



**Spiritual Education and Enrichment**  
**SCS100 – Overview: Hebrew Scriptures class**  
**10 Hours**  
**Unity of Houston Hybrid Course**

<b>Instructor</b>	Rev. Dr. Thomas Shepherd, <a href="mailto:RevDr.TomShepherd@gmail.com">RevDr.TomShepherd@gmail.com</a>
<b>Required Texts</b>	<i>New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*</i>
<b>Recommended Reading</b>	<i>Glimpses of Truth</i> , by Thomas W. Shepherd (blue cover, ©2014)

\*Inexpensive paperback NRSV recommended, something student can mark with personal notes. Also recommended: PowerPoint capability.

**Course Description:**

The Hebrew Scriptures (often called “Old Testament” in the Christian world) are at the root of three major world religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hebrew Scriptures are a collection of fascinating and sometimes confusing stories, poetry, wisdom sayings and inspired visions. While some stories in Hebrew Scriptures are little known outside scholarly circles, others have become commonplace in conversation, e.g., “David vs. Goliath.” Students will explore the history and development of Hebrew Scriptures, thereby acquiring a solid foundation for continuing study and reflection.

Topics and questions explored in this class include:

- Theodicy: If the gods are good, why do bad things happen?
- Hebrew Cosmology 101 - Three-Story Universe of Ancient Israel.
- Unpacking the Sin vs. Righteousness problem.
- Survival in a world ruled by force.
- Covenant: What does God require of us, and what do we get in return?
- What makes the “Old Testament” both brutal and nurturing?

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of the experience, learners will be able to:

- Identify parts and probable origins of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- Compare time periods and explain their significance.
- List and describe major themes in the literature of ancient Israel.
- Evaluate conflicting ethical, social and theological ideas in the text.
- Briefly sketch ideas for Unity talks/sermons drawn from the Hebrew bible.

**Instructor:** The Rev. Thomas W. Shepherd, D.Min, M. Div, B.S. Ed., is an ordained Unity minister who taught Historical and Theological Studies at Unity Institute and Seminary 2005-2016. His Q&A column "Good Questions" has appeared in *Unity Magazine* for over thirty years. "Dr. Tom" is the author of *Friends in High Places*, *Good Questions*, *Jesus 2.1*, and *The Many faces of Prayer*. Shepherd holds a B.S. Ed. from the University of Idaho, Master of Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary, and Doctor of Ministry from St. Paul School of Theology. In 2011 he received the Charles Fillmore Award from Unity Worldwide Ministries. Shepherd is a retired US Army Chaplain, long before which he flew medical evacuation helicopters during the Vietnam War. Dr. Tom and his wife, Caol-Jean, live in Tucson, Arizona, where he writes science fiction novels.

#### **Assignments and Expectations:**

1. Read assignments and complete written work prior to each class sessions.
  - Attend all classes and participate in the classroom discussions.
  - Write a 1,200 word paper sharing your insights and learnings about a specific topic in the biblical theology of Christian Scriptures. Due June 30, 2024. You will receive a handout NLT the last day of class describing the specific topic and requirements for the paper.

#### **Grade Scale:**

AU Audit – student is not seeking credentialing (no assignments required).  
 I Incomplete – waiting for final assignment.  
 NC No Credit – did not complete final assignment within three months of the course end and/or did not meet attendance requirements.  
 S Satisfactory – met all requirements.

10 course credits are granted on successfully completing the course.

#### **Instructor's Commitment:**

Regardless of your background or previous exposure to the Bible, this course will challenge you to re-think your basic ideas about the Hebrew Scriptures in their place of origin, the ancient Middle East. I will arrive at class prepared to engage you in discussions about Unity's heritage in the Hebrew Bible. I will create a positive, creative environment for the learner to grow and explore the literature of "Old Testament" and to apply its insights today. I will read and comment on all papers and assignments you complete. We will laugh and learn together.

