



SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY
The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego

HEBREW BIBLE 1

SYLLABUS Fall Semester 2019

Taught by
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Saturdays 8:00-10:00 a.m.
Episcopal Church Center in Ocean Beach
2083 Sunset Cliffs Blvd, San Diego, CA 92107

Welcome to Hebrew Bible 1! This class will introduce you to the discipline of academic Biblical Studies – specifically, the literature of the Torah and the Historical Writings in the Hebrew Bible.

“Old Testament” or “Hebrew Bible”?

The preferred terminology today – even in Christian Biblical Studies – is “Hebrew Bible” or “Hebrew Scriptures” rather than “Old Testament.” These are the sacred texts of Judaism, however important they might be to Christians - primarily *because* they were the sacred scriptures of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew. Referring to these texts as the “Old” Testament might suggest to Jews that they are out-dated compared to the “New” Christian Testament, or have been superseded. Also, as we will see, the language of “Old” and “New” Testaments imposes a “Christocentric” interpretive framework on the Hebrew Bible that is liable to corrupt or distort the original meaning of the texts. [In Judaism, the preferred term of art for their sacred writings is *Tanakh* – an acrostic made up from the three first letters of the three principal sections of the Hebrew Bible: (1) The T*orah* (the “Law” or “Teachings”); (2) the N*evi'im* (the “Prophets”, which includes History Books); and (3) the K*etuvim* (the Miscellaneous “Writings”) – hence, TaNaKh.]

The Mission of the Class is to Nurture Students towards a Nuanced, Critical Interpretation and Understanding of the Texts of the Hebrew Bible. The Bible is the most widely read and influential set of texts in human history, and is really a library of many books that chronicle the stories about God’s revelation in two volumes:

- I. The Story of God's Covenantal Relationship with the Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures (the *Tanakh* or "Hebrew Bible")
- II. The Life, Teachings, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and the Story of his Followers in the Early Church (the "Christian Scriptures")

This class is the first part of a two-part course that will form an introductory survey of the many writings compiled into the Hebrew Bible. [Indeed, this is a four-part course if you also take the two semesters on the Christian Scriptures.] The literature found in the Hebrew Bible was composed and edited over the course of more than a millennium. Students will be exposed to the literary genres, forms and motifs that comprise these writings. The texts will be placed in the historical, cultural, sociological and religious milieu of their original audience. Students will learn a variety of techniques which are helpful in the analysis of Biblical texts: these include analysis of form and structure, as well as genre, historical and redaction criticism. Students will be encouraged to put acquired knowledge to use as they apply Biblical interpretation to theological construction and pastoral practice.

Course Objectives

Students who have completed the Hebrew Bible class will hopefully be able to:

- Distinguish between various Interpretative Methods used to Study, Examine, Analyze, Research, and Comprehend Biblical Texts
- Understand the Historical Context within which the Religious Texts of Ancient Israel were Created and Read / Heard
- Appreciate the various Literary Genres found in the Texts of the Hebrew Bible, and Understand their Functions for Interpretation
- Be aware of the Social and Cultural Issues Relevant to the Formation of the Texts, and their Ethical Implications
- Comprehend the Significance, Relevance, and ongoing Influence of the Hebrew Texts on Contemporary Life and Debates, both inside and outside of the Church

"B.C." or "B.C.E."?

When did "B.C." and "A.D." change to "B.C.E." (Before the Common Era) and "C.E." (Common Era), and Why? Is this more unnecessary political correctness from the Academy? As with "Old Testament" and "New Testament," the method of dating history according to the epochs of "Before Christ (B.C.)" and "Anno Domini" (A.D. – Latin for "In the year of our Lord", NOT "After Death"!)) imposes a Christocentric standard of time on historical eras...which was convenient for a period when Christianity was the religion of the dominant (European) colonial powers...but is more and more untenable in a diverse and multicultural world (in both the academy and among everyday folks), a world where the majority of the global population does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the be-all-and-end-all of human history. Furthermore, the ancient monk responsible for this division of eras wasn't that great at math, and it's more likely than not that Jesus was born approximately 6-4 B.C.E. (just before the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E.). The Christian calendar – like the English language – has become the default standard of globalized world. Nevertheless, to mitigate the religious and cultural dominance of one particular system of measuring time, the preferred, *more neutral* universal terminology used today is "B.C.E." (Before the Common Era) rather than B.C, and "C.E." (Common Era) rather than A.D.

This class will be divided up into Three Parts, as follows:

Part 1: Introduction to Hermeneutics & Literature of the Hebrew Bible

4 Weeks

(August 31st, September 7th, 14th & 21st)

Part 1 of the Class will introduce you to some of the challenges and complexities of Biblical Studies and Hermeneutics during the first two weeks; and will then briefly survey the varied Literature of the Hebrew Bible for the following two weeks. During the sessions on Biblical Studies and Hermeneutics (the Science of Interpretation), we will be exploring together the basic principles used by scholars to read and interpret the Scriptures. Texts are never self-explanatory, as we shall discover; and reading Biblical texts, in particular, is an exercise that is fraught with potential pitfalls that requires patience and nuance on the part of the student who seeks to hear the “Word” of God in the words of these ancient manuscripts. Having familiarized ourselves with the basic principles of “Hermeneutics” – Genre (*what sort of text is this?*), Isegesis (*what do we bring to the text?*) and Exegesis (*what do we take out of the text?*) – we will be ready to move on to the next introductory phase of this course. This will involve an exploration of some of the Main Issues and Themes in Studying the Hebrew Bible – the literature of an ancient civilization that existed two to three thousand years ago – thinking in particular about the “Genre” of the books that make up the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as important Contextual Factors (History, Archaeology, Sociology, Anthropology, etc.) that constitutes our *Isegesis* and will inform our *Exegesis*.

