

# The Bible and Western Culture I

RELS 2310

Dr. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11:30 a.m.

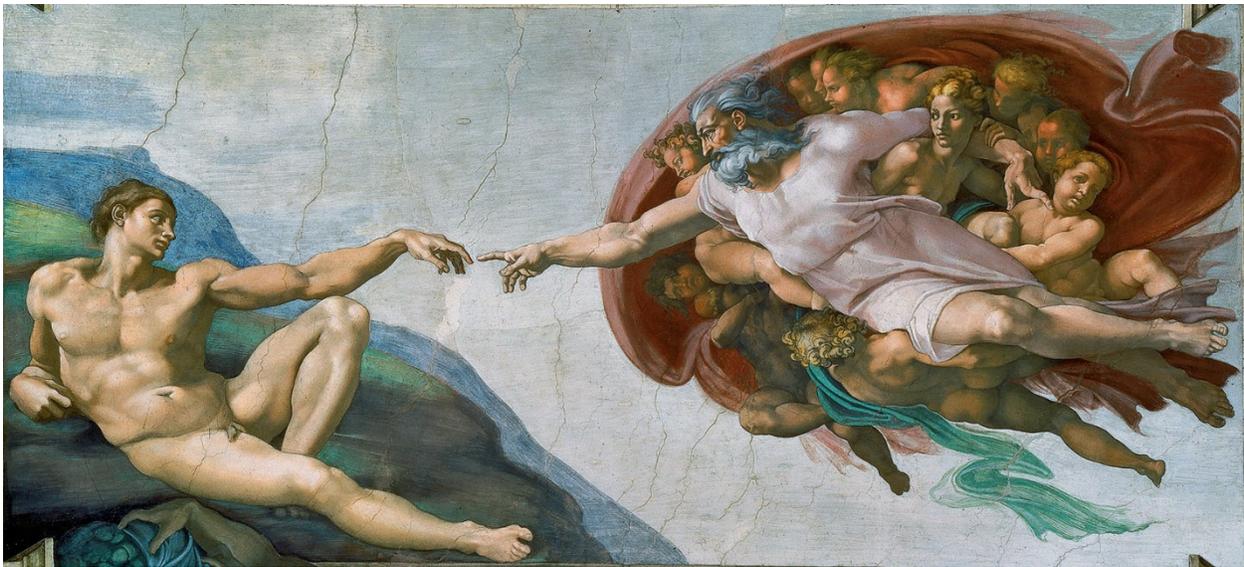
Architecture 402

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**Office hours:** Wednesdays 1-2 p.m., Thursdays 1-2 p.m., or by appointment (Please do not hesitate to visit my office to discuss the course, questions you have, assignments, etc.)



*The Creation of Adam, Sistine Chapel fresco, Michelangelo, 16<sup>th</sup> century*

## **Course description:**

The Hebrew Bible (Jewish Tanakh; Christian Old Testament) is a rich and diverse collection of texts that has shaped world history and the lives of individuals for millennia, and that continues to play a significant role today. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to these texts. We will read pieces of the Hebrew Bible in translation and explore the circumstances of their composition and, to some extent, their reception. We will examine what the Bible can and cannot tell us about the history of ancient Israel. We will also sample modern scholarship on the Bible, in the process learning about the various lenses used by those who study it in an academic context. Students will have an opportunity to evaluate claims made by contemporary readers of the Bible about its content on hot-button issues.

### **Course goals:**

- To learn about the content of the Hebrew Bible, its genres, themes, and literary features.
- To be able to explain what the Bible can and cannot tell us about the history of Israel, and to be able to speak and write clearly about the major components of that history.
- To gain a basic understanding of the different methods scholars use to read and interpret the Hebrew Bible.
- To explore how the Hebrew Bible functions in the contemporary world and how scholarly study can help us to make sense of modern rhetoric about the Bible.

### **Required books:**

Coogan, Michael D. and Cynthia R. Chapman. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. **(Coogan & Chapman)**

An edition of the **Bible** with Apocrypha.

