



IONA SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY

Old Testament
Criticism, Sources, Historical
and Cultural Background

Juniors
September 12, 2020
The Rev. Dr. Michael Floyd

STUDY GUIDE

The aim of this study guide is to pinpoint the specific information that needs to be learned from the reading assignments in the textbooks and Bible. In addition to the reading assignments and this study guide, you will receive a one-page “Biblical History Time Line” handout. Please familiarize yourself with it. We will refer to the information in it throughout the course.

Reading Assignments

Richard Nelson, *The Old Testament (TOT)*, 3-32

New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB) xxii (abbreviations used in notes and annotations), plus the articles entitled “Textual Criticism” and “Translation of the Bible into English” (page numbers may vary depending on the edition of NOAB)

Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash (WM)*, Introduction (pp. 1-11) and Appendix B (pp. 281-292)

You may also want to get started on your long assignment for the next class, which will cover the entire Pentateuch, by reading Genesis.

Study Questions

The answers to the following questions will be found—as indicated—in the assigned readings from the Bible itself, the basic textbook, Richard Nelson’s *The Old Testament (TOT)* plus page numbers, the supplemental material in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB)* plus page numbers, and Gafney’s *Womanist Midrash (WM)* plus page numbers)

1) What does *Tanak* mean? Summarize the main ways in which the Tanak (“Hebrew Bible”), the Protestant Old Testament, and the Catholic Old Testament differ from one another (TOT 4-13).

2) In what language(s) were the Old Testament documents originally written? What versions in other languages are also historically important and typically consulted in producing an English translation? (NOAB “Textual Criticism,” page numbers may vary)

3) How would you interpret the following abbreviations or symbols when you find them in NRSV footnotes or in commentaries, etc.? (NOAB xxii)

LXX	Syr
MT	Tg
Gk	Vg
QMs(s)	

Know both the language in which each of these textual witnesses is written and also the name by which each version is commonly known.

4) What are some of the main translations into contemporary English, and how are they commonly abbreviated? (NOAB, "Translation of the Bible into English," page numbers may vary)

5) What are some of the translation problems posed by the different ways in which Hebrew and English deal with gender? (WM, 284-292)

6) Describe the geographical and cultural area commonly known as the *Fertile Crescent*. Where in relation to it is Canaan ("the Promised Land")? (TOT 17-19) Be able to locate the following:

Mesopotamia
Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
Mediterranean Sea
Syria-Palestine/Canaan
Jordan River
Dead Sea
Nile River
Egypt

7) Describe and be able to locate the five main geographical zones of Palestine running north-south: a) the coastal plain, b) the lowland or Shephelah, c) the central highlands, d) the Jordan valley, and e) the elevated plateau or Golan (TOT 19-21).

8) What are the meanings of BC/AD and BCE/CE? (TOT 4)

9) Relate Nelson's brief sketch of Israel's pre-exilic history (TOT 26-28) with the data on the "Biblical History Time Line" handout. Look over the post-exilic section of the time line too, to get a rough impression of it prior to class.

10) In light of Nelson's description of pre-exilic Israelite religion (TOT 28-32), in what sense (if any) can it be said to be monotheistic?

Biblical History Time Line

Turning Point: Occupation of Canaan

National Period – 13th-6th century BCE

ca. 13th century BCE — Israel forms a tribal league

the age of the Judges

ca. 10th century BCE — from tribal league to monarchical state

ca. 1020-1000 - Saul

ca. 1000-960 - David

ca. 960-930 - Solomon

ca. 925 BCE — division of united monarchy into two kingdoms: Judah and Israel

722 BCE — fall of Israel (northern kingdom) to Assyria

587 BCE — fall of Judah (southern kingdom) to Babylonia

Turning Point: Babylonian Exile

Second Temple Period – 6th century BCE-1st/2nd century CE

538 BCE — Cyrus of Persia decrees the restoration of Yehud as an imperial province and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple as the capital

332 BCE — Alexander the Great conquers Palestine

301-198 BCE - Ptolemaic (Egyptian Hellenistic) rule

198-167 BCE - Seleucid (Syrian Hellenistic) rule

167 BCE — Maccabean revolt

143-63 BCE – Judea independent under Hasmonean rule (“the Maccabees”)

63 BCE — the Romans take control of Judea

37-4 BCE – Herod the Great

4 BCE-6 CE – Herod’s son Archelaus

6 CE-41 CE – Roman procurators (26-36 CE – Pontius Pilate)

Movement launched by Jesus of Nazareth

41-44 CE – Agrippa I (last Herodian to rule Judea)

44-66 CE – Roman procurators

Mission of Saul of Tarsus (Paul)

66-70 CE — First Jewish revolt

70 CE — fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple

132-135 CE — Second Jewish revolt

dissolution of Judea (renamed “Palestine”)

Turning Point: Roman Defeat of Jewish Resistance

Period of Rabbinic Jewish and Christian Orthodoxy – 2nd century CE on