



From the Beginning: Reading the book of Genesis

OT 3P1140/OT 5P1120

Times of class meetings: Tuesdays at 11:00am-12:50am

Professor. Dr. Paul S. Evans

Phone. 905.525.9140 x24718

E-mail. pevans@mcmaster.ca

Office. 236

Course Description:

This course leads students through a detailed reading of the book of Genesis with a view to its theological, historical and literary interpretation and significance. In order to equip students for interpreting this foundational book we will take into account critical matters & methodologies, ancient Near Eastern parallels and the canonical context of the book as the introduction to the Pentateuch and all of Christian Scripture. We will also focus on several questions throughout our study: What does Genesis say about science and the origins of life on earth? What does Genesis teach concerning the nature of humanity? How does an understanding of Genesis impact our worldview? What does Genesis teach us about God's Covenant(s) with humans? In this course we will examine the literary structure, authorial purpose(s) and theological significance of the book of Genesis, in order to underscore its continuing relevance for the church and society today.

Specializations: Biblical Studies, and Church and Culture



Course Objectives:

Knowing

- To have a thorough knowledge of the contents and message of Genesis
- To gain familiarity with the assumptions, methods and conclusions of modern critical scholarship on Genesis
- To gain an introductory knowledge of relevant Ancient Near Eastern Literature: One will read an English translation of the most important extra-biblical documents for a proper understanding of Genesis within its ancient Near Eastern context.

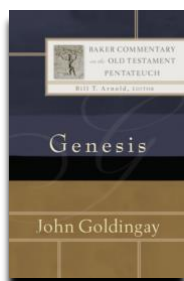
Being

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

Doing

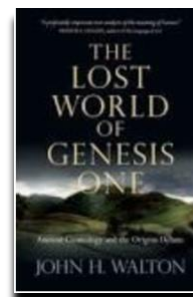
- To be able to discuss the relation of Genesis 1-11 to ancient Near Eastern mythology and modern science
- To be able to interpret Genesis in its original contexts
- To be able to apply the message of Genesis to contemporary audiences

Required Texts:



Goldingay, John. *Genesis*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch. Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Academic, 2020.

John Walton. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.



In addition, students must choose ONE of the following novels.



Buechner, Frederick, *The Son of Laughter*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Anita Diamant. *The Red Tent*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.



In addition students must WATCH *His Only Son* (*Angel Studios movie. Watch for free <https://www.angel.com/watch/his-only-son>



Textbook Purchase:

All required and recommended books 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 Requirements

I. Classroom Experiences

Participation in classroom experiences is an assumed foundation for this course, if a student fails to participate their final mark will be reduced by one full letter grade (so A becomes B, A- becomes B-).

II. Formal Assignments:

All Papers must be double-spaced, using 12pt Times New Roman font throughout (footnotes should be single-spaced 10pt Times New Roman font).

The assignments and their weights are as follows:

A. 25% - Critical Book Review Assignment: Due Feb 9 (6 pages).

After reading the Walton textbook (*The Lost World of Genesis One*), students will critically review the work in one paper. This review will present its content, provide a critique and finally give a response that outlines both theological and personal implications. See "Book Review Guidelines" below.

B. 25% - Bible in fiction: Due Mar 9 (6 pages).

After reading either the Buechner or Diamant novels, students will write a paper that looks at how their chosen novel has employed the biblical narrative and critically assesses its interpretation. Preparation for the paper will require a student's independent study of the relevant biblical narratives, utilizing Goldingay's commentary.

The paper should answer the following questions: What questions does the novel lead you to ask of the biblical text? What is your assessment of the legitimacy of such a retelling of a biblical story? What is helpful about the imaginative retelling of the biblical story? What is problematic about the novel in light of your knowledge of the biblical text? Would you recommend the novel? Why, or why not? If you would recommend the book, to what audience?

C. 10% - *Statement and Annotated Bibliography*. Due Mar 30.

In preparation for the major assignment students will write a **one-paragraph statement** of their chosen topic, along with an **annotated bibliography** of at least 12 bibliographic items of secondary sources. These secondary sources do not include primary sources



(the Bible, Josephus, Qumran). By way of **supplement** to these 12 sources, a student may use a **maximum of 2** Internet resources. Students are responsible for the quality of these Internet resources.

Annotated Bibliography Instructions

- A) List the sources you select in proper bibliographic format as outlined in the MDC style guide (in alphabetical order by author's last name).
- B) After each item listed include an annotation.
- C) Annotations should be approximately 100-200 words explaining the author's thesis and what evidence or arguments used to support it. Annotations should show that you have read and understood the article or book and assess the relevance of the item for your own research for your major assignment.

D. 40% - Major Assignment. Due Apr 13

All major assignment papers must follow the MDC Style Guide and be double-spaced, with a 12 pt. Times New Roman font (footnotes should be single spaced and 10 pt font). Papers must include a bibliography with at least 12 items of secondary sources (commentaries, theological dictionaries, monographs, and include at least 2 academic articles) each drawn on and cited in the paper. Students may supplement these 12 sources with 2 internet resources. See "Paper Evaluation" below.

1. Biblical Studies Specialization:

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

a. *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 on which you wish to write). The topic of this research must be related to the book of Genesis and approved by the professor. See 'Paper Evaluation' below

b. *Exegetical Paper*: 12–15 pages.

In this option students will choose one passage from the book of Genesis and write an exegesis paper. The chosen text should be between 10-20 verses. This paper will:

- Take into account the genre of the chosen text
- Take into account the historical context of the chosen text
- Provide a close reading of the text, noting key words, phrases, and literary features
- Identify different interpretive options and consider the validity of each and argue for the chosen interpretation.
- Elucidate the theological message of the chosen text
- Explain the applicability of the text for today for believers



2. Church and Culture Specialization:

There are three (3) options for the major assignment for Church and Culture: Choose only one (1) of the following:

a. Research Paper (12-15 pages).

This is especially recommended if you are planning to go on to a research degree or write a thesis (or if you have a particular topic in mind that you wish to write on). The topic of this research must be approved by the professor.

b. The Ancestral/Patriarchal Story as History (12-15 pages).

This paper will assess the Ancestral biblical narratives of Gen 12–50 (or a chosen narrative from these chapters) and argue for an appropriate genre designation and consider to what extent they should be viewed as historical. The paper will interact with major scholarly discussion on the question and argue for its own critical position.

c. Genesis 22 in Contemporary Ethical Debates (12-15 pages)

This paper will consider the ethics of the Akedah story (Genesis 22) and assess its use in debates over the morality of the God of the Old Testament. The paper will interact with discussion by atheists and apologists on the question and argue for its own critical position concerning this issue.

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 Press Style Guide** <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 (April 16) 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 student will use inclusive language in all MDC assignments. When referencing biblical texts, students should preserve the integrity



of the original expressions and the names of God while using gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Biblical quotations should be taken from a gender-inclusive translation such as: NRSVue (2022), NIV (2011), CEB (2011), NLT (1996), or CEV (1995).

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), McMaster Divinity College (MDC) is committed to supporting a learning environment that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Students who require academic accommodations to participate fully in this course must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) (<https://sas.mcmaster.ca/>) of McMaster University. SAS will work directly with the MDC Registrar to ensure reasonably appropriate accommodations are in place. Students with accommodations must use the SAS portal to activate the accommodations relevant to each course at the start of each term in which they are enrolled. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. Accommodations are not retroactive and will not be applied to coursework or activities that have already concluded.

Contact Information:

- **Student Accessibility Services General Inquiries:** sas@mcmaster.ca
- **Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC):** sobotar@mcmaster.ca
- **MDC Registrar:** mdcreg@mcmaster.ca

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresenting the authorship or ownership of written work through deception or other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include copying or using unauthorized aids during tests or examinations; plagiarism, that is, presenting another person's (or generative AI's) words, ideas, data, or creative work as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement and citation; or submitting work for credit in more than one course without instructor permission.

A special note about Generative AI: Students are expected to do their own thinking and write their own papers and assignments. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work. The use of AI to produce content that is then submitted as though it were the student's own work constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of the Academic Honesty Policy. While AI tools may be used to correct errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI must not be used to translate assignments from a student's native language into English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in the English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.

Online Etiquette

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for both classmates and the instructor. This is even more important in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that people use to interpret communication are largely absent. Therefore, students should be especially mindful of how their words may be interpreted by those who read them. Course instructors will monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing



their views in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course.

Online Synchronous Course Policy

Technology Requirements

- A reliable internet connection (tested before class time),
- A device with audio and video capability
- The correct video conferencing platform installed (e.g., Zoom, Teams).

Webcam & Environment

- Students must keep their microphones muted except when speaking to minimize background noise.
- Students must keep their webcams on throughout the class session.
- Students must dress appropriately.
- Students must ensure their surroundings are free from unnecessary distractions. Professional virtual backgrounds are permitted.

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.



COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	Classroom Experiences	Biblical Texts	Assignment due
Jan 12	A. Introductions B. Class overview C. Introduction to Genesis 1	--	--
Jan 19	A. Interpreting Creation Narratives B. The Toledoth of Heaven and Earth	Gen 1–2	
Jan 26	A. Cain and Abel B. The Toledoth of Adam C. Interpreting the Genealogies	Gen 3–5	
Feb 2	A. The Sons of God and Daughters of <i>haadam</i> B. The Toledoth of Noah C. Understanding the Flood	Gen 6–9	
Feb 9	A. The Toledoth of Noah's sons B. The Tower of Babylon C. The Toledoth of Terah	Gen 10–11	*Walton Book Review due Feb 9
Feb 16	READING WEEK		--
Feb 23	A. The Call of Abraham B. Abraham and Lot C. Abraham and Melchizedek	Genesis 12–14	--
Mar 2	A. Abrahamic Covenant B. Hagar's Story C. Sodom and Gomorrah	Genesis 15–19	--
Mar 9	A. Birth of Isaac B. The Akedah C. Discussion of <i>His Only Son</i>	Gen 20–24 Watch the Movie <i>His Only Son</i> https://www.angel.com/watch/his-only-son	* Bible in fiction assignment due Mar 9
Mar 16	A. The Toledoth of Isaac B. Buying & Stealing the Blessing C. Stairway to Heaven	Gen 25–28	--
Mar 23	A. Jacob, Leah, & Rachel B. Wrestling God C. Reunion with Esau	Gen 29–33	
Mar 30	A. Rape of Dinah B. Promises to Jacob C. The Toledoth of Jacob	Gen 34–37	*Statement and Annotated Bibliography due Mar 30
Apr 6	A. Joseph's Story	Gen 38–50	
Apr 13	A. Genesis as a Whole		*Final Paper Due Apr 13



Major Assignment Evaluation

I. The next 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

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



Critical Book Review Guideline

I. The Book Review of John Walton *The Lost World of Genesis One* should roughly follow this format:

Summary of Content: 2-3 Pages

Critique of Content 1-2 Pages

Personal Reflection 1-2 Pages

Total=*no more* than 6 pages! Pages 7ff *will not* be read

The following items are rated according to the following scale:

1 = poor/inadequate; 2 = adequate; 3 = good/more than adequate; 4 = very good;
5 = excellent/superior.

Summary of Content (noted key concepts etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of Critique (evidence of critical thought)	1	2	3	4	5
Reflective Thought (theological depth, sensitivity)	1	2	3	4	5
Literary Style (awkward, wordy, repetitive)	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 checked

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



Bible In Fiction Review Guideline

I. The Critical Analysis of either the Beuchner or Diamant novels should roughly follow this format:

Overview of Novel's Content & Approach: 2-3 Pages

Critique of Novel's Content & Approach: : 1-2 Pages

Reasoned Recommendations & Conclusions: 1-2 Pages

Total=*no more* than 6 pages! Pages 7ff *will not* be read

The following items are rated according to the following scale:

1 = poor/inadequate; 2 = adequate; 3 = good/more than adequate; 4 = very good;
5 = excellent/superior.

