

RS 228/JS 228: Big Ideas of the Bible

Syllabus: Fall, 2024

Instructor: Derek Suderman, dsuderman@uwaterloo.ca

Class: Tues, Thurs. 2:30-3:50

Room: CGR

Office hours: By Appointment; before class is generally free, and ZOOM is also possible.

**** For email: allow 2 days for a response, and *please put RS 228 and a topic in the Subject line of all e-mail correspondence.***

Territorial Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I live and work on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee (aka Iroquois) peoples. Conrad Grebel and the University of Waterloo are situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations in perpetuity that includes 6 miles on each side of the Grand River.

I. Introduction

A. Course Description

This course explores various “big ideas” of the Bible in light of its social, historical, linguistic, literary, and religious contexts. In doing so, we will also explore some ways the Bible has influenced and is reflected (and even been misunderstood) in Western culture. The course will also explore the Bible’s connection to history and its role as literature, as well as its ongoing function as Scripture within two distinct religious traditions (Judaism and Christianity).

**Note: No knowledge of or religious conviction regarding the material is required or assumed.*

B. Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will:

- gain an appreciation for various concerns, perspectives, and genres of material found in the Bible;
- be able to outline the basic story-arc of the Bible, identify major characters and events, and describe key biblical concepts and vocabulary;
- identify and contrast perspectives presented in course and secondary material (including articles, online videos and interviews, etc.);
- recognize diversity in the Bible, including different:
 - genres of material;
 - social and historical contexts;
 - ways of understanding God, the world, and humanity;
 - conclusions regarding the ethical demands of how to live in the world;

- consider how the Bible fits into the broader social, historical, and cultural context of the Ancient Near East;
- connect biblical perspectives and discussions on specific topics to later interpretation, as well as potential implications for issues today;
- use various key tools employed in biblical study (concordances, Bible dictionaries, Bible commentaries);
- begin to interpret specific biblical passages in light of secondary resources and write brief academic papers; and
- identify basic differences between Jewish and Christian Bibles and how they function within distinct religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity).

II. Course Requirements

A. Textbooks

1. The Bible (required)

This is *the most important textbook in the course*. To minimize distraction, I ask for students to have their own *physical* Bible, which they are expected to **bring to every class**. “**Reading guides**” on the LEARN web-site will identify Bible and secondary readings for each class along with a list of questions to think about as you read.

No one Bible version is required — in fact, having a diversity present enriches class discussion. *However, paraphrases and Bibles that use a ‘dynamic equivalence’ approach to translation will NOT be appropriate for this course (the Message, Good News Bible, Today’s English Version, etc.)*. The course will include New Testament readings, so people who use a Tanakh (Jewish Publication Society Bible) will need access to a New Testament as well. “**Reference editions**” that provide scriptural cross-references are recommended, and “**Study Bibles**” of various versions provide helpful additional information (NJPS, NIV, NRSV, NASB, NKJV, etc). You are welcome to choose from among:

- *Common English Bible* (CEB)
- *Tanakh* (JPS - Jewish Publication society)
- *New American Bible* (NAB), *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) or the older *American Standard Version* (ASV)
- *New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB) or the older *Jerusalem Bible* (JB)
- *21st Century New King James Version*, or the *New King James Version* (NKJV), or the venerable *Authorized* or *King James Version* (AV or KJV)
- *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) or the older *Revised Standard Version* (RSV)
- *Revised English Bible* (REB) or the older *New English Bible* (NEB)
- *Today’s New International Version* (TNIV) or the older *New International Version* (NIV).

2. LEARN

Reading Guides will provide specific biblical passages and questions to consider as you read; these readings should be done in preparation for class. Power Point presentations will be uploaded after class. Additional secondary resources (handouts, articles, videos, etc.) may also be made available through LEARN.

3. Optional (but Strongly Encouraged!) Resources

Michael Harvey, *The Nuts & Bolts of College Writing* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub. Co., 2003). --- HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

This book, *also available as an e-book*, provides an excellent, accessible, light-hearted guide to the style, writing and formatting of academic papers. (*If early in your academic career, this guide is worth referring to throughout your studies.*)

Questionnaire re: Learning Preferences (Option) <https://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/>

I encourage students to take this short quiz to recognize your own learning preference(s), *especially at the beginning of your university career*. This tool also provides very concrete suggestions for setting up notes, studying for tests, doing research, etc.

