

THE HISTORICAL JESUS

NES / JWST / RELST 296

MWF 2:30-3:20, RF 105



Instructor: Steven Di Mattei
Office Hours: MW 3:30-4:30, 406 White Hall
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Course Description: What can we know about the Jesus of history, his life and his teaching? Who was he? What did he believe? What historical, literary, and archeological evidence is there in helping us answer these questions? And why even search for the historical Jesus anyway? Do not the canonical Gospels provide us with a reliable portrait of the Jesus of history? These are merely some of the challenging questions that we will deal with in this course. Students will not only be introduced to an array of different, and often contradictory, theories and hypotheses advanced by modern scholars in the field, in an attempt to answer these questions, but more importantly to the rich corpus of ancient Christian literature, canonical and non-canonical, which also often depicted Jesus with different, and even contradictory, theological and/or political messages. Reading material will include excerpts from the Prophets, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other intertestamental Jewish literature, as well as excerpts from the epistles of Paul, the four canonical Gospels in their entirety, and the Gnostic gospel of Thomas. Students will also become thoroughly acquainted with first-century Palestinian Judaism, the religious, social, and political context from which Jesus emerges.

Texts: Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*
Marvin Meyer, *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels* (optional)
Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*
John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*
Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision. Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship*
Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*
Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (optional)
A copy of the New Testament (preferably the New King James translation)

Books on reserve:

Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*
Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*
Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew*
Graham Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*
Darrell Brock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*
Gerd Theissen & Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*

Course objectives: This course is designed as an introduction to the study of the historical Jesus. Students will not only study the primary texts related to this academic field, the canonical gospels, but also become familiar with the social, religious, and political context of first-century Palestine, as well as the various portraits of Jesus advanced by modern scholars in the field. Students will also:

- become acquainted with the prophetic background to first-century messianic expectations

- gain familiarity with second temple Judaism, its history and literature
- become acquainted with the historical contexts of the gospels
- become familiar with methods used by scholars in studying the gospels
- gain a thorough knowledge of first-century Palestine and Galilee
- learn about and be able to criticize the portraits of Jesus advanced by biblical scholars
- become familiar with the archeological and literary evidence in the study of the historical Jesus

Grading:

Daily preparation and participation	30%
Writing Assignment #1 (3-5 pp.)	15%
Writing Assignment #2 (3-5 pp.)	15%
'Round Table' Debate	15%
Final Paper (8-10 pp.)	25%

Additional sources:

- Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith*
- John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*
- Allison Dale, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*
- Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*
- Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity*
- Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus-Story*
- Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium*
- William Herzog, *Prophet and Teacher: An Introduction to the Historical Jesus*
- John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1-3
- Jonathan Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence*
- E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*
- , *Jesus and Judaism*
- Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*
- Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*
- , *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*
- L. Michael White, *From Jesus to Christianity*
- N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*

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Daily Syllabus

—Introduction—

- Wk. 1 M Jan. 22 Introduction to the Study of the Historical Jesus: Course Goals and Structure
What do we mean by ‘historical Jesus’? Why such a ‘quest’? Sources and Methods.
- W Jan. 24 Images of Jesus through the Centuries: 21st c. – 3rd c.
How have different cultures and time periods portrayed Jesus?
Readings: Theissen & Merz, 1-13; Ehrman, 8-15

—Portraits of Jesus in the Gospels: An Overview—

- F Jan. 26 John’s Jesus: The Divine Savior from Heaven
Readings: Gospel according to John; Fredriksen, 18-26
- Wk. 2 M Jan. 29 Luke’s Jesus: Savior of the Gentiles
Readings: Gospel according to Luke; Fredriksen, 27-36
- W Jan. 31 Matthew’s Jesus: The Persecuted Righteous Messiah of Scripture
Readings: Gospel according to Matthew; Fredriksen, 36-43
- F Feb. 2 Mark’s Jesus: The Suffering Son of Man
Readings: Gospel according to Mark; Fredriksen, 44-52

