

REL 102.01: History and Religion of Early Christianity

Seaver College, Pepperdine University
Spring, 2002 M & Th 8:00 - 9:30 AC 205

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Office hours:
Monday 9:30 - 11:00
Wednesday 1:30 - 3:00
Thursday 9:30 - 11:00
Other times as needed

A. Course Description: A study of the New Testament in its larger Jewish and Greco-Roman context, with emphasis on history, theology, and the different literary genres.

B. Textbooks

1. *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (= HCSB)
2. S. L. Harris, *The New Testament: A Student's Introduction*, 4th ed.

C. Tests

1. **Daily quizzes:** There will be a brief quiz at the beginning of most class periods. The quiz will cover two things:
 - a. **the lecture material and discussion from the previous day;** and
 - b. **the reading material assigned for the day of the quiz.** Because these readings will not have been covered in class prior to the quiz, questions over them will be more general and not as detailed as those on the lectures from the previous class period.

The quiz will begin promptly at 8:00; only those present at that time are permitted to take it. The scores of your two lowest (or missed) quizzes will be dropped when the total is figured.

2. **Major tests:** There are three major tests, counting the final exam.
 - a. **Thursday, February 7**
 - b. **Monday, March 18**
 - c. **Tuesday, April 23, 7:30 - 10:00 a.m. (final exam)**

Each test will include:

- multiple choice or other objective questions (50 - 60%);
- identification or other short discussion questions (20 - 30%); and
- one or more larger essay questions (15 - 20%).

Most of the final exam will deal with the material covered after the second test and will not be comprehensive. However, at least one large essay question that is comprehensive and integrative will be included on the final.

D. Other Requirements

1. Be regular and prompt in class attendance, participate in class discussions, and keep careful notes. Not only will your daily quiz grade and your overall grasp of the material suffer if you miss class often, but there will be a direct grade penalty as described under "E3" below.
2. Bring the *HCSB* to class each day. Since the Bible is the primary text for this course, being "present" without it is equivalent to being absent.
3. Carefully read assigned materials prior to each lecture. See the course schedule under "F" below. In addition to the readings from the Bible and the Harris textbook, you should read the *HCSB*'s introduction to each book of the New Testament as you read that book.
4. Take tests on schedule. Exceptions because of medical emergencies must be documented by a physician or by the Student Health Center.

E. Grading

1. After the two lowest (or missed) quiz grades are dropped, the total of your quiz points will be converted to a percentage score (e.g., a total of 162 out of a possible 180 is 90%). This grade will then be combined with your three test grades, and the total divided by four, to determine your course average.
2. Optional Internet Assignment. See details on pp. 5-7 below. If you choose to do this assignment, it will be weighted the same as the other grades; that is, it will be added to your quiz grade and the three test grades, with the total divided by five to determine your course average.
3. In the unfortunate event that a grade penalty is necessary because of excessive absences, the course average will be reduced 5 points for each absence beyond the third.
4. Letter grades for the course will be based on the following scale:

93 - 100 = A	80 - 82 = B-	67 - 69 = D+
90 - 92 = A-	77 - 79 = C+	63 - 66 = D
87 - 89 = B+	73 - 76 = C	60 - 62 = D-
83 - 86 = B	70 - 72 = C-	Below 60 = F

F. Course Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>
Jan. 7	Introduction	none
Jan. 10	The Text and Canon of the New Testament; the Jewish World of Jesus and His Early Followers	Harris, ch. 1; pp. 20-26 in ch. 2; pp. 36-41 in ch. 3
Jan. 14	The Jewish World of Jesus and His Early Followers, continued	Harris, ch. 4
Jan. 17	"	Harris, ch. 5
Jan. 21	MARTIN LUTHER KING HOLIDAY	
Jan. 24	Early Christianity and the Formation of the Gospels; The Synoptic Problem	Harris, ch. 6
Jan. 28	Mark's Portrait of Jesus	Mark 1:1 - 8:26
Jan. 31	"	Mark 8:27 - 16:8
Feb. 4	"	Harris, ch. 7
Feb. 7	F I R S T T E S T	
Feb. 11	Matthew's Portrait of Jesus; Synoptic Comparisons	Matthew
Feb. 14	"	Harris, ch. 8
Feb. 18	Luke's Portrait of Jesus; Synoptic Comparisons	Luke
Feb. 21	"	Harris, ch. 9
Feb. 25, 28	SPRING BREAK	

