

Ph.D./M.A. Seminar: Critical Studies in Prayer

OT 6R1120

McMaster Divinity College

Winter Semester 2027

Wednesdays 9:00am-10:50am

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I. Description

This course focuses attention on recent research on prayer in the Old Testament and its associated communities. 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 prayer texts in the Old Testament; to understand the key methodologies which have been used for study of these texts in the Old Testament and ancient Israel and Judah.

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

C. Doing: To be able to access the best resources for the study of prayer in the Old Testament; to employ recent methodologies for and engage recent topics on the study of prayer and its associated literature; to continue to increase Hebrew translation skills; to hone the ability to critically review literature and written papers in an oral setting

III. Reading Resources

Balentine, Samuel E. *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine–Human Dialogue*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.

Balentine, Samuel E. "Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: Retrospective and Prospective." In *Selected Studies on Deuterocanonical Prayers*, edited by Angela Kim Harkins and Barbara Schmitz, 9–26. Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology 103. Leuven: Peeters, 2021. Download in A2L.

Viljoen, Francois P., and Albert J. Coetsee, eds. *Biblical Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament*. Reformed Theology in Africa Series 12. Cape Town, South Africa: AOSIS, 2023. Free download at:

<https://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/417>

Readings made available in A2L

Hurlburt Family Bookstore: 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, students 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.

IV. Schedule

January

13 Orientation

- **Syllabus**
- **Critical Studies: Defining OT Prayer**
- **Assigned Reading: below**

20 Class

- **Primary Text: TBD by student praying**
- **Critical Studies: OT Prayer and Form Criticism**
- **Scholar: Mark Boda**
- **Assigned Reading: To be confirmed**

27 Class

- **Primary Text: TBD by student praying**
- **Critical Studies: OT Prayer and Social Function**
- **Guest Scholar: To be confirmed**
- **Assigned Reading: To be confirmed**

February

3 Class

- **Primary Text: TBD by student praying**
- **Critical Studies: OT Prayer at Qumran**
- **Guest Scholar: To be confirmed**
- **Assigned Reading: To be confirmed**

10 Class

- **Primary Text: TBD by student praying**
- **Critical Studies: OT Prayer and Scripturalization**
- **Guest Scholar: To be confirmed**
- **Assigned Reading: To be confirmed**

17 No Class: Reading Week

24 Class

- **Primary Text:** TBD by student praying
- **Critical Studies:** OT Prayer and Ethics
- **Guest Scholar:** To be confirmed
- **Assigned Reading:** To be confirmed

March

3 Class

- **Primary Text:** TBD by student praying
- **Critical Studies:** OT Prayer and Protest
- **Guest Scholar:** To be confirmed
- **Assigned Reading:** To be confirmed

10 Class

- **Primary Text:** TBD by student praying
- **Critical Studies:** OT Prayer and Religious Experience
- **Guest Scholar:** To be confirmed
- **Assigned Reading:** To be confirmed

11 Seminar Paper due

17 Class: Seminar Paper reviews

24 Class: Seminar Paper reviews

31 Class: Seminar Paper reviews

April

7 Class: Seminar Paper reviews

12 Biblical Theology of Prayer Paper due

14 Class: Reflection

V. Course Internet Resources

This semester we will be using Avenue 2 Learn for distributing course materials and papers. Papers will not be distributed in paper form, but only 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 (whether online or in person) and participate in discussions (whether online or in person), but also that they will assume responsibility for contributing to and learning from the experience. This means that readings will be completed prior to 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. *In this course each student will lead the opening prayer for class by quickly expositing a prayer from the Old Testament and then praying that prayer on behalf of the class. Weeks will be chosen at our first class session and a portion of that prayer will be translated by all members of the class prior to the class session.*

Value: 10%

B. Seminar Preparation Notes

1. Translation: Each week students will translate the assigned portions in the Hebrew Bible (BHS) based on the prayer chosen by a student for that week. Each person in the class will provide a basic translation of their own with justification in footnotes of difficult elements: text critical, lexical, syntactical and discursive. Post these to A2L.

2. Reading: Each week students will prepare for the seminar meeting by reading assigned secondary readings. Prior to the sessions with scholars students will post a minimum 2 page response to the A2L discussion which includes leading questions and critical interaction with the scholar's work for that week, also listing which articles/sections of books/books they read for that scholar.

Value: 20%

Due: The eve of the seminar, 11:59pm, then by the end of that week for responses to fellow students.

Submission: PDF for translations to A2L Discussion; Reading response to A2L discussion

C. Critical Studies in Prayer Paper

For this assignment the student will write a minimum 25 page critical paper on prayer text(s)/themes in the Old Testament (hopefully but not necessarily 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 (submit to A2L in assignments as well as the discussion for Critical Paper to professor by email) to be posted on the course web site. Each member of the class will provide a minimum 2 page review of other members of the class. The paper will be presented in a 5 minute overview during our class times together and will be followed by a review and discussion by the entire class. The minimum 2 page review is to be posted to the discussion in A2L immediately following the session.

