

WOMEN IN THE BIBLE
01:563:322 (Jewish Studies)
01:840:3xx (Religion)
01:988:3xx (WGS)

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Course Goals:

The two key words in the title of the course, “Women” and “Bible,” provide the two most important goals for this course. In addition, we will address a third issue, though to a somewhat lesser extent.

1) The Bible, by which I mean the Jewish Bible or the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament), speaks on many levels: historical, theological, political, legal, etc. But first and foremost it is *literature*, and that is how we will approach the text. We will seek to understand how the Bible operates as literature, with a special eye to investigating the literary devices and techniques utilized by the ancient authors.

2) We will do so not by reading stories at random, but by concentrating specifically on those stories which focus on *female characters*. We will note that in general ancient Near Eastern literature did not focus on women, but that by contrast a large portion of the biblical narrative corpus does. We will want to answer the key question as to why this is so. What does it tell us about ancient Israel’s worldview and self-definition?

3) A third avenue of inquiry will be the *status of women* in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East in general. While, as stated above, the focus of the course will be the literary approach to the Bible, by necessity the question will arise throughout the semester, and we certainly will address these issues as well.

Textbooks:

- *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (Schocken, 2002)
- Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Eisenbrauns, 1994)

Topics:

See the next two pages for a week-by-week presentation of topics and assigned readings. Note that we will read the stories of both familiar characters such as Sarah and Bathsheba and less familiar characters such as Rahab and Yael. In addition, we will investigate various functions that women held in society, including such diverse roles as prophet, prostitute, necromancer, queen, etc.

Course Packet:

The Course Packet for this course will be available for download via the Sakai course website.

Additional Readings:

The Sakai course website will include additional readings (all of them relatively short), to supplement the material found in the textbooks.

Written Work, Grading, Etc.

1. Prelim exam covering the first third of the course, in late February (20%).
2. Final exam, covering the last two-thirds of the course, during exam period (25%).
3. A 5-page reflection paper, due sometime during the middle of the semester, date to be announced (15%).
4. One 10-15 page term paper, due on the last day of class (25%).

5. Class participation, attendance, progress, and other subjective factors (15%).

Attendance:

A major portion of the educational experience in this course takes place in the classroom. While attendance comprises only a small portion of your course grade (see immediately above), you will be at a great disadvantage if you are not present in class on a regular basis.

If you expect to miss a class session, kindly use the University self-reporting system for absences: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> An email is automatically sent to me to apprise me of your absence.

In addition, please make every effort to arrive in time for the start of class. Late arrival is disruptive to the class discussion and in general disrespectful to me and your classmates.

Academic Integrity:

Please note the University's academic integrity policy:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers>

I personally endorse the policy and enforce its guidelines. In short, no cheating of any sort will be tolerated in my course; and such actions are grounds for probation and potential dismissal from the University.

01:563:323 One-credit add-on for those wishing to read the texts in Hebrew. We will meet once a week for a single period. We will read the same texts that are covered in class, but in the Hebrew original. Grading will be based on how well the material is prepared, one's oral reading in class, analysis of the Hebrew (both grammar and literary techniques), and class participation. Students may be asked to do some out-of-class research and report their findings to the group. However, no additional written assignment is required.

Women in the Bible – week-by-week

TFK = Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*
AB = Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*

Week 1: *Deborah and Yael* (Judges 4-5); Marginal Woman (tent-dweller) as heroine; Israel's self-definition as a marginal society; Woman at the Window motif

TFK, 45-57
AB, 70-71

Week 2: *Rahab* (Joshua 2); a second Marginal Woman (prostitute) as heroine, giving voice and expression to Israel's history and theology; Yael and Rahab as "the Other"; the "Braveheart" factor in biblical prose writing

TFK, 34-44
Additional reading, by Gary Rendsburg (Sakai)

Week 3: *Abraham and Sarah* (Genesis 12-22); the Barren Wife motif; Sarah as Israel in the wife-sister stories; ancient Near Eastern source material from Nuzi and Ugarit

TFK, 93-98

Week 4: *Sarah and Hagar* (Genesis 16, 21); Hagar as the lowly and mistreated one; God's care and concern for Hagar

TFK, 225-237

Week 5: An Excursus on Midrash; examples from Sarah, Rahab, and Yael

Additional reading, by David Stern (Sakai)

Weeks 6 and 7: *David and His Wives* (1 Samuel 18-20, 25, 2 Samuel 6, 11-12, 1 Kings 1-2); reversal of Michal and Jonathan vis-à-vis David; Bathsheba as agent (in her first story) and as character (in her second story); David's wives (from his private life) as reflections of his public career (as king and leader of Israel)

TFK, 143-156, 315-323
AB, 23-33

Week 8: *Ruth and Naomi* (book of Ruth); two women at the center of the narrative; the typescene; levirate marriage; sexual innuendo

TFK, 238-256
AB, 83-110

Week 9: *The Everyday Life of Women in Ancient Israel*; and *the Legal Status of Women in Ancient Israel*

Additional reading, by Carol Meyers (Sakai)

Week 10: *Judah and Tamar* (Genesis 38); once more the prostitute, this time with the moral upper hand; the deceiver deceived; “She is more right than I”

TFK, 264-277
AB, 59-60

Week 11: *Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife* (Genesis 39); the dangerous foreign woman; five tellings of the same story, with special focus on the manner in which Potiphar’s wife twists her two tellings

TFK, 74-77

Week 12: *Two Harlots before Solomon* (1 Kings 3); prostitutes yet again!; the reader in the role of Solomon; the Cordelia prototype

Additional reading, by Gary Rendsburg (Sakai)

Week 13: *Dinah* (Genesis 34); rape or consensual sex? and who is at fault?; the use of rhetoric and the reader’s need to judge

TFK, 179-198
AB, 76-78

Week 14: *Song of Songs*; the language of love poetry; the lead female voice; was this poem written by a woman?

Additional reading, by Robert Alter (Sakai)