

“Critical scholars of the Bible ... are prepared (if required by evidence and reason) to interpret the text against their own preferences and traditions, in the interest of intellectual honesty.”

- Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*



## *The New Testament and Early Christianity*

Spring 2020

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Office hours: Mon/Wed 4:15 to 5:00

### **Required Texts**

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible.*  
Revised ed. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1991.

Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings.* New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007.

Supplementary texts will be posted online to Canvas. Students are expected to print all supplementary materials and bring them to class on the date they are assigned.

### **Course Description**

From the University Handbook: Study selected New Testament and extra-biblical texts to discern religious perceptions shaping various early Christian movements.

### **Humanities GEP Learning Outcomes**

- Demonstrate an ability to read carefully, speak clearly, think critically, or write persuasively about cultures and cultural works/artifacts (including texts, images, performances, and technologies, as well as other expressions of the human condition).
- Identify and analyze how beliefs, values, languages, theories, or laws shape cultures and cultural works and artifacts.
- Engage a variety of ideas and worldviews critically by formulating reflective and informed moral, ethical, or aesthetic evaluations of cultures and cultural works/artifacts

**Course-Specific  
Learning Outcomes**

- to gain introductory level understanding of the contents of the New Testament and identify and analyze prominent themes in early Christian writing
- to be introduced to the modern discipline of biblical studies, and learn to assess and/or apply some of the methods of interpretation which are used by modern biblical scholars.
- to demonstrate an understanding of hermeneutics, the art of interpretation, and become aware of how one biblical text can be interpreted in many different ways
- to practice civil discourse—the ability to discuss controversial ideas in a diverse group setting in a manner that fosters clear communication, mutual understanding, and respectful, informed responses to different points of view.

**Requirements  
and Expectations**

1. **Preparation:** Students should complete the assigned readings and bring the readings with you to class every day. Online readings should be printed out and brought to class, unless otherwise noted on the reading schedule. Our ability to analyze texts critically depends on your having the material in front of you. Failure to bring assigned readings to class will cause you to be unprepared for class and negatively impact your grade. (If printing the online readings presents a problem for you, talk to me outside of class.)
2. **Participation:** Good participation requires active reading of the assigned texts, engagement with the materials in class, thoughtful involvement in class discussions, and active listening to your classmates. Further, if you have a cell phone, please be conscientious about turning off at the start of class.
3. **Civility:** Students are expected to show respect for course content, classmates, and opinions that may differ from their own in deference to the educational atmosphere. Civil discourse means that we can disagree and challenge colleagues while maintaining an atmosphere of respect for people and ideas.
4. **Due Dates:** Missed quizzes and exams cannot be made up unless arrangements have been made prior to the absence. Papers due throughout the semester cannot be made-up or submitted late. Students who miss an assignment because of illness or serious emergency should contact me as soon as possible. Students who know ahead of time that they will be absent should speak to me at least a week prior to the absence.

5. **Papers:** You will submit three papers during the semester, responding to the Questions to Consider from the weekly reading assignments. **At the top of each paper, copy and paste the specific questions you intend to address.** Papers should be five-hundred words in length (roughly two pages), not including any quotations. (They can be longer without penalty.) All papers should be properly formatted (Times Roman, 12 point type, double-spaced, one-inch margins) and should be submitted in the Canvas dropbox prior to the start of class on the date the reading was assigned.
  
6. **Communication:** During the semester, if a personal event or circumstance impacts your ability to succeed in our course, please come speak to me right away – before the problem becomes insurmountable. If you have a learning disability that might impact your work in our course, please speak to me in person (not via email) at the beginning of the semester.

#### **Email Policy**

As a general rule, it is unwise to email me if you have a time-specific question (e.g., “What’s on the exam on Monday?”) Also, do not email me because you want to know what you missed in class. For concerns such as these, speak with me in person. Good reasons to email me include:

- Letting me know about a technical problem with Canvas that is affecting your preparation for an upcoming class,
- Scheduling a time to meet face-to-face,
- Informing me as to why you missed class,
- Sharing your personal thoughts about our course material.

