

THEO 5919/RELS 5219 Hebrew Bible in Contexts

希伯來聖經的處境

Tuesday evenings: 19:00 – 21:15

Lecturer: Prof. Nancy Tan

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Course Overview

The Bible is held as its underlying foundation to the Christian faith. And, the Hebrew Bible, or commonly known as the Christian Old Testament, is the forerunner of the New Testament. This course aims at introducing students to the Hebrew Bible in its literary, socio-political and religio-cultural contexts. The literary setting and historical background of the biblical and historical world of the texts will be surveyed and explored to enhance students' understanding of the texts.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge Outcomes

- (1) Describe
 - a. what the study of Hebrew Bible constitutes.
 - b. with the help of resources, the general background and contexts of the biblical books.
- (2) Explain
 - a. the necessity of understanding contexts when studying the Hebrew Bible.
 - b. the literary, socio-political and religio-cultural contexts of a specified period in biblical history.
 - c. the necessity and limitations in biblical scholarship for reconstructing contexts.
- (3) Distinguish
 - a. what is “historical Israel” and “biblical Israel”.
 - b. the different contexts for interpreting scriptures.
- (4) Recite the main historical epochs of biblical Israel.
- (5) Carry out the process of studying and researching the contexts of a given text using quality resources.
- (6) Sketch an interpretation of a given text integrating a current context to a passage in the Hebrew Bible.
- (7) Evaluate on those information that were presented differently in church.
- (8) Reflect on the implications of academic study and its impact on faith-based communities.

Attitude Outcomes:

- (1) Appreciate the diverse interpretations of scriptures throughout history and their historical and contextual developments.
- (2) Respect for the historical development of Old Testament scholarship in its entirety and its relevance to current contexts – within the communities of faith and also within the academia.
- (3) Develop keen insights to read texts meaningfully and responsibly – for the sake of peace and justice, understanding and acceptance to all humanity and living creatures of God's creation.

There are many views and opinions of interpretations where this subject is concerned. The fact that the Hebrew Bible is scripture rather than merely classics for many, it is unavoidable for many to be confronted by views that are counter to one's own, just as there are many denominations within Christianity. It is necessary to keep an open and listening mind and heart to learn, appreciate and respect the various views and their rationale.

List of Topics

Topic	Contents
Introduction to Hebrew Bible in Contexts	This chapter gives an orientation to (1) what constitutes the Hebrew Bible and implications of 'canon'; (2) the study of the Hebrew Bible in its historical development – in terms of areas covered in contents and chronology.
Archaeology of the Biblical World	This chapter introduces the historical development and impact of archaeology to the study of the Hebrew Bible. It draws attention to the inevitable practice of interpretation and reconstructions.
'Biblical Israel' versus 'Historical Israel'	This chapter explains the loaded implications in theology and approaches to the subject of these two terminologies.
Introduction to the Pentateuch	This chapter introduces what is J, E, D and P and its Developments. It will deal with concepts of "Myths", "Legends" and "Truth claims" and religions. It also explains what is Historical criticism as a method to interpreting the Hebrew Bible.
Creation Stories	This chapter introduces Creation stories in the ancient Near Eastern Contexts. Why are creation stories significant for a civilization?
Torah and the Law	This chapter describes the significance of 'Law' and law codes in the ancient Near East and what it may mean in the Pentateuch. It will also explain what 'Torah' means for the people at different eras and places.
Prophets and Prophetic texts	This chapter explains what 'prophets' mean in the ancient Near East, the biblical world and its intended purpose. It will consider the texts concerning the return of the tribes and the historical Israel at different epochs. It will also look into the historical significance of the 'major' and 'minor' prophetic books.
The Exile	This is probably the most important topic in the Hebrew Bible as much of the discourse, promise and punishment,

