

Providence College

Biblical Poetry

3 Credit Hours

Instructor: Randall Holm Ph.D

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Class Times: Tuesday and Friday 11:10-12:25 AM

SYLLABUS

A. COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to the characteristics of Hebrew poetry and wisdom writings, viewed within the context of other ancient Near Eastern literary works with an eye to understanding their function in society both at the time of their writing and in contemporary culture. Selection from the Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and the Song of Solomon will be primarily featured.

3 credits

B. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Over the course of this semester students will:

- identify common Hebrew poetry tropes
- identify historical patterns of interpretation
- locate Hebrew poetry and wisdom literature within Near Eastern cultic literature
- locate Hebrew poetry and wisdom literature sociologically, historically and theologically.
- respond to questions of theodicy and providence as they unfold in Biblical poetry and wisdom literature

C. COURSE TEXT(S) AND SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

Fokkelman, J.P. *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001

Altson, Renee. *Stumbling Toward Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004

Recommended Texts

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1984.

Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: Psalms*. Colorado Springs: Navpress.

D. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

a) Memorization

The Psalms have been instrumental in the liturgical practice in both Temple and church worship. Using the NRSV Students shall rewrite a Psalm of not less than 20 verses by memory. Each verse will be graded as 1/2 mark. Incorrect spelling will result in the loss of 1/4 mark. A missing word, or phrase will result in the loss of 1/2 a mark. This assignment will take place on September 28th.

Grade: 10%

b) Interpretative Collage

The discursive power of Biblical poetry is found in its ability to shape our imaginations. Students shall select a chapter from the book of Ecclesiastes. Students will then choose a translation of their choice and prepare a collage of images in association with each verse. Students may wish to use their own photographs or find appropriate pictures from other published sources. Students may also substitute the visual collage with a video or power point presentation.

Grading will be based on the clarity of delivery, the creativity of their interpretation and the defence of their interpretation. The interpretive Psalms will all be presented in the class on the same day and 50% of the grade will be determined by peer evaluation. This assignment is due for presentation on November 30th and December 3rd.

Grade 10%

c) Book Review: *Stumbling Toward Faith*

In 3-4 pages students will review René Altson's autobiography, *Stumbling toward Faith*.

As a review, students will appraise *Stumbling toward Faith*, through description and exposition based on the aims and purpose of the Altson. In other words, what is she trying to achieve? Has her purpose been achieved? How does she go about achieving her aim? How has her style contributed or detracted from her overall purpose? Remember to substantiate your claims with evidence from the book. And finally students will need to consider both her style and the impact of her text in light of biblical poetry.

Students may also want to consider:

What are the "intellectual qualities" of the writing (e.g., simplicity, clarity)?

What are the "emotional qualities" of the writing (e.g., humour, wit, satire)?

What are the "aesthetic qualities" of the writing (e.g., harmony, rhythm)?

What stylistic devices are employed (e.g., symbolism, motifs, parody, allegory)?

Finally on the day of class students need to include 4 post-it notes each with a phrase that either spoke to them or they think should be shared with others. These quotes will form an anonymous collage that will be posted for all to read.

Grade 15%

d) D. Midterm

The Midterm is comprised of both objective and long answer questions.

Date: October 15th.

Grade 20%

e) E. Research Assignment

Students will choose **one** of the following two essays

1. From the perspective of biblical wisdom literature in a 3,000 word term paper address one of the following contemporary themes: *Global Warming, Tolerance and our Neighbour, Human Rights or Consumerism*. The paper should pay attention to any analogous precedents in biblical times. Turabian, SBL or MLA style with a bibliography of not less than 10 items is required.
2. Following the biblical structure for lament, in verse, students will compose a lament of not less than 20 stanzas. The lament may be personal or communal. Students will then unpack the lament explaining and or justifying the various components and context.

Final copies may be emailed but in this case students must use Microsoft Word and it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the professor has received the copy by the posted deadline.

An *above average* paper will be submitted on time. It will respect all formatting requirements including a minimum 10 required sources and be grammatically sound. It will reflect that students have read and engaged their resources acknowledging a full range of ideas on the subject. In addition, based on their readings, students will launch their own hypothesis for consideration.

An *average paper* will be submitted on time or late with mitigating circumstances. It will respect all formatting requirements including the 10 required sources and it will be grammatically reasonable. Their paper will reflect the dominant range of issues on the subject and from their readings will select a position that best represents their own view.

