

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE
REL/JSP 311
Spring 2012
Mondays and Wednesdays 12:45-2:05
Hall of Languages 205

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Purpose

The Bible is arguably the most important and literature of all time. Its style, images, characters, themes and language have influenced western writing for thousands of years. The purpose of this course is to introduce this ancient literature and to examine it using modern methods of literary theory. The course presents the major genres of biblical literature, including myth, narrative, law, poetry, gospels, epistles and apocalyptic writing. We will consider the forms of these literary types and how particular texts both resemble other examples of their type (from both biblical and other ancient texts) and where they deviate from it to make a unique, artistic work.

Goals

By the end of this course, you should:

- have familiarity with the primary genres of biblical literature
- have an understanding of the literary methodologies of academic study of the Bible and
- be able to apply these methodologies to biblical texts

Required Texts:

1. The main text for this course is a Bible in modern translation. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New Revised Standard Version) is available for purchase at the bookstore. This version provides notes on difficult passages, as well as other secondary information. You are not required to purchase it, but you may find it useful to have. You may also use another modern version (not the King James Version). If you use a Jewish Bible, you will need to find a version of the New Testament. Regardless of which version you use, **you must bring a Bible to class.**
2. Many secondary readings will come from *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction* (5th edition) by J. Gabel, C. Wheeler, A. York and C. Citino (Oxford University Press, 2006). It is available at the bookstore.

3. We will also read *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* by Yairah Amit (Fortress Press, 2001).

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard or can be found online.

Class Requirements:

1. Prepared participation in class sessions (10%). Come to class having read the assignments. **You must bring a Bible to every class.**

2. a. Six 2 page papers (30% -- 5% each) on the texts and reading for class. These will be due on Wednesdays at the end of the class session. You may choose which 6 weeks to hand these in (1/25, 2/1, 2/8, 2/15, [Note: Monday 2/20 instead of Wednesday], 2/29, 3/7, 3/21, 3/28, 4/11, 4/18, 4/25). Late papers will not be accepted.

b. Two 6-7 page papers (40% -- 20% each) on the texts and readings for class. You may decide which of the weekly papers you would like to extend to a longer discussion.

3. A class presentation (20%) of an academic article that combines literary theory with a biblical text. Instructions and topics will be handed out separately.

Plagiarism: The University has made the following statement about plagiarism:

“Syracuse University sets high standards for academic integrity. Those standards are supported and enforced by students, including those who serve as academic integrity hearing panel members and hearing officers. The presumptive sanction for a first offense is course failure, accompanied by the transcript notation “Violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.” The standard sanction for a first offense by graduate students is suspension or expulsion. Students should review the Office of Academic Integrity online resource “[Twenty Questions and Answers About the Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy](#)” and confer with instructors about course-specific citation methods, permitted collaboration (if any), and rules for examinations. The Policy also governs the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. Additional guidance for students can be found in the Office of Academic Integrity resource: [‘What does academic integrity mean?’](#)”

Plagiarizing in this class will result in failure and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. You may study with fellow classmates, but all written materials must be your own work with proper citations. For further information, see the links below and consult with the instructor or the TA.

Related Links:

The Academic Integrity Policy: <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Twenty Questions and Answers about the Academic Integrity Policy: <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/faculty-resources/>

What does academic integrity mean?: <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/what-does-academic-integrity-mean/>

Class Topics and Assignments

Please note that you may miss classes and extend assignments for religious observance provided you give notification by the end of the second week of class. You may do so online until the end of the second week through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances. SU's policy can be found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.html.

W. 1/18 Introductions: “The Bible” and “Literature”

Gabel: Chapter 1 and pp. 15-35; **Amit:** Chapters 1 and 2

HEBREW BIBLE

Issues for Understanding the Bible as Literature:

M. 1/23 Comparative Literature: Creation Myths

Bible: Begin reading Genesis 1-11; **Blackboard:** Selections from Enuma Elish and Atrahasis; **Gabel:** 42-43; 45-59

W. 1/25 Source and Redaction Criticism

Amit: Chapter 3; **Gabel:** 106-120

Focus Text: Genesis 2:4a-3

M. 1/30 Story and History

Bible: Begin Genesis 12-35; **Gabel:** 61-71; **Amit:** chapters 7 and 9

W. 2/1 Genre Analysis: Form and Function

Blackboard: Robert Alter, “Biblical Type Scenes and the Uses of Convention” from *The Art of Biblical Narrative*

Focus texts: Genesis 16:1-21 and 21:8-21

Biblical Narratives and Biblical Themes:

M. 2/6 The Call Narrative

Bible: Gen 12, Exod 3-6, Judges 6:11b-17; I Sam 3:2-18; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Ezekiel 1-3; **Amit:** chapter 5

