

BIB 401: Introduction to the Bible in the Orthodox Church

Synchronous Self-guided¹
Instructor: Jordan Henderson
Syllabus

Course Description

This course introduces the student to the Bible, its place in the Orthodox Catholic Church, and different approaches to biblical interpretation. We begin with the question, What is the Bible? We discuss how the books now included in the Bible came to be collected and what it means for the Church to include them in a scriptural canon. We discuss the difference between the Old and New Testaments, as well as the various collections of books with the two testaments, e.g. the Torah/Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Gospels, etc. We discuss the difference between the canon of the Old Testament used by Orthodox Christians and those used by Jews, Protestants, and Roman Catholics. We also cover some of the ways the Bible is used liturgically in the Orthodox Catholic Church and look at some of the problems (textual, historical, and theological) that arise in our interpretation of Scripture. As we consider these problems, we will survey various attempts by scholars to deal with them, as well as, when applicable, the Church's understanding of these problems.

Course Objectives

1. Understanding the function of the Bible in the life of the Orthodox Church and Orthodox Christians.
2. Differentiate between the biblical canons used within the Orthodox Church, Judaism, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism.
3. Develop a basic understanding of different interpretive approaches to the study of the Bible.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate their comprehension of and critical engagement with the material through active participation in class discussions.
2. Students will further demonstrate their comprehension of and critical engagement with the course material through completion of written assignments.

Required Books and Readings

Students will need access to an English Bible. There are numerous translations available online if the student does not possess one.

¹ Note that there are two versions of this course: the Live Cohort version and the Synchronous Self-guided version. In the Live Cohort version, students are required to virtually attend one lecture per week online (see attendance policy below). In the Synchronous Self-guided version, students are not required to attend the online lectures, but are required to show proof of having watched recordings of the lectures.

Additional readings will be provided to the student as PDFs on the course site on Learndash.

Course Requirements

Participation. Students are expected to attend all Zoom meetings, be on time at the beginning of class, and stay the duration of the class. Furthermore, students should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings for the class.

Papers. Students will write four short (1-2 page) double-spaced papers, due at the end of each of the first four modules. Prompts for these questions will be given at the beginning of each module and posted on the course page on Learndash. Students will write a longer (3-4 page) paper during the final module in response both to the material during the final module and to the material covered over the previous four modules. All assignments will be uploaded by the student to LearnDash.

Participation	10%
Module 1 Paper	15%
Module 2 Paper	15%
Module 3 Paper	15%
Module 4 Paper	15%
Module 5 Paper	30%

TOTAL 100%

Grades

Letter Grade	Percent Grade	4.0 Scale
A+	97-100	4
A	93-96	4
A-	90-92	3.7
B+	87-89	3.3
B	83-86	3
B-	80-82	2.7
C+	77-79	2.3
C	73-76	2
C-	70-72	1.7
D+	67-69	1.3
D	65-66	1
F	Below 65	0

Schedule

Module	Date	Course	Description
1	8/22/2023	What is the Bible?	<p>In this module, we will consider some of the following questions: What is Scripture? What is meant by “canon?” How is the Bible used in the Church today? We will also discuss the authority of the Bible in the Orthodox Church today and discuss the division of the Christian biblical canon into Old and New Testaments, as well as discuss the different canons of Scripture in the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism, and Judaism.</p> <p>Reading Assignment for Module 2:</p> <p>John Barton, “Canons of the Old Testament.”</p> <p>Written Assignment:</p> <p>1–2 page reflection paper in response to prompt on Learndash.</p>
2	8/29/2023	History of the Old Testament Canon	<p>This module will survey the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures (Tanakh) and examine the earliest evidence for a canon of Hebrew Scripture. We will also discuss the development of the Septuagint and consider its place of importance in the early Church and the Orthodox Church today. We will also discuss early Christian understandings of Scripture and early conflicts with Judaism over the Scriptures.</p> <p>Reading Assignment for Module 3:</p> <p>R. A. Baker, “How the New Testament Canon was Formed.”</p> <p>Written Assignment:</p> <p>1–2 page reflection paper in response to prompt on Learndash.</p>
3	9/5/2023	History of the New Testament Canon	<p>This module delves into the history of the development of the New Testament canon in the early centuries of Christianity. This begins with the writing, copying, and distribution of Paul’s letters, followed by other letters and books. We</p>

