

Unit 9: Literature Highlights

Job and Psalms

UNIT 9► This unit is designed to acquaint the student with the influential literary characteristics and forms found in the poetic Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.

Performance Condition/Action Statements

Based on assigned readings from Job, Psalms, and songs from Exodus and Judges, the student will:

1. (Knowledge) Identify examples of parallelism in the Psalms (see p.128).
2. (Comprehension) Compare the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 with Psalm 80.
3. (Application) Read the last five chapters of Job describing the Bible's account of the exchange between Job and his God. In what way are the questions and issues discussed universal and timeless in their theme? HOTS.
4. (Analysis) Explain why the poetry identified on p. 135 expresses the idealistic side of man. HOTS.
5. (Synthesis) Write a paraphrase of Psalm 23. HOTS.
6. (Evaluation) Assess the similarities in biblical parallelism with the poetry of authors such as George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, William Blake, and Edward Taylor. HOTS.

Performance Criterion: The student will complete writing assignments, participate in small group discussion, and complete readings as assigned.

Lesson 1: *An Introduction to Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry*

Lesson Objective: Based on lecture and class discussion, the student will explain in his own words the following terms: parallelism; simplicity of structure; use of the question; figurative language; understatement.

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Lesson 2: *Parallelism*

Lesson Objective: Based on the student's review of assigned readings in the text, the student will identify examples of synonymous, synthetic, antithetical, and climactic parallelism.

Lesson 3: *Use of the Question*

Lesson Objective: Based on the student review of assigned readings in the text, the student will interpret the impact of questioning to express a point of view from Job 38-41, and Psalm 137, 139, 8 and 13.

Lesson 4: *Other Literary Expressions*

Lesson Objective: Based on lecture and class discussion, the student will explain the terms personification, metaphor, hyperbole, simile, understatement, and iteration, and give examples of each from the Psalms, and Deborah's Song in Judges 5.

Lesson Objective: The student will compare the description of God provided in Moses' song (Exodus 15) with the Hallel recited during Passover celebrations (Psalm 113-118).

Lesson 5: *The Psalms Expressing Devotion to God & Nation*

Lesson Objective: Based on the student's review of assigned readings in the text, the student will summarize the themes of the psalms of praise, worship, procession and ascent. (See p. 134).

Lesson 6: *The Psalms Expressing Man's Ideals*

Lesson Objective: Based on the student's review of assigned readings in the text, the student will assess the themes of the psalms of penance, contrition, elegy and lamentation, and evaluate their meanings as expressions of man's nature.

Sample Lesson Plans

Note: Just a reminder here that review of Psalms or portions of Psalms (selected at the teacher's discretion) continues. The study of Proverbs will also continue through the end of the semester, culminating with chapter 15. The remaining Proverbs will be covered in the second semester of this course.

Lesson 1: Read Psalm 119 which offers an excellent opportunity to study several poetic characteristics noted in the curriculum. Note also that each set of eight verses is preceded by a Hebrew letter that may also be studied and learned. One to three class periods.

Introduce some Hebrew letters and their meaning for study. These may be found in Hebrew lexicons. HOTS.

Lesson 2: Choose a variety of Psalms for study and identification of synonymous, synthetic, antithetical, and climactic parallelism. Have students create examples of parallel statements. The students may work in pairs. One to three class periods.

Lesson 3: Read Job 38-41 and Psalm 137, 139, 8, and 13. Have students participate in discussions that display the impact of questioning to express a point of view. Compare and contrast these methods of questioning to courtroom or other scenarios. One to three class periods.

Lesson 4: Choose Psalms that exhibit examples of personification, metaphor, hyperbole, simile, understatement and iteration. Read these aloud and have students cite examples of each. More examples of these may be found in Deborah's Song in Judges 5. Compare and contrast the description of God in Moses' and Miriam's song (Exodus 15) with the Hallel recited during Passover celebrations (Psalm 113-118). Two class periods. HOTS.

Lesson 5: Choose Psalms that are expressions of praise, worship, procession and ascent. Suggestions are: 8, 9, 18, 19, 29, 30, 33, 34, 47, 48, 66, 81, 89, 95, 96, 98, 100, 103, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 112, 113, 117, 135, 138, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150. Have students choose any two, or three, and objectively compare and contrast these with one other for their literary and poetic qualities. One to two class periods. HOTS. (*Note: The instructor must point out that these selections are being reviewed only for their influential literary and poetic qualities, and that the review must not be regarded or treated as a "devotional" exercise – inappropriate for a classroom setting.*)

Lesson 6: Choose Psalms that express and assess the themes of penance, contrition, elegy, and lamentation and evaluate their meaning as expressions of man's nature. Read aloud and discuss. HOTS.

