

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE

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ARTS AND LETTERS 100

**READING SCRIPTURE AS SKEPTIC AND  
BELIEVER:**

The Hebrew Bible, The New Testament, and the Qur'an

Fall, 2005 T Th 3:30-4:50 PM  
THH 215  
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Dr. Reuven Firestone  
Office Hours: Before and  
after class by Appointment.  
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**KEEP THIS SYLLABUS!** It provides most of the information you will need for this course, including dates for exams, course requirements, how your grade is computed, etc. **PLEASE READ IT CAREFULLY & REFER TO IT.**

**I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will examine some of the ways through which the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam establish paradigms of interpretation. We will read sections of each scriptural tradition from the "inside" -- that is, as if we are believers in the religious system that the scripture represents, and also from the "outside" -- as if we are critical outside observers of a religious system through its classic literatures and theologies. This methodology will enable the student to gain an appreciation for different approaches to reading scripture. One unique aspect of this class is that we will study how the three great monotheistic scriptures articulate some of the same topics. One sample topic, for example, will be Abraham. Is the Abraham of Islamic scripture the same person as the Abraham of Christian scripture, or of Jewish scripture?

**II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Critical comprehension of lectures and assigned readings, and knowledgeable engagement in class discussion. Students are not expected to agree with the instructor or with one another, but all students are expected to apply the method taught in this course. All reading assignments from the attached schedule are to be read in preparation for the class at which the material will be discussed (dates are given for every assignment).
2. Attendance at class sessions is essential for good performance in the course. You are responsible for all material presented in class as well as the reading assignments, whether or not you attend. Role will be taken.
- 3.
4. Three written assignments.
  1. One 4-5 page paper described in the handout, "Writing Guidelines."

2. One 4 page term paper proposal.
  3. One 10-12 page term paper.
- See the handout, "Writing Guidelines," which will inform you about the expectations and requirements for each of the writing assignments. Note that writing assignments submitted late may be penalized.
5. One mid-term exam on October 6.
- One final exam during exam week according to the official USC schedule.

### **III. GRADING**

Your grade will be based on the following formula:

Midterm exam 25%

Writing assignment 1 25%

Writing assignment 2 0% (but required see note in Writing Guidelines)

Writing assignment 3 25%

Final exam 25%

Class involvement (attendance and informed discussion). A "good grade" here will push any borderline grade upwards. A "bad grade" here will push any borderline grade downwards.

### **IV. REQUIRED TEXTS**

1. Wayne A. Meeks, ed., *HarperCollins Study Bible*, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), or another English edition of the Bible which includes the Hebrew Bible ("Old Testament") and the Christian Bible ("New Testament").
2. Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall, transl., *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: New American Library) or another English edition of the complete Qur'an.
3. F. E. Peters, *Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
4. Handouts (from instructor).

### **V. IMPORTANT DEADLINES AND DATES:**

Writing Assignment #1	Sept. 20
Midterm	Oct. 6
Writing Assignment #2	Oct. 27
Writing Assignment #3	December 1
Final	Exam Week.

### **V1. HANDOUTS**

You will occasionally be given handouts in class. These will be distributed one time only. If you are not in class the day they are distributed, you are still responsible for the material and information contained in them. If there are extra copies, you may pick up a copy by coming by my office, but it will be easier for you simply to photocopy the handout from your study partner.

# CALENDAR

[subject to change by instructor]

**NOTE:**

***PLEASE BRING YOUR COMPLETE BIBLES AND QUR'ANS TO CLASS DAILY.***

**8/23 Introduction to the Course.**

**8/25 Scripture, Revelation, and the "Abrahamic Religions."**

- ◆ Peters, Children of Abraham ix-xi, 3-7.

## **TOPIC #1: ABRAHAM**

### **A: Abraham. The scriptural texts.**

The scriptural readings for the next few sessions are sometimes long and in all cases complicated. You will be asked to note important details in the life and portrayal of Abraham in the three different scriptures. You may need to read sections located immediately before and/or after the citations in the New Testament and Qur'an in order to understand their context. Take notes, and note your own questions as well. Keep in mind what aspects of Abraham's portrayal are repeated within and between the scriptures, and note also how the portrayals differ.

### **8/30, 9/1 Abraham in the Hebrew Bible:**

- ◆ Skim Genesis chapters 1-12
- ◆ Read Genesis 12:1-25:18.
- ◆ Skim Genesis chapter 26 through Exodus chapter 20.
- ◆ Read Leviticus 26:42 [various translations & Hebrew].
- ◆ Read Isaiah 41:8-10.

Class discussion: Who is the Abraham of the Hebrew Bible? What role does he play in the ongoing history of the Israelites? What are the key events in his history as portrayed in Genesis? Write down your responses to these questions long with the notes you take in your reading of the texts.

### **9/6, 9/8 The Christian Abraham:**

- ◆ Matthew 3:1-10
- ◆ Luke 1:5-75
- ◆ John 8:31-59
- ◆ Acts 7:1-8 (for background, see intro to Acts and Acts 6).
- ◆ Romans 4:1-25 (for background, see introduction to Romans)
- ◆ Romans 9:6-9
- ◆ Galatians 3:5-29 (for background, see introduction, etc.)
- ◆ Galatians 4:21-5:6
- ◆ Hebrews 11:8-19
- ◆ James 2:18-24.

