

## COURSE SYLLABUS

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# The Pentateuch

Course Lecturer: R. Laird Harris, PhD  
Former Professor and Department Chair of Old Testament at  
Covenant Theological Seminary

### Course Description

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Understanding the Pentateuch is essential to understanding the Bible. In this course, learners will study the contents of the Pentateuch and consider the particular Pentateuchal problems of evolution and higher criticism in light of its archaeological background. The course explores such historic events as the Creation, the Flood, and the Exodus, and highlights the lives of the Patriarchs and Moses. Students will also examine the content, meaning, and applicability of the laws that form the foundation of Israel's theocracy.

### Course Objectives

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Upon completion of the course, you should be able to do the following:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the five books of Moses.
- Recognize the principles for interpreting those five books.
- Interpret Genesis 1-11 and offer arguments in defense of the biblical teaching against evolutionary claims.
- Articulate answers to higher critical attacks on the unity of the Pentateuch.
- Know the archaeological background of Pentateuchal history and show its bearing on the interpretation of the text.

### Course Lecturer

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*R. Laird Harris, PhD (1911-2008)*

**Education:**

- Dropsie University, PhD
- Westminster Theological Seminary, BTh and ThM
- University of Pennsylvania, MA
- University of Delaware, BS
- Washington University, graduate work

### **Teaching Career:**

- Adjunct professor and founding faculty member of the Old Testament Department, Knox Theological Seminary (1989-1990)
- Professor and Department Chair of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary (1956-1981)
- Academic Dean, Covenant Theological Seminary (1964-1971)
- Professor, Faith Theological Seminary (1937-1956)
- Instructor, Wheaton College Graduate School, University of Pennsylvania, and the Near East School of Archaeology and Bible in Jerusalem
- Visiting professor in many countries around the globe, including Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, and Singapore
- Lecturer at several universities and seminaries in the United States

### **Other Career Highlights:**

- Ordained in the Presbyterian Church of America
- Moderator of the 10th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (1982)
- Elected Chairman of the NIV Editorial Board, the Committee on Bible Translation that produced the *New International Version* (1970-1974)
- President of the Evangelical Theological Society (1961)
- Moderator of the Bible Presbyterian Synod (1956)
- Founding member of the Evangelical Theological Society (1949)

### **Publications:**

- Numerous books, including *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, *Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, and *Man—God’s Eternal Creation*
- Consulting editor and contributor to the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*

## **Recommended Reading**

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Though not required, you may choose to read the textbooks shown below to supplement your learning.

Due to the nature of publishing, books frequently go in and out of print. For your benefit, a list of several texts is provided. You are encouraged to acquire the texts that seem most appealing of those available. Currently, all the works listed below are in print, and most are available in paperback. The books can be acquired at any good Christian bookstore. If the texts you have selected are not in stock, the bookstore will normally order them for you. Books may also be borrowed from a local college or university library.

### **The Holy Bible:**

Each chapter of the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) should be read at least twice. Each reading should be completed in a different modern translation, preferably King James Version, New King James Version, New American Standard, or the New International Version.

### **Biblical Texts:**

Wolf, Herbert. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991. (preferred if available)

Archer, Gleason L., Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Revised and expanded. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

Harrison, Ronald K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969 (paperback), Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004 (hardback).

### **Historical Textbooks:**

Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997. (preferred if available)

Wood, Leon. *A Survey of Israel's History*. Revised by David O'Brien. Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1970, 1986.

Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. 4th ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. (While this work does not reflect the views of the author of the course, it is widely available.)

### **Topical Textbooks:**

Blocher, H. *In the Beginning*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

A definitive work of exegesis on the opening chapters of Genesis by a Reformed theologian. A literary interpretation of Genesis 1 that takes the sting out of what are commonly construed to be internal textual contradictions as well as presumed contradictions of Scripture and science.

Denton, Michael. *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*. Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1996.

The author is an agnostic, anti-evolutionist who unleashes a scathing scientific attack against the theory of evolution. Recommended for someone with a scientific background.

Hummel, C. *The Galileo Connection*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.

A history of the relationship between science and Christianity, focusing on the impact of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton. Good introduction to an historical-artistic approach to interpreting Genesis.

Johnson, Phillip E. *Darwin on Trial*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993.

This work presents an excellent critique of the philosophical underpinnings of Darwinism.

Livingston, G. Herbert. *The Pentateuch and Its Cultural Environment*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974, 1987.

This book provides a broad introduction to the Pentateuch within its ancient, near-eastern cultural and literary context.

Moreland, J. P. *Christianity and the Nature of Science: A Philosophical Investigation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.

The author rejects the notion that science is a matter of rational analysis and Christianity a matter of faith. He maintains that scientific truth and Christianity are not incompatible.

Morris, Henry M. *Scientific Creationism*. San Diego: Creation Life Publishers, 1974.

This work was designed to be used as a classroom textbook for students to be exposed to the scientific creationism perspective.

Numbers, Ronald L. *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism*. 2nd ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

The author of this work is an admitted agnostic who disagrees with creationism yet has done an excellent job of tracing the historical development within the creation science movement. This book should only be read by a serious student who has knowledge of modern evangelical history.

Sailhamer, John H. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

This work provides an excellent introduction and analysis of the texts of the Pentateuch.

Whitcomb, John C. and Henry M. Morris. *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

This work is the classic treatment of many scientific and theological problems from a conservative, evangelical perspective.

Wonderley, D. E. *Neglect of Geological Data: Sedimentary Strata Compared with Young-Earth Creationist Writings*. Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1987.

Point by point presents data that young earth creationists have either neglected or ignored in their literature. Only for the serious student.

Youngblood, Ronald F., ed. *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000.

This book poses questions concerning scientific matters in Genesis and then presents opposing answers by different authors.

## Course Methods

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The lecture content for each lesson is provided in two easy-to-use formats: audio and PDF text (if available). Students can choose the medium (or combination of media) that most closely aligns with their individual learning styles.

## Course Assessment and Requirements

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To earn a Certificate of Completion, you must complete the course requirements. Course requirements include:

1. Listening to all 24 audio lectures.
2. Completing a final self-assessment form in which you will reflect on the content in the course and evaluate your life in light of what you have learned. The specifics of this assessment are provided in the course materials.

Course requirements noted in this syllabus will be validated before a Certificate of Completion is awarded to any student.