

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

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50:840:110:01, Spring 2013
TTh 1:30-2:50 p.m., Armitage Hall 219



“Well, actually, they are written in stone”

OBJECTIVES

This course examines the historical, literary, and contemporary worlds of the Jewish Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and Christian New Testament. These rich and controversial writings have profoundly influenced worldwide culture and thought for thousands of years and continue to present challenges for interpretation today. We discuss who wrote the Bible, the social and political contexts in which it was written, different ways to think about reading it, possible meanings for the twenty-first century, and core themes such as God, creation, evil, covenant, prophesy, justice, and love. Students will leave the course with a complex understanding of what one theologian has called “the strange world of the Bible.”

TEXTS

The following two texts are required for the course and can be purchased at the Rutgers bookstore or elsewhere. If possible, please use this version of the Bible.

- (1) *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, New Revised Standard Version (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993).
- (2) Christian E. Hauer and William A. Young, *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds*, Eighth Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012).

WEBSITE

The course has a Sakai website, where you will receive and turn in assignments, find announcements, be provided occasional readings, and take part in online discussion forums. To access the site, go to sakai.rutgers.edu, log in using your Rutgers user id (the first part of your Rutgers email address) and password, and click on the tab labeled Bible Spring 2013.

EXPECTATIONS

- (1) Class Participation. Class participation is essential if you are to develop further your abilities to think critically about the Bible. Class time is your opportunity to explore concerns, try out new ideas, and practice speaking publicly about the complex issues we will address. Class participation is a major part of your grade and is based on (1) class attendance, (2) frequency of contributions to class discussions, and (3) quality of these contributions. You will receive a poor grade for class participation if at any point in the course you are disruptive to the class (including whispering to a neighbor, putting down someone else's point of view, repeatedly arriving late to class, etc.), or if you are absent from class more than three times over the semester without informing the instructor beforehand.
- (2) Small Group Discussions. Most Thursdays will include small group discussions of a contemporary issue related to the readings for that week. You will be responsible during one Thursday of your choice for (1) leading a small group of your classmates in a 20 minute discussion of the issue, and (2) making a brief presentation of your group's conclusions to the class. There is nothing for you to prepare ahead of time and your presentations will *not* be graded. However, if you fail to lead a group, your grade for the course as a whole will be reduced by one full letter (e.g. A to B).
- (3) Online Forums. There will be 5 online forums over the semester on Sakai, of which you are required to participate in 4 (see Schedule below). Forums are online discussions in which you are required to complete one initial posting that engages with a question posted online (5-7 sentences); and to respond to at least two of your classmate's postings (2 sentences each). Each forum is worth a maximum of 5 points (3 for your initial posting, and 1 for each response).
- (4) Exams. There will two take-home exams: one midterm and one final. These will be posted on Sakai and turned in there too. Details on each will be provided in advance. Exams will consist entirely of essay questions asking you to make your own considered arguments about issues related to the readings.

Any plagiarism or cheating in any part of the class will result in receiving an F for the course, University disciplinary action, and the certain wrath of God.

GRADING

Criteria for grades are as follows:

- A (90 points or higher): outstanding work at a level well above and beyond requirements;
- B+ (85 points) or B (80 points): good work;
- C+ (75 points) or C (70 points): satisfactory work that fulfills minimum course requirements;
- D (60 points) or F (fewer than 60 points): poor or failing work.

The final course grade is based on the following:

- Class participation: 20 points
- Forum discussions: 20 points
- Midterm exam: 30 points
- Final exam: 30 points

SCHEDULE

Note on Bible readings: 1:1-5 means chapter 1 verses 1 to 5. 1:1-3:14 means chapter 1 verse 1 to chapter 3 verse 14.

Introduction

The Bible as Object of Study

- Tu 1/22 Introduction to the course (no reading).
Th 1/24 Read (ahead of class): Hauer and Young, pp. 1-23.

I. The Torah

Stories of Creation

- Tu 1/29 Read: Genesis 1:1-11:26; Hauer and Young, 49-60.
Th 1/31 No further reading. *Small group discussion:* Is Genesis 2-3 misogynistic?
Th 1/31 to Tu 2/5: First online forum.

