

RELS 405 - SEMINAR

WISDOM LITERATURE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST College of Charleston Fall 2002

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines that literature dealing with wisdom, the sage, the attainment of wisdom, and the problem of theodicy in ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts (e.g., Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, the Levant). Texts to be discussed include Egyptian didactic texts (e.g., Ptahhotep, Dispute between a Man and his Ba, Instructions of Amenemope, Papyrus Insinger), Mesopotamian literature (e.g., "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom," The Babylonian Theodicy, and Counsels of Wisdom), biblical books (e.g., Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job), and selections from the non-canonical corpus (Ecclesiasticus or ben Sirach). Some of the problems and issues to be addressed include: the social location of wisdom literature (sages in a royal context, popular wisdom); the origins of biblical wisdom (secular or religious?); the importance of cosmic order as a hermeneutical key for understanding biblical concepts of justice; does (or must) God act justly?; the relationship between biblical wisdom and Yahwism; and the influence of ancient Near Eastern traditions on the biblical writers (e.g., Egyptian wisdom and portions of Proverbs; Hellenism and Ecclesiastes).

REQUIRED TEXTS

- 1) *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. 3d edition. Michael Coogan, editor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Earlier editions of the study edition are also acceptable.
- 2) James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. Revised edition (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998). = OTW
- 3) Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. 3rd edition. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001. = TL
- 4) Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. Berkeley: University of California, 1973. Paper edition, 1975. = AEL

5) Archibald MacLeish, *J.B.: A Play in Verse*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986. (First published in 1956.)

6) Materials (articles, essays, etc.) on electronic reserve through library website.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

WEEKLY HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS (20%). Each week students will respond to a question(s) regarding the assigned readings, or a portion thereof, for that week (2-3 pages). These may involve, for example, a summary and/or critical analysis of a particular reading(s) or a comparison of two readings.

TWO SHORTER PAPERS (10% each). Over the course of the term, students will write two short papers (4-5 pages each) on topics selected by the professor. These may deal with various topics of scholarly debate, a comparison of biblical and/or ancient Near Eastern texts or seminal works in the field, or a cross-cultural comparison. Where necessary, materials for these will be made available on reserve in the library (e-reserve and hard copies).

PRESENTATION. Each student will give a brief presentation (10 minutes) on a particular reading(s) and/or scholarly position. Prior to the presentation, he or she will also provide the class with a one or two page summary outline of the major points and/or arguments of the reading(s), a critique of it/them, and questions for class discussion (to be initiated by the presenter). In addition, *all* students will prepare questions and comments on the presentation materials, copies of which must be turned in at the beginning of class.

RESEARCH PAPER (20%). As the term progresses, students should consider topics for a research paper. I will distribute a list of potential topics from which you may choose, although you may suggest other topics to me as well. A calendar schedule for proposals, bibliographies, preliminary summaries, first drafts, etc. is forthcoming.

FINAL EXAMINATION (20%). This exam will consist of a series of eight essay questions distributed prior to the date of the exam. I will then select four of these for response on the day of the exam. Questions may involve analysis of various ancient Near Eastern or biblical texts not dealt with in class, a comparison of scholarly views on a particular issue, or a critical response to a specific view (e.g., you may be given a quotation and asked to evaluate it pro or con). The questions will allow you to demonstrate your grasp of the issues explored during the term, drawing upon your vast knowledge(!) acquired from class lecture, discussions, and readings.

CLASS ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION (including presentation; 20%). Given the seminar nature of the course, it is imperative that you attend and actively participate in class discussion. If only a few participate, I will randomly call on individuals (often those who seem least interested or prepared). If you are consistently unable to respond and it is clear you've not done the readings, this will be noted by me in the determination of your final grade. Barring exceptional

circumstances, students should not miss class. Excessive or unexcused absences (more than two) may substantially affect your final grade for the course.

