TS 610: Studying the Old Testament

Instructor: Derek Suderman
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Office: 2126, Office hours by appointment

Territorial Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I live and work on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee (aka Irocquois) peoples. Conrad Grebel and the University of Waterloo are situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations in perpetuity that includes 6 miles (approx. 10 km.) on each side of the Grand River.

a). INTRODUCTION

i). COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the cultural and historical contexts, literary genres, composition, and canonization of the Old Testament. In it we will investigate the formation of Scripture from ancient traditions and analyze various hermeneutical approaches to biblical material, focusing on their potential contributions to Christian theological interpretation. We will focus more on how one approaches “Studying the Old Testament” than on providing a comprehensive survey of its content. To do so, the course will explore diverse modes of inquiry, provide hands-on experience with resources related to the Bible, and introduce issues related to biblical study and interpretation.

ii). COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course students will:

• gain insight into the language, content and diversity of material within the OT;
• examine the shape of individual biblical books to consider their interrelationship in Scripture and how this informs Christian theological interpretation;
• be introduced to various scholarly approaches to the OT, including issues related to its origin, composition, transmission, and canonization;
• explore hermeneutical issues and challenges (problems and opportunities) involved in interpreting and teaching ancient documents in the 21st century;
• consider how Mennonite scholars in particular have addressed specific issues related to the Old Testament;
• engage in theological reflection to consider the ongoing witness and function of the Old Testament as Scripture for Christian communities of faith; and
• gain first-hand experience with basic tools for biblical study such as concordances, Bible dictionaries and commentaries, as well as multiple Bible versions.
b). COURSE REQUIREMENTS

i). READING MATERIALS

The following materials are required.

(1). The Bible

This is the most important textbook in the course. I will provide a “Reading Guide” for each week that identifies biblical passages to concentrate on along with questions to guide your reading. Since we will not attempt to survey the content of each biblical book in class, biblical readings will not be exhaustive. **Students with limited background in Old Testament material may require more reading to provide context and ‘connect the dots’ between passages identified in the Reading Guides and discussed in class.**

No one Bible version is required—in fact, having a diversity present will enrich class discussion. However, **paraphrases and Bibles which use a ‘dynamic equivalence’ approach to translation will not be appropriate for this course** (the Message, Good News Bible, Today’s English Version, etc.). If you have a question about this, please ask.

Note: If you consider yourself familiar with the Bible, consider purchasing and using a different version than that with which you are most familiar; this often helps to hear material in a new way. Students are also expected to have more than one version available for consultation. Though we will not explore “apocryphal”/“deutero-canonical” books in this course, consider having at least one Bible that contains this material; **“reference” versions and “Study Bibles” are also particularly helpful.**

In no particular order, students are welcome to choose from among:

- *Tanakh* (JPS - Jewish Publication society)
- *New American Bible* (NAB), *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) or the older *American Standard Version* (ASV)
- *Common English Bible* (CEB)
- *New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB) or the older *Jerusalem Bible* (JB)
- *21st Century New King James Version*, or the *New King James Version* (NKJV), or the venerable *Authorized or King James Version* (AV or KJV)
- *Revised English Bible* (REB) or the older *New English Bible* (NEB)
- the older *New International Version* (NIV)
- *Net Bible* (available free on-line at http://www.bible.org). This can be used for comparison, but students will be expected to bring physical Bibles to class so this will not be sufficient as the only version.
(2). **TS 610 Courseware Reader**
This collection of articles and book chapters is available for purchase through the UW Bookstore. Secondary readings are identified in the ‘Class Schedule’ below. Some additional material (newspaper articles, online videos, etc.) may be provided through **electronic course reserves** (available on-line through the course LEARN site), in the library, or circulated by email.