W. 2/8 The Barren Woman and the Chosen Child

Bible: Gen.17:15-22; 18:1-15, 25:19-26, 30:1-24; I Samuel 1-3; Judges 13; **Amit:** Chapter 4; **Blackboard:** Ackerman, “Child Sacrifice: Returning God’s Gift” in *Bible Review*

Focus text: I Sam 1:1-2:10

M. 2/13 The Jew in the Foreign Court: The Novella of Joseph

Bible: Genesis 35-50; **Amit:** chapters 6, 10, 11

On Monday 2/13 in the afternoon there will be a public lecture by Professor Christophe Nihan (University of Lausanne, Switzerland) on the topic, “The Ritual Laws of the Pentateuch and the Social Memory of Israel in the Persian Period.” For 5% extra credit, attend the lecture and write a 150 word summary.

W. 2/15 The Threatened Hero:

Bible: Genesis 22, Exodus 1-4 (esp. 4:24-36), Genesis 32:22-32;
Blackboard: “Structuralist Criticism” in John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*

Focus texts: Genesis 22 and 32

M. 2/20 Intertexts: The Foreign Guest

Bible: Genesis 19, Genesis 24 and Judges 19; Genesis 22 and Judges 11; **Blackboard:** “Staying the Night: Intertextuality in Genesis and Judges” by David Penchansky in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*

Focus texts: Genesis 19 and Judges 19

W. 2/22 The Exodus Story

Bible: Exodus 1-15; **Amit:** chapter 8

Biblical Law

M. 2/27 Biblical Law and Form

Bible: Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 28; **Gabel:** 51-52; **Blackboard:** Richard Elliot Freedman, “Torah and Covenant” from *The Oxford Study Bible*

W. 2/29 Biblical Law and Biblical Story

Blackboard: James W. Watts, “Rhetorical Strategy and the Composition of the Pentateuch”

Focus text: Exodus 12:1-28

Poetry

M. 3/5 Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

Bible: Begin reading Job, especially 1- 11, 29-31, and 38-42; **Gabel:** 35-41; **Blackboard:** Robert Alter, “The Nature of Biblical Poetry”

W. 3/7 Poetry and Wisdom: Job

Bible: Finish reading Job; **Gabel:** 134-142, 147-151

Focus Text: Job 42

M. 3/12 NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

W. 3/14 NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

M. 3/19 Poetry and Prophecy

Bible: Amos; **Gabel:** 121-133; **Blackboard:** Petersen, “Literary Perspectives” from *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*

W. 3/21 Themes and Motifs in Prophecy

Bible: Micah 6:1-16; Hosea 1-4; Isaiah 1-2, 5-7, 40, 52:13-53:12; Ezekiel 16, 37

Focus text: Isaiah 1

Apocalyptic

M. 3/26 Apocalyptic Literature and Daniel

Bible: Begin reading the book of Daniel; **Internet:** “The Book of Daniel” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/explanation/bdaniel.html> and “Apocalyptic Literature in Judaism and Early Christianity” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/primary/white.html>

W. 3/28 Daniel

Finish Reading Daniel and Online Readings

Focus text: Daniel 10

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Gospels and their Forms:

M. 4/2 Mark

Bible: Begin reading the Gospel of Mark; **Gabel:** 224-235; **Blackboard:** “The New Testament and Greco-Roman Writing,” 561-570

W. 4/4 Mark

Bible: Finish reading Mark. **Blackboard:** “Reader Response Criticism: Figuring Mark’s Reader: What or Who Determines the Meaning of Mark?” by Robert M. Fowler in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 59-94

Focus text: Mark 8

M. 4/9 Birth Stories: Matthew and Luke

Bible: Matthew 1-6; Luke 1-3; **Gabel:** 235-240

W. 4/11 John

Bible: John 1:1-18; chapters 3, 6, 8-9, 14-16, 20; **Proverbs** 8; **Gabel** 240-243

Focus text: John 1:1-18

M. 4/16 Parables

Bible: Mark 4:1-34, 12:1-12; Luke 10:30-35, 12:13-21; 15:8-32
Blackboard: “Parables” from *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*.

Letters

W. 4/18 Epistles

Bible: Galatians, Philemon; **Gabel:** 240-243; **Blackboard:** “The New Testament and Greco-Roman Writing,” 570-77

Focus Text: Galatians 4:21-5:1

New Testament Apocalyptic

M. 4/23 Revelation

Bible: Begin reading Revelation (all); **Gabel:** 158-167; **Online:** Begin reading “The Book of Revelation – Overview” at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/revelation/white.html> (you can skip the section “Augustine’s Reinterpretation”) and “Understanding the Book of Revelation” (you can omit the section “Were the Christians being Persecuted?”) at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/explanation/b Revelation.html>

W. 4/25 Revelation

Finish reading Revelation and online readings

Focus text: Revelation 20

M. 4/30 Conclusions