

## Exploring Religion: Biblical Texts

AHUM 1716, Section 4

Fall Quarter 2005; Mondays & Wednesdays 11:00-12:50; Sturm Hall 234

Teacher/Facilitator: Dan Clanton

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“Jewish history unfolds in the present. Refuting mythology, it affects our life and our role in society. Jupiter is a symbol, but Isaiah is a voice, a conscience. Mars died without ever having lived, but Moses remains a living figure. The calls he issued long ago to a people casting off its bonds reverberate to this day and we are bound by his Law. Were it not for his memory, which encompasses us all, the Jew would not be Jewish, or more precisely, he would have ceased to exist.”

—Elie Wiesel, Preface to *Messengers of God*, 1976

“I think Judaism is a memory religion par excellence. . . . We have about four thousand years of history to remember. And what you are really bidden to do as an intelligent Jew is to remember and incorporate that history into your essential being. The biblical images of Abraham and Jacob are real. The story of the binding of Isaac is real. The story of Joseph is real. The story of David and Solomon, that’s a real story. It all becomes a part of the way you think about the world. . . . What Judaism wants Jews to do is to map the world with certain kinds of information. And that information consists of the value systems, the tensions, the successes and failures, the dreams and the terrors of the Jewish past.”

—Chaim Potok, Interview with *Mars Hill Review*, 1997

“The overriding aim of the biblical writers was to present a theological, or theocentric, didactic description of events. That is, these authors were intent on producing historiosophy rather than historiography. Animated by the unshakable conviction that divine sovereignty purposefully operates and controls human events, the biblical writers were not consciously composing mere historical records but rather documents of faith.”

—Nahum Sarna, Foreword to *Exploring Exodus*

**Description:** This course is designed as an introduction to the Torah of the Hebrew Bible, comprising Genesis-Deuteronomy.

### **Objectives**

- (1) To see the various ways in which biblical literature can and has been read in different settings.

- (2) To understand both the literary and religious layers of meaning(s) in these stories, i.e., to gain an appreciation for how these stories function as scripture as well as edificatory narratives.
- (3) To gain an appreciation of the narrative art in the Hebrew Bible, as well as to recognize that many of these stories are culturally familiar and as such deserve to be read in their original context.
- (4) To develop your own view(s) of the subject matter through reading primary and secondary sources, in-class discussion, and independent research.

**Requirements:** This course has four basic requirements and a total of 450 possible points:

- (1) Regular class attendance and participation are a must, and thus will account for 50 possible points toward your grade. By class participation, I mean both asking/answering questions and making relevant comments in the context of our in-class discussion. **Roll will be taken every class session; if you are not present during the taking of attendance, you will be counted absent unless you speak with me that Session. If you are absent 3 (three) or more classes your grade will be lowered by one letter grade; if you are absent 5 (five) or more classes you will fail the course.**
- (2) Completion of the primary and secondary readings **prior to class** goes hand in hand with class participation, and thus is as important. I also expect you to bring any and all readings to class with you on the days we're scheduled to discuss it.
- (3) We will have two short in-class quizzes, each worth 100 points toward your final grade. Quiz One will be given on **October 17<sup>th</sup> (Session 11)**, and Quiz Two will be on **November 16<sup>th</sup> (Session 20)**.
- (4) You will write an essay that will be 6-8 (1800-2400 words) pages long. First, you will submit a paper proposal containing a thesis, argumentative plan, and proposed sources, which will be due on **October 3<sup>rd</sup> (Session 7)**. Each student will be required to discuss these proposals with me prior to approval. Following approval, you will write a rough draft based on your proposal that will be due on **October 26<sup>th</sup> (Session 14)**. I will evaluate these drafts and return them to you with comments and suggestions for improvements. You will then write a final draft of the essay based on my feedback. The final draft will be due by noon in my office on **November 21<sup>st</sup>**. Formal instructions and sample topics for this paper can be found online at BlackBoard. Both versions of the essay will be worth 100 possible points toward your final grade. Note: A good guide on how to write academic papers can be found at <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/Gloess.htm>.

### **Additional Course Information**

- (1) No incompletes will be given unless the student contacts me well in advance of the end of the quarter. The circumstances must include serious medical problems or other extreme difficulties.
- (2) All requests for special accommodations, e.g., medical, athletic, or learning-related, must be presented to me the first day of class. All such requests must be accompanied by the appropriate paperwork to be considered.
- (3) No absences will be excused except in the cases of (a) an emergent medical situation or severe illness; or (b) a death in the student's immediate family.
- (4) Upon matriculation, all students implicitly agree to abide by the University's Academic Honor Code. Any violations of that code in our class will be taken very seriously. If I find evidence that you've violated the Honor Code, *either intentionally or unintentionally*, you will either (a) receive no credit for the assignment in question; or (b) be expelled from the class and assigned a failing grade for the course. In extreme cases, you may also be reported to the appropriate authorities on campus for further review.

