

Howard University School of Divinity
Introduction to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible — Spring 2022
Dr. John Ahn
Lecture: Thursday 7:10 to 9:30 PM
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Course Description: This is the second half of Introduction to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible (OT/HB). There is a pre-requisite (OT/HB I). In this course, participants engage the (Latter) Prophets (Major and Minor) and Writings of the HB/OT. Particular attention is given to the historical, political, and social developments that produced the literature of the HB/OT. Canonical consciousness, with attention to rewritings, additions, and interpolations are addressed. Other issues of social and religious injustices and abuses, including paleoclimatology, with attention to temple-centeredness, forced migrations and forced and voluntary return migrations, inter-marriage, generational consciousness, human suffering, gender issues, powerlessness, and the apocalypse, among other seminal topics from the text are analyzed and reframed to offer a better understanding of textual development by competing diaspora and remnant communities.

Course Objectives:

- 1) To locate and classify the Prophets and Writings, critically, which includes a history of scholarship (or reception history).
- 2) To identify and become familiar with the various (redactional) layers within each book of the Prophets and Writings.
- 3) To engage and critique the text critically, which includes reframing literary, sociological, climate, and theological objectives of the authors, tradents, or ancient communities behind the textual transmissions and traditions.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1) To ascertain and articulate a working knowledge of the contents of the Hebrew Bible.
- 2) To demonstrate knowledge of the cultural and religious development of ancient Israel.
- 3) To analyze classical and especially contemporary approaches to interpreting the HB.
- 4) To actualize and exegete (critical evaluation) the HB/OT illuminating liberative and oppressive aspects of texts in light of African and African American faith communities and traditions.

Requirements & Grades:

- 1) An exegesis paper is due in my email inbox (electronically as an attachment—save trees) on April 7, 2022, before the start of class. Note: late paper will not be accepted. Kindly plan accordingly and save your work often (cloud). A list of biblical passages is furnished (see February 3rd). Further guidelines and a sample paper will be posted on blackboard. The exegetical requirements with proper citation (SBL Handbook Style) will be 9 to 11 pages (double spaced, 12 point font, footnotes, etc.). On Feb 13th, one-third of the class session will be dedicated to resources and learning to do exegesis (70%). You will be paired (only two) but the actual final task of your exegesis paper is done individually.

- 2) A final reflection paper on the entire course (Fall and Spring) addressing what you learned (particular items that have been new to you, how have you grown, and what aspects of the HB/OT was most interesting to you) is also due on April 21st at 7:10 PM (15%) (500 words max): 1-2 pages (max).
- 3) Participation and class attendance (15%).

Reading Assignments and General Study Guide:

Students are expected to come to class prepared. A general study guide, comprised of each week's reading assignment, is provided below. It is not accidental that the Bible is listed first in each week's assignment. Students are expected to become familiar with the biblical text and secondary scholarship that analyzes the imbrogios arising from textual and hermeneutical problems. In my lectures and our discussions, students are expected to be familiar with the primary and secondary sources.

For the purpose of this course, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) has been selected, the *Peoples' Bible* or the NRSV UE. Students may opt to use the Harper Collins Study Bible, the New Oxford, or an un-annotated NRSV. The KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV, New Jerusalem, etc. are avoided. If cost prevents you from purchasing a Bible, an on-line NRSV is available.

Required Books:

- *The Peoples' Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).
- John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).
- James Maxwell Miller and John H. Hays, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).
- Mark Boda, Frank Ames, John Ahn, and Mark Leutcher, eds., *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration*, AIL 21 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).
- Ahn, John and Stephen L. Cook, eds., *Thus Says the LORD: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, LHBOTS 502 (London: T & T Clark, 2009).
- *SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

Required Articles:

- See Blackboard for articles that pertain to womanist, intersectionality, trauma, paleoclimatology, disability, and archeology.

Jan 20	Amos and Hosea <u>Womanist vs. Intersectionality & Black Feminist vs. Kyriarchy</u> SEE NRSV UE : MINOR PROPHETS (excerpts)
Jan 27	First Isaiah 1-39
Feb 3	Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk <u>Cultural Trauma Studies</u>

