Spring 2-1-2019

RLST 310.01: Topics in Biblical Studies - Prophecy

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**RLST 310: Prophets and Prophecy**
Spring 2019    T Th 11:00 am – 12:20 pm    LA 304    3 credits    CRN 34948

**Course Description**

This course explores the phenomenon of prophecy in the ancient world, with special attention to the literature by and about prophets in the Bible. We approach this topic from modern perspectives and disciplines including history, comparative religion, anthropology, political science, and literary studies. We begin by asking what “prophecy” may mean to people today and what it may have meant to the ancients. We then turn to the biblical world, starting with ancient Near Eastern prophecies outside of the Bible and then focusing on the biblical prophets in their literary and historical contexts. We conclude with a look at how prophecy was received and developed in early Judaism and Christianity.

**Required Texts:**

The following books are available for purchase in the UM Bookstore:


- A few required digital readings will be available on Moodle.

**Recommended:**

There are no prerequisites for this class – no previous knowledge of the Bible or religion is assumed. But for students who have not taken a university course in biblical studies, the following popular paperback (also available at the bookstore) will bring you up to speed on how we approach the Bible in the modern university and in this course: Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (HarperCollins: 1997)
Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance**: Regular attendance is required. Preparation for and participation in class meetings is expected and essential.
2. **Readings**: Plan to complete all readings before the class on which they are assigned. Bring the assigned readings to class with you.
3. **Presentations**: Students will have several opportunities to present assigned material in class.
4. **Quizzes**: 4 quizzes will be given over the course of the semester: Jan 31, Feb 28, Mar 21, Apr 11.
5. **Final Exam**: May 2.

Grading:

1. Attendance, preparation, participation: 20%
2. Presentations: 10%
3. Quizzes (4): 60%
4. Final Exam: 15%

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have acquired the ability to:

1. Work with modern multidisciplinary methods in and approaches to the study of biblical literature, with critical-historical attention paid to the structures, themes, and development of biblical literary and ritual traditions in comparative contexts. This includes the ability to make cultural-historical arguments based on textual and archaeological evidence using modern literary-critical and social-theoretical methods in disciplines including history, comparative religion, anthropology, political science, and literary studies.

2. Articulate key issues and primary evidence for modern debates about ancient biblical authorship and audiences.

3. Locate biblical traditions within the literary, social-historical and aesthetic frameworks of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean literature, art, history and religion.

4. Identify and describe major elements of biblical religions in historical perspective through written assignments and in-class presentations on topics such as the history of prophecy, the practice of sacrifice, the origin of law and writing, and differing classical perceptions of the relationship between divinity and humanity.
Course Policies:

1) There will be no make-up exams or extensions unless the student has made arrangements at least a week ahead of time. Except in the case of a documented emergency, late assignments will result in a decrease of one letter grade per day.

2) Attendance: Students are allowed one cut with no penalties or questions asked. Each additional cut will reduce the attendance and participation grade by 10% (that is, 2% of your final grade). Early departures from the classroom will be counted as absences. If you must miss a class meeting, it is then your responsibility to obtain from a classmate any class notes and other assignment and scheduling information discussed during your absence.

3) This is a course about religion as an academic subject and the development of the Bible in historical context. This is not a class that teaches religion or religious doctrine from a religious and/or devotional perspective. In this class, we will be examining biblical literature in an academic and secular setting, and treating the biblical text as an ancient document open to questioning, examination, criticism, and interpretation. An interest in exploring new ideas and new methods of examining the biblical text are essential. This class is not a forum for expressions of personal theology.

4) Plagiarism – the presentation of others’ work as your own – is an offense punishable by course failure and/or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and all references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the University guidelines, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, falsification or any other form of academic dishonesty will fail this course and the incident will be reported to the Dean.

Schedule

*Note: Our schedule may change as our course progresses. Regular attendance will ensure that you are informed of any changes.

Weeks 1 – 3 (Jan 10; Jan 15, 17; Jan 22)

Background, Definitions, Approaches

“Prophet,” “Prophecy”

The Bible and the Ancient World

Wilson, 21-88 (optional: pp. 1-19)

Petersen, 1-45

Blenkinsopp, 1-6, 8-26 (skim), 27-39

Digital: Marc Brettler, “Historical and Geographical Background to the Bible”
* Students without prior background in the academic study of the Bible in the university should also read Richard E. Friedman, “Who Wrote the Bible?” over the first weeks of the semester.

