

Fall 2014  
**JWST/RELG 213**  
**The Bible as/and Literature:**  
**Understanding Torah through Ancient and Modern Glasses**

Instructor: Shayna Sheinfeld

E-mail: [ssheinfeld@colgate.edu](mailto:ssheinfeld@colgate.edu)

Course day/time: MWF 12:20–1:10

Location: Lawrence 304

Office: Lawrence 312b

Office hours: Mondays 2–3:30 p.m., Thursdays 9:30–11, or by appointment

**Course Description and Goals**

The Pentateuch—the first five books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, also called the Torah—forms the foundation of the biblical narrative. This course will focus on the Pentateuch as the foundation of both ancient Jewish literature, as seen in the Second Temple Period, and modern rereadings/retellings of biblical heritage.

Our primary concern in this course will be with the literature of the Pentateuch and the literary influence of the received text in the Second Temple period. After familiarizing ourselves with the pentateuchal narratives, we will conduct a thorough analysis of how and for what purpose these texts were reused and retold as inherited, divinely inspired literature. Finally, as a case study we will consider four modern interpretations of Genesis 6–9.

**Goals:**

- To develop a familiarity with the variety of narratives in the Pentateuch
- To develop skills for close and critical reading of primary source texts
- To understand the idea of a literary afterlife of a text
- To hone analytical writing skills through close readings and comparisons of texts
- To become conversant with the interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Second Temple period, as well as the varieties of types of literature on the Pentateuch available during this time period
- To develop the necessary skills for comparing modern media with the biblical source

**Required Texts:**

- *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* by Robert Alter
- *The Bible as it Was* by James Kugel
- *The Preservationist* by David Maine
- *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood

All books are available at the Colgate Bookstore. If you choose to purchase your books elsewhere, be sure to get the same translations as those that are listed here. I have also put these books on reserve at Case library.

You will need to view 2 movies during the semester as well, available on reserve at Case Library:

- *Evan Almighty*
- *Noah*

**Evaluation:**

- |                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| ● Attendance & Participation | 10% |
| ● Exam (on the Pentateuch)   | 15% |
| ● In-class presentation      | 15% |
| ● Presentation Report        | 15% |
| ● Abstract                   | 5%  |
| ● Final paper                | 25% |
| ● Final Exam                 | 15% |

**Attendance & Participation:** Attendance and participation are a necessary part of learning in this course. Students are expected to attend each class session. *Since this course will be conducted as a discussion, absence from class will count against you.* Participation will be marked based on engagement during class.

**Pentateuch Exam:** The exam will consist of identification, short answers, and a textual analysis covering the pentateuchal material that we have read for class. More information about the content and format will be given in the classes leading up to the exam.

**In-class presentation:** Each student will be responsible for one in-class presentation and short paper (see below). Topics will be chosen on **Wednesday October 8**. After choosing your topic, you will be responsible for a 10-minute in-class presentation on the topic, schedule TBA. Details as to what the presentation should include will be posted on Moodle/handed out in class.

**Presentation report:** This report will be a 4–5 page formal write-up of your research for the topic (see presentation, above). This report should contain the same basic information as the presentation, but in a formal written form. Presentation reports will be due the same day as you give your presentation, schedule TBA. Details as to what the presentation report should include will be posted on Moodle/handed out in class.

*Note on the presentation/presentation report:* Colgate Librarian Jesi Buell has created an online research guide to assist with this assignment as well as the larger paper. You can access this guide here: <http://colgate.beta.libguides.com/RELG213>. She can also assist with questions you

might have during your research (jbuell@colgate.edu). Of course you should also feel free to e-mail me with any questions.

**Abstract:** Your abstract will be a short (1 paragraph) abstract of your final paper. The abstract should give the context out of which your research question/analysis emerges and should include a *thesis statement*. On the same page, you must include your proposed bibliography (at least 2 sources at the time of the abstract), according to the details laid out in the Essay Guidelines sheet, which will be posted on Moodle and discussed in class.

**Final Paper:** Your final paper will begin with an analysis of a story or pericope from the Pentateuch, and then compare it with either a Second Temple source or a modern source. I will post a list of possible topics, which you are welcome to choose from, or you may choose your own. All topics must be presented in abstract form (see above) with a short bibliography, *and must be approved by me*. Papers should be 10–12 pages. Specific guidelines will be posted to Moodle and discussed in class. Due the last day of class.

**Final Exam:** This exam will cover the materials from the Second Temple period and the modern case study (not cumulative). The exam will consist of short answers and essays. More information will be provided in class closer to the exam.

### **Electronics Policy:**

Electronics used for the purpose of the course (i.e. to access materials, take notes, etc.) are welcome to be used in class. **Cell phones are not to be used for this purpose, however.** I ask that you respect your fellow classmates as well as your instructor and any guests by *not* using your computer/iPad, etc. to access social media or other unrelated materials during class. Even if I cannot see it, it is a distraction for those sitting around you. *Please use good judgment and be respectful.*

Note that the course lecture *may not be recorded* unless you have arranged it with me prior to the lecture.

