



The Bible ... *for Smarties*

HEBREW SCRIPTURES 1: Beginnings, History & Covenant

SYLLABUS

Fall 2025

Taught by
David Moseley, Ph.D.

Mondays ~ 6:00-8:00 p.m. PST
Taught Online via Zoom

Welcome to Hebrew Scriptures 1! This class will introduce you to the discipline of academic Biblical Studies – specifically, the literature of the Torah and the Historical Writings in the Hebrew Bible.

“Old Testament” or “Hebrew Bible”?

The preferred terminology today – even in Christian Biblical Studies – is “Hebrew Bible” or “Hebrew Scriptures” rather than “Old Testament.” These are the sacred texts of Judaism, however important they might be to Christians - primarily *because* they were the sacred scriptures of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew. Referring to these texts as the “Old” Testament might suggest to Jews that they are out-dated compared to the “New” Christian Testament, or have been superseded. Also, as we will see, the language of “Old” and “New” Testaments imposes a “Christocentric” interpretive framework on the Hebrew Bible that is liable to corrupt or distort the original meaning of the texts. [In Judaism, the preferred term of art for their sacred writings is ***TaNaKh*** – an acrostic made up from the three first letters of the three principal sections of the Hebrew Bible: (1) The ***Torah*** (the “Law” or “Teachings”); (2) the ***Nevi'im*** (the “Prophets”, which includes History Books); and (3) the ***Ketuvim*** (the Miscellaneous “Writings”) – hence, ***TaNaKh***.]

The Goal of the Class is to Nurture Students towards a Nuanced, Critical Interpretation and Understanding of the Texts of the Hebrew Bible. The Bible is the most widely read and influential set of texts in human history, and is really a library of many books that chronicle the stories about God's revelation in two volumes:

- I. The Story of God's Covenantal Relationship with the Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures (the *Tanakh* or "Hebrew Bible")
- II. The Life, Teachings, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and the Story of his Followers in the Early Church (the "Christian Scriptures")

This class is the first part of a two-part course that will form an introductory survey of the many writings compiled into the Hebrew Scriptures. [Indeed, this is a four-part course if you also take the two semesters on the Christian Scriptures.] The literature found in the Hebrew Scriptures was composed and edited over the course of more than a millennium. Students will be exposed to the literary genres, forms and motifs that comprise these writings. The texts will be placed in the historical, cultural, sociological and religious milieu of their original audience. Students will learn a variety of techniques which are helpful in the analysis of Biblical texts: these include analysis of form and structure, as well as genre, historical and redaction criticism. Students will be encouraged to put acquired knowledge to use as they apply Biblical interpretation to theological construction and pastoral practice.

"B.C." or "B.C.E."?

When did "B.C." and "A.D." change to "B.C.E." (Before the Common Era) and "C.E." (Common Era), and Why? Is this more unnecessary political correctness from the Academy? As with "Old Testament" and "New Testament," the method of dating history according to the epochs of "Before Christ (B.C.)" and "Anno Domini" (A.D. – Latin for "In the year of our Lord", NOT "After Death"!) imposes a Christocentric standard of time on historical eras ... which was convenient for a period when Christianity was the religion of the dominant (European) colonial powers ... but is more and more untenable in a diverse and multicultural world (in both the academy and among everyday folks), a world where the majority of the global population does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the be-all-and-end-all of human history. Furthermore, the ancient monk responsible for this division of eras wasn't that great at math, and it's more likely than not that Jesus was born approximately 6-4 B.C.E. (just before the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E.). The Christian calendar – like the English language – has become the default standard of globalized world. Nevertheless, to mitigate the religious and cultural dominance of one particular system of measuring time, the preferred, *more neutral* universal terminology used today in scholarship is "B.C.E." (Before the Common Era) rather than B.C., and "C.E." (Common Era) rather than A.D.

