

## **Religious Studies 403: Reading and Special Study**

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**Zoom Office Hours:** Meeting Room details on Canvas  
Initially Open: 9:30-10:15 AM on Wed and 12-12:30 PM on Fri;  
Or by appointment

This independent study is geared toward making more focused and then advanced progress in learning and using key approaches and methods within religious studies, and within biblical or New Testament/early Christian studies in particular. Given the student's increasing interest in receptions and afterlives, the matter of method or approach is quite important to consider. This independent study, then, will in part serve as a survey of the different methods or approaches scholars take to NT/EC materials. Secondly, we will also learn what and how scholars and ultimately you might think through relationships to the "Historical Jesus" strains of scholarship, and what we can know historically about people in these movements, in all of their complexity and variety. If the focus of this independent study remains on the figure of Judas, and particularly on the impacts or afterlives of these materials, then we will also need to do key readings in the history of anti-Jewish uses of the gospels and especially the figure of Judas.

### **Course Objectives:**

- ~Gain intermediate familiarity with key concepts, arguments, and developments within and across a range of recent scholarship on methods and approaches in New Testament and Early Christian studies
- ~Develop reading, writing, and thinking skills to deal with complicated materials.
- ~Understand interesting and important practices, ideas, even people differently (and hopefully better) with the help of these approaches or methods.

### **Course Expectations:**

- ~Come to meetings prepared. This means having done the reading and any summative writing, and thus having worked to understand it and think about its applications to ancient texts, people, histories. Be sure to take thorough notes when doing the reading on your own.
- ~Be prepared to contribute substantially to conversations, even when there are things you do not understand (because there will be). Try to be precise about what you do and do not understand and why. In our open conversations, work to help each other.
- ~Be timely and respectful in as many ways as possible (including ending use of phones/laptops/tablets in meetings without a specified reason, requested in advance).

### **Planned Activities (with Grading Value):**

- ~Preparation/Participation (**25%**): This includes weekly levels of preparation and participation before and during meetings, and will primarily be measured by in-class spoken and then written activities. We will start with weekly meetings to discuss readings and their potential applications to ancient biblical and other emerging Christian texts, and then adjust as needed. Effort is primarily expected, but accuracy, complexity, and relevance will be recognized.

~Shorter Written Assignments (30%): Throughout the semester there will be both opportunities and occasionally requirements to write briefly about selections and then in relation your developing interests. This will include summary essays of even approaches you do not think you will want to pursue for intermediate and final projects, now or in the future. In all written activities, aim for precision and clarity, and please cite and quote materials accurately and helpfully.

~Midterm/Intermediate Written Project (15%): Further explanation about this will be given as we approach the mid-term week, but for now anticipate an integrative and connective activity that will involve more than one of our readings.

~Penultimate Report on Final Project (5%): A week or two before the final projects is due, we will set expectations for and communicate about the status of the projects in a developed way. This is not a preliminary check-in about where the project is going, but an activity that accounts for how the final project is almost done. Further explanation about this will be given after the midterm.

~Final Project (25%): Further explanation will be given about the possibilities for this project below and throughout the semester, but it will be a cumulative indicator of what the student has learned about approaches and methods and how to use them in New Testament and Early Christian studies.

### **University Statement:**

We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's [Disability Services](#) office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or [dsd@bsu.edu](mailto:dsd@bsu.edu).

### **Student Academic Ethics Policy:**

Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's [academic integrity website](#) (Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University [Student Academic Ethics Policy](#).

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty.

### **No Use of Generative AI Permitted**

Given the above policy, all work conducted and/or submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the Ball State University's [Student Academic Ethics Policy](#). You may not collaborate with or make use of ChatGPT or any other generative AI applications at any time to develop materials submitted in this course. This is one version of presenting others' work as your own (see above).

In plainer terms: lying, cheating, and stealing are wrong. Representing the work of others as your own in any way is an instance of lying, cheating, and/or stealing and is also therefore wrong.

Think for yourself, learn from our course resources as best as you can, so you can think for yourself more, and thus more clearly and honestly. Plenty of forces in the world are trying to steal these things from you – do not let them.

### **The Learning Center:**

The Learning Center offers free Tutoring and Academic Coaching for many courses at Ball State. Students can make appointments for online (Zoom) or in-person (NQ 350) appointments. To make an appointment, visit [myballstate.bsu.edu](http://myballstate.bsu.edu) and click on “Navigate” in the Academic Tools section, or just go directly to [bsu.navigate.eab.com](http://bsu.navigate.eab.com).

### **The Writing Center:**

All writers improve with practice and feedback, so as a student in this course, you are encouraged to use the Writing Center (in Robert Bell 295 during weekdays, Bracken Library First Floor West in the evenings, or online during any of our regularly scheduled hours) to get additional feedback on your writing.

