TS 715: Psalms
From Ancient Prayers to Christian Scripture

Instructor: Derek Suderman
Class: Thurs. 1-4 PM, CGUC 2201 (Paetkau Room)
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Office hours: By appointment

a). Introduction
i). Course Description
This course will explore the book of Psalms, from its roots in the liturgy and prayer of Ancient Israel to its contemporary function as a scriptural book within communities of faith. We will identify various psalm ‘types,’ consider the Psalter’s history of composition, explore the structure of the book, and study its use in and significance for the NT. Throughout the course we will pay particular attention to the ancient function and contemporary theological potential of the psalms.

ii). Course Objectives
This course will:
• familiarize students with different psalm genres present in the Psalter;
• introduce scholarly debates regarding the “original” contexts and “function” of the Psalms and how they have been transformed in their collection and canonization;
• describe the shape of the Psalter in its final form;
• consider how the Psalms have been understood/interpreted within the Christian history of interpretation;
• explore the theological significance of psalms, with a particular focus on lament, within Christian communities and liturgy;
• investigate how Psalms function in the larger context of Christian Scripture, especially in relation to the New Testament;
• prompt interaction with various exegetical interpretations of psalm material in and for communities of faith;
• encourage the ongoing study of and reflection on the Psalms.

b). Course Requirements
i). Textbooks
The following materials are required.
(1). The Bible
This is the most important textbook in the course. No one version is required — in fact, having a diversity present will enrich class discussion. However, paraphrases and Bibles which use a ‘dynamic equivalence’ approach to translation will not be appropriate for this course (the Message, Good News Bible, etc.).

Students are welcome to choose from among:
• Tanakh (JPS - Jewish Publication society)
• Common English Bible (CEB)
• New American Bible (NAB)
• New American Standard Bible (NASB) or the older American Standard Version (ASV)
• New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) or the older Jerusalem Bible (JB)
• 21st Century New King James Version, or the New King James Version (NKJV), or the venerable Authorized or King James Version (AV or KJV)
• New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) or the older Revised Standard Version (RSV)
• Revised English Bible (REB) or the older New English Bible (NEB)
• New International Version (NIV)
• Net Bible (available free on-line at http://www.bible.org). This can be used for comparison, but students will be expected to bring Bibles to class so this will not be sufficient as the only version.

(2). Brueggemann, The Psalms and the Life of Faith
To conserve space, reading from this text will be given with last name and chapter number (ie: Brueggemann, ch. 1). For a classic and still very good intro to the Psalms, I recommend Anderson. In addition to these, there are many excellent resource for Psalms study. For instance, Witvliet provides a helpful overview and many suggested resources related to liturgy, which may be of particular interest for those involved in pastoral ministry.

(3). Courseware Packet and other Readings
While most additional readings will be in a Course Reader (available at the UW bookstore), some will be placed on reserve in the library, on e-reserve through the University Library system (accessible through the LEARN website) or emailed directly to students. Make sure to either bring your own copy of the readings themselves and/or reading notes so we can refer to and build upon these in class.

ii). Attendance
Classes will build incrementally upon earlier topics and material, making consistent attendance crucial; expect to be engaged regarding psalms and assigned readings.

(1). Evaluation Overview
Written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned dates. This will be essential, as they will provide the basis for class discussion. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

Article Presentation (variable)

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iii). Description of Assignments

1. Psalm Reading
   One of the most important aspects of this course will be that, in addition to looking at specific Psalms related to class topics, students will be asked to read through the book of Psalms from beginning to end (at least once).

2. Article Presentation
   Each student will choose one substantial article to present to the class during the term, consisting of a 5-8 min. oral presentation accompanied by a 1p., point-form outline of the article (DUE the day the reading is assigned). This assignment will be peer-evaluated. Variable, but on specific dates.

3. Psalm “Voices” Assignment
   Our class will attempt to pay particular attention to the “voices” present within the Psalms with an eye to contemporary settings and issues. Students will choose a psalm (or two) to research and relate to a particular contemporary setting(s) or issue(s), expressed in a brief paper (5-7 pp., 1500-2100 words).

4. Use of Psalms in Liturgy or Formational Contexts
   For this assignment students will investigate how Psalms have been employed in liturgy or studied in Christian formation/educational contexts. This could consist of: searching church bulletins over a season or year to see how and which Psalms were used in a specific congregation; studying the appearance of Psalms in the lectionary; how the Psalms appear/are used in specific Sunday School material; etc. Students will write a brief paper (5-7 pp., 1500-2100 words) and be prepared to contribute to class discussion on the day it is due.
(5). **Final Project**

Students are free to pursue their own particular interests related to the Psalms with a final project that could take various shapes: a paper (15-20 pp.); a sermon or Bible study series; annotated bibliography on a specific topic; etc. Topics could include: looking deeper into one of the topics discussed in class; an analysis or comparison of a movie or novel with a Psalm(s); exploring how a musical piece interprets the Psalms; comparison of Jewish and Christian readings; history of interpretation of a psalm or the interpretation of the Psalms by a specific historical figure(s); NT use of a particular psalm; etc. Given the breadth of possible projects, a proposal outlining the topic, method, procedure, as well as a preliminary bibliography will be required before the end of the term.

c). **Class Schedule**

The following lists readings and topics to be discussed in our class sessions. *Readings should be done in preparation for the days listed.* Those suitable for class presentations appear in **Bold**.

