

Hebrew Bible Ecclesiastes

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1 Course Description

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; have a critical appreciation of the idea of wisdom literature; characterize some ancient and modern commentaries on Ecclesiastes; develop their own readings, supporting them with detailed exegesis.

Prerequisites: BF 1001; RM 1000 or GTRS 6000.

2 Required Texts & Materials

The following texts are required. Students are encouraged to obtain their own hard copies.

- [Qohelet] Debra Band and Menachem Fisch. *Qohelet: Searching for a Life Worth Living*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023. AST Library copy on reserve.
- [TBD] Select an additional commentary on Ecclesiastes. You may find one in the library stacks (try BS 1473–1475), in a commentary kept in the reference section, or indeed somewhere else. See [section 7](#). Nominate your selection at the start of the second class. Be prepared to change commentaries if necessary.

Students may also want access to a good Study Bible. I recommend the OUP editions of either the NRSV (ed. Michael Coogan) or NJPS (ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler).

3 Supplementary Texts

Supplementary readings will be recommended throughout the course. Excerpts from this literature may be placed on reserve or made available electronically. The titles below, selected from AST's library holdings, are notable in relation to the aims of this course.

- [Barbour] Barbour [Grillo], Jennie. *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. AST Library reserve: BS 1475.52 B37 2012.
- [Christianson] Christianson, Eric S. *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012. [AST eBook online](#).
- [Dell 2020] Dell, Katharine J. *The Solomonic Corpus of "Wisdom" and Its Influence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. [AST eBook online](#).
- [Dell 2023] Dell, Katharine J. *The Lord by Wisdom Founded the Earth: Creation and Covenant in Old Testament Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023. [AST eBook online](#).
- [Fox] Fox, Michael V. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004. AST Library reserve: BS 1473 F69 2004.
- [Krüger] Krüger, Thomas. *Qoheleth: A Commentary*. Translated by O. C. Dean Jr. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. AST Library reserve: BS 1475.53 K78 2004.
- [Short] Short, Robert L. *A Time to Be Born – A Time to Die*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. AST Library reserve: BS 1475.2 S56 1973; [Internet Archive](#).
- [Stone] Stone, Timothy J. *The Compilational History of the Megilloth: Canon, Contoured Intertextuality and Meaning in the Writings*. FAT 2.59. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. [AST eBook online](#).

Also, these two general works are worth consulting and even owning.

- [RLGS] 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. AST Library: Reference BL 41 N67 2019.

[SBL2] Collins, Billie Jean, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. Designed to augment *Chicago Style* (the standard at AST), there is also a free *Student Supplement for SBL2*. AST Library: Reference PN 147 S26 2014.

4 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	Questions & Themes	Date
1. Ecclesiastes 1	What is <i>hevel</i> ?	15 July
2. Ecclesiastes 1–12	Five questions of your own	16 July
3. Ecclesiastes 2	Who is King Qohelet?	17 July
4. Ecclesiastes 3–4	What time do you call this?	18 July
5. Ecclesiastes 5–6	Can one find a perfect good?	19 July
~. No Class: Midterm Break		20–21 July
6. Ecclesiastes 7–8	Is that what they say?	22 July
7. Ecclesiastes 9–10	What are the limits of knowledge?	23 July
8. Ecclesiastes 11	How sweet is the light!	24 July
9. Ecclesiastes 12	How does wisdom shape the book?	25 July
10. Ecclesiastes 1–12	The sum of the matter	26 July
☞ End of Term: Summer Administration hours begin		29 July

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

See the AST website for a list of other *important dates*.

5 Evaluation

The grade structure for HB 3116 has the following elements.

