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**HB643/HB743**  
**Reading the Psalms as Trauma Literature**  
**January Interterm Jan 5–9; 12–16, 2025 9am–12pm**

### 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:

I highly recommend reading the following two books before class starts. However, I know from experience trying to fit in all the readings during Christmas break is challenging to say the least. But the more you read, the better prepared you will be and the more you will get out of the course. If you can't get it all done before, then read as much as you can before and during the course, and then finish after the course. Students must demonstrate that they have read them through their presentations, discussion, journal entries and/or their final paper.

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 [VST eBook](#)

Other readings will be available on Populi.

## 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 hours each day during the January interterm (Jan 5–9; 12–16). 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 30 October 2024. All daily readings are available on Populi. HB643 students read and present (10 min presentation) on the HB643 texts. HB743 students read and present on both the HB643 & the HB743 texts (15 min presentation).

## Schedule:

### Jan 5: A Brief Introduction to Trauma

Psalm 88

HB643 Readings: (62 pages)

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Trauma: A Social Theory* Chapter 1
- Baldwin, Jennifer. Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma. Chapter 1–2

HB743 Readings: N/A

### Jan 6: Psalm 137 and the Verses You (almost) Never Hear Read in Church.

Psalm 137

HB643 Readings: (33 pages)

- Bar-Efrat, Shimeon. “Love of Zion: A Literary Interpretation of Psalm 137.” In *Tehillah le-Moshe*: 3–11
- Li, Xi. “Post-traumatic Growth, Belief in a Just World, and Psalm 137:9.” *BTB* 51, no. 3 (2021): 175–184.
- Plank, Karl A. “By the Waters of a Death Camp: An Intertextual Reading of Psalm 137.” *Literature and Theology* 22, no. 2 (2008): 180–194.
- Gunkel, Hermann. “Psalm 137: An Interpretation.” *The Biblical World* 22, no. 4 (1903): 290–293.

HB743 Readings: (45 pages)

- Ahn, John J. “Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments.” *JBL* 127, no. 2 (Sum 2008): 267–289.
- Ogden, Graham S. “Prophetic Oracles Against Foreign Nations and Psalms of Communal Lament: The Relationship of Psalm 137 to Jeremiah 49:7-22 and Obadiah.” *JSOT* 7, no. 24 (1982): 89–97.
- Savran, George. “‘How Can We Sing a Song of the Lord?’ The Strategy of Lament in Psalm 137.” *ZAW* 112, no. 1 (2000): 43–58.

### Jan 7: The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms

Psalm 79

HB643 Readings: (37 pages)

- deClaissé-Walford, Nancy L. “The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms.” In *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary*

*Scholarship*, edited by Rolf A. Jacobson, 77–92, 176–178. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.

- Boyle, Geoffrey Robert. “The Imprecatory Psalms as Means of Mercy and Wellness.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 3–4 (2022): 193–213.

HB743 Readings: (31 pages)

- Mandolfo, Carleen. “Talking Back: The Perseverance of Justice In Lamentation.” In *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, edited by Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo. SBL Symposium 43. 47–56. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Linafelt, Tod. “Surviving Lamentations (One More Time).” In *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, edited by Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo. SBL Symposium 43. 57–63. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Williamson, Robert Jr. “Lament and the Arts of Resistance: Public and Hidden Transcripts in Lamentations 5.” In *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, edited by Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo. SBL Symposium 43. 67–80. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

## Jan 8: Trauma Caused in Relationships

Psalms 55

HB643 Readings: (33 pages)

- Spector, Stephen. “Abraham and Isaac: Human Frailty and Trauma in Genesis.” *JBQ* 50, no. 4 (2022): 211–220.
- Sancken, Joni S. “Soul Wounds in the Bible” Chap 2 In *Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2019:
- Maté, Gabor. “You Wouldn't Believe My Life Story.” Chap. 4 In *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books; Lyons, Colorado: Ergos Institute, 2010.
- Jones, Serene. “Broken Communion: Leah’s Story” 3–12 In *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019.

HB743 Readings: (13 pages)

- O'Donnell, Karen. “The Voices of the Marys: Towards a Method in Feminist Trauma Theologies.” Chap 1 In *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, edited by Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross London: SCM, 2020.

## Jan 9: Seeking Schadenfreude

Psalms 69

HB643 Readings: (34 pages)

- Brueggemann, Walter. “Vengeance: Human and Divine.” In *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 63–81. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007.
- Frechette, Christopher G. “Daughter Babylon Raped and Bereaved (Isaiah 47): Symbolic Violence and Meaning-Making in Recovery from Trauma.” In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette. Semeia 86. 67–83. Atlanta: SBL, 2016.

HB743 Readings: (26 pages)

- Methot, Suzanne. “What it Means to be Colonized” Chap 2 In *Legacy: Trauma, Story and Indigenous Healing*. Toronto, ON: ECW Press, 2019.

### Jan 12: Painfully on the Nose

Psalms 83

HB643 Readings: (32 pages)

- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. “The People of Psalm 83.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174, no. 695 (2017): 259–266.
- Ross, Allen P. *A Commentary on the Psalms: 42–89*. Kregel Exegetical Library Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013, 727–742.
- Green, Leah. “Statement from Compassionate Listening Project Founder, Leah Green.” In *Compassionatelistening.org*, 19 Oct. 2023.
- Coyne, Kathleen. “Imagining the Possibility of Peaceful Coexistence.” In *Compassionatelistening.org*, 8 Nov. 2023.

HB743 Readings: (18 pages)

- Laurence, Trevor. *Cursing with God: The Imprecatory Psalms and the Ethics of Christian Prayer*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022, 1–18

### Jan 13: “Saying Amen to Violent Psalms”

Psalms 58

HB643 Readings: (30 pages)

- Balentine, Samuel E. “Legislating Divine Trauma.” In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette. Semeia 86. 161–176. Atlanta: SBL, 2016.
- LeMon, Joel M. “Saying Amen to Violent Psalms: Patterns of Prayer, Belief, and Action in the Psalter.” In *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, edited by Rolf A. Jacobson, 93–109. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.

HB743 Readings: (29 pages)

- Laurence, Trevor. *Cursing with God: The Imprecatory Psalms and the Ethics of Christian Prayer*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022, 117–146 (Feel free to read the whole of chapter 2)

### Jan 14: The Cry of the Wounded Heart

Psalm 109

HB643 Readings: (30 pages)

- Sutton, L. “When the Unheard Voices Become Violent: Perspectives from Psalm 109 and the #FeesMustFall Movement.” *AcT* 27, no. 1 (07/21 2023): 39–66.
- Zenger, Erich. *A God of Vengeance?: Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996. 55–61.

HB743 Readings: (20 pages)

- Wright, David P. “Ritual Analogy in Psalm 109.” *JBL* 113, no. 3 (1994): 385–404.

### Jan 15: “Gansta Rap”

Psalm 52

HB643 Readings: (33 pages)

- Strawn, Brent A. “Sanctified and Commercially Successful Curses: On Gangsta Rap and the Canonization of the Imprecatory Psalms.” *Theology Today* 69, no. 4 (2013): 403–417.
- deClaissé-Walford, Nancy L. “Human Violence in the Imprecatory Psalms.” *Ex auditu* 34 (2018): 19–36.

HB743 Readings: (18 pages)

- Simango, Daniel, and P. P. Krüger. “An Overview of the Study of Imprecatory Psalms: Reformed and Evangelical Approaches to the Interpretation of Imprecatory Psalms.” *Old Testament Essays (New Series)* 29, no. 3 (2016): 581–600.

### Jan 12: “Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care”

Psalm 11

HB643 Readings: (38 pages)

- Hunsinger, Deborah van Deusen. *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015, Chapter 1–2

HB743 Readings: (26 pages)

- Prinsloo, G. T. M. “Suffering as Separation: Towards a Spatial Reading of Psalm 11.” *Old Testament Essays (New Series)* 28, no. 3 (2015): 777–806.

## Assignment Requirements Per Enrolment Classification

1. Audit students will complete:
  - All assigned reading.
  - Class participation.
  - No letter grades will be given for the completion of courses by audit.
2. Certificate students will complete:
  - All assigned readings.
  - Class participation.
  - Seven journal entries on assigned psalms.
  - One class presentation (see below for details).
  - 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.
3. Basic Degree & Diploma 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).
4. Advanced 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).

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## Assignment 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 (single spaced) reflective journal entry engaging with 6 of the 10 assigned psalm texts before the start of each class. In other words, the journal entry on a particular psalm is due before the start of class on the day that psalm is explored. Given that this is an intensive, you may want to start on the journals ahead of time. But please submit them daily during the inter-term. The final journal entry will be the creation of a personal psalm of lament and will be due on January 31.

## 3. Class Presentation

Students 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. All daily readings are available on Populi. HB643 students read and present (10 min presentation) on the HB643 texts. HB743 students read and present on both the HB643 & the HB743 texts (15 min presentation). Presentations scripts are to be submitted in Word format the day of presentation. If using a presentation software such as PowerPoint, Keynote or Prezi, please provide a pdf copy for the class.

## 4. Research Paper on a Chosen Psalm.

Students will submit an academic research paper of 3000 (HB743: 5000) 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 (HB743: 10+ entries) are to be in the Chicago16/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 17<sup>th</sup>.**

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