

# Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

## History, Religion, Literature, and Traditions

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### RELI 121

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Saunders Hall XXX

***NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS WAS PUT TOGETHER AS PART OF AN INDEPENDENT STUDY WITH GREG GOERING A FEW YEARS AGO. IT HAS NOT BEEN TAUGHT, AND I THINK WHEN/IF I DO EVER TEACH SUCH A COURSE, I'LL PROBABLY USE A DIFFERENT TEXTBOOK.***

**Class Time:** MWF 10:00-10:50

**Office Hours:** MW 11:00-12:00

### **Course Description**

This course should more appropriately be called “Introduction to the Academic Field of Hebrew Bible and Old Testament Studies.” But this title is too long and less interesting. The object of this class will be to consider a number of approaches to the study of the Hebrew Bible. We will consider (1) the historical setting of its authors, (2) the historicity of the world it describes, (3) the manner by which the text comes down to us, (4) the various methods scholars have studied the Bible, (5) the ways various traditions have used the text throughout history. Because this course is meant as a broad overview, no previous knowledge—either academic or religious—is required or assumed. By the end of the semester, each student should feel confident that they have a *basic* understanding of the biblical text, the history and religion of the ancient Israelites, and the traditions that have adhered to this book over the past two thousand years.

### **Course Objectives**

1. To present an overview of the different aspects of biblical studies.
2. To introduce the history and culture of an ancient and foreign world.
3. To put to the test ANY preconceived notions about the Hebrew Bible.
4. To train in basic historical and literary methodologies.
5. To recruit future scholars in history and religion!

### **Textbooks and Readings**

The weekly reading assignments should be done *in preparation* for lecture or recitation, not afterwards. Recitations in particular depend on each student’s reading prep. You will need to acquire the following:

1. Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. (Abbreviated below as **OT**.)
  2. Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. (Abbreviated below as **OH**.)
  3. A copy of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in either the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) or the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation. (*Do not* use the King James Version in class—it is not a good translation!) I recommend purchasing *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, which uses the NRSV translation, and comes with indices and maps in the back. If you know a little Hebrew, it might be nice to buy the JPS *Tanakh*, since it has Hebrew printed next to the English. (Listed below by the name of each biblical book.)
  4. There will be additional readings on Blackboard. (Abbreviated below as **BB**.)
- The biblical sections assigned for class tend to be very long. I know that you won't have enough time to go through it closely, so you should read for general outline. Try to get a sense of the narratives, rather than reading every word. Think about how the stories fit together (or how they *don't* fit together!). Who are the main players? What are their motives and goals?

## Course Requirements

Attendance: I expect everyone to be in lecture and recitation. If you miss either, it is your responsibility to get the notes from a classmate and/or come to office hours to discuss what you missed. I don't take attendance in lecture. (Since at least 50% of the exam material covers the information given in lecture, I suspect that habitual absenteeism will be reflected in grades anyway.) However, I *do* take attendance in recitation. Since recitations focus on discussions of major issues, rather than strictly information, participation is important.

Recitations: Recitation will meet once a week. Most recitations will have 15-20 students in it. These smaller groups are designed to facilitate discussion and give you a chance to engage your teacher and fellow classmates in open forum. Each week, you will have an assignment which will include a 1-2 page response paper. Please see the recitation list at the end of the syllabus. As stated above, attendance is required for recitation, and class participation will be graded. (If there are any issues regarding class participation, please come see me so that I am aware and will take it into consideration.)

Honor Code: All students are required to uphold the University Honor Code. Any form of cheating devalues the grades of your peers and the integrity of higher education. It will stand as a mark of shame which you will carry for the rest of your life. Students in violation of the Honor Code will be dealt with mercilessly.

## Grading

Final Grade is determined by:

### Recitations

Response papers	15 %
Participation	15 %
Map Quiz	5 %

### Exams

Midterm Exam I	20 %
Midterm Exam II	20 %
Final Exam	25 %

Grading Scale: Letter grades for all assignments and the course are translated as follows:

- A Congratulations! You deserve a pat on the back for truly going out of your way to get the most out of this class. Your work was impressive and you showed a deep understanding of the course material.
- B Good job. You completed all the assignments satisfactorily, and in some cases exceeded the minimum. In addition, you showed a solid interest for the material, however there was probably more you could have done to show independent thinking.
- C You completed all the assignments, but you did not go beyond the bare minimum. You did not show any real interest in the material, however made a reasonable attempt to pass the class.
- D You pass the course, but your performance was unsatisfactory. Little effort was demonstrated in the assignments, and you showed no interest in learning anything useful here.
- F Congratulations! You deserve a pat on the back for truly going out of your way to get the least out of this class. Your work was virtually non-existent and you showed no interest in the course whatsoever.

