

Common Course Outline
HUM 255
Bible as Literature
3 Semester Hours

The Community College of Baltimore County

Description

Bible as Literature

Surveys the major books of the Old and New Testaments from an historical and literary point of view; focuses on Biblical themes, characters, symbols, and archetypes that have had the most significant impact upon subsequent Western literature and art.

Overall Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

1. develop and apply critical and analytical skills to cultural and literary analysis of Biblical texts
2. detail and analyze comparatively selected relevant Biblical texts
3. analyze selected Biblical texts in their cultural contexts
4. recognize and describe the relevant influences that shaped the production and formation of the Biblical canon
5. view Biblical texts with a more sophisticated intellectual and aesthetic appreciation
6. analyze critically the formal qualities and characteristics of selected Biblical texts
7. assess the different cross-currents of cultural influences that have shaped ancient Israeli and Early Christian culture
8. develop a greater openness and respect for different religious approaches to Biblical texts
9. produce a careful and thoughtful scholarly or creative project with written and oral components
10. recognize, analyze and assess the historical importance of selected Biblical texts
11. recognize and describe the impact and influences of biblical tradition on contemporary American and world culture

Major Topics

Depending upon the specific modules offered

I. Evolution and development of the Biblical literary canon, in the Ancient Near Eastern context.

II. The major genres of Biblical text: history, prophecy, myth, poetry, wisdom literature.

III. Biblical narratives and characters in the context of ancient Near Eastern history and literature.

IV. Formative individuals and decisive events in Biblical history.

V. History of methods of interpretation of the Bible; comparative exegeses of selected key texts.

VI. Concepts and vocabulary relevant to the academic study of Biblical tradition.

Common Course Outline-- Bible as Literature
page 2

Course Requirements

1. Regular and punctual attendance and active participation in class
2. Written essay-style examinations
3. Reading and writing assignments
4. Annotated scholarly or creative project with written and oral components

Other Course Information

Humanities 180, The Bible as Literature, is an academic study of Biblical tradition in comparative perspective; the course is devoted to the cultural understanding of the Bible in relation to other contemporary religious traditions and texts. Students are made aware that religious proselytizing, promoting or debunking of religious traditions is inappropriate to the academic study of religion.

The Community College of Baltimore County is committed to providing a high-quality learning experience that results in a growth of knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to function successfully as a transfer student, in a career, and as an informed and concerned citizen. To accomplish this goal, we maintain high academic standards and expect students to accept responsibility for their individual growth by attending class, completing all homework and other assignments, participating in class activities, and preparing for tests.

Bible as Literature
HUM 180

A survey of the major books of the Old and New Testaments considered from an historical and literary point of view. Major attention is devoted to those Biblical themes, characters, symbols, and archetypes that have had the most significant impact upon subsequent Western literature and art. A study of the literary characteristics of selected readings from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, with focus on their historical background and context, their relationships to other ancient religious texts, their literary forms and devices, and the patterns of meaning that emerge from their language and imagery.

Texts include the following: • Bible: any edition and translation you wish

(because we will be comparing them as we go along), but preferably a modern, annotated "study" edition, containing the complete Hebrew Scripture ("Old

Testament"), the "Apocrypha," and the Christian New Testament. •

Stephen

Harris, *Understanding the Bible*. A nonsectarian introductory guide. • Abraham

Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 1. A classic of Judaic studies.

• Donald Juel, *The Gospel of Mark*. A window into contemporary New Testament scholarship.

The course begins with an introduction to the study of the Bible as Literature, based on Harris's "Questions Readers Ask About the Bible." Issues discussed include: contents and canonicity; form criticism and the

"documentary hypothesis"; Biblical creation accounts and Ancient Near Eastern

parallels. The course continues with analysis of the Patriarchal sagas in

their Ancient Near Eastern contexts: Gen 12- 35 (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)

and 36-50 (Joseph). The next major unit considers the foundation narrative:

Moses, Exodus, Sinai law and covenant:. From here the discussion goes on to

the topic of nation-building and charismatic figures: Samuel and Saul. The

next unit focusses on David and the era of the united kingdom, and the ambivalences toward kingship in the accounts of David and Solomon. The next

major unit of the course is an introduction to the prophets, with a focus on

Amos, Hosea and Jeremiah, and Isaiah and the Isaiah tradition. The hypothesis

of a government of kings and an opposition of prophets. Literary analysis

turns to the third category of Hebrew Scripture, the Writings (Kethuvim), with focus on Psalms, Ruth, Esther & Job. Old Testament discussion concludes with later canonical and deuterocanonical works; the Intertestamental period and diversity of Jewish traditions.

The final weeks include an introduction to the New Testament; formation of the Christian tradition with discussions of 1 Corinthians & 2 Corinthians, Acts 1-13, and the Gospel of Mark. Discussion continues with analysis of the nativity/epiphany and passion narratives of the gospels compared. Concluding discussion focuses on the diversity of New Testament literary forms; epistolary & apocalyptic: Epistle to the Hebrews, esp. 11-13; Revelations (Apocalypse), esp. 1 & 4-14, & 21-22.