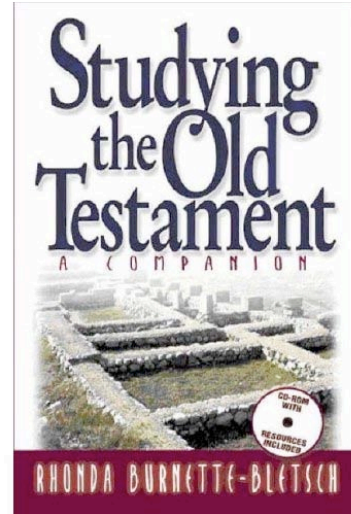


REL 1110: Introduction to the Old Testament/*Tanakh*
Greensboro College, Fall 2007
Tues./Thurs. 8:00-9:30 a.m.
Proctor West 305

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Course Description

“The importance of the Bible can hardly be overestimated. Not only is it foundational to three of the world’s great religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – it is undoubtedly the most influential book in the history of Western civilization. Even Westerners who do not consider themselves particularly religious are consciously or unconsciously affected by the Bible on an almost daily basis. This ancient text has inspired some of the world’s greatest art, music, and literature. Popular culture likewise abounds with biblical images and allusions. Appeals to biblical texts and precepts are commonplace on both sides of current debates about appropriate gender roles, reproductive rights, gay and lesbian rights, criminal justice, ecological issues, and public education. The relative merits of such arguments cannot be evaluated without firsthand knowledge of the Bible and its contents. Anyone who aspires to be an educated person or a responsible global citizen must grapple with the biblical text” (*SOTC*, p. ix).



In this course we will study the diverse writings of the OT or *Tanakh* as literary products of their original social and historical contexts. We will ask how ancient Israelites used these texts to respond theologically and ideologically to their lived experiences. We will also investigate some of the ways in which later communities appropriated these texts for new situations and consider why these writings continue to be culturally important.

Participants in this course will engage in academic study of the OT/*Tanakh*. We will *not* approach these writings devotionally as one might within a faith community (see *SOTC*, pp. 15-17). All students are welcome to participate openly in this class regardless of their religious background or lack thereof.

Learning Objectives

This course has been designed to give students the following opportunities:

- To gain familiarity with the varied contents, canonical arrangements, and social/historical contexts of the OT/*Tanakh*;
- To develop critical skills for reading and interpreting biblical texts;

- To develop analytical tools for assessing diverse interpretations and appropriations of biblical texts (including their own);
- To engage in active learning by *doing* biblical studies *rather than memorizing* the ideas of biblical scholars.

Required Texts

Bible – A variety of translations is encouraged. For direction consult *SOTC*, pp. 11-15 or the CD-ROM discussion entitled “Modern English Bibles” (Special Topic IIC.2). Please bring your Bible with you to every class session.

Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, *Studying the Old Testament: A Companion* (Abingdon, 2007). We will be using the exercises and additional resources provided on the CD-ROM that accompanies our textbook throughout the semester. Students should take initiative to locate open computer labs across campus and familiarize themselves with this resource.

Required Work

Regular Attendance and Active Participation: To be successful in this course students must demonstrate independent, critical thinking – neither rote answers nor memorization of course content will suffice. Students are expected to come to class ready to participate meaningfully and enthusiastically in classroom activities. This requires prior completion of assigned readings and exercises. Students are responsible for knowing what is required and when assignments are due. Absences will make it very difficult to do well in this course.

Preliminary Exercises and Readings: Students will regularly be assigned preliminary exercises from the *SOTC* CD-ROM that are designed to be completed in conjunction with biblical readings. Some of these exercises will be traditional worksheets while others will require more creative thinking. All of these exercises give students opportunities to interact with biblical texts firsthand rather than just read about them. Reading assignments in *SOTC* will typically follow exercises. Students should be forewarned that *SOTC* is not designed to replace the biblical text! It generally does not summarize biblical content or provide the “answers” to preliminary exercises.

While diligent completion of homework exercises is expected, I understand that personal crises and other responsibilities may sometimes compete for your attention. For that reason your lowest three grades on preliminary exercises will be dropped at the end of the semester. Because completed exercises are often discussed in class, no late work will be accepted for any reason.

Classroom Activities and Discussions: This course will rely heavily on classroom activities and discussions although traditional lectures will sometimes be necessary. In this component of the class we will review exercises and consider discussion questions found on the *SOTC* CD-ROM. This may take the form of a classroom debate, a student performance, group work, or a class-wide discussion. Students will be evaluated individually for the quality of their contributions in the classroom even in the context of

group work. Absences (for whatever reason) will negatively affect this component of your grade.

One Test: Only one test will be administered in this course following the introductory unit. The purpose of this test is to encourage retention of basic information – about the biblical world, the biblical text, and biblical studies as an academic discipline – that will be presupposed throughout the remainder of the course.

