

Union Theological Seminary in New York

Introduction to the Christian Bible, Part 1: The Old Testament

Twelve-week masters-level lecture course, 4 hours of meeting per week for total of 48 hours with 1 hour tutorial, 80 students enrolled in Fall 2010.

Instructor: David Carr (212-280-1382; dcarr@uts.columbia.edu)

Pedagogical Reflections:

As stated below, this course is designed to give students basic introduction to academic study of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible with an emphasis on historical background. Toward that end it is organized in the order of the history of Israel/Judah, so that students unfamiliar with that history can learn it in order and see how various biblical texts relate to each period. The textbook, *Introduction to the Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010) supplements the historical approach with other methodologies and adds qualifications about dating and historicizing readings. The main challenge of the course is starting out, since students unfamiliar with the history often are overwhelmed with new information: a new historical scheme, trying to read biblical texts in relation to it, etc. Usually by the midpoint in the course they are settling down and getting the hang of it. The quiz at the outset is useful for making sure students are at least initially on track (or helping them get there, if they are not), and it can be helpful in the class sessions to linger on a text or two, showing how one learns more about it by reading it in relation to the period at hand.

### Description

This course is designed to provide an academic introduction to the traditions of the Bible and diverse readings of it amidst structures of domination, survival and liberation. Guiding questions include:

What are differences in theology and concerns of biblical books (and parts of them), including books (or parts of them) written around the same time?

How was the Bible shaped by experiences of oppression and resistance to it (both oppression within Israel and by successive imperial structures)? How do biblical texts relate to structures of gender and sexual formation?

How can one read the Bible as an inspired word of God (Holy Scripture, etc.) fully conscious of its relationship to its socio-historical context(s) and the relationship of any readings of it to contemporary social contexts?

### EXPECTATIONS

**Note:** Unless otherwise announced, all assigned papers, exams, etc. are submitted *to your tutor*.

- 1) **Regular preparation** for, attendance at, and participation in class and tutorial sessions. Prior reading of preparation materials and watching of narrated Powerpoint presentations (on the CD and on computers in room 203) is presupposed in class. It is understood that

things sometimes get in the way of attending a class. Nevertheless, consistent prompt attendance will be noted, and absence from more than two or three classes (or more than one or two tutorials) can impede passage of the course (or passage with full credit). Be in touch with tutors about issues relating to class attendance. If you are absent, you are responsible for obtaining handouts and notes from classmates. There is no need to notify the instructor in advance about absences.

- 2) **Quiz:** an in-class quiz on basic dates and geography needed for orientation to the broader course.
- 3) **Weekly Blackboard Journal Posts:** for credit, must be up by 11:59 PM before Wednesday's class

**The Point:** Because this is a large course, the instructor and tutors can better teach when they have a sense of what people are thinking about the secondary readings. In addition, this course works if people read and reflect on material as it is being taught. For more specifics on what is required for a satisfactory (or better!) post, see the assignment sheet on Blackboard posts.

- 4) **Midterm:** *possibly* including a take-home component
- 5) **Class Project(s)** -- Decision on this option by end of class on Sept. 22 (after that, you must do the longer paper [option a] and no presentation). A sign-up will be available Sept. 13, 20 and 22.
  - a) Longer paper (10-12 pages) **due Nov. 15** at outset of class on how knowledge about the historical background, formation and/or ancient conceptuality of biblical texts (assigned up to that point in the course) can/has inform(ed) your use of them. See assignment sheet for details.
  - b) Shorter paper (5-6 pages) on the same topic to accompany a group class presentation (at most three members to a group) *submitted at time of presentation*. In special cases, individual projects can be accommodated if they can be shared with the class outside regular class time.
- 5) **Final Exam** (again *possibly* involving a take-home component)

**Grade Weighting:** the following indicates the rough weight of the above elements in determination of a final grade: first quiz (5%), online journals (15%), midterm (25%), paper (possibly with presentation; 25%), and final (30%). Consistent attendance at class sessions and the tutorial is presupposed in the above, along with good participation in tutorial. The grade may be raised or lowered based on unusual quality (or not) of your tutorial and class participation.

## EXTRAS

**Coffee, Lunches and Evening Dialogues:** there will be opportunities for introductions and discussion of class themes. I highly encourage attending one of the initial meetings with me.

### BOOKS AND KEY TO FOLLOWING SCHEDULE

**List of Required Texts and Key to Abbreviations Below:** (available at Columbia Un. Bookstore)

Carr *Introduction* = David M. Carr, *Introduction to the Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible*

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** unless otherwise instructed read the biblical texts (in the “READING” box at the beginning of sections) and do exercises for each assigned section of the textbook

Newsom = Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (Revised Edition; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999). **Note:** Newsom did not write all these articles. Cite by name the individual author of each article in any paper or posting!

Blkbd = a reading on Blackboard (in the Syllabus section)

\*is reading on Blackboard (in Syllabus section), on reserve in the library and in Packet

**Class Packet** with required readings not in the above texts is available from Village Copier, 2872 Broadway, phone 212-666-0600. Other texts at the Columbia bookstore.

