

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

Pentateuch and Histories — OT-2098

Fall 2023

Prof. Matthew J. Thomas

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Monday / Thursday, 11:10am—12:30pm

Room _____

Office hours: By appointment

Course description

This course introduces students the Pentateuch and Historical books of the Old Testament. It explores the historical, theological and literary significance of these texts both as revelation within the context of ancient

Israel, and as the foundation of the narrative that the apostles present as culminating with Christ's advent. The course employs a lecture / discussion format, and evaluates student progress with a research paper (40%) and presentation (10%), reading responses (25%), and class discussion (25%). This class is for MDiv and MA students, with Intro to Sacred Scripture as a prerequisite.

Required Textbooks

Robert Alter. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 2008. \$19.84. ISBN: 978-0393333930.

Robert Alter. *Ancient Israel*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 2014. \$16.80. ISBN: 978-0393348767.

Brant Pitre and John Bergsma. *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2018. \$34.00. ISBN: 978-1586177225.

NB: Alter's translations are used for the Pentateuch (Gen—Deut) and Former Prophets (Josh—2 Kings). For the remaining books (Ruth, 1-2 Chron, Ezra, Neh, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1-2 Macc), students may use their preferred Bible translation. For these books, many good audio versions are available as well: see www.bible.is, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Optional Textbooks

Michael Gorman. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Revised and expanded edition). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010. \$17.85. ISBN: 978-0801046407.

Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (9th edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. \$15.47. ISBN: 978-0060936990.

Student Learning Goals

In this course, students will:

- Be introduced to the history of scholarship and critical issues related to the origins of Israel's early biblical writings.
- Learn how ancient Israelite religion corresponded and contrasted with the religions of the ancient Near East.

- Become familiar with the distinctive stylistic features that characterize early Hebrew narrative and poetry.
- Apprehend the main theological messages of each book within the context of ancient Israel.
- Attain an overview of how the Pentateuch and Histories have been read as distinctly Christian scripture, beginning in the New Testament on the road to Emmaus and continuing in the early Christian writings.
- Learn to exegete significant texts from the Pentateuch and Histories with a view towards effective preaching.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who completes this course will be able to:

- Provide an overview of the history of scholarship on the origins of the Pentateuch and Histories.
- Convey how Israelite religion related to its ancient Near Eastern context.
- Describe distinctive Hebrew literary features in texts from the Pentateuch and Histories.
- Convey the significance of each text as God's word within the context of ancient Israel.
- Explain how these texts serve as Christian scripture in the light of Christ's advent.
- Analyze and exegete texts from the Pentateuch and Histories.

Methodology

Class meetings will consist of lectures, class discussions, and student presentations. Out-of-class assignments will include reading, writing reading responses, and writing a major paper.

Technology use

Use of computers in class is permitted for note-taking purposes, but is not allowed otherwise and not encouraged in general. Students without the distraction of computer screens tend to be those who earn the highest grades (both participation / overall), and your professor very much likes giving good grades.

Course Requirements

1. Class discussion: Class attendance is mandatory. Students must be punctual and prepared for each class by having studied the reading and completed any other assignments. This course is dependent upon students keeping up with the reading and actively engaging with the sources and one another in discussion, and students should be prepared to be called on, even when they have not raised their hand. Students are strongly advised to be vigilant in completing their readings, as they know neither the day nor the hour when they will be called upon.

2. Reading responses: All assigned readings must be completed before each class. At the end of each class, students will hand in a summary/response for each reading that need not exceed one page, though these can be as long as students wish. These summaries will not be graded for style, but are solely intended to ensure that the readings have been completed. A bullet-point format works well, but students may write the assignment however serves them best; however, the response must make clear that the text has been read. Assignments will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis, except that late assignments will receive a 50% deduction. **NB:** For students who focus their responses on summarizing the reading, please give at least one sentence of personal reflection at the end.

3. Sed Contra paper: Each student will write a *Sed Contra* paper of approximately 4 single-spaced pages (around 2000 words) on a disputed question in the Pentateuch and Historical writings that is agreed upon with the professor. The format of the paper is outlined at the end of the syllabus (see "Major paper: *Sed Contra*"). Papers are to be carefully proofread, and failure to follow the given format will

result in being required to rewrite the paper with a penalty of one letter grade. Final papers will be due at the end of the course.

