Poets
OOT512, 2 Hours

Lectures by
Richard P. Belcher, Jr., Ph.D.
This course notebook is for the coordination of your course materials, including reading assignments and lecture recordings. Each course notebook for RTS Distance Education is arranged by the GUIDE acronym. The five components of GUIDE are organized in each lesson by the following steps in the notebook:

**GUIDE**

**Getting Started**  To do the lessons, reading and listening assignments are listed.

**Understanding**  To maximize learning, the purposes are given.

**Investigating**  To explore the content, outlines are provided for note taking.

**Developing**  To expand content, readings are suggested.

**Evaluating**  To help review, lesson questions are based on purposes.
COURSE SYLLABUS
Poets, OT512, 2 hours
Lecturing and Professor of Record:
Dr. Richard P. Belcher, Jr.
Reformed Theological Seminary, Distance Education

Professor
Dr. Belcher is the Professor of Old Testament and Academic Dean of RTS Charlotte. He is an ordained minister in the PCA and pastored an urban nondenominational church in Rochester, NY for ten years before pursuing the Ph. D. This pastoral experience in an unusual and challenging setting gives him great insight into the practical, modern issues that will be faced by future pastors studying with him at RTS. He graduated from Covenant College and received his M. Div from Covenant Seminary. He also received an S.T.M. from Concordia Theological Seminary, and his Ph. D. is from Westminster Theological Seminary. He has served as stated supply for numerous churches in the area since coming to RTS Charlotte in 1995.

Course Description
This course examines the literary structure, themes, and history of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, with an emphasis on understanding these texts in their own historical and literary context, how they fit into redemptive history, and what they mean for God’s people today.

Course Objectives
- To better understand Hebrew poetry and how to interpret it.
- To examine how the concept of genre can help us interpret Scripture.
- To see how the wisdom books fit into their context in the ancient Near East (ANE).
- To explore how this section of the canon fits into redemptive history and its relationship to Jesus Christ.
- To begin to grapple with the issues raised in the wisdom books in light of the problems of the contemporary world.

Required Textbooks
Belcher, articles for DOTWPW (Thanksgiving, Psalms of and Suffering).
[Supplied]

[Supplied]

Ray Dillard and Tremper Longman III, Introduction to the OT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), hereinafter IOT.


[Supplied]


All required books are available through the RTS Online Bookstore at <www.rts.edu/bookstore>.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Poets, OOT512, 2 hours
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Online Student Handbook

The Online Student Handbook has been designed to assist you in successfully navigating the Distance Education experience, whether you are taking a single course or pursuing a certificate or degree program. In it you will find valuable information, step-by-step instructions, study helps, and essential forms to guide you through every aspect of your distance education opportunity from registration to graduation. Please use this resource as your first-stop reference manual. You will find it located at the RTS Distance Education website (www.rts.edu/distance) under the Student Services tab.

Summary of Requirements

• Follow the Study Guide provided.
• Listen to all Recorded Lectures.
• Complete all Readings.
• Participate in Forum Discussions (with other students and Professor)
• Take the Mid Term Exam
• Take the Final Exam.
• Write a Course Paper
• Write a Review of the Alexander Article
• Submit Mentor Report/Course Application Paper

Forum Discussions (15%)
The student is required to interact in two (2) forums:
1. Student-Professor Posts (15 total posts)
   A. Personal Introduction Forum: The student is required to post a brief personal introduction to the professor/class. Suggested details include your vocation, where you live, your church background, why you chose RTS, and what you hope to gain through the course (1 required post).
   B. 5 Topical Discussion Q&A Forums: The student is required to answer each topical discussion question with one (1) response. The professor will acknowledge the student’s answer and will follow up with a subsequent question to which the student must also answer with one (1) response. Each topical discussion question therefore requires two (2) total posts/responses from the student (Total of 5 forums x 2 posts = 10 total posts).
   C. Student-Professor Forum: The student is required to post four (4) times in this forum. Posts in this forum should focus on course-related content such as research paper topics, lectures and reading assignments, or other academic issues related to the course.
2. Student-Student Forum (5 total posts)
   • A post may be either a new topic or a response to an already existing topic.
Examinations (Midterm 25%, Final 25%)

There are two examinations for this course. No helps are allowed, including Bibles. The midterm examination will cover the lectures and readings from Lessons 1-11. The final examination will cover the lectures and readings from Lessons 12-20. Both exams will include multiple choice questions, which consist of terms, names, or concepts that have been discussed in class. There are also short essay questions and long essay questions, which are based on the Lesson Questions at the end of the lesson. You will also be tested on information provided in section titled “Outline for the Poetical Books” found later in this syllabus.

The midterm and final exams for this course are to be taken online in the Learning Management System (LMS). Please note that you will need to have a proctor for your exams. Your proctor can be anyone except a relative or current RTS Student. After clicking on the exam link you will be given detailed instructions about the exam. Please read these instructions carefully before entering the exam.

Research Paper (20%)

A research paper is required. It should focus on a particular passage from one of the wisdom books. See section titled “Guidelines for the Research Paper” in this syllabus.

Article Review (5%)

The review or summary of the Alexander article should focus on the four different views of Sheol (proponents, arguments against, etc.), with a clear statement of Alexander’s views. This should be accomplished in about one page, typed, single spaced.

Reading Report (5%)

In addition to the textbooks for the course, the student must read the biblical books: Lamentations, Psalms, Song of Songs, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. To receive full credit, the student must read all of the required readings listed at the beginning of each lesson.

Note: there is more reading for the Psalm lectures than the other lectures, which means you may want to spread some of the psalm reading out over several more weeks.

Mentor Report/Course Application Paper (5%)

Each Global/Non-Residential student is required to have a mentor submit a report at the end of the course. This report will contribute to 5% of the student’s grade. For students who are not Global/Non-Residential, you are asked to write a 200 word summary of how you perceive what you have learned in this course will fit into the objectives you have for your ministry, your educational goals, or other objectives you wish to achieve in life.

Assignments

Best practice for your time management is for you to submit all assignments at the end of the week in which they fall, using the upload links provided in the LMS. All work must be submitted by midnight of the course end date, per your course start letter. You are responsible for turning in all assignments on time; no late submissions are permitted. Any student who needs an extension must get approval from the Registrar prior to that time.

Contact Information
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Lesson One
The Basics of Hebrew Poetry

Lesson Two
Lamentations

Lesson Three
A Brief History of Psalm Interpretation

Lesson Four
Psalm Titles: The Prayer book and Hymn book of Israel

Lesson Five
The Organization of the Psalms

Lesson Six
Messianic Psalms and Genre

Lesson Seven
Lament: The Cry of the Soul to God

Lesson Eight
The Imprecatory Psalms

Lesson Nine
Wisdom Literature: A Comparative Approach

Lesson Ten
Introduction to the Song of Songs

Lesson Eleven
An Overview of the Song of Songs

Lesson Twelve
Proverbs and the Problem of Context

Lesson Thirteen
Wisdom: The Basis for a Successful Life
Lesson Fourteen
   Highlights of Wisdom

Lesson Fifteen
   Job: Patience or Perseverance?

Lesson Sixteen
   Nobody Knows the Trouble I See

Lesson Seventeen
   Where is Wisdom to be Found?

Lesson Eighteen
   Introductory Questions to Ecclesiastes: Who Knows?

Lesson Nineteen
   Approaches to Ecclesiastes: Is Everything Meaningless?

