

CANISIUS COLLEGE
Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2007

RST 200: Introduction to the Old Testament

Dr. Jonathan D. Lawrence

A: T/Th 11:30-12:45 (OM 403)

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OBJECTIVE and LEARNING GOALS: The Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) introduces characters, events, and traditions that are central to three of the worlds' major religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This course will allow you to gain skill at reading and interpreting these traditions through an in-depth examination of a few central passages.

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- 1) Apply various scholarly approaches for understanding the Hebrew Bible as you explore its contents, themes, history, social setting, etc.
- 2) Read the Hebrew Bible critically for its own merit & for Christian meanings, & compare the many ways Jews & Christians (especially Catholics) have interpreted its stories
- 3) Develop your interpretive voice & investigate the Hebrew Bible's modern implications

APPROACH AND ASSESSMENT: This course will address these objectives through a series of five two-week units, each focused on about 5-10 chapters. The pattern for each unit will be:

First Tuesday: Introducing the passage and its context in the Bible, reading and outlining its major points and concerns, determining important questions for the following sessions.

First Thursday: Considering the ways the passage has been interpreted in theology, literature, and various forms of art. You will be asked to examples to discuss in class and post them online.

Second Tuesday: Examining other themes and broader issues related to the passage, in terms of the rest of the Bible (Old and New Testaments), religious traditions, and modern society.

Second Thursday: Concluding discussion of the passage and considering its interpretations, returning to the questions generated at the start of the unit. Unit papers will offer a chance to check progress towards course goals. (see below)

This may be a new approach for you, but I hope it allows you to learn about the Old Testament by focusing on reading & interpreting texts, instead of being overwhelmed with facts.

ASSIGNMENTS (Note: Missing assignments may be grounds for failing the course.)

(See Angel for instructions and grading criteria.) (see also PLAGIARISM statement below)

Assignment	Date Due	% of Grade
Unit 1 Paper – Genesis	Sept. 13, 4 pm	7.5
Unit 2 Paper – Exodus	Sept. 27, 4 pm	10
Unit 3 Paper – Leviticus	Oct. 16, 4 pm	12.5
Unit 4 Paper – Habakkuk	Oct. 25, 4pm	15
Unit 5 Paper – Daniel	Nov. 8, 4 pm	20
Group Presentations	Dec. 4 & 6, 4pm	15
Final Paper	Dec. 12, noon	20

Short Papers: A **two-page reflection paper** (double-spaced) will be due at the end of each unit (submitted through Turnitin.com – see below). These papers will represent each student's reflections and interpretations of these passages, based on the class discussions, not in-depth scholarly research on what other scholars have said. Students will be encouraged to consult with each other while writing their papers, but students are responsible for writing their own papers.

These five short papers will account for 65% of the semester grade, with increasing value placed on these papers as we proceed: 7.5%, 10%, 12.5%, 15%, 20%.

Group Projects: Students will work in groups of 5 to explore the context and interpretation of a text selected from list provided by the professor. There will be several intermediate due dates through the semester, and each group will give a 20-25 minute presentation in the last week of the semester and then turn in a revised version of the project on **12/7**. The grade will be based on the presentation, revised version, and each group's evaluation of its members' participation. (15% of semester grade)

Final Paper: (20% of semester grade) **Due Dec. 12, noon – Follow-up to Group Project.** Students will write a 5 page paper, which summarizes and analyzes their findings and contributions to the group project and discusses its relation to the other aspects of analysis which have been discussed for the short papers.

Alternate Assignments

1) Campus Lectures – 2 page summary and response (replaces Unit 2 Paper)

- **9/27 (time and place tba) – George Weigel (Catholic Theologian / Historian)**

2) Service Learning

If you are interested in doing a service-learning project in lieu of another class assignment, please speak to me as soon as possible to find a placement and arrange a contract. See <http://www.canisius.edu/servicelearning/> for more information. If you sign a Service Learning Agreement, you will be expected to fulfill that commitment.

TEXTBOOKS (available at the bookstore – additional readings will be posted online)

New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha (New Revised Standard Version = NRSV). If you have another Bible that contains the Apocrypha (preferable NRSV translation), you may be able to use it for class, although you will need to borrow a copy of this edition for certain background readings. (Check with the professor if you have questions)

The Interpretation of The Bible in the Church (Pontifical Biblical Commission) (optional)

POLICIES

Evaluation: You will have many opportunities to succeed and challenge yourself during this class. Wherever you are starting in terms of biblical knowledge, I hope to see growth and development over the semester. While I hope that we can focus on your learning, grades must be calculated as well. As I see it, grades for this class will reflect your progress towards the course goals, rather than any value judgment about you or your ideas. Further details available online.

