NEJS 110b Syllabus Spring 2016

Wisdom in the Book of Qohelet

Instructor: Bronson Brown-deVost
Lown 311 - Office Hours: Thursday 3–5 and by appointment

Course Description

Israelite wisdom texts comprise a significant portion of the Hebrew Bible. The genre is perhaps most famous from the book of Proverbs, but that is far from its only exemplar. In this course we will examine a shorter example of Israelite wisdom literature: the book of Qohelet. This small work with its strangely named (or titled) author "Qohelet" and its ostensibly apathetic worldview will serve as an introduction to Israelite wisdom traditions. A close reading of the text will reveal some of the various debates and disagreements surrounding the book and its ideas, both in the ancient world and the modern.

Course Objectives

A careful reading of Qohelet will foster:

- a better understanding of the genre of wisdom texts
- some insight into the various types of wisdom traditions
- an appreciation for differing viewpoints and worldviews attested in wisdom lit
- an ability to recognize the ways wisdom texts allude to each other
- a greater facility for the grammar, syntax, and lexicon of Biblical Hebrew

Course Requirements

1. Class Participation (30%): Each student will be required to read Hebrew text in class and to contribute to class discussion.
2. Short Midterm Exam (20%): There will be a small take-home midterm exam with various questions about the grammar of a selected passage from Qohelet.
3. Final Exam (50%).
4. Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Required Texts

1. Adrian Schenker, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998.
2. Adrian Schenker et al., *General Introduction and Megilloth*, Biblia Hebraica Quinta 18, Ruth (Jan de Waard). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004.

Recommended Texts

1. Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, Anchor Bible Commentary Series, New York: Doubleday, 1997.
2. James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, Old Testament Library, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1987.
3. James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Third Edition, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

4. Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
5. Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, Continental Commentary Series, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.
6. Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, Interpreting Biblical Texts, Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.
7. Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, Word Biblical Commentary Series, Waco: Word, 1992.
8. Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature,* Third Edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
9. Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004.

Other Readings will be available online via Latte or on reserve at the library.

Policies

Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and if you wish to request a reasonable accommodation for this class, please see me immediately. Please keep in mind that it is not necessarily possible to provide accommodations retroactively.

Absences: Regular attendance will be necessary for successful progress through this course. Thus, students will be afforded only two absences for legitimate, but undocumented, reasons. In the event of an absence, the student is responsible for arranging a time during office hours to catch up on the missed class material. Excused absences may be granted at the discretion of the instructor, all reasonable

documented absences will be respected, though special arrangements will need to be made in the event of any extended leave from the course.

Passes: Each student will be afforded two in class passes. This means that the student may come to class but will not be required to participate, nor will that class be counted towards the class participation grade.

Classroom Restrictions: No computers or electronic devices shall be used in class and traditional note taking is strongly discouraged. Most of what we discuss in class will be readily available on the Latte website or in your course books; class notes would largely be superfluous. It is perfectly admissible to bring food and drink provided that no appreciable distraction is caused. Please wait until after class to consume larger meal items.

Academic Integrity: You will be expected to abide by the terms of academic integrity outlined in Section 4 of the Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities Handbook (available at http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sdc/rr/). This means that you are expected to cite the sources for all work that is not your own original contribution to scholarship. If you have questions about plagiarism or academic standards of originality, please see me. Violations of the University standards will be referred to the Office of Student Development and Conduct and could result in failure of the course.

Course Structure

The class units will be organized on the Latte website. I will update the unit dates as we work through the course so that we will be able to take as much time as necessary

to cover each one. Each unit consists of one or more primary texts and the relevant secondary readings. Students should be prepared to read each primary text at the start of the unit and should work through the secondary readings as quickly as possible in order to better engage in discussions related to the primary texts.