

REL 101: UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

[Prof. Bryan Rennie](#)

Required Textbook:

[*An Introduction to the Bible*](#)
by [Fant, Musser, and Reddish.](#)

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brennie@westminster.edu

Description of the Class

This course will be a 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 the whole history and development of Western literary tradition. As narrative, it has provided the basis of the Western culture's stock of stories, influencing and shaping both the arts and society. As history (or historiography), it has shaped the understanding of the meaning of history for generations. As scripture, it has provided the religious images and mythical structures which have been perceived as truly meaningful by both Jews and Christians. As a combination of all of these, the Bible has been a source of significance throughout the ages and still can be, even for "non-religious" individuals.

The course will commence with the history of the Old Testament as the *Tanakh* or Hebrew Bible. This will involve consideration of the original contexts of the books of the Old Testament and will constitute an introduction to Biblical genres including History, Prophetic Literature, Wisdom Literature, Myth, Apocalyptic Literature, and Theology. The question of the significance of the Hebrew Bible for Jesus and for the Early Church will provide a pivot as we move onto a similar consideration of the New Testament.

General notes on the class.

Required Textbook: *An Introduction to the Bible* by Clyde Fant, Donald Musser, and Mitchell Reddish.
also available as an e-book.

COURSE OUTCOMES

The aims of this course are firstly to acquire the basic information and skills of the academic study of the Bible. This requires a knowledge of the history of the

Bible and its composition along with some critical understanding of the history of religion. These are the tools for the construction of relevant and durable opinions about the Bible. The skills required to **communicate** those opinions clearly and persuasively will also be practiced.

So-the acquisition, the analysis, the assessment, and the articulation of information will all be practiced and evaluated.

All student work should be well-researched, well-reasoned, and well-written

The successful student in this course will demonstrate their abilities:

- to acquire reliable knowledge of the religious expressions characteristic of Biblical traditions
- to consider critically various theories of the composition of the Biblical text
- to acquire a critical understanding of the history and composition of the Biblical text
- to articulate that understanding
- to construct relevant, informed, and durable answers to their own questions about Biblical traditions
- to articulate and communicate those answers clearly

Basis for Grading

Quizzes (4 @ 10%), the final examination (20%), and two written papers (3-4 pp. and 5-6 pp. 15% @) will constitute the basis for grading, study guides and participation will total 10% of your final grade.

You must keep up with the assignments. Failure to do so will not only lose 10% of your grade but might incur further penalties. If a student misses assignments because of sickness or bereavement, or for athletic, employment, or other educational purposes this still will damage their progress in the class.

Purpose

The aim of this course is academic rather than theological (see FMR 31-34). The pursuit of historical research is seen as complementary rather than antagonistic to faith. One's personal belief in the truth of the Bible can be affirmed *independently* of questions of historical or literal accuracy. However, the academic understanding of the Biblical text *is* dependent on historical and literal accuracy. Students are offered the opportunity to consider and discuss the methods, theories, and conclusions of Biblical scholarship. In this way they can gain a thorough basis both for a well-considered personal understanding of the Bible and for any further, more detailed study they might undertake.

Readings

The primary text will be the Bible. Students can use whichever translation they prefer as variations in translation are illuminating. But a Bible **must** be used! **The sections from Fant, Musser, and Reddish, *An Introduction to the Bible* (= FMR) must be read before the dates listed for their discussion.**

To prepare for each chat session you should read the given section of FMR *Introduction* and also the Bible references made there. I will assign more extensive Bible readings as the class progresses. Try and formulate any questions that arise from these readings and have them ready to ask in the chat room sessions or in the forum. I advise you to write out your questions as this will help you to put them clearly before the whole class. If it is possible discuss the issues raised in the readings with your classmates (or anyone else who's interested).

