

HB 650: Women in the Biblical World
Instructor: Rev. Valerie Bridgeman, Ph.D.
Office: G237, vbridgeman@mtso.edu

Office hours: Please make appointments
I am on campus most Wednesdays (9-4) and Thursday mornings

Meeting Times and Place:
Tuesdays, 2 pm—3:30 pm
Gault Hall: G133

CONSULT YOUR SYLLABUS REGULARLY

SIGNIFICANT FIRST NOTE: *This syllabus is the first iteration of your course schedule for this fall. As with all written documents, it is subject to revision. Revision is a part of the human enterprise and indicates that I am not perfect, as none of us is. IF you receive a revised addition, immediately discard the first version OR, write, “invalid” on each page of the first one so that you will not be confused about the requirements for the course.*

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This course is a survey of the role and presence of women in the Hebrew biblical texts. It focuses on roles, theological concerns, and interpretive ways of engaging gender in biblical texts.
Prerequisites: HB510 and NT510.

WHY THIS COURSE: MTSO believes that it’s important for biblical students to know that the bible did not grow up in a “petri dish,” but rather are in relationship with the cultures around it. This course seeks to look at the milieu in which the bible arose and the life of women in ancient Israel and its surrounding neighbors.

Course Goal

This course seeks to help students learn and engage literary, historical, and interpretive strategies understanding the biblical world and the role women played in the making of our biblical faith. By the completion of this course, students should:

- Be able to identify the variety of roles women played in helping to create the political, private, and religious worlds of ancient Israel

- Be able to identify how surrounding cultures helped shape the ancient Israelite culture, including its religion
- Be able to appreciate the way the texts identifies and obscures women’s contributions and develop a hermeneutic that will make those contributions known

Required Text Books:

- 1) Bach, Alice, ed. *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- 2) Smith, Mitzi, ed. *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015
- 3) McCabe, Elizabeth, ed. *Women in the Biblical Word: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*. (Volumes 1 & 2) University Press of America, 2009, 2011.

Highly Recommended:

- 4) Chavalas, Mark, ed. *Women in the Ancient Near East*. Routledge, 2014.

NOTE: I am indebted to Dr. Greg Carey, New Testament Professor at Lancaster Seminary, for the section “Things You Can Do to Foster Your Success.” Modified and used with his permission.

Things You Can Do to Foster Your Success

1. Remember that this is your theological education and take ownership of it. The Seminary and the instructor are here to guide and assist your learning, but ultimately your education is what you make of it with the help of the Holy Spirit. Take account of your education in your prayer life. Your instructors do.
2. Prepare for class. Do the assigned readings in preparation for each class session. When you cannot read everything, take a few minutes to scan through the readings. Identify the major topics and lines of argument. The assigned readings will prepare you to benefit from class discussions. Use the helps provided in the Syllabus to guide your reading. Take advantage of the study helps provided by Powell, both in the book and online. An active learner learns more than a passive learner does.
3. Take a few minutes after each class session to reflect. What were the major discussion points of this class session? Usually there are only a few – see if you can identify them. Perhaps discuss these points with a friend. Always ask: what is the big picture here?
4. Plan your writing before you write. Statistically speaking, students who finish assignments with time to spare do better than students who rush at the last minute. When you’re preparing a short essay, be thinking about your topic during every class session. Organize your thoughts before you begin to write. Sketch out your ideas and line of thought before you write a single word. Make sure you are ready to provide credit to the sources from which you glean ideas and information. Once you’ve completed a first draft, review it – and consider whether your work meets the criteria of assessment spelled out in the Syllabus.

5. Your success on written assignments is all about clarity, logic, and detail. This is a masters-level course, and it provides preparation for religious leadership: superficial engagement will not do. Make sure you engage the primary texts directly and specifically. Make sure you engage the assigned readings where they can be helpful. Make sure you provide a clear thesis (or claim) and a clear line of thought. Think about it from your instructor's point of view: if you could have written this same assignment without having taken this class, something is wrong.

6. On rare occasions it is necessary to ask for an extension of a particular assignment. Be aware that students tend to do much, much better when they stay on schedule.

