



Course Syllabus Winter 2013

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

JANUARY 17 – APRIL 18, 2013
THURSDAYS, 8:30 PM TO 11:45 AM

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To access your course material, please go to <http://mytyndale.ca>

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 OUTCOMES

Through taking this course, the student should be able:

- To explain the dynamics involved in reading and understanding texts.
- To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of competing approaches within the spectrum of interpretive methods.
- To formulate a “personally adopted” hermeneutical philosophy—not necessarily the professor’s perspective—that integrates all three areas of author, text, and reader.
- To 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.
- To appreciate how the Bible has been interpreted in the past, both within Scripture itself and within second-temple Judaism and church history.
- To seek new and fresh ways in which to re-read and “hear” the ancient text—ways that foster a healthy understanding of biblical authority.
- To develop an attitude of “hermeneutical humility”¹ towards the correctness of one’s own interpretive conclusions.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED TEXTS

Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Revised and updated. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004. [ISBN: 0-7852-5225-8].

Webb, William J. *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001. [ISBN: 0-8308-1561-9].

B. RECOMMENDED TEXTS & TOOLS

Tate, W. Randolph. *Biblical Interpretation. An Integrated Approach*. 3rd ed. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008. [ISBN: 978-1-59856-080-0]

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

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.

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

C. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Lexical Study (15%)

The lexical assignment comes in two parts: (a) learning the Hebrew/Greek alphabets and (b) a word study assignment.

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 lexical 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. E.g., when you see the first small Greek letter on the alphabet list, you say “alpha” (without peeking at the English word “alpha” next to the first letter--only the person listening to you can look at both the Greek letter and the English pronunciation).

The student must be able to read the Greek alphabet (small letters) by the second class period and the Hebrew alphabet by the third class period. 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 the second part of the assignment (below). 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 “word study” portion) the professor must receive in-class confirmation from a fellow student that “_____ (student’s name) has recited perfectly or almost-perfectly (one “mulligan” allowed) the Greek and Hebrew alphabets. Signed: _____ (fellow student’s name).

Word Study. A word studies assignment will be handed out during the class lecture on this subject. The student will be able to utilize newly acquired lexical skills and theory in the process of interpreting biblical texts at the level of semantic meaning. The word study assignment involves (a) assessing the range of possible meanings of a particular

Hebrew/Greek word and (b) validating one's choice of meanings within a particular passage.

2. Genre Study (20%)

Beyond reading the introductory "genre section" in the course textbook, this assignment will take students further in their understanding of one or two genres (e.g., narrative, ritual texts, poetry, wisdom, law, prophecy, gospel, epistolary, apocalypse, etc.). Choose one or two articles/chapters cited in the "Genre Study" handout, which will be provided in class by the professor. The articles/chapters will be available in the library (hardcopy) and on the class website as a PDF file. After reading an article or chapter, the student must:

- a. Pick a biblical passage that was not mentioned anywhere in the article/chapter but is of the same genre explored in the article.
- b. Identify several features or characteristics about the biblical passage itself that demonstrate its genre category.
- c. Indicate how reading the article has interpretive implications for understanding the particular biblical passage you have chosen.

Complete your "Genre Study" paper by naming the article you read along with your brief development of the above points (a, b, and c). Write with insight and accuracy but keep it brief. The paper should be no longer than one and a half pages (250 to 350 word count is fine) per genre chosen.

Grading will be based upon the quantity and quality of your reading. A maximum of a "B+" grade is possible through reading one article/chapter and writing about one biblical text; the reading of two articles and applying genre insights from these articles to two biblical passages (with two different genres) creates the potential of an "A+" grade.

3. Application Study: Living out the Slavery Texts (20%)

In this application study of the slavery texts the student will move from the world of *what the text said to them back there . . .* to the surprisingly different world of *what the text says to us today*. Our focus will be the slavery texts of Scripture. The assignment will include three parts.

