RS 104: Topics in Biblical Studies
Women and the Bible
Mayterm 2009

Course description
A study of the place of women in biblical and intertestamental literature and in the socio-cultural context of antiquity. Special attention to the ongoing influence of biblical texts on the lives of women in the church and world.

In this class, we will explore biblical and intertestamental narratives, laws, and poetry concerning women. We will investigate the historical contexts of these texts, building a picture of what life was like for women in ancient Israel and the ancient Mediterranean world. We will also consider the influence of these texts on the lives of women and men in the church and question their significance for life in the twenty-first century.

Course details
We will meet Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 10.15 to 12.15.

Course goals
1. To gain familiarity with biblical texts concerning women in their social and cultural contexts.
2. To explore and use the tools and methods of biblical interpretation.
3. To see how biblical women both operated within and challenged the expectations placed on them.
4. To analyze, compare, and critique ‘traditional’ conservative, evangelical egalitarian, feminist, and womanist interpretations of women in the Bible.
5. To question how – or if – biblical texts concerning women should impact contemporary church life.

Required texts
An NRSV Bible with Apocrypha.

Recommended texts
Kroeger, Catherine Clark, and Mary J. Evans, eds. 2002. The IVP Women's Bible Commentary. IVP.

**Class policies**

**Attendance**
I expect you to attend class. Habitual absence will result in loss of points: your grade will fall by 1% for each unexcused absence above two.

**Laptops**
Laptops can be great aids in class, letting you take notes faster and more legibly than by hand. However, laptops also offer many temptations… to check your email, Facebook, chat, shop, watch tv, read the news, play games, etc. When you use your laptop for non-class purposes, you are missing out on an exciting discussion, distracting all the people sitting behind you, being rude to the people who are talking, and going to lose out in the end. If I catch you online, I will recommend that you no longer use your computer in class. If I catch you a second time, I will report you to the campus mafia. Use your laptop wisely – avoid the urge to multitask, and turn off the wireless during class.
**Turning in your work**
Submitted work is due during class on the date listed in the syllabus. Late work will be docked points (5% per day). Unless otherwise noted, a hard copy must be turned in (not by email), and work must be typewritten, not handwritten.

**Citing your sources**
You must cite anything you take from someone else – facts, theories, quotes. If you didn’t think it, don’t take credit for it. When in doubt, cite! Westmont College’s policy on plagiarism can be found at http://www.westmont.edu/academics/pages/provost/curriculum/plagiarism/. If you plagiarize any work in this class, you will receive a 0 for the assignment, and in the case of a severe offense, I will inform the dean. Repeated offenses may result in failure of the course.

In written work, reference biblical passages by book, chapter, and verse (Mark 15:51-52). Cite your secondary sources in the following format: Author date, page number (Rowling 2005, 389). Provide a ‘Works Cited’ list for each assignment in which you use a secondary source; unless you are using multiple versions, you do not need to include the Bible on this list.

**Grade definitions**
Westmont has an extensive description of what it means to get an A, B, C, D, or F. If you haven’t read it, it may be helpful (http://www.westmont.edu/offices/registrar/academic_policies/grades.html). Here is my own brief summary of the policy:
- **A**: Exceptional. Engage with course material critically, grasps its wider implications, and applies it creatively. Submitted work is superior in content and presentation.
- **B**: Very good. Demonstrates interest in and comprehension of the material and the underlying scholarship. Submitted work is neat and free of errors.
- **C**: Satisfactory. Meets the course requirements and shows adequate knowledge and understanding of the material. Submitted work is presented according to expectations.
- **D**: Poor. Completes course requirements, but submitted work does not show understanding of the material.
- **F**: Failing. Course requirements are not met and submitted work indicates a lack of understanding.

**Grading scale**

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**Course components**

*A. Participation, 25%*
This class will operate for the most part as a seminar. You should be prepared to join in class discussions and debates in each class period – I expect you to be present, engaged, and vocal in class. To aid class discussion, please bring a Bible and any assigned readings to class each day.

Your participation grade will be assessed according to the following scale:
- 25 points: 4 or more substantive remarks during each class period
- 20-24 points: 1-3 substantive remarks during each class period
- 15-19 points: 1-3 substantive remarks across three class periods
- 10-14 points: 1-3 substantive remarks a week
- 5-9 points: 1-3 substantive remarks across two weeks
- 0-4 points: Little or no contribution to the class

I will ask you to judge your level of participation for the class on the last day of class, and with my approval this score will be your participation grade. I reserve the right to increase or decrease the points given in your self-assessment.
B. Daily readings, 10%
Careful, thoughtful, analytical reading is the basis of good conversation. Complete the readings before class, and bring assigned readings with you each day. Reading comprehension may be tested by open-note quizzes.

C. Reflection essays, 25%
You will write a brief (2-3 page) response essay each week; possible questions are listed in the syllabus. Draw on class readings and discussion; you may, but do not have to, include outside research. Your papers should be thoughtful, critical, and personal.

