

HEBREW BIBLE INTRODUCTION
IST2003-1HY-WI14

HYBRID
WINTER 2014

(*DRAFT – subject to change – 12/17/13*)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to important themes in the Hebrew Bible, including creation, identity and ethnicity, history and memory, power, violence and war, hope, justice, and the nature of God and the gods. The course also covers the historical development of the literature, religion, and culture of ancient Israel, and methods and interpretive strategies for understanding ancient texts.

COURSE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to orient students to major aspects of the critical study of the Hebrew Bible. In order to accomplish this goal, we will:

1. introduce and familiarize students with the content of the Hebrew Bible, the types of literature contained therein, and the historical and cultural contexts in which this literature was produced, through readings, lectures, and examinations;
2. examine a number of critical issues and methods pertaining to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, through readings, lectures, and online discussions;

Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to reasonably accommodate student needs. Students are encouraged to contact their assigned advisor to initiate the process of requesting accommodations. The advising center can be contacted at advising@iliff.edu or by phone at 303.765.1146.

TEXTS

The Bible (*NRSV*).

Any study bible is fine as long as the translation is NRSV. I recommend *HarperCollins Study Bible: Student Edition: Fully Revised & Updated*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge, et al. Society of Biblical Literature; HarperOne, 2006.

ISBN-10: **0060786841** | ISBN-13: **978-0060786847**

Coogan, Michael. *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

ISBN-10: **0199830118** | ISBN-13: **978-0199830114** | Edition: **2**

***Pages numbers for the first edition (2009) of Coogan's *Introduction* will be listed as well**

Brown, Michael Joseph. *What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Biblical Studies*. Louisville: Westminster Knox, 2000.

• **ISBN-10:** 066422220X • **ISBN-13:** 978-0664222208

***Note: I'll be asking you to read Michael Brown's book prior to the first class session**

Matthews, Victor Harold, and Don Carlos Benjamin. *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*. Revised and Expanded 3rd Version. Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 2007.

• **ISBN-10:** 0809144352 • **ISBN-13:** 978-0809144358

LATE WORK POLICY

Hybrid/On-line: Posts to discussions that have ended will not be accepted. The point is to have conversation. If you don't show up for the conversation when it's happening, you miss out. Posting just for my benefit defeats the purpose.

Assignments submitted late are marked down at the rate of a grade per day.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Participation. 20%

Includes weekly conversations. Weigh in twice. The first time by Thursday at 8:00 a.m. and a second time, in light of a second set of readings, by Sunday at midnight.

Also includes engagement in discussions during gathering days.

Complete self-evaluation regarding participation grade.

Exegesis Exercises. 10%

Focused on two pericopes: Gen 1-2 and Joshua 2, 6. There are questions listed to get you thinking about what it means to “exegete a text,” but you should not answer every question. Please keep your postings to a maximum of four-five sentences, consisting of a thesis, your supports and evidence, and your line of argumentation. The goal of these assignments is to help you begin to learn how to formulate a thesis or an argument for a biblical passage and to present appropriate evidence to support that argument.

I am interested in hearing your individual voice come through, and I love creative interpretations, but I also want you to free yourself from any perceived need to make the text “preach.” Preaching is a related, but different, exercise (see Brown, *What They Don’t Tell You*). While I value and honor the task of preaching (and regularly do it and write about it myself), I have found that my students tend to rush through the text itself, overstating and overemphasizing what works for them theologically. It’s easier (and less fraught!) at this point to table those ideas about what the Bible should say or what we’d like it to say or what we have to make it say; just read the text closely and focus on where it surprises you and challenges your assumptions (resisting, while we can, the need to make it work for a particular audience with particular theological needs; there will be plenty of time for this later). Rather than smoothing over problems or inconsistencies in the text, look for problems and then play with a variety of solutions (one of which you might turn into a thesis statement).

Exams (2). 55%

There will be **two examinations** in the course: a mid-term and a final. Both the mid-term and the final will be open-book/notes essay examinations. Both exams will be comprehensive to that point in the course. You may employ as many or as few secondary sources as you would like.

Midterm: take-home essays are due Sunday, February 16 at midnight. Essay questions will be distributed at the end of the last on-campus session (25%)

Final: take-home essays due Friday, March 14 at 6 a.m. Questions will be posted on Sunday March 9 (30%)

Book review. 15%

Due February 24.

