



BIBS 317/413

God, Suffering and Justice in the Hebrew Bible

Distance Course Outline 2022

SEMESTER 1, 2022

Videoconferences:

Wednesday March 2, 18.10-20.00
Wednesday March 30, 18.10-20.00
Wednesday April 13, 18.10-20.00
Wednesday May 4, 18.10-20.00
Wednesday May 18, 18.10-20.00
Wednesday June 1, 18.10-20.00

Teaching Day:

Wednesday March 16 via Zoom
10am to 12 noon and 1.00pm to 3.00pm

Lecturer:

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I do hope you find this paper stimulating and rewarding, but I am aware that some of the material we cover may be challenging, both academically and personally. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you feel you are having difficulties, of any sort, or if you just want to discuss issues raised in class or in the readings. I would be more than happy to hear from you.

“The need to let suffering speak is the condition of all truth.”

Theodor Adorno

“No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.”

Irving Greenberg

The problem of defending the justice of God in light of the reality of human suffering, sometimes known as the problem of “theodicy”—a term coined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), though the problem is far more ancient—raises serious questions for Theology, and for the faithful reading of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. How can a God who is all powerful, all good, and all knowing permit the suffering of those who seem to deserve it least? Questions such as these are very difficult to resolve, at least in ways that give due attention both to the character of God (as revealed in the scriptures and tradition of Judaism and Christianity), and to the inherent worth and dignity of human beings. There are some people, indeed, for whom the tension between human suffering and a belief in the justice and goodness of God is too severe, and renders the faith impossible to maintain with moral and intellectual integrity.

We are going to focus in this paper on the way the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) deals with the tension between the justice of God and human suffering. Rather than trying to fit the biblical tradition into a preconceived theological framework, we will approach the subject inductively, through the careful and methodical exegesis of particular biblical texts. Some of these texts, particularly the Individual Psalms of Lament and the book of Job, are concerned with the suffering of the individual person before God. Others, such as the Communal Psalms of Lament and the Former and Latter Prophets, are more concerned with the fate of the people of Israel as a whole, against the background of the covenant(s) between Israel and their God. Many of these texts respond

theologically to catastrophes in the historical life of ancient Israel and Judah, such as the demise of Jerusalem and its Temple in 588-586 BCE and 70 CE. We will pay special attention to what is sometimes called the protest tradition, which accounts for some aspects of the Psalms and Job, as well as an important dimension of the prophetic literature.

It is not absolutely necessary to be able to read the texts in the ancient languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Syriac) in which they were written, because they will all be studied in English translation. However, “there are now such abundant aids to the study of these languages that the biblical scholar, who by neglecting them would deprive himself of access to the original texts, could in no wise escape the stigma of levity and sloth” ([Divino afflante spiritu](#) §15). Courses in Hebrew and Greek are offered annually in the Theology programme.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

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At the end of this course students will:

- be familiar with the major traditions in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) to do with human suffering;
- be familiar with the major perspectives on divine and human justice in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature;
- understand how early Jewish reflection on the problem of divine justice developed through time, from the fall of Jerusalem 588-586 BCE to the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE;
- be familiar with the significance of the biblical tradition of protest, in the context of the wider biblical witness to the character of God and the role of the prophet;
- have completed two written assignments, including an essay on divine justice in the Hebrew Bible and an exegesis of one biblical text relevant to this theme, in addition to a 3-hour final examination.

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- have a deep understanding of the major traditions in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) to do with human suffering;
- be able to compare and contrast the major perspectives on divine and human justice in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature;
- be able to explain how early Jewish reflection on the problem of divine justice developed through time, from the fall of Jerusalem 588-586 BCE to the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE;

- have come to understand the significance of the biblical tradition of protest, in the context of the wider biblical witness to the character of God and the role of the prophet, and be able to explain how it fits into the wider biblical tradition of response to human suffering;
- have completed three written assignments, including an essay on divine justice in the Hebrew Bible, an exegesis of one biblical text relevant to this theme, and a final assignment focusing on a specific text or tradition relating to divine justice and human suffering in the Hebrew Bible.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course is divided into ten modules, which correspond to the modules given in the Study Guide for this paper. The Study Guide contains notes for you to read in preparation for, and additional readings to supplement, the material covered in the videoconferences and the teaching day. Please bring a Bible, in hard or electronic copy, to every class. The Theology Programme recommends the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), but for papers in Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) the New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) version, with the introductions, notes, and essays in the second edition of *The Jewish Study Bible*, is preferred.

