Syllabus Winter, 2023

TS 715: Psalms From Ancient Prayers to Christian Scripture

Instructor: Derek Suderman

Class: Wed. 9-12 AM, CGUC 2021 (Paetkau Room)

Email: dsuderman@uwaterloo.ca

Office hours: By appointment – 1 have an UG class at 1 PM, so time after class is limited.

Territorial Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I live and work on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee (aka Irocquois) peoples. Conrad Grebel and the University of Waterloo are situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations in perpetuity that includes 6 miles on each side of the Grand River.

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 contemporary 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

In this course students will:

- become familiar with and be able to contrast distinct genres found in the Psalter;
- consider scholarly debates regarding the "original" contexts and function of psalms and how they have been transformed by their later collection and canonization in the book;
- explore the shape of the Psalter in its final form;
- consider how the Psalms have been understood/interpreted within the broader 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;
- interact with various exegetical interpretations of psalm material in and for communities of faith; and
- discuss the theological and broader potential of 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 Faith¹

Readings from this text will be identified by last name and chapter number (ie: Brueggemann, ch. 1). For a classic and still very good intro to the Psalms, I recommend Anderson.² There are many additional resources for Psalms study including Witvliet, who provides a helpful overview and many suggested resources related to liturgy that *may be of particular interest for those involved in pastoral ministry*.³

(3). Courseware Packet and other Readings

While most additional readings will be in the Course Reader (available from the UW bookstore), some may be placed on reserve in the library, on e-reserve through the University Library system or emailed directly to students. Make sure

¹Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, Ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

²Bernhard W. Anderson and Steven Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

³John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

to 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 *the night before classes* 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) Presentation and Handout Psalm "Voices" Assignment (DUE: Feb. 15) History of Interp. Assignment (DUE: Mar. 15) Marginal notes assignment (DUE: Mar. 29) Final Project Proposal (DUE: Mar. 22) 5%

iii). Description of Assignments

Project (DUE: Apr. 21)

(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. Part of the goal of the course is to immerse ourselves in the language, patterns, and repetitions of the language itself --- and nothing does this better than simply reading through it.

40%

(2). Article Presentation

Each student will choose one substantial article/book chapter to present to the class during the term, consisting of a 5-8 min. oral presentation accompanied by a 1p., point-form outline (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. History of Interpretation Assignment

This assignment will explore elements of continuity and discontinuity within the Christian history of interpretation of the Psalms. Students will choose a major historical interpreter and then will read a brief overview of their work and focus on their interpretation of a specific psalm (or psalms). Students will write a brief paper (3-5 pp., 900-1500 words) that describes their approach, and make a brief in-class presentation. A list of interpreters will be provided.

5. Marginal Notes Assignment

This year Herald Press is in the process of creating an "Anabaptist Bible." I have been contracted to write the introduction to the Psalms as well as create "marginal notes" for the text of this book. For this assignment students will study a block of 10 psalms in light of secondary sources and suggest/create 4 brief 'notes' per Psalm that I will feed into this process. More instructions will follow.

6. 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; a more in-depth study of a historical interpreter, 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 table lists readings and topics to be discussed in our class sessions. *Readings should be done in preparation for the days listed.* Items suitable for class presentations appear in **Bold**.

**Since your uwaterloo email address will be our primary means of communication between classes, make sure to update/forward this immediately.

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
A.Introduction	Brueggemann, ch. 7	
Jan. 11 - Introduction: Prayer, Psalms and Form Criticism • Syllabus		

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
	Gunkel, "Israelite Literary History"	
	(FYI: For his classic, brief overview of a form-critical approach to the Psalms, see Gunkel ⁵)	
B. From Ancient Prayers to a Scriptural Scroll/Book	Brueggemann, ch. 1, 4 Alter , "The Dynamics of Parallelism"	
Jan. 18 - Introduction to 'Psalm	After, The Dynamics of Paranensin	
Genres/Types'	BFNP Ep. 87: Alter: "The Art of Translating the Bible"	
• confession?	Gerstenberger, "Introduction to Cultic Poetry" ⁸	
	(FYI: For a more detailed discussion of various aspects of Hebrew poetry, included in your course reader, see: Berlin ⁹ ; for a classic description of different Psalm types from the "father" of form criticism, see: Gunkel. ¹⁰)	

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.

