

NELC/GH 250 / JWST 255 / RELS 224 COMP LIT 380 / – SPRING, 2009
THE BIBLE IN TRANSLATION: THE BOOK OF EXODUS

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Classroom: McNeile 169

This course is a careful textual study of the book of Exodus in the light of modern scholarship, including archaeological evidence and pertinent ancient Near Eastern documents. Topics covered will include the Israelite exodus from Egypt and the events surrounding it, its date, the first Passover, the role of Moses as a prophet, the Ten Commandments, civil and religious law in the Bible, the golden calf incident, and the impact of the book on Western civilization.

The format of the course will be lecture and discussion based on the reading assignments, with emphasis on the discussion. Doing the readings in advance of class is required, except for the first class. They are of varying length, which will require you to plan your time accordingly.

There will be a final exam and two papers. The first paper, of 5-10 pages, is to discuss how some document or object discovered by archaeologists, or some other type of cultural or literary parallel, enhances our understanding of something in Exodus. It is due Feb. 22 (no extensions). The second paper is to describe and discuss how some theme from Exodus is treated or reflected in postbiblical Judaism or Christianity, Western civilization, or American culture. This paper will be presented orally in class (up to ten minutes) and handed in simultaneously in writing (up to four pages in length, double spaced). Oral reports will begin on March 15. From that date on, two reports will be given each period, from 6:00-6:30. Students will choose their dates on a first-come-first-served basis. Full instructions for the papers will be found in two documents on the Blackboard website for this course: "General Guide for Undergraduate Research Papers" and "Instructions for Papers on Exodus." Please follow these instructions carefully.

The class will meet from 4:30-6:00 until the spring break. From then on (starting March 17) it will meet until 6:30.

There will also be one class visit to the University Museum at a different hour of the day, to be arranged in class.

TEXTBOOKS

Required:

- At the Penn bookstore: N.M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (bring to class every time)
- At Campus Copy Center, 3907 Walnut St.: *NELC- GH 250, The Bible in Translation: Exodus* (referred to below as READINGS). (Be sure you tell them that you want the coursebook for NELC 250, because my other course this semester also has the number 250 – namely HEBR 250, Studies in the Hebrew Bible.)

Bring Sarna's commentary and other assigned readings for the date to class each time.

Recommended:

- *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford University Press), a one-volume translation with brief commentary on the entire Hebrew Bible

Several readings and other information are found on the Blackboard website for this course, where it is listed as "NELC 250" (even if you are registered for one of the cross-listed numbers).

NOTE: The two scholars whose work you will be reading most frequently are Nahum Sarna and Moshe Greenberg. For information about their approach to Biblical scholarship, see the articles about them on the Blackboard Website.

ASSIGNMENTS

Every session will be based on a reading in the text of Exodus, which is to be read in Sarna's commentary along with his comments there, and additional readings in READINGS and/or the Blackboard Website. (You will not be responsible for comments based on Hebrew, since this course does not presuppose any knowledge of Hebrew; I will, however, be happy to discuss such matters with interested students after class). In each class, students will be called on to summarize the Biblical text and other readings assigned for the day and to identify particularly interesting, curious, or puzzling items for further discussion.

NOTE: The classes scheduled for April 9, 14, and 16 will have to be rescheduled due to Passover. Some of the following assignments may also be changed, or others added.

Jan. 15 INTRODUCTION

Jan. 20 AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

- Sarna's commentary, pp. xi-xv
- M. Greenberg, "Exodus, Book of," In READINGS.
- In READINGS: (a) fig. 9; (b) fig. 115; (c) "Oracles;" (d) "The Report of a Frontier Official;" and (e) "Asiatics in Egyptian Household Service." Note: In (c)-(e), "Asiatic" is the English translation of a general term used by Egyptians for people from Syria-Palestine/Canaan, no matter what their specific ethnicity; "Bedouin" is the English translation of an Egyptian term for pastoral nomads from the same region, including Transjordan.
- On Blackboard website: "Archaeological slides" nos. 1-3
- On Blackboard website: "Color-coded source analysis of Exodus 1-2."
- To prepare for class, write an outline, one to two pages long, of the book of Exodus.

