

Vanguard University
School for Professional Studies
Degree Program

**“THEOLOGICAL THEMES OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT”
MILD #461**

Student Guide

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is comprised of a study of selected, major themes in the writings of the Old Testament.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. The student will have a basic knowledge of the major theological themes of the Old Testament, their development from the sources within the Bible, and their relevance for faith and ministry.
2. The student will be able to use the resources of the Old Testament for spiritual formation and to inform their own spirituality.
3. The student will have a basic knowledge of the flow of history in the Old Testament and be able to place the books of the Old Testament within that history.
4. The student will observe the development of a theme of Old Testament Theology as it is taken up in the New Testament.
5. The student will have an introductory knowledge of the history of the major theories and methods of Old Testament theology.

TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Dyrness, William. Themes in Old Testament Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977.

Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982.

STUDENT EVALUATION

Competencies for this course come from the following sources:

1. Evidence of the student's understanding of reading assignments as indicated by written assignments and class participation. These assignments are to be handed in each week, written in proper form, citing sources as appropriate. (30% of grade)
2. Reflection and Observation papers. (25% of grade)
3. A final paper of 8-10 pages in length in which the student will write an introductory theology of one of the following themes: Creation, Creation Care, The Image of God, The Nature of the Human Person, Sabbath, The Nature of Sin, Suffering, Worship, Redemption, Covenant. The paper will be solidly rooted in an exegetical exploration, using critical commentaries, of the foundational texts of scripture and will make use of at least three theologies of the Old Testament. It will include proper formatting and citation of sources. (35% of grade)
4. Attendance and participation. (10% of grade)

STUDENT EVALUATION

| Percentages | Points | Grade | Significance | GPA |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|------------|
| 93-100% | 930-1000 | A | Exceptional | 4.00 |
| 90-92.9% | 900-929 | A- | | 3.67 |
| 87-89.9% | 870-899 | B+ | | 3.33 |
| 83-86.9% | 830-869 | B | Above Average | 3.00 |
| 80-82.9% | 800-829 | B- | | 2.67 |
| 77-79.9% | 770-799 | C+ | | 2.33 |
| 73-76.9% | 730-769 | C | Average | 2.00 |
| 70-72.9% | 700-729 | C- | | 1.67 |
| 67-69.9% | 670-699 | D+ | | 1.33 |
| 63-66.9% | 630-669 | D | Below Average | 1.00 |
| 60-62.9% | 600-629 | D- | | 0.67 |
| 00-59.9% | 000-599 | F | Failure | 0.00 |

OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

The argument has been made by Brevard Childs that Old Testament Theology is a Christian discipline, not simply because the text is referred to by Christians as the 'Old' Testament, but also because Christianity in origin and self understanding is deeply rooted in the scriptures which constitute the Old Testament. Even a casual reading of the New Testament reveals a certain assumed familiarity, not only with the text, but also the substance, of the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament is all but meaningless without an adequate background in the Old.

For the disciple of Jesus, the matter is even more plainly stated. That Jesus was deeply familiar with the Old Testament is readily demonstrated by the number of times He quoted it directly or alluded to it. If He exhibited such familiarity should we, who follow Him, do other?

Christians find their spiritual roots in the Old Testament. They find an informing understanding of the character and nature of God and his dealings with humankind. They find development of the root causes of the alienation from God that eventuated in the Cross. They find developed understanding of what it means to be God's people, how to relate in a just manner to others in and outside the community of faith, and how social life is informed by deep spiritual realities. And they find basic instruction by example and form in how to pray.

All of this does not, however, become immediately apparent upon reading in the Old Testament. Some work has to be done between text and life. That work is what Biblical theology is about - taking the fruit of exegesis and attempting to understand and order it. This course assumes, notwithstanding the debates of the last quarter century, that it is possible to speak of a 'Biblical' Theology, part of which is an Old Testament Theology. There is much that could be developed along these lines, therefore themes have been selected, any one of which would bear significant further study, as a way of introducing the concepts and methods of Old Testament Theology. Some attempt has also been made, although not properly the domain of Old Testament Theology, to trace a couple of key concepts having their root in the Old, and their fruit in the New, Testament.

The goal of this course, then, is to increase awareness and, with it, appreciation of the rich theological resource that is the Old Testament. This will be attempted through readings in the text of scripture, spiritual formations sourced in the scripture, and discussions and in-class assignments informed by readings and assignments done in preparation for class. Obviously, pre-reading the assigned passages and readings is essential for adequate participation in the class sessions. Class activities will include guided spiritual formation, theme lectures, presentations by class members of the results of reading and reflection, discovery exercises and small group activities.

Bill Dogterom
Vanguard University

STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK ONE

1. Read the Introductory Essay in the Student Guide.
2. Read Dyrness, Introduction.
3. Review Fee and Stuart, Chapters 1 & 2.
4. Review the concepts covered in the "Research Methods for the Study and Preaching of the Scriptures" course.

WEEK TWO

1. Read Dyrness, Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Chapter 1 - please answer **one** of the following:

- A. In 2-3 sentences, explain what Dyrness means by the following statement: “. . . the revelation of (God’s) person and character precedes and explains the revelation of his purposes.”
- B. According to Dyrness, what is the purpose of God’s revelation of Himself?
- C. In 2-3 sentences, explain the implications of the following statement: “Knowledge in the OT is always personal and intimate, it leads to relationship as well as to objective understanding.”

Chapter 2 - please answer **one** of the following:

- D. In 1-2 sentences each, describe the four “media” of revelation Dyrness discusses.
- E. In 3-5 sentences, describe one of the aspects of the character of God discussed by Dyrness.

