

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Fall 2008
Professor Sue Garrett
7:00 – 8:50 p.m. in Schlegel Hall 120

NT3151: Biblical Perspectives on Death and Afterlife

This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

Course Description: This 2-credit course will focus on biblical views of death and afterlife, and compare them to popular ideas about afterlife in contemporary American society.

Intended Major Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, each student will be able to:

1. Identify and summarize biblical passages pertinent to the topic of death and afterlife, and explain how views on these topics changed over the course of the biblical era and beyond;
2. Offer informed analysis of popular cultural phenomena related to death and afterlife (including, for example, near-death experiences; portrayals of “angels of death”; the entertainment media’s preoccupation with the “undead”);
3. Articulate his or her own personal beliefs about death and afterlife; and
4. Respond in a sensitive and informed way to questions or crises pertaining to beliefs about death and afterlife such as might arise in a pastoral context.

Format: Each session will include lecture by the professor, discussion of assigned readings, and structured activities of various kinds (role-plays, case studies, etc.).

Course Requirements: Consistent attendance is required (must be present for a minimum of 5 of the 6 sessions; roll will be taken; absences may necessitate written make-up work). Careful reading of assigned materials and energetic participation in classroom discussion and exercises are essential. Two three-page papers are required, and there will be an oral examination at the end of the course (see Appendixes A and B). The student’s final grade will be based on attendance, general preparedness, and participation (@20%); written assignments (@40%), and performance on the oral examination (@40%).

Meeting dates: September 9, 23; October 7, 21, and 28; November 11

Required Texts (available in LPTS bookstore):

William Stringfellow, *Instead of Death* (New and expanded edition; New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

Other readings will be available on reserve in the library and on the Blackboard Web site for the course.

****Note: You should always bring a study Bible with you to class. Other readings may be announced as the semester proceeds.****

Policy on Inclusive Language: In speech and in written assignments, please avoid divisive terms that reinforce stereotypes or are pejorative. Do not use language that leaves out part of the population, perpetuates stereotyping, or diminishes importance. Do not use male pronouns (such as “men”) to refer to a group that includes females as well. Consult the Academic Support Center for additional guidance if necessary.

Schedule:

September 9: “From Sheol to Resurrection: A Brief History of OT Belief (and Non-Belief) in the Afterlife”

Preparation: Read the following materials, taking notes as you go. Try to get a clear picture of the rough stages of development in beliefs about resurrection. Keep a list of which biblical texts illustrate different ideas, and take a moment to look at some of those texts as you go along.

- “Angels and Death,” by Susan R. Garrett, pp. 1-12 (available on the Blackboard Web site for the course, under “Course Documents”). *You may print this if you like.*
- Three articles from *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (available on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents”). *You may want to print the articles and bring them to class.* The articles are:
 - “Afterlife,” by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. (Hint: If you like, you may skip the sections on “Medieval Jewish Philosophy” and “Kabbalistic Literature”)
 - “Netherworld,” by Laurentino Afonso and Batya Kedar
 - “Resurrection,” by Moshe Greenberg, Daniel Boyarin, and Seymour Siegel. (Hint: If you like, you may skip the section on “Medieval Jewish Philosophy”)
- For further reference, if you are interested, these articles from the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* are quite useful:
 - “Dead, Abode of the,” by Theodore J. Lewis
 - “Hades, Hell,” by Richard Bauckham
 - “Resurrection (OT),” by Robert Martin-Achard.

These are not posted on Blackboard. The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* is available on permanent reserve in the Reference Room (BS 440 .A54 1992)

September 23: “New Testament Perspectives on Death, Afterlife, and the Coming Redemption”

Preparation: Read the following, taking notes as you go.

- “Angels and Death,” by Susan R. Garrett, pp. 12-34 (available on Blackboard Web site)
- 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15; Luke 16:13-31; 20:27-39; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20

- “Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity),” by George W. E. Nickelsburg, in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (available on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents”)

October 7: “Ancient Tours of Heaven and Hell”

Preparation: Read the following, taking notes as you go. Also, skim the critical introduction to each. Be prepared to discuss the article by Dale Allison.

