

Biblical Foundations Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

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1 Course Description

The First Testament of Christian Scripture is a fundamental part of Christian tradition and durable rule of faith and practice. Students in this course will be introduced to historical and literary data important for understanding the origins of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and its subsequent function as scripture in a variety of contexts. The outlook will be broadly ecumenical, with case studies that exemplify Jewish and Christian interpretation.

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 illustrative commentary from various biblical interpreters. Students will develop their exegetical skills by studying these examples, and so learn to appreciate the diverse canonical, cultural, hermeneutical, historical, literary, and theological elements involved in the art of biblical interpretation.

Prerequisites: none. The course is required for 3000-level courses in HB.

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; defend a decision to pronounce or circumlocute the Divine Name; 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; 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 **primary text** is required. All students should have their own copies.

[NJPS] Berlin, Adele, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. A non-circulating reference copy is held in the AST Library: Ref BS 895.J4 2014.

Alternatively, for an ecumenical study Bible with a gender-inclusive translation of the full Christian Bible, see Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

4 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings will be recommended throughout the semester and either placed on reserve or made available through the course website. Please give this material good effort and attention. Some of this material is listed in the bibliography below, in [section 8](#).

The following **secondary text** is recommended but, for undergraduates, not required.

[Davis] Davis, Ellen F. *Opening Israel's Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. An AST Library e-book (single user license) is [available online](#).

The professor especially recommends two titles as profound but accessible, pocket-sized exemplars of Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions. Both titles will be referenced in the course. They repay careful reading and are worth adding to your personal libraries.

[Heschel] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951.

[Irenaeus] Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Translated by John Behr. Popular Patristics Series 17. St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.

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 reading	Focal chs.	Secondary	Due
I. LAW / TORAH / PENTATEUCH			
1. Gen 1–11	Gen 1; 9	Syllabus	9 Sep.
2. Gen 12–36	Gen 12; 22	[Davis, ch. 1]	16 Sep.
3. Exod 1–18	Exod 3; 16	[Davis, ch. 2a]	23 Sep.
4. Exod 19–34	Exod 20–21; 34	[Davis, ch. 2b]	30 Sep.
~. No Class: Nat'l Day for T&R (self-study of Sinai covenant)			30 Sep.
5. Lev 1–10; 25–26	Lev 10; 26	[Davis, ch. 3]	7 Oct.
~. No Class: Thanksgiving (but meet Mon of Reading Week)			14 Oct.
6. Deut 1–16; 34	Deut 6; 16	[Davis, ch. 5]	21 Oct.
II. PROPHETS: FORMER & LATTER			
7. Josh 1–12; Judg 1–5; 19–21	Josh 1; Judg 19	[Davis, ch. 6–7]	28 Oct.
8. Ruth 1–4; 1 Sam 1–31	1 Sam 1–2; 8	[Davis, ch. 8]	4 Nov.
~. No Class: Remembrance Day			11 Nov.
9. 2 Sam 1–1 Kgs 12	2 Sam 7; 1 Kgs 11	[Davis, ch. 9]	18 Nov.
10. Hosea 1–Micah 7	Joel 2; Jonah 4	[Davis, ch. 10]	25 Nov.
III. WRITINGS: WISDOM & PRAISE			
11. Pss 1–8; 51–60; 89–90	Pss 1–2; 51; 90	[Davis, ch. 14]	2 Dec.
12. Prov 1–9; Eccl 1–12	Prov 8; Eccl 1; 7	[Davis, ch. 15]	9 Dec.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses			13 Dec.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

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

6 Evaluation

The grade structure for BF 1001-UG has the following elements.

1. **Notes and quotes** will be solicited from students at the start of each class. These are to be drawn from the primary reading [NJPS]. What do you note about the material on this occasion? What words, phrases, or ideas stand out to you? Pay attention to things

you notice from a survey of large sections of the Bible. Stay alert, too, to details that strike you from this translation. Mark up your Bible. Make notes as you read. Come prepared to share highlights with the class.

