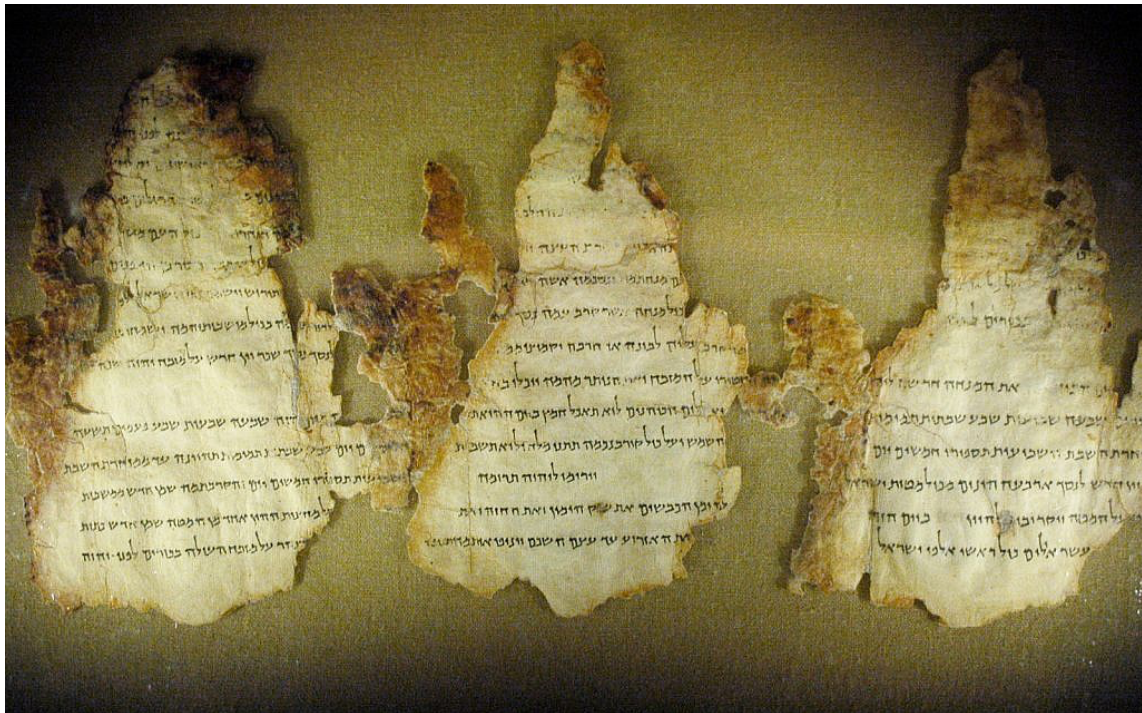


The Making of Scripture: From Revelation to Canon

NELC 1400, JWST 1400, RELS 1400

Fall 2023

Tentative Syllabus



Prof. Simcha Gross

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Tues/Thurs 12-1:30 PM

Location: TBD

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:30-12:30 (842 Williams Hall)

Course Description:

What is the collection of texts variously known as the Hebrew Bible, TaNaKh, or Old Testament, and how did it come into being? This question is rarely asked; instead, the nature of this collection is typically encapsulated in the modern era by the notion of “Canon,” an authoritative list of texts whose form is fixed and whose use and interpretation is standardized by particular communities. Ancient Jews and Christians however, held a range of vastly different notions about sacred texts and their nature, function, and meaning for their communities. Different communities venerated different works, adopted different understandings of their sacredness, and embraced different approaches for deriving meaning from them. These texts were enshrined in changing formats, such that notions like “book,” “library,” and “author” are often anachronistic and distort the ways ancient peoples concretized and conceptualized their sacred texts. This course explores how ancient communities

conceptualized and used sacred texts, revealing a fascinating world of shifting ideas and technologies that produced “the Bible,” and shaped and continue to shape modern religious communities today.

Course Structure:

Each class will begin with a brief overview and contextualization by the instructor. The class itself will be discussion based, focused predominately on primary sources that we prepare before class and analyze together in person (over Zoom).

Readings and Required Books:

All readings will be available on Canvas, besides for biblical texts, for which you should use the “Jewish Study Bible” (ISBN: 978-0199978465 – look for the Second Edition, though First Edition is fine as well) available on Amazon and other booksellers.

Additional Resource: Check out the new podcast, “Beyond Canon,” available on Spotify and other platforms. It seems to explore some of the issues we address in class, albeit mainly from the perspective of early Christian literature.

Prerequisites

There are **no** prerequisites for the course. You are not expected to have broad biblical literacy at the outset of the class.