COVENANT PRINCIPLES FOR SHARED LEARNING:

1. Attendance and active participation in class: I expect students to be in class by 2 p.m., prepared to fully participate by contributing to the conversation and discussing the readings, their responses, and questions that arise in this inquiry. **“Habitually coming in late conveys unintended disrespect to the community of co-creators and can be disruptive”** (Dr. Margaret Aymer, ITC, Womanist Biblical Interpretation syllabus). See the Student Handbook for the seminary's policy on absences from class (listed at the end of this syllabus). Students are responsible for any work missed when absent. I will not provide written copies of lectures/discussion sessions.
2. Style of pedagogy and class format: I do not lecture as much as lead discussions and small groups. I hope the creative components will fire your imagination. **This style requires that you have read and are ready to lead discussion if called upon.** I am presuming shared responsibility as in any master's level course, just as in a seminar style. As such, students will help lead discussions; we will have debates; we will use media, etc.
3. Read all assigned materials. As master's level students, I expect that each co-learner will help guide the discussion by his or her thoughtful, informed conversation. Pedagogues note that **for every hour in class, students should expect to study (read/reflect) three hours.** I have designed this course with the expectation that you will not be able to read “at the last minute” and that you will lean closer to that 9-hour study than not.
4. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, one-inch margins on all sides, and 12-point font (either Times New Roman, Arial, or Book Antiqua—no other font, please). No italics or bold fonts. Papers must be properly documented with its sources. The seminary's official document sourcing style is the Chicago Manual Style (Turabian) or MLA. Please get the latest addition or use the online version (for a fee). Proofread your work.
5. Please turn off cell phones. If you are on call or need to be “wired” because of children or other necessary connections, please be sure that your cell is on vibration/silent and leave the room to answer any calls.
6. You may use computers in my classroom but please limit Internet surfing, etc. Use the computer for the class itself.
7. As a part of our time together, I expect students to use respectful, inclusive/expansive language regarding the deity and humans. Contrary to what people have been told, this statement does not mean that you may never say “father god,” but it does mean that you are challenged to stretch further in your metaphoric language. It DOES mean you may

not use “man” as a “generic term,” or “mankind” when you intend to include all people. There are plenty of alternative words. “The language we use represents who we are and for what we stand as theologians and ministers” (Yee, syllabus). The following statement, “The Language of Community,” is the statement given for this course when taught by a former colleague, Dr. Steven Parrish. I could not have said it better.

From its opening chapter, the bible affirms the worth of community. Both male and female in the human community bear the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The bible values children as a part of human community (Exodus 12:26; Deut. 6:20; Luke 9:46-48). The oppressed are given special consideration by the Bible; e.g., strangers, orphans, and widow are important people in God’s community (Deut. 24:17, 19, 21). Further, Jonah discovered that even those he regarded as enemies are cherished by God and are important individuals in the world community. The faith of the Bible is an inclusive faith.

Further, the biblical language about God is also far more expansive and inclusive than we have often recognized. Exodus 3 maintains that God is essentially unnamable and free to remain who God wants to be. First Samuel 4-6 and 2 Samuel 6 testify to God’s unwillingness to be “boxed in” by human formulations of what God “ought” to be. The metaphorical language of the bible is diverse indeed, describing God by images that range from the battlefield (e.g., Psalm 18, 24) to images that depict God as the one who gives birth to the mountains Psalm 90:2 and the ice (Job 38:29). One of the aims of this course is to grow in the ways we think and speak of one another and of God.

Grading Rubric:

25% Mid-Term Project, DUE OCTOBER 20: Your mid-term will count for 25% of your grade. As we discussed in class, September 1, this project can be any of the (agreed upon) projects:

- a) Straight research, well-crafted 10-page paper on a subject matter in ancient Israel and surrounding areas (e.g., female slavery, queens in power, women's literature, widowhood, female economy, women's religious leadership, etc.)
- b) An exegetical paper, well-researched, on a story involving a woman (the Jezebel chronicles, Bathsheba, wise women narratives, etc.)
- c) A series of sermons (at least 4) that include exegetical information on texts involving women
- d) A creative project like a documentary, a series of visual art (with the historical, literary, exegetical data attached), a "novella" with creative midrash on the style of The Red Tent, etc.
- e) A bible study series

The choice is SOLELY your choosing; however, I MUST APPROVE ANY PROJECT THAT IS NOT A RESEARCH PAPER. You must receive this approval by September 22 (just under a month before the project is due).

