

# Reading, Writing & Religion II

TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL BIBLE COURSES IN 2011 – 12

BY MARK A. CHANCEY

*Professor of Religious Studies, Southern Methodist University*



TEXAS  
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raised by religion courses in public schools. His two earlier reports on Bible courses for the Austin-based watchdog group Texas Freedom Network Education Fund led to the drastic revision of a nationally used Bible curriculum and helped draw attention to the ways in which Bible courses are often used for the unconstitutional promotion of certain religious views over others in public school classrooms. Those reports also served as the basis of articles published in the journals *Religion & Education*, *Journal of Church and State*, *Religion and American Culture*, and *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Chancey now serves as a member of the editorial boards of *Religion & Education* and *Teaching the Bible*. An Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor, Chancey has been recognized by SMU with the Golden Mustang Teaching Award, the Rotunda Outstanding Professor Award, and the Maguire Center Public Scholar Award.

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BY PROFESSOR MARK A. CHANCEY, *Southern Methodist University (Dallas)*



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♦ FUND ♦

A Report from the  
Texas Freedom Network Education Fund

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## INTRODUCTION: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

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The state of Texas now has a specific law on teaching about the Bible in public schools. In 2007 the Legislature passed [House Bill 1287](#)<sup>1</sup>, which inserted into the Texas Education Code a provision allowing districts to offer “elective courses on the Bible’s Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament.” The law also includes a directive mandating that “each school district that offers kindergarten through grade 12” include in its required curriculum attention to “religious literature, including the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament, and its impact on history and literature.” That requirement could be met in any required course, including social studies and English classes.

Texas is not alone in having a Bible course law; Georgia (2006), Tennessee (2008), Oklahoma (2010), and Arizona (2012) have likewise all passed similar bills. In addition to these laws, which encourage on-campus Bible courses, some states (such as South Carolina) have statutes explicitly allowing students to receive academic credit for Bible courses taken off school grounds.<sup>2</sup>

Long before this recent legislative activity, the U. S. Supreme Court addressed the question of whether students could learn about the Bible in public schools. Nearly 50 years ago, the court commented in *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* that

It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.<sup>3</sup>

The Court’s ruling means that Bible courses in public schools are constitutionally permissible as long as they are taught in an academic manner that does not cross the line into religious instruction or religiously biased presentation. As a federal district court ruled in *Crockett v. Sorenson* (1983), material in Bible courses “should be taught in an objective manner with no attempt made to indoctrinate the children as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials.”<sup>4</sup> A general rule of thumb was provided by another district court in *Wiley v. Franklin* (1979): “If that which is taught seeks either to disparage or to encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs, it is constitutionally impermissible in a public school setting.”<sup>5</sup> These prescriptions reflect the so-called “Lemon test”: to determine if government actions regarding religion is constitutional, courts typically ask if the actions “have a secular purpose”; whether their principal or primary effect “advances or inhibits religion”; and whether they foster “an excessive government entanglement with religion.”<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, the courts have provided little detailed guidance on how to achieve the level of neutrality presumed in such language.<sup>7</sup> As a result, confusion about how to teach appropriately about religion is common. Intentionally or not, Bible courses are often taught from religious perspectives, with the result that some students find their own beliefs endorsed in the classroom while others find theirs disparaged or ignored. To complicate matters further, some groups and individuals have attempted to skirt the law by surreptitiously inserting their own religious beliefs into curricula. Controversies over how to teach about religion are common.

A recent example of such a controversy occurred in Odessa, Texas. In 2005 – two years before the state passed its Bible course law – the Ector County Independent School District (ECISD) school board began considering the use of course materials prepared by a Religious Right group, the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS). In 1998 a federal court had prohibited a Florida school district from teaching the New Testament section of the NCBCPS curriculum and allowed only a thoroughly revised version of the Old Testament portion to be taught.<sup>8</sup> Aware of the NCBCPS’s history, a local Odessa parent voiced his concern that its resources were designed to promote particular theological and political agendas. Worried about how the introduction of this curriculum would affect his Jewish daughter’s school environment, he urged the district to examine other curricular options. The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund published a report on the organization and its curriculum that August, *The Bible and Public Schools: Report on the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS)* ([www.tfn.org/BibleCourses](http://www.tfn.org/BibleCourses)), concluding that it attempted to persuade students to adopt “views that are held primarily within certain conservative Protestant circles but not within the scholarly community” and that it presented “Christian faith claims as history.”<sup>9</sup> Although the NCBCPS quickly corrected some of the course’s most egregious problems, subsequent editions have remained deeply flawed from both an academic and a constitutional perspective.<sup>10</sup> The ECISD nonetheless adopted the NCBCPS curriculum, prompting several plaintiffs to file a lawsuit challenging its legality. The district ultimately decided to abandon the curriculum rather than defend it in court, agreeing to a mediated settlement that allowed a Bible course to be taught as long as it was based on an original curriculum created by the district itself.<sup>11</sup> [See Appendix 2 for a copy of the [mediated settlement](#).<sup>12</sup>] Ironically, as this present report documents, ECISD still struggles with how to teach appropriate Bible courses; the version taught at the district’s Permian High School in 2011-12 was particularly sectarian in nature.

ECISD is hardly unique in having a difficult time crafting an appropriate class. In 2006 the

TFN Education Fund published *Reading, Writing & Religion: Teaching the Bible in Texas Public Schools* ([www.tfn.org/BibleCourses](http://www.tfn.org/BibleCourses)), which examined course materials from every district that had offered a Bible course in 2005-06 – 25 districts in all. That study discovered that only three of those districts had taught the courses “in a legally and academically sound manner that is respectful toward the biblical material and the diverse sensibilities and backgrounds of students.” The other 22 courses all assumed or encouraged religious views associated primarily with particular circles within Protestant Christianity, thus promoting that one faith perspective above all others. The study urged that districts ensure teachers of Bible courses have proper academic preparation and sufficient training on legal issues, avoid basing their courses on sectarian resources, and carefully monitor the courses’ content.

The following year, the Texas Legislature passed its law – HB 1287 – requiring school districts to teach about the Bible. The wording and legislative history of this bill have generated considerable confusion over exactly what it mandates, and many citizens and educators – including the leadership of some school districts – remain perplexed about how to comply. Some mistakenly believe that the law requires districts to offer distinct courses focusing on the Bible, when in fact it requires only that academic attention to the Bible be included somewhere in K-12 curriculum, such as in existing courses.

The primary source for this misunderstanding is a failure to understand how the bill developed. When the bill was originally proposed, it read: “A school district *shall* [emphasis added] offer to students in grades nine or above an elective course in the history and literature of the Old Testament era and an elective course in the history and literature of the New Testament era.” Furthermore, that initial version edited the pertinent section (28.002[a]) of the Texas Education Code to read: “Each school district that offers kindergarten through grade 12 shall offer, as a required curriculum ... the history and literature of the Old and New Testaments eras....” Although it emphasized that any such course must adhere to the constitutional guidelines offered by various courts, it prohibited the State Board of Education (SBOE) from identifying any

standards (“essential knowledge and skills”) or adopting textbooks for the course, leaving all such decisions up to local school boards.

This, however, was not the version of the bill that the Legislature passed. The House Public Education Committee changed it in important ways. The amended bill made Bible courses optional instead of required, substituting the word “may” for the earlier word “shall”:

*A school district may [emphasis added] offer to students in grade nine or above (1) an elective course on the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and its impact and an elective course on the New Testament and its impact; or (2) an elective course that combines the courses described by Subdivision (1) [that is, a single one-semester Bible course rather than two Bible courses].*

The House Public Education Committee also amended the bill to require the SBOE to submit essential knowledge and skill standards for Bible courses to the Attorney General of Texas. It added a requirement for the Commissioner of Education to “develop and make available training materials and other teacher training resources for a school district to use in assisting teachers of elective Bible courses” in developing proficiency in subject content, pedagogy, and the pertinent legal issues. These resources and materials were to be made “available to Bible course teachers through access to in-service training.” This amended version of the bill was the one passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the governor, with the designation that it would take effect in the 2009-10 school year.

However, the final form of the bill did retain the original’s specification that every school district be required to insert attention to the Bible into its “required curriculum.” The tension between this old provision and the new wording that districts “may” offer Bible electives prompted some interpreters to maintain that the law mandated every district in the state to develop a Bible course and others to argue

that districts could comply with the law without creating distinct Bible courses. To resolve the issue, the education commissioner sought the opinion of the attorney general of Texas. In an August 28, 2008, opinion ([No. GA-0657<sup>13</sup>](#)), the attorney general declared that the wording of the law meant that “a school district has discretion and authority to offer such courses but it is not required to do so.” The attorney general further noted that districts could comply with the law by including academic study of the Bible in existing courses.

The Texas Education Agency subsequently prepared a document clarifying the law’s impact on school districts. [See Appendix 3 for the 2008 and the [2011](#) versions of this TEA document. The excerpts below are from the 2008 version.] The “FAQ for Bible Literacy” explicitly addressed the question of whether special Bible courses were mandatory:

*Does the school district have to offer the Bible Literacy course?*

*No. The Attorney General’s Opinion No. GA-0657 determined that the [Bible] course ... is not required to be offered. However, the Opinion also determined that because “religious literature” had been added to the required enrichment curriculum, some instruction in that subject is required. Districts may incorporate instruction regarding religious literature ... in existing history or literature courses, or may offer a specific course on that subject.*

The TEA further noted:

*Although districts are not required to offer a Bible literacy course, districts are required to imbed literary and historical references into existing courses. That instruction could be incorporated in a number of other courses. For example, Biblical allusions in Shakespeare or other authors could be studied, or study of the Reformation or other historical events could*

provide a basis for that topic. How religious literature is incorporated into existing courses is a matter of local control.

According to this document, the state will not monitor districts' compliance with these requirements.

For those districts that did choose to offer Bible electives, the law mandated that the state develop course standards and teacher training. In this regard, Texas had the opportunity to show national leadership in ensuring that teachers, schools and districts were properly equipped to study the Bible in an academic and constitutional manner. Unfortunately, the state has thus far fallen short on both counts. Rather than developing content-specific guidelines for Bible courses, the SBOE determined that the broadly defined parameters of the "Special Topics in Social Studies" and "Independent Study in English" TEKS were applicable to Bible courses. With minimal changes, the board then [adopted those general standards for Bible courses](#).<sup>14</sup> (The SBOE did so despite a letter from the chairman and other members of the House Public Education Committee clearly explaining that the law's requirement was for content-specific standards. See Appendix 4.) Furthermore, because the Legislature did not appropriate funding for in-service training and teaching materials, the Texas Education Agency never developed any. The result is that Texas teachers who offer Bible courses have virtually no direction from the state on how to do so in ways that ensure academic quality and constitutional acceptability.

The predictable consequence of this lack of guidance is that many Texas courses are taught from a biased perspective that privileges some religious views over all others. In some cases, the bias appears to be intentional, but in many others it seems more indicative of a lack of training than of an inappropriate agenda. Indeed, one cannot help but sympathize with many of the teachers of Bible courses. Some did not request to teach these courses but were assigned them by their districts. Some are using curricular materials that they did not select but that were chosen for them by committees or their school boards.

The present study evaluates the resulting courses

for constitutionality and academic quality. The materials analyzed in it were obtained by Texas Freedom Network Education Fund (TFNEF) through requests submitted to school districts and charter schools through the Texas Public Information Act. TFNEF asked that school districts submit course materials (syllabi, lesson plans, tests, quizzes, handouts, names of resources utilized) and information regarding teacher qualifications. On request, it compensated school districts financially for expenses incurred in this process. The amount of materials provided by school districts varied widely; in a few cases too little was provided to allow detailed analysis.

All of the courses considered were offered in 2011-12, with the exception of that of Brenham ISD, which cancelled its course that year because of low enrollment but submitted course materials from a previous academic year. Most of these courses are taught in accordance with the detailed provisions added to the Texas Education Code (TEC) by HB 1287. The law itself, however, specified that this addition to the TEC "does not prohibit a school district from offering a course, other than the course authorized by this section, in the academic study of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, or both for local credit or for state elective credit towards high school graduation." That is to say, courses do not necessarily have to follow all of the provisions of HB 1287 to be legal under state law. They are, however, expected to adhere to the constitutional guidelines aptly summarized by that law: "A course ... shall not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective."

In some respects, things have improved since the 2005-06 report, *Reading, Writing & Religion: Teaching the Bible in Texas Public Schools*. Whereas very few of the courses analyzed for that study succeeded in avoiding serious legal and academic problems, several of the courses examined in the present study are very good in both respects. (See Section 13 of this report.) Most, however, are of mixed quality, with some elements that avoid religious bias and engage students in challenging ways and other elements that end up promoting some religious views over others, albeit often unintentionally. Unfortunately, a fair number of

courses are blatantly and thoroughly sectarian, presenting religious views as fact and implicitly or explicitly encourage students to adopt those views. (See the table at the end of this section.) In each and every case in which a course promotes religious views, the views in question are Christian, often those associated with conservative forms of Protestantism. No Texas course is taught from a perspective that privileges Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or mainline Protestant denominations, although some courses are intentional in teaching their students *about* the religious views of these various groups. On the other hand, no course is taught from a perspective that could reasonably be construed as “anti-religious.” In calling attention to the ways in which Texas Bible courses reflect religious bias, this study strives to identify areas for improvement. In calling attention to the ways in which Texas teachers succeed, it hopes to provide positive examples for other districts to follow.

See Appendix 5 for legal guidelines from the [First Amendment Center](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org) ([www.firstamendmentcenter.org](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org)) for schools offering Bible courses.

#### Most Problematic Courses in 2011-12

Life School (charter)
Alba-Golden ISD
Amarillo ISD
Belton ISD
Boys Ranch ISD
Brenham ISD
Christoval ISD
Dalhart ISD
Dayton ISD
Duncanville ISD
Eastland ISD
Ector County ISD
Eustace ISD
Klein ISD
Lazbuddie ISD
Longview ISD
Lubbock ISD
Peaster ISD
Perryton ISD
Prosper ISD
Sonora ISD



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## CHAPTER 1: BUILDING WEAK FOUNDATIONS

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Because of the failure to implement key guidelines for Bible courses laid out in House Bill 1287, many school districts have produced courses with weak foundations. In particular, many teachers lack needed training for such courses, and academic quality and rigor are often poor.



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## SECTION I: BIBLE COURSE BASICS FOR 2011 – 12

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Without a doubt, HB 1287 contributed to an increase in the number of Texas Bible courses. In 2005-06, only 25 districts in the entire state offered such courses. In 2011-12, at least 57 school districts and 3 charter schools did so. While a significant increase, 57 is still only a small percentage (5.5%) of the 1039 school districts in the state. (Texas has an additional 208 charter school districts.) Presumably, the overwhelming majority of school districts comply with HB 1287 not by offering a distinct Bible course but by incorporating material about the Bible into other courses.

The following chart indicates Texas school districts that offered a Bible course in 2011-12 (2010-11 for Brenham ISD). The subject area listed in the last column indicates which set of general State Board of Education-approved curriculum standards, Special Topics in Social Studies or Independent Studies in English, the school district chose to use. Both sets essentially offer broad guidelines rather than content standards truly specific to a course about the Bible.

Name of District	Name of Course	Subject Area
1. Abilene ISD		
a. Abilene HS		English or
b. Cooper HS	Hebrew Scriptures/ New Testament	Social Studies
2. Alba-Golden ISD	History of the Bible	English
3. Amarillo ISD		
a. Amarillo HS		
b. Tascosa HS	Old Testament/ New Testament	Local credit
4. Aransas County ISD	The Bible as Literature	English
5. Beaumont ISD	Old Testament/ New Testament	English
6. Belton ISD	Bible as Literature	Social Studies
7. Big Spring ISD	Special Topics in Social Studies	English
8. Boerne ISD		Social Studies
a. Boerne HS	Influence of the Old Testament on History and Literature/	
b. Boerne-Samuel V. Champion HS	Influence of the New Testament on History and Literature	
9. Boys Ranch ISD	Old and New Testament as Literature	Social Studies
10. Bridge City ISD	Unclear	Unclear
11. Christoval ISD	The Bible in History and Literature: Hebrew Scriptures	Social Studies
12. Conroe ISD	Bible Literacy and Western Civilization	English
a. College Park HS		
b. Conroe HS		
c. Oak Ridge HS		
d. The Woodlands HS		
13. Corsicana ISD	Bible Literacy	English
14. Dalhart ISD	The Bible's Influences on Western Civilization	English
15. Dayton ISD	Old Testament/ New Testament	Social Studies
16. Dripping Springs ISD	Bible Literacy	Social Studies
17. Duncanville ISD	Bible Survey	Social Studies
18. East Central ISD	Bible Literacy: The Bible and its Influence	English
19. Eastland ISD	Independent Studies in English and History (Bible)	English
20. Ector County ISD		Social Studies
a. Odessa HS	Bible History	
b. Permian HS	Bible History and Literature	
21. Eustace ISD	Bible History	Social Studies
22. Forsan ISD	Humanities	Humanities
23. Gilmer ISD	The Bible and its Influences	Unclear
24. Goose Creek ISD	Bible Literacy	Social Studies
25. Grapevine-Colleyville ISD	The Bible as Literature	English
26. Hallettsville ISD	Bible a Literature	English
27. Hooks ISD	Bible Literacy	General elective
28. Huntsville ISD	Influences of the Old Testament Bible on American Civilization/ Influences of the New Testament Bible on American Civilization	Social Studies
29. Jacksboro ISD	Academic Study of the Bible and its Influences	Social Studies
30. Joshua ISD	Old Testament/ New Testament	English
31. Klein ISD	The Bible as Literature	English
32. La Porte ISD	The Bible as History and Literature	Social Studies
33. Lazbuddie ISD	Two-semester course: Special Topics in Social Studies: Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) (1 semester) Special Topics in Social Studies: Hebrew Scripture (New Testament) (1 semester)	Social Studies

34. Leander ISD		Social Studies
a. Cedar Park HS	Influences of the Bible	
b. Vandergrift HS	Influence of the Old Testament Bible on American Civilization/ Influences of the New Testament on American Civilization	
c. Vista Ridge HS	The Role of the Bible in the Development of Western Civilization	
35. Longview ISD	The Bible as Literature	English
36. Lovejoy ISD	Influences of the Bible All high schools:	English Social Studies
37. Lubbock ISD	The Bible's Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)	Social Studies
a. Coronado HS	and Its Impact on the History and Literature and Western Civilization	
b. Lubbock HS	The Bible's New Testament and Its Impact on the History and Literature of Western Civilization	
38. Malakoff ISD	Special Topics in Social Studies: Hebrew Studies (Old Testament) (1 semester) Special Topics in Social Studies – New Testament (1 semester)	Social Studies
39. Mount Vernon ISD	The Bible's Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament and Their Impact on the History and Literature of Western Civilization	Unclear
40. North East ISD	The Bible As/ In Literature	English
41. Peaster ISD	Hebrew Scriptures/ New Testament	English
42. Perryton ISD	Bible	General elective
43. Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD	Bible Studies	English
44. Pittsburg ISD	Bible Literacy	Unclear
45. Plano ISD	Bible Literacy	English
a. Plano Senior HS		
b. Plano East Senior HS		
c. Plano West Senior HS		
46. Pleasanton ISD	Bible Literacy	English
47. Point Isabel ISD	Bible Literacy	Social Studies
48. Prosper ISD	Bible History/ New Testament	General Elective
49. Quinlan ISD	Unclear	Unclear
50. Redwater ISD	Bible History	Social Studies
51. Refugio ISD	The Bible as Literature	Social Studies
52. Sonora ISD	Bible Studies	Social Studies
53. Springlake-Earth ISD	Unclear	Unclear
54. Terrell ISD	Bible: Old Testament/ Bible: New Testament	Social Studies
55. Tomball ISD	Bible as Literature	English
56. White Settlement ISD	The Bible in History and Literature: Hebrew Scriptures	General elective
57. Whitehouse ISD	Role of the Bible in the Development of Western Civilization	Social Studies
<b>Districts Submitting Course Materials from Previous Academic Years:</b>		
Brenham ISD	Bible I/ Bible II	Social Studies
<b>Charter Schools Submitting Course Materials:</b>		
1. A+ Academy (Dallas)	The Bible as Applied to History and Literature	Unclear
2. Life School (Dallas area)		
a. Red Oak		
b. Secondary	Hebrew Scriptures-Old Testament/ New Testament	Social Studies
3. Shekhinah Academy (Schertz)	Bible as History	Unclear

As already noted, Brenham ISD did not offer a Bible course in 2011-12; discussions in this report of that district's course are based on materials from earlier years. Willis ISD initially offered a Bible course in 2011-12 but cancelled it due to insufficient student interest. Not all of the districts listed in the chart are currently offering courses; Christoval, Lazbuddie and Lubbock ISDs all indicated that they would not offer a course in 2012-13.<sup>15</sup>

Most districts teach Bible courses in Grades 11 and 12, although some also make them available to 9th- and 10th-graders. In a few districts, multiple high schools offer the courses. Most districts offer

the course as a two-semester sequence, although some offer only a single semester. Most courses are for credit toward state graduation requirements, although a few districts offer them only for local credit.

Enrollment in Bible courses varies considerably, reflecting district and campus size and, one suspects, the level of student interest. For the districts and schools that provided enrollment data, the chart below indicates the number of students in such courses within a single district (combining multiple courses and schools when appropriate) as measured by the semester for which enrollment was highest.

