

Course Outline: Winter 2022

*Gods, Empires, Kings, & Rebels:
The Hebrew Bible in Context
Intro to the Hebrew Bible*

RS2420A/BS 5120b

Location: W104

Day & Time: Thursday 11:30-2:00

Instructor: Dr. N. Meyer

Contact info: nmeyer5@uwo.ca

Office: @@@



This course will introduce students to the texts of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, paying particular attention to the historical and cultural environment of the ancient Israelites. The course will cover major texts from the Torah, historical books, prophetic books, and wisdom literature.

Recording of Classes

Class sessions for this course will be recorded. The data captured during these recordings may include your image, voice recordings, chat logs and personal identifiers (name displayed on the screen). The recordings will be used for educational purposes related to this course, including evaluations. The recordings may be disclosed to other individuals participating in the course for their private or group study purposes. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns related to session recordings. Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.

Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 landscape may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Prerequisites

The student should verify that they have the required prerequisites for this course.

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the contents of the Hebrew Bible (also called the Old Testament in the Protestant Bible; Tanak in Judaism), and to the historical conditions that gave rise to and shaped these writings, as these are understood by contemporary scholarship. While the focus is on historical considerations, some attention will also be paid to how these texts have been received by those who have cherished them as Scripture down through history.

Course Goals

Our goals include developing your familiarity with:

- selected aspects of the ancient Near Eastern context;

- the general contents of the Hebrew Bible, including its organization, distinct genres, story lines, and prominent characters, themes, and episodes;
- scholarly perspectives on ancient Israel's formation and history, and the way that history shaped these writings; and
- different interpretive stances among various communities today

Books for Purchase

Attridge, Harold, et al. eds. *The Harper Collins Study Bible*. NRSV translation. Revised ed. San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2006. **Or** Coogan, Michael D. ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed. (New Revised Standard Version; Oxford University Press, 2018)

John Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Students will come to class prepared to engage in discussion and answer questions when called upon. They should give some attention to the *Focus Questions* in the Schedule. Students should bear in mind that to receive full marks in this category, *their active participation is required and it should demonstrate that they have completed the readings.*

Notebook: 20%

Students will keep a notebook on their readings from the textbook. For each week, there should be *at least one full page* of single spaced 12-pt Times New Roman Text with 1 inch margins in which they will note insights and observations from each chapter read. They will want to take note of new and noteworthy information, key points, questions raised, and anything worth remembering. They may wish to use the questions supplied by the publisher in the Study Guide (see [here](#)) to help them focus on significant points.

Reflection Papers: 45% (15% each)

Students will submit three reflection papers at predetermined points throughout the term. There are five options in total, of which students must choose *two from the first three* and *one from the last two*. Please note: Reflection papers should be carefully crafted in excellent, academic prose. They should demonstrate engagement with the course material and the biblical texts. They are not mere opinion pieces, but rather they are your chance to show progress in meeting the course goals.

Write on two of the following three topics:

Reflection on the Pentateuch: Outline the story that the Pentateuch tells *and anticipates*; does this bear any similarity to Gen 1-3? What is the impact of the fact that the Pentateuch ends where it does, before Israel enters the land? If the Pentateuch took its final form sometime early in the post-exilic period, what do you think would have been its central challenge to its earliest readers? The paper should be documented with biblical references to passages summarized or discussed. 4-5 pages Due: Feb 3

Reflection on the Deuteronomistic History: Outline the story that the Deuteronomistic History tells, highlighting some of the major historiographical questions that emerge along the way. In your

retelling, be sure to address the process and ambiguous evaluation of Israel's adoption of a monarchy. Moreover, what evidence is there for the view that this history may have been initially sponsored in the time of Josiah before taking its obvious exilic (possibly post-exilic) form as we have it now? The paper should be documented with biblical references to passages summarized or discussed. 4-5 pages Due: Feb 17

