Course Name: COS 221- Bible II: Torah, and Israel’s History

Instructor Name: Josey Snyder
Instructor Email: josey.snyder@duke.edu

Course Description (as provided by GBHEM of the UMC):
This course interprets the critical events, developing institutions, and traditions of Israel. Attention is given to the earliest Covenants, to the Exodus, to the rise of the monarchy, and to other events up to the eighth century prophets.

Students will be able to:
1. Articulate a historical overview of the experience and faith of ancient Israel.
2. Exegete selected passages that illustrate crucial turning points in the history of Israel.
3. Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day.

Required Texts
1. **The Bible.** This is the primary text for the course, and you must bring it with you to class each day. For the purposes of this course, it is strongly recommended that you purchase one of the following editions, preferably choosing a translation you do not usually read:
   - *The Jewish Study Bible* (NJPS), ISBN-10: 0199978468

2. **Mark Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Jewish Bible,** ISBN-10: 0195325222
   *This will be our primary textbook for the course, and we will read approximately half of it (i.e. the portions pertaining to Genesis through 2 Kings).*

Recommended Texts (all readings will be scanned)
   *This book is on the required list from GBHEM. We will use it as a companion piece to Brettler. It is an excellent reference and would be a valuable addition to your personal*
library. We will read short selections, as they pertain to planned class discussions. There are three editions. Should you choose to purchase it, any edition will suffice.


This book is also a valuable resource and we will read portions of it in class. This book is also available as an audiobook, and is the sort of book you might listen to in lieu of (or in addition to!) reading.

Pre-Work Assignments:

1. Read Genesis to 2 Kings. See attached pages for explanation and accompanying assignment. The worksheet template for this assignment can be found in the 221 Course folder in the SCOS Student Duke Box. A link to the SCOS Student Duke Box will be provided by the COS office to each student who has enrolled.

2. The topic of our first day together will be “What is the Bible and How Do We Read?” To prepare for our discussion that day, please read the following:
   - Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, 1-17.
   - Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 1-46 (esp. 2-5, 7-17, 29-33, and 45-46)

Brettler and Kugel both discuss how different reading communities approach the biblical text with different sets of assumptions. In 2-3 double-spaced pages, reflect on how your community (i.e. your church) uses the Bible and what sort of assumptions your community makes about what the Bible is. Is the Bible something read only in fragmented pieces during worship? Does it play an integral role in small groups, Sunday school classes, or committee meetings? What kind of assumptions does your community make about the Bible and how we should read it? Think about the assumptions discussed in Kugel (esp. p. 14-16 and 31-32). Which (if any) of these fit your community? What other sorts of assumptions might you identify, and how might these affect the ways in which your community reads? Though your discussion should be informed by the readings from Brettler and Kugel, this is primarily a place for you to reflect on your own personal experience with reading the Bible in your own religious community. You need not cite or discuss the specifics of their work, though I would hope you will be prepared to discuss them in class.

Pre-Work Due Dates:

- **June 29, 5pm** – Worksheets covering Genesis through Deuteronomy
- **July 6, 11am** – Worksheets covering Joshua through Kings
- **July 6, 11am** – 2-3 page reflection essay on how your community reads the Bible
COS 221 – Pre-work Part I: Reading Genesis to 2 Kings

Welcome!

I am excited to be on this journey with you as we explore the texts of the Torah and Israelite history together, from Genesis to 2 Kings. As preparation for our time together, I would like you to read these nine books (or eleven, depending on how you count!). I recognize that this is a very large amount of reading. My hope is that it might serve for you as a sort of devotion and grounding for your pastoral work rather than a distraction that you must squeeze in. We might keep in mind Deuteronomy’s vision for the ideal leader, as one who sits and reads scripture all the days of his (or her?!) life (Deut 17:19). Would that we all lived up to this vision!

In our time together this summer, we will practice mostly with in-depth readings of short passages. This form of “segmented” reading has its benefits, and many find great benefit from practices such as reading one chapter a day during morning or evening devotion. However, for this assignment, I urge you to read each book in as few sittings as possible (ideally no more than two). The point is not to dig into a particular story or chapter, but to get a sense of each book as a whole. While I would strongly encourage you to read as slowly and carefully as time allows, the primary consideration is that you read the entire book in as few sittings as possible.

As you read, take (brief!) notes on things you notice, particularly major events or points of transition in the narrative, the types of genres you notice (i.e. narrative, prose, law, etc.), any words, phrases, situations that you see repeated over and over again, or anything else that surprises, inspires, or offends. I have designed a worksheet to aid you in recording these observations. Once you have finished reading each book, review the notes you have jotted down, think about the book as a whole, and answer the worksheet questions to the best of your ability. Please do not consult secondary sources (i.e. textbooks, study guides, etc.). I am interested in your observations based solely on reading the biblical text.

