



# Women in the Old Testament

## OT 3XW3

SPRING 2021



### ***Instructor:***

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**Class meets online via Avenue to Learn and Zoom: May 3–June 4, 2021**

### **Course Description**

This course leads the class in an examination of women characters, female imagery, and biblical legislation concerned with women in the Old Testament, with sustained attention to the significance of female characters in biblical salvific history. The history of interpretation of women characters will be surveyed, with a focus on the many divergent viewpoints and assessments of various biblical female characters through interpretive history. The class will focus on Old Testament women in terms of their characterization, their ancient historical context, and consider how they can contribute to the discussion of gender issues today. Modern ideological approaches (e.g., feminist, postcolonial) towards the text will be examined and employed in the reading of Old Testament narratives with women characters, prophetic passages with female imagery, and biblical laws concerning women. Both minor and major female characters will be studied, such as: Eve, Sarai/Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Dinah, Miriam, Rahab, Deborah, Jael, Ruth, Hannah, Naomi, Abigail, Bathsheba, Tamar, Athaliah, Huldah, Vashti, Esther, Hosea's wife.

**Specializations:** Biblical Studies, Church and Culture, Christian History and Worldview



## Course Objectives

### Knowing

- To know the women of the Old Testaments: their contexts, characters, and roles
- To understand a variety of feminist approaches to biblical interpretation
- To understand both the positive and negative contributions of women in the narrative of the Old Testament
- To understand the contribution of women to OT theology
- To understand the relevance of OT women to the NT and Christian theology

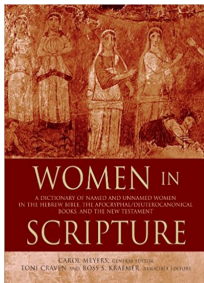
### Being

- To appreciate the contribution that women have made to the history of faith
- To appreciate the potential for women's contribution to the academy and the church
- To grow closer to God through his working through both men and women in the OT text

### Doing

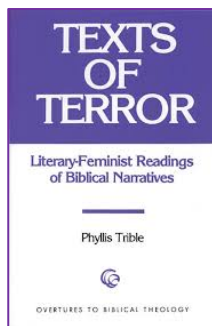
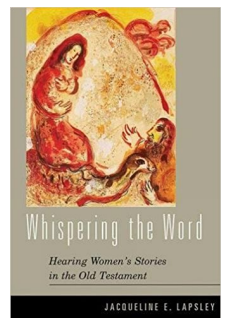
- To evaluate and apply feminist approaches to biblical interpretation
- To articulate, orally and in writing, the way in which women contribute to OT narrative and theology
- To be able to dialogue with those in the church who hold different perspectives

## Required Texts



Meyers, Carol L., Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Lapsley, Jacqueline E. *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.



Tribble, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

## **Course Requirements**

### **1. Synchronous Introductions and Class Orientation (May 4 at 3:00–5:00pm EST)**

Class will meet virtually via Zoom. Our time together will include introductions and an overview of the class.

\*\*\*A link to participate via Zoom will be posted in an announcement on Avenue to Learn.

### **2. Asynchronous Class Discussions (May 5 – June 3)**

Class discussion will occur online on the Avenue to Learn course website. Students must actively participate in the online discussion and **post** minimum **two** discussion topics at the beginning of a week (Sun-Tues). Student posts must be in regard to the posted lecture videos / assigned readings that week. As well, to further the online discussion all students must **respond** to minimum **two posts** every week. Since initial posts will be online in the first part of the week, there will adequate time for all students to respond to posts in a timely manner. Instructions on how to participate in the online classroom will be sent to each student via email before the course begins.

Participation in online discussion is an assumed foundation for this course (like class attendance) if a student fails to participate every week their final mark will be reduced by one full letter grade (so A becomes B, A- becomes B-).

### **3. Synchronous Reflective Discussion (June 1 at 3:00–5:00pm)**

Class will meet virtually via Zoom. In our time together we will share our reflections on course materials and what we wrote in our reflective papers (see below).

\*\*A link to participate via Zoom will be posted in an announcement on Avenue to Learn.

## **Assignments**

### **1. Reading - 10% - Due June 4**

Students will submit a detailed list of the reading that they have completed in the assigned textbooks (including page spreads for partial reading) and assigned articles available through A2L.

- Upload your Reading List assignment to the appropriate Assignment Box on A2L as one PDF file only.

## **2. Critical Book Review - 20%- Due May 18 (6 pages).**

After reading the Tribble textbook (*Texts of Terror*), students will critically review the work in one paper. This review will present its content, provide a critique and finally give an evaluative response that outlines both theological and personal implications. See “Critical Book Review Guidelines” below.

## **3. Student Virtual Presentations - 20% - Due May 25**

Each student will make a virtual presentation to the class on a woman character from the Old Testament. In this assignment students will critically review the relevant biblical narrative(s) and compare and contrast different Christian views of the character, taking into account (as relevant) the views of the textbooks and other posted readings. The presentation should conclude outlining the student’s approach to understanding the chosen woman character and articulating their own view.

