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**HB6/710 (3)**  
**Timeless Inquiries: Biblical Wisdom Literature and Contemporary Values**  
**Fall 2019**

**PURPOSE:** Biblical wisdom literature engages with a surprisingly modern set of concerns, including creation, ecology, feminine faces of God, sexuality, money, and responsibility. By learning and applying a variety of text-centered and reader-centered interpretive techniques, we will explore the lessons and questions of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Ben Sirach.

**PREREQUISITES:** HB500, Introduction to Hebrew Bible

**COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:**

Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to

- Summarize the content and describe the style of five works of wisdom literature
- Explain and apply a variety of Biblical interpretive techniques
- Use Biblical works of wisdom literature as resources to address selected contemporary issues

**FORMAT AND CONTENT:** This 3-credit semester-long course meets once a week for three-hours, Tuesday afternoons 2:00-5:00 pm, throughout fall term (September 9–November 29, 2019). Course activities include lecture, discussion, student presentations, and small group activities.

**TEXTS:** Please purchase through Amazon.ca or Chapters.ca:

- Berlin, Adele. *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2004.

Please note: This edition of Hebrew Bible provides us with a uniform translation, extensive annotations and short historical introductions. It also includes scholarly essays, some of which will be assigned reading.

Please arrange to view the film:

- *A Serious Man*

**RESERVES:** Please access through Canvas the following essays and chapters (bibliographic details in course bibliography):

- Adler, “Two Subjects, One Love” in *Engendering Judaism*, 133-139
- Alter, Robert. Selected excerpts from his new translations.
- *Ben Sirach*, excerpts from Goodspeed, Edgar J. *Apocrypha* (New York: Vintage Books), 1989.
- Duhan Kaplan, “Job and A Serious Man: Trials of a Generation”

- Kugel, "Wisdom and the Anthological Temper," in Stern, *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, 32-52
- McFague, "How Shall We Live? Christianity and Planetary Economics," *A New Climate for Theology*, 81-97
- Mitchell, "Introduction," *The Book of Job*, vii-xxxii
- Shapiro, *The Way of Solomon*, 95-102, 110-112.
- Radford Reuther, "Mary and Wisdom in Protestant Mystical Millennialism," *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 220-248

Please access through the course moodle the following blog posts at *sophiastreet.com*:

- Re-Discovering Cynicism
- I, Kohelet
- Ecclesiastes: What's It All About
- Listen to Your Mother
- Impossible Love
- Love, Sex, and Assault in the Song of Songs

### **EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA**

FOR ALL STUDENTS (Audit, Certificate credit, Basic credit, Advanced credit):

Attendance: Class attendance meeting VST policies.

Reading: Thoughtful preparation of the assigned readings before the class in which they are due.

Class participation: Includes careful listening and thoughtful responses to class lecture, discussion and reading; engagement in class activities, such as reflective writing or small group discussion.

FOR MOST STUDENTS (Certificate credit, Basic credit, Advanced credit):

Group presentation: Small groups of students (2-4, depending on course enrollment) will work together to prepare a 20-minute presentation on a short passage from that unit's Biblical text, exploring its content and relevance to a contemporary issue. The modality of the presentation can include speaking, drama, music, leading class activities and more. It should, however, include in some way the following elements:

(1) Choose an excerpt from the assigned Biblical reading, 10-20 verses long, depending on context. Explain briefly why your group chose it.

(2) Use one of the interpretive techniques we discussed in the course to explore the passage. Describe the technique, your application of it to the passage, and the new insight it revealed.

(3) Choose a topic of contemporary relevance that came up in your group discussion. Say how your passage offers insight, suggestions, reframes, or questions related to it.

In order that the in-class presentation not have to rigidly follow that outline, the group should prepare a written paper of 750-1000 words summarizing their work on the three elements listed above. The paper is due the day of the presentation. After review by the professor, and completion by students of any suggested revisions, the paper will be shared with the class via Canvas.

FOR CREDIT STUDENTS (Basic credit, Advanced credit):

Final paper: On a topic of the student's choice, approved by the professor. The final paper should be based on a Wisdom text studied in class, include appropriate outside reading, and demonstrate skill in both interpreting Biblical text and applying it to a contemporary issue. Examples will be discussed in class. Basic-level students complete a 3000-word final paper involving research (10 sources) beyond the course readings. Advanced-level students complete a 5000-word final paper involving significant research (15 sources) beyond the course readings.

### **SELECTED RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1999.

Bloom, Harold. *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (New York: Riverhead), 2004.

Brenner, Athalya, ed. *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press), 1995.

Brettler, Marc Zvi. *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007.

Chagall, Marc. *The Bible: Genesis, Exodus, The Song of Solomon* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books), 2007.

Clifford, Richard J. *The Wisdom Literature*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 2016.

Edinger, Edward. *Transformation of the God-Image: An Elucidation of Jung's Answer to Job* (Toronto: Inner City Books), 1992.

Fishbane, Michael. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs* (University of Nebraska Press and Jewish Publication Society), 2015.

Fox, Michael J. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 2004.

Garrett, Duane A. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, The New American Commentary Series* (Broadman & Holman), 1993.

Glatzer, Nahum N., ed. *The Dimensions of Job* (New York: Schocken), 1969.

Gordis, Robert. *Koheleth: The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes* (New York: Schocken), 1968.

Goodspeed, Edgar J. *Apocrypha* (New York: Vintage Books), 1989.

Koptak, Paul E. *Proverbs: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2003.

Lambert, W.G. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1960. [Reprinted by Eisenbrauns, 1996]

Mitchell, Stephen. *The Book of Job* (New York: HarperPerennial), 1987.

McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 2008.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2006.

Shapiro, Rami. *Ecclesiastes Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Illuminations), 2010.

Weeks, Stuart. *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature* (New York: T&T Clark/Continuum), 2010

Wright, Benjamin G., III. *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, The Letter of Aristeas, and the Septuagint* (London: Brill), 2008.