

SCR 5131: Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

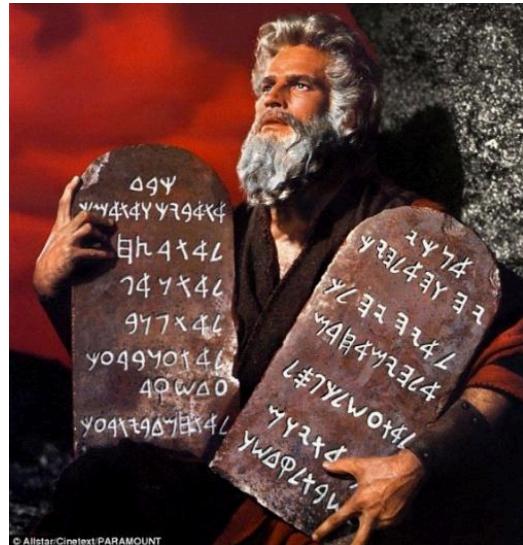
Spring 2026

Course Syllabus

Instructor

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Course Description

This is the school's foundation course on the Old Testament. In line with HJI's interfaith focus, this course will pay attention to the diversity of Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions. The term "Hebrew Bible" in the course title acknowledges its role in Judaism, which doesn't accept the word "old" in the name Old Testament. Many Jews refer to it by the term TaNaK, an acronym meaning "Torah, Prophets and Writings." Thus, in addition to the Old Testament's testimony to the coming of Christ that is of central significance for Christianity, it can be a window into understanding Judaism. Nevertheless, since the Old Testament was scripture for Jesus and the first Christians, we give close attention to Christian understandings of the text.

We will study the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible from multiple viewpoints, including historical, theological, and the history of interpretation, both Christian and Jewish. The passages selected for study cover almost every book in the Old Testament.

The course also provides an introduction to the field of Biblical Studies and issues of hermeneutics. This is a controversial topic for many, as there are conflicting views of the Bible and how it should be properly construed. We will look at all viewpoints, from traditionalists who regard Scripture as inerrant truth to modern approaches that apply the methods of historical-critical study in order to arrive at a more "accurate" record of

sacred history. To one who searches the scriptures, each perspective has something to offer.

Finally, this course will provide the student with an introduction to the discipline of exegesis. As an essential foundation for sermon preparation, facility in exegesis is an essential skill for ministry.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Biblical knowledge:** Discuss the books of the Old Testament and describe their contents
2. **Theological reflection:** Explain the meaning(s) of the text and relate them to the student's own theology
3. **Exegesis:** Demonstrate a beginner's competence in exegesis of a biblical text
4. **Historical knowledge:** Discuss the history of Israel as God's people and its struggles to meet God's expectations
5. **Hermeneutical knowledge:** Explain historical-critical methods of biblical study, their benefits and limitations, and distinguish between critical and faith-based hermeneutics in biblical scholarship
6. **Practical knowledge:** Relate the Bible to the witness of the church and personal faith

Textbooks

Required

1. *The Bible* (NRSV, NIV, KJV, NKJV or RSV). We recommend purchase of a good study Bible.
2. William Sanford La Sor, *Old Testament Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). ISBN: 0802837883 \$10.00 used

Supplementary

1. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) ISBN: 0310246040 \$10.00 or less
2. Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). ISBN: 0801046408 Used, \$9.00

Course Requirements

This class operates as a “flipped classroom.” Students will first view the lectures online and then discuss the content at weekly discussions in class and on Zoom.

Lectures, assignments, and other requirements for the weekly lessons are set up on Populi, under the “Lessons” tab. All assignments are to be submitted on Populi. The class sessions, which will run for approximately 80 minutes, are for discussion of the lectures and assignments for the week. The instructor may provide supplementary lecture material at that time.

Assignments should be submitted on time. Assignments submitted more than one week late are subject to a reduction of grade.

Equipment

Students must have access to the Internet, a computer and Microsoft Word. iPads and similar devices are not sufficient, because allow you to perform some of the required activities, they will not suffice for writing papers for the course.

Readings

Students are responsible to read the assigned texts from Scripture each week before listening to the lectures and complete the assigned readings from the textbook. Familiarity with the readings will feature on the Final Exam.

