



in partnership with



OT5302 Old Testament Historical Books

3 credits. Prerequisites: *none*.

'A' Livestream  Video on Demand

March 2-6, 2026

Module

Mon-Fri; 10am-5pm ET (9am-4pm SK)

Ryan Ball, Ph.D.

rball@horizon.edu

Please note: This course includes assignments before the module.

Course Goals

Course Description

This course focuses on either the Former Prophets (Joshua-Kings) or the post-exilic writings (Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah). While the study explores historical, literary, and theological issues related to the ancient Near Eastern context of these books, emphasis will be placed upon the relevance of such texts for the present-day church. This specific course instance will focus on books from the pre-exilic corpus (Joshua, Judges, Ruth) with attention also given to Esther.

Relationship to Horizon's Mission

To help equip Christian leaders for life and ministry, this course seeks to provide a learning community in which themes, topics, and issues in Scripture and their relation to life and ministry can be explored and God's truth applied. Through the study of God's word and actions in redemption history to accomplish his purposes, this course aims to demonstrate the Old Testament historical books as God's living word for the church today.

Course Competencies and Learning Outcomes

To demonstrate competency in **Biblical & Theological Literacy**, students will

1. Interpret the Old Testament Historical Books in light of their literary and socio-historical contexts and distinct theological perspective with the assistance of relevant secondary literature.
 - *Assessment:* Exegetical Paper; Thematic Study

2. Describe the key interpretive issues that are critical for understanding the Old Testament Historical Books.
 - *Assessment:* Exegetical Paper; Thematic Study
3. Identify and explain key emphases and their significance within the Old Testament Historical Books.
 - *Assessment:* Inductive Study; Reading Notes; Thematic Study
4. Explain how the theological witness of the Old Testament Historical Books speaks to the way we think, live, and minister today.
 - *Assessment:* Inductive Study; Exegetical Paper; Thematic Study

Course Work

Required Readings

The list of required readings is found under Assignment #2. This collection of chapters and articles will be posted as PDFs on Populi.

**While students have the benefit of accessing many of their textbooks online through the [Digital Theological Library](#), they will not have access to the Digital Theological Library upon graduation. Therefore, we encourage students to purchase select textbooks to build their personal library.

Course Assignments and Activities

Part I: Pre-Module Assignments

1. *Inductive Study* – 20%

As the first assignment in the course, students will write an inductive study on the book of Judges. An inductive study is a particular type of paper in which the student investigates and analyzes the book without the aid of commentaries, biblical or theological dictionaries, or even study Bibles. It is just the student and the biblical text! The aim of this approach is to develop the student's own skill, learning to read the text well, by providing space to sit with the text rather than going immediately to commentaries or other secondary aids to find "answers." The paper should be structured according to the following outline:

Part I: Outline (10%)

Write a brief, bullet point, outline of the book. This would look like a Table of Contents, where you will divide up the book into sections and provide a title for each—also include the reference for each section (e.g., Gen 1:1-9). This outline will show your understanding of the book's flow and structure. What are the major sections of the book? Are the different accounts subsections or part of a new section? Do not be confined to the chapter and section divisions/titles that you find in your English Bible; these are not always the most helpful.

Part II: Explaining the Structure (25%)

Provide a detailed explanation of the structure and progression of the book. In effect, part of this will reflect your outline presented in Part I. Here, you will provide an overview of

how the writer has organized and structured the book. What is the writer doing? How does the book progress, and how does the writer work to communicate the message? Is there a particular structure employed to highlight the message? Are there recurring events, or refrains? Are certain characters or events deliberately contrasted? The goal here is to learn to closely follow what the writer is doing and where the writer is leading so we can hear what the writer is saying.

Part III: The Main Point (30%)

Present and discuss what you understand to be the one central theme/message of the book. Be clear. Provide evidence from the text for your choice. The following are some helpful questions to consider. How is this central theme/message introduced? How is it developed? Is there a progression throughout the book? How does the writer communicate it? How does this central theme connect to the various parts of the book?

Part IV: Other Theological Insights (25%)

Apart from the main message of the book discussed in Part III, discuss other theological insights that you have found in your study of the book. Focus here on what the author teaches and not on personal application—reserve that for the next section.

Part V: Application (10%)

Briefly discuss what we should learn from the book. We are not the first audience, and we live in a very different culture and time. What is God’s message in this book for the church today?

Please stick to the above guideline; for clarity and simplicity, use the provided headings. And to reiterate, do not use any external sources for your study (not even a study Bible). This should be just you and the text. Please also take note of the weight distributed to each section of the paper. This should inform the amount of space you devote to each section. Use references to the text to support any claims/examples.

A few helpful points. Read, read, and re-read. You will not notice everything in one quick pass of the text; the more you study, the more you will find. Reading sections over again will help you identify recurring themes and see important connections. You might also want to try reading the text in a couple of different translations.

- Related learning outcomes: #3, 4.
- **Assignment length:** 6 pgs.
- **Due date:** Mar 1, 2026.

Part II: Post-Module Assignments

2. *Reading Notes – 20%*

Each student will read a series of articles/chapter (listed below; posted on Populi) and write a short summary on each reading. The summary should cover, where applicable, the author’s thesis, methodology, arguments, evidence, conclusions, implications, etc.

- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014. Read chapter 5, “The Old Testament Narratives: Their Proper Use,” 93-111.

- Sloane, Andrew. *At Home in a Strange Land: Using the Old Testament in Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014. Read chapter 3, “Avoiding Pitfalls, Hacking through the Jungle,” 99-141.
- Webb, William J., and Gordon K. Oest. *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?: Wrestling with Troubling War Texts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019. Read chapter 4, “Reading the Bible Redemptively,” 77-83.
- Gibson, Scott M., ed. *Preaching from the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006. Read chapter 3, “Preaching from the Historical Books,” 57-71.
- Moore, Erika. “Ruth 2: Ancient Near Eastern Background.” In *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, edited by Tremper Longman II, and Peter Enns, 687-93. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.
- Lee, Eunny P. “Ruth the Moabite: Identity, Kinship, and Otherness.” In *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, edited by Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler, 89-101. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. *Just Wives?: Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003. Read chapter 2, “Ruth and Naomi: Economic Survival and Family Values: Ruth 1-4,” 27-48.
- Dombrowski, Justin. “Esther 3: History of Interpretation.” In *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*, edited by Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, 175-81. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005.
- Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. *Just Wives?: Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003. Read chapter 3, “Vashti and Esther: Models of Resistance: Esther 1-10,” 49-67.
- Niditch, Susan. “Interpreting Esther: Categories, Contexts and Creative Ambiguities.” In *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*, edited by Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages, 255-73. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014.
- LXX Esther (instead of writing a summary; discuss the differences from the standard Protestant version of Esther)

These summaries are not personal reflections nor opinions of the reading but aim to faithfully convey the author’s work, thereby demonstrating the student’s understanding. Each summary should be a maximum of 0.75 pg.—aim for succinctness and clarity (more is not always better). Submit all the reading summaries together as a single document.

- Related learning outcome: #3.
- **Assignment length:** 0.75 pg. per reading.
- **Due date:** Mar 18, 2026.

3. Exegetical Paper – 30%

Each student will write an exegetical essay on a select passage from Joshua, Judges, Ruth, or Esther. *Passages must be approved by the instructor in advance*. This paper will consist of three sections (please use the following headings for your paper and please note the page length/weight given to each section):

Part I: Context of the Passage (1.5 pgs.) In this first section, discuss the historical and literary context of the chosen passage. Ask the following types of questions: when did it occur; who were the ruling powers at that time; were there specific events that occasioned the passage; who is the writer speaking to; etc. For the literary

context, be sure to consider the more immediate literary context (it is connected to a preceding or following section?) as well as its larger literary context; that is, the place and function of this passage within the book as a whole. Note: this section is not a detailed examination of the passage itself; that will be the focus of the next section.

Part II: Examination of the Passage (5 pgs.) In this section, examine the chosen passage, covering its main point(s) and how it makes them, its literary structure/design and features, and its theological claims and implications. In the process, be sure to adequately address interpretive difficulties: describe the difficulty; outline and weigh the options; present an approach/resolution that helps to ensure correct interpretation. Note: since this section is a study of the passage itself, do not talk about Jesus or NT connections yet; save that for Part III.

