Course Syllabus

FALL 2015

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: INTERPRETING AND APPLYING THE BIBLICAL TEXT
BIBL 0501 (SECTION 1)

SEPTEMBER 14 – DECEMBER 7, 2015
MONDAYS, 6:45 PM—9:35 PM

INSTRUCTOR: DR. WILLIAM J. WEBB
Email: bwebb@tyndale.ca

Office Hours: Before or after Monday class. Please email to make an appointment. Thanks.

To access your course material, please go to http://classes.tyndale.ca. Course emails will be sent to your @MyTyndale.ca e-mail account. For information how to access and forward emails to your personal account, see http://www.tyndale.ca/it/live-at-edu.

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a study of the pivotal methods and interpretative principles involved in discerning the meaning of the biblical text. Topics covered include essential steps in interpreting the Bible, the variety of methods and approaches available to the contemporary student of Scripture, historical and theological issues arising out of the interpretive task, the relationship between the testaments, word studies and literary genre. Students learn to use the standard tools of advanced biblical research.

Hermeneutics is concerned with understanding the meaning of the text as well as its significance for people today. This course will develop some of the philosophical and practical skills needed for the complexities of biblical hermeneutics. As a subcategory of communication theory in general, students will explore the relationship between the author, text and reader.
and how each contributes to the formation of meaning. Various interpretive models are examined in order to explore their value and limitations.

II. LEARNING ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

A. LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Explain the dynamics involved in reading and understanding texts.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of competing approaches within the spectrum of interpretive methods.
- Formulate a “personally adopted” hermeneutical philosophy—not necessarily the professor’s perspective—that integrates all three areas of author, text, and reader.
- Demonstrate basic skills in using a range of Hebrew-English/Greek-English tools as well as commentaries and periodical articles for the task of exegesis.
- Articulate how the Bible has been interpreted in the past, both within Scripture itself and within second-temple Judaism and church history.
- Explore approaches to re-reading and “hearing” the ancient text that foster a healthy understanding of biblical authority.
- Develop an attitude of “hermeneutical humility” towards the correctness of one’s own interpretive conclusions.

B. LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Conducting and presenting a semantic fields (word meaning) study involving the ability to recite Greek and Hebrew alphabets and use a concordance and lexicon,
2. Building a validation case for choosing between semantic fields where there is ambiguity in meaning (mutually exclusive options) and through interacting with other student’s validation,
3. Presenting an application study, which wrestles with interfacing two distinctly different horizons,
4. Developing and writing an exegetical paper on a selected passage of Scripture,
5. Discussing the application of biblical interpretation skills with colleagues, and
6. Reflecting upon course materials (lectures, handouts, textbooks, etc.).

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1“Hermeneutical humility” lies somewhere between the polar attitudes of absolute dogmatism and absolute skepticism about our ability to derive/know personally the correct biblical meaning; it is methodologically based upon degrees of reasoned probability in the assessment of that meaning.
III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED TEXTS


B. RECOMMENDED TEXTS & TOOLS


Hebrew-English and Greek-English Concordance (either a hardcopy [e.g., Kohlenberger] or computer version [e.g., *BibleWorks*]).

Interlinear Hebrew-English OT and Greek-English NT (either a hardcopy or computer version).

C. DISCUSSION FORUMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

*Discussion Forums*. Discussion forums are a key aspect of this course. They are your opportunity to wrestle with the assignments/relevant issues under consideration, to share your ideas with your peers, and share the evolving group consensus. There are two types of forums in this course: (a) research-based forums and (b) fun forums. You will discover the difference between these two forum types as you read through the assignment section (below) and in the “Forum Rules” posted online.

*Forum Expectations and Responsibilities*. As you know, the course is being offered online. An online course, by its very nature, is different from one presented using traditional classroom methods. Thus, it is important for you as a student to approach this course differently than you might approach a classroom course.

You have more personal responsibility in a course such as this. We are an online community building our knowledge and understanding together. Doing your readings and regularly showing up online by collaborating in discussions, asking questions, and providing feedback to your learning cohort are important community responsibilities.
Additionally, in order to keep up in the course it will be important for you to work consistently throughout the semester. You will need to be disciplined and take the initiative to participate.

