

Department of Theology

UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTION

Term: **Spring 2010**
Instructor: Steven Dunn
Course #: THEO 2000
Section: 103
Course Title: **Hebrew Scriptures: Old Testament Overview**

Description:

The Old Testament or Hebrew Bible is a collection of inspired, foundational books for both Judaism and Christianity, composed of a variety of genres, representing various strands of authorship, historical and theological developments, and literary forms. The Old Testament recounts the human experience of God's ongoing revelation in the history of Israel. As inspired texts, the Hebrew Scriptures continue to hold ongoing theological and spiritual relevance for subsequent generations of Jews and Christians. We will examine the literature of the Hebrew Bible and its theological claims by reading and examining the various books, their sources and composition, historical and social contexts, genres and literary forms, utilizing the methods of modern biblical scholarship. An essential aspect of our study will include reading and reflecting on the various texts and applying them to our modern human experience: how do these ancient texts still speak to us today? What do they teach us about the nature of God, the sanctity of human life and the goodness of creation, sin and its consequences? What do the texts say about the afterlife, the question of suffering, and how to live a proper life? In what ways can these texts serve to provide meaning, comfort, guidance, and hope for ongoing generations of readers? How does the "Old Testament" inform and influence the "New Testament"?

Course Objectives: In addition to required reading from our textbook, an essential aspect of our study will be reading and analyzing the Bible itself in preparation for and during class. Following the Instructor's presentation on important aspects of the various texts, we will engage in reflection and discussion on the various interpretations, meanings, and ongoing applications of the texts in life. The student will gain a deeper understanding of the formation of the Old Testament, its historical and social contexts, literary forms, and key texts. We shall also examine the interpretation of the Old Testament from the "ancient interpreters" through modern times.

Requirements include: Reading required texts and the Bible passages in preparation for class (*keeping up with the ongoing reading is essential for success in this class*). Students will be given **four** primarily objective exams. The exams will consist of short answer questions related to material studied and terminology; study guides will be provided before the tests to help students focus their preparation. In general, each of the four assignments constitutes 25 percent of the final grade; however, one can raise his or her grade by excelling in class participation and discussion.

Required texts:

- ***Instructor's online study guides, which are essential to the course, consist of summaries of the major points from my lectures; students will be expected to know this material in preparation for exams. Study Guides will be posted on ARES (library reserves) for each unit.**

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- **In addition, we will use the following two texts, both of which reflect the best of modern biblical scholarship:**
- James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (Free Press, 2007; ISBN-13: 978-0-7432-3586-0 ISBN-10: 0-7432-3586-)
- This text by a noted Jewish biblical scholar will supplement the instructor's lecture material and readings from the Bible. Kugel examines the Hebrew Bible through the lenses of both modern biblical scholarship and the "Ancient interpreters," i.e., the rabbis, *Mishna and Talmud*, and early Christian interpreters. This book examines two diverse but valid ways of interpreting the Bible. Kugel taught an immensely popular course on the Old Testament at Harvard University and is noted for numerous books and articles on the Bible.
- *Saint Mary's Press College Study Bible*, New American Bible (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 2007). ISBN: 978-0-88489-907-5.
- This combines the excellent *New American Bible* (NAB) translation of the Scriptures—the standard translation used by Catholics in the USA—with excellent interpretive articles, charts, study aides and notes. It also includes the full text of *Dei Verbum*, the Roman Catholic "Constitution on Divine Revelation" from the Second Vatican Council (1962—1965), which provides important information for modern Catholic biblical interpretation. We will study this early in the course and questions on *Dei Verbum* will be on the first exam. *The NAB* text includes excellent chapter introductions and footnotes.

Optional texts:

- The Reserve section on the first floor of Raynor Library has an excellent collection of Bible commentaries, dictionaries, and other resources, in particular I recommend the *New Interpreter's* Bible commentaries, the *Anchor* and *Word* commentaries (though these latter two are more technical and not as useful for the beginner or general reader), and the *Collegeville* and *Harpers* Bible commentaries and dictionaries. These books are useful for further study but not necessary for the course itself.