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| **A. Introduction** | - oral / written language  
- prayer/Psalms in the Bible  
- Psalms scroll - bird’s eye view  
- Syllabus review | Brueggemann, ch. 7; Gunkel⁴ (e-reserve) | FYI⁵ |

⁴Hermann Gunkel, “Israelite Literary History,” *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion*, Ed. K. C. Hanson, Fortress Classics in Biblical Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 31–41. The article itself is quite short (p. 31-37), but several notes are worth noticing (esp. 6, 9). This brief piece identifies both the approach Gunkel is rejecting as well as reflecting the assumptions inherent within his own perspective.

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<tr>
<td>B. From Ancient Prayers to a Scriptural Scroll/Book</td>
<td>- lament</td>
<td>Bruegg. ch. 1, 4; Berlin(^6) or Alter(^7); Gerstenberger(^8)</td>
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<td>Jan. 17 - Introduction to ‘Psalm Genres/Types’</td>
<td>- thanksgiving</td>
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<td>- confession?</td>
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<td>Jan. 24 - ‘Types’ continued</td>
<td>- Descriptive praise - narrative creation Psalms (is this a genre?)</td>
<td>Gerstenberger(^9); Sarna(^10)</td>
<td>FYI(^11)</td>
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<td>- Torah Psalms</td>
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<td>- Psalms in ANE perspective</td>
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<td>- ‘mixed’ and ‘derivative’ types</td>
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<td>Jan. 31 - Shape/Structure of the Psalter: From Lament... (Books 1-3)</td>
<td>- Royal Psalms</td>
<td>Wilson(^12); Mays(^13)</td>
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<td>- Psalms 1+2</td>
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<td>- Wisdom Psalms - Psalms 89-91</td>
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| Feb. 7 - Shape/Structure of the Psalter: ...to Praise (Books 4-5) | -Psalms 89-91  
-LORD reigns psalms (Book 4)  
-Songs of Ascent  
-Psalms 145-150, 1+2 revisited | Bruegg., ch. 6 or 10;  
Mays;  
Wilson;  
Suderman | “Voices” Assignment DUE  
Countless movies and novels broach topics of relevance here... |
| C. Selected Topics | | |
| Feb. 14 - Poverty and Wealth; Ecology | -the ‘Poor,’ ‘Meek,’ ‘Weak’ in the Psalms  
-Prosperity Theology  
-Creation Psalms and the Ecological Crisis | Suderman;  
Waziyatawin;  
Berry | |
| **Feb. 21 – NO CLASS -- READING WEEK (School for Ministers)** | | | |

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| Feb. 28 - the Theological Potential of Lament; Enemies and violent language | -the problem with ‘peace passages’  
-Lament concerning Enemies, intimate and otherwise  
-turning the tables  
-can ‘Violent’ Psalms witness to the Gospel (of Peace)? | Bruegg., ch. 5, 14 (11 is also excellent); Suderman;** Blumenthal** |
| Mar. 7 - Psalms in Liturgy, Pastoral Care, and Christian Formation | -Psalms in light of circumstances/settings in pastoral care  
-(lack of) attention to Psalms in biblical study  
-devotional use of Psalms | **FYI** |

**26**W. Derek Suderman, “‘Weep with Those Who Weep’: Suffering, Empathy, and the Function of Lament,” Canadian Mennonite Health Assembly (Waterloo, Ontario, 2015); accessible on VIMEO.  
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<td>Mar. 14 - David and the Psalms, Then and Now: Is there (still) a Connection?</td>
<td>’pre-critical’ History of Interpretation</td>
<td>Steinmetz: 28</td>
<td>Final Project Proposal DUE</td>
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<td>-the rise, effects, and legacy of ‘critical’ readings: Psalm</td>
<td>Childs: 29</td>
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<td>‘superscriptions’ and the limits of ‘the biblical text’</td>
<td>Yosl Rakover (read in one sitting): 30</td>
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<td>-LXX version(s)</td>
<td>selections from Historical Interpreters (Augustine, Luther, Calvin, etc.)</td>
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<td>-’authorship’ revisited</td>
<td>CLUDES</td>
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<td>-is there (still) a connection?</td>
<td>For a playful take on this issue, skim: Bono 31 (U2)</td>
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<td>Exploring possible implications...</td>
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<td>Mar. 21 - Reading the OT in light of the New:</td>
<td>the Messiah in the Psalms and the possibility of ‘Semantic Transformation’</td>
<td>Attridge: 32</td>
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<td>Messianic Psalms and Prophecy</td>
<td>-’Use’ of Psalms as witnesses to Jesus in the NT</td>
<td>Gillingham: 33</td>
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<td>-Differences between ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ readings of the Psalms:</td>
<td>McCann: 34</td>
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<td>implications?</td>
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| Mar. 28 - From Lament to Exaltation: NT Use of the Psalms | -Prayer and Lament in the NT  
-NT Interpretation of Passover readings (the Hallel --- Pss 113-118)  
-Jesus’ Passion and Exaltation  
-Reading Psalms as a book of scripture, as one of many possibilities... | Blount;\(^{35}\)  
Sheppard;\(^{36}\)  
FYI\(^{37}\) |             |

| E. Exploring the Contemporary Function of the Psalms as Scripture | -Modes of ‘Recovery’/Use  
-Liturgical, devotional, and other uses  
-Where to from here? | Brueggemann, ch. 2; Kugel\(^{38}\) |             |
| Apr. 4 - ‘Bridging the Gap’ - Ancient Psalms in Contemporary Life | | | |


