

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

**HEBREW BIBLE /OLD TESTAMENT**

MW 5:00-6:20 p.m.

LSH-B117

Dr. Steve A. Wiggins

Office hours MW 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.

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.* The material in this course is intended to be enjoyable as well as informative.

Attendance includes reading the assigned material prior to class and participating in classroom discussion. 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

### Exams

There will be three examinations for this course. Each exam will count as 50 points and will be allotted the entire 80-minute class period. The first examination is scheduled for **Monday 14 February**; the second examination is scheduled for **Wednesday 9 March**. The third examination is university assigned final examination, **Friday 6 May, 4:00-5:20 p.m.**

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 first ten minutes of the exam. Make-ups for the final exam will be at the convenience of the instructor.

Any incidents of cheating will be dealt with according to the university Academic Integrity policy. Any cheating on an exam will lead to a failure for that examination and may lead to university disciplinary action.

### Projects

One group project/presentation will count for 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, beginning **Monday 4 April**.

The project will involve meeting as small groups to prepare a presentation on a topic for which the Hebrew Bible is utilized in wider society. Each group will have 15 minutes to present its material 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. Points will be deducted for each session in which a student does not participate, according to the Presentation Instructions. 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.

### Attendance

Attendance counts for 25 points. All excused absences must be requested in writing. After the second unexcused absence a point will be deducted for each absence from the 25 possible attendance points. Additionally, after the second unexcused absence 2 points will also be deducted from the presentation grade total for each absence.

If more than 3 excused absences are requested, documentation must be provided justifying any further excused absences. If no documentation is presented, 2 points will be deducted from the attendance total after 3 excused absences. Excused absences may affect your presentation grade. If you have excused absences you are still expected to contact and work with your presentation partners.

If a serious problem arises affecting your attendance, please speak with your advisor about your options. A leave of absence or withdrawal may look better on your academic record than a poor grade based on lack of 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

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 final week of class***. Do NOT expect the instructor to offer last-minute solutions to a grade that does not meet your expectations.

### 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 1** (January 19/24) 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 2** (January 26/31) History and Archaeology

The background to Israel

How archaeology informs this background

How to tell history from rhetoric

**Read** Coogan 3-26

#### **Week 3** (February 2/7) 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 4** (February 9/14) Torah

Who was Moses?

Israel’s instruction from Yahweh

What Torah continues to mean

How to live with God and others

#### **FIRST EXAM**

**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 5** (February 16/21) The Gift of Land

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 6** (February 23/28) 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 7** (March 2/7) Eighth Century Prophecy

The first of the writing prophets

How prophecy started

Israel/Judah's understanding of prophecy

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

**Week 8** (March 9/21) The Divided Monarchy

How and why Israel split

The consequences of the division

The fall of Samaria

The fall of Jerusalem

**SECOND EXAM**

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

Coogan 193-219

**Week 9** (March 23/28) Sixth Century Prophecy

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 10** (March 30/April 4) 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

**GROUP 1 PRESENTATION**

**Week 11** (April 6/11) 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  
**GROUPS 2 & 3 PRESENTATIONS**

**Week 12** (April 13/18) 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

**GROUPS 4 & 5 PRESENTATIONS**

**Week 13** (April 20/25) 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

**GROUPS 6 & 7 PRESENTATIONS**

**Week 14** (April 27/May 2) Greece, Daniel, and Apocalyptic

What the Greek culture led to

The biblical response: apocalyptic

**Read** Daniel

**GROUP 8 PRESENTATION**

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.