



OT 221 Reading the Historical Books
Online Education Syllabus Edition 1, Published 2017
3 credit hours

Course designer/instructor: **Samuel Hildebrandt** (PhD)
Email: samuel.hildebrandt@prairie.edu (response within 24 hours)
Skype: Samuel.Hildebrandt2016 (by appointment only)

I. Course Description

This course offers a survey of the historical books of the Old Testament (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther). Over the course of twelve sessions, you will receive a general introduction to these books, including their historical backgrounds, literary structure, and theological themes, and the hermeneutic approaches suitable to interpreting them. The course also highlights some of the main issues in the scholarly debates and leads you towards a greater appreciation of these books and their usefulness for personal devotion and church ministry. These objectives will be accomplished through a combination of audio lectures, video material, the reading of the biblical books and selected scholarly resources, online interaction, and written assignments.

Prerequisite: OT 112 Reading the Torah

II. Course Rationale

Many readers of the Bible are familiar with individual stories from the historical books, such as the fall of Jericho or David's fight against Goliath. Yet, because of the literary scope of these books and the wide range of names and events that they include, Christians often struggle to see the "big picture" of Israel's history. Understanding how these books relate to other parts of the Old Testament and how they connect to the New Testament adds another level of difficulty for most readers. Intended to address these challenges, this course facilitates a guided, first-hand encounter with the biblical text and is geared toward fostering the ability to read historical material with academic soundness and personal dedication.

III. Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to

1. demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the structure and general message of each individual book covered.
2. think and speak about the idea of "biblical history" in a manner that reflects an awareness of the literary conventions of these books.
3. relate the content of these books to other parts of the Old Testament, especially

- to the Pentateuch and the Prophets.
4. discern how to read these texts in light of Jesus Christ and the New Testament.
 5. approach, analyze, and appreciate passages from these books in a manner that supports personal devotion and prepares for further study and church ministry.

IV. Course Reading Material

Required

Satterthwaite, Philip E. and J. Gordon McConville. *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.

ESV: The Holy Bible. English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2007.

*The ESV is listed here solely because it is the version that is used in the audio lectures. Students may choose a different modern translation, such as NIV or NRSV.

Recommended (optional)¹

Arnold, Bill T. and H. G. M. Williamson, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Long, V. Philips. *The Art of Biblical History*. Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Provan, Iain, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

V. Course Requirements

This course is taught online over twelve sessions. All assignments must be completed within four months (16 weeks) from the time of enrollment, leaving approximately one week per teaching unit with four extra weeks for assignments. Each student is required to submit the following assignments:

1. Forum Posting and Interaction (×10)	20%
2. Reading Report and Digital Notebook	15%
3. Reading Biblical Narrative Paper	25%
4. Research Paper	40%

1. Forum Posting and Interaction (20%). Providing an opportunity to reflect on the online material and the assigned readings, you will be asked to engage with specific questions and post your responses in online discussion forums. Once you have written and posted your contribution for a particular unit (max. 200 words), read some of the responses by other course participants and engage with one of them. Briefly indicate one positive aspect and make a suggestion for further thought. Please be concise, polite, and charitable in your online interaction.

Due each unit.

¹ More relevant literature can be found in *Exploring the Old Testament*, which concludes every chapter with a helpful bibliography.

2. Reading Report (10%) and Digital Notebook (5%). You are expected to read the biblical portions assigned for every unit (see course outline below), as well as the assigned chapters from *Exploring the Old Testament*. I recommend that you first read and reflect on a portion of the biblical text and then use the textbook as a commentary.

At the end of the course please submit your reading report, in which you indicate the percentage that you have completed. If you have read less than 100%, please specify which portions of the Bible readings and of the textbook readings you have not read.

Together with the Reading Report, please also submit a digital notebook (this should be either a Word document or a Powerpoint file). For each of the twelve units, please create an entry in your notebook in which you

- indicate something that you have encountered in your study that was entirely new to you or that has left a special impact on you. Keep your notetaking at around 100 words per unit.
- record one question that has come out of your study. This can relate to things which you have found confusing or which have sparked your curiosity.

Due unit 12.

3. Reading Biblical Narrative Paper (25%). A key characteristic of the historical books is their narrative format. On the basis of the audio lectures and the information provided in your textbook (see especially pp. 7-10, 108-118), you will embark on a guided analysis of three narrative passages in 1 Samuel (9.1-14; 16.14-23; 21.1-22.23). The focus of this analysis lies on the characterization, speech, and contribution of the anonymous, minor character of Saul's servants who appear in all three texts.

Please begin your discussion of each of these passages by *briefly* describing the surrounding literary context (what happens immediately before and after the passage?) and the wider book context (what is the significance of this passage in the storyline of 1 Samuel?). After this introduction, please share your observations in detail on the following questions:

1 Sam 9.1-14

- OT narrative rarely tells us what characters look like. How is Saul described in 9.1-2 and why might this description be included at this point of the narrative of 1 Samuel?
- Saul has trouble finding two things in this passage – what are they, how are they related, and what might the narrator be telling us through them about Saul's royal skills?
- Describe the dialogue between Saul and the servant in 9.5-10. What do their words and interaction tell us about them? How are their words used to contrast the two men? In what ways do they provide an indirect commentary on Saul's ability to be Israel's king?

