



McMaster Divinity
College

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 2

NT 1A03

McMaster Divinity College
Dr. Christopher D. Land
landc@mcmaster.ca

Winter 2017
Tuesday 10:30am–12:20pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Bible did not descend from heaven as a leather-bound book in King James English, nor did it come with a user's guide. Rather, it is a multifaceted book with a complex history and it can be read and received in many different ways.

In this second Biblical Foundations course, we will explore *where the Bible came from* and *how people read it*. In other words, we will look behind the text (at its cultural contexts and compositional history), within the text (at its genres and literary characteristics), and in front of the text (at its readers and its reception in church and society).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through their active participation in this course, students will:

KNOWING

- Understand the process of textual transmission and the importance of textual criticism
- Understand the complexities involved in Bible translation and the principles that underlie different modern translations
- Know some of the archeological and socio-cultural history that is relevant to the Bible
- Understand debates regarding historiography and the historicity of the Bible
- Distinguish the major genres of the Bible and appreciate their distinctive social functions and literary conventions
- Be familiar with introductory matters pertaining to the individual books of the Bible (i.e. date, provenance, authorship, etc.)
- Understand debates regarding the compositional history of the biblical texts (e.g. documentary hypothesis, synoptic problem, etc.)
- Know about the processes by which the biblical canon was formed
- Be familiar with different approaches to scripture that are characteristic of different Christian traditions
- Understand the role of the reader(s) in the process of biblical interpretation

BEING

- Experience how a hermeneutic of suspicion can actually lead to better listening
- Gain greater self-awareness of themselves as readers of scripture
- Develop an informed embrace of the Bible as both inspired and authoritative
- Appreciate the importance of participating in critical and respectful discussions concerning biblical texts

DOING

- Have the ability to locate useful resources and the wisdom to differentiate between reliable and unreliable resources
- Have the ability to read and respond to scholarly discussions regarding the Bible
- Have the ability to formulate clear (even if tentative) positions with respect to controversial issues and to articulate coherent arguments in support of those positions
- Have the ability to articulate a theological perspective on the Bible along with a practical explanation of how it should be handled by the church

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *Each written assignment should be uploaded in Microsoft Word format to Avenue to Learn. A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 12th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (thomn@mcmaster.ca).*

BIBLE BACKGROUND FORUM (2 x 5% = 10%)

Over the course of the semester, students will read two books that summarize historical and cultural topics relevant to the Bible. While these books are being read, students will discuss their contents on an Avenue to Learn discussion forum. The forum will be open and unstructured, meaning that students will be free to create new threads and to post replies whenever they wish. The forum is intended primarily as a safe place for students to dialogue with one another about historical and cultural issues related to the Bible, with the focus and flow of the conversation being dictated by student interest. On **February 14th** (Arnold & Hess) and **April 4th** (Green et al), students will be asked on the forum whether they read the assigned book in its entirety and whether the reading was informative and/or interesting. Each student will then write a reply, with this reply being the student's final opportunity to demonstrate his or her familiarity with the reading material. (The length of this reply will thus vary depending on how active the student has been in the forum during the semester.) The final grade for the forum will be an overall score out of ten that encompasses all posts throughout the semester, with the score reflecting for each book: (1) whether the student has demonstrated familiarity with the material; and (2) whether he or she has made some interesting observations that demonstrate thoughtful interaction with it.

BOOK RESPONSES (2 x 15% = 30%)

Over the course of the semester, students will read two books that explore topics of hermeneutical importance. For each book, students will post on the relevant Avenue to Learn discussion forum a reading response of *at least* 1,000 words that answers the following questions. The response does not need to be an essay; it need only supply an answer for each of the questions. The due dates for the initial reading responses are **January 30th at 10:00pm** (Walton & Sandy) and **March 20th at 10:00pm** (Porter & Stovell).

1. How has the information presented in the book broadened or deepened your understanding of the Bible's origin and/or the ways that it can be read? Give some examples of information that expanded your understanding of the Bible and/or the ways that people read it today.
2. Do you strongly agree or disagree with any of the claims made by the book's authors, editors, or contributors? Articulate some of these claims and then give specific reasons for your acceptance or rejection of them. If you don't know whether you agree or disagree, discuss whatever is preventing you from coming to a decision.
3. Why does the topic of the book matter? What difference do the issues make for the specific Christian community of which you are a part? In practical terms, how do these issues impact the way different churches interact with the Bible differently?
4. When it comes to the issues in question, how would you describe the outlook and attitude of your current Christian community? Would you describe your current Christian community as well-informed regarding the information presented in the book and/or the issues raised on account of that information? What are some of the factors (both positive and negative) that make it difficult for individuals and communities of faith to (re-)assess the evidence surrounding these specific issues?

