

# The Hebrew Bible

PMIN 207 | Professor Cathleen Chopra-McGowan



PROFESSOR CHOPRA-MCGOWAN

CLASS DETAILS

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**Kenna 323 A**  
**cchopramcgowan@scu.edu**  
**Student Hours: by appointment**

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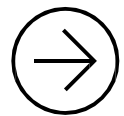
**IP Location TBD + MM**  
**Tuesday 6–9 PM**

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# ABOUT THE COURSE

The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is a complex anthology of disparate texts and reflects a diversity of religious, political, and historical perspectives from ancient Israel and Judah. Because this collection of texts continues to play an important role in modern religions, new meanings are often imposed upon this ancient literature. In this course, we will attempt to read biblical texts on their own terms and will also contextualize their ideas and goals with texts and material culture from ancient Mesopotamia, Syro-Palestine, and Egypt. In this way, we will discover that the Hebrew Bible is fully part of the cultural milieu of the ancient Near East. To these ends, we will read a significant portion of the Hebrew Bible in English, along with representative selections from secondary literature.

This course teaches students how to read closely and to think critically about the meaning of a text. Students will be asked to read primary sources for specific questions of content and meaning and to learn a methodology for deciding between right and wrong answers. All texts and all religious traditions will be examined analytically. Students are expected to understand and master this approach, which includes questioning conventional cultural assumptions about the composition and authorship of the Bible. Willingness to ask such questions and openness to new ways of thinking and reading are essential to successful participation in the course.



# WHAT WILL YOU LEARN IN THIS CLASS?

## *Course Objectives*

1. An overview of the shape and contents of the Hebrew Bible — its compositions, genres, modes of discourse, and poetics; its main figures and events; its central and marginal ideas;
2. An understanding of the Hebrew Bible as a literary anthology that has grown over time in a variety of ways, by both design and serendipity;
3. Clarity about the threefold distinction between the Hebrew Bible, a literary corpus; ancient Israel, an historical society; and Judaism and Christianity, religions — sets of ideas and practices — that developed over time from the people who emerged from ancient Israel and hold biblical texts to be sacred;
4. An appreciation of the modern, critical approaches to reading biblical literature — what led to such approaches, what they aim to accomplish, how they work, and their significance.

*Note:* \* This critical introduction cannot aim to cover the many biblical texts that are famous within Western civilization, but to put them and the entire biblical corpus in critical perspective.

## Required Books

*(All required books will be on reserve at the library or available as e-books; additional readings will be posted on Camino)*

- Brettler, Marc Zvi. *How to Read the Jewish Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. (HRJB)
- Coogan, Michael D. (Editor). *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Fifth edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. (OSB)



Jewish scribes depicted in the famous *Libro de los juegos* (“Book of games”) commissioned by Alfonso X in 1283



## THREE PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING IN THIS COURSE



### HAVRUTA

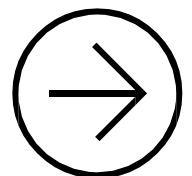
In Judaism, studying Torah (the bible) is something one rarely does alone. Havruta study is an approach to studying with a partner in which you are both the teacher and learner, helping your partner learn while also learning yourself. To learn and teach well, you must read the text very carefully and pay attention to your partner's reading as well. This type of study asks you also to reflect on your learning processes, and how you can each affect the other in their learning. We will be using this principle of peer-guided study throughout the quarter in the form of in-class partnered reading and interpretation assignments.

### CURIOSITY

Platonic tradition says that love always precedes knowledge (*Philosophy* means "friend of wisdom"). Put differently, commitment to knowing something or someone comes before actually knowing. The first step, St. Anselm, would say, is giving of yourself first—your time, your interest, your belief, and what results is a new relationship with and to knowledge itself. In this course, what I want most from all of you is this spirit of curiosity, to being open to learning.

### REASON

Judaism and Christianity have rich traditions of logic, reason, and inquiry. In this course, we will draw on these traditions while also building our own. The combination of your curiosity and your work with your partners will raise new questions and new ways of thinking about the texts we study. Carefully reasoned interpretation, in conversation with these traditions, will help us generate new answers to the questions you ask.





### Category 1: Intellectual Engagement (20%)

#### *Attendance and Participation*

Your attendance is vital. This is a discussion-based class and it's important we have everyone's input. If you're not there, you can't participate, and you will have a much harder time participating in the next class. If you are absent from class, you are responsible for getting any materials from your fellow students. Absences due to emergency or medical situations are excused if you contact me. Two unexcused absence are permitted, but each additional one will result in a **2% deduction** from your **overall** course grade. Situations that fall outside these categories will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

### Category 2: Reflections (10%)

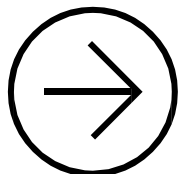
You will write two reflections (each 2-3 pages, double spaced) in this course: the first is due on Friday of Week 1: What do you already know about the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament? In what ways (if any) do you use biblical texts in your work as a minister of the church? What are you hoping to learn this quarter?

