Area I: Biblical Studies

This area is concerned with the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures in the broadest sense, including the study of the classical biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek), the content of the Old and New Testaments, critical methods of interpretation, biblical history, cultural and historical milieu of the Bible, and the theological and pastoral implications of the text.

1. Introductory courses are offered in the critical study of the Old and New Testaments. Except for the language courses, all courses in Area I normally have these foundation courses (or their equivalent) as prerequisites.

2. Language courses are offered at the elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. Generally, elementary biblical languages are eligible for elective credit only.

3. Three types of exegesis courses are offered: those based on the English text; those based on the original text and requiring a working knowledge of the biblical language; and advanced exegesis seminars that require at least an intermediate knowledge of the biblical language. Exegesis courses of each type are offered each term on selected books or topics from the Old and New Testaments. It is possible, therefore, during the course of one’s program, to engage in detailed exegesis of representative sections of the biblical text.

4. Thematic courses are offered on a wide range of theological and historical issues raised by the scriptures. These include courses on the cultural and historical milieu of the Bible.

5. Advanced seminars are designed for YDS students with the requisite background and qualifications, and for doctoral students. Permission to enroll in these seminars must be received from the individual instructor.

6. Area I is also concerned with examining the implications of the scriptures for the contemporary church. In addition to doing this in courses offered specifically in Area I, members of the faculty in Area I join with other faculty members in offering courses dealing with the use of the Bible in Christian ministry.

YDS offers intensive courses in elementary Biblical Hebrew and elementary New Testament Greek for six weeks during the summer. Such work earns six hours of academic credit and prepares the student for the course in exegesis. Summer work will satisfy most denominational language requirements.

Critical Introductions

REL 503a, Old Testament Interpretation I  Robert Wilson
An introduction to the contents of the Old Testament (Pentateuch and Historical Books) and to the methods of its interpretation. The course focuses on the development of ancient Israelite biblical literature and religion in its historical and cultural context as well as on the theological appropriation of the Old Testament for contemporary communities of faith. The course aims to make students aware of the contents of the Old Testament, the history and development of ancient Israel's literature and religion, the methods of biblical interpretation, and ways of interpreting the Old Testament for modern communities of faith. Area I. 3 Course cr

REL 504b, Old Testament Interpretation II  Joel Baden
A continuation of REL 503. This course introduces students to critical study of the Prophetic Books and Writings (Psalms, Wisdom) of the Old Testament. The course concentrates on the methods of Old Testament interpretation and on the development of Israelite biblical literature and religion in their historical and cultural context, as well as on the theological appropriation of the Old Testament for contemporary communities of faith. Area I. Prerequisite: REL 503. 3 Course cr

REL 505a, New Testament Interpretation I  Michal Beth Dinkler
This course is the first half of a two-term introduction to the literature of the New Testament and to the methods and resources useful for interpreting that literature. This first term focuses on the Gospels and Acts; the second term (REL 506) focuses on the Pauline letters, pastoral and catholic epistles, and the Apocalypse of John. Students can take one term without taking the other. Area I. 3 Course cr

REL 506b, New Testament Interpretation II  Michal Beth Dinkler
This course is the second half of a two-term introduction to the literature of the New Testament and to the methods and resources useful for interpreting that literature. This second term focuses on the Pauline letters, pastoral and catholic epistles, and the Apocalypse of John. Students can take this term without having taken the fall course (REL 505). Area I. 3 Course cr

Biblical Languages

Note: Elementary biblical languages are listed near the end of this chapter under Courses without Area Designations.

REL 518a, Intermediate New Testament Greek  Judith Gundiry
A sequel to Elementary Greek, this intermediate Koine Greek course prepares students for advanced Greek exegesis courses. The course work consists of preparation and discussion of translations of a variety of New Testament texts, readings and written exercises on Greek syntax, sight-reading of Greek texts outside the New Testament, and vocabulary building. Students gain practice in using a Greek-English lexicon and advanced Greek grammars. Area I. 3 Course cr

REL 572b, Post-Biblical Hebrew  Eric Reymond
The course explores the language of post-biblical Hebrew writings, primarily through a close study of text specimens written in unpointed or unvocalized Hebrew. We begin by studying briefly late biblical Hebrew texts before moving on to the study of the Hebrew
of the Wisdom of Ben Sira and the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and then concluding with a study of Mishnaic Hebrew. Area I. Prerequisite: one year of Biblical Hebrew. 3 Course cr

