



## REL 202 (01:840:202): New Testament and Earliest Christianity

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Office hours: After class and by appointment

Rutgers University, Fall 2016  
Hardenbergh A7 (College Ave)  
T/Th 4:30-5:50

### Course Goals

The aim of this course is to introduce the New Testament and earliest Christianity in such a way that students:

1. Acquire a basic knowledge of the New Testament's contents, with emphasis on their salient historical, literary and religious characteristics;
2. Develop insight into earliest Christianity's cultural and religious matrix;
3. Are introduced to the academic study of the New Testament: the art and methods of its exegesis.

### Required Texts

- *HarperCollins Study Bible – Student Edition* (eds. Attridge, Meeks; SBL Press, 2006);
- Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.

Your priority should be to read the New Testament itself, ideally more than once and in multiple translations (from among the NRSV, RSV, NIV, ESV, or NASB). Deepening your familiarity with and understanding of the documents themselves is this course's primary purpose.

For textbooks offering different perspectives on historical, literary, and religious questions surrounding the biblical text, you may consult the following:

Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*  
Eugene Boring, *An Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology*  
D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*  
Robert A. Spivey, D. Moody Smith, and C. Clifton Black, *Anatomy of the New Testament*  
Catherine Cory and Michael Hollerich (eds.), *The Christian Theological Tradition*

### Course Organization and Policies

Students must maintain a working e-mail account at all times and check this regularly for syllabus updates and announcements. When responses are required, please respond in a timely manner. Be sure to consult this course's Sakai page for course materials and announcements.

Students should familiarize themselves with Rutgers' policies on academic integrity and plagiarism. All work must be your own, and violations will lead to academic discipline and potential failure of the course.

No use of cell phones or internet (other than class-related work) is permitted in class.

Bring your hard copy Bible (no electronic Bibles) to class every day.

### Course Requirements

1. Reading entire New Testament. The course's reading schedule (below) includes texts from the NT that correspond to class lectures. The NT text itself is the most important thing you will read (or hear) during the course. At the end of the semester, you will fill out a sheet indicating how much of the NT you have read *during the course*.
2. Regular attendance of lectures and contribution to class discussion. Your presence in class is important not only for your own learning but for that of others. We hope to foster an academic community in which we broaden our minds, and your contribution is valuable. For this reason, attendance will be taken and will factor into your final grade; furthermore, *students will be asked to share critical questions* based on the day's readings (see below).
3. Participation in breakout sessions. The purpose of these small group working sessions is twofold: to begin to develop the skills necessary for critical understanding of the New Testament, and to practice reading texts within an academically diverse body of students. These will take place during lecture and will be explained in class.
4. Map quiz. Students will be asked to label major places on a map of the ancient Mediterranean basin.
5. Mid-Term Examination and Comprehensive Final Examination. Students are responsible for assigned readings, lectures, and the content of the entire New Testament. The final examination will be cumulative, covering the entire semester. Study guides for both examinations will be offered at the appropriate time.

### Basis for Evaluation

Attendance* and participation	10%
Map quiz	5%
Reading entire NT	10%
Mid-Term Examination	25%
Final Examination	50%

\*More than two absences or excessive tardiness will lower the participation component of your final grade.

### A word on studying religion

Studying religion explores matters that are deeply significant and sensitive to many. Be assured that no one will be judged or graded on the basis of his/her personal beliefs or the degree to which these beliefs align with those of the professor. Students are encouraged to express their views honestly throughout the course. Please do not hesitate to approach the professor with any questions or concerns you may have. Classroom conversation will be conducted with respect in a spirit of kindness and humility.

### Schedule and Readings

\* Students should come to class having read 1) the relevant NT text *in its entirety* and 2) the assigned reading. E.g., for 9/13, read the Gospel of Mark, Ehrman chapter 7, and Plutarch *before* class. Readings outside of Ehrman will be posted on Sakai and/or emailed, unless they are publicly available.

\*\* Each student must also be prepared to share a critical question informed by the reading for that day. The professor will randomly call on students throughout the semester to share their questions with the class.

\*\*\* This schedule is subject to change, and students are responsible for any alterations announced in class or via email/Sakai.