Essays are due each Monday at the beginning of class.

D. Research project, 40%
Your research project will investigate a text or theme of your choice (a list of possibilities is provided below, but you are free to go beyond the options listed). You should make thorough use of primary and secondary sources.

Components of the project include the following:
1. A 2-3 page, pre-research discussion of your interest in your chosen topic, the particular texts and questions you want to explore, and your expectations of what you may find, due 15 May. 2%.
2. An outline of your research of primary sources and an annotated bibliography of at least ten secondary sources, due 22 May. 5%.
3. A personal meeting with the professor to discuss your developing project, during the week of 25-29 May. 5%.
4. A 10-12 page paper, carefully researched and well written, due 12 June. 20%.
   *Students are encouraged to exchange papers with a classmate for final proofreading and logic-checking before the final submission of the paper.
5. A 3-5 page sermon on your topic, particularly exploring the relevance of your topic for the church today, to be presented in the final day of class (12 June). 8%.

Suggested research projects:
   Option 1: Study a biblical or apocryphal text relating to women in any way (by their presence or absence; in narrative, metaphor, law, or whatever else you find) in historical and literary perspective. Your final paper should explore the text and its significance for women in its historical context and today.
   Option 2: Pick a theme concerning women in the Bible (e.g., leadership, family life, sexuality, purity, role in the cult, etc.). Explore this theme across at least three texts from different eras of biblical history, explaining its development through time (or lack thereof) and its significance for women in the texts’ worlds and our world.
   Option 3: Choose a text used both in support of ‘complementarity’ in Piper and Grudem’s Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and in support of ‘egalitarianism’ in Pierce and Groothuis’s Discovering Biblical Equality. Explain and critique the interpretations of the text given by each side, and suggest a move forward (how do you think this text should be used in the evangelical debate over women in the church?).
   Option 4: Choose one of the major questions on women or gender facing the church today (e.g., the ordination of women; women’s role in the family and society; gender-neutral Bible translations; Christian women in positions of secular authority; stay-at-home moms vs. working moms; Christian perceptions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’; etc.). Address your question from the Bible and from society, and offer an answer to the question for the church.

Course components, summary
A. Participation, 25%
B. Daily readings, 10%
C. Reflection essays, 25%
D. Research project, 40%
**Class schedule**

**Week one: The foundations**

11 May: Genesis 1-3 and early interpretation  
Primary readings: Genesis 1-3, Sirach 25.16-16.18, Tobit 8, 4 Macc 18.7-8, Eph 5.21-33, 2 Cor 11.1-4, and 1 Tim 2.11-15

12 May: Contemporary evangelical interpretation of Genesis 1-3  
Primary readings: Genesis 1-3  

13 May: Feminism, biblical feminism, and evangelical feminism  

14 May: A woman’s life in ancient Israel  
Primary readings: Deuteronomy; Ruth; Code of Hammurabi  

15 May: A woman’s life in Second Temple Israel and the Diaspora  
Primary readings: Judith; Sirach; Acts; Plutarch, Advice to the Bride and Groom; Juvenal, Satire 6; The Twelve Tables  

**Week one response essays:**

*How, or how much, are ‘biblical’ pronouncements on man/woman impacted by culture (theirs or ours)?  
*Is Christian feminism a contradiction in terms? Can a Christian be a feminist or womanist? Can a feminist or womanist be a Christian?  
*Does the use of Genesis 1-3 to determine gender roles adequately reflect the purpose of the text?  
*In the first chapter of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper claims to be establishing biblical definitions of ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood.’ Does he succeed?  
*The evangelical church today often regards ‘feminists’ with great suspicion, but according to Margaret Wilson, feminism is rooted in the Christian faith. Discuss this conundrum.  
*Discuss the way the picture of a woman in one of the texts read for 14 or 15 May relates to the historical context of ancient Israel or Second Temple Judaism.

**Week two: Stories and women**


18 May: Women in Genesis  
Primary reading: Genesis  
Secondary readings: Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes*, ch. 3; Furman, ‘His Story Versus Her Story,’ in Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible*; the entries on Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Judith and Basemath (Esau’s wives), Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah, Dinah, Tamar, Potiphar’s Wife, and Asenath in Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture*
19 May: Women leaders in the Hebrew Bible
   Primary readings: Exodus 2.1-10 and 15.1-21; Numbers 12; Judges 4-5; 1 Samuel 1-2; 1 Kings 16.31-34; 1 Kings 18-21; 2 Kings 9.30-37; 2 Kings 11; 2 Kings 22
   Secondary readings: Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes*, chs. 4-7; the entries on Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Hannah, Jezebel, Athaliah, and Huldah in Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture*

20 May: The women of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha
   Primary readings: Judith, Tobit, and Joseph and Asenath

