

The Historical Jesus

I. [Introduction: The Scholarly Study of Jesus](#)

- A. What is meant by 'the historical Jesus'?
- B. Methods of study and sources of information
- C. [A bare minimum of sayings and deeds/events](#)

II. [Survey of key scholars and their approaches](#)

III. The world of Jesus

- A. [Context and background](#): General information on the world of Jesus
- B. [Influences on the historical Jesus](#)
 - 1) Family and upbringing, social status, education
 - 2) Galilee, Sepphoris, synagogues
 - 3) John the Baptist
- C. [Jesus and his contemporaries](#): Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, Essenes, etc.

IV. The birth narratives

- A. [History](#): Luke's Gospel, the census under Quirinius, and the date of Jesus' birth
- B. [Culture](#): The cultural background of the birth narrative in Luke
- C. [Theology](#): Jesus as a 'New Moses' in the early chapters of Matthew's Gospel.
- D. [Concluding thoughts on the accounts of Jesus' birth](#)

V. The start of Jesus' public ministry

- A. [John the Baptist](#) and Jesus' baptism
- B. The message and emphases of Jesus
 - 1) The [Kingdom of God](#) is at hand
 - 2) [Touching the unclean and eating with sinners](#)
 - 3) Jesus' audience: Israel and/or non-Jews?
- C. [The Twelve Apostles](#)

VI. [Jesus as Miracle-Worker and Exorcist](#)

- A. Healings
- B. Exorcisms
- C. 'Nature Miracles'

VII. Jesus as Teacher

- A. [The character of Jesus' teaching](#) (especially counter-cultural elements and images)
- B. [The Parables](#)
- C. [Ethical teaching](#)
- D. [The Lord's Prayer](#)
- E. [The Kingdom of God and the coming judgment: further thoughts](#)

VIII. [Jesus as Leader](#)

- A. Categories into which Jesus might be placed
- B. Jesus as charismatic/prophet
- C. Jesus as sage/wisdom teacher
- D. Jesus as rabbi/interpreter of the Law
- E. Did Jesus claim to be the Messiah?
- F. Who is this 'Son of Man'?
- G. [Did Jesus claim to be God?](#)

IX. Jesus and the Temple

- A. The apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13 and parallels)
- B. The 'cleansing of the Temple'
- C. "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will rebuild it"

X. [The Death of Jesus](#)

- A. Did Jesus say anything beforehand about his death and resurrection?
- B. [The Last Supper](#)

- C. The betrayal [cross-reference document on the Twelve disciples]
- D. Jesus on trial?
- E. The details of the crucifixion
- F. [Jesus' dishonorable burial](#)

XI. [The resurrection](#)

- A. What can a historian hope to say about the resurrection?
- B. What is the evidence and what does it suggest?

XII. Historical and modern images of Jesus

- A. The creeds and the development of Christian doctrine
- B. Scholarly/theological images
- C. Popular images
- D. Media images

COURSE INFORMATION, BIBLIOGRAPHY AND GENERAL WEB LINKS:

Course objectives: This course aims to introduce students to the scholarly study of Jesus as a historical figure, providing opportunity to become more familiar with the relevant primary sources and other data, and the tools for the critical historical evaluation and investigation thereof. Students will be given opportunities to critically evaluate and assess evidence and argumentation as they encounter the range of differing conclusion that characterize this particular field. Students will also be given opportunities to refine their skills at recognizing, identifying, and using credible sources of information, employing technology as appropriate. Through written work and oral presentations, students will have the opportunity to develop their skills in giving and accepting criticism thoughtfully.

TEXTBOOKS:

James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008)
A contemporary translation of the Bible will also be needed.



Students may also find James F. McGrath, *The Burial of Jesus* (BookSurge, 2008) useful.

Assignments/Grade

Book review (20%): Write a book review (around 4 pages in length) of a recent book on the historical study of Jesus. The following are recommended. Others may be substituted with the approval of the professor.