9/6	Introduction to the Course No reading -Conversation: What is the New Testament?
9/8	The world of earliest Christianity Ehrman chapters 3-4; 1QS= <i>Rule of the Community</i> (Sakai); 1 Maccabees 1-4 (in study Bible) -Conversation: What was the relationship between Judaism and Hellenism?
9/13	The Gospel of Mark <b>**Map quiz**</b> (materials will be distributed)

- Ehrman chapter 7; Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* I.1-6 (google)  
 -Conversation: What is the genre of a Gospel?
- 9/15 The Gospel of Matthew  
 Ehrman chapter 9  
 -Conversation: What is Matthew's stance towards Jews?
- 9/20 The Gospel of Luke  
 Ehrman chapter 10  
 -Conversation: Was Luke a historian?
- 9/22 The Synoptic Problem/What a Gospel is...and isn't  
 Ehrman chapter 8  
 -Conversation: What was the order of Gospel composition?
- 9/27 The Historical Jesus  
 Ehrman chapter 14  
 -Conversation: What is "historical," and what is historically knowable about Jesus?
- 9/29 The Gospel of John  
 Ehrman chapter 11; Gen 1:1-2:4; Philo, *On the Creation* I-IV (google)  
 -Conversation: How, and why, is John so different from the synoptics?
- 10/4 The Acts of the Apostles  
 Ehrman chapter 19  
 -Conversation: What is Luke's purpose in writing Acts?
- 10/6 \*Mid-term examination**
- 10/11 Introduction to the Letters and Life of Paul the Apostle  
 Ehrman chapter 20; Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, pp.1-50 (Sakai)  
 -Conversation: Was Paul a "city person"? Why?
- 10/13 The Thessalonian Correspondence and Galatians  
 Ehrman chapter 21 and pp.383-92, 438-41  
 -Conversation: What is the problem in Galatians?
- 10/18 The First Epistle to the Corinthians  
 Ehrman pp.368-79; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers Book VI* (Sakai)  
 -Conversation: Is Paul more "Cynical," or are the Corinthians?
- 10/20 2 Corinthians; Philippians; Philemon  
 Ehrman pp.379-83, 392-400  
 -Conversation: What are the power relationships at work in Philemon?
- 10/25 The Epistle to the Romans  
 Ehrman chapter 23  
 -Conversation: Why such a long letter to a church Paul has never met?
- 10/27 Colossians and Ephesians  
 Ehrman pp.434-38, 442-48  
 -Conversation: Are Colossians and Ephesians saying basically the same things?
- 11/1 The Pastoral Epistles  
 Ehrman pp.449-57; Johnson pp.240-42 (Sakai)  
 -Conversation: What does "authorship" entail in antiquity?
- 11/3 The Epistle to the Hebrews

- Ehrman pp.474-83  
-Conversation: How would knowing the date of Hebrews affect reading it?
- 11/8 The Epistle of James  
Ehrman 513-16; Wisdom of ben Sira 1:1-10:3 (=Sirach/Ecclesiasticus, in study Bible)  
-Conversation: What difference does Jesus make in James vis-à-vis Ben Sira?
- 11/10 The Epistles of Peter; Jude  
Ehrman pp.493-504, 523-527  
-Conversation: Is it more likely that Jude used 2 Peter or vice-versa?
- 11/15 The Epistles of John  
Ehrman chapter 12; *Gospel of Thomas* (google)  
-Conversation: How would the authors of 1 John and *Gospel of Thomas* (dis)agree?
- 11/17 The Book of Revelation  
Ehrman chapter 30  
-Conversation: Is Revelation speaking about the past, present, or future?
- 11/22 \*No class\***
- 11/29 The construction of the New Testament Canon  
Ehrman chapter 1; Muratorian Fragment (google)  
-Conversation: What and who determined which books were in the canon?
- 12/1 After the New Testament  
*1 Clement* chs.1-9, 57-59 (google); *Shepherd of Hermas*, only the five visions (Sakai)  
-Conversation: Do *1 Clement*, *Shepherd*, etc. “sound like” the NT?
- 12/6 New Testament today  
Prothero, *American Jesus*, pp.3-42 (Sakai)  
-Conversation: How does the “American Jesus” compare to the NT?
- 12/8 New Testament today  
MLK, “Paul’s Letter to American Christians,” “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (google)  
-Conversation: How does the Bible (inter alia) inform Dr. King’s logic?
- 12/13 Final exam review