

RLST 2210: Hebrew Scriptures

Millsaps College, Fall 2008

CC 24, MW 2:45-4:00 PM

Instructor: J. Blake Couey

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Office: CC 9 (ext. 1079)

Hours: MW 1:00-2:00 PM;

T 10:30 AM-12:00 PM; and by appt.

Course Description and Goals

The Hebrew Scriptures (aka Old Testament) are both a familiar and remote collection of documents, originating in the social and religious environment of the ancient Near East, yet informing communities of faith and influencing intellectual and cultural traditions in diverse cultures extending to the present. This course seeks to orient students to the content and scholarly interpretation of these texts, with some attention to their place in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and their popular interpretation through the ages. Although the subject is too large to be explored in depth in a single semester, the course will hopefully provide a foundation (and create a desire!) for further study of biblical literature.

By the end of the semester, students will have gained

- * a working knowledge of the content, socio-historical contexts, and literary conventions of the Hebrew Scriptures;
- * an awareness of scholarly approaches to the interpretation of biblical texts;
- * the capacity to read biblical texts carefully and critically;
- * a growing sense of the religious, intellectual, and ethical influence of the Hebrew Scriptures on subsequent cultures, including our own.

Textbooks

The following textbooks are required for purchase:

- * *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* (3d ed.)

If you already own a recent English translation of the Bible (English Standard Version; New American Bible; New International Version; New Jewish Publication Society Version/Tanakh; New Revised Standard Version; etc.) you may use it instead. The following are not acceptable for this class: King James Version, the Living Bible, the Message, or New Living Translation. If you have questions about a particular version, please consult the instructor.

You should bring your Bible to every class meeting.

- * James E. Bowley. *Introduction to Hebrew Bible: A Guided Tour of Israel's Sacred Library* (=IHB)
- * Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin. *Old Testament Parallels* (3d ed.) (=OTP)

Other assigned readings will be available through library or electronic reserve or will be distributed in class.

Requirements and Assignments

Participation and attendance: It should go without saying that consistent class attendance, preparation, and participation in discussion are essential on your part. You owe this not only to yourself but also to your classmates, as the overall experience of the course depends upon the preparation of each student. The participation component of your grade will take into account both the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussion.

Please let the instructor know in advance about any foreseen absences. You are allowed two absences for the semester. Any absences beyond this will negatively affect the participation component of your grade, and the impact will increase exponentially with each absence. If you miss more than eight classes, you will not pass the course.

Quizzes: Short quizzes will be given throughout the semester. Some of the quizzes will be announced and will cover specific material; others will be unannounced and will cover the assigned readings for that class meeting more broadly. Your lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester will be dropped. Students will only be allowed to make up missed quizzes in the event of an illness or emergency or a pre-approved, excused absence, at the instructor's discretion.

Written Assignments: Over the course of the semester, you will write three short essays (1000 words). In these essays, students are expected to make a specific claim (thesis) appropriate to the parameters of the assignment and craft an argument in support of this claim. The essays should be typed and must conform to standards of formal academic writing; a list of more specific guidelines will be provided before the first due date. Essays with excessive grammatical or typographical errors may be docked a letter grade and/or returned to the student for immediate revision. The assignments are as follows:

* The first essay (due Oct. 6) will be a focused interpretation of one of the following biblical texts: Genesis 11:1-9; Genesis 21:8-21; Exodus 15:1-18; Exodus 21:1-11; or Numbers 12:1-16. The essay should make a claim about what the text means and back it up with ample references to the text. Students are encouraged to consult the textbook and the essays and notes in the New Oxford Annotated Bible for background, and any references to these secondary sources should be cited appropriately; however, the paper must reflect the your own independent thought about the text.

* The second essay (due Nov. 15) will analyze of a work of biblical scholarship. You may choose one of four scholarly articles that will be available on reserve. The first half of the paper should summarize the argument of the article, and the second half of the paper should evaluate the argument. Keep in mind the following questions: What scholarly approaches does the article use? (See IHB, pp. 35-37, for short explanations of different approaches.) How is the biblical text used? What sources does the article draw on besides the Bible? Do you find the argument persuasive? Why or why not?

* The third essay (due Dec. 1) will discuss a popular interpretation-that is, intended for a wider audience and not simply a religious community-of a biblical text in a work of

literature, visual art, music, or drama (including films and television shows). The interpretation may come from any historical period. A list of suggested works will be distributed later in the semester, but students are encouraged to select their own work, in consultation with the professor. You must notify the professor of your selection two weeks before the due date for the assignment. Keep in mind the following questions: What cues does the work take from the text? What details does it add to its rendering of the text? Does the interpretation cause you to see something in the text that you would not have seen otherwise? The point is not to evaluate whether the interpretation gets the text "right" or "wrong" but to describe how it receives and transforms the text. In addition, shorter writing assignments will be given periodically throughout the semester. These will receive a grade of "check," "check plus," or "check minus."

Group Presentation: On Nov. 19, students will be responsible for class presentations on selected apocryphal texts (i.e., books that are part of the biblical canon for Catholic and Orthodox Christians but not for Jews or most Protestant Christians). Each presentation should be no longer than ten minutes and should include information about the book's historical background, content, and literary features. Creativity is strongly encouraged, but not at the expense of substance. You will have the chance to indicate your preferences for certain books later in the semester. The appropriate chapters in IHB and the essays and notes in the New Oxford Annotated Bible will be a good place to start preparing for the assignment.

Exams: Two exams will be given during the course: a midterm on Oct. 13 and a final on Dec. 15.

Both exams will include short-answer sections that deal with objective content and essay sections that require reflection upon and synthesis of larger issues relating to the Hebrew Scriptures. The final will be cumulative in scope, but weighted toward material covered after the midterm.

