

Introduction to the New Testament

Winter 2021

Required Texts:

Bart Ehrman. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 7th edition. Oxford University Press, 2019.

Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not A Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle*, HarperOne 2010.

Amy-Jill Levine; Marc Z. Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, second edition. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Yii-Jan Lin, *The Erotic Lives of Manuscripts: New Testament Textual Criticism and the Biological Sciences*, Oxford University Press, 2016. (THIS TEXT AVAILABLE VIA THE ILIFF LIBRARY IN E-BOOK FORMAT)

Justo González, *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel*, Eerdmans 2015.

Nijay Gupta, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Studies: Understanding Key Debates*, Baker, 2020.

Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts*, Yale University Press, 2018.

Course Overview

An introduction to the literature of Christian origins that begins with a look at the context out of which the New Testament emerged, then turns to the earliest extant texts, Paul's letters and covers the Gospels, Acts, and post-Pauline epistles.

Goals and Outcomes:

Course Goals:

- To recognize that multiple forms of Christianity emerge in and from the texts of the New Testament;
- To learn to carefully read and analyze ancient texts;
- To understand the texts of the New Testament in the context of other contemporaneous texts;
- To understand the larger debates that have preoccupied scholars, faith communities, and other readers of the New Testament.

Course Outcomes:

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Navigate confidently and competently through the world of early Christian writings
- Identify and engage the concepts that have emerged from the study of the New Testament.
- Identify where significant New Testament passages reside.
- Read and interpret the New Testament for a variety of contexts.

Evaluation

This course offers tiered grading options, in the "contract grading" sense. Students may opt to commit to the choice that best suits their life circumstances and educational goals. Although you are asked to indicate a preference at the beginning of the quarter, *you may change your selection at any point in the course. If you are pursuing ordination or licensure, please confirm the requirements for your tradition before you make a decision, as some denominations only accept grades of a certain quality for required courses. Your academic advisor may be able to help you find this information.*

To receive a grade of Pass or C, students must complete the following:

Each week consists of three posts. These are worth 2 points each, for a total of 60 points for the course. These posts are “low-stakes” in that they are designed to provoke engagement and conversation, not to be formal academic writing, and they are generally graded on a credit/no credit basis. If a post is egregiously short, off-topic, or unreadable, the student may receive less than full credit. Failure to complete all of these posts will result in a grade of Fail or lower than C, which will not give you credit toward graduation.

To receive a grade in the B range, students must complete the following:

To receive a grade in the B range, you must complete all the posts as listed in the top section.

Additionally, you must complete the Canon Creation Laboratory, in which you a) fashion your own biblical canon from a list provided and any other works you wish to include, b) explain your choices, attending to what is at stake in the works you included and in your canon as a whole, and c) imagining what kind of critical apparatus (notes, introductions, textual annotations, appendices) might be needed to accompany your canon and make it intelligible to readers. The total length of this project is about 6-8 pages.

Students who complete this work adequately will receive a B. Students who complete it but exhibit deficiencies will receive a B-. Students who complete this work in an exemplary manner will receive a B+.

To receive a grade in the A range, students must complete the following:

To receive a grade in the A range, you must complete all the posts listed in the top section, and the Canon Creation Laboratory (described above).

Additionally, you must complete an exegesis paper of 6-8 pages. For this assignment, you will choose a passage from the New Testament (typically between 5 and 25 verses) and a) provide an account of the ways the passage has been read by 5-10 different interpreters, and b) provide your own reading of the text, done with attention to the history of the text and its interpretation and the context in which you are interpreting it.

Students who complete this work in an adequate or exemplary way will receive an A (because Iliff does not allow for a grade of A+). Students who complete this work but exhibit deficiencies will receive an A-.

Assignments

Canon Creation Laboratory

In the Canon Creation Laboratory, you a) **fashion your own canon from the examples linked below and any other works you wish to include**, b) **explain your choices, attending to what is at stake in the works you included and in your canon as a whole**, and c) **imagining what kind of critical apparatus (notes, introductions, textual annotations, appendices) might be needed to accompany your canon and make it intelligible to readers**. The total length of this project is about 6-8 pages.

Your canon can include all or part or none of the New Testament, and may include other materials that you find meaningful or life-giving. Examples of these might include some of the early Christian so-called "gnostic" materials included in the [library at gnosis.org](http://www.gnosis.org) ([Links to an external site.](#)), or some of the texts included at the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#) ([Links to an external site.](#)), or texts from other religion traditions, or from literature. Essentially whatever you think should be included is fine to include.

