REL 212 – Israelite Religion
Saint Joseph’s University
Department of Theology and Religious Studies
Spring 2012 / M, W 4:00–5:15 p.m.
Course website on Blackboard

Professor
- Dr. Bruce Wells / Bellarmine 208 / office phone: 610-660-1399 / bwells@sju.edu
- Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Textbooks
- REL 212 course pack; contains English translations of relevant biblical texts.

Course Description
Combining the study of biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts, as well as that of material culture, this course analyzes the historical and social context of religion in ancient Israel. Special topics include the worship of different deities, the cultic system, the evidence for popular religious practices (e.g., devotion to the dead, fertility rites), and the origins and development of monotheism.

Course Objectives
1. To become familiar with the principal features of the various systems of belief and sets of religious practices that fall under the rubric of Israelite religion
2. To engage major viewpoints in current scholarship on the origins and history of Israelite religion
3. To understand how the study of Israelite religion differs from the study of the Hebrew Bible and how the latter serves as evidence only for a certain type (or types) of Israelite religion
4. To identify the key ways in which the historical and cultural context of ancient Israel—namely, its existence within the broader ancient Near East— Influenced the development of its religious ideas and practices
5. To express ideas about Israelite religion in a coherent, interesting, and persuasive manner

Assessment: Students’ degree of attainment of these objectives will be evaluated through a variety of assignments (discussed in more detail in the section below). First, all of the objectives will be assessed throughout the semester based on students’ performance in class, which will include the answers they give to direct questions, the comments and questions that they offer, and the contributions they make to small-group and whole-class discussions. Second, specific criteria that relate to the course objectives will be used to evaluate the reaction papers and the term paper (see below under “Term Paper”). The criteria “Critical Comprehension” and “Originality and Perceptiveness” relate directly the first four objectives. The criteria “Focus and Organization” and “Style and Conventions” relate directly to the fifth. Third, the in-class presentation will be especially important for evaluating progress toward objective #2. Finally, all questions on the tests and final examination will be categorized according to which course objective they address, The tests and exam, then, will be an important indication of meeting the objectives.

Requirements, Assignments, and Grading
Reaction Papers. Reaction papers should be 500-1000 words in length and should demonstrate close engagement with important aspects of the assigned reading for that day. The course schedule below lists the due dates for reaction papers as well as questions related to the assigned readings that should stimulate
students’ thinking about those readings. A reaction paper should focus on one or two key points, be logically organized, provide a thoughtful summary of how the readings bear on the paper’s key points, and include some evaluative comments. By “evaluative,” I mean that students should offer a critique of one or more of the readings’ arguments or make connections between different ideas in the readings or from other course material. Reaction papers will be graded on a pass/fail basis by using the four criteria listed below under the section on the “Term Paper.” Papers that are not deemed satisfactory can be re-written. Failure to complete these assignments well and on-time will negatively affect a student’s grade.

Class Participation (10% of course grade). Students are expected to do the assigned reading, to contribute regularly to whole-class discussions, to participate cooperatively in small-group discussions, and to demonstrate critical engagement with course material. Grades assigned for in-class performance will be largely subjective, based on the professor’s overall impression of a student’s efforts.

Online Reading Quizzes (10% of course grade). For most reading assignments, students will complete a quiz (more in the nature of a reading report) posted to the course’s Blackboard site. These quizzes must be completed prior to the class session when they are due.

Presentation (10% of course grade). Most students will each give one 5-10 minute presentation. A few of the presentations require more than one person. These are listed below in the course schedule, and these group presentations will be expected to be longer and more substantive than an individual presentation. There will be approximately one presentation per class period starting in week 3 of the semester. Students will each be assigned a scholarly article (or book, for the groups) that they are to summarize and critique in their presentation. Further instructions will be forthcoming.

Term Paper (20% of course grade). Students will write one 5-7 page paper (1500-2000 words) on a relevant topic of their choice. Sample topics will be distributed as well as other detailed instructions. Students are to rely primarily on the course textbooks as well as on two or three scholarly articles, obtained either from the BAS Archive, ATLA Religion Database, or holdings of the Drexel Library. The papers will be graded according to: (1) Critical Comprehension: Does the paper demonstrate clear understanding of the given topic and critical analysis of key aspects of that topic? (2) Focus and Organization: Does the paper have a clear thesis with logical arguments to support it? (3) Originality and Perceptiveness: Does the paper reflect the student’s own analysis of and thinking on the topic, as well as a reasonable attempt to suggest an original and/or interesting idea or perspective? (4) Style and Conventions: Does the paper use correct grammar and syntax, paragraph and sentence structure, strong and varied use of vocabulary, and a tone and voice appropriate to academic work?

