

Torah & Histories (BibSt-Fdn 3)

Part 1 of a 2-part survey of the Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament
Maine School of Ministry ~ Fall 2017

Syllabus

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As early as possible before the first class meeting, please read this syllabus in its entirety so that you understand the course requirements, including the written response paper due by email 7 days before the first class meeting.

Sequence Overview

The two-part course sequence BibSt-Fdn 3 & 4 is an introduction to the collection(s) of literature known to Christians as the Old Testament, and to Jews as the Tanakh or Bible. The focus is on reading and interpreting the various genres found within this collection – narrative, historiography, law, prophecy, poetry, wisdom, and apocalypse. This course sequence is designed to familiarize you with this literature and to give you the tools you need both to approach it critically and to draw upon it as a source for your spiritual formation and ministry. We will also briefly survey the history of ancient Israel and Judah, the processes of canonization of this literature within Judaism and Christianity, the history of interpretation of some important passages, and the relevance of biblical interpretation for the history of Jewish-Christian relations.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, I hope that you will:

1. Be familiar with many of the texts that make up the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible.
2. Be familiar with a variety of hermeneutical approaches to this literature; that is, the variety of ways this literature has been read and interpreted.
3. Be more self-reflective about your approach to these or any texts.
4. Be able to perceive how these texts' authors rhetorically construct their own worldviews, and able to articulate some of the difficulties in using these texts as historical evidence.
5. Be proficient in one particular way of reading these texts, that of historical criticism, which means coming as close as possible to the meaning of the text as understood by its original author(s) or audience(s). Proficiency in historical criticism will better allow you to appreciate the rich variety of worldviews contained in this literature.
6. Be familiar with a basic outline of the history of ancient Israel and Judah, and able to explain some of the social, historical, and political conditions under which these texts were produced.
7. Have found ways to draw upon this literature in your personal spiritual formation and/or your ministry, and have developed a foundation for continued reflective study of this literature beyond this class.

The following course requirements are designed to aid you in achieving these objectives.

Course Requirements:

1. Class Participation. I.e., Preparation and Discussion of the Assigned Readings.

Each month there will be a Reading Guide that supplements this syllabus and contains more specific reading assignments. On the Reading Guides, the assigned biblical texts will be broken down according to two ways I would like you to read them:

Reading through. For large amounts of biblical text, necessary to read for context. Read this material once, and try to remember the gist of what you have read. This will help provide context for the passages to be read closely. You may skim or even skip this, as appropriate.

Reading closely. For smaller textual units that will be the focus of in-class discussions. You are expected to read and prepare for discussion all of these assigned biblical texts. This does not mean that you are expected to have memorized or understood all of it, but I do want you to have done more than just reading through all of it (as described above). Rather, as you read, take notes on things of interest, including questions. Pay attention to the footnotes provided in your study Bible (see below). Be prepared to draw our attention to things that you find provocative: inspiring, troubling, confusing, funny, illogical, transformative, problematic, etc.

You are also expected to have read all of the assigned secondary literature (introductory essays for the biblical books in the study Bible; essays in *Women's Bible Commentary*, chapters in *Very Short Intro*, occasional additional reading provided via email). While this material is also fair game for discussion, we will endeavor to focus on the biblical texts. It is my hope that the secondary literature both aids and complicates your reading of the Bible. As you read the secondary literature, think about how these points of view interact with your own reading of the assigned biblical texts. What do you agree with? Disagree with? Why?

You will get the most out of this course if you prepare the reading ahead of time. Plan on spending at least four hours of preparation for every hour of class time; i.e. twenty hours per session. Spread out over four weeks, this amounts to one hour per weekday.

2. Four Written Response Papers (each one due by email 7 days before each class).

For each class, all students will be responsible for producing a written response paper to ONE of the texts assigned for close reading for that class, and emailing me the paper 7 days before each class. For the first class, students will select their text from the list of "read closely" texts found in the first monthly reading guide; for the remaining classes, they will be assigned in class at the class before.

The paper should include:

1. A description of one or more features that make the text difficult to interpret.
2. Anything that you found provocative: inspiring, troubling, confusing, funny, illogical, transformative, problematic, etc.
3. Any historical context that would aid in arriving at a historical-critical interpretation of the text (that is, what you think the text meant to its original author(s)/audience(s)). The *Very Short Intro* and the footnotes and essays in the Study Bible may be especially helpful here.
4. (optional) One or more interpretations that are important in the history of interpretation (reception history) of the text, but differ from a historical-critical reading of the text. The *Women's Bible Commentary* may be especially helpful here.