I sometimes use student papers (with names removed) as examples of how students have done the assignments. If you do not wish your papers to be used in this way, please let me know. Otherwise I will assume your permission to use your papers in this way.

Here is the grading scheme for the course. +'s and -'s represent gradations between categories.

Letter Grade	Numerical Cutoff	Description
A	4.0	Exceptional work that exceeds the expectations for an A- and shows creativity and careful analysis of material.
A-	3.7	Superior effort & impressive results. Shows exceptional mastery of concepts, & goes well beyond requirements.
B+	3.3	Above average; may be excellent work with several small errors or flaws. Work which is solid, and shows command of concepts.
B	3.0	
B-	2.7	
C+	2.3	Satisfactory. Fulfils basic criteria of assignment, but does not go beyond minimal requirements
C	2.0	
C-	1.7	
D	1.0	Substandard. Major flaws, no mastery of major or minor concepts. May not have fulfilled requirements.
F	0	Failure to complete requirements or unacceptable work.

Attendance and participation: Successful completion of the course and assignments depends on regular attendance. If an absence is unavoidable, please notify the professor. Participation in class discussions is expected. Exceptional contributions to class discussions may raise grades that are borderline (between B+/A-, etc.). Disruptive behavior in class will not be tolerated. Disruptions or excessive absences will be grounds for reduction of grade or failure of the course.

Due Dates for readings and assignments: Readings from the Bible are to be completed by the first day of each unit. Other readings are to be completed as soon as possible during the unit unless otherwise indicated by the professor.

Papers must be submitted online (through turnitin.com) by **4 pm on the day indicated below** to allow prompt and consistent grading. If possible, save papers in MS-Word format and make sure you put your UserID in the file name. Each student is allowed one extension to be arranged before the paper is due. No late papers will be accepted.

It is your responsibility to make sure that your papers are submitted on-time and in the proper format. If you are having technical problems with turnitin.com or Blackboard, make sure you notify the professor immediately or your paper will be considered missing.

Plagiarism: (see www.canisius.edu/integrity/)

Students are expected to abide by all provisions of the Code of Academic Integrity.

All written assignments are meant to be the student's own work and not someone else's. You are encouraged to discuss the texts with your classmates, but the papers must be in your own words. Please do not use someone else's ideas, words, theories, opinions, and/or facts which are not common knowledge without proper citation. (NOTE – the one exception is opinions which were already mentioned in class discussion – these need not be cited in the standard way, but you must indicate that the idea came from class and not from yourself.)

Plagiarism is a serious offence. It is considered wrong because it is *stealing* another person's ideas, theories, methods, etc., and it is *lying* because you are representing something as your own when it is not yours. Plagiarism includes not citing sources (even if re-worded or placed in quotes), improper paraphrasing, and not citing a quote from a source cited elsewhere in your paper.

At minimum, anyone caught plagiarizing will fail the plagiarized assignment, but extreme cases will lead to automatic failure of the course. (See course website or professor for further information. If you're unsure about proper citation it is better to ask for clarification.)

All papers will be submitted through turnitin.com, a website that checks each paper against previously submitted papers and all kinds of material available online, giving a color-coded report that highlights any parts of the paper that appear to be borrowed from someone else's work. The system will allow you to submit a preliminary draft to see if there are any problems with paraphrasing, etc. I see turnitin.com primarily as a tool for helping learn how to paraphrase and keeping everyone honest, sort of like random drug tests for athletes, not as a punishment.

Students with Disabilities: Students with any special instructional needs due to documented learning disabilities or health problems should advise the professor of those needs by the close of the first week of classes.

If there are any other special circumstances which will affect your ability to participate in the class, feel free to discuss them with the professor.

Angel: The Canisius College Angel (angel.canisius.edu) system will be used for posting of course-related files, schedule updates, periodic feedback surveys, and grades. If you have any difficulties using the system, please notify the professor immediately.

