

OT 3P1270

My Servants the Prophets: Reading Old Testament Prophetic Literature for Today

Course Information

Instructor:	Ambrose Thomson, PhD Assistant Professor of Old Testament McMaster Divinity College Hamilton, Ontario
Term:	Winter 2027
Mode:	In-Person + Livestream Option
Schedule:	Mondays from 4:00 PM to 5:50 PM
Live-Stream Info:	Zoom room link will be published on A2L course site.

Course Description

An introductory study of Old Testament Prophecy through a survey of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, with a special focus on the historical setting, literary form, content, and message of the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. This course examines the meaning of these books in their ancient context as foundational for understanding their message and theological significance for the Church and society today.

Course Objectives

Through active engagement with all aspects of this course, students will come to:

Knowing	Identify and explain key emphases and their significance within the Old Testament Prophetic Books. Explain how the prophetic corpus within the Old Testament fits within the grand narrative of the unified canon.
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Gain familiarity with the assumptions, methods and conclusions of modern critical scholarship on the prophetic books.

Being Reflect on the Glory of God revealed in the Old Testament Prophets and discover new motivation to give him worship and adoration as the King of the entire Cosmic Order.

Cultivate a posture of humble listening to God's Word as a life-long learner.

"Present [themselves] to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15)

Allow the Scripture to motivate, form, and transform one's life and ministry.

Doing Interpret the Old Testament Prophetic Books in light of their literary and socio-historical contexts and distinct theological perspectives with the assistance of relevant secondary literature.

Describe key Old Testament historical events, tracing them chronologically and geographically and to understand their significance for interpreting the prophetic books.

Apply the message of the prophets to contemporary audiences.

Discern appropriate secondary sources in biblical studies relevant to understanding and applying Old Testament prophetic texts.

Course Textbooks

The required reading for this course will come from a variety of sources, which will be provided in the final syllabus and posted on A2L. All of them except Abernethy will be available on DTL. The following three books will have several reading selections assigned from them and would be good for students to own.

Abernathy, Andrew T. *The Prophets*. Baker Handbooks on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2026.

Boda, Mark J., and J. Gordon McConville, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.

McConville, J. Gordon. *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets*. Exploring the Bible Series 4. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002.

Course Work

All students in the course must complete the following required course components as described by the due dates indicated unless otherwise arranged with the professor or accommodated through a Student Accessibility Services accommodation plan.

Name	Weight	Due Date	Length
Class Preparation	25%	Weekly/April 12	No set length
Reading Reflections	15%	Feb 2	≈6 Pages
Exegetical Essay	35%	March 9	≈12 Pages
Thematic Exploration	25%	April 6	≈10 Pages

All due dates must be strictly adhered to unless advanced permission is obtained from the professor for an extended deadline. All assignments are due at 11:59 PM on the date indicated unless otherwise stated. Course assignments handed in past the due date without prior permission will not receive written feedback but will receive only a grade.

Class Attendance – 0%

To support healthy classroom dynamics and create an engaging atmosphere for all students, class attendance is mandatory for all students. Those in attendance by livestream are expected to have their cameras on at all times during class. Late arrival and absences may be accommodated upon request for extenuating circumstances such as illness. Although no grade is assigned for attendance, participation in class sessions makes up the bulk of the learning furnished by the course. As such, *students who miss more than four class sessions cannot pass the course.*

Class Preparation and Participation – 25%

In order to cultivate a cooperative learning community, students will prepare for class each week by 1) reading assigned selections from biblical passages and secondary literature according to the class schedule and 2) by identifying questions and observations that can be used to interact during classroom activities (e.g., lectures, class discussions). The readings assigned for each class session will be posted on A2L at least one week before the date of class.

Length: No set length.

Due Date: Before each class session. Written submission due April 12, 2027.

Instructions: 1) Carefully read the assigned readings for each day *before* class.
2) Identify one critical question and one observation about the assigned reading *before* class. The questions and observations do not need to be related to one another.

- 3) During each class session, identify an *additional two* critical observations and an *additional two* questions that arise from further engagement through the classroom activities that day.
- 4) Using the assignment grid template provided on A2L, confirm your completion of each assigned reading and compile your questions and observations for submission by the assigned due date.

