

Preliminary course outline, subject to revision

THE BIBLE: THEN & NOW

Term 1

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Course Description

This course will introduce students to the academic study of the Bible. We will focus primarily on the composition, collection, canonization, transmission, and interpretation of biblical tradition. Our guiding question for most of the course will be: “How, when, and why did the Bible become the Bible?” This course will also provide students with an overview of the contents of the Jewish and Christian Bibles, and will end with a discussion of the history of the Bible’s reception in modern and contemporary North America.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- describe the contents of the Jewish and Christian Bible;
- understand how books were written, preserved, read, and interpreted in Jewish and Christian antiquity;
- explain the meaning and significance the terms “scriptures,” “canon,” and “canonization”;
- identify and analyze examples of the Bible’s use in contemporary culture.

Required Materials and Texts

- none (all readings will be available to download on Avenue)

Class Format

There will be two video lectures per week. Both videos will be available on Monday afternoons, and will be available for students to watch at their leisure until the following Monday morning. I will also host an optional, live Q&A session every Thursday from 3:30pm to 4:20pm. For more details, see Avenue.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Quizzes – 15% (every other week, starting Week 3)
2. Annotated bibliography – 15% (October 9)
3. Take-home midterm exam – 20% (October 23)
4. Rewriting Genesis: Short writing assignment #1 – 25% (November 13)
5. The Bible and Pop Culture: Short writing assignment #2 – 25% (December 7)

Course Evaluation – Details

Quizzes (15%): Every other week, starting Week 3

Quizzes will go live on Avenue on Monday afternoon, and will close the following Monday morning. The questions will be multiple choice and T/F. Each quiz will have

roughly 10 questions, and will be based on the readings since the previous quiz. Students will have 50 minutes to complete the quiz once they begin.

Annotated bibliography (15%): October 9

Students will create an annotated bibliography for a biblical book of their choice (e.g., Genesis, Isaiah, Matthew, etc.). The bibliographies will include fifteen entries. Each entry must be done in accordance with the SBL Handbook of Style (2d ed.). Each entry should also be accompanied by a short (2–3 sentences) description of the source's contents and its relevance for academic research on your chosen biblical book. See Avenue for more details.

Take-home midterm exam (20%): October 23

Students will write an open book midterm exam. The questions will be released a week before the due date. The answers must be uploaded on Avenue. See Avenue for more details.

Rewriting Genesis: Short writing assignment #1 (25%): November 13

Students will be given two passages: one from the Book of Genesis, one from a Jewish rewriting of the Book of Genesis. Students will write a short essay (3–4 page) about how the second text rewrites the passage from Genesis. Students must engage with relevant contemporary scholarship and cite their sources in accordance with the SBL Handbook of Style (2d ed.). See Avenue for more details.

The Bible and Pop Culture: Short writing assignment #2 (25%): December 7

Students will pick a piece of popular media (e.g., a song, film, comic book, etc.), and write a short essay (3–4 page) analyzing its use of the Bible. For some examples and more details about the assignment, see Avenue.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (September 8–11)

A) Topic: Introductory matters

Readings: none

B) Topic: “The Bible” and books in antiquity

Readings:

- Karel van der Toorn, “The Books of the Hebrew Bible as Material Artifacts”
- Adam Bülow-Jacobsen, “Writing Materials in the Ancient World”

Week 2 (September 14–18)

A) Topic: Authors, scribes, and literary production

Readings:

- Karel van der Toorn, “Making Books: Scribal Modes of Text Production”

B) Topic: Literacy and reading in antiquity

Readings:

- Daniel Boyarin, “Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe”
- 2 Kings 22:8–13; Jeremiah 36:1–8; Nehemiah 8:1–8; and Luke 4:16–21

Week 3 (September 21–25)

A) Topic: Scripturalization and canonization

Readings:

- Timothy H. Lim, “Modern and Ancient Views of the Canon”

Notes: Quiz goes live on Monday September 21

B) Hebrew Bible: The Masoretic Text

Readings:

- Geoffrey Khan, “The Tiberian Masoretic Tradition”

Week 4 (September 28–October 2)

A) Hebrew Bible: Pentateuch / Torah

Readings:

- Selections from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Number, and Deuteronomy

B) Hebrew Bible: Prophets (Former)

Readings:

- Selections from Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings

Week 5 (October 5–9)

A) Hebrew Bible: Prophets (Latter)

Readings:

- Selections from Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Haggai

Notes: Quiz goes live on Monday October 5

B) Hebrew Bible: Writings

Readings:

- Selections from 1 and 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Psalms, Proverbs

Notes: Annotated bibliography due on Friday October 9

Week 6 (October 12–16)

Reading Week: NO ASSIGNMENTS

Week 7 (October 19–23)

A) Hebrew Bible: Composing and collecting / An overview

Readings:

- John Barton, *The Bible: The Basics*, pp. 40–44

Notes: Quiz goes live on Monday October 19

B) Hebrew Bible: Composing and collecting / A test case: Daniel

Readings:

- Carol A. Newsom, *Daniel: A Commentary*, pp. 6–12
- The Prayer of Nabonidus (4Q242) and Daniel 4

Notes: Midterm exam due on Friday October 23

Week 8 (October 26–30)

A) Hebrew Bible: Revision and interpretation / Rewritten scriptures

Readings:

- Molly M. Zahn, “Rewritten Scripture”
- Selections from 4QReworked Pentateuch, Jubilees, Temple Scroll, and Genesis Apocryphon

B) Hebrew Bible: Revision and interpretation / Commentaries

Readings:

- Selections from 1Qpesher Habakkuk and Philo, *Questions and Answers*

Week 9 (November 2–6)

A) Canonization and canon-consciousness

Readings:

- John J. Collins, “Canon, Canonization”
- Claudia V. Camp, “Why Is There a Bible and What Do Women Have to Do with It? Gender, Ben Sira, and the Canon”

Notes: Quiz goes live on Monday November 2

B) New Testament: Gospels and Acts

Readings:

- Selections from Mark, John, and Acts

Week 10 (November 9–13)

A) New Testament: Pauline Epistles

Readings:

- Selections from Romans, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Titus

B) New Testament: General Epistles and Revelation

Readings:

- Selections from Hebrews, James, Revelation

Notes: Short writing assignment #1 due on Friday November 13

Week 11 (November 16–20)

A) New Testament: Composing and collecting

Readings:

- Edmond L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis*, pp. 30–56

Notes: Quiz goes live on Monday November 16

B) New Testament: Canonization

Readings:

- Finish: Edmond L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis*, pp. 30–56

Week 12 (November 23–27)

A) The Bible and the fight for gender equality

Readings:

- Selections from *The Woman's Bible*
- Ann Loades, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible*"

B) The Bible, race, and the struggle for liberation

Readings:

- NPR: "Slave Bible from the 1800s Omitted Key Passages That Could Incite Rebellion"

- Allen Dwight Callahan, “Reading and Using Scripture in the African American Tradition”

Week 13 (November 30–December 4)

A) The Bible and political rhetoric: A test case / 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Readings:

- Washington Post, “GOP lawmaker: The Bible say ‘if a man will not work, he shall not eat’”

Notes: Quiz goes live on Monday November 30

B) The Bible in popular media

Readings:

- Michael J. Gilmour, “Bob Dylan’s Bible”
- Noel Leo Erskine, “The Bible and Reggae: Liberation or Subjugation?”

Week 14 (December 7)

A) The Bible in popular media pt. 2

Readings: none

Notes: Short writing assignment #2 due on Monday December 7

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments will be submitted via Avenue.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Late assignments will be deducted 5% per day.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.