



The Bible ... *for Smarties!*

CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES 1: The Four Gospels

SYLLABUS

Fall 2026

Taught by
David Moseley, Ph.D.

Mondays ~ 6:00-8:00 p.m. PST
Taught Online via Zoom

Welcome to Christian Scriptures 1! This class continues to explore the discipline of academic Biblical Studies, building on the material covered in Hebrew Bible 1 & 2 – specifically, the literature of the Gospels, which are Ancient Religious Biographies written about Jesus of Nazareth.

“New Testament” or “Christian Scriptures”?

The preferred terminology today is “Christian Scriptures” rather than “New Testament.” Referring to the Bible as the “Old” and “New” Testaments might suggest to Jews that their sacred scriptures are out-dated compared to the “New” Christian Testament, or have been superseded. [Remember: The Hebrew Scriptures are the sacred texts of Judaism, however important they might be to Christians - primarily *because* they were the sacred scriptures of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew...and also Paul.] Also, as we will see, the language of “Old” and “New” Testaments imposes a “Christocentric” interpretive framework on the Hebrew Bible that is liable to corrupt or distort the original meaning of the texts. [In Judaism, the preferred term of art for their sacred writings is *Tanakh* – an acrostic made up from the three first letters of the three principal sections of the Hebrew Bible: (1) The *Torah* (the “Teachings”); (2) the *Nevi'im* (the “Prophets”, which includes History Books); and (3) the *Ketuvim* (the Miscellaneous “Writings”) – hence, *TaNaKh*.]

The Mission of the Class is to Nurture Students towards a Nuanced, Critical Interpretation and Understanding of the Texts of the Christian Scriptures.

The Christian Scriptures are the most widely read and influential set of texts in human history, and builds upon the many stories about God's covenant relationship with the Jews in the Hebrew Bible by focusing on two new stories:

1. The Story of Jesus of Nazareth – his Life, Death, and Resurrection
2. The Story of the Early Church – the Community of the Followers of Jesus

In essence, the Christian Scriptures synthesize these two stories as the *witness* ("Testament") of the earliest Christians who wish to proclaim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah ("Christ" in Greek), and that this is "Good News" (Gospel), signifying salvation for the whole world. This class is the first part of a two-part course that forms an introductory survey of the various writings compiled into the Christian Scriptures.

In Christian Scriptures 1, much of our focus will be on the figure of Jesus as we study the Gospels. We will consider just *who* this man was, or *is*, and *what* he really taught, and *how* we are supposed to ascribe significance to his life, words, deeds, and death – and reputed resurrection. Advances in archeological discovery, historical research and textual scholarship allow us to survey this person from a critical vantage point hitherto unavailable to previous generations. And yet, Jesus of Nazareth stubbornly refuses to disclose himself fully and transparently under the microscope of scholarship. Was he an ethical teacher? Or a miracle-worker and exorcist? Or a great prophet? Or a political revolutionary? Or a spiritual mystic? Or an apocalyptic firebrand? Or was he a madman, or a fraud? How did he come to be executed as a despised blasphemer in the opinion of his contemporaries, and a subversive criminal as far as the Roman authorities were concerned?

And the greatest mystery of all: *How did an artisan from an obscure part of the Roman Empire within a relatively short period come to be regarded as the 'Chosen One', the resurrected Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, such that men and women would die for their confession of faith in him — this human being they believed to be an incarnated revelation of God, who bridged the chasm separating heaven and earth, between time and eternity?*

These are some of the questions we will be examining during the course of this class. Starting with the social, political and religious world in which Jesus lived, we will examine the portrayal of Jesus in the four Gospels, noting their particular emphases, before trying to get behind the Gospels to catch a glimpse of the 'historical Jesus.'

The literature found in the Christian Scriptures was composed and edited over the course of approximately 50-70 years. Students will be exposed to the literary genres, forms and motifs that comprise these writings. The texts will be placed in the historical, cultural, sociological and religious milieu of their audience. Students will learn a variety of techniques, which are helpful in the analysis of Biblical texts: these include analysis of form and structure, as well as genre, historical and redaction criticism. Students will

be encouraged to put knowledge to use as they apply Biblical interpretation to theological construction and pastoral practice.

