



On-Campus Course Syllabus

OTS 350

Old Testament Backgrounds

Fall 2023

Class Information

Day and Time: Tuesday/Thursday 12:15-1:30 pm

Room Number: E209

Contact Information

Instructor Name: Kevin R. Warstler, Ph.D.

Instructor Email: kwarstler@criswell.edu

Instructor Phone: 214.818.1331

Instructor Office Hours: Tuesday 2-4 pm; Thursday 2-4 pm

Course Description and Prerequisites

An intensive study of the historical, social, and literary contexts of the Old Testament. (Prerequisites: OTS 101, OTS 201)

Course Objectives

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the conceptual world of the ancient Near East and its impact on biblical studies.
2. Interact with the content of ancient texts in order to understand the concepts and world views that are represented in those texts.
3. Evaluate supposed parallels between ancient texts and the Old Testament and articulate your thoughts on the nature and significance of the parallelisms.
4. Discuss the meanings of biblical texts in light of extrabiblical backgrounds.

Required Textbooks

1. Arnold, Bill T., and Bryan E. Beyer. *Readings from the Ancient Near East*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. (978-0801022920)
2. Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. (978-1540960214)

Course Requirements and Assignments

1. Class Participation (20%)

Class participation is a significant part of this course because the understanding of ancient texts and concepts necessitates hearing a variety of observations and interpretations. Even for those who have read and studied these texts before, there are always new observations and different perspectives that allow for a deeper understanding of the material. For this reason, it is expected that students will share

their observations and ideas both in class during discussions and outside of class in the reading response requirement.

2. Reading Responses (40%)

During the weeks when there are no written assignments and there are assigned readings from Arnold/Beyer and Walton, there will be questions posted on a discussion board in Canvas that will need to be answered before the week when we discuss that material. The answers to the questions will be due no later than the end of the day on Sunday evening (11:59 pm) before we have class on Tuesday. The first question will always be the same, which is to report that you have completed the reading assigned for the week. You will be given access to other students' answers to the questions but only after you have submitted yours. It is not necessary to respond to any of your colleagues' answers. I will use the answers as a basis for our class discussion on our Tuesday class period.

3. Assignments

There will be four assignments over the course of the semester that will be posted and submitted in Canvas. They will be directly related to the readings assigned for that week and will serve as a substitute for the reading responses during those weeks. In other words, there will be no reading responses due during the weeks when there is an assignment due.

Class Attendance

Students are responsible for enrolling in courses for which they (1) anticipate being able to attend every on-campus class session on the day and time appearing on course schedules, or (2) participating in academically related activities as identified in online-course schedules including synchronous class sessions conducted remotely by video, and then making every effort to do so. When unavoidable situations result in absence or tardiness, students are responsible for acquiring any missed information. Professors are not obliged to allow students to make up missed work. Per their independent discretion, individual professors may determine how attendance affects students' ability to meet course learning objectives and whether attendance affects course grades. Professors apprise students of such information in course syllabi.

Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships must meet specified requirements of various departments at the college and should consult relevant sections of the *Academic Catalog*. To ensure such funds will not be forfeited, students are responsible for contacting the proper departments to ascertain any specific course participation requirements and consequences of not meeting such requirements. Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships should consult the Financial Aid office.

While Criswell College is a non-attendance taking institution, it nevertheless must demonstrate that students begin their courses in order to comply with Federal Aid regulations. Accordingly, students must participate in academically related activities during census periods. Failure to meet this requirement will result in students being administratively dropped from courses.

Academically related activity is defined as any course-related activity that may be used as evidence of attendance. Examples include:

- physical presence in a classroom during a class session with the instructor present,
- participation in a synchronous remote video class session with the instructor present,
- submission of an academic assignment, quiz, or exam,

- participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- participation in a study group or discussion board that is assigned by the instructor,
- documentation showing that the student and a faculty member corresponded about the academic subject of the course.

NOTE: Logging into a Canvas course alone and logging into a Synchronous Online class session without active participation or with the camera off are not considered attendance.

NOTE: A census period begins on the first day of a semester/term and runs through the end of the last day to drop courses. During the census period, attendance data is collected in order to demonstrate compliance with Federal Aid regulations. There is no census period for winter terms since there is no last day to drop courses.

