

United Methodist Course of Study
Wesley Theological Seminary Satellite in Upper New York

COS 421 – Bible IV (2021) March 19-20 & April 23-24, 2021
Prophets, Psalms, and Wisdom Literature (Bible IV) – 4th Year

Rev. Jonathan D. Lawrence, Ph.D.

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This course examines God's Word as expressed through Israel's prophets, selected Psalms, and selected passages from Wisdom literature.

Students will be able to:

1. Understand the origin, history, and use of these forms of biblical literature among God's people.
2. Exegete these forms of biblical literature.
3. Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day.

Required Texts:

Walter Brueggemann, (Required) *Spirituality of the Psalms*

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

Richard Clifford, *Wisdom Literature* (Required)

Oded Borowski *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Required) (Society of Biblical Literature, 2003)

Reference: Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terrence Frietham, David Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament, 2nd Edition**

Recommended - Reference Texts:

Oxford Bible Atlas (Reference)

Bibleodyssey.org – short entries on biblical topics written by scholars in the Society of Biblical Literature.

Suggested - *Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition: Revised and Updated*, edited by Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012) ISBN: 978-0664237073

Please have your Study Bible accessible for all sessions

A note about class format:

I've been teaching in the Course of Study for several years now, always in the format of two weekends of Friday/Saturday sessions with several weeks in between for a total of 20 hours of in-class instruction. Since Spring 2021 will be online, I'm making some adjustments to take advantages of the opportunities provided by online teaching and put more of the interaction online, leaving shorter group zoom sessions to discuss the material that we're covering. The COS coordinators suggested limiting the zoom meetings to 10 hours total between the two weekends. That's still a lot of zoom, but frankly I suspect 10 hours each weekend would be pretty exhausting. There will be some written assignments that I will ask you to post online before the Friday/Saturday sessions. I will then assign some online discussions for the weekends between the zoom

sessions. This will help compensate for the contact hours and for some of the total pages of assignments.

Here is the general outline of assignments: (one double-spaced page = approximately 250 words)

Session 1: 3/19 6-8 pm, 3/20 9 am-noon – Prophets – Work due:

reflection questions (about 1250 words) & sample sermon or bible study (about 650-750 words)

3/26 - no meeting but online activities due (approx 2 hours and 500-750 words):

- Discussion Post – write a 250-word response to the posted prompt and reply to at least one of your classmates (100 words)
- Video Response – watch a short video and respond to question (150-200 words) (you may respond to your classmates, but you don't have to)
- Resource – find a website or other resource that addresses content for that week, summarize what you found and discuss its reliability (key terms will be given as a starting point for the search) (200-250 words)

(4/3 - no online work due - Holy week)

4/10 - online work due (approx 2 hours of work and 500-600 words - see above)

4/17 - online work due (approx 2 hours of work and 500-600 words - see above)

Session 2: 4/23 6-8 pm, 4/24 9 am-noon - Psalms and Wisdom Literature: Work due

reflection questions (about 1250 words) & sample sermon or bible study (about 650-750 words)

I will ask you to complete the written assignments before the Saturday session for which they are assigned. Most will be shared in a discussion-board format so that you can discuss them online with your classmates. Our Saturday sessions will be spent in conversation – discussing questions from the preparatory work, highlighting themes, and discussing how to apply these materials in ministry. I will ask you to complete the online assignments by 6 pm on the Saturdays for which they're assigned.

The zoom sessions will be held on Fridays from 6-8 pm and Saturday mornings from 9am-noon on March 19-20 and April 23-24. The Zoom link will be posted on Blackboard.

Except for the required textbooks, all material will be available on the Wesley Seminary Blackboard site and all written work will be submitted there. I know there were some challenges with Blackboard in the fall, but hopefully it will work better this time. I have reviewed this with the COS coordinators to account for the combined total of written assignments and for the equivalents between online discussions and class time, etc.

