



Prof. Erin Prophet:

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Meeting Time: MWF, 4 (10:40 – 11:30 a.m.)

Meeting location: MAT 0102

Office: Anderson Hall 130

(352) 273-2939

Office Hours: M, W, 4:15-5:15 or by appointment

Course Overview and Themes

Course Description:

The Christian gospels are some of the most influential documents in history. This course introduces students to critical approaches to comparing the gospels and understanding how they were edited and interpreted in the early years of Christianity and up to the present day. Students will learn how traditions about Jesus developed and understand the role of controversies about faith, history, knowledge, power and gender. They will also understand the latest scholarship about when the gospels were written and what is their relationship to history and literature. In addition, they will learn how to think about the choice to omit some Christian gospels from the New Testament. Finally, they will learn how techniques that were developed in the study of the gospels have informed the entire field of the critical study of religion. (H) (WR 2)

Prerequisite

REL 2210 (Hebrew Scriptures) or 2240 (New Testament), or instructor permission.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

1. To provide an introduction to the various methods of reading the New Testament in general and the gospels in particular,
2. To closely read, understand, and interpret canonical and noncanonical gospels in their original context and from a variety of perspectives, and

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3. To study the arguments for and against the historical reliability of the New Testament itself and specifically the gospels' portraits of Jesus and his teachings.

Students will:

- Learn to critically evaluate the Christian gospels through close reading and historical approaches.
- Assess the various portraits of Jesus that come from the gospels and some of their major interpreters.
- At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following general education [student learning outcomes](#) in content, communication and critical thinking:
 - **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in a variety of concepts, theories and methodologies related to religious studies. Students will acquire a basic knowledge of historical developments, contemporary dynamics, as well as the many ways that the gospels and their interpretation impact contemporary life. Achievement of this learning outcome will be assessed through two papers, a midterm and quizzes, and through in-class group discussion.
 - **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the topics covered in the course. Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions during the semester. Students are also expected to be able to communicate their ideas in their papers. Achievement of this learning outcome is assessed through evaluation (grading) of the written papers – paying attention to ability to present arguments in a coherent manner.
 - **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems. Students will prepare a research paper pertaining to the topics covered in the course. Students will critically evaluate empirical data and how they are theoretically framed, and be able to draw connections between different empirical cases covered in the course. Achievement of this learning outcome will be assessed by the paper, blog posts, exams, and by performance in joining and leading class discussions.

Assignments and Grading

- Attendance
- Leading and participating in formal and informal class discussions
- Blog posts (3)
- Weekly quizzes on course readings
- Midterm exam: Multiple choice, short answer and essay; see class schedule for details.

- Writing: A 2500-word research paper, submitted in outline, draft and final version.
- Oral presentation: Presenting the results of the research project to fellow students.

Grading Policies

The course grading rubric follows the standard [UF grading scheme](#).

- A 94 to 100; A- <94 to 90; B+ <90 to 87; B <87 to 84; B- <84 to 80
- C+ <80 to 77; C <77 to 74; C- <74 to 70; D+ <70 to 67; D <67 to 64
- D- <64 to 61; E <61 to 0

Evaluation of Grades

Assignment	Points per Assignment	Percent of Grade
Attendance	10 points per class	15%
Leading in-class discussion	2 – 3 assignments (10 points ea.)	10%
In-Class Quizzes	9 Quizzes, 20 points ea.	15%
Blog Posts	3 Blog posts regarding course themes	5%
Research Paper	2500 words. Paper Proposal (50), Annotated bibliography and outline (50), Paper draft (100); Revised paper (100)	35%
Oral Presentation	A 5-minute presentation of the results of the student's research project	5%
Midterm Exam	150 points	15%
Total		100%

Assignment Descriptions

Attendance: Attendance will be taken during each class. The lowest score will be dropped. Attendance represents 15% of the grade.

Blog Posts: During the first half of class, three blog posts are due discussing prompts related to the readings and lectures.

In-Class Quizzes

Nine quizzes on the primary textbook, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* by Bart Ehrman, will be given in class. Each quiz is worth 20 points.

Research Paper: Students will select a research topic, which must be a critical examination of an important issue related to the Christian gospels. The topic of the paper should not be confessional, but must be one on which the student can conduct research and develop a thesis. Topics must be approved by the instructor in the form of a report proposal. Once the topic is approved, the student will research the topic. Reports must cite a minimum number of five peer-reviewed, academic sources (published by university or academic presses) in addition to five course readings and should also make a persuasive argument.

