

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR PAPERS

The paper for this course is a literary analysis of a single biblical story or portion thereof, selected from the below list. The list is limited to assigned passages and books from the Hebrew Bible and “Apocrypha.” Students who are interested in writing about a story that is not on the list, including a story in the New Testament, should consult with the instructor at least a week prior to the due date.

Papers should be 7-10 pages in length (double-spaced, 12 point font, minimum one inch margins) and will be due March 25<sup>th</sup> in the lecture (note change from syllabus). Any paper handed in after the lecture will be considered late.

Late papers will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade per every day late. If an emergency or special situation arises such that you will be unable to make this deadline, you must make arrangements with the instructor at least a week before the due date.

### I. PURPOSE

Biblical stories have been heard, read, interpreted, and retold, to speak to changing concerns and contexts in a broad range of different times and places, for many centuries and up until the present day. Together with the enormous gap in time and space between our current context and the very ancient cultures in which these texts took shape, this can make it difficult for us—as readers engaged in the **academic study of this literature as literature**—to understand these texts **on their own terms**, without viewing them through the lens of a long tradition of interpretation or through the lens of our own modern questions, values, and assumptions. **The purpose of this paper is to pursue such a reading, by selecting a single story and carefully analyzing its literary features and the narrative choices that it makes.**

### II. GUIDELINES

A. Your paper should have the following structure:

**Introduction:** A brief paragraph providing some background about the story and the biblical book in which it is found. Questions that you may want to address about the biblical book include: What era does the book describe? In what era was it likely written/redacted? What is the purpose of the book, and how does the story contribute to it? What is the narrative context in which the story appears? How does the story fit within the literary structure of the book? What is its significance within the book in which it occurs? What genre or type of story is it? To what other biblical stories is it similar?

The introductory material can be taken primarily from lectures and assigned readings, as well as from the summaries in Harper-Collins Study Bibles and Oxford Study Bibles (explicitly referenced as such) and the materials linked on the course website (again, explicitly referenced as such). You need not consult any other books for this paper. If you wish to do so anyway, please ask the instructor for suggestions, since there is an enormous quantity of literature on the Bible and much of it is simply not appropriate for use in an academic course.

**Literary Analysis:** This should be the majority of your paper. This section should consider questions such as:

- Can we tell why the author/redactor deem this particular tale important to tell? For instance, does it have any aetiological purpose?
- What problem, if any, motivates the action in the narrative? How does the plot unfold, and what is the pacing?
- When and how is information divulged to the reader? How does this affect the reader's experience of the story (e.g., suspense, curiosity, surprise)?
- What does the text choose to say and choose not to say? What blanks are left for the reader to fill in or imagine? Are there questions remain unanswered or problems that remain unresolved?
- Are different points-of-view used in the telling of the story, and if so, how? How is dialogue used?
- Is the reader told things that the characters do not know? Are there gaps between what the reader knows and what the characters know and/or difference with regard to when the reader knows certain things and when the characters find them out? How do the characters' knowledge affect their choices?
- How do the various characters function in the story? What is the stance of the narrator towards the characters and the choices that they make? On whom does the narrator focus? What textual cues and clues shape the way a reader sees these characters (e.g., sympathetically, skeptically, or with ambivalence)?
- Does your story exhibit intertextual connections with other biblical stories that we have read for this class? In what ways does your story draw on (or contravene) conventions in biblical literature?
- What choices does the author/redactor make on the level of the narrative itself? What are the stylistic features of the narrative (e.g., use of repetition)? What are the structural features of the narrative (e.g., chiasms)?
- Is your story an example of "composite artistry"? If so, can we get a sense of how and why the redactor chose to select and arrange material from his sources in the ways that he did?

Here, it helps to read your story keeping in mind that an author/redactor could have told the exact same story in a number of different ways (and sometimes we find parallel stories that illustrate exactly this); hence, every feature of a story is the product of a choice, and a literary reading ask why these choices were made and how they shape the experience of reading.

The close readings of biblical stories by Alter provide good examples for this mode of analysis. For a helpful discussion of how to pursue a literary reading of biblical stories, see pp. 179-184. Also useful is <http://www.bible.gen.nz/0/poetics.htm>

**Conclusion:** Ideally, one or two paragraphs that make some statements about how your specific text relates to the broader themes that we have discussed in our course. In addition, if you would like to express your own opinions about the text, this is the place to do it.

B. Avoid making confessional statements. As we have stressed again and again, faith-based readings of biblical literature must be kept distinct from academic study of the same texts. Accordingly, I cannot grade you on a paper in which you make statements about your own faith, so if you hand in a paper that is confessional in tone, I will return it to you.