Feb 10	Jeremiah and Lamentation (Egypt) <u>Introduction to Paleoclimatology</u> List of exegetical passages: Hosea 3; Jer 29; Isa 43; Prov 31; Dan 1 a) Historical (and political context) b) Social (and religious) c) Literary d) Limit pericope to five or six verses e) Analyze and explain how your insights add understanding to the text.
Feb 17	Ezekiel (Babylon/Persia) <u>Introduction to Paleoclimatology (continued)</u>
Feb 24	Second Isaiah (40-55)
March 3	Intro to Exegesis paper: A workshop on EBSCO-ATLA-OT ABSTRACTS - Resources & SBL Citation
March 3	& Third Isaiah (56-66) <u>Disability Studies</u>
March 10	No Class (Spring Break)
March 11, 14	<i>Mid-Atlantic Region SBL Meeting (on zoom)</i> – students can attend for (\$20)
March 17	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Joel Exegesis Paper : Outline/Bibliography (due)
March 24	Ezra-Nehemiah (skim 1 & 2 Chronicles) <u>Archeology of the Persian Period: Ramat Rachel: Water</u>
March 31	Song of Songs and Proverbs
April 7	Job and Qohelet Exegesis Paper Due Date
April 14	Daniel and 1-2 Maccabees (Hellenistic and/or Greco-Roman)
April 21	Ruth, Jonah, Esther Reflection Paper Due Date

Amos & Hosea

Required Reading

Bible: Amos, Hosea

Collins, 283-306

Miller & Hayes, 360-369

On-line and PDF file(s) on Blackboard (Amos and Hosea)

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/minor-prophets-bible-amos/>

Supplementary Reading

Christl M. Maier, "Myth and Truth in Socio-Historical Reconstruction of Ancient Societies: Hosea, 11-14 as a Test Case," *Thus Says the LORD*

Gene M. Tucker, "The Social Location of Amos: Amos 1:3-2:16," *Thus Says the LORD*

Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 135-225, 253-270.

John Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 212-225.

Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 3-49.

General Study Guide

Content and Arrangement: Make some effort to understand the structure and contents in both Amos and Hosea. Note that in some cases, the prophetic oracles have clear relationships to each other and at other times, they will seem eccentric and unorganized. These unorganized thoughts are your historical and social markers of redactional activity. Be able to recognize the *Sitz im Leben* and the *Gattung*, which will facilitate in fostering a better understanding and relationship of the text to those insertions/emendations. Remember, those "interesting" insertions represent updates and important injections of inspired additions.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: The historical context of both works begin in the eighth century BCE. The final form of the text is late (post-exilic). The repeated motifs are social injustice and religious apostasy. As you read, reflect broadly: What constitutes a prophetic oracle? What are the typologies of prophetic oracles? What do you discover in Amos and Hosea as central for the people, society, and nation? Are prophetic oracles purely future predictions or do they say something about the past/current? Again, what message is being written down about the past and present actions and misdeeds, including misinformation? Provide clear cases or examples of prophetic oracles in each book. Repeatedly, what parallel literary themes in poetry or prose repeat? These questions are foundational for understanding the socio-historical and literary background of the two eighth century prophets and their books.

Interpretation: How would you characterize Amos' critique of the eighth century? In Hosea 1-3, the prophet Hosea's marriage to the prostitute Gomer becomes the vehicle for the LORD speaking about "his" relationship to Israel "her bride." What is it about this "particular marriage" that makes the rhetoric very harmful? What do we do with the children? Are they real characters or literary constructs? Did this really happen? Or is it prophetic literary imagination?

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: Amos 1 and 5 are collections of prophetic oracles from post-exilic and pre-exilic Israel. They are divided or sums of the (smaller) different oracles (Hosea 5). What are the grounds for separating them? How are they connected or combined into a single literary unit? Are some of the oracles more closely related to others? From your reading and analysis of the chapter, what types of prophetic oracles are discernable? Judgment speech is

one of the most basic forms of prophetic speech. What is the purpose for such pronouncement? Are there any judgment speeches in the text? Focus particularly on verses 7 and 10-11. What features suggest that these verses are related? What can you learn from this unit regarding the relationship between justice and the correct worship of God? Are verses 8-9 (Hosea 5) different from the rest of the chapter? Can you find other pericopes in Amos comparable to vv. 8-9?

First Isaiah (Isaiah of Jerusalem)

Required Reading:

Bible: Isaiah 1-39

Collins, 307-321

Miller & Hayes, 374-420

Supplemental Reading:

Christopher Seitz, "Prophetic Associations," in *Thus Says the LORD*

David Petersen, "Remembering the Prophets," in *Thus Says the LORD*

Roy Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *New Visions of Isaiah*, JSOTSup 214 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

Christopher R. Seitz, ed., *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

Wilson, *Prophecy and Prophecy*, 226-231, 270-274.

General Study Guide:

Content: Become familiar with the canonical shape of Isaiah 1-39. Search for repetitive themes within First Isaiah. Pay close attention to the memoir of Isaiah 6-8 and chapter 5, "the Song of the Vineyard." Briefly skim through Micah to get a grasp of what the central issues are. Both are contemporaries. What does Isaiah preach and why? What images and themes are the building blocks for his message? Why such words of judgment? Make sure you become familiar with the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and the Assyrians at large.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: What primary nations and leaders are represented during the years of Isaiah of Jerusalem? What is the international political climate and how do they impact Judah and Israel? What were the internal-political, social, economic, and religious conflicts in Judah? On the literary side, notice the various genres—prophetic oracles including biography, autobiography, general history, call narrative, legal-lawsuit (*rîb*), oracles of judgment, and oracles of salvation.

