

**Religion 201
Hebrew Scriptures
Fall 2011**

Professor: Marla Segol
Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:10-3:30, Ladd 106
Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:00-11:00, 215 Ladd Hall

Getting in touch:

My office hours will be held on Monday, 4:30-5:30 and Wednesdays from 11-12 a.m. in 215 Ladd Hall. I can be reached by e-mail at msegol@skidmore.edu

Course Description:

Who wrote the Bible? Why did they do it? What did they want to say? And how do we know? In this course we will carefully read parts of the Hebrew Bible to understand the narratives in it, the social context in which they were written, and the ways in which they generate meaning. That means that we'll begin with the primary text, we'll contextualize it historically, we'll pay attention to its style, and we will try to identify and understand the big questions asked and answered in the stories we read.

Required Texts

1. The Jewish Study Bible (JSB), ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler.
2. Richard Elliott Friedman, Who Wrote the Bible?
3. Ariel and Chana Bloch: Song of Songs
4. Coursepack

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance. Attendance is required.

2. Reading. You are required to do ALL of the reading for this course. You will be accountable for it in a variety of ways throughout the term, including informed class participation, reading exercises, and contribution to panels.

3. Class participation: (10 points) Class participation is a must. I will lecture for about half of each class, while the remainder of most meetings will consist of structured class discussion. You will be graded on your informed participation.

4. Notebook: Reading questions and step-by-step exercises: (50 points) I've assigned a reading question and/or a step-by-step exercise for each class. You are to answer these questions in your class notebook dedicated especially to this purpose. And, you are to bring your notebook to class every time it meets so that you can refer to your answers for class discussion. I'll collect and grade the notebooks four times during the term.

5. Final Paper Proposal (10 points)

6. Final Paper 7-8 Pages (30 points)

EXPECTATIONS & COURSE POLICIES:

General Expectations: I expect you to read, write, think, and learn. Then, I expect you to talk about it.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Only two absences (excused or unexcused) are allowed. Students who miss three (3) or more class sessions will have their final course grade lowered by two (2) points per excessive absence. Any student who misses more than a third of the class sessions will receive an "F" for their course grade. Regular and consistent attendance is necessary for success in this course. In short, if you're not in class, you can't participate and learn.

Participation: Active participation is necessary for success in this course. Students are expected to arrive to class on time and to consistently contribute to class discussions. Arriving late is both disruptive and disrespectful to classmates who are attempting to participate in the learning process and affects your own ability to participate in the entire class session. Points will be deducted from your final course grade for habitual lateness.

Participation is not simply about quantity or "how much you participate," but about the quality of your involvement in class. Excellent participation is arriving on time; actively listening to and being involved in the discussion at hand; asking questions about issues that you do not understand; synthesizing course and other materials to arrive at new understandings of the issues at hand; and being eager to make informed, thoughtful, and respectful comments on the ideas of others.

Assignments:

All course assignments must be handed in on time.

Expected Style: All written papers are expected to be well-written (e.g., well-organized, correct spelling, appropriate grammar), double-spaced, using 1" margins and 12 point font, stapled, and accompanied by a cover sheet. Do not use a paperclip or binder on your written papers. In addition, students must adhere to either MLA or Chicago style when citing sources in text and when generating reference lists for assignments of any kind.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to adhere to the college's honor code. Academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, failure to cite, cheating) will not be tolerated, and the Integrity Board will be notified of suspected violations. Skidmore's Expository Writing Network (available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/writingbrd/INDEX.html>) has helpful information on the ethics of writing. Please make use of this campus resource.

Personal Statement on Plagiarism:

Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to) copying from a book, article or another student, downloading material or ideas from the Internet, or otherwise submitting someone else's work or ideas as your own. Please take great care to cite your sources correctly as even an accidental representation of someone else's work as your own is still considered plagiarism.

I WILL prosecute you. It's easy to detect, and painful for everyone involved. So save us all the paperwork and hand in only your own work.

Disability Accommodations: Any student with special needs requiring accommodations should give me his/her memo of accommodations in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to follow up with me regarding all accommodations that require my participation. The student is advised to ensure full use of testing accommodations by coming to talk to me at least seven days before any test on the syllabus. The Coordinator for Students with Disabilities is located in the Office of Student Academic Services. You can make an appointment by calling extension 5180.