A *below average* paper will be submitted on time or late with mitigating circumstances. It will be incorrectly formatted, and/or be poor grammatically and/or contain between 5-10 required sources. In the end it will reflect the opinions of the author will little substantiation.

An *unacceptable paper* will be submitted late with no mitigating circumstances, and/or contain less than 5 acceptable sources. (Biblical translations are excluded).

Grade 25%

f) F. Final Examination

The final exam is based on the remaining lecture notes and readings following the midterm. The format repeats that of the mid-term.

Grade 20%

E. GRADING SUMMARY (and Percentage to Letter-Grade Breakdown)

Excellent	A+	4.0	91-100	Marginal	D+	1.0	57-59
	A		85-90		D		53-56
	A-		80-84		D-		50-52
Very Good	B+	3.5	77-79	Failure	F	0.0	<50
Good	B	3.0	73-76				
	B-		70-72				
Satisfactory	C+	2.5	67-69				
Adequate	C	2.0	63-66				
	C-		60-62				

F. COURSE POLICIES

Full text to the academic policies, procedures and regulations of Providence College can be found online in the Student Handbook

(<http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/student life/>) and the College Academic Calendar

(http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/programs/registrars_office/calendar/).

2. Late Assignment Policy

All late assignments will be accepted up until the last day of class but will only achieve a maximum grade of C+.

There are no exceptional circumstances that mitigate the above penalty.

3. Plagiarism

Issues of academic integrity will be dealt with according to the policies outlined in the Academic Conduct section of the Student Handbook

(<http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/student life/>), the Providence College document entitled "Academic Dishonesty: The Problem of Plagiarism in Academic Writing," in the Providence College Academic Formation Guide available in the Bookstore. Students are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the policies and with the consequences attached to their violation.

4. Final Exam Policy

All requests to have a final exam rescheduled must be approved by the Academic Committee in accordance with the Examination General Regulations (available in

the College Academic Calendar
http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/programs/registrars_office/calendar/).

5. Missed Exams

Students who miss exams other than a final exam are responsible to contact the professor within one week of the exam date if they still wish to write the exam. Permission to do so will be given to only those students who present evidence or reasonable grounds acceptable to the professor for having missed the exam. The format of the exam will be at the discretion of the professor, with essay questions likely. Students who do not write an exam by at most two weeks after the exam date will receive a grade of zero for that component of the course.

Exceptions to final exams must be processed by appeal to the Academic Committee.

6. Information and Communication Technologies in the Classroom

Student use of information and communication technologies for purposes other than class note-taking is not allowed in the classroom, as students are expected to give their total attention to class activities. Use of cell-phones or iPods is never appropriate in the classroom, and use of laptop computers to play games, chat with others, browse the internet, or engage material not related to the class is always distracting to classmates and disrespectful to the instructor. Unlike some other post-secondary institutions, Providence has not yet found it necessary to ban laptops from the classroom, or prevent wireless internet access in classrooms. Only judicious use of them will keep it that way.

G. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berrigan, Daniel. *Uncommon Prayer: a Book of Psalms*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978.

Brown, William. *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996.

Ceresko, Anthony. *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation*. Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1999.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Praying the Psalms*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007.

_____. *The Psalms: the Life of Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.

Estes, Daniel. *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.

Gerstenberger, Erhard S. *Psalms: Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Gutierrez, Gustavo, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Maryknoll, Orbis

Books, 1987.

Hopkins, Denise Dombkowski. *Journey Through the Psalms*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002.

Jaki, Stanley L. *Praying the Psalms: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Tremper, Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2002.

Westermann, Claus. *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*. Louisville: Eerdmans, 1991.

_____. *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980.

H. COURSE OUTLINE / SCHEDULE

Outlines for the course and other study helps can be found at the following website.
<http://web.mac.com/rfholm/Site/poetry.html>

Late Assignment Submission Form
Providence College

Student Information

Name: _____

Student number: _____

Course Number: _____

Course Title: _____

Instructor: _____

Assignment information

Title of Assignment: _____

Assignment Due Date: _____

Assignment Submission Date: _____

Reason for Lateness: *Please provide an explanation for the lateness of the assignment.*

N.B. Please provide all relevant documentation (e.g. Doctor's note)

Student's Signature: _____

Instructors Use Only

Date Assignment Received: _____

Late Penalty Waived / Assessed

Late Penalty: _____%

Faculty Signature: _____

