

# The Bible as Literature

**HBRJD-UA 23.001 / RELST-UA 23.001**  
**Fall 2022**

## 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 211  
Pronouns: she/her

Contact Info  
[lmfeldman@nyu.edu](mailto:lmfeldman@nyu.edu)

### Office Hours

Tue: 2:00–3:20  
Thurs: 9:30–11:00  
Use [this link](#) for available times and to schedule!

**Course Assistant:**  
**Abigail Beech**  
[abigail.beech@nyu.edu](mailto:abigail.beech@nyu.edu)

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**ATTENDANCE AND  
PARTICIPATION**

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**GENRE  
EXERCISES**

3

**2 LITERARY  
ANALYSIS PAPERS**

4

**FINAL PAPER,  
PROJECT,  
OR EXAM**

# COURSE REQUIREMENTS

FALL 2022

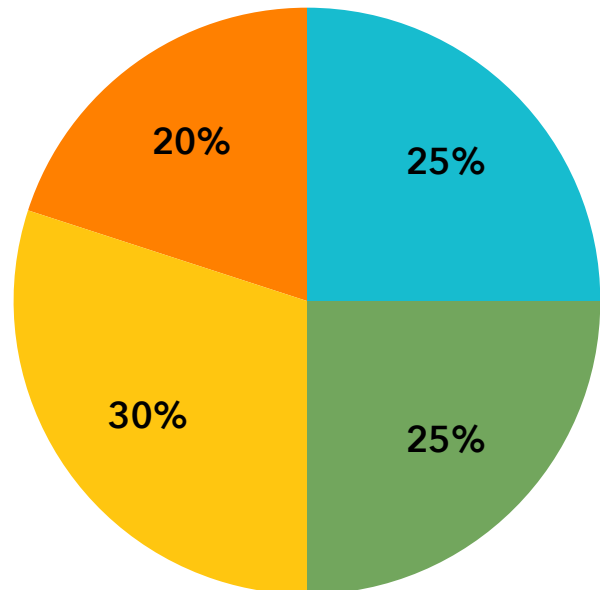
## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (25%)

This is a discussion-based class. It relies on your active participation during class time. You are expected to attend class, arrive on time, and complete the assigned readings. You will be expected to participate in the discussion of these readings and related themes in class. Participation can take many forms – see the participation addendum on the course website for a more detailed explanation.

Note:

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

- Attendance and Participation
- Literary Analysis Papers (2)
- Genre Exercises
- Final Project



## GENRE EXERCISES (5% EACH; 25% TOTAL)

Students will be asked to create their own compositions in various biblical genres in order to learn the mechanics and norms of ancient literary forms. These genre exercises will be done during class time and students will have the option to work with a small group (2-3 students) or by themselves. These are graded on a ✓+ (100); ✓ (85); ✓- (60); or 0 scale.

## LITERARY ANALYSIS PAPERS (15% EACH; 30% 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 Brightspace by 5:00pm on the day they are due. Any papers submitted after the due date will be subject to a grade penalty.

## FINAL PAPER, PROJECT, OR EXAM (20%)

Students have three options:

1. A final exam
2. A 6-8 page literary analysis paper. The student must identify their own topic and have it approved by the professor.
3. A final creative project in the medium of their choosing (art, video, podcast, writing, etc.) related to a text or theme discussed in this course. Creative projects must include a 2-page statement about why specific choices were made and how they relate to the themes of the course.

## 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.

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
<b>Reading the Bible as Literature</b>		
Thu., Sept. 1	Syllabus; Class Introduction	
Tue., Sept. 6	A Literary Approach to the Bible	- Holladay, "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible" [PDF]
Thu., Sept. 8	Which Bible? Whose Bible? Why do we care?	- Kugel, "The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha" in <i>Outside the Bible</i> (7-10) <b>[PDF]</b> - Schiffman, "The Dead Sea Scrolls" in <i>Outside the Bible</i> (24-32) <b>[PDF]</b> - Amy-Jill Levine, " <a href="#">What is the Difference between the Old Testament, the Tanakh, and the Hebrew Bible?</a> "
<b>Unit 1: Biblical Narrative: What is it and How was it Written?</b>		
Tue., Sept. 13	Introduction to Issues in Reading Biblical Literature	- Alter, "Balaam and the Ass"
Thu., Sept. 15	Creation	- Genesis 1-4 - Baden, "The Documentary Hypothesis"
Tue., Sept. 20	The Flood; The Documentary Hypothesis	- Genesis 6-9
Thu., Sept. 22	Biblical Type Scenes	- Genesis 12-20 - Alter, "Biblical Type Scenes"
Tue., Sept. 27	<b>NO CLASS; Rosh Hashanah</b>	
Thu., Sept. 29	Sarah and Hagar (In class exercise: Write a type-scene)	- Genesis 21-23 - Williams, "Hagar's Story"
Tue., Oct. 4	The Trickster Motif in the Patriarchal Stories	- Genesis 24-29
Thu., Oct. 6	Stories of the Matriarchs	- Genesis 30-36 - Gafney, "Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah"
Tue., Oct. 11	<b>NO CLASS; Monday Schedule at NYU</b>	
Thu., Oct. 13	The Joseph Story (In class exercise: Write a Midrash)	- Gen 37-50
<b>Paper 1 is Due on Friday, Oct. 14th at 5:00pm NYC time</b>		

