

RE 202 Christian Scriptures

Instructor: Dr. Stephen Butler Murray
Palamountain 304
Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:10-3:30PM

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30-4:30PM, and by appointment
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Course Description

This course is designed to give an overview of the content and background of the twenty-seven documents that comprise the New Testament. Through these texts we will explore the historical development of early Christianity as it is expressed in the literature of the various faith communities.

The course aims to:

- familiarize the student with the content and context of the four gospels, Acts, the epistles, and Revelation, including information related to the production and subsequent transmission of these writings
- introduce the student to early Christian writings that did not “make it” to the New Testament canon
- introduce the student to the role that different analytical methods or conscious "reading strategies" play in the interpretation of these texts
- familiarize the student with a number of exegetical tools which can be used in the study of biblical texts.

Textbooks

Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (3rd edition; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Vintage Press, 1989).

The New Testament. Almost any version of the New Testament will do, although the New Revised Standard Version or the Revised Standard Version are recommended for study purposes. Do not use the King James Version or the Living Bible (or any other paraphrase).

Outline and Readings

Week One: How We Got the New Testament & The World of the New Testament Thurs, Sept 6 and Tues, Sept 11

- Ehrman: 1-47

Study Focus: What socio-historical factors are significant for understanding the world of the New Testament and the growth of early Christian groups?

Week Two: Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles

Thurs, Sept 13 and Tues, Sept 18

- 1 Thessalonians
- 1 Corinthians 1-4, 15-16
- Galatians 1-2
- Philippians 2
- Philemon
- Romans 5-8
- Ehrman: 285-361

Study Focus: Be prepared to outline historical information about Paul and the major points of his theology.

Supplementary: 1 Corinthians 5-14; 2 Corinthians; Romans 1-4, 9-16; Ascough 1998; Roetzel 1991; Soards 1987; Donfried 1991; Francis and Sampley 1984.

Week Three: Paul's First Interpreters

Thursday, September 20 and Tuesday, September 25

- 2 Thessalonians
- Ephesians
- Colossians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Ehrman: 362-407

Study Focus: Be prepared to discuss the view of church structure and leadership roles in the post-Pauline epistles and compare and contrast this view with that found in the authentic letters of Paul.

Supplementary: Schüssler Fiorenza 1983; MacDonald 1983.

Week Four: How We Read the New Testament

Thursday, September 27 and Tuesday, October 2

- John S. Kselman and Ronald D. Witherup, "Modern New Testament Criticism," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 1130-45
- Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 3-40
- Ehrman: 479-490

Study Focus: Outline the major interpretive methods or "reading strategies" employed by scholars of the New Testament.

Supplementary: Schüssler Fiorenza 1983; Robbins 1996; Fee 1983

***** Short Essay Due October 2 *****

Week Five: From Oral Tradition to Written Word & Mark's Story of Jesus

Thursday, October 4 and Tuesday, October 9

- Mark 1-16
- Ehrman: 48-91

Study Focus: Be prepared to discuss the oral transmission of the stories about Jesus and be able to discuss the rationale behind positing the "Sayings Source" (Q) and give some of its basic features. Also, be prepared to outline the major structural and theological elements of Mark's gospel.

Supplementary: Stein 1987; Sanders and Davies 1989; Throckmorton 1992; Kingsbury 1983; Matera 1987; Robbins 1984.

Week Six: A.D. 66: The Last Revolt (video)

Thursday, October 11

Study Focus: Identify the social and political factors leading up to the Jewish Revolt of 66 C.E. and discuss the consequences of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem for the Jews of the first century.

Supplementary: Akenson 2000:14-54.

Week Seven: Matthew's Interpretation of Jesus

Tuesday, October 16 and Thursday, October 18

- Matthew 1-28
- Ehrman: 92-111

Study Focus: Be able to outline the major structural and theological elements of Matthew's gospel.

Supplementary: Luz 1995; Senior 1996; Senior 1997.

***** Midterm Exam on Tuesday, October 23 *****

Week Eight: Luke's View of Salvation History

Thursday, October 25 and Tuesday, October 30

- Luke-Acts
- Ehrman: 112-153

Study Focus: Be prepared to discuss how Luke and Acts present the story of Jesus and the growth of the early church and show how this story is linked to Luke's theological concerns.

Supplementary: Conzelmann 1961; Powell 1989; Powell 1991.

