The Five Books of Moses

McMaster University, Fall 2004

Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30-11:20, TSH/B106
Tutorial I: Fridays, 11:30-12:20, JHE/326H; Tutorial II: Fridays, 13:30-14:20, BSB/106

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Course Requirements

The first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—have had a formative influence on ideas about God, humankind, and the cosmos, as well as understandings of ethics, family, history, and nationhood, in Judaism, Christianity, and Western culture more broadly. Termed the Torah in Jewish tradition and the Pentateuch in Christian tradition, these books contain some of the most familiar and famous biblical tales, alongside laws and precepts that shaped Jewish and Christian views of piety and proper ritual practice. At the same time, these books provide precious evidence of the history, religion, and culture of ancient Israel. As such, their study opens a window onto the specific socio-historical circumstances that shaped the words that Jews and Christians would come to cherish as divine Scripture. In this course, we will read through the entirety of these five books. Approaching them from an academic perspective, we shall trace the processes by which these texts came to be formed and consider the multiple socio-historical contexts that informed them, while also analyzing their narrative structures and meaning in their present form.

Course Requirements

- Attendance & participation (10%) – It is imperative that students attend the Lectures and weekly Tutorials. Not only will attendance and participation count for 10% of the final grade, but Lectures will cover material not treated in the textbooks, for which students will be responsible in the Quizzes and on the Final Exam. Tutorial sessions will focus on close readings of key selections from the assigned biblical texts; detailed knowledge of these selections will be assumed in the Lectures and on the Exam. Make sure to have read the assigned passages prior to attending Lectures and Tutorials and to bring your Bibles to both!
Quizzes (30%) – Three in-class quizzes (20-30 min. each) will consist of identification questions and test knowledge of the biblical sources as well as key concepts from the supplementary readings in Friedman and Blenkinsopp. They are scheduled for October 6th (Genesis), October 25th (Exodus), and November 22nd (Leviticus & Numbers).

Short Paper (25%) – Due November 1st, the paper will be a short (3-5 pp.) source-critical analysis of a passage from the assigned readings, discussed with reference to Lectures and assigned readings as well as scholarly commentaries. These commentaries will be placed on reserve at Mills. Paper Guidelines

Final Exam (35%) – The final exam will consist of identification questions spanning all the material covered in the course, together with 2-3 essay questions.

Required Readings

The following books are required for this course. They are available for purchase at Titles and have been placed on Reserve at Mills:


Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notion on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: (1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. (2) Improper collaboration in group work. (3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Please be aware that Plagiarism includes
quoting and paraphrasing other people’s writings or ideas – whether from a book, commentary, website, etc. – without proper citation of the author, book, URL, or so on. I cannot stress this enough: whenever in doubt, always add a reference (whether in a footnote or in parentheses in the body of your paper) making clear the source of your information!

Schedule of Assignments

Monday, September 13 – Introductory Comments

Wednesday, September 15 – Approaches to Studying the Pentateuch

Friedman, pp. 15-49; Blenkinsopp, pp. 31-53

Class Handout

Additional resources:

P—Understanding the Priestly Source, BR 12:03, Jun 1996 By Victor Hurowitz (McMaster only)

Scholars Face Off Over Age of Biblical Stories, BR 10:04, Aug 1994 By Richard Elliott Friedman and John Van Seters (McMaster only)

The Documentary Hypothesis in Trouble, BR 1:04, Fall 1985 By Joseph Blenkinsopp
Monday, September 20 –
Creation of the Cosmos and Humankind
Genesis 1-3
Friedman, pp. 50-53;
Blenkinsopp, pp. 12-28, 54-71
Class Handout
Additional resources:
Eve and Adam, BR 4:03, Jun 1988 By Pamela J. Milne
(McMaster only)

Wednesday, September 22 –
Earliest Human History
Genesis 4-11
Friedman, pp. 53-61;
Blenkinsopp, pp. 71-97
Class Handout; Chart
Additional resources:
When the Sons of God Cavorted with the Daughters of Men, BR 3:02, Spring 1987 By Ronald S. Hendel
(McMaster only)
The Sources of Genesis 1–11 According to the Documentary Hypothesis, BR 1:04, Fall 1985 (McMaster only)
Disentangling the Sources of the Flood Story (Genesis 6:1–9:29) According to the Documentary Hypothesis, BR 1:04, Fall 1985 (McMaster only)
What the Babylonian Flood Stories Can and Cannot Teach Us About the Genesis Flood, BAR 4:04,
Monday, September 27 – Abraham Cycle  
Genesis 11:26-25:11  
Blenkinsopp, pp. 98-133

Class Handout; Chart  
Additional resources:  
The Patriarchal Age: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Ancient Israel, 1999 By Ronald S. Hendel and P. Kyle McCarter Jr. (McMaster only)  
Hagar’s Expulsion—A Tale Twice-Told in Genesis, BR 2:04, Fall 1986 By Zefira Gitay (McMaster only)

Wednesday, September 29 – Jacob Cycle  
Genesis 25:11-36:42  
Friedman, pp. 62-69

Class Handout  
Additional resources:  
Deception for Deception, BR 2:01, Winter 1986 By Richard Elliott Friedman (McMaster only)  
The Patriarch Jacob—An “Innocent Man”. BR 2:01, Winter 1986 By Carl D. Evans (McMaster only)

Monday, October 4 – Joseph Story  
Genesis 37-50  
Blenkinsopp, pp. 134-160

Class Handout  
Additional resources:  
Excavating the Tribe
Wednesday, October 6 –
Israel in Egypt
Exodus 1-6
**QUIZ 1
(GENESIS)**

Monday, October 11 –
Thanksgiving; no class

Wednesday, October 13 –
Plagues, Passover, and the Exodus
Exodus 7:1-15:21
Class Handout
Friedman, pp. 150-73

Monday, October 18 – Law and Covenant
Exodus 15:22-24:18
Class Handout
Class Handout #2
Friedman, pp. 173-206

Wednesday, October 20 –
Tabernacle, Golden Calf, and Renewal of Covenant
Exodus 25-40
Class Handout
Class Handout #2
Friedman, pp. 173-206

Monday, October 25 –
Sacrifice
Leviticus 1-7
** QUIZ #2
(EXODUS)**
Class Handout

Wednesday, October 27 –
Priestly Ordination
Monday, November 1 –  
Purity and Impurity  
Leviticus 11-16  
**PAPER DUE**

Monday, November 8 –  
Preparations for Departure to Sinai  
Numbers 1:1-10:10  
Blenkinsopp, pp. 160-182

Monday, November 15 –  
From Kadesh to Moab  
Numbers 20:22-36:13  
Blenkinsopp, pp. 229-242

Wednesday, November 3 –  
The Holiness Code  
Leviticus 17-27  
Blenkinsopp, pp. 223-25

Wednesday, November 10 –  
From Sinai to Kadesh  
Numbers 10:10-20:21  
Friedman, pp. 207-33

Monday, November 22 –  
**QUIZ #3, LEVITICUS & NUMBERS**
Wednesday, November 24 –
Looking forward to the
Future
Deuteronomy 4:41-
11:32
Friedman, pp. 101-149
Class Handout #2

Monday, November 29 –
Laws
Deuteronomy 12-26
Blenkinsopp, pp. 209-
20
Class Handout

Wednesday, December 1 –
Blessings, Curses, and the
Death of Moses
Deuteronomy 27:1-
34:12
Friedman, pp. 234-45
Class Handout

FINAL EXAM – December
11, 4pm Study Guide