THE 2011 – Origins of Law & the Bible
Saint Joseph’s University / Spring 2010
M, W: 4:00-5:15
Course website on Blackboard

Professor
Dr. Bruce Wells / Bellarmine 208 / bwells@sju.edu / 610-660-1399
- Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 10:00 – 11:30
- Please feel free to come and see me. If the office hours do not work for you, let me know and we can schedule an appointment. I will be happy to make time for you, if you should have questions or concerns that you would like to talk about in person.

Textbook
- Roth, Martha T. Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. 3d ed. SBL Writings from the Ancient World. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2003
- English translation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

Course Description
This course looks at the world’s earliest known law: the law of ancient Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, and other ancient Near Eastern societies. The course goes on to examine the relationship between these legal systems and the legal texts of ancient Israel and Judah found in the Hebrew Bible, as well as other issues related to the study of biblical law. Finally, the course considers the legacy of ancient Near Eastern law and its impact on the development of modern legal institutions and systems.

Course Objectives
- To obtain an understanding of ancient Near Eastern legal systems and the societies within which they developed (primary assessments: quizzes, exams).
- To develop the ability to analyze ancient legal texts, identify their salient features, and summarize the most important issues at stake (primary assessments: in-class performance, papers, exams).
- To understand and critique the scholarly theories that attempt to explain the relationship between the legal texts of the Hebrew Bible and those from ancient Near Eastern societies other than Israel and Judah (primary assessments: papers, exams).
- To appreciate the problems and issues common to both ancient and modern legal systems, as well as the heritage that modern systems find in the ancient Near East (primary assessments: papers, exams).

Assessment: Students’ degree of attainment of these objectives will be assessed by means of a variety of assignments (discussed in more detail in the section below). The first objective (an understanding of ANE societies and legal systems) will be assessed primarily by means of students’ contributions to in-class discussions, by quizzes over assigned readings, and by specific questions on both the midterm and final exams. The second objective (an ability to analyze ancient legal texts) will be assessed through the 4-5 page essay and through the group presentation. The third objective (understanding and critiquing scholarly theories) will be assessed primarily by reading quizzes and by targeted questions on the midterm and final exams. Finally, the fourth objective (appreciating problems/issues common to ancient and modern systems) will be assessed by students’ contributions to in-class discussions on this topic and by specific questions on the final exam.
Requirements, Assignments, and Grading

In-Class Performance (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 through their participation 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.

Quizzes (10% of course grade). Students should expect a pop quiz on any day that reading is due. A student’s lowest quiz grade will be dropped. If a student is absent for a quiz, that is the grade that will be dropped. No make-up quizzes will be allowed except in extraordinary circumstances.

Paper and Presentation (30% of course grade). Students will submit one 4-5 page essay during the first half of the semester. The essay will cover a legal topic that relates to the law collections of the ancient Near East. They will select their essay topic from the list given in the course schedule below. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, submitted on standard 8½ by 11 paper, and printed in a readable font style and size. E-mail submissions will not be accepted. All late papers will be discounted by 2 points per calendar day. In the second half of the semester, students will also be divided into groups of two or three for the purpose of doing group presentations. Each presentation will address a particular text from the Hebrew Bible that is important for the study of biblical law. Groups may select the text of their choice. Both the paper and the presentation will be graded by means of the following criteria. (1) Critical Comprehension: Does the essay/presentation demonstrate clear understanding of the given topic and critical analysis of key aspects of that topic? (2) Coherence: Does the essay/presentation have a clear thesis with logical arguments to support it? (3) Originality: Does the essay/presentation reflect the students’ 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) Mechanics: Does the essay/presentation use correct grammar (including syntax, paragraph structure, etc., for the essay) and a style appropriate to academic work? Both assignments are worth 15% each of a student’s final course grade.

Midterm and Final Exams (50% of course grade). Both exams will consist primarily of short answer and essay questions, and both will be worth 25% of a student’s final course grade. The final exam will cover only material introduced after the midterm.

Grading Scale
A student’s final course grade will be assigned based on the scale below, showing percentage points and the corresponding letter grade. The professor will use the upper and lower portions of each range to assign letter grades with a plus (+) or minus (–). 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 throughout the course.

90-99.............A
80-89.............B
70-79.............C
60-69.............D
0-60.............F

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

Students with Disabilities
For those who have a documented learning, physical, or psychological disability and who are requesting reasonable academic adjustments, you are encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (Room 113, Science Center, 610-660-1774 or 610-660-1620) early in the semester. If you suspect that you have an undiagnosed disability (learning, physical, psychological), please contact Services for Students with Disabilities to discuss this concern. You should also discuss instructional needs and accommodations with your professor as early in the semester as possible. All requests for extended-time testing must be discussed with your professor at a minimum of one week prior to the date of each exam. Students must complete the Extended-Time Request Form, obtain the professor’s approval, and submit the form to Services for Students with Disabilities a minimum of 3 days prior to the date of the scheduled exam. Failure to follow these procedures could result in a denial of the request.

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 regarding this course.

- 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.

- The five best ways to ruin your class participation grade
  - Write, read, send, and/or receive text messages during class.
  - Allow your mobile electronic device to ring, vibrate, or make other noises during class.
  - Speak while another student is contributing a comment to class discussion.
  - Leave the classroom on a regular basis while class is in session.
  - Participate unenthusiastically in small-group discussions and activities.
Course Schedule

Textbooks = Roth / Westbrook-Wells

Week 1 / Jan. 19 – Jan. 22

Topic: Introduction to the Course

Week 2 / Jan. 25 – Jan. 29

Topic: The Region and History of the Ancient Near East

Assignments:
- For Monday
  - Read: Westbrook-Wells “Timeline and Sources” (p. ix), “Introduction” (pp. 1-7)
  - Read: Roth “Introduction” (pp. 1-10)
- For Wednesday
  - Quiz: on “Timeline and Sources” in Westbrook-Wells
  - Read: Roth “Laws of Ur-Namma” (pp. 13-22)

Week 3 / Feb. 1 – Feb. 5

Topic: Legal Sources from the ANE and the Hebrew Bible

Assignments:
- For Monday
  - Read: Westbrook-Wells “Sources,” pp. 9-33
  - Read: Roth 23-35 (“Laws of Lipit-Ishtar”)
  - Be prepared to discuss at least two different ways to understand the relationship between
    (a) the so-called law codes and the law that was actually practiced in ANE societies; and
    (b) the legal texts of the Bible and those from cuneiform sources.
- For Wednesday
  - Read: D. Patrick, Old Testament Law (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), “Introduction” and
    chap. 1, pp. 1-31

Week 4 / Sept. 14 – Sept. 18

Topic: The Covenant Code, the Laws of Eshnunna, and the Laws of Hammurabi

Assignments:
- For Monday
  - Read: Roth “Laws of Eshnunna” (pp. 57-70)
  - Read: Exodus 20-24
  - Be prepared to discuss at least two specific similarities between provisions in the Laws of
    Eshnunna and those in your reading from Exodus 21-22
- For Wednesday
  - Read: Roth through ¶25 of “Laws of Hammurabi” (pp. 71-85)
  - Read: Roth ¶112-149 of “Laws of Hammurabi” (pp. 102-109)

Week 5 / Feb. 15 – Feb. 19

Topic: The Covenant Code and the Laws of Hammurabi / Litigation

Assignments:
- For Monday
  - Read: Roth ¶195-267 of “Laws of Hammurabi” (pp. 120-130)
  - Read: D. P. Wright, Inventing God’s Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009),
    “Introduction: The Basic Thesis and Background,” pp. 3-28 and 365-376
  - Be prepared to discuss at least two specific strengths and at least two specific weaknesses
    of Wright’s thesis
For Wednesday

Week 6 / Feb. 22 – Feb. 26
Topic: Litigation
Assignments:
  - For Monday
    - Submit: Essay (4-5 pages) with an analysis of one of the following topics, focusing exclusively on the law codes contained in Roth: adultery, adoption, contracts, debt, divorce, family, homicide, inheritance, marriage, miscarriage-abortion, negligence, oaths and ordeals, property, slavery, women
  - For Wednesday
    - Read: Westbrook-Wells “Litigation,” pp. 35-52
    - Be prepared to discuss the litigation procedures alluded to in Exodus 22:6-12 (in some translations, this is 22:7-13)

Week 7 / March 1 – March 5
Topic: Status and Family
Assignments:
  - For Monday
    - Read: Westbrook-Wells “Status and Family,” pp. 53-68
  - For Wednesday
    - Midterm Exam

Week 8 / March 8 – March 12
NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 9 / March 15 – March 19
Topic: Deuteronomy and the Middle Assyrian Laws
Assignments:
  - For Wednesday
    - Read: Deuteronomy 19-25
    - Read: Roth through the end of tablet A of the “Middle Assyrian Laws” (pp. 153-175)

Week 10 / March 22 – March 26
Topic: Crimes and Delicts / Cities of Refuge in the Bible
Assignments:
  - For Monday
    - Select topic/text for group presentation
  - For Wednesday
    - Read: Westbrook-Wells “Crimes and Delicts,” pp. 69-89
    - Read: Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19:1-13; Joshua 20
    - Be prepared to discuss at least two specific differences between these three biblical texts
Week 11 / March 29 – April 1 (Easter break on Friday, April 2)

**Topic:** Property and Inheritance / Deuteronomy’s Family Laws

**Assignments:**
- For Monday
  - *Read:* Westbrook-Wells “Property and Inheritance,” pp. 91-106
- For Wednesday
  - *Re-read:* Deuteronomy 21-22
  - Be prepared to discuss at least two particular aspects of how women are treated by the laws in these texts
  - *Write out* working hypothesis or tentative thesis for group presentation

Week 12 / April 6 – April 9 (Easter break on Monday, April 5)

**Topic:** Contract Law

**Assignments:**
- For Wednesday

Week 13 / Nov. 16 – Nov. 20

**Topic:** In-Class Presentations

**Assignments:**
- For Monday
  - Three group presentations
- For Wednesday
  - Three group presentations

Week 14 / Nov. 30 – Dec. 4

**Topic:** In-Class Presentations

**Assignments:**
- For Monday
  - Three group presentations
- For Wednesday
  - Three group presentations

Week 15 / Dec. 7 – Dec. 11

**Topic:** In-Class Presentations / Review

**Assignments:**
- For Monday
  - Three group presentations
- For Wednesday
  - Review for final exam