

**Methodist University**  
**REL 104: INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL LITERATURE**  
**Syllabus for Spring Semester 2014**

**Instructor:** Logan Mehl-Laituri

**Times:** Tuesday & Thursday, 8:00-9:15am (.002) or 9:30-10:45am (.003)

**Location:** Trustees Bldg. Room 214

**Email:** lmehllaituri@methodist.edu

**\*\*No Office Hours, Email for on-campus advising or consultation.**

**University Mission, Departmental Goals, and Additional Course Policies and Information:**

See Addendum on page 6

**REQUIRED TEXT BOOKS:**

- Fee, Gordon D. & Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, ed. David Alexander, et. al. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.
  - The most recent, “deluxe” edition is 2011, but pagination will follow the earlier version.
- A translation of *The Holy Bible* (New Revised Standard Version [NRSV] or Today’s New International Version [TNIV] strongly preferred)
  - We will not be covering Apocrypha in this class. Being a Methodist college, we will assume a Protestant Christian lens (see below).

*\*\*Additional required and recommended reading will be announced throughout the course and emailed to students in PDF format.*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS**

This course introduces students to the scholarly study of selected biblical texts as a way of exploring their enduring significance. In other words, we will ask of the selected biblical passages:

- **What does the text say in its literary context?**
- **What did the text mean then in its historical context?**
- **Why is the text important to us today as we reflect upon the Bible’s continuing theological relevance?**

While this course does not require prior biblical knowledge or a particular faith commitment on the part of its participants, the Bible is nevertheless considered sacred by many faith communities and should be treated with respect. The Bible helps form their sense of identity and inform their relationship with God. As

a religiously affiliated school, Methodist University requires students to take at least one course that deals primarily with the Judeo-Christian tradition. This course fulfills that requirement. For the sake of consistency, this course will read the Bible from the lens of Protestant Christianity and seek to help students achieve three main goals:

- To **learn the basic content of the selected biblical texts**, which lay at the foundation of the Judeo-Christian tradition and which are presupposed by all subsequent theological study.
- To **read the selected biblical texts critically**. Because we are separated from the Bible by language, time, culture, and by our own assumptions about what the Bible says, we will use various scholarly approaches to read the biblical texts in a way that honors their unique, original meaning.
- To **think theologically** as we explore the relevance of these ancient texts to modern concerns. The assumption here is that there is a critical correlation between God's revelation through the Judeo-Christian experience recorded in Scripture and our own modern experience of trying to understand the human situation in reference to God.

Again, the course does not *require* that students hold any particular theological conviction, but given the enduring significance of the selected biblical texts, we will explore the texts' contemporary and theological relevance and keeping up with the assigned readings is essential to success in this course. We will be reading the selected texts in light of literary and historical context before sharing our perceptions about the text. This way, our opinions will be critically informed.

Because the Bible contains too much material to cover in one semester, we will limit our selection of readings. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the assigned material is essential. In order to provide continuity to our diverse selection of texts, written over several centuries and in many different contexts, we will look at our material with a very specific lens in place, Protestant Christianity. Differing perspectives are welcome and encouraged, but only one will dictate course progress.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- 20% Participation and Attendance.
- 40% Reflection Papers (each is worth 20%)
- 40% Final Exam

Notice the emphasis on attendance and in-class participation. Critically engaging with the texts in question is a focus of this course and reading alone will not adequately prepare students to meet the three goals highlighted above. Furthermore, there are no planned weekly assignments specifically so that students are able to do the reading outside of class sessions. To calculate Midterm Grades, there may be short pop quizzes to gauge student progress and attention, which will contribute to the Participation and Attendance category. Come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings, which means reading the assigned texts prior to the weeks in which they appear below (example – read Fee & Stuart chapter 5 and also Zondervan pages 98-179 *before* January 14th).

