

**INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT I: GENESIS TO KINGS**  
New Life Covenant Church, (September 14-15, 2012)  
Paul Koptak, Instructor (773)-244-6242 ([pkoptak@northpark.edu](mailto:pkoptak@northpark.edu))

This two-day mini-course will introduce the books of the Old Testament sometimes known as the Torah and Former Prophets, Genesis through 2 Kings. We will overview the **content** of these books, but we will also pay some attention to the **methods** we use to study the Bible in order to hear its message for today. We will learn how the picture pieces of the different Bible books fit together into one life-changing narrative.

If you are coming to audit the two-day intensive only, pre-course reading is:

1. **Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry Into the Old Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 2008).** You are encouraged to purchase and read the entire book, but you should read pages 1-56, accessible at Google Books <http://tinyurl.com/cmltjb4>
2. **Covenant Affirmations**  
Booklet: Read pages 7-9 on Scripture, the whole booklet if you can <http://tinyurl.com/8xhndaf>  
Video featuring Klyne Snodgrass and your instructor <http://covchurch.tv/affirmations-1/>
3. **Covenant Resource Paper: The ECC and the Bible** (starts on page 3) <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/Covenant-Resource-Paper.pdf>

**Those who wish to take the class for credit will apply for admission and register for the regional hybrid course that runs throughout the fall semester (Aug 27 to Dec 14; syllabus on the following pages).**

**Paul Koptak** is the Paul and Bernice Brandel Professor of Communication and Biblical Interpretation at North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, and an ordained minister of the Evangelical Covenant Church. He is author of *Proverbs*, (New International Version Application Commentary), editor of *The Covenant Quarterly*, and a member of North Park's gospel bluegrass band, The Lonesome Theologians.



**INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT I: GENESIS TO KINGS**  
**BIBL 6121 Fall Semester (August 17-December 14, 2012) Three Credits**  
**Intensive Portion: New Life Covenant Church, (September 14-15, 2012)**  
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**LEARNING GOALS**

Students in the class will work to:

1. Appreciate the literary unity of the Old Testament as a witness to God's work in the world.
2. Understand how critical study of the Bible can be used effectively in preaching and teaching.
3. Use the historical and cultural context of the Old Testament figures and writers in discerning the biblical message for today.
4. Know how to identify and analyze the various literary genres of the Old Testament.
5. Be able to trace the main theological themes of God's relationship with humanity in the extended narrative of Genesis to 2 Kings.

**TEXTS**

Required:

Frank Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997), OR, if you've read Thomas, Ellen F. Davis, *Wondrous Depth: Preaching the Old Testament*, (Louisville: WJKP, 2005).

W. S. LaSor, et al., *Old Testament Survey* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

Iain Provan, Tremper Longman III, and V. Philips Long, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster, 2003).

Additional required readings will be provided on-line.

Recommended:

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, revised ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 2004).

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

**Completion of all assigned reading, including the biblical texts.** Grades will be based on a written report of pages read. (5%)

**Five papers.** Over the course of the term, the papers will provide opportunity to respond to readings, practice biblical interpretation, and make application to Christian life and ministry. Students will read and respond to classmates' papers (15% each)

**Final exegetical project.** In our class meeting we will go over an exegetical procedure you will use to prepare a sermon or teaching session. (20%)

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

North Park Theological Seminary provides services for students with documented disabilities to ensure equal access to programs, services, facilities, and activities. Students with a disability who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Seminary Academic Services as soon as possible. If desired or necessary, discussion pertaining to documentation and accommodation can take place at another suitable location or by telephone. Further information about the American Disabilities Act Services is found in the Student Academic Handbook.

## **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Students are reminded of the regulations concerning Plagiarism and Cheating, which can be found in the Student Academic Handbook. Do not be tempted to plagiarize as a way out of difficulties in completing your assignments. If you are having difficulty, contact the instructor.

## **TECHNICAL ABILITIES**

In order to complete this class, students need to have basic computer skills. Proficiency is required in word processing and in the use of the internet and e-mail. We will be using e-mail and the Google Docs platform this term. If you are new to using Google Docs, please let the instructor know.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS COURSE**

Students who take on-line classes often find it helpful to schedule weekly times for study and writing; a good rule of thumb is to set aside 10-15 hours per week. Read the whole syllabus through, noting assignment due dates. Take notes as you read (rather than marking with a highlighter), including questions you might want to ask (some of the best learning happens that way, and I'm glad to make time for them). Write a first draft of your papers a few days before the due date whenever possible; then do a final revision, checking spelling and grammar. When you write responses to your classmates' papers, point out what was done well and helped you, but also critique and raise questions.

## **PART ONE: ENRICHING OUR WAY OF READING**

Biblical Interpretation and the Role of the Interpreter: History, Hermeneutics, Theology

### **Week 1: August 27-31**

Covenant Resource Paper: The ECC and the Bible

<http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/Covenant-Resource-Paper.pdf>

Covenant Affirmations

Booklet: Read pages 7-9 on Scripture, the whole booklet if you can

<http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/04/CovenantAffirmationsBooklet.pdf>

Video featuring Klyne Snodgrass and your instructor

<http://covchurch.tv/affirmations-1/>

Living Faith Chapter: "The Centrality of the Word of God" (Available from Instructor)  
Old Testament Survey (OTS), chapters 44 through 48

### **Week 2: September 3-7**

Biblical History of Israel (BHI), chapters 1 through 5

Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (IBI), chapters 1, 2, 3, 5

### **1100-1200 word paper due Friday September 7, 5 pm Eastern Time**

Our reading of the Bible is enriched as we learn about its history of its development and the ways that others in the past and present have interpreted what it says. Suppose a member of your congregation asks: "Why do you need a course in studying the Old Testament?" Develop an answer that explains the role of 1) historical study, 2) hermeneutics, and 3) theological interpretation in discovering Scripture's message for today. Be sure to give a definition for each term before you explain how any Christian can make use of these practices- even if they don't read Hebrew or Greek!

In your answer (and in future response papers), you should make reference to your course reading. You can insert an abbreviated title and page number in the paper-- for example (OTS, 23). However, **you are not to quote from any of the sources**, but rather restate what they say in your own words.

**E-mail and post your own paper and then write a response of one or two paragraphs to two other papers. A maximum 2 responses per paper will make sure everyone gets the same number. Responses will be due by Wednesday, September 12, 5pm Eastern Time.**

### **Week 3: September 10-15**

**INTENSIVE CLASS SESSIONS AT NEW LIFE COVENANT, ATLANTA**

**SEPTEMBER 14-15** Send on questions, topics, or concerns you would like me to address during this week before our class meetings.

**Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry Into the Old Testament***

**(InterVarsity Press, 2008).** You are encouraged to purchase and read the entire book, but you should read pages 1-56, accessible at Google Books <http://tinyurl.com/cmltjb4>

## **PART TWO: THE TORAH OR PENTATEUCH**

**Study Tip: Read the paper assignment questions to help focus your study before you begin your study. Then read or survey the biblical book (primary source) before reading the textbooks (secondary sources) each week. See the instructions at the end of the syllabus for taking an overview survey of a biblical book. Many students find they understand and retain more by doing a survey than simply reading through. You will turn in a copy of your survey of Genesis with the next assignment.**

### **Week 4: September 17-21**

Reading Biblical Narrative; The Book of Genesis  
BHI Chapter 6, pp. 107-125; OTS chapters 1 through 3

### **Week 5: September 25-28**

IBI chapters 6, 7, and part of 9, pp. 323-337

### **1100-1200 word paper (plus the Genesis overview survey) due Friday September 28, 5pm Eastern Time**

Assignment: Submit your overview study of Genesis. Discuss the contemporary significance of the founders of the faith (patriarchs and matriarchs). How do the narratives unfold along the lines of the promise of offspring, land, and blessing in Genesis 12:1-3? What connection do these stories have with the narratives of creation, flood, and covenant in Genesis chapters 1-11? Finally, use the interpretative framework of history (including archaeology), hermeneutics (moving from ancient text to contemporary context), and theology (God's work in the world then and now), to explain how the stories of the founders offer hope and guidance for Christian living today. You may wish to focus your answer to the last question on one generation (you could choose Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel, or Joseph and his brothers).