1. **Notes and quotes** will be solicited from students early in each class. These are to be drawn from the primary reading in [[Qohelet](#)] and another commentary of your choice ([[TBD](#)]). What do you note about the assigned material? What images, words, phrases, verses, or motifs stand out to you from text and translation, and from the visual and verbal commentary of Band and Fisch? What does your chosen commentator add? Make notes as you read. Be prepared to share some highlights with the class. Finally, be sure to address any particular prompts that the professor may set as homework for the day. Regular participation is expected and required.
2. A **short paper** will give students an opportunity to work out an answer to a key question related to the interpretation of Ecclesiastes. The paper should be 1,500 words long, plus or minus 10%. Students may select from one of the following questions:
 - (a) How does the persona of King Qohelet emerge in Eccl 1–3?
 - (b) How should the term *hevel* be translated in the book of Ecclesiastes?
 - (c) In what sense is Ecclesiastes a book of wisdom within the HB/OT?
 - (d) In what sense is Ecclesiastes rightly understood as a book of joy?

Alternatively, students may propose a different question, subject to approval by the professor. Final drafts of these papers are due at the start of class on Friday, 19 July, where they will be read aloud to a small group of peers. Students *must* bring complete drafts with them to this workshop. Failure to do so will result in a loss of 50% on the assignment grade. Revised final submissions are to be handed to the professor in hard copy, stapled on top of the workshop draft, at the start of class on Monday, 22 July.

- Students are to produce some form of **visual exegesis** related to a verse, short passage, or (at most) one chapter of Ecclesiastes. Band provides a superb example; others may be seen in [Christianson] and [Short]. These creative responses to the text will be presented to the class on the last two days of the courses (25–26 July). Students will retain possession of their own artwork. For evaluation, they will submit a 1,000 word essay explaining their art’s relation to the text of Ecclesiastes. For a model, look again to Band. The explanatory essays are due at the start of class on Friday, 26 July.

The breakdown for the semester’s total work is shown in Table 2.

Notes & Quotes	30%
Short Essay	30%
Visual Exegesis	40%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST’s Academic Calendar provides guidelines and criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks. Note that graduate and undergraduate programs are assessed on a different scales at AST (see Table 3). For graduate students a C grade is deemed “Unsatisfactory,” whereas for undergraduates a C can be satisfactory in different degrees and a D is assigned for “Unsatisfactory” performance.

GRADUATE COURSES				UNDERGRADUATE COURSES		
	Percent	Descriptor	Points	Percent	Descriptor	Points
A+	90–100	Exceptional	4.30	90–100	Exceptional	4.30
A	85–89	Outstanding	4.00	85–89	Outstanding	4.00
A–	80–84	Excellent	3.70	80–84	Excellent	3.70
B+	77–79	Very Good	3.30	77–79	Very Good	3.30
B	73–76	Good	3.00	73–76	Good	3.00
B–	70–72	Marginal	2.70	70–72	Fair	2.70
C+	60–69	Unsatisfactory	2.00	67–69	Satisfactory	2.30
C				63–66	Less Satisfactory	2.00
C–				60–62	Marginal	1.70
D	0–59	Failure	0.00	50–59	Unsatisfactory	1.00
F				0–49	Failure	0.00

Table 3: Summary Definitions of Grades at AST

6 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, assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM (Atlantic) on the date indicated.

Essay submissions must be typewritten and double-spaced. They should be free from error. In this course they should follow SBL Style (see [SBL2] in [section 3](#), above). As a reminder, AST upholds an Inclusive Language Policy. Please use gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Our traditions have different norms for speech about God; you are of course free to follow and explore those traditions when referring to God.

Plagiarism is the **failure to attribute** (by means of footnotes when writing or aloud when speaking) any ideas, phrases, sentences, materials, syntheses, et cetera, that another author has composed and that you have borrowed for your own work. Plagiarism is unethical. Academic penalties for plagiarism at AST are serious, and may include failure of the course or even suspension of further studies. Unintentional plagiarism is considered plagiarism. AST's Plagiarism Policy is found under that heading in the Academic Calendar.

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 or hybrid course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

If you have needs that require modifications to any aspect of this course, please consult with the instructor as soon as possible. Any documentation regarding disabilities that you wish to divulge to AST should be provided to the Registrar's Office, where it will be kept in a confidential file.

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 for 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.