Note: “Stealing” the observations and questions raised by fellow students during classroom times is encouraged! However, try to think of why another person’s contribution stood out to you as important. Make it your own, even if your thoughts were stimulated by others. *Do not overtax yourself with the writing aspect of this assignment.* A sentence or two for questions and observations are sufficient—as long as the professor can understand what you’re saying and how it engages with specific passages and class times. The goal is to document that you prepared for class times as expected.

- Completion Criteria:**
- 1) Uses the assignment template provided by the professor.
 - 2) Includes three questions and three observations for each day.
 - 3) Indicates the date on which the student completed each assigned reading.
- Note:** No MDC style guide requirement for this assignment.

Reading Reflections – 15%

In this activity, students are to read the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel in the Bible. For each of the books, students will write a mini-essay reflecting on how their understanding of these books is growing in the course and how God is speaking to them through these books.

Approach your reading as a devotional activity with prayer. The goal of this exercise is both to learn what is in these books to support theological and biblical literacy and to allow these books to function as divine revelation for your life right now. Since the word of the Lord does not return to him empty, you should expect and pray that this assignment will be transformative, as well as informative.

Length: ≈2 pages per biblical book; ≈6 pages total.

Due Date: Feb 2, 2027

Instructions: 1) Before reading for the assignment, develop your personal context for reading these prophetic books by identifying several questions you have in your life and learning right now. These can be questions about your personal life such as questions about decisions and direction or sense-making questions that you have as you try to understand what God is doing in your life through the circumstances and experiences you have encountered. The questions can also be related to your current level of biblical and theological understanding, such as questions about

theological issues or Church practices and patterns of thought that you are wrestling with and need greater insight and clarity over. You will probably find it helpful to write down some of these questions as you begin the reading and add to them as you go.

2) Read the Old Testament books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, praying that the Holy Spirit will speak his living word to you through these Scriptures.

3) As you read, look for ways that the things you are learning in the course impact the perspective you have on the text.

4) As you read, watch for thoughts and ideas that come into your mind about the questions you identified in developing your personal context for reading. These may be promptings of the Spirit. Note these things and pray about them. Listen to what the Lord may want to say in or about those thoughts and ideas.

5) Write a short, reflective mini-essay highlighting how these books make sense to you now in light of the learning in the course and how your experience of hearing from God through Scripture has been helped (or hindered) by the perspectives you've gained in the course. The essay should include specific discussion of your perspective on each of those three books and how it has been impacted by the course as well as specific reflection on how God has or has not spoken into the questions you identified when developing your personal context of reading these Scriptures at the outset.

- Completion Criteria:**
- 1) Includes a short initial statement confirming that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel have been read in their entirety.
 - 2) Includes reflective discussion of all three assigned biblical books.
 - 2) Includes a bibliography of sources (if any) that you cited in the essay.
 - 3) Follows the MDC Style Guide.

Exegetical Essay – 35%

In this activity, students will write an exegetical essay on a passage from the list provided below, in which they will identify and interact with two to three major interpretive questions/problems/issues in the passage.

Length: ≈12 Pages

Due Date: March 9, 2027

Instructions: The assignment submission should include the following sections/content:

Introduction: 1) Identify the passage. 2) Give a 1–2 sentence summary of what kind of text the passage contains and what it is about. 3) Identify the 2–3 key interpretive questions/problems/issues you will be addressing and describe their significance in 1–2 sentences each. 4) Clearly state your thesis about how you will address the interpretive questions/problems/issues in the rest of the paper and what conclusion(s) you will reach.

Body Section: Present an argument that supports your thesis statement. This argument should supply evidence from the passage of scripture and interact with the secondary sources you have consulted. What have people said about the interpretive questions/problems/issues you are working on? Why do you agree or disagree with their assessments? In the main text of your argument, avoid overly long direct quotations of secondary sources. Instead, you should summarize their arguments in your own words and include, only if necessary, a very short quotation illustrating their main point. Make sure you mention the author you're summarizing and include a footnote indicating the source.