Lesson Twenty
   Interpreting Ecclesiastes: A Wearisome Task
GUIDELINES FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER
Poets, 0OT512, 2 hours
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The paper can be centered on one passage or it can look at a major theme in one of the books studied in this course. If the paper focuses on a theme in a book, it is important to see how that theme relates to the rest of the canon (OT and NT). If the paper focuses on one passage, the following questions should be kept in mind:

A. How does the passage fit into the rest of the book?
B. What is the major theme of the passage?
C. How is the theme developed (an outline of the passage may be helpful here)?
D. Are there any significant literary, historical, or theological questions?
E. Are there any major problems in the passage?
F. Is the passage using prior revelation in any way?
G. What is the message of the passage to the original reading audience?
H. Is the passage used in a significant way in later biblical history (either OT or NT)?
I. What is the message of the passage for today?

The paper could revolve around a particular literary, historical, or theological issue in the passage or a particular problem encountered in the text. The paper should reflect a developed argument centered around a theme or an issue in the passage.

The following are criteria that will be used to evaluate the paper:

a. Cogency of argument - is there a thesis statement, how well does the argument hang together, and how well are pertinent and fundamental points brought out?
b. Discussions of historical context, genre, and redemptive history (where these are appropriate, but do not go overboard); just give the reader enough information to understand your paper. Some issues, like authorship, can be omitted or issues and bibliography related to authorship can be given in footnotes.
c. The use of sources: this is a research paper so avoid study Bibles as a source; read as many commentaries as you can, including conservative commentaries, those from a critical perspective, and at least one older commentary, such as Calvin, Geneva series, etc. At least one journal article must be cited. Research is important and can be included in footnotes. Think of at least 8 sources.
d. Do not make a Scripture reference as a footnote, but put it in parenthesis in the paper.
e. The paper should be 10-15 pages, double-spaced, pages numbered, and with one inch margins on all sides, except the left margin should have a 1 1/4 inch margin.
*Do not leave extra space between paragraphs!
OUTLINE OF THE POETICAL BOOKS
Poets, OT512, 2 hours
Lecturing and Professor of Record:
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*The below outlines will be on your exams.

For references that include entire chapters, the student may just put the chapter number. If a section breaks in the middle of a chapter, then the verse reference needs to be included.

Lamentations

I. Jerusalem Personified to show the Shame of Suffering (chap 1)
II. Jerusalem Mourns the Day of the Lord’s Anger (chap 2)
III. A Lone Lamenting Voice Alternating Between Despair and Hope (chap 3)
IV. The Community Relives the Degradation of the Day of Suffering (chap 4)
V. A Prayer of the People Calling on God to Remember Them (chap 5)

Psalms

Book I (1-41)
Book II (42-72)
Book III (73-89)
Book IV (90-106)
Book V (107-150)

Song of Solomon

I. 1:2-2:7 Affirmation
II. 2:8-3:5 Lost and Found - Fearful Longings
III. 3:6-5:1 Consummation
IV. 5:2-8:4 Lost and Found - Problems Overcome
V. 8:5-14 Growing in Love

Proverbs

I. Preamble (1:1-7)
II. Extended Discourses on Wisdom (1:8-9:18)
IV. Sayings of the Wise (22:17-24:34)
V. Sayings of Agur (30)
VI. Sayings of King Lemuel (31:1-9)
VII. Poem to the Virtuous Woman (31:10-31)
Job

I. Prologue (1-2)
II. Job’s Lament (3)
III. The Cycle of Speeches (4-27)
IV. The Wisdom Poem (28)
V. Job’s Last Speech (29-31)
VI. Elihu’s Speeches (32-37)
VII. God’s Speeches and Job’s Responses (38-42:6)
VIII. Epilogue (42:7-17)

Ecclesiastes

I. Prologue: Exploration of the Nature of the World 1:1-11
II. Qohelet’s Autobiography 1:12-12:8
   A. The Search for Meaning Under the Sun 1:12-6:12
   B. Human Limitation Concerning Knowledge 7:1-12:8
III. Epilogue: Evaluation of the Work 12:9-14
Here is a brief review of commentaries on the Poets. This is not a comprehensive list, but is geared to what will serve you best in ministry (more punch for your dollar and time!):

**Lamentations**

*Allen, Leslie C. A Liturgy of Grief: A Pastoral Commentary on Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011)

This commentary is written by an OT professor who is also a volunteer hospital chaplain. Grief is used to throw light on Lamentations and Lamentations is used to throw light on grief. The grief of Lamentations is traumatic, collective, and complicated, which is covered in three trajectories. The first is the combination of the telling of the objective facts and the expression of subjective feelings. The second trajectory is the acknowledgment of guilt. The third trajectory is grievance, which is defined as a mixture of yearning, sadness, and angry protest. The author also identifies some of the voices of the poems as the mentor, who is similar to a pastoral guide in grief.


Although the author recognizes the events of 587 to be the historical background to the book, this commentary focuses on the literary aspects of the book to uncover the religious world view of the poems. The meaning of the book resides in the movement of discourse and the images so that the emphasis is on unpacking the metaphors. The poems are independent but have been collected together to convey a multi-faceted picture of the destruction of Jerusalem.


The author argues the book was composed in the exile after the destruction of Jerusalem. This commentary focuses on the lyricism of Lamentations and discusses genre (city lament, funeral dirge, laments), lyric poetry (character replaced by voice and persona), and the acrostic nature of the poems (a way to control the chaos of destruction). Although there is no closure to the poems of the book, Lamentations is ultimately life-embracing by resisting suffering. The commentary is a little too dependent on the Mesopotamian city lament.

*House, Paul and Duane Garrett, Song of Songs/Lamentations* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004)

The introduction to the commentary on Lamentations by House covers a number of issues, such as the benefit of studying a book like Lamentations, a good review of the
question of authorship of the book which reviews a wide variety of commentaries on the book of Lamentations, and a discussion of the theology of the book through the examination of several recent essays on this topic. He also discusses those who stress a negative, abusive view of God in Lamentations. He argues that Lamentations was written by a single poet who cannot be identified. Connections are also made between Lamentations and other parts of Scripture. This commentary gives both the expressions of suffering and the statements of hope in Chapter 3 a place in the overall theology of the book, with hope for the future coming out of the statements in Chapter 3.


Longman examines the book of Lamentations from the historical, literary, and theological perspectives. The occasion of the lament is the fall of Jerusalem, but that does not mean it had to be written immediately after the event. Although it is not unfeasible that Jeremiah is the author of the book, it is not likely that he is the author because Lamentations is more passionate about the pain of the people. The literary characteristics of the book include personification, where multiple voices are poetic vehicles through which the prophet speaks (Virgin Daughter, man who has seen affliction), and the use of acrostics. Instead of following typical lament format, which moves toward hope, the hope in Lamentations is found in the middle chapter. Theological themes highlighted are God as a divine warrior and the issue of covenant judgment, which Longman is not afraid to affirm against the tide of many commentators of Lamentations.

Mackay, John L. *Lamentations: Living in the Ruins* (Mentor; Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2008)

A solid commentary that succinctly deals with most issues with an emphasis on the message of the book. The book is addressed to those who survived the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and struggled to cope with the situation. Part of the goal of the book is to verbalize the grief of suffering to help the community move beyond the suffering. Although sin and guilt are recognized as part of the problem, the readers are not invited to sit in judgment on Jerusalem but to show sympathy.


There are good summaries of each chapter in this commentary. On many questions the author is non-committal due to what he sees as a lack of evidence (date, one author or many, public or private use). Answers to suffering are also not given in Lamentations.

Psalms


This commentary offers a fresh translation with random notes. Some of Alter’s positions include denial of Davidic authorship, the view that professional psalm poets existed in the vicinity of the temple from whom a worshipper coming to the temple could purchase a psalm that he would recite to express his need, and a more fluid view of
the genres. His greatest contribution is what he says about translating poetry, with his resulting translation, which deliberately uses concrete words (victory rather than salvation) and seeks to highlight the literary quality that is often lost in translation. The notes are not as helpful, especially where he emphasizes the ANE background. He also is quick to emend the Hebrew text. This work is better used as a usable translation to supplement other translations than an exhaustive commentary.


