



OT 217-3 Exegesis of Song of Songs

Louisville Presbyterian
Theological Seminary

Spring 2017: Mondays 2-4:50PM

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“For all of eternity in its entirety is not as worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.” Rabbi Akiva

“Know, my brother, that you will find many diversities in the interpretation of Song of Songs. In truth they differ because Song of Songs can be compared to a lock whose keys have been lost.” Saadia Gaon, medieval Jewish sage

Course Description:

This biblical elective course provides an in-depth examination of the poetic book of Song of Songs in English translation. This relatively short biblical book presents Christians and Jews with an excellent opportunity to sharpen historical-critical interpretive skills, to develop better literary approaches to biblical poetry, and to deepen our theological imaginations regarding love, sexuality, the body, and gender. Students will gain a toolbox of hermeneutical methods for contemporary ministry and will respond to this biblical book with an appropriate and creative event.

Course Objectives:

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe various historical issues, literary features, and theological outlooks of the book of Song of Songs. [Assignments #1, 2, 3]
2. Engage in conversation with various types of biblical scholarship in order to cultivate a sense of their own identity as interpreters. [Assignment #2]
3. Respond appropriately and creatively with pastoral sensitivity, theological imagination, and ethical concern to a biblical text in order to educate a given audience. [Assignment #3]

Required Course Books:

- 1) *Song of Songs: A Commentary* by J. Cheryl Exum (Louisville: WJK, 2005)
- 2) *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* by Ellen F. Davis (Louisville: WJK, 2000)

Additional readings are available on CAMS, Library Reserve, and through the ATLA database. See Course Schedule for notifications.

Assignments & Evaluation:

1) **Attendance & Participation.** (30% of final grade)

Students should come to class each day **eagerly ready** to discuss the assigned readings. Active participation includes, but is not limited to, activities such as listening carefully to others' presentations and thoughts, taking notes, asking relevant questions, responding to others' comments, and inviting others into the conversation. It does not include dominating a group or class discussion by constant talking. Monitor and vary your forms of participation; introverts should force themselves to speak more than they think necessary; extroverts should force themselves to speak less than they think necessary.

Students will be expected to take notes (jot down questions, write up summaries, etc.), while reading the assigned texts outside of class so that they have resources in class to use to speak. I expect that students will need at least 6 hours each week to prepare for our approx. 3 hour class; you should not expect to prepare in one setting per week.

Here's a quick and sketchy grading rubric:

0 – absent without an excuse	85 – present with some participation
70 – absent with an excuse	90 – present and participating readily
75 – present without participation	95 – present, alert, highly participatory
80 – present with limited participation	

2) **Weekly 2-page Papers.** (40% of final grade)

Students will write a 2-page paper in preparation for each class session (excepting the first class); so, 11 papers total. These papers will respond to a specific question or prompt given in this syllabus. A **hardcopy** of the paper is **due in class** each week. Students will often use the paper in class to contribute to class participation (in addition to their notes; see above) and will turn it in for grading at the end of each class.

3) **Campus-Wide Event in celebration of Love/Poetry/Sex.** (30% of final grade)

Students will create an event open to the LPTS community. This event can be a play, a poetry reading, a conference, a concert, a discussion, a workshop, a worship service, etc. or some combination thereof. The event can focus exclusively on human love or sex or love poetry. It needs to incorporate the Song of Songs in some substantial way. You will invite the entire LPTS community—students, staff, faculty, and administration—to this event.

Course Policies:

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site with information for current students.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

- Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Three or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

Policy on late work

All written assignments are due on the date given in the syllabus. Assignments submitted late will be penalized in the grading by one letter grade increment for every day (a B+ paper becomes a B if one day late, a B- if two days, a C+ if three days, etc.). Assignments submitted more than ten days after the due date will not be accepted.

Use of electronic devices in class

This course is a seminar-style one based on deep engagement with the readings and colleagues. Do not send or read text messages during class. Cell phones should be silenced. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask me for an exception to this rule. Laptops should not be used if you cannot trust yourself to restrict your use to note-taking and CAMS reading. You may not access the Internet during class time. Any misuse of electronic devices during class time, including checking of email or social networking sites, will be grounds for dismissal from the session and will negatively affect the course grade.

Course Schedule:

Monday, February 6: Introductions

1. Introductions to Course, Syllabus
2. Class Reading of Song of Songs
3. Song of Songs 1:1-4

Recommended Readings:

Exum, 89-97

Davis, 238-243

Monday, February 13: Historical Issues

1. Authorship & Dating of the SoS
2. Hebrew Poetry: Features, Analysis of 1:1-4
3. ANE love poetry

Required Readings:

Exum, 28-33, 42-67

Murphy, Roland. *The Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990): 3-6. [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Basic Books, 2011): 231-254 (Chapter 8: The Garden of Metaphor) [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Carr, David. *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 95-104. [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Recommended Readings:

Weems, Renita, "Song of Songs," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume V* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997): 363-366. [CAMS]

2-page paper topic: Name and describe 3 major historical issues related to the Song of Songs.

Monday, February 20: A Dialogue

1. Song of Songs 1:5 – 2:7
2. Song of Songs 1:5-6 and Race

Required Readings:

Exum, 97-119

Davis, 243-254

Carr, David, *The Erotic Word*, 110-116. [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Weems, Renita, "Song of Songs," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume V* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997): 382-384. [CAMS]

Sheppard, Phillis Isabella. *Self, culture, and others in womanist practical theology* (New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 173-186. [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Waters Sr., Kenneth. "The Beauty of Blackness," in *Afrocentric Sermons: Beauty of Blackness in the Bible* (Judson, 1993): 56-64. [Library Reserve]

2-page paper topic: Use one-page to write about 1:7 – 2:7 in general including one or two interpretive issues therein (e.g. who is speaking and when?); use another page to write about 1:5-6 specifically and the issue of race using the Weems, Sheppard, and Waters readings.