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Note: Explore pp. 247-303 of *The Bible As/In Literature* for other possibilities of literary Bible study concerning the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Job and Lamentations. Of particular interest may be the excerpt from *J.B.*, by Archibald Macliesh. Students may want to role play this work. HOTS.

JOB

The following commentary and analysis offers an excerpt from:
Joyce L. Vedral. *A Literary Survey of the Bible*, edited by Dennis Baker.
Plainfield, Logos International (1973), pp. 71-72.

The book of Job is one of the best known books of the Bible. Dealing with the questions of human suffering, especially the suffering of those who are morally upright, its central purpose is to probe the phenomenon of faith in the midst of anguish, in this case, prolonged anguish. It is a powerful, enigmatic masterpiece that has perplexed and absorbed men of every generation.

The name Job (Hebrew Iyyobh) was fairly common among Western Semites in the second millennium B.C., and scholars speculate that the land of Uz meant Edom or perhaps a more northern part of the Transjordan. There is authentic patriarchal coloring in the setting of Job's story: the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods are absent, wealth is measured in cattle and slaves. The Sabeans and Chaldeans are still depicted as wandering nomads. Job's longevity is reminiscent of the pre-Mosaic era, and the unit of money in 4211 (Hebrew Qesitah) is mentioned elsewhere in Genesis (33:19) and Joshua (23:32).

For these reasons, the ancients assumed that the author was Moses himself, and that Job could perhaps be identified with Jobab, King of Edom (Gen. 36:33) and grandson of Esau. Most scholars today are wary about precise dating or identification of the author of this book. A case has been made for several documentary series, and dates have been assigned that range from 2000 to 200 B.C.

The book of Job is the first example of "wisdom literature" to occur in the Bible. There will be more in the Psalms, and the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom, in the Bible, invariably begins with the fear of the Lord, and is that quality of mind that enables a man to be successful himself and to counsel others well. Beyond that, it is depicted as a female personality who declares of herself that she was pre-existent with God (Prov. 8:22-31) totally above, beyond, and apart from men who need to learn to love and cherish her, for as she says, "All who hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36).

Of all the wisdom literature, the Book of Job is unequalled in its scope and profundity, moving with lyrical grace and majesty, as it explores themes that few authors would even dare to attempt. The narrative is filled with drama and pathos, probing to the depths of one man's soul. In or out of the Bible, it is a monumental epic.

Poetry in the Bible

Objectives:

To appraise the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, including: parallelism; the use of figurative language; simplicity of structure; understatement; frequent use of the question.

To evaluate the influence of Hebrew poetry on English and American literature, especially, and on other literature of the world as well. To judge whether some passages in the Bible usually designated as prose, are actually poetic in language and style.

Comments:

Many Bibles categorize somewhere on the beginning pages those books which are called "poetic": Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are often referred to as "wisdom" literature. The Hebrew Tehillim (the Christian Book of Psalms) will be dealt with quite extensively in this course. It is the intention of this unit to illustrate how extensively its poetic passages (which are most frequently called prose) are used in the remainder of the Bible, and elsewhere in the literature of the world.

The songs of the Hebrew nation (sometimes called "The Psalter," or the "Psalms") offer great insight into the universal range and timeless nature of human emotion. They express joy, love, compassion, perplexity, sacrifice, anger, sadness, and depression. Many of the Jewish and Christian faith traditions consider the collection of the Psalms (songs) to be the greatest compilation of prayers ever written. The Psalms have enjoyed widespread appeal and popularity throughout history.

References:

Abbott, Gilbert, et al, *The Bible Reader: An Interfaith Interpretation*. (See attached CD ROM).

Mary Ellen Chase, *The Bible and the Common Reader, Rev. ed.*, New York: Macmillan (1952).

Solomon Freehof, *The Book of Psalms, A Commentary*, Cincinnati, Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1938).

Samuel Rolles Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, New York: Meridian Books (1956).

Samuel Sandmel, *Hebrew Scriptures: An Introduction to their Literature and Religious Ideas*, New York: Knopf (1963).

Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry: *Parallelism*

Objective:

To recognize perhaps the most striking feature of Hebrew poetry - parallelism.

Readings:

Mary E. Chase, Chapter 4

Judges 5, Deborah's Ode - for synonymous parallelism

Psalms 6, 8, 23, 27, 40, and 46 - for synthetic parallelism

Psalms 91, 30:3 - for antithetical parallelism

Psalms 29 and Isaiah 40:31 - for climactic parallelism

Selected poems from two 17th century English poets (George Herbert and Richard Crashaw)

Selected poems from the Pre-Romantic English poet, William Blake

Selected poems from 17th century American poet, Edward Taylor

The Bible Reader: An Interfaith Interpretation, Abbott, Gilbert, etc., p. 381

Activities: Define Parallelism in poetry in its four main forms: synonymous, synthetic, antithetical, and climactic. (See Chase, p. 86-102, and readings listed above). HOTS.

Parallelism is a method of balancing the two halves of a line, much like an equation in mathematics, (e.g., _____; _____), wherein something is given in the second half of the line to provide emphasis, or a consequence or result, etc. The following examples explain the different forms of parallelism:

1. **Synonymous**: The same thought is expressed in two lines with the second half giving emphasis to the first. Note: The dividing mark of punctuation is most often a semi-colon or a colon, with the word "and" used to show the continuing thought.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament showeth his handiwork." (Ps. 19:1)

2. **Synthetic**: The second half supplements the thought of the first half by giving the consequence or result of the first. Note: Here too, the word "and" is used to show something further, but the mark of punctuation is a simple comma.

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"I cried unto the Lord with my voice, And he heard me out of his holy hill." (Ps. 3:4)

3. Antithetical: The second line or half contrasts in thought to the first half.
Note: The mark of punctuation can be either a semicolon or a comma, but the distinguishing word held in common by both is the word "but."

"A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." (Ps. 91:4)

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Ps. 30:5)

4. Climactic: This builds up in thought, or in "stair like" progression.

*"Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty,
Give unto the Lord glory and strength;
Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." (Ps. 29)*

or

*"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.
They shall mount up with wings as eagles;
They shall run and not be weary;
They shall walk and not faint." (Is. 40:31)*

Activities:

1. Use selected readings from the Bible as an example of each form, and then have the class scan through the Psalms for examples of each. It can become quite a fun and rewarding game to see how many can be found within a set time.
2. Play the recording of "The Psalms" by Morris Carnovsky, to give the students opportunity to hear rhythm and balance in the Psalms when read in the original language of Hebrew.

Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry:

The Question

Objective:

To see the frequent use of questions, and simplicity of diction and construction, as a means of securing added rhythm and stress to sentences, variety of style, and suggestions of both pathos and mystery in Hebrew poetry. To examine figurative language as a powerful means of expression.

Readings:

The Question: Psalms 137, 139, 8, 13; Job 38-41

Activities:

1. Read Psalms 137 and 139 as illustrations of pathos and mystery in a question. Have students select at random other examples from the Psalms as illustrations of the use of the question.
2. Read at least Chapter 38 in Job to show the power of the question in obtaining stress and rhythm. Point out melody and rhythm and the pictorial value of single words.
3. Explain the use of figurative language in Hebrew poetry. Review terms such as metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, etc. Explain that the two most common types used by the Hebrews are metaphor and simile, with the simile being the most frequent. Ask the class to find examples of figurative language in the Psalms, Job, and the Song of Solomon and to write them down. They should also designate each figure of speech. HOTS.
4. Add to the student's vocabulary: *personification, metaphor, hyperbole, simile, understatement, iteration.*

Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry: *Figurative Language*

Objective:

To analyze figurative language revealing the Hebrew people of the Bible as concrete and vivid in their imagination, sense impressions, and emotions, rather than abstract.

Readings:

Psalms 23, 141, 91, 92; Song of Solomon; Deborah's Ode (Judges 5)

Activities:

1. Have students deliver reports on their findings of examples of figurative language in the Psalms, Job and Song of Solomon.
2. Ask students to read their paraphrases of Psalm 23. Compare and discuss the different versions. HOTS.
3. Use the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 for examples of hyperbole and iteration. Remind the students that this poem may be the oldest, or at least one of the oldest pieces of literature in the Bible along with two other pieces of poetry - Moses' song in Exodus 15 and the Book of Job.

Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry:

Poetic Understatement

Objective:

To examine the value of understatement as a Hebrew characteristic in poetry.

