

REL 312  
Ecstasy, Inspiration and Artifice:  
Prophetic Experience and the Prophetic Word  
in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond  
Fall 2006

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Office Hours: MW 3:00-5:00pm / TTh 10:00-11:00am / by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In this course we will study the phenomenological and sociological dimensions of prophetic activity, contextualize biblical prophecy within its ancient Near Eastern setting, and explore the various concepts of prophecy – and related notions of revelation, authority, etc. – to be found in the Hebrew Bible and in other texts and traditions. We will address the following kinds of questions: How do prophets claim authoritative, divine inspiration? What are the various ‘modes’ of prophetic expression? How do prophetic ‘speeches’ become prophetic ‘texts’? How much of prophecy is ‘inspiration’ and how much ‘artifice’ (not in its pejorative but its classical sense)? How does writing itself become a prophetic activity? And we will briefly chart the later development of notions of prophetic revelation as they unfold in Jewish and Christian traditions. We will also consider the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible from a modern perspective of social justice and liberation theology.

**GOALS AND OUTCOMES:**

- Use the basic vocabulary and methods of the academic study of religion
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably the nature of biblical texts, the historical contexts in which they arose, and their scholarly interpretation
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably major theological questions that have emerged in the history of tradition and the variety of answers that have been proffered for them
- Write respectfully about different religious traditions
- Articulate clearly and knowledgeably the role of religion in the manifold dimensions of social existence

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- *HarperCollins Study Bible*
- [DP] David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002)
- [CD] Carol J. Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000)

- [E-Res] Electronic Reserves - <http://eres.clunet.edu/eres>

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students will:

- Attend all classes and engage in critical discussion of the material for each class period. The importance of doing the readings and coming to class prepared for discussion cannot be overestimated, not least insofar as this will account for 15% of your final grade. Moreover, there will be weekly written responses to the readings that will be part of the participation grade.
- Write two 8-10 page papers. One paper will provide an exposition of a particular prophetic text, making reference where relevant to other ancient texts as well as contemporary scholarly works. The other paper will provide an assessment of a contemporary issue with reference to prophetic texts and prophetic concerns (more about the papers later...). Each paper is 20% of the final grade. Each paper will involve a rough draft followed by revisions and the submission of a final draft.
- Recite a prophetic text from memory (8-10 verses, minimum). 5% of final grade.
- Take a midterm and a final exam. Each 20% of final grade.

Summary of requirements and percentage points:

Participation	15%
Papers	20% (x2)
Recitation	5%
Midterm	20%
Final	20%

**More on the papers:** Writing is one of the most important – and one of the most difficult – things you must learn, and as such I take it quite seriously. Writing well requires foresight and planning, careful organization of the material, and the development of a compelling style or voice. Above all, it requires *practice*.

Do not wait until the last minute to crank out a paper that you don't have time to proofread or revise – it is likely that I will be able to detect this, and your grade may suffer as a result. I advise you to write a detailed outline ahead of time and speak with me about it. I am willing to work with you on writing a good paper – so don't hesitate to work with me!

**More on the Recitation:** This may seem a bit odd, if not downright archaic to you – to have to memorize and recite a prophetic text. But it is one way in which to imagine not only the moment of prophetic speech, but also to experience one important way in which a prophetic message may have been passed along. It is also based on the simple fact that the spoken / heard word is a very different thing from the word on the page, and at the very least this exercise mixes things up a bit.

The passage should be a more-or-less distinct unit from one of the biblical prophets, it should be about 8-10 verses in length, and you should prepare it well ahead of time. You should recite it with feeling and any drama you can muster! Ideally the recitation will be in front of the entire class, though provisions will be made for those of you who are uncomfortable doing this.

### **Policy of Academic Honesty**

All students are expected to know and to conform to the Policy on Academic Honesty found in the *Student Handbook* and to sign the statement specific to this course.

### **Students with Disabilities**

CLU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to **students with various documented disabilities** (physical, learning or psychological). If you are a student requesting accommodations for this course, please contact me at the beginning of the semester and register with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities (Pearson Library, Center for Academic and Accessibility Resources, x3260) for the facilitation and verification of need. I will work closely together with you and your coordinator to provide necessary accommodations.

### **CLASS SCHEDULE – Assignments / readings due on the day listed**

- [1] Th Aug 31: Course Introduction – What is prophecy? What are prophets? What is prophetic literature? How will we proceed in this course?
- Lecture: Prophetic Literature and the Hebrew Prophetic Canon
  - Write your own working definition of prophecy and submit via email by 5pm Friday
- [2] T Sept 5: Prophetic Experience and Prophetic Authority in Israel
- Exodus 20, 31-35; Numbers 11-12; Deuteronomy 18, 34
  - [E-Res] Clements, “Prophecy and the Prophets”
  - [E-Res] Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 1-19 (don’t worry about all the names of scholars, etc. – just get the basic idea)
- [3] Th Sept 7: Ecstasies and other Prophetic Roles in Israel
- 1 Samuel 1-12, 19; 1 Kings, 19-21
  - [E-Res] Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 37-49
  - [DP] 1-18
- [4] T Sept 12: Forms of Prophecy and Prophetic Literature in Israel
- [DP] 18-44
  - [E-Res] Barton, *Oracles of God*, 141-53

