

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE (HS1)

[Mercer School for Ministry](#)  
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## Course Description

The course introduces the study of Holy Scripture: the basics of biblical science, inspiration and canonicity, and a broad outline of the contents and structures of the Old and New Testaments. It also includes a bird's-eye view of the history of the Holy Land. Critical methodologies of biblical interpretation are introduced.

## Intended Learning Outcome and Objective

The intended learning outcome of this course is that students will broaden their understanding of the *study* of Holy Scripture, that is, students will gain greater awareness of the diverse approaches of biblical studies including the nature of Holy Scripture, the contexts in which it came to be written and collected, and the critical methodologies used to interpret it.

Initially, the students attain knowledge of the basics of biblical science in an introduction to inspiration and canonicity, as well as an overview of the contents and structure of the Old and New Testaments. Next, comprehension and application of this knowledge is moulded by an introduction to the history of the Holy Land. Finally, critical methodologies of biblical interpretation are introduced.

The course's objective is for students to be enabled to evaluate critically the multi-faceted readings of Holy Scripture. The means of instruction is the Socratic method. The course outline (below) indicates both the topics covered and the required reading necessary for active participation in each seminar. Active participation, facilitated by the required reading, is mandatory. The course takes a flipped-classroom approach to seminars, namely, students are expected to come to the seminars having completed the required readings in order to discuss them.

## Texts and Study Aids

The principal text is the Holy Bible itself. The preferred English translations are the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (1989) and the New International Version of the Bible (2011). The required readings can be found online; in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992; abbreviated *ABD*); or in Steven L. McKenzie and

Stephen R. Haynes, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Meaning* (rev. & exp. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999; abbreviated *EOM*).

For an introduction to the Holy Bible in the life of the Anglican Communion, please look [here](#). The information found by following the links provides the contextual mooring for the study of Holy Scripture in an Anglican/Episcopal setting.

### Course Outline and Evaluation

The course meets for five seminars: September 28, October 19, November 23, December 21, and January 18 on [Skype](#). In addition to the required readings, students are also tasked with writing five short essays of 500 to 750 words and emailing them to the instructor around the time of each seminar and no later than January 28 for all five. A letter grade, following [Mercer's Academic Policies and Procedures](#), will be allotted for each essay, and an average of the five will constitute the final grade.

#### 1. The Study of Holy Scripture (September 28): The basics of biblical science, inspiration, and canonicity

Reading:

- The *Articles of Religion*, especially numbers 6, 7, and 8. Available [here](#).
- Lewis, C. S. "Fern-seed and Elephants." In *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*. Edited by Walter Hooper, 104–25. Glasgow: William Collins Sons, 1975. The original is a talk given by Lewis at Westcott House, Cambridge, on May 11, 1959. Available [here](#).
- *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Report to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations*. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod 1975. Available [here](#).

Writing: Would Lewis' "Fern-seed and Elephants" be welcomed by seminarians in the twenty-first century? Why or why not? Please be sure to refer to the *Articles of Religion* and *The Inspiration of Scripture* in your answer.

#### 2. The Old and New Testaments (October 19): A broad outline of the contents and structure of the Bible

Reading:

- Sanders, James A. "Canon: Hebrew Bible." *ABD*, 1:837–52.
- Gamble, Harry Y. "Canon: New Testament." *ABD*, 1:852–61.

Writing: The evolution of biblical canons is a complicated history. What are two of the criteria for a book being included within the Bible?

#### 3. The History of the Holy Land (November 23): A bird's-eye view of the history of the Holy Land

Reading:

- Miller, J. Maxwell. "Reading the Bible Historically: The Historian's Approach," *EOM*, 17–34.

- Lemche, Niels Peter. William G. Dever, Leslie J. Hoppe, and Robert P. Carroll, "History of Israel," *ABD*, 3:526–76.

*Writing:* Why is the history of the Holy Land important for the interpretation of Holy Scripture?

#### **4. Critical Methodologies (December 21): Critical methodologies and biblical interpretation**

*Reading:*

- Viviano, Pauline A. "Source Criticism," *EOM*, 35–57.
- Di Vito, Robert A. "Tradition-Historical Criticism," *EOM*, 90–104.

*Writing:* Although it is not the only critical method, why is textual criticism the most important critical method?

#### **5. Critical Methodologies (cont.) (January 18): Critical methodologies of biblical interpretation (cont.)**

*Reading:*

- Martin, Dale B. "Social-Scientific Criticism." *EOM*, 125–41.
- McKnight, Edgar V. "Reader-Response Criticism." *EOM*, 230–52.

