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My PhD Seminar: Early Christian Apocrypha

A couple of weeks ago I shared on the blog the syllabus for my undergraduate class, "Jesus in Scholarship and Film." Periodically I'll discuss on the blog what I'm doing in that class. But I thought today I could provide the syllabus for my other course, a PhD Seminar that meets for three-hours, once a week, to discuss "Early Christian Apocrypha." Here it is!

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SEP
2013

31 

Reli 801: Early Christian Apocrypha

Instructor: Bart D. Ehrman

Fall 2013

The Early Christian Apocrypha are an amorphous collection of early and medieval Christian writings, many of which were forged in the names of the apostles. They have long been a subject of fascination among scholars. In this course we will consider a selection of the most interesting and historically significant examples.

Closely connected with the apocrypha are the writings that eventually made it into the New Testament; part of the course will involve understanding the process by which some early Christian texts came to be included among the canonical scriptures whereas others came to be excluded.

We will engage in four major tasks in the course: discussing primary sources; considering major textual, historical-critical, and interpretive issues; evaluating relevant secondary literature; and translating several Greek texts.

Course Requirements:

The success of the seminar depends on your active and enthusiastic **involvement**. During our weekly session you will be expected to engage your colleagues in intelligent discourse; this will presuppose your having read the assignments.

There will be forty minutes devoted to **translation** of relevant Greek texts at the beginning of each class period.

Each student will be responsible for making a major 50-minute **class presentation** on the textual, critical (e.g., author, date, provenance, sources, etc.), and interpretive issues relating to one of the texts indicated in the reading list below.

* The presentation is to presuppose the basic knowledge about these texts that other students will have acquired from the week's reading assignments (including the texts themselves, in translation),

* Ten minutes (no more) of the presentation is to involve distributing and discussing a comprehensive, partially annotated, bibliography of the secondary literature on the text in question. Annotations are to be 1-2 sentences in length, for as many of the items as possible in the bibliography. Please place an asterisk next to the three or four most important items on the list, to indicate

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Bart's Recent Posts

- Physical Persecution and the Physical Resurrection of the Dead
August 18, 2017
- A Resurrection for Tortured Jews (2 Maccabees)
August 17, 2017
- Interpolations and Textual Corruptions: The Blurry Lines
August 15, 2017
- Is There Evidence that Luke Originally Did Not Have the Story of Jesus Birth?
August 14, 2017
- Did Luke's Gospel Originally Have The Birth Story? Readers Mailbag and a Blast from the Past
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- A New Blog Podcast!
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- Was Resurrection a Zoroastrian Idea?
August 10, 2017
- Daniel and a New Doctrine of Resurrection from the Dead
August 9, 2017
- A Resurrection of the Dead in the Prophet Ezekiel?
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- Charges and Anti-Supernatural Biases! Readers Mailbag August 6, 2017
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- The Origins of Heaven and Hell
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- The First Apocalypse: The Book of Daniel
August 1, 2017
- A New Attack on My Views
July 31, 2017
- A New Genre in Jewish Antiquity: The Apocalypse
July 30, 2017

where one should begin research.

* Thirty to thirty-five minutes of the presentation are to involve a summary and evaluation of the hot textual, critical, and interpretive issues debated in the field, indicating what the problems are, why they have been perceived to be problems, and what data have been adduced to solve them. This presentation is to be based on an intimate knowledge of previous scholarship and should not be a simple regurgitation of data (which students will already be familiar with) but should present the evidence for the data, its strengths and weaknesses, the complications that it contains, and the scholarly disputes it has generated.

* Five to ten minutes (no more) may be allowed for class discussion of the issues.

You are to write a five-page, double-spaced **book review** of Bruce Metzger's now-classic, The Canon of the New Testament. This will be due on Sept. 23. The review should be about 80% summary and about 20% evaluation (the evaluation may be given en route, or at the very end). For examples of book reviews, see recent issues of the Journal of Theological Studies, Journal of Early Christian Studies, Review of Biblical Literature, etc.

You will be expected to write a **term paper** of 15-20 pages, on any topic of your choice pertaining to the text on which you made your presentation.