Part 2: The Torah

4 Weeks

(September 28th, October 5th, 12th & 19th)

The Book of Genesis is an intimidating text to read, mixing Creation / Origin stories from the Ancient Near East with archetypal narratives of a primordial “Fall”, a catastrophic Flood, and the Saga of Ancestral Patriarchs in a special “Covenantal” Relationship with God that is replete with dysfunctional family dynamics. The first two classes will introduce the stories of Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and explore their Anthropological, Psychological and Theological, Significance – both within Judaism, and as “Universal” stories of the Relationship of both God and Humanity, and of Humans with each other. The other four books of the Torah contain the Foundational Narrative in Judaism - the Exodus, when God intervenes decisively in history to liberate his “Chosen People” from slavery and genocide in Egypt and restore them to the “Promised Land” of Canaan. It forms the recurrent paradigm of Jewish History – Sinful Faithlessness, Resulting Persecution, and Ultimate Redemption...and then *Repeat!* - for the rest of the Hebrew Bible (which will also be recapitulated in the Crucifixion-Resurrection narrative of the Christian Scriptures). These books also include the “fine print” of the Covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants in the form of the 613 Commandments (*Mitzvah*) that constitute the Jewish Law (*Torah*), which cover universal principles of ethics as well as peculiar and esoteric rules of ritual, worship, diet and purity that are hard to comprehend in the 21st Century.

Part 3: The Deuteronomistic History

4 Weeks

(October 26th, November 2nd, 16th & 23rd)

Finally, the Hebrew Bible 1 Course will be rounded out by an examination of the Post-Mosaic History of the Jewish People - from the triumphal re-entry of the Israelites into (and often bloodthirsty subjugation of) the Promised Land of Canaan during the Tribal Period of History (*Joshua* and *Judges*); to the rise of the Golden Age of the Monarchy under King David (*I & II Samuel*); and the eventual decline of the Divided Kingdoms after the reign of Solomon (*I & II Kings*), leading to the conquest and destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel under the Assyrians (c. 722 B.C.E.), and the Fall of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including the destruction of Solomon's Temple and Exile, at the hands of the Babylonian Empire (c. 588 B.C.E.).

PLEASE NOTE: There will be **NO** class on Saturday 9th November (Diocesan Convention weekend).

Materials and Class Format

Our main text for this class is the Bible, and we will be using the following translation and edition:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with the Apocrypha (5th Ed.) edited by Michael Coogan (Oxford, 2018)

Part 1 of the class on Introduction to Hermeneutics & Literature of the Hebrew Bible (first 4 weeks of class) also uses two required books:

A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics by David Jasper (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004)

Introducing the Old Testament (Oxford Bible Series) by Richard Coggins (Oxford, 2001)

[The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* is about \$30 new in hardback on Amazon, and contains a wealth of useful introductory essays, maps, and annotations – and will be required for all Bible Classes at SFM. The Jaspers book is \$16 new on Amazon (from \$10 used from Amazon Marketplace); the Coggins book is \$70 new (*there's no rhyme or reason why it's so expensive – shame on Oxford Press!*)...but you can find it for about \$5-20 secondhand in good condition from different sites, including Amazon Marketplace – you can try searching at: <https://isbn.nu/9780198700630>]

Handouts and Outlines will be provided, as well as access to other Online Resources, and you are expected to complete assigned Readings and Written Assignments, and pay attention and take notes during class, which will form the basis for your Study for Assessments.

The Class Format will be Discussion in a Seminar-Style Setting rather than Lectures. The class is designed according to the “Five Pedagogical Characteristics” of the School for Ministry:

1. *The Seminar Table* - Classes at the SFM take place around the seminar table. Different from the lecture hall, the classroom that gathers around the seminar table is necessarily interactive between faculty and students.
2. *An Inquiry-Based Curriculum* - The curriculum of the SFM is an inquiry-based curriculum wherein academic material is critically explored by the student body in preparation for and during class time via the leadership of faculty who act as facilitators to the critical inquiry of their students.
3. *A Place-Based Curriculum* - The ministry contexts for students are seen as sources of a two-way interaction between classroom theory and ministerial practice.
4. *An Integrated Curriculum* - Recognizing that theology and ministry make an integrated whole, the SFM's curriculum encourages the cross-fertilization of ideas between subject areas.
5. *A Skills-Based Curriculum* - The cultivation of critical thinking skills for ministry lies at the heart of the SFM's pedagogical philosophy. Successful completion of a course of study at the SFM should result in a student having grown in the use of such skills and an ability to apply them across academic disciplines and in their everyday practice of ministry.

Procedures and Grading

Grades for the class will be based on weekly Assignments (usually in the form of brief written reflections), occasional Projects and Presentations, Exegesis Papers, and Examinations. Because the class is a Seminar-Style class based on Discussion, Students will also be evaluated based on their Contributions to Class, as well as other ways in which they enrich the class through their Curiosity, Cooperation, and Citizenship.

Every student is expected to attend class on time, complete assigned reading, be prepared for assessments, turn in completed work done to the best of your ability before the deadline in hard copy (not by e-mail), and show an interest in learning. *If you don't think you will be able to make a deadline for whatever reason, please contact your teacher immediately in person or by e-mail. Indeed, if there are any issues or concerns that you have that might prevent you from performing at your best in the class, please contact your teacher immediately so that we can try to figure out a solution.* All Assignments and Assessments will be explained in detail both in class and through postings on the SFM class website ahead of time. Please feel free to ask for help when you do not understand class material or assignments.

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Best Wishes for the Class!