

# **ADULT EDUCATION 2019-2020: THE OLD TESTAMENT**

KC4a, 9:30 am Sunday Mornings  
updated 9/12/2019

24 lectures by Amy-Jill Levine, Ph.D. E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter  
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These twenty-four lectures offer an introduction to the history, literature, and religion of ancient Israel and early Judaism as it is presented in the collection of texts called the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, and the Tanakh. Not all books will, or even could, be covered; the content of certain books, such as Genesis, could easily fill twenty-four lectures alone, as could the stories of certain figures, such as the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, Moses, and David. Attention is given not only to the content of the biblical books but also to the debates over their meaning and the critical methods through which they have been interpreted. Often, a book will be examined by means of an analysis of a representative text or figure in it.

The lectures presuppose only a very general familiarity with the Bible's major figures and themes (e.g., Adam and Eve, Moses, the Ten Commandments, David and Bathsheba); biblical literacy, as sociologists have noted, is on the wane in the West. Although students do not need to follow the lectures with an open Bible, reading the texts listed at the top of each of the outlines will enhance appreciation for the material.

## **9/8 1. In the Beginning (Genesis 1)**

What are the diverse issues, critical methods, and approaches that can play a role in biblical interpretation? How do they shed light on the chapter where God says "let there be light"?

## **9/15 2. Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:4b–3:28)**

This lecture follows Genesis selectively, episode by episode, to highlight its status as a foundational narrative, its complexity, the possible order of its composition, its ancient Near Eastern connections, and the questions it raises.

## **9/22 3. Murder, Flood, Dispersion (Genesis 4:1–11:32)**

This lecture investigates the major themes of Genesis by analyzing the stories of Cain and Abel, Noah's Flood, the Tower of Babel, and more.

## **9/29 4. Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar (Genesis 11:26–21:34)**

Here we meet Abraham—faithful hero, morally ambiguous trickster, and patriarch—first briefly via historical investigation, and then through a close reading of Genesis 12:10–20.

## **10/6 5. Isaac (Genesis 21–22)**

The accounts of Abraham's son Isaac and daughter-in-law Rebecca (Genesis 21–24) provide the opportunity to introduce the method of biblical study known as "source criticism" as well as to demonstrate its limitations.

## **10/13 6. The Jacob Saga (Genesis 25–36)**

The story of Isaac's sons Jacob and Esau (beginning in Genesis 25) provides an example of the insights that can be gleaned from "form criticism." This approach attends carefully to metaphor, double meaning, narrative voice, physical descriptions, handling of motivation, and use of dialogue.

### **10/20 7. Folklore Analysis and Type Scenes (Genesis 25–36, cont.)**

Source and form criticism can help us understand common biblical plot lines, or "type scenes." Type-scene analysis, a method pioneered by folklorists, reveals narrative art and teaches about community heroes and values. Here we focus on betrothal scenes.

### **10/27 8. Moses and Exodus (Exodus 1–15)**

Combining folklore, morality, theology and, perhaps, historical memory, Exodus 1–15 offers quick-witted women, a reluctant hero, and a mysterious deity. This lecture introduces "text criticism" while discussing slavery in Egypt, Moses' infancy and commission, and the Exodus itself.

### **11/3 9. The God of Israel (Exodus 1–15, cont.)**

More than an account of the liberation of Hebrew slaves, the opening chapters of Exodus also provide insight into the name of the deity and the sources employed in the Pentateuch's composition.

### **11/10 10. Covenant and Law, Part I (Exodus 19–40, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)**

Knowing the forms that legal contracts could take in the ancient Near East helps us understand the character of the covenants that the deity makes with the people (through Moses), and with individuals such as Noah, Abraham, and David.

### **11/17 Guest Speaker – church-wide; Jonathan Walton**

### **11/24 11. Covenant and Law, Part II (Exodus 20–35, Leviticus)**

Likely products of centuries of development, the Torah's laws concerning diet, farming, and sexual practices mark the covenant community as a holy people. Scholars still debate the laws' origin, symbolic meaning, and implementation.