* You should plan to talk with me about your topic early in the semester (within the first two or three weeks) and to spend a good portion of the semester working on it (on the whole, the weekly reading assignments are not particularly onerous to allow you to do your own work on your presentation and final paper).

* The paper is to be thoroughly researched and documented strictly according to the conventions of the SBL Handbook of Style (although a full bibliography, in this case, will be expected).

* A final draft of the paper is due on Nov. 18, the second to last class of the term. The draft is not to be **rough** but **polished**, absolutely as good as you can make it. I'll expect that you will be working on it for most of the term. I will mark up this final draft with comments. You are then to revise it accordingly, and turn in the finished product on December 13 (the date of the final exam) at 4:00.

* Both deadlines are firm. Late drafts and/or finished products will automatically be marked down a full letter grade (i.e., an H to a P, a P to an L, and an L to the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth).

That night we'll have an end-of-term party for the class; pizza and beer on me.

Textbooks

Bart Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše. Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Bart Ehrman. Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics. New York: Oxford, 2013.

J. K. Elliott. The Apocryphal New Testament. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

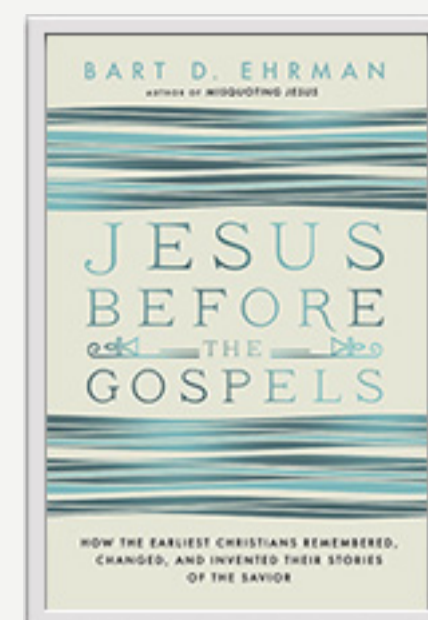
Bruce Metzger. The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development and Significance. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.

William Schneemelcher (revision of Edgar Hennecke). New Testament Apocrypha, revised edition. Tr. R. McL. Wilson. 2 vols. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991, 1992.

Evaluation

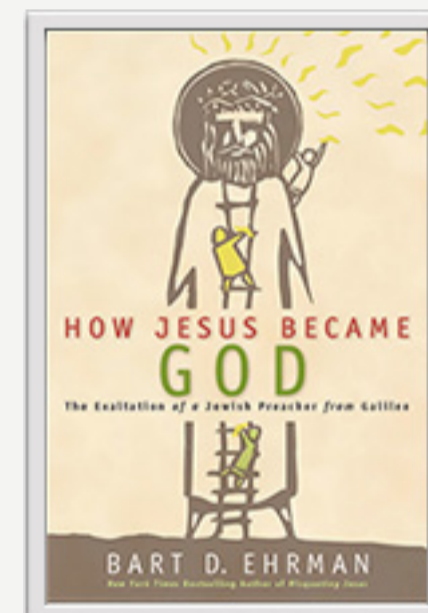
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Class Schedule

Aug. 26 Introduction to the Course

Sept 2 NO CLASS. Labor Day. Read Metzger and Prepare for second class.

9 Jewish-Christian Gospels and Gospel of the Egyptians;

TRANSLATION: All the texts for class, from Ehrman/Plese

READING:

- Stephen Patterson, "New Testament Apocrypha," in the Anchor Bible Dictionary 1, 294-97;
- Schneemelcher, "General Introduction," 1. 9-76
- "Introduction générale" in François Bovon and Pierre Geoltrain, Écrits apocryphes chrétiens, pp. xvii-lviii.
- "Jewish-Christian Gospels" in Hennecke-Schneemelcher, 1, 134-78, 209-15;
- Introductions to all the Gospels for the week in Ehrman/Plese
- Andrew Gregory, "Jewish- Christian Gospels," in Paul Foster, ed., The Non-Canonical Gospels. London: T&T Clark, 2008; pp. 54-67.

