



## **Torah: God's First Words**

BIBL 211 / 511 - 3 Credits

Spring Semester: 15 March - 26 June 2026

Jerusalem Seminary (55 Prophets Street, Jerusalem) and  
[jerusalemseminary.populiweb.com](http://jerusalemseminary.populiweb.com)

**INSTRUCTOR:** Dr. Baruch B. Kvasnica ([bkvasnica@jerusalemseminary.org](mailto:bkvasnica@jerusalemseminary.org))

**MEETING TIMES:** (online or in person)

- 12 live two hour sessions on Tuesdays, choose:
  - **either:** 12:00-14:00 (Israel Time) online
  - **or** 17:00-19:00 (Israel Time) in person and online
- The live sessions will be accompanied by additional video lectures, audio recordings, and readings.

**NOTE:** JS course times are set according to the time in Israel, where JS is located. Israel will observe Daylight Saving Time on 27 March. Please take note of how this impacts the timing of class sessions for you.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides an in-depth exploration of the Torah/Pentateuch that Jesus read, the foundational text of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and the foundation of Jewish and Christian spiritual life. Special attention will be given to the rich theological themes, literary structures, enlightening historical context, and the enduring significance of God's first words. The course will examine how the Torah functions within the canon of Scripture, its role in shaping Jewish and Christian identity, and its ongoing relevance to Messianic Jewish and Christian belief and practice.

**CREDIT HOURS:** 3; **OFFICE HOURS:** upon request, in person at JS or online via Meet.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO JS' CURRICULUM**

This is a foundational class, as it introduces key biblical and theological matters central to Jerusalem Seminary. It is a core course for graduate programs and certificate tracks.

### **RELEVANCE**

The Torah/Pentateuch is the core of the Tanakh which contains the foundational narratives of God and humanity, most pointedly with the people of Israel. The Torah/Pentateuch is central to the development of Jewish thought, life and traditions and serves as the scriptural and theological foundation of Christianity. Therefore, understanding the Torah and its interpretation is essential for any student of the Bible. Similarly important is both Israel's and the Nations' covenantal role and responsibility as described within the canonical narrative. This course responds to the need for individual and communal understanding of the Torah/Pentateuch, especially as the foundational witness to the relationship between God and Israel as well as the Nations. In order to address this need, we study core texts from the Torah/Pentateuch to engage the historic, salvific and tumultuous relationships in conversation with ancient Jewish and Christian interpretative traditions in order to better know God, to "hearken and to do" (Exodus 24:7) and be faithful followers of Yeshua the Messiah.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Better appreciate the majestic and infinite character of God and God's central role in history.
2. Explain the theological importance of God's covenant with Israel and the Nations that is woven into the Torah and the broader canonical narrative.
3. Develop one's ability to engage the historical and cultural context of the Ancient Near East in which the Torah was written in order to deepen one's understanding and interpretation of the Tanakh.
4. Develop skills in interpreting the Torah through traditional exegetical and hermeneutical methods.
5. Engage and articulate central theological and ethical themes found in the Torah, such as God's presence, covenant, law, love, creation, sin, grace, repentance, redemption, and holiness.
6. Discuss how the Torah informs Christian/Messianic faith and practice.

## **PREREQUISITE**

There are no prerequisites for this course, but basic familiarity with Hebrew is helpful.

## **THREE REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

1. *The Holy Bible*. Recommended translations: NASB, NKJV, TLV (Tree of Life Version), New English Translation (NET), Complete Jewish Bible (CJB), JPS (Old and New).
2. *The Steinsaltz Humash: Hebrew and English Translation and Commentary on the Torah, Second Edition*. Commentary by Adin Steinsaltz; Koren, 2019.

If the Steinsaltz Humash is not available to you, other options could include one of the following “Five Books of Moses with Commentary” called a “Chumash”:

- *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*. Edited by David L. Lieber, Jules Harlow et al. Jewish Publication Society, 2001.
- *The Stone Chumash: Hebrew and English Edition - The Torah: Haftaros and Five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*. Edited by Nosson Scherman, Meir Zlotowitz, et al., Mesorah/ Artscroll, 1993.
- *The Koren Shalem Humash: Hebrew and English Edition of the Torah*. Translation and Commentary by Jonathan Sacks. Koren, 2025.

