

Prof. Patricia Dutcher-Walls
Vancouver School of Theology
Office: 604-822-9804
Email: patdw@vst.edu

INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE HB500 **Fall 2019**

PURPOSE: This first half of the full-year Foundational Core 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, become familiar with the resources for that study, and develop the ability to do basic interpretation 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 also 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 addresses introductory matters of background and method and covers the Biblical books of Genesis through 2 Samuel (beginnings to the emergence of the monarchy). The spring semester builds competence in background and method and covers 1 Kings through Malachi (United Monarchy to early Judaism). No prerequisites.

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:***
 - 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 ones' 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 class room or online learning, including class discussions and small groups

FORMAT AND CONTENT For *on-campus students and synchronous distance 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 *asynchronous distance students*, work consists of recorded 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)

Michael Coogan and Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* **4th edition** ["Text" in calendar]

Patricia Dutcher-Walls. *Reading the Historical Books: A Student's Guide to Engaging the Biblical Text*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014. ["Historical Books" in calendar]

Reserves –all available on Canvas

EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

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 *asynchronous distance students*, this means listening to all the recorded lectures and participating in online discussion groups.
2. Reading all required assignments before class.
3. Participation in class discussions and preparation of in-class discussion exercises. For *on-campus students and synchronous distance students*, this means preparation and full participation in class activities. For *asynchronous 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. *Synchronous and asynchronous 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. *Synchronous and asynchronous 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.

Written Assignment Format

For written assignments other than the Journal, the following formats must be used:

- One-inch margins, size 12 font, double spaced, indent paragraphs ½ inch
- Footnotes and bibliography: use either Turabian/Chicago Manual of Style or Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style

For the Journal:

- Right margin should be 3 inches to allow room for comments from the professor; other margins one inch, size 12 font, double spaced, indent paragraphs ½ inch

Course Policies

1. **Academic honesty** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
2. **Inclusive language** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
3. **Assignment and Course Evaluation**
 - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
 - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. 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.
 - For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.
4. **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. 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.

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.

5. Limitation on use of social media

Ordinarily, the use of electronic devices in the contexts of classrooms or meetings will be to support the learning, formation, or agenda at hand.

6. VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment. If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

In-class or On-line Discussion Exercises:

1. Narrative/Literary Method Exercise

Using guide sheet on narrative method, do a “close reading” of Genesis 3. Take notes, recording observations on character, plot, etc. Summarize—what are the main narrative interests and themes in this passage?

2. Emergence of Israel Exercise

Read and compare Joshua 1-11, Judges 1 and Deut. 1-3. Use a map to locate places mentioned. Find 5 examples of different ways the tradition remembers that the Israelites related to the inhabitants of Canaan during the period when Israel was emerging as a self-identified people on its own land. Be sure to cite chapters and verses for each example.

3. Sociological/Feminist Methods Exercise

Read Meyers’ article (listed on reserves), pp. 569-572 (top), 576-589. Consider and make appropriate notes: in what ways does Meyers’ article illustrate sociological and feminist methods? In what ways do these approaches help make sense of HB texts like Joshua and Judges?

Written Skills and Methods Exercises

1. Map Exercise—on handout

2. **Historical-Critical Methods** This exercise will help you define and recognize historical-critical methods and see how a particular interpreter might use and go beyond those methods in how they read a text. Full instructions in class syllabus.

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 you 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: use any one of the following as a starting point:

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?*
3. Use any text of the assigned readings, and in particular a text that you find difficult or problematic and try to describe the meanings you take from the text in one or two paragraphs. Then in an additional paragraph or two, *state the interpretive principles you used to make that interpretation.* What are the problematic aspects of the text? Do they require new or different 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

Anchor Bible Dictionary. Vol. 1-6. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Eerdmans’ Dictionary of the Bible. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

HarperCollins Bible Dictionary. Revised and updated. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2011.

Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible. Vol. 1-5. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.

Ancient Context of Scripture

Hallo, William and Younger, K. Lawson, eds. *The Context of Scripture*. Vols. 1-3. Leiden: Brill, 1997-2002.

Pritchard, James B, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Pritchard, James B, ed. *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

Commentary Series [# of volumes vary; some are older; not every series complete for OT]

Anchor Bible Commentary. Doubleday Press.

Feminist Companion Series. Sheffield Academic Press.

Forms of Old Testament Literature. Eerdmans.

Hermeneia Commentary. Fortress Press.

Interpretation Commentary. Westminster/John Knox.

Interpreter's Bible Commentary. Abingdon.

New Century Bible Commentary. Eerdmans.

Old Testament Library Commentary. Westminster/John Knox

The Women's Bible Commentary. Westminster/John Knox Press.

Word Biblical Commentary. Word Books.

Methods and Interpretation

Coggins, R.J. and J.L. Houlden. *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. London: SCM Press, 1990.

Hayes, John H. and Holladay, Carl R., eds. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*. 3rd edition. Atlanta: John Knox, 2007.

McKenzie, Steven and Haynes, Stephen, eds. *To Each Their Own Meaning, Revised and Expanded: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999.

Guides to Biblical Scholarship Series. Fortress Press. [short volumes giving brief intros to methods]

General Sources and Background

Carter, Charles E. and Meyers, Carol L. (eds.) *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996.

Gottwald, Norman. *The Hebrew Bible--A Socio-Literary Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

King, Philip J. and Lawrence E. Stager. *Life in Biblical Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Long, V. Philips, ed. *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999.

McNutt, Paula. *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

Miller, J. Maxwell and Hayes, John H. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2nd edition, 2006.

Miller, Patrick D. *The Religion of Ancient Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2000.