

Hebrew Bible Creation and Canon

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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. Four major headings in the course are creation, counter-creation, de-creation, and re-creation. Related themes include sea monsters, land, sabbath, the 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; 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 reserve.

- [NJPS] Berlin, Adele, and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. The AST Library has a non-circulating copy: Ref BS 895.J4 2014.
- [Bouteneff] Bouteneff, Peter. *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. ISBN 978-0801032332.
- [Dalley] Stephanie Dalley, ed. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN: 978-0199538362.

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 may be placed on reserve or made available through the course website. For example, [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 these and other 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.

- [Anderson] Gary A. Anderson. *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- [Davis] Ellen F. Davis. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- [Dell] Katharine J. Dell. *The Lord by Wisdom Founded the Earth: Creation and Covenant in Old Testament Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023.
- [Goroncy] Jason Goroncy, ed. *T&T Clark Handbook of the Doctrine of Creation*. London: T&T Clark, 2024.

- [Levenson] Jon D. Levenson. *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- [Smith] Mark S. Smith. *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010.
- [Tanner] Kathryn Tanner. *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988 (repr. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).
- [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
1. Psalms 8; 74; 104		30 June
2. Other “Creation” Pss	[Smith , ch 1]	1 July
3. Genesis 1	[Davis , ch 3]	2 July
4. [Dalley , pp 1–153]	[Smith , ch 5]	3 July
5. [Dalley , pp 154–315]	[Levenson , chs 5–7]	4 July
~. No Class: Weekend Break, 5–6 July		
6. Genesis 2	[Bouteneff , ch 1]	7 July
7. Genesis 3	[Bouteneff , ch 2]	8 July
8. Job (selections)	[Bouteneff , ch 3]	9 July
9. Prov 8; Wis of Sol 6	[Bouteneff , ch 4]	10 July
10. John 1; Rom 5	[Bouteneff , chs 5–6]	11 July

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

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

6 Evaluation

The grade structure for HB 3117 has the following elements.

1. Students should come to class prepared to **discuss the readings**. What do you note about the assigned material? What images, words, phrases, verses, or motifs stand out to you? Make notes as you read. Share some highlights with the class. Finally, be sure to address any prompts that the professor may set as homework for the day. Regular participation is expected and required.

2. Two **short papers** will facilitate student engagement with themes and texts of creation. One is keyed to definition, the other to explication. The first paper is due at the start of class (9:15 AM) on day six; the second is due by midnight on day ten.
 - (a) An **extended definition** of 1,000 words gives students a chance to identify, select, and write up lemmas for a class lexicon of terms related to theological discourse about creation. A list of possible terms will be generated by the class. Each student will then select a word (lemma) and write up a definition with supporting detail, to be read aloud to the class on the first Friday (early option) or second Monday (deadline). The essay should include a one-sentence definition (read: **thesis statement**) in the introductory paragraph. For a published example, see Daniel R. Driver, “Sabbath and Land,” in: [[Goroncy](#), 21–31].
 - (b) An **exegetical essay** of between 1,500 and 2,000 words provides an opportunity for direct work with the biblical text. The first task is to identify an appropriate verse related to creation. Select a key verse from the HB/OT. Then, conduct an analysis and explication of it. Interact with at least five other sources or commentators. Advance a **thesis** that relates to the chosen text. See me and [[Making Sense](#), chs 3, 5, 8, 11] for guidance.
3. Students are to produce some form of **creative exegesis** in response to a verse, short passage, or (at most) chapter of the HB/OT that pertains to creation. These creative responses to the text will be presented to the class on days eight and nine of the course (9–10 July). Students will retain possession of their artwork. Evaluation will be based on a 5-minute oral explanation of their art’s relation to the chosen text.

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

Daily Discussion	10%
Extended Definition	25%
Creative Exegesis	30%
Exegetical Essay	35%

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 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.

	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+	60–69	Unsatisfactory	2.00	67–69	Satisfactory	2.30
C				63–66	Less Satisfactory	2.00
C–				60–62	Marginal	1.70
D	0–59	Failure	0.00	50–59	Unsatisfactory	1.00
F				0–49	Failure	0.00

Table 3: Summary Definitions of Grades at AST

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.