OT 2608 Wisdom/Writings
Dr. Barbara Green, O.P., instructor (DSPT)
Fall 2015; 3 units
Mondays, Thursdays: 11:10-12:30, DSPT 2

Central Course Question: Why are ancient and classic texts (considered revealed and inspired by Christians and Jews) useful for our producing meaning with them, and how does that process work? Alternative phrasing: Why do we use old texts when it might seem we would be better off with newer ones to guide us? How will we find helpful wisdom in these classic materials that may seem far removed from our lives?

Course Outcomes: We will progress on this central question by accomplishing the following and demonstrating these achievements in class and in assignments:

• Demonstrate a basic and adequate familiarity with portions of the wisdom and writings material of the OT (we will do 11 books) by competently completing three short (3 pages each) written assignments as prescribed below;

• ...and by participating helpfully (audibly and on-point) during class sessions;

• Demonstrating an adequate grasp of the (likely) historical and sociological issues involved with the particular book and its presumed setting and context;

• Discovering, exploring, naming, utilizing effectively a set of hermeneutical (interpretive) moves—our tools—for our common work with each book and for the three written assignments in particular;

• Discerning each our most urgent or relevant existential setting for the wisdom/Wisdom meaning/meaning quest by completing the final assignment of the course on the Book of Job;

• Becoming appreciative of the difference between “messaging” and acquiring insight as a result of our interpretation;

• Demonstrating a grasp of what sort of scholarly help is available from commentary, from monograph, and from current articles (perhaps other kinds of sources as well) by effective use of them in your assignments.

Course Requirements:

• The default assignment:

  o Choose three of the books (one from each section of the course) and complete the assignment prescribed for that book on the date named; to work with a partner is often effective
(since you are prompted by the collaboration to move to a deeper level), but you may work on your own if you prefer it. Each of these assignments will involve your engaging a critical question, using critical tools to offer your critical and informed interpretations on the book in question, and engaging the scholarly conversation that centers on the book in question; each effort must be completed within three typed (12 point) pages. Due dates: classes # 7, 14, 20.

- Toward the end of the course we will work together on the Book of Job; that syllabus supplement is also available for scrutiny, though don’t assume you can complete it until we have done the classes on Job. The final assigned and graded work on Job is due at class # 25.

- The **alternative assignment**: If you are ready to receive help to write a research paper (perhaps a MABL final paper or to practice for an MA thesis) you may ask to produce a 15-25 page paper on the Book of Daniel. Be advised that this is the more difficult choice, and though you will be helped, you will also be challenged. **If you are interested, e-mail me shortly after the end of class #1 to be given the specifics, so we can get going.** The first step is due at the start of class #3.

**Required Materials:**

- Please bring a Bible to every class session, ideally one that has the apocrypha/deuterocanonical materials included, since we are doing several of those books.

- In addition, please acquire or have ready access to:


- For each book we study I will name the best commentary on the GTU library exegesis shelf; I will give you a referral to an articles that you can reference (fairly) easily. Please use these (others as well, but at least these) when you are preparing your assignments. There are many materials available to you, and you need to use the most suitable, which is not all of them!

- Please consult from library reserve as indicated on the syllabus that specifies the course order (below).

- And particularly when you are doing a completion assignment for a book, recall that other relevant and useful articles are a mouse-click away; feel free to ask advice as you go, since not all that is “out there” is valuable.
Grading: The three completion assignments for individual biblical books count 1/7 each; the completion assignment for Job counts 2/7. Your attendance and participation counts (assessed pre- and post-reading week) count 1/7 each (to be present but never or rarely speak comprises about a B). If you choose a P/F option rather than a letter grade (not recommended), anticipate that to get a P you need to maintain a B. Please track your grade as you go, so that it is not a great shock at the end that it did not turn out as you hoped. Ask for help as needed.

Relevant Policies: Be advised of several:

• Students are expected to attend every class, prepared and participating helpfully for the whole group; if you need to miss a session, please inform the instructor by e-mail either before or shortly thereafter; no notification will be construed as an un-excused absence. When you miss a session, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and get any handouts that were available; you might have a “buddy” that will do automatically this for you/you for him or her.

