

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 2013

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Office: 1344 Van Hise Hall
Office Hours: MW 10:00–12:00

Place and Time:

Lecture meeting time: TThu 2:30–3:45pm
Lecture meeting place: Russell LB 184
Section time and place as assigned.
Final exam date: December 19, 2013 (7:45 am–9:45 am)

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 lectures and discussion sections; the former includes the critical reflection papers (see Sept. 3 and Dec. 10 assignments) and the latter includes the in-section exegetical paper. *Justifiable absences (events such as military training exercises, funerals, weddings, religious holidays not provided for by the syllabus in accordance with the University's academic calendar) must be excused prior to their occurrence. If these absences occur on exam days, exams will be made up on the first day the student is back from the absence. NO EXCEPTIONS.*
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, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).
- 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: *SIHB* = *A Short 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. 3

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 1–8 (These pages will serve as the background for the day's lecture; please read them as review before class on Sep. 5)

Assignments (to be handed in on Sept. 5):

- Write a self-critical paper (1 page, double-spaced) briefly explaining your view of the Bible. These can be written from the standpoint of your religious tradition, if you wish, or from a secular (i.e., non-religious) position. Consider answering a few of the following questions: What does the Bible mean to you? What is it about? Who wrote it? Why was it written? What role does it play in your life today (e.g., as a normative religious document, or as a major piece of world literature)? What role *should* it have in the life of the average American citizen? What do you anticipate (expect or even fear) this class will do to your thinking on these issues? ***There is no right or wrong answer to any of these questions; they are yours alone.*** *I will not be grading these on the basis of content—you will be assigned a grade merely for completion (full credit for satisfactory completion).* ***Here's the catch—****We're going to be doing two things with these assignments. First, I'm going to keep them until the final week of class. At that point, you'll be asked to write a final statement asking you to reflect on your answers and in what ways your view of the Bible has or has not changed. Please make sure to write your name on the assignment. But second, I'm going to ask you on Sept. 5th (before you hand in the paper) to summarize your answers on another half-sheet of blank paper (without your names). We will discuss some of the questions that come up.*

Th Sep. 5

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 8–14

Assignments (in addition to the reflection paper):

- Print out the timeline, found in the course website (Learn@UW), and begin filling in major events in the history of Israel and Judah using the information in the readings. We will continue using these sheets in class, so please bring them to class as well.

T Sep. 10

The literary environment of the Bible

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 15–27.
- S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: OUP, 1989):
 - Atrahasis, Tablet I, columns i–iv (pp. 8–15, ending with “The great Annunaki who assigns the fates.”)
 - Gilgamesh, Standard Version, Tablet I, column iv (pp. 55–56)
 - Gilgamesh, Old Babylonian Version, Tablet X, column iii (p. 150)
- M. Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Louisville: Westminster, 1978):
 - Baal I (pp. 86–89).

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Sep. 12

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 28–35 (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.)

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Sep. 17

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 36–43
- BT: *read* Genesis 1:1-3:24; 6:11-8:12

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Sep. 19

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 44–54
- BT: *read* Genesis 12:1–20; 16:1–18:33; 21:1–22:19

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Sep. 24

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 55–63, 64–73
- BT: *read* Exodus 1:1–3:22; 13:1–15:21; 19:1–20:21; 40:1–38

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Sep. 26

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 74–83
- BT: *read* Leviticus 8:1–11:47; 16:1–34; Numbers 13:1–14:45

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Oct. 1

The Pentateuch (/Torah), part 7: Deuteronomy

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 84–93

- BT: *read* Deuteronomy 1:1-6:9; 30:1-20

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Oct. 3

The Deuteronomistic History, part 1: Joshua and Judges

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 94-106, 108-115
- BT: *read* Joshua 5:1-6:27
read Judges 4:1-23; 19:1-21:25

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Oct. 8

EXAM #1 (on material through Oct. 1)

Th Oct. 10

The Deuteronomistic History, part 2: 1 & 2 Samuel

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 116-122, 123-130
- BT: *read* 1 Samuel 9:1-12:25
read 1 Samuel 16:1-17:58
read 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Oct. 15