Class discussion: Who is the Abraham of the New Testament? Is he the same Abraham as that of the Hebrew Bible? Are the values, concepts, and ideas represented

by him the same in both Scriptures? Take notes on your response to these questions, and raise your own questions also in your notes.

### 9/13, 9/15 The Islamic Abraham:

- ◆ Qur'an 2:124-140
- ◆ Qur'an 2:258-60
- ◆ Qur'an 3:64-71, 84.
- ◆ Qur'an 3:95-98
- ◆ Qur'an 4:125
- ◆ Qur'an 6:74-84
- ◆ Qur'an 6:161
- ◆ Qur'an 11:69-76
- ◆ Qur'an 14:35-41
- ◆ Qur'an 21:51-73
- ◆ Qur'an 22:26-27
- ◆ Qur'an 37:83-113

Class discussion: Who is the Abraham of the Qur'an? What are the key events in his history as portrayed in the Qur'an? What values, concepts, and ideas does Abraham represent in the Qur'an? How are they the same, similar, or different than those represented in the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible? Note your own answers to these questions, and jot down in your notes other questions and ideas as they arise.

### [9/20 First Writing Assignment Due!!]

**B: Abraham in the polemical tradition.** Consider for discussion:

- What aspects of Abraham's portrayal seem to be of greatest importance among the various religious traditions?
- How is the person of Abraham understood differently/similarly within the exegetical (interpretive) works?
- How is the person of Abraham used to support the authenticity of one tradition in opposition to another, both between and within individual religious traditions?

### 9/20

- Firestone, "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice (*al-dhabih*, Qur'an 37:99-113): Issues in Qur'anic Exegesis," *Journal of Semitic Studies* #89 (1989), 95-131 (handout).
- Firestone, "Comparative Studies in Bible and Qur'an: A Fresh Look at Genesis 22 in Light of Surah 37," in Benjamin Hary, John Hayes and Fred Astren (eds.), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interation: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*. Leiden: Brill, 2000, 169-184 (handout).

### 9/22

- Badawi, "Muslims, Jews, and the Abrahamic Connection," in Waldman, pp. 19-24 (handout).
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### 9/27, 9/29 History and Revelation

- ◆ 9/27 Peters, 8-26. The Peters material is dense and difficult reading. Read slowly and carefully, and take careful notes. This chapter will be the basis of much discussion.
- ◆ 9/29 Peters 26-43.

### **10/6 Scripture, Canon, and Tradition.**

- ◆ Peters, Children of Abraham 97-117.

Peters' chapter is again dense and difficult. Read it slowly and carefully. Keep in mind that when we read Scripture, we read according to traditions of interpretation. Especially when we read certain famous or important verses or sections of Scripture, we are told "what it means," perhaps even from very early childhood. "Tradition" in this sense is the means or framework for reading Scripture. It helps us understand the meaning of Scripture according to specific methods and goals of interpretation. Two separate traditions may teach two different and perhaps conflicting ways of interpretation. When you run across new or difficult terms, see the glossaries in Peters, Children of Abraham.

**10/11 Midterm Exam, in class.**

READING SCRIPTURE AS SKEPTIC & BELIEVER  
 SPRING 2004  
**CALENDAR PART TWO**

[10/27 Second Writing Assignment Due!!]

**10/20, 10/27 What Happened in the Garden & What was its Consequence?  
 The Hebrew Bible.**

These chapters are complex. Read them carefully. What is the relationship between Adam and Eve? Is it static or does it change or evolve between and within the three chapters? What is the relationship between Adam and God and Eve and God. Do these relationships change? What is the relationship between the snake and the humans and God? How exactly would you define the "sin" of Eve? of Adam? of the snake? Who was guilty and who not? What does it mean to be guilty of sin? What was the cost-benefit ratio between the punishment and the reward for eating of the fruit of the tree? There is a general Western view of this story as precipitating "the fall" of humankind. What might that mean? How is it expressed in Genesis?

- Genesis Chapter 1.
- Genesis Chapter 2.
- Genesis Chapter 3.
- Ezekiel 28:11-19.
- Ezekiel 31: 1-18.

**11/1, 11/3 What Happened in the Garden & What was its Consequence?  
 The New Testament.**

Read these passages carefully for what they say and what they do not say. How do they relate to the Genesis passages? What is the relationship between death and sin as articulated in these texts? What do they say about "original sin?"

- Matthew 10:4-6 & Mark 10:6-8.
- Romans 5:1-21; 7:7-25.
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 44-49.
- 2 Corinthians 11:1-4.
- 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

**11/8, 11/10 What Happened in the Garden & What was its Consequence?  
The Qur'an.**

Take careful note of the repetition of these passages. How does each one relate to the various Genesis chapters? How do they relate to the New Testament material? How are the characters of the narrative portrayed?

- 2:30-39.
- 7:11-29.
- 15:26-48.
- 17:61-65.
- 18:51-53.
- 20:115-126.

**11/15 What Happened in the Garden & What was its Consequence? Some Samples of Traditional Scriptural Commentaries in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.**

**11/17 Reading Scripture as a Religious Act of Piety. Judaism.**

Meet in the synagogue at Hebrew Union College (HUC).

**11/22 Reading Scripture as a Religious Act of Piety. Christianity.**

Meet at the Catholic Center.

**11/29 Reading Scripture as a Religious Act of Piety. Islam.**

Meet at the Omar Mosque.

**12/1 Prepare for Final. LAST DAY OF CLASS.**

**[12/1 Last Writing Assignment Due!]**