

The Pentateuch – The Torah and Its Interpretation

REL 311

T-TH 10:00-11:50am

Nygreen 4

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Office Hours: MF 10:00 – 11:30am / TW 4:00 – 5:00pm / by appointment

Course Description

In this course we will investigate the literary, historical and theological contours of the five books traditionally attributed to Moses – the books that make up the Torah or the Pentateuch. The Torah is itself a highly variegated and intricate aggregate of several different genres (types of text) and authorial voices; it is the product of a long history of composition, transmission and redaction (editing), one that spans many centuries of ancient Israel's existence. The Pentateuch contains many of the 'foundational narratives' of Israel's religious and national past, as well as myths, laws, stories and ideas that are rooted in the broader cultural world of the ancient Near East. It is, of course, Scripture to the world's Jews and Christians, and as such it has a rich history of interpretation in Judaism and Christianity, as well as in Islam.

In this course we will be doing several different things, often simultaneously, and we may encounter some tension among these different approaches. 1) We will read ancient texts and attempt to understand them *ON THEIR OWN TERMS* – in other words, with respect to what they say and NOT what we wish them to say. 2) We will compare these biblical texts with other ancient sources that can shed light on our understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of different parts of the Pentateuch. 3) We will consider several theories about the compositional history of the Torah – i.e. who wrote what when, and how it all came together in the end. 4) We will discuss the theological and ethical categories present in the Pentateuch, and reflect on what they tell us about God, ancient Israel and its neighbors, human nature, etc. 5) We will entertain different ways in which we might understand the Torah as a scriptural text – i.e. one that is authoritative and normative for different religious communities over time. And 6) we will take a look at how the Pentateuch/Torah has been interpreted in various ways in the context of early Judaism and Christianity.

In sum, the Pentateuch makes for a fascinating and complex study, and we will do our best to juggle these many different (and sometimes competing) ways of approaching the text. To do so will require an open mind and willingness to go beyond the face value to discover the rich tapestry that is the Torah.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES:

- Use the basic **vocabulary and methods** of the academic study of religion
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably the **nature of biblical texts**, the **historical contexts** in which they arose, and their **scholarly interpretation**
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably **major theological questions** that have emerged in the history of tradition and the variety of answers that have been proffered for them
- Write respectfully about **different religious traditions**
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably the **role of religion** in the manifold dimensions of social existence

Course Requirements

There will be a considerable amount of discussion and participation required for this course. As you will note below, this will be a significant portion of your grade, and thus attendance is mandatory (unless you can find a way to participate without being present). Additionally, each student will write one 8-10 page research paper on a topic to be determined later in the semester. This is to be an academic paper, one that uses scholarly conventions of research and presentation to describe a topic in the study of the Pentateuch. There will also be several short (2-3 page) submissions throughout the course of the semester on a range of topics that we will cover.

In addition to these requirements, each student must submit a final project that deals in some way with one or several of the themes we encounter during the course. This project can be a paper, story, poem, painting, sculpture, etc. – you get the idea – which will be determined in consultation with the professor. More on this later in the semester....

Participation:	20%
Research Paper	30%
Short Papers	20% (5 papers)
Final Project	30%

More on the papers: Writing is one of the most important – and one of the most difficult – things you must learn, and as such I take it quite seriously. Writing well requires foresight and planning, careful organization of the material, and the development of a compelling style or voice. Above all, it requires *practice*.

Do not wait until the last minute to crank out a paper that you don't have time to proofread or revise – it is likely that I will be able to detect this, and your grade may suffer as a result. I advise you to write a detailed outline ahead of time and speak with me about it. I am willing to work with you on writing a good paper – so don't hesitate to work with me!

Policy of Academic Honesty

All students are expected to know and to conform to the Policy on Academic Honesty found in the *Student Handbook* and to sign the statement specific to this course.

Students with Disabilities

CLU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to **students with various documented disabilities** (physical, learning or psychological). If you are a student requesting accommodations for this course, please contact me at the beginning of the semester and register with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities (Pearson Library, Center for Academic and Accessibility Resources, x3260) for the facilitation and verification of need. I will work closely together with you and your coordinator to provide necessary accommodations.

Required Texts

[**BBB**] Schniedewind, William. *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[**IRP**] Ska, Jean-Louis. *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

[**E-Res**]: There will be several articles placed on Electronic Reserve. These are for the most part REQUIRED reading; I suggest you print a copy and bring it to class. The E-Res password for this course is: abraham

You must also have a copy of the Pentateuch/Torah available to you. I would prefer if you use either the NRSV (such as the HarperCollins Study Bible) or the JPS translation, as they are the most accurate representations of the original language texts. We will from time to time refer to New Testament texts as well, especially as they present interpretations of Pentateuchal themes and narratives.

Class Schedule

[1] Th Jan 18: Course Introduction: What is the 'Torah'? What is the 'Pentateuch'?
What is the Bible?