Jan 22 ISRAEL'S PROLIFERATION AND ENSLAVEMENT

- Exodus 1 with Sarna's commentary, including Excursus 1.
- On Blackboard website: "The Pithom (?) slab in the University Museum."
- M. Cogan, "A Technical Term for Exposure." In READINGS. NOTE: This article is about the word translated "throw" in Exod. 1:22.

Jan. 27 MOSES' BIRTH & YOUTH

- Exodus 2 with Sarna's commentary, including Excursus 2.
- In READINGS: "The Birth Legend of Sargon."

Jan. 29 THE CALL AND COMMISSIONING OF MOSES

- Exodus 3-4 with Sarna's commentary, including Excursus 3. Note: In Sarna's comment on v. 3 (p. 310), what he means is not that the name YHVH is widespread, but that similar phrases – with the names of kings – are widespread. He is referring to royal inscriptions which begin with the king introducing himself with sentences in the form "I am so-and-so," as in inscriptions of kings such as Mesha, Shalmaneser, etc.
- Tigay, "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue'. On Moses' Speech Difficulty." In READINGS.

Feb. 3 THE FIRST APPROACH TO PHARAOH

- Exodus 5-6 with Sarna's commentary, including Excursus 4.

Feb. 5 THE PLAGUES

PROSPECTUS FOR FIRST PAPER DUE

- Exodus 7-11 with Sarna's commentary.
- Sarna, "The Ten Plagues," in READINGS (from *Exploring Exodus*, pp. 68-80)
- "King Cheops and the Magicians," in READINGS (from W.K. Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 13-24).

Feb. 10 THE FIRST PASSOVER AND THE EXODUS

- Exodus 12-13:16 with Sarna's commentary, including Excursus 5.
- Regarding 13:9 and 16, see Tigay, "On the Meaning of T(W)TPT" and the photograph following it, and "Notes on reading my article 'ON THE MEANING OF T(W)TPT,'" all READINGS. NOTE: This article is about the word translated in Exod. 13:16 and elsewhere as "symbol" or "frontlet." See also:
 - Sarna's comment on 13:9 and his Excursus 5
 - Footnote 36 of my article on *totafot*.
 - "Archaeological slides" on the Blackboard website, slides ## 21-25.
 - "Modern tefillin, as worn by worshiper," on the Blackboard website.

Questions and guidelines:

- Which rituals/practices in chapters 12:1-13:16 are to be performed at the time of the exodus, and which are commemorations to be performed in the future? Which are both? What is the reason for each ritual/practice, and how does each relate to some aspect of the exodus event? What are the specific means of commemoration – verbal, dietary, activity or prohibited activity, etc.?
- See Sarna's comments on the following passages:
 - 12:4, "will eat." Why might this type of sacrifice have been prescribed for this occasion, rather than a "burnt offering" in which the entire animal is given directly to God by burning?
 - 12:7, See also the comment on v. 13. Does the blood play a magical role in these verses?
 - 12:15, "remove leaven." What is the difference between "leaven" and "leavened bread/food"?
 - 12:15, "shall be cut off."
 - 12:24, does Ramban's comment have any basis in the text?

- 12:34, Note the last sentence about “reinterpretation” of a preexisting practice. Are you familiar with any other examples of the reinterpretation of older practices? See also 13:2.
- What is the traditional Jewish interpretation of 13:9 and 16? What is the alternative view, and what are the arguments supporting that view?

Feb. 12 THE CROSSING OF THE SEA

- Exodus 13:17-14:31 with Sarna's commentary. As you read, be mindful of the study questions for the Feb. 17 assignment, which ask you to compare chaps. 14-15.
- Excerpt from U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, in READINGS

Feb. 17 THE SONG AT THE SEA

- Exodus 15:1-21 with Sarna's commentary.
- Andrea Weiss, “Poetry. Biblical Poetry,” from *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. Vol. 16, pp. 254-62.