Monday, February 27: Literary Issues & Reception History

1. Genre, metaphor, imagery of flora and fauna, literary structure
2. History of Christian Interpretation & History of Jewish Interpretation

Required Readings:

Exum, 1-13

Murphy, Roland. *The Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990): 12-28, 32-41. [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Moore, Stephen D. "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," *Church History* 69:2 (June 2000): 328-349. [ATLA Database]

Fishbane, Michael. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015): xxxv-xlvi. [CAMS and Library Reserve]

2-page paper topic: What can we, 21st c. interpreters, learn about SofS from the history of its interpretation?

Monday, March 6: Woman's First Long Speech

1. Song of Songs 2:8 – 3:5, 3:6-11
2. Allusion to SofS in John

Required Readings:

Exum, 119-151

Davis, 254-262

Fokkelman, J.P. *Reading Biblical Poetry* (Louisville: WJK, 2001): 192-197. [CAMS]

Carr, David. *The Erotic Word*, 163-167 [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Recommended Readings:

Weems, Renita, "Song of Songs," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume V* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997): 392-401. [CAMS]

2-page paper topic: Compare and contrast at least 3 different English translations of our focal passage today. Do particular translation choices correspond to the scholarly discussions in Exum, Davis, Fokkelman, and Carr? If you have the ability, check out the Hebrew words that cause different translations.

Monday, March 20: Theological Approaches

Required Readings:

Exum, 73-77

Davis, 231-238

Carr, David M. "Passion for God: A Center in Biblical Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 23 (2001): 1-24. [ATLA Database]

Burrows, Mark S. "Foundations for an Erotic Christology: Bernard of Clairvaux on Jesus as 'Tender Lover,'" *Anglican Theological Review* 80.4 (Fall 1998): 477-493. [ATLA Database]

2-page paper topic: What is the theology of the Song of Songs? What does the book say about God? About humanity?

Monday, March 27: Man's First Long Speech

1. Song of Songs 4:1 - 5:1
2. Beauty, the waṣf

Required Readings:

Exum, 151-183

Davis, 262-275

Weems, Renita, "Song of Songs," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume V* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997): 402-408. [CAMS]

Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. "The Delight of Beauty and Song of Songs 4:1-7," *Interpretation* 59.3 (2005): 260-277. [ATLA Database]

Falk, Marcia. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990): 127-135. [CAMS]

2-page paper topic: Construct a historically and literarily informed interpretation of this passage. Who is speaking to whom about what?

Monday, April 3: Sexuality

1. Sexuality and Spirituality
2. Erotic Love

Required Readings:

Carr, David. *The Erotic Word*, 139-151.

Heyward, Carter. *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989): 87-118. [CAMS]

Nelson, James B. "Where are We? Seven Sinful Problems and Seven Virtuous Possibilities," in Ellison, Marvin M. and Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection Second Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010): 95-104. [CAMS]

Recommended Readings:

Ellison, Marvin M. and Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection Second Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). [Library Reserve]

2-page paper topic: What sorts of topics and issues must we examine in order to construct a Christian theology of sexuality?

Monday, April 10: Woman's Second Long Speech

1. Song of Songs 5:2 – 6:3

Required Readings:

Exum, 183-210

Davis, 275-284

Weems, Renita, "Song of Songs," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume V* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997): 409-417. [CAMS]

Fishbane, Michael. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015): 138-141. [CAMS and Library Reserve]

2-page paper topic: Compare and contrast at least 3 different English translations of our focal passage today. Do particular translation choices correspond to the scholarly discussions in Exum, Davis, and Fishbane? If you have the ability, check out the Hebrew words that cause different translations.

Monday, April 17: Interreligious Perspective

1. The Song of Songs in Interreligious Perspective

Required Readings:

Coleman Barks with John Moyne, *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 54-61, 128-129, 135-142, 261-262. [CAMS]

W. C. Chittick and P. L. Wilson, *Fakhruddin Iraqi: Divine Flashes* (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 82-87. [CAMS]

Philip Rawson, *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy* (New York: Avon Books, 1973), 1-30. [Library Reserve]

2-page paper topic: After reading the assigned selections of love/erotic poetry from other world religions, write imaginatively about how we might use these poems to enrich our own reading of Song of Songs? What comparisons can be made? What might the presence of this genre of literature in all the major religions say about the human condition?

Monday, April 24: Man's Second Long Speech & Woman's reply

1. Song of Songs 6:4 – 7:9, 7: 10-13

Required Readings:

Exum, 210-242

Davis, 284-295

Black, Fiona C. "Unlikely Bedfellows: Allegorical and Feminist Readings of Song of Songs 7.1-8," in in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* edited by Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 104-129. [CAMS]

Recommended Readings:

Weems, Renita, "Song of Songs," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume V* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997): 418-427. [CAMS]

2-page paper topic: Select one "reading" of this biblical passage from among Exum, Davis, and the four offered in the Black article. What are the strengths of your selected readings vis-à-vis the other readings? What are the weaknesses?

Monday, May 1: Dialogue

1. Song of Songs 8: 1-14

2. Conclusions

Required Readings:

Exum, 242-263

Davis, 295-302

Carr, David, *The Erotic Word*, 134-37 [CAMS]

Exum, J. Cheryl, "Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know About the Song of Songs," in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* edited by Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 24-35. [CAMS]

2-page paper topic: Write about 2 important "lessons" from this semester's study of the Song of Songs.