

ENGL4360 The Bible as Literature  
Professor Jamie Ferguson, fall 2013  
MW 2:30-4

This is an introduction to the literary 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. Our readings will include: Genesis, 1-2 Samuel, selected Psalms, the Song of Songs, Ezekiel, Job, Ecclesiastes, 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, 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. In addition to the literary approaches, we shall read the biblical texts from the perspectives of traditional Jewish and Christian exegesis, historical-critical analysis, and the history of translation. For some texts, we shall compare the KJV with other versions.

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