



PMIN 205: Hebrew Bible

Instructor: Dr. J. David Pleins

Office: Kenna 300J

Office Hours: by appointment through jpleins@scu.edu and 554-4763

Class Meeting Time:

Section 56753 (4.0 Units): Mon 6:00-9:00, Kenna 104

Purpose of the Course:

Scope: What did the Hebrew Bible mean for its own day and what is its enduring message? This course offers a study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as a historical document and a theological text.

Methods: In particular the course explores a variety of scholarly methods currently used to interpret and understand the Hebrew Bible. By the end of the course students will be able to tap these very different approaches to evaluate a wide-range of biblical texts. We are particularly interested in matters of historical setting and cultural context but also in how these texts continue to speak to issues of suffering and social justice today.

Theology: The major issues and questions raised by the scholarly study of the Hebrew Bible will be addressed with an assessment of the use of this text in the life of the Church.

Required Texts:

Bird, P. *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997.

W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1975.

Pleins, J. David, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Pleins, J. David, *When the Great Abyss Opened: Classic and Contemporary Readings of Noah's Flood*. New York: Oxford.

The Bible Documents: A Parish Resource. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications.

Tanakh. Philadelphia: Jewish Pub. Soc. of Am., 1985.

Research Papers and Requirements:

General comments: In addition to active involvement in the lecture/discussion sessions of the course, participants are to develop one research paper/project of 12-15 pages typed double space with annotated bibliography attached.

Style: For style and manner of presentation, follow the guidelines for graduate research papers available through the department office.

Consultation: You are *expected* to develop your research topics and analysis in consultation with the instructor. Leave New Testament topics to the appropriate courses.

Research Dimension: The research dimension of each paper should demonstrate that your particular thesis has been considered in light of various scholarly attempts to address your topic. Periodically, pointers toward research will be provided in class, but for specific research needs you are to consult with the instructor to facilitate access to relevant materials. In other words, these papers are *not* to offer simple reflections on scriptural texts but are to develop perspectives in light of a careful consideration of the scholarly literature related to the question explored in the paper. Note that the research papers should arise naturally from the course materials. Save a study of New Testament themes for your

New Testament courses and focus in a systematic and scholarly way on the Hebrew Bible materials in this course.

Library Resources: Our main library has markedly increased its resources on the Hebrew Bible in recent years. Please draw any gaps to the instructor's attention as soon as possible. The Graduate Theological Union library in Berkeley is open to non-GTU students. A phone call to St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park may gain you access to their useful collection.

Thesis: Papers are to argue for a specific view and not simply offer a survey of what others have said. The view defended (the thesis) should be stated concisely in the introduction and should be fleshed out in segments (sub-themes) in the body of the paper.

Paper Types: Text Analysis, Theme Analysis, or Ministry-Related Study:

This paper can be (1) an exegetical study of one particular chapter of the Hebrew Bible or one segment of a biblical text *or* (2) a thematic study of a particular issue raised in the course *or* (3) develop background research for a "project" that is tailored to your work in the parish or other ministries, where the issues raised in the course may have particular relevance.

Papers and projects should work through matters such as human suffering, social justice, gender issues, and liberation struggle by means of a critical, historical, and theological analysis of the passage, theme, or issue under consideration.

The research component is to be stressed. In this course, personal reflection is secondary to grappling seriously with the scholarly discussion of your topic.

The "project" is no less research based or analytic but affords students the opportunity to explore the implications of the scholarly study of the Hebrew Bible for the parish or ministry setting, in particular through the development of educational tools.

In the course of your paper or project, consider what place your text has in the lectionary cycle (if any). Explore the pastoral/ecclesial implications of your analysis.

While the instructor gives great latitude in the choice of passages and topics, it is *essential* that your paper arise naturally out of the subjects raised in the course and must be approved by the instructor.

Annotated Bibliography: A substantive annotated bibliography for your paper is due week 6. In this document, you should state the general thesis of your paper, outline the scope of the discussion, and briefly summarize the views found in the books and articles you have identified to this point. An initial annotated bibliography is due week 6.

