

# Learning from the Bible

*What It Might Do for Young American Undergraduates: A Proposal*

by **Geoffrey Clarfield** (March 2018)



*Moses Abandoned*, Sadao Watanabe, 1979

**T**he United States has for most of its history prided itself on a moral exceptionalism that is Biblically inspired. It finally has its own Museum of the Bible. It has taken two hundred and twenty-five years for this to happen, ever since

the United States signed the peace treaty with its former British ruler, beginning an independence that has lasted to this day, and which has been a beacon of hope for all peoples and nations struggling to be free.

I have visited the museum [web site](#), and I intend to visit the museum soon. I have also spoken to a senior staff member of the museum at some length. As a former museum curator, myself, I hope that this museum will be part of the pushback against the cultural Marxism that now imbues most of our educational and cultural institutions and that it will help us return our children to the political values of ethical monotheism, which are the foundations of the English-speaking democracies and their like-minded allies in new democracies such as India and Israel. This article/proposal goes some way towards showing how that can be enhanced by sponsoring a seminar abroad in Israel focusing on the Bible and Western democracy.

When I look at museums I usually assume that they are a means towards an end, some sort of "public good," a term much loved by the World Bank. In addition to its current mandate, I hope I am not wrong in assuming, from what I know so far, that one of the goals (perhaps implicit?) of the Museum of the Bible, is to show visitors that the Bible is the basis for Western civilization in all its stripes and, one of the three pillars of English speaking democracies.

From my vantage point as an anthropologist, the Bible is one of our complex charter myths, as it comprises one of the two major blueprints for Western civilization, the other being the heritage of the Greeks. The third may be the legal customs of the Germanic peoples. But the Bible is the most mythological (in the positive sense of the word) of the two charters, as we

have received them over the millennia and this is no longer common knowledge.

We now live during a time when most college students in North America have not read the Bible. The study of Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek have become the almost exclusive domain of theologians, Biblical archaeologists, and historians. Yet, as the late great literary critic, Northrop Frye used to argue, the Bible is also the "Great Code" of English literature. One cannot truly grasp the literature of Britain, Canada or America without it.

In addition, recent scholars of political Hebraism suggest that, with regards to the Old Testament, its political history is one of the enduring foundations of modern Western democracies and a direct contributor to the US constitution. [Writings](#) on these subjects are worth reading.

The Bible is the only one of the Great Books that is growing in popularity, at least among those who still believe in God. The rest—the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, Nietzsche, Freud, and Jung are now widely considered to be the products of patriarchal, pernicious, "dead white males" whose works are rarely taught to undergraduates without some sort of cultural Marxist filtering.

American professor Joshua Berman [wrote](#) recently about this paradox in Mosaic Magazine:

In the 2017 edition of The State of the Bible, its annual

survey, the American Bible Society reports that more than half of all Americans who regularly read the Bible now search for related material on the Internet. This shift in how the faithful learn about scripture has resulted in unprecedented public exposure to one kind of Bible study—namely, the academic kind. Major websites now offer the latest that scholars have to say about the Bible—its authorship, its historical accuracy, its proper interpretation—and those websites attract hundreds of thousands of unique visitors each month. In an age when interest in the humanities is generally waning, the department of biblical studies is providing enrichment to what has become the most popular online branch of the liberal arts.

This opens a great opportunity for the Museum of the Bible.

I believe that North American undergrads (and even grads) need to spend a semester abroad in Israel to study the development of the Bible and its effect on Western civilization.

When you read the Bible in Israel, both Old and New Testaments, you can still experience landscapes which have changed little since Biblical times. You can walk on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus and his disciples preached, drink the wine from the vineyards of the Carmel, hike out to the hilltops where Baal was once worshipped by the Canaanites, stare at the “wine dark sea” of Homer and contemplate Abraham and the prophets in the solitude of the Negev desert.

While reading Josephus by the Dead Sea, you can walk through the remains of the Roman military camps and hold in your hands the actual projectiles that the Romans lobbed at the last holdouts of the Jewish revolt of 70 AD, around the desert fortress of Masada. There are places in the Galilee where contemplating ancient churches and early Christian sites, you can conjure up the image of early Christians and the wary Romans who watched over them. And then there is Jerusalem in all its dimensions. Of course, Hebrew, the revived language of the Bible, is spoken everywhere.