Readings:

Selected Psalms: 18, 33, 22, 133

II Samuel 1:19-26 - David's lament over Saul and Jonathan

Job 14:1-2; 9:25-26

Activities:

1. Define the term "*understatement*."

Note: Although the Hebrews were a people of vivid imaginations and sense impressions, they nevertheless meant more than they expressed in words, whether in prose or poetry. The poet seems to have been more eloquent than the prose writer but he, too, leaned upon other things such as sound, rhythm, and melody rather than many words to convey his meaning. He nearly always meant more than he actually said in so many words. He did not actually consider himself to be guilty of understatement, however. It was simply natural for him to leave to his reader to supply what was already a vital and inherent part of this thinking. This purposeful omission of details on his part is called by Chase a "dramatic economy of words." The dramatic impact and warm emotional overflow are still intact, perhaps because of this very economy. [See Mary Ellen Chase, *The Bible and the Common Reader*, New York: MacMillan (1962)].

2. Refer to the familiar story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 as an example of understatement in prose writing in the Bible.

Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry:
The Ballad and the Folk Song
As an Expression of the People

Objective:

To analyze the ballad and the folk song as interpretations of the Hebrew sense of discipline, their energy and resourcefulness, scorn of weakness and delinquency, and their ability to lose themselves in devotion to their God and their nation.

Readings:

Gen. 4:23-24 - "The Song of the Sword" (Lamech)
Num. 21:17-18 - "The Song of the Well"
Joshua 10:12-14 - Joshua's Song at Gibeon
Exodus 15:1, 3, 5, 8-10, 20 - Song of Moses and Miriam
Psalms 79:6, 10, 12

Activities:

1. Explain what is meant by "folk" song, and why the term is applied to these songs and hymns. The composers were in most cases known, but many of these are also believed to have been handed down from generation to generation.
2. Explain the ballad and its characteristics:
 - a. Physical courage and love are frequent themes.
 - b. It involves the common people and their lot.
 - c. The transitions are often abrupt.
 - d. Tragic situations are dealt with simply.
 - e. It deals with one single episode or incident.
 - f. It begins in the middle (*in medias res*).
3. Have students read aloud from the selections listed above.
4. Students may begin to make more critical evaluation of the biblical writings as poetry.

The Tehillim (“Psalms”) as an Expression of Hebrew Devotion to God and Nation

Objective:

To analyze the songs of praise, worship, procession, and “ascent” as illustrations of the Hebrew devotion to their God and to their nation.

Readings:

Psalms 42, 47, 52 and 100 - Processional (antiphonal)
 Psalms 120-134 - Songs of Ascent (marching songs of pilgrims?)
 Psalm 136 - “The Great Hallel”
 Psalms 113-118 -The Hallel Psalms (songs of praise)
 Psalm 150 - the Doxology

Activities:

1. Point out Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, and a great Hebrew song of praise for the law of their God. It is an example of an octuple acrostic: a method of using the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet for the first eight verses, the second letter for the next set of eight verses, and so on.
2. The word “hallelujah” comes from the Hebrew root word "H-l-l", as does “Tehillim,” the Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms.
3. Add to students’ vocabulary: *penance, contrition, penitence, elegy, and lament.*
4. Use a Tehillim (Book of Hebrew Psalms) to acquaint the students with the viewpoint of the Psalms from that of the Hebrew/Jewish sages and rabbis. HOTS. Perhaps a local rabbi could visit to present his perspective for the class.

Hebrew Songs as a Revelation of their Idealization of Human Behavior & Man's Responsibility

Objective:

To show how the songs of penance and contrition, elegy, and lamentation reveal the Hebrew idealization of human behavior and man's responsibility. To acquire an understanding of the elegy and lament as expressions of man's idealistic nature.

Readings:

Psalms 22, 51, 55, 137, 139
I Samuel 1:19-26
II Kings 25:8-9
Isaiah 28:23-29
Jeremiah 52:12-13
Lamentations 3:18-32
Joel 2:21-23

Activities:

1. Explain *idealism*. Read aloud some of the selections designated as elegiac and ask students to reflect upon and provide answers as to how and why these kinds of poems are said to express the idealistic side of man? HOTS.
2. Explain what it means to *lament* something. Most biblical scholars accept that the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah was the author of the Book of Lamentations. According to the biblical account (2 Chronicles 36 and Jeremiah), he prophesied in the kingdom of Judah as Jerusalem and the temple were being devastated, and his people hauled away into the Babylonian captivity as a consequence of their sins. Yet, remarkably, in the midst of the suffering, the text suggests that Jeremiah celebrated the faithfulness and unfailing love of his God. (Lamentations 3:22-32). Ask students to discuss what this reveals about the attitude, philosophy or theology of the biblical figure Jeremiah. How does this attitude compare to that of a previously-studied biblical figure, Job? How does the text reflect that their situations were similar or distinctive?