The result will be a canon that you create based on the criteria you decide, for whatever purpose you determine. You might decide that the current New Testament is the only canon you need, and stick with that, or you might replace it completely with works of postcolonial literature. Whatever you do, you should have a framework and rationale for deciding your canon, and you should be able to explain what makes these texts a canon and not just a list. In other words, what makes those texts hang together and speak to each other as a unit?

The kind of critical apparatus you imagine for the canon, then, will proceed from those choices. Maybe each book will need an introduction and some notes for reading, to help contextualize it? Or maybe the texts should be left to speak for themselves? You don't have to write these materials, but you should think about how the canon will be presented to readers.

Above all, use this laboratory to think about a couple of things. First, what is a canon, and what does it do to have books in a collection like this? How do they talk to each other and change each others' meaning, to be brought together like this? And second, what is the canon doing for you? What meaning does it hold for you, and what values or ideals came through in the composing of a canon?

Exegesis Paper

To receive an A- or an A in the course, in addition to the [Canon Creation Laboratory](#), you must complete an exegesis paper of 6-8 pages. For this assignment, you will choose a passage from the New Testament (typically between 5 and 25 verses) and a) provide an account of the ways the passage has been read by 5-10 different interpreters, and b) provide your own reading of the text, done with attention to the history of the text and its interpretation and the context in which you are interpreting it.

Exegesis is just a fancy word for interpretation. We all interpret texts any time we read them or engage with them; exegesis is just a slightly more formal and intentional way of doing that. There are quite a few distinct methods or lenses for interpretation; if you would like a guide to exegesis, [Hayes and Holladay's *Biblical Exegesis* \(Links to an external site.\)](#) is a great introduction (though it's woefully thin on topics like queer reading, feminist interpretation, postcolonial reading, and the kinds of readings that the [readings from Friday of week 2](#) talk about). But you don't necessarily need to be that formal. All you are asked to do is to closely read your passage and pay close attention to what's going on in it. You can use the notes in your JANT or other study bibles, commentaries, or other resources, and use the library's electronic resources to find the 5-10 interpretations. If there are commentaries that the library only has in physical copies, and you want to consult them, please email me with a) the passage you are working with, and b) the commentaries you'd like to consult, and I will scan the relevant sections and email them to you. The earlier the better!

Some prominent commentary series include:

Hermeneia (very comprehensive and somewhat technical)

Sacra Pagina (Roman Catholic, fairly scholarly)

Interpretation (aimed toward preaching)

Belief (theological readings of the bible)

International Critical Commentary (somewhat dated but a good scholarly intro)

New Testament Library (very scholarly, comprehensive)

Women's Bible Commentary (feminist in orientation)

Queer Bible Commentary (more of an edited collection than a commentary, but still helpful in many places)

True to our Native Land (African American New Testament commentary)

They Were All Together In One Place (multi-ethnic perspectives, more of an edited volume)

Anchor Bible (general readership)

Asia Bible Commentary (published by the Asia Theological Association)

Phoenix Guides to the New Testament (for mainline Christian audiences)

This is not a complete list, but it will get you started. You can use the shelf view on the Iliff library site to see more related volumes!

This assignment can be *pointing toward* a sermon or a class or some other final project, but it should really focus on the reading of the text. So while you might be thinking in terms of a sermon, what I'm looking for is not a sermon or a sermon outline, but for your close and careful reading of the biblical text that would bring you to the point where you would be prepared to write the sermon.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Where Bibles Come From

Monday

- Read [*A Biblical Mystery at Oxford* \(Links to an external site.\)](#) by Ariel Sabar
- Take a look at the [Oxford Papyrology Oxyrhynchus Online \(Links to an external site.\)](#) exhibit, and choose a few biblical papyri to look up using their tool. (You can either go hunting for manuscripts using randomly guessed numbers, or [this Wikipedia page \(Links to an external site.\)](#) gives you the numbers of some interesting ones. Nongbri also has a list in one of the appendices to his book, if you have that handy).

In a post of a paragraph or two, talk about what you've learned about where bibles come from. What does the controversy around Obbink suggest about the field of papyrology, and the ways the production of the bible happens in licit and illicit ways? Were the biblical papyri in the Oxford collection what you had imagined, or were they different? What does it say to you that your bible comes from items like these? Why would we start a course on the New Testament this way?

