

MASTER LIST OF ESSAY QUESTIONS OLD TESTAMENT

Short Essays

Introductory Matters

What is the importance of geography for understanding the text?

In what languages was the OT written? What are they like in comparison with English?

What is textual criticism? Why is it helpful?

What was the process by which the books in the OT canon were selected for inclusion?

How does the arrangement of the Protestant canon differ from that of the Hebrew canon?

What is archaeology able to do or not do?

What are the three basic historical-critical presuppositions?

Can a believer use critical thought in studying the Bible?

Pentateuch

Compare and contrast Genesis 1 and 2.

Compare and contrast the Genesis account of creation with those from the Ancient Near East.

How does the text tell us that the creation of human is the climax of the creation stories?

What are the basic approaches to understanding Genesis 1-2? Which do you prefer? Why?

What does Genesis 1-2 imply for the creation-evolution controversy?

What are the consequences pronounced by God on participants in the Fall in Gen 3?

What is the message of Genesis 4-11?

Discuss the nature of and reasons for the flood.

Compare and contrast the Genesis flood account with flood stories from the broader ANE.

Discuss the covenant with Noah.

Discuss the significance of poems in Genesis 1-11.

What does God promise to Abraham?

When and how does God enter into covenant with Abraham?

Who were the “alternate heirs” to Abraham and why were they not chosen to continue the line of promise?

How does the story of Jacob continue the Promise saga?

Trace the significance of conflict in the life of Jacob.

Follow the relationship between Joseph and his brothers in both halves of his story (pre and post prison)

How does the story of Joseph continue the Promise saga?

Why is Genesis such an important book in the Bible?

When did the exodus from Egypt occur?

What are the two forms/types of law and what distinguishes them?

What is the significance of the plagues?

What is the significance of the Passover and Red Sea?

Discuss the genre of law. What are the challenges in understanding and applying law? How does it communicate its meaning?

Discuss the concept of covenant and its significance in the Pentateuch.

Why does God enter into a covenant with the people both at Sinai and on the Plains of Moab?

What is the importance of the revelation of the name of God in Exod 34:6-7 in its context and more broadly?

What is the importance of Moses interceding with God for the people?

How does the book of Leviticus fit with its context in the Pentateuch?

What is the importance of the regulations for sacrifice in Leviticus?

Why are there two censuses in Numbers?

What is the reason for including the Balaam stories in Numbers?

Is there a significance to be found in the way the case laws are arranged in Exodus 21-23 and Deut 6-26?

How has the book of Deuteronomy been arranged?

Historical Books

Discuss the genre of narrative. What are the challenges in understanding and applying narrative? How does it communicate its meaning?

What is the book of Joshua about?

Is the book of Joshua historically reliable? Why?

What does the book of Judges show about how God works?

Discuss the chronological issues of the book of Judges.

What is the theological message of Ruth?

Why is Samuel a pivotal figure in Israelite history?

Why was Saul a failure as a king?

What did David do to establish a monarchy and an empire?

What were David's failings and his response to what happened?

What is the significance of Solomon building the temple?

What was/were the terrible sin(s) of Jeroboam I?

What did Elijah and Elisha stand for and fight against? Why was this important?

Why are the books of Joshua through Kings called Former Prophets?

How does the text explain the fall of Samaria?

How does the text explain the fall of Jerusalem?

What distinguishes the history in Chronicles from the history recounted in the Former Prophets?

What is the theological theme of the books of Chronicles?

Poetry and Wisdom

What is the essence of Hebrew poetry?

How has the book of Psalms been structured? What does this imply?

Why are the Psalms so theologically rich?

Why are there lament Psalms?

What is the purpose of wisdom in the OT?

What are the theological foundations of wisdom?

What is the connection of Solomon to the wisdom books?

Distinguish the basic types of wisdom (proverbial and speculative).

What is a proverb? How are we to understand and derive meaning from a proverb?

What is the contribution of the book of Job to our understanding of suffering?

Is Ecclesiastes positive or negative in its message?

Why is the Song of Songs a wisdom book?

How is the Song structured? How does this reinforce its message?

History of Israel

Summarize the period of the United Monarchy in Israel.

Summarize the 9th century BC for Israel and Judah.

Summarize the 8th century BC for Israel and Judah.

Summarize the 7th century BC for Judah.

Summarize the Biblical period of the exile.

Summarize the Biblical post-exilic period.

Prophets

*Which classical prophets prophesied to or primarily about nations other than Israel or Judah?
What was the main theme of each one's message?*

Which classical prophets prophesied to the people of the kingdom of Israel? What was the main theme of each of their messages?

