

## **Syllabus for Introduction to the Bible**

### **For a 14-week semester**

N.B. Throughout the syllabus, material appearing in blue are suggestions for instructors.

### **Required books**

- John Drane, *Introducing the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); isbn – 9780800698409
- A translation of the Bible, either NRSV or NIV

### **Recommended book**

*HarperCollins Study Bible*, NRSV

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the content of the Bible and the methods of study that scholars use to understand it. To fulfill this purpose, we will learn about the history of the periods in which various biblical books were written and about how the individual writings came together into a single book. We will try to discover what the biblical writers were trying to accomplish through their writings. This search will present us with understandings of the world and the place of humanity. These can help us see alternative ways that human beings have experienced and made sense of the world.

### **Learning Objectives: Engaged Learning**

In this course, you will have the opportunity to become an engaged learner, one who

- Sets personal goals to participate, and evaluates progress;
- Prepares for class in order to teach others and to ask informed questions;
- Engages in respectful and collaborative discussion, taking responsibility for classroom dynamics;
- Expands the ability to learn in different ways, and to transfer knowledge bases;
- Researches a topic of interest, taking initiative to extend beyond required assignments.

### **Learning Objectives: Content**

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

#### 1. Demonstrate Biblical literacy

- Identify structural features of the Bible (e.g., Old Testament, New Testament, Apocrypha, Pentateuch, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Letters, etc.);
- Recount in chronological order the biblical metanarrative to the end of 1<sup>st</sup> C. C.E., identifying major historical figures, and events;

#### 2. Identify factors that influence Biblical interpretation

- Identify the impact of historical events on the writing and theology of the different books in the Bible;

Drane, *Introducing the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Fortress Press, 2011), sample syllabus

- Identify the various authors of the books of the Bible, their concerns and strategies (including genre), bias, dates, and social position;
- Describe the various Biblical genres, providing examples;
- Describe how and why the Bible became an influential book (canonization);
- Explore presuppositions of our culture;
- Identify factors that influence reading strategies of the Bible;
- Find resources that will help you to extend your study of the Bible.

### **Assignments**

*Reading:* Students will read the assigned portions of *Introducing the Bible*. The reading for the day appears on the class schedule below. Come to class prepared to discuss the material in the chapter, including what you do not understand or found problematic. The reading assignments will sometimes include readings from the text of the Bible. These readings should also be done when you arrive in class.

*Quizzes:* Occasionally, there will be a pop quiz on the day's reading.

*Exams:* There will be three exams during the semester and a final. The first two exams will come at the ends of the first two major sections of the textbook. The third exam will come after chapter XXX. The final exam will be comprehensive.

*Papers:* The purpose of these assignments is two-fold: to develop your ability to write short arguments and give oral presentations, and to identify principles of interpretation. Learning cell papers are written on two different levels. You will write 2 A-levels and 2 B-levels. The ascending grade point scale encourages improvement. Unexcused absence on learning cell days is a double-cut.

### **A-Level:**

A-Level Learning Cells are based only on the biblical text (primary sources). Do NOT consult secondary sources.

1) *Gather evidence:* Read the assigned biblical passages carefully. Keep a list of key words or themes as you read, noting chapter and verse references. Do not assume that you know what the text says; **make sure it is really there!** A concordance may be used to identify word repetition.

2) *Analyze the evidence:* What themes seem to be the most important and well-developed? Pick two and write a paragraph on each. Structure your paragraphs this way: introduce your theme with a topic sentence, give at least three pieces of properly-cited evidence to support the theme, and conclude (restate topic sentence and lead to the next paragraph).

3) *Evaluate the evidence within its context:* Make a clear connection between your two topic

sentences and write a thesis sentence. Write an introduction for your paper that states your thesis and how you will prove it (preview your topic sentences). Write a conclusion that reviews your topic sentences and restates your thesis. Possible questions to consider: How does this text present the relationship between God and humans? Is this relationship direct or mediated? What main image or language is used to describe God? How are the people presented? Are specific people or groups valued over others (e.g., priests, kings, Israelites, Canaanites)? What type of punishment or salvation is described? Use concept maps to clarify relationships. (I will demonstrate this.)