The paper must be at least 2,500 words (not including reference list or footnotes). The reference list must be complete and include all sources cited in the paper, including the minimum number of required course and non-course readings. Use APA citation style (7th edition) for the paper or another style guide approved by the instructor. Papers must be prepared in Microsoft Word and submitted both on paper and online via Turnitin.

Midterm Exam: The midterm exam will consist of multiple choice and essay questions. It represents 15% of the grade.

Writing Requirement

This course confers 2,500 words towards the writing requirement (WR), which ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. While helping students meet the broad learning outcomes of content, communication, and critical thinking, the instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on students' written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.

Course grades have two components. The papers are graded both with a numerical points grade and a Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (N) grade. Students who receive an unsatisfactory on a paper will have one additional opportunity to revise and resubmit. ***To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.***

The [University Writing Studio](#) can provide assistance with writing or rewriting of papers:

Style guide: The recommended style guide is the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition. Students may use another style with instructor approval.

Papers will be graded based on the following rubric:

Writing Assessment Rubric

	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
CONTENT	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off- topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

Course Policies

Returned Assignments

Assignments will usually be returned to students no later than one week after they are submitted. At the end of the semester, unreturned course work will be available for pickup in Dr. Prophet's office in Anderson 130 for 60 days after the official date that grades are posted by the registrar. After this time, they will be recycled.

Late or Missing Assignments

Late assignments will be penalized and may not receive credit. However, students will be provided with the opportunity to make up missed assignments in the case of excused absences.

Communication with Instructor

Communication and grading will take place online through Canvas. Please enable Canvas to forward all course announcements and instructor communications to your email so that you stay informed. You may also email me directly but communication through Canvas is preferred.

Use of Technology

During class, electronic devices may be used only for note-taking or participation in the course, such as accessing readings or completing online polls. Headphones may not be worn in class. Students who are misusing technology may be asked to switch to paper note-taking. Paper note-taking may actually lead to better comprehension: <https://www.thecut.com/2015/07/case-against-laptops-in-the-classroom.html>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Canvas Reading Assignment Pages are Authoritative

Course reading assignments may be modified. The syllabus distributed at the beginning of class may be updated. The course reading assignment pages on Canvas are the operative and binding version, so to be sure of your assignment, check Canvas rather than the version distributed at the beginning of class. No additions will be made to course assignments as provided in the syllabus, though due dates may be adjusted and readings may be substituted or removed. Students should

set up their Canvas account so that they receive instructor announcements via Canvas directly in their email.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation are highlighted in this class. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the [online catalog](#). Do not register for this class if you cannot attend on time. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. Please let me know about any planned absences (for religious holidays, athletic events, or other reasons) as soon as possible, and at least 24 hours in advance. For unplanned absences (due to illness or emergency), please let me know as soon as possible and provide paper or electronic documentation (e.g., doctor's note) if possible. Absences due to illness will be excused with a physician note. While some absences are unavoidable, if you expect to be unable to make class on a regular basis, you must receive permission in advance. Make-up assignments will be provided for those with excused absences, and recordings *may* be available for students with excused absences.

Academic Honesty and the Honor Code

Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and may fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action. See the [policy website](#) for more information.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations during the available interval. Summary results of these assessments will be available to students. Evaluations are completed at the [Gator Evals site](#).

Humanities Credit

This course meets the requirements for the University of Florida's general education Humanities credit. Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences

that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives. A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Required Texts: Purchase

Ehrman, Bart D. (2021). *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*. Fifth Edition (other editions may be acceptable). New York: Oxford University Press.

Metzger, Bruce M. and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*. New Revised Standard Version. Oxford University Press (any edition).

Recommended Text:

Ehrman, Bart D. (2005). *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. New York: HarperCollins.

Additional Required Reading (provided on Canvas e-learning site)

Adams, Edward. (2011). *Parallel Lives of Jesus: A Guide to the Four Gospels*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, ch. 8, 11 and 12.

Barnhart, Joe E. (1990). "Prosperity Gospel: A New Folk Theology." Reprint. pp. 494-496 in *American Decades: Primary Sources 1990-1999*, Gale Research.

Cook, Vaneesa. (2016). "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Long Social Gospel Movement." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 26:1, 74–100.

DeConick, April D. (2011). *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter*. London: Bloomsbury, exc.

DeConick, April D. (2016). *The Gnostic New Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, exc.

Ehrman, Bart D. (2009). *Jesus, Interrupted*. Ch. 3, "A Mass of Variant Views"; New York: HarperOne.

Ehrman, Bart D. (2003). *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Introduction, ch. 8, "The Quest for Orthodoxy").

