

Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: History and Literature

RS 3350 (CRN – 22766) and HUMN 3302 (CRN – 22509)

University of Texas at El Paso
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2023

Instructor: Dr. Clayton Bench

Time: MW 11:00 – 12:20

Room: Miners Hall 300

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Office Hours: M/W/F – 8:30 – 9:15AM; T/Th – 8:30 – 9:30AM

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Course Description and Objectives:

The Hebrew Bible is an important religious text in both Judaism and Christianity. For Judaism, the Hebrew Bible is central to religious life and worship. Among other things, the Hebrew Bible contains an account of the creation of the world, the stories of the patriarchs and the revelation of God's divine law to Moses at Mt. Sinai. For Christianity, the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament serves as a precursor and portent to the New Testament. Many Christians believe that the Old Testament foretells the coming of a Messiah who they claim was/is Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary. Each religious tradition that claims the text as part of its sacred canon does so with the belief that it is a divine book that contains revelations and laws dictated by God. For our purposes, we will set this assumption aside so as to take a critical look at the historical and social background of the Hebrew Bible.

In this course we will approach the Hebrew Bible as a work of literature written and compiled by various social groups over a long period of time. As we engage with various texts and books in the Hebrew Bible, we will also discuss the social groups/communities who compiled them. We will learn about the historical background of the books of the Hebrew Bible that we encounter in an effort to better understand these communities. Students should expect to gain a basic understanding of the structure and composition history of the Hebrew Bible as well as basic knowledge about the communities that preserved and transmitted it over time.

Required Texts:

Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

Coogan, Michael D. (ed.) *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. 4th Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010

Grade Breakdown:

- **Participation (weekly in class group discussions), 30% of grade**
- **Written Assignment (5 – 7 pages, double spaced, written on topic from the topics list in the Written Assignment folder on Blackboard) 30% of grade**
- **Midterm Examination 20% of grade**
- **Final Examination 20% of grade**

Course Outline:

The following schedule/outline is tentative. Time constraints, unforeseen events, and class interest may result in slight alterations.

Week 1	Topic	Readings
M – 1/16/23	MLK Jr. Day	
W – 1/18/23	Introduction to the Course Syllabus	
Week 2		
M – 1/23/23	Introduction: What are the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament?	Collins, “Introduction,” p. 1-23
W – 1/25/23	The Bible in its Ancient Near Eastern Context <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, “The Near Eastern Context,” p. 27-48; Lemche, “The History of Ancient Syria and Palestine: An Overview,” p.1195-1218 in CANE Vol II (to be provided)
Week 3		
M – 1/30/23	The Pentateuch: Overview	Collins, “The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative,” p. 49-68; The New Oxford Annotated Bible [NOAB], NRSV “To the Reader,” p. xv-xviii, “Introduction to the Pentateuch,” p. 3-6
W – 2/1/23	The Creation of the World and the Dispersion of the Human Race <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, “The Primeval History,” p. 69-84; NOAB, “Genesis,” p.7-11; NOAB/NRSV, Gen 1-11, p. 11-28
Week 4		
M – 2/6/23	The Patriarchal Narratives	Collins, “The Patriarchs,” p. 85-108; The Anchor Bible Dictionary, “Abraham,” “Isaac,” and “Jacob” (to be provided); Finkelstein and Silberman, “Searching for the Patriarchs,” p.44-73? in <i>The Bible Unearthed</i> (to be provided); NOAB/NRSV Gen 12-24, 37-47

W – 2/8/23	The Exodus from Egypt <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, “The Exodus from Egypt,” p. 109-124; Finkelstein and Silberman, “Did the Exodus Happen,” p.74-106? In <i>The Bible Unearthed</i> (to be provided); NOAB/NRSV “Exodus,” p.81-83, Exod 1-15
Week 5		
M – 2/13/23	The Revelation and Covenant at Mt. Sinai	Collins, “The Revelation at Sinai,” p. 125-142; NOAB/NRSV Exod 19-24
W – 2/15/23	The Priestly Theology <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, “The Priestly Theology: Exodus 25-40, Leviticus, and Numbers,” p. 143-162; NOAB/NRSV “Leviticus,” p. 141-143, “Numbers,” p. 185-188, Exod 25-32; Lev 1-7; Num 22-24
Week 6		
M – 2/20/23	The Laws of Deuteronomy	Collins, “Deuteronomy,” p.163-188; NOAB/NRSV “Deuteronomy,” p.247-249, Deut 12-26
W – 2/22/23	The Deuteronomistic History and the Conquest of Canaan <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, “The Book of Joshua,” p.189-210; NOAB/NRSV “Introduction to the Historical Books,” p. 331-317, “Joshua,” p. 318-320, Josh 1-12, 22-24
Week 7		
M – 2/27/23	Judges and the Disunity of Israel	Collins, “Judges,” p. 211-226; NOAB/NRSV “Judges,” p.355-356, Judg 1-3, 17-21
W – 3/1/23	First Samuel: The Initiation of the Kingdom of Israel <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, “First Samuel,” p.227-242; NOAB/NRSV “1 Samuel,” p.399-400; 1 Sam 1-3, 8-10, 12-13, 16-17
Week 8		
M – 3/6/23	Second Samuel: The Davidic Covenant and the History of David’s Rise	Collins, “Second Samuel,” p. 243-258; NOAB/NRSV “2 Samuel,” p.445-446; 1 Sam 31 – 2 Sam 1, 7, 11-12, 22-24
W – 3/8/23	Midterm Examination – In Class	
Week 9		
M – 3/13/23	Spring Break – No Classes	
W – 3/15/23		
Week 10		
M – 3/20/23	Introduction to Prophets and Prophecy	Grabbe, “Prophets,” p. 67-118 in <i>Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages</i>