School District	Enrollment 1 - 5	Enrollment 6 - 10	Enrollment 11 - 20	Enrollment 21 - 50	Enrollment > 50
1. Abilene ISD					X
2. Alba-Golden ISD		X			
3. Amarillo ISD			X		
4. Big Spring ISD				X	
5. Boerne ISD					X
6. Boys Ranch ISD	X				
7. Christoval ISD	X				
8. Corsicana ISD		X			
9. Duncanville ISD			X		
10. East Central ISD			X		
11. Eustace ISD	X				
12. Grapevine-Colleyville ISD			X		
13. Goose Creek ISD				X	
14. Huntsville ISD				X	
15. Jacksboro ISD		X			
16. Joshua ISD				X	
17. Lazbuddie ISD	X				
18. Leander ISD				X	
19. Longview ISD			X		
20. Lovejoy ISD		X			
21. Lubbock ISD				X	
22. Mount Vernon ISD			X		
23. Peaster ISD	X				
24. Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD				X	
25. Pittsburgh ISD				X	
26. Plano ISD					X
27. Pleasanton ISD			X		
28. Point Isabel ISD			X		
29. Redwater ISD			X		
30. Refugio ISD			X		
31. Sonora ISD			X		
32. Springlake ISD	X				
33. Terrell ISD				X	
34. Tomball ISD				X	
35. Whitehouse ISD				X	

Districts usually offer Bible courses as English/language arts or social studies electives. Those offered as English/language arts sometimes focus primarily on literary features such as plot, themes, characterization and genre, while those offered as social studies sometimes devote more attention to issues related to history, geography and religion. Often, however, there is minimal difference in content between courses, regardless of their curricular area; social studies courses might devote significant attention to literary questions, while English/language arts courses might focus heavily on historical questions.

A comparison of districts examined in the 2006 TFNEF study on Bible courses and the current one is instructive.<sup>16</sup> Of the 25 districts offering courses in 2005-06, only nine offered courses in 2011-12. Thus, most of the 2011-12 courses were quite new, and most of the earlier courses had fairly short lifespans. There are important exceptions to this last observation, however. The Big Spring ISD course was established in the heyday of the early- and mid-twentieth century program called Weekday (or Week-Day) Religious Education, a joint project of churches and public schools. Big Spring school officials have dated that course's inception to 1932-33, although an earlier study placed its creation in the mid-1940s; either way, it is undoubtedly the state's longest running course.<sup>17</sup> The Amarillo ISD course likely dates back in one form or another to at least the mid-1970s. The Belton and North East ISD courses started in the 1990s. Otherwise, all courses examined in this report began in 2000 or later, and 48 of them are less than five years old, many of them a response to the new law.

The cessation of two of courses analyzed in the 2006 TFNEF report merits particular comment. The Corpus Christi ISD course, the beginning of which stretched back to at least the early 1980s, had been one of state's oldest, and the 2006 study also found it to be one of the most sectarian. The district ceased offering it in 2011, however, because of lack of student interest.<sup>18</sup> Brady ISD's course was a more recent creation, appearing in 1997-1998, but it was significant as the flagship course of the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools.<sup>19</sup> The reasons for its suspension or elimination are unclear.

OFFERED BIBLE COURSE IN 2005-06	OFFERED BIBLE COURSE IN 2011-12
Alvin ISD	
Amarillo ISD	X
Belton ISD	X
Big Spring ISD	X
Blanket ISD	
Brady ISD	
Brazosport ISD	
Brenham ISD	X
Celina ISD	
Coahoma ISD	
Corpus Christi ISD	
Duncanville ISD	X
Forsan ISD	X
Graford ISD	
Greenville ISD	
Hamshire-Fannett ISD	
Leander ISD	X
Lindale ISD	
Millsap ISD	
Mineral Wells ISD	
North East ISD (San Antonio)	X
Perryton ISD	X
San Angelo ISD	
Sweetwater ISD	
Whiteface Consolidated ISD	

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## SECTION 2: ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF BIBLE COURSE TEACHERS

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Most of the Bible teachers in Texas public schools appear to be regular teaching staff in their respective districts, although in at least one (Longview ISD), the instructor is a long-term substitute teacher. HB 1287 stated that teachers of Bible elective courses (at least, those electives designed to follow the law's specifications) "must hold a minimum of a High School composite Certification in language arts, social studies, or history...." The majority of Bible course teachers are certified in one of these areas. Exceptions include Sonora ISD, where the course is taught by a teacher certified in science and whose other courses are in physics and computer science. Some districts, such as Amarillo ISD, indicate that their courses are sometimes taught by uncertified teachers.

Several teachers are ministers. In some cases they are regular district employees who also serve as clergy, as in the Sonora ISD and Gilmer ISD courses and the Permian High School course in Ector County ISD. In other cases those teachers do not seem to be otherwise employed by the district. The pastor of a local church taught the Amarillo High School course, and a retired minister teaches that of Duncanville High School. In all of these cases, if the individuals were selected to teach by their districts because of their academic qualifications, their ministerial status is not necessarily problematic – unless they teach the courses according to the precepts of their own religious traditions. Unfortunately, a review of materials submitted by the school districts reveals the latter to be the case in all of the courses mentioned above.

As noted earlier, HB 1287 required that teachers of the Bible courses described in the legislation's

own detailed provisions receive special training: "A teacher selected to teach a course under this section shall successfully complete staff development training ... A course under this section may only be taught by a teacher who has successfully completed training...." Five years after passing the law, the Texas Legislature has still never appropriated any funding to support the mandatory requirement it created. As a result, the Texas Education Agency has not yet developed an appropriate in-service training program, and a November 2011 pledge to offer training through Project Share, an online portal of resources for Texas educators, remains unfulfilled. In most cases districts are offering Bible courses without their teachers or other administrators having received any course-specific professional training despite the law's explicit requirement that staff development training be completed.

Thirteen districts did manage to obtain professional development for their teachers or other pertinent district personnel. Four sent representatives to a 2009 summer workshop titled "Teaching the Bible in Texas Public Schools," which was sponsored by the University of Texas at Austin's Religious Studies Department and Institute for the Study of Antiquity and Christian Origins in partnership with the Society of Biblical Literature.<sup>20</sup> Highlighting foundational concepts of biblical studies, the varying roles of the Bible in different religious traditions, and First Amendment issues, the workshop attracted a total of 21 Texas educators. Despite its success, a similar workshop the following summer was cancelled due to insufficient response, a circumstance that probably reflected confusion among the districts about what type of training was

required and districts' shifting of staff development funds to other curricular areas.

In 10 of the districts discussed in this study, the teacher or other district personnel received special training from the Bible Literacy Project (BLP). In most cases the training consisted of a one-day session for new teachers or for administrators considering adopting the BLP textbook. The teacher in Whitehouse ISD, however, received more extensive instruction at a 2008 BLP summer institute at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon.

One district (Lubbock ISD) received training from the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools. NCBCPS's teacher training sessions are typically offered by instructors with no academic background in biblical or religious studies. Given the thorough sectarian content of the group's curriculum itself, it is likely that its workshop is similarly problematic.

#### TEACHER TRAINING FOR BIBLE COURSES

BLP Workshop or Course	University of Texas at Austin 2009 Workshop	NCBPS Workshop
Boerne	Conroe	Lubbock
Conroe	Goose Creek	
Corsicana	Plano	
Dayton	Pleasanton	
Hooks		
La Porte		
Longview		
Plano		
Refugio		
Whitehouse		

Most Bible course teachers have never had a single college-level course in biblical, religious or theological studies, despite HB 1287's requirement that they hold "where practical, a minor in religion or biblical studies." Only 20 districts and two charter schools reported that their teachers had ever taken any academic coursework related to the scholarly study of religion. The focus of the courses they reported ranged from biblical studies to various fields of Christian studies (theology, church history, religious education) to more diverse fields of religious studies. The amount of coursework varied, ranging anywhere from a single course to

a graduate degree. The natures of the institutions where the courses were taken also reflected great diversity, from state schools (e.g., the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of Texas at Austin) to private colleges (e.g., the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Criswell College, Wheaton University, and Abilene Christian University) to seminaries and other graduate institutions (e.g., Asbury Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary). As these examples indicate, some institutions were secular, while others had religious (always Christian) identities. Course materials provided by school districts demonstrate that backgrounds at both types of institutions can provide strong preparation for teaching a Bible course. To maintain legality, however, it is essential that graduates of religious institutions do not import the particular theological orientations of their alma maters into the public school classroom.

In some cases an instructor's previous coursework clearly contributed to the success of the course as a whole. Thus, one of the Conroe ISD teachers had a religion major from University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, the East Central ISD teacher had pertinent work at the University of Texas at Austin and had a master's in philosophy from the University of Oklahoma, and the La Porte teacher held a religion minor from the University of Texas at Austin. The courses they taught were among the most legally compliant in the state. On the other hand, courses in districts such as Boerne, North East and Plano were also very adept in maintaining appropriate constitutional boundaries even though their teachers had no reported religion coursework.

Surprisingly, some of the courses taught by teachers with the most academic background nonetheless had strong sectarian natures, as two of the courses taught by area ministers illustrate. The minister teaching at Ector County's Permian High School has a bachelor's in Christian education, a Bible minor from Howard Payne University, and is currently working on his doctorate at Biola University. He serves as an adjunct in the School of Christian Studies at Howard Payne University. The Duncanville ISD teacher had a doctorate in theology from Orthodox Baptist Institute. As examples elsewhere in this report show, both of their courses

contained numerous elements that federal courts have explicitly identified as unconstitutional.

The wide variability of course quality and legal acceptability – even among teachers with college- or graduate-level coursework in directly pertinent fields – demonstrates the need for the state to develop more detailed content-specific course standards as well as substantial and standardized teacher training workshops. Without such direction, teachers often have little choice but to rely on what they have learned either from popular culture or from their own religious backgrounds. The result is that religious elements can find their way into their courses, despite even the best intentions of good teachers.

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### SECTION 3: ACADEMIC QUALITY AND RIGOR

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The frequent appearance of factual errors in course materials underscores the need for professional development opportunities for teachers. Students who take some of these courses may find themselves at a distinct disadvantage when they discover in college that they learned inaccurate information in high school.

Because many examples are noted in the various sections of this report, only one case will be discussed here. Texas course materials reflect much confusion about how the Bible was canonized, that is, the processes by which religious communities identified which books should be identified as scripture. For both Jews and Christians, canonization took a long time, and no single group or council ever made a final authoritative decision binding for the whole tradition.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, Texas courses frequently credit decisions about the final form of a tradition's canon to very specific parties – although the identities of those parties vary tremendously from one district to another. The following examples are representative of courses that misconstrue these processes. All rightly point to the fourth century CE as the period in which acceptance of a 27-book New Testament seems to have become widespread (though not universal), but all include factually inaccurate details:

- A worksheet at Ector County ISD asks, “The New Testament canon was closed at the Council of \_\_\_\_\_ in 397 A.D.” [The intended, although incorrect, answer is “Carthage”].
- A PowerPoint slide from Longview ISD reads: “<sup>315</sup> AD--Council of Trent--New Testament Canon--officially accepted” [The Council of Trent, a

Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation, occurred in 1545-1563.]

- Dripping Springs ISD repeats a common error of attributing the beginning of the process to Emperor Constantine, who issued an edict legalizing Christianity in 313 CE: “Under what Roman Emperor instituted the Edict of Milan which began canonization of the Bible?” [*sic*].

The academic rigor of many courses is also questionable. The majority of course materials submitted by Texas schools focus entirely on memorization of content or the most basic level of reading comprehension. Indeed, many courses appear to focus on these skills so strongly that they almost entirely neglect the tasks of cultivating critical thinking skills. Their documents reflect little more intellectual demand than memorizing and repeating specific biblical passages; looking up verses to answer fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, true/false, and matching exercises; or remembering the basics of Bible stories for simple questions on quizzes and tests. While such exercises might play important roles in courses that employ them alongside other pedagogical and assessment strategies, their use as the sole teaching strategy is insufficient to introduce students to the richness and complexity of the biblical text. Courses that over-rely on these methods also often give minimal attention to developing students' writing abilities.

A few examples illustrate the lack of academic challenge in such courses. Almost all of the materials submitted by Alba-Golden ISD fit the description above. A worksheet over the early chapters of Genesis illustrates the course's instructional technique:

GOD LOOKS AT CREATION. GOD DECIDES TO WASH AWAY THE SIN AND THE SINNERS BY \_\_\_\_\_. WATER FROM THE HEAVENS. FIRST TIME IT EVER \_\_\_\_\_... WATERS FROM THE \_\_\_\_\_, WATER \_\_\_\_\_THE EARTH.

FINDS \_\_\_\_\_. A RIGHTEOUS [sic] \_\_\_\_\_ IN GODS [sic] EYES. NOAH IS \_\_\_\_\_. OLD. GOD TELLS HIM TO BUILD AN \_\_\_\_\_. IT TAKES NOAH \_\_\_\_\_YEARS TO FINISH.

Other questions concerning the academic level of Alba-Golden ISD's course are raised by the fact that the course apparently had no lesson plans.

Duncanville ISD's course is similarly replete with exercises that require nothing more than regurgitation of details, such as: "The famous call of Moses to deliver the Israelites came from a burning bush" [True or False] and "The record of creation is written in: A. Gen. 1-2 B. Gen. 3 C. Gen. 4 D. None of these." The Duncanville course also incorporates weekly memory verses, an expectation more often associated with Sunday school.

Even when courses incorporate writing assignments, their presence does not in and of itself necessarily guarantee academic quality. The following assignment from Eustace ISD, for example, is problematic not only for its impossibly broad scope but also for its seeming assumption that "biblical times" consisted of a single historical context rather than a wide range of geographical settings, chronological periods and socio-political environments: "Using Biblical and Present Day Texts, write a 2-4 page paper that answers the following question: How do specific parts of society compare with those parts of society in biblical times and how will the relationship evolve in your life time?"

Numerous other examples of these sorts of exercises can be found in other sections of this report. The issue, again, is not the use of such exercises as one part of a broader set of teaching strategies but rather their overuse in some courses at the expense of other types of assignments.

As with other aspects of course construction, the role of videos varies widely from district to district. Most show at least a few videos, sometimes using religious resources (an issue discussed elsewhere

in the report), but more often incorporating documentaries from sources such as PBS, National Geographic, the History Channel, the Arts and Entertainment Channel and the Discovery Channel. Many also show various adaptations of biblical stories, with Cecil DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (shown in at least 11 districts) and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (shown in at least 9) as particular favorites.

The use and choice of videos in some courses raise serious questions about their academic caliber. As in 2005-06, the Duncanville ISD course relied heavily on Bible cartoons from the Hanna-Barbera series, *The Greatest Adventure: Stories from the Bible*.<sup>22</sup> Duncanville and Perryton ISDs both showed videos featuring the tabloid claims of amateur archaeologist Bob Cornuke, who claims to have demonstrated that the actual location of the biblical Mount Sinai is in Saudi Arabia. Students in the Point Isabel ISD course spent two days watching what lesson plans describe as "the historic documentary *Ancient Aliens*," which presents "a new interpretation of angelic beings described as extraterrestrials." Students were then asked to "write a small paragraph on how valid they think the ancient alien theory is." It is unclear from the course materials how critical the teacher's presentation of this material was, but the designation of two days for a video on this offbeat topic seems questionable given the large amount of material Bible courses are expected to cover.

Fortunately, many courses exhibit higher levels of academic expectation than the examples above suggest, and in some cases, exemplary exercises appear even in courses that have other elements that are problematic. Below are examples of questions or assignments that go well beyond rote memorization and require students to employ analytical skills:

Belton ISD: Assignments highlighting aspects of the literary concepts of "epic," "hero," and "characterization" require students to identify parallels between the character David and "other epic heroes such as Achilles, Odysseus, and Aeneas" and to make a chart identifying positive and negative attributes of David. An essay assignment also reflects keen attention to literary features: "In a well-developed paragraph, explain and give examples of how Esther is a book of extreme literary

symmetry (balance of organization). Show this by discussing duplications within the book, irony in the plot, and contrasts between chapters.”

Conroe ISD: An essay option on the importance of themes requires close reading of the text:

“Many themes recur in the stories of Genesis.

Select a theme, state it, and then trace it in at least two examples from the narratives of Genesis.”

Another assignment underscores the importance of recognizing not only differences between religions but internal diversity within religions:

“Compare messianic expectations in Judaism and in Christianity. How do they differ? How are they alike? How do messianic expectations vary within Judaism or Christianity? Compare messianic concepts in Judaism or Christianity with those of Islam or Hinduism, etc.”

Corsicana ISD: A question on literary elements again requires careful attention to the text: “In the Genesis account of Joseph, structure plays an important role. Describe the plot structure of the narrative of Joseph and how it relates to the overall themes in Genesis.”

Grapevine ISD: An essay on literary devices such as parallelism, simile, metaphor, allusion, apostrophe and personification states: “Using Psalm 103, identify an example of each poetic device. Give the verse, describe the meaning, and explain why the poet chose that device.” Another assignment on “The History of Your Translation” demonstrates the ways in which translations are themselves interpretations. It requires students to study the history of a particular translation, compare it to other translations in regard to “form, style, and readability” and compare the way different translations render individual verses. It then asks students to reflect on the significance of their findings for understanding the biblical material.

Plano ISD: An exercise on poems and paintings that refer or allude to the Adam and Eve story illustrates the importance of biblical imagery in western literature and art and asks students to reflect critically on the interpretive choices made by the poet or artist: “In their groups, have students explore the poet’s/artist’s purpose for appropriating the Adam and Eve story in their poem. Who does the poet/ artist blame? What added significance does the poet/ artist read into the Adam and Eve story? What

elements of the story does the poet/ artist use to interpret the significance of the Fall of Man?”

Lovejoy ISD: Students are assigned a creation myth from a tradition other than Judaism or Christianity and asked to analyze the differences between that myth and the creation story in Genesis. “How might these differences reflect the culture within which the story is told... How do the differences between these two stories add to the reader’s understanding of the Genesis story?”

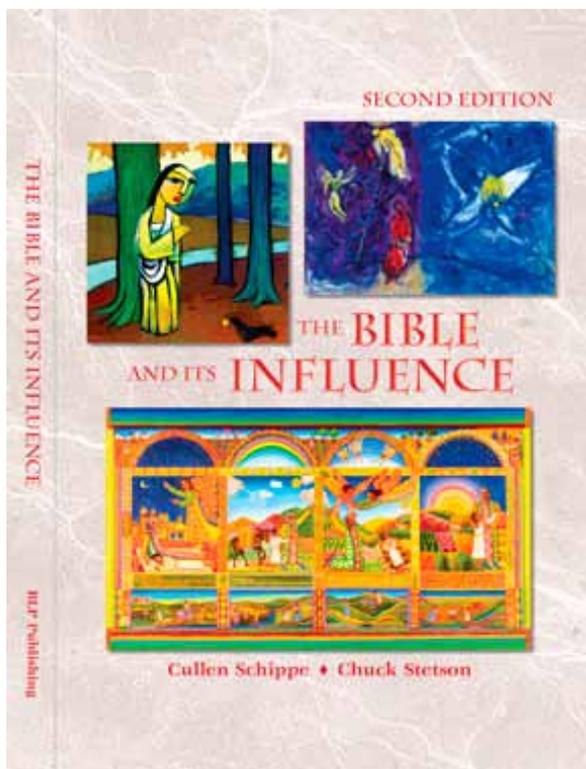
East Central ISD: One of the most challenging assignments in the state focuses on the “multivalence” of parables (that is, their inherent potential to be interpreted in a wide variety of ways). It asks students to read the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) and consider how the parable might have been interpreted in the first century CE by different types of listeners such as a “male peasant day laborer,” the “wife of a male peasant day laborer,” a “male vineyard owner,” and the “wife of a male vineyard owner.” The assignment not only requires students to reflect on the parable itself but helps them to think about how all texts can be interpreted differently, how the socio-economic situations of ancient listeners would have affected their interpretation, and how students’ own interpretive presuppositions are influenced by their positions in contemporary society.

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## SECTION 4: RESOURCES FOR CLASSROOM USE AND TEACHER PREPARATION

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A remarkable variety of materials make their way into Texas Bible courses, whether as a textbook, a supplemental resource or an aid to the teacher: curricula prepared specifically for use in a public high school, college- and graduate-level textbooks, resources aimed at a church audience, trade books of the sort one might find in any bookstore, and all sorts of online materials. As already suggested, the academic quality of many of these materials is quite low. As this section will demonstrate, many of them are written specifically for Christian audiences for the purpose of strengthening their faith.



*Bible Literacy Project*

As it turns out, however, the most widely used resource does not fall into that category: *The Bible and Its Influence* textbook (first edition, 2005; second edition, 2011) and associated resources, all created by the Bible Literacy Project (BLP). In fact, the extensive use of BLP products is the single most distinguishing feature between the courses taught in 2005-06 (before their publication) and those taught in 2011-12. The BLP describes itself as a “non-partisan, non-profit endeavor to encourage and facilitate the academic study of the Bible in public schools.”<sup>23</sup> It provides a complete course, supplemental resources such as sample tests, and professional development opportunities for educators, all designed to foster Bible classes that pass constitutional muster by neither promoting nor disparaging particular religious viewpoints. Its textbook attempts to provide an overview of the biblical material that draws upon the academic fields of biblical and literary studies; exposure to the interpretive strategies applied to the Bible by various religious communities, with particular attention to the differences between classical Jewish and Christian approaches; and an exploration of the ways in which biblical themes, motifs, characters and stories have been interpreted in art, music, literature, film and other media.

