Introduction to the Hebrew Bible
RELG 302 / 592H

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Course description
The Bible emerged from a tiny community perched on the margins of the great ancient Near Eastern civilizations. It is one of the central founding documents of western civilization, the basis for modern-day Judaism, Christianity, and ultimately Islam. This course will introduce you to some of the extraordinary historical, cultural and religious experiences of ancient Israel and its surrounding cultures. While employing a largely historical-critical approach, we will include early modes of Bible interpretation, and some more recent approaches such as Storahtelling and Bibleraps as well. I hope you will share my fascination for this intriguing and powerful literature, and develop an awareness of the stories that continue to shape our culture in many ways.

Course Texts
Books you might want to purchase (available at the University bookstores and elsewhere):
- James Kugel, How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now (Free Press, 2007)
- Recommended: Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler, eds., The Jewish Study Bible (Oxford University Press, 2005) ISBN: 0195297547. You will need a copy of the Bible next to you when you read Collins and Kugel. These texts often cite biblical passages and you will want to check at least some of them in order to understand the argument.

Learning outcomes
By the end of this class, you will:
- Demonstrate Biblical literacy and familiarity with the Biblical meta-narrative
- Identify the authors of individual books, their concerns, strategies, dates, and social position.
- Be familiar with some of the historical, cultural, and religious dimensions of ancient Israel.
- Be familiar with the impact of historical events on the emergence of Biblical literature.
• Develop competence in presentations and oral communication.
• Develop critical writing skills.
• Engage in professional and respectful discussion and behavior.
• Reflect on your own development as a student.

**Reading schedule**

Introduction
What is the Bible?
The Torah (Pentateuch) and Primeval History. The Documentary Hypothesis
The Patriarchs
More stories from Genesis
Exodus
Revelation at Sinai
The Image of God and the Name of God in these Texts
Priestly Religion
Deuteronomy
Joshua and Judges
Saul, Samuel, David, Solomon
The Divided Monarchy
Amos and Hosea
Isaiah I
Jeremiah (and Lamentations)
Ezekiel
Isaiah II and III
Post-exilic prophecy, Ezra and Nehemiah
Chronicles
Psalms
Wisdom Literature: Proverbs
Wisdom Literature: Job and Ecclesiastes (Kohelet)
Song of Songs
The Short Books (Ruth, Jonah, Esther)
Daniel
Conclusions, Review, and Reflections
MORE INFO... (online at http://vehlow.wordpress.com/student-info/)

Our Teaching Assistant is Megan Gold, (megsgold@hotmail.com) who will be happy to respond to your questions.

Course Readings. The readings from Collins and Kugel should be done carefully; they occasionally repeat each other, but usually they complement each other (or at least that is the idea in assigning them both!). The biblical readings you may do as slowly or as quickly as you like; they are samples in any case, since we don’t have the time to read the entire Bible or entire books of the Bible. The idea of the readings is to get a clear idea of the content and style of the various biblical books. Some of the suggested questions ask that you focus on a specific passage or set of passages.

Your 4 response papers (double-spaced, 1 inch margin, 12 pt. Times New Roman) should draw on the questions on the syllabus. You will sign up for your papers in the second week of class. No late assignments will be accepted.

There will be a number of (unannounced) reading quizzes, 5 of which will count towards your grade. These are usually brief and include the following: identification of key terms or concepts, identifications of author/title/context of selected passages, identification and commentary (ca. 3 sentences) explaining selected passages, etc. Anything covered in the readings or discussed in class is eligible for the test, including the reading questions. Homework, tests, or quizzes cannot be made up unless an official note verifying a legitimate absence with specific date and time is produced.

Academic honesty. Please feel free to do the readings with a friend, share notes and ideas, help each other, etc. However, when you submit written work that bears your name you are stating that the work is yours and yours alone, except insofar as you acknowledge your sources (including resources on the Internet). Please be careful and honest in this regard.

Absence policy. I take attendance and will, as is USC policy, notify the Student Success Center after 2 absences. You automatically fail the class with more than 5 absences. Religious observances are exempt, but you need to notify me within the first two weeks of class. Student athletes, too, should contact me asap.

If you have special needs, make sure you are registered with Student Disability Services and notify me early on in the semester as well. I like to know what I can do to make this class a success for you.

If you are an out-of-state students, have transferred, are a scholarship recipient, a sophomore or a student of color and think you need assistance, contact the Special Student Populations Office at the USC.

Grade Breakdown for undergraduate students
Class preparation and participation 10%
3 (2-page) papers (10% each) 30%
Pop quizzes 20%
Midterm 20%
Final 20%

**Grading scale:** 100-90% = A, 860-899 = B+, 800-859 = B; 760-799 = C+; 700-759 = C; 660-699 = D+; 600-659 = D; < 599 = F

**Course requirements if you are taking the course for graduate credit:** all of the above plus a research paper (ca. 15 pp.) on any topic related to the course. Please speak with me either in person or by email before you begin serious work on your paper.

**Grade Breakdown for graduate students**
Class preparation and participation 10%
4 (2-page) papers (10% each) 40%
Pop quizzes 10%
Midterm 10%
Final 10%
Research paper 20%