Videoconference 1

Wednesday March 2, 2022 (18.10-20.00)

Module One *Divine Justice in the Hebrew Bible*
 The Problem of Evil in the Hebrew Bible
 Justice in Old Testament Theology
 Theodicy and Anti/Theodicy

Teaching Day

Wednesday March 16, 2022 (via Zoom)

Module Two *Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History (10.00-10.50)*
 Module Three *Prophetic Intercession (11.00-11.50)*
 Module Four *The Book of Jeremiah*
 Theodicy in Jeremiah (13.00-13.50)
 Anti/Theodicy in Jeremiah (14.00-14.50)

Videoconference 2

Wednesday March 30, 2022

Module Five *The Book of Ezekiel (18.10-20.00)*

Videoconference 3

Wednesday April 13, 2022

Module Six *The Book of Lamentations (18.10-20.00)*

Videoconference 4

Wednesday May 4, 2022

Module Seven *The Psalms of Lament (18.10-20.00)*

Videoconference 5

Wednesday May 18, 2022

Module Eight Ezra, Daniel, and Penitential Prayer (18.10-20.00)

Videoconference 6

Wednesday June 1

Module Ten The book of Job (18.10-20.00)

ASSESSMENT

Essential information for the preparation of assignments can be found online on the departmental website: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/study/studentresources/>

Assignments must be submitted online via the Assignments tab on Blackboard, where TurnItIn plagiarism detection software is used. You have the option of submitting a “draft” assignment to receive a plagiarism report, as well as a “final” assignment, which is the one that will be marked and uploaded to Blackboard (with a numerical mark, a letter grade, and detailed feedback from the lecturer). Please note that unless you are able to produce a medical certificate, extensions will not be granted, and a 5% penalty applies for each working day your assignment is late.

If you would like to discuss any of your assignments with the lecturer, please feel free to contact him at any time.

BIBS317**Assignment 1 (Exegesis)**

Value: 20%
Word limit: 1,500 words
Due date: Thursday April 14, 2022

*In the context of this paper, an **exegesis** is an interpretation of a biblical text that pays attention to the meaning of the text in its ancient historical context, its literary genre, its place in the wider context of the book in which it appears, and its significance in the context of the biblical tradition as a whole.*

Write an exegesis of **one** of the following texts, with special reference to the themes of divine justice and human suffering:

- (1) Psalm 77
- (2) Genesis 18:16-33
- (3) 2 Kings 22:14-20 (in the context of the Deuteronomistic History)
- (4) Jeremiah 20:7-18
- (5) Ezekiel 14:12-23

Assignment 2 (Essay)

Value: 20%
Word limit: 1,500 words
Due date: Friday May 13, 2022

Either

With reference to specific texts from at least **two** biblical books, discuss the significance of the tradition of lament in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

Or

With reference to specific examples from at least **two** biblical books, explain the role of the prophet in interceding for the people of Israel.

Examination (BIBS 317 only)

There will be a three-hour examination for this paper, worth 60% of the final mark. Distance students of BIBS317 will be able to take an unannotated hard copy of the NRSV into the examination with them (i.e., it should **not** be a study Bible, and must not have any personal notes). The venue for Distance exams is based on your Semester Address as provided in eVision, so please ensure this is kept up to date. All enquiries regarding exams should be directed to the Examinations Office (examinations@otago.ac.nz), not to the Theology programme.

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There are three internally assessed assignments for this paper, and no final examination.

Assignment 1 (Exegesis)

Word limit: 3,000 words
Value: 30%
Due date: Thursday April 14, 2022

*In the context of this paper, an **exegesis** is an interpretation of a biblical text that pays attention to the meaning of the text in its ancient historical context, its literary genre, its place in the wider context of the book in which it appears, and its significance in the context of the biblical tradition as a whole. You should pay close attention to any difficulties scholars have had in understanding the text, and suggest ways in which these difficulties might be resolved.*

Write an exegesis of **one** of the following texts, with special reference to the themes of divine justice and human suffering:

- (1) 2 Samuel 24:1-25
- (2) Jeremiah 7:1-8:3

- (3) Jeremiah 15:1-21
- (4) Ezekiel 18:1-32
- (5) Lamentations 1:1-22

Assignment 2 (Essay)

Value: 30%
Word limit: 3,000 words
Due date: Friday May 13, 2022

Either

With reference to specific texts from at least **three** biblical books, evaluate the significance of the tradition of lament in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

Or

With reference to specific examples from at least **three** biblical books, evaluate the significance of the intercessory role of the prophet in ancient Israel.

Assignment 3 (Extended Essay)

This assignment is an extended essay, for which you will need to engage in detail with the biblical text and with a broad range of available scholarly literature, such as biblical commentaries, monographs, journal articles, and essays in edited volumes. You should search the available library databases for biblical commentaries, monographs, scholarly essays and articles, and other relevant works to support your discussion.

The final option for this assignment is specifically geared towards PGCertChap, PGDipChap, MChap, and PGDipMin students (though they may select one of the other options instead if they wish).

Value: 40%
Word limit: 4,500 words
Due date: Friday May 27, 2022

Either

Compare and contrast the approach to divine justice and human suffering in the book of Job with at least **two** other books of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

Or

Compare and contrast the approach to divine justice in Ezra 9:1-15 and Daniel 9:4-19 with **either** the psalms of lament **or** the book of Lamentations.

