

STANDARD SYLLABUS

**Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures**  
**THEO 231**

This course provide an introduction to the Old Testament / Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures).

**Knowledge Area(s) satisfied:** Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge  
**Skill(s) Developed:** Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions  
**Values Requirement(s) satisfied:** Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World

**Learning Objectives:**

**Knowledge Area (Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge):**

By taking this course students will be able to analyze and interpret the biblical text, with attention to the religious beliefs and practices it reflects, using standard scholarly methods and tools (competency "a"). Moreover, by taking this course, they will be able to demonstrate knowledge, with particular attention to origins and historical development, of central texts, beliefs, ethical understandings, and practices of both Judaism and Christianity, insofar as these biblical texts are universally acknowledged to be the foundational religious texts of both these religious traditions (competency "b"). So, for example, students who take this course should be able to analyze and interpret some major biblical texts (e.g., Genesis, Exodus, 1-2 Samuel, Isaiah, Job) and/or significant passages within these texts, using the historical and literary critical methodology that is the dominant approach to the study of the Bible in academic settings today, and with some knowledge of the history and culture of the ancient Near East (competency "a"). Further, they should know the major divisions, or parts, of the Old Testament / Tanakh, the names of major books or texts representative of each part, and some key features of those books (such as a knowledge of basic content, their history and formation, significant themes, important ideas, and the historical context); be able to describe in broad terms the composition and evolution of the biblical canon, or its parts, with particular attention to the Pentateuch / Torah; be able to articulate and discuss important religious ideas or questions underlying these traditions (e.g., creation, sin, suffering, evil, covenant, law, prophecy); and exhibit a knowledge of the most important narrative traditions of ancient Israel (e.g., the Exodus), the "theologies" implicit in these or in the Bible more generally, and the character of the deity that comes to expression in biblical traditions (competency "b").

This course addresses other competencies as well. Students in this course will be able to demonstrate knowledge of central ethical teachings and perspectives characteristic of Judaism and Christianity (competency "e") insofar as the Bible is the foundational religious text for both traditions and ethical concerns and teachings permeate these texts. They will also be able to evaluate their own religious perspective and the religious perspective of others (competency "d") to the extent that, again, these texts are foundational, and the historical framework in which they are discussed prods students, for example, into examining the place the beliefs articulated by these texts have in their own lives today. And finally, students taking this course can demonstrate knowledge of the intersections between religion and various contemporary issues (competency

"c"), for example by seeing how peoples' beliefs about the Bible inform their political convictions, or how certain religious understandings, for example faith understood narrowly in terms of "obedience," can lead under certain conditions to fanaticism and intolerance.

### **Skills (Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions):**

Students in this course will be expected:

1) to "comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and contextualize the meaning" of various literary genres employed by the biblical authors (e.g., reports, stories, myth, law) and the interpretations they have given rise to, in class discussions, quizzes and/or examinations, and, in some sections, essays, based upon a close reading of the biblical text and following upon lectures modeling the application of appropriate theological, historical, literary, and hermeneutical skills;

2) to "evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of varying points of view" in class discussion, quizzes and/or examinations, and, in some cases, essays, upon coming to understand the origins and development of central religious ideas and values against the backdrop of the exigencies of their particular times and circumstances;

and 3) to monitor their own "individual thinking or behavior in order to question, confirm, validate, or correct it" in class discuss or perhaps reflective essays, in which students will be encouraged, for example, to examine the consequences of various and often conflicting interpretations of important biblical texts (e.g., creation in Genesis 1 or the divine promise of the land to Abraham's descendents in Genesis 12) or to probe the basis of their own religious convictions and beliefs after confronting their historical roots in reading and lecture.

### **Values Area (Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World):**

These biblical writings are universally acknowledged to comprise in whole or in part the foundational texts of Judaism and Christianity, so students will be able to "demonstrate knowledge of and capacity to articulate the foundations" of these traditions whether they are Jewish or Christian themselves or not. They also will be able to "demonstrate how faith traditions or belief systems have been or can be related to intellectual and cultural life" because religion in the ancient Near East is not really distinct from culture and intellectual life but is rather a primary expression of it and the course is taught from within the framework of a historical and literary critical approach that emphasizes the history and culture of the ancient Near East. As such, students will see it as a mode of inquiry and not just a series of static beliefs or convictions.

## Learning Activities:

### **Possible array of texts:**

- Bible (recommended: New American Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, Jewish Publication Society)
- Gabel, John B., Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony D. York. *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*, 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. By N. K. Sandars. The Penguin Press.
- *The Enuma Elish: The Babylonian Epic of Creation*

Note: (Instructors may vary the textbooks.)

### **Possible evaluation methods:**

- Lecture
- Discussion
- Papers
- Examinations

Note: (Instructors may vary the evaluation categories.)

### **Sample Semester Schedule:**

- Week 1: The Bible as a Literary Work. "Nuts-'n-Bolts" of the Course.  
The Historical-Critical Method.
- Week 2: The Canon of the Bible.  
Outline of the History of Ancient Israel as the Bible presents it.
- Week 3: The Documentary Hypothesis. A Test Case: Genesis 1-3  
The Primeval History (Genesis 1-11): Genesis 1:1-2:4 and The Enuma Elish.  
What's in a beginning?
- Week 4: Genesis 1:1-2:4  
Adam and Eve: A Lost Opportunity? Genesis 2:4-3:24.
- Week 5: Ancient Epic Forms: The Epic of Gilgamesh  
The Epic of Gilgamesh.
- Week 6: Primeval History: Genesis 4-11. The Rise of Civilization.
- Week 7: The History of the Ancestors: Genesis 12-36.
- Week 8: The History of the Ancestors. Genesis 37-50.  
Exodus 1-15: History or Myth?
- Week 9: Exodus 1-15: Moses and the Theme of the Pentateuch (Torah).  
The Covenant at Sinai. Israel: Religious Community or National State?  
Exodus 16-40

Week 10: Samuel, Saul, and David: Israel as Kingdom.  
Messianic Trajectories: Jewish and Christian.  
1 Samuel -2 Samuel 7  
Divided Kingdom: The Rise of Prophecy: Elijah and Elisha.  
1 Kings 12-2 Kings 25

Week 11: A God of Justice: Amos

Week 12: Isaiah 1-39  
Isaiah 40-66

Week 13: Jeremiah.

Week 14: The Book of Job

Week 15: The Apocalyptic Imagination: Daniel.  
Wrap-up.

Note: (Instructors may vary the presentation of topics to some degree, but the material covered will remain the same.)