



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Unit Outline

VTBS001 Exploring the Old Testament

Unit Administrator:

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equipping Leadership *for* Mission



Greetings, and thanks for registering to be part of the **Exploring The Old Testament** (also called the Hebrew Scriptures) Unit. In this Unit Outline you will find details about the Unit, the assessment and other helpful information.

This Unit has been developed to be a time of discipleship-forming and faith-expanding learning.

This Unit is an indispensable resource for individuals and church study groups who want to learn more about their faith within a Uniting Church context.

The Unit is also foundational for Lay Preachers, Worship Leaders, Mission Workers, and people engaged in other forms of Christian Leadership.

We encourage you to approach your studies with a positive attitude and a willingness to be open to learning. Remember, don't be daunted by what lies ahead, as there will be help along the way.

Thanks again for committing this time to your journey of understanding.

May it be a time of learning, with some challenge, and a time of deepening faith in God.

MODES OF LEARNING

Your Presbytery may offer different modes of learning:

- Individual
- Face-to-face groups
- Online groups
- A mixture of all or some of the above

Talk with the person who looks after education in your Presbytery and find out how what learning modes are available.

HOURS OF ENGAGEMENT: 60 hours (9 Topics x 5 to 6 hours; + an optional project-based Unit) – not including Biblical reading. This Unit can be completed within 6 months. This will depend on your Presbytery's learning modes, your commitment to this study, and your other life and work commitments.

EXPECTATIONS OF ADULT LEARNERS:

- Participants will have computer abilities in research, assignment writing, and electronic submission **OR** will work alongside someone who can assist them with these tasks.
- Participants will take responsibility for their own learning – ask questions when uncertain or are unsure about what is required of them. Manage their time well/efficiently. Read the learning and assessment Task questions carefully. Read the Unit Outline carefully to ensure they are familiar with all requirements for the Unit. Seek assistance from their Presbytery, peers, identified local mentors/tutors.

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES FOR EXPLORING THE OLD TESTAMENT:

This Unit introduces you to the task of understanding and interpreting the Old Testament.

The Old Testament challenges us to explore vital questions in life, such as:

"Is there a God and how can we know God?"

"How do we experience a relationship with God?"

"How do we hear and respond to God?"

"Where is God when suffering and disappointment occur?"

The Old Testament describes God and how God acts in history and creation. Major themes that impact on Christianity find their beginning in the words of the Old Testament scripture.

This Unit acts as a foundation for understanding the New Testament scripture and Christian faith.

The Unit is closely integrated with the study of the life of Israel as a community of faith as well as historical and contemporary scholarship.

This Unit in the Old Testament is an invitation to participants to deepen their response to and faith in God as Trinity.

For those wishing to become La Preachers, this Unit caters to the academic requirements for accreditation within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

OUTCOMES and COMPETENCIES

At the completion of this Unit, Participants should be able to:

1. Evaluate and clearly express their understanding of the Old Testament writings, their history and main theological themes more confidently and in a more informed way, with regard to current scholarship and the various ways of interpreting the Scripture.
2. Articulate, discuss and explain their understanding of the key themes and developing interpretations of the Old Testament and, their application to Christian faith in contemporary contexts and UCA perspectives.
3. Integrate and connect this developing understanding with their faith relationship with Jesus Christ and in relation to their ministry context.
4. Demonstrate the ability to exegete texts using recognised approaches and criteria as well

as using appropriate reference materials (such as recent commentaries and dictionaries).

5. Communicate their understandings of the Old Testament in a variety of ways.

CONTENT:

Introduction to the Old Testament

Reading the Old Testament

Foundational Stories

Exodus

Living in Relationship with God 1

Living in Relationship with God 2

Prophetic Voice

Exile and the X Factor

Wisdom's Feast

The Things In Between!

Looking Back and Looking Forward (Optional)

METHOD

Depending on the **mode** (eg. face-to-face, online, blended) in which the Unit is offered, participants will be exposed to these types of learning experiences:

- Seminar, Workshop, and Webinar times will be focused on developing knowledge and skills.
- Video and online resources will be used to supplement information gathering.
- Key ideas will be discussed in class and in small group tutorials.
- Key ideas will be presented online and discussed through forums and Webinars.
- Ideas and interpretations will be discussed and debated in the learning community.
- Groups will construct some working definitions to better be able to articulate faith and talk about God.
- Unit Participants will be encouraged to read the set text and become familiar with a broad range of other texts.
- Unit Participants will have an opportunity to work with a range of resources and people in applied exercises.
- Unit Participants will be expected to personally reflect on and respond to the unit materials.

