

# Religion 307: Jesus (Online)

Spring 2013  
Rutgers University  
Chat session: Tuesday 7-8pm

Instructor	Kathleen Gallagher Elkins	Phone	848-932-9641 (main Religion department number; leave a message with the administrative assistant)
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Office Hours	Monday and Thursday 12:30-2:30pm		

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## Texts:

Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003.

Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. HarperOne, 2006.

*The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. (Or another version of the NRSV; but please note, it should be an academic study bible, not a church study bible that places emphasis on Christian formation. You may also use the online version of the NRSV [<http://bible.oremus.org/>], but the notes in the paper version are particularly helpful)

## Description:

The aim of this course is to study the various identity constructions of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament that were based on the historical, political, social and religious experiences of the early Christians. We will examine how these diverse portrayals of Jesus served to interpret and respond to the life situations of the earliest Christians, a people living within the context of the Roman Empire. Therefore, we will be able to discern how the Roman ideological context influenced the development of the many different faces of Jesus in the New Testament. By our

reflections on these issues we prepare ourselves for thinking critically about the various different ways that Jesus has been interpreted in later contexts, including our own cultural contexts.

Therefore, a significant portion of this course engages in the academic study of ancient gospels, the texts that tell of Jesus' birth, life and death. 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 course. This course welcomes students from all faith traditions and religious backgrounds and it is expected that we all treat each other respectfully in our chat discussions. In addition to considering the portrayals of Jesus found in ancient gospels, we will also look at the development of these portrayals in later (including contemporary) art, film, literature, and music.

**Goals:**

- Become familiar with the various complex depictions of Jesus of Nazareth, both ones in the canonical New Testament and subsequent ones (in film, novels, art, scholarship, pop culture, etc)
- Compare and analyze diverse portrayals of Jesus, including their various identity constructions (that is, looking at issues of history, ethics, politics, theology, gender, race, class, etc)
- Encourage students to reflect on how a person's social location affects his/her religious perspective
- Understand arguments and results of critical gospel and Historical Jesus research, including the stakes of such discussions
- Evaluate the various implications and effects of certain images of Jesus

**Resources:**

See webliography on eCollege site (always a work in progress, so check back regularly!)

**Religious Holidays:**

It is University policy (University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B, formerly 60.14f) to excuse without penalty students who are absent from class because of religious observance, and to allow the make-up of work missed because of such absence. Examinations and special required out-of-class activities shall ordinarily not be scheduled on those days when religiously observant students refrain from participating in secular activities. Absences for reasons of religious obligation shall not be counted for purposes of reporting. *Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.*

**Evaluation:**

Actively participate in weekly chat sessions (30% of course grade): Read the assignments carefully. Think. Come prepared to discuss and think some more! Students may not miss more

than two class meetings without penalty (and please do email me if you expect to miss the chat session).

Post discussion questions every other week (when your group is assigned) (25% of course grade): After completing the reading assignments, post two questions for discussion in the appropriate forum. These questions should be substantive and critical engagements with the week's reading and issues, not merely questions about the content of the reading or simple agree/disagree questions. For example, you might ask, "How do [scholar X]'s political commitments inform his portrayal of Jesus as a radical revolutionary, especially in terms of gender? And what are the possible implications of his hyper-masculine Jesus?" (Instead of "I like what [scholar Y] said. Do you?" or "What does the paragraph on page 13 mean?" If you also have clarifying questions, **you may post those in addition to the two critical, substantive questions.**) Please post by noon on Monday before our Tuesday chat, so everyone has plenty of time to read over the questions.

Write your own gospel (5% of course grade): Before we begin our study of Jesus, it is useful to consciously reflect on the different presuppositions that we each have. In that spirit, please write a brief (approx. 350 words) gospel (or, if you prefer, an autobiographical reflection on Jesus): who was Jesus? Why is he important (or not)? And to whom? Why should we study him? This is not intended to be a statement of faith, though it can include theological elements. Please be brave and post your gospel in the public forum – but if you are really uncomfortable doing so, email me and I will send instructions for a private Journal forum. (But really – be brave! 😊) Also, note that this is only 5% of your grade, because I don't want it to be something that is too stressful. It's really intended just to articulate our beginning points. Due: **Thursday, January 24.**

An obituary for Jesus (10% of course grade): The death of Jesus is a crucial part of the gospels (and later Christian theology, modern biographies of Jesus, etc). Please choose a particular ancient person's perspective and write an obituary for Jesus from that person's perspective (it could also be a collective identity; i.e. the obituary could be written by Pilate or by the Sanhedrin). Approximately 350 words, due **March 14.**

Analysis of Jesus artifact, film, or novel (30% of course grade): The final project for this course will involve utilizing the analytical skills developed throughout the semester to engage a particular image/depiction/portrayal of Jesus. More details will be provided at a later date. Due: **May 13.**

Course Schedule (the updated assignments/readings listed on eCollege always supersede the schedule below, so remember to check the course site!)

