

**OREGON SCHOOL OF JUDAIC STUDIES
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
Summer 2006**

English 099/410/510 Narratives of Power and Sexuality in the Hebrew Bible

Instructor: Deborah Eisenbach-Budner
Time frame: July 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, August 1, 2, 3; 1 - 3:20 pm
Credits: 2
Contact: (503) 248-4662 ex. 6; debudner@havurahshalom Office Hours: by appointment

Students needing an accommodation should immediately inform the course instructor. Students will be referred to Disability Services (725-4005) to obtain appropriate support services.

Course Description: The Hebrew Bible is rife with vexing theological and social questions around the tension between divine power and human agency as well as the relationship between social order and subversion. Questions of sexuality, power, and gender can be used as lenses to deepen our examination of these larger biblical themes. This course will examine the relationship between power and sexuality in foundational biblical texts: the Creation of the World and Garden of Eden, the Joseph narratives, Song of Songs, and Proverbs. Students will closely read biblical texts in translation as well as selected excerpts from Jewish classical commentaries and modern biblical criticism.

Course Readings Packet: A packet with all the course readings will be distributed at the first class to all registered students; please bring money to pay for the packet (approximately \$20.00).

Class Format and Preparation: The instructor will give brief presentations of background information. The majority of class time will be comprised of focused, close readings of biblical texts and secondary sources, in small groups, followed by whole group discussion of the biblical texts and other readings. Due to the paucity of time between classes, preparation will be limited to an initial overview reading of 6-20 pages of biblical text or introductory material per classes.

Grades: Attendance and participation, which is based on preparation of the readings below, are required for each of the sessions. Students will write 1 short paper each week (due July 31 and August 7); see below.

Session 1, July 24

In the Beginning - Introduction to Hebrew bible, classical Jewish commentary, and modern biblical criticism
Close reading of Genesis chapter 1 (The Creation of the World).

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Structure of the Hebrew Bible visual aid.
- ◆ Excerpts from Berlin, Adele and Brettler, Marc. "The Modern Study of the Bible" in *The Jewish Study Bible*. Eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- ◆ Fields, Harvey. "Turn it and Turn it! Introducing the Torah Commentators" from *A Torah Commentary for our Times* (Volume I, Genesis). New York: UAH Press, 1990. (pages 7-10).
- ◆ Biblical text: Genesis 1-3. Translation from Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004.

Session 2, July 25

In the Beginning - close reading of Genesis 2-3, classical Jewish commentary (rabbinic midrash) and excerpts from m

Preparation for Class:

1. Biblical text: Genesis 2-3
2. Niditch, Susan. "Genesis" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Eds. Carol Newsom and Sharon

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Biblical text
- ◆ selected rabbinic and classical Jewish commentary on Genesis 1-3 (separate handout)
- ◆ Tribble, Phyllis. "A Love Story Gone Awry" in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978. (pages 72-105)
- ◆ excerpts from Frankel, Ellen. *The Five Books of Miriam*. San Francisco: Harper, 1996.

Session 3, July 26

Joseph and his many striped identity – Introduction to and close reading of the Joseph narratives

Preparation for Class:

1. Biblical text – Genesis 37-41; translation and notes from *The Jewish Study Bible*.

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Biblical text

Session 4, July 27

Joseph and his many striped identity – continued close reading of the Joseph narratives

Preparation for Class:

1. Biblical text – Genesis 42-47, 50. translation and notes from *The Jewish Study Bible*.
2. Excerpts from Saxe, Jeffrey. "Torah, Testosterone, and Tears: Masculinity and Emotion in the

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Biblical text
- ◆ Commentary by Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105, predominantly France) on Joseph as well as a few earlier rabbinic commentaries (separate handout)
- ◆ Zarchi, Nurit. "And She is Joseph" in *Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers*. Ed. Miriyam Glazer. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000. (pages 17-23)

Short paper due July 31 (bring to class):

Write a 2 page analysis of Genesis 1-3. Your analysis should include: 1) a brief description of the general focus and themes of the biblical text, 2) an examination of the relationship between specifics of gender, sexuality, and power and the more general themes of your selected text. Question to be considered: How does using the lenses of gender, power, and sexuality deepen our understanding of larger biblical themes? Read the scholarly articles below (one article for undergraduate credit, two articles for graduate credit) to spur your thinking process; give proper attribution to secondary sources as needed. However, the success of your paper depends upon your own observations and analysis of the biblical text.

