

COS 421 Bible IV: Prophets, Psalms & Wisdom Literature

Syllabus and Pre-Course Assignments
Appalachian Local Pastors School
May 2017

Instructor:

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COS Catalog Statement

This course examines God's Word as expressed through Israel's prophets, selected Psalms, and selected passages from Wisdom literature. Students will be able to:

1. Understand the origin, history, and use of these forms of biblical literature among God's people.
2. Exegete these forms of biblical literature.
3. Apply exegesis to preaching, other pastoral responsibilities, and issues of the present day

Instructor Statement of Objectives

The objective of the independent-study assignments are for the student to gain an overview of the wisdom literature, hymnic literature, and prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible and to be able to relate this literature to Christian faith and practice. A more focused objective of the weeklong class session will be for the students to gain interpretative skills for reading, comprehending, and applying these types of biblical literature in their ministry contexts.

Comment on Workload

The assignments below would be equivalent to a little more than one half of what would be required for a one-semester, undergraduate course in college. Allow about 2 hours per assignment. I strongly advise you to schedule your time by dividing this work up into a period of several weeks/months, and that you work through it gradually, methodically, and thoughtfully. It will be most difficult to try to read and respond to all of the assignments, if you begin just a few weeks before these assignments are due. More importantly, you will not gain as much from the assignments. I encourage you to start early, to do only one or two assignments a week, and to try to use something from each assignment for your sermon/teaching ministry, so that this study time complements your normal work load rather than adding to it.

COS Textbooks:

Bible. I will generally use the *New International Version* (NIV) in class, so it is the preferred version; but, any modern translation – not a paraphrase -- will be acceptable.

Required:

- Anderson, Bernhard W.; Bishop, Steven; Newman, Judith. *Understanding the Old Testament*. 5th edition. Prentice Hall, 2007.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Spirituality of the Psalms*. Fortress Press, 2002.
- Clifford, Richard J. *The Wisdom Literature*. Abingdon Press, 1998
- Stulman, Louis, and Kim, Hyun Chul Paul. *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature*. Abingdon Press, 2010.

Reference:

- Birch, Bruce C.; Brueggemann, Walter; Fretheim, Terence E.; and Petersen, David L. *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2nd edition. Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Oxford Bible Atlas*. [Duke: note that you can find good electronic Bible map software as well.]

Comment on Textbooks

COS has selected new textbooks for use in 2015. This includes the adoption of the texts by Brueggemann, Clifford, and Stulman. However, since you have already invested in purchasing the Anderson text, that one will be used as the primary text. Electronic (PDF) copies of readings from the other three texts will be posted for a few assignments (see: <http://www1.appstate.edu/~dukerc/ALPSCOS4212017.html>); however, COS recommends that you purchase them for your library, as well as the reference work by Birch.

General Assignment Instructions (Read and follow the directions carefully!)

Where Students “Go Wrong”

1. Do not start soon enough. Not only is there a lot of work, but it is hard to digest quickly. Please start early and try to make this study time serve double duty by working it into your ministry preparation time, such as sermons and Bible study.
2. Do not follow the instructions closely. Example: follow the template and label the “Challenge” and “Application” sections. It will help keep you on track. These sections serve different purposes!
3. After the first couple of papers, students tend to fall back into a mode of retelling the content and rambling about application.

Please feel free to email me your first couple of responses for feedback. It is essential to get on track at the beginning.

Signed Cover Sheet

I only need one signed ALPS cover sheet for all of the assignments collectively, not one for each assignment.

Textbook Reading and Writing Assignments

All textbooks have their strengths and weaknesses and all authors have their own working assumptions and methodologies. Therefore, one component of the assignments will be to ask you to think carefully about the positions taken in the textbooks, as you should do for any textbook. However, one of the COS goals is for this course to aid you practically in preaching and ministry. Therefore, another component of the assignments will be for you to focus on what is relevant and applicable for you. (When we meet for class in May, we will spend much of our time not on background data, but on how to read and comprehend wisdom, hymnic and prophetic literature.)

