

Hebrew Bible Psalms in Interpretation

Professor	Daniel R. Driver, PhD	Course	Version 3.2.0
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1 Course Description

The Psalms have a special place in the life of the synagogue and church. Thus a major goal of this course is to see how the Psalter has fed and informed Jewish and Christian theology in various periods: biblical times, Rabbinic and Patristic periods, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and so on down to modern times. To help understand the anthology's unique arrangement, the course will also interact with current research into the shape and shaping of the Psalter.

Prerequisites: BF 1001 and RM 1000 or GTRS 6000.

2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to: report on at least three distinct periods in the reception of the Psalter; analyze key differences between ancient and modern interpreters, and a variety of Jewish and Christian interpreters; formally interpret (exegete) one psalm afresh, informed by its commentary tradition; memorize and recite twelve verses from the Psalter; respond creatively to a psalm so as to illuminate the text in a mode other than academic discourse, e.g. through music, visual arts, poetry, or performance.

3 Required Texts & Materials

The following texts are required. Students are encouraged to purchase print copies. Even where eBooks are assigned or available, print books can provide relief from screen time. Many readers find that hard copies can be marked up with greater ease, too.

- [Brodersen] Alma Brodersen. *The End of the Psalter: Psalms 146–150 in the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018 (paperback reprint). ISBN 978-1481308991. The AST Library also provides [access to the eBook \(BZAW 505; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017\)](#).
- [Creach] Jerome F. D. Creach. *Discovering Psalms: Content, Interpretation, Reception*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN 978-0802878069. An eBook is available from the book's [UK publisher \(London: SPCK, 2020\)](#).
- [NJPS] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible: Second Edition*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0199978465. The first edition of this study Bible (OUP, 2004) or another edition of the NJPS translation of the Tanakh (1985) will suffice, if you already have one to hand. The AST Library offers both through [Oxford Biblical Studies Online](#).

Other required texts and materials will be posted on Microsoft Teams and/or [Perusall](#), the two main platforms that will facilitate online delivery of this course.

4 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings may be recommended throughout the semester. Excerpts from this literature will be placed on reserve or made available through the course websites.

Modern commentaries on the Psalms include:

E. Hengstenberg (² 1849–52)	H. Schmidt (1934)	P. Craigie & L. Allen (1983)
J. Olshausen (1853)	W. O. E. Oesterley (1939)	C. Stuhlmueller (1985)
W. M. L. de Wette (⁵ 1856)	A. Cohen (1945)	E. Gerstenberger (1988)
H. Hupfeld (1855–62)	H. Lamparter (1958)	J. Day (1990)
F. Delitzsch (1871)	A. Weiser (1962)	M. Tate (1990)
J. J. S. Perowne (⁷ 1890)	E. J. Kissane (² 1964)	A. C. Feuer (³ 1991)
J. Wellhausen (³ 1898)	A. Deissler (1965)	A. Cohen (1992)
A. F. Kirkpatrick (1891–1901)	M. J. Dahood (1966–70)	J. L. Mays (1994)
C. A. Briggs (1906–07)	H.-J. Kraus (⁴ 1972)	M. Girard (1984–96)
B. Duhm (² 1922)	A. A. Anderson (1972)	K. Seybold (1996)
H. Gunkel (⁴ 1926)	D. Kidner (1975)	C. Broyles (1999)
R. Kittel (⁵⁻⁶ 1929)	J. Rogerson & J. McKay (1977)	K. Schaefer (2001)
E. W. Barnes (1931)	L. Jacquet (1975–79)	G. Wilson (2002)

R. J. Clifford (2002–03)	D. Bergant (2013)	B. Weber (2016)
J. Magonet (2004)	B. Peters (2004–14)	E. Charry (2015) &
J.-L. Vesco (2006)	T. Longman (2014)	J. Byassee (2018)
R. Alter (2007)	W. Brueggemann &	W. Tucker & J. Grant (2018)
J. Goldingay (2006–08)	W. Bellinger (2014)	S. Gillingham (2008–18)
J. H. Eaton (2008)	N. DeClaissé-Walford, R. Jacobson & B. LaNeel Tanner (2014)	B. Waltke, J. Houston &
F.-L. Hossfeld & E. Zenger (2000–08, ET 2005–11)	A. Ross (2011–16)	E. Moore (2010–19)
W. P. Brown (2010)	M. Oeming & J. Vette (2000–16)	R. Meynet (2017–19)
		N. DeClaissé-Walford (2020)

Also, the following reference works are worth owning and consulting. [Making Sense] in particular contains sound advice on core skills like reading religious texts, writing essays and reviews, revising essays, making oral presentations, and learning languages.