7 Bibliography

Some traditional commentaries on Ecclesiastes available in English:

- [1] Bonaventure. *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Edited and translated by Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., and Campion Murray, O.F.M. Works of Saint Bonaventure 7. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2005.
- [2] Chrysostom, John. *Commentaries on the Sages, Vol 2: Commentary on Proverbs, Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Translated by Robert C. Hill. Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2006.
- [3] Gregory of Nyssa. *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*. Translated by Richard McCambly. Edited by John Litteral. Ancient Bible Commentaries in English. Kentucky: Litteral's Christian Library Publications, 2014.
- [4] Jerome. *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Edited by Richard J. Goodrich and David Miller. Ancient Christian Writers 66. New York: Newman, 2012.
- [5] Luther, Martin. "Notes on Ecclesiastes." Translated by Jaroslav Pelikan. Pages 1-187 in vol. 15 of *Luther's Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1955.
- [6] Rashi. *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. In *The Metsudah Five Megillot*. Translated by Avrohom Davis and Yaakov Y.H. Pupko. Lakewood, NJ: Gross Bros., 2001. Accessed from sefaria.org.

Some more recent commentaries on Ecclesiastes available in English:

- [7] Bartholomew, Craig G. *Ecclesiastes*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.
- [8] Barton, George A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908.
- [9] Bennet, Stephen J. *Ecclesiastes / Lamentations: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. New Beacon Bible Commentaries. Kansas City: Beacon, 2010.
- [10] Brown, William P. *Ecclesiastes*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.
- [11] Crenshaw, James L. *Ecclesiastes*. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987.
- [12] Davis, Ellen F. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.
- [13] Delitzsch, Franz. *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*. Translated by M. G. Easton. Clark's Foreign Theological Library, 4th series, 54. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1877.
- [14] Eichhorn, David Max. *Musings of the Old Professor: The Meaning of Koheles*. New York: Jonathan David, 1963.
- [15] Enns, Peter. *Ecclesiastes*. Two Horizons Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- [16] Fox, Michael V. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.
- [17] Fredericks, Daniel C., and Daniel C. Estes. "Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs." Pages 17–263 in *Apollo's Old Testament Commentary* 16. Edited by David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010.
- [18] Ginsburg, Christian D. *The Song of Songs and Koheleth*. Library of Biblical Studies. New York: KTAV, 1970 [repr. of 1861 original].
- [19] Gordis, Robert. *Koheleth—The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes*. 3d ed. New York: Schocken, 1968.
- [20] Krüger, Thomas. *Qoheleth: A Commentary*. Translated by O. C. Dean, Jr. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.
- [21] Lohfink, Norbert. *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*. Translated by Sean McEvinue. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.
- [22] Longman, Tremper V., III. *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- [23] Murphy, Roland E. *Ecclesiastes*. World Biblical Commentary 23A. Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1992.
- [24] Ogden, Graham S. *Qoheleth*. Sheffield: JSOT, 1987.
- [25] Schoors, Antoon. *Ecclesiastes*. Historical Commentary on the Old Testament. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2013.

- [26] Seow, Choon-Leong. *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 18C. New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- [27] Towner, Sibley W. "The Book of Ecclesiastes." In *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Vol. 5. Edited by Leander E. Keck and Richard J. Clifford, 265–360. Nashville: Abingdon, 1997.
- [28] Weeks, Stuart. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. International Critical Commentary. 2 vols. London: T&T Clark, 2020–2022.

Articles and book chapters from the vast literature on Ecclesiastes may be recommended as the semester progresses. Students are encouraged to pursue secondary literature on their own as well. To start your research, refer to the bibliographies in the books listed in [section 3](#), above, search the library catalogue, and consult relevant databases such as:

- [Oxford Bibliographies Online: Biblical Studies](#) – s.v. "Ecclesiastes/Qohelet," by Timothy J. Sandoval and Marcus Hayes;
- [Old Testament Abstracts](#);
- [ATLA Religion Database \(Full Text\)](#);
- [EBR: Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception Online](#) – s.v. "Ecclesiastes, Book of," by various authors (and try other lemmas).