

**CH121**  
**THE CITY AND THE HEBREW BIBLE**  
**UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
**PROF. RICHARD D. WEIS**  
**FALL, 2005**

**SYLLABUS**

More than anything else this course is an exercise in hermeneutics. So it is concerned less with what the texts of the Hebrew Bible meant in themselves than with what meaning they might help us discover in our world, specifically, what meaning they might help us discover in the life of modern cities. The course works against two obstacles to easy use of the Hebrew Bible in this task. The first obstacle is the vast cultural and sociological difference between the world of the Bible and the modern world. The second obstacle is our lack of recognition that, even though ancient Israel's roots are in the culture of villages, the life of cities shaped many texts and themes in the Hebrew Bible. The course will begin with serious consideration of the life of modern cities – the field of human experience concerning which we seek meaning, proceed to a consideration of the life of ancient Israelite cities – to tune our sensibilities to the distance between our cities and the cities of the Bible, and then consider a variety of texts, themes and literary traditions in the Hebrew Bible and reflect on their relevance for theological and ethical reflection on modern cities.

***COURSE OBJECTIVES***

1. To explore the resources in the Hebrew Bible for theological and ethical reflection on modern cities, including:
  - the character and function of cities in ancient Israel;
  - texts and perspectives in which the city is a central subject or theological symbol;
  - other texts and perspectives, not necessarily from urban contexts, that may be relevant to modern urban issues.
2. To consider the possibilities for theological reflection on modern cities offered by these resources.
3. To assess critically the relationship between modern city life and these Biblical texts, themes and perspectives in order to learn more about the possibilities for relationship between modern life and the Bible.
4. To afford class members opportunity to exercise and further develop their skills in interpreting contemporary experience through the lenses of Biblical texts.

***ASSUMPTIONS AND STARTING POINTS***

**This course makes the following assumptions about its participants:**

1. That, whatever place the Bible may hold in your religious life and convictions, you are willing to acknowledge that it is a culturally and historically specific document that was first written for

readers in cultures and social/political/economic situations that are significantly different from ours, and you are willing to take that difference seriously in working with the text of the Bible.

2. That you come from different life situations, with different relations to the Bible and to the city, and that these differences are a gift to the class because they will enable us collectively to see more than any one of us might alone.
3. That some, but not all, of you have a basic familiarity with the history, society and culture of ancient Israel, and the literature of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., such as would be obtained in an introductory course in Hebrew Bible).
4. That some, but not all, of you have some level of familiarity with methods of interpreting narrative texts and prophetic texts in relation to the situation of their ancient audiences (i.e., such as would be obtained in an introductory course in Hebrew Bible).

**This course makes the following assumptions about its subject:**

1. Insufficient attention has been paid to the considerable resources in the Bible for a substantive theology of the city, often fixing on a small, and not always appropriate, selection of texts and themes.
2. Although great emphasis has been placed on Israel's origins in a nomadic or village society some of the most complex and compelling images of life in the Hebrew Bible -- both positively and negatively -- are images of cities. Thus the Hebrew Bible has the capacity to be a significant source for theological and ethical reflection on the life of contemporary cities.
3. The Hebrew Bible contains more texts about the city, using the city as metaphor or symbol, or originating from urban contexts that can reasonably be covered in a single course. Thus only a selection can be presented.
4. The physical and human reality of cities and city life in ancient Israel is in some respects similar to, and in other respects quite different from, modern metro-urban realities. Thus the human experience addressed by the Hebrew Bible's "city texts," and funding the metaphor or symbol of the city in the Bible is substantively different from that of people in modern America.

## ***CLASS ORGANIZATION***

The class will be organized in a seminar or discussion format. Although there may be occasional lectures to communicate certain basic perspectives, most classes will be a discussion of the assigned readings or passages for that day.

The course will also have an optional electronic component. Course documents will be posted on Blackboard; a discussion board for the whole class will be set up there, and discussion boards and means for sharing documents will be set up for project teams.