Chapter 3 - please answer **one** of the following:

- F. In a 3-5 sentences, discuss the implications of Dyrness’ definition of “myth” as it relates to the creation narratives of Genesis.
- G. Describe and define the three levels of God’s care that Dyrness discusses.

3. Read Psalm 19 and Psalm 104.
4. Have someone read Genesis 1 and 2 out loud to you. Read Genesis 1 and 2 out loud to someone. Make note of any observations you had while listening to or reading it. Come prepared to share these observations in class.
5. Read Genesis 1 and 2. Pay careful attention to patterns and structures in the first chapter, and differences between the two chapters.. Consider why the text might have been written in such a way. Write a two-page essay, suitable to be handed in, in which you detail your considerations.

WEEK THREE

1. Read Fee and Stuart, Chapters 5 & 9.

Please answer the following in a short paragraph:

- A. Explain what narratives are not, and briefly discuss the implications for theological reflection.
- B. What is the difference between seeing the Old Testament law as God's word *for* you and seeing the Old Testament law as God's commands *to* you?

2. Read Dyrness, Chapters 4, 5, 6, & 7.

Chapter 4 - please answer **one** of the following:

- A. In 3-5 sentences, describe the relationship of human beings to the rest of creation.
- B. In 3-5 sentences, describe the relationship of human beings to other human beings.
- C. In 3-5 sentences, describe the relationship of human beings to God.

Chapter 5 - please answer **one** of the following:

- D. In 3-5 sentences, explain what Dyrness suggests is made explicit by God's restriction of Adam and Eve from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
- E. In 1-2 sentences each, describe the three word groups that are concerned with sin.
- F. In 3-5 sentences, discuss what Dyrness means when he refers to the theological character of sin.

Chapter 6 - please answer **one** of the following:

- G. In a short paragraph of 5 – 8 sentences discuss what is a suzerainty treaty, what are its elements, and why it is significant in the study of the concept of covenant.
- H. In a short paragraph of 5 – 8 sentences discuss the theological implications of the idea of covenant.

Chapter 7 - please answer **one** of the following:

- I. In 2-3 sentences, define *torah* as informed by its root.
- J. In 2-3 sentences, discuss the relation of covenant to community.

3. Read Genesis 3-5. Be prepared to discuss in class.

4. Read Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5. Come prepared to discuss your observations in class. Write a 2-3 page essay outlining the context of each chapter, describing the structure you observe, and discussing the differences between, and the developments within, each of the two lists of commandments.

5. Read Psalm 8.

WEEK FOUR

1. Read Fee and Stuart, Chapters 10 & 11.

Please answer the following in a short paragraph:

- A. When considering the function of prophecy, what must be emphasized?
- B. Why is it important to recognize that the Psalms are literature – essentially, poems?

2. Read Dyrness, Chapters 8, 9 & 10.

Chapter 8 - please answer **one** of the following:

- A. In 2-3 sentences, explain what Dyrness means by the term “cult”.
- B. What are the two benefits Dyrness discusses of our ability to “make concrete objects and actions symbolic of our values.”
- C. In 2-3 sentences, what does Dyrness suggest are the core ideas in the system of sacrifice implemented in Israel?

Chapter 9 - please answer the following:

- D. Dyrness describes piety as the “response of the heart to God’s self-revelation.” What are the communal elements and individual expressions of piety listed in this chapter?

Chapter 10 - please answer **one** of the following:

- E. In 2-3 sentences, explain what Dyrness means by the following statement: “Piety and ethics go together...”
- F. In 2-3 sentences describe how, according to Dyrness, ethical behavior arises from the fact of creation.
- G. In 2-3 sentences, identify what Dyrness considers problematic areas in discussing Israel’s ethics.

3. Read Psalms 24, 100.

4. Read the Minor Prophet you have been assigned in the previous class. Write what you consider to be the major theme or themes of the prophet and trace the foundation from which the theme develops. What, in other words, is the theological platform upon which the prophet is standing in making his pronouncements? Come prepared to discuss 'your' prophet in class.

WEEK FIVE

1. Read Fee and Stuart, Chapter 12.

Please answer the following in a short paragraph:

- A. What are some of the abuses to which wisdom writing might be subject?

2. Read Dyrness, Chapters 11, 12, 13 & 14.

Chapter 11 - please answer **one** of the following:

- A. In 3-5 sentences, explain Dyrness means when he says, "It should be clear by now that wisdom is a matter of character rather than intellect."

Chapter 12 - please answer **one** of the following:

- B. In 2-3 sentences, describe the work of the Spirit during the early period of Israel's history.
- C. In 2-3 sentences, describe the work of the Spirit during the time of the Judges and Early Monarchy.
- D. In 2-3 sentences, describe the work of the Spirit during the prophetic period of Israel's history.

Chapter 13 - please answer **one** of the following:

- E. Explain what Dyrness means when he says, "what the prophets denounced was not the institutions... but what the people had made of these things."

Chapter 14 - please answer **one** of the following:

- F. In 3-5 sentences, outline the elements Dyrness discusses as being part of the prophetic picture of the Kingdom of God.

3. Read Proverbs 1 - 4.

4. Read Psalms 1, 91, 119:105 - 112.

5. Read Job. Write a one-page response, in Job's voice, that he might give to the wisdom expressed in the readings previously requested for this week. (Proverbs and Psalms)

FINAL PROJECT

Write a paper of 8-10 pages in length in which will be an introductory theology of one of the following themes: Creation, Creation Care, The Image of God, The Nature of the Human Person, Sabbath, The Nature of Sin, Suffering, Worship, Redemption, Covenant. The paper will be solidly rooted in an exegetical exploration, using critical commentaries, of the foundational texts of scripture and will make use of at least three theologies of the Old Testament. It will include proper formatting and citation of sources. **Due the first week of the next course.**