



# BIBS 112

## Interpreting the Old Testament

### Distance Course Outline 2021

#### SEMESTER 1, 2021

##### **Videoconferences:**

Tuesday March 2, 18.10-19.00  
Tuesday March 16, 18.10-20.00  
Tuesday March 23, 18.10-20.00  
Tuesday April 13, 18.10-20.00  
Tuesday April 27, 18.10-20.00  
Tuesday May 11, 18.10-20.00  
Tuesday May 25, 18.10-20.00

Please check the Otago website for up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the implications for your studies of the current alert level:

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/coronaviruses/index.html>

##### **Lecturer:**

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##### **Theology Programme Kaiāwhina**

##### **Māori:**

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Please read this course outline carefully at the start of the course, and refer to it regularly throughout the semester.

This paper (BIBS112 Interpreting the Old Testament) is an introduction to the Hebrew Bible, known in the Jewish tradition as the **Tanakh** (a Hebrew acronym תנ"ך standing for Law, Prophets, and Writings), and to Christians as the **Old Testament**. The main aim of this semester is to deepen your familiarity with the overall story of the Old Testament, focusing mainly on the books from Genesis to Kings. This takes us from the story of the creation of the world, as understood by the author(s) of Genesis, to the Babylonian Exile.

These ancient books bear witness to many generations of human wrestling with God. They became the scriptures of ancient Jews and the earliest Christians, and have shaped a great deal of human culture since. We will be reading these texts against the background of the geography, history, and literary cultures of western Asia in the last two millennia Before the Common Era (BCE), trying to get a clear sense of the overall narrative and theological framework of the Hebrew Bible, and looking at the various religious ideas the books of the Hebrew Bible contain. We will focus in detail on a few specific texts, learning how to read them closely and how to interpret them responsibly (another word for this is **exegesis**).

##### **What you will need**

You will need the **Study Guide**, an electronic copy of which will be available to everyone on [Blackboard](#). This read-only Word file is hyperlinked to a wide range of relevant online resources, particularly from a very useful website called [Bible Odyssey](#). The study units are cross-referenced to **The Jewish Study Bible**, of which you should if possible purchase your own hard copy, but which is available electronically via the **university library catalogue** ([www.library.otago.ac.nz](http://www.library.otago.ac.nz)). You will also need reliable internet access so that you can access both the university library catalogue and **Blackboard** (<http://blackboard.otago.ac.nz>),

through which you can find additional readings on **eReserve**, and on which you will also submit your three written assignments (there is no final examination for this paper).

### A note on Hebrew

We will be studying the Hebrew Bible in English, but no translation adequately renders the original Hebrew of these texts. You can study Hebrew for four years at Otago if you wish. HEBR131 and 132 are offered annually (on campus and by distance), and you can study this language further in BIBS213, BIBS313, and BIBS411. For more information, please contact Dr Katie Marcar ([katie.marcar@otago.ac.nz](mailto:katie.marcar@otago.ac.nz)).

## LECTURER'S INTRODUCTION

Lecturer:

Dr Katie Marcar

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Arts 4S12

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

After taking this paper, students will:

- have a good knowledge and understanding of the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, from the creation of the world (Genesis 1:1-2:3) to the Babylonian Exile (2 Kings 24:1-25:30);
- be able to use *The Jewish Study Bible* intelligently to understand the Hebrew Bible in its geographical, historical, and cultural contexts;
- be able to summarize a scholarly argument about the meaning of a particular biblical texts; (assignment one);
- be able to write a brief exegesis of a biblical text, taking account of its literary genre, historical context, and meaning in the context of the Hebrew Bible as a whole, with reference to available scholarly resources (assignment two);
- be able to offer one major theological idea, as it is presented across the Hebrew Bible as a whole (assignment three).

## OUTLINE OF TOPICS

Each of the topics listed below corresponds to a study unit in the Study Guide. You can find a read-only Word file containing the entire Study Guide on [Blackboard](#). The notes in the Study Guide contain references to required and recommended readings for each study unit,

which can be found either in *The Jewish Study Bible* or on eReserve. To prepare for the videoconferences, as a minimum you should read the specified readings from the Hebrew Bible, together with the accompanying notes in *The Jewish Study Bible*. To prepare fully, you should read the corresponding readings and notes in the Study Guide. Make sure you plan ahead, so that you have enough time to prepare for the videoconferences.