See the guidelines and the list of books recommended for your review

SCHEDULE

In general, this is how most weeks will be structured:

Beginning of the week I'll post an audio or video clip (in canvas) to introduce theme and reading for the week

Midweek: Lectures

--on google hangouts.

Two 15-20 min lectures, each followed by 5-10 min of Q & A. You can show up in the hangout or view the recording. Following the more formal lecture time, there will be time for questions and conversation.

--and/or audio podcasts

Discussions and postings. Do the first set of readings (usually from the textbook and the Bible) and listen to the lecture and make your first post by Thursday at 7 a.m.; midweek, do the second set of reading (usually you'll choose one article from a list of several) and weigh back in on the conversation by Sunday at midnight.

WEEK 1 (JAN 6-12)

INTRODUCTION

Week 1a (Jan 6-9).

Read Brown, *What They Don't Tell You*

Coogan (2009), 1-24

Hangout lecture: Introduction to the Course

On-line conversation: Reflect on what you've read about the academic discipline of biblical studies (by Thurs, Jan 9 at 7 a.m.)

Week 1b (Jan 9-12).

Choose two of the following:

**pdfs of the following articles have been scanned and posted or are available through the library's page on <http://library.iliff.edu/home/database-and-articles> (EBSCOHost databases)*

Walter Brueggemann, [Biblical authority: a personal reflection](#) *Christian Century*, 118 no 1 Jan 3-10 2001, 14-20.

Allen Jorgenson, "Peopled by the Book," *Word & World*, Fall 2009

Stephen Chapman, "What Are We Reading? Canonicity and the Old Testament," *Word & World*, Fall 2009

Mark Zvi Brettler, "Biblical Authority: A Jewish Pluralistic View," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible As Scripture*. Ed. W. P. Brown. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. 1-9.

Serene Jones, "Inhabiting Scripture, Dreaming Bible," in *Engaging Biblical Authority*, 73-80.

Peter Ochs, "The Bible's Wounded Authority," in *Engaging Biblical Authority*, 113-121.

Ellen Davis, "The Soil That Is Scripture," in *Engaging Biblical Authority*, 36-44.

On-line conversation: Discuss how the articles you read challenged the way you understand or conceive of the authority the Bible (by Sun, Jan 12 at midnight)

WEEK 2 (JAN 13-19)

CREATION

Week 2a (Jan 13-16)

Genesis 1-11; Ps 74:12-17; 77:11-20 (communal laments); 136 (praise); Isa 40:12-31; 44:24-45:7

Coogan (2009), "Creations" and "Formation of the Pentateuch," 27-57

OT Parallels, 3-42

First exegesis exercise (5%): Read the accounts of creation in *OT Parallels* comparing and contrasting Gen 1-2:4a and 2:4b-2:25 with these texts. Consider the questions below (as you read, or after reading each account, you might want to jot down notes to yourself or even create a chart to fill in), noting the similarities and differences between the accounts.

Who creates?

How? (Out of what?)

Why?

What terms are used to describe humanity?

Other similarities/differences you noticed.

What do these stories have in common? What is different? What difference do the differences make? i.e., How do the differences effect the theologies of the texts? How do the biblical account(s) compare to the other ANE ones? To one another? What are the implications of this exercise - for the biblical text? For you personally?

Provide a possible thesis statement or central argument you could make about one of the biblical texts in light of one of the Mesopotamian or Egyptian

texts (you will need to narrow your focus here; don't try to deal with all of these texts). You also need to provide 2–3 sentences in support of that thesis or argument.

**The above questions are designed to help you get started in your thinking (you should not try to answer them directly or completely).

Hangouts Lecture: Creation in Genesis and in ancient Near Eastern literature

Week 2b (Jan 16-19)

Podcast on creation in Job and Proverbs

Prov 8:22-31; Job 38:1-40:5 and “The Great Hymn to Khnum”

<http://amentetneferet.wordpress.com/gods/khnum/>

And choose among the following (read either 2 short articles or 1 longer, more academic piece):

1. Kathryn Schifferdecker, “And also many animals”: Biblical Resources for Preaching about Creation.” *Word & World* 2007 **and** William P. Brown, “Proverbs 8:22-31,” *Interpretation*, July 2007, 286-289.