Summary of Content	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of Critique (evidence of critical thought)	1	2	3	4	5
Reflective Thought (theological depth, sensitivity)	1	2	3	4	5
Literary Style (awkward, wordy, repetitive)	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 checked

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



Selected Bibliography

- Alter, Robert, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.
- Athas, George. "Has Lot Lost the Plot? Detail Omission and a Reconsideration of Genesis 19." Pages in *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. Volume 16, Article 5 DOI:10.5508/jhs.2016.v16.a5 http://jhsonline.org/Articles/article_217.pdf
- Becking, Bob and Susanne Hennecke, *Out of Paradise: Eve and Adam and Their Interpreters*. Hebrew Bible Monographs 30. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011.
- Bird, Chad L. "Typological Interpretation within the Old Testament: Melchizedekian Typology." *Concordia Journal* 26 (2000): 36-52.
- Bird, Phyllis A. "'Male and Female He Created Them': Genesis 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," Pages 329-361 in *"I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood"*. Edited by Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph, *Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11*. London: T & T Clark, 2011.
- Enns, Peter, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012.
- Evans, Paul S. "Creation, Progress and Calling: Genesis 1-11 as Social Commentary." *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 13 (2011): 67-100.
- Gunkel, Hermann, *Genesis*. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. Mercer Library of Biblical Studies. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997.
- Hamilton, Victor P., *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Hamilton, Victor P., *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Heide, Martin. "The Domestication of the Camel." *Ugarit-Forschungen* 42 (2010): 331-382.
- Kapelrud, Arvid S. "Mythological Features in Genesis Chapter 1 and the Author's Intentions."



Vetus Testamentum 24 (1974): 178-186.

Kidner, Derek, *Genesis : An Introduction and Commentary*. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL.: Inter-Varsity, 1977.

Lambert, Wilfred G. "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," Pages 96-113 in "*I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood*". Edited by Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994.

Mann, Thomas W. . "'All the Families of the Earth': The Theological Unity of Genesis." *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 341-353.

Moberly, R. W. L., *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*. Old Testament Theology. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Pinnock, Clark H. "Climbing out of a Swamp: The Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts." *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 143-155.

Skinner, John, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*. Icc. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910.

Smith, Gary V. "Structure and Purpose in Genesis 1-11." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 307-319.

Trible, Phyllis and Valparaiso University., *Genesis 22 : The Sacrifice of Sarah*. Gross Memorial Lecture ; 1989. Valparaiso, IN: Valparaiso University Press, 1990.

Tsumura, David Toshio, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*. JSOTSup, 83. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989.

Tsumura, David Toshio. "Genesis and Ancient near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," Pages 27-57 in "*I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood*". Edited by Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994.

Waltke, Bruce K. and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

Walton, John H., *Genesis*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2001.

Walton, John H., *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Wenham, Gordon J., *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary 1. Dallas, TX.: Word, 1987.



Wenham, Gordon J. "Method in Pentateuchal Source Criticism." *Vetus Testamentum* 41 (1991): 84-109.

Wenham, Gordon J., *Genesis 16-50*. Word Biblical Commentary ; v. 2. Dallas, TX.: Word, 1994.

Wenham, Gordon J., *Rethinking Genesis 1-11: Gateway to the Bible*. The Didsbury Lectures 2013. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2015.

Worthing, Mark William. "The Length of a Year in the Patriarchal Narratives: A Proposal." *Lutheran Theological Journal* 33 (1999): 117-123.

Youngblood, Ronald F. "The Abrahamic Covenant: Conditional or Unconditional," Pages 31-46 in *Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J Schultz*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983.