### **Videoconference 1**

Tuesday March 2, 2021 (18.10-20.00)

Introduction to *The Jewish Study Bible*

Overview of the biblical story from the creation of the world to the Babylonian Exile

Reading: Study Guide, week 1 study units 1 and 2

### **Videoconference 2**

Tuesday March 16, 2021 (18.10-20.00)

The book of Genesis

The priestly creation narrative (P) (Gen 1:1-2:3)

The Garden of Eden (J) (Gen 2:4b-3:24)

Reading: Study Guide, week 2 study units 1 and 2

### **Videoconference 3**

Tuesday March 23, 2021 (18.10-20.00)

The book of Genesis

Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; 22:1-19)

Joseph (Gen 37-50)

Reading: Study Guide, week 3 study units 2 and 3, and week 4 study unit 3

### **Videoconference 4**

Tuesday April 13, 2021 (18.10-20.00)

The call of Moses and the Divine Name (Exod 3:1-4:17)

The plagues of Egypt (Exod 7:14-10:29; 12:29-42)

The Exodus (Exod 13:17-15:21)

Reading: Study Guide, week 5 study units 1, 2, and 3, week 6 study unit 1

### **Videoconference 5**

Tuesday April 27, 2020 (18.10-20.00)

The books of Leviticus and Numbers

Ritual and moral (im)purity (Lev 18:1-30; 20:1-27)

The ordeal of the *sōfâ* (Num 5:1-31)

Reading: Study Guide, week 7 study unit 2, and week 8 study unit 1

### **Videoconference 6**

Tuesday May 11, 2021 (18.10-20.00)

The Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-14; Deut 5:6-18)

The love of God in Deuteronomy (Deut 6:4-9)

Reading: Study Guide, week 6 study unit 2, and week 9 study unit 3

### **Videoconference 7**

Tuesday May 25, 2020 (18.10-20.00)

From Judgeship to Monarchy in Israel

Abimelech (Judg 8:29-9:57)

Saul (1 Sam 13:1-15:35)

Reading: Study Guide, week 11 study unit 2 and week 12 study unit 1

## **TEACHING AND WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS**

- Videoconferences (7 x 2 hr)

You should expect to spend roughly thirteen hours per week on this paper, including videoconferences and preparation for the assignments and examination. The actual time will vary from week to week, but each 18 point paper is supposed to require a total of 180 hours work across the entire semester.

## **RESOURCES**

- *The Jewish Study Bible*, which contains the New Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* translation, accompanied by interpretive essays and extensive marginal notes
- The notes in the BIBS112 Study Guide
- [Blackboard](#), the University's online learning tool
- [eReserve](#), where you can find the readings assigned for each study unit (you can access this via [Blackboard](#))

In addition to the resources above, the following two websites contain a wealth of resources written and collated by scholars working on the Hebrew Bible.

Bible Odyssey: <http://bibleodyssey.org/>

TheTorah.com: A Historical and Contextual Approach: <https://thetorah.com/>

Please **do not** use any other resources from the internet than [Blackboard](#), [eReserve](#), and these two scholarly websites, and do not cite sources from elsewhere on the internet in your assignments. The reason for this is that a great deal of the material available online about the Bible is not subject to scholarly peer review, and can be misleading. One of the critical

skills you will be learning in this paper is how to discriminate between sound and unsound use of evidence from the Hebrew Bible.

You must have access to Blackboard and your university email address in order to complete this paper. You will receive access once your [enrolment](#) is complete. Communications from your lecturer regarding teaching matters will be provided only through Blackboard and your university email address, as outlined in the University's [Student Communications Policy](#), so you must check these emails regularly.

There is a lot of helpful information and resources on the Theology programme [website](#). You are expected to have read the section called **Essential Student Information**: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/study/studentresources/> Here you will find essential information about preparing and submitting assignments. Please read it at the beginning of the course, and use the information available there when preparing assignments.

