

Biblical Foundations Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Professor	Daniel R. Driver, PhD	Course	Version 4.0
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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 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; 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, 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 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 the bibliography below, in [section 8](#). Please give this material good effort and attention.

Introductions to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament abound. I have not required one for this class, though I have assigned 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] Brueggemann, Walter, and Tod Linafelt. *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] Davis, Ellen F. *Opening Israel's Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. AST Library: [online](#).
- [9] Hill, Andrew E., and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- [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*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986. AST Library: BS 1140.2 R3913 1986.

Also, the following basic works are also 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: Reference 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: Reference 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.

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

§. Primary reading (chs)	Supplementary reading	Due
I. LAW / TORAH / PENTATEUCH		
1. Genesis 1–11	Davis [23]; Seitz [42]	7 Sep.
2. Genesis 12–50	Levenson [32]	14 Sep.
3. Exodus 1–18	McGinnis [34]	21 Sep.
4. Exodus 19–40	Sommer [45]	28 Sep.
5. Leviticus (all if no chs)	Anderson [16]	5 Oct.
6. Deuteronomy	Heschel [28]; Moberly [36]	12 Oct.
☞ A short paper is <i>due</i> by the end of the <i>sixth week</i> of class		17 Oct.
II. PROPHETS: FORMER & LATTER		
7. Joshua; Judges	Trible [46]	19 Oct.
~. No Class: Reading Week from Tuesday to Friday		24–27 Oct.
8. 1 & 2 Samuel	Chapman [18]	2 Nov.
9. 1 & 2 Kings	Alter [14]	9 Nov.
10. Isaiah 1–12, 36–40	Irenaeus [29]; Davis [24]	16 Nov.
11. Hosea–Jonah	Nogalski [37, 38]	23 Nov.
☞ A short paper is <i>due</i> by the end of the <i>eleventh week</i> of class		28 Nov.
III. WRITINGS: WISDOM & PRAISE		
12. Psalms 1–8; Ecclesiastes	Childs [22]; Fox [27]	30 Nov.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses		14 Dec.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

6 Evaluation

The grade structure for BF 1001 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 assigned for each week. What do you note about the material on this occasion? What words, phrases, or verses stand out to you from the [NJPS] translation? Pay attention to things you notice from a survey of large sections of the Bible. Stay alert, too, to details that strike you from the English edition of the Hebrew (Masoretic) text. Make notes as you read. Finally, be prepared to share highlights with the class (three minutes maximum). Participation is required.
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 sixth week of class; the other one is due at the end of the eleventh week.
 - (a) A **review essay** invites student reflection on a model work of biblical interpretation. Approved options are listed as supplementary readings in Table 1. Alternatively, in consultation with the professor, you may select another supplementary article from section 8 or propose an entirely different source.
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's reading of Isaiah is are not the same thing as a modern academic article on Isaiah.) 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, 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 at least three sources and commentators. Advance a **thesis** that relates to the text itself. See me and [Making, chs 3, 5, 8, 11] for guidance.
3. **Seminar discussions:** Graduate students will lead **two** seminar discussions over the course of the semester; undergraduate (BTh) students will lead **one**. Handouts may be developed and circulated, but they are not required as part of the mark.
- (a) Each student in the course must lead a discussion of one chapter from the primary reading, to occur in the same week in which it is assigned. Any chapter may be selected. Discussion should last twenty minutes. It should begin with a brief overview (five minutes maximum) of the chapter and critical issues raised by it. The balance of the time should be spent helping the class discover, elaborate, reflect on, test, or otherwise explore the meaning of the passage. Vital to success here is the ability to ask good questions of the Bible.
 - (b) Each graduate student must lead a second discussion on a supplementary reading. If the reading selection deviates from what is set in the syllabus, consult with the professor to make sure the alternate reading is circulated at least one week in advance. These seminars, too, should occur in the same week in which the material is assigned and should last twenty minutes. The allocation of time is different, however. Approximately fifteen minutes should be given to summary and analysis, with just five minutes at the end for questions and class discussion. The goal here is for advanced degree students to report on the results of critical inquiries into various noteworthy examples of biblical interpretation.
 - (c) Students are encouraged to align their essay writing with their seminar topics. For example, it is perfectly acceptable to lead a discussion on the biblical chapter in which the short passage for your exegetical essay appears. It is also acceptable to let class discussion spur revisions to your paper, of course with the understanding that you credit others appropriately for their input.

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

Notes & Quotes	20%
Review Essay	30%
Exegetical Essay	30%
Seminar Discussions	20%

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 currently assessed on a different scales at AST (see [Table 3](#)). For graduate students, a grade of C is deemed "Unsatisfactory," whereas for undergraduate (BTh) students, a C is "Satisfactory" and the grade of D is possible for "Marginal" performance. Other grades have different definitions, too.

Graduate Courses			Undergraduate Courses	
A+	94–100	Exceptional	90–100	Excellent
A	87–93	Outstanding	85–89	Excellent
A–	80–86	Excellent	80–84	Excellent
B+	77–79	Good	75–79	Good
B	73–76	Acceptable	70–74	Good
B–	70–72	Marginally Acceptable		
C	60–69	Unsatisfactory	60–69	Satisfactory
D			50–59	Marginal
F	0–59	Failure	0–49	Failure
FP	0	Failure due to Plagiarism	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 Further 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](#).

- [14] Alter, Robert. "The Techniques of Repetition." Pages 88–113 in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- [15] 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.
- [16] 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.
- [17] 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.
- [18] Chapman, Stephen B. "1 Samuel 1–12." Pages 71–119 in *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- [19] Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.
- [20] Childs, Brevard S. *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- [21] Childs, Brevard S. *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- [22] 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. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023. Essay first published in 1969.
- [23] 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.
- [24] Davis, Ellen F. *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014.
- [25] deClaisse-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.
- [26] Dell, Katherine J. "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Consulting Early Interpreters." Pages 9–36 in *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013.
- [27] Fox, Michael V. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.
- [28] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951.
- [29] Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Translated by John Behr. Popular Patristics Series 17. St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.
- [30] Janowski, Bernd. *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013.

- [31] Levenson, Jon D. *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*. Minneapolis: Winston, 1985.
- [32] 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.
- [33] 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.
- [34] McGinnis, Claire Mathews. "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Christian and Jewish Interpretation." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6.1 (2012): 43–64.
- [35] Moberly, R. W. L. *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- [36] 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.
- [37] Nogalski, James D. "Reading the Book of the Twelve Theologically." *Interpretation* 61.2 (2007): 115–22.
- [38] 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.
- [39] Patrick, Dale. "Studying Biblical Law as a Humanities." *Semeia* 45 (1989): 27–47.
- [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. "'Can We Read This Book?' Reader Response-ability." Pages 51–68 in *The Elder Testament: Canon, Theology, Trinity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.
- [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 highly recommend exploring [Oxford Bibliographies: Biblical Studies \(Full Text\)](#). You can access the database automatically while on campus or remotely with your 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.