OT 521 Introduction to the Prophets and Writings

B. A. Strawn

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OT 521 Introduction to the Prophets and Writings

Fall 1999
Mon/Wed 1:00-2:15pm

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1. Course Description
Survey the organization and content of the prophetic and poetic books in the light of theological developments in Israel from the beginning of the Divided Monarchy through the Post-Exilic period. Considers both the hermeneutical and the higher-critical issues pertaining to this literature. Prerequisite: OT520 (Catalogue, p. 69).

The course will be run in seminar format: Mondays will be devoted primarily to presentations/lectures by the professor along with student interaction; ten Wednesdays will be devoted to seminars oriented around critical reviews and particular biblical texts (for further implications, see below). The professor reserves the right to present/lecture in these seminar sessions when it is deemed necessary.

2. Course Objectives
1. To achieve basic knowledge of the historical and cultural context that lies behind and is often formative for the Old Testament (OT) or Hebrew Bible (HB) -- specifically, for the Prophets (Nebi’im) and the Writings (Kethubim) (the second and third sections of the tripartite HB). This includes, at times, the history, culture, and literature of the ancient Near East but also and especially the major points in the history of Israel and Judah;
2. To gain familiarity with the content of the Prophets and the Writings;
3. To be exposed to and be able to expound many of the interpretive methodologies that are available to the interpreter of the OT/HB;
4. To cultivate literary competence, particularly in working with the different genres present in the OT/HB;
5. To appreciate the homiletical and theological resources contained in the OT/HB witness; and
6. To begin cultivating the practice of OT/HB interpretation and scholarly evaluation.

3. Textbooks
Required:
- Main text:
  The OT/HB in a standard, modern translation suitable for study purposes. I have recommended The HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), eds.


**Recommended/Collateral:**

### 4. Requirements and Grading

#### Class Preparation, Attendance, and Participation (20%)

(a) **Attendance:** Expected. As a rule, more than 3 unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. In compliance with federal regulations regarding student loans, attendance will be taken every session. This will be done by distributing a sign-in sheet. It is the student’s responsibility to sign this sheet every class session. The professor will not do so later, after the fact, the next day, etc. Please also note that it is the student’s responsibility to obtain notes, etc., from other students for any missed classes. The professor will not distribute lectures.

(b) **Reading:** All readings save those labelled “optional” or those assigned (to others) for critical review are required. Readings from the biblical text begin on Mon Sept 13. Unfortunately, the entirety of the Prophets and Writings cannot be covered. Note that assigned reading should be completed by the day listed.

(c) **Participation:** The seminar format of the course makes student participation, involvement, leadership, and dialogue an absolute necessity. It will comprise the major portion of this 20% of the final grade. See further below on guidelines for seminar preparation.

#### A Critical Review (15%)

A review of one of the items for discussion listed in the course schedule below. This review should be 3-4 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, 12 pt font (i.e., approximately 750-1000 words) and is due at the beginning of the class session for which the student has signed up. In addition, the student will be responsible for making an oral presentation (generally a summary/precis) of his/her review on that same day and will thus assume a large part of the task of initiating class discussion for this session. Note further discussion of the review below.

#### Two (Brief) Exegetical Papers (40%)

5-6 pages (each) in length, typed, double-spaced, with 12 pt font (i.e., approximately 1250-1500 words), these papers are due at the beginning of the class session for which the student has signed up. In addition, the student will be responsible for making an oral presentation (generally a summary/precis) of her/his paper on that same day and will thus assume a large part of the task of initiating class discussion for this session. Note the discussion of these papers below.
• Celebration of Learning (25%)
  There will be one such celebration (often called, erroneously, an examination): at present it is
  scheduled for Monday Dec 13.  The professor reserves the right to make this a take-home final
  that would be distributed prior to this date.  Alternative projects (e.g., research papers, etc.) may
  also be possible.

• Other Factors
  Additionally, other factors may determine the final grade calculation.