## ***COURSE EXPECTATIONS***

1. That each participant **will have done the week's assignments**, and **will participate constructively in class discussion**. The amount and quality of your participation in class discussions will contribute to your course grade.
2. That each participant **will submit three papers**:

- One paper of approximately 5 pages in length that reflects on some dimension(s) of modern American urban life as discussed in Kleniewski's book through the lens of one of the theological traditions about Jerusalem that Hoppe discusses. Due November 1.
  - One paper of approximately 5 pages in length that reflects on some dimension(s) of modern American urban life as discussed in Kleniewski's book through the lens of one of the six theological traditions (ideologies) about the land that Habel discusses. Due November 15.
  - One paper of approximately 10-15 pages, which analyzes and reflects theologically on modern urban reality through the lens of the Biblical passages and/or themes you (or your team) chose as the focus of your class presentation. The paper is due one week after the class session at which you (your team) presents.
3. During the last three weeks of the course, i.e., during the class sessions on November 29, December 6 and 13, our collective investigations will be initiated by **in-class team presentations** on the specific passages and topics the teams have chosen. The class will be divided into up to three teams, each of which will be responsible for one of these presentations. Teams will be identified by October 11. They will have selected the foci of their presentations by November 8. The function of these presentations is to the class in theological reflections on specific aspects of modern urban reality as interpreted through the lens of specific Biblical passages and/or themes chosen by the team. This includes the assignment of readings for class preparation, and in class presentation and discussion leadership. I expect that each team will meet with me once during their preparation for conversation about their work. These meetings ideally should happen before November 18.

I expect that you will observe the normal practices of the academic world for acknowledging dependence on the work of others (something none of us can avoid because the subject is too vast). Your papers will have bibliographies listing works you consulted in writing the paper even if these are only Bible translations or textbooks, and no matter how few or many there are. No paper will be accepted without a bibliography! Wherever in the paper itself you use information, ideas, opinions, etc. gained from your reading, it is not enough to list the source(s) of that material in the bibliography. A footnote identifying the source(s) at the actual point of usage is also necessary. Failure to identify the sources of material that is not your work, but taken over from others, is plagiarism. If you hand in work containing plagiarism, I will grade it "NC" or "F," and will not let you replace or make up that paper. Note that the *Masters Student Handbook* shows a possible penalty of dismissal from school in the event of repeated offenses.

### **REQUIREMENTS FOR AUDITORS**

Auditors are welcome in this class within the limits defined by seminary policy providing they keep faith with the first expectation for the course, completion of all reading assignments and participation in class discussions. Auditors will not complete written assignments. Auditors may participate in the teams presenting to the class at the discretion of the instructor, but in any case are not required to do so.

### **SEMINARY POLICY ON EXTENSIONS**

The work for a course is terminated at the end of the final class session. The student's performance in the course is evaluated on the basis of the work submitted by that time, unless an exception is made by the instructor, in which case a formal petition for extension must be approved by the instructor by the end of the final class session. Extensions (of course work) beyond the end of the

semester will be approved only under extraordinary circumstances. Each instructor will include this policy on each course syllabus as well as the criteria by which she or he will grant such an extraordinary exception. In this course extensions ordinarily will be granted only when the need for additional time arises from a significant life change that materially alters the time a student can give to course work (e.g., serious illness, family crisis, change in job hours).

In the event such an exception is approved, the instructor shall file the extension form with the Registrar by the date grades are due. The Student Review Committee shall monitor extensions. If no extension is filed, a final grade will be submitted.

An extension may be granted for a period not to exceed six months from the end of the term. If the work is not completed by the date petitioned, a final grade will be submitted. Any renewal of an extension must be approved by the instructor and filed with the Registrar prior to the due date on the original petition. No extension or its renewal will exceed six months from the end of the term in question.

