



COURSE SYLLABUS

The Book of Genesis (OLDT 0615)

Professor: Dr. John Kessler

Winter 2011

Wednesdays 6:30-9:20 Jan 11-April 11

Professor: Dr. John Kessler, Department of Biblical Studies

Tel: 416-226-6620, ext. 6724

E-mail: jkessler@tyndale.ca

Office hours:

BY APPOINTMENT:

MONDAYS 10:00 am to noon;

WEDNESDAYS 4:00-5:30 pm

THURSDAYS 2:00-4:00 pm*

I am usually available at these hours, but not always. To book an appointment, please leave me your preferred day and time, and a possible second choice, and I will confirm a time with you. Please contact me, preferably, via e mail: jkessler@tyndale.ca. If e-mail is unavailable, call 416-226-6620, ext. 6724. At other times, if I am in my office, and available, I will be glad to see you.

*usually, but not always

COURSE PRE-REQUISITES:

Required: Interpreting and Applying the Biblical Text (BIBL 0501)

Recommended: Old Testament History and Theology (OLDT 0511)

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to provide students with a general overall understanding of the content and theology of the book of Genesis. It will emphasize:

- A. The basic theology of the book of Genesis with special attention to the themes of promise and covenant, and their development throughout the book.
- B. An understanding of the key ideas of Genesis in the context of the thought

- forms of the Ancient Near East.
- C. Key exegetical issues within the book.
- D. The literary and narrative structure of the book.

II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the conclusion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the structure of the book of Genesis and locate key events within it.
- Identify God's redemptive promises and covenants and trace them through the book.
- Present a paper demonstrating the student's ability to conduct an academically credible study of the text of Genesis or a related ANE issue relevant to it. The paper will demonstrate competence at exegeting the biblical text, reading and evaluating the secondary literature related to it, and expressing the results of this exegesis logically and coherently, according to accepted formal conventions in the biblical sciences.
- Engage in an informed and creative discussion of the thought patterns of the Ancient Near East regarding the cosmos, creation, the dwelling place of God and the nature and role of the human person, and relate these concepts to the content of Genesis.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

○

A. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

The following books are to be read in their entirety and will form a significant part of the background for the discussion group sessions:

Arnold, Bill T., *Genesis*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 (ISBN 978-0-521-00067-3)

Walton, John H., *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. (ISBN9780801027505 or 0801027500.)

B. SUMMARY OF COURSE WORK

1. Major Paper	50%
2. Discussion Groups	25%
3. Annotated Readings	25%

C. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Discussion Groups (25%). Discussion groups will take place five times during the semester. See course outline (below) for dates.

Additional information regarding the details and the functioning of discussion groups may be found at the end of the syllabus. The questions for the discussion groups will be posted on the mytyndale.ca course page.

2. Reading Notations (25%). Due April 11. Note: no late assignments will be received after this date.

A full explanation of the methodology and marking scheme for this assignment may be found in the document “Gen615.Reading.Annotation.Instructions” on the mytyndale course page. This assignment will be graded according to the “contract marking” method. Students will fill out the form included for each reading, and the cover/summary form found in the assignment instructions section of the mytyndale.ca course page and submit them electronically on *the last day of class. No late submissions will be accepted for this assignment.*

3. Research Paper (50%): Due: Wednesday, March 28. Papers may be submitted electronically, in pdf format only, or in hard copy. Hard copies are due by the end of class. E-versions must be submitted before 11:59 pm. Send e-versions to christam@rogers.com

Papers may be done in either SBL or APA/MLA formats, but the chosen format must be used consistently. For details on the use of the SBL format see the *SBL Handbook of Style*. Ed. P.H. Alexander, et. al. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999 (available on the mytyndale.ca course page). All sources used must be cited. Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the Tyndale Student Handbook. Students are strongly encouraged to:

1. Use the library for the preparation of this assignment, especially the reference and periodical collections. *Any one of the suggested topics can be completed at a B+/A-level using only materials which NEVER leave the library.* Such materials include periodicals, encyclopaedias and Bible Dictionaries and reference copies of commentaries. These never leave the library. Similarly a massive amount of material is available on line in downloadable PDF files via the library’s e-resources (especially EBSCO HOST/ATLA and JSTOR). THERE IS A GIGANTIC DIFFERENCE IN THE QUALITY OF THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH THE LIBRARY’S E-RESOURCES AND THE INTERNET IN GENERAL. REMEMBER—ONLY QUOTE QUALIFIED EXPERTS IN THE SUBJECT YOU ARE STUDYING. Be sure to use scholarly reputable sources. These are usually found in peer-reviewed series and journals (e.g. *Vetus Testamentum* and *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*) or edited commentary series (e.g. *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*; the *Anchor Bible*.)

