

Hebrew Bible Ecclesiastes

Professor	Daniel R. Driver, PhD	Course	Version 2.0
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1 Course Description

In this course Ecclesiastes will be studied in the context of the Writings and other wisdom literature, and in connection with the book's reception history. By the end of the course students should be able to: understand the basic shape of the Writings and, within that collection, books classified as wisdom literature; give examples of extra-biblical parallels to wisdom literature; situate Ecclesiastes relative to other Solomonic literature; characterize some ancient and modern commentaries on Ecclesiastes; articulate a few of the major interpretive options in reading Ecclesiastes; defend their own readings of the book in writing, with detailed textual support.

Prerequisites: RM 1000 or GTRS 6000; and BF 1001.

2 Learning Objectives

In this course Ecclesiastes will be studied in the context of other biblical literature, with some reference to extra-biblical sources, and in connection with the book's reception history. By the end of the course students should be able to: name biblical books classified with the Writings and wisdom literature; understand some different ways this literature has been classified; give examples of extra-biblical parallels to it; locate Ecclesiastes relative to other Solomonic literature; recognize quotes from Ecclesiastes by chapter; name major ancient and modern commentators on Ecclesiastes; report on specific commentators verbally; articulate major interpretive options in reading Ecclesiastes; defend their own preferred readings in writing, with detailed textual support.

3 Required Texts & Materials

The following texts are required. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase their own copies.

- [Christianson] Eric S. Christianson. *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries* (paperback). Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. ISBN 978-0470674918.
- [Fox] Michael V. Fox. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004. ISBN 978-0827607422.

Students may also wish to access a good Study Bible. I recommend either the NRSV (ed. Michael Coogan) or the NJPS (ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler), both published by Oxford University Press. Element of both versions, and many other useful resources, are available digitally through [Oxford Biblical Studies Online](#).

4 Supplementary Texts

The following reference works are worth owning and consulting. [[Making Sense](#)] in particular contains sound advice on core skills like reading religious texts, writing essays and reviews, revising essays, making oral presentations, and learning languages.

- [Barbour] Jennie Barbour. *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*. Oxford Theological Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0199657827.
- [Dell] Katharine Dell. *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2013. ISBN 978-1575062815.
- [Making Sense] Northey, Margot, Bradford A. Anderson, and Joel N. Lohr. *Making Sense in Religious Studies: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0199026838.
- [SBL2] Collins, Billie Jean, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1589839649. Designed to augment *Chicago Style* (the standard at AST), there is also a free [Student Supplement for SBL2](#).

5 Course Outline

We will adhere to the schedule in [Table 1](#) as closely as possible, though the professor reserves the right to adjust it to suit the needs of the class.

§. Primary Text	Secondary Reading	Date
1. Ecclesiastes 1	Christianson 87–155; Fox Intro, 3–11	11 Jan.
2. Ecclesiastes 2	Christianson Intro, 156–163; Fox 11–19	18 Jan.
3. Ecclesiastes 3	Christianson 164–179; Fox 19–26	25 Jan.
4. Ecclesiastes 4	Christianson 180–183; Fox 27–32	1 Feb.
5. Ecclesiastes 5	Christianson 183–185; Fox 33–38	8 Feb.
6. Ecclesiastes 6	Christianson 184–187; Fox 38–42	15 Feb.
~. No Class: Midterm Break		22 Feb.
7. Ecclesiastes 7	Christianson 188–201; Fox 43–53	1 Mar.
8. Ecclesiastes 8	Christianson 201–205; Fox 53–61	8 Mar.
9. Ecclesiastes 9	Christianson 206–215; Fox 61–67	15 Mar.
10. Ecclesiastes 10	Christianson 216–224; Fox 67–72	22 Mar.
11. Ecclesiastes 11	Christianson 225–246; Fox 72–76	29 Mar.
12. Ecclesiastes 12	Christianson 247–263; Fox 77–85	5 Apr.
📅 End of Term: Final marks are due for all courses		10 Apr.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

See the AST website for a list of other [important dates](#).

6 Evaluation

The grade structure for HB 3116(Int) has the following elements.

