



## *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

### *Syllabus*

# *Early Christianity's Jewish Matrix: Gospels & Acts - 24305*

*Last update 13-02-2024*

*HU Credits: 2*

*Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)*

*Responsible Department: Comparative Religion*

*Academic year: 0*

*Semester: 2nd Semester*

*Teaching Languages: English*

*Campus: Mt. Scopus*

*Course/Module Coordinator: Dr. Serge Ruzer*

*Coordinator Email: [serge.ruzer@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:serge.ruzer@mail.huji.ac.il)*

*Coordinator Office Hours: by appointment*

---

Teaching Staff:

Dr. Serge Ruzer

Course/Module description:

The course will address the core ideas and beliefs of nascent Christianity as expressed in the canonical Gospels and in Acts – with a particular stress on those ideas' backdrop in various late Second Temple Jewish groups. Developments and metamorphoses in nascent Christian perceptions and their socio-historical setting will be emphasized.

Course/Module aims:

To expose the participants to the main trends in early Christian thought -- in their historical, social and religious context -- as attested in the Gospels and Acts.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

On successful completion of the course, the students will be able to properly evaluate the multifaceted nature of the early Jesus movement and its various settings in both Palestinian Judaism and wider Greco-Roman milieu, as well as the process of the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity during the first century of the common era.

Attendance requirements(%):

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Online recorded lectures that also encourage the participants to actively participate in discussion of textual evidence and various research models.

Course/Module Content:

UNIT 1

Introduction to the course.

Late Second Temple Judaism as setting of nascent Christianity. From the Land of Israel to broader Greco-Roman context. Gospels and Acts among the literary output of the early Jesus movement. Formation of Gospel tradition and evolution in perception of Jesus' mission.

---

## UNIT 2

*Early Christian message and contemporaneous Jewish messianic beliefs (A)*

*Variety of messianic outlooks in late Second Temple Judaism. The Synoptic Gospels as a reflection of that variety.*

*Early Christian message and contemporaneous*

## UNIT 3

*Jewish messianic beliefs (B)*

*Problematic side of Jesus' kingly messiahship. A switch to another Second Temple idea, that of a heavenly savior.*

## UNIT 4

*Hebrew Bible as the point of reference of Jesus' Messianic biographies (A)*

*The claim for Jesus' messiahship in the light of other Jewish exegetical trends. Messianic interpretation of Scripture at Qumran.*

*Hebrew Bible as the point of reference of Jesus' Messianic biographies (B)*

*Jesus as Interpreter of the Torah vis-à-vis the Torah exegesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls and among proto-rabbinic sages.*

## UNIT 5

*The Kingdom of God idea's Jewish setting.*

## UNIT 6

*The struggle for self-identity (A)*

*Strategies of identity building in the Synoptics.*

*Jesus as one of the Torah sages/Pharisees? The polemic against Pharisees in the Gospels, Qumran and rabbinic sources.*

*The struggle for self-identity (B)*

*Gospel of John's sectarian tendency compared to that of the Scrolls. The polemical function of "the Jews" in John's narrative.*

---

## UNIT 7

*The Gospel of John and Its special stance (A)*

*Messiah as Revealer of God's Word (logos). The idea of Messiah's preexistence: the question of Jewish setting.*

## UNIT 8

*The Gospel of John and Its special stance (B)*

*Jesus as second Moses.*

## UNIT 9

*Jesus' death and resurrection as the focal point of the Gospel narrative.*

*Various meanings of Messiah's death: Synoptic narrative vs. John's version. A suffering Messiah: precedents in Jewish thought.*

## UNIT 10

*Early Jesus followers' outlook reflected in Acts (A)*

*Preaching to the Jews in preparation for the Kingdom of Israel. Expectation of Jesus' return and the meaning of the interim period.*

## UNIT 11

*Early Jesus followers' outlook reflected in Acts (B)*

*Preaching to the Gentiles as fulfillment of biblical prophecies and metamorphoses in the movement's outlook. Paul's mission and tendencies in Hellenistic Judaism. The issue of Torah observance.*

*Delay in redemption and the response of Acts*

*Renewal of prophecy/the gift of the Spirit and the mission to the Gentiles as the signs of the interim period. Temple in Acts' eschatological scenario. Between quasi-Qumranian beliefs and broader universalistic ideas.*

*Concluding remarks.*

---

Required Reading:

B. D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York, Oxford, 1997).

D. Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem, 1998/2001).