**Week 3 – 4 (Jan 24; Jan 29)**

**Prophecy in Ancient Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt**

**Mari, Nineveh**

Wilson, 89-134  
Blenkinsopp, 41-48  
Marduk Prophecy (handout)  
Nissinen, pp. 1-12 (“Introduction”) and selected inscriptions: the numbers below refer to selections in Nissinen (not page numbers):

Mari prophecies: #1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16-26, 31, 32, 36-48, 61, 63;  
Eshnunna prophecy: #66;  
Nineveh prophecies: #68-71, 74-77, 79-82, 85, 86, 88; 90, 91, 94;  
Other Neo-Assyrian prophecies: #97-99, 101-103, 108-109, 111, 118;  
misc. cuneiform prophecies: #120, 122-126; 128-131; 134; 135;  
West Semitic prophecies: #137-141;  
Egyptian prophecy: #142.

**Thursday Jan 31: Quiz 1**
Weeks 5 – 6 (Feb 5, 7; Feb 12) *Student presentations begin at this point

Prophets and Prophecy in the Pentateuch
The Pentateuch and Early Israel
(Review: Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*)
Wilson, 135-66
Petersen, 215-26
*Deir Alla Inscriptions* (Nissinen #138)

Pentateuch:
Num 22-24; Josh 13:22 (*Balaam*); cf. *Deir Alla Inscriptions*;
Gen 37, 39-50; Cf Gen 37:19; 40, 41; 44:5, 15 (*Dreams of Joseph*);
Exod 28:30; Lev 8:7-8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8 (*Urim and Thummim*) (cf. 1 Sam 14:38-42; 1 Sam 28:6);
Gen 20; 12:1; 15; 22 (*Abraham*);
Exod 3; 4:10-17; 7:1; Exod 18:15; 21:6; 22:7; 33:7-23 (*Moses*);
Deut 5:23-33; Ex 20:18-21 (*Moses’ mandate*);
Deut 18:9-22; 2 Kgs 17:13; Jer 7:25-26 (*Prophets*);
Deut 13:2-8; 18:9-14 (*false prophets and other diviners*) (cf. 1 Kgs 22:1-28 [*True and False Prophets*]; 2Kgs 21 [Menasseh])

Weeks 6 – 8 (Feb 14; Feb 19, 21; Feb 26)

Prophets and Prophecy in the Historical Books
Kingship, Deuteronomistic History, Elijah & Elisha

Petersen, 226-34
Wilson, 166-225; 253-266
Blenksoopp, 49-64

Historical Books:
Selected passages in the biblical books of Samuel and Kings (see handout)

Thursday Feb 28: Quiz 2
Weeks 9 – 11 (Mar 5, 7; March 12, 14; Mar 19)

I. The 8th Century: Isaiah of Jerusalem, Amos, Hosea, Micah

The Assyrian Crisis

Blenkinsopp, 65-110
Wilson, 225-231; 266-276
Petersen: 47-96 (focus on his discussion of Isaiah chapters 1-39); 169-81; 184-89; 193-96
Isa 1; 5–11; 20;
Amos, 1–5; 7, 9:11–15; Hosea 1–4; 6; 9:7-9; 11; Micah 1-6

II. The 7th Century: Jeremiah

Josiah, Babylon, The Deuteronomists

Wilson, 231-252
Blenkinsopp, 111-147
Petersen: 97-135

2 kings 22–25; Jeremiah 52 // 2 kings 24:18 - 25:30
Jer 7:1–8:3; 11:1–5, 9–14; 18:1–12; 21:1–10;
Jer 29:1–14; Jer 31:23–40

Thursday March 21: Quiz 3

Week 12: March 25-29: Spring Break
Weeks 13 – 14 (Apr 2, 4; April 9)
The 6th Century: Ezekiel, Second Isaiah
Babylon, Exile, Return

Blenkinsopp, 148-193
Petersen: 137-67; 47-96 (focus on his discussion of Isaiah 40-55)
Ezek 1–3:15, 8–10
Ezek 3:16–5:17

Isa 40:1–11
Isa 43:14–21
Isa 41:8–16; 42:1–4; 44:1–5; 45:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12

Thursday April 11: Quiz 4

Weeks 15 – 16 (Apr 16, 18; April 23, 25)
Prophecy in Judaism and Christianity: Prophecy and Apocalyptic

Blenkinsopp 226-39
Wilson, 297-308
*Digital*: Collins, “From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: Expectation of the End”

Hebrew Bible:
2 Kgs 4, 5; 4:42
Isa 24-27
Daniel 2, 5, 7, 10, 12

Dead Sea Scrolls:
Habakkuk Interpretation
Damascus Document I, VII

New Testament:
Mark 1; 4:35-5:43
Matt 1:18-3:3; 24
Luke 1-5; Acts 1-2
1 Cor 14-15
1 Thes 4:13-5:11
Romans 1:16-17

Thursday May 2: Final Exam