The paper should be written in newspaper-quality prose and should follow these limits:

- Single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, & one-inch margins.
- Length: 1-2 pages, while meeting the spacing, font, and margin requirements above. That is, at least 1 full page and no more than 2 full pages.

Email me the paper as a separate MS Word document or as a PDF.

3. Introductory Presentations.

Each class after the first, some students will give 10-15 minute introductory presentations on their assigned biblical text. The total number of presentations each student will give will depend on class size. Each presentation should be based on the written response paper that has already been written and submitted for that class, although it should not be simply reading the paper out loud. Rather, convert the paper into an oral presentation that covers roughly the same material. The purpose of the introductory presentation is to begin the discussion of that text, and so raising questions about interpretation can be more important than solving them all.

Required Books:

1. Coogan, Michael D. (ed.), Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and Pheme Perkins (assoc. eds.). *New Oxford Annotated Bible: NRSV with the Apocrypha*. 4th edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN-10: 0195289552. ISBN-13: 978-0195289558.
Bring this Bible to class each time we meet.
Please note this is the same Bible required for BibSt-Fdn 1 & 2 in 2015-16.
An older edition of the New Oxford Annotated Bible is fine.
Henceforth: NOAB
2. Newsom, Carol A., Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds. *The Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition: Revised and Updated*. 2012. ISBN-10: 066423707X. ISBN-13: 978-0664237073
Henceforth: WBC
3. Coogan, Michael D. *The Old Testament: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0195305051. ISBN-13: 978-0195305050
Henceforth: VSI

Recommended Books:

For those interested in further reading beyond what we are able to cover in the class.

Coogan's expanded version of his introduction to the biblical literature:

Coogan, Michael D. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Two historical references for those interested in pursuing more solid historical information:

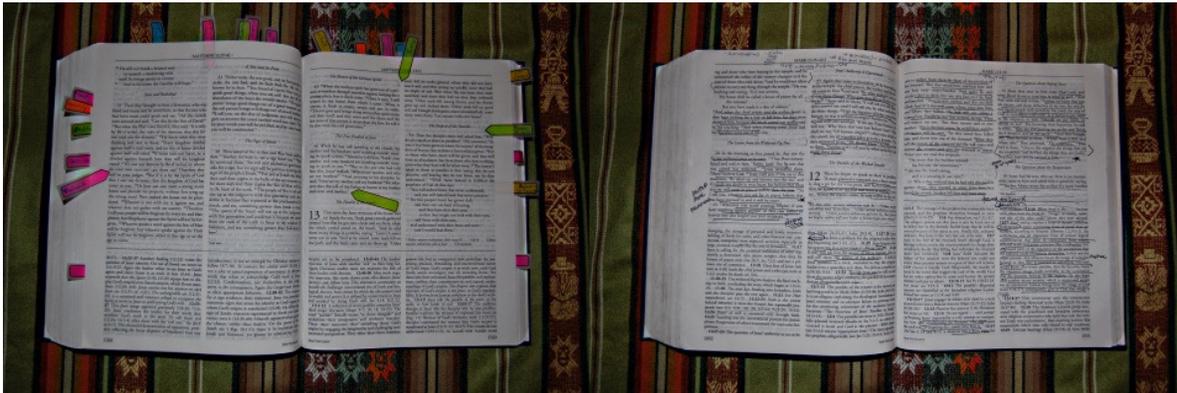
Coogan, Michael D., ed. *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 & 2001.

Miller, J. Maxwell, & John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Second edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

A Jewish Study Bible, with translation by the Jewish Publication Society (JPS). The JPS translation represents the collaboration of academic scholars with rabbis from the three largest branches of organized Jewish religious life in America.