Campus Closure

To ensure the health and safety of students and employees, college administrators may decide it is necessary on rare occasions to close the campus. Once this decision is announced, instructors will contact students to provide further details regarding the campus closure’s impact on those courses. Students are responsible to watch for communication from their instructors and respond appropriately. (Unless otherwise specified by the instructor in this syllabus, this communication will be sent to the student’s Criswell College e-mail account.)

In order to make progress toward the courses’ objectives, instructors have the freedom during most campus closures to require students to participate in activities as alternatives to meeting on campus. An instructor may, for example, hold class remotely (through Zoom) at the scheduled time, provide a recording of a class or presentation for students to watch independently, or assign other activities that students are to accomplish before returning to campus. Students are responsible for accomplishing these alternative activities as well as any course requirements listed in this syllabus during the period of the campus closure. If, during the period of the campus closure, personal circumstances prohibit a student from accomplishing these alternative activities or course requirements and assignment listed in the syllabus during the campus closure, the student is responsible for communicating with the instructor as soon as possible. Instructors will not penalize students who do not have the means to accomplish the alternative activities during the period of the campus’s closure and will work with students whose circumstances during the campus closure prohibited their timely completion of course requirements and assignments in the syllabus.

Grading Scale

Assigning grade definitions (i.e., above average, average, below average) is optional. Please delete the last column below if not assigning definitions. Additionally, delete these instructions when completing syllabus.

			Grade Definitions (optional)
A	93-100	4.0 grade points per semester hour	
A-	90-92	3.7 grade points per semester hour	
B+	87-89	3.3 grade points per semester hour	
B	83-86	3.0 grade points per semester hour	

B-	80-82	2.7 grade points per semester hour	
C+	77-79	2.3 grade points per semester hour	
C	73-76	2.0 grade points per semester hour	
C-	70-72	1.7 grade points per semester hour	
D+	67-69	1.3 grade points per semester hour	
D	63-66	1.0 grade point per semester hour	
D-	60-62	0.7 grade points per semester hour	
F	0-59	0.0 grade points per semester hour	

Incomplete Grades

Students requesting a grade of Incomplete (I) must understand that incomplete grades may be given only upon approval of the faculty member involved. An “I” may be assigned only when a student is currently passing a course and in situations involving extended illness, serious injury, death in the family, or employment or government reassignment, not student neglect.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructors prior to the end of the semester, plus filing the appropriate completed and approved academic request form with the Registrar’s Office. The “I” must be removed (by completing the remaining course requirements) no later than 60 calendar days after the close of the term or semester in which the grade was awarded, or the “I” will become an “F.”

Academic Honesty

Absolute truth is an essential belief and basis of behavior for those who believe in a God who cannot lie and forbids falsehood. Academic honesty is the application of the principle of truth in the classroom setting. Academic honesty includes the basic premise that all work submitted by students must be their own and any ideas derived or copied from elsewhere must be carefully documented.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- cheating of any kind,
- submitting, without proper approval, work originally prepared by the student for another course,
- plagiarism, which is the submitting of work prepared by someone else as if it were his own, and
- failing to credit sources properly in written work.

Institutional Assessment

Material submitted by students in this course may be used for assessment of the college’s academic programs. Since programmatic and institutional assessment is done without reference to specific students, the results of these assessments have no effect on a student’s course grade or academic standing at the college. Before submitting a student’s work for this type of assessment, the course instructor redacts the work to remove anything that identifies the student.

Institutional Email Policy

All official college email communications to students enrolled in this course will be sent exclusively to students’ institutional email accounts. Students are expected to check their student email accounts regularly and to

respond in an appropriate and timely manner to all communications from faculty and administrative departments.

Students are permitted to setup automatic forwarding of emails from their student email accounts to one or more personal email accounts. The student is responsible to setup and maintain email forwarding without assistance from college staff. If a student chooses to use this forwarding option, he/she will continue to be responsible for responding appropriately to all communications from faculty and administrative departments of the college. Criswell College bears no responsibility for the use of emails that have been forwarded from student email accounts to other email accounts.

Disabilities

Criswell College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and similar state laws, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Criswell College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students, faculty, and employees with disabilities as required by applicable laws. For more information, please contact the Student Services Office.

Intellectual Property Rights

Unless otherwise specifically instructed in writing by the instructor, students must neither materially nor digitally reproduce materials from any course offered by Criswell College for or with the significant possibility of distribution.