Value: 40% for paper, 10% for student paper reviews

Due: Paper: 11 March 2027 at 11:59 p.m.; Review: 17, 24, 31 November or 7 April 2027 orally in session and written within fifteen minutes following class

Submission: PDF to A2L in Assignments and Discussion

D. Biblical Theology of Prayer Paper

After reading the edited volume of Viljoen and Coetsee *Biblical Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament* and Balentine's *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* (and article updating it) students will submit a final 15 page paper which provides insight into their own articulation of a biblical theology of prayer, identifying in the end the potential for these insights to shape the life of believers and church communities. Interaction with scholarship should begin with the works of Viljoen-Cetsee and Balentine and then draw in others (especially those read this semester). We will discuss insights gained in our final class together.

Value: 20%

Due: 12 April 2027

Submission: PDF to A2L in Assignments

VII. Format and Evaluation

So I can properly evaluate your work the following guide is to be used for papers in this class. See further: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>.

- **Medium for Submission:** All material in this class is to be submitted in .pdf format through Avenue 2 Learn.
- **College Style for Submission of Written Work:** All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Press Style Guide <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.
- **Further style details:** 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 student will use inclusive language in all MDC assignments. When referencing biblical texts, students should preserve the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God while using gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Biblical quotations should be taken from a gender-inclusive translation such as: NRSVue (2022), NIV (2011), CEB (2011), NLT (1996), or CEV (1995).

- **Citations:** You must cite the source of your material very carefully, not only when quoting from a section, but also when drawing from it as a resource. Quotations should be kept to a minimum as I favour summary and integration of secondary literature (footnoted).
- **Academic Honesty:** Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresenting the authorship or ownership of written work through deception or other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include copying or using unauthorized aids during tests or examinations; plagiarism, that is, presenting another person's (or generative AI's) words, ideas, data, or creative work as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement and citation; or submitting work for credit in more than one course without instructor permission..

*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.

- **A special note about Generative AI:** Students are expected to do their own thinking and write their own papers and assignments. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work. The use of AI to produce content that is then submitted as though it were the student's own work constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of the Academic Honesty Policy. While AI tools may be used to correct errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI must not be used to translate assignments from a student's native language into English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in the English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.
- **Rubric:** 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? Does the voice of the paper writer dominate the argument, rather than merely provide a string of quotations?
 - **Content:** Are all the points considered? Is there proper documentation of sources used? Is there appropriate use of secondary literature while providing engagement with data (often the biblical text) which proves the argument?

VIII. Policies

- **Absence Due to Illness:** If you must miss class due to an illness, you must contact me 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. Even if 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.
- **GuardMe Statement:** Students at McMaster Divinity College have access to the GuardMe Student Support Program (GMSSP), which offers free, confidential mental health and wellness support 24/7. Through the program, students can connect with counsellors, access helpful tools and resources, and receive support anytime, from anywhere. Support is available by phone (1-844-451-9700) or visit gmssp.org to download the Student Support App.

- **AODA:** In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), McMaster Divinity College (MDC) is committed to supporting a learning environment that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Students who require academic accommodations to participate fully in this course must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) (<https://sas.mcmaster.ca/>) of McMaster University. SAS will work directly with the MDC Registrar to ensure reasonably appropriate accommodations are in place. Students with accommodations must use the SAS portal to activate the accommodations relevant to each course at the start of each term in which they are enrolled. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. Accommodations are not retroactive and will not be applied to coursework or activities that have already concluded.

Contact Information:

- **Student Accessibility Services General Inquiries:** sas@mcmaster.ca
- **Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC):** sobotar@mcmaster.ca
- **MDC Registrar:** mdcreg@mcmaster.ca

IX. Accountability

Note on Timeliness of Submissions: Since this is a seminar style course all participants must be timely in their submission of material. 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 soonest in person 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, ביד רמה, 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 (מנחה) no later than the next in person class meeting plus a Tim Hortons coffee (נסך) for the professor (cream, no sugar). This מנחה and נסך will function simultaneously as both a sin offering (חטאת, Leviticus 4) atoning for the accidental sin of the offender and a peace offering (שלמים, 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.

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 fuller הלכה התמבטים.

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

חָגְרוּ וְסָפְדוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים	Gird yourselves <i>with sackcloth</i>
הַלֵּילֹל מִשְׁרְתֵי מִזְבֵּחַ	And lament, O priests;
בָּאוּ לֵינוּ בַשָּׁקִים מִשְׁרְתֵי אֱלֹהֵי	Wail, O ministers of the altar!
כִּי נִמְנָע מִבֵּית 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
וְהַשְׂאִיר 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?