There is still room for improvement in regard to both academic quality and the avoidance of religious bias in BLP materials. Discussions of some topics (such as authorship issues) sometimes reflect a clear preference for traditional religious views over other options, and the overall thrust of the book is that religion is largely a source of social progress, with correspondingly less attention to

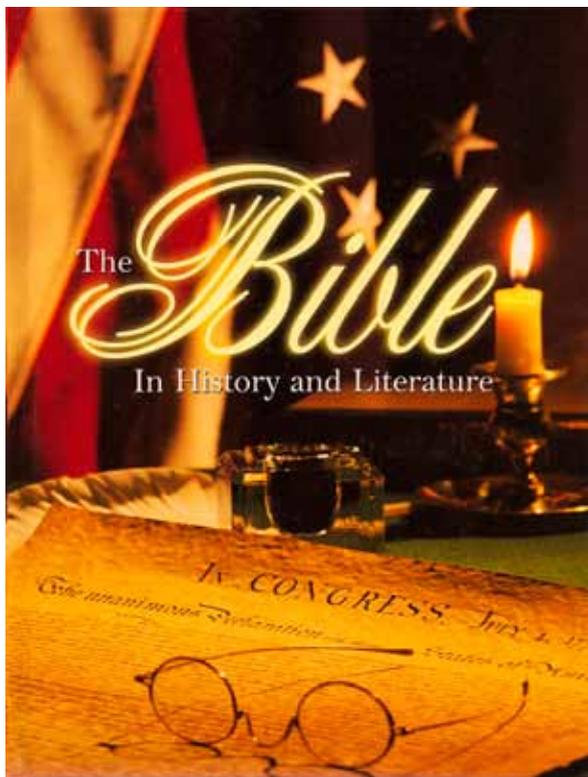
cases in which biblical passages have been used to justify oppression. Indeed, difficult and troubling biblical texts are often (though definitely not always) ignored, with the likely result that students encounter a somewhat sanitized Bible. Nonetheless, the BLP often succeeds in its attempt to provide a nonsectarian Bible course that is respectful of diverse religious sensibilities.

When it comes to Bible courses, Texas has quickly become a BLP state, with over two-thirds of all courses using the group's materials in some way. The extent to which individual courses relied on BLP resources, however, varied considerably. Some districts submitted only BLP materials, indicating that they were the primary or only foundation for the course, while others heavily supplemented the BLP resources with other materials. Some districts that indicated that they utilized BLP products actually appear to make minimal use of them, relying mostly on other resources (most notably Dalhart, Dayton, Longview, Lubbock, Peaster, and Perryton ISDs). A school's usage of the BLP did not guarantee that its course succeeded in avoiding religious bias. The courses of the six districts just identified as well as those of Klein ISD, Life School, and Leander ISD schools included much material taught from a sectarian perspective. It is noteworthy, however, that many of the schools that stuck closely to the BLP's content displayed fewer problems of the sort documented elsewhere in this report.

#### DISTRICTS SUBMITTING MATERIALS FROM THE BIBLE LITERACY PROJECT

1. Abilene ISD
2. Aransas County ISD
3. Beaumont ISD
4. Belton ISD
5. Big Spring ISD
6. Boerne ISD
7. Bridge City ISD
8. Conroe ISD (Conroe, College Park, and Oak Ridge High Schools)
9. Corsicana ISD
10. Dalhart ISD
11. Dayton ISD
12. Dripping Springs ISD
13. East Central ISD
14. Forsan ISD
15. Gilmer ISD
16. Goose Creek ISD
17. Grapevine-Colleyville ISD
18. Hallettsville ISD
19. Hooks ISD
20. Huntsville ISD
21. Jacksboro ISD
22. Joshua ISD
23. Klein ISD
24. La Porte ISD
25. Leander ISD
26. Life School
27. Longview ISD
28. Lubbock ISD
29. Malakoff ISD
30. Mount Vernon ISD
31. North East ISD
32. Peaster ISD
33. Perryton ISD
34. Plano ISD
35. Pleasanton ISD
36. Point Isabel ISD
37. Prosper ISD
38. Refugio ISD
39. Shekinah Radiance Academy
40. Terrell ISD
41. Tomball ISD
42. Whitehouse ISD

Though the BLP is easily the most popular Bible curriculum in the state, the number of schools TFNEF was able to identify as using it does not reach the “120 or more” noted on the organization’s website. Two factors likely contribute to the discrepancy: 1) a few schools offering Bible courses (particularly charter schools) may not have been identified as such by TFNEF’s research; 2) some schools that previously used the BLP suspended their Bible course for 2011-12 or ceased offering it entirely.<sup>24</sup>



NCBCPS

Usage of the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS) lags well behind that of the BLP. Only 11 districts and one charter school submitted NCBCPS materials, but simply listing them does not tell the whole story. High schools in Christoval, Lubbock and Peaster ISDs used the NCBCPS extensively. Although Amarillo ISD officials describe a locally produced course as their sole curriculum, materials submitted by the district included dozens of pages from the NCBCPS; how these pages were used is unclear. Lubbock and Peaster ISDs reported usage of both the NCBCPS and the BLP; it was the NCBCPS

that most influenced their courses. Longview ISD did not list the NCBCPS as a course resource, but some of its materials are clearly derived from the group; nonetheless, the BLP provided most of the structure for that district’s class.

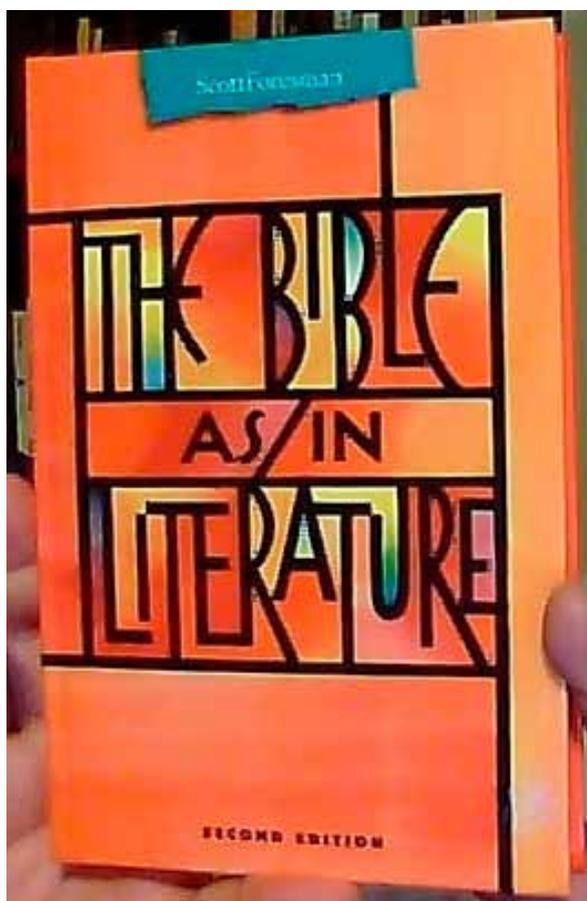
In contrast, although Alba-Golden, Boerne, Plano and Sonora ISDs indicated that their teachers had access to the NCBCPS, the materials they submitted attested to little if any actual use of it. The extensive materials submitted by the strong Boerne ISD and Plano ISD courses, for example, contained not a single example drawn from the NCBCPS course; both districts instead teach from a BLP perspective. Quinlan ISD, Redwater ISD, and A+ Academy provided insufficient materials to assess the nature and extent of their usage of the NCBCPS.

DISTRICTS/SCHOOLS SUBMITTING MATERIALS FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON BIBLE CURRICULUM IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
A+ Academy
Alba-Golden ISD
Amarillo ISD
Boerne ISD
Christoval ISD
Longview ISD
Lubbock ISD
Peaster ISD
Plano ISD
Quinlan ISD
Redwater ISD
Sonora ISD

The NCBCPS is clearly losing ground in Texas. Despite the extensive increase in the number of Bible courses taught in the state, the number of NCBCPS courses in 2011-12 was roughly the same as in 2005-06. Of the 11 districts that used the NCBCPS curriculum in 2005-2006, 10 offered no course at all in 2011-12, including Brady ISD, which formerly served as the flagship district for the NCBCPS. The single district of those 11 that did offer a Bible course (Perryton ISD) no longer uses the NCBCPS. Furthermore, two of the districts teaching NCBCPS courses for 2011-12, Christoval and Lubbock ISDs, reported that they did not intend to offer courses in the present year. Lubbock ISD indicated that it was suspending its

course specifically because of concerns about its curriculum.

Courses that were based on the NCBCPS curriculum typically replicated its theological emphases.<sup>25</sup> For example, they presented the Bible as an infallibly accurate historical source; suggested that biblical manuscripts proved that the wording of the biblical books had undergone little significant change since their composition, a claim designed to buttress conservative Protestant beliefs in biblical inerrancy; and sometimes misrepresented the influence of the Bible in the Founding Era of the United States. For additional discussions of these issues, see the appropriate sections elsewhere in this report.



*The Bible As/In Literature*

The third most frequent resource in Texas is a well-regarded textbook that has been used in public education contexts for decades: James S. Ackerman and Thayer S. Warshaw’s *The Bible As/In Literature*.<sup>26</sup> This book focuses primarily on biblical allusions

and imagery in various genres of western literature. Its literary focus enables it to sidestep many of the pitfalls of more historically and theologically oriented resources.

COURSES USING <i>THE BIBLE AS/IN LITERATURE</i>
Conroe ISD (Conroe High School, Oak Ridge High School)
Eastland ISD
Ector County ISD
Grapevine-Colleyville ISD
La Porte ISD
Lovejoy ISD
North East ISD
Refugio ISD
Tomball ISD

Several districts incorporate charts, maps and PowerPoint presentations produced by Rose Publishing, which describes itself as “a conservative evangelical Christian publisher”<sup>27</sup> (Bridge City, Dalhart, Duncanville, Eastland, Mount Vernon, Peaster, Prosper and Refugio ISDs). Although some of Rose Publishing’s materials are acceptable for public school usage, many of them reflect an inerrantist approach to the Bible and the theological belief that the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament supernaturally predicted events in the life of Jesus and the early church. The materials analyzed for this report suggested difficulty on the part of some schools in identifying the sectarian components of these resources. Materials produced by Gospel Light Productions (used by Peaster and Ector County ISDs) are comparable in their problematic nature.

The courses of three districts (La Porte, Plano and Pleasanton ISDs) used one or both resource books published by the Society of Biblical Literature, a professional society of biblical scholars teaching primarily in college, university and seminary settings: *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction* and *Teaching the Bible: Through Popular Culture and the Arts*.<sup>28</sup> Both of these books contain numerous exercises, discussion starters, and assignments for Bible courses that have been vetted by biblical scholars. A few that are theological in nature would need to be adapted for use in a public high school, but many are suitable for that context in their current form.

Because the other resources used in Texas Bible courses are too numerous and varied to provide a thorough summary, the remainder of this section will provide examples of resources used in Texas courses that explicitly promote particular religious perspectives.

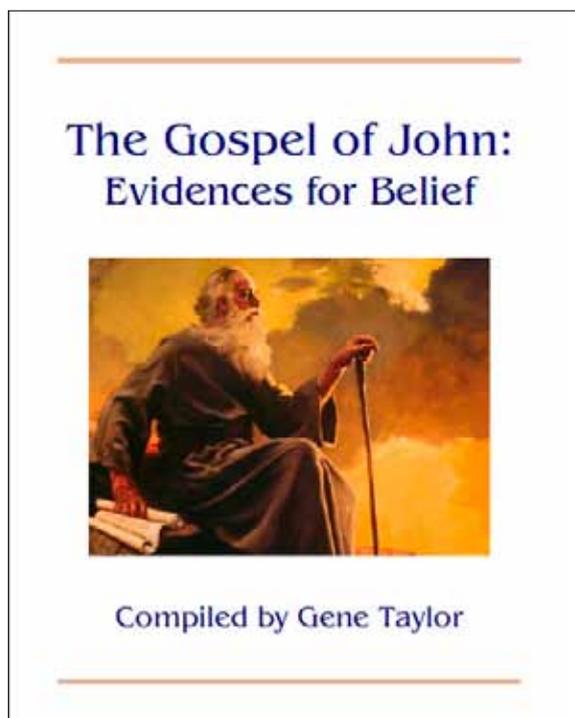
Although *Halley's Bible Handbook* was used in six courses in 2005-06, only two used it in 2011-12. Duncanville ISD continues to rely on it as a primary source for lecture material and test content, while Ector County ISD includes it as one of several resources available to students. As the back cover of the edition used in Duncanville summarizes, "Whether you have never read the Bible before or have read it many times, you will find insights here that can give you a firm grasp of God's World.... You will see how its different themes fit together in a remarkable way. And you will see the heart of God and the person of Jesus Christ revealed from Genesis to Revelation."<sup>29</sup> Although *Halley's* is a much-beloved evangelical classic, its distinctive theological focus makes it difficult to utilize appropriately in a nonsectarian class, and Duncanville's materials in particular reflect a wholesale adoption of its theology.

In two cases, courses use materials designed for use in the religious education classes cooperatively organized by churches and public schools in the mid-1900s. Duncanville ISD continues to use two classic workbooks from that period, just as it did in 2005-06.<sup>30</sup> Sonora ISD leans heavily on textbooks from the old Dallas High Schools Bible course, a church-run class that was taught from the 1920s through the early 1980s. Many of the questions on its final examination were taken directly from the Dallas materials.<sup>31</sup>

Textbooks that were evangelical standards in their own day but are now quite dated (in addition to being thoroughly sectarian) provided much of the lecture preparation material in the Ector County ISD (Permian High School) and Lubbock ISD courses. The ECISD course used H. I. Hester's *The Heart of Hebrew History: A Study of the Old Testament*, and Lubbock ISD used both that book and Hester's *The Heart of the New Testament*.<sup>32</sup> Published by a Baptist press, these books treat the Bible more or less as a history textbook.

Two districts base much of their courses around

online curricular materials written by ministers for conservative Protestants. Dalhart and Dayton ISDs incorporate much of the content from workbooks from an Illinois church's website.<sup>33</sup> Written by evangelists David Padfield, Jeff Asher and Gene Taylor, these books consist primarily of questions that assume a theological and literalistic reading of the Bible. Dalhart ISD uses eight of these workbooks; Dayton ISD, three. The first-person language used in questions from Padfield's *Workbook on the Gospel of Matthew* (2005) illustrate the Christian nature of its intended audience and its conviction that the biblical materials are doctrinally and ethically authoritative for its readers. A review of the Sermon on the Mount asks questions such as: "How are we to perform our charitable deeds?" "How are we to pray?" "What are we to avoid in prayer?" "What is our Father in heaven wanting to give us?" The front cover of Jeff Asher's workbook on the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, *Israel Goes Home* (2002), makes its Christian presuppositions quite clear: "The student will become familiar with the history of the period and the events that set the stage for the developments of the inter-testamental [*sic*] period that ended with the birth of Messiah. Special emphasis is given to the Messianic messages of the

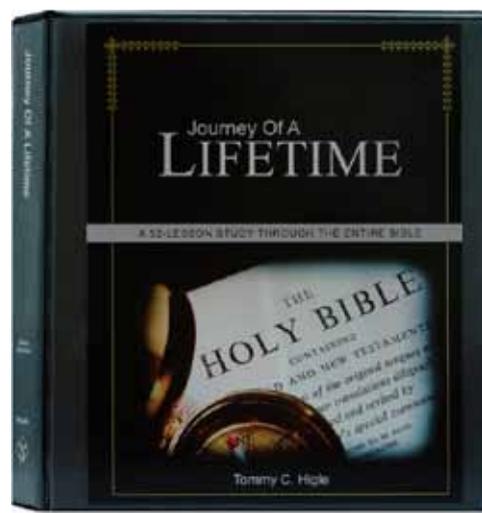


*Evidences for Belief*

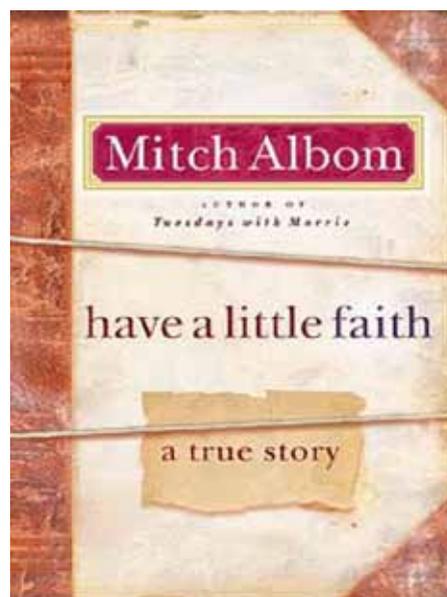
prophets and their exhortations to the remnant to remain faithful unto Jehovah.” Gene Taylor’s *The Gospel of John: Evidences for Belief* (2005), used by Dayton ISD, makes its purpose clear in its preface: “May this study be of value to you. May you fully come to believe that ‘Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.’ And may you have ‘life in His name.’”<sup>34</sup>

Other resources in the Dayton ISD course also clearly promote particular religious views: *Thru the Bible* by the late preacher and radio personality J. Vernon McGee; Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a best-selling exposition of the “end times” theology held in some conservative Protestant circles; *When the Enemy Strikes: The Keys to Winning Your Spiritual Battles*, by the famous Southern Baptist minister Charles Stanley; and *Jesus: The Lion and the Lamb* by David R. Reagan, “senior evangelist for Lion & Lamb Ministries.”<sup>35</sup>

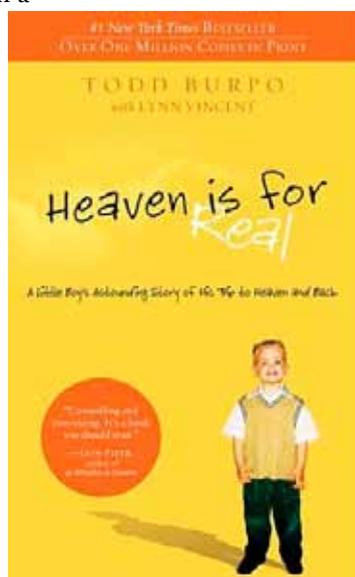
The only resource submitted by Lazbuddie ISD is *Journey of a Lifetime: A fifty-two lesson study of the entire Bible* by Oklahoma minister Tommy C. Higle.<sup>36</sup> “Tips for Your Personal Study” in its introduction include “Pray for God’s guidance before each lesson” and “Don’t worry about scriptures you do not understand. Simply concentrate on what God reveals to you in His Word and trust Him to make the vague things clearer to you as you continue to study.” Lesson one begins with a reference to 2 Timothy 2:15 (“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” [NIV]) as the reason “why we should study the Bible.” The book’s treatment of the Book of Romans explicitly attempts to convert the reader to Christianity with a section titled “How To Receive Salvation.”



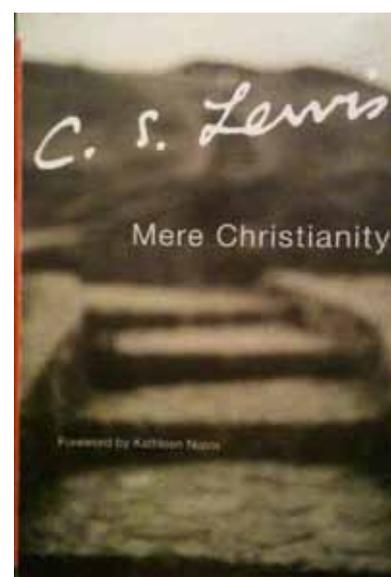
*Journey of a Lifetime*



*Have a Little Faith*



*Heaven Is for Real*



*Mere Christianity*

The texts in the Boys Ranch ISD class mirror what its syllabus identifies as the course's objective: "to consider the teachings of the New Testament through the lens of faith." All three directly promote religious faith: Mitch Albom's *Have a Little Faith* and Todd Burpo's *Heaven Is for Real*, the titles of which accurately communicate their messages, and C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, written "to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times."<sup>37</sup> Students are also directed to read "two books of choice relating to faith."

Some courses show students religious videos that are difficult to reconcile with the Supreme Court's benchmark of an objective approach to the study of the Bible as part of a secular program of education. Four districts utilize videos produced by Sherwood Pictures, a ministry of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia. Sherwood Pictures describes its goal as "to make family-friendly movies that build on the Judeo-Christian ethic and communicate the gospel without compromise."<sup>38</sup> Its movies are not scholarly documentaries about religious texts or history, nor are they modern adaptations of biblical stories; they are fictional dramas designed to evangelize non-Christians and to encourage Christians towards a deeper faith. These movies have been well received by the church audiences for which they were intended, but their explicitly religious purpose and the complete lack of any sort of connection to the academic study of the Bible make their appearance in a public school course highly problematic.

The plot and theme of *Fireproof* (2008), shown in Dayton ISD, are typical of Sherwood Pictures' movies: A firefighter (played by actor and Religious Right activist Kirk Cameron of the 1980s sitcom *Growing Pains*) saves his marriage by becoming an evangelical Christian. The movie ends with the words of Romans 5:8: "God demonstrates His love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Its final image reads, "To God Be the Glory! Are you Fireproof? Romans 10:9." The movie's website describes it as "the #1 inspirational movie in America" and "an action-packed love story" that "is a natural ministry tool for inspiring couples in your church and community."<sup>39</sup>

Additional Sherwood videos shown in Texas Bible courses include:

- *Courageous* (2011) (Dayton and Mount Vernon ISDs) ("Protecting the streets is second nature to these men. Raising their children in a God-honoring way? That's courageous."<sup>40</sup>);
- *Facing the Giants* (2006) (Belton, Dayton, and Mount Vernon ISDs) ("Daring to trust God to do the impossible, Coach Taylor and the Eagles discover how faith plays out on the field ... and off. With God, all things are possible" <sup>41</sup>);
- *Flywheel* (2003) (Dayton and Mount Vernon ISDs) ("Coming face-to-face with the reality of how he truly conducts himself, Jay Austin begins the ride of his life as he commits to honoring God with his business, his relationships, and his life!" <sup>42</sup>).