**E-mail and post your own paper, then write, send, and post a response of one or two paragraphs to two other papers. A maximum two responses per paper will make sure everyone gets the same number. Responses will be due one week later, Oct 5.**

### **Week 6: October 1-5**

Understanding Deliverance and Covenant: Exodus  
BHI Chapter 6, pp. 125-137  
OTS Chapters 4 and 5

### **Week 7: October 8-12**

Significance of the Land and the Law: Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy  
OTS Chapters 6, 7, 8

### **1100-1200 word paper due Friday October 12, 5 pm Eastern Time**

Assignment: Using examples from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, explain how the themes of deliverance, covenant, and holiness contribute to a theology of the chosen people of God. Then show how these teachings form the basis for the New Testament theology of the church (*ekklesia* in Greek; make reference to at

least two NT texts). What challenges and encouragements to the church are presented?

**Write, send and post your own paper, then write a response of one or two paragraphs to two other papers. A maximum two responses per paper will make sure everyone gets the same number. Responses will be due one week later, Oct 19.**

**Week 8: October 15-19 READING WEEK No reading or written assignment. Take the time to look back at what you've learned and look ahead at the work to come. Now is a good time to pick the text for your exegetical assignment and start working through the steps of the exegetical guide (it is at the end of the syllabus).**

### **PART THREE: ISRAEL, A PEOPLE AND A LAND**

#### **Week 9: October 22-26**

Entry into the Land: Joshua

BHI Chapter 7

OTS Chapters 9 and 10

#### **Week 10: October 29- November 2**

Life in the Land: Judges and Ruth

OTS 11 and 38

#### **1100-1200 word paper due Friday November 2, 5 pm Eastern Time**

Assignment: How does written and material archaeological evidence compare with the biblical account of the conquest of Israel? What other models of entry have been proposed? How does the literary structure of the books of Joshua and Judges help resolve the question? How does that literary structure also communicate the theological message? Finally, how would our understanding of the time before a king be poorer if we did not have the Book of Ruth? What would be lost if Ruth weren't in our Bible?

**Write, send, and post your own paper, then write a response of one or two paragraphs to two other papers. A maximum two responses per paper will make sure everyone gets the same number. Responses will be due one week later, Nov 9.**

### **PART FOUR: MONARCHY, EXILE, AND RETURN**

#### **Week 11: November 5-9**

The Call for a King: 1 and 2 Samuel

OTS 12 and 13

BHI Chapter 8 and 9

#### **Week 12: November 12-16**

The Divided Monarchy: 1 and 2 Kings

OTS Chapters 14 and 15

BHI Chapter 10

**1100-1200 word paper due Friday November 16, 5 pm Eastern Time**

Assignment: Outline in brief the roles played by Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon in establishing a monarchy in Israel. Then explain how the narrative historian (also called *the deuteronomistic historian*) uses their stories to assess the character and accomplishments of the kings of Israel and Judah that follow. Finally, how do the narratives about the prophets Elijah and Elisha communicate the theological meaning of these events, and how can that theology be presented today? As you answer, note how you are drawing from the disciplines of history, hermeneutics, and theology.

**Write, send, and post your own paper, then write a response of one or two paragraphs to two other papers. A maximum two responses per paper will make sure everyone gets the same number. Responses will be due one week later, Nov 23.**

**Week 13: Nov 19-23**

Exile and Return: 1 and 2 Chronicles; Ezra and Nehemiah

OTS 41, 42

BHI Chapter 11

**Week 14: November 26-30**

Finding the Message for Today: Preparing to Preach and Teach

Read all of Thomas, They Like to Never Quit Praising God

**1100-1200 word paper due Friday November 30, 5pm Pacific Time**

Assignment: Response to Thomas, They Like Never to Quit Praising God. Present a summary and critique. Include your answer to the question, what in Thomas's approach offers a challenge or help for improvement with your next sermon? Then make it personal: how has Thomas spoken to you? What challenges and responsibilities does he place on you as a biblical interpreter? In conclusion, say a word about who you are becoming as an interpreter and communicator of God's word.

