The Hebrew Bible is the foundational text of Judaism and Christianity. Modern scholars have developed new perspectives on the Bible, illuminating its great diversity in theology and political ideology, literary expression, and social circumstances. We will read a significant amount of the Bible in English translation, and we will study the approaches that situate the Bible in its own historical context. We will also study how the Bible was traditionally interpreted by Jews and Christians during the last two thousand years, and we will explore how the Bible became a classic book for Western religion and culture.

Books:

It is absolutely essential that you read the assigned biblical texts before class: it will make class more enjoyable and easier to understand. The following texts are required:

* The Jewish Study Bible. It has essays and notes that we will read.
* Hamilton, A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament
* Pritchard, The Ancient Near East

Other readings are on Ares and on the Olin library website.

Please bring your Bible and primary texts to each class meeting.

Attendance: You will be allowed three unexcused absences. Your grade will be lowered by one grade slot (i.e. A lowered to A-, B+ lowered to B) for each additional unexcused absence. In case of a physician’s visit, please notify me in advance or furnish a medical explanation signed by a physician. In case of a job interview or graduate school interview, please notify me in advance.

Course grade: midterm (35%), final exam/project (40%), class participation (25%).

Students with Documented Disabilities: Students needing accommodations need to register with Cornerstone <disability.wustl.edu> within the first two weeks of the semester.

Prerequisites: No prerequisites. No prior knowledge is necessary. Only your curiosity and willingness to engage with the biblical texts we will study.

(Mon Aug 26) Introduction: Approaches to the Study of the Bible

The assumptions and goals of biblical interpretation.

The larger cultural sphere in which the Bible was composed.
(Wed Aug 28) **Creation Stories**

Read Genesis 1:1-2:4. Organize this unit into paragraphs. Which phrases repeat? What does this repetition accomplish? Is this story a “myth”? Read Genesis 2:4-3:24. How many creation stories are there? What is the point of each story? Read Enuma Elish in *The Ancient Near East*, pp. 28-39. Be sure that you can summarize its plot. Has this text changed your appreciation of Genesis 1-2? For example, what is the significance of human beings and God/gods in each story? Why might we use comparisons to further our understanding of biblical texts?

Read Hamilton, 1-21

(Wed Sep 4) **The Flood and The Tower of Babel**


(Mon Sep 9) **The Patriarchs**

Skim Genesis 12-50. What kind of people are Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers? Why are these kind of stories told about them? Do they have distinct personalities? Do the same events happen to more than one patriarch or matriarch? With what themes are these chapters concerned? Why were these stories preserved and canonized? Consider where the patriarchs live, the type of names they have, and the interaction they have with cities in Canaan and countries outside of Canaan. Bring to class the Amarna Letters in *The Ancient Near East*, pp. 429-443. Why is the patriarchal period the most elusive of all periods in Israelite history? Read *Jewish Study Bible*, 2191-2201. Read Hamilton, 21-32.

(Wed Sep 11) **Characters in Genesis in Jewish and Christian Tradition**

Read *Jewish Study Bible*, 1841-1850, 1879-1891. All other readings will be distributed in class. Read the section of ancient interpretation titled “Adam and Eve” (to be distributed in class). What considerations have inspired these interpretations? Read the sections of ancient interpretation titled “Abraham,” “Three Men Visit Abraham,” and “The Binding of Isaac.” (to be distributed in class) Why is the Binding of Isaac so significant for Jewish and Christian tradition? Is it mentioned elsewhere in the Bible?
Read the section of ancient interpretation titled “Jacob’s Dream” and “Jacob and Esau” (to be distributed) What have Jewish and Christian interpretation done to Jacob and Esau? What has inspired this type of interpretation?

(Mon Sep 16) **Liberation -- The Historical Evidence and Literary Traditions**
Read Exodus 1-20, 24. What are the themes in Exodus 1-20, 24? What is the structure of the plague narrative? What is the point of the plague narrative? Why is Exodus 15 included if it repeats what has been already described? How is revelation described in Exodus 19-20 and 24? (Note that the individual sources may conceive of revelation differently).
Read the Hymn of Victory of the Pharaoh Merneptah (Ares) and look at the reliefs from Karnak (Ares). What do these Egyptian monuments tell us about the Israelites?
Read Hamilton, 33-43
Read *Jewish Study Bible*, 2107-2110, 2119-2125.
Read Barmash, “Out of the Mists of History: The Exaltation of the Exodus in the Bible”.
<https://wustl.academia.edu/PamelaBarmash>

(Wed Sep 18) **Biblical Law**
Read the Laws of Ur-Nammu, the Laws of Eshnunna, the Laws of Hammurapi, in *The Ancient Near East*, pp. 150-182.
Read Hamilton, 43-53.
Read *Jewish Study Bible*, 2201-2207.

(Mon Sep 23) **The Priestly Law**
Skim Leviticus.
Read Hamilton, 54-64.
What are the concerns of the Priestly literature?

(Wed Sep 25) **Deuteronomy**
Skim Deuteronomy. What is distinctive about this book?
Read the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon in *The Ancient Near East*, pp. 213-225. Note shared structures and details between the treaties and Deuteronomy. What are the implications of these common elements?
Read 2 Kings 22:1-23:30. Does the reform narrated here have any links to Deuteronomy?
Read Hamilton, 82-96.