Wednesday

- Read Brent Nongbri's book *God's Library*, the prologue and chapters 1 and 2

How does Nongbri's book inform, shift, complicate, or confirm what we discussed on Monday? What did you learn in this reading?

Friday

- Read Ehrman, chapter 1 (What is the New Testament?) and chapter 2 (Do We Have the Original New Testament?).

Ehrman will be our main textbook for this course. How is he synthesizing and smoothing out the information we encountered on Monday and Tuesday? Or, to come at it from a different angle, many people criticize Ehrman for being too dismissive of people's faith claims about the bible. After the readings from Monday and Tuesday, what do you think about how Ehrman is handling the thorny question of the bible's origins?

Week 2: Genetics, Genomics, and Racisms of the Bible

Monday

- Read Yii-Jan Lin's book *The Erotic Life of Manuscripts*, ([Links to an external site.](#)) the introduction, chapter 1, and chapter 2

Lin is putting the field of biblical studies and its histories in conversation with the biological sciences. What is the effect of this move? How do concepts like genealogy, classification, and racialization help us understand the history of the bible and biblical scholarship?

Wednesday

- Read Nijay Gupta's chapter 13
- Read the prefaces to the first and second editions (pp. xiii-xvi) and the essays by Neusner and Setzer (pp. 724-7, 730-3) in the Jewish Annotated New Testament

Friday:

Choose to read three (or more if you like) of the five short essays in the Political Theology Network's *Whiteness and Biblical Studies Symposium*:

- Ekaputra Tupamahu, *The Stubborn Invisibility of Whiteness in Biblical Scholarship* ([Links to an external site.](#))
- Jacqueline Hidalgo's *Occupying Whiteness: A Reflection in 2020* ([Links to an external site.](#))
- Angela Parker's *Invoking Paul's μη γενοιτω and Sophia's "Hell No" against the Stubborn Whiteness of Biblical Scholarship* ([Links to an external site.](#))
- M Adryael Tong's *Banishing Baur: The Antisemitic Origins of White Supremacy in Biblical Studies* ([Links to an external site.](#))
- Greg Carey's *Looking for White in the Synoptic Problem* ([Links to an external site.](#))

In your post, talk about how you see the pieces you read intersecting with, reinforcing, informing, or challenging things we read earlier in the course. How has biblical studies' racialized history affected the development of the field, and therefore the way the bible is read and understood?

Week 3: Perspectives on Paul

Monday

- Read Pamela Eisenbaum's *Paul Was Not A Christian*, chapters 1-3

Eisenbaum does two things at once for this class. First, she provides us our first introduction to Paul, the author of the earliest books of the New Testament. Second, she reframes Paul and the study of Paul away from Protestant/European models that are rooted in theology and toward a "new perspective" on Paul. Whether you are familiar with Paul's writings or not, what was the effect of this reading for you? What do you think the benefits of this kind of reading might be? What did you learn about Paul that you didn't know before?

Wednesday

- Read Ehrman chapters 18 and 19
- Read Gupta chapter 4
- Read 1 Thessalonians and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

1 Thessalonians is often considered the earliest extant writing by a follower of Jesus, and the earliest document in the New Testament. What anxieties, hopes, fears, and concerns do you see reflected in it? What did the Ehrman and Gupta chapters contribute to your understanding of this short letter?

Friday

- Read Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT
- Read Ehrman chapter 20 (the sub-sections on Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon; we will read the sections on 1 and 2 Corinthians next week)
- Read Gupta chapter 5

These three letters represent Paul's communication with three very different correspondents, and they surface a variety of different concerns and problems. What do you see Paul doing in these three letters? How does he view his authority, for example, in the first chapter of Galatians (where he is angry and scolding) vs Philemon (where he is subtly asking for a favor, but not leaving much room for Philemon to say no)? If part of the New Perspective's work is to decenter Protestant interpretations of Paul's writings, what role does theology play in these books? Is Paul self-consciously writing "scripture," or is something else going on here?

Week 4: Paul's Communities and Conflicts

Monday

- Read Eisenbaum, chapters 7 and 8

- Read Ehrman, chapter 20 (sub-section on 1 Corinthians)
- Read Gupta chapter 10
- Read 1 Corinthians and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT
- The Corinthian correspondence (1 and 2 Corinthians) represents the only community for which we have more than one of Paul's letters. His first letter to Corinth (which was actually at least his second letter to them; see 5:9; we just don't have the first) is a wide-ranging response to a number of events in the community there. What is Paul attempting to accomplish with this letter? What prompts him to write it, and how do you imagine it was received? Finally, what do you make of Paul's (or, possibly in some cases, later editors') comments about women in this text? What can we say about Paul and women's roles in earliest Christianity?

