



Religion 121

In this course we explore the origins of the earliest Christians and the social, political, religious, and economic worlds in which they lived. We will ask how we know what we know about the first century of Christianity and about the ways in which Christians found space for themselves in the Roman Empire. We will look at how (some) stories about Jesus and (some of) the writings of the earliest Christians eventually made their way into the Christian New Testament. We will delve into the diversity of Christianities that spread around the Roman world and how they competed with one another. To do this, we will read closely writings by Christians and non-Christians, as well as gaze on the archaeological remains of the Roman world. In particular, alongside our Christian sources we will read materials from others who negotiated the same complex landscapes as the earliest Christians. Our main goal will be to understand the ways in which a movement that we would come to call Christianity emerged out of the complex tapestry of Jewish, Roman, and Greek religious traditions and within the dynamic landscape of the Roman Empire. This course will fulfill the General Education requirements for GE-B.

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TAs:

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Office Hours: Tues, 3:30-5:30 in MHP B7AD.

Course Meeting Times:

Tues/Thurs 2-3:20 pm in MHP 101, plus an hour of section.

Goals of the Course

1. To read Christian and non-Christian texts from the first and second centuries critically and carefully, paying particular attention to what they tell us about the social contexts of the earliest Christians.
2. To become familiar with both the writings that make up the Christian New Testament and with the process by which this collection of writings became a sacred text. Students will also write on and discuss these materials, giving them practical experience with some of the most important literature in Western history.
3. To place these texts within the broader landscape of the Roman Empire and in conversation with other voices from the period. As part of the complex cultural world of the Roman Empire, Christians and their writings engaged many of the same issues that others confronted in their daily lives.

4. To pay careful attention to the different kinds of Christianities that existed in the first and second centuries.
5. To think more broadly about how religious traditions emerge, change, splinter, and endure in multicultural societies.

Requirements

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| 1. Regular Attendance and Participation in Lecture and Weekly Discussion Section | 10% |
| 2. Christians and Jews in the Ancient City Paper (due Feb 9) | 10% |
| 3. Forging Paul's Letters (due March 2) | 10% |
| 4. Gospel Parallels Paper (due March 28) | 10% |
| 5. Early Christians at the Movies Paper (due April 13) | 15% |
| 6. In or Out of the Canon Paper (Due April 27) | 15% |
| 7. Final Exam (May 4, 2-4 pm) | 30% |

Attendance and Participation

We expect you to attend both the lecture and section components of the course. Absences from lecture or section will lead to a lowering of your attendance grade. You are also expected to come prepared to lecture and section, which means that you will have done the assigned readings in advance. Part of your grade will be determined by your active participation in section.

Short Papers

Throughout the semester you will write five short papers designed to help you synthesize information that you learn about the New Testament and its "world." Prompts will be handed out in advance and they will be due on the course Blackboard site. I encourage you all to work on your papers in advance and take them to the Dornsife Writing Center (<http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>) to take advantage of their free (yes, free!) writing help.

Course Readings

All readings for the course will be available either on the course website or in the university bookstore. All the textbooks listed below will also be on reserve in the library. I am requiring that all students use the translation found in *A New New Testament*, both because this edition includes other early Christian texts that were not included in the *Christian New Testament*, and because the extensive notes and essays included in this edition will supplement the work that we do in class.

Books available for purchase at the bookstore:

A New New Testament (Mariner) - **Required**

Two Novels from Ancient Greece: Callirhoe and An Ephesian Tale (Hackett) - **Required**

Robert Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (Yale) - **Required**

Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford) - On Reserve

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/departement-public-safety>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Course Schedule

Week 1:

January 10:

Introduction: What is the New Testament?

Jan 12

How did we get the New Testament?