**\*A bibliography** must be sent to the professor.

Presentations may take one of the following formats:

- i. **Video presentation** (posted to YouTube or Vimeo). Students will send link to the video to professor who will upload it to Avenue to Learn for the rest of the students to view and hear
- ii. **Digital presentation** (PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, Google Slides etc.) with audio recorded sent to professor who will upload it to Avenue to Learn for the rest of the students to view and hear
- ii. **Digital presentation** (PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, Google Slides etc.) along with pdf handout sent to professor who will upload it to Avenue to Learn for the rest of the students to view and read

*\*\*Student presentations will form the basis for some of the virtual face-to-face discussions on June 1, 3pm–5pm.*

## **4. Reflective Paper - 10%: Due: June 4: Length: 4 pages**

For this paper students write a reflection on implications of the issues and research covered in the course for a student’s view of the OT as scripture and other implications for their faith.

## **5. Major Assignment - 40%. Due on June 11: Length: 12–15 pages**

All major assignment papers must follow the MDC Style Guide. Papers should be double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman font (footnotes should be single-spaced and 10pt). The major assignment must draw on (and explicitly cite) at least 12 sources within the paper. See “**Major Assignment Evaluation Guidelines**” below.

**There are three (3) options for the major assignment for Biblical Studies specializations. Choose only one (1) of the following:**

**A: Exegetical Paper:**

Students will select one self-contained OT story that involves a woman character and complete an exegetical analysis explaining the meaning of the passage and applying it to the contemporary situation. The paper should include

1. A thesis statement
2. Discussion of the historical and cultural context
3. An exegesis of the story
4. Discussion of how the story fits within its broader context
5. Theological reflections and conclusion

**B: Interpretive Lenses:** Find two interpretations of a passage involving an OT woman (journal articles, a passage from commentaries, etc.). One should be a feminist approach and one should be a non-feminist approach. Of course, there is a wide range of approaches within each category; some are more traditional or radical than others.

In this assignment, each student will:

1. evaluate the two interpretations in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, and the value of the conclusions they draw;
2. Explain your own approach and offer your own interpretation, based on your understanding of the biblical text and drawing on other sources and your research.

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**C: Research Paper:** This is especially recommended if you are planning to go on to a research degree or write a thesis (or if you have a particular topic in mind that you wish to write on). The topic of this research must be related to a woman character in the OT or an interpretive issue related to women or feminist interpretations.

**\*\*Topics and passages must be approved by the professor.**

**There are two (2) options for the major assignment for Church and Culture specializations. Choose only one (1) of the following:**

**A: Sermon (oral presentation):** a video-taped sermon uploaded to YouTube or Vimeo.

Beginning with the biblical text this sermon will expound a passage featuring a women character from the Old Testament and apply it to the contemporary context. Students must state who their audience is and the sermon must be relevant to the cultural context of the target audience.

The sermon should be 20–30 minutes long and although it will be delivered orally it will include a written paper with an outline. The paper may be a combination of sentence, bullets/point form, paragraphs (it need not be a complete essay of the words you preach). This paper should be grammatically correct and include appropriate citation of sources employed.

B: Interpretation/Application Paper:

Students will select an OT passage that involves a woman character(s), interpret it, and suggest contemporary applications for the church. The paper should include

1. A thesis statement
2. Discussion of the historical and cultural context
3. An exegesis of significant or controversial verses
4. Contemporary theological reflections on the passage
5. Suggestions for applications to the contemporary church, cultural context, missions, evangelism, etc.
6. Conclusion

**\*\*Topics and passages must be approved by the professor.**

**There are three (3) options for the major assignment for Christian History and Worldview specializations. Choose only one (1) of the following:**

A: Historical Women Interpreters:

Investigate a specific woman interpreter of scripture, contemporary or historical. In the paper, describe her context, her approach to biblical interpretation, her writing, and the way she was viewed by her contemporaries. Read some of her original material and comment evaluatively on it.

A good starting point for finding historic interpreters would be:

Taylor, Marion Ann, and Agnes Choi. *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

**\*\*Many of the works of historical interpreters are readily available online.**

For more contemporary women interpreters see:

Day, Linda, and Carolyn Pressler, eds. *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006)

Junior, Nyasha. *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

B: Historical Interpretation of OT Women:

Read three historical approaches to the interpretation of one specific woman in the OT. One may be contemporary. An electronic example from the McMaster catalogue is:

Thompson, Henry Adams. *Women of the Bible Consisting of Biographical and Descriptive Sketches of the Representative and More Important Women of Old Testament and New*

*Testament Times, as Viewed in the Light of Our Present Day Civilization*. Dayton, Ohio: U.B. Publishing, 1914.

Also try old commentaries in the public domain, such as Matthew Henry's (a example on Deborah <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/judges/4.html>). Of course, you only need to read the relevant parts of these sources. There are many more in our library and online. In a 6–7 page paper, describe how the theological interpretation of the role of this woman has changed over time.