Other explicitly religious videos shown in Texas Bible courses include:

- *Indescribable* (Eastland ISD), part of the Passion Talk Series by an Atlanta minister; "each talk tells a meaningful story of God's goodness, grace & love"; <sup>43</sup>
- *Left Behind* (2001) (Dayton ISD), a fictionalized depiction of "end times" theology held in some theologically conservative Protestant circles;
- *One Hit from Home* (2012) (Belton ISD), a baseball movie that "deals with tragedy, broken dreams, and finding your way back to Christ through life's toughest adversities"; <sup>44</sup>
- *To Save A Life* (2009) (Belton ISD), about a teenager who converts to Christianity after his friend's suicide ("Jake is going to realize just what it means to be a Christian and how to save a life").<sup>45</sup>



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## CHAPTER 2: SECTARIAN BIAS

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The consequences of the lack of proper teacher training and content-specific curriculum standards is most evident in the religious bias at the core of many Bible courses in Texas public schools. Instruction about the Bible frequently comes from a conservative Protestant Christian perspective. Moreover, theological claims and interpretations are often presented as widely accepted and inherently true.



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## SECTION 5: WHOSE BIBLE IS STUDIED?

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In a very basic way, many Texas Bible courses reflect a strong religious bias: how they define the Bible. Courses commonly describe it almost entirely in Christian terms that exclude Jewish views, usually opting for Protestant definitions that ignore not only Jewish beliefs but also those of other branches of Christianity. The privileging of Protestantism is also evident in the preference shown towards distinctively Protestant Bible translations.

A review of the different forms of the Bible illustrates the issues. Christian Bibles consist of an Old Testament and a New Testament. Agreement on a 27-book New Testament unites almost all Christians,<sup>46</sup> but there is less consensus on the contents of the Old Testament. Protestants accept a 39-book Old Testament, but Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Old Testaments include passages and entire books (seven for Roman Catholics, typically ten among Eastern Orthodox Christians, with more in an appendix) not accepted by Protestants. These latter texts are sometimes referred to as Deuterocanonical books or as the Apocrypha. Anglicans affirm the value of the Apocrypha and read passages from it in worship but reject it as a source of doctrine.

The most significant difference between the Jewish Bible and Christians Bibles, of course, is that Jews reject the New Testament in its entirety. Jewish Bibles consist of the same books as the Protestant Old Testament, but arranged in a different order and organized into only 24 books.<sup>47</sup> The differences in format are theologically significant; for example, the Jewish Bible ends with 2 Chronicles, which anticipates the rebuilding of the Temple after the Babylonian Exile, while Christian Old Testaments

end with Malachi, a book that Christians have traditionally argued points ahead to the coming of John the Baptist as a forerunner of Jesus.

Because Jews do not accept the New Testament or Christianity's central claim that Jesus was the messiah, they do not use the terminology of "Old Testament." Instead, they call their 24 books of scripture simply the Bible or the Tanak (or Tanakh), a Hebrew acronym for the three divisions in which the books are organized (Torah or Law, Nebi'im/ Nevi'im or Prophets, and Kethubim/ Kethuvim, or Writings). In an attempt to use terminology sensitive to the differences between Judaism and Christianity, scholars often use the term "Hebrew Bible," because most of the Tanak/ Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The choice of wording in HB 1287 ("Hebrew Scriptures [Old Testament]") reflects awareness of this issue. A nonsectarian approach would explain such variations in terminology and why they are significant.

At least one federal court has recognized that a public school Bible course should acknowledge these differences. *Herdahl v. Pontotoc County* noted that "the books that comprise the Bible depend on the religious faith to which one adheres" and characterized a course that defined the Bible only in Protestant terms as problematic.<sup>48</sup> The two largest professional societies for the study of religion also encourage attention to the different ways the Bible is defined. The Society of Biblical Literature's guide for public school Bible courses advises, "An academic course on the Bible should teach students about different forms of the Bible rather than simply assuming that one form is the norm."<sup>49</sup> The American Academy of Religion's guideline for

religion courses in public schools urges teachers to promote “an understanding that different faith communities have different Bibles (e.g., Jewish, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant). . . .”<sup>50</sup>

The absence of such an approach is reflected in the numerous districts that ask students questions like this one, taken from an Eastland ISD “Bible Trivia” sheet: “How many books are in the Bible?” The answer is Protestant: “The Bible contains 66 books, divided among the old and New Testaments.” (More appropriate wording to prompt this answer would be “How many books are in the Protestant Bible?”) The Dripping Springs ISD seems to regard the King James Version, a classic Protestant translation, as the authoritative Bible. A test question asks: “How many books were accepted to the canon in the King James version of the Bible? How many were accepted in the old testament? The new testament?” [sic].

Often, if the books of the Apocrypha are acknowledged at all, it is as deviations from the Protestant norm. A textbook that serves as a major resource for the Alba-Golden ISD course, for example, describes the Apocrypha simply as “Books that Didn’t Make the Old Testament Cut,” a definition that shows no cognizance of traditions other than Protestantism.<sup>51</sup> Dalhart ISD uses a PowerPoint presentation by Rose Publishing that largely ignores the role of the Apocrypha in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican churches, concluding simply, “By AD 1827, the Apocrypha is omitted from most English versions of the Bible.” The Joshua ISD course covers differences between the Protestant and Roman Catholic canons but does not appear to discuss Eastern Orthodox and Jewish canons. Belton ISD makes sure students learn about the Apocrypha by assigning poster board presentations on its books, but its final exam still assumes a Protestant understanding of the canon: “There are \_\_\_\_\_ books in the Old Testament. a. 36 b. 39 c. 42.” The intended answer, of course, is 39.

Courses with such an approach usually neglect the distinctive structure of the Jewish Bible entirely. Many discuss the period between the composition of the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament and that of the New Testament as the “400 Years of Silence.” This term reflects a Christian theological belief that God ceased inspiring scripture after the book of

Malachi and then resumed doing so with the New Testament.

Some courses make an effort to cover differences between the canons but still do not escape their Protestant focus. For example, the Abilene ISD course asks test questions on the three parts of the Tanakh, but its overall emphasis is squarely Protestant, with at least three quizzes requiring memorization of the books of the Protestant Old Testament and no comparable attention to the contours of any other canon. This insistence on using Protestant categories holds true even for most districts using the Bible Literacy Project’s textbook, despite the attention the BLP gives to the diversity of canons.

Mount Vernon ISD provides a positive example of how a course might frame this discussion. Directing students to discuss a chart of different canons, it uses BLP material to explain, “Jews do not like the Hebrew Scriptures referred to as the Old Testament as though they describe an outdated covenant. Christians often do not like the Old Testament referred to as Hebrew Scriptures because it seems to restrict ‘ownership’ of these books which Christians claim as inspired scripture to Jews. We often label and interpret the Bible according to the traditions we have grown up with.” Other districts that do a good job on this topic include Boerne ISD, which devotes substantial classroom time to the differences between canons and administers a quiz on the Deuterocanonical books, and Pleasanton ISD, which has a test with multiple questions on the Apocrypha, canonization and even the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of Jewish scripture).

The question of which translations to use is also significant when it comes to creating a course that neither promotes nor disparages a particular tradition. The ruling in *Herdahl v. Pontotoc* noted that using only a Protestant translation without incorporating any Roman Catholic or Jewish translation helped give the course in question an inappropriate Protestant orientation. The American Academy of Religion’s guidelines recommend that Bible courses include as a desired outcome “an understanding ... that there are many different translations of the Bible that often reflect significant theological differences (e.g., the New Jewish Publication Society, the Living Torah, the New

Standard Revised Version, the King James Version, the New International Version).”<sup>32</sup> The Society of Biblical Literature’s guide likewise recommends that “the course should find ways to expose students to the variety of translations [i.e., Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant] in use today.”<sup>33</sup> The issue is not to dictate to students which Bible they should use in class – indeed, HB 1287 included a provision explicitly guaranteeing students can use the Bible of their choice – but to ensure that the course as a whole is not taught in such a way that privileges the translation or translations of particular religious communities. Ideally, students should encounter a variety of translations emanating from diverse religious communities. The La Porte ISD course, for example, exposes students to the King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), New International Version (NIV), English Standard Version, and New English Translation (all primarily Protestant translations); the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (an ecumenical translation); the Jewish Publication Society translation; and the New Jerusalem Bible (a Roman Catholic translation).

When it comes to the Bibles provided by schools or made available in the classroom, the choice is usually a Protestant translation, typically the KJV or NKJV or a more recent evangelical favorite, the NIV. Historically, school preference for the KJV was a divisive issue between Protestants and Roman Catholics, figuring into nineteenth-century controversies as well as mid-twentieth century court cases. As for the NIV, its translation choices often reflect theological concerns as much as lexical principles; as one scholar has commented, “The NIV reflects without apology the [Christian] messianic interpretation of the Old Testament.”<sup>34</sup> Sometimes, as in Ector County ISD, the KJV or NKJV and NIV are provided together in a parallel edition. Belton ISD uses the NIV Study Bible, which is replete with explanatory notes written from a conservative Protestant perspective to accompany the theologically motivated translation choices. One district, White Settlement ISD, identified its primary Bible as not a translation but rather the popular paraphrase the Living Bible, which also is geared towards conservative Protestant sensibilities. In contrast, a few courses provide access to the NRSV, a translation to which some theologically

conservative Christians have objected but that can at least be regarded as ecumenical because of its religiously diverse translation team.

Discussions of the history of biblical translation also sometimes evidence bias. The materials utilized for Pittsburg ISD’s coverage of this topic highlight the NKJV, NIV, American Standard Version, New American Standard Version and the English Standard Version, but no modern Roman Catholic or Jewish translations. Similarly, a list of “English Bible Versions” from Amarillo ISD includes the NKJV, NRSV, American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, Today’s English Version, the New English Bible, the Living Bible and the New American Standard Bible, but makes no mention of Roman Catholic or Jewish translations.

Courses that direct students to memorize biblical passages (typically the Ten Commandments, the Twenty-third Psalm, and the Lord’s Prayer) usually require memorization of the KJV’s wording. In Abilene and Ector County ISDs, for example, students memorize the KJV-version of the Lord’s Prayer. This version, like other Protestant translations, includes material at the end that the Roman Catholic version (often called the “Our Father”) omits.

## THE SHAPE OF THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

### Four Canons

TaNaK (Jewish: Rabbinic-contemp.)	Septuagint (Greek Orth.: anc.-contemp.)	VULGATE (Catholic, med.-contemp.)	'Old' Testament (KJV: Protestant-contemp.)
<p><b><u>Torah (Law)</u></b> Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p> <p><b><u>Nebiim (Prophets)</u></b> <i>Former Prophets</i> Joshua Judges Samuel (1&amp;2) Kings (1&amp;2) <i>Latter Prophets</i> Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Bk. of the Twelve<sup>‡</sup> <small>[Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi]</small></p> <p><b><u>Kethubim (Writings)</u></b> Psalms Proverbs Job Song of Songs (Solomon) Ruth Lamentations Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) Esther Daniel Ezra (incl. Nehemiah) Chronicles (1&amp;2)</p>	<p>Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p> <p>Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 3 Kings (1 Kings) 4 Kings (2 Kings) <b>1 Chronicles</b> <b>2 Chronicles</b> 1 Esdras (3 Ezra)@ <b>2 Esdras (= Ezra + Nehemiah)</b> Esther [incl. additions@] Judith@ Tobit@ 1 Maccabees@ 2 Maccabees@ 3 Maccabees@ 4 Maccabees@</p> <p>Psalms Odes of Solomon@ Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon Job <b>Wisdom of Solomon@</b> Sirach@ Psalms of Solomon@</p> <p>The Twelve<sup>‡</sup> <small>Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</small></p> <p>Isaiah Jeremiah+ Baruch@ Lamentations Letter of Jeremiah@ Ezekiel Daniel [incl. additions@]</p>	<p>Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p> <p>Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 2 Kings (2 Samuel) 3 Kings (1 Kings) 4 Kings (2 Kings) <b>1 Chronicles</b> <b>2 Chronicles</b> Esther [incl. additions@] Judith@ Tobit@ 1 Esdras (= Ezra) 2 Esdras (= Nehemiah)</p> <p>Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon <b>Wisdom of Solomon@</b> Ecclesiasticus (= Sirach@)</p> <p>Isaiah Jeremiah Baruch@ Letter of Jeremiah@ Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel</p> <p>The Twelve<sup>‡</sup> <small>Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</small></p> <p>1 Maccabees@ 2 Maccabees@</p>	<p><b><u>Pentateuch (Law)</u></b> Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy</p> <p><b><u>History</u></b> Joshua Judges Ruth 1&amp;2 Samuel 1&amp;2 Kings <b>1&amp;2 Chronicles</b> <b>Ezra (1 Ezra)</b> <b>Nehemiah (2 Ezra)</b> Esther</p> <p><b><u>Poetry</u></b> Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon</p> <p><b><u>Prophets</u></b> <i>Major Prophets</i> Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel <b>Daniel</b></p> <p><i>Minor Prophets</i><sup>‡</sup> <small>Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</small></p> <p><b>@ Apocrypha</b> Tobit Judith Esther (Greek add.) <b>Wisdom of Solomon</b> Sirach Baruch 1 Esdras (3 Ezra) 2 Esdras (4 Ezra) Letter of Jeremiah Daniel (Greek add.) 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees Prayer of Manasseh</p>

Chart distributed at the 2009 "Teaching the Bible in Texas Public Schools" training workshop at the University of Texas at Austin. Prepared by Prof. L. Michael L. White, Ronald Nelson Smith Chair in Classics and Christian Origins, The University of Texas at Austin

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## SECTION 6: THE BIBLE AS DIVINELY INSPIRED

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Bible courses in several districts very directly “endorse, favor, or promote” (to quote HB 1287) particular religious beliefs by advocating or assuming that God inspired the Bible. Some go into detail about the nature and implications of divine inspiration by suggesting that God dictated the words of the Bible to its writers; that the Bible’s inspiration guarantees that it is free of any historical, scientific or theological error; or that God safeguarded the copying of the biblical text through the centuries and thus prevented any significant scribal errors or variations between manuscripts. While teaching *about* any of these views might be appropriate in a course that examined what different religious communities believe about inspiration, presenting such views as if they are factually accurate blatantly crosses the legal threshold.

Nonetheless, classes in some districts do just that. Eastland ISD distributes a worksheet titled “How We Got the Bible” that begins with this claim: “Torah/Books of Moshe/Pentateuch were dictated by YHWH [a transliteration of the Hebrew letters for the name of God] to Moshe. All other 61 books were inspired by YHWH.” A test question duly asks, “What is the difference in the five books of Torah and the other sixty-one books of the Bible?” The desired answer was provided on a student test: “The first five (pentateuch) [*sic*] were dictated. The other sixty-one were inspired.” This “How We Got the Bible” worksheet also claims, “The New Testament (B’rit Chadasha) [Hebrew for New Testament] was written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude under the inspiration of YHWH.”

Another resource titled “Bible Trivia” asks, “Who wrote the Bible?” It provides this answer:

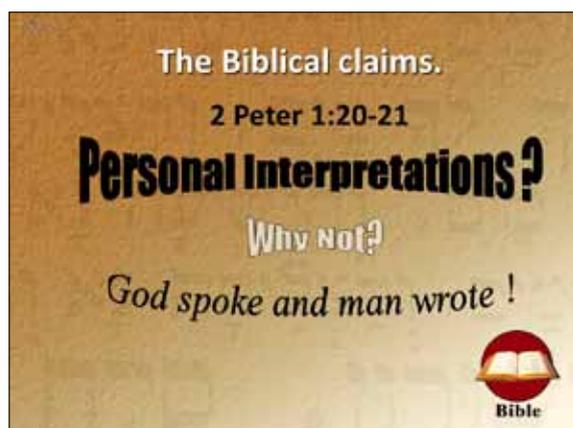
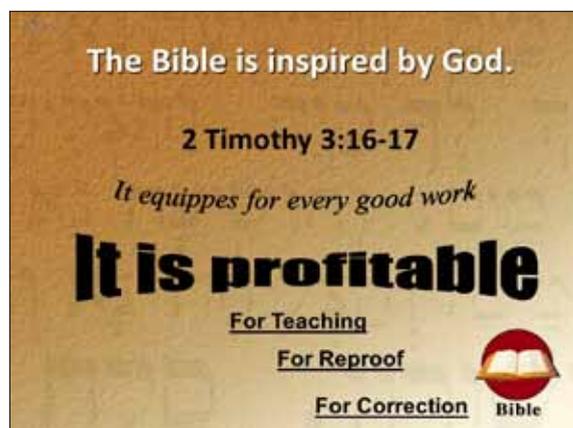
The Bible was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by over 40 different authors from all walks of life: shepherds, farmers, tent-makers, physicians, fishermen, priests, philosophers and kings. Despite these differences in occupation and the span of years it took to write it, the Bible is an extremely cohesive and unified book.

Klein ISD’s PowerPoint introductory presentation adopts a similar stance. One slide proclaims, “The Bible is the written word of God. The Bible is one volume which consists of 66 books.... It’s a word selected as a title for all of God’s Words. Scripture is also used to refer to God’s Word.... When the word Scripture is used with a capital ‘S’ it means the sacred writings of God.” Another reads, “The Bible is united in content because there is no contradictions in the writing [*sic*]. The reason for this is because the Bible is written under God’s direction and inspiration.” Other Klein materials describe “The books of Prophecy” by explaining that “these books are prophetic messages from God to His people about future events. Many of the prophecies have already been fulfilled, but some remain to be fulfilled in the future.” Its comment on what it calls the “books of history” is that “naturally they do not tell everything that happened, but they record the major events and show the results of both following and ignoring God’s law.”

When the Longview ISD course approaches this material, its PowerPoint presentation (“The Bible: From the Beginning to Today”) begins at

1400 BC: “The first written Word of God: The Ten Commandments delivered to Moses.” A later slide reads:

315 AD--Council of Trent [*sic*] --New Testament Canon--officially accepted. The word *canon* as applied to the Scriptures has long had a special and consecrated meaning. In its fullest comprehension it signifies the authoritative list or closed number of the writings composed under Divine inspiration and destined for the well-being of the Church.<sup>55</sup>



*These images are from a PowerPoint presentation in Dalhart ISD.*

Dalhart ISD’s discussion of the development of the Bible is even more heavy-handed. One of its main sources for discussion of the topic is a book distributed by an organization whose goal is to defend biblical inerrancy.<sup>56</sup> A resource labeled “Criteria for acceptance of the Canon” includes these points:

- Since God is perfect and infallible, an inspired book is absolutely infallible and errorless in its facts and doctrines as presented in the original manuscript.

- Since God is perfectly holy and pure, an inspired book must present only holy and pure doctrines.
- Since God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, then an inspired book should reflect these characteristics in such was as fulfilled prophecy and accurate statements with regard to geography, astronomy, science, math, psychology, and all areas of knowledge to the extent that it makes reference to these. If God is the Creator of both the world and man, He could not make an inaccurate statement about them. A book that does is not inspired.
- Since God is absolute truth, one inspired book cannot contradict another.
- Since God is absolutely just and fair, an inspired book must be impartial, without prejudice toward anyone.

Another PowerPoint presentation shown in that class (Rose Publishing’s “How We Got the Bible: A Time Line of Key Events in the History of the Bible”) advances the same theology, arguing for biblical inspiration and manuscript evidence remarkably free of variations. It begins: “The Bible is inspired by God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17. It equippes [*sic*] for every good work. It is profitable for teaching – For Reproof – For Correction.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is a favorite Bible verse for discussions of inspiration: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (KJV). Yet another slide points to 2 Peter 1:20-21 (“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” [KJV]). The presentation concludes with another reference to these verses: “The Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).”

Handouts in other districts also highlight key biblical proof texts for inspiration. A list of quotes in Belton ISD’s course is titled “Timely Words about God’s Timeless Word” and cites 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Brenham ISD apparently distributes material titled “Bible (Some General Facts)” that includes “Word of God. 1. Contains the word of men guided by a power not themselves (Psalms 39:2f) 2. Men moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20).”

## **Bible Studies**

### Hebrew Scriptures

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** In this course, students will gain an insight into the history of mankind and God dealing with man as revealed by the Old Testament Scriptures. Students will apply knowledge to an understanding of man's purpose and develop techniques to make good decisions in post high school endeavors.

### New Testament Scriptures

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** In this course, students will gain an insight into the history of mankind and God dealing with man as revealed by the New Testament Scriptures. Students will apply knowledge to an understanding of man's purpose and develop techniques to make good decisions in post high school endeavors.

*Students in Sonora ISD do not have to take its Bible course to encounter its theological claims. Even the description from the course catalogue promotes the idea that the Bible is divinely inspired.*

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## SECTION 7: THEOLOGICAL CLAIMS AND TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS

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As this and subsequent sections will show, one way or another, over half of the state's Bible courses teach students to read the Bible from a Christian theological perspective. They encourage students to accept the Bible's theological claims as facts or classic Christian interpretations as the standard and normal readings of particular passages. Some treat the Bible as authoritative, prompting students to look to it for personal life lessons and binding moral instruction. In these classrooms students and teachers often use language implying that they form a Christian community engaged in devotional Bible study. The use of first- and second-person pronouns in class exercises subtly encourages students to incorporate biblical claims into their own worldviews.

In some course materials, teachers argue that while they will teach students about (Christian) theological interpretation of scripture, they will not actually promote those theological claims. Efforts to

make this distinction are often not very successful. When the only or primary viewpoints presented are all associated with one particular religious community, it is difficult to argue that the course is not promoting the beliefs of that group. A letter distributed to students in the Eastland ISD course illustrates this point. The teacher wrote:

Because so many questions are not fully explained in both the Testaments, I will discuss, not teach, some of the common, practical, theological theories. For example:

1. the exact point before time when Lucifer was cast out of the Third Heaven.
2. the validity of the Gap Theory
3. the relationships we will have with each other in the Third Heaven
4. the pinpoint location of the Garden of Eden
5. which fruit Eve consumed in the Garden of Eden.

