

Minor Prophets

Semenari Theologi Malaysia
English TEE—Petaling Jaya Campus
January 2019
Syllabus

Instructor Contact

The Rev. Aaron Decker, Th.M.
Email: RevADecker@gmail.com
Website: www.RevAaronD.com

Objectives

- To increase familiarity with the contents and message of the Twelve Minor Prophets.
- To learn and practice Old Testament exegetical methods (text, historical, redaction, literary, etc.).
- To consider how different communities and individuals respond to the same prophetic witness dependent on their social location, and how the prophets spoke to various parts of their own society.
- To explore how the prophets constructed their proclamation, how it was adapted for new contexts in Israel's history and in the New Testament, and how it should (and should not) be used today.
- To consider the relationship between the Israelite prophetic witness and the Church's proclamation, teaching, and mission today.
- To cultivate a deeper view of God's vision for and presence in the world.

Required Textbooks

- The Bible. Any modern English translation* will do. The instructor will be using the NRSV in class.
- Another Bible. Any translation* in any language will do. Students are encouraged to choose a Bible in their primary home language, but should be aware that the class may require them to render it in English so that all may discuss. English-primary students may wish to choose another English translation, or another language in which they have competence.
- Readings available on the professor's website (www.RevAaronD.com under "Courses").

* While translations that fall any place on the spectrum between formal and dynamic equivalence are acceptable, please *do not* use a paraphrase, such as the Living Bible or the Good News Bible. While these strive to accurately capture the meaning of the biblical text and are excellent for devotional purposes, their method makes them unsuitable for scholarly study. The King James Version, while popular with many congregations, is also not appropriate for scholarly study due to a variety of translation issues.

Basic Course Plan

This plan provides a guideline for the course, but should not be understood as an inflexibly determined plan. Students are invited to help shape the course, and the instructor may change plans to facilitate classroom needs.

Preparation before January 11

- David Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*, Chapter 1.
- James D. Nogalski, *Interpreting Prophetic Literature*, brief section on using multiple translations. (Note that he is speaking to an American context, expecting monolingual students. Consider how his thoughts might differ in a Malaysian polyglot context.)
- Read Joel, Amos, Hosea, and Micah in one translation. Read *slowly* and *carefully*. Pay attention to both *what* the prophet is saying and *how* the prophet is saying it. Take note of anything you find particularly interesting, meaningful, or strange. Write down questions that occur to you and bring them to class.
- Read Joel, Amos, Hosea, and Micah in the second translation. How are they different from the first? Are there small translational differences that give the reading a different feeling? Are there words or verses that make the meaning very different?
- Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets*, Chapter 4, "Yet I Will Remember My Covenant with You: The World of Romance and Rape." Reflect on the marriage metaphor in Hosea 1–3 in light of her discussion. (Note that Weems is writing from within the culture of the United States of America.)

Friday - Jan 11, 20:00–22:30

- Course Overview
- Intro to Prophecy

Saturday - Jan 12, 9:00–18:00

- **Joel** - Doom and Hope
- **Amos** - Redaction Criticism, Rhetoric
- **Hosea** - Form Criticism, Culture and Context

Sunday - Jan 13, 14:00–18:00

- **Micah** - Church's History of Interpretation/Christ
- How We Use Prophecy

Preparation before January 18

- Charles C. Torrey, "Apocalypse," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1642-apocalypse> Compare with what your past impressions of apocalyptic literature such as Daniel, Zechariah 1–8, and the New Testament Revelation to John has been. Are these texts saying the same thing that most people assume they are saying? What do you need to know before reading in order to understand them correctly?

- Read Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah 1–8, Malachi, and Jonah in two translations, taking notes as you did for session one.
- Julia M. O'Brien, "On Saying 'No' to a Prophet" and "In Retrospect..."
- Mayer I. Gruber, "Nineveh the Adulteress."

Friday - Jan 18, 20:00–22:30

- **Obadiah, Nahum** - Israel's Enemies

Saturday - Jan 19, 9:30–18:30

- **Habakkuk** - Prophecy and Worship
- **Haggai** - After the Exile
- **Zechariah** - Apocalypse, Excursus on the Revelation to John
- **Malachi** - Death of the Old, Birth of the New

Sunday - Jan 20, 14:00–18:00

- **Jonah** - Israel's Enemies
- How Prophecy Uses Us

Student Assessment

ASSESSMENT	VALUE
Class Conversation	15%
Reflection Essay 1	15%
Reflection Essay 2	15%
Exegetical Essay	55%

Class Conversation

Your participation in classroom discussion is vital for both your learning and that of the other students in the class. Moreover, an intensive course will be very boring if we all spend hours simply listening to the professor talk! If you are reticent to speak or ask questions, challenge yourself to step outside your comfort zone. Different students participate in different ways. If there is another way you might contribute to the conversation more effectively, please speak to the professor, and we will find a more comfortable method of including you and your ideas. They are worth hearing!

Reflection Essays

Due **June 20**. Please choose two of the following questions to reflect on:

- The prophets spoke to a particular time and place. Are they still relevant to people/communities of faith?
- Prophets spoke against injustices and against idolatry, to both the general public and to the political and religious authorities of their time. How might we find our own modern prophetic voice?

- What do context and culture have to do with the prophet's ability to answer her calling? How would prophecy in modern Malaysia look different from that of ancient Israel? Does the minority status of the Christian faith in this country affect the Christian prophetic voice?
- We spent a great deal of time looking at the way the prophets spoke—the literary form of their message. Why is this important? How might reading their proclamations change the way you preach and teach?
- Prophets often use apocalyptic and end-times imagery in proclamation. These passages, especially, can be abused when misunderstood. How can the community of faith protect itself against misinterpretation while still allowing room for the Holy Spirit's work and creativity?
- What do the minor prophets have to do with Jesus? Consider more than the traditional Christological interpretation of specific prophecies. How can we read the prophets authentically, and still hear Jesus in their witness?
- Other topics that interest the student are certainly permissible with instructor approval.

Please plan to write approximately 2–3 pages of response to each of these questions. These essays are *reflections* on the meaning of prophecy and the practice of ministry, not research. You *do not* need to include any quotations or prove your points with sources. (If you *do* choose to use a source in your paper, you *must* cite it; all ideas that are not your own should be cited, so credit is given to their originator. But this essay does not need to contain anyone else's ideas—only your own reflections.)

GRADE	RUBRIC CRITERION FOR REFLECTION PAPERS
100	Student is able to clearly address the question with their own ideas and relate them to the biblical prophetic texts. Personal stories are told and the connection is made clear, theological teaching is questioned (whether ultimately challenged or affirmed), imaginative wondering is offered, or tangible lessons for Church leadership are given. At least some of these ideas are obviously new for the student. Implications for the life of the Church, for faith, or for academic research are explored deeply. Student may directly challenge the lecturer's teaching offered in class, and supports their challenge with evidence from the biblical text.
90	Student can adequately address some aspects of the question in relationship with the text of the prophets. The student's thoughts are supported by previous theological teaching, personal stories, and imaginative exploration. Theologies are gently questioned but without extended engagement. Implications for the life of the Church, for faith, or for academic research are explored in brief. Student may directly challenge the lecturer's teaching in class, with support from theology but not the biblical text itself.
80	Student explores the question from the standpoint of general prophetic witness, without directly engaging the prophets themselves. The student's thoughts are imaginative but mostly unsupported. Theologies are assumed and unquestioned. Implications for the life of the Church, for faith, or for academic research are unexplored. Student accepts the lecturer's ideas wholesale without support or challenge.

GRADE	RUBRIC CRITERION FOR REFLECTION PAPERS
70	Student is able to connect the question with their theological background or the historical theology of some part of the church—a clear sign that they have paid attention to people who have led and formed them in faith. They are able to relate the question to these theological positions to the prophets, but are not challenging them or drawing out their implications. Student is able to reflect well, but not in a personal way. The student is unable to relate the question to life beyond the paper.
50	Student is able to name theological ideas that are explicitly named in the text without any additional reflection. Reflections may appear lifted from commentaries or aimed directly at what the professor "wants to hear" without any real engagement with the text. Student addresses the question theologically, but without engaging the prophetic witness.
20	Student ignores the methodologies used in class (historical grounding, taking the text seriously and imaginatively, exploring form as well as meaning, serious skepticism toward Christological interpretations from church tradition, etc.). Student does not ground their writing in the class discussion or biblical text in any way.
0	Student does not turn in assignment, offers an assignment on some topic not discussed with the lecturer, or offers an assignment that has no clear connection to the Bible's prophetic witness. (This includes the modern idea of prophecy; you may write on this if it fits your topic, but you must connect that writing to the Hebrew prophets as well!)

Exegetical Essay

Due June 20. Please choose any reading from among the Twelve Minor Prophets on which to write a 2200–2500 word (approx. 7–8 pages) exegetical paper. If you are or will be preaching, you are encouraged to select a passage on which you might preach; students whose tradition employs a lectionary could choose a passage that appears in the reading cycle. Nevertheless, any passage that interests you is appropriate. Using available reference materials, interpret the passage. Some things you might consider:

- Why the passage starts and ends in the places you selected. How does it relate to the rest of the book?
- What oddities are present in the text—particularly word/grammar issues, if you can.
- What is the historical context of the passage? When was it written/spoken, where, and to whom? What was going on that provoked the oracle/story?
- Can you detect layers of editing and rewriting? What does each say?
- How do the language and shape of the passage contribute to or change its message?

