

## EMB 1003 HF

### Introduction to Old Testament I: The Pentateuch and Former Prophets

Fall Session 2019  
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This syllabus and other course material is posted on the Quercus website for this course available through the University of Toronto Dashboard: <https://q.utoronto.ca>

The Hebrew Bible is a rich collection of literature which includes stories of the people of Israel: the world's creation, Israel's history, ancient laws, covenants, worship practices, and many other traditions. Many affirm these texts as revelatory scripture: for Jews, as the Tanakh, and for Christians, as the Old Testament. They serve above all as a record of the divine encounter from the human perspective. In this course we will learn more about these stories and their importance for informing theological ideas: from the six-day creation and Sabbath rest, the enduring promise of land and blessing lacing through the ancestral stories of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar; to the story of God's liberation of Miriam, Moses and the Israelite slaves from Egypt, providential trials and care in the wilderness, the gift of the Law at Sinai, entry into the land of Israel, and the rise of prophets and kings and the eternal covenant with King David. Christians inherited this varied collection as part of their scriptures because these stories made up the scriptures of Jesus and Paul, the two foundational figures featured centrally in the New Testament. This course is an introduction not only to the stories themselves, but to some of the scholarly methods that have been developed to understand them and their significance both in the past and present.

#### Course Outcomes

##### By the end of this course, students should:

1. be familiar with the first half of the Tanakh, the Christian Old Testament so they can relate its general narrative content from creation to the Babylonian Exile;
2. have an introductory knowledge of historical-critical approaches to the Bible which introduces the literature in its historical setting in ancient Israel;
3. through the study of tradition history and early biblical interpretation, be able to articulate some of the ways in which the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament have come to have religious significance for Jews and Christians through the centuries;
4. be able to interpret the Bible in ways that inform responsible theological reflection for your religious community.

This is designed to be a first-year level Old Testament course with a concentration mostly on the narrative literature of the Pentateuch and books of Joshua-Kings. A second-year level semester course will concentrate in alternate years on the Prophetic Literature (EMB 2005) or Wisdom Literature (EMB 2004) of the Tanakh.

**Course texts:**

1. A Bible which includes the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical writings and the New Testament, preferably the NRSV, RSV, or New Jerusalem translation. HarperCollins Study Bible or New Oxford Annotated NRSV with Apocrypha are recommended. The Oxford Jewish Study Bible is another fine translation and edition, though it would need to be supplemented by a New Testament and Apocrypha.  
The [New Oxford Annotated NRSV with notes](#) is now available electronically through Kelly Library (St. Michael's). Follow the hyperlink and log on with your UtorId and password.
2. Michael D. Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament*
3. James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*
4. Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*
5. Recommended: Steven McKenzie, *How to Read the Bible*
6. A selection of essays and articles, available on the Quercus course website, marked with an asterisk \* in the syllabus

**Course requirements:**

1. Class attendance and conscientious preparation for in-class discussion (10%)
2. A historical chronology and map quiz (in class, **Sept. 25**) (5%)
3. One 1–2 page assignment using library resources for biblical studies (due on **Oct. 2**) (15%)
4. One 1-2 page assignment on the reinterpretation of a biblical text (due on **Oct. 15**) (15%)
5. A critical assessment of Atwood novel; details TBA (due on **Nov. 5**) (25%)
6. A final take-home exam or paper due during the exam period (on or before **Dec. 11**). (30%)

Class attendance and active participation are expected. Given the compressed nature of the term and once-weekly format, students missing three or more classes cannot receive credit for the course.

**N. B.** Anyone needing adjustment in the format or requirements of the course because of a disability should register with the University of Toronto Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible.

**Classes and assignments:**

**Please remember always to bring your Bible to class.** All required course books are on reserve (or in the reference section) in Emmanuel's library. All course readings marked with an asterisk \* (most supplementary) are on Quercus and also on reserve. Terms to know and understand are included after the reading assignments.