Shalom,  
Each one of you has been a delight to teach for these last ~~300~~ weeks. Your courtesy, your interest, your cooperation, and your focus warrant respect not only for you, but also for your family. I, as your teacher, will lead you on a step by step chronological walk through the *Bible* from *Genesis* through the *Revelation* with an emphasis on Literary elements contained therein. As other historical cultures spring up, the nations of the world will be meshed with those in the Holy Land, the general site of the Old Testament. The world cultures' characteristics, similarities, and differences will be studied with respect to their connection with biblical events and characters through the New Testament times to present time.  
~~Classes both sessions are recorded daily for your convenience. You are welcome to listen to any lesson that you miss, or want to hear again.~~ Each day you will be given relevant hand-outs, which at the end of the year, will be a valuable reference resource.  
Because so many questions are not fully explained in both of the Testaments, I will discuss, not teach, some of the common, practical, theological theories. For example:  
1. the exact point before time when Lucifer was cast out of the Third Heaven  
2. the validity of the Gap Theory  
3. the relationships we will have with each other in the Third Heaven  
4. the pinpoint location of the Garden of Eden  
5. which fruit Eve consumed in the Garden of Eden  
Thank you again for making this the beginning of the best year ever. Now, on with this narrative!!!!

*Eastland ISD teacher's letter to students*

## War in Heaven

-Elohim created not only the universe, but angels, millions of angels, who do errands for Him. Angels always stay angels. We never become angels while we live or when we die. They are created to serve God as messengers. Angles cannot reproduce with each other because then are, it seems, all males.

-One of the angels God created was named Lucifer aka Light-bearer, Day Star, Morning Star  
*Ezekiel 28:15: "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee".*

*From Eastland ISD materials about creation*

In fact, these issues received a remarkable amount of attention, far more than other interpretive matters. A worksheet on Creation, for example, explains what Genesis left out:

Elohim [a Hebrew word used for God] created not only the universe, but angels, millions of angels, who do errands for him. Angels always stay angels. We never become angels while we live or when we die. They are created to serve God as messengers. Angles [sic] cannot reproduce with each other because they are, it seems, all males. One of the angels God created was named Lucifer aka Light-bearer, Day Star, Morning Star.

The course interweaves discussion of Satan's origin and fall to earth with a two-stage creation separated by a gap. A test over Genesis included the question, "Explain what happens between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 according to the Gap Theory."<sup>57</sup> A successful student answer explained: "Hasatan [literally, 'the satan'] has a goal to overcome and 'be' YHWH. He decides to gather other angels to hold him. He confronts YHWH, and YHWH asked why he wanted to do this and explained to him that he was the most beautiful angel there was. YHWH threw Hasatan and 1/3 of the angels down to the first heaven. (Earth)." Judging from these materials, the course was clearly taught in a way that reflected very particular theological concerns.

The treatment of Genesis also provides a window into the theological orientations of other courses. It is fairly typical for students to find references to classic Christian doctrines in that book. Examples that recur often in Texas courses include:

- The first-person plural language in Genesis 1:26

("God said, 'Let us make man in our image...' [KJV]) is regarded as evidence for the Trinity.

- When Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the result is the "fall of man" and the creation of "original sin," the condition in which all humanity finds itself estranged from God and in need of salvation.
- The serpent that tempts Eve is actually Satan in disguise.

An Ector County ISD course's discussion of Genesis 2 and 3 illustrates how Christian theological categories sometimes guide the entire discussion of key passages. Learning objectives for that day include:

- Students will identify and describe the events surrounding the Temptation and the Fall as recorded in Genesis 2 - 3.
- Students will be able to describe the command, the temptation, the sin, and the punishment as recorded in Genesis 2 - 3.
- Students will discuss how the Temptation and the Fall applies to Mankind today.

The Perryton ISD course also reads this text only with Christian eyes. The course plan suggests "Begin story of Satan's fall," using Christian theological categories in equating the snake in the Garden of Eden with Satan. Three days later, students were to "discuss man's fall to the snake and how he disobey [sic] God and what are the consequences to sin at this time. Talk briefly about the dispensation of innocence." The language of "dispensation" reflects the teacher's usage of the categories of dispensationalism, a conservative Protestant theological system very influential in

Texas that divides history into a series of periods, or “dispensations.”

There is no reason why students cannot learn about historically influential interpretations or doctrines (e.g., the Trinity, the Fall, the serpent as Satan) in the name of cultural literacy – but those interpretations should be presented as the products of the interpretive practices and traditions of particular religious communities, not as universal and self-evident readings. In particular, if a course does study these sorts of Christian interpretive traditions, it is essential that they give equal time to classic Jewish interpretations of these passages as well. Jews, needless to say, do not find the Trinity in Genesis or anywhere else in their scripture, nor do they regard the consequences for Adam and Eve’s disobedience as humanity’s eternal damnation before God. Many of the Bible Literacy Project districts do well in this regard, as the BLP textbook is very intentional in noting classical interpretations across the religious spectrum and discussing key differences in the ways Jews and Christians have traditionally read various texts.

Creation is not the only place where particular theological concerns dictate how the text is discussed. Several courses reflect a significant preoccupation with eschatology (the theology of the “end times”), with course materials that synthesize the contents of Revelation and other biblical books into very detailed eschatological schemas. Prosper ISD’s “Event Timeline” frames not only the biblical story but all subsequent history into its framework, beginning with Noah’s three sons (Genesis 9:9) and concluding in 2011 with a note on the modern Jewish population of Israel, which figures prominently in some eschatological frameworks. A Prosper ISD timeline on “Revelations” [*sic*] likewise relates the fate of present-day Israel and the Jewish people with various verses: “Survival of the Jewish nations [*sic*] is one of the miracles of history and her greatest agony is yet to come. It was sealed in the book of Daniel 12:4-9, opened in Revelation 5:5, 7, 6:19, Matthew 28:21, 23, John 30:7, Revelation 12:12, 10.” The course explains that “the first time the Lord gathered his people back was after the Babylonian captivity. The second time the Lord will gather his people back will be at the end of the age.” Students in this course are taught that they themselves may

be living in the last days. A discussion of the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 suggests that “each church represents a period of history” and concludes with “the lukewarm church of the 20th century, today the last period of church history.”

Several other courses have similar content. Lazbuddie ISD’s only resource makes concerns about the apocalypse the central idea for its Noah lesson: “We should have an understanding of what happened in Noah’s day if we are to know when the coming of our Lord is near. What are the similarities between the days of Noah and the days preceding the coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:37-39)?”<sup>58</sup> Eastland ISD, among other districts, assumes that Christians will at some point be “raptured,” presenting students with a Venn diagram showing the pros and cons of theories that posit the rapture before the returning Jesus’ 1000-year reign and those that place it afterwards. Dayton ISD shows the movie *Left Behind*, a fictionalized depiction of the “end times” theology influential in some Protestant circles. Although Amarillo ISD’s course outlines four reading strategies for understanding Revelation (the “futurist, continuous historical, preterist, and philosophy of history” approaches), it nowhere exposes students to the standard scholarly interpretation of the book as a fairly typical ancient apocalyptic work that reflects concerns of the original author and his audience about threats facing them in their own time and environment.

A more subtle way that courses encourage particular theological readings of scripture is to present the material in such a way as to maximize students’ identification with biblical characters. This approach thoroughly infuses Leander ISD’s Vista Ridge High School course. Consider its treatment of Mark 3:20-21, in which Jesus’ family members come to get him, suspecting that he is insane: “One of the saddest episodes in the life of Jesus was when his own family came to get him and take him home.” The follow-up question for the passage is: “Jesus was a grown man. Do families do this to their adult children? Please discuss intelligently.” The assignment is clearly designed to foster sympathy for Jesus.

Many courses use biblical passages as prompts for students to reflect on key ideas and important issues. Sometimes they do so in an appropriate manner by

raising questions of the sort that might be posed for any great work of literature. The following examples succeed in taking the Bible seriously and requiring students to ponder its contents in depth without making any assumptions about the Bible's truth claims or the students' religious perspectives:

- Boerne ISD, in reference to stories about David and Jonathan: Write an essay “describing your idea of the ideal friend and your ‘Jonathan.’”
- East Central ISD, in reference to Saul's “Road to Damascus” experience in Acts: “What experiences have you had in your life that have helped you to ‘see the light’ so to speak? That is to understand something that you didn't understand before or to see things in a different way/from a different perspective?”
- Lovejoy ISD: “What is your notion of a perfect place, your ‘personal garden of Eden?’”

Assignments elsewhere provide a stark contrast. Note the theological assumptions underlying each of the following assignments from Amarillo ISD:

- In a 400-word essay, explain the main idea of Jesus' teaching in Mark 7:14-23. After you tell me what Jesus means here, use the rest of your essay to tell how this principle applies to people today.
- Write a well-reasoned 350-400-word essay on the subject, “Samson: Was He a Man of God?”
- In a well-reasoned 350-word essay, develop either the thesis that “Jesus' instructions (in the Sermon on the Mount) for everyday life are still practical today” or the thesis that “Jesus' instructions for everyday life are quite impractical today.”... I'm eager to see your thoughts on this most important of all sermons on earth.
- Find the three metaphors Peter (that is, 2 Peter) uses to explain what Jesus did for mankind. Tell what verse you find them in and what truth each metaphor contains.

Several Brenham ISD documents attest to the same sectarian approach. One test asks questions like “Discuss the temptation of Christ in the desert. How did Jesus resist the devil? How can we learn from this today?” Another test from the

same district asks: “Read Romans 12:1-2. What does this mean? Explain what changes will occur if this scripture is truly applied in one's life.” A Sonora ISD assignment seems designed to promote theological reflection: “Write a six paragraph discussion of the (1) trial (2) death (3) burial (4) post resurrection appearances of Christ and (6) its implication to you personally.” A Peaster ISD test question asks: “What did Jesus say were the two great Commandments that should guide our lives?” Prosper ISD assignments also adopt this approach. One notes: “In Galatians 3:28 we read, ‘there is neither male nor female’ in Christ. Does this mean we can have women elders, deacons and preachers?” A Prosper ISD worksheet on Romans poses questions such as “What did Christ make us free from? (8:1)” and “What can separate us from the love of Christ? (8:35).”

#### LESSONS FROM JOB

1. You do not have to \_\_\_\_\_ God.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is often the best answer we can give to those who are suffering.
3. Allow time for \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Never try to \_\_\_\_\_ something you can never fully \_\_\_\_\_.
5. We may never know \_\_\_\_\_. We can only know \_\_\_\_\_ better.

Answers: 1. defend. 2. Silence. 3. lament.  
4. explain ... understand 5. why ... God.

*From Ector County ISD's “Lessons from Job”*

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## SECTION 8: HISTORY AND THE BIBLE

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Perhaps no aspect of Bible courses is more challenging to negotiate than treatment of the Bible's historical claims. Religious groups vary tremendously both within and between themselves about the extent to which the Bible is historically accurate. Some conservative Protestants, for example, affirm the notion that the Bible is "inerrant," that is, without any error in history, science, or theology. For them, events – even miracles – occurred just as the Bible depicts them, and all biblical books were written by the authors to which they're traditionally attributed. Other groups within Christianity are often more open to the possibilities that, like other ancient works, the Bible is not always an accurate source of history or that traditional claims regarding its authorship may be erroneous. Among Christians, one encounters a diverse range of views on these issues within single denominations and even single congregations. Judaism is also internally diverse in these regards, although (Messianic Jews aside) Jews are unanimous in rejecting the miraculous claims of the New Testament. As the Society of Biblical Literature's *Bible Electives in Public Schools* notes, "scholars agree that the Bible is a valuable source of historical information, but their views on the extent of its accuracy vary widely."<sup>59</sup> A cursory comparison of college and seminary textbooks shows just how divergent these views sometimes are; scholars in theologically conservative Christian circles are far more likely to affirm the Bible's historical accuracy and traditional authorship claims than scholars in other religious circles or secular scholars.

Courts have consistently recognized the link between claims of the Bible's historical accuracy and the theological beliefs of particular religious

communities. For this reason, they have ruled that to teach the Bible as straightforward, unproblematic history is unconstitutional because doing so basically promotes a particular religious viewpoint. This point is particularly true in regard to miracle stories. As one court argued, teaching miracles as "historically viable events" is "inherently religious instruction, rather than objective, secular education, since much of the Bible is not capable of historic verification ... and can only be accepted as a matter of faith and religious belief" (*Herdahl v. Pontotoc County*).<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, the courts have given teachers little guidance in developing a more appropriate approach.

With much – perhaps even most – of the materials submitted for this study, it is difficult to determine whether districts are crossing this constitutional line because so many of the lesson plans and exercises focus only on memorization of biblical content and familiarity with biblical stories. In the absence of site visits, it is often impossible to tell when biblical texts were discussed as literature, as historical sources with the same sorts of limitations as other ancient texts, or as literal and accurate history.

What is clear is that when discussing historical questions, courses often present positions associated with conservative theology as normative without exposing students to other options in any substantial way. Most districts matter-of-factly attribute biblical books to their traditional authors, even though scholarship outside of conservative circles is unanimous in questioning many such authorship claims. Many districts confidently assign dates for the composition of books or for historical events

or personages that many scholars would argue are difficult to pin down chronologically. When multiple dates are possible, courses often opt for the earliest, which are often preferred in conservative theological circles. Because the Bible Literacy Project's textbook varies considerably in its handling of such issues (a reflection of the fact that the textbook was written by multiple authors), school districts that use its materials are often uneven in their own approaches. The BLP, for example, provides a clear explanation for why some scholars argue that different parts of the book of Isaiah were written in different time periods and thus may not have all been written by the prophet Isaiah. When it comes to the New Testament, however, it usually accepts traditional authorship claims at face value – despite the fact that many scholars have long doubted many of those claims.

A predilection for the Bible as a history book is reflected in the names of several courses: “Bible History” or “Bible as History.” The course description for Redwater ISD illustrates this approach: “The overall focus will be a cursory overview of the historical events as they unfold chronologically in the Holy Bible from Old Testament through the New Testament.” Courses with this emphasis often begin dating events as early as Adam and Eve, constructing a timeline that identifies dates for the creation, Noah's ark, Abraham, the Exodus, and the conquest of Canaan – all matters that academic scholarship has raised serious questions about for decades. Miracle stories are often thoroughly integrated into these timelines as if their historicity were unquestioned. Eustace ISD, for example, states as fact that “Jesus returns to Judea, is crucified, and resurrected... Jesus ascends to the Father's right hand” in “33 (or 30)” CE. A timeline used in Refugio ISD further reinforces the message that the Bible's historical claims are largely beyond question by listing biblical events side by side with historical developments from around the globe. One chart used in Dalhart ISD titled “Historical Periods in the Bible” begins with the “Ante-Diluvian Period (4004-2348 BC)” and ends with “The Christian Age (AD 30--Present),” although another provides a comparative perspective on ancient near eastern chronology that stretches back to 10,000 BCE. The NCBCPS curriculum

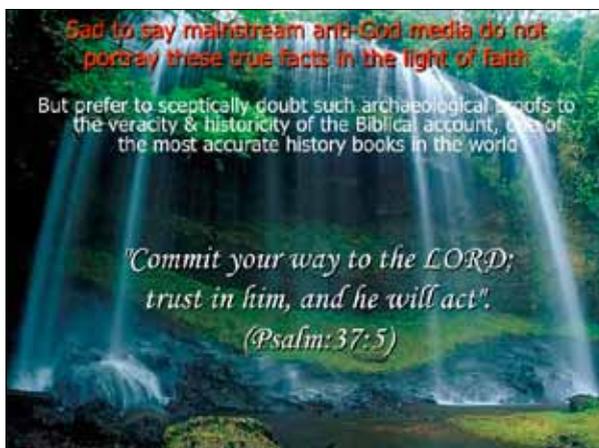
reproduces a Rose Publishing timeline showing how “Bible History” relates to “World History” that jumps from “The Beginning” (Creation, Noah, and the Tower of Babel) to “2200-2000 BC” (its date for the figure of Job), before proceeding story by story through the centuries to 90-100 AD. An insert assigns specific years to Jesus' miracles, among other events in his life.

The relationship of Moses to the first five books of the Bible (the Torah or Pentateuch) provides a good example of how many schools seem to opt for a conservative theological approach. Within both Judaism and Christianity, Moses has traditionally been regarded as the author of the Torah, and for the sake of cultural literacy, students should know this fact. Some Jews and Christians still affirm Mosaic authorship, but many do not. Since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many scholars have argued that the Torah was edited together from several (typically four) strands of tradition, none of which can be directly associated with Moses. Some scholars (including some who belong to faith communities) question whether Moses even existed.

One less controversial way to handle complicated historical issues like this would be to expose students to the fact that scholarly opinions and religious views differ without arguing too vociferously for any of them and then move on to a literary study of the text that focuses on non-historical questions. Very often, however, teachers take more definitive positions, and in most cases the positions they choose are the more theologically conservative. Thus, Aransas ISD distributes a list of dates taken from an inerrantist study Bible that places Moses composition of the Pentateuch in 1445-1405 BCE. A Boys Ranch ISD PowerPoint presentation on Genesis states simply: “Author: Moses. Date Written: Around 1500 BC.” The Refugio ISD's dating of the composition of Deuteronomy in 1407/1406 BCE also reflects an assumption of Mosaic authorship. An Amarillo ISD test shows that students learned about the scholarly theory of multiple authors, but another asks, “In what Old Testament book does Moses tell the story of the Exodus?” Some schools that use the NCBCPS curriculum adopt similar positions. Although the Life School course displays a number of problems, at least it acknowledges theological and scholarly diversity when it shows a

slide reading “Scholars and faithful readers differ on the date and authorship of Genesis.”

Courses usually discuss archaeological finds only to support the historical claims of the Bible, not to question them. The result is that students typically encounter archaeology depicted as a tool that buttresses particular theological claims about the Bible. Thus, a Leander ISD school and Ector County ISD cite an inscription known as the Moabite Stele because it sheds light on 2 Kings 3:4-8. A Life School worksheet on Luke claims that “many people set out to disprove the Bible including the archaeologist Sir Water Ramsay (who went to Asia Minor himself on such a quest), found this book to have been written with incredible accuracy [*sic*]. In fact, he could not even find one error.” That school’s fill-in-the-blank exercises instruct students that archaeology largely confirms the Bible’s historical reliability without exposing them to any of the many instances where archaeological evidence conflicts with biblical details. Citing a mid-century scholar, they read (with the desired answers indicated in brackets): “On the whole ... archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened [confidence] in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible [increased] by the experience of excavation in Palestine. Archaeology has in many cases [refuted] the views of modern critics.” Students in some courses are even taught that archaeological evidence confirms miracle stories. The “Moses and the Red Sea Crossing: Truth of Fiction” slide show in Ector County ISD’s Permian High School includes this claim:



From Ector County ISD

Sad to say mainstream anti-God media do not portray these true facts in the light of faith But prefer to sceptically [*sic*] doubt such archaeological proofs of the veracity & historicity of the Biblical account one of the most accurate history books in the world[.]

Districts like Peaster ISD that use the NCBCPS curriculum face a significant challenge in weeding out theological claims, factual inaccuracies and idiosyncratic elements. The NCBCPS, for example, wrongly implies that the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate that the Hebrew manuscripts used by the King James Version translators were “identical with the original text.” Its discussion of the scrolls is based on books written to promote religious claims: *Signature of God*, the cover of which promises “Documented Evidence that Proves Beyond Doubt the Bible is the Inspired Word of God,” and *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, which concludes, “There are many secrets yet to be searched out from the Scrolls, but there is no secret to a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus the Messiah.”<sup>61</sup> Although the strong scholarly consensus is that the Dead Sea Scrolls contain no direct ties to Jesus and his movement, the curriculum proposes this objective: “The student will determine suggested evidence from the Scrolls that may demonstrate a link between Judaism and Christianity.” Other oddities in the NCBCPS curriculum include a discussion of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur that appears not to have been updated in approximately twenty years. Noting that “access to the site of Ur today is very limited,” the curriculum explains that “both the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the more recent war with U.S.-lead [*sic*] coalition forces, have made the archaeological site virtually impossible to visit” – apparently in reference to the 1990-91 Gulf War.<sup>62</sup>

Theological agendas are also at play when courses emphasize historical accuracy of the Gospels and their strong basis in eyewitness testimony (traditional claims no longer widely accepted outside of certain religious circles). A Life School teacher’s notes on a video shown in class (“New Evidence the Gospels were Based on Eyewitness Accounts”) summarize what he wanted students to get from the video: “Can’t prove everything to be historical--But if the Gospels result from conspiracy

or incompetence this is not what you would expect--If gospels were produced on basis of stories several steps removed from eyewitnesses this is not what you would expect--Many hurdles the gospels could fall down at: local details, yet the consistently get over these hurdles.” Students in that class are also assigned chapters from a book written to support inerrantist theology, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, and told to determine whether it sufficiently refutes challenges to what the teacher refers to as “the traditional biblical view.” Since that book presents such challenges only as straw-man proposals that are easily overturned, the outcome of this assignment seems predetermined: students are intended to conclude that “the traditional biblical view”<sup>63</sup> is the most logical. Eustace ISD has a similar assignment that directs students to rebut claims of biblical inaccuracies.