NOTE: Each of these grades is earned; no one is entitled to any particular grade. There are no “A students,” “B students,” or “C students” in this class. The work you do in fulfillment of the assignments for *this* course only will be reflected in your grade.

Exams: The midterm exams will not be cumulative, however the final exam *will* be cumulative. The format will be the same for all the exams. The essay questions will be taken from the study questions distributed beforehand.

Extra Credit: Extra credit is awarded to students who did not perform as well as they would have liked on the exams. In order to earn extra credit points, you may do any of the following:

- (1) Write a 2-4 page review of any of the books listed under course reserves. The review should include a brief summary of the work, its major argument or thesis,

and its outline. You should evaluate the author's argument and evidence based on what you have learned in class.

- (2) Watch one of the videos listed under the course reserves and write a 1-2 page response in which you briefly summarize the content and give your opinion or reaction.
- (3) Attend a lecture presented outside of class on a topic related to course material, and write a 1-2 page response in which you briefly summarize the speaker's content and give your reaction. Acceptable lectures for this assignment will be announced in lecture and via email.

The book review will earn you the most extra credit, then the video, and lastly the lecture (based on the difficulty and time required to complete assignment).

## Course Reserves

For those interested in doing some further reading on any of the topics in the class, here are some suggestions. You may also want to consult some of these books for your presentation.

- G. Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.
- R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.
- R. Albertz, and B. Becking, *Yahwism After the Exile : Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003.
- J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984.
- J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.
- M.D. Coogan, *Oxford History of the Biblical World*. Oxford: New York, 2001.
- J.L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom : an Introduction*. Rev. and enl. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.
- F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic; Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973.
- W.G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? : What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001.
- I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed : Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: Free Press, 2001.
- K. Koch, *The Prophets*. 1st Fortress Press. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000--586 B.C.E*. New York: Doubleday, 1990.
- E.W. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: the legacy of Julius Wellhausen*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998.
- M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* JSOTSS ; 15 Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1981.

M.A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis : A Reassessment*. Freiburg, Schweiz Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989.

M.S. Smith, *The Early History of God : Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. 2nd. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002.

E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible. the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian periods, 732-332 BCE*. Anchor Bible reference library 1st. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

### **Videos**

*Forbidden Goddess*

# Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

- Class 1            **Introduction: Who, What, Where and When?**
- Class 2            **The Bible in the Ancient Near Eastern World: Creation Myths**  
                      Read: Genesis 1-3  
                                 OT, chs. 1 and 4 (pp. 1-20, 45-62)
- Recitation I**            *History and Religion*
- Class 3            **The Creation of the Canon**  
                      Read: OT, Appendix (pp. 545-49).
- Class 4            **Historical Setting I: Middle Bronze Age – Iron Age I**  
                      Read: OH, ch. 1 (pp. 25-57).  
                                 BB, Assignment 1 (selections from Pritchard, *ANET*)
- Recitation II**            *Geography and Maps*
- Class 5            **The Patriarchs of Canaan**  
                      Read: Genesis 12-50  
                                 OT, ch. 5 (pp. 63-84).
- Class 6            **Out of Egypt? Theories of the Origin of the Israelites**  
                      Read: Exodus 1-15  
                                 OT, ch. 6 (pp. 85-104)  
                                 OH, ch 2 (pp. 58-89).
- Recitation III**            *Conquest of Palestine? Text versus Archaeology*
- Class 7            **The Deuteronomistic History: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges**  
                      Read: OT, chs. 11-12 (pp. 173-209)
- Class 8            **Historical Setting II: Iron Age II (1000-586)**  
                      Read: OH, ch. 4-5 (pp. 132-205)
- Recitation IV**            *Deborah in Israelite History*
- Class 9            **The Deuteronomistic History: 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings**  
                      Read: OT, chs. 14-16 (pp. 231-86)
- Class 10           **The Deuteronomistic History: The Hypothesis**  
                      Read: OT, pp. 287-96, 307-10, 327-46, 349-56.

**\*\*Recitation V**            *Midterm Exam I (on Class 1 – Recitation IV)*

Class 11            **Historical Setting IV: Exile and the Persian Period**

Read: OH, chs.7-8 (pp. 242-316A)

Class 12            **Prophecy I: The Major and Minor Players**

Read: OT, pp. 297-306, 310-25, 346-47, 365-76, 386-97, 408-14, 426-28.