Grading

Your course grade will be determined according to the following breakdown:

Attendance/Participation 10%

Quizzes/Short Writing Assignments 10%

Group Presentation 10%

Essays 30%

Midterm 20%

Final 20%

The grade scale for the course is: A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D+ (67-69); D (60-66); F (0-59).

Schedule

Week One

W (8/27) What Are the Hebrew Scriptures?

Week Two

M (9/1) LABOR DAY

W (9/3) How Do We Read the Hebrew Scriptures?

READ IHB, pp. 1-54

Week Three

M (9/8) The World of the Hebrew Scriptures

READ IHB, pp. 55-106

Instruction/Torah

W (9/10) The Primeval History

READ Genesis 1-11; IHB, pp. 107-125; OTP, pp. 11-20, 33-42

Week Four

M (9/15) Ancestral Narratives

READ Genesis 12-35; IHB, pp. 126-131

W (9/17) The Exodus as Story and History

READ Exodus 1-15; IHB, pp. 132-143; OTP, pp. 89-90, 97-98

Week Five

M (9/22) Covenant and Law

READ Exodus 19-24, 32-34; Leviticus 16-23; IHB, pp. 143-161; OTP, pp. 91-96; 105-114

W (9/24) The Ten Commandments

Week Six

M (9/29) Wilderness and Catechesis

READ Numbers 11-14, 20-25; Deuteronomy 4-8, 12, 15, 28-34; IHB, pp. 162-84; OTP, pp. 131-133, 355-356

Prophets/Nevi'im

W (10/1) Entering the Land

READ Joshua 1-9; Judges 1-8, 11, 13-16, 19-21; IHB, pp. 185-200

Week Seven

M (10/6) The United Monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon

READ 1 Samuel 8-20; 2 Samuel 1-5, 7-12; 1 Kings 1-8, 11; IHB, pp. 201-211

ESSAY ONE DUE

W (10/8) The Divided Monarchy: Wicked Kings, Prophets, and Reformers

READ 1 Kings 12-13, 17-22; 2 Kings 2-10, 17-25; IHB, pp. 212-25; OTP, pp. 167-169, 190-194, 263-274

Week Eight

M (10/13) MIDTERM

W (10/15) Pre-Exilic Prophets: Israel

READ Amos 3-9; Hosea 1-6, 11, 14; IHB, pp. 226-229, 262-268, 273-280; OTP, pp. 341-346

Week Nine

M (10/20) FALL BREAK

W (10/22) Pre-Exilic Prophets: Judah

READ Isaiah 1, 5-11; Jeremiah 1, 16-20, 26-31; IHB, pp. 230-236, 244-255, 292-310

Week Ten

M (10/27) Exilic Prophets

READ Ezekiel 1-10, 37; Isaiah 40-46; IHB, pp. 237-243, 256-61, 281-284

W (10/29) Post-Exilic Prophets

READ Jonah 1-4; Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1-8; IHB, pp. 269-272, 285-291, 311-324

Writings/Ketuvim

Week Eleven

M (11/3) The Post-Exilic Period

READ Ezra 1, 3-7; Nehemiah 1-8, 13; 1 Chronicles 11-22, 28-29; IHB, pp. 422-436; OTP, pp. 207-215

W (11/5) Short Stories and Love Poetry

READ Ruth 1-4; Esther 1-10; Song of Songs 1-8; IHB, pp. 373-389, 406-413; OTP, pp. 321-326

ESSAY TWO DUE

Week Twelve

M (11/10) Poems of Pain and Praise

READ Psalms 1, 2, 13, 22, 23, 30, 46, 89, 97, 100, 103, 104, 121, 137; Lamentations 1-2; IHB, pp. 325-326, 329-343, 390-396; OTP, pp. 247-255, 275-279

W (11/12) Wisdom Literature

READ Proverbs 1-9, 22-24; Ecclesiastes 1-12; IHB, pp. 327, 344-354, 397-405; OTP, pp. 223-229, 293-302

Week Thirteen

M (11/17) More Wisdom Literature and Apocalyptic

READ Job 1-14, 38-42; Daniel 1-7, 10-12; IHB, pp. 355-372, 414-421; OTP, pp. 230-244

W (11/19) Apocrypha

READ IHB, pp. 437-440

GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Week Fourteen

M (11/24) NO CLASS

W (11/26) THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week Fifteen

M (12/1) The Hebrew Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

READ IHB, pp. 466-471

ESSAY THREE DUE

W (12/3) Concluding Reflections

FINAL EXAM on Saturday, Dec. 15, at 9:00 AM

Administrative Varia

Honor Code: The pledge signed by all students upon entering Millsaps College is as follows:

As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implication and of my responsibility of the Code. In the interests of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.

Please write "pledged" and sign your name at the top of the first page of all essays, exams, and other course assignments to indicate that that you have not given or received unauthorized aid on the assignment. All of us have share the responsibility to report offenses to the Honor Code Council in the form of a written report. This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to the Dean of the College.

Be especially diligent to avoid plagiarism. In any written assignment, you must acknowledge the source for any idea that is not your own, even if you have presented it in your own words.

Accommodations: Students with documented disabilities requiring accommodations should meet with the instructor at their earliest convenience to discuss their needs for this course.

Timeliness of Assignments: Any late assignments will be docked one letter grade. If you do not turn in an essay on time, please talk to the instructor immediately. Extensions can be granted if circumstances require them, but they must be requested before the paper is due.

If, for any reason, you find yourself falling behind in the class, or you are struggling to process the material, or you do not understand a particular assignment or requirement, please come and talk to the instructor-the earlier in the semester, the better!