Huntingdon College
W. James Samford, Jr. School of Business
and Professional Studies

COURSE NUMBER: REL 309
COURSE NAME: The Prophets (Hebrew Scriptures)
   Fall 2015, Session II – Clanton
   Tuesday, 10/6, 13, 20, 27, 11/3 from 5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

INSTRUCTOR’S NAME: Dr. John Brannon

CONTACT INFORMATION: john.brannon@hawks.huntingdon.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A study of the Israelite prophetic movement with special emphasis on the classic prophets and the religious, social, political and economic background of their message and its implications for today.

This course is designed to introduce students to the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, including but not limited to the books that fall under the similarly named canonical designations (“the prophets”) in Judaism and Christianity. The bulk of our energy will be spent on the primary literature of the Bible itself, but in this course we will also attend to the various interpretive strategies employed by those who have read the prophetic literature over the centuries of Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation. Particular attention will be paid to the phenomenon of pre-millennial dispensationalist interpretation of the prophetic literature because of its popularity among American evangelicals.

PREREQUISITE: one 200-level religion course recommended, but not required.

Bible

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES: The student, upon completion of this course, should be able to:
   1) describe in brief the various “writing prophets” of the Old Testament (i.e., the books that bear the names of prophets)
   2) interpret short sections of prophetic literature
   3) discern different approaches to the prophetic literature, and therefore also critically consider different approaches to the interpretation of the Bible more generally

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING CRITERIA:
   1) Class preparation, attendance, and participation (20%)
      To receive full credit for participation, students must a) fulfill all attendance requirements (see separate section below) and b) participate actively in all lectures and discussions. Every class session is designed to encourage student
participation. Every class will include some type of participation on the part of the students, and as a result it is difficult to make up absences, even if one obtains the notes or Powerpoint slides. Materials assigned for any particular day must be read in advance.

2) Final Exam (35%)
At the end of the session, a final examination will be given. The final exam will cover the content of the course, and students who keep up with their readings for the course should be adequately prepared for this assessment, which will include short answer, quote identification, a short essay, and a long essay on the following question: What, according the Old Testament, is prophecy?

3) Interpretive Essay (35%)
You must write one 4-page paper on a particular section of prophetic literature. Each class contains at least two “focus texts.” You will choose one of these and write a paper considering the text’s historical context, literary context, major themes, characters, and emphases. In short, you will tell me in writing what the passage is about. What does it mean? How might it continue to be meaningful in modern contexts? A sign-up sheet will be passed around to determine who will write on which passage in the first class.

4) Essay Presentation (10%)
On the day that you submit your essay, you must also present your findings on the focus text to the class for five-ten minutes. You may present your findings orally (i.e., simply as a speech), but the very best presentations (those that receive an A) will find a way to present their findings creatively (song, art, video, game, Ppt presentation, etc.). Have fun with it!

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<td>Interpretive Essay</td>
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GRADE POINT EQUIVALENTS - Describe the point range for each letter grade.
A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = 59-below

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Absences and Tardiness – All students are required to attend the first session. Those who do not attend the first session will be automatically dropped from the course. Students with more than one absence will receive an “F” for the course. Since this class meets only five times, missing a single class meeting is equivalent to missing three weeks of a regular term. If you cannot attend a class you must let the instructor know via email as soon as possible. In case of absences you are responsible for obtaining all handouts and assignments. Tardiness may result in a deduction in your class participation grade. Excessive tardiness may count as an absence.
Participation – Participation is not the same as attendance. Participation requires students to come to class prepared to actively participate, which makes the classroom experience more meaningful. However, participation is not just speaking out in class. The contributions made by the student should be related to the course content and meaningful to the class discussion.

Late Assignments – No shows fail the assignment. It is expected that the students fulfill their assignments on the date they are scheduled to do so. Students with illness or other problems that prevent them from attending class on the day a presentation or written assignment (including a test and/or exam) is due must contact their instructors PRIOR to the deadline via Huntingdon College email with supporting documentation to request an extension or a make-up. In most cases, missed assignments are logistically difficult to make-up while maintaining the integrity of the module. In rare cases, approval to make-up an assignment may be granted at the discretion of the faculty member based on the seriousness of the circumstance and on the supporting evidence provided by the student. Contacting a fellow class member does not substitute for contacting the instructor.

