

Living the Christian Life through Wisdom Literature: Proverbs and Job 6OT703

Reformed Theological Seminary – Washington/Baltimore
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Fourth Presbyterian Church
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M-F, 8:30am-2pm

Course Description and Relevance for Ministry

The course studies two enigmatic and fascinating books found in the Writings (Ketubim), the third portion of the Hebrew canon in English translation: Proverbs and Job. 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.

Proverbs and Job 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. These two books are particularly interesting to study in tandem. While Proverbs takes a positive view of the relationship between wisdom and reward, Job questions the equation.

Topics to Be Covered

- Topic One: The Nature of Wisdom in the Old Testament
- Topic Two: The Purpose of the Book of Proverbs
- Topic Three: The Structure and Theology of Proverbs (emphasis on chapters 1-9)
- Topic Four: A Christological Reading of the Book of Proverbs
- Topic Four: Reading the Individual Proverbs (chapters 10-31)
- Topic Five: The Issue of Reward and Punishment (Retribution in Proverbs)
- Topic Six: Topical Studies (Wealth and Poverty, Family Life, etc.)
- Topic Seven: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Proverbs
- Topic Eight: The Structure and Theology of Job
- Topic Nine: Retribution in the Book of Job
- Topic Ten: Christological Approach to Job
- Topic Eleven: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Job

Reading Assignment

Read Proverbs and Job 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 if possible.

T. Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (IVP, 2002).

W. P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1996).

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 Proverbs or Job. 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: Sept 30

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 that deals with that issue.

Due: Sept 2

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: Sept 9

Evaluation (the standard RTS grading scale found on page 44 of the Catalogue will be used)

Term Paper	40%	40%
Exam	40%	40%
Reading Reports	20%	20%

Recommended Resources

Job

Alden, R. L. *Job*. NAC. Broadman, 1993. 423 pp.

Alden presents a readable and insightful theological interpretation of the book of Job. He fails, however, to recognize the central issue of the book which is the nature and origin of wisdom. Nonetheless, much can be learned from this volume. LM***

Andersen, F. I. *Job*. TOTC. Inter-Varsity, 1976. 294 pp.

This is one of the best conservative commentaries on the book. It is limited by the length restrictions of the series, but still extremely valuable as a lay commentary. LM***

Atkinson, D. *The Message of Job*. BST. Inter-Varsity, 1991. 188 pp.

This commentary provides a very practical approach to Job. Atkinson offers little analysis of the ancient message of the book, but he does show how one major theme connects with our world. LM***

Bergant, D. *Job, Ecclesiastes*. OTM. Michael Glazier, 1982. 295 pp.

A good popularly written and moderately critical commentary on the Book of Job. In terms of exposition, Bergant “has decided to favor those themes, images and literary forms that cluster around the broad concept of order” (p. 23). See also under Ecclesiastes. LM***

Clines, D. J. A. *Job 1–20*. WBC. Word, 1989. cxi/501 pp.

Clines has written a stimulating and insightful commentary on the book. It is stimulating in the sense that it will get the reader thinking about the book and its issues. It is provocatively written. It is particularly strong in literary and theological analysis. The bibliographies are incredibly good. If a library only has one commentary on Job, this one should be it (of course, it covers only the first twenty chapters). MS*****

Driver, S. R., and G. B. Gray. *Job*. ICC. T. and T. Clark, 1921. lxxviii/360 pp.

This volume was begun by Driver who, when he died in 1914, bequeathed its completion to Gray. The latter actually did most of the work. Gray indicates in the introduction that he and Driver believe that the original Job excluded, among smaller passages, Job 28 (the poem on wisdom) and the Elihu speech. Very technical, but occasionally helpful notes for the scholar. S***

Gibson, J. C. L. *Job*. DSB. Westminster, 1985. ix/284 pp.

Gibson honestly reports that even after several decades of study he still struggles with the meaning of the Book of Job. Although from a critical perspective, his comments will help readers struggle through this difficult biblical book themselves. LM***

Gordis, R. *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies*. Ktav, 1978. xxxiii/602 pp.

