

# **Making Scripture Holy**

Matthew Goldstone

Fall 2017: MW 1:00-2:20

Room TBD

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## **Course Description:**

This class addresses the fundamental questions of what makes something Scripture and what makes Scripture holy. We will explore these topics from a number of different perspectives, looking at the relationship between sacred texts and communities particularly from within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Beginning with issues ranging from the possibility of changing the wording of scripture to the materiality of sacred works, the first half of the semester will lay the groundwork for thinking about how we construct the category of Scripture. The second half of the course will build upon these ideas by looking at the ways in which Scripture is interpreted and applied in and between religious communities.

## **Course Goals:**

- Familiarize students with the dynamics and problematics of defining Scripture
- Explore the similarities and differences between the understandings and roles of Scripture in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Think broadly about the ways through which Scripture manifests itself within contemporary society and thinking

## **Assignments and Grades:**

Please complete the readings listed for each session *before* that class meeting. Grades are based on preparation and class participation (40%), the midterm (25%) and the final project (35%). Class participation includes submitting a one page reflection on the assigned readings/images/video clips for each class (due at the beginning of each class). These reflections should address the question(s) associated with the lesson in addition to your own reactions.

## **Note on Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to maintain the highest levels of academic integrity and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All assignments should reflect students' own original work and all references to, and use of, outside sources must be cited or adequately noted.

## **Note on Disabilities**

I will do my best to reasonably accommodate student disabilities that impact their work and participation in the course. If you wish to request accommodations for a disability please identify

yourself within the first two weeks of the course with proper documentation of the disability and a description of the requested accommodations.

### **Class Schedule:** (14 weeks)

#### Defining Scripture

1. Week 1 Monday: **What Makes Something Scripture?**
  - We will discuss the course requirements and Kugel's 4 criteria for Scripture
  
2. Week 1 Wednesday: **Scripture and Community**
  - What is the relationship between Scripture and a community of believers?  
Reading: Wilfred Smith, "Introduction: Presenting the Issues," *What is Scripture?*, 1-20.
  
3. Week 2 Monday: **Picking and Choosing:** Which version is the best?
  - How does or should one relate to different versions of Scripture?  
Reading: Sidnie White Crawford, "The Text of the Pentateuch at Qumran," in *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 19-38
  
4. Week 2 Wednesday: **Inviolability of the Word:** Can I change the text of Scripture?
  - Are rewritten or revised versions of Scripture still Scripture? Are they holy?  
Readings: Sidnie White Crawford, "Reworked Pentateuch," in *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 39-59
  
5. Week 3 Monday: **Politics of Canonization:** What to include?
  - How does one decide what makes it into the "canon"?  
Reading: Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon," in *Imagining Religion*, ch. 3.
  
6. Week 3 Wednesday: **Heretical Scriptures:** Texts others canonized
  - How do we relate to texts competing with ours for the status of "Scripture"?  
Reading: Everett Ferguson, "Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon," in *The Canon Debate*, ch. 18
  
7. Week 4 Monday: **Scripture 2.0:** Supersessionism
  - What is the difference between the "Hebrew Bible" and the "Old Testament" and when is each label most appropriate?  
Reading: Stan Goldman, "The Problem of the Two Testaments," *College Literature* 20:2 (Jun., 1993), pp. 206-213.
  
8. Week 4 Wednesday: **Scripture 3.0:** Islamic Views on the Hebrew Bible and New Testament

- What do the Quran's depictions of Moses and Jesus imply about the way this work perceives the Hebrew Bible and New Testament?

Reading: Ejaz Naqvi, *The Quran: With or Against the Bible?*, chs. 16 and 17.

9. Week 5 Monday: **[Has] Prophecy (Has) Ended:** Scripture of more recent vintage

- What is the status of more contemporary claims to conveying the Divine word?

Reading: Terryl Givens, "'Devices of the Devil': The Book of Mormon as Cultural Product or Sacred Fiction," in *By the Hand of Mormon*, ch. 6.

10. Week 5 Wednesday: **Translation:** As good as the original?

- Is it still the same Scripture if it's in a different language?

Reading: The Letter of Aristeas [<http://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/aristeas.htm>]

11. Week 6 Monday: **Written and/or Oral:** Does the Medium Matter?

- How does the oral medium in which a tradition is transmitted affect its status as Scripture?

Readings: Steven Fraade, "Concepts of Scripture in Rabbinic Judaism" in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture*, 31-46 and Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, "The Hadith," in *The Quran and Hadith*, ch. 4.

12. Week 6 Wednesday: **Sacred Parchment:** Materiality of Holiness

- How does the physical format of written Scripture (materials, colors, weight, etc.) affect its holiness?

Reading: Jeremy Stolow, "Materializing Authenticity," in *Orthodox by Design*, 145-75.

13. Week 7 Monday: **What is Scripture?**

- Concluding discussions
- Review for Midterm

14. Week 7 Wednesday: **Midterm**

Holiness through Interpretation and Application of Scripture

15. Week 8 Monday: **Early Jewish Schools of Interpretation:** Rabbi Ishmael & Rabbi Akiva

- In what ways are the approaches of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva similar and distinct?

Reading: Abraham J. Heschel, "Two Approaches to Torah Exegesis," in *Heavenly Torah*, ch. 2.