(I recommend Coogan, Michael D. et al., eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. This study Bible contains helpful footnotes, essays, and maps, but any straightforward translation (i.e. *not* The Message, the Good News Bible, God's Word to the Nations, New Living Translation) in any language is fine. You may use a Bible app or website, but there is something to be said for a physical copy! Also, if you use your phone to pull up biblical verses, it may be harder to resist the temptation to check Instagram or make a move in Words with Friends, so be forewarned.)

### **Recommended book:**

Friedman, Richard Elliott and Shawna Dolansky. *The Bible Now*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. **(Friedman & Dolansky)**

All these books will be on reserve at the M.D. Anderson Library. The Friedman & Dolansky book is also available in electronic form on the library's website.

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard.

## Disclaimer:

Please be advised that the Bible is not G-rated. It contains material about sex, violence, sexual violence, violence against animals, ethnic hatred, mass murder, and genocide. We will be treating all these topics this semester.

## Course requirements and policies:

1. New concepts will be introduced every class session, so students are strongly encouraged to make attendance and punctuality a priority. An attendance sheet will be passed around every session (after the add period ends), and it is your responsibility to make sure you sign it. Excessive absences or lateness will affect your grade, as will unexcused early departures from class. If you must miss class, arrive late, or leave early on a given day, please *let me know in advance* if possible; it will be your responsibility to make up work that you have missed.
2. You are entitled to three absences, no questions asked, without your attendance and participation grade suffering. Further absences will affect your grade unless they are excused. Examples of excused absences include holidays, personal illness, or family emergency. Documentation of absences may be requested by the professor for them to count as excused.
3. Class participation is important! Please come to class prepared to contribute to class discussions and take part in group activities.
4. Please bring a Bible to every class. On quiz days, please bring the relevant scholarly article as well. You will not be able to refer to the article during the quiz, but we will follow each quiz with a short discussion of the article.
5. It is impossible to pay attention and participate if you are checking your e-mail or on Facebook (and it's also incredibly rude), so I ask that you refrain from using your computer, tablet, or phone for any non-class-related purposes during class time. Failure to honor this rule will result in a lowered grade. I strongly encourage you to use paper and pen to take notes; research has shown that retention of class material is improved when students use pen and paper rather than a computer for notetaking.
6. In between class sessions, I will occasionally need to communicate important information to the class via e-mail. It is your responsibility to check your university e-mail regularly.
7. For most sessions, students will be required to read the following: (a) a chapter or set of pages from Coogan & Chapman and (b) corresponding selections from the Bible. Even if you have read the assigned biblical materials before entering this class, read them again, with an eye toward what you have learned about them in the textbook and attention to the study Bible's notes and commentary. **Reading assignments should be completed in advance of the session for which they are listed.**
8. For most class sessions, I have provided a few questions for you to consider while doing the readings. I hope that this will focus your time and allow you to get more out of both the readings and class sessions.
9. Approximately every other week, I will assign a scholarly article related to one of that week's topics. These articles will be posted on Blackboard and are intended to give you a flavor for modern scholarly discussions about the Hebrew Bible.