If over the years, travelling in many parts of Greece has given me a much more visceral understanding of the life lived in Homeric and classical times, I can also say that reading and studying the Bible in Israel, while I lived, traveled and worked there, gave me a visceral feel for its writings. Exploration of the country by car and on foot, Bible in hand, would have a similar, dramatic effect on young North American minds.

And so, in the De Tocquevillian tradition of North American voluntarism, I designed the kind of seminar abroad for young undergraduates or even graduates that, over a period of three months, could give a young student a firm theoretical and experiential understanding of the Bible as one of the foundations of modern democracy in the English-speaking world.

Here it is in all its pragmatism:

## **Program Rationale**

When the Berlin Wall fell in the early 1990s ushering in the end of communism, many Westerners agreed with Francis Fukuyama that the world had reached the “end of history.” By this he meant that liberal democracy and capitalism had won its century-long battle with totalitarianism, both Nazi and Stalinist. It was assumed that all other countries would soon follow suit.

The atrocities of September 11th changed all of that since its perpetrators have literally declared war on Western civilization. They argue that they have an Islamic alternative to liberal democracy, a paradigm for a way of life that they believe to be the only one worth living. And, they are willing to attack us militarily and subvert our educational institutions and political process from the inside, to overthrow our liberal democracies.

This has produced a curious response from Western educators in most colleges and universities. The approach has been nicknamed “Western Civilization has got to go.” The various proponents of this school (who never agree on what should replace Western Civilization) argue that we must treat all cultures as equal and that our secondary school and higher educational curriculums must reflect this diversity. They argue that Western Civilization is no better (and often worse!) than other cultures. They argue that the texts, values, and heritage of Western Civilization should not be “privileged” in the halls of higher education.

In most of the mainstream colleges and universities of Canada, the United States and Britain, this response has become the conventional wisdom of the day. How this has happened is best described in the book [\*Tenured Radicals\*](#) by Roger Kimball. As a

result of this perspective which has taken over the social sciences and humanities, the average undergraduate no longer knows the Bible (New or Old Testament) the classic poems of Homer and by extension, the Great Books of the West (and its history), nor do they understand that the goal of the Holocaust was not only to rid the world of the Jews, but to utterly destroy that amalgam of Biblical and Greek theory and practise, that culminates in liberal democracy—what some still call “Western Culture and Civilization.”

The program described in this proposal was designed to win back college and university students from the politically correct doctrines that today poison the air of our colleges and universities. It is designed to appeal to youth. It does not endorse any specific theories of how the Bible was created and its influence, other than it was created, and has been enormously influential and formative of Western civilization. The program also asserts that there are strong, if not seminal, Biblical origins of our democratic beliefs and practises.

For example, our courts of law are highly influenced by Protestant and Old Testament concepts of justice and equality before the law and the dismissal of divine right. One may even go as far as arguing that the psychological structure of modern adults in the West has a Biblical substratum, and that denying the moral force and psychological truth of this cultural reality, will just give us more, rather than less, social turmoil.

The late, great Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye, was fond of pointing out to his students that all English literature is dependent on the Bible. Its mythological

motives, its diction and more than two thousand years of associations and connotations prevent even the most secular of writers from escaping its grasp. Frye's understanding of the Biblical paradigm of modern literature is refreshingly at odds with the post-modernist trend in the interpretation of literature now in vogue at our universities.

The practise of democracy shows us the many obvious and not so obvious ways how the heritage of the Bible, modified by the thinking of the Greeks, influences our daily life. That is what makes the West unique. These were the principles for which Winston Churchill and millions of Canadians, Americans, and other democratic citizens were willing to die during WWII.

It is with these thoughts in mind that the following proposal has been developed. It assumes that the Bible is a living legacy. *That is, it is the unconscious foundation of modern Western life regardless of whether you do or do not believe in revelation.* Given the multi-cultural paradigm now battling for the soul of the West, the Bible's legacy needs to be better understood by all rational citizens of the West since, alongside the heritage of Greece, it is the source of so much of our "modern" institutions. This legacy is now under attack from inside the university and from the Wahabi madrasas in the near east and around the world. The Museum of the Bible could easily adopt the proposal described below and begin the process of "re-educating" American youth on the Biblical heritage of their democratic tradition.

