



## Course Syllabus

**PSALMS  
OLDT 0618**

**WINTER 2013  
MONDAYS, 8:30-11:20 AM**

### **Instructor:**

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To access your course material, please go to <http://mytyndale.ca>

## **I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an introduction to the Psalter and its theology. The main theological themes of the Psalms and the different types of Psalms will be studied. Consideration will be given to the Psalms' historical and cultic contexts. The relevance of the Psalms to Christian faith and the life of the Church will be examined.

Prerequisite: Biblical Interpretation (BIBL 0501)

Recommended: Old Testament Theology and History (OLDT 0511)

## **II. LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Through this course, the student will learn the following:

### **A. Knowledge and Understanding**

1. to be able to explain the important theological themes and issues addressed in the Psalms.
2. to understand the Psalms in terms of their function in ancient Israel and in their canonical context.

3. to foster awareness of the interpretative issues and questions raised by scholars regarding the book of Psalms.
4. to learn different approaches taken to interpreting Psalms.
5. to appreciate the literary artistry of the Psalter as a book of poetry
6. to become acquainted with the history of interpretation of the Psalms, including current issues in Psalms studies.

#### B. Discipline-specific Skills

1. to be able to analyze and exegete individual psalms in the Psalter.
2. to be able to identify different Psalm types.
2. to assess and evaluate various approaches taken to the book of Psalms.
3. to critically evaluate commentaries and articles written on the Psalms.
4. to learn to use the Psalms in their personal prayer life and in public worship.
5. to seek practical ways in which the message of the book of Psalms can be interpreted and applied to the Church today in our contemporary context.

#### C. Transferable Skills

1. to be able to use the available resources for studying the Psalms.
2. to foster the ability to communicate effectively in writing and orally by participation in discussion groups.
3. to develop critical thinking skills to analyze, evaluate and synthesize a wealth of material.
4. to learn self-disciplined study habits and the ability to meet fixed deadlines as set out by the course outline.
5. to foster a desire for life-long learning in the study of the Psalter.
6. to tap into the resources of the Psalter for spiritual enrichment and Christian ministry.

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

#### A. REQUIRED TEXTS

McCann, J. Clinton Jr. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993. ISBN #: 0-687-41468-7

Davidson, Robert. *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. ISBN #: 0-8028-4246-1

#### B. RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Goldingay, John. *Psalms*. Volume 1: Psalms 1-41. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Goldingay, John. *Psalms*. Volume 2: Psalms 42-89. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Goldingay, John. *Psalms*. Volume 3: Psalms 90-150. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Broyles, Craig C. [Psalms](#). New International Biblical Commentary. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999.

### C. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

The following written assignments and discussion groups will help foster the skills of critical analysis and exegesis, the ability to evaluate various approaches and perspectives taken to the Psalms, and deepen the student's knowledge of the overall message of the book of Psalms.

**1. Devotional Study of the Psalms:** due Monday, March 4, 2013 (25 % of the final grade).

The student is required to complete a devotional reading of the book of Psalms and write a response to this experience. The student is expected to read through the whole Psalter before March 4 and then write a ten page reflection paper (2500 words). This paper should include the following:

- A report that you have completed a prayerful, disciplined, and devotional reading of the entire Psalter.
- Reflections on five Psalms. You must choose five Psalms (not all from the same Psalm type) and write up your personal reflections on them. Why did you choose these five and what impact did they have on you personally? What did you learn from them?
- The final part of your paper should include a response to the whole experience of reading the Psalms devotionally. What impact did this experience have on your spiritual journey? How would you convince someone who has never read the Psalms of the importance and value in reading the Psalms devotionally? Summarize what the book of Psalms is all about with the view of creating an interest in that person to read the Psalms devotionally.

**2. Book Review Discussion Groups:** (15 % of the final grade).

During the course of the semester the students will read and discuss the textbook by J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of the Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* in small groups. See below the instructions for the discussion groups. The discussion groups will be held on the following dates: Monday, January 28, February 11, February 25 and March 11, 2013.

