

Ancient Israel

New York University, Autumn 2022
Professor Daniel Fleming

Syllabus

Teaching staff:

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Please make all contact with Prof. Fleming by email, which he will answer as quickly as possible.

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Prof. Fleming's office, room 204, second floor from inside department, front right

Prof. Fleming's mailbox, at foot of staircase, middle of top row (for turning in late papers)

Welcome!

This is our second fall semester back face-to-face after the 2020-21 year was held remotely. Many people are putting Covid behind them, and masks are far from the norm. NYU has decided to maintain the policy from last spring through the first month, which means that masks are required in class. Partly in consideration for my 94-year-old father, I will be teaching with a mask through the semester. It worked last fall and I trust we will all manage again. It is fantastic to be in class together.

With the uncertainty surrounding Covid, I decided last year to organize the course so as to take advantage of a moment in 2011 when the university recorded my Ancient Israel class sessions and posted them on YouTube, where they still can be found. These recordings provide backup and a potential complement for our full-class meetings. My approach to the material will be new, but the topics track with 2011.

The Subject:

You may think you know ancient Israel quite well, or you may be sure you know nothing. In either case, this course is designed to make the acquaintance from scratch. My ancient Israel is strange, sometimes shocking, diverse, and mostly hidden. It can be approached from archaeology and non-biblical writing as well as from the Bible as its most famous artifact. I am a biblical

scholar and student of ancient literature, so this class will lean toward what is written. When it comes to ancient Israel, the Bible offers our *only* narrative. This can be something to shake off, to disprove or discount, and yet the stories are powerful and persistent. For this course, as I did in 2011, I will embrace the Bible as point of reference, and a recurring question will be how to gain the most from this approach, eyes open to the pitfalls.

In a broadly chronological framework, we will ask what I hope to be unfamiliar questions, trying to get you to see things you had not considered before. The course assumes no prior knowledge, and all knowledge is built from the ground up based on “primary evidence,” the actual material from the ancient world – including the Bible. Every full-class meeting will involve conversation in response to some piece of primary evidence, with expectation that you have as much right as any scholar to figure out who these people are for yourself. I will look forward to seeing what you come up with, both in class meetings and in your papers.

The Goal:

I do not expect study of Israel, the Bible, or the ancient world to be part of your career plans. Nevertheless, I intend the course to contribute directly to your university education. The two in-class exams are designed to help you keep your bearings, and they are not the focus of the coursework. My goal is to help you learn to reason critically and write analytically: to evaluate evidence for yourself, to identify problems of interest; to construct innovative and convincing interpretations; and to persuade readers of their plausibility. All the work for the course is designed to serve this goal.

Full-class meetings and sections:

The NYU Core program is built around the combination of large sessions with the professor and smaller “sections” with a “preceptor,” usually an advanced doctoral student with considerable experience in the field. Over time, I have moved ever further from considering my role to be built around “lectures,” which are generally less useful to today’s students than more interactive experiences. Therefore I have labeled the large sessions “full-class meetings,” which will be the primary venue for setting the agenda of the course: defining an approach to studying ancient Israel; establishing a method with reliance on primary evidence; doing everything I can to ignite an interest in the material. Section meetings are equally crucial to successful completion of the course. There, you will be able to work more personally with an instructor who can make sure you are comfortable with the basics and who can help you develop skills for the writing projects that carry the main weight of learning for the course.

Graded assignments:

I consider every fraction of the 100% available to grade this course a precious commodity, a way for you, and then us, to measure what you are accomplishing in pursuit of its priorities. Participation is essential, but the direct grades will all belong to three categories of work:

- a. Daily projects and class engagement (30%);

- b. Two in-class exams (one hour and fifteen minutes each) (15% each);
- c. Two six-page papers (20% each).

The exams represent a basic tracking of the material for the course, defined above all by what transpires in the full class meetings. **You must learn to take good notes – and when to take them.** Each meeting will include considerable conversation, and I will flag the particular sections that demand notation for later recollection. The two papers are designed to cultivate essential skills in developing your own ideas and making a case for them, based on evidence and logic. More information on these will be provided separately.

Daily preparations:

The more unusual grading element is the 30% devoted to daily writing assignments as preparation for class. **NOTE THE FOLLOWING:**

- I will give each assignment at the end of one class, to prepare for the next. I want the receiving of these to be part of your physical presence in class.
- On the day they are due, before class, daily preparations must be submitted through the “Assignments” heading in Brightspace. This system was new to us last year but worked well, though it takes us more time than paper. We will sometimes get behind on grading these, so please be patient with us!
- Preparations will be graded quickly on a scale of 1-10, to be multiplied as if by ten (8.5 = 85, a B; 9.5 = 95, an A). We will read them all, appreciating good work when we see it, but commentary will be minimal. This is a big load for all of us.
- Above all, I aim to make these stimulating and demanding. They will not be drab reports on the reading. Let yourself enjoy them. Be creative. Think systematically and rigorously. **PUT IN THE WORK.** It will show and be recognized in the grade. Please take them extremely seriously, as we shall.