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
<b>Unit 2: Biblical Poetry</b>		
Tue., Oct. 18	Poetic Parallelism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Psalm 13, 19, 29, 93</li> <li>- Alter, "The Dynamics of Parallelism"</li> </ul>
Thu., Oct. 20	Erotic Poetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Song of Songs</li> <li>- Kalmanofsky, "The Daughters of Jerusalem"</li> </ul>
Tue., Oct. 25	Poetic Parallelism (In class exercise: Write a parallelistic psalm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ben Sira, excerpt from <i>Hymn to the Ancestors</i> (44:1-45:26)</li> <li>- Berlin, "Reading Biblical Poetry"</li> </ul>
Thu., Oct. 27	Poetry and Wisdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ecclesiastes 1-3, 12</li> </ul>
<b>Unit 3: Rewritten, Revised: Innerbiblical Exegesis, Second Temple Literature, and New Testament</b>		
Tue., Nov. 1	The Idea of Innerbiblical Exegesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 Samuel 6; Numbers 3:1-12; 1 Chronicles 13</li> <li>- Sommer, "Inner-biblical Interpretation"</li> </ul>
Thu., Nov. 3	Introducing Apocalypticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sheinfeld, "Scenes from the End of the World,"</li> <li>- Skim all, but focus on pp. 3-6 (on Apocalypse, Apocalyptic, Apocalypticism)</li> <li>- Daniel 7-12</li> <li>- Animal Apocalypse</li> </ul>
Tue., Nov. 8	Apocalypticism (In class exercise: Write an apocalypse/30 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Murphy, "<u>Animal Imagery in Apocalyptic Literature</u>"</li> <li>- 1 Enoch 14</li> <li>- Revelation 1, 4-14</li> </ul>
Thu., Nov. 10	Rewriting Women's Songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 Samuel 1-2; Luke 1</li> <li>- Cook, "Hannah's Later Songs"</li> </ul>
Tue., Nov. 15	Rewriting Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Skim through/review Genesis 1-9</li> <li>- 1 Enoch 6-11</li> <li>- Jubilees 1-6</li> </ul>
Thu., Nov. 17	Rewritten Law: The Ten Commandments (In class exercise: Rewritten Bible/30 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5 (NRSVue)</li> <li>- Exodus 20 (Samaritan Pentateuch)</li> </ul>
<b>Paper 2 is Due on Friday, Nov. 18 at 5:00pm NYC time</b>		
Tue., Nov. 22	<b>NO CLASS; Professor at a Conference</b>	



Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
	<b>Unit 4: Novellas</b>	
Thu., Nov 24	<b>NO CLASS; Thanksgiving</b>	
Tue., Nov. 29	Parody and a Prophet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jonah</li> <li>- Ryu, "Divine Rhetoric and Prophetic Silence in the Book of Jonah" (pp. 226-235)</li> </ul>
Thu., Dec. 1	Fidelity of a Foreign Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ruth</li> <li>- Dearman, "Characters in the Book of Ruth" (pp. 59-76)</li> </ul>
Tue., Dec. 6	Jews in a Foreign Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Esther</li> <li>- Wetter, "Bodies, Boundaries, and Belonging in the Book of Esther," (pp. 255-265)</li> </ul>
Thu., Dec. 8	Second Temple Novellas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tobit</li> </ul>
Tue., Dec. 13	Wrap-up, conclusions, leftover bits	no reading due
	<b>Final Papers/Projectd are due at the beginning of scheduled time for the Final Exam of this class (TBD)</b>	

## COVID AND ILLNESS POLICY

If you are experiencing any symptoms Influenza or COVID and/or if you test positive, please do not attend class in person. Send me an email to let me know before class begins if you are able.

You will not be penalized for missing class and will have the opportunity to make up any work you may have missed.

Depending on how the semester goes, we may have an option for students who are symptomatic or recovering to join class remotely. You should only do so if you are physically able.

**Please communicate** with me as early as possible if you are falling behind or struggling **in any way for any reason, illness or otherwise**. I am ready and willing to work with you to help you successfully navigate this class, but I cannot work with you to find a solution if you don't tell me you need help!

**The sooner you contact me, the easier it will be for me to help you. If you wait until the end of the semester, I may have fewer options to offer you.**

## 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?](#)"

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

## THE WRITING CENTER

This class is relatively writing-intensive. I recognize that writing may not be everyone's strong suit. The Writing Center is a resource for you to meet one-on-one with trained writing consultants who can help you learn to communicate your ideas more clearly. Students work with consultants at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of writing except for exams. You can [schedule an appointment online](#).

## FORMS OF ADDRESS

You are welcome to share your pronouns and/or preferred name at any time. We will address you in accordance with your preference.

## LEARNING DISABILITY OR DIFFERENCE

If you are a student with a documented disability at NYU, I am happy to work with you to adapt the course material and assignments to your needs. Get in touch early in the semester!

If you have any questions about documentation, please contact:

[Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#)

## CLASS CANCELLATION

If class is cancelled, I will announce it via email and post it on the NYU Classes website. Students are responsible for checking their NYU email!

## 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%