

THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Coordinator: Elisabeth (Betsy) Gitter

Many LP2 members have studied the Bible as a source of religious guidance, disputation, and inspiration, but our approach will be entirely literary, historical, and secular. We will read selections from two important ancient anthologies: The Hebrew Bible and The New Testament. With the exception of *Genesis*, the assigned readings will come from outside the Pentateuch (Torah), supplemented occasionally by material from other ancient cultures. The word “Bible” comes from the Greek “books,” and with that in mind we will read a variety of the little books included in both The Hebrew Bible and The New Testament: mythic stories, family sagas, poems, proverbs, histories, sermons, parables, letters, and visionary prophecies.

Betsy Gitter joined LP2 in 2021 after teaching for many years in the Interdisciplinary Studies and Honors Programs at John Jay College, CUNY.

Type of Study Group: Close reading and discussion, with very occasional short lectures.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Required: *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with Apocrypha*, 5th edition, Oxford U.P. (2018, available in paperback).

Other material to be distributed via email by the coordinator.

***** **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: “In the beginning”: creation myths

READING:

Gen. 1:1 through Gen. 3;

Supplementary reading: Creation myths from other ancient cultures (provided as an attachment)

QUESTIONS:

The Hebrew Bible begins with two very different creation stories, one after the other. How are they different? Why would the redactors have included both stories? Compare the Biblical creation story with the others provided. What significant differences and similarities do you notice? Why do people from different cultures and civilizations seem to need a creation story? Assuming Creation stories are in fact important, what questions do they need to answer?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: Humans up to no good: floods and towers

READING:

Gen. 6 through Gen. 9; Gen. 11:1-9; Gen. 18:16 through 19.

Supplementary reading: Flood story from Gilgamesh (provided as an attachment)

QUESTIONS:

A surprising number of ancient mythologies included flood stories—some quite similar to the Biblical version. Why might this be? How do the Gilgamesh and Biblical flood stories differ? People behave badly in a variety of ways in these stories. Should they have known better? If so, how? What purposes do the punishments meted out in these Biblical stories serve? Does God seem to have a theory of reward and punishment?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Sibling rivals and dirty tricks

READING:

Gen. 4:1-16; Gen. 25:21-35; Gen. 27:1-28:9; Gen. 30:13-43

QUESTIONS:

Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah: all that rivalry! What can we make of this pattern of favoritism? Jacob belongs in the tradition of trickster heroes, who turn up in the myths and legends of many cultures: think, for example, of Odysseus. Why should a trickster be such a central character? What do tricksters accomplish, compared to more honest heroes? Is Jacob justified in preferring Rachel to Leah? Is any of this fair? Or is “fairness” not even a value in this world?

WEEK 4: Joseph, the ultimate favorite son

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

WEEK 5: (I Samuel) Kings are just trouble: the rise and fall of Saul

WEEK 6: (II Samuel) The rise and fall of David

WEEK 7: You Go, Girls: Ruth and Esther

WEEK 8: Isaiah: prophecy and poetry

WEEK 9: Gospel of Mark

WEEK 10: Gospel of Luke

WEEK 11: Paul's Epistles—selections

WEEK 12: A little revelation and a taste of the Apocrypha