

This course examines the efforts to reconstruct Israelite (or Hebrew) history and to understand the formation of Hebrew Scripture (= the Old Testament) in the context of that history. We start with Hebrew history as presented in Scripture (in Genesis through 2 Kings), focusing in particular on the stories of Hebrew origins, the Exodus, the Hebrew conquest of Canaan, and the Hebrew monarchies. We next consider non-biblical evidence of various kinds to test the credibility of the biblical accounts. We then try to reconstruct a more likely Israelite or Hebrew history from the earliest period to the time of exile in the early 6th century BC. Against this background we try then to understand the original nature and purposes of the accounts that became the biblical stories. We will look at the transformation of stories into scripture and the various roles Hebrew scripture has played in the development of Judaism and Christianity. Students will gain an understanding of both the historical and literary backgrounds of Hebrew Scripture (or the Old Testament).

Required Books (all at UNCG Bookstore)

William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (D)

Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed* (FS)

Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (S)

Richard Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (F)

James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (KG)

The Bible, Revised Standard Translation

**1/18 Introduction** FS 1-24 (read after the first class). Note especially the brief synopsis of the biblical narrative on pp. 8-10, the discussion of the constituent parts of biblical narrative on pp. 10-14, and the sketch of Finkelstein and Silber's alternative reconstruction on pp. 22-24. Canaanite religion and calendar

**1/23 Scripture (Torah + Deuteronomistic History) Appears**

Read *Ezra, Nehemiah*

Consider these questions: What did Ezra read aloud? Did the audience already know about the ideas and practices Ezra promulgated? What group ended up in a position of power as a result of acceptance of Ezra's reforms? Was there resistance to these reforms?

### **1/25-2/8 What does “Scripture” say? Re: Hebrew Origins, Exodus, Conquest, Kingdoms**

1/25 Origins: *Genesis* 11.1-36.43 (pay particular attention to prophetic passages)

1/30 Origins: *Genesis* 37.1-50.26 (pay particular attention to prophetic passages)

2/1 Exodus: *Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers* 1-15, 33-36

2/6 Conquest: *Deuteronomy; Joshua; Judges* 1-10

2/8 Monarchy: *1Samuel* 7.15-31.13; *2Samuel* 1.1-8.18; *1Kings* 1.1-11.26

2/13 Monarchy: *1Kings* 12.1-22.53, *2Kings* (pay very close attention to developments from Hezekiah to Josiah)

Paper #1. Summarize the story of Hebrew history as presented in Genesis through 2Kings. What are the major events according to this account? Is there a coherent narrative here—i.e., a discernible storyline or plot as opposed to a simple chronicle? Is there a moral or lesson to the whole centuries-long story? (Consider the criteria by which actions or people are judged or criticized). What specific places and persons seem to emerge as of particular importance (as good or bad figures)? Due 2/20.

### **2/20-3/22 Problems and Revisions (= What’s wrong with the biblical narratives as history and what might be more likely reconstructions of Israelite history?)**

2/15 FS 27-47

2/20 FS 48-71; D 7-21

2/22 FS 72-96

2/27 FS 123-145

3/1 Settlement Patterns FS 97-122, 319-339; D 153-223;

3/6 2 Kingdoms/2 Peoples FS 149-159

3/8 Israel FS 160-225

3/20 Judah FS 228-250

3/22 From Hezekiah to Josiah FS 251-295

Paper #2. Discuss the evidence presented or cited by Finkelstein/Asher and Dever that calls into question the biblical accounts of Israelite origins, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, and the story of the Israelite monarchy. Be specific about the particular points in question. Due 3/27

### **3/27-4/12 Texts and Contexts: Gods, Priests, Prophets, and Politics**

3/27 S 19-64

3/29 S 65-107, 182-191

4/3 F 33-88

4/5 F 89-149; Nadav Na'aman, 'The "Discovered Scroll" and the Legimation of Josiah's Reform,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130.1 (2011): 47-62 (pay particular attention to pp. 58-62)

4/10 F 150-213

4/12 FS 296-313; F 217-233

Paper #3. Discuss the role priestly conflicts and royal ambitions played in the production of texts that were later assembled in a composite "scripture". Consider these questions: Does Yahweh worship have a history? What role does kingship play in the history of Israelite religion? What groups had a stake in Israelite religion? By what means did they assert their claims? Due 4/17

#### **4/24-5/1 Scripture and Its Uses after Ezra**

4/17 FS 315-318

4/19 KG 40-72: How did Judaeans use Scripture?

4/24 Acts 2:-2:42, 3:1-3:26; Romans 9:1-11: 36; KG 109-125; how did early Christians use Hebrew Scripture?

4/26 KG 126-154

5/1 KG 155-199

Paper #4. What, finally, is the story Hebrew Scripture/the Old Testament tells? How do its plot, themes, and explanations provide a comprehensive world view—that is, an indication of what it all—history, the human experience, etc.—means. Does historical truth (more than a compelling story) matter from this perspective (or, to put this another way, how is the "truth" of Scripture made compelling by presenting it in the context of a historical narrative?)