An excellent Introduction and solid exegetical comments. Weak on the character of the lament psalms. Also, all three volumes in this series are weak on the theology of the psalms (read Calvin) and NT connections.

Tate, Marvin E. *Psalms 51-100*, WBC, Word, 1990.

Refers to Craigie’s Introduction for a review of introductory issues, but deals with the arrangement of these psalms in his own short Introduction. In addition to Form/Structure and Explanation there is a Comment section. Good complement to Craigie.


Refers to Craigie’s Introduction for a discussion of introductory issues. Handles the imprecatory psalms well. Emphasizes Form/Structure and Explanation but does not comment on individual sections of the psalms.


The author admits this is not a commentary in the traditional sense of the word since the standard introductory topics are waived in order to set forth the relevance of Ugaritic and the texts discovered at Ras Shamra for psalm studies. A fresh translation of the psalms are given with philological commentary in light of Ugaritic. The introduction of vol. 1 lays out how Ugaritic can enhance psalm studies in the areas of comparative literature, Hebrew grammar, and biblical theology, especially the view that the psalms teach resurrection and immortality. These volumes not much helpful for sermon preparation, but worth looking at if doing detailed work in the original, although overemphasis on Ugaritic makes a lot of the conclusions suspect.


This 1978 reprint of the 1867 edition, which comes from two orthodox Lutheran scholars, is a revision of the original 1860 edition. The Introduction has sections on the history of the composition of the psalms, the temple music, the translation of the psalms, the history of the exposition of the psalms, and understanding the psalms in light of the NT. Attention is paid to the individual, neighboring psalms. The author recognizes that the place of the Davidic psalms in the psalter shows that the psalms are an edited collection with the Davidic psalms providing the unifying motif of the entire
book - a concern with the Davidic covenant (which makes it messianic). There is also an emphasis on the historical situation behind the psalms. A knowledge of Hebrew is helpful in reading this commentary. Although dated, the expositions are solid.


The introduction covers historical, literary, and theological aspects of the psalms. The basics of Hebrew poetry are also covered. The author argues that the titles are canonical but that the imprecatory psalms are not for God’s people today. There are notes based on the text followed by comments on the meaning of the psalm (sometimes the notes are more extensive than the comments).


This commentary focuses on the original meaning of each psalm within the OT context. Although the explanations are solid, there are several things that are disappointing in this commentary from a hermeneutical standpoint. The author does not believe that the structure of the Psalter has any significance for meaning, and he also argues that the NT does not use a psalm, like Psalm 2, with the meaning that it had when originally inspired by the Holy Spirit through the human author. The Psalms are not implicitly messianic or eschatological so that many times the point a NT author is making from a psalm is not really found in the psalms. We cannot imitate the NT authors in the way they use the psalms. The psalms of David are fulfilled in the people as a whole. It also seems that Goldingay argues for soul sleep, not only for OT believers but also for NT believers (see pp 74-75).

Hossfeld, Frank-Lothar and Erich Zenger, Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100 (Hermeneia; trans. Linad M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005)

This is the first volume of a three volume work originally published in German in the Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (HTKAT). This work provides fresh translations, text-critical and philological details, comments on contents and structure, notes on the text of the Septuagint, and the connection of the psalms to the NT. What makes this commentary unique is the reception of the psalms in the NT and the significance given to the LXX. Although the authors see the significance of the structure of the psalter for the meaning of individual psalms, the adopt a historical-critical approach, which means they attempt to explain each psalm against its potential historical and geographical background. Each of the psalms is introduced by a bibliography, then the MT is translated into English (supplemented by text-critical and philological notes), and then comments on verse units, including remarks about the psalm in its specific context and its reception (LXX, Tg, NT). They refrain from emendations of the MT as much as possible. Only volume 2 is currently available.

Good summary of modern study of the psalms; good introduction to the vengeance psalms but still too much emphasis on personal revenge in the OT. Brief, but on target.


For the most part, solid exegetical decisions and comments, although fairly free in emending the Hebrew text. Deals with each psalm according to Form, Setting, Commentary, and Purpose and Thrust. Does not use standard genre categories, but tries to develop genre types from the terminology in the psalms themselves, which means that the section of the “Introduction” where he explains this should be read to get the full benefit of the commentary. Argues for an annual royal Zion festival as the setting for most psalms. Uses Hebrew extensively.


This commentary emphasizes literary issues over questions concerning historical and social context. The first goal of exposition is to see what the text says about God and God’s ways with people. Intentionally uneven in the treatment of some psalms, not only to keep the commentary briefer, but also to focus on psalms which have been important in the liturgical practice of the church. The comments on each psalm are not written as verse-by-verse commentary as such, but as exposition, which covers the psalm as a whole but is not able to deal with more detailed matters.


This commentary pays particular attention to the poetic structure and metaphorical characteristics of the psalms, with particular interest how the psalms relate to contemporary life. The Introduction covers structural and thematic issues, with concerns like superscriptions and the psalms situation in life left to Appendices. This is not really a verse-by-verse commentary but a collection of notes, related to the psalms, the author finds relevant for religious edification.


VG covers the major issues in understanding the Psalms, and is especially helpful in dealing with the meaning and theology of the Psalms. Perhaps the best one-volume commentary on the Psalms.


The commentary’s objective is to enrich the daily life and worship of the church and to hear the two voices of the believing church and the inspired author (both are
against the critical approach). The interpreter needs illumination to understand the text. The emphasis is on the plain sense of the text with appreciation for pre-critical commentaries over critical commentaries. The authors reject the allegorical approach but see typology as a disciplined form of allegory. There are two speakers in the psalms: David and Christ. The introduction covers their own approach and a history of interpretation of the psalms. Thirteen psalms are covered (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 15, 16, 19, 22, 23, 51, 110, and 139). The exposition of the psalms include voices from the past who comment on the psalm and a commentary on the psalm by one of the authors.


In affirmation that the cult was the native soil from which the psalms sprang, Weiser places all the psalms in the context of the Covenant Festival of Yahweh, a cultic drama whose aim is to renew the Sinai covenant and its salvation. He lays out the basic elements of the festival as the setting for the psalms, which makes the Introduction important for the rest of the commentary as he refers back to it. Very little comment on the Hebrew.

Wilson, Gerald H. *Psalms Volume 1*, NIVAC, Zondervan, 2002.

Wilson is known for his work on the editorial shape of the Psalter, which will be developed further in the second volume of this commentary. He sets the close of the Psalter much later than many, placing it after 70 AD with Psalms 90-150 a response to 70 AD. He accepts Kugel’s ideas on parallelism, and then redefines the traditional terms (synonomous, antithetic, and synthetic) to fit the later, better definition. The genres of the psalms themselves are discussed at places scattered throughout the commentary (royal psalms after Psalm 2 and laments after Psalm 3), which means one has to go looking for them. In the commentary itself the author does a good job most of the time giving the options of interpretation. There is a very interesting outline of the psalms keeping them in their canonical order but grouping them together on the basis of themes, some of them related to the Davidic covenant, but this outline is not explained. Maybe the second volume, which has not been published yet, will take care of this.


This commentary views the book as a collection of love poetry that creates a coherent plot of longing, searching, and losing, divided into six major poetic units. Solomon plays no significant role in the drama, but functions as a symbol of wealth and a way to give special honor to the man. There is a focus on the metaphors in the Song.