5. The Two (Brief) Exegetical Papers

• Format/Style
  1. These papers should be 5-6 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, with 12 pt font (i.e.,
     approximately 1250-1500 words).  Page/word limits should be strictly observed.
  2. Footnotes should be used instead of endnotes.
  3. The first page of the paper should not include the student’s name.  Instead, the last page of the
     paper should be an additional, blank page with the
     only thing on it being the student’s name and Seminary Post Office (SPO) number.
  4. Plagiarism is against the law and Seminary policy.  Any plagiarism whatsoever will be grounds
     for immediate failure of the entire course and punitive measures with the dean’s office.  Citations must be accompanied by both quotation marks
     (“”) and footnotes.
  5. Similarly, sources that are utilized and cited must be included in the bibliography.  Form and style
     for footnotes and bibliographies (only) must
     follow Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 6th ed.
     (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).  See also The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th
     ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) for further information if Turabian is
     unclear.
  6. Please note that the use of inclusive language is Seminary policy.  Do not use “man” or
     “mankind,”
     “he” or “his” generically; this is no longer appropriate.  “Humanity,” “humankind,” “human beings,” “they,” “one’s,” etc. are to be used
     instead.
  7. I strongly urge you to use (but not trust) your spell-checker.  I urge you even more strongly to
     proofread, proofread, and proofread again!  Poor
     grammar, syntax, spelling, and so forth will adversely affect your grade.

• Secondary Resources
  1. Outside sources (beyond the class textbooks) must be consulted.  These can include articles,
     commentaries, introductions, monographs, etc.
     Particular database resources such as Religion One Index (ATLA) and Old Testament Abstracts
     should be consulted.  These are in the library -- some years can be searched via CD-ROM in
     addition to printed hard copy.  See also the massive resource Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus.
     See the reference librarians for assistance.
  2. Recommended journals include: Vetus Testamentum (VT), Interpretation (Int), Journal of Biblical
     Literature (JBL), Catholic Biblical
     Quarterly (CBQ), Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT), Zeitschrift für die
     alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (ZAW), Biblica (Bib), Revue Biblique (RB), and so forth.
  3. A further bibliographical suggestion: start with David Bauer’s Biblical Resources for Ministry
     (1995).  If you are going to use commentaries, stick
     (primarily) to those he recommends.  Other bibliographical resources similar to Bauer’s are those
     by B. S. Childs and J. A. Fitzmyer.
  4. Given the great variability in quality, internet resources are not encouraged.  Students should stick
     to the established resources discussed in the previous paragraphs.  If internet sources are utilized (at best, in ancillary fashion), they must be
specified by the title/name of the site and the full URL address (e.g., “Asbury Seminary Home Page” at http://www.asburyseminary.edu).

- **Method**
  1. You are free to use whatever interpretive options that you have learned of in the course of the class or by reading texts for the course.

    However, **the student should undertake their own work with the text first before checking commentaries and secondary resources.** Even so, the paper should be an integrated whole (not a list of student insights followed by a commentary summary).

  2. The exercise is one in interpretation. I want to see you practice the art of interpretation. I don’t want new theories about the text, I want to know what the text says.

  3. Please note that this paper is not an IBS assignment. Please keep IBS jargon out of the final paper, even if you utilize IBS methods in your primary work.

  4. Final Hint: Thesis statements help! You can’t do everything or cover every aspect of a long passage, so pick an angle, get a thesis, and demonstrate it. Example: “The key to this text is found in...”; “While at first sight this text seems to be about x, in reality careful study reveals it to be about a similar, yet different subject: y”; etc.

  5. Students who are either unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or out of practice with the research process (and you know who you are!) should consult Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

  6. You may also want to utilize the document “How to Write an Interpretive Assignment/Brief Exegetical Paper” by Joel B. Green and Brent A. Strawn, which is available on the T drive.

- **Presentation**
  1. The student will give a brief summary/precis of their papers in the seminars in which they are due.

  2. This presentation should not be a reading of the paper manuscript.

- **Grading**
  1. Each paper is due at the beginning of the class session for which the student has signed up. Late papers will be docked a full letter-grade per day late (e.g., 1 day late = A paper goes to B, C paper goes to D; 2 days late = A paper goes to C, C paper goes to F). Late papers are not encouraged.

  2. Each paper will be assigned either a letter grade or “Rewrite.” Rewrites are to be rewritten following the suggestions of the professor and submitted on the date specified on the schedule. The original paper must accompany the new, rewritten version. Failure to rewrite the paper at a satisfactory level will result in a failing grade.

  3. Failure to follow instructions, especially regarding format/style (see above), will result in grade reductions.

  4. Pay attention to your argument and to your epistemological assumptions. How do you know that you are right about what you just said? How do you know what you know about this text? Indicate your evidence. Don’t just assume a point -- **argue it**.

6. **The Critical Review**

- **Format/Style**
  1. The review should be 3-4 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, 12 pt font (i.e., approximately 750-1000 words).

