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 Hebrew Bible and New Testament, 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 Hebrew Bible and New Testament. 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 Hebrew Bible and New Testament. 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, Hebrew Bible Interpretation I  Joel Baden
An introduction to the contents of the Hebrew Bible (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 Hebrew Bible for contemporary communities of faith. The course aims to make students aware of the contents of the Hebrew Bible, the history and development of ancient Israel's literature and religion, the methods of biblical interpretation, and ways of interpreting the Hebrew Bible for modern communities of faith. Area I.  3 Course cr

REL 504b, Hebrew Bible Interpretation II  Jacqueline Vayntrub
A continuation of REL 503. This course introduces students to critical study of the Prophetic Books and Writings (Psalms, Wisdom) of the Hebrew Bible as well as to exegetical method. Area I. Prerequisite: REL 503.  3 Course cr

REL 505a, New Testament Interpretation I  Michal Beth Dinkler
This course is an introduction to the literature of the New Testament and to the methods and resources useful for interpreting that literature. This term focuses on the Gospels and Acts. (Term two, a separate course, REL 506, focuses on the Pauline letters, pastoral and catholic epistles, and the Apocalypse of John.) The course considers the process of canonization, questions of genre, and contemporary implications of various modes of New Testament interpretation (e.g., historical-critical, feminist liberation, African American, narratological approaches, etc.). Emphasis is on students’ ability to engage in responsible, nuanced interpretation of the primary texts. 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 Gundry
This course is the sequel to Elementary New Testament Greek and consists of a systematic study of New Testament Greek syntax; translation and syntactical analysis of New Testament texts illustrating different genres and literary styles; sight-reading of other early Christian Greek texts, the Septuagint, etc.; vocabulary-building assignments; and review of NT Greek grammar. Area I. Prerequisites: REL 506 and REL 506; or GREK 110 and GREK 120; or REL 509; or equivalent study of Koine or Attic Greek.  3 Course cr
REL 570a, Historical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew  Eric Reymond
The course examines the development of the sounds and forms of Biblical Hebrew, paying particular attention to the following (partially hypothetical) stages of the language and its predecessors: Proto-Semitic, Proto-Hebrew, Hebrew in the Iron Age, and Hebrew in the Second Temple Period. The course begins with an introduction to Hebrew in relation to other Semitic languages and an introduction to the alphabet. It then addresses the phonology of Hebrew as attested in the time of the Masoretic scribes, in the time of early Judaism and Christianity, in the time of the Persian era, and in the time of the Iron Age and earlier periods. Finally, the course addresses specific morphologies of Biblical Hebrew: nouns, adjectives, verbs, and particles. Area I. Prerequisite: at least 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. Prerequisites: REL 3603 and REL 3604 or the 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 Biblical Hebrew 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. Prerequisites: REL 3603, REL 3604, and REL 574; or equivalents.  
3 Course cr

EXEGESIS BASED ON THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

REL 564a, Deuteronomy  Joel Baden
This course studies selected passages from the Book of Deuteronomy, emphasizing its composition, structure, theology, and literary prehistory. Area I. Prerequisites: REL 503 and REL 504, or their equivalents, and at least one year—preferably two—of Biblical Hebrew.  
3 Course cr

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 their equivalents, and at least one year—preferably two—of Biblical Hebrew.  
3 Course cr

GRADUATE SEMINARS IN BIBLICAL AND COGNATE STUDIES

REL 502a, Bounty and Duty: The Hebrew Bible and Creation  Gregory Mobley
The course explores ideas about creation and the interconnectedness among the created realms in the Hebrew Bible, then juxtaposes the ancient worldview with the science and ethics of contemporary ecological concerns. Area I.  
3 Course cr

REL 528a, 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. Completion of an introductory course in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible or the equivalent is recommended but not required.  
3 Course cr

REL 555a, Gnostic Texts in the Nag Hammadi Library  Daniel Bohac
In 1945, near the town of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt, the sudden discovery of a cache of some fifty ancient books drastically questioned our understanding of Christianity’s origins. Did another gospel exist before the canonical four? Were the “heresies” decried by Bishop Irenaeus in fact competing orthodoxies? This course introduces students to these discovered texts, along with their historical context (both ancient and modern). No knowledge of ancient languages is required. Area I and Area III. REL 505, REL 506, REL 712, or similar course work is recommended.  
3 Course cr

REL 560b, Death, Memorial, and Immortality in the Hebrew Bible and Its World  Jacqueline Vayntrub
This course considers the development of biblical and ancient Near Eastern concepts of death and life-after-death. Among the topics covered are the depiction of human mortality and divine immortality in literature, dying as a social process, the development of the notion of an afterlife and the concept of the “soul,” and communication with the dead. The course examines the history of how ancient texts have shaped inherited ideas of the immortality of the soul, human suffering, and divine justice. A central aim of the course is to foster an awareness of the ancient historical and cultural context in which these texts were written, and to deepen an understanding of modern views of mortality brought to bear on ancient literary traditions. Area I. Prerequisite: REL 503 or REL 504 or equivalent.  
3 Course cr
REL 589b, Early Biblical Interpretation  Joel Baden and Andrew McGowan
The purpose of this course is to familiarize students with the wide variety of interpretive trends and methods in early Judaism and Christianity. Beginning with interpretation of biblical texts within the Bible itself, and moving through both time and text, the course explores the intellectual and theological motivations behind interpretive choices and approaches, and illuminates both the capaciousness and limitations of biblical interpretation. How can different interpretations be productively compared? Why do we privilege one approach over another? What are the contexts from which interpretations we now take as standard developed? Area I. Prerequisite: at least one term of both REL 503 or REL 504 and REL 505 or REL 506. 3 Course cr

REL 594b, Judaism in the Roman Empire: Philo of Alexandria and Jewish Apologetics  Greg E Sterling
This course is intended to introduce students to some of the ways in which Jews (and Christians) interacted with the larger Roman world in the first century CE. We explore Philo’s fragmentary work known as the Hypothetica but use it as a lens to the larger issues it addresses. These issues comprise a wide range of topics including authenticity of fragmentary remains, historical origins of people, violence and nation formation, ethical codes and moral formation, the Essenes and the role of moral exemplars, Christianity’s indebtedness to Judaism, and the role of minority groups to empires. Area I. Prerequisite: reading knowledge of Greek. 3 Course cr

REL 597b, Readings in Recent Biblical Scholarship  Joel Baden
This course, intended primarily for M.A.R. Hebrew Bible students, provides an overview of the latest developments in the field of Hebrew Bible, and the critical tools to evaluate and engage with them, including learning how to respond responsibly to others’ ideas both orally and in writing. Each week students read all or part of a recent scholarly work in the field of Hebrew Bible (approximately 200 pages per week). The works to be read are chosen in consultation with the instructor over the course of the term, in line with the academic interests of students enrolled in the course. Students are asked to critically evaluate those works in class; prepare an oral response as if on a conference panel; and write book reviews. The course operates as a workshop, with all student contributions heard, read, and critiqued by their peers as well as by the instructor. Area I. Prerequisites: REL 503 and REL 504, or their equivalents, and at least one year—preferably two—of Biblical Hebrew. 3 Course cr