C. More generally, do your best to be attentive to the text itself. Try to set aside your own beliefs and opinions while reading and writing about it. Also try to separate later interpretations about the text from what the text itself says and doesn't say (such that, for instance, later Christian traditions should not shape our readings of texts in the Hebrew Bible). If you would like to express your own opinions about your story, you should do this *only after dealing with the text on its own terms*. Moreover, you should put such comments, not in the main section of your paper, but in your conclusion.

D. Where possible, students are encouraged to integrate ideas and themes from the lectures and tutorials, as well as to engage issues raised in those forums. You are also encouraged to bring in concepts and ideas from the assigned readings in Alter and Kermode (always noting, of course, the relevant page numbers; see below on "Plagiarism and Responsible Referencing"). Perhaps needless to say: if your story is discussed by one of these authors, you should especially make mention of it, even as you should feel free to disagree with their interpretations and approaches.

E. Feel free to quote liberally from your story, especially when pointing out details about the choices that the author/redactor has made—although you should also make sure to state in your own words what the story is doing and how. Make sure to include chapter and verse citations when discussing (and especially when quoting) biblical texts.

F. Make sure to spell-check your paper and to proofread it carefully before turning it in! This is much more important than you might think.

### **III. PLAGIARISM & RESPONSIBLE REFERENCING**

As stressed also in the syllabus, academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means, and it can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty") and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. *It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.*

Please be aware that Plagiarism includes quoting and paraphrasing other people's writings or ideas – whether from a book, commentary, website, etc. – without proper citation of the author, book, URL, or so on. *I cannot stress this enough: whenever in doubt, always add a reference (whether in a footnote or in parentheses in the body of your paper) making clear the source of your information.*

## II. LIST OF STORIES

### **A. Hebrew Bible**

- Six days of Creation (Gen 1:1-2:4a)
- Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4b-3:24)
- Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16)
- The Flood (Gen 6:9-9:17)
- Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9)
- Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Gen 12:10-20)
- Abram and Lot (Gen 13)
- Birth of Ishmael (Gen 16)
- Destruction of Sodom (Gen 18:16-19:38)
- Abraham and Sarah in Gerar (Gen 20)
- Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21)
- Binding of Isaac (Gen 22)
- Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca (Gen 24)
- Isaac and Rebecca in Gerar (Gen 26)
- Jacob and Esau (Gen 27)
- Jacob, Rachel, and Leah (Gen 29-31)
- Story of Dinah (Gen 34)
- Joseph's dreams (Gen 37)
- Judah and Tamar (Gen 38)
- Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 39)
- Joseph as dream interpreter (Gen 40-41)
- Joseph and his brothers (Gen 42-45)
- Moses' birth and youth (Ex 2)
- Plagues on Egypt (Ex 7-11)
- Exodus from Egypt (Ex 12:36-14:31)
- Golden Calf (Ex 32)
- Rebellion in the Wilderness (Num 11)
- Aaron and Miriam challenge Moses (Num 11:35-12:16)
- Spies sent to the Promised Land (Num 13-14)
- Sins of Korah (Num 16)
- Balaam and the Donkey (Num 22:22-40)
- Story of Othniel (Judg 3:1-11)
- Story of Ehud (Judg 3:12-30)
- Story of Deborah (Judg 4-5)
- Story of Gideon (Judg 6-8)
- Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:1-22)
- Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 2-4)
- Birth of Samuel (1 Sam 1-2)
- Israel Demands a King (1 Sam 8:1-22)
- Samuel's Farewell (1 Sam 12:1-25)
- Jonah's Call and Flight (Jonah: 1:1-17)
- Jonah in Nineveh (Jonah 3)
- Job's suffering (Job 1-2)
- Queen Vashti (Esth 1)
- Esther becomes queen (Esth 2:1-18)
- Haman's plot (Esth 2:19-3:15)
- Haman's downfall (Esth 4-7)
- Daniel and his friends at the court of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1)
- Daniel interprets the statue dream (Dan 2)
- The Fiery furnace (Dan 3)
- Daniel interprets the tree dream (Dan 4)
- Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall (Dan 5)
- Daniel in the lion's den (Dan 6)

### **B. "Apocrypha"**

- Story of Susanna (LXX Dan 13)
- Daniel, Bel and the Dragon (LXX Dan 14)
- Tobit's prosecution (Tobit 1:16-2:10)
- Sarah is falsely accused (Tobit 3:7-17)
- Tobias' journey (Tobit 4:1-6:17)
- Tobias' homecoming (Tobit 10-12)
- Judith and Holofernes (Judith 8-13)