

Religious Studies 101
The Bible: Texts and Contexts
Rhodes College/Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2006

Instructor:

Patrick Gray
Clough Hall 401-A
Office Hours: MW 8:30-10:00; TTh 2:00-3:30; and by appointment
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Time/Place:

Section 01 TTh 8:00-9:15/Palmer 203
Section 02 TTh 12:30-1:45/Palmer 203

Course Description:

This course is the first in the "Life: Then and Now" program, a three-course sequence by which students may fulfill the college's basic humanities requirement. The primary aim is to introduce students to the academic study of the Bible. This includes the study of the various historical, cultural, and social contexts in which it was written as well as a consideration of the different methods for interpreting it. A few basic questions will guide our reading in the course: What is the author trying to say? How is he or she trying to say it? And what understandings of God and the world does one encounter in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament? In trying to answer these questions, we not only want to examine the specific themes and arguments finding expression in these writings; we also want to cultivate skills and strategies for interpreting these and other texts. Objectives for the course include: (1) gaining factual knowledge and becoming familiar with terminology, methods, and trends in the critical study of the Bible; (2) developing skills in oral and written expression; and (3) learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

Required Texts:

Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd edition (=NOAB)
Arthur G. Patzia and Anthony J. Petrotta, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies*
*Additional required texts will be distributed in class and are noted in the syllabus.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation and Writing Exercises: Participating in class presupposes attendance and preparation. You are allowed three absences; after that, your grade will be lowered one-half of a letter for each absence. You must read all assigned texts. Class discussions are based on the assigned readings and writing exercises. Over the course of the term, students will hand in ten written responses to some aspect of the assigned reading. Completion of these short written exercises (one to two type-written pages) will facilitate class discussion. *Late papers will not be accepted.* However, students may drop the two lowest scores. *Together with class participation, these written responses will constitute 30% of your final grade.*

Book Review: Each student will write a critical summary and review (approx. four type-written pages) of a scholarly work on biblical studies. Students will choose from a list provided by the instructor. This paper is due on the last day of class *and will constitute 5% of your final grade.*

Quizzes: There will be ten short quizzes given over the course of the term. The dates for these quizzes will not be announced ahead of time *and may not be made up.* Students may drop the lowest score. *Quizzes will constitute 20% of your final grade.*

Mid-term Examination: The mid-term exam will include both objective and essay sections. *The mid-term exam will constitute 25% of your final grade.*

Final Examination: This will be an in-class exam during the week of finals and will include both objective and essay sections. *The final examination will constitute 20% of your final grade.*

****All work for this course should be completed in conformity with the College's Honor Code.****

Course Schedule:

- Aug 24 Course introduction
Aug 29 Prolegomena
 Reading: "Translation of the Bible into English" (NOAB, 466-471)
 Writing Exercise #1 due at class time
Aug 31 Modern and Pre-modern Approaches to the Study of the Bible
 Reading: "The Interpretation of the Bible" (NOAB, 488-497); "Introduction to the Pentateuch" (NOAB, 3-7)
 Writing Exercise #2 due at class time
Sept 5 "In the Beginning . . ."
 Reading: Genesis 1-11 (NOAB, 9-27)
Sept 7 Genesis: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 Reading: Genesis 12-35 (NOAB, 27-60); Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 44-48
 Writing Exercise #3 due at class time
Sept 12 "Let My People Go"
 Reading: Exodus 1-15 (NOAB, 82-105); "Cultural Contexts" (NOAB, 509-510)
Sept 14 Law and Covenant
 Reading: Exodus 19-23; 32 (NOAB, 109-116; 128-130); Deuteronomy 1-4; 31; 34 (NOAB, 240-251; 298-300; 307-308)
Sept 19 Entering and Settling the Land
 Reading: "Cultural Contexts" (NOAB, 510-511); Joshua 1-8 (NOAB, 314-328); Judges 1-21 (NOAB, 353-390)
 Writing Exercise #4 due at class time
Sept 21 The Rise of the Monarchy: Saul and David
 Reading: "Cultural Contexts" (NOAB, 511-512); 1 Samuel 8-20 (NOAB, 398-399; 409-433); 2 Samuel 1-7; 11-18 (NOAB, 446-458; 460-474)
Sept 26 The End of the United Kingdom
 Reading: "Cultural Contexts" (NOAB, 512-514); 1 Kings 1-4; 10-21 (NOAB, 487-497; 508-530); 2 Kings 17-25 (NOAB, 560-575)
Sept 28 The Prophets: The Nature of Prophecy in Ancient Israel
 Reading: "Introduction to the Prophetic Books" (NOAB, 969-973); Hosea 1-3; 11-14 (NOAB, 1278-1282; 1290-1294); Amos (NOAB, 1302-1317); Isaiah 5-11 (NOAB, 974-977; 984-995)
 Writing Exercise #5 due at class time
Oct 3 The Prophets: Responses to Crisis
 Reading: Jeremiah 1; 7-9; 26; 31 (NOAB, 1073-1076; 1088-1094; 1119-1121; 1126-1130); Isaiah 40-55 (NOAB, 1030-1056)
Oct 5 Wisdom Literature: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes
 Reading: Proverbs 1-9 (NOAB, 904-915); Ecclesiastes (NOAB, 944-958)
 Writing Exercise #6 due at class time
Oct 10 Wisdom Literature: Job
 Reading: Job 1-14; 38-42 (NOAB, 726-742, 768-774)
 Review for exam
Oct 12 Mid-term exam
Oct 17 Fall Break—No Class
Oct 19 Israel and the Nations
 Ezra 1; 9-10 (NOAB, 671-673; 683-687); Ruth (NOAB, 391-397); Jonah