Course Objectives

Students who have completed the Hebrew Scriptures class will hopefully be able to:

- Distinguish between various Interpretative Methods used to Study, Examine, Analyze, Research, and Comprehend Biblical Texts
- Understand the Historical Context within which the Religious Texts of Ancient Israel were Created and Read / Heard
- Appreciate the various Literary Genres found in the Texts of the Hebrew Bible, and Understand their Functions for Interpretation

- Be aware of the Social and Cultural Issues Relevant to the Formation of the Texts, and their Ethical Implications
- Comprehend the Significance, Relevance, and ongoing Influence of the Hebrew Texts on Contemporary Life and Debates, both inside and outside of the Church

This class will be divided up into Four Parts, as follows:

Part 1: Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible

2 Weeks (September 15th & 22nd)

Part 1 of the Class will be a brief survey of the varied Literature that makes up the Hebrew Scriptures. This introductory phase of the course will involve an exploration of some of the Main Issues and Themes in Studying the Hebrew Scriptures – the literature of an ancient civilization that existed two to three thousand years ago – thinking in particular about the “Genre” of the books that make up the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as important Contextual Factors (History, Archaeology, Sociology, Anthropology, etc.) that are part of Biblical Scholarship and Interpretation.

Part 2: The Torah

4 Weeks (September 29th, October 6th, 13th & 29th)

The Book of Genesis is an intimidating text to read, mixing Creation / Origin stories from the Ancient Near East with mythical and archetypal narratives of a primordial “Fall”, a catastrophic Flood, and the Saga of Ancestral Patriarchs in a special “Covenantal” Relationship with God that is replete with dysfunctional family dynamics. The first two classes will introduce the stories of Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and explore their Anthropological, Psychological and Theological Significance – both within Judaism, and as “Universal” stories of the Relationship of both God and Humanity, and of Humans with each other. The other four books of the Torah contain the Foundational Narrative in Judaism - the Exodus, when God intervenes decisively in history to liberate his “Chosen People” from slavery and genocide in Egypt and restore them to the “Promised Land” of Canaan. It forms the recurrent paradigm of Jewish History – Sinful Faithlessness, Resulting Persecution, and Ultimate Redemption ... and then *Repeat!* – for the rest of the Hebrew Bible (which will also be recapitulated in the Crucifixion-Resurrection narrative of the Christian Scriptures). These books also include the “fine print” of the Covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants in the form of the 613 Commandments (*Mitzvah*) that constitute the Jewish Law (*Torah*), which cover universal principles of ethics as well as peculiar and esoteric rules of ritual, worship, diet and purity that are hard to comprehend in the 21st Century.

Part 3: The Deuteronomist History

4 Weeks (November 3rd, 10th & 17th, December 1st)

Next we will be examining the Post-Mosaic History of the Jewish People - from the triumphal re-entry of the Israelites into (and often bloodthirsty subjugation of) the Promised Land of Canaan during the Tribal Period of History (*Joshua* and *Judges*); to the rise of the Golden Age of the Monarchy under King David (*I & II Samuel*); and the

eventual decline of the Divided Kingdoms after the reign of Solomon (*I & II Kings*), leading to the conquest and destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel under the Assyrians (c.722 B.C.E.), and the Fall of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including the destruction of Solomon's Temple and Exile, at the hands of the Babylonian Empire (c.588 B.C.E.).

Part 4: The Chronicler & Beyond

2 Weeks (December 8th & 15th)

Finally, we will round out the Hebrew Scriptures 1 course with the contributions of post-exilic historical writers who offered a revised narrative of the entirety of Jewish theological history (from Adam to the Return of the Exiles), which make up the books of I & II Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. Compared to the pessimistic analysis of the Deuteronomist Historians, who's account concludes with the catastrophe of the Babylonian conquest, the emphasis in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah on forgiveness and restoration after the Exile offers a more optimistic analysis of the Covenant between God and Israel.