The assignments in the textbooks will consist of reading a chapter, or sections in a chapter, and writing either a one-paragraph response (W) or a one-page response (WPg). One of the purposes of writing assignments is to help you to develop the skill of communicating your thoughts clearly in writing. **Therefore, all writing assignments are to be written as if you are writing to a reader who knows nothing about the**

Old Testament or the assignment, not to me. You are to explain your answers and thoughts clearly and succinctly in formal written English with complete sentences and correct grammar. You may wish to ask a friend to read your responses and to analyze them for their clarity of communication. If necessary, rewrite the assignments before sending them to be graded.

Both (W) and (WPg) Paper Format

- Audience:** Write clearly as if to peers, who are not familiar with the OT and have not read the assignments and questions, and not as if writing to me. You want an outside reader to be able to understand you.
- Form:** At least one **typed** paragraph (W) or page (WPg) for each paper, double spaced, 12-point font, one and a quarter inch margins. (Approx. 250 words/page).
- Style:** Rather formal. You may be personal and use 1st person, but these papers are not to be conversational journals or blogs. Try to avoid idioms, slang, contractions, or abbreviations - except standard biblical notation.
- General objective:** These papers are to be a tool that you create. After you have forgotten the details in the textbook, you ought to be able to reread your papers and regain/refresh your memory over the important points.

(WPg) Paper Template (Follow this format with these headings and subheadings)

(Heading)

Section and Assignment #: (e.g. *A. Wisdom, #1.*)

Chapter/section in Anderson:

(Body consists of two sections)

Challenges:

(One half to two thirds of your response. In this section identify and discuss one or two issues in the reading that you found to be important, challenging, confusing, or worth investigating more. Do not retell or summarize the general content of the chapter/reading. I am looking for thoughtful, scholarly interaction about what the author has presented. I do not expect you to agree with everything the author states.)

Application:

(One third to one half of your response. In this section identify and discuss specifically how you can or will apply one or two points of learning or reflection in your ministry. This point may be something that applied to you spiritually or something that you can preach, teach or use in counseling. For example, you might write out a main point/thesis and a sermon/teaching outline.)

Bible Reading Assignments

There will also Bible reading and reflection assignments for which you are to write out some notes (N) and paragraph responses (W). These assignments generally ask you to make observations and to reflect on the nature of the Israelite literature and how it can be applicable today. Do your best to make observations and put something down, even if you think you might be off track.

Copies:

Please make a copy of your assignment responses to bring to ALPS, in case they get lost in the mail.

**COS 421 Bible IV: Prophets, Psalms & Wisdom Literature
Assignments (Due April 1)**

Key:

- Obj. Refers to the main **objective** of the assignment. Do not answer this statement.
- (T) Refers to a question or statement that you are to **think** about before moving on to the next question. You are not required to write out an answer.
- (N) You are to record and submit an answer in **note form**, but you are not required to write out a paragraph in complete sentences.
- (W) You are to record and submit a written (typed) answer of at least a paragraph using formal English.
- (WPg) You are to record and submit a written (typed) answer of about one page (250 words) using formal English.

A. Wisdom Literature

1. Obj.: Reflect on the role of wisdom.
Read: Clifford, Chapt. 1, pp. 17-22. (PDF provided)
(W) Write a paragraph response on what you find to be the role of modern wisdom literature (oral or written) in our culture.
2. Obj.: Gain an overview of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.
Read: Anderson, Chapt. 17.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
3. Obj.: Become acquainted with one form of biblical wisdom literature.
Read: Ecclesiastes.
 - a) (T) A key motif in this book is, “under the sun.” What does that mean? (Remember that the Israelites conveyed God’s sovereignty by speaking about Him as enthroned above the heavens/the sun.)
 - b) (W) Write out a brief response to this book. (Develop any one observation, question, reaction, or comment you have about this text. Do not retell the content.)

4. Obj.: Become acquainted with a second form of biblical wisdom literature.

Read at least Job 1-14 (Prologue and 1st cycle of speeches) and 38-42 (Conclusion and Epilogue), or the whole book if you would like.

Read in a Bible dictionary about the structure/outline of Job.

