

## **The English Bible as Literature**

Religious Studies 311

Spring Semester 2017

Manly Hall, Room 102

Monday and Wednesday 3:30-4:45

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### **Course Description**

This course offers a critical study of the Hebrew Bible (*TANAKH*) and the Christian Bible as distinct but related literary and theological traditions. Stories will be examined in light of their literary development and their cultural and historical contexts. Emphasis will be placed on narratives and especially the literary qualities of the texts (for example: the uses of symbol, metaphor, repetition; typology and myth; dialogue, narrative technique, and type-scenes), though other approaches to the study of the Bible will be encouraged and explored throughout the semester.

Goals of the course include:

- 1] an appreciation for the significance of *TANAKH* as a literary and theological tradition
- 2] an understanding of how the Christian Bible is constructed
- 3] an understanding of the literary and theological relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament
- 4] greater familiarity with some of the stories that have provided the foundation upon which Western Civilization has been constructed
- 5] the ability to engage Biblical texts as cultural artifacts, works of literature, and key texts in the lives of religious communities
- 6] the ability to demonstrate this engagement in well-written essays, written exercises, and in-class discussion.

### **Course Requirements**

This course is limited to 15 participants. Religious Studies 311 will be conducted primarily as an advanced undergraduate seminar with occasional lectures by the instructor and brief research presentations by the seminar participants. Each participant will contribute actively to the on-going, in-class conversation. Written work will include four (or more) 1-2 page reading response papers written in relation to assigned readings; one 5-7 page paper (to be critiqued, graded, and returned by the instructor before mid-semester); one 2-3 page proposal for the final essay; and one 8-10 page term paper—which may be a research paper, a work of literary criticism, or an interdisciplinary essay (e.g., "The Depiction of Mary in Western Painting and Song.") Final grades will take into account these factors: Class Participation 10%; Before and/or In-class Response Papers 20%; Prospectus 10%; Short Essay 25%; Final Paper 35%.

WRITING PROFICIENCY IS REQUIRED FOR A PASSING GRADE IN THIS "W-DESIGNATED" COURSE. Papers will be evaluated according to the standards of excellence

established in the first-year sequence of composition classes at the University of Alabama. You are encouraged to discuss writing issues with me during my office hours and by appointment. Additional recommended resources include the University's Writing Center and the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Edition* (2009).

### **Attendance Policy**

This course engages a community of scholars in active, in-class learning. Because the unfolding classroom drama is essentially unrepeatable, and because your classmates are depending upon you for support, criticism and feedback, individual absences from class will diminish the learning experience of all. After three absences, the student's final grade will be reduced by one increment for each additional absence. In other words, if your grade average was **A** at the end of the semester but you had five absences, your final grade for the course would be **B+**. **If attendance is a problem for you for whatever reason, you should not take this course.**

Class discussions are central to how this course shall proceed. Please come to class with written comments and questions that you would like us to pursue together. Good class discussion is a sustained, wide-ranging-yet-focused, fun and exhilarating inquiry. It increases in quality and intensity as the semester progresses. Participation involves attentive listening as well as talking. We have a great deal to learn from each other. Listen respectfully to your colleagues; respond to their questions; build upon their comments. This is what a "liberal education" in the classic sense is meant to be.

Academic honesty is expected of all students. All acts of dishonesty (plagiarism, cheating) in any work constitute academic misconduct. The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

To request disability accommodations, please contact Disability Services (348-4285). After initial arrangements are made with that office, please see me.

### **Required Text**

- 1] *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).  
NOTE: please purchase this Bible even if you own another one. The annotations and essays contained in this volume will be important for our work together.
- 2] A miscellany of pdfs, including articles from the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, to be posted on Blackboard.

### **Recommended Texts**

- 1] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981).
- 2] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

**The English Bible as Literature**  
Tentative Course Calendar  
Subject to Change based on Seminar Interest and Time Constraints

**OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION**

- January 11     The Syllabus
- January 16     No Class: MLK Day
- January 18     What is the Bible? What is the English Bible? What does "as Literature" mean?

**I. GENESIS: Patriarchy, Family, the Fruits of Cleverness**

- January 23     Stories of Origin: Creation, Fall, First Family  
Assignment: Genesis 1-11
- January 25     Stories of Origin: Violence, Flood, Tower  
Assignment: Genesis 1-11
- January 30     The Abraham and Sarah Cycle: Prophet and Proliferation  
Assignment: Genesis 12-24
- February 1     The Jacob and Rebekah Cycle: Cunning Salvation  
Assignment: Genesis 25-36
- February 6     The Joseph Cycle: Siblings Again  
Assignment: Genesis 37-50
- February 8     The Joseph Cycle: Into the Land of Egypt  
Assignment: Genesis 37-50
- February 13    So What Was Genesis About? How is the Bible Constructed?  
Assignment: Genesis 1-50 in review  
Lecture: The Structure of TANAKH, the Christian Bible, and the role of Biblical Criticism
- February 15    Library Visit

**II. EXODUS TO CONQUEST: Freedom, Law, Land**

- February 20    Moses and Joshua: Pharaoh's Midwife Crisis  
Assignment: selections from Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua  
**DUE: First Paper Assignment on "Genesis" (5-7 pages)**
- February 22    Moses and Joshua: Succession and Conquest  
Assignment: selections from Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua

### III. JUDGES AND SAMUEL: Anomie, Disorder, Kingship

February 27 Book of Judges: Of Concubines and Human Worth  
Assignment: selections from Judges

March 1 Book of Kings: Common Story: How David Unites the Kingdom  
Assignment: selections from Samuel

