UMC COURSE OF STUDY

BIBLE II (COS 221): TORAH AND ISRAEL’S HISTORY

JUNE 13-14 & JULY 18-19, 2025

SYLLABUS

Instructor: Rev. Russell B. Sisson, Ph.D.

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**Course Description**

This course interprets the critical events, developing institutions, and traditions of Israel. Attention is given to the earliest covenants, the Exodus, the rise of the monarchy, and other events up to the eighth century prophets.

Students will be able to:

* Articulate a historical overview of the experience and faith of ancient Israel.
* Exegete selected passages that illustrate crucial turning points in the history of Israel.
* Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day.

**Required Texts**

* Coogan, Michael D. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN-13: 978-0199946617. Earlier editions of the Coogan textbook may be used, but reading assignments refer to page numbers in the 3rd edition.
* Fretheim, Terence E. *The Pentateuch: Interpreting Biblical Texts Series*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. ISBN-13: 978-0687008421.

Students should have the following textbooks from previous COS classes:

* *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003. ISBN-13: 978-0687278329. Students may read other versions of the Bible along with *NISB*, but not in place of it!
* *The New Interpreter's Bible One Volume Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010. ISBN-13: 9780687334117.
* Powell, Mark Allan, ed. *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. New York: HarperOne, 2011. ISBN-13: 978-0-06-146906-0.

**Recommended Reference**

* Curtis, Adrian. *Oxford Bible Atlas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0199560462.
* Birch, Bruce C., Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen. *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd edition. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005. ISBN-13: 978-0687066766.

**Requirements**

There will be virtual class sessions using Zoom on the evening of Friday, Jun 13, and the morning and afternoon of Saturday, June 14, and on the evening of Friday, July 18, and the morning and afternoon of Saturday, July 19. Exact times of Zoom sessions will be announced later.

Students write four exegetical essays. The cumulative grade for these essays will the student’s grade for the course. Two preclass essays are written prior to the first weekend session and must be submitted by mail beforehand (see preclass assignments below). A third essay is written after the first weekend session and must be submitted prior to the second weekend session. A fourth and final essay is written after the final weekend session and must be submitted within 10 days of the final class meeting.

Preclass Assignment 1: Promise and Obedience in the Stories of Abraham and His Descendants

Read Genesis in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible* (*NISB*) and its interpretative notes for chapters and passages referenced below. Read chapters on Genesis in *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, *The Pentateuch*, and *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Also read the entries on “Genesis,” “Abraham,” “names of God in the Hebrew Bible,” and “covenant” in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*.

1. Genesis provides two accounts of God establishing a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15 and 17). What does each account reveal about the nature of this covenant? Consult the notes for 15:6 and 17:9 in *NISB*.
2. How is the character of God’s covenant with Abraham rooted in Abraham’s encounters with God before it (Genesis 12-14) and what do Abraham’s encounters with God which follow (Genesis 18-22) reveal about this covenant relationship?
3. What is the central theme of the Jacob and Joseph narratives (see textbooks for identification and discussion of this theme) and how does it relate to God’s covenant with Abraham? Note where and how this theme comes to expression in these two narrative sections of Genesis.
4. How is God’s covenant with Abraham linked to acts of God recounted in Genesis 1-11? How do the genealogies in Genesis signal connections? See “Excursus: The Priestly View of History” and the note for 17:1 in *NISB*.

Integrate your answers to these questions in an essay on the topic, Promise and Obedience in the Stories of Abraham and His Descendants. Length: 850-1000 words (3 ½ to 4 pages, double-spaced, 12-pt font).

Preclass Assignment 2: God’s Self-Revelation and the Covenant

Read Exodus in *NISB* and its interpretative notes for chapters and passages cited below. Read chapters on Exodus in *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, *The Pentateuch*, and *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Also read the entries on “Exodus,” “Moses,” and “Yahweh” in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*.

1. How are God’s call of Moses and promise to deliver the Hebrews from captivity connected with the meaning of *Yahweh* (LORD), the name for God revealed to Moses? See comments on the meaning of this divine name in notes for Exod 3:13-22 and 6:2-9 in *NISB*. How does this divine name orient Moses and Israel toward the present moment and the near future?
2. How does the testimony to *Yahweh*’s power in delivering the Israelites from the Egyptians recall the power of *Yahweh* revealed in creation? See “Excursus: Salvation and the Sea” in *NISB*, as well as commentary on Exod 15:1-18 in the textbooks.
3. How does the song which the Israelites sing after their exodus from Egypt (Exod 15:1-21) testify both to what has just occurred and to what is about to occur? To what further acts of God do the Israelites bear witness in this song? What is significant about these *subsequent* acts of *Yahweh* being referred to in the *past* tense? What is significant about Miriam singing what is perhaps a refrain for the song (15:21; see interpretative note in *NISB*)?
4. How does this song provide a historical and theological framework for the covenant that God proceeds to establish with Israel at Sinai? Note how the covenant between God and Israel is grounded in recollection of *Yahweh*’s self-revelation in salvific acts. In the first commandments of the covenant, note how the Sabbath commandment (20:8-11) envisions conditions of life for Israelites in the near future (notes to these verses in *NISB* are insightful). Note how historical recollection precedes restatement and elaboration of this commandment in 23:10-13.

Integrate your answers to these questions in an essay on the topic, God’s Self-Revelation and the Covenant. Length: 850-1000 words (3 ½ to 4 pages, double-spaced, 12-pt font).

Mail both preclass essays to the address below. Envelops should be post-marked no later than June 4 (ten days before the first meeting of the class).

Russell Sisson

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Extensions may be granted for medical reasons only. Requests for extensions must be made through Dr. Barbara Nye, [byne34@gmail.com](mailto:byne34@gmail.com).

The third and fourth essays will be submitted either as essay attachments or by uploading to the instructor’s course page. More specific information will be provided at the first meeting of the class. The essays must be produced as Word documents.

Prior to the first class meeting, read Leviticus 17-26, Numbers 11-25, and Deuteronomy 4-18 and sections on these biblical books in the textbooks.