### **FERPA Information**

According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the Buckley Amendment, information concerning grades and other student information may only be disseminated if the professor or institution has a signed release from the student in question, or if the student requests the information in person. **Requests for information via telephone or email without the aforementioned release will not be granted.**

**Texts:** (Numbers 1-7 Required; Number 8 Recommended)

- (1) Michael Joseph Brown. *What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Biblical Studies*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. (Henceforth abbreviated as Brown)
- (2) Terence E. Fretheim. *The Pentateuch*. Interpreting Biblical Texts Series. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. (Henceforth abbreviated as Fretheim)
- (3) Sharon Pace Jeanson. *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. (Henceforth abbreviated as Jeanson)
- (4) James L. Kugel. *The Bible As It Was*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1999. (Henceforth abbreviated as Kugel)

- (5) Dennis T. Olson. *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994. Reprinted Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005. (Henceforth abbreviated as Olson)
- (6) Elie Wiesel. *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*. Translated by Marion Wiesel. New York: Summit Books, 1976. (Henceforth abbreviated as Wiesel, 1976)
- (7) *The Jewish Study Bible, Featuring The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- (8) Elie Wiesel. *Wise Men and Their Tales: Portraits of Biblical, Talmudic, and Hasidic Masters*. New York: Schocken Books, 2003. (Henceforth abbreviated as Wiesel, 2003)

### **Schedule**

September 12<sup>th</sup> (Session 1): Introduction to Course (Syllabus, Readings, Assignments, Responsibilities)

September 14<sup>th</sup> (Session 2): What Is the Bible and How Will We Study It?

Reading:

- (1) Brown, Chs. 1-2, “The Aims of Bible Study and the Aims of Biblical Scholarship,” and “Rules of Thumb for Reading and Interpreting Biblical Texts: A Basic Approach,” pp. 1-69.
- (2) Marc Zvi Brettler, “Torah,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1-7.

September 19<sup>th</sup> (Session 3): Perspective and Method

Reading: Fretheim, Chs. 1-2, “The Study of the Pentateuch,” and “A Proposal for Reading the Pentateuch,” pp. 19-63.

Suggested Reading: Kugel, Ch. 1, “The World of Ancient Biblical Interpreters,” pp. 1-49.

Video: Excerpts from *Mysteries of the Bible*: “Who Wrote the Bible?”

September 21<sup>st</sup> (Session 4): Genesis, Part One: The Creation Stories

Primary Reading: Genesis 1.1-3.24

Reading:

(1) Wiesel, 1976, "Adam, or The Mystery of the Beginning," "Parables and Sayings I," pp. 3-36.

(2) Kugel, Chs. 2-3, "The Creation of the World," and "Adam and Eve," pp. 53-82.

September 26<sup>th</sup> (Session 5): Genesis, Part Two: The First Homicide and the Flood Narratives

Primary Reading: Genesis 4-11

Secondary Reading:

(1) Fretheim, Ch. 3, "The Book of Genesis," pp. 67-84.

(2) Wiesel, 1976, "Cain and Abel: The First Genocide," and "Parables and Sayings II," pp. 37-68.

(3) Kugel, Chs. 4-5, "Cain and Abel," and "Noah and the Flood," pp. 85-120.

September 28<sup>th</sup> (Session 6): Genesis, Part Four: The Matriarchs and Patriarchs, Part One

Primary Reading: Genesis 12-25.11

Secondary Reading:

(1) Wiesel, 1976, "The Sacrifice of Isaac: A Survivor's Story," "Parables and Sayings III," pp. 69-102.

(2) Wiesel, 2003, "Ishmael and Hagar," and "Lot's Wife," pp. 3-38.

Optional Reading: Kugel, Chs. 7, 9-10, "Abraham Journeys from Chaldea," "The Trials of Abraham," and "Lot and Lot's Wife," pp. 133-148 and 165-195.

October 3<sup>rd</sup> (Session 7): Genesis, Part Five: The Matriarchs and Patriarchs, Part Two

Primary Reading: Genesis 25.16-36.43

Secondary Reading:

(1) Wiesel, 1976, "And Jacob Fought the Angel," and "Parables and Sayings IV," pp. 103-138.

(2) Kugel, Chs. 11-13, "Jacob and Esau," "Jacob and the Angel," and "Dinah," pp. 199-244.

**\*\*\* Paper Proposal Due \*\*\***

October 5<sup>th</sup> (Session 8): Genesis, Part Six: Women in Genesis, Part One

Reading: Jeansonne, Chs. 1-4, "Introduction," "Sarah: Carrier of the Covenant," "The Daughters of Lot: Victims of Their Father's Abuse," and "Hagar: Powerless Foreigner," pp. 1-52.