Takes the view that the book is a celebration of human love; no progressive story line but not an anthology because there is evidence of careful compilation.
Estes, Daniel J. *The Song of Songs* (AOTC; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010)

The author approaches the Song as Hebrew poetry and uses the names Solomon and Shulamith as literary persona used by the poet. The author does not argue for Solomonic authorship. There is a good discussion of canonicity, general approaches to interpreting the Song, structure, theme, and purpose. The author argues against a typological approach because the spiritual meaning drowns out the literal message and the NT does not use the Song this way (yet he recognizes the appropriate use of the Song as a pointer to divine love with theological and ethical significance). He also rejects dramatic readings with real characters (realistic autobiographical narrative) but accepts a literal approach which understands lyric poetry to direct attention to inward feelings and the recreation of the experience of intimacy. The poetic images evoke emotional responses. The discussion of unity and structure are excellent with the author arguing for snapshots of the couple’s relationship with the consummation of their relationship at the center of the book (4:16-5:1), with a loose temporal progression toward maturity (after this text the couple is understood to be married). The first half of the book is the awakening of intimacy and in the second half intimacy grows and deepens. The best option.


The author approaches the Song as a lyric poem about love and sexual desire with an emphasis on how lyric poetry works by creating the illusion of immediacy through direct speech. The man and the woman are literary personae and represent all lovers. They are types making it easy to identify with them. The author has one of the best discussions of the unity of the Song and that it is a single poem but she does not propose a detailed structure. There is not linear development of their love but there is poetic development in that the meaning accumulates as the imagery and themes are repeated, but this development is secondary to the circularity of the Song. The author rejects any typological connection with God’s love, does not believe the couple is betrothed, and argues that the Song expresses freer notions of sexuality than is found in other parts of the Bible. The author is resistant toward feminist readings of the Song and has an interesting discussion of post-modern readings (the privileged reader). This is a very interesting commentary.


Understands the Song to be a loose collection of 31 poems like an anthology. Good discussion of the imagery in the poems.


This book clearly states in the first chapter that the Song of Solomon is about fellowship and communion with Christ and is not in any sense to be taken literally. He identifies the book as spiritual, an allegory, a spiritual dialogue between Christ our heavenly bridegroom and the church, his bride. Thus 1:2 (let him kiss me with the kisses of his
mouth) is understood as the kisses of love and mercy, “a kiss from the Saviour’s mouth is a token of his deep love” (p 11). This approach completely bypasses the natural reading of the text.


The author argues for the likelihood of Solomonic authorship, has a good discussion of the various approaches to the interpretation of the Song, and deals with some of the major literary forms and motifs of the poetry. The author’s view is that the Song is a unified work best understood as love poetry describing a relationship between a man and a woman, with their marriage central to the Song.


Garrett argues for the origin of the Song in the Solomonic royal court of the tenth century and sees the Song as a unified lyrical poem (he labels the speakers Soprano, Tenor, and Chorus), comprised of numerous individual compositions (or cantos), which are individually arranged around the pivotal passage of 4:16-5:1 (a description of the couple’s consummation). He argues against the anthology view of the Song because the Song has unity of character portrayal, closure, coherence, associative sequences and a chiastic structure. It is not a drama but is lyric poetry which may have a story behind it but it does not tell the story in detail. Thus such poetry is highly allusive. The Song celebrates the emotional journey of a young woman into marriage and the loss of virginity in marriage. Without much justification he argues that ancient women were traumatized by losing their virginity, which the woman hero of the Song must overcome in light of her impending marriage. He also discusses the history of the interpretation of the book and the theology of the book. In the latter he is hesitant to find any meaning in the analogous relationship of human and divine love because it comes from outside the Song.


The two lovers are not real people but are typical of all real men and women in love. The song does not have a cohesive story line moving toward resolution but is a series of six cycles of poems that repeat common motifs and themes. Although the wedding cycle is the literary focal point and the chronological climax of the book, the cycles do not represent any progression in time sequence and the cycles which follow the consummation do not necessarily portray the couple as married. The commentary includes an overview of the Song, a literal translation of the Song, and his own free poetic paraphrase of the Song.


An analysis that hinges on recognizing 3:6-5:1 as the wedding night, and seeing progression in the development of the relationship and the intimacy of the couple before and after the wedding. Good analysis of some of the descriptive terminology.

This book is a reworking of the 1976 book. Both offer a modern translation and in this work extensive notes are given with the translation. It is in these notes on the translation where the real commentary aspect of the book lies and any interpretive differences with the first work can be more clearly seen. There is no recognition of the first book and the main part of explanation in this book is more general and popular (and thus less helpful in terms of explaining the text).

Hess, Richard S. *Song of Songs* (Baker Commentary on the OT Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005)

Hess believes the Song promotes a relationship of love, explores the passion of desire, and celebrates sex within a committed relationship of marriage, ultimately pointing to a greater love beyond human love. Although the Song is associated with Solomon, someone else writes the Song with the experience of the king in mind. Thus Solomon becomes an image of the male lover and Solomonic associations are used to enhance the love relationship. The Song is, however, a structured whole with a prologue (1:2-2:7), an epilogue (8:5-14), and four main parts (2:8-3:5, 3:6-5:1, 5:2-6:3, and 6:4-8:4). Key terms occur near these divisions and each new section begins with the lovers apart and concludes with them finding one another. The desire that drives the lovers together is the key to the Song and is more important than sexual consummation. This desire drives the reader to appreciate the time of waiting and commitment. The sections called “Theological Implications,” although brief, explore broader implications of the text, including the relationship between the human love expressed in the Song and divine love. See Belcher review in JETS 48.4 (2005)


Understands the Song as a series of 6 major poems that build from anticipation to consummation to aftermath. Basic themes: love is mutual, exclusive, total, and beautiful. Excellent, one of the best options for Song of Solomon.

Hwang, Andrew and Samuel Goh, *Song of Songs* (Asia Bible Commentary Series; Singapore: Asia Theological Association, 2002)

The Asia Bible Commentary series, which is not very accessible in the US (email: ccalmm@pacific.net.sg), is designed for pastors and lay leaders of Bible Study groups and is geared toward the Asain culture. The commentary proper is written by Mr. Hwang and the introduction and reflections for each passage are written by Mr. Goh. They take a literary approach seeing the Song as love poetry that deals with a relationship between two lovers and on a broad scale giving us a glimpse of Christ’s love. The commentary is good on the symbolism of the names and concepts in the Song and on the issue of moral purity. There is no narrative sequence to the Song so that even though the consummation occurs in 3:6-5:1, one should not assume the couple is married later in the book because of the chiastic arrangement of the Song, where sections before 3:6-5:1 parallel sections after 3:6-5:1 (1:2-8 // 8:1-14; 1:9-2:7 // 7:1-13; 2:8-17 // 6:4-13; 3:1-5 // 5:2-6:3).
Jenson, Robert W. *Song of Songs* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 2005)

The author is a theologian. He understands the genre as lyric love poetry with a continuing cast of personae written by one poet. Most understand the Song as secular love poems setting forth a theology of sexuality but the overt sense does not support this. Rather, it is written primarily to describe the love between God and Israel. It is a theological allegory which is the overt sense or the canonical plain sense and explains some of the poems better.


Keel interprets the Song as a collection of love songs which have no real relationship to each other. He begins each poem by commenting on its form and content and how it is separate from its surrounding context. Emphasizes mythical connections and comes complete with drawings from the ANE.


This brief commentary covers in the Introduction the issue of interpretation and why a book of love songs should be included in the canon. The author believes the Song contains an inherent unity and there is a bit of a story line. The purpose is to set forth marriage as it ought to be. God’s love for us is the original referent upon which our love in marriage is based.