- a. In weeks when we read one of these articles, there will be a short (10-minute) quiz about it at the beginning of the Wednesday class.
  - b. Grades for these quizzes will be check (adequate understanding of the article; corresponds to 85), check-plus (superior understanding of and engagement with the article; corresponds to 100), check-minus (deficient understanding of the article; corresponds to 70), or 0 (complete misunderstanding of the article, very incomplete answers, or missed quiz).
  - c. Unless there are extremely extenuating circumstances *that you tell me about beforehand*, no make-up quizzes will be allowed. If you arrive late, you will have that much less time to complete the quiz.
  - d. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.
10. Students will complete a short (2-3 pages) written assignment for which they will conduct an Internet search for “Bible and \_\_\_\_\_,” one of the following five topics, corresponding to the five chapters of *The Bible Now* by Friedman and Dolansky: homosexuality, abortion, women’s status, capital punishment, or the environment. This reflection paper will be due via TurnItIn by 9:30 a.m. (a half hour before class) on **Tuesday, February 5**. I will distribute a prompt for this paper in class on Tuesday, January 29.
  11. Students will write a paper, 4-6 pages in length, based on one chapter of *The Bible Now* by Friedman and Dolansky. This may be the same chapter as your initial assignment, but it does not have to be. This assignment will be due via TurnItIn by 9:30 a.m. on **Tuesday, April 16**. I will distribute a prompt for this paper in class on Tuesday, April 2.
  12. Written work may be handed in up to one week after its due date, at a penalty of one-third of a letter grade per day. For example, a paper handed in two days late (i.e. more than 24 hours and less than 48 hours late) is eligible for a maximum grade of A-. After one week, late work will not be accepted.
  13. There will be a midterm and a final exam. The midterm will be given in class on **Thursday, March 7**. The final exam will be held from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. on **Thursday, May 9** in our regular classroom. For the midterm and final exam, you will be required to purchase and bring with you a blue Scantron form.
  14. I have posted on Blackboard a list of key terms for the semester. This list will serve two purposes for you:
    - a. Use it to chart your progress in the class. At the beginning of the semester, check off which terms you already know. As we proceed through the course and you complete readings and attend lecture, check off terms you have learned. At the end of the semester, check off the terms you now know.
    - b. Use it as a study guide for the midterm and the final. (Hint: flashcards are a great study aide!)
  15. There will be opportunities to earn extra credit points by attending events on campus and/or completing a bonus assignment. Stay tuned for more information.
  16. This syllabus is subject to change. If I make any changes, I will notify you.

## **Grading:**

Internet search paper: 10%  
Friedman/Dolansky paper: 15%  
Quizzes: 25%  
Midterm: 20%  
Final: 20%  
Attendance and participation: 10%

Participation points may be earned by asking or answering questions in class, making respectful and valuable contributions to class discussions, actively participating in group activities or discussions, and/or attending office hours.

Grading will be on the following scale. Please note that the highest *final course grade* the University permits is A.

97-100: A+	77-79: C+
93-96: A	73-76: C
90-92: A-	70-72: C-
87-89: B+	67-69: D+
83-86: B	63-66: D
80-82: B-	60-62: D-
	<60: F

## **Academic integrity:**

Students at the University of Houston are required to adhere to the university's academic honesty policy. If you are unsure how the honesty policy applies to a given assignment in this course, please ask me. I have a zero-tolerance policy towards any type of academic dishonesty (including plagiarism) and will refer all violations to the department hearing officer. According to [plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org), plagiarism includes:

- a. "turning in someone else's work as your own
- b. copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- c. failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- d. giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- e. changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- f. copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not" (<http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism>)

## **CAPS Statement:**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS ([www.uh.edu/caps](http://www.uh.edu/caps)) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine

appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let's Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. [http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html)

### **Special accommodations for students with disabilities:**

The University of Houston System complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for students with a disability. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, the University of Houston strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. Students seeking accommodation in this course should contact the instructor after obtaining the appropriate documentation through the UH Center for Students with Disabilities.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### Week 1

Tuesday, January 15: Introduction, syllabus review

Thursday, January 17: The lay of the land, approaches to the Bible

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 1-2

- What is a canon? What are the major differences among the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox canons?
- What are the three major divisions of the Jewish canon?
- How are religious and scholarly readings of the Bible different?
- What are the different names for the land of the Bible? Why are there so many different names? Do they all refer to exactly the same place?
- Who were the neighbors of ancient Israel? Why do they matter?

#### Week 2

Tuesday, January 22: The Documentary Hypothesis

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 4

- Name and describe the four proposed sources of the Pentateuch.
- Why might the Documentary Hypothesis be controversial for some religious readers?

Thursday, January 24: Bible translation

Read: Leonard Greenspoon, “10 Common Misconceptions about Bible Translation”

Quiz and discussion: Greenspoon article

### Week 3

Tuesday, January 29: Creation

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 3  
Genesis 1-3

- What do the stories of *Enuma Elish* and *Gilgamesh* say? Why might they be relevant to the biblical creation stories?
- What are the two accounts of creation in Genesis? How do they differ?
- Which character (man, woman, snake, deity) do you think is most at fault for what happens with the fruit in the Garden of Eden? Why?