If you examine the various seminars that are offered in Israel by American colleges with programs there, or Israeli universities with programs for English speakers, you will find none like this one. This proposal adopts a middle way. It is



not designed to oppose the faith of any student. It establishes a framework by which students can develop an interest in this central text of modern civilisation without the pressure of adhering to or joining any sect. And, it is done in a way that will immediately capture the imagination of the undergraduate. For there is no greater motivation to reading a historically significant text such as the Bible than to walk where the prophets walked, stand in front of the gates of Jerusalem, feel the Mediterranean sun on your back, and the wind out of Egypt and contemplate the caves of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the dry desert air.

There is a battle going on for the souls of the young. The program described here is one tactic in the war to win back our youth to liberal democracy by celebrating the legacy of the Bible. This is what it would look like.

### **A Field School for the Study of the Bible and Civilisation**

This field school is designed as an educational program whose goal it is to provide university students and interested adults with seminars that combine residence and travel in Israel and neighbouring countries. It includes lectures, language study, field work, and private tutorials with field school staff.

Since this field school is about the Bible and its enduring influence on modern democracies it is based in Israel where the ecology, geography, ethnography, national language, educational facilities, and local expertise allow for a holistic understanding of the cultures and environments of the

ancient world and their legacy, which are the special focus of this program.

This program is interested in maintaining a student to teacher ratio of ten to one, thus guaranteeing that seminar participants receive personal attention from all field school staff and that they will be able to experience graduate school conditions within an undergraduate academic framework.

### **The Bible and its Legacy**

The academic term of the first seminar will be held in Israel at facilities near the Sea of Galilee.

The fundamental objective of this seminar abroad is to present overseas participants with a comprehensive and comparative understanding of the civilisations of the ancient near east, their relation to the Bible and their enduring legacy that lives on today in our law, literature, visual art and arrangements for living (such as the much-disputed phenomenon of love, marriage and monogamy in its Western forms).

The seminar rests on four pillars; language training, lectures, seminars, and field trips to various parts of the country to get an on-site "feel" for the spatial organisation and material culture upon which life in the ancient near east was based, from prehistoric times to the fall of the Western Roman Empire and on into late antiquity.

All seminar participants will have access to the necessary written materials, videos, archaeological artifacts and museum collections that are spread across the State of Israel to round out their understanding of class and field work. In addition, each student will have one of the resident lecturers as her or his academic advisor under whose guidance each participant will be able to explore their area of interest in detail.

### **Accommodation and Facilities**

The site for this seminar abroad is the Lower Galilee in a rural settlement with modern facilities. Students will be housed in rooms shared by small groups within walking distance of all the settlement's facilities. These include a swimming pool, dining room, classrooms, lecture hall, study rooms, and library.

The Lower Galilee is ideally situated in Israel. One can sample the delights of city life in the ancient town of Tiberias with a bus drive from the seminar base of less than an hour. In under an hour one can arrive at the port city of Haifa in the Carmel hills overlooking the Mediterranean. Haifa is famous for its beaches, its many and inexpensive middle eastern restaurants, and the Persian Gardens of the Bahai Temple—one of many faiths that have attached themselves to the land of the Bible. The Mediterranean is never far away.

### **Transport**

Private buses in Israel are, safe, comfortable, and

inexpensive. They are well-maintained and are served by the highways that connect all parts of the country. One has easy access to areas such as the Golan, Galilee, Sharon Plain, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea and the Negev, all areas of great interest to any student of the Bible and the ancient near east.

Consider for example the Golan Heights. It is not only a place of wide vistas and snow-covered mountains, but it is also a treasure trove of archaeological sites and nature reserves, such as the one on Mount Hermon with species of flowers that are found nowhere else in the world. Via Tel Aviv or the Rift Valley highway one can gain access to the Negev, the Dead Sea and the Red Sea port of Eilat with its roads open to Mount Sinai to the south.

Seminar students will have access to transport which will be used for various field trips and will be made available for those who, toward the end of the seminar, opt to follow the "Shvil Yisrael" (Israel Trail) a series of "off the beaten track" paths designed for hikers who want to walk through the "length and breadth" of the land as did the Patriarchs in their time.

### **Acclimatisation**

The weather in the Galilee throughout the year is in some respects comparable to parts of southern Canada and the North Eastern United States during spring, summer and fall but with milder winters. During some winters parts of Israel experience heavy snow falls. Most seasons, except the rainy winter period, are characterised by warm days and cool evenings, thus

allowing for newly arrived North Americans to easily acclimatise themselves to a different environment without first enduring the extremes of the Negev desert or the high humidity of the Mediterranean coast.

