

840:303:01/563:325:01

Mon., Wed. 6:40-8:00 p.m.

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HEBREW PROPHETS:
Social and Religious Thought
LSH A143

Office hours M-W 4:30-5:00 p.m.

This course presents the development and diffusion of Israelite prophetic thought from early associations with divination in Near Eastern culture through the Exile and its replacement with written Torah. After presenting a context for prophecy in the ancient world, the course will focus on specific prophets in Israel and Judah in their specific contexts.

COURSE GOALS

As part of the Hebrew Bible ("Old Testament"), the prophets of Israel were an important social institution in the religion of the emerging monarchic state. Prophecy represents a less restrained form of religious leadership than priesthood. In popular society prophets are held to be mystic future predictors. The biblical concept of a prophet is much different than the modern idea. This course is intended to equip the student to:

1. Develop an informed understanding of what prophecy was and how it developed
2. Refine an appreciation for prophetic writing and what motivated prophets
3. Gain a sense of what issues were important to prophets and how they understood their own role in those issues
4. Assess popular perceptions of prophecy and judge how they match the biblical ideal
5. Acquire a deeper understanding of ancient Israelite religion based on the words and activities of the many prophets cited in the Hebrew Bible.

TEXTS

A reasonable translation of the Bible with which to work. Recommended is the *Green Bible*, although any accurate translation will work.

Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (revised and enlarged edition)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class attendance is not optional; attendance will be taken. You are expected to attend unless you are ill or have a serious reason, such as a family emergency, for being absent. *Any absence not explained in writing to the instructor will be counted as unexcused.*

Swine Flu Alert: if you have flu-like symptoms, please **do not attend** class. Flu constitutes illness and is an excused absence; it will not affect your grade. Attendance includes reading the assigned material prior to class and participating in classroom discussion. The material in this course is intended to be enjoyable as well as informative.

Students are responsible for the class work covered in the event of any absence. An absence when an exam is scheduled will result in a zero for the exam unless the cause is illness (supported by a doctor's note or official supporting document), family emergency, or a legitimate religious holiday (according to University Regulation on Attendance, Book

2, 2.47B). The instructor must be notified of any religious holiday in writing by each student who wishes to have the holiday recognized as an excused absence. Assuming the instructor knows your religious tradition or what holidays you observe is not a sound premise! If an exam must be missed the instructor must be notified prior to the scheduled exam time (except in the case of being prevented by a serious illness) to avoid a zero on the exam. Make-up exams will be offered during the next class period following the scheduled exam. The student will be responsible for any material missed in class while making up the exam.

The final exam will be at the time scheduled by the University. The final exam for this class will be the first 80 minutes of that session only. The instructor reserves the right to consider a student absent from the final exam if s/he does not check in during the ten minutes of the exam. Make-ups for the final exam will be at the convenience of the instructor.

This class has a supporting Sakai page (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) and much important information will be made available there. Students will be responsible for material that is posted on Sakai, so it is essential to make sure that access to the site is secured early in the semester.

GRADING

There are 6 graded elements in this course:

3 exams (mid-term and final) worth about 75 % of the grade

1 book report worth about 10 % of the grade

1 short writing assignment worth about 20 % of the grade

attendance is worth about 20 % of the grade.

The examinations are scheduled for **Monday 22 February; Wednesday 31 March**, and the university assigned final examination on **Monday 10 May, 8:00 p.m.** Students will have 80 minutes to complete each exam.

The book report must be based on a book concerning prophets. The book may be chosen from the following list, but is not limited to it:

David Aberbach, *Imperialism and Biblical Prophecy*

Robert Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*

Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*

Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*

R. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*

James Newsome, *The Hebrew Prophets*

Norman Podhoretz, *The Prophets: Who They Were, What They Are*

John Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets*

James Ward, *Thus Says the Lord*

Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*

If you prefer to read a different book on the prophets, have the instructor approve it before beginning. Start on this right away! The due date for the book report is **Monday 22**

March! Any book reports submitted late will have significantly reduced grades. The book report must be double-spaced and *no more than 2 pages*.

The writing assignment is a creative writing exercise that is designed to determine if the concerns and outlook of the prophets are understood. Write a two-page chapter of a biblical-era prophet that you have invented. Please double-space your paper. Name the prophet, set up his or her context, and present his or her message in the way a biblical prophet would. The project will be graded on creativity, depth of comprehension of biblical prophetic issues, consistency with a biblical outlook, and choice of topic of concern. The idea is to “get into the head of” a prophet and try to understand the prophetic experience. The two-page limit will be strictly enforced; overly long submissions will be handed back for editing. The due date for the paper is **Monday 19 April**. Because of the time involved in reading the papers, late submissions will not be accepted; late papers will receive a grade of 0.

