



**MCMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE
COURSE SYLLABUS
SUMMER 2014**

**THE FIVE MEGILLOT [THE FIVE SCROLLS] (OT 3XM3)
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Esther Scroll, 18th c. Italian. Library of Congress.




I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

These five small but fascinating books of the Old Testament are often overlooked in both church and seminary; nevertheless, they form an essential part of Christian Scripture and give us increased insight into the relationship between God and humanity. They contain exciting narrative and profound philosophy, lyrical poems and poignant lament, and stories of both love and danger. This course examines the books known as the Five Scrolls or Megillot—Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther—their content, their place in the history of Israel, their theology, their role as Christian Scripture, and their application to the church today.

Program Specializations: Biblical Studies (OT), Pastoral Studies, Christian Worldview.

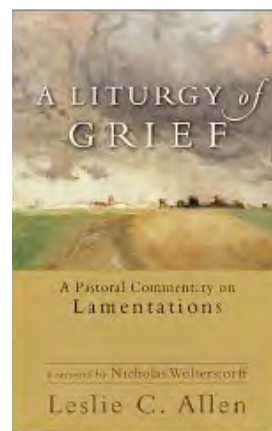
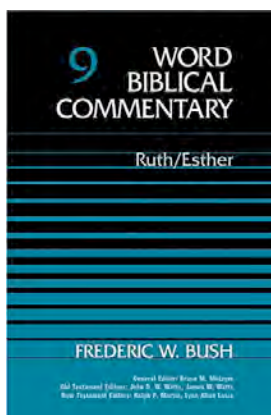
II. LEARNING OUTCOMES



- a.  Knowing
- To understand the basic content of the Five Scrolls
 - To understand the practical and spiritual relevance of the Five Scrolls to God's people in their historical context and for the Christian church today
- b.  Being
- To embrace the relevance of the Five Scrolls for the contemporary church and today's society
 - To grow to love God and humanity more through the internalization of the concepts in these books
- c.  Doing
- To communicate effectively what the Five Scrolls teach about God and his purposes for humanity
 - To examine more thoroughly a pericope from one of the Five Scrolls and relate it to the New Testament and Christian life today
 - To relate the Five Scrolls to various ministries and specializations in today's church and culture

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED TEXTS



- Allen, Leslie C. *A Liturgy of Grief: A Pastoral Commentary on Lamentations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011. [Google Books Preview](#) (This commentary has a pastoral care and counselling focus.)
- Brown, William P. *Ecclesiastes*. IBC. Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2000. [Google Books Preview](#) (This commentary is designed with a preaching and teaching focus.)
- Bush, Frederic William. *Ruth, Esther*. WBC 9. Dallas: Word, 1996. (This commentary has a comprehensive, academic focus. It is available for Logos.)
- Longman, Tremper. *Song of Songs*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001. [Google Books Preview](#). (This commentary aims to bridge the cultural gap between today's world and the world of ancient Israel.)

Note: Students whose interest is in different books may want to share their texts to reduce the cost involved. All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, R.E.A.D. On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College or contact R.E.A.D. On Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1. Phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail books@readon.ca. Website: <http://webhome.idirect.com/~readon/bookstore.html> [XBkEducation](#). Texts may be ordered ahead and sent to your home or purchased on the first day of class.

B. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Reading the Five Scrolls: 10%; due throughout the week and Friday, May 16, 2013 at 11:59 pm for reading statement.

The most effective way to become familiar with the Old Testament and to appreciate its contribution to the Christian life is to read it. To this end, students should read the five books—Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations in a in a modern critical translation (e.g., NRSV, TNIV, NIV, NLT, NASB, JPS). For each book you will submit by email or in hard copy two thoughtful, open-ended questions that you have developed during your reading. These questions may focus on content, background, theology, or application. If possible, read the biblical books and submit your questions before the course starts; otherwise, submit the two questions for each book by the time discussion of that book begins (e.g., Lamentations by the start of class on Wednesday afternoon). These questions will be addressed on the last day of class. You are also responsible for sending an email to conwam2@mcmaster.ca by the end of the last day of classes (see above date and time) stating what percent of the Five Scrolls you have read.

2. Reading about the Five Scrolls: 15%; reading statement due Monday, May 26, 2013 at 11:59 pm.

You will read the introductory material in the four commentaries that are the course texts.

Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, 5-56; 273-337.

Longman, *Song of Songs*, 1-69.

Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 2-18.

Allen, *A Liturgy of Grief*, 1-29.

