

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
Old Testament Backgrounds

OT-722
Fall 2006
3 Units
Friday 1:00- 4:00 p.m.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of the geographic, historical, social, religious, and intellectual context of ancient Israel.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Describe, discuss and summarize canonical content and structure of the Old Testament
2. Examine, classify, and compare parallel literature from ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultures that are contingent temporally and geographically with the Israel described in the OT
3. Explore, describe, and summarize cultural, historical, religious, and intellectual artifacts and other data from ANE which impact understanding the OT
4. Analyze and critique minimalist and maximalist approaches to OT history
5. Explore how contextual insight serves imaginative biblical study

TEXT MATERIALS [all on 1 day reserve]

Required Text.

Provan, Iain, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Purchase Suggestions.

A Bible atlas. *Oxford Bible Atlas* or *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible* are recommended.

An introduction to the OT or a Bible dictionary. (e.g. Harrison, *Introduction to the OT*, Eerdmans, 1969 or Longman and Dillard 1994).

An anthology of texts from ANE. (Pritchard, James B, ed. *The Ancient Near East: An anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Princeton University Press, 1969 or Matthews, Victor H. and Don C. Benjamin. *Old Testament Parallels*, Paulist 1991.)

ASSIGNMENTS/LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Class Participation

Attendance/participation/interaction in class sessions and learning groups is required. There is a grade reduction of 5% for each missed class that is not made up. Students are responsible for contacting the instructor about make-up work. Students missing more than two classes risk course failure. On “video days” the class will do a group project to demonstrate interaction with the video.

2. Reading (15%)

Submit a list indicating the readings for the course. Close reading is defined as reading for note taking at about 30-40 pages/hour; survey reading grasps the argument (about 60 pages/hour).

Reading category	Close Reading	Survey Reading
Bible	200 chapters	200 chapters
Biblical history	200 pages	200 pages
Minimalist literature	100 pages	200 pages
Maximalist literature	100 pages	200 pages
Interest areas	300 pages	350 pages
Periodicals	100 pages	100 pages
TOTAL	1000 pages	1250 pages

The student is responsible to choose breadth in reading including archaeology, ANE parallels, and literary aspects in each section of biblical history. Comprehensive reading list with annotated bibliography is **due Apr. 27**.

Reading list should include author, title, and pages read with summative and comprehensive totals and academic annotation of 25-50 words per item—a bit more for longer readings is permitted.

3. Summary outline of the biblical books (10%)

Each student will create a template to summarize each of the major sections (Torah, Former and Latter Prophets, Writings) and each canonical book of the Tanak. Each one-page book-summary will include such items as the traditional dating of the book, an identified critical dating (cite scholar or school), a half-page structural outline, at least one cultural artifact crucial to good exegesis, and a 50-word (or more) devotional thought, sermon seed, or idea for Bible study. **Due April 20.**

4. Class Presentations:

Students will investigate and choose topics/titles with the approval of the professor by Jan. 17. Student choices will be posted on the course website to avoid duplication.

A. Monograph research presentation (15%)

Students will present their reading of one monograph. The student will prepare a 10-minute illustrated summary of the book and engage in a 10-minute conversation with professor/classmates regarding the book. In the dialogue students should be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. What is the thesis of the book? 2. What is the perspective of the author? 3. How does this monograph inform our understanding of OT Backgrounds? 4. How does this understanding inspire imaginative teaching? 5. How does this author engage other scholars? 6. How do you wish to challenge the author? The book summary (using the sample Monograph Research rubric) is **due via email to all class members 48 hours before the assigned class period.**

B. Class presentations (30%)

Students will prepare two class presentations on topics/issues related to the course. One presentation will involve an archaeological artifact/find/dispute. One presentation will involve a literary artifact/issue/approach. Presentations will be 18-25 minutes in length. Presentations will describe and illustrate the artifact, explore scholarly appraisal of the artifact, explain how the artifact illustrates Israel's unique and/or common relationship to its neighbors, and demonstrate the artifact's relationship to OT study, including how Bible study in a congregational context can be informed by the study. Presentations should be engaging, including the use of appropriate visual aids. A two-page scholarly precise will be distributed 48 hours before the presentation.

C. Creative project (15%)

Students will prepare and present a project that demonstrates findings to a popular audience (perhaps targeted at a college study group). The project may involve a model of the tabernacle, a short story or dramatic sketch, a creative lesson and exploration, or another project. Approval of the professor is required. Student to prepare grading rubric with professor's approval required. Project reports are due **April 27**.

5. Final Exam (15%) April 27

Note: A penalty of 10% will obtain on all late papers. The project, if submitted after April 27, will be reduced by 20%. A minimum of 70% on each assignment is required to pass the course.

