

**Comparative Study (Senior Seminar)**  
REL 4933, Fall 2025  
MWF 8 (3:00-3:50), MAT 0051

**Professor:** Dr. Robert Kawashima  
**office hours:**  
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**Department of Religion:** 107 Anderson

Course Description:

The comparative method, practiced in varying forms in a number of disciplines (biology, linguistics, literature, etc.) compares, say, species, languages, and texts, in an attempt to account for both what unites as well as differentiates these objects of study. Generally speaking, they either arise from an historical relation. According to comparative grammar, for example, the Romance languages all descend historically from Latin. Or they arise from certain universal properties intrinsic to the objects under consideration. According to Chomsky, for example, all natural human languages derive formally (not historically) from an innate mental faculty he calls “universal grammar,” so that even wholly unrelated languages still share a core of crucial grammatical features. Comparative religion, in the same way, might be said to identify and account for the similarities and differences that exist between religions. What is religion? And what similarities, both historical and formal in origin, exist between religions?

In this seminar, we will approach these problems through the lens of Foucault’s project, “the archaeology of knowledge.” We will conceptualize and analyze religions as discourses, realized in various beliefs, rituals, institutions, and so forth. We will specifically compare the religious traditions of what might be thought of, broadly speaking, as the ancient Mediterranean world: Mesopotamia, Canaan (including Israel), and Greece. Given the nature of our primary evidence, we will need to confront certain theoretical issues involved in the critical analysis and interpretation of ancient literature. (Thus, we will also read a selection of secondary texts addressing these problems of method.) Our comparative analyses will not only trace religious evolution through history, but chart religious variation across geography as well. In particular, we will uncover two “epistemic breaks” or “ruptures.” The first underlies what is generally (and unsatisfactorily) known as the “monotheistic revolution” of ancient Israel — which led, as we will see, to homologous developments in other religious traditions as well. The second underlies the appearance of Jewish apocalypticism, out of which Christianity itself would eventually emerge. By thus using the comparative method, in conjunction with critical analytical and interpretive tools, we will seek to gain some sense of historical and theoretical perspective within the diversity of ancient religious traditions.

Required Texts:

*HarperCollins Study Bible* — or other approved translation

Michael David Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*

Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*

Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West

**additional** secondary readings, course materials, and information will be made available through  
**Canvas** at e-Learning

### 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 Requirements:

#### **Attendance is mandatory**

Participation — 10%

2 Exams — 45%

2 Essays (6 pages) — 45%

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-	

### Schedule:

#### Week 1

8/22 **Introduction:** syllabus; general background

#### Week 2

8/25 **Creation Myth:** Dalley, “Epic of Creation,” pp. 233-64

8/27 **Creation “History”:** Genesis 1-3; Kawashima, “Introduction”

8/29 **Creation “History”:** Genesis 1-3

#### Week 3

9/1 **Labor Day (no class)**

9/3 **Myth versus History:** Eliade, “Sacred Time and Myths”

9/5 **The Enchanted Cosmos:** Hesiod, *Theogony*; Dalley, “Epic of Creation”; Frymer-Kensky, “The Pantheon”

#### Week 4

9/8 **The Disenchanted World:** Genesis 1-11; Psalms 19 and 29; Frymer-Kensky, “Israel and the Master of the Universe”

9/10 **Divinity:** Coogan, “Epic of Baal”; Genesis 1; Exodus 19, 32-33; Deuteronomy 4; 1 Kings 19; Vernant, “Mortals and Immortals: The Body of the Divine”; Bottéro, “Religious Representations,” 44-58

9/12 **Nature:** “Homeric Hymn to Demeter”; Dalley, “Descent of Ishtar”; Coogan, “Baal”; Genesis 1-3, 6-9; Bottéro, “Religious Representations,” 77-95

#### Week 5

- 9/15 **Culture and Cosmic Balance:** Hesiod *Theogony*, 19-21; *Works and Days*, 38-40; Genesis 2-11; Vernant "The Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod"
- 9/17 **Discussion:** TBA
- 9/19 **Flood Myth:** Dalley, "Atrahasis"

