

APPALACHIAN LOCAL PASTORS SCHOOL—MARCH 2017

Course: COS 121—Bible I: Introduction

Date: March 3-4 & 17-18, 2017

Location: London, KY

Instructor: Dr. Russell B. Sisson (rsisson@unionky.edu)

Course Description

This course introduces biblical interpretation. Attention is given to the inspiration, formation, and function of the canon and the development of a methodology of interpretation consistent with the nature of scripture. The importance of the Bible as a witness to the life and faith of ancient Israel and earliest Christianity will be emphasized.

Objectives

- * Articulate the place of scripture in the life of the congregation and the role of the pastor in interpretation.
- * Understand the inspiration and formation of the canon and its authority within the community of faith.
- * Understand and apply historical, literary, and theological approaches to various types of literature in scripture using Genesis, Hosea and Amos, Mark, and Philippians.
- * Develop a method of exegesis consistent with the nature and authority of the Bible.

Textbooks

* *NRSV—New Interpreter's Study Bible*

* *The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary*

* *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*

John Hayes & Carl Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*

Bernhard Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*

* These are basic reference works that students will use in this course and subsequent Bible courses in the Course of Study. Students should have *NRSV—New Interpreter's Study Bible* from a previous class or Licensing School.

PRE-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Students write *two* papers (each 750-1000 words, or 3-4 typed pages double-spaced) on topics related to the biblical writings examined in the course. Papers may be *slightly* longer than 1000 words, but students are encouraged to write concisely and speak *directly* to the point of a question or topic. Cite textbook readings as you use material from them. Pre-class assignments are designed to prepare students for discussions in class sessions. Two other papers are required. One written during the week the class meets and is turned in at the last class meeting. The other paper is submitted by email within one week of the final class meeting. Pre-class papers must be submitted to the ALPS registrar before the deadline established for pre-class work. Students who wish to submit papers directly to the instructor *prior to this deadline* for review may do so. Instructions for submitting papers directly to the instructor will be sent out after the instructor receives a list of registered students.

POST-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Students write a paper at the end of *each* weekend class meeting. The first paper is submitted in class on second weekend session. The second paper is submitted by email following the last weekend session. That paper must be received within one week of the last meeting.

GRADE

A student's grade for the course is the average of the four papers written.

PRE-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1: Testimonies to Order and God's Purpose in Creation

Readings: (1) Articles on *Genesis*, *monotheism*, and *polytheism* in *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, (2) "Study 1—Prologue: In the Beginning" in the Anderson textbook, (3) "Historical Criticism" and "Form Criticism" in the Hayes and Holladay textbook, and (4) Genesis 1-11 in the *New Interpreter's Study Bible*.

Pre-class Paper 1: Close analysis of Genesis and the other four books of the *Torah* suggests that the anonymous Hebrew scribes who produced what we read were compilers and organizers of existing traditions. For example, the creation accounts in Gen. 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-3:24 were traditions passed on orally before they were written down, and the Hebrew scribes who produced the text of Genesis as we have it placed the two accounts side by side. We thus need to consider how each account of creation functioned in the religious life of the ancient Israelites both before and after they were written down in the form we have them. For now, we will examine Gen. 1:1-2:3. Answer the following questions in an essay on the theme of this assignment. Your essay should be 750-1000 words.

- (1) Note the repeated words and phrases--a common characteristic of orally transmitted tradition—which give Gen. 1:1-2:3 a formal structure. For example, before each of God's creative acts, the text reads, "And God said, 'Let there be ...'" What other words and phrases are repeated along with this? What words and phrases mark the beginning and end God's creative acts? (You should be able to identify two or three phrases, depending on whether you focus on shorter phrases or longer phrases.) Are some of these words or phrases repeated more often than others?
- (2) Based on your answers to the question above, is there a pattern or structure in the description of God's creative acts in the sequence of six days? Note where God expresses a judgment about the value or quality of these creative acts. Where do these expressions occur? Do these expressions of judgment about creation correspond to steps or stages in the six-day progress? Think of how each of God's creative acts sets the stage for an act that follows and what makes the sequence of creative acts complete.

- (3) Most of the repeated words and phrases occur in the description of God's creative acts on the sixth day. What significant, perhaps peculiar, words or phrases used here mark this as the end of the process and the fulfillment of God's purpose in creation?
- (4) The account ends with a description of what God does on the seventh day. Note how God declares his creation to be "holy." The priests who conducted sacrifices were authorities on holiness; thus scholars have called this the "priestly" account of creation. Read Psalms 8 and 104, which appear to be a songs composed for praising God. How do these songs of praise presume that humans are able to recognize in creation what God himself recognizes when he creates the heavens and earth? Where in Psalm 104 is there an indication that the order God whose imposes on chaos is fragile and capable of disruption? How is this form of testimony essential to worship *then and now*? In addition to the translation and notes in the *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, you may want to read the translation and notes in the *New American Bible*. Here are links to the *NAB*: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1> and <http://www.usccb.org/bible/psalms/8>.
- (5) The creation account in Gen. 2:4b-3:24 describes how the original order and harmony of God's creation is disrupted. How does this disruption of order relate to further acts of disruption described in Genesis 4-11? How does God act to restore order after each of these disruptions? Although order is not restored perfectly, what are the prospects for human well-being in God's created world at the end of Genesis 11?
- (6) What do these two psalms and Genesis 1-11 teach us about God's purpose in creation, the place of humans within the created order, and what is a stake in our recognition of both? Why should the praise and acknowledgment of God's purpose in creation central to worship?

