



Biblical History and Ideas

REL 110

Prof. Shayna Sheinfeld

E-mail: shayna.sheinfeld@centre.edu

Phone ext. 5258

Course day/time:

110B: T/Th 8–9:30

110C: T/Th 12:40–2:10

Location: Olin 123

Office: Crounse 438

Office Hours:

Mondays 3–4

Wednesdays 9:30–11:30

Tuesdays/Thursdays 9:40–10:40

By appointment

Course Description and Objectives:

This course introduces students to ancient Jewish and Christian scripture. We will explore the history, literature, and traditions of the ancient Israelites and Jews, including those Jews who came to call themselves “Christians.” To do this, we will carefully examine the literature of Jewish and Christian scriptures. Through our close and critical literary analysis of the variety of genres found within scripture (narrative, law, epistle, apocalypse, wisdom, etc.), we will also engage with archaeological data and the historical context of the Ancient Near East in order to explore when and why the texts were written, who wrote them, and how ancient religious communities understood these texts. We will then apply our knowledge of the biblical stories to examine their afterlives: how some of these texts were used and understood by individuals and communities during different periods throughout history. This endeavor will grant us a better appreciation for the biblical texts themselves while also exposing us to the variegated use of biblical texts and their afterlives. We will come out of this collaborative learning experience with an appreciation of the biblical narratives, the role they played in the formation of Christianity and Judaism, their historical importance, and their continued use in contemporary American society—especially in popular culture and the arts.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, a diligent student will

1. develop competence in the critical analysis of “texts” (ranging from sacred writings to American culture) and the ideas they mediate in reading, writing, and discussion
2. be familiar with the major narratives of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as some apocrypha stories
3. gain understanding of common literary features in the biblical narratives, including myth, genre, themes, etc.
4. be familiar with an overview of the main socio-historical contexts related to the narratives told in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Testament and understand how these contexts are

relevant for any reading of the biblical narratives

- understand how the Bible continues to shape cultural identifications and differences in the world, especially in contemporary American culture

Required Texts:

- *The HarperCollins Study Bible* New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books.
- *The Bible: Historical and Literary Introduction* by Bart D. Ehrman
- *Genesis* a novel by Bernard Beckett (ISBN: 978-0547335926)
- Tri-fold Poster for the final project (note that these are inexpensive at Walmart)
- Additional materials handed out in class or posted on Moodle

Course Expectations:

- This course will be a mixture of interactive lecture, discussion, and in-class active learning. You are expected to actively engage in all aspects of the class.
- Readings are listed in the course schedule according to the date they will be discussed. Be sure to **read and annotate** the assigned reading **before coming to class** and bring copies of the readings to class for reference. If you cannot participate in the class discussions based on the readings, you may be asked to leave. You must have your Bible with you in every class.
- My expectation is that you will spend **at least two hours** preparing for each hour that you are in class. Look ahead at your readings, as some readings will take more time than others.
- Electronic Devices: Laptops, tablets, cell phones, and other electronic devices are NOT allowed and must be silenced and stored out of easy reach during class, unless we have planned otherwise. You may not use electronic devices to access the biblical texts during class.

Assessment:

Attendance & Active Participation:	10%
Tests (4 x 10% each):	40%
Textual Analyses (10 %, 15%):	25%
Final Project:	25%

Attendance and Active Participation: Attendance and *enthusiastic participation* are a necessary component of learning in this course. You are expected to attend each class session. You may miss up to 2 classes without penalty, but you will be responsible for the material and readings covered. Three or more missed classes unless excused (with missed work completed) will result in a letter grade reduction in the final grade. Participation will be marked on active engagement during class, including clear engagement with the readings and with clicker activities. To let me know you have read this syllabus carefully, send me an email and attach a picture of a mythical creature before the end of the first week of classes.

Attendance is required at two talks as part of the participation grade in this class:

- Monday February 27, 7pm, Weisiger Theatre. Dr. James Tabor on the Apostle Paul.
*Convocation
- Monday April 10, 7:30pm, Vahlkamp Theatre. Dr. Terryl Givens on Mormonism, Western Religions, and the Bible.

Tests: Tests will cover specialized terminology and main points/ideas from the lectures and textbook. Tests will be given in class. Make-up tests are only allowed for *excused* absences. Note: Sleeping through

the alarm clock is not an acceptable excuse.

Textual Analyses: Twice during the semester select readings are available for a close textual reading/analysis. Papers will be graded for clearly stated thesis, conciseness and clarity of the argument, level of engagement with the primary text, and the thoughtfulness of the response, as well as grammar and usage. Students will submit two (2) analyses, due on the date listed on the syllabus (approximately 2 pages, excluding bibliography). Assignments must be submitted via Moodle (Turnitin) *before* the beginning of the scheduled class. Guidelines will be posted on Moodle, and the assignments will be discussed further in class.