SCHEDULE

(supplemental readings will be posted online and announced in class – read Bible text for 1st session of unit)

Introduction (8/28, 30)

Complete online survey by 4 pm Wed. 8/29

Oxford NRSV: ES 453-458, 466-471, 507-514 (skim 514-525) (all in back of book)

Unit 1 Creation: Genesis 1-4 (9/4, 6, 11, **13 Paper due**)Unit 2 Exodus 7-15 (9/18, 20, 25, **27 Paper due**)

9/13 – List of Group members due

Unit 3 Law & Society: Leviticus 11-15 (10/2, 4, 11, **16 Paper due**)

No Class 10/9 – Fall Break

10/4 - Group Purpose statement due

Unit 4 Prophecy: Habakkuk (entire book) (10/18, 23, **25 Paper due**)Unit 5 Apocalyptic Literature: Daniel (entire book) (10/30, 11/1, 6, **8 Paper due**)

11/1 - Project Outline Due

11/13 - tba

No Class 11/15, 20 (Professor out of Town)

No Class 11/22 (Thanksgiving)

11/27, 29 – Wrap-up

12/4 – Group Presentations Groups 1-3

12/6 – Group Presentations Groups 4-6

12/7 Project Revisions due

12/12, noon - Final Paper due

NOTE – this syllabus is a tentative outline of the course schedule and activities. It may be adjusted over the course of the semester. Any changes to readings or assignments will be discussed in class or by e-mail. I reserve the right to adjust any of these policies according to my professional judgment and the circumstances.

Task: Based on a close reading of the text and the class discussions, write a two-page paper analyzing a portion of the text and considering its interpretation(s).

Due Dates and Procedures: due online by date specified in Syllabus

Submit through Angel (and to Turnitin.com). Please include your username (ex. – mine is lawrenc7) in the file name. It is your responsibility to make sure that the correct file is submitted on-time. Make sure you keep a printed and electronic backup of all work.

Length: 2 pages only (1” margins, double-spaced, standard 12 point font) (anything past 2 pages will not be read) I realize that limiting it to two pages may be difficult – one part of this process is learning to be focused and concise in what you say. You may use the first-person.

Since the texts for each unit will be several chapters long, it will be easiest to stay focused if you select an issue or smaller portion in the text to discuss.

Contents: For the issue / verses you have selected, please address the following:

- 1) Introduction - The Text: identify the verses you are analyzing and their characters / subject matter, along with the questions you are trying to answer.
- 2) Context: based on your own investigations and class discussions, discuss the context(s) in which we can understand the passage: (choose at least one – some will be more applicable to certain stories than others)
 - a. Biblical –role in the book where it’s found, other Biblical references to the story
 - b. Social – how the story fits into our understandings of ancient social practices
 - c. Historical / Archaeological – connection to ancient events, other cultures, or archaeological discoveries
- 3) Other interpretations – based on your own investigations and class discussions, discuss the ways the passage has been interpreted: (choose at least one – some will be more applicable to certain stories than others) (outside sources are usually necessary)
 - a. Theological aspects – how does the passage help us answer questions about God and our relationship with God?
 - b. History of interpretation – (how) have readings of the passage changed over time?
 - c. Artistic / Literary / Musical, Cinematic, etc. adaptations – how has the passage been used in various artistic formats, **and** what messages do the artists convey?

NOTE – the background readings are a good source of information for context / interpretation

- 4) Your own interpretation – based on the above information, what does the story mean to you, how do you answer the questions you raised? What (if any) implications does the story have for church and society? If you’ve used outside sources, give a brief analysis of the reliability of your sources. (at least one paragraph)

These are not research papers for which you need to do extensive searches for other information. Instead they are intended to give you a chance to analyze the texts and reflect on them, based on the issues discussed in class. However, if you base your answer on material written by anyone else, you must cite it. Parenthetical references (ex.: Dickens, 235) are acceptable, as long as full bibliographic entries are then included on third page. Any websites must also be fully cited – not just the home page but the URL for the exact page used. (see additional links on Course Information page and below)

RST 200 - Unit Exegesis Papers - Assignment and Evaluation Criteria

Criteria for Evaluation (see comments in syllabus as well)

	Excellent	Good	Fair
Introducing Text	Clear, concise introduction of text and questions to consider	Some detail, but objectives not entirely clear	Minimal detail, introduction missing or doesn't fit w/ rest of paper
Context Discussion	Clear, detailed consideration of context(s), how they explain text (Detail & Implications)	Either less detail of contexts or less discussion of implications	Minimal detail and discussion of implications of context
Other Interpretations	Clear, detailed discussion of other interpretations and how they relate to your questions (Detail & Implications)	Either less detail from other interpretations or less discussion of their implications	Minimal detail and consideration of the implications of the other interpretations
Your Interpretation	Clear, detailed discussion of how you interpret the text and how you answer the questions you set out for yourself, Evaluate sources	Either less detail of your interpretation or less connection to the questions you introduced at the start	Minimal detail and no connection to the questions you introduced at the start
Mechanics			
- Structure	Polished, enjoyable to read, creative	Thesis, flow, and transitions present but not clear	Structure difficult to follow, No thesis or transitions between sections
- Grammar & Spelling	Polished, excellent use of appropriate terminology	A few spelling and grammatical errors	Serious spelling and grammatical errors making comprehension difficult
- Citations	Excellent, Complete	Most sources cited correctly and fully	Few or no citations, web links incomplete

