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## OT 712 Hebrew Exegesis of the Psalms

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## OT(HB) 712 Hebrew Exegesis of the Psalms

Fall Term, 2004  
Instructor: Lawson G. Stone  
A Three Hour Course

**This course aspires** to equip the student with a working knowledge of biblical Hebrew with the skills needed for theological exegesis of the Old Testament, specifically, the book of Psalms. The ultimate goal is competent biblical study within a larger theological method with a specific emphasis on relating exegetical skills to devotional and pastoral reading of the Psalms. The course emphasizes the craft of textual analysis, but always against the backdrop of an interpretative approach embracing the history of interpretation, theological formulation, and reflection upon contemporary questions. This course on the Psalms also seeks to place exegesis in the framework of the devotional use of the Bible in the church and in the lives of individuals.

**Specific objectives:** Students most fully realizing the course aspirations will, at the end of the course, be able to:

- 1) Place a particular Psalm in the context of the entire book of Psalms;
- 2) Translate selected passages from the Psalms accurately and forcibly, using standard grammatical and lexical tools;
- 3) Evaluate the textual condition of a passage in the Hebrew Psalms by interpreting the apparatus of BHS;
- 4) Evaluate selected variables in interpretation, specifically philology, contextual relations, literary form, and historical setting; this entails:
  - a) Practise with lexica and concordance;
  - b) Analysis of structure, form, and aesthetics;
  - c) Preparation of a word, phrase, or formula study;
  - d) Review of impact of critical theories;
  - e) Ranking of various interpretive determinants;
- 5) Materially use insights from a wide range of resources, regardless of the theological bias or historical setting of the source, in particular, appreciating the contribution of so-called "pre-critical" interpreters;
- 6) Understand the exegesis of the Psalms, and by extension, all exegesis, as the application of a comprehensive appreciation of aesthetics and linguistics as they function in literature;
- 7) Read through the entire book of Psalms in translation, keeping a log of impressions, ideas, thoughts, devotional insights, questions, etc..

The **means by which these objectives will be reached** include **student preparation** of assigned texts, exercises in exegetical method, readings, seminar presentations and discussions, and written assignments. Students will periodically be asked, without prior warning, to take 10-15 minutes and simply present the results of their study of a psalm to the class as the basis for our discussion that day. Persistent evidence of slipshod daily preparation will lead to a reduction of the grade.

In a seminar class, **attendance** is critical. Attendance will be taken daily. Student attendance will be significant part of the grade, counting 25 points. An absence for any reason reduces that score by 1 point. All absences count, *and all may be made up*, therefore no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” will be observed. *Any absence can be made up* by contacting the instructor. Make-up work will normally involve completing a reasonable written assignment, typically a summary of work done on the assigned Psalm of the day or a brief additional reading and 250-500 word precis.

A **word study paper** of about 2000-2200 words will be prepared by the student, taking a word that appears significantly in the Psalms. The word study should deal both with the OT as a whole and with the word's role in the Psalms. The word must be one that occurs at least 75 times in the OT, but words appearing more than about 250 times will be extremely difficult to handle adequately. A detailed rubric will be provided.

A **commentary review** of selected readings on a psalm studied in class will be submitted. This will be no more than 750 words, and reflect the student's reading in at least 4 commentaries representing a variety of periods and viewpoints. Students are expected to assess (a) what each commentator sees the task of interpretation to be (b) what specific knowledge is brought to bear on the task (c) what constructive claims and insights the commentator is able to provide (d) what limitations or weaknesses appear in the work, if any.

An **exegesis paper** of about 2500-2700 words on a passage from a Psalm not covered in detail in class. The passage studied should be 3-5 verses. The paper should present:

1. The major textual difficulties of the chosen passage
2. An analysis of the passage's grammatical and lexical features
3. An analysis of the poetic structure, style, and devices of the Psalm *as a whole* to established context for the chosen passage.
4. An discussion of the form, setting, and background of the Psalm *as a whole*, to the extent these are discernable
5. A discussion of the distinctive theological themes expressed in the psalm, particularly as expressed in the chosen passage, seen in the framework of the Psalms, the theological traditions of the OT, and potential points of contact with the NT
6. Reference throughout to the appropriate secondary literature

7. A discussion of the devotional and experiential dimension of the psalm's meaning, including reference to appropriate commentary literature
8. A sketch of a sermon to be preached from the psalm. Indicate the title of the message, the central purpose and theme, and an outline at least to the I/AB level. Show where and how you will incorporate the fruit of your study.
9. A carefully worked out translation that captures as fully as possible all the facets of meaning that your exegesis has uncovered.

Note, *this is not an outline of your order of presentation*, but rather a list of issues and concerns that need to be addressed in the course of your research. A complete, detailed rubric will be circulated later in the course. The paper should conform to standard research paper form and style, with appropriate footnotes and bibliography. At no point may a student present work done for a previous class, or work for which the major portion was completed for a previous class. Work is to be completed specifically for this course, and is to be the student's own work. The exegesis counts 40% of the student's grade.

