

CLAS 375: A Historical Introduction to the New Testament

Texts:

A Brief Introduction to the New Testament. Bart Ehrman. Oxford, 2021.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Fifth Edition. Oxford, 2018.

Course objectives:

- Understand the Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts in which the books of the New Testament were composed.
- Understand how historians explain the distinct treatments of Jesus in the gospels and reconstruct the historical Jesus.
- Understand the development of Christian thought in the writings of the apostle Paul.
- Understand how early Christians distinguished themselves from Jews and Pagans.
- Understand the role of women in the early Church.
- Understand and apply different scholarly approaches to the New Testament.

Promise and disclaimer

The Bible, and the New Testament in particular, is the most important book written in classical antiquity, and indeed the most important book in the entire western tradition. And Christianity has had a massive impact on our culture and the world at large. Yet few college courses address these topics. This course will introduce you to how historians read the New Testament in its original historical context. This course is not designed to convert you to Christianity or turn you away from it. It is historical in outlook, and we will apply the same tools historians use for studying other aspects of the ancient world to our study of early Christianity. Our approach will therefore be predominantly historical, though we will sample a variety of different historical approaches, and also consider theological and literary approaches to the New Testament.

Grades and assignments

Reading guides. 15%. Short reading guides, due at most Mondays and Wednesdays, designed to help you master the readings. I will allow you three free passes.

Quizzes. 15%. Short mainly factual quizzes covering reading assigned in a given week. One free drop.

Exams. Midterm (20%) and final examination (25%). Exams will include questions drawn from reading guides, questions keyed to passages from the New Testament, and essays. Study guides will be provided.

Essays. 25%. Two 1,000 word essays asking you to raise and address a question about the New Testament, employing a methodology introduced in class . Details and grading rubrics to follow.

Assignments

E = Ehrman

Week	Topic(s)	Reading & assignments
1	Historical context	E 1-2
2	Context and Mark	Mark; E 4 and 5
3	Matthew	Matthew; E 3 and 6
4	Luke	Luke; E 7
5	John	John; E 8
6	The historical Jesus	E 9; Midterm
7	Acts	Acts and E 10; Essay 1
8	Paul 1	E 11, E13; 1 Corinthians
9	Paul 2	2 Corinthians; Romans; E 15
10	Women in early Christianity	E 16; selections
11	Conflicts: Jews and Pagans	E 17, 18; Hebrews, 1 Peter
12	Conflicts: Christian vs. Christian	E 18; selections
13	Revelation	E 19; Revelation
14	Christianity after antiquity	Online survey
15	Final exam & Essay 2	