

**840:201:02/563:220:02**

**HEBREW BIBLE /OLD TESTAMENT**

Mon., Wed. 5:00-6:20 p.m.

Beck 250

Dr. Steve A. Wiggins

Office hours M/W 4:30-5:00 p.m.

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This course is an introduction to the history and literature of the Hebrew Bible (sometimes known as the “Old Testament”). It will include a survey of the historical, cultural and religious traditions of ancient Israel, a study of the archaeological, historical and literary methods of research and a survey of the role of ancient Israel in ancient West Asia as indicated in the Hebrew Bible and related documents. Brief overviews of each book will be presented as well.

**COURSE GOALS**

The Hebrew Bible, a product of an Eastern Culture, has become a standard component of all Western cultures. Given its prominence, understanding the document itself and how it has been used by various formative groups in Western culture is a priority. This course intends to provide the student with the critical methods for understanding the historical, cultural and religious traditions of ancient Israel and pertinent material from other countries of ancient West Asia so they may:

1. Understand the traditions and history of ancient Israel from the Ancestral Period to the Post-Exilic period
2. Form a synthesis of the literary, historical and archaeological data to demonstrate the layers of meaning within the text
3. Identify and understand the important religious beliefs of the ancient Israelites in shaping their culture and historiography
4. Respond intelligently to the question of how western culture has been influenced by ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible.

**STUDENT OBJECTIVES**

As an instructor, believe it or not, I have goals for you! You have elected to sign up for a course based on material that I have spent my whole life studying. I teach this material because I believe in its importance for the individual and society. Specifically, my hopes for you as students are that you might

1. Develop an understanding of the history of ancient Israel and foster the ability to distinguish between historical and metaphorical writing. You should learn to determine acceptable use of and recognize misuse of the Hebrew Bible.
2. Understand the use, as far as the English text will allow, of various critical methods for analyzing the text, interpretation of archaeological data and extra-biblical sources. You should be able to identify several ways in which Western cultures have understood the Hebrew Bible.
3. Understand the various Israelite religious beliefs and practices within the different historical periods, and the idea of popular religion as opposed to formal religion. You should learn how to distinguish an historical text from a rhetorical text.

4. Formulate a response of how western culture and personal religion have been influenced by the Hebrew Bible. You should learn to recognize how the Hebrew Bible continues to influence our culture through its ideas and concepts.

## TEXTS

*The Green Bible*, New Revised Standard Version

Michael Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament*

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class attendance is not optional; attendance will be taken. You are expected to attend unless you are ill or have a serious reason, such as a family emergency, for being absent. *Any absence not explained in writing to the instructor will be counted as unexcused.*

**Swine Flu Alert:** if you have flu-like symptoms, please **do not attend** class. Flu constitutes illness and is an excused absence; it will not affect your grade. Attendance includes reading the assigned material prior to class and participating in classroom discussion. The material in this course is intended to be enjoyable as well as informative.

Students are responsible for the class work covered in the event of any absence. An absence when an exam is scheduled will result in a zero for the exam unless the cause is illness (supported by a doctor's note or official supporting document), family emergency, or a legitimate religious holiday (according to University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B). The instructor must be notified of any religious holiday in writing by each student who wishes to have the holiday recognized as an excused absence. Assuming the instructor knows your religious tradition or what holidays you observe is not a sound premise! If an exam must be missed the instructor must be notified prior to the scheduled exam time (except in the case of being prevented by a serious illness) to avoid a zero on the exam. Make-up exams will be offered during the next class period following the scheduled exam. The student will be responsible for any material missed in class while making up the exam.

The final exam will be at the time scheduled by the University. The final exam for this class will be the first 80 minutes of that session only. The instructor reserves the right to consider a student absent from the final exam if s/he does not check in during the ten minutes of the exam. Make-ups for the final exam will be at the convenience of the instructor.

This class has a supporting Sakai page (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) and much important information will be made available there. Students will be responsible for material that is posted on Sakai, so it is essential to make sure that access to the site is secured early in the semester.

## GRADING

There will be three examinations for this course. Each exam will count as 25 % of the grade (50 points each) and will be allotted the entire class period. The first examination is scheduled for **Wednesday 17 February**; the second examination is scheduled for **Monday 29 March**. The third examination is university assigned final examination, **Friday 7 May, 4:00-5:20 p.m.**

One group project/presentation will count for the 15% of the grade (30 points). The class will divide into groups and class time will be allotted to plan for this project. Groups will present their projects during the class during **Week 13**.