I will indicate the expected length of entries for each assignment – since page formatting may disappear in Blackboard, I will usually count by word-length – i.e., half a page is approximately 200-250 words. The requested lengths add up to 20 pages for the whole course. You may write more if you wish, but you are not required to – please try to include sufficient detail from readings, while keeping your answers concise. For most of the assignments, unless otherwise indicated you will not need to do any outside reading apart from the required texts. You do not need to provide a full bibliography or footnotes for any citations, but please give parenthetical citations – for instance (Coogan, 23). Please complete these assignments before the start of the Saturday morning class.

Assignments

There will be readings and written essays for each session. Please try to balance giving sufficient detail in your answers with keeping them focused and concise.

Please adhere to the estimated word lengths given in the instructions below. *If you have questions about the reading and/or essays please feel free to email or call me before the first class.*

NOTE – these instructions may be updated on Blackboard – please check Blackboard before working on the assignments and if there is a discrepancy, follow the instructions on Blackboard.

for Session 1:

1. *In New Oxford Annotated Study Bible:*

- a. Read the Books of Jonah, Isaiah, and Daniel including the notes and commentary on each page, and read (or review) the introductory essays to each book. – NOTE – since Isaiah is very long, focus on Chapters 1-11 and 49-55, but try to skim the rest of it for themes.
- b. In *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, please skim the supplementary articles for material related to the texts for this session and use <https://www.bibleodyssey.org> as well if time permits.

2. Read the following:

Louis Stulman & Hyun Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature*
pp. 1-62 in *Daily Life in Biblical Times*

3. After reading the material, please answer the following questions. If possible, you may also consult a multi-volume Bible commentary, such as *The Anchor Yale Bible*, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, *Eerdmans Critical Commentary*, *the Women's Bible Commentary* or *The Old Testament Library*.

Please answer these questions for the Books of Jonah, Isaiah, and Daniel, unless otherwise specified. You may write a combined answer for all three books rather than a separate answer for each. I am aware that the books are too lengthy for a comprehensive summary so please focus on what you see as some of the most important examples.

1. Reflection Questions

- a. What questions do you have about these readings? Keep a list of questions and select one or two questions to investigate (using your study bible and other resources) – what explanations did you find? (250 words)
- b. What are some of the theological issues and themes in these books? How is God portrayed? What spiritual teachings involved might be significant to us today? How do these texts continue the themes of covenant and obedience from Genesis, Exodus and the historical books? (250-375 words)
- c. Compare Jonah, Isaiah and Daniel – they are all prophets but they differ in form and content. How are they similar? How are they different? How do these differences affect their themes? (250-375 words)

- d. Scholars have debated whether Daniel was written during the Babylonian Exile (c. 586 BCE) or during Greek Persecution (c. 165 BCE). Summarize the arguments – which do you find more convincing? How does the dating affect your understanding of the prophecies? (250-375 words)
2. Preaching Application: Select a passage from Jonah, Isaiah, or Daniel (no more than 1 chapter in length) and discuss briefly how you might use this in your ministry, including the following (375-500 words total)
 - a. Audience and setting – to whom are you speaking and when / where (Sermon, Sunday School, Youth Group, Bible Study, Women’s Fellowship, etc., time of year, formal / informal discussion, etc.)
 - b. What message would you highlight in the text and why?
 - c. How would you adjust the message to the audience?

Online work between Sessions

For each week between the two sessions (except for Holy Week) there will be some online assignments in Blackboard – these online assignments help make up for the total number of hours and also reduce the amount of writing for the two class weekends. This online work will be due by 6 pm on the Saturday indicated:

- Discussion Post – write a 250-word response to the posted prompt and reply to at least one of your classmates (100 words)
- Video Response – watch a short video and respond to question (150-200 words) (you may respond to your classmates, but you don’t have to)
- Resource – find a website or other resource that addresses content for that week, summarize what you found and discuss its reliability (key terms will be given as a starting point for the search) (200-250 words)

(more detail will be posted on Blackboard)

1. Online week 1: 3/26
 - a. Discussion
 - i. - Assumptions for Biblical Interpretation – What are your assumptions and priorities about how to interpret the Bible? Please read <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/theological-guidelines-scripture>. How does your view of the Bible fit with this statement? (1 page)
 - b. Video response (tba)
 - c. Resource – TERMS TBA
2. Online week 2: 4/9
 - a. Discussion - Write your own Psalm:
 - i. Include one simile. For example, "God is like a strong tower because I ran to Him and He protected me." Similes use the word "like" or "as". Relate our awesome God to something.
 - ii. Recall a time when you asked God for help and He answered you. How did you feel?
 - iii. Tell about how you were sad or hurting (possibly physically) and God lifted you up. What did God do? How? How long did you suffer?

