

The Hebrew Bible as Literature
REL 3213 / JST 3930 / LIT 3374; Fall 2023
MWF 8 (3:00-3:50), AND 0019

Professor: Robert Kawashima

office hours:

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Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the literary study of the Hebrew Bible within its ancient Near Eastern context. It contains some of the great literary works to come down to us from antiquity, on par with the Homeric epics. And biblical narrative constitutes the oldest prose literature that we know of at present. Our primary focus will be on a wide and varied reading of biblical narrative — along with a bit of poetry — but students will also be introduced to the scholarly study of the Bible from a literary perspective. More generally, this course will introduce students to the scholarly, interdisciplinary study of literature. That is, if the solutions and interpretations proposed will be specific to the Bible, the problems and ideas raised will have relevance for the study of literature in general.

Required Texts:

HarperCollins Study Bible — or other approved translation

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, second edition

Richard Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* – RECOMMENDED ONLY

Secondary readings, course materials, and other information will be made available through Canvas.

Course Requirements:

Attendance is mandatory

Participation — 10%

2 Writing Exercises (3 pages) — 30%

2 Exams — 60%

Make-up exams and late papers must be approved by instructor beforehand, or justified afterward by providing appropriate documentation (medical, etc.).

Grade scale:

87–89 = B+	77–79 = C+	67–69 = D+	below 60 = E
93–100 = A	83–86 = B	73–76 = C	63–66 = D
90–92 = A-	80–82 = B-	70–72 = C-	60–62 = D

Schedule:

Week 1

8/23 **Introduction:** syllabus; aims of course; historical background

8/25 **Adam and Eve:** Genesis 1-3; Kawashima “Sources and Redaction,” 47-61

Week 2

- 8/28 **Philology:** Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, ch. 1
8/30 **The Literary Approach to the Bible:** Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, ch. 1;
Kawashima, "Literary Analysis," 83-89
9/1 **Cain and Abel; the Giants and the Tower:** Genesis 4-11; Kawashima, "Violence and
the City"

Week 3

- 9/4 **Labor Day: No Class**
9/6 **Sodom and Gomorrah:** Genesis 12-24; Alter, "Sodom as Nexus"; Kawashima,
"Literary Analysis," 89-104
9/8 **How to Read Biblical Narrative I:** Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, chs. 3-4

Week 4

- 9/11 **The Binding of Isaac:** Genesis 22; Homer, *Odyssey*, excerpt; Auerbach, "Odysseus'
Scar"
9/13 **The Binding of Isaac; How to Read Biblical Narrative II:** Alter, *Art of Biblical
Narrative*, chs. 5
9/15 **How to Read Biblical Narrative II:** Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, ch. 6

Week 5

- 9/18 **Jacob and Esau:** Genesis 25-27; Alter, "Literature"
9/20 **Jacob and Esau; Jacob and Laban:** Genesis 28-36; Hendel, "Cultural Memory"
9/22 **Jacob and Laban:** Genesis 28-36

Week 6

- 9/25 **Yom Kippur: No Class**
9/27 **Joseph and his Brothers:** Genesis 37-50; Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, ch. 8
9/29 **Joseph and his Brothers:** Genesis 37-50

Week 7

- 10/2 **Moses and Pharaoh:** Exodus 1-16
10/4 **Moses and Pharaoh:** Exodus 1-16
10/6 **Homecoming: No Class**

Week 8

- 10/9 **From Egypt to Sinai:** Exodus 14-24; Pardes, "Imagining the Birth of a Nation";
PAPER 1 due in class
10/11 **From Egypt to Sinai; Aaron and the Gold Calf:** Exodus 32-34; 1 Kings 11-12;
Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, ch. 3
10/13 **EXAM 1 (8/25-10/11)**

Week 9

- 10/16 **In the Wilderness:** Numbers 11-17; Pardes, “The Spies in the Land of the Giants”
 10/18 **In the Wilderness; Song and Story:** Judges 4-5; Exodus 14-15; Kawashima, “From Song to Story”
 10/20 **Song and Story:** Judges 4-5; Exodus 14-15

Week 10

- 10/23 **Jephthah and his Daughter:** Judges 1-12; Alter, “Allusion and Literary Expression”
 10/25 **Samson and Delilah:** Judges 13-16
 10/27 **The Levite and his Concubine:** Judges 17-21

Week 11

- 10/30 **The Ark and the Philistines:** 1 Samuel 1-7
 11/1 **The Ark and the Philistines; David and Saul:** 1 Samuel 8-23; Alter, “Imagining History in the Bible”
 11/3 **David and Saul:** 1 Samuel 8-23

Week 12

- 11/6 **David and Abigail:** 1 Samuel 24-31; 2 Samuel 1-10; Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons*, excerpts
 11/8 **David and Abigail; David and Bathsheba:** 2 Samuel 11-24; 1 Kings 1-2
 11/10 **Veteran’s Day: No Class**

Week 13

- 11/13 **David and Bathsheba:** 2 Samuel 11-24; 1 Kings 1-2
 11/15 **Biblical “Period Pieces”:** Jonah; Esther; Funkenstein, “Biblical and Postbiblical Perceptions of History”
 11/17 **Biblical “Period Pieces”:** Esther; Ruth; Pardes, “The Book of Ruth: Idyllic Revisionism”

Week 14

- 11/20 **No Class (due to academic conference)**
 11/22 **Thanksgiving: No Class**
 11/24 **Thanksgiving: No Class**

Week 15

- 11/27 **Biblical “Period Pieces”:** Ruth
 11/29 **Job:** Job 1-27; Alter, “Truth and Poetry in the Book of Job”; **PAPER 2 due in class**
 12/1 **Job:** Job 1-42

Week 16

- 12/4 **Job:** Job 28-42
 12/6 **EXAM 2 (10/16-12/4)**

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to me when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/scct/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments: For more information, please see:

<http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html>