### **12/7 12. The "Conquest" (Deuteronomy 20–21, 27–31; Book of Joshua)**

With this lecture we move to Joshua, the first prophetic book. After looking briefly at the account of Moses' death and the function of "holy war," we address Joshua through three major explanations for Israel's presence in Canaan: conquest, immigration, and internal revolt.

### **12/15 13. The Book of Judges, Part I (Judges 1–8)**

In essence a large type scene of apostasy, punishment, repentance, and rescue, Judges ultimately spirals into idolatry, rape, and near genocide. Yet this deep tragedy is leavened by high comedy, which this lecture introduces even as it raises historical, theological, and moral questions.

### **12/22 14. The Book of Judges, Part II (Judges 8–21)**

Returning to Gideon's son Abimelech and then introducing the tragic judges of Jephthah and Samson, this lecture unveils the increasing instability of the judge as political leader and the descent of Israel's tribal confederation into moral and political chaos.

### **1/5 15. Samuel and Saul (1 Samuel)**

This lecture begins with Samuel, who represents the transition from charismatic leader to prophet, and then turns to the tragedy of King Saul to reveal the benefits and liabilities of monarchy.

**1/12 16. King David (1 Samuel 16–31, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1–2)**

What is David's status in history? How does the complex story of his relationship with Bathsheba combine the personal and political while revealing his charm, his ruthlessness, and his faith?

**1/19 17. From King Solomon to Pre-classical Prophecy (1 Kings 3–2 Kings 17)**

Biblical prophets were known less for predicting the future than for communicating divine will, usually through poetry, and often in debate with kings and priests. This lecture focuses on the "pre-classical" (non-writing) prophets, particularly Elijah.

**1/26 18. The Prophets and the Fall of the North (1 Kgs. 16–2 Kgs. 17, Amos, Hosea)**

Amos and Hosea, the first two classical prophets whose words are preserved in the canon, offer poetic critiques of the government of Israel, the priesthood, and the rich. What followed from their warnings about both personal behavior and political machinations?

**2/2 19. The Southern Kingdom (Isaiah, Deuteronomy, 2 Kings 18–23)**

What was the context in which the major prophet Isaiah issues his oracles? How did the Southern Kingdom of Israel respond under its kings Hezekiah and Josiah?

**2/9 20. Babylonian Exile (2 Kgs. 24–25, Jeremiah, Isaiah 40–55, Ezekiel)**

This lecture begins on the eve of the Exile, with the prophetic warnings of Jeremiah. It introduces the prophecies, narratives, and law by which the Judean exiles maintained their identity.

**2/16 21. Restoration and Theocracy (Isaiah 56–55, Ezra–Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Ruth, Jonah)**

What did the exiles find on their return from Babylon? How did these conditions lead to the breakdown of classical prophecy and an increasing concern with assimilation and intermarriage?

**2/23 22. Wisdom Literature (Song of Songs, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job)**

Since the "Sumerian Job" of the 4th century B.C.E., authors have attempted to make sense of the world and our place in it. Biblical contributions to such "wisdom literature" range from the optimistic Song of Songs to the practical proverbs and the pessimistic Ecclesiastes. But the most famous, and most controversial, is the Book of Job.

**3/1 23. Life in the Diaspora (Genesis 30, 37–50; Esther; Daniel 1–6)**

The Babylonian Exile gave rise to the Diaspora ("dispersion") of the Judeans, now known as Jews. New questions of identity arose. The court tales of Esther and Daniel, like those of Joseph and Moses, gave answers at once humorous, macabre, and profound.

**3/8 24. Apocalyptic Literature (Isaiah 24–27, 56–66; Zechariah 9–14; Daniel 7–12)**

What are the literary devices and sociological origins of apocalyptic writing? How are these typified by the Old Testament's only full-blown apocalyptic account (Daniel 7–12)? We conclude with a few comments on messianic speculation and future hope