Part III: Looking Forward (1.5 pg.) Discuss how the passage relates to the larger biblical narrative of God's redemptive work in history, how it relates to the NT and Christ's work, and how it speaks to the church today.

Students are encouraged to study the passage first by themselves before turning to secondary sources. Cite (engage) a minimum of eight scholarly secondary sources. Include a bibliography.

- Related learning outcomes: # 1, 2, 4.
- **Assignment length:** 8 pgs.
- **Due date:** April 3, 2026.

4. *Thematic Study* – 30%

For the final paper in this course, students will write on a select theme/issue found in one or more of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, or Esther. Optional themes include the issue of violence and holy war, God's heart for foreigners, and God's acting in history, etc. *All paper topics must be approved in advance by the instructor.* Students are encouraged to pursue a theme or question encountered in class or readings that draws their interest.

The student's essay will present the theme, analyze the key texts, outline any interpretive difficulties, engage with various views, and propose a helpful way forward. Strong papers will also give sufficient attention to the historical, literary, and canonical context of the theme. While students are encouraged to trace the theme into the NT, in conversation with Christ's work, and to apply it to the church today, please reserve such discussion for the final (smaller) portion of the paper. The majority of the study should focus on the theme in its OT context. Cite (engage) a minimum of eight scholarly secondary sources. Include a bibliography.

- Related learning outcomes: # 1, 2, 3, 4.
- **Assignment length:** 8 pgs.
- **Due date:** April 24, 2026.

Video-on-Demand (VOD) Student Requirements

As indicated on the course schedule, this class is offered by VOD. Students taking the course through VOD are required to indicate this during their course registration. While VOD recordings are available for any student who may be absent from class, non-VOD students are expected to attend class live following the class attendance policy.

- For this course, VOD students have *one* different assignment due date:

- *Inductive Study* due Mar 1, 2026.
- *Reading Notes* due Mar 21, 2026 (**different**)
- *Exegetical Paper* due April 3, 2026.
- *Thematic Study* due April 24, 2026.
- VOD students are required to watch and engage with all lecture content and in-class activities. Students will watch the lectures according to the following schedule:
 - Day 1 Lectures and Report due Sat, Mar 7 at 11:59 PM.
 - Day 2 Lectures and Report due Wed, Mar 11 at 11:59 PM.
 - Day 3 Lectures and Report due Sat, Mar 14 at 11:59 PM.
 - Day 4 Lectures and Report due Wed, Mar 18 at 11:59 PM.
 - Day 5 Lectures and Report due Sat, Mar 21 at 11:59 PM.
- By 11:59 pm on each of the dates noted above, VOD students will submit a short 2-3 min video to Padlet that 1) affirms that you watched the lecture; 2) summarizes on thing you learned that will help you reach the course learning outcomes; and 3) explains one question you had after watching the class recording. In lieu of a report, such as the first one, VOD students are encouraged to arrange a time to meet with the instructor on Zoom.
- In order to pass the course, VOD students must submit all of their VOD weekly submissions. These submissions are marked are pass/fail based on whether or not they demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the lecture content and in-class activities.
- The Late Assignment and Extension policy applies to all VOD Report submissions.

Estimate of Time Investment (individual time investments may vary)

Component	Hours	Due Date	Assignment Weighting
Classroom time	30 hrs	N/A	N/A
1. Inductive Study	20 hrs	Mar 1	20%
2. Reading Notes	30 hrs	Mar 18	20%
3. Exegetical Paper	25 hrs	Apr 3	30%
4. Thematic Study	25 hrs	Apr 24	30%
Total =	130 hrs		

All assignments are due at 11:59pm *ET time* unless otherwise indicated.

Course Schedule

**The following schedule is a guideline. Adjustments may occur.*

Day	Time (ET)	Time (SK)	Topics
Monday	10:00 – 10:30	9:00 – 9:30	● Course Introductions
	10:30 – 1:00	9:30 – 12:00	● Introduction to the OT Historical Books
	2:00 – 5:00	1:00 – 4:00	● Introduction to Joshua
Tuesday	10:00 – 1:00	9:00 – 12:00	● Joshua cont.
	2:00 – 5:00	1:00 – 4:00	● Violence in the OT
Wednesday	10:00 – 1:00	9:00 – 12:00	● Introduction to Judges
	2:00 – 3:15	1:00 – 2:15	● Chapel
	3:30 – 5:00	2:30 – 4:00	● Judges cont.

Thursday	10:00 – 1:00	9:00 – 12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judges cont. • Introduction to Ruth
	2:00 – 5:00	1:00 – 4:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruth cont.
Friday	10:00 – 1:00	9:00 – 12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Esther
	2:00 – 5:00	1:00 – 4:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Esther cont.

- Assignments will not be accepted after **April 27, 2026**.

Academic Policies

General Guidelines for the Submission of Written Work

Please see the [Horizon](#) & [MCS](#) Format Guide for assignment submission, grammar, and formatting guidelines. The length of papers should fall within +/- 10% of the stated length. Papers that fall outside the length guidelines may not be graded. Assignments should be submitted via Populi under *Submissions* (not *Comments*). The resource at this [link](#) explains how to submit assignments on Populi.

Late Assignments and Extensions

Please contact the professor well in advance if you would like to request an adjustment to any of your due dates. No extensions will be granted beyond the end of the course unless approval is granted by Horizon's Assistant Academic Dean.

A late penalty will be assessed for all overdue assignments: 1-3 days late, penalty of 10%; 4-6 days late, penalty of 20%. After six days late, an assignment receives a grade of 0.

Grading

Grade	Percentage	GPA	Descriptor
A+	97-100%	4	Exceptional
A	93-96%	4	Excellent
A-	90-92%	3.7	Excellent
B+	87-89%	3.3	Good
B	83-86%	3.0	Good
B-	80-82%	2.7	Good
C+	77-79%	2.3	Satisfactory
C	73-76%	2.0	Satisfactory
C-	70-72%	1.7	Satisfactory
D+	67-69%	1.3	Minimal Pass
D	63-66%	1.0	Minimal Pass
D-	60-62%	0.7	Minimal Pass
F	<60%	0	Failure

Academic Integrity

Students learn best when practicing academic integrity. A lack of integrity is displayed in acts such as deception, abuse of confidentiality, cheating, inappropriate collaboration, or plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs when a student presents the words or ideas of another person or an artificial

intelligence (AI) tool in such a way as to give others the impression that it is their own words or ideas. In academic writing, there should be no doubt which words or ideas are the student's and which are drawn from other sources or AI. Students are expected to submit their own original work and give due recognition to sources from which all substantial phrases, sentences or even ideas are drawn. Note also that you may not submit work done in one course to satisfy the requirements of another course (unless both instructors agree beforehand to accept such work). See [here](#) for examples of plagiarism and further guidelines in the [Student Handbook](#).

Horizon and MCS have a subscription to software that ensures the originality of academic writing, verifies the proper citation of all sources, and detects AI-generated content. When you submit an assignment, you will automatically receive a summary on Populi that includes your submitted files along with an originality score (a high originality score is positive).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage

In keeping with the Academic Integrity policy above, students must disclose on the title page of all assignments whether or not they have used AI and how they have used it. If the assignment has no title page, the student must disclose this to the instructor by some other means, such as in a comment on Populi. Students are expected to follow the policy for acceptable use of AI that is published in the [Horizon](#) and [MCS](#) Student Handbooks.

Accessible Learning Services Information

Horizon and MCS are committed to provide safe and inclusive learning environments which equalize the opportunity for students with disabilities to meet the requirements of the institutions, programs, and courses. The application for Academic Accommodations begins with a student disclosing a medical diagnosis or professionally documented learning disability during the application process. Enrolled students may contact Accessibility services personnel (at MCS, the Director of Academic Success, Wendy Holmes at wendy.holmes@mcs.edu; at Horizon, the Academic Accommodations Coordinator, Richelle Bekkattla at rbekkattla@horizon.edu). All Academic Accommodations will adhere to the Guiding Principles listed in the Student Handbooks.

Class Attendance (On Campus or Livestreaming)

Students should attend all classes in order to facilitate competency development. Students are expected to be present through the delivery method that they registered for, either on campus or through livestreaming with their camera on. A student must be present for the full duration of a class period in order to be registered as present for the class. In the case of illness or other unforeseen circumstances, students may miss the equivalent of six hours of class (e.g., one day of a module course or two three-hours classes) without academic penalty. Students who are absent for more than this will automatically fail the course. Students wishing to be exempted from this policy due to extenuating circumstances may make an academic appeal, where they will need to document and verify those circumstances. Students who miss a class are responsible to get missed notes or handouts from another student, rather than from the professor.

Livestreaming Etiquette

Students taking the course through livestreaming are required to indicate this during their course registration. While livestreaming access is available for on-campus students who are unable to

attend class due to illness, on-campus students are expected to attend class in person following the class attendance policy.

If attending class online via livestream, in order to be marked present for class, you must keep your camera on and stay present and attentive throughout the class session, extending the gift of full engagement. Access your class with a computer (preferably) or tablet, not a cell phone. Arrive to class on time, and dress as you would if you were attending class on campus. Join the class from a quiet space with minimal background noise, and mute your microphone until you wish to speak to the class.

Use of Technology

Horizon and MCS encourage the use of electronic devices in the classroom to enhance learning. Careful consideration must be given to privacy issues, copyrighted materials, and the general care and concern for others. Please respect the following classroom policies:

- Please use online access for course learning only. This is a matter of respect for the instructor's teaching, your own learning, and fellow students who may be distracted by other uses.
- Students should secure permission from the instructor to record any teaching material. This includes PowerPoint slides, white board illustrations, notes, and any form of audio or video.
- Student feedback is a valuable input for course improvements. Please resolve any classroom grievance about the instructor or course with the instructor personally, through the Horizon College and Seminary grievance procedures, or the Populi-based course evaluations. It is inappropriate to air classroom grievances on a social media platform.
- When instructors use recording mechanisms in the classroom, recorded materials will be used for the sole purpose of instruction and cannot be released to any social media outlet without the written consent of the students whose images have been recorded.
- In general, it is not acceptable to share photographs or videos of students in the classroom setting without permission from those whose images appear in such media.

Bibliography

Allen, Leslie C., and Timothy S. Laniak. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Rev. ed. New York, NK: Basic Books, 2011.

Amit, Yairah. *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

Arnold, Bill T., and H. G. M. Williamson, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014.

- Gibson, Scott M., ed. *Preaching from the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *Handbook on the Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Harria, J. Gordon, Cheryl A. Brown, and Michael S. Moore. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.
- Hess, Richard S. *Joshua*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2015.
- Hess, Richard S., Daniel I. Block, and Dale W. Manor. *Joshua, Judges & Ruth*. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary. Edited by John H. Walton. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.
- Hubbard Jr., Robert L. *Joshua*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.
- Jobes, Karen H. *Esther*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.
- Lau, Peter H. W. *The Book of Ruth*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Longman, Tremper III. *Confronting Old Testament Controversies: Pressing Questions about Evolution, Sexuality, History, and Violence*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019.
- Longman, Tremper III, and Peter Enns, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Mathews, Kenneth A. *Joshua*. Teach the Text Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2023.
- Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. *Ruth*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999.
- Sloane, Andrew. *At Home in a Strange Land: Using the Old Testament in Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Taylor, Marion Ann. *Ruth, Esther*. The Story of God Bible Commentary. Edited by Tremper Longman III, and Scot McKnight. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020.
- Way, Kenneth C. *Judges & Ruth*. Teach the Text Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016.
- Webb, Barry G. *The Book of Judges*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.

Webb, William J., and Gordon K. Oest. *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?: Wrestling with Troubling War Texts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

Wenham, Gordon J. *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000.

Wray Beal, Lissa M. *Joshua*. The Story of God Bible Commentary. Edited by Trember Longman III, and Scot McKnight. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Younger Jr., K. Lawson. *Judges, Ruth*. Rev. ed. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021.