

# Jesus and the Gospels

**Religion 114**

**Classroom:** 116 PPHAC

**Class times:** MW 2:35-3:45

**E-Mail:** radine@moravian.edu

**Professor:** Jason Radine

**Office:** 108 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314

**Office Hours:** MW 1:30-2:30pm

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 for the non-canonical gospels.

## **Grading and Class Policies**

- 1) Five exams, a mix of essay and short-answer.
- 2) Generally bi-weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), assigned on Wednesdays and due on Mondays. The essays will be based on questions drawn from the textbooks that I will give out. Grading will be based on an average of the exams altogether, averaged with the essays, which will count altogether as the value of two exams. Plagiarized papers will receive F grades, and will result in a one-letter grade reduction for your course grade overall at least, and a failing grade in the class at most. Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.
- 3) Active, in-class participation. 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	August 29 <sup>th</sup>
The Jewish Background to the Life of Jesus <i>Readings:</i> McClymond chapters 1&2	August 31 <sup>st</sup>

### **The Synoptic Gospels**

The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings:</i> Mark 1-5, McClymond chapters 3&4	September 7 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings:</i> Mark 6-10, McClymond chapters 5&6	September 12 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Mark <i>Readings:</i> Mark 11-16, McClymond chapters 7&8	September 14 <sup>th</sup>
Gospel of Mark Exam	September 19 <sup>th</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings: Matthew 1-9, McClymond chapters 9&amp;10</i>	September 21 <sup>st</sup>
The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings: Matthew 10-19, McClymond chapters 11&amp;12</i>	September 26 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Matthew <i>Readings: Matthew 20-28, McClymond chapters 13</i>	September 28 <sup>th</sup>
Matthew Exam	October 3 <sup>rd</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 1-8, Ehrman chapters 1&amp;2</i>	October 5 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 9-16, Ehrman chapters 3&amp;6</i>	October 12 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings: Luke 17-24, Ehrman chapters 7&amp;8</i>	October 17 <sup>th</sup>
Luke Exam	October 19 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 1-7, Ehrman chapters 9&amp;10</i>	October 24 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 8-14, Ehrman chapters 11&amp;12</i>	October 26 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings: John 15-21, Ehrman chapters 13&amp;14</i>	October 31 <sup>st</sup>
John Exam	November 2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Non-Canonical Gospels</b>	
<i>Gnostic Gospels</i>	
The Gospel of Thomas <i>Readings: Cameron, Borg chapter 1</i>	November 7 <sup>th</sup>
Dialogue of the Savior, Gospel of the Egyptians <i>Readings: Cameron, Borg chapter 2</i>	November 9 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Peter, the Acts of John <i>Readings: Cameron, Borg chapter 3</i>	November 14 <sup>th</sup>

*Jewish Gospels*

The Gospels of the Hebrews, Ebionites, Nazoreans  
*Readings:* Cameron

November 16<sup>th</sup>

*Prequel Gospels*

The Protoevangelion of James, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas  
*Readings:* Cameron, Ehrman chapter 5.

November 28<sup>th</sup>

*Gospels of Jesus' Relationships*

The Gospel of Judas  
*Readings:* Handout, Borg chapter 4

November 30<sup>th</sup>

The Gospels of Mary and Philip  
*Readings:* Handout, Borg chapter 5-6

December 5<sup>th</sup>

The Secret Gospel of Mark  
*Readings:* Cameron, Borg chapter 7, Ehrman chapter 4

December 7<sup>th</sup>

Final Exam (Non-Canonical Gospels)

1:30pm

December 15<sup>th</sup>