Additional Suggestions:

- a) Use the commentaries, Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias in the Reference Section of the library.
- b) Use the Library’s E-Resources (<http://www.tyndale.ca/library/>), especially Journal Search

- (<http://www.tyndale.ca/library/eresources/ejournals>) via EBSCOHost>ATLA or JSTOR; and the reference volumes available via the Gale Virtual Reference Library (access via <http://www.tyndale.ca/library/eresources> and select “G”, the once in the Gale site, choose “Religion.”). This gives you access to several excellent Encyclopaedias including the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.
- c) For bibliographies for your subject see the Oxford Bibliographies Online (<http://www.tyndale.ca/library/eresources?title=o>) available via the e resources portlet on the library website (choose “o”). These excellent bibliographies will give you an orientation to the subject, and a place to start. Similarly check out the Oxford Biblical Studies Online portlet (just above the Oxford Bibliographies Online portlet).
 - d) Before you start, read an overview of your subject in a major Bible Dictionary or Encyclopaedia, such as the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, the *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* or the *New International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, or the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*
 - e) Begin early, and take time to *think and pray about your work*.
 - f) Make sure that you have consulted *at least 15 sources*, and that these sources are listed in *proper bibliographic form* at the end of your paper.
 - g) Make sure your pages are numbered.
 - h) Ask a friend to proofread your work before handing it in.
 - i) NEVER cite the editor of an encyclopaedia or dictionary article as the author of the article. Example: D. N. Freedman is the editor of the *Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD)*, but not the author of its individual entries (articles). ALWAYS cite the name of the author of the article, e.g. A. R. Millard, “Abraham” *ABD* 1:35-40.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced and include footnotes and bibliography, and pages must be numbered. The papers should be approximately 15-20 pages in length (18 pages of text 2 pages of bibliography). If your paper exceeds 18 pages of text marks will be deducted.

Three types of papers will be received.

- 1. An exegetical paper.** The student will present a full exegetical analysis of a specific pericope in Genesis. This passage will be chosen in consultation with the professor. The paper must include
 - a) an exegetical analysis of the passage. This exegetical analysis must demonstrate an awareness of the major text-critical and exegetical questions/problems in the passage. Students must weigh the various

scholarly opinions expressed on these issues and present their own conclusions

b) theological analysis. The student must identify the key theological themes and motifs present in the passage. Students are encouraged to identify other passages within the OT and NT where similar themes and motifs occur.

c) contemporary appropriation. How can the contemporary Christian community be instructed by this text? In what areas of life can these theological themes and motifs be appropriated by believers today?

This option is a good choice for students who have taken two or more semesters of Hebrew and who wish to develop their Hebrew skills.

2. A Position Paper

Like a debate, a position paper attempts to argue for a certain position by presenting positive evidence for a specific thesis, and refuting objections to it. The paper should be structured as follows:

Arguments for the position
 Arguments against the position
 Rebuttal of arguments for
 Rebuttal of arguments against
 Evaluation and Conclusion

Topics:

1. The nature of the “days” of Gen 1:1-2:4 (pick a position and argue for it).
2. Genesis 1-3 and Evolution (pick a position and argue for it).
3. The nature and extent of the Genesis Flood (Pick a position and argue for it).
4. The historicity and date of Abraham.

3. A Topical Essay. A research paper may be presented on one of the following topics:

- a) the meaning of the ‘desire’ of the woman and the ‘ruling’ of the man in Gen 3:16.
- b) The origin, function and meaning of circumcision. (The paper should include a survey of the practice of circumcision in the Ancient World, its significance and function in Gen 17 and the rest of the OT.)

- c) In Genesis God is frequently referred to via divine epithets using the name El. Discuss the following issues: (1) What does El mean? What are the characteristics of the god El in West Semitic religions? (2) Survey the various divine epithets using El in Genesis (e.g. Shaddai, [Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11 etc. and El Elyon [Gen 14:18-20]. What does each name mean? What are its origins? (3) What is the significance of the use of these diverse divine names? Why do we find several divine names with El in Genesis, but rarely elsewhere in the Bible?
- d) Discuss Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18. Address the following issues (and any other you deem relevant): Why does Yahweh tell Abraham his plans? What is the significance of Yahweh's visit to Sodom and Gomorrah? Why does Abraham intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah? Why does Abraham stop when he does in his intercession? What are the key theological issues regarding divine justice and judgment that are raised in the passage?
- e) Discuss the famous pericope regarding Jacob's wrestling with the angel (Gen 32:22-32). Present a brief verse-by-verse exegesis of the passage with special attention to the questions of the identity of Jacob's opponent, and who won the contest. Discuss the theological significance of the text in its present context and evaluate suggestions regarding extra-biblical uses of the night-wrestling motif.
- f) Evaluate one or several of the scholarly methodologies used to study the book of Genesis (source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, traditions criticism, new literary criticism, canonical readings, deconstructionism, ideological criticism, structuralism etc.). Be sure to provide: a brief historical sketch and explanation of the approach, the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, the relationship between the approach and other approaches taken, an evaluation of the ways in which the approach helps the community of faith read the text as Scripture and the challenges raised by the approach to a faith-based

reading. Be sure to illustrate your discussion with *concrete examples* of its utilization on the text of Genesis.