Interpretation: God is sovereign. This is a one of the many themes in First Isaiah. Identify the passages in which this pervasive theme is developed. How may such a theme be appropriated today without falling into a sort of "divine puppeteer" view of God? What kind of "political" advice does Isaiah give to Ahaz? What are the theological grounds for his advice? What are the problems (then and now) that rulers or leaders face when considering advice from religious spokespersons?

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: The memoirs of Isaiah contain personal history. Moreover, chapters 7, 9, and 11 are "messianic oracles." In light of the New Testament, how does this historical background enrich the text in its original and new contexts? What problems

remain? Inter-textual or typological reading is always about a forward progression, is this helpful?

Micah, Nahum,
Zephaniah, Habakkuk

Required Reading:

Bible: Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk

Collins, 324-327

Miller & Hayes, 439-477

Supplemental Reading:

John J. Ahn, "Zephaniah, A Disciple of Isaiah?" in *Thus Says the LORD*

John J. Ahn, "Introduction to Zephaniah," in *The Peoples' Bible*

Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper, 1960), 27-97.

J.J.M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*. (OTL; Louisville: Westminster, 1991).

Christopher Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Towards a New Introduction to the Prophets*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: In contrast to the book of Hosea, Micah is textually well preserved. But, it should be said that there are textual variances and frequent inconsistencies. There are two major block of material in Micah—1:2 to 5:15 and 6:1 to 7:20. The first three chapters are thought to be genuine Micah material whereas the remaining portions are later expansions. However, this has been recently challenged. The current view is that chapters 4-7 likely came from the pen of the eighth century prophet himself. Micah and Isaiah should be read in light of each other since they were contemporaries. Nahum is filled with vivid images of the Lord's judgments. The Lord is "slow to anger but great in power" (1:3) and "a stronghold in a day of trouble" (1:7) both describe the Assyrian context of the book. Habakkuk is a near contemporary of Nahum. He too has a voice of destruction. Habakkuk 3 is associated with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai (Jewish tradition). Equally interesting is chapters 1-2, with a running commentary in Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls). Some scholars suggest 2:4b as the basis for Paul's theology of "justification by faith" (Rom 1:17). Zephaniah is the most important 7th century prophets. He reflects on the tradition of Isaiah of Jerusalem (day of the Lord and his hand is still stretched out). He is an important bridge between Isaiah and Jeremiah. His message is one of condemnation against the religious and political leaders but hope and restoration is powerfully expected.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah reflect the Assyrian context of the 8th and 7th centuries. In contrast, Habakkuk depicts the Babylonians of the 6th century. Like Amos, Micah dissociates himself from the guild of prophets. The genre of legal disputation is highly developed and utilized throughout the book. Nahum 2 is addressed to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Chapter 3 rings as a taunt song against the Babylonians. In Zephaniah, he traces his lineage back to (King) Hezekiah but also includes the information he is a Cushite (from Africa). He is a fascinating character. There is a classical stereotypical oracle against Judah (1:1 to 2:3), oracles against the nations (2:4 to 3:8), and oracles of salvation (3:9-20). One key feature that demarcates a major prophet from a minor one is the inclusion of oracles against the nation and the oracles of salvation in that prophetic book. Zephaniah is to be seen as

“central prophet.” In the book of Habakkuk, there is no superscription. However, the historical setting appears to be the Battle at Carchemish. Habakkuk’s prophetic and psalmic combination has projected the notion that he was in fact a cultic prophet who recited versions of his text in temple worship. Other scholars, however, have noted that those cultic elements are later redactions. In any case, the Qumran community saw a cosmic battle in the book of Habakkuk taking place in their own times. There is a rich running commentary worth reading and discovering.

Interpretation: Habakkuk and Zephaniah share a message of hope and waiting for Yahweh in the face of prevailing disillusionment. Nahum is exceptional for lack of criticism projected at his own people: why? Micah has theological parallels with both Isaiah of Jerusalem and Amos.

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: Recent work on the minor prophets suggest that the Book of the Twelve is to be read as a unified whole. What are some cohesive themes that pull them together? What are distinctive theological features about each book? The newest approach is called canonical-historical.

Jeremiah, Lamentation

Required Reading:

Bible: Jeremiah, Lamentation

Collins, 334-352

Hayes & Miller, 478-487

Supplemental Reading:

S. Dean McBride, Jr., “Jeremiah and the Levitical Priests of Anathoth,” in *Thus Says the LORD*

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

Patrick Miller, “The Book of Jeremiah” *NIB* 7:555-1072.

