

Proverbs



McMaster Divinity College
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August H. Konkell (Ph.D.), Professor of Old Testament
konkela@mcmaster.ca; 905 525 9140 x23505
mcmasterdivinity.ca/faculty/core/august-h-konkel

Course Designation

OT 3XH3 Proverbs Hebrew Exegesis

Course Specializations

Biblical Studies
Christian Worldview
Pastoral Studies
Spiritual Care and Counselling

Course Schedule

Class begins Tuesday January 6th.
Class meets each Tuesday 1:30 – 4:20p.m. Please note the following exceptions:
No Class Tuesday January 20th (professor leading a church seminar in Hermosillo Mexico);
No class on Tuesday February 17th (reading week).

A guest lecturer is planned for Tuesday March 3 (Introduction to Proverbial Collection, 10:1-31:31).
Class will meet on Tuesday April 7 (exam week).

Course Description

This course is a study of the books of Proverbs, cognizant of the lengthy time in which the collections were brought into their present form, always within the milieu of ancient near eastern wisdom. Particular attention will be given to the structure of the book of Proverbs, the various genres included within the collection, and the way these functioned in their original life setting (*Sitz im Leben*). The course will examine how proverbs should be interpreted and applied in contemporary teaching, preaching and life circumstances.

Course Objectives

Knowing

In this course the student will come to know the content, literary structure, history, and theology of the book Proverbs as to its historical context, rhetorical meaning, theological message and contemporary relevance.

The lessons of Proverbs come to us in their own code with a specific goal; they are “modes of reflection and poetic expression that arise out of the deeply felt ontic tension between order and disorder and that are employed either to reaffirm a tradition or to articulate a counter-order which is based in experiences not validated by the tradition” (Williams 1981, 89). Participants in this course will come to better understand the genre of *maskil* and the reason for considerable differences in translation, especially in particular proverbs. They will learn the technique of making the wisdom of Proverbs relevant to particular situations.

Being

This course will teach the student to embrace proverbs as relevant material for today and be moved by its themes to love God, humanity, and creation in greater ways.

There is no graduation from the school of learning how to live. The more we learn about life, the more we realize that we all contribute to its problems. The problems of life are complex because we are complex and there are very many of us. Life is continually a matter of learning to deal with stress and difficult situations. Wisdom has been defined simply as “the ability to cope” (Alexander W. Kenworthy, “The Nature and Authority of Old Testament Wisdom Family Ethics: with Special Reference to Proverbs and Sirach,” unpublished dissertation, University of Melbourne, 1974).

Doing

It is the goal of this course to better apply the lessons of Proverbs to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Participants in this course will demonstrate proficiency in interpreting proverbs in their original life situation; this will enable application of instruction and aphorisms to contemporary life.

It was the conviction of the sages of ancient Israel that there is a divine order which one must understand in order to know what is good. Reality, however, is a plethora of persons and events that is too multifaceted and puzzling to master (Prov 16:1, 9). What one must do in one circumstance may be inappropriate in another (Prov 26:4, 5). There is no point in debating the existence of God with Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusions*); but Alistar McGrath should write a response to those that listen to Dawkins (*The Dawkins Delusion?*). This course will enable participants to learn how to live so they may best function in their own social circumstances.

Course Texts

Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction*, Downers Grove, Illinois /Nottingham, England: IVP Academic /Apollos, 2011.

James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., Westminster John Knox, 2010.

Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Academic, 2006.

Textbook Purchase

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

Course Topics

1. Structure and Content of Proverbs – Jan. 6th
2. Proverbs in the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom – Jan. 6th
3. Proverbs in the Context of Hebrew Wisdom (canonical and post canonical) – Jan. 13th
4. Introduction to Proverbs as Instruction (Proverbs 1-9) – Jan. 27th
5. The Tree of Life – Feb. 3rd
6. The Call of Lady Wisdom to Chastity (sexual and spiritual) – Feb. 10th
7. Wisdom as the Craftsman of Creation – Feb. 24th
8. Introduction to Proverbial Collections and Song of Valiant Woman (10:1-31:31) – Mar. 3rd
9. Three Hundred Seventy Five Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16) – Mar. 10th
10. The Thirty Sayings of Amenemope (22:17-24:22) – Mar. 17th
11. Notable proverbs in the Solomon Collections (e.g. Prov. 22:6) – Mar. 24th
12. Proverbs Collected under the Supervision of Hezekiah (25:1-29:27) – Mar. 31st
13. Sayings of Agur (numerical proverbs) and Lemuel (30:1-31:9) – April 7th

Course Assignments and Grading

1. Old Testament Wisdom

1.1 Reading: James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, pp. 23-276.

1.1 Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom (1000 words; due Jan. 27th; 15%)

Using Crenshaw, class lectures, and other readings from the bibliography, discuss Hebrew wisdom as part of the phenomena of wisdom in the ancient near east. Compare and contrast the *Sitz im Leben* (life setting) in which wisdom functioned, the main purpose of wisdom in its particular geographical locations. Note similarities and differences in genre and content.

1.2 Development of Wisdom in the History of Israel (1000 words; due Jan. 27th; 15%)

Using Crenshaw, class lectures, and other readings from the bibliography, discuss the origins and development of Hebrew wisdom into the post canonical period (e.g. Ben Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon). Compare and contrast the various writings that may be classified as Hebrew wisdom. Approximately 1000 words are due Jan. 27 for 15% of course grade.

2. Book Review (1000 words; Due Feb. 10th)

Do a book review of Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction*. This should be the kind of review that could be published in an academic journal, i.e. a summary of the contents and an evaluation.

3. Hebrew Translation and Exegesis

Seven units of Proverbs will be assigned for translation and exegesis. The units will vary in length depending on the degree of difficulty involved. Each unit will count for 5% of the course grade. Due dates for each assigned unit will be approximately every two weeks

4. Application of Proverbs (1200 words; due April 7; 20%)

With the assistance of the text by Longman (pp. 549-578), choose a topic of Proverbs important and relevant to human life. Examine all the proverbs that may contribute to this topic, using the commentary by Longman as a guide to their meaning. Detailed exegesis should not be done, but care should be taken to be sure each proverb is reasonably understood. Draw some conclusions as to what may be learned from proverbial wisdom on the topic chosen. The paper should be 1200 words in length.

Course Policies

Academic Honesty

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 ~ <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

Gender 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.

Style

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuide.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Bibliography

Hebrew Wisdom

An extensive though now dated bibliography on wisdom can be found in James L. Crenshaw, *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, KTAV, 1976, 46-60.

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