Course Description
This course offers an investigation of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth through a critical analysis of the ancient sources and modern scholarly reconstructions. The course will examine Jesus within the religious, social, and political context of the first century CE, explore ways in which early Christians constructed their understanding of him, and assess modern scholarly and popular portraits of Jesus. In this endeavor, we recognize that we come to this task not as “objective” scientists, but as individuals with preconceptions and biases that will affect our understanding of the complex information available to us. Through examining the approaches and interpretations of others, we will better understand and develop our own constructions.

Learning Goals
- Become familiar with the primary source material available for study of the historical Jesus.
- Understand the criteria for judging historicity of a text. Recognizing the problems with the data.
- Critically analyze passages and make decisions about likely historicity.
- Construct a coherent, historically based reconstruction of who Jesus was, what he did and said.
- Recognize the influences and presuppositions on your reconstructions.
- Work together with others to articulate the reason for your decisions.
- Reflect on the ways in which we construct truth, and the relationship between history and truth.

Course Structure
Reading the Texts: We will read the range of gospel texts (both canonical and non-canonical) that form the earliest and most reliable information about the historical Jesus. In each case we will discuss elements of its portrayals of Jesus.

Analyzing the Texts and Contexts: The gospels cannot be read as straightforward, historical narratives or transparent windows onto Jesus’ life. This section will provide an introduction to the critical study of the gospels. Since Jesus lived and taught in a world very different than ours, we will focus our attention on gaining a basic understanding of the context in which Jesus lived. We will survey the history of ancient Palestine, the political role of the Roman Empire in first century Palestine, the social structures governing Jewish society, and the major Jewish beliefs and practices of the time.

Reconstructing a Life of Jesus: In the last half of the semester, you will work in groups to work through the problems of reconstructing a life of the historical Jesus. In the process you will examine Jesus’ life from birth to death, and explore the possible ways to reconstruct and understand his teachings, actions, and interactions with his followers and opponents. By undertaking close readings of the gospels, and interacting with the varied reconstructions by a selection of scholars, each group will produce its own account.

S Competency Course:
This course is offered as an “S” certification class. I conceive it as such in two ways. First, the literature and traditions we will be studying were formed within oral cultures and originated as oral literature. Jesus himself wrote no texts, as far as we know, and it is likely that most of his companions were illiterate. The literature itself also reflects, in its content, oral discourse and rhetoric in the use of parables and disputations. Understanding these oral forms will be essential to reconstructing the historical Jesus.
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Second, most of your assignments will focus on developing the skills of speaking and listening. Throughout the semester you will have many opportunities to communicate your ideas orally and listen actively to the ideas of your colleagues in the class. In addition to participation in free flowing discussions, you will make presentations before the class, work closely in small groups, and present texts and defend your analysis in an oral exam. On the listening side, you will be expected to work well in small groups to solve problems. Although unlikely, it is possible to pass the course and not receive the “S” certification.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty constitute serious offenses that undermine your education and violate DePauw policy on academic integrity and may result in penalties ranging from a lowered grade to course failure or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and must be completed specifically for this class. You may not turn in work previously written for another class. Any use of another’s work without proper citation constitutes plagiarism and will be dealt with severely. The policy and discussion of each student’s obligations and rights are in the Student Handbook. Proper citation of secondary sources should follow Chicago Style footnotes and include all of the following: author, title, publisher, place, date of publication, and page number.1 Biblical texts should be cited as follows within the body of the text: (Book Chapter: Verse, translation*). E.g. “Congratulations to the poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3, SV). If you have further questions regarding plagiarism or citation styles ask me or consult a writing handbook.

*translation only required if quoting directly from the text.

Required Texts


You will also need access to a Bible. The translation I recommend is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). A useful edition that is widely available is the Harper Collins Study Bible.

Some Additional Resources

Accordance Bible Software (available on the mac in the digital media lab in ROW and the Geo Lab in Julian 201). Information about purchasing the program can be found at www.accordancebible.com. Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD) (available in reference section in ROW and on Accordance) Other materials available on reserve in ROW.

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Course Requirements:
1. **Attendance and Participation**: Students are expected to come to class having completed assigned readings prior to each class. If you are going to miss class please email me before class to let me know. Repeated unexcused absences may constitute a failing grade. All students are expected to actively participate in class discussions. Active participation is not so much an issue of the number of comments, but primarily the substance of those comments.

2. **Primary Source Presentations (5-10 minutes)**: During each class period in the first 4 weeks, each student should prepare two different sections of the primary source texts to read, then discuss. The texts you choose should epitomize the goals of the author of the gospel, or provide important information about the setting or audience of the gospel. *(This will require that you try to figure out the goals, setting and audience before choosing your texts)*. You may want to raise questions about the text, or highlight interesting points made by the text. Finally, you should discuss how each selection gives a sense of the purpose, perspective or audience of the text or its author. During each class period, I will call on 2-3 students to present one of her or his texts. Other students in the class will ask follow up questions about the texts presented.

3. **Historical Gospel Paper**: Select one of the gospels (canonical or non-canonical) and based on your reading of it and comparisons with the other sources describe its goals, biases, agendas, audience. Who is Jesus for this source? What is this source trying to say about him? Include specific examples from the text. 1500 words. The paper must be submitted to moodle on **Friday October 3rd**.

4. **Acts and Sayings of Jesus**: You have been asked to form a team of scholars to produce a new edition of the life of the historical Jesus. *(A new Jesus Seminar)*. You are to produce an assessment of those that should be considered authentic (or most likely so) and those that should be considered inauthentic. You will need to decide, as a group, how to make such judgments, what criteria you will use, etc. Your commentary should engage at least the 4 scholars from our texts.

