

The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Religion 112

Classroom: 218 Comenius Hall

Class times: MW 1:10–2:20

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Office: 202 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314

Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30pm
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, 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.
- 2) Generally bi-weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), assigned on Wednesdays and due on Mondays. The essays will be based on questions drawn from the textbook that I will give out. Grading will be based on an average of the exams altogether, averaged with the essays, which will count altogether as the value of two exams. Plagiarized papers will receive F grades, and will result in a one-letter grade reduction for your course grade overall at least, and a failing grade in the class at most. 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.

- 3) Active, in-class participation is important. Cell phones must be silenced in class and texting in class is not allowed.
- 4) Attendance. After two 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.

Lecture and Readings Schedule

Introduction and Orientation

August 30th

The Structures of the Hebrew Bible: Canons
“Tanakh” and “Old Testament.”

Torah/Pentateuch

Genesis and the Creations of the World

September 2nd

Readings: Genesis 1:1-5:32, Brettler chapters 2-6

The Flood

September 8th

Readings: Genesis 6-11, Brueggemann chapter 2

The Chosen Family

September 13th

Readings: Genesis 12-50, Brettler ch. 7, Brueggemann ch. 3

The Exodus

September 15th

Readings: Exodus 1-19, Brueggemann ch. 4

The Law

September 20th

Readings: Exodus 20-24, Leviticus 11-12, 15, 18-20, 23-24
Brettler chapters 8-9, Brueggemann chapters 4-6

Trouble in the Wilderness

September 22nd

Readings: Exodus 32-34, Numbers 5-6, 10-14, 16, 20-25, 27, 31-33, 36.
Brueggemann chapters 4-6

Deuteronomy

September 27th

Readings: Deuteronomy 1-6, 11-13, 18, 21-25, 28, 31-34
Brettler chapters 1 and 10, Brueggemann chapters 1, 7, 8.

Torah/Pentateuch Exam

September 29th

The Histories of Israel

The Conquest of the Land

October 4th

Readings: Joshua 1-13, Brettler chapter 11.

Victories and Collapse in the Land

October 6th

Readings: Judges, Brueggemann ch. 11

The First King of Israel <i>Readings:</i> I Samuel, Brettler chapter 12	October 13 th
The Reign of David <i>Readings:</i> II Samuel, I Chronicles 21, Brueggemann chapter 12	October 18 th
The Reign of Solomon and the Division of the Kingdom <i>Readings:</i> I Kings, Brettler chapter 13	October 20 th
The Fall of the Two Kingdoms <i>Readings:</i> II Kings, II Chronicles 33, Brettler ch. 14	October 25 th
The Exile and Return <i>Readings:</i> Ezra, Nehemiah, Brueggemann chapter 26.	October 27 th
Historical Books Exam	November 1 st
Prophecy	
The Eighth-Century Prophets <i>Readings:</i> Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-11 Brettler chapters 15-17, Brueggemann pages 214-219, 223-228.	November 3 rd
Exilic Prophecy <i>Readings:</i> Jeremiah 1-8, 28-29, Habakkuk, Ezekiel 1-7, 37 Brettler chapters 18-19, Brueggemann chapters 15-16.	November 8 th
Post-Exilic Prophecy <i>Readings:</i> Isaiah 40-55, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi Brettler chapter 20, Brueggemann chapters 14 and 19.	November 10 th
Prophecy exam	November 15 th
Wisdom and Song	
Poetry <i>Readings:</i> Psalms 1-23, Lamentations, Song of Solomon Brettler chapter 22 and 25, Brueggemann chapter 21.	November 17 th
Proverbs <i>Readings:</i> Proverbs 1-15, Brettler chapter 23.	November 29 th
Ecclesiastes and Job <i>Readings:</i> Ecclesiastes and Job 1-10, 38-42, Brettler chapter 24, Brueggemann chapter 22 and pp. 319-320, 329-334.	December 1 st

Wisdom and Poetry Exam

December 6th

Novellas and Other Writings

Ruth, Esther, Daniel

December 8th

Readings: Ruth, Esther, Daniel; Brettler chs. 21, 26, 27; Brueggemann pp. 320-323, 343-349, and chapters 25 and 29.

Final exam

8:30am!

December 16th