The two exams:

There will be a midterm and an end-term exam, each covering half the course, so no “final,” and each to be given during a 75-minute class session. The exams represent a basic tracking of the material for the course, defined above all by what transpires in the full class meetings. You must learn to take good notes – and when to take them. Each meeting will include considerable conversation, and I will flag the particular sections that demand notation for later recollection. There will be a study sheet for identifications to prepare, and essays will be based primarily on the class sessions.

Midterm exam: Wednesday, October 26

End-of-term exam: Wednesday, December 14 (last day of class)

The two papers:

Instructions for each paper will be posted on the course site well in advance of each assignment. As with the daily preparations, we will undertake a fully digital grading system. This means that papers must be posted to the “Assignments” heading on Brightspace by the beginning of class on the due date. Here are brief descriptions of the two papers:

- a. Paper no. 1 (6 PAGES) – **Due Wednesday, October 12:** 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 body of biblical writing from the books of Samuel in the Bible and from the Gilgamesh Epic of ancient Babylonia that present intimate male friendships between heroes: David and Jonathan on one hand, and Gilgamesh and Enkidu on the other. These relationships have been called sexual (and so homosexual) by some, and their intensity and sexual overtones require careful consideration.
- b. Paper no. 2 (6 PAGES) – **Due Wednesday, December 7.** 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 a selection of the class-session topics that had a rich reading base (e.g., November 9, What If God Was Married?).

NOTE ON ATTENDANCE: There is no “class participation” grade, but effort and engagement will be taken into account with grades that are near the border of two possibilities. Generally, the system of daily preparations will show us who is coming, and we will notice students who work around this system. Attendance at sections is essential for your ability to perform well in the course, and participation there will be taken seriously in grading.

Jewish holidays: Every year, the holiday schedule varies, and this year, the holidays fall fairly severely on class days, especially Mondays between September 26 and October 17. Class meetings will continue on the holidays. For students who celebrate and anticipate obstacles, please tell us your plans in advance. I can provide the preparation assignments by mail and accept postings by an adjusted calendar. I have scheduled the first paper and first exam so as to avoid direct conflict, though of course the holidays make everything tighter. Where there is difficulty completing the work because of holiday commitments, please let us know.

Reading

All three books should be available at the NYU Bookstore.

1. *The Jewish Study Bible* (JPS Tanakh translation). This is an up-to-date Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. I would like everyone to use the same text, for coherence of evidence in both classwork and writing assignments.
2. *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, Michael D. Coogan editor. For historical background and context, we will work through much of this volume, which consists of separate chapters by separate authors, each with a different point of view.
3. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, by Karel van der Toorn. A wonderful Dutch scholar wrote this volume as an alternative to standard introductions to the Bible, but intending to reach university students like you. You will get a feel for the Bible as the product of an ancient profession that you probably knew little about.

Administration

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 most students' work at least once during the semester. The four teaching staff will meet to compare grades in each case, so that we come as close as possible to matching evaluations. Professor Fleming takes 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.

Full-class meetings

Part I: Preliminaries

September 7, Ancient Israel

Reading: Lauren Monroe and Daniel Fleming, "Earliest Israel in Highland Company," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82 (2019) 16-23 (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: Judges 4-5

September 12, Israel in the Bible and without it

Reading: *Oxford History* Table of Contents; Preface

Primary evidence: the Merenptah stele (Egypt, ca. 1207 BCE)

September 14, What to do with the Bible

Reading: *Scribal Culture* Chapters 2-4

Christopher Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel* (2010), Chapters 4 and 5 (Brightspace)

William Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible* (2019), Chapter 2, "Scribal Curriculum at Kuntillet 'Ajrud" (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: Song of Songs 1-3; Hosea 2 and 14 (scribal schooling)

September 19, Another world out there

Reading: *Scribal Culture* Chapter 1 (writing)

James Barr, "Adam and Eve, and the Chance of Immortality," Chapter 1 in *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (1992) 1-20 (Brightspace)

Sara Milstein, "The 'Magic' of Adapa," in Paul Delnero and Jacob Lauinger (eds.), *Texts and Contexts: The Circulation and Transmission of Cuneiform Texts in Social Space* (2015) 191-213 (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: Genesis 2-3; the tale of Adapa (from Mesopotamia)

September 21, God and us

Reading: Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses* (1992) 83-107 (Brightspace)

Primary evidence: Genesis 1-3; Atrahasis (from Mesopotamia; abbreviated version in *Context of Scripture* I.450-52) (Bobst digital)

September 26, Israel's roots (**Rosh Hashanah**)

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 1 (through Middle Bronze)

Primary evidence: "A nomad's life" (a letter between tribal kings found at Mari, 18th century BCE) (Brightspace)

Part II: Only the Bible story: Before non-biblical sources

September 28, What to do with Genesis

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 1 (Late Bronze to the end)

Primary evidence: Genesis 28-31 (Jacob's escape to Syria)

October 3, Israel arrives

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 3 (through tribes and tribalism)