You are also expected to complete the anonymous course evaluation in the final week of the course.

The role of your instructor is different as well. In an online course, the main role of the instructor is to function as a coach. I will be striving in various ways to fulfill that function. I will be presenting information in various formats along the way, but my main role will be to help guide you through the course so that you can get as much from the course as possible. Throughout, I will be encouraging you to think critically about the course content and the views of others, mine included. I will be online regularly, but I will not be responding to every post in the discussion forums. Rather, I will make intermittent contributions, summarizing, challenging, and at times suggesting new directions. One last thing, make sure that you read the documents related to forums that you will find in the resources section of the website (the main window before the weeks start)—i.e., (a) Forum Rules and (b) specific instructions for each forum. These resources provide more detailed information about specific course requirements.

D. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Research-Based Forum #1: Semantic Fields (5%)
The assignment on semantic fields comes in two parts: (a) learning the Hebrew/Greek alphabets and (b) exploring semantic fields [SFs].

Hebrew/Greek Alphabets. Believe it or not, the Greek alphabet is incredibly easy to learn! If you know “alpha” and “omega”, then you already know two of the letters. The student must now learn the rest of the Greek alphabet. This part of the SFs assignment will be tested orally for recognition (not reproduction) of the alphabet. You can work off of a Greek alphabet list in front of you. See resources under “RB Forum #1” for the alphabets. E.g., at the point of testing, when you see the small Greek letter α on the alphabet list, you say “alpha” (without peeking at the English word “alpha” next to the letter a —only the person listening to you can look at both the Greek letter and English pronunciation).

The student must be able to read the Greek alphabet (small letters) and the Hebrew alphabet by the second week (Week 2). This stage of the assignment is like an admissions test (GRE) for entering law or medicine. While it does not count towards your grade, the two alphabets are a requirement for entry into doing the remainder of the SFs assignment and the next assignment on validation. For a wee bit of work the two-alphabet exercise has immense payback. It is extremely valuable for several reasons:
begin using Hebrew/Greek-English concordances
start reading interlinear Hebrew/Greek-English Bibles
crack open Hebrew/Greek-English dictionaries (called, “Lexicons”)
enjoy Hebrew/Greek-English theological lexicons (entire articles on H/G words)
gain a greater comfort level in using Hebrew/Greek-English commentaries (no longer have to “skip over” those foreign language words)
allows you to do word studies that (a) explore the range of possible meanings for a H/G term and (b) engage in the validation process of choosing between semantic domains (dictionary meanings) for a particular passage

In order to proceed to the second part of the assignment (i.e., the “semantic fields” portion) the professor must receive an email confirmation that “[your name] has recited perfectly or almost-perfectly (one ‘mulligan’ allowed) the Greek and Hebrew alphabets.” Please have an adult person/friend who heard the two alphabets send this email confirmation. Thanks.

Exploring Semantic Fields. After reciting the two alphabets, the student may now complete the semantic-fields part of this assignment. Use the instructions, grading rubric and various resources posted on the course site under “RB Forum #1: Semantic Fields”.

2. Research-Based Forum #2: Validation (20%)
Becoming familiar with the concept of semantic fields and how they work is the first step in word studies. The next step is to wrestle with meaning in a text where several semantic fields are possible and commentators are divided over which one is correct. In this assignment students will begin to develop the skills for choosing between semantic fields in a case where there is ambiguity in meaning. Please use the instructions, grading rubric and various resources posted on the course site under “RB Forum #2: Validation”.

3. Research-Based Forum #3: Reading Slavery Texts from Two Horizons (25%)
The process of applying Scripture to our lives involves assessing the interface between two horizons (a) the ancient world horizons of the biblical text and (b) our contemporary horizon—the world in which we live. Applying or appropriating Scripture in a cogent manner requires just as much rigorous thinking and skill as does a good word study or choosing between interpretive options. Kindly use the instructions and grading rubric posted under “RB Forum #3: Reading Slavery Texts from Two Horizons”.

See the discussion of late RB Forum submissions below.