#### **Attendance Policy**

It is expected that you will arrive to class each day and on time. Over the course of the semester, you may miss three class periods (for whatever reason) without penalty. Students who miss more classes can expect to lose 3% percentage points from their final grade for each absence. If you have a severe illness or personal emergency that will affect your attendance, speak with me outside of class.

#### **Tutoring- Learning Center**

All writers benefit from peer feedback. Take advantage of the writing, reading, and study assistance at the Tutoring-Learning Center. One-on-one tutors can help with writing papers, reading challenging assignments, preparing for exams, lab reports, resumes, research papers, and personal statements. To sign up, call 346-3568 or stop by the bottom floor of the Media Resource Center, room 018.

#### **Academic Integrity**

The full text of the Community Rights and Responsibilities guidelines is available online in the Rights and Responsibilities section at: [www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs](http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs). Students will be expected to adhere to all university expectations.

In particular, I expect you to familiarize yourself with the definition of plagiarism and the disciplinary process.

If you have questions about this policy or would like to discuss it further, contact me. All infractions will be reported to the university and the minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment, although more severe infractions may be assessed.

To ensure a fair assessment process in this course, students will be required to submit their papers to the Canvas dropbox prior to the due date in class. Canvas has plagiarism detection software, and will flag papers that are derivative of published texts, websites, and other student writing.

**Assignments**

Participation .....	50 points
Fifteen Online Quizzes (10 points each) .....	150 points
Midterm Exam .....	100 points
Reflection Paper #1 (due between Jan 27 and Feb 19).....	50 points
Reflection Paper #2 (due between Feb 24 and Mar 25).....	50 points
Reflection Paper #3 (due between Mar 30 and May 4) .....	50 points
Final Exam .....	150 points

**Final exam:** Monday, May 11, 2:45 PM to 4:45 PM

## Week 1

Wed Jan 22	<b><u>Introductions</u></b> <input type="checkbox"/> Who am I? Who are you? What are we all doing here?
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## Week 2

Mon Jan 27	<b><u>What is “The New Testament”?</u></b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Harris chapter 1 [Canvas]
Wed Jan 29	<b><u>Who Created “The New Testament”?</u></b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Harris chapter 2 [Canvas] <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #1 (Harris chap 1 and 2) in Canvas, prior to the start of class today.

## Week 3

Mon Feb 3	<b><u>The Greco-Roman World</u></b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman Chapter 2: “The World of Early Christian Traditions” <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #2 (Ehrman chapter 2) in Canvas, prior to the start of class today. <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Question to consider:</u></b> #1. How does knowledge of first century Greco-Roman religion, culture, and politics help us better understand the New Testament and early Christianity?
Wed Feb 5	<b><u>First Century Judaisms</u></b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman Chapter 3: “Jewish Context of Jesus and His Followers” <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman Chapter 5: “The Christian Gospels: A Literary and Historical Introduction” <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #3 (Ehrman chapter 3 and 5) <input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b> #1. How does knowledge of first century Jewish religion, culture, and politics help us better understand the New Testament and early Christianity? #2. How do modern biographies differ from ancient biographies, as a literary form?

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#3. Was Judaism a single religion in the first century, or were there multiple “Judaisms”?

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**Week 4**

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Mon

**The Gospel According to Mark (Bible)**

Feb 10

**Read:** The Gospel According to Mark (NRSV)

**Questions to Consider:**

#1. The oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark ended at chapter 16, verse 8. As your Bible indicates, later copies of Mark’s gospel have a few extra verses added. If the author of Mark’s gospel intended the narrative to end at verse 8, why do you think later writers might have been compelled to add additional verses?

#2. Consider the Gospel of Mark as a work of literature. What themes or concepts do you find repeated in the story?