Midterm and Final Examinations (50% of course grade). Both examinations are worth 25% of a student’s course grade. The questions on both may consist entirely of objective questions, entirely of essay questions, or of a mixture. The professor will announce which type will be given in advance.

Grading Scale
A student’s final course grade will be assigned based on the scale below, which shows percentage points and corresponding letter grades. The professor also reserves the right slightly to raise or to lower a student’s grade, based on the professor’s perception of the student’s effort and attitude.

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<tr>
<th>Percentage Points</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>93.33 – 99.99</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90.00 – 93.33</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>86.66 – 90.00</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>83.33 – 86.66</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80.00 – 83.33</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>76.66 – 80.00</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>73.33 – 76.66</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70.00 – 73.33</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<td>66.66 – 70.00</td>
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<td>0-60</td>
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If a student does all of the assigned work in an adequate and average manner, that student will typically receive a grade in the C range. Grades in the B range are given for very good work. Grades in the A range are for excellent or outstanding work. Grades in the D range are for below average or poor work. More detailed descriptions of each range are below.

A  excellent comprehension of material, insightful analysis, creative synthesis of material, frequent and highly valuable contributions in class, clarity in spoken communication, no issues with mechanics in written communication

B  very good comprehension of material, solid analysis, good synthesis of material, frequent and valuable contributions in class, clarity in spoken communication, no major issues with mechanics in written communication

C  adequate comprehension of material, some acceptable analysis, early stages of synthesis of material, some interesting and valuable contributions in class, clarity in spoken communication, few significant issues with mechanics in written communication

D  difficulty in comprehension of material, little analysis, very little synthesis, infrequent contributions in class, some difficulty with clarity in spoken communication, significant problems with mechanics in written communication

Services for Students with Disabilities
For those who have or think that they may have a learning, physical, or psychological disability and who would like to request reasonable academic adjustments, you are encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (Bellarmine Hall, Room G10: 610-660-1774 or 610-660-1620) early in the session/semester. Reasonable accommodations can only be offered to students with current (within 3 years) documentation of the disability and to the extent that such accommodation does not interfere with the essential requirements of a particular course or program.

The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities will do all it can to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. However, there may be times when a disagreement will occur between the student and the university. The student has a right to file a grievance for complaints regarding a requested service or accommodation on the basis of a disability under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and University policies. Questions may be directed to Jim Scott, Director, Services for Students with Disabilities (jscott@sju.edu).

Academic Honesty Policy
It is expected that students’ work in this course will be conducted in keeping with the highest degree of academic honesty. Acts of dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, unauthorized collaboration, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. The “Academic Honesty Policy” of Saint Joseph’s University will be enforced. The text of the full policy can be found in the Student Handbook.

Important Notes
- Changes to the syllabus, important announcements, and other information will be sent to students via e-mail or posted to the course website. E-mail communications will go to students’ SJU e-mail accounts. Students may send e-mail messages from other accounts but should check their SJU accounts on a regular basis in order to be sure they are not missing important information.
- If a student is absent for a class, the student should check with other students in order to obtain lecture notes or any other information that was missed. Students should not e-mail the professor, simply asking to be told what happened during that class session. Important items that require
contact with the professor, such as assignments that were not turned in due to an absence, should be discussed in person if at all possible.

- Some comments on classroom comportment. Please do not use phones or other hand-held electronic devices during class. If you wish to use a notebook/laptop/tablet computer during class, you must request permission in writing from the professor and explain how such usage will enhance your learning. You will also be required to sit in the front row of the classroom when using a computer. In general, please do not be disruptive. Please do not leave the classroom on a regular basis while class is in session. Be cooperative. Pay attention. Take copious notes.

Course Schedule
The course textbooks are identified by their authors’ last names. Readings from the Hebrew Bible are identified by chapter number(s) and the biblical book in which they occur. Other readings are listed with their full bibliographic information and are available either on the course website or through the Drexel Library’s electronic resources (note the references to BAS and ATLA for some articles).

Week 1 / Jan 17 – Jan 20
Topic: Introduction to the Course and Geographical Overview

Week 2 / Jan 23 – Jan 27
Topic: Historical Overview / What Is Religion?
Assignments:
- Monday
  - Read Winston L. King, “Religion [First Edition],” in *Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Lindsay Jones; 2d ed.; Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), vol. 11, 7692-7701 (on library’s e-resources page, look under Encyclopedias/Handbooks, then under Religion; in the Gale Virtual Reference Library, use search box on left)
  - Reaction Paper #1: Why is it hard to define religion? Are there reasons not to define it? What distinguishes religious experience from similar phenomena? What are some hallmarks of religion?
- Wednesday (all readings for today on course website)
  - Reaction Paper #2: Using the readings for last class, where do scholars agree and disagree on the relationship between the phenomenon of religion and that of human evolution? What are different ways to explain that relationship? Do you think that religion developed because of its own advantages or as the by-product of other evolutionary developments?