(3). **Additional Recommended Books and Resources (Not Required)**
Other Introductions worth consulting include:
- David Carr, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*
  (primarily historical; imperial contexts and function as sacred text)
- Corrine Carvalho, *Encountering Ancient Voices*
  (primarily theological; Catholic)
- John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*
  (primarily historical; historical critical)
- Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*
  (primarily theological; Reformed Protestant)
- Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament*
  (primarily sociological and literary)
- The *Fortress Commentary of the Old Testament and Apocrypha* (FCOT)
  (primarily historical and theological; written by a team of specialists)

Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture*.\(^1\)
In previous years I have used this as an additional textbook. An insightful, accessible discussion of major topics related to biblical studies (both OT and NT) and faith.

Michael Harvey’s *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing* provides a helpful guide to writing, both re: general style (active vs. passive voice) and the specifics of academic writing (footnotes, bibliography). I strongly encourage you to purchase this or a similar resource early in your program, and to refer to it consistently. *This resource is on reserve in the library and available electronically through the library system.*

Re: additional resources, **Bible Atlases** can be very helpful and **concordances** are key resources (in my view, every church community should have access to a concordance and teachers taught how to use them). Strong’s on-line concordance is the most simple and effective for entry level use. I also highly recommend **Bible software programs**, particularly for those involved in church ministry or further study. Logos (originally PC) and Accordance (originally Mac) are both excellent.

**N.B. -** While such programs can be helpful, **be aware (beware) of material that comes ‘bundled’ with them.** Not all of this is either current or helpful.

\(^1\) Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 2007).
B. ACADEMIC STYLE
Article reviews for this class will use in-text citations, ie: (Anderson, 54). Unless otherwise indicated, all other papers with references will use bottom of the page footnotes and bibliographies that comply with the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS).

In Biblical Studies certain conventions apply when citing biblical documents:
- Unless written within the flow of the paper, abbreviations consisting of the first three letters of biblical books should be used. Thus: “At the beginning of Genesis...” within a sentence, but (Gen. 1:1-6) as a reference following a sentence.
- Chapters and verses are separated by a colon, while verses within the same chapter are listed with a hyphen when describing a section (Pro. 1:1-7) or separated by commas when speaking of specific verses (Gen. 5:14, 17). Verses from different chapters or different books are separated by a semi-colon (Job 2:1-4; 42:1-6; and Ps. 2:1-4). As noted here, the parentheses should precede ending punctuation.
- Unlike other citations, Bible citations are generally made in (parentheses) within the document itself. During discussions clearly marked as dealing with a specific chapter, abbreviations for verse and verses should be used (v. and vv. respectively). If you provide a list of references (for instance, several other places where the same term is found), these should be placed in a footnote.
- Reference to terms in biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) are placed in italics. So, you write peace (English) but shalom (Hebrew).

C. EVALUATION OVERVIEW
Written assignments will be due at the beginning of class, since they will usually provide the basis for class discussion on that day. All assignments (except for the article review) will conform to the Chicago Manual of Style, with bottom-of-the-page footnotes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Self-Evaluation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modes of Inquiry Assignment</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Oct. 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key Word Assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nov. 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation and Handout</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Article Reviews</td>
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<td>various</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handout + online/in class Moderation of Discussion</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Milestone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Podcast Overview and Response</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrative Paper</td>
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<td>Milestone</td>
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D. DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

(1). **Weekly Reading / Reading Self-Evaluation**

For this course students will read a significant portion of the Old Testament along with selected secondary material. **Reading Guides** will specify biblical material to read in preparation for each class session along with the secondary readings identified in the syllabus. The Reading Self-Evaluation reflects the importance of this task. Students will evaluate their own participation, by providing a mark for the degree to which they completed the assigned readings (5 for Bible and 5 for secondary readings).

(2). **Modes of Inquiry Assignment**

This assignment will introduce students to a variety of questions being asked and methods employed in commentaries related to the Bible. Students will write a short paper (5-6 pp., 1500-1800 words) that compares and contrasts the approaches of several commentaries on the same biblical book.

