

**OT512: POETICAL BOOKS**  
**Winter 2007**  
**Dr. Willem VanGemerens**  
**January 3-5 (Wed-Fri), 8:30am-5pm, McLean Presbyterian Church**

**GOAL**

This course aims at meeting the spiritual, academic, and professional needs of ministerial students. The poetical writings were included in Scripture to shape our being, feelings and imagination, the structure of our thoughts, and our activities (incl. preaching/teaching). It is my prayer that this course may shape your walk with the Lord and your ministry in years to come.

**METHOD**

The class period will be largely given to an interactive lecture method. I am praying (1) that **the Holy Spirit** will help me in making the Word clear, (2) that you as future teachers, preachers, and leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ will respond to this opportunity of self-development in **God's Word**, (3) and that the Spirit of God will transform us together into the image of **the Lord Jesus Christ**.

**EXPECTATIONS:**

Apart from the course requirements (below), I am asking you to be open to the issues raised in the interpretation of the poetical books. The poetical books challenge our innermost being as they invite us to be more "open" with God and to enter the textual world of Scripture. Some of the teaching will be uncomfortable, but I ask you not to reject these challenges immediately. Grow in your being by reflecting on the interpretive implications of these books.

**REQUIREMENTS**

Reflections	75
Reading reports	100 (50+50)
Examination	
Questions and answers	75
Take-home exam	75
Total	350

**REFLECTIONS.** Submit three reports containing your personal reflections on any aspect of the course. Due at the beginning of the next class period and the final reflection is due at the time of the examination (25 points each).

**READING REPORTS**

A report on Brown, Peterson or VanGemerens (elective reading/listening, see below) is due on January 3. Limit of 2-3 pages double spaced.. (50 points)

The report on all reading is due at the time of the final examination. will consist of a statement of what you have read and the percentage of completed reading, including the English Bible. Sign the report as follows; "I have read ---% of the reading required for this course and I have completed \_\_\_\_% of the Hebrew reading. Signature. Limit of one page. (50 points)

**EXAMINATION**

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.** The answers to the questions (at end of the syllabus) are due at the time of the examination. This portion is a part of the examination.

A **TAKE-HOME EXAMINATION** will examine your ability to work with the poetical books. More details will be provided in class.

**READING****REQUIRED:**

Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament: The Wisdom and Songs of Israel*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988<sup>2</sup> [= *IPBOT*]

Waltke, B. "Psalms: Theology of," *NIDOTTE* 4:1100-1115.

English Bible: the poetical Books (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations)

**ELECTIVE READING/LISTENING** (choose one out of three)

Brown, William P. *Character in Crisis: A fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Petersen, David L. and K. H. Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

VanGemeran, Willem A. *Wisdom Life Conference*. September 9, 2006 (4 CDs). Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Order by calling 215-546-3696.

### GRADING SCALE

The standard RTS grading scale will be used.

A	(97-100)	4.00 quality points
A-	(94-96)	3.66
B+	(91-93)	3.33
B	(88-90)	3.00
B-	(86-87)	2.66
C+	(83-85)	2.33
C	(80-82)	2.00
C-	(78-79)	1.66
D+	(75-77)	1.33
D	(72-74)	1.00
D-	(70-71)	0.66
F	(below 70)	0.00

### NOTES:

1. Plagiarism will automatically result in a failure in the course. If unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism, please, consult the Student Handbook and/or the professor.
2. Late work will not be accepted or severely penalized, unless excused.

### SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading
3	Hebrew poetry and wisdom literature Psalms	<i>IPBOT</i> 19-68 <i>IPBOT</i> 111-45
4	Job, Proverbs	<i>IPBOT</i> 69-110; 146-77
5	Ecclesiastes, Lamentations; Song of Songs	<i>IPBOT</i> 178-234, 178-234

