

## Religion 310: The Hebrew Scriptures



*Ark containing Torah scroll, ca. 1500*  
--Courtesy Jewish Museum, London

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Office Hours MWF 10-12  
and by appointment

[Merriam-Webster](#)  
[OnlineDictionary](#)

### I. Course Aims:

- To gain a knowledge of the contents of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)
- To learn to read and understand these writings in their historical, religious, and literary contexts
- To learn to recognize different genres in the Biblical writings and to discern the intents of the various authors and redactors (editors)
- To increase appreciation of the Bible as *both* a religious document written, adapted, and preserved by a multitude of individuals and communities throughout history *and* as a book which has helped to shape western culture.

### II. Texts

- The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). For this class we will be using the Tanakh translation called *The Jewish Study Bible*. In addition to the Hebrew scriptures, it has a number of essays that we will be reading. We will be following the Jewish order of the Hebrew Bible and using *Tanakh* for classes. However, other translations will give you an understanding of how the order of the books has been changed. Please consult with me before using another translation.
- Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel* (revised) (Prentice Hall: 1999)

### III. Course Requirements

- Discussions and weekly interpretation papers: 30%

All students will write 1-2 page papers each week to aid in preparing for discussions of the texts. Ongoing interpretation of the Bible is an important part of the religious communities that value this text; we will be doing this in an academic context. Active participation in discussions is a critical component of this class. Missing more than two classes or two weekly papers will lower your final grade by one full point (B becomes C, for example).

- **Midterm and Final exam: 20% and 30%**

**Midterm and final exam questions will be given in advance. The final exam will**

**be take-home and will be due on the day of the scheduled final exam. The final exam must be typed and double-spaced.**

- **Class presentations: 20%**

**Our primary focus for this course is the context in which the Hebrew Bible developed. But themes in the Bible have been explored and interpreted throughout the history of our culture. There will be weekly short power point presentations on historical or contemporary uses of the Hebrew Bible in western culture: in literature, art, music, dance, drama, psychology. For example, the week we learn about the Exodus, a presentation could focus on depictions of Moses artistically. Presentations should take about 15 minutes. See [Guidelines for Presentations](#). Signup for each week will start the second week of class. [Signup List for Presentations](#)**

## **IV. Course Outline**

- **Week 1: January 17-19: Introduction; getting to know the text and terminology**

[Books of the Bible](#)

[The Tower of Babel](#)

[An introduction to the Bible](#)

[Martin Luther King: "I have been to the promised land"](#)

*Reading: Jewish Study Bible, 1-11*

**Barry Holtz, *Back to the Sources*, chapter 1, pages 1-25 (E-Res)**

*Jewish Study Bible, 2062-67 (Biblical languages)*

*Re-Reading the Bible (E-Res)*

**Genesis, chapters 12-15**

[Explanation](#) of the terms Copper, Bronze, and Iron Ages

[Chart](#) of Bronze and Iron Age periods relating to ancient Israel

[Ancient Mesopotamian Civilizations](#)

- **TORAH** (Weeks 2-5)

**Week 2: Jan. 24-26: Patriarchs and matriarchs; the Joseph cycle**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 1-31*

[Traditions underlying patriarchal stories](#)

## Who were the patriarchs?

Genesis, chapters 12-30; 35, 37, 41-50

## J,E,P in Genesis 15-30

## What is a hero?

Suggestions for presentations: Bob Dylan's *Highway 61*, the play *Joseph's Technicolor Dreamcoat*

## Features of Biblical narrative

**Week 3: Jan. 31, Feb. 2: The flight from Egypt; the Covenant**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 33-54*

*Jewish Study Bible, 2041-47 (Purity)*

Exodus, chapters 1-15; 19-24; 32-34; Leviticus 11-12; Deuteronomy 5-8

## Some principles of Torah commandments

Suggestions for presentations: artistic depictions of Moses, Exodus themes in reggae and American film and music

**Week 4: Feb. 7-9: The Promised Land; the conquest of Canaan**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 56-90*