**Recommended:** 1) *The Erotic Word* by David Carr (also available on CLIO as ebook); 2) *Take Back the Word* ed. by Ken Stone and Mona West; and 3) the 4th Edition of *The Oxford Annotated Study Bible*

## SCHEDULE:

Mon. Sept. 13 Orientation to Multiple Bibles and Multiple Translations

Wed. Sept. 15 Contemporary and Ancient Empires

Assignment: Carr, *Introduction*, 1-32 (do exercise for chapter 1 and give to tutor)

Before 11:59 PM on Tues., Sept. 14th, post a brief intro. of yourself

Watch: "Empires and the Bible" (Powerpoint Presentation on CD + in room 203)

Tutorial: Introducing ourselves and reflecting on what makes a good discussion (or not)

Mon. Sept. 20 Pre-Textual Israel: In Search of Israel's Earliest Oral Traditions

Quiz: Prologue and chapter 1 of intro. with extra credit question on chapter 2

Assignment: Chapter 2 of Carr, *Introduction*, pp. 34-52 with biblical texts and exercise p. 40\*

\***Note:** from here on out, you *do not* submit notes for exercises unless asked for them.

Niditch, "Genesis," pp. 13-15 and 18-29 in Newsom

Bring An RSV or NRSV translation of the Bible to this class *and the next one!*

### Israel Amidst Empires 1: Echoes of Ancient Empires

Wed. Sept. 22 The Rise of the Monarchy and Early Royal/Zion Traditions (bring RSV/NRSV)

[Sign-up for class presentations concludes this day.]

Watch: "Ancient Education and Echoes of Empire in the Bible" (CD and in room 203)

Assignment: Carr *Introduction*, 53-70 with biblical texts and exercises on pp. 57 and 64

Do: Poetic analysis on 2 verses in Psalm 2. See "Poetic analysis" in Carr, *Intro.* p. 69

Tutorial: Dealing with Issues of the Bible and History

Mon. Sept. 27 Echoes of Empire in Texts Associated with Solomon: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

Assignment: Chapter 4, Carr *Introduction*, 72-8

\*Carol Newsom, "Women and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," pp. 142-160 in Peggy L. Day, ed. *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (1989)

Wed. Sept. 29 Gender, Sex and the Song of Songs

Prepare **for class**: Make a list of the rules about sex with citations: Exod 22:16-17, 19; Leviticus 18 (all) and 19:20-22; 20:10-21; 21:9; Deut 5:18; 22:13-29; 23:18; 24:1-5; Lev 18:20; 20:10; 21:9. Compare Prov 6:20-35 + SoS.

Read: Weems, pp. 164-68 in Newsom (Song of Songs)

Recommended: Carr *Erotic Word*, 49-56 and 109-137 (on “the rules” and Song of Songs)

Tutorial: The Bible and Gendered Bodies

Mon. Oct. 4 Source Criticism and Echoes of Empire in Genesis 1-11

Assignment: Carr, *Introduction*, 79-88 (as always: with biblical and other texts and exercise)

Watch: “How Ancient Texts Were Changed” (CD and in room 203)

Read: Genesis 1:1-11:9 **and** Primeval Source Parallels Handout (on Blkbd)

Recommended: Carr, *Erotic Word*, 17-48

### **The Bible Amidst Empires 2: The Neo-Assyrian Empire**

Wed. Oct. 6 Northern Texts and Neo-Assyrian Empire

Assignment: Carr, *Introduction*, 92-114 (with biblical texts, *but* do the prophecy rewrite [no. 7 in the “Chapter Five Review”] *rather than* the p. 93 chapter exercise.)

Yee, pp. 207-215 in Newsom (Hosea)

Recommended: Carr, *Erotic Word*, 59-87 on prophetic gender violence

Tutorial: Inspiration, Authority and Struggle with the Bible (including formation issues)

Mon. Oct. 11 Neo-Assyrian Empire Continued: Eighth century Southern Prophecy

Read: Carr, *Introduction*, 116-130 (with texts in READING and p. 123 exercise)

Watch: “Early Southern Prophecy” (on CD and in Room 203) -- while watching, use appendix I to ch. 6 in Carr, *Introduction*, to compare Micah and Isaiah “Reading Isaiah 9: Jewish and Christian Perspectives” by J. Ferris and J. Shorb (CD and Room 203)

Wed. Oct. 13 The Neo-Assyrian Empire: Deuteronomy, History and Hybridity

Read: Carr, *Introduction*, 132-152 (with biblical texts in “READING”)

Do “MINI Pre-Class Assignment -- Looking for Signs of Deuteronomistic

History Writing (this is a separate assignment sheet in hardcopy and on CD)

Compare the laws in the left two columns of the “Jubilee Parallels” Handout Frymer-Kensky pp. 57-68 in Newsom (on Deuteronomy)