(Wed Oct 1) **The Settlement of Canaan**
Read Joshua (skim 13-21) and Judges. What happened to the Canaanites? Do Joshua and Judges agree on what occurred during the Settlement?
Read *Jewish Study Bible*, 2125-2126.
Read Hamilton, 97-104 (and in your copious free time, 105-131).
What types of models and materials may be used in addition to the biblical text to recreate a historical picture of the conquest/settlement? Why has no consensus been reached? Which type of evidence is more valuable, literary or archaeological?
What is the structure of the book of Judges? What is the role of individual judges?
(Mon Oct 7) **The United Monarchy**
Skim 1 and 2 Samuel.
Read the Gezer Calendar in *The Ancient Near East*, p. 287, and the Tel Dan stele (to be distributed).
Read Hamilton, 139-156.
Read *Jewish Study Bible*, 2035-2041.
Why was the monarchy established?
How are Saul and David depicted?

(Wed Oct 17) **History, Version I**
Read 1 Kings 1-14. Why did the kingdom become divided?
Read 1 Kings 15 - 2 Kings 14. Read the Moabite inscription, in *The Ancient Near East* pp. 287-288. Why was the Northern Kingdom politically and economically powerful during the ninth century?
Read Hamilton, 157-179.

(Wed Oct 23) **Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography**
Read 2 Kings 15 - 23:30. Look at the Black Obelisk, in *The Ancient Near East*, fig. 100.). How did the rise of the Assyrian empire affect the Northern and Southern Kingdoms?
Read Barmash, “At the Nexus of History and Memory: The Ten Lost Tribes in History and Folklore,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 29 (2005): 207-236. (e-Journals)
Read 2 Kings 18-20. (Check those chapters against 2 Chronicles 29-32, and Isaiah 36-39 -- are they the same? Speculate on why these chapters were repeated three times in the Bible). Bring to class the Siloam inscription, and the Annals of Sennacherib, in *The Ancient Near East*, pp. 269-271, 290, fig. 73. What do each of these sources tell us? What ideology does each source reflect? Is each source credible?

**Midterm Project due Oct 27**

(Mon Oct 28) **History, Version II**
Read 1 and 2 Chronicles (skim 1 Chronicles 1-9 -- why include genealogies!??)
How does the Chronicler take a different view of events from the historians of 1 and 2 Kings? Why did the Chronicler write his book?
Read Hamilton, 180-192.

(Wed Oct 30) **Introduction to Prophecy**
Re-read 1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 2. What do these biblical prophets do?
Read Isaiah 1-11, then skim to 39. Is there a structure to Isaiah 1-39? What is Isaiah’s political message? What does Isaiah I say about repentance? What is his vision of the future?
Is there biographical information about the prophet? What do prophets like Isaiah do?
Read Hamilton, 267-284.

(Mon Nov 4) **Jeremiah and Ezekiel**
Read Jeremiah 1-11, then skim the rest. What is the structure of this book? What is Jeremiah’s political message, and how does it compare to Isaiah’s? What does Jeremiah say about repentance? Does Jeremiah’s message change in chapter 29?
What does the book tell us about Jeremiah’s biography?
Skim Ezekiel 1-39. How is the book organized? Is it similar to the other prophetic books?
Is it easier to read?
Would you have liked to live next door to Ezekiel?
What does the book tell us about Ezekiel’s biography?

(Wed Nov 6) **The Exile**
Read 2 Kings 23:31-25:30. Read Psalms 126,137; Lamentations. Read the Lachish Letters (in *The Ancient Near East*, pp. 292-293). In what ways does exile differ from Diaspora? What are the reactions of the Judeans to the Exile? In what ways did the loss of homeland and other institutions (monarchy, priesthood) transform Jewish religion?
Read Hamilton, 308-313, 284-289.
Read Isaiah 40-45, then skim to 55. Is there a structure to Isaiah 40-55. What is Isaiah II’s political message? What is his religious message?

(Mon Nov 11) **The Second Temple Period**
Read Ezra-Nehemiah; 2 Chronicles 35:20-36:23 (compare to last chapter of 2 Kings).
What are the continuities and discontinuities between these texts and earlier texts?
Read Hamilton, 193-200.

(Mon Nov 18) **Prayer**
Skim Psalms.
Read Hamilton, 222-240.
What do the psalms have in common? Which kinds of spirituality do these prayers express? Is there any structure to the book of Psalms? When were the Psalms recited/chanted? What function could the Psalms have served in ancient Israel?

(Wed Nov 20) **Theodicy**
Read Psalm 1; Proverbs 1-9; Qohelet (a.k.a. Ecclesiastes); Job 1-4; 38-42.
Read “I will Praise the Lord of Wisdom,” *The Ancient Near East*, pp. 365-374
How do these texts answer the question of how bad things happen to good people? Are any of these answers satisfying to you?
Read Hamilton, 211-221.

(Mon Dec 2) **Esther and Ruth**
Read Esther and Ruth.
How do these books portray women? How do they speak to life in the Second Temple period?
Read *Jewish Study Bible*, 2177-2184.
(Wed Dec 4) *The Hebrew Bible Considered as a Whole*

Read the Song of Songs. What is this doing in the Bible?

How would a collection of materials as diverse both historically and ideologically as the Bible be put together as a book? If you were the creator of the Bible, would you have included all the books we have studied?

What are the themes of the Hebrew Bible? How diverse are the perspectives on God, humanity, the future, community, in the Bible? How diverse are the texts and books that make up the Bible? Are there common elements in the Bible?

Read Hamilton, 386-388.


Final project due Dec 6.