

Introduction:

Before the Piedmont Project I had only occasionally incorporated issues concerning the environment into my class lectures in OT501-502, the large intro sequence required for all M.Div. first year students – for instance, in a discussion on the role of the environment as crucial in the plot development of a book like Jonah. In recent years, however, I had developed a three-session talk on the role/theme/issue of the land across the Old Testament canon. The Piedmont Project has helped me see how important it is for me to inject the insights I gathered from the Project and from my three-session talk throughout the entirety of the OT intro course. Indeed, for some time now I have been fishing around for a “master problem” that would provide the entirety of the year-long course with an interpretive crux that would, among other things, give students a sense of the importance of the biblical data for contemporary concerns. I believe that I have found that in the issue of sustainability and the triple-bottom line, to which the study of religion and sacred texts certainly contributes (in the societal segment and in the moral rootedness of the problem[s] and its solution[s]).

For further specifics, see the prefatory notes that follow and the changes throughout the syllabus.

Prefatory Notes:

1. The following is a much-abbreviated version of my old (2002) syllabus because the new version (2009) cannot be finalized (due to TA meetings, etc.) until after the Piedmont deadline.
2. Nevertheless, the new elements from the Piedmont project are included and highlighted in green. I have often added a comment to these new elements in order to specify their content or significance.
3. In the main, five major changes are reflected:
 - a. Inclusion of a new required textbook explicitly devoted to land and sustainability issues in the Bible and the contemporary context: Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (foreword by Wendell Berry; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009);
 - b. Inclusion of two recommended textbooks devoted to the land theme in the Old Testament (Brueggemann, *The Land*; and Habel, *The Land Is Mine*);
 - c. Requirement of a critical review on a book about land issues in the Old Testament;
 - d. Insertion of no less than 10 excurses (approximately 20-minute long lecture segments) devoted to the land theme across the two semesters – the majority of these (8) are in the Fall;
 - e. Making the land issue a consistently-engaged issue throughout the Fall semester (I expect this to continue in Spring) as a kind of “master interpretive problem” for the students to consider and work on throughout the year-long course.

OT 501 000 Interpretation of the Old Testament I

Fall 2002
Wed/Fri 8:00-9:20am
Bishops Hall 311

Professor: B. A. Strawn

“To underestimate the intellectual capacity of the clergy is a far more grievous fault than to set the standard too high.”¹

1. Course Description

An introduction to (1) the literature of the Old Testament (OT; also known as the Hebrew Bible) in its socio-historical, literary, and theological contexts; and (2) critical study of the OT. This is the first half of a year long, two part course. Part I is devoted to the Torah/Pentateuch, the Former Prophets, and a few books belonging to the Writings. The remainder of the OT will be covered in Part II.

2. Course Objectives

After successfully completing this course, the student will have:

- achieved a working knowledge of the *historical and cultural context* that lies behind and is often formative for the OT – this includes aspects of the history, culture, and literature of the ancient Near East and ancient Israel/Palestine;
- become familiar with the *content of the books and traditions* of the OT – including, especially, their respective *theologies*;
- been exposed to and be able to expound many of the *interpretive methodologies* that are available to the interpreter of the OT;
- appreciated the unique *homiletical and theological resources* contained in the witness of the OT; and
- begun to cultivate the practice of *interpretation and critical assessment* of the OT and materials relating thereto.

3. Textbooks

Required:

- *Main text:* The OT. For the purposes of this course, the following version will be used: *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (NRSV) (ed. W. Meeks et al.; New York: HarperCollins, 1993). Citations in written work *must* follow the NRSV.
- Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999). [ATIOT]
- Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). [OHBW]
- Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002). [RANE]
- Susan E. Gillingham, *One Bible, Many Voices: Different Approaches to Biblical*

¹Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Books for Pastor and Teacher* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 12.

Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). [Gillingham]

- Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Recommended/Collateral: [For Reference]

- David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). [EDB]
- Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). [LBI]
- Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (2d ed., *Overtures to Biblical Theology*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).
- Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (*Overtures to Biblical Theology*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:08 PM

Comment: After the Piedmont Project, I decided to add a textbook dealing with land to the list. Moreover, I decided to make it a *required* textbook. The schedule below shows assignments from Davis' book throughout the year-long sequence.

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 2:33 PM

Comment: Brueggemann's book on land in the Old Testament is a classic. Habel updates it in some ways. Since both are possible books for the critical book review, I decided to add them to the recommended list.

4. Requirements and Grading

- *Class Preparation, Attendance, and Participation*
 - (a) *Attendance:* Attendance is expected. As a rule, more than three (3) unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. Please note that it is the student's responsibility to obtain notes, etc., from other students for any missed classes. The professor will not distribute lectures. Lectures will be taped and are available for purchase in the Candler Media Center.
 - (b) *Reading:* All readings are required, save those labeled "recommended." Assigned reading is best completed by the day listed.
 - (c) *Participation:* Participation will be evaluated in various ways, especially in terms of the conversations around the various focus texts for some of the class sessions and in LearnLink discussions.
- *Student Survey*

Fill out the attached sheet and turn it in on **Fri Sept 6**.
- *Critical Book Review* (25%)

4-6 pages (i.e., 1000-1500 words) in length, typed, double-spaced, 12 pt font, with 1-inch margins on all sides, this paper is due on **Fri Dec 6**. Note further discussion of this assignment below.
- *Celebrations of Learning* (75%)

There will be three such celebrations (often called, erroneously, examinations): The first (**Wed Oct 9**; 20%), second (**Fri Nov 8**; 20%), and third/last (a.k.a.: the final "quiz"; **Tues Dec 17**; 35%).
- *Other Factors*

Additionally, other factors (including attendance, preparation, and participation) may and will (if necessary) figure into the final grade calculation.

5. The Critical Book Review

- *Books*

Students will select *one* of the following volumes to review:

 1. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (required textbook)
 2. Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (2d ed.; *Overtures to Biblical Theology*; Minneapolis;

Fortress, 2002).

3. Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995)

• *Format/Style*

1. The review should be 4-6 pages (i.e., 1000-1500 words) in length, typed, double-spaced, 12 pt font, with 1-inch margins on all sides. Page/word limits should be strictly observed.
2. The first part of the review should be the bibliographical information of the book under review itself. E.g.:
John D. Currid, *Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 269 pages.
3. When citing the book under review, no footnote is necessary. Indicate the citation with quotation marks (“ ”) and then use a parenthetical reference to the page number. E.g.:
Yet not all readers will concur with Currid’s assessment that “the Hebrew conception of reality conflicted with ancient Near Eastern pagan cosmologies” (49) – at least not completely.
If a volume other than the one under review is cited, it should be done so in traditional fashion with a footnote.
4. Similarly, no bibliography is necessary unless a volume other than the one under review is cited.
5. Form and style for footnotes and bibliographies, if they are used, *must* follow Chicago style. See Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (6th ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) or *The Chicago Manual of Style* (14th ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
6. The first page of the review should *not* include the student’s name. Instead, the last page of the review should be an additional, blank page with the only thing on it being the student’s ID number and box number.
7. The use of inclusive language is required.
8. Final advice: Proofread, proofread, proofread!

• *Method/Content*

1. The review should summarize the author’s central theses, demonstrate the author’s approach to the subject matter, and critically engage/critique the author’s analysis (e.g., methodologically; in light of the primary materials; the book’s logic, argument, evidence, etc.).
2. Those who are unfamiliar with book reviews and the book review genre are advised to read some reviews in journals such as the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *Interpretation*, *Theology Today*, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, etc.
3. You may also benefit from reading the document “How to Write a Book Review” (available on reserve). (Note: as stated there, the syllabus is the ruling document for any discrepancy.)
4. Lastly, note the book by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (rev. and updated ed.; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), which may be of use to you in the practice of reading.

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:08 PM

Comment: After the Piedmont Project, I decided to devote the book review completely to volumes having to do with land, environment and, thus, sustainability. It is possible that the book review will have to be on either Brueggemann or Habel, with Davis being required reading throughout (see below). If so, this means that students will read at least two books devoted to these issues throughout the course of the year.

- *Grading*

1. Late papers will be docked a full letter-grade per day late (e.g., 1 day late = A paper goes to B, C paper goes to D; 2 days late = A paper goes to C, C paper goes to F). Late papers are not encouraged.
2. Failure to follow format/style instructions (see above) will result in grade reductions. The same is true for typographical and grammatical errors.
3. Ideally, a competent book review will be a synthesis of content summary and critical analysis thereof. One should err (if one must!) on the latter side, rather than the former.
4. Pay attention to your argument and to your epistemological assumptions. This is true, especially, of your own critical assessment of the work, which should be based on your knowledge and the materials available to you, not simply on your personal opinion or “hunch.”

7. Tentative Schedule²

1. Wed Sept 4 *Starting Points for OT501: Syllabus, Introduction, Orientation*
Excursus on Land, Part 1: Introducing the Land Theme in the OT
 Familiarize yourself with the front matter of the textbooks.
 Begin Gillingham reading for Sessions 2 and 3.
Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 1-41
2. Fri Sept 6 *The Old Testament/Hebrew Bible: What Is It and Why Study It?*
 ATIOT 17-34
 Gillingham 9-26
 Note the chronological charts in OHBW 447-52 and LBI xxiii
Assignment due: Student Survey
3. Wed Sept 11 *Interpretive Contexts, Options, and Methods: From Here to There and Back Again, Part I*
 Gillingham 46-54, 61-71, 72-93, 100-13, 117-43, 144-53, 157-70
Recommended: LBI 1-19
4. Fri Sept 13 *Interpretive Contexts, Options, and Methods: From Here to There and Back Again, Part II*
 Gillingham 171-86
5. Wed Sept 18 *From Mosaic to Mosaic: The Formation of the Pentateuch*
6. Fri Sept 20 *In the Beginning, Part I: Creation and “Fall”*
Excursus on Land, Part 2: Land in Gen 1-3
 Genesis 1-3
 ATIOT 35-57
 OHBW 3-24

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:09 PM

Comment: The first of 8 new lecture parts in the Fall semester that are devoted to the land motif at certain key junctures.

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:09 PM

Comment: Required reading from the new required textbook on land and sustainability issues.

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:10 PM

Comment: This first excursus will take up the issue of creation and the correlation of Genesis chap. 1 (rule and subdue) with chaps. 2-3 (serve and preserve) as well as Lynn White’s view that the Bible lays at the root of our present ecological crisis.

²Dates in **bold** indicate that an assignment is due on that day.

RANE ##1-4, 6, 8-11
Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, 42-65
Focus Text: Genesis 1:26-28

7. Wed Sept 25 *In the Beginning, Part II: The Primeval History*
Genesis 4-11
ATIOT 57-66
RANE #5, 12, 13, 45
Focus Text: Genesis 11:1-9

8. Fri Sept 27 *Promise and Threats, Part I: The Abraham Cycle*
Excursus on Land, Part 3: Land Promised
Genesis 12-25:18
ATIOT 67-84
OHBW 25-57
RANE ##14-16, 20
Focus Text: Genesis 12:1-4
Recommended: LBI 36-59

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:11 PM
Comment: Critical reflection on the ancestral promises of land and progeny.

9. Wed Oct 2 *Promise and Threats, Part II: The Jacob Cycle and Joseph Novella*
Genesis 25:19-50
ATIOT 84-98
Focus Text: Genesis 50:15-21

10. Fri Oct 4 *The Paradigmatic Experience: The Exodus from Egypt*
Excursus on Land, Part 4: Land Delayed
Exodus 1-18
ATIOT 99-130
OHBW 58-89
RANE ##17, 50
Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, 66-79
Focus Texts: Exodus 2:23-25 and 3:1-15

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:12 PM
Comment: Consideration of the long delay in land acquisition that marks the early and later "periods" of Israel's story. Also: Life in the wilderness land.