X. Bibliography

Select Key Volumes in the History of Scholarship (chronological order)

- Gunkel, Hermann, and Joachim Begrich. *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*. Translated by James Nogalski. Mercer Library of Biblical Studies. Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1998 (1933 as *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der Religiösen Lyrik Israels*).
- Mowinckel, Sigmund. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*. Biblical Resource Series. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004 (1951 as *Offersang og Sangoffer*).
- Krinetzki, L. *Israels Gebet im Alten Testament*. Aschaffenburg, Germany: Paul Pattloch, 1965.
- Crüsemann, Frank. *Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel*. Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 32. Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1969.
- Westermann, Claus. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1981 (1977 as *Lob und Klage in den Psalmen*).
- Westermann, Claus. *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994 (1990 as *Die Klagelieder: Forschungsgeschichte und Auslegung*).
- Greenberg, M. *Biblical Prose Prayer as a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983.
- Reventlow, H. Graf. *Gebet im Alten Testament*. Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer, 1986.
- Throntveit, Mark A. *When Kings Speak: Royal Speech and Royal Prayer in Chronicles*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 93. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1987.
- Balentine, Samuel E. *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue*. *Overtures to Biblical Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.
- Miller, Patrick D. *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994.
- Falk, Daniel K. *Daily, Sabbath, and Festival Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Leiden: Brill, 1998.
- Werline, Rodney A. *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution*. *Early Judaism and Its Literature* 13. Atlanta: Scholars, 1998.
- Newman, Judith H. *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*. *Early Judaism and Its Literature* 14. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1999.

- Nasuti, Harry P. *Defining the Sacred Songs: Genre, Tradition and the Post–Critical Interpretation of the Psalms*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 218. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999.
- Boda, Mark J. *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 277. Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999.
- Mandolfo, Carleen. *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 357. London, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2002.
- Morrow, William S. *Protest against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition*. Hebrew Bible Monographs 4. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006.
- Boda, Mark J., et al., eds. *Seeking the Favor of God*. Early Judaism and Its Literature no 21-22. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006.
- , eds. *Seeking the Favor of God—Volume 2: The Development of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*. Early Judaism and Its Literature 22. Atlanta, GA; Leiden, Netherlands: Society of Biblical Literature; Brill, 2007.
- , eds. *Seeking the Favor of God—Volume 3: The Impact of Penitential Prayer beyond Second Temple Judaism*. Early Judaism and Its Literature. Atlanta, GA; Leiden, Netherlands: Society of Biblical Literature; Brill, 2008.
- Mandolfo, Carleen. *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations*. Semeia Studies 58. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically*. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.
- Matlock, Michael D. *Discovering the Traditions of Prose Prayers in Early Jewish Literature*. Library of Second Temple Studies 81. London: T. & T. Clark, 2012.
- Bier, Miriam J., and Tim Bulkeley, eds. *Spiritual Complaint: The Theology and Practice of Lament*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013.
- Newman, Judith H. *Before the Bible: The Liturgical Body and the Formation of Scriptures in Early Judaism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Middleton, J. Richard. *Abraham's Silence: The Binding of Isaac, the Suffering of Job, and How to Talk Back to God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021.
- Camp, Phillip, and Elaine Phillips, eds. *Speaking with God: Probing Old Testament Prayers for Contemporary Significance*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021.
- Balentine, Samuel E. *The Lure of Transcendence and the Audacity of Prayer: Selected Essays*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 157. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022.
- Laurence, Trevor. *Cursing with God: The Imprecatory Psalms and the Ethics of Christian Prayer*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2022.
- Viljoen, Francois P., and Albert J. Coetsee, eds. *Biblical Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament*. Reformed Theology in Africa Series 12. Cape Town, South Africa: AOSIS, 2023. download: <https://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/417>
- Harrichand, James Japheth Sudarshan. *Compassionate Intercultural Care Practices for Coping with Grief: Biblical Theology in Conversation with Pastoral Theology*. Studies in Theology Series. Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2024.
- Suderman, W. Derek. *The Social Audience of Prayer: A Rhetorical and Canonical Study of Individual Lament Psalms*. Siphut 28. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2026.
- Falk, Daniel K. and Rodney A. Werline, eds. *Prayer in the Ancient World* (3 volumes). Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

More Popular Works by Scholars on Prayer in the Old Testament

- Clements, R. E. *In Spirit and in Truth: Insights from Biblical Prayers*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1985.
- Thompson, Michael E. W. *I Have Heard Your Prayer: The Old Testament and Prayer*. Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 1996.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. *Prayer and the Knowledge of God: What the Whole Bible Teaches*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Hawkins, Ralph K. *While I Was Praying: Finding Insights about God in Old Testament Prayers*. Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2006.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Great Prayers of the Old Testament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008.
- Camp, Phillip G., and Tremper Longman, eds. *Praying with Ancient Israel: Exploring the Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2015.
- Kaiser, Walter C. *I Will Lift My Eyes unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament*. Wooster, Ohio: Weaver Book Company, 2015.

Please Note: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.