MS 5P1010

# The Bible and Kingdom Work: Biblical-Theological Methodology for Practice-Led Doctoral Study

## Course Information

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| **Instructor:** | Ambrose Thomson, PhD |
| | Assistant Professor of Old Testament |
| | McMaster Divinity College |
| | Hamiton, Ontario |
| **Term:** | Spring/Summer 2026 |
| **Mode:** | Online Synchronous (Livestream) |
| **Schedule:** | Class will meet via livestream on the following dates: |

| | |
|---|---|
| May 6 | Class from 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM |
| May 13 | Class from 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM |
| May 20 | Class from 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM |
| May 27 | Class from 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM |
| July 29 | Class from 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM |
| August 5 | Class from 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM |

**Live-Stream Info:** Zoom room link will be published on A2L course site.

## Course Description

This course exposes students pursuing practice-led doctoral research to important scholarship in Biblical Theology with the goal of promoting deeper reflection on the role of the biblical witness within practice-led research. Students will bring their own work into conversation with biblical-theological scholarship and will discern how to integrate Scripture into their practice-led research agendas from the questions they ask to the conclusions they reach.

## Course Objectives

Through active engagement with all aspects of this course, students will come to:

**Knowing**   Explain the major factors requiring consideration in developing an approach to interpreting biblical texts.

Explain how each book or corpus within the Bible fits within the grand narrative of the unified cannon.

Explain the relationship of their practice to the theological themes of the biblical canon.

**Being**   Cultivate a posture of humble listening to God's Word as a life-long learner.

"To present [themselves] to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15)

To allow the Scripture to motivate, form, and transform one's professional practice in the way of the Lord and in the grand narrative of redemption.

**Doing**   To articulate the primary biblical-theological topics relevant to one's practice-led research interests.

To identify some of the major biblical passages relevant to one's practice-led research interests.

To interpret the biblical text meaningfully and responsibly within broader context.

To discern appropriate secondary sources in biblical studies relevant to one's practice-led research interests.

## Course Textbooks

Gnuse, Robert Karl. *A Short Introduction to Critical Old Testament Methodologies*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2025.

Klink, Edward W., and Darian R. Lockett. *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.

Stanley E. Porter. *Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching: An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023.

Thompson, Alan J. *A Basic Guide to Biblical Theology: Nine Themes That Unite the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2025.

## Course Work

All students in the course must complete the following required course components as described by the due dates indicated unless otherwise arranged with the professor or accommodated through a Student Accessibility Services accommodation plan.

| Name | Weight | Due Date | Length |
|---|---|---|---|
| Class Experience | 20% | Weekly | 500 Words/Week |
| Position Paper | 25% | May 26 | 5000–6000 Words |
| Peer Reviews | 10% | June 3–17 | 750–1500 Words |
| Seminar Paper | 35% | July 18 | 7000–8000 Words |
| Seminar Paper Questions | 10% | July 28 & Aug 4 | |

*All due dates must be strictly adhered to unless advanced permission is obtained from the professor for an extended deadline. All assignments are due at 11:59 PM on the date indicated unless otherwise stated. Course assignments handed in past the due date without prior permission will not receive written feedback but will receive only a grade.*

## Class Attendance – 0%

To support healthy classroom dynamics and create an engaging atmosphere for all students, class attendance is mandatory for all students. Those in attendance by livestream are expected to have their cameras on at all times during class. Late arrival and absences may be accommodated upon request for extenuating circumstances such as illness.

## Class Experience – 20%

In order to cultivate a cooperative learning community, students will prepare for class by 1) reading all assigned material, 2) by identifying critical questions about the readings (the kind of thing you might ask the author if attending their presentation at a conference), and 3) identifying how the reading impacts your approach to biblical study and its integration with your practice-led research. The readings assigned for each class will be primarily the course textbooks and peer papers.

**Length:** ~500 words

**Due Date:** Weekly, before each class session.

## Position Paper – 25%

In this activity, students will write a research paper in which they articulate their position on the hermeneutical and epistemological issues that they must navigate as practical theologians when

interpreting scripture and using it for practice-led theological reflection. The paper will give a detailed description of the student's own approach to biblical interpretation including theoretical reflection on the nature of interpretation and methodological considerations for biblical interpretation in particular. The paper will also include a discussion of how this approach serves the student's agenda of practice-led research including reflection on how one moves from interpretation, to theological synthesis, to ministry practice.