Grading Scale for all assignments in the course;

A = 100-93%	B- = 82-80%	D+ = 69-67%
A- = 92-90%	C+ = 79-77%	D = 66-63%
B+ = 89-87%	C = 76-73%	D- = 62-60%
B = 86-83%	C- = 72-70%	F = less than 60%

## I. PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE

Students should plan ahead to attend every class session and are required to notify the instructor by email of absences that are known in advance. Students in introductory classes that are required for graduation may not miss any more than 20% of classes for the course. On paper, this amounts to six (6) total class periods, at which point an automatic “Withdraw, Failing” (WF) grade is generated and the student is involuntarily dropped from the class. To keep this from happening, attendance will be taken every day and those in danger of being dropped may be notified by the instructor based on their own discretion, but *it is the responsibility of each student* to show up for class consistently and track their own attendance. However, in order to actually achieve the highest grade in this category, students must engage with the material either in verbal discussion in class, online in discussion groups, or by turning in short reflections directly to their instructor. Attendance alone does not guarantee the best grade.

## II. TWO REFLECTION PAPERS (Critical Thinking) – Due Thursday, March 13th & Thursday, April 10th

Each student will be responsible for writing two 4-5 page (12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced) reflections on a biblical genre encountered in class that is paralleled in contemporary literature. Sources (biblical text and contemporary source, whether aural, visual, or textual) are to be identified and explored in light of class discussions and readings. The best papers will display critical engagement with each source, including their literary, theological, and historical significance and how they compare and contrast with one another. Students are strongly advised to consult with the professor on which source(s) they desire to use prior to beginning work. Additional guidance on the reflection papers will be provided in class, along with a grading rubric and tips for writing a thoughtful, compelling, and high-grade paper.

Examples of genres for project:

Law	Wisdom Literature	Prophecy*
Genealogy	Comedic Satire	Psalm/Hymnody
Parable	Irony	Proverb
(Chronological) History	(Instructive) Epistle	Eulogy/Panegyric
Narrative	Apocalyptic*	Synoptics/Forensics

*\*Be very careful – there is a difference between biblical examples and popular conceptions thereof. Consult the professor if you are interested in these genres.*

## III. FINAL EXAM (Information Recall)

The Final Exam is a multiple choice-type test meant to measure memory and recollection of anecdotal information to display students’ ability to remember basic information on the Bible and methods of historical and theological interpretation. Test will be cumulative and a study guide will be provided, but students should

plan on keeping thorough notes. Students are encouraged to study in groups and take notes throughout the course to aide in preserving information and strengthening their potential exam score.

The Final Exam schedule can be found here: <http://www.methodist.edu/academics/exams.shtml>. The last regular class day for Spring 2014 is Tuesday, April 29th.

- .002 students AND ALL **SENIORS** take their Final Exam on **Thursday, May 1st at 8-10am**
- .003 underclassmen take their Final Exam on **Friday, May 2nd at 2-4pm.**

## COURSE SCHEDULE

To supplement the following schedule, be sure to review Methodist University's Academic Calendar: [www.methodist.edu/academics/academiccal.shtml#currentyear](http://www.methodist.edu/academics/academiccal.shtml#currentyear)

Note: A few weeks are designed to be deliberately non-intensive. Take advantage of the reduced reading load these weeks to study in groups and strengthen your knowledge of the Bible and interpretive methods. Week 9 will also include reintroductions and check-ins, in which we will collectively reassess what we have learned and how such knowledge has affected us individually.

Key for **Readings**;

FS – Fee/Stuart book; *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*

Z – *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*

\*\*[Brackets] indicate biblical sources, which need not be read comprehensively. Familiarize yourself with these texts as much as possible, as they will be authoritative for this class, but focus on the other readings when time and energy are short. Few, if any, questions on the final exam will focus on biblical texts themselves, but may include broad questions of very basic biblical knowledge that the other readings and class discussions will provide.

**Week 1 (of Jan.7): Tues** – Introductions and review of syllabus

**Thurs** – *Canon*: Interpretations & Translation: **FS ch.1&2, Z pp.14-77**

>OLD TESTAMENT<

**Week 2 (of Jan.14): OT Narrative** [Genesis & Exodus], **FS ch.5, Z pp.98-179**

**Week 3 (of Jan.21): Law** and the rest of Torah [Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy], **FS ch.9, Z pp.180-219**

**Week 4 (of Jan.28): History**: [Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther] **Z pp.220-254 & 328-343.**  
**Thurs** – the triple doubles [Samuel, Kings, Chronicles], **Z pp.255-327**

**Week 5 (of Feb.4): *Wisdom*** [Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon/Songs] **FS ch.12, Z pp.393-407**  
**Thurs – *Eulogy*** and mourning [Job & Lamentations] **Z, pp.349-358 & 459-460**