Week 3 / Jan 30 – Feb 3
Topic: The Hebrew Bible
Assignments:
- Monday
  - Read Friedman 15-49; Genesis 1-3, 6-8
- Wednesday
  - Read Friedman 50-88; Genesis 34, 37-38, Exodus 32
  - Presentation #1: E. Tov, “The David and Goliath Saga,” *Bible Review* 2 (Fall 1986) [BAS]
Week 4 / Feb 6 – Feb 10

**Topic:** The Hebrew Bible (continued)

**Assignments:**

- **Monday**
  - Read Friedman 89-116; 2 Kings 17-19, 22-23

- **Wednesday**
  - Read Friedman 117-149; Deuteronomy 12-13, 27-28; Jeremiah 7, 32

Week 5 / Feb 13 – Feb 17

**Topic:** The Hebrew Bible (continued)

**Assignments:**

- **Monday**
  - Read Friedman 150-173; Leviticus 26-27; Ezekiel 5, 8-10
  - Presentation #6: V. Hurowitz, “P—Understanding the Priestly Source,” *Bible Review* 12 (June 1996) [BAS]

- **Wednesday**
  - Read Friedman 188-206, 217-233; Ezra 7-10

Week 6 / Feb 20 – Feb 24

**Topic:** Midterm Examination

**Assignments:**

- **Monday**
  - Special Speaker; meet in Doyle Banquet Hall North in Campion

- **Wednesday** – **Midterm Exam on Wednesday, 2/22**

Week 7 / Feb 27 – Mar 2

**Topic:** Ugarit and Ugaritic Literature

**Assignments:**

- **Monday**
  - Read Coogan 9-47
- **Wednesday**
  - *Read* Coogan 48-74

Week 8 – NO CLASS, Spring Break

Week 9 / Mar 12 – Mar 16

**Topic**: The Study of Divinity

**Assignments**:  
- **Monday**
  - *Read* Coogan 75-115
  - *Reaction Paper #3*: What is the basic story line of the Baal epic? What seems to be the point of the story and how is that story developed? Why do you think that certain major characters in the story were chosen instead of other figures that might have been included? What sort of picture of Baal comes across in the story?
- **Wednesday**
  - *Read* Smith 3-26; Deuteronomy 32

Week 10 / Mar 19 – Mar 23

**Topic**: Organization among West Semitic Deities

**Assignments**:  
- **Monday**
  - *Read* Smith 27-53; 1 Kings 22, Job 1-2  
  - *Presentation #13 (group of 3)*: L. K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994)
- **Wednesday**
  - *Read* Smith 54-66

Week 11 / Mar 26 – Mar 30

**Topic**: Characteristics of West Semitic Deities

**Assignments**:  
- **Monday**
  - *Read* Smith 83-103
  - *Read* Z. Meshel, “Did Yahweh Have a Consort?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 5 (Mar/Apr 1979) [BAS]
- **Wednesday**
  - *Read* Smith 104-131
  - *Reaction Paper #4*: What do scholars mean when they refer to dying-and-rising gods? Does Smith think that Baal should be called a dying-and-rising god? How does he try to relate this concept to the god of Israel?
Week 12 / Apr 2 – Apr 6
Topic: The Development of Monotheism
Assignments:
- Monday
  - Read Smith 149-166
- Wednesday – Term papers due on Wednesday, 4/6

Week 13 / Apr 9 – Apr 13 (No class on Monday, April 9, due to Easter Holiday)
- Wednesday
  - Read Smith 135-148

Week 14 / Apr 16 – Apr 20
Topic: The Development of Monotheism (continued) / Sin, Sickness, and the Gods
Assignments:
- Monday
  - Read Smith 167-178
  - Presentation #18: W. G. Dever, “A Temple Built for Two: Did Yahweh Share a Throne with His Consort Asherah?” Biblical Archaeology Review 34 (Mar/Apr 2008) [BAS]
- Wednesday
  - Read F. R. Magdalene, On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job (Providence, R.I.: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007) ch. 2 “Disease, Disability, and Disaster as Law”
  - Read Leviticus 4-6; Numbers 15
  - Presentation #21: B. Lang, “Afterlife,” Bible Review 4 (Feb 1988) [BAS]

Week 15 / Apr 23 – Apr 27
Topic: Presentations / Review
Assignments:
- Monday
- Wednesday
  - Review for final exam