

Providence College and Seminary  
Proverbs  
Instructor: Dr. Tremper Longman III

May 24-28, 2010

## Course Objectives

This course intends to instruct students how to read and interpret the book of Proverbs according to its original meaning as well as its continuing significance for faith and practice. This study involves not just the mastery of the content of the book, but a study of the principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) that grant access into the meaning of the book as well as the ability to bridge the horizons to our present situation for the purposes of ministry.

## Textbooks

### *Required Reading*

Brown, W. P. *Character is Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament*. Eerdmans, 1996.  
Longman, T. *How to Read Proverbs*. IVP, 2002.  
Kidner, D. *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes*. IVP, 1985.

Seminary students should also choose a commentary or two of their choice (see recommended commentaries below) and read three hundred pages. This should not be from your research for the paper.

These are to be read in their entirety, by the end of the week of classes. It is recommended that the reading be done before the class sessions begin, but this is not required. If the student can read one book before classes begin, the one by Crenshaw is suggested.

### *Recommended Commentaries*

R. J. Clifford, *Proverbs* (OTL; Louisville: John Knox/Westminster, 1999).  
M. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (AB; Yale, 2000); *Proverbs 10-31* (AB; Yale, 2009).  
P. Koptak, *Proverbs* (NIVAC; Zondervan, 2003).  
T. Longman, *Proverbs* (BCOTWP; Baker, 2006).  
L. G. Perdue, *Proverbs* (Interp; Louisville: John Knox, 2000).  
B. K. Waltke, *Proverbs*, 2 vols. NICOT: Eerdmans, 2004-2005.

## Assignments

### *Reading*

See the above assigned books.

### *Papers*

All students will write an interpretive paper. This paper will focus in on one unit of text from the book of Proverbs. The paper will present an interpretation that explains the meaning of the passage as well as its canonical significance and application to the present day. The length of the paper will be 12 to 15 pages.

### *Exam*

A take home examination will be given to students on the last day of class that will cover the content of the lectures and readings. This exam will be turned in by email one week after the conclusion of the class.

## Evaluation

Reading and exam will count for 50% of the final grade and the paper will count for 50%

### *Submission/Return of Assignments*

Take home exam is due one week after the conclusion of classes.

Papers are due on xxx.

Please submit the paper and the exam to [longman@westmont.edu](mailto:longman@westmont.edu)

# Preliminary Course Outline

## The Book of Proverbs

- I. Why Read Proverbs?
  - A. The Purpose of Proverbs (1:1-7)
    - 1. To Teach Wisdom
    - 2. Wisdom's Colleagues
    - 3. The Ability to Read
  - B. To Whom is the Book Addressed?
  - C. The Fear of the LORD
- II. Proverbs in an (Ancient) Worldwide Perspective
  - A. Mesopotamian Wisdom
    - 1. Sumerian Literature
    - 2. Akkadian Literature
  - B. Egyptian Literature
  - C. Northwest Semitic Proverbs
- III. Connections between Extra-Biblical Wisdom and Proverbs
  - A. Father-Son
  - B. Amenemope and Proverbs
  - C. Wisdom Themes
    - 1. The Dangerous Woman
    - 2. The Wise and the Fool
    - 3. Etiquette before the King
    - 4. Other Topics
  - D. Wisdom Forms
  - E. Conclusions: Implications of Similarities and Differences
- IV. The Authorship and Date of the Book of Proverbs
  - A. The Composite Authorship of Proverbs
  - B. Date
- V. Walking on the Path of Life
  - A. Listen, My Son...
  - B. The Path...of Life
- VI. Woman Wisdom: The Heart of the Matter (Prov. 8 and 9)
  - A. The Ultimate Encounter: With Whom Will I Dine?
  - B. Who are Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly?

- C. To Whom are They Speaking?
- D. What is Their Message?
- E. Who Are They Really?
- F. The Moment of Choice
- G. The Crossroads
- VII. Christ: The Treasure of God's Wisdom
  - A. A Closer Look at Proverbs 8 (not a prophecy of Christ)
  - B. Wisdom and Creation
  - C. Christ as the Epitome of God's Wisdom
    - 1. The Gospels
    - 2. The Epistles
  - D. Jesus and Woman Wisdom
  - E. Warning: Treat as Poetry
  - F. The Choice Revisited
  - G. The Shadow of Woman Wisdom
- VIII. What Exactly is a Proverb—and How Does It Work?
  - A. What is a Proverb?
  - B. Parallelism and Its Functions
    - 1. Parallelism of Opposites
    - 2. Better-than Proverbs
    - 3. Other Types of Parallelism
  - C. Imagery in Proverbs
  - D. Other Literary Devices
- IX. A Time and a Place: Are Proverbs Always True?
  - A. A Matter of Genre
  - B. Contradiction or Paradox in Proverbs
  - C. The Right Time and the Right Circumstance
  - D. The Road to Wisdom
    - 1. Observation and Experience
    - 2. Instruction (Tradition)
    - 3. Learning from Mistakes
    - 4. Revelation: At the Bottom of It All
    - 5. What Kind of Fool? (Prov. 26:4-5)
- X. The Rewards of Proverbs in an Eschatological Perspective
- XI. Reading Proverbs in the Context of the Canon:
  - A. The Book of Job: Is Life Fair?
    - 1. Wisdom and Success
    - 2. A Little Background
    - 3. Who Is Wise? The Plot and Character of Job

4. Job's Message on Suffering and Wisdom
  5. Anticipating Christ
  6. Consequences for Reading Proverbs
- B. The Book of Ecclesiastes: Is Life Meaningful?
1. Issues in Interpretation: How Do We Put It Together?
  2. Genre and Structure
  3. Characters
  4. The Message of Qohelet
  5. The Theology of Ecclesiastes
  6. Anticipating Christ
- XII. Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs
- XIII. The "Virtuous Woman" in Proverbs 31:10-31
- XIV. The Tongue in Proverbs
- XV. Reading, Preaching, and Teaching the Book of Proverbs