

SCR 5302 The Prophets

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Course Description

This course will be conducted in a seminar format. The first priority is to become familiar with the prophetic writings themselves. Then we will examine these writings from several perspectives: From a phenomenological perspective, we will look at the human side of the prophets—their call, their religious experience, their self-understanding of their mission, and how they coped with persecution. From an historical perspective, we will examine the prophet's social position in Israelite society and his mission in the light of the politics of the day. From a theological perspective, we will examine theology of prophetism in light of Israel's covenant and its theology of the monarchy. From a providential perspective, we will discuss how the prophets supported God's expectation for Israel to receive the coming Messiah. Finally, we will explore the meaning of “prophetic ministry” in the contemporary world.

Prerequisite: SCR 5131 Hebrew Bible or SCR 5141 New Testament Foundations

Course Objectives

Through this course, students will:

1. Become familiar with the corpus of prophecy in the Old Testament.
2. Understand critical issues regarding the dating, authorship, composition and editorial revisions of the prophetic books.
3. Explore the spirituality of prophetic religion, and especially as it relates to issues of social justice and covenant-faithfulness.
4. Understand something of the phenomenon of prophecy and similarities and differences from other forms of communication with the heavenly world.
5. Become acquainted with the pathos and suffering of the prophets and of God Him-Herself as conveyed in the texts.
6. Explore the relevance of the prophets' message to contemporary politics and the life of the church.
7. Recognize how Old Testament prophecy prepared or did not prepare Israel to receive Jesus Christ.
8. Understand prophetic ministry, and both the value and the costs, of carrying out such a ministry in today's world.

Textbook

James D. Newsome, *The Hebrew Prophets* (John Knox Press, 1986).
ISBN 0-8042-0113-7. \$17.36.

Supplementary texts

In addition to reading the main textbook, every student will select one from among these supplementary texts and be prepared to speak about what it contributes to our understanding of the prophets being discussed each week.

Megan McKenna, *Prophets: Words of Fire* (Orbis Books, 2001). ISBN 1-57075-364-4. \$15.00
A Catholic perspective on the prophets, their spirituality and relevance to contemporary social justice issues.

Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Zondervan, 1996). ISBN 0-310-21138-7. \$22.26. A survey from an Evangelical Christian perspective.

David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature* (Westminster John Knox, 2002). ISBN 0-664-25453-5. \$16.66. Has an introduction to each book, focusing on the literary features and issues in composition and redaction.

Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press, 2001). ISBN 0-8006-3287-7. \$15.84. A thematic treatment of the prophets' consciousness and the motivating issues in their ministry.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). ISBN 0-06-093699-1. \$19.95. A classic Jewish treatment, full of spirituality.

Gerhard Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1972). ISBN 0-06-06892903. \$16.00. A classic of German scholarship on the theology of the prophets, and the second volume of his *Theology of the Old Testament*.

Learning Outcomes (for assessment)

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Biblical knowledge:** Discuss the prophetic books and describe their contents
2. **Theological reflection:** Explain the meaning(s) of prophetic texts and relate them to the student's own theology
3. **Exegesis:** Demonstrate a beginner's competence in exegesis of a biblical text
4. **Hermeneutical knowledge:** Explain and apply historical-critical methods of biblical study to prophetic texts, and distinguish between critical and faith-based hermeneutics in biblical scholarship
5. **Practical knowledge:** Relate the biblical prophets to the mission of the church and personal faith

Course Requirements

1. Readings: Please complete them before class.
2. Two 10-to-15-minute class presentations on one of the biblical passages to be covered in class. The student should make use of at least one of the supplementary texts, above, in preparing for the presentation. (each is 10% of grade)
3. Two 7 to 10-page exegesis papers on selected biblical passage of prophecy. (each is 25% of grade)

The passage must be from one of the prophets on the syllabus up to the due date, but it does not have to be one of the assigned readings. It should be at least 5 verses long but not more than 15 verses. Ideally it should be a whole oracle, not just a snippet of one. The exegesis must be in the student's own words; plagiarism will not be tolerated (see policy on Academic Integrity, below). **Papers are due October 11, November 15.**

4. One 10 to 12-page final paper, devoted to researching a specific topic. (30% of grade)

Topics can include:

- An issue in life of a prophet, such as the question of Hosea's marriage;
- A theme running through several of the prophets; for instance, the conflict between 'true' and 'false' prophets, or the nature of the prophet's spiritual experience;
- Promise and fulfillment—prophecy either fulfilled or not fulfilled;
- A literary issue regarding dating, authorship or the composition of a prophetic book;
- A topic of modern relevance, such as the applicability of the message of the prophets to the struggle for civil rights, or to questions of wealth and poverty, or war and peace;
- Passage(s) from the prophets that testify to Jesus Christ, and how they can illuminate the work of Christ or create unrealistic expectations about Jesus

The paper will be graded according to clarity of argumentation, thoroughness of research and bibliography consulted, and the degree to which the student advances valuable insights of his or her own. See the policy on Academic Integrity, below.

Paper is due December 20.

Grading

There are no incompletes. failure to submit an assignment will result in an F for that assignment.

In calculating the final grade for the course, letter grades for assignments are converted into the following numerical equivalents, and the total is then converted back to a letter grade:

A	97	A-	91.5	B+	87
B	82	B-	77	C+	72.5
C	67.5	C-	62.5	D+	57.5
D	53	D-	50	F	0

This scale severely penalizes Fs. Therefore, it is better to hand in a poorly done assignment than not to hand one in at all.

Course Outline

Aug 30 Introduction

Topics to be discussed in this course: Who were the prophets? What are the characteristics of prophecy? What was their calling and purpose before God? How did prophecy function in society? Why did the Israelites pay attention to the prophets? How did the prophets point to God's greater purpose in Christ?

The origins of prophecy

Prophecy in the ancient Near East. Prophecy versus other forms of gaining "divine" knowledge: divination, augury, astrology, necromancy. Prophecy and divination: similarities and differences. The prophets of Mari. Balaam, the pagan prophet.

Saul and ecstatic prophecy in Israel.

Moses the prophet. How God spoke to Moses. Disputes over whether others could also prophecy: Eldad and Medad. Miriam as a prophet. The Song of Moses as a prophetic anthem.

Jewish lore about Moses. His position as the fount of revelation who passed down the "oral Torah" to the prophets and then the rabbis.

READ: Exod 15:20-21; Num 11:10-29; 12:1-15; ch. 22-24; 31:15-16; Deut 18:15-22; 34:10-12; 1 Sam 9:1-10:13; 19:20-24; 1 Kgs 18:25-29; 22:10-12

Sep 6 Elijah, Elisha and other prophets in Samuel-Kings

The historical birth of Israelite prophecy at the time of Samuel.

Ahijah of Shiloh and the division of the kingdom.

Elijah's political and religious struggle. Naboth's vineyard. Elijah on Mt. Horeb. Elijah the new Moses. Centrality of the prophetic Word. The remnant. Elijah's translation to heaven. Elisha. Miracle stories. Prophetic guilds and discipline. Later Jewish traditions about Elijah.

Some forms of prophetic speech—types of oracles

READ: 1 Sam 9:15-10:27; ch. 13; 15:17-31; 1 Kgs 11:26-39; 17:1-21:29; 2 Kgs 1-10.

READ: Newsome, pp. 1-15.

How does Elijah prefigure John the Baptist and Jesus?

Sep 13 Amos

Historical background of Amos. The nature of prophetic books, their composition and collection. Amos's universal viewpoint: God the Judge and Creator. Confrontation with Amaziah.

Covenant theology. Prophets as guardians of the covenant. The covenant lawsuit.

Forms of prophetic speech: judgment oracle, vision cycle.

READ: Amos 1:1-3:8, 5:21-24; 7:1-9:10

READ: Newsome, pp. 16-29.

Sep 20 Hosea and Micah

Meaning and purpose of Hosea's marriage. Exegesis of selected passages from Hosea. Marriage as covenant; earthly marriage and spiritual marriage.

Micah's lonely and difficult course. His opposition to a self-satisfied kingdom. Prophecy of Christ's birth in Bethlehem and prophecies of the kingdom.

Exegetical method.

