

The Lessons of Proverbs



McMaster Divinity College
Fall 2020

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Course Designation

OT 3XH3 The Lessons of Proverbs

or

OT 2XH2 The Lessons of Proverbs (Hebrew Exegesis)

Course Specializations

Biblical Studies

Church and Culture

Counseling and Spiritual Care

Christian History and Worldview

Course Description

This course is a study of the book of Proverbs, being cognizant of the lengthy time in which the collections were brought together within the changing milieu of ancient near eastern wisdom. Attention

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will be given to the structure of the book of Proverbs, the function of the Hebrew *mašal*, various genres included within the collections, and the way these functioned in their original life setting (*Sitz im Leben*). 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 *mašal* 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 specific situations.

Course Objectives

Knowing

- The student will come to know the content, literary structure, and development of the Book of Proverbs within the context of Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom.
- The student will understand cultural context and rhetorical effect in using proverbs.
- The student will learn how the Book of Proverbs assumes covenant values and applies its theology to life issues.

Being

- The student will be wise in knowing how to live according to covenant values.
- The student will be an example in using proverbs constructively to understand circumstances.
- The student will mature in “the ability to cope” (Alexander W. Kenworthy, 1974).

Doing

- Students will interpret and apply the wisdom of proverbs in all daily life.
- Students will “answer” and “not answer” fools according to their folly (Prov. 26:4–5).
- Students will teach others to use proverbs in counseling.
- Students will use proverbs to better understand their own culture.

Course Schedule

This course is offered in hybrid format, meaning there will be two days of on campus in class interaction. The dates assigned for this course are Tuesday afternoon, October 27, 1:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. and Wednesday all day from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Online synchronous lectures will be held September 15, 29, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, and Dec. 1 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. All of these will be recorded. Students unable to attend during these times may participate through the recording.

Course Topics

1. Structure, Content, and Development of the Composition of Proverbs

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2. Proverbs in the Wisdom of the Old Testament and its World
3. Proverbs for Instruction (Proverbs 1–9)
4. The Call of Lady Wisdom to Chastity (sexual and spiritual)
5. Wisdom as the Craftsman of Creation (8:1–36)
6. Proverbs of Solomon [*šlmh*: $\check{s}=300+l=30+m=40+h=5$, 375 proverbs] (10:1–22:16)
7. Proverbs on the Wise and the Foolish, Righteous and the Wicked (Antithetic)
8. Proverbs on Speech, Wealth, Family, and Community (Synthetic)
9. Thirty Sayings and Sayings of the Wise (22:17–24:34)
10. Preparing Youth (Prov. 1:1–6) for Lifelong Wisdom (Prov. 22:6)
11. Proverbs Collected under the Supervision of Hezekiah (25:1–29:27)
12. Sayings of Agur (numerical proverbs) and Lemuel (30:1–31:9)
13. Song of Valiant Woman Wisdom (31:10–31)

The course will include guest lectures and posted videos.

Course Texts

Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2017.

Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary 22, Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

Textbook Purchase

Students 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. Online book services include Advanced Book Exchange, Bookdepository, and Amazon.

Course Assignments and Grading

1. Online lectures and discussion questions (20%)

There will be **five** online synchronous lectures held on Tuesdays from 2:00 p.m. to 4 p.m. These will be scheduled for September 15, 29, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, and Dec. 1. All of these will be recorded, those not able to attend during the synchronous sessions can substitute the recording. Discussion questions will be posted for each of the online sessions. Participation is required for each session and discussion. Note that each discussion may have several threads for interaction. Some threads of discussion will be listed by the instructor, but students will be free to add their own threads as they see fit. Each discussion forum will count 4% towards the total grade of the course.

2. Proverbs in the world of wisdom (30%)

Proverbs may appear spontaneously, as when David counters Saul with “Wickedness proceeds from the wicked” (1 Sam 24:14b). But proverbs are part of a broad category of writing known as wisdom.

Proverbs appear frequently in other wisdom writings such as Job: “An empty head can be taught as a wild donkey man may be reborn” (11:12). Using the introduction by Longman, explain what we know of

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the teaching and function of wisdom in ancient Israel. Identify where wisdom may be found in the Old Testament. Show how wisdom transforms after the Old Testament, particularly in Sirach, and on into the New Testament. This paper should be about 2000 words.

3. Function of Proverbs (35%)

Research proverbs on a topic prominent to understanding the book and relevant to your specialization. For **biblical studies** the range includes matters related to form and poetry, such as antithetic proverbs, numerical proverbs, proverbs related to nature, or various collections of proverbs such as the thirty sayings and their relationship to the Egyptian writing of Amenemope. The specialties of **Church and Culture** and **Counseling and Spiritual Care** are limited to thematic topics such as speech, work, marriage, instruction, and others related to the specialty. This topic may be as specific or general as suits the interests of the student. The study should show how proverbs within the book provide instruction on this topic as it applies to the specialty. This will require explanation of the function of the proverb in relation to the topic chosen. The study should include research of the specialty on the topic as well as specific studies of proverbs done on the topic. It will require thorough exegesis and explanation of each of the proverbs chosen. The proverbs selected in relation to the topic must be limited enough in number so detail of interpretation and application can be provided for each proverb. The specialty **Christian History and Worldview** further includes options such as a study of the relation of proverbs to a theology of creation and a study of the use of Proverbs 8 in the debates on the nature and person of Jesus Christ in the pre-Nicene period. This paper should be about 2500 words, but it should reflect a bibliography of all recent relevant studies.

4. The Valiant Woman (15%)

The closing poem of proverbs in 31:10–31 is very significant to the impact of the book. Do a focused study of the meaning and importance of this poem in concluding the book of Proverbs. The work of Al Wolters, *The Song of the Valiant Woman* (Paternoster, 2007) is a valuable starting point to analyzing this poem. This paper should be about 1000 words.

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: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>.

Gender Inclusive Language

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

names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

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: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

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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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