20% Course Leadership, DUE DATES LISTED: Each student will, with partners, lead the class in its on-site conversation. This course assumes high motivation and that students will prepare to be able to lead in class as if facilitating in a local congregation or gathering of interested parties. On your assigned date: you are the experts on the topics under discussion. To be so means that you have carefully read all material and are prepared to answer any questions from the readings from your peers. Below are the assigned cohorts with dates:

September 8: John Wooden, Hope Hutchison, Sean McLeod

September 22: Jeremiah Diegel, Sara McSwords, Anika Bailey

September 29: Cecil Thompson, Judy Alston

October 6: Joyce Oyler, Michael Malley

October 27: Sally Meyer, Jeffrey Long, Stephany Blackston

November 3: Beth Staten, Kat Gensler-Nic, Luigi Perez Perez

My assessment will be based on how leaders engage the material and the class and whether they have actually demonstrated that they know the material. This is NOT a "group" assignment. Each leader will be assessed on his or her participation on the date in question. This grade is different from the course participation grade, which presumes ongoing engagement with the course and course material.

40% Final Research Paper, DUE December 1: This research paper is a 15-page well researched, well written paper on a topic of the student's choosing, in consultation with the professor. It presumes that students have chosen a topic of interest to them and begun research early enough to write a presentation-worthy essay.

15% Course Participation, Assessed at the End of the Course: This grade assumes that students have carefully read assignments and watched video and will be able to engage in conversation or other assignments that demonstrate knowledge of the subject under discussion. It presumes ongoing engagement with the course and its materials.

COURSE CALENDER WITH READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS, DISCUSSION GOALS

AUGUST 25: NO CLASS MEETING

September 1: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

IN CLASS: We will meet one another, go over the course and expectations, and make assignments. I look forward to seeing you all.

ON-LINE: Watch the lecture by Christine Hayes on mythology and beginnings.

PREPARE FOR SEPTEMBER 8: READ "In the Beginnings" on line (lesson for September 8) and "An Exploration of the World of Women in Third-Millennium Mesopotamia

READ: Genesis 1-12

September 8: THE BIBLE, WOMEN, LITERARY CONTEXT

IN CLASS: Setting Ancient Israelite/Judahite women in the surrounding culture: An overview

ONLINE: Watch Hayes Lecture.

Post at least 3 new things you learned from the lecture. Do you have at least 2 questions?

PREPARATION FOR SEPTEMBER 15: CHOOSE A TOPIC ON INTEREST FOR RESEARCH

September 15: RESEARCH TIME

IN CLASS: This on-site gathering meets IN THE LIBRARY where you will have 1 1/2 hour to look through resources for your first 10-page paper due October 20. You will sign in and out. This day is not a "walk." You are required to meet, to sign in, and to work to be counted as present.

ON LINE: Continue spending the 1 1/2 hour remaining on your project for mid-term and/or your final research.

POST on the thread what you are thinking about doing for either mid-term or your final project. Respond to at least two of your classmates on their paper, providing them with critical questions to consider about their topic.

PREPARE FOR September 22:

Read Weems' "Re-Reading for Liberation" in *I Found God in Me*

Read Bird, "The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*

Read Ackerman, "'And the Women Knead Dough': The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*

Read Jeremiah 44

September 22: WOMEN AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS

You should have read for this class gathering (they are on the info page and on September 15): Weem's "Re-Reading for Liberation" in *I Found God in Me*; Bird, "The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*; Ackerman, "'And the Women Knead Dough': The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible* (listed on Sept 8 lesson)

IN CLASS: Discussion regarding beginnings; Women as religious leaders

ON LINE: Watch Ackerman's Lecture on Household Religion

List at least 3 new insights you learned about ancient Israelite religion

Reflect on and discuss how this new information affects what you now believe about women in the bible and the religious world of ancient Israel.