### **The Seminar Approach**

The land of Israel has been settled, migrated to and away from, and conquered by a multitude of different ethnic groups going back over three thousand years. The physical remains of these immigrants and conquerors dot the countryside. They are found in towns, cities, and villages that have been continuously occupied for up to four millennia. Deserted "tels," or overgrown ancient cities and temples can be seen in every part of the country. It has been estimated that it would take more than five hundred years to excavate all of them.

Therefore, we feel that this part of the Eastern Mediterranean has the "geographical and institutional resources" most suitable for the needs of students of the Bible and its legacy. For those students who at the end of the seminar wish to travel to Egypt, Greece, Jordan or Turkey, seminar staff will be on hand to help arrange an itinerary based on the student's interest.

### **Museums and Ancient Artifacts**

In the major cities of the country, Tel Aviv, Beer Sheva, Haifa, and Jerusalem there are large archaeological, historical, and ethnographic museums whose collections of material artifacts often deal in exquisite detail with the

civilisations of the Bible, the ancient near east, and their ethnographic analogues.

Part of almost every seminar will include visits to many of these sites and museums under the supervision of seminar staff who will give on site explanations. In addition, parts of these collections will be made available for hands on study and inspection.

### **In the Footsteps of the Ancients**

Many of the visits to field sites, especially in rural areas, can be organised as hikes that take students off the main roads. It is often much more relevant and physically satisfying to have approached an ancient site, spring or well, knapsack on back, with the sweat, thirst, and muscle strain that were once part and parcel of everyday life in the early agricultural and nomadic settlements of the land of Israel and during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

### **Ethnographic Analogies**

Israel in the year 2018, even though it is a modern society with high literacy and an economy based on advanced technology, still shows the vestiges of a multi-ethnic society whose cultural style and origins are decidedly Mediterranean and Near Eastern.

Among the Jewish population there still exist distinct communities from Yemen, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Greece,

and North Africa as well as non-Muslim, Muslim and Christian communities that span every variation of cultic practise from Samaritans to Greek Orthodox.

Many of these communities have maintained much of their pre-industrial life style including aspects of their social structures, folk religion, ceremonies, music, and dance. These living traditions provide fertile analogies for understanding the ancient near east. Indeed, many of these practises are simply traditions that, having begun in the ancient near east, have continued uninterrupted until the present day.

For example, near the shores of the Mediterranean in and around a low-income housing complex in the city of Haifa, is a cave that has been in constant use for over two thousand years. It is called the Cave of Elijah and according to tradition it is the cave under the hill where Elijah the prophet challenged and triumphed over the priests of Ba'al. It is still a place of pilgrimage, animal sacrifice, and thanksgiving for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. The ethnographic study of such sacred places sheds much light on ancient religious practises and beliefs.

## **Ecology and Society**

This modern/traditional hodgepodge of peoples, cultures, religions, and languages reflects one of the geographical and cultural continuities that characterise the land of Israel and which are partly caused from its unique position as the land bridge between Asia and Africa.

It is a role that it has played for over a million years when early hunters and gatherers, the first members of the modern human species, migrated up the rift valley from East Africa as they spread across the globe. The living sites of these early peoples are found all over the country. Some of them are open sites, some are still buried in debris while others have been excavated, but all are open to visitors who respect these sites.

Much of the ethnic and religious distinctions that have arisen over the millennia are a function of the ecology of the land, which varies dramatically. It is a combination of Mediterranean, temperate, and desert conditions, with the Saharan-like Negev, the Mediterranean forest of the Galilee, the humid, lowland coast, and the temperate to montane climate of the Golan.

In ancient times the ecological situation was not much different than what it is today. As a result, the land of Israel was often a frontier that separated and connected different societies, religious groups, languages, and empires and especially the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, all of whom have left traces of their material culture behind them, whether they stayed for five or five hundred years.

For those who are interested in the natural history or ethnobiology of the ancient near east, one can still find in Israel many of the wild as well as domesticated species of plants and animals that were essential to the rise of agriculture in the ancient near east. Likewise, a deeper understanding of ancient religion can be gained from examining the differences between rain fed agricultural systems and those that depended on complex irrigation schemes or pastoral



nomadism.

So, whether one studies Canaanites or Egyptians, Persians, Babylonians or Israelites, or early Christian communities, the material remains of these civilisations can all be found within a short distance from each other. Often, they are found on top of each other in the strata that are common to archaeological sites, as one conquering group established their life style on top of the burnt remains of the previous inhabitants' towns, villages, and cities.