Course Objectives

Students who have completed the Christian Scriptures classes will hopefully be able to:

- Distinguish between various Interpretative Methods used to Study, Examine, Analyze, Research, and Comprehend Biblical Texts
- Understand the Historical Context within which the Religious Texts of Early Christianity were Created and Read / Heard
- Appreciate the various Literary Genres found in the texts of the Christian Scriptures, and Understand their Functions for Interpretation
- Be aware of the Social and Cultural Issues Relevant to the Formation of the Texts and their Ethical Implications
- Comprehend the Significance, Relevance, and ongoing Influence of the Christian Scriptures Texts on Contemporary Life and Debates, both inside and outside of the Church

“B.C.” or “B.C.E.”? “A.D.” or “C.E.”?

When did “B.C.” and “A.D.” change to “B.C.E.” (Before the Common Era) and “C.E.” (Common Era), and why? Is this more unnecessary political correctness from the Academy? As with “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” the method of dating history according to the epochs of “Before Christ (B.C.)” and “Anno Domini (A.D.)” (Latin for *“In the year of our Lord”*) imposes a Christocentric standard of time on historical eras...which was convenient for a period when Christianity was the religion of the dominant (European) colonial powers...but is more and more untenable in a diverse and multicultural world (in both the academy and among everyday folks) where the majority of the global population does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the be-all-and-end-all of human history. Furthermore, the ancient monk responsible for this division of eras wasn’t that great at math, and it’s more likely than not that Jesus was born approximately 6-4 B.C.E. (just before the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E.). Nevertheless, the Christian calendar – like the English language – has become the default standard of globalization; but to mitigate the religious and cultural dominance of one particular system of measuring time, the preferred, *more neutral* universal terminology used today is “B.C.E.” (Before the Common Era) and “C.E.” (Common Era).

This class will be divided up as follows:

Part One: Introduction to the World of the Christian Scriptures

2 Weeks

Part 1 of the Class will focus on situating Jesus of Nazareth in the world in which he lived, taught, ministered, suffered and died. It is a strange, ancient, exotic (to us) world at the intersection of indigenous Judaism and the occupying external influence of the Roman Empire and Hellenistic (Greek) Culture. In order to properly understand the Gospels and the stories that they relate, it is vital to appreciate the intricacies of these intersecting worlds – the politics and structures of power, socio-economic divisions, competing religious factions, and cultural worldviews that shaped and defined ancient

Palestine, creating a unique set of circumstances within which the “Jesus Movement” gestated and thrived.

Part Two: The Four Gospels

8 Weeks

Part 2 of the Class will be a detailed examination of each of the four Gospels, in chronological order: **(1) Mark**, the earliest Gospel, used as a source by **(2) Matthew** and **(3) Luke** (collectively they form the “Synoptic Gospels” due to the huge similarities between these texts); and lastly **(4) John** (a vastly different text and portrayal of Jesus from the other three Gospels). The four Gospels are different accounts of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, and we will be focusing on identifying the different forms of storytelling and contrasting thematic emphases in each Gospel. We will also be delving into the socio-historical background of the communities of early Christians from which these Gospels emerged, and the specific concerns of these communities that the Gospels express and address.

Part Three: The Quest for the Historical Jesus

2 Weeks

Finally, at the end of the class we will be considering some of the issues that dominate what is known as “The Quest for the Historical Jesus” – namely, epistemological questions about method and analysis of Gospel textual criticism, and the varying portraits and categorizations of Jesus that emerge from this process.

Materials and Class Format

Pre-Semester Reading for the class is *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* by Marcus Borg & N.T. Wright [2nd Edition] (HarperOne, 2007).

Our main text for this class is the Bible, and we will be using the following translation and edition:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with the Apocrypha (5th Ed.) edited by Michael Coogan (Oxford, 2018)

[The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* is currently \$40 new in hardback on Amazon, and contains a wealth of useful introductory essays, maps, and annotations – and will be required for all Bible Classes at SfM. As this text is thick and will be used a lot, I strongly recommend the more durable hardcover, not the paperback.]