Accommodation of Special Needs – Huntingdon College makes every reasonable accommodation for disabilities that have been processed and approved through our Disability Services Committee in accord with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. In order to request disability-related services at Huntingdon College, students must self-identify to the Disabilities Intake Coordinator, Camilla Irvin, and provide appropriate and up-to-date documentation to verify their disability or special needs. After the accommodations have been approved by the Disability Services Committee, the 504 Coordinator, Dr. Lisa Olenik Dorman, will notify your professor(s) of the committee’s decision. If you have any questions regarding reasonable accommodation or need to request disability-related services, please contact Disability Services at (334) 833-4577 or e-mail at disabilityservices@huntingdon.edu.

Academic Honesty – Plagiarism is literary theft. Failure to cite the author of any language or of any ideas which are not your own creation is plagiarism. This includes any text you might paraphrase, as well. Anyone is capable of searching the Internet or any printed media; your research paper is intended to broaden your knowledge, stimulate your creativity, and make you think, analyze, and learn. It is not consistent with the College Honor Code, nor with scholarly expectations to submit work which is not the product of your own thinking and research. Severe penalties will result upon the submission of any work found to be plagiarized, including potential failure of the entire course. It is easy and simple to properly cite all sources used in your paper. Take no risks – cite your sources.

First Night Assignment -

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Week 1:  
*Week 1: What is a prophecy? What is prophetic literature?*
*Reading Assignments:* Numbers 12:6-8; Deuteronomy 18:9-22; 34:10-12; 1 Kings 17-20; Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature*, xi-45
Learning Outcomes: [At the end of this first session, students will be able to...] 

- Perceive the overarching “prophetic nature” of all of biblical literature, taking note of the presence of prophets across many parts of the canon, especially Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History
- Articulate the overarching question of the course: what is prophecy, according to the Bible? The groundwork should be laid for them to reevaluate their own definitions of the word, and especially to expand its meaning beyond that of simple prediction.
- Situate prophets and prophecy in the wider narrative of the Old Testament, relating the literary portion of the OT called “prophets” to the Pentateuch and the historical traditions that followed the life and work of many of the prophets

Classroom Activities:

Part 1: - Introductions and Overview: Syllabus review and introduction of instructor and students. Introduction of course topic, with special attention to the unique way in which the Prophets will be studied in an academic context. During this time a sign-up sheet for student presentations on the focus texts should be passed around.

Part 2: - Lecture on prophetic foretelling and forthtelling. Special attention to definitions and the typical common-sense definition of prophecy in modern Western culture. You may wish to show a YouTube video on prophecy in popular culture (e.g., Miss Cleo) to make the point that OT prophecy is more than just prediction, even if it often entails this sort of thing. As lecture continues, reflect at some length on the Deuteronomic ideal of Moses as a prophet found in the Pentateuch. What did it mean for the Israelites to say that Moses was a prophet and that there would always be one like him in Israelite history?

Part 3: - Lecture on the distinction between early Israelite prophecy and that found in the so-called “writing prophets” (Petersen is good on this difference). Spend some time considering Elijah and Elisha in the context of the Deuteronomistic History. What role do prophets play in this part of the canon? How do they challenge our usual definitions of prophecy? In this lecture you will want to re-familiarize your students with the art of interpreting biblical narrative, which is a simpler task than that of interpreting poetic prophetic texts.

Week 2:

Week 2: Isaiah and Jeremiah

Reading Assignments: Isaiah 1-20; 40-55; Jer 1-8:3; 26-36

Petersen, Prophetic Literature, 47-135

Focus Texts: Isaiah 45:1-7; Jer 7:1-8:3

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand the composite nature of the prophetic literature, that it was produced by multiple hands over centuries. Here, both Isaiah and Jeremiah offer excellent examples of the way in which prophecy was interpreted afresh for new generations of Israelite audiences.
- Consider the theological strength that this composite character represents, since modern readers are themselves a new generation of readers who wish to interpret the Bible in their own generation.
Situate Isaiah and Jeremiah in their various historical and geographic frameworks as men who lived in a particular time and spoke to its needs with great force. Understand that this is a first step in interpreting prophetic literature in subsequent generations.