16 Papyrus Egerton 2, P Merton 51, P Oxy 210, P Oxy 840, P Oxy 1224, P Oxy 4009, PVind G2325 (Fayûm fragment),

TRANSLATION: All the texts for class, from Ehrman/Plese

READING:

- Stephen Gero (1992). "Apocryphal Gospels: A Survey of Textual and Literary Problems." Pages 3969-3996 in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. Principat II.25.5. Edited by W. Haase. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter
- Introductions to all fragments for the class in Ehrman/Plese;
- Harold Idris Bell and T. C. Skeat, eds. (1935). *The New Gospel Fragments*. London: Trustees of the British Museum.
- Tobias Niklas, "Papyrus Egerton 2," Thomas Kraus "The Fayum Fragment," and Michael Kruger, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840," all in Foster, ed., Non-Canonical Gospels, pp. 139-70.

23 Protevangelium Jacobi.

BOOK REVIEW OF METZGER DUE.

TRANSLATION: Protevangelium 1-5

READING:

- Introductions to Protevangelium in Ehrman/Plese, in Elliott, and in Hennecke-Schneemelcher;
- P. A. van Stempvoort,. (1964). "The Protevangelium Jacobi: The Sources of its Theme and Style and Their Bearing on its Date." Pages 410-26 in *Studia Evangelica*. Edited by F. L. Cross. Vol. III. Texte und Untersuchungen 88. Berlin: Akademie Verlag;
- Émile de Strycker,. (1964). "Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problemes critiques et exegetiques." Pages 339-59 in *Studia Evangelica III*. Edited by F. L. Cross. Texte und Untersuchungen 88. Berlin: Akademie Verlag..
- Ron Hock, The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995; pp. 13-20.
- Ehrman, Forgery and Counterforgery, pp. 484-93.

30 Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

TRANSLATION: Protevangelium 6-9

READING:

- Introductions to Infancy Thomas in Ehrman/Plese, in Elliott, and in Hennecke Schneemelcher.
- Gero, Stephen. (1971). "The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: A Study of the Textual and Literary Problems." *Novum Testamentum* 13: 46-80.
- Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, pp. 90-99.
- Tony Chartrand-Burke, "The Infancy Gospel of Thomas," in Foster, ed., *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, pp. 126-38.

Oct. 7 Coptic Gospel of Thomas.

TRANSLATION: Protevangelium 10-14

READING:

- Introductions in Elliott, Hennecke-Schneemelcher, and Ehrman/Plese;
- Ron Cameron, "Thomas, Gospel of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, VI, 535-40;
- April Deconick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation*. London: T&T Clark, 2006; pp. 2-24.
- R. T. Fallon and R. Cameron, "The Gospel of Thomas: A *Forschungsbericht and Analysis*," *ANRW* 2.25.6, 4195-4251;
- Antti Marjanen, "Is Thomas a Gnostic gospel?" in Risto Uro, ed., *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 107-39;
- Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 230-37, 338-44, 415-18.

14 Gospel of Peter

TRANSLATION: Protevangelium 15-19

READING:

- Introductions in Elliott, in Hennecke-Schneemelcher, and in Ehrman/Plese;
- Raymond Brown, "The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority," *NTS* 33 (1987) 321-43;
- McCant, Jerry. "The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered." *New Testament Studies* 30; (1984): 258-73.
- Paul Foster, *The Gospel of Peter*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010; pp. 57-91; 115-74.
- Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 324-32

21 The Secret Gospel of Mark

TRANSLATION: Protevangelium 20-25

READING:

- Introductions in Elliott and in Hennecke-Schneemelcher;
- Quentin Quesnell,. (1975). "Mar Saba Clementine: A Question of Evidence." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37: 48-67;
- Morton Smith,. (1976). "On the authenticity of the Mar Saba letter of Clement: Reply to Q. Quesnell." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38: 196-200;
- Quentin. (1976). "Reply to Morton Smith." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38: 200-3; 4.
- H. Criddle, (1995). "On the Mar Saba Letter Attributed to Clement of Alexandria." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3: 215-220; 5
- Charles Hedrick. (2003). "The Secret Gospel of Mark: Stalemate in the Academy." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 2: 133-145;
- Guy Stroumsa, (2003). "Comments on Charles Hedrick's Article: A Testimony." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 2: 147-53.
- Bart D. Ehrman, (2003). "Response to Charles Hedrick's Stalemate." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 2: 155-63.
- Roger Viklund and Timo Paananen, "Distortions of the Scribal Hand in the Images of Clement's Letter to Theodore," *Vigiliae Christianae* 67 (2013) 235-47.