READ: Hosea 1:1-4:14; 5:15-6:6; 8:1-10; 11:1-9; 12:2-14; Micah 1:1-4:4; 5:2-4; 6:1-8; 7:1-7.

READ: Newsome, pp. 30-57.

Sep 27 Isaiah

Contents of the book of Isaiah. Questions about the unity and composition of the book. Can we find an overarching theological framework? Look at chapter 1.

Life and times of Isaiah of Jerusalem. Exegesis of specific passages: Ch. 2: the reign of God on Mount Zion vs. judgment on the lofty heights of pride; Ch. 5: Parable of the vineyard and the "wild grapes"; Ch. 6: Isaiah's call and ministry; Ch. 7: Messianic signs; Ch. 9: The Messianic king; Ch. 10: God's "whip"; Ch. 11: the peaceable kingdom.

READ: Isaiah 1:1-2:22; 5:1-17; 6:1-13; 7:10-17; 9:1-7; 10:5-19; 11:1-9

READ: Newsome, pp. 58-78.

How do we read Messianic prophecies today?

Oct 4 Isaiah (continued)

Ch 8: Isaiah's disappointment and legacy. The "stone of stumbling." Against consulting mediums or other "experts." Ch 14: oracles against Babylon and other nations; the fall of Lucifer. Chs. 18, 28 and 30: Isaiah's late ministry warning against foreign entanglements and Hezekiah's rebellion. Ch. 22: Isaiah's heart at the siege of Jerusalem. Chs. 28-29: hypocrites vs. true faith.

Post-exilic additions: 14:1-3, 18:7; 19:16-25, 25:6-12: themes of universalism, conversion of the Gentiles, and the international highway.

READ: Isaiah 8:1-22; 14:13-21; 18:1-7; 19:16-25; 22:1-14; 25:6-12; 28:9-22; 29:9-14; 30:1-17; Ps 118:22-23

Oct 11 Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk

Dies Irae. God's justice is sure. The destruction of Nineveh. The problem of innocent suffering and the meaning of faith. Psalm of Habakkuk.

What is the meaning of faith?

READ: Zephaniah 1:7-18; 3:1-7, 8-13; Nahum 2:1-12; 3:1-19; Habakkuk 1:1-2:4; 3:1-19

READ: Newsome, pp. 79-100

First Exegesis Paper is due.

Oct 18 Jeremiah

The prophet Jeremiah: his call (ch. 1), early prophecies during the reign of Josiah (ch. 2-8), autobiographical "confessions" (ch. 12, 15, 20), prophecies against kings (ch. 22-23:6). Jeremiah's suffering and the divine pathos.

READ: Jeremiah 1:1-3:14; 4:4; 5:1-9, 20-31; 6:16-21; 7:1-28; 8:8-12; 8:18-9:1; 12:1-13; 15:10-21; 17:9-10; 18:1-12; 20:1-18; 22:13-19, 24-30; 23:1-6, 13-40.

READ: Newsome, pp. 101-123.

Oct 25 Jeremiah (continued)

Jeremiah's struggle with false prophets and encounters at the court of Zedekiah (chs. 23, 26-28). Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (ch. 29). The Book of Consolation (chs. 30-33): promises of restoration and a "new covenant." Jeremiah's encounters at the court (chs. 34, 36-38).

READ: Jeremiah 23:13-40, chs. 26-29; 30:1-3; 31:1-17; 31:31-34; 32:1-25; 33:14-22; chs. 34, 36-38

Nov 1 Ezekiel

Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot (ch. 1). His commission as a prophet (2-3). Sign acts (3:24-5:4; ch. 12). Visions of impurity in the temple and prophecies of Jerusalem's destruction (8-9); the exiles a righteous remnant (11:13-21) Allegories (chs. 16, 17, 23, 24, 31) Individual responsibility (18). Death of the prophet's wife as a sign (24). Tyre as a type of Lucifer (28); The prophet as "watchman" (33); prophecies against the false shepherds (34); Israel's restoration (36); valley of the dry bones (37); The apocalypse of Gog and Magog (38-39). Vision of a New Jerusalem (40-48).

READ: Ezekiel 1:1-5:4, 8:1-9:10; 11:13-25; ch. 12; 14:12-23; chs. 16, 18, 24; 28:1-19; chs. 33, 34, 36-40, 47.

