

CRITICAL TOOLS FOR BIBLICAL STUDY

(BS 220)

CRITICAL TOOLS FOR BIBLICAL STUDY - BS 220

Introduction

Welcome to the module “Critical Tools for Biblical Study.” The course will be taught by Dr. Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (keithh@ukzn.ac.za), Dr. Sarojini Nadar (nadars@ukzn.ac.za) and Rev. Khawulani Ntuli (ntulimu@ukzn.ac.za) assisted by Prof. Jonathan Draper (draper@ukzn.ac.za). Dr Nadar is the course coordinator and all queries should be directed to her via email. As this module is a service learning module students will also work with Ms. Maria Makgamathe and Ms. Bongzi Zengele from the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research.

General Course Description

The module aims to introduce students to critical approaches to Old and New Testaments. BS210 focussed on the challenges of interpreting text and culture highlighting the effects of inheriting traditions of reading the Bible from parents, ministers (churches), schools and lecturers. The course concluded that any claim of “this is what the Bible says” is actually an exercise of power! While many Christians may claim that challenging what the Bible says is challenging God’s Word, this course showed that “God’s Word” can be interpreted in a number of ways depending on the perspective and context of the reader.

BS220 continues where BS210 left off. As indicated, it aims to introduce students to the various critical approaches/tools used in interpreting the Bible as well as some of the challenges and perhaps even dangers of using them. Students will discover that the tools each have an associated history and ideological agenda, even though this is not always declared by the users of these tools. We will therefore try to discern the advantages and disadvantages of using these tools and unpack some of the ideological presuppositions behind them.

The course is divided into two sections: Old and New Testament. The New Testament component focuses on the historical-critical method and the various approaches within this method, such as translation, form-, text- and redaction criticisms. These will be illustrated through a close reading of various texts in the book of Matthew.

The Old Testament section focuses on literary methods, with a particular focus on narratological methods and feminist approaches within them. These approaches will be illustrated through close and careful readings of the book of Ruth. In addition to the work that will be covered in the class, the Old Testament section has a community-based learning activity built into it – namely Contextual Bible Study.

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General Overview of the Old Testament Section (Dr. Helen Efthimiadis-Keith and Dr. Sarojini Nadar)

Lecture	Date	Topic	Lecturer	Readings	Assignments
#1	4 Aug	Overview of Class Expectations and Class Exercise	Nadar: Efthimiadis-Keith; Ntuli		
#2	11 Aug	Issues of Authority	Nadar	Nadar; Johnson; Jones; Matera	
#3	18 Aug	Brief Introduction to Literary Criticism focussing on Sasson's <i>book</i>	Efthimiadis-Keith	Longman, Sasson (<i>book</i>)	Short Assignment #1 Due
#4	25 Aug	Narrative Criticism	Efthimiadis-Keith	Deist, Longman, Amit, Bowman	
#5	1 Sept	Ruth	Efthimiadis-Keith	Berlin, Green	
#6	8 Sept	Ruth	Efthimiadis-Keith	Fewell & Gunn 1988 & 1989, Coxon	Short Assignment #2 Due
#7	15 Sept	Ruth	Efthimiadis-Keith	Efthimiadis, Nadar	
#8	29 Sept	Readings of Ruth from the South	Nadar	Dube; Nadar; Maluleke	Short Assignment #3 Due
#9	06 Oct	Contextual Bible Study	Nadar	Ruth chapters 1-4	
#10	13 Oct	Contextual Bible Study	Nadar	West	
#11	20 Oct	Contextual Bible Study - Participation in Ujamaa Celebration Week	West, Makgamathe, Zengele, Nadar		
#12	27 Oct	Report-back Contextual Bible Study	Nadar	West et al;	Short Assignment #4 Due

Reading List

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Lecture # 2

Nadar, Sarojini. 2009. "The Bible Says! Feminism, Hermeneutics, and Neo-Pentecostal Challenges." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 134 (July 2009), 131-146.

Johnson, Luke. T. 2007. "The Bible's Authority For and In the Church," in William P. Brown (ed.) *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox. 62-87

Jones, Serene. 2007. "Inhabiting Scripture, Reading Bible," in William P. Brown (ed.) *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 73-80.

Matera, Frank, J. 2007. "Biblical Authority and the Scandal of the Incarnation," in William P. Brown (ed.) *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 98-105.

Lecture # 3

Longman, T 1987. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books. Chapters 1-3.

Sasson, Jack M. 1989. *Ruth – a new translation with a philological commentary and a formalist - folklorist interpretation*. Baltimore and London: Sheffield Press, 1979 (1st edition)

Lecture # 4

Deist, FE 1986. Narrative texts, in Deist, FE & Vorster, W (eds) 1986, *Words from Afar. The Literature of the Old Testament, Volume I*, 72-107.

Longman, T 1987. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books. Chapter 4.

Bowman, Richard G. 1995. "Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence" In Gale Yee. (Ed.) *Judges and Method, New Approaches in Biblical Studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 17-44.

Amit, Yairah. 2001. *Reading Biblical narratives, literary criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1-32

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Lecture # 5

Berlin, A 1983. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: The Almond Press, 83-107.

Green, Barbara. 1982. "The plot of the Biblical story of Ruth." *Journal for the study of the Old Testament* 23: 55-68.

