

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

Prophets — OT-2149

Fall 2019

Prof. Matthew J. Thomas

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Tuesday / Friday, 9:40—11:00am

Room 1

Office hours: Tuesday / Thursday 12:30–1:30, and by appointment

Course description

This course introduces students to the history of Israelite prophecy and selected prophetic texts from the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods. It focuses both on the significance of the prophets as heralds of God's word to Israel in their own historical contexts, and as witnesses to the coming reality that is made manifest with Christ's advent. The course employs a lecture / discussion format, and evaluates student progress with exams (midterm and final, 25% each), a research assignment and presentation (35%), and discussion participation (15%). This class is for MDiv and MA/MTS students, with OT Introduction as a prerequisite.

Required Textbooks

Thomas L. Leclerc. *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings, and Scrolls*. 2nd edition. New York: Paulist Press. 2017. \$26.11. ISBN: 978-0809153619.

Brant Pitre and John Bergsma. *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2018. \$34.00. ISBN: 978-1586177225.

Optional Textbooks

Michael Gorman. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Revised and expanded edition). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010. \$17.85. ISBN: 978-0801046407.

Abraham Heschel. *The Prophets*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics. 2001. \$19.12. ISBN: 978-0060936990

Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (9th edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. \$15.47. ISBN: 978-0060936990.

Student Learning Goals

In this course, students will:

- Be introduced to the history of Israelite prophecy in the context of the ancient Near East, as well as in the context of the history of Israel.
- Attain an overview of the individual Major and Minor (Writing) prophets, focusing on biographical data, historical context, and content and significance of their message.
- Become familiar with the history of reading the Prophets as distinctly Christian scripture, beginning in the New Testament on the road to Emmaus and continuing in the early Christian writings.
- Learn to exegete significant texts from the various prophets with a view towards effective preaching.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who completes this course will be able to:

- Explain the overall history of Israelite prophecy in the context of the history of the ancient Near East and Israel.
- Give biographical information on those prophets for which we have data.
- Identify the historical context of each of the Israelite prophets (when possible).
- Convey the significance of each prophetic text as God's word within the context of ancient Israel.
- Describe how these prophetic texts serve as Christian scripture in the light of Christ's advent.
- Analyze and exegete prophetic texts.

Methodology

Class meetings will consist of lectures, class discussions, and student presentations. Out-of-class assignments will include reading and studying, writing a major paper, and studying for the midterm and final.

Course Requirements

Class attendance is mandatory. Students must be punctual and prepared for each class by having studied the reading and completed any other assignments. Class participation in answering questions and contributing appropriately to discussions is important, and students should be prepared to be called on, even when they have not raised their hand.

In lieu of reading quizzes, students will be asked to take notes on their assigned readings for each class period. During each class period, a student will be called upon to share their impressions for each assigned reading to begin our discussion. Students are strongly advised to be vigilant in completing their readings, as they know neither the day nor the hour when they will be called upon.

Each student will write a *Sed Contra* paper of approximately 4 single-spaced pages (around 2000 words) on a disputed question in prophetic literature that is agreed upon with the professor. The format of the paper is outlined at the end of the syllabus (see "Major paper: *Sed Contra*"). Papers are to be carefully proofread, and failure to follow the given format will result in being required to rewrite the paper with a penalty of one letter grade. Final papers will be due at the end of the course.

Related to this assignment, students will give a 10-15 minute presentation of their *Sed Contra* papers, followed by 5-10 minutes of responding to questions from the class. This will give the class an opportunity to explore the significance of the question and test the presenter's arguments, and allow the presenter to further refine their work for the final version of the paper (which will be turned in at the conclusion of the course).

The midterm and the final will be approximately 45 minutes each. The midterm will be on the prophets covered to this point in class (i.e. through Habakkuk). The final exam will cover the prophets after Habakkuk. Exams are open-Bible, but no notes are allowed.

Grading Procedures and Rubric

Discussion participation: 15%

Midterm: 25%

Final: 25%

Sed Contra paper: 25%
Presentation: 10%

- A Excellent work; student demonstrates excellent understanding of the material.
- B Very good work; student demonstrates strong understanding of the material.
- C Fair work; student demonstrates adequate understanding of the material, though with room for improvement.
- D Poor work; student demonstrates some barely adequate understanding of the material, with substantial room for improvement.
- F Student demonstrates inadequate understanding of the material.

Grade scale

A	100 – 95	B-	82 – 80	D+	69 – 66
A-	94 – 90	C+	79 – 76	D	65 – 63
B+	89 – 86	C	75 – 73	D-	62 – 60
B	85 – 83	C-	72 – 70	F	59 and below

Course Schedule

Week 1 (September 3, 6)

Class: Course introduction, syllabus, introduction to Leclerc & Pitre-Bergsma

HW: Read Leclerc introduction; Heschel, “What Manner of Man is the Prophet?”