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Wed

**The Gospel According to Mark (Analysis)**

Feb 12

**Read:** Ehrman Chapter 6: “Jesus, the Suffering Son of God: the Gospel According to Mark”

**Complete:** Quiz #4 (Gospel of Mark)

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## Week 5

Mon Feb 17	<p><b><u>The Synoptic Problem;</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman, Chapter 7, “The Synoptic Problem and Its Significance for Interpretation”</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #5 (Synoptic Problem)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#1. Chapter 7 refers to the “Synoptic Problem.” In your own words, explain what the “problem” is. What solution does chapter 7 offer for this problem? Do you find the solution persuasive?</li><li>#2. Among contemporary biblical scholars, the most common solution to the “synoptic problem” is the “four-source hypothesis.” Briefly summarize the four-source hypothesis. Can you think of other explanations for the synoptic problem?</li><li>#3. Is it important to understand the synoptic problem? Does it matter? Why or why not?</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b><u>The Gospel According to Matthew (Bible)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> The Gospel According to Matthew (NRSV), chapters 1-7 and 21-28.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#1. Many scholars who have studied The Gospel of Matthew have wondered whether Matthew was Jewish, or if he was writing to a predominantly Jewish community. After reading the gospel, what evidence can you see to suggest that Matthew, or his readers, might have been Jews who were well-acquainted with the Old Testament?</li><li>#2. Consider the Gospel of Matthew as a work of literature. What themes or concepts do you find repeated in the story?</li></ul></li></ul>
Wed Feb 19	<p><b><u>The Gospel According to Matthew (Analysis)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman Chapter 8: “Jesus, the Jewish Messiah: The Gospel according to Matthew”</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #6: Gospel of Matthew</li></ul>

## Week 6

Mon Feb 24	<p><b><u>The Gospel According to Luke (Bible)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> The Gospel according to Luke (NRSV), chapters 1–12</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#1. What additions does Luke’s gospel offer that we have not come across in either the Gospel of Matthew or Mark?</li><li>#2. Does the Gospel of Luke present a fundamentally different portrayal of Jesus?</li></ul></li></ul>
Wed Feb 26	<p><b><u>The Gospel According to Luke (Bible)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> The Gospel according to Luke (NRSV), chapters 13–24</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#1. What additions does Luke’s gospel offer that we have not come across in either the Gospel of Matthew or Mark?</li><li>#2. Does the Gospel of Luke present a fundamentally different portrayal of Jesus?</li></ul></li></ul>

## Week 7

Mon Mar 2	<p><b><u>The Gospel According to Luke (Analysis)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman Chapter 9: “Jesus, Savior of the world: the Gospel according to Luke”</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #7: (Gospel of Luke)</li></ul>
Wed Mar 4	<p><b><u>The Gospel According to John (Bible)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> The Gospel according to John (NRSV) chapters 1–10</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#1. Is the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel of John fundamentally different than his portrayal in the synoptic gospels? Cite evidence for or against.</li><li>#2. Compare the portrayal of Jews in John’s gospel with Mathew’s gospel. What similarities and differences do you note? Do you think these differences are significant?</li></ul></li></ul>



## Week 8

Mon Mar 9	<p><b><u>The Gospel According to John (Bible)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> The Gospel according to John (NRSV) chapters 11–21</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#1. Is the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel of John fundamentally different than his portrayal in the synoptic gospels? Cite evidence for or against.</li><li>#2. Compare the portrayal of Jews in John’s gospel with Mathew’s gospel. What similarities and differences do you note? Do you think these differences are significant?</li></ul></li></ul>
Wed Mar 11	<p><b><u>The Gospel According to John (Analysis)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman Chapter 11: “Jesus, the Man Sent from Heaven: The Gospel According to John”</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #8: Gospel of John</li></ul>

## Week 9

Mon, Mar 23	<p><b><u>Midterm Exam</u></b></p>
Wed Mar 25	<p><b><u>Other Gospels</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> Ehrman Chapter 13: “Jesus from Different Perspectives: Other Gospels and Early Christianity”</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Read:</u></b> <u>Noncanonical Gospels</u> [Canvas]</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Complete:</u></b> Quiz #9 (nonCanonical Gospels)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <b><u>Questions to Consider:</u></b> Most of the gospels described in chapter 13 date from the first and second centuries. Although they were not ultimately selected for canonization, many early Christians considered these texts to be scriptural, and some of them (such as Q) influenced the synoptic gospel authors, as we have seen. Write a paper in which you answer one of the following questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#1. What do these texts teach us about early Christianity? What conclusions might we draw about a community that retained one of these gospels?</li><li>#2. Why did some early Christians find these gospels worthy of the status of scripture?</li><li>#3. Although we do not know for sure, why do you think the proto-orthodox church leaders chose to exclude these gospels from the New Testament?</li></ul></li></ul>