Week Nine: The Johannine Community

Thursday, November 1 and Tuesday, November 6

- Gospel of John
- 1-3 John
- Ehrman: 154-194

Study Focus: Discuss the development and eventual split of the Johannine Christian community and the theologies that contributed to these factors.

Supplementary: Kysar 1993; Sloyan 1991; Brown 1979.

Week Ten: The Quest for the Historical Jesus

Thursday, November 8 and Tuesday, November 13

- Ehrman: 210-284

Study Focus: Outline the major periods in the scholarly quest for the historical Jesus and the primary historical and theological issues at stake for each period.

Supplementary: Borg 1994; Ehrman 2000:208-12, 229-51; Funk and Hoover 1993; Funk and Hoover 1998; Witherington 1997; Theissen 1987.

VIDEO TBA ON THURS, NOV 15

NO CLASS ON TUES, NOV 20

Week Eleven: General Epistles and Revelation

Tues, November 27 and Thurs, November 29 and Tues, December 4

- Hebrews 1-2, 11-12
- James 1-3
- 1 & 2 Peter
- Jude
- Revelation
- Ehrman: 408-478

Study Focus: Outline the major features of the ancient genre of "apocalyptic" and identify the social function that such literature served.

Supplementary: Balch 1981; Elliott 1981; Chester and Martin 1994; Prévost 1991; Talbert 1994.

Week Twelve: Beyond the New Testament

Thursday, December 6 and Tuesday, December 8

- *Gospel of Thomas* (in Miller 1992:301-22 or Ehrman 1998:116-23 or online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/noncanon/gospels/gosthom.htm>)
- *Gospel of Mary* (in Miller 1992:357-66) or online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/noncanon/gospels/gosmary.htm>
- Ehrman: 195-209

Study Focus: Discuss arguments for and against using the *Gospel of Thomas* as a source for understanding the words and deeds of the historical Jesus.

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, December 19 from 1:30-4:30 in Palamountain 304

Assignments

20% Short Essay. In a 3-4 page paper use the following texts to argue either that Paul's eschatology (view of the end of human history) is consistent or that Paul's eschatology develops over the course of his letter writing: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-58; Philippians 1:21-24. Conclude by using your analysis to argue for or against the inclusion or exclusion of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 among the authentic letters of Paul (that is, does it fit into his eschatological schema or not?). The objective of this assignment is to introduce you to the basics of detailed exploration of Paul's letters and Paul's theology. **Due October 2.**

20% Midterm Exam. An examination of all aspects of the course, including the textbook. **October 23.**

20% Redaction Criticism Assignment. In an essay no longer than 5 pages (typewritten, double-spaced) provide a redaction critical analysis of Mark 16:1-8 and the parallels in Matthew and Luke, assuming the two-document hypothesis (using the sheets handed out in class). Be sure to point out similarities and differences among the accounts and suggest reasons why Matthew and Luke made the changes to Mark's account. In a final section, outline your view of the literary relationship of John's account (20:1-10) to that found in the synoptic gospels. The objective of this assignment is to provide students with the opportunity to have hands-on application of one of the key methods for studying the gospel texts. **Due December 8.**

40% Examination. An examination of all aspects of the course, including the textbook. This examination will take place during the examination period on **December 19 from 1:30-4:30 in Palamountain 304.**

Format:

This class primarily will be a lecture format, with time for questions. Regular attendance and active participation are vital to the success of the course.

Attendance Policy:

Because regular attendance and active participation are vital to success in this course, no more than three unexcused absences will be tolerated. Exceeding this limit will result in an automatic lowering of your semester grade for each additional class missed (i.e., for the fourth absence, an A would be lowered to an A-).

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the stated day. Late assignments will be assessed a penalty of a one mark reduction per day late. Please observe all page length restrictions.

Please do not hand in assignments enclosed in a covering of some sort (e.g., binder, plastic sleeve); just place a staple in the top left corner.

Supplementary Bibliography

Akenson, Donald Harman. 2000. *Saint Saul: A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Ascough, Richard S. 2000. ["The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association."](#) *Journal of Biblical Literature* 19/2: 311-28.

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- Fee, Gordon D. 1983. *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
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- Kee, Howard Clark. 1997. *Understanding the New Testament*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
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- Powell, Mark Allan. 1989. *What Are They Saying About Luke?* New York and Mahwah: Paulist.
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