## TEXTBOOK AND TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

You will need to have access to the following, to which the university library has electronic access:

Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Hard copies of this work are available from:

[The University Bookshop](#)  
361 Great King Street,  
Dunedin North

Tel 03-477-6976  
Fax 03-477-6571  
Email [ubs@unibooks.co.nz](mailto:ubs@unibooks.co.nz)

If you do not know Hebrew—and even if you do—you should also consult other Bible translations, which may have a different interpretation of the underlying Hebrew text. If English is not your first language, you are of course very welcome to use a Bible translation in your first language, and to refer to it in your assignments.

The Theology programme recommends the New Revised Standard Version. You can access this version online via the University library catalogue, through which you can find an electronic copy of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.; ed. M. Coogan, M.-Z. Brettler, C. A. Newsom, and P. Perkins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), which is based on the NRSV.

If you are able, you should also consult Robert Alter's recent *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (3 vols.; New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2019), which is a literary translation of the entire Hebrew Bible, with marginal commentary (see my response to this work [here](#)).

An excellent recent work that addresses the difference between Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible is Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible with and without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020).

## ASSESSMENT

Three internally-assessed assignments are required for this course. Please note that you cannot use the same material in detail in more than one assignment (though you can refer to such material in passing). You will be expected to be familiar with the primary and secondary sources given in the Study Guide that are pertinent to the topics on which you write, in addition to *The Jewish Study Bible*.

In each assignment, you will be assessed on the following:

- your familiarity with the content of the biblical text;
- the accuracy of your understanding of the biblical text both in its ancient cultural context, and in the wider context of the Hebrew Bible;
- your understanding and use of the material in *The Jewish Study Bible*;
- your use and understanding of additional scholarly literature referred to in the Study Guide;
- your ability to structure your assignment well, and thus to develop a cogent argument;
- your ability to express yourself accurately and persuasively in writing.

For your assignments, you should consult:

- **tertiary** sources (i.e., scholarly works such as [Bible Odyssey](#) and *The Jewish Study Bible*, which contain summaries of the original research of scholars, without necessarily contributing anything original themselves);
- **secondary** sources (i.e., scholarly works available in biblical commentaries, monographs, articles, and essays, which contain the original research of scholars on the biblical texts);
- **primary** sources (i.e. the biblical texts in the original languages or in translation, as well as ancient texts from the wider cultural context of the ancient Near East, where relevant).

For the purposes of this paper, please **do not** use any other resources from the internet than [Blackboard](#), [eReserve](#), [Bible Odyssey](#) and [TheTorah.com](#), and do not cite sources from elsewhere on the internet in your assignments.

### Assignment 1 (review essay)

*Value:* 20%

*Word limit:* 1,500 words

*Due date:* Thursday April 1, 2021 (11.59pm)

This is a two-part assignment, designed to assess your ability to understand and critique a scholarly argument. You must complete both parts of the assignment.

- Part 1: Summarize the argument of **one** of the following essays by Walter Moberly (approx. 750 words).
- Part 2: Critical assess Moberly's argument, based on your own engagement with the relevant biblical text(s) and other scholarly sources, including *The Jewish Study Bible* (approx. 750 words).

- R. W. L. Moberly, "Genesis 6-9: Cataclysm and Grace," in *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 102-120.
- . "Genesis 12:1-3: A Key to Interpreting the Old Testament?," in *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 141-161.
- . "Genesis 37-50: Is Joseph Wise?," in *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 225-245.

Electronic access to Moberly's book is available via the university library catalogue ([www.library.otago.ac.nz](http://www.library.otago.ac.nz)).

## **Assignment 2**

*Value:* 20%

*Word limit:* 1,500 words

*Due date:* Friday April 30, 2021 (11.59pm)

Title:

Write an exegesis of **one** of the following texts.

- (1) Genesis 1:1-2:3
- (2) Genesis 3:1-24
- (3) Genesis 22:1-19
- (4) Exodus 15:1-18
- (5) Exodus 20:1-14
- (6) Numbers 5:11-31

Please note that each of the dates given above is a deadline, not a target. It is your responsibility to plan your work, and you should not wait until the deadline is looming before making a start on your assignment, nor do you need to wait until a topic has been covered in class before starting your research.

