Poetic and Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament
RTS Washington DC – Fall 2008

OT512
2 credit hours
Fall 2008

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Class will meet on the following dates:
October 17-18, 2008
November 14-15, 2008
December 12-13, 2008

Times: Fridays 7:30-10PM, Saturdays 9AM-4PM

Course Description: A study of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs focusing on comparative issues, literary forms, settings in Israelite society, and theological themes. The focus will be on interpretation for the purpose of public proclamation in preaching and teaching in the Church.

Grading

The course grade will be based on five factors. The three major graded assignments include:

Exams: 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 poetical books in their ministry. Students’ exam responses are not to be edited after the designated writing time has ended.

Paper: There will be a term paper of 12-15 pages due before class on December 12. For each day or fraction of a day it is late the final grade of the paper will be reduced by half a letter grade (the equivalent of 5 points). Early submissions are encouraged. The paper may be either textual or topical in nature, but approval for the paper must be given by November 14. A short one paragraph description of the paper...
must be submitted no later than the beginning of class on that date. Earlier approval is encouraged.

A textual paper is an extensive study of a particular passage. An example of a topical paper would be “The Authorship of Ecclesiastes” or “Laziness in the Book of Proverbs.” Further details will be given in class.

**Reading Journal:** The following books are required to be read in full.


Reading journals will be due on or before class on December 12.

**Recommended Reading**


**Final Grade:** The final grade of the class will be 50% exam; 50% paper. Reading journals will be pass/fail and will affect your grade up to a full letter (an A will become a B) if they are not done.

**Tentative Outline**

**Psalms and Wisdom**

**Introduction**

The Purpose of the Course
The Books Covered by the Course
Assignments, etc.

**Topic 1: Poetry in the Old Testament**

Why is there poetry in the Bible?
What is Hebrew Poetry?
Terminology
Topic 2: Parallelism, Meter, Metaphor, and Other Poetic Devices

Parallelism
- Rabbinic Approaches (A=B)
- Traditional Approach (Lowth—A=B)
- The Dynamic Approach to Parallelism (Kugel, Berlin, Alter)

The Categories of Parallelism
- Grammatical/Semantic
- Synonymous/Antithetic/Synthetic

Expansion of Traditional Categories
- Emblematic
- Repetitive
- Chiasm
- Pivot Pattern

Meter

Imagery in Poetry
- What is an Image?
- Types of Images
  - Simile
  - Metaphor

How an Image Works
- Why Images?

Mythological Images in the Psalms
- Metaphor and the Incomprehensibility of God

Secondary Poetic Devices
- Acrostics
- Merism
- Inclusio
- Metonymy

Topic 3: Ugarit and the Psalms

Introduction
- The Need for Comparison
  - Rider on the Clouds
  - Subjugation of the Waters
  - Zaphon

Set Ugaritic Texts in Proper Historical Context
- Geographical location (Ras Shamra)
- Political History
- Archeological Discovery

The Literary Remains
- The Baal Epic (Anat, Kothar-wa-Hasis, Yagrush and Ayamur, Lady Asherah, El, Mot, Lotan=Leviathan)
- Kirtu (Udum, Pabil, Hurriya, Ilihu)
- Lesser Known Texts (Rephaim, Cult of the Dead)

The Question of Comparison
Dahood’s Negative Example

His method—rewrite the psalms in the light of Ugaritic

His assumptions

Consonants reliable/vowels to be disregarded
Hebrew and Ugaritic are dialects of the same language
Downplays geographical and temporary distance
Low regard for the versions
Early date for poems

Some examples of rewriting

Prepositions
Divine Names
Enclitic mems
Lexicography

Reactions to Dahood’s Approach

Ugaritic and Hebrew not that close
Temporal, geographical, and generic distance
Consonants not as reliable and vowels not as misleading
Limited knowledge of Ugaritic

Conclusion

The Positive Benefit of Studying Ugaritic

The Interpretation of Psalm 29
The Motif of the Subjugation of the Waters

The Recent Discoveries at Tell Mardikh-Ebla

**Topic 4: The Interpretation of the Psalms in the Twentieth Century**

Introduction (reasons for reviewing critical approaches to the Psalter)

Hermann Gunkel

The intellectual/historical context of Gunkel’s Work

Wellhausen and his school (B. Duhm)

Psalms as individual proclamation of a poet
Focus on concrete historical event
Secondary focus on inner feelings of poets
Late date

Gunkel and the ‘religionsgeschichte’ school (Eichhorn, Wrede, Bousset, and Troeltsch)

Oral origin of Psalms
Identification of genres
Genre had one Sitz im Leben
Setting in regular worship rather than historical event

Five main types of Psalms

Hymns
Community laments
Individual laments
Individual thanksgiving (*todah*)
Royal psalms
Positive point concerning Gunkel’s Work—Genre and Interpretation

Sigmund Mowinckel

The Psalms and the Cult
  Cult as central setting of most psalms (contra Gunkel)
  Higher view of cult
  Evidence for psalms’ role in cult
    Psalm titles
    Rabbinic tradition
    1 Chronicles 16
    The ‘procession’ psalms (Pss. 24, 68, 118, 132)
    References to specific cultic acts (Pss. 5:7; 66:13; 63:2-4; 26:6f.; 51:9f.; 84, etc.)
  Problem of the ‘I’ Psalms

