

The Bible as Literature

HBRJD-UA 23.001 / RELST-UA 23.001
Spring 2021

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
Use [this link](#) for available times and to schedule!

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**ATTENDANCE AND
PARTICIPATION**

2

**GENRE
EXERCISES**

3

**2 LITERARY
ANALYSIS PAPERS**

4

**FINAL
PROJECT**

Note: This class is synchronous; there is no asynchronous option!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

SPRING 2021

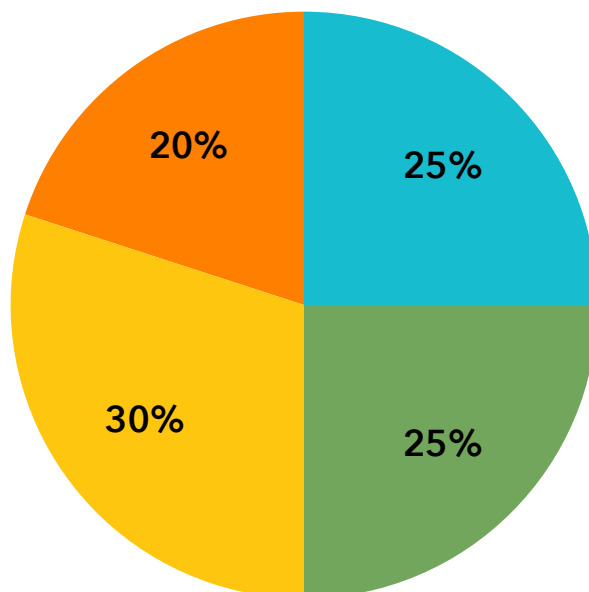
ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (25%)

This is a seminar class. It relies on your active participation during class time. You are expected to attend class **synchronously**, 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 at the end of the syllabus 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 ● Genre Exercises
● Literary Analysis Papers (2) ● 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 (2-4 students) or by themselves. These are graded on a ✓+ (100); ✓ (85); ✓- (70); 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 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 PROJECT (20%)

Students have two options for the final project:

1. Create a portfolio of their work from the semester and write a 5-6 page response paper to a series of reflection and synthesis questions I will provide, or
2. 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.

COVID-19 Policies for this Class

This is not a normal semester.

Everyone is navigating a more complicated reality, whether they are on campus in NYC or off-campus somewhere else in the world. Please be patient with yourselves, with each other, and with your teaching assistants and professor.

Your physical, mental, and emotional health should be your priority this semester.

I expect you to put as much effort as you are able into this course, but I also recognize that this will look different for each student and that it may vary over the course of the semester. That is okay!

If you or someone close to you gets sick

First things first. Get the medical care and support you need. Then, make sure you notify NYU's Covid-19 Prevention and Response team.

Once you've done that, please email me and your TA—or have someone email us on your behalf—to let us know that you might not be able to participate in class as actively (or at all) while you are recovering or caring for someone who is recovering. I will work with you to find a way to complete the class requirements.

You do not need to send me a doctor's note or any personal health information!

Please communicate with me as early as possible if you are falling behind or struggling in any way. 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.

THIS IS A SYNCHRONOUS CLASS!

I realize that many of you are not on NYU's New York campus, and that time zone differences can present a challenge. However, this class is being run synchronously, meaning that you have to log into Zoom during the regular class time. This is not primarily a lecture class! Students will be expected to participate in the class discussions and activities that make up the majority of our class time. This cannot be done asynchronously!

CAMERAS ON/OFF ON ZOOM:

The default for the discussion portion of this class will be for students to have their cameras turned ON.

I recognize that there are multiple types of obstacles to this, from short-term ones like shaky internet connection to longer term accessibility issues. If this policy will cause a problem for you, talk to me and we can work something out.

Virtual backgrounds are more than welcome, and thematically-appropriate ones for the day's discussion are always encouraged.

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 be found [here](#).