### **Additional Information:**

**Academic Honesty:** Students are required to observe the honor code. Plagiarism, any attempt by a student to represent the work of another as one's own, will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes all of the following: copying the answers of another student on an examination, copying or substantially restating the work of another person or persons in any oral or written work without citing the appropriate source, and collaboration with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution. All instances of plagiarism will be dealt with according to Colgate's policy on plagiarism, as outlined on pages 21–2 of the University Academic Honor Code.

**Learning Challenges:** Students who may need additional assistance due to learning disabilities or learning challenges are expected to see me as early as possible in the semester. I am willing to make accommodations whenever possible, but only if you see me ahead of time.

**Class Schedule:**

**Thursday August 28**

Introduction to the Class/Syllabus

**Friday August 29**

No Class; Tuesday class schedule

**Week 1**

**Monday September 1**

Reading: Introduction to Genesis (Alter), Genesis 1–5

**Wednesday Sept 3**

Reading: Genesis 6–11:9

**Friday Sept 5**

Reading: Genesis 11:10–25:18

**Week 2**

**Monday Sept 8**

Reading: Genesis 25:19–28:22

**Wed Sept 10**

Reading: Genesis 29–33, 35–36

**Fri Sept 12**

Reading: Genesis 34, 38

**Week 3**

**Mon Sept 15**

Reading: Genesis 37, 39–50

**Wed Sept 17**

Reading: Introduction to Exodus (Alter), Exodus 1–6:27

**Fri Sept 19**

Reading: Exodus 6:29–13:16

#### **Week 4**

##### **Mon Sept 22**

Reading: Introduction to Deuteronomy (Alter); Exodus 13:17–20, Deut 25:17–19

##### **Wed Sept 24**

Reading: Exodus 21–25:10,

##### **Fri Sept 26**

No class, Rosh Hashanah

#### **Week 5**

##### **Mon Sept 29**

Reading: Introduction to Leviticus (Alter), Exodus 32–34, Leviticus 10

##### **Wed Oct 1**

Reading: Introduction to Numbers (Alter); Numbers 10:11–14:45

##### **Fri Oct 3**

Reading: Numbers 20–24

#### **Week 6**

##### **Mon Oct 6**

Reading: Numbers 25, Deuteronomy 4–6, Deut 12:32, Deut 27

##### **Wed Oct 8**

Reading: Deut 32–34

Sign up for presentations

##### **Fri Oct 10**

Pentateuch Exam

##### **Mon Oct 13 (Oct 11–14: Mid-Term recess)**

**While reading Kugel's book, please have your Pentateuch open to the appropriate passages and review them for content.**

**Continue to bring your Pentateuch to class, as well as Kugel's book.**

#### **Week 7**

##### **Wed Oct 15**

Reading: Kugel, 1–50, 51–64

**Fri Oct 17**

Reading: Kugel, 65–96

**Week 8**

**Monday Oct 20**

Reading: Kugel, 97–120

**Wednesday Oct 22**

Reading: Kugel, 131–148, 163–178

**Friday Oct 24**

Reading: S. Sheinfeld, “The Old Gods are Fighting Back: Mono-and Polytheistic Tensions in Battlestar Galactica and Jewish Biblical Interpretation.”

**Week 9**

**Monday Oct 27**

Reading: Kugel, 97–120

**Wednesday Oct 29**

Reading: Kugel, 197–230

**Friday Oct 31**

Reading: Kugel, 231–244

**Week 10**

**Monday Nov 3**

Reading: Kugel, 245–284

**Wednesday Nov 5**

Reading: Kugel, 285–308

**Friday Nov 7**

Reading: Kugel, 309–352

**Week 11**

**Monday Nov 10**

Reading: Kugel, 371–414

**Wednesday Nov 12**

Reading: Kugel, 477–500

**Friday Nov 14**

Reading: Kugel, 501–548

**Week 12**

**Monday Nov 17**

Reading: Reread Genesis 6–9, *The Preservationist*

**Wednesday Nov 19**

Reading: *The Preservationist*

**Friday Nov 21**

Abstracts due via e-mail, 5pm.

No class (Society of Biblical Literature Conference)

**22–30 Nov: Thanksgiving Recess**

**Week 13**

**Monday Dec 1**

Reading: *The Preservationist*

**Wednesday Dec 3**

In-class discussion: *Noah* and *Evan Almighty*

**Note:** Please be sure you have watched these movies before class on Dec. 3. Both movies are on reserve at Case library.

**Friday Dec 5**

Reading: *The Year of the Flood*

**Week 14**

**Monday Dec 8**

Reading: *The Year of the Flood*

**Wednesday Dec 10**

Read *The Year of the Flood*

**Friday Dec 12**

Review Session

Final Papers Due

**Final Exam: Friday Dec 19, 9:00–11:00 a.m.**