

Biblical Faith and Our World Today

Elmhurst College THL 200

Thursdays, 6:30 - 9:45 am

Instructor:

Jim L. Papandrea, Ph.D.
office hours by appointment

Course Description

The Bible is studied in the light of modern scholarship with an eye toward its relationship to the contemporary world and the issues arising out of modern culture.

Purpose of the Course

The purpose of this course is to gain an understanding of the types of literature contained in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, along with the faith of the people who produced these documents, in light of modern scholarship and in relation to contemporary society. The Bible has had a greater influence on western culture than any other writing or collection of writings, and therefore the biblical writings are worthy of the most detailed study. However, our survey will only be a brief overview of the Bible as a unified whole, admitting of course that it consists of two testaments, one of Hebrew origin and one of Christian origin. Students will be encouraged to engage the primary texts of the Bible and think through their own religious convictions. It should go without saying that the purpose of this course is not to convert or indoctrinate, but it is hoped that each student will reflect upon the philosophical principles of Judeo-Christian spirituality, and as a result think through his or her own personal religious beliefs. The goal of this class is to provide a non-threatening atmosphere in which students can think critically and reflect on the issues of biblical faith.

This course fulfills the general education objectives of the "Judeo-Christian Heritage and Religious Faith" category. Those objectives are:

1) Understanding significant aspects of the Judeo-Christian belief through the examination of classical primary texts and/or artifacts. *We will meet this objective by reading the primary text of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and through lecture and discussion on the meaning of the text. Exams will assess our success in understanding the primary texts and the concepts and issues dealt with in the text.*

2) Understanding of the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage in the formation of western civilization and values. *We will meet this goal by working through the book The Death of Truth, and through discussion of the relevance of biblical faith to contemporary society.*

3) Helping students to hold in creative balance the personal importance of their own religious convictions with a respect for the spirituality of others. *We will meet this goal through the writing of interpretation papers and through group discussion on the interpretation of the meaning of Bible texts.*

4) An exploration of the relationship between religious faith and secular convictions. *We will meet this goal through the writing of response papers on the book The Death of Truth.*

Oral Communication Across the Curriculum: *Reading aloud in class and discussions, both in small groups and within the whole class will facilitate student's oral communication skills.*

Writing Across the Curriculum: *Exams give the students an opportunity to think through and synthesize material from readings, lectures, and discussion. The Response Paper gives the students a forum for their own thought and interpretations, and the Interpretation Paper gives the students a chance to begin to learn research methods.*

Course Requirements

Each class meeting will consist mainly of lectures, although questions and discussion during the lecture are encouraged. It is expected that all positions and opinions will be respected, and no sincere question will be excluded from our exploration. Reading assignments are to be done before each class meeting. Late assignments will be reduced in grade by one letter for each class meeting that the assignment is late, unless previous arrangements are made with the instructor. In the case of emergencies, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Late final exams will not be accepted, except in extreme cases, and then only at the instructor's discretion. All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course. It is expected that all work for this course will conform to the college's Code of Academic Honesty, as outlined in the student handbook.

Class participation: Attendance, reading preparation, group participation, and class discussion will effect the course grade, especially in the case of a borderline final grade. Students must bring their Bibles to each class (New Revised Standard Version only), and be prepared to read aloud when called upon.

Exams: There will be two 5 page take-home exams: a mid-term exam on the Old Testament and a final exam on the New Testament. (All papers for this course must be double-spaced.) The exams will focus on synthesizing material from the reading and lectures, specifically the main themes, events and characters found in each testament, rather than the minor details of each book. Each exam will count for 30% of the course grade.

Interpretation Paper: Each student will write a 5 page interpretation of a passage from the Bible, explaining what he or she thinks it meant in its original context as well as its significance for contemporary faith. The primary resources for this assignment will be the Bible itself and various Bible study aids. After the rough draft of the paper is written, students will meet in groups and compare their conclusions. Each student will then add a section to his or her paper outlining the findings of the group. Explain how other members of the group agreed or disagreed with your interpretation. Explain how your opinion of the passage changed (if at all) based on the group discussion. The interpretation paper will count for 20% of the course grade.

Response Paper: Each student will write a 5 page response to one of the chapters in the book *The Death of Truth*, edited by Dennis McCallum. Specifically, choose one of chapters 5 through 12, and write your own response to what the author presents as the relevance of biblical faith to our world today. Note that you are not required to agree with the authors' conclusions, but you must work to understand them so that you can evaluate them based on your own understanding of biblical faith. This is not simply a book report, the paper must make use of Scripture and give reasons for agreement or disagreement with the claims of the book. Also, you must read the whole book, so that you can understand the concepts thoroughly. Students are encouraged to do additional research, especially using Bible study aids. Grades will be based, not on the students' opinions per se, but on how well each student has thought through the issues, and how well he or she has related the contemporary issues in the McCallum book to biblical faith. The response paper will count for 20% of the course grade.