- g) The “Abrahamic Covenant”. Theologians frequently speak of an entity called “the Abrahamic Covenant.” Such a designation, however, glosses over the complexity of the ideas of promise and covenant in the Abraham narrative. In this essay the student will examine Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 15:7-21; ch 17 and ch 22. The focus is on the unique aspects and characteristics of each text, and the relationship of the texts to one another. The student will indicate proceed text by text and indicate, that which is promised or given in covenant in each text, to who is it given, any conditions or requirements attached to the promise or covenant, and whether the promise or covenant is breakable or unbreakable (conditional or unconditional). Finally the student will attempt an explanation to how these various texts “fit” together. Note: in addition to the careful reading of these texts, the student must consult secondary sources (commentaries, Bible Dictionaries, specialized articles).
- h) A topic proposed by the student (with the professor’s permission).

NOTE: Essays in this course may be submitted for the Donald A Leggett essay award. If you have received a superior grade, consider submitting your essay for the prize.

D. GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

Late Grading Policy

Late assignments are assessed at **2.0% per day** to a maximum of 3 weeks, after which the paper receives a zero. It is far better to submit your work on time than to take a late penalty. Note: Tyndale Seminary policy requires that all assignments must be done in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

Days are calculated from the end of class hour (i.e. 9:20 pm on the due date).

Extensions are granted **only** in exceptional circumstances. These include illness (a medical attestation is required), crisis, severe illness or death in the family, etc.

Extensions will NOT be granted for: mission trips, ministry responsibilities, heavy workload in other courses, computer or printer problems, etc.

In the event that the final exam is missed the student must: (1) produce a medical attestation justifying the absence; (2) contact the Registrar and schedule a re-write date, and (3) re-write the exam no later than 10 days after the original exam date (exceptions may be made on the basis of medical recommendations). The responsibility for these steps lies entirely with the student and must, under normal circumstances, be completed within 10 calendar days for the original exam date.

Dead Date Policy: According to the Tyndale Academic policy, no papers may be submitted later than the last day of exam week. Any requests for extensions beyond this time must be made directly to the Registrar. The professor will accept no materials after this date. All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the course.

Remember: it is generally more advantageous to submit an acceptable paper on time, than a better paper one week late.

Attendance

Attendance at class is of vital importance for this course. In accordance with Tyndale Seminary policy, missing more than two classes without reasonable cause such as illness (a medical attestation is required), crisis, severe illness or death in the family, etc., may result in a receiving an F for the course. If a discussion group session is missed without excuse, the student will receive a zero for the session.

General Guidelines

Students should consult the current *Academic Calendar* for academic policies on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System. The Academic Calendar is posted at www.tyndale.ca/registrar/calendar.

IV. COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Jan 11

Introductory Hermeneutical Matters

Reading Genesis as an Ancient Israelite Text
Dimensions *within* Genesis
Questions from *outside* Genesis

Methodological approaches to Genesis and their significance
Spiritual Dynamics and studying Genesis

Literary Introduction

Composition and Literary History
 Structure, Literary Genre and Composition
 Current Methodological Approaches
 Theological Focus

Week 2: Jan 18

The Primeval History: Genesis 1:1-11:26

- **Creation, General**
 - The Structure of Genesis 1:1-2:25
 - Non-Biblical Creation Accounts
 - Mesopotamia
 - Canaan
 - Egypt
- **Creation, Part One 1:1-2:4**
 - Basic Structure
 - Gen 1:1-3 Interpretive Issues
 - Key Theological Themes

Week 3: Jan 25

Creation--Part Two 2:4-3:24

Section 1. 2:4-25

- Eden Alone
- Man Alone
- Male and Female

Discussion Groups- Session 1

Week 4: Feb 1

Creation—Part Two, Section Two 3:1-24

- Temptation and Failure
- Disruption and Expulsion
- Theological Implications

Week 5: Feb 8

The Early Development of Sin and Redemption 4:1-11:26 (Part One)

- Cain and Abel 4:1-16
- Lamech and the line of Cain 4:1-24
- Adam and his line 4:25-5:23
- The Flood: cause, extent, theological implications Chs. 6-8