- a) (T) Job is often characterized as “patient.” Do you think he was patient?
- b) (T) People, particularly in the church, give all sorts of “pat answers” about the reason for suffering and how to handle suffering. What are some of those “pat answers”? How are they like the some of the responses of Job’s friends?
- c) (W) You, as the reader, learn in 1:1-12 why Job is suffering. He questions his sufferings and challenges God. How would you describe God’s speeches and Job’s response (Ch 38-42)? (Are Job’s questions answered? Is he satisfied?)
- d) (W) What do you learn about God and suffering from Job?

e) (T) What do you learn about “the Satan” (= “the adversary”)?

5. Obj.: Uncover some aspects of the historical context of wisdom literature (composer, transmitter, and collector).

a) (N) List some non-biblical proverbs that you know (e.g. “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”).

b) (W) Reflect on: What might have been the specific settings of the origins of your examples? In general, how do people come up with such proverbs? In what settings do you think they were passed on (from whom to whom)? What might prompt the collecting and recording of such proverbs?

Speculate on how the biblical proverbs originated. Verses to guide your thinking:

Read: Set 1: 24:30-34; 25:2; 30:24-28.

Read: Set 2: 10:2,16; 11:4; 12:28; 14:31; 16:2,9; 19:21.

c) (N) What differences do you notice between these two sets regarding their sources/origins?

Read: Pro 1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1.

d) (N) What is the function these verses have in common?

e) (W) What do you learn about the preservation and transmission of proverbs in these verses? What do you learn about the history of the composition of the Book of Proverbs?

f) Read the beginning of Clifford, Chapt. 3, pp. 42-56 (on Proverbs), in the PFD file.

6. Obj.: Discover how proverbial wisdom is meant to be applied.

a) (T) Are proverbs “mechanical-like” rules that were to be followed precisely by the community of faith?

Read and compare Proverbs 26:4 and 5.

b) (T) What is most striking about the instructions in these proverbs?

c) (T) Why do you think an editor would place these verses back-to-back?

d) (W) Come up with guidelines for how such wisdom was meant to be applied. (Is one proverb right and the other wrong? Is one applicable and the other not? What is the audience supposed to do?)

7. Obj.: Characterize the world-view behind Proverbs. (What is the nature of the world envisioned by the authors of Proverbs? How does their world work?)

Read: Pro 1:18-19; 2:7-8; 10:27; 12:21; 13:21.

a) (T) What kind of assumptions or perspective about how the world operates seems to lie behind these passages?

Now read: Pro 11:16b; 13:23; 15:16; 16:8.

b) (T) How might these texts cause you to revise your first impression?

c) (W) Because the books of Job and Ecclesiastes reflect on the presence of evil, suffering, and disorder in the world, they have often been viewed as containing a “higher” order of wisdom than Proverbs. Proverbs is often characterized as simplistic, traditional wisdom, in which the good and the bad get their just rewards in a mechanistic way. Discuss whether or not this characterization of Proverbs is correct.

d) (T) How does your worldview compare or contrast to that of Proverbs?

8. Obj.: Identify the Israelite "key" to living wisely. (If you were an ancient Israelite, what would you need first to "do" to become wise?)
Read: Pro 1:7a; 9:10-12; 15:33; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10.

a) (W) How would you define/explain the Israelite key to wisdom?
(For more insight into the above concept, you might want to check: Deuteronomy 6:24; Psalm 130:4; Isaiah 11:2-3; Acts 10:35; Philippians 2:12; Hebrews 12:28-29.)

9. Obj.: Reflect on the value of the wisdom literature for Christian faith and practice.

(W) Based on the above assignments regarding wisdom literature, explain, as if speaking to a member of your congregation, why it is valuable for Christians to read and study the Old Testament wisdom.