You may shape the paper in any way you prefer. It may be centered around a thesis, or simply synthesize information. It may be organized in sections by methodology, issue, verse, or something else. Ultimately, your goal should be to communicate clearly what the passage means for both its original audience and for (y)our context today. Your own ideas should drive the paper and be supported by your research; not the other way around. With sufficient notice, your instructor may be able to provide some brief research materials to you, scanned from the STM library, via email.

Formatting your Essays

Detailed formatting and citation requirements can be found in the seminary handbook. In brief, plan to use A4 or foolscap sized paper, with 1” margins, using a 12-point font and 1½ line spacing. (Your instructor will be happier while he reads your paper if you use a serif font (like Times) and fully justified margins (both sides)—but these are not requirements.) Citations should be in a consistent style; Turabian, SBL, or Chicago style (on which the others are based) are suggested.

As concise, thoughtful communication is a valuable ministry skill, please do your best to stay within the length guidelines; points will be deducted for failing to do so. Issues with grammar and spelling will also be considered, particularly for more advanced students. *Students are encouraged to invite a friend to read their essays and make editing suggestions before submitting them.*

GRADE	RUBRIC CRITERION FOR EXEGETICAL PAPERS
100	Student offers a clear interpretation of the text, grounded in modern methodologies discussed in class and in other Bible coursework. (This interpretation does not have to be shared by the lecturer.) Student has clearly engaged with the ideas learned in class, as well as with secondary literature and the Bible text itself. A firm grasp of some of the problems typically seen in the text is evident, and the student has made some clear decisions based on the evidence they have uncovered. Implications for interpretation (for the Church or the academy) are drawn out at the end of the discussion.
90	Student interprets the text well, using modern methodologies as discussed in class, tenuously. Student has clearly engaged with the ideas learned in class, as well as with secondary literature and the Bible text itself. Student is unclear about some of the problems in the text, but makes an adequate attempt to sort through them. Student mentions problems, but makes no attempt to decide them (or say why they cannot be decided), or does make a decision but without evidence. Implications for interpretation are brief.
75	Student interprets the text, using some modern methodologies mixed with haphazard readings. Untested theological assumptions are made, but are well-grounded in the student’s tradition. Class discussion or secondary literature is brought in sparsely. Student avoids some major problems in the text. A clear interpretation is offered, but with little evidence outside their own ideas.
60	Student offers an interpretation of the text that mostly ignores the historical grounding of the Hebrew prophetic witness. The interpretation shows signs of engagement with authentic theology, but that theology seems somewhat ungrounded. Neither class discussion nor secondary literature is used thoughtfully, but only to support previously-held conclusions. Student focuses on popular interpretation of the text instead of well-defined and agreed-upon interpretive problems. No evidence is offered for many conclusions.

GRADE	RUBRIC CRITERION FOR EXEGETICAL PAPERS
20	Student ignores the methodologies used in class (historical grounding, taking the text seriously and imaginatively, exploring form as well as meaning, serious skepticism toward Christological interpretations from church tradition, etc.). Student does not ground their writing in the class discussion or biblical text in any way.
0	Student does not turn in assignment, offers an assignment that is neither exegetical nor thesis-driven, or offers an assignment that has no clear connection to the Bible's prophetic witness.

Other policies

Your instructor for this course is both a scholar and a pastor. The latter, hopefully, means that he is approachable! If you have any questions, worries, ideas, concerns, etc., *please* do not be afraid to speak with him at any time.

According to the Seminary's Academic Handbook, students may not miss more than two hours of any course, and further absence can constitute failure of course. Your professor is *extremely* understanding about legitimate problems that may interfere, including but not limited to physical or mental health, family emergencies, or surprise vocational obligations. If you expect to be absent, please contact the instructor as early as possible *before* the class session. If an emergency arises, please contact the instructor as early as possible after the emergency is resolved.

Assignments, however, must be punctual. Any delay in submitting work will result in a grade penalty. Ministerial or church duty (such as preaching on a Sunday or conducting a last-minute funeral) does not constitute an emergency. As a church leader, you will need to find ways to complete your daily work and prepare for these events at the same time; now is a good time to start practicing!

Part of the goal of a seminary education is to help the student learn to communicate more effectively, both in spoken and in written formats. Do not be afraid to invite other students—or even the instructor—to read your work before the due date to help you improve your writing.

Feel free to discuss your assignments and resources with other students. However, your writing must be your own work. The seminary also has strict rules about plagiarism. I would rather read a paper in your own words with grammar/spelling/clarity errors than one in which you have copied sections from someone else's writing. I want to know what *you* think, not what others think. Feel free to run your paper through an online plagiarism checker before submission if you want to be certain your work is your own. Copying another person's work without giving credit, or submitting another person's work in a way that makes up the majority of your submission (even if it is cited), will cause your assignment to be rejected, and can be grounds for failure of the course and reporting to seminary administration.

This syllabus is meant to be a resource for the student and a general guide for the course, but does not constitute an inflexible contract between the instructor and student. *If the student has checked the syllabus first*, questions for clarification or suggestions for changes are always welcome.