**Exploring the Old Testament**

**A Biblical Survey[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**for members and friends of First Presbyterian Church of Tallahassee**

**September 22, 2021 – May 4, 2022**

**Wednesdays 5:45 – 6:45 p.m. on Zoom**

**Led by Rev. Margaret Orr Fox**

“The church is in the world only with a book in its hands” – Karl Barth

Purpose:

* Guided reading of the Old Testament over the course of an academic year
* Give participants a roadmap of biblical knowledge to explore the scriptures
* Reflect on how individual texts and the Bible as a whole impact our faith and life
* Learn how to view the Bible historically, as literature, and as sacred scripture

Commitment:

* Attendance at weekly classes, in-person or online, as regularly as possible
* Two hours per week of reading texts prior to the sessions, averaging 5-7 chapters a day
* Participation in discussions
* Openness to different interpretations presented in class and shared by others

Eligibility

* Members, friends, and visitors of First Presbyterian Church
* People of any faith tradition or none
* No prior biblical knowledge assumed/required: “It is everyone’s desire to master the Bible… [But] as genuine witnesses we can only become, be, and remain students here. We are in a school from which we shall not some day be graduated and become masters ourselves. On the contrary, the school in which we are enrolled will make us increasingly students.” --Barth.

Weekly Format

* Brief lecture presentation of overall themes
* “Whole group” questions and discussion around focus texts
* Reflection in small groups on faith and life issues arising from the weekly texts

Bible

* Study Bible in the NRSV translation (examples: New Oxford Annotated Bible, HarperCollins Study Bible, New Interpreter’s Study Bible)
* Each participant must have his/her own Bible and bring it to class

Registration

* Please sign up by Sunday, Sept. 13 by emailing [margaret@oldfirstchurch.org](mailto:margaret@oldfirstchurch.org)
* You are welcome to “shop” the first class on Sept. 22 to decide if you’d like to participate

Class and reading schedule:

(Please have the week’s reading completed *prior* to class—you and your classmates will get more out of it that way! If you don’t complete them all, come anyway. I suggest setting aside a regular time to read each day, and dividing the chapters up so that you read 5-6 days each week.) Most weeks there will be a “Focus Text” on a central theme which we’ll discuss in detail, and a “B-side,” a selection of one of the more colorful passages of scripture.

Questions for reflection and note-taking:

* What strikes me as neat, profound, beautiful, wise, worthy of affirmation?
* When am I nodding my head and saying “That’s cool,” “Ah, I recognize that,” or “I didn’t know that was in the Bible.
* What is boring? What do I not understand? (Try a couple of times and move on.) Not everything in the Bible will speak to everyone all of the time.
* What seems to be missing? Where is there a gap in information that begs to be filled?
* What do I have trouble with? What offends me? What do I simply not believe in what I am reading?
* What do I want to make sure I bring up in the class?
* What memories or hopes is this reading evoking in me?

**Weekly Class Focus**

**September 22 Introduction**

What’s in the Bible and how do we read it?

Advance reading assignment: none

**Section I: Origins**

**September 29 Creation and Fall**

Advance reading assignment: Genesis 1-11

Focus text: Gen. 3 B-side: Gen. 9:18-28

**Section II: Land, Descendants, and Blessing**

**October 6 Covenant: the Jacob Cycle**

Advance reading assignment: Genesis 12:1-35:29

Focus text: Gen. 17 B-side: Gen. 31

**October 13 Egypt: The Joseph Cycle**

Advance reading assignment: Genesis 37:1-50:26

Focus text: Gen. 41 B-side: Gen 38

**Section III: Liberation**

**October 20 Exodus**

Advance reading assignment: Exodus 1-18

Focus text: Ex. 3 B-side: Ex. 4:24-26

**Section IV: Law**

**October 27 Books of the Law – Part 1**

Advance reading assignment:

Exodus 19-20 (Israel at Sinai)

Exodus 21:1-23:19 (laws concerning slaves, restitution, Sabbath, and feasts)

Exodus 24-27 (covenant ratification; the Ark of the covenant; the Tabernacle)

Exodus 31:18-32:35 (the Golden Calf)

Exodus 34:29-36:1 (New tablets; offerings for the Tabernacle)

Exodus 40 (the glory of the Lord)

Leviticus 1-5 (the Burnt offering; offerings of well-being; sin and guilt offerings)

Leviticus 6-7 (Ritual for offerings; the priests’ portion)

Leviticus 11 (Clean and unclean animals)

Leviticus 16-17:9 (Day of Atonement)

Leviticus 17:10-19:37 (sexual relations; the Law of Love)

Focus text: Ex. 20 B-side: Ex. 33

**November 3 Books of the Law – Part 2**

Advance reading assignment:

Numbers 1 (census of Israel)

Numbers 6 (Vows of the Nazirites)

Numbers 13:1-14:38 (spies to Canaan)

Numbers 18 (Priests and Levites)

Numbers 22:1-24:5 (Balak and Balaam)

Deuteronomy 4:44-5:33 (summary of law)

Deuteronomy 6-9 (what God requires)

Deuteronomy 12:29-13:18 (warning against idolatry)

Deuteronomy 14:22-15:23 (tithe; sabbatical year)

Deuteronomy 31-34 (death of Moses)