October 10<sup>th</sup> (Session 9): Genesis, Part Seven: Women in Genesis, Part Two

Reading: Jeansonne, Chs. 5-8, "Rebekah: The Decisive Matriarch," "Rachel and Leah: Rival Daughters of a Manipulative Father," "Dinah: The Fracturing of a Tenuous Peace in a Troubled Land," and "Tamar: The Woman Who Demanded Justice," pp. 53-106.

October 12<sup>th</sup> (Session 10): Genesis, Part Eight: The Joseph Novella

Primary Reading: Genesis 37-50

Secondary Readings:

- (1) Fretheim, Ch. 3, "The Book of Genesis," pp. 84-100.
- (2) Wiesel, 1976, "Joseph, or The Education of a *Tzaddik*," and "Parables and Sayings V," pp. 139-173.
- (3) Jeansonne, Ch. 9, "Potiphar's Wife: The Stereotyped Temptress," pp. 107-113.

Optional Reading: Kugel, Chs. 14-15, "Joseph's Ups and Downs," and "Jacob's Sons in Egypt," pp. 247-284.

October 17<sup>th</sup> (Session 11): Exodus, Part One: Birth and Early Career of Moses; Plagues, Exodus, and Sea of Reeds

Primary Reading: Exodus 1.1-15.27

Secondary Readings: Kugel, Ch. 16-18, "Growing Up in Pharaoh's Court," "The Exodus from Egypt," and "The Red Sea," pp. 287-352.

**\*\*\*In-Class Quiz\*\*\***

October 19<sup>th</sup> (Session 12): Exodus, Part Two: Wilderness, Sinai, and Law

Primary Reading: Exodus 16.1-24.18

Secondary Reading: Kugel, Chs. 19-20, "Into the Wilderness," and "At Mt. Sinai," pp. 355-414.

October 24<sup>th</sup> (Session 13): Exodus, Part Three: The Golden Calf and Conclusions

Primary Reading: Exodus 32-34

Secondary Reading:

- (1) Fretheim, Ch. 4, "The Book of Exodus," pp. 101-120.
- (2) Kugel, Ch. 21, "The Golden Calf," pp. 417-437.
- (3) Wiesel, 2003, "Aaron and His Problem of Innocence," pp. 39-55.

Suggested Reading: Drorah O'Donnell Setel, "Exodus," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (eds. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe; expanded edition, with Apocrypha; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998), 30-39.

October 26<sup>th</sup> (Session 14): Leviticus: Law and Creation

Primary Reading: Leviticus 16-19, 20, 26

Secondary Reading:

- (1) Fretheim, Ch. 5, "The Book of Leviticus," pp. 121-136.
- (2) Judith Romney Wegner, "Leviticus," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (eds. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe; expanded edition, with Apocrypha; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998), 40-48.

Optional Reading: Kugel, Ch. 22, "Worship in the Wilderness," pp. 441-460.

**\*\*\* Rough Draft of Essay Due \*\*\***

October 31<sup>st</sup> (Session 15): Numbers: Law, Journeys, and Discontent

Primary Reading: Numbers 5, 11-14; 16-17; 20-24

Secondary Reading:

- (1) Fretheim, Ch. 6, "The Book of Numbers," pp. 137-151.
- (2) Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Numbers," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (eds. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe; expanded edition, with Apocrypha; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998), 49-56.

(3) Wiesel, 2003, "Miriam the Prophetess and Her Melancholy Fate," pp. 56-67.

Suggested Reading: Kugel, Chs. 23-24, "Trouble Along the Way," and "The Bronze Serpent, Balaam, and Phineas," pp. 463-500.

November 2<sup>nd</sup> (Session 16): Deuteronomy, Part One

Primary Reading: Deuteronomy

Secondary Reading:

(1) Fretheim, Ch. 7, "The Book of Deuteronomy," pp. 152-170.

(2) Tivka Frymer-Kensky, "Deuteronomy," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (eds. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe; expanded edition, with Apocrypha; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998), 57-68.

November 7<sup>th</sup> (Session 17): Deuteronomy, Part Two

Reading: Olson, Chs. 1-4, pp. 1-61.

November 9<sup>th</sup> (Session 18): Deuteronomy, Part Three

Reading: Olson, Chs. 5-6, pp. 62-125.

November 14<sup>th</sup> (Session 19): Deuteronomy, Part Four

Reading: Olson, Chs. 7-9, pp. 126-182.

November 16<sup>th</sup> (Session 20): Conclusion(s)

**\*\*\* *In-Class Quiz* \*\*\***

**\*\*\* *Final Draft due by noon in my office on Monday, November 21<sup>st</sup>* \*\*\***