16. Week 8 Wednesday: **Early Christian Schools of Interpretation:** Alexandrian and Antiochian

- How do these methods of interpretation differ from one another and from the Jewish schools of interpretation from last week?

Reading: Frances Young, "Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 1, ch. 12.

17. Week 9 Monday: **Early Islamic Schools of Interpretation:** Major *Madhahib*

- For these schools, what is the relationship between the Quran and subsequent traditions when it comes to determining law?

Reading: Wael Hallaq, "The Legal Schools," in *Introduction to Islamic Law*, ch. 3.

18. Week 9 Wednesday: **Conflicting Truths:** The many ways of reading a text

- Can conflicting ways of reading a passage both be true?

Reading: David Stern, "Midrash and Hermeneutics: Polysemy vs. Indeterminacy," in *Midrash and Theory*, 15-38.

19. Week 10 Monday: **Critical Study of Scripture:** Assumptions and goals

- What makes critical study of Scripture different from religious study of Scripture?

Reading: Christopher Stanley, *The Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Approach*, ch. 5.

20. Week 10 Wednesday: **Is Academic Study of Scripture Opposed to Holiness?**

- In what ways does a literary reading of Scripture add to and detract from its status as holy?

Reading: Benjamin Sommer, "A Modern Jewish Approach to Scripture" in *Revelation and Authority*, ch. 6.

**You must submit your final project topic for approval by this date!**

21. Week 11 Monday: **Recitation of Scripture:** The power of the words alone

- What is the value of reciting words even without understanding their meaning and can this be more valuable than interpreting Scripture?

Watching: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2012/07/20/ramadan-quran-recitation/9348/>

22. Week 11 Wednesday: **Scriptural Homilies:** Infusing old words with new meaning

- In what ways does a homily bring Scripture "to life" and forge a connection between the text and its community of adherents?

Watching: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gpt\\_R6BouJU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gpt_R6BouJU)

23. Week 12 Monday: **Make Them Holy!:** Missioning and imposing our scriptures on others

- What is the importance of missionizing for others, for the person going on a mission, and for Christian theology more broadly?

Watching: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqQkIGCGevM>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dUgS3wwlwE>

24. Week 12 Wednesday: **Non-Western Scriptures in the West:** How do we receive/appropriate other's scriptures?
- When we discuss non-Western Scriptures how do we usually describe them? What assumptions do we make about these texts and their relevance for the western world?
- Reading: Kenneth Kramer, *World Scriptures: An Introduction to Comparative Religions*, ch. 1.
25. Week 13 Monday: **Word as Image:** Scripture in Art
- How does the selection of which scene to depict and the way it is depicted express a tradition/community's relationship to Scripture?
- Observing: Select 2-4 different works of art from <http://www.artbible.info/art/> for your reflection. Please include the links to the specific pieces at the bottom of your response.
26. Week 13 Wednesday: **Word as Film:** Scripture in the Cinema
- In what ways do motion picture representations of Scripture expand while also limiting the meaning of texts?
- Watching: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4H5tjx2Zpg>
27. Week 14 Monday : **The Politics of Scripture**
- Do you feel that contemporary politics/politicians should use Scripture in their speeches and campaigns or not? Why?
- Watching: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqpr0PEGz2g>
28. Week 14 Wednesday: **What Makes Scripture Holy?**
- Concluding Discussions

Week 15 - **Final Project Due!**

**Final Project Guidelines:**

The final project is due at the beginning of the finals period and can be submitted in several different formats discussed below, but it must include direct references to the assigned readings, ideas discussed in class, and your own research into academic sources. This project should be accompanied by a bibliography of primary and secondary academic sources (minimum of 5, including at least 2 which are not included on the syllabus).

**Topic Options:**

1. Select a particular example of Scripture which we have not discussed this semester. Using sources from within the religious tradition/community that ascribes this work scriptural status, in conjunction with academic scholarship on the nature of this Scriptural work and the

relationship between it and its religious tradition/community, you will apply the ideas we have investigated this semester. Your work should address key questions regarding the role this work plays within the religious tradition/community, the elements that demonstrate its Scriptural status within this tradition/community, and the implications of its Scriptural status for interpretation and application.

2. Select a particular text from within one of the Scriptures discussed this semester. Discuss how its Scriptural status has informed the way this text has been interpreted and applied by its particular tradition/community. Compare this with how the text has been interpreted by a different tradition/community that has a different primary Scripture but recognizes the Scriptural work from which your text derives. Use sources from the religious traditions/communities under discussion in addition to academic scholarship that treats the text and/or traditions/communities in a relevant way.
3. Discuss the relationship between Scripture and holiness with regard to assumptions about the text, the way the text is interpreted and applied, and the ways in which values, morals or realities which conflict with the Scripture are resolved. Your discussion should make explicit reference to readings and ideas from the course as well as additional academic sources.

**Format Options:**

**Paper:** Write a 15-20 page final paper with standard formatting (e.g. double spaced except for your name and course information, 11-12 point font, Times New Roman or other standard font, 1 in. margins, etc.).

**Video:** Create a 10-12 minute video which includes visuals such as Powerpoint (or otherwise) that allows for clear references to readings and research.

**Artistic Rendering:** Create a work of Scripture in the form of a text, commentary, picture, or other artistic representation accompanied by a 8-10 page explanatory caption detailing how each element of the work addresses the topic.