

The Hebrew Bible

Religion 112

Classroom: 111 Comenius Hall

Class times: TTh 10:20am-11:30am

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Blackboard TBA

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Office: 202 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314

Office Hours: MWF 1:40-2:40pm

and by appointment.

Course Content

The Hebrew Bible, called the Old Testament in Christian tradition and the Tanakh in Jewish tradition, is a foundational set of texts not just for those two religions, but also for western civilization in general. The purpose of this course is to introduce the literature and historical context of the Hebrew Bible utilizing the methods of modern critical scholarship. The various genres of literature in the text will be explored, as well as the distinct and often sharply divergent points of view of the biblical authors. We will be looking at the text from both religious and scientific perspectives, utilizing the latest in archaeological and historical discoveries. The textbooks assigned for this class present scholarly views of the text from Jewish and Christian perspectives, and will allow us to see how the text is read in its two primary religious communities. Biblical study is a dynamic and ever-changing field, so we can expect new discoveries to appear even in this semester!

Goals of the Course

- 1) *Biblical Literacy:* The knowledge of significant figures and ideas in the Bible, biblical literacy is declining in American society even as the Bible continues to be drawn into social and political discussions, often with little knowledge of its actual contents. Students in this course will learn biblical literacy, a vital area of knowledge for full participation in today's public discourse.
- 2) *A Comprehensive Knowledge of the Individual Biblical Books:* Students in this course will be able to distinguish each biblical book from the others, for example knowing the differences between I Kings and II Kings, Jeremiah from Zechariah, etc.
- 3) *The Academic, Scholarly Method of Biblical Criticism:* While many students may be familiar with the methods of reading the Bible in faith communities, this course will introduce the critical methods of modern academic scholarship (see "Approach" below for further details). Students in this course will learn how to use the critical method to uncover the history, ideologies, and theologies in the biblical texts.
- 4) *Close Reading Skills:* Many of the most interesting and revealing details within the Bible are missed by readers not reading closely. This course will demonstrate the methods of close reading, wherein small details are brought to the surface rather than glossed over. This skill is useful in a virtually limitless range of life tasks.

5) *Analysis of Contrasting Arguments*: This course will be examining the Hebrew Bible from three general perspectives: Historical/Critical, Jewish, and Christian. Students in this course will enhance their skills in distinguishing these positions and understanding the complex arguments that they bring to the text. Students will learn how to read sophisticated arguments and come to their own conclusion.

Approach

The approach will be literary and historical, not religious, as the Hebrew Bible will be studied like any other work of ancient literature. This course will employ the scholarly, academic approach of biblical criticism, without privileging any particular religious view. “Biblical criticism” does not refer to negatively criticizing the Bible, but instead to the careful analysis of biblical texts using the most current methods from a variety of disciplines. This approach, used in biblical criticism in colleges and universities around the world, attempts to be as neutral as possible, and to let the biblical texts speak for themselves, even if it runs counter to later religious traditions. While you are not required to agree with the presentations of the Hebrew Bible in this class, you are required to understand them and be able to demonstrate that understanding in exams.

Required Texts

- 1) The New Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible, with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (Oxford University Press).
- 2) *How to Read the Jewish Bible* by Marc Zvi Brettler, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- 3) *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann, Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Grading and Class Policies

- 1) Five exams, a mix of essay and short-answer, each worth 15%.
- 2) Bi-weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), generally assigned on Fridays and due on Mondays. The essays will be based on questions drawn from the textbook that I will give out. 20% of the grade altogether. Consult the Student Handbook for the academic honesty policy.
- 3) Active, in-class participation: 5%. Cell phones must be silenced in class.
- 4) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the syllabus; that is, before class.
- 5) Attendance. After three unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence.
- 6) It is within the instructor’s purview to apply qualitative judgment in

- determining grades for an assignment or for the course.
- 7) Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

Lecture and Readings Schedule

Introduction and Orientation	January 20 th
The Structures of the Hebrew Bible: Canons “Tanakh” and “Old Testament.”	
Torah/Pentateuch	
Genesis and the Creations of the World	January 22 nd
<i>Readings:</i> Genesis 1:1-5:32, Brettler chapters 2-6	
The Flood	January 27 th
<i>Readings:</i> Genesis 6-11, Brueggemann chapter 2	
The Chosen Family	January 29 th
<i>Readings:</i> Genesis 12-50, Brettler ch. 7, Brueggemann ch. 3	
The Exodus	February 3 rd
<i>Readings:</i> Exodus 1-19, Brueggemann ch. 4	
The Law	February 5 th
<i>Readings:</i> Exodus 20-24, Leviticus 11-12, 15, 18-20, 23-24 Brettler chapters 8-9, Brueggemann chapters 4-6	
Trouble in the Wilderness	February 10 th
<i>Readings:</i> Exodus 32-34, Numbers 5-6, 10-14, 16, 20-25, 27, 31-33, 36. Brueggemann chapters 4-6	
Deuteronomy	February 12 th
<i>Readings:</i> Deuteronomy 1-6, 11-13, 18, 21-25, 28, 31-34 Brettler chapters 1 and 10, Brueggemann chapters 1, 7, 8.	
Torah Exam	February 17 th
The Histories of Israel	
The Conquest of the Land	February 19 th
<i>Readings:</i> Joshua 1-13, Brettler chapter 11.	
Victories and Collapse in the Land	February 24 th

<i>Readings:</i> Judges, Brueggemann ch. 11	
The First King of Israel <i>Readings:</i> I Samuel, Brettler chapter 12	February 26 th
The Reign of David <i>Readings:</i> II Samuel, I Chronicles 21, Brueggemann chapter 12	March 10 th
The Reign of Solomon and the Division of the Kingdom <i>Readings:</i> I Kings, Brettler chapter 13	March 12 th
The Fall of the Two Kingdoms <i>Readings:</i> II Kings, II Chronicles 33, Brettler ch. 14	March 17 th
The Exile and Return <i>Readings:</i> Ezra, Nehemiah, Brueggemann chapter 26.	March 19 th
Historical Books Exam	March 24 th
Prophecy	
The Eighth-Century Prophets <i>Readings:</i> Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-11 Brettler chapters 15-17, Brueggemann pages 214-219, 223-228.	March 26 th
Exilic Prophecy <i>Readings:</i> Jeremiah 1-8, 28-29, Habakkuk, Ezekiel 1-7, 37 Brettler chapters 18-19, Brueggemann chapters 15-16.	March 31 st
Post-Exilic Prophecy <i>Readings:</i> Isaiah 40-55, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi Brettler chapter 20, Brueggemann chapters 14 and 19.	April 2 nd
Prophecy exam	April 7 th
Wisdom and Song	
Poetry <i>Readings:</i> Psalms 1-23, Lamentations, Song of Solomon Brettler chapter 22 and 25, Brueggemann chapter 21.	April 9 th
Proverbs <i>Readings:</i> Proverbs 1-15, Brettler chapter 23.	April 14 th
Ecclesiastes <i>Readings:</i> Ecclesiastes, Brueggemann pp. 319-320, 329-334.	April 16 th

Job April 21st
Readings: Job 1-10, 38-42, Brettler chapter 24, Brueggemann chapter 22,

Wisdom and Poetry Exam April 23rd

Novellas and Other Writings

Ruth and Esther April 28th
Readings: Ruth, Esther, Brettler ch. 26, Brueggemann pp. 320-323, 343-349

Apocalypticism and Diaspora April 30th
Readings: Daniel, Brettler chapters 21 and 27 and afterward, Brueggemann chapters 25 and 29.

Final exam 1:30pm May 8th