Longman argues that there is a loose unity and on overall coherence to the book based on the occasional refrain and the unity of persona, but the poems are ultimately independent of each other. Thus he rejects a dramatic approach for an anthological view. The reading strategy produced by this approach is to unpack the metaphors of the poetry, to recover the ancient customs reflected in the work, and to describe the thoughts and emotions expressed in the poems. The relationship of Solomon to the book is ambiguous. He has a minimal role in the book as he is mentioned only three times. Some of the poems could have been written by Solomon, but he is not a character, since the book is an anthology and does not tell a story. We should assume that the couple is married because of the canonical perspective of the OT and the importance of the family in the Hebrew culture. The man and woman in the Song are poetic types, not historical individuals, which invites the reader to identify with them. The book is not a manual on dating or a how-to book concerning sex, but addresses the issues of love and human relationships. The book shows love redeemed and takes us back to the garden of Eden. It also illuminates the divine-human relationship since there is a parallel between the marriage relationship and our covenant relationship with God.
Murphy, Roland E. *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990.

Murphy argues that there is a certain homogeneity between the poems and the structural coherence so that the collection is not haphazard, but can be shown to be a unified composition. Has a good history of interpretation of the Song of Songs. Takes a two character view. After establishing that the book is about human love, explores the implications of this for our relationship with God. This commentary has a long introduction, comment sections, and a separate section for notes on the Hebrew.


Pope has an extensive discussion of the various interpretations of the Song. His own view is that the Song is rooted in the ancient funerary ritual of the cult of the dead, where funeral feasts were celebrated with wine, women, and song. Pushes the imagery to crass sexual references. He finds no formal, overall structure, and instead of delineating sections or poems, he just comments on each verse individually.


The Song of Songs is called a drama, not in the sense that the text is written for actors, but in the sense that it is a unified work that has an overall coherence, even if there may be sudden shifts of perspective. The author takes a three character view: a) the woman, who is already a member of Solomon’s harem at the beginning, b) the other man with whom the woman is in love, c) and Solomon, who is only spoken of in the third person in the Song. Solomon is primarily portrayed in a negative light. The author wants to read the Song at both the literary level and allegorical level (our relationship with God), and thinks that the allegorical meaning may be a part of the author’s intention. The author has a tendency at times to make vague generalities without being specific (see pp. 249-250 concerning the dysfunctionality of relationship in the church and society at large), and so leaves the reader unsure about specific application in some situations.

Schwab, George M. *The Song of Songs‘ Cautionary Message concerning Human Love* (New York: Lang, 2002)

The Song is a collection of love poems written to explore and celebrate human love. A secondary idea is that love is dangerous, powerful, threatening to marriage, and potentially harmful to the individual lover (love has a dark side with negative qualities). The negativity is explored in four areas related to the created order, the inevitable forces of chaos in Job 38-42, things connected with God and king, and human activity that is censured. The refrain in 2:7 is a warning against the premature stirring up of passion with the Song presenting exclusivity as the preferable mode of love. He assume the unity of the Song, but does not argue for it in light of his view that the Song is a collection of poems.

This book is not a traditional commentary, but it offers a translation of the Hebrew text arranged for oratorio performance, including musical scores. There is an introduction, which sets forth how the author understands the Song, and a concluding section that covers the meaning of the Song, introductory issues, and a brief section dealing with the translation of difficult Hebrew passages. Takes a three character view which is very negative toward Solomon, contrasting the love of the Shulamite and shepherd freely given and inspired by God with the lust of Solomon.

Proverbs


Atkinson gives an exposition of the book of Proverbs by looking at the major themes and ideas of the book. In the first nine chapters he first examines the portrait of Wisdom, and then in a different chapter considers major ideas related to Wisdom and her detractors. Chapters 10:1-22:16 is examined first according to the values of wisdom, and then the practical dimensions are considered, including marriage and family, diligence and hard work, and appropriate speech. The rest of Proverbs is handled by exposition of major sections. There is a good discussion of Wisdom and the structure of the better-than proverbs.


The book of Proverbs does not primarily give information but provides a perspective about vision and action. The most productive approach to the book is not through textual criticism, comparative studies, or philology, but through rhetorical analysis. Yet has good discussions of the relation of Proverbs to Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom, including the uniqueness of the Israelite proverbs, but thinks that Woman wisdom is derived from Mesopotamian myths stressing the mediation of wisdom to human kings through semi-divine mediators. Deals with the book consecutively chapter by chapter.


The ITC series is a critical counterpart to the TOTC series. It wants to emphasize the theological message of the OT books because it recognizes that Scripture speaks with an authentic voice as a witness to God’s purpose. This commentary not only covers Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but the author thinks the two books are meant to be read together. Covers the proverbial section of Proverbs not by a verse-by-verse commentary, but by a thematic approach.


This commentary offers with each section a translation of the passage (with the notes on the translation at the back) and an exegesis of the passage that requires no
knowledge of Hebrew. Any technical or philological notes are placed in small print. The second volume will conclude with essays on the broader issues of interpretation: literary, theological, and historical. There is an extensive discussion on the terms used for wisdom and folly in Proverbs, as well as a review of other wisdom literature from Egypt and Mesopotamia. The social setting of Proverbs is primarily the family, but the flow moves toward the royal court. Chapters 1-9 serve as an introduction to the book; thus it was added last, sometime in the Persian or Hellenistic period. Although Fox tends to draw unnecessary distinctions (he calls Proverbs a secular book because it has no pretense to divine origin) his commentary includes a lot of excellent material. Currently, only volume 1 is available.


This second volume also has an introduction which covers Reading the Proverbs as a Collection, Reading a Proverb, and the Dating and Social Setting of the Proverb Collections. Fox interprets the proverbs as stand alone sayings, but he also pays attention to the context. Proverbs close by can effect the meaning of other proverbs. There is some thematic clustering in Proverbs. Some proverbs are secular (do not imply religious belief). Discusses parallelism and argues that there is not always movement between lines but that some are deliberately static. Disjointed proverbs show a violation of parallelism leaving a gap for the reader to fill in. There are also essays at the end of volume 2 on The Growth of Wisdom, Ethics, Revelation (including Torah and Wisdom), and Knowledge.


The author presents very good discussions on some of the major issues surrounding wisdom literature, such as the origin of wisdom literature, the history of the wisdom tradition, the relation of wisdom to the rest of the OT, and extensive discussions on form and patterns found in wisdom literature. The author goes chronologically through the book of Proverbs chapter by chapter. A little lean in some of the comment sections.


Hubbard discusses the difficulty of preaching from Proverbs and gives six guidelines for their interpretation and proclamation, a major part which deals with the importance of the literary forms for understanding the book. There is an index of Proverbs 10:1-22:16 and 25:1-29:27 indicating where in the commentary these verses are discussed since these sections are dealt with topically.

Kidner, Derek Proverbs, TOTC, IVP, 1964.

Shows that wisdom can easily fit the Solomonic period and brings out the relationship of wisdom to the covenant; there is a section dealing with subject studies, such as God and man, Wisdom, the fool (good discussion of the terminology), the sluggard, life and death.

A solid commentary that focuses on explanation of the text, giving half-a-page to a page or more of commentary on each verse. A few of the major concepts are explained in Appendix A and a very detailed Thematic Index of the major concepts and ideas found in the Proverbs is given in Appendix B, a very good tool for trying to preach or teach on the short proverbs. The author is good on the genre of Proverbs (truth stripped to essentials without qualification), the theology of Proverbs (major discussion of the fear of the LORD), but still operates with the older view of parallelism. The author notes that the pragmatic impulse in Proverbs of a successful life fits in well in our post-modern society, which may be a good starting point for communicating the message of Proverbs.


The purpose of Proverbs is to teach wisdom, form character, and to encourage an obedient relationship with the Lord. The author helps build a bridge to the present through analyzing rhetorical effects, canonical context, and theological reflection. The sentence proverbs were originally independent sayings that were brought together in clusters. They are for the most part intentionally arranged. The commentary has good discussions on the structure of chapters and deals with the individual sayings in sequence. In the Original Meaning section of the commentary, the meaning of the independent sayings is examined and links with other proverbs are noted. In the Bridging Context section interpretive comments are made on the links suggesting themes and theological insights that draw the sections together. In the Contemporary Significance section, how the themes speak to our lives are explored.


