

Ph.D./M.A. Seminar: Critical Studies in Prophecy
OT 6R1110

McMaster Divinity College
Winter Semester 2026
Wednesday, 2:00pm-3:50pm
Location: Camelford

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I. Description

This course focuses attention on recent research on the prophets and prophetic books of the Old Testament. Key streams of research over the past few decades will be investigated with the opportunity for students to engage key passages utilizing new methodologies.

II. Purpose

A. Knowing: To have a thorough knowledge of critical studies on the history, sociology, literature, and theology associated with the prophetic books of the Old Testament.; to understand the key methodologies which have been used for study of these figures and books in the Old Testament and ancient Israel and Judah.

B. Being: To gain a deeper appreciation for the theological potential of the prophetic books for Christian believers; to be challenged to deeper personal faith in God by the prophets and their message.

C. Doing: To be able to access the best resources for the study of the prophets and prophetic books; to employ recent methodologies for the study of the prophets and their associated literature; to hone Hebrew translation skills; to develop the ability to critically review literature and written papers in an oral setting

III. Reading Resources

The assigned readings listed in the schedule below will be distributed electronically.

Boda, Mark J. & McConville, J. G., eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2012. (DOTPr)

Sharp, Carolyn. *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. (OHP)

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Digital Theological Library: We have superb access to key monographs and research articles through the Digital Theological Library online and Mills Library in person here at McMaster.

IV. Schedule

January

7 Orientation

14 Class

- Primary Text: Zech 11:4-16
- Critical Studies: From Inner-biblical Allusion to Intertextuality
- Scholar: Mark Boda
- Assigned Reading:
 - Boda: *Exploring Zechariah 2 (preface, chs. 1, 9)* https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9780884142010_OA.pdf
 - For Student review (the student responsible for reviewing critical scholarship this week) begin with:
 - “Intertextuality and Innerbiblical Interpretation” by Michael Stead in DOTPr

21 Class

- Primary Text: Zech 8:1-13
- Critical Studies: Redaction and Compositional Criticism
- Scholar: Mark Boda
- Assigned Reading:
 - Boda: *Exploring Zechariah 1 (chs. 3, 5, 11)* https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9780884141983_OA.pdf
 - Boda: “Authors, Real and Implicit” <https://www.dropbox.com/s/6m1nxsko7gzmk5j/Boda%20Authors%20Real%20and%20Implicit%20in%20Block%20and%20Schultz%202015.pdf?dl=0>
 - For Student review (the student responsible for reviewing critical scholarship this week) begin with:
 - “Editorial/Redaction Criticism” by Paul Redditt in DOTPr
 - “Formation of the Prophetic Books” by J. Stromberg in DOTPr
 - “Redaction Criticism and the Prophets” by James D. Nogalski in OHP

28 Class

- **Primary Text:** Joel 2:1-11
- **Critical Studies:** Form and New Form Criticism
- **Scholar:** TBA
- **Assigned Reading:**
 - Readings distributed in A2L
 - For Student review (the student responsible for reviewing critical scholarship this week) begin with:
 - “Form Criticism” by Colin Toffelmire in DOTPr
 - “Genre Criticism and the Prophets” by Barbara Green in OHP

February

4 Class:

- **Primary Text:** Amos 5:5-17
- **Critical Studies:** Sociological Approaches
- **Scholar:** TBA
- **Assigned Reading:**
 - Readings distributed in A2L
 - For Student review (the student responsible for reviewing critical scholarship this week) begin with:
 - “Social-Scientific Approaches” by Danny Carroll in DOTPr

11 Class:

- **Primary Text:** Jer 20:7-18
- **Critical Studies:** Trauma and the Prophets
- **Scholar:** TBA
- **Assigned Reading:**
 - Readings distributed in A2L
 - For Student review (the student responsible for reviewing critical scholarship this week) begin with:
 - Claassens, L. Juliana. “Jeremiah: The Traumatized Prophet.” Pages 358–73 in *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*. Edited by Louis Stulman and Edward Silver. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.
 - Garber, David G. “Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies.” *Currents in Biblical Research* 14.1 (2015): 24–44.