	and even the purposes of many narratives seem to hang on this event. This chapter examines what exile means to the ancient Near East, the implications and how and why the importance of this idea is to the biblical writers and the communities of faith.
The Post-exilic Period, or Second Temple Period	Following the concept and event of Exile, this period as history and the concepts and theological development resulting in the post-exilic texts, are equally crucial. This chapter will cover the political world, the historical development of the issues confronting the people in that era that we can glean from the biblical texts. These are important precursors that formulate some theologies making Judaism and Christianity what it has become today. In particular, we will look at Ezra-Nehemiah, the book of Ruth and the books of Chronicles.
The Apocalyptic Texts	This chapter introduces this genre found in the canon and its origin of influence/s. It will also cover the Persian religious ideas of Zoroastrianism.
People of the Monotheistic Faith and Texts	This chapter allows the student to experience how the Jewish and Zoroastrian tradition, culture and customs have evolved and are practiced by their believers today.

Learning Activities

Each week comprises 2 hours and 15 mins. For each hour of class, students are expected to spend approximately two hours for output, excluding the final essays. Students will require about an hour to read the required texts before every lecture, and on average, an hour per week to work on the Reflection Papers.

Students will also require approximately on average 1½ hour per week to complete the written essays (which include one presentation).

Classes will include mostly lectures, and class/group discussions on the assigned topics and field trips.

The CK Lectureship on 17th March and 19th March are required

Required Texts

1. The Hebrew Bible.
2. Essays/Articles listed in the Course Schedule below.

Assessment Scheme

Task Nature	Purpose	Learning Outcomes
1. Reading based assignments: 30% 2 Reflection Papers	To give students a guide to understand the related topics. To provide a foundation and	1. Comprehend the general subject matter related to the topics.

<p>from the Required Reading list found under the Course Schedule.</p> <p>Final submission date: 13th April 2017</p>	<p>basis for further self-directed studies.</p>	<p>2. List ideas that are novel and of interest and relevant to the student’s context.</p> <p>3. Construct implications of the ideas presented in the text.</p> <p>4. Evaluate the ideas and implications in the light of the student’s contexts.</p>
<p>Select 2 topics, e.g., “Creation Stories” and “Exile” – and locate the Required Readings under these topics. After reading the relevant essays, write a Reflection Paper for each of these topics. The papers should be structured accordingly as follows:</p> <p>Within 800-1,000 words for each paper, answer at least 3 of the following questions accordingly. Qns (a.) and (d.) are compulsory:</p> <p>(a.) Before I read this essay, what were the ideas I have had about the topic? (This includes what you were taught in Sunday School, or what you were told by Christians or other religious institutions and what you have read either through books or the internet.)</p> <p>(b.) What are the things the author said which I have not known, or considered seriously before?</p> <p>(c.) What is/are the thing/s the author said which I disagree? What do other scholars in the recommended bibliography have to say on this/ese things?</p> <p>(d.) What have I changed in my understanding concerning this topic? (This includes how it affects your reading of the Bible – specific texts or general – from now and in the future).</p> <p>(e.) What are the other recommended resources I have read during this course about this topic? What have they said there that I think has helped me to understand this topic more?</p> <p>Note: Footnotes with proper references are required when other sources are cited.</p> <p><u>Assessment Criteria (100% for each paper)</u></p> <p>Question (a.) – 100-150 words; 15% for Clarity, straight to the point, and relevance to the whole paper.</p> <p>Question (d.) – 250-350 words; 30-45% (depending on the number of questions you have selected) for originality, rationality, substantiated opinions, and relevance to the whole paper.</p> <p>Questions (b.), (c.), and (e.) make up the remaining paper; 40-50% for clarity, originality, creativity, rationality, substantiated opinions, and relevance to the whole paper.</p> <p>Please see the rubric in Appendix A for grading criteria.</p>		
<p>2. 15% Field Trip Reflection Paper</p> <p>Reflection Paper on one of the Field Trips. Final submission date: 2nd May</p>	<p>To engage the students to appreciate the modern day beliefs and practices of Judaism and also Zoroastrianism.</p>	<p>1. Comprehend the current religious beliefs and practices by the people who continue to preserve the transmission of the Hebrew Bible, as well as by the</p>