The chat sessions will generally follow a question-and-answer pattern. I will ask students to outline and explain what they understand from their reading and the class as a whole will discuss the topic. During that discussion I will attempt to answer students' questions as thoroughly and clearly as I can. **All students will be expected to participate in discussions.** The ability to express yourself

clearly before a small audience like this is *absolutely necessary* to your advancement in many areas of life.

The schedule of chat sessions, quizzes, etc. remains negotiable until the third week of term. Changes must be made before this date. participation in chat sessions is mandatory. You will **not** be given extra points for participation. Rather you will lose percentage points which will result in a *lowering of your final grade*. Reading alone will not give you the skills or the information needed to pass this course satisfactorily. The discussions and explanations are a necessary component of the course.

Academic Integrity

(see the relevant section of the Student Handbook and the Academic Integrity Policy.ppt on your class Handouts)

Westminster College as an institution and I as an individual both pursue a strict policy of academic honesty. **Plagiarism: leading your reader or listener to believe that what you have written or said is your own work, when, in fact, it is not, will be treated severely.** But always remember that while using someone else's work without declaring your source is dishonest, doing the same thing and citing the source is good scholarship! Books **must** be cited in the correct bibliographic style ([see here](#)) and personal sources can also be cited. Your instructor reserves the right to use the plagiarism software at Turnitin.com.

Please remember that high grades reflect very well on my teaching record. I *want* to give you good grades! But I am examined also and you must give me *cause* to give you a good grade. Like most other skills academic ability improves with practice. If you feel weak in public speaking or critical analysis **now** is the time to practice and improve.

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brennie@westminster.edu

THE TWO PAPERS.

These are not reports but research papers: your own views are required as well as knowledge of your subject material. Please consult the [notes on common errors in writing](#).

Paper topics and brief statements of your thesis must be submitted on or before 10/11 and 11/15.

Paper one is due to be handed in at the end of week nine (10/25). It should be 3 to 4 pages long, double spaced, (750 - 1000 words), **MINIMUM**. It will have a maximum value of 15% of your grade.

Paper two is due to be handed in in week fourteen (11/29). It should be 3 to 4 pages long, double spaced, (750 - 1000 words), **MINIMUM**. It will have a maximum value of 15% of your grade.

Papers should be submitted as e-mail attachments.

Papers will be penalized for every day they are late and will not be accepted one week after the due date. **YOU HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED OF THIS SINCE THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE COURSE.**

General requirements of a research paper.

1. Papers must have a title which states the topic of your essay. They must be double-spaced and properly formatted.
2. You must have a thesis, that is to say a specific statement you want to make, which should be stated clearly either in your introduction or in your conclusion, or both. It must be supported by argument and evidence.
3. The arguments and research which support your thesis should make the main body of the essay. Do not waste time and space by simply relating Biblical narratives--give references instead.

Source material (books, but don't forget articles in journals and encyclopedias etc., even newspapers and personal interviews) should be integrated into your argument as evidence, example, or as illustration. **You must document the sources of *all* quotations, statistical information, and paraphrased material.**

4. Your conclusions must be clearly stated. They can be negative as well as positive. You will not be penalized for concluding that your original thesis was wrong either wholly or in part, as long as your conclusion is based on your research.

5. You must give a separate list of sources (entitled "References" or "Bibliography" or "Works Cited") at the end of your paper. In *alphabetical order* give the full name of each author, surname first, then first name, followed by the title of the work.

Book and journal titles should be *italicized* (use underline ONLY if italics are not available).

Article titles should be in "quotation marks." Details of publication must be included. For example:

Throckmorton, Burton H. *Gospel Parallels*. New York: Thomas Nelson, Fourth Edition, 1970.

Ferré, Frederick. "The Definition of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 38, no.1 (1970): 3-16.

The Bible should be listed under B and the **version** should be stated. That is, King James Version, New Revised Standard Version, New American Version, etc..

This information is given in the front matter of all reliable Bible translations.

You must have at least as many PRINT resources as you have on-line or web-based sources.