—Second Temple Judaism: A Brief History of Its Literature and Theology—

- Wk. 3 M Feb. 5 Prophecies of Doom and Destruction against Israel’s Ruling Class: Social and Economic Injustices
Readings: Amos; Micah; Isaiah 5; 10:1-11:9; Jeremiah 5-6
Fredriksen, 67-73
- W Feb. 7 Babylonian and Persian Rule (587 – 331 BC): Jerusalem’s Messianic Hopes in the Wake of Its
Destruction and the Burning of the Temple in 586 BC
Readings: Ezekiel 5-7; 36:33-37:28; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 33:14-26; Isaiah 40-55; 60-62;
Fredriksen 73-77; Bock, 79-84
- F Feb. 9 Hellenistic Rule from Alexander the Great to Antiochus Epiphanes IV (331 – 164 BC): The Birth
of the Apocalyptic
Readings: I Maccabees 1; II Maccabees 6:1-11; 7; Daniel
Fredriksen, 81-86; Bock, 84-91; Ehrman 28, 30
- Wk. 4 M Feb. 12 The Maccabean Revolt and Hasmonean Rule (164 – 63 BC)
Readings: I Enoch 46-51; Psalm of Solomon 17; *Dead Sea Scrolls*: The War Scroll (1QM);
Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521); selected Hymns
Fredriksen, 77-79; Bock, 91-96; Crossan, 107-111
- W Feb. 14 Roman Rule: Pompey to Augustus / King Herod the Great (63 – 4 BC)
Readings: Bock, 96-102; Horsley, 3-19; 133-145

—**First Century Palestine: Social, Political, and Religious Context of Jesus**—

F Feb. 16 Galilee under Herod Antipas (4 BC – 39 AD) / Judea under Pontius Pilate (26 - 36 AD)
Readings: Fredriksen, 86-93; Bock 107-136; Horsley, 28-58; Crossan, 91-102; 174-178; 111-123; 128-136

Wk. 5 M Feb. 19 Yeshu: A Short Biography: Origins, Language, Education / Judea prior to the Destruction of the Temple in 70 AD
Readings: Theissen & Merz, 162-180; Crossan, 15-19; 158-167; 178-206; 212-218; Ehrman, 231-249

W Feb. 21 Paul proclaims the gospel to the Greeks (ca. 45-60 AD)
Readings: I Thessalonians; I Corinthians 11:23-27; 15; II Corinthians 5:10-17; Philippians 2:5-11; Galatians 1:11-2:16; 3:13-4:7; Romans 1:1-6; 3:20-26; 5:8-11
Fredriksen, 52-61; 79-81

—**Aftermath of the Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD: The Gospel(s) of Jesus Christ**—

F Feb. 23 Introduction to the New Testament Gospels: Methods of Study. Non-canonical Sources
Readings: Ehrman, 48-66, 210-224; Stanton, 13-36; Theissen & Merz, 63-74; 79-84

Wk. 6 M Feb. 26 The Gospel of Mark
Readings: The Gospel according to Mark 1:1-3:35
Writing Assignment #1 Due

W Feb. 28 The Gospel of Mark
Readings: The Gospel according to Mark 4:1-8:30; Ehrman, 67-82

F Mar. 2 The Gospel of Mark
Readings: The Gospel according to Mark 8:31-12:44; Fredriksen, 177-185

Wk. 7 M Mar. 5 The Gospel of Mark
Readings: The Gospel according to Mark 13:1-16:8; 4 Ezra 9-12:39

W Mar. 7 The Gospel of Matthew
Readings: The Gospel according to Matthew 1:1-9:38; Testament of Moses 6-10; Ehrman 83-91

F Mar. 9 The Gospel of Matthew
Readings: The Gospel according to Matthew 10:1-20:34; Ehrman, 92-111

Wk. 8 M Mar. 12 The Gospel of Matthew
Readings: The Gospel according to Matthew 21:1-28:20; Fredriksen, 185-191

W Mar. 14 The Gospel of Luke
Readings: The Gospel according to Luke; 1:1-8:56; Ehrman, 112-131

F Mar. 16 The Gospel of Luke
Readings: The Gospel according to Luke 9:1-18:43; Fredriksen, 191-198

—Spring Break—

Wk. 9 M Mar. 26 The Gospel of Luke

Readings: The Gospel according to Luke 19:1-24:53

W Mar. 28 The Gospel of John

Readings: The Gospel according to John 1:1-11:57; Ehrman, 154-175

F Mar. 30 The Gospel of John

Readings: The Gospel according to John 12:1-21:25; Fredriksen, 198-204

Wk. 10 M Apr. 2 The Gospel of Thomas

Readings: The Gospel according to Thomas; Ehrman, 195-209

Writing Assignment #2 Due

—The Quest for the Historical Jesus—

W Apr. 4 Galilee and Jesus: The Birth Narratives

Readings: Plutarch, *Lives: Alexander*, 1-2; 5-6; Suetonius *Lives of the Caesars: Augustus*, 94; Matthew 1:18-2:23; Luke 1:5-2:21

F Apr. 6 John the Baptist

Readings: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18:116-119; **1)** Mark 1:1-13; Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 3:1-22; & John 1:19-34; **2)** Mark 6:14-29; Matthew 14:1-12; & Luke 9:7-9; **3)** Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35
Fredriksen, 94-98; Crossan, 227-264