READ: Newsome, pp. 124-138.

Nov 8 Second Isaiah

Deutero-Isaiah and prophecies of restoration. Introduction (40:1-11); the omnipotence of God and His power to revive the weak (40:12-31). Trial speeches (41-43) Idolatry: what's wrong with bowing to an image? (44:9-20) Cyrus as God's instrument, the "messiah" (44:24-45:13); Israel's mission as the servant of the Lord (42-43). God's abundant grace (55).

The Servant Songs (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12): The servant as Christ and as Israel. His mission to the nations. The meaning of Christ bearing our sins. Christ's suffering and Israel's suffering.

READ: Isaiah chs. 40, 41; 42:1-4, 5-9; 43:1-7, 8-13; 44:9-20; 44:24-45:13; 50:4-9; 51:9-11; 52:7-12; 52:13-53:12; 55:6-11

READ: Newsome, pp. 139-156.

The mission of the chosen people. What does Isaiah teach about the tribulations of a confessing ministry?

Nov 15 Haggai and Zechariah

Haggai and Zechariah 1-7: Encouragement to build the Second Temple. Zechariah's visions; the menorah and the two olive trees. Role of Zerubbabel. Echoes in the Book of Revelation.

Zechariah 8-14: the Messiah's triumph (9:9-10); the rejected shepherd (11); the pierced king (12:10-14); shame of the prophets (13:1-6). God's universal reign (14).

READ: Haggai; Zechariah ch. 1-7; 9:9-10; 11:4-17; ch. 12; 13:1-6; ch. 14

READ: Newsome, pp. 157-169, 201-205.

Second Exegesis Paper is due.

Nov 22 Thanksgiving recess

Nov 29 Third Isaiah

Struggle over the shape of the restored community in Zion. The ideal community (60-62); the invitation to foreigners (56). Prophetic ideals meet with vicious partisanship and conflict within the restoration community (57-59, 63, 65). Against sham religion. God's lonely reckoning (63). New heaven and new earth (65-66)

The "apocalypse of Isaiah" (24-27)

READ: Isaiah 56:1-56:8; 57:15-21; 58:1-12; 59:1-3, 14-19; 60:1-62:12; 63:1-6; 65:17-25; 66:1-6, 18-24. (cf. Ezek 44)

READ: Isaiah ch. 24; 26:10-21; 27:1

READ: Newsome, pp. 170-179.

Dec 6 Obadiah, Joel, Malachi and Jonah

Prophets of the Persian Period. Obadiah: recompense on Edom for despoiling Judah. Joel: a locust plague and the Day of the Lord. Malachi: rebuke to a corrupt priesthood, condemnation of divorce, coming Day of Judgment and the return of Elijah. Jonah: a satire about narrow-minded prophets.

READ: Obadiah, Joel 2-3, Malachi, Jonah

READ: Newsome, pp. 180-200

Dec 13 Daniel

Daniel's life and times; issues of date and authorship. Daniel's tribulations and the situation of Jews in the Diaspora. Daniel's visions: the four-part statue, the four beasts, and their interpretation. Historical horizon of Antiochus Epiphanes—the "little horn" (7:8, 8:9) and the "contemptible person" (11:21). "Bible prophecy" and calculations of the Last Days. Relationship to the Book of Revelation.

