



TYNDALE
Seminary

Course Syllabus

INTERDISCIPLINARY SEMINAR: TEXT AND INTERPRETATION INTD 0900

**WINTER 2012
JAN 9 – APR 13 2012
TUESDAYS 8:30-11:20AM**

INSTRUCTOR: DR. JOHN KESSLER

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Course Resource Page: <http://class.tyndale.ca>

Office hours: Mondays 10 am to noon.
Wednesdays 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

I will usually be available at these hours, but not always. To book an appointment, please leave me your preferred day and time, and a possible second choice, and I will confirm with you. Please contact me, preferably, via e-mail: jkessler@tyndale.ca. If e-mail is unavailable, please call 416-226-6620, ext. 6724.

If I am in my office, and the door is open, please feel free to check with me to see if I am available.

General questions about the course can be addressed to my research assistant Chris Tam (christam@rogers.com) or via the mytyndale [course page](#).

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar is focused on developing an understanding of the task of interpretation. The course explores how one moves from the biblical text to contemporary concerns, with particular attention given to the interpretation of the Old Testament in a Christian context, the Canon, the nature of meaning and significance, the role of the interpreter and the place of the community. A variety of hermeneutical approaches will serve as resources for coming to terms with assessing the meaning of the biblical text for the community of faith.

This course will examine the various issues involved in the reading of the Hebrew Bible in the context of the faith and life of the Christian community. As such, the following dimensions of reading the text will be examined:

- (1) exegetical, historical and literary matters;
- (2) hermeneutical considerations, especially the relationship between the Testaments;
- (3) reading strategies;
- (4) the interface between text, theology and canon, and
- (5) the history of interpretation.

II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this course the student will be able to:

1. demonstrate competence in examining the grammatical, historical, philological, redactional and literary dimensions of a biblical text as well as matters of introduction related to the text.
2. articulate the major positions regarding the relationship between the historical meaning of a text and its authorship and literary history, and its function as Holy Scripture/Divine Discourse.
2. explain and evaluate various contemporary and historical reading strategies and hermeneutical approaches utilized in the reading of the Hebrew Bible within the Christian tradition.
3. apply the broader perspectives of Theology and Canon to the interpretation of a text.
4. interact with the history of interpretation of a given text.
5. suggest relevant paths of reflection for the contemporary significance of a biblical text.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED TEXTS

Grant, R. M., and D. Tracy. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*. Revised ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1984 (available on reserve in the library).

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Weekly readings as distributed by the professor in class.

Due dates for readings will be distributed on a separate sheet, along with the course outline.

B. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Course Requirements

1. **Class Preparation, Participation and Leading Class Discussion (25%)**

Students will be expected to prepare for class by completing the weekly readings, preparing certain biblical texts and related assignments in advance of the class, and participating actively in class discussion. A weekly reading sheet will be circulated. Students will indicate whether or not the reading has been done by checking off the appropriate box on the sheet. If the reading has not been done leave the box blank. Reading may be made up *until the last day of class* and may be indicated by placing an "L" (for late) the appropriate check off box. From time to time, each student will lead the class in the analysis and discussion of a text or article. The length of the time involved is 15 to 20 minutes. Students can expect to do this three to four times during the semester.

2. **Response Paper (25%) . Due Feb 22.**

Ps 137: 7-9, with its famous "cursing" of Edom and Babylon has challenged Christian interpreters over the centuries. How can it (as well as the other instances of "imprecations in the psalms" be read as Christian Scripture? The student will prepare a short paper of no more than 10 pages on this topic. The student will first present a survey of the major approaches to the problem (C. Westermann, C. S. Lewis, R. Murphy, et. al.), and present her or his evaluation of the question. The student will then discuss the issue of these imprecations in terms of the broader question of what determines the *meaning* of a Biblical text? Here the student will present a summary of how the hermeneutical approaches of Steinmetz, Poythress, Kaiser, and Wolterstorff (and others) would handle the issue. Further instructions and bibliography will be posted on the mytyndale course page.

3. **Class Seminar and Term Paper (50%). Final Submission date: April 13, 5 pm. Note: there will be no class March 13.**

A. The student will prepare a class seminar and a term paper (if so desired, students may elect not to present the class seminar, and have their mark based entirely on the term paper) on a passage chosen in consultation with the professor below, consisting of:

1. the explanation of the "sensus literalis" of a biblical passage.
2. the relevant historical material regarding: (1) the world *within* the text (that is the world depicted and narrated within the text) and (2) the world *around* the text (i.e. the world of the narrator who configured the text and the community for which it was destined) and (3) the central preoccupations of the text in the world in which the text was produced.