⁵Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, second, trans. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

⁶Robert Alter, "The Dynamics of Parallelism," *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985) 3–26.

⁷For an excellent and accessible study, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Alter has also completed his own translation of the entire Hebrew Bible, attuned to these dynamics and with explanatory footnotes.

⁸Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Introduction to Cultic Poetry," *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, FOTL 14 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988) 5–22.

⁹Adele Berlin, "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry," *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary (1996) 301–15.

¹⁰Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, Ga.: Mercer UP, 1998).

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
Jan. 25 - 'Psalm Types' continued • Descriptive praise - narrative • creation Psalms (is this a genre?) • Torah Psalms • Psalms in Ancient Near Eastern perspective • 'mixed' and 'derivative' types	Gerstenberger ¹¹ Sarna, "Ps. 19: The Excellence of Torah: an Anti-Pagan Polemic" ¹² (FYI: For reading the Psalms in light of ancient Canaanite Ugaritic parallels and ancient cosmology/iconography,	
Feb. 1 - Shape/Structure of the Psalter: From Lament (Books 1-3) • Royal Psalms • Psalms 1+2 • Wisdom Psalms • Psalms 89-91	see: Dahood ¹³ and Keel. ¹⁴) Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter", 15 Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter", 16 Walker-Jones, "Like a Tree Planted': Wisdom Psalms", 17	
Feb. 8 - Shape/Structure of the Psalter:to Praise (Books 4-5) • Psalms 89-91 • LORD reigns psalms (Book 4) • Songs of Ascent	Brueggemann, ch. 6 or 10; Mays, "The Center of the Psalms: 'The LORD Reigns' as Root Metaphor" 18	

¹¹Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Introduction to Cultic Poetry," *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, FOTL 14 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988) 5–22.

¹²Nahum M. Sarna, "Psalm 19: The Excellence of Torah: An Anti-Pagan Polemic," *The Message of the Prophets.*, *Songs of the Heart: An Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (New York: Schocken, 1993) 69–96.

¹³Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, AB 16 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966); Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100*, AB 17 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968); Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms III: 101–150*, AB 17A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970).

¹⁴Othmar Keel, "Conceptions of the Cosmos," *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Crossroads, 1985) 16–60. On reserve.

¹⁵Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85–94.

¹⁶James Luther Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter," *JBL* 106.1 (1987): 3–12.

¹⁷Arthur Walker-Jones, "Like a Tree Planted': Wisdom Psalms," *The Green Psalter: Resources for an Ecological Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 19–33.

¹⁸James Luther Mays, "The Center of the Psalms: 'The LORD Reigns' as Root Metaphor," *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1994) 12–22

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
• Psalms 145-150, 1+2 revisited	Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter" 19	
	Suderman, "Seeking <i>Shalom</i> as the End of Lament" ²⁰ (I am providing my 'in process' paper here as an example for the "Psalm Voices" Assignment).	
C. Selected Topics	Suderman, "Praying the Hope of the Poor (In Process)" ²¹	Psalm "Voices" Assignment DUE
Feb. 15 - Poverty and Wealth;	Wagiyatayyin "A Samant in the	
• the 'Poor,' 'Meek,' 'Weak' in	Waziyatawin, "A Serpent in the Garden: An Unholy Worldview on	
the Psalms	Sacred Land," ²²	
Prosperity Theology	Sacred Land,	
Trosperity Theology	(FYI - For a classic critique of	
	Christianity's complicity in the	
	environmental crisis, see: Berry ²³)	
**Feb. 21 READING WEEK	, , ,	
Mar. 1 - the Theological Potential	Brueggemann, ch. 5, 14 (11 is also	
of Lament; Enemies and violent	excellent);	
language		
 Modes of 'peace' and 	Suderman, "The Cost of Losing	
'violence'	Lament for the Community of Faith" ²⁴	
Potential Theological		
Contribution of Lament (Even		
'Violent' Psalms)		

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¹⁹Gerald H. Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, Ed. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2005) 229–46.

