

840:201/563:220

HEBREW BIBLE "OLD TESTAMENT"

12/23, 12/27-12/30, 1/3-1/14. 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Office hours by
appointment

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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.

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.

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

Attendance

Class attendance is not optional; attendance will be taken. It is difficult to overstress the importance of attendance for a healthy grade in this class. Even excessive excused absences will likely lower your grade. If more than one class is missed without excuse the final grade for the course will be reduced by a letter grade for each session missed.

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 encouraged to bring in current media material illustrating the topics under discussion to share with the class.

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.

Students are responsible for the class work covered in the event of any absence. Please note:

- The instructor can NOT “go over” material from a missed class. If you miss a class the missing information may be obtained by borrowing another student’s class notes.
- The instructor’s PowerPoint presentations are NOT available for copying or distribution. Multiple reasons, including copyright, prevent the copying of these presentations. Do NOT ask to have copies of the notes; they will not be provided.
- 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) or family emergency (documented).
- The instructor must be notified of any religious holiday (according to University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B) in writing in advance *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 to avoid a zero on the exam.
- The instructor reserves the right to consider a student absent from the any exam if s/he does not check in during the first ten minutes of 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.

GRADING

There will be three examinations for this course. Each exam will count as 25% of the grade and will be allotted 1 hour of testing time. The first examination is scheduled for **Wednesday 29 December**; the second examination is scheduled for **Thursday 6 January**.

The third examination is on the last day of class. The exams will be given for one hour of the class period. The final exam will be during the final hour of class.

One group project/presentation will count for 15% of the grade. 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 period of **Wednesday 12 January**.

The project will involve meeting as small groups to prepare a presentation on the topics offered. Each group will have 20 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.

The final 10% of the grade is based on attendance.

Grade Scale Percentages:	94-100 = A
	89-93 = B+
	84-88 = B
	78-83 = C+
	70-77 = C
	60-69 = D
	0-59 = F

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS COVERED

Session 1 Thursday 23 December

Read Read Coogan 3-26, Introductory essays in the *Green Bible*

Course introduction; defining the Bible, ancient Israel and its context, the geography of Israel, the neighboring nations

Session 2 Monday 27 December

Read Gen 1-12

Archaeology and the concept of history; what archaeology tells us about ancient Israel, a broad overview of the historical context of Israel, background to the Bible

Session 3 Tuesday 28 December

Read Coogan 27-77

Creation and flood accounts, the cultural background to these ideas, how the ancient Israelites considered the creation and flood, the purpose and outcome of the flood

Session 4 Wednesday 29 December

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

Ancestral traditions of Israel; the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph

FIRST EXAM

Session 5 Thursday 30 December

Read Exod 1-5, 7-12, 14-15, 20, 32; Lev 1-7, 10, 16-19; Num 11-14, 22-24; Deut 12-15
Moses and the Torah

Session 6 Monday 3 January

Read Josh 1-12; Judg 1, 4-5, 13-16
Coogan 78-146

The Prophets; how Israel perceived its entry into Canaan, Joshua and the characters of the judges, how Israel perceived the need for a monarchy, Samuel

Session 7 Tuesday 4 January

Read 1 Sam 8-10, 16-17, 28, 31; 2 Sam 1, 7, 11-12, 15, 18; 1 Kgs 1, 3, 10-12,
Coogan 147-192

The institution of monarchy, Saul, traditions of David's background and reign, the succession and traditions of Solomon

Session 8 Wednesday 5 January

Read 1 Kgs 17-19, 22; 2 Kgs 1-5, 16-19, 22-25; Amos 5-7; Hos 1-3; Isa 1-11; Mic 4-6
Coogan 193-219

The period of Assyrian domination; the divided monarchy, Elijah and Elisha, the rise of the latter prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah

Session 9 Thursday 6 January

Read Isa 40-45; Jer 1, 7-11, 15-20, 31; Ezek 1-10, 37; Nah, Hab, Zeph
Coogan 220-267

The fall of the Northern Kingdom, the developments in the southern kingdom; Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habbakuk; period of Babylonian domination; fall of the Southern Kingdom

SECOND EXAM

Session 10 Friday 7 January

Read Joel; Hag; Zech 1-8; Obad; Mal;
Coogan 268-310

Prophets in the period of Persian domination; second temple, post-exilic outlook

Session 11 Monday 10 January

Read Jonah; Ruth; Esther; Prov 1, 3, 8, 10, 30; Job 1-14, 38-42; Eccl
Coogan 311-340

The stories of survival that emerge during the Post-Exilic period and the development of wisdom literature in the biblical tradition

Session 12 Tuesday 11 January

Read Song; Pss 8, 22, 23, 29, 42-43, 51, 69, 72, 82, 89, 91, 104, 107, 121-122, 139, 145, 150; 1 Chron 15-17, 29; 2 Chron 29-36; Ezra; Nehemiah
Poetry and Priestly History that grew in the Post-Exilic world

Session 13 Wednesday 12 January

GROUP PRESENTATIONS; the remainder of the class period will be used to catch up on any material not yet covered to this point

Session 14 Thursday 13 January

Read Daniel

Coogan 341-401

Period of Hellenistic domination, the growth of apocalyptic, Daniel

THIRD EXAM

Session 15 Friday 14 January

Review

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.