3. a brief summary of the history of interpretation of the text and a discussion of how the text interacts with broader issues in canon and theology.
4. reflections on the contemporary use of the text in the Christian community.

OR

B. The student will prepare a study on a biblical text or theme, using a different methodology than the one proposed above. The text and approach are to be approved by the course professor.

OR

C. The student will prepare a study on an author or an issue *vis-à-vis* biblical hermeneutics. The topic and approach are to be approved by the course professor.

Note: There will be no class during Reading Week (Mar 13)

C. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

1. Guiding Principle on the Quality of Papers at the Advanced Masters Level

Your paper must reflect ThM level research and writing skills. It must reflect the research and writing skills you have honed in your M Div or MTS work. It must demonstrate the ability to:

- a. Carefully analyze and exegete primary sources (Bible, ANE texts, original writings in the history of interpretation).
- b. Locate and interact with the key scholarly discussions of a text or topic in the secondary literature.
- c. Interact critically with the key advocates of certain positions with reference to the texts or topics under consideration (ex D. J. McCarthy vs. M. Weinfeld on covenant as 'imposed obligation').

2. Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is a major problem in contemporary education. As such Tyndale Seminary academic policy stipulates that a paper may be given an F should it contain plagiarized content. Remember: if you use someone else's words, put them in quotation marks and cite the source in a footnote. If you refer to someone's ideas (i.e. 'covenant is the centre of OT theology') or a fact derived from your reading which is not common knowledge (e.g. 'the territory of Benjamin did not suffer significant destruction during the Babylonian invasions'), but the words are not put in quotation marks, you must still cite your source. Do not cut entire paragraphs out of books or articles and insert them into your text, (unless it is to illustrate the position of a specific author that you intend to

discuss or critique) even if they are footnoted. An essay is *not a series of long quotes strung together*. Such essays will not receive a passing grade. You must attempt to read and assimilate various sources, then attempt to collate, compare, contrast and evaluate them.

Attempting to do your best, even if it is a feeble first try, is far better than copying and failing the assignment and possibly the course, or even worse losing the opportunity to learn new things by doing the assignment. Remember, essays are about you, as a student learner. You do not have to provide the last word on complex subjects.

I will post further helps for your essay writing on the [course resource page](#).

3. Research Technique

Students are strongly encouraged to use the library for the preparation of this assignment, especially the reference collection. Be sure to make ample use of the reference and periodical collections of the library. These include the major Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, the major commentary series, and the major periodicals. Students must also make use of the e resources available through the library especially the ATLA database, the JSTOR Library (all available via [EBSCO Host](#)), and the [Gale Reference Library](#).

Remember to consult all the relevant materials (primary sources and best secondary literature) and to avoid insignificant works, or works which have been surpassed by others, or works by non-specialists.

4. E-Mail Submissions

You may submit your papers by e-mail, but in pdf format *only*. Submissions must be made to christam@rogers.com and must be received by 11:59 PM on the due date. Papers may also be submitted in regular hard copy of you prefer, by 5 pm on the due date.

5. Language Proficiency

Please note: The Seminary requires the Professor to identify students who display difficulties with English language skills in their assignments and refer them for further language assessment in the Tyndale Writing Centre. To help them improve in their studies, students may then be required to take the English for Academic Purposes course in conjunction with current courses. Please see the attached *Guidelines for Written Work* for further information.

6. Marking Standards: General Principle

The professor will follow the marking standards as stated in Tyndale's academic policies. Generally speaking, assignments which satisfactorily meet the professor's expectations will receive a B/75%.

Excellence or deficiency in the following areas will increase or decrease the mark

assigned:

- a. form and presentation (Note: correct bibliographic form must be used. Additional information is available on the mytyndale [course resource page](#)).
- b. number and quality of primary and secondary sources cited. Generally a minimum of 20 good sources is required to write a good ThM paper.
- c. thoroughness of historical, grammatical, syntactical, exegetical and theological investigation. This includes doing your own Bible study work (word studies, background studies etc., and quoting other ANE primary sources where relevant (e.g. Code of Hammurabi, Gilgamesh Epic, etc)
- d. logical and methodological accuracy and consistency.
- e. use of such foundational tools as: ANE texts and inscriptions; Hebrew grammar and syntax; specialized studies in ANE history, archaeology, culture and sociology; student's own exegetical interaction with the Hebrew text; specialized scholarly articles and studies, interaction with major commentaries.
- f. quality and clarity of written English.

