*, ch. 1, pp. 3-28 *)
 Aug 27 III (*Ehrman*, ch. 2) **homework assignment, due Sep 3**
 Aug 29 *no class: Religious Studies faculty retreat*
 Sep 1 *no class: Labor Day*
 Sep 3 IV (*Anchor Bible Dictionary* II, pp. 895-899 [Art. "Hellenistic/Roman Galilee"] *)
 Sep 5 Sources for the study of early Christianity and Judaism I (*Ehrman*, ch. 1; *Muratorian Canon* [*Ehrman*, After the NT, pp. 311f.] *)
 Sep 8 II (*Vanderkam*, pp. 88-115.138-146.150-158 [158-166 for those interested] *)
 Sep 10 III (*Anchor Bible Dictionary* IV, pp. 340-345 [Art. "Literature, Early Christian"] *; Gospel of Thomas [*Ehrman*, After the NT, pp. 238-244] *)
 Sep 12 Methods in interpreting ancient texts (*Brown*, Introduction, pp. 20-29 *; *D.L. Barr*, New Testament Story, pp. 3-9 *)
 Sep 15 **Test 1**

Part II: Early Christianity in Palestine and Beyond: The Gospels and Acts

- Sep 17 The "historical Jesus" in modern scholarship
 (*Setzer*, The Historical Jesus — either online at course reserves * or on the web at:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/tikkun.html>)
 Sep 19 Gospel genre (*Ehrman*, ch. 4; *Aune*, pp. 46-67 *; *Cartlidge/Dungan*, pp. 129-136 *)
 Sep 22 Mark I (Gospel of Mark; *Ehrman*, ch. 5)
 Sep 24 II (*Ehrman*, ch. 14 *Cartlidge/Dungan* pp. 151-165 *)
 Sep 26 Synoptic Gospels (*Ehrman*, ch. 6; *ABD* V, Art. "Q [Gospel Source]", pp. 567-572 *)
 Sep 29 **Study groups + library tours**
 Oct 1 **Study groups + library tours**
 Oct 3 **Study groups**
 Oct 6 Matthew I (Gospel of Matthew; *Ehrman*, ch. 7)
 Oct 8 II
 Oct 10 III **study group papers due**
 Oct 13 Luke I (Gospel of Luke; *Ehrman*, ch. 8)
 Oct 15 II
 Oct 17 Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and the Historical Jesus (*Ehrman*, ch. 13 and ch. 17)
 Oct 20 Acts of the Apostles I (Acts; *Ehrman*, ch. 9)
 Oct 22 II (*Aune*, pp. 80-96 *)
 Oct 24 III
 Oct 27 Johannine community (Gospel of John and letters) I (Gospel of John and Johannine Epistles 1-3; *Ehrman*, ch.10 and ch.11 [only pp. 162-170])
 Oct 29 II
 Oct 31 III
 Nov 3 "Historical Jesus" in retrospective I
 Nov 5 II
 Nov 7 **Test 2**

**Part III: Early Christianity in Asia Minor and Greece: Letters of Paul,
Revelation of John**

- Nov 10 Paul: Introduction and 1Thess I (*Ehrman*, ch. 18; **topics for voluntary essays**
Aune, pp. 158-174 *)
- Nov 12 **II** (*Ehrman*, ch. 19)
- Nov 14 **III**
- Nov 17 Paul: Corinthians I (1+2 Corinthians; *Ehrman*, ch. 20, pp. 290-303)
- Nov 19 **II**
- Nov 21 Galatians (Galatians; *Ehrman*, ch. 20, pp. 303-311)
- Nov 24 Paul: Gal, Rom I (Romans; *Ehrman*, ch. 21) **essay volunteers report in**
- Nov 26 **II**
- Nov 28 *no class: Thanksgiving Holiday*
- Dec 1 Apocalypse of John I (Rev; *Ehrman*, ch. 28)
- Dec 3 **II**
- Dec 5 **III** (*Barrett*, pp. 316-344 [excerpts] *) **voluntary essays due**

**after Dec 16 essays can be
picked up at Manly Hall 212**