- Dale C. Allison, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus*
- Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*
- Borg & Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*
- John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* or *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*
- Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*
- James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* or *The New Perspective on Jesus*
- Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews*
- Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History*
- E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*
- Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus*
- Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*

Term paper (40%): Students will write a term paper of approximately 8 pages in length on a specific subject related to the historical figure of Jesus. The precise topic is to be chosen in consultation with the professor. It may be related to the topic of your class presentation. The topic chosen may be thematic (e.g. on whether Jesus referred to himself as **son of man** and if so what that may have meant) or on a specific incident (e.g. whether Jesus was buried dishonorably).

In-class presentation (10%): Students will each sign up for one in-class presentation. On the date of their presentation, students will discuss one of the discussion questions from the textbook, or some other aspect of the topic for that day. In addition to the reading assigned to the whole class,

students will identify, read and incorporate in their presentation at least two additional sources of an academic character and quality.

Participation (20%): Students are expected to do assigned reading and come to class prepared to discuss and investigate.

Course schedule/outline (more details about specific readings will be provided as the course progresses):

August 27th Introduction; Syllabus

September 1st
Charlesworth pp.ix-xx

September 3rd Quests for the Historical Jesus
Charlesworth chapter 1

8th Quests for the Historical Jesus continued
[James M. Robinson, "The Impossibility and Illegitimacy of the Original Quest"](#)
[Marcus J. Borg, "A Renaissance in Jesus Studies"](#)

10th Methods
Charlesworth chapter 2

15th Criteria of Authenticity

17th Sources
Charlesworth Chapter 3
[Theissen and Merz on Josephus](#) ["Testimonium Flavianum"](#) (The Historical Jesus pp.63-74)

22nd Sources: New Testament Gospels and Hypothetical Sources
Q

24th Sources: Other Gospels and Early Christian Sources Outside the New Testament
[James Dunn, "Jesus Tradition in Paul"](#)
The Gospel of Thomas

29th Sources: Other Gospels and Sources Continued
The Gospel of Peter, The Secret Gospel of Mark,

October 1st The Context of Jesus
Charlesworth Chapter 4

6th The Birth of Jesus
Charlesworth Chapter 5

8th Early Years of Jesus

13th John the Baptist
Charlesworth Chapter 6

20th Jesus and Archaeology
Charlesworth Chapter 7

22nd The Kingdom of God & The End of the World
Charlesworth Chapter 8

27th Parables
[Norman Perrin, "The Kingdom of God"](#)

29th Parables continued

November 3rd Ethics
Matthew 5-7

5th Disciples and the Restoration of Israel

10th Healing and Miracles

12th Did Jesus Claim to be God?

17th The Last Supper: Did Jesus Expect That He Was Going To Die?

19th Trials and Blame: Who Killed Jesus?

December 1st The Crucifixion
Charlesworth Chapter 9

3rd The Burial of Jesus

8th Historical Study and the Resurrection

10th Last Class: Discussion, Conclusions
Charlesworth Chapter 10

A few general web links (see various pages linked above for more):

[Markus Bockmuehl \(editor\), *Companion to Jesus*](#)

[Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Tradition of Judgment and Restoration*](#)

Mark Goodacre's New Testament Gateway <http://www.ntgateway.org>

and his on-line class notes at <http://www.bham.ac.uk/theology/goodacre/jesus/index.htm>

PBS Frontline Special <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/>

Jerry Truex's Site <http://www.ntworld.org>

Historical Jesus Studies <http://www.faithfutures.org/Jesus.html>

and <http://www.faithfutures.org/HJstudies.html>

Historical Jesus FAQ <http://www.robotwisdom.com/science/jesus.html>

[Jesus Archive](#) [if that doesn't work try [here](#)]

[The Jesus Institute](#)

Robert Kraft's class materials: <gopher://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/11/courses/rels/435>

