

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

### **Tips on How to Teach with this Book**

John Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Fortress Press, 2011)

Teaching an introductory course in the Hebrew Bible can be a daunting task. To a certain degree, this is true even if you have already taught the course numerous times, but it is especially true if you are teaching it for the first time. Either way, you will no doubt find this edition of John Drane's, *Introducing the Old Testament*, to be exceedingly helpful. The text has several features that make it immediately appealing to both students and instructors: maps, timelines, photos, a useful glossary and articles on special topics of interest inserted into each chapter. Less obvious, but perhaps even more critical, is the author's gifted way of telling a story. The *Old Testament* is, after all, a story of a people; the people of Israel, whose story becomes foundational for western civilization. In that sense, it is not just Israel's story but rather, a story that belongs to all of us who are interested in the world, and in our own society's place in the world. Professor Drane's skill at conveying the living and sacred nature of the Old Testament texts while simultaneously addressing the tough questions raised by Biblical scholarship in regard to them makes this book especially useful for the classroom.

There are several issues with which anyone who teaches an introductory course in the Old Testament must reckon. First, there are issues related to the texts themselves, such as the vast time period they cover, questions related to authorship and context, and of course, the many literary genres represented. Second, there are numerous issues related to students of today. If we, as instructors, are to guide them not only in an understanding of these texts as history but also to an appreciation for the relevance of these texts for the world today, it is necessary to be aware of several factors that we are likely to encounter in the classroom today. These include a wide range of basic Biblical knowledge among students, a wide range of learning styles, a wide range of assumptions or beliefs about the nature of Biblical texts, as well as a wide range of attitudes regarding the importance and proper place of religion in general in our world today. There are several ways in which this textbook is useful in working through these issues and a number of varied approaches that the instructor can take in order to best engage students.

*The texts themselves -- How to cover a vast historical time period and a wide variety of genres in one short semester:*

The text is arranged such that the first chapter provides a very brief overview of Israel's history interwoven with a discussion of the number of books included, their ordering in different traditions, and the various genres represented. By reading this chapter at the very beginning of the semester, students will gain some understanding regarding the varied nature of the books as well as a sense of the complex nature of the material and of Biblical study in general. Chapters two through eight are historical in nature, following the history of Israel in chronological fashion, beginning with the patriarchs up to the Roman period, while chapters nine through thirteen are theologically oriented and more universal in scope, focusing on the nature of God, God's relationship with the world, Israel's way of life as the people of God, and finally, the use and value of these texts for the world today.

The layout of the book works very well as it is but depending on the preference of the instructor it is also possible to intersperse later chapters (or parts of those chapters)

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

with the earlier ones. For instance, in teaching the Old Testament, it is always difficult to decide where exactly to teach the primordial texts, that is, Genesis 1-11. In the layout of this book, these texts are discussed in more depth after the class has been guided through the history of the Israelite people. This works very well because it helps the students understand how Israel moves from understanding its god as one of many, who is only for them, to the One God whose power is universal in scope.

In another way of thinking, however, it can be helpful for students to learn about the primordial texts at the beginning. While this runs the risk of having them fail to understand that in terms of actual dating, parts of these texts very likely came later than portions of the historical narrative, it does help those who tend to be linear thinkers, and who thus have difficulty moving *back* to creation after having gone through the bulk of Israelite history. Such an approach can also be advantageous because it allows the instructor to show that the view of God presented in these stories is embedded in Israel's perception of God, and of the nation's relationship with God, from its earliest history. It also serves to help students understand how and why, throughout Israel's history, there is a subtext of God opening himself to non-Israelites, as seen when people like Tamar, Rahab and Ruth are brought into the covenant. If the instructor chooses to set the course up in this fashion, chapters nine and ten can be read following chapter one. Chapter eleven might be read along with chapter four and chapters twelve and thirteen at the end of the semester.

