HB600 INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE
Spring 2015

PURPOSE: This full-year Foundational Course will be based in a serious and scholarly engagement with the literature of the Hebrew Bible. Several lines of approach and areas of knowledge will be developed through the year. First, the study of the history of ancient Israel in its ancient Near East context will help us focus on how that history interacts with the literature of the HB. Second, in a series of graduated exercises, we will build skills in the critical methods used to study the HB, resources for that study, and the ability to do basic exegesis of a HB text. Finally; through readings, discussion and reflection we will develop an understanding of the theologies of the HB as expressed in its texts; and ability to reflect critically on the use and interpretation of the HB develop the ability to reflect critically on the use and interpretation of the HB in the church, in religious settings, and in contemporary culture. The fall semester will address introductory matters of background and method and cover the Biblical books of Genesis through 2 Samuel (beginnings to the emergence of the monarchy). The spring semester will cover 1 Kings through Malachi (United Monarchy to early Judaism). Prerequisites: HB500.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES: In successfully completing this course, a student will be able to:

- **Demonstrate an introductory knowledge of the Hebrew Bible:**
  - Identify major time periods, events and peoples in the history of ancient Israel and the ancient Near East
  - Identify major locations and interactions in the geography of ancient Israel and the ancient Near East
  - Identify and discuss the narrative/poetic artistry, content, and theological issues of Hebrew Bible texts, particularly those assigned in the course
  - Discuss the interactions of the historical and geographical context of ancient Israel with the content and theological issues in Hebrew Bible texts, particularly those assigned in the course

- **Demonstrate an introductory knowledge of the methods used in Hebrew Bible study:**
  - Demonstrate familiarity with the major resources for critical study of the Hebrew Bible
  - Define and identify and describe the use of the major critical methods
  - Apply critical methods to the interpretation of texts following models demonstrated in class

- **Demonstrate at an introductory level a willingness and ability to discuss interpretive issues arising from contemporary readings of the Hebrew Bible:**
  - Identify one’s own social location, starting assumptions and interpretive principles in reading Hebrew Bible texts
  - Summarize the interpretive principles of interpreters from social locations other than one’s own
• Identify the complexities involved in interpretive questions and discuss how such complexities may change one’s own interpretive position

• **Demonstrate the skills and attitudes necessary for graduate level Hebrew Bible study:**
  • Gather and select information from reading appropriate to task assigned
  • Communicate clearly in both oral and written forms, using good organizational formats and proper research formats
  • Show a willingness to assess one’s own work
  • Demonstrate ethical behaviour, taking responsibility for the expectations of the course and showing respect and willingness to listen in the learning atmosphere of the classroom, including class discussions and small groups

**FORMAT AND CONTENT** For **on-campus students**, work in the course consists of weekly classes including lectures, discussions, and small group exercises; assigned readings; exercises both handed-in and for class discussion; a journal; and a final exam. For **distance students**, work consists of recorded audio lectures, online discussion groups and small group exercises, assigned readings, exercises both handed-in by email and for online discussion, a journal, and a final exam.

**Texts**—available at UBC Bookstore
Bible (modern critical translation required; Oxford Annotated or HarperCollins New Revised Standard Version suggested)

1. Attendance as specified by VST requirements, which requires at least 80% attendance. For **on-campus students**, this means attending class on time with no more than 2 allowable absences for any reason. For **distance students**, this means listening to all the recorded lectures.

2. Reading all required assignments before class.

3. Participation in class discussions, and preparation of in-class discussion exercises. For **on-campus students**, this means preparation and full participation in class activities. For **distance students**, this means preparation and full participation in online activities.
   Evaluative criteria: comments and questions show adequate preparation, an understanding of the assigned readings and exercises, and a readiness to apply readings to interpretive questions and insights.

4. Skills and methodology exercises: Two written exercises to gain specific skills and learn critical Biblical study methods. Described below and due as specified in calendar. Evaluative criteria: concise and clear writing, and completeness and accuracy in carrying out tasks assigned. **On-campus students** must submit assignments in hard copy unless another arrangement has been made with the professor; assignments will be returned either in person or through the student return boxes in the library. **Distance students** submit assignments by email attachment, preferably in MSWord format or .pdf. Assignments will be returned by scanned attachment.

