

Hebrew Bible Topics: The Song of Songs (BIBHB604-A)

Thursdays 1:00-2:30pm Central Time online, AND 90 minutes asynchronous activity; ALSO, Tuesday December 10 "Make-up Day" for Reading Days.

Fall 2025 (September 8 - December 16)

Instructor: Dr. G. Brooke Lester (Associate Professor of Hebrew Scriptures; he/him/his)

Revision: March 2, 2026

Contact Information:

Email: brooke.lester@garrett.edu

Dr. Lester may be reached by email. He checks email twice/day. He will respond within 36 hours. (See "Emergencies" in this syllabus.)

Office location: Shaffer 731. Dr Lester's campus office is only accessible via stairs. Office hours by appointment, in-person or via Teams.

Course Description and Objectives:

This course will introduce the learner to the Song of Songs. We will focus primarily on the Song's content in its ancient West Asian context, its place among other ancient love literature, and the roles that such love literature may have played in the lives of ancient Israel.

Secondarily, we will engage the "post-biblical" life of the Song: the ways that the Song has been "received" by communities, from antiquity to today.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will develop substantive historical understanding about the Song of Songs, its composition, and its relation to its ancient West Asian contexts.
- Students will gain acquaintance with interpretations of the Song of Songs from multiple perspectives.
- Students will further develop their skills in interpretation of Hebrew-Bible texts through their interpretive engagement with the Song.
- Students will further develop their skills in expressing and contextualizing what they have learned to broader audiences.

Required Textbooks:

- Exum, Cheryl. *Song of Songs*. Old Testament Library Series. Westminster John Knox reprint edition, 2005. ISBN-10: 0664238416. ISBN-13 : 978-0664238414. Amazon paperback cost \$40.00 (as of 2026-03-02).
- Keel, Othmar. *Song of Songs*. Continental Commentary Series. Fortress Press, 1994. ISBN-10: 0800695070. ISBN-13 : 978-0800695071. Amazon hardcover cost \$40.00 (as of 2026-03-02).
- Pardes, Ilana. *Song of Songs: A Biography*. Lives of Great Religious Books series. Princeton University, 2019. ISBN-10: 0691146063. ISBN-13: 978-0691146065. Amazon hardcover cost \$20.00 (as of 2026-03-02).

- Any major critical NRSV or CEB Study Bible, such as used in an introductory Hebrew-Bible course (e.g., HarperCollins, Oxford, SBL, CEB). Please no devotional/denominational study bibles. Contact instructor with questions.

Delivery:

- This course meets synchronously online for a 90-minute weekly block of time.
- Learners will also accomplish asynchronous shared activities, estimated at 90 minutes/week. (In this way, we accomplish a 3-credit-hour course.)
- In addition, learners should expect to spend at least 6-9 hours/week of their time outside of class on reading and writing for this course. If you find that you are spending 6-9 hours/week and are not getting the results you want, the instructor is happy to meet with you to discuss and "troubleshoot" your preparation habits.

Assignments:

These will include

- Weekly preparation, including reading, writing, and research;
- Synchronous-session presentations;
- A final text-based research paper, with a complete draft due at the midterm and small-group peer review.

Evaluation rubrics will be available on course Moodle site when the semester begins.

Grading:

Evidence of weekly preparation: 30%

Presentation: 20%

Peer Review: 20%

Final paper: 30%

Some syllabus details may change before the semester begins on September 5.

Schedule (EVERY THURSDAY, PLUS TUESDAY DECEMBER 10TH):

Week One, 09/10

We will do at least one read-through (aloud) of the Song; perhaps more than one. Be prepared to read the CEB or NRSV Study Bible in class. Bring Pardes for reference. Beginning with Week Two, bring all three required books.

Week Two, 09/17

Song of Songs and Its Afterlives

Read: Pardes 1-135; Dobbs-Allsopp "Song of Songs" (*New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*).

Choose a passage for text-based research paper.

Week Three, 09/24

Afterlives Continued, and Beginnings of Exegetical Introduction

Read: Pardes 136-230; Exum 1-27; James "Introduction" (*An Invitation to Biblical Poetry*).

Week Four, 10/01

Exegetical Introduction Continued

Read: Exum 28-86; Keel 1-37; James "Voices" (*An Invitation to Biblical Poetry*).

Have a Thesis Statement for peer review.

Week Five, 10/08

Song 1:1–2:7 and Presentations

Read: Exum 89-119; Keel 38-94; Anderson "Song of Songs: Redeeming Gender Constructions in the Age of AIDS" (*Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*).

Week Six, 10/15

Song 2:8–3:11 and Presentations

Read: Exum 119-151; Keel 95-137; Grossberg, "Two Kinds of Sexual Relationships in the Hebrew Bible" (*Hebrew Studies*).

10/16–17: **Reading Days**

Week Seven, 10/29

Song 4:1–5:1 and Presentations

Read: Exum 151-183; Keel 138-184; Carr, "Rethinking Sex and Spirituality: The Song of Songs and its Readings" (*Soundings*).

Complete Draft of text-based research paper due by class time.

Week Eight, 11/05

Song 5:2–6:3 and Presentations

Read: Exum 183-210; Keel 185-210; James, "Battle of the Sexes: Gender and the City in the Song of Songs" (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*).

Week Nine, 11/12

Song 6:4–7:13 and Presentations

Read: Exum 210-242; Keel 211-255; Gault, "Nature as Erotica: Sexual Euphemism and Double Entendre" (*Body as Landscape, Love as Intoxication*).

Peer Reviews due by class time.

Week Ten, 11/19

Song 8:1-14 and Presentations

Read: Exum 242-263; Keel 256-285; Wilson-Wright, "Love Conquers All: Song of Songs 8:6b-7a as a Reflex of the Northwest Semitic Combat Myth" (*Journal of Biblical Literature*).

Week Eleven, 12/03

Song Topics TBD (and Presentations?)

Read: TBD

11/24-28: ***Thanksgiving Break***

Week Twelve, 12/10

Song Topics TBD (and Presentations?) Candidate topic: Sensory Criticism

Read: TBD

Final Paper due by class time.

“Make-Up Week for Reading Days,” Tuesday, 12/15

Song Topics TBD (and Presentations?)

Read: TBD

Institutional Academic Policies

This course follows all school academic policies and procedures, which can be accessed in their entirety on the Registrar section of MyGETS at this

link: https://mygets.garrett.edu/ICS/Registrar_and_Advising/Common_Syllabus_Policies.jnz .