Read at least 200 pages from the remainder of the commentaries as they relate to class

and assignments. You are responsible for sending an email to conwam2@mcmaster.ca the above date and time stating what percent of the assigned reading you have finished, and listing other sections of the books that you have read.

4. Program Specialization Responses, 35%; due Monday, June 2, 2013 at 11:59 pm.

Students will complete one of the following assignments which relate the Five Scrolls to various ministries and specializations in today's church and culture. This project will be evaluated for both creativity and content. Your work should indicate understanding of the Five Scrolls as well as their contemporary relevance. Reference to secondary sources (books, articles, music, video, websites, etc.) is encouraged as appropriate, and must be fully documented. Be sure to evaluate the quality of your sources carefully. Note: A DropBox folder will be set up for files too large to email.

a. Biblical Studies (OT) (do only one of the two options)

- i. Select three different commentaries on one of the Five Scrolls and study them carefully. Write a 5-6 page critical review of these commentaries in which you evaluate them for their usefulness in biblical studies. Be sure that you set out your criteria, which may include: presuppositions (implicit or explicit), format and organization, use of original languages, historical and cultural background information, consideration of textual issues, breadth of scholarship, cogency of arguments, validity of theological conclusions, contemporary application, etc.
- ii. A number of films focus on the books of Esther and Ruth: *Esther and the King* (1960, available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ6qYypfmlo>), *Esther* (2000), *The Book of Esther* (2013, available to borrow from the professor), *The Story of Ruth* (1960, available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWYhNTJTwrA>), *Queen Esther, One Night with the King* (2006, available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4nd9yPzc1s>), and the *Book of Ruth* (2010). Select one of these movies and watch it. In a paper of 5-6 pages, critically analyze the movie in terms of its portrayal of Scripture. Consider content, characterization, historical accuracy, and theological themes.

b. Pastoral Studies (do only one of the three options)

- i. Prepare and record (audio or video) a sermon of 20-25 minutes on a passage from one of the five Scrolls that you might deliver at your church. This sermon must be written specifically for this course and must not be recycled material. It should demonstrate insights that you have gained from the course. Include a typed version of the sermon.
- ii. Prepare a 30 minute liturgy for your church that will lead up to and conclude a sermon by your pastor on a topic or section of one of the Five Scrolls. Describe the purpose and content of the sermon that will be delivered. The service may be traditional, contemporary, or blended. Prepare a bulletin listing the sermon topic, music, songs, prayers, etc. Please provide the text of prayers and links to the music/songs (or email the file). Include a 2-3 page explanation of why you chose these elements for your liturgy.

iii. Select one of the Five Scrolls and explain in a paper of 5-6 pages how you would use it as a pastor in individual counselling with members of your church. For example, you might use Lamentations in grief counseling, Ruth in dealing with personal setbacks and difficulties, Ecclesiastes in coping with depression, Esther in handling situations involving prejudice or cultural oppression, and even Song of Songs in marriage counseling. Many other options are possible.

c. Christian Worldview (do only one of the two options)

- i. Create a 40 minute Sunday school lesson for grade school children or high school students, or a 40 minute small group study for adults, that deals with a relevant section of one of the Five Scrolls and that integrates historical validity with contemporary theological relevance. Focus on how the material is relevant for Christians today and how it might reinforce or challenge their worldview. For example, Ecclesiastes may be relevant to our modern workaholic, consumeristic culture, Esther may connect to the oppressed, or Ruth may relate to problems of immigrants or the marginalized. Specify the age level and nature of your class. Include the purpose of the lesson, the strategies, and the lesson materials.
- ii. Select a novel or movie that has a situation, theme, or character type in common with one of the Five Scrolls. This does not need to be a “Christian” novel or movie. For example, *The Signature of All Things* by Elizabeth Gilbert may make an interesting comparison with Qohelet in Ecclesiastes since Alma and Ambrose live with “a desperate need to understand the workings of this world and the mechanisms behind all life” as they explore the realms of the scientific and the spiritual. Or, the movie *Schindler’s List* may relate to Lamentations in its depiction of suffering. Or, Jhumpa Lahiri’s book, *The Lowland*, may relate to Ruth. There are limitless possibilities. In a paper or 5-6 pages, explore the similarities and differences between the biblical book and the contemporary novel or movie, and give insights into how each informs the other.