More than one court has observed that it is unacceptable for public schools to teach that stories of Jesus’ resurrection are straightforward history. For example, the 1998 Florida ruling prompted by the NCBCPS course noted that it is “difficult to conceive how the account of the resurrection or of miracles could be taught as secular history” (*Gibson v. Lee County*).<sup>64</sup> Many Texas schools avoid problems in this area by focusing on literary aspects of the gospels’ resurrection accounts or the afterlife of these stories in art, music, and literature. Some courses, however, put concerns about historicity at the center of their discussion with the obvious goal of persuading students that such stories are accurate. Life School directs students to “debate for or against the resurrection and identify the two worldview assumptions behind the two sides of the argument.” A PowerPoint slide in Brenham ISD emphasizes, “Christ’s resurrection was an event that occurred in time and space – that it was, in reality, *historical* and not *mythological* (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16).” It sets out to debunk the alternative explanations for the resurrection accounts that frequently function as targets in conservative Christian apologetics, such as theories that Jesus only fainted on the cross (the “swoon theory”) or that his body was stolen from the tomb. The Permian High class in Ector County employs a similar strategy, asking students to fill in the appropriate data for the following boxes:

ATTEMPTED EXPLANATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION
The Swoon Theory
The Fraud Theory
The Mistake Theory
The Vision Theory

POSITIVE PROOFS OF THE RESURRECTION
Documentary Evidence
Testimony of Witnesses
Change in the Disciples

One can imagine Bible courses that strayed too far in the opposite direction by attempting to demonstrate that biblical stories across the board have little if any basis in history. Fortunately, the materials submitted for this study and for the earlier 2005-06 study provided no evidence that any such course is taught in Texas.



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## CHAPTER 3: JUDAISM THROUGH CHRISTIAN EYES

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Many courses teach students to interpret the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament as a set of prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament, a view obviously not shared by Jews. In addition, courses often interpret ancient (and sometimes modern) Judaism through a distinctly Christian lens.





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## SECTION 9: FINDING JESUS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE/OLD TESTAMENT

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One common way that some courses promote one religion (Christianity) over another (Judaism) is by teaching students to interpret the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as a set of prophecies supernaturally fulfilled in the New Testament. For some biblical books, in fact, practically the only passages students encounter are those classically interpreted in the Christian tradition as predictions of Jesus or of other figures or events important in early Christian history. The theme that the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament consists of numerous prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament permeates some courses. Eastland ISD distributes a resource that includes 315 “Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled by Christ.” Duncanville ISD shows the video *The Messiah: Prophecy Fulfilled* (2003) (the cover advises, “GET READY FOR A POWERFUL AND CHALLENGING EXPERIENCE THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE!”). The very first lesson in the book used by Lazbuddie ISD reflects the same theology: “The OT is a history of the Hebrew race through which this Person, who would crush the head of Satan and redeem mankind, would be born. More than once Satan tried to annihilate the Hebrews to prevent the Messiah from being born. There are many sub-themes in the OT, the main theme is the preparation of the One who will be born in *the fullness of time* (Gal 4:4) [italics in original]. This theme of the OT is fulfilled in the NT.”<sup>65</sup> For the Sonora ISD course, fulfillment of prophecy confirms the Bible’s inspiration. Drawing from the old Dallas High Schools Bible Course textbook, one of its exercises asks: “What is the strongest evidence of the Bible’s divine origin?” The

intended answer reads: “The greatest evidence of the Bible’s divine origin is fulfilled prophecy.”

Students often get no further than Genesis – the first book of the Bible – before encountering this idea. Day four of the Amarillo ISD curriculum has students “begin Messianic prophecy list” as they read Genesis. A test question makes sure students paid attention: “In the first Messianic prophecy in Genesis, the Lord said that the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman’s descendant. What part of the serpent would be wounded?” A Brenham ISD test question over the same verses (Genesis 3:14-15) shows that its course also taught students that God’s curse on the serpent in the Garden of Eden was a prediction of Jesus. A Life School chart titled “Jesus in the Genesis Flood” suggests five key similarities between the Genesis flood narrative and theological claims about Jesus, such as: “As there was only one Ark where people must be saved, There is only one man by which we must be saved today: the man Jesus Christ.”

A study guide for the final examination in the Alba-Golden ISD course shows that a key concept for its presentation of Genesis was charting Jesus’ ancestry: “Origin of Nations – Begins with the creation of heaven and earth and especially man. But man failed Gods [*sic*] test and sinned, bring [*sic*] death and judgment on himself. Following in his Adams [*sic*] footsteps, Cain starts an evil civilization, which ultimately brought wickedness and violence which filled the earth and brought on the flood. Meanwhile God was fulfilling his promise to bring a savior by developing a godly line of people through Seth, from whom came Noah and his blessed son Shem.”

The religious workbooks used in Dayton ISD presented Genesis's Abraham story as messianic prophecy. A typical exercise directs students to "list the three great promises God made to Abram (12:1-3)." The intended answers are identified as "(I) Promise of a Great Nation (II) Abram would be famous – his name would be known worldwide (III) Be a blessing to other nations -- Jesus Christ." Discussion of Genesis 15:1 explains the reward in the LORD's promises to Abram: "There is no better reward that [sic] the Lord Jesus Christ !!" The explanation continues: "This promise finds its fulfillment in not only the coming nation of Israel even more so, those gentile peoples who through faith in Christ have become heir of the promise God made to Abraham" [sic].<sup>66</sup>

Other parts of the Torah are sometimes taught in the same manner. A quiz in the Huntsville ISD course asks: "How might the Passover be a sign foreshadowing Christ?" Duncanville ISD's examination of Exodus is accompanied by the video *The Passover*, produced by the late Messianic Jewish evangelist Zola Levitt. The video cover makes its theological agenda clear: "Zola Levitt welcomes you into a Jewish home for the traditional Seder festival meal, revealing the meal's symbols and the true Messiah to whom these symbols point."<sup>67</sup> That district also shows *The Tabernacle*, which offers a Christian theological interpretation of the biblical Tabernacle, a portable sanctuary at which the Hebrews conducted sacrifices during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The video promises that a "tour guide will take you through the world's only complete, life-sized and authentic replica to the Tabernacle. Your guide will explain the unique articles showing shadow and types of Jesus Christ. As you observe the awe-inspiring teachings of the Tabernacle, you will have a new appreciation of God's redemption for mankind."<sup>68</sup> Other classes also interpret aspects of the Tabernacle as symbols of Christian concepts. Alba-Golden ISD makes the following associations:

Door or Gate	The Only Way to God
Brazen Altar	Substitution is necessary for atoning sins

Veil	There is separation between God and his people
Mercy Seat	Only blood [sic] can make atonement
Sacrifice	Ceremonial illustration of how God is to be approached through Christ

An Amarillo course reveals a similar interpretation. Tests over the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament portion of the course ask question such as "Be familiar with ... the symbolism of the items of the tabernacle" and "Tell which part of the tabernacle symbolized the following ideas in the New Testament. Baptism. God's word. Prayer."

The same sectarian approach is advocated in presentations of other parts of the Tanakh. An Amarillo ISD unit test over Genesis through Nehemiah asks questions like, "Which prophet foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem?" and "Who foretold, 'A virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son'?" A PowerPoint slide from a series used in Boys Ranch ISD describes the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah 53 and then asks, "Does this describe Jesus?" A quiz from Sonora ISD asks several questions on "Prophecies concerning the coming of Christ" that focus on Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2, Jeremiah 23:5-6, and Zechariah 9:9.

Typological interpretation, a variation of the "fulfilled prophecy" approach, is also surprisingly prominent in some courses. Readers employing this classic theological approach argue that details of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (characters, events, places, etc.) prefigure similar elements more fully revealed in the New Testament. Such prefiguring details are known as "types." An Ector County ISD course promotes this interpretive method extensively and explains it clearly in a PowerPoint:

### Isaac as a Type of Christ

- They were both sons of promise.
- Their births were foretold by angels.
- Their births were both miraculous.
- They both carried wood to their sacrificial site.
- They were both offered as sacrifices.
- They were both offered as sacrifices on the same hill.

Eastland ISD distributes a worksheet titled “Joseph – A type of Christ” that explains: “The Old Testament contains various ‘types’ of Christ – people who reflected what the Messiah would be like, but I think the one person who foreshadowed Jesus the most was Josephus, the son of Jacob.” After listing purported similarities, the sheet summarizes: “Joseph was a type of Christ, giving us a picture of what Jesus went through at his betrayal, his trial, his death on the cross, and what we are to expect in the end times that we are in now, some still in our future. As shown through Joseph’s life as he went through his ordeal, God revealed to us a sequence of events that parallels the prophecies that Jesus has fulfilled and those that will be fulfilled in our future.” Brenham’s worksheets are similar, describing the biblical judges as “typical’ – as deliverers, they were types of Christ” and suggesting that because the Greek form of the name Joshua is Jesus, we should “think of him as a type of Savior.”

The examples above are academically and legally problematic because they teach students (explicitly

or implicitly) that reading the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament as a set of prophetic predictions about Jesus and Christianity is the *right, normal, and best way* to interpret it. As discussed in the previous section, however, nothing is inherently problematic with *exposing* students to traditional ways particular religious communities have read particular texts. Any teacher adopting this more fitting approach, however, should ensure that students encounter interpretations from both Jewish and Christian perspectives, presented with the reminder that even within each of these traditions, interpretations vary. Sensitivity to this issue is a strength of the Bible Literacy Project’s materials. For example, the BLP textbook’s consideration of the so-called “Suffering Servant” passages in Isaiah (especially Isaiah 53) discusses a traditional Jewish interpretation of the “Suffering Servant” as the people of Israel as well as the traditional Christian interpretation of the figure as a foreshadowing of Jesus. Many of the Texas school districts that used BLP materials did a better job handling such passages.

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## SECTION 10: TREATMENT OF JUDAISM

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Given that courses frequently teach about the Bible from a Christian perspective, it is unsurprising that some depict Judaism through almost exclusively Christian eyes. Some assume a theology of supersessionism, which posits that Christianity has superseded or replaced Judaism and that God's new covenant with Christians has replaced God's old covenant with Jews. None of the materials submitted for this study suggests the presence of intentional anti-Semitism, but these and other types of anti-Jewish bias are not uncommon – in some cases, even in courses where the teachers clearly have great affection for Judaism and the Jewish people.

Furthermore, many courses provide little detailed attention to the ways particular biblical books and passages have been used to foster anti-Jewish views. John's depiction of Jesus saying to "the Jews" that "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires" (John 8:44 in the NIV), Paul's claim that "Christ is the end of the Law" (Romans 10:4), and, as will be discussed below, arguments in the Hebrews that Christianity is superior to Judaism – such passages figure prominently in the more troubling chapters in the histories of Jewish-Christian relations and of anti-Semitism in general. Although lesson plans show that students encounter these passages, the complexities and difficulties posed by them usually go without discussion.<sup>69</sup>

The influence of supersessionist theology appears in a variety of ways. In the Lazbuddie ISD course, it permeates the course's foundational resource, the Bible survey written by Oklahoma minister Tommy Higle. Higle's book contrasts the Old Testament as

a book of law and the New Testament as a book of grace, concluding, "The old covenant ended, and the new covenant began at the cross."<sup>70</sup> A Rose Publishing chart used in the Permian High School course in Ector County ISD similarly claims that with the coming of Christ, the Holy Spirit has replaced the Law of Moses and the "New Covenant" has replaced the "Abrahamic Covenant." The description for "Bible I" in Brenham High School's official course catalogue, which is presumably distributed to the school's entire student body, pledges that the course will chronicle "the beginnings of the nation of Israel as a chosen people to its fall from grace and into captivity by foreign nations."

2061 BIBLE I(FALL) GRADE PLACEMENT: 10-12  
CREDIT: 1/2 LOCAL CREDIT ONLY

The Old Testament is studied from a historical perspective: From the beginnings of man, the patriarchs, judges, prophets and kings. It chronicles the beginnings of the nation of Israel as a chosen people to its fall from grace and into captivity by foreign nations.

*From Brenham High School course descriptions:*

The theology of the book of Hebrews, written to persuade early Christians not to adopt or continue practicing aspects of Judaism, sometimes appears to be taken at face value. The "Higher Order Question" on a Belton ISD lesson plan asks: "Why does the covenant in Hebrews super cede [*sic*] all previous covenants?" An Amarillo ISD chart outlines all the ways in which Hebrews suggests Jesus is superior to Judaism: He is superior to "angels (1:4-2:18) ...

Jewish leaders (3:1-4:13) ... their priests (4:14-7:28).” The overview continues: “Christianity offers ... A better covenant (8:1-13), A Better Sanctuary (9:1-10), A Better Sacrifice for sins (9:11-18).” That the tone of the presentation goes beyond examination of the book’s theology to affirmation of it is indicated by the final summary: “Since we have such excellent blessings from such an excellent Lord, we should live by faith (10:19-13:25).”<sup>71</sup> A worksheet from Peaster ISD that draws upon an explicitly religious online workbook also uses first-person wording that suggests acceptance of the theological arguments of Hebrews. <sup>72</sup> Pointing students to specific verses, it asks questions such as the following:

Who is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession?

Can our High Priest sympathize with our weaknesses? Why?

Could the Old Law make anyone perfect?

What made the old covenant obsolete?

If we sin willfully, what no longer remains?

Why was the first law taken away?

A slide citing Hebrews 8:5 from the “How We Got the Bible in English” PowerPoint used in Dalhart ISD implies that most branches of American Judaism (Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist) are only an imperfect copy, shadow, or pattern of true heavenly religion. By its logic, most contemporary American Jews are equivalent to what Hebrews describes as obsolete ancient Jewish priests. <sup>73</sup>

Other courses depict Judaism or particular Jewish sects in the time of Jesus as legalistic, hypocritical or spiritually empty. They sometimes seem to rely entirely on negative portrayals of Jewish leaders (especially priests and Pharisees) in the New Testament without considering the extent to which those passages reflect Christianity’s growing pains as it struggled to define its relationship to Judaism. A chart from Amarillo ISD states that the Pharisees “tended to reduce their faith to rule-

keeping” and the Sadducees “believed the Scriptures were quaint myths, so they ignored most of God’s laws.” Longview ISD speaks appreciatively of the monotheism and “moral and ceremonial purity” of the Pharisees but then categorically denounces them: “Jesus exposed their hypocrisy & self-righteousness.” The Permian High School course in Ector County ISD paints with a broad brush that goes beyond the sects; a PowerPoint show on “The New Testament World” sums up “Life in 1st Century Palestine” with this description: “Religious – very important but lacking spiritual fervor; they were waiting for the Messiah.”

The usage of generalizing terminology such as “the Jews” to refer to opponents of Jesus and early Christians rhetorically obscures the fact that all of Jesus’ earliest followers were themselves Jews and inadvertently suggests that all ancient (and modern?) Jews should be placed together in a single category. An Amarillo test question on the stoning of the early Christian leader (Acts 6:8-8:1) asks:

While the Jews murdered Stephen, the young man Saul

(a) held their cloaks

b) left quickly because he could not stand the sight of blood

c) tried to stop them from doing this terrible thing.

Such wording puts “the Jews” and Stephen into opposite camps, despite the fact that Stephen himself was a Jew. Sonora ISD uses questions with similar phrasing from the old Dallas High School Bible Course, such as: “Why did the Jews seal the tomb of Christ and set a watch over it? (Matt. 27:62-66).” A workbook used in Dalhart ISD seems to assume all Jews were (and perhaps are) the same, asking: “What would a Jew learn from the first verse of Matthew?”

This problem is most acute when courses reach the Gospel of John, which itself frequently refers to “the Jews,” often as enemies of Jesus. A Duncanville ISD test question exemplifies the issue:

The Jews sought to kill Jesus (Jn. 5:18) because He:

A. Unnecessarily stirred up the Romans

B. Made Himself equal with God the Father

C. Neither of the above

It is important to realize that the language of the Duncanville question derives directly from John 5:18 itself: “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (KJV). The teacher was thus simply alluding to that verse and not intentionally making a generalizing reference to “the Jews.” Nonetheless, the negative implications of such language underscore how important it is for students to be aware of the role passages like this have historically played in justifying persecution of Jews – a fact that few districts acknowledge. Such language unwittingly echoes the age-old charge of deicide – that is, the belief that Jews as a group are responsible for the death of Jesus.

The deicide motif is explicit in an essay distributed to students in Dalhart ISD. A handout taken from [raptureready.com](http://raptureready.com) attempts to incorporate Daniel 9:24-27 into detailed calculations about history’s steady progression towards the end of the age. “No prophecy in all of Scripture is more critical to our understanding of the end times than these four verses,” according to the article. Expounding on Daniel’s 9:26’s reference to the “messiah” being “cut off,” it explains:

It wasn’t the killing the Messiah that put the Jews at odds with God. After all He came to die for them. No. It’s that in killing Him, they refused to let his death pay for their sins so He could save them. This had the effect of making His death meaningless to them. That’s what severed the relationship.

The writer attributes the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple by the Romans and the scattering of Jews around the world as a result of Jesus’ crucifixion but assures that when Jesus establishes his kingdom on earth, “Israel will finally have her Kingdom back and will live in peace with God in her midst forever.”<sup>74</sup> How this reading

figured into class discussion is unknown, but there is no evidence it was analyzed critically.

The book used at Lazbuddie ISD emphasizes the Jewishness of early Christianity but advocates an understanding of the ultimate fate of Jews similar to that of the Dalhart ISD article:

THE LORD IS NOT FINISHED WITH THE JEWS! We must never forget the prophets were all Jews, our Lord was a Jew, and all the apostles were Jews. Furthermore, thousands of Orthodox Jews still today earnestly anticipate the coming of the Messiah. After the church is gone from the earth, God will take the veil from many of their eyes, and they will embrace Jesus Christ as the true Messiah. 75

Occasionally, course elements are unfortunate not because they explicitly denigrate Judaism but because they indicate either insufficient effort and preparation to teach about it or a lack of sensitivity. For example, Longview ISD’s discussion of early Judaism suggests that Jews in the time of Jesus read the Talmud; in fact, the Palestinian Talmud was not compiled until approximately 400 CE and the Babylonian Talmud until approximately 500 CE – centuries after Jesus. The goal of a Dalhart ISD lesson plan reflects similar confusion about the relation of the Bible and much later rabbinic texts: “Identify the Jewish divisions of the Old Testament which include the Torah, Talmud, Midrash.” A PowerPoint presentation in the same district inadvertently reduces the Holocaust to a visual prop by including a photograph of Holocaust victims stacked like cordwood to illustrate the massacre of King Ahab’s family and supporters by King Jehu of Judah (2 Kings 10). The biblical story’s claim that God ordained the slaughter makes its illustration with this particular image all the more unfortunate.

In some instances, even courses that go out of their way to encourage sympathetic appreciation of Judaism still end up analyzing it mostly within the framework of Christian theology. Students in the Eastland ISD course learn to prepare traditional treats for Purim (Hamantashen cookies), look at latke recipes for Hanukkah, sing and dance the Hava Nagila (a Hebrew folk song), meet a Holocaust survivor, and visit the Dallas Holocaust Museum. But the course’s handout on the Jewish holiday the

9th of Av (a commemoration of the destruction of the two Jewish temples) ends with the proclamation “Jesus is Lord!” It interprets other Jewish festivals typologically: “If the fall feasts represent the Return of Christ on Rosh Hashana, then Yom Kippur could be the day of the Judgment Seat of Christ...”

Some courses do better in educating students about the vitality of ancient and contemporary Judaism, and a few intentionally sensitize students to the ways certain biblical texts have been interpreted to justify anti-Jewish sentiment. Several, for example, devote significant course time to the study of Jewish festivals without utilizing the sort of typological interpretation seen in the Eastland ISD course. Bridge City ISD distributes an excellent handout describing the major categories of rabbinic texts (Talmud, Mishnah, etc.) and classic Jewish interpretive approaches. It assigns exercises that help students understand differences between Judaism and Christianity. (“What is different between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sabbath?”) Along with White Settlement ISD, it depicts early Judaism as an important religion in its own right rather than simply a backdrop for Christianity. Refugio and Boerne ISDs make good use of a section in the BLP textbook called “Gospel Attitudes toward Jews” that discuss the historical use of the New Testament to justify anti-Semitism. Noting the importance of “dialog and study among Jews and Christians,” it

emphasizes, “It is important to recognize ... that much of contemporary Christianity is working to overcome this unhappy fact [religiously motivated anti-Semitism] in history.”

A slide from Dalhart ISD highlighting Hebrews 8:5 (below) implies that three branches of American Judaism [Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist] are merely a “pattern,” “copy,” or “shadow” of the superior heavenly realities made accessible through Jesus. Interpreted within the larger context of Hebrews 8, the verse argues that Jewish priests serve only an inferior copy of the heavenly ideals to which only Christians have full access. The following verse (not shown on the slide) makes explicit the passage’s argument that Judaism is inferior to Christianity: “But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6, NASB).

- Reform Judaism
- Conservative Judaism
- Reconstructionist Judaism

Exod 25:40

40 "And see that you make {them} after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

Heb 8:5

5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned {by God} when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern

6 which was shown you on the mountain."

(NAS)

*From Dalhart ISD*



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## CHAPTER 4: THE BIBLE AND PSEUDO-SCHOLARSHIP

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Public school Bible courses sometimes incorporate pseudo-scholarship, including suggestions that the Bible provides evidence for creationism or offers biological insight into matters such as race. This pseudo-scholarship also reflects ideological biases, including the belief in an America founded as a Christian nation on biblical Christian principles.





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## SECTION 11: PSEUDOSCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

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Courts have repeatedly ruled that advocating creation science in public school science courses is unconstitutional.<sup>76</sup> They would likely come to the same conclusion again should a case be filed regarding the presentation of creation science or other forms of pseudoscience in a Bible course, especially if that “science” was presented for the purpose of supporting a particular religious belief such as the claim that the Bible is without any sort of error. Nonetheless, several courses incorporate pseudoscientific material, presenting inaccurate information to their students and exposing their districts to the risk of litigation.