### ***SEMINARY POLICY ON THE USE OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE***

Exclusive language is any form of communication which demeans, discounts, or ignores the experiences and full humanity of a group of people on the basis of gender, race, ethnic group, class, age, sexual orientation, or differing abilities and hence fosters oppression and injustice. Language shapes relationships between persons and shapes the self-image of persons. UTS seeks to affirm the human community in all its diversity. In a tradition of seeking justice as an educational community and while embracing the diversity of faith traditions, UTS strongly encourages all of its members to use language in writing and speech that is inclusive in regard to gender, race, ethnic group, class, age, sexual orientation, or differing abilities.

#### **Implications:**

1. Sexually inclusive language refers to human beings either in ways which are not gender-specific (e.g. "humankind," "chairperson," etc.) or which use balanced male and female terms (e.g. "she or he," "all men and women," etc.).
2. Nonsexist language is a broader category that refers to:
  - Language about God as well as about human beings, either using non-gender specific references for God or using pronouns and personal or non-personal images for God which reflect male/female balance; and
  - Language about human beings that acknowledges the full equality of women and men rather than reinforcing assumptions of male superiority and social privilege and/or reinforcing gender stereotypes (e.g. "pastor" rather than "woman pastor," "nurse" rather than "male nurse," "flight attendant" rather than "stewardess," etc.).
3. Racially and ethnically inclusive language rejects the equating of color with virtue and does not equate darkness with negative qualities or lightness with positive qualities. It also rejects the use of or construction of "otherness" in language that connotes superiority of the dominant group.
4. Inclusive language also rejects the identification of single physical characteristics with a whole person, particularly in the case of physical or mental limitations, and instead strives to name the personhood first (e.g., "person who is blind" instead of "the blind person").

5. Inclusive language rejects sexuality-specific language in general reference to relationships (e.g. "partner" is a more inclusive term than "husband" or "wife").
6. Likewise, inclusive language referring to age, class, and other categories acknowledges the full humanity of persons and does not use terms which identify only singular characteristics of a person or group. (e.g. people who are homeless)

Further elaboration of this policy and suggestions and resources for its implementation may be found on reserve in the library in the folder marked "Inclusive Language." You may also find these resources helpful:

Clanton, Jann Aldredge. *In Whose Image?* New York: Crossroad, 1990.

Hardesty, Nancy A. *Inclusive Language In the Church.* Atlanta: John Knox, 1987.

Miller, Casey and Swift, Kate. *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing.* Second edition. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1989.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female.* New York: Crossroad, 1987.

Schwartz, Marilyn, and the Task Force on Bias-Free Language of the Association of American University Presses. *Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Wren, Brian. *What Language Shall I Borrow?* New York: Crossroad, 1990.

## TEXT BOOKS

*The Bible.* (New Revised Standard Version) OR: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.*

Fritz, Volkmar. *The City in Ancient Israel.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

Habel, Norman C. *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies.* Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Hoppe, Leslie J. *The Holy City: Jerusalem in the Theology of the Old Testament.* Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000.

Kleniewski, Nancy. *Cities, Change, and Conflict: A Political Economy of Urban Life.* Second edition. Belmont, CA: Wadworth/Thomson Learning, 2002.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### THE SOCIAL REALITY OF CITIES IN MODERN AMERICA AND ANCIENT ISRAEL

#### SEPTEMBER 13 -- INTRODUCTIONS

- AN OVERVIEW OF THE SUBJECT MATTER
- INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH TECHNIQUES, TOOLS AND RESOURCES

**SEPTEMBER 20 -- THE MODERN CITY, I**

**Preparation: Read:** Kleniewski, *Cities, Change, and Conflict*, Chaps. 2-7 = pp. 24-169  
(If need be, skip the "Case Studies," "Discussion Questions," and "Resources on the Internet.")

**SEPTEMBER 27 -- THE MODERN CITY, II**

**Preparation: Read:** Kleniewski, *Cities, Change, and Conflict*, Chaps. 8-15 = pp. 173-355  
(If need be, skip the "Case Studies," "Discussion Questions," and "Resources on the Internet.")

