**How the Bible Became Holy**

No book in human history has exercised as much influence as the Bible. Over the past 2,000 years, people have killed and died for the Bible, and it continues to exercise a powerful if contested role in modern politics. Yet how did it achieve this power? This course will trace the development of both the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament from their origins to their development as foundational texts for Jews and Christians. The focus will be on how Jews and early Christians throughout antiquity understood and ascribed authority to the Bible.

**Goals**

By the end of the semester, you should:

1. Be familiar with the general contents of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament;
2. Have a better understanding of how these texts were viewed in antiquity;
3. Know the general historical narrative of the Israelites/Jews and Christians in antiquity;
4. Be able to identify the major sources behind that narrative and some of the issues involved in their interpretation;
5. Be more sensitized to issues of authority, particularly the ways in which texts are used as authoritative;
6. Be a more sensitive reader of texts;

**Resources**

We will frequently be using the books below.

1. *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (ISBN: 978-0195289602)
2. M. Satlow, *How the Bible Became Holy* (ISBN: 978-0300171921)
3. T. Lim, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN: : 978-0192806598)
4. R. E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (ISBN: 978-0060630355)

**Requirements**

*Obviously, this is very much up to the instructor. I tend to use a combination of online responses (“low stakes writing”), short papers, and a historical simulation exercise or two. The syllabus adapts easily to a midterm and final also, though.*

**Schedule**

*The numbers represent units, not necessarily individual classes; obviously this needs to be tailored to your own meeting schedule. The supplemental readings are just ideas; not all readings should be used for each unit.*

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| **1** | **Introduction** |
| **2** | **Defining Textual “Authority”**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 1-9McDonald, “What Do We Mean by Canon?” in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (2010), pp. 8-40D. Brakke, “Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity,” in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation* (2012): 263-80What does it mean to give a text “authority”? How do we today give texts authority? |
| **3** | **Textuality in the Ancient Near East**Reading: Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (2007), pp. 9-49What role did texts play in antiquity? |
| **4** | **Biblical Israel**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 13-30 2 Kings 9:1-10:36AmosWhat do we know about the earliest history of the Israelites, and how do we know it? |
| **5** | **The Southern Kingdom: Judah**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 31-51Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel* (2010), “Scribal Education,” pp. 91-114 and “Extent of Literacy,” pp. 127-136 Shanks, “Will King Hezekiah Be Dislodged from His Tunnel?” *BAR* 39:5 (2013)2 Kings 18-25Isaiah 36-39Deuteronomy 16-17Did Judahites know how to read? |
| **6** | **Prophecy**Reading: 1 Samuel1 Kings 17-21 Isaiah 1-13How did one become a prophet? What did a prophet do? Were prophetic oracles written down, and if so, by whom and for what reason? |
| **7** | **Law**Reading Exodus 21-23Deuteronomy 12-26“Hammurabi’s Code of Laws” Slanski, “The Law of Hammurabi and its Audience,” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 24 (2012)What was the purpose of ancient law codes? How was justice administered in antiquity? |
| **8** | **Narratives**Reading: GenesisWhat problems does this narrative pose? What is its (and/or its parts) purpose? |
| **9** | **Wisdom**Reading: JobProverbs 16-25For these authors, what role did writing and texts play in the acquisition of knowledge? |
| **10** | **The Torah and Source Criticism**Reading: *Who Wrote the Bible?* |
| **11** | **Exile and Return**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 52-68Jeremiah 1-3, 27, 36Ezekiel 3HaggaiL. Pearce, “Continuity and Normality in Sources Relating to the Judean Exile,” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 3:2 (2015), 163-184Esther“Passover Letter”Cyrus CylinderHow did the destruction of the Jerusalem temple affect the Judahite elite? What changed in Babylonia? Did texts have authority in these communities? |
| **12** | **Ezra and Nehemiah**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 69-100EzraNehemiah 1, 5, 8-9; Did the Jews accept the Torah? |
| **13** | **Hellenism** Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 103-23EcclesiastesEcclesiasticus (Ben Sira) Prologue, 1, 9-10, 35, 44:23-end of bookWhat is Hellenism and what impact did it have on Jerusalem? Did the author of Ecclesiastes know the Torah? Compare Ecclesiastes to Ecclesiasticus. |
| **14** | **Early Apocalypticism**Reading: Genesis 5-6 1 Enoch 1-5 and 90:6-42 Daniel 7-9What is “apocalypticism”? Why would it appeal to people? |
| **15** | **Maccabean Revolt**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 124-351 Maccabees 1-2, 14:35-49 2 Maccabees 1-8Ma, “Re-examining Hanukkah” (online)What was the cause of the Maccabean Revolt? |
| **16** | **Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes: Origins**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 136-52Josephus, *Antiquities* Book 13, chapter 10.5-6 (288-300)*Jewish War* Book 2, chapter 8.2-14 (119-166)Who, according to Josephus, were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes? How did they originate? |
| **17** | **Jubilees**Reading: *Jubilees*Why do you think the book of Jubilees was written? What is the author’s goal? |
| **18** | **Septuagint**Reading:*How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 153-70T.M. Law, *When God Spoke Greek*, pp. 33-57*Letter of Aristeas*Why was the Torah translated into Greek? How was it used? |
| **19** | **Philo**Reading:Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* I.I-VII*Life of Moses* I.I-V *Special Laws* I.I-IIHow does Philo treat the Bible? |
| **20** | **Dead Sea Scrolls: Historical Background**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 171-88T. Lim, *The Dead Sea Scrolls**Serekh ha-Yahad* *Miqsat Ma’ase Ha-Torah (=MMT)**A Commentary on Nahum**The Last Days: A Commentary on Selected Verses*What are the Dead Sea Scrolls? What role did Scripture play in the life of the community? How do these works treat Scripture? Compare their approach to that of Philo. |
| **21** | **The Roman Period: Historical Introduction**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, 191-209 |
| **22** | **Jesus**Reading: MarkMatthewWhat do we know about Jesus? What might we know about the authors of Mark and Matthew? |
| **23** | **Paul**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 210-223 RomansGalatiansCompare Paul’s approaches to the Torah (and the status of Jewish law) in Romans and Galatians. Do they cohere? |
| **24** | **Gospel of John**Reading: JohnCompare and contrast John – specifically its approach to the Torah and the Jews – to Paul and Matthew |
| **25** | **Luke and Acts**Reading:*How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 224-240 LukeActsMany scholars consider Luke and Acts to have the same author. What authority do they each give to Scripture? Are they written in order to be Scripture? |
| **26** | **The Second Century**Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 241-256Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 31, 67Irenaeus*, Against Heresy*, 3.11Gospel of ThomasHahneman, “The Muratorian Fragment”What role did Scripture play in different Christian groups in the second century? |
| **27** | **The Rabbis:** Reading: *How the Bible Became Holy*, pp. 257-275M. Brettler, “The Canonization of the Bible,” in *The Jewish Study Bible* (2nd ed.), pp. 2153-2158Selections from *Genesis Rabbah* |