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENTS

For those studying for accreditation:

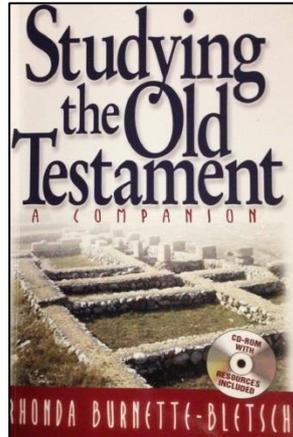
- A. Spiritual Reflection – reading the Old Testament through the eyes of faith.
- B. Response to a specific question relating to your reading from the text book/s and one other chosen reading
- C. Creative or Digital Presentation (alternative assessment)
- D. Short essay (alternative assessment)

**The Unit allows participants to engage in
MULTIPLE LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT:**

1. The person, or group, who wishes to dip into all, or part, of this Unit in order to create or supplement Bible studies/group studies, etc. You are encouraged to use the materials, including assessment questions, in creative ways that provide opportunities for faith and discipleship growth.
2. The person wishing to study, update, or refresh their understanding but not seeking formal accreditation – perhaps a Lay Preacher looking for some continuing education. In order to deepen your learning experience, you are encouraged to work through the activities, readings, and reflections in the Units, and to complete all the Task A activities.
3. The person wishing to explore the Old Testament for their own learning, or to meet the academic requirements for the Specified Ministry of Lay Preacher - i.e. the person seeking formal accreditation. You will need to work through the activities, readings, and reflections in the Topics, **and** to complete all Task A and Task B activities.
4. **Your Presbytery** may choose Task C and Task D as alternative assessment pieces to Task A and/or Task B. Please ensure you are clear which assessment Tasks your Presbytery expects you to complete, particularly if you are undertaking the course for accreditations purposes.

Unit Materials

- 1) The key text for this Unit is Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch's "***Studying the Old Testament: A Companion***" Abingdon Press, 2007.



Copies can be purchased online – try www.booko.com.au, or check at Christian bookstores.

Burnette-Bletsch forms the basis of the Unit and you will work through all of the chapters in this book. Each Topic, where possible, will relate to a relevant chapter from Burnette-Bletsch and it is important that you read this chapter. Ensure your book has the CD attached – this will also form part of your study.

Burnette-Bletsch has a glossary of key terms in the CD section – be sure to make use of this. You are encouraged to begin developing your own glossary as you discover new words and terms.

- 2) **Other readings** for the Unit are also provided. **There are two types of readings for each Unit – one type are readings and the other, usually a passage of Old Testament Scripture, comes from a more spiritual viewpoint.** You will need to access different readings for specific Learning Activities, and the Assessment Tasks.

“Exploring the Old Testament”

UNIT OUTLINE

Topics
Module 1: Introduction to the Old Testament
Introductory Topic: Introduction to Interpreting the Old Testament
Topic 1: Reading the Old Testament
Module 2: A God who creates and calls
Topic 2: Foundational stories
Topic 3: Exodus
Topic 4: Living in Relationship with God 1
Topic 5: Living in Relationship with God 2
Module 3: A voice cries out ...
Topic 6: Prophetic Voice
Topic 7: Exile and X factor
Module 4: Bread for the journey
Topic 8: Wisdom’s Feast
Topic 9: The Times in between!
Topic 10: Looking Back and Looking Forward (Optional)

Some optional resources are also provided at the end of the Unit, for those who are interested in exploring “God and Violence in the Old Testament”.

UNIT TASKS

Unit Task	Nature of Task	Length	Due
Task A	Spiritual Reflection (Multi-sensory/multi-intelligence approach)	No more than half a typed A4 page for each response.	Uploaded to the online site on completion of the Topic
Task B	Response to a specific question on the set reading/s. Answering a question pertaining to the Topic and associated reading/s	No more than half a typed A4 page for each response. The response must be referenced in the required manner	Uploaded to the online site on completion of the Topic
Task C - alternative assessment	Creative and/or Digital presentation - for those seeking accreditation	500 words The analysis must be referenced in the required manner	Upload any time prior to the end of the Unit
Task D - alternative assessment	Short essay - for those seeking accreditation	1000-1200 words The essay must be referenced in the required manner	Upload any time prior to the end of the Unit

**All participants studying the Old Testament for accreditation will complete Tasks A and Tasks B.
Tasks C and D are offered as alternative assessment, and would need to be negotiated with your Presbytery/assessor.**

For all Tasks, grading is based on reaching Competency (C) or competency not yet achieved (NYC).

Please negotiate with your assessors about resubmissions.

TASK A – Spiritual Reflection

- Task A requires a different kind of response to the other Tasks
- more of a faith or spiritual response, than an academic one
 - involving **heart, mind and soul**.

