"God is not nice. God is not an uncle. God is an earthquake."
--Rabbi Abraham Heschel

Course Texts:

Required:
- Other readings will be assigned throughout the semester and made available on Blackboard (Bb) and/or as class handouts.

Recommended:

Course Description:

No other book has captured the attention and inspired the devotion and derision of so many people as the Bible. As complex as it compelling, the Bible rewards critical academic attention. The Bible, containing the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the Christian New Testament, has inspired radically different interpretations from both its critics and its followers. It is a classic of western literature, yet, for the most part, it is not western literature at all. Indeed, it is far more than just classic literature; people do not devote their lives to obeying the collected works of Shakespeare. In many ways familiar, the Bible is also strange. It contains themes that transcend time and culture and have become part of the fabric of western society, yet upon closer examination many of its themes and stories are foreign, even impenetrable, to modern eyes. The Bible has been and continues to be read as a unified whole, yet is made up of various disparate parts written by multiple people in multiple contexts and in multiple styles over approximately a millennium. What holds it together,
and what about this book makes it such a lightning rod? What is it about these texts that prompts people to hail them as Scripture? In this course, we will examine these important texts with a view toward understanding what makes them worthy of such attention.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to:
- Critically analyze the Bible through different lenses and in different contexts
- Trace the general contours of ancient Near Eastern religions and cultures
- Perform close readings of select biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts
- Situate them in their wider cultural contexts
- Compare them with analogous texts
- Articulate biblical religion’s complexity and its complex relationship to its ancient contexts
- Articulate the importance of context for interpretation, both the original context and the interpreter’s context

Assessment:
The degree to which students achieve these objectives will be evaluated in a variety of ways (discussed in more detail below). First, all of the objectives will be assessed throughout the semester based on students’ performance in class, which will include the answers they give to direct questions, the comments and questions that they offer, and the contributions they make to small-group and whole-class discussions. Second, the one-page and term papers will demonstrate and serve as criteria for assessing students’ attainment of learning outcomes. Third, all questions on the midterm and final examination will also be an important indication of meeting the objectives.

Course Content and Goals:

As a liberal arts course, Introduction to the Bible promotes the development of critical thinking and communication skills; as a humanities course, it investigates the human condition. More specifically, the course examines the human condition as described in the Bible, revealing biblical characters who face similar issues as we do today, yet have different resources and different worldviews at their disposal to deal with them. As always in the humanities, context is key. Thus, we will direct our attention to understanding the biblical texts in their literary and historical contexts (attention will also be given to how and to what effect this disparate literature was collected and came to become sacred Scripture). Biblical literature is also distinct from other literature in the humanities in an important way; it is religious literature. In turn, we will address the human condition in view of and in intersection with the divine, with God as a primary character and resource.

Starting close, we will move outward in our analysis. We will perform close readings of biblical texts, situate these texts alongside other texts and textual corpora by identifying commonalities and differences, and situate the biblical portraits in their larger ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman contexts. I also hope that you will use the skills you have honed to analyze your own contexts, to challenge how you view religion, the world, and your place in it.
Course Requirements:

Attendance, preparation, and participation (15% of the grade):
Your engagement in class will affect not only your grade, but also the success of the course. If you are present, prepared and engaged, class will be interesting, provocative, and worthwhile, and you will do well. I truly want to hear what you have to say and will treat you and your opinions with respect.

In order to participate, you have to be in class. Attendance will be taken at every meeting. Two unexcused absences are permissible; more than two will lower your grade unless you bring a compelling note from a dean, doctor, coach or employer.

In order to meaningfully participate, you have to prepare. Rather than just skimming through the reading, I expect you to spend time with it; underline, take notes, analyze, ponder larger implications, and prepare to communicate what you have learned in class. When pressed for time, linger more over the biblical text than the textbook. It is far better for you to read the text itself than someone else’s opinion of it. As you read the Bible, keep in mind three basic questions: 1) What does the text say? 2) How does it say it? 3) Why does it say this and not something else?

