

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Instructor: Lynne Darden

lsdarden@rci.rutgers.edu

Office: Dept of Religion

Room 130

Cook Douglass Campus

Loree Building

70 Lipman Drive

Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

The aim of this course is to study the diverse writings of the New Testament as products of their original historical, political, social and religious contexts. We will examine how these ancient writings served to interpret and respond to the life situations of the earliest Christians, a people living within the context of the Roman Empire. We will question how the imperial context had impact on the formation and central issues of these texts. By our reflection on this question, we prepare ourselves for thinking critically about the ways the New Testament writings have been appropriated and interpreted in later contexts, including our own contemporary cultural contexts.

This course engages in the academic study of the New Testament. While many faith communities understand these writings as a source of divine guidance and a tool for personal reflection, these *are not* the foci of this class. This course welcomes students from all faith traditions and religious backgrounds and it is expected that we all treat each other with the respect and dignity each one of us deserves.

Course Goals

- Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.
- Explain and be able to assess the relationship among assumptions, method, evidence, arguments, and theory in social and historical analysis.
- Identify and critically assess ethical issues in social science and history.
- Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time including the history of ideas or history of science.
- Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors.

Course Objectives

- Students will obtain familiarity with some of the most popular and culturally important New Testament writings
- Students will be introduced to major critical issues in the interpretation of this literature including questions of authorship, translation and canon formation
- Students will develop a set of analytical tools for developing and assessing the interpretation of the biblical texts

- Students will begin to engage the issue of how ancient texts shape modern cultures and individuals

Required Texts

Harper Collins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version. Fully Revised and Updated (with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and Concordance) edited by Harold Attridge, (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006). ISBN: 978-0060786847.

Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5th Edition (Oxford, 2012). ISBN: 978-0199757534. Written by a former instructor of this course who is now a major scholar in the field, this text provides helpful background information on the Greco-Roman-Jewish milieu of the first and second centuries.

Warren Carter. *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide*. (Abingdon Press, 2006). ISBN: 978-0687343942. This small guide familiarizes the student to the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious aspects of Roman rule and demonstrates how the New Testament enabled its first readers to negotiate their pervasive imperial context.

All three texts are available at the Livingston Campus Bookstore and, of course, through online text distributors, such as Amazon.com

There will also be articles and handouts that will be distributed in class as designated on the syllabus.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation. Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to participate in class discussions. Student participation is an integral part of learning. Come to class ready to discuss the issues that you encounter - whether these issues surprise you, bother you, or inspire you. Students are expected to attend all classes; however if you expect to miss classe, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Three (3) absences will be allowed without a marking down of your grade. After the third absence, all subsequent absences will result in your attendance/ participation grade being lowered. Consistently arriving to class late and/or leaving class early is rude and disruptive and therefore will also result in a lowering of final grade. Attendance and participation will comprise **20%** of your final grade. In cases where students must miss classes for periods longer than one week, they will always be directed to see a Dean of Students for assistance to help verify these circumstances.

Cell Phone, Texting, Laptops. The cell phone and text messaging are invaluable tools for the students and the professor. But, alas, the cell phone has no use within the classroom during lecture. Therefore, any use of this device is limited to prior to the start of the

lecture. However, you may keep your cell phone on vibrate so that you may answer calls and texts that you deem to be an emergency. In case of emergency, please leave the room as quietly as possible so as not to disrupt the class session. Needless to say, laptops are to be used for taking notes and not for E-Bay, YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, etc. Consistent use of electronic devices will result in a grade markdown.

Quizzes. Students will take four (4) quizzes on basic information related to the study of the New Testament and are based on your readings. The dates of the quizzes are noted on the syllabus and the information to be covered will be discussed prior to the quiz. Each quiz will be worth **5%** of your grade. **Total: 20%**

Essays. There will be two (2) six-page essays. The due dates are noted on the syllabus. Essay assignments will be discussed during the course of the semester. **Total: 60%**

Important: *I recommend checking your email in the afternoon of each class. If for some reason I have to cancel class, I will send an email notification to the students on the roster. I recommend that you make sure that your student email account is current.*

Course Schedule

(Note: Success in this course demands that you are familiar with the syllabus and the schedule of readings. However, this schedule is subject to change per the instructor's discretion. You are responsible for keeping up with any changes that are announced in class, even if you are absent.)

Jan 19 Introduction to the Course

Assignment: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/?autoplay>. Watch **Part One** of the video which details how the Roman Empire shaped Jesus' life. (Note: Part One begins with Chapter 1: The Quest for the Historical Jesus. How did the Roman Empire shape Jesus' life?). Write a one page, single-spaced paper on why it is important to understand the original environment in which the N.T. was written? How did the Roman Empire shape the early Christians and their writings? What is the difference that you perceive in studying the N.T. academically vs. as holy scripture? What does the term "canon" mean? Due: Jan 23.