Questions:

- What is the course of events as narrated in chapter 14?
- What is the course of events as related in chapter 15:1-18?
- Could you reconstruct the course of events from chapter 15?
- What are the goals of each chapter – what is the writer doing in each? How does that account for the differences between them?
- What were the initial goals and ultimate consequences, or effects, of the event at the sea according to chapter 14?
- What were the initial goals and ultimate consequences, or effects, of the event at the sea according to chapter 15? What is the culmination of the whole process according to 15:1-18?

Feb. 19 THE JOURNEY TO SINAI AND JETHRO'S VISIT

- Exodus 15:22-chapter 18 end, with Sarna's commentary. See also the map "EXODUS" in READINGS.
- Be prepared for a map quiz in which you will show the location of Ramses; Succoth; six possible locations for Mt. Sinai; and four possible routes followed by the Israelites from Egypt to the Sinai.

Feb. 24 AND 26 THE THEOPHANY AT MT. SINAI AND THE COVENANT

- Exodus 19-20 with Sarna's commentary.
- M. Greenberg, "נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany," in READINGS. This article is about the word translated "test" in Exod. 20:17. NOTE: In this article, the verse numbers following the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are three numbers higher than in Sarna's commentary.
- In READINGS: (1) Sarna, "The covenant concept," "Near Eastern parallels," and "Israelite innovations;" (2) “Hittite Diplomatic Texts” – note the underlined passages; (3) “The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon.” In the latter, note particularly the stipulation to love the (§ 24 line 268) and the curses for violating the covenant by acts of disloyalty to the suzerain (pp. 538-41).

Questions, based on pp. 134-144 in the reading from Sarna in READINGS:

- Which are the three main groups of ancient Near Eastern treaties (identify them by date and geography)?
- What are the two main types of ancient Near Eastern covenants?
- What are the six main elements in the Hittite treaties?
- Which features of the Biblical covenant between God and Israel parallel each of these elements in the Hittite treaties, and where are they found in the Torah (see the verses cited by Sarna, including his footnotes)?
- Identify at least three ways in which the Israelite concept of the covenant differs from ancient Near Eastern treaties.

March 3 THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- Exodus 20:1-17 with Sarna's commentary.
- M. Greenberg, arts. "Decalogue" and "Sabbath," on Blackboard Website.

Question:

- Describe the order, style, and literary structure of the Ten Commandments and the implications of these characteristics.

March 5, CIVIL LAW (Part 1)

- **FIRST PAPER DUE**
- Exodus 21-22:16
- Read in greater depth Exodus 21:1-32, along with (a) Sarna's commentary on those verses, and his Excursus 6, and (b) Tigay, "Notes on the Laws of Exodus," Blackboard Website – just the part pertinent to 21:1-32.
- Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law." In READINGS.
- The Hammurabi stele, from "Archaeological slides" on Blackboard Website; see slides no. 48, 49. Regarding the scent depicted at the top of the stele, see the comments of Greenberg on p. 21, last paragraph, and his accompanying note 10 on page 35.

Questions:

- Apart from 21:1-11, can you detect a logical order of arrangement in the laws from 21:12-22:16. Can the location of 21:2-11 be explained as part of that arrangement? Can you think of a more logical place for 21:2-11?
- What is the Bible's concept of the origin of its laws, and how does that differ from other ancient views about the origin of law? How does the Biblical view affect the notion of duty and sin?

March 10, 12 SPRING BREAK

Class will end at 6:30 from March 17 on.

