

Prof. Wasserman
Office: Loree 110
Department of Religion
70 Lipman Drive
wasserm@rci.rutgers.edu
Office Hours: Tues 12–2
and by appointment

Spring 2010
Rutgers University
Tues/Thurs 5:35–6:55
RAB 204

REL 202 (SECT. 3): INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT/EARLY CHRISTIANITY

This course will study ancient religion through the lens of early Christian texts. The focus will be on the first century C.E and seek to contextualize our earliest Christian writings: the letters of Paul and the gospels. We will consider the literary form and thought of these texts and seek to understand them as produced by persons living within historical and social settings that inform their particular interests and ambitions. One goal will be to understand how Christianity emerges as a distinct religion in antiquity without taking it to be uniform, static, or unchanging. Major themes of the course will be on apocalypticism, church hierarchy and leadership, the role of women, and slavery in the ancient world.

Required Texts (available at the Student Coop on the Douglas campus, 57 Lipman Drive):

The Harper-Collins Study Bible (or other NRSV study Bible approved by the instructor)
B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 4th edition
Karen King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala*

Policies and Requirements:

1. Attendance: regular attendance is mandatory. In the case of illness or emergency, please inform the instructor as soon as possible. In the case of more long-term illnesses or other issues, please provide a note from a health-care provider, or, if appropriate, from a dean. Students must take responsibility for informing the instructor about absences and making up missed work. After the first three absences, additional unexcused absences will result in a deduction of 1/3 of your overall grade (e.g. B to B- etc.). *Students must be sure that their work and other commitments will allow them to arrive to class on time. If you cannot manage to arrive on time most of the time, please drop the course.*
2. Exams: 2 in-class exams and a final exam scheduled for May 12, 4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. in normal meeting room, RAB 204. *Except in very unusual circumstances, there will be no special allowances for students who cannot make the final because of personal vacation plans or for students who forget or are confused about the date of exams.*
3. Portfolio: There will be handouts of primary texts given out for most classes for in-class written analysis. Students must keep a portfolio folder of all in-class work and hand it in with each exam. Portfolios are worth 10 points on the exam. In case of absences, students must be sure to make up this in-class work.

Assignments will be weighted as follows

- a. First Exam 25%
- b. Second Exam 25%
- c. Final Exam 25%
- d. Written assignments: 20%
- e. Quizzes 5%
- f. Significant improvement over time and/or class participation can lift the grade by up to 1/3 (b to b+)

Use of Sakai and e-mail: Many readings and updates will be posted on the Sakai course-site. Students should familiarize themselves with this site and check e-mail regularly for news about updates or changes to the syllabus. *Students must also respond to any e-mail correspondence from the instructor in a timely manner and also make sure their e-mail accounts remain in working order. Students who do not get an important e-mails because of not checking or not keeping their e-mail accounts working will not receive any special treatment.*

Laptops and cell-phones: if you wish to take notes on a laptop you must ask for special permission to do so. *Cell phones must be turned off and put away at all times during lectures. If I find you texting or otherwise using an electronic device I will ask you to leave the class.*

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

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| 1/19 | Tues | Introduction to the Course |
| 1/21 | Thurs | Texts and Historical Contexts
Ehrman, <i>Historical Introduction</i> , chapter 1 (pages 1–16); chapter 30 (487–498). |

Suggested Reading Questions: According to Ehrman, what is historical criticism and how does it differ from other approaches? What is “the canon,” and when, and for what reasons, is it defined as a canon? What is textual criticism and why is it important for historical criticism?

PART 1: THE CRUCIBLE OF EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY: COSMOS, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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| 1/26 | Tues | Hierarchy and Rule: From the Roman Empire to the Household
Readings: Ehrman, 17–35 |
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Map Quiz based on handout (the handout and practice map are available on Sakai)

Reading Questions: Focus on Ehrman’s discussion of the household and economy. What, according to Ehrman, are the major differences between modern economies, religions, and social structures, and ancient ones?

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| 1/28 | Thurs | Cosmologies and Religions: 2 Examples
Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> (Sakai)
Gen 1–6:4 (i.e. read from chapter 1 through the first four verses of chap. 6) |
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Hesiod was an ancient Greek poet who wrote the *Theogony* as a divinely inspired poetic myth that explains the origins of the cosmos (earth, heavens, etc.), the Greek gods, women and fire, different generations of gods and their conflicts, and ends with the emergence of the Heroes (part mortals and part immortals). Genesis provides a Jewish mythic tradition about creation that begins with creation, but focuses especially on the creation of human beings, their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, their descendants, and ends also with a brief discussion of Nephilim (giants) and heroes.

Assignment due: make a list of *at least* 10 points of significant similarity and difference (20 total) btw Genesis and *Theogony*. Due on the Sakai site “assignments” page by 5:35 on Thurs and a copy must be printed out and brought to class as well to be handed in. No late assignments will be accepted.

