

Interpreting Abraham
אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהִים

Religious Studies 2301f - 5201a
Fall 2010
Centre for Abrahamic Religions
Huron University College

Instructor: Susan Harrison
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Office hours: TBA; Office: A8
Lectures: Thursdays 2:30-5:20pm during the fall term

1. The purpose of the course:

Abraham —our common father, remains a pivotal historical person in the perspective of the monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This course seeks to understand through study of the TaNaKh, New Testament, and Qur'an and their interpretations some seminal aspects of his story: Abraham's Call, father of nations, Prophet, first monotheist, friend of God, ethic of hospitality, among other things. We will also explore the formative stories of Abraham's family particularly Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac from the perspective of the three traditions. In addition to tafseer, hadith, midrash, talmud, and the early church fathers we will also view these common ancestors through the lens of history, literature, music, sociology, psychology, theology as well as other optics. Readings will draw from Jewish, Christian and Islamic sources to create an expanded and interactive figure whose importance in each tradition sends a message of what it is to be human and divinely connected. This course moves between ancient and modern views, and seeks to enlarge a common understanding of the human predicament by situating ourselves in relationship with this distant figure.

2. Objectives:

- To become familiar with the Interpretive traditions about Abraham within the perspectives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam: observing continuities and discontinuities
- To engage primary texts & their interpreters: TaNaKh, New Testament and Qur'an
- To learn how scriptures are interpreted in the three traditions: Rabbis, Imams, Church Fathers, Psychology, Historians of Religions, Literary, Sociological, Aesthetic, among other approaches.
- To gain an understanding of Intertextuality
- To understand and practice scriptural reasoning
- To reflect on Abraham as a source of hope for peace between the Abrahamic religions

3. Required texts:

- a) Kuschel, K.-J. (1995). Abraham: Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims. London, SCM Press Ltd. [Out of Print book see short term loan at library]

b) Tribble, Phyllis and Letty Russell., Ed. (2006). Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children : Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives. Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press. (at bookstore)

4. Links:

Qur'an and Tafseer www.altafsir.com and www.shiasource.com/al-mizan

TaNaKh and Talmud <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm> and

www.sacred-texts.com/jud/tlo/index.htm

Bible and early church fathers www.biblegateway.com

Society for Scriptural Reasoning

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/index.html>

5. Evaluation:

students enrolled in 2301f

weekly reading reflections	30%
20 page Interpretive essay	40% (topics TBD with instructor)
Final exam	30%

students enrolled in 5201a

weekly reading reflections	20%
Book report	10%
20 pg Interpretive Essay	40% (topics TBD with instructor)
Final Exam	30%

6. Support Services:

- UWO Registrar's Office: <http://www4.registrar.uwo.ca>
- Huron's Faculty of Theology, Office of the Dean:
http://www.huronuc.on.ca/faculty_of_theology/info_for_current_students
- srice@uwo.ca, 519-438-7224, ext. 289
- Huron's Writing Skills Centre: http://www.huronuc.on.ca/student_life/writing_services
- UWO Student Support and Development Services:
http://communications.uwo.ca/current_students/student_services.htm

7. Accommodation for absences:

documentation must be submitted by the student directly to your Faculty's Dean's office (or academic counselor), and not to the instructor. For the Faculty of Theology, all such documentation must be submitted to room A227. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

a) Non-medical absences:

Marks are deducted on a daily basis for late work, and there is a “drop –dead” date beyond which work will not be accepted.

Non-medical absences from mid-terms (tests and in course examinations other than in December or April) are more problematic. Since dates are known well in advance, documentation and a request for relief must be submitted to the Dean’s Office in order for accommodation for non-medical absences from tests and examinations to be considered.]

b) Medical absences: See also the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness —Undergraduate Students, at

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf>)

For work representing 10% or more of the overall grade for the course, a student must present documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities.

Documentation must be submitted as soon as possible to your Faculty Dean’s office (Huron Arts & Social Science students should take their documentation to the Academic Counsellor, through the Academic Services Centre at Huron), together with a Request for Relief specifying the nature of the accommodation requested. The request and documentation will be assessed and appropriate accommodation will be determined by the Dean’s office in consultation with the instructor(s.) Academic accommodation will be granted **ONLY** where the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete his/her academic responsibilities.

The UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) and Request for Relief are available at the Student Centre website (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>), Huron University College Academic Counselling website (www.huronuc.on.ca) or from the Dean’s Office or Academic Services Centre at Huron.

Schedule:

9/16 Week 1: Abraham in scripture

Introduction to primary texts, hermeneutics and Intertextuality

9/23 Week 2: Abraham in Judaism

read:

- a) Kuschel, K.-J. (1995). Part I “Abraham and Judaism” Abraham: Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims. London, SCM Press Ltd. pp 4-68
- b) Vermes (1973) Part II: The rewritten Bible (Haggadic development of Abraham) in Scripture and Tradition in Judaism : Haggadic Studies. Studia Post-Biblica. 2nd, rev. ed. Leiden: Brill. pp 67-126.
- c) The Jewish Study Bible – Jon Levenson’s *Introduction* to Genesis p8ff
[optional additional readings pp. 1829-1919, 2067-2096]

9/30 Week 3: Abraham in Christianity

read:

- a) Kuschel, K.-J. (1995). Part II “Abraham and Christianity” Abraham: Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims. London, SCM Press Ltd.pp. 69- 129
- b) Tobin, T. (1995). “What Shall We Say that Abraham Found? The Controversy behind Romans 4.” Harvard Theological Review, 88(4), 437-452.