## POETICAL BOOKS

### PSALMS

- Allen, L. C. *Psalms 101-150*. WBC. Word, 1983.
- Anderson, Bernhard W. *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*. Rev. ed. W/JKP, 1983.
- Avishur, Yitzhak. *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms*. Magnes, 1994.
- Bouzard, Walter C., Jr. *We Have Heard with Our Ears, O God: Sources of the Communal Laments in the Psalms*. SBLDS 159. Scholars, 1997.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Augsburg, 1984.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Edited by Patrick D. Miller. Fortress, 1995.
- Craigie, P. C. *Psalms 1-50*. WBC. Word, 1983.
- Crow, Loren D. *The Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134): Their Place in Israelite History and Religion*. SBLDS 148. Scholars, 1996.
- deClaisé-Walford, Nancy L. *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter*. Mercer, 1997.
- Flysvik, Ingvar. *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms*. Concordia, 1997.
- Gerstenberger, E. S. *Psalms, part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. FOTL. Eerdmans, 1988.
- Green, Barbara. *Like a Tree Planted: An Exploration of the Psalms and Parables through Metaphor*. Liturgical, 1997.
- Holladay, William L. *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses*. Fortress, 1996.
- Howard, David M., Jr. *The Structure of Psalms 93-100*. Biblical and Judaic Studies. UCSD 5. Eisenbrauns, 1997.
- Keel, Othmar. *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Trans. by Timothy J. Hallett. Eisenbrauns, 1996 (reprint of 1978 ed.).
- Kraus, H.-J. *Theology of the Psalms*. Trans. by K. Crim. Continental. Fortress, 1986.
- Kraus, H.-J. *Psalms 1-59*. Trans. by H. C. Oswald. Continental. Fortress, 1988.
- Kraus, H.-J. *Psalms 60-150*. Trans. by H. C. Oswald. Continental. Fortress, 1989.
- Levine, Herbert J. *Sing unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms*. Indiana, 1995.
- Lindström, F. *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms*. CBOTS 37. Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994.
- Mays, James L. *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms*. W/JKP, 1994.
- Mays, James L. *Psalms*. Interpretation. W/JKP, 1994.
- McCann, J. Clinton, Jr. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah*. Abingdon, 1993.
- McCann, J. Clinton, Jr. (ed.). *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. JSOTS 159. Sheffield, 1993.
- Sarna, Nahum M. *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel*. Schocken, 1993.
- Soll, Will. *Psalms 119: Matrix, Form, and Setting*. CBQMS 23. CBA, 1991.
- Tate, M. E. *Psalms 51-100*. WBC. Word, 1990.
- Terien, Samuel. *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- VanGemeren, W. A. "Psalms." *EBC*, 1990, 5:1-880.
- Wendland, Ernst R. *Analyzing the Psalms: Exercises for Bible Students and Translators*. Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998.
- Westermann, C. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 1981.
- Westermann, Claus. *The Psalms - Structure, Content, and Message*, 1990.
- Whybray, Norman. *Reading the Psalms as a Book*. JSOTS 222. Sheffield, 1996.
- Zenger, Erich. *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*. Trans. by Linda M. Maloney. W/JKP, 1996.

### JOB

- Alden, R. *Job*. NAC. Broadman, 1993.
- Cheney, M. *Dust, Wind, and Agony: Character, Speech, and Genre in Job*. CBOTS 36. Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994.
- Clines, D. J. A. *Job 1-20*. WBC. Word, 1989.
- Course, John. *Speech and Response: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Introductions to the Speeches of the Book of Job*. CBQMS 25. CBA, 1994.
- Perdue, Leo G., and W. Clark Gilpin (eds.). *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*. Abingdon, 1992.
- Pope, M. H. *Job*. Anchor Bible. Doubleday, 1965.
- Whybray, Norman. *Job*. Readings. Sheffield, 1998.
- Zuckerman, Bruce. *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint*. Oxford, 1998.

### SONG OF SONGS

- Bloch, Ariel, and Chana Bloch (trans.). *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*. California, 1998.
- Gledhill, T. *The Message of the Song of Songs: The Lyrics of Love*. BST. InterVarsity, 1994.
- Keel, O. *Song of Songs*. Trans. by F. J. Gaiser. Continental. Fortress, 1994.
- LaCocque, André. *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs*. Trinity, 1998.
- Murphy, R. E. *Song of Songs*. Hermeneia. Fortress, 1990.
- Pope, M. H. *Song of Songs*. Anchor Bible. Doubleday, 1977.

### ECCLESIASTES

- Gordis, Robert. *Koheleth: The Man and His World*. Aronson, 1995 (reprint of 1955 edition.).
- Isaksson, Bo. *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth with Special Emphasis on the Verbal System*. Uppsala, 1987.

Longman, Tremper, III. *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. NICOT. Eerdmans, 1998.

Murphy, R. E. *Ecclesiastes*. WBC. Word, 1992.

Perry, T. A. *Dialogues with Kohelet, The Book of Ecclesiastes: Translation and Commentary*. Penn State, 1993.

Seow, Choon-Leong. *Ecclesiastes*. Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 1997.

Zuck, Roy B. (ed.). *Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes*. Baker, 1994.

#### **LAMENTATIONS**

Hillers, D. R. *Lamentations*. 2d ed. Anchor Bible. Doubleday, 1992.

Hunter, Jannie. *Faces of a Lamenting City: The Development and Coherence of the Book of Lamentations*. Peter Lang, 1996.