2. Alan Lenzi, “Proverbs 8:22-31: Three Perspectives on its Composition,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 687-714.

3. Sarah Stokes Musser, “Comfort in the Whirlwind? Job, Creation, and Environmental Degradation,” *Word & World* 2012 **and** William P. Brown, “Proverbs 8:22-31,” *Interpretation*, July 2007, 286-289.

On-line conversation: Reflect on creation in the HB and the ancient Near Eastern texts, in particular in light of what you have learned, perceived, appreciated, etc. after reading the creation texts in the wisdom literature.

CLASS 3 (JAN 20-26)

ORIGIN STORIES AND ETHNICITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Week 3a (Jan 20-23)

Gen 12-50; Deut 34:1-8; Exod 1-15 (esp 1-5); Ruth; Esther

Coogan (2009), “Ancestors of Israel” and “Escape from Egypt,” 61-95

“Ethnicity,” in *A Thematic Intro to the HB*, ed. S. Gravett, K. Bohmbach, F. Greifenhagen, and D. Polaski (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 199-237.

Hangout lecture: Moses's Hybrid Identity

On-line conversation: Reflect on the way the HB presents (in complex ways) the identity and ethnicity of some of its characters (e.g., Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Joseph, Ruth, Esther) and/or how it creates a rhetoric of identity/ethnicity.

Week 3b (Jan 23-26)

Read one of the following articles:

Thomas Römer, [Moses Outside the Torah and the Construction of a Diaspora Identity](#) *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8.15 (2008)

F. V. Griefenhagen, [Ethnicity In, With, or Under the Pentateuch](#) *Journal of Religion & Society* 3 (2001)

Gale A. Yee “ ‘She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn’: Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority,” *They were all together in one place? toward minority biblical criticism*. eds. Bailey, Randall C.; Liew, Tat-siong Benny; Segovia, Fernando F. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.

Randall Bailey, “That’s Why They Didn’t Call the Book Hadassah! The Interse(ct)/(x)ionality of Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality in the Book of Esther,” in *They were all together in one place?*

On-line conversation: after reading one of the articles above, weigh back in on the conversation about identity and ethnicity.

WEEK 4 (JAN 27-FEB 2)

SHAPING AND MAINTAINING IDENTITY: BOUNDARIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Week 4a (Jan 27-30)

Exod 20:22-23:33 and 25-40; Read ‘around’ in Leviticus, but concentrate on Lev 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21

Coogan (2009), “From Egypt to Sinai” through “The End of the Journey...,” 96-159

OT Parallels, 101-130

Martin Cohen, “The Biblical Prohibition of Homosexual Intercourse (Lev 18:22; 20:13),” *Biblical Studies Alternately*, ed. S. Scholtz. pp 153-164.

Hangout lecture.

Week 4b (Jan 30-Feb 2)

Second exegesis exercise: Joshua 2, 6.

Read Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, chap one (“A Literary Approach to the Bible”) and read the story of Rahab using a literary approach.

Provide a possible thesis statement or argument you could make about this pericope using this method (literary). You can focus on only a few verses or a single character or you can deal with how the two chapters interrelate. After stating your thesis, provide 2–3 sentences in support of that thesis or argument.

The following questions are designed to assist you in your thinking (you need not address all or any of them in your posting). Consider the themes and threads that hold the story together. How do the two narratives (in Josh 2 and Josh 6) function together (or not)? Can you identify repeated phrases and words that link them together or make them distinct? Who speaks, at what points in the story(-ies), and to whom does that person speak? Be alert to shifts and anomalies in the narrative and in the speeches. Can you identify elements in the narrative that function as symbols or metaphors? What does this text have to say about the identity of Israel? About God? How does the story function in the larger context of the book of Joshua?

Weeks 5 and 6 *ON-CAMPUS: Feb 6-8**

Assignments and readings to prepare for on-campus sessions (Classes 5 and 6)

History and Memory; War and Violence; Power
Reading Biblical Texts: Methods and Perspectives

Deut 1–7; 31–34; Josh 1–12; 23; Judges 1–9, 19–21; 1–2 Sam and 1 Kgs 1–2;
Esther

Coogan (2009), 160–206

OT Parallels, 165–197

***MIDTERM ESSAYS DUE FEBRUARY 16**

WEEK 7 (FEB 17–23) **JUSTICE**

Week 7a (Feb 17–20)

Exod 1–15; Deut 14, 16, 15, 23, 26, 28; Amos; Jeremiah 1–7; Pss 22, 40, 72,
82

Coogan, 235–260, 287–308

Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, “Old Testament Theology and the Problem of Justice,” 735-742.