Grading:

The course grade consists of four equal components:

1. Participation (25%): Given that this is a discussion-based course, with textual analysis at its core, participation is crucial to staying abreast of the material and maximizing what the course has to offer. Participation includes not only attendance, but active participation and clear demonstration of having prepared the readings in advance.
2. Response Papers (25%): There are five 400-word response papers interspersed throughout the course. The goal of these responses papers is to encourage you to synthesize the prior few weeks of discussions. The prompt for each is a category (book, scribe, author, library, interpretation) that we will have spent the prior classes discussing at some length. These responses are an opportunity for the instructor to both follow the participation and progress of students, and to engage more deeply with the particular interests of each individual student. There is an additional sixth assignment for due on September 8th, detailed in the syllabus.
3. Book Report (10%) – Modern Rewritten Scripture: Read Stefan Heym’s *The King David Report* and write a 1000-word report. In what ways might we think of this work as a modern example of rewritten bible? What methods does Heym use, and are these similar or different from the methods used in the sources we have discussed throughout the semester?
4. Creative Project (20%) – Rewritten Scripture: As we will explore throughout the semester, the bible’s earliest readers employed a range of strategies not only to understand the biblical text, but to imagine and rewrite it anew. This project is intended for you to create your own “rewritten scripture” based on a story from Genesis or Exodus. As this is a creative project, you are free to create almost anything, including, but not limited to: a short film, a podcast, a website, a screenplay, a sculpture, and more. Along with the project itself, please include a two page creator’s statement, in which you explain what you are trying to accomplish, the sources that animated your project and how they are

used/interpreted in your piece, your creative process, and any other information that sheds light on what you have created. There are no strict guidelines for this statement, as each creative piece will require something different. It is your job to write thoughtfully about your project and to provide the necessary background and analysis for the instructor to understand and appreciate your piece. You will be graded based on the creativity of the concept, execution, meaningful engagement with the biblical text, and the quality of the Creator's Statement.

5. Final Exam (20%): The final exam will cover the major themes of the semester. The questions will ask you to think critically about the topics of the course and draw on relevant primary and secondary sources.

Covid-19

We are living in uncertain and unprecedented times, and may be dealing with a range of issues that interfere with our ability to succeed in this class over the course of the semester. I will regularly check in with students on their wellbeing and in order to optimize the structure of the course for our individual needs. Students should feel free to contact the instructor with any issues or concerns related to the class or the students' academic life in general, and I will do my best to help accommodate you and sort out the issues at hand.

Schedule

1. Introduction: What is the Bible

2. Biblical Stories

Primary Source:

Genesis 1-12

Either read Joel Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 13-33 or watch Baden's lecture here:

<https://youtu.be/NIXfDyoYK8Q>.

Q. What is the purpose of the stories in Genesis? Why were they told, what were they intended to communicate? Pay special attention to the story (or is it stories...) of creation and the flood; do you sense seams in the text, gaps or internal inconsistencies? Why might that be the case?

3. The Priestly Narrative – From Creation to Wilderness Sanctuary

Read Gen 1-2:4a, 6-9, Exod 6, Exod 19:1, 24:15b-18, 25:1-9, and read the Introduction to Liane Feldman's *The Biblical Priestly Narrative*.

Assignment due next day at Midnight: In 500 words, based on the biblical readings and Dr. Feldman's introduction, please respond to the following questions: Is there a thread that runs through all of these passages? What is the version of Israelite history it tells? Why does it unfold the way it does? What is the purpose of the sanctuary within the narrative?

4. What is Biblical 'Law'

Primary Source:

Exodus 18-24

Bruce Wells, "What Is Biblical Law? A Look at Pentateuchal Rules and Near Eastern Practice."

Assignment 1, due by Midnight Sept 12th: Book

5. Deuteronomy – Supplementing or Supplanting

Primary Source:

Deuteronomy 1-11

Listen to the podcast episode of New Testament Review dedicated to Hindy Najman's, *Seconding Sinai* (available here: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/34-hindy-najman-seconding-sinai/id1377442882?i=1000483158197>). Alternatively, read Hindy Najman's, *Seconding Sinai*, 1-40.

Q: What is the relationship of Deuteronomy to the other stories and laws in the Pentateuch? Is Deuteronomy supplementing those other sources, or supplanting them? What work does Mosaic authorship do in the text?

6. No Class (Yom Kippur)

7. Josiah's Reforms

Josiah's Reform and Textual Legitimation

2 Kings 22-23

Read William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 91-117, and skim Nadav Naaman, "The 'Discovered Book' and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform."