The final reflection (due on Tuesday of Week 9) asks you to reflect on one of the following prompts:

1. How does the study of the Hebrew Bible contribute to or complicate efforts of meaning making around disaster? You might choose, for example, a reading from Lamentations or Ezekiel and focus on the issue of migration and exile that faced ancient populations during times of war, assessing biblical texts and comparing their differing conceptions of divine justice. In your final reflection, please bring in specific examples from topics or texts we have studied in class.
2. Select a topic, like "biblical religion," "Israelite history," or "canon and hermeneutics." How have the Required Readings changed your idea about the topic? What assumptions did you hold before, in what way have they changed, and what specifically caused you to reconsider? Refer to specific passages. Explain how the Lectures and any supporting materials you have read advance or complicate your understanding of the topic. What significance might this have for church ministry and your place in it?

### Category 3: Critical Analyses (70%)

Over the quarter, you will write two short papers (5–7 pages each, double spaced; each 15%) and one longer one (8–10 pages, double spaced; 40%). These papers are synthetic in design, asking you to consolidate and analyze major themes and materials we have covered in class.





### Category 3: Critical Analyses, Contd.

#### *Forms of Citing the Bible*

Genesis 1 means Genesis, chapter 1.

Genesis 1:4 means chapter 1, verse 4

Genesis 1–3 means chapters 1–3.

Genesis 1:1–5:6 means from chapter 1, verse 1 through ch. 5, v. 6

Genesis 1:1–5; 2:4–6 means chs. 1, vv. 1–5; and then ch. 2, vv. 4–6.

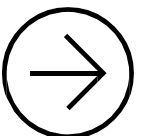
#### Due Dates

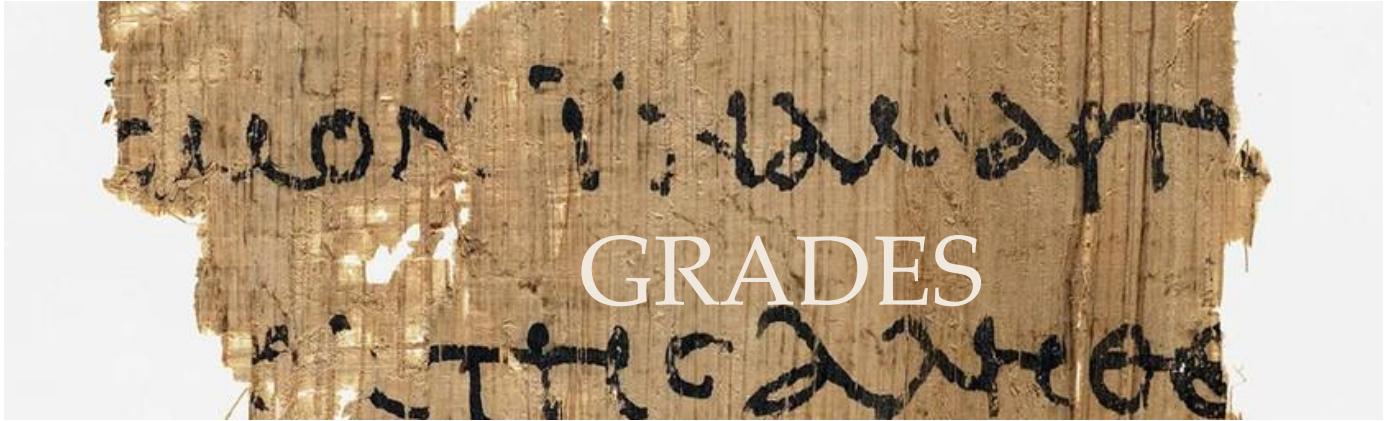
**Week 1: January 10** *Reflection 1*

**Week 3: January 21** *Critical Analysis 1 (Short Paper)*

**Week 6: February 11** *Critical Analysis 2 (Short Paper)*

**Week 9: March 4** *Critical Analysis 3 (Long Paper) AND Reflection 2*





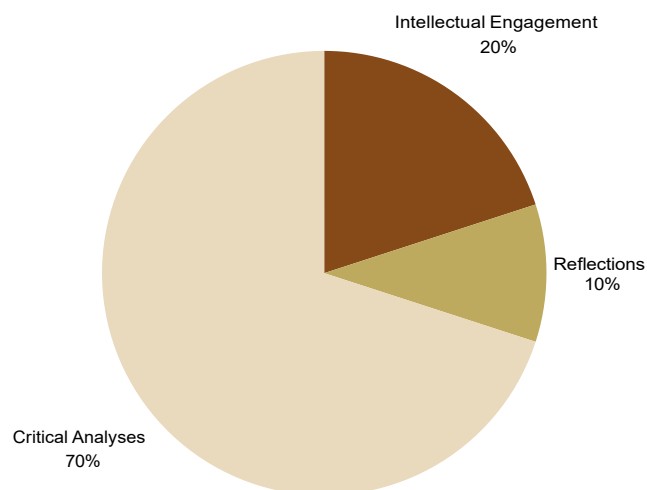
## Grading Scale: What does it all mean?