(3). **Key Word Assignment**

This assignment will explore the ‘semantic range’ and use of a specific term in the Old Testament in order to gain first-hand experience with Bible dictionaries and concordances. Students will:
- write a short paper (5-6 pp., 1500-1800 words),
- prepare a 1-p. handout (one-sided), and
- make a 6-8 min. in-class presentation of their findings.

*The latter two elements will be peer-evaluated.*

(4). **Critical Article or Podcast Review**

Each student will choose one substantial article or podcast from among those bolded in the Class Schedule to introduce during the term. They will:
- post a 1p. outline (one-sided) on the LEARN site on the preceding Monday by noon,
- moderate ensuing on-line discussion, and
- summarize this discussion and/or raise questions based on this interaction to initiate and enhance class discussion.

In the following week students will **write a brief critical review** of their chosen article (3-4 pp., 900-1200 words). Since the outline will already depict the piece’s structure and argument, the review will concentrate on your response/critique in light of your own thoughts and class discussion. Students will choose articles early in the term, which will then be discussed on the day listed in the syllabus. **Variable, but assigned on specific dates.**

(5). **Podcast Overview and Response**

Students will choose a podcast from the ‘Bible for Normal People’ (or comparable; check with me) to describe in a brief online post, and then write a brief response (300-600 words). Students can choose from the suggestions at the end of the syllabus or find another on a topic of interest to them.
6. Integrative Paper and “Coffee and Conversation”

This assignment consists of writing a brief reflection paper (3-4 pp., 900-1200 words) that identifies some of the challenges you encountered in the course. It will provide an opportunity to reflect on your own goals for engaging the OT and how this course may inform your future interaction with the Bible and interpreting communities. **These papers will be shared with the others in your conversation group and are DUE 24 hours before the conversation appointment.**

**Students will also sign up for a “Coffee and Conversation” time slot,** where students will meet with the instructor and a small group to discuss their papers and their experience in the course.

c). CLASS SCHEDULE

In addition to biblical ones, Special Topics will be explored in class. Names in BOLD in the “Required Readings” column identify articles, book chapters, or podcasts suitable for your article review. FYI identifies related resources that are **NOT required reading** but may be of interest.

We have all become used to appeals to be flexible and ready to ‘pivot.’ Re: managing the ongoing COVID pandemic, we will follow Public Health and University guidance. If in-person classes need to be suspended for some reason, we will plan to hold a ZOOM meeting during the same block of time.

**Since your uwaterloo email address will be our primary means of communication between classes, make sure to update/forward this immediately.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and Topic</th>
<th>Special Topics</th>
<th>Required Readings / Podcasts</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 8 - <strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>dynamic translation vs. formal equivalence; “semantic range;” Translation (versions) as interpretation</td>
<td>“a History of the Bible” – PP Presentation Enns, “When the Bible Doesn’t Behave”2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modes of Inquiry</td>
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<tr>
<td>A brief history of Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some Challenges for interpreting ancient documents (Gen. 1-5)</td>
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2 Peter Enns, “When the Bible Doesn’t Behave,” in The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture has Made Us Unable to Read It (New York NY, 2014), 4-7.
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<tr>
<td><strong>Torah (Pentateuch)</strong></td>
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<td>Sept. 15 - <em>Genesis</em></td>
<td>Women in the OT; Introducing the “Modes of Inquiry” assignment (Green, “Methods” helps to consider approaches you encounter in this assignment.)</td>
<td><strong>Meyers</strong>, “Everyday Life”&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covenant, Naming, and Family Matters (Gen. 12-38)</td>
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<td><strong>Suderman</strong>, “Created as Male and Female”&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>FYI</strong>&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 22 - <em>Exodus narratives</em></td>
<td>‘Source Criticism’ and ‘Form Criticism’</td>
<td><strong>Janzen</strong>, “Ethical Model Stories”&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of Egypt “with a mighty hand”</td>
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<td><strong>Suderman</strong>, “Remembering the Gospel of the Exodus”&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>“10 Words” and immediate problems</td>
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<td>Sept. 29 - Law as “gospel”</td>
<td>‘Tradition History’ and ‘Redaction Criticism’</td>
<td>BFNP Ep. 11: <strong>Benjamin D. Sommer</strong> “Jewish Views on the Bible”</td>
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<tr>
<td>(How) Might an ‘eye for an eye’</td>
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<sup>3</sup> Joel B. Green, “Methods,” in *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 103–42.