Or

Write an introduction to **either 4 Ezra or 2 Baruch**, and evaluate the contribution of the book to the development of the Jewish understanding of divine justice, with reference to earlier traditions found in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

Or

[PGCertChap, PGDipChap, MChap, and PGDipMin students]

With reference to specific texts from the book of Psalms, the book of Job, and at least one other book, suggest ways in which one might draw upon the various perspectives on human suffering found in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) in the context of pastoral ministry.

RESOURCES

- Blackboard, the University's online learning tool;
- This Course Outline;
- eReserve, a resource for electronic readings, which you can access via Blackboard;
- The Department's "Study and Style Guide" which recommends students use the 17th edition of the Chicago citation style when writing essays. It is available online at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/study/studentresources/>
- The website "Information and Support for Distance Students": <https://www.otago.ac.nz/distance/current/otago697137.html>.

Please Note: 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. eVision will also send important messages through your University email. If you have any concerns about your access to Blackboard or to other course resources, please contact the lecturer or administrative staff immediately so that these can be resolved.

ESSENTIAL READING

Students **must** have access to a copy of the following, to which constant reference will be made throughout the course:

A Bible. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books (London: Collins, 1989) is recommended by the Department, but for the purposes of this paper we will be mainly using the following extensively annotated Study Bible, based on the New Jewish Publication Society translation of the Tanakh. The [Otago University Library](https://www.otago.ac.nz/library/index.html) (<https://www.otago.ac.nz/library/index.html>) has electronic access:

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

The Otago University Library also has electronic access to the following, which is an extensively annotated Study Bible based on the NRSV (we will be looking at parts of 2 *Esdra*s in this paper):

Coogan, Michael D., Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and PHEME PERKINS, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

The following, to which the Otago University Library has electronic access, is a good, basic introduction to the themes and texts we will be covering in this paper, and would be a very useful book to start with:

Crenshaw, James L. *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

There is a Study Guide for this paper, divided into ten modules that cover all the material in the Videoconferences and Teaching Day (for distance students) and the Lectures (for campus students). This can be accessed via Blackboard. It is keyed to readings available on eReserve, to which there is a link on Blackboard, and which contains a large number of additional readings to support and extend your learning. You do not need to read everything available on eReserve, but you should use the available readings to prepare for your assignments and the examination.

VIDEOCONFERENCES

Interactive videoconferences enable immediate response from the teacher and other students. They are an excellent forum for discussing the issues raised and for clarifying any problems you may encounter as you work through the material. For the method to be successful, it is essential that everyone participates fully. Videoconferences are not lectures, where the teacher delivers a monologue, nor are they a dialogue with one person in the group. They are intended to involve you in careful listening and active participation.

How should students prepare for each videoconference?

An interchange of views and reactions to the study material is an important aspect of each videoconference. Each participant brings a unique combination of prior experience, study and theological perspective to the sessions, and each participant is a resource for the group as a whole. In this kind of learning situation it is important that students prepare well, not only to engage meaningfully with the study material, but also to be ready to state and support their own viewpoints in dialogue with the whole group. A briefing about the next videoconference, and any reading that needs to be done, will be circulated by email the previous week. The most important thing is to ensure that you have read the biblical texts specified in the "Course Structure" section of the Course Outline, above, ideally with the accompanying notes in either *The Jewish Study Bible* or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

Accessing the Videoconferences

Attending videoconferences is a requirement of taking this paper. If you are obliged by circumstances beyond your control to miss one, you may find a recording of the

videoconference on Blackboard, under the “Zoom Videoconferences” tab. Here you will also find instructions on using Zoom and the URL that you need to join the sessions.

If you have any problems using Zoom, please call the ITS HelpDesk, using one of the contact numbers given on Blackboard.

Videoconference sessions will be held on **Wednesday evenings** as below:

SESSION	DATE	TIME
1	March 2	6:10 pm – 8:00 pm
2	March 30	6:10 pm – 8:00 pm
3	April 13	6:10 pm – 8:00 pm
4	May 4	6:10 pm – 8:00 pm
5	May 18	6:10 pm – 8:00 pm
6	June 1	6:10 pm – 8:00 pm

REFERENCING SYSTEM

For writing your assignments, the Theology Programme 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 Theology Programme's "Essential Student Information" page: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/theology/study/studentresources/>

SUBMITTING WRITTEN WORK

All assignments are to 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 Student Information](#)" web page on the Theology programme website.

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 or ask at the Student Learning Centre or Library. If you have any questions, ask your lecturer.

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago116838.html>
<http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago116850.html>

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.

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

For all enquiries about the content of this paper and about your study progress, please feel free to contact the lecturer.

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.

THEOLOGY PROGRAMME

University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand
www.otago.ac.nz/theology