

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION

Following a brief introduction to Hebrew poetry and the development of the Psalter, exegetical studies of selected Psalms and an overview of other Psalms not selected for close study.

II. COURSE RATIONALE

The church historically has viewed the Bible as the word of God written, mediated through human agency. That is, we have seen the Bible as originating in *both* divine and human authorship. Nowhere in the canon is it more important to focus on the human authorship of the Bible than in the section of which the Psalter is the first and most prominent part. A useful contrast, if not pressed too far, is to think of the Torah and the Prophets as God's word to ancient Israel (and through them, to the human race), and the Writings, especially Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations, as ancient Israel's response (and through them, that of all humanity) to God's gracious initiative in redemption.

Israel's response is recorded in many and varied forms. The Psalter may be thought of as an individual and corporate hymnbook for all occasions. Is one lonely? Depressed? Anxious? Overwhelmed? Joyous? Triumphant? Nostalgic? Contented? Desiring knowledge and wisdom? Thankful? Worshipful? The Psalter has a song for all these states and more, whether the community of faith is gathered, or an individual is isolated from fellowship.

For theology, which also comforts, and for inspiration, which also teaches, the Psalter has been a close companion of individual believers and of the community of faith gathered, for well over two millennia. The Psalter contains rich treasure for believers today, as well, whether we experience its help at any given moment as the community gathered or as individual members dispersed. Expressing as it does human response to God at all levels, the Psalter is an inexhaustible resource for the believer. For the pastor/teacher-still-in-formation-and-already-in-ministry (that is, for all of us), the Psalter is a resource beyond price, both for our own well-being and for our ministry to others.

To know this treasure in all its aspects, to make it our own through study and incarnation, is our goal together in this course this semester.

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Discuss the process and timing of composition of the Psalter, generally, and of certain individual Psalms specifically, insofar as these may be discovered.
2. Discuss the use of the Psalter in ancient Israel, both corporately and individually.
3. Identify selected theological themes within the Psalter, and discuss their contributions to Israelite/Jewish/Christian theology.
4. Exegete any Psalm with appropriate confidence.
5. Express your own views on the proper uses of the Psalter in corporate and individual worship/spiritual expression, and in the living out of our faith in the world.

IV. REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.
2. Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction & Commentary*: Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
3. Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction & Commentary*: Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
4. Longman, Tremper III. *How to Read the Psalms*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

V. STUDENT EVALUATION

Your course grade will be determined by the following:

- A. Necessary (but not sufficient) to earn a grade of "A":
 1. Complete reading of course texts, in line with Course Schedule (VI.);
 2. Consistent class attendance.
- B. Ten exegetical papers, 600-700 words each, comprise 70% of the course grade.
- C. One exegetical paper, 4,000-4,500 words long, comprises 30% of the course grade.

Notes: 1. Papers are due by class time each week. Each full or partial calendar day late will lower a paper's grade by one step on the grading scale.
2. Papers deficient in form, style, grammar, spelling, etc., cannot earn an "A" grade. Seriously wanting papers will be returned ungraded. If resubmitted within one week, such a paper may earn a "B" grade. If not resubmitted, a grade of "F" will be entered.

N.B.: Writing skills are critical to effective performance in any profession. One who can write, can think. It may not be an exaggeration to say that if one cannot write, one has not yet learned to think clearly, precisely, and effectively. If one thinks and writes well, one can (or can learn to) speak well. Good writing enhances solid content, but solid content is less likely with poor writing. Every person in ministry depends on communication skills to be effective. Therefore, every person in ministry should strive continually to improve his/her writing skills.

VI. COURSE SCHEDULE

February 6 – No class session

13 – The art and science of Hebrew poetry; Psalms 1-15

20 – Psalms 16-30; first exegetical paper due, on Psalm 23
 READ: Longman

27 – Psalms 31-45; second exegetical paper due, on psalm of choice (except 42)

March 6 – Psalms 46-60; third exegetical paper due, on Psalm 48; title of paper:
 How Is Psalm 48 “Christian”?

13 – Psalms 61-72; fourth exegetical paper due, on psalm of choice

20 – No class session (Reading and Research Week)

27 – Psalms 73-89; fifth exegetical paper due, on Psalm 73; title of paper:
 The Psalmist’s Move from _____ to _____

April 3 – Psalms 90-106; sixth exegetical paper due, on Psalm 100

10 – Psalms 107-119; seventh exegetical paper due, on Psalm 110; title of paper:
 Psalm 110 and Its Use in the Epistle to the Hebrews

17 – Psalms 120-134; eighth exegetical paper due, on psalm of choice (except 121);
 first two class members to e-mail professor have “claim” on each psalm

24 – Psalms 135-145; ninth exegetical paper due, on Psalm 137:7-9

May 1 – Psalms 146-150; tenth exegetical paper due, on Psalm 148

8 – (Short!) presentations of final exegetical papers

(N.B.: First class member to e-mail professor has “claim” on each psalm; no psalms already written on may be chosen; do not choose Psalms 1, 2, 8, 19, 23, 24, 29, 42, 51, 88, 104, 117, 119-134, 136-137, 139, or 146-150)