

BS426 Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures

**Meadville Lombard Theological School
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Online Course**

**Instructor: Thomas P. Haverly, Ph.D.
Email: thaverly@meadville.edu**

Course Description:

The Hebrew scriptures comprise the sacred scriptures of Judaism (also known as the Hebrew Bible or *Tanakh*) and also the core of what Christians call the Old Testament. We will explore these documents and selected other writings that illuminate them. Particular attention will be given to the *torah*, to the prophetic writings (the “latter prophets”), and the psalms, for their religious and cultural significance.

The writings of the Hebrew Bible developed over a period of several centuries, perhaps beginning about 1000 BCE (roughly the time of King David), and at least some documents appear still to have been under construction as late as the period of the Dead Sea Scrolls (in the decades before and during the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth). At about this same time, the final shape and contents (“canon”) of the Hebrew Bible was being formed. From 300 BCE on, Jewish readers sought to interpret their scriptures in their contexts of cultural and political domination by first Greek and then Roman rulers. After Jesus of Nazareth, Jews and Christians (most of whom were Jewish as well, initially) continued to read these scriptures in strikingly different ways: a situation that pertains to this day.

We will seek to understand conventional and current Jewish and Christian readings, while pursuing the ways in which critical, academic scholarship (now practiced by many Jews and Christians as well as non-sectarian scholars), has approached and interpreted the history of ancient Israel and the literature of Hebrew Bible. This critical approach to the scriptures has long nurtured Unitarianism and Universalism, and is a key factor to appreciating their abiding religious and ethical value. In addition to achieving biblical literacy, students will be encouraged to practice both critical and creative interpretations of these texts for their own faith journeys and ministries.