

# INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Hebrew Studies 217/Jewish Studies 227/  
Religious Studies 227/Literature in Translation 227

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UW-Madison  
Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies  
Fall 2011

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## **Place and Time:**

Lecture meeting time: TThu 2:30-3:45pm  
Lecture meeting place: Ingraham 19  
Section time and place as assigned.  
Final exam date: December 21, 2011 (10:05 am - 12:05 pm)

## **Course Description:**

The Hebrew Bible comprises one of the foundational literary corpora of Western Civilization, regardless of whether we treat it in our personal lives devotionally as holy scripture or mundanely as “mere” literature. Its stories have exerted an immeasurable influence on our own modern literary genres; its bodies of legal material persist as a primary cultural background and a significant touchstone of our own legal system (with the commensurate disagreements as to *what role* they should play in our system); and its turns of phrase have been immortalized in countless allusions found in subsequent literature. The Hebrew Bible continues to make truth claims in religious communities; even if we are not members of these communities, it is worth our time to become familiar with the dominant strains of ethical thought permeating the biblical text. This course will probe the full corpus of the Hebrew Bible, introducing students to the historical context of the book’s development, the process of its formation, and the very human production of a text considered sacred by both Christians and Jews alike, and acknowledged worldwide as a literary masterpiece.

## **Catalogue Description:**

Introduction to the literature and literary history of the Hebrew Bible/Old

Testament.

**Student Achievement Goals:**

Students will:

1. demonstrate familiarity with the basic methodological approaches to and problems with the text of the Hebrew Bible as a literary corpus, historical artifact, product of a long process of composition, and a text considered authoritative by two of the world's major religious traditions.
2. develop a deeper understanding of the multitude of philosophical and theological positions taken by the authors of the biblical text, and exhibit a more self-critical understanding of their own personal approach to the biblical text.
3. hone their close reading skills so as to be able to read a literary text with deeper attention to detail and sharper interpretive instincts, as well as increase their ability to articulate their observations.

**Course Requirements:**

As part of the work contributing to their successful completion of this class, students *must* (a) read the assigned readings *before* attending class (completion of the readings will provide a solid background for the lectures); (b) attend both lectures and discussion sections diligently, so as to integrate the readings with the lectures; (c) take three examinations asking them to analyze, synthesize, and interpret the biblical texts and secondary readings (no postponements of the exam without extreme extenuating circumstances; *the second and third exams will be cumulative only from the material handled since the previous exam*); (d) submit a paper providing a close reading of a passage from the Hebrew Bible (further instructions will be communicated by the TA's; tardiness will be reflected in an automatically lowered grade).

TA's will distribute assignments for the discussion sections.

**The grade will be calculated with the following values:**

1. 30% — Satisfactory attendance and participation in discussion sections, as well as the paper.
2. 20% — Exam #1
3. 20% — Exam #2
4. 30% — Exam #3

**Please contact me early in the semester if you are registered for honors credit.**

I have set up an e-mail list for this class, which I will use to disseminate announcements. Students are welcome to post questions or comments for discussion outside of class, provided that appropriate courtesy is shown and the conversation does not move beyond what is *relevant to the course*. Posts are sent to students' wisc.edu account, and it is the student's responsibility to have email forwarded to any alternate addresses they might use.

## Texts:

### **Required:**

- John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).
- The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible—this translation is available in a variety of formats, including hardcover, paperback, and now widely available online as well. I have asked that a particular edition be held in bookstores as “recommended” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 3rd. ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press]), but it is unnecessary for students to purchase this particular edition if they already own or have access to another edition of *the NRSV translation*. (Because we cannot get bogged down in questions of why one student’s Bible translates a verse one way, while another’s takes a different approach, this version will be the standard for our class. Its chief advantage is that it taps the best scholarship regarding both what the “original” Hebrew text was and how that text can best be translated into English.)