			<p>will discuss disputes over the next few centuries with Marcion, the Gnostics, and other heretical groups and how these disputes affected the development of our New Testament. We will also discuss the reasons certain books were rejected as heretical, others rejected from the New Testament but deemed profitable to read (e.g. the Shephard of Hermas), and others that were in the canon, but were controversial (e.g. Hebrews, 2 Peter).</p> <p>Reading Assignment for Module 4:</p> <p>Sirach 44–50 Acts 7 Hebrews 11 Acts 2:14–36</p> <p>Written Assignment:</p> <p>1–2 page reflection paper in response to prompt on Learndash.</p>
4	9/12/2023	The Story of the Scriptures	<p>Having discussed at length the story of how the Scriptures came to be written, collected, and compiled into what we now call the Old and New Testaments, in this lecture we will examine the story within the Scriptures themselves. This overview of the scriptural story from the creation of the world to the New Creation will be foundational for future courses offered by St. Athanasius College which focus on the particular books within the Scriptures.</p> <p>Reading Assignment for Module 5:</p> <p>Stefanos Alexopoulos, “The Use of the Bible in Byzantine Liturgical Texts and Services.”</p> <p>Written Assignment:</p> <p>1–2 page reflection paper in response to prompt on Learndash.</p>
5	9/19/2023	Use of the Scriptures in the Church: Liturgy,	<p>In this module, we in a sense return to our initial discussion, asking what is the purpose of Scripture in the Church. We will give special attention to the liturgical use of the Scriptures in</p>

		Theology, Praxis, Ethics	<p>the divine services of the Church. We also consider the complex issue of Scripture and Tradition. We examine the use of Scripture in doctrinal controversies of the past and in addressing key moral and ethical issues. We conclude with a discussion of some difficult problems of theology, praxis, and ethics facing the Church today, and how Scripture may be properly employed to meet these challenges.</p> <p>Written Assignment:</p> <p>3–4 page reflection paper in response to prompt on Learndash.</p>
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Late Assignment Policy

All assignment grades will be deducted 20% per day the assignment is submitted late unless excused. Please send an email to jhenderson@stacollege.org if you are unable to submit your assignment on time with a proper excuse. No excuses or exceptions will be considered after the due date/time.

Religious Holy Days

St. Athanasius College will provide reasonable accommodations to students who request to be excused from class to observe a religious holy day of their faith. Students will make the request in writing to their instructor, preferably upon receipt of the course syllabus, but not later than two weeks before the holy observance. Note that such an accommodation may not be possible when the religious holy day conflicts with group work or experiential learning projects that cannot reasonably be rescheduled; therefore, students should avoid potential conflicts when scheduling courses. While excused students will be held responsible for the material covered in their absence, they shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the work missed. Instructors and administrators shall not penalize students who are absent from academic activities because of excused religious holy day observance. This policy applies to all St. Athanasius College courses, regardless of location or mode of delivery.²

Academic Honor Policy

² This language has been adapted from a Florida State University Memorandum from Janet Kistner, Vice President for Faculty Development and Advancement, to Members of the Faculty and All Instructors on 6 January 2021. See https://fda.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu636/files/Media/Files/Academic%20Policies/Religious_Holy_Days_Spring-2021_v2.pdf#:~:text=Subject%3A%20Policy%20on%20Observance%20of%20Religious%20Holy%20Days,sites%2C%20regardless%20of%20location%20or%20mode%20of%20delivery.

Anyone caught plagiarizing or abetting plagiarism will receive a zero for the assignment and may result in expulsion from St. Athanasius College. There are no exceptions to this rule. Plagiarism includes claiming as your own work that which is not yours.

Americans with Disabilities Act

St. Athanasius College provides reasonable accommodations or modifications in adherence with local, state, and federal law. To receive accommodations through St. Athanasius College, students must self-elect to disclose their disability to the Office of the Dean and follow the steps to receive accommodations. Accommodations are not retroactive. Approved accommodation requests submitted after courses have begun will be effective as of the date the completed request was received by the Office of the Dean.

The Accommodation Request Form can be found on the St. Athanasius College LearnDash site. If the student has an issue accessing the form for any reason please contact the Office of the Dean. In addition to the Accommodation Request, students should email appropriate documentation to the Office of the Dean.³

Syllabus Change Policy

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

³ This language has been adapted from Grand Canyon University Student Disability Services. See <https://www.gcu.edu/about/offices-services/student-disability-services>.