**Sept. 11** Introduction to Biblical Study: Overview of Course; Reading the Bible through the Centuries; Source Criticism and the Pentateuch; Introductions; Brief tour of biblical reference tools in the library

## TORAH/Pentateuch

### Sept. 18: The Primeval History: Creation and its Undoing

1. Read Genesis 1–11, with special attention to Gen 1-3, Psalm 104
2. Coogan, chs. 1–4, pp. 1–58
3. Kugel, ch. 1, pp.1–49

(Terms/concepts to familiarize yourself with: assumptions of modern biblical criticism, documentary hypothesis, the *Enuma Elish*, *bara'*=create, Priestly source, JEDP)

**For class consideration/discussion:** A focus on the creation accounts in Gen 1–3. Most modern biblical scholars view these chapters as comprising two different sources, Gen 1:1–2:4a and Gen 2:4b–3:24, written four hundred or more years apart. Do you see distinctive views of God and humanity suggested by each or not? What would you say is the primary thrust or purpose of each account? There are other accounts of creation in the Bible, including Psalm 104. How is it different from the accounts in Gen 1-3?

### Sept. 25: The Ancestors: God’s Promised Blessing and Abraham’s Response

\*\*\*short Historical chronology and map quiz\*\*\* (15-20 minutes)

1. Genesis 12–36, skim the story of Joseph in Gen 37–50
2. Coogan, ch. 5, pp. 61–78
3. Kugel, chs. 7–9, pp. 131–178

(etiological narratives, ancient Near Eastern covenants, “man of faith,” ten trials of Abraham)

### For class discussion:

The book of Genesis contains two stories about the expulsion of the Egyptian slave Hagar, in Gen 16:1–16 and Gen 21:1–20. What are the similarities and differences between the two? What purpose does each serve in the larger narrative of the ancestors into which they are woven?

### October 2 Exodus and the Sinai Covenant

1. Exodus 1–24, 31–34, Deuteronomy 29, Joshua 24, Nehemiah 9
2. Coogan, chs. 6–7, pp. 79–107
3. Kugel, chs. 18–21, pp. 331–437
4. \*Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Structure of P,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976) pp. 275–292.

(call of Moses and prophetic authority; Passover and the Red Sea, divine attributes, tradition-history, covenant and law, Red Sea and baptism, Sinai covenant, *Gattung*, *Sitz-im-Leben*)

### For class consideration/discussion:

Read Exodus 32-34 paying special attention to Exod 34: 6-7 which is also referred to as the “divine attribute formula.” How is this divine revelation different from others you have read about so far? Read also the book of Jonah, a much later work that includes the “divine attribute formula.” How is the

formula used in the book of Jonah 4:2? How does its use help to characterize the prophet Jonah?

### **October 9 Law in the Wilderness: Human Response to the Divine Gift of Torah**

1. Leviticus 1, 8–11, 16–19, 23, Exodus 12, Deuteronomy 5, 16, Numbers 6, 11–14, 16, 20–29
2. Coogan, chs. 8–9, pp. 108–147
3. Kugel, ch. 22, pp. 439–460
4. \*Marva Dawn, “Sabbath Keeping and Social Justice” in *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend: Managing Time in a Global Culture*. Ed. E. O’Flaherty and R. Petersen (Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 23–40.
5. \*Jonathan Klawans, “Moral and Ritual Purity” in *The Historical Jesus in Context*. ed. A.J. Levine, D. Allison and J. Crossan, Princeton 2006, pp. 266–284.

(Decalogue; henotheism; the love commandment; the Holiness Code; festal calendar, Deir Allah inscription, Aaronide priesthood, the scepter and the star, daughters of Zelophehad)

**For class discussion:** Reread Exod 20 and Deut 5. What are the differences between the two Sabbath laws? What might account for these differences? What significance does the Sabbath have for contemporary Christians? Do you agree with Marva Dawn’s argument? What challenges are there in understanding (interpreting) and observing the ten commandments today?

**\*\*\*October 15:** Biblical text reinterpretation assignment due today\*\*\*

### **October 16: Deuteronomy: The Book’s Older Core and King Josiah’s Reform**

1. Deuteronomy 1–6, 12–13, 17–18, 20–34, 2 Kings 21–23
2. Coogan, ch. 10, pp. 148–162
3. Kugel, pp. 522–560

(Deuteronomistic history; law of the king, levirate marriage, *cherem*=spoils devoted to YHWH, “this book of the torah,” second authorship)

**For class discussion:** In your reading from Kugel this week, pay particular attention to the way in which the NT passages p. 520 (Matthew, James), p. 527 (Romans) interpret parts of Deuteronomy. (Deut 30:11–14) How is “torah” or “law” understood in those passages and what role does the witness of Jesus play in these particular construals? Do the often-used terms, “law” and “gospel,” stand in opposition to each other?

