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Hebrew Bible (Candler/Jewish Studies)
War and Destruction in the Hebrew Bible
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This course was prepared after finishing a special program for faculty at Emory called the Piedmont Project. Organized by Peggy Bartlett and Erica Weaver, this 2-day seminar consisted of various lectures and activities in which we (about 15 faculty members from a wide range of schools and departments at Emory) learned about various issues related to the environment and sustainability – at Emory, in Atlanta, the US and globally. We learned to think locally since we must first learn to open our senses to our most immediate surroundings and change our daily habits in treating our own environment. In this class I study war in ancient Israel – thus a place and time that is very remote. This remoteness posed the biggest obstacle in thinking about how to organize the course with components of our Piedmont Seminar. I have research a lot on ancient warfare and its impact on the environment (or better: Life-Support-Systems). But the question plaguing me was how to get the students to connect to it, since most of them had not been exposed to the ravages of war firsthand. My solution is to show them a video on Ecocide (destruction of environment) in the Vietnam War (<http://www.gmpfilms.com/ECO.html>) as well as most to invite an expert on the Civil War to speak on the devastation of the South by Sherman. I hope this will be an effective way to communicate to my students what have been - and through Piedmont have become even more - important subjects for my own research.

EMORY COLLEGE
Department of Religion/Jewish Studies

REL/JS 370: War and Destruction in the Hebrew Bible

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A. Course Objectives:

“My argument is that War makes rattling good history; but Peace is poor reading.”¹

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(“And never again shall they learn war...” Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3.)

That the Hebrew Bible continues to fascinate readers is arguably related in no small measure to its abundance of war stories, and especially to its diversity of depictions and notions of war. Unfortunately much of biblical scholarship has focused on only one of these ideas, namely “holy war” or “YHWH-war.” This narrow research trajectory has a long history,² but it gained momentum with the publication of Gerhard von Rad’s *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel*.³ In this course, we will tread a

¹ Spirit Sinister in Thomas Hardy’s *The Dynasts* (London / New York: Macmillan, 1904-1908), Pt. 1, Act 2, Sc. 5.

² See e.g. Friedrich Schwally, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Leipzig: Dietrich, 1901); Otto Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (1917-1919; trans. and ed. by Hans H. Gerth; Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), 118-46; F. Fredriksson, *Jahwe als Krieger: Studien zum alttestamentlichen Gottesbild* (Lund: Gleerup, 1945); Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1965) 1:213-266

³ (AThANT 20; Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1951); English: *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (trans. and ed. by Marva J. Dawn, introd. by Ben C. Ollenburger, bibliogr. by Judith E. Sanderson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

different path – one that leads to the central ideas of war in the Bible by following the varied topography of the biblical text, rather than flattening its contours into conformity with a one-dimensional map. Our aim will be to appreciate the diversity of biblical perspectives on wars fought by ancient Israel (in the late 2nd millennium and first half of the 1st millennium). Our particular approach will be a holistic-anthropological one insofar as we are interested in the question, How did war bring about change in ancient Israelite society? Our interest applies to all areas of Israelite life – from state formation and the consolidation of peoples to social mobility and gender. However, we will pay particular attention to many and various representations of deliberate destruction of Life Support Systems (what I will call ecocide and urbicide) in biblical literature. We will compare these literary representations to images found in ancient Near Eastern iconography and evidence from the archeological record.

We will proceed in the following manner:

1. To begin, we will devote a couple sessions to the structure of the biblical material, the views of war espoused in the various books, and the nature of extra-biblical evidence.
2. We will then view the film *Seven Samurai*. This portrayal of a village battling its perennial enemy will assist us in thinking about the various sectors of society that are affected by war.
3. In the second part, we will set the scene by looking at types and causes of war, preparations for war, and the major actors involved.
4. After the Spring Recess, we will return to discuss actual warfare, focusing specifically on the practices of ecocide and urbicide.

B. Requirements:

1. Attendance (10%): You must come to class. Two unexcused absences are allowed. All additional unexcused absences will be reflected in your grade.

Did I Miss Anything?