Regardless of whether one chooses to follow the textbook in the order it is laid out or in some other fashion, the text provides the student with a large amount of background material which it would be impossible to cover in the amount of class time allotted per semester. The text, then, allows the instructor to elaborate on certain sections of the material or on certain critical stories while knowing that the student has the resources, that is, the timelines and broad information provided by the text, in which to situate the class material chronologically. Although it would not be possible to do justice to the history of Israel in one semester of class lectures, it is possible to introduce the material adequately when doing so in conjunction with this textbook.

*How to teach a group who have a wide range of assumptions and beliefs about the nature of Biblical texts:*

One of the most valuable aspects of this particular textbook is the author's ability to weave information about methods of Biblical scholarship, and issues surrounding those methods, into his discussion throughout the book rather than treating them as a separate topic. While a course in methods is critical for any student who wishes to pursue a major in Biblical Studies or Religion in general, it is not necessarily critical or helpful for the general education student who is taking the course simply out of interest or to fulfill a basic liberal arts requirement. By weaving the basics of what is necessary at this level throughout the textbook rather than treating it separately, the students learn about the importance of method in context -- for instance, the instructor can emphasize the importance of recognizing genre (and characteristics of different genres) each time the class moves to a new type of text; and the historical-critical method (its strengths and its limitations) can be discussed over and over throughout the semester as the class studies both the history that is revealed in the texts as well as the editor's theological perspective on that history.

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

Furthermore, whether at a religiously affiliated or a state institution, any Old Testament class taught today is bound to include students who have a very secular view regarding Biblical texts as well as students who have very traditional views, especially regarding authorship and dating of Biblical texts. In order to teach this material with any integrity, it is essential to guide all students in seeing that the Old Testament is an anthology of texts from various times and places. At the same time, it is less threatening and causes less trauma for the traditionally minded student if s/he is guided through the range of methods and possibilities regarding interpretation within the context of discussions about Israel's history than it is if the topic is approached separately and appears to be detached from any notion that God might actually be involved in that history. At the same time, this integrated style of teaching also has advantages for the more secularly minded student as s/he can be guided to see why it is that for many, these texts are not just historical but are also sacred.

*How to teach a group who have a wide range of background knowledge about the Bible:* In any classroom today, the instructor is likely to run into students who have very little, if any, background knowledge about the Bible, as well as students who have strong knowledge at least regarding the main characters and heroes of those texts that tend to be taught in classes for children held at most churches and synagogues: Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Solomon. The gap between students, however, is not generally as difficult to bridge as it might seem. Students who are able to identify some of the main figures of the texts have rarely looked beyond the basic story, that is, they have not considered how the story fits into Israel's history overall; they have not considered the social or literary context of the story; they have not considered the theological importance of the story for the people of Israel; and they have not thought beyond the most superficial level about the theological implications of the story for people today. Thus, even those with some knowledge are rarely far ahead of those with none. Yet, the basic knowledge they do have can be put to good use by having them work with students who, often coming from eastern traditions, have no knowledge of these texts at all. After spending time with the patriarchs and matriarchs, for instance, it is useful to periodically take five minutes at the end of class to have students drill one another on names of major figures and the stories associated with them. The students can be assigned to groups for this purpose with the instructor ensuring that each group is made up of students who came in with some knowledge and students who did not. These same groups can also be encouraged to study together outside of class, especially prior to exams. For those times, they should be given a review sheet that includes not just factual information but also historical and theological themes that have been covered. They should also be encouraged to refer frequently to the timelines provided in the textbook.

*How to teach a group in which attitudes about religion range from apathy to hostility:* Attitudes about religion and the Bible that students bring to the classroom is perhaps the most difficult thing to deal with in regard to teaching the Old Testament, mainly because it is a factor over which the instructor has no control. S/he can only respond, and hope to do so, in such a way as to reshape attitudes that are less than positive. Since I teach in a religiously affiliated College, I have found that students often assume that they are required to take the course for this reason. Therefore, I always begin the semester by

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

explaining that even if they were at a secular institution the chances are very good that a certain amount of "Religion" would be required because of the increasing recognition of the power and influence of religion in the lives of people and nations today. Spending even a half hour on this topic goes a long way toward defusing students who are irritated about being in such a class, and it has the added advantage of setting the stage for future discussions where connections will be made between the ancient material and the modern day -- this is helpful in prodding some students out of an initial sense of apathy.

