Interpreting the Old Testament (OT 511)
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Dr. Donna Petter
Thursday 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Fall 2013

Course Description:

Students who have completed at least one term of Hebrew are introduced to the tools and methods of Old Testament exegesis. It is the counterpart to Interpreting the New Testament (NT 502). In addition, the course serves as a general introduction to Old Testament critical issues.

Course Objectives:

At the end of the course students should be able to:

- Perform individual steps of exegesis in Hebrew narrative. This objective will be met through class lectures, workshops, and weekly exegetical assignments.

- Understand the independent yet dependent nature of interpreting the text. We will strain ourselves to wrestle with meaning (interpretive fruit) by careful observation of the text. In this way the process starts off independently. But we will also see the dependent nature of the process by reading secondary sources (commentaries and articles) and evaluating their contribution to our passage (s).

- Assess and interact with OT critical issues. This objective will be met through assigned readings and class lectures with a view to strengthening one’s commitment to the Scripture as the Word of God.

Course Relationship to the Curriculum

OT 511 is a required course for M.Div. students as well students pursuing an M.A. in Old Testament. This class assumes at least one term of Biblical Hebrew (prerequisite: OL 501/Hebrew I) and should be taken in conjunction with Hebrew II (corequisite: OL 502 /Hebrew II). It further serves as a prerequisite for all Hebrew exegesis classes.

Required Readings:


**Recommended but only on Reserve:**


**Course Evaluation:**

Final Exam: all course readings and lectures (40%)

Seven Exegetical Exercises (60%)

1. big picture of the book assignment (main idea/themes, historical setting)
2. literary context assignment
3. analysis of a text-critical problem (intro. level) + translation
4. lexical and grammatical/syntactical assignment
5. structural and narrative art assignment
6. biblical/cultural/theological assignment
7. application exercise

**NOTE**: I reserve the right to change anything on this syllabus, at any time, should I deem it necessary for the completion of the course goals.
OT 511: Course Schedule: subject to change at my discretion!

*BBHE* = Basics of Biblical Hebrew: An Integrative Approach

*TOT* = Text of Old Testament

*OTTC* = Old Testament Textual Criticism (on reserve not assigned)

*IBI* = Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

*OROT* = On the Reliability of the Old Testament

***For Sept 12th (our first class) write out & turn in a burning question(s) you need/want to have answered as it pertains to interpreting the OT (required)***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thurs. Sept. 12</td>
<td>Course introduction &amp; overview On the Reliability of the Received Text</td>
<td>For today (our first class) write out &amp; turn in a burning question(s) you need/want to have answered as it pertains to interpreting the OT (required). Also: Read TOT: But read in this order First read pp. 1-44 Second read pp. 105-119 Third read pp. 50-104 Read IBI pp. 120-125</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Thurs. Sept. 19</td>
<td>TC assignment instructions/initial translation/demo</td>
<td>Read Chapter 8 OTTC pp.136-166 (on reserve)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Thurs. Sept. 26</td>
<td>Presuppositions about Received Text Attacks on the Text: On the Reliability of the OT</td>
<td>Work on TC assignment; to help with this: Read BBHE section on TC; Review : OTTC pp. 133-166 (Brotzman; on reserve) review class samples</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Thurs. Oct. 3</td>
<td>Presuppositions about Received Text Attacks on the Text: On the Reliability of the OT</td>
<td>TC assignment due Read OROT see syllabus for what to read</td>
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| 5 | Thurs. Oct. 10 | OT | Interpreting a Reliable Text  
Overview of OT exegetical method  
Big Picture book/demo & Situating a passage within a book (literary context) | Read *IBI* pp. 169-201  
Read all of *BBHE*  
Read *IBI* pp. 229-239 & GCTS Article #1/commentary  
Read *IBI* pp. 213-229  
Read *BBHE* on this section |
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thurs. Oct. 17</td>
<td>READING WEEK</td>
<td>READING WEEK #1</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Thurs. Oct. 24</td>
<td>Structure and Narrative art</td>
<td>BP and Literary assignment due</td>
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| 8 | Thurs. Oct. 31 | Lexical and key word analysis; Translation issues | Structure and narrative art assignment due | Read *IBI* pp. 240-256; 257-272  
Read *BBHE* on these sections |
| 9 | Thurs. Nov. 7 | The passage in its biblical/cultural/theological setting: OT Context ANE Context NT Context Demo | Lexical & Grammatical assignments due | Read BBHE on these sections |
| 10 | Thurs. Nov. 14 | READING WEEK | READING WEEK #2 | Work on Biblical/Cultural/Theological assignments |
| 11 | Thurs. Nov. 21 | Application and Contextualization | Biblical/Cultural/Theological assignments due | Read *BBHE* on these sections  
Read pp. 477-504 |
| 12 | Thurs. Nov. 28 | THANKSGIVING | | |
14. Week of Dec. 9th (Final Exam: Dec 12th)