Carolyn Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (London: T & T Clark, 2003).

Leslie Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

Readings on Paleoclimatology:

D. Kaniewski, E. Paulissen, E. Van Campo, et. al., “Late Second-Early First Millennium BC Abrupt Climate Changes in Coastal Syria and Their Possible Significance for the History of the Eastern Mediterranean,” *QR* (2010) 74:207-25.

J. Neumann and S. Parpola, Climatic Change and the Eleventh-Tenth Century Eclipse of Assyria and Babylonia, *JNES* (1987): 161-82.

Bob Becking, “Global Warming and the Babylonian Exile,” in *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon*

C. Wunsch, “Quantitative Estimate of the Milankovitch-Forced Contribution to Observed Quaternary Climate Change,” *QSR* 23 (2004): 1001–1012.

D. Goldsmith, “Ice Cycles,” *NH* 116 (2007): 14-19.

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: Be able to describe the canonical shape of the book of Jeremiah. This is a very complex book with two parallel traditions the MT and the LXX.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: What is the political situation in the ancient Near East in the 6th century B.C.E? What is the Southern Kingdom of Judah's position and situation in light of the Neo-Babylonians during the time of Jeremiah? What were some features of the internal political and prophetic dynamics in Judah? There are several genres in the book of Jeremiah. They are labeled Jeremiah "A" for poetic oracles, "B" the prose narrative material which is autobiographical in nature, and "C" the redactional Deuteronomic homily.

Interpretation: The laments found in Jeremiah are unique and share some common features with the lament psalms. In order to gain an appreciation for the stereotypical feature of this genre, reading Jeremiah's confessions (11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23) as well as the small sampling of individual lament psalms (Pss 3; 6; 13; 31) is a good beginning.

Paleoclimatology: In a recent essay by Bob Becking, he suggests that the Neo-Babylonians were closely monitoring the levels of aridification (of the Tigris and Euphrates), which established the levels of the irrigation canals of Babylon. In short, based on ancient climate reconstruction, he suggests that there was a considerable dry spell during this period. This was the factor which precipitated movements of peoples, by force, to work on the canals of Babylon. There is credible evidence to support Becking's suggestion. The migrations in the 6th century BCE were driven by climate inasmuch as by "purposive forced migration." Introduced last semester, interested students my further investigate the study of paleoclimatology and its impact on the Hebrew Bible.

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: What literary features within the study of oracles are noticeable in Jeremiah 20:7-13? Describe the shift in mood between verses 10 and 11. There is an on-going debate that asks whether verse 13 belongs to this lament or ends in v 12. Although the lament uses traditional language, scholars know enough about Jeremiah's ministry context to suggest circumstances that might have given rise to such a complaint laden lament. The accusation against God in verse 7 is harsh. Intertextually, where have you seen similar accusations? What do you think about the appropriateness of this accusation? Is there a theological basis?

Ezekiel, Obadiah

Required Reading:

Bible: Ezekiel, Obadiah

Collins, 353-377

Miller & Hayes, 488-497

Supplemental Reading:

Stephen L. Cook, "The Speechless Suppression of Grief in Ezekiel 24:15-27: The Death of Ezekiel's Wife and the Prophet's Abnormal Response," *Thus Says the LORD*

D. Nathan Phinney, "Portraying Prophetic Experience and Traditions in Ezekiel," *Thus Says the LORD*

Corrine Carvalho, "Putting the Mother Back in the Center: Metaphor and Multivalence in Ezekiel 19," *Thus Says the LORD*

Michael Fishbane, "Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel" in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 170-187.

Carol A. Newsom, "A Maker of Metaphors: Ezekiel's Oracles against Tyre" in *Interpreting the Prophets*, 188-199.

Moshe Greenberg, "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of Restoration" in *Interpreting the Prophets*, 215-236.

Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong, eds., *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, SBL Symposium Series 9 (Atlanta: SBL, 2000).

John J. Ahn, "Introduction to Obadiah," *The Peoples' Bible*

Paleoclimatology

R. Reuveny, Climate Change-induced Migration and Violent Conflict. *Political Geography* (2007) 26: 656–673.

Weiss, H., Bradley, R.S., What Drives Societal Collapse? *Science* (2001) 291: 609–610.

