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**HB643**  
**Reading the Psalms as Trauma Literature**  
**January Interterm Jan 2–12**

**Course Description:**

The psalms are some of the most loved scriptures and yet they come laden with violent words and images. The Revised Common Lectionary often edits out the most disturbing verses. Psalm 137 is cut off at v 6 thereby avoiding the psalmist plea for vengeance and its cry to dash babies against stones in v 9. Ignoring and avoiding these difficult texts is neither productive nor honest. This course reads the psalms as trauma literature. For many, the legacy of understanding scripture as the inspired Word of God has resulted in thinking that everything in scripture must be “God approved.” Even if one does not hold that opinion, the influence of it colours how the psalms and “texts of terror” are read. In this course we will read the psalms as an honest cry from humanity, often in oppressed and persecuted circumstances. While not agreeing with the cry for vengeance, we should be able to hear and hold their pain. Each week a difficult psalm will be studied in its *sitz in leben* alongside modern case studies.

**Competency Objectives:**

- Engage in a close reading of selected imprecatory psalms and learn to read them in their context through a trauma lens.
- Learn how to connect the suffering in the psalm with modern stories of suffering and trauma.
- Apply this knowledge in preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. In other words, gain the knowledge needed to engage the challenging questions when difficult passages in the psalms are read or referred to.
- Engage in class discussion honestly, openly, and with compassion.
- Create a psalm which honestly expresses personal lament.

**Prerequisites**

HB 500 Introduction to Hebrew Bible.

**Assigned Texts:**

- Jones, Serene. *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. Second ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019. [VST eBook](#). Full download available!

- Travis, Sarah, and Paul Scott Wilson. *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-informed Theology*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021. ISBN: 978-1725267978
- Other readings will be available on Populi well in advance of the interterm.

### **Recommended Reading:**

- Hunsinger, Deborah van Deusen. *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 9780802871039
- Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010. [VST e-Book](#). Full download available!
- Sancken, Joni S. *All Our Grievs to Bear: Responding with Resilience after Collective Trauma*. Newburyport MA: Herald Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781513809779 [VST e-Book](#).

### **Format:**

This class meets daily for three and a half hours each day during the January interterm (Jan 2–5; 8–12). The primary format will be class presentation, discussion based on the reading of the assigned texts, and lecture. Depending on class size, the discussions will be either all together or in small groups. As this is an intensive course, there will be pre-reading and writing required. Each day one or more students (depending on class size) will give a class presentation. Please register early so a schedule of presentations can be determined well in advance of the start of the interterm to give enough time to do the required reading and writing for your presentation. A sign-up rota with a schedule of readings will be posted to Populi by end of November, 2023.

### **Assignments:**

*Audit students will complete:*

- All assigned reading.
- Class participation.
- No letter grades will be given for the completion of courses by audit.

*Certificate students will complete:*

- All assigned readings.
- Class participation.
- Seven journal entries on assigned psalms.
- One class presentation (see below for details).

*Basic Degree students will complete:*

- All assigned readings.
- Class participation.
- Seven journal entries on assigned psalms.
- One class presentation (see below for details).

- One final paper (see below for details).

1. Class Participation and Expectations

Consistent and timely attendance is required according to VST guidelines. This includes the completion of the assigned reading for each class with each student ready to engage in discussion. If a student is unable to attend a class, the instructor is to be informed by email. Smart Phones can be disruptive to the learning experience of other students. Please set all phones to silent or turn them off during class. Exceptions can always be made for medical or family issues that require being in constant contact. Laptops may be used during class but for note taking only. Surfing the internet is not permitted while class is in session unless it is part of a small group activity. Sending texts and emails will be limited to break time.

2. Daily Journal (total of 7)

Students will submit a 1-page journal entry engaging with the assigned psalm text before the start of each class. The final journal entry will be the creation of a personal psalm of lament.

3. Class Presentation

Student(s) will initiate discussion by presenting the salient points in the day's reading assignments, raising two or three questions to generate conversation over important issues/themes. The presentation should be approximately 10 minutes.

4. Research Paper on a Chosen Psalm.

Students will submit an academic research paper of 3,000 words (double spaced, 12-point font, word count does not include footnotes) in a Word document. Footnotes and bibliography (5-10 entries beyond course readings) are to be in the SBL Style. Remember, this is an academic research paper, and it is important to demonstrate your integration of the course lectures, readings, and discussions in your final paper. **Due Date: Friday April 12<sup>th</sup>.**

Written assignments should demonstrate the ability to thoughtfully engage the material and reading for the class while offering a personal reflection on the reading and material covered.

Certificate courses will be evaluated on an Approved (APP) /Not Approved (NAPP) system. No letter grades will be given for the completion of certificate courses.