

MONDAY/WEDNESDAY 12:30–1:45
+ TUESDAY RECITATION SECTION

Cultures and Contexts: Ancient Israel

Online
Version

CORE-UA 514

Course Description

We will study ancient Israel from the perspective of its history, literature, and material culture. Known primarily through its most famous anthology: the Hebrew Bible (also known as the Old Testament), ancient Israelite literature reflects the changing cultural landscape of a small Levantine society over nearly a thousand years. The Hebrew Bible itself contains many different perspectives on religion, government, family life, and social organization. These different perspectives, combined with non-biblical ancient Israelite literature, archaeology and material culture, and texts from surrounding cultures form the basis for our modern understanding of ancient Israel. This class will examine what we can know about ancient Israel from the perspective of its writings and material culture. We will look at both the ancient and modern processes by which some texts become “history” while others remain “myth” and explore the process of history-making both then and now. Students will develop the skills to critically analyze written sources, and to understand, contextualize, and critique the assumptions inherent in modern reconstructions of ancient societies.

Note: This class is entirely remote this semester and will be held synchronously. All lectures and recitation sections will be held via Zoom at the regularly scheduled times. If you cannot attend class synchronously, please contact the Core Office (core.cas@nyu.edu) to make arrangements to find a class that will better fit your schedule.



**Professor
Liane Feldman**

Office: KJCC 107
Pronouns: she/her

Contact Info
lfeldman@nyu.edu

Office Hours
By Appointment

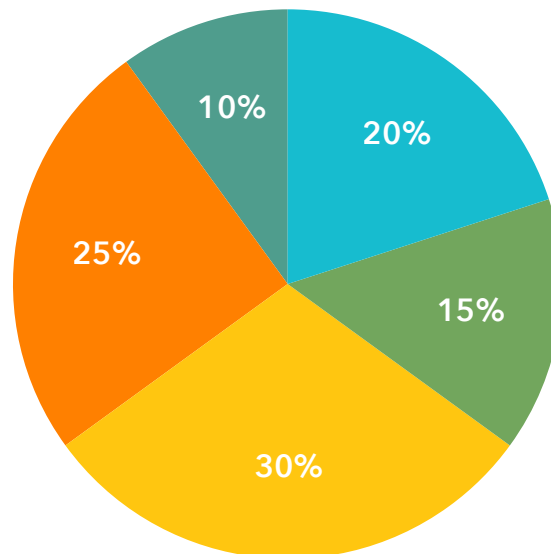
Teaching Assistants

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (20%)

Participation grades will be calculated at 5% per capsule of the class

Attendance and participation is required for all lectures and recitations. You are expected to come on time having completed all of the assigned readings and assignments for that day and to actively participate in discussions and lectures. Participation credit also includes the submission of assignments on time and in the proper format.

- Attendance and Participation
- Writing Assignments
- Reading Responses
- Final Project
- Exam



READING RESPONSES (15%)

There will be a "reading response" assignment in NYU Classes for each set of readings.

You must complete one reading response each week. You can choose whether you do the response for Monday or Wednesday.

At the end of each set of readings, you will be asked to contribute a short response. Your lecture response should be around 200 words long or 1 minute of audio/video and can include comments, questions, or observations about the assigned reading material. These responses will be visible to the entire class.

Checks and Responses will be graded as: ✓+ (100); ✓ (80); ✓- (60); F (0).

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

(10% EACH; 30% TOTAL)

You will write **three** 2-3 page papers in this class.

Paper 1: Primary Source Analysis **(Due Sept 25)**

Paper 2: Secondary Source Analysis **(Due Oct 16)**

Paper 3: Artifact Worksheet and Analysis **(Due Nov 20)**

More details instructions for these papers will be distributed in class two weeks before the due date. All papers should be 12pt font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides.

MIDTERM EXAM (10%)

This will be a take-home, open-book essay exam that covers content and methods of historical analysis addressed in the first half of the semester.

Midterm Due October 23, 2020

FINAL PROJECT (25%)

Students will be asked to design and curate a virtual exhibit about some aspect of ancient Israel, including photos of the objects, descriptions, and links to further discussions and/or context.

Due: December 16, 2020

THE “IT HAPPENS” CLAUSE

Stuff happens. Each student can invoke the “It Happens” clause once per semester for a no-questions asked 3-day extension on a paper. Just email your Teaching Assistant **and cc the professor** before the paper is due to invoke the clause.