The SONG of SOLOMON (SONG OF SONGS)

Objective:

To learn that this great collection of “love” songs is eloquent and intense in its description of human love. To see the background and the atmosphere of the Song as idyllic and pastoral. To consider the possible purposes for the inclusion of this book in the biblical canon. To become aware of the rich, oriental influences on the Song of Songs.

Readings:

The Song of Songs, King James Version
Abbott, et al, *The Bible Reader: An Interfaith Interpretation*, p. 403 (see enclosed CD ROM).

Comments:

This book is a unique one among the biblical books, because it centers around what is apparently an exclusive love relationship between a man and a woman. Yet, the name “The Song of Songs,” suggests that this book is the best of the 1,005 songs of the wisest biblical figure, Solomon (see I Kings 4:32).

Although most Bible translations ascribe this book’s authorship to Solomon, some scholars and theologians dispute that attribution today. Those who *do* believe the song was written by Solomon argue that its subject references, like plants and animals, would make sense coming from the man whom the Bible records as having maintained horse trades and stables throughout Israel. Moreover, it seems logical that a man who was married to a daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh would reflect such Persian and Egyptian influences in his writing. However, those who doubt Solomon’s authorship argue that a close analysis of the book’s language suggests that it was actually composed at a much later date than the time in which Solomon is thought to have lived.

Analysis of the poem has proven to be a point of controversy also. THE ZONDERVAN PICTORIAL BIBLE DICTIONARY, General Editor: Merrill C. Tenney. Associate Editor, Steven Barabas. Grand Rapids: Zondervan (1963), provides the following summary of the various views with which it is usually held:

1. Allegorical - The view generally held by some Jews and Christians, with the Jews saying it is descriptive of the love of God for his people Israel (Rabbi Akiba in the second century A.D. was an outspoken advocate of this

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viewpoint), and the Christians saying that it is descriptive of the love of Christ for his people, the Church (see Ephesians 5:23-25).

2. Typical - Combines literal and allegorical views, holding to both historical and spiritual aspects of the book.
3. Literal - Presents actual history and nothing more.
4. Dramatic - Not actually labeled drama, since the Hebrews did not use this literary form very much. It is also doubtful that if it were presented as drama, and for no other reason, it would have been included in the canon.
5. Erotic-literary - Holds that the book is a collection of love songs, nothing more. [See Otto Eissefeldt, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, New York: Harper Row (1965)].
6. Liturgical - Borrowed pagan liturgy associated with fertility cults. The question remains why it would have made it into the canon were this so.
7. Didactic-moral - Presents the wonder and purity of true love.

Activities:

1. Review the meaning of the terms *idyl* and *pastoral*. How does this book fit these terms? HOTS.
2. Read Chapter 2 aloud in class and point out the great number of plays, novels, hymns, etc., which have come from this one chapter:

The Little Foxes, *Our Vines Have Tender Grapes*, the character Rose of Sharon in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*(1939), the hymns *The Lily of the Valley*, *The Rose of Sharon*, etc.

Poetry in the New Testament

Objective:

To trace elements of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament style, language, and imagery in New Testament poetry. To understand why Luke's Gospel is considered by some to be one of the most beautiful of all books. To see the influence of New Testament poetry on the fine arts.

Readings:

Luke 1:46-55, the Magnificat (Mary)

Luke 1:68-79, the Benedictus, the Song of Zacharias

Luke 6:20-23, the Beatitudes

Luke 2:29-32, the Nuno Dimittus, the Song of Simeon

Activities:

1. Review the story in Luke 1 as the background for the Song of Mary, "The Magnificat."
2. Read "The Magnificat" and Hannah's "Song" in I Samuel 2:1-10, and have students discuss what similarities they observe.

Allegory in the Bible

Objective:

To examine some Old Testament allegories as a distinct form of writing and teaching. To see the place of the allegory in the New Testament book of John. To stimulate students' discussion and contributions from outside reading.