*The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1990).

*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross, (Oxford, 1957/1958/1978/1997).

N. Perrin, D. C. Duling, *The New Testament. An Introduction* (HBJ, 1982/94).

-----  
G. Anderson, "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 in the Targums," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52, 1 (1990): 21-29.

L. H. Feldman, "The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* September/October 1986, 59-69.

P. Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2," *Journal of Theological Studies* 42, 532-564.

S. Ruzer, "From 'Love Your Neighbor' to 'Love Your Enemy'" in S. Ruzer, *Mapping the New Testament: Early Christian Writings as a Witness for Jewish Biblical Exegesis* (Leiden, 2007), 35-70.

S. Ruzer, "Antitheses in Matthew 5: Midrashic Aspects of Exegetical Techniques," in *Mapping the New Testament*, 11-34.

S. Safrai, "The Jewish Cultural Nature of Galilee in the First Century," in *The New Testament and the Christian-Jewish Dialogue [Immanuel 24/25]* (Jerusalem, 1990).

Schwartz D. R., "The End of the Ge (Acts 1:8): Beginning or End of the Christian Vision?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 669-76.

G. Stroumsa, "The Body of Truth and its Measures: New Testament Canonization in Context," in *idem, Hidden Wisdom* (Leiden, 1996).

R. F. Tannenbaum, "Jews and God-Fearers in the Holy City of Aphrodite," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* September/October 1986, 55-57.

J. Taylor, "The List of Nations in Acts 2:9-11," *Revue Biblique* 106.3 (1999), 408-420.

Additional Reading Material:

L. Alexander, "Fact, Fiction, and the Genre of Acts," *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 380-399.

Atkinson K., "On Further Defining the First Century CE Synagogue: Fact or Fiction?" *NTS* 43 (1997): 491-502.

E. J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1988/94).

R. L. Brawley, "The Identity of Jesus in Luke 4:16-30 and the Program of Acts," *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology and Conciliation* (Atlanta, Georgia, 1987), 28-50.

- 
- D. Flusser, "Ostrakon from Qumran Throws Light on First Church," *Jerusalem Perspective* 53 (1997), 12-15.
- P. Fredriksen, "Paul, Purity, and the Ekklesia of the Gentiles," in J. Pastor and M. Mor, *The Beginnings of Christianity* (Jerusalem, 2005), 205-17, esp. 215-16.
- J. Gager, "Introduction," in idem, *Reinventing Paul* (New York, 2000).
- R. S. MacLennan and A. T. Kraabel, "The God-Fearers – A Literary and Theological Invention," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* September/October 1986, 46-53.
- Pines S., "Notes on the Twelve Tribes in Qumran, Early Christianity and Jewish Tradition," in Gruenwald I., Shaked S., Stroumsa G. (eds.), *Messiah and Christos* (Tübingen, 1992), 151-54.
- S. Safrai, "Teachings of Pietists in Mishnaic Literature," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (1965).
- J. Taylor, "Paul and the Jewish Leaders at Rome: Acts 28:17-31," in T. G. Casey and J. Taylor (eds.), *Paul's Jewish Matrix* (Rome, 2011), 311-326.
- J. B. Tyson, "Jews and Judaism in Luke-Acts: Reading as a Godfearer," *NTS* 41 (1995): 19-38.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 50 %  
Mid-terms exams 50 %

Additional information: