

The Bible against the backdrop of its ancient Near Eastern birthplace. Selections from the Tanakh will be discussed with the goal of understanding what they can tell us about the values and ideals of the people who produced the text.

**Sept 15: Introduction and Overview**

- What is “the Bible,” and when was “the Ancient World”? How to (and why) read the Bible as an historian
- Reading biblical literature to learn about the authors, their worlds, and their worldviews

*Case Study: Creation stories in the ancient world, and Genesis 1*

**Sept 22: Women, Men, & Families**

- What did an ancient household look like – and how do we know?
- Gender roles and how to understand biblical patriarchy in its ancient context

*Case Study: portrayals of women in Genesis and Judges*

**Sept 29: Religion**

- Official religion – belief and practice according to the Torah
- Temple, priesthood, and sacrifice in Israel & the ancient Near East

*Case Study: Leviticus*

**Oct 6: God and The Gods**

- Ancient polytheism and biblical monotheism
- The God of Israel vs the gods of Canaan, Syria, and Mesopotamia – how different were they?
- Asherah and the goddesses of ancient Israel

*Case Studies: the Flood; Exodus 15; selected Psalms; Proverbs 8-9*

**(no class Oct 13) Oct 20: Law**

- Why does Israel get its law from God, when other ancient Near Eastern civilizations got theirs from kings?
- Ancient covenants, treaties, oaths, and laws
- Legal status of persons: men, women, children, and slaves – in Israel, and elsewhere

*Case Studies: Deuteronomy; Exodus 20*

**Oct 27: Prophecy**

- Prophets vs priests; soothsayers, diviners, necromancers, and sorcerers
- Divine inspiration, theodicy, judgment, destiny, & history

*Case Studies: Isaiah, Jeremiah, & Ezekiel*

**Nov 3: Heroes**

- Flawed humans and demi-gods – heroic figures in ancient Near Eastern literature

*Case Studies: Moses & David*

**Nov 10: Wisdom**

- The genre of ancient Wisdom Literature
- How to live, what to value; What does *fear* have to do with being wise?

*Case Studies: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Job*

**Nov 17: Love**

- Defining pornography: cultural reflections and rhetorical uses
- Defining orientation: heterosexuality and homosexuality in the ancient world
- Ancient erotic love poetry – understanding the genre

*Case Study: Song of Songs*