• All written work must be presented in conformity with Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) (or if you have started your program since 2013, use the 8th edition).

• Assignments need to be completed and turned in on time and will be graded down if they are late; assume no revision option. Exceptions to deadlines are sometimes possible but rare and gained ahead of time. Anticipate that I can be helpful to you, but possibly not at the last minute. Schedule early what you might need.

• Be sure you know, understand, and follow the policies on academic honesty that are pertinent to GTU, DSPT and your own school.

• The GTU and DSPT policies relating to disability pertain and are available on websites.

Course Communication:
• To make an appointment with the instructor, please e-mail: bgreen@dspt.edu or telephone (510 883-2076). Brief matters can be handled after class. There are no standard office hours but your requests for consultation time will be addressed promptly. In general, I am available Mondays through Thursdays but not Fridays. My office is at DSPT, room 208.

• Assume that you will work collaboratively with the instructor (consultation appointments are encouraged), with other students, with a partner or two on assignments (if you wish); a list of your names and e-mail addresses will be available once you have released that information for us to share.
Course Schedule: This will hold in general; specifics will be provided as we arrive at each book.

Introduction

class # 1 September 10

read: syllabus, carefully
Brown, Wisdom's Wonders, chs. 1
Green, "This Old Text" (attached by e-mail to those who are enrolled)

focus questions:
- is it clear from the syllabus what is expected in this course? questions?
- as Brown introduces and summarizes the topic, how do you respond, and why? bring three questions/responses to what you read of his thoughts;
- what is critical methodology, according to "This Old Text," and why is it required/ useful for reading? questions?

relevant critical tools: be clear on the main "critical tools" point of "This Old Text"

anticipate class process:
we will be sure the syllabus is clear and then discuss the Green article and the Brown reading

Part One: Gnomic Wisdom [short, aphoristic sayings]

class # 2 September 14 PROVERBS

read: Proverbs 1-9, notably chs. 2,5,7,8,9 and look as well at chs. 26 and 30;
Brown, WW, ch. 2
(on exegesis shelf: Michael V. Fox, Proverbs [Anchor Bible, 2 vols])

focus question: how can we best enter the world of Proverbs, from where we live?

relevant critical tools: we will name and sample several historical tools:
- some aim to talk about the world that produced and is assumed in Proverbs:
- some aim to uncover the past processes by which the book reached its present shape:

anticipate class process: discussion of the chapters, aided by Brown

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¹As promised, I am naming the best commentary in case you need it; I'm not assigning it.
class # 3 September 17  PSALMS

read:  Psalms 1, 19, 37, 49, 73 (are the generally agreed “wisdom psalms”)
       (on exegesis shelf: Konrad Schaefer, Psalms [Berit Olam])

focus question:  why do the psalms remain so central, and how have they been re-interpreted/prayed? How can we get into them by negotiating their language?

relevant critical tools:  literary tools (shape/structure; metaphors; plot/story lines; aphoristic language)

anticipate class process:  we will ask literary questions and make specific observations about how the psalms’ language works by working with our five wisdom psalms

class # 4 September 21  QOHELET/ECCLESIASTES

read:  Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth;
       Brown, WW, chs. 5-6
       (exegesis shelf: Michael Fox, Ecclesiastes [Jewish Publication Society])

focus question:  what can we say about what Qoheleth said, amid all that we cannot quite say?

relevant critical tools:  noticing the impact of the absence of a clear socio-historical context; close reading of his ideology or world view, what he seems to be saying foundationally, how his small points build to larger themes

anticipate class process:  We will work with a section of the book and bring our responses to five specific questions (worksheet);

class # 5 September 24  PROVERBS, PSALMS, QOHELET/ECCLESIASTES

read:  Brown, WW, ch. 7. Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 39; Qoh 5:1-7

focus question:  what is wisdom, according to these texts (in context of the three books we have sampled so far)?

relevant critical tools:  integrating the ones we have used and showing you can use them

anticipate class process:  see last page of syllabus;  assignment due: at the start of class # 7
Part Two: Narrative Wisdom

class # 6 and 7: September 28 October 1  EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

read:  Ezra and Nehemiah
       Grabbe, Introduction, chs. 1 (part), 2 (on priests)
       article
       article
       (exegesis shelf:

focus question: how do the various critical questions and methods collaborate, and how can we avoid being overwhelmed by the multiplicity and messiness of them?

relevant critical tools: these books give us the opportunity to raise and examine, to correlate and organize virtually all the critical questions we are using this semester;

anticipate class process: we will use a worksheet to move through these questions; be ready to note places where the project is not clear to you, and to raise them for clarification

class # 8 and 9: October 5, 8  RUTH

read:  Ruth
       article tba
       (exegesis shelf: Edward Campbell, Ruth, Anchor Bible)

focus question:
   what practical problem do all the characters in the story collaborate on (as we watch them—they may not always know of each others’ efforts)—in order to accomplish a wise and just outcome?

how do the various critical questions and methods collaborate, and how can we avoid being overwhelmed by the multiplicity and messiness of them?

relevant critical tools: this book gives us the opportunity to raise and examine, to correlate and organize virtually all the critical questions we are using this semester;

anticipate class process: we will continue the process we were doing with Ezra and Nehemiah, moving to greater complexity and to places where uncertainty looms; bring your questions and issues with our tools so we can have them pretty clear after these classes
class #10 and 11: October 12, 15 DANIEL (first half)

read: Daniel 1-6 (try to read at least two of the chapters carefully if you can’t get to them all); Grabbe, chs. 3, 4 as he provides us with the context in which those adventures are set; tba
(exegesis shelf: Carol Newsom, Daniel, Old Testament Library)

focus question: what are the challenges the four exiled Judeans face? what challenge do the Babylonian leaders face? how do these four Judeans represent the other exiles in Babylon? are their problems the same, different? who needs what wisdom?

relevant critical tools: historical context; narrative tools of storytelling

anticipate class process: we will work with a couple of these scenes and appreciate how they are both “playful” and serious

class #12 October 19 EZRA AND NEHEMIAH, RUTH DANIEL 1-6

as before, you will have a separate sheet to specify both the integrative class and the writing assignment

read: choose one text: Ezra (tba), Nehemiah (tba), Ruth (tba), Daniel (tba)
as well as reviewing the materials we have read

focus question: what is narrative—are stories, and how do they seem to work, compared, perhaps, with the shorter saying we studied earlier in the course? See if you can pin down, to some extent, how the narrative you will be writing on refracts your issues and questions?

relevant critical tools: all of them!

anticipate class process:

assignment due: at the start of class #14
class # 13 October 22   ESTHER

read: Esther (note whether your Bible has the six additions or not)
     (exegesis shelf: Adele Berlin, Jewish Publication Society)

focus question: how does this narrated story fare when transposed into another genre (a musical
     oratorio) in a later period (18th century) and how do you respond to it now?

relevant critical tools: reception, and the decisions about “staging” text into music

anticipate class process: we will listen to some of the music and discuss some of our responses to
     it (also my efforts to talk about a Bible story when received as music)

Part Three: Scenic Wisdom [neither gnomic nor narrative! a mix of genres]

class # 14-15: November 2, 5   DANIEL (second half)
read: Daniel 7-12 at least 10-12
     Grabbe, chs. 3, 4
     article
     article
     review Grabbe, pp.
     (exegesis shelf: Newsom, Old Testament Library as above)

focus question: what can we learn about the genre apocalyptic eschatology, characteristic of this
     material and use it as a resistance document?

relevant critical tools: historical circumstances; genre consideration; reading conventions

anticipate class process:

class # 16-18: November 9, 12, 16   WISDOM OF SOLOMON

read: Wisdom of Solomon 1-6; 7-10; 11-19
     Grabbe, 1,3,4
     article
     article
     review Grabbe, pp.
     (exegesis shelf: David Winston, Anchor Bible commentary)
focus question:

relevant critical tools: intertextuality: how does this book re-use and extend other biblical material as a strategy of resistance?