<sup>8</sup> Derek Suderman, “Remembering the Gospel of the Exodus (a Sermon)” (Wanner Mennonite Church, 2007).
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<td>make sense? (Exodus)</td>
<td>“You shall be Holy…” (Lev.)</td>
<td><strong>Klawans</strong>, “Concepts of Purity in the Bible”(^9)</td>
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<td>Oct. 6 - <strong>Deuteronomy:</strong> What is Scripture and how should it function?</td>
<td>Characteristics of Scripture; Covenants and Deuteronomy; Reading the Torah / Pentateuch as a Whole</td>
<td>Childs, “Intro to the Pentateuch” (selection)(^10)</td>
<td>Suderman, “Who’ll Be a Witness?”(^11)</td>
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**Oct. 10-14 --- BREAK**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Prophets</strong></th>
<th>Commentary Assignment Discussion</th>
<th>BFNP Ep. 37: Shafer-Elliott, “What Archeologists Do &amp; Why It Matters”</th>
<th><strong>‘Modes of Inquiry’ DUE</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Former Prophets” / “Historical Books”</strong></td>
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<td>For an article that explains this further focused on Judges, see: “Introduction: The Importance of Everyday Life,” King and Stager(^12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differing Views of Entering ‘the Land’ (Joshua; Judges)</td>
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<td>For an article that explains this further focused on Judges, see: “Introduction: The Importance of Everyday Life,” King and Stager(^12)</td>
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</table>
| Oct. 27 – Violence in the Bible and Hermeneutics: Joshua as a ‘Test Case’ | Introduction to ‘Key Word Study’ | “The Moabite Stone,“\(^\text{14}\)  
**Warrior**, “Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians”\(^\text{15}\)  
**Hawk**, “The Truth about Conquest”\(^\text{16}\)  
*Direction* journal: [https://directionjournal.org/40/2/index.html](https://directionjournal.org/40/2/index.html) (Seibert intro and conclusion, Wilma Bailey, Matties, etc.) |  |
| Nov. 3 - II Samuel, I-II Kings: The Rise and Fall of the Monarchy of Kings and Prophets (I Kings) and Bumbling | The ‘End’ of History: Biblical history and historical reconstruction | **Green**, “Rethinking ‘History’ for Theological Interpretation”\(^\text{17}\)  
BFNP Ep. 87: **Robert Alter**: “The Art of Translating the Bible”\(^\text{18}\) |  |


\(^{18}\) For an excellent and accessible study, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Alter has also completed his own translation of the entire Hebrew Bible, attuned to these dynamics and with explanatory footnotes.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>towards Exile (II Kings)</td>
<td>What’s different b/t Kings and Chronicles? (and why?)</td>
<td>FYI¹⁹</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘True’ and ‘False’ Prophecy</td>
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<tr>
<td>“(Latter) Prophets”</td>
<td>Historical criticism, ‘liberal’/’conservative’ debates, and the church; Canonization and LXX</td>
<td>Hays, “Jeremiah, the LXX, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy”²⁰</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writings to NT</td>
<td>Nov. 17 - Psalms</td>
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²⁰ J. Daniel Hays, “Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy: Just What Exactly Do We Mean by the ‘Original Autographs’?” in *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguelez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 133–49.


