

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.
- William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. This is available fro 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

Habel, Norman C. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*. The Earth Bible, 1. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000.

Habel, Norman C, and Shirley Wurst. *The Earth Story in Genesis*. The Earth Bible, 2. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000.

Habel, Norman C, and Shirley Wurst. *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*. The Earth Bible, V. 3. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

Habel, Norman C. *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*. The Earth Bible, 4. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001

Habel, Norman C, and Vicky Balabanski. *The Earth Story in the New Testament*. The Earth Bible, 5. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.

Habel, Norman C, and Peter L Trudinger. *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*. Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series, No. 46. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008.

Horrell, David G. *Ecological Hermeneutics : Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*. London: T & T Clark, 2010.

Turner, Marie. *Ecclesiastes, an Earth Bible Commentary : Qoheleth's Eternal Earth*. First ed. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017.

Daly-Denton, Margaret. *John : An Earth Bible Commentary : Supposing Him to Be the Gardener*. Earth Bible Commentary. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017.

SCHDULE

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)
- James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, Chapter 2 “What is Gaia?” and Chapter 3 “The Life History of Gaia” (on Moodle)
- 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>
- If you have some science background, read Chapter 3 “Ecosystems” in *Environmental Studies*:

A New Approach by P. Dahiya and M. Ahlawat. This is an ebook in Lilly Library.
<http://earlham.worldcat.org/oclc/1028192743>

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)
- The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” in Norman Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, pp. 38-53. (ebook in Lilly Library)
- *Discover Magazine* (2019), “The World is Our Niche” (on Moodle)
- 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/biological-evolution-and-the-kinship-of-all-life/>
<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
https://www.ted.com/talks/yuval_noah_harari_what_explains_the_rise_of_humans

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
- Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*, pp. 93-99 (on Moodle)
- “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

Lev 18:24-30; 19:9-10, 23-25; 20:22-26; 23:22, 39-40; 25:2-7, 10-12, 33-34; 26:4-5, 16, 19-20, 22, 26, 31-32, 34-35, 43; 27:30

Num 13:17-27; 35:33-34

Deut 5:12-15; 8:7-10; 20:19-20; 22:4, 6-7; 24:19-22; 25:4; 28:3-5, 11-12, 18, 22-24, 38-40, 42, 49-51

- 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

ebook in Lilly Library)

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, “The World Is About To Turn: Preaching Apocalyptic Texts for a Planet in Peril,” pages 140-159 in Dahill, Lisa E, Jim B Martin-Schramm, and Bill McKibben. *Eco-Reformation : Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016. (on Moodle – the book *Eco-Reformation* is available as an ebook in Lilly Library)
- 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