## Book Review Discussion Group Instructions<sup>1</sup>

During the course, there will be four in-class discussion times of approximately thirty minutes each. These discussions have five purposes:

- a. to challenge students to develop their critical, thinking skills.
- b. to enable students to improve their skills in developing and expressing theological arguments in a group context.
- c. to empower students to foster ability in leading fellow students in discussion.
- d. to have students take responsibility for their fellow students' education by mutually supporting one another.
- e. to encourage students to listen respectfully to views not their own.

In the first class, students will be divided into groups of four. They will assign themselves the days for which they will be responsible for leading the discussion. They will also discuss together what they think will make for a successful discussion in each class.

### *Responsibilities of the student as group participant.*

Having read the assigned chapters carefully for the day of the discussion groups, each student in the group should come prepared with some questions arising from their reading as well as some thoughtful reflections on the material. Some possible questions to ponder are: What struck you about the reading? What new and helpful insights did you find in the reading? Do you agree with McCann's views and argument? Do you find McCann convincing or are there weaknesses in his arguments? (For example, is the concept of the Psalms as Torah a helpful way to interpret the Psalms, why or why not?) The student can come up with their own questions as well related specifically to each chapter. Each student also needs to report to the leader whether they have read all or only some of the assigned chapters for that day.

### *Responsibilities of the student as leader.*

During the course, each student will lead the group discussion. The group leader has two responsibilities:

- a. During the group discussion, the leader's responsibility is to guide the discussion and keep it on track. The leader should develop some leading questions as well as guide the discussion so that each person has a chance to contribute.
- b. After the discussion, the leader will assign a participation grade for each member of the group and submit the grade to the teacher at the end of the class (grade from zero to five, with five being highest). Base the grade on the following criteria:

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my colleagues Dr. John Kessler of Tyndale Seminary and Dr. Ken Fox of the Canadian Theological Seminary, for much of the text of this section, and the conceptual use of discussion groups in this way.

- If the student's comments during the discussion reflected an informed reading of assigned material, allocate a higher grade.
- If the student has contributed their fair share (not too much, not too little), allocate a higher grade.
- Consider a grade of 4.5-5.0 if the individual has excelled with respect to the above two criteria.
- Consider giving a grade of 4 if the individual has contributed capably with respect to the above two criteria.
- If the student has dominated discussion in inappropriate ways, reduce their grade.
- If the student has not contributed or contributed only minimally, reduce their grade.
- If a student has contributed but their contributions were not informed by a careful reading of the material, reduce their grade.
- Has the discussion led to a better understanding of the textbook and to a critical interaction with it? If not, reduce the grade.
- If the student has not completed reading all the chapters assigned for that day, reduce their grade.

The average grade should be between 3.0-4.3. If the student has excelled, give a 4.7. If their contribution is outstanding, give a 5. If the student's contribution is less than adequate, give a grade of 2.5 or below.

All grades are confidential (leaders may give fraction grades: e.g., 3.7).

### Discussion Group Schedule

- **January 28, 2013** First Discussion Group: Preface, Intro, Part I: Chapters 1–2, pp. 9–50.
- **February 11, 2013** Second Discussion Group: Part II: Chapters 3–4, pp. 53–82.
- **February 25, 2013** Third Discussion Group: Part III: Chapters 5–7, pp. 85–124.
- **March 11, 2013** Fourth Discussion Group: Part IV: Chapters 8–9, Conclusion and Appendix, pp. 127–179.

**3. Expository Research Paper on a Psalm:** due Monday, April 1, 2013 (worth 50 %). See instructions below.

### Instructions for the Expository Research Paper:

Choose one psalm and write a 10–12 page research/exegesis paper (2500–3000 words) on it. Your paper should include the following (elements):

- Give the psalm a title/name.
- Identify the type or form of the psalm (whether it is a lament, thanksgiving psalm, praise). This is called form-critical analysis.