Classroom Assignments:

Part 1: - Lecture on Isaiah as a whole and First Isaiah. Be sure to emphasize the rough but sturdy unity across the book of Isaiah as a whole. There are surely historical and literary seams across the book, but that does not mean that there is nothing that make it unified (themes like holiness, divine sovereignty, etc.) Here, you may wish to post a map of the Assyrian empire for historical context. Attention must be given to Isaiah 7:14 and it multiple interpretations. Emphasize the ways in which prophetic verses simply make sense in particular interpretive communities. Note the theme of justice/judgment (mishpat) and the call narrative of Isaiah in Isa 6.

Part 2: - [Student pres. on Isa 45:1-7] Lecture on Second/Third Isaiah (sometimes called Exilic Isaiah), with special focus on exile and Cyrus' role a Messiah. Again, maps of both the Babylonian and Persian empires may be necessary, and will provide students with basic framework of ancient Israelite history. Significant time should also be spent on the servant songs, which in my estimation most likely intend Israel itself as the most likely referent but of course became very important in the NT and ongoing Xn tradition. Here, make the point that prophecies need not intend only a single meaning, but may mean many things.

Part 3: - [Student pres. on Jer 7:1-8:3] Lecture on Jeremiah, with special attention to his role as a prophet during the destruction of Jerusalem in 587. Other possible topics include Jeremiah’s laments, his role as a writer (cf. Jer 36), and the increasing scribal role evident in the book. Jeremiah also represents a composite document that was produced over roughly a century of Israelite history, and this is a point that can be emphasized.

Week 3:

Reading Assignments: Ezekiel 1-11; 37; 40-43; Daniel

Focus Texts: Ezekiel 37; Daniel 7

Learning Objectives:

- Comprehend the generic difference between prophetic literature and apocalyptic as it can be seen in Ezekiel and Daniel. Ask: why was Daniel included among the prophets?
- Understand and critically evaluate modern appropriations of both Ezekiel 38 and Daniel 7. Are modern pre-millennial dispensationalist interpretations of texts like these appropriate, or do they bring to bear a set of modern expectations that is foreign to the text itself?
- Consider the unique nature of a text like Ezekiel and ask whether and how it can be appropriated as part of Christian Scripture? Why, one might ask, isn't Ezekiel preached more often?
Classroom Assignments:

Part 1: Lecture on Ezekiel, with special attention to tripartite structure of the book - the glory of the LORD in the temple, departed from the temple, and returned. Note move from woe to weal as the book moves on, as well as the importance of symbolic actions (i.e., sign-acts) and the character of God in the book (“son of man” language important here as well). End this lecture with the student presentation on the prophetic vision in Ezekiel 37.

Part 2: Lecture on Daniel as a prophetic text. Note in particular the makeup of Daniel as both legendary material and apocalyptic literature, taking care to define the meaning of that terminology. Ask why and how Daniel does or does not belong in the prophetic corpus. [This is a vexed question that you may answer in multiple ways, but the students should see that it is a unique book in the section of the canon in which it appears.] Distinguish between Daniel as history and Daniel as legend. This should show students that the Bible attempts to do more than simply state historical facts; it attempts to say something about who God is and how God interacts with God’s people Israel.

Part 3: [Student presentation on Daniel 7] Critical discussion on pre-millennial dispensationalist interpretations of Daniel 7 and Ezek 38. Use a video on YouTube (these abound) on Obama as the Antichrist and ask students whether or not this is responsible biblical interpretation. Why or why not? What have they learned about prophetic literature that would call this sort of interpretation into question?