Even the most discredited claims occasionally appear. Eastland ISD’s materials, for example, include a tract (*The Missing Day*) claiming “the space program is now proving what has been called ‘myth’ in the Bible to be truth.” According to it, “astronauts and space scientists at Green Belt, MD” discovered “a day missing in space in elapsed time” that corroborates biblical stories of the sun standing

still (Joshua 10:8) and moving backwards (2 Kings 20:1-11).<sup>77</sup> This anecdote is a textbook example of an urban legend, and its history and development have been well documented in scholarly literature.<sup>78</sup> The exact function of this tract in class discussion is unclear, but in light of the theological orientation of the course as a whole, its claims were likely presented to students in a positive light.

Pseudoscience most often appears in discussions of Genesis. Creation science, which attempts to show that the Bible’s account of a six-day creation can be reconciled with modern science, figures prominently in the Permian High class in Ector County ISD. The learning objective for coverage of Genesis 1-2 is the following: “Students will identify and explain the various theories of creation.” A test later asks students to “identify and explain the four major theories of creation discussed in class.” A worksheet asks students to identify those theories by name.

### Theories of Creation

<b>Literal 24-hour Day Theory</b>	Day = 24 Hours; Six days of creation
<b>Age/Day Theory</b>	Day = extended period of time or age; Six days or ages of creation.
<b>Alternate Age/Day Theory</b>	Creation occurred in six days, with extended periods of time in between each day.
<b>Mature Earth Theory</b>	The earth was created in a mature state; Adam was created as an adult, not a baby.

*Ector County ISD Worksheet. After reading the descriptions in the right column, students are asked to provide the names of the theories on the left.*

Eastland ISD covers the so-called “gap theory,” an attempt to reconcile the biblical story of a six-day creation with scientific views of the earth as billions of years old by positing the passage of a lengthy gap of time between the Bible’s opening verses. (“How much time, if any, elapsed between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2-3?” one Eastland ISD exercise asks.) The commentary on Genesis 1 in the NCBCPS curriculum used by several districts also emphasizes attempts to find a way to reconcile old-earth and young-earth theories: “Since then [Darwin], several views have developed to try and harmonize the six biblical days of creation with secular scientific theories. The commonly held views today are: Literal Days ... Gap Theory ... Day-Age Theory ... Framework Hypothesis.”<sup>79</sup> Lesson plans for Longview ISD discussions of Genesis include “discuss creation theories: literal; gap; day-age; framework hypothesis.” A Eustace ISD assignment, “Origins of the Earth Presentation,” encourages students to categorize interpretations of Genesis as reflecting either a “Biblical Perspective” or a “Secular Perspective,” suggesting that anyone who doesn’t embrace a creationist reading of Genesis is “secular.” A Life School test at over Genesis 1 asks, “What does the first law of thermodynamics state?”, an apparent reference to a common creationist argument that this scientific principle proves that the world must have appeared in its completed form and was thus the product of a creator. A Perryton ISD Genesis lesson in which students “discuss the difference between theory and facts” may hint that class discussion focused on biblical creationism as a viable scientific alternative to evolution. Dalhart ISD features a slide show arguing for a 6,000-year-old earth, and Eastland ISD shows videos produced by the Creation Evidence Museum, a Glen Rose-based organization famous for its defense of a 6,000-year-old earth and claim to possess a fossil of “a pristine human footprint intruded by a dinosaur footprint” from the Paluxy River bed.<sup>80</sup>

The Noah story also prompts appeals to pseudoscience. In the Boys Ranch ISD, students watch “various videos from You Tube that present different views of the flood in coordination with account from Genesis.” A workbook used in Dayton ISD suggests that biblical characters’ life spans declined “due to major environmental changes brought about by the flood.”<sup>81</sup> Peaster ISD’s course

submitted NCBCPS pages on the topic that suggest the question of whether the earth experienced a local or global flood is an ongoing matter of debate among scientists.

The story of Noah’s sons Japheth, Ham, and Shem (Genesis 9-10) serves as an opportunity to introduce another type of pseudoscience into the classroom, race theory. As was the case in 2005-06, Amarillo ISD course materials include a chart titled “Racial Origins Traced from Noah” that uses modern racial and national terminology to identify the ancient tribes mentioned in the text as descendants of the three sons. According to the chart, “Western Europeans” and “Caucasians” descend from Japheth, “African races” and Canaanites from Ham, and “Jews, Semitic people, and Oriental races” from Shem. A test question shows that the chart was taken seriously: “Shem is the father of a) most Germanic races b) the Jewish people c) all African people.” In Peaster ISD, a “Genealogies: Diversity through Noah’s Sons” resource explains: “We need to get a perspective on how the world became so diverse. The scriptures unlock this mystery by revealing us [*sic*] the creation and spread of cultures through Noah’s sixteen grandsons.” It then presents a chart similar to Amarillo ISD’s that mixes up ancient and modern place names and people groups.<sup>82</sup>

The idea that racial diversity can be traced back to Noah’s sons has been a foundational component of some forms of racism. The belief that Africans were akin to Canaanites and subject to the “curse of Ham” placed by Noah (Gen. 9:18, 22, 25) undergirded nineteenth-century defenses of slavery and is still cited in racist theory. It is important to emphasize that the materials of neither Amarillo ISD nor Peaster ISD explicitly refer to the “curse of Ham” tradition, but neither course reflects any familiarity with the tragic role played in American history by literalistic interpretations of the sort they advocate, either. Terrell and East Central ISDs, in contrast, provide very positive examples of how teachers might handle texts with troubling histories of interpretation like this one. Utilizing BLP material, both of these latter districts acknowledge that some religious groups have interpreted these chapters literally in the way that the Amarillo and Peaster courses do, but they also devote attention to the use of this story in pro-slavery and racist rhetoric.

## RACIAL ORIGINS TRACED FROM NOAH

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***Shem***

**Jews**

**Semitic people**

**Oriental races**

***Ham***

**African races**

**Canaanite nations**

***Japheth***

**Western Europeans**

**Caucasians**

*Amarillo ISD's Bible course materials include this overhead transparency. The idea that racial diversity can be traced back to Noah's sons has been a foundational component of some forms of racism.*

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## SECTION 12: AMERICA'S BIBLICAL HERITAGE

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In a few districts, Bible courses echo claims made within the Religious Right that the Founding Fathers were largely orthodox Protestant Christians who intended for the United States to be a distinctively Christian nation with laws and a form of government based on the Bible. This logic is implied, for example, in a Dalhart ISD daily lesson plan: “The student understands the beliefs, and principles taken from the Biblical texts and applied to elements of the American system of government.” These claims are problematic not only because they are historically inaccurate but also because they figure prominently in attempts by the Religious Right to guarantee a privileged position in the public square for their own religious beliefs above those of others.

The most common technique for making such arguments is to string together quotations lauding the Bible, Christianity or religion in general from political philosophers, historic documents, the Founding Fathers and other famous Americans. These quotations are typically cited in a completely decontextualized manner, almost as if they are biblical proof texts with self-evident meanings. Fake quotes never actually uttered by the speaker to whom they are attributed are cited side by side with legitimate ones. Even authentic quotes are sometimes presented in such a way as to misrepresent the views of their sources, and no quotes that would support alternative viewpoints are discussed or acknowledged. When Bible courses adopt this “proof by sound bite” approach to teaching about the role(s) of the Bible in American history, students learn little if anything about the larger views of the individuals quoted, the historical

contexts in which they uttered or wrote their sentiments, or how their quotes relate to the larger speeches, letters, books or other sources of which they were originally a part.

Belton ISD’s course is one of the most heavy-handed in this regard. It makes available to its students an American Tract Society pamphlet titled “One Nation Under God” that begins: “The United States was founded on the principles of liberty in the Holy Bible and the reverence of the Founding Fathers.” To support this contention, the tract presents quotes attributed to William Penn, John Quincy Adams, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, and excerpts from the texts such as the Pledge of Allegiance. It concludes: “Giving God His rightful place in the national life of this country has provided a rich heritage for all its citizens. Yet, wonderful as the benefits of that heritage may be, a true relationship to God is not a matter of national declaration but rather the personal responsibility of each individual citizen.” It then asks: “Would you like to place your trust in Jesus Christ and receive Him as your Savior from Sin?” Another Belton ISD resource titled “Timely Words about God’s Timeless Word” consists entirely of favorable quotes from famous figures about the Bible. Students are tested over their ability to match such quotes with their speaker.

Ector County and Eustace ISDs have similar materials. An Ector County ISD worksheet asks students to identify who said, “I have said and always will say, that the studious perusal of the Bible will make better citizens, better husbands, and better fathers” (Thomas Jefferson). Another question on the same sheet asks who said, “I am profitably

engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man” (Abraham Lincoln). The syllabus for The Eustace ISD begins with quotations about the value and accuracy of the Bible by Patrick Henry, John Quincy Adams and Isaac Newton.

Lubbock and Prosper ISDs are among the districts that relied on material from the NCBCPS course on this topic. Since at least 2005, the NCBCPS curriculum has included a 10-page selection of isolated quotations (at least five of them spurious) praising the Bible, God and Christianity set against a blurry backdrop depicting soldiers carrying an American flag. This section appears to have been a major source for the material used in constructing “The Bible in American History Daily Quiz” in Lubbock ISD, which asked students to identify the (purported) sources of quotes such as the following:

- “The Bible is worth all the other books which have ever been printed.” (attributed to Patrick Henry)

- “It cannot be emphasized too strong or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians, not on religions, but the gospel of Jesus Christ.” (attributed to Patrick Henry)<sup>83</sup>

- “The whole inspiration of our civilization springs from the teachings of Christ and the lessons of the prophets. To read the Bible for these fundamentals is a necessity of American life.” (attributed to Herbert Hoover)<sup>84</sup>

- “The Bible is the source of liberty” (Thomas Jefferson).<sup>85</sup>

These quotations give a good sense of the others included on this quiz. Of the four cited here, only the first is authentic.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the deeply flawed nature of the history-by-proof text method is to show how the exact same method could be employed to advocate the opposite viewpoint. Consider the impression made by the following hypothetical test (answer key on next page):

**Match the following quotes with the appropriate Founding Father.**

1. “Among the sayings and discourses imputed to him [Jesus] by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others, again, of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being.”
2. “The Bible is such a book of lies and contradictions there is no knowing which part to believe or whether any.”
3. “What could be invented to debase the ancient Christianity, which Greeks, Romans, Hebrews, and Christian factions, above all the Catholics, have not fraudulently imposed upon the Public?”
4. “There is not any thing, which has contributed so much to delude mankind in religious matters, as mistaken apprehensions concerning supernatural inspiration or revelation....”
5. “The world has been scourged with many fanatical sects in religion who, inflamed by sincere but mistaken zeal, have perpetuated under the idea of serving God the most atrocious crimes.”
6. “I conceive then that the Infinite has created many Gods, vastly superior to men, who can better conceive of his perfections than we, and return him a more rational and glorious praise.”

- A. John Adams
- B. Thomas Jefferson
- C. Ethan Allen
- D. Thomas Paine
- E. Benjamin Franklin
- F. Alexander Hamilton

Answer Key:

1. B
2. D
3. A
4. C
5. F
6. E

One can imagine the controversy such a test might provoke. In the absence of any alternative evidence, this particular collection of quotations (all of which are authentic) implies that the religious views of the Founders were uniformly characterized by skepticism, unorthodoxy and/or suspicion towards the Christianity of their day. In fact, the Founders held a wide range of religious views, ranging from affirmation of classic Christian doctrines to outright hostility towards Christianity. Similarly, they often held quite different views on the proper relationship between church and state. In short, their positions on such matters were far too complex and diverse to be adequately represented by isolated quotations. This is true not only for the Founders collectively but for each Founder individually; single quotes like those above do not adequately represent the positions of these figures. For these and other reasons, using proof texts to teach about complicated historical issues leads to a skewed understanding of our national heritage and undermines critical thinking skills rather than fostering them.

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## CHAPTER 5: DOING IT THE RIGHT WAY

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A number of school districts have succeeded in offering Bible courses that largely comply with legal and constitutional requirements and are academically serious. This study concludes with recommendations that, if followed, could help more school districts craft courses that give a study of the Bible and the students in those classrooms the respect they deserve.



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## SECTION 13: SUCCESS STORIES

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In contrast to the 2005-06 course materials, which showed that the overwhelming majority of Texas Bible courses were taught from a religious perspective, the quality of materials submitted for this present study is much more mixed, falling into three main categories:

1. Courses that are thoroughly sectarian in nature. (See the table on page ix at the end of this report's introduction.)
2. Courses that reflect a combination of successful and less successful elements, some of them balanced and nonsectarian and others lapsing into one form of religious bias or another. Many of the more problematic components might disappear if the state provided teachers with appropriate professional development. Those teachers cannot be blamed for the lack of such opportunities, since the state has developed none.
3. Courses that are especially successful in complying with legal requirements and maintaining academic rigor. While these courses vary in their details, they typically display most of the following characteristics:
  - They rely primarily on resources that are informed by a broad range of biblical scholarship, not just the scholars of one religious community, and that reflect sensitivity towards issues of religious diversity.
  - Their assignments offer intellectual challenges to students that require critical thinking, develop oral and written communication skills, allow for creativity, and go beyond rote memorization.
  - They inform students about the different Bibles of different religious traditions (Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox).
  - They recognize that biblical translations themselves reflect particular religious orientations, and they are intentional in exposing students to translations associated with different religious traditions.
  - They are sensitive to the different ways various religious communities have read particular biblical passages and do not present one community's interpretation as the norm.
  - They are respectful of the fact that some religious traditions regard the Bible as inspired without endorsing or rejecting inspiration themselves.
  - They recognize the importance of biblical texts as historical sources while avoiding a tone that assumes complete historical accuracy.
  - They discuss the theological, ethical and moral claims of the Bible without presenting them as authoritative for the students.
  - They treat Judaism as a religion in its own right and not merely as the background or foil for Christianity, and they help students understand how tensions between and within early Christianity and early Judaism are reflected in New Testament passages that have often been interpreted as anti-Jewish.
  - They recognize that the Bible is a religious text and not a science textbook.
  - If they discuss America's religious heritage, they do so in a way that reflects a respectful understanding of the diversity of that heritage

and that does not attempt to elevate one contemporary religious community above all others.

**Districts Offering Most Successful Courses<sup>86</sup>**

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Bridge City ISD

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Conroe ISD

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Corsicana ISD

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East Central ISD

---

Goose Creek ISD

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Grapevine-Colleyville ISD

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Lovejoy ISD

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North East ISD

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Plano ISD

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Pleasanton ISD

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## SECTION 14: RECOMMENDATIONS

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Religious literacy is essential for the smooth functioning of a pluralistic democracy, and Bible courses can play an important role in fostering that literacy. The materials analyzed in this report, however, suggest that while Texas has made some progress since 2005-06 in offering Bible courses that are academically informed and legally sound, considerable work remains to be done. As the numerous examples cited in this study document, the courses of many publicly funded schools promote some religious beliefs and disparage others, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The following steps would help remedy this situation so that Texas teachers have the support they need and Texas students can be assured when they take a Bible course that it is not biased towards a particular religious perspective.

### State Policy Recommendations

1. The Texas State Board of Education should develop detailed, academically informed, content-specific curriculum standards (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS) for Bible courses. The current standards adopted by the state board are far too general for a truly academic study of the Bible's and its cultural impact.
2. The Legislature should appropriate funding for developing the in-service training for teachers mandated by HB 1287 for teachers of Bible courses.
3. The Texas Education Agency should develop the in-service training for teachers mandated in HB 1287.

4. The Texas Education Agency and the State Board for Educator Certification should tighten requirements and better vet applicants for Continuing Professional Education providers who develop training for Bible course teachers.
5. The Texas Education Agency should monitor public school Bible courses to ensure that all teachers of such classes have received the mandated in-service training.

### Recommendations for School Districts

1. Until training is provided by the state of Texas, districts should make every effort to provide other suitable forms of professional development for Bible course teachers.
2. Districts and individual schools should carefully and regularly monitor course content.
3. Teachers should adhere to the guidelines proposed in the Society of Biblical Literature's *Bible Electives in Public Schools: A Guide* and the First Amendment Center's *The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide*.<sup>87</sup>
4. Teachers should avoid relying primarily on sectarian textbooks, websites, videos and other resources for course content.

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## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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*(Prepared by Texas Freedom Network Education Fund Staff)*

In the early spring of 2012, the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund (TFNEF) staff attempted to compile as comprehensive a list as possible of all Texas school districts potentially offering an elective course in the Bible during the 2011-12 school year. The list was drawn from several sources:

- TFNEF’s own prior research into Texas Bible courses during the 2005-06 school year
- Data provided by the Texas Education Agency from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) on all districts offering a course in “Old Testament” or “New Testament” during the last two school years
- List of Texas districts provided by the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas from their research and monitoring of state Bible courses
- Search of media articles (via Lexis-Nexis) from January 2006 to January 2012 and extensive search of Texas school district websites

The resulting list included 117 traditional school districts and 4 charter schools. On April 12, 2012, the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund sent a request under the Texas Public Information Act to all of these districts. The full text of that request appears below:

Dear Public Information Officer:

This request is made under the Texas Public Information Act, Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code. We respectfully request copies of the following information for courses offered in your district **during the current 2011-12 school year** on religious literature, including the Bible, Old or New Testament, Hebrew Bible, the Bible in history and/or literature, or any course in which the study of the Bible is a primary component:

**NOTE: If your district did NOT offer such a course during the current school year, you may simply indicate that in an email (to the address below), and we will consider this request fulfilled.**

1. copy of **cover, title page and copyright pages** – indicating title, author, publisher information, copyright date – for any textbooks, curriculum or other instructional materials used in all such Bible courses;
2. **course syllabi and lesson plans** used in Bible courses;
3. all **tests and quizzes** used in Bible courses;
4. all **printed handouts distributed to students** in Bible courses;
5. a list of any **guest speakers and/or organizations** who have made presentations or addressed students in those Bible courses;
6. a list of **videos or other multimedia materials** (including, but not limited to, software, CDs, DVDs, films, videotapes, PowerPoint presentations, slide shows, transparency packages) used in Bible courses;
7. any **reading list or list of outside resources** provided to students in those Bible courses;
8. document indicating the **number of students enrolled** in Bible courses (for both fall and spring semesters);
9. copies of **any notes or documents – including emails and electronic communications – sent home to parents;**
10. the **names, vitae/résumés or list of qualifications** for any individuals who taught or currently teach those Bible courses (including

documents indicating the completion of any college-level coursework related to biblical studies, religious studies, or related fields); and

- ii. if the teacher has completed any **special staff development and/or in-service training** – as required under Texas Education Code § 21.459 – copy of a certificate of completion or other documentation indicating such (including name of the organization or program that provided the training).

We look forward to hearing from you within the 10 days specified in the Public Information Act. The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund is a tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation, and we would ask that the district waive any fees associated with the response to this request. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

After several months of follow-up emails and phone calls by TFNEF staff, all districts responded to this request. While many of these districts replied that no such course was offered during the time period specified, 57 traditional independent school districts and 3 charter schools provided responsive information. (One additional district – Brenham ISD – did not offer a course during the 2011-12 school year but did provide the requested information from a course taught in the district during the previous year.)

This report is based on responsive documents obtained from those 61 Texas school districts and charter schools. All original documents were provided to the author of this report, Dr. Mark Chancey; electronic copies are kept on file at the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund.

This research was funded by the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund.

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**APPENDIX 2: MORENO V. ECTOR ISD  
MEDIATED SETTLEMENT**

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**Mediator-Proposed Settlement Document**

Re: Bible Curriculum Design Suit for Ector County Independent School District  
Case No: MO-07-CV-039

1. A Committee will be formed by the ECISD staff with the charge to develop an original curriculum to teach a Bible Course as per Texas state law, § 28.011, “Elective Courses on the Bible’s Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament and Their Impact on the History and Literature of Western Civilization,” including, inter alia:

Chapter 28(A); Section 28:011, Texas Education Code

“The purpose of a course under this section is to:

(A) Teach students knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, including literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy and

(B) Familiarize students with, as applicable:  
The contents of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;  
The history of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament;  
The literary style and structure of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament; and  
The influence of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament on law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

(C) A student may not be required to use a specific translation as the sole text of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different translation of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament from that chosen by the board of trustees of the student’s school district or the student’s teacher.

(D) A course offered under this section shall follow applicable law and all federal and state guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views, traditions, and perspectives of students in their school district. A course under this section shall not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. Nothing in this statute is intended to violate any provision of the United States Constitution or federal law, the Texas Constitution or any state law, or any rules or guidelines provided by the United States Department of Education or the Texas Education Agency.”

The substantive requirements set forth in Texas Education Code § 28.011 for a course conceived under this statute, will be followed even if that statute is not yet in effect statewide.

2. The Committee will be 7 professional local educators appointed by the Superintendent and five votes are required on all action taken by the committee. The Committee will be ongoing with the Superintendent filling vacancies as needed with other professional educators.

3. Whether a Bible class is taught is the sole decision of the School Board. The curriculum developed and approved by this Committee will be presented no later than May 1, 2008 to the School Board. The School Board will vote to adopt or not adopt the curriculum but will not make changes to the curriculum (no line item veto).

4. An appropriate monitoring system to ensure compliance with state law will be implemented as determined by the Committee. The curriculum will be open to the public.

5. The Committee is charged with creating an original curriculum and will not use any existing high school Bible curriculum as its basis, or any past or future versions of such curriculum. Any existing high school curricular material may be used as a resource by the Committee as long as such curriculum materials are in compliance with Texas state law. Within 30 days of the Committee receiving its charge, the Plaintiffs may submit their comments to the Committee for consideration.