While in my own experience, it has not happened often, one occasionally runs into the student who is blatantly hostile toward religion and angry about being in the course. If one can engage such a student in private discussion it sometimes becomes clear that the student's anger is rooted in a relationship with a parent or a religious leader whom s/he believes has forced "religion" on him/her. By extension, the student believes the instructor is about to do the same thing. In this case, it is helpful to explain the difference between the study of theological doctrine that is associated with any particular denomination and the academic study of the Bible. If the student can be helped to see that the College course is not an attempt to teach a particular doctrine but rather to explore the texts in their historical context, the hostility will usually be defused. Encouraging the student to browse through this textbook is another way of easily showing him/her the academic, rather than doctrinal, approach that the course will take. In the event that the student's anxiety cannot be reduced, the instructor may need to engage the help of another party, perhaps the College's Dean of Students or the like.

*How to teach a group who have a wide range of learning styles:*

This, of course, is a challenge shared by instructors of all disciplines. It is not unique to Biblical Studies. However, because of the vast time period and different types of texts covered when teaching the Old Testament, it is especially important to be cognizant of the fact that students do not all learn in the same way. In my own teaching, I have found it best to vary the approach as much as possible so that a student who does not grasp material when it's taught in one way might pick it up in another. For instance, given the vast amount of material to be covered and the fact that a certain baseline of knowledge is essential before any intelligent discussion can happen, lecture has a strong and legitimate place in this course. As much as possible (and this will vary according to the style of the instructor), it is helpful if the professor can make the lecture interactive, that is, by asking students questions throughout, by having students read relevant portions of text aloud or by having students come to the board to write important facts and themes that are raised. Power Point can be a very useful tool in delivering some material -- it is efficient and allows the students easy access to basic notes as well as a place where they can add their own notes. As with all good things, however, some caution needs to be taken in regard to Power Point presentations. Used too often, students tend to ignore the lecture, thinking apparently that they can come back to the material later, and/or they rely solely on the Power Point and never add their own notes.

Regardless of how one delivers lecture material, it is also important to include other modes of instruction. Films and video clips are helpful because they often make the material seem more alive to students. If one can actually *see* the landscape of the Sinai desert, for instance, it is easier to picture what it must have been like for the Israelites to wander around for so many years in such rugged terrain. Likewise, when discussing the

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

racial and ethnic tension that characterizes the post-exilic time period of Ezra and Nehemiah, the connection to the modern world can easily be made by using video clips illustrating similar tensions in our world today. This particular issue can also be illustrated more light-heartedly (but ultimately equally as heavily), by using a clip from Dr. Seuss' story, *the Sneetches* -- those with belly stars and those with none.

Finally, group work can be useful when teaching the Old Testament. I recall working with one very distinguished professor who had taught these texts for many years and who had come to the conclusion that group work is "nothing more than pooled ignorance." I have never forgotten this statement because I have seen the truth of it both as a student and as a professor. Group work can work, and indeed can be very effective, especially in solidifying key themes and helping the students see applications in the world today -- but, in order to work well, it must be carefully orchestrated and carefully controlled. If students are simply told to get into groups and discuss a particular topic, you will quickly see them discussing all sorts of topics, unfortunately almost none related to the course. In order to prevent this, the instructor should provide each group with a list of specific questions related to the particular topic. The groups should be told that after a set amount of time allotted for discussion, they will be expected to have discovered key points on which they can elaborate and which they can share with the larger group. They should also be required to designate one person from the group to write key conclusions on the board for the entire class to use as notes for study. If the group work is controlled in these types of ways, students do feel more accountable and discussions tend to be more fruitful.

***Key Reference Works:***

Freedman, David Noel, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992 (Scheele Library – REF BS440.A54).

Keck, Leander E., ed. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vols 1-7. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994-2001 (Scheele Library – REF BS491.2.N484)

*Dictionary of the Bible and Western Culture* (forthcoming, Sheffield Phoenix).

