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**


2) *How to Read the Jewish Bible* by Marc Zvi Brettler, Oxford University Press, 2007.


**Grading and Class Policies**

1) Five exams, a mix of essay and short-answer, each worth 15%.
2) Weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), generally assigned on Fridays and due on Mondays. The essays will be based on questions drawn from the textbook that I will give out. 20% of the grade altogether. Consult the Student Handbook for the academic honesty policy.
3) Active, in-class participation: 5%. Cell phones must be silenced in class.
4) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the syllabus; that is, before class.
5) Attendance. After three 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**

**Introduction and Orientation**
The Structures of the Hebrew Bible: Canons
“Tanakh” and “Old Testament.”

**August 25**

**August 27**

**August 29**

**September 3**

**September 5**

**September 8**

**September 10-12**

**September 15**

**September 17-19**

**September 22**

**September 24**

**September 26**

**September 29**

**Torah/Pentateuch**

Genesis and the Creation of the World
*Readings:* Genesis 1:1-2:3, Brettler chapters 2-4

The Second Creation
*Readings:* Genesis 2:4-5:32, Brettler chapters 5-6

The Flood
*Readings:* Genesis 6-11, Brueggemann chapter 2

The Chosen Family
*Readings:* Genesis 12-50, Brettler ch. 7, Brueggemann ch. 3

The Exodus
*Readings:* Exodus 1-19, Brueggemann ch. 4

The Law
*Readings:* Exodus 20-24, Leviticus 11-12, 15, 18-20, 23-24
Brettler chapters 8-9, Brueggemann chapters 4-6

Trouble in the Wilderness
*Readings:* Exodus 32-34, Numbers 5-6, 10-14, 16, 20-25, 27, 31-33, 36.
Brueggemann chapters 4-6

Deuteronomy
*Readings:* Deuteronomy 1-6, 11-13, 18, 21-25, 28, 31-34
Brettler chapters 1 and 10, Brueggemann chapters 1, 7, 8.

Torah Exam

The Histories of Israel

The Conquest of the Land
*Readings:* Joshua 1-13, Brettler chapter 11.

Victories and Collapse in the Land
*Readings:* Judges, Brueggemann ch. 11

The First King of Israel
*Readings:* I Samuel, Brettler chapter 12
The Reign of David       October 1
   Readings:  II Samuel, I Chronicles 21, Brueggemann chapter 12

The Reign of Solomon and the Division of the Kingdom  October 3
   Readings:  I Kings, Brettler chapter 13

The Fall of the Two Kingdoms     October 10
   Readings:  II Kings, II Chronicles 33, Brettler ch. 14

The Exile and Return          October 15

Historical Books Exam       October 17

Prophecy

The Eighth-Century Prophets      October 20
   Readings:  Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-11
               Brettler chapters 15-17, Brueggemann pages 214-219, 223-228.

Exilic Prophecy      October 27
   Readings:  Jeremiah 1-8, 28-29, Habakkuk, Ezekiel 1-7, 37
               Brettler chapters 18-19, Brueggemann chapters 15-16.

Post-Exilic Prophecy       November 3
   Readings:  Isaiah 40-55, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
               Brettler chapter 20, Brueggemann chapters 14 and 19.

Prophecy exam       November 10

Wisdom and Song

Poetry          November 12
   Readings:  Psalms 1-23, Lamentations, Song of Solomon
               Brettler chapter 22 and 25, Brueggemann chapter 21.

Proverbs      November 17

Ecclesiastes      November 19

Job      November 21
   Readings:  Job 1-10, 38-42, Brettler chapter 24, Brueggemann chapter 22,
Society of Biblical Literature Conference, TBA  November 24th

Wisdom and Poetry Exam  December 1st

**Novellas and Other Writings**

Ruth  December 5th

*Readings:* Ruth, Brueggemann pp. 320-323

Esther  December 8th

*Readings:* Esther, Brettler chapter 26, Brueggemann pp. 343-349

Apocalypticism and Diaspora  December 10th

*Readings:* Daniel, Brettler chapter 21, Brueggemann chapter 25.

**Books outside the Jewish and Protestant Canons**  December 12th

Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal Books

*Readings:* Tobit, Judith

Brettler chapter 27 and Afterword, Brueggemann chapter 29.

Final exam  8:30am  December 17th