Supplement on Class Presentations

The purpose of class presentations is five-fold:

1. To encourage students to learn from each other. Although we are not all specialists in the Hebrew Bible, we are all members of the human race and therefore full participants in the humanities. We all experience religion either through contact with religious persons and institutions, or through personal conviction or adherence to a religion. Our common human experience provides us with a level of expertise on the human religious quest.
2. To learn how the Hebrew Bible may be used to inform or misinform the discussion of wider social issues. In the United States, no social issue is unaffected by interpretations of the Bible. Politicians may be elected largely because of their presentation of religious beliefs. The Hebrew Bible, however, is a document that must be interpreted — it is a document that was written over 2000 years ago in a very different culture. Your group discussions are intended to help you hear how other people understand what the Hebrew Bible says.
3. To familiarize you with basic Bible research tools. Many of these tools are now readily available online or with Bible software packages. The Bible is a confusing book. To help you find what the Bible might declare about any particular issue, it is useful to know what resources are available. Tools such as concordances (books that let you look up biblical passages by subject), Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, commentaries (books that give a particular explanation for specific parts of the Bible), and Bible atlases are all readily available. You will need to use these to address any biblical issues with any sincere attempt at understanding. Such sources are often biased towards a particular theological outlook. Learning about that dimension is also very valuable.
4. To build a support group. If you need to miss a class, it is best to know others who might help with supplying notes or other information. Regular group meetings allow for a chance to develop relationships with other students who you know you will see each class session.
5. To give the entire class a chance to learn from you. Your outlook on the Hebrew Bible is as valid as anyone else's outlook. In presenting your material to the class, you are offering

them a new view toward the biblical record. To be truly balanced, it is important to be informed not just by the instructor, but also by each other.

Expectations for Group Time

Group time gives a break from constant lecturing. It is not, however, just “free time.” The time spent in groups is intended to be group-building time, but also learning time. To accomplish this, the following must be done:

1. Each group must choose a “point person.” This individual will take the initiative in making sure that the group maintains its focus during discussion time. The point person is not the leader of the group, but the student who facilitates the progress of the group towards its goal.
2. Each group must choose a “scribe.” This individual may not be the same person as the point person. The scribe’s job is to take attendance and general notes about the discussion during in-class time and will be responsible for emailing those notes to the instructor after each class. A form for the scribe is available on Sakai.
3. Each individual in each group must keep a logbook. This logbook will be a record of your personal participation in each group discussion and a record of how much time you have spent *outside of class* working on this project and what you have been doing at this time. Describe the resources you examine, the discussions you have, and the physical work you contribute to the presentation. This logbook must be typed up, printed out, and handed in at the end of **Session 13**. The form is available on Sakai. One point will be deducted for every class session that you do not have a logbook sheet (excluding excused absences). Your logbook must be signed by the members of your group *during each group session* to indicate their agreement that you have done the work you state that you have. Half of your grade for the presentation will largely reflect on this logbook.
4. Each group will decide upon and discuss an issue. The issue must be one which involves the wider society and in which the Hebrew Bible is frequently invoked. Groups will regularly meet to share their research and outlooks on the issue, especially concerning the Hebrew Bible’s use in the political discussions. Even students who do not know the Bible have impressions of what “the Bible says” about issues. Groups are not expected to agree on their interpretations! Groups are a forum for discussion and debate — do not be shy about your outlook/opinions!

Form of Presentations

The form the presentations take is up to the group. Creativity is encouraged. Presentation will count as half of the presentation grade: you will need to be present and actively involved to earn full points. Attendance in regular group sessions will be a factor in the grading as well.

Specifically, the presentation must demonstrate:

1. The group has examined the Hebrew Bible for material on the subject. Some subject may yield negative results — the Hebrew Bible does not discuss all modern issues! Show

that your group has engaged the Hebrew Bible for evidence of the issue. Is the Hebrew Bible clear or ambiguous about the issue? Try to reflect any points of disagreement either within the Hebrew Bible itself or within the group.

2. The group understands the currency of the issue. Does this issue matter to people today? How is this evident? Why do you think the instructor might have chosen this issue? Do you think you could convince others that your approach is a valid one to the issue, in the light of the Bible?

3. The group finds evidence that the Hebrew Bible is still being used to address this issue. Point out news stories, magazine or newspaper articles, television shows, websites, etc., that deal with the issue. Look for evidence that those dealing with the issue use their own understanding of the Bible to develop their case for it.

4. The group has questioned whether the Hebrew Bible is an adequate source to decide issues surrounding the concept on which you are focusing. Does other material inform the way the Hebrew Bible should be used? Feel free to compare with other “scriptures” such as the Christian Scriptures (“New Testament”), the Quran, the Rig Veda, the Book of Mormon, or any other sacred writing. Also note non-religious sources and how they view the issue. Does science affect our present understanding of the issue? Many issues have a psychological component, how does this affect the issue? What should be the basis for deciding on the issue in the light of the Hebrew Bible?

Grading the Presentation

Grading will be based on whether there is evidence for the issues being seriously debated and discussed via both your logbook and your presentation. The logbook should indicate substantial work outside of the group sessions themselves, and will count as half of the presentation grade (15 points). Each group member must bring a print version of their logbook to every group meeting, discuss what they have done with their group, and have the other group members sign off on the logbook. One point will be deducted for every session in which a group member does not participate. Excused absences will not result in a deduction as long as the member is able to demonstrate that s/he has been doing work outside the class to make up for the missed group session. Full points will be assigned for group members whose logs indicate a conscientious effort to assist the group with the project. Points will be deducted for lack of initiative or cooperation with the group.

The other half (15 points) of the grade will be based on participation in the presentation itself. All students are required to participate. If you miss the presentation, 15 points will be deducted from your presentation grade. In case of emergency absences, notify your group scribe as well as the instructor. It is unfair for you not to show up if your group is expecting you to be present. Decisions about the points earned in the case of absence will be made on a case-by-case basis.

The presentations will be graded with an eye towards the way issues should be examined noted above and evidence that groups have worked together. Points will be deducted for failure to follow the guidelines above. Each group must be prepared to answer questions regarding their issues from students outside the group.