This commentary represents years of research preceded by numerous articles and a full-length book on Job. The author provides a detailed exegesis, textual study, and philological analysis. He also provides forty-two special studies on selected topics. While definitely within the critical tradition, he is moderate and looks at the book as a whole. MS****

Habel, N. C. *The Book of Job*. OTL. Westminster, 1985. 586 pp.

Habel has produced a major critical commentary on the Book of Job. It is a fairly well rounded commentary, but it concentrates particularly on literary features and theology. While Habel is aware of the questions surrounding the unity of Job, he treats it as a finished whole. MS***

Hartley, J. E. *The Book of Job*. NICOT. Eerdmans, 1988. xiv/591 pp.

This is one of the most recent commentaries on Job and it is a major contribution to the study of the book. This is because it examines all the facets of the book, not necessarily because it is terribly original. It is solidly evangelical in its approach. Very well-researched. MS***

Janzen, J. G. *Job*. Interp. John Knox, 1990. viii/273 pp.

In keeping with the parameters of the series, Janzen concentrates on theological significance and contemporary relevance. He does his job admirably, basing his work on an appraisal of such works as Pope and Gordis, but often presenting new ideas. He makes a small, yet significant shift away from the question "Why do the innocent suffer?" to "Why are the righteous pious?" Very helpful and stimulating. LM****

McKenna, D. L. *Job*. CC. Word, 1986. 331 pp.

McKenna concentrates on Job's "faith-development." This is a distortion of the book that shows Job moving away and not toward God in the dialogues. McKenna appropriately examines the book as it anticipates Jesus Christ. LM**

Murphy, R. E. *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*. FOTL. Eerdmans, 1981. 185 pp.

This is the first volume to appear in the FOTL series. Although proportionately shorter than others, it is still full of information and certainly one of the best in the series. Perhaps it is more useable than the others because it is less technical. Murphy is also a very clear writer who is concerned about the meaning of the text. The bibliographies are great (characteristic of the series). S****

Pope, M. H. *Job*. AB. Doubleday, 1965. lxxxviii/409 pp.

As with many of the Anchor Bible commentaries, this one's strength is its philological analysis. Pope is one of the very best scholars of Northwest Semitic languages and, unlike Dahood, is a very sound practitioner of comparative Semitics. This is a good solid commentary, but not brilliant like his Song of Songs commentary. MS***

Rowley, H. H. *Job*. NCB. Eerdmans, 1970. xix/281 pp.

Rowley represents the best of British critical scholarship of the past generation. He was a prolific and knowledgeable writer. He offers thorough discussion of many critical issues and argues for a composite approach to the Book of Job. MS***

Selms, A. van. *Job*. TI. Eerdmans, 1985. vii/160 pp.

This commentary is a concise, competent reflection upon the theology of the book. However, money is better spent on larger commentaries that are more well rounded. M**

Proverbs

Pride of place goes to the new two volume commentary by B. Waltke, *Proverbs 1-15* and *Proverbs 16-31* (Eerdmans, 2004, 2005).

Note that T. Longman III has a commentary on Proverbs coming out in March 2006 published by Baker.

Aitken, K. T. *Proverbs*. DSB. Westminster, 1986. 276 pp.

The introduction to this volume is one of the more critical of the series, although the bulk of the commentary provides helpful information. Interestingly, Aitken orders the material in Proverbs 10 and following in a topical rather than textual format. LM***

Alden, R. *Proverbs*. Baker, 1983. 222 pp.

This is a devotional commentary on the book. While it does discuss various translation possibilities, it is more concerned to draw applications for today. Sometimes these applications are helpful and right; others are forced and even trite. L***

Clifford, Richard J. *Proverbs*. OTL; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox/Westminster, 1999. xvi/286 pp.

This commentary puts more emphasis on text criticism, philology, and ancient Near Eastern background than some of the others listed here. His exposition of the meaning of the Hebrew is a little less substantial than that of other commentaries, but it is still very good. MS****

Farmer, K. A. *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*. ITC. Eerdmans, 1991.

This interesting, nontechnical commentary takes a canonical approach, with substantial discussion of the theology of the book and its significance for contemporary society. LM***

Fox, Michael V. *Proverbs 1-9*. AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000. xix/474 pp.