Your bibliography does *not* count as part of your length requirement.

Possible topics.

(These are only suggestions to give an idea of the type of topics possible. **I strongly recommend that students select topics which particularly interest them and discuss their titles with me so that I can recommend reading material.**)

FIRST PAPER

1. What is the relationship of the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures or between the Old and New Testaments?
 2. If the Adam and Eve story of Genesis 2 and 3 is not historical fact what else might it mean?
 3. Disregarding questions of its significance and authority, what is the Bible? Describe its contents.
 4. The Hebrew Bible contains both historical and mythological material which it is very difficult to separate. Discuss this difficulty.
 5. How did the religion of the Jews help them to maintain their identity in the pre-Christian period?
 6. Describe the history of the Israelite nation from their entry into Canaan until the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE.
 7. Discuss the transmission of the biblical books from their original languages to modern English.
 8. Discuss the source of death and evil in Genesis.
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SECOND PAPER

1. There are commonly said to be two figures at the center of Christianity, the Historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. What distinctions can be made between the two?
2. The Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Trinity. These are three of the major doctrines of the Christian Church. Describe and discuss them with reference to the Biblical text.
3. What is the Christian liturgy? What forces and events have shaped it? What Biblical elements pre-figured it?
4. Discuss the differences between the story of Jesus as presented by the synoptic gospels and John's gospel.
5. What is the "kerygma" of the New Testament?
6. Compare the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.
7. Compare Jesus and Moses.
8. Discuss gender relations or the role of women in the Old Testament/New Testament/Bible.

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[*brennie@westminster.edu*](mailto:brennie@westminster.edu)

Professor Bryan Rennie

Understanding the Bible Fall 2015 SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week [1](#)[2](#)[3](#)[4](#)[5](#)[6](#)[7](#)[8](#)[9](#)[10](#)[11](#)[12](#)[13](#)[14](#)[15](#)[16](#)

This class will meet from 9:20 until 10:20 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in Patterson Hall 205.

I will be available in my office Monday and Friday from 10:30 until 1:30, Tuesday and Thursday from 12:30 to 1:30
(and at other times by arrangement).

Week 1. Introduction to the Bible.

Monday. 8/31

Introduction. Contents of the Bible: [the Old Testament](#) and [the New Testament](#). The terms of the study.

Assignment: Your constant and ongoing assignment is to **take notes** on the material discussed in class. These notes will be indispensable in both answering the quiz questions and in preparing the written work for your papers. The instructor might ask to look at your notes randomly at any time and points will be subtracted if they are inadequate.

Wednesday. 9/2

Assignment: look at the class webpages, especially the description of the course. Read Fant, Musser, and Reddish, *An Introduction to the Bible* (=FMR 21-28), Part One, "The Bible and Western Culture," and "The Cultural Influence of the Bible." Think about "stories."

Friday. 9/4

"What is the Bible?" (FMR 28-34)

The contents and canonization of the [Jewish Bible](#).

Assignment: Keep taking notes.

Week 2. The Study of the Bible.

Monday. 9/7

Biblical criticism: "Methods and Tools for Studying the Bible" (FMR 35-54).

Wednesday. 9/9

"The Origins and Development of the Bible" and "The Process of Translation" (FMR 55-73)

Friday. 9/11

[The manuscripts and papyri etc.](#)

Assignment: Don't forget the notes.

Week 3. The Context of the Bible.

Monday. 9/14

"The Cultural and Geographic Context of the Bible" (FMR 75-94)

[Significant dates in Biblical History.](#)

Wednesday. 9/16

Early Jewish Tradition (FMR 97-109)

The Ancestral Tradition.

Friday. 9/18

From this point on you are required to read AT LEAST the "Suggested Biblical Readings" given in FMR at the beginning of each chapter. Be prepared to discuss the following:

[Genesis 12-13](#); [22:1-19](#); [32](#); [Exodus 1:1-4:20](#); [12:1-39](#); [14](#); [19](#); [20](#); [Deuteronomy 32:44-52](#); [34:1-12](#).