Selected Readings for Personal Reflection:

Psalm 139 or Psalm 23

Genesis 1 to 2:3 or Psalm 104

Exodus – 3:13-15

Deut 6:4-9 or Ruth 1:11-22 or Joshua 24: 14-18

1 Samuel 2:1-10 or 2 Samuel 11:27 - 12:1-14

Micah 6:6-8 or Hosea 2: 14-23 or Ezekiel 2

Jeremiah 31:31-34 or Isaiah 52:13 -53:12 or Lamentations 3: 1-33

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 or Proverbs 1:20-2:15 or Song of Solomon 4 or Psalm 88

Daniel 3:1-16

Over the duration of the Unit, read each of the above texts. To help you, they are identified in each Module that you study. Prayerfully read and re-read each of these passages **identifying their meaning and what is significant for you**. Meditate on the part you have selected asking God to illuminate your *“heart, mind soul and strength”*.

Place yourself within the passage as a participant or observer. Imagine what it would be like. Allow the passage to have a conversation with your own life. Be conscious of your thoughts and feelings about the passage. Your personal reflection will come from all this - the Scriptural passages, your life and experiences (similarities and contrasts to the Scripture). How do you believe the Spirit is speaking into your life at this time?

Your response for each Task A should be ***no longer than 150-200 words***.

Across the entire Unit, you are encouraged to vary your forms of responses to the text. You are asked to use at least ***four (4)*** of the forms below:

- prayer – written by you
- poetry – written by you
- a Psalm or Lament
- a banner that you have created yourself (with a SHORT explanation)
- a photo or image that you have created yourself (with a SHORT explanation)
- lyrics for a song that you have written yourself (can be provided with audio)
- an item in a church newsletter (eg. a reflective paragraph or a poem written by you)
- photos of a piece of your own artwork in clay or paint, etc (with a SHORT explanation)
- a PowerPoint slide/s – consider copyright issues for any images used (with a SHORT explanation)
- **OR** another form as negotiated with the Unit facilitators

Your response will reflect the **text’s meaning and its particular relevance to you.**

TASK B – Response to a specific question

Participants will prepare a response to the specific question for each required Topic, using the set text reading (Burnette-Bletsch – see below) and **one** of the extra readings provided in the online folder.

Participants will be assessed on their demonstrated understanding of the concepts in the reading/s (shown in their response to the question). Note: You are not expected to provide a definitive answer – focus on providing an answer that shows you are beginning/continuing to wrestle with the issues posed in the question.

1. You will provide **a short personal response to the question summarising your own thoughts**. This must demonstrate what you have learned as well as your analysis of what you have read.
2. You will **refer to the assigned readings** from your text book and **one** other reading of your choice from those provided in the Topic.

Each response is to be **no more than half a typed A4 page**. The response can be in dot point form and must be clearly understandable to the assessor.

This assessment requires you to use and acknowledge the authors of the readings and the sources you are using to support your ideas. Information on how to reference your sources can be found at the end of the "**Assessment Tasks Information**" section in the online Unit. Referencing will not be counted in your word length. Ask for help from your mentor or Unit facilitator if you do not know how to do this.

Introductory Topic: An Introduction to Interpreting the Old Testament
Note there is no Task B for this introductory Topic.
Topic 1: Reading the Old Testament Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 1 pages 1-7
Using Burnette-Bletsch and one other reading from the folder, discuss how the Israelites' understanding of their history and their place in the world impacted on their scripture and faith.
Topic 2: Foundational Stories Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 2 pages 23-62
Using Burnette-Bletsch and one other reading from the folder, discuss, "What is the purpose of the primeval stories in helping the Israelites understand their origins and humanity's relationship with God?"

Topic 3: Exodus Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 2, pages 63-71 and 86-94

Using Burnette-Bletsch and one other reading from the folder, choose one issue of oppression in today's society. Discuss how the main themes from Exodus help us to respond to these issues with liberating actions that reflect God's justice.

Topic 4: Living in Relationship with God 1 Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 2, pages 71-86

Using Burnette-Bletsch and one other reading from the folder, consider this scenario: 'A friend says, "In the Old Testament, God is a punishing God who oppresses the Israelites with laws that cause them to fail!"' How would you respond to this?

Topic 5: Living in Relationship with God 2 Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 3, pages 95-166

Using Burnette-Bletsch and one other reading from the folder, select two of the themes that occur in the Former Prophets. Briefly discuss their implications for the church today.

Topic 6: Prophetic Voice Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 4, pages 167-237

Burnette-Bletsch states that the Old Testament prophets were a "Moral Compass". Choose two of the common concerns of the Old Testament Prophets and briefly discuss how these concerns influence your faith journey today? Remember to use Burnette-Bletsch and one other reading from the folder, in your response.

