

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PAPER

The paper for this course (= 40% of total grade) will consist of an exegesis and analysis of a passage selected from the assigned primary sources (marked in syllabus with *). Since we're covering so much material in this course, you should approach the paper as an opportunity to get to know a text that you find particularly interesting.

Papers should be 6-8 pages in length and are due March 28th in the lecture. Any paper handed in after the lecture will be considered late. Late papers will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade per every day late. If an emergency or special situation arises such that you will be unable to make this deadline, you must make arrangements with the instructor at least a week before the due date. Due to the university's test and examination ban, no papers will be accepted after March 31st!

Your paper (perhaps needless to say) should concentrate on issues pertaining to death and the afterlife. The precise focus will differ, depending on your choice of texts. That said, it may help to reflect upon the following questions when reading through your text:

- What is the attitude towards death expressed and assumed in the text? What is the view of human beings expressed and assumed (e.g., are humans thought to be essentially mortal or essentially immortal creatures)?
- Is there an interest in the afterlife, and if so, how is it imagined? Why is there an interest in the afterlife (e.g., does reflection on the afterlife form part of reflection on the human condition, or on the justice of God, or on some other broader issue)?
- Do you find in your text a concern with personal and/or collective eschatology? Does the text imagine a post-mortem judgment (i.e., for each person after s/he dies), on the one hand, and/or a judgment at very the end of time?
- What is the cosmology expressed and assumed in the text (e.g., does it speculate about the layout or contents of the abode(s) of the dead – heaven, hell, etc.)?
- What is the anthropology expressed and assumed in the text (e.g., is there a concept of the soul, and if so, is it immortal and completely distinct from the body)? Do we find key concepts in the text, such as immortality of the soul or resurrection of the body?
- Are there any tensions in the text between different ways of approaching the above issues?

You needn't answer all of these questions, only those relevant to your chosen text! This list of questions is just intended to help get you thinking in the right directions.

In the paper, your approach should be two-fold:

[1] **Exegetical:** A close reading of your passage should form the heart and bulk of your paper; to ensure a close reading, you may wish to focus only on a portion of the passage, if the assigned portion is too long to cover in depth. The process of exegesis for this paper is the same as close readings done in exercises done in Tutorials, and further instructions and suggestions are below. Most likely, you will want to do this in the body of your paper. See further guidelines below.

[2] **Contextual:** It is also important to put your text in historical, cultural, and religious context, both in terms of the historical period to which it dates, its relationship to other religious traditions discussed in this course (if applicable), and its place within its own tradition (i.e., Judaism and/or Christianity as the case may be), esp. with regard to its relationship to earlier materials. For this, please consult the lectures and textbook readings. Most likely, you will want to put this information mainly in the Introduction and Conclusion of your paper.

I. EXEGESIS

The academic study of religious literature begins with the effort to read the texts on their own terms and to try to recover something of their original intent and their meaning within their original socio-historical contexts.

In this paper, you should try to pursue these aims by carefully analyzing your passage. This should be the starting point for reflecting on how your passage relates to the more general themes, trends, and concepts that our course has explored.

Practically speaking, this means that you should begin working on your paper by reading your passage carefully, with questions like the following in mind:

- What does the text choose to say and choose not to say, and what might this tell us about what is important to the author(s)? What questions remain unanswered? What ideas or values does the text take for granted? What are the unspoken assumptions?
- Do you think that there a specific message that the text is trying to communicate? If so, how does the text go about saying it? For instance, does it state its message explicitly to reader, or does it provide the reader with an illustrative story, which s/he must contemplate in order to arrive at the message? Does it argue for a certain belief or practice, and if so, can you get a sense of whom it may be arguing against?
- Or, alternately, is there a specific issue or situation that the text seems to be addressing or struggling with? Does it refrain from communicating a clear-cut judgment and leave some answers ambiguous or, relatedly, communicate an ambivalence towards certain characters and their actions?
- If it is a narrative (i.e., a story): What problem, if any, motivates the action? Why do the characters do what they do? Can we tell why their story and this particular tale is deemed important to tell? How do the various characters function in the story? What is the stance of the narrator towards the characters and the choices that they make? On whom does the narrator focus? With whom is the reader meant to sympathize? What textual cues and clues shape the way a reader sees these characters?