Hand out and discuss: Internet search paper assignment

Thursday, January 31: Primeval History

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 5  
Phyllis Tribble, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread"  
Quiz and discussion: Tribble article

- What Ancient Near Eastern parallels are there for the biblical flood stories?
- What might these parallels mean?
- What is an etiology?

### Week 4

Tuesday, February 5: Patriarchs and Matriarchs

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 6  
Gen 12:1-9, Gen 19, Gen 22

- What are God's promises to Abram?
- What ambiguities do you see in the story of the binding of Isaac?
- Who are the patriarchs? Who are the matriarchs? Why aren't there the same number of each?
- Why are some of the patriarchs known by more than one name?
- What happened at Sodom and Gomorrah? Why?

Due via TurnItIn: Internet search paper

Thursday, February 7: Genesis Family Stories

Read: Gen 34, Gen 37, Gen 39-50

- Who is Dinah? What are the consequences of what happens to her?
- Who is Tamar? Do you think she is a sympathetic character? Do you think the text intends her to be sympathetic?
- Trace Joseph's journey from favorite son, to slave, to prisoner, to high-ranking public servant. Why does he fall so far, and how does he rise again?

## Week 5

Tuesday, February 12: Exodus

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 7  
Exodus 1-15

- What is Moses' origin story? How do women figure in?
- According to the biblical story, how did the Israelites escape from Egypt?
- What role does Aaron play in the Exodus story?
- What does historical evidence say about the Exodus?
- What is Passover?

Thursday, February 14: Wilderness Wanderings

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 8 and 11  
Numbers 5:11-31, 12, 22-25

- What is a covenant? Describe the covenant between God and Israel made at Sinai.
- How does the covenant resemble an Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty?
- According to Numbers 5, what is the procedure when a husband suspects his wife of adultery?
- What is apostasy? How does apostasy figure into the book of Numbers?
- How and why do the Israelites rebel during their period of wilderness wandering?

## Week 6

Tuesday, February 19: Law and Ritual

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 9-10  
Exodus 19-23, Leviticus 11-15, Leviticus 17-26

- What are the different law codes in the Bible? What topics does each treat?
- What does Leviticus say about what the Israelites can and cannot eat?
- What does Leviticus say about proper and improper sexual behavior?
- What are some possible reasons for these detailed rules?
- What is a Decalogue?
- Describe the procedures and purposes of sacrifice.

Thursday, February 21: Ideas of God

Read: Martin Cohen, "The Biblical Prohibition of Homosexual Intercourse"

Optional: Mika Ahuvia, "Us vs. Them: Challenging Stereotypes about Judaism in the Wake of the Pittsburgh Shooting"

Quiz and discussion: Cohen article

## Week 7

Tuesday, February 26: Covenant, Conquest and Settlement

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 12-13

Deuteronomy 12-26, Joshua 1-15 OR Judges 1-15 (assigned in class)

- What is the Deuteronomic Code?
- What is Deuteronomic Theology? What are its core principles?

Thursday, February 28: Conquest and Settlement, Judges

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 14

Robert A. Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians”

Quiz and discussion: Warrior article

- What books are included in the Deuteronomistic History?
- How do the books of Joshua and Judges differ in their accounts of how the Israelites settled the land?
- What is *herem*?
- What was a Judge? Who were the most important ones?

## Week 8

Tuesday, March 5: Midterm review

Thursday, March 7: Midterm exam

Bring: Blue Scantron form and a pencil

SPRING BREAK

## Week 9

Tuesday, March 19: Rise of the Monarchy

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 15

1 Samuel 15-17

- How and why does Saul become king?
- What is the role of Samuel in the creation and centralization of the kingship?

Thursday, March 21: The United Monarchy—David, Solomon, and the Temple

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 16-17

2 Samuel 7, 11-12; 1 Kings 1-2, 8-9, 12

- What picture emerges of David in the books of Samuel and 1 Kings? Do you think he is a sympathetic figure?

