

The Bible as Literature

HBRJD-UA 23.001 / RELST-UA 23.001

Course Description

The Bible is a complex and fascinating anthology of ancient literature, written by many different people over the course of nearly a thousand years. The focus of this course will be on reading the Bible as literature, and not as a religious or sacred text. In this course, students will be introduced to various strategies for the literary reading and interpretation of biblical texts. The class will engage diverse literary genres from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and consider the biblical writers' creative deployment of poetic forms, plot devices, and narrative styles. With the guidance of secondary literature that will introduce us to a number of diverse ways to think about the literary interpretation of these texts, we will read parts of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Esther, Ruth, Jonah, and the Gospels, as well as selections from the poetic and wisdom traditions. The goals of this course are twofold: 1) to introduce students to literary forms and styles from one corner of the ancient world, and 2) to enable students to engage with these texts from a new perspective, and examine the ways in which our assumptions about the origins of a text can and do shape our interpretations of it.



**Professor
Liane Feldman**

Office: KJCC 107
Pronouns: she/her

Contact Info
lmfeldman@nyu.edu

Office Hours
Tuesday/Thursday
3:30–4:30pm

Course Requirements

1

ATTENDANCE AND
PARTICIPATION

2

READING
RESPONSE
QUIZZES

3

2 LITERARY
ANALYSIS PAPERS

4

FINAL EXAM



Required Text: A New Revised Standard Version Bible
Recommended Edition: The Harper-Collins Study Bible

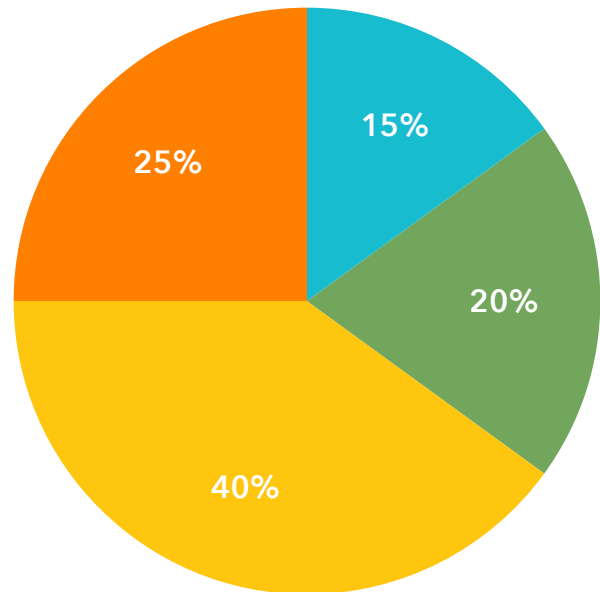
ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (15%)

You are expected to attend every class and to arrive on time, having completed the assigned readings. You should be prepared to thoughtfully discuss these readings in class. If you skip class or make a habit of being late, your participation grade will suffer. If you need to miss class for a religious holiday, illness, or other essential reason, you must email me in advance.

Note:

2 unexcused absences will be permitted. Subsequent absences will result in a lowering of your final course grade.

- Attendance and Participation
- Reading Response Quizzes
- Literary Analysis Papers (2)
- Final Exam



READING RESPONSE QUIZZES (2% EACH; 20% TOTAL)

There will be 11 short reading response quizzes throughout the semester.

You will not be notified in advance of the dates of these quizzes. They will happen in the first five minutes of class. If you are late, you cannot take the quiz. Each quiz is worth 2% of your final grade and the lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

LITERARY ANALYSIS PAPERS (20% EACH; 40% TOTAL)

You will write two 5-6 page papers in this class. The prompts for these papers will be distributed in class ahead of time. Your papers should be 12pt font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides.

All papers should be submitted on NYU Classes by midnight on the day they are due. Any papers submitted after the due date will be subject to a grade penalty.

FINAL EXAM (25%)

There will be an in-class final exam at the end of the semester. This exam will cover literary terms and ideas we have discussed over the course of the semester, and ask you to do a short literary analysis of multiple biblical texts.

You will receive a study guide in the last week of class, and the final class meeting will be an optional review session with me.

THE "IT HAPPENS" CLAUSE

Stuff happens. Each student can invoke the "It Happens" clause once per semester for a no-questions asked 3-day extension on a paper. Just email me before the paper is due to invoke the clause.