Syllabus: While every attempt is made to include all course information on this syllabus, some changes may be necessary. Any changes will be announced in class. Students are responsible for adhering to the information contained in the syllabus and any announcements in class pertaining to course information.

NOTE: Whenever you need to read a book of the Bible at home, be sure to read carefully its introduction in the JSB. Additional useful background information is found in the following essays in the JSB, which you are encouraged to read at your leisure: "Languages of the Bible" (pp. 2062-2067); "The Bible in the Dead Sea Scrolls" (pp. 1920-1928); "Textual Criticism of the Bible" (pp. 2067-2072); and "The Development of the Masoretic Text" (pp. 2077-2084).

Class Schedule:

1. Thurs 9/8

When we use the word "Bible," what book or books are we referring to? Do Jews and Christians have different lists of books included in the Bible? And how do biblical scholars arrive at the text of the Bible itself?

Handout: History of the Hebrew Biblical Text

2. Tue 9/13 Background

A. Friedman Chapter 1, pp. 15-49

3. Thurs 9/15: Creation

Readings

- A. Jewish Study Bible Introduction to Genesis: pp 8-11
- B. Genesis 1 and 2
- C. Percy Cohen: Theories of Myth (CP1)

Step-by-step exercise 1:

Summarize the plot of Genesis 1-2. Now compare Genesis 1 to Genesis 2. What are the differences and how might they matter? Of the theories of myth presented by Cohen, which works best for this story and why?

4. Tues 9/20:

Readings

A. Genesis 3-11

B. Friedman Chapter 2

Question: What is the covenant and how does it work? Use Friedman and Cohen to discuss the events narrated in these chapters.

5. Thurs 9/22

Readings:

A. Genesis 12-24

Question: Does the Sacrifice of Isaac make narrative sense? What is the relation between 22-3 and the previous narratives? How does it deal with the covenant?

6. Tues 9/27

Readings:

A. Genesis 25-36

B. Frymer-Kensky: The Dinah Affair (CP2)

Question: How does the Dinah affair color the rest of the Jacob cycle?

7. Thurs 9/29

NO CLASS ROSH HASHANAH, 9/29

8. Tues, 10/4

This class will be devoted to discussion of the following two step-by-step exercises

A. Summarize the careers of the patriarchs. What kinds of obligations do they have, and to whom? Do the same events happen to more than one patriarch? What patterns do you discern? What sorts of promises are made to the patriarchs and how are they fulfilled? How were these characters used to speak to the social concerns of the authors? Now summarize the careers of the matriarchs and other female characters. Answer the same questions as above. How were these characters used to speak to the social concerns of the authors?

B. What is Genesis? Is it history? Is it myth? Is it literature? Law? Is it theology? Why was it written? Drawing on the text itself, and upon the different methodologies applied in the secondary reading, come up with and argue for a preliminary classification and description of Genesis.

NOTEBOOKS DUE 10/4

9. Thurs, 10/6

Reading

- A. Intro Exodus;
- B. Exodus 1-12:42

Question: How is the covenant communalized? How does this text speak about communal identity?

Tues, 10/11

Reading:

A. Exodus 12:42-24

B. A Theory of Revelations (CP3)

Step-by-step assignment: Find the decalogue (ten commandments). What does it actually ask for? To whom are they addressed and why?

Write an outline of chapters 21-23, organizing the laws under broad headings. How are the laws organized? What are the different types of forms in which the laws of Exodus 21-23 are cast? Would these laws have formed a complete legal handbook? What type of society do they reflect? Are they civil or religious legislation?

10. Thurs, 10/13

Reading:

A. Exodus 25-40

1. How does this text describe prophecy, and what might it mean for religious practice? Apply ideas from "A Theory of Revelations" to answer this question.

2. God gives instructions for building. Then, while Moses is busy receiving divine revelation, Aaron builds something. What went wrong and why? What's the big deal? And what does it mean?

11. Tues, 10/18

Reading:

- A. Introduction
- B. Leviticus 1-10
- C. Friedman, Chapter 3

Question: Nadab and Abihu? What happened, and how can we compare it to other instances of botched instructions? See especially Aaron and the Golden Calf. Can we derive from these instances a working theory of ritual in the Torah? What is it, who/what is it for, and how does it work?

