



Grace Communion Seminary

BT503 – The Writings

Short Syllabus

[Not for Publication]

Instructor: Rev. John McKenna, Ph.D.

Course Description:

We will study the ‘Third Division’ of the Canon the Hebrew Bible is for Judaism’s ‘*Massoretic Tradition*’ (MT). *The Writings* or *The Ketubim* of the Holy Scriptures, according to Judaism and Christianity, belong to the inspiration of the Revelation of God along with Moses’ Five Books and the books of the Prophets of Israel. The whole of this Canon is considered to be the Word of God in the history of Israel and the Creation. We will seek to understand *The Writings* in their wholeness and in their parts as inspired by the Revelation of the Word of God as the Torah, Prophets, and Writings of the Hebrew Canon. In this way, we hope to grasp the ‘Doctrine of Inspiration’ appropriate for the whole of the Biblical World and taught by both Israel and the Church in the World.

Course Goals:

To understand the form and content of *The Writings* as they participate in the ‘Canonical Truth’ of the Witness the People of God are in the Old Testament read as the Holy Scriptures interpreted in the Light the Revelation of God with Moses, the Prophets, and the Sages of Israel among the Nations in God’s Creation. We will seek to understand the ontology inherent in the relationship between God and His Inspiration of the Scriptures. Thus, the various books of ‘Third Division’ of Israel’s Canon, read and interpreted as particular books of Israel’s history beyond her Exile among the Nations, will be read in our course as parts of a whole whose theology may not be divorced from the Witness of Moses and the Prophets to the Revelation. The goal then is to provide a theology of *The Writings*.

This means we will take seriously the ‘*Doctrine of Inspiration*’ in our understanding of the Community Faith even in our times. We intend that the form and content of the diverse nature of the books belong to theological construct we hope to develop with our course is intended as Witness to the Revelation of God on the same level as with Moses and the Prophets. We would study ‘*The Writings*’ as

the Canon of Faith of Truth, even in its various forms, as bearing the Voice of the Great I-AM the Lord God is with Israel as Prophecy among the Nations in the Creation of God.

Our goal must therefore be to grasp, so far as we may and as best we can, the Theological significance of the History we read recorded as *'The Writings'*, the 'Third Division' of the 'Canon of Truth' in the Massoretic Tradition. The Lord God He is for His People in His Creation belongs to a Continuum that serves the Inspiration of His Self-Witness to His Self-Revealing, Self-Naming, Self-Defining Revelation as the One He is with us, even in our times.

Required Reading:

The Writings include the books of The Psalms, Job, Proverbs, The Five Scrolls or *Megilloth* (The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, 1 & 2 Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah. Any translation of these books into English may be read for our course.

LaSor, William S., David A. Hubbard, Frederic W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996. ISBN: 978-0802837882, pages 425-694. Approximate price at Amazon: \$32.

McKenna, John E. *The Great AMEN of the Great I-AM*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, Wipf & Stock, 2008. ISBN: 978-1597528474. Chapters 5-9. Approximate price \$45; a lower price is usually available at the publisher's site, wipfandstock.com.

Please obtain these books before the class begins. To find the lowest prices on these books, you may find it helpful to use www.bookfinder.com.

Recommended Reading:

Bartholomew, C.G. & R.P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, IVP Academic, 1988.

Bright, John, *The History of Israel*, Westminster John Knox, 2000, 4th edition

Childs, Brevard S., *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993. 978-0800626754. (He struggles to overcome the split between Creation and Covenant in his efforts to explicate *The Writings*.)

Eissfeldt, O., *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, paperback, 1978.

Henshaw, T., *The Writings*, Rushkin House, 1963.

Hubbard, D.A., *The Wisdom of the Old Testament*, Messiah College, Occasional Paper, No. 3, 1982.

Knierem, R., *The Task of Doing Old Testament Theology*. W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, ISBN: 0-8928-0715-1, pages 400-494.

J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Westminster Press, 1976, pp. 364-425.

Commentaries: (See also bibliographies included with the Study Units.)

Goldingay, J.E., *Daniel* (WBC, 1989)

Hubbard, D.A., *Proverbs* (WBC, 1989)

———, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (WBC, 1991)

Kraus, H.J., *The Theology of the Psalms* (Fortress Press, 1989)

MacKenzie, S.L., *1 & 2 Chronicles* (Abingdon, 2004)

Williamson, H.G.M., *Ezra-Nehemiah* (WBC, 1989)

Further bibliographies will be provided with the Study Units!

Student Learning Outcomes for GCS

Grace Communion Seminary has five learning outcomes for its students (see the document on our website titled Goals and Objectives). This course serves largely to support SLO 1: Explain the revelation of the Bible in its historical and cultural setting as it relates to God, Jesus Christ, and his salvation with biblical faith today.

Student Learning Outcomes for BT503

1. Students will describe the form and content of the various books of *The Writings*. This will involve reading the biblical books, and will be verified by written outlines of the books.
2. Analyze the relationship of the Third Division of the Hebrew Bible to the Prophets and the Five Books of Moses of the Hebrew canon. (We hope the student will become a pioneer in developing an integrated “Theology of *The Writings*.”) Two of the lectures are focused on this topic, and the student’s understanding will be verified by the forum discussions and reflected in the final papers.