Proposed CLASS SCHEDULE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Focus</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>ANE Parallel</u>
Jan. 12	Primeval Story	Genesis 1-11	Enuma Elish; Atrahasis
Jan. 19	Video	“As It Was in the Beginning”	
Jan. 26	Ancestral Stories	Genesis 12-50	Family; gods of the fathers Ebla, Mari, Amarna, Ugarit
Feb. 2	Video	“Chronicles and Kings”	
Feb. 9	Steve Reimer	Intro to Archaeology Uruk/Tower of Babel Amorites and Patriarchs	
Feb. 16	Exodus, Law, and Wandering	Exodus-Deuteronomy	Hyksos, dating the exodus, Hammurabi legal code
Feb. 23	Settlement	Joshua-Judges	Merneptah, technology and settlement in the hills, tribes, Philistines
Mar. 2	Video	“Enigma of Dead Sea Scrolls”	
Mar. 9	Module week	No Class	
Mar. 16	Monarchy	Samuel-Chronicles	State, Dan stela, Moabite stone, Black Obelisk, Samaritan ostraca,
Mar. 23	Prophets	Isaiah-Malachi	Social injustice
Apr. 6	Writings	Job, Psalms, Proverbs	Cultic institutions
Apr. 13	TBA		
Apr. 20	Exile		
Apr. 27	Postexile	Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel	Dead Sea Scrolls <u>Final Exam</u>

1. Academic Policies. MBBS academic policies (as well as other school policies) are described at <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/>. These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, accommodations for disability, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to the professor or consult the Registrar.

2. Evaluation. Each of the assignments has specific grading criteria (see descriptions above).

All assignments must be completed to be eligible to earn a passing grade for the course.

Please note that “student work will be evaluated by two standards: a) by what is considered the appropriate level of graduate performance, and b) by comparison with work submitted in a given class” (see <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/grading>).

The letter grade conversions follow the MBBS Grading Template: A (100-94%), A- (93-90%), B+ (89-87%), B (86-83%), B- (82-80%), C+ (79-77%), C (76-73%), C- (72-70%), and F (69-0%) (see <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/grading>).

The performance expectations are as follows: “A ‘B’ grade is the baseline. A ‘B’ grade means the student is doing satisfactory work. The ‘B+’ or higher grade indicates that the student has exceeded the baseline performance standard. The ‘C’ grade indicates that the student has not achieved the baseline level” (see <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/grading>).

3. **Formatting specifications.** Any of the three standard citation styles is acceptable (Chicago, APA, MLA). Choose one and follow it consistently. Consult *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson, 1999) which is in the Reference section of the *Hiebert Library* (Ref PN 147.S26) for examples of how to cite dictionary articles, journal articles, monographs, commentaries, books in series, websites, etc. An online version of the *SBL Handbook* is available at http://www.sbl-site.org/Publications/Publications_PublishingWithSBL.aspx (click on *Student Supplement for SBL Handbook of Style* under the “Resources” section). Slade’s, *Form and Style: Research Papers, Reports, Theses*, 11th ed. (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000) is also a useful guide. The preferred documentation format is parenthetical citation style.

Evaluating Papers

A

Excellent overall, no major weaknesses

Grasps what biblical and theological thinking is

Strong evidence of original thinking

Clear, precise, well-reasoned with obvious capacity to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, discern, justify and elaborate

Clear authorial voice demonstrated by a well-defined thesis, effective body, and summative conclusion

Clear analysis and formulation of information

Good organization

Meticulous concern for documented evidence

Recognizes key issues, assumptions, questions consistently

Identifies points of view

Breadth

B

Very good overall, no major weaknesses but some discernible ones

Grasps what biblical and theological thinking is

Evidence of some original thinking with clear writing plan

Clear, precise, well-reasoned with occasional lapses; satisfactory critical and analytical capacity

Minor errors of documentation do not detract from clarity

Usually demonstrates clear analysis and formulation of information

Recognizes most key issues, assumptions, questions

Frequently identifies points of view

Breadth

C

Good overall, mixture of weakness and strengths

Modest grasp of biblical and theological thinking

Uses some terms correctly but makes some mistakes

Lapses in reasoning at times

Needs to develop clarity and precision and use of key concepts

Shows inadequate evidence of having read the material

Presence of grammatical, stylistic, and/or documentation errors which detract from clarity

Lacks breadth

D

Poor overall

Minimal grasp of biblical thinking

Little evidence of reasoning; lack of effort to pull together ideas, concepts, information

Organization flawed, difficult to follow

Lacks evidence of reading material

Failure to document clearly

Class Presentation: Monograph Research Grading Rubric

- _____/10 Follows the rubric categories and submits work on time
- _____/10 Analyzes the book's thesis in a way that is concise, well-defined, complete
- _____/20 Presentation is clear, organized, concise, complete
- _____/10 Engages in discerning dialogue with class/professor
- _____/30 Discerns thoughtful insights for nurturing faith and church life
- _____/20 Evaluates book's contributions and limits/challenges author's conclusions with fair analysis

Each student will present the reading of one monograph. The student will prepare a 10-minute illustrated summary of the book and engage in a 10-minute conversation with professor/classmates regarding the book. In the dialogue the student should be prepared to answer the following questions: 1. What is the thesis of the book? 2. What is the perspective of the author? 3. How does this monograph inform our understanding of OT Backgrounds? 4. How does this understanding inspire imaginative teaching? 5. How does this author engage other scholars? 6. How do you wish to challenge the author? The book summary (using the sample Monograph Research rubric) is **due via email to all class members 48 hours before the assigned class period.**

Model Monograph Review for “Old Testament Theology,” MBBS, Lynn Jost

Middleton, J. Richard. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Brazos, 2005. 304 pages.

