RELIGIOUS STUDIES 201.01
HEBREW BIBLE: HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
Spring 2016

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
In this course, the student is introduced to the academic study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, examining issues of its composition, historical development, and interpretation (ancient and modern). Particular genres or types of biblical literature are interpreted within their wider ancient Near Eastern context (creation and cosmos, biblical laws, wisdom traditions, etc.). In reading and analyzing selected portions of the Hebrew scriptures, students will be exposed to various historical-critical, literary, and archaeologically informed interpretations of the text. Topics covered include the covenant theme in Genesis and beyond, kingship in ancient Israel, the exodus event (history and archaeology), the biblical legal tradition (covenant code, Ten Commandments), the role of prophets and the nature of ancient Israelite prophecy, the Davidic king-messiah and messianic expectation, biblical wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, Qohelet), and love poetry (Song of Songs). A primary goal of the course is to instill in the student an acute awareness of and appreciation for the underlying strategies and ideologies that informed the composition of the biblical and other Near Eastern ancient texts, as well as the cultures that produced them.

GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLO)
In dealing with the history and interpretation of the biblical text in its ancient surrounding world, the course addresses the following two GenEd learning outcomes: (1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, or valued in various expressions of human culture; and (2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret that material in writing assignments. These outcomes will be assessed by means of a short analytical paper on the interpretation of a biblical passage(s).

REQUIRED TEXTS
1) A translation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The following translations are preferred for this course (you need only one!):

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV; 1991). This comes in a variety of study editions, including The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (4th ed., fully revised, 2010), and The HarperCollins Study Bible (Student edition; revised and updated, 2006).


**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES**

*Three exams (25% each = 75% of final grade).* These consist of multiple-choice, passage identification, and essay. It is imperative that you notify me in advance if you are unable to take an exam. You should call me at my office (553-4996) and (if I'm not in) leave a message regarding your situation. Make-up exams may be of increased difficulty and must be taken as soon as possible after the original exam date, preferably within a day or two at the most. Only those who provide a valid excuse will be allowed to make up an exam.

*Weekly quizzes/homework assignments (10%).* It is expected that each student will come to class prepared (having done the readings and assignments) and ready to participate. As part of your weekly work, I will give either an in-class quiz over the readings or a written homework assignment. The quizzes (announced beforehand) are designed simply to motivate you to keep up with the readings. You will be allowed to miss two of these (late assignments will not be accepted via e-mail). Any number beyond this will count as a zero, regardless of why you missed class or did not turn in the assignment. In-class quizzes cannot be made up. Exceptions to these policies are possible only in cases of severe illness or other grave circumstances. In either case, suitable documentation is required.

*SLO Assignment (5%).* Short analytical paper dealing with the interpretation of a biblical text(s).

*Class Attendance and Participation (10%).* I assume students will attend regularly, eager to discuss the material that they've carefully read before class. If only a few participate, I will randomly call on individuals to answer questions. If you are consistently unable to respond, particularly if you are rarely in class, or it is clear you've not done the readings, this will be noted by me in my little black book of languid, lethargic, and generally listless students. Those who are conspicuous by their absence, physically or mentally, may be subject to a lower final grade. Should you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain notes on material covered that day (so make friends in class!). Please do not ask me via e-mail to update you on what has happened in class.

*Electronics in the Classroom.* Laptops are permitted in class ONLY for access to Oaks readings or taking notes. **If you use your laptop, you must sit in front of the classroom where everyone can see your screen activity.** Any other online activity is prohibited. If I suspect or confirm the latter, I will ask you to close your computer. If this happens a second time, your laptop privileges will be revoked for the duration of the course. Also, smart phone use is prohibited. Please set your phones on silent and put them away. If I see you continually staring at your crotch and smiling, I will assume you have a phone (if not, I don't want to know).
Honor Code Agreement. Read the handout carefully, sign/date it, and return it to me no later than Wednesday, January 13.

GRADING
Final grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

A = 100-94  C = 75-73
A+ = 93-90   C- = 72-70
B+ = 89-86   D+ = 69-66
B = 85-83    D = 65-62
B- = 82-80   D- = 61-59
C+ = 79-76   F = 58-

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS
(This schedule is subject to revision. Please bring all materials - Bible, Oaks readings, and/or textbook - relevant to the lecture topic for that day.)

I. INTRODUCTION

Jan. 8-13: The Literature of the Hebrew Bible, its Ancient Near Eastern Context, and a Quick Overview of Israel's History (Coogan, chapters 1-2 and "Chronology" on pp. 540-547; also summary narrative on pp. 22-27 and Box 2.1). Oaks readings #1 and #2 contain relevant maps and charts to orient you to the region and its chronology. Readings #3-5 discuss issues relating to the Hebrew text, translations, and approaches to its interpretation.
For the Dead Sea scrolls online, see http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/
For the Aleppo Codex, see http://aleppocodex.org/

II. TORAH (PENTATEUCH)

1/15: By Way of Preface: Genesis 1-11
(read Genesis 1-11 and Coogan, chaps. 3-5). Oaks reading #6 contains various maps, charts etc., and passages from some ancient texts relevant for Genesis - please make sure you have these pages in class (note especially the Robbins translation of Genesis 2-3 in Oaks #6a). Readings #7-10 (Baden, Orlinsky, Batio, Fewell) deal with additional matters of interpretation; I will announce beforehand which you are to read for lecture.