GRADING

Letter grades for quizzes and exams are determined in accordance with the following scale:

100-92	A	91-87	B+
86-81	B	80-76	C+
75-70	C	69-61	D
60-	F		

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS (subject to revision)

(Note: Readings, biblical and otherwise, should be done in advance of the class for which they are assigned. I will assume you have read the material carefully and critically.)

I. INTRODUCTION (Aug. 21)

Readings:

- James L. Crenshaw, "The Contemplative Life in the Ancient Near East" (ER #1)
- Roland E. Murphy, "Appendix" in TL, pp. 151-179.
- Crenshaw, "Egyptian and Mesopotamian Wisdom Literature," OTW, pp. 205-26

II. WISDOM TRADITIONS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST (excluding biblical)

A.. Wisdom in Ancient Egypt (Aug. 26 - Sept. 2)

Primary Texts:

- Satire of the Trades (AEL, pp. 184-92)
- Papyrus Lansing: A Schoolbook (ER #2)
- The Immortality of Writers (ER# 3)
- Instruction of Prince Hardjedef (AEL, pp. 58-59)
- Instruction Addressed to Kagemni (AEL, 59-61)
- Instruction of Ptahhotep (AEL, 61-80)
- Instruction Addressed to King Merikare (AEL, 97-109)
- Dispute Between a Man and his Ba (AEL, 163-69)
- Three Harpers' Songs (AEL, 193-97)
- Song from tomb of Neferhotep (ER# 4)
- Instruction of Amenemope (ER# 5)
- Instruction of Ankhsheshonq (ER# 6)
- Papyrus Insinger (ER# 7)

Secondary Readings (required):

- Ronald Williams, "Scribal Training in Ancient Egypt" (ER# 8)
- Williams, "The Sage in Egyptian Literature" and "The Functions of the Sage in the Egyptian Royal Court" (ER# 9)
- Williams, "Egyptian Literature (Wisdom)" (ER# 10)
- John D. Ray, "Egyptian Wisdom Literature" (ER# 11)
- Lichtheim, AEL, pp. 3-12 ("Introduction")
- Hornung, "The Concept of Maat" (ER # 12)
- Hornung, "Divine Action and Human Response" (ER # 13)
- Hornung, "The Use of the Word *ntr*" (ER# 14)
- Lichtheim, "Ankhsheshonqy's Principal Themes" (ER# 15)
- Lichtheim, "The Major Themes" (of Papyrus Insinger) (ER# 16)

B. Wisdom Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia (Sept. 4 - 11)

Primary Texts

- List of the Sages and Kings from the City of Uruk (handout)
- Etiological Myth of the Seven Sages (handout)
- Story of Adapa (ER# 17)
- Mesopotamian Proverbs (ER # 18)
- Counsels of Wisdom (ER# 19)
- Advice to a Prince (ER# 20)
- A Sufferer's Salvation (ER# 21)
- The Dialogue of Pessimism (ER# 22)
- Man and His God (ER# 23)
- Dialogue between a Man and his God (ER# 24)
- I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom (*Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*) (ER# 25)
- The Babylonian Theodicy (ER# 26)

Secondary Readings

- Ronald F. Sweet, "The Sage in Akkadian Literature: A Philological Study" (ER# 27) and "The Sage in Mesopotamian Palaces and Royal Courts" (ER # 28)
- Lambert, "The Development of Thought and Literature in Ancient Mesopotamia" (ER# 29)
- Lambert, "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature" (ER# 30)
- Oppenheim, "The Care and Feeding of the Gods" (ER# 31)
- Jean Bottero, "The Religious System" (ER# 32)
- Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Gods as Parents; The Rise of Personal Religion" (ER# 33)
- Bottero, "The *Dialogue of Pessimism* and Transcendence" (ER# 34)

III. WISDOM TRADITIONS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL (Sept. 16 - Oct. 28, Nov. 18)

A. Issues of Definition and Social Location (Sept. 16)

Secondary Readings:

Crenshaw, OTW, pp. 1-54

Murphy, TL, pp. 1-14

Whybray, "The Social World of the Wisdom Writers" (ER # 35)