Grading:

Numerical Grade	Explanation
4.0	Excellent in all four content areas AND exceptionally well-written
3.7	Excellent in all four content areas
3.3	Excellent in three content areas, Good in one
3.0	Excellent in two content areas, Good in two
2.7	Excellent in one content area, Good in three
2.3	Good in all content areas
2.0	Good in two or three content areas, Fair in rest
1.7	Fair in all content areas

(an Excellent and a Fair will average out to two Goods)

Don't panic if you don't do as well as you would like on the first couple papers – each paper will increase in weight (7.5%, 10%, 12.5%, 15%, 20%) so there will be plenty of chances to pull your grade up.

Note – papers with excessive grammatical or stylistic problems will not be graded until they have been revised. (Such papers may not receive more than a 3.3.)

You are allowed one extension for the semester, to be arranged before the due date. Otherwise late papers will not be accepted.

(note – these criteria may be adjusted over the semester. Any changes will be discussed in class before being implemented.)

Additional Comments

First, these grading criteria reflect my attempt to systematically outline the characteristics of an effective paper. My goal with these papers is to help you become more systematic and analytical in your reading and interpretation of the Bible. I am not grading your beliefs, but the way you present your arguments. There is no “right” answer, and some of you will notice in my comments that I disagree with your conclusions, but that in itself will not reduce your grade. On the other hand, if you misquote Biblical verses or get factual information wrong, I will say something and it will likely reduce your grade.

Second, while there are many ways to organize papers of this sort, I have chosen the format I outlined as a way to efficiently present and discuss the kinds of information and interpretations we’re investigating in class. That is the various contexts and interpretations that relate to the texts. Stating facts about the context or describing existing interpretations of the text is the first part of each section, but discussing the implications of those details is the second part. Without both parts, your treatment of the context or interpretations is incomplete. For instance, saying “in August 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan and some people say it was immoral,” would be accurate but incomplete. If you then contextualized the reasons for the decision to drop the bomb and discussed different views of the morality of that decision, you would demonstrate that you had gone beyond just the basic facts.

Third, I realize that this structure may seem awkward and difficult given the two-page limit. The same may have been true when you started to learn how to write mathematical proofs, business letters, lab reports, and many other kinds of assignments. Once you learned the structure of these kinds of writing, you could then adjust it and introduce your own creative touches, and by the end of the semester some of you may be able to meet the criteria for these papers without worrying so much about the exact structure. I believe this format will help you learn to effectively analyze biblical passages and express your interpretations. I don’t necessarily expect you to change your beliefs, but I do expect you to grow in the way you express them. For instance, saying, “I believe the earth is flat,” is not likely to convince many people. On the other hand, if you say “I believe the earth is flat because of evidence X, Y, Z and because arguments for a round earth are wrong because of A, B, C,” people may still disagree with you but you have at least presented details which you can debate and discuss.

Some practical details:

- a) please keep to 2 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font (preferably Times Roman)
- b) for citations, mentioning the source by name in the text is insufficient, you must footnote it or put it in a works cited section, with as much of this information as possible:
 - Bible: Genesis 1:1. (i.e., “Genesis says that God ...” is insufficient.)
 - Movies: American Graffiti. George Lucas, Universal, 1973.
 - Music: Mozart, “Requiem,” 1791, Philips Classics, 1991.
 - Artwork: Michaelangelo, David, The Accademia, Florence, Italy, c. 1504.
 - Book: Kirsch, Jonathan. The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible. Ballantine Books, 1997.
 - Website: “Habakkuk’s Prophecy of the USA’s Corruption of Islam”, <http://www.eyesalve.org/jesushabakkuk.htm>

Finally, please look at the samples posted online for examples of how others have successfully completed this assignment, and please feel free to contact me if you have questions about your grade or my comments. It’s better to get things fixed now than to wait until the last paper.

RST 200 - Reflection Paper Feedback (Lock or “Protect Sheet” to enable Forms features)

	Excellent	Good	Fair
Content Areas			
Text Summary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Context Discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Examples of Interpretations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conclusion – Your Interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mechanics			
- Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Grammar & Spelling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Citations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments (please refer to the grading criteria as posted on Blackboard for more info)

Grade

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Feel free to contact me to discuss any concerns with your paper.

Prof. Lawrence (jonathan.lawrence@canisius.edu)