

REL 301

THE BIBLE AND HERMENEUTICS

Professor: Dr. Sheila H. Gillams

For Cluster III of the General Education Learning Outcomes

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Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. Isaiah 28:9 – 10 (King James Version)

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (King James Version)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Religious Studies 301 is an advanced level course that focuses on the history, formation, canonization, and interpretation of the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Any piece of literature opens the door to the mystery of the inner self of the author and reader. The Bible, as a library of the ancient proclamation, history, and gospel of Yahweh and Jesus Christ, holds an authority for many in spiritual injunctions and statutory direction. This course proposes to engage this text as literature, studying the major themes of the Old Testament (or Tanakh) and New Testament in the context of ancient Near Eastern and Israeli history, the inscription and canonization of the literature, and the various literary forms that comprise its books. The latter half of the course delves into hermeneutics proper—the science and art of biblical interpretation—which includes elements of form criticism, tradition analysis, and literary explication.

One does not need previous exposure to the Bible for this coursework as this course is not designed to provide the student with a detailed knowledge of the Bible's content or to develop a particular theological perspective. Instead we propose to gain an appreciation for the aesthetics of biblical literature and an understanding of the world and worship of the people and spiritual experiences inscribed in its pages.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To engage in a guided reading of the library of ancient Israel, early Judaism, and Christian formation recognized as normative for the Judeo-Christian tradition and practices.
2. To introduce the student to the historical, religious, and cultural factors that affected the collection, composition, transmission, and interpretation (hermeneutics) of these scriptures.
3. To introduce students to methods of historical critical and literary analysis of the scriptures.
4. To fulfill the rubric of the 3 E's—Exploration, Exegesis, Explication—in order to delve into the religious implications of the Bible's message(s).
5. To offer a mixture of historical analysis, cultural inquiry, and literary analysis that sustains the requirements for Cluster III of the General Education Guidelines.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version (other texts may be used as reference; this text will be used in class and for in class work)

Concordance

A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera M. Mickelsen, *Understanding Scripture: A Laymen's Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books), 1982.

Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press), 1983.

Additional Handouts from Ancillary Texts

Christian E. Hauer and William A. Younger, *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall), 2008.

John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press), 1982.

Jonathan Underwood, *A History of the English Bible* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company), 1983.

CLASS SESSIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Homework assignments should be completed on the date indicated.

1. Feb 2 Course Overview and Introductions. Biblical Literary Analysis.
2. Feb 9 Biblical Content and Divisions
HW: Hauer and Young, Excerpt from Chap. 1, The Three Worlds of the Bible
3. Feb 16 Biblical Formation and Canonization.
HW: Read Mickelson and Mickelson, pp. 1 – 62.

FEBRUARY 23, NO CLASS (Conversion Day)

4. Mar 2 Old Testament Exegesis; Concordance exercise.
HW: Mickelson and Mickelson, pp. 63–104, 114–131.
5. Mar 9 Old Testament Exegesis continued. Exegetical Models (handout).
HW: Mickelson and Mickelson, pp. 105 – 113, 132 – 160;
Hayes & Holladay, “Introducing Exegesis” and “Integrating Exegetical Procedures.”
6. Mar 16 Diagnostic Exam. Introduction to the New Testament.

