OT 2094  PENTATEUCH AND FORMER PROPHETS
Dr. Barbara Green, O.P., Instructor (DSPT)
Spring 2015: M, Th: 9:40-11  DSPT room 2 (3 units)

general description
This survey course on the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) and the Former Prophets (six books found in Joshua-Kings) is well-suited to a general goal which grounds every course I teach: That we will all deepen our capacity to read the Bible well (deeply and effectively), adding to our skills and frameworks for understanding, consulting the insights and strategies of others, and being able to articulate where our readings come from. More specifically, the emphasis this semester is to ponder why these narratives are crucial and how we can best read them. We will manage our material in four basic units, always building on what has preceded in terms of both content and skills, goals and outcomes acquired and demonstrated as assignments are completed.

● the instructor’s main responsibilities are:
  ● To present the material in a compelling way;
  ● To demonstrate effective use of critical methods and tools;
  ● To facilitate students to become competent readers.

● The student’s main responsibilities are:
  ● To deepen a sense of the beauty and truth of biblical material;
  ● To acquire a solid grasp of how critical methods and tools work for meaning;
  ● To demonstrate a basic skill in using critical methods and tools to read well.

● Collaboratively, we will know we are doing our work well when you remember and love the biblical texts, can see the presence and value of critical interpretation, can use these strategies effectively yourselves both in class and in written assignments.

student outcomes
By the end of the course the student will have demonstrated a capacity to use biblical interpretation tools and methods cumulatively in order to engage the text meaningfully, by participating orally in class exercises and by producing about 10 professionally-honed pages that show the relationship between reading, methodology, interpretive frameworks, and interpretive insights (detail below), all those gathered in dialogue with the broad scholarly tradition.

default assignment
In addition to the reading and general preparation required for each class session, we will stop and do some integration of materials four times (see below for specific dates and process).

alternative assignment: If anyone needs to practice the skills involved in writing a 15-20 page research paper competently at the graduate school level (e.g., if you need to write a thesis), it may be arranged, though it entails following instructor direction as you proceed. If you choose this option, please notify the instructor in writing (note or e-mail) before the start of class # 2 and then follow the directions provided.
required materials
Besides a •Bible that you will read assiduously and bring to every class, please have ready access to •four books (buy, rent, share, use on library reserve [see end of syllabus for annotations on these]):

•Diana Edelman et al., Opening the Books of Moses (Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2012); ISBN 978-1-84553-684-8; list-price is $42.47;

•Thomas C. Römer, The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction. New York: T&T Clark, 2007. ISBN 978-0-567-03212-6; $36.95. [If you are tempted to skip any, skip this one!]


•course reader, called by the course name and number, from Instant Copying and Laser Printing, 2138 University Ave. (510 704-9700).

In addition to what is suggested here, use •on library reserve, •from the reference section of the library, or •from the exegesis shelf some of the books listed at the end of the syllabus, suggested as helpful and reliable. You know that the library offers you access to an •unlimited amount of material through the various search engines it provides.

grading
Grades will be assigned as follows: The synthesis assignments will each count 1/8; general attendance and participation will count 1/4 (once pre- and once post-Reading Week); (alternative: the major paper will count 3/4 with the other 1/4 distributed in terms of attendance and participation). (If you plan or need to take the course P/F [not recommended], be advised that to receive a P means to earn a B.)

other relevant policies
•Students are expected to attend every class, prepared and participating helpfully for the whole group; if you need to miss a session, please inform the instructor by e-mail either before or shortly thereafter; no notification will be construed as an un-excused absence. When you miss a session, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and get any handouts that were available; you might have a “buddy” that will do automatically this for you/you for him or her.

•Since the official syllabus needs to be finalized at least by the time the course begins, expect that you will be provided with a syllabus supplement that updates and specifies relevant matters; start with the general syllabus and then consult the more recent supplement for the day.
•Assignments need to be completed and turned in on time and will be graded down if they are late; **assume no revision option.** Exceptions to deadlines are sometimes possible but rare and gained ahead of time. Please plan to turn in hard copies of your assignments.

