The Bible & Its Contexts

PHRE-370 / Fall 2016

Phillips Academy

Mr. Prescott



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Course Description

This course will introduce students to major ideas and themes from the Hebrew Bible. One goal of the course will be increased biblical literacy: a deepened understanding of significant stories, people, and ideas from these texts and the two major religious traditions that they influence, Judaism and Christianity. Another goal of this course will be a better understanding of how these narratives have been used in historical contexts. For example, how was the Bible used to justify colonialism and, at the same time, to challenge it? This section of the course will look at specific case studies to help students make sense of the way in which the Bible is a living document that is continually being re-understood and reinterpreted.

Course Requirements, Evaluation, and Policies

**I. Required Texts:**

1. HarperCollins Study Bible
2. Andrew George, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
3. Additional texts will be made available in class and posted on Canvas

**II. Evaluation**

**i. Classroom Preparation/Participation (25%) –** Much of this class will proceed as a seminar, which means regular attendance, participation in class, and careful reading of assigned texts are all essential in order to succeed in the course. Indeed, it is not enough to merely run our eyes over the pages: we must be active in our effort to understand what we are reading. In order aid this process, students will be asked to complete **1-page reflection papers** in conjunction their readings (generally speaking, one per week on a night of the student's choosing). A separate handout on reflection papers will be provided. Additional prompts will also be assigned in-class throughout the term, which will also be factored into the participation grade.

**ii. Essays (75%) –** Three different analytical/argumentative essays (appx. 4-5 pages in length) will be assigned at the conclusion of each unit. More specific information about the nature of these essays will be provided closer to their corresponding due dates. There will also be class time set aside for working on each paper on the meeting prior to its due date.

1. **Unit 1 Essay (20%) –** Due Tuesday, October 4
2. **Unit 2 Essay (25%) –** Due Tuesday, October 25
3. **Unit 3 Essay (30%) –** Due Friday, November 18

**III. Late Work Policy –** The baseline expectation is that all written assignments will be handed in at the beginning of class on the date they are due (not 15 minutes after class has started). If a student has a scheduling conflict or multiple major assignments due on the same date, **it is the student’s responsibility to speak to me beforehand** about appropriate accommodations (the earlier the better). An e-mail the night before is not sufficient. Also, please note that technological difficulties are **not** an excuse for lateness. Anticipate that the printer will break, that files will be lost, or that your computer will die! **Any work handed in after the due date will receive a grade no higher than a 4.**

**IV. Rewrite Policy** – All essays that receive a grade of 3- or lower must be rewritten. In addition, all students may choose to rewrite one essay per term. Revisions must be substantial; it is not sufficient simply to plug in the instructor’s feedback. The grade for the rewrite will be averaged with the first grade to determine the final grade for the assignment. All rewrites are due one week after the initial essay is returned. Please note that I do not accept rewrites for unauthorized late essays.

**V. Absences** - As noted above under Classroom Preparation/Participation, regular attendance is essential if one is to succeed in this course. However, I realize that this class is not your only commitment this term, just as I realize that circumstances outside of your control inevitably arise. First and foremost, I ask that you communicate (the earlier the better). Please note that students are responsible for all announcements or changes made in class. Last, in the event that an assignment is due on the day a student is sick (with an excused absence from the Health Center), said assignment will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting.

**VI. E-mail** – I will respond to all e-mail within 24 hours. However, please note that any e-mail sent after 8:00 PM will not receive a response until the following morning, so please plan ahead!

**VII. Religious Observances –** Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

**VIII. Disabilities –** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, though I may consult Student Health Services to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

**Unit 1: Ancient Near Eastern Mythology & Genesis**

**Thursday, September 8 – Introduction**

* No assigned readings

**Week 1: Near Eastern Creation Stories**

**Tuesday, September 13 – What Is Mythology?**

* Read: Gen 1:1-2:4.
* Draw: Depiction of the creation as best you can (artistic skill is not important)

**Wednesday, September 14 – Genesis and the Enuma Elish**

* Read: James B. Pritchard, “The Creation Epic,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 60-71.

**Friday, September 16 – The Second Creation**

* Read: Gen 2:4-3:22.

**Week 2: The Epic of Gilgamesh**

**Tuesday, September 20 – A Sumerian Eden?: The Taming of Enkidu**

* Read: Andrew George, trans., Tablets I-III, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 1-22.

**Wednesday, September 21 – Limits of Mankind: The Forest of Cedar**

* Read: Andrew George, trans., Tablets II, IV, and V, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 22-47.