Discussion Groups—Session 2

Week 6: Feb 15

The Early Development of Sin and Redemption 4:1-11:26 (Part Two)

- The new beginning and covenant 9:1-19
- Noah and his line 9:20-10:32
- Babel 11:1-9
- The Genealogy of Shem 1:10-26

The History of the Founding Families of Israel (Genesis 11:27-50:26)

Abraham and Isaac 11:27-25:18

- Call and Promise 12:1-3

Week 7: Feb 22

- Threats to the Promise 12:4-15:1
- The Promise Confirmed 15:1-21
- Sarah and Hagar 16:1-16

Discussion Groups—Session 3

Week 8: Feb 29

- The Covenant 17:1-27
- Sodom and Gomorrah 18-19
- Abraham and Abimelech 20:1-18
- Ishmael and Isaac 20-21
- The Sacrifice of Isaac 22:1-19
- Descendants of Nahor, Sarah's Death and Burial 22:20-23:20
-

Week 9: Mar 7

- The Marriage of Isaac 24
- Transmission of Promise, Death of Abraham 25:1-18
- Isaac
- Birth of Jacob and Esau 25:19-34
- Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-35
- The Theft of the Blessing 27:1-45
- Wives of Jacob and Esau 27:46-28:9

MARCH 14: READING WEEK. NO CLASS.

Week 10: Mar 21

Jacob 28:10-36:43

- Two Theological Keys
- Birth and Early Days in Canaan 27:1-28:20

Discussion Groups—Session 4

-

Week 11: Mar 28

- Flight and Sojourn at Haran 29:1-30:43
- Return to Canaan 31:1-35:8
- The Transmission of the Promise 35:9-13

Discussion Groups-Session 5

Week 12: April 4

Joseph 37:1-50:26

- Questions of Theme, Form and Theology
- Descent into Egypt 37
- Interlude: Judah & Tamar 38
- Humiliation and Exaltation 39
- Reconciliation and Hope 42-50

Week 13: April 11

- Israelite Migration 47
- Jacob's Blessing 48-49
- Jacob's Burial 50:1-14
- Reconciliation 50:15-21
- Joseph's Death 50:22-26

Discussion Groups ¹

During the course, there will be five in-class discussion times of approximately thirty (30) minutes each. These discussions have five purposes:

- to challenge students to develop their critical, thinking skills.
- to enable students to improve their skills in developing and expressing theological arguments in a group context.
- to empower students to foster ability in leading fellow students in discussion.
- to have students take responsibility for their fellow students' education by mutually supporting one another.
- to encourage students to listen respectfully to views not their own.

In the first or second class, students will be divided into groups of five. Each student will choose a date when she or he will be responsible for leading the discussion.

Responsibilities of the student as leader. During the course, each student will lead the group discussion. The group leader has two responsibilities:

- 1 During the group discussion, the leader's responsibility is to guide the discussion and keep it on track. *The group leader should not prepare a mini-lecture.* For the discussion, the leader may choose to use some of the teacher's questions (see below) and/or develop her/his own.
- 2 After the discussion, the leader will assign a participation grade for each member of the group and submit the grade to my Research Assistant within 48 hours after the end of the class (grade from zero to five, with five being highest). Base the grade on the following criteria:
 - If the student's comments during the discussion reflected an informed reading of assigned material, allocate a higher grade. If a student clearly has not read the assigned reading assign a grade no higher than 2.75. If a student has only marginally read the assigned readings assign a grade no higher than 3.25.
 - If the student has contributed their fair share (not too much, not too little), allocate a higher grade.
 - Consider a grade of 4.5 if the individual has excelled with respect to the above two criteria. Grades higher when 4.5 should only be given rarely, where a student has excelled in a remarkable way.

¹ I am grateful to my friend and colleague Dr. Ken Fox of the Canadian Theological Seminary, Calgary, for much of the text of this section, and the conceptual use of discussion groups in this way.

- Consider giving a grade of 3.5-4.25 if the individual has contributed very capably with respect to the above two criteria.
- If the student has dominated discussion in inappropriate ways, reduce their grade.
- If the student has not contributed or contributed only minimally, reduce their grade.
- If a student has contributed but their contributions were not informed by a careful reading of the material, reduce their grade.
- Has the discussion led to a better understanding of the textbook and to a critical interaction with it? If not, reduce the grade.
- The average grade should be between 3.25-4.25. If the student's contribution is less than adequate, give a grade of 3.0 or below.
- All grades are confidential
- Leaders may give fraction grades: e.g., 2.7.

Responsibilities of the student as group participant. Students should come to each class having read the assigned materials and discussion questions (below) carefully. In addition, students should come with their own questions and comments based on the readings.