Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs

Reformed Theological Seminary
January 2005

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Course Description and Relevance for Ministry

The course studies two enigmatic and fascinating books found in the Megilloth section of the Writings (Ketubim), the third portion of the Hebrew canon in English translation: Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. These books will be studied from a historical, literary, and theological perspective. Focus will be on original meaning, contemporary significance and the hermeneutical principles that allow us living at the end of the second millennium AD to appropriate these ancient books.

Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs are not only interesting in their ancient setting, but have tremendous implications for life today. They are both wisdom books, and wisdom, as presented in the Bible, is a skill for living, an ability to navigate life. While the books of Proverbs and Job teach us that God is the only source for such wisdom, Ecclesiastes warns us about the limits of wisdom and, along with many of the other books, grapples with the issue of suffering and reward in this life. The Song is a collection of love poems extolling intimate human relationships. How does such a book fit into the canon and how does this book inform our relationships today?

Topics to Be Covered

Topic One: The Nature of Wisdom in the Old Testament
Topic Two: The Issue of Retribution in the Old Testament
Topic Three: Understanding the Book of Ecclesiastes in Its Old Testament Context
Topic Four: Exegesis of Selected Passages in Ecclesiastes
Topic Five: The Biblical Theology of Meaningless
Topic Six: Ecclesiastes as Idol Buster
Topic Seven: Understanding the Song of Songs in Its Old Testament Context
Topic Eight: Exegesis of Selected Passages in the Song of Songs
Topic Nine: The Biblical Theology of Marriage and Sex
Topic Ten: Implications of the Song of Songs for Marriage and Other Relationships

A more detailed class outline will be handed out on the first day

Class Schedule

Monday, January 17: 8:30 a.m.-Noon
Tuesday, January 18: 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, January 19: 8:00-Noon
Thursday, January 20: 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Friday, January 21: 8:00 a.m.-Noon

Reading Assignment

Read Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs in at least four different translations: recommended are NLT (the most recent edition [has a diamond rather than a square logo], NRSV, NIV, the Message, the ESV, the New Century Version, and the Holman-Standard Bible.

**Read at least two before the beginning of class.**

T. Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (IVP, 2002). **Read this before the beginning of class if possible.**
M. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Eerdmans, 1999)
Iain Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NIVAC, 2001)

Recommended Resources


These works contain extensive bibliographies.

Graded Assignments

1. Term Paper
All students will write a paper between 10 and 15 pages. This paper will be a detailed exegetical and biblical theological examination of one unit of text from either Ecclesiastes or Song of Songs. Alternatively, a topical paper is acceptable. The student may choose the text or topic, but it must be cleared by the professor by the last day of class. This paper will show the student’s personal reflection on the passage as well as interaction with the commentaries and other secondary literature.

Due: March 4, 2005

2. Reading Report

All students are to write a book report on the required reading. Each report is to be approx. 3 pages. Students should choose one issue in a book and write a critical interaction with that deals with that issue.

Due: March 4, 2005

3. Take-Home Exam

The exam will be an essay-type exam in an open book, take-home format. It will be written by all students taking this course for credit. The questions will help students review the class material and reflect on further implications of the material for their reading of the Bible and their application of Exodus in their ministry. Students’ exam responses are not to be edited after the designated writing time has ended.

Due: January 31, 2005

Evaluation

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