



McMaster Divinity
College

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 1

OT 1A03

McMaster Divinity College
Dr. Christopher D. Land
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Fall 2017
Tuesday 7:00–9:00pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Bible has permanently and irrevocably shaped human culture. Thus, whatever one thinks about the role that the Bible has played and continues to play in human history—and opinions on this are quite varied—the Bible cannot be safely ignored. Understanding the Bible is essential for understanding who we are and how we got here. For Christians, understanding the Bible is also essential for figuring out who God is and who we ought to be.

Unfortunately, biblical illiteracy has become the norm even within the church. All too often, neither the Bible's opponents nor its defenders seem to have a clue what they are talking about. In this first Biblical Foundations course, we will explore the Bible and develop preliminary understandings of *what it looks like* and *what it says*. This will then allow us to explore, in the second course, *where the Bible came from* and *how people read it*.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through their active participation in this course, students will:

KNOWING

- Know the names of the books of the Bible;
- Know the various canonical orderings and their communal significance;
- Know the overall shape of key biblical narratives (i.e. history of Israel; life of Jesus; emergence of early church), including major locations, characters, and events;
- Know the general shape of each biblical book, including overall structure and major themes.

BEING

- Become self-aware as a reader of the Bible;
- Assume a receptive and diligent posture towards the Bible;
- Dispense with over-confidence (or lack of confidence) concerning knowledge of the Bible, adopting instead an attitude of life-long learning;
- Confess the ongoing usefulness of both Old and New Testaments as Christian scripture.

DOING

- Have the ability to quickly locate specific books in the Bible along with key passages within them;
- Have the ability to answer questions about the content of the Bible, such as might be asked during an ordination exam;
- Have the ability to draw together the entire canon when exploring matters of theological interest.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *Written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as Word documents (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf). A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments, including assignments submitted in incorrect file formats. Assignments cannot be submitted after December 12th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (thomn@mcmaster.ca).*

PRIMARY READING (0%, WITH 5% PENALTY FOR NON-COMPLETION)

During the semester, each student will read through the entire Bible, as well as some related texts from the Ancient Near East or the Greco-Roman world. The Bible reading is to be done using an easy-to-read English translation, or a translation in the student's native language if his or her English reading pace is too slow. Students can begin this reading prior to September, but it must not be commenced more than three months prior to the start of the course. The parallel texts from the ancient world will be made available on Avenue to Learn in electronic format. At the completion of the semester, each student must report whether or not the biblical and parallel readings have been read in their entirety. Failure to report completion of the assigned reading prior to **Tuesday, December 12th @ 11:59pm** will result in a final grade reduction of 5%.

INITIAL SELF-REFLECTION (15%)

Before **Tuesday, September 26th @ 11:59pm**, each student will submit a 1,500-word essay that describes his or her current relationship with the Bible, including both theory (i.e. what is it?) and practice (i.e. what does it do and what do we do with it?). Because an important goal of this self-reflection is to make the student aware of his or her own situatedness, the essay should look not only at the student as an individual but also at major influences that have affected the student's relationship with the Bible (e.g. historical influences, biographical influences, etc.). In short, what do you believe about the Bible and why? For students who are uncertain about what constitutes a good self-reflection essay, a detailed grading rubric is available on Avenue to Learn.

BIBLE CONTENT QUIZZES (10% EACH = 70% TOTAL)

Drawing upon the Bible, the supplied study tools, and the course lectures, each student will write a series of quizzes that test his or her familiarity with the content of the Bible. There will be seven quizzes overall, covering: (1) Pentateuch; (2) Historical Books; (3) Minor Prophets; (4) Major Prophets; (5) Gospels, General Epistles & Revelation; (6) Poetic Books; and (7) Acts & Pauline Epistles. The quizzes will be fifteen minutes in length and will consist primarily of short answer questions. Each quiz will be cumulative

relative to the earlier quizzes, with the final questions on the quiz relating to material already covered in the earlier quizzes. Maps and study notes will be posted on A2L, but students are also expected to be familiar with the relevant primary and parallel readings.