Week	Topic	Assignment
January 22	Introduction to the course	
January 24		<b>Your Gospel due!</b> Also, please post a brief introduction in the threaded discussion.
<b>UNIT 1: Contextualizing Jesus</b>		
January 29	Greco-Roman world	<p>Read Harold Attridge and L. Michael White, "Hellenistic Culture" <a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/hellenisticculture.html">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/hellenisticculture.html</a></p> <p>Marianne Bonz, "Religion in the Roman World" <a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/religions.html">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/religions.html</a></p> <p>Listen to: These episodes of the History of Rome podcast:  <i>#56 The King is Dead, Long Live the King</i>  <i>#86 Wealth and Class</i>  <i>#87 Thinking and Feeling</i></p> <p>Watch: The first hour of the PBS Frontline documentary "From Jesus to Christ"  <a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/</a></p> <p><b>Group A</b> posts before noon on Monday</p>
February 5	Judaism in antiquity	<p>Read Levine 1-52</p> <p>Listen to: These episodes of the History of Rome podcast:  <i>#66 666</i>  <i>#67 What an Artist The World is Losing</i>  <i>#83 May His Bones Be Crushed</i></p> <p>Watch: Section on the Jewish Revolt, "From Jesus to Christ"</p>

		<a href="http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/">http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/watch/</a>  <b>Group B</b> posts before noon on Monday
<b>UNIT 2: Jesus in the Canon</b>		
February 12		Selections from Paul Prothero 1-42 Levine 53-86  <b>Group A</b> posts before noon on Monday
February 19		Read: Gospel of Mark Daniel Boyarin, <i>The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ</i> , New York: New Press, pp. TBD. Listen to: Podcast 2.1 <a href="http://www.philipharland.com/Blog/category/podcasts/page/2/">http://www.philipharland.com/Blog/category/podcasts/page/2/</a>  <b>Group B</b> posts before noon on Monday
February 26		Gospel of Matthew Levine 87-117  <b>Group A</b> posts before noon on Monday
March 5		Gospel of Luke Suetonius on the birth of Augustus Additional readings TBA  <b>Group B</b> posts before noon on Monday
March 12		Gospel of John Levine 119-166  <b>Group A</b> posts before noon on Monday
March 19		<b>Spring Break – NO CHAT SESSION</b>
March 26		The Revelation to John Moore, Stephen D. <i>God's Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible</i> . Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 173-200.

		<b>Group B</b> posts before noon on Monday
<b>UNIT 3: Beyond the Canon</b>		
April 2	Other ancient gospels	Gospel of Thomas, Mary, Infancy Gospel of James Prothero 56-64, 87-123 Jane Schaberg with Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, <i>Mary Magdalene Understood</i> (Continuum, 2006), 98-126.  <b>Group A</b> posts before noon on Monday
April 9	Quest for the Historical Jesus	Explore: Historical Jesus Theories <a href="http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/theories.html">http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/theories.html</a> Read: Prothero 19-42 Kwok Pui-lan, "On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-lan," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., <i>The Postcolonial Bible</i> , London: T & T Clark, pp. 176-88.  <b>Group B</b> posts before noon on Monday
April 16	Identity politics: Gender, Race, Sexuality, Religion	Prothero 200-228 Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, <i>Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation</i> . New York: Continuum, 2000, pp. TBD. <a href="http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-harvey/why-no-one-cares-about-the-white-jesus-of-mitt-romneys-mormonism_b_1864710.html">http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-harvey/why-no-one- cares-about-the-white-jesus-of-mitt-romneys- mormonism_b_1864710.html</a>  <b>Group A</b> posts before noon on Monday
April 23	Jesus goes to the movies	Read: Prothero 124-157 Adele Reinhartz, <i>Jesus of Hollywood</i> , New York: Oxford, 2007, pp. 1-42. Watch: Selections from <i>Jesus Christ Superstar</i> , <i>Life of Brian</i> , <i>Last Temptation of Christ</i> , and <i>The Passion</i> (posted)  <b>Group B</b> posts before noon on Monday
April 30	Course wrap-up	Prothero 291-304 Levine 215-226