This commentary discusses all the major hermeneutical issues in Proverbs. He argues that the proverbs are randomly organized (see Waltke for a different view), which is a result of the history of composition and reflects the messiness of life. The commentary includes a list of essays on the major topics covered in the book which can aid someone who tries to teach from the individual proverbs. There are good discussions of the genre of a proverb, the social settings of proverbs, other ANE literature similar to Proverbs, the theology of Proverbs, Woman Wisdom and Lady Folly, and the NT and Proverbs. Longman cautiously connects covenant and wisdom, as well as wisdom and law, discusses retribution, and affirms that Proverbs teaches an afterlife, especially in light of the NT. This is the best one volume commentary on Proverbs available.


The author argues against the view that Prov 1-9 is the latest part of Proverbs on the basis that Instruction is a separate genre not made up of individual sentences, which is demonstrated in Egyptian Instruction. He divides the proverbs into three classes: class A are mundane, secular proverbs for the education of the individual for a successful life,
class B are the community conscious proverbs, and class C are the moralistic Yahweh proverbs, which reinterpret class A proverbs. The Egyptian literature is the basis for the discussion of these proverbs so there is an extensive section that discusses International Wisdom. The Commentary does not follow a chapter chronology, but deals with the proverbs according to their class, so that when he gives his own translation of the proverbs at the beginning, he also gives the page number upon which a particular proverb is examined. The commentary section is very helpful, but falls short on the theological emphasis of the book.


The author offers his own translation of Proverbs, which attempts to adhere to the Hebrew as close as possible, while recognizing translation difficulties and uncertainties. The commentary goes section by section in chronological order, with notes on the Hebrew text, comments on form, and an emphasis on a theological angle in each section. There are several Excursus, including topics such as translating proverbs, Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly, the fear of the Lord, wealth and poverty, and retribution.


Ross has an extensive discussion of the ANE background and its importance for understanding Israelite wisdom literature. He also has five pages of a topical index where he groups the proverbs according to topic.


The strength of this commentary is the author’s recognition of the importance of context (both literary and social) and the relationship between proverbs that set forth a clear contrast between the righteous and wicked (10-15), and those proverbs that set forth a more complex view of the relationship of the righteous and wicked (16-22). The author goes through the book section by section in chronological order, with comments and reflections on each section.


This thorough and comprehensive commentary will be the standard among Proverb commentaries for years to come. The comments themselves are geared toward pastors and students, with some parts presented as a model for topical preaching, and the footnotes are geared toward scholars, with discussions of Hebrew and other matters. Waltke approaches the proverbs as stand-alone sayings, which cannot reflect all the complexity of life, and as literary compositions to be understood in their literary context. Waltke argues for Solomonic authorship of most of the proverbs, with some collections of Solomon’s proverbs made by Hezekiah. Two smaller sections were written by Agur, and Lemuel and the final editor of the book lived in the Persian period. There are excellent discussions in the Introduction on Hebrew poetry, poetics, and the
theology of Proverbs. The latter includes discussions of retribution, Woman Wisdom (a personification of Wisdom that is a type of Christ), and the fear of the LORD, as well as many other topics. The one negative for the student is that both volumes are quite expensive.


A substantial commentary that gives a good review of the major issues in Proverbs and wisdom literature (such as the origin of proverbs, the relationship of wisdom literature to the rest of the OT, the religious character of proverbs, and the relationship of Proverbs to Egyptian literature). Although a critical scholar, Whybray’s discussions are fair. Good summaries before each main section of the book.

Job

Alden, Robert L. Job, NAC, Broadman & Holman, 1993.

This commentary gives attention to each verse, tries to answer questions people might ask as they read the text, and attempts to explain the differences between the English translations. This book is a solid exegetical effort that seeks to make sense of the Hebrew text without arbitrary emendation or dislocation of the texts.

Andersen, Francis I. Job, TOTC, IVP, 1974.

After reviewing other ANE literature similar to Job, concludes that Job is sui generis, but closest in genre to the epic history of the patriarchs in the way the characters and facts are presented. Includes an extensive discussion of the supposed stages of composition, but argues for the unity of the book. Although not sure who, when, or where Job was written, Andersen suggests 750 BC.


By the author’s admission, this book is less a commentary and more an exploration, with the desire that it be useful to people in pastoral ministry. It is very light on introductory questions, but accepts the integrity of the book. Takes an expositional approach dealing with large blocks of material, which can help in getting the big picture, but short on details.


An engaging and extremely interesting commentary written from a literary perspective that deals with the final form of the book and does not spend much time on traditional questions of date and authorship. Deals with the argument of Job under the problem of suffering (Job is a model for how to respond to suffering not an answer to the why of suffering) and the moral order of the universe. Includes a section on different readings (feminist, vegetarian, socio-economic, and Christian), but trivializes the Christian reading by placing it on the same level as the other readings and by rejecting a Christological approach. Fascinating reading.

Written from a literary perspective which tries to deal with the book as a finished product, and not how the book came together. A solid contribution.


An excellent review of all the major issues, including a summary of ANE literature similar to Job, Job’s relationship to other OT books (Isaiah uses Job as a model for a righteous sufferer), an informative overview of the sections of the book and their meaning (makes only minor variations for the third cycle of speeches), and an analysis of the message of Job around six themes. Argues for an early 7th century date. Each passage of the commentary is followed by a section called “Aim,” which summarizes what that section is about (invaluable in getting a handle on the speeches). The best option.

Janzen, J. Gerald. *Job* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985)

The book of Job deals with arbitrary suffering, which has universal appeal. It was written during the exile and deals with the existential tension between the historical upheaval of the exile and Israel’s religious traditions. It also offers a critique of the prophetic tradition. The author takes a literary approach to the book and takes seriously the final form of the book. For example, he does not try to rearrange the third cycle of speeches but allows the speeches to stand as they are presented in the book. He has a more positive view of Satan, a negative view of Elihu, and a nuanced view of Job’s “repentance.”

Konkel, August A. *Job* (CBC; Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2006), 6:1-250

Job is a book that reflections on the mysteries of divine order but it does not resolve the problem of innocent suffering. The author argues that the book is a unity and recognizes the difficulty of dating the book but opts for the exilic or post-exilic period (partly based on the use of Isa 41:20 in Job 12:9. The theme of the book is justice in the divine order. The author argues that no genre classification really fits Job, the third cycle should be accepted the way it is presented in the text as incomplete, Job hopes in chapter 19 that God would appear before he dies and be propitious, and Elihu does not offer a solution to the suffering of Job. This is a very good commentary which is highly recommended.


Rowley was one of the first to write in the NCB series, and the 2nd edition brings the commentary up to the same format of the rest of the NCB. This commentary accepts some of the book of Job as secondary, but also tries to understand the book as a whole. The finished product is post-exilic after 500 BC. He recognizes that the genre of the book is unique. The purpose of the book is not to contest the doctrine of retribution, nor to solve the problem of suffering, but is to show the mystery of suffering and that God can be present in suffering. If suffering is innocent, it cannot be the proof of
isolation from God. Rowley argues that there are two concepts of God in Job’s mind: the God of his past experience who he will not curse, and the God of his present experience as represented by his friends and increasingly accepted by Job.

Schwab, George M. *The Book of Proverbs* (CBC; Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009)

The author interprets the individual proverbs in light of other proverbs in near proximity and reads a proverb in the context of whatever unit of text it occurs almost as part of an on-going narrative. He reads each interpreted by the others. Thematic arrangement is also used in Proverbs. Wisdom is not gained through observation because the sages do not observe nature to discover what wise behavior is but to illustrate wise behavior.