*NOTA BENE: The Professor does not conduct business concerning special exemptions/assignments, etc. over e-mail, via Twitter, on Facebook, via text message, over the phone, or even via carrier pigeon (as impressive as that feat might be). In order to make any requests, students must speak with the professor face-to-face, either before or after class, or at a pre-arranged time (it is completely permissible to arrange the meeting through one of the media listed above).*

## Course Schedule:

**The following abbreviations are used below: *IHB* = *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*; *BT* = *Biblical Text*; passages are cited by indicating the book, followed by the chapter and verse(s), separated by a colon. (For example, “Genesis 1:12-27” designates Genesis chapter one, verses 12 through 27. “Genesis 1-3” designates chapters one through three of Genesis.) Verses are separated by commas (“Genesis 1:12, 16” = Genesis chapter one, verses 12 and 16), while chapters and parts of chapters are separated by semicolons (“Genesis 1:12-16; 2:1-3” = Genesis chapter one, verses 12 through 16, and chapter 2, verses 1 through 3)**

### T Sep. 6

Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (Jewish *Tanak* / Christian Old Testament)

#### **Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 1-9 (These pages will serve as the background for the day’s lecture; please read them as review before class on Sep. 8)

### Th Sep. 8

Israelite History, Biblical Chronology, Ancient Historiography, and Modern Historicism

#### **Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 10-20

**T Sep. 13**

The literary environment of the Bible

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 25-45

**Th Sep. 15**

The Pentateuch (/Torah), part 1: “Who Wrote the Bible?”

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 47-64 (This subject is a complex one, and potentially somewhat disconcerting to a number of students. Do not worry too much about the details of the textual source-division; focus primarily on what scholars have said about their reasons for dividing these sources.)

**T Sep. 20**

The Pentateuch (/Torah), part 2: The Primeval History

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 67-81
- BT: *skim* Genesis 1-11;  
*read* Genesis 1:1-3:24; 6:11-8:12

**Th Sep. 22**

The Pentateuch (/Torah), part 3: The Patriarchs

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 83-104
- BT: *skim* Genesis 12-50  
*read* Genesis 12:1-18:33; Gen 22:1-19; Gen 27:1-30:43

**T Sep. 27**

The Pentateuch (/Torah), part 4: The Exodus from Egypt and the Revelation at Sinai

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 107-119, 121-136
- BT: *skim* Exodus  
*read* Exodus 1:1-7:13; 13:1-15:21; 19:1-20:21; 40:1-38 (read ch. 14 alongside Collins’s discussion in pp. 115-117).

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**Th Sep. 29 — ROSH HA-SHANAH (NO CLASS)**

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**T Oct. 4**

The Pentateuch (/Torah), part 6: The Priestly Theology

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 139-156.
- BT: *skim* Leviticus, Numbers  
*read* Leviticus 8:1-11:47; 16:1-34; Numbers 13:1-14:45

**Th Oct. 6**

The Pentateuch (/Torah), part 7: Deuteronomy

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 159-178.
- BT: *skim* Deuteronomy  
*read* Deuteronomy 1:1-11:32; 30:1-20

**T Oct. 11**

**EXAM #1**

**Th Oct. 13**

The Deuteronomistic History, part 1: Joshua and Judges

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 183-200, 203-214.
- BT: *read* Joshua 1:1-6:27  
*read* Judges 1:1-3:6  
*skim* the rest of Judges 3-16

**T Oct. 18**

The Deuteronomistic History, part 2: 1 & 2 Samuel

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 217-230, 231-243
- BT: *read* 1 Samuel 9:1-18:30  
*read* 2 Samuel 11:1-19:8

**Th Oct. 20**

The Deuteronomistic History, part 3: 1 & 2 Kings

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 245-257, 261-278
- BT: *read* 1 Kings 17:1-22:40  
*read* 2 Kings 17:1-18:37  
*read* 2 Kings 22:1-25:30

**T Oct. 25**

Prophecy, part 1: Amos and Hosea

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 283-304
- BT: *skim* Hosea and Amos  
*read* Hosea 1:1-3:5; 11:1-12:14  
*read* Amos 2:6-5:27