18 No Class: Intensive Hybrid Week

25 Class:

- Primary Text: Jer 36:11-20
- Critical Studies: Prophets and the ANE
- Scholar: TBA
- Assigned Reading:
 - Readings distributed in A2L
 - For Student review (the student responsible for reviewing critical scholarship this week) begin with:
 - “Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy” by J. Stökl in DOTPr
 - “Prophetic Intermediation in the Ancient Near East” by Martti Nissinen in OHP

March

4 Class:

- Primary Text: Isa 57:1-10
- Critical Studies: Literary Approaches
- Scholar: TBA
- Assigned Reading:
 - Readings distributed in A2L
 - For Student review (the student responsible for reviewing critical scholarship this week) begin with:
 - “Literary Approaches” by L. Wray Beal in DOTPr
 - “Metaphorization and Other Tropes in the Prophets” by Julia M. O’Brien in OHP

Critical Paper Due: March 7

11 Class: Paper reviews

- Assigned Reading (one of):
 - “Isaiah: History of Interpretation” in DOTPr by B. H. Lim
 - “Isaiah: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues” in OHP by Ulrich Berges

18 Class: Paper reviews

- Assigned Reading (one of):
 - “Jeremiah: History of Interpretation” in DOTPr by J. Andrew Dearman
 - “Jeremiah: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues” in OHP Mark Leuchter

25 Class: Paper reviews

- Assigned Reading (one of):
 - “Ezekiel: History of Interpretation” in DOTPr by Iain M. Duguid
 - “Ezekiel: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues” in OHP by Andrew Mein

April

1 Class: Paper reviews

- **Assigned Reading (one of):**
 - “Twelve, Book of the: History of Interpretation” in DOTPr by Aaron Schar
 - “The Twelve: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues” in OHP by Rainer Kessler

8 Class: Final Reflection

V. Course Internet Resources

This semester we will be using Avenue 2 Learn for distributing course materials and papers. Papers will be distributed digitally.

VI. Learning Experiences

A. Class Experiences

This is a graduate seminar style class of collaborative learning in which professor and students are engaged in active learning together. Learning to critically (in its positive sense) engage material is essential to functioning in a graduate program and is expected of all students in our MA/PhD. It is expected that all students will not only attend these sessions, but also that they will assume responsibility for contributing to and learning from the experience. This means that readings will be completed prior to arrival in class and that student and presenter alike will pursue the acquisition of knowledge in the learning environment. It is expected that ALL members of the class will ask questions and contribute insights whenever opportunity is given, during and following presentations by professor or student alike.

Value: 15%

B. Seminar Preparation Notes

1. Translation: Each week students will prepare for the seminar meeting by translating the assigned portions in the Hebrew Bible (BHS). Each person in the class will provide a basic translation of their own with rudimentary justification in accompanying notes of difficult elements (lexical, syntactical, discourse, text critical).

2. Reading: Each week students will prepare for the seminar meeting by reading assigned secondary readings, noting any comments and questions in a minimum two page review.

Value: 25%

Due: The eve of the seminar, 11:59pm

Submission: A2L Discussion (PDF file)

C. Critical Studies Review

During the semester each student will prepare a review of critical scholarship on a key topic in the study of the prophets of the Old Testament. For these reviews an up-to-date bibliography on the topic must be prepared and distributed. The student will present a 20 minute overview of current scholarship on the topic, followed by a 20 minute session fielding questions from seminar participants. The bibliographies should indicate key works and their significance noted in a couple of sentences. The overviews should be synthetic and identify key and unresolved issues.

Value: 10%

Due: According to the schedule, eve of the seminar, 11:59pm

Submission: PDF to A2L in Assignments and Discussion

D. Critical Paper

For this assignment the student will write a minimum 20 page critical paper on the prophets or prophetic books in the Old Testament (hopefully relevant to their doctoral work) engaging the best in recent scholarship while showing awareness of the classic works in the field. These papers should provide a new perspective on the field, such as would be expected in a journal article. The hope is that this paper will be useful for conference presentations in the near future. Papers are due in PDF format by 7 March at 11:59 p.m. Each member of the class will provide 2 page reviews of all the other papers in the class and must be prepared before the class in which the paper is presented and must be posted to the discussion in A2L within 5 minutes after the end of class.