B. Hymnic Literature and Temple Cultus (Form of Worship)

1. Obj.: Reflect on the spiritual role of the Psalms.
Read: Brueggemann, Chapt. 1, pp. 1-15. (PDF provided)
(W) Write a paragraph response on how psalms might relate to spiritual seasons of life (times of orientation, disorientation, new orientation).
2. Obj.: Gain an overview of hymnic literature
Read: Anderson, Chapt. 16
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
3. Obj.: Formulate a tentative definition of hymnic literature.
Read Psalms 21-30.
- a) (N) Record what you think is the major purpose/goal for each psalm separately (not the message, but what the psalmists wants to achieve through each psalm).
b) (N) As you do (a) identify some literary strategies/devices which have been employed by the psalmist in order to achieve his purpose.
c) (T) When just one book from the Old Testament is added to a pocket-size New Testament, it is usually the Book of Psalms. Why has this OT book been so valuable to the Church?
d) (W) Respond to either: What has the Book of Psalms meant to you in your Christian walk? or What role do you think the Book of Psalms should have in your future Christian walk?
4. Obj.: Study a Psalm
Find a modern Bible commentary on the Psalms, which examines them according to their forms and functions. Study your favorite psalm.
- (N) Fill out the "Hymnic Literature Study Form" (attached below) as well as you can. (You might not know how to diagram the structural patterns of "Analyze #'s 5, 6," but do all the steps that you can.)
Write down what commentary resource you used.
If you have the Brueggemann book, in the Application section of the study form, you might want to reflect on how the psalm can serve in times of disorientation or new orientation.
5. Obj.: Reflect on the implications of Israelite worship for New Testament theology.
Read the attached two-page outline (below), "Holiness: Purity, Sacrifices," and/or, if possible read Bible encyclopedia articles on the holiness system.

(W) How does your understanding of the Israelite holiness system and sacrifices influence your understanding of God's holiness and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus?

6. Obj.: Reflect on the value of the hymnic literature for Christian faith and practice.

(W) Based on the above assignments regarding the Psalms and Temple worship, explain, as if speaking to a member of your congregation, why it is valuable for Christians to read and study the Psalms.

C. Prophetic Literature

Note: if you took COS 211 Hebrew Bible I, using Anderson, then you have already read Chapters 9-15 for their historical overview. In the Anderson assignments below, you do not have to read the whole chapter; rather, focus on the material about the prophets.

1. Obj.: Explore why and how prophetic words might have been recorded.

Suppose the following: In the archives of a church you have discovered a fairly recently written text (50 years old) of an event that happened 300 years ago (well before audio recording). This text vaguely tells about a large church community that was suffering from division among its members over some issue. One Sunday, one of the lay people stood up in the middle of the service and delivered a message to the people about the issue. By the next Sunday, in response to the message, the people had changed their minds and behavior. They came together in unity and resolved the issue. The document you have found contains the message this person spoke and the general context but without all the details of what the division was about.

Speculate:

- a) (T) For what reasons, by whom, and in what form might this message have been preserved initially? How much would you expect the initial preservation to agree in form and content with what was literally spoken?
- b) (T) For what reasons, by whom, and in what form would this account have been preserved for later generations? How much would you expect this later account to agree in form and content with the first account?
- c) (W) What would you as a modern audience need to do or find out in order to understand the message as fully as possible? What comparisons and contrast to this process would you expect to apply to the message of the biblical prophets?

2. Obj.: Form an overview of OT Prophets and Prophecy.

a) Prequestion (W): Define "prophet," and "prophecy" based on your own understanding.

b) Then, read a Bible dictionary article on "prophets, prophecy."

(W) Explain how your definitions would change. If they would not change, what is something new that you learned?

3. Obj.: Identify some characteristics of the Israelite prophets and their messages.

Read the following sets of texts:

a) Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, and Ezekiel 1-2;

b) Isa 1:10-20, Jer 2:1-13;

c) Isa 11:1-9, Jer 31:31-34.

- a) (N) Identify what the verses in each set (a,b,c) have in common.
- b) (W) Summarize what someone can learn about OT prophets from these texts.

