

# BRIERCREST

## BLST 715 Old Testament Wisdom Literature Spring 2020

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Course Dates: June 1-5, 2020

3 Credit Hours

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to the interpretation of Old Testament wisdom literature. This course will focus on ancient Israelite wisdom as a life skill in church settings (Proverbs), how to minister to those suffering in inexplicable ways (Job), and how Ecclesiastes' theme of 'vanity' provides a way to engage with God's gifts of life and work.

**Note:** Students with credit for BLST 615 Where Can Wisdom be Found may not take this course for credit.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To acquire a broad knowledge of the content and theology of the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible, and appreciate the unique contribution of this extended sector to the biblical canon as a whole.
2. To understand the range of literary techniques used and theological questions raised by Hebrew writers in this portion of the Scriptures, and recognize the abiding value in attending to this facet of the biblical text.
3. To perform competent exegesis and interpretation of selected texts with sufficient literary discernment and theological depth.
4. To better appreciate the relationship between scholarly study of the Scriptures and application in ministry contexts, and recognize both the complexities and some of the various ways that books such as Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs have been received and interpreted over the centuries.
5. To take preliminary steps toward disseminating the results of our study to various audiences in the academic world and the church.

### COURSE TEXTS

*Interpreting Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, edited by David G. Firth and Lindsay Wilson (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017) [paperback]

Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010) [paperback].

We should also bring a copy of the Bible – ideally two different reliable translations – for each lecture.

Students are expected to refer Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <http://briercrest.ca/current/seminary/academics/important-documents/>.

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>; cf. <http://briercrest.ca/online/canvas>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

## OUTLINE of PROPOSED TOPICS and QUESTIONS

- The presentation of wisdom in biblical literature and the immediate attributes that can discerned.
- An overview of the scholarly study of wisdom literature in recent years, and current approaches that can be found in various commentaries.
- What is a *proverb*, what is a *wisdom text*, and do passages such as 1 Sam 16:7 or Luke 15:11-31 provide examples? What is the book of Proverbs, and how has it been studied over the centuries?
- The gateway to the book of Proverbs and the significance of chapters 1-9.
- Are there any plot movement in Proverbs 10-29 (or is it composed as a loose anthology), and how does the book conclude?
- Introducing the notion of theodicy, the difficulties in approaching suffering in wisdom literature, and the place of the book of Job in the Writings.
- Job's introduction, the arrival of catastrophe, and the outline the first two chapters of the book and immediate problems that occur.
- Date, authorship, and the place of poetic dialogue and the divine voice in the book of Job.
- Ecclesiastes and the collapse of the Israelite monarchy: what are probable dates for the composition of the book, and what perspective is reflected in the poetic musings?
- Song of Songs and the central interpretive positions over the centuries: allegorical representations or romantic verses perhaps used in ancient Near Eastern weddings?
- The position of books such as Psalms and Ruth in the wisdom tradition, issues such as retribution and divine absence, and the place of wisdom literature within a wider biblical theology and its enduring value for contemporary faith communities.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### *Pre-Course Assignment:*

1. Write a three-page single-spaced report on our course textbook *Interpreting Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, and a three-page single-spaced report on our other textbook (Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes*) due prior to the start of our course on Monday morning (**June 1, 2020**). The report should summarize the content of the volume and provide a summary of what the student has learned (10%). Please email to the professor ([kbodner@briercrest.ca](mailto:kbodner@briercrest.ca)) as a WORD attachment.

***Mid-Course Assignment:***

2. End of course reflection: on Friday (**June 5, 2020**) there will be an “end of course reflection” assignment, providing an opportunity to respond to six questions from our class discussions (**20%**).

***Post-Course Assignments:***

3. Creative Responses: *The Workshop* (**40%**). Over the course of our week together we will work through a series of interactive questions (for example, “What are some options for dating the book of Job, and who might have been the primary audience? How should the name of Solomon be interpreted at the outset of Ecclesiastes? What does *the fear of the LORD* mean in the context of the book of Proverbs and wisdom literature as a whole, and why does this phrase occur at the gateway of the book?”). The student will provide a written response of approximately 150-300 words for each question, and the entire workshop should be emailed to the professor as a WORD file not later than **July 31, 2020**.

4. Research and Reflection essay: (**30%**). This is a standard 2000-word paper, single-spaced in Chicago format to be emailed to the professor as a WORD file no later than **July 31, 2020**. The topic can relate to any of our discussion items, a particular book or issue in the wisdom tradition, or problems, pitfalls, and possibilities for the application of these texts in the contemporary journey of faith. Ideally, the topic should be chosen during the week or in subsequent correspondence between the student and the professor.

**SEMINARY CALENDAR**

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

***Attendance Policy***

Students are expected to attend 100% of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

***Course Schedules***

Classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

***Assignment Submission***

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week

after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

### ***Return of Graded Assignments***

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

### ***Academic Honesty***

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 24-25 in the [academic calendar](#) for more information.

### ***Academic Accommodations***

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Director of the Academic Resource Centre in person (L234 in the Library), by telephone (1-306-756-3230) or by email ([academicresourcecentre@briercrest.ca](mailto:academicresourcecentre@briercrest.ca)). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.).

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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