

FOURTH YEAR
Perkins Course of Study School Satellite Program at McMurry University
Fall 2021

COS421 Bible IV: Prophets, Psalms, and Wisdom Literature
Syllabus & Pre-Class Assignments

Instructor:

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Class Dates:

September 11, 2021
October 9, 2021
November 6, 2021

Required Texts:

- Bernard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (5th ed.; ISBN-13: 978-0130923806)
- Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (ISBN-13: 978-0800634506)
- Richard Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature* (ISBN-13: 978-0687008469)
- Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson, eds., *The New Interpreter's Bible One-Volume Commentary* (ISBN-13: 978-0687334117)
- Louis Stulman and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (ISBN-13: 978-0687465651)
- *Mark Powell, ed., *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (ISBN-13: 978-0061469060)
- *Harold Attridge, ed., *HarperCollins Study Bible* (NRSV) (ISBN-13: 978-0060786854)

(*These two HarperCollins volumes are not specifically essential, but you will need a good study Bible [in the NRSV] and a good Bible dictionary. Another required short text by Westermann [see Session 2] will be sent to all students as a pdf.)

Course Description:

This course examines God's Word as expressed through Israel's prophets, selected Psalms, and selected passages from Wisdom literature.

Course Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Understand the origin, history, and use of these forms of biblical literature among God's people.
2. Exegete these forms of biblical literature.
3. Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day.

Course Assignments and Grade Calculation:

Participation – 20%

In a course of this nature, active participation in discussions and exercises is essential for the learning process. (Please also see the course catalog: missing four or more hours of class time will result in failure in the class.)

Pre-Class Assignments – 50%

There are individual pre-class assignments due approximately two weeks before each of the three Saturday meetings (see the assignments and deadlines below).

Post-Class Assignments – 30%

There are individual post-class assignments (brief reflections on the exegetical exercises conducted in class) due approximately one week after the class meeting (see the assignments and deadlines below).

Grading Rubric for Written Pre-Class and Post-Class Assignments:

75% Effort and Engagement

Has the student read the assignment, and any assigned reading, carefully? Has the student engaged the assignment thoughtfully? Has the student engaged the work of others (especially in the assigned readings) respectfully? (As these questions suggest, I am not expecting perfect answers. Instead, I want to see that you have taken the assignment seriously.)

25% Presentation

Has the student shown care in proofreading and editing her/his work? Does the student communicate clearly? (Clear communication is usually the difference between being understood or misunderstood. No one should expect his/her first draft to be a suitable finished product. Please take the time to read your work out loud. This simple process will help remarkably. If you really struggle with your writing, have someone else read your work out loud to you. You'll be surprised how many rough spots become apparent when you do.)

Percentage Equivalents for Letter Grades:

A = 95-100 Unusually high quality, exceptional work	D+ = 67-69 Minimal work
A- = 90-94 Far above average, fine work	D = 63-66 Barely acceptable
B+ = 87-89 Above average for graduate work	D- = 60-62 Acceptable
B = 83-86 Very good, average for graduate work	F = 59 or below: Failure.
B- = 80-82 Slightly below average for graduate work	
C+ = 77-79 Meets requirements, but noticeable inadequacies for graduate work	
C = 73-76 Meets requirements, but with significant gaps for graduate work	
C- = 70-72 Meets requirements, but serious gaps	

Pre-Class Assignments (please e-mail all assignments to jbmiller@mcm.edu by the date indicated)

For all pre-class and post-class assignments in this course please adhere to the following guidelines. Do not include lengthy quotations, either of the biblical text or of the textbooks. Instead, summarize the relevant information in your own words, making sure to cite your source. Use parenthetical notation like this: (Isa 42:3) or (Anderson, 538). All responses to writing assignments should be double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font, with one inch margins (saved as a Microsoft Word.doc). Please adhere to the specific page lengths given for each assignment. Remember, headers and footers are not counted as part of your response.

Session 1 (September 11, 2021) – Israel’s Prophetic Traditions

Pre-Class Assignment (Due by 11:59PM, Saturday, August 28, 2021):

Reading Assignments:

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (see page assignments below)

Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 387 (in *NIB One-Volume Commentary*)

Writing Assignment (answer all questions):

1. Read carefully Anderson, 230 – 234. Summarize the various roles that prophets played among the people of Israel. Your response should be approximately **half a page** long.
- 2a. The prophetic texts of Israel reflect the specific historical contexts in which they were written. Read carefully Anderson (295-296 and 429-432) and Goldingay (*NIBOVC*, 387). Why do scholars divide Isaiah into three parts, positing that each part was written at a different time? Your response should be approximately **half a page** long.
- 2b. Read carefully Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12 and Anderson, pp. 444-455. Who is the “servant” in these Isaianic passages? Do all four “servant songs” in Isaiah refer to the same figure? Although some of Jesus’ earliest disciples understood Jesus’ suffering in light of this image from Isaiah (e.g., Acts 8:32-33), why is it also important to understand the image of the suffering servant in terms of the historical context reflected in Isaiah 40 – 55? Your response should be approximately **two pages** long.
3. Read Jeremiah (especially Jer 26 – 35) and Anderson, pp. 356-385. Now, focus on Jer 29:11. We have all heard this verse quoted as a general promise for a bright future. According to the text of Jeremiah, to whom was this promise given? Was it a promise for themselves, or for someone else? What challenges arise for theological interpretation if the message of hope focuses on people several generations in the future? Write a **one-page** reflection on the message of hope in Jeremiah 29-33 addressing these questions.

In-Class Assignment & Activities (Please complete the reading before class meets on September 11, so that you will be prepared to participate in the learning activities):

Reading Assignment:

Micah (our exegesis will focus on Mic 6:1-8; please read this text very carefully for the exegetical discussion)

Ezekiel (please read Ezek 18 very carefully for the exegetical discussion)

Hosea and Amos (skim these texts, since they were covered in detail in COS 121)

Daniel, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, pp. 1-15 and 48-75

Stulman and Kim, *You Are My People*

Class Discussion Topics and Activities:

- Prophetic roles in Israel
- Exilic and post-exilic prophets responding to the Deuteronomistic History
- Discussion of Stulman and Kim, *You Are My People*
- Exegesis of Ezekiel 18
- Exegesis of Micah 6
- Return and discussion of pre-class assignments

Post-Class Assignment (Due by 11:59PM, Saturday, September 18, 2021):

Offer a two-page reflection on **either** our exegetical discussion of Ezek 18 **or** our discussion of Micah 6. Focus on two ministry applications. First, what exegetical observations might inform a future sermon? Second, how might the exegesis of this passage inform some other aspect of your ministry (e.g., pastoral care, interactions with staff, committee discussions, etc.).

Session 2 (October 9, 2021) – Psalms

Pre-Class Assignment (Due by 11:59PM, Saturday, September 25, 2021):

Reading Assignments:

Psalms

Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, pp. 490 – 518

Jacobson, “Psalms,” pp. 308 – 309 (in *NIBOVC*)

Westermann, *The Psalms*, pp. 5 – 28 (a pdf of this text will be e-mailed to all students)

Writing Assignment (answer all questions):

1. Read carefully Anderson (pp. 496 – 508), Jacobson (pp. 308 – 309), and Westermann (pp. 23 – 28). What can you surmise from the fact that each scholar offers a different way of categorizing the different types of psalms? After reading through the psalter, do you find one

way of categorizing more helpful than the others? Why? Your response should be approximately **one page** long

2. Read carefully Westermann, pp. 5 – 11. Reflecting on Ps 103, Westermann writes: “It is neither a spiritual heirloom nor a leftover relic bearing witness to the tenacious power of religious rites; for this summons to praise has in fact succeeded in breaking through the limitations and boundaries characteristic of religions” (6). Offer a response Westermann’s discussion of the ways in which the Psalms are a record of past praise that transcends the past by becoming our own praise. Your response should be approximately **one and a half pages** long.