Newsom, Carol A. & Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary – expanded edition*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

***Useful websites:***

Maps and other useful material:

<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Maps/Story584.html>

<http://www.ebibleteacher.com/imagehtml/batlas.html>

Images of artifacts at the British Museum:

<http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&q=Old+Testament+British+Museum&wrapid=tlif12888780281561&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&biw=1003&bih=551>

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

An open online course taught by Prof. Christine Hayes at Yale:

<http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/introduction-to-the-old-testament-hebrew-bible>

*An excellent collection of photos – useful for describing the varied landscape of Palestine:*

The Biblical World in Pictures, Revised Ed., Libronix Corporation, Bellingham, WA.

**Film:**

Bruce Feiler, *Walking the Bible: A Journey By Land Through the Five Books of Moses* (2 dvd set), PBS, 2005.

**A short, basic reading list -- if you are teaching this course for the first time:**

Arnold, Bill T. & Bryan E. Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*, Grand Rapids. MI: Baker Academic, 2002 (On reserve in Scheele Library – BL1060.R42).

Barton, John, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.

Boadt, Lawrence, ed., *The Hebrew Prophets: Visionaries of the Ancient World*, NY: St. Martin's, 1997.

Borowski, Oded, *Daily Life in Biblical Times*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003

Bright, John, *A History of Israel*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Louisville,: Westminster John Knox, 2000.

Crenshaw, James L., *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

Heschel, Abraham, *The Prophets*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001.

Hess, Richard S., *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey*, Grand rapids, MI: Baker, 2007.

Matthews, Victor H., *Studying the Ancient Israelites: A Guide to Sources and Methods*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007.

Meyers, Carol, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

Trible, Phyllis, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984.

**A few other Introductions that are useful for their differing approaches to teaching the Old Testament:**

Boadt, Lawrence, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, NY: Paulist, 1984.

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

Dick, Michael B., *Reading the Old Testament: An Inductive Introduction*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008.

Dillard, Raymond B. & Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Zondervan, 1994.

**Following are a few sample exercises and assignments that instructors may find useful:**

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

This very basic quiz is an interesting exercise for the first or second day of class. It provides the instructor with an idea of the baseline knowledge of the class and it helps students recognize that they may not know as much about the Bible as they thought they did.

### **Old Testament Literacy Pre-test**

1. Who is the Biblical figure who is understood as the "Father" of Jews, Christians and Muslims?
2. Who killed Goliath?
3. Today when a person shows great patience in the midst of severe suffering it is often said that s/he has "the patience of \_\_\_\_\_" (name the Biblical figure).
4. What is the name of the guy who was given a fancy, multi-colored coat by his father?
5. In the story of "Pinocchio," the little wooden guy ends up in the belly of a whale. On what Biblical story is that image based?
6. Who is the Biblical figure whose name often appears in the title of relief organizations that help after severe floods?
7. What does the Bible say is the "sign" that a flood will never again cover the whole earth?
8. According to the Bible, who or what tricked Adam and Eve into eating the fruit?

### **True or false:**

9. Both the Old Testament and the Qur'an say women should cover themselves completely.
10. "God helps those who help themselves" is a saying found in the Bible.

Answers: 1) Abraham, 2) David, 3) Job, 4) Joseph, 5) Jonah, 6) Noah, 7) the rainbow, 8) the Serpent, 9) False, 10) False

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

**Short Assignment based on a movie clip**

(This is easy to do via the College/University's Blackboard system)

Go to Blackboard.

Click on weblinks (on left).

Click on "Ten Commandments" – video clip

Watch the video clip – it is *still terrific* even after more than 50 years.

After watching the clip, write two paragraphs:

In paragraph 1, explain what is taking place in the clip and tell how this does or does not follow the account given in the Biblical text.

In paragraph 2, answer this question: Why do you think this film has remained so successful, that is, why is it still so popular even though it is so old? You might discuss, for instance, the special effects or the acting.