12. Thurs, 10/20 NOTEBOOKS DUE TODAY, 10/20

Reading:

- A. Leviticus 11, 17 (laws of kosher food), 15 (sexual purity), 16 (Yom Kippur), 18 (sexual prohibitions), 19

(holiness), Numbers 5:11-6:27 (law of the Sotah, or the woman suspected of adultery).

B. Mary Douglas, from Purity and Danger (CP4)

Question: Compare these commandments to the ones elaborated in Exodus, 21-23, and continue your work theorizing ritual in the Hebrew Bible.

13. Tues, 10/25

Reading:

A. Intro Deuteronomy

B. Friedman Chapters 4 and 5

C. Deuteronomy 1-11

Question: Compare Deut. 5 with Ex. 20 – two slightly different versions of the ten commandments. Why do these differences matter?

14. Thurs, 10/27

Reading:

A. Deuteronomy 26-34

B. Intro Joshua

C. Joshua 1-13:8

Question: Do these sources tell the same story? How are they different and why? What are the implications in terms of the historical utility/accuracy of the Hebrew Bible? Does this make the Bible 'untrue'?

15. Tues, 11/1

Reading

A. *Judges* 1-11

Step-by-Step Exercise 5:

Some commentators argue that the women appearing in Judges are used to depict a society falling to pieces and in need of kingship. The idea is that the appearance of women in these roles points to a 'topsy-turvy' world, based on the assumption that these roles were closed to women. Is this the case?

- A. Establish the background provided to understand the social situation in Judges 3.
- B. Determine the context for understanding Deborah's leadership in Judges 4
- C. Describe women's political action in Judges 4
- D. Compare it to the Song of Judges 5

Draw some conclusions about women's expected social roles- are they rigid or fluid? What are these women concerned with, and can their concerns be subsumed into an attempt to draw a picture of a topsy-turvy world, or do they say something different?

Final Paper Proposals due today, Thurs, 11/3

16. Thurs, 11/3 The Women and Men of Judges

Reading:

A. Judges 11-21

B. Dismemberment and Community (CP5)

Question: What are the social values at play in these two horrendous accounts? How do they speak to similar biblical accounts, such as the visitation of the angels to Lot in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and to prohibitions of child sacrifice throughout the Bible? What is the point of including these narratives?

17. Tues, 11/8

Reading

A. Introduction to 1 Kings

B. 2 Kings, 17, and 21-25

C. Friedman chapters 6 and 7

Question: How does Josiah tell the story of the redaction of the bible? How does he position it in public life? How does he theorize and the function of scripture?

Bigger question: Re-evaluating biblical social history: What kind of a history do the writers of the Bible want to tell? Much of what we have read in this section is concerned with forging and regulating communal identity through law, ritual and genealogy. Biblical narratives of identity are also forged around conceptions of gender identity and communal fertility. Choose one of these biblical genres- law, ritual description, genealogy, family saga, gender narratives, texts of terror- and explain how it contributes to the narration of a communal Israelite identity.

NOTEBOOKS DUE TODAY, 11/8

18. Thurs 11/10 Kings and Textual history

Reading:

- A. EZEKIEL, 1-5, 8-9

Really. What is the plot of this selection? What did Ezekiel see, why did he see it, and what does it mean?

19. Tues 11/15

- A. Friedman, chapter 8-9

- B. Ezekiel 16

Question: Let's talk about the vision of the chariot, and the whore of Babylon. How do these relate to the covenant?

PAPER PROPOSALS DUE 11/15

20. Thurs 11/17

Reading:

- A. Proverbs 1 and 3; 7-9.

- B. Introduction to Kethuvim, p1275, intro to Proverbs p1447

Question: How do these verses differ from biblical material that we previously studied? Read Proverbs 1 and 3. Who is wise? What is the point of Proverbs 7-9? How is this point argued? (Note: In Hebrew, the word "wisdom" *hokmah*, is a feminine noun.) What are the likely origins of Proverbs? Is wisdom a secular or a religious genre?