4. Obj.: Learn about the early non-written prophetic traditions (Elijah, Elisha).
Read Anderson, Chapt. 8: pp 228-34; 246-56.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
5. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of the eighth-century prophets (Amos, Hosea).
Read Anderson, Chapt. 9: pp 267-89.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
6. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of the eighth-century prophets (Isaiah, Micah).
Read Anderson, Chapt. 10: pp 290-1, 294-323.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
7. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of the seventh-century prophets (Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk).
Read Anderson, Chapt. 11: pp 331-8, 353-4.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
8. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of the seventh-century prophet Jeremiah.
Read Anderson, Chapt. 12: pp 355-85.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
9. Obj.: Explore the life of Jeremiah.
Read the attached case study on Jeremiah, "Being A Prophet"
(W) Write about a 250 word (one page) response.
10. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of the exilic prophet Ezekiel.
Read Anderson, Chapt. 13: pp 388-408.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
11. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of the post-exilic prophets.
Read Anderson, Chapt. 14: pp 425-459.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
12. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of the post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Obadiah, Malachi, Joel).
Read Anderson, Chapt. 15: pp 470-7, 485-9.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
13. Obj.: Learn about the setting and messages of Jonah and Daniel.
Read Anderson, Chapt. 18: pp 554-6, 573-87.
(WPg) Write one-page paper on challenges and application as per instructions in syllabus.
14. Obj.: Practice exploring the study of a prophetic book.

Pick out one of the written prophetic books that you would like to study. Using study aids, such as a Bible dictionary and commentary:

a) Fill out (N) the “Prophets Research Form” (attached below) on that prophet and book. b)(W) Write a paragraph on the relevance of the message of that book for today (E. 3. on the form).

15. Obj.: Reflect on implications of the crisis context of much of the prophetic literature. Read Stuhlman and Kim, Chapt. 1, pp. 9-24. (PDF provided)
(W) Accepting the authors’ thesis that the prophetic literature is both disaster and survival literature, write a paragraph response to ONE of the following prompts:
- a) How does their thesis lead to new insights or points of application for you?
 - b) How can you or your congregation relate to the prophetic literature as disaster and survival literature?
 - c) How does being a citizen of a power nation and a safe culture make comprehending the prophets difficult?

16. Obj.: Reflect on the value of the prophetic literature for Christian faith and practice.

(W) Based on the above assignments regarding the prophets, explain, as if speaking to a member of your congregation, why it is valuable for Christians to read and study the Old Testament prophets.

HYMNIC LITERATURE STUDY FORM

Analyze (N) (Many of the "steps" are not sequential, but simultaneous.)

1. What is the type and function of this psalm?
2. What are the historical and cultic settings?
3. Outline the general structure.
 - a) What are the main sections and their motifs?
 - b) What is the connection/flow of thought among sections?
4. Identify the flow of thought and topics within each section.
5. Identify/diagram the structural patterns among the verses.
What impact are these structures meant to have?
6. Identify/diagram the parallelism (balanced structures) within verses. What are the relationships between the balanced elements?
7. Identify the figures of speech and what each one evokes.
8. Focus on the graphic language and ask what it is meant to evoke.
9. Look for allusions to other OT events and texts. What impact do they add to the psalm?
10. If the title/superscription gives a setting (e.g. in the life of David), look up that event and explore what this perspective would add to the themes and mood of the psalm.

Synthesize (N)

1. What is/are the psalmist's purposes for this enacting this psalm?
2. What is the psalmist's situation (personally, and cultic setting)?
3. What is the psalmist feeling and experiencing?
4. What is/are the psalmist's thesis/theses?

Application (W)

1. In what ways do you identify or empathize with the psalmist's situation and/or feelings?
2. What is the psalmist teaching about the God-humanity relationship and/or about how life works?
3. How can (or should?) this psalm provide a model for you when speaking to God or others about God?

Holiness: Purity, Sacrifices

Intro: Both within and outside of the official cultic (Temple) practices, Israelite life confronted the people with the reminder that they were to be holy, because Yahweh was holy.

