

REL128
The Bible: Sacred Texts & Imperial Contexts
Autumn Semester, 20 Credits

Convenor: Dr Meredith J C Warren
m.j.warren@sheffield.ac.uk

Jessop West room 222
x 20502

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10–12

General

The Bible is arguably the most important collection of literature of all time. Its style, images, characters, themes, and language have influenced western writing for thousands of years. This module is a literary and historical journey through the books of Genesis to Revelation, from creation to apocalyptic visions of a “new creation.” The module examines the major genres of biblical literature, including myth, legend, narrative, law, poetry, gospel, epistle and apocalypse. We will consider the forms of these literary types and how particular texts both resemble other examples of their type (from both biblical and other ancient texts) and where they deviate from it to make a unique, artistic work. Historically, the module focuses on the role of a number of empires in the formation of the Biblical canon, the historical role the Bible has played in subsequent empires, and its enduring influence in the contemporary world, resulting in a balanced overview of the historical forces that shaped the Bible.

Goals

By the end of this module, you should:

- have familiarity with the primary genres of biblical literature
- have an understanding of the literary methodologies of academic study of the Bible
- be able to apply these methodologies to biblical texts

Required Texts:

1. **EITHER** the Harper Collins Study Bible (with Apocrypha; 2006 edition or later)
→ Some copies will be available for purchase at Blackwell’s bookshop or you can order one online: https://www.amazon.co.uk/HarperCollins-Study-Bible-NRSV-Student-Harold-Attridge/dp/0060786833/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1473080168&sr=8-1&keywords=harper+collins+study+bible)
- OR** the New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha, revised 4th edition.
→ https://www.amazon.co.uk/New-Oxford-Annotated-Bible-Apocrypha/dp/0195289552/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1473080265&sr=8-1&keywords=new+oxford+annotated+bible

NB: These Bibles include numerous essays written by scholars. Make sure that the edition you purchase contains these essays.

For each class session, it is expected that you will read carefully (a) the relevant primary texts and (b) the relevant essay(s) in your annotated Bible. Additional texts may be made available on MOLE.

Assessment:

50% = Interpretation Project

- *Interpretation project = creative “translation” of a biblical story and the historical, political, social, and/or literary issues raised in the original text. Students use a creative medium (video, short story, podcast, graphic, etc) to best express the meaning of the chosen text to a contemporary audience. Project includes a 600 word justification of methods, interpretation, and focus.*
- *Students are encouraged to choose a text NOT covered during class.*

50 % = Final Exam

- *Study guide will be distributed toward the end of the semester.*

This module also has seminars; attendance is required, and it is expected that students will come having completed and annotated the set reading for the week, ready to engage with class discussion and activities.

Schedule & Topics

Schedule:

WEEK 1: 29 September — Creation, Fall, & Flood

Read Gen chapters 1–11

5 Oct Seminar: Selections from 1 Enoch, Enuma Elish, Atrahaisis, Gilgamesh (On MOLE)

WEEK 2: 6 October — The Barren Woman and the Chosen Child

Read Gen 17:15-22; 18:1-15, 25:19-26, 30:1-24; I Samuel 1-3; Judges 13;

12 Oct Seminar: Luke 1:5–80

WEEK 3: 13 October — The Akedah (Binding of Isaac)

Read Read Gen 22; Judges 11

19 Oct Seminar: Read Pseudo-Philo 39 (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/bap/bap56.htm>)

Week 4: 20 October—The Jew in the Foreign Court

Read Gen 35–50; Daniel

26 Oct Seminar: Read Esther

WEEK 5: 27 October — The Exodus Story

Read Exodus 1–15

2 Nov Seminar: Philo, *Life of Moses* 1–4, 95–180.
(<http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book24.html>; use the numbers in brackets only, not the Roman numerals)

WEEK 6: 3 November — Law & Form
Read: Exodus 19–25, 32–34; Deut 28; Leviticus 18–19

WEEK 7 — Reading week. No class or seminar.

16 Nov Seminar: The influence of Mary Douglas. Read Saul M. Olyan, “Mary Douglas’s Holiness/Wholeness Paradigm: Its Potential for Insight and Its Limitations,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8 (2008): 2–9 (On MOLE)

WEEK 8: 17 November—Biblical Poetry & Wisdom Literature
Read: Job, esp. 1–11, 29–31, 38–42; Psalms 22–23; Ecclesiastes 1–3; Proverbs 1, 8, 31

23 Nov Seminar: Poetry activity; Prose vs. Poetry in Judges 4 and 5

WEEK 9: 24 November — Prophecy & Political Criticism
Read: Amos; Hosea 1–4; Isaiah 1–2, 40, 52:13–53:12; Ezekiel 16, 37

30 Nov Seminar: Gender & Jerusalem. Read 4 Ezra, esp. 9–10

WEEK 10: 1 December — Apocalyptic Literature
Read: Daniel 1, 5, 7, 9, 12; Revelation

7 Dec Seminar: Apocalypse & Empire. Read Collins, John J. "Apocalypse and Empire." *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 76, (2011): 1–19 (on MOLE). Do Collins’s conclusions in this article fit with Revelation?

WEEK 11: 8 December — Gospels
Read: Matthew, John, Gospel of Thomas
(<http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>)

14 Dec Seminar: The Canon Debates. Read Jude, Eva Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 114–155 (on MOLE)

WEEK 12: 15 December — Letters and the Early Church
Read: 1 Corinthians, Galatians, James, 1–3 John (not to be confused with the Gospel!)