6. The primary text for the curriculum will be a parallel translation Bible or multi-translation Bible that uses more than one translation for side by side comparison. In addition, resources will be provided in each classroom that will include several translations of the Bible, including a direct translation from the Hebrew and Greek. Additionally, other analytical texts will be used to aid in the analysis and study.

7. The current curriculum will be replaced with the curriculum developed by the committee, and, after the 2007-2008 school year, this will be the only Bible curriculum taught. In order for a Bible elective to be taught after the 2007-2008 school year, the curriculum will only be the work of this committee and according to this agreement.

8. Lawsuit dismissed without prejudice. Each party to bear its own costs and fees.

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## APPENDIX 3: TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY “FAQ FOR BIBLICAL LITERACY” (2008)

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### FAQ for Bible Literacy October 2008

1. For the 2008-2009 school year, does the school district have to implement a Bible Literacy class under Section 28.011 of the Education Code?

No, the transitional provision states in Section 4 of HB 1287 that “The provisions of this Act pertaining to a school district do not take effect until the 2009-2010 school year.”

Please refer to HB 1287:

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/BillSummary.aspx?LegSess=80R&Bill=HB1287>.

Please refer to Texas Education Code (TEC) 28.011:

<http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/ed.toc.htm>. Please refer to Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §74.36:

[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/sboe/schedule/2008/july/instruction/attachments/1\\_bible\\_a2.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/sboe/schedule/2008/july/instruction/attachments/1_bible_a2.pdf).

2. Does the school district have to offer the Bible Literacy course?

No. The Attorney General’s Opinion No. GA-0657 determined that the course authorized in Section 28.011 is not required to be offered. However, the Opinion also determined that because “religious literature” had been added to the required enrichment curriculum, some instruction in that subject is required. Districts may incorporate instruction regarding religious literature as required by Section 28.002(a)(2)(H) in existing history or literature courses, or may offer a specific course on that subject. The Opinion is available at:

<http://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinions/opinions/50abbott/op/2008/pdf/qa0657.pdf>

3. Does the school district have to offer the course if 15 or more students require it?

No. The Attorney General’s Opinion No. GA-0657 determined that a district or charter does not have to offer the course authorized in Section 28.011 in response to a request by 15 students. However, some instruction in religious literature is required, as explained in Question 2 above.

4. What certifications must a teacher have to teach the course?

The law states in Section 1 (f) of HB 1287 that “A teacher of a course offered under this section must hold a minimum of a High School Composite Certification in language arts, social studies, or history with, where practical, a minor in religion or biblical studies.”

Please refer to Texas Education Code, (TEC) Section 28.011:

<http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/ed.toc.htm>. However, the TEKS adopted by the State Board of Education for the course closely follow two courses districts have already been using to teach courses on the Bible, Independent Study in English and Special Topics in Social Studies. Districts may teach those courses without meeting the training requirements of Sections 28.011 or 21.459.

5. What professional development will be provided for the teachers of this course?

Bible Course Training is required under Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 21.459; however money has not been allocated for that training. Please refer to Texas Education Code, (TEC) 21.459: <http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/ed.toc.htm>. At this time, no training has been approved for teachers of the course authorized by Section 28.011.

6. What instructional materials will be provided for the teachers of this course?

Training materials are required under Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 21.459 (b) and (c); however, money has not been allocated for those materials. Please refer to Texas Education Code, (TEC) 21.459: <http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/ed.toc.htm>

7. Where can the TEKS be found if a district decides to teach the Bible Literacy course?

The TEKS for the Bible Literacy course may be found in the Texas Administrative Code. Please refer to Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Section 74.36: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter074/ch074c.html#74.36>. As explained in Question 4, the TEKS closely follow two existing courses previously used to teach Bible courses. Districts may choose to follow either the TEKS adopted by the State Board specifically for purposes of Section 28.011, or continue to use the TEKS for those two courses.

8. What materials/resources should a district plan to use for the Bible Literacy course?

Decisions regarding materials and resources for any course generally fall under local district control. However, Section 28.011(c) prohibits requiring use of a specific translation of the Bible.

9. What do I have to do to offer Bible Literacy?

The Bible course authorized by Section 28.011 may be offered like any other elective course, as can similar courses using the Independent Study in English and Special Topics in Social Studies. Instruction in the subject of religious literature as required by Section 28.002(a)(2)(H) is determined at the local level to the extent that instruction is provided through other literature or history courses.

10. What PEIMS number should a district use when reporting the class?

The Bible course should be treated as one course with two options for instruction, either Independent Study in English or Special Topics in Social Studies. The PEIMS coding will reflect which option is selected.

11. a) How is the requirement to offer instruction in religious literature different from the Bible Literacy course?

Districts are required to offer instruction in religious literature (including the Old and New Testaments and their impact on history and literature) which is now part of the required curriculum. Although districts are not required to offer a Bible literacy course, districts are required to imbed literary and historical references into existing courses. That instruction could be incorporated in a number of other courses. For example, Biblical allusions in Shakespeare or other authors could be studied, or study of the Reformation or other historical events could provide a basis for that topic. How religious literature is incorporated into existing courses is a matter of local control.

11. b) Will the state require documentation of this?

No, the state will not monitor per the general limitation on compliance monitoring in the Texas Education Code, (TEC) Section 7.028. Please refer to Texas Education Code, (TEC) Section 7.028: <http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/ed.toc.htm>.

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**APPENDIX 4: LETTER FROM HOUSE PUBLIC  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO THE SBOE**

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ROB EISSLER  
CHAIR, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

STATE REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT HOCHBERG  
MEMBER, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DIANE PATRICK  
MEMBER, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

May 16, 2008

Ms. Cristina De La Fuente-Valdez  
Director, Policy Coordination  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 North Congress Avenue  
Austin, TX 78701

Re: Proposed Rules 19 TAC Section 74.36

Dear Ms. De La Fuente-Valdez:

We urge the State Board of Education to reject the vague TEKS that have been proposed for the elective courses on the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament under HB 1287, and to develop the rigorous curriculum that this important area of study merits.

We are the authors of the ten amendments that were adopted unanimously by the House Public Education Committee that significantly changed the direction of the bill, and we speak authoritatively regarding the intent of the legislation as amended. The Committee fully intended for the Board to adopt detailed, content-specific curricula for courses taught under the authority of this bill. The proposed rule unequivocally does not meet the intent of the legislation as passed, nor does it meet the long-standing practice of the Board to establish content-specific curricula for elective courses. Further, without specific TEKS, there is no way a school district can have confidence in the Constitutionality of any course the district would offer under this legislation, hence defeating another major purpose of the bill.

**One main purpose of the legislation was to provide for a well-defined curriculum.**

A fundamental premise of the series of amendments passed unanimously by the House Committee on Public Education, and ratified by the full Legislature, was that courses adopted under this legislation meet the same rigorous curriculum standards that we trust the Board to establish for other regularly taught courses in the elective curriculum. We clearly expected the Board to apply at least the same effort and scrutiny toward this subject area as it does toward other elective courses in order to create a curriculum specific enough to establish textbook proclamations and to develop standardized training for teachers. The proposed standards do not

meet that expectation.

Our expectations were clearly stated during the debate on the amendments in committee, and echoed by Chairman Eissler in his “Explanation of Committee Amendments” document which he distributed to House members before the floor vote on the bill. (See attached document.)

“The Bible course would be an elective course – an enrichment course – that would need to meet the *same criteria* as all other courses offered in our public schools.... [The amendments] ensure that *school districts will have curriculum standards to follow*.... [Members of the House] can feel secure that the proposed Bible course will be taught with the *same respect and to standards given to other courses* taught in our public schools.” [emphasis added]

This expectation was not arbitrary. Over several days of public testimony, it became clear to the committee that to treat the New Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures and other religious literature with appropriate respect, courses on this material should not be ad hoc or subject to the whims of textbook publishers any more than we would allow Algebra II or U.S. History to be treated this way. The Board, more than perhaps any other group, knows the challenges of assuring that accurate, scholarly material reaches our students through course curricula and instructional materials. The Committee was united in asserting that students deserve nothing less from a course in this curriculum.

To further assure the quality of the course, we adopted amendments specifying that teachers of these courses be certified in language arts, social studies or history with, where practical, a minor in religion or biblical studies. We required the development of teacher training materials, based on similar requirements for materials for math teachers, and required that teachers successfully complete this training before teaching these courses.

We also removed language from the original bill that prohibited the adoption of a textbook for the course, and were assured by legal counsel that by doing so, textbooks would be adopted through the proclamation process under Section 31.022, Education Code, without the need to specifically direct the Board to do so in this bill.

We were aware that development of a curriculum and adoption of materials would take time and hard work by the Board and the Agency. So, after discussion of the tasks required by the bill, we specifically amended the bill to delay implementation of this curriculum until the 2009-2010 school year, instead of the immediate implementation in the original bill, to allow time for this work to occur.

Simply pasting the bill's language concerning the purpose of the course and religious neutrality onto a curriculum designed for any independent study course in English or social studies, as the Board has proposed, is hardly the process the Committee or a majority of the Legislature envisioned. None of this would have been necessary if we were simply intending to ratify the Board's previous adoption of independent study standards for courses in religious literature. No bill was needed to do that. Instead, the committee spent more time deliberating on this bill than on any other, meeting three different times to take testimony and hold discussions. It was our sincere belief that we were bringing forward a bill that would make Texas a shining example of

how to teach about religious literature in a respectful, scholarly and secular manner.

The Legislature honored the efforts of our committee by maintaining our language despite an attempt to return the bill to its original form. We urge the Board to continue this process.

**The Legislature expects the Board to adopt specific curriculum for elective courses, and the Board has consistently done so, until now.**

By failing to adopt a specific content-related curriculum for courses on religious literature, the Board would set a precedent that contradicts the broader state policy of establishing detailed curriculum standards for elective courses.

The Legislature seriously considered eliminating curriculum standards for courses that were not linked to state assessments when it rewrote the Education Code in 1995. It deliberately rejected that proposal, after considering that school districts would likely not have the resources and expertise to individually construct and evaluate curricula for the dozens of non-core courses that a district may offer. Even for large or wealthy districts with sufficient resources, such work would be duplicative and could be carried out much more efficiently at the state level. The need for consistency in curricula for a mobile student population was also offered as a reason to maintain state curriculum standards.

Since that time, the Board has maintained and expanded curricula for the widest range of courses, in considerable detail as to course content.

For example, the course in “Aerobic Activities” in the high school physical education curriculum contains five areas of knowledge and skills specifically related to this course, which, in turn, include 22 specific items that a student is expected to accomplish. The level of detail is substantial, including requiring the student to “describe equipment and practices that decrease the likelihood of injury such as proper footwear.” (See Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 2, Rule 116.54(c)(4)(D).)

Or, take the state curriculum for the vocational course on Fruit, Nut and Vegetable Production. Again, there are five areas of knowledge and skills, with 21 specific items for students to accomplish. The student is expected to “prepare mulches and compost,” “propagate fruit, nut, and vegetable crops,” “market fruit, nut, and vegetable crops”, and in fact specifically do just about everything pertaining to these crops. (See Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 2, Rule 119.54(c).)

The purpose of discussing the curricula for other courses is not to criticize the Board for its attention to detail. The legislative history implies that this is exactly what the Legislature asked the Board to do. Rather, it is to contrast these TEKS with the complete lack of such relevant specifics in the proposed curriculum for religious literature courses.

Not a *single one* of the proposed knowledge and skills for religious literature courses even mentions the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, or any religious writings! Instead, students are required to “read widely to establish a specific area of interest for further study”, “use text

organizers such as overviews, headings, and graphic features to locate and categorize information”, and “use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure and punctuation”. All of these are legitimate goals, but obviously not designed for this course.

**Extra attention to curriculum is required so districts can be less fearful of legal challenges.**

Rather than abandoning the practice of determining curriculum, the Board should pay *exceptionally careful* attention to the curriculum for this course.

A district can offer almost any other course in the curriculum without the fear of lawsuits. It is likely there has never been a lawsuit over the content of the course on Fruit, Nut and Vegetable Production. But in discussing this legislation, both the bill's author and the Committee agreed on the need to give school districts confidence that they can offer the courses on religious literature with minimum concern about lawsuits over potential First Amendment violations. The Committee chose to provide this confidence through a well-researched curriculum created through a scholarly process with public input.

At the request of the bill's author, Rep. Hochberg added an amendment to require the unusual step of having the Attorney General review any curricula for possible First Amendment issues before the curricula could be adopted by the Board. The intent of this amendment was to give the Attorney General the opportunity to prevent potential First Amendment battles rather than having to react to challenges after their filing.

The TEKS the Board has proposed leaves each district on its own to establish a curriculum for any course it chooses to offer under this legislation. Unless each proposed district curriculum is submitted to the Attorney General for prior review (which is clearly not anticipated by this bill), a district can have no comfort that the State can or will defend the district if a First Amendment suit is filed. There was substantial discussion that without that level of comfort, few districts will choose to offer such courses.

**The existence of vendors selling Bible curricula in the marketplace does not justify the adoption of vague curriculum standards.**

Some have argued that content-specific curriculum standards are unnecessary for this subject area because there are curricula available in the marketplace for districts to purchase. That argument must be rejected by the Board.

There are curricula available for a wide range of subject areas. Yet the Board, with authority from the Legislature, develops its own curriculum standards for each course it approves.

Certainly, the Board would not think of simply leaving science or math or reading curricula open to whatever the market provides. Instead, there is a lengthy process of curriculum development and review for every course in each of these subjects. Textbooks are then designed to meet the requirements that the Board establishes.

Texas has steadfastly held to this process despite its cost and the challenges it presents, because

we believe it is important that what students are taught be accurate, well-planned, and subject to public review. In the absence of standards, curriculum vendors and textbook publishers are exempt from such requirements.

The curriculum proposed by the Board provides little guidance for instruction and no means to assess completeness of materials. The course would indeed be subject to the whims of publishers. The Board has fought far too many battles over content to ignore its importance in such a significant and sensitive area as religious literature.

**The Board should reject the proposed vague standards and begin a process to build a well-defined course.**

The Legislature has given the Board an admittedly difficult task. The Board should embrace the challenge and create a course worthy of the important and complex subject matter to be taught. We will all be proud of the result.

Thank you for your consideration.

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## APPENDIX 5: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TEACH “ABOUT” RELIGION UNDER THE FIRST AMENDMENT?

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From The First Amendment Center ([www.firstamendmentcenter.org](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org))

- The school’s approach to religion is *academic*, not *devotional*.
- The school may strive for student *awareness* of religions, but it should not press for student acceptance of any religion.
- The school may sponsor study about religion, but it may not sponsor the *practice* of religions.
- The school may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but it may not *impose*, discourage or encourage any particular view.
- The school may *educate* about religion, but may not *promote* or *denigrate* any religion.
- The school may *inform* the student about various beliefs, but it should not seek *conform* him or her to any particular belief.

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## ENDNOTES

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1 Full bill text, including original and amended versions, available at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=80R&Bill=HB1287>.

2 South Carolina's practice is called "released time" education; for legal provisions regarding released time in other states, see Bible Education Released Time (<http://www.releasedtime.org/sitert/>).

3 *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963).

4 *Crockett v. Sorenson*, F. Supp. 1422 (W. D. Virginia, 1983) at 1431.

5 *Wiley v. Franklin*, 474 F. Supp. 525 (E. D. Tenn. 1979) at 531.

6 *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U. S. 602 (1971).

7 Two publications partly address this need by synthesizing the pertinent legal rulings and offering suggestions for course design and implementation: *Bible Electives in Public Schools: A Guide* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), which is published by the primary professional society for biblical scholars, and *The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide* (New York: Bible Literacy Project, Nashville: First Amendment Center, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999). Both are available at <http://www.sbl-site.org/educational/thebibleinpublicschools.aspx>.

8 *Gibson v. Lee County School Board*, 1 F. Supp. 2d 1426 (M. D. Fla. 1998).

9 *The Bible and Public Schools: Report on the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS)* (Austin: Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, 2005) ([www.tfn.org/religiousfreedom/biblecurriculum/](http://www.tfn.org/religiousfreedom/biblecurriculum/)). The TFN report is one of several available critiques of the NCBCPS. See also Chancey, "A Textbook Example of the Christian Right: The National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 (2007): 554-581; Chancey, "'Complete Victory is Our Objective': The National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools," *Religion & Education* 35:1 (2008): 1-21; A. W. Martin, *A Teacher's Nightmare? The Lubbock Independent School District's Bible Course* (Houston: American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, 2011) (<http://www.aclutx.org/reports/2011Teacher'sNightmare.pdf>); Brennan Breed and Kent Harold Richards, "Review of The Bible in History and Literature," *Religion & Education* 34:3 (2007): 94-102; and Frances R. A. Paterson, "Anatomy of a Bible Course Curriculum," *Journal of Law and Education* 32 (2003): 41-65.

10 A frequent complaint about the NCBCPS is the absence of scholarly vetting of its curriculum. To address this

critique, the NCBCPS now cites an Austin-based organization, Biblescholars.org, as its content reviewers. However, even the founder and CEO of that group expresses serious reservations about the quality of the NCBCPS curriculum: "I was able to correct some of the worst problems, but it is still full of errors" (quoted in Katherine Stewart, *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children* [New York: Public Affairs, 2012], 180).

11 Mark A. Chancey, "The Bible, the First Amendment, and the Public Schools in Odessa, Texas," *Religion and American Culture* 19:2 (2009): 169-205.

12 Mediated settlement available at [http://www.tfn.org/site/DocServer/Mediator\\_Settlement\\_-\\_Moreno\\_v\\_Ector\\_County.pdf?docID=1521](http://www.tfn.org/site/DocServer/Mediator_Settlement_-_Moreno_v_Ector_County.pdf?docID=1521).

13 Texas Attorney General Opinion GA-0657 is available online at <https://www.oag.state.tx.us/opinions/opinions/50abbott/op/2008/html/ga-0657.htm>

14 The Bible course standards are available online at <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter074/cho74c.html#74.36>.

15 Lubbock ISD originally offered the course at three high schools, so the fact that only two offered it in 2011-2012 marks a decline; see Joe Gulick, "Bible Classes Set for Three Lubbock High Schools," *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, May 21, 2010. Burleson ISD submitted materials for this report, but because they are associated with a world religions course rather than a Bible course, they are not discussed.

16 See discussion in Chancey, *Reading, Writing & Religion: Teaching the Bible in Texas Public Schools* (Austin: Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, 2006), 8-10.

17 On the 1932-1933 date, see Sydney Levesque, "Study: Bible Classes are Slanted," *The Abilene Reporter-News*, September 14, 2006; on the 1940s date, see Earl R. Humble, "Religious Instruction and Activities in the Public Schools of Texas: A Contemporary Survey" (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960), 253.

18 Jennifer Stump, "Lessons Raise Constitutional Questions," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, Feb. 4, 1999; Elaine Marsilio, "Corpus Christi ISD Eliminates Bible Literacy Course, Nonprofit Hopes to Offer Similar Teacher Training," *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, August 20, 2011.

19 NCBCPS promotional packets have typically included a testimonial letter from a Brady High School principal; cf. Ralph Blumenthal and Barbara Novovitch, "Bible Course Becomes a Test for Public Schools in Texas," *New York Times*, August 1, 2005.

20 Ellen E. Flynn, "Teaching the Bible in Public School," *Life and Letters* (Nov. 11, 2009) (<http://sites.la.utexas.edu/lifeandletters/2009/11/11/teaching-the-bible-in-public-school/>); "The University of Texas at Austin Introduces New Bible Curriculum Instruction Courses for Public School Teachers," *University of Texas at Austin News* (Aug. 4, 2009) ([https://www.utexas.edu/news/2009/08/04/bible\\_curriculum/](https://www.utexas.edu/news/2009/08/04/bible_curriculum/)).

21 Although it was once thought that rabbis finalized the canon of Jewish scripture at a conference at Yavneh/ Jamnia in 90 CE, modern scholarship generally rejects this position and acknowledges that the canonization process was more complex. Although various church councils affirmed what was emerging as the canon of the New Testament, their decisions were binding only for their own circles. No ancient church-wide council ever approved the New Testament canon. See Mark Allan Powell, "Canon," in Powell, ed., *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 118-120.

22 Districts might well make good academic use of a Bible cartoon. Lovejoy ISD's, for example, included a creative assignment that required thoughtful comparison of the DreamWorks movie *The Prince of Egypt* with the narrative of Exodus. Duncanville ISD's materials, however, included no hint of this sort of critical analysis of the numerous cartoons shown in the course.

23 [www.bibleliteracy.org](http://www.bibleliteracy.org).

24 The most noteworthy example is New Braunfels ISD, which received considerable media attention for its course; see, for example, David Van Biema, "The Case for Teaching the Bible," *Time*, March 22, 2007.

25 For critiques of the NCBCPS, see the articles cited in this report's "Introduction."

26 James S. Ackerman and Thayer S. Warshaw, *The Bible As/In Literature* (Glennview, IL: ScottForesman, first ed., 1976; second ed., 1995)

27 <http://www.rose-publishing.com/Assets/ClientPages/aboutus.aspx>.

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- 84 After searching through all available resources, the archives staff at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library could find no evidence that Hoover made this statement (e-mail communication, August 8, 2012).
- 85 According to the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, there is no evidence Jefferson ever said, "The Bible is the source of liberty;" see Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia (<http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/bible-source-liberty-quotations>).
- 86 Several other districts with what appeared to be strong courses were not included on this list only because they submitted too few district-specific materials for analysis.
- 87 Both are available at <http://www.sbl-site.org/educational/thebibleinpublicschools.aspx>.

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