(A poem by Tom Wayman)

Nothing. When we realized you weren't here
we sat with our hands folded on our desks
in silence, for the full two hours

Everything. I gave an exam worth
40 percent of the grade for this term
and assigned some reading due today
on which I'm about to hand out a quiz
worth 50 percent

Nothing. None of the content of this course
has value or meaning
Take as many days off as you like:
any activities we undertake as a class
I assure you will not matter either to you or me
and are without purpose

Everything. A few minutes after we began last time
a shaft of light suddenly descended and an angel
or other heavenly being appeared
and revealed to us what each woman or man must do
to attain divine wisdom in this life and
the hereafter
This is the last time the class will meet
before we disperse to bring the good news to all people
on earth.

Nothing. When you are not present
how could something significant occur?

Everything. Contained in this classroom
is a microcosm of human experience
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder
This is not the only place such an opportunity has been
gathered

but it was one place

And you weren't here

2. Participation and Preparation (30%): It is important that you contribute to the class discussions in a meaningful way through listening actively, finishing the small writing assignments, and preparing for class with independent research, and bringing entry tickets.

a. Active Listening. Listening to another person speak is not a passive enterprise. In order to really understand another person, you must pay attention to his or her words, take notes on what the other person says, make associations with what you already know, and ask questions when you don't understand. This rule applies not only to in-class discussions but also to the verbal and written interaction in your blogging (see below). When

b. Small Writing Assignments: In addition to writing a very short essay on the film *Seven Samurai*, you will need to occasionally (once a week) contribute to the class blog on Blackboard. There you can continue the class discussions in the direction you deem important. Although you will be expected to demonstrate your skills of writing and critical reflection, your level of involvement – not your individual contributions – will be graded.

c. Independent Research: For most of the sessions, I will place on Blackboard an article or excerpt of a book as your reading assignments. In addition, you will be expected to prepare the specified biblical texts by reading them carefully and consulting commentaries where questions arise. However, I intentionally will not name all the relevant biblical texts in order to test your skills in independent research. In one of the sessions early in the semester, we will learn how to use electronic concordances with which one can search for relevant biblical texts to a given topic. You will be expected to have undertaken a search for the topic of the session.

d. Entry Tickets: For each class, prepare at least two questions that reflect your careful reading of the assignments, and email them to me the night before. Don't forget! I will check early every morning before coming to class.

For each class period, you should devote at least 3 hours to preparation. On an average, 50 pages of reading will be assigned per week.

4. Two Longer Writing Assignments (20% and 40% respectively)

The first essay is 10-12 pages and the second is 12-15 pages in length. Both should focus on a problem related to Israel's wars, preferably ecocide or urbicide. The specific subjects are up to you, but you must discuss them with me first (as early as possible). The papers should treat the biblical evidence on the chosen subject in a judicious and critical manner, comparing it to analogous phenomena from antiquity and the present. You should begin by stating your thesis, then move on to discuss, in the body of the paper, anticipated difficulties posed by your thesis, and finally conclude with a summary of your argument as well as questions posed by your findings.

Each paper should include footnotes and a bibliography, using the SBL Manual of Style (a version will be distributed in class). In addition, please attach an outline, a statement from the writing lab that you submitted your paper for review, and a copy of Emory's honor code with your signature.

The first paper will be due on Thurs., March 6th (at the start of class), and the second will be due on Tues., May 1st (by noon).

C. Texts:

For most sessions, I will also post articles and excerpts of books on Blackboard.

1. Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* (1985) – should be purchased. (An alternative is the HarperCollins Bible or the Oxford Annotated Bible.)

2. Niditch, Susan, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* – should be purchased.
3. Kelle, Brad, *Ancient Israel at War 853-586 BC* – on reserve in Woodruff Library.
4. Von Rad, Gerhard, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*; translated and edited by Marva J. Dawn – on reserve in Woodruff Library.
5. Gabriel, Richard A., *The Military History of Ancient Israel* – on reserve in Woodruff Library.
6. De Vaux, Roland, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*; translated by John McHugh. pp. 213-270 – on reserve in Woodruff Library.
7. King, Philip J. and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, pp. 223-258 – on reserve in Woodruff Library.
8. Yadin, Yigael, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Study*, trans. by M. Pearlman – on reserve in Woodruff Library.