Wk. 11 M Apr. 9 Disciples, Family, and Ministry

Readings: *Ministry:* Mark 1:14-15, Matthew 4:12-17, 9:35, Luke 4:14-15; Mark 6:1-6, Matthew 13:53-58, Luke 4:16-30; Mark 6:6b-13, Matthew 10:5-15, Luke 9:1-6; *Calling of the Disciples:* Mark 1:16-20, Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:1-11; Mark 2:13-17, Matthew 9:9-13, Luke 5:27-32; Mark 3:13-19, Matthew 10:1-4, Luke 6:12-16; Mark 6:52, 7: 18, 8:17, 8:34; Luke 14:25-33; *Family:* Mark 3:31-35, Matthew 12:46-50, Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 10:34-39, Luke 14:26-27
Fredriksen, 98-102; Borg, 39-51

W Apr. 11 Miracles and Exorcisms

Readings: Mark 1:21-28, Luke 4:31-37; Mark 1:40-45, Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 5:12-16; Mark 2:1-12, Matthew 9:1-8, Luke 5:17-26; Mark 3:1-6, 5:1-20, 5:21-45, Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 6:30-44; Mark 6:53-56, Matthew 14:34-36; Mark 7:24-30, Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 9:14-29, 10:46-52; Luke 7:11-17, 13:10-17, 14:1-6; John 2:1-11, 5:1-9, 9:1-12, 11:38-44
Crossan, 310-353; Borg, 57-71

F Apr. 13 Conflict Stories: Jesus and the Pharisees

Readings: Mark 2:1-12, 2:23-28, 7:1-13, 10:1-12, 12:13-17; Matthew 5, 17-20, 12, 38-42, 21:33-46, 23:1-36; Luke 12:1-7, 18:9-14; John 7:45-52, 8:39-59, 9:13-34, 12:36b-43
Fredriksen, 102-110; Borg 79-93

Wk. 12 M Apr. 16 The Kingdom of God

Readings: Mark 1:14-15, 4:1-41, 9:1, 9:47, 10:14-15, 10:23-27, 14:25, 15:43; Matthew 4:17, 5:3-10, 5:19-20, 6:10, 6:33, 7:21, 8:11-12, 13:44-50, 18:1-5, 18, 21-35, 20:1-16, 21:28-32, 22:1-14, 24:3-14, 25:1-13; Luke 8:1, 9:27, 10:1-12, 11:20, 14:15-24, 17:20-37, 18:17; John 3:3-5, 18:36
Crossan, 265-302; Horsley 167-208

W Apr. 18 Ethics and the Torah

Readings: Marc 7:1-23, 10:1-12; Matthew 5:1-7:29, 12:1-8, 19:16-30; Luke 6:27-42, 10, 25-37, 12, 22-34, 14, 7-14, 16, 1-13; John 8:1-11, 13:31-35
Horsley, 246-284; Borg 97-116

F Apr. 20 Jerusalem Entry, Temple Incident and Last Supper

Readings: Mark 11:1-14, Matthew 21:1-11, Luke 19:28-40, John 12:12-19; Mark 11:15-26, Matthew 21:12-22, Luke 19:45-48, John 2:13-22; Mark 14:12-26, Matthew 26:17-30, Luke 22:7-23, John 13:21-30
Fredriksen, 110-114

Wk. 13 M Apr. 23 Arrest, Trials, Crucifixion, and Death

Readings: Mark 14:43-65, 15:1-20; Matthew 26:47-68, 27:1-56; Luke 22:47-23:49; John 18:1-14, 18:19-19:37
Fredriksen, 115-122; Crossan, 354-394

W Apr. 25 Burial, Empty Tomb and the Risen Lord

Readings: Burial: Mark 15:42-47, Matthew 27:57-61, Luke 23:50-56a, John 19:38-42; *Empty Tomb*: Mark 16:1-8; *Empty Tomb and Post-Resurrection Appearances*: Matthew 27:62-28:20; Luke 23:56b-24:53; John 20:1-21:25
Crossan, 395-416

—‘Round Table’ Debate: The Many Faces of Jesus—

F Apr. 27 Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet or Non-Apocalyptic Jewish Cynic?

Readings: Ehrman, 250-284; Crossan, 74-88; 417-426

Wk. 14 M Apr. 30 Jesus: Social Revolutionist or Compassionate Man of the Spirit?

Readings: Horsley, 156-166; 285-326; Borg, 1-17, 125-165, 190-200

W May 2 Jesus: Wandering ‘Hasidic’ Holy Man or Risen Lord and Christ?

Readings: Vermes (TBA); Johnson, 105-177

—Conclusion: Jesus and Christian Beginnings—

F May 4 The Legacy of Jesus: James, the ‘Brother of the Lord’ or Paul?

Readings: Galatians 2:11-21; Epistle of James; Ehrman, 362-371

Final Paper Due Friday noon May 11th