Once each student's response has been posted, he or she will be able to read other student responses. This will allow for follow-up replies and an open-ended discussion amongst students regarding the issues raised by the reading. For grading purposes, the initial post will be immediately assessed and assigned a score out of ten. However, if the student demonstrates greater insight in follow-up discussions than he or she did in the initial response post, this additional content will be taken into account and the student might receive an improved book response grade.

INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEWS (2 x 20% = 40%)

Drawing upon a range of commentaries and reference resources, together with specialized articles, each student will prepare a detailed overview that introduces one of the books of the Bible (or, in the cases of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, two books, and in the case of the Johannine Epistles, three books). The overview should begin with a brief introduction and then proceed with a distinct section for each of the following topics: literary genre and social function; main content/themes; authorship and/or compositional history (i.e. oral transmission, written sources, redactional/editorial work, etc.); provenance (i.e. place[s] of origin); date(s) of composition; original audience(s); subsequent textual transmission; acceptance into Jewish/Christian canons; reception history (i.e. role played in subsequent

theological and/or ecclesial developments); bibliography. When different views are espoused by different traditions or scholars, the overview should note the differences of opinion, as well as some of the reasons *why* different views exist, but there is no need to argue which view is the best. Overall, each overview should be approximately 2,500 words in length and should follow the MDC *Guidelines for Essays and Theses*. One of the overviews must introduce a book of the OT; the other must introduce a book of the NT. The OT overview is due on **February 26th at 11:59pm**. The NT overview is due on **April 2nd at 11:59pm**.

PERSONAL POSITION PAPER (20%)

At the conclusion of Biblical Foundations 2, each student will write a personal position paper in which he or she explains *what the Bible is* and *how it should be understood by the church*. Although no particular structure is prescribed for the essay, it should at some point touch on the major topics of the course with some explanation as to how they impact the church's understanding of the Bible. Essential topics include: the historical origins of biblical texts (and if/how these origins matter), the literary qualities of the biblical texts (and if/how they matter); the origin and function of the biblical canon(s), the role of biblical scholarship in the life of the church; and the role of the S/spirit in understanding the Bible. At the conclusion of the paper, students should briefly reflect on how *understanding the Bible* relates to *understanding God, the universe, and how to live well as a human being in the twenty-first century*. In particular, what is relationship between these different understandings, and how does one move between them? The personal position paper should be approximately 1,500 words in length and should follow the MDC *Guidelines for Essays and Theses*. It is due on **April 12th at 11:59pm**.

GRADING SUMMARY

Bible Background Forum	10%
Book Response: Walton & Sandy	15%
Book Response: Porter & Stovell	15%
Introduction to a Book of the Bible (OT)	20%
Introduction to a Book of the Bible (NT)	20%
<u>Personal Position Paper</u>	<u>20%</u>
Total	100%

TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess an English translation of the New Testament, as well as

Arnold, Bill T., and Richard S. Hess, eds. *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014. (459 pages)

Green, Joel B., and Lee Martin McDonald, eds. *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. (572 pages)

Walton, John H., and D. Brent Sandy. *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2013. (309 pages)

Porter, Stanley E., and Beth M. Stovell, eds. *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2012. (210 pages)

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.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Dates	Seminar Sessions	Secondary Reading	
Jan 10	Welcome & Introduction; Best Practices for Biblical Research	Arnold & Hess	Walton & Sandy
Jan 17	Textual Transmission & Translation		
Jan 24	Canon Formation and Biblical Theology		
Jan 31	Hermeneutics: The Nature of Understanding		
Feb 7	Behind the Text: The Historical Environment and Compositional Origin of the OT		
Feb 14			Walton & Sandy Online Discussions
Feb 21	Reading Week (No Class)		
Feb 28	Behind the Text: The Historical Environment and Compositional Origin of the NT	Green et al	Porter & Stovell
Mar 7			
Mar 14	Within the Text: Biblical Genres and Their Distinctive Qualities		
Mar 21			
Mar 28	In Front of the Text: A Brief Reception History of the Bible		Porter & Stovell Online Discussions
Apr 4	Hermeneutics Again: A S/spirit of Understanding		
Apr 11	Final Week: After Understanding...What Then?		

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Due Dates	Assignments
Jan 30 @ 10:00pm	Book Response: Walton & Sandy
Feb 26 @ 11:59pm	Introduction to a Book of the Bible
Mar 20 @ 10:00pm	Book Response: Porter & Stovell
Apr 2 @ 11:59pm	Introduction to a Book of the Bible
Apr 12 @ 11:59pm	Personal Position Paper

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.