

## SYLLABUS: PENTATEUCHAL NARRATIVES

Hebrew Studies 513 & 643

Fall, 2011

T, 8:50-9:40; R 8:50-9:40 & 9:55-10:45

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Office hours: T, 9:45-10:35 & R, 10:50-11:40

### 1. Course description

This course involves a close reading of selected narratives from Genesis and Exodus. We will invoke all relevant philological and literary tools to understand the origins, forms, and purposes of the individual narratives and, on the larger plane, their interrelationships. In addition, we will consider the nature of narrative literature, questions raised by feminist critics, and the perspective of ecological hermeneutics.

### 2. Course objectives

This course addresses issues involved in study of the Pentateuchal narratives. It explores how narrative functions, including the roles of the narrator (as a persona of the author), the narratee, point of view (including multiple points of view), and plot. It also considers how the discrete narratives co-relate in constructing a narrative arc, given the surmise that the Pentateuch was not composed as a continuous narrative but comprises distinct narrative units conjoined to create a story of Israel's heritage.

This recognition requires that we attend to hypotheses developed since the eighteenth century to account for the composition of the Pentateuch. Although the documentary hypothesis dominated scholarship from the late nineteenth century through the 1960's, the latter decades of the twentieth century exposed inadequacies in it that evoked new proposals, reviving both the fragmentary and supplementary hypotheses that had competed with the documentary hypothesis before the latter gained ascendancy.

Most important, the course will focus on the narratives themselves. By studying narratives from Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy, using both the evidence from the ancient translations into Greek, Syriac, and Aramaic and the modern commentaries by Westermann, Propp, and Weinfeld, we will explore the meanings possible for these texts in the context of the ancient Near East. At the same time, we will consider attempts to comprehend these texts within ideological readings by feminist scholars and ecologists.

A competent grasp of the issues in this course will be evidenced by

### 3. Readings in the Hebrew Text

- a. In class: We will read, translate and discuss Genesis 1-3, 6-9, 17 (cf. 15); 25:20-26:11; 28:10-29:30; 31; 37; Exodus 1-7; 14; 16 (cf. Num 11:1-23); 19; 32; Deuteronomy 1; 4:44-5:5, 22-33; 9:1-10:5 (For instructions on preparing for class, see "WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS," below.)
- b. Translation for exams (regardless of how much we cover in class)  
Mid-term exam: Genesis 12-36  
Final exam: Exodus 1-19; Deuteronomy 1-5

(see point 7 for information on the exams)

4. Oral reading: I will assign verses in meaningful units to each member of the class in rotation for oral reading (this is in addition to sharing the reading of each verse as we encounter it). Your reading will be judged by its phonological accuracy and its sensitivity to the phrasing indicated by the Masoretic accents. Practice your passage in advance so that you can give a correct and meaningful oral rendition.
5. All students in the course will read the following:

Carr, David M. *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996, 3-22.

Exum, J. Cheryl. "Hagar *En Procès*: The Abject in Search of Subjectivity." In *From the Margins, I: Women in the Hebrew Bible and their Afterlives*. Sheffield: Sheffield-Phoenix Press, 2009, 1-16.

Holmstedt, Robert D. "The Restrictive Syntax of Genesis i 1." *VT* 58 (2008) 56-67.

Rogerson, John W. "The Creation Stories: Their Ecological Potential and Problems." In Horrell, David G., Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou, eds. *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010, 21-31.

Walsh, Jerome T. *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2010. Pp. 1-130, excepting sections labeled "Exploring the Stories."

6. There will be two exams: 1) Midterm, Tuesday, October 25: texts from class, as well as Genesis 12-36, and an essay question on the readings discussed in the first half of the term; 2) The final (December 22, 5:05-7:05 p.m.): texts covered in class since the first exam, the remainder of the assigned texts, and an essay question on the remainder of the readings.

Each exam will comprise three units. First, you will be required to translate verses from a passage studied in class and provide philological notes, along with comments on the role of the verses in the narrative. Second, you will be asked to translate two passages from the larger swaths of texts specified in "b," above. Third, you will write an essay on a question that asks you to critique a statement on a topic addressed in the secondary readings prescribed for class.

7. Students enrolled in 653 will read the following, in addition those assigned to the whole class:

Baden, Joel S. "The Relationship of D to J and E." In *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, FAT 68. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, 99-195.

Carr, David M. *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996, 23-77.

Römer, Thomas C. "The Elusive Yahwist: A Short History of Research." In *A Farewell to the Yahwist?* Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, eds. Symposium 34. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006, pp. 9-27.

Schmid, Konrad. "The So-Called Yahwist and the Literary Gap between Genesis and Exodus." In *A Farewell to the Yahwist?* (see above), pp. 29-50.

8. Each student registered for 653 will prepare a report of their preliminary observations and conclusions about the composition of the Pentateuch's narratives, in interaction with the readings listed under #6 (15-20 pages). Papers will be due Tuesday, November 1, at class time (one grade level will be deducted for each day a paper is late). I will return papers by Thursday, November 17, to allow you opportunity to make corrections and turn in a revised copy (along with the original) by Tuesday, December 6.
9. Students enrolled in 513 will read the following, in addition those assigned to the whole class:
  - Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
  - James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 1-95.
10. 513 students will submit, by Tuesday, December 9, 513 students will submit a paper (12-15 pp.), summarizing *and evaluating* the various viewpoints expressed in assigned English readings (assigned below) on the following topics:
  - a. What distinguishes poetry from prose?
  - b. Parallelism from Lowth on: its strengths, weaknesses and necessary modifications as a theory for understanding Hebrew poetry.
  - c. The merits of metrical theory for Hebrew poetry: what views have been advanced, which (if any) seem viable, and to what degree is metrical theory useful in restoring the “original” form of a text (emendation *metri causa*)?
  - d. What are “fixed pairs” and what is/are their function(s)? Are they a case of “ballast variants”?
  - e. How do lexical, semantic, and grammatical parallelism collaborate to give Hebrew poetry its distinctive force?
11. Your final grade will be a composite of your grades on the paper (20%), class participation (10%) and the two exams (35% each). Participation in class could also have an affect on border-line grades.
12. Discussions of the Hebrew text will entail consideration of the text-critical evidence (the versions, Samaritan Pentateuch, and DSS). A helpful resource for Genesis 1-11 is Hendel, Ronald. *The Text of Genesis 1-11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. For the rest, take note of the text-critical notes in the commentaries and be certain to be aware of readings in the versions, principally the Old Greek.
13. The chief commentaries that all students will consult (others may be consulted) are:
  - Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1-11, A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1984.
  - \_\_\_\_\_. *Genesis 12-36, A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1985.
  - \_\_\_\_\_. *Genesis 37-50, A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1986.
  - Propp, William H. C. *Exodus 1-18, AB 2*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
  - Weinfeld, Moshe. *Deuteronomy 1-11. AB*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

14. Office hours: I will be available the hour following class each day and by appointment. Please feel free to approach me with any problem, concern or question you have. If these hours conflict with your schedule, contact me for an appointment, either in person or at [rltroxel@wisc.edu](mailto:rltroxel@wisc.edu)

DAILY ASSIGNMENTS

Daily assignments comprise blocks of verses for consideration in class. You are expected to have worked through the verses consulting the Old Greek, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the appropriate commentary, along with any secondary readings assigned for the day. Be prepared to read the verses aloud in Hebrew, translate, and highlight the significant problems each raises, along with your proposed solutions.