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 preferred name and/or pronoun at any point in the semester. We will address you respectfully 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%

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
	Reading the Bible as Literature	
Thu., Jan. 28	Syllabus; Class Introduction	
Tue., Feb. 2	A Literary Approach to the Bible	- Holladay, "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible" [PDF]
Thu., Feb. 4	Which Bible? Whose Bible? Why do we care?	- Kugel, "The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha" in <i>Outside the Bible</i> (7-10) [PDF] - Schiffman, "The Dead Sea Scrolls" in <i>Outside the Bible</i> (24-32) [PDF] - Amy-Jill Levine, " What is the Difference between the Old Testament, the Tanakh, and the Hebrew Bible? "
	Unit 1: Biblical Narrative: What is it and How was it Written?	
Tue., Feb. 9	Introduction to Issues in Reading Biblical Literature	- Alter, "Balaam and the Ass"
Thu., Feb. 11	Creation	- Genesis 1-4 - Baden, "The Documentary Hypothesis"
Tue., Feb. 16	The Flood; The Documentary Hypothesis	- Genesis 6-9 (when you read this, keep a list of things that seem like contradictions to you)
Thu., Feb. 18	NO CLASS; Monday Schedule at NYU	
Tue., Feb. 23	Biblical Type Scenes	- Genesis 12-20 - Alter, "Biblical Type Scenes"
Thu., Feb. 25	Sarah and Hagar	- Genesis 21-23 - Williams, "Hagar's Story"
Tue., Mar. 2	The Trickster Motif in the Patriarchal Stories	- Genesis 24-29
Thu., Mar. 4	Stories of the Matriarchs	- Genesis 30-36 - Gafney, "Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah"
Tue., Mar. 9	The Joseph Story	- Gen 37-50
	Paper 1 is Due on Friday, March 10th at 5:00pm NYC time	

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
Unit 2: Biblical Poetry		
Thu., Mar. 11	Biblical Poetry; Poetry and Prose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Judges 4-5 - Berlin, "Reading Biblical Poetry"
Tue., Mar. 16	Poetic Parallelism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psalm 13, 19, 29, 93 - Alter, "The Dynamics of Parallelism"
Thu., Mar. 18	Poetic Parallelism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ben Sira, excerpt from <i>Hymn to the Ancestors</i> (44:1-45:26) - Kugel, excerpt from <i>The Idea of Biblical Poetry</i>, (pp. 1-23). Note: there are <u>a lot of examples</u> in these pages; ignore the Hebrew text, everything is translated!
Tue., Mar. 23	Erotic Poetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Song of Songs - Kalmanofsky, "The Daughters of Jerusalem"
Thu., Mar. 25	Poetry and Wisdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ecclesiastes 1-3, 12
Unit 3: Rewritten, Revised: Innerbiblical Exegesis, Second Temple Literature, and New Testament		
Tue., Mar. 30	The Idea of Innerbiblical Exegesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 Samuel 6; Numbers 3:1-12; 1 Chronicles 13 - Sommer, "Inner-biblical Interpretation"
Thu., Apr. 1	Apocalypticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daniel 7 - Revelation 1-6
Tue., Apr. 6	Rewriting Women's Songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 Samuel 1-2; Luke 1 - Cook, "Hannah's Later Songs"
Thu., Apr. 8	Historical Criticism, New Historicism, and the Gospels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56; Matt 9:18-26 - Leviticus 15 - Greenblatt, "The Power of Forms" (pp. 1443-1445) - Fry, "The New Historicism" (pp. 246-258)
Tue., Apr. 13	Rewriting Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Genesis, Exodus (selections TBD) - Jubilees (selections)
Thu., Apr. 15	Humor in Parabiblical Literature Guest Lecturer: Prof. Annette Reed; NYU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Testament of Abraham (pdf with Intro and Notes on Classes)
Paper 2 is Due on Friday, April 16 at 5:00pm NYC time		
Tue., Apr. 20	Rewritten Law (The Ten Commandments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5 in Harper Collins - Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5 in Samaritan Pentateuch

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
	Unit 4: Novellas	
Thu., Apr. 22	Parody and a Prophet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jonah - Ryu, "Divine Rhetoric and Prophetic Silence in the Book of Jonah" (pp. 226-235)
Tue., Apr. 27	Fidelity of a Foreign Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ruth - Dearman, "Characters in the Book of Ruth" (pp. 59-76)
Thu., Apr. 29	Jews in a Foreign Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Esther - Wetter, "Bodies, Boundaries, and Belonging in the Book of Esther," (pp. 255-265)
Tue., May. 4	Second Temple Novellas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tobit
Thu., May. 6	Wrap-up, conclusions, leftover bits	no reading due
	Final Projects are due on Friday, May 14th at 5:00pm NYC time	