

## **English/Religious Studies 220B. Literature of the Bible: The New Testament**

Meets Mon., Wed., Fri. 11:00-11:50 in Mod. Lang. 202

Professor Willard

Office: Mod. Lang. 330

Hours: Mon., Wed., Fri. 12:00-12:50

Email: [willard@email.arizona.edu](mailto:willard@email.arizona.edu)

Phone: (520) 621-1154

and by appointment

URL: [www.u.arizona.edu/~willard](http://www.u.arizona.edu/~willard)

Close study of representative New Testament texts in connection with parallel passages in the Old Testament and non-canonical texts, emphasizing story and symbol rather than history and theology. Lectures, discussions, and in-class writing.

Prerequisite: Two courses in Traditions and Cultures or their transfer equivalents.  
Strongly recommended: Completion of English Composition requirement.

### **Required Reading**

AB = *The Access Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford).

Required. In addition to a standard English translation, includes readable introductions, sidebar essays, definitions, maps, and other information to be covered in lectures and discussions and included on quizzes and exams.

SS (1-15) = Study Sheets posted on D2L. Summaries of material covered in the Monday lecture and Wednesday discussion, with reference to relevant material in the AB (glossary terms, map locations, sidebar essays, biblical texts and notes). Consult these after each week is over and while preparing for exams.

RP (1-2) = Reading Packets posted on D2L. Supplementary readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hamadi (or Gnostic) Gospels.

### **Recommended Reading**

NTL = Kyle Keefer, *The New Testament as Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford). Strongly recommended as a supplement to the lectures and an aid to writing responses to questions posed by the New Testament texts.

TB = Karen Armstrong, *The Bible: A Biography* (Grove). Required for the Honors Contract. Recommended for anyone who wants a better understanding of the New Testament within the Bible as a whole and of the Bible and biblical interpretation within Western culture.

### **Requirements**

Exams	Two comprehensive exams, both closed book Midterm. 50 minutes. Short answer (terms and topics), essay (a theme). 15 percent of course grade Final. 100 minutes. Short answer (terms and topics), essay (a theme). 30 percent
Quizzes	Best 5 of 7. Different formats. Some unannounced. No make-ups. 15 percent
Responses	15 short essays (one page each). Due at the start of class each Friday. 30 percent

Participation            Attendance, engagement in group and class discussions,  
progress. 10 percent

A = 90, B = 80, C = 70, D = 60

### **Tentative Syllabus**

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, Monday classes will be devoted to lecture. All readings assigned for the week should be completed before the class. Wednesdays will be devoted to close study of selected texts from the week's reading (to be announced Monday and on the D2L course page), and Fridays to discussion of the week's reading. In addition to the translated texts, read the editors' introductions and sidebar essays.

#### Week 1. Aug. 24-28. Introductions

Mon. Introduction to studying the literature of the Bible: course goals and requirements

Wed. Introduction to *The Access Bible*. Read "Guide" pages 1-25

Fri. Introduction to the biblical canon. Read "Guide" pages 26-40

#### Week 2. Aug. 31 - Sep. 4. Three letters from Paul

Read 1 Thessalonians, Philippians 1-2, and Galatians

#### Week 3. Sep. 7-11. The first communion

Read 1 and 2 Corinthians

#### Week 4. Sep. 14-18. The Messianic secret

Read Mark 1-8

Fri. Last day to drop without a "W"

#### Week 5. Sep. 21-25. The temple and the tomb

Read Mark 9-16 and Hebrews 1-2

#### Week 6. Sep. 28 - Oct. 2. Interlude: the Old Testament legacy

Read Exodus 14-20, 30.1-16 (OT pages 87-97, 108); 1 Wisdom of Solomon 1-4, 18-19  
(Apoc. pages 53-58, 76-79, 180-182); hymns from the Dead Sea Scrolls (on D2L)