- *1 Enoch* 17:1-8; 18:10–19:2; 21; 22; 26:3–27:4.
 - *1 Enoch* available online at: http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/ot/pseudo/enoch.htm. This link is also posted on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.” A more contemporary translation is available in vol. 1 of James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, on permanent reserve in the Reference Room (Ref. BS 1692 1983).
- *Testament of Abraham*
 - *Testament of Abraham* available online at: <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txua/abraham0.htm>. This link is also posted on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.” A more contemporary translation is available in vol. 1 of James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, on permanent reserve in the Reference Room (Ref. BS 1692 1983).
- The *Acts of Thomas* [Act 6 only]
 - *Acts of Thomas* available online at: http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/acts/actthom.htm. This link is also posted on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.” Scroll about one-third of the way down (or go to the edit menu and select “find [on this page]”; search for the phrase “The Sixth Act”).
- 2 Cor 12:1-6; Revelation 4–5
- Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 56-110. Available on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.”
- For further reference, this article from the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* is quite useful: “Descent to the Underworld,” by Richard Bauckham (especially sections D, G, H, I). The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* is available on permanent reserve in the Reference Room (BS 440 .A54 1992); it is also accessible electronically on terminals 9 and 10 in the computer lab (click on “Bible Dictionary” in the menu at the left of the desktop).

October 21: “The Power of Death and the Denial of Death”

Preparation:

- Read William Stringfellow, *Instead of Death*. Prepare a three-page response to the book to hand in at the end of class. On the first page, summarize main themes of the book. On the remaining two pages, discuss a theme or chapter that was especially compelling for you, and explain why you found it so.

October 28: “Obsession with Death in American Culture”

Preparation: Read the following, taking notes as you go. Also, skim the critical introduction to each.

- Selections from James Moorhead, *World Without End: American Mainstream Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880–1925* (on changing views of death, heaven, and hell in American society). Available on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.”
- “Spiritualism,” online: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritualism>. This link is also posted on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.”
- “Understanding Goth: A philosophical exploration of the gothic subculture,” parts I–III (online: <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/9094/GOTH.html>). This link is also posted on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.”

November 11: “Intimations of Immortality: Near-Death Experiences”

Preparation:

- Visit the Web site www.near-death.com. Spend at least an hour perusing; be sure to read some specific accounts of near-death experiences. This link is also posted on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.”
- Carol Zaleski, *The Life of the World to Come*. Several copies available on reserve; or, you may wish to purchase a used copy through Amazon.com. Prepare a three-page written summary of and response to the book (to hand in at the end of class). On the first page, summarize main themes of the book. On the remaining two pages, discuss a theme or chapter that was especially compelling for you, and explain why you found it so.
- Susan Blackmore, “Are Out-of-Body Experiences Evidence for Survival?” In *Anabiosis – The Journal for Near-Death Studies* 3:2 (1983): 137-55. Available on the Blackboard Web site, under “Course Documents.”

Arrangements for final oral examinations will be made at this time.

**APPENDIX A:
Guidelines for Short Papers**

An excellent paper will exhibit the following characteristics:

Style:

1. Overall the paper is well organized.
2. Individual paragraphs in the paper are logically ordered with smooth internal (sentence-to-sentence) and external (paragraph-to-paragraph) transitions.
3. The paper is written with correct grammar and spelling throughout.

Content:

1. In summarizing the book under discussion, the paper describes key points succinctly yet accurately.
2. The paper reflects insightfully on the significance of one or more points made in the book under discussion for the contexts and concerns which are the focus of the course.
3. The writer of the short paper exercises critical thinking and supports assertions with evidence and analysis.
4. The paper does not digress or include irrelevant information.
5. When citing a passage or point from the work in question, the writer of the short paper includes a balance of paraphrase, summary, and direct quotation.

**APPENDIX B:
Guidelines for Oral Exams**

Midway through the course, students will be given three possible questions for the final exam. Collaborative preparation to answer these questions is strongly encouraged. Students will take the exam in groups of four (or three or five, as numbers require), and will decide among themselves who will go first, second, etc. Each student will be given two questions to answer (out of the three pre-assigned). Each student in turn will answer both of his or her questions, taking between four and six minutes for each question. No written notes are permitted. Excellent performance on the oral exam will be characterized by the following traits:

1. Overall the answer is clear and coherent. It is easy to follow the student's reasoning or argumentation;
2. The student expresses himself or herself with sufficient detail, yet with a minimum of repetition, digression, and stumbling;
3. The student demonstrates mastery of knowledge gained in the course pertinent to the question at hand (e.g., knowledge of biblical texts and positions, or of how certain widely held views developed); and
4. The student exhibits theological and pastoral sensitivity to the dynamics of the situation envisioned in the question.

When all students have answered both questions, there will be an opportunity to review and debrief all students' answers with the professor. Within two weeks of the exam, the professor will send written comments and suggestions on each student's performance and a final course grade to each student.