Wednesday

- Read Eisenbaum chapter 10
- Read Ehrman chapter 20 (sub-section on 2 Corinthians)
- Read 2 Corinthians and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

2 Corinthians is a composite letter that has been assembled (probably out of order) from at least two fragmentary letters. What does that say about the letter and what do you imagine led a scribe or scribes to do this? Putting 2 Corinthians in conversation with Lin's work from week 2 and Nongbri's work from week 1, how should we think about a document like 2 Corinthians? Finally, how is Paul playing out his authority in this letter? What are his attitudes toward the Corinthians in it, and why is he taking the stances he takes?

Friday

- Read Eisenbaum chapter 12
- Read Gupta chapter 6
- Read Ehrman chapter 21
- Read Romans and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

You will notice, in our readings, a variety of opinions about what Romans even *is*. Is it a theological treatise, a missiological tract, a Kickstarter campaign, a self-indulgent self-defense, a "gospel according to Paul?" Romans is probably the most theologically significant book in the New Testament, and therefore it is the front line of many disputes and contests. How do you view it after these readings? What *is* it, and what is Paul trying to *do* in it?

Week 5: The Synoptic Problem

Monday

- Read Ehrman, chapters 6 and 7

- Read Gupta, chapter 1
- Read the Gospel of Mark and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

What is a gospel, and how does Mark fit the description? Who is Jesus in Mark--who does he think he is, and who do others think he is, and why? What did you notice in reading Mark that you have not noticed before?

Wednesday

- Read Ehrman, chapters 8, 13
- Read Gupta, chapter 2
- Read the Gospel of Matthew and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT
- Read [*The Redactional Tendencies of Kidz Bop: A Strategy for Teaching New*](#)

[*Testament Redaction Criticism*](#) [Download The Redactional Tendencies of Kidz Bop: A Strategy for Teaching New Testament Redaction Criticism](#) by Alexander P. Thompson

Today we will discuss the synoptic problem, and spend some time comparing Matthew and Mark's accounts of Jesus' life and teachings.

[Here is a link to an online four-gospels parallel, \(Links to an external site.\)](#) to which we might refer during our discussion.

Friday

- Read Ehrman, chapter 12
- Read the [Gospel of Thomas \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- Read the [Infancy Gospel of Thomas \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- Read Nongbri, chapter 7 (if you have time and energy)

If you have time, you can go looking for other early Christian gospels: the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, the Infancy Gospel of James, etc. Thinking with at least the Gospel of Thomas and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas but adding in any others that you've read, what do you think about the relationship of non-canonical and canonical gospel texts? Thinking with Nongbri, what do you make of canonicity and the authority that is produced by practices of scholarship?

Week 6: The Johannine Tradition

Monday

- Read Ehrman, chapter 10
- Read Amy-Jill Levine's essay Bearing False Witness: Common Errors Made about Early Judaism in JANT, p. 759
- Read the Gospel of John and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

What do you make of John's Jesus? How is this Jesus familiar or unfamiliar when compared to the Jesus you met in Mark, Matthew, and the non-canonical gospels?

Wednesday

- Read Gupta, chapter 3
- Read Daniel Boyarin's essay *Logos, a Jewish Word: John's Prologue as Midrash* in JANT, p. 688.
- Read Randi Rashkover's essay Christology in JANT, p. 754

What do these different views of John's christology have in common? Over what are they at odds? What is at stake in the interpretation of John?

Friday

- Read Ehrman, chapter 11
- Read 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John

How do these books fit within the Johannine tradition as you understood it when reading the Gospel of John? How do they participate in similar themes and concerns, and where do they part ways with the gospel?

Week 7: Luke-Acts and the Great Reversal

Monday

- Read Justo González, *The Story Luke Tells* (entire)

González's reading of Luke and Acts is a theological one (he is part of the United Methodist tradition). What theological motifs does he see in these texts? What does he think are the big themes of Luke's perspective on Jesus' life and teachings, and how does Gonzalez think about Acts?

Wednesday

- Read the Gospel of Luke and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT
- Read Ehrman, chapter 9

What's distinctive about Luke's gospel? What does he emphasize that the other canonical gospels don't, and what does he leave out that they include?