LATE WORK

The writing assignments are due on the date specified on the syllabus. Late work will be accepted and graded based on the content of the assignment, but unexcused late work will result in a lowering of a student’s participation grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (PLAGIARISM)

Plagiarism occurs when writers misrepresent others’ work as their own. To be sure about when to cite your sources in written assignments, read [“Is It Plagiarism Yet?”](#)

If I suspect that you have submitted work that is not your own, the two of us will enter into a period of collective misery. So, please, save us both a lot of grief: do your own work, learn something in the process, feel justifiable pride in that accomplishment, and enjoy the learning experience.

Any student caught plagiarizing will receive an F on the assignment, and depending on the severity of the offense, failure of the entire course. NYU’s academic integrity policy can be found [here](#), and attached at the end of this syllabus.

THE WRITING CENTER

411 Lafayette, 998-8866 | [website](#)

The Writing Center is a resource for you to meet one-on-one with trained writing consultants who can help you learn to communicate your ideas more clearly. Students work with consultants at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of writing except for exams. You can [schedule an appointment online](#).

LEARNING DISABILITY OR DIFFERENCE

If you are a student with a documented disability at NYU, I will be happy to work with you to adapt the course material and assignments to your needs. Please provide me with documentation of your learning needs as soon as possible because accommodations cannot be provided retroactively.

If you have any questions about documentation, please contact:

[Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#)
(212)-998-4980

FORMS OF ADDRESS

You are welcome to share your preferred name and/or pronoun at any point in the semester. We will address you respectfully in accordance with your preference.

GRADING RUBRIC

A 95-100%	C 74-76%
A- 90-94%	C- 70-73%
B+ 87-89%	D+ 67-69%
B 84-86%	D 64-66%
B- 80-83%	D- 60-63%
C+ 77-79%	F 0-59%

COVID-19 Policies for this Class

This is not a normal semester.

Everyone is navigating a more complicated reality, whether they are on campus in NYC or off-campus somewhere else in the world. Please be patient with yourselves, with each other, and with your teaching assistants and professor.

Your physical, mental, and emotional health should be your priority this semester.

I expect you to put as much effort as you are able into this course, but I also recognize that this will look different for each student and that it may vary over the course of the semester. That is okay!

Capsule Teaching

This class is divided into four roughly equal capsules:

1. 9/2-10/5: Ancient Israel: What are our Sources?
2. 10/7-10/26: Religion and Politics
3. 10/28-11/11: Everyday Life in Ancient Israel
4. 11/16-12/9: Ancient Israel in the Modern World

While these capsules do build on each other, they are designed to be somewhat self-contained. Your participation grade will be calculated per-capsule. Each capsule is worth 5% of your final participation grade. This builds some flexibility into the grading scheme for you in case you become sick or have to quarantine.

If you or someone close to you gets sick

First things first. Get the medical care and support you need. Then, make sure you notify NYU's Covid-19 Prevention and Response team.

Once you've done that, please email me and your TA—or have someone email us on your behalf—to let us know that you might not be able to participate in class as actively (or at all) while you are recovering or caring for someone who is recovering. I will work with you to find a way to complete the class requirements.

You do not need to send me a doctor's note or any personal health information!

Please communicate with me or with your teaching assistant as early as possible if you are falling behind or struggling in any way. We are ready and willing to work with you to help you successfully navigate this class and your Cultures & Contexts CORE requirement, but we cannot work with you to find a solution if you don't tell us you need help!

The sooner you contact us, the easier it will be for us to help you. If you wait until the end of the semester, we may have fewer options to offer you.