3. As noted in most translations (and on Anderson, p. 495), the psalter is divided into five “books.” Select one psalm from each book that you find particularly compelling. Write a half page reflection on each of these five psalms, highlighting the reasons why it is meaningful to you. Your response should be approximately **two and a half pages** long. (You will be sharing these psalms with the class [see below]. If you favor a translation other than the NRSV, please bring copies of your five psalms in your favored translation to share with the class.)

In-Class Assignment & Activities (Please complete the reading before class meets on October 9, so that you will be prepared to participate in the learning activities):

Reading Assignment:

Psalms (our exegetical discussions will focus on Psalms 37, 68, 89, 95, 104, 106, 109(/137), and 131

Jacobson, “Psalms”: for each of the psalms above, read the brief entry in the *NIBOVC*, along with the notes in your study Bible.

Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*

Class Discussion Topics and Activities:

- Sharing personal favorites from Psalms (see the pre-class assignment)
- Discussion of Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*
- Exegesis of (portions of) Psalms 37, 68, 89, 95, 104, 106, 109(/137), and 131
- Return and discussion of pre-class assignments

Post-Class Assignment (Due by 11:59PM, Saturday, October 16, 2021):

Offer a **two-page** reflection on **one** of the eight psalms from our exegetical discussion. Focus on two ministry applications. First, what exegetical observations might inform a future sermon? Second, how might the exegesis of this passage inform some other aspect of your ministry (e.g., pastoral care, interactions with staff, committee discussions, etc.).

Session 3 (November 6, 2021) – The Wisdom Traditions of Israel

Pre-Class Assignment (Due by 11:59PM, Saturday, October 23, 2021):

Reading Assignments:

Proverbs

Job

Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, pp. 519 – 552

Writing Assignment:

1. Read carefully Prov 1 – 9 and 31, and Anderson, pp. 531-532. Consider the contrast of what Anderson calls the “Strange Woman” and the “Wisdom Woman” (Prov 1-9), and then turn your attention to the idealized wife portrayed in Prov 31. How do these portrayals shape the way women might be viewed by anyone reading Proverbs as holy Scripture? Offer a balanced reflection in which you explore both the positive and negative aspects of these portrayals. Your response should be approximately **one and a half pages** long.
2. Near the end of his discussion of Proverbs, Anderson claims: “Despite this refinement of the conception of wisdom, the book of Proverbs sets forth a facile doctrine of rewards and punishments” (532). Evaluate this claim. What does it mean? What evidence do you find in your reading of Proverbs that supports this claim? What evidence do you find that contradicts it? Your response should be approximately **one page** long.
3. Consider the contrast found between Job 3 – 31 and Job 38 – 42. How is God characterized in this material? How do you find this characterization theologically comforting? How do you find it theologically challenging? Your response should be approximately **one and a half pages** long.

In-Class Assignment & Activities (Please complete the reading before class meets on November 6, so that you will be prepared to participate in the learning activities):

Reading Assignment:

Ecclesiastes (Eccl 2:12-26 will be our exegetical focus, and we will be situating that passage within the theology presented in the book as a whole)

Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, pp. 533 – 539

Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*

Class Discussion Topics and Activities:

- What is “disinterested” faith?
- The spectrum of wisdom traditions in Israel and Judah
- Discussion of Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*
- Exegesis of Eccl 2:12-26
- Return and discussion of pre-class assignments

Post-Class Assignment (Due by 11:59PM, Saturday, November 13, 2021):

Offer a **two-page** reflection of our exegetical discussion of Eccl 2. Focus on two ministry applications. First, what exegetical observations might inform a future sermon? Second, how might the exegesis of this passage inform some other aspect of your ministry (e.g., pastoral care, interactions with staff, committee discussions, etc.).