The project will involve meeting as small groups to prepare a presentation on the topics offered. Each group will have 15 minutes to present its response to the class. Grades for the presentation will apply to the entire group, so full participation is expected for full credit. Students who do not participate with their assigned groups will be penalized for non-participation. Five points will be deducted for each session in which a student does not participate. Students who fully participate in the project will be awarded full credit for this portion of the grade. The presentation may take any form: a panel discussion, a skit, a report, video, or PowerPoint demonstration.

The final 10% of the grade (20 points) is based on attendance. All excused absences must be requested in writing. Unexcused absences will result in points being deducted from your grade.

#### Grade Scale Percentages

94-100 = A

89-93 = B+

84-88 = B

78-83 = C+

70-77 = C

60-69 = D

0-59 = F

In no case will a grade be changed after final grades are posted! If you are concerned about your grade you must see the instructor about this concern before the semester is over.

#### SCHEDULE OF TOPICS COVERED

In the following section “Week” refers to the sequence of two classes that constitute a total of two class sessions. (“Weeks” tend to be divided over calendar weeks.)

##### **Week One** (January 20/25) Introduction

What is the Bible: where did it come from, and how do we read it?

Writing: its origins and significance to Israel and its neighbors

**Read** Introductory essays in the *Green Bible*

##### **Week Two** (January 27/February 1) History and Archaeology

The background to Israel

How archaeology informs this background

How to tell history from rhetoric

**Read** Coogan 3-26

##### **Week Three** (February 3/8) Genesis

Israel understands its beginnings

What the book of Genesis is

What the book of Genesis is not

**Read** Gen 1-12, 18, 21-22, 24, 27, 29, 37, 42-43, 47

Coogan 27-60

**Week Four** (February 10/15) Torah

Who was Moses?

Israel's instruction from Yahweh

What Torah continues to mean

How to live with God and others

**Read** Exod 1-5, 7-12, 14-15, 20, 32, Lev 1-7, 10, 16-19, Num 11-14, 22-24,

Deut 12-15

Coogan 61-77

**Week Five** (February 17/22) The Gift of Land; First Exam

How Israel became a state

Joshua's role

Judges and the need for kings

**Read** Josh 1-12, Judg 1, 4-5, 13-16

Coogan 78-146

**Week Six** (February 24/March 1) The Establishment of Monarchy

Samuel-Saul-David

**Read** 1 Sam 8-10, 16-17, 28, 31, 2 Sam 1, 7, 11-12, 15, 18

Coogan 147-192

**Week Seven** (March 3/8) Eighth Century Prophecy

The first of the writing prophets

How prophecy started

Israel/Judah's understanding of prophecy

**Read** Amos 5-7, Hos 1-3, Isa 1-11, Mic 4-6

**Week Eight** (March 10/22) The Divided Monarchy

How and why Israel split

The consequences of the division

The fall of Samaria

The fall of Jerusalem

**Read** 1 Kgs 1, 3, 10-12, 17-19, 22, 2 Kgs 1-5, 16-19, 22-25

Coogan 193-219

**Week Nine** (March 24/29) Sixth Century Prophecy, Second Exam

The change in prophecy in the sixth century

Exile and its influence

How Isaiah's viewpoint changed

The response of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to the fall of Jerusalem

**Read** Isa 40-45, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Jer 1, 7-11, 15-20, 31, Ezek 1-10, 37

Coogan 220-267

**Week Ten** (March 31/April 5) Persia and the Bible

How the Persian Empire ended the Exilic Period

How Persia influenced the Bible

**Read** Ezra, Neh, 1 Chron 15-17, 29, 2 Chron 29-36

Coogan 268-310

**Week Eleven** (April 7/12) The End of Prophecy

The final stages of prophecy in Israel/Judah

Concerns of the final prophets

What was replacing prophecy

**Read** Joel, Hag, Zech 1-8, Obad, Mal

**Week Twelve** (April 14/19) Story and Song as Scripture

Some of the stories contained in the Bible

Why stories could be understood as sacred

The point of stories

**Read** Jon, Ruth, Esther, Song, Lam

Coogan 311-340

**Week Thirteen** (April 21/26) Psalms and Wisdom

The “Hymnal” of the Second Temple

The function and themes of the Psalms

Wisdom literature

**Read** Pss 8, 22, 23, 29, 42-43, 51, 69, 72, 82, 89, 91, 104, 107, 121-122, 139,  
145, 150, Prov 1, 3, 8, 10, 30, Job 1-14, 38-42, Eccl

Coogan 341-401

**Week Fourteen** (April 28/May 3) Greece, Daniel, and Apocalyptic

What the Greek culture led to

The biblical response: apocalyptic

**Read** Daniel

The instructor and the University reserve the right to modify, emend, or change the syllabus (course requirements, grading policy, etc.) as the curriculum and/or program require(s). Topics covered on an individual day are subject to change. Instructor travel circumstances may also affect the course schedule.