PREPARE FOR September 29:

READ Gafney's "Female Prophecy around Israel" (attached)

READ Gafney's "Prophet Terrorist(a)"

READ Coogan, "Bible and Empire" (attached)

READ "Female Priests in Egypt" (attached)

READ Ackerman, "Miriam Among the Prophets"

READ Gafney's "A Womanist Midrash of Zipporah" in *I Found God in Me*

September 29: WOMEN AMONG THE PROPHETS

You should have read the following pieces in preparation or this session (listed on September 22 and on the info page): Gafney's "Female Prophecy around Israel" (attached); Gafney's "Prophet Terrorist(a)"; Coogan, "Bible and Empire" (attached); "Female Priests in Egypt" (attached); Ackerman's "Miriam among the Prophets"; Gafney's "Womanist Midrash of Zipporah in *I Found God in Me*

IN CLASS: Discuss Women prophets in the bible and in its surrounding environs

ON LINE: Watch Bridgeman on "Women and Children among the prophets"

Post at least 3 things you learned from the video. Think about the implications of your new information and post at least one thing that it makes you rethink about the way you approach prophetic biblical texts.

PREPARATION FOR OCTOBER 6:

READ Fontaine, "A Heifer in Thy Stable" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible* Cities as Goddess

READ Symbols of Masculine and Feminine in ANE Magic Rituals

READ YHWH's Significant Other

OCTOBER 6: ON Goddesses and Religious Power

You should have read the following in preparation for this session (logged on September 29 lesson): Fontaine, "A Heifer in Thy Stable" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*; Cities as Goddess; Symbols of Masculine and Feminine in ANE Magic Rituals; YHWH's Significant Other

IN CLASS: In the Time of Goddesses

ON LINE: Weems lecture on Gods, Goddesses, and Jeremiah

POST at least 3 observations from Weems' lecture.

PREPARATION FOR OCTOBER 20

READ The Amarna Royal Women (attached)

READ Harem-Bat-Sheba (attached)

READ Bird, "Images of Women in the Bible" (attached)

READ Abishag-Sumerian Tale (attached)

READ Status Rights of the Queen Mother (attached)

READ "Defending Queen Vashti" in *Women in the Bible World* (Vol. 2)

October 13: FALL BREAK

PREPARATION FOR OCTOBER 20

READ The Amarna Royal Women (attached)

READ Harem-Bat-Sheba (attached)

READ Bird, "Images of Women in the Bible" (attached)

READ Abishag-Sumerian Tale (attached)

READ Status Rights of the Queen Mother (attached)

READ "Defending Queen Vashti" in *Women in the Bible World* (Vol. 2)

October 20: ROYAL WOMEN

In advance of this session, you should have read (all posted on October 6 and 13): The Amarna Royal Women; Harem-Bat-Sheba; Bird, "Images of Women in the Bible; Abishag-Sumerian Tale; Status Rights of the Queen Mother; "Defending Queen Vashti" in *Women in the Bible World* (Vol. 2)

IN CLASS: On Women in and with Power

ONLINE: Watch the video on Queen Nefertiti (please note that although the video says "1:41 hours" it is really only about 1:25 when you take out the repetitious parts)

POST at least 5 things you learned about this particular Queen of Egypt. Think about what you've learned about ancient Israelite leaders. How does any of this work reflect on what you know about biblical political leaders?

IN PREPARATION FOR OCTOBER 27:

READ Wise and Strange/Trickster (attached)

READ The Wise Women of 2 Samuel in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*

READ Digging up Deborah (Archeology) (attached)

READ The Two Wise Women in Proverbs 31 (attached)

READ Female Imagery in Proverbs 1-9 (attached)

READ "Sumerian Wisdom Literature" (attached)

October 27: WISDOM AND WISE WOMEN

In advance of this session, you should have read (posted on October 20): Wise and Strange/Trickster; The Wise Women of 2 Samuel in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*; Digging up Deborah (Archeology); The Two Wise Women in Proverbs 31; Female Imagery in Proverbs 1-9; "Sumerian Wisdom Literature"

IN CLASS: Discussion on Wisdom, wise women, and the role of wisdom in ordering ancient society

ON LINE: Watch Bridgeman lecture on Wisdom Personified and a possible Goddess
POST at least 3 reflections on the Bridgeman Hokmah lecture.