Readings:

Psalm 128:3
Ezekiel 15, The Useless Vine
Ezekiel 16, The Unfaithful Lover
Ezekiel 17, The Eagles and the Vine
Ezekiel 19, The Lion's Whelp (two elegies in allegorical form -also classified as parables by other sources)
Ezekiel 23, The Two Unchaste Sisters
Ezekiel 24, The Rusty and/or Boiling Cauldron
Ezekiel 27-28, The Ship Tyre
John's Gospel
Romans 11:16-24, The Olive Tree and the Branches
Galatians 4:22-31, The children of the bondwoman and the free woman
Creative Religious Literature, Culler (now out of print)
Biblical Patterns in Modern Literature, Fairman, Marion, p. 67-83

Activities:

1. Review the terms: *allegory*, *metaphor*, *simile*, and *personification*. Introduce material on the definition of allegory.

An *allegory* is: "A form of extended metaphor in which objects and persons in a narrative, either in prose or verse, are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. Thus, it represents one thing in the guise of another - an abstraction in that of a concrete image. The characters are usually *personifications* of abstract qualities - the characters, events, and setting may be historical, fictitious, or fabulous [resembling a fable]; the test is that these materials be so employed in a logical pattern that they represent meanings independent of the action described in the surface story. Such meaning may be religious, moral, political, personal, or satiric[al]."

- *Handbook To Literature*, Thrail, Hibbard and Holman, p. 7-8

Anagoge, a form of allegory, is given by the same authors named above as the “mystical or spiritual meaning of words or passages.” It is the highest of the four “senses of interpretation,” the others being the literal, the allegorical, and the moral.

For example, Jerusalem is *literally* a city in Israel; *morally*, the believing soul, and *anagogically* the heavenly City of God.

We can see these uses clearly in such works as Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (c. 1306) and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678).

2. Read in class some of the allegories given under readings suggested above, and have students locate examples of allegory as defined above. Call attention to the fact, though disputed by others, one scholar (Pfeiffer, *The Books of the Old Testament*, p. 287) has argued that Ezekiel’s pictures are so vivid and natural, and the details of the ship in Ezekiel 27 so true to life, that, together with the *Odyssey* and with Acts 27, it is one of the most important sources for our knowledge of ancient navigation. HOTS.
3. Students may bring in additional outside-reading allegories. One of the best choices is the aforementioned *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan, because of its clear allegorical elements. An excerpt:

“...I, writing of the way
And race of saints in this our gospel-day,
Fell suddenly into an allegory
About their journey, and the way to glory, . . .”

-John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress, Part I, “The Author’s Apology for His Book,”* p.1 (1678).

4. For more advance students, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) might be suggested. *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville (1851) also lends itself well to an allegorical comparison to the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament. HOTS.
5. Read Galatians 4:24-31 as a further example of allegory in the New Testament. Assign as reading the Book of James, and inform students to be conscious of short, pithy sayings that are “proverbial” in style.

Shakespeare & THE BIBLE

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born in Stratford-on-Avon, April 1564, to parents Mary Arden and John Shakespeare, a successful and prominent alderman. Little is known about his upbringing, but there does exist a written record of his customary Christian baptism as an infant at the Holy Trinity parish church.¹ All that we know of his formal education is a presumption that he attended the Stratford Grammar School.² He did not begin to emerge as a recognized actor, poet, and playwright until sometime around the year 1589.³

Much has been written about the significance of Shakespeare's frequent use of, and references to, the Bible in his works of great literature. It seems clear that he must have extensively studied the Bible as a young man. Since the King James Version was not produced until 1611, he would have read an earlier translation. (See curriculum, pp. 38-47, for a review of the history of the English Bible.) Dr. Donald King, Editor of *Christian Scholar's Review*, offers the following perspective:⁴

Shakespeare, born in 1564, probably was exposed to the Great Bible, the Bishop's Bible, and the Geneva Bible. A close study of his use of Scripture in his work confirms that he probably learned the Bible through the Geneva version. Thomas Carter in *Shakespeare and Holy Scripture* [New York: AMS Press, 1970 (1905)] argues that "no writer has assimilated the thoughts and reproduced the words of Holy Scripture more copiously than Shakespeare." . . .

