

What Does It Mean to Be Wise?
A Survey of Biblical Wisdom Literature
A VST Academy Certificate Program Course

Thursday March 12, 2:00-5:00 pm, 7:00-9:00 pm
Friday March 13, 9:00 am – 12:00 noon, 1:00-3:00 pm
Grace Presbyterian Church, Calgary

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan, ldkaplan@vst.edu, www.sophiastreet.com

Course Description: What does it mean to be wise? To know how to love, be strong through suffering, or kind in speech and action? To see through life's superficialities and wax philosophical about its ups and downs? All these answers and more are found in Biblical wisdom literature, as it explores enduring human questions about creation, ecology, money, gender, sexuality and responsibility. In this continuing education course, we will explore some surprisingly modern Biblical perspectives on these questions, guided by the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Ben Sirach. Lecture, discussion, and text study will take us through the Biblical mindset into our own explorations. Please bring to class a Bible (any translation) containing these books.

Course outline and advance reading:

Thursday, March 12: 2:00-5:00

Intellectual and Practical Wisdom: *Ecclesiasticus*

Read: Ben Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 38:24-39:11

Cynicism and Equanimity: Perspectives on *Ecclesiastes*

Read: *Ecclesiastes* (entire book), any translation

Read: Shapiro, *The Way of Solomon*, 95-102, 110-112 (moodle)

Thursday, March 12: 7:00-9:00 (Public lecture)

Erotic Imagination: Wisdom of the *Song of Songs*

Read: *The Song of Songs* (entire book), any translation

Read: Adler, "Two Subjects, One Love" in *Engendering Judaism*, 133-139 (moodle)

Friday, 9:00am-12:00 noon

Mystical, Maternal, Metaphorical Ideals: Wisdom in Proverbs

Read: Proverbs 1-9, any translation

Read: Kugel, "Wisdom and the Anthological Temper," in Stern, *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, 32-52 (moodle)

Friday, 1:00-3:00 pm

When Wisdom Fails: The Book of Job

Read: Job, excerpts posted on moodle plus Job 28, any translation

Read: Mitchell, "Introduction," *The Book of Job*, vii-xxxii (moodle)

Auditor expectations:

Students not taking the course for credit are encouraged to do all the pre-reading and attend all course sessions. No assignments are required.

Certificate credit work expectations:

- Completion of assigned reading
- Full attendance
- Thoughtful participation in class discussion and group work
- Completion of reflective paper (3-4 pages), due April 13 by email to ldkaplan@vst.edu

Reflective Paper: Choose one Biblical book or theme from the course. After a brief summary of the relevant ideas, offer a personal reflection on them, demonstrating your ability to thoughtfully engage the course reading, lecture and discussion.