3. Describe the contribution the Writings make to a doctrine of the revelation of the word of God in the history of the world, as part of a doctrine of inspiration. This is part of the lectures, and is also verified in the forum discussions.
4. Analyze the form and content of the individual books of Israel's worship in the biblical covenanted relationship (BCR) as the messianic hope in the messianic King of the kingdom of God in the world. Not only will we look at the form and content of each book, we will look at it in its canonical context, as part of the covenanted relationship of God with his people. This is the focus of one textbook and will be verified by forum discussions, and the final paper should take this larger context into account.
5. Identify the role of the office of the King-Priest, Prophet-Sage, of the Person of the I-AM the Lord God is among the nations of the Ancient Near East. This looks at God's role with his people, and will be a significant part of several lectures and verified in the respective forum discussions.
6. Describe the nature of the eschatological King David and the apocalypse of his reign over his kingdom among the nations of the world. The covenant relationship of God and his people cannot be understood without seeing where it leads. This will be addressed in the lectures and forums.
7. To describe the history of Israel as prophecy among the nations in God's creation, the self-witness of the Lord God to the revelation the I-AM HE IS for his people even in our times today. God was using the Israelite nations to reveal himself to the world, and we can still learn from this history, as will be discussed in lectures and forums.

Course Requirements

- 1) Each week, responses to the 10 units of study of our course format will be required. We hope to obtain from our students a forum of conversation at the course site.
- 2) An analytical outline (about 1 page single-spaced) of the assigned books of the Bible is to be prepared, mainly for the files of the student. These outlines are important to the development of the student's ministries in the Church.
- 3) A 5-10 page paper on a subject or passage of the student's choice will be due as a final for our course. This essay or exegetical study should conform to the standards of scholarly arguments.
- 4) An outline of a preaching or teaching for your ministry, based on the student's course paper, will also be required.

There will be no final exam.

Grades: The assignments will constitute the course grade according to the following percentages:

- 1) Study Unit Weekly Reports ---35%
- 2) Essay or Exegetical Study Paper ---35%
- 3) Preaching or Teaching Outline---10%
- 4) Analytical Outlines ---10%
- 5) Number of Pages read during our course --- 10%

Assignment	Hours *	Percentage of grade
Reading the syllabus and lectures, 90 pages, at 10 pages per hour	9	
Weekly responses to the lectures and readings	20	35
Forum discussions	10	10
Reading the textbooks, at 20 pages per hour		
The Writings in the Bible, 513 pages ¹	25.5	
LaSor: 270 pages	13.5	
McKenna: 188 pages, at 15 pages per hour	12.5	
Writing analytical outlines, 7 papers	21	10
Writing the research paper	25	35
Writing the teaching or preaching outline	5	10
Total – about 12 hours each week	141.5	100

Schedule for Study Units: *The Writings*

The ‘Study Units’ are to fit into the weekly semester schedule. The ‘Study Guides’ are intended to focus on the main points of learning at stake from week to week. We hope they will also facilitate weekly discussions among students at the course site forums.

We will study the ten units of course on *The Writings*, the Third Division of the Canon according to the Massoretic Tradition of Judaism and Protestantism over a schedule of ten weeks.

¹ Page count comes from the Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* (1988).

“The Psalms, the wisdom literature, the Chronicler’s history, the songs of love and lamentation, the visions of comfort---these all give dynamic expression to the depths of the faith which God expects of his people. The impact of law, prophecy, and history on succeeding generations would have been less powerful if God had not also inspired and preserved the emotions, the instructions, even the frustrations represented in the Writings.”

---W.S. LaSor, D.A. Hubbard, F.W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, Eerdmans, 1996, p. 427

“Modern critical scholarship has attributed little significance to the Hebrew canon’s division of a final section called the Writings of Hagiographa (ketubim).”

---B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Fortress Press, 1979) p. 501

‘We are at a loss to explain the formation of the Ketubim within the Canon.’

--- R. Murphy, ‘The Image of God in the Writings’ in *Studies in Old Testament Theology*, eds. R. Hubbard, et al, p. 190

Unit One—*The Canon*: The ontology of the inspiration of the revelation of the Great I-AM the Lord God is with Israel among the nations in God’s creation.

Reading assignments

Bible: Psalms 1–72

LaSor: 425-446

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

Unit Two—*The Psalms*: We will study, especially, Psalm 50 as a Covenant Renewal Psalm providing the fundamental ‘ontology’ of the Five Books of David, in analogy with the Five Books of Moses, of Israel’s Worship among the Nations in God’s Creation.

Reading assignments

Bible: Psalms 73-150

LaSor: 471–496

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

One-page outline of the Psalms

Unit Three—*Job*: We will study, especially, Job 28 & 38-40:1-5 as the ‘ontology’ of the Lord God with the suffering of His Righteous Servant and the final restoration of His Fortunes in the Messianic Ending of the Drama.