[2] T Jan 23: The Pentateuch and Its Place in the Bible

- [**BBB**] 1-23, "How the Bible Became a Book"
- [**IRP**] 1-15, "Basic Questions about the Pentateuch"

[3] Th Jan 25: Methods for Studying and Understanding the Hebrew Bible

- [**E-Res**] "Methods in Old Testament Study"
- [**BBB**] 24-34, "The Numinous Power of Writing"

- [4] T Jan 30: Genre and Context in the Pentateuch / Torah – The Book of Genesis
- [E-Res] Fokkelman, *Literary Guide to the Bible*
 - [IRP] 165-83
- [5] Th Feb 1: The Book of Genesis: The Creation of the World
- Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a (read very carefully)
 - [E-Res] *Enuma Elish*, excerpts
 - [E-Res] Blenkinsopp, "Creation, the Body, and Care for a Damaged World"
- [6] T Feb 6: Adam and Eve in the Garden
- Genesis 2:4b – 3:24 (read very carefully)
 - *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet XI
<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab11.htm>
 - [E-Res] Blenkinsopp, "Gilgamesh and Adam"
 - **Short Paper Due** (2-3 pages): What is the meaning (or what are the meanings) of the Garden of Eden story?
- [7] Th Feb 8: The *toledot* Series and the Structure and Content of Genesis 1-11
- Genesis 4-11
 - *Atrahasis*, excerpts
 - [E-Res] DiVito, "The Demarcation of Divine and Human Realms in Gen 2-11"
 - Look at the following website:
http://hope.edu/bandstra/RTOT/CH1/CH1_3B.HTM
- [8] T Feb 13: Abraham, the Covenant, and the Nation of Israel
- Genesis 12-21
 - [E-Res] Tribble, *Texts of Terror*
 - [E-Res] Boadt, "Genesis 12-50: The Patriarchs," 133-44
- [9] Th Feb 15: The 'Binding of Isaac'
- Genesis 22:1-19 (read very carefully)
 - [E-Res] Levenson, "Abusing Abraham"
 - [E-Res] Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar"
- [10] T Feb 20: The Jacob Cycle
- Genesis 24-36
 - [E-Res] Boadt, "Genesis 12-50: The Patriarchs," 144-49
 - **Short Paper Due**: Discuss one ambiguity or dilemma posed by the Akedah.
- [11] Th Feb 22: The Joseph Cycle **NO CLASS**
- Genesis 37-50
 - [E-Res] Boadt, "Genesis 12-50: The Patriarchs," 149-54
- [12] T Feb 27: The Exodus and Sinai Traditions: An Overview
- Exodus 1-6, 11-15 (esp. 15)
 - [E-Res] Blenkinsopp, "From Egypt to Canaan"

- [13] Th Mar 1: Moses and the Prophetic Office
- Exodus 32-34; Numbers 11-12; Deuteronomy 18, 34
 - [E-Res] McBride, "Transcendent Authority"
 - **Paper Topics Distributed**
- [14] T Mar 6: The Sinai (Or Was It Horeb?) Theophany and the Sinaitic Covenant
- Exodus 18-24
 - [E-Res] Brettler, "The Many Faces of God in Exodus 19"
- [15] Th Mar 8: The Legislation for Priests and the Wilderness Tabernacle
- Exodus 25-31
 - [E-Res] Levenson, "Zion as the Heir to Sinai"
 - **Short Paper Due:** How does the tradition of Sinai get reapplied and understood in new ways in Jewish and Christian traditions?
- [16] T Mar 13: The 'Ten Commandments'
- Exodus 20:1-14, 34:14-28; Deuteronomy 5:6-18
 - [E-Res] Miller, "Is There a Place for the Ten Commandments?"
- [17] Th Mar 15: The Book of Leviticus and the Holiness Code
- Leviticus (chapters to be assigned)
 - [E-Res] Klawans, "Concepts of Purity in the Bible"
 - [E-Res] Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*
 - **FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE IN CLASS**
- [18] T Mar 20: Codes and Covenants in the Ancient Near East
Readings to be assigned
- [19] Th Mar 22: Balaam, the Ass, and the Question of False Prophecy
- Numbers 22-24; Deuteronomy 18; the Book of Jonah
 - [E-Res] *De'ir Alla Inscription*
 - **FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER RETURNED WITH COMMENTS**
- [20] T Mar 27: **NO CLASS – work on papers**
- [21] Th Mar 29: **NO CLASS – work on papers**

SPRING BREAK

- [21] T Apr 10: Deuteronomy and the Book of the Law
- Deuteronomy 12-26; 2 Kings 22-23
 - [BBB] 91-117
 - **FINAL REVISION OF PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

- [22] Th Apr 12: Deuteronomy: Introduction or Conclusion?
- [E-Res] von Rad, "The Purpose of Deuteronomy"
- [23] T Apr 17: The Final Shape of the Pentateuch and the Rest of the Hebrew Bible
- Deuteronomy 34; Joshua 1-6; Malachi 3 (esp. vv. 22-24); 2 Chronicles 36:11-23
 - [BBB] 118-38
 - [IRP] 217-34
- [24] Th Apr 19: The Torah / Pentateuch in the Dead Sea Scrolls
- [E-Res] *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* ("Scriptures" and "Temple Scroll")
 - [E-Res] Jubilees 1-2, Genesis Apocryphon excerpts
- [25] T Apr 24: The Torah in Jewish Tradition
- [E-Res] Pirke Avot
 - [E-Res] Jaffee, "The Ideological Construction of Torah in the Mouth"
 - **Short Paper Due:** What is the relationship among the themes of covenant, Sinai, and entry into the land in the Pentateuch?
- [26] Th Apr 26: The Torah in Christian Tradition
- Matthew 5-6; Galatians 3; Romans 2-3, 7
 - [E-Res] Sanders, "Paul and the Law"
- [27] T May 1: The Torah in Islamic Tradition
- [E-Res] Wolf, "Moses in Christian and Islamic Tradition"
 - Selections from the Qur'an (handout)
- [28] Th May 3: Student Projects and Course Conclusion
- [E-Res] Gilkey, "Scripture, History, and the Quest for Meaning"

FINAL PROJECTS DUE BY WEDNESDAY, MAY 9.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO WILL TAKE A FINAL EXAM, THE EXAM WILL BE ON TUESDAY, MAY 8TH, 10:30AM – 12:30PM