BIBLE OVERVIEW (20%)

Before **Tuesday, December 12th @ 11:59pm**, each student will submit a 2,000-word essay that surveys the entire Bible, commenting on each of its major sections (defined according to the lecture schedule below). The goal is to summarize the major themes of each section and to trace how each section contributes something important to the Bible. In keeping with the grading rubric on A2L, the essay must illustrate both the diversity that characterizes the different sections/books of the Bible and the unity that can be found in receiving the entire canon together. At the very least, the essay must begin with an introduction, proceed through each biblical section with a distinct heading for each, and then conclude with an overall conclusion regarding unity amidst diversity.

GRADING SUMMARY

Primary Reading	0%
Initial Self-Reflection	15%
Bible Content Quizzes	70%
Bible Overview	15%
Total	100%

TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess a copy of the Bible in whatever language or translation is easiest for the student to read.

All students are recommended to possess a good Bible dictionary, such as:

Freedman, David Noel, ed. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, ON, M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Due Dates	Assignments
Sep 26	Initial Self-Reflection Due
Oct 3	Pentateuch Quiz
Oct 24	Historical Books Quiz
Nov 7	Major Prophets Quiz
Nov 14	Minor Prophets Quiz
Nov 28	Gospels, General Epistles & Revelation Quiz
Dec 5	Poetic Books Quiz
Dec 12	Acts & Pauline Epistles Quiz
	Thematic Overview Due
	Reading Report Due

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Dates * = Quiz † = Prof. Away	Seminar Sessions	Bible Reading (Word Count)	Parallel Reading
Sep 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome & Introduction to the Course Lecture: Pentateuch (Part 1) 	Genesis – Exodus (58,003)	ANE Creation & Flood Stories
Sep 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lecture: Pentateuch (Part 2) 	Leviticus – Deuteronomy (66,908)	
Sep 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: Pentateuch & Parallels Lecture: Historical Books (Part 1) 	Joshua – 1 Samuel (53,932)	Amarna Letters, Sennacherib's Annals, Cyrus Cylinder
*Oct 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz: Pentateuch Lecture: Historical Books (Part 2) 	2 Samuel – 2 Kings (56,315)	
Oct 10	Reading Week (No Class)	1 Chronicles – Esther (57,057)	
Oct 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: Historical Books & Parallels Lecture: Major Prophets 	Isaiah – Lamentations (60,934)	ANE Prophecies & Incantations
*Oct 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz: Historical Books Lecture: Minor Prophets 	Ezekiel – Malachi (60,756)	
Oct 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion: Prophetic Books & Parallels Lecture: Gospels 	Matthew – John (64,767)	Birth Accounts, Josephus on Banditry, Apocalyptic Literature
*Nov 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz: Major Prophets Lecture: General Epistles & Revelation 	Hebrews – Revelation (22,395)	
†*Nov 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz: Minor Prophets Lecture: Wisdom Literature 	Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (27,132)	

†Nov 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Gospels, General Epistles, Revelation & Parallels • Lecture: Psalms & Song of Solomon 	Psalms, Song of Songs (32,167)	ANE Theodicy, Instruction, Erotic Poetry
*Nov 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz: Gospels, General Epistles & Revelation • Discussion: Poetic Books & Parallels • Lecture: Acts 	Acts (18,450)	Jewish Attitudes towards Gentiles and Torah Observance
*Dec 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz: Poetic Books • Lecture: Pauline Epistles 	Romans – Philemon (32,408)	
*Dec 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz: Acts & Pauline Epistles • Discussion: Acts, Pauline Epistles & Parallels • Summative Reflection & Anticipation • Course Evaluations 		

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty at:

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

In this course, we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) for plagiarism detection and the student's continuation in the course represents his or her consent to the use of this service. If a student has objections to the use of this service, alternate arrangements for assignment submission must be made with the professor in advance of the assignment deadlines.

A useful guide to avoiding plagiarism is the Harvard Guide to Using Sources:

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the latest edition of the McMaster Divinity College *Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*:

<https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and NIV (2011) are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

This syllabus is for information only and remains the property of the respective professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course.