Reading assignments

Bible: Job

LaSor: 447–470

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

One-page outline of Job

Unit Four—*Proverbs*: We will study, especially, Proverbs 8:22-31 as the ‘ontology’ of the Wisdom of the Lord as the Creator of the Creation in Covenanted Relationship for His People in His Creation.

Reading assignments

Bible: Proverbs

Hubbard: Wisdom Movement (article on website)

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

One-page outline of Proverbs

Unit Five—*The Five Megilloth*: We will study the ‘ontology’ of the Five Scrolls for the History of Israel’s Worship among the Nations in God’s Creation. 1) The Song 2) Ruth, 3) Lamentations.

Reading assignments

Bible: Song of Songs, Ruth and Lamentations

LaSor: 510–531

Laurin: Song of Songs (article on website)

Bush: Ruth (article on website)

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

One-page outline of the Five Scrolls

Unit Six—*The Five Megilloth, part 2*: 4) Ecclesiastes, 5) Esther

Reading assignments

Bible: Ecclesiastes and Esther

LaSor: 497–509, 532–541

McKenna: 191–220

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

Unit Seven—*Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1 & 2 Chronicles*: We will study, especially, Daniel 9: 1-27 as the ‘ontology’ of the Fulfillment of the Covenanted Relationship between the Lord God and His People among the Nations in His Creation, an Apocalypse of Time and Times with the Great I-AM He is.

Ezra-Nehemiah: We will study, especially, Nehemiah 9:1-38 as the ‘ontology’ of the Covenant Renewal in the Return of the People of God from their Babylonian Exile and for the Rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

1 & 2 Chronicles: From Adam to the Messianic David of the Kingdom of God for the Latter Days of Israel’s history in the World, we will study the ‘ontology of the Revelation of the Great I-AM the Lord God is for Israel’s History among the

Nations in God’s Creation. Reading
assignments

Bible: Daniel

LaSor: 566–582

McKenna: 221–246

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

One-page outline of Daniel

Unit Eight— Recapitulations, part 1: The Ontology of the Revelation of the Lord God as the Great I-AM with His Inspiration of the Writings, the Third Division of the Canon of Israel’s Faith in the World.

Reading assignments Bible:

Ezra and Nehemiah

LaSor: 550–565

McKenna: 248–270

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

One-page outline of Ezra-Nehemiah

Unit Nine— Recapitulations, part 2: Messianic Hope in the Old Testament

Reading assignments

Bible: 1 & 2 Chronicles

LaSor: 542–549

McKenna: 272–319

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

One-page outline of 1 & 2 Chronicles

Unit Ten—Recapitulations, part 3: Messianic Hope and the New Testament

Reading assignments

McKenna: 320–378

Writing assignment

Contribute to forum discussion

Final papers due in two weeks

5-10 page essay or exegetical study

Preaching or teaching outline on the same topic

Towards the end of his distinguished career at Yale University, Brevard Childs became very aware, as Professor of Biblical Studies, of the ‘dead ends’ into which much of our historical, critical, and analytical methods had fallen. Reading and interpreting the Bible, according to much modern critical scholarship, had produced a chasm between the Church and the Academy over which we have to get in our times. We have posited and experienced abysmal splits between Salvation History and Scientific History today. An Institutional Word of God and a Prophetic Word of God compete for our attentions now. Childs has, therefore, sought, unsuccessfully I believe, to lead both scholars of the Academy and the preachers with the Church out of these deadly ‘dead ends’. The quotes of La Sor, Hubbard, Bush, with that from Childs and Murphy indicate the challenge our course seeks to face in our times. We will seek to understand the real significance of the ‘Third Division’ of the Canon of Israel among the Nations in the History of the World in a real Continuum with Moses and the Prophets of Israel, the First Two Divisions of the Canon. How is it that *The Writings* do more than represent the God of the Bible to us, but have been made to participate in the actuality of the Revelation of the Word of God with us in these times?

Our study of *The Writings* will seek, then, to discover and understand the full significance of the ‘Third Division’ of the Canon of the Scriptures for Biblical Theology and for the Dogma of the Word of God to which the Canon of Truth is intended to ‘Witness’. In the past, theology has tried to grasp of the nature of the King, Priest, and Prophet the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is as the Messianic fulfillment of the Providence, Presence, and Prophecy of the Word of God within the fragmentation and alienation of the common sense induced and deduced from our analyses of the texts and their preservation in the history of the World. Much of this analysis suffers from an *a priori* assumption made within the Newtonian World associated with the so-called Age of Enlightenment, where little if any serious attention has been given to the effect of our modern scientific culture’s developments with Einstein’s Universe of Light and the Quantum World’s

relationship to the gravity of the World. I believe the lack of integration implicit in modern methods in such analysis lies behind our inability to explain the significance of the books of *'The Writings'* as they participate in the wholeness, with Moses and the Prophets, of the Revelation of God in the history of the World. We confess that he is the King of the Universe and the King of Israel, but with a faith that has been torn away from the actuality of His Word, His Being, His Interaction with us in our times. The assumption in our course is that, as the Great I-AM the LORD GOD IS with Moses and the Prophets, He also is who He is with *'The Writings'*, the Third Division of the Canon of the Old Testament Scriptures.