Exploring the Bible  
*Religious Studies 100  
*Fall 2011

Section 1: Tue & Thur 8:00 AM – 9:15 AM  
Arts & Letters 102  
Office Hour: Thur 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM  
Arts & Letters 636  

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Description: The Bibles are the most quoted and least read sets of books in the Western World. When they are read, more often than not it is done through a non-critical lens of faith — unlike any other set of books. In this course we will learn to read the books of the Bibles intimately through the lenses of modern biblical scholarship.

This course is an *historical-critical introduction* to the Bible as literature, as narrative, as philosophy, as history, as revelation and as myth. As literature, the Bible has influenced much of the history and development of Western literary traditions and even morality. As narrative, it has provided the basis of much of Western culture’s stock of stories, influencing and shaping numerous societies. As history and historiography, it has guided leaders and institutions while shaping the understanding of the meaning of history for multitudes over many centuries. As scripture, the Bible has provided religious foundations, structures, imagery, and laws perceived as meaningful to Jews, Christians and Muslims. As a combination of all of these, the Bible has had significant impact upon individuals – religious and non-religious – and societies.

The aim of this course is academic rather than theological. The academic study of the Bibles can be seen as complementary rather than antagonistic to faith. One’s personal beliefs regarding “the truth of the Bible” can be affirmed independent of questions of historical or literal accuracy. However, the academic understanding of the biblical text is dependent on historical and literary accuracy. You will be offered the opportunity to consider and discuss the methods, theories and conclusions of biblical scholarship. In this way you may gain a thorough basis for both a well considered personal understanding of the Bible and for any further, more in-depth study you may undertake.

Goals: In this course we will explore the Jewish and Christian Bibles from historical and literary perspectives. It is impossible to read and understand the more than sixty books of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in 14 weeks. Our goals for this semester are to:

1. Gain a general overview of the themes, ideas and structure of the different sections and books of the Bibles;  
2. Understand how the Bibles were composed;  
3. Gain an introductory understanding of the ways in which the Bible is read and studied in the secular university and by biblical scholars.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the semester, the successful student in this course will be able to:

1. Identify the sections of the Hebrew Bible;  
2. Place the biblical books into the Bible in which they belong;  
3. Identify the source for key quotations from the Bibles based on their content and/or meaning;  
4. Define a set of roughly 100 key terms, characters and places related to the Bibles and biblical scholarship;
5. Present cogent arguments for the dating of specific biblical books;
6. Apply various forms of biblical analysis to a biblical text.

**Readings:** The following texts/materials are required for this course and are available for purchase in the University bookstore:
- i>Clicker Student Remote
- Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible, 7th or 8th Ed.*

Additional readings will be provided as handouts throughout the semester. All handouts and materials will be provided through Blackboard and/or email approximately one week before they are to be read.

Readings for each lecture are listed on the Reading Assignment sheet. Please read the assignment in the texts **BEFORE** you come to class. It is necessary to bring your Bible to every class, but not your Harris text. We will discuss and analyze the biblical material in the lecture.

**Class Participation:** This course will utilize the new i>clicker system. There will be in-class questions **every day** of lecture which **can only be answered** with the i>clicker remote. You will be graded both on your participation in these daily “Quizzes” as well as your ability to answer the questions correctly. The questions will be based on the reading assignment due that day. Your overall i>clicker grade will contribute 20% towards your Final Grade as a combined grade for participation and in-class quizzes.

You will need to purchase the i>clicker remote and register it, with the ID number written on the back of the remote through the link in Blackboard for this class. In order to receive full participation points, you will need to do this **before the first day of class.**

I would also suggest that you write your name on your i>clicker, you store your i>clicker ID in a safe place, and you bring spare AAA batteries to every class.

**Exams:** There will be both a Midterm (11/1) and Final Exam (12/15) in this course. The students are responsible for all material covered in class and the readings for both Exams.

**Paper:** There will be one 3-5 page paper assigned for the class. The instructions for the paper will be disseminated and explained in class. The **paper is due before class on Thursday, April 21.**

**Grading:** Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
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You will be assigned a letter grade for this course according to the following schedule:

- A 92-100%
- A- 90-92%
- B+ 88-90%
- B 82-88%
- B- 80-82%
- C+ 78-80%
- C 72-78%
- C- 70-72%
- D+ 68-70%
- D 62-68%
- D- 60-62%
- F <60%

You will be provided with all of the materials for the exams. You need bring only a pen. There will be no make-up exams or paper extensions. Should you have a family or medical emergency, please notify me as soon as possible.

**General Education: Communication and Critical Thinking**

This course is one of three courses that you will take in the General Education area of Communication and Critical Thinking. Upon completing this area of our General Education program, you will be able to: 1) craft well-reasoned arguments for specific audiences; 2) analyze a variety of texts commonly encountered in the academic setting; 3) situate discourse within social, generic, cultural, and historic contexts; and 4) assess the relative strengths of arguments and supporting evidence.

**Note Well:** This course is not a religiously oriented “Bible Study.” It is not appropriate to use this class as a forum for debating your own personal ideas about religion, the Bible, God, heaven or hell. There are appropriate times and places for such discussion, REL S 100 is not one of them. The Bible provokes strong feelings from many people; nevertheless, we will set personal feelings aside in the interest of academic exploration and discovery.

**Final Note:** There may well be changes to this Syllabus and the Schedule of Readings during the semester. All changes will be announced in class, emailed to students and posted on Blackboard.