Please Note:

In the event that a student should need assistance beyond what the instructor is able to give, resources are available in the Learning Center. Students can receive help with English skills, including reading, writing, grammar, and speech. Students can also receive tutoring and help with study

habits. Help with written assignments is available in the Writing Center, located in the basement of the library.

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this course, please contact the Director of Advising at 103 Goebel Hall (617-3450).

Required Reading

The Oxford Annotated Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version
The Westminster Guide to the Books of the Bible by William M. Ramsay
The Death of Truth edited by Dennis McCallum

Bible Study Aids

(In the Reference Section of the EC Library)

Atlas of Biblical Places, such as The Oxford Bible Atlas

Concordance, such as Strong's or Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible

Bible Commentaries, several good series are available, individual volumes are listed by the title of the biblical book dealt with

Bible Dictionary, such as the Dictionary of New Testament Theology, edited by Colin Brown

Encyclopedia of Biblical Studies, such as the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

Harmony/Synopsis of the Gospels, such as Synopsis of the Four Gospels, edited by Kurt Aland, or Gospel Parallels (which does not include John), edited by Burton H. Throckmorton

Course Schedule

Week 1

Introduction to the course and the Old Testament

In the beginning: Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Tower of Babel

Read: Ramsay; Introduction and Chapter 1, up to p. 39

Bible; Genesis

McCallum; Preface and Chapter 1

Week 2

The Covenant - Adam, Abram (Abraham) & Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Moses

The Law, Holiness, the Land, Hebrew Ritual

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 1, from p. 39

Bible; Exodus 1:1-20:17

Leviticus 11:1-47, 16:1-34

Deuteronomy 6:1-14, 29:24-30:20

McCallum; Chapters 2 and 3

Week 3

The Historical Writings

The Kings of Israel and Judah, The Divided Kingdom and the Exile

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 2 and 3, up to p. 142

Bible; Joshua 1:1-6:27, 23:1-24:33

Judges 2:6-23, 13:1-16:31

I Samuel 16:1-19:10

II Samuel 5:1-7:29, 11:1-12:31

_____ I Kings 1:1-6:1, 9:1-9, 11:1-13, 16:29-18:40

II Kings 17:1-41, 22:1-25:30

McCallum; Chapter 4

Week 4 *Hand out Old Testament Exam Question*

The Prophetic Writings, Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Literature
The Intertestamental Period
The Concept of Messiah

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 3, starting from p. 142, Chapter 4

Bible; Jonah, entire book

Hosea 1:1-3:5

Micah 5:2-6:8

Isaiah 1:1-12:6, 40:1-56:8, 60:1-63:16

Jeremiah 1:1-5:31, 19:1-20:18, 23:1-22, 29:1-31:40

Ezekiel 1:1-2:6, 33:1-34:17

Daniel 1:1-8:27

Zechariah 1:1-6, 9:9-10

Job 1:1-2:10, 38:1-42:17

Psalms 22, 23, 34, 37, 51, 139

Proverbs 16:1-17:3

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3:13

McCallum; Chapter 5

Week 5 *Old Testament Exam Due*

Introduction to the New Testament
The Synoptic Gospels

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 6

Bible; Matthew, entire book

Mark, entire book

McCallum; Chapter 6

Week 6

The Synoptic Gospels, continued
The Gospel of John

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 12, from page 520

Bible; Luke, entire book

John, entire book

McCallum; Chapter 7

Week 7

Jesus the Man

Jesus' Message - The Kingdom of God/Heaven

Read: Ramsay; no assignment - catch up if behind!

Bible; no assignment - catch up if behind!

McCallum; Chapter 8

Week 8

Acts of the Apostles

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 7

Bible; Acts of the Apostles, entire book

McCallum; Chapter 9

Week 9 *Interpretation Paper Due - Choose Response Paper Topic Chapter*

Introduction to Paul, The Letters of Paul

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 8

Bible; I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Galatians 1:1-2:21, 3:23-29, 5:16-26

I Corinthians, entire book

II Corinthians 4:1-5:21

Romans 1:1-23, 3:19-31, 7:15-10:21, 12:1-21

McCallum; Chapter 10

Week 10

The Letters of Paul, continued, including the Pastoral Epistles

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 9

Bible; Colossians 2:8-23

Philippians 2:1-4:9

Ephesians 1:13-2:10, 4:1-5:33

I Timothy 1:1-2:8, 6:20-21 & II Timothy 1:1-14, 3:1-4:22

McCallum; Chapter 11

Week 11

Major Themes in Paul

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 10
Bible; no assignment - catch up if behind!
McCallum; Chapters 12 and 13

Week 12

The Catholic, or General Epistles

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 11
Bible; Hebrews 4:12-16, 10:1-12:2
James 2:14-26
I Peter 1:1-2:10, 5:12-14
II Peter 1:10-21, 3:1-18
McCallum; Chapters 14 and 15

Week 13 *Response Paper Due - Hand out New Testament Exam Question*

The Johannine Literature
Concluding Thoughts

Read: Ramsay; Chapter 12, up to page 520
Bible; I John, entire book
Revelation 1:1-5:14, 19:1-22:21
McCallum; no assignment

Week 14 - No Class - Exam Week