All non-Bible readings are on the NYU Classes website

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
	Reading the Bible as Literature	
Tue., Sept. 3	Syllabus; Class Introduction	
Thu., Sept. 5	A Literary Approach to the Bible	Holladay, "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible"
Tue. Sept. 10	Introduction to Issues in Reading Biblical Literature	Alter, "Balaam and the Ass"
Thu., Sept 12	Class Attends a Book Review Panel at the Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies 1:30-3pm; speak to me if you have a time conflict.	
	Unit 1: Biblical Narrative: What is it and How was it Written?	
Tue., Sept. 17	Creation	Genesis 1-4 Baden, "The Documentary Hypothesis"
Thu., Sept 19	The Flood; The Documentary Hypothesis Guest Lecturer: Prof. Joel Baden; Yale Divinity School	Genesis 6-9
Tue., Sept. 24	Stories of the Patriarchs	Genesis 12-20
Thu., Sept. 26	Sarah and Hagar	Genesis 21-23 Williams, "Hagar's Story"
Tue., Oct. 1	NO CLASS: ROSH HASHANAH	
Thu., Oct. 3	Biblical Type Scenes	Genesis 24-29 Alter, "Biblical Type Scenes"
Tue., Oct. 8	Stories of the Matriarchs	Genesis 30-36 Gafney, "Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah"
Thu., Oct .10	The Joseph Story	Gen 37-50
	Paper 1 is Due on Friday, October 11th	
	Unit 2: Biblical Poetry	
Tue., Oct. 15	Biblical Poetry; Poetry and Prose	Judges 4-5 Berlin, "Reading Biblical Poetry"
Thu., Oct. 17	Poetic Parallelism	Psalms 13, 19, 29, 93 Alter, "The Dynamics of Parallelism"
Tue., Oct. 22	Erotic Poetry	Song of Songs Kalmanofsky, "The Daughters of Jerusalem"

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
Thu., Oct. 24	Poetry and Wisdom	Ecclesiastes 1, 3, 12
Tue., Oct. 29	Poetry and Prophecy	Isaiah 14:4-21; Isaiah 40
	Unit 3: Innerbiblical Exegesis and New Testament	
Thu., Oct. 31	The Idea of Innerbiblical Exegesis	2 Samuel 6; Numbers 3:1-12; 1 Chronicles 13 Fewell, "Reading, Writing, and Relating"
Tue., Nov. 5	Apocalypticism Guest Lecturer: Prof. Candida Moss; University of Birmingham	Daniel 7 Revelation 1-6
Thu., Nov. 8	Women's Songs	1 Samuel 1-2; Luke 1 Cook, "Hannah's Later Songs"
Tue., Nov. 12	The Gospel of Mark Guest Lecturer: Prof. Candida Moss	Mark 1-8
Thu., Nov. 14	Rewriting Creation	Genesis, Exodus (selections) Jubilees (selections)
Tue., Nov. 19	Humor in Parabiblical Literature Guest Lecturer: Prof. Annette Reed; NYU	The Testament of Abraham (pdf with Intro and Notes on Classes)
Thu., Nov. 21	Rewritten Law (The Ten Commandments)	Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5
	Paper 2 is Due on Friday, November 22nd	
Tue., Nov. 26	NO CLASS, PROFESSOR AT A CONFERENCE	
Thu., Nov. 28	NO CLASS; THANKSGIVING	
	Unit 4: Biblical Novellas	
Tue., Dec. 3	Parody	Jonah Brenner, "Jonah's Poem out of and within its context"
Thu., Dec. 5	A Story about Foreign Women	Ruth Linafelt, "Narrative and Poetic Art in the Book of Ruth"
Tue., Dec. 10	Writing about Writing	Esther
Thu., Dec. 12	REVIEW SESSION FOR FINAL EXAM	

FORMS OF ADDRESS

You are welcome to share your preferred name and/or pronoun at any point in the semester. We will address you respectfully in accordance with your preference.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (PLAGIARISM)

Plagiarism occurs when writers misrepresent others' work as their own. To be sure when to cite your sources in written assignments, read "[Is It Plagiarism Yet?](#)"

If I suspect that you have submitted work that is not your own, the two of us will enter into a period of collective misery. So, please, save us both a lot of grief: do your own work, learn something in the process, feel justifiable pride in that accomplishment, and enjoy the learning experience.

Any student caught plagiarizing will receive an F on the assignment, and depending on the severity of the offense, failure of the entire course. NYU's academic integrity policy can be found [here](#).

LEARNING DISABILITY OR DIFFERENCE

If you are a student with a documented disability at NYU, I will be happy to work with you to adapt the course material and assignments to your needs. Please provide me with documentation of your learning needs as soon as possible because accommodations cannot be provided retroactively.

If you have any questions about documentation, please contact:

[Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#)
(212)-998-4980.

CLASS CANCELLATION

In the event that class is cancelled for any reason, the professor will notify students by email and post an announcement on NYU Classes. Students are responsible for checking their NYU email on a regular basis.

GRADING RUBRIC

A 95-100%	C 74-76%
A- 90-94%	C- 70-73%
B+ 87-89%	D+ 67-69%
B 84-86%	D 64-66%
B- 80-83%	D- 60-63%
C+ 77-79%	F 0-59%