B. Student Evaluation

Online quizzes will be accessible through LEARN. Two longer written assignments submitted will comply with **the Chicago Manual of Style**

(<https://guides.osu.edu/c.php?g=605168&p=4194386>).

- *Papers with multiple citations will use appropriate footnotes*, that include author, publication, date, and page number(s). Also, see the “Cite Biblical Sources” document on LEARN for more detailed information for how to cite Bible passages specifically.
- *Written assignments MUST provide both a word count and signed copy of the ‘Academic Integrity Statement’ (found on the LEARN web-site) on the title page.*

****Unexcused late assignments will be docked 3% / academic day, to a maximum of 12%.**

In-Class

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| - Questions | 10% |
| - Workshop Participation | 10% |

On-line Secondary Reading Quizzes (various, lowest mark dropped)

15%

Bible Reading Quizzes (x 3) (IN CLASS – Oct. 3; Nov. 12; Dec. 3)

15%

Word Study

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| On-Line Quiz (by Feb. 10) | 5% |
| Assignment (DUE: Mar. 6) | 20% |

NT Simulation Prep. (DUE: Mar. 27)

25%

****BONUS assignments** (2% each, up to 4%). The effect of BONUS assignments will be capped (see below).

Descriptions**1. In-Class Questions**

Throughout the term students will briefly respond to basic in-class questions, with a satisfactory response resulting in full marks.

****Consistent attendance will be crucial for success in this class.**

2. Workshop Engagement

During the term students will complete several in-class workshops on selected topics. These workshops will consist of working through a series of readings and related questions in a small group.

3. Online Secondary Reading Quizzes

Students will complete several basic quizzes based on secondary readings (SR on the Class Schedule). The majority of these will consist of True/False and Multiple Choice questions. SRs will be available for 24 hours, from **NOON the day before class to noon the day of class**.

4. Bible Reading Quizzes

At three points in the term students will complete a **brief quiz IN CLASS** based on Bible readings and class discussions completed to that point (end of Deuteronomy, end of Tanakh/Old Testament, end of New Testament). More information regarding the nature of these quizzes will be provided in class.

5. Word Study

Students will take an **on-line quiz** that uses Strong's on-line concordance to explore the "semantic range" of a specific Hebrew term. Students will then use their own observations and consult secondary sources to write a **brief paper (600-900 words)** that explores how this term is used in the Tanakh/OT and its significance in a specific book.

6. New Testament Simulation Prep.

The New Testament reflects many lively debates over how to understand Jesus and live as his followers. This assignment will explore one of these debates. Students will be assigned and then research the perspective of one of the sides involved, writing a **brief paper (900-1200 words)** and creating a **1-page 'talking points' summary** (included as an appendix). This assignment provides a window into the dynamics of biblical interpretation and introduces students to Bible commentaries as study resources.

BONUS Assignments

There are many opportunities to hear various speakers, attend events on campus, etc. If there is something that relates to the Bible (even peripherally) you can attend, write a one page summary and critique linking it to the class, and you will receive a 2% boost on your final mark per report (up to a maximum of 4%).

The effect of BONUS marks will be capped at a 95% grade for the course --- ie: if someone is sitting at a 94%, the most their mark can be bumped up is to 95%.

***The Librarians here at Grebel** are a wonderful resource, who can be particularly helpful for working on assignments for this course. Just go up to the Grebel library on the 3rd floor and ask for Mandy Macfie or Lauren Harder-Gissing.

****The Use of Generative AI is Prohibited in this course**

This course includes the independent development and practice of specific skills, such as close reading of documents, critical thinking, clear communication, and basic academic writing. Therefore, the use of Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) trained using large language models (LLM) or other methods to produce text like Chat GPT, DALL-E, or GitHub CoPilot, is not permitted in this class. **Unauthorized use in this course, such as running course materials through GenAI or using GenAI to complete a course assessment is considered a violation of [Policy 71](#) (plagiarism or unauthorized aids or assistance).** Work produced with the assistance of AI tools does not represent the author's original work and is therefore in violation of the fundamental values of academic integrity including honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and courage ([ICAI](#), n.d.).

