



Bible IV: Prophets, Psalms, and Wisdom Literature (CS 421)

Spring 2025 Syllabus

Instructor Information

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Pronouns: he/him/his

Course Description

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

Course Objectives

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.

Text Books and Course Materials

Required Readings

- 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**

Any additional readings will be listed in Blackboard.

All textbooks are available for purchase online through sites such as Amazon, or you may check available libraries or borrow from friends.

Students are encouraged to build a library of commentaries on the various books of the New Testament. There are many one volume and series commentaries in existence differing greatly in content, style, and level of difficulty. Suggested commentaries include the following:

Harper's Bible Commentary. HarperCollins, 1988.

Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Westminster/John Knox, 1982.

New International Biblical Commentary. Hendrickson, 1992--.

The New Interpreter's Bible. Abingdon Press, 1994--.

The Oxford Bible Commentary. Oxford U.P., 2001.
The SBL Study Bible (with NRSVue) – HarperOne, 2023.

Student Learning Outcomes

Through readings, assignments, and class discussions, students will articulate their understanding of the Biblical texts, the context of those texts, and possible applications of those texts in ways that are consistent with the Methodist theological Tradition. In dialogue with materials presented in class and other students, students will develop awareness of the wide range of ways the Scripture has been (and continues to be) interpreted and consider the ways these interpretations impact their ministries.

Course Schedule

- **Pre-course: March 1, 10am - noon Eastern. MANDATORY Zoom meeting. We will cover introductions and orient you to the mechanics of the course.**
- **BEFORE April 11—Students will complete online modules at their own schedule. Plan to devote about 10 hours to completing these modules, NOT including the time it will take to read course texts or complete writing assignments. DUE ON APRIL 12.**
- **Friday April 11, 9 am – noon, 1 pm - 3 pm Eastern—MANDATORY Synchronous Zoom meeting**
- **Saturday April 12, 10 am – 2 pm Eastern—MANDATORY Synchronous Zoom meeting.** Discussion of readings, written assignments, and application in ministry.

NOTE – zoom links will be shared in Blackboard and via the Wesley Seminary emails at least 2 days before the March 1 and April 12 meetings.

Course Requirements

Attendance and participation

Attendance and participation in class sessions is mandatory. Students are required to watch online videos and be present in synchronous Zoom meetings of the class in April. (MARCH 1?) Logging into Zoom while also at another job is not acceptable. Students are expected to complete their written work on time. All assignments are to be uploaded to Blackboard by the end of the day by the start of our synchronous Zoom classes (April 11). Online modules must be completed by April 11.

Readings

Prophets

- *In NRSV New Interpreter's Study Bible:*
 - 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.
 - 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.

- 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*
- After reading the material, please answer the questions below. 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.

Wisdom Literature

- In *The NRSV New Interpreter's Study Bible*:
 - Read 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.
 - In please skim the supplementary articles for material related to the texts for this part and use <https://www.bibleodyssey.org> as well if time permits.
- Read the following:
 - Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*
 - Richard Clifford, *Wisdom Literature*
 - pp. 63-126 in *Daily Life in Biblical Times*
- After reading the material, please answer the questions below. 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.

Graded Activities/Assignments

Assignments: Due April 11, 10 am

Reflective Essays

Please write 10 short essays (1 page or 200-250 words each, not including footnotes) in response to each of the 10 questions listed below. Read the designated texts and complete the modules on Blackboard for each question first to inform your responses.

Note – I'm still trying to figure out how I want to set up Blackboard – I may just ask you to submit your answers as "text" in the Blackboard dropboxes – we will discuss this further in the zoom

session on March 1. Since there are currently at least 10 of you, I will ask each of you to assist in leading the conversation on one of these essays when we meet in April. I will have you pick your preference when we meet in March.

Please answer these questions for the relevant books of the Bible (Prophets - Jonah, Isaiah, and Daniel, Wisdom – Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) unless otherwise specified. You may write a combined answer for all three books of the Bible 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.

Each response should include Bible references and specific references to the scholarly readings (at least one scholarly source for each response.) “Proof-texting” is not acceptable. When you quote a Bible passage, you must also explain what that passage means to you and why you quoted it. Please include citations for Biblical and scholarly references. Please answer all parts to the question – or indicate why you have not answered a part.

