

RS 104

**Topics in Biblical Studies:
Jesus in the Gospels and the Land**

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Description

A study of Jesus and the Gospels with particular attention to physical, historical, geographical and cultural settings. Central to the course will be visits to archaeological and religious sites associated with the life of Jesus, supplemented by formal study (lectures, guides, readings, discussion) of the historical/social/cultural/political contexts of Jesus' life and ministry. The goal is to "meet" and understand Jesus in his world, the world of both early Judaism and Imperial Rome, in order to become better followers of Jesus in ours.

Thinking Historically

With the focus on Jesus as an historical figure, we will give careful attention to the particular world of 1st century Judea in its Roman context, while locating Jesus' time and place within the broader historical context of 2nd Temple Judaism (587 BCE to 70 CE) and the early Roman empire (from Augustus to Aurelius), the period often called the *Pax Romana*. This historical period was a time of complex transitions for both Judaism and Imperial Rome, the understanding of which provides important background for the study of Jesus. The primary source material for the course will be the four Gospels, understood as both Christian canon and as occasional, historical documents composed according to patterns and principles of ancient historiography. Additional primary sources will include Josephus, Philo, the Apocrypha, Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Assigned secondary literature will raise historical, historiographical, archaeological and cultural issues important for the sound interpretation of the Gospels and for the responsible construction of the history of the period. Students will gain new appreciation for the centrality of context (geographical, social, historical) for understanding Jesus and the early movement that grew up around him, and they will gain first hand experience constructing their own accounts, accounts that take seriously what was unique and distinctive about Jesus, what he shared with the world of his day, and how his life and message provoked challenges to both Jewish and Roman establishments.

Animating this course will be a set of historical questions.

1. Who did Jesus think he was? How did he see himself in relation to the nation of Israel? The Jewish Law? The Jerusalem Temple? The Kingdom of God?
2. What did Jesus mean when he announced the arrival of God's rule?
3. Did Jesus begin as a disciple of John the Baptist?
4. Why did people follow Jesus? What role did women play in the early Jesus movement?
5. With what contemporary Jewish and Hellenistic figures (preachers, magicians, messianic claimants, exorcists, rebels, etc.) might Jesus be compared?
6. Did Jesus foresee his own death? What significance did he attach to it?
7. Why was Jesus opposed by the Jewish elite and executed by the Romans?
8. What was the connection between Jesus' message, his deeds and his death?
9. Why weren't his followers arrested and executed with him?
10. Are the Gospels reliable as historical documents? What does "reliable" mean in this context?
11. Is the Jesus "quest" important for Christian discipleship?

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12. How should our study of Jesus inform and shape our response to the present conflict between the state of Israel and the Palestinians?

Satisfies *upper division RS elective* for RS major and RS minor.
 Satisfies *upper division NT elective* for RS majors.
 Satisfies *Thinking Historically GE* requirement.

Requirements (Tentative)

1. On campus

- 1.1. Map work: Israel in 2nd Temple Judaism, indicating key places and regions, geographical features (Shephelah, central mountains, rift valley, lower & upper Galilee, key rivers and wadis, Golan) and the locations of key events in the Gospels.
- 1.2. The Gospels: careful reading of all 4 Gospels (in conjunction with map work), tracking four themes: geography, opposition (Jewish, Roman, demonic), power, the marginal (women, children, poor, sick, demonized, Gentiles). Students will submit tables showing relevant passages and parallels.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Place/space				
Opponents/opposition				
Powers (Jewish/Roman/spiritual)				
The marginal				

- 1.3. Historical Settings: A test on pre-trip readings will focus on historical events, figures, movements and themes significant for understanding and contextualizing the life and message of Jesus. Topics to be covered include:
 - 1.3.1. Maccabean Revolt / martyrs
 - 1.3.2. Roman rule and taxation
 - 1.3.3. Herod the Great / Herodian dynasty
 - 1.3.4. Pontius Pilate / Roman procurators
 - 1.3.5. Jewish War / destruction of Jerusalem
 - 1.3.6. Sects and groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Sicarii, Samaritans)
 - 1.3.7. Messianic hope
 - 1.3.8. Burial and afterlife in Judaism
 - 1.3.9. Dead Sea Scrolls / Essenes / Qumran
 - 1.3.10. Temple practice / priesthood
 - 1.3.11. Synagogue / early Jewish biblical interpretation
 - 1.3.12. Magic and miracle in the Roman world
- 1.4. Film screenings with submitted written and oral responses to discussion questions.

The Roman Empire in the First Century
Where Jesus Walked (Biblical Archaeology Review, 2005)
Echoes from the Ancients

2. Jesus in the Five Gospels

As we travel we will study the figure of Jesus in the four Gospels and the fifth—the land. Physical settings along with historical and cultural contexts will be used to illuminate key passages in the Gospels about Jesus and his mission. Each student will co-lead (with the professor) an on-site discussion of one of the following topics, incorporating insights from the Gospels and assigned secondary literature. All

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students will be responsible for assigned readings prior to site visits. Good co-presentations will offer evidence that the student:

- is familiar with the major historical issues and debates surrounding the topic and location, and with the particular challenges scholars face in constructing an account of people, events and developments from ancient times,
- has consulted both primary and secondary sources,
- has noted the significance of social place, time and critical distance on the interpretive process,
- knows the subject without excessive dependence on notes and can tell a good (hi)story,
- can field questions comfortably and competently,
- and understands the importance of effective oral delivery: organization, clarity, creativity, rhetoric, appropriateness.

