

**Religion 213: Prophecy in Ancient Israel**  
**Smith College----Spring 2012**

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### **Course Description**

Prophecy is a subject that is shrouded in misconceptions. There are those who think of the biblical prophets as fortune tellers and charlatans and thus dismiss them as belonging to a primitive past that thankfully has been overcome. Others take biblical prophecies so seriously that they believe they can have advanced knowledge of the way history will unfold by correctly understanding these ancient prophecies.

In this class we will focus on both the institution of prophecy and the individuals who functioned as prophets in ancient Israel. The class will explore the following issues in-depth: What are the different types of prophets that are found within the Hebrew Bible? What role did the prophets play within their larger society? Did different prophets deliver different, or even conflicting prophecies? Can one tell a true prophet from a false prophet? What sort of person became a prophet? What psychological dispositions do prophets exhibit? If prophecy is not simply fortune telling, what is it?

The class will operate in a chronological fashion moving from the earliest instances of biblical prophecy to the latest. It is hoped that by the end of the class students will have a much broader and clearer understanding of this most fascinating subject.

### **Required Books**

1. The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, 4th College edition. It is best to buy a copy of this Bible because it is the one I will use in class. Furthermore it is an excellent Bible and has many study tools within it. Other versions which are in modern English (e.g. Jerusalem, New English) are acceptable if you already own one and cannot afford the Oxford. The Authorized (meaning the King James) is not acceptable because it is not in modern English. It is best to own a Bible that also includes the Apocrypha.
2. A History of Prophecy in Israel, revised edition, by Joseph Blenkinsopp. (Abbreviated as **HPI**)
3. **Course Packet** available from Paradise Copies.

### **Course Requirements**

- 1) Every student will be required to make a brief 4-8 minute presentation summarizing a particular secondary reading and perhaps raising a question about it. You can make up a 1-2 page handout for distribution if you like. This will be worth 5% of your course grade.
- 2) There will be a **Midterm Exam** worth 25% of your course grade. Tentatively scheduled for March 7th.

- 3) Students will be expected to attend the John J. Collins Bible related talk on February 22, 2012 at 4:30PM and to write a reaction paper on the talk reflecting on its content. This will be worth 5% of your final course grade and is due on Monday February 27th in class.
- 4) You will write one research/exegetical paper approximately 9-11 double-spaced pages in length for 25% of your course grade. This will be an exegetical or historical-critical paper on either a text from the prophetic corpus or on an idea, event, or figure of direct relevance to the prophetic corpus, its ancient Near Eastern background, or its later history of interpretation. This paper must include a full bibliography and real footnotes. All topics must be approved by the Professor before you leave for spring break in mid-March. A rough draft of at least 4 pages double-spaced with an outline of where you see things going, plus a preliminary annotated bibliography will be due on **Monday April 9th** in class. If you have it completed sooner please do submit it sooner. The Final draft will be due on **Monday April 30th** in class. It is imperative that students briefly consult with me to discuss topic selection and some starting bibliography, and if need be a second time to discuss their rough drafts. I will plan a library research tour at some point shortly before or after spring break. You should try to use articles and books that are more recent and stay away from ones over 50 years old, unless you are writing on the history of how a passage was interpreted through the ages.
- 5) There will be a **Final Examination** worth approximately 30% of your course grade.
- 6) **Class Attendance and Participation** will be worth approximately 10% of your course grade. **If you skip more than 3 classes I will drop your grade.** To facilitate class discussion each student will come prepared with at least one passage from the biblical reading that they have questions or thoughts about. Ideally students will have their questions or thoughts typed up or written out and in front of them in class as I may on occasion collect your prepared thoughts.
- 7) In order to do well at any of the above requirements it is imperative that you do all of the readings required for each class. If you are pressed for time before a particular session make sure to do at least the primary readings. (I mean those that are selected from the Bible and other ancient sources). But you must eventually complete all the secondary readings in order to do decently on the exams.

## Course Outline

### January 30th-Introduction to the Course

We will begin by giving a general chronology of the biblical period and a brief introduction to the Hebrew Bible and to the history of its composition. Then we will turn toward the issue of prophecy more specifically and begin to explore some of the following questions: What is prophecy? Is it still alive today? Are there different types of prophecy? What is the best way to approach this subject: Chronologically, according to biblical ordering, or thematically? Which texts in the Hebrew Bible speak about prophets and prophecy? How trustworthy are these documents? When were they written and when were they edited?

### February 1st, 6th, and 8th Early Accounts of Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible.

A look at some of the early scattered references to prophecy in the Pentateuch and the books of Samuel and Kings.

## Assignments:

- 1) Read Gen. 20:7; Exodus 32-33, Number 11-14, 22-24; Judges 1-5; 1 Samuel 1-16; 19:18-24 ; 2 Samuel 11-12; 1 Kings 11-12.