D. Course Calendar:

PART ONE: PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1. Thurs Jan 17 **Introduction to the subject and course objectives.**
Question: What are the various ways one could study the subject of war in the Hebrew Bible?

2. Tues Jan 22 **Overview of the structure and shape of the Hebrew Bible and the major historical epochs I**

Assignment for next 3 class periods:
View *Seven Samurai* (on reserve), thinking about the question, How does this film depict the way war changes life in the Japanese village? Write an essay responding to this question, 3-5 pages (double spaced) in length. **Due on Tues, Jan 28.**

3. Thurs Jan 24 **Overview of the structure and shape of the Hebrew Bible and the major historical epochs II and the nature of additional sources (material, epigraphic, iconographic, etc.)**

4. Tues Jan 28 **Conclusion of PART ONE and discussion of *Seven Samurai*.**
Questions: What role does war play in consolidating and giving identity to a people. How is this portrayed in various ways in the HB? (The rest of the semester will treat this question by focusing on various areas.)

PART TWO: INVESTIGATION OF CENTRAL THEMES RELATED TO WAR IN THE HEBREW BIBLE – WARS AND THEIR ACTORS

5. Thurs Jan 30 **The Wars: Types and Causes I**
Questions: What is war? Develop a working definition. How is wartime distinct from peacetime?

6. Tues Feb 5 **The Wars: Types and Causes II**
Questions: What are the various kinds of war Israel fought? What were the causes of these wars? Who were the enemies?

7. Thurs Feb 7 **The Army: Militia versus Professional (Standing) Army I**
Questions: What are the types of armies that fought Israel's wars? What were the sizes of the armies?
Reading: de Vaux, pp. 7-10 and 213-228; King and Stager, pp. 239-245.

8. Tues Feb 12 **The Army: Militia versus Professional (Standing) Army II**
Question: How were the armies organized? What were the common characteristics of the various ranks?

9. Thurs Feb 14 **The Outbreak of War**
Questions: When were wars usually fought? How was a war declared? What about prewar negotiations?

10. Tues Feb 19 **Mobilization**
Questions: How were soldiers recruited? How were they trained? How were civilian involved?

11. **Building for War**

Questions: How did war affect the architecture of cities? What do we know about the technology of ancient weaponry? What other technological advancements were propelled by war?

12. **The role of Priests and Prophets**
Question: What functions did priests and prophets assume in wartime?

13. **The role of the King**
Questions: How did war give rise to the monarchy? How important was war to the royal ideologies?

14. **The Hero**
Questions: What was the social importance of heroism on the battlefield? How did war and the military facilitate climbing up – as well as falling down – the social ladder?

15. **Women and War**
Questions: To what extent were women actively involved in fighting? What were other roles and functions assumed by women in wartime?

16. Spring Recess
17. Spring Recess

PART THREE: INVESTIGATION OF CENTRAL THEMES RELATED TO WAR IN THE HEBREW BIBLE – FIGHTING AND SURVIVING WARS

18. **Battle Tactics**
Questions: What are the most popular offensive and defensive tactics? What were the possibilities for the underdog? What was considered unethical? What were the rules governing warfare?

19. **Siege Warfare**
Questions: What are the specific problems posed by siege warfare? Why

20. **Ecocide I**

Questions: To what extent did warfare in ancient Israel specifically target the destruction of Life Support Systems? Why did it do this, and how?

21. **Ecocide II** (view and discuss the video “Ecocide: A Strategy of War – The War on the Environment in Vietnam”)

22. **Ecocide III** (guest lecturer on Sherman’s March to the Sea)

23. **Population Shifts**

Question: What affect did war have on depopulation and repopulation throughout the centuries in the Land of Israel?

24. **Urbicide I**

Questions: To what extent did warfare in ancient Israel specifically target cities and aim to wipe out architectural memories? Why did it do this, and how?

25. **Urbicide II**

26. *Session cancelled due to lecture in Europe*

27. **Surviving Wars**

What were some of the strategies for surviving wars? How did polities change? What were the

28. **Final Assessment**

Question: What role did war play in shaping Israelite society?