1 Sam 16.14-23

- How are Saul and David brought into contact in this passage?
- What does the narrator tell us through the words of Saul's servants?
- How do the powerful king and the nameless servants compare in this passage?

1 Sam 21.1-22.23

- Compare the three "ruler-servant" episodes in 21.1-6, 21.10-15, and 22.6-19. How do David, Achish, and Saul treat their men differently? How do the words and actions of their servants function as an indirect commentary about their royal character?
- What may be the function in wider narrative of 1 Samuel of placing Saul (Israel's first king), David (Israel's second king), and Achish (a foreign king) side by side?

Based on your study of the three passages, please write a conclusion in which you

- summarize the overall narrative contribution of "the servants" in 1 Samuel.
- reflect on the fact that God uses minor, anonymous characters ("servants") to work out his purposes: can you think of other biblical texts which portray servants as important characters? How does this theme appear in the New Testament (see, e.g., Phil 2.7)? What kind of challenge, inspiration, or encouragement do you draw from your narrative analysis of 1 Samuel for your own service to God?

Please keep your essay around 2,000 words.

Due unit 5.

***Important Note:** Beyond the general context provided in your textbook, please do not use any secondary literature, such as commentaries, scholarly articles, dictionaries, or Bible study guides. This assignment is intended to give you an opportunity for sharpening your skills of close and careful reading of the biblical text.

4. Research Paper (40%). Culminating the course, you are invited to explore a passage, topic, or issue that has attracted your attention in your study. You may, for instance, write an analysis about a specific character or relationship, or study a theme, such as faithfulness in Judges, sacrifice in Ruth or Esther, or trusting God in 1-2 Kings. Alternatively, you might choose to study a particular link between the material covered and the New Testament.

Please think early in the course about a possible topic and submit a rough proposal of *what* you want to write, *why* you are interested in it, and *how* you plan to structure your paper. While I ask you to submit this proposal no later than unit 7, you can, of course, write on topics that relate to the material in units 8-12. The proposal is *not* a graded assignment but simply a way for you to receive some feedback as you start thinking about your paper.

For this assignment, you must use and cite at least eight different secondary sources. Ensure a

balanced combination, such as commentaries, journal articles (see ATLA database), and monographs. The bibliographies in your textbook provide a good starting point for your research. Please adhere in your citation practice to the guidelines in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (8th ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Although your selection, assessment, and use of secondary material will be of advantage for getting high grades, it is mandatory that you focus your paper throughout on what *the biblical text* says rather than what others say about it.

Please keep your paper at around 2,400 words (including footnotes).

Due unit 12.

***For all written assignments:** In order not to diminish the quality of *what* you have to say by *how* you say it, please check your spelling and grammar, cultivate a concise and clear style, structure your paper along headings and well-connected paragraphs, include an introduction and a conclusion, and always build your personal reflections on your study of the biblical text. Please refrain from submitting multiple assignments on the same day in order to allow the feedback you will receive for your work to inform your next submission.

VI. Academic Policies

1. *Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.* Plagiarism, passing off someone else's words or ideas as your own, is a serious academic offense. Please familiarize yourself with the Prairie College Academic Guide found at <https://prairie.edu/current-students/registrars-office/>.

2. *Policies Regarding Submission of Work.* All written assignments must be word-processed on a computer, double-spaced, and written in size 12 Times New Roman font. Any work that is considerably below or beyond the required word count (+/- 10%) will be appropriately penalized.

3. *Grading Policies.* The timeline for grading and assignment feedback is 7-10 days. I will endeavor to respond to student communications within 2 days, excluding weekends, holidays, and vacation time. The grading scale that is applied to all written assignments is the following:

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Rating	Point Value
A+	90-100		4.0
A	85-89	Excellent	4.0
A-	80-84		3.7
B+	77-79		3.3
B	73-76	Good	3.0
B-	70-72		2.7
C+	67-69		2.3
C	63-66	Satisfactory	2.0
C-	60-62		1.7
D+	55-59		1.3

D	50-54	Poor	1.0
F	0-49	Failure	0.0
P	50 or above	Pass	
AU	-----	Audit	
I	-----	Incomplete	
W	-----	Withdrew	

Numerical course grades are not rounded.

VII. Course Schedule

Unit	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Bible Reading</i>	<i>Textbook Reading</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
1	Introduction	- - -	pp. 1-40	Forum posting
2	Joshua	Josh 1-24	pp. 41-72	Forum posting
3	Judges	Judg 1-21	pp. 73-104	Forum posting
4	1-2 Samuel	1 Sam 1-31	pp. 105-122	Forum posting
5	1-2 Samuel	2 Sam 1-24	pp. 122-146	Biblical Narrative paper due
6	1-2 Kings	1 Kgs 1-16	pp. 147-158	Forum posting
7	1-2 Kings	1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 25	pp. 159-198 (pp. 199-220 are optional)	Research Paper proposal due
8	Ruth	Ruth 1-4	pp. 220-230	Forum posting
9	Esther	Esth 1-10	pp. 231-243	Forum posting
10	Ezra and Nehemiah	Ezra 1-10; Neh 1-13	pp. 244-265	Forum posting
11	1-2 Chronicles	1-2 Chr	pp. 266-290	Forum posting
12	Conclusion	- - -	- - -	Forum posting; Research Paper, Reading Report, and Digital Notebook due