1/18 - No Class (Martin Luther King Day)


1/25-29: The Fathers and Mothers of Israel: Abraham and the Covenant Theme
Film Clips: Over the course of the term we will view segments from two films relating to the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel. Both as it happens bear the same title: “The Bible’s Buried Secrets” - one from the PBS series NOVA and the other produced by the BBC. Segments of both are available on-line via Youtube and PBS.

Feb. 1-3: The Exodus in Israelite Tradition: History and Archaeology
(read Exodus 1-18; Coogan, chap. 7; and Huddleston in Oaks #13). Note relevant maps in Oaks #2 and full text of the Merenptah stela in Oaks #12.

2/5-8: The Covenant and the Biblical Legal Tradition
(read Exodus, chaps. 19-24, 34; Coogan, chap. 8 and pp. 128-134, Box 9.2, and pp. 141-144, 162-163 on Law; and Westbrook, “Crimes and Delicts” in Oaks #14). Oaks #15 contains a brief selection of laws from Mesopotamia on similar topics.

2/10: Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History
(read Deuteronomy, chaps. 1-12, 18, 28-30, 34; Coogan, chap. 12; plus pp. 196-198 on editions and themes). Note also pp. 290-291 on the prophecy-fulfillment motif.

***2/12- EXAM 1***

III. NEV’TIM: THE FORMER/LATTER PROPHETS

2/15-17: Emergence in the Land of Canaan
(read Joshua 1-12, 22-24 and Judges 1-5; Coogan, chaps. 13-14, minus pages on Ruth [230-231]). For two views on early Israel and the settlement in the land, see Finkelstein, “How and When Did the Israelites Emerge” (Oaks #16a) and Mazar, “The Israelite Settlement” (Oaks #16b).

2/19-22: “We want a king like those of other nations”: The Formation of the Monarchy
(read 1 Samuel 3-17; Coogan, chap. 15).

2/24-26: Israel’s “Golden Age”: The United Monarchy under David and Solomon
(read 2 Samuel 1-8, 11-12; 1 Kings 1-11; and Coogan, chaps. 16-17). Oaks #17 (Berlin) provides a literary analysis of David’s women, while Baden (#17a) engages in a close, critical and historical reading of the Bathsheba affair and its aftermath. For Solomon’s temple, see Fritz in Oaks #18 and Monson in Oaks #19. For photos of the temple at Ain Dara, Syria, see http://www.pbse.com/dosseman_syria/aidara&page=all

2/29 – 3/4: Gods, Temples, and Sacrifices in Ancient Canaan/Israel

***March 7-11: Spring Break***
3/14-16: The Divided Monarchy down to the Destruction of the Northern Kingdom
(read 1 Kings 12-22; 2 Kings 1-11, 17; and Coogan, pp. 290-299). Oaks #24 contains some non-biblical inscriptions relevant to this period.

(review relevant passages in 1-2 Kings above; read book of Amos [all]; Coogan, pp. 299-309, 312-320, and Box 19.3).

3/21-23: Judah's Last Days: King Hezekiah and Isaiah of Jerusalem ("First Isaiah")
(read 2 Kings 16,18-20; 2 Chronicles 28; Isaiah 1-12; Coogan, chap. 20, and text no. 28 on Sennacherib in Oaks #24, pp. 11-13).

***3/25 - EXAM 2***

3/28-30: Kings Manasseh, Josiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE
(read 2 Kings 21-25; 2 Chronicles 33-35; and Coogan, chaps. 21-22). See Oaks #24, p. 17, for the account of Nebuchadnezzar's taking of Jerusalem.

April 1: Jeremiah, the Exile, and the Problem of Prophetic Authority
(read Jeremiah 1, 7, 23-33; Coogan, pp. 366-376).

4/4-6: Second Isaiah on Cyrus, the Messiah: "God the Master Puppeteer"
(read Isaiah 40-51; Coogan, chap. 24). See Oaks #25 for the Cyrus Cylinder (Finkel) and Smith, "Monotheism in Isaiah 40-55" (Oaks #26).

4/8: Return and Restoration
(read Coogan, pp. 417-424, 428-34; the biblical books Haggai, Zechariah 3-6; Ezra 1, 3-10; and Nehemiah 1-4, 8-10, 13).

IV. KETHUVIM (THE WRITINGS)


Proverbs: The Two Ladies, the Two Paths
(read Proverbs 1-9; Coogan, pp. 467-470; and Pechansky, "Is Hokmah an Israelite Goddess, and What Should We Do about It?" - Oaks #27).

Job: The System is Broken, God's a Gambler
(read Job 1-14, 19, 22-23, 27-42 [skim the rest]; and Coogan, pp. 475-485). In contrast to Coogan, see Clines in Oaks #28 ("Why is There a Book of Job, and What Does It Do to You if You Read It?") and #29 ("Seven Interesting Things about the Epilogue to Job"). For the problem of suffering, injustice, and the gods (theodicy) outside biblical tradition, see the Mesopotamian texts in Oaks #30.
Ecclesiastes (Qohelet): Who Knows Anything?

4/18: Songs of Songs: Love Poetry in the Bible!
(read Song of Songs [“Song of Solomon”] and Coogan, pp. 490-492). See Oaks #32 for some Egyptian love poetry similar to that in this biblical book.

4/20-21: Lion, Tigers, and Bears! Daniel and the Apocalyptic Genre
(read Daniel 7-12 [skim 1-6]; I Maccabees 1-4 (apocrypha section of Bible); Coogan, pp. 494-506 for historical background, and pp. 531-537 on Daniel).
[Note that the 21st falls on Thursday, but counts as a Monday class day.]

***EXAM 3 (in this classroom) -- Wednesday, April 27 @ 9:30-11:00***