

Course Syllabus

Course Information

**Political Science 4330
The Bible and Politics
Spring 2014**

Professor Contact Information

Dr. Edward J. Harpham
Time: MW 8:30AM-9:45AM
Classroom: GC 1.208B
Office: GC 1.208A Office Phone: 972-883-6729
Office Hours: MW 4:00-5:00PM, F 11:00AM-12:00PM and by appointment
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Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

none

Course Description

The Bible is arguably the single most influential book in the history of western political thought. Its themes and ideas continue today to shape the ways that we understand the world, our political communities, and our place in them. The purpose of this course will be to provide students with an interdisciplinary understanding of the Bible as a political text. It will draw heavily upon the literatures of theology, archaeology, history, literature, political science, political theory, and philosophy. By bringing the perspectives found in these literatures together, students will gain a deeper appreciation of what the Bible has meant to people at different points in time and why the Bible has a complex political message for people today.

The course will not be an analysis of "true" religion or of the development of any "correct" Jewish or Christian religious doctrine. On the contrary, the course will be concerned with showing the contentiousness of religious ideas and doctrines drawn from the Bible over the past 2500 years. Students will be encouraged to explore their own understanding of the Bible, and to understand why and how competing perspectives to their own may exist in the world today.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able

- 1) to describe and critically evaluate the documentary hypothesis and its implications for a political reading of the Bible.
- 2) to explain how different political and cultural contexts shaped the various books of the Bible.

- 3) to describe and assess how translation has affected the transmission and reading of the Bible in different political contexts, with a particular attention to the translation and publication of the King James Bible
- 4) to be able to explain how scholars have considered the question of the historical Jesus through their readings of the four Gospels in the New Testament.
- 5) To contrast the political teaching derived from the New Testament with those in the Hebrew Bible.

Required Textbooks and Materials

The Bible: You are responsible for purchasing a translation of the Bible which includes the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are many different translations and editions of the Bible to choose from, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. These will be discussed in the first day of class. For many readers, the most beautiful version of the Bible in English remains the King James Bible (KJB: 1611). However, its language is out-of-date and more accurate translations are available. Good translations for students to choose from include the Revised Standard Version (RSV: 1952) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV: 1989), the New English Bible (NEB: 1961 and 1970), the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB: 1985), the New American Bible (NAB: 1970), the New International Version (NIV: 1978), and the Revised American Standard Version (RASB: 1971). There is also a translated version of the Tanakh (The Jewish Bible) published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1988. A new translation of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) was published in late 1995 as Volume 1 of the Schocken Bible.

Students interested in comparing different translations can consult either *The Complete Parallel Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1993) or *The Precise Parallel New Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1995). The former places translations from the NRSV, REB, NAB, and the NJB alongside one another for the Old and New Testaments as well as the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. The latter places the Greek Text of the New Testament next to translations from the KJV, the Rheims Bible, the Amplified Bible, NIV, NRSV, NAB, and New American Standard Bible.

Some "study editions" of the Bible come with study guides and extensive footnotes that can assist you in the course. The Anchor Bible is a massive scholarly project whose goal is to publish new translations of each book of the Bible along with extensive scholarly commentary.

There are numerous websites providing various translations of the Bible. Two useful ones are bible.crosswalk.com and <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

Required Texts:

John Riches *The Bible: A Very Short Introduction*

Alister McGrath *In The Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible*

Richard Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Harper Collins)

Elaine Pagels *The Origin of Satan* (Random House)

Paula Fredriksen *Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews* (Knopf)

Suggested Course Materials

none

Assignments & Academic Calendar

(Topics, Reading Assignments, Due Dates, Exam Dates)

January 13: Introduction to the Bible

- An essay on the Fundamental Principles of Judaism can be found at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/articles_of_faith.html.
- The Thirteen Principles of Faith by Maimonides can be found at www.mesora.org/13principles.html.
- Ancient and Modern Christian Creeds can be found at www.creeds.net.
- Qumran Library <http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/Library/library.html>
- Nag Hammadi Library <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html>

The Hebrew Bible

January 15 and 22: Politics and the King James Bible

Readings:

Riches: Chapters 1-3, 5

Alister all

An online version of the Geneva Bible (with commentary) can be found at <http://www.genevabible.org/>

January 27 and 29. February 3: From Creation to Covenants

Readings:

Genesis, Exodus

Friedman Preface Chapters 1-5

February 5, 10 and 12: Politics Before Monarchy

Readings:

Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges

Friedman Chapters 6-10

February 12: First Paper Due

February 17, 19, 24, and 26: Politics and Monarchy

Readings:

Samuel I and II

Kings I and II

Friedman Chapters 11-14

March 3: Women and Politics

Readings:

Esther

March 5 : Exam 1

March 10-15: Spring Break

March 17: Prophets and Politics

Readings:
Jonah

March 19: The Politics of Wisdom

Readings:
Ecclesiastes

March 24: Suffering and Justice

Reading:
Job

March 26: Second Paper Due

The Christian Bible:

March 26: Introduction to the New Testament

Readings:
Fredriksen Chapters 1-2
Early Christian Writings <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/index.html>
Gospel of Thomas <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>

March 31: The First Gospel

Readings:
Mark
Pagels Chapters 1-2

April 2: The Jewish Gospel

Readings: Matthew
Pagels Chapter 3

April 7: The Gentile Gospel

Readings: Luke
Pagels Chapter 4

April 9: The Spiritual Gospel

Readings: John

April 14 and 16: Beyond the Gospels

Readings:
Acts
Pagels Chapter 5
Eusebius *History of the Church* <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250101.htm>

April 21 and 23: The Pauline Letters

Readings:

First Letter to the Corinthians I

Letter to the Romans

Letter to the Galatians

Fredriksen Chapter 3

April 28: The New Testament and the End Times

Readings:

Riches: Chapters 6, 8 and 9

Pagels Chapter 6 and Conclusion

Fredriksen Chapter 4-5 and Afterward

Third Paper Due: April 28**Wednesday April 30. 8:00AM: Second Exam in class**

Grading Policy

Exam 1: 35%

Exam 2: 35%

Papers: 20%

Quizzes: 5%

Participation: 5%

The two exams will be comprised of short answer and identification questions that test students understanding of the major themes discussed in class and in the secondary literature read in the class. Students will write three short (3-page) essays on questions derived from the secondary texts in the course.. There will be short quizzes (8-10 total) given at the beginning of various class periods testing students understanding of the material under consideration in the discussion or in the readings. Attendance will be taken and comprise 50% of the participation grade. Students will be allowed 2 unexcused absences.

Course & Instructor Policies

There is no extra credit possible in the course. Late work will be reduced 1 letter grade for every missing day. Students must contact Dr. Harpham 24 hours before a test date or due date if they are unable to sit for an exam or complete work in a timely manner. Failure to do so will result in a F grade for the assignment. Essays must be one's own work.

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.