

Course Syllabus (Fall 2020)

OT5605 Old Testament Backgrounds

Dr. Gordon Johnston

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A survey of the physical, historical, and cultural world of the Old Testament, with special attention to its influence on Israel and the Bible and to its value in a modern understanding and communication of the Old Testament. 2 hours.

A. Cognitive Objectives

1. *Trace* the general periods of human history and the approximate dates for those periods, starting with the Paleolithic Period and running forward to the Hellenistic Period.
2. *Chart* the historical chronology of ancient Israel and the ancient Near East, as well as *identify* the major historical synchronisms within ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite history.
3. *Trace* the major events of ancient Near Eastern history with special focus on the history of ancient Egypt, Syro-Palestine, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, as well as *correlate* the major events of ancient Israelite history against this background of ancient Near Eastern history.
4. *Identify* and *explain* the significance of selected archaeological discoveries that contribute to a reconstruction of the history of ancient Israel and the historicity of the Old Testament.
5. *Evaluate* selected historical, archaeological, literary, religious, and cultural issues relating to Old Testament interpretation and *defend* his or her view on those issues.
6. *Identify* and *explain* the significance of the literary heritage and religious beliefs of ancient Near Eastern people that relate to a proper understanding of the Old Testament.

B. Affective Objectives

1. *Appreciate* the contribution of the historical, archaeological, literary, religious, and cultural background of the ancient Near Eastern world to understanding of the Old Testament.
2. *Appreciate* the contribution of the ancient Near Eastern backgrounds (history, archaeology, literature, culture, and religion) to reconstructing the history of ancient Israel.
3. *Appreciate* the role that background studies contribute to supporting the historicity of the Old Testament and to a proper hermeneutical approach to the Old Testament.

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTBOOKS

- Arnold, Bill and Brent Strawn, eds., *The World around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient Near East*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Books, 2016. [collection of essays written by experts providing succinct synopsis of each of the major civilizations in OT world] [about 500 pages]
- Jonathan Greer, John Hilber and John Walton, eds., *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social and Historical Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018 [collection of essays specialists addressing dozens of important topics related to Old Testament backgrounds] [about 500 pages]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The course requirements for OT605 are carefully and intentionally designed to be completed within 75 hours total, which will amount to an average of about 5 hours per week. The course requirements are divided into two equal components both in terms of time allotment and weighting of assignments: (1) course reading assignments (50% of the course grade) will require about 37.5 hours total to complete which will be about 2.5 hours per week; and (2) course research paper (50% of the course grade) will require about 37.5 hours total to complete which will amount to about 2.5 hours per week.

A. Reading Assignments (50%)

1. Each student will complete reading assignments of selections from the two course textbooks. The total reading load for the semester is about 750 pages total. This amounts to an average of 50 pages per week when calculated over the span of 14 weeks during the semester.
2. Students will only be required to complete 10 of the 14 weekly reading assignments. Each individual weekly reading assignment will count 5% of the final course grade for a total of 50% of the course grade. Students who complete an individual weekly reading assignment on time will receive full credit of 5 points. Students who are late in completing an individual weekly reading assignment will receive partial credit of 4 points. Please make sure that you complete 10 of the 14 assignments since failure to complete the minimum number will result in 0 points for each of the reading assignments that fall short of the 10 required weekly reading assignments.
3. Please see my discussion below: “Philosophy of Reading Loads and Reading Rates.” I am not (!) a fan of the concept of speed reading. Contrary to popular level claims that students who learn how to speed read effectively are able to comprehend and retain the same amount of material as students who read more slowly. Empirical studies performed in academic settings over the past 40-50 years have demonstrated that this is not the case—speed reading typically
4. Since I want you to read carefully in order to understand and absorb each weekly reading, I have intentionally limited the number of pages for each weekly reading assignment. Since I want you to read carefully enough to understand, learn and absorb the material, I will ask you to read at level 4: learning (see “Philosophy of Reading Rates and Reading Loads” below). Thus, I will ask you to read no more than 20 pages per hour which will allow approximately 3 minutes per page. Since each of the 10 required weekly reading assignments is about 50 pages total, you should plan to devote about 2.5 hours per week to complete the reading assignments.