In class, I expect you to participate regularly, by offering opinions and asking questions. Throughout the course of the semester, you will also be expected to post regularly on Blackboard, asking questions, making comments, and simply noting what you find interesting, helpful, and/or troubling. As a general rule of thumb, you should try to post at least once a week, with a minimum of 10 posts over the course of the semester. Please post by 9:00 AM the morning of class so that I have time to review it and the opportunity to bring it up in class.

Although this is a course about the Bible, I am not looking for spiritual or church answers, or even the “right” answers. As with all literature and more so than most, the Bible allows for and even invites multiple interpretations. I expect you to think for yourselves, to analyze the text critically, and to make carefully reasoned arguments backed by evidence. I have no intention of trying to convert you to or divert you from Christianity, Judaism or any other religion. You may take any position, no matter how blasphemous, provided it is empirically grounded and well-articulated. My goal is to familiarize you with the weird and wonderful world of the Bible and to develop your ability to think and communicate critically, clearly, and persuasively about its content and implications.

Papers (35%)

1 5-page term paper (double-spaced with standard margins) (25%)
2 1-page critical response papers (single-spaced) (5% each)

Everyone will be given a list of essay topics from which you will choose one to write about for the term paper (specific instructions will accompany the assignment of the term paper and 1-page papers). Rather than simply regurgitate the ideas of others, I encourage you to think for yourselves, be creative, trust your instincts, and let the text and your intuition take you wherever they lead. If you simply restate what others have said, you will not get an A. While I will not read rough drafts, I will be happy to discuss your ideas in person. NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.
Midterm Exam (20%)
The midterm will consist of short answers and essays, covering both readings and lectures to date. Before the test, you will be given a study guide with 5 sample questions, 3 of which will appear on the midterm. On the midterm, you will be asked to answer 2 of the 3 questions.

Final Exam (30%)
The final exam will consist of two parts: short answers and essays. The test will be cumulative and cover both the readings and lectures. Before the test, you will be given a study guide with 8 sample essay questions, 5 of which will appear on the final exam. On the final, you will be asked to answer 3 of those 5 questions.

Grading Scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic Integrity:
The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. In this course, students found cheating on a test or assignment will receive zero (0) credit for that test or assignment. For more information and the complete policy, see [http://academicintegrity.syr.edu](http://academicintegrity.syr.edu).

Religious Observances Policy:
SU religious observances policy, found at [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm), recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through [MySlice/StudentServices/Enrollment/MyReligiousObservances](http://myslice.syr.edu/) from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

Disability-Related Accommodations:
Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore,
planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/.

Other Important Notes:

- Please do not use phones or other hand-held electronic devices during class. If you wish to use a notebook/laptop/tablet computer during class, you must request permission in writing from me and explain how such usage will enhance your learning. You will also be required to sit in the first two rows of the classroom when using a computer.

- Changes to the syllabus, important announcements and other information will be sent to students via e-mail or posted on Blackboard. Please check your Syracuse email and Blackboard regularly.

- The five best ways to ruin your class participation grade:
  - Write, read, send, and/or receive text messages or other types of communications (e.g., e-mail, social networking, etc.) during class.
  - Allow your mobile electronic device to ring, vibrate, or make other noises during class.
  - Speak while another student is contributing a comment to class discussion.
  - Leave the classroom on a regular basis while class is in session.
  - Participate unenthusiastically in small-group discussions and activities.

