

OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES FOR COUNSELING, FALL 2026

Stephen J. Smith, Ph.D. (ssmith@rts.edu)

WEDNESDAY 8am-11am

TA: HSeeley2598@students.rts.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION (According to the RTS Catalogue)

This course is designed to provide a basic introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). In this course, the Old Testament will be approached from a canonical, covenantal, redemptive- historical, and Christ-centered perspective with sensitivity to the original historical and literary context out of which it arose. This approach should provide students with the ability to contextualize the course material in a variety of personal and vocational contexts, but special attention will be given to the role of the Old Testament in Christian counseling.

COURSE OUTCOME GOALS:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Understand and articulate the major contours of the Old Testament's (Hebrew Bible) design and message from a Reformed, covenantal perspective.
2. Understand the basic contribution of each individual book in the Old Testament.
3. Understand and interact with some of the basic challenges related to the interpretation and application of the Old Testament to the Christian life, especially Christian Counseling.
4. Be familiar with quality, secondary sources that may be used for further research.

COURSE DETAILS

1. Grading Scale.

A (97-100) 4.00

A- (94-96) 3.66

B+ (91-93) 3.33

B (88-90) 3.00

B- (86-87) 2.66

C+ (83-85) 2.33

C (80-82) 2.00

C- (78-79) 1.66

D+ (75-77) 1.33

D (72-74) 1.00
D- (70-71) 0.66
F (below 70) 0.00
I (incomplete) –
W (withdraw) –
S (satisfactory) –
P (passing) –

2. *Attendance and Late work.* Students are required to both attend *and* participate in class. Failure to do either will result in a considerable negative impact on your final grade. The penalty for late work is one reduced letter grade per day. Please come to class prepared, i.e., have any assignments completed before class.

3. *Special Needs.* Students requiring special accommodations should contact the instructor at the beginning of the course.

4. *Disclaimer.* This syllabus is meant to reflect the learning objectives, format and other information necessary for students to appraise the course. But please note that I reserve the right to modify any portion of the syllabus as may become necessary.

5. I do not permit students to post class lectures, in part or in whole, to any social media platform, or to be recorded without my prior consent.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Textbooks

Required:

Van Pelt, Miles V., ed. *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.

A physical copy (i.e., non-electronic) of any standard translation of the Bible.

Recommended Resources:

Brisco, Thomas V. *Holman Bible Atlas: A Complete Guide to the Expansive Geography of Biblical History.* Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014.

Carson, D.A., R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, G.J. Wenham. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition.* Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1994.

Currid, John D. and David P. Barrett. *ESV Bible Atlas.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.

Hill, Andrew E. and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament, 3rd edition.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2009.

Roberts, Vaughn. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003.

Walton, John H., David W. Baker, and Daniel I. Block, eds. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Assignments

1. **Biblical Reading:** Students will read the entire Old Testament in a standard Bible translation. Each book must be completed prior to our class discussion of *the section within which it falls*. For example, Judges must be completed by Week 8 (i.e., by the beginning of class), the Major Prophets (Isa., Jer. Ezek.), by Week 10, etc. Students will give a reading report on the *total number of chapters* completed (see the course schedule below).

2. **Secondary Literature Reading:** Students will read *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*. Students will report on their final exam the total number of chapters completed.

3. **Bible Summaries:** Students will prepare succinct one-page summaries on **five** sections of the Hebrew Old Testament. These should include a brief introduction to the section as a whole, major themes for the section, a New Testament connection, and a brief reflection on how each section (in whole, or a specific part) might apply to counseling. These are due before class on respective days (see course schedule below).

- **Law** (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)
- **Former Prophets** (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings)
- **Latter Prophets** (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve)
- **Writings 1** (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Lam., Ecc.)
- **Writings 2** (Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1&2 Chronicles)

4. Paper

Therapy and worldview are integrally linked. More specifically, your views on the nature of reality (metaphysics), how we come to know truth (epistemology), and what is right and good (ethics) will inevitably shape how you understand clients, diagnose problems, what goals you pursue in therapy, what methods you employ (or reject), etc.

In other words, how you answer questions like the following will shape, indeed *determine*, the nature and practice of your counseling:

- Does God exist—and if so, can he be known? If so, how?
- Is life purposeful? If so, what is its purpose—and who defines it?
- What is the nature of reality? Is it only material? Who decides?
- What is the nature and purpose of humanity? Are humans basically good, or are they broken—even corrupted? What is the source and nature of this corruption?

- Are humans in need of restoration? How do you know, and what does it look like? Is it possible? Who makes it possible?
- Where is humanity going (i.e., to they have a telos or goal)?

The Bible offers a particular set of answers to these questions. These answers form what we might call a biblical worldview—and that worldview should undergird any faithful Christian engagement with the discipline and practice of therapy.

Using the Old Testament as your foundation, develop a biblical-theological framework for understanding:

1. Human flourishing as originally designed (Genesis 1–2 and elsewhere in the OT),
2. Human brokenness as a result of the fall (Genesis 3 and its aftermath), and
3. God’s restorative plan and purposes as revealed throughout the OT.

Once you have traced this biblical-theological trajectory, reflect on its implications for counseling / therapy. You are not developing a comprehensive counseling model. You are thinking through and articulating the foundational theological/philosophical convictions that will inform your therapeutic posture, method, and discernment by engaging with questions like: “What are the purposes or goals of therapy according to a biblical worldview?” and “How might these differ from and/or overlap with secular therapy purposes or goals?”

Assignment Parameters:

- **Length:** 5–7 pages, double spaced, Times New Roman, normal margins
- **Sources:** minimum of 8 academic sources.
- **Citation Style:** choose one and be consistent.
- **Due Date:** TBA

5. **Exam:** A final exam will be given. More information on the exam will be given in class.

COURSE SCHEDULE: TBA

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Old Testament Studies for Counseling (OT5500) Professor: Dr. Stephen J. Smith

Campus: Jackson

Date: Fall 2025

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes		Rubric	Mini-Justification
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None 	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Students will synthesize and articulate information in the form of class discussions, final papers, and an exam.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	This course stressed the organization and teaching of all of Scripture, especially the OT, and Scripture's implications for ministry.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Introduction to the shape of Reformed theology.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Sustained focus on the sanctifying and therapeutic significance of Bible study.
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	Stresses the biblical framework for thinking about therapeutic practice in theological categories.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Moderate	Focus on the wider catholic heritage and also the Reformed distinctives that mark approach to biblical studies.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.		