

BRIERCREST

BLST 715 Old Testament Wisdom Literature Fall 2023

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Course Dates: November 6-10, 2023
Course Delivery Method: Online Modular

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.

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 have a copy of the Bible on hand 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.

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.

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 (**November 6, 2023**). 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) as a WORD attachment.

Mid-Course Assignment:

2. End of course reflection: on Friday (**November 10, 2023**) 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 **January 5, 2024**.

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 **January 5, 2024**. 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

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent 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 (1) 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.

Online Courses

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. 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.

Semester-Based Courses

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

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

As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) without instructor authorization in the preparation and/or submission of their assignments violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately. Students are responsible to ensure they are using their sources with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#). In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email (arc@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).

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