READ: Daniel

READ: Newsome, pp. 214-224

Dec 20 *Final Paper is due.*

Learning Outcomes Rubric

Course Learning Outcome	Novice	Approaching	Proficient	Advanced
Biblical knowledge: Discuss the prophetic books and describe their contents	Discusses only contents taught in church's theology	Explains some parts of the OT beyond the church's theology	Explains the wider contents of the OT presented in the course	Ready command of the OT and its contents
Theological reflection: Explain the meaning(s) of prophetic texts and relate them to the student's own theology	Explains conventional meanings only	Explains conventional meanings of texts and also meaning in light of historical context	Reflects on the texts in relation to personal faith	Reflects on texts in relation to personal faith; also applies historical critical interpretations to personal faith
Exegesis: Demonstrate a beginner's competence in exegetical method	Does not show understanding of what exegesis is	Attempts at exegesis but misses essential elements	Exegesis includes historical context, verse-by-verse treatment, and theological reflection	Demonstrates skill at all elements of exegesis
Hermeneutical knowledge: Explain and apply historical-critical methods of biblical study to prophetic texts, and distinguish between critical and faith-based hermeneutics in biblical scholarship	Does not utilize historical-critical approach	Utilizes the historical-critical approach occasionally but not consistently	Distinguishes critical viewpoints from faith-centered viewpoints on selected passages and biblical books	Distinguishes critical viewpoints from faith-centered viewpoints; finds additional insight from historical-critical approaches
Practical knowledge: Relate the biblical prophets to the mission of the church and personal faith	Uses the Bible mainly for proof-texts of theology	Application of prophetic texts through church doctrinal approach	Explain application of prophetic texts to contemporary life and ministry	Practices prophetic ministry and reflects on it based on the prophetic texts

Supplementary Bibliography

Prophecy in General

- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Buber, Martin. *The Prophetic Faith*. New York, Macmillan, 1949.
- Lods, A. *The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism*. Westport: Greenwood, 1971.
- Kaufmann, Yehezkiel. *The Religion of Israel. 4 vols.* New York: Schocken, 1972-75
- Mowinckel, S. *He That Cometh*. New York: Abingdon, 1956.
- Scott, R.B.Y. *The Relevance of the Prophets*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

On Individual Books

This bibliography is too vast to be included here. Research strategies:

Begin with the commentaries in such series as *The Anchor Bible*, *Hermeneia*, *Interpreter's Bible*, and *Old Testament Library*.

Expand your search by looking in the stacks, where monographs treating individual books are grouped together.

Expand your search further to the journals for the most in-depth and current views.

Make use of footnotes to lead you to additional materials.

On Topical Issues

These are only a selection, including some of the most seminal works. It shows the range of topics which have been the focus of research:

Ackroyd, P.R. *Exile and Restoration*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968.

Albright, W.F. *Samuel and the Beginnings of the Prophetic Movement*. Reprinted in Orlinsky, *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition*. New York: Ktav, 1969.

Baltzer, K., "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968), 567-581.

Berger, Peter, "Charisma and Religious Innovation: the Social Location of Israelite Prophecy," *American Sociological Review* 28 (1963), 940-950.

Carroll, Robert P. *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*. London: SCM, 1979.

Childs, Brevard. *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*. London: SCM, 1967.

Clements, R.E. *Prophecy and Covenant*. Napierville, IL: Allenson, 1965.

Crenshaw, J.L. *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion*. BZAW 124. Berlin: deGruyter, 1971.

DeVries, Simon J. *Prophet against Prophet*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

- Gottwald, Norman K. *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- Habel, Norman, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1965), 297-323.
- Hanson, Paul. *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.
- Hillers, Dilbert R. *Covenant: the History of a Biblical Idea*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1970.
- Hillers, Dilbert R. *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964.
- Klausner, Joseph. *The Messianic Idea in Israel from its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah*. New York: Macmillan, 1955.
- North, C.R., *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah*. New York: Oxford, 1964.
- Plöger, Otto, *Theocracy and Eschatology*. Richmond: John Knox, 1968.
- Westermann, Claus, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967.
- Widengren, G. *Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets*. Uppsala, 1948.
- Wilson, Robert R. *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is a form of dishonesty that occurs when a student passes off someone else's work as their own. This can range from failing to cite an author for ideas incorporated into a student's paper, to cutting and pasting paragraphs from different websites, to handing in a paper downloaded from the Internet. This includes buying or submitting a paper written by a third party. All are considered forms of "plagiarism" and a violation of the Seminary's academic integrity policy. Instances of plagiarism may be reported to the Vice President of Academic Affairs for disciplinary action. Possible disciplinary actions include probation, suspension or withdrawal.

The first instance of plagiarism in this course, the student must repeat the assignment. If the student plagiarizes again, the student will receive an "F" for the course.

Netiquette Policy

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threatening, infringing of intellectual property rights, invasive of privacy, profane, libelous, threatening, harassing abusive, hateful or embarrassing to any person or entity, or otherwise, is a violation of the Student Code.