Value: 35% for paper, 15% for student paper reviews

Due: Paper: 7 March at 11:59 p.m.; Review: Mar 11, 18, 25; Apr 1, 8 after class

Submission: PDF to A2L in Assignments and Discussion

VII. Format and Evaluation

So I can properly evaluate your work the following style guide is to be used for papers in this class.

- **Medium for Submission:** All material in this class is to be submitted in digital format to me via Avenue 2 Learn. Please use .pdf format and ensure that what you send is what you want me to read.
- **Style:** All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/current-students/#mdc-style-guide>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions. Title page, footnoting where appropriate and bibliography are not included in the length required. Material should be written in excellent modern literary English with proper grammar, spelling, punctuation and rhetoric (including an introduction, conclusion and logical flow of argument). If it helps an outline may accompany the “paper” but this is not included in the length of the “paper.” Secondary and Primary sources should be used, cited and footnoted appropriately.
- **Gender Inclusive Language:** McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).
- **Citations:** You must cite the source of your material very carefully using a consistent system, not only when quoting from a section, but also when drawing from it as resource. Quotations should be kept to a minimum as I favour integration of secondary literature (footnoted).
- **Statement on Academic Honesty:** Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one’s own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student’s dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of

gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents. **All papers will be run through turnitin.com to ensure there is no plagiarism or inappropriate use of internet resources.**

***This is a special issue for those pursuing second and third degrees in theology. It is understood that students will be building on earlier ideas and work, but it is expected that students will not hand in material that is merely “warmed over” previous work. If there is reason for concern speak with the professor about this.

- **Artificial Intelligence:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you “tidy up” your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one’s own as if it is one’s own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one’s academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty @ <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>. **Papers submitted in this class may be checked by an AI checking site: <https://gptzero.me>.**
- **AODA:** In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.
- **Absence Due to Illness:** If you must miss class due to an illness, you must contact me (via email) as soon as possible to let me know. Likewise, if I should become ill, I will communicate with you via A2L about how we will make up class sessions. Although much of the course content will be made available via A2L, it would still be a good idea to have a friend take notes for you, if possible.
- **Inclement Weather:** If on a class meeting day MDC closes due to inclement weather, I reserve the right to move the lessons and, where possible, class activities for the week to A2L (asynchronous format). This will help to ensure that we stay on target in the course.

So I can properly evaluate your work and help you grow in your biblical and writing skills the following evaluation guide should be kept in mind as you write:

- **Presentation:** Is the spelling correct? Does the grammar/syntax reflect proper English? Is the paper laid out properly?
- **Argumentation:** Is there a good introduction and conclusion? Does the argument flow with ample support? Is the question answered?
- **Content:** Are all the points considered? Is there proper documentation of sources used?

VIII. Accountability

Note on Timeliness of Submissions: Since this is a seminar style course all participants must be timely in their submission of material. People will need to read the various submissions and once the schedule is set there is no room to switch dates. For that reason there are considerable penalties for late materials in this course. Each **DAY** a paper is late will mean the loss of half a letter grade (5%). Take this into account when planning out your semester.

Note on Timeliness of Attendance: From time to time you may find that you are late for class. Late arrivals, hereafter called “tardies,” are unacceptable and will lead to a negative disposition in the professor and your classmates. Such “tardies,” however, can be redeemed at the rate of Timbits for the entire class at the session following the tardy as well as a coffee for the professor.

Rule of the Timbits (הלכה התמבטים): Because “tardies” raise the ire of the covenant community (bound by this covenantal syllabus document delivered here at the foot of the “Mountain”), those who are late for class must have a means by which to atone for such “accidental sins” (בשגגה, if they are defiant sins, בְּיָד רָמָה, then the offender will be “cut off” from the community, see Num 15:27-31).¹ which means anyone late for class will need to bring Timbits for the entire class (מִנְחָה) no later than the next class meeting plus a Tim Hortons coffee (נֶסֶךְ) for the professor (cream, no sugar). This מִנְחָה and נֶסֶךְ will function simultaneously as both a sin offering (חֲטָאת, Leviticus 4) atoning for the accidental sin of the offender and a peace offering (שְׁלָמִים, Leviticus 3) enhancing the fellowship of the covenant community. See the high professor for further details and any torah-rulings (see Haggai 2:10-14) regarding specific situations.

Especially important is to take seriously the cry of Joel of old in 1:13:

חֲגִדוּ וְסָפְדוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים	Gird yourselves <i>with sackcloth</i>
הִילֵלוּ מִשְׁרְתֵי מִזְבֵּחַ	And lament, O priests;
בֹּאוּ לֵינוּ בַשָּׁקִים מִשְׁרְתֵי אֱלֹהֵי	Wail, O ministers of the altar!
כִּי נִמְנָע מִבַּיִת אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִנְחָה וְנֶסֶךְ:	Come, spend the night in sackcloth
	O ministers of my God,
	For <u>the grain offering and the drink offering</u>
	Are withheld from the house of your God.

And note his promise of a reward to those who repent in 2:14:

מִי יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם	Who knows whether He will turn and relent
וְהִשְׁאִיר אַחֲרָיו בְּרָכָה	And leave a blessing behind Him,
מִנְחָה וְנֶסֶךְ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	<u>Even a grain offering and a drink offering</u>
	For the LORD your God?

¹ Of course, see the “definitive” work on this: Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 1. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 53-54. For specific torah ruling also see the הלכה התמבטים.

IX. Preliminary Bibliography

Bibliographic Introductions/Surveys of Research:

- Baker, David W. "Israelite Prophets and Prophecy." Pages 266–94 in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*. Edited by D. W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999.
- Boda, Mark J., and J. G. McConville, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*. IVP Bible Dictionary Series 4. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012.
- Cook, Stephen L. "Apocalyptic Literature." Pages 287–301 in *The State of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*. Edited by H. H. Hardy and M. Daniel Carroll R. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024.
- Hauser, Alan J., and Schuyler Kaufman. *Recent Research on the Major Prophets*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2008.
- Hayes, John H. "Prophecy and Prophets, Hebrew Bible." Pages 310–17 in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by John H. Hayes. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.
- Hilber, John W. "Israelite Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context." Pages 132–45 in *The State of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*. Edited by H. H. Hardy and M. Daniel Carroll R. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024.
- Kelle, Brad E. "Prophetic Literature: Major Prophets." Pages 259–71 in *The State of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*. Edited by H. H. Hardy and M. Daniel Carroll R. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024.
- Sandy, D. Brent, and Daniel M. O'Hare. *Prophecy and Apocalyptic: An Annotated Bibliography*. Institute for Biblical Research Bibliographies 4. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Sharp, Carolyn J. *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Timmer, Daniel C. "Prophetic Literature: Minor Prophets." Pages 272–86 in *The State of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*. Edited by H. H. Hardy and M. Daniel Carroll R. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024.
- Tucker, Gene M. "Prophecy and the Prophetic Literature." Pages 325–68 in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*. Edited by Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- Wilson, Robert R. "Current Issues in the Study of Old Testament Prophecy." Pages 38–46 in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East; Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon*. Edited by J. Kaltner and L. Stulman. Vol. 378 of *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. London: T&T Clark, 2004.

Key Works (preliminary):

- Barton, John. *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Ben Zvi, Ehud, and Michael H. Floyd. *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*. Society of Biblical Literature 10. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins*. Center for the Study of Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity 3. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1977.
- . *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.
- Brenner, Athalya. *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.
- Chapman, Stephen B. *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation*. Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 27. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.
- Clements, Ronald E. *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.
- Conrad, Edgar W. *Reading the Latter Prophets: Toward a New Canonical Criticism*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 376. London: T&T Clark, 2003.
- Cook, Joan E. *Hear O Heavens and Listen O Earth: An Introduction to the Prophets*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005.
- Cryer, Frederick H. *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements 142. Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1994.
- Dempsey, Carol J. *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- Gowan, Donald E. *Theology of the Prophetic Book: Death and Resurrection of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- Gunkel, Hermann. "The Prophets as Writers and Poets." In *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity*, edited by J. L. Schaaf and D. L. Petersen, 22–73. Issues in Religion and Theology 10. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.
- House, Paul R. *The Unity of the Twelve*. Bible and Literature Series 27. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990.
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- . *Prophecy and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*. Writings from the Ancient World 12. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.
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- Rendtorff, Rolf. "The Place of Prophecy in a Theology of the Old Testament." In *Canon and Theology: Overtures to Old Testament Theology*, edited by M. Kohl, 57–65. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.
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- . *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.
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