IN PREPARATION FOR NOVEMBER 3:

READ Adoption/Alienation (attached)

READ Female Reproductive (attached)

READ Myth of birthing the Hero (attached)

READ Weems "The Hebrew Women are not like the Egyptians" (attached)

READ Genesis 16, Genesis 21, and 1 Samuel 1 and 2

November 3: ON MOTHERS AND BIRTHING

In advance of this session you should have read (posted on October 27): Adoption/Alienation; Female Reproductive; Myth of birthing the Hero; Weems "The Hebrew Women are not like the Egyptians"; Genesis 16, Genesis 21, and 1 Samuel 1 and 2

IN CLASS: Discussion on childbirth in the biblical world

ON LINE: Watch video on Sex in the Ancient World

POST at least 3 things you learned and reflect on what it might mean when reading biblical texts

IN PREPARATION OF NOVEMBER 10: Women as wives

READ Hated Wife in Deuteronomical Law (attached)

READ "Rape, Enslavement, Marriage" (attached)

READ "Widow in Bible and ANE" (attached)

READ "Psalm 45, Love Songs and ANE Marriage Texts" (attached)

READ "Jacob's Marriages and ANE Customs" (attached)

November 10: Marriage and Beyond

In preparation for this session, you should have read the following (posted on November 3): Hated Wife in Deuteronomical Law; "Rape, Enslavement, Marriage"; "Widow in Bible and ANE"; Psalm 45, Love Song and ANE Marriage Texts, Jacob's Marriages and ANE Texts, Love Poetry

IN CLASS: Conversation on marriage in the biblical world

ON LINE: Watch lecture "Texts of Terror"

POST at least 4 observations from the lecture and how they had an impact on you.
How did her lecture on preaching these texts affect the way you think about reading them.

IN PREPARATION FOR NOVEMBER 17:

READ Harlots at Heroine (attached)

READ "Rahab in Rehab" in *Women in the Biblical World* READ "Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible* READ Mixed Marriages (attached)

READ Serving Women/Mirrors-Exod.38 (attached)

READ Daughters of Zelophehad

READ Numbers 26:33; Numbers 27:1-11; Numbers 36:1-13

November 17: OTHER WOMEN

In preparation for this session, you should have read (posted on November 17): Harlots as Heroine; "Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative" in Women in the Hebrew Bible; "Rahab in Rehab" in Women in the Biblical World; Serving Women/Mirrors-Exod.38; Daughters of Zelophehad Revisited; Numbers 26:33; Numbers 27:1-11; Numbers 36:1-13

IN CLASS: Discussion on unlikely Heroines

ON LINE: Spend this 1 1/2 on your final project

POST on your progress. Note at least 3 things you discovered in your research.
Respond substantively to at least ONE of your colleagues about their work

IN PREPARATION FOR DECEMBER 1:

READ Achsah-Caleb Agreement (attached)

READ Poverty Laws in ANE and the Bible (attached)

READ A Case History: Number 5:11-31 in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*

NOVEMBER 24: THANKGIVING BREAK

IN PREPARATION FOR DECEMBER 1:

READ Achsah-Caleb Agreement (attached)

READ Poverty Laws in ANE and the Bible (attached)

READ A Case History: Number 5:11-31 in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*

December 1: LEGAL CLAIMS AND WOMEN

In preparation for this session, you should have read (posted at NOVEMBER 17) the following: Achsah-Caleb Agreement; Poverty Laws in ANE and the Bible; A Case History: Number 5:11-31 in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*

IN CLASS: Discussion on Laws

ON LINE: Bridgeman lecture on laws that impact women in the biblical world
POST at least 3 observations from the lecture that are new or impactful to you and state WHY it is impactful

IN PREPARATION FOR DECEMBER 8: Reflect on all the pieces you've read. Make a list (and bring to class with you) of the ones that have been most impactful and WHY

December 8: LAST WORDS AND REVIEW

IN CLASS: Each learner will take 5-7 minutes to reflect on her or his most significant insights from the course. These reflections will in dialogue with each other. Learners are to think about 1) where they began; 2) where they've arrived; 3) the impact of this course on their understanding of the biblical world; 4) implications of that impact on their ministry and learning going forward.

There will be no on-line component for this session.

MORE INFORMATION BY WHICH TO GOVERN OURSELVES:

ADA—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

Class attendance—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions. As it relates to blended courses, students may not be allowed credit if they are absent for 25% of class meetings or if 25% of online course work is not completed. Use of Skype or similar technology is not a substitute for attendance in class.

Electronic Devices—Turn mobile devices off or “vibrate only” during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

Human Subjects Research—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non-public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary

organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

Inclusive Language—In accordance with MTSO’s policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

Incompletes—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean’s Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

Pass/Fail—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of "pass" the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters’ level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school’s policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If students have questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school’s writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion.