



OT APOLOGETICS

Essential Answers to Difficult Questions



OT 3P1190/OT5P110

This course runs Sept 10-Dec 10, 2025

Class meets on Wednesdays at 9:00am-10:50am

Professor: Dr. Paul S. Evans

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Course Description:

This course provides essential responses to ethical and evidentiary challenges to Old Testament texts and theology, answering questions such as: Can we trust the text of the Bible or has it been distorted over time? Is the God of the Old Testament different than God in the New Testament? What is the character of God like according to the Old Testament? Is the History in the Old Testament Bad History? Is the Bible scientifically accurate? Is the Old Testament misogynistic or patriarchal? What about the so-called genocidal conquest of Canaan? Why all the harsh punishments in Old Testament law? Are biblical laws immoral? What about Psalms that call for vengeance or even the murder of babies? This course will consider various Christian responses to these challenges and critically assesses their value for defending the authority and theological importance of the OT scriptures in both their ancient context and for the Church today.

Specializations: Biblical Studies, Church & Culture



Knowing
the word of God



Being
transformed into
Christ's image



Doing
the work of ministry

Course Objectives:

Knowing

- To gain an awareness of the basic issues relating to contemporary intellectual challenges to the morality and authority of the Old Testament
- To gain an understanding of the diverse Christian responses to these intellectual challenges to the Old Testament
- To gain a deeper understanding of the nature and significance of so-called problem texts in the Old Testament
- To be familiar with Christian resources available for further study in this area

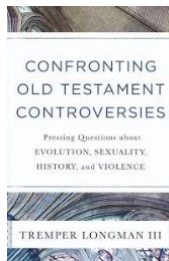
Being

- To embrace the contemporary relevance of Old Testament texts for the Church today
- To grow closer to God through study of the Old Testament

Doing

- To be able to interpret Old Testament texts in their original contexts
- To be able to recognize and critique intellectual challenges to the Old Testament
- To be able to explain reasons for confidence and faith in Old Testament scriptures, drawing on theological, historical, and exegetical arguments
- To be able to articulate personal responses to such challenges to the Old Testament

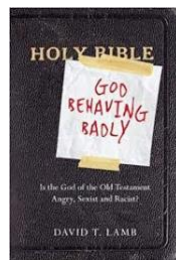
Required Texts



Tremper Longman. *Confronting Old Testament Controversies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018.



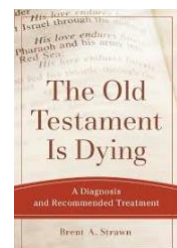
Paul Copan. *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense Of The Old Testament God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011.



Lamb, David T., *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist, and Racist?* Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011.

Recommended Text

Brent C. Strawn. *The Old Testament is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017.



Textbook Purchase:

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Course Evaluation

The assignments and their weights are as follows:

1. 10% - Readings. Report Due Dec 12

Each week of the course has specific readings from the textbooks assigned (see reading schedule below). Each student must keep up with the readings in a timely manner in order to participate in class discussions.

- Students will submit a detailed list of the reading that they have completed in the assigned textbooks (including page spreads for partial reading) and assigned articles available through A2L.
- Students will upload their accomplished reading list assignment to the appropriate Assignment Box on A2L before the last day of class (Dec 12)

2. 20% - Response to Richard Dawkins' View of the OT. 6-8 pages. Due: Oct 8

Informed by class material and textbooks, students will read and critique the document "Dawkins.OT.pdf" which is an excerpt from his book, *The God Delusion*. This short paper will answer the following questions:

How does Dawkins characterize the OT?

- What evidence does Dawkins use to support his characterization?
- Note specific OT passages/stories used

What is wrong with his characterization of the OT?

- Where do you see problems with his interpretation of OT passages?
- Note hermeneutical flaws in Dawkins' interpretation of OT passages/stories

What is your response to this critique of OT scripture?

- Offer your informed critique/opinion on Dawkins' conclusions

3. 25% - Creative Presentation. Due: Nov 5. Answering a popular criticism of/or challenge to the OT designed for a specific cultural context (Church, Youth Group, Public Forum). Research for this presentation requires a bibliography of at least **6 secondary sources** (commentaries, theological dictionaries, monographs, articles; online/web-based sources do not count). *Students must email the professor beforehand to receive approval for their chosen topic.*

This Creative Presentation could take various forms.

- i. Video presentation (posted to YouTube or Vimeo). Students will send a link to the video to professor who will upload it to Avenue to Learn for the rest of the students to view and hear
- ii. Digital presentation (PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, Google Slides etc.) with audio recorded or a pdf handout.
- iii. a Podcast (audio only) uploaded online. Students will send a link to the video to professor who will upload it to Avenue to Learn for the rest of the students to hear

4. 5% - Reflective Paper: 4 Pages. Due: Dec 10.

For this paper students write a reflection on implications of the issues and research covered in the course for a student's view of the OT as scripture and other implications for their faith.

5. 35%- Major Assignment: 12-15 Pages. Due Dec 3.

All Major Assignments must be double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman font (footnotes should be 10pt Times New Roman font and single spaced). The bibliography must contain **12 secondary sources** (commentaries, theological dictionaries, monographs and at least 3 academic articles). Each item must be drawn on and cited in the paper. Students may supplement these 12 sources with 2 internet sources. Cf. "Assignment Evaluation" below.

A. Major Assignments for Biblical Studies Specializations:

There are two (2) options for Biblical Studies: Choose only one (1) of the following:

- 1. Research Paper: 12–15 pages** This is especially recommended if you are planning to go on to a research degree or write a thesis in OT (or if you have a particular topic in mind that you wish to write on). The topic of this research must be related to a difficult question(s) about the Old Testament and approved by the professor.
- 2. Exegetical Paper: 12–15 pages** Students will write an exegetical paper on a difficult text from the Old Testament that has led some to question the morality of the Old Testament (your chosen text must be approved by your professor).

B. Major Assignments for Church and Culture Specializations:

There are two (2) options for Church and Culture studies: Choose only one (1) of the following:

- 1. Research Paper: 12–15 pages.** The topic of this research must be related to difficult questions raised about the Old Testament in contemporary culture. The research in this paper will conclude with a proposal for a culturally

sensitive approach to communicating God's word in the Old Testament. Topics must be approved by your Professor.

2. Paper Assessing Atheism(s) and the OT Today: 12–15 pages.

According to cultural critics, within the last decade there has been a substantial decline of New Atheism (Dawkins, Harris, Dennett, and Hitchens) due to their inability to offer a compelling alternative to religion and due to changing cultural and political contexts. However, other forms of Atheism (e.g., activist, temperate, and amicable atheism) have come to the fore. After reading the articles by Gericke and McDade (listed below) this paper will critically assess current cultural and scholarly variations of atheism(s) and critique how OT texts feature in their dialogue or polemic. The paper will include an informed critical response to their use of/approach to the OT and include a Christian apologetic of the issue, locating the atheist/atheism in their cultural context with a view to assessing and articulating what is happening in contemporary culture.

Jaco W. Gericke. "A Fourth Paradigm? Some Thoughts on Atheism in Old Testament Scholarship." *Old Testament Essays* 25 (2012): 518-533.

Stefani McDade. "New Wave Atheism: The New Atheists Have Lost Their Cultural Hold, but Friendlier Forms of Unbelief Are Alive and Growing." *Christianity Today* 67 (2023): 48-56.

College Style for Submission of Written Work

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

All papers must be in pdf format only and posted to the appropriate place on A2L. Include your last name in the file name of your paper (e.g., evans.paper.pdf). To avoid late marks papers must be received by 11:59pm on their due date. Late assignments receive no critical feedback.

Policy concerning late papers

Extensions for papers will not be given except in very exceptional circumstances (serious illness, family crises, etc.). Busy-ness, computer problems etc. are not legitimate reasons to grant extensions and in the interests of fairness requests for extensions will take into account the entire class. Late assignments will be docked at the rate of 2% per day for the first 7 days (including weekends) and 4% per day after that. All assignments must be received by the last day of class (Dec 12) in order to avoid a failing grade in the class. Late assignments receive no critical feedback.

Gender Inclusive language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Class Schedule

| Week | Topic | Assignment | Longman | Copan | Lamb |
|---------|---|--|-------------------|-------------|----------|
| Sept 10 | A. Introduction: The Good Book or the Bad Book? B. Interpretive Principles | -- | Intro pp. 1-24 | pp. 11-26 | Ch. 1 |
| Sept 17 | A. Interpreting Creation narratives B. Science and faith | -- | pp. 25-47 | -- | -- |
| Sept 24 | A. Is the OT bad history? B. The genre of OT historiography | -- | pp. 48-76 | -- | -- |
| Oct 1 | A. The Exodus B. The Judges C. The Monarchy | -- | pp. 79-102 | -- | -- |
| Oct 8 | A. Does the OT condone violence? B. Understanding <i>herem</i> texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua | *Dawkins Response due Oct 8 | pp. 103-122 | pp. 158-168 | Ch. 4 |
| Oct 15 | READING WEEK: NO CLASS | | | | |
| Oct 22 | A. Is God violent? B. Should we always imitate God? | -- | pp. 123-143 | pp. 169-185 | Ch. 5 |
| Oct 29 | A. Do the Psalms teach us to curse our enemies? B. Imprecatory psalms in their ancient context | -- | pp. 144-171 | pp. 186-208 | Ch. 7 |
| Nov 5 | A. Is Biblical Law immoral? B. Interpreting Biblical law in its ancient context | *Creative Presentation due Nov 5 | pp. 172-194 | pp. 57-77 | Ch. 8 |
| Nov 12 | A. Laws about women B. Is Wisdom Literature Patriarchal? | -- | pp. 195-206 | pp. 78-100 | Ch. 6 |
| Nov 19 | A. The OT and sexuality B. The OT and slavery | -- | pp. 207-234 | pp. 101-123 | Ch. 3 |
| Nov 26 | ETS/SBL: NO CLASS | | | | |
| Dec 3 | A. The Character of God B. Does God demand human sacrifice? | *Major Assignment due Dec 3 | pp. 235-250 | pp. 124-157 | Ch. 2 |
| Dec 10 | A. Is Yahweh egotistical? B. The Morality of praise and worship | *Reflective paper due Dec 10 *Reading List due Dec 12 | pp. 250-270 | pp. 27-56 | Epilogue |

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

Policy Concerning Inclement Weather

In the event of inclement weather, students are advised to check the McMaster University website to determine whether the university is open. In the event that the university is closed then McMaster Divinity College will also be closed, the course instructor will adjust the teaching schedule accordingly. NOTE: Assignments that are due on a day the university is closed due to weather are still due on that day.

Policy Concerning Illness

Students who are registered to attend class in-person are expected to inform the course instructor if they become ill. These students are expected to return to the classroom once they have recovered from their ailment. Students who are registered to attend class via the live stream option are expected to inform the course instructor if they become ill and their illness prevents them from attending on-line. Students are advised that classes will not be recorded. As a result, students are expected to check A2L for any course handouts and to obtain notes from their peers. NOTE: Unless the student has been granted an illness accommodation by the course instructor, any assignment due on a day the student is ill must be submitted on that day.

Disclaimer

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

Students are advised to retain this syllabus for their records.

ASSIGNMENT EVALUATION

I. The following items are rated according to this scale: 1 = inadequate; 2 = adequate;
3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = superior.

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bibliographic consciousness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Range and Use of Sources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Clarity in Defining Issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Strength of Argument | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Awareness of Exegetical Issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Accuracy of Data and Assertions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Analysis /Critical Thinking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Introduction (Thesis Statement /Clear Issue) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Development of Thesis (focus) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Literary Style (awkward, wordy, repetitive) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Organization/coherence of ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Grammar/Spelling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Neatness/Presentation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

§ Note: this is a simple evaluation tool to assist in paper assessment. The categories are not weighted equally, and thus are not added together or averaged to calculate your grade.

II. The following need attention if so indicated

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use inclusive language | <input type="checkbox"/> The paper is too long/too short |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write a unified essay | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit your paper more thoroughly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Line spacing, Font size, Margins, Page numbers etc. need attention | <input type="checkbox"/> The paper needs balance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cite primary resources correctly/consistently (e.g., Gen 1:26; Gen 1; etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cite secondary resources correctly/consistently |

III. Comments

Bibliography

- Alexander, Denis and Alister E. McGrath. *Coming to Faith through Dawkins: 12 Essays on the Pathway from New Atheism to Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2023.
- Boyd, Gregory A. *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament's Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017.
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- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.