5. **Passion Narrative Project**: You have been asked to produce a play, screenplay, or documentary that would present Jesus’ final weeks, from his entrance into Jerusalem to the end of the story (whatever you deem that to be). You are to present only those episodes that you deem to be most historically reliable.

6. **Oral Final Exam**: During finals week, you will be asked to choose 2 events or sayings that you consider to best represent the actions and purposes of the historical Jesus. You will present them to me with explanation about why these are historically plausible, and what they tell you about the historical Jesus.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
<th>Final Grade Breakdown</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Source Presentation</td>
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<td>Historical Gospel Paper</td>
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<td>Acts and Sayings</td>
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<td>Passion Narrative</td>
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<td>Oral Final Exam</td>
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<td>C  73-76.99</td>
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<td>C- 70-72.99</td>
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### Week 1

**T** Introduction: Who was Jesus? How Do We Know?  
**R** Gospel of Mark

### Week 2

**T** Gospel of Matthew  
**R** Gospel of Luke

### Week 3

**T** Gospel of John  
**R** Gospel of Thomas, Greek Fragments of Thomas

### Week 4

**T** Gospel of Judas  
Dialogue of the Savior  
**R** Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Fragmentary Gospels  

**Thursday 7pm – Marcus Borg speaking at Franklin College**

### Week 5

**T** Synoptic issues – Issues with sources  
Sayings Gospel Q  
**R** Critical methods

Study carefully *SFG* #14, 90, 128. Be able to identify the verbal and thematic similarities and differences in each passage. How might you account for the literary relationships among the texts?

**R** Herzog, *Jesus* 1-46.  
Borg/Wright, *Meaning*, 3-27.

### Week 6

**T** Textual and Religious Contexts  
**R** Second Temple Texts (moodle)

#### Biblical texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covenant</th>
<th>Genesis 12; 17; 22</th>
<th>Exodus 19-20</th>
<th>Deuteronomy 29-30</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Kings 22-23</td>
<td>Ezra 9</td>
<td>Nehemiah 8-9</td>
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<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>2 Samuel 7</td>
<td>Isaiah 7, 9, 11</td>
<td>Psalms 2; 89; 110</td>
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<td>Temple</td>
<td>Leviticus 1-3; 11; 15</td>
<td>1 Kings 8</td>
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<td>Ezekiel 20:33-38; 37</td>
<td>Micah 4:1-5:5</td>
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<td>Malachi 3:1-5</td>
<td>Zechariah 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apocalypticism</td>
<td>Zechariah 14</td>
<td>Daniel 7, 11-12</td>
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**R** Second Temple Texts (moodle)  
Dead Sea Scrolls (moodle)

| 4 Ezra 11; 13 | 1QS - Community Rule |
| Mishnah Sotah 9:15 | 1QSa - Messianic Rule |
| Psalm of Solomon 17 | 4Q521 - Messianic Apocalypse |
| Josephus on messianic figures | Midrash on Last Days |

**Historical Gospel Paper due Friday.**
| Week 7 | Social and Political Contexts | Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine*, 1-92.  
| Kinship and Patronage | Herzog, *Jesus*, 71-89. |
|-------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **R** | Social and Political Contexts | Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine*, 93-152.  

**Week 8**  
Spring Break

**Week 9**

| **T** | Criteria for Assessing Historicity | *Finding the Historical Jesus* (moodle)  
| “Authenticity Criteria” (moodle) |
|-------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **R** | Birth Narratives | Biblical passages:  
| Genesis 18:9-15 | 1 Samuel 1-2  
| Exodus 1-2 | Isaiah 7:10-17; 60:6  
| Numbers 24:15-24 | Micah 5:2  
| Judges 13 |
| Birth narratives (SFG #1-12):  
| Mark 6:3 (Jesus’ family) |
| Talbert, “Miraculous Conceptions and Births” (moodle) |

According to Christian tradition, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. What are the arguments to support or reject Bethlehem as the site of Jesus’ birth?  
How might biblical traditions (i.e., passages from the Hebrew Bible) have influenced the thinking about Jesus’ birth and the writing of the birth narratives?

**Week 10**

| **T** | Early Ministry |  
| John the Baptist  
| 2 Kings 1-2 | Isaiah 1:16-17; 32:14-18; 40:1-5  
| Ezekiel 36:25-27 | Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6  
| SFG #13-17, 29, 30, 45, 106-107 144, 162, 276; Luke 1:17; John 1:21  
| Josephus on John the Baptist: *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119 (on moodle)  
| *1QS (Community Rule)* Col. 4 |
| Baptism and Temptation  
| SFG #18, 20 | Flusser, *Sage*, 18-33. |
| Based on the available information from the Gospels and Josephus, who was John the Baptist?  
| Describe the relationship between John and Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels and assess its historicity.  
| Explain the significance of Jesus’ baptism and temptation. How do these events indicate who Jesus is and what he will do? Why are these events described in the way that they are? |

**Week 10 (R) – Week 13 (T)**  
Problem #1 – Acts and Sayings of Jesus

**Week 13 (R) – Week 15 (T)**  
Problem #2 – Passion Narrative Project

**Week 15 (R)**  
Conclusions. The Historical Jesus and Jesus Today.

**Week 16 – Finals Week – Oral Final Exam**  
Tues May 17\textsuperscript{th} 1-4pm - Presentation of the Passion Narratives.