Weiss, H., Courty, M.A., Wetterstrom, W., Guichard, L., Senior, L., Meadow, R., Curnow, A., 1993. The Genesis and Collapse of Third Millennium North Mesopotamian Civilization. *Science* (1993) 261: 995–1004

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: Be able to describe the canonical shape of the book of Ezekiel and its major motifs. Also recognize the precision date formulas used to chronologically sequence the material in the book.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: The book of Ezekiel is highly structured. We are able to date most of Ezekiel's prophecies from internal sources (fifteen in all). However, the problem lingers in that scholars are still unsure where he actually prophesied and if those oracles were written down at that time or later on. The most troubling aspect of the book is the use of symbolic action. There are of course, the prototypical oracles of judgment, oracles of restoration, images of sexual or even child pornography to allegorize Israel's infidelity (Ch 16 and 23). This is very problematic since we are so protective of children. It is one of the most graphic depictions in the HB/OT. Political friction is relayed in terms of a riddle or *māšāl* (Ch 17 and 19). My current focus of research is on Ezek 15. Switching gears, the single chapter of the book of Obadiah consists of two parts: vv. 1-14 (against Edom) and vv 15-21 (prediction of judgment on all the nations followed by restoration of Judah). Obadiah shares its overtones with Nahum.

Interpretation: The departure of God's glory from Jerusalem to Babylon substantiates that God is with the displaced and resettled community. Jerusalem which is torched is no longer the epicenter of Zion theology. Babylon has replaced Jerusalem with many Judean communities scattered across the Mediterranean basin, including Egypt. Two other important themes beyond the theological significance of the divine Glory (see chapters 1, 10, 43) are the special attention given in chapter 18 (the so-called 'individual responsibility chapter'), 36 ("new heart" c.f. Jeremiah's "new covenant") and the dry bones passage in chapter 37 with the vision of the new temple. In my view, the new temple is the real counter-temple, a spiritual one, to mirror the second temple in Yehud. For those that remained in Babylon/Persia (chapters 40ff) their new temple is one that is not built with stones and walls, but an eternal spiritual one.

Paleoclimatology: New insights have suggested that empires and humanity react to changing environments, including climate. With punctuation, that is, a sudden change in the climate of the ANE, humanity reacts and continues to react not merely to survive but adapt and progress. Human beings are incredibly resourceful in spite of challenges. Modern or ancient engineers are problem solvers. Perhaps, ancient dream interpreters are working in the fields of what we call engineering or simply problem solving. They learn masterfully from the failures or collapses of previous modes of operation. The Neo-Babylonians observed and analyzed the grand collapses of the Neo-Assyrians. As the Book of Ezekiel opens with references to the irrigation canals of Babylon, the setting is very telling. In light of these new thoughts on climate, what does a responsible climate-driven exegesis look like?

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: The influence of the P writer is quite prevalent in the book of Ezekiel. Like the Holiness Code in Leviticus, there is hardly or no real differentiations between moral and ritual laws. Holiness is central in Ezekiel. The state of being holy calls into account much or all of Ezekiel's action—even the most bizarre and eccentric acts which may be described as Ezekiel's zeal for the glory of God. For him, nothing is held back for God. Ezekiel provides a model for believers to succumb and surrender totally before God. Do you buy this? Why or why not? Lastly, if God is in total control, over all the elements, including climate and forces of migration, what are some of the possible reasons for such movements of people? What does this mean for modernity's situations across the globe?

Second Isaiah (Chapters 40-55) and Third Isaiah (56-66)

Required Reading:

Bible: Isaiah 55-66

Collins, 379-400

Miller & Hayes, 498-513

Supplemental Reading:

Carolyn J. Sharp, "(Re)Inscribing Power Through Torah Teaching: Rhetorical Pedagogy in the Servant Songs," *Thus Says the LORD*

Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991).

H.G.M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66, IBC* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

Roy Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *New Visions of Isaiah*, JSOTSS 214 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

Brevard Childs, *Isaiah, OTL* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: The composition and the layers of redaction in the book of Isaiah are as complex as it gets. Chapters 40-55 come from the Babylonian period while chapters 56-66 are grounded in the Persian or post-exilic (Return Migrations) setting. Even if First Isaiah is said to have authored 1-39, and Third Isaiah constitute 56-66, chapter 35 is the work of Second Isaiah and chapters 60-62 also belong to Second Isaiah. This is the most important books in the OT/ HB

in terms of complexity and richness. It further has powerful implications in the New Testament. Discern the larger blocks of material that comprise Isaiah 40-55. What similar motifs from First Isaiah resurface in Second and Third Isaiah?

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: In addition to the socio-historical and literary history of the book of Isaiah, the “servant songs” or “suffering servant passages” (42:104; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12) are often regarded as a separate literary block carefully woven into the message of Second Isaiah. The suffering servant passages continue to exhibit much controversy and resolve for both Jews and Christians alike. Is the identity of the servant an individual, the community, or both?

