



Religious Studies 2163A/B (670)
“An Eye for an Eye”: Biblical Foundation of Crime and Punishment
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026

Instructor: C. Halberstam

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Course Information

Calendar Description:

How similar are biblical ideas of crime and punishment to our own? We cover topics like vengeance, blood feud, ordeal, and collective punishment alongside more familiar issues such as courtroom procedure, rules of evidence, and remedies for wrongful judgments. Do ancient, biblical approaches to crime and punishment remain relevant today?

Extra Information: 3 lecture hours.

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category B

Subject Code: RELSTUD

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or 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.



RS 2163B (670)

An Eye for an Eye: Biblical Foundations of Crime and Punishment

Enrollment

Prerequisite(s): no prerequisites or antirequisites

Recommended Preparation: no knowledge of religion, the Bible, or criminology is assumed. A previous course in Arts & Humanities is recommended.

OVERVIEW

Course Description:

What influence does biblical and pre-biblical legal thought have on our thinking about crime and punishment today? In this course, we will learn about ancient, religious structures of crime and punishment by looking closely at stories of biblical criminals. Topics covered include vengeance / blood-feud; the death penalty; trial procedure and rules of evidence; divine retribution; and miscarriage of justice. *This course offers a **secular** approach to the Bible and religion.*

Course Materials:

All course materials will be available on OWL or accessed digitally through the library at no extra cost.

Class Format:

This course is delivered as an online, asynchronous course. However, **there are deadlines for completing work throughout the term.** You cannot wait until the last two weeks and then do all the coursework at once.

Instructor Information:

Professor Chaya Halberstam – Instructor

Jennifer Baker – Teaching Assistant

Please use the Brightspace direct messaging system to contact us

Statement of Solidarity: I stand in solidarity with all who are struggling for a fairer university in the context of our long history of white supremacy and other systemic forms of discrimination. I pledge to listen empathetically and with an open mind to any concerns you raise with me at any point during the term. I will **NEVER** hold it against you if you speak up about feeling uncomfortable or distressed at any point during the semester.

Message Response Time:

We will generally be "on duty" Monday-Friday, 9:30am-5:30pm. Sometimes we will be able to respond immediately, but not always. Rest assured that we will get back to you as soon as possible within our work schedules.

Office hours:

Your instructor will be available in person on Wednesdays from 12:30-2:30. I am always happy to schedule an appointment outside of these hours to help you or chat with you online or in person, typically in 15 minute timeslots.

Resources:

- King's ITS Helpdesk: For OWL support and other technical support, contact the King's ITS Helpdesk.
- Student Support: Browse this site for the kind of support you need.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A student who passes this course should be able, upon completion, to:

- ❖ Describe and recall concepts of and topics in crime and punishment in an ancient, biblical context

A student who gets a C in this course should be able, in addition, to:

- ❖ Compare ancient ideas with contemporary ones
- ❖ Evaluate different approaches to crime and punishment
- ❖ Critically appraise criminal and penal models from different societies and different eras

A student who gets a B in this course should be able, in addition, to:

- ❖ Connect biblical stories of crime with legal concepts
- ❖ Analyse biblical stories from a legal/ethical perspective and observe gaps and ambiguities
- ❖ Identify multiple interpretations of biblical stories

A student who gets an A in this course should be able, in addition, to:

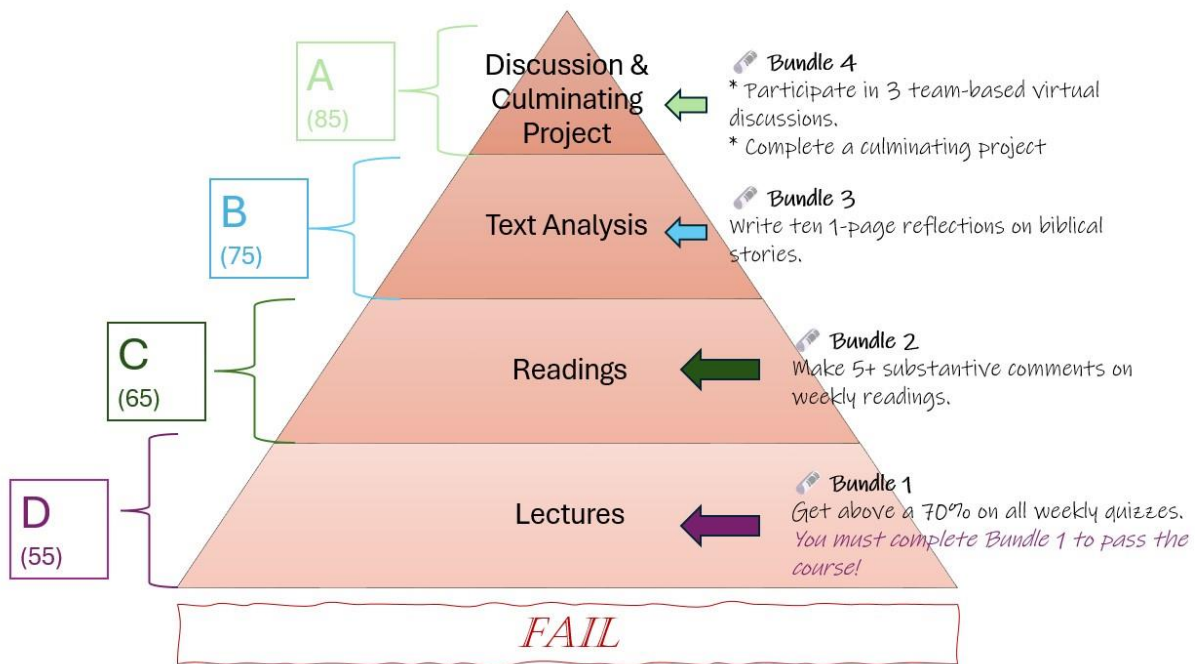
- ❖ Identify the convergences and divergences of religious and secular law
- ❖ Analyze various impacts of biblical thinking on contemporary approaches to crime and punishment
- ❖ Weigh moral and legal considerations in decisionmaking from a variety of perspectives

ASSESSMENT

🛑 **STOP!** Grading for this course will be VERY DIFFERENT from what you are used to! I will be using a system called “specs grading.”

Specifications grading allows students to **choose the grade they want to earn** in the course based on **the amount of effort** they want to put in. In a specifications grading system, the professor creates “bundles” of assignments for each letter grade: the more bundles you complete, the higher your grade. In order to earn the grade of their choice, students complete the bundle of assignments aligned with that grade. For every assignment, the professor shares a clear set of criteria for successful completion (aka, the assignment’s specifications).

No letter grades are given for individual assignments; rather, each assignment a student turns in either meets the specifications or it does not. Instead of a letter grade on each assignment, the instructor offers feedback. Students receive four (4) tokens throughout the term to exchange for extensions, re-submissions, etc.. **All work is marked pass/fail.** **You pass if you meet the specs. You get a “plus” if you exceed the specs by doing an exceptional job.**



Breakdown

Pass (D): Watch weekly lectures and get above a 70% on weekly quizzes

C: Lectures & Quizzes + read readings on Perusall and make 5+ substantive comments on each

B: Lectures & Quizzes + Readings + Read and analyse 10 biblical stories and write short (1-page, with prompts) reflection responses

A: Lectures & Quizzes + Readings + Biblical Story Reflections + produce an in-depth final comparative project and participate in monthly end-of-unit team debates/discussions

There is no final exam in this course

Late Assignments & Revisions

Each student in the class will get **four “tokens”** valid for one revision each of a failed assignment or one assignment up to **one** week late without accommodations, each. Your TA and I will keep track of these on a spreadsheet, and you should keep track of them too. If you are sick or have other kinds of extenuating circumstances, you will need to go to academic counselling and we can work out accommodations together. If you do not have official accommodations, **any assignment more than one week late will be considered missed.**



KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

GENERAL COURSE POLICIES

2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King’s University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

GBSV Support:

King’s is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western’s Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with your instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

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; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

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.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

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.