Slavery A: ANE/GR World & the Bible. In the first step, the student will need to think about biblical slavery within the broader setting of the ANE/GR. Doing a skim read on some background works on ANE/GR slavery would be a good place to start. Also, use a concordance and search through all of the major biblical texts (OT & NT) on slavery, looking up verses with words like slaves, masters, servants, etc. List the specific ways in which the biblical material is *redemptive* relative to the broader/surrounding cultures of the day. Interact with the details of specific biblical texts. Start by reading the list in *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, pp. 44, 74-78. Your assignment is to add to that list one or two (perhaps even three) more specific examples beyond those already provided in

SW&H that make the same broad point about redemptive movement. Validate your comparative examples through citing ANE/GR sources within footnotes. Please do *not* reproduce the *SW&H* list in your paper.

Slavery B: Direct/Primary Application—Slavery and Us Today. List the specific ways in which (from a modern abolitionist viewpoint) the biblical material on slavery is *repressive/regressive*. How do the slavery texts in the Bible represent a less-than-ideal ethic in the treatment of human beings? How could/should one improve upon biblical legislation related to slaves (as one examines the Bible’s words found and read “on the page”)? List the changes that you could (we should!) make in order to improve upon what is found in an on-the-page reading of the text. In other words, interact with various OT/NT texts and list the specific ways in which these biblical texts do not reflect an ultimate ethic. Again, start by reading the list in *SW&H*, pp. 44, 74-78. Your task is to add to that list one or two (perhaps even three) more specific examples beyond those already provided in *SW&H* that make the same broad point about the need for a further realization of redemptive movement towards an ultimate ethic. Please do *not* reproduce the *SW&H* list in your paper.

Slavery C: Indirect/Secondary Application—The Modern Workplace. In what ways do the slavery texts in the Bible continue to “speak” to our modern context? Should we preach/teach today that God wants Christian employees to “obey” and “submit to” their employers? Yes or no. Why? Develop your rationale. Should employees obey/submit even if their employer is “harsh” (biblical instructions for slaves)? Yes or no. Why? Again, support your answer with several reasons. How does the “spirit” of the biblical slavery texts enter into the application question? How do the similarities/differences between ancient slavery and modern employment impact our secondary application of these texts? Interact with *SW&H*, chapter 2 and criterion #4.

Length and Bibliography. Since there is no purpose in duplicating my list(s), it should be easy enough to develop the first two steps of your assignment (A & B) in one or two pages. The entire study could be done in four to six well-written pages. Include a bibliography of at least 2 or 3 works that you have used to gain an understanding of ANE/GR slavery. Please cite these works in footnotes within the paper to make your specific points of comparison to ANE/GR world.

4. Exegetical Paper (45%)

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

Mark 8:22—9:1

Philippians 2:1-11

Revelation 7:1-17*

Note: * indicates a passage with a more difficult/challenging interpretive issue. Specific instructions for the exegetical paper will be handed out in class. As with all assignments within this syllabus the exegesis paper is due (a) *through email submission* as an attached file [bwebb@tyndale.ca] and (b) before *the beginning* of the class period (i.e., not half way through or at the end of the class). Papers handed in later than at the beginning of class will be considered late. See further discussion of late submissions below. Length: 12—15 pages (3,000 to 3,750 word count). Going over the allowable page limit by more than one page (250 words) will result in a reduction of the grade.

5. **Bonus:** Herman-etic Cartoons & Interpretive Bloopers [intentional misspelling]

Every course needs some fun. Students can achieve a 2% bonus towards their exegetical paper. Simply find a cartoon (e.g., Herman, Far Side, etc.) that illustrates *some aspect of hermeneutics* within the broader framework of the communication process in every-day life. Send the cartoon to the professor as an attached file along with *a brief comment about what aspect of hermeneutics it illustrates*. Or, submit an example of biblical interpretation that you would consider as an outrageous interpretive blooper. The professor will share a select number of these during class and/or on the class website.

