

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.

D. B. Allender and T. Longman III, *Cry of the Soul* (NavPress, 1993).

D.B. Allender and T. Longman III, *Intimate Allies* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1995).

W. P. Perdue, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Westminster John Knox, 2002).

L. G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Westminster John Knox, 2007).

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

Recommended Reading

T. Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (IVP, 1988).

T. Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (IVP, 2001).

D. B. Allender and T. Longman III, *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart: How to Navigate the Temptations of Life* (InterVarsity, 2007).

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 temporal 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; 3; 22=Ps. 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)

Human Wisdom is Valuable (Prov. 24:13, 14; 16:16; 10:23; 1:9; 4:9; 3:22; 3:18)

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