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

(The following could also be added to tests as short essay questions. For in-class writing assignments, a number of the review questions from the Student Guide might also be used)

**Questions for Short In-class Writing Assignments:**

1. Name two foreign women who entered into the people of Israel. Briefly tell the story of each and then show how at least one of the patterns we've discussed in class is present in each of their stories.
2. Compare and contrast the God of Israel as portrayed in *Gen 1 & 2* with the gods as they are portrayed in *Enuma Elish*. Then explain the purpose (reason) for which humans are created in each text.
3. Explain the difference between apodictic and casuistic law and give an example of each.
4. Explain how the location of the land of Israel made it so desirable – in other words, what advantages did its location provide?

(The following could be used as *either* an in-class or out-of-class assignment)

**Writing Exercise**

As we have seen, the following themes recur often in the Old Testament texts:

- 1) God manages to work his will even when the leaders he chooses are reluctant
- 2) God is the God of Israel but he is also God for ALL people
- 3) God is merciful even when his people are disobedient and unloving toward him and others

In three carefully structured paragraphs (approximately 1 page), explain how each of these themes is clearly seen in the book of *Jonah*.

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

(The following questions are based on readings from the Biblical text. For reading quizzes based on the textbook, many of the questions from the Student Guide work very well)

**Questions suitable for Reading Quizzes or for Short in-class Writing Exercises:**

1. What does God (through Moses) tell the people to do on the night before the last plague? What is the immediate purpose and what yearly ritual helps the people remember this event in later years, even in our day? (7 points)

2. In what country was Jacob buried and who took charge of his burial? (3 points)

3. Describe the dream of both Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer and his chief baker. Then describe the interpretation of each of these dreams. Finally, discuss why this portion of text is important in helping the reader understand Joseph and his role in Israelite history (7 points).

4. Name two of the patterns we have spoken about in class and describe how you see them in the figure of Moses (3 points).

5. What message did the prophet, Nathan, deliver to King David following his affair with Bathsheba? Describe how this prophecy comes true in David's later years.

6. Describe what it meant to have "wisdom" in the ancient world. Then, discuss one Israelite figure who you believe exhibits this type of wisdom and show how s/he does so. Finally, think of one person today who you believe also exhibits Biblical type wisdom and explain the characteristics s/he has that bring you to that conclusion.

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

**Essay Questions suitable for short paper assignments or for a Final Exam:**

1. In their day, the Biblical prophets whom we've studied this semester were considered by many to be religious fanatics. Since the prophets always spoke up for justice -- for the care of the poor and the oppressed -- discuss why they were labeled in this manner (as crazy fanatics)? What factors do you think enabled them to persist in the face of such opposition? Name one person who you believe has a *prophetic-like* voice in our world today. Discuss the ways in which s/he resembles the prophets of old?
2. The return to Jerusalem was difficult both for the Jews who returned from Babylon and for those people who were already living there at the time of the return. What were some of the benefits, and some of the drawbacks, to the reforms pushed by Ezra and Nehemiah (for both returnees and people already there)? Give an example of an area where we see tension over issues of assimilation today. In regard to that example, discuss the benefits and problems that have arisen during the process of assimilation (both for the people entering and for the people already there).
3. What are specific characteristics of "covenant" love? In what ways do you see "covenant" type love exhibited in the Book of Ruth? Name at least two characters in that text who exhibit this type of love and explain clearly how you see it in their actions.
4. Write an essay in which you describe how each of the following motifs (patterns) can be seen in the life of King David: 1) the lowly (often shown as the younger) is exalted, 2) the God of Israel works in human history and with imperfect human beings, and 3) the God of Israel expects his kings to be held to higher standards than other kings of the world.

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

### **Group Assignment:**

This assignment is best suited to more mature students -- thus, you may only want to try it if your class is made up mainly of juniors and seniors.

Each student should be required to complete a group evaluation form (follows here after the assignment). This helps the instructor gain a sense of who did what and whether or not everyone in the group should receive the same grade.