Lecture # 6

Fewell, Danna N., and Gunn David M. 1988. "'A Son is Born to Naomi!' Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth', *Journal for the study of the Old Testament* 40: 99-108.

Coxon, Peter.W., "Was Naomi a Scold?" *Journal for the study of the Old Testament* 45 (1989), 25-37.

Fewell, Danna N and Gunn, David M. 1989. Is Coxon a Scold on Responding to the Book of Ruth? *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45: 39 – 43.

Lecture # 7

Efthimiadis, H 1995. Woman to Womyn: Countering Patriarchal Stereotypes in the Book of Ruth. *Journal for Semitics*, 7(1): 57-78.

Nadar, Sarojini. 2001. "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth", In Musa W. Dube (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 159-175.

Lecture # 8

Nadar, Sarojini. 2001. "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth", In Musa W. Dube (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 159-175.

Dube, Musa W. 2001. "Divining Ruth for International Relations." In Musa W. Dube (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 179-189.

Maluleke, Tinyiko. S. 2001. "African Ruth's in Ruthless Africa: Reflections of an African Mordecai," In Dube, M. W. (Ed). In Musa W. Dube (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 237-252.

Lecture # 9

Ruth Chapters 1-4 (New Revised Standard Version)

Lecture # 10

West, Gerald. O. 2006. "Contextual Bible reading: a South African case study." *Analecta Bruxellensia*, 11, 131-148.

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Lecture # 11

Lecture # 12

Nadar, Sarojini. "Beyond the 'ordinary reader' and the 'invisible intellectual': Shifting Contextual Bible Study from Liberation Discourse to Liberation Pedagogy". *Old Testament Essays* 22/2: 384-403.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Attendance

Attendance and participation in class is required. You will only be given a DP if you have attended 80% of the module. The course will be taught on Wednesdays from 11:25 to 13:05 in Room 221, and Thursdays from 7:45 to 9:25 in Room 221. Participation in the Ujammaa celebration week is compulsory, not optional

Class Marks

Your class mark counts for 50% toward your final mark - 25% New Testament and 25% Old Testament.

Late assignments will have 2% a day deducted for a period of one week, and thereafter will receive 0%. Your assignments should be typed.

New Testament Section Class Marks:

1. Weekly responses (50% of the class mark).
2. One essay **due on the 8th of September** (another 50% of class mark) in which you are asked to demonstrate your ability to fruitfully use the historical critical tools in reading either Matthew 8:28-34 or Matthew 16:13-20. In this essay, you do **not need to discuss** the historical tools **but to apply** them to the reading of the text. You will also be required to **apply** your exegesis to your own context. The essay should not be more than 6 pages, 12pt, Roman Times, 1.5 spacing.

Old Testament Class Marks:

4 Short Assignments (1000 words each)

Short assignment Number 1:

Write an essay in which you briefly retell the story of the Book of Ruth in your own words. In your retelling, you must a) provide clear references to the biblical text, b) break the story into larger scenes, and c) note changes in setting, time, and character which occur in each scene. Please do NOT use

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commentaries or other scholarly resources in formulating your responses. Marks will be allocated for YOUR OWN reading of the Book of Ruth.

Please note: There are NO CORRECT ANSWERS. This must be your OWN work based on your OWN reading of the biblical text, and NOT on your own memories of anything you have heard or read on *Ruth*.

Short assignment Number 2:

Write an essay in which you show the various possibilities of engaging with biblical authority. Your essay should draw on the writings of Nadar; Johnson; Jones and Matera. Please include in your essay why it is important for feminist biblical scholars to engage on the issue of biblical authority.

Short assignment Number 3:

Adele Berlin states that, while Naomi is the main character of the Book of Ruth from a perceptual point of view, Ruth is its main character from an interest point of view. Write an essay in which you a) clearly explain this difference *in your own words*, and b) critically compare Berlin's understanding of these two characters according to the work of at least two other biblical scholars.

Short assignment Number 4:

Gerald West¹ has asserted that “Ordinary readers of the Bible do not need the resources of biblical research, whether historical or literary to hear the Bible speaking into their contexts. But...the resources of biblical scholarship provide substantial additional ways of establishing connections between the Bible and the ordinary interpreter.” In the light of your experiences of participating and facilitating Contextual Bible Study, write an essay in which you demonstrate to what extent West’s above assertion is valid. In other words you must show through examples from actual bible studies participated in, or facilitated by yourself, how and whether the resources of the academy are useful in communities of faith.

Exam

You will be required to write a 3 hour written examination, wherein you demonstrate competence in each of the course outcomes listed below. Your exam is worth 50% of your final mark (25% New Testament and 25% Old Testament).

¹ West, Gerald. O. 2006. “Contextual Bible reading: a South African case study.” *Analecta Bruxellensia*, 11, 132-133

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Course Outcomes

At the end of this module you should, through written and practical assignments and exams, demonstrate:

- Knowledge of different critical methods and tools proposed by biblical scholars in various contexts for interpreting the bible.
- The ability to apply critical methods and tools to particular texts for the purpose of interpretation and analysis.
- An understanding of the dialogical relationship between critical study of the bible and faith communities through the process of Contextual Bible Study (CBS).