Berlin, Adele, and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.). *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Note on study Bibles: A good study Bible will contain introductory articles, maps, and commentaries by some of the world’s leading biblical scholars writing in the historical critical tradition. In addition, the biblical text that it uses will be in a suitable translation. The study Bible edition I have selected for this class, the New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB), contains the biblical text in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation, which was translated by a committee of the best text critics, working from the most recently available ancient manuscripts, and operating under an open and accountable procedure. In addition, it contains the so-called “Apocrypha,” otherwise known as the “Deuterocanonical Books,” which are part of the greater Old Testament canon used by Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, but not by Protestants or Jews; these texts are an essential part of the history of the canon, and the course includes a very brief introduction to them and the different canons. Reading assignments of biblical texts always include the short essay before that biblical book. Please purchase this edition for this class. There is no harm in owning more than one Bible. We will discuss Bible translations and editions during the class. I highly recommended purchasing this in hardcover for long-term durability. Then mark it up.



Study Bibles used by two actual seminary students.
They are now happily married, despite their differing techniques for marking up their study Bibles.

Note on Women’s Bible Commentary (WBC): This is our primary text for reading the ancient literature through liberal hermeneutical lenses. Even if you already have the first or second edition, please purchase the Third Edition for this class. It is newly revised, includes over a dozen new articles about the interpretation of specific women in the Bible, and a good half of the original (1st & 2nd ed.) articles have been completely rewritten by a younger generation of feminist scholars. These updated essays incorporate important perspectives on masculinity, sexual identity, and postcolonial theory missing from the original essays written over 20 years earlier. Finally, the Third Edition is available in hardcover for long-term durability. Those interested in feminist biblical scholarship will want to have both the 2nd and 3rd editions in their libraries. The full case for the Third Edition may be read in its introduction.

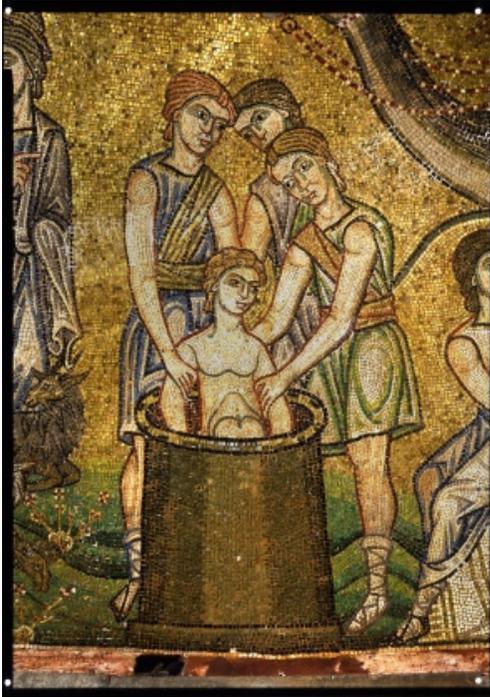
Note on The Old Testament: A Very Short Introduction (VSI): This is our primary “textbook” for the class. Among its excellent qualities is its brevity.

Division of Class Meetings.

All required readings are to be done before the session indicated. Please see the monthly reading guides for more detailed assignments of the biblical texts. The appearance of a biblical book on the syllabus does not necessarily imply that the entire book need be read.

Session 1: Saturday, September 09, 2017.

Torah / Pentateuch, Part One: Genesis.



Joseph's brothers throw him into a well.
13th century mosaic, Byzantine style.
Basilica of Saint Mark, Venice.

Biblical Books covered:

(Each month, see reading guide for more specifics)

- Genesis

Additional Required Reading:

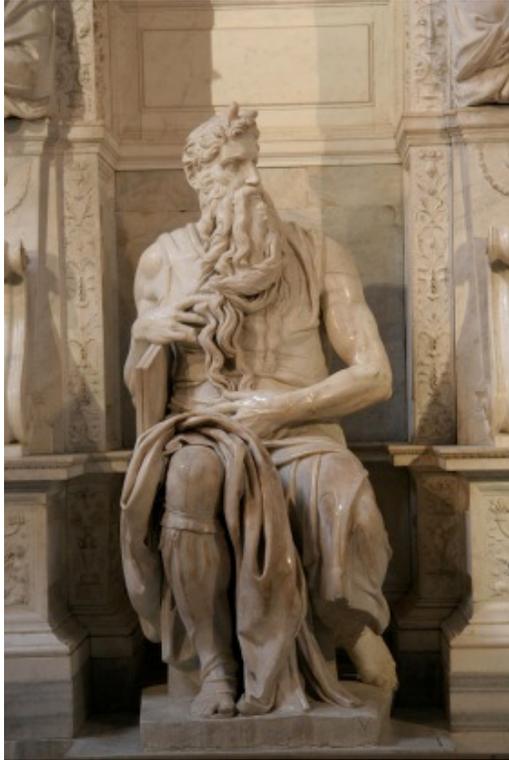
- NOAB: Introductory essays “To the Reader” and “Introduction to the Pentateuch”
- NOAB: Introductory essays to each biblical book above
- VSI: chs. 1-4
- VSI: “Chronology” & “Appendix: The Canons of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament” (pp. 125-129)
- WBC: articles on assigned biblical texts