3. *Regions on the Run: Introductory Map Studies in the Land of the Bible*, by James Monson and Steven P. Lancaster. Biblical Backgrounds, 2022. [www.biblicalbackgrounds.com](http://www.biblicalbackgrounds.com)

**or**

*Satellite Bible Atlas*, by William Schlegel, [www.bibleplaces.com/satellite-bible-atlas-schlegel/](http://www.bibleplaces.com/satellite-bible-atlas-schlegel/)

## REQUIRED READING

Please read the entire Torah/Pentateuch in the weeks prior to the start of the class (17 March 2026) or along with the class so that the entire Torah/Pentateuch will have been read by 9 June 2026. The reading should be preferably done from *The Steinsaltz Humash* textbook. While the weekly reading assignments sound tremendous, every other page is mainly in Hebrew and so the amount of reading is reduced by about 40%. For example the reading assignment for Week 1 is: “Genesis 1–11 and Commentary in the Steinsaltz Humash (pp. 4–62)” but this is closer to 35 pages while Week 2 is pp. 62–279, but is closer to 110 actual pages of reading.

## HIGHLY RECOMMENDED READING

While not required textbooks, the following works are very useful for background and orientation to the Torah/Pentateuch:

- Wenham, Gordon J., *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch*. IVP Academic, 2016. (The 2003 edition is fine.)
- *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Edited by John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas. IVP, 2012. Or J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays eds. *Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, 2020.

And two more wonderfully written and devotionally oriented books:

- Meyer, F.B., *The Five Books of Moses: A Devotional Commentary on each Chapter from Genesis, Leviticus, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*. Wipf & Stock, 2016 (1955). An old but beautiful devotional commentary on the Pentateuch

- Tverberg, Lois. *Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus: How a Jewish Perspective Can Transform Your Understanding*. Baker, 2017. Engagingly written and articulates a number of the emphases of this course.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDED READING

- Kaiser, Jr. Walter C. *The Old Testament Really Matters: A Call for Believers to Read the Bible of Jesus and the Early Church*. Lampion House, 2022.
- Koren *Tanakh of the Land of Israel - Humash Set, 5 Volumes* (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Edited by David Arnovitz and Jeremiah Unterman. Koren, 2020-2024.
- Kugel, James L., *The Bible As It Was*. Harvard, 1998.
- Postell, Seth D., *The Art of Narrative Analogy: Identifying and Interpreting Parallel Passages in the Bible*. Baker Academic, 2025.
- Sailhamer, John H., *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*. Zondervan Academic, 1995.
- Sailhamer, John H., Walter C. Kaiser Jr., and Richard Hess (eds.) *Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 1: Genesis-Leviticus*.
- Vogt, Peter, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*. Kregel 2009.
- Wolf, Herbert, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch*. Moody, 1991, reprinted 2007.

Additional bibliography and optional readings will be provided by the instructor.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING (FOR CREDIT)

- **Attendance (25%)** Attend the 12 live lectures. View/listen to supplemental lecture materials.
- **Weekly Reflection Essay and Forum Participation (25%)**: Write a short 200-300 word reflection essay as an assignment after each week's lecture. This assignment should be done before next week's lecture. Interact with the Forum at least once each week.
- **Exegetical Essay and Presentation (25%)**: Write a 6-8 page paper analyzing a selected passage from the Torah using historical, literary, contextual (realia, geographical, archaeological), theological and reception-history methods. Submit the paper and a one page outline in Populi by Monday 27 April. Give a short presentation (5-7 minutes) of your essay, using the one page outline, on the last day of the class, June 23.
- **Final Synthesis Essay (25%)**: Write a 5-7 page theological reflection on how the Torah/Pentateuch informs Messianic/Christian faith and practice. Submit in Populi by Monday 15 June.

- **Grading:** 90-100 A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C, 60-69 D and under 60 is no credit.

#### **COURSE EXPECTATIONS (FOR AUDIT):**

- Attend the live Lectures if possible.
- Read, View or Listen to Course Materials on the course site.
- Complete weekly quizzes if time allows.
- Write reflection essays if desired.

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

The Torah is not merely an ancient document; it is the foundation of God's revelation, shaping the story of redemption of the Jewish people that culminates in the Messiah and the redemption of all humanity. This course invites students to engage deeply with "God's First Words" and discern their ongoing significance for faith and ministry.