7. Late Grading Policy

Late assignments are assessed at 2.0% per day to a maximum of 3 weeks, after which the paper receives a zero. It is far better to submit your work on time than to take a late penalty. Days are calculated from 11:59 pm on the due date (e mail submissions) or 5 pm (hard copies)

8. Extensions and Date Changes

Extensions for assignments are granted *only* in exceptional circumstances. These include illness (a medical attestation is required), crisis, severe illness or death in the family, etc.

Requests for extensions must be submitted to the professor in writing. Extensions will NOT be granted for: mission trips, ministry responsibilities, heavy workload in other courses, computer or printer problems, etc. Try to follow the '24 hour rule' i.e. have a final version of your work ready 24 hours before it is due.

Exemptions from discussion groups may be made on the same basis as extensions for assignments. Requests for extensions and alternative dates for the final exam must be made directly to the registrar.

Students should consult the current *Academic Calendar* for academic policies on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System. The *Academic Calendar* is posted at www.tyndale.ca/registrar/calendar. An excerpt is attached with this syllabus for easy reference.

Attendance

Attendance at class is of vital importance for this course. In accordance with Tyndale Seminary policy, missing more than two classes without reasonable cause such as illness (a medical attestation is required), crisis, severe illness or death in the family, etc., may result in a receiving an F for the course. If a discussion group session is missed without reasonable cause (as above), the student will receive a zero for the session.

E. SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Evaluation is based upon the completion of the following assignments [*Sample*]

Class Participation, Discussion, and Leading	25 %
Response Paper	25 %
Term Paper	50 %
Total Grade	100 %



Academic Policy Attachment to All Syllabi

The Academic Policies of Tyndale Seminary are outlined in the Academic Calendar, available on the Tyndale Website: www.tyndale.ca/seminary/calendar. Students are responsible for reading and adhering to the academic policies governing all aspects of academic life. As a service to students, selected policies are summarized below, but the full policy statements as printed in the Academic Calendar are the standards to which students will be held.

1. Attendance Policy
2. Policy on Gender Inclusive Language
3. Policy on Academic Honesty
4. Guidelines for Written Work
5. Academic Grading System
6. Policy on Late Papers and Extensions
7. Application for an Extension Due to Extreme Circumstances

Attendance Policy

- 1) Three or more unexcused absences from a Fall or Winter semester course will constitute grounds for failing that course. Excused absences include the following: death in the family, hospitalization of yourself or a member of your immediate family, or a prolonged illness for which you require treatment by a physician. Excused absences will not be granted for late registration, ministry responsibilities, mission trips, etc.
- 2) An unexcused absence of one day or more of any course taught in an intensive format (e.g., Intersession, Spring/Summer School) will constitute grounds for failing that course. Excused absences include the following: death in the family, hospitalization of yourself or a member of your immediate family, or a prolonged illness for which you require treatment by a physician. Excused absences will not be granted for late registration, ministry responsibilities, mission trips, etc.
- 3) As a matter of basic courtesy, Tyndale students need to make a serious commitment to arriving on class on time, and returning from class breaks on time. Students who manifest disrespect for the classroom evidenced by chronic lateness or failure to return from break, will be considered in breach of the attendance policy and may be referred to the Dean of Students.
- 4) If a student knows in advance that he/she will miss a class, the student is obligated to notify the Professor prior to that class.
- 5) Faculty members are under no obligation to provide handouts or other classroom materials to those students who are absent from class.

Policy on Gender Inclusive Language

The use of gender-inclusive language is an expectation in all written assignments and course requirements at Tyndale Seminary. The motivation behind the use of gender-inclusive language is clarity of communication and the avoidance of terms that are, or could be perceived as, exclusive or pejorative. Inclusive language is relevant not only to issues of gender but to all individuals and groups.

The decision at Tyndale Seminary to use gender-inclusive language carries with it the responsibility to be creative in writing without compromising religious faith or grammatical accuracy. Resources and guidelines for gender-inclusive and nondiscriminatory language are widely available.