4. Presentation: Related to this assignment, students will give a 10-15 minute presentation of their *Sed Contra* papers, followed by 5-10 minutes of responding to questions from the class. This will give the class an opportunity to explore the significance of the question and test the presenter's arguments, and allow the presenter to further refine their work for the final version of the paper (which will be turned in at the conclusion of the course).

Grading Procedures and Rubric

Class discussion: 25%

Reading responses: 25%

Sed Contra paper: 40%

Presentation: 10%

- A Excellent work; student demonstrates excellent understanding of the material.
- B Very good work; student demonstrates strong understanding of the material.
- C Fair work; student demonstrates adequate understanding of the material, though with room for improvement.
- D Poor work; student demonstrates some barely adequate understanding of the material, with substantial room for improvement.
- F Student demonstrates inadequate understanding of the material.

Grade scale

A	100 – 93	B-	82 – 80	D+	69 – 67
A-	92 – 90	C+	79 – 77	D	66 – 63
B+	89 – 87	C	76 – 73	D-	62 – 60
B	86 – 83	C-	72 – 70	F	59 and below

Course Schedule

Week 1 (September 4, 7)

Class: **Labor day, no class. NB:** To keep up with our schedule, students are to read and write one-page reading responses for **1)** *Ignatius* Ch. 3 (“What is the Pentateuch?,” 13 p.), *Ignatius* Ch. 4 (“Origins of the Pentateuch,” 25 p.) and **2)** Alter, *Five Books*, “Introduction” (40 p.). The two Ignatius chapters can be combined onto one response, so only two reading responses are required. Your professor apologizes in advance for requiring extra work this first week — it’s the only way to fit in all our material!

Class: Course introduction, syllabus; discussion on *Ignatius* Ch. 3, “What is the Pentateuch?” (13 p.), *Ignatius* Ch. 4, “Origins of the Pentateuch” (25 p.), Alter, *Five Books*, “Introduction” (40 p.)

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 5, “Genesis 1—11” (38 p.) • Alter, *Five Books*, Intro & Gen 1—11

Week 2 (September 11, 14)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 5, Genesis 1—11

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 6, “Genesis 12—50” (34 p.) • Alter, *Five Books*, Gen 12—25

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 6, Gen 12—25

HW: Read Alter, *Five Books*, Gen 26—50

Week 3 (September 18, 21)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Gen 26—50

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 7, “Exodus” (38 p.) • Alter, *Five Books*, Intro & Ex 1—15

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 7, Ex 1—15

HW: Read Alter, *Five Books*, Ex 16—40

Week 4 (September 25, 28)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Ex 16—40

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 8, “Leviticus” (23 p.) • Alter, *Five Books*, Intro & Lev 1—10

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 8, Lev 1—10

HW: Read Alter, *Five Books*, Lev 11—27

Week 5 (October 2, 5)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Lev 11—27

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 9, “Numbers” (28 p.) • Alter, *Five Books*, Intro & Num 1—11

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 9, Num 1—11

HW: Read Alter, *Five Books*, Num 12—36

Week 6 (October 9, 12)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Num 12—36

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 10, “Deuteronomy” (31 p.) • Alter, *Five Books*, Intro & Deut 1—11

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 10, Deut 1—11

HW: Read Alter, *Five Books*, Deut 12—34

Week 7 (October 16, 19)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Deut 12—34

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 11, “Joshua” (27 p.) • Alter, *Ancient Israel*, Intro & Joshua

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 11, Joshua

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 12, “Judges” (20 p.) • Alter, *Ancient Israel*, Intro & Judges

Week 8 (October 23, 27) **Reading week, no class**

Week 9 (October 30, November 2)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 12, Judges

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 13, "Ruth" (11 p.) • *Ruth* • *Ignatius* Ch. 14, "The Books of Samuel" [-2 Sam overview], (26 p.)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 13, Ruth, *Ign.* Ch. 14

HW: Read Alter, *Ancient Israel*, Intro & 1 Samuel

Week 10 (November 6, 9)

Class: Lecture / discussion on 1 Sam

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 14, "2 Sam overview" (6 p.) • Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 2 Samuel