Mar. 4	John's Portrait of Jesus; The Quest for the Historical Jesus	John; Harris, ch. 10
Mar. 7	Acts 1 - 12: The Beginning and Growth of the Church	Acts 1 - 12; Harris, pp. 277-286 in ch. 13
Mar. 11	Acts 13 - 28: The Career of Paul and the Expansion of Christianity	Acts 13 - 20; Harris, pp. 287-301 in ch. 13
Mar. 14	"	Acts 21-28
Mar. 18 S E C O N D T E S T		
Mar. 21	The Urban Setting of Christianity in the Greco-Roman World	Harris, pp. 40-56 in ch. 3
Mar. 25	CLASS WILL NOT MEET.	
Mar. 28	Introduction to the Pauline Corpus; The Thessalonian Correspondence	I & II Thessalonians; Harris, ch. 14 and pp. 315-318 in ch. 15
Apr. 1	The Corinthian Correspondence	I Corinthians
Apr. 4	"	Harris, pp. 318-331 in ch. 15
Apr. 8	The Gospel of Grace: Galatians and Romans	Galatians; Romans; Harris, ch. 16
Apr. 11	The Prison Letters and Pastoral Letters	Philippians; Philemon; I & II Timothy; Titus; Harris, ch. 17 & pp. 358-369 in ch. 18
Apr. 15	Hebrews and the General Letters	Hebrews; James; Harris, ch. 19
Apr. 18	Faith's Vision of a New Order: The Book of Revelation	Revelation; Harris, pp. 395-411 in ch. 20
Apr. 23	F I N A L E X A M , Tuesday, 7:30 - 10:00 a.m.	

Optional Internet Assignment

There are many websites now available to illuminate the social and historical context of early Christianity. For the equivalent of one additional test score, you can explore several of these sites and write a paper on the social and historical setting of early Christianity as seen in these internet resources. There is no expectation that the paper be comprehensive; the topic is much too broad and complex for that. Nevertheless, from browsing these sites you should quickly detect many specific ways in which the pictures and information on ancient society, culture, geography, history, government, religion, art, etc., provide a helpful backdrop against which to see the New Testament texts that we are reading in this course.

Most of the ancient Christian artifacts that have been recovered date to a period later than that covered in our study. Although you may deal briefly with some of these as they parallel and illustrate first-century Christianity, the assignment has to do primarily not with Christian artifacts themselves, but with the more abundant Jewish and especially Greek and Roman materials that represent the **setting or context or environment** of Jesus and early Christianity. Class discussion of the Jewish world of Jesus and his early followers on January 10, 14, and 17, and on the urban setting of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world on March 21 and April 1, should help you focus on some specific ideas to explore further.

Part of the paper should be simply descriptive. Refer to several websites (at least six or eight) that deal with various aspects of the Jewish, Greek, or Roman background or setting of Jesus and early Christianity. Describe what kind of information and graphics you find in each, and indicate in a general way whether and how the material in each sheds light on the world in which Jesus lived and Christianity developed. Use footnotes to specify all resources from which your draw.

About two-thirds of the paper should concentrate on one specific topic that you find especially interesting and insightful. Use at least two or three sites on your chosen topic to ensure some balance. This part of the paper should be more integrative. That is, in addition to describing what you find you must discuss how this background information sheds light on particular texts, concepts, or characters in the New Testament. For example, you might focus on Greek art and reflect on how you think early Christianity would have interfaced with the religious ideas and social practices depicted in that art. Or you might consider burial practices and funeral monuments in Greco-Roman antiquity and give your impressions about how these relate to early Christian views of death and afterlife. Or you might explore the archeological excavations at some of the cities visited by Jesus or Paul in the New Testament; how does this information affect your perception of the activities of Jesus or the early Christians in these places? Or you could investigate some of the Roman religious traditions that provided competition for the early Christian religion, and reflect on the tensions and conflicts that this competition produced. Or you could explore the archeological work on the massive building projects of Herod the Great and discuss how these records compare with the portrayal of Herod in the New Testament. Or you could investigate some of the ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls and compare them with early Christian ideas as expressed in the New Testament. Or you could investigate athletic competition and other entertainments that were popular in Roman cities and discuss how this information affects your perception of the dynamics of early Christian life in such an environment. And, of course, there are countless other possibilities. Be creative! Your **impressions** about this information and its significance for studying early Christianity are as important in this part of the paper as the factual information itself.

