

Biblical Foundations Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

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1 Course Description

From the Academic Calendar: The First Testament of Christian Scripture, also called the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, is a fundamental part of Christian tradition and durable rule of faith and practice. Students in this course will therefore be introduced to historical and literary data important for understanding the origins of the Hebrew Bible and its subsequent function as Old Testament Scripture in a variety of cultural and religious contexts.

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.

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 a variety of ancient and modern approaches to the Bible, including traditional "plain sense" and figural reading strategies as well as historical criticism and its legacy.

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 texts are required. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase their own copies. Library copies that are not reference works have been placed on a 2-hour reserve.

- [NRSV] M. D. Coogan, ed. *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: NRSV*. 4th ed. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0195289602.
- [HBFB] J. Kaminsky and J. Lohr. *The Hebrew Bible for Beginners: A Jewish and Christian Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1426775635.
- [Heschel] Abraham Heschel. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951 (repr. 2005). ISBN 978-0374529758.
- [Irenaeus] St Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Trans. John Behr. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997. ISBN 978-0881411744.

An acceptable alternative study Bible is the NJPS: Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Second Edition* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). A reference copy is available in the library, and it is well worth consulting.

4 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings will be recommended throughout the semester. Excerpts from this literature, ordinarily an article or a book chapter per week, will either be placed on reserve or made available for download through the course website.

Students are not strictly required to read this additional material; then again, students who choose not to read it should not expect to receive an "A" for the course. Stated more positively, these selections represent some of the best contemporary readers of the HB/OT, and you will not want to miss out on their hermeneutical and theological insights.

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 (chapters)	Secondary (pgs)	Supplement (author)	Due
I. LAW / TORAH / PENTATEUCH			
1. Genesis 1–11	[HBFB , 1–26]	Ellen Davis	14 Sep.
2. Genesis 12–50	[HBFB , 27–64]	Jon Levenson	21 Sep.
3. Exodus 1–34	[HBFB , 65–83]	C. Mathews McGinnis	28 Sep.
4. Leviticus 1–16	[Heschel , all]	Gary Anderson	5 Oct.
5. Deuteronomy	[HBFB , 85–99]	R.W.L. Moberly	12 Oct.
II. PROPHETS: FORMER & LATTER			
☞ <i>First paper is due before midnight on the sixth day of class</i>			
6. Joshua, Judges	[HBFB , 103–121]	Phyllis Tribble	19 Oct.
7. 1 & 2 Samuel	[HBFB , 123–143]	Stephen Chapman	26 Oct.
~. No Class: Term Break (Monday to Friday)			2 Nov.
8. 1 & 2 Kings	[Irenaeus , all]	Robert Alter	9 Nov.
9. Isaiah 1–12, 36–40	[HBFB , 145–168]	Brevard Childs	16 Nov.
10. Hosea–Jonah	[HBFB , 169–184]	Christopher Seitz	23 Nov.
III. WRITINGS: WISDOM & PRAISE			
☞ <i>Second paper is due before midnight on the eleventh day of class</i>			
11. Psalms 1–8, 90, 110, 118	[HBFB , 187–202]	Gerald Sheppard	30 Nov.
12. Ecclesiastes	[HBFB , 203–246]	Katharine Dell	7 Dec.
☞ <i>End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses</i>			15 Dec.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

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

6 Evaluation

6.1 Grade Structure for BF 1001(Int)

- I will set **reading prompts** throughout the semester. They are designed to ensure that you have read the assigned material carefully, and to help you explore its significance. Prompt responses submitted online should be between 250 and 300 words long.
- Two **short papers** will facilitate student reflection on two extended works of biblical interpretation, one by [[Heschel](#)] and one by [[Irenaeus](#)]. Each should be 3,000 words long. They are due on the sixth and eleventh days of class, respectively.
 - The **first paper** will articulate and evaluate multiple rationales for sabbath observance by interacting with biblical and post-biblical traditions. The latter must include, but need not be limited to, Heschel's *The Sabbath*.
 - The **second paper** will explore Irenaeus' use of the Old Testament as Christian scripture by: succinctly summarizing *On the Apostolic Preaching*, selecting a characteristic example of biblical interpretation in that work, and then developing and defending a coherent thesis about that instance of interpretation.

- Each student will **make an online presentation** on one of the twelve supplementary articles. It may take the form of a podcast or YouTube video, and should be sharable by URL. The discussion, which should last 20 minutes, should begin with a brief (5 min) summary of the article. The balance of the time should be spent helping other readers elaborate, reflect on, test, challenge, or extend the main ideas presented there.

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

Reading Prompts	25%
First Paper	25%
Second Paper	25%
Online Presentation	25%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST's [Academic Calendar](#) provides guidelines and detailed criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade (see [Table 3](#)) using these benchmarks. 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 Grading System at AST

7 Other Course Policy

Late work will not be accepted, except in genuinely extenuating circumstances. Unless I state otherwise, written assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM 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 the *SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd Edition (refer to the free, online [Student Supplement](#)). APA may be used by permission.

Plagiarism, if **detected**, will result in failure of the course.

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 course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

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 of open dialogue by honouring the presence of your classmates. In online 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.