Lauren Monroe, "On the Origins and Development of Greater Israel," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 10 (2021), section on the Song of Deborah (Bobst digital or Brightspace)

Primary evidence: Judges 5:12-23 (chapter 5, verses 12-23)

October 5, The good life: no sovereign in sight (**Yom Kippur**)

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 4

Elizabeth Bloch-Smith and Beth Alpert-Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life: The Iron Age I," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 62 (1999) 62-92 (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: Judges 8:4-21 (Gideon); 9:26-55 (Abimelech)

October 10, Columbus Day, **no class**

October 11 (**Tuesday – meet on Monday schedule for full class**), Women and power

Reading: Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, Chapter 11, "On Gender and Its Image" (Brightspace)

Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen* (1998), Chapter 1, "Deborah, Women, and War" (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: "The Song of Deborah" (Judges 5)

October 12 (**Wednesday, regular schedule**), And then there were kings (**FIRST PAPER DUE**)

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 5

Daniel Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible*, Chapter 18, "Israel and Its Kings" (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: 2 Samuel 6 (David brings the ark to Jerusalem)

October 17, Love and marriage

Reading: Carol Meyers, "'Women of the Neighborhood' (Ruth 4.17): Informal Female Networks in Ancient Israel," in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (1999), 110-27 (Bobst digital and Brightspace)

Primary evidence: The book of Ruth

October 19, Archaeology's tenth-century solution

Reading: articles by Finkelstein, Mazar, and Blum, in Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann (eds.), *One God – One Cult – One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (2010) (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: the Stepped Stone Structure (*Oxford History* pp. 254-5)

October 24, Yhw3, New Kingdom Egypt, and the proper name of God (NOT on YouTube)

October 26, **First in-class exam**

Part III: The two kingdoms: When the Bible's story took shape

October 31, Israel and Judah: the period of two kingdoms

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 6 (through From Omri to Jehu)

Daniel Fleming, "The Two Kingdoms Narrative: A Late Monarchic Foundation for Historiography in the Books of Kings," Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 2019 (Brightspace)

Primary evidence: 1 Kings 16 (especially Omri of Israel);

November 2, How the other side lives (or, Israel in the east)

Reading: Bruce Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age* (2004) Chapter 7 (Brightspace)

Primary evidence: the Mesha Inscription (*Context of Scripture* II.137-8); Deuteronomy 2:1 – 3:11; 2 Kings 3

November 7, The House of David

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 6 (the rest)

Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *The House of David* (2016), Chapter 7, "The House of David in History" (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: the Tel Dan Inscription (*Context of Scripture* II.161-2) (Bobst digital); 1 Kings 12:1-24

November 9, What if God was married?

Reading: Judith Hadley, "Some Drawings and Inscriptions on Two Pithoi from Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987) 180-213 (Bobst digital)

(Schniedewind from September 15)

Primary evidence: the drawings at the end of Hadley's article and the short texts cited; Jeremiah 44

November 14, Judah alone

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 7 (through Survival under Assyrian Vassalage)

Primary evidence: Assyrian royal annals for Sennacherib's third campaign (*Context of Scripture* II.302-3) (Bobst digital); 2 Kings 18-19

November 16, Yellow journalism and purple prose: writing like a prophet

Reading: *Scribal Culture* Chapter 7 (The Book of Jeremiah as Scribal Artifact)

Primary evidence: Jeremiah 1, 5, 20, 26, 29, 36, 38

November 21, NO CLASS: travel for Society of Biblical Literature meeting

November 23, NO CLASS: NYU travel day for Thanksgiving

November 28, Judah the ideal and the end of Judah

Reading: *Oxford History* Chapter 7 (King Josiah to the end)

Quinn Daniels on the Yabneh-Yam inscription

Primary evidence: 2 Kings 22-25; the Hebrew inscription from Yabneh-Yam (Mesad-Hashavyahu), ca. late 7th century BCE

Part IV: After the kingdoms; and the thought-world of the Bible

November 30, Judah's Bible: The idea of revelation

Reading: *Scribal Culture* Chapter 8 (Inventing Revelation)

Primary evidence: Lamentations; 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29 and 35:25

December 5, Away from home: Jewish refugees and resettlement

Reading: Karel van der Toorn, *Becoming Diaspora Jews: Behind the Story of Elephantine* (2019), Chapter 1, "Elephantine Revisited" (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: letters from Elephantine (Pritchard *Ancient Near East*, 448-52) (Bobst digital)

December 7, When you talk about sex (**SECOND PAPER DUE**)

Reading: David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (2001), Chapter 1, "Introduction: The Bible and *eros*" (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: Genesis 19; Genesis 30; Judges 19; Hosea 1-3; Ezekiel 16; Song of Songs 4

December 12, Ancient Hebrew psychology

Reading: Matthew Suriano, "Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa's Stele, Hosea 9:4, and the Early History of the Soul," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014) 385-405 (Bobst digital)

Primary evidence: Genesis 2:7; 35:18; Deuteronomy 12:23; the Katumuwa stele

December 14, **Second in-class exam**