Additional Recommended Reading:

- NOAB: “The Canons of the Bible,” “Textual Criticism,” “Translation of the Bible into English”

Session 2: Saturday, October 14, 2017.

Torah / Pentateuch, Part Two: Exodus, Wilderness, & Biblical Law



Moses by Michelangelo
Tomb of Pope Julius II, Rome, c. 1515 CE

Biblical Books covered:

(Each month, see reading guide for more specifics)

- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

Additional Required Reading:

- NOAB: Introductory essays to each biblical book above
- VSI: chs. 5-7
- WBC: articles on assigned biblical texts

Additional Recommended Reading:

- NOAB: “The Interpretation of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible’s Interpretation of Itself & The New Testament Interprets the Jewish Scriptures”

Session 3: Saturday, November 04, 2017.

Histories Part One: The Deuteronomistic History

Biblical Books covered:

(See reading guide for more specifics)

- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings
- 2 Kings



Deborah Judging Israel”
Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska (1922-1932)

Additional Required Reading:

- NOAB: “Cultural Contexts: The Ancient Near East and Ancient Israel to the Mid-first Millennium BCE”
- NOAB: “Introduction to the Historical Books”
- NOAB: Introductory essays to each biblical book above
- VSI: chs. 8, 9, 11
- WBC: articles on assigned biblical texts

Additional Recommended Reading:

- NOAB: “The Geography of the Bible”

Session 4: Saturday, December 02, 2017.

Histories Part Two:

The Chronicler, the Ezra-Nehemiah History, & the Biblical Novella

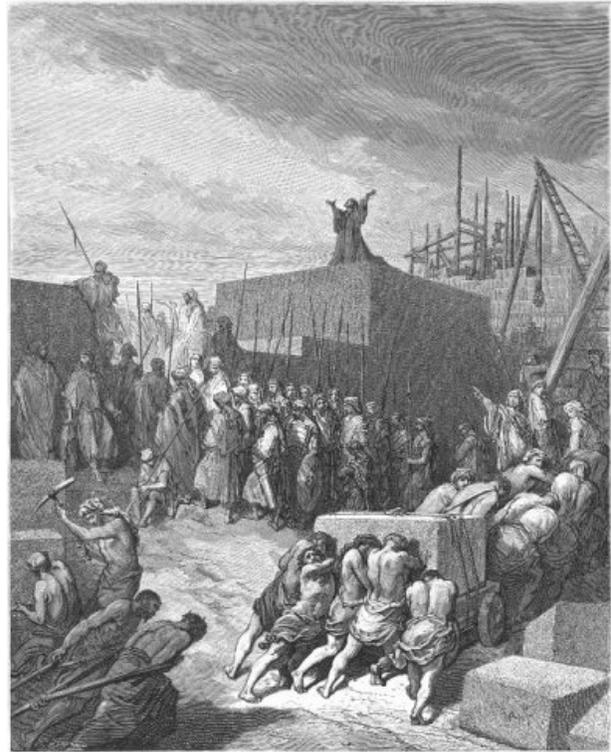
Biblical Books covered:

(See reading guide for more specifics)

- 1 & 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Esther
- Ruth

Additional Required Reading:

- NOAB: “Cultural Contexts: The Persian Period”
- NOAB: Introductory essays to each biblical book above
- VSI: ch. 12
- VSI: “Chronology” & “Appendix: The Canons of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament” (pp. 125-129) [reread]
- WBC: articles on assigned biblical texts



“The Rebuilding of the Temple” by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

Additional Recommended Reading:

- NOAB: “Timeline,” “Chronological Table of Rulers”
- VSI: ch. 10 (the only chapter in VSI we did not read this semester; a prelude to next semester)