5. Exegetical or Thematic Paper, 40%; due Friday, June 13, 2013 at 11:59 pm.

Students will prepare an exegetical or thematic paper of approximately 11-14 pages. At least 10 academic secondary sources are required for these papers, and all must be used and cited in the paper. Sources may include the class texts, monographs, commentaries,

and articles from journals or books. Sources must NOT include web sites (other than on line databases for articles, unless with the professor's permission), one volume Bible dictionaries, study Bibles, Bible translations, and dated devotional commentaries (such as Matthew Henry's). Recent sources are preferred. Please avoid lengthy quotations from these sources; integrate the information into your own writing, documenting paraphrase as well as direct quotation. Do not include lengthy biblical quotations.

Your written work will be evaluated according to three main criteria:

- I. **Presentation:** Spelling, grammar, clarity, layout, format of footnotes and bibliography. Use subtitles to enhance organization.
- II. **Argumentation:** Introduction with clear thesis, logical flow of ideas, compelling evidence, effective use of sources, effective conclusion.
- III. **Content:** Coverage of all relevant issues, adequate background information, deep engagement with the text and with sources.

a. Exegetical Paper:

Students will select one self-contained pericope of 8-12 verses from one of the Five Scrolls and complete an exegetical analysis. The paper should include:

- i. **Introductory Material:**
 - a. A clear statement of the thesis in the introduction
 - b. The historical and cultural context of the passage and book
 - c. Explanation of how your passage fits within the book as a whole
- ii. **Analysis:** (this should form the major part of your paper)
 - a. A detailed exegesis of the passage
 - b. Theological reflections on the passage (may be integrated with the exegesis)
- iii. **Conclusions:**
 - a. Connections to the rest of the OT, NT and/or suggestions for practical/pastoral applications
 - b. A clear conclusion

b. Thematic Paper:

Students will identify a significant theme in one or more of the five scrolls and explore its development. The paper should include:

- i. **Introductory Material**
 - a. A clear statement of the thesis in the introduction
 - b. A clear explication of the theme and its importance
- ii. **Development:** (this should form the major part of your paper)
 - a. Analysis of relevant passages that relate to the theme
 - c. Theological reflections on the theme (may be integrated with your argument)
- iii. **Conclusions:**
 - a. Connections to the rest of the OT, NT and/or suggestions for practical/pastoral applications
 - b. A clear conclusion

C. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

All assignments must adhere to the MDC Writing Style Guide, available from <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/resources-forms>. All assignments should be double spaced and typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Assignments must be submitted in .pdf format by email to conwam2@mcmaster.ca. If you do not have Adobe Acrobat Professional, most recent versions of Word have a built in .pdf printer, or there are on-line sites such as <http://primopdf.com> or <http://www.pdf995.com> where you may obtain a free program to convert your document to .pdf format. Other document types will not be accepted. Be sure to include your last name as part of the file name. Your assignment will be evaluated by means of comments on the .pdf and returned to you by email. Please include your preferred email address on the cover page. Note that page requirements do not include the title page and bibliography. Please use footnotes, not endnotes.

Late Assignments

Extensions are not given for summer courses. You must contact the registrar, Nina Thomas, at thomn@mcmaster.ca if exceptional situations arise.

Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty at <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>.

D. SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Reading the Five Scrolls	10%
Reading about the Five Scrolls	15%
Program Specialization Responses	35%
Exegetical Paper	40%

Total Grade	100%
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IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

One-week courses take place from 11:30 am to 4:00 pm Monday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm Tuesday to Thursday (lunch from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm), and 9:00 am to 12:00 pm Friday. A free lunch is included on Monday and a short chapel will take place on Wednesday.

	Lectures	Readings Due
Monday Afternoon	Introduction	
Tuesday Morning	Ruth	Ruth, Song of Songs
Tuesday Afternoon	Song Of Songs	
Wednesday Morning	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes, Lamentations
Wednesday Afternoon	Lamentations, Part 1	
Thursday Morning	Lamentations, Part 2 Esther, Part 1	Esther
Thursday Afternoon	Esther, Part 2	
Friday Morning	Conclusions	

V. CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR, ATTENDANCE, AND PARTICIPATION

- Students are expected to be on time for class. Admittedly, unavoidable delays do occasionally happen. If you arrive late, please enter as quietly as possible and give an explanation to the professor after class.
- Students are also expected to stay for the entire class session.
- Computers and tablets should only be used for class related purposes, not for social networking and the like.
- All thoughtful student participation is welcome. There are no “dumb questions” or “stupid answers.” Students will respect the contributions of other students and respond to them without ridicule or scorn.
- Students may eat or drink in class as long as they do so quietly and unobtrusively and clean up afterwards.