You should be prepared to show your work. To demonstrate your learning, you should keep your rough notes, including research notes, brainstorming, and drafting notes. You may be asked to submit these notes along with earlier drafts of your work, either through saved drafts or saved versions of a document. If the use of GenAI is suspected where not permitted, you may be asked to meet with your instructor or TA to provide explanations to support the submitted material as being your original work. Through this process, if you have not sufficiently supported your work, academic misconduct allegations may be brought to the Associate Dean.

In addition, you should be aware that the legal/copyright status of generative AI inputs and outputs is unclear. More information is available from the Copyright Advisory Committee: <https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-at-waterloo/teaching/generative-artificial-intelligence>

You can reach out to campus supports if you need help with coursework including:

- [Student Success Office](#) for help with skills like notetaking and time management
- [Writing and Communication Centre](#) for assignments with writing or presentations
- [AccessAbility Services](#) for documented accommodations

III. Faculty of Arts Information

Cross-listed Course: Please note that a cross-listed course will count in all respective averages no matter under which subject code it has been taken. For example, a PHIL/PSCI cross-list will

count in a Philosophy major average, even if the course was taken under the Political Science subject code.

Academic integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

Note for students with disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

IV. Class Schedule

**If we need to suspend in-person meetings for some reason during the term, the weekly class session will be moved to an on-line ZOOM class at the same time (Mon. / Wed. 1-2:20).

Date and Topic	Topics	Secondary Reading	Assignments
A. Introduction Sept. 5 - Reading the Bible as a "Cross-Cultural Experience"; Orientation to the Course	Syllabus		

Sept. 10 - Bible & Community: What is the Bible(s)? How do people approach it?	Basic Story-line Metaphors for the Bible	"A Few Basics," Kaminsky et. al. ¹ "The Bible as a Religious Book," Kaminsky et. al. ²	
B. Tanakh / Old Testament Torah/Pentateuch Sept. 12 - Humanity in Creation: Who are We, Why Are We Here?	Genesis 1-5; 'adam; challenges in studying the Bible	King, "The Truth about Stories" - Part 1 ³ "Created as Male and Female," Suderman ⁴	
Sept. 17 - Covenant, Family & Hospitality: God's Strategy for Blessing	Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael/Isaac (Genesis 11-35)	"Everyday Life," Meyers ⁵	SR Quiz
Sept. 19 - 'Authorship' Before Books: <i>Moving Behind the Printing Press to Scroll Production</i>	ANE 'quilt'; ancient production of scrolls (based on Gen. 6-9)		Workshop
Sept. 24 - Memory & Liberation: What does this story <i>Mean</i> ? And What is True Freedom?	Exodus (narratives)		
Sept. 26 – <i>Law, Holiness & Sin: Ritual, Ethics, and Implications for Today</i>	Legal material in Exodus & Leviticus	"Concepts of Purity in the Bible," Klawans ⁶	SR Quiz Workshop
Oct. 1 - Torah & Scripture: What Makes this "Book" Different than Others?	Deuteronomy		

¹ Joel S. Kaminsky, Joel N. Lohr, and Mark Reasoner, "A Few Basics," in *The Abingdon Introduction to the Bible: Understanding Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 5–18.

² Joel S. Kaminsky, Joel N. Lohr, and Mark Reasoner, *The Abingdon Introduction to the Bible: Understanding Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 19–29.

³ Thomas King, "The Truth About Stories – Part 1," *CBC Massey Lectures 2003*: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-2003-cbc-massey-lectures-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative-1.2946870>

⁴ W. Derek Suderman, "Created as Male and Female: 'adam', Gender, and the Legacy of Disobedience," in *On Being Human: Essays from the Fifth Shi'i Muslim Mennonite Christian Dialogue*, ed. Harry Huebner and Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2013), 211–30.

⁵ Carol L. Meyers, "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 244–51.

⁶ Jonathan Klawans, "Concepts of Purity in the Bible," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Marc Zvi Brettler and Adele Berlin, Michael Fishbane, consulting editor (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2041–47.