10/7 Week 4: Abraham in Islam

read:

- a) Kuschel, K.-J. (1995). Part III “Abraham and Islam” Abraham: Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims. London, SCM Press Ltd pp130- 169.
- b) Firestone, Reuven “Abraham” in Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an. Leiden: Brill (2001) vol 1: 5-11.
- c) Kaltner, J. (1999). Ishmael instructs Isaac : an introduction to the Qur'an for Bible readers. Collegeville, Minn., Liturgical Press. pp 9-25.

10/ 14 Week 5: Tri-ologue on Abraham

read:

- a) Hauglid, Brian M. "On the Early Life of Abraham: Biblical and Qur'anic Intertextuality and the Anticipation of Muhammad." Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality. Ed. John C. Reeves. Vol. 24. Symposium Series. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003. 87-

105.

b) Lodahl, Michael. "Arguing over Abraham: Arguing with God" in Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010: 9-24.

c) Rosenblatt, S. "Rabbinic Legends in Hadith." The Muslim World 35.3 (1945): 237-52.

d) Bryant, M. D. (2007). "The Abrahamic faiths and the quest for dialogue: does common ancestry make for good relations?" Dialogue & Alliance 21(1): 9-25.

10/21 Week 6: Abraham in history: Nomad, Prince, Hanif, Iconoclast

read:

a) Hendel, Ronald "Remembering Abraham" and "Historical Memories in the Patriarchal Narratives" in Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible, Oxford Univ Press (2005): 31-55.

b) Wiseman, Donald J. "Abraham Reassessed." Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives. Ed. A.J. Millard and D.J. Wiseman. Leicester: IVP, (1980) 139-56.

c) Kaltner, John. Ishmael Instructs Isaac : An Introduction to the Qur'an for Bible Readers. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press (1999) 87 – 131.

d) Mirza, Younus. "Abraham as an Iconoclast: Understanding the Destruction of 'Images' through Qur'anic Exegesis." Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations 16.4 (2005) 413 - 28.

10/28 Week 7: Abraham's hospitality: friend of God, Call-Covenant, Blessing, circumcision, father of nations, prophet

read:

a) Dakake, Maria Massi "Human contention and Divine Argument: Faith and Truth in the Qur'anic Story of Abraham" in Crisis, Call and Leadership in the Abrahamic Traditions, eds Peter Ochs and William Stacy Johnson (2009) New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp 191-207.

b) Muilenburg, James. "Abraham and the Nations : Blessing and World History." Interpretation 19.4 (1965): 387-98.

c) Rogers, Cleon L., Jr. "Covenant with Abraham and Its Historical Setting." Bibliotheca sacra 127.507 (1970): 241-56.

d) Kueny, K. (2003). Abraham's Test: Islamic Male Circumcision As Anti/Ante-covenantal practice. Bible and Qur'ān : essays in scriptural intertextuality, J. C. Reeves. Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature: 161-182.

11/4 Week 8: Abraham's women: Sarah, Hagar & Keturah

read:

a) Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives Trible, Phyllis and Letty M. Russell, eds Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press (2006).

b) Firestone, R. "The Problem of Sarah's Identity in Islamic Exegetical Tradition." The Muslim World 80.2 (1990): 65-71.

11/11 Week 9: No Class - (reading week for 5201f students) – No Class

read:

a) Kepnes, Steven "Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning" Modern Theology 22:3 July (2006) 367-383.

b) Ford, David "Developing Scriptural Reasoning Further: Reflections on Scripture, Reason and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter" in Shaping Theology: Engagements in a Religious and Secular World, David F. Ford, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing) 2007: 73-90.

11/18 Week 10: Abraham's sons: Ishmael (5201f student book reports due, final date)

read:

a) Alexander, G. "The Story of the Ka'Ba." The Muslim World 28.1 (1938): 43-53.

b) Bijlefeld, W. A. "Controversies around the Qur'anic Ibrāhim Narrative and Its "Orientalist" Interpretations." The Muslim World 72.2 (1982): 81-94.

c) Nikaido, S. "Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study." Vetus Testamentum 51.2 (2001): 219-42.

11/25 Week 11: Abraham's sons: Isaac (Aqedah)

read:

a) Vermes (1973) "Redemption and Genesis XXII" and "Conclusion" in Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies. Studia Post-Biblica. 2nd, rev. ed. Leiden: Brill pp.193 -229

b) Sherwood, Yvonne. "Binding-Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to The "Sacrifice" Of Abraham's Beloved Son." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 72.4 (2004): 821-61.

c) Levenson, Jon D. "Abusing Abraham: Traditions, Religious, Histories, and Modern Misinterpretations." Judaism 47.3 (1998): 259-277.

d) Firestone, R, 1989, 'Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice (*Al-Dhabīḥ*, Qur'ān 37:99–113): Issues in Qur'ānic Exegesis', Journal of Semitic Studies, vol. 34, no.1, pp. 95–131.

e) Green, Ronald "Abraham, Isaac, and The Jewish Tradition: An Ethical Reappraisal" Journal of Religious Ethics 10:1 (1982) 1-21.

