BBL 1013: Old Testament Survey — Key Study Notes

John Brown University | 3 Credit Hours | On Campus & Online

Course Overview & Aims

BBL 1013 is a brief introduction to the history and message of the Old Testament, offering a general survey of each book's content and significant themes, with emphasis on relevance to Christian living . The course prioritizes **content mastery** before interpretation: students must first answer "what does the text say?" before asking "what does it mean?" .

Core objectives (per JBU syllabus):

1. Recognize the historical flow and unity of the Old Testament.
2. Identify main characters, personalities, dates, and events.
3. Trace the overarching themes of **covenant** and **promise** throughout the Old Testament.
4. Use literary tools (commentaries, dictionaries, journals) for research.
5. Develop appreciation for the Old Testament as Word of God .

Module 1: Foundations — Introduction to Biblical Study

Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

- **Exegesis**: "leading out" — drawing meaning *from* the text based on its original context, language, and literary form. The disciplined, intended approach.
- **Eisegesis**: "leading in" — reading one's own presuppositions or desired meaning *into* the text. To be avoided.

Biblical Geography (Essential Framework)

The Promised Land sits at the crossroads of the ancient Near East, comprising four vertical zones west of the Jordan:

1. **Coastal Plain** (Philistia, Sharon, Acre) — Mediterranean border.

2. **Central Hill Country** — where most Israelite settlement and leadership (Jerusalem, Samaria) occurred.
3. **Jordan Rift** — the Jordan River valley, Dead Sea, and Sea of Galilee.
4. **Transjordan Plateau** — east of the Jordan (where Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh settled).

   Two major roads: The Way of the Sea (Via Maris) along the coast, and the King's Highway east of the Jordan .

Module 2: The Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy)

The Pentateuch at a Glance

Book	Key Word	Role for Israel
Genesis	Beginnings	Election of the nation
Exodus	Redemption	Redemption from Egypt
Leviticus	Holiness	Sanctification / worship
Numbers	Wanderings	Direction toward the land
Deuteronomy	Review	Instruction / covenant renewal

Creation Accounts (Genesis 1–2)

Two complementary accounts, not contradictory:

- **Priestly account (1:1–2:4a)**: Orderly, cosmic, seven-day framework; God (*Elohim*) creates by word; humans (male and female) made in God's image as the crown of creation.

- **Yahwistic account (2:4b–25)**: Narrative, anthropomorphic; God (*Yahweh*) forms man from dust, plants a garden, creates woman from man's side; establishes human vocation and the marriage bond .

The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22)

Three promises: Land (Canaan), Seed (a great nation / descendants), Blessing (to all nations through Abraham's line). The covenant is **unconditional** in its ultimate fulfillment—God alone passes between the divided animals in Genesis 15, binding Himself to the promise. Circumcision becomes the sign of the covenant in Genesis 17.

The Mosaic Law & Tabernacle

- **Purpose of the Law**: Often summarized as a mirror (reveals sin), a hedge (sets Israel apart), and a guide (directs covenant life) .
- **Tabernacle symbolism**: God's presence dwelling among His people; the structure's graded holiness (outer court → holy place → most holy place) teaches both God's accessibility and His separateness. Sacrifices address sin and uncleanness, pointing forward to a final atonement.

Module 3: Settlement & Rise (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel)

Joshua: Conquest and Inheritance

Joshua (name means "savior") leads Israel across the Jordan into Canaan. Key events: Jericho's fall, the central/southern/northern campaigns, and the division of land among the twelve tribes. The conquest is presented as God's judgment on Canaanite sin and the fulfillment of land promises.

Judges: The Cycle of Rebellion

The period is characterized by a repeating spiral:
Sin → Oppression → Cry for help → Deliverance by a judge → Peace → Relapse.
The refrain "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 21:25) captures the spiritual anarchy. Judges are military/spiritual deliverers (e.g., Deborah, Gideon, Samson), not kings.

