

Full Name: Reading the Bible as Literature

Short Name: Bible as Literature

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ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: HT

Year JS/SS: JS

The influence of the Bible is difficult to overestimate. It has done more than any other text to shape our world religiously, politically, linguistically, intellectually, and culturally. Much of this impact, of course, stems from its status as a religious text, a holy book. This course will focus on the Bible as a literary text, examining the genres, themes, and narratives that intertwine to compose this extraordinarily rich text. It will also explore some of the ways in which literature in English has been shaped by the Bible from the sixteenth century onwards.

Aims

- to introduce students to reading the Bible as literature;
- to introduce the range of Biblical genre and to the appropriate approach to engaging with each genre;
- to introduce the history of Bible translation in English, the issues that translation raises and their implications for our understanding of the text;
- to examine to what extent it is appropriate to treat the Bible as a single text or as a composition of individual texts;
- to develop awareness of the influence of the Bible on western literature and popular culture.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course the successful student should be able to:

- appreciate the significance of the Bible as a cultural artefact;
- articulate the history, philosophies and mechanisms of Bible translation;
- appreciate the significance of canon;
- demonstrate an awareness of the complex of links between Biblical books;
- demonstrate an awareness of the impact of Biblical literature on English literature more broadly;
- demonstrate evidence of the above in written work appropriate to Sophister level.

COURSE OUTLINE

1. Introduction

- John D. Meade, *Scribes and Scripture*, (2022)
- Dee Dyas and Esther Hughes, *The Bible in Western Culture* (2005)

2. The Bible in English

- David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its history and influence*, (2003)

3. Genesis

4. Judges/Ruth

5. Job

6. Psalms

Read as much of the Psalms as you can, but concentrate especially on Psalms 1, 3, 22, 23, 24, 69, 119, 150.

7. Reading Week

8. The Prophets

Read as much of the prophets as you can, but concentrate especially on Daniel and Zechariah

9. The Gospels: Mark and John

10. The Acts of the Apostles

11. Romans

12. Revelation

READING LIST

Primary Texts

Norton, David 2005a. *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible with the Apocrypha*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Any edition of the KJV (including those freely available online) is fine, but this edition provides some useful apparatus.

Tyndale, William, and David Daniell, eds. 1989. *Tyndale's New Testament. Modern-Spelling ed.* New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

Secondary Texts

Core secondary texts will include David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its history and influence* (2003); John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*, 4th edition (2000); Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (1989); David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature* (1993), which has been condensed from its original two volumes to become a paperback (2000). Readers who are coming to the Bible for the first time should also consult Dee Dyas and Esther Hughes, *The Bible in Western Culture* (2005).

- Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. 2nd edition (2011).
- Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. 2nd edition (2011).
- Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, (2018).
- E.T.A. Davidson, *Intricacy, Design, and Cunning in the Book of the Judges*, (2008).
- Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, (2003).
- Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1983).
- Northrop Frye. 'Words with Power': *Being a Second Study of 'The Bible and Literature'* (1990).
- John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*, 4th edition (2000)
- J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (2010)
- Douglas S. Huffman, *The Story of Jesus Continues: A Survey of the Acts of the Apostles* (2025)
- David Lyle Jeffrey (ed.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (1994)

- Stephen Prickett, "The Bible in literature and art," in John Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (1998)
- Stephen Prickett, "Biblical and Literary Criticism: A History of Interaction," in David Jasper and Stephen Prickett (eds), *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (1999)
- Stephen Prickett (ed.), *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory* (1991)
- Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible*, (1974).
- Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (1984).
- Leland Ryken, *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament* (1987).
- Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (1993)
- Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III, *The Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, (2010)
- Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* 2nd ed. (2020)
- Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel, *How to Read and Understand the Psalms* (2023).

The Influence of the Bible

- Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (2010).
- Katherine Clay Bassard, *Transforming Scriptures: African American Women Writers and the Bible*, (2011).
- Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace*, (2002).
- G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages*, (1984).
- G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation*, (1985).
- Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*, (1995).
- Lisa M. Gordis, *Opening Scripture: Bible Reading and Interpretive Authority in Puritan New England*, (2003).
- Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture*, (2012).
- Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (2005).
- Debora K. Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity*, (1998).
- Naomi Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society, and Culture in Early Modern England* (2010).