Class: Lecture / discussion on 2 Sam

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 15, "The Books of Kings" [-2 Kgs overview], (39 p.) • Alter, *Ancient Israel*, Intro & 1 Kings

Week 11 (November 13, 16)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 15, 1 Kings

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 15, "2 Kgs overview" (6 p.) • Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 2 Kings

Class: Lecture / discussion on 2 Kings

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 16, "The Books of Chronicles" (15 p.) • *1 Chronicles* • *2 Chronicles* [**NB:** 1 and 2 Chronicles can be speed-read, as we'll have already covered much of the material, and this is a ridiculous amount of reading]

Week 12 (November 20, 23)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 16, 1 Chron, 2 Chron

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 17, "Ezra and Nehemiah" (14 p.) • *Ezra* • *Nehemiah*

Class: **Thanksgiving holiday, no class**

Week 13 (November 27, 30)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 17, Ezra, Neh

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 18, "Tobit" (9 p.) • *Tobit*

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 18, Tobit; student presentations

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 19, "Judith" (9 p.) • *Judith*

Week 14 (December 4, 7)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 19, Judith; student presentations

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 20, "Esther" (19 p.) • *Esther*

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 20, Esther; student presentations

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 21, "The Books of Maccabees" [-2 Macc overview], (16 p.) • *1 Maccabees*

Week 15 (December 11, 14)

Class: Lecture / discussion on *Ign.* Ch. 21, 1 Macc; student presentations

HW: Read *Ignatius* Ch. 21, "2 Macc overview" (6 p.) • *2 Maccabees*

Class: Lecture / discussion on 2 Macc; student presentations

HW: Finish *Sed Contra* papers

Major paper: *Sed Contra*

The *Sed contra* assignment is an opportunity for students to develop and employ their exegetical, research, and theological reasoning skills. In this assignment, students will seek to answer a disputed question in biblical studies (of their own choice) following the general structure of a Summa article. The purpose of this exercise is for students to closely examine and reflect upon the text(s) in question, and to engage critically with both traditional and modern interpretation in the selected area.

(NB: While this assignment adopts the structure of a Summa article, the purpose is not to reproduce an article in philosophy or systematics, but to use St. Thomas' methodology as a tool for critically engaging with a particular question in biblical studies. Thus, while logic should not be neglected, priority should be given to historical and textual considerations in formulating your answer and responding to objections.)

The five parts of the assignment's structure are as follows:

- **Question (*Quaestio*):** The question you will be answering -- i.e., "Whether Barney the dinosaur is a product of the jurassic period," etc. Students will get approval on their question from the professor before beginning research.
- **Objections (*Videtur quod*):** Concise presentations of the strongest arguments against your own position. Each should be distilled to a few sentences, and three to five objections total should be included.
- **On the contrary (*Sed contra*):** A brief, punchy statement of your own position; generally one to three sentences.
- **Answer (*Respondeo quod*):** A presentation of the argument and evidence for your own position. The arguments may be enumerated, and the response should be well-structured and carefully reasoned. This is the largest single section, and should comprise two to three paragraphs.
- **Replies to objections (*Ad... dicendum quod*):** A response to each of the prior objections, each of which should generally comprise one to three sentences (though additional space may be used if necessary).

Assignments will be evaluated along the following criteria:

- **How relevant is the question?** An excellent article will be on a disputed question, with some significance beyond the immediate field of study (rather than one that is not actually disputed by anyone, and/or largely irrelevant).
- **How strong are the objections?** An excellent article will identify the strongest arguments for the opposing side of the question, and state them in a manner that is precise and compelling, showing that

the student has mastered the counter-evidence and listened well to both sides of the question. NB: Your own argument will only be as strong as the opposing evidence you admit from the other side!

- **How compelling is the positive statement?** An excellent article will be able to provide a well-structured, well-reasoned, and persuasive statement of their own position on the question. This will take the form of the initial statement (*Sed contra*) and the arguments for this position (*Respondeo*). Thorough research and engagement with relevant Scripture / commentaries and academic sources / theologians is key here.

- **How well are the objections answered?** An excellent article will provide compelling responses to each objection, showing how their weight can be allayed by other means.

- **How well does the presenter answer questions?** Students will present their articles to the class and answer follow-up questions; an excellent presentation will show mastery of the material in their responses.