Dating the Psalms

The Psalms and Magic in the Near East

The Reconstruction of a New Year’s (Enthronement) Festival
  Cultic Nature of the Psalms
  Extra-biblical evidence (Babylonian akitu festival)
  Israelite liturgical calendar

The Myth and Ritual School (Betzen, Engnell, Widengren, and Hooke)
  Starting point: cultic origin of Psalms a la Mowinckel
  Creative power of ritual and its close relationship with myth
  Kingship in Israel (A. R. Johnson)
  Differences among members of Myth and Ritual School
  Fundamental Critique of Myth and Ritual School (H. Frankfort)

Covenant (Weiser) versus Enthronement (Mowinckel) Festival
  Weiser’s objections to Enthronement Festival
  Reconstruction of Covenant Festival
  Problems

Recent Trends in Psalms Research
  Alonso-Schokel and Rhetorical Criticism
  Brevard Childs and Canonical Criticism

**Topic 5: The Structure and Format of the Book of Psalms**

The Overall Structure of the Book
  Title—‘Psalms’ (Luke 20:42; Tehillim)
  Number of psalms
  Five Books of Psalter (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150) (1 Chron. 16:35ff) (53/14; 40:13-17/70; 57:7-11/60; 60:5-12/108)
  Smaller Collections in the Book
    Bound by a common author
      Davidic psalms (72:20)
      Asaphite psalms 73-83
      Korahite psalms 42/43; 44-49
Grouped by common cultic function

Psalms of Ascents (120-134)
Hallel (113-118)

General Conclusions on the Structure of the Psalter (2 Sam. 23:1ff.; 1 Chron. 15:8-27; 16:4-7; 23:30; 25:1)

Psalm Titles
Titles in General
Introduction: Views of Kidner, Young and Harrison
Some Questions concerning the originality of the historical titles
Titles Concerning Authorship (1 Sam. 16:15; Amos 6:6; 2 Sam. 1; 322=P. 18; 2 Sam. 23:1; Hab. 3:1; 1 Chron. 6:31; 15:16; 16:7; 25:1; 29:30; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:24, 36, 45, 46; Ps. 2=Acts 4:24; Ps. 16=Acts 2:25-29)

Historical Notes
Summary: The Origin, Development, and Use of the Psalms

**Topic 6: The Nine Principles of Psalm Interpretation**
Read the Psalm in Context
Identify the Genre of the Psalm
Meditate on the Parallelism
Unpack the Imagery
Read the Psalm in the Light of the Title
Read the Psalm as a Portrait of God
Read the Psalm as Anticipating Christ
Read the Psalm as a Mirror of the Soul
Look for the Imperatives of the Psalm

**Topic Ten: The Nature of Wisdom in Israel**
Wisdom as ‘knowing how’ rather than ‘knowing that’ (Prov. 30:24-28; Job 35:11; 38:36; 39:17; Ex. 31:1ff., 6; Ex. 35:25; Ps. 107:27; Ezek. 27:8; Gen. 41:33, 39; Prov. 20:26)

**Topic Eleven: The Source of Wisdom**
The Book of Job as a Wisdom Debate
Theme: Who is Wise?
The Structure of the Book of Job
The Question of Historicity
The Near Eastern Background (The Babylonian Theodicy; Ludlul bel nemeqi)
The Content of the Dialogues
The ‘Retribution Theology’ of the Three Friends
Job’s Assertion of Innocence
Job Attacks the Wisdom of his Friends
They Attack His Wisdom
The Place of Job 28
Elihu’s Speeches
The Divine Response

**Excursus: The Patience of Job**

The Book of Proverbs as a Choice between Wisdom and Foolishness
Introduction
  Wisdom as a Female Street Preacher
  Structure of Chapter 8 (3 parts—1-11; 12-31; 32-36)
  The Choice: the Gospel of Dame Wisdom or the Gospel of Dame Folly
    (Prov. 2:16ff.; 7:15-27)
  Section I (vss. 1-11: Dame Wisdom as Evangelist)
  Section II (vss. 12-31: Autobiography of Dame Wisdom)
  Section III (vss. 32-36: Admonition)
Proverbs 9: Lady Wisdom or Dame Folly as Hermeneutical Key to Proverbs

Christ as the Wisdom of God
  Christ and Creation (Col. 1:15-17; Rev. 3:14)
  Christ and Wisdom in the Gospels
    Luke 2:21ff (vs. 40)
    Christ as Wise King (1 Sam. 23:1ff.; 1 Ki. 3:3; Job 34:17; Prov. 16:10ff.)
      Jesus as the Wise Teacher
      Jesus as the Wise Judge
      Jesus as the Divine Warrior
      Jesus as the Wisdom of God in Paul

**Topic Twelve: The Book of Ecclesiastes**
Introduction
The History of Exegesis
  Traditional View
  Critical View
  Alternative View
Genre and Structure
Overall Approach to the Book
Quests
Overarching Concerns
  Uncontrollability
  Death
Joy/Vanity Themes in Qohelet
Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes

**Topic Thirteen: The Song of Songs**
Introduction
Drama or Love Poetry?
Allegory or Realistic?
The Theology of the Song
  Theology of Sexuality
  Divine-Human Relationship