
The Bible as Literature

Description

When we label a religious tradition a “religion of the book,” what do we mean? How do the literary devices in a sacred text enable (or thwart) worship, devotion, or belief? In what ways is the meaning offered by a faith tradition redolent of literary meaning? This course explores the ways in which a variety of biblical genres—apocalypse, prophecy, songs and poems of praise, political complaint, chronicle history—impact our understanding of literature and its interpretation. That is, we’ll be examining not only what literary tools can tell us about the bible, but also how this disparate text—in different languages and from two distinct religious traditions—shapes our understanding of literary value and meaning. After all, the study of literature entails a careful, even devout attention to a text at hand, accompanied by the simultaneous conviction that this written text is not all there is, that there is a meaning—or a spirit—that animates it.

In this course, we will read substantial portions of the Bible as well as several pieces of critical commentary. We’ll spend most of the class time focused on the following five concepts: history, prophecy, law, devotion, and faith. In each instance, our goal will be to explore the relationship between the religious concept and its literary analogues and to ask whether we know what we’re talking about when we identify something—an era, a culture, or a person—as secular or as religious.

Readings and Course Organization

History, Epic, and Allegory

Exodus
Judges
1-2 Samuel
Luke
Acts

Law and Creativity

Genesis
Leviticus
Ecclesiastes
Romans

Prophecy, Signs, and Prolepsis

Revelation
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Daniel

Devotion and Metaphor

Song of Solomon
Psalms
1 Corinthians
Ephesians

Faith, Parable, and Meaning

Matthew
John
Job

Texts

- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, eds. Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol Newsom, and Pheme Perkins (Oxford UP, 2010).
- John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler, Anthony D. York, David Citino, and Nicola Denzey, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford UP, 2005).

Requirements

Five analysis papers, one midterm exam, and one final examination.