Prof. Barry D. Smith, [The Life of Jesus](#)

[Study Guide on the Life of Jesus](#)

[The Real Jesus?](#)

[A Plain Guide to the Historical Jesus: Is Jesus History?](#)

[The Jubilee of the Words of Jesus?](#)

[Jesus, Judaism and History](#)

Schweitzer, Albert, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, New York: Macmillan, 1968 (reprint). [The classic survey of 19th century studies of Jesus, whose criticism thereof not only shook the whole enterprise to a standstill but also determines Jesus research right down to the present day. It is available on-line at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/schweitzer/>]

The following points represent key things that will be looked for in *all* your work:

1) **Intellectual honesty:** All written work must be your own. If you use someone else's words, there must be quotation marks and a footnote indicating this (see the links I have provided on my home page at <http://blue.butler.edu/~jfmcrat/plagiarism.htm>). Simply changing a few words is not good enough. You must put ideas in your own words; and even then, if the idea is someone else's, you must still provide a footnote or other reference. If you plagiarize you will fail the class, and the dean of student services as well as the dean of your college will be informed so that there will be a record of the offense so that it can be clear if you are a repeat offender. If you do not adequately reference your sources you will either fail, or be required to redo the paper, or at the very least get a lower grade than you might otherwise have received on that assignment, depending on the nature and severity of the case. Intellectual honesty is of more fundamental importance than anything you will learn by taking this class.

2) **Critical thinking:** *How* you think is infinitely more important to me than *what* you think. You will gain no points by agreeing with me, and lose none by disagreeing. What matters is *how* you argue your case, and that you examine critically not only the views of others, but also your own views. Coupled with the need for critical thinking is a need for:

3) **Fairness:** You must understand the views of others, even if you disagree with them. Treat their views the way you would like your own viewpoints to be treated. Again, whether you agree or disagree with an author's viewpoint is completely up to you. But you must understand what he or she says, and not merely in a superficial manner. Recent (postmodern) thought may emphasize that none of us can claim to be objective: we all have a viewpoint, and we all have assumptions and biases. But this need not mean that we are incapable of interacting with the views of others in a manner that is fair.

4) **Breadth of reading, reflection, and interaction with scholarly writings:** Your view and opinion are important; in fact, your ability to evaluate different viewpoints and then draw your own conclusions will make the difference between B+ or A- work and A work. On the other hand, a university essay is not simply your reflections. You must find out what others have to say, and relate your conclusions to theirs. To simply reference one or two books or articles (or worse, one or two web pages) will not be adequate. The best research papers will combine in-depth research with creativity and originality. Please also note that, although I have sought to make available to you the highest quality of online resources via the course web page, *online reading is rarely if ever sufficient* for writing a college-level paper. Unless you are certain you have access to complete online articles and books by authors who deal with topics in a scholarly manner, you should use web-based resources with caution.

5) Although it should not be necessary to specify this, all work submitted must be typed and must be in appropriate English (i.e. correct spelling and punctuation, no IM abbreviations). What you are trying to say is important, but it will not count for much if your ideas are not communicated clearly and intelligibly. A good idea might be to have a study partner or other individual who can proofread your work, in some form of reciprocal arrangement. Getting critical feedback prior to handing work in will also very likely contribute to you receiving a higher grade.

For more information about religion and the Liberal Arts at Butler, visit <http://www.butler.edu/las/ReligionSy.aspx>. On the value of a Liberal Arts education at Butler University, visit <http://www.butler.edu/las/ValuestatementGregory.aspx>.

[Note: This web page was designed to be followed sequentially in connection with the course (RL307) taught by Dr. James F. McGrath at Butler University, and with the reading of the assigned textbook. While it is hoped that these resources will be useful to others as well, it is not impossible that certain points, approaches, or arguments may be misunderstood if the material is not followed in order and in connection with other assigned readings. All information provided below regarding this course is *provisional* and subject to amendment or modification]



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