

Ancient Israel Fall 2015
Professor Daniel Fleming, New York University

SYLLABUS

Nothing but the Facts

I have taught Ancient Israel at NYU since 1999, usually once a year. Somehow, it is impossible for me to remain satisfied with the same approach for more than two or three years, though I keep hoping. Last year I started afresh once again, defining the whole project from scratch, and the results were exciting. Maybe this time I have something that will last.

A while back I heard another of those commentaries about the sad state of American education, in this case college education. Look at how little students know, they said: the Bill of Rights, the crucial presidents, basic names from classic literature. Shocking, they said, shocking! It occurred to me that it was ridiculous to measure college education by lists of facts that we were supposed to learn in high school or before. University studies are about more than learning lists of facts – and indeed they are.

Then I found myself talking with a colleague about teaching big introductory courses and was casting about for something fresh and fun and it suddenly occurred to me: What if I *did* build my Ancient Israel course around a list of facts, but I pushed myself to come up with my own most important facts on my own terms, not as names and dates but as essential perspectives and conclusions?

This course is the result of my effort to compose such a list and to try it out as a way to introduce ancient Israel. Every class session will revolve around one “fact,” as defined by your professor, anchored to both primary evidence and secondary readings that relate. There will be daily preparations that will lay the groundwork for discussion of each of my declarations, and the two in-class exams will be structured around them as well.

No textbook has been written to suit either this format or my particular ideas, so the readings have been assembled piecemeal, according to each topic. I want you all to be equipped with the same annotated Bible translation and with a fairly simple Bible “atlas” as regular references, though much of the evidence for the course reaches outside the Bible and the Bible is never a simple authority for history. As you will see, the course will begin with large framing considerations and then will move in the second half to what may be called “history from below,” or more technically, “social history,” focused on everyday life and experience, ending with religion.

Graded work:

General note: Just as I have revised the entire definition of this course, I have also shifted the grading from past practice. I have always valued writing more than demonstration of knowledge by examination, and I have assigned three papers, with the first two as preparation for a final

research paper. Now I am assigning only two papers, with 30% of the grade devoted instead to daily one-page writing assignments as preparation for class. These will be graded quickly on a scale of 1-10, to be multiplied as if by ten (9.5 = 95, etc.), and they are essential for the success of our class meetings. Daily preparations will vary widely, with some focused on problem-solving and some more creative or speculative; they will not be drab reports on the reading. Please take them extremely seriously, as we shall.

1. Breakdown of grading:

- a. Daily projects and class engagement (30%): The definitions for these will be provided in a separate document.
- b. Two in-class exams (one hour and fifteen minutes each) (15% each): Each exam will be framed by the 26 “facts” that define the shape of the course.
- c. Two six-page papers (20% each)

2. The two papers:

Instructions for each paper will be posted on NYU Classes well in advance of each assignment. Here are brief descriptions:

- a. Paper no. 1 (6 PAGES) – **DUE WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4**: The first paper is intended to develop skill in careful reading and analysis of primary evidence, the raw material for any knowledge or comprehension. In this case the texts will include a passage from the Bible recounting a major war with Moab, Israel’s neighbor to the east, and an inscription reflecting the very same conflict from a king of Moab boasting of victory over Israel. These two different views on the same events will offer an occasion to approach evidence for Israel with both a critical and a sympathetic eye, trying to get into their minds and understand their purposes, as well as to get a sense of the past through contrasting sources.
- b. Paper no. 2 (6 PAGES) – **DUE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2**. This second paper is intended to send you into the “secondary literature,” what others have written on a given topic. Unlike the first paper, this one will allow a range of potential topics, each picking up from some element of the secondary literature associated with preparation for the individual “facts” of each class session.

Reading:

Only two texts have been ordered for the course: the Jewish Study Bible from the Jewish Publication Society, so all will have the same translation for work with the Bible; and the Oxford Bible Atlas for reference to places in Israel. This atlas may be used more often in sections than in the main class meetings, but it will be important for knowing where you are and for having a basic grasp of the lay of the land for each main period.

Administration:

Teaching staff:

Daniel Fleming, Edelman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, df2@nyu.edu
Rachel Angel, doctoral student in Hebrew Bible, section instructor, ra1076@nyu.edu
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Office hours for the professor: Monday 1:00 – 2:00 PM and Wednesday 10:00 – 11:00 AM.

Office hours for section instructors as set individually.

Prof. Fleming's telephone is 212-998-8985, but the most reliable way to make rapid contact is by email.

The Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies

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53 Washington Square South, first floor (enter at right of elevators, to right from atrium)

Prof. Fleming's office, room 211, second floor from inside department, to back on left

Prof. Fleming's mailbox, behind staircase on first floor, middle of top row (for turning in late papers)

Policies:

Grading for this course will be shared by the professor and the section instructors. Students will be graded on a regular basis by their section instructors, but I will take at least an equal share of each assignment and try to grade each student's work at least once during the semester. The three teaching staff will meet to compare grades in each case, so that we come as close as possible to matching evaluations. I take final responsibility for every grade, within the following structure. If you believe that your grade is in error or not fair, please approach first the person who graded the work, for review. If you are still not satisfied after your section instructor reconsiders a grade, you may submit it to the professor, whose judgment is final. I have a bias toward supporting the careful decisions of the instructors.

Late papers will be graded down as follows. Up to and including one week, one grade fraction (e.g. B to B-); more than one week, through the end of the term, one full grade (e.g. B to C). **IF YOU HAVE ANY PROBLEM MEETING DEADLINES, INFORM YOUR SECTION INSTRUCTOR OR THE PROFESSOR AS SOON AS YOU ARE AWARE OF IT.** It is always possible to consider special circumstances, to be judged on an individual basis. Again, the professor takes final responsibility for deciding how to handle individual requests about problems.

Class sessions: 24 Facts about Ancient Israel

Part I: Framing Ancient Israel

A. Definitions

1. (September 2) When I talk about ancient Israel I mean the people of Yahweh in the Bible.

Evidence: the Ketef Hinnom inscription (see "Ketef Hinnom" under Wikipedia – authorized for this use!)

Reading:

Philip Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History – Ancient and Modern* (Louisville 2008), "Bible, History, and 'Biblical History'," 1-18; "Bible II," 47-57.

2. (September 9) An ancient Israel course is not a Bible course: keep your Bible handy but get ready to take on more historical baggage.

Evidence: Judges 17-18

Reading:

Philip King and Lawrence Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville 2001), "Introduction: The Importance of the Everyday Life," 1-19.

3. (September 14 – Rosh Hashanah) Ever heard of Moab? Israel was another not-so-splashy Middle Eastern people unique like you are to your mother.

Evidence: the Mesha Inscription from ancient Moab (Context of Scripture vol.2)

Reading:

Delbert Hillers, "Analyzing the Abominable: Our Understanding of Canaanite Religion" (*Jewish Quarterly Review* 75/3 [1985] 253-69). (JSTOR)

Mark Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids 2002), "Introduction," 1-18.

4. (September 16) We can only understand them because they were people like us, and we will only begin to understand them by recognizing just how different their world was from ours.

Evidence:

Psalms 82 (my translation)

"Prayer to the Gods of the Night," David Ferry versification from translation by William Moran, in Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard, and Piotr Steinkeller eds., *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran* (Atlanta 1990), 171.

Reading: David Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor 1984), "Part I: Introduction and the Two Descriptions," 3-41 (available online in the NYU library through the HattiTrust).

B. History

5. (September 21) "History" is life in the past, not just great events or people.

Evidence: Inheritance by a "prostitute" from 13th-century BCE Syria (Emar VI.3 31)

Reading:

Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor 2005), "Preface," ix-xiv; "Becoming a Historian: A Personal Preface," 1-12 (NYU ebrary online version); read more if you like!

Daniel Fleming, "A Woman at Emar of Independent Means," paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, March 2011.

6. (September 23 – Yom Kippur) In the end, Israel was only one of two sister kingdoms, with the other called Judah, but in the Bible, Judah is the one that gets to tell Israel's story.

Evidence: 1 Kings 12:1-24

Reading:

Daniel Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible* (Cambridge 2012), "Part I, Introduction: Israel and Judah," 3-35.

Peter Machinist, "The Transfer of Kingship: A Divine Turning," in Astrid Beck et al. eds., *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman* (Grand Rapids 1995) 105-20.

7. (September 28) Be careful of explaining a thing by how it began – yet the Bible loves this: think of Moses, Joshua, and David.

Evidence: Exodus 14-15; the Elephantine stele of Sethnakht (ca.1190-1188 BCE), translated in J. C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism* (Leuven 1990) 145.

Reading:

William Propp, *Exodus 19-40* (New York 2006), "Appendix B: The Historicity of the Exodus from Egypt," 735-56.

Graham Davies, "Was There an Exodus?" in John Day ed., *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London 2004) 23-40.

8. (September 30) Archaeology is the anchor for exploration of ancient Israel, though without names and storyline.

Evidence: 'Izbet Sartah; see Google images for "Izbet Sartah plan"; Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem 1988) 73-80).

