

Department of Religious Studies

RELIGION 350-001/HISTORY 386-001
The Religion and History of Ancient Israel

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Office Hours: TR 10.30-11.45 a.m. or by appointment

Web-site: www.gmu.edu/departments/religious_studies

Fall 2011

TR 12.00-1.15 p.m.

Krug 210

Course Description

This course will investigate the religion and history of the Ancient Israelites from the Late Bronze Age (c. 1200 BCE) up to the Babylonian Exile in 587 BCE. The religion and history of Ancient Israel are bound closely together. From an historical perspective we will examine the ongoing debates concerning the historical value of the Biblical narrative e.g. the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the united monarchy of David and Solomon. Extra-Biblical inscriptions, annals, other textual sources, philology and archaeology will be studied. The progress of Israel's religion from a traditional polytheism towards monotheism, focusing on the things that ultimately contributed to a unique self-understanding will be studied.

Course Goals

By the end of the course students will be able to:

understand the origins and development of the people who would create the founding religious tradition of the West, ultimately producing Christianity and shaping Islam.

analyze the debate between the minimalist and maximalist approaches to the historical value of the Biblical texts.

comprehend the progress from traditional Canaanite/Israelite polytheism to monotheism.

assess the value of ancient texts and artifacts in reconstructing a plausible representation of Ancient Israel.

have a critical understanding of the major issues in the religion and history of Ancient Israel and to reflect on them intellectually and sympathetically.

Required Texts

The Bible, Jewish Publication Society Tanakh (Paperback) TNK

(any up-to-date Bible translation will do, but I will be working from the above)

Eric H. Cline, Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford UP, 2009) BA

V. H. Matthews, A Brief History of Ancient Israel (Westminster/John Knox, 2002) BHA

Studying the Ancient Israelites (Baker Academic, 2007) SAI

V. H. Matthews & D. C. Benjamin, Old Testament Parallels (3rd ed., Paulist 2006)*

*(handout of the selected material)

M. S. Smith, The Memoirs of God (Augsburg/Fortress, 2004) TMG

Highly Recommended

R. Albertz, A History of Israelite Religion Vol. 1 (Westminster/John Knox, 1994)

W. G. Dever, What did the Biblical Writers Know (Eerdmans, 2001)

Who were the Early Israelites (Eerdmans, 2003)

Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel
(Eerdmans, 2005)

Megan B. Moore and B. E. Kelle, Biblical History and Israel's Past (Eerdmans, 2011)

Susan Niditch, Ancient Israelite Religion (Oxford UP, 1997)

K. L. Noll, Canaan and Israel in Antiquity (Sheffield Academic, 2001)

Recommended

T. W. Davis, Shifting Sands: the Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology (Oxford, 2004)

P. J. King and L. E. Stager, Life in Biblical Israel (Westminster/John Knox, 2001)

N. P. Lemche, Prelude to Israel's Past (Hendrickson, 1998)

W. M. Schniedewind, How the Bible became a Book (Cambridge UP, 2004)

K. van der Toorn, Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible (Harvard UP, 2007)

Course Requirements

Class participation - attendance at lectures and thoughtful participation in the investigation and discussion of texts and concepts – 5%.

Readings - as assigned and should be read before each class to aid in understanding and participation

Evaluation

Papers and Examinations - 3 papers on aspects of ancient Israelite religion and history – each worth 25% and a final take-home examination – 20% - dates TBA

Students will be graded on their ability to gather, utilize and analyze information, to write logically, intelligently and to offer reasoned judgements and conclusions. Writing assessment criteria established by the Religious Studies Faculty will be used and can be accessed on line. Grading by numbers should not be a feature of the humanities – however:

A 95-100, A- 91-94, B+ 88-90, B 84-87, B- 81-83, C+ 78-80, C 74-77, C- 71-73,
D 60-69, F 59 and below. Numbers are only used to calculate the final grade.

Classroom Etiquette

The class begins at the appointed hour, please be there – tardiness seems an increasing phenomenon at GMU and does not help in the final grading process. Students must present papers and take exams on the dates and at the times in the syllabus. Should a very serious crisis make this difficult, the instructor must be notified as soon as possible. Excuses for illness must be accompanied by a medical certificate. Papers are due at class time on the assigned date - late papers will incur the loss of a grade point per week-day. If the course work is not completed the student will receive a failing grade for the course. IN (Incomplete) must be requested in writing and is given only under extreme circumstances.

