

# Jesus and the Gospels

**Religion 114****Classroom:** 111 Comenius Hall**Class times:** TTh 1:10–2:20pm**E-Mail:** radine@moravian.edu**Professor:** Jason Radine**Office:** 202 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314**Office Hours:** TTh 11:00–12:00

and by appointment.

## Course Content

Jesus is without doubt the most famous historical person worldwide, but in fact he remains an enigmatic, mysterious figure whose meaning and message is hotly debated today. The purpose of this course is to try to answer the following questions:

- 1) What can modern historical methods tell us about Jesus?
- 2) Why do the Gospels present different views of him?
- 3) What can we know about what Jesus *really* thought and said?
- 4) What can we learn from Gospels that did not make it into the Bible?
- 5) What did non-Christian authors from antiquity think about Jesus?

There are not necessarily any single answers to these questions, so we will bring in a variety of viewpoints into the class. In addition to primary sources (the Bible and non-canonical gospels) there are three books assigned that present three different views of the historical Jesus from three serious and historically-committed biblical scholars. These will provide a good sample of the range of opinion on who Jesus was and what he believed and said. Biblical study is a dynamic and ever-changing field, so we can expect new discoveries to appear even in this semester!

## Goals of the Course

1) *An Understanding of the Complexities of the Question of Who Jesus Was:* There are a variety of possible ways of seeing and understanding Jesus, and a major goal of this course is for students to learn about that variety.

2) *Biblical Literacy:* The knowledge of significant figures and ideas in the Bible, biblical literacy is declining in American society even as the Bible continues to be drawn into social and political discussions, often with little knowledge of its actual contents. Students in this course will learn biblical literacy, a vital area of knowledge for full participation in today's public discourse.

3) *The Academic, Scholarly Method of Biblical Criticism:* While many students may be familiar with the methods of reading the Bible in faith communities, this course will introduce the critical methods of modern academic scholarship (see "Approach" below for further details). Students in this course will learn how to use the critical method to uncover the history, ideologies, and theologies in the biblical texts.

4) *Close Reading Skills*: Many of the most interesting and revealing details within the Bible are missed by readers not reading closely. This course will demonstrate the methods of close reading, wherein small details are brought to the surface rather than glossed over. This skill is useful in a virtually limitless range of life tasks.

5) *Analysis of Contrasting Arguments*: This course will be examining the debate on the historical Jesus and the Gospel messages using several well-thought-out theories. Students in this course will enhance their skills in distinguishing these positions and understanding the complex arguments that they bring to the questions. Students will learn how to read sophisticated arguments and come to their own conclusion.

### **Approach**

The approach will be literary and historical, not religious, as the biblical and non-biblical texts will be studied like any other works of ancient literature. This course will employ the scholarly, academic approach of biblical criticism, without privileging any particular religious view. “Biblical criticism” does not refer to negatively criticizing the Bible, but instead to the careful analysis of biblical texts using the most current methods from a variety of disciplines. This approach, used in biblical criticism in colleges and universities around the world, attempts to be as neutral as possible, and to let the biblical texts speak for themselves, even if it runs counter to later religious traditions. While you are not required to agree with the presentations of biblical texts and beliefs in this class, you are required to understand them and be able to demonstrate that understanding in exams.

### **Required Texts**

- 1) The New Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible, with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (Oxford University Press).
- 2) *Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth* by Michael J. McClymond, Eerdmans Publishing, 2004.
- 3) *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* by Bart D. Ehrman, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- 4) *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* by Marcus J. Borg, HarperOne Press, 2006.
- 5) *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* edited by Ron Cameron, Westminster John Knox Press, 1982.
- 6) Occasional handouts, especially on the non-Christian sources on Jesus that we will be studying at the end of the semester.

## Grading and Class Policies

- 1) Six exams, a mix of essay and short-answer, each worth 13%.
- 2) Bi-weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), generally assigned on Thursdays and due on Tuesdays. The essays will be based on questions drawn from the textbooks that I will give out. 20% of the grade altogether. Consult the Student Handbook for the academic honesty policy.
- 3) Active, in-class participation is 2% of the grade. Cell phones must be silenced in class, and texting is not allowed.
- 4) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the syllabus; that is, before class.
- 5) Attendance. After two unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence.

## Lecture and Readings Schedule

### Introduction and Background

Introduction	September 1 <sup>st</sup>
The Jewish Background to the Life of Jesus <i>Readings:</i> McClymond chapters 1&2	September 3 <sup>rd</sup>

### The Synoptic Gospels

The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings:</i> Mark 1-5, McClymond chapters 3&4	September 8 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings:</i> Mark 6-10, McClymond chapters 5&6	September 10 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings:</i> Mark 11-16, McClymond chapters 7&8	September 15 <sup>th</sup>
Gospel of Mark Exam	September 17 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings:</i> Matthew 1-9, McClymond chapters 9&10	September 22 <sup>nd</sup>
The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings:</i> Matthew 10-19, McClymond chapters 11&12	September 24 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Matthew	September 29 <sup>th</sup>

<i>Readings: Matthew 20-28, McClymond chapters 13</i>	
Matthew Exam	October 1 <sup>st</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 1-8, Ehrman chapters 1&amp;2</i>	October 6 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 9-16, Ehrman chapters 3&amp;6</i>	October 8 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 17-24, Ehrman chapters 7&amp;8</i>	October 15 <sup>th</sup>
Luke Exam	October 20 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 1-7, Ehrman chapters 9&amp;10</i>	October 22 <sup>nd</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 8-14, Ehrman chapters 11&amp;12</i>	October 27 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 15-21, Ehrman chapters 13&amp;14</i>	October 29 <sup>th</sup>
John Exam	November 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Non-Canonical Gospels</b>	
<i>Gnostic Gospels</i>	
The Gospel of Thomas Cameron, Borg chapter 1	November 5 <sup>th</sup>
Dialogue of the Savior, Gospel of the Egyptians Cameron, Borg chapter 2	November 10 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Peter, the Acts of John Cameron, Borg chapter 3	November 12 <sup>th</sup>
<i>Jewish Gospels</i>	
The Gospels of the Hebrews, Ebionites, Nazoreans Cameron Gnostic Gospels exam	November 17 <sup>th</sup>

*Prequel Gospels*

The Protoevangelion of James, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas  
Cameron, Ehrman chapter 5. November 19<sup>th</sup>

*Gospels of Jesus' Relationships*

The Secret Gospel of Mark  
Cameron, Borg chapter 4 November 24<sup>th</sup>

The Gospel of Philip  
Handout, Borg chapter 5 December 1<sup>st</sup>

The Gospel of Mary  
Handout, Borg chapter 6 December 3<sup>rd</sup>

Jewish and Roman Sources  
Cameron, Borg chapter 7, Ehrman chapter 4 December 8<sup>th</sup>

Final Exam (Non-Gnostic non-Canonical Gospels) 1:30pm December 16<sup>th</sup>