

# OT801 Seminar in Old Testament

## Erskine Theological Seminary

Spring 2009

Required for Th.M. students majoring in Old Testament.

Elective for other Th.M. students.

DMin students may take this course as a norms elective.

Due West: Thursdays 1:00-4:00 PM

3 Credit Hours

Professor: Terry L. Eves, Ph.D.

Office: Belk 225

Telephone (Work) (864) 379-8864

Telephone (Home) (864) 379-3395

Fax (864) 379-2167

Email [eves@erskine.edu](mailto:eves@erskine.edu)

### Office Hours

**TBA.** Other times by appointment. Breakfast or lunch discussions are also encouraged. Scheduling appointments is recommended but not required. Scheduling an appointment may be advantageous for those traveling a distance.

### Course Description

#### OT801 Seminar in Old Testament

In a seminar format, students investigate and critically analyze leading methodological approaches to Old Testament studies. The presuppositions, history, and constructive use of each methodology are examined. The course involves substantial reading, research, and analysis of primary and secondary sources, as well as both oral presentations and written essays.

*Required for Th.M. students majoring in Old Testament. Elective for other Th.M. students. D.Min. students may take this course as a norms elective.*

*Offered alternate years. Three hours.*

### Course Purpose

The mission of Erskine Theological Seminary is to educate persons for service in the Christian church. The seminar this year will focus on Old Testament narrative (note, however, that the same techniques work equally well in New Testament narrative, i.e.,

the Four Gospels and Acts<sup>1</sup>☺). As part of that mission, training in the ability to read and interpret biblical narrative responsibly leads to a deeper understanding of the main genre of both Testaments. Such increased competence is a powerful resource for Gospel teaching and ministry as this is the main, but not sole, genre of Scripture. Increased commitment to the centrality of the Bible for ministry and increased competence and skill in interpreting narrative (of either Testament) will be strengthened by this course.

## Course Objectives

- To aid students in gaining an appropriate mastery of technical vocabulary, concepts, and many of the leading figures in the field of the interpretation of OT narrative.
- To introduce students to the discipline, contents, methodology of Biblical narrative interpretation, its unique dynamics and role, and to begin to think through its contributions to exegetical theology, systematic theology, practical theology and preaching. This will also involve us in better understanding how to preach the Gospel competently and faithfully from any portion of narrative Scripture.
- To introduce students to the necessity of carefully thinking through the interpretive triad of how history, theology and artistry are mutually significant and mutually affective. Due to recent scholarly discussion that the closest modern genre to biblical narrative is prose fiction we need to think through together how a more responsible understanding of biblical narrative requires dealing with how real history (including differences between ancient and modern historiographies), Ancient Near Eastern genre sensitivity, valid theological meaning, and narrative artistry are all significant and interactive in biblical narrative. We will therefore *not* be sidestepping readings and discussion of how biblical narratives relate to real history and instead simply focus on artistry and theology as is often done. ☺
- To aid students in developing *literary sensitivity*, helping them become skilled in reading the genre of narrative (story).

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<sup>1</sup> Since the methods and approaches used for OT narrative are all transferable this course is as relevant to NT students who wish to be able to better understand the major genre of the NT. Additionally, however, this course may also be of real interest as an elective to students in both Systematic Theology and Historical Theology tracks. Systematic people, not only since narrative is the predominant genre in the Bible and the ability to handle it with more depth and insight is inherently significant to any theology that wants to be exegetically based, but additionally because of the continuing discussion of narrative theology, etc., in the discipline. For those people interested in this class we could substitute Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, 1980, Yale University Press that was the book responsible for beginning the whole influential Yale School of Narrative approach, for one of the other books for Systematics people. It is also relevant to Historical Theology people, first because historically, the inability to either perceive real theological or spiritual value in many narratives or troublesome or causing outright offense over the content of many narratives, was a significant part of the rise of the allegorical method. Second, Historical Theology people could write their paper by interacting with the similarities or differences between the methods and approaches used in this course and a major historical church figure's handling of the OT narrative material.

