

HEBREW SCRIPTURES – STMM 526-01
Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry
Fall Quarter 2010 • Hunthausen 100 • Wed 9-11:50 am

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to provide students with a historical, literary and theological introduction to the Hebrew Bible. We will read various biblical texts that have been selected as a sampling of its rich diversity of form, style, theological concern, historical background, etc., and we will ask questions of these texts. Some questions will arise from our use of standard methodologies in the field; others will arise from the unique experience each of us brings to this course. All of these questions are valuable and integral to the success of our class. I hope that by the end of the course you will be familiar with the basic shape of the Hebrew Bible, that you will be hungry for more Scripture courses, and that you will have found creative new ways to infuse your ministry with the Bible.

II. TEXTBOOKS

A. Required

1. One of the following annotated Bibles: *The HarperCollins Study Bible*; *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (which I will use in class); *The Catholic Study Bible* (2d ed.); *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*; *The Jewish Study Bible*.
 - Avoid the following translations: *The King James Version*; *The Message*; *The Living Bible*; *The Way*.
2. Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
3. Marvin Sweeney, *Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

B. Recommended (for personal enrichment)

1. M. Gorman, ed., *Scripture: An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and its Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005).
2. C. DeYoung, W. Gafney, L. Guardiola-Sáenz, G. Tinker, F. Yamada, eds., *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).
3. A. Rainey and R. Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006).

III. SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Wed 9/22 *Ancient Israel, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Canon*

Assignment: Coogan, pp. 45-62, 545-49; Sweeney, pp. 1-22.

Wed 9/29 *Genesis: Origins of the World (chs. 1-11) and Israel's Ancestors (chs. 12-50)*

Assignment: Gen 1, 2-3, 12, 15, 17, 22; Coogan, pp. 3-30, 63-84; Sweeney, pp. 23-41.

Wed 10/6 *Exodus: Formation of Israel, Law and Covenant*

Assignment: Exod 1-3, 14-15, 17, 20, 32-34; Coogan, pp. 85-96, 105-119, 130-37; Sweeney, pp. 42-63.

Wed 10/13 *Priestly Ritual and the Deuteronomic Code*

Assignment: Lev 1, 16, 19; Deut 12-26, 34; Coogan, pp. 138-39, 144-46; 173-90.

Wed 10/20 *Conquest and the Emergence of Kingship and Royal Theology*

Assignment: Josh 1-6, 24; Judg 4-5, 13-16; 1 Sam 1-2, 15-16; 2 Sam 7; Pss 2, 89; Coogan, pp. 191-96, 206-65, 276.

Wed 10/27 *The Prophets (First Paper due)*

Assignment: 1 Kgs 22; Isa 1-2, 6-9, 11, 36-39; Coogan, pp. 327-48; Sweeney, pp. 84-103.

Wed 11/3 *Exile and Restoration*

Assignment: Isa 40-42, 53, 55-56, 60, 65; Coogan, pp. 359-65, 408-16, 427-29.

Wed 11/10 *The Psalms and Lamentations*

Assignment: Pss 7, 22, 44, 83, 94; Lam 1; Coogan, pp. 381-84, 456-68, Sweeney, pp. 167-87.

Wed 11/17 *Wisdom Literature*

Assignment: Prov 1-9; Job 1-3, 19, 28, 38-42; Qoh 1-3; Coogan 471-98; Sweeney, pp. 188-207.

Wed 12/1 *Apocalyptic Literature (Second Paper due)*

Assignment: Daniel 1-12; Coogan, pp. 436-38, 536-44; Sweeney, pp. 222-41.

IV. REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

- A. Reading assignments, which should be completed prior to the class on which they are assigned.
- B. Attendance and participation in class (40%). Each class will include class discussion, either as a whole or in small groups, and you are expected to give these discussions your full attention and participation. In addition, there may be some (very) short writing assignments that will be fall under this category.
- C. Two mini-research papers (30% each). Both papers should be approximately 1500 words.

The **first paper** should respond to the argument made by Marvin Sweeney in ch. 1 of his book, *Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Shoah*. There he argues that the narrative structure of Gen 11:27-25:11 raises doubts about the fidelity of Yahweh.

Your assignment in this paper is (1) to evaluate the persuasiveness of his argument(s). To what extent are his interpretations of various episodes in Genesis convincing? How else might they be interpreted? (2) to examine another passage in the Pentateuch where the fidelity of Yahweh is a central concern. After demonstrating that Yahweh's fidelity is indeed at issue in the text you have selected, discuss how does the text supports/qualifies/ counters Sweeney's argument?

The **second paper** is an exegesis of biblical text, preferably one that has not been discussed extensively in class. The term "exegesis" refers to "the process of careful, analytical study of biblical passages undertaken in order to produce useful interpretations

of those passages...The goal of exegesis is to know neither less nor more than the information actually contained in the passage” (D. Stuart, “Exegesis,” in *ABD* II, p. 682).

It may help to think of this paper in a four-step process: text, form, comment and aim.

- 1) **Text.** Begin by choosing a passage and reading it carefully several times **before** reading any commentaries. (At this stage, commentaries are your enemy.) Begin with the original meaning of the text. What does the passage urge hearer/reader to do, think, or feel?

Establish the best text by comparison of ancient versions and (sometimes) by emendation. At the introductory level simply accept the textual judgment of good modern versions.

Only **after** your independent study should you consult commentaries. Commentaries help you check your own work, i.e., to provide information, to become aware of scholarly work on the passage, and to point out possible errors in your own thinking.

- 2) **Form** (*genre, Gattung*). In ancient literature, it is important to determine the type of literature (e.g., hymn, case, law, saga, novella) and then compare similar literature, especially from within the Bible, to learn the conventions of the genre. See G. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).
- 3) **Comment.** Provide only what readers need to know in order to understand the passage. Do not supply too much information or merely interesting details. What is the main concern of the text? If it is a narrative text, analyze the story: how are the characters introduced; where is the suspense, the resolution? What surprises you about the text? What traditional motifs and traditions are being reused here? Begin by showing that the passage is a unit.
- 4) **Aim.** Consider the passage’s pastoral implications, both for its immediate audience and for a contemporary audience. Think of a community that you serve (or will serve) and consider how its members might be challenged by your reading of this passage.

Upon completion of these four steps, you will have the raw materials of your exegesis paper, not the final product. With these raw materials you should craft an elegant and organized paper (or sermon, if you like) that integrates the fruits of your research.

For further discussion of biblical exegesis and what it entails, consult the following works: J. Hayes and C. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982); and D. Stuart, “Exegesis,” in *ABD* II, pp. 682-688.