SCR 5302 The Prophets

Course Description

This course is an in-depth study of the prophets of the Old Testament. This reading of the prophets will emphasize exegesis of prophetic texts, the prophets' call for social justice, and what these texts reveal about God's providential expectation for Israel and the coming Messiah. Students will study the human side of the prophets—their religious experience, theological outlook, political activities, persecution and struggle. Students will explore the relevance of the prophetic message to contemporary ministry.

Learning Objectives

Through this course, students will:

1. Become familiar with the corpus of prophecy in the Old Testament.
2. Understand scholarly 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 its connection with, and differences from, other forms of mysticism and 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. See the relevance of the prophets' message to contemporary life, including politics and the life of the church.
7. Recognize how Old Testament prophecy prepared Israel to receive Jesus Christ.
8. Understand the value, and the costs, of carrying out a prophetic ministry in today's world.

Prerequisite

SCR 5131 Hebrew Bible

Textbook

James D. Newsome, *The Hebrew Prophets* (John Knox Press, 1986).
ISBN 0-8042-0113-7. $22.50.

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.*

Requirements

- Two 10-15 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 the presentation.
- One 7-10 page exegesis paper of a selected biblical passage of prophecy. The passage must be from one of the prophets on the syllabus *up through April 28 (Third Isaiah).* But it does not have to be one of the assigned readings. It should be at least 4 verses long but not more than 13 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). Paper is due March 24.
- One 10-12 page final paper, devoted to researching a specific topic. 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—how a prophet's promises were seen as 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 confusion in the minds of people for understanding who Jesus was

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 May 19.

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.

Course Outline

Jan 27 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

Feb 3 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?

Feb 10 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.

Feb 17 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.

Feb 24 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?

Mar 3 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

Time to write the Exegesis Paper! You may consult the professor on the choice of the Bible passage. Paper is due March 24.

Mar 10 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

Mar 17 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.

Mar 24 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

Mar 31 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.

Apr 7 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?

Apr 14 Easter Recess

Apr 21 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.

Time to begin writing your Final Paper! You may consult the professor on the choice of a topic. Paper is due on May 19.

Apr 28 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.

May 5 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

May 12 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

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.