This is an excellent commentary both because the series allows more space than other commentaries and because Fox is a master interpreter. The only drawback is that it covers just the first nine chapters. Hopefully, we will not have to wait too long for the rest of the commentary to appear. MS*****

Garrett, D. A. *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes. Song of Songs*. NAC. Broadman, 1993. 447, 252 devoted to Proverbs.

Garrett's introduction is an interesting and helpful conservative approach to the issues of historical and literary structure. His comments on the text itself are helpful, but too brief. LM***

Hubbard, D. A. *Proverbs*. CC. Word, 1989. 487 pp.

While somewhat more scholarly in tone than other commentaries in the series, Hubbard's contribution is still quite readable and achieves the purposes of CC. The introduction highlights six principles of interpretation before beginning the commentary proper. Hubbard gives important guidelines to the proper understanding of the forms of speech and literary devices of the book. The section on Proverbs 10ff. orders the discussion by topic rather than verse-by-verse. LM****

Kidner, D. *Proverbs*. TOTC. Inter-Varsity, 1964. 192 pp.

This small commentary is packed with helpful insight and comments on the text. It is exegetically sensitive, theologically helpful, and orthodox. However, for serious study of Proverbs it should be supplemented by a fuller commentary like McKane's. LM****

Leeuwen, Raymond van. "Proverbs." In *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1997. 5:19-264.

This commentary expositis the text and also reflects on it theologically. Written from a progressive evangelical perspective, it is one of the best commentaries on Proverbs. LM*****

McKane, W. *Proverbs: A New Approach*. OTL. Westminster, 1970. xvii/670 pp.

This commentary is a significant contribution to the study of Proverbs, even if the critical conclusions are difficult to appreciate. McKane differentiates the instruction genre of 1-9, 22:17-24:22, 31:1-9 from the sentence literature of 10-22:16, 24:23-34, and 25-29. However, this commentary is invaluable for the study of the language of Proverbs. The way to use it is to turn to McKane's translation on pages 211-61, where he references his discussion of individual verses. A further debatable conclusion of his study is his division of the sentence literature into three classes. A must for scholarly enquiry into Proverbs, but of doubtful value to the layperson or pastor. MS****

Murphy, R. E. *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*. FOTL. Eerdmans, 1981.

See under Job.

Murphy, R. E. *Proverbs*. WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998. lxxiv/306 pp.
Murphy is a preeminent interpreter of wisdom literature. MS****

Murphy, R. E. and E. Huwiler. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. NIBCOT. Hendrikson/Paternoster, 1999. 312 pp.

Murphy wrote the section on Proverbs and he is an acknowledged master of the subject, but if one is really interested in his opinions, it is better to get his fuller treatment in the Word series. Perhaps laypeople might find this a more accessible version. LM**

Perdue, Leo G. *Proverbs*. Interp; Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 2000. xi/289 pp.

This commentary focuses on the literary, structural, ethical, and theological issues of the book of Proverbs. Its perspective is critical but moderately applied; a source for many good insights. LM****

Ross, A. "Proverbs." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, 1991.

This commentary is an added bonus in the volume featuring VanGemeren's commentary on the psalms. It is well worth adding to your library, especially considering the poor quality of other commentaries presently on the market. However, in the next few years two or three major commentaries on Proverbs will be released that promise to eclipse this one. LM***

Scott, R. B. Y. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*. AB. Doubleday, 1965. liii/257 pp.

This is not one of the better commentaries in the Anchor Bible series. It represents a classical critical approach to Proverbs. It is not particularly strong in any area of research. S*

Toy, C. H. *Proverbs*. ICC. T. and T. Clark, 1899. xxxvi/554 pp.

Toy was one of the leading scholars of the turn of the century, but his commentary is now dated in its critical methodology and conclusions. S**

Whybray, R. N. *The Book of Proverbs*. CBC. Cambridge, 1972. x/197 pp.

A good, competent study of the book from a critical perspective. Whybray distinguishes secular from religious proverbs. He studies the book in its ancient Near Eastern setting. LM**