

**Draft**

**WYBxxxx • “For such a time as this:” Insights and Issues from the Books of Ruth and Esther for Today**

**I. Course Details:**

Instructor: Marion Taylor  
Phone: (office) 416-946-3542

E-mail: m.taylor@utoronto.ca

Office Hours: By appointment: Wycliffe College, Rm 227  
Class: April 22-26, 9-12 AM, 1-3:00 PM

**II. Course Description**

We will read the books of Ruth and Esther together with a cloud of witnesses from the past and present who found them not only life giving but also, especially in the case of Esther, deeply troubling. We will examine techniques and strategies used for reading these and other Old Testament narratives through history. We will explore the contexts of Ruth and Esther within both the ancient world and Scripture. We will examine their contents making use of a variety of traditional and innovative interpretive techniques and strategies (including reading within the context of the Ancient Near East, theological exegesis, disaster and trauma studies, and narrative criticism). We will consider how these books speak to us as individuals and as the church in the twenty-first century. The class will include lectures and group-discussions. **Note pre-course assignment below.**

**Prerequisite: Old Testament Introduction or Permission of Professor**

**III. Outcomes: Basic Degree**

Like all Wycliffe College courses, “For such a time as this:’ Insights and Issues from the Books of Ruth and Esther for Today” is shaped by a set of course outcomes/learning goals, describing the knowledge and abilities a student will have attained by the end of the course. In the chart below, these course outcomes are correlated with the outcomes for the M.Div and MTS programs as a whole. For a full list of the latter consult the Wycliffe College website.

<b>COURSE OUTCOMES</b>	<b>COURSE ELEMENT</b>	<b>PROGRAM OUTCOMES</b>
<b>By the end of this course, students will be able to :</b>	<b>This outcome will be achieved through these course elements:</b>	<b>This course outcome corresponds to these aspects of Wycliffe’s statements of outcomes (MTS, MDiv)</b>
Describe the content of the books of Ruth and Esther	reading the primary texts, commentaries and secondary readings; through the inductive studies on Ruth and	<b>MTS: 1.1</b> <b>M.Div: I a; 1 e</b>

	Esther; through lectures; and the final assignment	
Recognise various ways Old Testament texts have been interpreted throughout history, including current issues in Old Testament scholarship	reading commentaries and articles; lectures	<b>MTS:</b> 1.2; 1:4; 1:5 <b>M.Div:</b> 1a
Interpret a biblical book and suggest ideas for its application for the church today	preparing Inductive studies on Ruth and Esther and final assignment	<b>MTS:</b> 1.2, 1.3 <b>M.Div:</b> 1a, 1e
Recognize how knowledge of the biblical world influences one's reading of Old Testament.	readings, lectures	<b>MTS:</b> 1.1 <b>M.Div:</b> 1a; 1e

### Learning Outcomes: Advanced Degree

The Advanced Degree Council has developed detailed statements of “learning outcomes” for each of the advanced degree programs (ThD, MA and ThM). They are available as appendices in the respective Handbooks. “Learning outcomes” have to do in part with the level of knowledge and skill that will be characteristic of a typical graduate of the program. In accordance with this overall statement, instructors are required to develop a statement of learning outcomes for each course. These outcomes will provide one of the benchmarks for evaluation and grading.

<b>COURSE OUTCOMES</b>	<b>COURSE ELEMENT</b>	<b>PROGRAM OUTCOMES</b>
<b>By the end of this course, students will be able to:</b>	<b>This outcome will be demonstrated through these course elements:</b>	<b>This course outcome corresponds to this aspect of the TST outcomes statement for the individual graduate programs:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the context and contents of the books of Ruth and Esther using a variety of traditional and innovative interpretive techniques and strategies (including reading within the context of the Ancient Near East, theological exegesis, disaster and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>course requirements as a whole</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PhD: 1.1</li> <li>MA: 1.1,2,3</li> <li>ThM: 1.1</li> </ul>

trauma studies, and narrative criticism).		
---	--	--

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare and contrast the content and critical issues surrounding the interpretation of Ruth and Esther</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in-class discussion</li> <li>• final paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PhD: 1.1</li> <li>• MA: 2.3, 5</li> <li>• ThM: 1.1</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translate at a proficient level of understanding at least two passages in Ruth and Esther</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• class presentation</li> <li>• final paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PhD: 1.1</li> <li>• MA: 2.2, 3, 4, 5</li> <li>• ThM: 1.1</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and deliver an oral presentation in a clear and effective manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• class presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PhD: 5</li> <li>• MA: 2.5</li> <li>• ThM: 2.5</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare a research project and present the assembled results in a clear and cogently argued manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• final paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PhD: 2</li> <li>• MA: 2.5</li> <li>• ThM: 3.1</li> </ul>