Students will need to do additional library research for the papers and assignments. Ordinary Christian resources from the Internet are not adequate for graduate-level biblical studies. Therefore, students should familiarize themselves with the HJI library and its ProQuest collection.

Lectures

The recorded lectures are accessed from Populi. They should be viewed before class.

Discussions

Discussions take place during class time, whether in the classroom or on Zoom. To get the most out of that time, students should view the recorded lectures before class.

Weekly reflections

There are weekly reflections, eleven in all. Students write one or two paragraphs reflecting on the content of the week's lectures or answer a specific question. They are graded according to the depth of the student's personal reflection on the material.

Short exercises

Exercises on text criticism and source criticism, quizzes on Genesis and messianic prophecies, and an exercise on Proverbs. They should be completed within the week they are assigned.

Exegesis Papers

There are two exegesis papers, the first on a passage from Deuteronomy assigned by the instructor; the second on a passage from the Prophets selected by the student. Students have two weeks to complete each paper. Instructions and rubric will be provided.

Final Exam

The final exam is basically a test of the student's knowledge of the Bible, and especially the history of Israel in the Old Testament. The exam will be administered on Populi, and will be open for the day of the exam only. Students may use the Bible to take the exam, but should not consult other sources.

Evaluation

A letter grade will be assigned based on:

- Weekly Reflections (11): 2% of the grade; total 22%
- Exercise on Text Criticism: 2%
- Exercise on Source Criticism: 5%
- Quiz on Genesis 8%
- Quiz on messianic prophecies: 8%
- Exercise on Proverbs 8%
- Exegesis paper on Deuteronomy: 12%
- Exegesis paper on the Prophets: 20%
- Final Exam: 15%

Grades for each assignment are recorded by letter, and are understood as follows:

- A Excellent
- B Good
- C Acceptable
- D Below expectations
- F Failure

Failure to submit an assignment will result in an F for that assignment.

Incomplete assignments are not awarded Fs until several weeks after assignments are due. Hence, students who fail to hand in assignments may not notice anything at first, until suddenly half-way through the course they see their overall grade drop. They should take it as a warning to quickly make up the incomplete work and hand in their late assignments, so as to remove those Fs before the course closes.

In calculating the final grade for the course, letter grades for assignments are converted into the following numerical equivalents, and the total is then converted back to a letter grade:

A	97	A-	91.5	B+	87
B	82	B-	77	C+	72.5
C	67.5	C-	62.5	D+	57.5
D	53	D-	50	F	0

This scale severely penalizes Fs. Therefore, it is better to hand in a poorly done assignment than not to hand one in at all.

Course Schedule

Zoom and in-person classes are held on Tuesday mornings, 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. All lessons are accessed through Populi and are available from the Thursday before the class meeting.

January 27: The Book of Two Religions; Text Criticism

Assignment: Text Criticism, due February 3

February 3: Creation and Fall

February 10: Approaches to the Bible

Assignment: Source Criticism, due February 17

February 17: The Patriarchs

Quiz on Genesis, due February 24

February 24: Moses and the Exodus from Egypt

March 3: The Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses

March 10: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges

Assignment: Exegesis of Deuteronomy, due March 24

March 17: Samuel and Kings: The Early Prophets

March 24: Amos, Hosea and Isaiah (1)

Quiz: Messianic Prophecies, due April 7

March 31 SPRING BREAK

April 7 Prophets and National Crisis: Isaiah (2) and Jeremiah

Assignment: Exegesis of a passage from the Prophets, due April 21

April 14: Prophets of the Exile: Ezekiel and Second Isaiah

April 21: Restoration and Schism

April 28: Psalms and Proverbs

Assignment on Proverbs, due May 5

May 5: Ecclesiastes, Job and Song of Songs

May 12: Ezra and Daniel

May 19: Final Exam

Academic Policies

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy

Each student's work is expected to be a product of his or her own effort. Plagiarism is a form of dishonesty that occurs when a student passes off someone else's work as their own. Plagiarism in its most severe form occurs when a student purchases a paper from a third party or submits an entire body of work written by a third party, as the student's own. These most serious cases can be reported to the Office of the Provost for disciplinary action. Possible actions include probation, suspension or dismissal/separation from HJI.