Grade Scale Percentages

94-100 = A

89-93 = B+

84-88 = B

78-83 = C+

70-77 = C

60-69 = D

0-59 = F

Grades cannot be altered after the final exam except in the case of a grade calculation error. If you are concerned about your grade you must take the initiative to see the instructor before the final exam!

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS COVERED

In the following section “Week” refers to the sequence of two classes that constitute a total of two class sessions. (Some “weeks” are divided over calendar weeks.)

Week One (January 20/25) Definitions and Context

What is prophecy and how did it come to Israel? Consideration of prophecy in extra-biblical contexts.

Read Blenkinsopp 1-39

Week Two (January 27/February 1) Moses vs. Balaam

Moses as the prototype of a prophet and his encounter with Balaam of Beor, a foreign prophet. The Deir Alla inscription will be explored.

Read Exodus 1-4; Numbers 22-24

Blenkinsopp 40-48

Week Three (February 3/8) Samuel and Saul

The role of prophecy in establishing the monarchy in Israel, and a consideration of which office -- prophet or king -- was considered primary.

Read 1 Samuel 1-15, 28
Blenkinsopp 48-55

Week Four (February 10/15) Court prophets

Under David's kingship court prophets appear. The role of the court prophet will be considered. The following prophets are examples: Nathan, Gad, and perhaps Ahijah.

Read 2 Samuel 7, 11-12; 1 Kings 11, 14

Week Five ((February 17/22) Wonder-working prophets; First Exam

Elijah and Elisha represent the wonder-working prophets in the northern kingdom of Israel. Their signs will be discussed, along with the implications of Micaiah ben-Imlah's episode against Ahab. The story of Jonah fits into this period as well.

Read 1 Kings 17-22; 2 Kings 1-14, Jonah
Blenkinsopp 55-64

Week Six (February 24/March 1) Prophecy in the shadow of Assyria

Writing prophets emerge in the form of Amos and Hosea. The story of Jonah also fits in this period and its inclusion in the prophets will be examined.

Read Amos, Hosea
Blenkinsopp 65-90

Week Seven (March 3/8) Prophecy in the shadow of Assyria II

Isaiah represents this era as well. The Midterm will be given on Monday 9 March.

Read Isaiah 1-12
Blenkinsopp 91-110

Week Eight (March 10/22) Prophecy From Assyria to Babylonia

The book of Isaiah will be completed and the book of Micah, his contemporary, will be examined. Book reports are due this Wednesday, 11 March.

Read Isaiah 13-39; Micah

Week Nine (March 24/29) From Assyria to Babylonia

Several minor prophets, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk, stand at the beginning of the Babylonia crisis.

Read Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk
Blenkinsopp 111-129

Week Ten (March 31/April 5) Second Exam; Babylonian domination

Jeremiah and how he fits into this period.

Read Jeremiah 1-45, 52
Blenkinsopp 129-147

Week Eleven (April 7/12) Babylonian domination II

Ezekiel also fits into this period.

Read Ezekiel 1-28, 37-48

Blenkinsopp 148-180

Week Twelve (April 14/19) The Growth of Isaiah

The traditions of the material added to Isaiah, an exploration of second and third Isaiah.

The minor prophet papers are due this week – Monday 20 April.

Read Isaiah 40-66

Blenkinsopp 181-193

Week Thirteen (April 21/26) Restoration

Prophets of the restoration. Haggai and Zechariah lead the thinking of the returning Exiles back to the temple. Malachi's later response is also to the temple. Joel and Obadiah's

particular concerns will be considered.

Read Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Joel, Obadiah

Blenkinsopp 194-245

Week Fourteen (April 28/May 3) Apocalyptic

How prophecy comes to an end and gives way to apocalyptic. A consideration of biblical apocalyptic material: Daniel, Deutero-Zechariah, and the Isaiah apocalypses.

Read Daniel

The instructor and the University reserve the right to modify, emend, or change the syllabus (course requirements, grading policy, etc.) as the curriculum and/or program require(s). Topics covered on an individual day are subject to change. Instructor travel circumstances may also affect the course schedule.