**Reading:** We often take for granted that we understand how language works to communicate everything from directions to the rest room to the nature of the Trinity. But in fact, the enormous range, variety, and power of human language is one of the greatest mysteries and wonders of the human race. Most theological students fail to grasp the implications of the "Babel Reality" for our exegesis. Few thinkers have devoted as much study and thought to this as George Steiner. His book *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* is perhaps one of the most profound and challenging discussions available. Though not a theologian, Steiner's whole discussion has a strong theological and spiritual undercurrent. And though not a "theology textbook," *After Babel* remains one of the most significant books the professor has ever read for understanding the task of "carrying over" the meaning of the Bible to our own situation. We will devote 6 class sessions to discussion of Steiner's book, one session per chapter. Students are expected to submit a written synopsis and reaction of each chapter on the date when it is discussed. Students will be called upon "at random" to share their written synopsis with the class. These will be scored on a scale of 0-5 and cumulatively contribute up to 30 points for the final grade. Synopses will be approximately 750-1000 words in length and may be single spaced. Note these assignments are to be taken seriously. Cutesy running commentary or chatter will not suffice, nor will "Geeze, this guy is really hard and I didn't understand it so it must not be very important..." Hello. This is graduate school.

**A log of the student's reading of the book of Psalms in translation and the commentary by Mays** (in its entirety) will be kept, and will be submitted 3 times in the semester for inspection. Students are required to read the book of Psalms in translation, and keep in written, dated form, a log or journal of impressions, questions, insights, ideas, prayers, etc. that come to mind. As long as the journal or log clearly indicates the psalms have been read, it may assume any format the student wishes. Note, there is no "right or wrong" on this assignment! Students may use any translation they wish. Students do not have to write notes on every single psalm, but hopefully the reading will stimulate many thoughts and ideas.

The main requirement is that this be done regularly, and with a degree of devotional sensitivity and openness. The log will be collected on the dates noted on the schedule. A log that is sketchy, un-engaged, hasty, or sloppy receive a low evaluation. Note that all three logs cumulatively count 30 points for the final grade. The completion of Mays counts A log that is excellent, engaged, and otherwise clearly fruitful not only contributes to the student's final grade, it reflects and authentic and rigorous engagement with the Word of God..

The Course **GRADE** will be based on a "total points" system. Each evaluated aspect of the course will be assigned the following points:

Attendance	25
Class Participation	25
Reading: Mays	30
Log 1-3	30
Steiner 1-6	30
Word Study	40
Commentary Review	40
Exegesis Paper	50
Total	270

Total Points will be converted to a letter grade on the following scale:

Letter	From	To
A	254	270
A-	240	253
B+	235	239
B	227	234
B-	213	226
C+	208	212
C	200	207
C-	186	199
D+	181	185
D	173	180
D-	159	172
F	0	158

### Course Resources

*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* is the standard critical text. Please do not bring interlinear or parallel column Bibles to class.

### Some Handy Tools:

Arnold, Bill T. and John H. Choi. *A Guide to Hebrew Syntax*. Cambridge, 2003.

- Elliger, K., and W. Rudolph, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967-77.
- Murphy, T. J. *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of Biblical Hebrew*. IVP. 2003.
- Vasholz, R. I. *Data for the Sigla in BHS*. Eisenbrauns, 1983. Provided by instructor.
- A Hebrew-based Concordance or Biblical Software with full Hebrew root and grammar based search capability (For Wintel: *Bibleworks*, *Logos*; for Macintosh *Accordance*)

Other Resources You Will Need to Have Access To:

1. General Reference Tools (Consult these *first* among secondary sources)
  - The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 1992. 6 Volumes. Also available on CD-ROM for all the major biblical software packages.
  - New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols; ed. W. Van Gemeren, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. Also on CDROM
  - The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-1988. 4 Volumes. Not yet available digitally. If the *ISBE* is in your software, it's the wrong edition.
2. Lexical and Grammatical Resources
  - Köhler-Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT) (Brill: Multiple Volumes through late 1990's, also on CDROM)
  - NOTE: Brown-Driver-Briggs is now obsolete and is not a sufficient source for your research. Your primary lexicon of reference needs to be Köhler-Baumgartner (HALOT)
  - Scott, William R. *A Simplified Guide to BHS*. Berkley, Calif.: BIBAL, 1987.
  - Seow, C. L. *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*. Rev. ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.
  - Jüon P. & T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. 2 Vols. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993. The standard current research grammar.
  - Waltke, Bruce and M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*. Eisenbrauns. 1990.
3. Text-Critical and Septuagint Tools
  - Rahlfs, A. ed. *Septuaginta* by the Stuttgart; Württembergische Bibelanstalt/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935, 1979. The *software* form is: The Kraft-Taylor-Wheeler CATSS/UPenn Morphological LXX, Version 2.0 (KTW-LXX)
  - Brenton, L. *Septuagint in English*. London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., 1851. Found in software usually as LXE (*Bibleworks*) or LXX-B (*Accordance*)
  - Wurthwein, Ernst, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., tr. E. F. Rhodes, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,.

**Select Bibliography on the Psalms**

(To be distributed in class)

**IMPORTANT DATES**

Sept 16 Steiner, Ch. 1  
Sept. 30 Steiner, Ch. 2  
Oct 5 Log, Psalms 1-50+Mays  
Oct 7 Word Study Due  
Oct 14 Steiner, Ch. 3  
Oct 26 Commentary Review  
Oct 28 Steiner, Ch. 4  
Nov 4 Log, Psalms 51-100+Mays  
Nov 11 Steiner, Ch. 5  
Dec 2 Steiner, Ch. 6  
Dec 9 Log, Psalms 101-150+Mays  
Dec 15 Exegesis Paper Due, 1 PM