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The New Testament



Bart D. Ehrman, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Religious Studies
The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Professor Bart Ehrman is the Bowman and Gordon Gray Professor of Religious Studies at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. With degrees from Wheaton College (B.A.) and Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Div. and Ph.D., magna cum laude), he taught at

Rutgers for four years before moving to UNC in 1988. During his tenure at UNC, he has garnered numerous awards and prizes, including the Students' Undergraduate Teaching Award (1993), the Ruth and Philip Hettleman Prize for Artistic and Scholarly Achievement (1994), and now the Bowman and Gordon Gray Award for excellence in teaching (1998).

With a focus on early Christianity in its Greco-Roman environment and a special expertise in the textual criticism of the New Testament, Professor Ehrman has published dozens of book reviews and over 20 scholarly articles for academic journals. He has also authored or edited eight books, including *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford University Press, 1999); *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford, 1997; 2nd ed. 1999); *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity* (Oxford, 1999); *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader* (Oxford, 1998); *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford, 1993); and (as co-editor) *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (Eerdmans, 1996). He is currently at work on a new Greek-English edition of the Apostolic Fathers for the Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press).

Professor Ehrman is a popular lecturer, giving numerous talks each year for such groups as the Carolina Speakers Bureau, the UNC Program for the Humanities, the Biblical Archaeology Society, various civic groups, and universities across the nation. He has served as the President of the Society

cont'd

Scope:

The New Testament is undoubtedly the single most important book in the history of Western civilization, whether seen as a religious book of faith or as a cultural artifact. It is probably also the most widely disputed and misunderstood. The 24 lectures of this course will approach the New Testament from a historical perspective, bracketing questions of belief and theological truth to acquire a historically rich grounding for our understanding of these foundational documents.

The course will begin with four lectures on the historical context in which the New Testament was written, considering both the world of Greco-Roman pagan cults and the world of early Judaism—examining, that is, the beliefs, sacred spaces, liturgical practices, and distinguishing features of the religions surrounding the birth of Christianity.

In the second four lectures of Part I, we will examine the New Testament Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are our principal sources for knowing about the life and teachings of Jesus; they are also major literary works in their own right, each with its own perspective on who Jesus was and why his life and death matter. A major methodological concern will be to allow each of these books to speak for itself, rather than assume they all portray Jesus in the same way. Individual lectures will be devoted to establishing the distinctive portrayals of Jesus in each of the Gospels. An additional lecture will look at how Jesus is portrayed in two Gospels that did not make it into the New Testament, the Gospels of Peter and Thomas.

Part I concludes with four lectures that will take the results of our discussions and, in a sense, move behind them to see what we can learn about the historical Jesus himself and what he actually said and did. After considering what noncanonical sources (e.g., Roman and Jewish authors) say about Jesus, we will discuss the kinds of criteria historians have devised for using the Gospels not as literary texts but as historical sources for Jesus' life. We will then apply these criteria to reconstruct his actual words and deeds. We will

New Testament Scope

see that the earliest records of Jesus are probably right in portraying him as a kind of apocalyptic prophet who anticipated that God would soon intervene in the course of history to overthrow the forces of evil and establish his good kingdom on earth and that people needed to repent in preparation for it. We will also consider the circumstances that led to his death at the hands of the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate.

In Part II of the course, we will move to consider the Book of Acts—the earliest surviving history of the early Christian movement—then the 21 epistles of the New Testament. Because 13 of these epistles claim to be written by the apostle Paul, we will spend some time trying to understand his life and theology. Paul was a Jew who converted to faith in Jesus after being a persecutor of the church. His letters are addressed to churches that he had founded, principally among Gentiles. In them, he spells out his convictions that a person can be made right with God only through the death and resurrection of Jesus (not, for example, through the Jewish Law) and draws numerous ethical and theological implications. Following our discussion of Paul's own letters, we will devote a lecture to considering the



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relationship of Paul and Jesus, to see whether, as some people have claimed, Paul transformed the religion *of* Jesus into a religion *about* Jesus.

We will then consider other New Testament books that claim Paul as their author that modern scholars have concluded are, in fact, pseudonymous. Finally, we will move into a discussion of the remaining writings of the New Testament, including the books of 1 Peter and Hebrews and ending with a discussion of the book of Revelation, a book that continues to fascinate and intrigue modern readers. We will see that it, like all the other books of the New Testament, is best understood when situated in its own historical context—rather than taken out of context.