Carter further argues that Shakespeare's plays demonstrate a mind "richly stored with the thoughts and words of the English Bible." He then infers that Shakespeare probably gained this knowledge in childhood as that is the time we most easily become grounded in memorizing Scripture. Yet his familiarity with the Bible neither means he always uses it in a religious sense nor that he was a Christian – it is never good literary criticism to take the words of an author's characters and ascribe them to the author.

¹ *Shakespeare of Stratford*, <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography>; The Literature Network, Jalic LLC (2000), <http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ See Commentaries, <http://www.montreat.edu/dking/Shakespeare/SHAKESPEAREANDTHEBIBLE.htm>.

According to Peter Milward (*Shakespeare's Religious Background*, 1973), Shakespeare's familiarity with the Bible is extensive. There is hardly a book in the OT or NT which is not represented in his plays; this argues for his close knowledge of Scripture. The books he seems to have known most thoroughly, even in places by heart, are Genesis, Job, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Matthew, Luke, and Romans. In his use of them he does not merely borrow an occasional phrase or allusion for enrichment of the dramatic language, but he derives the central ideas and images that run through all his plays. It might be possible to characterize each stage of his dramatic development in terms of some major biblical influence.

The comedies, Milward says, turn on the great texts on marriage from Genesis, Matthew, and Ephesians; the history plays on the treatment of kingship as a sacred institution in the books of Samuel; the problem plays, on the Pauline theology of sin and redemption; the great tragedies on the accounts of Adam's sin and the passion of Christ; the romances on Christ's teaching of forgiveness and Paul's proclamation of new life in Jesus Christ. Each play, of course, treats a secular subject in a secular way, but its thought is invariably charged with religious overtones, largely in virtue of the frequent though subtle Biblical allusions. In brief, it may be said that Shakespeare's view of human life is neither more nor less than the Biblical view...

Indeed, Shakespeare did not merely quote the Bible, but made a myriad of allusions that revealed his extensive knowledge and understanding of its contents. In his three authoritative books on the subject, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Comedies*, U. of Delaware Press (1993), ... *Histories* (1989), and ... *Tragedies* (1987), noted expert Naseeb Shaheen "finds more than 1,300 biblical references, an average of almost 40 per play. In the 12 Comedies, Shaheen finds 371 biblical or liturgical references. These references are established by locating key phrases or idioms of a distinctively biblical origin. Because such phrases often recur in more than one biblical verse, the references yield a total of 1,202 potential source listings in Shaheen's appendices."⁵

In his Preface to *Cromwell* (1827), Victor Marie Hugo [author of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) and *Les Miserables* (1862)] wrote: "Lastly, this threefold poetry flows from three great sources-The Bible, Homer, Shakespeare... The Bible before the *Iliad*, the *Iliad* before Shakespeare." Hugo is said to have also famously stated: "England has two books, the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England." ▪

⁵ Review by Roger Stritmatter, *Elizabethan Review*, <http://cc.msnsnscache.com/cache.aspx?q=2130641817596&lang=en-US&FORM=CVRE>.

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Three Examples of William Shakespeare's Allusions to the Bible

- * The biblical source of Hamlet's *Apologia Laertes* (V. i. 226-239) is Romans 7:20.
- * *Speed and Proteus'* lengthy comical interlude (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I. i. 73-100) about the sheep which "follows the shepherd for food" is based upon Ezekiel 34.
- * The primary source of Portia's *Little Candle* (MV, v. i. 91) is Philippians 2:15.

Shakespeare & THE BIBLE

Answer the following questions regarding your readings and discussions about William Shakespeare's frequent use of biblical allusion in his great works of literature.

1. What evidences do you find in Shakespeare's writing of his use of the Bible? (Give name of play, scene, event, and/or quote.)
2. What passage in the Bible does he reference in this particular scene, conversation, or event? (Give the Bible reference)
3. What was he trying to convey to the reader? (Example: A warning? A fact? An example? A truth?)
4. What was the impact of his use of this Bible reference on the character or characters involved?

Activities:

1. Prepare a written character analysis of a character referenced in #4 above.
2. Write a short play or story which incorporates a biblical reference or allusion.
3. *Interesting facts:* The King James Bible is said to be composed using approximately 8,000 different words. It is estimated that the average American has a vocabulary of 15,000 words. Shakespeare's works employ the use of over 30,000 different words.

Complete a word study of unusual Shakespearian word usages, or, create a list of at least ten new words with which you were previously unfamiliar. Look up and list their definitions, and use each one in a sentence.