**Week 6 (of Feb.11): *Wisdom* Songs:** [Psalms] **FS ch.11, Z pp.359-392**

**Week 7 (of Feb.18): *Prophecy - Major Prophets:*** [Isaiah, Jeremiah ~ Ezekiel] **FS ch.10, Z pp.417-458 & 461-472.** Additional readings to be announced (Heschel, King)

**Week 8 (of Feb.25): *Prophecy - Minor Prophets*** [Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi] **Z pp.483-514**

\*\*NO CLASS MARCH 3-7 (Fall Break)

**Week 9 (of Mar.11):** Reintroductions and Reflection Papers discussion  
**Thurs – *Commentaries*; FS Appendix, Z pp.80-95 & PAPER #1 DUE!**

>NEW TESTAMENT<

**Week 10 (of Mar.18): *The Fourfold Gospel*** – Synoptics [Matthew and Mark], **FS ch.7, Z pp.549-594**  
**Thurs – [John] Z pp.621-642**

**Week 11 (of Mar.25): *Gospel History*** [Luke and Acts] **FS ch.6, Z pp.595-620 & 643-673.**

**Week 12 (of Apr.1): *Parable*** – **FS ch.8, Z p.796,** Selected Gospel readings  
Additional readings to be announced (Fables, fairy tales, and other parabolic literature)

**Week 13 (of Apr.8): *Epistles*** [“Pauline” Epistles: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon] **FS ch.3 & 4, Z pp.674-739**  
**Thurs – [“General” Epistles: Hebrews, James, Peter, John, Jude] Z pp.740-762 & PAPER #2 DUE,**

**Week 14 (of Apr.15):** Final Exam review and discussion, (Buffer week – catch up, etc.)

>INTER-TESTAMENTAL FEATURES<

**Week 15 (of Apr.22): *Genealogy*** [Genesis, Matthew 1:1-17, Luke, 3:23-38] **Z pp.147, 267, & 628**  
**Thurs – *Names* Z, 121 & 162.**

**Week 16 (Apr.29): *Apocalyptic*** [Revelation and Daniel] **FS ch.13, Z pp.473-482 & 763-777**

**FINAL EXAM:**

.002 students *AND ALL SENIORS* = **Thursday, May 1st @ 8am**  
.003 underclassmen = **Friday, May 2nd @ 2pm**

## **ADDENDUM TO RELIGION SYLLABI:**

### **University Mission and Departmental Goals:**

The mission of Methodist University is to develop responsible members of society by providing an education firmly grounded in the liberal arts, committed to nurturing moral values and ethical decision-making, and is designed to prepare students for a variety of careers.

### **The purpose of the Department of Philosophy and Religion:**

The purpose of the Department of Philosophy and Religion is to introduce students both to philosophical and religious traditions—particularly Western, but including others—and in the spirit of the liberal arts tradition to engender critical thinking in these areas.

Goal 1: Students who complete the core requirements in philosophy and religion will have a general knowledge of principal philosophical and religious traditions.

Goal 2: Students who complete the core requirements in philosophy and religion will be conversant with critical thinking.

Goal 3: Students who complete a minor in philosophy or a minor/major in religion will be prepared to enter professional or graduate studies.

See above for course goals (student learning outcomes) and requirements (assessments).

### **Core/General Education requirements in Religion:**

For the B.A., B.S., B.S.W., and A.A. in General Studies, 6 semester hours, at least 3 of which must deal primarily with the Judeo-Christian tradition. For the B.M., B.F.A., A.S., and A.A. with a Subject Concentration, core requirement in Religion, the 3 semester hours must deal primarily with the Hebrew-Christian tradition. Neither 103 (Introduction to Religion) nor REL 150 (Eastern Religious Traditions) may be used to fulfill the 3 semester hours Judeo-Christian tradition

**Requirement.**

## **Core/General Education Competencies in Religion – Humanities:**

Humanities: The human condition is influenced by multiple cultures, belief systems, and traditions. Courses in the humanities provide students with a rich variety of ways to interpret and understand the world.

### **Writing-Enrichment Courses:**

According to University policy, each student, day or evening, must take at least one writing– enriched course in his/her major field. REL 352, 405, and 406 can be used to meet this requirement. Other courses can be used with special permission from the instructor.