REL 574a, Intermediate Biblical Hebrew I  Eric Reymond
This course focuses on the reading of biblical texts but also offers a review of the elementary grammar of Biblical Hebrew and the introduction of more complicated grammatical concerns. More specifically, the course focuses on prose texts and reviews the morphology of verbs and nouns as well as basic components of Hebrew syntax. In addition, the form and function of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) are introduced. Area I. Prerequisite: Elementary Biblical Hebrew or its equivalent (i.e., one year of an introductory course in Biblical Hebrew). 3 Course cr

REL 575b, Intermediate Biblical Hebrew II  Eric Reymond
The course focuses on the reading of Hebrew Bible texts, but also offers a review of the elementary grammar of Biblical Hebrew and the introduction of more complicated grammatical concerns, especially syntax. The course introduces the student to Biblical Hebrew poetic texts, including those of Psalms, Proverbs, and the prophetic books. Students learn vocabulary from a textbook and consult an intermediate grammar for the study of syntax. The majority of each class is spent reading aloud a small portion of text, translating it, and studying the most important forms it contains and the elements of its syntax. Area I. Prerequisite: one year of Biblical Hebrew. 3 Course cr

REL 576a, Advanced Biblical Hebrew Prose  Jacqueline Vayntrub
This course examines topics in the grammatical and syntactical analysis of Biblical Hebrew prose. It introduces students to the fine points of the Hebrew grammar and syntax so that students are capable of reading the biblical text fluently and carefully. Area I. Prerequisite: REL 574 and REL 575. 3 Course cr

EXEGESIS BASED ON THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

REL 573a, Hebrew Exegesis: Ecclesiastes/Qohelet  Jacqueline Vayntrub
The course focuses on translation and critical analysis of Ecclesiastes (Qohelet) from Biblical Hebrew, with continuous reference to ancient translations, related biblical and parabiblical texts, and ancient Near Eastern literary texts as relevant. The translation and analysis of primary texts are accompanied by critical evaluation of biblical scholarship. Area I. Prerequisites: REL 503 and REL 504 or equivalent and one and preferably two years of Biblical Hebrew. 3 Course cr

REL 584b, Greek Exegesis: The Epistles of John  Staff
The three epistles of John pose a number of intriguing questions, both in terms of the historical situation behind them and in terms of their theology. Each epistle addresses a conflict situation and seeks to build a boundary against some other Jesus-followers, which involves discussion about crucial theological issues, such as the role of Jesus, God's commandments, sin and sinlessness, and Christians' mutual love. Building on recent studies on other groups of the learned in antiquity, the notions of "textual/reading community" and "therapeutic community" provide new historical perspectives to understand the intellectual and social world behind the epistles of John. Area I. Prerequisites: one term of REL 503, REL 504, REL 505, or REL 506; REL 360 and REL 3606; and REL 518 (or equivalent). 3 Course cr

GRADUATE SEMINARS IN BIBLICAL AND COGNATE STUDIES

REL 507a, Book of Judges and Contemporary Religious Life  Gregory Mobley
This course explores a neglected biblical book filled with violence, antiheroes, and fractured folktales in order to wrest theological and ethical insights for contemporary communities of faith. Moving between a detailed examination of the translated text and the phenomenon of orality in ancient and modern expressions, the following topics, among others, are considered: the human body as a controlling metaphor in biblical meaning-making; gender; domestic and martial violence; the emergence of literature from its original oral matrix; and the function of that portion of scripture known as Judges in a centuries-long quest by ancient Israel to tell its story, and the corresponding millennial-long quest by Jews and Christians to interpret that story. Area I. 3 Course cr

REL 511a, Past Tense: Classical Biblical Prophecy  Gregory Mobley
In an era that lasted barely more than two centuries, from about 740 to 540 B.C.E., the company of ancient religious geniuses we know as the classic Hebrew prophets composed and performed a body of work that has inspired and confounded the world for more than two millennia. In this class we seek to understand the biblical prophets and endeavor to enlarge our capacity to be prophet-like, that is, "prophet-ic." The basic method of the course is to carefully read selected oracles and vision reports from the prophetic corpus in concert with secondary readings about the social and historical background of the prophets, the creative process, and contemporary poetic and political discourse in the spirit of biblical prophecy. Area I. 3 Course cr