<p>2017</p>	<p>To encourage students to think more deeply about the earlier claims of monotheism and/or monolatry that influenced the origins of Christianity.</p>	<p>community who influenced the theology of the 2nd Temple period.</p> <p>2. Appreciate the long tradition of beliefs and practices and ways these communities contextualize their faiths and interpret and reinterpret their sacred texts.</p> <p>3. Reflect on how our own communities of faith interpret and reinterpret our own canon and sacred texts, and transmit our own tradition/s, practices, rituals and beliefs.</p>
<p>Within 1,000 words, you are to write a Reflection Paper on your field trips to the United Jewish Congregation or the Zoroastrian Prayer Hall. You may choose to write your reflection on one of the trips only, or do a comparison of the two visits. Your paper should contain at least 70% of your personal reflection about the topics raised in the visits. 30% or less will be about the contents of those topics raised. Please supply footnotes if you have consulted any sources. You may use the format for Assignment #1 for this paper. The Assessment Criteria is the same as well.</p>		
<p>3. Research based assignments: A. 40% Essay #1 Write an essay on a selected passage of your choice. Submission date: 28th April 2017</p>	<p>To let students showcase their understanding of the historical, cultural, socio-economic, textual and theological/ideological contexts of the biblical passage.</p>	<p>1. Describe at least two of these contexts: historical, cultural, socio-economic, textual and theological/ideological.</p> <p>2. List the difficulties scholars encounter to reconstruct these contexts.</p> <p>3. Account for the proposals and interpretations that scholars have made in their reconstructions.</p> <p>4. Analyse the scholars' reconstructions and give opinions.</p>
<p>This essay should be within the range of 3,200-3,600 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography.</p> <p>Contents of the essay: <u>Introduction:</u> Describe the contents of the biblical passage in your own words as briefly as you can. (Recommended: not more than 100-120 words!)</p> <p><u>Contextual Issues:</u></p>		

With the help of recommended commentaries (at least 3) and dictionaries (at least 1) and introductory books (at least 1), describe at least 2 of these contexts:
 (1) historical, (2) cultural, (3) socio-economic and (4) textual and theological/ideological.

Depending on some texts, (2) and (3) may merge under one sub-heading.
 What are some of the difficulties scholars have in their attempt to reconstruct these contexts?
 What are the different opinions?

My Evaluation

Say what is your opinion for each context, after you have considered all the readings from (1) to (4). You can have a specific viewpoint or you may not. In other words, you do not need to take sides and can choose to hold more than one view. You just need to state your reasons. Describe what you think could be the contexts of the biblical passage.

Note: In order to ensure that you are researching and writing on the right track, it is advised that you submit your selected biblical passage and a bibliography of at least 8 resources for approval. Your teacher will comment and advise the feasibility of your topic and may suggest helpful links for your research. Please note that you should use only those resources recommended in the list provided in Appendix 2.

B. 15% Essay #2

My Context and Interpretation

Write an essay about how your context can relate to this biblical passage and the results of your passage.

Submission date: 28th April 2017

To give a space for the students to reflect on the results of their exercise according to their contexts.
 To help students to recognize that their interpretations are also affected by their contexts.

1. Students describe their own contexts in relation to the text.
2. Analyse the reasons how the student’s context can or cannot appreciate the results of their study about the text.
3. Think creatively how to help the student’s community appreciate the text, as according to the results of the study by rewriting the biblical text.

Within the range of 1,200-1,500 words, students (1) explain how your context can or cannot appreciate the biblical passage after your study of it; (2) show how you may help your community to appreciate these contexts.

Describe the similarities between your context and the selected biblical passage, which you have described under “My Evaluation” in Essay #1. Alternatively, it may be a complete contrast between yours and the selected biblical passage.

From the similarities or contrasts, reconstruct the passage to make it relevant to you and your community of faith. In this reconstruction, you may come up with a renewed theological interpretation of the text.