**Recitation VI**            *North and South – The Legacy of the Kingdoms (and map quiz)*

Class 13            **Prophecy III: The Social Dimension of Prophecy**

Read: BB – Selection from R. Wilson’s *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*.

Class 14            **Temple and Tabernacle as Place and Concept**

Read: Exodus 25-27

**Recitation VII**            *Pilgrimage Festivals and Jewish Practice*

Class 15            **The Temple Cult and Priesthood: Leviticus**

Skim: All of Leviticus.

Read: Leviticus 11-15  
OT, ch. 9 (pp. 138-53).

Class 16            **The Documentary Hypothesis – Introduction**

Read: OT, chs. 2-3 (pp. 21-44).

**Recitation VIII**            *Understanding the Documentary Hypothesis*

Class 18            **The Decalogue and the Law**

Read: Ex. 12:12-20; 20:1-23:22. Lev. 11:1-47; 15:1-32.  
OT, ch. 8 (pp. 120-37).

Class 19            **The Rabbinic Tradition and the Hebrew Bible**

Read: Lev. 11:1-47; 15:1-32 (again).  
BB – Neusner article.

**\*\*Recitation IX**            *Midterm Exam II (on Class 10 – Recitation VIII)*

Class 20            **Wisdom and Wise-Guys: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes**

Read: OT, chs. 27-28 (pp. 456-98)

Class 21            **Retelling and Reinterpreting: Chronicles and Para-biblical Literature**

Read: Gen. 5

BB – Selections from I Enoch  
OT, ch. 26 (pp. 446-55)

**Recitation X**      *Theodicy in the Ancient Near East and in Tradition*

Class 22      **Apocalyptic Literature: Daniel and the Second Temple Period**  
Read: OT, chs. 29-30 (pp. 499-544)

Class 23      **Finding the “True Israel”: Early Christianity and the Hebrew Bible**  
Read:

**Recitation XI**      *A New Monotheism in the East*

Class 24      **Textual Criticism and the Hebrew Bible**  
Read: BB – “Bible, Canon, and Text,” pp. 161-81, from L.  
Schiffman’s *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*

Class 25      **The Hebrew Bible in the Modern World**  
Watch: No reading assignment for this class. Instead I’d like you  
to go to the Movie Lab or your nearest video store and watch the  
1956 Charlton Heston classic, *The Ten Commandments*.

**Recitation XII**      *Summing Up and Review for Final*

# Recitations: Topics and Assignments

Response Papers: All response paper for recitation should be typed, double-spaced, and in 12-pt. font. They should be no less than one page and no more than two. Response assignments are to be turned in at the end of each recitation. No email attachments will be considered—paper only. The purpose of the response papers is to compel you to consider the issues raised by the assigned reading and prepare you for the discussions in recitation. Therefore the papers you turn in do not need to be “finished and polished.” Having said that, I expect the papers will be reasonably well-written and thoughtful. These will not be graded heavily, but marked with “S” (= Satisfactory) if you have completed the assignment adequately, or “U” (= Unsatisfactory) if you have not. Any assignment turned in late will automatically be marked “U.” Assignments not turned in at all will receive a zero. If you cannot come to class, you need to get your paper in beforehand, or give it to someone else to turn in for you.

We will make every effort to return your response papers promptly (usually the following week). Please keep a copy on your computer, just in case.

## **Recitation I**            *History, Literature and Religion*

This being the first recitation, your prep work is easy. First, write two questions you have about the Hebrew Bible. What don’t you know and what would you like to learn? Second, *without using a dictionary*, write a definition of “history,” a definition of “literature” and a definition of “religion.”

## **Recitation II**            *Geography and Maps*

Geography determines where we are—maps tell us how we got there. For this recitation please print out Maps 1, 2, and 3 from Blackboard. For your response paper, tell me a little about why you think geography matters. Don’t give me the cliché response that “geography determines history.” Explain why. Think of an example or two from recent history or modern events. (Let me know your brain is working.)

## **Recitation III**            *Conquest of Palestine? Text versus Archaeology*

For over a century, archaeologists and Biblicists have been trying to find evidence of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, as recounted in Joshua and Judges. For this class, you’ll take a look at a few different arguments that try to determine if this account is historically accurate, using both our textual sources and archaeology.

There are two assignments to do in order to prepare for this recitation. First, read through Joshua and Judges. Don't read for detail, just try to get the gist of what they say.

Second, the class has been assigned four different articles. You are only required to read the one assigned to you (though of course you're welcome to read the others if you'd like). I'd like you to write a summary of your article for your response paper, including a short paragraph regarding how well you think the author argued his or her point.

