

The Ten Commandments

Professor	Daniel R. Driver, PhD	Course	Version 3.0.1
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Office	Main Building, Room 106	Where	Online
Hours	Tuesdays, 2:00–4:00 PM	Website	astheology.ns.ca

1 Course Description

From the Academic Calendar: As the first words spoken by God at Sinai and the leading terms of a covenant sealed with blood, the Ten Commandments are well known as the preeminent instance of biblical law. Less well appreciated is the complex legal and cultic context that gave rise to multiple versions of the Decalogue in ancient Israel, as seen in Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, Exodus 34, and Leviticus 19.

This course examines the ancient origins of the Ten Commandments as a premier example of the Bible's legal traditions. It also considers the weight that these laws have held for Jews, Christians, and others through an exploration of the Decalogue's reception history, which includes modes of expression as diverse as liturgy, biblical commentary, fine art, film, and popular culture. Finally, with ample time to consider a commandment per week, the course invites students to reflect creatively on the ethical trajectory of the commandments, their place in contemporary religious life, and their stature in and beyond the Christian Church. *Prerequisite:* BF 1001.

2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to: know the Ten Commandments in order; locate at least three versions of the Ten Commandments in the Bible; differentiate biblical versions by their contents; interpret each of the Commandments in their immediate literary context; integrate an understanding of the Ten Commandments with a broader view of biblical law; summarize the way different religious traditions count to Ten; compare the ways the Commandments have been interpreted in history; identify, evaluate, and report on contemporary connections with at least one of the Ten Commandments.

3 Required Texts & Materials

The following texts are required. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase their own copies. [Links to help you order the correct editions](#) are on the professor's website.

- [Reflections] Carl E. Braaten and Christopher R. Seitz, eds. *I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. ISBN 978-0802828125.
- [Coogan] Michael Coogan. *The Ten Commandments: A Short History of an Ancient Text*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0300178715.
- [Centuries] Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen, eds. *The Decalogue through the Centuries: From the Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012. ISBN 978-0664234904.
- [Miller] Patrick D. Miller. *The Ten Commandments (Interpretation)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009. ISBN 978-0664230555.

If you do not have access to a good study Bible, I recommend either the NRSV (Michael Coogan, ed.) or the NJPS (Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds.), both published by Oxford University Press.

4 Supplementary Texts

The following titles may be referenced as supplementary texts. They are not required. Other supplementary materials may be provided through the course website.

- [1] Roger E. Van Harn, ed. *The Ten Commandments for Jews, Christians, and Others*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. ISBN 978-0802829658.
- [2] Abraham Heschel. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951 (repr. 2005). ISBN 978-0374529758.

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.

Note that readings are listed by the textbook's key word and chapter number, except in the case of [Reflections](#), where readings are listed by the author's surname.

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

§. Topic	Exposition	History	Reflections	Date
1. Introduction		Coogan 1		8 Jan.
2. First Word	Miller Intro	Coogan 2–4	D. B. Hart	15 Jan.
3. Second Word	Miller 1	Coogan 5–6	C. Seitz	22 Jan.
4. Third Word	Miller 2	Coogan 7–end	E. Radner	29 Jan.
5. Fourth Word	Miller 3	Centuries 1	M. Bockmuehl	5 Feb.
6. Fifth Word	Miller 4	Centuries 2–3	P. Turner	12 Feb.
☞ <i>Review Essay: Due before midnight at the end of Week Six</i>				16 Feb.
~. <i>No Class: Reading Week</i>				19 Feb.
7. Sixth Word	Miller 5	Centuries 4–5	W. Cavanaugh	26 Feb.
8. Seventh Word	Miller 6	Centuries 6–7	R. Jenson	5 Mar.
9. Eighth Word	Miller 7	Centuries 8–9		12 Mar.
10. Ninth Word	Miller 8	Centuries 10–11	Hütter; Braaten	19 Mar.
11. Tenth Word	Miller 9	Centuries 12	R. R. Reno	26 Mar.
☞ <i>Final Paper: Due before midnight at the end of Week Eleven</i>				30 Mar.
~. <i>No Class: Easter</i>				2 Apr.
12. Conclusion	Miller –end	Centuries 13	Wilken; Meilaender	9 Apr.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

6 Evaluation

6.1 Grade Structure for HB 3113(Int)

1. I will set **discussion prompts** for each of the Ten Commandments. They are intended to help you engage with the assigned reading material, and with your classmates. Prompt responses should be about 250 words long, and are due by the start of each class (9 AM Atlantic Time). You must also read through all other responses and post another 50 words or so as you interact with some (not all) classmates. Start your own thread by morning, and respond to other threads by the end of the class day.
2. Students are to make a **creative presentation** on one of the Ten Commandments in the week in which that Commandment is under investigation. Week 3 is an exception, since it is reserved for the Prologue and Commandments I and II. Presentations may take the form of a podcast or video, and their contents may be anything that merits the adjective “creative” – an interview, a dramatic piece, some form of engagement with culture, or anything else suitable that you envision. Each one should last 15 to 20 minutes, and should feel like it deserves 20% of the final grade. The only strict requirement is that the work be sharable by URL. (Try SoundCloud or YouTube.)
3. A **review essay** on Coogan’s *The Ten Commandments* will be due at the end of the sixth week of class (Friday, 16 February 2018). It should be 2,250 words long, plus or minus 10%. The first third of the essay should be a summary of the work, while the remaining two thirds should be devoted to critical engagement and evaluation.
4. A comprehensive **final paper** will give students an opportunity to explore one of the Ten Commandments in detail, complete with a thesis that involves original exposition and theological reflection. It is due at the end of the eleventh week of class (Friday, 30 March 2018). It should be 3,500 words long, plus or minus 10% (the total count includes footnotes but not the final bibliography).

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

Weekly Prompts	25%
Presentation	20%
Review Essay	20%
Final Paper	35%

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 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, 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 either *The SBL Handbook of Style* (refer to the online [Student Supplement](#)), or *The Chicago Manual of Style*, per AST’s policy for major papers. As a reminder, AST also upholds an Inclusive Language Policy.

[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.