The Assessment for the two essays can be found in the Appendix 1

Note:

1. All hardcopies of the assignments must reach the mailbox of Prof. Nancy Tan at KKB before 17:00 hours of the deadline.
2. All electronic copies of the assignments must be submitted via VeriGuide. Please read the following, provided by the University's recommendation carefully and take all plagiarism warnings seriously. Failure to do any of the steps prescribed will result in severe penalization.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures

applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. In the case of group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible should there be any plagiarized contents in the group project, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed directly or indirectly to the plagiarized contents.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide. The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submission. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

Feedback

Students are welcome to give their feedback to the teacher throughout the course. There will be a final Evaluation conducted by the University at the end of the course.

Course Schedule

Key:



Required reading







Additional reading (not required to be completed before lecture, or during the course, but highly recommended)















Contents covered for the week

All readings (biblical texts and essays/articles) should be done prior to class lectures beginning from Week Three.

Jan 10	Week One: Introduction to HB in Contexts
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	<p> Brueggemann, Walter. 2003. "Introduction." Pp. 1–13, in <i>An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination</i>. Kentucky: Westminster John Knox.</p> <p>West, Gerald. 2006. "Contextuality." In John F. Sawyer (ed.), <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture</i>. Oxford/New Jersey: Blackwell. Blackwell Reference Online (assessed 09 August 2014). [electronic resource available via cuhk library]</p>
Jan 17	<p>Week Two: 📅 Archaeology of the Biblical World; 'Biblical Israel' versus 'Historical Israel' I Biblical texts: Exodus, Joshua, Judges, the books of Kings</p> <p>Class Activity: 4 selected video clips on "The Bible Unearthed" produced 2013-2016. List and consider the implications drawn by the scholars and discuss in class.</p>
Jan 24	<p>Week Three: 📅 Archaeology of the Biblical World; 'Biblical Israel' versus 'Historical Israel' I Biblical texts: Exodus, Joshua, Judges</p> <p></p> <p>1. Drane, John. 2001. "Archaeology and the Old Testament." Pp. 32–35, in <i>Introducing the Bible</i>. Minneapolis: Fortress.</p> <p>2. Dalley, Stephanie. 2002. "Near Eastern Myths and Legends." Pp. 41–64, in John Barton (ed.), <i>The Biblical World</i>. Vol. I. London/New York: Routledge.</p> <p></p> <p>Carr, David M., and Conway, Colleen M. 2010. "Studying the Bible in its Ancient Context(s)." Pp. 15–32, in <i>An Introduction to the Bible: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts</i>. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.</p>
Jan 31	<p><i>Week Four: Chinese New Year!</i></p>
Feb 07	<p>Week Five: 📅 Introduction to the Pentateuch; Creation Stories.</p> <p>Texts: Genesis to Joshua</p> <p></p> <p>Coogan, Michael D. and Chapman, Cynthia. 2009. "The Formation of the Pentateuch and the Primeval History." Pp. 41–57, in <i>A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in its Contexts</i>. New York / Oxford: Oxford University.</p>