[Making Sense] Northey, Margot, Bradford A. Anderson, and Joel N. Lohr. *Making Sense in Religious Studies: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0199026838.

[SBL2] Collins, Billie Jean, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1589839649. Designed to augment *Chicago Style* (the standard at AST), there is also a free **Student Supplement for SBL2**.

5 Course Outline

We will adhere to the schedule in Table 1 as closely as possible, though the professor reserves the right to adjust it to suit the needs of the class.

§. Seminar Text	Secondary Reading	Date
1. Psalm 1	Driver 2019, 2020	12 Jan.
2. Psalm 2	[Creach, chs. 1–2]	19 Jan.
3. Psalm 8	[Creach, chs. 3–5]	26 Jan.
4. Psalm 19	[Creach, chs. 6–8]	2 Feb.
5. Psalm 24	[Creach, ch. 9–end]	9 Feb.
— No Class: Term Break (Monday to Friday)		16 Feb.
6. Psalm 34	[Brodersen, ch. 1]	23 Feb.
7. Psalm 51	[Brodersen, ch. 2]	2 Mar.
8. Psalm 90	[Brodersen, ch. 3]	9 Mar.
9. Psalm 104	[Brodersen, ch. 4]	16 Mar.
10. Psalm 110	[Brodersen, ch. 5]	23 Mar.
11. Psalm 146	[Brodersen, ch. 6]	30 Mar.
☞ Exegetical essays are due by the last class		6 Apr.
12. Psalm 150	[Brodersen, ch. 7]	6 Apr.
☞ End of Term: Final marks are due		19 Apr.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

See the AST website for a list of other **important dates**.

6 Evaluation and Grade Structure

1. Each week of class will feature a live (by video conference) **seminar-style discussion** of one individual psalm. Students will select a commentator for a period of 3–4 weeks, during which time they are responsible to report on the the author's commentary and bring its insight to bear on the seminar discussions. How should you prepare?
 - (a) Read the week's psalm closely and carefully in the NJPS translation. (Read it in Hebrew if you have the ability.) Look for distinctive words, themes, and images in the psalm, and stay alert to intertextual connections between it and other biblical literature. Jot down your observations.
 - (b) Consult your designated commentary. It should be read carefully, too, but after you have got a sense for the psalm on its own. One good approach might be to read the psalm twice, make some preliminary notes, and then study your commentator and fill out your preliminary notes. Be sure to note any differences between the Hebrew and the version being commented upon, and try to read relevant ancient versions of the psalm in translation or in the original, as you are able. Make select annotations on the week's psalm in Perusall.
 - (c) Augment your knowledge of each commentary you study by reading about its place in reception history. Key recourses are listed in [subsection 8.2](#), below (start with reference works like M. Sæbø's *HB/OT* and *EBR Online*). Remember that you will be the resident authority on your chosen commentator.
2. Discussion of **secondary reading** will take place asynchronously on **Perusall**, a social e-reading platform. Whether you read the assigned texts there or offline first, engage the readings collaboratively by annotating them on Perusall.
 - (a) Prepare for each week by reading the secondary reading (either online or off). Then, spend about one hour per week discussing the material on Perusall. Try to do both tasks before the seminar that week. Top issues may be carried over, briefly, into the live discussions.
 - (b) Engage in discussion by posting good questions or comments, helping others by answering their questions, and upvoting good questions or comments to draw attention to the most important issues and ideas. Note that this platform takes the place of other discussion forums. Some of the time you spend there counts towards contact hours for this course, too.
3. Students will **memorize 12 verses of a psalm** and recite them to a witness, in person, before the last day of class. Any psalm is allowed except for Psalm 23. You may also choose to memorize verses from a combination of psalms. For instance, you might memorize the first verses (incipits) of the psalms of ascent, Psalms 120–134 (skip three if desired). The witness will sign a form to vouch for your recital.
4. Students will **creatively represent one psalm** in the class immediately following that psalm's workshop (e.g., Psalm 2 in Week 3). Engage as many of the senses as possible, using whatever you can find or create. Be inventive! The only conditions are (a) that you explain or demonstrate a connection with the text studied and (b) that your presentation last between 5 and 8 minutes. Record, upload, and share as a URL.