1. I will set **discussion prompts** each week. They are intended to help you engage with the assigned reading material, the lectures, and your classmates. Prompt responses may vary in length. In fact there is no required word count, though if it helps you may think of about 300 words as a rule of thumb. Questions will go up by the start of each class day (Fridays, 10 AM Atlantic Time). Answer the week's question before the following Wednesday. Then, before the next class, take some time to read the responses of your classmates. You are invited to post another 50 words or so as you interact with them. No post is required in the week of your creative presentation.
2. Students are to make a **creative presentation** related to one chapter of Ecclesiastes, due the week after the chapter is assigned. (A presentation on Ecclesiastes 1, for example, would be due at the start of Week 2.) Presentations may be audio or video, and they may take virtually any form you wish – a podcast, a homily, an interview, a dramatic piece, an explication of fine art (cf. [Christianson](#)), a show of original artwork, or some other creative thing you envision. It should last 15 to 20 minutes, and should feel like it deserves 20% of the final grade. The only strict requirement is that the work be sharable by URL. (Try SoundCloud or YouTube.) Sign up for a week early on and, when the time comes, post your title and link to the presentation forum.
3. A major **exegetical paper** will give students an opportunity to work directly and closely with the biblical text. The first task is to identify an appropriate text. Select a

suitably short passage from Ecclesiastes. Focus on just a few verses that interest you: a full chapter is almost certainly too much material to handle well in a paper of this length. Then, conduct an analysis and explication of your passage. Advance a thesis that relates to the text itself, and your explication of it. If you are unsure how to craft a thesis, see me and [[Making Sense](#), Chs 3, 5, 8, 11] for further guidance. Feel free to build on an idea first explored in one of your discussion prompts. The paper is due one week before the last class (on 29 March 2019). It should be 4,000 words long, plus or minus 10%. The total count includes footnotes but not the final bibliography, which should contain at least a dozen scholarly sources.

The breakdown for the semester’s total work is shown in [Table 2](#).

Discussion Prompts	40%
Creative Presentation	20%
Exegetical Paper	40%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST’s [Academic Calendar](#) provides guidelines and detailed criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks (summarized in [Table 3](#)). Note that, at AST, a grade of “C” is deemed “Unsatisfactory.”

A+	94–100	Exceptional
A	87–93	Outstanding
A–	80–86	Excellent
B+	77–79	Good
B	73–76	Acceptable
B–	70–72	Marginally Acceptable
C	60–69	Unsatisfactory
F	0–59	Failure
FP	0	Failure due to Plagiarism

Table 3: Outline of Grades at AST

7 Other Course Policy

Late work will not be accepted, except in genuinely extenuating circumstances. Students must submit something before the deadline if they wish to receive credit. Unless I state otherwise, written assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM on the date indicated.

Essay submissions must be typewritten, double-spaced, and formatted as PDFs. They should be free from error. In this course they should follow SBL Style (see [[SBL2](#)] in [section 4](#), above). As a reminder, AST also upholds an Inclusive Language Policy.

Plagiarism, if **detected**, will result in failure of the course.

Students should request permission to record a class or lecture. If permission is granted, or if recordings are provided (as in the case of an online course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

If you have abilities or disabilities that require modifications to the assessment process or other aspects of this course, please advise the course instructor as soon as possible.

Finally, I encourage the conscientious use of laptops, tablets, and other technology in my classes. In classroom settings, realize that, as **cognitive psychologists have demonstrated**,

“laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers.” Do your part to foster an environment of open dialogue by honouring the presence of your classmates. In online and hybrid settings, consider both the physical environment in which you choose to work and the virtual environment that you help create through your participation in various forums. Let your engagement in this course be marked by rigour and charity alike.

8 Bibliography

Articles and book chapters from the vast literature on Ecclesiastes in reception, and in the context of the Writings and wisdom literature (so-called), may be recommended and placed on the course website as the semester progresses. Students are encouraged to pursue secondary literature on their own as well, with an awareness that a good, focussed bibliography is an essential component of the exegetical paper. For a place to start your research, refer to the detailed bibliographies in the back of [[Christianson](#)] and [[Dell](#)]. You might also see what you can find through the following databases:

- [Oxford Bibliographies Online: Biblical Studies](#)
- [Old Testament Abstracts](#)
- [ATLA Religion Database \(Full Text\)](#)
- [EBR: Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception Online](#) – Note: after logging in through OpenAthens, search “Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception Online” in the top right-hand corner search bar for access to the database.