

# Religious Studies 135: CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

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## LECTURE OUTLINE & ASSIGNMENTS (Fall 2002)

This course deals with the origins of "Christianity" in general, to about the year 200 ce, with particular reference to the various writings preserved from early Christians, including the "New Testament" anthology. The primary goal of the course is to **understand** what took place in this complex period, without consciously importing later ideas or imposing later value judgments upon the materials. It is thus concerned more with history and the history of ideas than with today's religious perspectives as such, although the study can have great relevance for understanding certain attitudes in modern circles interested in Christian and Jewish heritages. Grasp of **METHOD** of historical investigation is of primary importance.

Evaluation of student performance for grading purposes will rest on several factors, but especially the following:

- informed class participation (do the readings beforehand!),
- a major research paper due at the end of classes (topics vary),
- a comprehensive final review (written and/or oral).

Every student will be expected to have a computer account on the Internet and to keep in regular contact with the instructor by that means. Students are encouraged to join or monitor at least one academic discussion group (IOUDAIOS-L, ELENCHUS, or EccHst-L are recommended) and to learn to access other relevant materials linked from the instructor's home page and elsewhere (learn to search the net with google.com and similar tools).

There are various resources from which the pertinent information may be gathered, and students are encouraged to explore a wide range of modern treatments and interpretations. The assignments will be based on the following books that have been ordered in the Penn Bookstore, but it is possible to cover the same material from other books and resources as well, in accord with the stated topics. Of the modern "secondary" works, Ehrman (also Tyson) is written for college level classes such as this; Koester is more advanced (graduate level), and may prove to be

more challenging, but hopefully no less rewarding! Note that individual students may choose the specific "track" by which they acquire information, all the way from using the Internet, the [bibliography](#) and the [library](#) resources, to using a fixed body of "textbooks."

### Recommended Secondary Overviews

- Bart D. [EHRMAN](#), [The New Testament: A Historical Introduction](#) to the Early Christian Writings (Oxford 2000 [1997\1])
- -- [see also Joseph TYSON, The New Testament and Early Christianity,] OR
- Helmut KOESTER, Introduction to the New Testament (2 vol); also
- Keith HOPKINS, A World Full of Gods: The Strange Triumph of Christianity (Free Press 2000 [1999]) for a quite different, supplementary, treatment.

### Recommended Collections of Primary Sources

- C. K. BARRETT, New Testament Backgrounds (Harper & Row 1987\2)
- -- [OR Howard C. KEE, The New Testament in Context: Sources and Documents (Prentice Hall 1984)].
- EHRMAN ["red"], The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: a Reader (Oxford 1998)
- EHRMAN ["green"], After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity (Oxford 1999)
- The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha, ed. B. M. Metzger;
- J. K. ELLIOTT (ed), The Apocryphal New Testament,
- -- [OR HENNECKE - SCHNEEMELCHER - WILSON, NT Apocrypha (2 vol)];
- J. STEVENSON and W. H. C. FREND, A New Eusebius.

## Sequence of Foci (Course Outline and Topical Assignments)

### 1. ESTABLISHING A BASIS FOR APPROACHING THE MATERIALS

For this part of the course, read introductory sections that deal with "methodological" and background issues, as in [EHRMAN](#) chs 1+14+29 [or TYSON] and BARRETT (Intro and Sources), or KOESTER 2 ch 7. A general encyclopedia article on the sweep of Christian history would also be useful.

#### 1.0 Definitions and Distinctions

- primary/secondary sources; history/tradition; "Christianity"; "Judaism";

orthodoxy/heresy/heterodoxy; generalization; etc.

## **1.1 The Surviving Communities and their Voices**

- How has Christianity's early period been valued?

## **1.2 The Filters of Classical Christian "Orthodoxy"**

- canon, creed, heresy; see [Eusebius](#), Church History 1-4.

## **1.3 The Filters of Classical Jewish "Orthodoxy"**

- torah, canon, authoritative tradition, purity.

## **1.4 Moving Behind the Filters to the Earliest Recoverable Materials**

- purposeful memory, ambiguous clues, and historical occurrence

### **1.4.1 Archaeology and Art**

### **1.4.2 Inscriptions & Manuscripts -- Preservation and Study**

### **1.4.3 Historical-Critical Analysis**

- the search for "objectivity" and "controls"

### **1.4.4 Imaginative Reconstruction**

- moving in spirals, using analogy, searching for patterns

## **2. THE WORLD(S) IN WHICH EARLY CHRISTIANITY DEVELOPED**

For this section, read about the "backgrounds" of early Christianity ([EHRMAN](#) ch 2 [or TYSON, part 1]; KOESTER 1 entire), see HOPKINS chs 1 & 5 ("time travel to Pompeii," etc.), and sample the primary sources collected in BARRETT.

## **2.0 Definitions and Distinctions**

- geography, politics, language, culture, thought, community and individuality

## **2.1 Greco-Roman (Hellenistic) History, Culture, and Thought**

- from Alexander the Great to Constantine the Great
- BARRETT ## 1-19, 21-48, 49-57, 58-93, 106-115

## **2.2 Judaism(s) in the Greco-Roman World(s)**

- Philo, Alexandrian Judaism, and "the diaspora"
- BARRETT 148-152, 225-237, 252-253
- See also HOPKINS ch 2 and RelSt 525 (Kraft)

## **2.3 The Palestinian Scene at the Time of Jesus and Beyond**

- from the Maccabees to Roman Aelia Capitolina & Bar Kochba
- BARRETT 116-147, 210-224

## **2.4 The Roman Empire and its "Religions"**

- collegia, colosseum, catacombs, churches

# **3. JESUS AND THE TRADITIONS ABOUT HIM (died ca 30 ce)**

Along with the syntheses such as in [EHRMAN](#) [or TYSON] & KOESTER 2, sample sections of the [NT Gospels](#) (synoptics and John; see [Gospel Parallels](#) as a convenient tool) and the ["apocryphal Gospels"](#) (e.g. in EHRMAN Red & Green ch 8). See also HOPKINS chs 4 & 8, and [RelSt 435](#) (Kraft).