•Be sure you know, understand, and follow the policies on academic honesty that are pertinent to GTU, DSPT and your own school.

•The GTU and DSPT policies relating to disability pertain and are available on websites.

**communication**
I am generally available for appointments Mondays through Thursdays in DSPT office 207, (883-2076) or email (bgreen@dspt.edu); drop-ins and quick pre- or post-class session consultations are possible but **appointments are best.** Early planning also works best. A list of class names and contact information will be available once you have all agreed to release the information.

**schedule of classes and assignments** (more detail will be provided in syllabus supplements as we progress, but nothing basic will change)

**class # 1 February 2** introductions to key frameworks we will use: syllabus, tools and methods, time-lines and maps;

**read in preparation:** syllabus; reader: Green, “This Old Text”

**focus question:** what frameworks do I need to grasp to succeed in learning this material?

**critical tools:** an overview of them and how they work together

**class plan:** we will go over all that is needed to get ready for the course

**PART ONE: GETTING OUT OF EGYPT** (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers)
**class # 2 February 5**
**read in preparation:** Exodus 1-11

**focus question:** how do scholars reconstruct the ways in which this material is composed?

**critical tools used:** historical: source, form, redaction, general aNE background; reception: liberation, Christian theology

**class plan:** we will sample some clues in the material that scholars think help us understand how it came to us, and we will assemble the ways in which the material informs the NT presentation of Jesus and why it has been a classic liberation text
class # 3 February 9
read in preparation: Exodus 11-15 and 19-24

focus question: how can we appreciate the presence and impact of legal material interspersed with narrative, particularly these key founding stories?

critical tools used: historical: source, form, redaction, general aNE background; genre: law

class plan: we will continue to work with the tools we began with and add form criticism

class # 4 February 12
read in preparation: Exodus 32-34 + 25-30 and 35-40

focus question: what are some of the challenges of living near the deity

critical tools used: historical: source, form, redaction, general aNE background; genre: law

class plan: we will try to understand what complexities are suggested by this key encounter and get a sense of why the tabernacle is constructed as it is

class # 5 February 19
read in preparation: Leviticus 8-10; reader article by Elliott;

focus question: what are some of the challenges to understanding this narrative, and why have other readers commented as they have done, do you think?

critical tools used: historical: Priestly theology

class plan: we will try to converge what we learned of the P source from the material on the portable shrine and on the consecration of priests

class # 6: February 23
read in preparation: Numbers 11-20 (see Edelman et al. for shape of rebellion stories); reader material by Odell, who connects some material in Ezekiel to this material

focus question: what elements do these stories share, and where do they diverge?

critical tools used: historical: source, form, redaction, general aNE background; genre: murmuring narrative; a reception question
class plan: besides noting the detail, we will also suggest how this set of narratives may have functioned at the time of the production of the Pentateuch, which is plausibly the return from exile in the late 6th century

class # 7: February 26 Synthesis of “Getting Out”
read in preparation: review what we have studied, both biblical texts, secondary material, tools;

focus question: How do we approach the question of the apparent incapacity of the “exodus witnesses” to be able to appropriate their experience and make it useful for the next step?

critical tools used: all of the ones we have worked with so far

class plan: see separate sheet

PART TWO: GETTING INTO THE LAND AND STRUGGLING TO STAY (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges)

class # 8 March 2
read in preparation: Deuteronomy 1-3 and 27-34; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh chs. 1, 11; reader: Lundbom pp. 6-7, 93-97.

focus question: why are some stories told more than once, and what is the impact of multiple and somewhat contradictory versions of key events:

critical tools used: historical: history of traditions, sociology, archeology, form/genre; historical theology (Deuteronomy); literary: the 6-member reading model, the production / setting distinction, rhetoric;

class plan: we will try to see how contemporary literary tools enhance the historical ones we have been working with, notably as we manage repetition

class # 9 March 5
read in preparation: Deuteronomy 4-11; Römer see table of contents chart; reader: Lundbom pp. 23-25, 77-78;

focus question: what can we observe about the rhetorical style of this book, and consequently about its theological viewpoint?