11. Wed Oct 9 *First Celebration of Learning*
(covers sessions 1-10)

12. Fri Oct 11 *Covenant and Law*
Exodus 19-40
ATIOT 131-35, 150-52, 157-67
RANE #21-33
Focus Texts: Exodus 19:1-6 and 20:1-17
Recommended: LBI 59-61

13. Wed Oct 16 *The Politics of Holiness: The Book of Leviticus*
Leviticus 1-27
ATIOT 135-39, 152-53

EDB 805-807
RANE ##34-38, 58
Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, 80-100
Focus Text: Leviticus 19
Recommended: LBI 353-63; G. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings," *ABD* 5:870-86.

14. Fri Oct 18 *In the Wilderness: The Book of Numbers*
Numbers 1-36
ATIOT 139-44, 153-55
EDB 974-75
RANE #91
Focus Text: Numbers 13:1-14:35

15. Wed Oct 23 *Hinge and Center: The Book of Deuteronomy*
Excursus on Land, Part 5: Land Preached
Deuteronomy 1-34
ATIOT 144-50, 155-57, 167-74
Focus Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:12 PM
Comment: Discussion of Deuteronomy's view of the land as both gift and task but also temptation to be squandered and wasted.

16. Fri Oct 25 *Making Sense of God's Ways: The Deuteronomistic History*
EDB 341-42
RANE ##46-49

17. Wed Oct 30 *Conquest(s) and Settlement(s)*
Excursus on Land, Part 6: Land Acquired
Joshua 1-24, Judges 1
ATIOT 175-204
OHBW 90-131
RANE ##39, 55
Davis, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, 101-19
Focus Text: Joshua 2:1-22
Recommended: LBI 21-35, 85-129

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:13 PM
Comment: The complexities surrounding land acquisition ideology, esp. when it becomes land acquisition policy.

18. Fri Nov 1 *The Tribal "League"*
Judges 2-21
ATIOT 204-13
OHBW 132-64
RANE ##7, 19
Focus Text: Judges 19:1-30
Recommended: LBI 319-53

19. Wed Nov 6 *The United Kingdom, Part I: Samuel-Saul-David*
1 Samuel 1-31
ATIOT 215-34
OHBW 165-205

RANE ##59
Focus Text: 1 Samuel 8:1-22 and 1 Samuel 15:1-35
Recommended: LBI 201-23

20. Fri Nov 8 *Second Celebration of Learning*
(covers sessions 12-19)

21. Wed Nov 13 *The United Kingdom, Part II: David to Solomon*
2 Samuel 1-24
ATIOT 235-45
Focus Text: 2 Samuel 7:1-29
Recommended: LBI 223-58

22. Fri Nov 15 *End of the Union and Civil War: The Divided Kingdom(s) and the End of the North (722)*

Excursus on Land, Part 7: Land (Mis)managed

1 Kings 1-12, 2 Kings 8-17; skim 1 Kings 13-2 Kings 7 and Micah
ATIOT 245-81
OHBW 206-69
RANE ##40-43, 51, 54, 60-62
Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 120-38
Focus Texts: 1 Kings 11:1-13; 2 Kings 17:7-23

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:13 PM
Comment: Reflection on how the OT portrays the monarchy (esp.) as largely culpable of mismanaging the gift of land, which leads inevitably – in their view – to punishment, exile, and land-loss.

