And what does the Lord require of you?

JUSTICE

In Jewish and Christian Scriptures

Course Description

Verses about social justice abound in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and speak to what people--neighbors, soldiers, property owners, the wealthy, even paupers--owe one another. “Justice, justice, you shall pursue,” the book of Deuteronomy (16:20) exclaims. What does biblical justice mean?

The book of Exodus famously proposes a retributive idea of justice, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth (Ex. 21:24).” Deuteronomy exhorts the conquering Israelite armies to capture cities and “annihilate” the peoples that live there (Deut. 20:17). Remarkably, these verses coexist with moving prophetic calls, such as Micah’s: “what does the Lord require of you?...do justice...love kindness, and...walk humbly with your God... (Micah 6:8).” Isaiah’s prophetic call is practical: “rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:17).”

The New Testament’s verses can be just as difficult to put together. Jesus exhorts his followers to forgive their neighbors, and love their enemies. Paradoxically the God of the New Testament appears to regard Jesus’ excruciating death on the cross as a just act, somehow correcting the cosmic scales of justice. This course will conclude with a discussion of how the Bible is used on the American political scene.

Instructor

Jamie Bryson is currently a PhD student in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis, focusing on Bible and the ancient Near East. He has a strong research interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and more specifically how they can inform our understanding of the formation of the Hebrew Bible in the cultural context of Second Temple Judaism. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of South Carolina, a Master of Divinity from Columbia International University, and a Master of Arts from Brandeis University.

Registration for Justice in Jewish and Christian Scriptures

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