You may find the following sites helpful in getting started. Several of them have good search capabilities as well as links to numerous other sites:

- <http://classics.lsa.umich.edu> ("Classics and Mediterranean Archaeology"; has links to hundreds of sites)
- <http://www.pepperdine.edu/seaver/religion/isar/Links.htm> (Pepperdine's own "Institute for the Study of Archaeology and Religion" site, related to the ongoing dig at Banias [Biblical Caesarea Philippi], with links to other sites on archeology in Israel)
- <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> (good searching tools as well as links to related sites on classical antiquity)
- <http://argos.evansville.edu/about.htm> (good search capability as well as links to related sites)

Or, of course, you can use whatever search engine you normally use. For example, if you go to “Yahoo” and in the search box type the name “Herod” and another key word such as “Caesarea” or “Masada” or “Jerusalem,” you will immediately finds hundreds of resources, although discrimination will be needed to narrow your inquiry to those that are relevant, credible, and helpful. Avoid websites designed to promote a particular religious agenda. There are many of these, ranging from the reasonable and responsible to the ill-informed and propagandistic. Too often, the reliability of the information is compromised if the objective is religious advocacy rather than historical research.

This optional assignment is designed to supplement—not replace—classroom instruction and quality performance in other aspects of the course. Therefore, no one who misses class more than four times is eligible to do this assignment for credit.

There is no set requirement as to length, but seven to ten typed, double-spaced pages is an ideal. Provide footnotes to document all your information, using the format shown below on p. 7 as a model. Your grade will depend on your precision and clarity of writing style and your creativity as well as the substance of the paper. The deadline for submission is **8:00 a.m. on Monday, April 8.**

Optional Internet Assignment: Sample Pages

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not as reliable or helpful as the information in "Scrolls from the Dead Sea: The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Scholarship."⁶

The remainder of this study will focus on Jewish synagogues in the time of Jesus. A more important aspect of the Jewish world of Jesus and the New Testament could scarcely be found. Not only did Jesus frequent the synagogue (e.g., Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:16; John 18:20), but Paul used the synagogue as a base of operation for his missionary efforts in many Roman cities (e.g., Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10; 18:4; 19,

26). Synagogues were major forces in shaping the worship and communal life of the early Christians, but also major centers of opposition to the young Christian movement (e.g., Acts 9:1-2; 13:14-52; 18:4-16). Therefore, any light that can be shed on ancient synagogues also inevitably sheds light on the life of Jesus and the origins and early development of Christianity.

- Note the use of footnotes for documentation.
- Pictures may be included if you have a color printer, but only if they are important to your topic, and not as "filler."
- Make clear how the background information relates to the study of the New Testament.
- Proofread to eliminate errors!

discovery of the oldest synagogue yet unearthed in Palestine. Built sometime between 75 and 50 B.C. in Wadi Kelt, a town near the ancient city of Jericho, it is similar in design to several other synagogues in the area where Jesus' ministry took place. It was uncovered beneath the ruins of a Herodian palace and was part of a Hasmonean palace complex that was destroyed in 31 B.C. by an earthquake. This website provides images of the ongoing archaeological work, a detailed drawing of the synagogue complex, and the initial Associated Press news release.⁸ Related sites give the report of the find from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem⁹ and the news release in the *Jerusalem Post*.¹⁰

This most recent discovery is only one of dozens that shed new light on Jewish synagogues in the time of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament. Others in Palestine that have been excavated include those at Gamla, Capernaum, Masada, and Salem.¹¹ Remains of synagogues around the Mediterranean have not only been investigated,¹² Valuable information comes not only from various inscriptions that provide information, but also from various inscriptions that provide the place of women, the process of synagogue life the various religious and social functions that synagogues entered literary references, including those from the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and various other ancient Jewish texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament canons.¹⁴ help to round out the picture.

⁶ metalab.unc.edu/expo/deadseascrolls/exhibit/intro.html

⁷ www.smu.edu/~dbinder

⁸ www.smu.edu/~dbinder/jericho.html

⁹ www.huji.ac.il/archaeology/jericho.htm

¹⁰ www.jpost.com/com/Archive/30.Mar.1998/News/Article-1.htm

¹¹ www.smu.edu/~dbinder/image.html; see also members.aol.com/fjosephus/archCamala.htm

¹² www.smu.edu/~dbinder/image.htm

¹³ www.smu.edu/~dbinder/faqs.htm

¹⁴ www.smu.edu/~dbinder/lit.htm; see also ccel.wheaton.edu/j/josephus/JOSEPHUS.HTM; and www.hivodata.net/ast/ktpilopag.htm

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