

THEO 5919/RELS 5219 Hebrew Bible in Contexts

希伯來聖經的處境

Monday evenings: 19:00 – 21:15

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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.

Course Components:

The course consists mainly of lectures, interwoven with class discussion, independent reading, educational excursion, and research activities. The time allocation (on average per week) of the learning activities is as follows:									
Lecture		Class discussion		Excursion/ Web-based repot		Reading and research		Written assignments	
In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class
2-2.5 hrs	NA	0.5-1 hr	NA	0.5 hr	0.5 hr	NA	3 hrs	NA	2 hrs
M		M		M		M/O		M	
M: Mandatory activity in the course					O: Optional activity				

Required Texts

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

Assessment Scheme

Task Nature	Purpose	Learning Outcomes
A. Reading based assignments: 1. 15% Reading Log	To ensure students have a general grasp of the Hebrew Bible – the genres	1. Acquire an overview of the general contents found in the Hebrew Bible.

Complete Required Reading list found under Course Schedule and the biblical passages/books. Submission date: 8th Dec 2017	and contents.	2. Appreciate the stylistic differences of the genres found in the Hebrew Bible. 3. Comprehend the general scholarship concerning each topic related to the Hebrew Bible.
Please fill in the given Reading Log accordingly and you may scan it and upload it to Blackboard for submission. There is no need to upload this file to Veriguide.		
2. 20% 1 Reflection Paper from the Required Reading list found under the Course Schedule. Final submission date: 4th Dec 2017	To give students a guide to understand the related topics. To provide a foundation and basis for further self-directed studies.	1. Comprehend the general subject matter related to the topics. 2. List ideas that are novel and of interest and relevant to the student's context. 3. Construct implications of the ideas presented in the text. 4. Evaluate the ideas and implications in the light of the student's contexts.
<p>Select 1 topic, e.g., "Creation Stories" – and locate the Required Readings under this topic. After reading the relevant essays, write a Reflection Paper for each of these topics. The papers should be structured accordingly as follows: Within 1,000-1,200 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/these 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%)</u> Question (a.) – 100-150 words; 15% for Clarity, straight to the point, and relevance to the whole paper. 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. 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. Please see the rubric in Appendix A for grading criteria.</p>		
<p>B. Research-based Assignments: 1. 25% Historical and Theological contexts of a passage/book in the Hebrew Bible Submission Date: 4th Dec 2017</p>	<p>To let students showcase their understanding of the historical and theological contexts of the biblical passage.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the historical context of the passage/biblical book. 2. List the difficulties* scholars encounter to reconstruct the historical context. 3. Account for the proposals and interpretations that scholars have made in their reconstructions. *4. If there are no difficulties, explain how they derived at the reconstruction. 5. Analyse the scholars' reconstructions and your opinion or evaluation. 6. How does the historical context affect the significance of the theological context? What are the issues the community are confronting that need this passage or book?
<p>This essay should be within the range of 2,500-2,700 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography. 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!) <u>Historical Context of the passage/book</u>: With the help of at least 3 recommended commentaries (from the bibliography) and 1</p>		

(from the bibliography) introductory book, describe the historical context.

What are some of the difficulties scholars have in their attempt to reconstruct these contexts? What are the different opinions? List and explain them.

* If there are no difficulties, explain how scholars derive at the reconstruction.

Say what is your opinion for the different viewpoints, 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 historical context of the biblical passage.

Theological Context of the passage/book:

How did the scholars from the 3 recommended commentaries describe the theology of this passage/book, in relation to the historical context they have reconstructed? Do you agree or disagree? Give your reasons. If you have formulated your own opinion concerning the historical context, then explain what do you think the community is trying to address theologically.

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. The outline should be submitted by 22nd Sep 2017.

2. 20%

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: 4th Dec 2017

To give a space for the students to reflect on the results of the above 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 passage/book.
2. Analyse the reasons how the student's context can or cannot appreciate the results of their study about the passage/book.
3. Think creatively how to help the student's community appreciate the passage/book, 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 passage/book 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/book.