The Writing Center offers free planning, feedback, and accountability sessions (in person and online) to all students composing essays, reports, reflections, research projects, web content, lesson plans, slideshows, poster presentations, resumes, and other digital or print texts. To schedule a free appointment to discuss your writing, go to [bsu.edu/writingcenter](http://bsu.edu/writingcenter). Online and in-person appointments are available; however, plan ahead because appointments book quickly!

### **The Basic Needs Hub:**

If you are having difficulty affording enough food, do not have a safe and reliable place to sleep, and/or experiencing an emergency or crisis, help is available through the [Basic Needs Hub](#). The Basic Needs Hub has information, resources, and provides individualized support to students. To talk with a supportive staff member about your experience, receive one on one assistance, or learn more about resources, you can submit a [Basic Needs Assistance Form](#).

### **Attendance and Making Progress in Times Like These:**

Students are expected to attend all of their meetings. A missed meeting should be a relatively rare exception.

As most of the goals and descriptions for this course indicate, your participation and engagement are essential for this class. Success in this course depends upon a regular ability to prepare, think about what you prepared, and engage with others.

These are, of course, irregular times. When you are healthy and not exposing yourself or others to risk, you should maximize your chances at success by attending and arriving to meetings on time and ready to engage. In the rare instance when you need to miss an in-person class meeting, please let me know as soon as possible. The last few years have taught all of us to be flexible, but also to appreciate opportunities to do things that matter when we have them.

Religion matters in SO MANY ways in the world right now. I promise to work with you to provide ongoing learning opportunities over the entire semester; I hope you can promise to try your best in admittedly difficult circumstances. We will continue to measure your learning progress in a realistic manner and, where necessary, advise when the lags or lacks in that progress become significant and need reassessing.

### **General Expectations:**

All students will be expected to treat each other, the professor, and themselves with courtesy, respect, and dignity. In these times we all could use a bit more grace and patience with and from each other too. Please consider how your actions can help reduce the risks for yourself and all those around you. Let's aspire to these considerations and make our limited time together seriously fun.

Disruptive or disrespectful behavior of any kind in class (whether it be eating, making excessive noise, talking over another person, ringing or audibly vibrating electronics, or most seriously not observing university COVID protocols) will negatively affect one's final course grade. Unless previously arranged, open laptops, tablets, or smartphones are not permitted during class meeting time. Thus, we have a strong preference that you use the paper version of the main course textbook. The professor reserves the right to determine what actions count as disruptive or disrespectful.

Students will be responsible for obtaining, reading, retaining, and bringing all readings for the week to class meetings. Do not wait to acquire these materials.

### **A Word (or More) on Sensitive Subjects:**

By its nature, the topics of this course often involve sensitive, personal issues that might challenge, excite, disturb, turn on, turn off, or otherwise generate discomfort. Some of these can even happen simultaneously, and what pleases you might make someone else turn green (and vice versa). All of this is to be expected; we do not need to reach for consensus in this course or settle difficult issues. This might prove trying to some or even all of us sometimes. Yet, this is also the excitement of the course and the questions raised. Many of us struggle to understand, in the best sense of both of these words.

As a result, in our meetings and beyond, I ask you to be sensitive to these difficulties that you or others might be experiencing. Use good judgment about discussing particulars of meetings to those outside of our class meetings. In-class, we can all act respectfully without agreeing and all should be involved without thinking the same way or same thing. If you become aware of heightened personal, emotional, or political reactions in our shared learning experiences, please also operate with a "benefit of the doubt" toward others, who may be doing their best to figure things out from their own perspective(s) (just like you are, from another perspective).

### **Required Texts (to Start):**

~*SBL Study Bible* or *Westminster Study Bible* (NRSVue) (YES! You really do need one of THESE particular Bibles.)

~Crossley/Keith's *Next Quest for the Historical Jesus*

~Then, at least two of the following:

McKenzie/Hayes, *To Each Its Own Meaning*

Anderson/Moore, *Mark and Method*

Marchal, *Studying Paul's Letters*

~Upon completing these, and based on interest and motivation, we will craft the list of readings for the second half of the independent study

~Other required (and some optional) reading will be posted to the course Canvas site.

Be sure to check this out as soon as possible and let me know of problems in the first 2 weeks of our meetings. Beyond this, technology problems or user errors will not serve as legitimate excuses for the lack of preparation by participants. Please plan ahead!

**Outline of Assignments Schedule** (with weekly meeting dates and initial writing deadlines, to be filled out together in the opening weeks of the semester, all subject to change):

Weekly meetings, at first covering several chapters of Crossley/Keith's *Next Quest for the Historical Jesus* per week