The Jewish Background of the New Testament

Course Description: The course covers a number of key thematic topics under the broad umbrella of the encounter between Jewish and Christian Studies. It considers relevant historical, theological, literary and archeological data, enabling the students to read the New Testament in its original context. Over the span of 30 lectures the course adopts a variety of critical, literary but sympathetic, approaches to the NT collection and the ancient literature that will be referred to during the course. The course will challenge the students to appreciate the significance of ancient Judaism/s and how it relates to the early Christian context focusing on NT as a Jewish literary work.

Special attention is given to the Anti-Judaism of John’s Gospel and its Samaritan-Jewish backgrounds as a test case study. This will be a specific area of focus and the course will consider a variety of interpretive options that may help the student read the Gospel of John in a new way. The course explores the New Testament in light of some early rabbinic texts, pre-rabbinic traditions, apocalyptic writings, histories, accounts of era contemporaries and Greco-Roman writings.

As an introduction to a variety of Jewish Studies-related themes relevant to the New Testament interpretation, the course will relate to both ancient and modern post-Holocaust Jewish contexts. As such, this course is not simply a course on Jewish backgrounds of the New Testament; it focuses on the encounter between the New Testament Studies and Jewish Studies. With its practical emphasis in the area of Jewish-Christian understanding, relations and dialogue, the course provides a firm foundation for students who wish to continue their studies in this field.

Teaching Objectives and Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will:

1) **Develop a firm grasp of the main historical and theological issues** that connect the New Testament and Jewish Studies.

2) **Survey some of the Jewish background literature most relevant and useful** for New Testament interpretation.

3) **Become familiar with the tools that are available for further study** of the New Testament in the Jewish context.

4) **Be exposed to Jewish, Historical and Archaeological approaches** to New Testament interpretation through selected readings and lectures.

5) **Achieve a greater personal appreciation of Jewish thought, culture and history** and be able to clearly articulate the main ways in which they are helpful, can and must be used in interpreting the New Testament.
Additional Outcomes:

1. **Develop a skill of looking at the New Testament** texts within a framework of Jewish literature.
2. **Identify the “common ground” points of reference for academic dialogue** in the fields of Jewish and Christian studies and relations.

Course Outline:

Lecture 01: Introduction: Traditional Paradigms Reconsidered
Lecture 02: Dead Sea Scrolls and New Testament Studies
Lecture 03: Samarians and Samaritans: Rethinking the Samaritan Woman
Lecture 04: John, Jews and Judaism: Rethinking the Story of Lazarus
Lecture 05: Josephus Flavius and New Testament Studies
Lecture 06: Jewish Movements According to Josephus
Lecture 07: Jewish Logos Theology and Two Powers in Heaven
Lecture 08: Jews and Hellenism: Rethinking the Bethesda Healing
Lecture 09: Early Jewish Followers of Jesus and Torah
Lecture 10: Jesus Among the Rabbis: Exploring Shared Ideas
Lecture 11: The Jewishness of All Four Gospels
Lecture 12: Hebraisms in the New Testament
Lecture 14: Rabbinic Judaism: History, Texts, Traditions
Lecture 15: Hillel, Shammai and the Teachings of Jesus
Lecture 16: Merkavah Mysticism: Anomalies in Rabbinic Judaism.
Lecture 17: Ruth and Naaman: Two Paths to Israel’s God
Lecture 18: John’s Revelation: A Jewish Apocalypse
Lecture 19: Jews, Pagans and gods: Understanding Ancient Monotheism
Lecture 20: Israel’s Holy Days: Insights in the Jewish Calendar
Lecture 21: Israel in the Roman World
Lecture 22: Jewish Gospel in Roman Cities
Lecture 23: Eating with Gentiles: Tensions Over Defilement
Lecture 24: Rediscovering Jewish Paul in New Testament
Lecture 25: Paul’s Shema and the Nations
Lecture 26: Romans and Galatians in Context
Lecture 27: The Stigma of Circumcision
Lecture 28: Law, Promise and Paul’s Allegory
Lecture 29: Jews, The Nations and Those in Between
Lecture 30: One New Man and Identity Confusion
Select Bibliography:


Setzer, Claudia, Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30-150 C.E. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).


