

The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Religion 112

Classroom: 105 Comenius Hall

Class times: MW 1:10-2:20

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Office: 108 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314

Office Hours: M-Th 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) Four 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 Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

- 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 27 th
The Structures of the Hebrew Bible: Canons “Tanakh” and “Old Testament.”	
Torah/Pentateuch	
Genesis and the Creations of the World	August 29 th
<i>Readings:</i> Genesis 1:1-5:32, Brettler chapters 2-6	
The Flood	September 5 th
<i>Readings:</i> Genesis 6-11, Brueggemann chapter 2	
The Chosen Family	September 10 th
<i>Readings:</i> Genesis 12-50, Brettler ch. 7, Brueggemann ch. 3	
The Exodus	September 12 th
<i>Readings:</i> Exodus 1-19, Brueggemann ch. 4	
No class on September 17 th for Rosh HaShanah	
The Law	September 19 th
<i>Readings:</i> Exodus 20-24, Leviticus 11-12, 15, 18-20, 23-24 Brettler chapters 8-9, Brueggemann chapters 4-6	
First Exam, Torah Sources	
Trouble in the Wilderness	September 24 th
<i>Readings:</i> Exodus 32-34, Numbers 5-6, 10-14, 16, 20-25, 27, 31-33, 36. Brueggemann chapters 4-6	
No class on September 26 th for Yom Kippur	
Deuteronomy	October 1 st
<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 law, continued	October 3 rd

The Histories of Israel

The Conquest of the Land <i>Readings:</i> Joshua 1-13, Brettler chapter 11.	October 10 th
Second Exam, Torah law	
Victories and Collapse in the Land <i>Readings:</i> Judges, Brueggemann ch. 11	October 15 th
The First King of Israel <i>Readings:</i> I Samuel, Brettler chapter 12	October 17 th
The Reign of David <i>Readings:</i> II Samuel, I Chronicles 21, Brueggemann chapter 12	October 22 nd
The Reign of Solomon and the Division of the Kingdom <i>Readings:</i> I Kings, Brettler chapter 13	October 24 th
The Fall of the Two Kingdoms <i>Readings:</i> II Kings, II Chronicles 33, Brettler ch. 14	October 29 th
The Exile and Return <i>Readings:</i> Ezra, Nehemiah, Brueggemann chapter 26.	October 31 st
Historical Books Exam	November 5 th

Prophecy

The Eighth-Century Prophets <i>Readings:</i> Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-11 Brettler chapters 15-17, Brueggemann pages 214-219, 223-228.	November 7 th
Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophecy <i>Readings:</i> Jeremiah 1-8, 28-29, Habakkuk, Ezekiel 1-7, 37, Isaiah 40-55, Haggai, Zechariah Brettler chapters 18-20, Brueggemann chapters 14-16, 19.	November 12 th

Wisdom and Song

Poetry <i>Readings:</i> Psalms 1-23, Lamentations, Song of Solomon Brettler chapter 22 and 25, Brueggemann chapter 21.	November 14 th
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No class on November 19th or 21st due to Society of Biblical Literature conference

Proverbs

November 26th

Readings: Proverbs 1-15, Brettler chapter 23.

Ecclesiastes and Job

November 28th

Readings: Ecclesiastes and Job 1-10, 38-42, Brettler chapter 24, Brueggemann chapter 22 and pp. 319-320, 329-334.

Wisdom and Poetry continued

December 3rd

Novellas and Other Writings

Ruth, Esther, Daniel

December 5th

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

Final exam

1:30pm

December 11th