Jan 23 What is the New Testament?
Readings: Ehrman, 1-28
Carter, 1-43
Assignment due

Jan 26 Introduction to the Roman Empire
 Readings: Ehrman, 29-48
 Carter, 83-99

Timeline and Contextual Background on PBS Roman Empire Webpage
http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/timeline_01.html

Emperor Game on PBS Roman Empire Webpage*****
<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/index.html>

Societal Stratification: Slavery and Gender:

“Resisting Slavery in Ancient Rome” – Keith Bradley
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/slavery_01.shtml

“Roman Women: Following the Clues” – Suzanne Dixon
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/roman_women_01.shtml

“Social Pecking Order in the Roman World” – Valerie Hope
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/social_structure_01.shtml

Musonius Rufus “Why Women Too Should Study Philosophy”
<http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/wlgr-philosophers.shtml>

“Religion in the Roman World” – Marianne Bonz
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/religions.html>

Jan 30 Jewish Context in First-Century Roman Empire
 Readings: Ehrman, pages 49-68, 259-295.
 Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 2, Chapter 8
 <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/war-2.htm>

“The Political History of the Jewish People” – L Michael White
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/explanation/jews.html>

“Temple Culture” – Shaye Cohen
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/temple.html>

Feb 2 **Quiz #1: Who's Who and What's What in the Roman Empire**

Readings: Carter, 44-53

"Jesus In Film: The Hollywood Perspective on the Jewishness of Jesus"

<http://avalon.unomaha.edu/jrf/JesusinFilmRein.htm>

Film: Monty Python's Life of Brian

Feb 6 *Finish Monty Python's Life of Brian*

Feb 9 The Secret Messiah I: The Gospel of Mark

Readings: The Gospel of Mark, 1-5, 8

Ehrman, 88-113

Carter, 100-118

Feb 13 The Secret Messiah Part II: Gospel of Mark/Synoptic Problem

Readings: The Gospel of Mark, 13-16

Ehrman, 105-113 (*Synoptic Problem*)

Feb 16 The Birth and Baptism of a Messiah: Jesus in Matthew & Luke

Readings: The Gospel of Matthew, 1-4

The Gospel of Luke 1-5:11

Ehrman, 114-153

Feb 20 The Life of a Messiah: Jesus in Matthew & Luke

Readings: The Gospel of Matthew, 5-6, 24-25

The Gospel of Luke, 4:16-6: 10:25-11:13

Feb 23 The Death of a Messiah: Jesus in Matthew & Luke

Readings: The Gospel of Matthew, 26-28

The Gospel of Luke, 22-24

Quiz #2: Who Do You Say that I Am?: Jesus in the Synoptics

Essay Assignment #1 handed out and due on Mar 8

Feb 27 The Question of a Historical Jesus

Readings: Ehrman, 237-258

Josephus on Jesus: <http://www.virtualreligion.net/iho/jesus.html#testimonium>

Mar 1 The Divine Logos Revealed: Jesus in the Johannine Tradition

Readings: Ehrman, 176-197

The Gospel of John, 1-4

Mar 5 Johannine Anti-Judaism and the Crucifixion

Readings: The Gospel of John, 8-9, 18-21

Mar 8 The Resurrection of Jesus

Readings: Matthew 28, Luke 24, John 20-21
Midterm essay due

Mar 12 & 16 Spring Recess

Mar 19 **Quiz #3: The Historical Jesus and the Fourth Gospel**

Mar 22 Film: The Passion of the Christ

Mar 26 The Acts of the Apostles
 Readings: Ehrman, 154-174
 Film: Peter and Paul and the Christian Revolution, Pt 1
 <http://www.pbs.org/empires/peterandpaul/>

Mar 29 Film: Peter and Paul and the Christian Revolution, Pt 2

Apr 2 Paul and His Letters
 Readings: Ehrman, 306-338
 Richard Horsley article from *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, 1-19
 Simon Price, *Response* 176-183
 (handouts in class)

Apr 5 Crisis in the Church: Circumcision and the Circumcised
 Reading: Ehrman, 354-362
 Galatians

Apr 9 Crisis in the Church: Paul's Apocalyptic Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians
 Readings: Ehrman, 340-349
 1 Corinthians 1-4

Apr 12 Crisis in the Churches: Paul and Women
 Readings: 1 Corinthians
 Ehrman, 421-434
 Galen "A Comparison of Female and Male Anatomy"
 <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/wlgr-medicine351.shtml>
 Hippocrates, "Hysterical Suffocation"
 <http://www.stoa.org/diotime/anthology/wlgrwlgr-medicine345.shtml>

Apr 16 **Quiz #4: Crises in the Churches: Paul and the Church**
Final Exam Assignment handed out

- Apr 19 The Pseudonymous Letters:
 Reading: Ehrman, 397-420
 Letter to the Colossians
 Letter to the Ephesians
 Clarice Martin, "The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes)
 213-225 (handout in class)
- Apr 23 The Response of 1 Peter: Don't Rock the Boat!
 Readings: 1 Peter
 Ehrman, 454-464
- Apr 26 Revelation Responds
 Reading: Revelation, 1-3, 13, 17-18
 Ehrman, 490-503
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/explanation/brevelation.html>

**FINAL ESSAY DUE DATE PERIOD: 4/26-to the scheduled date of the final exam
(to be announced during the course of the semester)**