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RLST 391.01: Creation and Destruction in the Bible

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Office Hours:
Tu 1:00 – 2:00 pm,
Th 1:00 – 3:00 pm,
& by appointment

Creation and Destruction in the Biblical World

Spring 2018 38906 Tuesday 4:00 – 6:50 pm

Course Description:

This course explores the paired themes of creation and destruction in the Bible, its ancient environment, and its later interpretations. We begin with an introductory overview of the Bible, its ancient contexts and its modern study. We then turn to biblical creation texts in general, and Genesis 1-11 (also known as the “Primeval History”) specifically. Here we focus on the Bible’s stories about the creation of the world (Genesis 1), Adam and Eve in Eden (Genesis 2-3), and the flood (Genesis 6-9) including their history of interpretation. Later in the semester, we examine two related dimensions of the creation-destruction thematic framework: the production and destruction of images and of writing. In this course, students will be introduced to the world of biblical literature, its ancient contexts, and its history of interpretation. Throughout the course, students will also be introduced to contemporary topics and methods in the modern study of the Bible and religion.

Required Textbooks:

The following books are available for purchase in the UM Bookstore:

1. *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (HarperCollins: 2006)
2. Ronald Hendel, *The Book of Genesis: A Biography* (Princeton, 2013)
3. Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (HarperCollins: 1997)
4. All other assigned readings noted in the syllabus will be available on the Moodle site for this course. Because these readings will be the basis of our discussion, please print these readings out and bring them to class with you.

Course Requirements:

1. *Attendance and participation:* Regular attendance is required for this course. Preparation for and participation in class meetings is expected and essential.
2. *Readings:* Plan to complete all readings before the class session for which they are assigned. Take notes on the readings to facilitate your discussion in class, and bring the assigned readings with you to class. Students must type out one discussion question on each assigned reading for every class.
3. *Class presentations:* Students will have several opportunities to present assigned materials and their own research in class.
4. *Term paper,* on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor: 10-12 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font). A *preliminary topic statement* (1 page, typed) is due by week 8. An basic *outline* of the paper (typed) is due by week 12. Student *presentations* will be given in weeks 14 and 15. The paper itself is due Friday May 4.

Grading:

- 1) Regular attendance, preparation, and participation in seminar: 30%**
- 2) Preparation of typed discussion assignments on class readings: 15%**
- 3) Presentations of class materials: 10%**
- 4) Presentation of research topic: 15%**
- 5) Term paper: 30%**

Course Policies:

- 1) There will be no make-up exams or extensions unless the student has made arrangements at least a week ahead of time. Except in the case of a documented emergency, late assignments will result in a decrease of one letter grade per day.
- 2) Attendance: This course meets once a week for a total of 14 class sessions. Students are allowed one cut; each additional absence will result in a decrease of 10% of the attendance and participation grade (that is, 3% of the final grade). It is the student's responsibility to obtain from a classmate any class notes and other assignment and scheduling information discussed during an absence.
- 3) This is a course about religion as an academic subject and the development of the Bible in historical context. This is not a class that teaches religion or religious doctrine from a religious and/or devotional perspective. In this class, we will be examining biblical literature in an academic and secular setting, and treating the biblical text as an ancient document open to questioning, examination, criticism, and interpretation. An interest in exploring new ideas and new methods of examining the biblical text are essential. This class is not a forum for expressions of personal theology.
- 4) Students may not use any electronic communication devices in the classroom. Tablets and laptops may be used only for note taking, only if necessary, and must remain offline. Students using cell phones, smartphones, or computers to text or go online during class will be asked to leave the classroom.
- 5) Plagiarism – the presentation of others' work as your own – is an offense punishable by course failure and/or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and all references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the University guidelines, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, falsification or any other form of academic dishonesty will fail this course and the incident will be reported to the Dean.
- 6) Disability accommodations: Students with disabilities may develop a course accommodation plan with the assistance of Disability Services. The instructor will assist in facilitating all disability accommodations.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: Our schedule may change as our course develops. Regular attendance will ensure that you are informed of any changes.

Part I: Introductions

Class #1 (Tues. January 23):

Introduction to the Course

There are no prerequisites for this course, but students without prior background in the study of the Bible in the university will find it very helpful to read Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* during the first weeks of the semester.

Class #2 (Tues. January 30):

Genesis: First Encounters

Reading:

- R. Alter, *Genesis 1-11*
- Familiarize yourself with the Hebrew Bible's structure and contexts: review the introductory essays in the Harper-Collins Study Bible as well as the tables, timelines and maps, especially for the Pentateuch.
- Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* pp. 15-69.

