

# Rel 304: The New Testament and Early Christianity

Summer 2018 (May 29 to June 22)

Dr. Shanny Luft  
sluft@uwsp.edu  
Phone: (715) 346-4385

Office: CCC 420  
Office hours: email day and night

---

## Required Texts

- ***The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible***. Revised ed. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1991.
- Ehrman, Bart D. ***The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings***. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007.
- **Additional readings** will be posted online to the “content” tab of D2L. I encourage you to print supplementary materials and read them on paper, which will improve your comprehension.

---

## Course Description

Students will study select New Testament and extra-biblical texts to discern religious perceptions shaping various early Christian movements.

---

## General Education Humanities Learning Outcomes

1. Read closely, think critically, and write effectively about texts or cultural artifacts that reflect on perennial questions concerning the human condition (such as the search for truth and meaning, the confrontation with suffering and mortality, or the struggle for justice, equality, and human dignity).
  2. Investigate and thoughtfully respond to a variety of ideas, beliefs or values held by persons in situations other than one’s own.
-

---

## Rel 304 Learning Outcomes

1. to gain introductory level understanding of the contents of the New Testament and identify and analyze prominent themes in early Christian writing
2. to be introduced to the modern discipline of biblical studies, and learn to assess and/or apply some of the methods of interpretation which are used by modern biblical scholars.
3. to demonstrate an understanding of hermeneutics, the art of interpretation, and become aware of how one biblical text can be interpreted in many different ways
4. to practice civil discourse—the ability to discuss controversial ideas in a diverse group setting in a manner that fosters clear communication, mutual understanding, and respectful, informed responses to different points of view.

---

## Requirements and Expectations

1. **Civility:** Students are expected to show respect for course content, classmates, and opinions that may differ from their own in deference to the educational atmosphere. Civil discourse means that we can disagree and challenge colleagues while maintaining an atmosphere of respect for people and ideas.
  2. **Due Dates:** Missed quizzes and papers cannot be made up unless prior arrangements have been made with the professor. Papers due throughout the semester cannot be submitted late. Students who miss an assignment because of serious emergency should contact me as soon as possible.
  3. **Papers:** Students will post five reflection papers during the semester in the appropriate dropbox. You are required to submit one reflection paper in the first, second, and third week of the semester. And two reflection papers in the fourth (and final) week. The topics of these papers will come from the “Potential Paper Topics” found in the reading schedule below. Papers should be three-hundred words in length, not including any quotations. Always include your name, the date, a title, and the specific question you have chosen to answer. All papers should be written by you and submitted to D2L by 8 PM on the date indicated on the reading schedule below.
  4. **Communication:** During the semester, if a personal event or circumstance impacts your ability to succeed in our course, please come speak to me right away—before the problem becomes insurmountable. If you have a learning disability that might impact your work in our course, please let me know at the beginning of the semester.
-

---

## Academic Integrity

The full text of the Community Rights and Responsibilities guidelines is available online in the Rights and Responsibilities section at: [www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs](http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs). Students will be expected to adhere to all university expectations.

In particular, I expect you to familiarize yourself with the definition of plagiarism and the disciplinary process.

If you have questions about this policy or would like to discuss it further, contact me. All infractions will be reported to the university and the minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment, although more severe infractions may be assessed.

To ensure a fair assessment process in this course, students will be required to submit their papers to the D2L dropbox prior to the due date in class. D2L has plagiarism detection software, and will flag papers that are derivative of published texts, websites, and other student writing.

---

## Assignments

The assignments are described in detail in the document “Read this first.” The three types of assignments you will complete are:

1. Online Quizzes (10-20 points each)
2. Reading Worksheets (50 points each)
3. Five Reflection Papers (50 points each)
4. One midterm paper (100 points)

Rel 304: New Testament  
Reading Schedule

**Week 1**

You are required to complete each reading, quiz, and worksheet on the day it is assigned below. In addition, you should choose one reflection paper topic any day this week, write the paper, and submit to the D2L dropbox titled “Reflection paper #1.”

---

Tues

**Introductions**

May 29

- Start by reading “Read this First” in the D2L Content tab.
- By the end of the day today, post an introduction about yourself under the D2L “Discussion” tab. Tell us whatever you think we should know about you. Here are some suggestions: Why did you take this course? What do you hope to learn? Do you have any pets? What’s your favorite movie, television show, novel, or video game? What do you do in your free time?