Course Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tue., Sep 1</td>
<td>Introduction and Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu., Sep 3</td>
<td>What is Israel? What is (Israelite) History?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read Coogan, <em>The Old Testament</em>, 13-29 (Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hundley, “Way Forward,” 209-10 (Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cline, “The 1990s and Beyond: From Nihilism to the Present” (Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Questions: When we say 'Israel,' what are we talking about? What is history? How do we reconstruct the past? (How) can we trust our reconstructions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue., Sep 8</td>
<td>The Rise of YHWH in Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hundley, “Divine Fluidity?”, 24-5 (under subsection “Competition and Character-Poaching”) (Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P. Miller, <em>The Religion of Ancient Israel</em>, 23-29 (Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Questions: Where did God come from? What is his relationship to the other ‘gods’? How does the Bible establish his supremacy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu., Sep 10</td>
<td>YHWH and the Israelite Divine World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read Smith, “The Levels of the Divine Assembly and Family at Ugarit,” 101-5 (Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 1:26; 6:1-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psalm 82, 89
Job 1-2
Deuteronomy 32:8-9
1 Kings 22:19
Reading Questions: Who or what else is in the Israelite divine world? What do these texts tell us they are and are they like? Why don’t we call them gods?

Tue., Sep 15
Biblical Literature and the Western Literary Tradition
Read Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar” (Bb)
Compare selections from the Iliad book 22 and Judges 4-5 (Bb)

Thu., Sep 17
In the Beginning: Creation of the Text and in the Text
Read Coogan, The Old Testament, 1-12 (Bb)
Old Testament Parallels (OTP), 3-20
Genesis 1-2:4a
Psalm 74:10-23; 104
Genesis 2:4b-3:24
Coogan, The Old Testament, ch. 3 (Bb)
Reading Questions: Where did the Bible come from? (How) can we trust it? What ties it together? How do the ANE texts imagine creation? How do the biblical texts imagine creation? How and why are the ANE and biblical texts different? How and why are the biblical texts different from each other?

Tue., Sep 22
Creation Continued
First 1-page paper due

Thu., Sep 24
After Eden
Read Gilgamesh Tablet XI (OTP 27-30)
Atrahasis (OTP 33-42)
Genesis 4-11
Collins, “The Nature of the Documentary Hypothesis” (Bb)
Reading Questions: How does the story continue and why does it continue in this way? Why did God reject Cain’s sacrifice? What is the purpose of this story? Compare the biblical and ANE flood stories. How does having one God in charge make the biblical story different?

Tue., Sep 29
The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
Read Genesis 12-35
Reading Questions: What is the relationship between God and these characters? Why does the text present them and God as it does?

Thu., Oct 1
YHWH Flexing His Muscles: The Exodus
Read Exodus 1-24 and 32-34
Reading Questions: What is the purpose of the Exodus? Are the Israelites freed from slavery or simply enslaved to a new master? Why are there so many more miracles in Exodus than elsewhere in the HB/OT?
Tue., Oct 6
The Law
Read OTP 101-30
Exodus 20-23
Deuteronomy 5-11, 15-17, 28-30, 34
Leviticus 19
Reading Questions: Compare the different biblical and ANE laws. What is their purpose? What kinds of issues do they address? How and why? What is love (esp. in Deuteronomy)? How do they make sense in an ancient context?

Thu., Oct 8
When God Moves In: The Tabernacle
Read Exodus 25-31, skim 35-39, and read 40
Haran, “The Priestly Image of the Tabernacle” (Bb)
Reading Questions: What is a building? What purpose does this building serve? Why is there so much detail?

Tue., Oct 13
Ritual and Worship
Read Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, paragraph on bottom of 365 and top of 366 (Bb)
Hundley, “Initiation Rituals” (Bb)
Read Leviticus 1-16, focus on 4-5, 12, 16
Hundley, “Sin and Guilt” (Bb)
Reading Questions: What is ritual? What are some modern rituals? Why do people do rituals? How do we know they work? What are sin, guilt and impurity? What effect do they have? How do you fix them? Why do it this way?

Thu., Oct 15
Midterm

Tue., Oct 20
Field Trip

Thu., Oct 22
Holy War
Reading Questions: Does God command genocide? How does the text justify the conquest? How does it compare with other justifications? What do you think of their argument?