- How does David rise to power, when he is not Saul's heir?
- How does Solomon rise to power, when he is not David's eldest son?
- Why is the matter of who builds the Temple so important?
- How do David and Solomon manage to unite the 12 tribes?

## Week 10

Tuesday, March 26: The Divided Kingdoms

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 18

1 Kings 16-19, 21-22

- According to the biblical text, why do the northern and southern kingdoms split?
- Who are Elijah and Elisha?
- How are the northern and southern kingdoms similar? How are they different?
- What kind of extrabiblical evidence do we have about the divided kingdoms?

Thursday, March 28: Life in the Northern Kingdom, Introduction to Prophecy

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 19

Amos 2-4, Hosea 1-3

Excerpt from Renita Weems, *Battered Love*

Quiz and discussion: Weems reading

- What is a prophet? Why might this have been a difficult job?
- What were the major threats to the northern kingdom?
- What were the messages of Amos and Hosea?

## Week 11

Tuesday, April 2: The Fall of the Northern Kingdom, Life in the Southern Kingdom

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 20-21

2 Kings 11, 17-23, Isaiah 1-6

Discussion of Friedman/Dolansky paper

- Why and how does the northern kingdom fall?
- What happens to the people of the northern kingdom after the conquest?
- What were the major threats to the southern kingdom?
- How does the southern kingdom manage to withstand Assyrian invasion?

Thursday, April 4: The Fall of the Southern Kingdom

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 22-23

2 Kings 24-25, Lamentations 1-5

- Who ultimately conquers the southern kingdom?
- What happens to the people of the southern kingdom after the conquest?

- How does Lamentations respond to the conquest? What imagery does the poet use to describe the land and its people?

## Week 12

Tuesday, April 9: Exile, Return, and Restoration

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 24-25

Psalm 137, Isaiah 40, Ezekiel 37, Ezra 1

- What becomes of the exiles in Babylon?
- How does Psalm 137 reflect on the exile?
- What other biblical texts might have been produced during the exile?
- Describe the circumstances leading to the return of the exiles.

Thursday, April 11: Postexilic prophecy, Psalms

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapters 26-27

Isaiah 60, Zechariah 1-3

Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “By the Waters of Babylon: Exile as a Way of Life”

Quiz and discussion: Isasi-Díaz article

- Describe some of the themes of postexilic prophecy.
- What is apocalyptic prophecy?
- What is a psalm?
- Who is the Chronicler?

## Week 13

Tuesday, April 16: Song of Songs, Wisdom literature

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 28

Song of Songs 1-8, Proverbs 1-9

Due via TurnItIn: Friedman/Dolansky paper

- What is the Song of Songs about? How does it differ from other biblical texts?
- What is the role of women (or female figures) in the first several chapters of Proverbs?
- What were some of the apparent purposes of wisdom literature?

Thursday, April 18: Wisdom literature, Jewish Novellas

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 29

Job 1-3, 38-42, Ecclesiastes 1-2, Ruth 1-4

Ericka Dunbar, “For Such A Time As This? #UsToo: Sexual Trafficking, Silence, & Secrecy In The Book Of Esther”

Quiz and discussion: Dunbar article

- How might the books of Ecclesiastes and Job have been challenging to an ancient audience?
- Why does Job suffer?
- What is Ecclesiastes' answer to questions about the meaning of life?
- What is the book of Ruth's take on whether non-Israelites can be righteous?
- Who is Esther? How does she save her people

#### Week 14

Tuesday, April 23: Tales: Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Jonah, Susanna, Tobit, Judith

Read: Coogan & Chapman chapter 30

Jonah 1-4

- What is the book of Jonah's take on whether non-Israelites can be righteous?
- Who is Judith? How does she save her people?
- What sorts of stories are told about Daniel? How might these stories have offered guidance to diaspora Jews?

Thursday, April 25: Final exam review

**Final exam: Thursday, May 9, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.—Bring Blue Scantron and pencil**