

THEO 710 – THE PROPHETS

Fall 2010, Queen's University School of Religion

Professor Shawna Dolansky

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-2:30PM

Course Description

The prophets of the Hebrew Bible mean many things to many people. Today their words inspire billions of Jews and Christians worldwide, from mainstream to orthodox, from liberation theologians to evangelicals, from the Pope to radical fringe apocalyptic cults. Throughout Jewish and Christian history their words have been interpreted and reinterpreted in diverse social, cultural, and religious contexts; they have been used to inform charitable social programs and inquisitions, martyrdoms and executions. And even in their own places and times, the prophets were sometimes considered to be authorities inspired by God, other times heretics and traitors, and even occasionally stark raving madmen. They were diviners, miracle workers, poets, charismatics, and religious reformers. Most significantly, they were theologians whose messages to the people of Israel profoundly shaped the theology of the Hebrew Bible and of the Jewish and Christian traditions that emerged from it.

Themes

We will examine the lives, works, and words of the biblical prophets from a variety of perspectives, looking at:

1. The prophets as eye-witnesses to biblical history, describing, reacting, and prescribing with respect to their own contemporary social, political, and religious realities.
2. Each prophet as an individual to try to discern his particular understanding of God and God's relationship with the world.
3. Comparing, contrasting, and comprehending certain themes that are prevalent in many of the prophets' writings, i.e. social justice; Israel's relationship with other nations; eschatology; messianic expectations; covenant theology; theodicy.
4. How their messages have been interpreted in different historical, religious, and cultural contexts, from the New Testament to the present day.

Class Format

Classes will be a combination of lecture and discussion. For the first three classes, I will start with a short lecture to provide background for the ensuing discussion. My lectures tend to be interactive, as I enjoy asking and answering a variety of related (and tangential) questions while I teach. Discussion questions for the following week will be provided in advance, either in class or by email. They will be designed to guide your reading of (and thinking about) the assigned material for each upcoming class.

During weeks Four through Twelve, individual students will be responsible for (a) providing these questions in advance (by Friday) for their classmates, (b) presenting an aspect of the material assigned to the class, and (c) leading the ensuing class discussion. I strongly encourage students to meet with me prior to their assigned presentation date to go over the material and potential approaches to it.

Evaluation

Attendance and Participation: 30%

Class Presentation/Discussion: 35%

Final Paper: 35%

Final Paper

A 10-12 page exegetical paper (double-spaced; 12 pt font, 1" margins, not including your endnotes and bibliography) will be due **December 10, 2010** by 9 AM, via email to me at s.dolansky@neu.edu. You will need to do research beyond the required readings for this paper; please see me for guidance during my office hours.

An exegesis is an analysis of a piece of scripture; it is a technical term for what we will be doing with the biblical text during each class throughout the semester. Your paper will analyze the text from a scholarly perspective, *and* provide a discussion of both historical and contemporary theological implications and interpretations. Following is a list of potential topics. Any topic not on this list will need to be approved by me in writing by November 23.

Paper Topics

- "True prophecy" in Deut 18 and Jer 27
- Theodicy and responsibility in Ezek 18
- "Pornoprophets" in Hosea and Ezekiel
- "Woe oracle" in Hab 2:6-20
- Joshua and the satan in Zech 3
- Priesthood in Mal 1:6-2:9
- Messianic expectations in Isa 11 and 45
- Ecstatic prophecy in 1 Sam 10:9-13 and 2 Kgs 3:15
- The "suffering servant" in Isa 53

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to abide by the values and practice of Academic Integrity. Departures from Academic Integrity are serious academic offences and may result in a range of penalties. Students are advised to acquaint themselves with academic regulation 12 in the Faculty of Arts and Science Calendar

<http://www.queensu.ca/calendars/artsci/pg532.html> and visit the University web site on Academic Integrity at <http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/senate/policies/AcadInteg.htm>

Outputs: During the course students will --

- demonstrate an understanding of the phenomenon of biblical prophecy in its ancient Near Eastern context
- identify and articulate the place of prophecy and prophetic interpretation in the development of Jewish and Christian theologies
- research and present material on one of the biblical prophets, discussing his character, understanding of God and God's relationship with the world, and the main issues related to scholarly study of a particular prophet as both a theologian and a historical figure

- prepare discussion questions for the class that help us explore the important issues in relation to one of the biblical prophets, and lead the ensuing discussion in an ecumenical and scholarly manner
- read primary texts and secondary scholarly material to perform their own exegesis of a potentially controversial or difficult passage from the prophetic texts

Outcomes: As a result of the course the instructor and students should --

- understand and be able to apply scholarly methods of exegesis and historical reconstruction to biblical texts
- understand and be able to apply methods of biblical literary criticism as a parallel enterprise to theological interpretation
- understand and articulate the development of biblical theology both inner-biblically and post-biblically
- understand and articulate the ways in which prophetic theologies were affected by their particular historical, cultural, and religious environments; and the ways in which the interpretation of these theologies throughout history have in turn been affected by different historical, cultural, and religious circumstances
- conduct scholarly analysis of biblical texts alongside theological interpretation of the same texts

Schedule

Please note: this is the basic schedule of lectures and reading assignments. Supplementary readings may be added to this list as we work through the course, and ALL readings are required preparatory material to be completed prior to each class.

9/14 Introduction to the course - - Orientation in time and space

9/21 Prophecy in Israel and the Ancient Near East

READ: Weber's "Sociology of Religion" sections A1 and C only:

http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/society/socio_relig/socio_relig_frame.html

Tiemeyer L. Recent currents in research on the prophetic literature. *The Expository Times*. 2008;119:161. [Link](#) (available through Queen's Library *Summon*)

9/28 Early Israelite Prophets

READ: Ex 3-14; 24, 32; Num 11; 22-24; Deut 18; 1 Sam 3; 8-11; 13-16; 19, 28; 2 Sam 7; 12; 1 Kgs 1; 11-14; 16; 1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 13

Overholt TW. Prophecy in history: The social reality of intermediation. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. 1990;15:3. [Link](#) (available through Queen's Library *Summon*)

10/5 Amos

READ: Amos (all)

Paul R Noble. Amos and Amaziah in context: Synchronic and diachronic approaches to Amos 7-8. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. 1998;60:423. [Link](#) (available through Queen's Library *Summon*)

10/12 Hosea

READ: Hosea (all)

10/19 Isaiah

READ: Isaiah 1-39

10/26 Micah

READ: Micah (all)

11/2 Late 7th c Prophets: Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Obadiah

READ: all above-mentioned prophets (they're not that long)

Mark E Biddle. Obadiah-jonah-micah in canonical context: The nature of prophetic literature and hermeneutics. Interpretation. 2007;61:154. [Link](#) (available through Queen's Library *Summon*)

11/9 Jeremiah

READ: Jer 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 16, 18-21, 23, 25-30, 32, 34-45

11/16 Ezekiel

READ: Ezek 1-5, 8-10, 14, 16, 18, 33-34, 36-37, 43

11/23 Postexilic Prophecy: 2nd Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah, 3rd Isaiah, Malachi, Joel, Jonah

READ: Isa 40-55; Haggai; Zech 1-4; Isa 56-58, 62, 65; Obadiah; Joel; Malachi; Jonah

Overholt TW. The end of prophecy: No players without a program. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. 1988;13:103. [Link](#) (available through Queen's Library *Summon*)

11/30 Hellenism and Apocalypticism: Daniel

READ: Daniel (all); Zech 12-14

Collins, JJ. From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End. The Continuum History of Apocalypticism, eds. B McGinn, JJ Collins, BJ Stein (copies TBA)