Again, you needn't answer all these questions; they are meant to be helpful, rather than prescriptive.

Many ancient texts – and especially the books in the Bibles of present-day faith communities – have been read and interpreted and re-interpreted to speak to changing concerns and contexts in a vast range of different times and places, for many centuries and up until the present day. Biblical traditions have also had a profound influence in shaping modern Western culture more broadly. These factors, together with the enormous gap in time and space between our current context and the ancient cultures in which these texts took shape, can make it difficult for us – as readers engaged in the *academic, secular, non-confessional, and historical* study of ancient religious literature – to understand these texts *on their own terms*, without seeing them through the lens of a long tradition of interpretation or through the lens of our own modern questions, values, and assumptions.

Now non-canonical religious texts from antiquity are also difficult to read on their own terms because of the enormous gap in time between their authors and ourselves. Since their viewpoints may be less familiar than those in now canonical texts, this gap may seem all the more large: their ideas might strike us as strange or even “heretical” in comparison with modern views and/or with traditions based in texts that function in present-day faith communities as Scripture. This is why it is especially important to remember that biblical canons were created at a later time than most of the texts that we’re surveying and by specific communities for specific aims (hence the difference between Jewish, Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic Bibles). It is imperative that we don’t treat these texts as inherently “non-canonical” when we read them exegetically, since they were only deemed so later (and, often, only by particular groups or communities, in contrast to others).

II. CONTEXT

When discussing how your passage relates to the more general themes, trends, and concepts that our course has explored, you should draw primarily on the lectures and textbook.

Make sure to include, ideally in your Introduction, a brief paragraph providing some basic background about the passage and the text in which it is found. For instance: What era does the text describe? In what era was it likely written/redacted? What is the purpose of the text, and what is the place of your passage within it? What genre or type of text is it? The introductory material can be taken primarily from lectures and assigned readings from Segal.

- Students writing on passages from the Hebrew Bible (HB), Apocrypha (OTA), or New Testament (NT) may wish also to consult the summaries in the following Study Bibles [[all on reserve at Mills](#)]: M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, James R. Mueller, eds., *The Oxford study Bible : Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and/or Wayne A. Meeks, et al, eds., *The HarperCollins study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books* (New York: HarperCollins, c1993).

- Students writing on passages from the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (OTP) may wish also to consult the introductory material in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*; vol. 2, *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985)—also on reserve at Mills.
- Students writing on passage from the New Testament Apocrypha (NTA) may wish also to consult Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991-1992)—also on reserve.
- Students writing on other passages should consult me if they wish introductory material.

It is not required to consult additional sources. For those who do wish to do so, however, the following books have been placed on reserve at Mills:

- Alan E. Bernstein, *The formation of hell : death and retribution in the ancient and early Christian worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, c1993).
- Ra'anan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *Heavenly realms and earthly realities in late antique religions* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- John J. Collins, *The apocalyptic imagination: an introduction to Jewish apocalyptic literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).
- John J. Collins, *Seers, sybils, and sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (New York: Brill, 1997).
- George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, immortality, and eternal life in intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).
- J. Edward Wright, *The early history of heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, c2000).
- N.T. Wright, *The resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, c2003).

There are many approaches to ancient religious literature, not all of which are relevant for our course or fitting for an academic paper. If you wish to use a commentary, book, article or any other secondary source apart from the textbook and the sources listed on this handout, you must first consult with me. If you use another source (including a website) that you haven't first cleared with me, I will deduct 3 points from your paper grade.