- To emphasize that careful and faithful exegesis is the necessary basis for reliable narrative genre theological conclusions. This requires aiding students in developing the *close reading of narrative texts as active interpreters* rather than passive readers. If we want to understand a biblical story we must first take seriously the effort required to learn how biblical stories are told. The immediate goal here is that the student will demonstrate substantial mastery of these skills by detailed interpretation of a text we have not analyzed in class. The ultimate goal is the increasing ability of being able to responsibly interpret any narrative text.
- To aid students in developing *ancient literary competence*<sup>2</sup> regarding the genre of biblical narrative. In order to become genuinely competent in the Ancient Near Eastern literary conventions and techniques of biblical narrative, we need to be careful to not think too quickly that we understand the literary conventions of biblical narrative better than we do, and learn to increasingly competently work at learning to read ancient stories from a foreign culture in an informed, coherent manner.
- To aid students in developing a *poetics of biblical narrative*. Narrative is the predominate mode of expression in the OT and of well over half of the New Testament<sup>3</sup>. We will work together in learning how it tells its stories, for if we know *how* texts mean, we have a much better chance to accurately discover *what* a particular text means.
- To aid students in learning how to *carefully and faithfully move from story to theology*. In biblical narrative the story *is* the theology, and we will never understand the latter until we fully comprehend the former.
- The personal dimension. As Calvin teaches us in the beginning of his *Institutes*, true knowledge of God and true knowledge of ourselves are inseparably connected. Since this is so, coming to better understand the main genre of both Testaments also means that we will come to better understand God is as Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and one day Consummator. This then also means that we will begin to understand better who we are, who we were made to be, and what sort of things we are called to do in his world and in his Kingdom. Also, since only man and woman are made in God's image and we have our origin in God, we can only find our true destiny in God and his good will for us. Saint Augustine puts this beautifully when he writes in the Confessions "Lord, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." This means that we will frequently discuss what the ecclesial and the personal implications are of all that we are studying together. For it is only when we begin to faithfully put ourselves into the metanarrative of Scripture that we begin to understand all of reality more faithfully. This also means that a course that results in a deeper understanding of narrative as Scripture and inseparable part of the Gospel should also result in our greater love for and commitment to Father, Son and Spirit and his people, the church.

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<sup>2</sup> This term is V. Philip Long's.

<sup>3</sup> Believe it or not, if you look closely at your New Testament the Four Gospels and Acts make up the majority of the New Testament! ☺

- To engage in a more educationally co-operative style of learning in which students take responsibility for seminar presentations and more responsibility for class discussion.
- To give students the opportunity for significant input regarding questions, content and issues that they want us to think through together and sustained opportunities for discussion together.
- To aid students in continuing to develop graduate level biblical and theological analysis, research skills, rhetorical skills in leading discussions, critical thinking and evaluation, reading, writing and conversational skills.

### Required Textbooks<sup>4</sup>

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Basic Books, 1983, paperback.

Jan P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, paperback, Westminster John Knox Press, April 2000.

V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation Vol. 5, paperback, Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, paperback.

Last one to two book(s):--**TBA**.

Journal articles will frequently be distributed in class or assigned in the library as required.

### Course Methods

The purposes and objectives of this class will be achieved through lectures, class discussions, oral presentations and papers. There will be a lecture component to this class, however, this class will be taught in a graduate seminar dynamic which seeks to be genuinely collaborative in nature<sup>5</sup>. We will seek for all members of the class, professor and graduate students alike, to be actively engaged in comprehending, evaluating and mastering the materials together. One cannot master the field of biblical narrative in a single semester<sup>6</sup>, but a proper and foundation can be poured and a substantial beginning can occur, with diligence.