Topic 7: Exile and the X factor Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 4, pages 218-237, Chapter 5, 242-251

Identify two (2) ways in which the exile impacted the Israelites.

Topic 8: Wisdom's Feast Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 5, pages 239-284 (excluding pages 244-250)

Briefly discuss how the Wisdom Literature (including the Psalms) has helped the Israelite people to understand themselves and the nature of God.

Topic 9: The Things in Between! Burnette-Bletsch Chapter 5 and the Conclusion, pages 288-299

Choose one idea from the Chapter on theological themes in the online Topic. Discuss its influence/impact upon the Jewish world at the time of Jesus.

Topic 10 (Optional): Looking Forward and Looking Back!

Note there is no Task B for this Topic.

TASK C – Creative and/or digital presentation (500 words) – alternative assessment

What you are asked to do

You have been asked to prepare a presentation to a study group in your church. They have invited friends who do not belong to the church for this event.

Your presentation will be your own original work and could take the form of:

- a PowerPoint display;
- a song or song lyrics you have written to a well-known tune;
- a painting, image or sculpture that you have made;
- engaging and interesting handout notes with a map, chart or table which also includes questions the group would discuss.

Your presentation must be accompanied by a short description (no more than 500 words) of the points you are seeking to achieve in the presentation. This can be in note form with dot points provided they are understandable to the assessor.

The topic question -

The choice of topic is **one** of the following:

- **The Book of Esther almost did not make it into the Jewish canon, and yet in the end it did. There are a number of intriguing reasons for this conundrum. Find out why and make your presentation as interesting for your hearers and watchers.**
- **“I only read the New Testament! The God of the Old Testament is judgemental and harsh. That’s not the same loving, God of grace of the New Testament!” This comment, or a variation of it, is often heard – and has been around since the time of early Christianity. Take your group on a journey through heresy and beyond to ‘discover’ the God of all people.**
- **The Song of Songs/Song of Solomon is a contentious book in the Bible - far too racy for some to even be in there! Traditionally, the church has interpreted the Song of Songs as referring to Christ and the church. Is this a fair interpretation of the text? Are there other equally relevant interpretations of the text? Check out the text and what is said about it for yourself and take your study group on a journey into a story of a great love.**

- **Daniel in the lions' den; the three men in the fiery pit - the book of Daniel is full of graphic and colourful stories and images that many are familiar with from Sunday School. Yet it is a book that is often misunderstood, misquoted, and misused in today's society and church. Briefly explore and discuss the types of literature (prophecy, apocrypha, etc) within the book of Daniel and how modern readers and your study group might find hope within it today.**
- **"My God, my God. Why have you abandoned me?" (Ps 22). The lament is something we can all relate to and connect with at different points in our lives. And yet, we rarely hear them read in church, or know what great percentage they are of the book of Psalms or hear something from the book of Lamentations read in church. With your study group, explore the world of the lament, and how within it they help us find hope and meaning in dark times.**
- **"Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart;
don't try to figure out everything on your own.
Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go;
GOD's the one who will keep you on track. (Proverbs 3:5, The Message)
The book of Proverbs is often just used for quotes rather than exploring in depth. Is this all it is useful for? Or can it offer deeper wisdom? Choose a section and share what you find to inspire your hearers!**

TASK D – Short Essay (1000 - 1200 words) – alternative assessment

Choose **ONE** of the following topics and prepare a 1000-1200 word essay.

1. Discuss the significance of the Exodus event, and how the event impacted on the people of Israel throughout their continuing history.
2. In what ways did the experience of exile shape Israel's faith?
3. Identify the different forms of Psalms. What were the specific functions and use of each?
4. Discuss the implications for Israel in living in a covenantal relationship with God.
5. What are the theological themes in the prophetic literature that are significant for the church today?

You will be assessed on your competency to:

- identify and discuss the key biblical passages and themes that relate to the question
- demonstrate appropriate exegetical skill when handling biblical passages
- support your essay by referring to contemporary scholarly thought
- identify and provide your own response to the biblical interpretations and ideas presented by the scholars you have researched for this question

IMPORTANT: You will need to refer to commentaries and other reference material to prepare this Assessment Task. Your texts and other Unit materials contain material that will be helpful. The websites below may also be of use.

Join the Dalton McCaughey Library (<https://www.dml.vic.edu.au/>) or the theological library in your Synod. Staff are very helpful and will provide assistance. As well as hard copy library books they can loan you, they are developing an e-book facility which will also be helpful.

This assessment requires you to use and acknowledge the authors of the readings. You must provide footnotes and a bibliography as part of your response to the specific question. These will not be counted in your word length.

Information on the correct form for presenting your footnotes and bibliography can be found at the end of the "**Assessment Tasks Information**" section in the online Unit.

This task is to be uploaded before the end of the Unit.