

Early Christianity Exam Study Guide

The exam questions shall be selected from AMONG the following. Not every question here will appear on the exam itself, but be prepared to answer any of these. In your answers, be sure to draw on the readings as well as on lecture and class discussion.

Short Answer

--What is monotheism?

--What is a synagogue, and why were synagogues established in Jewish communities?

--Describe each of the following interpreters of 1st century Judaism: Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, Essenes, and Kingdom of God people.

--What is a Gentile?

--What is a messiah?

--What are the synoptic gospels? Why are they called 'synoptic'?

--Why do many biblical scholars believe that the synoptic gospels are more historically reliable than the gospel of John (the Borg handout is helpful here)? And why did early Christians almost decide not to include John in the New Testament?

--To what religion did Jesus belong?

--What is a parable? Why might Jesus have taught using parables?

--What event is being celebrated by the Christian festival of Easter? Briefly describe how two different Christian denominations celebrate it in Jerusalem.

--What happened during Pentecost (according to the book of Acts)? Why is it significant for Christians?

--What happened in 70 CE, and why was it significant for Judaism?

--What is apocalypticism?

--What is baptism?

--What is a catechumen?

--What is a martyr?

--What is a liturgy?

--What are some of the leadership roles in the early Christian community, as named in the Didache and in the Wilson reading?

--According to the Didache and Wilson, what were the main rituals in an early Christian worship service?

--According to the Didache, what's the difference between a good and a bad teacher or prophet?

--What is a heresy? Who defines what counts as a heresy?

--What is the difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism?

Essay Questions

1) Describe some of the key features of the life and teachings of Jesus as they appear in the synoptic gospels.

2) Describe various titles, images, and meanings of Jesus among early Christians, including those found in each of the assigned scripture readings (including the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary).

3) Discuss why Paul was so significant in early Christianity. Citing and interpreting Romans 5:1-6:14, describe some of the ways Paul reinterpreted Judaism in order to make sense of Jesus' death and resurrection for both Jews and Gentiles.

4) Describe Gnosticism and some key Gnostic beliefs. Then discuss how Gnosticism and the teachings of Marcion each contributed to the formation of the Christian biblical canon.

5) Discuss the status and roles of women among the disciples of Jesus and among early Christians as reflected in Luke 8, the Gospel of Mary, and in the early church handbook called the Didache. What are some of the reasons why the leadership and status of women seems to have been restricted within the first few centuries of Christianity?

6) Discuss the main reasons for the occasional persecution of Christians in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Roman Empire, then briefly narrate the story about the martyrdom of Perpetua. What other commitments or loyalties were at odds with

being a Christian, in Perpetua's eyes? How did her father view her choices? Are you more sympathetic with Perpetua or with her father, and why?

7) Discuss two basic types of Christian attitudes towards Judaism. According to Wilson, what were some of the reasons why Christians couldn't entirely reject Judaism and Jewish scriptures (even if some Christians, like Marcion, wanted to do so)?