**Write, send, and post your own paper, then write a response of one or two paragraphs to two other papers. A maximum two responses per paper will make sure everyone gets the same number. Responses will be due one week later, Dec 7.**

**Week 15: December 3-7      Work on Exegetical Paper and Teaching/Sermon**

**Week 16: December 10-14    Exegetical Paper and Teaching/Sermon due Friday  
November 14, 5 pm Eastern time**

## TAKING AN OVERVIEW OF A BIBLICAL BOOK

We will cover a large portion of the Bible this term, so reading through the entire books may be daunting and even counter-productive if you get bogged down. As a student and campus staff member with Inter-Varsity, I learned this approach that helps readers see the way a Bible book works by looking at the book as a unit. You may have used something similar in inductive studies you have done. So, to encounter the life-giving word first-hand before we begin to look at what others have said about it, give this approach a try. Of course, you can read the Bible texts through if you like also!

As we will stress again and again this term, the great principle in Bible study is to read texts in context, to survey the whole before analyzing the parts. These questions will help you survey a biblical book before you read the assignments from the textbooks. A study like this can take a whole day once you get into it, so plan on giving it about an hour total. You can run through the questions either all at once or at different study times.

1. Read the first and last chapters, then page through the rest of the book, looking at beginnings of chapters and the first sentences of paragraphs. Do stop and read those portions that catch your interest, but don't linger too long! When you have finished, write down three or four major impressions of the book. What stood out to you, and what questions did were raised by this rapid read-through?

2. A narrative is usually organized around the main characters, main events, or by geography. Look through the book again to get an idea of its organization. In other words, ask, which chapters can be naturally grouped together? Where are the turning points? What organization scheme is used: people, places, events?

3. Make an outline or chart of the book that shows the divisions and gives each a title. Try to have only two to four main groups of chapters and then give a three to four word title to each group. For example, my way of doing Genesis would be:

- I. God Creates and Re-creates the World (Genesis 1-11)*
- II. God Chooses and Protects a Family (Genesis 12-50)*

4. Now write a theme sentence. To arrive at this statement of the book's main message, ask: What does the title of the book tell you about its contents? (A Bible dictionary, handbook or commentary will be helpful here.) How could you summarize the contents in a sentence with God as the grammatical subject? For example, a theme sentence for Genesis could be: "*God calls his wandering children to a loving and trusting relationship.*"

5. Finally, it is good to ask some questions to engage the content personally: What did you learn about God in the book (What is God like? What does God value and want? What does God do? What is God's role as the "hero" of the story?) What difference can this make in your life? In our world? Are there any characters in the book whose example you would like to follow (or maybe avoid?) What character qualities do you see in their lives that you would like to be found in your own?

## **BIBL-6120: INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT I**

### **Exegetical Guide for Sermon Preparation**

The steps outlined here should help you discover the message and purpose of a text in preparation for preaching or teaching. You can write up your findings as directed by the underlined sentences. Be sure to number your steps and edit your papers carefully. If you write one-half to three-quarters of a page for each step, your paper should be eight to ten pages in length.

The bibliography and citation of sources should follow the guidelines set out in Turabian's manual (<http://www.libs.uga.edu/ref/turabian2009.pdf>). Consult at least six sources such as commentaries, Bible and theological dictionaries, histories, atlases, and journals.

To be included in those six sources: Use at least two commentaries that are recent (written in the last 25 years) dedicated (not a one-volume commentary) and critical (includes discussion of original setting and language). Include at least one article from one of the biblical journals such as the *Journal of Biblical Literature* or *Interpretation*. To widen the range of perspectives, make sure that at least one source is written by a person of color and one by a woman. Textbooks and Bible translations should be consulted, but they are not listed in the bibliography. No internet-only sources are allowed--if it hasn't been published previously in a journal or as a book, don't use it.

1. Choose a text that is a recognizable unit, typically with a clear beginning and end. Read the passage ***aloud*** several times using at least two different translations (state which), making notes on your observations and questions. (You may also wish to read and discuss your text with a group of persons who will hear your sermon or teaching.) List your observations and questions, then summarize the passage in one or two sentences.
  