Westermann, Claus. *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*. Trans. by Charles Muenchow. Fortress, 1993.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR OT717 - POETICAL BOOKS

### 1 SHORT ANSWERS

- 1.1 Discuss how each text, discussed in class, opens up a window to the book as a whole or to the theology of that book.
- 1.2 Discuss the major theological contribution of each poetical book.
- 1.3 Discuss imagery as a literary and theological phenomenon.
- 1.4 What are the characteristics of Hebrew poetry?
- 1.5 Discuss Hebrew parallelism.

### 2 ESSAYS

#### 2.1 PSALMS

- 2.1.1 Discuss the uniqueness of the book of Psalms.
- 2.1.2 Discuss the theological significance of the Psalms as a book and as a collection of books. In your answer consider these dimensions: (1) the opening two psalms in Book I (Wisdom as a way of life, the Davidic ideal), (2) the architecture of the Psalms, (3) the movements (from lament to praise, from the messianic agency to the kingdom of God, from local to universal), (3) the significance of the creation, royal, wisdom, and Zion psalms, (4) the contrastive closure of Books II (Ps 72) and III (Ps 89), (5) the function of the psalms at the seam of each book, (6) the coherent message of the Psalter, and the place of imprecatory psalms in Christian circles (see Waltke)..

#### 2.2 JOB

- 2.2.1 Discuss the composition of Job and the theological contribution of each part. Be familiar with the main argument of each of the speakers.
- 2.2.2 What is the problem with Job 28? What is its special contribution to the book and to the wisdom theme in general?
- 2.2.3 Demonstrate how cosmic order has a bearing on the discussion of moral order (justice, innocent suffering).

#### 2.3 PROVERBS

- 2.3.1 Discuss the prologue as a hermeneutic framework for interpreting Proverbs/ the wisdom sayings?
- 2.3.2 Explain the "fear" of the Lord as the beginning of "wisdom."
- 2.3.3 What is wisdom? Define wisdom and develop wisdom in terms of the four themes discussed in class (Submission, etc.). How does the "virtuous woman" model wisdom?

#### 2.4 QOHELETH

- 2.4.1 What is the structure of Qoheleth and discuss the composition of the book. How do the introduction and conclusion affect understanding the book as a whole?
- 2.4.2 Discuss Qoheleth's bearing on apologetics: the fallenness of humanity or the "winter" approach to life.

#### 2.5 SONG OF SONGS: What are the theological values of the book?

- 2.6 LAMENTATIONS: Explain the book as a tension between retribution theology (consequences of Judah's sin in the experience of judgment) and vindication theology (hope in God's judgment of the enemies and the restoration of God's people to himself).

## SELECT QUOTES FROM PAST CLASSES

### PSALMS

I was also influenced by the Ps. and the talk on having a living and honest faith. We should be honest with God and that may mean lamenting and crying out to him in distress. This is o.k. - he expects it and wants us to grow through hard times.

All of these books have had an impact on my life. I am encouraged that it is okay to struggle with God and the inconsistencies of this life like Qohelet and the imprecatory Psalmists.

### JOB

I was again refreshed to see, as Job did, that I only have a myopic view of life and that I can completely trust that God is working everything out in accordance to his holy, perfect sovereign will.

I have been challenged and convicted in two areas of life. First, I recognize my inherent ability to rationalize, compartmentalize my life. It is possible to have a "private" life and a "public" life that are incongruent. Proverbs has challenged me in the importance of being a man of integrity. Specifically, Job's comment about his eyes being pure was a challenge to me. As a single man it is possible to allow images from TV to be seen and not turn away rather to justify them or rationalize it. However, if I am going to be a man of God this cannot be.

I have made a movement from "knowing" (as an engineer by training) to "feeling" and "being." I knew the content of the books of Job and Eccl before, but now they feel like old friends. I can go to them and feel the tensions that are inherent in the questions that they raise. I now empathize more with non-Christians who follow Qoheleth into cynicism and despair. I can quietly sit now with my wife who is suffering under a heavy problem. I don't have to provide a simple solution. I can BE with her as she struggles.

### PROVERBS

The definition of integrity and its relationship to wisdom made me think of the ways my thoughts and actions are not integrated. I am not walking in the wholeness of life.