Fossum, Jarl and Phillip Munoa. (2004). *Jesus and the Gospels*. Belmont, CA, Wadsworth.

Henze, Matthias. (2016). "The Historical Method and the Hebrew Bible," pp. 315–331 in *Religion: Social Religion*, ed. William B. Parsons, Macmillan Reference USA.

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. (2006). "Trinity," pp. 9360-9364 in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones.

Lyman, J. Rebecca. (2006). "Arius and Arianism." In Donald Borchert, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (pp. 282–284). Macmillan Reference USA.

Meyer, Marvin W. trans. (1984). *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels*. The Gospel of Thomas (pp. 16-38). New York: Vintage Books.

Pearson, Birger A. (2007). *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Riedl, Matthias. (2005). "Christian Mysticism," pp. 1546-1549 in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Woodhead, Linda. (2016). "Christianity," ch. 7, pp. 207–235 in *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, ed. Linda Woodhead, Christopher Partridge, Hiroko Kawanami. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Course Schedule

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Activities
Week 1 Wed. Aug. 24	Course Syllabus and Intro. to Historical Study of the New Testament	NRSV: Matt. 1:1–2:12 (optional) NRSV: Luke 1:26–2:22 (optional)	Lecture 1, Parallel Gospels exercise
Unit 1: Introduction to the Academic Study of Christian Scriptures			
Week 1 (cont.) Fri. Aug. 26	Historical Study of Religion	Henze, “The Historical Method and the Hebrew Bible”	Lecture 2
Week 2 Mon. Aug. 29	What is the New Testament?	Ehrman ch. 1, “What is the New Testament and Why Should We Care?” NRSV: Mark 1–5 (optional)	Lecture 3
Week 2 Wed. Aug. 31	The World of Early Christianity	Ehrman ch. 2, “The Greco-Roman World of Early Christianity”	Lecture 4
Week 2 (cont.) Fri. Sep. 2	A Multi-Vocal New Testament	Ehrman <i>Jesus, Interrupted</i> , pp. 61–85.	Quiz, Ehrman ch. 1 and 2 Film clip and Group discussion
Week 3 Mon. Sep. 5	NO CLASS	Labor Day	
Week 3 Wed. Sep. 7	Judaism and the New Testament	Ehrman ch. 3, “The Jewish World of Early Christianity,” pp. 38–47 NRSV: Isaiah 40-41.	Blog Post 1 DUE before class Lecture 5
Week 3 Fri. Sep. 9	Judaism cont.	Ehrman ch. 3 cont., pp. 48–57 NRSV: Daniel 7.	Quiz, Ehrman ch. 3 Lecture 6
Week 4 Mon. Sep. 12	From Oral Tradition to Written Gospel	Ehrman ch. 4, “The Traditions of Jesus in their Greco-Roman Context”	Lecture 7
Week 4 Wed. Sep. 14	Source Criticism	Fossum and Munoa, ch. 5	Lecture 8

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Activities
Week 4 Fri. Sep. 16	Redaction Criticism	Fossum and Munoa, ch. 6	Lecture 9
		Unit 2: The Canonical Gospels	
Week 5 Mon. Sep. 19	The Gospel of Mark	Ehrman ch. 5, “Jesus, the Suffering Son of God: The Gospel According to Mark” NRSV: Mark 6–14 (optional)	Quiz, Ehrman ch. 4 Lecture 10
Week 5 Wed. Sep. 21	The Gospel of Mark (cont.)	Fossum and Munoa, ch. 9 NRSV: Mark 15–16	Quiz, Ehrman ch. 5 Film clip and group discussion
Week 5 Fri. Sep. 23	Form Criticism	Fossum and Munoa, ch. 7 NRSV: Matt. 7–19 (optional)	Lecture 11
Week 6 Mon. Sep. 26	The Gospel of Matthew	Ehrman ch. 6, Jesus, “The Jewish Messiah” NRSV: Matt. 2–4	Lecture 12 Blog post 2 DUE before class
Week 6 Wed. Sep. 28	Matthew (cont.)	Fossum and Munoa ch. 10 NRSV: Matt. 5-6 (required)	Quiz, Ehrman ch. 6 Student-led discussion 1
Fri. Sep. 30		NO CLASS	
Week 7 Mon. Oct. 3	Matthew (cont.)	NRSV: Matt. 26–28 (required) NRSV: Matt. 20–25 (optional)	Film clip and group discussion
Week 7 Wed. Oct. 5	The Gospel of Luke	Ehrman ch. 7, “Jesus, the Rejected Prophet” NRSV: Luke 2–10 (optional)	Lecture 13