Each student will give a major seminar presentation and write a major research paper this semester. Every student will prepare two paper presentations. The first will be an 18

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<sup>4</sup> All textbooks may be ordered from the Erskine Theological Seminary Online Bookstore at <http://www.ecampus.com/erskine>.)

<sup>5</sup> Since this class meets once a week I will encourage each student to send the professor and all other students questions, thoughts, interpretive issues, concerns, implications, etc., that we can be thinking about in better preparing for our class discussions.

<sup>6</sup> I will repeatedly give students suggestions for future readings throughout the semester.

to 20 page research paper which will be presented and defended in a near-final condition to the class. This will include guiding the discussion that follows the paper's presentation. Copies of the paper will be submitted to the professor and each of the students no later than the class period the week before the presentation. Because these papers are the basis for the day's discussion it is essential that all work is submitted on time. The revised final draft of your paper will reflect the benefits of the class interaction. The final version of the paper will be submitted both in hard copy and electronically to the professor. Second, each student will be designated as the formal responder to another student's paper giving a 3 to 5 page written critique. This will be submitted electronically to the professor at least one day before the student's presentation and hard copies will be distributed to the professor before the formal response and to each of the students after the response on the presentation day. After the formal response each of the other students will then thoughtfully respond to the paper. Finally the professor will respond.

### **Conduct in Theological Discussions**

Erskine Seminary is committed to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and it expects its students to show respect for all who identify with that one Church. In all written work, oral presentations, and discussions both inside and outside the classroom, the Seminary expects students to conduct discussions of controversial issues in a context of respect for those with whom one disagrees. Please see the Community Life Statement in the Catalog for more information.

### **Rules of Engagement in Discussion<sup>7</sup>**

You are invited and encouraged to intellectually engage one another and your professor in this class! Thoughtful and vigorous discussion is crucial to this class. Reading biblical narrative competently involves thoughtful and disciplined inquiry about matters that are of fundamental importance to human existence. Such inquiry is best done in community, and there is no greater potential for productive interaction – interaction that is mutually beneficial and productive of real, valid, and worthwhile answers – than in a community of Christian scholarship. Recognizing that together we form a small community of truth-seekers devoted to Christ and his Kingdom, let us commit ourselves to work together in a spirit of mutual respect and love. The following guidelines are proposed as some ground rules, or “rules of engagement,” for our class discussions and interaction:

- Be humble, courteous, and respectful.
- Work hard to correctly understand the day's readings and one another.
- Try to articulate your thoughts as clearly as possible.
- Avoid personal attacks.
- Keep clearly in mind that our mutual goal is Truth, not personal gain or ego.
- Avoid monopolizing the conversation.
- Try to stay on topic.
- Welcome criticism and questions.
- Expect disagreement at times, and deal with it constructively when it arises.

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<sup>7</sup> These rules represent a slightly modified version of Dr. John Wingard's rules. I'd like to thank my generous former colleague and friend for sharing them with me.

- Be quick to apologize if you offend someone.
- Be equally quick to forgive if you are offended by someone.

## **Seminary Policies Related to Research Papers**

Inclusive Language: The Seminary encourages all students to make use of language, in reference to human beings, that is inclusive rather than needlessly exclusive. It is a mark of a good communicator to build bridges rather than barriers; therefore, such language should be used in all written work and oral presentations. The Seminary Catalog stands as an example of recommended usage.

## **Language about God and Humanity**

Although God transcends the distinction between male and female, the Bible and the Church's historic creeds and confessions use masculine language in reference to God. Thus, the Seminary encourages all students to retain this masculine usage when speaking and writing about God. Furthermore, the Seminary recognizes that all human beings, male and female, are created equally in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and believers of both sexes are fellow heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). Accordingly, whenever students are speaking and writing about males and females, they should use language that clearly includes both men and women (for example, by saying/writing "humanity" rather than "man" or "people" rather than "men").