Hangouts Lecture. Justice in the Prophets

Week 7b (Feb 20-23)

Podcast: Humanitarian Concerns in Deuteronomy

Choose one:

1. George Pixley, “A Latin American Perspective: The Option for the Poor in the Old Testament,” in Chapter 3 in *Biblical Studies Alternatively*, ed S. Scholtz. “Liberation and Oppression in the Book of Exodus,” pp 385-405.
 - a. Interprets Exodus as a universal paradigm of liberation
2. Naim Stifan Ateek, “A Palestinian Perspective: The Bible and Liberation,” in Chapter 3 in *BSA*, “Liberation and Oppression in the Book of Exodus,” pp 385-405.
 - a. Interprets Exodus from the perspective of the Canaanites displaced by the freed Israelites. Concludes the exodus is not liberating for Palestinians
3. Robert Allan Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” in Chapter 3 in *BSA*, “Liberation and Oppression in the Book of Exodus,” pp 385-405.
 - a. Like Ateek, takes the perspective of Canaanites and compares them to the native people displaced by the arrival of the Europeans
4. Jon D Levenson, “Liberation Theology and the Exodus,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ed. A. Bellis and J. Kaminsky; Atlanta: SBL, 2000)
 - a. Critiques liberation interpretations of the exodus story for anachronistically reading modern notions of freedom back into the text, and for universalizing the story by erasing God’s particular relationship with a particular people

On-line discussion: Liberation in the Hebrew Bible? Tell us about your article – First posters, tell us what is the article’s thesis then talk about something that surprised you, that you found interesting, challenging, convincing or unconvincing...

BOOK REVIEWS DUE FEB 24

WEEK 8 (FEB 24-MAR 2). JERUSALEM

Week 8a (Feb 24-27) Politics and Hope, King and Messiah

Deut 18; Pss 2, 9-10; Isa 1, 6, 7, 9, 11, “the servant songs” (42:1-9, 18-25; 44:24-45:8; 48:12-22; 49:1-6, 7-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12); Jer 1, 28.

Coogan, 268-286

On-line discussion: text exercise: Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (google doc)

Hangout lecture.

Week 8b (Feb 27-Mar 2) Temple and Jerusalem

Jon Levenson, "The Temple and the World." *The Journal of Religion* 64.3 (1984): 275-298.

R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Fortress 1996), pp 1-21.

Johanna Bos, "Responsible Christian Exegesis of Hebrew Scripture," in *The People's Bible*, pp 117-123.

New on-line discussion: What is "Responsible" Christian Interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures?

WEEK 9 (MARCH 3-9)

Week 9a (Mar 3-6) The God of the Hebrew Bible: One god of many, many gods in one

Deut 4; Judges 5, 16; Pss 29, 96, 104; Isa 40, 41, 56, 57, 66

OT Parallels, 263-274

Read one of the following:

Jan Assmann, *Of God and gods: Egypt, Israel, and the rise of monotheism*. Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Pr, 2008. Chap 1.

Mark Smith, "God in Israel's Bible: Divinity between the World and Israel, between the Old and the New," *CBQ* 2012.

Matthew Schlimm, "Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos" An Examination of Hermeneutics in Biblical theology" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 2007: 673-694

Podcast: The Development of 'Monotheism'

On-line discussion. Reflect on the question, Who is the god of the Hebrew Bible? What is your reaction to this god? What aspects of this god do you appreciate, struggle with, respect, like/dislike?

Week 9b (Mar 3-9). Talking to and about God: The Psalms

Psalms 1, 33, 40, 42, 43, 56, 73, 88, 145

Coogan, 366-379

Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typography," in *Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed Patrick Miller, 3-32.

Patrick D. Miller, "Prayer as Persuasion: The Rhetoric and Intention of Prayer," *Word & World* Fall 1993.

On-line discussion. According to the Psalms, how are God's people to relate, communicate, and interact with God? How might such a relational model prove useful to contemporary communities of faith?

WEEK 10: EXAM WEEK

Take home essays due Friday, March 14 at 6 a.m.