95-100 A Incredible work. 90-93.99 A- Excellent work, only a few small areas for improvement.

87-89.99 B+ Very good work; near excellence, but has minor problems. 83-86.99 B Good work above average, some errors and problems. 80-82.99 B- Good work, but lacking some completeness, and/or accuracy.

77-79.99 C+ Acceptable work but errors in accuracy, completeness, and/or citations. 73-76.99 C Acceptable work, but lacking in completeness, critical thinking or accuracy. 70-72.99 C- Perfunctory work; may be simply rehashing sources.

64-69.99 D Unsatisfactory work; shows minimal grasp of concepts or sloppy analysis. 0-63.99 F Failure.





## A Statement on Wellness

Jesuit education is grounded in concern for the whole person—mind, body, and spirit— and SCU has many resources and programs to support you. Resources that assist with mental wellness and mindfulness can be found through the Cowell Center and Campus Ministry, to name but a few. University students may experience stressors or setbacks from time to time that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressure or challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing difficulties, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If you are concerned with your progress in this class, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. The Drahmman Center can also offer support with issues regarding your academic progress more broadly. For personal concerns, SCU offers many resources, some of which are listed on the Cowell Center website.

## Statement on Access

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity.

You are also welcome to contact the Office of Accessible Education (OAE), Benson 216, <http://www.scu.edu/oa> to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. This office is responsible for determining reasonable and appropriate adjustments for students with disabilities on a case-by-case basis, and more generally, for ensuring that all members of the community have access to SCU's programs and services. If you have already arranged accommodations through the OAE, please discuss them with me during my office hours. Students who have medical needs related to pregnancy may also be eligible for accommodations. The OAE would be grateful for advance notice of at least two weeks. For more information, you may contact OAE at 408-554-4109.







## Absence Policy

Your presence in class is expected. However, circumstances may occasionally arise that prevent you from attending class, such as illness or family emergency. You are thus allowed **two** absences with no penalty.

After the first two, any subsequent absence will result in the loss of 5% *per absence* from your final grade and a 0 intellectual engagement grade for the day.

- Generally, **absences due to illness count** towards your two allowed absences.
- Some absences may be excused on a case-by-case basis, with no penalty (such as an extended illness, significant mental health crisis, death in the family, jury duty, etc.). If something in your life is causing you to miss class or to struggle in the course, *please* let me know so that we can work together to help you succeed.

**Makeup Work:** If you miss class for any reason, please consult the syllabus to see what readings you have missed. Please do not contact me instructor to request class notes or other information. Instead, please, in advance, introduce yourself to two different students and exchange phone numbers and emails so that you have a way of getting notes. Ideally, get two complete sets of notes. It is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate and to ensure you are aware of any announcements made during class.

Please do not write to me asking if you “have missed anything important.” Class is important: if you’re not there, you’re always missing *something*. In case of illness or otherwise excused absence, late submission of assignments and/or making up a test is permitted provided you work out a new due date with me.





## Pregnancy and Parenting

If you are pregnant or a parent, please know that you are welcome in this class, and I'd like to help make your fullest participation possible and successful.

In alignment with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and with the California Education Code, Section 66281.7, Santa Clara University provides reasonable accommodations to students who are pregnant, have recently experienced childbirth, and/or have medically related needs. Pregnant and parenting students can often arrange accommodations by working directly with their instructors, supervisors, or departments. Alternatively, a pregnant or parenting student experiencing related medical conditions may request accommodations through Disability Resources.

*Additional Policies are linked on Camino*



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OFFICE  
Kenna Hall 323A

## Academic Integrity

In brief: do not cheat or use shortcuts that are not approved by me. This includes plagiarism of all kinds, but especially forbids the use of generative AI like ChatGPT to write your notes, annotate texts, or write papers (the full version of this statement is available on Camino). If you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism, *please* ask me.

If I discover you have plagiarized, you will receive a zero on the assignment, and may also receive an F for the course as a whole.

## Communication Policy

I will communicate important messages regarding the course via the announcements feature on Camino (do make sure you've set up your preferences to receive notifications) or via your SCU email. If you would like to contact me, I am available via email during the working week (business days) or during scheduled office hours (M 11:45–12:45). I am not available via social media (instagram, FB Messenger, etc.).

Please note that email is an asynchronous method of communication. Thus, I do my best to respond within 24 hours, but a response may take up to 48 hours or two business days. →

*Note 1 This syllabus is subject to change if unforeseen circumstances arise*

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