## **Assignment 3**

*Value:* 60%

*Word limit:* 2,500 words

*Due date:* Friday June 4, 2021 (11.59pm)

Title:

Write an essay on **one** of the following themes in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament):

- (1) The image of God
- (2) Blessing
- (3) Covenant
- (4) Holiness
- (5) The love of God
- (6) The character and attributes of the God of Israel
- (7) Redemption



In your essay, focus as much as possible on specific biblical texts that illustrate your chosen theme. Pay attention to the historical context in which they were written, and to the wider literary and theological contexts in which they are set in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Note especially the distinctive way that your chosen theme appears in different texts (e.g. the difference between the covenants associated with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, as well as the “new covenant” prophesied in the book of Jeremiah). By all means, find ways to connect the evidence from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) with the evidence of the New Testament if you wish, but make sure you distinguish clearly between the likeliest *original* meaning of the texts in their historical contexts, the way the texts were later *interpreted*, and what they *might mean when we read them today* (here you might wish to think about what makes one interpretation likelier than another, and whether some interpretations are simply wrong—and if so, why). Make sure you also show how we can recognize the difference between *Jewish* and *Christian* interpretations.

## REFERENCING SYSTEM

For writing essays, the Department requires that you use the 17th edition of the Chicago Style Guide, which is the norm for many academic journals in the Humanities and is often recommended for theses in the humanities. It is available online via the [university library catalogue](#). The Department has prepared a *Study and Style Guide*, which outlines the essential elements of Chicago Style and offers other advice on essay presentation. You may find it via the Department’s “Student Resources and Information” page: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/study/studentresources/>

## SUBMITTING WRITTEN WORK

All assignments shall be submitted **electronically** via the “Assignment” feature on Blackboard by **midnight** on the due dates notified. Please do not submit paper copies. For full instructions about how to submit assignments electronically via Blackboard as well as other important information on plagiarism, grading, and deadlines, please see the “Essential Information” web page.

All Assignments submitted in the Theology Programme must be prefaced with a student Plagiarism Declaration Form (or the plagiarism declaration on Blackboard must be ticked). They will not be deemed to have been submitted unless and until the Plagiarism Declaration Form has been submitted or box ticked. The form can be downloaded from <http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/study/studentresources/>

It is also on the Blackboard site for this course.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity means being honest in your studying and assessments. It is the basis for ethical decision-making and behaviour in an academic context. Academic integrity is informed by the values of honesty, trust, responsibility, fairness, respect, and courage.



Students are expected to be aware of, and act in accordance with, the University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Academic misconduct, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a breach of academic integrity and is taken very seriously by the University. Types of misconduct include plagiarism, copying, unauthorised collaboration, taking unauthorised material into a test or exam, impersonation, and assisting someone else's misconduct. A more extensive list of the types of academic misconduct and associated processes and penalties is available in the University's [Student Academic Misconduct Procedures](#). It is your responsibility to be aware of and use acceptable academic practices when completing your assessments. To access the information in the Academic Integrity Policy and learn more, please visit the University's Academic Integrity website at [www.otago.ac.nz/study/academicintegrity](http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/academicintegrity) or ask at the Student Learning Centre or Library. If you have any questions, ask your lecturer.

## STUDENT SUPPORT

The "**Essential Information**" web page provides helpful information on how to access the University Library's resources, as well as a guide to the support services available to students at the University of Otago, including the Student Learning Centre and Disability Support. See <http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/study/studentresources/index.html>

For all **administrative** enquiries, please contact the Theology Administrator:  
Email: [theology@otago.ac.nz](mailto:theology@otago.ac.nz) Phone: 03 479 8639

**We recommend that you contact the Programme as soon as possible if you have any problems participating in the course or accessing resources. Please remember to check your University email account regularly for updates and announcements.**

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**THEOLOGY PROGRAMME, SCHOOL OF ARTS**  
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