Biblical texts: Deut. 1-4, 12, 17, 20, 26-29

B. Proverbs (Sept. 18 - 25)

Primary Text (order for class discussion):

Proverbs, chaps. 1-9 (Title, Introduction, and Instructions)

Chaps. 10:1–22:16 and 25–29 ("Solomonic" collections)

Chaps. 22:17-24:22 ("Sayings of the Wise")

Chaps. 30–31 (misc. sayings and praise of a good wife)

Secondary Readings:

Crenshaw, OTW, pp. 55-88

Murphy, TL, pp. 15-32

Gerhard Von Rad, "The Significance of Orders for Correct Social Behavior" (ER# 36)

Crenshaw, "The Sage in the Book of Proverbs" (ER# 37)

Stuart Weeks, "Proverbs and the Court" (ER# 38)

Carol Newson, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom" (ER# 39)

Michael Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9" (ER# 40)

C. Job (Sept. 30 - Oct. 7)

Primary Texts:

Book of Job (in the following order for class discussion)

Introduction (chaps. 1-2)

Dialogues w/ three Friends (3-31)

Elihu Speeches (32-37)

God from the Whirlwind (38-42)

Epilogue and Conclusion (42)

The Testament of Job (ER # 41)

Secondary Readings:

Crenshaw, OTW, pp. 89-115

Murphy, TL, pp. 33-48

Gerhard Von Rad, "Job" (ER# 42)

Tsevat, M. "The Meaning of the Book of Job" (ER# 43)

Crenshaw, "When Form and Content Clash: The Theology of Job 38:1 - 40:5" (ER# 44)

Robert Alter, "Truth and Poetry in the Book of Job" (ER# 45)

David Noel Freedman, "Is it Possible to Understand the Book of Job?"
(ER # 46)

D. Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) Oct. 9 - 21 (Fall Break on Oct. 14)

Primary Text:

Qohelet (all)

Secondary Readings:

Crenshaw, OTW, pp. 116-139

Murphy, TL, pp. 49-63

Fox, "On Reading Contradictions" (ER# 47)

Gerald T. Sheppard, "The Epilogue to Qohelet as Theological
Commentary" (ER# 48)

Addison Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx..." (ER# 49)

Otto Kaiser, "Qohelet" (ER# 50)

Stefan Fischer, "Qohelet and Heretic Harpers' Songs" (ER# 51)

E. Ecclesiasticus (ben Sirach) - Oct. 23

Primary Texts:

TBA

Secondary Readings:

Crenshaw, OTW, pp. 140-64

Murphy, TL, pp. 65-81

Crenshaw, "The Problem of Theodicy in Ben Sira" (ER# 52)

Crenshaw, "The Concept of God in Old Testament Wisdom" (ER# 53)

F. Lady Wisdom: Goddess and Feminist - Oct. 28

Secondary Readings:

Murphy, TL, pp. 133-149

Crenshaw, OTW, pp. 80-82

Lang, "Wisdom as a Goddess" (ER# 54)

Lang, "Lady Wisdom vrs. Lady Folly" (ER# 55)

Athalya Brenner, "Proverbs 1-9: An F Voice" (ER# 56)

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS -- Oct. 30 - Nov. 13

G. The Place of Wisdom in the Hebrew Canon: Wisdom vrs. Yahwism - Nov. 18

Secondary Readings:

Crenshaw, "Murphy's Axiom: Every Gnostic Saying Needs a Balancing Corrective" (ER# 57)

Murphy, TL, pp. 121-26, 225-26, 273-77

Crenshaw, OTW, 184-204

Clements, "Wisdom and Old Testament Theology" (ER# 58)

Stuart Weeks, "Was Early Wisdom Secular?" (ER# 59)

IV. The Interpretive Tradition - Nov. 20 and Dec. 2 (no class on Nov. 25-27)

JB: A Play in Verse

Kierkegaard, "The Example of Job" (ER# 60)

Buber, "A God Who Hides His Face" (ER# 61)

Robert Frost, "A Masque of Reason" (ER# 62)