critical tools used: we will blend historical and literary tools and distinguish some issues in reception as well, as we note NT use of this material

class plan: we will aim to be sure the three kinds of criticism can be distinguished, then combined
class # 10 March 9
read in preparation: Deuteronomy 12-26; Römer see table of contents chart; reader article by Engelmann; reader: Lundbom pp. 77-78, 950-955.

focus question: how can we manage perceptively but not too anachronistically the workings of law in social context, particularly the impact upon women?

critical tools used: we will blend historical and literary tools (see syllabus supplement for design)

class plan: we will work with some scenarios provided by the book

class # 11 March 12
read in preparation: Joshua 1-11; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh ch. 3-5;

focus question: how can we appreciate the plotting and characterization in this material?

critical tools used: literary: plotting, characterization

class plan: we will work on the basics of these two literary tools

class # 12 March 16
read in preparation: Judges 6-9 and 11-12; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh chs. 6-7;

focus question: what is the significance of distinguishing setting from production?

critical tools used: literary: production/setting distinction; reception: art and rabbinic.

class plan: we will be sure the setting/production distinction is clear and useful, and we will note some challenges in two modes of reception of this text;

class # 13: March 19: Synthesis of “Getting in and Struggling to Stay”
read in preparation: see syllabus supplement
focus question:
critical tools used:
class plan:
PART THREE: BEING IN THE LAND AND THEN BEING FORCED OUT (1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings)

class # 14 March 30
read in preparation: 1 Samuel 1-15; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh chs. 5, 7 (plus review other Walsh points)

focus question: what is the gain from attending carefully to plot, structure, point of view, notably in view of the proffered view of monarchy?

critical tools used: literary: characterization (Hannah, Samuel, the ark)

class plan: we will explore this narrative using literary rather than historical tools

class # 15 April 2
read in preparation: 1 Samuel 16-31, 2 Samuel 1; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh 7-9; reader: Green, “Enacting Imaginatively”

focus question: how can we explore the relationship between Saul and David, noting how rich and multivalent are the possibilities?

critical tools used: literary: characterization, gaps and ambiguities, structure and symmetry

class plan: we will look for some broader purposes to which this literature may have been put, besides appreciating its rich texture

class # 16 April 9
read in preparation: 2 Samuel 1-13; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh, chs. 5, 7, 9, 10; reader: Green. “Engaging Saul and Michal Afresh”

focus question: how to read apparent disorder; how to read ambiguity and multivalency

critical tools used: literary: structure, 6 member reading model; reception: art, literature

class plan: we will ponder the significance in choosing tools for a passage: historical ones? literary ones? some combination of them?
class # 17 April 13
read in preparation: 2 Samuel 14-24; 1 Kings 1-2; Römer see table of contents chart; reader: Auld;

focus question: what nuance can we get when we make responsible use of literary tools

critical tools used: literary: plotting, characterization; genre: parable; intertextuality

class plan: we will explore the possibilities for reading David in these crucial but painful parts of the story;

class # 18 April 16
read in preparation: 1 Kings 3-16; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh, appendix, “The Jeroboam Story”; reader: Bodner

focus question: how to appraise Solomon and temple, Jeroboam and his moves?

critical tools used: a blend of reconstructions and interpretations

class plan: we will be clear on these key narrated events

class # 19 April 20
read in preparation: 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 1; Römer see table of contents chart; Walsh appendix, “The Elijah Story” and “The Ahab Story”; reader: Park

focus question: what do history and the social sciences tell us about the emergence of prophets in the Northern kingdom, and how is the material presented in literary terms?

critical tools used: historical: sociology and anthropology; literary: plotting and characterization

class plan: we will explore the clash of prophets and kings, of an emergent segmentary society and its imperial neighbors, of Yahwism and its competitors

class # 20 April 23
read in preparation: 2 Kings 2-21; Römer see table of contents chart; reader: Park; reader: Dutcher-Walls, Lee;

focus question: what is the story of the decline and disappearance of northern Israel?

