

SYLLABUS

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY HEBREW PROPHETS SPRING 2012

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Office Hours: Weds: 2:30-4:00 pm,
Loree Office Bldg- Rm 132, Douglas Campus

Day/Time: MW: 6:40 pm – 8:00 pm
Location: A143, Lucy Stone Hall

Course Description and Objectives/Outcomes

This course is a literary, socio-historical, and theological introduction to the Hebrew prophets designed to aid the student in understanding the biblical prophets and the forces that prompted and shaped their words. We will examine various dimensions of Biblical prophecy including: the nature of prophetic revelation, the stylistic forms of Hebrew prophecy and the practical and ethical ramifications of prophetic faith. While we will examine the overall context for prophecy in the ancient world, our predominate emphasize will be reading the biblical texts focusing on particular prophets in Israel and Judah in their specific contexts. The objectives and outcomes of this course are

- To acquaint students with the social, political, and historical settings for the prophets in ancient Israel in order to introduce the prophetic role, the prophetic message and the prophetic challenge.
- To explore the interrelations between prophet and king in order to place the message of the prophets within the cultural-historical framework of Israel and the Ancient Near East.
- To develop an informed understanding of what prophecy was and how it arose and was perceived in ancient Israel.
- To examine some of the major themes of the Hebrew Prophets and how these themes can be understood contemporarily.

Required Texts

Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Revised and Enlarged, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983. ISBN 0-664-25639-2

The New Oxford Annotated Bible W/Apocrypha, Oxford University Press (New Revised Standard Version) ISBN 978-0195283834

Supplemental Readings as posted on **Sakai**

Course Requirements

1. Class Preparation and Participation (15%)

Students are expected – besides punctuality, to be in full attendance at all sessions. *Attendance will be taken. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.* Four absences (excused/unexcused) will result in the student's grade being lowered a full letter grade. Six or more absences will result in complete forfeiture of the student's grade. As a courtesy to your fellow students, please turn off cell phones prior to entering class. If a cell phone rings or the student is observed texting, tweeting, etc., the student in possession will be dismissed from class and assessed an absence. In order to advance our conversations, **laptop/ipad usage in class** will be limited to accessing electronic files and images that are under discussion, and taking only the most critical of notes. Checking/sending email and surfing the web during class are prohibited except under unusual circumstances and with express permission of the instructor. If your laptop/ipad usage hinders in anyway your class participation (contribution or careful listening), laptop/ipad privileges will be revoked.

Please note:

- If you miss a class, the missing information should be obtained by borrowing another student's class notes.
- An absence when an quiz or exam is scheduled will result in a zero unless the cause is illness (supported by a doctor's note or official supporting document) or family emergency (documented).
- The instructor must be notified of any religious holiday (according to University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B) in writing in advance by each student who wishes to have the holiday recognized as an excused absence. 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 any quiz or exam if s/he does not check in during the first ten minutes of the exam.

2. Quizzes and Discussion Questions (20%)

Throughout the semester there will be a series of 10 quizzes consisting of short answer, definition or fill-in-the blank. Students will be notified in advance when a quiz is scheduled for a particular class session. There are no make-up quizzes. To stimulate class discussions, each session will include a series of discussion questions. These questions will be listed under the weekly readings. Students should be prepared to response to one or two of these questions either verbally or in writing. When required written responses to a single question will be turned in at the end of the class period.

The Message of the Prophets (20%)

Beginning March 19th each student will lead a discussion on the “message of the prophet” that places contemporary issues (i.e. political, religious, social, etc.) in conversation with the prophetic word. To prepare for this discussion, students will select a prophet and one

issue (preferably a concern raised by their selected prophet) and monitor how this issue is addressed today via various media (i.e. television, newspaper, etc.) along with a 350-400 written reflection on the prophetic message in relation to the selected issue. These are student lead discussions, students are expected to reflect on the prophet's treatment of the issue from both a historical and contemporary perspective. After March 19th, students may turn in their written reflections during any of the class sessions; however, all written reflections are due by April 23rd. Students will be assigned a date for their respective presentations. These dates will be provided in early February.

Final Exam (25 points): The Final Exam will consist of multiple-choice questions, T/F and short answer covering content explored throughout the course.

3. **Assessment**

- Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions 15%
- Quizzes 20
- Message of the Prophets 20%
- Final Exam 25%

Grade Scale Percentages

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|----------|----|
| 94-100 – | A |
| 89-93 – | B+ |
| 84-88 – | B |
| 78-83 – | C+ |
| 70-77 – | C |
| 60-69 – | D |
| 0-59 – | F |

Note: This Class has a supporting Sakai page (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>) where resources and assignments have been made available. Students will be responsible for material posted on Sakai. Access to Sakai should be obtained early in the semester to avoid any missed assignment penalties.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNED READINGS

January 18th Introductions and Syllabus Review
Class Discussion: What is Prophecy?

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss some of the issues/concerns with providing a concrete definition of prophecy in the Ancient Near East.
2. What is the underlying concept behind the use of prophecy in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible?
3. Is there a role for prophecy in modern communities of faith?

Assignment: Due January 23rd - In 150-200 words write a brief statement in response to the following question. Reflect on a social, political or religious issue (only one) that is of significant relevance to you. Why is this issue/concern important to you? Why should this be of importance and interest to others?

Your response must be uploaded to Sakai prior to the beginning of class.

For Next Week:

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 1-26, 40-48.

January 23rd Class Discussion: Perspectives and Approaches to Studying Prophecy in the Ancient Near East.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does studying the phenomenon of prophecy in the Ancient Near East aid our understanding of its use in Israel and Judah?
2. What are the sources and evidence for prophecy in the Ancient Near East and Biblical prophecy?
3. Comment on the cultural and conceptual preconditions for prophecy in the Hebrew Bible.
4. How and why is prophecy an effective tool for communicating political and theological grievances?

January 25th Quiz

Class Discussion: Prophecy and Divination:

Discussion Questions:

1. Prophecy was a widespread phenomenon in the Ancient Near East. Discuss the various purposes and use of divination and prophecy in the Ancient Near East.
2. Comment on the various means used to communicate with the gods. Specifically, who, when and what vehicles were employed?
3. Distinguish between the terms *forthtelling* and *foretelling*. Why are these terms significant in understanding the nature of prophecy in ancient Israel and Judah? In the Ancient Near East?
4. What defining features differentiate Hebrew prophecy from its Ancient Near Eastern neighbors?

For Next Week

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, pp. 27-39, 48-64.

January 30th Class Discussion: The Portrait of a Prophet

Discussion Questions:

1. What terminology is classically associated with the term prophet? Explain the variation in the use of these terms.
2. Discuss the call and commissioning of the prophet.
3. Comment on the prophetic experience. In what way does the prophetic experience help to authenticate the prophet's call and commission?
4. Describe some of the elements that attend the prophetic experience.
5. Discuss the prophet as symbol.

February 1st Quiz

Class Discussion: The Social Location and Message of the Prophet

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the significance of the prophetic message to the prophet's social location?
2. In what way(s) is the prophetic institution connected to kingship?
3. Discuss the message of the prophet as corrective speech and censure of other nations.
4. Comment on the prophetic message and the theme of social justice and covenant disobedience.

For Next Week:

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, pp. 65-90
The Books of Amos and Hosea, *NRSV*

February 6th Quiz

Class Discussion: Amos and the Call to Repentance

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the international climate attending the period of Amos and Hosea's prophetic activity.
2. To whom does Amos direct his words? Are these words of hope or judgment or both? Explain
3. What two themes of import emerge in the book of Amos?
4. Discuss the prophet's critique of wealth? How does his complaint reflect the social and economic conditions of his day? How have the words of the prophet raised human consciousness about issues of fairness and social justice through the ages?

