

The Bible, Spring 2014
Drs. Shelley Rees and Zachary Simpson
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma

Class Meeting Time: T*Th, 3-4:25 pm; Davis 226

Dr. Zach Simpson

E-mail: zsimpson@usao.edu

Phone: (405) 574-1381

Office hours: MWF, 8:30-9:30 am and 2:30 to 3:30 pm; T*Th 1-3 pm (Davis 204c)

Web: <http://usao.edu/faculty/zachary-simpson>

Dr. Shelley Rees

E-mail: srees@usao.edu

Phone: (405) 574-1244

Office hours: MWF 9:30-11:30; MW 1:30-2:30; T*Th 1:30-2:30 (Davis 222c)

Web: <http://usao.edu/faculty/shelley-rees>

Course Description

The Bible is, without exaggeration, the most influential text in the West, and, with the exception of a few other texts, perhaps the most influential collection of ideas, stories, and histories in the world. Yet, despite its pervasive influence and seemingly banal ubiquity, the Bible is subject to a host of misunderstandings, misreadings, and glosses, along with a suite of competing interpretations. The universality of the Bible is matched only in the number of ways that it can be read, interpreted, and appropriated. This class is yet another attempt to read the Bible, attempting to gain a more secure hold on the ways in which it can be seen, and, in turn, the ways in which has been seen historically. This course, in particular, will examine the literary, historical, and theological underpinnings of the text(s).

The “Bible,” literally translated, is a collection of works, a library of the collected stories, poems, fictions, tales, regulations, and visions of a number of lineages whose literature and culture survived for at least three thousand years. Because of its composite nature, the Bible has, at minimum, multiple genres of writing which demand different methods of interpretation. Arguably, the additive nature of the text also means that there are points of disagreement, dissonance, resonance, and overlap between and amongst its various stories and lessons. This course is designed to register and wrestle with the complexities inherent within the Bible and the number of theological, literary, and philosophical challenges it presents.

As such, the course has been designed to read major sections of the Bible, along with appropriate secondary texts, to bring out these differential readings and interpretations. The course will proceed in a roughly sequential manner, starting with the book of Genesis, and ending with the Christian Apocalypse, Revelation. This more sequential (but not necessarily linear) ordering will proceed through the text by first grappling with creation, then the patriarchal period, the deuteronomistic period, the founding of the Israelite kingdom, the writings after the fall of the kingdom, prophecy, the rise of writings about a/the Christ, the post-Christian missionary writings, and the end of time. Intermingled within this traditional ordering will be writings on the status of women, poetry, apocryphal texts, love stories, and other tales often lost or forgotten in religious and cultural history. It is the hope of this course that this variety of texts will evince the richness and complexity of a cultural and literary tradition that is often taken for granted.

As mentioned earlier, our methodological focus in this course is three-fold, representing the historical, literary, and theological implications of these texts. These different dimensions of interpretation will be brought out most ostensibly through the course readings and the instructors themselves, though it is incumbent upon students to bring these different methodologies to bear on the texts as well. In doing so, we will see how the Bible has been represented historically in theology, fiction, and Western iconography. We will also hopefully see the ways in which the Bible continues to be brought forth into the present in new and often startling ways.

Given the variety of readings put forth here, the course will be quite challenging, both in terms of the work it demands and the thought required for its adequate completion. The course has been constructed as a seminar in which student participation is paramount and expected. This means, at minimum, that students have completed the course readings before class and tried to identify the literary and theological problems they present. Doing so will allow for a richer and more variegated classroom experience.

Of course, the Bible will continue to persist as a wellspring of both inspiration and contention. It is not our job to resolve, or settle, the variety of readings that the text authorizes. Rather, the course's success will depend, in large part, on the degree to which we add to the multiplicity of readings and imaginings elicited by the Bible itself.

Assessment and Grading

30%: Eight 500-word response papers over readings of your choice. Response papers can be informal in style but should demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the material. Response papers are due *on the day that reading is assigned*, as they are designed to facilitate class discussion. **NO LATE RESPONSE PAPERS ACCEPTED.**

25%: Short essay (4-6 pages) using theological or literary approach to a book of the Bible not on our syllabus (e.g., 3 Ezra, Numbers, 2 Kings, etc.).

35%: Seminar paper 10+ pages in length on a topic of your choosing. Please consult with either Dr. Rees or Dr. Simpson regarding your paper topic.

10%: Class participation and attendance

Honor Code

This course requires original work from each student. No work is to be plagiarized or copied in any way, and potential violations will be referred to the academic integrity committee. Students found guilty of academic misconduct will automatically fail the course.

In order to eliminate any possibility of plagiarism, please do not use the internet for research unless you are accessing peer-reviewed journals. Do not cut-and-paste, use Wikipedia or blogs, or cite from anything other than journals for your papers. The only internet site which is permissible as a source is the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. All other sites, unless accessed through our library, are unacceptable. As always, we are here to help if you have any questions.

This class uses Turnitin.com, which allows us to insure proper citation of sources. In order to submit a paper for this class, you will need the following information (papers not submitted to Turnitin.com will not be accepted):

Class ID: 7474385

Password: mores

Class Sessions

This class is an upper level seminar. What that means, in brief: 1. You will have a lot of reading to do. 2. You will be expected to contribute to class discussions.

Do not expect to show up and sit quietly while we tell you what you need to know. Come to class fully prepared for that day's material, having read relevant texts and prepared questions in advance. This is compelling stuff; the professors should be fighting to get a word in as opposed to begging you to speak. Talk to us; talk to each other; talk to the texts.

