Religious Studies 277
The Bawdy Bible
Spring 2008
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Description
A survey of texts and stories in the Bible that are unusual and deal with or have been interpreted as dealing with sex and related topics.

Please note that this course will involve candid discussion of sexual topics. If you find such subjects inappropriate, you should not take this course.

Course objectives
1. To sharpen critical-reading and interpretive skills through the careful assessment of scholarly interpretations of biblical texts.
2. To improve familiarity with the Bible and some of its less familiar parts.
3. To enhance appreciation of the Bible as a collection of writings that derive from and deal with human life in all of its dimensions, sensual, sordid, and sublime.

Textbooks
2. Most readings are accessible electronically on the Rhodes network via the Shortcut to Acad_Dept_Pgm on fileserver1>Relig_Studies>McKenzie>Public>Bawdy Bible>Readings). You will need to print these out and bring them to class for discussion.

Requirements and evaluation
1. Attendance, participation, and quizzes (25%)
Each student’s participation is evaluated for each class on the following 4-point scale: 3 = student was prepared with proper materials, including readings printed out and spoke at least once with a meaningful comment or question; 2 = student was attentive but did not speak or spoke but did not have the proper materials; 1 = student was present but inattentive, dozing, disruptive; 0 = student was absent or so inattentive that s/he may as well have been absent.

Quizzes over the daily readings, both biblical and interpretive, will be given frequently throughout the semester. These will be mostly 10-point, true/false or multiple choice in format. Quizzes cannot be made up. The final quiz grade will factor the quiz average including absences and the quiz average excluding absences.

Attendance policy: Each student is allowed two “free” unexcused absences for the semester. A student’s final grade is reduced one letter for each unexcused absence beyond two. After five unexcused absences, a student will be asked to withdraw from the course; after six, a student will normally receive a failing grade for the course. Excused absences are those for illness, bereavement, sanctioned College activity, or the like. Notification of the reason for an absence is required beforehand or immediately following the absence in the case of unanticipated illness or emergency.
2. Examinations (50%).
A mid-term exam (25%) over the material in Genesis is scheduled for Feb. 25. The final exam (25%) will focus on the material covered after the mid-term but may also draw on Genesis. The final is scheduled for April 23.

3. Interpretive analysis (25%).
Each student is required to submit a critical analysis of an unusual interpretation of some biblical passage. The interpretation must be published in a journal or book and written by a recognized interpretive authority (scholar, clergy member, known author, etc.). Potential interpretations may be found by consulting such resources as Biblical Archaeology Review, Bible Review, New Testament Abstracts, Old Testament Abstracts, Reader’s Guide to Religious Periodical Literature, and other such listings or publications. A list of three potential interpretations must be submitted for approval and is due on or before Feb. 29 (before Spring Break). Topics are approved on a first-come, first-served basis.

The interpretive analysis should be 5-10 pages each in length (typed, double-spaced) and should follow this format: (a) Read the Bible passage, then write 1-3 page summarizing it and explaining what you understand it to mean. Mention problems or difficulties with the passage as you understand it. (b) Read the article, then write 1-3 more pages summarizing the article. Explain the problems with the usual interpretation as pointed out in the article, and give the main arguments in favor of the new interpretation. (c) Finally, spend 1-3 pages critiquing the new interpretation. Explain what points you find convincing and where you think the weaknesses lie. This will entail doing some research—checking out other texts that the interpreter cites and seeking help for technical arguments or those based on languages you don’t know.

The interpretive analysis is due in my office during class time on April 4. Papers turned in late will be penalized. Papers more than 24 hours late will normally not be accepted.

Calendar
Wed. 1/9  Introduction to the course
Fri. 1/11  What Was Adam’s Bone?
Read: 1. Genesis 1-2
Mon. 1/14 Was “Knowledge of Good and Evil” Sex?
Read: 1. Genesis 2-3
3. Augustine, City of God, Book XIV.16-18, 22-23, available online at: www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm

Wed. 1/16 Was Eve Cursed?
Read: 1. Genesis 3

Fri. 1/18 Was Cain Depressed?
Read: 1. Genesis 4

Mon. 1/21 Martin Luther King day; no class.

Wed. 1/23 Did Gods and Humans Hook Up?
Read: 1. Genesis 6:1-4

Fri. 1/25 Was Noah a Drunken Pervert?
Read: 1. Genesis 5; 9-10

Mon. 1/28 Why Did Abraham Pimp Sarah?
Read: 1. Genesis 12; 20; 26:1-11

Wed. 1/30 Was Lot a Sexually Abusive Father?
Read: 1. Genesis 19
3. Randall Bailey, “The Incestuous Bastards,” in F. Segovia and M. Tolbert (eds.,) Reading From This Place (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 128-33.
Fri. 2/1  Was Isaac Molested By His Brother? Was Isaac an Exhibitionist?
Read:  1. Genesis 21; 26:1-11

Mon. 2/4  How Did Isaac and Rebekah First Meet?
Read:  1. Genesis 24; 1 Kings 18

Wed. 2/6  You Want Me to Touch Your What? and Does God Hit Below the Belt?

