

# Biblical Influence on Literature: Old Testament

---

## *Three Foundations of Western Culture*

- Greek Philosophy and Education
- Roman Law
- Judeo-Christian Religion

## *Importance of the Bible*

- Central to understanding of other literary works
  - “No text is more deeply imbedded in the literature of the English-speaking world than the King James version of The Holy Bible., but many late 20th century readers have lost the easy familiarity with its stories, phrases, and cadences which was so ordinary to earlier generations. Knowing the central texts of the Old and New Testaments will do far more than equip you to recognize Biblical allusions in literature. It will equip you to understand how the Judeo-Christian scriptures have shaped western culture.” –Dr. Sharon Cassavant
  - World (and especially Western) literature is dominated by **allusions** to the Bible
  - An allusion is a reference to something supposed to be known, but not explicitly mentioned; a covert indication; indirect reference; a hint.

## *History and Structure of the Bible*

- The Bible is composed of two major sections, the Old and New Testaments.
  - Simplistically, the Old Testament is primarily about the establishment of God’s law. The Old Testament is divided into three portions: the Law (Torah), the Prophets, the Writings. The Old Testament was **canonized**, or fixed, between 200 BCE and 200 CE.
  - Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, though some portions were written in Aramaic.
  - The Old Testament establishes the creation of the universe and the centrality of God’s law.
  - The New Testament, which was probably written in Greek originally, were probably completed and canonized by about 150 CE.
  - The New Testament is primarily devoted to exploration of the life of Jesus Christ in the **Gospels**.

## *The Creation Story*

- Major Themes
  - There is only one God, who is responsible for the creation of the universe and all within it.
  - God is a personal being, one who is described in anthropomorphic terms.
  - Humans are created in the image of God.
  - Humans have Dominion Over Animals
  - Man’s Domination of Womyn?
  - The Fall from Grace
    - Humans existed in a state of perfection when originally created. Their sin, consuming fruit from the forbidden tree, was the **Original Sin**, a sin that was passed on to all descendants of Adam and Eve.

# Biblical Influence on Literature: Old Testament

---

- As a result, all humans would know death, sin, and pain. Womyn in particular were afflicted with pain associated with childbirth.
- Cain and Abel.
  - Adam and Eve initially have two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain grows envious of the favor found by his brother before God, and slays him. The first murder is that of a brother.
- Textual Differences
  - The story in Genesis is likely the result of a combination of sources. It explains apparent repetition and contradiction in the opening.

## *The Flood*

- Displeased with the sin on Earth, possibly the result of a union of fallen angels and humans, God decides to destroy creation, except for one family.
- Noah (the most righteous man living) and his family are spared death when they construct an Ark. In this boat, they (and sets of animals of all kinds) survive the flood.
- When the flood ends, God enters into a **covenant**, or promise, with Noah and all of his descendants, promising never to destroy the world utterly again.
- The Flood story is common to almost every culture living near the Mediterranean.

## *The Book of Ruth*

- Story

Ruth ("Compassion", is a Moabite woman whose father-in-law, Elimelech, had settled in the land of Moab. Elimelech died there, and his two sons married, Mahlon taking Ruth as his wife, and Chilion taking Orpah, both women of Moab; both sons likewise died. Naomi heard that the famine in Judah had passed, and determined to return. Ruth accompanied her mother-in-law to Bethlehem, at the beginning of barley harvest, in a state of poverty. Elimelech had had an inheritance of land among his brethren, but, unless a Go'el, a redeemer, could be found, Naomi would be compelled to sell it. Elimelech had a prosperous relative in Bethlehem whose name was Boaz, and who was engaged in the harvest. Naomi sent Ruth to glean in his fields, and, after he had spoken kindly to her and shown her some favors, Boaz was attracted to her, but informed her that there was a kinsman nearer than he who had the first right to redeem the estate of Elimelech, and that it would be necessary for that kinsman to renounce his right before he (Boaz) could proceed in the matter. Accordingly Boaz called this kinsman, and told him of the situation, and of the kinsman's right to redeem the estate and to marry Ruth. The kinsman declared that he did not desire to do so, and drew off his shoe, the ritual way of showing that he had renounced his rights in favor of Boaz. Boaz thereupon bought the estate from Naomi, married Ruth, and became by her the father of Obed, who in due time became the father of Jesse, the father of King David. (from the Wikipedia)
- Significance
  - Illustrates the importance of submission to God. His will is the most important thing. The suffering of Naomi and her willingness to bear it are signs of proper submission to God.
  - This submission, however, is not seen as negative. Hebrew religion and literary works emphasized the importance of submission to God, who will ultimately provide for all of his people.

# Biblical Influence on Literature: Old Testament

---