



# Course Syllabus

## OTS 350

### Old Testament Backgrounds

### Fall 2025

#### 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](mailto:kwarstler@criswell.edu)

**Instructor Phone:** 214-818-1331

**Instructor Office Hours:** Tuesday 1-4 pm; Thursday 1-4 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. (978-1540960214)

#### Recommended Supplemental Materials

Walton, John H. *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1994. (978-0310481614)

## 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. NO LATE READING RESPONSES WILL BE ACCEPTED. Canvas is set to cut off access on Sunday at 11:59 pm so you will not be allowed to post after that time. Please plan accordingly.

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 (40%)

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. Unlike the reading responses, assignments may be turned in late but with a significant penalty (10 points per day). The penalty for one day will begin at 12:16 pm on the day the assignment is due. If you have not completed the assignment on the due date, it is requested that you do not attend class to participate in the discussion since it will be exclusively about that assignment. However, missing class will also affect your class participation grade. Please plan carefully so that you can have the assignments completed on time and participate in the discussion. All of the course work is available from the first day so you can work ahead.

## Course/Classroom Policies and Information

### Video Recording

To ensure FERPA compliance when a course is live-streamed or recorded, students can opt out of video recordings by requesting seating in a designated area off camera. Students who sit outside of this area are giving implicit permission to be recorded.

### Class Attendance:

Students should only enroll in courses they are able to attend regularly.

- **On-campus** students are expected to attend class **in person** according to the course syllabus.
- Students enrolled in the **online section** must pay any applicable online course fees.

- Online students are expected to attend class **synchronously** at the scheduled time via the designated video conferencing platform, Zoom, found in the left-hand global menu in Canvas.
- Online students must have their **cameras turned on with sound muted** during class, and actively participate in discussions and activities. In order to be properly identified, students must upload a picture ID to their Canvas Account Profile *prior to the first online meeting*. For instructions on how to upload a profile picture, [click here](#).

#### Missed Classes:

- Each instructor may decide how attendance impacts your grade and learning objectives. Details are provided within the course syllabus.
- Students are responsible for catching up on any material missed due to absence or tardiness.
- Instructors are **not required** to allow make-up work for missed classes.

#### Attendance & Financial Aid:

- Students receiving **grants, loans, or scholarships** must meet participation requirements set by the college.
- It is the student's responsibility to:
  - Review relevant sections of the Academic Catalog.
  - Contact the **Financial Aid Office** for details on how attendance affects aid.
  - Understand the consequences of non-participation.

#### Census Period Attendance Requirement:

- Though Criswell College does not officially take attendance, it must verify that students **begin their courses** to meet federal aid regulations.
- **During the census period** (first two weeks of a 16-week semester or first week of shorter terms), students must participate in **academically related activities**, or they may be dropped from the course.

#### Examples of Qualifying Activities:

- Attending class in person or via live video with the instructor present
- Submitting an assignment, quiz, or exam
- Taking part in assigned tutorials, study groups, or discussion boards
- Having documented communication with the instructor about course content

#### Important Note:

Simply logging into Canvas or a Zoom session without participating (e.g., camera off, no interaction) **does not count** as attendance.

#### Canvas:

- Criswell College uses Canvas as its web-based Learning Management System (LMS).
- **For online courses** at Criswell College, instructors use Canvas to:
  - Organize course content on a module basis using organizational tools within Canvas
  - Control the timing of course requirements through module control or assignment due dates to ensure that students are engaged for the full length of the semester or term
  - Accept assignments from students only inside the Canvas course (emailed assignments are not acceptable)
  - Provide written feedback on assignments only within Canvas, preferably through Speedgrader
  - Use the Announcement or e-mail feature in Canvas to communicate with the students rather than by broadcasting to a class email listserv outside of canvas
  - Use Zoom in Canvas for all "live" (synchronous) class sessions

#### Important Note:

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.

## 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

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.

## **Course Policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Examples of AI-related functions you **may not use** without permission:

- Text Generation – You may not use AI to generate text for use in an assignment.
- Outline Generation – You may not use AI to generate an outline for an assignment.

AI-related tools you **may use** without permission:

- Spellcheck and grammar – built into Word, Pages, and Google Docs
- AI re-writing tools – tools that take what you’ve written and help make it clearer, such as what Grammarly offers. However, you must cite Grammarly or other sources in your assignment/paper and submit both original draft of paper and the final paper.
- AI research and summarize – tools that help you find sources to cite, such as the new AI tools built into Logos Bible Software.)

## **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](mailto: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](mailto: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 a wide range of academic resources and receive research assistance by contacting or visiting the Wallace Library, located on the second floor of the Education Building.

Login credentials for accessing the library's databases are emailed to students near the beginning of each semester.

For more information or assistance, email the Wallace Library at [library@criswell.edu](mailto:library@criswell.edu) or visit [www.criswell.edu/academics/wallace-library/](http://www.criswell.edu/academics/wallace-library/).

Tutoring Center: Students are encouraged to consult with tutors to enhance their skills and build confidence. All tutors are recommended by faculty to ensure they are qualified to support the student body. To meet with a tutor, students can schedule an appointment through Calendly at <https://calendly.com/criswell-tutoringcenter>. The Tutoring Center is located in room E203 of the Education Building.

For questions, email [tutoringcenter@criswell.edu](mailto:tutoringcenter@criswell.edu).

## Course Outline/Calendar

Class	Dates	In-Class Topic	Text Reading	Walton Reading
1	Aug 19, 21	Introduction to Course, Syllabus, ANE Geography, History, and Culture		
2	Aug 26, 28	Witnesses to the ANE, Archaeology, Primary Texts		Ch 1–3
3	Sep 2, 4	Creation and the Flood, Part 1	#6	Ch 4
4	Sep 9, 11	Creation and the Flood, Part 2	#1-5, 7-9	Ch 7-8
5	Sep 16, 18	Epic of Gilgamesh and Confusion of Tongues	#12-13	
6	Sep 23, 25	Epic Literature	#17-19	
7	Sep 30, Oct 2	Patriarchal Customs <b>Assignment #1 Due</b>	#14-16	Ch 6
8	Oct 7, 9	Covenants and Treaties	#21, 23-24	Ch 12
	Oct 13–17	STUDENT DEVELOPMENT WEEK – NO CLASS		
9	Oct 21, 23	Law Codes <b>Assignment #2 Due</b>	#27-28, 30	
10	Oct 28, 30	Cultic Texts, Hymns and Prayers	#35, 38, 72-77	Ch 5
11	Nov 4, 6	Historiographic Texts, Part 1 <b>Assignment # 3 Due</b>	#40-43, 49 (Chronicle 5)	Ch 9
12	Nov 11, 13	Historiographic Texts, Part 2	#44, 50-51, 54-56, 60	Ch 10
13	Nov 18, 20	Wisdom Literature <b>Assignment #4 Due</b>	#63, 65-66, 69	Ch 13
	Nov 24–28	FALL/THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS		
14	Dec 2, 4	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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> 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*. 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.
- Lichteim, 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- van de Mieroop, Marc. *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC*. 2<sup>nd</sup> 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Baker Academic, 2018.