Final Project: The final project will be a culmination of our textual analyses and our exploration in the reception and afterlives of biblical narratives; it will thus include both a written component and an oral and visual presentation component. More information will be given about a month before the due date.

Additional Information:

Late Policy: All assignments are due by the start of class on the date specified on the syllabus unless otherwise noted. Assignments may be turned in up to two days late; late assignments may have up to one letter grade subtracted (A- becomes B+) for each day late. If you think you will be more than two days late with an assignment, *you must make an appointment with me ahead of time* in order to discuss the situation, otherwise **assignments more than 2 days late will not be accepted.**

Grading: All assignments will be graded within 2 weeks of being submitted. If there is ever extenuating circumstances that may affect this deadline, I will be upfront about it with you during our class.

Communication: I will respond to emails within 24 hours during the week, and within 36 hours on weekends or breaks. If there is an impending deadline, I will attempt to respond as soon as possible. I encourage you to take advantage of office hours; if you can't come during office hours, send an email to arrange a meeting.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is a serious issue. Students are required to observe the honor code. Plagiarism—any attempt by a student to represent the work of another as one's own—will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, all of the following: copying the answers of another student on an examination, copying or substantially restating the work of another person or persons in any oral or written work without citing the appropriate source, and collaboration with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution. All instances of plagiarism will be dealt with according to university policy, *no matter how minor.*

I am committed to making our classroom an inclusive and supportive learning environment for people of all ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Learning Challenges: Students who may need additional assistance due to learning differences or challenges are expected to see me during the first two weeks of the semester. I am willing to make accommodations whenever possible, but only if proper documentation has been provided *and you see me in advance.* If you think you need accommodations but are not certain how to find them, I can assist you by helping you reach the College's coordinators for disabilities, Dr. Mary Gulley (x5223), who will prepare a signed Accommodation Notice. Note that in any course the instructor must sign the back of the Accommodation Notice before any necessary accommodations can take effect.

Introduction

Thurs 2/2

- Topics: Introduction. Why do I have to take this class? Demographics. What is the Bible? How can we read ancient texts?

Module 1: Pentateuch

A brief note on Conversation Starters: You are expected to have spent time thinking about the questions listed. Be prepared to write or talk about them in each class.

Tues 2/7

- Topic: Creation Narratives
- Reading: Genesis 1–3 (from the Bible); Ehrman chapter 1
- Conversation Starters: How does the creation account in Genesis 1 differ from that in chapters 2? How might we reconcile these different accounts? How is the figure of God portrayed in each account?

Thurs 2/9

- Topic: Primeval Narratives; Documentary Hypothesis
- Reading: Gen 4–11; Ehrman 31–38; Book of the Watchers Excerpt (Moodle)
- Conversation Starters: Why do you think the Hebrew Bible includes genealogies? How is the Book of the Watchers excerpt related to Genesis 5:21–6:4? What purpose(s) might the story of the tower of Babel (Gen 11) serve?

Tues 2/14

- Topic: Patriarchal (or Ancestral) History; the Akedah; What is a Textual Analysis Paper?
- Reading: Gen 12–13, 15–19, 21–22, 32:9–32, 37, 39–41; Ehrman 38–57
- Conversation Starters: Who is Abram/Abraham and why does God choose him? Is Abraham portrayed consistently in Genesis? What is the purpose of God’s covenant(s) with Abraham in the narrative? What should we make of the stories of Jacob & Joseph?

Thurs 2/16

- Topic: Exodus
- Reading: Exodus 1–16; Ehrman 58–65
- Conversation Starters: Consider the figure of Moses: who is he? Why is he special? Exodus 3–4 describes Moses at the burning bush: how is Moses portrayed here? How is God portrayed? Chapter 12 describes the first Passover—what are the attributes of this event? How does it compare to what you know about how Passover is celebrated today? How do the accounts of the event at the Reed/Red Sea compare in Exodus 14 & 15? Were you able to recognize any of

the Documentary Sources in your readings?

Tues 2/21

- Topic: Decalogue
- Reading: Exodus 19–24, 32; Leviticus 18–19; Deuteronomy 6–8; Ehrman 65–83
- Conversation Starters: What is the covenant that God makes with Moses & the Israelites? How does the Decalogue compare with the Suzerainty Treaty? Why do you think there are so many different types of laws found in the Torah?