**Friday, September 23 – Ishtar and the Bull of Heaven**

* Read: Andrew George, trans., Tablets VI, VII, and VIII, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 47-69.

**Week 3: The Epic of Gilgamesh**

**Tuesday, September 27 – Noah and the Flood**

* Read: Gen 6:1-9:28.

**Wednesday, September 28 – The Wanderings of Gilgamesh**

* Read: Andrew George, trans., Tablets IX, X, and XI, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 70-99.

**Friday, September 30 – Writing Workshop**

* Due: Thesis Statement and Essay Outline

**Week 4: The Abraham Cycle**

**Tuesday, October 4 – Near Eastern Mythology**

* Due: Essay #1

**Unit 2: The Origins of Israel**

**Wednesday, October 5 – A Matter of Interpretation: Sarai & Hagar**

* Read: Gen 12-21
* Read: Renita J. Weems, “A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy,” *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 1-14.

**Friday, October 7 – The Binding of Isaac**

* Read: Gen 22:1-24
* Read: Timothy Roche, “Andrea Yates: More To The Story,” *TIME* (March 18, 2002).

**Week 5: The Exodus**

**Monday, October 10 – The Enslavement of Israel**

* Read: Ex 1:1-6:13; 6:28-8:15; 8:16-10:29 (skim)

**Tuesday, October 11 – The Exodus from Egypt**

* Read: Ex 11:1-12:42; 13:17-15:27

**Friday, October 14 – The Ten Commandments**

* Read: Ex 19-20; Deut 5.

**Note: Midterm Grades due October 16**

**Week 6: The Conquest of Canaan**

**Monday, October 17 – The Conquest of Canaan**

* Group 1: Josh 1:1-8:35.
* Group 2: Judg 1:1-8:35.

**Tuesday, October 18 – Exodus: A Story of Liberation?**

* Group 1: Robert Allan Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” *Biblical Studies Alternatively: An Introductory Reader*. Ed. Susanne Scholz (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 400-405.
* Group 2: Naim Stifan Ateek, “A Palestinian Perspective: The Bible and Liberation,” *Biblical Studies Alternatively: An Introductory Reader*. Ed. Susanne Scholz (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 394-399.

**Friday, October 21 – Writing Workshop**

* No assigned readings; work on projects

**Unit 3: The Babylonian Exile**

**Week 7: The United Monarchy**

**Tuesday, October 25 – The Israelite Monarchy**

* Due: Essay

**Wednesday, October 26 – The Rise of David**

* Read: 1 Sam 16-20; 23-25; 27:1-28:2; 29-30

**Friday, October 28 – Introduction to Prophecy**

* Read: Jonah (Entire)

**Week 8: Prophecy in the Northern Kingdom of Israel**

**Tuesday, November 1 – Elijah and the Prophets of Ba’al**

* Read: 1 Kings 16:29-19:3; 21:1-29.

**Wednesday, November 2 – Who is Asherah?**

* Read: Ronald Hendel, “Israelite Religion,” *HarperCollins Study Bible*. Ed. Harold W. Attridge (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1989), xliv-xlv, xlvi-xlvii.

**Friday, November 4 – The Northern Prophets: Amos & Hosea**

* Group 1: Amos (entire)
* Group 2: Hosea (entire)

**Week 9: Prophecy in Judah**

**Tuesday, November 8 – Prophecy in Judah: The Voice of Jeremiah**

* Read: Jer 1:1-19; 7:1-15; 11:1-23; 13:1-11; 17:1-4; 19:1-15; 28:1-17; 38:1-6
* Read: 2 Kgs 24:1-25:21

**Wednesday, November 9 – The Babylonian Exile: Diagnosing Ezekiel**

* Read: Ezek 1:1-3:11; 8:1-11:25; 33:21-34:31; 37:1-14; 40:1-16; 43:1-12; 47:1-23

**Friday, November 11 – The Babylonian Exile: Isaiah’s Vision**

* Due: Reflection Paper

**Week 10: Finals**

**Monday, November 14 – Conference Period**

* No class; work on final paper

**Wednesday, November 16 – Writing Workshop**

* Work on final paper

**Friday, November 18 – Final Paper Due**

* Due: Final Paper

**Bibliography**

Ateek, Naim Stifan. “A Palestinian Perspective: The Bible and Liberation.” *Biblical Studies Alternatively: An Introductory Reader*. Ed. Susanne Scholz. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003. 394-399.

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Roche, Timothy. “Andrea Yates: More To The Story.” *TIME*. March 18, 2002.

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Weems, Renita J. *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible*. San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988.