21. Tues, 11/22: Job 1

- A. Job, 1-21

- B. Parsons, Gregory. Literary Features of Job (CP6)

How does Parsons' article help you to understand Job?

Note: This class may need rescheduling because of the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

THANKSGIVING BREAK: 11/23-27

22. Tues, 11/29: Job 2

Reading

- A. Job, 22-42

- B. Newsom, Carol: Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth (CP7)

Question: What sort of truth should we look for in Job, and how do we find it?

23. Thurs, 12/1: Song of Songs 1

- A. Begin *Song of Songs*. Make sure to read Ariel and Chana Bloch's introduction.

Who is the Shulamite woman, and what is her significance? What is the significance of assigning authorship to King Solomon?

24. Tues, 12/6 Song of Songs 2

Reading:

A. Finish Song of Songs

B. Brettler's article The Canonization of the Bible, pp2072-2077 of JSB

Question: What is the subject of this book? How do we know? What is it doing in the Bible?

25. **Thurs, 12/8**

Concluding discussion

NOTEBOOKS DUE TODAY, 12/8

FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, 12/12

Step-by-Step Exercise Guidelines

These exercises are gained to draw your attention to and to help you draw informed conclusions about the structure and to the literary qualities of the texts we study. Since they are step-by-step exercises, please follow the instructions precisely, using the question as a template for the paper you will hand in. As you complete each step, record your findings, and conclude by formulating your answers to the final questions and relevant conclusions as a paragraph with an argument. Then hand it in at the beginning of class on the day that it is due. If you are a panelist that day, be prepared to discuss your findings and their implications. You will be graded on the completeness of the exercise and on the thoughtfulness of your conclusions. Please be concise.

Paper Guidelines:

Papers should be double-spaced, and in black 12-point font with one-inch margins.

They should include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

- a. The introduction should introduce and present your thesis, and explain how you intend to prove it.
- b. The body should support your thesis with quotes from the work, and from whatever secondary sources you intend to use. Quotes must be interpreted as well as presented in order to be effective.
- c. The conclusion should explain your progress. That is, it should not only restate your thesis, but it should acknowledge some of what you have learned about it through writing your paper. You should not introduce any new ideas in your conclusion, but instead, you should show a more nuanced understanding of your original thesis, with the benefit of the experience of your paper.

It is very important to focus on the question by supporting your ideas about it with quotations from the text. This means that if you believe something to be true about a text you must include or refer to those parts of the work from which you deduced this idea.

Citations: The following items must be cited:

- a. pieces you have taken from the work in question
- b. all secondary sources- criticism, facts, figures, etc.
- c. ideas: if you got an idea about the work from a book, you should cite it even if you do not quote it directly.

Using sources productively: You must include quotations from the textual sources you discuss in your paper.

The proper way to use a quote includes three steps:

You introduce and contextualize the quote.

You cite it properly according to MLA or Chicago style guidelines

You conclude by analyzing the quote and showing how it supports your point.

Here is a very simple example: (A) In Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, the main character justifies his desire to practice three religions by espousing a universalist understanding of religion, asserting that "the God of the Hebrews and the Christians is the same as the God of the Muslims!" (B) (Martel, p 72) (C) In this, Piscine expresses his belief that because these three religions work toward the same goal, serving the same God, he is justified in practicing both Christianity and Islam.

Papers must include and **USE** full text printed academic sources. No web sites are permitted except those I have designated on the syllabus. You may use campus databases of full text articles such as JSTOR. Otherwise, you must use books to prove your points.

Your paper must explicitly treat course material.

Use the bibliographies and suggestions for further reading provided at the end of each chapter of *Anatomy of the Sacred* to find secondary sources.

The Wilson Humanities Index, available through the university library, is an excellent source for scholarly articles that can be accessed online.

For your information: for our purposes a primary source is a sacred or literary text. A secondary source is one that analyzes and theorizes the primary source. For example: The biblical book of *Exodus* is a primary source, and Nahum Sarna's *Exploring Exodus* is a secondary source. Your textbook is a secondary source because it theorizes primary religious sources. However, when I ask you to use a secondary source I do not mean your textbook because it is the starting point of our inquiry, and I am asking you to go further.

Failure to cite your sources properly is **plagiarism** and will be treated as such.