

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: Hebrew Bible as Literature

Course Number and Section:

JEWISH STUDIES

2720F 550

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

Given its enormous influence on Western culture, it is a wonder how little the Hebrew Bible is understood on its own literary terms. That is, it is a bit surprising how little the common reader of the Hebrew Bible understands its literary art. One reason for this, of course, is that it is primarily understood as a religious book, as it is sacred scripture for Jews (Tanakh) and Christians (Old Testament) and holds a foundational status in Islam as well. But the religious value of the Hebrew Bible has always been connected to its literary value, and if one wants to understand the messages and ideas of the Hebrew Bible one must know its inner literary workings.

One could thus think of this course as an introductory course about certain basics of reading the Hebrew Bible. The major framework for doing this is to explore the Hebrew Bible's literary techniques, to the read the Hebrew Bible as literature. This requires paying attention to its wordplay, diction (and minute use of words), interplay of dialogue and narration, succinct characterization, imagery, tone, genre, and a host of other features that display how the Hebrew Bible is a carefully crafted piece of writing (and thus needs to be read on such terms if it is to be properly understood). The books of the Hebrew Bible are indeed full of interesting and complex characters, mystery and surprise, and violence and love, as they grasp with the most profound questions of life.

Learning Outcomes:

- To gain familiarity with the literary art of the Bible.
- To develop critical skills for reading biblical texts, which includes understanding and appreciating the prominent features of biblical literary art: repetition and key words, type-scenes, reticent narration and characterization, composite artistry, and so on.
- To cultivate an awareness of the importance and benefits of studying the Bible from an academic and critical perspective.
- To develop academic reading, writing, and critical thinking skills.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

There are no required reading purchases for this course.

Methods Of Evaluation:

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Participation		15
Homework		15
First Paper		25
Annotated Bibliography		10
Second Paper		35

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.

Friday, August 8, 2025