

## RELIGION 121—INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Professor David Brusin—Ripon—Fall 2015  
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This course is an introduction to the collection of literature known as **The Hebrew Bible** or by the acronym, *TANACH*, standing for its three main divisions -- *Torah*, *Prophets [Nevi'im]*, and *Writings [Ketuvim]*. No prior knowledge and no particular religious commitments are presupposed. Actually, we will put all religious preconceptions and beliefs aside as we try to confront the biblical text on its own terms. One issue we face is deciding to what extent this is possible.

The Hebrew Bible is ancient literature that has greatly influenced the course of western civilization as well as some of its most important writers and thinkers for more than two millennia. It gave rise to three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The questions that emerge and with which we will struggle are just as important, therefore, as the answers we might agree upon along the way. Our central concern is not to arrive at a definitive understanding of the texts we examine; our main purpose is to appreciate the genius and majesty of the biblical writers and of biblical themes and ideas.

There is a vast and growing body of scholarship focused on analyzing and interpreting the Hebrew Bible from many different perspectives. We will familiarize ourselves with some of these trends; *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, with its extensive bibliography, will be our guide. Still, our central objective will always remain the same: to hear the voice of the biblical writers, to do our best to understand that voice, and to allow ourselves to respond to it, each in his or her own way.

### REQUIRED BOOKS

*The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2004, paperback  
Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2007

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

--We meet only once a week, from 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm on Tuesdays, so regular attendance is very important. Sometimes missing class is unavoidable, but if you miss more than once it is your responsibility to contact me to arrange to make up a missed class (typically a three or four page paper or written version of a class activity). Absences that are not made up will affect your final grade.

--Students are expected to have read all assignments before coming to class.

--Students with special needs of any kind should contact me at the beginning of the course so appropriate accommodations can be arranged.

--Feel free to contact me, by phone or email, for any reason; if necessary, we can arrange to meet before or after class. Note: I do **not** use my Ripon email address.

## GRADING

Attendance and participation:	25%
Two Reflection Papers (about four pages each) on Assigned Topics:	25%
Study Group Presentations, beginning <b>Week #7</b> :	25%
Final Research Paper, about eight pages in length, due <b>December 8</b> :	25%

## CLASS SCHEDULE, READING AND ASSIGNMENTS

*Week #1 – Intro & Logistics/Reading an Ancient Text and Historical Context*  
[9/1] Reflection Papers, Grading, Assignments, Study Groups, Getting on the same page, etc.

*Weeks #2 & #4 – Creation, The Flood and Babel: Mythology or Science?*  
[9/8 & 9/22] Reading: Genesis, chapters 1 to 11  
Excerpts from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and *Enuma Elish*,  
*The Babylonian Creation Epic*, Frymer-Kensky article  
Essays in Jewish Study Bible [JSB]: pp 1-11; 2048-2062  
*How to Read the Jewish Bible* [HTR]: Chapters 1 to 6  
**NO CLASS ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 [Week #3]**

*Weeks #5, #6 & #7 – The Mamas and The Pappas*  
[9/29, 10/6 & 10/13] Reading: Genesis, chapters 12 to 50  
**HTR: Chapter 7**  
**FIRST REFLECTION PAPER DUE WEEK #6—OCTOBER 6**  
**STUDY GROUP #1 PRESENTATION—Week #7—October 13**

### **FALL VACATION—TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20**

*Week #8 – Moses: A Leader Larger Than Life?—Revelation at*  
[10/27] **Sinai—Covenant and Legal Traditions**  
Reading: Exodus, chapters 1 to 24; and chapters 31 to 33;  
Leviticus, chapters 17-26  
Deuteronomy, chapters 12 to 26 and chapter 34  
Essays in JSB, pp 102-107, 203-206  
**HTR: Chapter 8**  
**STUDY GROUP #2 PRESENTATION—Week #8—October 27**

*Weeks #9 & #10 – The Conquest and Settlement of The Promised Land*  
[11/3 & 11/10] Reading: Joshua, chapters 1 to 12, and chapters 21, 23 and 24  
Judges, chapters 1 to 3  
Essays in JSB: pp 462-464, 508-510, and  
2048-2052  
**HTR: Chapter 11**  
**STUDY GROUP #3 PRESENTATION—Week #9—November 3**  
**SECOND REFLECTION PAPER DUE WEEK #10—NOVEMBER 10**

**Week #11 – The Monarchy: Saul, David, Solomon**

[11/17] Reading: 1 Samuel  
2 Samuel, chapters 1 to 8  
1 Kings, chapters 1 to 12, 16  
2 Kings, chapters 17 to 25  
1 Chronicles chapters 1, 5, 20  
2 Chronicles chapters 7, 33, 35  
Essays in **JSB**: pp 558-561, 668-671, and  
2052-62

**HTR**: Chapters 12, 13 and 14

**STUDY GROUP #4 PRESENTATION—November 17**

**Week #12 – Prophecy—Amos and Jeremiah**

[11/24] Reading: Amos and Jeremiah  
Essays in **JSB**: pp 917-920 & 1176-77  
**HTR**: Chapters 15,16 and 18

**Week #13 – Wisdom Literature—Lamentations and Psalms**

[12/1] Reading: Lamentations  
Psalms, 1,3,6,8,14,15,19,23,24,53,118,137,139  
Essays in **JSB**, pp 1275-84, pp 1587-89,  
**HTR**: Chapter 22

**STUDY GROUP #5 PRESENTATION—December 1**

**Week #14 – Wisdom Literature—Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Esther**

[12/8] Reading: Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Esther  
Essays in **JSB**, pp 1564-66, pp1603-06 and pp 1623-25  
**HTR**: Chapters 23, 25, 26, and 27

**STUDY GROUP #6 PRESENTATION—December 8**

**FINAL PAPER DUE NO LATER THAN TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8**

**Mission Statement of the Religion Department**

Classes in the Department of Religion are designed to allow students to encounter some of the major religious and moral traditions of our world in order to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the origins and development of our diverse spiritual heritages, while, as a consequence, come away with a better understanding of the multi-religious dimensions of the contemporary world.