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.

**C. 20% Field Trip
Reflection Paper**

Reflection Paper on one of the Field Trips. **Final submission date: 6th Dec 2017**

To engage the students to appreciate the modern day beliefs and practices of Judaism and also Zoroastrianism.

To encourage students to think more deeply about the earlier claims of monotheism and/or monolatry that influenced the origins of Christianity.

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 community who influenced the theology of the 2nd Temple period.

2. Appreciate the long tradition of beliefs and practices and ways these communities contextualize their faiths and interpret and reinterpret their sacred texts.

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.

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.

Note:

1. All hardcopies of Assignments #B must reach the mailbox of Prof. Nancy Tan at KKB before 17:00 hours on the deadline.
2. For Assignments #A and #C – they can be submitted via Blackboard.
3. Besides Assignment for Reading Log, all assignments #1B, 2A, 2B and 3 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.

Sep 04	<p>Week One: ⚡ Introduction to HB in Contexts</p> <p></p> <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>
Sep 11	<p>Week Two: ⚡ Archaeology of the Biblical World; 'Biblical Israel' versus 'Historical Israel' I</p> <p>Biblical texts: Exodus, Joshua, Judges, the books of Kings</p> <p></p> <p>The Bible Unearthed (watch the Youtube link via Blackboard)</p> <p>Class Activity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 4 selected video clips on "The Bible Unearthed" produced 2013-2016. List and consider the implications drawn by the scholars and discuss in class. 2. Lecture on how to use Commentaries and Introduction books for Assignments.
Sep 18	<p>Week Three: ⚡ Archaeology of the Biblical World; 'Biblical Israel' versus 'Historical Israel' I</p> <p>Biblical texts: Exodus, Joshua, Judges</p> <p></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Drane, John. 2001. "Archaeology and the Old Testament." Pp. 32–35, in <i>Introducing the Bible</i>. Minneapolis: Fortress. 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>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>
Sep 25	<p>Week Four: ⚡ Introduction to the Pentateuch; Creation Stories.</p> <p>Texts: Genesis to Joshua</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>
Oct 02	Public Holiday
Oct 09	<p>Week Six: ⚡ Torah and the Law Texts: Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Historical books, Ezekiel.</p>  <p>Barton, John and Bowden, Julia. 2004. "How Should We Live? Ethics in the Old Testament." Pp. 77–90, in <i>The Original Story: God, Israel and the World</i>. Michigan / Cambridge (U.K.): Eerdmans.</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>
Oct 16	<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>
Oct 23	<p>Week Eight: ⚡ Prophets and Prophetic Texts I; The Exile</p> <p>Texts covered: The Major prophets: Isaiah and Jeremiah and the minor prophets</p>

	 Auld, Graeme. 2001. "Prophecy." Pp. 88–106, in John Barton (ed.), <i>The Biblical World</i> . Vol. I. London/New York: Routledge.
Oct 30	Week Nine: People of the Monotheistic Faith and Texts Visit to the United Jewish Congregation in Hong Kong and the Zoroastrian Centre - followed by discussion on the visits.
Nov 06	Week Ten: 8 The Apocalyptic Texts Texts covered: Daniel 7–12; Zechariah 9–14  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.
Nov 13	Week Eleven: 8 Writings I – The Post-exilic Period Texts Covered: Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles  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] 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.
Nov 20	Week Twelve: Writings II – The Post-exilic Period Texts covered: Wisdom books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job; Psalms; and The Jewish Novels  1. Dell, Katherine. 2001. "Wisdom." Pp. 107–128, in John Barton (ed.), <i>The Biblical World</i> . Vol. I. London/New York: Routledge. 2. Gerstenberger, Erhard S. "The Psalter." <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible</i> . 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.
Nov 27	Week Thirteen: Conclusion Activities: (1) Recollection

	(2) Discussion of Essay topics Conclusion: Understanding Contexts of the Hebrew Bible and beyond: the Jewish scriptures and early Christian scriptures.
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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.