2) Read 1 Kgs. 17-2 Kgs. 10.

3) Read Blenkinsopp **HPI** pp. 1-64.

4) Read "The Journey of Wen-Amon to Phoenicia," in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pp. 25-29. **Packet**

5) Read "Prophecy in the Ancient Near East," by Helmer Ringgren. Pages 1-11 in Israel's Prophetic Tradition (edited by Richard Coggins; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). **Packet**

6) Read "Elijah and Elisha in the Context of Israelite Religion," by Thomas Overholt. Pages 94-111 in Prophets and Paradigms (ed. Stephen Breck Reid; JSOTSup 229; Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

### February 13th and 15th -Amos and Hosea

An examination of two of the earliest literary prophets in ancient Israel. These lectures explore the messages of Amos and Hosea as well as literary and historical problems inherent in both books. We hope to show that different prophets in Israel could have very different approaches and very different agendas.

#### **Assignments:**

1) Read all of Amos and Hosea.

2) Read Blenkinsopp **HPI** pp. 65-90.

3) Shalom Spiegel, "Amos vs. Amaziah" from The Jewish Expression, ed. Judah Goldin (New Haven: Yale, 1976), 38-65. **Packet**

4) Read Renita Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor," Semeia 47 (1989): 87-104. **Packet**

February 22nd in place of class you will attend the John J. Collins Talk at 4:30PM

**Assignments:** Try to ask an intelligent question and take notes if possible so you can write a thoughtful reaction paper.

### February 20th, 27th and 29th -Isaiah

An exploration of perhaps the greatest prophet in ancient Israel. We will examine the role Isaiah plays in relation to the larger political structure in which he lives.

#### **Assignments:**

1) Read Isaiah 1-23, 28-33, 36-39, 2 Samuel 7, 2 Kgs. 18-20, and Psalm 2.

2) Read Blenkinsopp **HPI** pp. 97-110.

3) Read Th. Vriezen, "Essential of the Theology of Isaiah," pages 128-146 in Israel's Prophetic Heritage (edited by B.W. Anderson and W. Harrelson; New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

4) "Isaiah and his Children," by J. J. M. Roberts, pages 193-203 in Biblical and Related Studies Presented to

Samuel Iwry, edited by Ann Kort (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985). **Packet**

5) Read Jon D. Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," in Jewish Spirituality, Volume 1, edited by Arthur Green, (New York: Crossroads, 1988), pp. 32-61. **Packet**

6) Read A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, edited by Hayes and Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster), pp. 353-363. **Packet**

### March 5th--Micah

A look at a prophet who was probably Isaiah's contemporary but who preached about different things in a different style, as well as being someone who represented a different group of interests. One major difference between Micah and Isaiah is that Micah is much more critical of the cult and the Jerusalem establishment than is Isaiah.

#### **Assignments:**

- 1) Read all of Micah.
- 2) Read Blenkinsopp **HPI** pp. 91-97.
- 3) "Micah's Debate with Isaiah," by Marvin Sweeney, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 93 (2001): 111-124. **Packet**
- 4) Read H. B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," Journal of Biblical Literature 78 (1959): 285-95. **Packet**

### March 7th- Midterm Exam

#### March 12th, 14th and 26th --Jeremiah

Perhaps the best known among the prophets of ancient Israel, Jeremiah predicted the inevitable end of the Southern kingdom. This prophet is important because we have more personal information about him than about any other prophet in the Hebrew Bible. We will focus class discussions on the nature of Jeremiah's vocation and on questions of true and false prophecy.

#### **Assignments:**

- 1) Read all of Jeremiah and try to get a sense for the different types of material in this book. Also read Deut 13: 1-5; 18:15-22, and 1 Kgs. 13.
- 2) Read Blenkinsopp **HPI** pp. 111-121, 129-147 and 153-165.
- 3) Read Ronald Clements, "Jeremiah 1-25 and the Deuteronomistic History," pages 107-122 and 249-250 in Ronald Clements, Old Testament Prophecy (Westminster/John Knox, 1996). **Packet**
- 4) Read Samuel Balentine, "Jeremiah, Prophet of Prayer," Review and Expositor 78.3 (1981): 331-44. **Packet**

5) Read Gary Yates, "New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26-45," Tyndale Bulletin 57.1 (2006): 1-22.  
**ATLA DATABASE, Library website**

March 28th, April 2nd and April 4th--Ezekiel

Perhaps the strangest prophet in the biblical corpus. An examination of this prophet's message and his life. Emphasis will be placed on understanding how Ezekiel's words and symbolic deeds embody God's message to the community.

**Assignments:**

1) Read all of Ezekiel; Genesis 18; Exodus 32-34.

2) Read Blenkinsopp **HPI** pp. 165-180.

