

Course of Study 421  
Prophets, Psalms and Wisdom Literature  
Wesley Theological Seminary, New England Satellite  
April 26-27 and May 24-25, 2019

**CS-421 Bible 4: Prophets, Psalms, and Wisdom Literature**  
**Instructor: Rev. Dr. Sarah Mount Elewononi**  
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**The work is divided into three parts. Question 1 is due on or before April 1, 2019, submitted via Blackboard. Questions (3-6) are due by April 26 via Blackboard and questions (7-10) are due May 24 also submitted via Blackboard.**

Please let Sara Sheppard know if we can help you with this in any way.

This course examines the Work and Word of God as expressed through Israel's prophets, Psalms, and Wisdom literature.

Students will be able to:

1. Understand the origin, history, and use of these parts of the Bible among God's people.
2. Become familiar with and exegete these forms of biblical literature.
3. Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral tasks and issues of the present day.

Textbooks: Please purchase books from Cokesbury, Christian Book Distributor, Amazon or borrow from friends.

**REQUIRED**

- 1) New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

Please choose a solid study bible such as

*New Interpreters Study Bible, 2003, Nashville, Abingdon Press*

or *Harper Collins Study Bible, 2006, HarperOne*

**Read:** Job; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth); The Song of Solomon; The Wisdom of Solomon; Sirach (Ben Sira); Isaiah; Jeremiah; Lamentation; Ezekiel; Daniel; Hosea; Joel; Amos; Obadiah; Jonah; Micha; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi including the introductory material for each book. Give yourself time to let your curiosity guide you to reading some of the study bible notes as well.

- 2) **Pray the Psalms.** Use the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer and incorporate the Psalms into your daily prayer time for at least 28 days in a row. If you don't have your own BCP go to: <https://www.bcponline.org/> and click on Daily Office Lectionary. Use the appropriate weeks for Year One (unless you start before Advent – then start in Year Two). One or more Psalm can be found for each day's Morning (left column) and Evening (right column) prayer time.<sup>1</sup> Try reading them aloud, or even chanting them –

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<sup>1</sup> For example if you start on Sunday December 2 you would start on page 937 of the BCP and pray psalms 146, 147 in the morning and psalms 111, 112, and 113 in the evening. Monday December 3 you would

but read the psalms whole (not the abbreviated versions in the UMC Hymnal). This lectionary is set up so that all 150 psalms are prayed every 4 weeks. Keep a prayer journal, noting how God speaks to you through this time honored prayer practice and identify which type of prayer each psalm is (see assignment 4).

3) Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*

**Read:** all

4) Louis Stulman & Hyun Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature*

**Read:** all

5) Richard Clifford, *Wisdom Literature*

**Read:** Chapters 1, 2 and 9 and scan through the other chapters so you know what they cover. Before you write a paper be sure to read any relevant chapter thoroughly.

### Reference

Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terrence Frietham, David Petersen, A *Theological Introduction to the Old Testament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition\**

Coogan, Michael D., *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*

The course is delivered over two weekends, each with 10 hours of classroom time. All the reading assignments are expected to be read before we meet on April 26. Take notes as you read, especially of anything that you find confusing or don't agree with. Do not get to the end of your papers and try to remember all your questions. Write them down when you first think of them and bring them to class. This will enable us to have the most fruitful discussions.

### Assignment Instructions:

- Please type your papers, double-spaced, 12 font. Make sure your name, the assignment number and title (i.e. 4. Vertical Habits) and page number are in the heading of each page. Papers are to be submitted to Blackboard on the day they are due. Please contact me ASAP if using Blackboard is problematic for you.
- Be sure to refer to all textbooks and reference books, and the Bible itself in your answers. (e.g. "As Clifford says, '....' (p. 25)" or "Wisdom is seen as female in Proverbs (8:1)"). I most want to see how you are absorbing and using the reading material.
- Don't use footnotes or endnotes when you quote but simply give the author and page number in parentheses after the quote, e. g. (Brueggeman, 49). Abbreviations will give you more space to write your own thoughts in these short papers.
- Pay attention to page limits. If you are a page or half a page short, read some more and add the new ideas. Anything over the posted limit may be discounted.

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pray psalms 1, 2 and 3 in the morning and 4, 7 in the evening. If you are confused please contact me early so I can get you going.

- Write all of your answers as if you were talking to adults in your congregation, some of whom know very little about the Bible. You do not have to try to impress anyone with all the big words you know.