(Former) Prophets/ Historical Books Oct. 3 - History & Story: From ‘Video Camera’ to Meaning	Differences between Joshua & Judges	“The Bible as ‘Story’ and ‘History,’” Kaminsky ⁷ ; “The Era of the Judges,” Fant et. al. ⁸	Bible Quiz #1 Intro to Word Study paper
Oct. 8 - Land & Conquest: Re-Reading a Dangerous Book...	Joshua	“Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians,” Warrior ⁹	SR Response Word Study Quiz- by Feb. 10
Oct. 10 - Prophets & Kings: the Purpose and Limits of Government	Samuel and Saul; David and Nathan; Solomon; Ahab and Elijah		
BREAK (Oct. 12-20)			
Oct. 22 - Empires & Exile: What is the “End” (Goal/Purpose) of History?	I-II Kings		
(Latter) Prophets Oct. 24 - Prophetic books & Justice: Forth-tellers or Fortune-tellers?	Prophetic books (Amos, Isaiah, vari- ous)	“The Prophetic Books,” Malchow ¹⁰	SR Quiz
3. Writings Oct. 29 - Wisdom & Knowledge	Solomon (1 Kings); Proverbs		
Oct. 31 - <i>Words Matter...!</i>	Jonah – much more than a Fish story...		Word Study DUE; Workshop
Nov. 5 - Prayer, Suffering & Praise	Psalms & Job	“In a Perfect Storm,” Suderman ¹¹	

⁷ Joel S. Kaminsky, Joel N. Lohr, and Mark Reasoner, “The Bible as ‘Story’ and ‘History,’” *The Abingdon Introduction to the Bible: Understanding Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 45–49.

⁸ Clyde E. Fant, Donald W. Musser, and Mitchell G. Reddish, “The Era of the Judges,” *An Introduction to the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 121–34.

⁹ Robert Allan Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today,” in *Native and Christian*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 93-104.

¹⁰ Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What is New and What is Old* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 31–49.

¹¹ Derek Suderman, “In a Perfect Storm,” *Canadian Mennonite* (July 20, 2020), 4-6.

C. Second Temple Period and NT Nov. 7 - <i>Synagogue, Temple & Judaism(s): Re-entering the Land and the Backdrop of the New Testament</i>	Ezra, Nehemiah, Luke	“Faith Forged in Disorientation,” Suderman ¹² “The Stories of Jesus,” Enns ¹³	Workshop
Nov. 12 - <i>Messiah & “Son of God”:</i> <i>A Case of the ‘Synoptic’ Gospels</i>	Comparing Matthew, Mark, Luke (Synoptic Gospels)		Bible Quiz #2 Workshop
Nov. 14 - Gospel, Saviour & “the Kingdom of God”		“Kingdom of God,” Yoder Neufeld ¹⁴	SR Quiz
Nov. 19 – Jesus the Storyteller: Exploring the Parables	GUEST SPEAKER: Dr. Alicia Batten	“Laborers in the Vineyard,” Levine ¹⁵	
Nov. 21 - Cross & Resurrection: From Instrument of Torture to Salvation	“Synoptic Gospels” and John		
Nov. 26 - New Testament Simulation; Pharisees, Christians, & the Church (<i>Ekklesia</i>) in the 1 st Century	Acts 15 Acts, Galatians & James	“The Pharisees: Jesus’ Competition,” Neusner ¹⁶	NT Simulation Assignment
Nov. 28 - <i>Apocalypse & the “End Times”:</i> <i>From a Calendar to a Re-Oriented Perspective</i>	Revelation		Workshop
D. Conclusion Dec. 3 - Scripture & Tradition: The Function of the Bible in Religious Communities Today	Challenges and Opportunities	“How a Rabbi Reads the Torah,” Neusner; ¹⁷ “How a Priest Reads the Bible,” Greeley; ¹⁸	Bible Quiz #3

¹² Derek Suderman, “Faith Forged in Disorientation,” *Canadian Mennonite* (Oct. 26, 2020), 4-6.

¹³ Peter Enns, “The Stories of Jesus,” *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (Harper One, 2014), 78-81.

¹⁴ Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, “Kingdom of God: What? Where? When?” in *Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 125–38.

¹⁵ Amy-Jill Levine, “Laborers in the Vineyard,” *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2014), 197-219.

¹⁶ Jacob Neusner, “The Pharisees: Jesus’ Competition,” in *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 45-61.

¹⁷ Jacob Neusner, “How a Rabbi Reads the Torah,” in *Common Ground* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 1-5.

¹⁸ Andrew Greeley, “How a Priest Reads the Bible,” in *Common Ground* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 6-11.

		Biblical Authority,” Brueggemann ¹⁹	
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¹⁹ Walter Brueggemann, “Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection,” in *Christian Century* 118:1 (2001): 14-20.