

# The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

**Religion 112**

**Classroom:** 302 Memorial Hall

**Class times:** TTh 1:10-2:20pm

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**Office:** 108 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314

**Office Hours:** Monday 1:30-2:30

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) *Introducing the Old Testament: A Short Guide to its History and Message* by Tremper Longman III, Zondervan Press, 2012.

### **Grading and Class Policies**

- 1) Four exams, a mix of essay and short answer. Generally bi-weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), assigned on Thursdays and due on Tuesdays. 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 Ms. Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Academic & Disability Support, located on the first floor of Monocacy Hall (extension 1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic & Disability Support office.
- 2) Active, in-class participation is important. Cell phones must be silenced in class and texting in class is not allowed.

- 3) 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

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

## **The Histories of Israel**

The Conquest of the Land <i>Readings:</i> Joshua 1-13, Brettler chapter 11, Longman chapter 7.	February 24 <sup>th</sup>
Second Exam, Torah law	
Victories and Collapse in the Land <i>Readings:</i> Judges, Longman chapter 8.	February 26 <sup>th</sup>
The First King of Israel <i>Readings:</i> I Samuel, Brettler chapter 14.	March 3 <sup>rd</sup>
The Reign of David <i>Readings:</i> II Samuel, I Chronicles 21, Longman chapter 10.	March 5 <sup>th</sup>
The Reign of Solomon and the Division of the Kingdom <i>Readings:</i> I Kings, Brettler chapter 15.	March 17 <sup>th</sup>
The Fall of the Two Kingdoms <i>Readings:</i> II Kings, II Chronicles 33, Brettler ch. 14, Longman 11-12.	March 19 <sup>th</sup>
The Exile and Return <i>Readings:</i> Ezra, Nehemiah, Longman chapter 13, and pp. 84-85.	March 24 <sup>th</sup>
Historical Books Exam	March 26 <sup>th</sup>

## **Prophecy**

The Eighth-Century Prophets <i>Readings:</i> Amos, Hosea, Brettler 15-16, Longman 25, 27, 30.	March 31 <sup>st</sup>
Isaiah of Jerusalem <i>Readings:</i> Isaiah 1-11, Brettler 17, Longman 20.	April 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Exilic Prophecy <i>Readings:</i> Jeremiah 1-8, 28-29, Habakkuk, Ezekiel 1-7, 37 Brettler chapters 18-19, Longman 21, 23, 28, 31, 32, 33.	April 7 <sup>th</sup>
Post-Exilic Prophecy <i>Readings:</i> Isaiah 40-55, Haggai, Zechariah Brettler chapters 20-21, Longman 26, 34, 35, 36.	April 9 <sup>th</sup>

## Wisdom and Song

Poetry	April 14 <sup>th</sup>
<i>Readings:</i> Psalms 1-23, Lamentations, Song of Solomon Brettler chapters 22 and 25, Longman chapters 16, 19, 22.	
Proverbs	April 16 <sup>th</sup>
<i>Readings:</i> Proverbs 1-15, Brettler chapter 23, Longman chapter 17.	
Ecclesiastes and Job	April 21 <sup>st</sup>
<i>Readings:</i> Ecclesiastes and Job 1-10, 38-42, Brettler 24, Longman 15, 18.	
Wisdom and Poetry continued	April 23 <sup>rd</sup>

## Novellas and Other Writings

Ruth and Esther	April 28 <sup>th</sup>
<i>Readings:</i> Ruth, Esther; Brettler chapter 26; Longman chapters 9, 14.	
Daniel	April 30 <sup>th</sup>
<i>Readings:</i> Daniel; Brettler chapters 21, 27; Longman chapter 24.	
Final exam	8:30am! Tuesday May 5 <sup>th</sup>