**From Jesus to Christ**

- Watch “From Jesus to Christ” (Hour 1) available online. The link is available on our D2L page under in the “content” tab under “film links.”
  - Potential Reflection Paper:** Write a 300-word reflection paper on one of the following questions, and post to the dropbox in D2L tonight.
    - 1. What was most surprising about the historical information of the program?
    - 2. Who were the Essenes? Why is it important to understand the Essenes in order to study first century Christianity?
-

---

Wed

### **What is the “New Testament”?**

May 30

- **Read:** Harris chapter 1 [D2L].
- **Complete Quiz:** Harris chapter #1 on D2L. The quiz has 15 questions and you will have 20 minutes to complete it. You have until 8 PM tonight to finish the quiz. After 8 PM, you will be able to return to the quiz and see how each question was graded.

**Potential Reflection Paper:** At the end of chapter one, there are seven “Questions for Review.” Choose one of the questions and write a 300-word response. Post to the dropbox by 8 PM. See the model paper on D2L to see how your paper should be formatted. It is available in the “content” tab under “handouts and samples.”

### **How the New Testament was Formed?**

- **Read:** Harris chapter 2 [D2L].
- **Complete Quiz:** Quiz #2 on D2L. The quiz has 15 questions and you will have 20 minutes to complete it. You have until 8 PM tonight to finish the quiz. After 8 PM, you will be able to return to the quiz and see how each question was graded.
- **Potential Reflection Paper:** At the end of chapter two, there are eight “Questions for Review.” Choose one of the questions and write a 300-word response. Post to the dropbox by 8 PM. See the model paper on D2L to see how your paper should be formatted. It is available in the “content” tab under “handouts and samples.”

---

Thurs

### **The Greco-Roman World**

May 31

- **Read:** Ehrman Chapter 2: “The World of Early Christian Traditions”
  - **Complete Quiz:** Ehrman chapter 2 on D2L. You have until 8 PM tonight to finish the quiz. After 8 PM, you will be able to return to the quiz and see how each question was graded.
  - **Potential Reflection Paper:** How does knowledge of first century Greco-Roman religion, culture, and politics help us better understand the New Testament and early Christianity? Write a 300-word response and post to the dropbox by 8 PM today.
-

---

Friday

**First Century Judaisms**

June 1

- Read:** Ehrman Chapter 3: “Jewish Context of Jesus and His Followers”
- Read:** Ehrman Chapter 5: “The Christian Gospels: A Literary and Historical Introduction”
- Read:** The Jewish Idea of the Messiah, in the “content” tab of D2L, under “additional readings.” (Jews do not recognize Jesus as the messiah because the Jewish notion of “messiah” is not the same as the Christian notion of the “messiah.” This reading, written from a contemporary Jewish perspective, will help you understand how Jews and Christians understand the concept of “messiah” differently.)
- Complete Quiz:** Ehrman chapter 3 and 5 on D2L. The quiz has 15 questions and you will have 20 minutes to complete it. You have until 8 PM tonight to finish the quiz. After 8 PM, you will be able to return to the quiz and see how each question was graded.
- Potential Reflection Paper:** Choose ONE of the following questions and write a 300-word response. Post your paper to the dropbox by 8 PM.

#1. How does knowledge of first century Jewish religion, culture, and politics help us better understand the New Testament and early Christianity?

#2. How do modern biographies differ from ancient biographies, as a literary form?

#3. Was Judaism a single religion in the first century, or were there multiple “Judaisms”?

#4. Why do contemporary Jews not believe that Jesus was the messiah?

---

---

## Week 2

You are required to complete each reading, quiz, and worksheet on the day it is assigned below. In addition, you should choose one reflection paper topic any day this week, write the paper, and submit to the D2L dropboxes titled “Reflection paper #2.”

---

Mon

### **The Gospel According to Mark (Bible)**

June 4

- Read:** The Gospel According to Mark (NRSV)
  - Reading Worksheet:** Gospel of Mark (download this file from the “content” tab of D2L, type your answers into the document, and then upload to the dropbox.
  - Potential Reflection Paper:**
    - #1. The oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark ended at chapter 16, verse 8. As your Bible indicates, later copies of Mark’s gospel have a few extra verses added. If the author of Mark’s gospel intended the narrative to end at verse 8, why do you think later writers might have been compelled to add additional verses?
    - #2. Consider the Gospel of Mark as a work of literature. What themes or concepts do you find repeated in the story?
-

