

Department of Religious Studies

**RELIGION 350-001/HISTORY 386-001**  
**Religion and History of Ancient Israel**

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Office Hours: TR 9.30-10.30 a.m. or by appointment

Spring 2009  
TR 1.30-2.45 p.m.  
Thompson 117

**Course Description**

This course will investigate the timely topic of the origins of the Israelites in the Late Bronze Age, their history and the development of their religion up to the Babylonian Exile in 587 BCE. It will examine the debates concerning the historical value of the Biblical accounts e.g. the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the united monarchy of David and Solomon. Using extra-Biblical inscriptions, annals, other textual sources, philology and archaeology, ancient Israel will be set in the context of the ancient Near East. Those factors that ultimately contributed to a unique self-understanding, enabling the Israelites to survive the trauma of Exile and create Judaism will be studied.

**Course Goals**

To give students a comprehensive understanding of the origins and development of the people who would create the founding religious tradition of the West.  
To introduce students to the debate between the minimalist and maximalist approaches to the historical value of the Biblical texts.  
To reflect on the move from traditional Canaanite/Israelite polytheism to monotheism.  
To enable students to assess the value of ancient texts and artifacts in reconstructing a plausible representation of Ancient Israel.  
To bring students to a critical understanding of the major issues in the religion and history of Ancient Israel and to reflect on them intellectually.

**Required Texts**

The Bible, Jewish Publication Society Tanakh (Paperback) TNK  
V. H. Matthews, A Brief History of Ancient Israel (Westminster/JKnox, 2002) BHAI  
Studying the Ancient Israelites (Baker Academic, 2007) SAI  
V. H. Matthews & D. C. Benjamin, Old Testament Parallels (3rd ed., Paulist 2006) OTP  
M. S. Smith, The Memoirs of God (Augsburg/Fortress, 2004) TMG

**Highly Recommended**

G. Ahlström, The History of Ancient Palestine (Fortress, 1993)  
R. Albertz, A History of Israelite Religion Vol. 1 (Westminster/JKnox, 1994)  
J. Day, Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan (Sheffield Academic, 2000)

W. G. Dever, What did the Biblical Writers Know (Eerdmans, 2001)  
Who were the Early Israelites (Eerdmans, 2003)  
Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel  
(Eerdmans, 2005)  
K. L. Noll, Canaan and Israel in Antiquity (Sheffield Academic, 2001)

### **Recommended**

T. W. Davis, Shifting Sands: the Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology (Oxford, 2004)  
J. A. Dearman, Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel (Hendrickson, 1992)  
P. J. King & L. E. Stager, Life in Biblical Israel (Westminster/JKnox, 2001)  
N. P. Lemche, Prelude to Israel's Past  
The Israelites in History and Tradition (Westminster/JKnox, 1998)  
W. M. Schniedewind, How the Bible became a Book (Cambridge UP, 2004)

### **Course Requirements**

Class participation - attendance at lectures and thoughtful participation in the investigation and discussion of texts and concepts  
Readings - as assigned and should be read before each class to aid in understanding and participation

Papers and Examinations - 3 papers on aspects of ancient Israelite religion and history  
– each worth 25%  
a final take-home examination – 25%

The class begins at the appointed hour, please be there – tardiness seems an increasing phenomenon at GMU and does not help in the final grading process. Students must present papers and take exams on the dates and at the times in the syllabus. Should a very serious crisis make this difficult, the instructor must be notified as soon as possible. Excuses for illness must be accompanied by a medical certificate. Papers are due at class time on the assigned date - late papers will incur the loss of a grade point per week-day. If the course work is not completed the student will receive a failing grade for the course. IN (Incomplete) must be requested in writing and is given only under extreme circumstances.

### **Evaluation**

Each paper counts as 25% and the final examination as 25%.  
Students will be graded on their ability to gather, utilize and analyze information, to write logically, intelligently and to offer reasoned judgements and conclusions. Writing assessment criteria established by the Religious Studies Faculty will be used.

### **Disability Resources**

Should any student require assistance in this area, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center.

### **Honor Code**

Is in effect.

## Course Outline

- Week 1: Introduction to studying the Ancient Israelites: SAI should be read completely as background: lectures will focus on important issues for the class, also OTP 357-362.
- Week 2: The Ancient Near East at the end of the Late Bronze Age – overview [Annals of Hatshepsut, Amarna Letters and Annals of Rameses III OTP 59-64, 146-154]
- Week 3: Origins and Heroes [BHAI ch. 1. TMH Intro., pp. 7-18, 29-30; Genesis 5, 12-18:15, 21:1-20, 27-33]
- Weeks 4-5: Exodus and Settlement: models of conquest, revolt, infiltration [BHAI ch. 2, TMG pp. 18-21; Exodus 1-20, Joshua 1-5, Judges 1-5 Papyrus Anastasi V&VI, Sargon, the Stele of Merneptah, OTP 89-90, 97-98]
- Weeks 5-6: Early and United Monarchy – History [BHAI ch. 3, TMG pp 21-28, 46-52; I Samuel 4-10:25, 16-20, II Samuel 5-7:17, I Kings 1-5, 12, Tel Dan Inscription, OTP 170-171]
- Weeks 7-8: Early Israelite religion – a subset of Canaanite religion? – [Noll – handout; Memoirs 86-101]
- Week 9: The rise of Iron Age kingdoms – Israel, Judah, Moab etc., nations and national gods [BHAI ch. 4, Mesha Stele, Azitiwada, OTP 172-175, 167-169]
- Week 10: Origin and rise of Israel's national and patronal deity- YHWH [handout – Exodus 3, Deuteronomy 6, 32:1-9, 33:1-5, Habakkuk 3; Memoirs ch. 3]
- Weeks 11-12: Divided Monarchy [BHAI chs. 4-5, TMG 28-38, 52-62 – I Kings 12, 16:21-34, II Kings 9, 18-25, Assyrian annals, Shalmaneser, Tiglath-Pileser Sargon II, Sennacherib; Lachish and Arad ostraca; Neo-Babylonian Chronicles and court documents OTP 176-203]
- Week 13: Israel's sacred times, places and persons [handout and readings from Tanakh]
- Week 14: From polytheism to monotheism [TMG 101- 125, II Kings 23 and prophets]
- Week 15: Exile and Beyond, reactions and responses [BHAI 101-119, TMG 62-85; Isaiah 40-66, Ezekiel 1-12; Cyrus Cylinder OTP 207-209]
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