anticipate class process:

writing assignment: Choosing to write on a portion of either Daniel or Wisdom of Solomon, explain how your text (Dan x or Wis Sol y), explain how your passage functions as resistance literature, produced by those resisting oppression and meant to console later readers doing the same thing; note we will not take a class to synthesize these two, since I think it will be clear that they represent two narratives of and responses to the same general situation;

assignment due: at the start of class # 23

class # 19-20: November 19, 23       SONG OF SONGS

read: Song of Songs
      article
      (exegesis shelf: look at two:
      J.Cheryl Exum, Old Testament Library; Michael Fishbane, Jewish Publication Society)

focus question: how does this material seem to function as Scripture? what other biblical “voices” do you hear in these poems/this poem, offering readers access to something that is important if a bit unclear?

relevant critical tools: intertextuality

anticipate class process:

Part Four: All of the Above       JOB

classes #21-24: November 30, December 3, 7, 10

read: Job
Brown, WW, chs. 3, 4
      Katharine Dell, Job: Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?

(exegesis shelf: try two:
      James Crenshaw, Job, Smyth & Helwys [actually, this series is not on the
exegesis shelf, but for no good reason that I could discover; David J.A. Clines, Word Biblical Commentary, 3 vols.)

**Focus question:** see separate assignment sheet

**Relevant critical tools:**

**Anticipate class process:**

**Class #25 December 14**

**Completion assignment:** Please read the brief article, “The Miners’ Fragile Solidarity,” and respond in no more than 2 pages to the following challenge: If you were in that group, what that you have learned from our study of wisdom/Wisdom would help you and your companions, and how would you present it? Hint: Be specific; this will not be a general summary but a clear insight. Feel free to indicate what was particularly helpful of all that we consulted, and why so.

Please attach to your assignment an appropriately addressed (stamped if your school closes mailboxes or you are leaving right away) envelope to receive this assignment back and an accounting of your grade.

We will complete course evaluations today and chat briefly about your advice to miners.
Discussion Process for “This Old Text”

1. What is the question to which the article is a response?

2. What is the thesis or main point the article claims to demonstrate?

3. How is the article structured so as to unpack its point?

   All factors stressing primarily the past of the house/text:

   All the factors stressing primarily the “ever-present-ness” of the house/text:

   All the factors stressing primarily the needs of present “users” of the house/text:

4. Name five crucial insights you got from reading the article.
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 
   d. 
   e. 

5. What questions remain for you?
syllabus supplement for both class # 5 and the first writing assignment

note: this sheet sets up the process for both the class and for the writing assignment; one flows out of the other, as they both flow out of the three classes we have had

the class session:

read: Brown, WW, ch. 7; Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 39; Qoh 5:1-7

focus question: what is wisdom, according to these texts (in context of the three books we have sampled so far)?

relevant critical tools: integrating the ones we have used and showing you can use them:

be prepared to draw together anything we have done that is aimed at historical processes (though it remains pretty general for these three books; review the several literary tools we have used; and consider what brief things we have reviewed about how readers have approached or do now receive these texts; note any insight you get as you work with these texts; practice these skills on the three texts, noticing how they help you enter the texts better;

class process: we will use a worksheet to help us think about wisdom and specify it a bit more

the writing assignment: the point of the writing (your doing it and my assessing it) is to demonstrate what you have learned from class so far and how you can further it on your own; how to proceed:

choose one of the texts (not more than one, please); be sure it is clear which it is!
ask a question that you have regarding it, a genuine question you have that is answerable;
indicate where your question rises from, why you are asking it; name a situation, if that is relevant;
respond to your question with a main, single point, having thought about your question, worked with the text, used the tools;
consult a critical source to help you, a commentary or book or article that seems suitable;
what experts say can be a big help;
cite that source correctly (Turabian edition 7th or 8th);
say something about the text’s original context, such as you can (this will be easier on material that is more historically situated than these three are);
the literary tools will be the most useful, so choose one or more of them and see how they can be useful: structure, metaphor, language, imagery, plot;
revise your work enough that it makes sense, reads well, is free of basic errors and is not longer than 3 pages; think of it as a banzai tree: miniature but lovely!

due, hard copy, at the start of class # 7;