Date	Topic	To Read	To Watch or Look at
Capsule 1: The Study of Ancient Israel: What are our Sources?			
Wed 9/2	Syllabus and Class Introduction Introduction to Technology for this Class		
Mon 9/7	No Class: Labor Day		
Wed 9/9	What is History, Anyway?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ezra 1:1-4 - Cyrus Cylinder, read "Introduction" and "Translation" - Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah" on <i>Bible Odyssey</i> 	Neil MacGregor, " 2800 Years of History in One Object " (TED Talk)
Mon 9/14	Literature: Part 1a: The Hebrew Bible (History in and of the Hebrew Bible)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Numbers 6:24-26 - Amy-Jill Levine, "What is the Difference between the Old Testament, the Tanakh, and the Hebrew Bible?" - Berlin and Brettler "Historical and Geographical Background to the Bible" (2049-2062 in <i>Jewish Study Bible</i>) [PDF] 	View images of Real biblical manuscripts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aleppo Codex (~10th c. CE) 2. Leningrad Codex (~1010 CE) 3. Isaiah Scroll (~125 BCE) 4. Nash Papyrus (~2nd c. BCE) 5. Ketef Hinnom Amulets (~600 BCE)
Wed 9/16	Literature: Part 1b: The Hebrew Bible (How do we read it as scholars?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Genesis 1-3 - Berlin and Brettler "The Modern Study of the Bible" (2084-2096 in <i>Jewish Study Bible</i>) [PDF] 	Joel Baden, " The Bible Doesn't Say What you Think it Does " (Nantucket Talk)
Mon 9/21	Literature: Part 2: Literature Beyond the Bible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kugel, "The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha" in <i>Outside the Bible</i> (7-10) [PDF] - Schiffman, "The Dead Sea Scrolls" in <i>Outside the Bible</i> (24-32) [PDF] - Genesis 12:10-20; Genesis 20 - Genesis Apocryphon; Columns 19-20 [PDF] - 1 Enoch 1-9 [PDF] 	Browse the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Library and read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction Page - Scrolls Content

Date	Topic	To Read	To Watch or Look at
Wed 9/23	Archaeology and Inscriptions Guest Lecturer: Quinn Daniels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laughlin, "A Brief History" in <i>Archaeology and the Bible</i> (3-16) [PDF] - Joshua 6 - 2 Kings 3 - The Mesha Inscription [PDF] - Jarus, "Biblical War Revealed on 2,800-year-old Stone Altar" 	<p>Look through two online collections of ancient artifacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Non-Biblical Texts Relating to the Biblical World" at West Semitic Research Project - "Israel and the Bible Collection" at The Israel Museum
PAPER 1 DUE 9/25 (Primary Source Analysis)			
Mon 9/28	NO CLASS; Yom Kippur		
Wed 9/30	Israel's Neighbors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Podany, selections from <i>Ancient Near East</i> (1-15, 110-126) [PDF] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Map of Mesopotamia - The Ancient Near East overlaid on a modern map of the Middle East
Mon 10/5	Scribes and Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - van der Toorn, "Books that are not Books: Writing in the World of the Bible" (9-26) [PDF] - Jeremiah 36 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visit The British Museum's website on the Development of Cuneiform writing and follow the "explore" link.
Capsule 2: Religion and Politics			
Wed 10/7	God(s) and Temples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hundley, "Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples" (203-215) [PDF] - Ancient 'Outlaw Temple' discovered in Israel - Exodus 25; 39-40 	
Mon 10/12	The Idea of Sacrifice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings" (870-886) [PDF] - Leviticus 1-4, 16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religion for Breakfast, "The Origins of Animal Sacrifice" - Religion for Breakfast, "Ancient Greek Sacrifice, Why did they do it?"
Wed 10/14	The Question of Monotheism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sommer, "Monotheism in the Hebrew Bible" - Dever, <i>Did God Have a Wife</i> (271-300) [PDF] - Exodus 15:11; 20:3; Deuteronomy 32; Isaiah 45; Psalm 82 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religion for Breakfast, "YHWH had a Wife?"
PAPER 2 DUE 10/16 (Secondary Source Analysis)			

Date	Topic	To Read	To Watch or Look at
Mon 10/19	Kings and Palaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dever, "Palaces and Temples in Canaan and Ancient Israel" (605-614) [PDF] - Power, "Kingship in the Hebrew Bible" (1-6) [PDF] - 1 Kings 1-8 - 1 Kings 11:42-12:33 	
Wed 10/21	Laws and Legal Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brettler, "Biblical Law" in <i>How to Read the Bible</i> (61-72) [PDF] - Roth, "Laws of Hammurabi" (71-85) [PDF] - Exodus 19-24 	Anderson, " Law and the Bible "
Midterm Exam Distributed after class on 10/21; Due on Friday 10/23 at 5:00pm EST			
Mon 10/26	Prophets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Huffman, "What was a Prophet?" - Carvalho, "How to Recognize a Biblical Prophet" - Glazier-McDonald, "Elijah" - Couey, "Isaiah" - Numbers 22-24 - 1 Kings 19 - Isaiah 6 - Deir 'Alla Inscription 	
Capsule 3: Everyday Life in Ancient Israel			
Wed 10/28	The Israelite Household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meyers, "Eve's World: The Household," in <i>Rediscovering Eve</i> (103-124) [PDF] - Joshua 7 - Judges 17-18 - Ruth 1-4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Browse Penn Museum exhibit online: "Daily Life, Home, and Family" - Look at Replica of an ancient Israelite house
Mon 11/2	Magic and Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - J. Scurlock, "Magic," <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> vol. 4 (464-468) [PDF] - S. Dolansky, "Separating Religion from Magic in Biblical Scholarship," (4-16) [PDF] - Numbers 5 - Deuteronomy 21:1-9 	