*Writing:* Explain why social-scientific or reader-response criticism is important in the twenty-first century.

### **Biblical Studies on the Internet and Computer Software**

There is a plethora of biblical-study tools online, for example, [BibleGateway](#) and [StudyLight](#). Caution is recommended when utilizing web-based resources. They run the gamut from the reliable to the unreliable; they are sometimes unrefereed and in flux.

Online biblical-study aids (for purchase and for free) are legion, for example, [E-Sword](#), [GloBible](#), and [Olive Tree Bible Software](#). For a website regarding all things biblical, especially the jargon, abbreviations, and sigla used in biblical commentaries, see the [Society of Biblical Literature](#). SBL's [Bible Odyssey](#) is also helpful and informative.

There are two excellent biblical-studies computer software programs: Accordance and Logos. Either is more than sufficient for even the most proficient biblical scholar; each contains more bells and whistles than any one person will ever use. [Accordance Bible Software](#) (originally a Mac-only program, now with a Windows version). Accordance's strengths are its speed, user-friendly interface, and broad-based modules. [Logos Bible Software](#) (originally a Windows-only program, now with a Mac version) is an amorphous program more akin to a library of biblical and biblically-related resources than to a Bible-study program per se.

### **Old Testament/Hebrew Bible Study Websites**

A helpful website is the [Tyndale Seminary Old Testament Reading Room](#). This site is designed to help make Old Testament/Hebrew Bible commentaries, dictionaries, and related resources available to those without easy access to a theological library. Two online introductions to the

Old Testament/Hebrew Bible are highly recommended. The first is Christine Hay's [Introduction to the Old Testament \(Hebrew Bible\)](#), a part of the Yale Open Courses series. The second is Shaye J. D. Cohen's *The Hebrew Bible*, a part of Harvard's online courses and available in [iTunes U](#).

### New Testament Study Websites

A helpful website is the [Tyndale Seminary New Testament Reading Room](#). This site is designed to help make New Testament commentaries, dictionaries, and related resources available to those without easy access to a theological library. One online introduction to the New Testament is highly recommended. It is Dale B. Martin's [Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature](#), a part of the Yale Open Courses series.

### Recommend Reading

- Achtemeier, Paul J. *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture*. Rev. ed. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999.
- Barton, John, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . *A History of the Bible: The Story of the World's Most Influential Book*. New York: Viking, 2019.
- . *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.
- Bauer, David R. *An Annotated Guide to Biblical Resources for Ministry*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. 4th ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- Caird, G. B. *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*. London: Duckworth, 1980.
- Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.
- Clements, R. E., ed. *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Collins, John J. *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Collins, Raymond F. *The Birth of the New Testament: The Origin and Development of the First Christian Generation*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.
- Comfort, Philip W. *Essential Guide to Bible Versions*. Wheaton: Tyndale, 2000.
- Dundes, Alan. *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.
- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Hamel, Christopher de. *The Book: A History of the Bible*. London: Phaidon, 2001.
- Hengel, Martin. *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002.

- Lemche, Niels Peter. *Prelude to Israel's Past: Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity*. Translated by E. F. Maniscalco. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998.
- Matthews, Victor H. *Manners and Customs in the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to Daily Life in Bible Times*. Rev. ed. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991.
- Matthews, Victor H., and Don C. Benjamin. *Old Testament Parallels: Law Stories from the Ancient Near East*. 2nd ed. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997.
- McDonald, Lee Martin, and Stanley E. Porter. *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Context*. 2nd ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1983.
- Millard, Alan. *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*. Washington Square: New York University Press, 2000.
- Moyise, Steve. *Introduction to Biblical Studies*. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013.
- Paget, James Carleton et al., eds. *New Cambridge History of the Bible* (4 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012–16).
- Rogerson, J. W., and Judith M. Lieu, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Sawyer, John F. A. *Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Schertz, Mary H., and Perry B. Yodder. *Seeing the Text: Exegesis for Students of Greek and Hebrew*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- Schmidt, Werner H. *Old Testament Introduction*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell with David J. Reimer. 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.
- Schökel, Luis A. *A Manual of Hermeneutics*. Translated by Liliana M. Rosa. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.
- Soggin, J. Alberto. *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah*. Translated by John Bowden. 2nd ed. London: SCM Press, 1993.
- Soulen, Richard N. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Würthwein, Ernst. *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*. Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.