Module 2: Rise & Fall of the Monarchy

Thurs 2/23

- Topic: Joshua & Judges; Deuteronomistic History
- Reading: Joshua 4–6; Judges 2–4, 11*, 13–16, 19*; Ehrman 84–99
- Conversation Starters: What are the scholarly theories for the emergence of Israel in the land of Canaan? How does archaeology play a role in those theories? What is the main focus of the description of the battle at Jericho, and why? What roles do women play in the accounts of the Judges?

Test #1: Module 1

*Nb. Judges 11 and 19 include mentions/descriptions of rape, murder, and dismemberment of women.

Mon 2/27:

- Required convocation: “How the Apostle Paul Has Influenced All We Think About Everything.” Dr. James Tabor. 7:00pm in Weisiger Theatre.

Tues 2/28

- Topic: The Rise of the Monarchy; Apologetic Literature; King David
- Reading: 1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 5, 11–12; Ehrman 99–105
- Conversation Starters: After reading Judges, why do you think the Israelites ask for a king? What kind of king is David? What role do prophets play in the monarchy? Can you draw any comparisons between the Israelite monarchy and our current political election cycle?

Submit 1-paragraph summary of the talk along with your reactions to what Dr. Tabor said (Moodle)

Thurs 3/2

- Topic: The Divided Monarchy & the Early Prophets
- Reading: 1 Kings 1:1–2:12; 12; 2 Kings 17–19; 24–25; Sennacherib’s Account (Moodle); Ehrman 105–113
- Conversation Starters: What reasons are some possible reasons for the division of Judah and Israel? What are the similarities and differences between Sennacherib’s account of the siege of

Jerusalem, and the one found in 2 Kings 18:13–19:37?

- Discuss (in class) Cultural artifact assignment (due 3/9)

Textual Analysis #1 Due (Moodle)

Tues 3/7

- Topic: Prophecy
- Reading: Amos; Jeremiah 1–2, 7, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27–29, 37–40; Ehrman 114–5, 117–121, 127–133
- Conversation Starters: To whom are the prophets speaking? Does the audience change with the context? What are the main messages/points that are being addressed? Do the messages of Amos or Jeremiah resonate with you today? If so, in what capacity, and if not, why not?

Thurs 3/9:

- Topic: Return to Judah; Cultural Artifact Assignment (in-class)
- Reading: Ezra 1–3, 7, 9–10; Nehemiah 8, 13; Ehrman 140–147
- Conversation Starters: What concerns do the Jews from Babylon face when coming back to Judah? What roles does Ezra play in Jerusalem? Nehemiah? Who are the people that they find in Jerusalem, and what role do they play in the narrative?

Bring a cultural artifact to class; be prepared to talk about the artifact and how it uses/reflects the biblical narrative

Module 3: Creative Endeavors in Scripture

Tues 3/14

- Topic: Wisdom Literature
- Reading: Proverbs 1, 8, 22–24; Ecclesiastes 1–3, 7, 12; Job 1–2, 7–8, 28–31, 38, 42; Ehrman 191–206
- Conversation Starters: What is wisdom literature? Are there different kinds of wisdom literature? After reading Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, do you think that the Bible can provide firm answers for why people suffer?

Test#2: Module 2

Thurs 3/16

- Topic: Storytellers & Poets
- Reading: Psalms 22, 23, 137; Lamentations 1:1–22; Song of Songs 3:1–4:16; Ruth; Jonah; Ehrman 166–179, 181–184
- Conversation Starters: In what ways is ancient Hebrew poetry different from modern poetry? What are Lamentations and Song of Songs about? Be prepared to outline the stories of Ruth and Jonah.

Spring Break: 3/18–3/26

Tues 3/28

- Topic: Apocalypses
- Reading: Daniel; Ehrman 184–186, 206–213
- Conversation Starters: How are Daniel and his friends portrayed in chapters 1–6? Is he portrayed differently in chapters 7–12? If so, how? Does the book of Daniel share any similarities with the Book of the Watchers?

Thurs 3/30

- Topic: Canon Formation & Apocrypha
- Reading: Judith 7:19–16:25; Susanna (in the additions to Daniel); 2 Maccabees 5–7; Ehrman 232–234, 237–239, 374–383
- Conversation Starters: What role do women play in these apocryphal narratives? How do you think people decided which texts to include in the canon? Why do you think it is important for us to be aware of how the biblical canon was formed (“because Dr. Sheinfeld said so” is not an acceptable answer!)?

Module 4: Early Jesus Movement

Tues 4/4

- Topic: The Judaism that Jesus knew
- Reading: Ehrman 215–232, 239–241
- Conversation Starters: What do you think the world was like at the time of Jesus? What is the *pax romana* and why is it important in our understanding of Jesus’ life and death?

