

ABRAHAM IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, & ISLAM
Winter 2023



Instructor: Dr. Abby Kulisz

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Lecture: Th 10:30AM - 12:20PM (T13 125)

Tutorial: Fr 11:30AM - 12:20PM (HH 302)

Office: University Hall 127

Office Hours: By appointment

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Course Description

This course explores the figure of Abraham—often considered the “founder” of Abrahamic religions—in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic pre-modern traditions. Who is this man who nearly sacrificed his son for God? Why do Jews, Christians, and Muslims have different and conflicting accounts of him and his family? We will begin the course by investigating his story in Genesis and then will examine how ancient and medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim exegetes re-narrate his story in their respective contexts. We will also explore Abraham’s reception in contemporary contexts—how does his story help us understand ourselves in the present? What would it look like to view Abraham’s story through feminist and womanist lenses? And finally, how else has Abraham been interpreted, particularly by literary theorists, activists, and psychologists? Special attention will be paid to representations of gender, race, and sexuality.

Course Objectives

- Develop a broad understanding of the figure of Abraham in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic pre-modern literary traditions
- Analyze ancient texts using textual analysis and scholarly interpretative methods with a critical eye toward representations of gender, race, and sexuality
- Gain familiarity with contemporary understandings of Abraham in the works of literary theorists, activists, and psychologists
- Develop a broad understanding of the academic study of religion through analysis of written and visual sources
- Evaluate ancient sources in tandem with contemporary sources and consider how studying antiquity can help inform the present (and vice versa)
- Improve your critical thinking skills by applying and synthesizing information and concepts in disparate contexts

Required Materials and Texts

- Access to course readings, films, and other media available via Avenue

Course Evaluation – Overview

- Participation (15%)
- Quizzes (20%)
- Short essay (15%)
- Mid-term exam (20%)
- Final project (30%)

Course Evaluation – Details

- Participation (ongoing): As we learn together and through each other’s questions and comments, your attendance is required. You are expected to be present in class, participate in class discussions with your peers, complete the readings,

and consult the recommended websites ahead of time to be adequately prepared. Each week you will receive a grade for your participation.

- Quizzes (10 total; 2 points each): Over the course of the semester, the instructor and teaching assistant will choose 10 different lectures/tutorials to give a brief quiz on the course material covered during that week.
- Short essay (due February 3): You will submit a 600-800 word essay that responds to a prompt pertaining to the course readings. Instructions and rubric will be provided and discussed in class.
- Mid-term exam (due March 1): The mid-term exam for this course is a take-home assignment. You will respond to a combination of short-answer and extended response questions.
- Final Project (due April 17): For the final class project, you will create your own literary account of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, or Ishmael's life. You will create one primary source document that narrates the life story of one of these characters, which will be informed by the course readings. You will also invent a secondary source document that describes how one might interpret the primary source from an academic perspective. You will submit an outline that details your preliminary idea and receive instructor feedback. Instructions and rubric will be provided and discussed in class.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

* This is a tentative course schedule and is subject to change. For weekly readings and other assigned materials, please refer to the weekly checklists posted on Avenue.

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

- Introduction to the academic study of biblical literature and the study of religion
- Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (selection)

Week 2: Introducing Abraham

- Genesis 1-12
- Genesis 13-16
- Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (selection)

Week 3: Introducing Abraham

- Genesis 17-21
- Genesis 22-26

- Jon Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (selection)

Week 4: Feminist & Womanist Interpretations

- Nyasha Junior, *Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and Bible* (selection)
- Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God* (selection)

Week 5: Jewish Traditions

- Genesis Rabbah
- Genesis Apocryphon

Week 6: Jewish Traditions

- Apocalypse of Abraham
- Book of Jubilees

Week 7: Critiques & Dilemmas

- Eric Auerbach, *Odysseus' Scar* (selection)
- Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (selection)

Week 8: Paul

- Romans 4
- Galatians 3-4

Week 9: Islamic Traditions

- Selections from the Qur'ān
- Selections from *Sahih al-Bukhari*

Week 10: Islamic Traditions

- Al-Tabari, *History of Prophets and Kings* (selections)
- Ibn Kathir, *Stories of the Prophets* (selections)

Week 11: Rethinking Hagar

- Hibba Abugideiri, "Hagar: A Historical Model of 'Gender Jihad'"
- Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (selections)

Week 12: What Was Abraham Thinking?

- Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (selections)

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments must be submitted through Avenue as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf file. Assignments submitted as email attachments will not be graded.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-89	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

It is important that you turn in all assignments in on time to avoid falling behind. Late assignments will receive a two-point deduction for each late day and will not be accepted after one week past the deadline. If you are having difficulty keeping up with assignments, please let me know immediately.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

University Policies **Academic Integrity Statement**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour 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. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#), located at [the University Secretariat website](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to the [Office of Academic Integrity website](#).

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail

accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.