Assignment 2-- Comparing Amos and Hosea: Prophetic Visions of Judgment and Renewal in Their Times and Beyond

Readings: (1) Anderson, *Unfolding Drama*, Studies II-IV, (2) articles on *covenant, prophets, Amos, and Hosea* in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, (3) discussions of Amos and Hosea in Hayes and Holliday, *Biblical Exegesis* (see index for page numbers), and (4) Hosea and Amos in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*.

Assignment: The prophets Amos and Hosea were both active in the northern kingdom of Israel in the mid-8th century BC. At the time, the northern kingdom enjoyed peace and prosperity, but this was about to end. In 722, Assyrians invaded and conquered Israel. Since written collections of the oracles and teachings of these prophets were likely produced sometime after this catastrophic event, the fall of Israel undoubtedly was viewed as vindication of their messages. We may assume that few in Israel heeded the warnings of either Amos or Hosea. Nevertheless, their messages are preserved to serve as a prophetic witness to future generations. The ending of Hosea suggests how it and presumably other prophetic writings are to be studied. Bring to the first class meeting written answers to these questions (to be collected in class).

- (1) What activities in Israel do Amos and Hosea condemn? Are they the same or different? What evidence is there in the message of these prophets that Israel suffers from a religious complacency or false sense of religious security?
- (2) What credibility problems do Amos and Hosea likely encounter? What makes each an unlikely candidate to be a prophet? How do their backgrounds actually lend credibility to their message?
- (3) On what basis might Hosea be characterized as a *covenant* prophet? Note how Anderson (Study III) describes Jeremiah as a covenant prophet. How is Hosea similar to Jeremiah?
- (4) On what basis might Amos be considered a *wisdom* prophet? How do the moral imperatives of Amos belong to a more universal and less legalistic covenant than the Mosaic covenant? Note here Anderson's discussion of Isaiah (Study IV), particularly "Second Isaiah" whose vision of a restored Israel is found in chaps. 40-55. How is Amos similar to Second Isaiah? How is God dealing with Israel on a stage which allows all nations to witness and learn about the God of Israel?
- (5) What makes the messages of Amos and Hosea powerful witnesses to God in the life of ancient Israel? What makes their messages powerful testimonies to God and God's expectations of people in the world today? What are the parallels in today's church to Israel's transgressions and forgetfulness of its traditions?

Pre-Class Assignment 3: Jesus and the Restoration of God's People

Readings: (1) Articles on "gospel," "Mark," "John the Baptist," "Pharisees," "synagogue," and "apocalyptic literature" in *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, (2) "Study VI—Victory Through Defeat" in the Anderson textbook, (3) "Form Criticism" in the Hayes and Holladay textbook (focus on the authors' discussion of the function of Christian traditions preserved in the gospels), and (4) Gospel of Mark in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*.

Pre-class Paper 2: In Mark's account of Jesus' visit to the temple in Jerusalem (11:15-19), the episode is preceded and followed by a split account of Jesus' cursing a fig tree which bears no fruit. In the first part (11:12-14), Jesus curses the tree; in the second part (11:20-25), the disciples discover that tree has withered and Jesus comments on the significance of this. Answer the following and incorporate your answers into an essay on the topic, "Jesus' Prophetic Witness in Word and Deed." In Mark's account of Jesus' visit to the temple in Jerusalem (11:15-19), the episode is preceded and followed by an account of Jesus' cursing a fig tree that bears no fruit. In the first part (11:12-14), Jesus curses the tree; in the second part (11:20-25), the disciples discover that tree has withered and Jesus comments on the significance of this. Answer the following and incorporate your answers into an essay on the topic, "Jesus' Prophetic Witness in Word and Deed." Your essay should be 750-1000 words.

- (1) How does this relate to what Jesus says and does in the temple? How do Jesus' words and actions in Mark 11:15-25 link him with Hebrew prophets before him? What echoes of earlier prophets are heard in the words of Jesus?

- (2) Is there a connection between what Jesus says and does here and what John the Baptist says about him at the beginning of the gospel? How might Jesus' words and actions mark *the kingdom of God (the true restoration of Israel) being at hand*--his opening proclamation in the gospel?
- (3) How might Jesus' comments on the discovery of the withered fig tree relate to concerns and anxieties of Christians living in the years after the destruction of the temple? Relate this to Jesus' teachings in Mark 13. How would his words and actions have been understood by Christians who witnessed or heard of the destruction of the temple forty years after the death of Jesus? (The Gospel of Mark is believed to have been written around this time.) Jesus concludes his apocalyptic teaching with a warning about the futility of predicting "the day or the hour" (13:32). How does this compare with what the voice of the whirlwind speaks to Job (Job 38)?
- (4) Mark's Gospel begins with prophetic words which in their original context envision of the restoration of Israel. These words describe the appearance of John the Baptist, which is followed by Jesus's appearance proclaiming "the kingdom of God is at hand." Much of what follows in the gospel narrative focuses on opposition to the proclamation and disbelief in the messenger. Who is opposed to Jesus and why? Cite examples. Even Jesus' own disciples struggle to believe at points in the narrative. How might the Gospel of Mark provide hope to its *first readers* that the kingdom of God *truly* is at hand despite what happened to John and Jesus and what might be happening around *them*?
- (5) How can Mark's account of the prophetic mission of Jesus teach today's church about its mission in the world?