## **Text and Contexts**

One may ask, "Why conduct a seminar that deals with all the major civilisations of the ancient near east and Hellenistic times, their relation to the Bible and the legacy of the Bible on modern men and women?"

The answer is that the contemporary interest in the material remains and social practises of the ancient near east began specifically because of the European and North American preoccupation with the historical context and meaning of the Bible.

The key text to be understood was and is the Bible. *In one sense, then, the context of the Bible is simply those other civilisations that the Israelites lived among such as Egypt and Mesopotamia.* Therefore, we are interested in to what extent modern archaeology, historiography, and ethnography can give us a clearer picture of the Bible, the world of ancient people, and to what degree we still live in that world,

whether it be in the domains of religion, law, literature, music, the iconography of Western art, or the Biblical nature of such social contracts or “covenants” such as the Constitution of the United States of America or Canada’s more recent Charter of Rights.

Modern anthropology is part of this, too, as the work of New Testament scholars like Stevan Davies and Morton Smith has shown us with their exhaustive use of ethnographic studies of ancient magic and spirit possession, that better explain the historicity of Jesus and the rise of the early Christian community.

### **Societies as Living Systems**

Perhaps the best way of understanding the outlines of these ancient cultures can be achieved by taking an anthropological approach. An anthropological and “area studies” perspective starts from the assumption that societies are wholes, and that the parts of these societies contribute to that unique configuration which gives a society, culture, or civilisation its unity or style over time.

What social scientists have come to call “institutions” can be isolated and labelled as special areas of comparative study, such as material technology, settlement patterns, kinship, law, economics, politics, or religion. The people who created and lived within these systems of meaning never thought of these dimensions of social life as discrete entities rather they were part and parcel of everyday life.

It follows logically, then, that for every “great tradition” of court scribes, kings, priests, and aristocrats with their literate understanding of the terrestrial and the celestial there was a folk or “little tradition” of the common people. The elite’s culture was the “icing on the cake,” so to speak. Most ancient societies were comprised of townspeople, peasants, and nomads. Very often it was their experience of nature, society, and religion that formed the substrate or basis of ancient religion, literature, art, and science.

In many respects it was the “masses” that formed the human building blocks and major contexts of ancient life. Therefore, a “comparative institutions” approach to society and culture in the ancient near east is central to any balanced understanding of the peoples who once inhabited the fertile crescent and their influence on our way of life today.

In this way we can guard against the bias toward the sacred and historical writings of the bearers of the great tradition and use archaeology and anthropology to give us a more balanced picture of these archaic societies, as well as our own.

### **Questions Across Courses**

Such an approach prods us to ask the following questions:

- 1) What was the influence, both religious and political, of the two great civilisations of the Nile and the Euphrates on the smaller tribes and city-states that lived in between them and how much of Egypt and Mesopotamia “lives” in the

Biblical heritage?

2) What ecological and demographic factors precipitated the rise of ancient near eastern civilisation?

3) Did the growing salinity that may have weakened the early Sumerians' agricultural base have an analogy in Egypt, which the ancient Greek historian Herodotus once called the "gift of the Nile?"

4) Would this also explain the comparative non-violence of Egyptian civilisation vis a vis those more violent and less stable societies of the Tigris and Euphrates?

5) Is it possible that much that is thought of as "Biblical" is simply a normal part of widespread ideas and beliefs that were common to the ancient near east, but that have only retained our attention through our modern interest in the Bible?

6) On the other hand, what makes Biblical civilisation different from all the others that came before and lived beside it-i.e. what is its lasting effect upon us theologically, legally, politically, psychologically? Is it truly different?

7) Is the linguistic and cultural background of our own time and culture so vastly different from that of twenty-five hundred to two thousand years ago thus preventing a

true understanding of the original meaning of the Bible, as the late John Allegro once claimed?

8) How is it that much of ancient religion in India and as well among the indigenous religions of the New World was related to cults of sacred drugs and that this does not seem to be the case for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?

9) Was there a qualitatively different mode of thought that was common to ancient people? For example, the psychologist Julian Jayes has argued that ancient people were not "conscious" in the way that moderns are.

10) Is it therefore legitimate to seek in the non-industrial world, in places such as East Africa, the fringes of Arabia or in North Africa, for societies that are analogues to those found in the ancient near east, to try and make better sense of the ancient world? For example, Bruce Lincoln has taken the Samburu and Masai of Kenya as an analogue for his analysis of ancient Persian religion.