Tue., Oct 27
The Trouble without Kings
Read Judges 1-5, 13-16, 19-21
Reading Questions: How and why does the presentation in Judges differ from the one in Joshua? What is the message of the book of Judges? What role does Samson play? Does he fulfill his intended purpose and why does the text present him in this way?

Thu., Oct 29
The Trouble with Kings
Read Hundley, “The Way Forward is Back to the Beginning,” 216-8 (under subheading Royal Apologetic Autobiographies) (Bb)
Saul and David: 1 Samuel 8-13:15; 15-19; 24; 26; 28; 31; 2 Samuel 1-2:7; 5-7; 11-12; 24
The Assessment of Kings: 2 Kings 17:1-18; 24-25
Reading questions: How do kings who usurp the throne justify themselves? How does this play itself out in the biblical story? Why does the text present Saul and David as it does? What standards does the book of Kings use to judge its kings (all of the brief passages are there to help you figure this out)? How could they have judged the kings differently?

Tue., Nov 3
The Exile
Read 2 Kings 24–25
Lamentations
Jeremiah 1; 7:1–8:3; 26:1–29:14; 31
Ezekiel 1:1–4:8; 8; 10; 36-37
Reading Questions: What is the exile? How does it compare with forced migration? What new issues does it raise? How and why do these texts deal with it in different ways?

Thu., Nov 5
The Prophets, and Biblical Poetry
Linseifert, “Guidelines for Reading Biblical (and Other) Poetry” (Bb)
Reading Questions: How do people hear from God? Why? What is a prophet (prophecy)? What purpose do they/does it serve? How can you tell if a person is a prophet, or if their prophecy is true?
Term Paper Due!

Tue., Nov 10
Wisdom Literature
Read OTP 293-309
Proverbs 1-11, 22:17-24:34
OTP 239-43
Job 1-7, 38-42
Reading Questions: What is wisdom literature? How is it different than what we have read so far? Who is Lady Wisdom and what purpose does she serve in the text? What is the purpose of Job? Who is to blame for Job’s suffering? What role does Satan (the accuser) play? Why doesn’t God give Job a straight answer? How does Job compare to Proverbs? Are they compatible?

Thu., Nov 12
All the Single Ladies
Read Ruth and Esther

Tue., Nov 17
The HB/OT on the Way to Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Questions: How does the HB/OT end? What is the situation, and what questions remain? No one lives based solely on the HB/OT, but Judaism, Christianity and Islam are founded upon its stories. How and why do they understand it and their purpose in life differently?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading and Scene</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 22-29</td>
<td>No class. Thanksgiving break.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu., Dec 3</td>
<td>Jesus’ Teaching: Parables and the Sermon on the Mount</td>
<td>Read Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:4-15 Matthew 5-7; Isaiah 1, 6 Reading Questions: Why did Jesus speak in parables? Was he trying to make it easier for people to understand? How does the text explain itself? How and why does it appeal to Isaiah? What is the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount? How does it compare with the Old Testament rules? Are they easier or harder to fulfill? Is it possible/expected that the reader will be able to follow them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue., Dec 8</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Read Romans 7-8 1 Corinthians 13 Galatians Ehrmann 285-96, 302-7 (Bb) Reading Questions: What issues does Romans 7 address? Is it talking about Paul before or after he became a Christian? How does Romans 8 address the problem? What does it mean that there is no condemnation? Why not and to what end? What does 1 Corinthians 13 mean by love, and why does it focus on it? What is the purpose of Galatians? How does Paul understand the law, both in the Old Testament and for the New Testament Christian?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thu., Dec 10</td>
<td>Letters from Prison</td>
<td>Read Philippians Dr. M. L. King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading Questions: What is the purpose of Philippians? What is Martin Luther King’s argument in “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and how does he use the Bible to make it? What do the letters have in common (other than the obvious)? How is their suffering redemptive? What inequalities still exist?
What can we do about it?
Second 1-page paper due!

Tue., Dec 15 Final Exam 5:15-7:15 PM