



Course Syllabus Winter 2013

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

JANUARY 14 – APRIL 15, 2013
ONLINE

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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 ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

By:

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.),

The student 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”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].

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.

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]

Webb, William J. *Corporal Punishment in the Bible: A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic for Troubling Texts*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011. [ISBN: 978-0-8308-2761-9].

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 α —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: Semantic Fields”.

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

Mark 8:22—9:1

Philippians 2:1-11

Revelation 7:1-17

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 [bill.webb@rogers.com] on the date specified in the syllabus schedule below. See 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-e^uctic 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.

6. Grading Summary

RB Forum #1: “Semantic Fields”	5%
RB Forum #2: “Validation”	20%
RB Forum #3: “Reading Slavery Texts from Two Horizons”	25%
Exegetical Paper [bonus added here to EP grade*]	50%
<u>Fun Forums</u>	<u>*5% bonus (maximum)</u>
Total	100%

E. 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: bill.webb@rogers.com

Late FORUM Submissions. The initial “assignment” post to a RB Forum is due between Monday and Wednesday (midnight, Eastern Standard Time) of the first week. Two subsequent “critical interaction” posts are due by the end of the first week—i.e., Sunday (midnight, Eastern Standard Time). Any interaction the following week is optional but encouraged. *The penalty for late RB Forum 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 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 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. 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 partial penalty). By clear mitigating circumstances I mean something along the following lines. Suppose I as your professor were to take your circumstances to the class (hypothetically, not in reality) 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 [mitigating?] 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 this sort of late submission without penalty (or with only partial penalty) where the submission is on or before the LDOE, please contact the professor. 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 dean/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 dean 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.

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"; article in *Westminster Theological Journal* (handout)
- Note: W2, W3 and other reading materials will be posted online with their corresponding week and topic.

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

Week 1	Syllabus Dimensions of Communication	KBH (<i>skim</i> chp. 2)
Week 2	Authorial Intent: a rationale SOCIAL, CULTURAL, & HISTORICAL analysis The Spirit & Interpretation	Grk./Heb. Alphabets KBH (chps. 1, 5)
Week 3	Dimensions of Language	RB Forum #1: "Semantic Fields" KBH (chp. 6, 7) W2 (two appendixes)
Week 4	Validation of Semantic Fields	RB Forum #2: "Validation"

II. Text-centered Approaches/Genre

Week 5	A Text-Centered Approach: a rationale INTRO TO GENRE NARRATIVE RITUAL TEXTS	KBH (323-40)
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Week 6	GOSPELS EPISTOLARY (reading; no lecture) POETRY PROVERBS & WISDOM	KBH (399-417) KBH (426-39) KBH (chp. 8; 351-58) KBH (387-97)
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READING WEEK: Feb. 25th –Mar. 3rd

Week 7	PROPHECY APOCALYPTIC	KBH (359-83) KBH (384-86; 440-48)
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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
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Week 9	SW&H OVERVIEW <input type="checkbox"/> Criteria #1—9 <input type="checkbox"/> Criteria #10—18	W (all); W3 RB FORUM #3: “Reading Slavery Texts”
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Week 10	Applying the Bible Redemptively <input type="checkbox"/> Slavery texts <input type="checkbox"/> Women texts
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Week 11	Application I—General Procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Principle/Abstraction Approach <input type="checkbox"/> CP texts	[MP3 + PDF]
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Week 12	Application II—The Covenants Application III—The Will of God & Scripture <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)
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Week 13	Final Paper Due: Wednesday April 17th	Exegetical Paper due
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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).

V. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY: GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

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