

Exodus and the Life of Moses

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1 Course Description

Who is Moses? How does his story shape Israel's story in Egypt and at Sinai? This course will examine the life of Moses in the context of the book of Exodus, with special attention to the book's canonical shape and historic reception. Students will also become familiar with some of the current debate about the formation of the Pentateuch, particularly as it relates to different accounts of Israel's origins in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.

Prerequisites: BF 1001; RM 1000 or GTRS 6000.

2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to demonstrate a critical awareness of the main contours of the Book of Exodus and, to a more limited extent, of its modern interpretation and ancient reception history. They should be able to communicate their own understanding of who Moses is, with an ecumenical outlook that includes some knowledge of Jewish and Christian tradition. They should develop a critical self-awareness of their own patterns of thought about biblical story and biblical law, particularly where these elements converge on the figure of Moses. Ideally, they will discover in the study of Old Testament scripture a genuine love of learning, all due humility before the task of interpretation, and the courage to address themselves to text and tradition.

Students should also be able to: summarize and understand major hermeneutical approaches to the Pentateuch; identify, analyze, and explicate short passages from it, especially from Exodus; appreciate, compare, and evaluate modern and traditional religious understandings of the text; generate and defend an original, coherent thesis about Moses.

3 Required Texts & Materials

The following texts are required. Students should have their own copies. Library copies that are not reference works have been placed on reserve.

- [Nyssa] Gregory of Nyssa. *The Life of Moses*. Translated by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson. New York: Paulist, 1978, rev. 2002; repr. New York: HarperOne, 2006. ISBN 978-0809121120 (Paulist) or 978-0060754648 (HarperOne).
- [Sommer] Benjamin D. Sommer. *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0300234688.
- [von Rad] Gerhard von Rad. *Moses*. 2nd ed. Edited by K. C. Hanson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011. ISBN 978-1606087718.

Students should also have a good, modern translation of the Bible such as the NRSV or NJPS. If you want a study Bible, I recommend either Michael Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: NRSV with Apocrypha* (5th ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2018) or, with some superb notes and essays but neither Apocrypha nor NT, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Second Edition* (2nd ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2014).

4 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings may be recommended throughout the semester. Excerpts from this literature will either be placed on reserve or made available through the course website. The following secondary titles are notable but not required:

- [Buber] Martin Buber. *Moses*. Oxford: East and West Library, 1946.
- [Childs] Brevard S. Childs. *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974.
- [Schmid] Konrad Schmid. *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*. Translated by James D. Nogalski. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010.

Also, the following basic works are worth consulting and even owning. [Making] 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] 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. AST Library: Ref BL 41.N67 2019.

[SBL2] Collins, Billie Jean, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. Designed to augment *Chicago Style* (the standard at AST), there is also a free *Student Supplement for SBL2*. AST Library: Ref PN 147.S26 2014.

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	Secondary	Due
1. Exodus 1		8 Sep.
2. Exodus 2	[Nyssa, 1–68]	15 Sep.
3. Exodus 3	[Nyssa, 69–132]	22 Sep.
4. Exodus 7	[von Rad, 1–44]	29 Sep.
5. Exodus 12	[von Rad, 45–87]	6 Oct.
☞ The first paper is due before the sixth week of class.		26 Oct.
~. No Class: Thanksgiving		13 Oct.
~. No Class: Reading Week		20–24 Oct.
6. Exodus 16	[Sommer, 1–26]	27 Oct.
7. Exodus 19	[Sommer, 27–98]	3 Nov.
8. Exodus 20	[Sommer, 99–146]	10 Nov.
9. Exodus 24	[Sommer, 147–187]	17 Nov.
10. Film: <i>The Prince of Egypt</i>		24 Nov.
11. Exodus 32–33	[Sommer, 188–208]	1 Dec.
12. Exodus 33–34	[Sommer, 209–251]	8 Dec.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due for this course.		15 Dec.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

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

6 Evaluation

The grade structure for HB 3115 has the following elements.

1. To facilitate regular engagement with the biblical text, **notes and quotes** will be solicited from students at the start of each class. Prepare by giving careful attention to the primary reading in a modern translation (such as NJPS or NRSV). Annotate it. Mark up your Bible. Make excursive notes as you read. Reflect: What do you note about the material? What words, phrases, or ideas stand out to you? Graduate students must augment this work by consulting a different commentaries in each half of

the class, ideally from two different eras. All students should come prepared to share and discuss your observations with the class.