- ◆ Tribble, Phyllis, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978. (pages 72-143)
- ◆ Fewell, Danna and Gunn, David. *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993. (pages 9-38)
- ◆ Slivniak, Dmitri. "The Garden of Double Messages: Deconstructing Hierarchical Oppositions in the Garden Story" from *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 27 no 4; June 2003. (pages 439-460)

Session 5, July 31

Song of Songs- Introduction to the text and context and close reading of the first half of Song of Songs

Preparation for Class:

1. Biblical text: Song of Songs. Translation and notes from *The Jewish Study Bible*

2. Weems, Renita, "Song of Songs" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*. (pages 156-160)
- ◆ Additional article **highly encouraged** as preparation: Introduction to A. Bloch and C. Bloch. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation*. New York: Random House, 1995. (pages 3-35)

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Excerpts from A. Bloch and C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation*. New York: Random House, 1995. (separate handout)
- ◆ Excerpts from Exum, Cheryl. *Song of Songs: A Commentary*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. (separate handout)

Session 6, August 1

Song of Songs, Part II – continuation of close reading of the text, rabbinic commentary, exploration of the text's place in the Jewish biblical canon

Preparation for Class (each article will be read by a third of the class participants):

1. Carr, David, "Gender and the Shaping of Desire in the Song of Songs and Its Interpretation" from *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume 119 (Summer 2000), pages 233-248.
2. Tribble, Phyllis. "Love's Lyrics Redeemed" in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978. (pages 144-165)
3. Pardes, Ilana. "I am a Wall, and My Breasts like Towers": The Song of Songs and the Question of Canonization" in *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992. (pages 118-143)

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Biblical text translations and notes: same as Session 5

Session 7, August 2

The Wise and Strange 'Women' and 'Men' of Proverbs – introduction to and close reading of Proverbs 1-15

Preparation for Class:

1. Biblical text: Proverbs chapters 1-15. Translation, notes from *The Jewish Study Bible*.
2. Read Fontaine, Carole, "Proverbs" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*. (pages 145-152)

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Biblical text

Session 8, August 3

The Proverbs, Part II – continuation of close reading, particularly ch. 31 ("Woman of Valor") conclusions about using questions of power, sexuality, and gender in biblical study

Preparation for Class:

1. Biblical Text: Proverbs chapters 18-27, 30-31. Translation and notes from *The Jewish Study Bible*.
2. Camp, Claudia. "Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman: Where is Power to be Found?" in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*. Eds Timothy Beal and David Gunn. New York: Routledge, 1996. (pages 85-115)

Resources from the Course Packet to be used in class:

- ◆ Biblical text: Proverbs chapters
- ◆ Lyons, Ellen Louise "A Note on Proverbs 31:10-3," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, Journal for

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Short paper due August 7 (e-mail debudner@havurahshalom.org or deliver to 825 NW 18th between

9:00- 1:00 pm; it is the student's responsibility to be sure that I have received the paper)

Write a 2-3 page comparative analysis of Song of Songs AND Proverbs. Using the tools developed in this class, your paper should discuss the general message and themes of the biblical text, the images related to sexuality and power, and the characterizations or roles of male and female in each text. You may also want to explore similarities and differences in form and voice as they relate to gender. Your analysis should reflect a critical reading of at least 2 of the provided articles; give proper attribution to secondary sources as needed. However, the success of your paper depends upon your own observations and analysis.

For graduate credit, the above requirements need to be fulfilled in a 3-5 page paper that reflects a critical reading of one additional scholarly article.