Helpful Notes:

What Hebrew Texts will we utilize? The book of Ezra will be our laboratory example for most of the exercises pertaining to narrative. We will largely confine ourselves to chapter one, though not exclusively. By confining ourselves to a chapter in one book, we reinforce methodology allowing for a consistent interpretive picture to emerge. For class demonstrations and workshops we will likely use Exodus 32-34 when applicable.

Can I prepare in advance for the final exam? Yes. The most obvious way to do this is making certain you read the books assigned for the class. However, please read according to the class schedule as outlined above, rather than cramming in these readings during the second reading week! You will be robbed of the full value of this course and its intentional design if you do not discipline yourself to read on a weekly basis.

The next way to prepare in advance for the exam is to read intelligently. See below for a list of questions for each textbook that will help you to read intelligently. The questions are a way to make sure you are gleaning what is necessary as you read.

The Text of the Old Testament

Why read this text?

This book introduces you to the field of textual criticism. The field of textual criticism is crucial because first and foremost it establishes a text for us to actually interpret.

Original documents have all been lost.
The Hebrew text that is available comes to us in copies that have been separated by centuries from the original autographs. As a result of hand copying for hundreds of years, errors entered the text that were transmitted with each copy. The goals of textual criticism are to identify these errors, and to provide a text/reading that was likely the original, most authentic (before the errors). The way to do this is to review the existing textual witnesses, and utilizing sound principles of textual criticism, arrive at a reading that has a high degree of probability of being close to the original.

But we have various witnesses to the Hebrew text. That is we have versions of the Hebrew Bible translated into other ancient languages. They include the following:

- The Samaritan Pentateuch
- The Septuagint
- The Aramaic Targums
- The Syriac Version or Peshitta
- The Old Latin
- The Vulgate (Jerome’s Latin)
- The Coptic Versions
- The Ethiopic Version
- The Arabic Versions

For the final exam you need to be able to answer the following questions based on this text and the related lecture:

- What are the aims of text criticism?
- What are the main textual witnesses to the Hebrew Bible?
- What codex is used in the printed edition of BHS?
- What is the date of this codex?
- Why can we trust a document that is relatively late in its production?
- Name a few possible scribal errors.
- Discuss and assess the LXX and its role in textual criticism.

**On the Reliability of the Old Testament:** K. A. Kitchen

Why read this text?

This book engages the following questions. Is the literature, religion, and history of Israel as discussed in the OT purely fictional? Or does the OT have a fictional matrix with a few historical nuggets embedded? Or does the OT contain major historical content and value for understanding the history of Israel?

The answers to these questions are important for our interpretation of the OT. Both the questions and answers illumine our presuppositions.
The answers to these questions place us in clearly defined theological camps (liberal, conservative, or progressive). These questions cannot be answered on the basis of one’s personal belief system or religious agenda but on firm facts and evidence.

Thus, Kitchen utilizes inscriptions and artifacts to demonstrate the basic honesty of the OT writers. He goes back to antiquity and aligns the OT with documents and other remains for comparison. The Bible, (OT) when compared with documents from the ancient Near East proves to be a reliable and valuable source of Israel’s religion and history.

Read the following:

The Preface

Chapter 1 = First Things First – What’s in Question?

Chapter 3 = Home and Away – Exile and Return

Chapter 10 = Last Things Last – A Few Conclusions

Read his balance sheets:

On Kings and Chronicles pp. 62-64

On Exile and Return pg. 79

On the 10th Century (Saul, David, Solomon) pp. 156-158

On the Conquest of Canaan pp. 234-239

On the Exodus and Covenant pp. 310-312

On the Patriarchs pp. 371-372

On the Prophets pg. 420

On Genesis 1-11 pg. 447