Syllabus
BS380 Environmental Biblical Interpretation

Description
The course presupposes that students bring to the class concerns for justice, the environment and its care and stewardship, and the consequences of climate change. This course is not about determining whether the Bible demands an ethic of Earth care since “no issue can be resolved by appeal to the Bible.” How then, might we engage the biblical text in conversation with environmental issues and concerns? A guiding principle of this course is that our reading of the Bible should engage and be informed by modern understandings of environmental science, ecology, and evolution. As Brown asks, “What is it like to read the Bible in one hand and the journal Science in the other?” To that end, as an upper level Bible class, this course will focus on developing environmental hermeneutics and applying those as we engage biblical texts and their views of the environment. To use the language of Norman Habel, we will ask, ‘Is a “green” reading of this text possible or does it remain ‘grey’?’

Course Objectives
By the end of the course students should demonstrate:
- knowledge of the environment in which the Bible was written
- knowledge of basic tenets of environmental science, ecology, and evolution
- understanding of Ecojustice Principles as developed by The Earth Bible project.
- ability to use this knowledge to interpret biblical texts and consider how interpretations may help or hinder environmental justice today

Assignments for Evaluation
1. Environmental reflective essay. This essay should:
   Identify 2-3 key learnings or take aways from environmental history, environmental science, other science materials, and and the environment of Israel.
   How have these learnings impacted your reading of the biblical text?
   Length: 1000-1200 words. DUE: Anytime but no later than June 14 (when final paper is due).
2. 3-6 blog posts. Write blog posts that connect class readings and discussion with a wider audience. Think about the key words someone might Google to help you focus a topic and your analysis. These will be written during the Intensive. For each topic you may choose to compose two blog posts of 500-600 words or one longer post of 1000-1200 words.
   #1 DUE Friday May 24 on the topic of Gen 1-3
   #2 DUE Monday May 27 on the topic of law and/or Psalms
   #3 DUE Thursday May 30 on the topic of Job and/or Wisdom and/or Second Testament
3. Final paper/project: The topic of the final paper/project will be decided in consultation with the instructor. Approval for the final paper/project is NO LATER than Tuesday May 28. Each student will do a class presentation of approximately 30 minutes on their research/thinking to date on either Thursday May 30 or Friday May 31. The purpose of the presentation is to share your thinking as well as to solicit suggestions from your peers. The final paper/project will be DUE June 14. The final paper should be 2500-3000 words.
Books

The following books are required.

- J. Donald Hughes, *Environmental Problems of Greeks and Romans: Ecology in the Ancient Mediterranean* (2nd ed. 2014) Lilly Library has one print copy that will be placed on Reserve.
- David C. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment* (Biblical Challenges in the Contemporary World, 2014). This is available from Lilly Library as an ebook.

Optional: *The Green Bible* (This uses the NRSV as the base text. It's similar to “red letter” Bibles that put Jesus' “words” in red letters, only this one puts verses that pertain to creation in green letters.

There will be various articles and other book chapters assigned that will be posted on Moodle or available through Lilly Library.

**For Research:** The following books are available as ebooks in Lilly Library


**SCHEDULE**

**Monday May 20**

Topic: Israel's Environment

Reading:

- Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, Part I (pp. 3-19)
- Hughes, *Environmental Problems*, Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-67)
- If you have no science, old science, or bad science, read Chapter 4 “Ecosystems” in *Basics of Environmental Science* by Reeta Khosla and Zahid Siddiqui. This is an ebook in Lilly Library, [http://earlham.worldcat.org/oclc/1005843523](http://earlham.worldcat.org/oclc/1005843523)
- If you have some science background, read Chapter 3 “Ecosystems” in *Environmental Studies*.
Tuesday May 21
Topic: Genesis 1 and Evolution
Readings:
- Bible: Genesis 1
- Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, Chapter 3 (pp. 23-36)
- Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation*, Chapter 2 (pp. 40-51) and Chapter 3 (pp. 52-97)
- If you need a refresher on evolution, read Berkeley: Evolution 101 https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo_01