4. Exegetical Paper (50%)
The culmination of the course is the writing of an exegetical paper. Choose one of the following passages of Scripture and write your exegesis (+ application) paper on it:

- Exodus 34:1-9*
- Isaiah 64:1-7*
- Jonah 2:1-10

Draft: May 26, 2015
Mark 8:22—9:1
Philippians 2:1-11
Revelation 7:1-17*

[*While the selection of a text is completely your choice, there may be some greater
learning benefit choosing a text that is not known as well by the Christian community
and/or one that you have not worked on before.]

Use the instructions, grading rubric and various resources posted on the course site under
“Exegetical Paper: Resources.” The exegetical paper is due through email submission as
an attached file [bwebb@tyndale.ca] on the date specified in the syllabus schedule
below. See discussion of late submissions below. Length: 12—15 pages. Going over the
allowable page limit by more than one page will result in a reduction of the grade. As a
formal research paper the Exegetical Paper must use correct Turabian (Chicago) style in
all of its components—margins, font size, title page, headings, paragraph spacing, block
quotes, footnotes and bibliography. See grading rubric.

Due date: Monday December 14th, 2015. See the discussion of late Exegetical Paper
submissions below.

5. Fun Forums (5% bonus on Exegetical Paper)

Every course needs some fun. Students can achieve a 5% bonus (maximum) towards
their exegetical paper by participation in some “fun forums” during the semester. These
are like interaction class discussions where you get graded simply on the basis of
participation. If you contribute something to the fun forum, you have just earned
yourself a 1% bonus. There are four fun forums but one fun forum has the potential for
two contributions (2% bonus) so that is how if it possible to get 5% easy mark advantage
on your final paper. I mark your final paper, give it a grade and then look to see what
your Fun Forum bonus marks are and, hopefully, I can add 5% to boost your grade! So,
join us for some fun.

E. SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Evaluation is based upon the completion of the following assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RB Forum #1: “Semantic Fields”</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>RB Forum #2: “Validation”</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>RB Forum #3: “Reading Slavery Texts from Two Horizons”</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exegetical Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun Forums [bonus added to EP grade]</td>
<td>*5% bonus (maximum)</td>
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F. GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

Submissions. Kindly email all assignments as attached files (either MSWord or PDF formats are fine) to the professor at: bwebb@tyndale.ca

Late RB FORUM Submissions. The initial “assignment” post to a RB Forum is due between Monday and Thursday (midnight, Eastern Standard Time) of the first week of an RB Forum. Two subsequent “critical interaction” posts—critiquing two other students in your group—are due by the end of the first week, i.e., Sunday (midnight, Eastern Standard Time). Any interaction the following/second week of an RB Forum is encouraged but optional. The penalty for late RB Forum “assignment” submissions is one letter grade reduction per day late (rather weighty) since these submissions play an educational component for all students within the course.

Late EXEGETICAL PAPER Submissions, part I: ON OR BEFORE the “Last Day of Exams” [LDOE] Deadline. The last day of exams in a semester is the official deadline for any late submissions. After that day the professor cannot accept late work without the explicit/written approval of the dean’s office (see below). If a student recognizes that a late submission on or before the LDOE deadline does not involve clear extenuating circumstances (defined below), they may submit the material to the professor as (i) a late submission with penalty until midnight of the LDOE. In this case there is no need to contact the professor for approval. For each day (or part of a day) late, the grade will be reduced by one-half (1/2) a letter grade. On the other hand, if there are clear extenuating circumstances, the student may ask the professor for (ii) a late submission without penalty (or with only partial penalty). By clear mitigating circumstances I mean something along the following lines. Suppose I/the course professor were in theory (not in reality) to take your circumstances to the class and ask them the following question, “Should I treat this student differently regarding late penalties than I would treat the rest of you based upon their particular circumstances?” If the class were to respond with an overwhelming, “Yes, of course,” then you have a case of clear mitigating circumstances. If you wish to ask for a late submission without penalty (or with only partial penalty), please contact the professor and provide an explanation in writing. The student must take the initiative in this matter.