Abraham's Covenant

- Tu 2/5 Read: Genesis 11:27-18:15; Hauer and Young, 60-69.
Th 2/7 Read: Genesis 18:16-25:11. *Small group discussion:* What, if anything, could Abraham's willingness to murder Isaac in Genesis 22:1-19 mean for today?

Moses and the People of God

- Tu 2/12 Read: Exodus 1:1-7:24, 12:1-14:31, 18:1-21:27, and 31:12-18; Hauer and Young, 72-87.
Th 2/14 No further reading. *Small group discussion:* Which covenant, Abrahamic or Sinai, do you find more meaningful for today?
Th 2/14 to Tu 2/19: Second online forum.

II. Prophecy and Wisdom

Prophecy

- Tu 2/19 Read: Jeremiah 1:1-4:31, 14:19-17:4, 31:31-33:13, and 36:1-32; Hauer and Young, 124-28 and 137-39.
Th 2/21 No further reading. *Small group discussion:* What might Jeremiah say about today's issue of same-sex marriage?

Sacred Songs

- Tu 2/26 Read: Psalms 8, 13, and 23; Song of Solomon (in entirety); Hauer and Young, 147-58.
Th 2/28 No further reading. *Small group discussion:* Can erotic poetry tell us anything about God?

Ways of Wisdom

- Tu 3/5 Read: Job 1:1-10:22, 13:20-14:22, 27:1-28:28, 38:1-42:17; Hauer and Young, 162-63 and 166-72.
Th 3/7 No further reading or small groups. Discussion of midterm exam.

Midterm exam due on Sakai by Sunday 3/10 at 5:00 p.m.

III. Gospels

Jesus of Nazareth

Tu 3/12 Read: Matthew 1:1-2:12; Mark 1:1-20; Luke 1:1-2:52; John 1:1-18; Hauer and Young 215-21 and 229-37.

Th 3/14 No further reading. *Small group discussion*: What might it mean to believe that Jesus is “the son of God”?

Spring Recess

The Synoptic Gospels

Tu 3/26 Read: Matthew 2:13-7:12, 10:1-13:23, 15:32-19:30, 27:1-28:20; Hauer and Young, 239-43, 246-49, and 256-60.

Th 3/28 Read: Matthew 6:19-34 and 19:16-30. *Small group discussion*: Can Jesus’ view of money be applied to contemporary life?

Th 3/28 to Tu 4/2: Third online forum.

The Gospel of John

Tu 4/2 Read: John 1:1-51, 11:1-12:50, 13:1-16:33, and 18:28-21:25; Hauer and Young, 251-56 and 260-62.

Th 4/4 No further reading. *Small group discussion*: Is Jesus’ commandment to “love one another” meant to include all of humanity or only Christians?

Non-Canonical Gospels

Tu 4/9 Read: “The Gospel of Mary” and “The Coptic Gospel of Thomas” (on Sakai under Resources); Hauer and Young 322-27.

Th 4/11 *Small group discussion*: Should newly discovered gospels be added to the Bible?

Th 4/11 to Tu 4/16: Fourth online forum.

IV. Early Christianity

The Invention of Christianity

Tu 4/16 Read: Acts of the Apostles, 1:1-3:10, 4:32-5:42, 8:1-3, 9:1-31, and 17:1-34; Hauer and Young, 266-73.

Th 4/18 No further reading. *Small group discussion*: Does this early church differ in fundamental respects from churches today?

The Theology of Paul

Tu 4/23 Read: Romans in its entirety; Hauer and Young 284-90 and 297-99.

Th 4/25 No further reading. *Small group discussion*: Does Paul accurately describe human evil?

Th 4/25 to Tu 4/30: Fifth online forum.

Post-Apostolic Apocalypse

Tu 4/30 Read: Revelation to John 1:1-10:11, 14:1-20, and 19:11-22:21; Hauer and Young, 305-10 and 318-22.

Conclusion

Th 5/2 Conclusion and discussion of final exam (no readings).

Final exam due on Sakai by Friday 5/10 at 5:00 p.m.