4) *Extend your thesis to a new context:* **Briefly** compare this text with other texts we have studied so far. Consider any one of the following questions: How does this text fit into or advance the metanarrative? Why does the author tell this story or present this material in this particular way (genre)? What historical situation or event might have provoked this kind of message or understanding of God? What bias do you detect? [Hint: consider the bias of the author rather than the perspective of God or other characters.] Write your question and a possible solution (no more than one sentence) and insert it into your introduction and conclusion, framing the rest of your paper.

5) Write no more than one page. Edit your papers carefully, using the samples to guide your form. *Do not just re-tell the story!* Before class, submit your paper to turnitin.com. Also, complete the LC rubric, attach it to a copy of your paper, and bring it to class the day it is due. The LC will form the basis of class discussion.

### **B-Level:**

Now that you have developed the skill of writing short arguments based on the Biblical text alone (primary sources), you will have the opportunity to develop a more sophisticated writing style and argument by including information from secondary sources.

1) *Begin with an examination of the primary source:* Prepare a paper based on #1-4 above, having a clear question identified. For example, you might ask, “What is going on that the author insists that Jews only marry other Jews?” [Hint: if you do this part well, the rest will be easier!]

2) *Include research:* Research the question that you identified in #4 above. Consult at least five secondary sources dated after 1975, including your textbook and the introductions in the *HarperCollins Study Bible*. Include at least one Bible commentary specific to your text (E.g., *Commentary of 1 Corinthians*). Do **not** use internet sources. Use proper bibliography format (see samples). Integrate this research into your paper wherever appropriate.

3) These learning cell papers may be up to two pages in length. Before class, submit your paper to turnitin.com. Also, complete the LC rubric, attach it to a copy of your paper, and bring it to class the day it is due. The LC will form the basis of class discussion.

### **A Word about assignments:**

- Late learning cells will not be accepted.
- Go to the Writing Center for assistance. Feel free to discuss your concerns with the instructor.
- You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is and what it is not.
- You **MAY** discuss your learning cells with other students. Your written assignments, on the other hand, **must** be your own work. Dependence of one student on another will result in a grade of zero for all parties, and you will be reported.

Drane, *Introducing the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Fortress Press, 2011), sample syllabus

This may be more than a typical Intro course requires, but it will help students experience the discipline more fully and may qualify the course as a writing course.

### **Grading Scale**

A 93-100 B 83-86 C 73-76 D 63-66

### **Class Schedule**

Week 1—The relevance of study of the Bible; context for the Old Testament and earliest narratives

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2—Founding of Israel; development of the monarchy

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 3 and 4

Week 3— The divided kingdoms; the Exilic Period

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 5-7

Week 4—**Exam 1** (covers chapters 1-7 and class lectures)

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapter 8

Week 5— The Jewish people and their relation to God: piety, ethics, worship; implications for Christianity

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 9-11

Week 6— From the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapter 12

Week 7— The person of Jesus

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 13-15

Week 8— The stories of Jesus' life

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 16-18

Week 9—**Exam 2** (covering chapters 8-18 and class lectures)

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapter 28

Week 10—Understanding the Gospels

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 19-20

Week 11— The beginning of the church according to Acts

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapter 21

Week 12—**Exam 3** (covering chapters 19-21, 28)

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapter 22

Week 13—Paul's letters AND Discussion of Disputed Paulines and Catholic Epistles.

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 23-25

Drane, *Introducing the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Fortress Press, 2011), sample syllabus

Week 14—Discussion of Revelation and conclusion of course.

Reading: *Introducing the Bible*, Chapters 26-27

**Final Exam (comprehensive)**