A note on electronics: We do not allow use of electronic devices during class. This includes laptops, even for note taking, unless you have documentation from the office of disability services requiring the use of a computer. If you use a Kindle or other tablet for your books, please let us know. (This should not present a problem for the most part, but it may affect your ability to cite materials in papers or have the same translation as the rest of the class.)

Required Course Texts

The Harper-Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocryphal Texts (Paperback), ed., Wayne Meeks (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1997). ISBN: 0060655275.

Introduction to the Bible, Christine Hayes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). ISBN: 978-0300181791.

Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology, Paul Achtemeier, Joel Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). ISBN: 978-0802837172.

****There will also be a coursepack required for purchase from the bookstore.****

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction and Method

Tuesday, January 14: Introductions and Greetings

Thursday, January 16: How we will approach the course: literary, critical, and theological methods of analysis and interpretation

Reading: *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 5; Robert Alter, "Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction" (coursepack)

Week 2: Beginnings

Tuesday, January 21: Genesis ~ Creation Stories

Reading: Genesis 1-3; *The Enuma Elish* (from coursepack); *Introduction to the Bible*, Chs. 2 and 3

Thursday, January 23: Covenant, Flood, and Nephilim

Reading: Genesis 4-9; *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 4

Week 3: Patriarchs and Journeys

Tuesday, January 28: Fathers, Sons, and Tricksters

Reading: Genesis 12-36; *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 6

Thursday, January 30: Exodus

Reading: Exodus 4-20; *Introduction to the Bible*, Chs. 7 and 8; Holloway, Ch. 2 (coursepack)

Week 4: The Promised Land

Tuesday, February 4: Biblical Law, Purity, and the Deuteronomic Code

Reading: Leviticus 11-13, 15, 17-20 and Deuteronomy 4-28; *Introduction to the Bible*, Chs. 10 and 11

Thursday, February 6: Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan

Reading: Joshua 1-12, and 23-24; *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 13; Ehrman, Ch. 4 (coursepack)

Week 5: From Judges to Monarchs

Tuesday, February 11: Judges

Reading: Judges 1-5, 9-16, and 19-21; *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 13

Thursday, February 13: Samuel

Reading: I Samuel 1-20; 2 Samuel 11-14; I Kings 1-4; Article on Netanyahu's use of Amalek in reference to Iran; Schroer and Staubli, "Saul, David and Jonathan" (coursepack)

Week 6: Women and Suffering

Tuesday, February 18: Esther, Ruth, and Judith

Reading: Esther; Ruth; Judith 8-16; *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, "Ruth" (coursepack)

Thursday, February 20: The Problem of Evil

Reading: Lamentations; Job 1-11, 21-31, and 38-42; *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 20

Week 7: Wisdom and Poetry

Tuesday, February 25: Wisdom Literature – Ecclesiastes and Proverbs

Reading: Proverbs 1-15 (you may want to read more); Ecclesiastes 1-12; *Introduction to the Bible*, pgs. 339-345

Thursday, February 27: Poetry – Psalms and Song of Solomon

Reading: Psalms 1-6, 22-23, 34, 51, 58; Song of Solomon; *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, “Psalms” (coursepack)

Week 8: Prophecy

Tuesday, March 4: Pre- and Post-Exilic Prophecy: Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Reading: Jeremiah 1-8 and 35-45; Ezekiel 8-11, 16-18, 33, 36-37, 40, 47; *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 15 and pgs. 288-307

Thursday, March 6: Minor Prophets: Amos and Ezra

Reading: Amos; Ezra (skim); *Introduction to the Bible*, Ch. 16

Week 9: Messianic Expectation and Jesus

Tuesday, March 11: Maccabees, Isaiah, and Daniel: The Hope for a Messiah

Reading: Isaiah 49-55; Daniel 7-12; 1 Maccabees 1-4

Thursday, March 13: The Synoptic Gospels: Luke

Reading: Luke 1-9, 12, 15, 18-19, 22-24; *Introducing the New Testament*, Ch. 6

Week 10: Spring Break

Week 11: More Variations on Jesus

Tuesday, March 25: Jesus from the Perspective of the Gospel of John

Reading: John 1-2, 5-6, 11-15, 17-21; *Introducing the New Testament*, Ch. 7

Thursday, March 27: Gnosticism: The Gospel of Thomas

Reading *The Gospel of Thomas* (in coursepack); *Introducing the New Testament*, Ch. 8

Week 12: After Jesus

Tuesday, April 1: Acts

Reading: Acts 9-10, 21-28; *Introducing the New Testament*, Ch. 9; *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, “Acts” (coursepack)

Thursday, April 3: Paul’s Evangelism and Message

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1-2, 5-8, 11-13, 15; Galatians 1-5; *Introducing the New Testament*, Chs. 11, 13, and 14

Week 13: Paul’s Theology and Other Ways of Viewing the Message of Jesus

Tuesday, April 8: Paul’s Letter to the Romans

Reading: Romans 2-8 and 10-13; *Introducing the New Testament*, Ch. 12

Thursday, April 10: Other Epistles – James and Hebrews

Reading: Hebrews 1-2, 6-10, 13; James 1-2, 4-5; *Introducing the New Testament*, Chs. 20 and 21

Week 14: Revelation and Apocalypse

Tuesday, April 15: Revelation

Reading: Revelation 4-9 and 12-22; *Introducing the New Testament*, Ch. 24

Thursday, April 17: Apocryphal Apocalypses

Reading: Selections from *Revelations*, Elaine Pagels (in coursepack)

Week 15: Provisional Endings

Tuesday, April 22: Wrap-Up and Discussion