In short, this will be a historical introduction to the 27 books of the New Testament. The course will try to address such significant questions as who wrote these books, under what circumstances, and for what audience; we will consider what the books of the New Testament say, what they mean, and how historically accurate they are. Our ultimate goal is to come to a fuller appreciation and understanding of these books that have made such an enormous impact on the history of Western civilization and that continue to play such an important role for people today. ■

Prof Bio. Cont'd

of Biblical Literature, SE Region; book review editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*; editor of the Scholar's Press Monograph Series *The New Testament in the Greek Fathers*; and co-editor of the E.J. Brill series *New Testament Tools and Studies*. Among his administrative responsibilities, he has served on the executive committee of the Southeast Council for the Study of Religion and has chaired the New Testament textual criticism section of the Society of Biblical Religion, as well as serving as Director of Graduate Studies at the Department of Religious Studies at UNC. ■

Notes: All rounded numbers are approximate. All dates are B.C.E. P.1

- 1800–1700
(Middle Bronze Age) Patriarchs and matriarchs.
- 1700–1300..... Israel in Egypt.
- 1300..... Exodus from Egypt.
- 1280..... Reign of Ramses II (1290–1224).
- 1250–1200..... The “conquest.”
- 1200–1000..... Period of the Judges.
- 1000–922..... Davidic monarchy; time of the
(hypothetical) “J” writer.
- 922–722..... The Divided Kingdom; time of the
(hypothetical) “E” writer.
- 850..... Elijah, Jezebel, and Ahab.
- c. 750..... Amos.
- c. 740..... Hosea.
- 724–722..... Siege of Samaria.
- 722..... Assyrian conquest of Israel; dispersal of
the ten northern tribes.
- 715–687..... Hezekiah rules the Southern Kingdom.

N.T. Timeline

P.2

- 701..... Sennacherib's unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem.
- 700..... The first Isaiah.
- 640-609..... Josiah.
- 622..... Josiah finds the Book of Deuteronomy and implements the Deuteronomic Reforms.
- c. 620-597..... Jeremiah.
- 612..... Nineveh (the Assyrian capital) falls to Babylon.
- 609..... Josiah is killed and the Deuteronomic Reform ends.
- 597..... First deportation to Babylon.
- 587..... Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem; second deportation.
- 587-539/8 Ezekiel; the second Isaiah; the priestly writers edit J and E.
- 539/8 Edict of Cyrus.
- 522-486..... Darius I; work on rebuilding the Temple begins.
- c. 515..... Haggai, Zech. 1-8.
- 465-424..... Ezra (Ruth? Jonah?); editing of Proverbs.

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P.3

- 423..... Nehemiah.
- 400-300..... Early versions of the Book of Esther and Dan. 1-6.
- 331..... Battle of Issus: Alexander the Great conquers the Persian empire.
- 323-198..... Judah under Ptolemaic rule.
- 198..... Battle of Paneas: Seleucids gain Palestine.
- 175-163..... Antiochus IV Epiphanes.
- 167..... Maccabean revolt; Daniel 7-12.
- 165..... Rededication of the Temple.
- 333-323 B.C. Conquests of Alexander the Great.
- 145 B.C. Book of Daniel (final book of Hebrew Bible).
- 140 B.C. Rise of Jewish Sects.
- 63 B.C. Conquest of Palestine by Romans.
- 44 B.C. Assassination of Julius Caesar.
- 40-4 B.C. Herod, King of the Jews.
- 27 B.C.-A.D. 14 Octavian Caesar Augustus as Emperor.
- 4 B.C.-A.D. 65 Seneca.
- 4 B.C.? Jesus' birth.
- A.D. 14-37 Emperor Tiberius.
- A.D. 26-36 Pilate as Governor of Judea.
- A.D. 30? Jesus' death.
- A.D. 33? Conversion of Paul.

The New Testament

24 lectures / 30 minutes per lecture

DISC 1

- 1 The Early Christians and Their Literature
- 2 The Greco-Roman Context
- 3 Ancient Judaism
- 4 The Earliest Traditions About Jesus
- 5 Mark—Jesus the Suffering Son of God
- 6 Matthew—Jesus the Jewish Messiah

DISC 3

- 13 The Acts of the Apostles
- 14 Paul—The Man, the Mission, and the *Modus Operandi*
- 15 Paul and the Crises of His Churches—First Corinthians
- 16 Pauline Ethics
- 17 Paul's Letter to the Romans
- 18 Paul, Jesus, and James

DISC 2

- 7 Luke—Jesus the Savior of the World
- 8 John—Jesus the Man from Heaven
- 9 Noncanonical Gospels
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- 11 The Historical Jesus—Solutions and Methods
- 12 Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet

DISC 4

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- 20 The Pastoral Epistles
- 21 The Book of Hebrews and the Rise of Christian Anti-Semitism
- 22 First Peter and the Persecution of the Early Christians
- 23 The Book of Revelation
- 24 Do We Have the Original New Testament?



The New Testament



Professor Bart D. Ehrman, currently the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has provided students with great insights into Christianity for more than 15 years. Among his acclaimed books is the *New York Times* bestseller *Misquoting Jesus*. Professor Ehrman's numerous teaching awards include the Bowman and Gordon Gray Award for Excellence in Teaching.

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