#### **Recitation IV**      *Deborah in Israelite History*

Women in biblical history are general thought to take a subordinate role, however the Song of Deborah in Judges 4-5 is a testament to their prominence and importance in biblical tradition.

For this recitation, start out by reading the Song of Deborah. Then read the passage from J. Cheryl Exum's article, "Feminist Criticism," that I've posted on Blackboard. In your response paper, I'd like you to address Exum's argument, and state where you stand on the issue by answering the question she poses in her title.

#### **Recitation V**      *MID-TERM EXAM I – GOOD LUCK!*

The exam will cover everything from Class 1 through Recitation IV. If you have any questions, you should come to office hours. **Only those emails received before midnight on the previous Wednesday will be answered.**

#### **Recitation VI**      *North and South – The Legacy of the Kingdoms (and map quiz)*

At the beginning of class, there'll be a ten-minute map quiz. You should study the maps you went over in Recitation II.

For the remainder of class, we'll discuss the divided monarchies. The collapse of the United Monarchy following the death of Solomon marks one of the most important events in the history of Israel, one whose ripples would be felt for the next millennium. For this recitation, you'll be given a selection of passages to read from 1-2 Kings. I want you to determine which passages are pro-North and which pro-South, and write a response paper justifying it. Then, consider what sort of effects these divisions might have had on later generations.

#### **Recitation VII**      *Pilgrimage Festivals and Jewish Practice*

The pilgrimage festivals played an important role in the biblical text, ancient practices, and modern holidays. In this recitation we'll explore the textual root of these practices.

Before you begin your reading assignment, make a list of all the modern Jewish holidays you know. Then, read the following biblical sections: Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 12: 3-20; 20:8-11; Lev. 23:15-43; and Num. 29:1-6.

After reading these sections, I want you to determine which holidays are being described. What is the purpose of each? When and for how long are they celebrated? How are the celebrated? Write up your answers for your response paper.

### **Recitation VIII**      *Understanding the Documentary Hypothesis*

The Documentary Hypothesis is a difficult, yet very important, concept to grasp in the critical study of the Hebrew Bible. In this recitation, we'll try to master.

For your assignment, print out the worksheet on BB entitled "Documentary Hypothesis Supplement." Go through the passages on this page and try to determine the source (J, E, P, or D) for it. If you're unclear as to how to do this, or you missed the previous lecture, refer to chapter two of OT.

\* Bonus assignment: Some have suggested that there may have been an underlying anti-semitic motive to Wellhausen's "Documentary Hypothesis." Read the following article on BB: L.H. Silberman, "Wellhausen and Judaism," *Semeia* 25 (1982): 75-82. Write an *additional* response paper discussing the issue at hand, and give your opinion. This may be handed in anytime before Recitation X.

### **Recitation IX**      *MID-TERM EXAM I – GOOD LUCK!*

The exam will cover everything from Class 10 through Recitation 16. This exam is *not* cumulative. If you have any questions, you should come to office hours. **Only those emails received before midnight on the previous Wednesday will be answered.**

### **Recitation X**      *Theodicy in the Ancient Near East and in Tradition*

"Why does God let bad things happen to good people?" This question has plagued theologians for millennia. The book of Job is among the earliest Israelite attempts to grasp the concept of human suffering as it relates to one's faith in God.

To begin, make sure you know what the story is about by reviewing OT, pp. 479-89). Then, read through the book of Job. It's long, so read quickly and don't get bogged down in the prayers.

For the first part of your response paper, try to list a few modern stories, books, movies, etc. that deal with this same issue of the suffering of the righteous. For the second part, I want you to be the judge. Does the *satan* prove his point about Job? Is God fair toward Job? Should Job question God?

### **Recitation XI**      *A New Monotheism in the East*

The rise of Islam in the seventh century marked a major turning point in the history of the Hebrew Bible in the Near East. A new religion, influenced by both Christianity and Judaism, adopted these traditions and employed them in their own sacred text, the *Qur'an*.

Please read the *Qur'an* selection on Blackboard for this week's recitation. What sorts of similarities and differences do you see in the employment of biblical traditions? How would you characterize such use, that is, what would you call it? What do these texts tell you about this third "people of the book"?

**Recitation XII**      *Summing Up and Review for Final*

For our last recitation, we will be reviewing for the final exam. Please go through your notes and jot down anything that doesn't seem clear to you. Then I want you to write six (legitimate) essay questions that you think might appear on the exam. This is to be handed in, instead of the response paper.