



September Study Guide

Subject: Old Testament, Criticism, Sources, Historical and Cultural Background

Instructor: The Rev. Dr. Michael Floyd

Class: Juniors

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) – Please note that there are different editions in use, which means that page numbers may be slightly different. In giving assignments from NOAB the title of the article will be given along with page numbers. If the page numbers in your edition don’t match the article cited, look for the title of that article in the table of contents to find out the page numbers for your edition.

“Textual Criticism,” pp. 2192-2197 in the 4th ed.

“Translation of the Bible into English,” pp. 2197-2201 in the 4th ed.

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; see note above), 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,” 2192-2197).

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

MT	Syr
Gk	Tg
QMs(s)	Vg

Also the symbol LXX, see TOT pp. 9-10

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," 2197-2201)

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