I. Introduction
   A. 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 communi-
      ties 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.

   B. 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 as well as how these may have been transformed in their collection and
        canonization;
      • describe the shape of the Psalter in its final form;
      • consider the theological significance of psalms, with a particular focus on lament,
        within Christian communities and liturgy;
      • explore how Psalms function in the larger context of Christian Scripture;
      • 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.

II. Course Requirements
   A. 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, para-
         phrases 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
   To conserve space, reading from this text will be given with last name and chapter number (i.e.: 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 some may be placed on e-reserve through the University Library system (accessible through the LEARN website) and others emailed or made available in the library. 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.

B. 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.

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C. 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 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. History of Interpretation Assignment
   Each student will choose a pre-19th century historical interpreter for this assignment. Students will read a brief article about this person and his/her hermeneutical approach, and then study their interpretation of specific psalms. Students will prepare a 1-2 p. handout and 5-10 min. presentation that briefly identifies the interpreter and outlines their approach, based on the psalms considered. Students will also submit a descriptive summary (4-5 pp., 1200-1500 words) that describes and illustrates their approach. The first two elements will be peer-evaluated, and then I will mark the descriptive summary.

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; 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; 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.

III. 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.

A. Introduction
   Sept. 13 - Introduction: Prayer, Psalms and Form Criticism
   Readings: Brueggemann, ch. 7; Gunkel\(^4\) (e-reserve); Gunkel\(^5\) (reserve)

B. From Ancient Prayers to a Scriptural Scroll/Book
   Sept. 20 - Introduction to ‘Psalms Genres/Types’
   Readings: Brueggemann, ch. 1, 4; Gerstenberger\(^6\)
   (FYI: For the classic description of different Psalm types from the “father” of form criticism, see: Gunkel\(^7\) For an excellent and very readable description of parallelism in Hebrew Poetry, see: Alter\(^8\))
   • lament
   • thanksgiving
   • confession?

\(^4\)Hermann 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.


Sept. 27 - ‘Types’ continued

Readings: Gerstenberger;⁹ Sarna;¹⁰ Berry¹¹
(FYI: For reading the Psalms in light of ancient Canaanite Ugaritic parallels and ancient cosmology and iconography respectively, see: Dahood;¹² and Keel.¹³)
- Descriptive praise - narrative
- creation Psalms (is this a genre?)
- Torah Psalms
- Psalms in Ancient Near Eastern perspective
- ‘mixed’ and ‘derivative’ types

Oct. 4 - Shape/Structure of the Psalter: From Lament... (Books 1-3)

Readings: Wilson;¹⁴ McCann;¹⁵ Mays¹⁶
- Royal Psalms
- Psalms 1+2
- Wisdom Psalms
- Psalms 89-91

Oct. 11 ---- STUDY DAY

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Oct. 13 - Shape/Structure of the Psalter: ...to Praise (Books 4-5)
Readings: Brueggemann, ch. 6 or 10; Mays,17 Wilson18
• Psalms 89-91
• LORD reigns psalms (Book 4)
• Songs of Ascent
• Psalms 145-150, 1+2 revisited

C. Selected Topics
Oct. 18 - the Theological Potential of Lament
** Psalm “Voices” Assignment DUE
Readings: Brueggemann, ch. 5; Suderman;19 Waziyatawin20
(FYI: For a classic earlier overview of this topic and a paper concentrating on the possibility of ‘intimate’ enemies, see Westermann21 and Sheppard22 respectively).

Oct. 25 - Poverty and Weath; Enemies and violent language
Readings: Camara;23 Rawls;24 Brueggemann ch. 11, 14 (FYI - see 12); Blumenthal25
• Modes of ‘peace’ and ‘violence’
• the ‘Poor,’ ‘Meek,’ ‘Weak’ in the Psalms
• Prosperity Theology
• Potential Theological Contribution of Lament (Even ‘Violent’ Psalms)

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24 E-article: http://killingthebuddha.com/mag/confession/fuck-your-prayer-show-me-solidarity/
D. The Psalms as Christian Scripture

Nov. 1 - David and the Psalms, Then and Now: Is there (still) a Connection?
Readings: Witvliet, 3-10, 37-44; Childs; Yosl Rakover (read in one sitting);
Augustine
**History of Interpretation Assignment DUE**
(FYI: For a playful take on this issue by a contemporary pop star (U2), see: Bono)
- ‘pre-critical’ readings
- the rise, effects, and legacy of ‘critical’ readings: Psalm ‘superscriptions’ and the limits of ‘the biblical text’
- LXX version(s)
- is there (still) a connection? Exploring possible implications...

Nov. 8 - Reading the OT in light of the New: Messianic Psalms and Prophecy
Readings: Attridge; Janowski
- the Messiah in the Psalms and the possibility of ‘Semantic Transformation’
- ‘Use’ of Psalms as witnesses to Jesus in the NT
- Differences between ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ readings of the Psalms - implications?

Nov. 15 - From Lament to Exhaltation: NT Use of the Psalms
**Final Project Proposal DUE**
Readings: Blount; Sheppard (for an intriguing description of the Psalms in light of the ‘Lord’s Prayer,’ see: Bonhoeffer; an overview of prayer in the NT by a prominent OT scholar (Brueggemann’s father-in-law and long-time editor!), see: Miller)

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28Augustine, Exposition on the Psalms --- available online:
http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801.htm
• Prayer and Lament in the NT
• Interpretation of Passover readings (the Hallel --- Pss 113-118)
• Jesus’ Passion and Exhaltation
• Reading Psalms as a book of scripture, as one of many possibilities...

E. Exploring the Contemporary Function of the Psalms as Scripture
Nov. 22 - Psalms in Liturgy and Pastoral Care (Guest speaker, Dr. Carol Penner)
Readings: Bail; West; Brueggemann ch. 8; Suderman
(FYI: For a compelling challenge to the lack of attention to domestic violence in Mennonite “peace theology,” see: Penner. Also, countless movies and novels broach topics of relevance here, providing powerful ways to “hear” the voices of the Psalms in contemporary settings/issures.)
• Lament concerning Enemies, intimate and otherwise

Nov. 29 - ‘Bridging the Gap’ - Ancient Psalms in Contemporary Life
Readings: Brueggemann, ch. 2; Kugel
• Modes of ‘Recovery’/Use
• Liturgical, devotional, and other uses
Where to from here?

(Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing house, 1970).
38W. Derek Suderman, “‘Weep with Those Who Weep’: Suffering, Empathy, and the Function of Lament,” Canadian Mennonite Health Assembly (Waterloo, Ontario, 2015); accessible on VIMEO.