Academic Honesty

Tyndale expects students to conform to the highest standard of ethics in the completion of all assignments. Academic dishonesty is a serious matter. **Students are responsible for reading and adhering the full policy on academic honesty as found in the Seminary Academic Calendar.**

- 1) Honesty in written and verbal assignments requires a balance between using words and ideas that are part of the common domain and careful ascription of borrowed ideas and words. Ideas and words of others may be used only with acknowledgment. Failure to do so is plagiarism – the literary version of

- stealing.
- 2) The most obvious form of plagiarism is the direct quotation of words without quotation marks, parenthetical ascription, footnotes or endnotes. Less obvious forms of plagiarism consist of paraphrases of another's words and the use of an opinion with no reference to the source.
 - 3) Academic dishonesty also includes the submission of work for which previous credit was given, the submission of work under one's own name which is largely the result of another person's efforts, aiding another's dishonesty, cheating on exams and giving false information for the purpose of gaining admission, credits, etc.
 - 4) The submission of one paper for two courses is not permitted. Approval of faculty is required for an expanded paper, on a project common to two courses of study, to be acceptable.

Consequences of Academic Dishonesty

If a student is suspected of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, the instructor is obligated to follow the steps outlined in the Academic Calendar.

Guidelines for Written Work

- 1) The following information must be included on the title page of all assignments: your full name, student ID, your MAILBOX NUMBER, course title, title of the paper, name of the professor, and date submitted.
- 2) All papers should be characterized by the following:
 - *Accuracy* (Is what I say correct? Is it true to the case?)
 - *Comprehensiveness* (Have I covered all the points that need to be covered?)
 - *Clarity in structure* (Is there a self-evident and meaningful order to the paper?)
 - *Clarity in content* (Will the reader correctly understand what I have tried to say?)
 - *Specificity* (Have I moved beyond generalities and made specific statements?)
 - *Thorough and accurate documentation* (At every point where I have consciously drawn upon the ideas of others, have I provided the information necessary for the reader also to consult the sources I have used?)
- 3) Written assignments must adhere to academic standards for style, format, citations and references as found in the most recent edition of a recognized style manual (e.g., *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the *Turabian Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertation*, *The SBL Handbook of Style*, *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*). The course instructor will advise students as to the preferred academic style format for the course.
- 4) All written assignments must adhere to the Standards on Academic Honesty. Plagiarism is a serious offence. Students will be held accountable to the policy on academic honesty as found in the Academic Calendar.
- 5) Graded papers will normally be returned in class. In some circumstances they will be returned to your student mailbox. Students who are not returning to Tyndale and would like the paper returned by post must include a self-addressed envelope with sufficient Canadian postage. Unclaimed papers will be held in the Seminary Office for 6 months, then destroyed.
- 6) All students are required to keep a back-up copy of their papers.
- 7) Students who display difficulties with English language skills in their assignments may be referred by the instructor to the Tyndale Writing Centre. Students will be assessed and may be required to take the *English for Academic Purposes* course in conjunction with current courses.
- 8) Students may seek assistance on their own initiative by contacting the Tyndale Writing Centre.

Academic Grading System

The standards and definitions used by Tyndale Seminary in the assignment of letter grades and percentage grades are outlined in the Academic Calendar.

Policy on Late Papers and Extensions

All papers and course assignments must be submitted by the due dates indicated by the instructor or in the course outline. Unless the instructor already has a policy on grading late papers in the course outline, grades for papers submitted late without advance permission will be lowered at the rate of 1/3 of a grade per week or part thereof (e.g., from A+ to A, from B to B-). Students who have not completed course requirements by the end of the semester (or Registrar approved extension date) will be assigned a grade of F.

Faculty may grant an extension only up until the last day of exams for the semester. Requests for extensions beyond this date must be addressed in writing to the Registrar and will be considered only in cases such as a death in the family, medical emergency, hospitalization of oneself or immediate family

member or prolonged illness requiring treatment by a physician. Factors such as assignments for other courses, holidays and technology related difficulties or malfunctions are all insufficient grounds for requesting an extension.

Application for an Extension Due to Extreme Circumstances

Requests for extensions will only be considered in the circumstances noted above and only upon submission of a completed application form to the Registrar. Application forms are available from the Registrar's office or online at www.tyndale.ca/registrar.

Student Medical Certificate

Applications for extensions for medical reasons must be accompanied by a Medical Certificate signed by a physician. The Student Medical Certificate form is available from the Registrar's office or online at www.tyndale.ca/registrar.