  2. The first part of the review should be the bibliographical information of the book under review itself. E.g.:


  3. When citing the book under review, no footnote is necessary. Indicate the citation with quotation marks (“ ”) and then use a parenthetical
reference to the page number. E.g.: Yet not all readers will concur with Currid’s assessment that “the Hebrew conception of reality conflicted with ancient Near Eastern pagan cosmologies” (p. 49) -- at least not completely.

If a volume other than the one under review is cited, it should be done so in traditional fashion with a footnote.

4. No bibliography is necessary unless a volume other than the one under review is cited.
5. The first page of the review should not include the student’s name. Instead, the last page of the review should be an additional, blank page with the only thing on it being the student’s name and Seminary Post Office (SPO) number.

- **Method/Content**
  1. The review should summarize the author’s central theses, demonstrate the author’s approach to the subject matter, and critique the author’s analysis (e.g., methodologically; in light of the primary materials; its logic, argument, evidence; etc.).
  2. Those who are unfamiliar with book reviews and the book review genre are advised to read some reviews in journals such as JBL, CBQ, Int, Theology Today, The Princeton Seminary Bulletin, etc.

3. You may also want to utilize the document “How to Write a Book Review” by Joel B. Green and Brent A. Strawn, which is available on the T drive.

- **Presentation**
  1. The student will give a brief summary/precis of their review in the seminar in which it is due.
  2. This presentation should not be a reading of the book review manuscript.

- **Grading**
  1. The review is due at the beginning of the class session for which the student has signed up. Late papers will be docked a full letter-grade per day late (e.g., 1 day late = A paper goes to B, C paper goes to D; 2 days late = A paper goes to C, C paper goes to F). Late papers are not encouraged.
  2. Failure to follow format/style instructions (see above) will result in grade reductions.
  3. Ideally, a competent book review will be a synthesis of content summary and critical analysis thereof. One should err (if one must!) on the latter side, rather than the former.
  4. As with the brief exegetical papers, pay attention to your argument and to your epistemological assumptions (see above).

### 7. Tentative Schedule

#### I. Introductory Matters

1. **Wed Sept 8**  
   *Syllabus/Introduction/Overview*  
   Nelson: 9-63

#### II. יִשְׁדַּק נְפָר <gāybn> “The Former Prophets”

2. **Mon Sept 13**  
   *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic History (D, Dtr, DtrH)*  
   Bible: Deuteronomy 1-34  
   UOT: 333-344, 402-404, 166-167  
   Nelson: 67-77  
   *Optional:* Laffey: 71-84, 220-225

3. **Wed Sept 15**  
   *Settlement and Conquest*
4. Mon Sept 20  
*The Tribal “League” and the Rise of Kingship*  
Bible: Judges 2-21, 1 Samuel 1-8  
UOT: 164-190  
Nelson: 93-108  
*Optional:* Laffey: 97-107, 205-210

5. Wed Sept 22  
**Seminar #1:** Judges 19:1-30  

6. Mon Sept 27  
*The United Kingdom and Royal Theology*  
Bible: 1 Samuel 9-31; 2 Samuel 1-7, 11-12:25  
UOT: 192-222  
Nelson: 109-128  
*Optional:* Laffey: 108-138

7. Wed Sept 29  
**Seminar #2:** 2 Samuel 7:1-29  

8. Mon Oct 4  
*Civil War: The Divided Kingdom(s) and 722*  
Bible: 1 Kings 1-12; 2 Kings 14:23-29, 15:8-31, 17:1-41  
UOT: 229-262, 283-284  
Nelson: 129-148  
*Optional:* Laffey: 128-143

9. Wed Oct 6  
**Seminar #3:** 2 Kings 17:7-23  

10. Mon Oct 11  
*Nadir as Zenith: 587 and Exile*  
Bible: 2 Kings 18-25; Ezekiel 1-5, 8-11, 18, 23, 37, 40-48; Lamentations  
UOT: 350-380, 382-416  
*Optional:* Laffey: 200-202

12. Mon Oct 18  Return and Restoration
Bible: 2 Chronicles 36, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Malachi
UOT: 452-480
Blenkinsopp: 181-222
Nelson: 77-78, 149-176
Optional: Laffey: 204-205

Critical Review: Martin Noth, *The Chronicler’s History*, JSOTSupp 50
(Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

III. <ynwrja <yaybn “The Latter Prophets”

Bible: 1 Kings 13, 17-22; 2 Kings 1-9; Isaiah 6, Jer 1:1-10, Amos 7:10-17
UOT: 223-229
Blenkinsopp: 1-64
Optional: Laffey: 144-167