An excellent commentary that accepts the text as it is, including the cycles of speeches. He argues that the purpose of the book cannot be reduced to a single statement as different parts of the book may have different purposes. The general theme is wisdom teaching about God and human suffering. In the prologue the wisdom of total submission to the will of the Creator is set forth, whereas the dialogues give the human perspective of honesty in our relationship with God and man’s limited knowledge of the divine purpose, which is reinforced in the divine speeches. The two pictures of Job (submissive and protesting) give the book its profundity, for either picture alone would have produced just another statement on suffering.


This commentary is not a verse-by-verse commentary but an exposition of the text focusing on the message of Job. Although Job is unique, the author adopts a theatrical view, which is not technically accurate but reflects the atmosphere of the book. The theme of the book focuses more on how we should respond to suffering.


This commentary is excellent for the purposes of preaching through Job as the author has himself preached through Job. He recognizes the problems of too much repetition in the book and that few answers along the way could lead to scepticism. The book is short on typical introductory matters but long on theological issues. The book of Job addresses how we are to respond to the difficulties of life.

Wilson, Gerald H. *Job* (NIBC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007).

The core message of the book is to endure faithfully in extreme loss and suffering, which fits a later date as the book addresses the questions of the community in exile. He argues that the structure of the book implies different stages and accepts an
early version of the book as being composed of the prologue and epilogue (calling it a
satisfying moral narrative). He also argues that there is an intentional, editorial unity
with a cohesive purpose to the book. He accepts the incomplete cycle of speeches,
without trying to rearrange them, as evidence that the friends were running out of
steam. He also understands Job 28 as the words of Job, as presented in the text. The
commentary is broken down into short, very manageable sections.

Ecclesiastes

Bartholomew, Craig G. *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*,

The author examines the relationship between OT studies and the larger philosophical
issues that are involved in OT studies as a way to move the discussion forward as there
is now no consensus in OT studies on one paradigm. These issues are examined in
light of a reading of Ecclesiastes. The author argues that the juxtaposition of different
views next to each other in Ecclesiastes produces a reading gap that is filled in by the
epilogue.

Bartholomew, Craig. *Ecclesiastes* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009)

The commentary gives a fairly substantial history of the interpretation of Ecclesiastes,
highlighting three main turns in Jerome (an allegorical and Christological reading),
Luther (a literal and theological reading), and the Enlightenment (an historical-critical
reading). The author argues that Qohelet was an unnamed Jew living in the third
century BC responding to Greek influences. Qohelet’s epistemology fits the Greek
epistemology because it is based on observation, which he uses to deconstruct the
tradition by focusing on individual exceptions. Thus the wisdom of Qohelet is different
than the wisdom of Proverbs. He understands hebel as enigmatic, which leaves open
the possibility of meaning, although Qohelet has a hard time finding it. The calls to
enjoyment are confessional responses, a positive approach to life, that represent the
voice of Qohelet the believer. Thus there is tension within the person of Qohelet,
which is represented in the tension between the calls to enjoyment and the statements
of hebel. This tension creates a gap that needs to be filled in by the epilogue. The
commentary has sections entitled “Theological Implications” where the author reflects
on broader implications of the text. There is also a postscript, where the topics of
post-modernism, a psychological reading, and spiritual formation is covered. Although
the author talks about sanctification and soul formation, he discusses these issues
from the perspective of Jungian psychology and the relationship of the ego to the self.
This is a very interesting and scholarly commentary, the strengths of which include
the recognition of the struggle of Qohelet, the autonomous epistemology of Qohelet,
and the fact that the wisdom of Qohelet does not match the wisdom of Proverbs.
Depending on one’s approach to Ecclesiastes, the Greek setting, the understanding of
hebel as enigmatic, and the calls to enjoyment as confessional may not be convincing.
Plus, the use of Jungian categories to describe spiritual formation will not be very useful
to pastors who are seeking to preach on Ecclesiastes.
Bollhagen, James *Ecclesiastes* (CC; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011)

This commentary is written from a conservative, confessional, Lutheran perspective. The author argues for Solomonic authorship with the author writing in an atypical style. Solomon writes the book as a repentant old man. Although the book understands the message of Ecclesiastes more positively, there is a recognition of the negative statements in the book, which he attributes to an observational point of view. Thus there are times when the author Solomon is off track. The commentary also has a strong theological bent. The books of the OT have a theological message, but at times it seems that Bollhagen reads too much NT theology from the text (specifically Lutheran, confessional theology).


An older commentary that argues for Solomonic authorship partly based on seeing the book as a confession as he reviews his past with repentance. The book demonstrates where the true happiness of man does not consist and it also shows us that happiness consists in the enjoyment and service of God as nothing can substitute for God. We are to despise the world to find our rest in God. Thus the book prepares us to receive the gospel.


This commentary understand Ecclesiastes against the backdrop of the Gilgamesh Epic with its search for meaning. He places the book at the beginning of the Persian period with its cultural malaise, its questioning of the wisdom of the age, and its socioeconomic developments. The aim is to whittle down glorified promises in conventional wisdom, which cannot guarantee security or prosperity. The epilogue summarizes and endorses Qohelet’s message but blunts its subversive edge.


Qohelet’s radical views render his teachings alien within the body of the OT, but the radical nature of his teachings is curbed by a redactor, who inserts dogmatic corrections into the book. Thus the tensions in Qohelet are explained by different sources and the work of redactors.


Although Delitzsch affirms that Qohelet confesses God as the true God, that the fear of God is the highest duty (he even calls Ecclesiastes “The Song of the Fear of God”), and that the religious conviction of the rectitude of God stands firm as a rock, he also acknowledges that there are self-contradictions and “the most dissonant and confused impressions of the present world” in the book. He understands Eccl 8:12b-13 as Qohelet’s own conviction of a righteous requital which is contradicted by appearances. Qohelet affirms the judgment of God, but it is only an abstract postulate of faith not
powerful enough to raise a person above the miseries of this life. Qohelet sets forth a dark view of the world, a darkness that is broken only by scattered gleams of light. The book is post-exilic based on the language of the book.


Ecclesiastes is an essay in apologetics defending the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternatives. What is to be seen as sheer pessimism under the sun may be seen differently in the light of faith in the generosity of God. The book is an exploration of the barrenness of life without a practical faith in God.


The author wants to allow the tensions of the book to stand while working toward the theology of the book. He recognizes differences between Ecclesiastes with the rest of the OT and even contradictions within the book itself. The epilogue is mildly confirmatory placing the thoughts of the author of Ecclesiastes in a larger traditional context. There is a tension in the juxtaposition of death and the calls to enjoyment which is resolved in the epilogue of the book. Qohelet is basically right but something more is given in the epilogue (fear and obedience). Qohelet is a character created by the author to make his theological point. The introduction and the commentary take up about half the book and the biblical theology section takes up the rest of the book.


The author argues that hebel is ambiguous but should be understood more along the lines of “breath” than in the abstract, negative terms of vanity or futile. Thus a more positive view of the book emerges. The phrase “under the sun” shows that there has been speculation about life after death. Qohelet is like someone who is journaling and we get to overhear his reflective meditations. There seems to be some tension with the book of Proverbs in that Farmer argues that unlike the writers of Proverbs, who confidently make assertions (Prov 22:4), Qohelet suggests that those who keep the commandments cannot count on receiving the just desserts in their lives under the sun. The speakers in Proverbs seem confident of their ability to predict how God will deal with either the wicked or the righteous. But Qohelet is much more humble.

Fox, Michael V. *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, Bible and Literature Series, Almond Press, 1989.

The contradictions in Ecclesiastes are the way Qohelet states the problems with which he is wrestling; therefore, they should not be explained away. Contains excellent discussions of Toil and Pleasure, Qohelet’s Epistemology, and Theodicy.