Area: Creation

Thesis: *Image of God* as used in Genesis 1 and the Hebrew Bible shatters ancient and contemporary rhetorical expectations. God is a generous creator, sharing power with humanity and other creatures. God takes the risk of inviting creatures to participate in the creative and historical process. (296-97)

Structural Analysis: Middleton develops his thesis in three parts. In Part 1 he reviews the traditional interpretations of *image of God* and identifies their weak points, lays out his interdisciplinary, subjective hermeneutics of mutuality, then exegetes Genesis 1:27 with careful word studies and intertextual analysis. Part 2 identifies *image of God* in Genesis 1-11 as a subversive ideological critique of ANE mythology, with analysis of Egyptian and especially Mesopotamian literature. Part 3 weighs the possibility that the Hebrew Bible uses the myth of creative violence in Job and the Psalms, then returns to Genesis 1 to reconsider the notion that Genesis 1 establishes a perfectly symmetrical order for creation.

Evaluation: Middleton has written a book which is smart, accessible to the nonscholar, engaging, yet stretching, demanding, given to meticulous detail and argument. As an online critic says, “Middleton is one of a group of biblical scholars who combine deep grounding in traditional scholarship, profound awareness of the effects of postmodernism on culture and thought, and are unafraid to name openly their faith commitment that informs and shapes their scholarship. . . . Middleton is working to rethink some ancient questions in light of today's intellectual, social and economic contexts.” (“Reviews Written by Wes in Issaqah.” Amazon N.P. Cited 20 July 2006. http://www.amazon.com/gp/cdp/member-reviews/A10QPVDDVWMWY4/ref=cm_cr_auth/104-4585166-6901567?ie=UTF8) The book's strength lies in its postmodern biblical exegesis with careful attention to a biblical subversive approach to imperial ideology. It would be strengthened by stronger, clearer development of the contemporary implications of this reading.

Helpful Insights: “. . . *imago Dei* refers to humanity's . . . role as God's earthly delegates . . . to extend God's rule on earth through ordinary communal practices of human life.” (60) God's relationship to creation is illuminated by images of kingship, covenant, kinship, artisanship, one who fashioned the world as a cosmic sanctuary (as the emphasis on sevens substantiates [83]). Human responsibility for creation in God's name is both *representational* and *representative* of God (88) as humans imitate God's creativity (89). Genesis 1 challenges “the Mesopotamian notion of king as image of a god . . . with the claim that all humanity was made in God's image” (145). “Rather, God granted a royal-priestly identity . . . to all humanity. . . . This democratization . . . [dignifies] the human race with a noble status in the world, analogous to that of royalty in ANE” (204). Israel's distinctiveness may lie less in theological claims about God's historical action and more in the social order these claims generate (193), resulting in internal debate in Israel (195). “Genesis 1 constitutes a normative framework by which we may judge all the violence that pervades the rest of the Bible” (269).

Response: I am beginning to move from prioritizing *deliverance* as a theme of OTT to recognizing the priority if not primacy of *creation*. M. also reinforces my growing sense that one faithful reading of the Bible recognizes it as a subversive text that deconstructs imperial ideology. M.'s colleagues Walsh and Keesmaat have written a smart book entitled *Colossians Remixed* which uses a similar strategy but includes more application.

Grading Rubric for Presentation

Students will prepare two class presentations on topics/issues related to the course. One presentation will involve an archaeological artifact/find/dispute. One presentation will involve a literary artifact/issue/approach. Students are responsible to discover and define the thesis they will investigate and defend. Presentations will be 18-25 minutes in length. Presentations will describe and illustrate the artifact, explore scholarly appraisal of the artifact, explain how the artifact illustrates either Israel's unique or common relationship to its neighbors, and demonstrate the artifact's relationship to OT study. Presentations should be engaging, including the use of appropriate visual. A two-page scholarly precise will be distributed 48 hours before the presentation.

Outline

_____ 25	Articulation of thesis is clear, complete, concise, appropriate, defensible
_____ 10	Description of artifact is clear
_____ 10	Scholarly appraisal is comprehensive, accurate
_____ 20	Explanation of artifact's role in OT study is comprehensive, clear
_____ 15	Analysis of artifact's role in defining Israel's uniqueness in ANE is complete
_____ 10	Demonstration of artifact's value for congregational learning is clear
_____ 10	Use of visual aids assists and does not distract learning

Failure to submit materials on time or according to the rubric results in a penalty of not less than 10%.