**Th Oct. 27**

Prophecy, part 2: Isaiah, Micah, Nahum

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 307-326 (down to “Zephaniah”)
- BT: *skim* Isaiah 1-23; Micah; Nahum  
*read* Isaiah 5:1-6:13  
*read* Micah 1:1-3:12  
*read* Nahum 1:1-15

**T Nov. 1**

Prophecy, part 3: Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah (with Lamentations)

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 326-327 (“Zephaniah”), 331-350
- BT: *read* Zephaniah 1:1-18  
*read* Habakkuk 3:1-19  
*read* Jeremiah 1:1-19;  
*read* Jeremiah 7:1-15;  
*read* Jeremiah 26:1-31:40  
*read* Lamentations 1:1-22

**Th Nov. 3**

Prophecy, part 4: Ezekiel, Obadiah

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 353-376
- BT: *read* Ezekiel 1:1-4:17  
*read* Ezekiel 8:1-11:25  
*read* Ezekiel 18:1-32  
*read* Ezekiel 43:1-44:3  
*read* Obadiah 1-21 (these are verses, not chapters!)

**T Nov. 8**

Prophecy, part 5: Additions to Isaiah

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 379-399
- BT: *read* Isaiah 40:1-45:25  
*read* Isaiah 56:1-8  
*read* Isaiah 65:17-66:24

read Isaiah 27:1-13

**Th Nov. 10**

Prophecy, part 6: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Joel

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 401-423
- BT: *skim* Zechariah, Malachi, and Joel
  - read* Haggai 1:1-2:23
  - read* Zechariah 3:1-4:14
  - read* Malachi 3:1-4:6
  - read* Joel 1:1-20

**T Nov. 15**

**EXAM #2**

**Th Nov. 17**

The Writings, part 1: 1&2 Chronicles

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 445-460
- BT: *skim* 1-2 Chronicles, devoting special attention to 1 Chr 1-9: what is the purpose of such extensive genealogies, do you think? Is there a literary centerpiece—a guiding principle or central passage—to this whole complex?
  - read* 2 Chronicles 33:1-20; go back and compare this passage to the report on Manasseh's reign in 2 Kings 21:1-18. How do the two presentations differ?

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**T Nov. 22 — SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE (NO CLASS)**

**Th Nov. 24 — THANKSGIVING (NO CLASS)**

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**T Nov. 29**

The Writings, part 2: Ezra and Nehemiah

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 427-442
- BT: *skim* Ezra and Nehemiah
  - read* Ezra 7:1-10:44
  - read* Nehemiah 4:1-9:38

**Th Dec. 1**

The Writings, part 3: The Psalms and the Song of Songs

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 461-484
- BT: *read* Psalms 1, 2, 6-8, 74, 82, 89, and 137  
*read* Song of Songs 1:1-5:16

**T Dec. 6**

The Writings, part 4: Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 487-502, 505-526
- BT: *skim* Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth (= Ecclesiastes)  
*read* Proverbs 1:1-2:22  
*read* Proverbs 7:1-8:36  
*read* Job 1:1-2:13  
*read* Job 38:1-42:17  
*read* Qoheleth 1:1-3:15  
*read* Qoheleth 12:9-14

**Th Dec. 8**

The Writings, part 5: the Diaspora Novellas

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 529-543, 553-571 (down to “The Additions”; skim 571-579)
- BT: *read* Ruth 1:1-4:22  
*read* Jonah 1:1-4:11  
*skim* Esther, Daniel  
*read* Esther 5:1-9:19  
*read* Daniel 1:1-3:30

**T Dec. 13**

Post-biblical Wisdom and Additions to the Writings

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 544-548, 571-579, 581-597
- BT: *read* Bel and the Dragon  
*read* Ben Sira (=Wisdom of Solomon) ch. 24

**Th Dec. 15**

Concluding Reflections on Canonicity, Religious Traditions, and Scripture & Scripturalization of Texts

**Readings:**

- Collins, *IHB*, 599-604

**W Dec 21 (10:05 am - 12:05 pm)**

**EXAM #3**