Date	Topic	To Read	To Watch or Look at
Wed 11/4	Death and Afterlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - King and Stager, <i>Life in Biblical Israel</i> (363-381) [PDF] - Genesis 23; 1 Samuel 28 - Isaiah 14:9-11; Job 14:10-12; Psalms 6:5; 88:3-12; 139:8; 146:4 	
Mon 11/9	Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Borowski, <i>Daily Life in Biblical Times</i> (25-35, 55-59) [PDF] - 1 Samuel 8:13; 28:7; 1 Kings 3:16; Proverbs 31:10-31 - Gezer Calendar 	
Wed 11/11	Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Borowski, <i>Daily Life in Biblical Times</i> (63-74) [PDF] - Barrett "Lentils Key Role in Historically Bad Business Deal" - Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal" [PDF] - Genesis 1:29-30; Genesis 9:1-4; Leviticus 11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at the attempt to recreate the recipe for lentil soup from Genesis 25:29-34: "What the Ancient Israelites Ate - Jacob's Lentil Stew"
Capsule 4: Ancient Israel in the Modern World			
Mon 11/16	The Antiquities Trade, and Museums 101	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brodie, "Introduction," in <i>Archaeology, Cultural Heritage, and the Antiquities Trade</i> (1-24) [PDF] - Mendelsohn, "How the Met Convinced the U.S. Government that the Temple of Dendur Belonged in New York" 	Tess Davis, " The Scourge of Looting: Trafficking Antiquities, from Temple to Museum "
Wed 11/18	Museum Collections: What goes into curating an exhibit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch pre-recorded conversation with Dr. Sarah Graff (The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Dr. Elizabeth Ann Knott (Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, NYU) - Have your topic for your final project selected and ready to discuss in class 	
PAPER 3 DUE 11/20 (Artifact Worksheet and Analysis)			

CLASS SCHEDULE

SPRING 2020

Date	Topic	To Read	To Watch or Look at
Mon 11/23	<p>Provenance, Provenance, Provenance!</p> <p>Guest Speaker: Prof. Candida Moss (University of Birmingham, UK)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ariel Sabar, "Did Jesus Have a Wife?" (in <i>The Atlantic</i>) - "Authorities Seek Forfeiture of Gilgamesh Tablet from Hobby Lobby" - Michael Press, "Dispelling the Myths Around the Hobby Lobby Antiquities Case" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at this Wikipedia page on the Hobby Lobby smuggling scandal - Watch: "She's the Art Detective at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston"
Wed 11/25	NO CLASS; Thanksgiving		
Mon 11/30	Black Samson: The Hebrew Bible and American History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Junior and Schipper, "Black Samson in the Temple of Liberty" and "Black Samson of Brandywine" (11-34) [PDF] - Judges 13-16 	
Wed 12/2	Israelite Prophecy and Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walter J. Houston, "Social Justice and the Prophets" - Samuel Thomas, "Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters (Amos 5-6)" - J. David Pleins, "Social Ethics of the Hebrew Bible" - Amos 5-6 - Micah 6 - Isaiah 58 	
Mon 12/7	The Jerusalem Temple as Church, Theme Park, and Museum(?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Romero, "Temple in Brazil Appeals to Surge of Evangelicals" - Branham "The Temple That won't Quit: Constructing Sacred Space in Orlando's Holy Land Experience Theme Park" (358-382) [PDF] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at the photos of the Temple of Solomon in Sao Paolo - Look at "An Illustrated Tour of the Holy Temple" on the Temple Institute Website
Wed 12/9	Where else is Ancient Israel in the Modern World? Student Led Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each student should find 1-2 examples of ideas, institutions, or texts from ancient Israel being used in modern society. Examples can come from your own context – they do not need to be United States-centric! - Be prepared to introduce your finds to the class, discuss how this find is interpreting history in order to apply it to the present, and analyze how this presentation differs (or not) from how the text, institution, or idea might have been understood in ancient Israel. 	
FINAL PROJECTS ARE DUE ON 12/16 at 5:00pm EST.			

What is NYU's Core Curriculum?

