Exploring the Bible
Religious Studies 100
Fall 2015

Section 1: Tue/Thur 8:00 AM – 9:15 AM  Office Hour: Tue/Thur 12:30 PM – 1:30 PM
GMCS-309  Arts & Letters 636

Lecturer: Rabbi Scott Meltzer  Phone: 858.752.1329
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Description: The Bibles are the most quoted and least read sets of books in the Western World. When they are read, more often than not it is done through a non-critical lens of faith – unlike any other set of books. In this course we will learn to read the books of the Bibles intimately through the lenses of modern biblical scholarship.

This course is an *historical-critical introduction* to the Bible as literature, as narrative, as philosophy, as history, as revelation and as myth. As literature, the Bible has influenced much of the history and development of Western literary traditions and even morality. As narrative, it has provided the basis of much of Western culture’s stock of stories, influencing and shaping numerous societies. As history and historiography, it has guided leaders and institutions while shaping the understanding of the meaning of history for multitudes over many centuries. As scripture, the Bible has provided religious foundations, structures, imagery, and laws perceived as meaningful to Jews, Christians and Muslims. As a combination of all of these, the Bible has had significant impact upon individuals – religious and non-religious – and societies.

The aim of this course is *academic rather than theological*. The academic study of the Bibles can be seen as complementary rather than antagonistic to faith. One’s personal beliefs regarding “the truth of the Bible” can be affirmed independent of questions of historical or literal accuracy. However, the academic understanding of the biblical text is dependent on historical and literary accuracy. You will be offered the opportunity to consider and discuss the methods, theories and conclusions of biblical scholarship. In this way you may gain a thorough basis for both a well-considered personal understanding of the Bible and for any further, more in-depth study you may undertake.

Goals: In this course we will explore the Jewish and Christian Bibles from historical and literary perspectives. It is impossible to read and understand the more than sixty books of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in 14 weeks. Our goals for this semester are to:

1. Gain a general overview of the themes, ideas and structure of the different sections and books of the Bibles;
2. Understand how the Bibles were composed;
3. Gain an introductory understanding of the ways in which the Bible is read and studied in the secular university and by biblical scholars.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the semester, the successful student in this course will be able to:

1. Identify the sections of the Hebrew Bible;
2. Place the biblical books into the Bible in which they belong;
3. Identify the source for key quotations from the Bibles based on their content and/or meaning;
4. Define a set of roughly 100 key terms, characters and places related to the Bibles and biblical scholarship;
5. Present cogent arguments for the dating of specific biblical books;
6. Apply various forms of biblical analysis to a biblical text.

Readings: The following texts/materials are required for this course and are available for purchase in the University bookstore:

- Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible, 7th or 8th Ed.*

Additional readings will be provided as handouts throughout the semester. All handouts and materials will be provided through Blackboard and/or email approximately one week before they are to be read.

Readings for each lecture are listed on the Reading Assignment sheet. Please read the assignment in the texts BEFORE you come to class. It is necessary to bring a Bible to every class, but not your Harris text. You must use the NRSV for your biblical reading, though you are welcome to bring any translation or edition of the Bible to class. We will discuss and analyze the biblical material in the lecture.

Class Participation: Students are expected to attend lectures having completed the readings assigned for that day and to participate in class discussions. Attendance will be taken through Top Hat.

Quizzes: There will be at least one quiz in class each week, and sometimes two. The quiz must be completed in class, and there will be no makeup quizzes. The quizzes usually will be based on the biblical readings for that day. This course will utilize Top Hat technology for in-class quizzes. Each student is required to register at tophat.com/register/student/. The course code for this course is: 250995. You must be enrolled in Top Hat before class on Tuesday, September 1. Students who miss more than 20% of classes, as recorded in Top Hat, will have their semester grade lowered by one complete letter grade.

Exams: There will be both a Midterm (11/3) and Final Exam (12/15) in this course. The students are responsible for all material covered in class and the readings for both Exams.

Paper: There will be one 3-5 page paper assigned for the class. The instructions for the paper will be posted in Blackboard and explained in class. The paper is due before class on Tuesday, November 24.

Grading: Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Midterm Exam 25%
- Final Exam 35%
- Paper 20%
- In Class Quizzes 10%
- Class Participation/Attendance 10%
You will be assigned a letter grade for this course according to the following schedule:

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You will be provided with all of the materials for the exams. You need bring only a pen. There will be no make-up exams or paper extensions. Should you have a family or medical emergency, please notify me as soon as possible.

**General Education: Communication and Critical Thinking:** This course is one of three courses that you will take in the General Education area of **Communication and Critical Thinking.** Upon completing this area of our General Education program, you will be able to: 1) craft well-reasoned arguments for specific audiences; 2) analyze a variety of texts commonly encountered in the academic setting; 3) situate discourse within social, generic, cultural, and historic contexts; and 4) assess the relative strengths of arguments and supporting evidence.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

**Note Well:** This course is not a religiously oriented “Bible Study.” It is not appropriate to use this class as a forum for debating your own personal ideas about religion, the Bible, God, heaven or hell. There are appropriate times and places for such discussion, REL S 100 is not one of them. The Bible provokes strong feelings from many people; nevertheless, we will set personal feelings aside in the interest of academic exploration and discovery.

**Final Note:** There may well be changes to this Syllabus and the Schedule of Readings during the semester. All changes will be announced in class, emailed to students and posted on Blackboard.

*Syllabus version 19a, revised August 23, 2015.*