	 <p>Coogan and Chapman. 2009. “Creations.” Pp. 27–40, in <i>A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in its Contexts</i>. New York / Oxford: Oxford University.</p>
Feb 14	<p>Week Six:  Torah and the Law Texts: Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Historical books, Ezekiel.</p> <p> Carmichael, Calum. 2006. “Law and Narrative in the Hebrew Bible.” In Leo G. Perdue (ed.), <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible</i>. Oxford/New Jersey: Blackwell. Blackwell Reference Online. [electronic resource available via cuhk library]</p>
Feb 21	<p>Week Seven:  Prophets and Prophetic Texts II; The Exile</p> <p>Texts covered: 1 Samuel – 2 Kings</p> <p> Carr and Conway. 2010. “Narrative and Prophecy amidst the Rise and Fall of the Northern Kingdom.” Pp. 85–117, in <i>An Introduction to the Bible: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts</i>. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.</p> <p> Spieckermann, Hermann. 2006. “Former Prophets: The Deuteronomistic History.” In Leo G. Perdue (ed.), <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible</i>. Oxford/New Jersey: Blackwell. Blackwell Reference Online. [electronic resource available via cuhk library]</p>
Feb 28	<p>Week Eight:  Prophets and Prophetic Texts I; The Exile Texts covered: The Major prophets: Isaiah and Jeremiah and the minor prophets</p> <p> Auld, Graeme. 2001. “Prophecy.” Pp. 88–106, in John Barton (ed.), <i>The Biblical World</i>. Vol. I. London/New York: Routledge.</p>
Mar 07	<p>Week Nine: People of the Monotheistic Faith and Texts Visit to the United Jewish Congregation in Hong Kong - followed by discussion on the visit.</p>
Mar 14	<p>Week Ten:  The Apocalyptic Texts Texts covered: Daniel 7–12; Zechariah 9–14</p>

	 <p>John J. Collins. 2006. "The Apocalyptic Literature." In Leo G. Perdue (ed.), <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible</i>. Oxford/New Jersey: Blackwell. Blackwell Reference Online.</p>
Mar 17 (Sunday) 2:30-4:15pm	Make-up lecture - CK Lectureship: Women as Prophets by Prof. Adela Collins
Mar 21	<p>Week Eleven: ם Writings I – The Post-exilic Period Texts Covered: Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles</p> <p></p> <p>1. Klein, Ralph. 2006. "Narrative Texts: Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah," In Leo G. Perdue (ed.), <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible</i>. Oxford/New Jersey: Blackwell. Blackwell Reference Online. [electronic resource available via cuhk library]</p> <p>2. Carr and Conway. 2010. "Persian Empire and the Emergence of a Temple-Centered Jewish Community." Pp. 181–204, in <i>An Introduction to the Bible: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts</i>. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.</p>
Mar 28	<p>Week Twelve: Writings II – The Post-exilic Period Texts covered: Wisdom books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job; Psalms; and The Jewish Novels</p> <p></p> <p>1. Dell, Katherine. 2001. "Wisdom." Pp. 107–128, in John Barton (ed.), <i>The Biblical World</i>. Vol. I. London/New York: Routledge.</p> <p>2. Gerstenberger, Erhard S. "The Psalter." <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible</i>.</p> <p>3. Wills, Lawrence M. 2001. "The Jewish Novel." Pp. 149–61, in John Barton (ed.), <i>The Biblical World</i>. Vol. I. London/New York: Routledge.</p>
Apr 11	<p>Week Nine: People of the Monotheistic Faith and Texts Visit to the Zoroastrian Prayer Hall and Community - followed by discussion after the visit</p>
Apr 18	<p>Week Thirteen: Conclusion Activities: (1) Recollection 2 (2) Discussion of Essay topics Conclusion: Understanding Contexts of the Hebrew Bible and beyond: the Jewish scriptures and early Christian scriptures.</p>

Other 📖

The Introductory sections to each book of the Hebrew Bible in the following commentary series or books:

Barton, John and Julia Bowden. 2004. *The Original Story: God, Israel, and the World*. London: Darton, Longman, and Todd.

Brueggemann, Walter. 2003. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*. Kentucky: Westminster John Knox.

Collins, John J. 2004. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Augsburg Fortress.

Hayes, Christine Elizabeth. 2012. *Introduction to the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University.

Newsom, Carol A. and Sharon H. Ringe (eds.) 1998. *Women's Bible Commentary*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox.

Patte, Daniel (gen. ed.) 2004. *Global Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Rogerson, J. W. 2005. *An Introduction to the Bible. Rev ed.* London/Oakville/CT: Equinox.

Course Evaluation:

A Final Course Evaluation will be done at the end of the course.

Final Note:

Please check the Blackboard regularly for any announcements or further information for the course.