- Determine the historical background or *Sitz im Leben* (Life Situation) of the psalm if possible. Look for clues in the psalm itself. Is there a superscription which gives clues to its historical context? Look up the biblical reference to which it alludes. Check commentaries for further information on historical background. If there is a psalm title, how does it contribute to, or influence, the interpretation of the psalm, in comparison to a reading of it without the title?
- Analyze the structure of the psalm. Note any change in speaker or subject. Do an outline of the psalm and explain how the parts fit together to create the whole.
- Discuss the literary techniques used in the psalm (acrostic, parallelism, strophic patterns, metaphors, similes, etc).
- Analyze key words or phrases used in the psalm. What do they really mean? How do these significant terms contribute to the structure and the overall message of the psalm?
- Identify the tone or emotions expressed in the psalm (anger, love, comfort). Are there changing emotions in the psalm?
- Canonical analysis. Note the canonical placement of the psalm within the Psalter itself. In which book of the Psalter is it located, and how does it relate to that collection of psalms? Also consider whether the psalm is used anywhere else in the biblical canon (in the Old Testament or/and in the New Testament). If it is, how is the psalm used and understood in its new biblical context? For what purpose is it re-used?
- Discuss the main theological theme or themes in the psalm.
- What does the psalm say about God? List the epithets or names of God in the psalm.
- Summarize the essential message of the psalm and its contribution to the overall message of the Psalter.
- Application: How can the psalm be re-applied in our contemporary context (both individually and corporately)? Give specific application to your personal life, in your local congregation's life, and to the community of faith as a whole. Give concrete suggestions and examples and a plan for implementing them.

The paper must be well-researched, properly documented, and include a bibliography of the works consulted and cited. Please use a minimum of seven secondary sources. You may consult class texts, reference works, and other reputable and recent books and journal/periodical articles. However, be sure to use these sources for background and contextual information. Do not simply survey the interpretations of commentators for the passage that you are investigating, but give evidence of having worked through the interpretive issues yourself. When you use commentaries, make sure you interact and dialogue with the commentators, stating whether you agree or disagree with their interpretations and proposals, or demonstrating how they support your interpretation and conclusions.

Please NOTE: Going over the allowable page limit by more than one page (or word count by 250 words) on any of the written assignments will result in a reduction in the grade.

**4. Required Reading and Personal Psalm:** due Monday, April 15, 2013 (worth 10 %).

Along with the study of different topics and individual Psalms in class, the student will be required to read a number of articles on specific topics related to the course, as well as sections from the commentary by Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship*. The student will also write a personal psalm. See instructions and list of readings below. The student is expected to report that they have completed the required readings, by keeping a record of what has been read and when it was completed. This record along with the personal psalm is due on April 15, 2013 in class.

*Instructions:*

Choose twenty-five psalms and read the section from Robert Davidson's commentary *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* on each of those twenty-five psalms. You need to report which psalms from Davidson's commentary you read.

Read the all the articles/essays listed below.

Write a personal psalm: In response to having studied the Psalms, write your own personal psalm. Choose the type of psalm you will write (Lament, Thanksgiving, Hymn of Praise, etc), and then write in that genre. Put yourself in the shoes of the psalmist and write your prayer. With your personal psalm, identify the type of psalm it is in its title and hand in the psalm as part of your Required Reading Assignment.

The following articles and chapters are on reserve in the library:

**Introductory issues:**

Suggested Reading Schedule. Read before Jan 21:

Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3–32.

Tremper Longman III, "The Psalms: The Heart of the Old Testament," in *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 51–62.

Eugene H. Peterson, "Text," and "Way," in *Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 11–20, 23–32.

**The Canonical Shape of the Psalter:**

Read before Jan 28:

Gerald Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in J. Clinton McCann Jr., ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSS 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 72–82.

**The Psalms and David:**

Read before Feb 4:

Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 26–31.

**Autumnal New Year Festival:**

Read before Feb 11:

Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "The Festival of the Lord as King," in *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Trans. Frederick H. Cryer; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 119–122.

**Poetry in the Psalms:**

Read before Feb 11:

Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms: 6. Appendixes: Literary approach to the psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 21–28.

**Torah Psalms:**

Read before Feb 25:

C. S. Lewis, "Sweeter than Honey," in *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 54–65.

**Psalms of Lament:**

Read before Mar 4:

Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986): 57–71.