- Finally, students must compose an **exegetical essay** on one psalm from the seminar. Consider all the perspectives brought to bear in class on a psalm of your choice, noting anything useful for your discussion, and then dig deeper into the text and its history. Your work should be aided by the preliminary researches of your classmates, but you will need to read more widely on your own; the seminar is only a starting point. You are expected to develop a strong thesis, and to interact with a selection of secondary literature in 4,000–5,000 words. The paper is due at the start of the last class.

The breakdown for the semester’s total work is shown in [Table 2](#).

Seminar Contributions	15%
Reading Discussion	15%
Psalms Memorization	10%
Creative Representation	20%
Final Paper	40%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST’s **Academic Calendar** provides guidelines and detailed criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks (summarized in [Table 3](#)). Note that, at AST, a grade of “C” is deemed “Unsatisfactory.”

A+	94–100	Exceptional
A	87–93	Outstanding
A–	80–86	Excellent
B+	77–79	Good
B	73–76	Acceptable
B–	70–72	Marginally Acceptable
C	60–69	Unsatisfactory
F	0–59	Failure
FP	0	Failure due to Plagiarism

Table 3: Outline of Grades at AST

7 Other Course Policy

Late work will not be accepted, except in genuinely extenuating circumstances. Students must submit something before the deadline if they wish to receive credit. Unless I state otherwise, written assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM on the date indicated.

Essay submissions must be typewritten, double-spaced, and formatted as PDFs. They should be free from error. In this course they should follow SBL Style (see [\[SBL2\]](#) in [section 4](#), above). As a reminder, AST also upholds an Inclusive Language Policy.

Plagiarism, if **detected**, will result in failure of the course.

Students should request permission to record a class or lecture. If permission is granted, or if recordings are provided (as in the case of an online course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

If you have abilities or disabilities that require modifications to the assessment process or other aspects of this course, please advise the course instructor as soon as possible.

Finally, I encourage the conscientious use of laptops, tablets, and other technology in my classes. In classroom settings, realize that, as **cognitive psychologists have demonstrated**,

“laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers.” Do your part to foster an environment for dialogue by honouring the presence of your classmates. In online and hybrid settings, consider both the physical environment in which you choose to work and the virtual environment that you help create through your participation in various forums. Let your engagement in this course be marked by rigour and charity alike.

8 Additional Bibliography

Literature on the Psalter is vast. Two exceptional, actively maintained bibliographies are:

1. Annotated: Stephen Breck Reid and Rebecca Poe Hays, “Psalms,” in *Oxford bibliographies Online: Biblical Studies*, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195393361/obo-9780195393361-0099.xml> (access at AST through Open Athens). doi: 10.1093/OBO/9780195393361-0099
2. Exhaustive: Beat Weber, “BiblioPss1990ff.: Bibliography of Psalms and the Psalter since 1990” (German and English), <https://bienenberg.academia.edu/BeatWeber> (use the embedded link or browse to his bibliographies).

For the weekly Psalms seminar, students should focus on a commentator from the list below and give a short (5 minute) overview of the interpretation of the psalm in question. Be sure to work with three different commentators over the semester, from at least two different major periods. (For those with the language skills, registering notes on Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or Latin versions can be one selection.) The goal is to gain maximum insight into the message of the Psalms by close attention to text, translation, and commentary.