## Two views of Biblical history

Numbers 11-14; 20-24; Joshua 1-12; Joshua 24

## The Settlement of Canaan

*Jewish Study Bible, 1827-35 (Biblical interpretation)*

Suggestions for presentations: American political speeches

## Excerpts

## Manifest Destiny and 1990's War Discourse

## Ronald Reagan: City on a Hill

**Week 5: Feb. 14-16: Formation of Epic; primeval stories**

*Reading: Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, chapter 5 (E-Res)*

*Jewish Study Bible, 2000-2005 (Women's interpretations)*

Genesis 1-11

## Myth

## Enuma Elish

**Suggestions for Presentations: Shakespeare, Milton**

## Some Interpretations of Cain and Abel

## Gilgamesh: Summary of Events

## The Epic of Gilgamesh

- **NEVI'IM** (Weeks 6-11)

**Week 6: Feb. 21-23: The tribal Confederacy; Judges**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 56-90*

## The Period of the Tribal Confederacy

*Jewish Study Bible, 451-455, 1990-2000 (Bible in Israeli life)*

## Two Theories About Sources for the Early Israelite Monarchy

## The Samuel Scroll

**Judges 2-9; I Samuel 1-13**

## Samuel and the End of the Tribal Confederacy

**Week 7: Feb 28, Mar. 2: Saul and transition to kingship**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 90-100*

*Jewish Study Bible, 2084-2096 (Modern study of the Bible)*

**I Samuel 15-18;28; 31**

## **MIDTERM**

-----SPRING BREAK-----  
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**Week 8: Mar. 21-23: The United Monarchy: David and Solomon**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 100-128*

**II Samuel 5- 8; 11-13; 18**

## The City of David

**I Kings 1-11**

[Israelite Religion](#)

[Biblical Religion](#)

**Week 9: Mar. 28-30: Divided monarchy; the prophets Amos, Hosea, Elijah**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 129-150*

*Jewish Study Bible, 456-61*

[Prophecy](#)

[The Divided Kingdom, 922-850](#)

**I Kings 17-19**

**II Kings 2**

[Deuteronomist History](#)

[The Divided Kingdom, 850-750](#)

**Hosea 11-13; Amos 1-5**

**Week 10: April 4-6: Isaiah; Mosaic reform**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 150-192*

[Fall of the Northern Kingdom](#)

**Isaiah 1-11; Jeremiah 1-5**

**II Kings 22-24**

**Deuteronomy 12-26**

[The Deuteronomy Law Code](#)

**Week 11: April 11-13: Exile; the priestly tradition**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 193-216*

*Jewish Study Bible, 1863-1875 (Midrash)*

**II Kings 24-25; Ezekiel 1-20; priestly tradition in Torah**

[The Priestly Tradition](#)

[Priest vs. Prophet \(Max Weber\)](#)

[The Kingdom of Judah, 700-539](#)

- **KETUVIM** (Weeks 12-14)

**Week 12: April 18-20: Wisdom literature**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 216-230*

[The Persian Period: 539-400](#)

*Jewish Study Bible, 1275-79*

[New Religious Ideas](#)

**Proverbs 1-3; 8-10**

**The book of Job**

**Week 13: April 25-27: The Psalms and the Megilloth**

*Reading: Jewish Study Bible, 1279-84; 2097-2104 (Biblical Poetry)*

[An Alexander the Great Page](#)

**Psalms 8, 11, 23-4; 103-4, 137, 150**

[Parallelisms in the Psalms](#)

[The Psalms Scroll](#)

**Ecclesiastes**

**Ruth, Esther**

**Week 14: May 2,4: The Song of Songs; Apocalyptic**

*Reading: Ancient Israel, 231-254*

*Jewish Study Bible, 1929-1937 (Bible in the Synagogue), 2072-2077 (Canonization)*

[The Hellenistic Era](#)

[New Religious Ideas](#)

**The Song of Songs**

[Interpretations of the Song of Songs](#)

**Daniel 1-3; 7-8; 12**