B. Course Research Paper (50%)

1. Each student will research and write a course paper on a topic of your choice addressing a specific example (e.g., particular passage, theme, issue, etc.) which demonstrates knowing the background helps the modern reader better understand its original meaning and/or significance. The specific kind of background might be historical, cultural, literary or religious in nature. The reading assignments will help surface various kinds of topics that you might want to pursue. The student should consult with the professor for approval your topic.
2. This research paper should be typed (double spaced) and 10-12 pages in length. The paper should follow Turabian form and include a works cited bibliography. Since this is a research paper, you must engage a minimum of five peer-reviewed academic publications (not popular level sources) that represent discipline specific discussions of the topic (not commentaries). The paper must be thoroughly researched, carefully written and meticulously edited.
3. The course research paper will be due during week 12 of the semester. Please upload an electronic PDF version of your paper to the Course Assignments page for OT605-A on Canvas. The paper will count 50% of your course grade, so plan to devote approximately 35 hours total for the research, the writing and the editing of your paper.

PHILOSOPHY OF COURSE LOAD AND SEMESTER COURSE WORK

1. The course requirements for OT605 are based upon my philosophy of course loads. My approach is based upon the assumption that ThM students (like undergraduate students at a typical university) should not be expected to devote more than 40 hours per week on course work. Although ThM studies are intellectually challenging, I do not believe a student's work load should exceed 40-42 hours per week, which is the typical full-time work load in contemporary society. The course work load for OT605 is designed with this in mind.
2. The recommended full-time course load is 12-15 credits each semester, which will allow the student to complete course work within 8 semesters or 4 years. Assuming the ideal of 42 hours for course work each week, a course load of 12 credits equates to 12 hours in class and 30 hours of course work outside of class each week. Likewise, a course load of 15 credits equates to 15 hours in class and 27 hours of course work outside class each week.
3. Following this formul, a student taking 12 to 15 credits should devote about 2.5 hours of course work outside of class for every 1.0 hour in class each week. If you are taking a 3 credit course, you should expect to devote about 7.5 hours to course work outside of class each week. If you are taking a 2 credit course, the wise student will plan to dedicate about 5.0 hours to course work outside of class every week. Since OT650 is a 2 credit course, the requirements are designed to be completed within an average of 5 hours of course work outside of class each week.
4. Using this formula, the work load for a typical 3 credit course should amount to approximately 100 hours over the span of the semester. Likewise, the typical 2 credit course should amount to about 70 hours over the span of the semester. Since OT605 is a 2 credit course, the course requirements are designed to be completed within a total of 70 hours of course work outside class.

5. Assuming a 50/50 split between the completion of required reading assignments and preparation of research/writing assignments, the 100 total hours of coursework for a 3 credit course equates to about 50 hours for reading (3.75 hours per week) and 50 hours for research/writing (3.75 hours per week). The same 50/50 split between reading and research/writing for a 2 credit course equates to about 35 hours for reading (2.5 hours per week) and 35 hours for writing (2.5 hours per week). Since OT605 is a 2 credit course, the workload is designed with this in mind.
6. In keeping with this principle, the course research paper in OT605 is designed to be completed within 35 hours over the span of the semester (an average of about 2.5 hours per week). Empirical studies indicate the typical graduate student can produce 1 quality page of a course research paper in an average of 3-5 hours. Assuming a median of 4 hours of research/writing to produce 1 quality page of a research paper, 35 hours of research/writing will result in a quality paper of 10 pages. The prudent student will plan to devote about 2.5 hours per week throughout the semester to have plenty of time to research and write the course paper in a thoughtful manner.
7. The weekly reading assignments in OT605 are designed to be completed within 35 hours over the span of the semester (about 2.5 hours per week). Since I am not a fan of speed reading, I encourage you to read at a rate of about 20 pages per hour (3 minutes per page on average). This will enable you to learn the material rather than simply expose you in a superficial way to the reading.
8. Empirical research (e.g., Ronald Carver) indicates that the reading rate of technical literature by a typical graduate school student falls into five categories: (1) *scanning*: average of 5 pages per minute; (2) *skimming*: average of 3 pages per minute; (3) *rauding* (not to be confused with the term “reading”): average of 1 page per minute; (4) *learning*: average of 1 page every 3 minutes; and (5) *memorizing*: average of 1 page every 5 minutes. Here are helpful definitions:
 - **Scanning**: the minimalistic attempt to quickly breeze through a reading in the most superficial manner without slowing down to read any individual sentences. Scanning involves discovery of the most basic idea about the topic discussed, but without careful attention to detail. Average rate: 5 pages per minute = 300 pages per hour.
 - **Skimming**: the rapid attempt to peruse the basic content of a reading as a means of identifying the only the (two or three) main points of the material, but without a concerted attempt to absorb any details. Average rate: 3 pages per minute = 180 pages per hour.
 - **Rauding** (not to be confused with “reading”): the engaged attempt to not only read individual sentences, but to actively attempt to follow the author’s argument as a whole. This is what professors generally have in mind when they assign readings for general exposure to a topic to be presented by the professor in class, but without requiring the students to actively discuss the reading in class. Average rate: 1 page per minute = 60 pages per hour.
 - **Learning**: the more engaged attempt to understand the author’s argument as a whole as well as in detail. This is what professors generally have in mind when they assign readings which students will be required to discuss in a seminar style class. This is known as a “close reading.” Average rate: 1 page every 3 minutes = 20 pages per hour
 - **Memorizing**: the most engaged attempt to commit to memory the main thesis and key points of the reading as well as particular specific statements (such as particular important quotations). This is the intense level of study which students need to do in order to prepare for an exam (or quiz) over a reading assignment(s). This level of reading not only involves learning the material, but absorbing it. Average rate: 1 page every 5 minutes = 12 pages per hour.