Test#3: Module 3

Thurs 4/6

- Topic: Second Temple Sects; Introduction to the Synoptic Problem & Q
- Reading: Josephus excerpt (Moodle); Ehrman 162–165, 243–247
- Conversation Starters: What does it mean to belong to a “sect”? What questions about the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes do you have after reading Josephus? What was most confusing about the “synoptic problem”?

Mon 4/10:

- Required attendance in lieu of class on April 11: Dr. Terryl Givens on Mormonism, Western Religions, and the Bible. Vahlkamp Theatre, 7:30pm.

Tues 4/11: No Class: Passover

Submit 1-paragraph write up connecting Dr. Givens’ talk and course material (Moodle)

Thurs 4/13:

- Topic: Synoptic Gospels; Apocryphal gospels
- Reading: Gospel of Matthew; Ehrman 248–267, 276–283
- Conversation Starters: Describe the person of Jesus in Matthew—what is Jesus like? What does he do? Are you familiar with any stories about Jesus that were missing from this gospel? If so, which ones?

Tues 4/18

- Topic: Gospel of John; Historical Jesus; anti-Semitism; Supersessionism
- Reading: Gospel of John; Ehrman 269–276, 283–296
- Conversation Starters: How is Jesus portrayed different in the Gospel of John compared with the Synoptics? How does the John portray “the Jews?” Why is this problematic? What does it mean to talk about “the historical Jesus”? How is this different from talking about “Jesus”?

Textual Analysis #2 Due (Moodle)

Thurs 4/20

- Topic: Pauline Epistles; Pastoral Epistles
- Reading: Galatians; 1 Corinthians; 1 Timothy; Ehrman 297–310, 312–315, 316, 340–342, 344–347
- Conversation Starters: Paul wrote letters to specific people in specific circumstances. What challenges do we face when reading and interpreting his letters? What are some of the issues that Paul’s congregations face? How is 1 Timothy different from the letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians?

Tues 4/25

- Topic: Revelation
- Reading: Revelation; Ehrman 367–373
- Conversation Starters: What part of this text did you find most confusing? Most interesting? Do you think that Revelation could be used to predict the apocalypse in our society today? Why or why not?

Thurs 4/27

- No formal class: Research Day/Meetings

Submit: 1-paragraph description of your primary source selection & cultural artifact on Moodle by 11:55pm.

Module 5: Bible/Biblical Themes in Popular Culture

Tues 5/2

- Topic: Biblical Themes in Contemporary Movies (part 1)
- Watch: Last Temptation of Christ (Ensemble); Begin reading *Genesis*
- Conversation Starters: Did you like this movie? Why or why not? Which gospel(s) do you think this movie draws from? Which type of Christology is portrayed in this movie? Where does this movie differ from the gospels, and how? What was your response to Jesus' last temptation?

Test#4: Module 4

Thurs 5/4

- Topic: Biblical Themes in Contemporary Movies (part 2)
- Watch: Pleasantville (Ensemble); Continue to read *Genesis*
- Conversation Starters: Did you like this movie? Why or why not? Which part(s) of Genesis does this movie draw on?

Tues 5/9

- Topic: Biblical Themes in Contemporary Literature
- Reading: Finish *Genesis* by Bernard Beckett
- Conversation Starters: Did you like this book? Why or why not? What parallels did you see between the book and biblical themes/ideas? Why do you think the book is called *Genesis*?

Final Projects:

Final projects are due during the final exam period. Short presentations of the final projects will take place during the final exam period. **Nb. I cannot make exceptions for the scheduled final exam time.**

REL 110B (T/Th 8–9:30): Wednesday May 17, 8:30–11:30am

REL 110C (T/Th 12:40–2:10): Friday May 12, 1:30–4:30am

Grading Rubric:

A 93-100 A- 90-92	Excellent work; clear and concise thesis; an original and well-supported argument with evidence from the text. Clean and proofread text, a paper where the reader encounters few mistakes and learns a good deal about your topic.
B+ 88-89 B 83-87 B- 80-82	Very good work. A clear thesis with well-written evidentiary support containing a well-thought argument. Clear and logical structure. Few errors in grammar/spelling/punctuation.
C+ 78-79 C 73-77 C- 70-72	Above to average work. An identifiable thesis with some evidentiary support. Thesis may not be strong; supporting arguments are lacking, poorly organized and/or do not support the thesis.
D 60-69	Barely acceptable work. Scattered prose with no clear thesis or directional argument. Less than clear prose.
U 0-59	Unacceptable. No argument or direction and lack of clear use or knowledge of the text. Poor writing and grammar.