

**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**

#### **Attendance**

*Class attendance is not optional; attendance will be taken. It is difficult to overstress the importance of attendance for a healthy grade in this class. Even excessive excused absences will likely lower your grade.* The material in this course is intended to be enjoyable as well as informative.

Attendance includes reading the assigned material prior to class and participating in classroom discussion. Students are encouraged to bring in current media material illustrating the topics under discussion to share with the class.

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.

Students are responsible for the class work covered in the event of any absence.  
Please note:

- The instructor can NOT “go over” material from a missed class. If you miss a class the missing information may be obtained by borrowing another student’s class notes.
- The instructor’s PowerPoint presentations are NOT available for copying or distribution. Multiple reasons, including copyright, prevent the copying of these presentations. Do NOT ask to have copies of the notes; they will not be provided.
- 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 (documented), 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 to avoid a zero on the exam.
- The instructor reserves the right to consider a student absent from the any exam if s/he does not check in during the first ten minutes of 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.

## GRADING

There are 6 graded elements in this course:

3 exams worth 40 points each

1 book report worth 15 points

1 short writing assignment worth 25 points

Attendance is worth 25 points.

## EXAMS

The examinations are scheduled for **Wednesday 16 February; Wednesday 23 March**, and the university assigned final examination on **Monday 9 May, 8:00-9:20 p.m.** Students will have 80 minutes to complete each exam.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

The book report must be based on a book concerning prophets. The book must be chosen from the following list:

David Aberbach, *Imperialism and Biblical Prophecy*

Robert Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*

Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*

Thomas Jemelity, *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*  
Richard Sklba, *Pre-Exilic Prophecy: Words of Warning, Dreams of Hope*  
Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*  
James Ward, *Thus Says the Lord*  
Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*

Start on this right away! The due date for the book report is **Wednesday 2 March!** Any book reports submitted late will have significantly reduced grades. The book report must be double-spaced and *no more than 500 words*. A word count must be provided at the head of the document. Book reports are graded on the basis of how well you interact with the book. Do not give a summary of the contents; rather give your honest impressions of the book. What were its strengths and weaknesses? Did you agree or disagree with the author? What was the author trying to do? Did s/he succeed? Would you recommend the book to others? Why or why not?

The writing assignment is a creative writing exercise that is designed to determine if the concerns and outlook of the prophets are understood.

You are a prophet. A contemporary social issue strikes you as so intolerable that it requires a prophetic statement (oracle) from you. For this writing assignment, you are to write an oracle of about 750 words – a word-count must be supplied in the heading to your paper. Oracles over 750 words will not be accepted! Your oracle must be about a tangible issue (not something as amorphous as “losing faith” or “wanting justice” – be specific!). Do not write a story about your prophetic experience, rather write an oracle, or prophetic proclamation. To get a sense of how this is done, look at the book of Amos or Micah. Their work is oracular and is an excellent guidepost on how to write prophetically.

Please double-space your paper. The project will be graded on creativity, depth of comprehension of biblical prophetic issues, consistency with a biblical prophetic 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 750-word limit will be strictly enforced; overly long submissions will be handed back for editing. The due date for the paper is **Monday 4 April**. Because of the time involved in reading the papers, **late submissions will not be accepted**; late papers will receive a grade of 0. **No electronic submissions of either writing assignment will be accepted.**

## ATTENDANCE

25 points of your grade are based on attendance. All excused absences must be requested in writing. After the second unexcused absence 2 points will be deducted for each absence from the 25 possible attendance points.

If more than 3 excused absences are requested, documentation must be provided justifying any further excused absences. If no documentation is presented, 2 points will be deducted from the attendance total after 3 excused absences.

If a serious problem arises affecting your attendance, please speak with your advisor about your options. A leave of absence or withdrawal may look better on your academic record than a poor grade based on lack of attendance.

This class has a supporting Sakai page (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) and 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.

#### 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 19/24) 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 26/31) 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 2/7) 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 9/14) 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 16/21) 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

EXAM 1: February 16

**Week Six** (February 23/28) 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 2/7) Prophecy in the shadow of Assyria II

Isaiah represents this era as well.

**Read** Isaiah 1-12

Blenkinsopp 91-110

BOOK REPORTS DUE: March 2

**Week Eight** (March 9/21) 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 23/28) 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

EXAM 2: March 23

**Week Ten** (March 30/April 4) Second Exam; Babylonian domination

Jeremiah and how he fits into this period.

**Read** Jeremiah 1-45, 52

Blenkinsopp 129-147

PROPHETIC ORACLE DUE: April 4

**Week Eleven** (April 6/11) Babylonian domination II

Ezekiel also fits into this period.

**Read** Ezekiel 1-28, 37-48  
Blenkinsopp 148-180

**Week Twelve** (April 13/18) 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 20/25) 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 27/May 2) 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.