Conclusion: Given the brevity of the paper, there need not be any recap of your argument in the conclusion. Instead, reflect in several sentences on how your investigation of these interpretive questions/problems/issues have impacted your personal understanding of God's word and the way you try to live out his teaching in real life and ministry.

Research: Your paper should make clear references to and interact with 12 or more distinct scholarly resources. At least three of these should be journal articles or essays in edited volume. At least two of them should be monographs. The remaining sources can be commentaries or introductory works such as the course textbook or dictionary articles.

- Completion Criteria:**
- 1) Analyses an approved passage.
 - 2) Has a clear thesis statement.
 - 3) Includes a clear introduction, body section, and conclusion, including a discussion of impact on real life and ministry
 - 4) Cites 12 or more distinct scholarly sources including three journal articles or book chapters and two monographs.
 - 5) Follows the MDC Style Guide.

Thematic Exploration – 25%

In this activity, students will write short essays in response to four questions on the theme of idolatry in one of the three major prophets.

Length: ≈10 Pages

Due Date: April 6, 2027

- Instructions:**
- 1) Begin by reading Deut 4:15-31 to get a picture of Israel's foundational teaching about idolatry.
 - 2) Select one of the three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) as the basis of your thematic study. It is strongly encouraged that you leverage the Bible reading you are already doing already for the Reading Reflections assignment.

3) Consult scholarly resources that deal with the topic of idolatry in the Old Testament and especially the prophets. A good place to start is a dictionary entry in something like *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, or *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. However, students must go beyond introductory resources by looking at the bibliography provided in such resources to find more critical resources such as articles and monographs.

4) Write short essay responses to the following four questions *using the template provided on A2L*.

1. What is the basic nature of idolatry according to the prophetic book chosen?
2. Why is idolatry a problem for God's people according to the prophetic book chosen?
3. What is God's response to deal with the problem of idolatry according to the prophetic book chosen?
4. How can the Bible's teaching about idolatry be applied in the modern/post-modern world?

5) Your paper should make clear references to and interact with 8–10 distinct scholarly resources, only one of which should be introductory in nature (i.e., stick to monographs, articles, commentaries, etc.).

Course Outline

1. Introduction and Course Overview
2. Prophets in the Canon
3. The Prophetic Phenomenon
4. Prophets in Old Testament Times
5. Prophetic Literature
6. Reading Week
7. Orientation to Isaiah's Life and Writings
8. The Prophecy of Isaiah
9. Orientation to Jeremiah's Life and Writings
10. The Prophecy of Jeremiah
11. Orientation to Ezekiel's Life and Writings
12. The Prophecy of Ezekiel
13. "Wise unto Salvation"—OT Prophecy in the NT

Course reading Schedule

The reading schedule will be updated on the final syllabus in the Fall 2026 term, prior to the launch of the course. Students can expect that for each week of class there will be 2–3 chapters of Bible reading plus 1–2 chapter(s) or article(s) of secondary source reading taken from the textbook and/or other resources.

MDC Course Policies

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.

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.

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

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).

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.

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.

Presence and Meaningful Participation

Presence and participation in this course are expected and a student's level of presence and participation in the course will impact how well they will score in the course. Low levels of presence and participation tend to translate to low grades; mediocre presence and participation tend to translate to mediocre grades; and high levels of presence and participation tend to translate to higher grades.

Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. Students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week both within and outside of the learning management system (Avenue to Learn).

Online Etiquette

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for both classmates and the instructor. This is even more important in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that people use to interpret communication are largely absent. Therefore, students should be especially mindful of how their words may be interpreted by those who read them. Course instructors will monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course.

Online Synchronous Course Policy

Technology Requirements

- A reliable internet connection (tested before class time),
- A device with audio and video capability
- The correct video conferencing platform installed (e.g., Zoom, Teams).

Webcam & Environment

- Students must keep their microphones muted except when speaking to minimize background noise.
- Students must keep their webcams on throughout the class session.
- Students must dress appropriately.
- Students must ensure their surroundings are free from unnecessary distractions. Professional virtual backgrounds are permitted.

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and MDC. It 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. Students will be kept apprised of any changes.