

STUDYING THE HEBREW BIBLE

[Institution]

[Semester]

[Class Times and Location]

[Instructor's name, contact information, and office hours]

Course goals

This course is an introduction to the contents of the Hebrew Bible (also called the Old Testament in the Protestant Bible; Tanak in Judaism), and to the historical conditions that gave rise to and shaped these writings, as these are understood by contemporary scholarship. Our goals include your familiarity with:

- selected aspects of the ancient Near Eastern context;
- the general contents of the Hebrew Bible, including its organization, distinct genres, story lines, and prominent characters, themes, and episodes;
- scholarly perspectives on ancient Israel's formation and history, and the way that history shaped these writings; and
- different interpretive stances among different communities today.

Course resources

Required texts:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, 4th ed. (New Revised Standard Version; Oxford University Press); or *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Jewish Publication Society translation; Oxford University Press)

John Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Fortress Press)

Please consult the course website regularly **[insert URL]**.

Course requirements

- Complete readings from the Bible and from Collins as assigned in the Course Schedule
- Come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings and discussion questions
- Complete the questions for each chapter read from the online Test Bank and submit these electronically to the instructor
- Complete quizzes as assigned
- **[insert other requirements]**

Course Schedule

Week	Read in Collins	In the Bible	Focus questions for discussion
1	Introduction and chap. 1	[sample passages for discussion?]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you characterize your previous experience with the Bible? Has your understanding of the Bible changed over time? How? • How does your understanding of the Bible up until now compare with the approach Collins describes? • What aspects of the ancient Near Eastern context are new to you; how do you predict they will matter for the study of the Hebrew Bible?
2	Chaps. 2–4	Genesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes the Genesis creation story (Genesis 1–2) distinctive in the ancient Near East environment? • In Genesis 22, what does the text tell you about the significance of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his own child?
3	Chaps. 5, 6	Exodus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Exodus 1–3, how many different motives can you identify on the part of YHWH (the LORD)? • What is the significance of the absence in Egyptian records of any mention of the Exodus?
4	Chaps. 7, 8	Leviticus, Deuteronomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which parts of Leviticus seem most relevant to contemporary life? How do different communities today understand Leviticus? • If Deuteronomy was written centuries after Moses, what is the point of ending the Torah with his death?
5	Chaps. 9, 10	Joshua, Judges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What motives are attributed to YHWH (the Lord) in Joshua? How do you understand the violence attributed to, or called for by YHWH? • What is the significance of an

			archaeological record that doesn't bear out the conquest narrative as narrated in Joshua?
6	Chaps. 11, 12	1 and 2 Samuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What made David such an attractive character as Israel's "greatest king"? • What is the significance of his fall?
7	chaps. 13, 14	1 and 2 Kings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do these books want us to think about kings? about prophets? Why? • What does 1 Kings 22 want to convey about prophecy in Israel? • What might "prophecy" look like today, based on what you've read?
8	chaps. 15, 16	Amos, Hosea, Isaiah 1-39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is Amos in trouble? What does God think of religion, according to Amos? • Why (in Isaiah 6) does God want the people NOT to understand?
9	chaps. 17, 18	Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is Jeremiah in the minority—and how did he get into the Bible? • What, according to chap. 20, is prophecy like?
10	chaps. 19, 20	Isaiah 40-66; Haggai, Zechariah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do scholars distinguish "Second Isaiah" from Isaiah of Jerusalem? Do you find the arguments convincing? • Read the "Suffering Servant" passages identified in the textbook. What clues do you find to the Servant's identity?
11	chaps. 21, 22	Ezra, Nehemiah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the innovations accomplished during the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah? • What do these innovations have to do with Jewish history?
12	chaps. 23, 24	Psalms 1, 2, 22, 48, 72, 96, 100, 137; Proverbs 1-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two well-known Psalms are 22 and 23; 22, because it plays a part in the later Christian Gospels. Read on its own terms, what is Psalm 22 about; what does it "do"? • Why is "Wisdom" portrayed as a female character in Proverbs 8 and 9?

13	chaps. 25, 26	Job; Ecclesiastes Qoheleth); Ruth; Esther	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do Job and Ecclesiastes offer different views of the meaning of human life or of suffering? • What would you identify as the main theme of the story of Ruth? Of Esther?
14	chaps. 27, 28	Daniel; 1 Maccabees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What lessons might Jews living in a foreign land take from Daniel? • From Esther (read last week)? • From 1 Maccabees?
15	chap. 29		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: What do you make of the Hebrew Bible? How do you understand its contents or purpose differently at the end of the course?