Assignment 2 due by September 22nd at Midnight: In 500 words, answer two questions. First, did Josiah/his priests actually "discover" a text? Second, how does Schniedewind contextualize the "discovery" of the text?

8. Prophets and Prophecy: Writing and Orality

Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 1-3; Hosea 1-2.

Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, 173-204.

Q: What is the source of a prophet's authority? From whence do their instructions derive? How is prophecy delivered, how is it heard, how is it preserved?

9. No Class (Sukkot)

10. The Law of Moses: Ezra the Scribe, Nehemiah, and the Persian Period

Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah 8

Michael Satlow, *How the Bible Became Holy*, 69-84 (for intrepid students, 85-100).

Q. What is the Law of Moses in the works of Ezra and Nehemiah? How does it relate to the works we now call the Pentateuch? What are scholarly theories about the role of the Achaemenid (Persian) Empire in the elevation of the Law of Moses?

Assignment 3, due by Midnight Oct. 3rd: Scribe

11. Are There Biblical Authors? Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Psalms

Proverbs 1, Ecclesiastes 1, and Read the first verse (ie. Superscription) of Psalms 40-50.

Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination*, 51-85.

Q: What anchors the ideas of these works? To what authority do they appeal and how? What is the author function in these texts?

12. “Parabiblical Literature?”: 1 Enoch: Book of the Watchers

Genesis 6, 1 Enoch 1-20, Epistle of Jude 1:14-15.

Sidnie Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 1-15.

Q: What is the relationship of this work to Genesis? How does this text authorize itself? Does it reflect a notion of scripture? Where do texts fall within its epistemology?

Assignment 4, due by Midnight October 11th: Author

13. Rewritten Scripture: Interpretation or Independent?

Molly Zahn, “Rewritten Scripture.”

James Kugel, “Four Assumptions.”

[More reading for this class than usual, but no primary texts!]

Q: What is the scholarly category of “Rewritten Scripture”? What does it suggest about notions of scripture and authoritative texts? How does James Kugel understand the logic undergirding these texts, and what alternative explanations are available? Apply these different approaches to the book of Jubilees.

We will discuss the category of Rewritten Pentateuch, though you do not have to read any in advance.

14. No Class (Fall Break)

Book Report, due by Midnight October 18th

15. Genesis Reimagined?

Jubilees, Genesis Apocryphon, Testaments of the Patriarchs

Sidnie Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 60-82.

Q: What is the relationship of these works to Genesis?

16. Deuteronomy Reimagined?

Temple Scroll

Sidnie Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 84-102.

Q: What is the relationship of this work to Deuteronomy? How does the text authorize itself?

17. Ancestors and Exemplars

Ben Sira 40-50

Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, 86-113.

18. Revelatory Interpretation?

Pesher Habbakuk, Pesher Hosea

Hindy Najman, "Early Nonrabbinic Interpretation."

Q: Is Pesher "commentary?" How does it conceptualize the relationship of interpreter to prophet?
Can anyone interpret scripture in this way?

19. The Septuagint, a Second Revelation?

Letter of Aristeas

Timothy Lim, *Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 74-93.

[Suggested Reading: Steve Johnstone, "A New History of Libraries and Books in the Hellenistic Period."]

20. Hellenistic Jewish Authors

Ezekiel the Tragedian, Joseph and Asenath

Tim Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic: Adventures in Greek Postclassicism*, 211-227 (Chapter 13).

21. Philo of Alexandria and Allegorical Interpretation

Philo, "Migration of Abraham"

Adam Kamesar, "Biblical Interpretation in Philo," 65-91.

22. The First List(s) of Books

Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book 1; 4th Ezra 14.

Timothy Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 35-53.

23. Jesus: Fulfilling and Interpreting Scripture

Matthew 5-7

Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, chapter 1

24. The New Perspective on Paul

Galatians 4, 21-31.

Assignment 5: Due next day by Midnight: Library

25. No Class (Thanksgiving)

26. The Development of Christological Readings

The Epistle of Barnabas, Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, Didache

27. The Rabbis: Midrash

Selections from early Rabbinic Midrash

Goodman, "Sacred Scripture and 'Defiling the Hands'," *Judaism in the Roman World*, 69-78.

Timothy Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 178-188.

28 Aggadic Midrash

Selections from Genesis Rabbah and Pirke DeRabbi Eliezer

David Stern, "Midrash and Midrashic Interpretation," *JSB* pp. 1863-1875

29. Canonical Assumptions

Song of Songs

Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, 1-44.

Creative Project Presentations

Assignment 6, Due next day at Midnight: Interpretation

Creative Project Submission due last day of finals week.