Four Reflection Papers: Rather than taking tests after each subsequent unit of the course, students will write reflection papers based on their own interaction with the biblical text. More specific guidelines for these papers and their evaluation will be provided later in the semester. In brief, you may notice that most chapters of *SOTC* contain an “interlude” which provides one possible way of understanding the biblical literature under consideration in that unit of the course. At the completion of each unit students will write a 4-5 page, single-spaced, typed paper that (1) summarizes in their own words the theory presented by the interlude and (2) assesses that theory based on their own interaction with the biblical text in this class. What evidence in the text supports the theory? Does the theory leave any important features of the text unexplained? Are there other reasonable ways of understanding this literature? Reflection papers will be evaluated based on the quality of a student’s reasoned arguments and demonstrated grasp of the analytical tools presented in this course. Students will not be penalized for disagreeing with the professor or with the existing scholarly consensus.

Optional Extra Credit: As engaged learners students are expected (1) to set personal goals and monitor their own progress in this course and (2) to pursue topics of interest beyond required assignments.

Study aids such as review questions and self-tests found on the *SOTC* CD-ROM can assist students in assessing their grasp of course material. Students have the option of submitting typed responses to these questions as each unit is completed for extra-credit consideration.

Other resources on the CD-ROM (special topics, discussion questions, suggestions for further reading, etc.) can guide students who wish to explore topics of interest that extend beyond required coursework. Students have the option of developing and completing projects in consultation with the instructor that reflect additional research. Students are responsible for initiating and executing these optional research projects while the instructor will serve only as a resource consultant.

The awarding of extra credit lies at the discretion of the instructor based on the quality of work submitted. Extra credit can improve your grade, but it cannot “save” students who do not conscientiously complete other work required in the course.

Grading

Preliminary Exercises	20%
Classroom Participation	20%

Test	15%
Reflection Papers	45%

Learning Resources

I will make every reasonable effort to help you meet the learning objectives of this course. My contact information is posted at the top of this syllabus and office hours are posted on my office door. You should also be aware of other resources such as our excellent library staff and various services offered through the Peak Learning Center. All students are advised to consult with the writing tutor on each of their reflection papers, so do not begin writing these papers at the last minute before the due date! Students with documented learning disabilities should meet with me early in the semester to discuss any necessary accommodations.

Conduct and Integrity

Students are expected to review and follow the Academic Honor Code and Student Conduct Code found in the Greensboro College Student Handbook. Be respectful of your instructor and your classmates. Learning is enhanced when we seriously consider the opinions and perspectives of others in class discussions. Students are also encouraged to discuss assignments and papers, but all written work in this course must be completed independently. Suspected cases of cheating or plagiarism will be referred to the Academic Honor Court and may result in failing an assignment, failing the course, or an even more severe penalty.

Course Outline and Test/Paper Due Dates

This course consists of five units, which are listed below and broken down into topics with associated primary and secondary readings. Unit #1 will be covered in 1 ½ weeks and followed by a test on Aug. 30th. Subsequent units will each occupy roughly three weeks of class time and be followed by reflections papers due on Sept. 25th, Oct. 23rd, Nov. 13th, and Dec. 4th. The instructor reserves the right to revise this schedule as necessary during the course of the semester.

Unit #1 – Preparing for Our Journey through the Old Testament/*Tanakh*

1. Orientation to the Biblical World (*SOTC*, pp. 1-7)
2. Orientation to the Biblical Text (*SOTC*, pp. 7-15)
3. Orientation to Biblical Studies (*SOTC*, pp. 15-22)

Unit #2 – Torah: The Journey Begins

1. Cosmic Origins (Gen. 1-11, *SOTC*, pp. 23-35)
2. Interlude (*SOTC*, pp. 35-46)
3. Family Origins (Gen. 12-50, *SOTC*, pp. 47-62)
4. National Origins (Exod.-Deut. excerpts, *SOTC*, pp. 63-94)

Unit #3 – Former Prophets: A Nation's Journey

1. The Road to Canaan (Josh.-Judg. excerpts, *SOTC*, pp. 95-117)
2. Interlude (*SOTC*, pp. 118-131)
3. The Road to Statehood (I-II Sam. excerpts, *SOTC*, pp. 131-147)

4. The Road to Exile (II-Sam.-II Kgs. excerpts, *SOTC*, pp. 147-166)

Unit #4 – Latter Prophets: Israel’s Moral Compass

1. The Assyrian Period (excerpts from various prophets, *SOTC*, pp. 167-188)
2. Interlude (*SOTC*, pp. 188-196)
3. The Babylonian Period (excerpts from various prophets, *SOTC*, pp. 196-218)
4. The Persian Period (excerpts from various prophets, *SOTC*, pp. 218-237)

Unit #5 – Writings: The Homeward Journey

1. The Path of Worship (excerpts from various Writings, *SOTC*, pp. 239-268)
2. The Path of Wisdom (excerpts from Prov./Ecc./Job, *SOTC*, pp. 269-284)
3. The Path of Apocalyptic (excerpts from Daniel, *SOTC*, pp. 284-299)