21 May: Women meeting Jesus
   Primary readings: Luke; John

22 May: Women without names
   Primary readings: Judges 13-16; 2 Samuel 20; Mark 7.24-30, 12.41-44, and 14.1-9 and 66-72

*Week two response essays:*
*Discuss the viewpoint of women in biblical narratives: do we hear of women from women’s point of view, or men’s point of view?*
*How do the women of Genesis impact the story of the covenant?*
*Do women in biblical narratives meet or break socio-historical expectations?*
*Compare the stories of named men and their associated unnamed women.*
*What women do we not hear or see in biblical narratives?*
*Discuss the literary characterization of a particular woman we’ve read about this week.*

*Week three: Texts of terror*

26 May: Sons and daughters
   Primary readings: Genesis 22, Judges 11

27 May: Sex and rape
   Primary readings: Genesis 34; 2 Samuel 13; Judges 19; Deuteronomy 22.13-29

28 May: Second Temple wives
   Primary readings: Susanna; Mark 6.14-28; Acts 5.1-11; Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2; John 7.53-8.11 and 19.17-42
Secondary readings: Gench, *Back to the Well*, ch. 5; Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, ch. 3; the entries on Herodias 1 and Herodias 2, Susanna 1, Sapphira, Mary 1, Elizabeth, and Anna in Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture*

29 May: Metaphorically female

Primary readings: Lamentations; Ezekiel 16 and 23; Hosea; Revelation 12, 17-18, and 21


*Week three response essays:*

*What redemptive value can be found in Judges 19, Acts 5, Ezekiel 23, or any other text read this week?*

*Compare and contrast the readings of Genesis 22 and Judges 11 in Levenson, Delaney, and Trible.*

*Should the nativity story be read alongside texts of terror?*

*Discuss the place of power or authority in these stories (e.g., are the women actors or acted upon’?).*

*How do the prophetic and poetic metaphors concerning women impact the church’s perception of gender?*

*Does the inclusion of these texts in the Bible concern you? Should it?*

**Week four: Focus on the New Testament**

Readings for the week: Kraemer and D’Angelo, *Women and Christian Origins*, Part 2 (chs. 5-8)

1 June: Healing women

Primary readings: Mark 5.21-43; Luke 13.10-17; John 8.1-11; Acts 9.36-43; Mishnah Tohorot 6-8 and Mishnah Niddah

Secondary readings: Gench, *Back to the Well*, chs. 2 and 6; the entries on ‘Daughter of Jairus,’ ‘Woman with a Twelve-Year Hemorrhage,’ ‘Woman Bent Over for Eighteen Years,’ and Tabitha in Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture*

2 June: The family of Jesus

Primary readings: Mark 3.31-35, 6.1-6, 10.1-12 and 28-31, and 13.9-13 and parallels (synopsis)

Secondary readings: Ahearne-Kroll, “‘Who Are My Mother and My Brothers?’”, *Journal of Religion* 81 (2001); Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, ch. 4

3 June: House churches

Readings: Luke 8.1-3; Acts 16; 1 and 2 John

Secondary readings: Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, chs. 7, 9-10; the entries on Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna 2, Lydia, and 1 John and 2 John in Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture*

4 June: Paul and women – The good

Readings: Acts 18; Romans 16; Philippians; 1 Corinthians

Secondary readings: Kraemer and D’Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, ch. 9; the entries on Prisca (Priscilla), Phoebe, Mary 7, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, the mother of Rufus, Julia, the sister of Nereus, Euodia, and Syntyche in Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture*

5 June: Paul and women – The ugly

Readings: 1 Corinthians 11.1-16 and 14.34-36; Ephesians 5.21-6.9; 1 Timothy

Secondary readings: Kraemer and D’Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, chs. 10-11; Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, chs. 2 and 6; Moo, ‘What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?’ in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*

*Week four response essays:*

*What kind of woman is found in authority in the New Testament? What kind of woman isn’t?*
*How does the envisioning of the church as a family impact the place of women in the first century world?
*How do we reconcile 1 Tim 2.11-15 with Romans 16?
*How do we reconcile Ephesians and 1 Timothy with the picture of Jesus interacting with women in the gospels?
*Reflect on 1 Peter 3.1-7.
*Offer a critical response to Moo, ‘What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?’, or Osiek and MacDonald, A Woman’s Place, ch. 6.

**Week five: Great debates**

Recommended readings for the week: Spencer, Beyond the Curse; LaCelle-Peterson, Liberating Tradition; or Ingersoll, Evangelical Christian Women

8 June: God’s gender; gender neutrality

9 June: God’s fatherhood; the brotherhood of all believers
   Recommended readings: Thompson, The Promise of the Father, ch. 3; Benjamin, ‘Israel’s God: Mother and Midwife,’ BTB 19 (1989); Lacelle-Peterson, Liberating Tradition, chs. 10-11

10 June: Women in the family
   Recommended readings: Patterson, ‘The High Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective,’ in Piper and Grudem, eds., Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood; LaCelle-Peterson, Liberating Tradition, chs. 4-5; Hsu, Singles at the Crossroads, ch. 3

11 June: Women in the church

12 June: Class presentations and celebrations of research