



The Old Testament / Hebrew Bible

REL 310

T-Th 12:25-2:05pm

Chapel Classroom

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Office Hours: MW 1:00pm–2:00pm / TTh 10:00am–11:00am / by appointment

Course Description

In this course we will investigate the literary, historical and theological contours of the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible is a highly variegated collection of several different genres (types of text) and authorial voices; it is the product of a long history of composition, transmission and redaction (editing), one that spans many centuries of ancient Israel's existence. The Hebrew Bible contains many of the “foundational narratives” of Israel's religious and national past, as well as myths, laws, stories and ideas that are rooted in the broader cultural worlds of the ancient Near East. It is, of course, scripture to Jews and Christians, and as such it has a rich history of interpretation in Judaism and Christianity, as well as in Islam.

In this course we will be doing several different things, often simultaneously, and we may encounter some tension among these different approaches. 1) We will read ancient texts and attempt to understand them *ON THEIR OWN TERMS* – in other words, with respect to what they say (and not necessarily what we wish them to say). 2) We will compare these biblical texts with other ancient sources and inscriptions that can throw light on our understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of different parts of the Bible. 3) We will consider several theories about the compositional history of the Bible – i.e. who wrote what when, and how it all came together in the end. 4) We will discuss the theological and ethical categories present in the texts, and reflect on what they attempt to communicate about God, ancient Israel and its neighbors, human nature, etc. 5) We will entertain different ways in which we might understand the Bible as a scriptural text – i.e. one that is authoritative and normative for different religious communities over time. And 6) we will take a look at how the Bible has been interpreted in various ways in the context of early Judaism and Christianity.

In sum, the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible makes for a fascinating and complex study, and we will do our best to juggle these many different (and sometimes competing) ways of approaching the text. To do so will require an open mind and willingness to go beyond the face value to discover the rich tapestry that is the world of the Bible.

RELIGION DEPARTMENT GOALS AND OUTCOMES:

- Use the basic **vocabulary and methods** of the academic study of religion
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably the **nature of biblical texts**, the **historical contexts** in which they arose, and their **scholarly interpretation**
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably **major theological questions** that have emerged in the history of tradition and the variety of answers that have been proffered for them
- Write respectfully about **different religious traditions**
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably the **role of religion** in the manifold dimensions of social existence

Course Requirements

There will be a considerable amount of **discussion and participation** required for this course. As you will note below, this will be a significant portion of your grade, and thus **attendance is mandatory**. Each student will write **two medium-length papers** (4-6 pages; each dealing primarily with primary source materials) and **one research paper** (10-15 pages, interacting extensively with secondary sources), each of which will be part of a process of draft writing and peer commentary. The research paper will use scholarly conventions of research and presentation to address a topic in the study of the Hebrew Bible; sample topics are provided below. In addition, each week students will be required to submit an entry to an ongoing journal, providing commentary and reflection on the readings for that week.

MORE ON THE PAPERS:

The two medium-length papers will be submitted in draft form (at least 3 pages) and will receive peer commentary in the form of in-class “workshops.” You will be asked to present your writing to peers and receive constructive criticism of ideas, arguments, style, and interaction with primary source materials. The larger research paper will be submitted in draft form (at least 8 pages) to the instructor, who will provide comments on clarity of thesis, content, argument, and use of secondary sources; prior to submission of the final draft, students will be required to have the paper reviewed by the Writing Center to correct for style, flow, and grammatical and typographical errors.

In addition to these requirements, each student must submit a final project that deals in some way with one or several of the themes we encounter during the course. This project can be a paper, story, poem, painting, sculpture, etc. – you get the idea – which will be determined in consultation with the professor. Students may elect to substitute the final project for an essay-based exam.

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| Attendance and Participation: | 15% |
| Research Paper: | 30% |
| Medium Papers: | 30% (2 papers) |
| Journal: | 10% |
| Final Project: | 15% |

Policy of Academic Honesty

The educational programs of California Lutheran University are designed and dedicated to achieve academic excellence, honesty and integrity at every level of student life. Part of CLU’s dedication to academic excellence is our commitment to academic honesty. Students, faculty, staff and administration share the responsibility for maintaining high levels of scholarship on campus. Any behavior or act which might be defined as “deceitful” or “dishonest” will meet with appropriate disciplinary sanctions, including dismissal from the University, suspension, grade F in a course or various forms of academic probation. Policies and procedures regarding academic honesty are contained in the faculty and student handbooks.

Plagiarism, cheating, unethical computer use and facilitation of academic dishonest are examples of behavior that will result in disciplinary sanctions. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- word-for-word copying without using quotation marks or presenting the work as yours
- using the ideas or work of others without acknowledgement
- not citing quoted material. Students must cite sources for any information that is not either the result of original research or common knowledge.

Students with Disabilities

CLU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to **students with various documented disabilities** (physical, learning or psychological). If you are a student requesting accommodations for this course, please contact me at the beginning of the semester and register with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities (Pearson Library, Center for Academic and Accessibility Resources, x3260) for the facilitation and verification of need. I will work closely together with you and your coordinator to provide necessary accommodations.

Required Texts

[ANETOT] Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Baker)

[TOS] Barton and Bowden, *The Original Story* (Eerdmans)

[SCA] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (Oxford)

[BB] Blackboard: Additional readings will be made available on Blackboard under Course Materials // Course Readings

You must also have a copy of the Hebrew Bible available to you. I would prefer if you use either the NRSV (such as the HarperCollins Study Bible) or the Jewish Publication Society translation, as they are the most accurate representations of the original language texts. We will from time to time refer to New Testament texts as well, especially as they present interpretations of earlier themes and narratives.

