



McMaster Divinity  
College

# BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 1

## OT 1A03

McMaster Divinity College  
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Fall 2016  
Tuesday 10:30am–12:20pm

### 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. And 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 in order to develop a preliminary understanding 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 characters, places, and plot points
- 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 should be uploaded in Microsoft Word format to the designated Avenue to Learn dropbox. A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Assignments cannot be submitted after December 14<sup>th</sup> without written permission from the Office of the Registrar ([thomn@mcmaster.ca](mailto: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 primary readings have been read in their entirety. Failure to complete the assigned reading prior to Final Week will result in a final grade reduction of 5%.

### INITIAL SELF-REFLECTION (15%)

Before **Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> @ 8:30am**, 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.

### THEMATIC OVERVIEW (20%)

Before **Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup> @ 8:30am**, each student will submit a 1,500-word essay that traces a specific biblical theme across both the Old and New Testaments (including at least some discussion of each major section of the canon). The essay must demonstrate an awareness of the diversity that characterizes the different Testaments and their individual books, as well as the unity that arises from a coherent canonical reading of the entire Bible.

### BIBLE CONTENT QUIZZES (25% 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. The quiz questions will probe the overall shape of scripture as well as the structure and content of each individual book. There will be five quizzes overall, covering: (1) The Pentateuch; (2) The Historical Books; (3) The Prophets; (4) The Psalms and Wisdom Literature; (5) The Gospels and Acts.

### FINAL EXAM (40%)

During Final Week, each student will be required to write an exam such as might be written for ordination. In keeping with the major goals of this course, the exam will assess whether or not students know *what the Bible looks like* and *what it says*. The exam will be two hours in length and will consist primarily of short answer questions. It will be cumulative relative to the earlier quizzes, encompassing all of the material covered in the semester.

## GRADING SUMMARY

|                         |      |
|-------------------------|------|
| Primary Reading         | 0%   |
| Initial Self-Reflection | 15%  |
| Thematic Overview       | 20%  |
| Bible Content Quizzes   | 25%  |
| Final Exam              | 40%  |
| Total                   | 100% |

## TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess an English translation of the Bible with Apocrypha, such as:

Coogan, Michael D., ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

All students are recommended to possess:

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](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

## ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

| Due Dates | Assignments                 |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Sep 27    | Pentateuch Quiz             |
| Oct 11    | Initial Self-Reflection Due |
| Oct 18    | Historical Books Quiz       |
| Nov 1     | Prophets Quiz               |
| Nov 15    | Wisdom Literature Quiz      |
| Nov 29    | Gospels and Acts Quiz       |
| Dec 6     | Thematic Overview Due       |
| Dec 13    | Final Exam                  |

## SEMINAR SCHEDULE

| Dates   | Seminar Sessions  | Bible Reading               | Parallel Reading             |
|---------|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sep 13  | Welcome & Introduction to the Course<br>The Pentateuch (Part 1) | Genesis – Exodus            | See Avenue to Learn<br>(A2L) |
| Sep 20  | The Pentateuch (Part 2)   | Leviticus – Deuteronomy     |                              |
| *Sep 27 | The Historical Books (Part 1)                                   | Joshua – 1 Samuel           |                              |
| Oct 4   | The Historical Books (Part 2)                                   | 2 Samuel – 1 Chronicles     |                              |
| Oct 11  | Reading Week (No Class)   | 2 Chronicles – Esther       |                              |
| *Oct 18 | Wisdom Literature (Part 1)                                      | Job – Psalms (1–72)         |                              |
| Oct 25  | Wisdom Literature (Part 2)                                      | Proverbs–Isaiah (1–39)      |                              |
| *Nov 1  | Major Prophets  | Isaiah (40–66)–Lamentations |                              |
| Nov 8   | Minor Prophets  | Ezekiel–Jonah               |                              |
| *Nov 15 | The Gospels<br>(Professor in San Antonio)                       | Micah–Luke                  |                              |
| Nov 22  | Acts & Pauline Epistles<br>(Professor in San Antonio)           | John–2 Corinthians          |                              |
| *Nov 29 | General Epistles & Revelation                                   | Galatians–2 Peter           |                              |
| Dec 6   | Exam Review   | 1 John–Revelation           |                              |
| Dec 13  | Final Exam  | Psalms (73–150)             |                              |

## 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*:

<http://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.**