

## 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 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. It is open to Continuing Education participants.*

## 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 text is required. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase their own copy. A non-circulating copy is held in the AST Library reference section (BS 895 J4 2014).

[NJPS] Berlin, Adele, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Optionally, 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. See [section 8](#) for full bibliographic details. Please give this material good effort and attention.

Introductions to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament abound. I have not assigned one for this class, though I have used a number of them in the past. Students may find one or more the following introductory and companion volumes useful.

[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] 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.

- [4] Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. AST library: BS 1140.3 C65 2004.
- [5] 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.
- [6] Davies, Philip R., and John Rogerson. *The Old Testament World*. 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005. AST library: BS 1171.3 D38 2005.
- [7] Davis, Ellen F. *Opening Israel's Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. AST library: [online](#).
- [8] Hill, Andrew E., and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- [9] 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](#).
- [10] Kugel, James L. *How To Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*. New York: Free, 2007.
- [11] 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.
- [12] Rendtorff, Rolf. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986. AST library: BS 1140.2 R3913 1986.

The following basic works are also 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.
- [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](#).

## 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.

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

## 6 Evaluation

The grade structure for BF 1001 has the following elements.

§. Primary reading (chs)	Supplementary reading	Due
I. LAW / TORAH / PENTATEUCH		
1. Genesis 1–11	Davis [9]; Seitz [28]	7 Sep.
2. Genesis 12–50	Levenson [18]	14 Sep.
3. Exodus 1–18	McGinnis [20]	21 Sep.
4. Exodus 19–40	Anderson [3]	28 Sep.
5. Leviticus (all if unstated)	Anderson [3]	5 Oct.
6. Deuteronomy	Heschel [14]; Moberly [22]	12 Oct.
☞ A first short paper is <b>due</b> by the end of the sixth week of class		17 Oct.
II. PROPHETS: FORMER & LATTER		
7. Joshua; Judges	Trible [31]	19 Oct.
~. No Class: Reading Week		24–27 Oct.
8. 1 & 2 Samuel	Chapman [5]	2 Nov.
9. 1 & 2 Kings	Alter [1]	9 Nov.
10. Isaiah 1–12, 36–40	Irenaeus [15]; Davis [10]	16 Nov.
11. Hosea–Jonah	Nogalski [23, 24]	23 Nov.
☞ A second short paper is <b>due</b> by the end of the tenth week of class		2 Dec.
III. WRITINGS: WISDOM & PRAISE		
12. Psalms 1–8; Ecclesiastes	deClaissé-Walford [11]; Fox [13]	30 Nov.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses		14 Dec.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

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. Individual posts are not marked, though points may be deducted from your final grade if the exercise is not taken seriously. Prompt responses submitted online should be around 250 words long, and should not exceed 300 words. Try to post the in the morning of class days, after you do the reading but before you listen to the lecture. You are invited (but not strictly required) to respond to and interact with classmates on the forums through the rest of the day.
2. Two **short papers** will facilitate student engagement with the art of biblical interpretation. One is keyed to the exposition of a model, the other to a short biblical text. Each should be about 2,500 words in length. Either paper (your choice) is due at the end of the fifth week of class; the other one is due at the end of the tenth week.
  - (a) A **review essay** invites student reflection on a model work of biblical interpretation. The short books by [?] and [?] are the primary options, though with permission you may also select one of 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 interpretation or argument under review, and be mindful that traditional interpretation requires special attention to context. (Irenaeus' reading of Isaiah or the Jewish tradition around sabbath observance are not the same thing as an academic article on the Book of the Twelve.) Devote the second half of the paper to critical analysis and evaluation of your chosen example. 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 [9] 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.

Writing Prompts	25%
Review Essay	25%
Exegetical Essay	25%
Seminar Discussion	25%

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 (summarized in Table 3). Note that, at AST, a grade of "C" is deemed "Unsatisfactory."

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 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 Bibliography

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

- [1] Alter, Robert. "The Techniques of Repetition." Pages 88–113 in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- [2] 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.
- [3] 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.
- [4] 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.
- [5] Chapman, Stephen B. "1 Samuel 1–12." Pages 71–119 in *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- [6] Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.
- [7] Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- [8] Childs, Brevard S. *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.



- [9] 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.
- [10] Davis, Ellen F. *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014.
- [11] 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.
- [12] Dell, Katherine J. "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Consulting Early Interpreters." Pages 9–36 in *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013.
- [13] Fox, Michael V. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.
- [14] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951.
- [15] Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Translated by John Behr. Popular Patristics Series 17. St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.
- [16] Janowski, Bernd. *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013.
- [17] Levenson, Jon D. *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*. Minneapolis: Winston, 1985.
- [18] 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.
- [19] 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.
- [20] McGinnis, Claire Mathews. "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Christian and Jewish Interpretation." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6.1 (2012): 43–64.
- [21] Moberly, R. W. L. *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- [22] 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.
- [23] Nogalski, James D. "Reading the Book of the Twelve Theologically." *Interpretation* 61.2 (2007): 115–22.
- [24] 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.
- [25] Patrick, Dale. "Studying Biblical Law as a Humanities." *Semeia* 45 (1989): 27–47.
- [26] Rutledge, Fleming. *And God Spoke to Abraham: Preaching From the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

- [27] Schmid, Konrad. *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. Translated by Peter Altman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN 978-0802876935.
- [28] Seitz, Christopher R. "Old Testament or Hebrew Bible? Some Theological Considerations." *Pro Ecclesia* 5.3 (1996): 292–303.
- [29] Seitz, Christopher R. "'Can We Read This Book?' Reader Response-ability." Pages 51–68 in *The Elder Testament: Canon, Theology, Trinity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.
- [30] Sheppard, Gerald T. "Theology and the Book of Psalms." *Interpretation* 46.2 (1992): 143–55.
- [31] 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.