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| 2/2 | Tues | Patterns of Cosmic Hierarchy and Reciprocity: Temple, Priest, and Rule
Priestly Texts: Exodus 34:1–35:19; Deut 9:1–12:32; Lev 1:1–17, 11:1–22:33
Readings: Ehrman, 36–42 |
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The readings come from the legal traditions (i.e. they lay out codes for behavior) found in the Hebrew Bible. They are written by priests and show typical “priestly” interests in the temple, holiness, and purity and pollution. According to these texts, what kinds of demands does God make of his people and what does he offer in return? What types of things make a person pure and impure?

Written assignment due: Write a 100–150 word explanation of what “holiness” is according to these texts and submit to the assignments page on Sakai by 5:35. Note: this should be somewhat difficult!

2/4 Thurs Varieties of Judaism
Readings: Ehrman chap, 43–55
Josephus on the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes (Sakai)

Josephus (37–100 c.e.) is a Jewish historian writing in the court of the Roman emperor. How does he describe different Jewish sects? According to Ehrman, what are the main “types” of Judaism in this period and what major political crises shaped life in Palestine?

PART 2: THE LETTERS OF PAUL: TRANSFORMATION, THE INNER PERSON, AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW TYPE OF RELIGION

2/9 Tues Pauline Christianity and Apocalypticism
1 Thessalonians and Philippians
Ehrman, 309–323

Assignment Due: Textual analysis of 1 Thessalonians (minimum 300 words). 1 Thessalonians is our earliest source for understanding the movement that will become “Christianity.” Your analysis should answer the following questions: How does Paul seem to understand his role as an apostle? How does he characterize his audience, and what are the main features of his instructions to them? When and how does he expect Christ to return? What major differences (e.g. subject matter, tone, specific ideas and concerns) do you find between 1 Thess and the later Philippians?

2/11 Thurs Apocalypticism, Sex, and Social Hierarchy
1 Corinthians
Ehrman, 324–334

1 Corinthians is a complex and difficult letter. In many cases Paul seems to address imagined opponents and various problems they supposedly have, but it is not always easy to see exactly how he imagines the situation on the ground or why he addresses them in the ways he does. As you read the letter, try to focus also on the statements about sex and marriage in 1 Cor 7 and the various discussions of women and hierarchy in the text. Does the letter seem to make consistent claims about these issues?

2/16 Tues First Exam

2/18 Thurs Paul and the Legacies of Paul
Galatians
Acts 9
Stendahl, “Call Rather than Conversion” (1–23; *Sakai*)

Galatians 1–2 contains Paul’s self-description of his own calling and a conflict with Peter at Antioch and so is our earliest and best evidence for the historical timeline of the earliest period. How does his description of his own experience compare to that of the book of Acts, written some 40 or so years later? What is the distinction between call and conversion, according to Stendahl and why is this important?

Short analysis of Stendahl’s essay due (about 150-200 words). You must 1) clearly identify the thesis of the essay; 2) explain what Stendahl means by ‘conversion’ versus ‘call’; and 3) explain how this is supported (or not) by Acts 9 and Gal 2. Assignment must be posted to the Sakai cite before class begins but students must also bring a copy to class.

2/23 Tues Ways of Reading Romans

Romans 1–4

Stowers, Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 1–32 (Sakai)

Begin work on reading summary, due Thursday on Stowers; final form will be one page, single-spaced

Focus on Stowers' critique of the way previous scholars have understood Romans as addressed to universal humanity. What are the main ways that these later interpreters have misinterpreted the text, according to Stowers? What is speech-in-character and the diatribal or dialogical style?

2/25 Thurs Romans and Rhetorical Techniques
Romans 5–8

Assignment due: 1 page single-spaced summary of Stowers argument (*A Rereading of Romans*, 1–32) due. Focus on his arguments about a) the ways the imposition of chapter and verse divisions changes the meaning of the text b) the way ancient rhetoric illuminates certain specific texts. You should also show a basic knowledge of how important Romans has been for the West and how much later interpreters have changed and reshaped its meaning. Must be posted to the Sakai cite before class begins; no late submissions will be accepted.

Reread Romans 5–8 carefully and focus on the statements about sin. Does Paul seem to be making a consistent set of arguments here? Does Stowers analysis of speech-in character help to explain certain aspects of the famous monologue of 7:7–25?

3/2 Tues Paul and Judaism
Rom 9–11
Fredriksen, “Paul and the Destiny of Israel?” 485–490 (Sakai)

Paul's writings have often been understood as undermining and opposing traditional Jewish religion. For instance, Romans 9–11 has often been taken as advocating the replacement of the Jews as the true people of God by Christians. What is Fredriksen's approach to these issues? What are the 3 most basic points she makes about how to understand some of Paul's most seemingly anti-Jewish statements?

PART 3: JESUS AND THE GOSPELS: CHRISTIAN LEADERS, TEXTS, AND CONFLICTS

3/4 Thurs Mark and Messianism
Mark
Ehrman, 75–91

According to Ehrman, what is the messianic secret and why might the editor of “Mark” have included such a motif? According to Mark, what does it mean that Jesus is “the messiah”?