Academic Integrity

This course follows all university, college, and department guidelines regarding academic dishonesty and integrity. You must never represent the work of others as your own work. Papers must give full credit for exact quotes and paraphrases of material. Failure to follow these guidelines will result in failure of the course.

Attendance

Given the nature of the courses and the amount of material covered each week, students are expected to attend all class sessions and the mandatory paper session during “finals week.” Exceptions are granted only in extraordinary circumstances.

Course Outline and Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introduction and Lectionary

Question: How can we construct a fruitful dialogue between ancient traditions, modernist skepticism, and postmodern globalized diversity?

- (1) Part of the first session will be used to orient the class to the scope and development of the Canon and the English Bible.
- (2) Observations on the Church's use of Sacred Scripture, particularly its use of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible in the lectionary.
- (3) Translating the Hebrew Bible, especially with regard to matters of inclusive language.

Reading: The Bible Documents, pp. 11-29, 131-95

Related Reading: Pleins, *Social Visions*, chs. 1, 13
Dei Verbum (in *The Bible Documents*)
Introduction to the Lectionary for the Mass (in *The Bible Documents*)

Week 2: The Exile: Prophetic Responses to Israel's Dislocation

Question: How does the Bible speak to the Babylonian Dream and the American Dream?

- (1) The events of the exile and restoration as pivotal to the creation of biblical literature..
- (2) The responses of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah to the exile.
- (3) The pastoral/ecclesial implications of Brueggemann's analysis of the exilic prophets.

Reading: Pleins, *Social Visions*, chs. 6-8

Essential: At least one of Pleins, *Social Visions*, chs. 6-8

Biblical Readings: Jer 1-3, 7-8, 18-20, 26-29, 30-31;
Ezek 1-5, 16-18, 36-37; Isa 40-41, 51-55; Ezra 7-10
Essential: Jer 1-3; Isa 51-55

Week 3: Exodus as Liberation: The Politics of Biblical Narrative
Question: How can we say God is a liberator in a world wrenched by so much political violence and oppression?

- (1) To show that the Hebrew Bible is written with certain literary conventions. To appreciate the meaning of a text, one has to understand its literary modes of expression.
- (2) To discern how theological and philosophic ideas can be derived from a literary encounter with the text.
- (3) Explore the Book of Exodus as a liberation document.

Reading: Pleins, *Social Visions*, ch. 4
Essential: Pleins, *Social Visions*, ch. 4

Biblical Readings: Exodus (all)
Essential: Exodus 1-20

Week 4: God and National Calamity: The Deuteronomistic History

Question: How do we affirm God's active presence when God seems to have disappeared from the global stage?

- (1) To introduce theories of the historical development of the Pentateuch/Torah, in particular Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis of the sources J, E, D and P.
- (2) To detail Noth's theory of the Deuteronomistic History. We will also consider the modifications made by other scholars.
- (3) To consider how Israel's exiles read the Torah and the Deuteronomistic History. We will also be concerned with applications of the text in the modern context.

Reading: Brueggemann and Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (all) and Pleins ch. 3
Essential: Brueggemann and Wolff, *The Vitality*, chs. 1, 3, 5, 6

Biblical Readings: Deut 1-4, 31; Josh 1, 6, 8, 11, 22-24;
Judg 2-3, 10; 1 Sam 3-12; 2 Sam 7-12; 1 Kgs 8, 19; 2 Kgs 5, 17-
21

Essential: Read selections from Deuteronomy and any one book of the
Deuteronomistic History listed above.

Week 5: The Prophetic Voice: Raising Words of Protest
Question: Is protest enough?

- (1) Define prophet. Discuss the ancient Near Eastern background of prophecy and the social location of the prophet.
- (2) Present the prophetic social critique and discuss the concepts of poverty and justice found in the prophetic literature.