Tutorial: Biblical Hybridity and Our Hybridity

- Mon. Oct. 18      Seventh Century Prophecy with a Focus on Jeremiah
- Read:          Carr *Introduction*, 154-64 with biblical texts in READING and p. 157 exercise
- Wed. Oct. 20      Taking stock: the pre-exilic period in Israel
- Reread/rewatch materials for course up to Oct. 18 and come with 1 question + 1 concern
- Tutorial:      Review for Midterm
- Mon. Oct. 25      Midterm -- In-class portion (with take-home due at outset of class)
- The Bible Amidst Empires 3: **Neo-Babylonian Temple Destruction and “Exile”**
- Wed. Oct. 27      Judah under Neo-Babylonian Empire: Exile, Lament and New Editions
- Read:          Carr, *Introduction*, 166-73 (**do not** do exercise, it will be done in class)
- \*Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “By the Rivers of Babylon: Exile as a Way of Life,” in  
                            *Reading from This Place* (ed. F. Segovia and M. Tolbert; Minneapolis:  
                            Fortress, 1995), 149-163.      (Packet on Blkbd)
- Tutorial:      Reading the Bible in Relation to Diaspora (then and now)
- Mon. Nov. 1      Ezekiel and Second Isaiah
- Read:          Carr, *Introduction*, 174-83 (with biblical texts in “READING”)
- \*William D. Watley, “God Calls Us to be Eagles,” in Samuel. D. Proctor and  
                            William D. Watley. *Sermons from the Black Pulpit* (Valley Forge: Judson,  
                            1984), 99-106 (Packet and on Blkbd)
- Do:**          Meditation Assignment on 4-5 verse passage of your choice in Isaiah 40-55  
                            (see INSTRUCTION SHEET: meditation on scripture in hardcopy, blkbd  
                            and on CD)
- Wed. Nov. 3      Exile and Torah: L and P
- Read:          Carr, *Introduction*, 189-206 (with biblical texts in “READING”)
- Watch:**      “An Introduction to the Documentary Hypothesis” (CD and room 203)
- “The Earliest Pentateuch: Competing Models” (CD and room 203)
- Tutorial:      Torah, Exile and Truth
- Mon. Nov. 8      Exile and Torah: Wilderness and Law
- Read:          \*R. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Studies* (AAR Studies in Religion  
                            23; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976),7-23. (Packet and on Blkbd)
- Focus on pp. 7-21 regarding exile.
- Exodus 16-34 (skim 35-40) and Leviticus 1; 16; 18-20

**Prepare:** look for what makes the law on the right-most column of the “Jubilee parallels” handout different from the earlier versions on the left two columns (focus on page)

Wed. Nov. 10 Multiple Perspectives on Exodus -- (**readings in Packet and on Blkbd**)

**Read:** \*A. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 28-36.  
\*Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 149-60 **and/or**\*James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 62-65 (at least!)

**Then:** \*Jon Levenson, “Liberation Theology and the Exodus,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (eds. Bellis and Kaminsky; 2000), 215-230.

Tutorial: Exodus and Truth

### **The Bible Amidst Empires 4: The Persian Empire**

Mon. Nov. 15 Persian Period: History of Rebuilding and Torah

**DUE:** Longer paper (if you chose this option) -- See assignment sheet for details  
**Read:** Carr, *Introduction*, 208-222 (with biblical texts in “READING”)  
Cohn Eskenazi, pp. 123-30 in Newsom (Ezra-Nehemiah)

Wed. Nov. 17 Persian Period (and other Periods): Psalms

**Read:** Carr, *Introduction*, 222-27 (with biblical texts in “READING”)  
Farmer, pp. 145-52 in Newsom (Psalms)  
\*Irene Travis, “A Modern Psalm in the Midst of Breast Cancer,” 124-25 in *Take Back the Word* (on Blkbd)

**Prepare:** A contemporization of a psalm assigned in “READING” p. 222 of Intro.

**Tutorial:** Torah, Psalms and Christian Faith

### **THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Mon. Nov. 29 Persian Period: Texts linked with Rebuilding and the Book of Job

**Read:** Carr, *Introduction*, 231-35 (with biblical texts in “READING”)

Wed. Dec. 1 Persian Period Continued: Texts on Inclusion of Foreigners

**Read:** Carr, *Introduction*, 235-42 (with biblical texts in “READING”)  
\*Archie Lee, “Returning to China: Biblical Interpretation in Post-Colonial Hong Kong,” *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999):156-173. (Packet 81-89 and on Blkbd)

Mon. Dec. 6 Hellenism and the Final Formation of the Hebrew Bible

Read: Carr, *Introduction*, 247-62 (with biblical texts in “READING” and p. 251 exercise)

Final Tutorial: Review and conclusion

Wed. Dec. 8 Pulling Different Threads Together

Assignment: Bring a list of at least two themes or ideas that you saw across multiple parts of the Hebrew Bible. List the major places you saw this theme.

Mon. Dec. 13 Optional Review 3-3:50 PM in room 207

**FINAL EXAM** scheduled *by registrar* (not instructor!) sometime in December 17-22. Plan for this!