Ruth: Covenant Loyalty

A Moabite widow's *hesed* (covenant faithfulness) toward Naomi; Boaz acts as **kinsman-redeemer**. Ruth becomes great-grandmother of David—a bridge from the chaotic Judges era to the monarchy and a sign of God's inclusion of outsiders.

1–2 Samuel: Monarchy and the Davidic Covenant

- **Samuel**: last judge, prophet who anoints first Saul (failed king) and then David.
- **David**: shepherd, giant-slayer, fugitive, king. His reign unifies Israel and captures Jerusalem.
- **The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7)**: God promises David an **everlasting dynasty**, a throne established forever, and a father-son relationship with his heirs. This becomes the Messianic hope—the expectation of a future son of David who will reign eternally.

Module 4: Kingdom & Rupture (1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles)

Solomon's Temple

Solomon builds the first Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5–8), centralizing worship and fulfilling David's preparation. The Temple becomes the theological center of the nation—God's name dwells there. Yet Solomon's foreign marriages and idolatry sow seeds of decline.

The Split of the United Kingdom (931 BC)

After Solomon, the kingdom divides:

- **Northern Kingdom (Israel)**: 10 tribes, capital eventually Samaria, all kings judged as evil (Jeroboam's golden calves at Dan and Bethel set the pattern).
- **Southern Kingdom (Judah)**: 2 tribes (Judah + Benjamin), capital Jerusalem, Davidic dynasty preserved; a mixed record of good and bad kings.

Spiritual Decline and Prophetic Warning

Kings evaluates every ruler by covenant faithfulness. The Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria in **722 BC**; the Southern Kingdom falls to Babylon in **586 BC** with the Temple destroyed. Chronicles retells the same history from a priestly perspective, emphasizing Temple worship, Davidic dynasty, and immediate divine retribution.

Module 5: Exile & Post-Exile (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther)

The Babylonian Captivity

Begins in stages (605, 597, 586 BC). The Temple is destroyed; the elite are deported. Exile raises the crisis: Has God abandoned His covenant? The prophets (Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah 40–66) answer: No—God will restore.

Return and Restoration

- **Ezra**: priest and scribe; leads a return, teaches the Law, addresses intermarriage and spiritual renewal.
- **Nehemiah**: cupbearer to Artaxerxes; returns to rebuild Jerusalem's walls (completed in 52 days); reforms social justice and covenant obedience.
- **The Second Temple** is rebuilt (516 BC), though its glory seems lesser than Solomon's to older witnesses.

Esther: Providence Without Miracles

Set in Persia, the book never mentions God's name, yet demonstrates His hidden providence in preserving the Jewish people from annihilation through Esther and Mordecai. It establishes the festival of **Purim**.

Post-Exilic Identity

The community re-centers on **Torah, Temple, and Sabbath**. The danger shifts from idolatry to formalism—hence the prophets' continued calls for heart obedience.

Module 6: Wisdom & Worship (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon)

Hebrew Poetry: Key Structures

- **Parallelism**: the dominant feature.
  - *Synonymous*: line 2 restates line 1 (e.g., "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands").
  - *Antithetic*: line 2 contrasts line 1 (common in Proverbs).
  - *Synthetic*: line 2 completes or advances line 1.
- **Acrostic**: poems structured by the Hebrew alphabet (e.g., Psalm 119, Proverbs 31).

The Wisdom Books

Book	Core Question	Key Insight
Proverbs	How to live skillfully?	"Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"; practical, retribution-based observations (generally true, not absolute promises).
Job	Why do the righteous suffer?	Suffering is not always a direct result of personal sin; God's sovereignty transcends human formulas; honest lament is permitted.
Ecclesiastes	What is the meaning of life "under the sun"?	Apart from God, all is *hevel* (vapor/meaningless); enjoy God gifts and fear Him.

