

Hebrew Bible Creation and Canon

Professor	Daniel R. Driver, PhD	Course	Version 1.0
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1 Course Description

A study of creation across the Christian Bible, with particular focus on the HB/OT, this course will explore why the topic of creation has been sidelined in biblical studies and biblical theology, and how, thanks in part to the ecological crisis, it is getting new attention. Major headings in the course are creation, counter-creation, de-creation, and re-creation. Minor themes include sabbath, sea monsters, land, city, wisdom, and praise.

Prerequisites: RM 1000 or GTRS 6000; BF 1001.

2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to articulate a theology of creation. In particular, they should be able to: understand a variety of methods and approaches to the theme; analyze a proposal stipulating rules for Christian speech about creation; identify a number of primary texts, both inside and outside the Bible; contextualize and discuss many of those texts informally; name and evaluate with ecumenical sensitivity a range of scholarly interpretations, including by Jews, Christians, and others; formally exegete at least one biblical creation text; begin to construct, or to know how to begin to construct, a more complete biblical theology of creation.

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 will be 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.
- [Myths] Stephanie Dalley, ed. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN: 978-0199538362.
- [Levenson] Jon D. Levenson. *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988 (repr. 1994). ISBN: 978-0691029504.
- [Tanner] Kathryn Tanner. *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988 (repr. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). ISBN: 978-0800637378.

The NJPS is a good alternative study Bible: Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). [See my website for links to required and recommended books, and a discussion of options for a Bible.](#)

4 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings will be recommended throughout the semester and may be placed on reserve or made available through the course website.

The following titles are especially worth owning and consulting. [Davis] explores the theology and ethics of land use. [Smith] develops a suggestive reading of Genesis 1 within a comparative framework. We will read excerpts from both books. Beyond the course theme, [Making Sense] contains sound advice on core skills like reading religious texts, writing essays and reviews, revising essays, making oral presentations, and learning languages. Finally, [SBL₂] will help you format your papers appropriately.

- [Davis] Ellen F. Davis. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0521732239.
- [Smith] Mark S. Smith. *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. ISBN: 978-0800663735.

- [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	Secondary	Due
I. CREATION		
1. Genesis 1–2		13 Sep.
2. Psalms 8; 19; 104	[Tanner , chs 1–2]	20 Sep.
3. Prov 8; Wis of Sol 6	[Tanner , chs 3–end]	27 Sep.
4. Isaiah 40–55	[Smith , ch 1]	4 Oct.
~. No Class: Thanksgiving		11 Oct.
~. No Class: Reading Week		18 Oct.
☞ A first short paper is due by the end of week five		
II. COUNTER-CREATION		
5. Genesis 3–5	[Levenson , chs 1–4]	25 Oct.
6. [Myths , pp 1–153]	[Levenson , chs 5–9]	1 Nov.
7. [Myths , pp 154–315]	[Levenson , chs 10–12]	8 Nov.
III. DE-CREATION		
8. Genesis 6–9	self-directed	15 Nov.
9. Job; Psalms 74; 89	self-directed	22 Nov.
10. Ecclesiastes 1–12	self-directed	29 Nov.
☞ A second short paper is due by the end of week eleven		
IV. RE-CREATION		
11. Gen 10–14; Exod 1–15; 39–40	self-directed	6 Dec.
12. Psalms 51; 146–150	[Davis , ch 9]	13 Dec.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses		

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

See the AST website for a list of other [important dates](#).

6 Evaluation

The grade structure for HB 3117(Hyb) has the following elements.

1. **Writing 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. Prompt responses are not marked, though points may be deducted if the exercise is not taken seriously. Prompts will usually be given live, near

the beginning of each class. However, we may shift to online submissions if the format seems preferable (depending, in part, on how hybrid engagement works). If the prompts move to online forums, responses should not exceed 300 words.

2. Two **short papers** will facilitate student engagement with the art of biblical interpretation. One is keyed to a theological theme, the other to a biblical text. Each should be about 3,000 words in length. The first paper is due at the end of the fifth week of class; the second is due at the end of the eleventh week.

- (a) A **theological essay** invites reflection on the parameters for Christian discourse about creation. How can and should we speak of the God of creation? The primary interlocutor for this paper is [Tanner]. She outlines a number of rules for faithful speech about the transcendence and creative agency of God. Is her thesis persuasive? Is it right? How does it help? What are its limitations? Other sources may be engaged, if desired, but [Tanner] must be engaged fully.

You might think of this paper as a *review essay* (note: this is not the same thing as a book report). Devote the first half of the paper to a summary the argument under review. Devote the second half of the paper to critical analysis and evaluation of the same. Be specific. In your analysis, select and discuss concrete examples from the work. Be fair, too, 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 the assigned literature and at least five other sources or commentators. (Note that secondary reading from week eight is self-directed; you may also ask for suggestions.) Advance a **thesis** that relates to the chosen text. See me and [Making Sense, chs 3, 5, 8, 11] for guidance.

3. Before the last day of class, each student will upload a brief (5–7 minute) **video presentation** that summarizes and synthesizes their work in this course. First, by way of *summary*, describe and contextualize the results of your exegetical paper. What text did you select and why? What did you discover about it through research and study? In a single sentence, what was your thesis? Second, by way of *synthesis*, what might your exegetical work contribute to a renewed Christian theology of creation? You may revisit Tanner’s argument here, if desired. Alternatively, how might your findings sharpen our understanding of the Bible’s creation traditions?

In essence, in this video you are distilling and representing the introduction and conclusion to your exegetical essay, but with a wider outlook and in a different medium. Elaborate with a view to the broad theme of creation. Answer the question: So what? Videos should be sharable by URL (try YouTube or Vimeo), and posted to Teams for the benefit of the class, to be viewed and discussed asynchronously. Finally, be sure not to exceed the time limit; points will be deducted for overlong submissions. To keep to time you will probably need to edit your video (recommended), or else to plan and rehearse your presentation well enough to capture it in a single take.

The breakdown for the semester’s total work is shown in [Table 2](#).

AST’s [Academic Calendar](#) provides guidelines and detailed criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks (summarized in [Table 3](#)). Note that, at AST, a grade of “C” is deemed “Unsatisfactory.”

Reading Prompts	20%
Review Essay	30%
Exegetical Essay	30%
Video Presentation	20%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

A+	94–100	Exceptional
A	87–93	Outstanding
A–	80–86	Excellent
B+	77–79	Good
B	73–76	Acceptable
B–	70–72	Marginally Acceptable
C	60–69	Unsatisfactory
F	0–59	Failure
FP	0	Failure due to Plagiarism

Table 3: Outline of Grades at AST

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, 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 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. AST's Plagiarism Policy is found under that heading in the Academic Calendar.¹

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.¹

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.

¹This paragraph is adapted from standard language provided by the Academic Dean's office.