We will watch the following videos in class:
- https://www.scienceforseminaries.org/resource/science-and-religion-the-draper-white-conflict-
  thesis/
- https://www.scienceforseminaries.org/resource/to-be-human/
- https://www.ted.com/talks/prosanta_chakrabarty_four_billion_years_of_evolution_in_six_minutes

Wednesday May 22
Topic: Genesis 2-3 and evolution; Genesis 6-9 Environmental Destruction and Covenant with Creation
Reading:
- Bible: Genesis 2-3, 6-9
- Brown, *Seven Pillars of Creation*, Chapter 4 (pp. 98-133)
- Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, Chapter 4 (pp. 37-48)
- Hughes, *Environmental Problems*, Chapters 5-6 (pp. 68-109) On deforestation see Josh 17:15
- “20 Things You Didn't Know About Rainbows,” *Discover* (May 2019)

Thursday May 23
Topic: Environmental Torah – Laws relating to environment
Reading:
- Bible:
  - Exodus 20:8-11; 22:5-6, 9-15; 23:4-5, 10-12
  - Num 13:17-27; 35:33-34
- Hughes, *Environmental Problems*, Chapter 7 “Agricultural Decline,” Chapter 8 “Industrial Technology and Environmental Damage” (pp. 110-149)
- Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, Chapter 5 “A Wholesome Materiality: Reading Leviticus,” pp. 80-100 (On Moodle – also available as an
Friday May 24 (Blog Post #1 DUE)
Topic: Psalms and the Environment
Readings:
Bible: Psalm 104
Also: Each student should select one psalm to work on and lead a 10-15 minute discussion in class on that psalm. Please let the class know no later than the end of class Thursday, which psalm you will discuss so others can read the psalm before class. Possible Psalms to look at are: 8, 36, 50, 65, 79, 93, 98, 107, 148. (Other possibilities: 29, 33, 74, 89, 105, 114, 136, 144, 147)
  • Brown, Seven Pillars of Creation, Chapter 6 (pp. 160-179)
  • Horrell, The Bible and the Environment, Chapter 5 (pp. 49-55)
  • Hughes, Environmental Problems, Chapters 9-10 (pp. 150-182)

If you want to watch a movie this weekend that fits with our themes, consider Noah (with Russell Crowe) or Avatar

Monday May 27 (Blog Post #2 DUE)
Topic: The Environment and Wisdom Literature
Reading:
  • Bible: Job 12, 38-41; Proverbs 8:22-31; Wisdom of Solomon 7:17-23; 11; 16
  • Brown, Pillars of Creation, Chapter 5 (pp. 134-159) and Chapter 7 (pp. 180-195)
  • Nancy R. Bowen, chapter on 7:22-23 (on Moodle)
  • Horrell, The Bible and the Environment, Chapter 5 (pp. 55-61)
  • Hughes, Environmental Problems, Chapters 11-12 (pp. 183-214)

Tuesday May 28
Topic: Environment in the Second Testament
Reading:
  • Horrell, The Bible and the Environment, Chapters 6-7 (pp. 62-87)
  • Hughes, Environmental Problems, Chapters 13-14 (pp.215-235)
  • Martha Delaney-Hotz, Reading the Bible Ecologically, Chapter 6 “Creation Groans: Romans 8:18-28” (pp. 88-96) and Chapter 8 “Calming the Sea: Mark 4:35-41” (pp. 117-132) (On Moodle)
  • Grace Jun-Si Kim, pp. 49-55 of Colonialism, Han, and the Transformative Spirit (on Moodle)

Wednesday May 29
Topic: Environmental Transformation
Reading:
  • Bible: Isaiah 11:1-10; 41:17-20; 42:14-16; 55:12-13; 65:17-25; Ezekiel 47; Mark 13; 2 Peter 3; Revelation 12, 21-22
  • Horrell, The Bible and the Environment, Chapters 8-11
  • Barbara R. Rossing. “‘Hastening the Day’ When the Earth Will Burn?: Global Warming, Revelation and 2 Peter 3 (Advent 2, Year B).” Currents in Theology and Mission 35, no. 5
(October 2008): 363–73. (on Moodle – also available via ATLA)

**Thursday May 30 (Blog Post #3 DUE)**
Student Presentations

**Friday May 31**
Student Presentations