

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE: THE OLD TESTAMENT

****Note:** This is a prospectus; not a full syllabus.

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Course IDs: JWST 0303, NELC 0300, RELS 0301

Course Description: For a purportedly boring book filled with old fashioned ideas, the Hebrew Bible sure spends a lot of time talking about political intrigue, murder, incest, magic, and ghosts. When we set the Bible against the backdrop of the world that produced it, we will find stories that could fill any number of HBO series explicit enough to make most modern audiences blush. Have you heard the one about the last princess from a murdered royal family taking over Jerusalem? What about when she was assassinated by a boy king from nowhere and his band of warrior priests? Did you know about the prophet Elisha's uncanny ability to summon bears? David's army of undead kings? Daniel's tenure as the Sorcerer Supreme? This course will challenge students to take a fresh look at some of the Hebrew Bible's familiar passages and to engage with some of its most overlooked ones. We will do this by setting the Hebrew Bible's internal narrative against what we know of the external events that shaped it. We will pivot from this critical engagement of the Hebrew Bible to questions about its reception, how faith communities relate to their sacred writings, and how cultural and philosophical assumptions shape our reading of a text. No religious background is assumed and all questions are fair game.

Learning Objectives:

1. Develop basic familiarity with the contents and contexts of the literature in the Hebrew Bible.
2. Recognize the relationship between the Bible's content (internal history) and the sociocultural contexts (external history) that shaped it.
3. Engage critical approaches to the Hebrew Bible in order to frame academic inquiries into the biblical text.
4. Describe the dynamic development of the Hebrew Bible as both literature and scripture.
5. Acquire the methods of research writing in order to better consume and produce research-oriented media.
6. Construct and present an original argument about a topic, event, person, group, or passage from the Hebrew Bible in written or audio/visual form.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation (15%) – This includes **course readings**. As many as 6 short biblical passages (but usually less) and up to 48 pages of secondary reading (but usually less) will be assigned every week.
2. Quizzes (15%) – 5 quizzes consisting of multiple choice and short answer questions
3. Midterm (20%) – In-class essay(s).
4. Research Fundamentals (20%) - 6 short writing exercises (2 sentences to 3 paragraphs) all graded based on completeness.
5. Final Project (30%) - 15-20 minute podcast or 10-15 minute video essay, done individually or in a group.