**Length:**     5000–6000 words.

**Due Date:**     May 26, 2026

## *Position Paper Peer Reviews – 10%*

In this activity, students will be divided into groups of 2–3 to review and review and discuss each other's position papers. These group discussions will be led by the course instructor at a time of mutual availability after the papers have been completed with at least one week for peer reviews to be completed. In each group, students will carefully read the work of their fellow group members and provide a minimum 750 word written review for each paper. Due to the brevity of the reviews, no summary of the paper's content should be included. Instead, reviews should focus on areas of both affirmation and improvement/clarification within the content and argument of the paper. These reviews will serve as the foundation for group discussion of each paper, where the author will provide a 1–2 minute summary and then interact with the questions, critiques, and affirmations of the other group members for 30–40 minutes. Each contributor should be prepared to articulate, defend, and even revise their approach to biblical interpretation and its integration with practical theology in light of the discussion.

**Length:**     750–1500 words depending on group size.

**Due Date:**     Between June 3 and June 17, 2026 as scheduled during the course.

## *Seminar Paper – 35%*

In this activity, students will write a biblical theological research paper that 1) focuses on a single theme or topic in the biblical canon, 2) develops that theme in detail showing the contribution of each major canonical corpus (Torah, Prophets, Writings, Gospels/Acts, Epistles), 3) discusses the theological relevance of that theme/topic to the student's own practice-led research agenda, 4) explains the potential impact/application of the theme/topic in their practice of ministry.

**Length:** 7000–8000 Words

**Due Date:** July 18, 2026

## *Seminar Paper Critical Questions –10%*

In this activity, students will read the major paper of every other class member and provide one page of critical questions about the work formulated to help the author improve the argument and clarity of the paper as well as take their research further in the future. These critical questions will also serve as the foundation for the seminar discussion of each classmate's paper and will be shared with each respective author after the class in which their paper is discussed.

**Length:**        250–300 words per peer paper

**Due Date:**      July 28, 2026 & August 4, 2026

## Weekly Seminar Sessions and Required Readings

| *Class* | *Seminar Topic(s)* | *Required Readings* |
|---|---|---|
| May 6 | Biblical Normativity in Practical Theology | |
| May 13 | Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Criticism | Gnuse, *Critical Old Testament Methodologies* Porter, *Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching.* |
| May 20 | Biblical Theology: Theories and Issues | Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology.* |
| May 27 | Biblical Theology: The Theology of the Bible | Thompson, *A Basic Guide to Biblical Theology.* |
| July 29 | Seminar Papers | Classmates Papers |
| August 5 | Seminar Papers | Classmates Papers |

## MDC Course Policies

## *Academic Honesty*

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted

work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

**A special note about AI:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

## *AODA*

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

## *Gender Inclusive Language*

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

## *Bookstore*

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

## *Presence and Meaningful Participation*

Presence and participation in this course are expected. Faculty know from many years of experience that a student's level of presence and participation in the course will impact how well she or he will score in the course. Although there are exceptions to this rule of thumb, low levels of presence and participation tend to translate to low grades; mediocre presence and participation tend to translate to mediocre grades; and high levels of presence and participation tend to translate to higher grades.

A word needs to be said about what constitutes "presence" (attendance) and "participation" in an asynchronous course. Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Be aware that merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. "Academically related activities" certainly includes participation in and completion of the course requirements that are described below. Additionally, just as students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week outside of the learning management system (A2L), so also students are expected to engage one another in formative dialogue "outside of class." This is an important part of belonging to and maintaining a community of learning and is a staple ingredient in what constitutes "presence."

## *Online Etiquette*

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for classmates and the instructor. This is even truer in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that we use to interpret what a person is communicating to us are not present online (except, perhaps in video posts). Therefore, it is especially critical that we be mindful of how our words will be interpreted by those who are reading them. As the instructor of the course, it is my responsibility to monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. Most if not all courses at MDC are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture. Invariably there will be disagreements; these disagreements must be discussed and negotiated in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course. The instructor will expect that you will give some thought to your postings. Excessive postings are also frowned upon because these amount to dominating the discussion. Please limit your postings to less than 200 words. Instructors reserve the right to ask students to take a step back to allow others discussion time if she or he feels that an individual is dominating the discussion. In your responses, please try to be clear which point your response refers to. Students who violate these guidelines may be dismissed from class.

*This syllabus is the property of the instructor and MDC. It is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class. Students will be kept apprised of any changes.*