- [5] Th Sept 14: Samuel, Redux
- 1 Samuel 1-10; Deuteronomy 17; 2 Samuel 7
  - [E-Res] Albright, "Samuel and the Beginnings of the Prophetic Movement"
  - [E-Res] Barton, "Give Us a King!"
- [6] T Sept 19: Other Early Prophets: Elijah, Elisha, and other Holy Madmen
- 1 Kings 17-22; 2 Kings 2-8 (read ch. 2 carefully)
  - [DP] 226-36
  - [E-Res] Wilson, "The Prophets of the Elijah-Elisha Traditions"
- [7] Th Sept 21: **NO CLASS** (but there is an assignment!)
- [E-Res] Scott, "The Theology of the Prophets"
- [8] T Sept 26: Isaiah of Jerusalem and the Call of the Prophet
- Isaiah 1-11
  - [DP] 47-60
  - [CD] 161-69
- [9] Th Sept 28: Amos of Tekoa
- Amos (all of it – it's not very long)
  - [DP] 184-89
  - [CD] 1-21
- [10] T Oct 3: Hosea
- Hosea (all of it – it's longer than Amos but not by much)
  - [CD] 153-59
  - **FIRST PAPER ASSIGNMENT** – to be written on one of the following (in consultation with the professor):
    - Describe the nature of the prophetic call with reference to at least three specific texts. How is the prophet called? What literary features are employed to recount such a call? What is the function of this 'call narrative' within the overall account?
    - Describe the use of the symbolic act in Hosea (and others where relevant) as a prophetic expression. Explain Hosea's use of specific (and graphic!) imagery and its intended effect. How is the symbolic act related to the metaphor being employed?
    - Compare the concept of 'covenant' in at least three different prophetic writings. How do differing social and historical contexts inform each prophet's presentation of the covenant relationship?
- [11] Th Oct 5: Micah of Moresheth
- Micah
  - [CD] 23-35
  - **FILM:** "Mysteries of the Bible: The Prophets"

[12] T Oct 10: Nahum and Habakkuk

- Nahum; Habakkuk
- [DP] 196-202
- **FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

[13] Th Oct 12: Jeremiah

- Jeremiah 1-3; 18-19
- [DP] 97-103; 128-34

[14] T Oct 17: **NO CLASS – WORK ON PAPERS!**

[15] Th Oct 19: Jeremiah, Redux

- Jeremiah 25; 30-33; 36; 51; Damascus Document (handout)

**FRIDAY OCT 20: -FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER DUE BY 5PM  
-MIDTERM STUDY GUIDE AVAILABLE**

[16] T Oct 24: Lamentations, the Letter of Jeremiah and Pseudepigraphy

- Lamentations; the Letter of Jeremiah (HarperCollins pp. 1628-31)
- **MIDTERM REVIEW SESSION**

[17] Th Oct 26: **MIDTERM**

[18] T Oct 31: Ezekiel son of Buzi

- Ezekiel 1-10; 28-29
- [DP] 137-56

[19] Th Nov 2: Ezekiel, Redux

- Ezekiel 37; 40-48
- [DP] 156-68

[20] T Nov 7: Haggai and Zechariah

- Haggai; Zechariah 1-8
- [CD] 129-34
- [DP] 205-09

[21] Th Nov 9: Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55)

- Isaiah 40-55 (esp. 40-43; 49; 53)
- [CD] 171-81
- *Optional:* [E-Res] Orlinsky, "The So-Called Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53"

[22] T Nov 14: Malachi

- Malachi
- *Optional:* [E-Res] Blenkinsopp, "The Making of the Prophetic Canon"

[23] Th Nov 16: Jonah

- Jonah – read this text carefully, and read it twice!

**FIRST DRAFT OF PAPERS DUE MONDAY, NOV. 17 by 5PM in my office**

[24] T Nov 21: **NO CLASS**

[25] Th Nov 23: **THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS**

**SIGN UP FOR RECITATIONS – IN CLASS OR IN PRIVATE**

[26] T Nov 28: Daniel and the Apocalyptic Tradition

- Daniel (esp. 7-12)
- [CD] 115-19
- [E-Res] Collins, “From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End”

[27] Th Nov 30: Did Prophecy Cease?

- Primary texts to be determined and handed out
- [E-Res] Levison, “Did the Spirit Withdraw from Israel?”

[28] T Dec 5: Some New Developments in the Prophetic Tradition

- Peshet Habakkuk; the Oven of Akhnai (handouts); 1 Corinthians 12-14
- [E-Res] Kugel, “David the Prophet”
- **FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

[29] Th Dec 7: Film and Final Thoughts

- *Optional*: [E-Res] Scholem, “Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism”
- Film: *TBD*

**FINAL EXAM – THURSDAY, DEC. 14, 10:30am – 12:30pm**