Week 4. History in the Old Testament, continued.

Monday. 9/21

The Exodus and Wilderness Traditions (FMR 109-134)

[Deuteronomy 20:1-18](#); [Joshua 1-2](#); [23-24](#); [Judges 2](#); [4](#); [5](#); [13-14](#); [16](#).

Wednesday. 9/23

The United Monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon (FMR 135-149).

Assignment: Notes, Notes, Notes!

Friday. 9/25

Biblical Readings from FMR p. 135:

[1 Samuel 8 - 10](#); [18:1 - 16](#); [31](#); [2 Samuel 7](#); [11:1 - 12:25](#); [Genesis 1 - 3](#); [6:5 - 9:17](#); [11:1 - 9](#).

Week 5. History in the Old Testament, continued.

Monday. 9/28

"Theological Developments During the Monarchy" (FMR 150-154) and "The Divided Kingdom" (FMR 155-174).

[1 Kings 1:11 - 2:12](#); [11:41 - 12:20](#); [2 Kings 17:1 - 14](#); [24 - 25](#).

Wednesday. 9/30

Discussion and preparation for the Quiz.

Friday. 10/2

Quiz #1: FMR 1-174: Textual Criticism, History of Israel, and Developments in the Biblical Text.

Week 6. The Literatures of the Bible. Prophecy.

Monday. 10/5

The Pre-Exilic Prophets (FMR 175-204)

Wednesday. 10/7

The Exile, Exilic Prophets, and Exilic History (FMR 205-232)

[1 Kings 17 - 19](#); [Amos 2:4-16](#); [5:14-24](#); [7:1-9](#); [Hosea 1:1-11](#); [3](#); [11](#);

[Isaiah 1](#); [6](#); [9:1-7](#); [11:1-9](#); [Jeremiah 1:1-10](#); [7](#); [31:31-34](#).

Friday. 10/9

Biblical Texts from FMR p. 175 and 205.

[Ezekiel 1:1-3](#); [15](#); [37:1-14](#); [47:1-12](#); [Isaiah 40:1-11](#), [28-31](#); [42:1-4](#); [53](#); [55](#);

[Genesis 1:1-2:4](#); [Joshua 23](#); [Ezra 1:1-4](#); [9:1-10:5](#).

Week 7. Exile and Restoration

Monday. 10/12

The Return from Exile and new literature: [Wisdom Literature](#) (233-249).

[Psalms 1](#); [8](#); [22](#); [106](#); [Proverbs 7](#); [10](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:1-11](#); [12](#); [Job 1-2](#); [40:6-42:17](#).

Wednesday. 10/14 A Discussion of [Wisdom Literature](#): The Books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

Preparation for the next quiz. Note that [your first paper](#) is due in on 11/6.

You are required to submit a title and brief thesis statement for your first paper today, 10/14.

Friday. 10/16

Quiz #2: FMR 175-249: Exile and Restoration, Prophecy, and Wisdom Literature.

Week 8. Exile and Restoration, continued.

Monday. 10/19

The Origins of [Apocalyptic Literature](#) and the Book of [Daniel](#) (FMR 271-291).

[Daniel 1-3; 7; 10-12](#); [2 Maccabees 6-7](#); [Susanna](#); [Prayer of Manasseh](#).

Wednesday. 10/21

The influence of the Zoroastrian tradition.

Read: [Professor Rennie on Zoroastrianism](#).

Friday. 10/23

Discussion: The origins Of Christianity.

You are still taking notes, aren't you?

Midsemester Break Saturday October 24 to Tuesday October 27

Week 9.

Arguably the earliest ever image of Jesus, Fourth Century CE, from Hinton St. Marys in England

[The New Testament](#).