Late EXEGETICAL PAPER Submissions, part II: AFTER the “Last Day of Exams” [LDOE] Deadline. Any submissions after the LDOE require a formal process of appeal to the Registrar’s Office (not to the professor). Requests for such extensions beyond the LDOE must be (a) submitted in writing using the Tyndale Extension Forms, explaining the reason why the extension is needed and (b) submitted to the registrar before the LDOE unless there are reasons why this was not possible. No assignments will be accepted after the LDOE unless the student has a valid reason for an extension. In that case, the student must apply for an extension to the dean/registrar (again, not to the professor). Extensions will be considered only in cases such as a death in the family, the hospitalization of yourself or a member of your immediate family, or an illness for
which you require treatment by a physician. Reference to a heavy work load, other assignments, professional or ministry obligations or holidays do not constitute legitimate grounds for an extension.

**Academic Honesty.** Integrity in academic work is required of all our students. Academic dishonesty is any breach of this integrity, and includes such practices as cheating (the use of unauthorized material on tests and examinations), submitting the same work for different classes without permission of the instructors; using false information (including false references to secondary sources) in an assignment; improper or unacknowledged collaboration with other students, and plagiarism. Tyndale University College & Seminary takes seriously its responsibility to uphold academic integrity, and to penalize academic dishonesty.

Students should consult the current *Academic Calendar* for academic polices on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System.

For proper citation style, consult the *Chicago-Style Quick Guide* (Tyndale e-resource) or the full edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style Online*, especially ch. 14. For citing scripture texts, refer to sections 10.46 to 10.51 and 14.253 to 14.254.

**G. COURSE EVALUATION**

Tyndale Seminary values quality in the courses it offers its students. End-of-course evaluations provide valuable student feedback and are one of the ways that Tyndale Seminary works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. Student involvement in this process is critical to enhance the general quality of teaching and learning.

Before the end of the course, students will receive a MyTyndale email with a link to the online course evaluation. The evaluation period is 2 weeks; after the evaluation period has ended, it cannot be reopened.

Course Evaluation results will not be disclosed to the instructor before final grades in the course have been submitted and processed.
IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

KBH = Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*

W = Webb, *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals*


Note: W2, W3 and other reading materials will be posted online with their corresponding week and topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture/Subject</th>
<th>Assignments/Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Author-centered Approaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td>KBH (skim chp. 2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dimensions of Communication</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Authorial Intent: a rationale</td>
<td>Grk./Heb. Alphabets</td>
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<td>SOCIAL, CULTURAL, &amp; HISTORICAL analysis</td>
<td>KBH (chps. 1, 5)</td>
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<td>The Spirit &amp; Interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Dimensions of Language</td>
<td>RB Forum #1:</td>
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<td>“Semantic Fields”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>KBH (chp. 6, 7)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>W2 (two appendixes)</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Validation of Semantic Fields</td>
<td>RB Forum #2:</td>
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<td>“Validation”</td>
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<td>Monday Oct 12th: No class (Thanksgiving Weekend; Monday holiday)</td>
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<td>II. Text-centered Approaches/Genre</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>A Text-Centered Approach: a rationale</td>
<td>KBH (323-40)</td>
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<td>INTRO TO GENRE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NARRATIVE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>RITUAL TEXTS</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Week 6  
GOSPELS  
KBH (399-417)
[Oct 26]  
EPISOLATORY (reading; no lecture)  
KBH (426-39)
POETRY  
KBH (chp. 8; 351-58)
PROVERBS & WISDOM  
KBH (387-97)

Week 7  
PROPHECY  
KBH (359-83)
APOCALYPIC  
KBH (384-86; 440-48)

III. Reader-centered Approaches

Week 8  
THE READER & MEANING  
A Reader-Centered Approach: a rationale
Reader-Oriented Methods: “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly!”
Use of Scripture in later Scripture
Canon and Community

Week 9  
SW&H OVERVIEW  
W (all); W3
☐ Criteria #1—9
☐ Criteria #10—18

Week 10  
Applying the Bible Redemptively
☐ Slavery texts
☐ Women texts

Week 11  
Application I—General Procedure
☐ Principle/Abstraction Approach
☐ CP texts

Week 12  
Application II—The Covenants
Application III—The Will of God & Scripture  
KBH (chps. 11, 12)
☐ Hermeneutical Spiral
☐ Never Ending Story
☐ The Bible & God’s Will

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2 I am drawing upon the spiral metaphor as popularized by Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006).

Draft: May 26, 2015
V. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY: GENERAL HERMENEUTICS