²⁰W. Derek Suderman, "Seeking *Shalom* as the End of Lament," Word, Spirit and the Renewal of the Church (Goshen College, Goshen IN, 2017).

²¹W. Derek Suderman, "Praying the Hope of the Poor (In Process)," Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament and Apocrypha: A Preacher's Companion (Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock, 2019). ²²Waziyatawin, "A Serpent in the Garden: An Unholy Worldview on Sacred Land," Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together, Ed. Steve Heinrichs (Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 2013) 210–24.

²³Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994, c1993) 93–116.

²⁴W. Derek Suderman, "The Cost of Losing Lament for the Community of Faith: On Brueggemann, Ecclesiology, and the Social Audience of Prayer," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6.2 (Fall 2012): 201–17.

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
	Blumenthal , "Psalm 44: A Psalm of National Anger" ²⁵	
	(FYI - For a classic earlier overview of this topic and a paper concentrating on the possibility of 'intimate' enemies, see Westermann ²⁶ and Sheppard ²⁷ respectively)	
Mar. 8 - Psalms in Liturgy, Pastoral Care, and Christian Formation	Bail , "'O God, Hear My Prayer': Psalm 55 and Violence Against Women" ²⁸	
	West, "The Medicine of God's Word: What People Living with HIV and AIDS Want (and Get) from the Bible" ²⁹	
	Brueggemann ch. 8;	
	Suderman, "'Weep with Those Who Weep': Suffering, Empathy, and the Function of Lament" ³⁰ https://vimeo.com/143501945	
	(FYI: For a compelling challenge to the striking lack of attention to	

²⁵David R. Blumenthal, "Psalm 44: A Psalm of National Anger," *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 86–110.

²⁶Claus Westermann, "The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, Ga.: J. Knox Press, 1981) 259–80.

²⁷Gerald T. Sheppard, "Enemies' and the Politics of Prayer in the Book of Psalms," *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Ed. David Jobling, Peggy Lynne Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1991) 61–82.

²⁸Ulrike Bail, "'O God, Hear My Prayer': Psalm 55 and Violence Against Women," *Wisdom and Psalms*, Ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 242–63.

²⁹ Gerald O. West and Bongi Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word: What People Living with HIV and AIDS Want (and Get) from the Bible," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 125 (July 2006): 51–63.

³⁰W. Derek Suderman, "'Weep with Those Who Weep': Suffering, Empathy, and the Function of Lament," Canadian Mennonite Health Assembly (Waterloo, Ontario, 2015).

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
D. The Psalms as Christian Scripture Mar. 15 - David and the Psalms, Then and Now: Is there (still) a Connection? • History of Interpretation ('precritical' 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	domestic violence in Mennonite "peace theology," see: Penner ³¹) Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre- Critical Exegesis" ³² Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis" ³³ "Yosl Rakover Talks to God" (read in one sitting) ³⁴ Historical Interpreters, various (Augustine, Luther, Calvin, etc.) (FYI: For a playful take on this issue by a contemporary pop star, skim: U2 frontman Bono ³⁵)	History of Interpretation Assignment DUE
Mar. 22 - Reading the OT in light of the New: Messianic Psalms and Prophecy • the Messiah in the Psalms and the possibility of 'Semantic Transformation' • 'Use' of Psalms as witnesses to Jesus in the NT	Attridge, "Giving Voice to Jesus: Use of the Psalms in the New Testament" ³⁶ Gillingham, "The Eleventh Century BCE to the Fifth Century CE" ³⁷	Final Project Proposal DUE

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³¹Carol Penner, "Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices: Peace Theology and Violence Against Women" (1999).