For an excellent introduction to the science of reading rates, see: Ronald P. Carver, “Reading Rate: Theory, Research and Practical Implications,” *Journal of Reading* 36:2 (October 1992) 84-95.

Course Schedule—OT5605 Old Testament Backgrounds

Wednesdays 1:00-2:50 pm, Todd Academic Building 215

TWAOT = Arnold, Bill and Brent Strawn, eds., *The World around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient Near East*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Books, 2016.

BSOT = Jonathan Greer, John Hilber and John Walton, eds., *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social and Historical Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.

Readings marked in [*bracketed italics*] are not required, but may be completed for extra credit

No.	Date	Class Topics	TWAOT Reading	BSOT Reading
PART 1: SURVEY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WORLD—GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OT				
1	Wed	Course Introduction: Course Syllabus Introduction to Old Testament Backgrounds		BSOT §§1-4 pp. 5-38
2	8/26	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—1 Geography and Peoples of the Ancient Near East		
PART 2: SURVEY OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN HISTORY—HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OT				
3	Wed	ANE History: Part 1a—Egypt Pre-Dynastic Period, Early Dynastic Period, Old Kingdom Period	TWAOT 169-196 Egypt/Egyptians	
4	9/02	ANE History: Part 1b—Egypt 1st Intermediate, Middle Kingdom Period, 2nd Intermediate Period	[TWAOT 267-308] [Phoenicia/Phoenicians]	
5	Wed	ANE History: Part 1c—Egypt New Kingdom Period, 3rd Intermediate Period, Late Period	[TWAOT 309-352] [Transjordanians]	
6	9/09	ANE History: Part 2—Anatolia Hatti/Hittites: Old Kingdom, New Kingdom, Neo-Hittite State	TWAOT 197-228 Hatti/Hittites	
Due Date—Topic Approval for Course Research Paper—Upload Your Topic Proposal Idea (Paper Title) to Canvas				
7	Wed	ANE History: Part 3a—Levant Aram/Arameans and Phoenicia/Phoenicians	TWAOT 229-266 Aram/Arameans	
8	9/16	ANE History: Part 3b—Levant Philistia/Philistines (including the Sea Peoples)	TWAOT 353-378 Philistia/Philistines	
9	Wed	ANE History: Part 4a—Mesopotamia Sumerians: Early Dynastic Period, Ur III Period, Isin/Larsa Period	TWAOT 139-168 Ugarit/Ugaritians	
10	9/23	ANE History: Part 4b—Mesopotamia Akkadians: Old Akkadian Period	TWAOT 309-352 Amon, Moab, Edom	
11	Wed	ANE History: Part 4c—Mesopotamia Babylonians: Old Babylonian Period to Middle Babylonian Period	[TWAOT 1-30] [Amorites]	
12	9/30	ANE History: Part 4d—Mesopotamia Babylonians: Middle Babylonian Period to Neo-Babylonian Period	TWAOT 107-138 Babylon/Babylonians	
13	Wed	ANE History: Part 4e—Mesopotamia Assyrians: Old Kingdom Period to Middle Assyrian Period	TWAOT 31-69 Assyria/Assyrians	
14	10/7	ANE History: Part 4f—Mesopotamia Assyrians: Middle Assyrian Period to Neo-Assyrian Period	TWAOT 70-106 Assyria/Assyrians	
Due Date—Preliminary Outline and Bibliography for Course Research Paper—Upload to Canvas				