Reading:

William Dever, "Retrospects and Prospects in Biblical and Syro-Palestinian Archaeology," *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982) 103-7 (available through JSTOR; can be found through *Near Eastern Archaeologist*, its new name).

Avraham Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis* (London 2006), "Introduction," 3-10.

9. (October 5) While history is often known by famous events and leaders, history "from below" asks about everyday life and may give a richer sense of ancient Israel.

Evidence: reconstructed four room house in the Harvard Semitic Museum (2013): Google images, "Harvard Semitic Museum four room house" (or the like).

Reading:

E. P. Thompson, "History from Below," *The Times Literary Supplement*, April 7, 1966 (available through NYU library).

Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford 1991), Chapter 2, "The Problem of Patriarchy," 24-46; Chapter 7, "Household Functions and Female Roles," 139-64.

Daniel Fleming, "Chasing Down the Mundane: The Near East with Social Historical Interest," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 1 (2014) 5-20 (available through de Gruyter press, open access).

C. The Politics of Israel

10. (October 7) "Israel" never took its identity from a great city, unlike Babylon, Athens, or Rome, and it was never easy to control from a central place.

Evidence: the Merenptah Stele; the Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III king of Assyria (from Mordechai Cogan, *The Raging Torrent* [Jerusalem 2008])

Reading:

Daniel Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, Chapter 15, "The Power of a Name," 239-55.

Avraham Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, 163-66.

Kenneth Kitchen, "The Victories of Merenptah, and the Names of Their Record," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (2004) 259-72.

(October 12: Fall recess, no class)

11. (October 13 – TUESDAY!) In ancient life and ancient Israel you never leave your family – never – and where you are buried tells the story of who you are.

Evidence: the inscribed tomb from Khirbet Beit Lei (description in Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel* [London 2001] 404-8)

Reading:

Patricia McAnany, *Living with the Ancestors* (Austin 1995), introduction (GET pages).

Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Death and Burial, Bronze and Iron Age," in Daniel Master ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Archaeology* (Oxford 2013), 254-62 (available through academia.edu by author's name).

12. (October 14) When you understand Jerusalem, you can grasp all the big pieces of Israel's political life, both by where it appears and where it does not.

Evidence: Judges 5; 2 Samuel 5; 1 Kings 22; Isaiah 6

Reading:

Ann Killebrew, "Biblical Jerusalem: An Archaeological Assessment," in Andrew Vaughn and Ann Killebrew eds., *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (Atlanta 2003) 329-45.

Daniel Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, Chapter 18, "Israel and Its Kings," 290-303.

13. (October 19) A woman could be in politics, but better a mother than a queen.

Evidence: Judges 5; 2 Kings 11

Reading:

Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen* (New York 1998), Chapter 1, "Deborah, Women, and War," pages to be selected.

Reading on Athaliah.

October 21: First in-class exam

Part II: History from Below: Real life Israel

D. Staying Alive

14. (October 26) Life could be cut off without warning, so it is better to see it as an obstacle course than as "lifespan."

Evidence: Genesis 35:16-21; Ecclesiastes/Qohelet 3

Reading:

Paolo Xella et al., "Cemetery or Sacrifice: Infant Burials at the Carthage Tophet," *Antiquity* 87 (2013) 1191-1207.

Matthew Rindge, "Mortality and Enjoyment: The Interplay of Death and Possessions in Qohelet," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 73 (2011) 265-80.

Fritz Graf, "Victimology: Or, How to Deal with Untimely Death," in Stephen Ahearne-Kroll et al. eds., *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions* (Tübingen 2010) 227-40.

15. (October 28) Most people did not travel, and stable life meant a stable home. Violence was the violation of that home from outside or from within.

Evidence: Genesis 34; 2 Samuel 13;

Reading:

Yael Shemesh, "Rape is Rape is Rape: The Story of Dinah and Shechem (Genesis 34)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 119 (2007) 2-21 (available through NYU library).

Heather A. McKay, "Lying and Deceit in Families: The Duping of Isaac and Tamar," in Patricia Dutcher-Walls ed., *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel* (London 2009) 28-41.

Jack Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Archival Mosaic of an Old Babylonian Culture* (Winona Lake, Ind. 2015, advance copy with appreciation to the author), Chapter 3, "War."

16. (November 2) The ingredients of an arranged marriage tell us everything we need to know about the bounds of everyday life, where the family is the essential structure.

Evidence: the marriage contract in the Kathleen Abraham article; the book of Ruth

Reading:

Kathleen Abraham, "West Semitic and Judean Brides in Cuneiform Sources from the Sixth Century BCE: New Evidence from a Marriage Contract from Āl-Yahudu," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 51 (2005) 198-219 (available through Kathleen Abraham Academia).

Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, Chapter 1.8, "Marriage of Mari Princesses."

17. (November 4 – **SECOND PAPER DUE**) Forget about careers: think about income in terms of farming and flocks.

Evidence: Gezer calendar (see King and Stager, p.88)

Reading:

Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind. 1987), Chapter 4 section on the Gezer text.

King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, "Farming and Animal Husbandry," 86-122.

E. Life Experience

18. (November 9) The IT Department: whether in the Bible or in ancient copies, writing was information technology mastered mainly by specialists, few people knew how to read, and you have to approach it with professional scribes in view.

Evidence: Three "school dialogues," translated by Herman Vanstiphout, in William Hallo and Lawson Younger eds., *The Context of Scripture* Vol. 1 (Leiden 1997) 588-93.

Reading:

Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Mass. 2007), Chapter 3, "In Search of the Scribes, I," 51-73.

19. (November 11) Entertainment without the internet: what did you do for a good time? Think festivals, drama, and a good story.

Evidence: Esther; a Hittite ritual text (KUB XVII 35 Column III)

Reading:

Charles Carter, "Hittite Cult-Inventories," University of Chicago Ph.D. 1962, 142-44.

Adele Berlin, "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001) 3-14.

Takeshi Inomata, "Plazas, Performers, and Spectators: Political Theaters of the Classic Maya," *Current Anthropology* 47 (2006) 805-42 (including responses and discussion; available through NYU library).

20. (November 16) You are what you eat: whole patterns of life are revealed by the difference between boiling and roasting, and sweetness sums up everything "good" in life.

Evidence:

Reading:

Aron Pinker, "On Sweetness and Light in Qohelet 11:7," *Revue Biblique* 117 (2010) 248-61.

Jodi Magness, "Conspicuous Consumption: Dining on Meat in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Near East," in Peter Altmann and Janling Fu eds., *Feasting in the Archaeology and Texts of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind. 2014) 33-59.

David Wengrow, *What Makes Civilization? The Ancient Near East and the Future of the West* (Oxford 2010) 120-24.

21. (November 18) They were human like us, but our most basic experiences are interpreted through socially conditioned expectations, and these are different for different peoples and times: consider the emotions of love, hate, and anger.

Evidence: (biblical text on human anger); a letter from Mari (A.1146)

Reading:

Deena Grant, "Human Anger in Biblical Literature," *Revue Biblique* 118 (2011) 339-61.

William Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963) 77-87.

F. The Powers Beyond

22. (November 23) Worship of a single God comes from polytheism, where the powers beyond us are persons and we live in a community combining gods and humans: most assumptions of polytheism remain part of the Bible's monotheism.

Evidence: Deuteronomy 32:8-9 (and the whole poem); Prayer to Any God (Foster, *Before the Muses* [Bethesda, Md. 1996] 2.670-72).

Reading:

Mark Smith, *The Memoirs of God* (Minneapolis 2004), Chapter 3, "Biblical Monotheism and the Structures of Divinity," 87-123.

Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago 1992), Chapter 12, 201-31.

November 25, Thanksgiving break – NO CLASS

23. (November 30) When you meet a god, he (or she) could take the form of an animal, a monster, or even a human, all to communicate something you need to know – and God as well.

Evidence: Genesis 18:1-15; the temple at Ain Dara (look at Google images under "Ain Dara")

Reading:

Esther Hamori, "When Gods Were Men" (Berlin 2008), Chapter 1 on Genesis 18:1-15, pp.1-13; Chapter 7, "Conclusions: The Embodied God," 150-55.

John Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26/3 (2000) 20-35+67 (should be available through NYU library).

24. (December 2 – **SECOND PAPER DUE**) The God of Israel has a history that puts him among the gods of polytheism.

Evidence: Exodus 15; Judges 5; Habakkuk 3

Reading:

Daniel Fleming, "Yahweh before Israel," *The Biblical Colloquium* 2015.

25. (December 7) There were no doctors and no therapy; we have to imagine the treatment of physical and mental illness in terms of religion and the encounter with powers beyond ourselves.

Evidence: 1 Samuel 1

Reading:

Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta 1995), "A New Approach to the Study of Near Eastern Health Care Systems," 22-35; the role of the temple in the health care system, Shiloh in 1 Samuel 1, pp.326-37.

26. (December 9) They suffered too, and you can feel it in their poetry.

Evidence: Job (the whole book)

Reading: to be provided, as necessary

December 14 (second in-class exam)