Week 4:

Week 4: The Book of the Twelve I

Reading Assignments: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah

Petersen, Prophetic Literature, 176-191

Focus Texts: Hosea 11:1-9; Amos 5:18-24

Learning Outcomes:

- Appreciate the unity of the Book of the Twelve and thus be further introduced to the idea of canonical cohesion across books. The idea of the Bible as canon, a collection of documents for a particular religious community, should be emphasized alongside the themes of the Book of the Twelve (e.g., the day of the LORD).
- Comprehend the diversity of the prophetic literature by the comparison of the tone and intent of texts like Amos and Hosea. Students should be able to attend to the diversity of theological portraits between Hosea and Amos. How is God portrayed in each of these books, and to what ends?
- Perceive God’s special attention to his chosen people Israel, but his abiding interest in the entire world in texts like the oracles against the nations (e.g., Amos 1-2, Obadiah). According to the prophets, students should ask, how is it that God interacts with the nations other than Israel itself?

Classroom Assignments:

Part 1: Introductory Lecture on the Book of the Twelve, its themes, and unity and diversity within this corpus. Before attending more closely to Hosea, student presentation on Hosea 11:1-7. Conduct in-class exegesis on Hosea 1-2, noting sign-acts, importance of names in ancient Israelite tradition, and the idea of divine pathos as
it appears throughout the book. This is no dispassionate God in the prophetic literature, but a God deeply involved with humanity (see Heschel on this point).

Part 2: - [Student presentation on Amos 5:18-24]. If the student does not mention it, you may note King's use of Amos 5 in his "I Have a Dream" speech before conducting a lecture on the topic. A YouTube video of that particular moment might work even better. Note dual meaning of justice and judgment attached to word mishpat in Amos. Finally, ask how, according to Amos 1-2 and Obadiah, God interacts with the nations? What is Israel's special burden among the nations? [Here you may have to remind the students of the divided nature of Israel after Solomon.]

Part 3: - Lecture on Joel, the latest of these books but second in canonical ordering. Why? Given poetic nature of Joel and difficulty of pinning the historical context down, ask students what the book could possibly mean? Connect the book to its interpretation at Pentecost in Acts 2 and ask the students how and why this was a good interpretation by the NT writer. Other topics in Joel might include the nature of the locust swarm, the book's dating, and the fact that its vagueness actually encourages further interpretation.

Week 5:

Week 5: The Book of the Twelve II
Reading Assignments: Nahum, Jonah, Haggai, Zechariah
Petersen, Prophetic Literature, 169-76, 191-193, 196-199, 205-209

Focus Texts: Jonah 3-4; Zechariah 1:7-17

Learning Outcomes:

➢ Differentiate between pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic historical moments as they apply to the prophetic literature. In this session, special attention should be paid to the post-exilic moment and the so-called cessation of prophecy.

➢ Compare Nahum and Jonah with respect to Assyria and ask: what degree of consistency should one expect in the Old Testament? When two texts seem to demonstrate mutually exclusive positions, what does this mean for our interpretation of the Bible?

➢ Note the generic distinctions in the reading assignments and critically evaluate the books on offer with greater sensitivity than prior weeks. They should note in particular the importance of priests and governors in the books of Haggai and Zechariah, not to mention the apocalyptic nature of Second Zechariah. These are difficult skills to master, so any improvement on these lines will be encouraging indeed.

Classroom Assignments:

Part 1: - [Student Presentation on Jonah 3-4] Conduct a critical discussion on the messages of Nahum and Jonah. How do the two books perceive the Assyrians differently? What are their overall messages? How are Jonah and Nahum different, and can they coexist side by side in the same canon? Why or why not? In this session you may wish to intersperse the discussion with brief lectures on both books.

Part 2: - [Student Presentation on Zech 1:7-17]; Lecture on post-exilic prophecy, with special attention to Haggai and Zechariah. Possible topics include the dual nature of leadership in post-exilic period (high-priest and governor), the "cessation" of prophecy, and the increasingly scribal nature of prophecy as time wears on. Note the apocalyptic nature of Zechariah and the book's use in the NT.
Part 3: - Final in-class exegesis. Choose one text that the students have been interested in over the course of the session and conduct a final close reading together. The most important skill we can develop in this class is careful reading of prophetic literature, and so it is appropriate to end this way, on what I hope will be a high note.