Wednesday. 10/28

The Hellenistic and Roman Periods (FMR 251-270 and 288-291)

[1 Maccabees 1-5](#).

Friday. 10/30 The New Testament.

Jesus and Early Christianity (FMR 295-318)

[The Quest for the Historical Jesus](#). The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith.

[Luke 1-3; 10:25-11:13](#); [Mark 1-2; 3:13-35](#); [Matthew 5-7; 21:1-17](#).

First paper due Friday 30th October.

Week 10.

Monday. 11/2

The Gospels: [the priority of Mark](#). and [the Synoptic problem](#) (FMR 319-336).

Wednesday. 11/4

[Themes in the Gospel of Mark](#).

Friday. 11/6

Readings from FMR p. 319:

[Mark 4:1-6:6](#); [8:1-11:19](#); [14:1-16:8](#).

Week 11. Some Gospel Narratives.

Monday. 11/9

Matthew, Luke, and John (FMR 337-357).

Wednesday. 11/11

[The arrest of Jesus](#). The trial, [execution](#) and Resurrection.

Friday. 11/13

Readings from FMR p. 337:

[Matthew 1:1-3:23](#); [20](#); [27-28](#); [Luke 7](#); [15:1-16:13](#); [18-19](#); [24](#);
[John 1-4](#); [7](#); [9:1-10:39](#); [11:1-53](#); [12:1-19](#); [13:1-14:19](#); [20:1-29](#).

Week 12. Other New Testament Works.

Monday. 11/16

[The Acts of the Apostles](#) (FMR 359-373)

You are required to submit a title and brief thesis statement for your second paper today.

[Acts 1-2](#); [5:27-6:15](#); [7:54-9:31](#); [10](#); [15](#).

Wednesday. 11/18

[Paul](#) and his conversion (FMR 373-377 and 387-390).

See: [Luke's account of the conversion of Paul from Acts 9](#) and [22](#);

[Paul's account of his conversion from Galatians 1](#);

Friday. 11/20 & Monday. 11/23

No Class: Prof. Rennie will be at the [AAR Conference](#) in Atlanta.

Thanksgiving Break, Wednesday 11/25 until Sunday 11/29

Week 14.

Monday. 11/30

Quiz #3: FMR 250-390: Judaism and the Greco-Roman World, the Quest for the Historical Jesus, the Gospels, Luke/Acts.

Wednesday. 12/2 Paul and The Church in the Roman Empire.

The Developing Institutional Church: [Paul](#) and the Greco-Roman Empire (FMR 379-416)

[Acts 16:1-18:17](#); [19:1-10](#); [22-28](#). [Galatians 1-3](#); [4:12-20](#); [5:1](#); [5:13-25](#);

[1 Corinthians 1:1-25](#); [3:1-9](#); [7](#); [11:2-16](#); [12:12-13:13](#); [15:1-28](#);

[Philemon](#); [Romans 3:1-20](#); [4:13-25](#); [5](#); [8:1-39](#); [12](#).

Friday. 12/4

The Early Church (FMR 417-436). Discussion.

[James 1-2](#); [1 John 1](#); [4](#); [Colossians 2](#); [Ephesians 3](#); [2 Thessalonians 2](#);

[1 Timothy 4](#); [Hebrews 8](#); [9:11-10:25](#); [11:1-12:2](#).

Second paper due, Friday December 4th.

Week 15. The Church in Conflict

Monday. 12/7

The Church in Conflict and [the Apocalypse \(Revelations\) of St. John](#) (FMR 437-455)

[Revelation 1-7](#); [12:1-14:13](#); [19:1-22:5](#).

Wednesday. 12/9

Quiz #4 (FMR 359-436: Luke/Acts, Paul, and the Developing Church).

Friday 12/11

Last Class: Student Assessments of the course, discussion of papers and of the final exam.etc.

Week 16.

The Take-Home Final is due by e-mail on Monday December 14th by 5:30.

Term ends Friday, December 17th.