As we study the four Gospels, we will also be using the following text:

Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading by Richard Burridge [3rd Edition] (Eerdmans, 2014)

Handouts and Outlines will be provided, as well as access to other Online Resources. Ultimately, what you get out of the class will depend on what you decide to put into it. You are strongly encouraged to complete assigned Readings before each class.

This Course uses a “Flipped Classroom” methodology – rather than the instructor lecturing students in order to transmit content, students are encouraged to have absorbed primary content (Bible readings) through weekly reading, enabling secondary reflection and analysis to take place through guided classroom discussion in a seminar-style setting.

All being well, additional classes on Christian Scriptures 2 will be offered in Spring 2027, which will cover the Book of Acts, the Pauline Literature, the General Epistles, and the Book of Revelation.

Course Instructor

David Moseley, Ph.D. Teaches Religious Studies & Philosophy and is Director of Global Education at The Bishop’s School, La Jolla. Dr. Moseley holds undergraduate and graduate Degrees in Law, Theology and Philosophy from Oxford University; and a Doctorate in Theology & Music from Cambridge University. Dr. Moseley taught Theology and Biblical Studies at the University of San Diego for 16 years; he was formerly Theologian-in-Residence at St. Paul’s Episcopal Cathedral in San Diego; a founding member of the Faculty of the San Diego Diocesan School for Ministry, where he taught all the Biblical Studies classes for a decade; he has Led Trips to the “Holy Land”; and Teaches Adult Education Classes in Parishes throughout the County, and online through his “The Bible ... *for Smarties!*” program. Dr. Moseley’s teaching style is enthusiastic, fun and engaging – he uses multimedia techniques and an interdisciplinary approach to fully explore the depth and nuance and inexhaustible fascination that he finds in the study of Biblical texts.

Registering for the Class

The cost of the class is \$295 (for 12 x 2-hour online classes ... a total of 24 hours of class time). For those of you who have taken “The Bible ... *for Smarties!*” classes before, the discounted cost of the class is \$250. [Scholarships are available upon inquiry.]

If you'd like to take the Christian Scriptures 1 class, you can either Venmo me the money (@David-Moseley-17); or pay using Zelle [my Zelle account is listed under my cell# (858) 414-8169 and/or my personal email address: djsmoseley@aim.com]; or mail a check made out to "David Moseley" with "CS1 – Fall 2026" in the Memo Line, depending on your preference:

Dr. David Moseley
P.O. Box 27031
San Diego
CA 92198

****Zoom Recordings** of other “The Bible ... *for Smarties!*” classes are available for purchase, with access to all supporting materials (assignments and reading lists, outlines, slide shows, and other resources). Classes that are available on Zoom recordings include:

1. A Short Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics (Three 2-Hr Classes)
2. Hebrew Scriptures 1 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Torah & Historical Books
3. Hebrew Scriptures 2 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Prophets & The Writings
4. Christian Scriptures 1 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – The Christian Gospels
5. Christian Scriptures 2 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Pauline Literature & All the Rest
6. The Parables of Jesus (Six 2-Hr Classes)
7. The Nicene Creed (Six 2-Hr Classes)

Please email me if you have any interest in purchasing access to these recordings.

And please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

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Best Wishes for the Class!

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Schedule

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

- 1.1 Introduction to the World of the Christian Scriptures 1
14th September
- 1.2 Introduction to the World of the Christian Scriptures 2
21st September

PART 2: THE FOUR GOSPELS

- 2.1 The Gospel of Mark 1
28th September
- 2.2 The Gospel of Mark 2
5th October
- 2.3 The Gospel of Matthew 1
12th October
- 2.4 The Gospel of Matthew 2
26th October

2.5 The Gospel of Luke 1
2nd November

2.6 The Gospel of Luke 2
9th November

2.7 The Gospel of John 1
16th November

2.8 The Gospel of John 2
30th November

PART 3: THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

3.1 The Quest for the Historical Jesus 1
7th December

3.2 The Quest for the Historical Jesus 2
14th December

****PLEASE NOTE**** - There will be **NO** classes on the following Mondays:

- 19th October
- 23rd November