REL 528b, Gender, Sexuality, and the Hebrew Bible  Jacqueline Vayntrub
This course examines how the Hebrew Bible, as a collection of texts written by multiple authors, with multiple (and conflicting) literary and ideological aims, in multiple historical periods, variously depicts gender, relationships, and social values. Students learn how to read the biblical texts through the lens of the social world of their ancient authors and how to critically evaluate interpretations of biblical texts with respect to gender and sexuality. Area I. Recommended but not required: completion of an introductory course in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible or the equivalent. 3 Course cr
REL 529b, Authors, Editors, and Scribes: The Making of the Hebrew Bible  Joel Baden
This course provides an overview of the diverse compositional techniques employed in the creation of the various books of the Hebrew Bible. By closely examining the literary features of a selection of biblical texts, along with comparative evidence from related corpora, students learn how authors, editors, and scribes have created and influenced this central text of Western civilization. Area I. Prerequisite for Divinity students: REL 503 or REL 504 or equivalent; for Graduate School students: an introductory course in the Bible at some level is preferred. 3 Course cr

REL 530a, English Exegesis: Gospel and Epistles of John  Harold Attridge
This course explores exegetical and hermeneutical issues relevant to the study of the Johannine corpus through a careful analysis of the gospels and epistles of John in English translation and a critical reading of their modern interpreters. Area I. 3 Course cr

REL 544a, History and Methods of Old Testament Interpretation I  Joel Baden
In this course, students engage with classic secondary works from the history of Old Testament scholarship. Area I. Prerequisites: REL 503 and 504 or equivalent. 3 Course cr

REL 545b, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature  John Collins
An introduction to Jewish apocalyptic literature, including the books of Daniel, Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 3 Baruch, and related themes in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other literature. Area I. Prerequisite: introductory course in OT or NT. 3 Course cr

REL 555a, Gnostic Texts in Coptic  Harold Attridge
The class reads selected portions of important texts from the Nag Hammadi collection, including the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Truth, Thunder, the Treatise on Resurrection, the Tripartite Tractate, as well as other noncanonical texts preserved in Coptic, including the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Judas. Area I. Prerequisite: EGYP 510 or equivalent. 3 Course cr

REL 562a, What Are Biblical Values?  John Collins
This course examines what the Bible has to say about several issues that are controversial in the modern world. It also reflects on the difficulty of identifying a single, or even a dominant, biblical position on some issues, and on the relevance of the biblical texts for the modern debates. The foundations for biblical values in creation, covenant, and eschatology are considered, and biblical attitudes to family values, gender and sexuality, social justice, war and peace, ecology, purity, and other issues are discussed. Area I and Area V. Prerequisite: introductory course in OT or NT. 3 Course cr

REL 568b, Women and Gender in Early Christianity  Judith Gundry
Was the early Jesus movement a discipleship of equals? Did women exercise the most authoritative roles in the early church? Was gender equality attained through erasure of the difference between male and female, in baptism, or through sexual asceticism? Did love patriarchalism overtake gender equality in the post-apostolic period? What can be reconstructed about early Christian women’s lives from the New Testament and other ancient sources? How did early Christian ideas about koinonia, the gifts of the Spirit, marriage, sex, and procreation affect the roles of women and men in these communities? This course explores such questions by studying the key early Christian primary sources together with Second Temple Jewish and Greco-Roman sources on women and gender, and by drawing on the wealth of secondary literature on these subjects. The aim is to encourage a critical and historically informed understanding of the key primary texts and provide an exposure to a variety of contemporary perspectives and interpretations of this material. Area I. 3 Course cr

REL 591a, Philo of Alexandria and the Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture  Gregory Sterling
Philo of Alexandria, an exact contemporary of Jesus Christ, is the main source for our knowledge of Alexandrian Judaism. He shed much light on the New Testament and was a key influence on early Christianity. He is best known for his allegorical exegesis of the Pentateuch, making extensive use of ideas from Greek philosophy and developing this method to expound and defend scripture inside (and possibly outside) the Alexandrian Jewish community. Area I. Prerequisite: reading knowledge of Greek. 3 Course cr

REL 598b, History and Methods II: Interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in Late Modernity and Beyond  Jacqueline Vayntrub
This course explores significant developments in late modern and postmodern methods of biblical interpretation. The course is designed to foster learning along three interrelated axes of inquiry having to do with historical analysis, literary representation, and the role of the reader. Of particular interest is exploration of notions of authorship and constructions of ideology and reader agency in feminist interpretation, queer readings, masculinity studies, and postcolonial criticism. Throughout the term, we focus on the book of Ruth as a textual site for our engagement of methodological questions and their implications for meaning making. Area I. 3 Course cr

RLST 800a, Hebrew Bible Seminar: Problems in the History of Israelite Religion  Robert Wilson
An intensive study of important features of ancient Israelite religion, including the origins of monotheism, the priesthood, worship, prophecy, and apocalyptic.