<p><b>Class 1</b></p>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> hour – Intro to Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Psalm</li> <li>• Musical Sermon by Cab Calloway</li> <li>• Introduction &amp; course overview: It's IMPOSSIBLE!</li> <li>• Adam &amp; Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Laban, Joseph, David, Solomon, all the prophets—we can't cover it all.</li> <li>• Key Concept: Biblical Theology</li> <li>• Lecture/discussion: "Three-story Universe" made observable sense.</li> <li>• Historical context of ancient Middle East as the battleground of empires.</li> <li>• <i>Meso-potamia</i> to the north, Egypt to the South, sea peoples raiding the coasts.</li> <li>• Safety in the wilderness and hill country.</li> <li>• Religion based on offerings to gods.</li> <li>• Big Story: Genesis starts with Creation, ends with Israel in Egyptian bondage.</li> <li>• Genesis answers the question a child might raise: "Mommy and Daddy, how did we get here?"</li> </ul> <p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> hour -</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Lecture continues.</li> <li>• Questions and discussion.</li> </ul> <p><b>Written assignment:</b> Carefully read Genesis 1:1-31. Write a brief, bullet-point summary (200-words or less) for a Unity sermon drawn from a text in this chapter. Focus! Do not try to preach the whole Creation narrative. (Jesus &amp; Carl Sagan couldn't do it if they collaborated!)</p>
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<p><b>Class 2</b></p>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> hour – Torah Part 2 - Books of the Law (Torah/Pentateuch)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Psalm</li> <li>• Thoughts &amp; Remarks from the previous day.</li> <li>• Spot Quiz. The Commandments.</li> <li>• Lecture/discussion: Crash Course in Torah, aka., Pentateuch, or Books of Moses (who wrote not a word of it).</li> <li>• Covenant—Key concept in Jewish thought and religion.</li> <li>• Peek at Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.</li> <li>• The Law: Starkly brutal, sometimes insightful, roughly pragmatic?</li> <li>• Hints of grace amid cruel punishments. Is the rubric <i>“Eye for an eye”</i> the primitive beginning of <i>“let the punishment fit the crime”</i> i.e., don’t engage in feuds?</li> <li>• Law meant to move away from personal vengeance.</li> </ul> <p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> hour - Torah Part 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion: Importance of Torah in Judaism and Christianity through the centuries and today.</li> <li>• Do people need forgiveness? (Don’t leap to a quick answer. Needless guilt is guilt no less.)</li> <li>• Has a sense of identity begun to evaporate in Church and society as a whole, including Unity?</li> <li>• Principles vs. commandments?</li> </ul> <p><b>Written assignment:</b> Skim the first five chapters of Leviticus. Don’t expect to meet Jesus preaching love beside Lake Galilee—it’s a bloody mess. They were herdsmen, regularly butchering animals for food. See if you can find a passage which offers some hope to the people. Get inside their heads and ask what’s going on here. Can you give a talk based on the human need for forgiveness based on these verses? Jot down a few ideas for Unity sermons/lessons. Try not to judge them too harshly. It was a different world.</p>
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<p><b>Class 3</b></p>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> hour – The Prophets, Part 1 - Joshua – 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Psalm</li> <li>• Thoughts &amp; Remarks from the previous day.</li> <li>• Lecture/discussion: What was a prophet in ancient Israel?</li> <li>• Seers/fortune tellers, charismatics, workers of miracles</li> <li>• Judges and Kings: Rise of Israelite Monarchy</li> <li>• Samuel, Saul and David</li> </ul> <p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Hour – The Prophets, Part 2</b></p> <p>Four Major and Twelve Minor Prophets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture continues: <i>“No other gods before me...”</i></li> <li>• Henotheism: YHWH displaces other gods</li> <li>• Solomon’s Temple: Worship = sacrifices to YHWH</li> <li>• Key concept: Centralization of Worship at Jerusalem</li> <li>• Questions and thoughts.</li> </ul> <p>Assignment: TBA</p>
<p><b>Class 4</b></p>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> hour</b></p> <p><b>“The Writings”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Psalm</li> <li>• Thoughts &amp; Remarks from the previous day.</li> <li>• Third and youngest division of Hebrew Bible “the Writings”</li> <li>• Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Esther</li> </ul> <p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Hour – Focus on the Psalms, Part 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture/discussion on Book of Psalms.</li> <li>• Importance of Psalms in Unity’s life and thought.</li> <li>• Analysis of 6 types of psalms.</li> </ul> <p>Assignment: TBA</p>

<b>Class 5</b>	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> hour - Focus on the Psalms, Part 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lecture/discussion on Book of Psalms.</li><li>• Importance of Psalms in Unity's life and thought.</li><li>• Analysis of 6 types of psalms.</li></ul> <p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Hour – Sampling Other Writings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Proverbs</li><li>• Psalm Song of Solomon</li><li>• Ecclesiastes</li><li>• Esher</li></ul> <p><b>Final Thoughts and Lingering Questions</b></p> <p><b>Written Assignment due July 8 – Details TBA.</b></p>
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