Book	Core Question	Key Insight
Song of Solomon	What is the nature of love?	Celebrates covenantal, physical marital love; often allegorize God's love for Israel/the church, but literal marital reading is primary.

Psalms: The Liturgical Heart

The Psalter is Israel's **prayer book and hymnal**. Major types: **lament** (individual/communal—the largest category), **praise/thanksgiving**, **royal** (Messianic), **wisdom**, and **imprecatory** (calls for justice). The Psalter moves from lament to praise, modeling honest worship in every circumstance.

Module 7: The Prophetic Voice (Isaiah–Malachi)

Who Were the Prophets?

Prophets were **covenant prosecutors**—not merely predictors of the future. Their primary role was to call Israel and Judah back to covenant faithfulness, addressing **socio-political injustice**, idolatry, and empty ritual. They spoke *forth* God's word to their own generation before they spoke *fore* the future.

Major vs. Minor

"Major" and "Minor" refer to **book length**, not importance. Major: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. Minor: the twelve shorter books (Hosea through Malachi).

Key Prophetic Themes

- **Justice and Righteousness**: e.g., Amos 5:24—"let justice roll down like waters"; Isaiah 1—God rejects worship without ethical obedience.

- **Covenant Lawsuit (*Rib*)**: God brings formal charges against His people (Micah 6, Hosea 4).
- **Day of the LORD**: a future day of both judgment on the wicked and deliverance for the faithful; often near (historical judgment) and far (eschatological) fulfillment.
- **Remnant**: a faithful minority will survive judgment and become the seed of restoration.

Messianic Prophecies (Selected)

Prophecy	Reference	New Testament Fulfillment
Virgin-born Immanuel	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Child born / Son given, Davidic throne	Isaiah 9:6–7	Luke 1:31–33
Root of Jesse	Isaiah 11:1–10	Romans 15:12
Suffering Servant	Isaiah 52:13–53:12	Acts 8:32–35; 1 Peter 2:24
New Covenant	Jeremiah 31:31–34	Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8
Ruler from Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1–6

The Prophets by Era

- **Pre-Exilic (to Assyria/Babylon)**: Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah.
- **Exilic**: Ezekiel, Daniel.
- **Post-Exilic**: Haggai, Zechariah (Temple rebuilding); Malachi (covenant renewal and coming Messenger).

Unifying Threads (Exam Themes)

1. **Covenant**: Abrahamic (promise) → Mosaic (law) → Davidic (kingship) → New Covenant (heart transformation). Each builds on and does not cancel the previous.

2. **Promise and Fulfillment**: Land, seed, blessing, dynasty, and divine presence—partially realized in the Old Testament, ultimately pointing to Christ .
3. **Presence of God**: Eden → Tabernacle → Temple → Exile (loss of presence) → Second Temple → promise of future indwelling.
4. **Sin, Judgment, and Grace**: The cycle from Genesis 3 onward, met by God's persistent covenant faithfulness.

Study Checklist

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  Define exegesis and eisegesis with examples.
- □

  Label the four geographic zones of the Promised Land and two major roads.
- □

  Summarize the three promises of the Abrahamic Covenant and its unconditional nature.
- □

  Explain the cycle in Judges and its theological significance.
- □

  Outline the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7) and its Messianic implications.
- □

  Explain why the kingdom split and the dates/agents of both falls (722 BC, 586 BC).
- □

  Compare the message of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes on wisdom and suffering.
- □

  Identify the major types of Psalms and the function of parallelism.
- □

  Define the prophet's role as covenant prosecutor, not merely predictor.
- □

Match at least five Messianic prophecies to their New Testament fulfillments.

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Trace the themes of covenant and promise across all seven modules.

Note: The JBU catalog description of BBL 1013 is brief, emphasizing "a general survey of the overall content of each book and certain significant themes stressing relevance to Christian living" . The module structure you provided aligns with the standard content sequence in JBU's Old Testament survey materials . Verify specific exam emphases and the required textbook (often Arnold & Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*) against your current syllabus