- HW: Study for in-class exam.
Hayes & Holladay, “Introducing Exegesis” and “Integrating Exegetical Procedures.”
Swartley, pp. 224-228.
7. Mar 23 New Testament Continued; Case Study.
HW: Swartley, Chap 1, Slavery.
8. Mar 30 Conservative versus Liberal Approaches to the Bible.
Student Presentations on Old Testament Pericopes.
HW: Swartley, Chap. 1, Slavery.
9. Apr 6 Case Study; Theological and Doctrinal Considerations.
Old Testament Exegesis Paper Due.
HW: Swartley, Chap. 2, Sabbath.
10. Apr 13 Case Study; Social Applications and the Bible.
HW: Swartley, Chap. 3, War.
NO CLASS, April 20, SPRING RECESS
11. Apr 27 Case Study; Hermeneutical Exercise.
HW: Swartley, Chap. 4, Women.
12. May 4 Hermeneutics and Homiletics.
Hermeneutics Review; Student Presentations.
HW: Hayes & Holladay, “Employing the Fruits of Biblical Exegesis.”
13. May 11 History of Hermeneutics; Cross-cultural Applications: The Bible and the Qur’an.
Student Presentations.
HW: Swartley, Chap. 5.
14. May 18 Cross-cultural Applications: The Bible and Science.
HW: New Testament Exegesis Paper due.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- *Oral Presentations [10%]* – Twice during the semester each student will give a 5- to 10-minute presentation that will introduce his/her research and hermeneutical analysis.
- *Class Participation [20%]* – On specific occasions the class will hold workshops to practice hermeneutical skills. Written portions of the exercises will be collected and graded. Participation in class discussion, collegiality, and overall team work will also be factored into this part of the grade.

- *Diagnostic Examination [20%]* – There will be one diagnostic exam given at the end of the first third of the class to review the student's acquaintance with key terms and issues presented in the reading and discussion of Bible history and canon formation.
- *Exegetical Papers [50%]* – Students will write two papers demonstrating their knowledge of hermeneutics. Models for the papers will be provided in class in addition to the models presented in the Swartley text. One paper will be on the Old Testament (or Tanakh); the other based on a New Testament text. Oral presentations will be based on your preferred pericope and will utilize hermeneutical models and exercises used in class.

CLASS POLICY:

- Active participation in class discussion is an essential part of our learning experience.
- Make-up exams and paper extensions will be granted only with a medical excuse or in a verifiable emergency. All assignments will be averaged into your final grade. No assignment will be accepted after class without meeting the exception requirements as stated above and a discussion with the professor beforehand. In brief, grades will be granted as follows:

A- to A+ = 90 to 100; B- to B+ = 80 to 89.9; C to C+ = 70 to 79.9

D- to D+ = 60 to 69.9; F = 0 to 59.9

- **Complete All Assigned Work**

All students are expected to complete all work required for the course. Being absent on a day that work is assigned is not an excuse for not turning it in. Any grade assignment that is not submitted will receive a zero grade. Schedules for oral presentations will be strictly enforced. It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with the professor for make-up work. Only certified emergencies justify such arrangements. Your final grade will reflect any missed homework, exams, and oral reports. Assignments may be sent via email; receipt will be verified by the instructor.

- **Special Needs Assessment**

If you have special needs as addressed by the American with Disabilities Act and need special arrangements for this class, please contact Anthony Phifer in the Office of Services for the Differently-Abled at (718) 270-5027. Any necessary accommodations will be made with that office and the instructor.

- **Academic Integrity**

Each student has a responsibility to submit work that is uniquely his or her own, or to provide clear and complete acknowledgement of the use of work written by others. Toward these ends, the following actions are expected of students:

Complete all work on exams without assistance.

Follow the professor's instructions when completing all class assignments.

Ask for clarification when instructions are not clear.

Provide proper credit when quoting or paraphrasing.

Submit one's own work on exams and essays.

CLASSROOM DECORUM:

- Punctuality facilitates a fully developed discourse among professor and students. Lateness is not acceptable and you will not be able to gain entry unless the professor is contacted regarding an excused lateness.
- Students are expected to carry themselves according to proper academic etiquette. Eating in class is not acceptable. You may bring a nonalcoholic beverage.
- If you have an emergency, please excuse yourself quietly from the room.
- Children and other guests will not be admitted unless permission of the instructor is secured before class.
- Individual use of headphones, Internet connections, cell phones, or beepers violates the class's attention and collegiality and is not permitted.
- Recording of class sessions will be at the discretion of the professor and the class.