Suggestions for passages (these should be primary texts that have not been assigned to the class as a whole -- although the students may gain insight into them from the textbook): Ex 32; 1 Sam 14: 1-46; 1 Sam 25; 1 Sam 28; Num 22

### **The Assignment: Group Presentation**

Please note that on the following dates the class will be led by a small student group. You will sign up early in the semester for *one* of these dates. The dates are:

(The number of days will depend on the number of students in the course and the number of class periods the professor wishes to allow for these presentations)

### ***Guidelines for the session:***

Your presentation and discussion is to be based on a small portion of Old Testament text that has not been assigned to the rest of the class (see syllabus for text). Your task is to introduce this portion of text to the class and to help the class gain understanding about the meaning and importance of the text. You should consider, and perhaps address, the following points/issues/questions (but are not limited to these):

- In general, what is the passage about? Who are the main characters and why are they important?
- What problems/issues are raised by the passage?
- Why might the writers of the larger text have chosen to include the passage/story?
- What *historical* significance might the passage/story have, i.e. what role does it play in the progression of Israelite history?
- What *literary* significance might the passage/story have, i.e. does it serve a particular narrative function – how does it help to move the story forward (or perhaps even to purposely disrupt a larger narrative)?
- What *theological* significance does the passage/story convey, i.e. what does it show or teach about Israel's understanding of God and their relationship to God?
- In what way is the passage/story still relevant for our day, i.e. what can we learn from it? Does it raise issues/questions that are still important in the world today? How might we wrestle with and/or apply the message(s) of the passage/story in our lives today?

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

***Format:***

The format of the session is entirely up to the members of your group. You should meet outside of class to plan and prepare for the session. I encourage you to be creative and to use whatever means you believe will work best to engage the class. Power point, props, games, music etc are all acceptable so long as they serve the purpose of illuminating the text and helping the larger group to engage and understand the text.

***Group member evaluation form:***

The one absolute about this presentation is that every member of the group must participate and is expected to do his/her share of the work. In order to help me better understand how each member participated in the planning as well as the presentation portion of this project, each member will complete a brief questionnaire describing his/her own participation and that of each of the other group members. I will provide you with this form on the day that you present. **It is due on the first class day following your presentation.**

**Grading -- The project is worth a total of 25 points as follows:**

20 – presentation itself

5 -- group evaluation form

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

(For use with the above assignment)

**Group Project -- Evaluation of Group Members**

**Briefly describe your own contribution to this group presentation. Think of the various things that were needed in order to make the presentation happen and of how you contributed to meet these needs i.e. analyzing of material, preparation of material and decisions regarding how the material should be presented to the class, facilitating the gathering of your group for preparation etc.**

**On a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the greatest and 1 being the least, rate each of the other persons in your group in terms of effort and active participation. Then write one or two sentences stating the way in which each member contributed.**

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

### **Formal Writing Assignment**

Choose one character from the Old Testament readings that we have covered up to this point in the semester. You will find it useful to choose one to whose story you feel you can somehow relate.

Then:

*First*, discuss why this person is important to the history of Israel and why you think it was important that this person's story be included in the text. Specifically, explain the theological message that is conveyed through this person and his/her experiences. In other words, what is it that the Biblical writer wanted the Israelites to know/learn (through this person's story) about Israel's relationship with God.

*Second*, explain how the text about this person and his/her life experience is still relevant today. What can be learned from it and how can its message still be applied to life in the twenty-first century?

**Format:**

Typed, double-spaced, 12 point font

Length – approximately 3 pages

Due date -- \_\_\_\_\_

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

## Formal Writing Assignment

Choose **one** of the following portions of scripture on which to base your essay:

Judges 6:1--8:35 (the story of Gideon)

Judges 13:1--16:31 (the story of Samson)

Write an essay in which you consider each of the following points:

1) The importance of this Judge's story for the people of Israel

Here, you should consider *the historical context* of the text -- some things to think about as you approach this part of the paper are: what is happening in the lives of the people at this time? What is this person called on to do and why? How does he go about the task to which he has been called? What kind of a leader is he? What qualities of leadership does he (or does he not) possess?