23. Wed Nov 20 *Nadir as Zenith: 587 and Exile*

Excursus on Land, Part 8: Land Lost

2 Kings 18-25, Psalm 137, Lamentations, Obadiah (skim Isaiah 40-43)
ATIOT 283-92, 319-71
OHBW 269-75
RANE ## 56-57, 90
Focus Texts: 2 Kings 22:1-20; Psalm 137; Isaiah 40:27-31

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:14 PM
Comment: Land-loss as sign of punishment and also as care for land (restoring the land's Sabbath years, e.g.). Return of the trope of landlessness.

24. Fri Nov 22 *No Class: AAR/SBL Meeting*

25. Wed Nov 27 *No Class: AAR/SBL Meeting*

26. Fri Nov 29 *No Class: Thanksgiving Break*

27. Wed Dec 4A *New Start: Return and Restoration*
2 Chronicles 36, Ezra, Nehemiah (peruse Isaiah 60-63, Haggai, or Malachi)
ATIOT 417-28
OHBW 275-316
RANE #44
Focus Text: Ezra 9:1-10:44; Nehemiah 13:23-29

28. Fri Dec 6 *Telling It All Over Again: The Books of Chronicles*

1-2 Chronicles
 ATIOT 428-29
 EDB 241-44
 Focus Text: 1 Chronicles 21:1-13 (cf. 2 Samuel 24:1-14)
Assignment due: Critical Book Review

29. Tues Dec 17 *Third (and Last) Celebration of Learning*
 (covers sessions 1-28, with special emphasis on sessions 21-28)

- Note: the second half of the course will include at least two more excursions concerned with land:
 - Excursus on Land, Part 9: Land Re-Gifted and Transformed (Second Isaiah)
 - Excursus on Land, Part 10: Land Re-Gifted and Transformed (Ezekiel 40-48)
 - (assigned at this same time will be Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 155-78)
 - and possibly a third: Excursus on Land, Part 11: Jonah and the Environment.
- Additionally, Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 139-54 will be assigned during the lectures on Wisdom literature.
- Finally, Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 179-80, will be assigned on one of the final lectures in the concluding unit that wraps up the whole year-long course, allowing reflection on the land theme across a full year's worth of work.

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:15 PM
Comment: Both of these excursions demonstrate that exilic visions of restoration include the land as re-given/gifted and as transformed in key ways that will prevent future mismanagement a la the monarchy.

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 4:16 PM
Comment: The book of Jonah quite simply cannot "take place" without the characterization and plot advancement provided by key elements of the environment. The story becomes a microcosm of the importance of the non-human world, even and esp. in human dramas.

9. Bibliography/Reserve List

The list has been kept to a minimum. Note that required and recommended textbooks are on reserve. Items marked with an asterisk (*) are advanced treatments for further study; those marked with a plus (+) are eligible for the critical book review. Students are reminded to not write in library books.

Arnold and Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East*.
 *Barton, J., *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, rev. and enlarged ed.
 Birch, B. C., W. Brueggemann, T. E. Fretheim, and D. L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*.
 Brueggemann, W., *The Land*.
 *Childs, B. S., *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*.
 Coogan, ed., *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*.
 +Felder, C. H., *Troubling Biblical Waters*.
 Freedman, D. N., et al., eds., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*.
 Gillingham, S. E., *One Bible, Many Voices: Different Approaches to Biblical Studies*.
 +González, J. L. *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes*.
 *Gottwald, N. K., *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*.
 Habel, N. C., *The Land Is Mine*.
 _____, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* (The Earth Bible 1) – note esp. the six ecojustic principles on p. 24 and Habel's essay, "Introducing the Earth Bible," pp. 25-37, as well as "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," by the Earth Bible Team (pp. 38-53).
 _____, ed., other vols. in the Earth Bible series.

Brent A. Strawn 5/31/09 2:40 PM
Comment: The Earth Bible readings are new to the course bibliography. The ones mentioned here will be drawn upon and discussed in class.

Holladay, W. L., *Long Ago God Spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today*.
King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*.
+Levenson, J. D., *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and
Christians in Biblical Studies*.
+Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*.
Strawn, B. A., "How to Write a Book Review."
+Trible, P., *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*.