Note –you should be able to compose your answer in the Blackboard Assignment tool.

- If you close it by accident, it will save – click “Continue Attempt 1” (or whatever #)
- To save a draft and finish later, Click “Save and Close” – and then “Continue Attempt”
- When you are done with your answer (including citations), Click “Submit”
- The Assignments are set for unlimited submissions, so you make changes and resubmit if needed.

Question 1 – 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?
- How do the various textbooks seem to fit with your assumptions?

Question 2 – Prophets – Reading questions

- 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?

Question 3 – Prophets - Themes

- 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?

Question 4 – Prophets – Comparing Jonah, Isaiah, Daniel

- 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?

Question 5 – Prophets – When was Daniel written?

- 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 and why?
- How does the dating affect your understanding of the prophecies?

Question 6 – Wisdom – Reading Questions

- 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?

Question 7 – Wisdom - Genres

- 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?

Question 8 – Wisdom – Contemporary Use

- 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?

Question 9 – Writing Your Own Psalm

- Write your own Psalm:
 - Include one simile. For example, "God is like a strong tower because I ran to God and God protected me." Similes use the word "like" or "as". Relate our awesome God to something.
 - Recall a time when you asked God for help and God answered you. How did you feel?
 - 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?
 - Praise God's character. Use colorful adjectives like awesome, deep, gracious, mighty, perfect, fantastic, etc. Consider using a thesaurus for interesting words!
 - Tell what you've learned and how you've grown.
 - 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!
- 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.
- (Note –I found this on a webpage that doesn't work anymore. You can find other sample prompts if you're interested)
- Your comments (not counting your Psalm) should be about 200-250 words.

Question 10 – Wisdom – Life’s Choices (a play)

- 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>
- 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?
- If you were to do this in your own setting, how might you adjust the characters and content to make it accessible to your community?

Preaching Application – Sermon Outlines

Prophets (Due April 11)

- 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 (400-500 words total)
 - 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.)
 - What message would you highlight in the text and why?
 - How would you adjust the message to the audience?

Wisdom Literature (Due April 11)

- 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 (400-500 words total)
 - 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.)
 - What message would you highlight in the text and why?
 - How would you adjust the message to the audience?

Participation Assessment (Due April 15, 10 am)

Assess your participation in this course:

- Did you participate in the March 1 Session?
- How well do you think you did in helping guide the discussion for your assigned topic?
- How well do you think you contributed to the discussion in the April 12-13 zoom sessions?
- Please indicate the score you think you earned (up to 20 points)
- Note - participation can take several forms
 - asking questions during the zoom session (out loud or in the chat)
 - asking the instructor questions by email
 - offering examples of other articles or links that might be useful

Assignment Weighting

Reflective Essays	60%
Sermon Outline on Prophets	10%
Sermon Outline on Wisdom Literature	10%
Class Participation	20%

Please submit all papers in Times New Roman, 12-point font, with 1 inch margins. Papers that do not meet or exceed the page/word guidelines will be marked down. Papers must include complete footnotes for all references and a bibliography. Please use the Turabian footnote-bibliography style. Several universities have published helpful guides to Turabian online, and the many libraries have printed copies of the Turabian style guide. Proper citation of all sources is expected, so any quotation of three words in length or greater must be footnoted. (Parenthetical notes in Turabian style are permitted)

Overall Grade schema

93 – 100 = A (Excellent/Outstanding)

90 – 92 = A-

(Outstanding) 88 – 89

= B+ (Very Good) 83 –

87 = B (Good)

80 – 82 = B- (Adequate)

78 – 79 = C+ (Adequate)

73 – 77 = C (Adequate)

70 – 72 = C- (Substandard)

Grading scale for assignments

Essays	Sermons	Participation	Description
Out of 6	Out of 10	Out of 20	
6	10	20	Excellent – no mistakes or gaps
		19	
	9	18	Outstanding – few mistakes or gaps
5		17	Good – Very Good – could include more detail
	8	16	
4.5		15	Adequate – answers questions but leaves gaps
	7	14	Substandard – doesn't answer question sufficiently
Below	Below	below	Substandard - unacceptable

Late work Policy

No extensions will be granted for late work, except in cases of extreme necessity.

