**The Book of Job**

, aka “the most controversial, irreverent, and daringly subversive pages of the Bible”

–William Safire



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Spring 2019

“Scripture tells us that there is evil in the world, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding. In the words of Job, ‘when I looked for light, then came darkness.’ Bad things happen, and we must guard against simple explanations in the aftermath.”

--Barak Obama, Tucson, Arizona

“There is only one question which really matters: why do bad things happen to good people? All other theological conversation is intellectually diverting; . . . Virtually every meaningful conversation I have ever had with people on the subject of God and religion has either started with this question, or gotten around to it before long.”

–Harold Kushner

“I read the book of Job last night, I don't think God comes out well in it.”

--Virginia Woolf

The aim of this course is to understand the book of Job and its lasting significance. In order to accomplish this aim, the course will include two parts: a study of the book of Job in the context of the biblical world, and an examination of responses to Job by contemporary writers.

**Books**

I. The Bible (NRSV)

I also recommend that you use one of the common contemporary translations, such as the new Common English Bible (CEB), the New International Version (NIV) or the King James Version (KJV), together with the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is required.

II. Our common secondary reading.

Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

III. Other secondary readings

During the first part of the course (focus on the biblical book of Job) each week, read one or two additional articles from those listed in the syllabus.

IV. Job’s Interpreters. Select ONE (during the second part of the course, you’ll be working in discussion groups based on the book you choose)

Safire, William. *The First Dissident: The Book of Job in Today’s Politics*. New York: Random House, 1992. [ISBN 067974858X]

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Translated by Matthew J. O’Connell. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987. [ISBN 0883445522]

McKibben, Bill. *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*. Cowley Publications, 2005. [ISBN-13: 9781561012343]

Wimberly, Edward P. *Claiming God: Reclaiming Dignity—African American Pastoral Care*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003. [ISBN 0687030536]

Negri, Antonio. *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*. Durham:

Duke University Press, 2009. [ISBN 0822346346]

**Rhythm of the Course** (up to GDs):

Read the assigned section of the book of Job, then read Carol Newsom. By Tuesday, post a reaction and a question designed to continue the discussion.

In small groups, work on the focus text(s). First posts due Wednesday; conversation finishes up on Thursday morning. I won’t be involved in these groups, but I would like you to articulate a clearly formulated question that arose out of your conversation (each week someone should volunteer to be the scribe but everyone should work toward articulating the questions). There will be a place for the scribe to submit your question.

I’ll weigh in after you all post on Tuesday and Wednesday/Thursday (how? TBD).

Read the “different take” and view the posted image(s). Post your (brief) reaction by Friday.

**Schedule**

*The Biblical Book of Job*

Week 1. Monday, March 25

Skim the book of Job

-Newsom, chap 1

-David Clines, “Does the Book of Job Suggest that Suffering is Not a Problem?”

Week 2. Monday, April 1

The Prose Frame, Prologue and Epilogue (Job 1-2, 42)

-Newsom, chap 2

Choose two of the following:

-T. Linafelt, “The Undecidabily of b-r-k in the Prologue to Job and Beyond.” *BibInt* 4 (1996) 154-72.

-K. Ngwa, “Did Job Suffer for Nothing? The Ethics of Piety, Presumption and the Reception of Disaster in the Prologue of Job.”*JSOT* 33 (2009) 359-380.

-R. Stokes, “Satan, Yhwh’s Executioner.” *JBL* 133 (2014) 251-270

-K. Dell, “What Was Job’s Malady?” *JSOT* 141.I (2016) 61-77

-L. Klein, “Job and the Womb: Text about Men, Subtext about Women.” In *Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. A Brenner. Bloomsbury Academic, 1995.

- E. Gravett, “Biblical Responses: Past and Present Retellings of the Enigmatic Mrs. Job.” *BibInt* (2012) 97-125.

-Focus Texts: Job 1:1-5 and Job 2:7-10

-A Different Take

*Testament of Job* (Spittler)

-Images

Job and His Wife, Georges de La Tour (ca. 1650)

Illustration of Job 3:4-5 in Bib. Vat., gr. 1231, fol. 97v (12th c.)

Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus

Job with Leprosy, circa 1580. Fresco, Parz Castle, Austria.

Job Altarpiece, Strassburg

-Watch: http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/video-gallery/r/reception-of-job-seow

Week 3. Monday, April 8

The Dialogue (with a focus on Job’s friends’ speeches)

-Newsom 72-129

Choose two of the following:

-B. Zuckerman, “Anti-Job.” In *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

-A. Pinker, “Bildad’s Contribution to the Debate—A New Interpretation of Job 8:17–19.” *Vetus Testamentum* 66 (2016) 406-432

-J. Holbert, “The skies will uncover his iniquity": Zophar Tries to Put Job in His Place.”

