

The Hebrew Bible as Literature
REL 3213 / JST 3930 / LIT 3374; Spring 2025
Tu 8-9 (3:00-4:55) / Th 9 (4:05-4:55), AND 0019

Professor: Robert Kawashima

office hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:30; Thursday 1:30-2:30; or by appointment

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Department of Religion: 107 Anderson

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the literary study of the Hebrew Bible within its ancient Near Eastern context. It contains some of the great literary works to come down to us from antiquity, on par with the Homeric epics. And biblical narrative constitutes the oldest prose literature that we know of at present. Our primary focus will be on a wide and varied reading of biblical narrative — along with a bit of poetry — but students will also be introduced to the scholarly study of the Bible from a literary perspective. More generally, this course will introduce students to the scholarly, interdisciplinary study of literature. That is, if the solutions and interpretations proposed will be specific to the Bible, the problems and ideas raised will have relevance for the study of literature in general.

Required Texts:

SBL Study Bible — or other approved translation

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, second edition

Richard Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* – RECOMMENDED ONLY

Secondary readings, course materials, and other information will be made available through Canvas.

Course Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory – see UF Course Policies below

Participation — 10%

You should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned primary and secondary readings, which you will have read beforehand.

2 Writing Exercises (3 pages; ~1000 words) — 30%

These written exercises will give you an opportunity to construct brief interpretations of biblical passages utilizing the concepts and methods covered in class.

2 Exams — 60%

There will be two in-class, closed-book exams, each consisting of five sections: 1) short answers; 2) definitions of crucial concepts; 3-5) three short interpretive exercises in response to a primary text and a prompt.

Make-up exams and late papers must be approved by instructor beforehand, or justified afterward by providing appropriate documentation (medical, etc.).

Grade scale:

87–89 = B+ 77–79 = C+ 67–69 = D+ below 60 = E
93–100 = A 83–86 = B 73–76 = C 63–66 = D
90–92 = A- 80–82 = B- 70–72 = C- 60–62 = D

A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit. Courses intended to satisfy the general education requirement cannot be taken S-U.

Here is UF's policy for assigning grade points: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Schedule:

Week 1

- 1/14 **Introduction:** syllabus; aims of course; historical background
1/16 **Adam and Eve:** Genesis 1-3; Kawashima "Sources and Redaction," 47-61

Week 2

- 1/21 class cancelled
1/23 **The Literary Approach:** Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, ch. 1

Week 3

- 1/28 **Cain and Abel; the Giants and the Tower:** Genesis 4-11; Kawashima, "Violence and the City"; Kawashima, "Homo Faber in J's Primeval History"
1/30 **Sodom and Gomorrah:** Genesis 12-24; Alter, "Sodom as Nexus"; Kawashima, "Literary Analysis," 89-104

Week 4

- 2/4 **How to Read Biblical Narrative I:** Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, chs. 3-4
2/6 **The Binding of Isaac:** Genesis 22; Homer, *Odyssey*, excerpt; Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar"; Kawashima, "Biblical Narrative and the Birth of Prose Literature"

Week 5

- 2/11 **How to Read Biblical Narrative II:** Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, chs. 5-6
2/13 **Jacob and Esau:** Genesis 25-27; Alter, "Literature"

Week 6

- 2/18 **Jacob and Laban:** Genesis 28-36; Hendel, "Cultural Memory"
2/20 **Joseph and his Brothers:** Genesis 37-50; Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, ch. 8

Week 7

- 2/25 **Moses and Pharaoh:** Exodus 1-13
2/27 **EXAM 1** (1/14-2/27)

Week 8

- 3/4 **From Egypt to Sinai:** Exodus 14-24; Pardes, "Imagining the Birth of a Nation"
3/6 class cancelled for SBL-SE; **WRITTEN EXERCISE 1 due**

Week 9

3/11 **Aaron and the Gold Calf:** Exodus 32-34; 1 Kings 11-12; Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, ch. 3;

3/13 **In the Wilderness:** Numbers 11-17; Pardes, "The Spies in the Land of the Giants"

Week 10

3/18 Spring Break

3/20 Spring Break

3/25 **Jephthah and his Daughter:** Judges 1-12; Alter, "Allusion and Literary Expression"

3/27 **The Levite and his Concubine:** Judges 13-21

4/1 **The Ark and the Philistines:** 1 Samuel 1-7

4/3 **David and Saul:** 1 Samuel 8-23; Alter, "Imagining History in the Bible"

4/8 **David and Abigail:** 1 Samuel 24-31; 2 Samuel 1-10; Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, excerpts

4/10 **David and Bathsheba:** 2 Samuel 11-24; 1 Kings 1-2

4/15 **Biblical "Period Pieces":** Jonah; Esther; Funkenstein, "Biblical and Postbiblical Perceptions of History"; **WRITTEN EXERCISE 2 due**

4/17 **Biblical "Period Pieces":** Esther; Ruth; Pardes, "The Book of Ruth: Idyllic Revisionism"

4/22 **EXAM 2 (3/9-4/15)**

UF COURSE POLICIES

Attendance:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Students Requiring Accommodations:

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://disability.ufl.edu>) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to me when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at

<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/> Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

University Honesty Policy: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Software Use: All faculty, staff, and students at the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against university policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy: There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments: For more information, please see: <http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html>

Gen Ed (H): Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

This class meets Gen Ed Designations H & N. By the end of this course students will be expected to gain mastery of the following topics and issues:

- Identify, describe, and explain the theories and methods used in the discipline of literary criticism and interpretation. What, in particular, are the challenges facing the study of ancient texts produced by foreign cultures in foreign languages.
- Identify, describe, and explain the theory and method comparative religion to enhance the study of different scriptural traditions. What commonalities do all religious traditions seem to share? What differences do these commonalities

sometimes hide?

- Identify and analyze the literary representation of religious concepts and rituals using those disciplines employed in the study of religion, for example, the study of myth and cultural anthropology.
- Develop and present their own interpretations of ancient texts, both orally in class discussion and in writing through essays and exams.