#### Week 6

- 9/22 **Flood "History":** Genesis 6-9
- 9/24 **Sons of Adam versus Sons of God:** Genesis 6:1-4, 11:1-9
- 9/26 **Discussion:** TBA

#### Week 7

- 9/29 **The Human Condition:** Dalley, "Gilgamesh"; "Atrahasis"
- 10/1 **The Human Condition:** Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 5-11, 27-34; Kawashima, "Covenant and Contingence"
- 10/3 **Discussion:** TBA

#### Week 8

- 10/6 **The Hero:** *Iliad* 1, 9; Coogan, "Aqhat" and "Kirta"; Detienne, "The Memory of the Poet" ; **PAPER 1 due**
- 10/8 **The Patriarch:** Genesis 12-50; Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar"
- 10/10 **Discussion:** TBA

#### Week 9

- 10/13 **EXAM 1** (8/25 to 10/10)
- 10/15 **Genealogy of the Self:** *Odyssey* 19-20; Genesis 22; 1 Samuel 24; 2 Samuel 11-12; Aeneid 2; Vernant, "Some Aspects of Personal Identity in Greek Religion"
- 10/17 **Homecoming (no class)**

#### Week 10

- 10/20 **Reading Day (no class)**
- 10/22 **Death:** *Odyssey* 11; *Aeneid* 6; 1 Samuel 28; Dalley, "Nergal and Ereshkigal"; Vernant, "Three Ideologies of Death"
- 10/24 **Divine Abode:** Deuteronomy 33; Judges 5; Habakkuk 3; Psalm 68; Exodus 19; Deuteronomy 4; 1 Kings 8, 19

#### Week 11

- 10/27 **Sacred Space:** Kawashima, "Priestly Tent of Meeting"  
Exodus 35-40; Leviticus 10; Numbers 1-3, 9:15-23;  
Exodus 33:6-11; Numbers 11:16-17, 12:4-10; Deuteronomy 31:14-15;  
Genesis 28, 35; 2 Samuel 24
- 10/29 **Temple:** Exodus 35-40; 1 Kings 6-8
- 10/31 **Divine Presence:** Exodus 3, 24-25, 32-33; 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2; Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Averted Gaze"

#### Week 12

- 11/3 **Sacred Time:** Genesis 1; Exodus 12, 23:10-17, 31:12-17, 34:18-24; Leviticus 23; Numbers

- 28-29; Deuteronomy 16  
 11/5 **Discussion:** TBA  
 11/7 **Sacrifice:** review Hesiod and “Atrahasis”; Detienne, “Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice”

#### Week 13

- 11/10 **Sacrifice:** Genesis 4, 6-9, 22; Exodus 12-13; Leviticus 1-10, 16; Deuteronomy 12, 16, 21  
 11/12 **Oracles and Prophecy:** Exodus 19-20, 24; 1 Kings 18; Amos 4-5  
 Exodus 28:15-30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 14:36-42, 28:3-20;  
 11/14 **From Autochthon to Alien:** Genesis 11-23, 31-35, 50; Exodus 1-12; Deuteronomy 12, 26;  
 Joshua 12-21; Aeneid 12

#### Week 14

- 11/17 **History:** Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 40-42; “KingList” and “Hammurabi Law Code”;  
 Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 1-10; 2 Samuel 5, 7; Psalm 2  
 11/19 **Apocalypticism (Space):** “The Astronomical Book” (1 Enoch 72-82); Auerbach,  
 “Figura,” 49-60  
 11/21 **Reading Day (no class); PAPER 2 due**

#### Week 15

- 11/24-28 **Thanksgiving (no class)**

#### Week 16

- 12/1 **Apocalypticism (Time):** Leviticus 25; “Jubilees,” 1-6, 50; Mark 13-14; Auerbach, “Figura”  
 12/3 **EXAM 2** (10/15 to 12/1)

### 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>.

#### Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/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 of 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>

#### Course Goals and Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe the theory and method of comparative religion. What commonalities do all religious traditions seem to share? What differences do these commonalities sometimes hide?
- Identify and describe 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.
- Analyze and interpret various ancient religious documents.