

The Bible in Translation: The Book of Exodus

NELC 1200-401; JWST 1200-401; RELS 1200-401

The University of Pennsylvania

Spring 2023

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Class Meetings: Wednesdays 5:15–8:14pm

Office Hours: TBD

Description of Course and Procedures

The book of Exodus has gripped the imagination of readers across millennia — how could it not? Its narrative is both familiar and foreign, bound up in the saga of a people whose writings are now deemed sacred by Jewish and Christian communities alike. As readers we are thrown into ancient Egypt, confronted with the oppression of a people called the “Israelites.” We eagerly follow their harrowing story, casting our hopes onto the leader named Moses, the mouthpiece of God himself. If burning bushes, raining frogs, parting waters, and magical staffs are of no interest to the reader, the book offers a world populated with vibrant characters: Pharaoh, Moses, Aaron, Jethro, Zipporah, and God himself. Through them, we experience the journey out of Egypt, chasing the pillars of smoke and fire into the wilderness, with the salt of the Red Sea still stuck to our clothes. On the other side of the water, we come to the foot of Mount Sinai to encounter the mysterious thundering presence of God himself. Too holy to approach, he utters forth commands and laws to Moses that now govern life in the wilderness and the Promised land on the horizon.

Class time will consist of a seminar-style process of slowly and carefully working through the book, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. We will raise questions, consider new lines of interpretation, and open the floor for dialogue. Where many courses expect mastery of knowledge and facts, this course will privilege the reading process, the experience of class meetings, and the exchange of thoughts, impressions, observations, and hypotheses. To be sure, the instructor will give lecture-like presentations throughout the semester, and these moments will introduce crucial scholarly discourses about the contents of this book. However, the heart and soul of class meetings will involve time spent together in the text. As such, *the only external preparation for sessions will involve reading the selection of text once ahead of time.*

Required Textbooks:

- Hebrew Bible (Old Testament); pick one:
 - NJPS — *The Jewish Study Bible* (eds. A. Berlin and M. Brettler). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- NJPS — *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures. The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985, 1999.
- NRSV — *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (ed. M. D. Coogan). New York: Oxford University Press, 3d augmented ed., 2007.
- NRSV—*The Harper Collins Study Bible: Fully Revised & Updated* (Ed. H. Attridge, et al.) New York: Harper One, 2006.
- Lexham English Bible (LEB) — Online

Grading Scale:

A	90–100%	C–	67–69.99%
A–	87–89.99%	D+	63–66.99%
B+	83–86.99%	D	60–62.99%
B	80–82.99%	D–	57–59.99%
B–	77–79.99%	E	53–56.99%
C+	73–76.99%	F	below 53%
C	70–72.99%		

Components of Evaluation:

Attendance/Participation	(50%)
Guided Research Paper	(30%)
Presentation of Paper	(20%)

Attendance/Participation (50%): If you show up to each class meeting, you will receive extra credit for this grading component. This class only meets once a week, and because of this, the instructor will only permit two absences before marking down the participation score. Give yourself buffer space for emergencies that will require you to miss class!

Guided Research Paper (30%): By the end of the term, the student will turn in an 8-page paper that is defined in some way, shape, or form by the materials in the book of Exodus. The paper is to be developed in consultation with the instructor, who will help shape and direct the topic/thesis. This advising will include suggestions for bibliography. At some point in the course, the class will decide together on dates for submitting rough drafts and outlines for peer review.

Presentation of Paper (20%): Once papers have been finalized, there will be presentations of the papers to the rest of the class at the end of the term.

Class Dates:

January 11th – NO CLASS, Go to Monday classes

January 18th

January 25th

(Jan 24th – Course Selection Period Ends)

February 1st

February 8th

February 15th

February 22nd

(Feb 20th – Drop Period Ends)

March 1st

March 8th – NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

March 15th

(March 17th – Grade Type Change Deadline)

March 22nd

(March 27th – Last Day to Withdraw from Course)

March 29th

April 5th – NO CLASS, PASSOVER

April 12th

April 19th

April 26th — Final Presentations