PART 3: INTEGRATION OF ANCIENT ISRAELITE HISTORY WITH ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN HISTORY				
15	Wed	Integration of Ancient Israelite History and ANE History—Part 1a Broad Historical Contexts		BSOT §§23-31 pp. 187-252
16	10/14	Integration of Ancient Israelite History and ANE History—Part 1b Broad Historical Contexts		
17	Wed	Integration of Ancient Israelite History and ANE History—Part 2a Integrated Approach to Historical Event-Based Contexts		BSOT §§32-41 pp. 253-331
18	10/21	Integration of Ancient Israelite History and ANE History—Part 2b Integrated Approach to Historical Event-Based Contexts		
PART 4: SURVEY OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CULTURE—CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE OT				
19	Wed	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—2a Archaeology of the Ancient Near East		BSOT §§5-10 pp. 39-90
20	10/28	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—2b Archaeology of the Ancient Near East		
21	Wed	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—3a Literature of the Ancient Near East		BSOT §§11-18 pp. 91-150
22	11/14	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—3b Literature of the Ancient Near East		
23	Wed	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—4a Integrated Approach to Themes in Israelite Religion		BSOT §§42-49 pp. 333-390
24	11/11	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—4b Integrated Approach to Themes in Israelite Religion		
Due Date—Course Research Paper—Upload PDF Version of Your Paper to Canvas				
25	Wed	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—5 Integrated Approach to Themes in Family Networks		BSOT §§50-61 pp. 391-474
26	12/02	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—6 Integrated Approach to Economic Contexts		
27	Wed	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—7 Integrated Approach to Themes in Social Organization		BSOT §§62-66 pp. 475-510
28	12/11	Ancient Near Eastern Culture—8 Iconography of the Ancient Near East		BSOT §19-22 pp. 151-186
Due Date—Course Reading Report Due Date—Upload Reading Report to Canvas				

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS

1. Studies Related to Historicity of the Old Testament

- Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess, eds., *Ancient Israel's History; An Introduction to Issues and Sources*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2014.
- John Day, ed., *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel*. The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies. London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004.
- Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Alan Millard and Donald Wiseman, eds., *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983.

2. Survey of Ancient Near Eastern Histories and Cultures

- Jack M. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Reprint edition: 2 volumes. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000. [collection of essays on aspects of individual ANE civilizations]
- Ian Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. New Edition. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Trevor Bryce, *Kingdom of the Hittites*, 2nd Edition. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000—323 BC*, Second Edition. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. [synthetic history of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor]

3. Survey of Ancient Near Eastern Literatures

- Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005. [synthetic survey of literary genres]
- William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds. *The Context of Scripture*. 4 volumes. Leiden, Boston: E.J. Brill, 2016. [collection of selected examples of ANE literature by genre]
- John Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. ISBN 0310365910, 9780310365914

4. Special Topics in Israelite Historiography: Origin of Israel from Exodus to Settlement Period

- James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. [evangelical scholar in archaeology of Egypt]
- James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Sinai: Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. [evangelical scholar in archaeology of Egypt]
- Alan R. Millard, Gary A. Rendsburg and James K. Hoffmeier, eds. "Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?" *Biblical, Archaeological and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives*, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 13. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016.
- Ralph Hawkins, *How Israel Became a People*. New York: Abingdon, 2013. [evangelical scholar who specializes in the archaeology of the conquest and early settlement periods]
- Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider and William Propp, eds., *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture and Geoscience*. Quantitative Methods in the Humanities and Social Sciences. New York: Springer, 2015.

5. Topic in the History of Israelite Religion: Origin of Early Israelite Monotheism

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MINIMALIST APPROACH

- Mark Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). ISBN 0199881170, 978-0199881178
- Mark Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002). ISBN 080283972X, 978-0802839725

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MAXIMALIST APPROACH

- George Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament against Its Environment*, Studies in Biblical Theology 2 (London: SCM Press, 1962)
- John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) ISBN 0310285097, 978-0310285090