Reflection on Monotheism: While the Bible was clearly written and edited by those who believed that Yahweh alone should be worshipped, how should we characterize the *ancient Israelite* view of deity as a whole? Was it uniform? Is there evidence of diversity and development in the understanding of deity? How would you characterize the pre-exilic prophets' critique of Israelite religion and does Second Isaiah make any rhetorical developments? Would you be surprised if non-human beings are still at times referred to as "gods" in Jewish literature from the post-exilic period? Why? The paper should be documented with biblical references to passages summarized or discussed. 4-5 pages Due: Mar 17

Writer on one of the following two topics:

Reflection on Ethics and the Hebrew Bible: The Hebrew Bible touches on many ethical questions, everything from murder and slavery, to sexuality and hospitality, and religious fidelity and justice for the oppressed. What are the salient themes? What are some of the major challenges involved in making a contemporary application? Speak to the nature and diversity of the claims made and to the socio-cultural conditioning. How can one engage this text from an ethical-theological perspective? The paper should be documented with biblical references to passages summarized or discussed. 4-5 pages Due: April 7

Reflection on the Problem of Evil: Is the fact of evil or misfortune a problem for belief in the justice of God in the Hebrew Bible? What explanations are given for where evil comes from? What socio-historical contexts seemed to have influenced developments in the way these questions were answered? If it can fairly be said that the major "historical books" of the Hebrew Bible share basically a coherent view of the matter (which is what?), can the same be said of the Wisdom books or of the developments in prophecy and apocalyptic? The paper should be documented with biblical references to passages summarized or discussed. 4-5 pages Due: April 7

Take-Home Final Assignment: 20%

A take-home final assignment will be given to students on the last day of class. Part of the assignment for seminarians will include a reflection on how the Hebrew Bible can be received as Scripture within the Christian community.

Course Schedule

Readings marked with an asterisk will be made available on OWL and, along with other online content which may be gradually added to, are *generally not required*. Readings from the Bible should be completed with sufficient attention to generate reasonable questions and insights. Key texts appear in bold to highlight just *some* significant texts which we are likely to discuss in class.

Week	Textbook and (optional) online articles	Bible, Ancient Texts, Archaeology	Focus Questions
Jan 13	Introduction Ch. 1 The Near Eastern Context “Gilgamesh and the Bible,” Shawna Dolansky at BibleOdyssey		<i>What major questions do you bring to the course?</i> How would you characterize your previous experience with the Bible? How has your understanding of the Bible changed (if it has)? How does your understanding of the Bible up until now compare with the approach Collins describes?
Jan 20	Part One: The Torah Ch. 2 The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative Ch. 3 The Primeval History Ch. 4 The Patriarchs “Who Wrote the Torah according to the Torah,” Christopher Rollston, at TheTorah.com “Eve in Art,” Theresa Sanders, at BibleOdyssey.com “Eve,” Carol Myers, at BibleOdyssey.com	Genesis 1:26-30; 3:15; 12:1-3 (cf. chs. 15; 17; 22); 49:8-13 *Enuma Elish *Atrahasis *Baal Cycle *Aqhat Epic *Kirita Epic	What makes the Genesis creation story (Genesis 1–2) distinctive in the ancient Near East environment? In Genesis 22, what does the text tell you about the significance of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his own child?
Jan 27	Ch. 5 The Exodus from Egypt Ch. 6 The Revelation at Sinai Ch. 7 The Priestly Theology... Ch. 8. Deuteronomy “Weddings and Marriage Traditions in Ancient Israel,” Tracy Lemos at BibleOdyssey “The Shema and the Commandment to Love God in its Ancient Contexts,” Jon D. Levenson, at TheTorah.com	Exod 1-24, 32-34 (3:13-15; 6:2-3; 19:3-6; 34:5-7); Lev 10-16; 19 (19:18, 34; 20:26); Num 10:11-25:19; Deuteronomy 1-12 (6:4-9); 28-30 *Sargon Legend *Code of Hammurabi	In Exodus 1–3, how many different motives can you identify on the part of YHWH (the LORD)? What is the significance of the absence in Egyptian records of any mention of the Exodus? Which parts of Leviticus seem most relevant to contemporary life? How do different communities today understand Leviticus? If Deuteronomy was written centuries after Moses, what is the

