

REL 351 | The Geography of Faith: Paul, and the Emergence of Christianity in the Aegean Summer 2025

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Course Description

The purpose of this class is to introduce students to the work and thinking of Paul as well as the social impact the emergence of Christianity had on the Greco-Roman world. This will be accomplished with a combination of lectures and discussion on both the life and teaching of Paul of Tarsus as well as a general overview of Greco-Roman religion and society. Students will be introduced to Paul's letters and the social world implied therein. The introductory classroom experience in Athens will equip students to explore the ancient streets and byways of some of the major urban sites of the ancient Greek world - that is, we will begin our study in a classroom in Athens, the major classical sites in Athens and then continue in the ancient streets and byways of some of the major cities where Paul worked and taught: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. In this environment students will also be introduced to life in the Greek city as best as we can understand the first century of the Common Era. The class will also make visits to Eleusis and Delphi, which were major centers of Greek religious life in the First Century. We will be aided in our study with visits to museums like the Archeological Museum in Athens and Thessalonica. In addition to our focus on the life and work of Paul we will also have occasion in the course of our studies to explore the impact that Paul's work ultimately had in the region with visits to various Byzantine sites, which will include the New Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessalonica, and a trip to the Monastic site of Meteora among others from Late Antiquity.

Students will participate in an intensive seminar setting with assigned readings and discussion of primary texts, as well as on-site discussion and conversation. The course will conclude with a take-home open book final exam essay of short essays. Students will be evaluated 60% on attendance, participation, and discussion; 40% on the final exam.

The following is a syllabus indicating the topics of study and respective readings:

Introduction: The Jewish and Greek Religious Background

1. The Origins of Christianity in the Resurrection Experience and the Jesus Movement

The Book of Acts (if you haven't read the NT, perhaps also Luke or Matthew)
 Newsome, *Greeks Romans and Jews*, "The Spread of Hellenism"
 Esler, *The Early Christian World*, "Mediterranean Context of Early Christianity"
 Barrett, *NT Background: Selected Documents* "Rabbinic Literature and Rabbinic Judaism (For in class discussion)

2. Greek Religion

Homeric Hymn to Demeter
Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo
 Martin, "Greco-Roman Philosophy and Religion", in Esler, *The Early Christian World*.
 Barrett, *NT Background: Selected Documents* "Mystery Religions"
 Rice & Stambaugh, *Sources for the Study of Greek Religion* on Delphi, Eleusinian Mysteries, Dionysian Mysteries and the Kabeiroi at Samothrace
 Burkert, *Greek Religion*, "Individual Gods," "Mystery Sanctuaries: The Kabeiroi and Samothrace, Eleusis, and Bacchica"

3. Women and the Greco-Roman World,

Kramer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons and Monastics* (excerpts)
 Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice* "Part 1" pp. 9-58

The Life of Paul

4. Paul, a Pharisee, Conversion and Questions of Chronology

Galatians 1 (Acts 9)
 Martin, "Paul and the Development of Gentile Christianity", in Esler, *The Early Christian World*.

The Birth of a Mixed Jewish and Gentile Community

5. "The Antioch Incident" Galatians

1-2 (Acts 13-15)

Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, "The Urban Environment of Paul"

Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, "The Social level of Pauline Christians"

Paul's Missionary Journeys in Asia Minor and Greece

6. Ephesus: Mission to the Gentiles

Galatians 3-5, Philemon (Acts 16:1-10)

Murphy O'Connor, *St. Paul's Ephesus*

Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, "The Formation of the Ekklesia"

7. Thessaloniki: The Church and Persecution

1 Thessalonians, (Acts 17)

Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians*, "Founding the Christian Community"

Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Mediterranean Piety*, "The Setting in Thessalonica"

H. Koester, "Archeology and Paul in Thessalonike" in *Paul and His World*

8. Philippi: Christian Identity and The Role of Women in Paul's Churches

Philippians (Acts 16:11-40)

Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice* pp. 59-128

H. Koester, "Paul and Philippi" in *Paul and His World*

9. Corinth: Christians among Gentiles

(Acts 18)

The Corinthian Correspondence

Balch, *Paul and the Greco-Roman World*, "Paul, Households, and Families" Murphy

O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*

10. Back to Athens: Conclusions

The books on the syllabus will be available either online or in the CYA library.

Reading List:

This list comprises a set of books which provide background to and a greater understanding of what will be discussed in class. This list is a suggested bibliography on the subjects which we will touch upon during our discussion and is not meant to be either required or exhaustive.

Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1995.

This is the classic and erudite survey of Greek religion in antiquity.

Hans-Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. An excellent study of the cultural contrasts engendered by the emergence of Christianity in the Greco-Roman-World

The Religious Context of early Christianity. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

This is a general introduction to religion life of the pre-Christian Greco-Roman world; basically an excellent reference work, a compliment to Burkert.

Helmut Koester, *Paul and His World* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007

A collection of articles on the historical and archeological context of Paul's writing from one of the premiere scholars of archeology and the New Testament.

Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. Yale, 2nd ed. 2003. This is the classic social-scientific study of urban Pauline Christianity.

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul a Critical Life*. Oxford University Press, 1996. A major monograph on the life of Paul.

Paul: His Story. Oxford University Press, 2006.

This is a short highly speculative but learned and entertaining account of Paul's travels. *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archeology*. 3rd ed. Liturgical Press, 2002.

Calvin Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*

This is a clear and erudite introduction to Paul's writings, highlighting the importance of reading these texts as letters which relate to specific cultural contexts.

E. P. Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford, 2001

The title says it all, a good short introduction to Paul, especially his theology.

N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* Fortress Press, 2009 A

good introduction to Paul's theology.

Paul A Biography Harper One 2018

A new, very readable yet at times almost novelistic biography of Paul. It incorporates Wright's decades long work on Paul's theology and sets it in the context of a chronology that sometimes contradicts a long term consensus on the order of Paul's letters. The dominant position among NT scholars has been to try to keep Paul's own writings and the Book of Acts at arms length, yet Wright does as good a job as any attempting to harmonize any discrepancies in chronology.

Course Bibliography

Balch, David L. "Paul, Families, and Households". In *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*. Edited by Paul J. Sampley. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003.

Barrett, Charles K. *New Testament Background: Selected Documents*. San Francisco: Harper, 1995.

Burker, Walter. *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*. Translated by John Raffan. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.

Esler, Philip F., ed. *The Early Christian World*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Hesiod. *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*. Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most. Loeb Classical Library 57. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Jewett, Robert. *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986.

Klauck, Hans-Josef. *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles*. Translated by Brian McNeil. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Klauck, Hans-Josef. *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Koster, Helmut. *Paul & His World: Interpreting the New Testament in its Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1007.

Kramer, Ross S., ed. *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

Malherbe, Abraham. *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011.

Meeks, Wayne A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Metzger, Bruce M. and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *Paul: A Critical Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *Paul: His Story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008.

Newsome, James D. *Greeks, Romans, Jews: Currents of Culture and Belief in the New Testament World*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.

Portefaix, Lilian. *Sisters Rejoice: Paul's Letter to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Seen by First-Century Philippian Women*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988.

Rice, David G. and John E. Stambaugh. *Sources for the Study of Greek Religion*. Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.

Roetzel, Calvin J. *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Sanders, E.P. *Paul: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Wright, N.T. *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

Wright, N.T. *Paul: A Biography*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018.