Frederico G. Villanueva, "Preaching Lament," in *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching* (eds. Grenville J. R. Kent, Paul J. Kissling and Laurence A. Turner; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010), 64–84.

**Psalms of Praise:**

Read before Mar 11:

James Luther Mays, "Praise is Fitting: The Psalms as Instruction in Praise," in *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 61–71.

C. S. Lewis, "A Word About Praising," in *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 90–98.

### **Penitential Psalms:**

Read before Mar 25:

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "When Guilt Overwhelms You: Forgiveness during the Journey, in *The Journey Isn't Over: The Pilgrim's Psalms for Life's Challenges and Joys* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 111–120.

### **The Problem of Vengeance and Imprecation in the Psalms:**

Read before Apr 1:

Chalmers Martin, "Imprecations in the Psalms," in *Classical Evangelical Essays* (edited by W. Kaiser; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 113–132.

Eugene H. Peterson, "Enemies," in *Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 95–103.

C. S. Lewis, "The Cursings," in *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 20–33.

### **Messianic Interpretation of the Psalms:**

Read before Apr 8:

Bruce K. Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg* (eds. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg; Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 3–18.

Walter C. Kaiser, "The Messiah in the Psalms (Part 1 & 2)," in *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 92–135.

### **Preaching from the Psalms:**

Read before Apr 15:

Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," in *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 137–163.

Altogether the reading of the articles come to 289 pages.

## D. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

1. Your work should demonstrate the following characteristics:

**Accuracy** (a fair and accurate presentation of scholarly judgment on the issues) – Is what I say correct? Is it valid? Have I understood the topic or question?

**Critical Analysis** – Have I understood the main issues? Have I done sufficient research on the topic? Does my paper show critical reflection, interaction and dialogue with the biblical text and with authors writing on the subject?

**Organization** – Does my paper follow a clear outline? Does my paper have a thesis statement? Is there a clear progression and development of an idea or an argument in the paper? Does my argument have a meaningful order?

**Clarity** – Does what I say make sense? Will others clearly understand what I am seeking to express?

**Good Grammar and Writing** – Is my paper clean of spelling mistakes? Is the text punctuated correctly? Does the sentence structure consistently adhere to basic rules of good grammar? Do I use inclusive language?

**Well Documented** (thorough) – Is my work complete? Does my bibliography reflect sufficient research. Have I fully and accurately documented where I have relied upon the work of others? Have I provided complete information about my research sources? Will others be able to locate these sources on the strength of my documentation?

2. Matters of Style

You should submit written work in a style consistent with either the model outlined in [The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies](#) (P. H. Alexander, et al, eds. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999) or the [Chicago Manual of Style Online](#). For proper citation style, consult the [Chicago-Style Quick Guide](#) (Tyndale e-resource) or the full edition of the [Chicago Manual of Style Online](#), especially [ch. 14](#). For citing scripture texts, refer to sections 10.46 to 10.51 and 14.253 to 14.254.

Written work ought to be free of spelling mistakes, punctuated correctly, and adhere to basic rules of grammar. It is expected that written work will be submitted in a clear, straight-forward style of academic prose (cf. the guidelines in Strunk and White, [Elements of Style](#)). Written work ought to betray clear organization, argument and coherent thought. The use of inclusive language is expected.

3. Plagiarism and Honesty

Students should consult the current [Academic Calendar](#) for academic policies on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System.

Integrity in academic work is required of all our students. Academic dishonesty is any breach of this integrity, and includes such practices as cheating (the use of unauthorized material on tests and examinations), submitting the same work for different classes without permission of the instructors; using false information (including false references to secondary sources) in an assignment; improper or unacknowledged collaboration with other students, and plagiarism. Tyndale University College & Seminary takes seriously its responsibility to uphold academic integrity, and to penalize academic dishonesty.