Course Policies

Inclusive Language Policy

Bearing in mind that language reflects, reinforces, and creates social reality, the Seminary expects class conversation and written work to employ language that respects the equal dignity and worth of all human beings. In particular, linguistic sexism and racism are to be avoided.

Weather Policy:

Since this class is online, weather should not create much disruption, unless power and phone lines are disrupted. Please notify me if such an emergency will keep you from joining on zoom.

Accommodations/Disability Support

Once admitted to Wesley, students needing accommodations must communicate with the Associate Dean for Community Life. Students will submit to the Office of Community Life relevant, current documentation from a qualified professional, which will be evaluated by a consultant with a degree in special education. All accommodations for classes are made by the Office of Community life on behalf of the student. Please see our [page on Disability Accommodations for more information](#).

Academic Honesty & Integrity

Wesley Theological Seminary considers plagiarism as a serious offense which will result in substantial penalties, including the possibility of academic dismissal. Students are expected to comply with all standards for academic honesty and integrity, both of the seminary and of the classes in which students are enrolled. The seminary regards the following as forms of plagiarism or academic dishonesty:

- copying from another student's work;
- giving or receiving unauthorized assistance to or from another student during an examination;
- using unauthorized material during an examination;
- presenting as one's own (i.e., without proper attribution) the composition or ideas of another;
- copying material from any sources, whether print or online.

All work submitted must be the work of the student submitting. Work from other sources must be thoroughly paraphrased or indicated as a direct quotation. In either case, the source of the material must be cited. Students are referred to the most current edition of Kate Turabian's *Manual for Writers of Research Papers* for instructions on source citations.

Furthermore, the mutilation, defacement, or stealing of library materials are also considered forms of academic dishonesty and a violation of the seminary's *Covenant of Professional Ethics and Behavior* (see "Use of Property") and are also subject to disciplinary action.

In questions of academic dishonesty, the professor will report the circumstances of the case to the Dean. In first instances of proven plagiarism or dishonesty, the student will receive a "Fail" grade for the course. Second instances will result in automatic separation from the Seminary. Please see the Wesley Theological Seminary Catalog for further details.

Note – the policy does not yet seem to address use of Artificial Intelligence tools like ChatGPT to write papers. All papers should be written in your own words, with borrowed passages in quotation marks (or paraphrased) and citations given for both. Use of AI tools in writing the paper is discouraged and if it is used at all, it should be limited to outlining your responses. If you use AI to generate an outline, you should indicate what tool you used and make sure that you have rewritten everything in your own words. (If the Wesley Seminary Academic Integrity policy refers to AI or if a policy is added during the course, that policy will supersede what I have written here.)

SafeAssign

You may be asked to submit one or more of your writing assignments to Blackboard's SafeAssign plagiarism prevention service. Assignment content will be checked against Internet sources, academic journal articles, and the papers of other Wesley Theological Seminary students for common or borrowed content. SafeAssign generates a report that highlights any potentially unoriginal text in the submitted paper. The report may be submitted directly to the instructor or the instructor may elect to have students submit initial drafts through SafeAssign so that you will receive the report allowing the opportunity to adjust and ensure that all source material has been properly cited.

Blackboard Administration

Blackboard Learn automatically records all student and faculty activities including: the first and last access to the course, the pages accessed, the number of discussion messages read and sent, chat room discussion text, and posted discussion topics. This data can be accessed by the instructor to evaluate class participation and to identify participants having difficulty, or to verify academic honesty.

Courses will be unavailable to students two months after the course has ended. Please be sure to save any course material, content, or readings prior to the course completion. If you need the course after it has become unavailable, you must contact the instructor.

Technical Support

Students must attempt to solve technical problems and contact their instructor when technical problems do arise.

If you experience technical problems, please exercise one or all of the following options:

- [Blackboard Training Materials](#)
- Call Blackboard Support at (202) 885-6091
- Email Blackboard Support at edtech@wesleyseminary.edu

If you have lost your password, or have a problem that is not specifically Blackboard related, please contact Solutionworx at support@solutionworx.com or by phone at (703) 961-1840

Policies were modeled after Dr. Douglas D. Tzan's COS 122 (Winter 2024) syllabus.

NOTE – this syllabus is a tentative outline of the course schedule and activities. It may be adjusted during the course. Any changes will be communicated or by e-mail. I reserve the right to adjust any of these policies according to my professional judgment and the circumstances.