3/9 Tues Mark, Thomas, and the Historical Jesus
Mark
Gospel of Thomas (Sakai)

Compare and contrast the views about Jesus' life and teachings in Mark and the (apocryphal) Gospel of Thomas. To what extent does the gospel of Thomas, an early collection of the “sayings of Jesus,” make any sense as a collection with a coherent view of Jesus and his teachings? What sayings do you find especially interesting and/or confusing?

Written assignment: pick 3 sayings of Jesus from the gospel of Thomas or Mark that you find particular interesting and/or confusing and explain (in 1-2 sentences each) why you find them interesting and/or confusing.

3/11 Thurs Matthew, Luke, and the Synoptic Problem
 Matthew
 Ehrman, 92–100.

What is the “synoptic problem” and according to Ehrman, what is the best way of solving it? Matthew synthesizes the gospel of Mark and adds lot of new material. How do certain major additions (e.g. the sermon on the mount) end up changing the story about Jesus as compared to that in Mark? How has the role of the disciples changed or not changed?

3/16 Tues No class, Spring break

3/18 Thurs No class, Spring break

3/23 Tues Luke and the Rejection-Replacement View of Judaism
 Luke
 Ehrman, 121–140

Compare and contrast the Sermon on the Mount (in Matt) and the Sermon on the Plain (in Luke); also compare the crucifixion of Jesus scenes in Matt, Luke, and Mark. In what ways does such comparison’s help us see the particular story of Luke’s gospel as distinct from the other gospels?

3/25 Thurs Historical Jesus and Exam review
 Ehrman, Chap 14 (224–239)

How does Ehrman understand the life of Jesus as a type of historical problem? What reasons does he give for his more minimalist version of the historical Jesus? After reading the gospels, how do you view the historical nature of Jesus?

Assignment due: Explain the major points of thematic and narrative similarities and differences between Matt, Mark, and Luke. Then explain, in your view, the extent to which it is possible to reconstruct a history of Jesus’ life from these texts. Apron. 300 words; to be uploaded to the Sakai assignments page by 5:35. No late assignments.

3/30 Tues Second Exam

4/1 Thurs Acts as a Christian Myth of Origins
 Acts

Acts is written by the same (unknown) writer as the gospel of Luke as a kind of sequel. What is the basic story it tells about the evolution of the church? How does Acts tell this story and what is the role of Peter and Paul’s in it?

4/6 Tues Another Kind of Gospel: John
 John
 Ehrman, 171–184 (begin with “the gospel of John from a Redactional Perspective”)

Focus on the prologue of John and on Jesus’ teachings about what his own role is vis-à-vis God. What difference does it make that Christ is the “logos”? What are Ehrman’s proposals about the community situation that may have shaped the gospel of John?

4/8 Thurs The Apocalypse
 Book of Revelation
 Ehrman, selections from chap. 29 (469–482)

What seems to be the issues that Rev 1–5 addresses in relation to “the churches of Asia Minor”? How does the writer understand “true Christians” and their opponents? Many writers have identified the whore of Babylon in chap. 17 with the Roman Empire. To what extent do you find this identification convincing? If this does reflect on Rome and the Roman Empire, what does this suggest about the writer’s views of the relation between the empire and their religion?

PART 4: VARIETIES OF CHRISTIANITY 95–200 CE: DIVERSITY AND CONFLICT

4/13 Tues Peter and Paul as Figures in the Early Churches
 Ephesians
 Colossians
 The Apocalypse of Peter (Sakai)
 Ehrman, 381–401

What are the main reasons that Ehrman gives for taking Ephesians and Colossians as Pseudepigrapha? How does the Apocalypse of Peter (also a Pseudepigrapha) understand punishment and reward in the afterlife?

4/15 Thurs Women and Hierarchy in the Early Churches
 1 Timothy, 1 Peter
 Ehrman, 403–415
 Ehrman, 440–449

How do 1 Timothy and 1 Peter imagine the proper order within their churches? How do they describe the proper order of the household and how is this similar or different to other texts we’ve read?

4/20 Tues The Gospel of Mary Magdalene
 Mary Magdala, 3–34

What are the main teachings of the Gospel of Mary? At what points does the text seem confusing or obscure? Why do the apostles seem to be in conflict about Mary’s teachings?

4/22 Thurs Mary Magdalene and Varieties of Christianity
 Mary Magdala, 37–81

According to King, in what senses is Jesus’ role in the Gospel of Mary distinctive, especially compared to other Christian gospels? What is orthodoxy and the orthodox perspective/tradition? How is the Gospel of Mary influenced by philosophical traditions?

4/27 Tues Mary Magdalene and Varieties of Christianity
 Mary Magdala, 155–190

Assignment due: 2 page single-spaced reading summary of King, 155–190. You should show a clear understanding of the forces that shaped the idea of Gnosticism as a heresy, the "master story" of the history of Christianity criticized by King, and provide a clear explanation of her more complex alternative story about the beginnings of Christianity.

4/29 Thurs The Rise of Christianity Under Constantine

Final Exam: Wednesday, May 12, 4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. in normal meeting room, RAB 204.