Interpretation: How is Second Isaiah different from First Isaiah? In what ways is Third Isaiah in continuity with Second Isaiah and First Isaiah? How is Third Isaiah distinctive? How would you express the view that God gave this extended prophecy to three separate prophets? Why do you suppose Isaiah became a prominent work that the New Testament authors so often drew upon? With respect to Third Isaiah, there are echoes of indictment against those guilty of improper temple sacrifice and those that abuse the socio-economic system. Does this remind you of any particular past timeframe?

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12 deal with the figure that is simply called “my servant.” Work out the movement of this poem. How does it begin and end? What dramatic scenes does it relay? What is moving in the on-going drama? Who are the actors? Who speaks and what do they say? What is the relationship between the servant and those who speak? What does it mean to relay that the servant suffers?

Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Joel
Discussion: Malachi 2.17-3.5

Required Reading:

Bible: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Joel
Collins, 401-424
Miller & Hayes, 514-527

Supplemental Reading:

David Peterson, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).
Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, JSOTSup 97 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).
David Peterson, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1995).
Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Scharf eds., *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 325 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003).

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: The chronological information in the four oracles of the book of Haggai places the *Sitz im Leben* between mid-August and mid-December of 520 B.C.E., the early reign of Darius I or Darius the Great. The sequence of sermons shifts from Zerubbabel son

of Shealtiel, the governor of Yehud to Joshua the high priest (the beginning of the reconstruction of the second temple). Zechariah has eight visions and prophetic oracles. Zech 1-8 begin with the date of Oct/Nov 520, disseminating hierocracy (ruled by priests). Chapters 9-14, however, are less cohesive and show the disillusionment of the post-exilic world (proto-apocalyptic such as Joel 2:28-3:21; Isa 24-27). Zechariah and Haggai share the same mission to rebuild the temple in a timely manner. Malachi is technically not the last book to be written, though it is the last prophetic book situated in the Hebrew canon. As the temple becomes functional again, it is natural to assume that the setting is after the time of Haggai and Zechariah (1-8). The issues of intermarriage highlighted in Nehemiah (445 B.C.E.) is far reaching in Malachi. Hence, the setting is more appropriately closer to the reign of Artaxerxes I (465 to 424 B.C.E.). Joel's setting is more problematic. It extends from 800 to 300 B.C.E. The metaphor of an invading army of locusts may be the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians or the Greeks.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: Because the book of Ezra (5:1; 6:14-15) deals the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple during the time of Darius and Artaxerxes, it is safe to assume that a Priestly redaction, as in the book of Ezekiel, is at work in Ezra. The theme of restoration, rebuilding the temple, and the Ezra-Torah with glimpses of apocalyptic vision are all visible.

Interpretation and Basic Questions for Discussion: The motif and repetition of the "Day of the LORD" has eschatological implications. As dismay and unrest dominated the initial stages of the post-exilic life, the struggle to rebuild and re-establish a community which started with nothing in Babylon is now forced to repeat this same feat all over again. But this time, it is in Yehud, under ruined conditions without the presence of the elites since they only committed provisionally in order to return home as quickly as possible. The struggles and outbursts of elders, priests, and people to join in fasting, prayer, and repentance repeat. This is quite suggestive that we have a community falling apart rather quickly. There is no glamour, no river basins or myriad of irrigation canals that Second Isaiah preached. Lastly, the Book of the Twelve receives emphasis from OT perspective because it directly leads to the New Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, however, the closure of the prophets leads to the next intellectual movement, the Writings dominated by the Wisdom Tradition. As a whole, how might such a difference in placement in the canon affect the overall message of covenant or salvation history?

Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles
Discussion: Ezra 9

Required Reading:

Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles
Collins, 427-460
Hayes & Miller, 528-537

Supplemental Reading:

Ralph W. Klein, "Ezra-Nehemiah, Books of." *ABD* 2:731-42
Sarah Japhet, *I and II Chronicles* OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).
Christine Hayes, "Intermarriage and Impurity in Ancient Jewish Sources" *HTR* 92 (1999): 3-36.

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: Ezra-Nehemiah was counted as a single book until the Greek LXX and Jerome's Vulgate. Ezra 1-6 (4:8-6:18 in Aramaic) relays the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple; 7-10 is the collection of the memoirs of Ezra; Nehemiah 1:1 to 7:73a and 11-13 are the memoirs of Nehemiah. I and II Chronicles may be divided into three parts: 1-9 Introduction; Chapters 10 to 2 Chron 9 David and Solomon, and 2 Chron 10-36 as the revisionist history of Judah.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: With the decree of Cyrus the King of Persia, (Cyrus Cylinder), all conquered peoples in Babylon (now Persia) were permitted to return home. One section of the Cylinder says: "I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations." Against this background, the return to Judah was in three stages, comparable to the three displacements and resettlements. In the original Hebrew, Ezra-Nehemiah was considered one book. This scroll was the initially a part of the larger historical work which includes 1 and 2 Chronicles (also one book in Hebrew). As JEP was central in laying out Genesis to Numbers, and Dt and Dtr for Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, the third and final section of biblical history is the work of the Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 & 2 Chronicles (Chronicler's History "CH").