6. Grading Summary

Lexical Study	15%
Genre Study	20%
Application Study	20%
<u>Exegetical Paper</u>	<u>45%</u>
Total	100%

D. 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 directly at: bwebb@tyndale.ca

Late submissions. All written work must be submitted on or before the corresponding due dates. Should this not occur, the following policy will govern the evaluation of your work. For every week late, the grade will be reduced by 5 %, a half a letter grade (i.e. one week late: 82 % A- becomes 77% B+; two weeks late, 82 % becomes 72 % B-, etc.). Please note that the deduction is accumulated weekly, not daily, so a student will receive the same penalty whether the assignment is one or six days late.

Extensions. 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. Requests for extensions must be submitted in writing using the Tyndale Extension Forms, explaining the reason why the extension is needed. Such requests need to be submitted prior to the due date. All assignments must be handed in by the last day of exams. No assignments will be accepted after that date unless the student has a valid reason for an extension. In that case, the student must apply for an extension to the Registrar and not to the professor.

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 policies 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.

IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

- KBH = Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*
 W = Webb, *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals*
 W2 = Webb, *Returning Home* (Appendix A & B) (handout)
 W3 = Webb, "Balancing Paul's Original-Creation and Pro-Creation Arguments" (handout); article in *Westminster Theological Journal*
 W4 = Webb, "Revelation 20: Exegetical Considerations" (handout); article in *Baptist Review of Theology*

Date	Lecture/Subject	Assignments/Reading
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I. Author-centered Approaches

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|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Jan. 17 | Syllabus
Dimensions of Communication | KBH (<i>skim</i> chp. 2) |
| 2. Jan. 24 | Authorial Intent: a rationale
SOCIAL, CULTURAL, & HISTORICAL analysis
(reading; no lecture)
The Spirit & Interpretation | Greek Alphabet
KBH (chps. 1, 5) |
| 3. Jan. 31 | Dimensions of Language

LEXICAL analysis | Hebrew Alphabet
KBH (chp. 6, 7)
W2 (two appendixes) |
| 4. Feb. 7 | FIGURES analysis
BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL analysis | |

II. Text-centered Approaches/Genre

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|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 5. Feb. 14 | A Text-Centered Approach: a rationale
INTRO TO GENRE
NARRATIVE
RITUAL TEXTS | Lexical Study Due
KBH (323-40) |
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|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6. Feb. 21 | GOSPELS
EPISTOLARY (reading; no lecture)
POETRY
PROVERBS & WISDOM | KBH (399-417)
KBH (426-39)
KBH (chp. 8; 351-58)
KBH (387-97) |
| 7. Feb. 28 | PROPHECY
APOCALYPTIC | Genre Study due
KBH (359-83)
KBH (384-86; 440-48) |

III. Reader-centered Approaches

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| 8. Mar. 7 | 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 | |
| 9. Mar. 14 | NO CLASS—READING WEEK | |
| 10. Mar. 21 | SW&H OVERVIEW
<input type="checkbox"/> Criteria #1—9
<input type="checkbox"/> Criteria #10—18 | W (all); W3 |
| 11. Mar. 28 | APPLICATION PROCESS: Applying the Bible Redemptively
<input type="checkbox"/> Slavery texts
<input type="checkbox"/> Women texts | Application Study due |
| 12. Apr. 4 | APPLICATION PROCESS: Application I—General Procedure
<input type="checkbox"/> Principle/Abstraction Approach
<input type="checkbox"/> CP texts | [MP3 + PDF] |
| 13. Apr. 11 | APPLICATION PROCESS: Application II—The Covenants
<input type="checkbox"/> Hermeneutical Spiral ²
<input type="checkbox"/> Never Ending Story
<input type="checkbox"/> The Bible & God’s Will | [MP3 + PDFs]
KBH (chps. 11, 12) |
| 14. Apr. 18 | Final Paper Due (no class) | Exegetical Paper due |

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).

V. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY: GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

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