- iv. Praise God for His character. Use colorful adjectives like awesome, deep, gracious, mighty, perfect, fantastic, etc. Consider using a thesaurus for interesting words!
 - v. Tell what you've learned and how you've grown.
 - vi. Don't forget to personalize your psalm with words like "Me" and "My". When you're finished with your psalm, write a title for it. Make something creative and grabbing!
 - vii. Include your Psalm and write a paragraph about what it was like to write your own and how you might use this in your ministry.
 - viii. (Note – I cannot take credit for this – I found this on a webpage that doesn't work anymore. You can find other sample prompts if you're interested) (1.5 pages for the Psalm and reflection)
 - b. Video response (tba)
 - c. Resource – TERMS TBA
3. Online week 3: 4/16
- a. Discussion
 - i. Read the following play: *Life's Choices – A Play Based on Eight Characters in Proverbs*
<https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=488>
 - ii. How do these ancient wisdom texts apply in our modern setting? Do any of the images (especially agricultural ones) need to be updated for modern life? Please respond to the play *Life's Choices* –does this adaptation help make the text more accessible? If so, why? If not, why not? (1-1.5 pages)
 - b. Video response (tba)
 - c. Resource – TERMS TBA

for session 2:

1. In *The Oxford Annotated Bible*:

- a. Review the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, including the notes and commentary on each page, and read (or review) the introductory essays to each book.

Note – If you have time, read through the entire book of Psalms before Session 2 – if you read 3 Psalms a day, that will take you 50 days. Similarly, please try to read all of Proverbs.

Please make sure that you read Psalms 1-24, 40-43, 51, 119, 120-134, 150 and Proverbs 1-9 and 31.

- b. In *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, please skim the supplementary articles for material related to the texts for this session and use <https://www.bibleodyssey.org> as well if time permits.

2. Read the following:

Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*
Richard Clifford, *Wisdom Literature*

pp. 63-126 in *Daily Life in Biblical Times*

4. After reading the material, please answer the following questions. If possible, you may also consult a multi-volume Bible commentary, such as *The Anchor Yale Bible*, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, *Eerdmans Critical Commentary*, or *The Old Testament Library*.

Please answer these questions for the Books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, unless otherwise specified. You may write a combined answer for all three books rather than a separate answer for each. I am aware that the books are too lengthy for a comprehensive summary so please focus on what you see as some of the most important examples.

1. Reflection Questions

- a. What questions do you have about these readings? Keep a list of questions and select one or two questions to investigate (using your study bible and other resources) – what explanations did you find? (250 words)
 - b. Based on the background readings, identify some of the genres of psalms – how are they different? In structure? In content? In theme? Identify specific psalms for the different genres. How do these genres fit the themes of the psalms, especially ideas like covenant and obedience?(350-500 words)
 - c. Find some contemporary interpretations of wisdom literature (in songs, in other translations like *The Message*, etc.) – compare them to the biblical texts (give specific references). What do you think of these interpretations? (350-500 words)
2. Preaching Application: Select a passage from Psalms, Proverbs, or Ecclesiastes (no more than 1 chapter in length) and discuss briefly how you might use this in your ministry, including the following (375-500 words total)
- a. Audience and setting – to whom are you speaking and when / where (Sermon, Sunday School, Youth Group, Bible Study, Women's Fellowship, etc., time of year, formal / informal discussion, etc.)
 - b. What message would you highlight in the text and why?
 - c. How would you adjust the message to the audience?