The Bible & Its Contexts

PHRE-330 / Winter 2016-17

Phillips Academy

Mr. Prescott



**Instructor:** Mr. Prescott

**Location:** Chapel 015

**Email:** kprescott@andover.edu

**Office Phone:** (978) 749-4136

**Cell Phone:** (207) 504-6512

Course Description

This course will introduce students to major ideas and themes from the Hebrew Bible. One goal of the course will be increased biblical literacy: a deepened understanding of significant stories, people, and ideas from these texts and the two major religious traditions that they influence, Judaism and Christianity. Another goal of this course will be a better understanding of how these narratives have been used in historical contexts. For example, how was the Bible used to justify colonialism and, at the same time, to challenge it? This section of the course will look at specific case studies to help students make sense of the way in which the Bible is a living document that is continually being re-understood and reinterpreted.

Course Requirements, Evaluation, and Policies

**I. Required Texts:**

1. HarperCollins Study Bible
2. Andrew George, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
3. Additional texts will be made available in class and posted on Canvas

**II. Evaluation**

**i. Classroom Participation (20%) –** Much of this class will proceed as a seminar, which means careful reading of assigned work, regular attendance, and participation in class are all essential in order to succeed in the course. A separate handout/rubric will be distributed regarding expectations for classroom participation/discussion.

**ii. Reflection Papers (10%)** – In an effort to deepen our understanding of the assigned reading, students will be asked to complete weekly 1-page reflection papers (due on a night of the student’s choosing). A separate handout on reflection papers will be provided.

**iii. Essays (60%) –** Several different analytical/argumentative essays will be assigned over the course of the term. More specific information about the nature of these essays will be provided closer to their corresponding due dates.

1. **Essay 1 (15%) –** Due Wednesday, December 14
2. **Essay 2 (20%) –** Due Tuesday, February 7
3. **Essay 3 (25%) –** Due Wednesday, March 1

**iv. Campaign Project (10%) –** Due on Friday, January 20

**III. Extensions –** Generally speaking, I do not grant extensions. In addition to allocating class time for papers, prompts are also handed out at least one week prior to the due date, so the expectation is that students will plan ahead and manage their time appropriately. The only exception to this policy is when a student has three or more major assignments due on the same day, in which case students are expected to follow the protocols outlined on p. 51 of the Blue Book under “Workload & Assignments” (which includes 24-hours advance notice).

**IV. Late Work Policy –** All written assignments are to be uploaded to Canvas as word documents (.doc) by the beginning of class. Any work uploaded after this point will be counted as late. Please note that technological difficulties are **not** an excuse for lateness. Anticipate that the printer will break, that files will be lost, or that your computer will die! **Any work handed in after the due date will receive a grade no higher than a 4-.**

**V. Rewrite Policy** – All students may choose to rewrite **one** essay per term. Revisions must be substantial; it is not sufficient simply to plug in the instructor’s feedback. Indeed, students electing to complete a revision are required to meet with me to discuss the revision process – please note that any revision completed without this meeting will not be accepted. The grade for the rewrite will be averaged with the initial grade to determine the new grade for the assignment. All rewrites are due one week after the initial essay is returned. Please note that I do not accept rewrites for unauthorized late essays.

**VI. Absences** - As noted above under Classroom Preparation/Participation, regular attendance is essential if one is to succeed in this course. However, I realize that this course is not your only commitment this term, just as I realize that circumstances inevitably arise that our outside of your control. First and foremost, I ask that you communicate with me (the earlier the better). Regarding **Personal Time**, I ask that students follow the procedures outlined on pp. 54-55 of the Blue Book (specifically, the request must be made at least 24 hours prior said class meeting). Please note that students are responsible for all announcements or changes made in class. Finally, in the event that an assignment is due on the day a student is sick (with an excused absence from the Health Center), said assignment will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting.

**VII. E-mail** – I will respond to all e-mail within 24 hours. However, please note that any e-mail sent after 8:00 PM will not receive a response until the following morning, so please plan ahead!

**VIII. Religious Observances –** Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

**IX. Disabilities –** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, though I may consult Student Health Services to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

**Schedule of Assignments**

(Subject to Change)

**Unit 1: The Flood Narrative**

**Week 1 – In The Beginning**

**Thursday, December 1 – Introduction & Overview**

* No assigned readings

**Friday, December 2 – In The Beginning…**

* Read: Gen 1:1-3:24

**Week 2 – Near and Middle Eastern Flood Narratives**

**Tuesday, December 6 – Noah and the Flood**

* Read: Gen 6:1-9:28
* Option: Reflection Paper (upload to Canvas)

**Wednesday, December 7 – Myths from Mesopotamia: The Epic of Gilgamesh**

* Read: Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford; New York: Oxford Univrsity Press, 1989), selections.
* Read: Andrew George, trans, Tablet XI, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 88-99.
* Option: Reflection Paper (upload to Canvas)

**Friday, December 9 – The Flood and Christian Fundamentalism**

* Read: Carmine Grimaldi, “The Obsession With Biblical Literalism,” *The Atlantic* (Aug. 21, 2016).
* Visit: Please spend some time exploring the webpages related to the “Ark Encounter” attraction at the Creaiton Museum in Williamstown, KY (links posted on Canvas)
* Option: Reflection Paper (upload to Canvas – final day for first reflection paper to be completed)

**Week 3 – Flood Narratives and Truth Claims**

**Tuesday, December 13 – Writing Workshop**

* Due: Rough Draft (upload to Canvas)

**Wednesday, December 14 – Reconsidering the Flood Narrative**

* Due: Essay #1 (upload to Canvas)

**Friday, December 16 – Challenging Notions of Truth: The Black Sea**

* Read: William Ryan and Walter Pitman, “Other Myths,” in *Noah’s Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About the Event that Changed History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 238-252.