critical tools used: historical: general aNE background; literary: all the tools; genre: prophetic
narratives; historical theology: D

class plan: we will focus on understanding what is narrated and what seems to have happened as the contending empires of Assyria, Egypt and Babylon close in on Syria-Palestine

class # 21 April 27
read in preparation: 2 Kings 22-25; Römer see table of contents chart;
focus question: how is the collapse of Judah and Jerusalem presented?
critical tools used: historical: reconstructions of exile; literary: all the tools;
class plan: we will examine the material available with the tools we have

class # 22 April 30  Synthesis of “Being in and Forced Out”
read in preparation: see syllabus supplement
focus question:
critical tools used:
class plan:

PART FOUR: RETURNING TO THE LAND (Genesis)

class # 23 May 4
read in preparation: Genesis 1-11; review Meyers, chs. 4-5; reader: Schüngel-Straumann, Campbell and O’Brien
focus question: how do these initial stories serve to ground the biblical tradition and the cultures it presents?
critical tools used: converging them: historical: source and redaction; literary: plotting; reception: theology
class plan: though touching on Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, we will focus on the flood
class # 24  May 7
read in preparation: Genesis 12-26; from library reference, please read McKenzie and Kaltner, New Meanings for Ancient Texts, chs. 4 and 9 (by Hens-Piazza and Stone) on Genesis 18-19; and from McKenzie and Haynes, To Each Its Own Meaning, ch. 10 (Gunn); reader: Sjöberg

focus question: what difference does methodology make in interpreting texts?

critical tools used: converging them: new historicism, narrative criticism, queer studies

class plan: though touching on the Abraham/Sarah/Isaac/Rebekah stories as a whole, we will focus on chs. 18-19

class # 25  May 11
read in preparation: Genesis 27-36; Liverani (library reserve) ch. 13; reader: Alter, Anderson

focus question: how does Jacob contribute to the richness of the founding stories?

critical tools used: converging them: anthropology, characterization, genre

class plan: we will manage these stories as comprehensively as we can

class # 26 May 14
read in preparation: Genesis 37-50; reader: Green, What Profit? and “Backstory”; Exum

focus question: how do dreams drive the story of leaving the land?

critical tools used: converging them: historical exilic context, all literary tools; reception

class plan: we will catch the whole story while focusing on chs. 37, 38, and 44

class # 27  May 18  Synthesis of “Returning to the Land”
read in preparation: see syllabus supplement
focus question:  
critical tools used: converging them (see syllabus supplement)
class plan:  

class # 28: May 21 conclusions; evaluations
other useful information
• course reader, providing here fuller information than is given in the schedule:


Green, Barbara “Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul,”


• library reserve for this course or available in the reference section of the library:

Edelman, Diana et al., Opening the Books of Moses (Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2012); this is your basic background for Exodus through Numbers and later for Genesis; read it as soon as possible, since it covers general background in its own order.

Liverani, Mario. Israel’s History and the History of Israel. Translated by Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies. London and Oakville, CT: Equinox Press, 2005. This book explains how materials that are often thought of as old and historical are younger than was thought and not to be taken as reliable on their literary details but rather narrated for later purposes.


Meyers, Carol. Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); read this book as soon as you can, since it, too, is generally useful for all the material we are dealing with;


Ska, Jean-Louis. Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006. This book talks about various issues related to the construction of the Pentateuch, so it is useful at the start of the course and then again at the end, when we go back to Genesis.

Walsh, Jerome T. Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009). The methods he features we will work with mostly after we cross into the Deuteronomistic History, so save it for then but maybe take a look when you can.