### IV. KINGS: Decline, Fall, the Rise of the Prophet

March 6 The Elijah-Elisha Cycle  
Assignment: I Kings 17 to 2 Kings 8

March 8 The Elijah-Elisha Cycle  
Assignment: I Kings 17 to 2 Kings 8  
**DUE: Proposal for Final Paper (2-3 pages)**

SPRING BREAK

### V. CHRONICLES/DANIEL/MALACHI: Let's Begin Again

Mar 20 Trajectories: Rebuilding the Temple  
Assignment: selections in Chronicles, Book of Daniel, Book of Malachi

Mar 22 Trajectories: Preparing the Way for the Lord  
Assignment: selections in Chronicles, Book of Daniel, Book of Malachi

### VI. GOSPEL

March 27 Mark Among the Gospels: Constructing the Kingdom of God  
Lecture: True Greatness, or A Gospel for Losers  
Assignment: Mark 1-16.8

March 29 Mark: Building the Kingdom of God with Words and Transformations  
Assignment: Mark 1-16.8

April 3 Mark: What about the Disciples?  
Assignment: Mark 1-16.8

April 5 Mark: The Unnamed, The Confrontation with Power, The Way to Galilee  
Assignment: Mark 1-16.8

RESEARCH WEEK

## VII. APOCALYPSE

April 17 Revelation: The Intolerable Present Wickedness and its Planned Destruction  
Assignment: Revelation 1-22

April 20 Revelation: Reconstructing the New Jerusalem as Old Eden  
Assignment: Revelation 1-22

## FINAL PRESENTATIONS

April 24

April 26

**THE FINAL PAPER IS DUE ON OR BEFORE APRIL 26, the last day of class.** Papers will be available for collection in the Religious Studies office (212 Manly Hall) during the month of May.

### **The English Bible as Literature** ***ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES***

#### **A. Written Assignments**

There are four types of writing assignments for this class.

##### 1] Short Critical Essay

One 5-7 page TYPED papers must be submitted. A critical essay is not a book report or a plot summary. You should find some aspect of the biblical story (or stories) that matters deeply to you, tell why this is significant to you, and try to convince your audience that it should be significant—perhaps even "religiously" so—to them. Consider this distinction from John R. Trimble:

The difference between a plot summary and a critical analysis is analogous to the difference between (a) an account of the highlights of the Vietnam War and (b) an explanation of how the United States happened to get into it, why we stayed in it, and what its effects have been on us. A plot summary begins with no thesis or point of view; it merely recapitulates the facts. A critical analysis, on the other hand, takes a viewpoint and attempts to prove its validity; its object is to help the reader make better sense of something he [or she] is already familiar with (Trimble, 25-26).

##### 2] Prospectus

This two-page TYPED assignment should describe: 1) what you plan to do for the final paper; 2) why you chose this particular topic; 3) why this topic matters to you personally; 4) what resources you intend to use in addition to the required texts; and 5) what aspects of the required texts are most helpful to your paper. The prospectus is due on March 8, shortly before or after which time you are welcome to make an appointment with me to discuss your proposal.

##### 3] The Final Paper

The final paper is your response to issues, ideas, problems, solutions, etc., that the course materials and your own research present to you. Topics for the final paper might involve (but are not limited

to): theological or literary themes; significant or "insignificant" (matriarchs, prophets, kings, the unnamed) characters in the Bible; uses of the *Hebrew Bible* in the New Testament; the role of women; relationships among canonical or non-canonical gospels; the eschatological trajectories of biblical narrative, etc. Careful attention should be given to the choice of a topic in conversation with other members of the class and with the instructor.

#### 4] The Reading Response Paper

At various (i.e., "random") moments throughout the semester and sometimes with advance notice, you will be asked to comment upon various readings from the Bible with particular reference to their inter-relationships. These brief, in-class compositions will explore such matters as: Who are the characters in a particular story and why are they important? What happened? Where did the events occur? Why does this story matter? What problems does the story pose or resolve? How and where are the concerns of this story developed elsewhere in the canon?

### **B. General Notes on Written Work**

- \* All writing except for in-class response papers should be TYPED and double spaced.
- \* Recommended fonts include Courier, Palatino, Times, Bookman, and Century Schoolbook.
- \* Type size should be 10, 11, or 12.
- \* Margins on the paper should be 1 to 1 1/2 inches on the sides and 1 inch at the top and bottom.
- \* Papers longer than one page in length should have page numbers.
- \* A cover sheet should be stapled with the body of your paper. It should contain the following information:
  - 1) title of paper
  - 2) your name
  - 3) the date
  - 4) the course name and number
  - 5) the professor

For example, *in the middle of the page*:

Worse Off Ruthless:  
The Significance of the Book of Ruth  
in Relation to Biblical Canon

and *in the lower right corner of the page*:

Terri Mysteria  
April 26, 2017  
REL 311: The English Bible  
Professor Trost

\* Papers with more than six spelling or grammar errors will be returned for revision prior to evaluation. Please use the spellcheck function on the computer and review your work to make certain that properly spelled words are in fact the words you intend to use (for example: be careful about the difference between "there" and "their" or "its" and "it's").

\* Papers with major construction problems will be returned for revision prior to evaluation. At the very least, make certain that your sentences are complete sentences (they have a subject and a verb) and that they express one (but not more than one) complete thought. There should be no run-on sentences.

\* If you have writing composition problems, you should consult one of the specialists at the Writing Center on the third floor of Lloyd Hall (room 322). Your tuition pays for this kind of assistance.

\* Even if you have a facility with words, you may wish to sharpen your writing skills. In addition to the services of the Writing Center, I recommend:

1) John R. Trimble, *Writing With Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2010).

2) Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell, *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide*, 11th Edition (2009).

These books are available from <amazon.com> among other booksellers.

Please feel free to raise questions about these assignments at any time. You may do this in class—so that others might benefit from your inquiry; or come see me during my office hours. Have fun!