Cutting and pasting material from various websites without citing the source of said material also constitutes plagiarism, as is a failure to cite sources in a paper, conveying the impression, intentionally or not, that another writer's work is the student's own. In these cases of plagiarism, the instructor may give the student an "F" for the offending assignment, require that the student repeat the assignment, or if the plagiarism continues, give the student an "F" for the course. A pattern of such behavior may be reported to the Office of the Provost. It can lead to serious consequences as listed above.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT in assignments is permitted only with prior permission of the instructor. If the instructor permits students to use AI for research, students should know that it may give false results and its facts need to be checked and verified. Any passages generated by AI must be given proper citation, just as for citing other authors' works. In addition, students must append a paragraph at the end of their work explaining how and why they used ChatGPT, which includes what prompts were used and what measures were taken to verify its accuracy.

Students may not use AI to produce the content for an assignment. If an AI tool is used without obtaining prior permission and/or without providing the required citation or explanation, it will be treated as plagiarism.

Faculty reserve the right to use plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin, to find instances of AI-generated writing, as well as plagiarism from other sources, in student assignments.

Netiquette Policy

When posting online, you need to follow the same ethical standards and laws as you would in face-to-face communications. Your language should be respectful of faculty members and fellow students. Do not post private or confidential information about anyone, and do not provide personal information that could put yourself at risk. The school's Learning Management System (LMS) has robust security measures to protect

communication between teacher and student. Yet please be aware that anything that you post in discussions and groups in which other students participate can be retrieved by others and copied.

Do not download and share course materials without permission of the instructor, as this may violate copyright. UTS reserves the right to delete postings on HJI-maintained sites that are considered insensitive, harassing or illegal. Language that is illegal, obscene, defamatory, threatening, infringing of intellectual property rights, invasive of privacy, profane, libelous, threatening, harassing abusive, hateful or embarrassing to any person or entity, or otherwise, is a violation of the Student Code.

Assessment of Student Learning

Map of Course Assignments to Learning Outcomes

Assignment: Outcome:	Weekly reflections	Exegesis papers	Text criticism; source criticism	Quiz on Genesis	Quiz on messianic prophecies	Proverbs	Final Exam
1. Biblical knowledge				X	X	X	X
2. Theological reflection	X	X			X		
3. Exegesis		X					
4. Historical knowledge					X		X
5. Hermeneutical knowledge			X		X		
6. Practical Knowledge	X	X				X	

Learning Outcomes Rubric

Course Learning Outcome	Novice	Approaching	Proficient	Advanced
Biblical knowledge: Discuss the books of the Old Testament and describe their contents	Discusses only contents taught in church's theology	Explains some parts of the OT beyond the church's theology	Explains the wider contents of the OT presented in the course	Ready command of the OT and its contents
Theological reflection: Explain the meaning(s) of the text and relate them to the student's own theology	Explains conventional Christian/Unif. meaning of the OT and its fulfillment in the NT	Explains conventional Christian/Unif. meaning of the OT as fulfilled in the NT, as well as points of OT theology in itself	Discusses a range of meanings and interpretations of the OT	Discusses interpretations of the OT and relates them to the student's theology and the practice of ministry
Exegesis: Demonstrate a beginner's competence in exegetical method	Does not show understanding of what exegesis is	Attempts at exegesis but misses essential elements	Exegesis includes historical context, verse-by-verse treatment, and theological reflection	Demonstrates skill at all elements of exegesis
Historical knowledge: Discuss the history of Israel as God's people and its struggles to meet God's expectation	Displays ignorance of Israel's history	Explains Israel's history mainly based on literal view of the Bible	Explains Israel's history from modern scholarship and in light of Israel's covenant relationship with God	Discusses and analyzes Israel's history from modern scholarship and in light of Israel's covenant relationship with God
Hermeneutical knowledge: Recognize historical-critical methods of biblical study, their benefits and limitations, and be able to distinguish between critical and faith-centered approaches in works of biblical scholarship	Unfamiliar with historical-critical method	Utilizes the historical-critical approach occasionally	Explains historical-critical viewpoints on selected passages and biblical books	Identifies and distinguishes between historical-critical and faith-centered approaches
Practical knowledge: Relate the Bible to the witness of the church and personal faith	Uses the Bible mainly for proof-texts of theology	Applies biblical texts directly to contemporary life and ministry	Utilizes context as a factor in application of biblical texts to contemporary life and ministry	Relates the wisdom of the Bible appropriately and contextually to issues in faith and ministry; recognizes misuse of texts

Select Bibliography

General

Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) The most up-to-date general treatment of the Old Testament.

Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005). A liberal theological approach utilizing latest scholarship; lacks any messianic focus.

Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 5th ed. (Pearson, 2006). A good general treatment and alternative to La Sor.

Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longmann III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). An Evangelical attempt to bridge liberal and conservative perspectives; weak on history with emphasis on interpretation.

Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). A conservative evangelical approach to the Old Testament.

Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977). A solid survey from a Fundamentalist doctrinal standpoint.

J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. (Westminster John Knox, 2006). An up-to-date history of ancient Israel that pays attention to data from archaeology.

John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985). An older standard history of ancient Israel.

Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). This Fundamentalist Christian historian seeks to maintain the literal biblical chronology.

Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 1965). A classic theological treatment of the Old Testament.

Joseph Telushkin, *Biblical Literacy: The Most Important People, Events and Ideas of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Morrow, 1999). A Jewish perspective, valuable for its discussion of laws in the Torah.

Special Topics

F. R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* (New York: Schocken, 1968). Classic discussion of the Fall in Jewish and Christian literature from the Bible through the Church Fathers.

James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. (Princeton University Press, 1969). An encyclopedic compendium of texts from Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, Mari, Assyria, Phoenicia and Canaan that gives a glimpse of Near Eastern cultures contemporary with Israel, as well as biblical parallels.

Michael David Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978). Foundation myths of Canaanite religion: the loves and wars of Baal, etc. from tablets discovered at Ugarit.

Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (University of Chicago, 1945). Full text of Gilgamesh and other ancient accounts of the Flood.

Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001). Combines traditional Jewish learning with modern scholarship; useful for Bible study from a Jewish perspective.

Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976). Discerns the J, E, P and D sources individually and studies their distinct messages.

Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1964). The founder of form criticism investigates the oral traditions behind the sources.

Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). Discusses the lasting influence of the Exodus on Western political thought.

John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). A useful tool for studying the OT and providential history.

Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). Groundbreaking studies on Israelite religion and especially in relation to its Canaanite environment. Difficult reading but rewarding.

George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1973). Seminal scholarly essays on Israelite religion during the period of the wilderness wanderings and Judges. The essay on Baal Peor is relevant to the study of Canaanite fertility practices.

Jonathan Kirsch, *The Harlot by the Side of the Road* (New York: Ballantine, 1997). A popular study of women in the Bible whose stories involved seduction, rape, incest and violence, including Tamar, Dinah, Bathsheba, Jael, and Jephthah's daughter.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). A Jewish classic explores the psychology and religious experience of the prophet as he is confronted with God's word.

Megan McKenna, *Prophets: Words of Fire* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001). The spirituality of the prophets and their quest for justice, words that call us to account even today.

Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). Survey of the prophets centered on Christian doctrine.

Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965). Religious and social institutions of Israel, including the family and family law, economy, civil administration, the army, and the Temple.

Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature* (Intervarsity Press, 1985). A readable introduction from a Christian viewpoint.

James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Westminster John Knox, 1998). An historical study of Israel's wisdom literature that brings in Egyptian and Mesopotamian parallels.

Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). On the origin of apocalyptic in the context of social conflict in post-exilic Judaism.

Jacob Neusner, ed., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, 1987). Shows the diversity of messianic interpretation among Jews at the time of Christ.

Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel from Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (New York: Macmillan, 1955). A Jewish historian looks at Messianism in the Old Testament through the early rabbinic period.

R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch*. Important extra-biblical text (included in Ethiopian Orthodox bible); contains descriptions of the fall of the angels and the Son of Man.

James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols.

For more on specific biblical books, consult the commentarial literature.