Topics:

- 2.1. Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke (Bethlehem)
- 2.2. Jesus baptism (Jordan river, Jordan)
- 2.3. John the Baptist (Machaerus, Jordan)
- 2.4. Jesus' apocalyptic expectation (Qumran)
- 2.5. Healings, miracles and magic (Siloam, Bethesda, Cana, Capernaum, Ginnosar)
- 2.6. The politics of Jesus (Nazareth)
- 2.7. Jesus and women (Migdal)
- 2.8. Jesus the Jew in Samaria (Nablus / Jacob's Well)
- 2.9. Jesus' Kingdom ethic (Mount of Beatitudes)
- 2.10. Jesus' titles and self-understanding: prophet, Messiah, Lord, Son of Man, Son of God (Caesarea-Philippi)
- 2.11. Jesus' royal entry in Jewish and Roman context (Mount of Olives)
- 2.12. Jesus' action in the Temple (Temple Mount)
- 2.13. Jesus' Jewish hearings and Roman trial (Herodian houses)
- 2.14. Passover and Last Supper (Cenacle)
- 2.15. Jesus prayer and arrest (Gethsemane)
- 2.16. Roman crucifixion and Jesus' death (Holy Sepulchre)
- 2.17. Jesus' burial and resurrection (Akeldama)
- 2.18. Jesus' post-resurrection appearances (Damascus, Syria)

3. Journal

A shared assignment with PSY 150, this journal will be used to record experiences, cross-cultural encounters, readings, Biblical studies, conversations, and to identify parallels and contrasts between the ancient world of Jesus (RS 104) and the modern Middle East. (PSY 150). During the trip, the professors will provide prompts and raise questions to insure that the scope of the journals remains analytical and integrative. Group meetings will allow students to share and discuss their reflections and to benefit from the thoughts of others.

4. Final Paper: Jesus in history and faith

A final integrative paper, due July 15, will begin with one of the topics / site visits listed above (see #2) and offer a careful analysis of how the relevant biblical passage(s) can be better understood by geographical, historical, and cultural contexts, by contemporary biblical scholarship and, where relevant, by Christian traditions and The conclusion of the paper will need to show how the resulting historical portrait of Jesus might inform, reform, shape and challenge the church today.

Course texts (tentative)

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- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. IVP, 2008.
- Fisk, Bruce. *Hiking the Gospels*. Baker, forthcoming (handout).
- Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*. 5th ed. Oxford, 2008.
- Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. 2nd ed. Eerdmans, 1994.
- Reader of select primary sources (Josephus, 1 Macc., 4 Macc., Gospel of Judas, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary; excerpts from Pliny the Younger, Dead Sea Scrolls, Mishnah, Tacitus, Suetonius).
- Bible in one of the following translations: RSV, NRSV, NASV, NIV, TNIV.

Primary Sources

- Dead Sea Scrolls: War Scroll (1QM), Community Rule (1QS) (trans. Vermes)
- Josephus, *The Jewish War* (revised edition: Penguin Classics, 1981).
- Nag Hammadi corpus: Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Mary
- Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Psalms of Solomon, Jubilees, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch (trans. J. H. Charlesworth).
- Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (Penguin Classics, 2003)
- Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (Penguin Classics)
- The Letters of the Younger Pliny* (Penguin Classics, 1963).

Recommended Secondary Literature

- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Eerdmans, 2006
- Blomberg, Craig. *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*. IVP, 2005.
- Borg, Marcus J. and J. D. Crossan, *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.
- Burridge, Richard A. and Graham Gould. *Jesus Now and Then*. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Bryan, Christopher. *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church & the Roman Superpower*. OUP, 2005.
- Carroll, J. T. and J. B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity*. Hendrickson, 1995.
- Dunn, James D. G. *New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed*. Baker, 2005.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus Remembered*. Eerdmans, 2003.
- Eddy, P. R. and G. Boyd, *Jesus Legend, The: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition*. Baker, 2007.
- Evans, Craig. *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*. IVP, 2006.
- Evans, Craig. *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies*. Hendrickson, 2005.
- Evans, Craig. *Jesus and the Ossuaries*. Baylor, 2003.
- Hanson K. & D. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures & Social Conflicts*. Fortress, 1998.
- Hellholm, D., ed. *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*. J. C. B. Mohr, 1983.
- Horsley, Richard & John Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets & Messiahs: Popular Movements & the Time of Jesus*.
- Jeffers, James S. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*. IVP, 1999.
- Kee, Howard C. *The Origins of Christianity: Sources and Documents*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: 1973.
- Klauck, Hans-Josef. *The Religious Context of Early Christianity*. B. McNeil, trans. T. & T. Clark, 2000.
- Klauck, Hans-Josef, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*. Fortress, 2003.
- Mason, Steve. *Josephus and the New Testament*, 2nd ed. Hendrickson, 2003.

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- McClymond, Michael J. *Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth*. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Millard, Alan. *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*. Sheffield, 2000.
- Powell, M. A. *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*. Westminster/JKP, 1998.
- Reed, Jonathan. *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.
- Sanders, E. P. *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63BCE-66 CE*. Trinity, 1992.
- Shanks, Hershel and Ben Witherington, III. *The Brother of Jesus*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2003.
- Tripolitis, Antonia *Religions of the Hellenistic Roman Age*. Eerdmans, 2002.
- Wright, N. T. *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus*. Baker, 2006.
- Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
- Wright, N. T. *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*. InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Augsburg Fortress, 1997.
- Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Augsburg Fortress, 1992.