• map of methods as we will generally accumulate use of them (see also “This Old Text”):

By way of overview: Consider •those aimed primarily at historical background; •those aimed primarily at historical reception; •those aimed primarily at contemporary literary theory; •those aimed primarily at contemporary reception. Or with slightly more detail:

reader-alert frameworks
remember, you start with yourself and your own issues, beliefs, questions.
historical-critical tools/methods

**general historical background**: what’s pertinent to our materials: early to 6th-5th century; **source**: who spoke/wrote/produced it and what difference do those circumstances make; **redaction**: how did an “editor” arrange parts; **form**: what template underlies the material and where did the template come from; **history-of-traditions**: how does material “travel” and recur within the Bible, changing as it goes; **sociological**: what relevant social circumstances were pertinent; **historical production**: when besides its setting we understand material to have been produced; **geography**: how to picture and understand the actual and portrayed neighborhood; **archeology**: reading monumental inscriptions and other physical evidence;

literary-critical (aesthetic) tools/methods/devices

**the 6-member reading model**: how do we usefully distinguish among roles; **production/setting distinctions**: when was material produced and what is the setting assigned; **narrative patterns**: what story-telling/reciting choices seem to have been made; **characterization**: how, specifically, a is character drawn; why some are clearer than others; **structure**: what indicators of shape or plan of a unit are discernible; **plot**: what can we discern about the order in which a narrative is presented; **rhetoric**: how, specifically, is a character shown to be persuasive; **literary-theological**: how to construe the theology presented by a particular book; **genre**: a character as an epitome; parable; narrative analogy; **imagery**: how an object can function to suggest something deeper than its usual self;

reader-oriented (advocacy, pragmatic) frameworks

**liberation**: how material stresses and valorize liberation **interest-angle**: how can we understand what makes a text particularly meaningful to some; **feminist**: what goals drive feminist study and what results emerge; **gender studies**: how naming particular interests opens and drives reading and interpretation; **Jewish reception**: how does the biblical tradition re-shape when appropriated by later scholars; **Christian reception**: how did pre-critical interpretation correlate Jesus and OT figures; **violence**: how to read sacral violence responsibly; **spirituality**: how a text can be asked to help orient a reader to the most meaningful issues;

and: ultimately you return to, end with yourself, as you choose what of many, many aspects of a narrative you “actualize” and appropriate; you can’t do it all
Additional information on the four syntheses, which are your primary written responsibility:

This is a new assignment (I have not used it before) so it will remain somewhat unclear until we do it. But in general, once we have finished each of the four parts indicated in the schedule of classes and assignments above, we will take a class session to step back to address a more general but perhaps more urgent existentially urgent question as well. We will divide up the challenge of reviewing texts and readings, methods and tools for reconsideration (I will do that and provide you with the information on the syllabus supplement). Each student will have a specific assignment to prepare both for sharing in the session and for handing in (a tight, 2-page summary); after we have considered the question in a class session, you will then, drawing on what you heard as well as on what you prepared, offer at the start of the next class session a 1-page broader reflection, indicating what you learned from the session. The two parts (or actually the three parts—written response to your specific question, verbal participation with others in the synthesis class, and the final written reflection) will get a single grade.

For example, if we were working with the prophet Jeremiah, after we finished a section like chs, 11-20, where the prophet and deity both reflect on problems to be resolved, we might pose a question like: How do prophet and deity pray distinctively, and which appeals to you most? We would divide up the texts, methods, and readings we had used and come at the broader question together in a 70-minute discussion; you might be assigned one of the prophet’s prayers and one of the deity’s soliloquies and be asked to work with their literary imagery; you would aim both to make your own contribution clear and useful to others and learn from what they say; you will have reduced your many insights into 2 pages to turn in, but after the session you will have so much more to say that you will get to craft one more page of response, which you will do right away and turn in at the start of the next session.

The challenge will be to think as we go and to draw on all you have learned as we move forward. The hope is for qualitative insight, not quantitative. Please plan your time so that you have the time set aside to do these pages as scheduled, since we need to keep moving. One thing you may want to do is schedule some time with the instructor ahead of time! Another is to work with a partner, which may be a really good plan if you are nervous about this.