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psalms and Prayer in the Bible&lt;br&gt;Syncretism / contextualization&lt;br&gt;From Psalm Types... to a book of (Jewish and Christian) Scripture</td>
<td>Tips and Implications for Bible Study</td>
<td>Gonzalez, “Authority and Perspective”&lt;sup&gt;23&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;br&gt;Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation”&lt;sup&gt;24&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;br&gt;Suderman, “Questioning Techniques”&lt;sup&gt;25&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>‘Key Word’ Assignment DUE&lt;br&gt;Jonah word studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 24 - Wisdom Literature&lt;br&gt;Optimistic Wisdom (Proverbs)&lt;br&gt;the questioning of Wisdom (Ecclesiastes; Job)</td>
<td>Tips and Implications for Bible Study, con.</td>
<td>Tamez, “Ecclesiastes: a Reading from the Periphery”&lt;sup&gt;26&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;br&gt;Suderman, “In Search of Divine Wisdom”&lt;sup&gt;27&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;br&gt;Enns, “The OT and Ancient Near Eastern Literature” (pp. 23-45)&lt;sup&gt;28&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Ruth word studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1 - Reconstituting a People: Ezra-Neh. to NT&lt;br&gt;Post-exilic Period</td>
<td>Christians and the OT; Scripture and the Church</td>
<td>Janzen, “A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation”&lt;sup&gt;29&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<sup>25</sup> W. Derek Suderman, “Questioning Techniques for Bible Study” (*Work in progress*).


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</table>
| Biblical discernment in light of (apparently) conflicting witnesses: inclusion/exclusion in Ez/Neh. and Ruth |  | Brueggemann, “Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection”\(^{30}\)  
Enns, “The OT and Ancient Near Eastern Literature” (pp. 45-70)\(^{31}\) | ‘Integrative Paper’ DUE” – 24 hrs. prior to conv. |

*The Bible for Normal People* podcasts [https://peteenns.com/podcast/](https://peteenns.com/podcast/)
(a suggested, curated list).

As always, these podcasts are not recommended because I espouse or agree with each interviewer or speaker, or everything they say. Rather, these long-form interviews provide a great opportunity to hear from and better understand the approaches of various top-notch scholars on significant topics and issues, both historical and contemporary.

**General Topics**
- Ep. 2, Richard Rohr: “a Contemplative Look at the Bible”
- Ep. 4, Walter Brueggemann: “Resurrecting the Bible in the Mainline Church”
- Ep. 16, Ellen Davis: “What is the Practical Value of the OT?”
- Ep. 21, Jon D. Levenson (Jewish): “Resurrection in the Hebrew Bible”
- Ep. 26, Drew Hart: “The Bible, Race, and White Supremacy”
- Ep. 32, Carolyn Custis James: “Moving Beyond Patriarchy”

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Week 2: Genesis  
  https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2398900256.  
- Ep. 46, Wil Gafney, “Womanist Midrash”

Week 3: Exodus Narratives  
- Ep. 10, Pete Enns: “Monolatry: The Israelites Believed in Many Gods”

Week 4: Law  

Week 5: Deuteronomy

Week 6: Judges/Samuel and History  
- Ep. 8, Kent Sparks: “Where did the Israelites Come From?”

Week 7: Joshua and Violence  
- Ep. 30, Pete Enns: “Taking a Shot at Divine Violence”

Week 8: Monarchy (I-II Kings)

Week 9: Prophets

Week 10: Psalms

Week 11: Wisdom  
- Ep. 56, Peter Enns: Evangelicals and the Problem of the OT (the subtitle of his book *Inspiration and Incarnation*)

Week 12: Restoration and New Testament  
- Ep. 6, Amy Jill Levine (Jewish): “Jesus, Judaism, and Christianity”  
- Ep. 237, James Kugel (Jewish): “Challenging Our Assumptions About the Bible”  
- Ep. 210, Sidnie White Crawford: “What You Really Need to Know about the Dead Sea Scrolls”