III. REFERENCES

Any sources that you use (including the textbook) should be listed in a bibliography at the end of your paper. Bibliography entries should follow the form used for the books listed above = Author, *Title* (Publisher: Place, Date). In your paper, you can choose to use footnotes with a short reference (= Author, *Title*, page numbers) OR to include references in the body of your text in parentheses with Author and Date (Author Date, page numbers). In either case, it is required that you cite the specific page numbers.

The only things that you do not need to cite are points made in course lectures or facts listed on handouts.

Whenever you use information from a secondary source (whether the textbook or the additional sources listed above or another book or article to which I might point you), it is imperative that you give proper credit for it. This is a central part of scholarly writing—engaging with other people's ideas but doing so in a manner that makes clear which ideas are yours and where you are building your argument from the work of others.

If you just want to learn how to use secondary sources more effectively in your own writing and argumentation (esp. if you will have to write a thesis and/or are thinking about pursuing graduate studies), or if you have any doubts about what constitutes Plagiarism and/or how, why, and when to cite references, I strongly encourage you to peruse the following very clear and helpful resource: Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Harvard Students* (© 1995; The President and Fellows of Harvard University), on-line at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/>

According to university policy, academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3. The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: (1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. (2) Improper collaboration in group work. (3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

In short, plagiarism includes quoting and paraphrasing other people's writings or ideas – whether from a book, commentary, website, etc. – without proper citation of the author, book, URL, or so on. I cannot stress this enough: whenever in doubt, always add a reference making clear the source of your information!

Please be warned as well that I take Plagiarism extremely seriously. It is an insult to the learning process and to your own potential to learn, to write, and to express your own ideas. Moreover, it can be profoundly unfair to other students and is a serious breach of the trust that your professors and TAs place in you. If you are having trouble writing your paper such that you are tempted to resort to such cheating, please do not hesitate to contact me or Susan for help and advice.

III. FURTHER GUIDELINES

- Make sure to include chapter and verse citations when discussing (and especially when quoting) from your passage. For example: (Gen 2:5-6).
- Do your best to be attentive to the text itself. Try to set aside your own beliefs and opinions while reading and writing about it. Be sensitive to its historical and cultural context, and do your best to separate later interpretations about the text from what the text itself says and doesn't say (when working in an academic context, for instance, later Christian traditions should not shape our readings of texts in the Hebrew Bible). Especially if you're writing on a passage that's familiar to you already, it helps to read it aloud slowly, stopping to think about what it says and how.
- Where possible, you are encouraged to integrate ideas and themes from the lectures and tutorials, as well as to engage issues raised in those forums. You are also encouraged to bring in concepts and ideas from the textbook (always noting, of course, the relevant page numbers; see above). If your passage is discussed by Segal, you should especially make mention of it, even as you should feel free to disagree with his interpretations and approaches.
- Avoid making confessional statements. An important difference between religious and academic approaches to ancient religious texts and traditions is that academic approaches ask different questions (geared towards history rather than eternal truths) and seek to explore and discuss these questions in a way that is open and accessible to people of many different backgrounds and beliefs. Simply stated, I cannot grade you on a paper in which you make statements about your own religious beliefs or faith. If you hand in a paper that is confessional in tone, I will return it to you.
- While writing the paper, you should also try to suspend your value-judgments about whether its message is good or bad. This is a necessary part of understanding a text on its own terms. If you would like to express opinions about a text's value, you should do this *only after dealing with the text on its own terms*. Such comments should not be put in the main section of your paper, but only at the very end, in your conclusion. Note that I will not grade you on such opinions, although I do encourage you to express them if you so wish and if it's helpful to you as part of your process of writing.
- Do, however, express your own view about what a text is saying, even if your view differs from mine or from the textbook – what is important is that you argue your point from the text itself and/or from what you know of its context!
- Make sure to spell-check your paper and to proofread it carefully before turning it in! Be forewarned that I am very particular about such things.