			point of ending the Torah with his death?
Feb 3	Part Two: The Deuteronomistic History. Introduction Ch. 9 Joshua Ch. 10 Judges Ch. 11 1 Samuel Ch. 12 2 Samuel Jericho at BibleOdyssey	Josh 1-8 Judges 1-9, 17-21 1 & 2 Samuel (1 Sam 8 ; 2 Sam 7:4-17) *The Merneptah Stele	What motives are attributed to YHWH (the LORD) in Joshua? How do you understand the violence attributed to, or called for by YHWH? What is the significance of an archaeological record that doesn't bear out the conquest narrative as narrated in Joshua? What made David such an attractive character as Israel's "greatest king?" What is the significance of his fall?
Feb 10	Ch. 13 1 Kings 1-16... Ch. 14 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 25... Mesha Stela at BibleOdyssey *Kuntillet 'Ajrud Kuntillet 'Ajrud Storage Jar at BibleOdyssey	1 Kings & 2 Kings (21:10-15 ; 22:14-20) *Kurhk and Black Obelisk Inscriptions	What do these books want us to think about kings? about prophets? Why? What does 1 Kings 22 want to convey about prophecy in Israel? What might "prophecy" look like today, based on what you've read?
Feb 17	Part 3: Prophecy. Introduction Ch. 15 Amos and Hosea Ch. 16 Isaiah	Amos (5:18-24) Hosea Isaiah 1-39 (esp. 1-11; 2:1-4 ; 11:1-11)	Why is Amos in trouble? What does God think of religion, according to Amos? Why (in Isaiah 6) does God want the people NOT to understand?
<i>Reading Week</i>			
Mar 3	Ch. 17 The Babylonian Exile: Jeremiah and Lamentations Ch. 18 Ezekiel	Jeremiah (ch. 7 ; 31:31-34) Lamentations Ezekiel (18:1-4 , 19-24 ; ch. 34)	Why is Jeremiah in the minority—and how did he get into the Bible?
Mar 10	Ch. 19 The additions to the Book of Isaiah Ch. 20. Postexilic Prophecy...	Isaiah 40-66 (40:1-5 ; 42:1-9 ; 45:1-19 ; 55:3-5) Haggai Zechariah *Cyrus Cylinder	How do scholars distinguish "Second Isaiah" from Isaiah of Jerusalem? Do you find the arguments convincing? Read the "Suffering Servant" passages identified in the textbook. What clues do you find to the Servant's identity?
Mar 17	Part Four: The Writings. Introduction Ch. 21 Ezra and Nehemiah Ch. 22 The Book of Chronicles	Ezra (1:1-4) Nehemiah 2 Chron 33-35	What are the innovations accomplished during the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah?

	Ch. 23 The Psalms and Song of Songs	Psalms 1, 2, 22, 48, 72, 89, 96, 100, 137	What do these innovations have to do with Jewish history? Two well-known Psalms are 22 and 23; 22, because it plays a part in the later Christian Gospels. Read on its own terms, what is Psalm 22 about; what does it “do”?
Mar 24	Ch. 24 Proverbs Ch. 25 Job and Qohelet Ch. 28 The Deuterocanonical Wisdom Books	Prov 1-9 (ch. 8), 31 Job 1-14, 28, 38-42 Ecclesiastes 1-3; 12 Sir 24	Why is “Wisdom” portrayed as a female character in Proverbs 8 and 9? How do Job and Ecclesiastes offer different views of the meaning of human life or of suffering?
Mar 31	Ch. 26 The Hebrew Short Story... Ch. 27 Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees	Ruth Jonah Esther Daniel 7-12 (7:13-14; 9:1-2, 24; 12:1-3) *Enoch (excerpts) 1 Macc 1-6 2 Macc 1-10	What would you identify as the main theme of the story of Ruth? Of Jonah? Of Esther? What lessons might Jews living in a foreign land take from Daniel? From Esther (read last week)? From 1 Maccabees?
April 7	Ch. 29 From Tradition to Canon		What do you make of the Hebrew Bible? How do you understand its contents or purpose differently at the end of the course?