2. Two **reflection papers** give students an opportunity to consider their relationship to the Scriptures of Israel and to reflect on its development over the course. Each of these papers is to be about 1,000 words long, including any footnotes. The first paper is due before the third week of class; the second paper is due by the final day of class.
 - (a) Before the third week, answer the following question: *What does my tradition tell me about the Scriptures of Israel?* To start, identify a tradition that broadly informs your thinking about the Tanakh/OT/HB. Our traditions are often multiple, but for the purposes of this assignment, select one that is, for you, especially relevant, dominant, or in need of investigation. Then, summarize what your tradition says. Focus on official statements, where available. You may review informal attitudes, too, but keep to things that are identifiable with a tradition (not too personal, in other words). Students associated with AST's founding parties should consider sources like: the Catechism of the Catholic Church; the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion; the four subordinate standards of the UCCan. Students with other religious affiliation, or with none, should consider what pertains to them. (Anglo-American celebrity atheists embody a tradition, too, for example.)
 - (b) Before the final class, answer the following question: *What would I like to say to my tradition about the Scriptures of Israel?* Revisit your first reflection paper and the tradition you identified at the start of the term. Then, as you think about what you might want to affirm, critique, or reform in that tradition, reflect on what we have studied. Based on what you have learned, what is something you would say about the Tanakh/OT/HB to others today who are shaped by your tradition? If desired, you may craft this paper as an open letter to a peer (someone like you before this course) or an authority (an official leader or public figure). In your discussion, incorporate at least two good examples from the Bible. Whether you make points broad or narrow, be sure to cite chapter and verse.
3. Two **exegetical papers** facilitate direct work with the biblical text as students practice the art of biblical interpretation. Each of these papers should focus on one narrow passage and be about 2,000 words long, including any footnotes. The professor encourages, but does not require, the selection of shorter passages from within the focal chapters listed in the course outline ([Table 1](#)). The first paper is due before the sixth week; the second paper is due before the eleventh week.
 - (a) Before the sixth week, compose and submit an exegetical analysis of any suitably short passage from the **Law** (Torah).
 - (b) Before the eleventh week, compose and submit an exegetical analysis of any suitably short passage from the **Prophets** (Former or Latter).
 - (c) Each paper must advance a **thesis** related to the selected text. This thesis should be clearly identifiable as a single sentence in an obvious location. Each paper should interact with at least four (4) sources or commentators, not counting lectures (which need not be cited).
 - (d) See my "[Guidelines for Papers and Other Written Assignments](#)" (PDF). See also [[Making](#), chs. 3, 5, 8, 11] and [[SBL2](#)].

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

Notes & Quotes	10%
Reflection Paper 1	15%
Reflection Paper 2	15%
Exegetical Essay 1	30%
Exegetical Essay 2	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.

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

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 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. AST’s Plagiarism Policy is found under that heading in the Academic Calendar.

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

Introductions to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament abound. Students looking for a second or third opinion on basic matters may find one or more the following volumes useful. They arise from a variety of contexts and, in terms of orientation, have different kinds of utility. The one by Kaminsky and Lohr [10] is notable for its brevity and interfaith outlook.

- [1] Barton, John, ed. *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- [2] Birch, Bruce, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen. *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 2005. AST Library: BS 1192.5 T43 2005.
- [3] Brueggemann, Walter, and Tod Linfelt. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*. 3rd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021. AST Library (2nd ed.): BS 1140.3 B78 2012.
- [4] Chapman, Stephen B., and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. AST Library: BS 1140.3 C35 2016.
- [5] Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. AST Library: BS 1140.3 C65 2004.
- [6] Coogan, Michael D. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. AST Library: BS 1197 C56 2014.
- [7] Davies, Philip R., and John Rogerson. *The Old Testament World*. 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005. AST Library: BS 1171.3 D38 2005.
- [8] Hill, Andrew E., and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- [9] Jacobson, Rolf A., and Michael J. Chan. *Introducing the Old Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023.

- [10] Kaminsky, Joel S., and Joel N. Lohr. *The Hebrew Bible for Beginners: A Jewish and Christian Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015. AST Library: BS 1171.3 K39 2015 and [online](#).
- [11] Kugel, James L. *How To Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*. New York: Free, 2007.
- [12] Page, Hugh R., Jr., and Randall C. Bailey, eds. *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. AST Library: BS 1171.3 A37 2010.
- [13] Rendtorff, Rolf. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986. AST Library: BS 1140.2 R3913 1986.
- [14] Schmid, Konrad. *The Old Testament: A Literary History*. Translated by Linda Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012. AST Library: BS 1174.3 S3613 2012.