Reading: Pleins, *Social Visions*, chs. 6, 9
Essential: Pleins, *Social Visions*, 9

Biblical Readings: Hosea, Amos, Micah, Isaiah 1-12
Essential: Amos or Micah

Week 6: Feminist Hermeneutics and the Hebrew Bible
Question: Can the Bible be liberated from its patriarchy?

- (1) Implications of patriarchal religion for the study of biblical religion: elements of feminist biblical interpretation.
- (2) Discuss the significance of male bias in the composition, transmission, and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.
- (3) Discuss role of women in ancient Israelite culture and history.

Reading: Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*.
Essential: Bird, chs. 4, 6, 12

Biblical Readings: Gen 16, 21; Exod 1-2; Lev 12, 15-16;
Judg 4-5, 11, 19; 2 Sam 13
Essential: Gen 16, 21; Exod 1-2; Judg 5; 2 Sam 13

Due: Annotated bibliography for your papers.

Week 7: Covenant and Law in Ancient Israel: Instituting Justice

Question: In a world struggling over “human rights,” of what relevance are ancient monarchic ideas of duty and justice?

- (1) Treaty forms and law codes in the ancient Near East.
- (2) The Covenant Code (Exodus 21-23) and the forms of biblical law.
- (3) The structure of the book of Deuteronomy and its law code.
- (4) The covenant law-suit in the prophets.

Reading: Pleins, *Social Visions*, chs. 2, 4

Essential: Pleins, *Social Visions*, ch. 2

Biblical Readings: Exodus 19-24; Deut 5-32; Micah 6

Essential: Exodus 19-24

Week 8: Wisdom in Conflict: The Question of Suffering

Question: Are the poor to blame for their suffering?

- (1) Social background of wisdom literature: Egypt, Israel, Mesopotamia.
- (2) Discuss the conflict between the prophets and the wise.
- (3) Introduce liberation theology and Gutiérrez.
- (4) Consider Gutiérrez on Job: contemplative and prophetic views.

Reading: Pleins, *Social Visions*, chs. 11-12

Essential: Pleins, *Social Visions*, ch. 12

Biblical Readings:

Prov 1-3, 10-11, Job (all), Ecclesiastes 1-3 (= Qoheleth 1-3; not Ecclesiasticus!)

Essential: Prov 1-3, Job 1-3, 15-31

Week 9: Bible as History and Myth

Question: In a world dominated by science and reason, of what value are ancient myths?

- (1) The session will consider the Hebrew Bible from the perspective of archaeological and textual discoveries, especially in relation to the creation stories, the flood story, the patriarchal narratives, and the period of the conquest of Canaan.
- (2) We will consider (a) how archaeology should and should not be used to illustrate/illuminate biblical materials; (b) the value of comparing ancient Near Eastern materials with the biblical record; (c) archaeology's contribution to the understanding of early Israelite religion.

Reading: Pleins, *When the Great Abyss Opened* (all).

Essential: Pleins, *When the Great Abyss Opened*, chs. 2, 6, 8, 9.

Biblical Readings: Gen 1-15, 17-24; Exod 15; Josh 1-12;
Judg 1-5

Essential: Gen 1-15; Josh 1-12

Week 10: Tragedy and Hope in Liturgy: Ritual, Reform, and Justice

Question: How should the quest for justice transform our worship?

- (1) Outline the essential features of the major genres in the Psalter.
- (2) Discuss the use of the Psalms in contemporary worship.
- (3) Highlight issues of human suffering and social justice in light of Lamentations
- (4) Consider the relationship between ritual, reform, and justice in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Esther, and Ruth.

Reading: Pleins, *Social Visions*, chs. 5, 10

Essential: Pleins, *Social Visions*, ch. 10, plus any one biblical book in ch. 5

Biblical Reading: Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Esther, Ruth, and Lamentations.

Essential: Lamentations 1
Esther.

Finals Week: The finals week session will be devoted to a discussion of the research papers. Please note that *we will meet as a group* during the same time slot allotted for the normal class sessions. Bring your papers to this session.