February 8th Class Discussion: Fidelity and the Knowledge of God in Hosea

Discussion Questions:

1. Reflect on Hosea's call and discuss the significance of the marriage metaphor to the prophet's message.
2. What is the overarching theme of Hosea?
3. Compare and contrast Hosea's message with that of Amos. What (if any) relevance is there to the fact that Hosea is from the north and Amos is from the south?
4. Discuss the universal nature of the message of the prophet Amos, is there similar applicability for the message of Hosea? Explain

For Next Week:

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 91-110
The Books of Micah and Isaiah (Chapters 1-39), *NRSV*

February 13th Class Discussion: Micah – The Prophet Against Urban Oppression

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the social class conflict present in Micah. How does it relate to covenant theology?
2. To whom does Micah direct his message?
3. Re-read Micah 4 and 5. Why might some scholars believe that these chapters (and possibly 6-7) represent later additions? If so, what does this say about the on-going importance and application of the prophetic message?
4. In what ways does the message of Micah mirror that of Amos?

February 15th Quiz

Class Discussion: Isaiah of Jerusalem

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Isaiah's call and commission differ from Amos, Hosea and Micah?
2. Reflect on the Syro-Ephraimite crisis of 735BCE. What do you think Isaiah intended to accomplish by giving Ahaz the Immanuel sign?
3. Evaluate the advice Isaiah gave to Ahaz during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. Was it politically prudent? Was it realistic? Explain
4. What differences do you find between the messages of Isaiah and Micah regarding what is wrong with Jerusalem?

For Next Week:

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 111-129
The Books of Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk, *NRSV*

February 20th Class Discussion: A Critique of Assyria and The Day of the Lord

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Nahum condemn Nineveh?
2. What is the basic theme in Nahum? Comment on the imagery found in Nahum. What affect to you think this imagery had on Nahum's audience?
3. To whom does Zephaniah address his message and what is his complaint?
4. Discuss the Day of the Lord theme present in Zephaniah. What does this day refer to and why was it important? In what other prophet book(s) do we find this theme?

February 22th Class Discussion: Habakkuk's Watchtower

Discussion Questions:

1. What issue of God's justice does Habakkuk raise?
2. What evidence in Habakkuk points to the practice of incubation? What does this suggest about Habakkuk's cultic ties?

3. Comment on the overall purpose of the book of Habakkuk. How does the book's theme relate to the issue of God's justice?
4. Discuss the contemporary relevance, application and audience for Habakkuk's message?

For Next Week:

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 129-147
The Book of Jeremiah (Chapters 1-33)

February 27th Quiz

Class Discussion: The Call and Critiques of Jeremiah

Discussion Questions:

1. Reflect on Jeremiah's call and commission. What stands out? How does the call of Jeremiah differ from that of Isaiah?
2. Discuss the historical climate that gives rise to the prophet's message.
3. What themes are beginning to emerge in Jeremiah?
4. How does the vocabulary and thematic thrust of Jeremiah betray the theological perspective of the Deuteronomic school?

February 29th Class Discussion: Jeremiah Cont'd—Prophets in Conflict

Discussion Questions

1. How does Jeremiah view of Judah's future differ from that of his contemporaries? How is Jeremiah received because of these differences?
2. How does the message of Jeremiah reflect the regional tensions occurring between the North and the South?
3. What is the 'Little Book of Comfort?' How does Jeremiah both affirm the importance of the Mosaic formulation of God's covenant and give it a new twist?
4. Comment on the basic thrust of Jeremiah's ministry before and after the destruction of Jerusalem.

March 5th Film on Ancient Prophecy

For March 7th

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 149-160
The Book of Jeremiah (Chapters 34-52)

March 7th Class Discussion: Jeremiah Cont'd—The Weeping Prophet

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss Jeremiah's complaint against Yahweh. What do these complaints reveal about the prophet's relationship with the deity?
2. Comment on Jeremiah's personal suffering as a prophet. Discuss the prophet call to service and its impact on the personal lives of the prophet.

3. Reflect on the symbolism in Jeremiah. What was it meant to convey?
4. What do you think the overall purpose of the Book of Jeremiah serves?

March 12th-16th Spring Break – No Classes

For March 19th

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 161-180
The Book of Ezekiel (Chapters 1-24)

March 19th Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: Ezekiel's Visions

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare and contrast Ezekiel's call and commissioning with that of the prophet Isaiah.
2. Discuss the symbolism and Ezekiel's bizarre behavior. How do both aid and convey the prophet's message?
3. Comment on Ezekiel's vision of the Temple? How does the vision of the Temple communicate the prophet's perception of the deteriorating spiritual conditions of the Temple personnel?

March 21st Quiz

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: Metaphors and Prophetic Rhetoric

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the use of extensive metaphors in Ezekiel 12-24. Compare Ezekiel's use of metaphors with Hosea. Similarities/Differences?
2. What social and political changes are affecting the prophetic institution?
3. Re-read Ezekiel 18. Does the reference to individual responsibility serve a doctrinal, rhetorical or homiletic purpose? Explain

For Next Week:

Read: The Book of Ezekiel (Chapters 25-48)

March 26th Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: Ezekiel's Valley

Discussion Questions:

1. How does a story like the 'Valley of Dry Bone' (Eze. 37) inspire hope among marginalized and oppressed groups?
2. What mental images and associations come to mind based on Ezekiel's description of a valley of dry bones. What might the valley represent theologically? Politically?

March 28th Quiz

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: Hope and Restoration

Discussion Questions:

1. In what way does Ezekiel's message differ from the first half of the book?
2. What effect (if any) does Ezekiel's priestly lineage have on his prophetic message?
3. Prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel tried to convince people they spoke for God, and that disaster was inevitable unless the people changed. Why did People not heed their message? Did it have to do with the prophets or the people?

For Next Week

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 181-193, 212-222
The Book of Isaiah (Chapters 40-66)

April 2nd

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: The Book of Comfort

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways does Isaiah 40-55 differ from chapters 1-39? Be Specific.
2. Does the issue/concern with justice manifest in these chapters? If so, how?
3. Discuss the function of the servant songs in these passages. What does Yahweh entrust to the servant?

April 4th

Quiz

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: Isaiah 56-66: A Concern for Justice

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the issue of justice in both its ancient and contemporary relevance.
2. In what ways do these chapters reflect a different historical situation?
3. Overall describe the relationship between the prophet Isaiah and kingship?

For Next Week:

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 195-209 (Read up until last paragraph)
The Book of Haggai and Zechariah

April 9th

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: The Book of Haggai

Discussion Questions:

1. How did Haggai explain the dismal conditions in Jerusalem after the return from Babylonian exile? What did he recommend to remedy this situation?
2. What is the overall focus and goal of the prophet Haggai?

3. Discuss the theology of Haggai.

April 11th

Quiz

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: Zechariah's Visions

Discussion Questions:

1. How did Zechariah provide spiritual and moral support to the returned refugees in Jerusalem?
2. Compare the messages of Haggai and Zechariah. What theme emerges in both books?
3. Discuss the apocalyptic nature of Zechariah 9-14.

For Next Week:

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 209-212
The Books of Malachi and Obadiah

April 16th

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: The Book of Malachi

Discussion Questions:

1. What did Malachi have to say about Elijah?
2. Describe the historical and social conditions that give rise to the prophet's message. How would you describe the language and tone of Malachi?
3. What is the book's overall concern?

April 18th

Quiz

Student Led Discussion

Class Discussion: The Book of Obadiah

Discussion Questions:

1. Whom did Obadiah condemn for taking advantage of the plight of the Israelites?
2. Discuss the history between Edom and Israel. How does this history affect the author's view of Edom?
3. How do the visions of Obadiah speak to those suffering in every age?

For April 23rd

Read: Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 240-245, 224-240.
The Books of Jonah and Joel

April 23rd

Class Discussion: Jonah: The Disobedient Prophet

Discussion Questions:

1. How does irony and satire manifest in the book of Jonah?
2. How does the book reflect a resistance to the prophetic calling?

3. In what ways does the book of Jonah reflect a criticism of Israelite prophets?
4. Discuss the various interpretations that can be derived from the book.

April 25th Class Discussion: The Book of Joel

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the central theme of Joel and how does it relate to locusts?
2. Discuss the apocalyptic-type characteristics of the book of Joel.
3. Discuss 'The Day of the Lord' in Joel. Compare and contrast its usage in other prophetic books.
4. Comment on some of the problems of dating that attend the book?

April 30th **Final Class Session: Reflections, Lingering Questions**
Final Exam Review

FINAL EXAM – Date: TBD

Topics covered on an individual day are subject to change.