

ENGL4360 The Bible as Literature
Professor Jamie Ferguson, fall 2014
MW 2:30-4

This is an introduction to the literary and historical study of the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament in the King James Version (1611), which scholars consider a generally reliable reflection of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek originals – but which, for our purposes, has the additional advantage of being itself a classic work in English. We shall read the biblical texts in the context of other Near Eastern literature, from the perspectives of traditional Jewish and Christian exegesis, historical-critical and literary analysis, and the history of translation. For some texts, we shall compare the KJV with other versions. Our readings will include: Genesis, 1-2 Samuel, selected Psalms, part of Isaiah, Job, the Song of Solomon, 2 Esdras, the Gospels of Mark and John, and the Epistle to the Romans. The Bible includes a veritable anthology of literary genres: narrative, song, dream vision, folktale, lament, dramatic dialogue, parable, proverb, epistle, apocalypse, etc. This generic variety is matched by copious literary craft, including close plotting, irony, complex characterization, rhetorical address, metaphor, allegory, and much else. In addition, the biblical canon, written over the course of some twelve centuries, includes within itself many layers of repetition, redaction, reworking, and self-commentary. This complex of texts offers a rich and varied field for interpretation; it also raises fundamental issues of originality and derivativeness, vision and revision, authorial intent and interpretive latitude.

This course satisfies three hours of the British Literature pre-1798 requirement for English majors. The course is open to all students but may be taken for Honors credit (without petition).

Required texts:

The English Bible, King James Version. Norton Critical Edition. Norton, 2012.

- Vol. 1: The Old Testament. Ed. Herbert Marks. ISBN 978-0-393-92745-0
- Vol. 2: The New Testament and the Apocrypha. Ed. Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch. ISBN 978-0-393-97507-9