Class Schedule

Introduction

[1] Th Sept 5: Course Introduction: What is the Old Testament? What is the Hebrew Bible? What is the “Ancient Near East”?

[2] T Sept 10: Methods and Approaches

- [BB] Clines, “Methods in Old Testament Study”

Writing, Religion, Politics, and Peoplehood

[3] Th Sept 12: Literature of Israel and the Ancient Near East

- [TOS] 1-35 (1.1-1.4)

[4] T Sept 17: Literature of the Ancient Near East, Continued

- [ANETOT] 43-83 (skim just to get an idea of the various kinds of writing and the various cultural contexts)

[5] Th Sept 19: Alphabets and Peoples

- [BB] Sanders, “Empires and Alphabets”
- [TOS] 53-64 (2.2)

[6] T Sept 24: Textualization and the Production of Scripture

- [BB] Schniedewind, “How the Bible Became a Book,” and “The Numinous Power of Writing”
- [BB] VanderKam, “Questions of Canon Viewed through the Dead Sea Scrolls”

Myths and Epics, Gods and Goddesses, Temples and Kings

[7] Th Sept 26: Cosmology and Creation

- [ANETOT] 179-99
- Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a
- [BB] Hymn to Ptah
- [BB] Enuma Elish

[8] T Oct 1: The Garden of Eden and the Epic of Gilgamesh

- [BB] Blenkinsopp, “Gilgamesh and Adam”
- [BB] Gilgamesh excerpts
- Genesis 2:4b-3:26

[9] Th Oct 3: The Garden of Eden and the Epic of Gilgamesh

- [BB] Blenkinsopp, “Gilgamesh and Adam”
- [BB] Gilgamesh excerpts
- Genesis 2:4b-3:26

[10] T Oct 8: Abraham and Isaac

- Genesis 12-22
- [BB] Levenson, "Abusing Abraham"

Short Paper #1 Draft Due

[11] Th Oct 10: Moses, Sinai, and the Law

- Exodus 3-24
- [TOS] 245-56

[12] T Oct 15: Jerusalem and Monotheism

- [BB] Stager, "Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden"
- [ANETOT] 113-34
- Deuteronomy 5-12 // 2 Kings 22-23

Short Paper #1 Due

[13] Th Oct 17: Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel

- [ANETOT] 275-86
- [TOS] 133-41 (3.3)
- 1 Sam 1-10 // 2 Sam 7 // 2 Kings 25

Research Paper Topic Due

[14] T Oct 22: Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture

- [SCA] 8-41

Sex, Sexuality, and Gender in Ancient Israel

[15] Th Oct 24: "Texts of Terror"

- [BB] Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 1-29
- Genesis 16-21

Research Paper Preliminary Bibliography Due

[16] T Oct 29: A Song of Love

- [BB] Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 144-62
- Song of Songs
- [BB] Egyptian Love Poems

Death and Afterlife

[17] Th Oct 31: Going Down to the Pit: Burials and Metaphors

- [BB] ABD, "Sheol"
- [BB] Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence"

[18] T Nov 5: Death and the Future in the Ancient Near East

- [ANETOT] 313-29
- Ezekiel 37 // Daniel 11-12 // other texts TBA

Research Paper Preliminary Bibliography Due

[19] Th Nov 7: A Brief History of Resurrection

- [BB] Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*
- Gospel of Mark (longer ending) // Luke 24 // John 20-21

Divination and Revelation

[20] T Nov 12: Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East

- [BB] Excerpts from the Mari Letters
- [TOS] 191-204 (4.2)
- Jonah

[21] Th Nov 14: Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Covenantal Justice

- [BB] Dempsey, *The Prophets*, 5-21
- [SCA] 120-38
- Isaiah 2 // Amos

Research Paper Rough Drafts Due

[22] T Nov 19: *Scriptprophetie*: Interpretation as Revelation

- [BB] Najman, "Early Nonrabbinic Interpretation"
- Daniel 9 // Jubilees 1 // selections from the Dead Sea Scrolls

Wisdom, Ethics, and the Good Life

[23] Th Nov 21: Wisdom Literature

- [TOS] 221-33
- Psalm 119
- Job 1-10, 38-42
- Ecclesiastes
- **Short Paper #2 Rough Draft Due**

[24] T Nov 26: Wisdom and Work

- [SCA] 139-54

Thanksgiving Break

[25] T Dec 3: Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture

- [SCA] 42-65
- **Short Paper #2 Final Draft Due**

[26] Th Dec 5: Wholesome Materiality and Covenantal Economics

- [SCA] 80-119

[27] Th Dec 10: Visions of Shalom

- [SCA] 155-80

Research Paper Final Draft Due

Final Projects due by the last day of the exams period.

Possible Research Paper Topics:

- The origins and development of the Hebrew language
- In-depth study of particular biblical texts (Genesis 1 / 2-3, Deuteronomy, etc.)
- Comparative study of “parallel” texts in Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East
 - Song of Songs and Egyptian love poetry
 - Creation stories
 - Wisdom compilations
 - Legal collections
 - Other?
- Women / Gender in the Hebrew Bible / ancient Israel
- Study of Temple architecture and function
- Folk religion in ancient Israel / ancient Near East
- Archeology and the Bible (or “biblical archeology”)
- Sociology of ancient Israel (this one would have to be narrowed)
- Irony in the Hebrew Bible
- Theories of biblical narrative
- Scribes and “scribalism” in early Judaism
- Ideas about evil in the Hebrew Bible
- Burial practices in ancient Israel / early Judaism
- The Samaritans
- The making of the Septuagint
- Other?