

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
OTL745 The Megillot  
Summer, 2009 (May 18-29)

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## I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION

A study of the Megillot (Scrolls), read on the major occasions of the Jewish liturgical year, with attention to literary analysis, and to their historical settings and theological contributions.

## II. COURSE RATIONALE

The Church of the Nazarene, together with the larger Wesleyan/Holiness movement and most Christian denominations, views the Bible as a foundational document, informing all the life of the church. The Megillot, though not well-known in the church, make a vital contribution to the whole of the Scriptures.

The Megillot have their most prominent place and function within Jewish worship, as the scrolls read on the major occasions of the liturgical year: Passover, Song of Songs; Shavuot/Pentecost, Ruth; Succot/Tabernacles, Ecclesiastes; Ninth of Ab, Lamentations; Purim, Esther. How and why these books are connected to these liturgical occasions, and why this matters to Christians and the Christian faith, will constitute a part of our study. Their individual content and messages, of course, are an important and fascinating study, as well. Furthermore (though by no means a final “rationale”), the grouping, sequence, and process of canonization of these five small scrolls is vastly illuminating for how Christians view the Bible, and why we view and use it as we do (or as we “should”).

The Megillot are unfamiliar territory, even to most devout Christians. But they are books of profound depth and insight, and of considerable emotional intensity in many of their parts. These small books will richly reward those willing to expend time and effort to understand their patterns and their messages. They are mines of hidden treasure; wealthy, indeed, are those who explore their depths.

## III. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, you will:

1. Be familiar with the content of the Megillot;
2. Be able to summarize the important positions regarding authorship, provenance, dating, occasion, and audience of these several books;
3. Be able to identify the major theological themes of the Megillot, and discuss their contributions to the life and thought of God's people;
4. Have experience with the exegesis of some of the Megillot;
5. Use your knowledge and understanding of the Megillot in ministry assignment(s).

#### IV. COURSE TEXTS

1. Bush, Frederic W. *Ruth/Esther (WBC)*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996.
2. Hess, Richard S. *Song of Songs*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

#### V. COURSE SCHEDULE

**May 18** – Syllabus; Course introduction; Ruth 1-2

**May 19** – Ruth 3-4

Essay title: Fred Bush's *own* translation and understanding of Ruth 4:5

**May 20** – Song of Songs 1-4

**May 21** – Song of Songs 5-8

Essay title: A biblical theology of erotic love from Song of Songs

**May 22** – Ecclesiastes

Essay title: "Under the Sun" in Ecclesiastes [or Qohelet]

**May 26** – Lamentations

Essay title: An Introduction to the Book of Lamentations

**May 27** – Esther 1-5

**May 28** – Esther 6-10

Essay title: A Profile of Esther, the Woman

**May 29** – Living, preaching and teaching the Megillot

Essay: Student's choice (within the Megillot)

All essays during the two weeks of class sessions should be six hundred (600) words in length. Please use a readable 12-point font; please double-space; Turabian is the standard reference work NTS has adopted for matters of formatting, style, usage, etc. (For your convenience, a short style sheet is appended to this syllabus.) Essays are due at (or before) class time (5:30 p.m.), via e-mail attachment and/or hard (paper) copy.

**July 17** – Final paper due

We will discuss parameters of the final paper during the two weeks of class sessions.

**BECOMING A BETTER ACADEMIC WRITER**  
**Avoiding common mistakes and uninspired usages**  
**in formal academic writing**

**Correct:** Use past and past perfect tenses when discussing historical persons and events.

Moses approached the bush; he had seen nothing like this before!

**Incorrect:** Do *not* use the so-called “historical present.”

Moses approaches the bush; he hasn’t seen this before!

**Correct:** *Never* split *any* infinitive: Jack learned *never* to split an infinitive.

**Incorrect:** His professor could count on Jim to *always* split his infinitives.

**Likewise**, it is poor usage in most situations to split an auxiliary verb from its main verb, or a verb of being from a predicate adjective.

**Good usage:** Really having done her best, Jill retired from the scene.

**Poor usage:** Having really done her best, Jill retired from the scene.

**Good usage:** Recently having discovered she really is excellent at debating,  
Jill plans to try out for the debate team.

**Poor usage:** Having recently discovered she is really excellent at debating,  
Jill plans to try out for the debate team.

An exception can be “not”: I am *not* going to write, seriously, “I am going, not, to write this sentence.” or, “I not am going to write this sentence”!

**Correct:** Write complete sentences; use at least a subject and a predicate in each clause.

Sarah wrote at least a paragraph in her Bible-study journal every day.

**Almost always incorrect:** An incomplete sentence *almost* always is incorrect.

Always promising herself to really do it tomorrow.

**Common issues involving the use of apostrophe:**

**Correct:**

boys, meaning “more than one boy”

boy’s, meaning “belonging to one boy”

boys’, meaning “belonging to more  
than one boy”

its, meaning “belonging to it”

it’s, meaning “it is”

**Incorrect:**

boys’, meaning “more than one boy”

boys/boys’, meaning “belonging to one boy”

boy’s, meaning “belonging to more than  
one boy”

it’s, meaning “belonging to it”

its, meaning “it is”

**A common issue with commas and periods:**

**Correct:**

He said, “It’s over.”

He said, “It’s over,” and left.

(This is American usage; British, Canadian, and many others are opposite.)

**Incorrect:**

He said, “It’s over”.

He said, “It’s over”, and left.

→

**Correct, referring to Deity:** He, Him, His, You, Yours, Thy, Thine  
(Lowercasing of *all* pronouns referring to Deity also is correct; just be consistent.)

**Always incorrect, referring to Deity:** Himself

**Correct:** Bible, biblical

**Incorrect:** bible, Biblical

**Correct:** None dares do it.  
(Hint: “None” equals “no one.”)

**Incorrect:** None dare do it.

**Correct:** They do their own thing.  
(Don’t introduce a number usage problem to solve a gender usage problem.)

**Incorrect:** Everyone does their own thing.

**Correct/refined:** as though

**Incorrect/inelegant:** as if

**Correct/refined:** concerning, regarding  
(I do not judge, as though academically inferior, people who say, e.g., “As to that, we all are entitled to our own opinions and usages,” but in writing I find this an execrable usage, and these *are* tips to help you in writing papers for my courses. A word to the wise . . .)

**Abominable:** as to

**Prune your prose judiciously:**

**Effective:** Many people lived there.

**Much less effective:** There were many people who lived there.

**Effective:** He said she was alive.

**Less effective:** He said that she was alive.

**Always check Turabian or Chicago for correct usage of ellipses:**

**Correct:** The three dots themselves *always* are separated by two single spaces: . . .  
What precedes and follows depends on what is left out of the quotation.

**Always Incorrect:** Microsoft Word’s default ellipses; they do *not* know this issue.

**Always place biblical references in the text, enclosed in parens, never as footnotes.  
Always place punctuation after the second parenthesis, not before the first:**

**Correct:** “Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

**Incorrect:** “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

**These commonly are misused and/or misspelled--*always* check before submitting:**  
affect/effect; prophecy/prophesy; than/then; whose/who’s; might/may; to/too/two;  
for/four/fore; Canaan; Isaac; Israel; Ezekiel; Brueggemann; canon; desert

**These commonly are misused--*always* check before submitting:**

“Jew/Jewish” instead of Israel/Israelite before end of Northern Kingdom, 721 B.C.;  
“church” instead of Israel in Old Testament period; “Palestine” before A.D. 135