Focus text: Deut. 6 B-side: Num. 22

**Section V: Land**

**November 10 Joshua**

Advance reading assignment: Joshua 1-24; Judges 1:1-2:10

Focus text: Josh. 6 B-side: Josh. 2

**Section VI: Leadership**

**A: Tribal Leadership**

**November 17 Judges**

Advance reading assignment: Judges 2:11-21:25

Focus text: Judges 2:11-23 B-side: Judges 4

*The class will not meet November 24 for Thanksgiving*

**B: Monarchial Leadership**

**December 1 Ruth**

Advance reading assignment: Ruth 1-4

**December 8 Samuel**

Advance reading assignment: I Samuel 1-8, 12

Focus text: 1 Sam. 3 B-side: 1 Sam. 6

**December 15 Saul**

Advance reading assignment: I Samuel 9-11, 13-31; II Samuel 1

Focus text: 1 Sam. 9 B-side: 1 Sam. 24

*The class takes a break for the holidays and resumes January 12*

**January 12 David**

Advance reading assignment: II Samuel 2-24; I Kings 1:1-2:12

Focus text: 2 Sam. 7 B-side: 2 Sam. 11

**January 19 Solomon**

Advance reading assignment: I Kings 2-22

Focus text: 1 Kings 3 B-side: 1 Kings 11

**January 26 Divided Monarchy**

Advance reading assignment: II Kings 1-25

Focus text: 2 Kings 17 B-side: 2 Kings 2:23-25

**February 2 Ezra and Nehemiah**

Advance reading assignment: Ezra and Nehemiah

Focus text: Ezra 1 B-side: Ezra 3:8-13

**C: Prophetic Leadership**

**February 9 The Latter Prophets – Isaiah**

Advance reading assignment: Isaiah

1-7

9:1-7

11:2-10

28:1-30:17

40:1-11

42:1-9

45:1-8

49:1-7

50:4-11

52:13-53:12

55:1-13

61:1-11

65:17-25

Focus text: Is. 40:1-11 B-side: Is. 20

**February 16 The Latter Prophets – Jeremiah and Ezekiel**

Advance reading assignment:

Jeremiah 1-2, 8, 19, 24, 27, 30-33, 37-39

Lamentations 1:1-22, 3:11-24

Ezekiel 1-5, 8-11, 18, 24, 34, 37:1-14

Focus text: Jer. 1 B-side: Ezek. 24

**February 23 The Twelve – Amos/Hosea/Micah**

Advance reading assignment:

Amos 1-9

Hosea 1:1-3:5, 11

Micah 1-7

Focus text: Micah 6 B-side: Hosea 1

*The class will not meet March 2 – Ash Wednesday*

**Section VI: Hearts and Minds**

**March 9 Psalms**

Advance reading assignment: Psalms

History of Salvation: 78, 136

Prayer for help: 139

Lament as community: 90, 137

Lament as individual: 22, 42

Penitence/prayer of confession: 51

Community thanksgiving/creation: 65

Personal thanksgiving: 116

Praise of God: 24, 84

Wisdom and meditation: 1, 2, 49, 127, 133

Prayer for guidance: 121, 143

Trust and meditation: 23, 46

Forgiveness: 32, 39

Focus text: Ps. 73 B-side: Ps. 50

**March 16 Proverbs**

Advance reading assignment: Proverbs 1-31

Focus text: Prov. 6:6-10 B-side: Prov. 21:9

**March 23 Job**

Advance reading assignment: Job 1-42

Focus text: Job 1 B-side: Job 39

**March 30 Song of Songs**

Advance reading assignment: Song of Songs 1-8

**April 6 Ecclesiastes**

Advance reading assignment: Ecclesiastes 1-12

Focus text: Ecc. 3:1-8 B-side: Ecc. 9

*The class will not meet April 13 – Holy Week*

**April 20 Esther**

Advance reading assignment: Esther 1-10

**April 27 Daniel**

Advance reading assignment: Daniel 1-12

**May 4 Jonah, Hosea 11, and Old Testament Endings**

Advance reading assignment:

Jonah 1-4

Hosea 11:1-9

II Chronicles 35:20-36:23

Malachi 1-4

**A note on additional resources**

Your study Bible contains helpful introductions, footnotes, and other supplemental materials to help you interpret and understand the text.

Your main time and energy should go to *reading the assigned reading* leading up to each class, and I encourage you to do so thoughtfully, prayerfully, and creatively: taking notes, writing questions, engaging the text for its beauty and hope, arguing with it and expressing your questions and even anger when it is difficult and offensive.

You do *not* have to read the *footnotes, excurses, and introductions* to each book as you do this reading. While it will enrich your study, it may slow you down, therefore I encourage you to prioritize the text itself and read these helps only if you have time.

I *do* suggest consulting a map on a regular basis. Most study Bibles contain them—take some time to familiarize yourself with the apparatus. A helpful print resource is the Carta Bible Atlas by Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, or search online.

If you’d like an overview of each book before you read it, you might find The Bible Project to be a helpful resource. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/> A note about this resources: while it contains a very helpful structural outline of each book, it takes a decidedly Christo-centric reading of the Hebrew scriptures.

1. Syllabus heavily borrowed and moderately adapted from Rev. Larry Hayward, Westminster Presbyterian Church of Alexandria, VA. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)