Readings:

1. *A New New Testament*, pgs 500-18
2. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament* ch. 29 (website and on reserve)

Part 1: The Hellenistic and Roman World

Week 2:

Jan 17

The Hellenistic World

Readings:

1. Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Tale*, books 1-2

Jan 19

The Roman World

Readings:

1. *An Ephesian Tale*, book 3
2. Wilken, chapter 1

Week 3:

Jan 24

The Marketplace of Ideas in the Roman World

Readings:

1. *An Ephesian Tale*, books 4-5
2. Selections of Ancient Philosophical Writings (website)

Jan 26

Judaism in the Hellenistic World

Readings:

1. Stories from the Maccabean Revolt (website)
2. Daniel (website)
3. *The Letter of Aristeas* (website)

Week 4:

Jan 31

Jews and Judaism in the Roman World

Readings:

1. Hosea (website)
2. 1 Enoch (selections, website)
3. On the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes (website)

Feb 2

Murky Beginnings: On Jesus of Nazareth

Readings:

1. Luke 1:1-4
2. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, chapter 3 (website)
3. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Message of Jesus and the Problem of Mythology" (website)

Week 5:

Feb 7

From Jerusalem to Antioch and Beyond

Readings:

1. 1 Thessalonians
2. Wilken, ch. 2

Feb 9

Early Conflicts

Readings:

1. Galatians
2. Acts 9, 15

*** Christians and Jews in the Ancient City Paper Due in Class***

Week 6:

Feb 14

Paul in Corinth 1

Readings:

1. 1 Corinthians 1-6

Feb 16

Paul in Corinth 2

Readings:

1. 1 Corinthians 7-16

Week 7:

Feb 21

Paul, the Jews, and the Gentiles

Readings:

1. Romans 9-11

Feb 23

Writing in Paul's Name

Readings:

1. The Letter of Jesus to King Abgar (website)
2. Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians

Week 8:

Feb 28

Peter and James: Fighting Back Against Paul

Readings:

1. James
2. The Pseudo-Clementines (website)

March 2

Charismatic Miracle-Workers and their Biographers in the Roman World

Readings:

1. Gospel of Mark

Forging Paul's Letters Paper Due

Week 9:

March 7

Matthew, Jesus, and the Law

Readings:

1. Gospel of Matthew

March 9

Similarities and Differences: The Synoptic Problem

Readings:

1. Gospel of Luke
2. Q (website)
3. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, chapter 6 (website)

Spring Break

Week 10:

March 21

Jesus and Philosophy: The Gospel of John

Readings:

1. Gospel of John

March 23

On Knowing God and Reading Rightly

Readings:

1. *The Gospel of Thomas*
2. *The Secret Revelation of John*

Week 11:

March 28

Jesus Fights Back: Revelation

Readings:

1. Revelation (Bible)

Gospel Parallels Paper Due in Class

March 30

Women and the Earliest Christians

Readings:

1. The Acts of Paul and Thekla
2. Gospel of Mary

Week 12:

April 4

Putting Women in their Place: The Pastorals

Readings:

1. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus

April 6

Persecution and Martyrdom: Ignatius of Antioch

Readings:

1. Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* (website)
2. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Romans* (website)
3. Wilken, ch. 3

Week 13

April 11

Slavery and the Early Christians

Readings:

1. 1 Corinthians 7; Philemon; Ephesians 5-6; Colossians 3-4; 1 Peter
2. Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery and Early Christianity* (website)

April 13

Putting an End to Desire

Readings:

1. 1 Corinthians 6-7 (again) and Romans 1
2. Matthew 5-7 (again)

Early Christians at the Movies Paper Due in Class

Week 14:

April 18

The Fate of the Body

Readings:

1. 1 Corinthians 15 (read again carefully)
2. Treatise on the Resurrection (website)

April 20

Poetry and Theology: Valentinus in Rome

Readings:

1. The Gospel of Truth
2. Summer Harvest (website)
3. David Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 99-112 (website)

Week 15

April 25

The Imperial History of the Church: Acts

Readings:

1. Acts

April 27

Marcion and the Development of the Christian Canon

Readings:

1. Marcion, *Antitheses* (website)
2. Jason BeDuhn, *The First New Testament*, ch 1 (website)

*** In or Out of the Canon Paper Due***

Final Exam:

Thursday, May 4 from 2-4 pm