

## INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL AND KORANIC CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

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### Course Description

Though many people think of God as something fixed and unchanging, a careful study of scripture reveals that this is not so. Rather, it seems that the Western conception of God - and indeed the very notion that there is only a single God - has evolved over the millennia. This course will introduce students to some of the varying conceptions of God found in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Koran through careful reading and discussion of primary materials in English translation. Readings will be drawn primarily from the Torah (especially Genesis and Exodus), the Book of Job, the Gospels, and key suras (chapters) of the Koran – though we will begin by looking at Mesopotamian and Greek conceptions of the gods as manifested in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Hesiod's *Theogony*. Students will be responsible for doing close, thoughtful reading of each assignment and actively participating in each class discussion. In addition, students will be asked to write three papers (about 6 pages in length) and to make a presentation related to the themes of the course. The second essay is to be revised based on class and instructor feedback.

### Reading List

*Gilgamesh: A New English Translation* (Free Press, 0743261690)

Hesiod, *Theogony / Works and Days* (Oxford, 019283941)

Bible (New Revised Standard Version preferred but any will do; Oxford, 0195284852)

Koran (Ahmed Ali translation preferred but any will do; Princeton 0691074992)

"From Adonai to Yahweh: A Glossary God's Names" [Handout]

"Translation of God's Name" [Handout]

"The 'Bibles' Used Today" [Handout]

Genesis 1-3 (Fox Translation) [Handout]

### Requirements

Reading, discussing and writing about a text are interdependent. Working at each task helps one do the others better. For this reason, students will be required to do all three. However, since this is a discussion course operated according to what is sometimes called the "Socratic Method" (see below) rather than a lecture course, **it is particularly important that all students prepare for, attend and actively participate in class discussions.**

Reading: Students are required to do all the assigned reading for each class in a thoughtful and open-minded manner that prepares them to participate in classroom discussion. This will require time and concentration. Questions raised by the reading are especially encouraged. Students are required to submit a "Reading Review Homework" for every assigned reading at the beginning of the class in which it will be discussed.

Discussing: Students are required to actively participate in each class discussion, sharing their own viewpoints and listening to those of others. Through this collaboration the class will try to get a better understanding of each work and its implications. Since we will be referring to the reading during class, **students must bring the current text to each class.**

Writing: Students will be required to write three papers on assigned topics and make a final presentation based either a fourth paper or on a project. Each paper will be roughly 6 pages long (typed in a standard 12-point font, double-spaced, 1" margins). The second paper will be revised based on instructor and class feedback. See schedule for due dates. *(Note: Plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable. All quotations and paraphrases of others' work must be cited using an appropriate format. However, since no outside research will be required or expected, this issue should only arise when referring to portions of the texts read and discussed in class. See Plagiarism Appendix for more information.)*

### **Grading**

For those who want grades, final grades will be based on an assessment of a student's:

- 1) Ability
- 2) Effort
- 3) Writing

as determined in approximately the following manner:

Class Participation & Homeworks	50%
Papers & Presentation (4)	10% each
Paper Revision	10%

Class participation grades are based on attendance, active participation and submission of completed homework assignments; unexcused absences (including late arrivals after attendance has been taken), early departures, missing or incomplete homework assignments, and/or silent non-participation will lower this part of the grade and may result in failure in the course. Papers are due at the beginning of the class on the day due. Late papers will be penalized one grade "step" for each day (or portion thereof) late (e.g. an "A" becomes an "A-" if it's up to one day late). Occasional homework in addition to the assigned reading and unannounced "pop" quizzes may be given at any time and will also influence the grade.

### **"Socratic Method"**

This class is operated according to what is sometimes called the "Socratic Method" in which students are required to learn for themselves through the various class activities. The role of the teacher is primarily to facilitate discussion, pose questions, and offer occasional insights into the text and/or ideas under discussion—not to lecture on "what the book means". The success or failure of such a class therefore depends primarily on the combined contributions of all participants.

## Etiquette

A collaborative exploration of ideas requires that participants treat the material and each other with respect. Participants may argue for or against any relevant idea as long as they do so based on the readings and an acknowledgement that others may hold different points of view.

In addition, students should:

- 1) arrive for class on time and **not leave the room until the end of class**;
- 2) **turn off cell phones**, pagers, and other disruptive devices;
- 3) not eat or drink to the extent that it will affect their or others' participation;
- 4) exercise common sense and courtesy in their dealings with others.

Students who do not abide by these rules will be marked down substantially in the "class participation" portion of their grade and risk not passing the course.

## Schedule

Wk	DATE	6:00-7:25	7:35-9:00	ASSIGNMENT
1	Aug 31	Class Introduction	Genesis Introduction	
2	Sep 7	<i>Gilgamesh</i>	Genesis 1-36	
3	Sep 14	<i>Theogony / Works &amp; Days</i>	Genesis 37-50	<b>Paper 1 Due</b>
4	Sep 21	Exodus	Exodus	
5	Sep 28	Deuteronomy / Joshua	PAPER 2 PREP	
6	Oct 5	PAPER 2 REVIEW	Ecclesiastes	<b>Paper 2 Due</b>
7	Oct 12	Job	Job	
8	Oct 19	Matthew	PAPER 3 PREP	
9	Oct 26	PAPER 3 REVIEW	Koran #1	<b>Paper 3 Due</b>
10	Nov 2	John	Koran #2	
11	Nov 9	Luke	Koran #3	<b>Paper 2 Revision Due</b>
12	Nov 16	Acts 6-9, Romans	Koran #4	
	Nov 23	<b>NO CLASS</b>		
13	Nov 30	Revelation	Koran #5	
	Dec 7	<b>NO CLASS</b>		
14	Dec 14	Presentations	Presentations	<b>Presentation Due</b>

**Koran #1:** 1, 2:1-7, 113, 114, 96, 110, 93, 94, 73, 74

**Koran #2:** 112, 95, 72, 55, 81-88, 101-102

**Koran #3:** 40-41, 13-15, 7, 11, 23, 21, 50

**Koran #4:** 12, 35-39, 16-20

**Koran #5:** 47-49, 60-67, 8, 9