³²David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37.1 (1980): 27–38.

³³Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 (1971): 137–50; e-journal in *Journal of Semitic Studies*.

³⁴Zvi Kolitz, *Yosl Rakover Talks to God* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999) 3–25.

³⁵Bono, "Introduction by Bono," *Selections from the Book of Psalms*, Pocket Canon Series (New york: Grove press, 1999) vii-xii.

³⁶Harold W. Attridge, "Giving Voice to Jesus: Use of the Psalms in the New Testament," *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions*, Ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler, vol. 25, SBL Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 101–12.

³⁷Susan Gillingham, "The Eleventh Century BCE to the Fifth Century CE," *Psalms Through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford; Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
Differences between 'Jewish' and 'Christian' readings	McCann, "The Single Most Important Text in the Entire Bible: Toward a Theology of the Psalms" 38	
Mar. 29 - From Lament to	Longenecker, "Jewish Hermeneutics	
 Exhaltation: NT Use of the Psalms Prayer and Lament in the NT Interpretation of Passover 	in the First Century" ³⁹ Kugel , "The Psalms of David" ⁴⁰	Marginal Notes DUE
readings (the Hallel Pss 113-118) • Jesus' Passion and Exhaltation	Blount, "Breaking Point: a Sermon" ⁴¹	
Reading Psalms as a book of scripture, as one of many possibilities	(FYI: for an intriguing description of the Psalms in light of the 'Lord's Prayer,' see: Bonhoeffer ⁴² ; an overview of prayer in the NT by a key OT scholar - Brueggemann's fatherin-law + long-time editor! - see: Miller ⁴³)	
C. Exploring the Contemporary	Brueggemann, ch. 2;	Additional options:
Function of the Psalms as		The state of the s
Scripture Apr. 5 - 'Bridging the Gap' -	Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms" 44	BFNP 214: Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, "On Repentance
Ancient Psalms in Contemporary Life	Tanner , "Rethinking the Enterprise: What Must Be Considered in	and Repair"
Modes of 'Recovery'/Use		BFNP 210, Sidnie Crawford: "What

³⁸J. Clinton McCann Jr., "The Single Most Important Text in the Entire Bible: Toward a Theology of the Psalms'," Ed. Rolf A. Jacobson, *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011) 63–75.

³⁹Richard N. Longenecker, "Jewish Hermeneutics in the First Century," *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Vancouver: W.B. Eerdmans Regent College Pub., 1999) 6–35

⁴⁰James L. Kugel, "The Psalms of David," *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007) 458–73

⁴¹Brian K. Blount, "Breaking Point: A Sermon," *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, Ed. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller 145–54.

⁴²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, trans. James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing house, 1970).

⁴³Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Teach Us to Pray:' The Further Witness of the New Testament," *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 304–35.

⁴⁴Gerald T. Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation* 46.2 (1992): 143–55.

Date and Topic	Required Readings / Podcasts	Assignments
 Liturgical, devotional, and 	Formulating a Theology of the	You Really Need
other uses	Psalms," ⁴⁵	to Know about the
Where to from here?		Dead Sea Scrolls"
	Marzouk, "Intercultural Worship and	
	Decolonization: Insights from the	
	Book of Psalms" ⁴⁶	

⁴⁵Beth Tanner, "Rethinking the Enterprise: What Must Be Considered in Formulating a Theology of the Psalms," *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, Ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011) 139–50. ⁴⁶Safwat Marzouk, "Intercultural Worship and Decolonization: Insights from the Book of Psalms," Keynote Presentation, *Mennonite Scholars and Friends*, Society of Biblical Literature (Denver, Colorado) Nov. 18, 2022.