Fri. 2/8  Did Jacob Take an Ancient “Little Blue Pill”?
2. Read what Josephus said about mandrakes in his Jewish Wars, Book VII, Chapter VI, para. 3 – available at www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/war-7.htm
3. Check out the info on mandrakes at: www.panspantry.co.uk/mandrk.htm and www.redgrave.com/mandrake/mandrakery.htm
4. Also check out one of the following literary references to mandrakes: J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (New York: Arthur A. Levine, 1999), 92-93 or Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, Act IV, Scene 3.

Mon. 2/11  Did Jacob Use Sex Toys?
Read:  1. Genesis 30:22-43

Wed. 2/13  Did Dinah Marry Her Rapist?
Read:  1. Genesis 34; Judges 21
Fri. 2/15   How and Why Did Rachel Die?
Read: 1. Genesis 35:16-21; 42
     Complications: The Birth of Benjamin and Death of Rachel,” Jewish Bible

Mon. 2/18   Was Onan a Wanker?
Read: 1. Genesis 38
  2. For serious interpretations see: www.rtforum.org/lt/lt67.html and
     www.catholic-forum.com/saints/ncd06105.htm
  3. Thomas W. Laqueur, Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation (Zone

Wed. 2/20   Was Joseph a Transvestite? Was Potiphar a Eunuch?
Read: 1. Genesis 37; 39; 2 Samuel 13
  2. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., Jacob’s Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the
     Literature of Ancient Israel (Continuum, 2005) 177-96.
     142-46.

Fri. 2/22   Review session

Mon. 2/25   Mid-term exam

Wed. 2/27   Why Did God Try to Kill Moses?
Read: 1. Exodus 4:24-26
     of Moses,” in The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible
     (New York: Ballantine, 1997) 155-79;
  3. Pamela Tamarkin Reis, Reading the Lines: A Fresh Look at the Hebrew Bible

Fri. 2/29   Is Sex With Your Daughter Incest?
Read: 1. Leviticus 18; 20

Interpretive analysis topics due.

3/3 – 3/7   Spring Recess
Mon. 3/10  Is There Bikini Waxing in the Bible?
Read:  1. Deuteronomy 23; 25
2. Jerome T. Walsh, “You Shall Cut off Her … Palm”? A Reexamination
electronically at Barrett Library.

Wed. 3/12 Was Ehud a Sewer Rat?
Read:  1. Judges 3

Fri. 3/14 Who’s Zoomin’ Who?
Read:  1. Judges 4-5
*Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Fortress, 1989) 43-57.

Mon. 3/17 Were Samson and Delilah Into S & M?
Read:  1. Judges 13-16
2. Lori Rowlett, “Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah,” in
Ken Stone (ed.), *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (Cleveland: Pilgrim,

Wed. 3/19 Was Offering Your Daughters to Visitors Just Good Manners?
Read:  1. Judges 19

Fri. 3/21 Easter Recess

Mon. 3/24 Did Ruth and Boaz Have a Roll in the Hay at the Threshing Floor?
Read:  1. The book of Ruth

Wed. 3/26 Did David Collect Weird War Trophies?
Read:  1. 1 Samuel 18; 2 Samuel 6
Institute Communications 10; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931) 21-24
Fri. 3/28 Did David Have a Potty Mouth? Did He Marry His Sister?
Read: 1. 1 Samuel 25

Mon. 3/31 Was Bathsheba a Victim or a Seductress?
Read: 1. 2 Samuel 11-12

Wed. 4/2 Was Tamar Raped?
Read: 1. 2 Samuel 13

Fri. 4/4 Interpretive analyses due, No class.

Mon. 4/7 Was Jezebel Really That Wicked?
Read: 1. 1 Kings 16-19; 21; 2 Kings 9-10

Wed. 4/9 Is the Bible Pornographic?
Read: 1. Ezekiel 16; 23; Hosea 1-3

Fri. 4/11 Does the Bible Have a Recipe for Beer or an Erotic Song?
Read: 1. Psalms 45; Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)
Mon. 4/14 Was Jesus a Bastard?
Read: 1. Matthew 1-2; Luke 2

Wed. 4/16 Was Paul Gay?
Read: 1. Rom 1:18-27; 7:14-25; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 7:2 Cor 12:7; 1 Tim 1:9-11

Fri. 4/18 Sexual Images in Paul
Read: 1. 1 Corinthians 6; 1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Sam
2. Teresa J. Hornsby, *Sex Text from the Bible* (Skylight Paths, 2007) 57-59, 124

Mon. 4/21 Wrap up and review.

Wed. 4/23 Final exam

Fri. 4/25 Awards convocation, URCAS
PLEASE FILL OUT AND TURN IN BY THE NEXT CLASS THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BELOW THAT YOU HAVE READ THE SYLLABUS AND ARE AWARE OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS COURSE.

I, ___________________________________, hereby certify that I have read and understood the syllabus for Religious Studies 277, “The Bawdy Bible,” and that I agree to follow its stipulations.

Specifically, I understand the following:

1. the attendance policy of the course and how unexcused absences will adversely affect my grade;
2. the importance of class participation and how failure to prepare, inattentiveness, or failure to speak in class will adversely affect my grade;
3. the due dates for the submission of interpretive analysis topics and of the final paper and how lateness will adversely affect my grade;
4. the format for the interpretive analysis and how failure to follow it will adversely affect my grade.