**C: Worldview of a Movie:** Select a contemporary movie that has a focus on a woman of the OT. This should not be a "Christian" movie/novel. For example, there are several movies called *Samson and Delilah* (1996, 2009, etc.), *Esther* (2000), *Queen Esther*, *One Night with the King* (2006), *The Book of Esther* (2013), *The Book of Ruth* (2010). Exodus movies (e.g., *Exodus: Gods and Kings* 2014) may portray Miriam, Jochebed, and Zipporah. Select one of these movies and watch it. In a paper of 6-7 pages, evaluate the worldview represented by the movie, and how it is similar to and/or different from your Christian worldview. Note: focus on the worldview; do not simply identify differences between the movie and the biblical story.

### Course Schedule

Wk	Date	Content
1	May 3–8	The Social/Historical Context of Women in the OT
2	May 9–15	Women of the Pentateuch
3	May 16–22	Women of the Historical Books
4	May 23–29	Women of the Prophetic Books
5	May 30–June 4	Women of the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes)

### College Style for Submission of Written Work

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <http://mcmasterdivinity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/mdcstyleguide.pdf> Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

All papers to be submitted in electronic format only (a pdf file)—no hardcopies! Email to [pevans@mcmaster.ca](mailto:pevans@mcmaster.ca). Include your last name in the file name of your attachment (e.g., [evans.researchpaper.pdf](mailto:pevans@mcmaster.ca)). To avoid late marks papers must be received by 11:59pm on which they are due. Late assignments receive no critical feedback.

### **Policy concerning late papers**

Extensions for papers will not be given except in very exceptional circumstances. (serious illness, family crises, etc.). Busy-ness, computer problems etc. are not legitimate reasons to grant extensions and in the interests of fairness any request for extensions will take into account the entire class. Late assignments will be docked at the rate of 2% per day for the first 7 days (including weekends) and 4% per day after that. All assignments must be received by June 11, 2021 in order to avoid a failing grade in the class. Late assignments receive no critical feedback.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>

**Disclaimer:** This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

\*\*I originally co-taught this course with Mary Conway and thanks is expressed to Dr. Conway for her contributions to the course syllabus and class design.



## Critical Book Review Guideline

I. The Book Review of Phyllis Trible: *Texts of Terror* should roughly follow this format:

Summary of Content: 2-3 Pages

Critique of Content 1-2 Pages

Personal Reflection 1-2 Pages

Total=*no more* than 6 pages! Pages 7ff *will not* be read

The following items are rated according to the following scale:

1 = poor/inadequate; 2 = adequate; 3 = good/more than adequate; 4 = very good;

5 = excellent/superior.

Summary of Content (noted key concepts etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of Critique (evidence of critical thought)	1	2	3	4	5
Reflective Thought (theological depth, sensitivity)	1	2	3	4	5
Literary Style (awkward, wordy, repetitive)	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar/Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
Neatness/Presentation	1	2	3	4	5

§ Note: this is a simple evaluation tool to assist in paper assessment. The categories are not weighted equally, and thus are not added together or averaged to calculate your grade.

## II. The following need attention if checked

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use inclusive language  | <input type="checkbox"/> The paper is too long/too short                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write a unified essay   | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit your paper more thoroughly                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Line spacing, Font size, Margins, Page numbers etc. need attention          | <input type="checkbox"/> The paper needs balance                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cite primary resources correctly/consistently (e.g., Gen 1:26; Gen 1; etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Follow MDC Style guide                          |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cite secondary resources correctly/consistently |

## Major Assignment Evaluation Guidelines

I. The next items are rated according to this scale: 1 = inadequate; 2 = adequate; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = superior.

Bibliographic consciousness	1	2	3	4	5
Range and Use of Sources	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity in Defining Issues	1	2	3	4	5
Strength of Argument	1	2	3	4	5
Awareness of Exegetical Issues	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy of Data and Assertions	1	2	3	4	5
Analysis /Critical Thinking	1	2	3	4	5
Introduction (Thesis Statement /Clear Issue)	1	2	3	4	5
Development of Thesis (focus)	1	2	3	4	5
Literary Style (awkward, wordy, repetitive)	1	2	3	4	5
Organization/coherence of ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar/Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
Neatness/Presentation	1	2	3	4	5

§ Note: this is a simple evaluation tool to assist in paper assessment. The categories are not weighted equally, and thus are not added together or averaged to calculate your grade.

## II. The following need attention if so indicated

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use inclusive language  | <input type="checkbox"/> The paper is too long/too short                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write a unified essay   | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit your paper more thoroughly                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Line spacing, Font size, Margins, Page numbers etc. need attention          | <input type="checkbox"/> The paper needs balance                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cite primary resources correctly/consistently (e.g., Gen 1:26; Gen 1; etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Follow MDC Style guide                          |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cite secondary resources correctly/consistently |

## Selected Bibliography

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