Research and Writing Standards

The default writing style for written assignments in Criswell College Courses is the latest edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian. However, instructors are free to require alternative writing styles in their courses. These styles include but are not limited to the American Psychological Association (APA), Chicago Manual of Style, Modern Language Association (MLA), and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) writing guides.

Resources and Supports

Canvas and SONIS: Criswell College uses Canvas as its web-based learning tool and SONIS for student data. Students needing assistance with Canvas should contact the Canvas Help Support line at (844) 358-6140. Tech support is available at this number, twenty-four hours a day. Students needing help with SONIS should contact the Campus Software Manager at studenttechsupport@criswell.edu.

Student Services: The Student Services Office exists to foster and encourage success in all areas of life—physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance by contacting the office at 214.818.1332 or studentservices@criswell.edu. The Student Services Office also works with local counseling centers to ensure that every student has access to helpful mental health resources. More information is located on the college website at [Criswell College Mental Health Resources](#), and students may contact the Director of Student Services if they have any questions.

Wallace Library: Students can access academic resources and obtain research assistance by contacting or visiting the Wallace Library, which is located on campus. For more information, email the Wallace Library at library@criswell.edu. Login credentials are emailed to students near the beginning of the semester.

Tutoring Center: Students are encouraged to consult with tutors to improve and enhance their skills and confidence in any subject matter taught at the college. Tutors have been recommended by the faculty to ensure that the tutor(s) are qualified to serve the student body. Every tutor brings experience and expertise in an effort to provide the proper resources for the subject matter at hand. To consult with a tutor, students can schedule an appointment through Calendly (<https://calendly.com/criswell-tutoringcenter>) or by visiting the Tutoring Center located on the second floor in room E203. For questions, call 214.818.1373 or email at tutoringcenter@criswell.edu.

Course Schedule

Class	Dates	In-Class Topic, Assignment Due	Arnold/Beyer Reading	Walton Reading
1	Aug 22, 24	Introduction to Course, Syllabus, ANE Geography, History, and Culture		
2	Aug 29, 31	Witnesses to the ANE, Archaeology, Primary Texts		Ch 1–3
3	Sep 5, 7	Creation and the Flood, Part 1	#6	Ch 4
4	Sep 12, 14	Creation and the Flood, Part 2	#1-5, 8-9	Ch 7-8
5	Sep 19, 21	Epic of Gilgamesh and Confusion of Tongues	#12-13	
6	Sep 26, 28	Epic Literature	#17-19	
7	Oct 3, 5	Patriarchal Customs Assignment #1 Due	#14-16	Ch 6
8	Oct 10, 12	Covenants and Treaties	#21, 23-24	Ch 12
	Oct 16–20	STUDENT DEVELOPMENT WEEK – NO CLASS		
9	Oct 24, 26	Law Codes Assignment #2 Due	#27-28, 30	
10	Oct 31, Nov 2	Cultic Texts, Hymns and Prayers	#35, 38, 72-77	Ch 5
11	Nov 7, 9	Historiographic Texts, Part 1 Assignment # 3 Due	#40-43, 49 (Chronicle 5)	Ch 9
12	Nov 14, 16	Historiographic Texts, Part 2	#44, 50-51, 54-56, 60	Ch 10
	Nov 20–24	FALL/THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS		
13	Nov 28, 30	Wisdom Literature Assignment #4 Due	#63, 65-66, 69	Ch 13
14	Dec 5, 7	Prophetic Texts	#80, 82, 86-87, 90	Ch 11, 14 and Concluding Remarks
	Dec 11–15	NO CLASS DURING FINAL EXAM WEEK		

Selected Bibliography

Arnold, Bill T., and Bryan Beyer. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Chavalas, Mark W., ed. *Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.

Hallo, William W., and K. Lawson Younger. *The Context of Scripture*. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001-2003.

Hallo, William W., and William Kelly Simpson. *The Ancient Near East: A History*. 2nd ed.

Hess, Richard S. *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Hill, Andrew E., and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Kitchen, K. A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Kuhrt, Amélie. *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 B.C.* 2 vols. New ed. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Lichtheim, Miriam *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. 3 vols. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

Matthews, Victor H., and Don C. Benjamin. *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*. Third revised expanded ed. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007.

Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

van de Mieroop, Marc. *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Pritchard, James B., ed. *The Ancient Near East: A New Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Sasson, Jack M., ed. *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001.

Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. Baker Academic, 2018.