A. Purity System

1. People, animals, and objects were classified either: "clean/pure" or "unclean/impure" [clean/pure = lack of impurity]
2. Origin (ANE): Impurity often seems to be associated with a spiritual, demonic realm of external forces.
3. Israel: Impurity is not associated with a demonic realm, but seems to be associated with things that symbolized death or chaos. (Yahweh was a God of order and life.) Unclean objects: out-of-place objects representing life ("spilled" semen and menstrual blood), corpses, lepers (i.e. they had the appearance of death), animals with characteristics out of place for their domain (e.g. lobsters walk in the sea), mixed realms (crossbreeding animals, mixing seed in a field).
4. Impurities were of two types: permitted and prohibited. A person could become unclean through normal and necessary actions (e.g. sexual intercourse, burying a family member). Such impurity was permitted and not a sin, but the uncleanness had to be removed before coming into contact with the holy. Prohibited impurity arose from the mismanagement of permitted impurity or from breaches of the moral realm.

B. Holiness System (Holy things were things "set apart" for divine use.)

1. People, animals, objects, places, times were classified as either: "profane/common" or "sacred/holy" [profane = lack of holiness].
2. There were also "**gradations**" of holiness: temple architecture, temple admission and personnel, sacrificial system, sins, etc., so that some things were more holy or more impure than others.

C. Purity/Holiness Relationships

1. The two 'systems' of purity and holiness were interrelated: Something could be profane/common (a layperson) and be clean or unclean. Something could be holy (a sacrifice) and be clean (prior to use) or unclean (remnants of the sacrifice after use to remove impurity).
2. In general, there was a scale (unclean -- common -- less holy -- more holy) in which contact between non-adjacent levels was forbidden.

D. Impurity and Purification

1. Permitted impurity generally made the person or object unclean, but also could pollute the sanctuary in severe cases (see #2 below). The person or object was made clean again by one or more means: washing, waiting a certain length of time, offering certain sacrifices (see "purgation offering," below), or by disposal of the impure thing.
2. Prohibited impurity/sin polluted the dwelling place of God (land, temple) and possibly the person, and appears to stand as an impediment to communion with God. In some cases, purification was possible through the same means as for permitted impurities, but usually required purgation sacrifices to cleanse (symbolically) God's dwelling place. In other cases purification was not possible. The guilty party might be executed, "cut off," or expelled from the land (see Leviticus 20). Continued pollution could result in all Israel being "vomited out" of the land (Lev 18:28).

E. Sacrificial System (See Leviticus 1-16)

1. Origin in the Ancient Near East: The root concept seems to be to provide a **gift of food** for the gods, because the gods could be manipulated and "bribed." Sometimes the whole sacrifice was to be consumed by flames, going up to the gods. Other times, after a sacrifice had been "set apart" (made holy) to the gods, the one who offered the sacrifice ate part, perhaps effecting communion/unity with the gods by ingesting something of the divine realm. Such actions could be a gesture of attempted manipulation (magic) or could be out of respect.

2. Israel: The feeding vocabulary and symbolism persisted (e.g. the altar was the "table of God"), but there was a theological level that rejected the concept of a person being able to feed and manipulate Yahweh. At this theological level, the sacrificial system was seen as given by Yahweh to Israel as a means of making atonement/reconciliation. The sacrifices were given then by Israel in obedience and as gifts of respect back to Yahweh (see Lev 17:10-14).
3. Main types:
 - a. Most holy sacrifices/offerings:
 - 1) **whole burnt offering** - totally consumed by flames. Seems to be connected to making atonement for sins (Job 1:5; Lev 1:4) and/or serving as a gift which invoked the deity's presence.
 - 2) **purgation/sin offering** - part eaten by priests. Removes/purges impurities. Offerer repents, places hand on head of animal, then it is killed. The blood (life) of the offering was applied to the cultic objects (e.g. altar) to symbolically cleanse God's place and remove the impediment of impurity. The more serious the sin, the closer the blood was brought to the Holy of Holies (e.g. for deliberate sins, blood was sprinkled in front of the "mercy seat" in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, see Lev. 16:1-19). (It does not appear that the purgation offering cleansed the person of sin; but that by atonement the offence was forgiven to the repentant sinner [Lev 4:20,26,31].) Such offerings were primarily for permitted impurity and **involuntary** sins. Only sacrifices on Day of Atonement were for **willful** sins.
 - 3) **reparation/guilt offering** - part eaten by priests. Similar to purgation sacrifice, but has the idea of payment for a debt and can be replaced by a monetary equivalent.
 - 4) **cereal offering** - part eaten by priests
 - b. Less holy sacrifice: **well-being/peace offering** - main part eaten by the one who offered the sacrifice along with his extended family as a celebrative feast. There were three subtypes: thanksgiving, vow, freewill. This type is mentioned frequently in Psalms.

