

# TEXTS AND CONTEXTS: WISDOM & THEODICY

Eden United Church of Christ | Spring 2024 | Thursdays 7:30 pm

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## Course Description

The Ancients are regarded to be holders of a wealth of wisdom. The Bible, an ancient product, is no different. Distinct from covenantal theology, wisdom was from its inception a very international enterprise, greatly influenced by the phenomena of migration. We will examine some of the biblical books that fit the so-called Wisdom tradition: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, and James. We will also explore Egyptian and Sumerian works of Wisdom. We will explore how the differing biblical traditions approached the philosophical inquiries of the meaning of life as well as theodicy. We will attempt to locate each strand's *sitz im leben* or social and historical contexts behind our texts, with the objective to better imagine what gave rise to differing answers, to challenge our own thinking about life and theodicy, and to better understand the thinking of others within our contemporary context.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Encounter ancient creation myths and ancient meaning-making sapiential traditions
2. Differentiate between later Greek philosophical and earlier Semitic notions of theodicy
3. Challenge their own construction of wisdom, way of world, and the Divine's relating

## Suggested Readings

- Johannes van Saaz, *The Ploughman from Bohemia* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966)
- J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Interpretation Series; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1985)
- Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. James Scully and C. John Herington (Oxford: OUP, 1989)
- Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)
- Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. & ed. Breon Mitchell (New York: Schocken Books, 1998)
- James L. Kugel, *The Great Poems of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 1999)
- Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature, 3rd ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002)
- Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Anchor, 2004)
- T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley, *The Birth of Satan: Tracing the Devil's Biblical Roots* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005)
- Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008)
- Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: OUP, 2009)
- Carol Fontaine, *Smooth Words: Women, Proverbs and Performance in Biblical Wisdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009)
- Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: OUP, 2009)
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2015)

**Course Schedule\***

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>THEME</b>	<b>READINGS</b>
Week/Semana 1	02/01	Ancient Near Eastern creation myths	Enūma Eliš (Babylonian Genesis) & Ugaritic (Canaanite) Ba'al Cycle
Week/Semana 2	02/08	In the beginning. . . Earth, wild and waste	Genesis 1; Proverbs 8; Psalms 72, 82, 104; Deut 32:1-9; Isaiah 27; Job 38-41
Week/Semana 3	02/15	Proverbs: Divine Design, Lady Wisdom (Ḥokhmah) & Egyptian Ma'at	Proverbs 1-7; 8-9; 10; 22:17-24:22; 31
Week/Semana 4	02/22	<b>NO CLASS</b>	Familiar Proverbs & Sayings
Week/Semana 5	02/29	Suffering: Persistence of Chaos in an almost Ordered World	Ludlul bēl nēmeqi (The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer) & The Babylonian Theodicy
Week/Semana 6	03/07	Hassātān & Trial of all Trials	Job 1-2; 3-14
Week/Semana 7	03/14	Who is the Adversary?	Job 15-21; 22-28
Week/Semana 8	03/21	Where is Wisdom?	Job 29-31; 32-37
Week/Semana 9	03/28	<b>NO CLASS</b> (Maundy Thursday)	Film: "A Serious Man," by Ethan and Joel Coen (2009)
Week/Semana 10	04/04	Burning Down the House	Job 1-2, 42; Ezekiel 14:12-20
Week/Semana 11	04/11	Persistence of Evil/Chaos & Problem for Monotheism	1 Samuel 16:14-16; Isa 45:7; Zechariah 3:1-2; Mt 16:23; 1 John 3:8
Week/Semana 12	04/18	Ethereal Mist	Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
Week/Semana 13	04/25	Wisdom & Worship	Sirach (Ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus) 1-6
Week/Semana 14	05/02	Wisdom Acts	Wisdom of Solomon 6-10
Week/Semana 15	05/09	Ḥokhmah & Logos	John 1; James 5
Week/Semana 16	05/16	Combined Class	Potluck

\* Subject to change. All classes will meet in hybrid format in the Fireside Room & Zoom.