11) After more than a century of archaeology and research do we still believe that the nineteenth century scholar Robertson Smith was correct in his assumption that there was a common religion shared by almost all ancient Semitic groups and from which Israel, with great difficulty, tried to break away? Do the recently discovered lectures of Robertson Smith, published during the last five years put this question in a new light?

12) Can one subscribe to the radical thesis, recently put forward by Bernal that ancient Greek civilisation was based on Egyptian culture, and that the Greeks themselves attest to this in their most ancient myths and chronicles?

13) Are all the above preoccupations just further examples of “Western ethnocentrism” in viewing other civilisations simply as ways and means to self-understanding? And, if so, does that mean that modern civilisation should adopt the radical cultural relativism of Margaret Mead and most contemporary anthropologists?

14) Finally, what of Moses and Monotheism? Freud’s work by that name is the continuation of a discourse as old as Hellenism as to the relationship between Israel and Egypt, polytheist and monotheist, insider and outsider. For example, Assman’s book called [\*Moses The Egyptian\*](#) chronicles this discourse which has confounded the greatest thinkers of the West throughout time.

These are the kinds of questions and issues that will be raised throughout this seminar in addition to language training, field trips, taking the comparative study of civilisations and institutions through time and space as our focus. Together, these all add up to provide this educational program its unique perspective.

## **Professors and Courses**

## **Cross Cultural Teaching**

Israel is the only country in the middle east where one of the ancient Western Semitic dialects, Hebrew, is the national language of the country. Although the modern versions of the language are somewhat different than Biblical Hebrew, any modern Israeli can understand Biblical Hebrew with minimal difficulty.

For those Israelis who have become Biblical scholars and archaeologists they have the advantage of not only living, speaking, dreaming, and working in Hebrew, they also live in and among the sites of the Holy Land and thus have a deep and abiding affinity for its geography, climatic rhythms, and their Biblical significance.

Therefore, this seminar will engage, in addition to the staff of the Museum of the Bible, Israeli and Israel-based college and university lecturers who specialise in the teaching and research of the following fields of study. By ranging across all Israeli institutions of higher learning that deal with the ancient near east, students will receive perspectives on these fields which are delivered without the prejudices and constraints of the host institution. *This approach will give this seminar the greatest degree of academic freedom to explore these topics.* Topics investigated and taught will include:

- 1) The Old and New Testament and Their Influence on Modern Society-A General Introduction
- 2) Near Eastern Natural History and Historical Geography
- 3) The Prehistory of the Near East from one million B.C. to

the rise of Sumeria

4) The Sumerians

5) The Ancient Semites of the Fertile Crescent-Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians

6) The Western Semites-Mari, Ebla, Ras Shamra, Phoenicia and the Canaanites

7) A Western Semitic Enigma-Hebrews and Israelites

8) Indo Europeans on the Fringes-Hittites, Persians and Medes

9) Indo Europeans in the Centre-The Sea Peoples and the Mycenaean World with a focus on the Homeric Epics

10) Egypt -The Gift of the Nile

11) Inside and Out-Canonical and Non-Canonical Texts-OT and NT

12) The Bible and the World of the Greeks

13) The Bible and the World of the Romans

14) The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Enigma of Christian Origins

15) Rabbis and Christians-The Talmud and the Church

16) Late Antiquity-Islam, Judaism, Christianity and the Medieval Synthesis

17) Political Hebraicism and the origins of modern American democracy

18) The Enlightenment and the Modern Mind-A Return to Paganism or Something New?

19) The Legacy of the Bible-Ancient, Medieval, Modern



## 20) The Bible-A Legacy or Burden?

All the staff teaching within the program will be fluent English speakers, many of whom will have taught at universities in Europe, Canada, and the U.S.A. Such a set-up will enhance the cross-cultural similarities and differences that will come out in the interaction between student and teacher.

### **The Structure of the Courses**

Each of the above topics can comprise a course which will run throughout the seminar. Each course will be divided into two streams, history and institutions or, as sociologists are fond of saying "diachronic" and "synchronic study."

Half of the lectures will trace the rise and fall of each of these above-mentioned civilisations. The other half will be divided among a series of lectures that try to make sense of the major outlines of the institutions that gave these societies their identities over time. All lectures and courses will conclude with presentations on the effect of the Bible on modern thought and practise.