Bible: Isaiah 1-12, Amos, Hosea, Micah
UOT: 262-283, 285-318
Blenkinsopp: 65-110
Optional: Laffey: 167-172


17. Wed Nov 3  Isaiah Continued: “Second” and “Third”
Bible: Isaiah 40-66
UOT: 417-451
Blenkinsopp: 181-193, 212-222
Optional: Laffey: 172-174
18. Mon Nov 8  *Visions and Dreamers: Post-Exilic Narrative, Prophecy, and Apocalyptic*
Bible: Daniel, Zechariah, Esther, Ruth, Jonah
UOT: 548-552, 583-573
Collins: 1-42, 85-115, Epilogue
Blenkinsopp: 194-212, 240-245
*Optional:* Laffey: 205-210, 213-217

19. Wed Nov 10  **Seminar #7:** Daniel 7:1-28

IV. <ybwtk> “The Writings”

20. Mon Nov 15  *Pleasing Words and Plain Truth: Wisdom in Israel*
Bible: Proverbs 1-9, 25-31
UOT: 510-524
Crenshaw: 1-88, 205-226
*Optional:* Laffey: 181-200, 210-213, 217-219

21. Wed Nov 17  **Seminar #8:** Proverbs 8:22-36

22. Mon Nov 22  Reading Week: No Class

23. Wed Nov 24  Reading Week: No Class

24. Mon Nov 29  *The Dark Side of Order: Job and Ecclesiastes*
Bible: Job 1-14, 29-31, 38-42; Ecclesiastes
UOT: 524-544
Crenshaw: 89-139, 184-204, 227-229

25. Wed Dec 1  **Seminar #9:** Job 19:1-29

### 26. Mon Dec 6

**Enthroned on the Praises of Israel: Psalms and Songs**

**Bible:** Psalms 1-19, 22-38, 51, 74-76, 78, 89-91, 103-105, 145-150; Song of Songs

**UOT:** 481-509

**Miller:** vii-x, 3-78

**Optional:** Gunkel: 1-21, 319-351.

### 27. Wed Dec 8

**Seminar #10:** Psalm 89:1-52


### 28. Mon Dec 13

Celebration of Learning (Final Examination)

### 8. Study Guide for Seminar Sessions

**Seminar #1:** Judges 19:1-30

Trible calls this story a “text of terror.” Why? What does she (and do you) find terrifying about it? Outline the story paying careful attention to plot, structure, and key turning points in the narrative. Note also the many ambiguities in the passage. How does the Levite act and react? How are his actions portrayed? What of the (ritual?) act after the rape? What is its function? Are there parallels to it? What seems to be the function of the story in the broader framework of Judges? Finally, what sense can be made of such a horrible story preserved in Scripture? What function does this story play (or should it play) in the overall canon and in contemporary theological reflection?

**Seminar #2:** 2 Samuel 7:1-29

Nathan’s oracle is one of the high points of the Deuteronomistic history, especially in the light of Noth’s assessment (now challenged widely) that Dtr was generally anti-kingship. The text is also of import for discussions of covenant in Old Testament theology and to the subject of royal theology. In particular, the Davidic covenant is thought to be unconditional vs. the Mosaic/Sinaitic covenant which is thought to be conditional. Is this true? What of later reflexes of this promise, especially with Solomon? What is ultimately the most significant thing about the oracle and the covenant with David?

**Seminar #3:** 2 Kings 17:7-23

In this brief passage, the reasons that Israel (the Northern Kingdom) went into exile are summarized. Assess these. Are there other possibilities as well (cf. 1 Kings 1-11, 12-13)?
so, what might this indicate about the perspective of Dtr?  In the final analysis, what is most important to Dtr?  Do you agree with Dtr’s viewpoint?  How might you nuance it and why might you nuance it (e.g., to provide a fuller perspective)?  And, finally, what does this say about the nature of DtrH as “history”?  What kind of history is it?

Seminar #4: Psalm 137:1-9

Consider the historical background of the psalm and lay out its structure.  Note that many lectionary readings break off with v. 6.  This raises a question: Is this psalm to be read in its entirety by the contemporary community of faith?  What is the function of such a piece in the fifth and final book of the Psalter (Pss 107-150: the so-called “Book of Praises”)?  How can we appropriate the Ps 137 in Christian life and worship?  Should we appropriate it at all?


The divorce texts of Ezra-Nehemiah are quite shocking to modern sensibilities and contrast quite sharply with what many scholars call the inclusive nature of much of the biblical materials whether it be in eschatological visions (e.g., Isaiah 2:1-4) or in portions of the New Testament (esp. some points in the ministries of Jesus and Paul).  What is going on here?  Why is this action undertaken?  Can you explain it?  Do you agree with it?  Are the various socio-political factors at work in the restoration period the cause of this situation?  What positive insights, if any, can be gleaned from these texts?

