

## 1.103 – INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT - FALL 2004

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A foundational introduction to the entire Old Testament surveying the contents of the Old Testament, Israelite history, and modern interpretive methodologies.

### **RATIONALE**

Every Christian, and especially those in church professions, should know the Bible. Biblical knowledge, however, should not be simply limited to familiarity with its content. More important is an understanding of the Bible as a formative faith document that continues to help shape and guide Christian reflection and action.

This course will introduce students to the discipline of biblical interpretation. It will provide an introduction to the content of the Old Testament and the history of ancient Israel. More importantly, this course will also help students understand the Old Testament as the Church's scripture and as an important resource for theological reflection. Such an understanding requires familiarity with the complex historical and cultural contexts in which these writings were composed, remembered, and preserved. We will seek to understand the Old Testament within its original setting as a means for ancient Israel to remember and celebrate its God and its heritage. We will also seek to hear the message of the Old Testament in ways that engage us today, ways that may seem strange or may challenge our assumptions, but ways that ultimately serve to strengthen and vitalize our faith in the one God of both the Old and New Testaments.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The primary goal of this course is to provide students with a foundational knowledge of the Old Testament so that they may read it with a critically informed understanding. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe broadly the content of the Old Testament, identifying the basic story line and significant characters and stories
2. Describe the history of Israel, identifying the main chronological periods and key historical events for Israel in relation to the surrounding nations
3. Describe the origin, function, and theological outlook of the books of the Old Testament from oral tradition through their various written stages to their present canonical form
4. Demonstrate that they can read the Old Testament with discernment and appropriately apply the tools of biblical criticism
5. Demonstrate an appreciation for the central questions of the interpretive task and arrive at personal responses to some of the classic issues of Old Testament theology and interpretation
6. Demonstrate an appreciation of the value of the Old Testament within the larger scope of God's actions in human history including its relationship to the New Testament, Christian theology, and its importance for the Church's ongoing self-reflection
7. Appropriately the full range of biblical images for God and develop proficiency in using inclusive language to communicate the message of the Old Testament
8. Read the Old Testament appropriately, faithfully, and professionally in the vocation and ministry to which they aspire.

## STRATEGIES

In order to accomplish the stated Objectives of this course, the following Strategies will be employed:

### 1. CLASS SESSIONS

Class will be held each week on Tuesdays, 8:45-11:40AM. We will often use the pattern:

- 8:45-10:00: Introduction to topic, content
- 10:00-10:25: Break
- 10:25-11:40: Textual / exegetical / methods study

**STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO BRING AN ENGLISH BIBLE TO EVERY CLASS**

### 2. CLASS PARTICIPATION

The students will be expected to attend class, to have read all required readings prior to class, and to be prepared to discuss the topics for each class session. If you are absent, you are absent. It may reflect negatively on your final grade. If there are mitigating circumstances, let me know.

### 3. CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Students will be expected to hand in or complete all assignments on time. Assignments will be accepted past the due date **ONLY** if the reason for tardiness is commensurate with a reason why a rostered leader would not be prepared to preach or teach as expected by their congregation on a given Sunday.

### 4. READINGS

#### REQUIRED READING

Students are expected to read all assigned readings in the following:

- *The New Revised Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha* (recommended: HarperCollins Study Edition or Zondervan's *NRSV Student Bible* or *The Access Bible* or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*)
- [The NET Bible Online](#) also available as [NET Bible FREE download](#)
- *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* by Brice C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen (Abingdon Press, 1999)
- Selected readings from other resources posted on the Internet or on the course web site

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* by Everett Fox (The Schocken Bible, Volume 1, 2000)
- *Give Us a King: Samuel, Saul, and David* by Everett Fox (The Schocken Bible, 1999)
- *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation, Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim* by Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, Michael Fishbane (Oxford, 2003)
- *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Paul J. Achtemeier, et al, eds. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1985)
- *Harper's Bible Commentary*. James L. Mays, et al, eds. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1988)
- *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. David Noel Freedman, et al, eds. (Doubleday, 1992)
- *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 5 vols. George Arthur Buttrick, et al, eds. (Abingdon, 1980)
- *The Bible As It Was* by James L. Kugel (Belknap, 1999)
- *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* by Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg (Image Books, 1995)

## **REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS AND PARTICIPATION**

- **Exegetical exercises:** In order to get a better experience of the text and to prepare for the final project and paper, these exercises will be done both in and outside of class. Ones assigned as a homework need to be completed by class time. You may work with a partner.
- **Online Forums:** One way we will be able to engage in discussion and learn from each other will be through participation in online discussion forums. The class will be divided into small groups, and each group will be given one discussion question (almost) every week. You are required to post at least one response by Friday noon and to reply to at least one other posting by Monday noon.
- **OT Facts Test:** A basic knowledge of the Old Testament does include learning a certain set of facts regarding dates, places, persons, and events. The test will be posted on the course web site. I will not be grading this test, but successful completion of it is required, and it does count toward your grade in this class. As a church professional, this is a minimal set of facts you should know. You will be able to keep taking the test until you achieve the proficiency of 6 or less wrong answers. More information will be posted on the web site. You may work with a partner.
- **Weekly class assignments and student participation:** Completion in advance of readings and other assignments is critical for your readiness to learn and your ability to contribute to the mutual learning that occurs in class.
- **Integrative Bible Study Project:** An integrative project will be due 2 weeks before the end of the course. Based on an Old Testament topic or passage of your choice that has been approved by the instructor, one part of this project will include a Bible study you might use in your ministry setting. You will submit the one-page handout you would use for the class. More details will be provided later regarding the exegetical work and personal expression that are part of the complete project.
- **Final Reflection Paper:** A final reflection paper (2-3 pages; double-spaced; 12 pt font; 1.25 inch margins on all sides) will be submitted by the end of the course. In this reflection paper the student will address how one's role/call to be a leader in the mission of the church for the 21st century world is guided, grounded, and enhanced by a better understanding of the Old Testament.

## **EVALUATION**

Evaluation of students will be as follows:

- **Exegetical Exercises:** 25%
- **Online Forums:** 10%
- **OT Facts Test:** 5%
- **Class Participation:** 20%
- **Integrative Bible Study Project:** 25%
- **Final Reflection Paper:** 15%

A grade of at least 70% is needed to pass.

For those taking the class for a grade, the scale is: A = 90-100%; B = 80-89%; C = 70-79%)

## **SCHEDULE**

A tentative course schedule has been posted online, but the course web site will give the definitive schedule of topics and assignments.