5. Journal as described below. Due as specified in calendar. Evaluative criteria: completeness and depth of reflection and insight.
6. Final exam: identification, short answer, essay. Evaluative criteria: answers are correct, comprehensive, insightful and clear. **On-campus students** write the exam on the specified date at VST. **Distance students** must, at least five days before the exam, set up a proctored exam location (church office, public or local school library) and confirm with the professor the email contact information of the proctor (church administrative assistant, public or school librarian).

7. Audit students are required to do all the reading and participate in the class discussions and exercises (whether in class or online).

8. Certificate students are required to do all the reading, participate in the class discussions and exercises (whether in class or online), and do the journal, handing in the sections of the journal as listed in the calendar.

**Assignment and Course Evaluation**

Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system with a competence model of assessment. Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) or NAPP (Not Approved) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. No number or letter grades or weights of assignments are calculated for assignments. One re-write is allowed on any assignment which is INC or NAPP within a course. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.

In all cases, all work for the course, including any re-writes, is due by the last day of term unless an extension for medical reasons is granted by the Dean.

The final grade for a course is reported both as a letter grade and as a narrative evaluation on the basis of a student’s overall fulfillment of the competencies and expectations of the course, which are stated in the course syllabus. No number grades are assigned. Final grade designations are: A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-; NAPP. No re-writes are allowed to improve a letter grade given as a final grade for a course.

**Policy on Late assignments**

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus for each course. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course. Particular faculty members will specify the extent to which repeated late submission of assignments will affect a student’s final grade.

Five written assignments (two written exercises and three journal batches) are due this term on the dates specified. If three or more assignments for the course are submitted late, the final grade will be reduced by one mark (a B+ becomes a B). In any case where two or more assignments are more than one week late, additional reductions may be taken in the final grade.
Journal

Keep a journal on the topics described below. The journal may be typed or handwritten, (if sufficient margins and legible handwriting are used!). The reflections will be done every week or so, for a total of 10 entries. Entries 1-3, then 4-6 are due mid-term (see calendar) for feedback and suggestions about meeting the expectations of the assignment. The complete journal is as assigned. Don’t leave the entries until they are due! The point is to watch your own thoughts develop over time.

Entries should be 250-300 words as assigned for the first and last entries and on topic 1 or 2 for entries 2-9. I am looking for thoughtful consideration of the topics, even if it’s just to raise insightful questions, not great length or scholarly acumen. The ability to raise and deal with the complexity of interpretive issues surrounding the Biblical text is more valuable than seeking easy or immediate “answers.” No research, extra reading, or footnotes are required—although use proper note format if you do quote something.

Entry 1 Write a short essay (200 words) on each of the following topics, giving your personal views:

- What is meant by the “inspiration of Scripture”? What authority does the Bible have and why?
- What principles of interpretation/assumptions/reading guidelines do you use when you read and study the Bible? Why are these important to you?

Entries 2-9:

1. Describe briefly an incident or situation where someone used/quoted/referred to the HB/OT in a church or social/cultural setting. How did the person seem to use the HB/OT? Is what they did/said “true” to the Biblical text, an appropriate use of the text? What interpretive principles did you use to make your judgment? [Please do not give just a summary of last Sunday’s sermon!]

2. Reflect on any topic or insight that has impressed you in your HB/OT study during the week. How has the topic/insight changed your understanding of the HB/OT? How is the topic/insight significant for the use of the HB/OT in the church, social witness, congregational education, or public square? How does the insight change your interpretive principles?

Entry 10

The ability to do insightful self-evaluation is a critical competency in ministry. In your final journal entry, do a self-evaluation of your journal as a whole (not of the whole course!!) Given the assignment and criteria for evaluation for the journal, use the final journal entry to assess: how well did you carry out the assignment? Assign yourself a rating (approved/not approved). [Note: The professor’s grading of the journal will include an evaluation of your self-evaluation. However, the assessment given by the professor will not necessarily reflect your own.]
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR HEBREW BIBLE/OLD TESTAMENT STUDY

**Bible Dictionaries**

**Ancient Context of Scripture**

**Commentary Series** [# of volumes vary; some are older; not every series complete for OT]
- *Anchor Bible Commentary*. Doubleday Press.
- *Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*. Abingdon.
- *New Century Bible Commentary*. Eerdmans.

**Methods and Interpretation**
  **NOTE:** This third edition contains a terrific appendix, “Using Electronic Technologies in Exegesis” which includes reviews of Bible software and a selected bibliography of Bible study web sites.
- *Guides to Biblical Scholarship Series*. Fortress Press. [short volumes giving brief intros to methods]

**General Sources and Background**