12/2 Week 12: Abraham as symbol of hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims

-- final essay's due -- peacemaking, hope, belonging, family squabbles

read:

a) Peachey, P., G. F. Mclean, et al., Eds. (1997). Abrahamic Faiths Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts. Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series 1: Culture and Values.

Washington, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
(pages 1-11, 94-137, 305-347)

- b) Kuschel, K.-J. (1995). Abraham: Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims. London, SCM Press Ltd. pages 173-253
- c) Moberly, R. W. L. (2009). Abraham and the Abrahamic Faiths. The Theology of the Book of Genesis. New York, Cambridge University Press: pages 200-224.

12/9 study day

12/ ? **Final Exam** and Final essay “drop dead” date

BOOK REPORT CHOICES:

- 1- Kessler, E. (2004). Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. [BS 1238.S24 K47 2004]
- 2- Abramovitch, H. H. (1994). The first father : Abraham : the psychology and culture of a spiritual revolutionary. Lanham, Md., University Press of America. [BS 580.A3A16]
- 3- Van Seters, J. (1975). Abraham in history and tradition. New Haven ; London, Yale University Press. [BS 580.A3V36]
- 4- Siker, J. S. (1991). Disinheriting the Jews : Abraham in early Christian controversy. Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press. [BS 580.A3547]
- 5- Firestone, R. (1990). Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis. Albany, State University of New York. [BP 133.7 A27F57]
- 6- Fretheim, T. E. (2007). Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith. Columbia, University of South Carolina Press. [BS 580 .A3F74]
- 7- Chilton, B. (2008). Abraham's Curse: Child sacrifice in the Legacies of the West. New York, Doubleday. [BS 1238 .S24C45 2008]
- 8- Rosenberg, David (2006) Abraham: The First Historical Biography. New York: Basic Books.

Abraham in dictionaries & encyclopedias

Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (Leiden 1995), cols 6-10
Encyclopedia Judaica 1 (Jerusalem 1971), cols 111-125
The Encyclopedia of Islam 3 (Leiden: 1971), pp 980-981
The Encyclopedia of Religion 1 (New York 1987), pp 13-17
The Encyclopedia of Quran 1 (Leiden: 2001), pp5-11
Lexikon für Theologie un Kirche 1 (Freiburg 1993), cols 61-65
Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum 1 (Stuttgart 1950), cols 18-27
Theologische Realenzyklopädie 1 (Berlin 1977), pp 372-387

revised: Sept. 7, 2010



Appendix to Course Outlines

Prerequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Conduct of Students in Classes, Lectures, and Seminars

Membership in the community of Huron University College and the University of Western Ontario implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. The academic and social privileges granted to each student are conditional upon the fulfillment of these responsibilities. In the classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Students can avoid any unnecessary disruption of the class by arriving in sufficient time to be seated and ready for the start of the class, by remaining silent while the professor is speaking or another student has the floor, and by taking care of personal needs prior to the start of class. If a student is late, or knows that he/she will have to leave class early, be courteous: sit in an aisle seat and enter and leave quietly.

Please see the *Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities* at:

http://www.huronuc.ca/students/student_life/student_policies

Technology

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited to, laptops, PDAs, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an academic offence and will be treated as such. Students who are in doubt as to the nature of this offence should consult their instructor, Department Chair or the Dean, as well as the Huron University College Statement on Plagiarism, available at the reference desk in the HUC Library and at <http://www.huronuc.ca/library/Citing/>. In addition, students may seek guidance from a variety of current style manuals available at the Reference Desk in the HUC Library. Information about these resources can be found in LibGuides on the main page:

<http://www.huronuc.ca/library>.

Students found guilty of plagiarism will suffer consequences ranging from a grade reduction to failure in the course to expulsion from the university. In addition, a formal letter documenting the offence will be filed in the Dean's Office, and this record of the offence will be retained in the Dean's Office for the duration of the student's academic career at Huron University College.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Personal Response Systems ("clickers") may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence,
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Statement on Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>

Policy on Special Needs

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the

regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Class Cancellations

In the event of a cancellation of class, every effort will be made to post that information on the Huron website.

Accessibility

Huron University College strives at all times to provide its goods and services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. We are also committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our goods and services and allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place as, and in a similar way to, other customers. We welcome your feedback about accessibility at Huron. Information about how to provide feedback is available at: <http://www.huronuc.ca/accessibility>

Program and Academic Counselling

Religious Studies students registered at Huron who require advice about modules and courses in Religious Studies should contact Dean Danaher, wdanaher@huron.uwo.ca. Students should contact Debbie Chadwick or Kent Robinson, Academic Counsellor on other academic matters. See the Academic Counselling website for information on services offered.

http://www.huronuc.ca/students/service_centre/academic_counselling/