### Course Outline

#### **April 26-27**

Friday afternoon: The Scripture and God's Way of Salvation: Helping people see the Work of God leading them out of the spiral of violence  
Exegesis

Friday evening: COS 421 Trivial Pursuit

Saturday morning: Psalms & Wisdom Literature

#### **May 24-25**

Friday afternoon: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Lamentations

Friday evening: Ezekiel

Saturday morning: The Twelve

### Assignments

Due April 1, 2019 posted to Blackboard

**1. Why I Deserve an A in this Course** Write a letter to me describing how you, your congregation and the community to which you are appointed will benefit when you give your best time and attention to this course. How will becoming better acquainted with the content and message of these portions of the Old Testament, the theological perspective of the authors and methods of exegesis help you grow as pastor? What confusing or troubling aspects of these books of the Bible would you like to understand better? Your answers will help me shape my lectures, and make the course more valuable for all of us! (1 page)

Due April 26 posted to Blackboard

**2. Become a COS 421 Trivia Champ** Come to class on April 26 ready to play COS 421 trivia against your classmates. Categories will include 1) **identify** the book, chapter and verse of a passage (how specific can you get?) 2) define **technical terms** in the texts (i.e. hegemony, eschatology, liminality), 3) the **context** (geography, history, politics) of each book (or part of a book like Second Isaiah), 4) **art** – recognize the book (chapter and verses if you can) of famous paintings and architecture (Edward Hicks' *Peaceable Kingdom*, and *Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares* at the United Nations building in New York city), 5) **music** –recognize the book (at least) referred to in songs and hymns (“Them Bones Gonna Rise Again,” and “What Does the Lord Require of You”) 6) **Who said?** which prophet, sage or poet made this speech or wrote these words? For extra points see if you can recite the books of Job-Haggai by memory. On Friday evening we will team up, fight hard and win fabulous prizes!

3) **Write a Sermon** based on Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31. You can use this text on Trinity Sunday (Sunday June 16). Use your new understanding of wisdom literature as you construct your sermon to give insight to the Trinity at work in the lives of your

congregation and in the world around us. Please bring one copy to exchange with a classmate to use for assignment 7. (4 pages)

**4) Vertical Habits** In 2012 the Calvin Institute created a program called Vertical Habits which was designed to help congregations become more fluent in several types of prayer: praise (I love you God), confession (I messed up), lament (Why?), illumination (I'm listening), petition (Help), gratitude (Thank you), dedication (I want to help), and benediction (God bless you/us). <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/practical-resources-for-vertical-habits> As you pray the Psalms make note of which category(ies) each one falls into. Make a one page handout for people in your congregation, listing each vertical habit with three-five psalms as examples. Include an introduction of about 300 words which gives testimony to how praying the psalms has impacted your own life and what you hope it might do for theirs. (1 page)

**5) Known By Heart** Pick three of the following passages (one from each genre) and memorize them. In your paper give one page to each choice. Name your choice (but don't take up space copying it directly) and describe how your understanding of this passage has been changed through the readings of this class and how is it good news for people today? Be ready to recite your passage from memory to the class. (3 pages)

Psalms

Psalm 22 *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*

Psalm 50:7-15 *Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving.*

Psalm 100 *Make a joyful noise to the Lord*

Psalm 121 *I lift up my eyes to the hills*

Psalm 133 *How good and pleasant it is*

Wisdom:

Job 19:23-27 *I know that my Redeemer lives.*

Proverbs 1:20-33 *Wisdom cries out in the street*

Proverbs 31:10-31 *A capable wife*

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10 *Rejoice, young man, while you are young*

Song of Solomon 2:1-7 *My beloved like an apple tree*

Prophets:

Isaiah 41:2-6 *Surely it is God who saves me*

Isaiah 55:6-11 *Seek the Lord while he wills to be found*

Isaiah 60 (use the BCP Canticle 11) *Arise, shine,*

Jeremiah 1:4-10 *Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you*

Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 *Eat this scroll*

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 *Valley of Dry Bones*

Daniel (Song of the Three Jews – BCP Canticle 12) *Glorify the Lord*

Daniel (Song of the Three Jews – BCP Canticle 13) *Glory to you, Lord God*

**6) Share God's Wisdom** Pick a specific group of your congregation (youth, newly bereft, working mothers), select Proverbs that will be uplifting to them and arrange them as a hand-out. (1 page)

**Part 2 Due May 24: posted to Blackboard**

**7) Collaborate with your Colleague** Read your colleague's sermon on Mark 10:17-22. In the first third of your essay affirm what is "right on" about this sermon. Use the rest of the essay to suggest how this sermon could be strengthened so that the congregation understands how the text relates to the Trinity at work in their own lives and in the world around us. (2 pages)

**8) Texts in Conversation with One Another about the spirit-breath of God**

The power of God's spirit pulses in every breath we take. This may not be the whole experience of the spirit. There are judges and kings and prophets and apostles and Jesus himself, all of whom received fresh doses of the spirit to accomplish their grand tasks. Yet the place to start lies elsewhere, with the scream and gulps of a newborn baby that let us know she is alive and kicking, or better yet, with the old and infirm, whose final breaths, when full of integrity, are a testimony to the spirit of God. This realization too, finds a home in the Bible.

