



# The Bible as Literature

## HUM 3223

*The Bible has been a subversive document, suspicious of orthodoxy since the time of Amos and Hosea* — Karen Armstrong

*The Bible is literature, not dogma* — George Santayana

Fall 2024 • Aug 26–Dec 13, 2024 • MWF 12:00–12:50

James R. Adair • james.adair@utsa.edu

Class website: <http://rosetta.reltech.org/UTSA/HUM3223/>

Office hours by appointment in FLN 1.02.06H

210-363-8230 (cell)

## I. Course Description

The Bible is considered by many Jews and Christians to be a sacred text. People read it devotionally, from a historical perspective, and even theologically, but it may also be read as a literary text, or rather as a collection of literary texts. This course will focus on a variety of literary approaches to the text of the Bible, informed by an understanding of the historical development, selection, and transmission of the text. The instructor does not assume any previous knowledge of the Bible or any particular faith commitment on the part of the student. The course will be taught from an academic, nonsectarian perspective.

## II. Course Aims and Objectives

### Aims

In this course students will learn to read the Bible as literature, using techniques often (but not always!) developed in other fields of study.

### Specific Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to recognize and describe several different approaches to reading the Bible as literature.
- Students will be able to apply several of these approaches to reading the Bible as literature to selected biblical passages.
- Students will have a general understanding of the development, selection, and transmission of the biblical text.

- Students will learn to listen critically and respond in a scholarly yet respectful manner to the ideas of others.
- Students will critically analyze books and articles related to the subject matter.

### **III. Format and Procedures**

The instructor will meet with the students for fifteen weeks on Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays, with class sessions of fifty minutes apiece. The instructor will use a modified lecture approach for some class sessions, and students will lead other class sessions. Students are expected to have read assigned materials before coming to class and to participate in class discussion, both individually and as part of an assigned group. Class announcements, assignments, and supplementary material will be available on the class website and/or on Canvas.

Assignments should be submitted to Canvas no later than 11:59 p.m. on the due date. Assignments are due on the assigned date regardless of whether the student attends class on that date. Late work will be penalized one letter grade per week (or portion of week), with a minimum penalty of half a letter grade (e.g., for work submitted the day after the due date).

### **IV. Course Requirements**

#### **1. Class Attendance, Participation, and Assignments**

Students will endeavor to attend every class, turn in every assignment on time, and participate in all class discussions. It is particularly important for students to attend every session in which their assigned group is responsible for presenting material. Students with more than three unexcused absences will be penalized one point on their final grade per additional class missed (as part of their Class Participation grade). Excused absences are illness, death in the family, and officially sponsored UTSA activities. The student will be expected to provide documentation for all excused absences. Students who are absent, whether the absence is excused or unexcused, are expected to complete assignments on time (see previous section). Students who know in advance they will be absent may make arrangements to turn in assignments or take an exam early.

Unless otherwise specified, all written assignments should be composed in Times or Times New Roman font, 12 point type, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all four sides, and follow MLA specifications. Papers with a minimum page count specified will be considered short of the required minimum if they employ excessive margins. For example, a two-page paper must extend to the bottom of the second page, or it will be considered a one-page paper. Charts, illustrations, and other non-textual material may be included in a paper when appropriate—in fact, they may well improve a paper in some instances—but the non-textual material will not be counted toward the total page count, so students should adjust the length of their papers accordingly. **Papers submitted via Canvas must be in Word (.doc or .docx) or PDF format.**

A schedule of readings and other assignments will be on the class website.

## 2. Course Readings

Class texts are:

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books, 2011. (available online through UTSA library)

Coogan, Michael D., ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018.

Keefer, Kyle. *The New Testament as Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 2022.

Additional readings will also be assigned.

## 3. Reaction Papers/Literary Analyses

Students will submit brief papers (minimum of 2 pages, double-spaced) expressing their reaction to an assigned reading. These papers are due on Mondays of most weeks, with a few exceptions, as indicated on the class website.

## 4. Exam

Students will have one exam on Friday, Sep 27.

## 5. Book Review

Students will write a review of a book selected from a list provided by the instructor, or approved in advance. This paper will be between 6 and 8 pages, double-spaced. This paper is due on Monday, Oct 21. It must be submitted electronically via Canvas by 12:59 p.m. See the class website for guidance on how to write a book review and for sample book reviews.

## 6. Group Presentations

Every student will be assigned to a group that will discuss topics, present information to the rest of the class, and produce a literary analysis paper (see #7 below). The group presentations represent a significant portion of the student's grade for the class, so participation in group work is important.

## 7. Literary Analysis Paper and Presentation

Each group of students will choose one literary technique discussed in class and apply it to one biblical passage, or perhaps a small group of related passages. This paper (one per group) will be between 12 and 15 pages in length, double-spaced. Students should feel free to be creative with this paper. This paper is due on Friday, Dec 13, the day scheduled for the Final Exam. It must be submitted electronically via Blackboard by 11:59 p.m. on that day. In addition to the paper itself,

each group is responsible for presenting the findings of their research to the rest of the class during the Final Exam period. The Final Exam period is Friday, Dec 13, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:50 p.m. (*note that the time is different from regular class meetings!*)

## **V. Grading**

The student's grade will be determined as follows:

- a. Reaction Papers: 15%
- b. Exam: 15%
- c. Book Review: 15%
- d. Group Presentations: 30%
- e. Literary Analysis Paper and Presentation: 15%
- f. Class Participation: 10%

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following table:

|            |           |           |           |             |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| A+: 97-100 | B+: 87-89 | C+: 77-79 | D+: 67-69 | F: below 60 |
| A: 93-96   | B: 83-86  | C: 73-76  | D: 63-66  |             |
| A-: 90-92  | B-: 80-82 | C-: 70-72 | D-: 60-62 |             |

## **VI. Subject to Change**

Assignments, grades, schedules, and other items detailed in this syllabus are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. The instructor will give students reasonable notice of any changes that are made.

## **VII. Supplemental Information**

UTSA offers many services to help students succeed in their classes. Some of the offices that provide these services are Counseling Services, Student Disability Services, and the Tomás Rivera Center, which offers Supplemental Instruction and Tutoring. Information on these services, as well as the Student Code of Conduct and Scholastic Dishonesty policies, can be found on the following web page: <http://provost.utsa.edu/syllabus.asp>. Please read the information on this page, which may be considered an appendix to this syllabus.