Interpretation: As I move directly into the 5th century period, I am engrossed with what caused collapsed of the Babylonian Empire. Herodotus records Babylon's fall with praise of Cyrus. But this still does not explain why the Babylonians collapsed! A working hypothesis is that of "water-ecological-system" mismanagement. Currently, this is on the cutting edge of the primary reason for societal collapses. Ankor is a contemporary example. In terms of religiosity, the reform in Ezra 7-10, the rebuilding of the wall in Nehemiah 1-6 both show religious/political restoration. What is remarkable is the confession of guilt in response to the Mosaic-Ezra Torah. The repentance leads to the active removal and eradication of all intermarriages, including all children. This is Israel's sin. Here is a painful example of ethnic cleansing, in the name of "purity."

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: Ethnic cleansing has been recently prevalent in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sudan. My litmus test for any first-rate serious study bible is Ezra-Nehemiah. Can the scholar assigned to this book faithfully call the act of removing all women and children, for what it really is? Will the issue be hidden and subtly defended as this was God's doing, or taken up with passion and zeal to declare that this was and continues to be wrong! Ezra-Nehemiah was obsessed with ethnic/religious purity. Parallels to Joshua and the removal of the Canaanites come to mind. Be able to defend and argue both for and against Ezra 9.

Psalms and Song of Songs

Required Reading:

Bible: Psalms & Song of Songs

Collins, 461-486

Supplemental Reading:

Robert B. Robinson, "The Poetry of Creation," *Thus Says the LORD*
James May, *Psalms*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994).
Hermann Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, Complete by Joachim Begrich, Trans. J.D. Nogsalski (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998).
Patrick Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).
Roland E. Murphy, *Songs of Songs*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1977).
Robert Jenson, *Song of Song*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: The book of Psalms is divided into five books. Book One 1-41; Book Two 42-72; Book Three 73-89; Book Four 90-106; and Book Five 107-150. This division reflects the five-fold division of the Pentateuch. Psalms is ancient Israel's worship book. Each book begins with a doxology. Although traditionally, the Psalms are attributed to David, we notice late editorial works with collections from Asaph (50, 73-83), Korah (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88), Heman (88), Ethan (89), Moses (90), and Jeduthun—one of David's musicians (39, 62, 77). The form critical study Psalms has played an important role in identifying the original *Sitz im Leben*. Song of Songs is a specific kind of poetry, erotic poetry. Because the language was so powerful, Rabbis as well as Christian interpreters by-passed the literal message and opted to allegorize the contents as a love poem between God and Israel or Christ and his Church.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: With the pioneering work of H. Gunkel and S. Mowinckel, the study of psalms took a profound radical shift. The title of Psalms in Hebrew is *tehillim*, songs of praise. And although there are many genres within the collection, the nomenclature is quite appropriate. Every aspect of life or death, pain and joy, good times and hard, we have to somehow find the faith to praise God. This is Israel's confession of praise through its outcries and even laments. Other identified genres are: hymns, Yahweh's enthronement, communal complaint songs, royal psalms, individual complaint songs, individual thanksgiving songs, blessing and curse, pilgrimage songs, victory songs, prophetic psalms, wisdom psalms, and mixed genres. The canonicity of Song of Songs was debated heavily. With Qohelet, the Song of Songs was one of the last books to enter the canon.

Interpretation: Bonhoeffer once asked how the words of men could ever be considered God's words to men. The essence of the psalms is "praise" even in the midst of pain. One must find that transition point—the "but" or the *waw* in Hebrew that turns the page from lament to praise. The psalms continue to impact modern readers and religious communities. Responses in the psalms may be understood as God's response to particular situations, petitions, prayers, and requests. For Jews and Christians, the psalms are a living witness of faith. Sometimes, God's words to humanity arrive through and from the lips of women and men.

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: Carefully read and re-read Ps 137. Read the larger context of Psalms 135-138. Why is Ps 137 placed in the midst of thanksgiving and Hallelujah psalms? As for the Song of Songs, be prepared to have an open mind about this book.

Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes)

Required Reading:

Bible: Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth
Collins, 487-528

Supplemental Reading:

James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

C.L.Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: One goal of wisdom was the formation of character. It is a guide book for practical governance and prudent living. One school of thought says that it was written to establish sagacious rulers. Without much reference to God or the Torah, instructions are universal in scope, set in a family context, using nature and commonalities to illustrate that one can talk about God without referencing God. The focus is individual rather than societal. Wisdom literature is represented by Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Wisdom of Solomon, and some Psalms.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: Without any reference to Israel's salvation history, *Heilsgeschichte*, Wisdom literature which is secular and international in scope, became the prevailing movement that replaced the prophets. Proverbial sayings from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and other regions congealed and took canonical-shape. We notice a subtle movement in canonical Wisdom—Proverbs, Job and Qoheleth. There is a movement from the theological right to the left. The composition and literary structure of Proverbs is straightforward. Be good to others and God will reward you. Do bad you will be punished. Job begins with a prologue and concludes with an epilogue. In between are discourses by Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu. But the point is, bad things can happen to the righteous. And how does one cope with loss and still be faithful? Qoheleth is off the theological charts. It looks as if it really walks away from God. Others have suggested that the God component was redacted, added, to give the text a God-presence. I see this work as the OT's truest existentialist. Yet the three as one, constitute what I think is Israel's economic texts. I'm still thinking about the broader ramifications of that thought. The book of Proverbs, Job's prologue and epilogue, and even Qoheleth all have a strong economic component. This is quite timely, in our trying economic times.

Interpretation: The concept of Lady Wisdom is hypostatized in Prov 8, Job 29 and Sir 26. As we distinguish Wisdom literature from other sections of the HB/OT, this genre and its theology balances out the androcentric and predominant Deuteronomic and Prophetic viewpoints. A new era enters. But a major problem in the classical study of Old Testament theology is "What is Wisdom's role in salvation history?"

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: As you read Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth—Proverbs relates proper decorum. Job deals with the problem of theodicy; and Qoheleth with "existentialism." Pay close attention to the final redactions of each book. What common grounds do you notice?

Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees,

Ruth, Jonah, Esther

Required Reading:

Bible: Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees, Ruth, Jonah, Esther
Collins, 553-579, 529-551

Supplemental Reading:

Roy L. Heller, "'BUT IF NOT...?' What? The Speech of the Youths in Daniel 3 and a (Theo)Logical Problem," *Thus Says the LORD*

William W. Hallo, "Jonah and the Uses of Parody," *Thus Says the LORD*

Robert R. Wilson, "From Prophecy to Apocalyptic: Reflections on the Shape of Israelite Religion" *Semeia* 21 (1988): 79-95.

John J. Collins, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

General Study Guide:

Content and Arrangement: The book of Daniel is written in Hebrew (1 and 8-12) and Aramaic (2:4b-7:28). The Aramaic section circulated independently. It is likely that the remaining portions were added in Hebrew for patriotic flavor. Daniel 1-6 is commonly known as the court tales. Chapters 7-12 are visions. Stories in the books of Ruth, Jonah, Esther, Tobit, and Judith are fictitious short stories or novella set in a time of crisis to show how to survive such challenges in the midst of assimilation and acculturation.

Socio-History and Literary Analysis: The narratives in the book of Daniel are a product of the Hellenistic period. The setting, however, are retrospective, in the Babylonian and Persian periods. The novellas in the OT are further found in Gen 24, 38, 37, and 39-50; Judges 3:12-30; 4; 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2; Job 1-2; 42:7-17; Daniel 1-6. The historical settings of the short stories are rather problematic: Ruth in the time of the Judges, Jonah in Assyria, and Esther in the Persian period. Ruth and Jonah were established to balance Ezra Nehemiah. It should be noted that many of these short stories feature women of valor and faith (Deborah, Jael, Esther, Ruth, Judith, Susanna). These stories move from isolation, barrenness, and hopelessness to joy, hope, fertility, renewal, and power.

Interpretation: The first half of Daniel confronts life in the Diaspora. As acculturation (and assimilation) is called for, the ideal of not foregoing God and traditional faith becomes of essence. But how this is to be done? How much of religious tradition can be compromised in order to rise to the top? In the second half, the role of a wise-man is better understood as a mantic dream interpreter. In the book of Ruth, she is said to be a charming and lovely. The "human comedy," though this description may be slightly outdated, is one measure of reading the text. Jonah—a satire, anti-prophetic text is an epilogue to the study of the book of the Twelve. It seriously critiques and challenges to the entire prophetic tradition as being solely misguided and self-serving. The book of Esther has parallels with stories about Joseph and Daniel. More controversial in the book of Esther is absence of the Deity. The fantasy-like

volition of utter violence for the enemies of the Jews is again, very problematic, since the Jews were delivered from such violence in the first place.

Some Basic Questions for Discussion: Culture is formative and transformative. But in our biblical narratives, cultural norms clash with religious values. This is not surprising since we continue to witness such polarity in our cosmopolitan context. Culture gives birth to values and ethos but can the same be said of religious values giving birth to cultural norms? Compare the actions of those in Daniel 1-6 with Ruth and Naomi (see *Christ and Culture*).