The goal of the Core curriculum is to provide all undergraduates at NYU with a foundational academic experience in the Liberal Arts. Liberal Arts refers to a longstanding commitment in universities to offer courses that teach students the skills needed for excelling in any aspect of professional life. Courses in literature, science, mathematics, or history, for example, don't only provide students with information in these areas of study. The foundational goal of these courses is to provide students with advanced skills in critical analysis. This means the ability to examine evidence and draw sound conclusions. Courses are designed to build students' critical, analytic, and communications skills, hone the imagination, and promote creative thinking. These skills are not just the foundation of a liberal arts course; they are the foundation for success in all aspects of academic and professional life.

Who Should Take this Class?

Many of your peers in this class will be majors in the College of Arts and Science (e.g., English, History, Economics). Other students will come from other schools and disciplines such as Education, Business, or Real Estate Management. Very few of you will be majors in Religious Studies or Jewish Studies. The Core Curriculum is designed for ALL of these diverse students. Everyone will benefit from the skills learned in a Core course and hopefully apply these skills successfully into their unique course of study and professional goals. I am hopeful that this course will spark an interest in Religious Studies or Jewish Studies. There are many other fantastic courses offered at NYU in these fields.

What are we going to Learn in this Class?

In this course, you will enter into a foreign world. This world is separated from our own by several thousand years and takes place in distant lands. We examine the culture of ancient Israel. The world of ancient Israel has left a deep imprint on Western Civilization, primarily through the most famous book produced by its inhabitants – the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). This course is not devoted primarily to the study of the Hebrew Bible (there are other courses at NYU for this) nor are we interested exclusively in the history of the ancient Israelites. In this course, we will try to understand the cultural landscape of ancient Israel and its many inhabitants over time. Think about your own place of origin and its many unique customs and traditions. Cultures have distinct perspectives on religion, marriage and family life, death, justice and law, clothing, food, war and violence – and these perspectives usually change over time. These subjects and many more represent the cultural landscape of a people and a society. In modern settings, anthropologists embed themselves in societies and observe these aspects of a culture. This approach is obviously impossible for ancient societies. We therefore must try to reconstruct ancient societies through the slivers of evidence left to us as modern observers. This evidence usually falls into two categories: literary (e.g., ancient writings) and physical (e.g., archaeological data and other material culture). We will develop the skills for critical analysis of these sets of data and how these contribute to our understanding of the culture of ancient Israel.

The world of ancient Israel may be an ancient society, but its impact on modern society can be seen in many ways – from the growth of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the role of the Hebrew Bible in modern political discourse. In this course, we will at times step out of our ancient-oriented focus to consider several examples of the imprint of ancient Israel on modern society.

What Tools are we going to Use?

Hebrew Bible: The Hebrew Bible is the most prominent piece of data for understanding the culture of ancient Israel. Many people in diverse settings wrote this anthology of books, which were then edited by later scribes. The actual creation of the Bible as the holy book of Judaism and Christianity happened even later. These writers and scribes were not historians or anthropologists. They were learned elites attempting to promote a distinct set of ideas. The Hebrew Bible therefore hardly represents the full spectrum of Israelite society. In this course, we will learn how to read the Hebrew Bible critically. This does not require you to dismiss the religious significance the Bible may have in your own life. I only ask that you “bracket” these assumptions as we develop the skills to peer behind the biblical text to see the often hidden social and cultural world of ancient Israel.

Other Literature from Ancient Israel: We know that ancient Israelites wrote other books, but these have all disappeared. We do have a small number of other Israelite texts that we will attempt to read alongside the Hebrew Bible. We will also draw on some later Jewish literature.

Archaeology: If the Hebrew Bible represents the heritage of the elite, archaeology often allows modern observers to observe a wider segment of society. Archaeological excavation of ancient Israel has a long history and continues today in an extremely robust way. While archaeology is sometimes thought to produce “hard evidence,” modern scholars debate the archaeological data as vigorously as other scholars debate the literary evidence. We will examine the archaeological data alongside the literary evidence to generate the broadest portrait possible.

Related Cultures: The ancient Israelites lived in a vibrant, creative, and often volatile world. Some of these neighboring societies are well known to us – for example, Egypt, Mesopotamia – and other are less well known. How many of us have heard of Mari, Ugarit, or Phoenicia? Like ancient Israel, these societies have left modern observers with a wealth of literary and physical data to understand them. Historians studying these societies have painted wonderful portraits of these ancient worlds and their inhabitants (you can take a Core course on Ancient Egypt). Much of this comparative evidence is helpful in filling in the gaps in our study of ancient Israel.