*Word & World* 31 (2011) 417-423.

-Focus texts: Job 4:12-21 and 8:11-22

-A Different Take

*The Babylonian Theodicy*

-Images

A. Durer, Job’s Friends Making Music <https://www.artbible.info/art/large/808.html>

William Blake (1757–1827) Job's Despair. <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/William-Blakes-World/25>

###### William Blake, [Job Rebuked by His Friends](http://bibleodyssey.org/tools/image-gallery/t/theodicy-ot), 1805.

Week 4. Monday, April 15.

The Dialogue (with a focus on Job’s speeches)

-Newsom 130-168

Choose two of the following:

-K. Langton, “Job’s Attempt to Regain Control: Traces of a Babylonian Birth Incantation in Job 3.” *JSOT* (2012) 459-469

-N. Esala, “Towards Contextualizing 'Contextual Bible Study' among the BiloDmi Peoples in Ghana.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 154 (2016) 106-126.

-M. Masenya, “All from the same source?: deconstructing a (male) anthropocentric reading of **Job** (3) through an eco-bosadi lens.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 137 (2010) 46-60

### -M.Suriano, [Death, disinheritance, and **Job**'s kinsman-redeemer](https://web-a-ebscohost-com.iliff.idm.oclc.org/ehost/viewarticle/render?data=dGJyMPPp44rp2%2fdV0%2bnjisfk5Ie46bZMsqu2TK%2bk63nn5Kx95uXxjL6prUmwpbBIr6%2beULimtVKwrJ5Zy5zyit%2fk8Xnh6ueH7N%2fiVauqtk2urK9Jsa6khN%2fk5VXj5KR84LPwfuac8nnls79mpNfsVb%2fKylmupq5Jta2yUbCvpH7t6Ot58rPkjeri8n326gAA&vid=52&sid=ac4c92b0-664e-427b-bbca-7ae10fe11e28@sessionmgr4008).”*JBL* 129 (2010) 49-66

-Jacobsen, T. and K. Nielsen, "Cursing the Day." *SJOT*6 (1992) 187-204

-Focus texts: Job 3:1-10 and Job 19:13-22, 23-27

-A Different Take

-Jeremiah 20:7-18

-Image: Statue of Job by Nathan Rapoport (1968) now at Yad Vashem

-Job and the Holocaust

“Hope, Despair and Memory: Excerpts from Elie Wiesel's Nobel Prize Lecture.” <http://www.zchor.org/WIESEL.HTM>

Full text: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1986/wiesel/lecture/>

-Image: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gruber-job-t00180>

-Quick read: http://bibleodyssey.org/people/related-articles/patience-of-job

Weeks 5 & 6 (Gathering Days). April 24 and 25

The Wisdom Hymn, Job’s Final Speech, Elihu’s Speeches, God’s Speeches, Job’s Response, The Epilogue

-Finish Newsom (169-264)

Choose four of the following:

-D. Hankins, “Wisdom as an Immanent Event in Job 28, Not a Transcendent Ideal.” Vetus Testamentum 63 (2013) 210-235.

-S. Jones, “Job 28 and Modern Theories of Knowledge.” *Theology Today* 69 (2013) 486-496.

-A. Pelham, “Job’s Crisis of Language: Power and Powerlessness in Job’s Oaths.” *JSOT* 36.3 (2012) 333-334.

M. Hamilton, “[Elite lives: Job 29-31 and traditional authority](https://web-a-ebscohost-com.iliff.idm.oclc.org/ehost/viewarticle/render?data=dGJyMPPp44rp2%2fdV0%2bnjisfk5Ie46bZMsqu2TK%2bk63nn5Kx95uXxjL6prUmwpbBIr6%2beULimtVKwrJ5Zy5zyit%2fk8Xnh6ueH7N%2fiVauqtk2urK9Jsa6khN%2fk5VXj5KR84LPwfuac8nnls79mpNfsVb%2fKylmupq5JtKezS7WrpH7t6Ot58rPkjeri8n326gAA&vid=61&sid=ac4c92b0-664e-427b-bbca-7ae10fe11e28@sessionmgr4008).” *JSOT* 32 (2007) 69-89

-C-L Seow, “Elihu’s Revelation.” *Theology Today*.

-M. Fox, “God’s Answer and God’s Response.” *Biblica* 94 (2018) 1-23.

-S. Stokes Musser, “Comfort in the Whirlwind? Job, Creation, and Environmental Degradation.” *Word & World* (2012) 286-293.

-K. Low, “Implications Surrounding Girding the Loins in Light of Gender, Body, and Power.” *JSOT* 36 (2011) 3-30

-A. LaCocque, “Justice for the Innocent Job!” *BibInt* (2011) 19-32

-Focus text 1: Job 28:12-22

-Focus text 2: Job 32:6-14

-Focus text 3: Job 38:1-11, 25-30

-Focus text 4: Job 42:1-6

Week 7. Monday, May 6.