### III. Requirements and Evaluation

Regular and faithful attendance is mandatory. Plagiarism is a serious offense. *The minimum penalty for a plagiarized paper is the grade of zero.* If you borrow ideas or distinctive phrases, you must acknowledge your source(s) properly.

**1) First Assignment (20%)** In preparation for the class, each student will read and/or listen to the books of Ruth and Esther- a total of 14 chapters. The estimated reading time for Ruth is 15 minutes and Esther is 30 minutes according to <http://ya.ccphilly.org/how-long-does-it-take-to-read-each-book-of-the-bible/>. Also each student will read and do a short reflection paper on *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Yairah Amit, Fortress, 2001. If you have read this book you may choose another book on narrative criticism listed below. Unlike the traditional book report which consists of the 3 R's, Retell, Relate, and Reflect, this paper should show that you have read the book and

that you can apply Amit's narrative approach to reading Ruth and/or Esther. Your paper should illustrate Amit's approach to character, plot development, narration, and dialogue with **brief and selected** examples from the books of Ruth and/or Esther. This paper should be no longer than 2-4 pages. **If you need an extension to complete the reflection paper, which is due at the beginning of the first class, please email the professor m.taylor@utoronto.ca**

### **2) Insights and Questions on your reading of two commentaries (20%)**

Before each class you need to read a commentary and my MSS on Ruth and Esther on the chapters being discussed. Beginning on the second day of classes, bring to class two insights and two questions raised in your readings as you will get to share them with the class. At the end of the week, hand in your insights and questions.

### **3) Final Paper (40%)**

The final paper can be exegetical or topical in nature. It may take the form of a traditional essay (10-12 pages BD 15 pages+ AD) on a particular text or problem or method—including trauma and disaster studies—or on the history of the interpretation of a character or particular text in Ruth or Esther. Please consult with the professor about your final paper. This assignment is due August 9.

### **4) Class Participation (20% for BD and AD students not specializing in Bible, 10% for AD Bible students- see #5 below)**

Students are expected to attend every class and to involve themselves fully through preparatory reading, active participation in discussions, and finding resources that will add to the class. At the first class, each student will sign up to present on one of the topics listed above. The presentation can focus on an article or commentary on the chapter under discussion or to help us wrestle with the question of insights from Ruth and Esther for today, or you can share with the class **1. A sermon** (good and bad; classic or contemporary) on the book of Ruth and Esther. For example: Mark Driscoll on Esther-<https://marshill.com/esther>

Tim Keller on Esther- <http://www.gospelinlife.com/esther-and-the-hiddenness-of-god.html>

Spurgeon's sermons on Ruth- [http://www.spurgeon.org/index/r\\_ru.htm](http://www.spurgeon.org/index/r_ru.htm)

**2. Artistic interpretations** of the characters in Ruth or Esther that you can share with the class.

**3. introduce a movie or video** including those for children on the books of Ruth and Esther (e.g. Veggie Tales).

**5) AD students specializing in Bible (10%)** As you prepare for class, work through the Robert Holmstedt's *Ruth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* and Peter Screnock and Robert Holmstedt's *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*. This will help you prepare for your Hebrew language exams. Those specializing in Greek can read the primary texts in the LXX instead. A one- page report on this assignment is due August 1.

## **IV. Required Texts.**

1. *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Yairah Amit, Fortress, 2001.

2. A modern translation of the Bible is also required (e.g. ESV, NRSV, RSV, TNIV, NIV, NJPS, NET, or NASB). The NET Bible offers extensive textual notes and is available for use online **NET Bible site** ([net.bible.org](http://net.bible.org)); or as a free download from [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org). Check out also <https://lumina.bible.org/bible>

3. One commentary on Ruth and one on Esther.

Highly recommended for length and content are

- Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. *Ruth*. Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1999.
- Jobes, Karen H. *Esther*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1999.