## **Style and Bibliographical Formatting Requirements**

For the research paper, students are required to follow the form and style guidelines found in Turabian, *Manual for Writers* (7<sup>th</sup> edition). These guidelines are summarized in the Erskine Seminary document "Style and Form Standards for all Masters Level Programs," (Erskine Seminary). All papers must be typed/processed (twelve point type, double spaced, one-inch margins) and fully documented. In this course, footnotes and an appropriate bibliography are required in each paper. The paper's cover page and bibliography are not counted towards page requirements.

Additionally, the final version of the paper will be submitted with a clear, easy to read font, such as Arial, Mangal, or Palatino Linotype. Papers will be printed on white paper and stapled or put in a binder. No unstapled papers will be accepted. Students will submit one printed copy in class and email me one electronic copy of their paper the same day.

The final versions of the papers will be due on \_\_\_\_\_. In addition to handing in a printed copy please send me an electronic copy also in Microsoft Word format.

## **Official Seminary Plagiarism Policy:**

Plagiarism is the use in writing of wording or ideas produced by others without crediting the author and/or source from which the material was taken. As the following statement indicates, plagiarism is a serious offense that undermines both the witness and integrity

of the Christian community:

*Plagiarism injures the community by inhibiting the recognition and cultivation of gifts imparted by the Spirit. Clearly unattributed use of the words and/or ideas of others fails to give appreciative recognition of their gifts. But this illegitimate appropriation of the gifts of others also blocks the recognition and cultivation of the actual gifts of the person engaged in plagiarism.*

*Plagiarism creates an atmosphere of falsehood in the community's discernment and cultivation of gifts, both within the Christian community and in God's larger creation. Since freedom comes only by way of truth (Jn. 8:32), such falsehood can only result in captivity, and therefore has no place in the Christian community.*

*On this basis, the Seminary adheres to the following general requirements for the acknowledgement of sources of academic work. These requirements apply to both print and electronic media.*

*1. Quotations. Any sentence or phrase that a student uses from another source must be placed in quotation marks or, in the case of longer quotations, clearly indented beyond the regular margin. Any quotation must be accompanied (either within the text or in a note) by a precise indication of the source.*

*2. Paraphrasing. Any material that is paraphrased or summarized must also be specifically acknowledged in a note or in the text.*

*3. Ideas. Specific ideas that are borrowed should be acknowledged in a note or in the text, even if the idea has been further elaborated by the student.*

*4. Bibliography. All the sources consulted in the preparation of an essay or report should be listed in a bibliography.*

*In addition to plagiarism, the following related practices are also unacceptable compromises of the truth requisite to a free community:*

*1. Multiple submission. Failure to obtain prior written permission of the relevant instructors to submit work which has been submitted in identical or similar form in fulfillment of any other academic requirement at any institution.*

*2. False citation. The deliberate attribution to, or citation of, a source from which the material in question was not, in fact, obtained.*

*3. Submission of work done by someone else, either with or without that person's knowledge. Neither ignorance of the regulations concerning academic violations nor personal extenuating circumstances are an adequate defense against charges of plagiarism. The Seminary's provisions for "due process" apply in cases of alleged plagiarism.*

[The italicized statement above is used by permission of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, based upon a document adapted by LTSP, with permission, from "Princeton University Rights, Rules and Responsibilities," 1990 Edition. Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.]

Occurrences of plagiarism shall be considered 'documented' when the instructor is able to produce documentary evidence that plagiarism has occurred, and when the instructor has reason to believe that the plagiarism was motivated by a deliberate attempt to receive credit for ideas or work not the student's own. Where such plagiarism involves the theft of the academic work of another student, whether at Erskine or any other

institution, it shall be designated 'documented theft of another student's work.'  
The instructor involved, in consultation with the Dean, may recommend measures deemed appropriate. In cases of documented plagiarism or documented theft of another student's work, the offending student will automatically receive the following penalties:

- Failure of the course(s) in which plagiarized or stolen work is submitted
- Dismissal from the Seminary for a minimum of one semester
- Forfeiture of the right to tuition refunds during the semester(s) affected

Before such penalties are imposed, a committee of at least three faculty members must agree that they are appropriate to the case. Appeals in such cases may only be addressed, in writing, to the President of Erskine College and Theological Seminary.