In his book, *Inspired*, Jack Levison explores the place of the Holy Spirit in the church and the Christian life using exegesis of various passages where the Hebrew word *ruach* or Greek word *pneuma* are found. Levison notes three challenges: 1) Both the Hebrew and the Greek words have a range of meanings (breath, wind, spirit), 2) English translators sometimes capitalize the word spirit when they believe the word points to the Holy Spirit, and sometimes leave it lower case when it seems to be a created spirit and 3) English translators usually want to add "the" when the equivalent definite article is not in the original text ("she was filled with holy spirit" sounds awkward, but if we add "the" it leads us to think of the Holy Spirit). Levison argues that these choices in translation can make it hard to understand what the Bible is saying about the spirit-breath of God.

Use exegetical tools to investigate how the word *ruach* is used in Genesis 1:1-2; Genesis 2:4-7; Psalm 51:1-5, 10-12 and 16-17; Job 32:6-9; Job 32:16-20; Daniel 4:8, 9, 18; Daniel 5:11-12; Daniel 5:14; Daniel 6:3-4; Wisdom of Solomon 1:1-8; Sirach 39:1-11. What new understanding are you getting from reading each passage closely and thinking about where they agree and where they differ? What insights of this study connect to your own faith and might contribute to the spiritual growth of people in your congregation? (5 pages)

**9) Sunday School Drama**

Create a short play for youth or children (or anyone in your congregation who playfully belongs to the kingdom of God) to perform during worship. Use footnotes, or endnotes to show that you have considered and incorporated knowledge you've gleaned from the lectures and readings. Make sure the play is not just "cute" but that it conveys the Prophet's message.

Choose from:

Daniel chapters 1-5 (Nebuchadnezzar, the Fiery Furnace and the Writing on the Wall)  
Hosea (figure out how to keep it PG but not lose the core message)

Amos chapters 7-8 (weird visions)  
Micah 5:2-6  
Zephaniah 3:14-20

(2 pages)

**10) Choose a or b**

**a) Sacred Art**

Use google to find paintings or sculptures that are inspired by the Prophets. Pick a prophet who has touched you during your reading and create your own original piece of art and bring it to class. Write a reflection paper describing your work. (1 page)

**b) Sacred Music**

Pick a prophet and see what hymns you can find that refer to or quote him. A great on-line tool for this is <https://hymnary.org/> using “advanced search.” Carolyn Winfrey Gillette is a contemporary hymn writer who may also inspire you.

<https://www.carolynshymns.com/>

Write a fresh hymn based on a passage of the same prophet using one of the following tunes: AMAZING GRACE, CWM RHONDDA, KINGSFOLD, BEACH SPRING, or DUBOIS Use footnotes, or endnotes to show me that you have considered and incorporated knowledge you’ve gleaned from the readings. Make sure the hymn conveys the Prophet’s main message. (1 page)

**Inclusive Language**

In both oral and written contributions to the course, students are expected to be aware that language has the power to include or exclude, show compassion or judge. Writing with inclusive language means the author remembers that every human being is made in God’s image. There are no enemies in the reign of God and even when we slip into depicting someone as an enemy we remember Christ’s compassionate mandate to love and forgiven them repeatedly.

**Grading**

The objectives of this course are to examine the Work and Word of God as expressed through Israel’s prophets, Psalms, and Wisdom literature. We believe you will become a stronger pastor when you

1. Understand the origin, history, and use of these parts of the Bible among God’s people.
2. Become familiar with and exegete these forms of biblical literature.
3. Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral tasks and issues of the present day.

What you get out of the course corresponds to what you put into it. Each student is expected to start where he or she is to build up knowledge and wisdom through engaging in God’s word. It is assumed that you will give your all to this work. To avoid the use of grades as rewards or punishments, everyone will start with an A.

### **Academic Policies**

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all classes in their entirety. Faculty member have the authority to set attendance policies for particular courses. Deviation from the attendance policy may result in loss of credit for the course.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offense and inhibits learning. Some of the most important insights you will get will come when you try to put ideas you are learning in your own words. The faculty regards the following as form of plagiarism or dishonesty:

- Copying from another student's paper
- Borrowing or presenting as one's own (i.e. without proper attribution) the composition or ideas of another.

Please refer to your Wesley Student Handbook (on-line) for more information about Wesley's academic policies or contact the Course of Study office 202-885-8688.