The scheduling of the courses will be such that those who are not registered in some will still be able to selectively attend those lectures that cater to their interests. Therefore, the lectures on institutions will be co-ordinated in such a way that the order and time of their presentation will be the same, regardless of which course is being given. One can then expect a tentative schedule for the teaching of

these topics and which will be presented according to the following list:

- 1) Ecology and Material Culture
- 2) Kinship and Social Organisation
- 3) Legal Customs and Courts
- 4) Economics and Trade
- 5) Politics and Warfare
- 6) Religion, Myth and Ritual
- 7) Literature, Music and Art
- 8) The Enduring Legacy-The Effect of These Practises on Modern Civilisation

Each course will include the screening of many documentary films relevant to its theme. The entire set of films covering a variety of aspects of life in the ancient near east and the Bible will be made available to all students during the seminar for viewing online, outside of the classroom.

At the beginning of each course each teacher will hand out five essay topics with accompanying bibliographies. These will be the sole source of the student's essay on the topic. Each student will choose one of these topics to prepare as a term paper.

In this way the program will insure that students will not waste their time and energy finding, developing, and expanding

a bibliography for their term papers. Instead, they can read through and write their essay with the guidance of their advisor, without sacrificing time better spent on field trips, museum visits, and visits to the beach.

All students must take the course called "The Enduring Legacy-The Effect of The Bible on Modern Civilisation." Then, they have the choice of one other course and a language.

## **Languages**

The seminar will be offering private tutoring in the following ancient languages-Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Western Semitic Dialects, Biblical Hebrew, Greek, and Egyptian Hieroglyphics. Modern Hebrew will also be offered to those interested. The texts studied will focus on scholarship that discusses the ancient near east, thus feeding back into the theme of the seminar.

Students can begin their studies of these languages as entrants to the seminar or, if they have already begun the study of these languages, specialists will prepare- having once informed the program administrator of their linguistic proficiency- tutors, materials and exercises at advanced levels for them.

## **Tuition and Credit**

Each student can sit in on as many additional lectures as he or she desires. However, to gain one undergraduate university

credit for their efforts they will be responsible for studying a language and taking two series of lectures. This is essential if the comparative and holistic goals of the courses and the seminar are to be fulfilled.

Once a week each one of the lecturers participating in the program will give a general talk for all seminar participants, surveying their field and discussing their central research interests, thus giving students a taste of high quality research in process.

The entire seminar, including airfare costs will be similar to those found on [www.studyabroad.com](http://www.studyabroad.com). The seminar will take just under three months to complete. This will include all meals and board, seminars, language training, field trips, books, articles, videos, and access to the facilities at the seminar center. Each student will choose an academic advisor and can consult the Seminar Director concerning any problem that may arise.

The program will be accepting students on a first come, first serve basis only. All applications and payments must be made in advance. There is room for thirty-six students in each seminar for two seminars a year and one summer seminar of eight weeks, so that high academic standards and low student-to-teacher ratio are maintained.

## **Conclusion**

The conceptualization and design of this seminar is not rocket science, but it is visionary. This kind of teaching goes

against the grain. It is based on the idea that society and history are complex, that they must be studied in detail and, above all, that the legacy of the Bible lives on in our thoughts, our hopes, our institutions, and in our politics.

In a world where most countries still believe that might is right, ours is a fitting way to begin the education of the next generation. Like our forbears during the nineteenth century once believed, it is their inheritance by right.

I hope this program is adopted by the Museum of the Bible and that it will provide the Museum with a generation long mandate for today's North American youth who are, in general, grossly unaware of the Bible as one of the foundations of North American democracy.

### **Afterthought**

The following is a short list of some of the key books that inspired me to create this project proposal. There are scores of others, as well as countless articles which have contributed to the writing of this proposal. Some of them I have read many times. Others, I have scanned and others still, I have only briefly examined. No doubt, when I get a chance to read them all again I will be able to rank them appropriately as is the 21st century custom. But, for those who cannot wait for that day, I have provided links to some of them according to the 20th century custom, in their chronological order.

[\*The Legacy of Israel\*](#)

[\*The Jewish Contribution to Civilization\*](#)

[\*The Bible and Civilization\*](#)

[\*The Mediterranean 1972 English translation\*](#)

[The Biblical Heritage of American Democracy](#)

[The Gifts of the Jews 1998](#)

[Political Hebraism](#)

[The Hebrew Republic](#)

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