TRANSLATION: Infancy Gospel of Thomas 1-8

READING:

- The following articles in J. N. Bremmer, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of John*. (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995):
 - J. Bremmer “Women in the Apocryphal Acts of John” (pp. 37-56);
 - Pieter J. Lallerman, “Polymorphy of Christ” (pp. 97-118);
 - Gerard Luttikhuisen, “A Gnostic Reading of the Acts of John.” (pp. 119-52).

Nov. 4 The Acts of Peter

TRANSLATION: Infancy Gospel of Thomas 9-19.

READING:

- Introductions in Elliott and in Hennecke Schneemelcher;
- Judith Perkins. “This World or Another? The Intertextuality of the Greek Romances, the Apocryphal Acts and Apuleius’ Metamorphoses.” *Semeia* 80 (1997): 247-60.
- And the following articles from Jan Bremmer, ed., The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic Miracles, and Gnosticism (Leuven: Peeters, 1998):
 - J. N. Bremmer, “Aspects of the Acts of Peter: Women, Magic, Place and Date” (pp. 1-20);
 - G. P. Luttikhuisen, “Simon Magus as a Narrative Figure in the Acts of Peter,” (pp. 52-64);
 - M. Misset-van de Weg, “‘For the Lord always takes Care of his own’. The Purpose of the Wondrous Works and Deeds in the Acts of Peter” (pp. 97-110);
 - J. Bolyki, “Head Downwards-: The Cross of Peter in the lights of the Apocryphal Acts...” (Pp. 111-22).

11 The Acts of Paul

TRANSLATION: The Acts of Thecla, 1-15

READING:

- Introductions in Elliott and in Hennecke-Schneemelcher;
- Melissa Aubin. “Reversing Romance? The Acts of Thecla and the Ancient Novel.” Pages 257-72 in Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative. Edited by R.F. Hock. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.
- Margaret E. Howe. “Interpretations of Paul in the Acts of Paul and Thecla.” Pages 33-49 in Pauline Studies. Essays presented to Professor F.F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday. Edited by D.A. Hagner and M.J. Harris. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- And the following articles in Jan Bremmer, ed., The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996):
 - J. Bollók, “The Description of Paul in the Acts Pauli” (pp. 1-15);
 - M. N. Bremmer, “Magic, Martyrdom and Women’s Liberation in the Acts of Paul and Thecla” (pp 60-74);
 - T. Adamak, “The Baptized Lion in the Acts of Paul” (pp. 60-74);
 - J. Boyki, “Events after the Martyrdom” (pp. 92-106);
 - P. J. Lalleman, “The Resurrection in the Acts of Paul.”

TRANSLATION: Gospel of Peter 1-8

READING:

- Introductions in Elliott and in Hennecke-Schneemelcher;
- Rist, M. "III Corinthians as a Pseudepigraphic Refutation of Marcionism." *Ilf Review* 26 (1969): 49-58.
- Klijn, A.F.J. "The Apocryphal Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians." *Vigiliae christianae* 17 (1963): 2-23.
- Burnet, Régis. "Pourquoi avoir écrit l'insipide épître aux Laodicéens?" *NTS* 48 (2002): 132-41.
- Hill, C. E. "The *Epistula Apostolorum*: An Asian Tract from the Time of Polycarp." *JECS* 7 (1999): 1-53;
- Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, pp. 425-32, 434-45; 520-27;

25 No Class: Polish off drafts of papers.

Dec. 2 The Apocalypse of Peter

TRANSLATION: Gospel of Peter 9-14

READING:

- Introductions in Elliott and Hennecke-Schneemelcher;
- Richard Bauckham, (1988). "The Apocalypse of Peter: An Account of Research." Pages 4712-50 in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. Principat II.25.6. Berlin: de Gruyter;
- Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 445-51.

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Comments

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Adam0685 *September 8, 2013*

What is your current or next book project? Is it the commentary on the gospels of the second century?