Additional Statements:

1. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices during Class and in Tests and Exams

It is particularly important in an online setting that students respect the classroom environment and refrain from inappropriate or distracting use of technology. It is also important that students exercise the highest levels of integrity during tests and exams, completing these within the limits established by the instructor.

2. Statement on Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

https://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_20.

3. Plagiarism-detecting Software/Computer Marking:

A) All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

B) Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

4. Support Services:

- Huron's Faculty of Theology, Office of the Dean: <http://www.huronuc.on.ca> > Theology
- Faculty of Theology office: srice@uwo.ca
- Bachelor's Academic Advising at Huron: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/academic-advising/>
- Huron's Writing Skills Centre: <https://huronatwestern.ca/library/writing-services/>
- Mental Health@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to this website for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.
- Student Accessibility Services:
http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html
Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their faculty (normally their Dean and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged.

- Services provided by Western University Student Council: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/>

5. Academic Accommodation for Absences:

Types of Accommodation and how to use them:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html

Student Medical Certificate can be found here, if required:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Students who experience an extenuating circumstance (illness, injury, or other extenuating circumstance) sufficiently significant to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements may submit a request for academic consideration through the following routes:

- i. **Submitting a Self-Reported Absence form** provided that the conditions for submission are Met (see below);
- ii. **For medical absences, submitting a Student Medical Certificate (SMC)**, signed by a licensed medical or mental health practitioner in order to be eligible for Academic Consideration (for instance, when a Self-Report is not possible: any assignment worth more than 30%, final exams, or December mid-terms during exam schedule); or
- iii. **For non-medical absences**, submitting appropriate documentation (e.g., obituary, police report, accident report, court order, etc.) to Academic Counselling in their Faculty of registration in order to be eligible for academic consideration. Students are encouraged to contact their Academic Counselling unit to clarify what documentation is appropriate.

Any documentation required must be submitted by the student directly to your Faculty's Dean's office (or academic counselor), and not to the instructor. For students of the Faculty of Theology, all such documentation must be submitted to theology@huron.uwo.ca. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

Further Details about Requests for Academic Consideration Self-Reported Absence Form

Report through student.uwo.ca.

The full Policy on Academic Consideration for student absences is available at:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Consideration_for_absences.pdf.

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less.

The following conditions are in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances:

- a. students will be allowed a maximum of two self-reported absences between September and April and one self-reported absence between May and August
- b. any absences in excess of the number designated in clause a above, regardless of duration, will require students to present a Student Medical Certificate (SMC), signed by a licensed medical or mental health practitioner, detailing the duration and severity of illness, or

appropriate documentation supporting extenuating circumstances to the Academic Counselling unit in their Faculty of registration no later than two business days after the date specified for resuming responsibilities.

- c. The duration of the excused absence will be for a maximum of 48 hours from the time the Self-Reported Absence form is completed through the online portal, or from 8:30 am the following morning if the form is submitted after 4:30 pm;
- d. The duration of the excused absence will terminate prior to the end of the 48-hour period should the student undertake significant academic responsibilities (write a test, submit a paper) during that time;
- e. The duration of an excused absence will terminate at 8:30 am on the day following the last day of classes each semester regardless of how many days of absence have elapsed;
- f. Self-reported absences will not be allowed for scheduled final examinations; for midterm examinations scheduled during the December examination period; or for final lab examinations scheduled during the final week of term;
- g. Self-reporting may not be used for assessments (e.g. midterm exams, tests, reports, presentations, or essays) worth more than 30% of any given course.
- h. students must be in touch with their instructors no later than 24 hours after the end of the period covered by the Self-Reported Absence form, to clarify how they will be expected to fulfil the academic expectations they may have missed during the absence