**ALPS-MTH COURSE OF STUDY SCHOOL**

Course: COS 121—Bible I: Introduction

Date: May 16-17, May 30-31, 2025

Instructor: Rev. Russell B. Sisson, Ph.D. (rsisson@unionky.edu)

*Course Description*

 This course examines various facets of biblical interpretation. Attention is given to the inspiration, formation, and function of the canon and the use of interpretative methods consistent with the nature of scripture. The importance of the Bible as a witness to the life and faith of ancient Israel and earliest Christianity is emphasized.

*Objectives*

 \*Articulate the place of scripture in the life of the congregation and the role of the pastor in interpretation.

 \* Understand the inspiration and formation of the canon and its authority within the community of faith.

 \* Understand and apply historical, literary, and theological approaches to various types of literature in scripture using Genesis, Hosea and Amos, Mark, and Philippians.

 \* Develop a method of exegesis consistent with the nature and authority of the Bible.

 *Textbooks*

 \**The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: NRSV with the Apocrypha* (Abingdon, 2003)

 \**The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary* (Abingdon 2010)

\* *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (HarperOne, 2010)

Bernhard Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible* (Augsburg, 2006)

John Hayes & Carl Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook* (John Knox Press, 2007)

 \* These are basic reference works that students use in this course and subsequent Bible courses in the Course of Study curriculum. Students should have *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible* from a previous class or Licensing School. Note that this particular study Bible is required. Students may use other study Bibles in addition to the *NISB*, but not in place of it. Focus questions for essay assignments presume a student’s reading of interpretative notes in the *NISB*. Essays should cite the NRSV translation of biblical passages.

*Assignments*

 Students write two pre-class essays (approximately 750-850 words, or 3 to 3 1/2 typed pages double-spaced) on topics described below. The essays may be slightly longer than 1000 words, but students are encouraged to write concisely and speak directly to the assignment topic. Textbook readings should be cited when material from them is used in the essays. Pre-class assignments are designed to prepare students for discussions in class sessions. Students write additional essays after each Zoom class meeting. These essays are submitted to the instructor by email. Pre-class papers must be submitted to the ALPS-MTH registrar before the deadline established for pre-class work.

*Grade*

A student’s grade for the course is the average of the four essays described above.

Pre-class Assignment 1: Order and Disorder in Creation

Readings: Genesis 1-11; Psalm 8; Psalm 104. Read these chapters in Genesis and the two psalms in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible* and pay close attention to the interpretative notes at the bottom of each page. Also read the commentary on these biblical texts in *The New Interpreter’s Bible One Volume Commentary* and the essay, “Cultures of the Ancient Near East” in the same resource (973-978). Read Study I in Bernard Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*. In *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, read these entries: *Genesis*, *creation*, *sky*, *Leviathan*, and *names of God in the Hebrew Bible*.

Essay Assignment: Near the end of the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:4, we read that God beheld all creation and it was "very good" (1:31). The basic goodness of creation is threatened by events recounted in a second account of creation in Gen 2:5-3:24, but God acts to restore some semblance of order here and after subsequent disruptions of order which are recounted in Genesis 4-11. Answer the following:

1. How does the step-by-step account of creation in Genesis 1 support the evaluation of it as “very good”? See "Excursus: In God's Image" and "Excursus: Dominion or Dependence?" in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*. In the creation account of Genesis 2, note how God is referred to by the divine YHWH, translated LORD (all capital letters). For insights into the significance of this name, read the entries “Yahweh” and “names of God in the Hebrew Bible” in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*.
2. If creation is understood as God establishing order out of chaos, as Anderson discusses in *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*, in what ways is the order God establishes disrupted (Genesis 3-11)? Note how God restores some semblance of order after each disruption?
3. Read Psalms 8 and 104. How does each psalm present a human testimony to the goodness of creation and the special place of humans in the created order? Identify themes of the creation accounts in Genesis that are present in these psalms? What does Psalm 8 imply about the responsibility of humans for maintaining the goodness of God's creation? In Psalm 104, note how God’s victory over chaos (Leviathan) is described. How then are humans seen the primary threat to the good order of creation?
4. How do these psalms provide a meaningful testimony to the special place of humans in God's creation for worshipers both in ancient times and today?

Integrate your answers to these questions in an exegetical essay on the topic, Order and Disorder in Creation. Do not simply answer the questions in numerical order. Be sure to reference scriptural passages (book, chapter, and verses in parentheses) that you either quote or summarize. Your essay should not include extended quotations of passages when a summary in your own words is sufficient. Quote only particular statements or phrases in the biblical text for which you have comments. Note where insights from reading assignments have influenced your interpretation. Your essay should be between 750 and 850 words.

Pre-class Assignment 2: The Focus and Grounding of Amos’ Message

Readings: Book of Amos in *NISB* along with the interpretative notes. Also read the commentary on Amos in the *New Interpreter’s Bible One Volume Commentary* and the essay, “Prophetic Literature,” in the same resource (956-958). In *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, read these entries: *Amos,* *prophet*, *priest*, *righteousness in the Hebrew Bible*, and *king in the Hebrew Bible*.

Essay Assignment: Two-thirds of the way into the Book of Amos, there is an account of a confrontation between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (7:10-17). Amos' foretelling of King Jeroboam's death and Israel's exile prompts Amaziah's rebuke of Amos. This probably is not the only reason why Amaziah reacts as he does to Amos. Pronouncements of Amos before this episode no doubt troubled the king and his prophets. Answer the following:

1. What proclamations of Amos in the oracles preceding this (chapters 1-6) explain why this priest at the king's sanctuary reacts as he does to Amos? Consider how priests and kings were considered human mediators between God and the nation. How are prophets like Amos emerging as mediators between God and Israel alongside these other types?
2. What does Amos mean when he replies that he is "no prophet, nor a prophet's son" (7:14)? Consider Amos' background and how he might be different from other types of prophets (see "prophets" in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary)*. How might Amos’ way of speaking in his oracles reflect his social background, to which he calls attention when confronted? How might this background lend credibility to what he says?
3. Note how the Book of Amos begins with oracles addressed to Israel’s *non-Hebrew* neighbors (1:2-2:3). What does this signify about the *universal* scope of Amos’ mission and message? Read Genesis 12-14 and note how non-Hebrew rulers come to recognize the righteousness of the God of Abraham. How might Amos be understood to condemn Israel for violating a standard of righteousness which God expects all humans to understand and obey?
4. What makes Amos’ testimony to the righteousness of God timeless? Can you identify with Amos? If so, how?

Integrate your answers to these questions in a 750-850 word essay on the topic, The Focus and Grounding of Amos' Message. Do not simply answer the questions in numerical order. Be sure to reference scriptural passages (book, chapter, and verses in parentheses) that you either quote or summarize. Your essay should not include extended quotations of passages when a summary in your own words is sufficient. Quote only particular statements or phrases in the biblical text for which you have comments. Note where insights from reading assignments have influenced your interpretation.