Class: The Prophets as Christian Scripture; or, how to avoid being a Marcionite (Justin, *Dial.* 8-9, 11)

HW: Read Leclerc 1, 2

Week 2 (September 10, 13)

Class: Lecture / discussion Leclerc 1, 2: Prophecy in Various Contexts and ANE

HW: Read Amos; Leclerc 6; Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Amos

Class: Lecture / discussion on Amos

HW: Read Hosea; Leclerc 7; Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Hosea

Week 3 (September 17, 20)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Hosea

HW: Read Leclerc 8; Pitre-Bergsma 30 on Isaiah (1st half, up to 747)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Isaiah (historical background)

HW: Read Isaiah 1-23

Week 4 (October 1, 4)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Isaiah 1-23

HW: Read Isaiah 24-39

Class: Lecture / discussion on Isaiah 24-39

HW: Read Micah; Leclerc 9; Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Micah

Week 5 (October 8, 11)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Micah

HW: Read Zephaniah, Nahum; Leclerc 10 (Beginning through Nahum); Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Zephaniah and Nahum

Class: Lecture / discussion on Zephaniah, Nahum

HW: Read Habakkuk; Leclerc 10 (Habakkuk); Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Habakkuk

Week 6 (October 15, 18)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Habakkuk

HW: Study for midterm

Class: **Midterm**

HW: Read Jeremiah 1-29; Leclerc 11 (Beginning through Jeremiah); Pitre-Bergsma 31

Week 7 (October 22, 25) **READING WEEK**

Week 8 (October 29, November 1)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Jeremiah 1-29

HW: Read Jeremiah 30-52, Baruch; Pitre-Bergsma 33

Class: Lecture / discussion on Jeremiah 30-52, Baruch

HW: Read Lamentations, Obadiah; Leclerc 11 (Lamentations and Obadiah); Pitre-Bergsma 32 and 36 on Obadiah

Week 9 (November 5, 8)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Lamentations, Obadiah

HW: Read Ezekiel 1-24; Leclerc 12

Class: Lecture / discussion on Ezekiel 1-24

HW: Read Ezekiel 25-48; Pitre-Bergsma 34

Week 10 (November 12, 15)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Ezekiel 25-48

HW: Read Isaiah 40-55; Leclerc 13; Pitre-Bergsma 30 (2nd half, 747 to end)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Isaiah 40-55

HW: Read Haggai, Malachi; Leclerc 14 (Beginning through Haggai, Malachi); Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Haggai, Malachi

Week 11 (November 19, 22) **SBL**

Class: Lecture / discussion on Haggai, Malachi, student presentations

HW: Read Zechariah; Leclerc 14 (Zechariah); Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Zechariah

Class: **No class – SBL**

HW:

Week 12 (November 26, 29)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Zechariah, student presentations

HW: Read Isaiah 56-66; Leclerc 15 (Isaiah)

Class: **No class – Thanksgiving**

HW:

Week 13 (December 3, 6)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Isaiah 56-66, student presentations

HW: Read Joel, Jonah; Leclerc 15; Pitre-Bergsma 36 on Joel, Jonah

Class: Lecture / discussion on Jonah, student presentations

HW: Read Daniel; Leclerc 16 (Daniel); Pitre-Bergsma 35

Week 14 (December 10, 13)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Daniel, student presentations

HW: Study for final

Class: The Vision of the Prophets, **Final**

Major paper: *Sed Contra*

The *Sed contra* assignment is an opportunity for students to develop and employ their exegetical, research, and theological reasoning skills. In this assignment, students will seek to answer a disputed question in biblical studies (of their own choice) following the general structure of a Summa article. The purpose of this exercise is for students to closely examine and reflect upon the text(s) in question, and to engage critically with both traditional and modern interpretation in the selected area.

(NB: While this assignment adopts the structure of a Summa article, the purpose is not to reproduce an article in philosophy or systematics, but to use St. Thomas' methodology as a tool for critically engaging with a particular question in biblical studies. Thus, while logic should not be neglected, priority should be given to historical and textual considerations in formulating your answer and responding to objections.)

The five parts of the assignment's structure are as follows:

- **Question** (*Quaestio*): The question you will be answering -- i.e., "Whether Barney the dinosaur is a product of the jurassic period," etc. Students will get approval on their question from the professor before beginning research.
- **Objections** (*Videtur quod*): Concise presentations of the strongest arguments against your own position. Each should be distilled to a few sentences, and three to five objections total should be included.
- **On the contrary** (*Sed contra*): A brief, punchy statement of your own position; generally one to three sentences.
- **Answer** (*Respondeo quod*): A presentation of the argument and evidence for your own position. The arguments may be enumerated, and the response should be well-structured and carefully reasoned. This is the largest single section, and should comprise two to three paragraphs.
- **Replies to objections** (*Ad... dicendum quod*): A response to each of the prior objections, each of which should generally comprise one to three sentences (though additional space may be used if necessary).

Assignments will be evaluated along the following criteria:

- **How relevant is the question?** An excellent article will be on a disputed question, with some significance beyond the immediate field of study (rather than one that is not actually disputed by anyone, and/or largely irrelevant).
- **How strong are the objections?** An excellent article will identify the strongest arguments for the opposing side of the question, and state them in a manner that is precise and compelling, showing that the student has mastered the counter-evidence and listened well to both sides of the question. NB: Your own argument will only be as strong as the opposing evidence you admit from the other side!
- **How compelling is the positive statement?** An excellent article will be able to provide a well-structured, well-reasoned, and persuasive statement of their own position on the question. This will take the form of the initial statement (*Sed contra*) and the arguments for this position (*Respondeo*). Thorough research and engagement with relevant Scripture / commentaries and academic sources / theologians is key here.
- **How well are the objections answered?** An excellent article will provide compelling responses to each objection, showing how their weight can be allayed by other means.
- **How well does the presenter answer questions?** Students will present their articles to the class and answer follow-up questions; an excellent presentation will show mastery of the material in their responses.