

Biblical Foundations Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

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1 Course Description

The First Testament of Christian Scripture, also called the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, is a fundamental part of Christian tradition and durable rule of faith and practice. Students in this course will therefore be introduced to historical and literary data important for understanding the origins of the Hebrew Bible and its subsequent function as Old Testament Scripture in a variety of cultural and religious contexts.

The broad sweep of biblical tradition will be presented through a survey of representative books from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. To help foster an ecumenical outlook, primary readings from the Bible will be supplemented by case studies of classic Jewish and Christian readings of biblical texts. Students will develop their exegetical skills by studying these examples, and so learn to appreciate the diverse literary, canonical, cultural, historical, hermeneutical, and theological elements involved in biblical interpretation. In addition, the course will consider some ways that the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament can feature in the practice of ministry and in the spiritual practice of faith communities.

Prerequisites: none. The course is required for HB courses at or above the 3000-level.

2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to: name major Old Testament people and events; locate a few important biblical sites on a map; give key dates for Israel's history and summarize the succession of superpowers in the Ancient Near Eastern political theatre from Egypt to Greece; recognize and cite examples of most genres of biblical literature; understand the general shape of the Masoretic Text tradition and differentiate it from other canonical orders; report on parallel and divergent material across the Law and the Prophets, such as the uses of the Divine Name or the rationales for sabbath observance; classify and begin to evaluate a variety of ancient and modern approaches to the Bible.

Students should also be able to identify settings in which the Scriptures of Israel are read (notably the synagogue, church, and academy), employ terminology appropriate to these communities, recognize where their own biographies place them in relation to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and its uses, and monitor and test their individual attitudes and assumptions. They should be able to extend their awareness of the Bible's contemporary readers to the Bible's long history of reception. Finally, students should begin to infer what Jesus meant in speaking of "the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24:44), and so learn to hear claims about New Testament fulfilment of scripture in light of the unique voice that the Old Testament retains along side of the New in Christian Scripture.

3 Required Texts & Materials

The following texts are required. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase their own copies. Library copies that are not reference works have been placed on a 2-hour reserve.

[NRSV] M. D. Coogan, ed. *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: NRSV*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN 978-0190276072 (get the hardcover).

[HBFB] J. Kaminsky and J. Lohr. *The Hebrew Bible for Beginners: A Jewish and Christian Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1426775635.

An good alternative study Bible is the NJPS: Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). A reference copy is available in the library, and it is well worth consulting.

4 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings will be recommended throughout the semester. Excerpts from this literature will either be placed on reserve or made available through the course website. Give this material good effort and attention. It represents some of the best contemporary readers of the Bible, and you will not want to miss their hermeneutical and theological insights.

Also, the following reference works are worth owning and consulting. [Making Sense] in particular contains sound advice on core skills like reading religious texts, writing essays and reviews, revising essays, making oral presentations, and learning languages.

[Making Sense] Northey, Margot, Bradford A. Anderson, and Joel N. Lohr. *Making Sense in Religious Studies: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0199026838.

[SBL2] Collins, Billie Jean, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1589839649. Designed to augment *Chicago Style* (the standard at AST), there is also a free *Student Supplement for SBL2*.

5 Course Outline

We will adhere to the schedule in [Table 1](#) as closely as possible, though the professor reserves the right to adjust it to suit the needs of the class.