**Happy Winter Break!**

**Unit 2: Who Wrote the Bible?**

**Week 4 – Abraham and the Covenant**

**Tuesday, January 10 – The Covenant**

* No assigned readings

**Wednesday, January 11 – Abraham and the Covenant**

* Read: Gen 12-21
* Option: Reflection Paper (upload to Canvas)
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Friday, January 13 – The Binding of Isaac**

* Read: Gen 22:1-24
* Read: Timothy Roche, “Andrea Yates: More To The Story,” *TIME* (March 18, 2002).
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Week 5 – Ancient Israelites Politics: A Biblical Perspective**

**Tuesday, January 17 – The Ten Commandments: No Other Gods Before Me**

* Read: Ex 19-20; Deut 5
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Wednesday, January 18 – The Rise of the United Monarchy**

* Read: 1 Samuel, selections
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Friday, January 20 – The Divided Monarchy: Jeroboam I and the Golden Calves**

* Due: Campaign Projects
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Week 6 – Prophecy in the Northern Kingdom**

**Tuesday, January 24 – The Divided Monarchy: Jeroboam I and the Golden Calves**

* Read: 1 Kings 2:1-12; 6:1-37; 11:1-12:33
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Wednesday, January 25 – Who Is Ashearh?**

* Read: 1 Kings 16:29-22:40
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Friday, January 27 – Popular Religion in Ancient Israel**

* Due: Asherah Response

**Week 7 – Understanding Biblical Bias**

**Tuesday, January 31 – Prophecy in the Northern Kingdom: Amos**

* Read: Book of Amos (entire)
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Wednesday, February 1 – Writing Workshop**

* Work on essays

**Friday, February 3 – Head of School Day**

* Class will not meet!

**Unit 3: The New Testament**

**Week 7 – The Life and Death of Jesus Christ**

**Tuesday, February 7 – Canon Formation and the New Testament**

* Due: Essay #2
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Wednesday, February 8 – The Gospel of Mark**

* Read: Mark 1-7
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Friday, February 10 – The Crucifixion of Jesus**

* Read: Mark 8-16
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Week 8 – Women and the New Testament**

**Tuesday, February 14 – The Synoptic Problem**

* Read: Matt 1:1-4:24; Mark 1:1-4:41; Luke 1:1-4:44; John 1:1-4:54; Matt 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-31
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Wednesday, February 15 – The Gospel of Mary Magdalene**

* Read: Karen L. King, “Introduction,” *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), pp. 3-12.
* Read: The Gospel of Mary Magdalene
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Friday, February 17 – Women and the Pauline Corpus**

* Read: Romans 16, pp. 1930-31; First Corinthians 7:1-11, p. 1940; 11:1-16, pp. 1946-47; 1433b-36, p. 1952; Galatians 3:26-28, p. 1978; Philippians 4:2-3, p. 1996; Colossians 3:18-4:1, pp. 2003-04; 4:15, p. 2004; First Timothy 2:8-15, p. 2018
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Week 9 – The Apocrypha**

**Tuesday, February 21 – The Acts of Paul and Thecla**

* Read: J.K. Elliott, ed., “The Acts of Paul and Thecla,” *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 364-372.
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Wednesday, February 23 – Female Ordination and the Catholic Church**

* Read: Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (St. Paul’s: June 25, 1995)
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Friday, February 25 – Writing Workshop**

* Due: Rough Draft
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Week 10 – Finals Week**

**Tuesday, February 28 – Optional Writing Workshop**

* Mr. Prescott available for conferences

**Wednesday, March 1 – Essay #3 Due**

* Due: Essay #3

**Bibliography**

Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II. *Letter to Women*. St. Paul’s: June 25, 1995.

Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Elliott, J.K. “The Acts of Paul and Thecla.” *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. 364-372.

George, Andrew, trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*. New York: Penguin, 1989.

The Gnostic Society Library. “The Gospel According to Mary Magdalene.” *The Gnostic Society Library*. < <http://gnosis.org/library/marygosp.htm>>.

Grimaldi, Carmine. “The Obsession With Biblical Literalism.” *The Atlantic* (Aug. 21, 2016).

King, Karen L. *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003.

Roche, Timothy. “Andrea Yates: More To The Story.” *TIME* (March 18, 2002).

Ryan, William and Walter Pitman. *Noah’s Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About the Event That Changed History*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998.