Seminar #6: Amos 1:1-2:16

Break this unit down into its constituent parts and pay attention to how one might do this (recurring formulae, etc.).  What is the nature of the various “sins” or “transgressions” that are recorded?  Explore the relationship of the nations mentioned to Israel (and Judah).  How does Israel’s (and Judah’s) sin compare with these others?  What, then, seems to be the force of this oracular unit of Amos and how does it fit with the other portions of Amos’s prophecy, including 1:2?

Seminar #7: Daniel 7:1-28

From your reading of the entire book, how does Daniel 7 differ from the preceding chapters?  What is the mode of revelation here?  Note the structure of the chapter: vision and interpretation.  The vision itself includes much enigmatic imagery, especially in the contrast between the beasts that rise out of the sea and the coming of the “one like a human being [or: son of man].”  What are the elements of the vision?  How does the interpretation illumine the vision?  Does it raise new questions?  The figure called the “one like a human being [or: son of man]” is a key part of the vision and has significant carry-over into the way the Gospels speak about Jesus of Nazareth.  On the basis of Daniel 7, what can you say about this figure?

Seminar #8: Proverbs 8:22-36

To whom does the first person pronoun in this passage refer?  How does this passage relate to the rest of the book of Proverbs and to the biblical wisdom literature in general?  What is the message of this unit and what is the rhetoric by which that message is communicated?
Seminar #9: Job 19:1-29

This chapter has been widely debated and many have tried to locate a deep and profound hope in Job’s words in vv. 25-27. What is your opinion? On the basis of the chapter as a whole, as well as the structure of the book and so forth, is Job profoundly hopeful or profoundly despairing or both? Is he “blameless and upright” after all? Why or why not?

Seminar #10: Psalm 89:1-52

Carefully analyze the structure of Psalm 89. It contains elements of royal theology, mythological motifs, and historical reminiscences. Isolate these individual elements and consider their background. Note how each contributes to the overall argument of the psalm. To which of Gunkel’s categories does Ps 89 belong? To answer this, careful consideration must be given to v. 52. How do you treat this verse -- doxology to Book III or switch to praise for Ps 89? What does this psalm (and its structure) say about the nature of prayer in the OT/HB?
9. Bibliography/Reserve List

The list has been kept to a minimum. Required and recommended textbooks (section a) are on reserve. Materials for seminar assessment are listed in section b. Students are reminded to not write in library books.

a. Textbooks and Recommended Reading

b. Seminar Assessment Materials
   ________, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 2d ed., JSOTSupp 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press,
NOTES

Clarify goals
Add section on test-taking, etc. (5 essentials...; rhymes; anacronyms [ww?]; reflection!) -- structure for lecture too!!!
reflection/synthesis

Jeremiah of Anathoth
Blenkinsopp 111-121; 129-147

Ezekiel of Babylon [part done]
Blenkinsopp: 148-180

Summing Up
Collins: 145-176, 256-283

For further reading (Sem1): Commentaries on Judges, esp. Dennis Olson; literary-feminist works by J. Cheryl Exum, Alice Bach, Alice Ogden Bellis, and Athalya Brenner.


For further reading (Sem3): Commentaries on 2 Kings 17.

For further reading (Sem4): Commentaries on Psalm 137; Zenger, 47-50; Carol Antablin Miles, “‘Singing the Songs of Zion’ and Other Sermons from the Margins of the Canon,” Koinonia: The Princeton Theological Seminary Graduate Forum VI/2 (Fall 1994) 151-173.

For further reading (Sem5):

For further reading (Sem6): Commentaries on Amos 1-2, especially those by Hans Walter Wolff, James Luther Mays, Shalom Paul, Francis Anderson and David Noel Freedman.

For further reading (Sem7): Commentaries on Daniel 7, especially those by W. Sibley Towner and John J. Collins.

For further reading (Sem8): Commentaries on Proverbs 8; Fontaine, Camp, etc.

For further reading (Sem9): Commentaries on Job 19, especially those by Carol Newsom, Norman Habel, Marvin Pope, David J. A. Clines, and J. Gerald Janzen; Carol Newsom “The Moral...” PSB ; J. Gerald Janzen, Job, Interpretation; Mattitahu Tsevat, “The Meaning of the Book of Job,”

For further reading (Sem10):