In all work, you are obliged to pay careful attention to matters of intellectual property, honesty and integrity. Plagiarism is to be avoided at all costs and will not be tolerated in any form whatsoever. Plagiarism, by definition, is the use of the work of another person without proper acknowledgement. Examples of plagiarism include (but are not limited to) the following: copying a sentence or part of a sentence from a book or article without using quotation marks and citing the source; rephrasing another person's words without giving credit for the idea that you have borrowed by citing the source; copying the work of someone else and handing it in as your own. It is assumed that each assignment required for this course will be written independently. Please note that plagiarism in any form on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of "F" for the assignment with no opportunity for resubmission.

#### 4. Title Page and Documentation

The title page for all written work ought to include the following:

The title of the paper, name of the course, name of the professor, date of submission, and your name (if you have a Tyndale Campus mailbox, this must also appear on the title page).

Ensure that you have accurately and fully documented sources used in your paper (footnotes are preferred, endnotes or, in the case of a review, parenthetical references may be used). Documentation and notes should be consistent with the model provided in [\*The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies\*](#) (P. H. Alexander, et al, eds. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999) or the [\*Chicago Manual of Style Online\*](#).

#### 5. Late Assignments

The assumption is, of course, that all written work will be submitted on and before the corresponding due dates. Should this not occur, the following policy shall govern the evaluation of your work. For every week late, the grade will be reduced by 5 %, a half a letter grade (i.e. one week late: 82 % A- becomes 77 % B+; two weeks late, 82 % becomes 72 % B-, etc.). Please note that the deduction is accumulated weekly, not daily, and so a student will receive the same penalty whether the assignment is one or six days late.

Extensions will be considered only in cases such as a death in the family, the hospitalization of yourself or a member of your immediate family, or an illness for which you require treatment by a physician. Reference to a heavy work load, other assignments, professional or ministry obligations or holidays do not constitute legitimate grounds for an extension.

Requests for extensions must be submitted in writing using the Tyndale Extension Forms, explaining the reason why the extension is needed. Such requests need to be submitted prior to the due date.

All assignments must be handed in by the last day of exams. No assignments will be accepted after that date unless the student has a valid reason for an extension. In that case, the student must apply for an extension to the Registrar and not to the professor.

#### 6. Criteria for the Evaluation of Written Work

Your work will be evaluated on whether you answered the specific questions given and whether you followed the general guidelines for submitting written work. For example, the evaluation of your inductive study will be based on whether you followed the specific instructions for doing an inductive study.

#### 7. Submission of Written Work

See the 'Guidelines on Written Work' above.

Students are required to retain a copy of all assignments (hard copy or electronic version). If a student wishes to submit written work by mail, they must be mailed directed to the Professor, c/o Tyndale Seminary. Alternatively, work may be given directly to the Professor at the beginning of class on the due date. If the student does not have a Tyndale Campus mailbox and wishes to have all written work returned to them, they must submit written work with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Otherwise assignments will be returned in the student's campus mailbox. Unclaimed assignments are destroyed after six months.

### **E. SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

Devotional Study of the Psalms	25 %
Book Review Discussion Groups	15 %
Expository Research Paper on a Psalm	50%
Required Reading and Personal Psalm	10 %
Total Grade =	100%

#### IV. COURSE SCHEDULE, CONTENT AND REQUIRED READINGS

Jan 14	Introduction to the Psalter The Origin and Function of the Psalms
Jan 21	The Canonical Shape of the Psalter
Jan 28	The Psalms and David
Feb 4	Psalms Titles and Technical Musical Terms Types of Psalms
Feb 11	History of Interpretation of the Psalms
Feb 18	NO CLASS: Family Day
Feb 25	Psalms 1 and 2: Introduction to the Psalter
Mar 4	Psalms of Lament
Mar 11	Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving
Mar 18	NO CLASS: Reading Week
Mar 25	Liturgical Psalms
Apr 1	The Problem of Vengeance and Imprecation in the Psalms
Apr 8	Psalm 8: What is a human being?
Apr 15	Jesus Christ and the Psalms: Messianic Interpretation of the Psalms

#### V. SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY:

See Robert Davidson's bibliography in *The Vitality of Worship*, pp. 481–84 and J. Clinton McCann, Jr.'s Notes in *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, pp. 182–94.