

The World(s) of St. Paul

Before there was a St. Paul, there was Saul or Paul, the itinerant Jewish leatherworker, occasional jailbird, and prolific letter writer. In his travels in the 40s and 50s, he somehow persuaded small groups of people in numerous eastern Mediterranean cities that the end of the world as they knew it was imminent and that if they acted appropriately in response to this they would be part of a new world and enjoy everlasting life. He connected this to the resurrection of the Jewish prophet we call Jesus and claimed that Jesus himself had appeared to him and commissioned him as a messenger (apostle) to non-Jews. Paul thus stands at the very beginning of the history of Christianity (indeed before there were any gospel writings). Through him we can follow the westward movement of the Jesus message from its Judean starting point and watch a Jewish sect become a gentile “religion”. Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew living and working in cities of the Roman Empire in the first century, and through him we can see the beginnings of the convergence of Jewish, Greek, and Roman elements that shaped ancient Christianity. But without Christian believers there would be no Christianity, so to understand the story of early Christianity we need also to investigate the mostly anonymous initial “converts” and their beliefs, motivations, and new practices.

In this seminar, using Paul’s letters we will examine the ideas and activities of Paul and the responses and concerns of the groups of believers Paul created. Using a variety of readings, we will consider Paul and Pauline ideas and practices in the context of contemporary Jewish, Greek, and Roman ideas and practices.

As we enter Paul’s world(s) through readings, discussions, and writing assignments during the initial weeks of the course, students will identify research topics that interest them and begin the research process. This process will follow a sequence of specific tasks (identified in the syllabus), leading to a writing phase, which will also follow a sequence of specific tasks culminating in a finished research paper.

Books

Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (UNCG Bookstore)

Holy Bible (Revised Standard Version) (UNCG Bookstore)

James Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era* (e-book, access through Jackson Library)

E. P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity* (e-book, access through Jackson Library)

E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE: Common Judaism, Paul, and the Inner and Outer in Ancient Religion* (e-book, access through Jackson Library)

Benjamin Reynolds and Leonard Stuckenbruck, *The Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition in the Shaping of the New Testament* (e-book, access through Jackson Library)

1/15 Introduction: The World(s) of Paul Paul, *Letter to the Romans*
to be read in class

1/22 The Roman World (Government, Society, Culture/Religion) Paul, *Romans* (again)
Meeks 1-2, 9-32; Jeffers 89-109,
110-119

Writing Assignment for 1/22: Read Paul's Letters and using only the information he divulges in them (do not refer to the Acts of the Apostles), write a sketch of his life and activities

1/29 The Jewish World Paul, *1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians*
Historical Background, Sects Sanders, *Judaism* 19-44; Jeffers 119-141;
Monotheism, Vision of History Meeks 32-39

Writing Assignment for 1/29: Using both Paul's Letters and *Acts of the Apostles*, identify Paul's associates helpers and his opponents (associates have names, opponents typically have only characteristic ideas and/or activities)

2/5 The Missionary World (Itineraries, Message and Methods)
Paul, *Galatians*; Jeffers, 48-69; Meeks 40-50, 74-110

Writing Assignment for 2/5: What does the Acts of the Apostles tell us about Paul that Paul himself does not? What does the Acts of the Apostles tell us about Paul that conflicts with or varies from what Paul himself tells us?

2/12 The Missionary World (Social Characteristics, Organization)
Paul, *Philippians* and *Philemon*; Meeks 51-73, 111-139

2/19 The New World—Prospects and Problems (Paul's Ideas through Paul's Letters)
Meeks 140-192; E. P. Sanders, "Did Paul Break with Judaism?" in Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity*, 231-240; Karina Martin Hogan, "The Apocalyptic Eschatology of Romans", in Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, 155-174; John Byron, "Paul the Seer and the Apocalyptic Community at Thessalonica" in Reynolds and Stuckenbruck, 245-258

2/26 Pauline Christianity after Paul—*2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*

NOTE: Research and Writing: Topic Choices Presentation; submit potential choices to me via email attachment before 2/26

After 2/19, class meetings will deal with topics and sources particularly relevant to the various research topics students have chosen. This is a way that all students can engage in the issues individual students are working on. Since the specific topics are “to be determined” (TBD), they do not appear in the syllabus. Expect a supplement to this syllabus with specific information on or soon after 2/26.

3/5 Spring Break—No Class

3/12 TBD; Research and Writing: Bibliography/Primary and Secondary Sources

Due: a bibliography comprising at least 6 monograph titles and 6 journal titles and all the primary sources discovered to date; be prepared to discuss process, concerns, and problems

3/19 TBD; Thesis Statement with Outline

Submit a one-sentence (provisional) thesis statement with an outline sketch of how you plan to develop and prove your thesis, 1-2 pages

3/26 TBD; 1st Paragraph + Outline

Submit a more substantial version of the 3/12 assignment, fashioning a full prose introductory paragraph and fleshing out as fully as possible a paragraph by paragraph sketch (not necessarily full sentence prose) of the whole paper

4/2 TBD; Expanded Outline-- Refine and amplify your 3/29 version

4/9 TBD; Draft 1--Full prose version with citations (in preliminary form)

4/16 TD; Draft 2--Revise Draft 1

4/23 TBD; Complete Final Draft

4/30 –Submit Final Draft; present findings