2. Imagine that a church press is releasing a new edition of a classic treatise on Moses, and you have agreed to write a new preface. Compose a new **book preface** for either [Nyssa] or [von Rad]. Describe what your selected book contributes to a Christian understanding of Moses. Be sure to touch on aspects of biography and authority (legal and moral). Contextualize your description by comparing your book to a Christian portrait from a very different era, whether modern (20th C. German in [von Rad]) or ancient (4th C. Cappadocian Greek in [Nyssa]). Focus on one work and use the other for auxiliary support. By all means “spoil” the works, and illustrate your account with abundant paraphrase and a few well-chosen quotes. Your preface should be about 3,000 words long. It is due before the sixth week of class.
3. **Teach a chapter** from [Sommer]. In most cases, students will work in pairs. Undergraduate students should pair up with graduate students. One or two graduate students may elect to work alone. Teaching sessions should last 30 minutes, with about 20 min given to presentation and 10 min to class discussion.
4. A **final thesis** gives students an opportunity to develop their own answer to the question “Who is Moses?” The paper must have a clear thesis, which should govern the entire discussion. The thesis needs to be supported by exegesis of passages from Exodus and research into the literature. The paper should also show an awareness of the readings, lectures, and classroom discussions. It should be 4,000 words long, the first 500 of which are to be read aloud at the start of the last class. Let this introduction feature a single-sentence thesis statement. The paper is due by the last class.

For guidance on how to approach these and other assignments, see [Making] in [section 4](#), above. The breakdown for the semester’s total work is shown in [Table 2](#).

Notes & Quotes	20%
Book Preface	25%
Teaching Session	25%
Final Thesis	30%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST’s [Academic Calendar](#) provides guidelines and criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks. Note that graduate and undergraduate programs are assessed on a different scales at AST (see [Table 3](#)). For graduate students a C grade is deemed “Unsatisfactory,” whereas for undergraduates a C can be satisfactory in different degrees and a D is assigned for “Unsatisfactory” performance.

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, assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM (Atlantic) on the date indicated.

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

GRADUATE COURSES				UNDERGRADUATE COURSES		
	Percent	Descriptor	Points	Percent	Descriptor	Points
A+	90–100	Exceptional	4.30	90–100	Exceptional	4.30
A	85–89	Outstanding	4.00	85–89	Outstanding	4.00
A–	80–84	Excellent	3.70	80–84	Excellent	3.70
B+	77–79	Very Good	3.30	77–79	Very Good	3.30
B	73–76	Good	3.00	73–76	Good	3.00
B–	70–72	Marginal	2.70	70–72	Fair	2.70
C+				67–69	Satisfactory	2.30
C	60–69	Unsatisfactory	2.00	63–66	Less Satisfactory	2.00
C–				60–62	Marginal	1.70
D				50–59	Unsatisfactory	1.00
F	0–59	Failure	0.00	0–49	Failure	0.00

Table 3: Summary Definitions of Grades at AST

when referring to human beings. Our traditions have different norms for speech about God; you are of course free to follow and explore those traditions when referring to God.

Plagiarism is the **failure to attribute** (by means of footnotes when writing or aloud when speaking) any ideas, phrases, sentences, materials, syntheses, et cetera, that another author has composed and that you have borrowed for your own work. Plagiarism is unethical. Academic penalties for plagiarism at AST are serious, and may include failure of the course or even suspension of further studies. Unintentional plagiarism is considered plagiarism. Unacknowledged use of content generated by computers is considered plagiarism. AST's Plagiarism Policy is found under that heading in the Academic Calendar.

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) refers to a set of tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, DeepSeek, Gemini, Grok, Otter, Perplexity, and others) that can produce diverse kinds of new media. In this course it is permissible, though perhaps not beneficial, to use GenAI as an aid to study and learning. However, GenAI should not be used to complete course assignments, including by summarizing readings, responding to discussion prompts, or drafting or revising prose. Any use of GenAI in an assignment must be clearly acknowledged up front, with adequate detail about the use case. Err on the side of transparency. Such attribution is a matter of academic and personal integrity. All assignments submitted in this class must be your own original work.

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 or hybrid course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

If you have needs that require modifications to any aspect of this course, please consult with the instructor as soon as possible. Any documentation regarding disabilities that you wish to divulge to AST should be provided to the Registrar's Office, where it will be kept in a confidential file.

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 for dialogue by honouring the presence of your classmates. In online and hybrid 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.

8 Further Bibliography

For additional literature, I recommend exploring [Oxford Bibliographies: Biblical Studies \(Full Text\)](#). You can access the database automatically while on campus or remotely with OpenAthens credentials. Among the many articles by subject-area specialists, see especially these three by Thomas B. Dozeman: “Moses,” “Pentateuch,” and “Book of Exodus.”