(NOAB, 1321-1324)

Writing Exercise #7 due at class time

- Oct 24 The Apocrypha
Reading: "Introduction to the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books" (NOAB, 3-10); 1 Maccabees 1-4 (NOAB, 201-214); Prologue of Sirach (NOAB, 101-102); and either Susanna (NOAB, 194-197) or Bel and the Dragon (NOAB, 198-200)
- Oct 26 The Historical and Cultural Context of Early Christianity
Reading: "The NT Interprets the Jewish Scriptures" (NOAB, 474-478) "The Roman Period" (NOAB, 519-525)
- Oct 31 Introducing Jesus and the Gospels
Reading: "Introduction to the Gospels" (NOAB, 3-6); Mark (NOAB, 56-92); Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 1-27
- Nov 2 Matthew's Gospel
Reading: Matthew (NOAB, 7-55)
Writing Exercise #8 due at class time
- Nov 7 Luke's Gospel
Reading: Luke (NOAB, 93-145)
- Nov 9 The Acts of the Apostles
Reading: Acts (NOAB, 183-239)
Writing Exercise #9 due at class time
- Nov 14 Paul: 1 Corinthians and Philemon
Reading: "Letters/Epistles in the NT" (NOAB, 240-241); 1 Corinthians (NOAB, 267-292); Philemon (NOAB, 366-368)
- Nov 16 Paul: Romans and Galatians
Reading: Romans (NOAB, 242-266); Galatians (NOAB, 309-319)
Writing Exercise #10 due at class time
- Nov 21 No Class
- Nov 23 Thanksgiving--No Class
- Nov 28 The Letter to the Hebrews
Reading: Hebrews (NOAB, 369-385)
- Nov 30 Johannine Christianity
Reading: Gospel of John (NOAB, 146-182); 1 John (NOAB, 406-412)
- Dec 5 Revelation
Reading: Revelation (NOAB, 420-449)
Book Review due at class time
- Dec 7 Reading Day
- Final Exam: Section 01—Saturday, December 9, 1:00 p.m.
Section 02—Tuesday, December 12, 5:30 p.m.

Writing Exercises

Book Review (4 pages)

This paper is a critical summary and review of a volume relating to biblical studies. The options are listed below. In this exercise, approximately three-fourths of the paper should summarize the key points of the work. In the remainder of the paper, you should comment on such matters as how the author's ideas help you to see some text or topic we've studied more clearly and whether you find the argument compelling.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It?: A History of Scripture Through the Ages*

Jacob Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began: A Survey of Belief and Practice*

Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*

Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*

Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*

Steven McKenzie, *King David: A Biography*

Gail Streete, *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible*

J. E. Bowley, *Living Traditions of the Bible: Scripture in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Practice*

John Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac: An Introduction to the Qur'an for Bible Readers*

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

Topics for Short Papers (1-2 pages each)

1. "The most important thing to remember about the Bible is _____." Fill in the blank and then use this as the first sentence of a paper in which you explain and defend the claims it makes.

or

What is the Bible? If you had to answer this question in a page or two, what would you say? You do not need to consult the reading.