---

Tues

**The Gospel According to Mark (Analysis)**

June 5

- Read:** Ehrman Chapter 6: “Jesus, the Suffering Son of God: The Gospel According to Mark”
- Complete:** Quiz #4 (Gospel of Mark)

**The Synoptic Problem**

- Read:** Ehrman, Chapter 7, “The Synoptic Problem and Its Significance for Interpretation”
- Complete Quiz:** Quiz #5 (Synoptic Problem)
- Potential Reflection Paper:**
  - #1. Chapter 7 refers to the “Synoptic Problem.” In your own words, explain what the “problem” is. What solution does chapter 7 offer for this problem? Do you find the solution persuasive?
  - #2. Among contemporary biblical scholars, the most common solution to the “synoptic problem” is the “four-source hypothesis.” Briefly summarize the four-source hypothesis. Can you think of other explanations for the synoptic problem?
  - #3. Is it important to understand the synoptic problem? Does it matter? Why or why not?

---

Wed

**The Gospel According to Matthew (Bible)**

June 6

- Read:** The Gospel According to Matthew (NRSV), chapters 1-7 and 21-28.
  - Reading Worksheet:** Gospel of Matthew (download this file from the “content” tab of D2L, type your answers into the document, and then upload to the dropbox.
  - Potential Reflection Paper:**
    - #1. Many scholars who have studied The Gospel of Matthew have wondered whether Matthew was Jewish, or if he was writing to a predominantly Jewish community. After reading the gospel, what evidence can you see to suggest that Matthew, or his readers, might have been Jews who were well-acquainted with the Old Testament?
    - #2. Consider the Gospel of Matthew as a work of literature. What themes or concepts do you find repeated in the story?
-



---

Thurs      **The Gospel According to Matthew (Analysis)**

- June 7
- Read:** Ehrman Chapter 8: “Jesus, the Jewish Messiah: The Gospel according to Matthew”
  - Complete Quiz:** Matthew
- 

Fri      **The Gospel According to Luke (Bible)**

- June 8
- Read:** The Gospel according to Luke (NRSV), chapters 1–12
  - Reading Worksheet:** Complete Gospel of Luke Day 1 worksheet (download this file from the “content” tab of D2L, type your answers into the document). The completed document is due at 8 PM tonight.
- 

**Week 3**

You are required to complete each reading, quiz, and worksheet on the day it is assigned below. In addition, you should choose one reflection paper topic any day this week, write the paper, and submit to the D2L dropboxes titled “Reflection paper #3.”

---

Mon      **The Gospel According to Luke (Bible)**

- June 11
- Read:** The Gospel according to Luke (NRSV), chapters 13–24
  - Reading Worksheet:** Complete Gospel of Luke Day 2 worksheet (download this file from the “content” tab of D2L, type your answers into the document). The completed document is due at 8 PM tonight.
  - Potential Reflection Paper:** #1. What additions does Luke’s gospel offer that we have not come across in either the Gospel of Matthew or Mark? Does the Gospel of Luke present a fundamentally different portrayal of Jesus?

**The Gospel According to Luke (Analysis)**

- Read:** Ehrman Chapter 9: “Jesus, Savior of the world: the Gospel according to Luke”
  - Complete Quiz:** Gospel of Luke
-

---

Tues

**The Gospel According to John (Bible)**

June 12

- Read:** The Gospel according to John (NRSV) chapters 1–10
- Reading Worksheet:** Complete Gospel of John Day 1 worksheet (download this file from the “content” tab of D2L, type your answers into the document). The completed document is due at 8 PM tonight.
- Potential Reflection Paper:**  
  
#1. Is the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel of John fundamentally different than his portrayal in the synoptic gospels? Cite evidence for or against.  
  
#2. Compare the portrayal of Jews in John’s gospel with Mathew’s gospel. What similarities and differences do you note? Do you think these differences are significant?

---

Wed

**The Gospel According to John (Bible)**

June 13

- Read:** The Gospel according to John (NRSV) chapters 11–21
- Reading Worksheet:** Complete Gospel of John Day 2 worksheet (download this file from the “content” tab of D2L, type your answers into the document). The completed document is due at 8 PM tonight.