Also possible are the following commentaries.

- Baldwin, Joyce G. *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984.
- Bechtel, Carol M. *Esther*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Berlin, Adele. *Esther = [Ester] : the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001.
- Block, Daniel Isaac. *Judges, Ruth*. Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.
- ———, *Ruth*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Bush, Frederic William. *Ruth, Esther*. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1996.
- Campbell, Edward F. *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975.
- Chisholm, Robert B. *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013.
- Clines, David J. A. *The Esther Scroll*. Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 30, 1984.
- ———. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
- Davis, Ellen F. *Who Are You, My Daughter?: Reading Ruth Through Image and Text*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Duguid, Iain, *Esther & Ruth*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2005.
- Eskenazi, T. C., and T. Frymer-Kensky. *Ruth*. JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2011.
- Firth, David G. *The Message of Esther: God Present but Unseen*. Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010.
- Hamlin, E. John. *Surely There Is a Future: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Harris, J. Gordon, Cheryl Anne Brown, and Michael S. Moore. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000.
- Robert Holmstedt, *Ruth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010
- Hubbard, Robert L. *The Book of Ruth*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Levenson, Jon Douglas. *Esther: A Commentary*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- Linafelt, Tod, and Timothy K. Beal. *Ruth*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999
- Macchi, Jean-Daniel, *Le Livre D'Esther*. Genève: Labor et Fides, 2016.

- Moore, C. A. *Esther*. The Anchor Bible. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Studies in the Book of Esther*. New York: KTAV, 1982.
- Nielsen, K. *Ruth: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.
- Roop, Eugene F. *Ruth, Jonah, Esther*. Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press, 2002.
- Peter Screnock and Robert Holmstedt, *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015.
- Sasson, J. M. *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*. 2nd ed. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.
- Smit, Laura A, and Stephen E. Fowl, *Judges & Ruth*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos, 2018.
- Younger, Jr. K. Lawson, *Judges, Ruth* NIV Application Commentary, 2002.
- Ulrich, D. R. *From Famine to fullness: The Gospel according to Ruth*. Phillipsburg, NJ; P and R Publishing, 2007.
- Way, K. C. *Judges and Ruth*. Teach the Text Commentary Series. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016.

## V. Course Website

Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/> This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the U of T Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus Page 3 of 7 using your UTORid and password, look for the My Courses module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701> .

**Email** All UofT students are required to have a valid UTORmail email address. You are responsible for ensuring that your UofT email address is properly entered in the ROSI system.

## VI. Course Schedule:

### 1. Monday April 22

Topic 1 Introduction to Reading Old Testament Narratives or How to Read Ruth and Esther as Narratives.

Marina Hofman Willard, "Narrative Criticism: Methodology and Procedure."

Topic 2 Ruth 1

Taylor's chapter 1

Lecture, "Classic Responses to Ruth and Orpah"

Margaret Black on Orpah and Ruth

Handout on Grief and Loss

### 2. Tuesday April 23

Topic 3 Ruth 2

Taylor's chapter 2

Lecture- The gospel of Ruth

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Ruth and Naomi: Economic Survival and Family Values," in *Just Wives? Stories of Power & survival in the Old Testament & Today*, 27-49.

Read and discuss Spurgeon's sermon on Ruth 2 see Quercus.

Topic 4 Ruth 3 and 4

Taylor's chapter 3 & 4

How to Interpret the Threshing Floor scene

Read the posted pieces that explore modern applications of chapter 3 that related it to dating practices.

Read the article that explore the work of Ephrem the Syrian that relates to Ruth.

### **3. Wednesday April 24**

Topic 5: A look at the whole and considerations of Trauma

**Guest Rachel Tullock**, Gender and Violence and Trauma as it relates to Ruth, Esther and Today.

Read the article on Trauma in *the Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* under the readings link on Quercus.

Read the posted article on "The Trauma of Otherness and Hunger: Ruth and Lot's Daughters."