Fox, Michael V. *A Time To Tear Down & A Time To Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, Eerdmans, 1999.

This is a “revision” of his earlier work Qohelet and His Contradictions, which he says is no longer the “same” book. However, he deals with the same issues from the same basic standpoint. He stresses more the “building up” side of Ecclesiastes in this book.
Fox, Michael V. *Ecclesiastes*, JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004

The format is to print the Hebrew and the NJPS translation side-by-side at the top of the page with the author’s brief notes below, which makes it easy to use the Hebrew text. There is a brief introduction followed by concise notes on the text. For a more extensive analysis one should consult the author’s work *A Time to Tear Down and A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Eerdmans, 1999). The book gives a more in-depth analysis of his approach, and the commentary lays out his thoughts on particular verses. Although the author is negative toward many things in life, there are some things in life that are worthwhile: moderate work, the temperate enjoyment of pleasure, fearing God, love and friendship, and hoping for divine justice.


The author argues that hebel refers to what is transcient, which means that the human condition is limited in its duration without emptying life of its true, although temporary value. Thus the book consoles rather than disturbs because evil is temporary in its impact on life. The advice of Qohelet is that true wisdom will recognize the temporality of all that is experienced, and will accept the fact that a fallen world and the evil within is soon to pass.


One of the few contemporary authors who argues that Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes. Understands the message of the book to be positive, showing the futility of the world in light of eternity, with affirmations of faith found throughout the book.


Gordis argues that the tensions within the thought of Qohelet can be explained by means of quotations. Many times these quotations represent more traditional wisdom teaching, which Qohelet denies.


Vanity and joy set the rhythm to the book. Vanity marks the limits of our ability to understand and change the way life works. Joy brings relief in the midst of frustration. Hubbard limits the negative message of the book by understanding hebel to be “mystery” and the inability to grasp the meaning of God’s way rather than an ultimate emptiness in life.


A very positive understanding of the message of Ecclesiastes. The book is for those who want to live again. The central concern is to see the totality of life within a pattern. It has implications for the relationship of Christ and culture. The epilogue is the key to
the book where the conclusion is that all is not vanity. The author argues for Solomonic authorship when he fell into idolatry. There is in the book an air of repentance, related to the statement of Solomon’s wisdom “the rest of his days” (1 Kings 11:41). The lack of the mention of Yahweh, salvation, and law means the book has in mind a wider circle of readers. The mood of the book is one of delight.


Kidner’s approach is very similar to Eaton in viewpoint, but much briefer as it stresses the overall message instead of detailed analysis. Qohelet puts himself in the shoes of the secularist, which produces tensions with his convictions of faith. Although he draws some negative conclusions about life, Qohelet is only tearing down so he can build up.


Qohelet is a wisdom teacher who struggles with the traditions of his people, including the normative traditions represented in Proverbs. He is pessimistic about discovering the meaning of life, which is reflected in the frequent refrain that “everything is meaningless.” The calls to enjoyment are not statements of joy but statements of resignation in view of the meaninglessness of life. Thus the theological message of the autobiography (1:12-12:7) is that life is full of trouble and then you die. This is an “under the sun” perspective, which is a limited perspective because it does not take into account heavenly realities; however, as a description of the world apart from the reality of God’s redeeming love, it is a true assessment of the world. Qohelet’s pessimistic theology is not the concluding voice in the book. The epilogue (12:8-14) evaluates the teaching of Qohelet, shows the dangers of speculative, doubting wisdom in Israel, and reinforces the normative teaching of the OT.


Murphy gives the negative statements their due recognizing that Qohelet is in conflict and dialogue with traditional wisdom, yet also stresses that Qohelet is a man of faith, which means accepting God on his own terms. Includes a helpful section on key terms used in Qohelet, as well as a bibliography for those terms.


He understands the message of the book to be very positive. The key to the meaning of the book is hebel. Since most commentators take it as representing the conclusion or thesis which Qohelet wishes to convey, they have concluded that the meaning of the book is negative. However, hebel does not mean “meaningless,” but has the very specific connotation of identifying the enigmatic and the ironic dimension of human experience. It suggests that life is not fully comprehensible. The advice of the book comes in the calls to enjoyment, which are the real thesis of the book. These calls to enjoyment are theological statements of faith in a just and loving God, despite many signs to the contrary. The person of faith is aware of the mysteries of life (hebel), but the person of faith moves forward positively to enjoy life.

This Handbook takes the same approach to Ecclesiastes that Ogden takes in his 1987 commentary but it is geared toward the difficulties that translators face. It focuses on exegetical, linguistic, and cultural problems in translating the text and attempts to explain the Hebrew text to translators who have not yet learned the language.


This commentary seeks to wrestle with the original meaning of Ecclesiastes and the advocacy of joy which is short of resurrection joy. The author is a post-exilic writer who stands in the wisdom tradition and who reports the words of Qohelet, which he values. The gloomy tone of the book is explained as trying to undermine the false hopes of people. Wisdom cannot give a comprehensive view of reality. Hebel means breath, with an emphasis on the passing nature of existence. Although the author takes seriously the negative nature of the book, he does not carry this far enough in its implications because he does not stress the under the sun perspective and that there is no yitron (profit), only cheleq (a portion). The NIVAC series has a section on Application, but if you do not fully agree with the way an author understands the meaning of the text, the application part is almost useless.


Qohelet is in a debate with himself, a reflection of his inner struggles, where the inconsistencies and outright contradictions in the world cannot be explained. It is the intention of the author that the reader wrestle with these contradictions. Seow does not believe that the major message of Ecclesiastes is that everything is meaningless or futile, but rather that people cannot comprehend what is happening or control their own destiny. He argues for a fifth or fourth century date on the basis that the book reflects the socioeconomic context of the Persian period.


Qohelet is a preacher of joy. Although there are negative statements in the book, the crucial question is whether this negativism dominates the whole of Qohelet’s worldview, or whether it is only a foil for some other positive assessment of the human situation. Qohelet does not entirely abandoned the traditional view that justice will ultimately prevail, but he points out that human existence is rendered fundamentally unsatisfactory because, judging at least by appearances, there are exceptions to the rule. The use of hebel shows them to be inexplicable exceptions and no more; but they are enough to leave people in a state of uncertainty about their future.

This commentary is very open to Solomonic authorship and believes the book gives insight into how to develop a world and life view that is God-centered in a world that does not contain the key to its own meaning. There are two questions behind the book. Does the world itself offer any satisfying key to life? How can a believer rise above the world system if he cannot grasp the whole? Periodically there are comments by John Walton bringing some issues up to date.
# Course Objectives Related to MAR Student Learning Outcomes

**Course:** Poets  
**Professor:** Richard P. Belcher, Jr.

## MAR Student Learning Outcomes

In order to measure the success of the MAR curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MAR outcomes.

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<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<td>Strong</td>
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| **Articulation (oral & written)** | Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. | Moderate | Articulation of essential biblical, theological, and historical information is covered, but mostly written, not oral |
| **Scripture** | Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.) | Strong | The original meaning of the poetical books is covered with an emphasis on research in a paper and substantial time spent on meaning for today |
| **Reformed Theology** | Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards. | Minimal | There is an emphasis on the theological message of the historical books, but not as directly tied to the Westminster Standards |
| **Sanctification** | Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification. | Minimal | Learning about our relationship to God, especially in the Psalms, aids sanctification |
| **Desire for Worldview** | Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. | None |  |
| **Winsomely Reformed** | Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.) | None |  |
| **Teach** | Ability to teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm. | Moderate | We talk about how to preach and teach the poetical books |
| **Church/World** | Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues. | None |  |
| **MAR Specific SLO** | An ability to integrate such knowledge and understanding into one’s own calling in society | None |  |