Seminar Instructor

David Moseley, Ph.D. holds undergraduate and graduate Degrees in Law, Theology and Philosophy from Oxford University, and a Doctorate in Theology from Cambridge University. He is Director of Global Education and Teaches Religious Studies & Philosophy at The Bishop's Episcopal School, La Jolla, CA. Dr. Moseley taught Theology and Biblical Studies at the University of San Diego for 16 years; he was formerly Theologian-in-Residence at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in San Diego; and was a founding member of the Faculty of the San Diego Episcopal School for Ministry, teaching all four of their Biblical Studies classes (Hebrew Scriptures 1 & 2, New Testament 1 & 2) for five full cycles over the last decade. Dr. Moseley has Led Trips to the "Holy Land" (Israel, Palestine & Jordan), and regularly Teaches Adult Religious Education Classes in Episcopal Parishes throughout the County. He formed *The Bible ... for Smarties* (BfS) program in 2023 as a way of continuing online opportunities for deeper engagement with Biblical texts growing out of his experiences teaching at the diocesan School for Ministry.

Materials and Class Format

Our main text for this class is the Bible, and we will be using the following translation and edition:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with the Apocrypha (5th Ed.) edited by Michael Coogan (Oxford, 2018)

Part 1 of the class on Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible (first two weeks of class) also uses a required text:

The Old Testament: A Very Short Introduction by Michael Coogan (Oxford, 2008)

[The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* is about \$45 new in hardback on Amazon, and contains a wealth of useful introductory essays, maps, and annotations – and will be required for all my Bible classes. I strongly urge you to get the hardback edition as this will be a well-worn book over the next two years, and you should get a sturdy copy! The Coogan book is \$13 new on Amazon.]

Handouts and Outlines will be provided, as well as access to other Online Resources. Ultimately, what you get out of the class will depend on what you decide to put into it. You are strongly encouraged to complete assigned Readings before each class.

This Course will be made up of both illustrated presentations and will sometimes use a “Flipped Classroom” methodology – rather than the instructor lecturing students in order to transmit content, students are expected to have absorbed primary content (Bible readings) through weekly reading, enabling secondary reflection and analysis to take place through guided classroom discussion in a Seminar-Style Setting.

All being well, a second class on the Hebrew Scriptures will be offered in Spring 2026 which will cover the rest of the books in the Hebrew Scriptures – namely, the Prophetic Literature, and the Poetic, Philosophical and Inspirational texts that make up the “Writings” section of the *TaNaKh*. And if you want to study the whole Bible, there will also be classes on The Christian Scriptures (“New Testament”) in Fall 2026 and Spring 2027.

Registering for the Class

The cost of the class is \$295 (for 12 x 2-hr online classes -- a total of 24 hours of class time). For those of you who have taken any “The Bible ... for *Smarties!*” classes before, the discounted cost of the class is \$250. [Scholarships are available upon inquiry.]

If you'd like to take the Christian Scriptures 1 class, you can either Venmo me the money (@David-Moseley-17), or pay using Zelle, or mail a check made out to "David Moseley" with "HS1 Class" in the Memo Line, depending on your preference:

Dr. David Moseley
P.O. Box 27031
San Diego
CA 92198

****Zoom Recordings of other “The Bible ... for *Smarties!*” classes are available for purchase, with access to all supporting materials (assignments and reading lists, outlines, slide shows, and other resources). Classes that are available on recordings include:**

1. A Short Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics (Three 2-Hr Classes)
2. Hebrew Scriptures 1 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Torah & Historical Books
3. Hebrew Scriptures 2 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Prophets & The Writings
4. Christian Scriptures 1 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – The Christian Gospels
5. Christian Scriptures 2 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Pauline Literature & All the Rest
6. The Parables of Jesus (Six 2-Hr Classes)

Please email me if you have any interest in purchasing access to these recordings.

And please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Dr. David Moseley
drdavidmoseley@gmail.com
Cell: (858) 414-8169

Best Wishes for the Class!