Further literature on the Bible is vast. The works listed here have been selected for clarity, insight, and theological alertness. Some will be supplementary texts, as per [section 4](#).

- [15] Alter, Robert. "The Techniques of Repetition." Pages 88–113 in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- [16] Anderson, Gary A. "Biblical Origins and the Fall." Pages 197–210 in *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- [17] Anderson, Gary A. "Apophatic Theology: The Transcendence of God and the Story of Nadab and Abihu." Pages 3–22 in *Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament: Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.
- [18] Ben Zvi, Ehud and James D. Nogalski. *Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve / the Twelve Prophetic Books*. Analecta Gorgiana 201. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009.
- [19] Chapman, Stephen B. "1 Samuel 1–12." Pages 71–119 in *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- [20] Childs, Brevard S. "Psalm 8 in the Context of the Christian Canon." Pages 85–93 in *Canon as Rule and Guide: Collected Essays*. Edited by Daniel R. Driver. FAT 1.174. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023.
- [21] Childs, Brevard S. "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem." Pages 169–80 in *Canon as Rule and Guide: Collected Essays*. Edited by Daniel R. Driver. FAT 1.174. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023.
- [22] Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.
- [23] Childs, Brevard S. *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- [24] Davis, Ellen F. "Teaching the Bible Confessionally in the Church." Pages 9–26 in *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Edited by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

- [25] Davis, Ellen F. *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014.
- [26] deClaissé-Walford, Nancy L. "The Meta-Narrative of the Psalter." Pages 363–76 in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*. Edited by William P. Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- [27] Dell, Katherine J. "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Consulting Early Interpreters." Pages 9–36 in *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013.
- [28] Fox, Michael V. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.
- [29] Janowski, Bernd. *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013.
- [30] Levenson, Jon D. *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*. Minneapolis: Winston, 1985.
- [31] Levenson, Jon D. "The Test." Pages 66–112 in *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- [32] MacDonald, Nathan. "Israel and the Old Testament Story in Irenaeus's Presentation of the Rule of Faith." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3.2 (2009): 281–98.
- [33] McGinnis, Claire Mathews. "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Christian and Jewish Interpretation." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6.1 (2012): 43–64.
- [34] Moberly, R. W. L. *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- [35] Moberly, R. W. L. "A Love Supreme." Pages 7–40 in *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- [36] Nogalski, James D. "Reading the Book of the Twelve Theologically." *Interpretation* 61.2 (2007): 115–22.
- [37] Nogalski, James D. "Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve: Creating Points of Contact for a Theological Reading." *Interpretation* 61.2 (2007): 125–36.
- [38] Patrick, Dale. "Studying Biblical Law as a Humanities." *Semeia* 45 (1989): 27–47.
- [39] Provan, Ian. *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014.
- [40] Rutledge, Fleming. *And God Spoke to Abraham: Preaching From the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- [41] Schmid, Konrad. *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. Translated by Peter Altmann. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN 978-0802876935.
- [42] Seitz, Christopher R. "Old Testament or Hebrew Bible? Some Theological Considerations." *Pro Ecclesia* 5.3 (1996): 292–303.

- [43] Seitz, Christopher R. "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy." Pages 145–61 in Christopher R. Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight, eds. *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- [44] Sheppard, Gerald T. "Theology and the Book of Psalms." *Interpretation* 46.2 (1992): 143–55.
- [45] Sommer, Benjamin D. "What Happened at Sinai? Maximalist and Minimalist Approaches." Pages 27–98 in *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.
- [46] Tribble, Phyllis. "An Unnamed Woman: The Extravagance of Violence." Pages 65–91 in *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.

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. Numerous articles by subject-area specialists appear under such headings as: Ancient Near East; Bible; Early Christianity; Greco-Roman World; Hebrew Bible; New Testament; Rabbinic Judaism; Second Temple Judaism.