Main sources: "Holiness," "Unclean, clean," **Anchor Bible Dictionary**, 6 vols. edited. by D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

Prophets Research Form

A. Setting

1. Political situation: what kingdom? what kings? dominant power? etc.
2. Economic and social situation: prosperous? distinction among classes? etc.
3. Religious situation

B. Biographical Information

1. Dates
2. Area of origin and of ministry
3. Class, occupation, education, etc.
4. Call?
5. Type of prophet: guild member? court? cult? fringe? ecstatic? etc.
6. Etc.

C. Text

1. Condition of Hebrew text
2. Understanding of text (rare words, grammatical problems, etc.)
3. Indications of history of composition and redaction.
4. Kinds of material present (Forms): autobiography, biography, hymnic, types of oracles, etc.
5. Outline of contents

D. Message/Theology

1. Main message and subsidiary themes
2. Theology
3. Key texts

E. Issues/Questions

1. Unresolved scholarly issues
2. Questions/issues raised for you personally
3. Reflections on relevance of message for today

BEING A PROPHET¹

(Case Study on Jeremiah)

Background

Around the time the Israelites chose to live under rule by a king we learn that there emerged also a category of persons known as “prophets.” The Hebrew word “prophet” means “spokesman,” that is “one who speaks on behalf of another.” These persons in ancient Israel who functioned as prophets were persons who were particularly devout and especially sensitive to God. They often said or announced important things they claimed Yahweh told them to say to other persons. Although we do not always know how they learned or determined what God would have them say, they usually began or ended their remarks with “thus says the Lord” (God is saying to you). With this phrase they attempted to make it clear that these were not their ideas, but that they were simply bearing a message that they had received from Yahweh.

Being a faithful prophet of Yahweh had serious drawbacks. It was not a paid position. It often made a lot of enemies. The prophets’ messages were often critical of particular persons or of society’s practices. The hearers tended to be offended and either totally ignored the prophet, or became hostile and sought revenge. Many were actually killed because of what they said. .

The Situation

Jeremiah was a young man who was raised in a particularly religious home. His ancestors had served as priests in Israel’s religious services. He knew the familiar stories of prophets who had lived before his time.

As a young man Jeremiah had a strong feeling that he should be a prophet. Whenever he thought about it he resisted the idea. But he could not shake the thought. He came to believe that God had intended for him to be a prophet even before he was born. He finally agreed to give in to the conviction he couldn’t shake when he felt he received a message from Yahweh. As unpleasant as the task was going to be he believed that God would be close to him, would give him courage, and would protect him.

He started by going to the Capitol City, Jerusalem, and declaring publicly in the streets that the country was on the wrong track and that the leaders, priests and prophets were nothing but pagans and criminals. We have no record whether anyone took him seriously and repented of wrongdoing.

Before long, Jeremiah began to experience persecution and discouragement. He discovered that some of his unhappy relatives were laying a plot to kill him. Whenever he tried to warn people that God would bring judgment on them for sinful practices, people who falsely called themselves prophets contradicted him and told the people more pleasant things.

Jeremiah retreated from society believing that the times were so wicked that he shouldn’t socialize with the people. He felt that God forbade him to attend public weddings and funerals or to even get married. Gripped by loneliness and isolation he began to feel that God had dealt unfairly with him. In a desperate prayer overheard by his only close friend, Baruch, he angrily charged God with abusing him by suckering him into the job of prophet. In the face of all the hostilities, ridicule and loneliness he faced, he told God he wished he had never been born.

¹ An original form of this case study was developed by Dr. Leroy Brightup of Friends University and given to me to use and adapt. (Rodney Duke, Appalachian State Univ., 1998)

Jeremiah gave serious consideration to quitting. However, he experienced messages from God so strongly that he described them as “fire” in his bones. He knew he could not stop preaching what God gave him to say.