March 17 CIVIL LAW (Part 2)

- Exodus 21:33-22:16, along with (a) Sarna's commentary on those verses, and (b) Tigay, "Notes on the Laws of Exodus," Blackboard Website – just the part pertinent to 21:33-22:16
- Selections from ancient Near Eastern Laws, in READINGS. Read the following: "Hittite Laws" 1-4; "Laws of Eshnunna" 53-58; and "Laws of Hammurabi," paragraphs 6-14, 21-25, 117, 129-130, 195-201, 206-214, 229-231, 250-252. Compare each of these laws with the Biblical laws mentioned in the middle column of each page.

Questions:

- What is the punishment for murder/homicide in the Laws of Eshnunna, the Laws of Hammurabi and the Hittite Laws? What are some of the punishments for theft? How do these differ from punishments of those crimes in the Bible?
- In the Laws of Hammurabi, under what circumstances is a person who maims another punished with talion ("an eye for an eye") and under what circumstances with a monetary fine? What is the case in the Bible?
- Describe the basic postulates and underlying values of Biblical law, and how they affect the contents of the law, according to Greenberg's article "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law." How do these values differ from those of other ancient Near Eastern legal systems? How are those differences rooted in theological differences that we studied in connection with the creation of the world?

March 19 CIVIL LAW (Part 3)

- **PROSPECTUS FOR SECOND PAPER DUE**
- Exodus 22:17-23:9, along with (a) Sarna's commentary on those verses, and (b) Tigay, "Notes on the Laws of Exodus," Blackboard Website – just the part pertinent to 22:17-23:9.

Questions:

- Can you detect a logical order of arrangement in 22:17-23:9?
- How do the Biblical laws about debt and interest differ from those of today? What is their aim?

Mar. *24, *26 RELIGIOUS LAW

- Exodus 23:10-19 with Sarna's commentary.
- Haran, "Seething a Kid in its Mother's Milk." In READINGS.

*Mar. 31 PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY, THE COVENANT CEREMONY

- Exodus 23:20-ch 24 with Sarna's commentary.
- Yurco, "3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites found in Egypt," in READINGS

*April 2 INSTRUCTIONS FOR BUILDING THE TABERNACLE

- Exodus 25-31 with Sarna's commentary.
- Ten photographs of a scale model of the Tabernacle, from M. Levine, *Melekheth Hamishkan*, pp. 21, 43, 45, 53, 65, 81, 91, 106, 115, 133 (Blackboard Website)
- W.F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?" In READINGS.

- K.A. Kitchen, "The Desert Tabernacle" (from *Bible Review* 16/6 [December, 2000]:14-21). Blackboard Website
- M.M. Homan, "The Divine Warrior in His Tent" (from *Bible Review* 16/6 [December, 2000]:22-33, 55). Blackboard Website
- A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Care and Feeding of the Gods" (Blackboard website)

*Apr. 7

- Exodus 32 with Sarna's commentary.
- S.E. Loewenstamm, "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf." In READINGS.
NOTE: This article proposes translating a number of terms in Exod. 32 differently from the way they usually are and yields a surprising dimension of the incident.

*Apr. 9 (RESCHEDULE) MOSES'S INTERCESSION

- Exodus 33-34 with Sarna's commentary.
- M. Greenberg, "Moses' Intercessory Prayer." In READINGS.

*Apr. 14 (RESCHEDULE) THE BUILDING OF THE TABERNACLE

- Exodus 35-40 with Sarna's commentary.

*Apr. 16 (RESCHEDULE) TO BE ANNOUNCED

*Apr. 21 TO BE ANNOUNCED

*Apr. 23 TO BE ANNOUNCED

*Apr. 28 THE IMPACT OF EXODUS ON WESTERN CIVILIZATION

- Selection from M. Walzer, Introduction to EXODUS AND REVOLUTION in READINGS.
- Drawing of design for the seal of the United States based on proposals by Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams, in READINGS

April 29-May 1 – READING DAYS

May 8 (Friday) FINAL EXAM 3:00-5:00 PM (tentative time and date)

A review session can be arranged prior to the final exam if members of the class wish to hold one.