

Syllabus for Introduction to the Bible 14 week Semester

N.B. Throughout the syllabus, material appearing in orange are suggestions for professors.

Required books

Jerry L. Sumney, *The Bible: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

A translation of the Bible, either NRSV or NIV

Recommended book

HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the content of the Bible and the methods of study that scholars use to understand it. To fulfill this purpose, we will learn about the history of the periods in which various biblical books were written and about how the individual writings came together into a single book. We will try to discover what the biblical writers were trying to accomplish through their writings. This search will present us with understandings of the world and the place of humanity. These can help us see alternative ways that human beings have experienced and made sense of the world.

Student Learning Goals

Students will learn about the settings in the ancient world that produced various biblical books. Students will recognize biblical books as attempts to make meaning of human existence (that is, see them as theological writings).

Students will learn the basic stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Students will recognize the methods scholars use to understand biblical texts.

Students will be enabled to analyze uses of biblical texts in public contexts.

Assignments

Reading: Students will read the assigned portions of *The Bible: An Introduction*. The reading for the day appears on the class schedule below. Come to class prepared to discuss the material in the chapter, including what you do not understand or found problematic. The reading assignments will sometimes include readings from the text of the Bible. These readings should also be done when you arrive in class.

Quizzes: Occasionally, there will be a pop quiz on the day's reading. These will usually be in the form of multiple choice questions. (These are available on the companion website for *The Bible: An Introduction*—fortresspress.com/sumney)

Exams: There will be three exams during the semester and a final. The first two exams will come at the ends of the first two major sections of the textbook. The third exam will come after chapter 14. The final exam will be comprehensive.

Paper: A 7-10 page research paper will be due _____. That paper may investigate the way a passage or group of passages from the Bible is or has been used in the public square by

people who want to shape social or political policy. Alternatively, you may write a critical introduction to a biblical book. This may be more than a typical Intro course requires, but it will help students experience the discipline more fully and may qualify the course as a writing course.

Class Schedule

Week 1—The relevance of study of the Bible as an element of the humanities, for life as an informed citizen, and for information that helps us think of how to make meaning in our world.

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction* chapter 1

Week 2—Discussion of canon formation, textual criticism, and translation theory; beginning of exploration of claims about inspiration and its meaning

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 2-3

Week 3—Exploration of claims about inspiration and its meaning, continued; Composition of the Torah and understanding Genesis 1-11

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapter 4; Genesis 1-4; 6-9

Week 4—**Exam 1** (covers chapters 1-3 and class lectures)

Discussion of Genesis 1-11 and 12-50 (from Abraham until the Israelites move to Egypt)

Reading: Genesis 18:16-19:29

Week 5—Discussion of the narratives of the other books of the Pentateuch Profs may emphasize the meaning of the law in relation to the covenant and the exodus; purpose of the Law as something that makes Israel “holy” (moral and distinct); the oddity of the call to worship only one God

Special attention to how these books function in the post-exilic community

Begin discussion of the Deuteronomistic histories.

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapter 5

Lev 11:39-47 (example to being unclean, but only needing to wait until sundown to be clean; basis for differences from others: vv. 44-45—God is holy and brought you out of Egypt)

Lev. 11:24-30—keep these commands to be different from the nations

Week 6—Continued discussion of the Deuteronomistic histories. Emphasis on the pattern of unfaithfulness as the reason for the eventual defeat of both Israel and Judah and the devastating exile of Judah that these texts are trying to understand and interpret; some attention to (and interpretation of) the idea in Joshua that it is a good idea to kill all inhabitants of a city—this in relation to the difficulty of worshipping only one God

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapter 6 and first half of ch 7

Judges 2:1-5; 2:11-23; 3:7-9; 3:12, 15; 4:1-3; 6:1, 7; 10:6, 10, etc

1 Kings 12:25-28; 14:21-22; 15:1-3; 15:25-26, 33-34; 16:13, 19, 25, 29-30

BUT 1 Kings 12:9-11; 22:1-2

Week 7—Discussion of the Israelite prophets: overall themes and distinctive things about some: attention to the composition of Isaiah and the importance of Ezekiel in interpreting the exile: special note that prophets who predict doom also see hope because defeat and exile do not mean

the end of the covenant, but rather the defeats are within the terms of the covenant, even demanded by the terms of the covenant

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, second half of chapter 7, chapters 8-9

Amos 2:1-8

Hosea 11:1-2, 8-11

Jonah 3:10-4:11

Week 8— Discussion of the Wisdom Literature AND Discussion of the Psalms (and beginning of Intertestamental period history and

Exam 2 (covering chapters 4-9)

Week 9—Discussion of the Intertestamental period (political developments and Second-Temple Judaism)

Discussion of the genre of the Gospels, Synoptic Problem, and Historical Jesus; discussion of Mark

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapter 10-11

Mark 1:1-2; 5:1-20

Mark 1:25, 34, 43-44; 5:43

Week 10—Discussion of distinctive features of Matthew, Luke, John;

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapter 12

Matthew 5:1-26; Luke 4:14-30

Week 11— The beginning of the church according to Acts And Paul and the letters of Paul.

Emphasis on particular historical and social circumstances of Paul's churches and how his letters address those specific concerns; also how this is an initial attempt to figure out what it means to live out a new religion—new not just for these people, but newly founded.

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 13-14

Acts 9:1-9; 10:1-6, 44-48

Week 12—**Exam 3** (chs 10-14); lectures on Paul's letters continued

Week 13—Conclusion of discussion of Paul's letters AND Discussion of Disputed Paulines and Catholic Epistles. Note new concerns that arise in 2nd and 3rd (and later) generations of the new religion. Thinking about how to relate to the rest of the world as newness and excitement are no longer enough.

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 15, 16

Week 14—Discussion of Revelation and conclusion of course. Emphasis on the sociological and theological purpose of such writings AND that Revelation not giving outline of world history.

Return to relevance of religious studies for civic engagement (and perhaps personal life).

Reading: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapter 17 and Epilogue

Revelation 1:9-20; 7:13-8:6

Final Exam