Mon. Yom Kippur

#### Week 7. Oct. 5-9. The Source

Mon. Midterm exam

Wed. Read Matthew 1-9

#### Week 8. Oct. 12-16. The Synoptic problem

Read Luke

#### Week 9. Oct. 19-23. The Way and the First Christians

Read Acts 1-15

Week 10. Oct. 26-30. The perils of Paul

Read Acts 16-28

Week 11. Nov. 2-6. Open Letters

Read James, 1 Peter, Jude

Week 12. Nov. 9-13. Interlude: The Gnostic gospels

Read The Gospel of Thomas; excerpts from the Gospel of Truth; Colossians

Wed. Veterans Day. No class meeting

Week 13. Nov. 16-20. The fourth gospel

Read John

Week 14. Nov. 23-27. Revelation

Read 1 John; Revelation 1-11

Wed. Take-home assignment. No class meeting

Fri. Thanksgiving holiday. No class meeting

Week 15. Nov. 30 - Dec. 4. Revelation

Read Revelation 12-20

Week 16. Dec. 7-11. End days

Read Revelation 21-22

Fri. Final exam (11 a.m. - 1 p.m. in Mod. Lang. 202)

**Policies**

Attendance. You are allowed three unexcused absences, the equivalent of one full week of meetings. You may miss all or part of any three classes without penalty, but further unexcused absences will affect your participation grade. Student athletes who will be going out of town for games should provide a copy of their schedules at the start of the semester and should notify the instructor of any changes.

Participation. You are expected to participate in class and group discussions. As a matter of courtesy please respond when called upon, even if only to say, "I don't know." If you want to avoid being called upon randomly, make a point of volunteering questions or information when you can do so.

Classroom climate. Please practice the "golden rule": show others the respect you would like to receive. Keep an open mind. You do not have to agree with anyone's interpretation, but must be respectful of all participants. Try to help others clarify their thoughts about the texts—including the instructor and the preceptors—and you will clarify your own thoughts in the process.

To help maintain a productive climate, please arrive promptly for each class meeting or segment, turn off cell phones and pagers, bring your copy of the assigned reading, and bring beverages only (no food please).

Academic integrity. When you submit work with your name on it, you affirm that the work is substantially your own and does not borrow from another person unless proper recognition is made. The Student Code of Conduct provides sanctions for students found, or suspected, to be in violation of this policy.

Incompletes. The grade of “I” can be assigned only under exceptional circumstances such as a major accident or illness and only if a contract has been completed identifying the missing work to be completed (usually a single assignment) and the time-frame for completion.

### **Honors Contracts**

Students who have “active” status in the Honors College may arrange to take this course for honors credit. To do so, they must obtain an Honors Contract (available on the college’s web site) and complete it, have the instructor sign it, and turn it in to Professor Berry at the Honors College before Labor Day. Include this information:

I will read Karen Armstrong’s book *The Bible: A Biography* (New York: Grove, 2007). I will write a review essay on it (500 to 1000 words, due September 30). In the review, I will identify a topic from chapter 3 or elsewhere in the book related to interpretation in or of the New Testament. After meeting with the instructor to discuss that topic, and perhaps other topics, I will write an original essay about some aspect of New Testament interpretation (1000-2000 words, due November 13). I will meet again with the instructor to discuss my approach to the topic. (Note: If schedules permit, I will also present my work to other Honors students in the course.)

I understand that, when I have successfully completed the Honors project, I will be excused from the final examination. My grade for the project (including the review, essay, and subsequent discussion) will account for 30 percent of my overall grade in the course.

### **Weekly Responses**

Directions. Allow margins of at least one inch. Use type font no smaller than 11 point. To save space, you may use the header for your name (also add mine if you submit the essay at the English Department and not in class). You may use the footer to document sources other than the class readings and lectures.

Response 1. Due Aug. 28. The many Bibles. Why isn’t there a single Christian Bible or, for that matter, a single Christian gospel or church? How does the existence of different canons and translations affect your approach to the Bible?

Response 2. Due Sep. 4. From Paul. Discuss the hymn in Philippians 2 or the story of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4. What does it suggest to you about Paul as a teacher or about the needs and responses of his audiences?