2. Consider Samuel L. Jackson's soliloquy in the closing scene of the movie *Pulp Fiction* (text will be provided). To what extent, if any, is it appropriate to think of it as an example of biblical interpretation?
3. At the beginning of *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard imaginatively retells the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 in four different ways. In what ways do these different versions help you to notice things about the story that you did not notice the first time you read it?

4. Does the Book of Judges have a happy ending?
5. Consider this statement: “The God one encounters in the message of Amos condemns economic inequality.” Would it make a good thesis statement for a short essay? If so, how would you go about supporting it? If not, how would you go about undermining it?

or

Are there prophets among us today? Who are they? Upon what sorts of factors does your answer depend? In your response, be sure to explain the understanding of prophecy you are assuming and how it compares with the nature of prophecy as it was understood in ancient Israel (cf. NOAB, 970-972).

6. Do bad things happen to good people? How would the author of Proverbs or the author of Ecclesiastes answer this question?

or

Imagine that a director is making a film version of the Book of Job. After reading Job 38-42—the divine speeches from the whirlwind, Job’s response to God, and the conclusion to the book in which God restores Job—he decides that this ending is somewhat confusing (what exactly is God trying to say to Job?) and not very compelling (how can God simply return everything to Job and think that will make amends?). You are commissioned to rewrite this part of the book for the screenplay (or an alternate ending for the DVD version). Briefly describe your changes to the director and explain why your version is to be preferred over the canonical one. If you think the original ending is satisfactory, then you should explain why it is preferable to other possible endings are problematic. (If you choose this topic, the paper is due on October 10.)

7. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward foreigners found in the books of Ezra and Jonah.

or

If you were in charge of casting for a film production of the story of Ruth, whom would you choose to play the title role? Who would play Boaz? Or, if you would prefer to work on a movie about Jonah, who would you cast in the lead role? In explaining your answer, you need to show your familiarity with the dynamics of the plot and the character traits of the biblical protagonists.

8. Choose a painting, a movie, or a poem that appropriates a scene from one of the gospels. Write a short paper in which you discuss the ways in which the writer/artist/director is (or is not) offering an interpretation of the ideas found in

- the gospel. What has been added? What has been deleted? What is different from what you imagined when you first read the account in the New Testament? What is the significance or the overall effect of any differences you have noted?
9. Consider the plot of Acts. What are its major “turning points,” that is, moments at which the story changes in a fundamental way. Choose two or three points and describe (a) why the event is so crucial for the development of Acts’ story and (b) what other events in Acts are made possible by this turning point.
 10. According to Paul in Romans 9-11, is it God’s predetermined plan that certain people are to be damned and certain people are to be saved, regardless of the choices they make? Why might one read Paul this way? If this is not what Paul is saying, then what is he saying here? Remember to cite specific passages in support of your answer.

Paper Guidelines

Below you will find general expectations for the papers you will write this semester. Sample papers are on reserve in the library. More detailed advice may be found on the departmental website (http://www.rhodes.edu/public/2_0-Academics/2_1_7-Religion/2_1_7_6-News/2_1_7_6_1-Paper.shtml):

*The A essay answers the question completely, drawing on the broadest range of sources. Its thesis is clearly stated and well-supported with carefully chosen examples. The analysis of evidence is thoughtful and, when appropriate, shows a degree of originality. It will be well-organized and free of grammatical and spelling errors. It will use an appropriate format and properly cite references.

*The B essay will be well-organized and will communicate well. The analysis may be flawed or be insufficiently supported by evidence. There may be small errors in format. There may be minor errors of structure or language.

*The C essay will lack analysis. The essay will summarize rather than analyze, and will be poorly organized. There may be significant errors in grammar or syntax. There may be significant problems with organization and communication.

*The D essay will be poorly organized with no analysis and poorly executed summary. The essay may simply be a collection of unsupported opinions or descriptions. There may be significant errors in grammar and syntax.

*The F essay will fail to meet the basic requirements for the assignment. Of special note is plagiarism. Failure to cite one’s sources, especially when quoting material, constitutes plagiarism. Suspected instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Council.