5-page exegesis papers and peer responses

Draft due Monday, May 6; peer reviews due Wednesday; final version of paper due Saturday.

Useful resource: William P. Brown, *A Handbook to Old Testament Exegesis*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017.

*Job’s Interpreters*

Week 8. Monday, May 13.

Small group discussions on the book you chose (Job’s Interpreters)

Week 9. Monday, May 20.

Planning your presentation on one of Job’s Interpreters

Week 10. Monday, May 27.

Post group presentations of your book

**Notable Commentaries** (resources for your exegesis paper)

Habel, Norman C. *The Book of Job*. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985. [ISBN 0664218318]

Hartley, John E. *The Book of Job*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988. [ISBN 0802823627]

Janzen, J. Gerald. *Job*. Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985. [ISBN 0804231141]

Pope, Marvin H. *Job*. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1965. [ISBN 0385008945]

Good, Edwin. *In Turns of Tempest: a reading of Job, with a translation*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990.

Iliff’s attendance and on-line course participation policy

<https://iliff.bloomfire.com/series/3206014/posts/2819851-attendance-and-special-days>

Assignments

***Exegesis Paper***

Your paper should consist of 1000-1300 words (approximately four pages) on a passage from the book of Job.

The paper is to be a focused essay demonstrating careful study of the passage chosen by the student. I recommend students limit the length of their passage to about 10 verses. Students are to identify the methodological approach or approaches (at least broadly construed) they are employing, then demonstrate the use of that method in their exegesis. In my view, it would be wise to limit yourself to one primary method.

Students are expected to engage the scholarly literature related to their chosen passage by making reference to at least **one scholarly monograph** (book), at least **two commentaries (**[**guide**](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2473549/files/139990087/download?verifier=z15KZq9A6tyVhp6UY2232TQe4KxvgHAITE0PHY6I&wrap=1)**[Preview the document](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2473549/files/139990087/download?verifier=z15KZq9A6tyVhp6UY2232TQe4KxvgHAITE0PHY6I&wrap=1) is linked\*)**, and at least **two scholarly journal articles.**The library staff will happily help you find such items.

\*What not to use: single authored, whole-bible-commentaries (as in one guy wrote a commentary of every book, e.g., Matthew Henry)

Papers exceeding 1300 words will be frowned upon (i.e., your grade will be adversely impacted). Word count is to include all notes. Please include your word count at the end of your paper.

***Group Presentation***

Students will work in groups to plan, prepare, and practice the assignment collaboratively. The end result will be a video recording that is no more than 10 minutes in length, posted to canvas. All group members will be responsible for participating in the conversation that follows.

Step 1 (at Gathering Days): Choose roles

--Project Manager

Plans group meetings, works with IT if necessary, communicates with instructor (if you have a slacker in your group, you must tell me about it), edits the script.

--Writers of the script

--Producer of the video (for the technologically confident)

This person will be responsible for making the slides and the recording (note that all students in the group should review the video before submission)

Step 2: Discuss the book in small groups (some combination of zoom calls, in person / zoom meetings, email threads, canvas small groups, and google docs)

1. The perspective of the interpreter.
2. The interpreter’s thesis about Job.
3. The way in which the interpreter builds on the biblical book of Job and takes it in new directions.
   1. Does the perspective bring something valuable - something previously unseen or under seen - to your understanding of the book and its relevance? Describe the author’s contribution.
   2. What gets lost or over-simplified in this reading of the book?
4. New insights you gained into Job and/or the problem of suffering.
5. Whether this interpreter helped you think about your own experience in new ways.

Step 2: Identify key learnings to highlight in your presentation.

1. Describe the writer’s thesis and illustrate it with a key quotation or two. The aim here is to describe the way in which the author of the book interprets Job and deals with the problem of suffering.

2. Describe the ways in which this author’s response to the problem of suffering is similar to or different from the response to suffering in the biblical book of Job. The aim here is to identify the way in which an interpreter of Job builds on the biblical book and takes it in new directions.

3. Identify new insights into the biblical book of Job and/or the problem of suffering that occurred to you as a result of reading this book.

Step 3: Produce the written plan, including a script, for the video presentation

Step 4: Submit that plan to the instructor

Step 5: Post the recorded group presentation (7-10 minutes) to Canvas

Step 6: Participate in an asynchronous Q&A and discussion session

Platforms that have work well for students to record and present their materials: Present.me (<https://present.me/content/>) and Knovio (<http://www.knovio.com/>). <https://screencast-o-matic.com/>

I highly recommend using the rich history of the book’s interpretation in the visual arts to enliven your presentation!

Terrien, Samuel. The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.