Response 3. Sep. 11. Corinthians. Closely study Paul's teachings about the gifts of the Holy Spirit or the experience of Christian resurrection. What do they suggest to you about Paul's character, about the churches he founded, or about his expectations for the future of humanity? You may also comment on how well they are realized in the church today or to what extent they remain relevant in today's world.

Response 4. Due Sep. 18. The Messianic secret. How do you understand the obtuseness of Mark's disciples (i.e., the misunderstanding the show)? Does it affect your understanding of Jesus Christ in Mark's gospel? Does it tell you anything about the audience for which Mark's gospel was written? Does the sense of a specific audience affect your understanding of what a (or the) gospel is?

Response 5. Due Sep. 25. Herod's temple. Discuss Mark's treatment of temple worship. You may also consider the temple in the End Days (chapter 13).

Response 6. Due Oct. 2. The Old Testament Legacy. Christianity has been called Judaism for the gentiles. It has also been called a reform movement within Judaism. What do you consider the most important lesson to be learned from the Old Testament writings we have studied.

Response 7. Due Oct. 9. The Source. The Source. Compare the teachings of Jesus and Paul. Choose one or more teachings from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-9) another teaching from the letters to the Corinthians. What can you infer about the different aims or audiences of Jesus and Paul?

Response 8. Due Oct. 16. The synoptic problem. What is the effect of having three gospels that are "synoptic" (i.e., seen from the same point of view, telling the same basic story)? Why do you suppose they were not combined into a single gospel?

Response 9. Due Oct. 23. The first Christians. Analyze a sermon by Peter, Stephen, or Paul, identifying major appeals (ethical, emotional, or logical). If you notice any differences in teaching by Jesus and about Jesus, you may wish to discuss them.

Response 10. Due Oct. 30. The perils of Paul. Compare Paul's message in Galatians to what he says (and what Luke says about him) in Acts. You may wish to speculate on what motivates Paul or to comment on your response to his message.

Response 11. Due Nov. 6. Open letters. What assumptions can you draw about first-century Christianities from the letters of James, John, and/or Jude? What elements in the letters seem to you most or least relevant two thousand years later?

Response 12. Nov. 13. The Gnostic Gospels. Discuss your response to one of the Gnostic or Nag Hamadi gospels, as found in readings online or on D2L. What can you infer from it about the “lost Christianities” of the earliest period in church history? Do they supplement or contradict the message of the canonical gospels?

Response 13. Due Nov. 20. Miracles and signs. Compare a miracle story from one or more of the synoptic gospels with a “sign” from the fourth gospel. You might suggest how the different approach is connected to the different emphases or audiences you find in the gospels under consideration.

Response 14. Due Nov. 30. The Revelation. Discuss the one of the letters to the seven churches of Asia. Do you see similarities to any message in the gospel according to John or the letters of John the Elder? Can you infer anything about life in the church from the blessings or curses that the letter mentions? How do the promised consequences prepare for the message that follows.

Response 15. Due Dec. 4. Armageddon. What can be inferred about the “war in heaven” that John witnesses? When and where did, does, or will it occur? What can be inferred about John’s attitude toward war?

Marks on responses:

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| √ + + 5 | Heavenly. Fully meets all requirements. Also demonstrates at least one of the following: original thinking, strong insight into the assigned texts, effective expression of ideas, development and support of a good thesis. |
| √ + 4.5 | Fully meets all requirements. Also demonstrates at least one of the following: original thinking, strong insight into the assigned texts, effective expression of ideas, development and support of a good thesis.           |
| √ 4     | Fully meets all requirements. Shows understanding of the topic and familiarity with the week’s reading as well as clear thinking about the assigned topic.   |
| √ - 3.5 | Does not fully meet all requirements. Perhaps it does not respond to the assigned topic, or does not show understanding of the week’s reading. Or it does not use appropriate language or documentation.                     |
| √ - - 3 | Hellish. Does not meet the requirements of the assignment.   |