3) "Ezekiel's Dim View of Israel's Restoration," by Baruch Schwartz, pages 43-67 in The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives (ed., John Strong and M. Odell; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). **Packet**

4) Michael Fishbane, Sin and judgment in the prophecies of Ezekiel. Interpretation 38.2 (1984) :131-150.  
**Packet**

5) "'Should our Sister be Treated like a Whore?' A Response to Feminist Critiques of Ezekiel 23," by Corrine Patton, pages 221-238 in The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives (ed., John Strong and M. Odell; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). **Packet**

April 9th and 11th --Habakkuk, Nahum, Zephaniah, Joel, and Obadiah

An examination of several lesser known books in the prophetic corpus.

**Assignments:**

1) Read Habakkuk, Joel, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Obadiah.

2) Read Blenkinsopp, **HPI** pp. 121-129, 148-153, 222-226.

3) Read The Dead Sea Scrolls in English edited by Geza Vermes (Penguin, 1975), pp. 235-243. **Packet**

4) Read Richard Coggins, "An Alternative Prophetic Tradition?," pages 77-94 in Israel's Prophetic Tradition (Edited by Richard Coggins; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). **Packet**

5) Zephaniah by Adele Berlin (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1994), pages 9-16 and 31-47. **Packet**

6) Read Joel as 'Literary Anchor' for the Book of the Twelve," by James Nogalski, pages 91-109 in Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve (ed. James Nogalski; Atlanta: SBL, 2000). **Packet**

April 16th --Second Isaiah

An examination of some of the most sublime prophecies in the Hebrew Bible that are of great importance to Judaism as well as Christianity.

**Assignments:**

- 1) Read Isaiah 34-35, 40-55; Psalms 95-99.
- 2) Read Blenkinsopp, **HPI** pp. 181-193.
- 3) Read Joel Kaminsky, "The Concept of Election and Second Isaiah: Recent Literature." Biblical Theology Bulletin 31.4 (Winter 2001): 135-144. **Packet**

April 18th –Haggai and Zechariah

A look into the late biblical corpus to see some of the factional disputes that began to erupt in the second temple period.

**Assignments:**

- 1) Read all of Haggai and Zechariah 1-8.
- 2) Read Blenkinsopp, **HPI** pp. 194-209.
- 3) Read Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 by David Petersen (Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), pp. 109-125. **Packet**

April 23rd and 25th – Third Isaiah, Deutero-Zechariah, Malachi

A look at the closing chapters of the prophetic corpus in order to reflect upon the theological implications of the structure of the canon.

**Assignments:**

- 1) Read Isaiah 56-66; all of Ruth, Deut. 23, Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 8-13.
- 2) Read Isaiah 24-27, Zechariah 9-14 and all of Malachi.
- 3) Read Blenkinsopp, **HPI** pp. 209-222 and 226-239.
- 4) Read "The Future Fortunes of the House of David: The Evidence of Second Zechariah," by Carol and Eric Myers, pages 207-222 in Fortunate the Eyes that See (edited by Astrid Beck; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). **Packet**

April 30th and May 2nd –Daniel and Jonah

An examination of the literary artistry behind the very popular book of Jonah, with an eye toward what this book tells one about the difficulties prophets faced in antiquity. A brief introduction to apocalyptic eschatology and the idea of resurrection of the dead, two important components of the book of Daniel.

**Assignments:**

- 1) Read Daniel and 2 Maccabees 7.
- 2) Read "Daniel and His Social Word," by John J. Collins, Interpretation 39 (1985): 131-143. **Packet**

3) Read Jonah and read Blenkinsopp, **HPI** 240-245.

### Timeline of Important Dates in the Biblical Period

1800 B.C.E. = Abraham

1280 B.C.E. = The Exodus from Egypt

1240 B.C.E. = The Conquest of Canaan

1020 B.C.E. = King Saul

1000 B.C.E. = King David

960 B.C.E. = King Solomon

922 B.C.E. = The Empire that David and Solomon ruled over split into two smaller nations. These are Israel or Ephraim in the north and Judah in the south.

722 B.C.E. = The Northern Kingdom (Israel) fell when it was conquered by Assyria.

587 B.C.E. = The Southern Kingdom (Judah) fell when it was conquered by Babylonia.

538 B.C.E. = The Edict of Cyrus allowed the first exiles to return and rebuild the temple. This was the beginning of the 2nd temple period.

333 B.C.E. = Alexander the Great conquered the Persian empire and took all its holdings including what was once the territory of biblical Israel.

323 B.C.E. = Alexander the Great died and several Macedonian generals fought over his kingdom. Two major victors emerged. Ptolemy ruled over Egypt, North Africa, and sometimes owned Palestine. Seleucus ruled over Persia, Syria, Asia Minor, and at times owned Palestine.

165 B.C.E. = The Maccabees

63 B.C.E. = Pompey, a Roman general, took Jerusalem.

70 C.E. = The Second Temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was ransacked.

200 C.E. = The Mishnah was compiled by Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Prince)