

RLST 310: Prophets and Prophecy Fall 2016 Levtow

Class information and contact information:

- T Th 9:30 – 10:50 am GBB 205
- 3 credits
- Dr. Nathaniel Levtow
- Office: LA 101
- Office phone: 243-2845 Office Hours: Tu Th 11:30 am – 1:00 pm
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Course Description:

This course explores the phenomenon of prophecy in the ancient world, with special attention to the literature by and about prophets in the Bible. We approach this topic from modern perspectives and disciplines including history, comparative religion, anthropology, social theory, political science, and literary studies. We begin by asking what “prophecy” means to us today and what it may have meant to the ancients. We then turn to the biblical world, starting with ancient Near Eastern prophecies outside of the Bible and then focusing on the biblical prophets in historical and literary contexts. We conclude with a look at how prophecy was received and changed in early Judaism and Christianity.

Required Texts: The following books are available for purchase in the UM Bookstore:

1. *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (HarperCollins: 2007) (any NRSV translation is OK)
 2. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (2nd ed. Westminster: 1996)
 3. Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBL: 2003)
 4. David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature* (Westminster John Knox: 2002)
 5. Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Fortress: 1980)
- A few required digital readings will be available on Moodle and/or handed out in class.

Recommended:

There are no prerequisites for this class – no previous academic course in the Bible or religion is assumed. But for students with no previous background, the following popular paperback (also available at the bookstore) will bring you up to speed on how we approach the Bible in the modern university and in this course:

Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (HarperCollins: 1997)

Course Requirements:

- 1. Attendance:** Regular attendance is required. Preparation for and participation in class meetings is expected and essential.
- 2. Readings:** Plan to complete all readings before the class on which they are assigned. Bring the assigned readings to class with you.
- 3. Presentations:** Students will have several opportunities to present material in class.
- 4. Quizzes:** 4 quizzes will be given over the course of the semester: Sept 15, Oct 11, Oct 27, Nov 15
- 5. Final essay-exam:** 7-10 pages, due at the end of the semester.

Grading:

1. Attendance, preparation, participation: 20%
2. Presentations: 20%
3. Quizzes (4): 40%
4. Final Essay-Exam: 20%

Course Policies:

- 1) There will be no make-up exams or extensions unless the student has made arrangements at least a week ahead of time. Except in the case of a documented emergency, late assignments will result in a decrease of one letter grade per day.
- 2) Attendance: Students are allowed two cuts with no penalties or questions asked. Each additional cut will reduce the attendance and participation grade by 10% (that is, 2% of your final grade). However, *more than 7 cuts will result in failure for the course*. Early departures from the classroom will be counted as absences. If you must miss a class meeting, it is then your responsibility to obtain from a classmate any class notes and other assignment and scheduling information discussed during your absence.
- 3) This is a course about religion as an academic subject and the development of the Bible in historical context. This is not a class that teaches religion or religious doctrine from a religious and/or devotional perspective. In this class, we will be examining biblical literature in an academic and secular setting, and treating the biblical text as an ancient document open to questioning, examination, criticism, and interpretation. An interest in exploring new ideas and new methods of examining the biblical text are essential. This class is not a forum for expressions of personal theology.
- 4) Plagiarism – the presentation of others' work as your own – is an offense punishable by course failure and/or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and all references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the University guidelines, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, falsification or any other form of academic dishonesty will fail this course and the incident will be reported to the Dean.

Schedule

*Note: Our schedule may change as our course develops. Regular attendance will ensure that you are informed of any changes.

* Students without prior background in the academic study of the Bible should read Richard E. Friedman, “Who Wrote the Bible?” over the first three weeks of the semester.

Weeks 1 – 2 (Aug 30, Sept 1; Sept 6, 8)

Background, Definitions, Approaches

“Prophet,” “Prophecy”

The Bible and the Ancient World

Wilson, 21-88 (optional: pp. 1-19)

Petersen, 1-45

Blenkinsopp, 1-6, 8-26 (skim), 27-39

Digital: Marc Brettler, “Historical and Geographical Background to the Bible”

Digital: Max Weber, “The Prophet”

Week 3 (Sept 13, *15) *Quiz 1: Sept 15

Prophecy in Ancient Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt

Mari, Nineveh

Wilson, 89-134

Blenkinsopp, 41-48

Marduk Prophecy (handout)

Nissinen, pp. 1-12 (“Introduction”) and selected inscriptions: the numbers below refer to selections in Nissinen (not page numbers):

Mari prophecies: #1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16-26, 31, 32, 36-48, 61, 63;

Eshnunna prophecy: #66;

Nineveh prophecies: #68-71, 74-77, 79-82, 85, 86, 88; 90, 91, 94;

Other Neo-Assyrian prophecies: #97-99, 101-103, 108-109, 111, 118;

misc. cuneiform prophecies: #120, 122-126; 128-131; 134; 135;

West Semitic prophecies: #137-141;

Egyptian prophecy: #142.