8.1 Ancient Sources

1. Versions
 - (a) John R. Kohlenberger, III, ed., *The Comparative Psalter: Hebrew-Greek-English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) [Ref BS 1419 2007]. Very useful, but not to be mistaken for a critical edition or a full account of ancient versions.
 - (b) The Septuagint/Old Greek (LXX/OG) is available in **two main editions**, each with major and minor editions. A. Rahlfs produced the Göttingen Septuagint’s *editio maior* of *Psalmi cum Odis* in 1931 (3rd ed., 1979).
 - (c) Vulgate/Jerome: *Biblia Sacra Latina* [**online**].
 - (d) Targumim: *The Aramaic Bible, Vol. 16: The Targum of the Psalms* (trans. David M. Stec; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2004) [BS 709.2 B5 1987 vol.16]. Also, **Edward Cook’s translation is available online**.
2. Early Church / Synagogue
 - (a) John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Psalms* (trans. R. C. Hill; 2 vols.; Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998) [BS 1430.3 J63 1998].
 - (b) Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* (trans. M. Boulding; 6 vols.; Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2000–2004). Older English translations of *Enarrationes in Psalmos* appear in the Ancient Christian Writers series (trans. S. Heiggin, F. Corrigan; Westminster, Md., Newman Press, 1960–) and in **P. Schaff’s NPNF translation, first printed 1847–57 and now online**. For the Latin original see *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (CSEL), vols. 93–95.

- (c) Diodore of Tarsus, *Commentary on Psalms 1–51* (trans. R. C. Hill; Atlanta: SBL, 2005) [BR 65 D393 D5613 2005].
- (d) Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms* (trans. R. C. Hill; 2 vols; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000–2001).
- (e) Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Psalms 1–81* (trans. R. C. Hill; Atlanta: SBL, 2006).
- (f) Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms* (trans. P. G. Walsh; New York: Paulist Press, 1990–1991) [BR 60 A35 no. 51–53].
- (g) Midrash Tehillim / *Midrash on the Psalms, Translated from the Hebrew and Aramaic* (trans. W. G. Braude; 2 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

3. Medieval

- (a) Aquinas, *Postilla super Psalmos / Commentary on the Psalms* (1272–1273). A Latin–English parallel edition for (most of) Psalms 1–54, ed. Stephen Loughlin, is [online as part of the Aquinas Translation Project](#). See also: Thomas Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).
- (b) *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (trans. Mayer I. Gruber; Leiden: Brill, 2004) [BS 1429 R3713 2007].

4. Reformation Era

- (a) Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536): *Expositions of the Psalms* (Collected Works of Erasmus, Vol. 63–65; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, 2005, 2010) [CWE 63: Pss 1, 2, 3, 4; CWE 64: Pss 88, 22, 28, 33; CWE 65: Pss 38, 83, 14].
- (b) Martin Luther (1483–1546): *Werke*, 35 = *Luther's Works*, 10–14 [BR 330 E5 1955]. See also: J. S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1969).
- (c) John Calvin (1509–1564): *Commentary on the Psalms* (1557–, ET 1839–). All of Calvin's commentaries are available online, in English translation, at the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#): Psalms 1–35, 36–66, 67–92, 93–119, 119–150. See also: Herman J. Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

5. Early Modern / Modern / Critical

- (a) Select an example from [section 4](#) or nominate an early modern or modern commentator of your own discovery.
- (b) If you have modern language skills beyond English, this is an opportunity to put them to use. For options in an array of European languages, see §2 of B. Weber's exhaustive bibliography, or consult a good continental commentary. See, for example, the first pages of F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), and idem, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

8.2 Other Literature on the Psalms and Reception History

- ArtScroll Tanach Series, 2 vols. (English and Hebrew): Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Tehillim / Psalms: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1985).
- Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, OT vols. 7–8: Craig A. Blaising and Carmen Hardin, eds., *Psalms 1–50* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008); Quentin F. Wesselschmidt and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Psalms 51–150* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007).
- Reformation Commentary on Scripture, OT vols. 7–8: Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *Psalms 1–72* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015); Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *Psalms 73–150* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018).
- Willaim Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
- H. Attridge and M. Fassler, eds., *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
- Susan Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) offers an [expanded bibliography online \(PDF\)](#). The first volume pays especial attention to Psalm 8 as a case study. The second, *Psalms Through the Centuries, Vol. 2: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1–72* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018) consolidates and builds on some of her other work, including *A Journey of Two Psalms: The Reception of Psalms 1 and 2 in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and *Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Conflict and Convergence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- M. Sæbø, *HB/OT: For help with specific periods and commentators in biblical reception history see Magne Sæbø, ed., Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (3 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996–2015).
- C. M. Furey et al, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (EBR) Online* (30 vols.; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–2024) is an ambitious work still in progress, available: <https://db-degruyter-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/db/ebr>