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Bart Ehrman *September 11, 2013*

Yup. But it will be years in the making, and I'll be doing at least one

other book en route.

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RonaldTaska *September 8, 2013*

Wow! Looks like a lot of “heavy” reading. Your students are lucky to have your help.

I have been trying to learn about the canon of the Old Testament as well as that of the New Testament. Is Metzger’s book something a fairly educated Barnes and Noble reader can grasp or is it only for very advanced readers? Do you think the hypothesized Council of Jamnia never existed and that, hence, it played no role in the selection of the Old Testament canon?

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Bart Ehrman *September 10, 2013*

Metzger deals only with the NT. His book is broadly understandable, but not scintillating unless you are really into it, like scholars tend to be! No, I don’t think Jamnia dealt with the OT canon (though there was indeed a council).

[Log in to Reply](#)



James Chalmers *September 8, 2013*

I hope you may be able to let us know whether Morton Smith was putting one over on us.

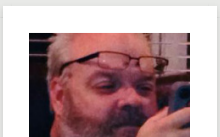
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Bart Ehrman *September 10, 2013*

My *guess* is that he was. I talk about it in Lost Christianities and in my article I cite in the syllabus.

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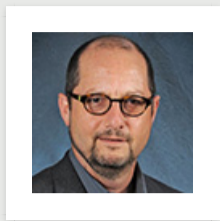


gmatthews *September 11, 2013*

Wouldn't a more accessible article be the one you participated

in for Biblical Archaeology Review last year (or the year before)?

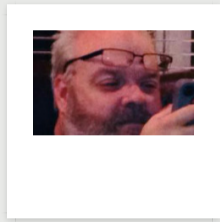
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Bart Ehrman *September 11, 2013*

Sorry, you lost me. Accessible article on what topic?

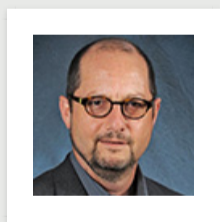
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gmatthews *September 12, 2013*

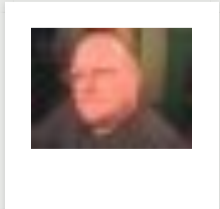
The above question was asking if you might ever discuss Morton Smith “putting one over on us” which I presumed was in reference to Secret Mark. You said to see the article you referenced and if I was reading your syllabus correctly the article you meant was from a scholarly journal. Sure one can pay for those articles individually, but with my comment I meant that there was an article from BAR a year or two ago, perhaps longer than that, where you and a few others argued for and against the authenticity of Secret Mark. BAR is found in quite a few libraries and like me I’m sure there are a lot of other blog members who subscribe. As such I meant that it might be easier / cheaper to find a copy of the BAR article.

Perhaps I’m misremembering what the point of the article was, but I know that I’ve see several quotes in BAR attributable to you speaking out against Secret Mark’s authenticity.



Bart Ehrman *September 12, 2013*

Ah, right! Yes, I decided to go for more scholarly articles instead of the more public ones.



dewdds *September 8, 2013*

“...and an L to the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth).”

Cute. Especially for a course on early Christianity. 😊

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toddfrederick *September 9, 2013*

I am very interested in these documents. I hope you will write about some of them in this blog from time to time as your course progresses (for “Dummies,” such as I, of course :D).

I read your discussion of Luke with great interest. I did not have any questions of significance to ask since what you presented was very thorough. Thank you for taking the time to present that to us.

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billgraham1961 *September 9, 2013*

For your graduate classes, I assume one has to know NT Greek. What about Aramaic, French, German and Latin? Are those necessary as well?

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Bart Ehrman *September 10, 2013*

Grad students need Greek before being admitted. They need to pick up French and German while with us, if they don't have it yet. They need one other ancient language (Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic, Latin, etc.). And we urge them to pick up yet one more.

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Peter *September 9, 2013*

“Both deadlines are firm.”

Any chance you will do a post on some of the better excuses you've got for overdue assignments over the years?!

I'm sure, since you are such a nice person, you always relent in the end!!

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Bart Ehrman *September 10, 2013*

Interesting idea for a post. I have a *great* one. But no, I usually don't relent. Tough love....