Weeks 4 – 5 (Sept 20, 22; Sept 27) *Student presentations begin at this point

Prophets and Prophecy in the Pentateuch **The Pentateuch and Early Israel**

(Review: Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*)

Wilson, 135-66

Petersen, 215-26

Deir Alla Inscriptions (Nissinen #138)

- Pentateuch:

Num 22-24; Josh 13:22 (**Balaam**); cf. Deir Alla Inscriptions;

Gen 37, 39-50; Cf Gen 37:19; 40, 41; 44:5, 15 (**Dreams of Joseph**);

Exod 28:30; Lev 8:7-8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8 (**Urim and Thummim**) (cf. 1 Sam 14:38-42; 1 Sam 28:6);

Gen 20; 12:1; 15; 22 (**Abraham**);

Exod 3; 4:10-17; 7:1; Exod 18:15; 21:6; 22:7; 33:7-23 (**Moses**);

Exod 15:20-21; Num 11:16-30; 12:1-9 (**Miriam, Moses, Aaron**);

Deut 5:23-33; Ex 20:18-21 (**Moses' mandate**);

Deut 18:9-22; 2 Kgs 17:13; Jer 7:25-26 (**Prophets**);

Deut 13:2-8; 18:9-14 (**false prophets and other diviners**) (cf. 1 Kgs 22:1-28 [**True and False Prophets**]; 2Kgs 21 [**Menasseh**])

Weeks 5 – 7 (Sept 29; Oct 4, 6; Oct *11) *Quiz 2: Oct 11

Prophets and Prophecy in the Historical Books

Kingship, Deuteronomistic History, Elijah & Elisha

Petersen, 226-34

Wilson, 166-225; 253-266

Blenkinsopp, 49-64

Historical Books:

Selected passages in the biblical books of Samuel and Kings (see handout)

Weeks 7 – 9 (Oct 13; Oct 18, 20; Oct 25, *27) *Quiz 3: Oct 27

I. The 8th Century: Isaiah of Jerusalem, Amos, Hosea, Micah

The Assyrian Crisis

Blenkinsopp, 65-110

Wilson, 225-231; 266-276

Petersen: 47-96 (focus on his discussion of Isaiah chapters 1-39); 169-81; 184-89; 193-96
2 kgs 14:23–20:19; Isa 36–39 // 2 kings 18:13–20:19

Isa 1; 5–11; 20;

Amos, 1–5; 7; 9:11–15; Hosea 1–4; 6; 9:7-9; 11; Micah 1-6

II. The 7th Century: Jeremiah

Josiah, Babylon, The Deuteronomists

Wilson, 231-252

Blenkinsopp, 111-147

Petersen: 97-135

2 kings 22–25; Jeremiah 52 // 2 kings 24:18 - 25:30

Jer 1:1–3; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 19:1–20:6; 20:7–12, 14–18; 36–45;

Jer 7:1–8:3; 11:1–5, 9–14; 18:1–12; 21:1–10;

Jer 2:2–6:30; 8:4–9:11; 9:17–22; 10:1–10; 12:7–13;

Jer 29:1–14; Jer 31:23–40

Weeks 10 – 12 (Nov 1, 3; Nov [8], 10; Nov *15) *Quiz 4: Nov 15

The 6th Century: Ezekiel, Second Isaiah

Babylon, Exile, Return

Blenkinsopp, 148-193

Petersen: 137-67; 47-96 (focus on his discussion of Isaiah 40-55)

Ezek 1–3:15, 8–10

Ezek 3:16–5:17

Ezek 18; 20; 11:14–21; 36:22–32; 37:1–14, 15–28

Isa 40:1–11

Isa 40: 18–20, 25–26; 42:17; 44:9–20; 45:1–7, 16, 20–21; 46:5–11

Isa 43:14–21

Isa 41:8–16; 42:1–4; 44:1–5; 45:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12

November 17, 22, 24: No class meetings (academic conference, Thanksgiving)

Weeks 14 – 15 (Nov 29, Dec 1; Dec 6, 8)

Prophecy in Judaism and Christianity: Prophecy and Apocalyptic

Blenkinsopp 226-39

Wilson, 297-308

Digital: Collins, “From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: Expectation of the End”

Hebrew Bible:

2 Kgs 4, 5; 4:42

Isa 24-27

Daniel 2, 5, 7, 10, 12

Dead Sea Scrolls :

Habakuk Interpretation

Damascus Document I, VII

New Testament:

Mark 1; 4:35-5:43

Matt 1:18-3:3; 24

Luke 1-5; Acts 1-2

1 Cor 14-15

1 Thes 4:13-5:11

Romans 1:16-17