

Jesus, the Bible, and the Invention of Christianity
University of Arizona
Humanities Seminar Programs
Thursdays, 10am–12pm, June 4–25

Instructor

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I. Course Description

The Christian religion is inextricably bound up with contemporary culture not only in America but also around the globe. Yet, even after centuries of scholarly inquiry, numerous questions regarding its historical origins remain contested and unanswered. This course probes several: How did Jesus of Nazareth, the son of an obscure carpenter, come to be worshiped as the eternal son of God? How did his death at the hands of the Romans, by any ordinary measure a calamitous misfortune, come to be interpreted as a means of salvation for the world? And how, in the wake of this death, did his marginalized band of followers evolve into the church that would eventually convert the Roman Empire? Using historical and literary methodologies, we will discover which aspects of these events can be reconstructed and which ones remain obscure and speculative.

II. Textbooks

Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. 6th ed. Oxford, 2016.

The Harper Collins Study Bible Student Edition. Revised and Updated. HarperCollins, 2006. Or, something similar.

III. Schedule

Week 1 (June 4): The Kingdom of God and the End of the (Roman) World

Reading: Ehrman, *The New Testament*, chapters 1 and 3. Optional: chapters 2 and 4
Gospel of Mark, especially chapters 1–4 and 8

Week 2 (June 11): Tell Me the Story of Jesus: (Synoptic) Gospel Traditions and Inventions

Reading: Ehrman, *The New Testament*, chapters 5 and 6. Optional: chapters 7 and 8
Gospel of Matthew, chapters 1–7

Week 3 (June 18): Historical Jesus: A Man behind the Myths?

Reading: Ehrman, *The New Testament*, chapters 14 and 16. Optional: chapters 15 and 17

Week 4 (June 25): Jesus of Nazareth: From Resurrection to Pre-Existence and Back

Reading: Ehrman, *The New Testament*, chapters 11 and 18
Gospel of John, chapter 1; First Corinthians, chapter 15