		(to be provided); Alter, "Prophecy and Poetry," p.232-271 in <i>The Art of Biblical Poetry (to be provided)</i> ; NOAB/NRSV "Introduction to the Prophetic Books," p.961-964
W – 3/22/23	The Prophetic Message of the Book of Hosea <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, "Amos and Hosea," p.305-324; NOAB/NRSV "Amos," p. 1282-1283, "Hosea," p.1259-1260, Hos 1-3, 4, 12-14; Amos 1-2, 7-9
Week 11		
M – 3/27/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Amos	
W – 3/29/23	The Prophetic Message of the book and Micah <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, "Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah," p. 325-348; "Micah," p.1306, , Mic 1-7,
Week 12		
M – 4/3/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Isaiah	Collins, "Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah," p. 325-348; "Micah," p.1306, , Mic 1-7, NOAB/NRSV "Isaiah," p.965-967, Isa 1-3, 6, 7-8//2 Kings 16, Isa 9-13, 36-39//2 Kings 18-20
W – 4/5/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Nahum <u>Group Discussion</u>	"Nahum," p.1316, "Zephaniah," p.1327; Nah 1-3, Zeph 1-3
Week 13		
M – 4/10/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Zephaniah and Habakkuk	Collins, "The Babylonian Era: Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Lamentations," p.349-370; NOAB/NRSV "Habakkuk," p.1321, Hab 1-3;
W – 4/12/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Jeremiah <u>Group Discussion</u>	NOAB/NRSV "Jeremiah," p.1057, "Lamentations," p.1147-1148; Jer 1-5, 17-19, 23, 51-52 (for the background of Jer, see 2 Kings 21-25), Lam 1-2, 5
Week 14		
M – 4/17/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Ezekiel	Collins, "The Exilic Period: Ezekiel and Obadiah," p.371-394; NOAB/NRSV "Ezekiel," p.1159-1162, Ezek 1-6, 8-11, 23, 34, 37,
W – 4/19/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Obadiah <u>Group Discussion</u>	NOAB/NRSV "Obadiah," p.1298
Week 15		

M – 4/24/23	The Final Additions to the Book of Isaiah: Hope for Israel	Collins, “The Additions to the Book of Isaiah,” p.395-416; NOAB/NRSV Isa 40-44, 50-53, 56 (parts of 2 nd Isaiah), Isa 60-66 (3 rd Isaiah)
W – 4/26/23	The Prophetic Message of the book of Haggai and Zechariah <u>Group Discussion</u>	Collins, “Postexilic Prophecy: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Joel,” p.417-448; NOAB/NRSV “Haggai,” p.1333; NOAB/NRSV “Zechariah,” p.1337
Week 16		
5/1/23	Final Examination review	
	Final Examination – In Class	Written Assignment Due by Friday, 5/5/23 before midnight – The written assignment must be submitted online through the link provided in the written assignment folder.

Grading:

Marks for assignments, tests, and exams are given in percentages, to which letter grades are also assigned, according to the table below. The percentage mark resulting from the entire term work and examination then produces the final letter grade for the course.

Grading Scale

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Points
90-100%	A	4.0
80-89%	B	3.0
70-79%	C	2.0
60-69%	D	1.0
0-59%	F	0.0

Academic Standing and Integrity:

“Academic Integrity

The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence. In all matters of intellectual pursuit, UTEP faculty and students must strive to achieve excellence based on the quality of work produced by the individual. In the classroom and in all other academic activities, students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of scholastic dishonesty is an affront to the pursuit of knowledge and jeopardizes the quality of the degree awarded to all graduates of UTEP. It is imperative, therefore, that the members of this academic community understand the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and that all faculty insist on adherence to these standards.

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the [Handbook of Operating Procedures](#) (HOP) (available through the [Dean of Students Office](#)) may result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to failing a grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others.” (“Academic Standing,” for more information, please visit <http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=61879&submenuheader=1>)

Policy for Late Assignments:

Students who consult with me in advance regarding expected issues preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at my discretion, be granted an extension. Students who are prevented from submitting an assignment due to a personal emergency should inform me as soon as possible.

Special Needs

If you have a disability and require special needs classroom accommodations, please contact *The Center for Accommodations and Support Services* Monday through Friday 8:00a.m. – 5:00p.m. at the Union East Room 106. You can also reach the center by phone at (915) 747-5148 or by email: cass@utep.edu .