*Which classical prophets prophesied to the people of the kingdom of Judah in the 8th century?
What was the main theme of their messages?*

*Which classical prophets prophesied to the people of the kingdom of Judah in the 7th century?
What was the main theme of their messages?*

Which classical prophets prophesied to the people in exile? What was the main theme of each of their messages?

Which classical prophets prophesied to the people in Judah during the post-exilic period? What was the main theme of each of their messages?

What is the significance of Hosea's marriage?

What is the significance of the remnant in the book of Micah?

What are the primary contributions of Isaiah to our theology?

Is the book of Isaiah entirely the product of Isaiah of the 8th century? Why or why not?

How is the book of Jeremiah structured?

Does Jeremiah offer a message of doom, hope, or both?

Why did Ezekiel behave and prophesy in ways that seem so strange?

How did the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah relate to the scene in Jerusalem around 520 BC?

What is the significance of the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah?

What themes do the books of Daniel and Esther share in common?

Is the book of Daniel a product of the exilic period, or the work of a much later author (2nd century BC)?

Full Essays

- Study by preparing the essays listed on this page. Suggestion: Put your thoughts together in outline form and study the outlines. Remember that you will be evaluated on factors including:
 - ⇒ the organization of your thoughts,
 - ⇒ your engagement with the biblical text, and
 - ⇒ your interaction with the material covered in class lecture, discussions and readings.
- When you are ready to take the test, pick up your exam, cut the tape and open it.
- At one sitting write your answer to the question you have received. (Word-processing on the computer is preferred.) Allow yourself no more than 2 hours. If you are still writing when 2 hours expires, please mark where you are at that time and go ahead and finish.
- You may use only an unmarked Bible in answering this question--no study Bibles, nor Bibles in which you have made notes. You may not use lecture notes or books or any other resources.

Midterm Essay

Your essay will be chosen from one of the following questions.

- 1. Write an essay that discusses the book of Genesis, including contents, structure, historical background, and origin of the book. What is the unifying theological theme of the book of Genesis? How does this theme relate to the central focus or foci of the entire Pentateuch? Explain the Documentary Hypothesis and evaluate its presuppositions and claims about the origins of the book. How do you explain the origin of Genesis?*
- 2. Write an essay that discusses the book of Exodus, including contents, structure, historical background, and origin of the book. What is the unifying theological theme of the book of Exodus? How does this theme relate to the central focus or foci of the entire Pentateuch?*
- 3. Write an essay that discusses the genre of law in the Pentateuch, including its forms, relation to the narrative story line, theology, and applicability to the Christian today.*
- 4. Write an essay that discusses the significance of the concepts of promise and covenant in the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.*
- 5. Write an essay that discusses the book of Deuteronomy, including contents, structure, historical background, and origin of the book. What is the unifying theological theme of the book of Deuteronomy? How does this theme relate to the central focus or foci of the entire Pentateuch? Give attention to the relation between the book and the covenants of that period in the ancient Near East.*
- 6. Is there a primary central theme for the Pentateuch? What do you think that is and why?*

Final Essay: To Be Included in Your Assessment Portfolio

Answer the following question on other paper.

- Prepare for writing the essay. Reflect and meditate on the question and your developing answer. Be sure to organize your thoughts well and consider the thesis you will formulate and seek to defend. What Biblical (and other) evidence will you use to defend your thesis? Support your claims with evidence from the biblical text and from other sources (e.g., archaeological discoveries, history, theology, scholarly hypotheses). In preparing the essay you may use any notes from class or any reference resources.
- Create an outline of your answer. Do not write out a full manuscript. Revise and perfect your outline.
- Allow yourself a period of two hours in which you will be able to write without interruption.
- Sit down and write the essay. Please type if at all possible.
- In writing the essay you may use only an unmarked Bible (i.e., no study Bibles or Bibles with handwritten notes) and your outline. You may not use any other resources (such as notes from class or texts or documents in your computer).
- Allow yourself two hours to complete the writing. If you are still writing at the end of two hours, please do not end your essay abruptly or leave out material that is essential to your answer. Rather, make a note in the text of your essay that you have now reached the two hour mark at this point. Then continue to write and complete the essay.
- Print out two copies of your essay, make certain that your name is on each, staple them together, and bring them to class at the time of the objective portion of the final, or bring them by the Urbana Seminary office. One copy will be graded and can be returned to you. The other copy is to be included in your assessment portfolio in the Seminary Office.

The question:

What is the central message of the Old Testament? What is the Old Testament about? Summarize your choice of theme for the Old Testament in a sentence (or less) and defend your choice. How is this theme the focus of the story of the Old Testament? How is it expressed in each different genre of literature and era of history? That is, trace the expression of this central message throughout the entirety of the Old Testament.