

**United Methodist Course of Study
Buffalo, New York Extension**

COS 421 – Bible IV: Prophets, Psalms, and Wisdom Literature

January 13-14 & February 17-18, 2017

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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.

Required Texts: Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*

Louis Stulman & Hyun Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature*

Richard Clifford, *Wisdom Literature*

Oded Borowski *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2003)

Reference: Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terrence Frietham, David Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament, 2nd Edition**

Please Bring your Study Bible to both sessions

Assignments

There will be readings and written essays for each session. Please try to balance giving sufficient detail in your answers with keeping them focused and concise. Your answers for Sessions 1 and 2 should total no more than 20-25 pages for the course (not 20-25 pages for each session).

Readings and essay answers should be completed before each session and handed in at the beginning of the Friday class.

Please adhere to the estimated page lengths given in the instructions below. You should use Times New Roman font size 12, double spaced, with standard margins. Include your name and essay number in the heading and staple each essay separately. You may give them to me in a folder with pockets if that is easier for you but do not place the papers in a three hole binder. Please bring your essays to the first session. *If you have questions about the reading and/or essays please feel free to email or call me before the first class.*

for Session 1:

1. *In New Oxford Annotated Study Bible:*

- a. Read the Books of Jonah, Isaiah, and Daniel including the notes and commentary on each page, and read (or review) the introductory essays to each book. – NOTE – since Isaiah is very long, focus on Chapters 1-11 and 49-55, but try to skim the rest of it for themes.
- b. Review the General Essays at the end of the New Oxford Annotated Study Bible, particularly the following: (note – depending on your edition, some sections may be different or unavailable – do your best)
 - The Canons of the Bible
 - Textual Criticism
 - Translation of the Bible into English
 - The Hebrew Bible's Interpretation of Itself
 - Cultural Contexts (all)(the rest of the essays should be reviewed for Session 2)

2. Read the following:

Louis Stulman & Hyun Paul Kim, *You Are My People: An Introduction to Prophetic Literature*
pp. 1-62 in *Daily Life in Biblical Times*

3. After reading the material, please answer the following questions. If possible, you may also consult a multi-volume Bible commentary, such as *The Anchor Yale Bible*, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, *Eerdmans Critical Commentary*, or *The Old Testament Library*.

Please answer these questions for the Books of Jonah, Isaiah, and Daniel, unless otherwise specified. You may write a combined answer for all three books rather than a separate answer for each. I am aware that the books are too lengthy for a comprehensive summary so please focus on what you see as some of the most important examples.

1. What questions do you have about these readings? Keep a list of questions and select one or two questions to investigate (using your study bible and other resources) – what explanations did you find? (1-1.5 pages)
2. How do these texts continue the themes of covenant and obedience from Genesis, Exodus and the historical books? (1-1.5 pages)
3. Compare Jonah, Isaiah and Daniel – they are all prophets but they differ in form and content. How are they similar? How are they different? How do these differences affect their themes? (1-1.5 pages)
4. Scholars have debated whether Daniel was written during the Babylonian Exile (c. 586 BCE) or during Greek Persecution (c. 165 BCE). Summarize the arguments – which do you find more convincing? How does the dating affect your understanding of the prophecies? (1-1.5 pages)
5. What are some of the theological issues and themes in these books? How is God portrayed? What spiritual teachings involved might be significant to us today? (1-1.5 pages)

6. Select a passage from Jonah, Isaiah, or Daniel (no more than 1 chapter in length) and discuss briefly how you might use this in your ministry, including the following (1-2 pages total)
 - a. Audience and setting – to whom are you speaking and when / where (Sermon, Sunday School, Youth Group, Bible Study, Women’s Fellowship, etc., time of year, formal / informal discussion, etc.)
 - b. What message would you highlight in the text and why?
 - c. How would you adjust the message to the audience?

for session 2:

1. In *The Oxford Annotated Bible*:

- a. Review the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, including the notes and commentary on each page, and read (or review) the introductory essays to each book.

Note – If you have time, read through the entire book of Psalms before Session 2 – if you read 3 Psalms a day, that will take you 50 days. Similarly, please try to read all of Proverbs.

Please make sure that you read Psalms 1-24, 40-43, 51, 119, 120-134, 150 and Proverbs 1-9 and 31.

- b. Review the General Essays at the end of the New Oxford Annotated Study Bible, particularly the following:
 - The New Testament Interprets the Jewish Scriptures
 - Jewish Interpretation in the Premodern Era
 - The Interpretation of the Bible – from the 19th to the Mid-20th centuries
 - Contemporary Methods in Biblical Study
 - The Geography of the Bible

2. Read the following:

Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*
Richard Clifford, *Wisdom Literature*
pp. 63-126 in *Daily Life in Biblical Times*

3. Read the following play: *Life’s Choices – A Play Based on Eight Characters in Proverbs*
<https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=488>

4. After reading the material, please answer the following questions. If possible, you may also consult a multi-volume Bible commentary, such as *The Anchor Yale Bible*, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, *Eerdmans Critical Commentary*, or *The Old Testament Library*.

Please answer these questions for the Books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, unless otherwise specified. You may write a combined answer for all three books rather than a separate answer for each. I am aware that the books are too lengthy for a comprehensive summary so please focus on what you see as some of the most important examples.

1. What questions do you have about these readings? Keep a list of questions and select one or two questions to investigate (using your study bible and other resources) – what explanations did you find? (1-1.5 pages)
2. What themes do you find in these readings? How do covenant and obedience fit into these readings? (1-1.5 pages)
3. Based on the background readings, identify some of the genres of psalms – how are they different? In structure? In content? In theme? Identify specific psalms for the different genres. (1-1.5 pages)
4. How do these ancient wisdom texts apply in our modern setting? Do any of the images (especially agricultural ones) need to be updated for modern life? Please respond to the play *Life's Choices* –does this adaptation help make the text more accessible? If so, why? If not, why not? (1-1.5 pages)
5. Find some contemporary interpretations of wisdom literature (in songs, in other translations like *The Message*, etc.) – compare them to the biblical texts (with specific chapter references). What do you think of these interpretations? (1-1.5 pages)
6. Select a passage from Psalms, Proverbs, or Ecclesiastes (no more than 1 chapter in length) and discuss briefly how you might use this in your ministry, including the following (1-2 pages total)
 - a. Audience and setting – to whom are you speaking and when / where (Sermon, Sunday School, Youth Group, Bible Study, Women's Fellowship, etc., time of year, formal / informal discussion, etc.)
 - b. What message would you highlight in the text and why?
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