On the following pages, you will see a detailed explanation for the kind of answer I am looking for with each question, followed by a template for you to use in answering these questions for each book. Your responses for each book should not exceed two pages, and may well fit onto one page. While I would invite you to read the book of Ruth, you need not fill out a worksheet for that story. Please type your answers. There is no need to write in paragraphs or even sentences for this assignment. However, please do be attentive to basic rules of spelling and grammar.
My hope is that these worksheets will not take significant time in and of themselves. The most significant work will be reading the biblical books. The worksheets should serve to help you focus your observations toward things that help you characterize each book as a whole. It is my hope that you will find these worksheets useful in your pastoral work. Detailed exegetical work (i.e. for sermons or Bible studies) should always be grounded in a sense of the book as a whole. With these worksheets, you are making your own map to each biblical book, so that you might more easily situate a biblical passage within its context. These worksheets should also help you notice when a passage is especially characteristic (or especially uncharacteristic!) of the book in which it is found.

Given the limited time you will for outside-of-class work during the two weeks of coursework, it is essential that all pre-reading be completed before class begins. To aid in this, I am requiring the first five worksheets (Genesis through Deuteronomy) to be turned into me, by email, one week before the start of class: **June 29, 5pm.** The second half (Joshua through Kings) must be turned into me (by email or hard copy) no later than the start of class, **July 6, 11am.** Keep in mind that there is also a 2-3 page reflection essay due at the start of class.

I sincerely look forward to meeting each of you and to working with you in July. If you have any questions about this pre-work or about the course in general, please feel free to contact me at any time: josey.snyder@duke.edu.

Happy reading!

Josey Snyder
Biblical Pre-Reading Worksheets: An Explanation of the Questions

1. Narratively, what are the major events included in this book?

   For Genesis, you might say it starts with creation, continues with Cain’s murder of Abel, the great flood, the tower of Babel, and stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, concluding with Jacob’s "blessing" of his 12 sons. Feel free to include more detail. Part of the intent here is to develop good notes for your own reference. What “happens” in this biblical book? However, keep the detail minimal enough that you get a broad sense of what it is going on and do not have to settle in with a cup of coffee to read and digest the notes you have made! Think of this as your own, personal “Cliff Notes” to the Bible.

2. What genres do you identify in this biblical book?

   We will talk a lot about genre during our time together. If you are going to interpret a biblical text, it helps to know what the genre is. We have different expectations of poetry than we do of prose. Likewise, we have different expectations of narrative than we do of law codes. Most biblical books are a mix of several different genres. Make a note of which ones you can identify. Where a particular genre is localized to a few chapters (e.g. a law code), note those chapters.

   Some genres you might identify in your reading include: narrative, poetry, law code, speeches or sermons, hymns, etiologies (or stories meant to explain the origin of something). There is no need to get too specific; again, we are looking mostly for broad strokes that will help you conceptualize the book as a whole. I would not expect you to identify more than 4-5 genres for each biblical book.

3. What are the major points of transition in the book? Note the chapters.

   These major moments of transition might be marked narratively or by genre. In this way, your answers to the last two questions should help you significantly here. For Genesis, you might note a major transition between Gen 11 and Gen 12, where the story shifts from a focus on all of humanity to a focus on a particular family (i.e. that of Terah or, more particularly, Abraham). Due to this transition, many scholars refer to Gen 1-11 as the “primeval history” You need not be aware of these kinds of traditional divisions, but do try to notice what appear to you to be major points of transition in the story.

   One more example: for a major transition marked by genre, you might notice that Exod 20 marks a transition from narrative to law. Were it simply a few verses of law
(i.e. just the 10 commandments), this might not constitute a major shift in the book. However, in this case, the law extends for several chapters, so it is definitely a “major” shift that you should notice when reading the book as a whole.

I would expect you to note at least 2-3, but no more than 4-6 points of transition in any given book. Your answer to this question might look like an outline. So, for example:

- Gen 1-11 – Stories about all of humanity from the beginning of the world
- Gen 12 - ?? - Stories about Abraham

4. What are the major themes you notice in this book?

Think of each biblical book as having its own personality. Indeed, you might find more than one personality within each book, but that variety, too, can then be part of the “personality” of the book. What words, images, or situations do you find repeated most often? For example, when reading Leviticus, you might notice the frequent repetition of the statement “I am the LORD your God” as God's explanation for why the Israelites should follow God's laws. Or, in Genesis, you might notice the frequent focus on the line of succession, and particularly with God's sometimes inexplicable decision to favor one son over another. You may find some of the same elements in multiple biblical books. That is okay, too, but try to focus on what stands out for each biblical book as a part of its unique “personality.” Another way to think about this question is to ask, “Who is God according to Genesis (or Exodus), etc.?” What does God do or say, and what is said about God? Which aspects of God's personality receive particular focus and attention in this biblical book? This is the hardest question of the four. Do your best. Anything that YOU notice as a major theme or focus is a “right” answer.

5. If you make any other observations you want to be sure to remember, particularly in relation to the book as a whole, please note them here.

You are not expected to write anything for this question, but it is here in case the four questions above do not capture some of your most significant observations. My hope is that you will look back at these sheets when you are preparing sermons or Bible studies on passages from these biblical books, in order to help you quickly contextualize your passage within the context of the whole. If you have any observations that you think might benefit you later for this purpose, write them here.