The Deuteronomistic History, part 3: 1 & 2 Kings

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 131-139, 141-151
- BT: *read* 1 Kings 3:1-28
read 2 Kings 17:1-18:37
read 2 Kings 22:1-25:30

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Oct. 17

Prophecy, part 1: Amos and Hosea

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 153-163
- BT: *skim* Hosea and Amos

read Hosea 1:1–3:5; 11:1–12:14
read Amos 2:6–5:27

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Oct. 22

Prophecy, part 2: Isaiah, Micah, Nahum

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 164–172
- BT: *read* Isaiah 5:1–6:13
read Micah 1:1–3:12
read Nahum 1:1–15

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Oct. 24

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 174–184
- BT: *read* Zephaniah 1:1–18
read Habakkuk 3:1–19
read Jeremiah 1:1–19; 7:1–15; 26:1–31:40
read Lamentations 1:1–22

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Oct. 27

Prophecy, part 4: Ezekiel, Obadiah

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 185–196
- BT: *read* Ezekiel 1:1–4:17
read Ezekiel 8:1–11:25; 18:1–32; 43:1–44:3
read Obadiah 1–21 (these are verses, not chapters!)

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Oct. 29

Prophecy, part 5: Additions to Isaiah

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 197–208
- BT: *read* Isaiah 40:1–45:25; 56:1–8; 65:17–66:24
read Isaiah 27:1–13

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Nov. 5

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 209–219
- BT: *read* Haggai 1:1–2:23
read Zechariah 3:1–4:14
read Malachi 3:1–4:6
read Joel 1:1–20

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Nov. 7

The Writings, part 1: 1&2 Chronicles

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 229–235
- 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?

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Nov. 12

EXAM #2 (on material through Oct. 29)

Th Nov. 14

The Writings, part 2: Ezra and Nehemiah

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 220–228
- BT: *read* Ezra 7:1–10:44
read Nehemiah 4:1–9:38

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Nov. 19

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 236–246

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

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Nov. 21

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 248–255, 256–266
- BT: *read* Proverbs 1:1–2:22; 7:1–8:36
read Job 1:1–2:13
read Job 38:1–42:17
read Qoheleth (=Ecclesiastes) 1:1–3:15; 12:9–14

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Nov. 26 — SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE (NO CLASS)

Th Nov. 28 — THANKSGIVING (NO CLASS)

T Dec. 3

The Writings, part 5: the Diaspora Novellas

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 268–276
- BT: *read* Ruth 1:1–4:22
read Jonah 1:1–4:11
read Esther 5:1–9:19

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

Th Dec. 5

The Writings, part 6: Daniel & 1-2 Maccabees

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 278–292
- BT: *read* Daniel 1:1–3:30
read 1 Maccabees 1:1–2:69

Assignments:

- See the course website for this session’s discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.

T Dec. 10

Deutero-Canonical Wisdom Books and Additions to the Writings

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 293–300,
- BT: *read* Bel and the Dragon 1–40 (these are verses, not chapters!)
read Ben Sira (=Sirach) 24:1–34
read Wisdom of Solomon 6:1–8:21

Assignment:

- See the course website for this session's discussion questions, which we will use to orient our questions for today.
- Make sure to be in class to receive your short critical reflections from the beginning of the semester. For the assignment that I want you to complete on the basis of this reflection, see Dec. 12.

Th Dec. 12

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

Readings:

- Collins, *SIHB*, 302–305

Assignment (to be handed in on Dec. 12):

- I will hand back your short critical reflections from the beginning of the semester on Dec. 10. Your assignment to be handed in on Dec. 12 is to write another self-critical paper (1 page, double-spaced) reflecting on ways that this class has changed, challenged, or confirmed your thinking about what the Bible is and its place in your culture, your society, and your life. What has changed over the course of the semester? What hasn't? ***Again, there is no right or wrong answer here—only completion is mandatory. The goal of this assignment is simply to reflect critically on what you have learned in this course, and how it has affected you.***

Th Dec. 19, 2013 (7:45 am–9:45 am)

(Please believe me when I say that I did not set this schedule)

EXAM #3