

The Art of Biblical Narrative

Professor: Keith Bodner

Course Code: OT 2XA3

Dates: Monday May 26th until Friday May 30th 2008, McMaster Divinity College

Times: 9 a.m.– 12 p.m., 1 p.m.– 4 p.m., Mon.–Thurs.; 9–12 on Friday

Phone: tollfree 1 888 YOU N ABU, Extension # 137

Email: Keith.Bodner@abu.nb.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION: There are many ways of reading biblical narrative and exploring its richness, and various methods (such as historical, sociological, and theological approaches) have been used in the past. The Bible, as most agree, is a literary document; it is a book composed of narratives, poems, legal texts, prophetic visions, parables, and letters. Therefore, a literary approach to the Scriptures is highly appropriate, and will prove to be fruitful for enriching a student's interpretation and understanding of this ancient library. This course will introduce and develop a literary approach to biblical narrative, highlighting and drawing attention to a wealth of examples in the process. We will focus on general literary features such as plot, character, point of view, creation of suspense and intrigue, and irony. Through collaborative discussions that center around various texts in Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and the Gospels, by the end of our journey we will be further along the road of apprehending the vast unities and complexities of biblical narrative and its inherent "artfulness."

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand the place of literary criticism when studying the Bible, and to acknowledge the value of such an approach for interpretation.
2. To appreciate the literary beauty and artistic complexity of biblical narrative in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and to discern how the various literary elements contribute to the theological landscape of the canon.
3. To undertake a literary analysis of selected biblical passages, and become acquainted with the skills and signals involved in a "close-reading" of the text.
4. To take preliminary steps toward disseminating our research on the art of biblical narrative to various audiences in the academic world and the church.
5. To read a considerable portion of biblical text and establish the relevant points for literary analysis.

COURSE TEXTS:

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

COURSE EVALUATION:

1. *The Judges Workshop* (further details to be provided) – 70%, due *no later than July 4th*, with absolutely no extensions. This assignment involves questions from the book of Judges, and we will discuss most of them during our course time.
2. Final Exam (take-home) – 30% due *no later than July 4th*, with absolutely no extensions.

OUTLINE of Topics:

Day 1 – Introduction and discussion of methodology

Day 1 – Type-scenes and the uses of convention

Day 1 – Dialogue and repetition

Day 2 – Characterization and point of view

Day 2 – Allusion and intertextuality

Day 2 – Reading for the plot

Day 2 – Literary art in Judges (1-3)

Day 3 – Literary art in Judges (4-10)

Day 4 – Literary art in Judges (11-12)

Day 4 – Literary art in Judges (13-16)

Day 5 – Literary art in Judges (17-21)

Day 5 – Conclusions

Additional notes:

Academic Dishonesty – Academic dishonesty is a serious offence in the academic world that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on the transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the McMaster Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty located at www.macdiv.ca/regs/honesty.php.

Inclusive Language ~ McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV is a good example of the use of inclusive language. It is expected that all students will use inclusive language in all MDC assignments.

Sexual Harassment ~ Sexual harassment is a violation of the integrity of persons in the form of unsolicited, unwelcome, verbal or physical behaviour, which discriminates on the basis of gender about a person's body, attire, gender, marital status or economic status. Among faculty, staff, and students, sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.

Disclaimer ~ This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up until the first day of class.