

Humanities Elective: Reading the Qur'an

Spring 2015

MWF, 1:45-3:05

TBD Classroom

Instructor: Adam Kotsko, a.kotsko@shimer.edu

Course Introduction

This course is an intensive study of the Holy Book of Islam, the Qur'an. Revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the early 600s, the Qur'an decisively shaped Islamic society, law, and literature as well as religious practices and beliefs. Among Muslims, the original Arabic text is considered a miracle in itself, a word of literary beauty on par with how English-speakers might think of a combination of Shakespeare and the King James Bible.

This semester, we will read through the entire text of the Qur'an in English translation, generally following an approximation of the chronological order of their revelation, accompanied by selected classical Islamic commentaries as well as contemporary scholarship.

Course Goals

After completing this course, students will be able to

- give an account of the content, themes, and literary style of the Qur'an
- make use of classical Qur'anic commentaries in coming to a deeper understanding of the text
- use and evaluate contemporary scholarly work on the Qur'an
- relate key stories in the Qur'an to previous versions that appear in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament
- relate and assess differing views on the historical and theological place of women in Islamic society in light of the Qur'an

Required Readings

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Amana Publications, 1997).

Asma Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Texas UP, 2002).

Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi, and Farhana Mayer, eds., *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Volume 1: On the Nature of the Divine* (Oxford UP, 2008).

Sells, Michael, ed. and trans., *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, 2nd ed. (White Cloud Press, 2007).

Additional readings will be provided as hand-outs.

Course Requirements

Grading: Students will be graded based on their class participation (50%), two oral presentations (25%, or 12.5% each), and a final paper (25%).

Class participation: Come to class prepared. This means that you've not only read the assigned text but that you've marked important passages, jotted down questions, and prepared some notes from which to initiate a discussion. Keep in mind that a fruitful discussion must go beyond

individual achievements to develop into a cohesive group activity. Students will be graded not only on the quantity and content of their remarks in class, but also on their contribution to the overall learning environment in the classroom.

This course will follow the standard Shimer attendance policy—more than four absences may be grounds for failing the course, and each absence will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

Class presentations: Students will be required to prepare two brief in-class presentations. These presentations will take place on days for which the Qur'an itself is our primary reading; students must sign up ahead of time. These presentations should consist of a written paper of 600-900 words (approximately 2-3 double-spaced pages using standard fonts and margins), submitted to the professor ahead of time and presented in class. In addition to presenting your paper, you should be prepared to answer questions from your fellow students in class.

Presentations should focus on a particular passage from the day's reading that you found puzzling or otherwise worthy of further investigation. You may draw on one of the tafsir commentaries available at <http://www.altafsir.com> (I will send a more precise address via e-mail early in the semester), a translation of the Qur'an other than the one assigned for class (I will have the translations of Laleh Baktiar, Ahmed Ali, and Muhammad Asad on hand for students to borrow), a passage from the Hebrew Bible or New Testament relating a version of the same story, or a scholarly article retrieved from one of the library databases. You should give an account of what additional insight your research provided and, if applicable, what significant questions still remain for you.

Final paper: Students will be required to complete a paper of 1800-2400 words (approximately 6-8 double-spaced pages using standard fonts and margins). You may, but need not, make use of contemporary scholarly literature, properly cited in either MLA or University of Chicago format. In any case, students are strongly urged to discuss their paper topics with the professor early and often.

All written work must be submitted via e-mail by the deadline stated in the class schedule below. Papers submitted by the deadline may be rewritten for a higher grade. If you submit a printed copy on time, your paper will count as being on time, but you must submit an e-mail copy as soon as possible—the professor will not grade or respond to any printed work. All papers should be submitted in ***a format compatible with Microsoft Word or Libre Office*** (.doc, .docx, .rtf., or .odt); please **do not** submit papers in Pages or PDF format.

Tentative Course Schedule and Readings

Handouts are marked as follows: (**). Selections from the Qur'an are marked with a "Q," and the number of the sura (or chapter). Selections from *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries* are marked with "AQC."

Wednesday	January 14	Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur'an</i> , Preface, Introduction, "Sura of the Compassionate"
Friday	January 16	Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur'an</i> , pp. 42-91
Monday	January 19	Martin Luther King Day—NO CLASS <i>Suggested background reading:</i> AQC, introduction,

Wednesday	January 21	biographies of Tabari, Tabrisi, Kashani, Fadl Allah Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur'an</i> , pp. 92-141
Friday	January 23	
Monday	January 26	AQC, commentaries on Q112 (read intro, Tabari, Tabrisi, Kashani, Fadl Allah)
Wednesday	January 28	Q38, 50, 53, 68, 72-75, 77, 80
Friday	January 30	Q7, 35-36, 54
Monday	February 2	AQC, commentaries on 54:49 (read intro, Tabari, Tabrisi, Kashani, Fadl Allah)
Wednesday	February 4	Q19-20, 25, 56
Friday	February 6	Q26-28
Monday	February 9	Q10-11
Wednesday	February 11	Q12, 17
Friday	February 13	Q6, 15, 37
Monday	February 16	AQC, commentaries on 6:12 (read intro, Tabari, Tabrisi, Kashani, Fadl Allah)
Wednesday	February 18	Q31, 34, 39-40
Friday	February 20	Dean's Break—NO CLASS
Monday	February 23	Bonus day off—NO CLASS
Wednesday	February 25	Q41-46
Friday	February 27	Q16, 23, 51
Monday	March 2	Q18; Brown, "The Apocalypse of Islam" (**)
Wednesday	March 4	Q14, 21, 32, 52, 71
Friday	March 6	Q29-30, 67, 69, 70, 78-79
Monday	March 9	Q2
Wednesday	March 11	AQC, commentaries on 2:115 (read intro, Tabari, Tabrisi, Kashani, Fadl Allah)
Friday	March 13	AQC, commentaries on 2:225 (read intro, Tabari, Tabrisi, Kashani, Fadl Allah)
Monday	March 16	Spring Break—NO CLASS
Wednesday	March 18	Spring Break—NO CLASS
Friday	March 20	Spring Break—NO CLASS
Monday	March 23	Q4; Baktiar, "The Sublime Quran: The Misinterpretation of Chapter 4 Verse 34" (**)
Wednesday	March 25	Q3

Friday	March 27	Q8-9
Monday	March 30	Q13, 24, 59
Wednesday	April 1	AQC, commentaries on 24:35 (read intro, Tabari, Tabrisi, Kashani, Fadl Allah)
Friday	April 3	Q33, 47, 57, 60, 65, 76
Monday	April 6	Q22, 49, 58, 61-64, 66
Wednesday	April 8	Q5, 48
Friday	April 10	Barlas, ch. 1
Monday	April 13	Barlas, ch. 2
Wednesday	April 15	Barlas, ch. 3
Friday	April 17	Barlas, ch. 4
Monday	April 20	Barlas, ch. 5
Wednesday	April 22	Barlas, chs. 6-7
Friday	April 24	NO CLASS All written work due by the Absolute Deadline.