Class #3 (Tues. February 6):

Background and Contexts: The Bible, Genesis, Myth, Interpretation

Reading:

- J. Kugel, "The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship," pp. 1-46 in Kugel, *How to Read the Bible* (Free Press, 2007)
- R. A. Segal, "Myth," pp. 337-55 in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (Blackwell, 2009)
- R. Hendel, *Genesis: A Biography*, Introduction and chap. 1

Part II: Creation in the Bible: Texts, Contexts, Themes & Interpretation

Class #4 (Tues. February 13):

Creation-Destruction: A Theme in the Bible and Beyond

Reading:

- Genesis 1-2; Psalms 74, 89, 104; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9–10; Job 38:1–11; 40:15–41:34
- *Enuma Elish* (Trans. B. Foster, *Before the Muses* (CDL, 2005).
- *Baal Cycle*, pp. 75-115 in Coogan, *Stories From Ancient Canaan* (Westminster, 1978)
- M. Smith, “Three Models of Creation in the Bible,” pp. 11-37 in Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Fortress, 2010).

Class #5 (Tues. February 20):

Genesis 1: The Priestly Creation

- Genesis 1; Exodus 15; Isaiah 43; Ezekiel 1-3
- M. Smith, “The First Day: Questions about Genesis 1,” pp. 41-85 in *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*
- R. Hendel, *Genesis: A Biography*, chaps. 2-3
- J. Kugel, “Creation of the World,” pp. 53-64 in *The Bible as it Was* (Harvard, 1997)

Class #6 (Tues. February 27):

Genesis 2-3: The Eden Narrative

- Genesis 2-3; Ezekiel 28; Job 15: 7-8
- *Adapa*, (Trans. B. Foster, *Before the Muses* (CDL, 2005).
- C. Meyers, “Eve in Eden: Genesis 2-3,” chap 4. pp. 59-80 in Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve* (Oxford, 2013)
- T. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, pp. 1-11, 47-64, 85-98, 123-35
- R. Hendel, *Genesis: A Biography*, chap. 4
- J. Kugel, “Adam and Eve,” pp. 65-82 in *The Bible as it Was*.

Class #7 (Tues. March 6):

Genesis 6-9: The Flood

- Genesis 6-9
- *Atrahasis; Gilgamesh XI*
- R. Hendel, *Genesis: A Biography*, chap. 5
- J. Kugel, “Noah and the Flood,” pp. 97-120 in *The Bible as it Was*

Class #8 (Tues. March 13):

Genesis 1-11: The Primeval History: Text and Interpretation

- R. Hendel, *Genesis: A Biography*, chaps. 6-7

Part IV: The Image & the Word

Class #9 (Tues. March 20):

The image: Creation of Images

- T. Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," pp. 15-32 in P.D. Miller et al., *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Fortress, 1987)
- *Mis Pi* Ritual and Incantation Texts ("mouth opening" rites for divine images:), in M.B. Dick, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth* (Eisenbrauns, 1999)
- T. Lewis, "Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel," *JAOS* 118 (1998) 36-53

Class #10 (Tues. March 27):

Spring Break ➔

Class #11 (Tues. April 3):

The Image: Destruction of Images

- Law: Exodus 20:4; 20: 23; 34:17; Leviticus 19:4; 26:1; Deuteronomy 4:15-28; 5:8; 12:1-5; 27:15
- Narrative: Genesis 35:1-4; Exodus 32; 1 Samuel 4-6; 2 Samuel 6; 1 Kings 12: 25-32; 2 Kings 19:15-19;
- Poetry: Jeremiah 10:1-16; Isaiah 40:19-20; 41:6-7; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16-17, 20; 46:1-7; 48:5; Habakkuk 2:18-19; Psalms 115:3-8; 135:15-18.
- M. Halbertal and A. Margalit, "Idolatry as Error," pp. 108-36 in Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry* (Harvard, 1992).

Class #12 (Tues. April 10):

The Word: Creation

- K. van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book," pp. 229-48 in van der Toorn, *The Image and the Book* (Peeters, 1997).
- J. W. Watts, "The Three Dimensions of Scripture" *Postscripts* 2 (2006): 135-59
- W. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge, 2005), selections.
- M. Idel, "The Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," pp. 42-79 in S. Katz, *Mysticism and Language* (Oxford, 1992)

Class #13 (Tues. April 17):

The Word: Destruction

- Exodus 32-34; Jeremiah 36, 51; Ezekiel 3; Numbers 5
- Protective Curses on ancient inscription, selections
- N. Levtow, "Text Production and Destruction in Ancient Israel: Ritual and Political Dimensions," pp. 111-39 in Olyan, *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion* (SBL: 2012)

Part V: Student Presentations

Class #14 (Tues. April 24):
Student Presentations

Class #15 (Tues. May 1):
Student Presentations

Final paper due: Friday May 4