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Activities
Week 7 Fri. Oct. 7	Luke (cont.)	Fossum and Munoa ch. 11 NRSV: Luke 11–18 (optional)	Quiz, Ehrman ch. 7 Student-led discussion 2
Week 8 Mon. Oct. 10	Luke (cont.)	NRSV: Luke ch. 19–24	Film clip and group discussion
Week 8 Wed. Oct. 12	Who Did Jesus Believe He Was?	Ehrman, <i>How Jesus Became God</i> , ch. 2	Student-led discussion 3
Week 8 Fri. Oct. 14	Divine Humans in Judaism	Philo of Alexandria The Dead Sea Scrolls (readings TBA)	Lecture 14
Week 9 Mon. Oct. 17	The Gospel of John	Ehrman, ch. 8, “Jesus, the Man Sent from Heaven” NRSV: John 1	Lecture 15
Week 9 Wed. Oct. 19	John, cont.	Fossum and Munoa ch. 12 NRSV: John 2–12 (optional)	Quiz, Ehrman ch. 8 Student-led discussion 4
Week 9 Fri. Oct. 21	John, cont.	Adams, ch. 11, “The Death of Jesus”; ch. 12, “The Empty Tomb” NRSV: John 20:1–10 (required) NRSV: John 13–21 (optional)	Film clip and group discussion
Week 10 Mon. Oct. 24		Review for midterm	Film clip Blog Post 3 DUE before class
Week 10 Wed. Oct. 26	MIDTERM		MIDTERM (in class)
Unit 3: Non-Canonical Gospels and the Battle for the Canon			
Week 10 Fri. Oct. 28	Competing Visions of Jesus	Ehrman ch. 9, pp. 141–153	Lecture 16 Review midterm

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Activities
Week 11 Mon. Oct. 31	Competing Visions of Jesus (cont.)	Ehrman ch. 9, pp. 153–175	Lecture 17 Quiz, Ehrman ch. 9 Film clip
Week 11 Wed. Nov. 2	Heresy and Orthodoxy	Ehrman, <i>Lost Christianities</i> , pp. 1-6, ch. 8, 163-180.	Proposal for Final Paper Due
Week 11 Fri. Nov. 4	Gnostic Themes	Pearson, pp. 7-19 DeConick, pp., 47-76	Student-led discussion 5
Week 12 Mon. Nov. 7	Thomas Christianity	Pearson, ch. 9, Thomas Christianity. Meyer, trans. The Gospel of Thomas, Sayings 1–113	Student-led discussion 6
Week 12 Wed. Nov. 9	Gnosticism and the New Testament	DeConick 2016, ch. 4, 107-134 (required) DeConick 2016, ch. 5 (optional)	Student-led discussion 7 with film clip
Fri. Nov. 11	Gender and the Gospels	DeConick 2011, TBA	Lecture 18
Week 13 Mon. Nov. 14	Canon and Arian Heresy	Lyman, Arius and Arianism LaCugna, Trinity Ehrman, <i>Lost Christianities</i> , ch. 12, pp. 247-257	Student-led discussion 8 Outline for Final Paper Due
Unit 4: Gospel Interpretations in History			
Week 13 Wed. Nov. 16	Christian Mysticism	Reading TBA	Student-led discussion 9
Week 13 Fri. Nov. 18	The Reformation	Reading TBA	Student-led discussion 10 Film clip
Week 15 Mon. Nov. 21 (Online class)	The Gospels in Contemporary Times	Woodhead 212-223	Student-led discussion 11 (online class) Film clip
	Thanksgiving Recess No Class Nov. 23-25		

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Activities
Week 16 Mon. Nov. 28	The Gospels in the 20 th and 21 st Centuries (cont.)	Woodhead, 225-235	Draft of Final Paper Due Student-led discussion 12
Week 16 Wed. Nov. 30	Prosperity Gospel	Barnhart, "Prosperity Gospel." NRSV: John 10:1-18	Student-led discussion 13
Week 16 Fri. Dec. 2	Social Gospel	Cook, "MLK and the Long Social Gospel Movement" NRSV: Matthew 25	Student-led discussion 14
Week 17 Mon. Dec. 5	Oral Presentations		Oral presentations
Week 17 Wed. Dec. 7	Oral presentations		Oral presentations
	Reading days Dec. 8-9		Final Paper Due Dec. 9

Campus Resources

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit umatter.ufl.edu/ to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit <https://counseling.ufl.edu> or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit <https://shcc.ufl.edu>

University Police Department: Visit <https://police.ufl.edu/> or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; <https://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center>.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services career.ufl.edu/.

Library Support: various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.