Read the sermon "A Deeper Look at the Book of Ruth," in "*One in Three*" Sermon Guide 2014, 15-18 WWW.IMAWORLDHEALTH.ORG • [WWW.WEWILLSPEAKOUT.US](http://WWW.WEWILLSPEAKOUT.US)

Topic 6 Introduction to the Book of Esther

Narrative analysis of the Book of Esther

Read the introduction to Geneva Bible Study notes on Esther and have them handy for discussion.

Read and Discuss the Overview of Esther from the Docent Group

### **4. Thursday April 25**

Topic 7 Esther 1-3

Read Zonana, "Feminists Providence: Esther, Vashti and the Duty of Disobedience in nineteenth-century Hermeneutics".

Discuss the Preacher and Vashti handout.

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Vashti and Esther: Models of Resistance," in *Just Wives? Stories of Power & survival in the Old Testament & Today*, 27-49.

Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's struggle for Liberation in South Africa"

Topic 8 Esther 4-6

Read Wilhelm Visher, "The book of Esther"- a German reading in 1939

Skim John Donne's sermon on Esther 4:16, especially the last few pages

Discuss Esther, the intercessor- see handout

### **5. Friday April 25**

Ideological Criticism and Using Esther Today

Read the following posted articles:

Arie Leder, 'Historical Narrative and Wisdom. Toward Preaching Esther "For Such a Time as This,"' *Acta Theologica* 2011, 31(2) 135-158.

"Preaching Subversively: The Book of Esther"

John Donne's sermon on Esther 4:16

Discuss Tim Keller's sermons.

Topic 9 Esther 7-9

Read Susan Niditch, "Interpreting Esther: Categories, Contexts and Creative Ambiguities"

Topic 10 Esther 10 and a look at the whole

## **Additional Bibliography**

### **Narrative Criticism**

- Alter, Robert and Kermode, Frank (eds). *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.
- Amit, Yairah. *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Translated by Yael Lotan. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953 and 2003.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by Christine Van Boheemen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- Bar-Efrat, Shimon. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. London: T&T Clark International, 2004.
- Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983.
- Berlin, Adele. "8 Literary approaches to the Hebrew Bible", (eds.) Chapman, Stephen B. and Sweeney, Marvin A. *The Cambridge companion to the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp.163-83.
- Fokkelman, J. P. *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*. Translated by Ineke Smit. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.
- Graybill, Rhiannon ed. "Literary Criticism, Literary Theory and the Bible", *Oxford Encyclopedia of Interpretation*. Oxford Biblical Studies online, Feb 4, 2017. <<http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t373/e101>>
- Gunn, David M. "Narrative Criticism." In *To Each Its Own Meaning: Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, edited by Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999. Pp. 201-29.
- Gunn, David M. and Danna Nolan Fewell. *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Longman III, Tremper. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.

- Miscall, Peter D. *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative*. SBLSS. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- Moore, Stephen D. "Biblical Narrative Analysis from the New Criticism to the New Narratology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, edited by Danna Nolan Fewell, New York, NY: Oxford, 2016. Pp. 27–50.
- Polzin, Robert. *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts*. Semeia Supplements. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977.
- Powell, Mark Allan. *What is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Sumner, George and Wells, Samuel, *Esther & Daniel*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013.
- Tull, Patricia K. "Narrative Criticism and Narrative Hermeneutics", (ed.) McKenzie, Steven L. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 37-46.
- Walsh, Jerome T. *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

**Other Useful resources on Ruth and Esther:**

- Anderson, B. W. The Place of the Book of Esther in the Christian Bible. *Journal of Religion* 30 (1950): 32-43.
- Berg, Sandra Beth. *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure*. SBL Dissertation 44. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979.
- Carruthers, Jo, *Esther Through the Centuries*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.
- Fox, Michael. The Structure of the Book of Esther. In Safer Isaac L. Seeligmann, Edited by Alexander Rofé. Jerusalem: Rubenstein, 1983, Pp. 291-301.
- Irwin, B. P. "Ruth 3: History of Interpretation." In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, edited by T. Longman III and P. Enns, 693–700.
- Jensen, J. R. "Ruth according to Ephrem the Syrian." in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*. Ed. A. Brenner, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, Pp.170–76.
- Manor, D. W. "Ruth." In *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, edited by J. H. Walton, 2:242– 65. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Anthony Tomasino, "Esther," in *1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Vol 3 Ed John H. Walton. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.