The use of cell phones for texting, browsing, twittering, e-mail or voice mode is absolutely forbidden in class: they must be switched off and hidden. Laptops, netbooks, tablets, e-book readers, etc. may only be used for reading assigned texts under discussion or taking notes and at the front of the class where the instructor can check. Students engaging in those activities will be asked to leave the class and even these enforced absences are recorded against the final grade. Unexcused late arrival to class and early departure are unacceptable and will also result in loss of grade points.

Honor Code

George Mason University has an honor code. It is the duty of all members of this academic community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

See honorcode.gmu.edu for more detailed information.

Disability Services

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see the professor and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

Other Useful Campus Resources

Writing Center: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>
University Libraries "Ask a Librarian" <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/TM/TMRef.html>
Counseling and Psychological Services (caps): (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>
University Policies: the University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.

Important Semester Enrollment and Withdrawal Dates

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.
Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the 2011 Fall Schedule of Classes at: <http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/2011Fall.html#dates>

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Course Outline

Week 1: 8/30, 9/1- Introduction to studying the Ancient Israelites: SAI should be read completely as background: lectures will focus on important issues for the class [BA1-9, OTP handout 357-362] BA chs. 1-6 give a good introduction to Biblical/Syro-Palestinian archaeology – ch. 6 is important for the maximalist/minimalist controversy.

Week 2: 9/6,8 -The Ancient Near East at the end of the Late Bronze Age – overview
[Amarna Letters and Annals of Rameses III OTP handout 146-154]

Week 3: 9/13,15- Origins and Heroes [BA ch. 7: 71-76, BHAI ch. 1. TMH Intro., pp. 7-18, 29-30; Genesis 5, 12-18:15, 21:1-20, 27-33]

Weeks 4-5: 9/20,22,27,29- Exodus and Settlement: models of conquest, revolt, infiltration
[BA ch. 7: 76-79, BHAI ch. 2, TMG pp. 18-21; Exodus 1-20, Joshua 1-5, Judges 1-5 Sargon, the Stele of Merneptah, OTP 89-90, 97-98]

Weeks 5-6: 9/27,29, 10/4,6 -Early and United Monarchy – History [BA ch. 8:80-81, BHAI ch. 3, TMG pp. 21-28, 46-52; I Samuel 4-10:25, 16-20, II Samuel 5-7:17, I Kings 1-5, 12, Tel Dan Inscription, OTP 170-171]

Weeks 7-8: 10/13,18,20 (Class does not meet 10/11Columbus Day) Early Israelite religion – a subset of Canaanite religion? – [Noll – handout; Memoirs 86-101]

Week 9: 10/25,27-The rise of Iron Age kingdoms – Israel, Judah, Moab etc., nations and national gods [BHAI ch. 4, Mesha Stele, Azitiwada, OTP 172-175, 167-169]

Week 10: 11/1,3-Origin and rise of Israel's national and patronal deity- YHWH [handout – Exodus 3, Deuteronomy 6, 32:1-9, 33:1-5, Habakkuk 3; Memoirs ch. 3]

Weeks 11-12: 11/8,10,15,17-Divided Monarchy [BA Ch. 8:82-88, BHAI chs. 4-5, TMG 28-38, 52-62 –I Kings 12, 16:21-34, II Kings 9, 18-25, Assyrian annals, Shalmaneser, Tiglath-Pileser Sargon II, Sennacherib; Lachish and Arad ostraca; Neo-Babylonian Chronicles and court documents OTP 176-192, 195-197, 201-203]

Week 13: 11/22 (Thanksgiving break 11/23-27) Israel's sacred times, places and persons [handout and readings from Tanakh TBA]

Week 14: 11/29, 12/1- From polytheism to monotheism [TMG 101- 125, II Kings 23 and prophets TBA]

Week 15: 12/6,8-Exile and Beyond, reactions and responses [BA ch. 12, Epilogue, BHAI 101-119, TMG 62-85; Isaiah 40-66, Ezekiel 1-12; Cyrus Cylinder OTP 207-209]

Final Paper due date 12/15/2011.