Friday

- Read the Acts of the Apostles and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT
- Read Gupta, chapter 9

Acts is the only book in the New Testament that takes the shape it does; there are no other books like it. What is Acts? What is it attempting to convince its readers of? What audience is it imagining for itself?

Week 8: Pseudo-Paul and Pseudepigraphy

Monday

- Read Ehrman, chapter 23
- Read 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

These three books are sometimes called "disputed Pauline epistles," "pseudo-Pauline epistles," or "deutero-Pauline epistles," to signal that many scholars don't think Paul wrote them. Ehrman will walk you through some of the reasons why. Reading through them, can you perceive any differences between these and the 7 "undisputed" or "authentic" Pauline letters? Can you see any of the similarities that lead some scholars to see them as authentically Pauline?

Wednesday

- Read Gupta, chapter 8
- Read 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

These three books are often referred to as the "Pastoral Epistles," because of their emphasis on pastoral advice given to a younger missionary/pastor figure. They are also "deutero-Pauline," "pseudo-Pauline," or "disputed," although even fewer scholars think Paul wrote these than think Paul wrote the books from Monday. Even very conservative or evangelical scholars sometimes argue that these letters preserve *authentic fragments* of Paul's writing or thought, rather than that they came directly from him. But most mainstream scholars think these come from well after Paul's lifetime, perhaps sometime in the second century. Today we will discuss what evidence you see in these letters for that position, and what difference it might make if they *are* from a later period and not written by Paul.

Friday

- Read the [Gospel of Truth \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- Read Maia Kotrosits, [chapter 6 \(Pleasure, Pain, and Forgetting in the Gospel of Truth\) from the book Rethinking Early Christian Identity: Affect, Violence, and](#)

[Belonging](#) Download chapter 6 (Pleasure, Pain, and Forgetting in the Gospel of Truth) from the book Rethinking Early Christian Identity: Affect, Violence, and Belonging

What is the difference between the pseudepigraphic nature of the Gospel of Truth and that of the pseudo-Pauline epistles, if any? Why is one canonical and the other not? How might people who think of the New Testament as sacred think about these questions? And, thinking with Kotrosits, what is the heritage of diaspora, trauma, and imperial haunting that attends to these texts?

Week 9: Hebrews and the General Epistles

Monday

- Read Ehrman, chapter 25
- Read Hebrews and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT
- Read the [*Epistle of Barnabas* \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Both Hebrews and the Epistle of Barnabas are working out what will eventually become Christian theologies. What do you notice about how they are thinking about things like salvation, christology, the inheritance of Israel's theologies and scriptures, etc.? If both of these texts are early attempts at articulating what it means to be a follower of Jesus, what parts of their articulations did the tradition pick up and carry with it, and what parts did it abandon?

Wednesday

- Read Ehrman, chapters 26 and 27
- Read 1 Peter, 2 Peter, [*Ignatius' letter to the Romans* \(Links to an external site.\)](#), James, and Jude and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

All of these works likely date to the second century--in fact, it's possible that Ignatius' letter is the earliest of them (but this is probably unknowable for certain). How do you see the Christian tradition and its writings developing in this period?

Friday

- Read Jennifer Kaalund's [*Reading Hebrews and 1 Peter with the African American Great Migration: Diaspora, Place, and Identity* \(Links to an external site.\)](#) introduction (skim), chapter 5, and chapter 6 (conclusion)

How is Kaalund thinking about the coalescence and formation of the thing we will come to call "Christianity?" In what sense is it an "identity," and in what sense is it "Christian?" What forms of belonging are in play in books like Hebrews and 1 Peter?

Week 10: Revelation and Revelations

Monday

- Read Ehrman, chapter 28
- Read Gupta, chapter 7

- Read Revelation and accompanying introduction and notes in the JANT

What does knowing the genre of Revelation do for your interpretation of it? How does it make sense as a work of literature, and how does it make sense as an expression of late first century Jesus-followers' desires, fears, fantasies, hopes, etc.?

Wednesday

- Read Lin, [*The Erotic Life of Manuscripts \(Links to an external site.\)*](#), chapter 4 and conclusion

How is Lin thinking about what we are doing when we read and interpret the New Testament? How is she problematizing our interactions with these texts, and what assumptions is she calling into question?

Friday

- Read Nongbri, *God's Library*, the very short Epilogue

Take Nongbri's invitation to think about "the future of ancient Christian books," and expand it beyond the meaning he has. What has this course changed about the future of your thinking about these books? What might the future hold for your relationship with these books, and in what ways might those books themselves be changing over your lifetime and theirs?