He went to the Temple and in front of worshippers he declared that they were not serious. He said they were just using religion for a cover up of their sinful practices. He said God would soon destroy the Temple. That really got people mad and they arrested him on charges of speaking evil of God’s holy Temple. His court trial nearly ended in a death sentence for him.

Speaking out for God continued to bring persecution down on him. Some unhappy priests locked him in stocks overnight. When he wrote down his messages from God the king got the record and burned it. When he tried to get the king to surrender to an approaching army before anyone got hurt or killed he was thrown into an old well for being a traitor and not believing in his country.

When the Babylonians did attack the city it was totally destroyed. Homes, palaces, walls, and the Temple were all pulled down. There was widespread death and destruction. Jeremiah did not die in the attack, but shortly afterwards some Jewish men trying to escape to save their lives took him hostage to Egypt. Even there Jeremiah continued to condemn his companions for their lifestyle and worship of pagan gods. He declared that they would die by sword or famine for sin. They retorted that they had no intention of listening to him, but planned to go right on living as they had been.

We have no information on how, where, or when he died, but it is clear that for all Jeremiah went through in doing what he thought God wanted him to do he had very little effect. Practically no one listened to his warnings of destruction and pleas for repentance.

To Think About

Read the following: Jeremiah 1-2:13; 11:18-23; 16:1-13; 20:7-18; 26:1-24. Then think about being a prophet. In the light of his ineffectiveness do you think Jeremiah was wrong about feeling he should be a prophet? Do you think God has a life plan for everyone or just for certain people? Do you think He would actually decide someone should have a job like “prophet” before he or she is born? How do you think you would feel if you were called to be a prophet today?

Do you think the prophets were right to declare publicly that people were sinners and announce God’s ‘judgment on them? Was it right for Jeremiah to make charges of sin against priests and worshippers in front of the Temple? Why do you think they were ready to kill Jeremiah for that?

Do you think Jeremiah would have had more success in his ministry if he had mixed with the people more? Did he spoil his influence by not attending social functions? Do you think his decision not to marry helped or hurt his effectiveness? Do you feel God expected too much of him by not permitting him to have a home and family in which to experience love and companionship in difficult times? Is this a good model for people in religious service today?

Do you think Jeremiah was out of order in his angry accusations against God? Do you think God was shocked? Why didn’t God strike him dead for such an outburst? Is it ever right to tell God exactly how we feel when we are angry or when we feel He ad let us down? Do you think Jeremiah was out of line to even think about quitting as a prophet? Does that mean he questioned whether he was really called by God? Is thinking about quitting a form of sin?

Jeremiah seemed confident when he began being a prophet that God would help him and protect him. How can you account for all the persecution and suffering he went through? Do you think it is right for God to permit so much opposition and physical abuse when a person is doing everything possible to serve Him faithfully? Is the suffering Jeremiah experienced really an indication that he is not serving God faithfully?

Was it wrong for Jeremiah to encourage the king to surrender to an enemy army without a battle? How would you react to someone who keeps declaring publicly that American troops should surrender to some opposing force (Russia, Iraq, Somalia, etc.)? Should persons like that be silenced by force if that is what it takes?

If you heard a prophet proclaiming a message on our streets today, how do you think you would respond? If they behaved in unusual ways and made unpopular remarks as Jeremiah did, what would you think of them? Do you think persons like that should be removed from society, forcibly if necessary? Could you accept that someone like that was a true messenger from God?

To Write Out

Try to put yourself in Jeremiah's situation. In about 250 words (1 typewritten page) tell how you would feel about his situation and how you would respond to it. Give thoughtful reflection to the chapters from Jeremiah and the questions above. Then present your views and position in a well-organized fashion. Refer to the Bible passages to help clarify or support your position.

Go to this link for the complete syllabus and additional reading:

<http://www1.appstate.edu/~dukerk/ALPSCOS4212017.html>

PDF's of select readings:

Brueggemann, *Psalms*, pp. 1-15.

Clifford, *Wisdom*, pp. 17-22, 42-57.

Stuhlman and Kim, *Prophetic*, pp. 9-23.

Duke, "Priests," pp. 646-55.

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