**\*\*\*\* October 21–25 Reading Week: No class on October 23 \*\*\*\***

**October 29 \*\*\*final paper proposals due for those who take this option\*\***

## NEBI'IM/Former Prophets and The Deuteronomistic History

### October 30 Joshua, Judges: Settling the Land

1. Joshua 1–12, Judges 1–20, Heb 11:29–31, Mt 1:5–6
2. Coogan, chs. 11–12, pp. 163–193
3. \*\*Steven McKenzie, *How to Read the Bible*, ch. 1 (“Not Exactly as It Happened”, pp. 23–66 (online resource through U of T library)
4. Recommended \*Niditch, “Historiography, ‘Hazards,’ and the Study of Ancient Israel,” *Interpretation* 57.2 (2003): 138–150

(conquest theories; charismatic leadership, Rahab in early exegesis, Deborah in song and story, *chesed*=covenant faithfulness)

### \*\*November 5: Atwood assignment due\*\*

### November 6 The Rise of Kingship and Prophecy

1. 1 Samuel 1–12, 15–18
2. Coogan, ch. 13, pp. 197–212
3. \* Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*, ch. 3, pp. 65–91
4. the Gospel of Luke 1–3

(the Levite’s concubine, the Philistine threat, ‘*am ha’arets*= people of the land, the rejection of Saul, feminist criticism; David’s rise(s); *mashiach*=anointed)

**For class discussion:** We will discuss *The Year of the Flood*, including responses to some of the possible questions: What parallels do you see between “the Year 25” after the Flood and our present? Do you know any contemporary “God’s Gardeners? What role does singing and praying play in the book? [Let us sing, p.13, 52, 92, 126, 197]. What concept of sin or death or evil exists in the book? How is that related to or different from that in Gen 1–3? **Is this novel “prophetic”? a lament? satire? What is Atwood aiming at?** Where is the author’s perspective or does she have a fixed one?

### November 13 The Zion Covenant: King David and Jerusalem Theology; Solomon the Heir

1. 1 Sam 31–1 Kings 12, Psalms 2, 51, 78, 89, 132, 1 Chron 16  
Read especially closely 1 Sam 15–18; 2 Sam 7; 2 Sam 22–23
2. Coogan, chs. 14–15, pp. 209–236

(Jebusites, Nathan’s rebuke, Solomon the wise, the Jerusalem Temple, David the poet-prophet)

### For class discussion:

The promises and obligations of two covenants, Sinai and Zion, dominate the Pentateuch and the prophetic books. The Mosaic covenant is often characterized as a covenant of law and obligation; the covenant with David as one of grace and promise. Compare the “terms” of the promise in 2 Sam 7 with

Psalms 89. Is that an adequate characterization in your view? Which covenant has had more influence on Christianity?

**November 20 The Lived Virtue of *Chesed*: the book of Ruth**

1. the book of Ruth
2. Coogan, pp. 410-411

**For class discussion:**

The book of Ruth is an artfully crafted tale of the trials and ultimate triumphs of two women. In preparation for this discussion, carefully map the structure of the book's four chapters. (You might imagine how many acts and scenes it would contain as if staging a play.) Which characters dominate and when? How does the dialogue move the plot forward and reveal major themes of the book as a whole? How is God present in the book? How does this book relate to other Old Testament literature, either by contrast or by continuity?

**November 27: NO CLASS**, Instructor at a conference

**December 4: A Divided Kingdom and the Babylonian Exile: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Fall to Assyria; The Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Fall to Babylon; the Exile and its Significance**

1. 1 Kings 13; 1 Kings 16–19; 21–22; 2 Kings 1–5; 2 Kings 18–25; Malachi 4:5–6; Mt 1:17
2. Coogan, ch. 16–19, pp. 241-316 (You may skip the material on individual prophets, e.g., Micah and Jeremiah.)
3. \*\*Benedict Anderson, “Memory and Forgetting” in *Imagined Communities*, pp. 187-207 (online resource through U of T library)

**For class discussion:** Benedict Anderson states: “Having to ‘have already forgotten’ tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be ‘reminded’ turns out to be a characteristic device in the construction of national genealogies.” (p. 201) What does he mean by that? How might we say the same of ancient Israel? What events in the life of ancient Israel constitute such ‘forgotten’ tragedies? What sources and history shape community in the United Church of Canada? Can amnesia be a good thing?

**December 11 Take home final exam due, details TBA**