**OCTOBER 4 -- CITIES AND VILLAGES IN ANCIENT ISRAEL**

**Preparation: Read:** Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, Chaps. 4-10 = pp. 50-189.  
Geus, C. H. J. de, "The City of Women: Women's Places in Ancient Israelite Cities" in *Congress Volume, 1992* (ed. J. A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1995) (reserve shelf)

**SURVEY OF MATERIALS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE RELATING TO CITIES****OCTOBER 11 -- THE CITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE**

**Preparation: Read:** **Priestly Laws:** Num 35:1-15 (+16-29); Lev 14:34-53, 25:24-34;  
**Deuteronomic Laws:** Deut 14:22-29, 19:1-13, 21:1-9, 21:18-21, 22:13-30, 25:5-10;  
**Narrative:** Gen 14; 19; 21:22-34; 34; Josh 2; 6; 2 Sam 20:1-22 (esp. vv 14-22); 1 Kgs 21:1-16; 2 Kgs 6:24-7:20; Jonah 3-4  
As you read ask the following questions, as they seem appropriate:

- what is the city in this passage?
- what function(s) does the city serve in this passage? who is served by that?
- what attitudes toward the city are visible in this passage? whose view is that?

**OCTOBER 18 -- THE BIBLICAL CITY PAR EXCELLENCE: JERUSALEM, I**

**Preparation: Read:** Hoppe, *The Holy City*, Chaps. 2-4 = pp. 23-71

**OCTOBER 25 -- READING WEEK - NO CLASS****NOVEMBER 1 -- THE BIBLICAL CITY PAR EXCELLENCE: JERUSALEM, II**

**Preparation: Read:** Hoppe, *The Holy City*, Chaps. 5-7 = pp. 73-126  
**Assignment due:** a paper of approx. 5 pages reflecting on some dimension(s) of modern American urban life as discussed in Kleniewski's book through the lens of one of the theological traditions about Jerusalem.

**NOVEMBER 8 -- RELATING BIBLICAL THEOLOGIES OF THE LAND TO MODERN CITY LIFE, I**

**Preparation: Read:** Habel, *The Land is Mine*, Chaps. 1-4 = pp. 1-74

**NOVEMBER 15 -- RELATING BIBLICAL THEOLOGIES OF THE LAND TO MODERN CITY LIFE, II**

**Preparation: Read:** Habel, *The Land is Mine*, Chaps. 5-8 = pp. 75-148  
**Assignment due:** a paper of approx. 5 pages reflecting on some dimension(s) of modern American urban life as discussed in Kleniewski's book through the lens of one of the theological traditions (ideologies) about the land.

**PRESENTATIONS:  
BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MODERN CITIES**

**NOVEMBER 22** -- CLASS MEETING FOR TEAMS TO WORK ON PRESENTATIONS

**NOVEMBER 29** -- TEAM PRESENTATION

*Preparation:* Readings assigned by the team making this day's presentation

**DECEMBER 6** -- TEAM PRESENTATION

*Preparation:* Readings assigned by the team making this day's presentation

*Assignment due:* paper of approx. 10-15 pages, analyzing and reflecting theologically on modern urban reality through the lens of the Biblical passages and/or themes you (or your team) chose as the focus of your class presentation if you presented on November 29

**DECEMBER 13** -- TEAM PRESENTATION

*Preparation:* Readings assigned by the team making this day's presentation

*Assignment due:* paper of approx. 10-15 pages, analyzing and reflecting theologically on modern urban reality through the lens of the Biblical passages and/or themes you (or your team) chose as the focus of your class presentation if you presented on December 6

**DECEMBER 20** -- LAST DAY TO TURN IN PAPERS

*Assignment due:* paper of approx. 10-15 pages, analyzing and reflecting theologically on modern urban reality through the lens of the Biblical passages and/or themes you (or your team) chose as the focus of your class presentation if you presented on December 13