2. Note the literary contexts of the passage. What comes before and after? Does your passage belong to any larger units? For example, Exodus 22 belongs to the larger "Book of the Covenant" of chapters 20-23, and Exodus is the second book of the Torah/Pentateuch. What place does this text hold in the book and in the Bible? What would be lost if it were not there? Summarize the relation of your passage to its contexts in a paragraph.
  
3. If you read Hebrew or Greek, translate at least ten verses of the passage. Print out a version of the text in the original language and make a provisional interlinear translation. Then write out your final translation in colometric lines that indicate where breaths and pauses are placed (You can use this manuscript when you read your text before your sermon or teaching.). Discuss any significant manuscript problems or grammatical issues that bear upon the meaning of the text. Do any key/theme words stand out? Attach your translation and summarize your findings in a paragraph.  

*If you do not read Hebrew or Greek, you can still use a commentary to identify any text or translation issues and summarize them here. If you do not translate, say so and add two extra sources (commentaries, articles or sermons) to your bibliography.*
  
4. As best you can, create an outline of the passage that highlights the two or three major units of thought. Do you observe any structural patterns such as chiasmus or parallel sequence? What new insights emerge after examining the structure of the text? Write out your outline in complete sentences so another reader can understand it. Then give the text a title that sums up its message. Finally, add your observations or insights.

5. Do a literary-rhetorical analysis. What do you learn by looking at word-play and imagery? Plot, character, and point of view? What repetitions, contrasts, progressions or transformations do you see (use Burke's four questions)? Summarize in one or two paragraphs how the literary and rhetorical strategies help you understand the text's message and purpose.

6. Study the historical and geographical setting of the passage. What was going on in the world during the time depicted in the text? Where would you locate the action of this passage on a map? Do archaeological discoveries shed any light? In a paragraph or two, summarize the results and explain how it informs your interpretation.

7. Address some sociological questions: What customs or practices might need explanation? Are there any dimensions of social status and/or power that are important? Is there a position or structure of power that is being challenged? If so, how? What is the social location of any characters or figures (major or minor)? Seek to identify who is at center and who is at the margin. Is there anyone who does not speak? What is his or her role? In a paragraph or two, summarize the results and explain how it informs your interpretation.

8. Bring your passage into conversation with the canon; ask how the passage relates to other texts in the Bible. Do any Old or New Testament texts quote or allude to your passage? Are the themes of your passage treated anywhere else? If you are using the lectionary for a sermon, show how this passage relates to the other texts of the day. In a paragraph or two, show how the teaching of your passage links up with other texts of Scripture.

9. Trace the movement from trouble to grace in the text by naming the concerns: (t) for trouble, (g) for grace, and (n) for neutral. Then for each concern of the text, write a corresponding concern for the sermon. Finally, choose one pair of concerns that demonstrate trouble and one pair that demonstrates grace. Consult chapters four and five of Paul Scott Wilson's *The Practice of Preaching, revised edition* (2007) for help.

10. Reflect on what your study of this passage has discovered about the person and activity of God. What new or familiar images of God present themselves in this chapter? Do they reveal anything about ethnicity, gender, identity? What do you observe about God's action? God's character? In a few sentences, identify what you hope your hearers will come to know about God after you have taught or preached.

11. What does the passage say or imply about our response (in attitude or action) to God's character and God's work in the world? How might individual believers respond? To what corporate responsibility does this text call Christian congregations? How will God empower that response? Your sermon or teaching does not have to treat both individual and corporate change, but it deserves your thought as you prepare. In a sentence or two, state what we are asked to believe, trust, or do in response to God's work in this text.

12. After reviewing your work in items 10 and 11, show how the central teaching of your text can become the basis for a lesson or sermon. You should answer two questions:

1) What is the purpose of this text? What effect(s) was it designed to accomplish with and for its hearers? 2) What will the lesson or sermon say to accomplish that purpose? In a sentence, what is the main point? Try to write the theme sentence with God as its grammatical subject.