This class has made a profound impact in my life. First, the topic of the fear of the Lord was a challenge I needed to have. I have been wrestling with certain sins in my life. Developing a fear of the Lord has helped me find victory over sin in my life. As a result of this course, one of my new life goals is to be a wise person - one who fears the Lord and shuns evil. Secondly, it taught me the importance of living a life of integrity. I wear many different hats in life - student, pastor, friend, son, colleague, etc. I needed to hear that integrity is integration. I realized that one reason why I wrestle with certain sins is that I've been living a compartmentalized life. I want to live a life that's wholly open before the Lord. I want to submit my understanding to God's concern for creation order, not just moral order. Finally, I learned the secret of contentment. I want to be content with my life and knowing that I have a living relationship with God. With the hymn writer, I want to be able to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul." Amen! Hallelujah! I am the "ašrê, h-š" - "Blessed is the man."

This Course has challenged me in several areas.

1. Emotionally - I need to slow down. I have enjoyed trees, sunsets, and solitude. I have tried to be more purposeful in being still and listening to that small still voice.
2. Spiritually - I have become aware that I am not always honest with God or myself regarding my emotions. He is my loving Father, I can be myself in His presence. He loves me always, I can be free to revel in the fact that He is in control.
3. In my marriage- I have been challenged to practice the sanctification of my imagination on a daily basis.

### SONG OF SONGS

I chose to talk about my reflections on the S of S because currently it is the most relevant to my life situation. I am a full-time student and I work full time on the night shift plus my wife and I have had a baby 9 months ago today. I love my family intensely but I know that they can be crowded out at times. In your devotions on this book you spoke a great deal about the impurity of the sexual relationship infesting our society. This was very meaningful to me. I know my weaknesses but you also made a statement that I have been dwelling on. You said, "Gentlemen, let your wife be who she is" she is more than her attachments. She is more than wife, mother, lover, friend. She is who she is. I have been reading in the song and trying to "fertilize" her with all that I have so that she can be all that she is. When I actually concentrate on doing that she is so radiant. It's wonderful. But when I fail it is a downright shame. I know that God can work in spite of my failures. But I want to be the man He wants me to be. On a humorous note: Sometimes she knows what I'm up to and calls me out and we both have a good laugh. Thanks.

Proverbs and S. of S. have been very helpful in teaching me about this, and about loving, pursuing and honoring my wife. I especially was impacted by the part which said (from Eph 5) that we need to make our wives be radiant in our ministry to them, and when you said that we should pursue our wives but not force ourselves on them physically - we should wait for them to respond. Very good words - thank you! I actually want to incorporate the former of those two in to my personal mission statement.

The discussion of sexual purity in relation to S of S was good to hear and always should be emphasized. This hit me square in the eyes as it always does. The culture pulls so hard in the other direction - we need to be reminded over and over.

In S of S I became more convinced of the beauty of sexual expression in marriage and deepened my conviction to maintain sexual purity through abstinence until I become married. Also,

Further, the devotion on S of S reminded me that as a single man I must completely shut down the sexual aspects of my person until I am married. Although I strive to be pure I realize that it is a daily struggle that I must not drop my guard.

My life has been impacted by S of S this course. Although in my written list of priorities my wife is above school, many nights I chose to stay up late and complete school work. As such, our sex life has suffered. Reading S of S has reminded me of the importance which God has put on sex, so I have been trying to limit the times I stay up late and put priority on our times together.

The comments about husband/wife relationships in the book of S of S really pushed me toward wanting to rid myself of pettiness and focusing on really loving my wife for who she is. Also, I want her face to shine with radiance (from Prov) because of our relationship and how I am encouraging her. These are the areas I have already acted on in our marriage and our relationship.

So of S. So often I have been changed by S.of S. to have a deeper passion for my wife in times of "winter" = the hard times and of summer = the good times. It has changed me in that I crave time and feeling from her and I heap affection, love, appreciation to her and I serve her far more than anyone else. I try to treat her as God has treated me - graciously, favorably, honestly, lovingly and a prized person or a crown on my head. I'm changed by the S of S.

Having been married for 18 years, I have been challenged both by S of S and Proverbs (esp, I think ch. 5) to reclaim the "language of imagination" in my marriage. Seeing anew God's plan for joyous fulfillment (including physical love) in marriage has made me value my wife more, and motivated me to build her up and affirm her in ways that truly show the high value which I place on her and our relationship. I have sought to enhance the "integrity" of my beliefs, faith and knowledge by putting them into practice in my marriage.

The S of S has increased my fascination for and devotion to my wife. Though cherishing her before, I have seen an even deeper dimension in her specialness and beauty. Seeing anew God's view of and appreciation of marriage has given my heart even more freedom to enjoy the gift of marriage.

One way this course has influenced me is in my teaching ministry of Bible Study. I am currently leading a Bible Study on Eccl., and I have modified my approach based on our class discussions. But more than that, this class stirred me to deeper reflect on my need for discipline, especially as I prepare for marriage in January.