Theology 6314, The Law of Moses
Law and Government in the Ancient Near East,
the Bible, and Traditions of Interpretation

Fall 2014, Wednesdays 6:30–9:15 pm, Blume Library 113 and distance learning technology
Dr. Todd Hanneken, thanneken@stmarytx.edu, Treadaway 151, 210-431-8050 (office)
Office hours: Tuesdays 4:45–5:45 pm, Wednesdays 3:45–4:45 pm, Thursdays 1:00–2:00 pm, and
by appointment.
Course website: http://palimpsest.stmarytx.edu/thanneken/th6314/ The site is restricted to
students for copyright reasons. Log in with your stmarytx.edu username and the last four digits
of your student id number.

Course Description
This course focuses on the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament from
the perspective of law and government. The Torah participates in the legal and cultural traditions
of the Ancient Near East, and introduces radical innovations. Unlike its ancient counterparts, the
Israelite Law continues to influence social thought not only in Judaism and Christianity, but the
secular systems that developed in the Christian world. That influence is mediated, however, by
the various traditions of interpretation in Judaism and Christianity. This course seeks
appreciation of the Law of Moses in four contexts: the original context of its development in the
Ancient Near East, the history of interpretation in Judaism and Christianity, contemporary ethical
and religious questions, and the relationship between the principles of biblical law and American
law. While much of the Torah is recognizable as “law” in the modern sense, the entire Torah,
including narratives and exhortations, will be studied with respect to underlying questions of
how a society orders itself around common understandings of national identity, duty to God and
neighbor, and principles of justice inherent in creation.

Required Texts
At least one scholarly study Bible based on the NAB, NRSV, or JPS Tanakh translation.
Martha T. Roth. Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. Second edition, Writings
2014. (2007 first edition also acceptable)
Joseph Blenkinsopp. Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and
Early Judaism. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. (This is available
electronically through the St. Mary’s library website.)
Additional readings will be available from the course website.

Outcomes
By the end of the course the student will be able to:
• Distinguish layers of meaning pertaining to the time of composition, the reception in Jewish and Christian history, and readers today.
• Identify points of dependence and innovation in Israelite law in the context of Ancient Near Eastern law.
• Identify points of literature and history of the ancient world relevant to understanding Israelite laws in their original contexts.
• Identify the major tools and models scholars have contributed to understanding the original composition of the Torah.
• Appreciate the variety of interpretations of the Law of Moses in Jewish and Christian traditions with respect to individual issues and basic concepts of ordering society.
• Identify continuities and discontinuities in the development of modern western concepts of law in relationship to Israelite law and its interpretations in Judaism and Christianity.
• Identify a variety of views on the role biblical law does or should play in American public policy.

Responsibilities
Informed participation begins with coming to class having thought about the readings and being prepared to discuss difficulties and key points. Besides offering answers, participation includes asking questions and participating in discussion. Each student should draw from his or her academic and professional background to offer insights on the topic at hand. Each student’s contribution will be unique. Since the class meets only once per week missing more than one class meeting becomes a cause for concern.

The final exam will focus on objective knowledge and synthesis of information across the course.

A final paper is required for graduate credit (not auditors or undergraduates). The final paper should demonstrate the ability to do scholarly research in the study of the Pentateuch and its legacy in traditional interpretation and modern social issues. The paper should be grounded in the themes of the course and take account of information and arguments encountered in the course. Additionally, the paper should make a more advanced argument on a focused topic, based on research in primary and scholarly sources. Students who do not have experience writing graduate-level research papers in the humanities should be especially prepared to ask for help from the instructor, librarians, and other resources. The rough expectation is 15 pages of original argument (excluding block quotations, title page, bibliography, appendices, etc.), and engagement with several reliable and recent scholarly treatments. The instructor is open to proposals for alternative final projects that may fit the goals of the student more than a traditional research paper. Such proposals should be discussed well in advance.

A short presentation on work in progress on the paper will exercise oral presentation skills and facilitate peer feedback on topics and research skills.

Evaluation
40% Participation
30% Exam (December 10 at the normal class time)
30% Paper (Due December 14)
University Policies
All university policies apply to this course, including the policy on academic honesty and the disability statement.

Preliminary Schedule
August 20, Introductions and Start Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-18 and Deuteronomy 5)
August 27, The Decalogue and Its Status in Interpretation
September 3, The Covenant Code, Hammurabi
September 10, The Covenant Code, Life, Personal Status and Slavery
September 17, Deuteronomy
September 24, Deuteronomy, Family and Inheritance Law
October 1, Deuteronomy, Premodern and Feminist Interpretations
October 8, Holiness Code
October 15, Holiness Code, Conflict Resolution
October 22, The Priestly Source, Purity and Social Order in Daily Life
October 29, The Priestly Source, Hierocracy
November 5, Narrative as Law, Fraud and International Relations
November 12, Narrative as Law, National Identity
November 19, Narrative as Law, The Meaning of Life (Primordial Etiology)
November 26, No Class (Thanksgiving)
December 3, Research Reports
December 10, Final Exam

Last updated August 8, 2014