### **University Attendance Policy:**

Missing more than 20% of any 100 level classes for any reason, excused or not, will result in being withdrawn from the course and given a WF. Additional, possibly stricter, attendance policies are set by each instructor— see the rest of the syllabus for information.

### **University Email Policy:**

Students have been issued an email account ending in @student.methodist.edu. All students are responsible for checking their e-mail daily for messages from the University.

### **Students with Disabilities and Additional Writing Assistance:**

Any student requiring accommodations due to one or more disabilities must bring the appropriate documentation to the Methodist University Center for Personal Development no later than the first week of classes during the semester in which the accommodations are required. Together the student and personnel of the Center for Personal Development will decide upon the accommodations to be implemented. Students desiring assistance with written assignments should contact the Writing Center. Also, in both cases please feel free to contact the professor.

### **Honor Code:**

Learning best occurs in an environment of trust and mutual respect. It also requires accountability. As such, cheating, plagiarism, improper citations (whether intentional or not), lying and/or academic misrepresentation can result in a zero on an assignment or a failing grade for the course, at the discretion of the instructor. It will also be reported to the Academic Standards Committee. Rude comments and/or disruptive actions, whether directed toward other students or toward the instructor, and whether spoken aloud or sent privately through email, negatively affect the learning environment and can also result in penalties ranging from a zero on participation to an F for the course, again at the discretion of the instructor.

Inattentive behavior can negatively affect one's participation grade, and serious disturbances

can result in expulsion from the course. If in doubt about any of the above, please ask the instructor for clarification. See catalogue for further information.

### **Honor Code: Course Etiquette:**

Your instructor wants this to be an enjoyable, engaging and worthwhile class and, as such, is willing to work with you to help you achieve the goals you set. Toward that end we will all want to keep in mind some (hopefully common sense) rules of etiquette.

University Policy: “Students are expected to interact with other students, the instructor, and any teaching assistants or technical support staff enrolled in the course just as they would be expected to do in a traditional classroom setting. Because online courses contain a combination of communication channels, some public and some private, such as e-mail, instant messaging, discussion forums, and chat rooms, inappropriate conduct in these channels is not allowed. Examples of inappropriate conduct that are never permitted include sexually harassing language, racially or ethnically degrading language, profanity, and verbally abusive language. Evidence of any of these represents grounds for dismissal from the course by the Assistant Dean for Distance Education. In general, the discussion of personal matters, such as questioning a grade, is inappropriate for public forums. These matters may be addressed privately through e-mail, provided none of the conduct listed above occurs in that communication.

Additional requirements: The goal of the honor code is not to be arbitrary, but to promote the free exchange of ideas in a safe and respectful manner. Behavior that interferes with the smooth running of the course is to be avoided. As such disrespectful or overly confrontational comments, whether directed toward other students or toward the instructor, and whether posted publicly on the discussion board or sent privately through email, will result in points being deducted from one’s participation grade—the goal of participation is to facilitate mutual learning, while obviously in-your-face comments negatively affect course morale by shutting down dialogue. Determination of inappropriate comments and behavior lies in the hands of the instructor, and so if in doubt about a comment, please ask the instructor. Or if you find yourself struggling with something in the course, or are unsure of why you received a certain grade, please feel free to contact the instructor. The instructor is committed to making this a worthwhile and fun course, and if we all work together, we should have no problem achieving this goal.

### **Honor Code: Cheating and Use of Proper Citations:**

It should also go without saying that cheating, in whatever form it occurs, is a serious act of disrespect—both towards the professor and towards one’s fellow students. It is also stealing, as it robs value from those who do not cheat. As such cheating will not be tolerated. Any act of cheating will result in an F for the assignment or, depending on the severity and at the discretion of the instructor, an F for the course. Acts of cheating will also be **reported**



to Methodist University Honor Committee and can result in more serious penalties, including suspension or expulsion from Methodist University.

IMPORTANT: You MUST cite any sources that you use in your writing (on exams, papers, and discussion boards), including any web sites that you consult. Copying and pasting material from a web site or paraphrasing material found there without a citation constitutes an act of plagiarism and is a violation of the honor code. In general any verbatim phrase that is more than three or four words long MUST be put under quotation marks, and any paraphrasing of content that you did not already have in your head (and content that is not general knowledge to an average undergraduate) must include a citation as to its original source. If you are not confident in your use of citations, please contact the instructor or stop by the Writing Center for help.