## **3.1 The Sources and their Relative Value**

- searching for solid ground on which to build
- [non-Christian sources](#); BARRETT 11 again ([Tacitus](#)), 242-244 ([Josephus](#))
- [Christian sources](#): "canonical" and "extra-canonical" "gospels," etc.

## **3.2 Reconstructing Jesus' Life and Career**

- the narrative outline in G.Mark and similar materials

### **3.3 Recapturing Jesus' Message(s)**

- collections of sayings in "Q" and G.Thomas, etc.
- EHRMAN Red & Green ch 8; STEVENSON 82 (G.Thomas)
- the efforts of ["the Jesus Seminar"](#); study of the sayings [Gospel of Thomas](#)

### **3.4 The Fate of the Jesus Traditions in Early Christianity**

- Jesus as healer, wise one, righteous, revealer, savior, etc.
- see also HOPKINS ch 8

## **4. EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY (to about 70 ce)**

Paul and the NT book of Acts are the dominant subjects in this section; read about them (e.g. [EHRMAN](#) Intro chs 9 & 18-24), and read them. Also sample the ["apocryphal" Acts](#) and [non-canonical Pauline materials](#) (EHRMAN Red & Green ch 8). See also [RelSt 436](#) (Kraft).

### **4.1 The Sources and their Relative Value**

- what did Paul really write? can we trust Acts?

### **4.2 Jesus' Palestinian Companions and their Work**

- searching for the twelve disciples/apostles, and others

### **4.3 Christianity in the Greco-Roman World at Large**

- why did Christianity expand, and by what agencies?
- BARRETT 11-14 again (Nero's persecution)

### **4.4 Paul, "Apostle to the Gentiles," his Career and Opponents**

- squeezing our earliest witness for all he can supply!

### **4.5 The Crisis Years in the Roman World (64-73 ce)**

- [Josephus](#), a Jewish reporter on the spot
- (BARRETT 138-144 again); STEVENSON 4-5

## 4.6 Christianity beyond the borders of Rome

- the [Thomas/India traditions](#), and similar hints

# 5. THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY, RECOGNITION & CONSOLIDATION

Everything else from the first 150 years or so of Christian existence fits here, rather loosely. Read the secondary treatments for attempts at synthetic reconstruction (e.g. [EHRMAN](#) chs 25-28, [HOPKINS](#) chs 3 & 6-7), and explore the various primary sources listed below (see [EHRMAN Red and Green](#), and the "[Noncanonical Homepage](#)"). See also [RelSt 535](#) (Kraft).

## 5.1 Early Christianity and Early Judaism

- See also [HOPKINS](#) ch 2

### 5.1.1 Development of Mutual Hostility

- [BARRETT](#) 199-200; ([Diognetus](#)); ([Tertullian](#)); see also [EHRMAN Green](#) ch 5

### 5.1.2 Christianity's Apocalyptic Jewish Heritage

- [BARRETT](#) 260-280; [Revelation](#) (NT), [Didache](#) 16 (see [EHRMAN Red](#); compare [EHRMAN Green](#) ##49-50)

### 5.1.3 Christian Adaptation of Jewish Lifestyle Traditions

- [1 Peter](#) (NT); [James](#) (NT); [EHRMAN Red & Green](#) also have [Didache](#) 1-6 // [Barnabas](#) 18-21; [Hermas](#); [1 Clement](#); [2 Clement](#)

### 5.1.4 Christian Approaches to Jewish Scriptures & Authorities

- [Hebrews](#) (NT); [Barnabas](#) 1-17 ([EHRMAN Red & Green](#) ch 5); [BARRETT](#) 230-231, 249-251

## 5.2 The Battle Within -- Tensions in Early Christianity

### 5.2.1 Problem of Allegiance -- Who is to be Worshipped?

- [STEVENSON](#) 60 (Justin), 42-80 (Gnostics, Marcion), 110 (see also [EHRMAN Green](#), passim)

## **5.2.2 Problem of Authority -- Pneumatic vs Transmitted**

- 1-3 John (NT); STEVENSON 7-15 (1 Clement, Didache, Ignatius; also in EHRMAN Red & Green), 84-90 (Montanism), 106-107 (Peregrinus); see also EHRMAN Green ch 10

## **5.2.3 Problem of Community -- Institutionalized Forms/Rules**

- Pauline "Pastorals" (NT); STEVENSON 8 (Didache 7-10; also in EHRMAN Red, & Green # 56); EHRMAN Green ch 11

## **5.2.4 Problem of Conformity -- Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy**

- EHRMAN Green, ch 7 (& 6) Jude // 2 Peter (NT); STEVENSON 91-101 (Irenaeus, etc.)

## **5.3 The Struggle for Public Recognition**

### **5.3.1 Survival in the Roman World -- "Delay of the Parousia"**

- (2 Peter 3 [NT]); STEVENSON 16-25, 32 (Diognetus; also in EHRMAN Green #12)

### **5.3.2 Responses to [Persecution](#) -- Christian Apologists**

- EHRMAN Green, ch 4; STEVENSON 31 (Aristides), 33-41 (Justin, etc.)

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