You should also consider *the theological meaning* of the text -- for instance, what is the nature of this judge's relationship with God? Are any of the patterns that we have seen earlier present in this text? If so, how do they function and what do they tell us about the judge and about God?

2) The importance of this text for people today

In what way(s) is this text still relevant, especially for people of faith? What timeless lessons does it teach about God and his relationship with human beings? (If you have noted any of the patterns, they may be useful here as well).

This is NOT a research paper. Rather, it is a paper in which you are to *carefully* read the text and consider its meaning. Therefore, you may discuss your ideas with other people but do **NOT go to websites** for ideas -- that will only distract you and too often leads to unintended plagiarism.

For help with historical context, you may go to the entries for "Gideon" or "Samson" in either the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* or *Interpreter's Bible Dictionary* in the Reference section of the library. However, remember that if you use material from those sources, you must provide citations. Do not use other sources beyond those.

**Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Format:** typed, double-spaced, 12 point font

**Length:** approximately 3 pages

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

(This assignment is particularly useful for First-Year students because it is short and because it introduces them to the notion of utilizing the College Writing Center)

### **Formal Writing Assignment**

#### ***Before you write:***

Each of the characters listed in the topics below suffered a great deal of hardship in his/her life. Choose one of the topics. Read the corresponding chapter. Think about how this person's story is still relevant to our lives today -- what can be learned from the hardship endured and his/her response to the hardship?

Pharaoh's cup-bearer and his chief baker -- Gen 40

Hagar -- Gen 16

Tamar -- Gen 38

#### ***Writing Instructions:***

Write a 2 page paper addressing the question above. The paper must contain:

- a. an introductory paragraph with a clear thesis statement (highlight the thesis statement before turning in your paper)
- b. at least three structured paragraphs that relate to your thesis statement
- c. a brief conclusion

**You must make at least one visit to the Writing Center** with an outline or rough draft of your paper. **Ask the tutor who works with you to send a report to me.**

#### ***Grade:***

30 points (15 of this will be given for your documented visit to the Writing Center -- you may earn up to another 15 for the quality of the paper itself).

#### ***Format:***

Typed, double-spaced, 12 point font. No email submissions. Length: approximately 2 pages.

#### ***Due Date:***

You must have visited the Writing Center by \_\_\_\_\_

Paper Due on \_\_\_\_\_

Tips on How to Teach with Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 3e (Fortress Press, 2011)

(This assignment was designed to work in conjunction with one College's theme for the year. Similar assignments using other films could be created to fit a variety of themes)

### **Formal Writing Assignment**

The College theme for this year is *Freedom & Responsibility*. It's a theme that is prominent in the Old Testament and that carries forward through time and into our world today. Like equality and tolerance, freedom is a concept that is especially near and dear to the hearts of Americans. It is, as we discussed in class, embedded in our world view – it is our paradigm for living. The events of September 11, 2001 severely threatened that paradigm and brought forth all sorts of questions on matters previously taken for granted. Many of those questions had to do with God, and the nature and place of religion in our lives.

For this assignment, please do the following:

**Watch the film *Faith & Doubt at Ground Zero*.** There are two copies of the film on reserve in the library. Feel free to watch it with others in one of the library's viewing rooms as there are several students who will need to see it.

**After viewing the film, write an essay** in which you do one of the following:

1. Choose two major points / questions raised by the film – for each point or question, describe the circumstances of the person(s) raising it and discuss why it (the point or question) is important for all of us (and not just for that person).

OR

2. Consider your own responsibility to take religion seriously, especially as regards “evil” and the potential of all religions to generate both great good and great evil. In what ways is it not only a gift of freedom *but also a civic responsibility* to study religion (one's own but also that of others) and to work respectfully with people of all faiths?

### **Requirements:**

**Make at least one visit to the Writing Center with a rough draft of your paper.** Be sure to tell the tutor you are in this class so that s/he will keep a record of your session and send it to me. I must receive a notice from the writing center in order for you to get credit!

**Writing Center Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Revised Final Paper Due:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Length:** 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced

**Assignment Value:**

10 points -- Visit to Writing Center

25 points – Final Paper

**Total: 35 points**