**The Gospel According to John (Analysis)**

- Read:** Ehrman Chapter 11: “Jesus, the Man Sent from Heaven: the Gospel According to John”

**Complete Quiz:** Gospel of John

---

---

Thurs

## **NonCanonical Gospels**

June 14

- Read:** Ehrman Chapter 13: “Jesus from Different Perspectives: Other Gospels and Early Christianity”
  - Read:** Noncanonical Gospels [D2L]
  - Complete Quiz:** NonCanonical Gospels
  - Potential Reflection Paper:** Most of the gospels described in chapter 13 date from the first and second centuries. Although they were not ultimately selected for canonization, many early Christians considered these texts to be scriptural, and some of them (such as Q) influenced the synoptic gospel authors, as we have seen. Write a paper in which you answer one of the following questions:
    - #1. What do these texts teach us about early Christianity? What conclusions might we draw about a community that retained one of these gospels?
    - #2. Why did some early Christians find these gospels worthy of the status of scripture?
    - #3. Although we do not know for sure, why do you think the proto-orthodox church leaders chose to exclude these gospels from the New Testament?
-

---

Fri

June 15

## **The Historical Jesus**

- Read:** Ehrman, chapter 14: "The Historical Jesus"
- Read:** Ehrman chapter 16: "Jesus in Context"
- Complete Quiz:** Quiz "Chapters 14 and 16"
- Potential Reflection Paper:**

#1. Write a short paper in which you are for or against the following thesis: "Historians can demonstrate that Jesus was probably raised from the dead."

#2. Is it important to understand Judaism in the first-century in order to understand Jesus' message? Make an argument either for or against this question.

## **Midterm Paper (due June 18, 8 PM)**

**Introduction:** Now that you have completed our study of the four gospels, it should be clear that each gospel emphasizes specific and unique themes and concepts. For example, one gospel focuses more attention on the poor while another gospel focused more attention on Jesus' Judaism. This is because each author had a different audience and a different purpose for writing their text. Your midterm paper will require you to watch the film "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988) directed by Martin Scorsese and answer the following prompt below. The film can be streamed by clicking the link on our D2L "content" tab under "film link."

**Prompt:** There are many films about Jesus that have been produced for over a hundred years, all over the world. Many of these films tend to be more influenced by one gospel more than the others. For example, some films depict the themes of John's gospel, while other films are more influenced by the ideas in Matthew's gospel. Just like the original gospel authors, contemporary filmmakers have specific ideas and concepts they wish to focus on, and audiences they want to communicate with. For this paper, you should answer the following question: Of the four gospels in the New Testament, which do you think is the most similar to the depiction of Jesus in "The Last Temptation of Christ"? In other words, which themes in the film most closely align with the specific themes from one of the gospels?

**Thesis:** Your introduction should include a thesis sentence, such as, "This paper will argue that *The Last Temptation of Christ* depicts the themes of Luke's gospel more than the other three." (Of course, you may pick whichever gospel you prefer.) After the introduction, the body of your paper should provide specific, persuasive evidence to support your thesis.

**Citations:** Your paper should cite the gospels directly (referencing specific chapters and verses) as well as cite our textbook. You can use footnotes, internal citations, or

---

---

whatever citation system you are most comfortable with.

**Format:** Your paper should be in Times New Roman, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. Put your name and date on the right margin of the first page and include page numbers on each page. Don't forget a title that reflects something of the content of the paper. The paper should be a minimum of three pages (approximately 900 words) but can be longer without penalty.

**Grading:** By comparing a modern retelling of the life and Jesus with the original gospel texts, your paper should show that you have a clear understanding of the distinct characteristics of each gospel. Your paper will be graded on the persuasiveness of its argument, organization, use of evidence from the film, gospels, and textbook, and use of citations and formatting. This assignment is not intended as a film review or film criticism. That is, whether you enjoy the film or not is not relevant to this assignment. Instead, your paper should model how well you can apply your knowledge of our reading material to this assignment.

**Suggestion:** When "The Last Temptation of Christ" first appeared in theaters in 1988, audiences were split. Some appreciated the film's complexity since it was directed by one of America's most revered directors, Martin Scorsese. Other audiences were offended by the film's portrayal of Jesus which, at some points, veers away from the gospel stories. However, Scorsese makes clear from the very first moment in the film that he was not intending to make a film that retold the gospels accounts of Jesus' life. Rather, Scorsese intended to produce a film that expressed religious ideas that he himself was interested in exploring. Some of those ideas are similar to ideas in the gospels but other are not. While watching, you may find the film interesting, provocative, thoughtful or offensive, depending on your own expectations and beliefs. Your feelings about the film, whatever they are, are fair. Everyone responds differently to art. But for this assignment, it is important to not forget what you are asked to produce. This paper is not a film review or a summary of your beliefs about Jesus. Rather, this paper is asking that you present what you learned in this course thus far and apply your knowledge of the gospels to this film. If you find you have feelings about the film you would like to share (but that do not belong in your paper), you are free to email your thoughts to me. I added this suggestion to make sure that you understand what the paper is specifically asking you to do in the prompt.

---

---

## Week 4

You are required to complete each reading, quiz, and worksheet on the day it is assigned below. In addition, you should choose two reflection paper topics this week, write the papers, and submit to the D2L dropboxes titled “Reflection paper #4” and “Reflection paper #5.”

---

Mon

### **The Apocalyptic Jesus**

June 18

- Read:** Ehrman chapter 15: “Excursus: The Historian and the Problem of Miracle”
- Read:** Ehrman chapter 17: “Jesus, the Apocalyptic Prophet”
- Complete Quiz:** Quiz: “Chapters 15 and 17”
- Potential Reflection Paper:**

#1. What is the problem of miracles, according to Ehrman? Indicate whether you agree or disagree with Ehrman’s argument in chapter 15, and provide a justification for your position.

#2. Summarize Ehrman’s argument that Jesus was an apocalypticist from chapter 17, and identify which criterion were used to make this argument.

**Reminder: Submit midterm paper by 8 PM tonight**

---

---

Tues

**The Acts of the Apostles**

June 19

- Read:** Ehrman chapter 10: “Luke’s Second Volume: The Acts of the Apostles”
- Complete Quiz:** Acts of the Apostles
- Potential Reflection Paper:**

#1. In Acts, Paul’s relationship to Judaism is complicated. Based on your reading, explain why this relationship was complicated. Use internal citations and direct references to the readings.

#2. In what ways is the Acts of the Apostles a continuation of Luke’s Gospel? What are some of the common themes? Citing specific examples, how are those themes illustrated in each narrative?

**Paul the Apostle**

- Read:** Ehrman chapter 19: “Paul the Apostle: The Man and His Mission”
- Complete Quiz:** Paul the Apostle
- Read:** The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians (NRSV)
- Reading Worksheet:** Complete the Thessalonians worksheet and handout to the dropbox by 8 PM, today.
- Potential Reflection Paper:**

#1. Compare and contrast Acts and Paul’s letters. On what points do they agree? On what points do they disagree?

#2. Paul had been a Pharisee who was very critical of Christians until he himself converts. After his conversion experience, how do Paul’s beliefs change? And what beliefs stay the same?

---

---

Wed

**Paul's Letters: Corinthians**

June 20

- Read:** NRSV, "The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians"
- Read:** Ehrman chapter 21: "Paul and the Crises of His Churches" (read pages 324–334)
- Complete Quiz:** Quiz: "Paul's Letters: Corinthians"
- Potential Reflection Paper:** What does Paul's letter to the Corinthians reveal about Paul's audience? What motivates Paul to write the letter? What is Paul trying to accomplish with this letter?

**Paul's Letters: Galatians**

- Read:** NRSV, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians"
- Read:** Ehrman chapter 21: "Paul and the Crises of His Churches" (read pages 339–347)
- Complete Quiz:** Quiz #15: Paul's Letters: Galatians
- Potential Reflection Paper:** What does Paul's letter to the Galatians reveal about Paul's audience? What motivates Paul to write the letter? What is Paul trying to accomplish with this letter?

---

Thurs

**Christians and Jews**

June 21

- Read:** NRSV, "The Letter to the Hebrews"
  - Read:** Ehrman, chapter 26: "Christians and Jews"
  - Complete Quiz:** "Christians and Jews"
  - Potential Reflection Paper:**
    - #1. Summarize the attitude toward Judaism in Hebrews and Barnabas. In your opinion, should either Hebrews or Barnabas be thought of as anti-Semitic?
    - #2. How, when, and why did strong anti-Jewish sentiments arise in early Christianity? How did a religion that began as Jewish so quickly become anti-Jewish?
-



---

Fri

**Do We Have the Original New Testament?**

June 22

- Read:** Ehrman, chapter 23, “Does the Tradition Miscarry?”
- Read:** Ehrman chapter 30: Epilogue: Do We Have the Original New Testament?
- Complete Quiz:** Ehrman, Chapters 23 & 30.

**History After the Bible**

- Read:** Harris, Chapter 21, “The Judeo-Christian Bible and Subsequent History” [D2L]
  - Quiz:** Harris, History after the Bible
-