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Wilusa *September 9, 2013*

Whew! This is certainly daunting! I'm sure the Ph.D. candidates who get through it will become highly-respected scholars.

A question: What if two or more students initially want the same term paper topic? Do you require them to select different ones?

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Bart Ehrman *September 10, 2013*

That rarely happens (since they have to do class presentations on different texts, and their term papers are usually on the texts they present on in class, since they've already done so much work on it). But when it does, that's not a problem for me.

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jebib *September 10, 2013*

talk about getting your moneys worth!

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CaliforniaPuma *September 11, 2013*

None of my professors ever wrapped up a course with comped beer and pizza. Therefore, they must have all been teetotalers, indigents, or tightwads. Prost!

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Bart Ehrman *September 11, 2013*

Well, these are grad students after all!

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FrankB57 *September 11, 2013*

Geez Louise!! Thank you for positing the syllabus. Bart, can you tell me if a typical seminary student would have the same type of course or is what you're offering this Fall specific to graduate work in "Religious Studies"? I'm interested because my wife has been impressed by a local pastor whose claim to fame is that he's "never been to seminary," spoken with the intonation that it is an admirable trait.

As an apostate fundamentalist-type, evangelical (Arminian), I've restrained myself from declaring to my wife that avoiding seminary could suggest that her pastor may be something like an "imposter" (or worse) as he's never submitted himself to wrestling with more difficult concepts than what is popular among evangelicals like him and his current flock. And it is a large church he pastors in our area.

I'm going to bet that your reply will be along the lines of "well, first, there is no typical seminary student or seminary . . . and academic standards vary widely."

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Bart Ehrman *September 11, 2013*

Yes, I'm a firm believer in education. The opposite of knowledge is ignorance. And education is meant to promote knowledge....

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Brad Billips *September 11, 2013*

I would love a post on how you teach your students to read the ancient NT Greek manuscripts. I have tried with the help of the Codex Sinaiticus website tools. Even learning Koine Greek has helped but not much. Not spacing between words, all caps, etc. Makes it hard. Do they read these text fluently? Like reading a book normally or is slower (much slower)?

[Log in to Reply](#)



Bart Ehrman *September 11, 2013*

Interesting idea. I'll think about posting on it. Short answer: if you have someone to guide you, and you know Greek, you can learn to read Sinaiticus in an hour. (Try cheating with a text of a printed Greek NT beside the page of Sinaiticus, and just figure out how the letters/words "work")

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Jacobus *September 11, 2013*

Seems quite enjoyable and a lot of work. The only thing that I would give a miss if I were a student of yours is the pizza and beer.

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bobnaumann *September 12, 2013*

Wow! And I thought my grad course in Quantum Electrodynamics was tough!

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cwspeaks *December 10, 2014*

I have William Schneemelcher's collection of the apocrypha as I thought this was the definitive edition. Any reason why you make the other editions required for your class other than for their introductions? Do you find something in particular problematic with using Schneemelcher's collection as your primary?

[Log in to Reply](#)



Bart *December 12, 2014*

It's a great two-volume work, and I use it with my graduate students. My more recent book, on just the Gospels, gives more up-to-date scholarship in the introductions and translations that are (in my judgment) far more readable (his are German translations that have then been translated into English, and are not very user friendly in my view.)

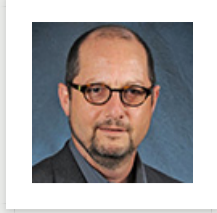
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cwspeaks *December 12, 2014*

Yeah, translations of translations can be a bit of a problem. I've got your translation on order. Is Schneemelcher still the best source for the apocryphal Acts and Apocalypses? If not, what is your recommendation?

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Bart December 13, 2014

I prefer the translations and introductions in J. K. Elliott, The Apocryphal New Testament. (It is, however, briefer)

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BART D. EHRMAN DISCUSSION FORUM

Don't forget, when you join the "The Bart Ehrman Blog," membership includes access to a very active discussions forum password secured for members only. While Bart normally cannot moderate the forum due to limited time, it provides members the opportunity to bounce thoughts off each other, to discuss recent posts by Bart, or any number of other insightful and topical discussions. **You don't want to miss out on this unique interaction feature!**

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