### **Course Requirements**

Faithful Attendance and active, informed participation in each class is essential to the graduate educational task. One class period's absence (three hours) is permitted. If any additional crisis or emergency absence becomes necessary (to be determined as such by the professor), please consult the professor immediately (before class if at all possible). Each student is expected to be on time and to have thoughtfully read and critically thought through the week's reading materials prior to class in order to significantly contribute to the discussion of that week's materials. All required course work is to be submitted at the beginning of that day's class.

### **Criteria for Grading Papers**

This professor is operating with the expectation that each student will have enrolled in Dr. Fairbairn's writing/research January seminar. Papers will be evaluated based on the following considerations: grammar and style; organization; clarity and rhetorical power of argument; competent research; depth and creativity; independence of thought; significance of research for Christian life and thought.

### **Grading Scale**

|        |    |       |    |       |    |
|--------|----|-------|----|-------|----|
| 100-95 | A  | 85-84 | C+ | 71-70 | D- |
| 94-93  | A- | 83-80 | C  | 69-0  | F  |
| 92-91  | B+ | 79-78 | C- |       |    |
| 90-88  | B  | 77-76 | D+ |       |    |
| 87-86  | B- | 75-72 | D  |       |    |

### **Class Attendance Policy**

Students must attend each class meeting. If a student must be absent they are responsible for all work due and accomplished during that class session. One class period can be missed without penalty. Any additional class period missed, unless it constitutes a genuine emergency (to be determined by the professor) threatens the student's ability to successfully pass this course. Students who miss more than one class period should consult with the professor to see whether they can pass the course.

### **Drop/Add/Withdrawal**

Once a student has completed, signed, and submitted his/her registration to the Registrar for this class, it is a *binding contract* and billing will be based on this registration. If the student decides not to take this class, he/she must complete a "drop/add" form and secure the appropriate signatures *prior to the drop/add deadline during the second week of the semester or term*. If one wishes to withdraw from the course after the drop/add deadline, one must complete a withdrawal form, and tuition will be refunded on a pro rated basis. Failure to withdraw from the class properly will result in the student's receiving a grade of "F" for the course and full tuition charges will apply. *No exceptions will be made to this policy.*

### **Incompletes**

The grade of "I" or incomplete is given at the discretion of the professor. A grade of "I" is normally given when a student has substantially completed the requirements for a course but has been prevented by extraordinary circumstances from completing the remainder of the course requirements. A student who wishes to request an incomplete should normally complete an incomplete form prior to the end of the semester and ask the professor to grant the request. (Under unusual circumstances, the student may communicate with the professor by phone or email rather than in person, and the professor may then agree to fill out the form at the student's request. Under exceptional circumstances, the professor may initiate the process by filling out the form on the student's behalf.) If the professor grants the request, he/she will sign the incomplete form and turn it in with his/her final grade report. An "I" in any course must be removed by March 1 for the Fall Term, April 1 for the January Term, August 1 for the Spring Term, and November 1 for the Summer Term. Only the Dean may grant extensions of incompletes beyond the established completion date. Otherwise, these grades automatically become "F."

All work is to be turned in on time. Any work that is turned in after the due date will be subject to at least a one grade penalty. Work that is significantly late (determined by the professor) can result in failure of the course.

### **Course Outline: Lectures and Assignments**

Dear class, I will provide specific reading assignments in the near future with an updated version of this section of the course syllabus. Until I know how many students will be taking the class I cannot block out the reading schedule since I need to also block out your class presentations. In the meantime, feel free to begin reading in the textbooks. ☺