§. Primary (chapters)	Secondary (pgs)	Supplement (author)	Due
I. LAW / TORAH / PENTATEUCH			
1. Genesis 1–11	[HBFB , 1–26]	Christopher Seitz	10 Sep.
2. Genesis 12–50	[HBFB , 27–64]	Jon Levenson	17 Sep.
3. Exodus 1–34	[HBFB , 65–75]	C. Mathews McGinnis	24 Sep.
4. Leviticus 1–16	[HBFB , 77–83]	Gary Anderson	1 Oct.
~. No Class: AST Closed on Monday			8 Oct.
5. Deuteronomy	[HBFB , 85–99]	Walter Moberly	15 Oct.
☞ A first short paper is <i>due</i> by the end of the fifth week of class			19 Oct.
II. PROPHETS: FORMER & LATTER			
6. Joshua, Judges	[HBFB , 103–121]	Phyllis Trible	22 Oct.
7. 1 & 2 Samuel	[HBFB , 123–134]	Stephen Chapman	29 Oct.
8. 1 & 2 Kings	[HBFB , 135–143]	Robert Alter	5 Nov.
~. No Class: AST Closed on Monday			12 Nov.
9. Isaiah 1–12, 36–40	[HBFB , 145–168]	Ellen Davis	19 Nov.
10. Hosea–Jonah	[HBFB , 169–184]	James Nogalski	26 Nov.
☞ A second short paper is <i>due</i> by the end of the tenth week of class			30 Nov.
III. WRITINGS: WISDOM & PRAISE			
11. Psalms 1–8, 41, 51, 89–90	[HBFB , 187–202]	N. deClaissé-Walford	3 Dec.
12. Ecclesiastes	[HBFB , 203–246]	Michael V. Fox	10 Dec.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses			14 Dec.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

See the AST website for a list of other **important dates**.

6 Evaluation

6.1 Grade Structure for BF 1001

1. **Reading prompts** will be given throughout the semester. They are low-risk writing exercises designed to encourage careful reading of the assigned material, and to help explore its significance. They are not marked (although points may be deducted if the exercise is not taken seriously), and there is no length requirement. In general, prompt responses submitted online should not exceed 300 words.
2. Two **short papers** will facilitate student engagement with the art of biblical interpretation. One is keyed to the exposition of a scholar, the other to a short biblical text. Each should be about 2,000 words in length. Either paper (your choice) is due at the end of the fifth week of class; the remaining one is due at the end of the tenth week.
 - (a) A **review essay** invites student reflection on a model work of biblical interpretation, to be selected from the supplementary articles. Note that a review is not the same thing as a report. Devote the first half of the paper to a summary the

argument under review, and the second half to critical analysis and evaluation of the same. Be fair, but do not fail to take a position. The paper needs to develop a thesis. See me and [Making Sense, Chs 3, 5–7, 11] for guidance.

- (b) An **exegetical essay** provides an opportunity for direct work with the biblical text. The first task is to identify an appropriate text. Select a suitably short passage from the HB/OT. Then, conduct an analysis and explication of it. Interact with [HBFB] and at least two other commentators. Advance a thesis that relates to the text itself. See me and [Making Sense, Chs 3, 5, 8, 11] for guidance.
3. Each student will lead a **seminar discussion** of one chapter from the HB/OT, freely chosen from a week's primary reading. The discussion should last about 25 minutes. It needs to begin with a brief (5 min) **outline** of the chapter. Outlines must be original, not borrowed from commentators. They should be circulated as handouts and explained orally. The balance of the time should be spent helping the class discover, elaborate, reflect on, test, or otherwise explore the meaning of the passage. Critical to success here is the ability to ask good questions of the Bible.

The breakdown for the semester's total work is shown in Table 2.

Reading Prompts	20%
Review Essay	30%
Exegetical Essay	30%
Seminar Discussion	20%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST's **Academic Calendar** provides guidelines and detailed criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks.

7 Other Course Policy

Late work will not be accepted, except in genuinely extenuating circumstances. Students must submit something before the deadline if they wish to receive credit. Unless I state otherwise, written assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM on the date indicated.

Essay submissions must be typewritten, double-spaced, and formatted as PDFs. They should be free from error. In this course they should follow SBL Style (see [SBL2] in section 4, above). As a reminder, AST also upholds an Inclusive Language Policy.

Plagiarism, if **detected**, will result in failure of the course.

Students should request permission to record a class or lecture. If permission is granted, or if recordings are provided (as in the case of an online course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

If you have abilities or disabilities that require modifications to the assessment process or other aspects of this course, please advise the course instructor as soon as possible.

Finally, I encourage the conscientious use of laptops, tablets, and other technology in my classes. In classroom settings, realize that, as **cognitive psychologists have demonstrated**, "laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers." Do your part to foster an environment of open dialogue by honouring the presence of your classmates. In online settings, consider both the physical environment in which you choose to work and the virtual environment that you help create through your participation in various forums. Let your engagement in this course be marked by rigour and charity alike.