

# McMaster Divinity College

NT/OT 2A03: Biblical Interpretation  
M.A., M.Div, DPT, Ph.D. (see separate syllabus)

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Mondays 11:00 a.m.–12:50 p.m.

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## I. Course Description

A study of the principles of interpretation and application of the Bible. Attention is given to students developing a clearly defined framework for interpreting the Bible that is biblically and theologically grounded, spiritually sensitive, critically aware and practically relevant.

This course is an elective for specializations in Biblical Studies (BS), Christian Worldview (CW) and Pastoral Studies (PS).



Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective in connection with this course. Once the application is accepted, DPT students can take the course as part of their degree program.

## II. Course Objectives— Through reading, lectures, discussion and assignments the following goals are set for the student:

### A. Knowing—

1. Know sound guidelines for reading and interpreting Scripture.
2. Understand common fallacies of interpretation.
3. Know the types of literature in the Bible, and how they affect interpretation.
4. Know a variety of methods by which the Bible has been interpreted.
5. Know principles for applying the Bible to life, ministry and thought.

### B. Being—

6. Be habitually challenged and changed by the reading and study of the Bible.
7. Become an informed and responsible interpreter of the Bible.
8. Be a critical thinker in the process of the constant evaluation of interpretation
9. Be one who values Scripture deeply

### C. Doing—

10. Make specific applications of the Bible to your ministry and/or spiritual formation
11. Listen and read critically→Identify fallacies of interpretation
12. Apply biblical interpretation in a way that is relevant to your specialization

### III. Course Requirements

#### A. **Class Participation** (15%)

1. Student attendance and participation in interactive lectures and class and group discussions is expected.
2. Each student will participate in an online discussion in Avenue once a week

#### B. **Reading** (10%)

1. Read selected Old and New Testament texts.

##### *Old Testament*

Narrative: Genesis

Narrative + Law: Exodus

Poetry:

Lament: Psalms 22, 136

Thanksgiving: Psalms 116

Royal: Psalms 93, 110

Salvation History: Psalms 98

Praise: Psalms 89, 132

Prophecy: Isaiah, Jonah, Hosea

Prophecy+narrative+apocalyptic: Daniel

##### *New Testament*

Narrative: Luke-Acts

Epistles

Group: Romans, Galatians, Philippians

Personal: Philemon, 2 Timothy

Homiletic: Hebrews, James

Apocalyptic+Epistle+Prophecy: Revelation

#### 2. **Course Textbooks**

For the course texts, there are three tracks to choose from for the course reading that best correspond to your needs and your specific areas of specialization:

- a. Christian Worldview: The texts reflect a general introduction to Biblical interpretation and guidelines for responsible reading, interpretation and application of Scripture
  1. Gorman, Michael J. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009 (302 pp.).
  2. Brauch, Manfred. *Abusing Scripture: The Consequences of Misreading the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009 (294 pp.).
- b. Pastoral Studies: This text reflect the traditional evangelical approach to exegesis for preaching and teaching:  
Klein, William, Blomberg, Craig L. & Hubbard, Robert L. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017 (707 pp.).

- c. Biblical Studies: The texts reflect the multi-faceted discipline of exegesis
    - 1. Gorman, Michael J. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009 (302 pp.).
    - 2. Choose *one* of the following texts (OT or NT)
      - a. Baker, David W. & Arnold, Bill T. *The Face of Old Testament Studies*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999 (512 pp.).
      - b. Green, Joel. *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010 (440 pp.).
3. **Reading Report**  
 On the day of the scheduled final (**December 10**), each student will submit a reading report by e-mail at [westfal@mcmaster.ca](mailto:westfal@mcmaster.ca) for the Bible and text reading, stating a percentage of the reading completed on time, and groups will turn in their evaluations. Do your own math on the percentage.

### C. **Written Assignments**

There will be two assignments for each student. The first is a paper that reflects the area of specialization and the second is a project that is a suitable contribution to the student's portfolio. **Submit all assignments by e-mail in PDF form to the professor at [westfal@mcmaster.ca](mailto:westfal@mcmaster.ca).**

#### 1. **Written assignment for Specializations, (40%)**

**Due midnight Friday Nov 2. Late papers will lose 1% a day for a week, then 4% a day.**

Each student must utilize the MDC Style Guide

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

- a. Christian Worldview: Scripture Twisting Journal
  - 1. Each student is required to keep a "journal" with 10 total entries, where they identify a significant abuse of biblical interpretation and/or application that they have observed—some cases can be from past experience, but the students should also be particularly alert to "Scripture twisting" that they encounter during the course. Each student may submit their first entry by e-mail for feedback on Sept. 24.
  - 2. Remember the priority is biblical interpretation, meaning that each entry should focus on a (mis)interpretation of a particular Bible verse or passage. Avoid addressing theological issues/topics. Do not include comics that are intended to be puns or wordplay (ie. Eve is tempted by an Apple computer).
  - 3. The contexts where you observe biblical interpretation can range from children, friends and family to the pew, the pulpit, and scholarly journals as well as popular media.

4. Format of Scripture Twisting Journal
  - a. Identify the use of Scripture.
  - b. Describe the situation/conversation where you state how the Scripture is interpreted and/or misapplied.
  - c. Explain what is wrong with the use of Scripture
  - d. Explain a better approach to understanding the passage, researching and footnoting your sources (see MDC Style Guide) utilizing a minimum of 1 good commentary per entry—attempt to look at different commentaries of the best quality for each entry to become acquainted with available resources. Include a bibliography (see Style Guide) of all the sources that you have used at the end of the journal.

**b. Pastoral Studies: Exegetical Paper**

1. Each student will write a type of exegetical paper which is the traditional seminary assignment for the preparation of a sermon or a Bible Study.
2. Length & style: it should be no more than 5,000 words (about 15 pages of text) excluding footnotes and bibliography. For all matters of style and form, see the MDC Style Guide. There should be a minimum of 15 sources used in the footnotes and bibliography. For all other matters, follow the “Steps to Exegesis.”
3. Approach: Choose a text from the Old Testament or New Testament according to the course you registered for. It must form a cohesive unit, of 10–15 verses. Detailed instructions (“Steps to Exegesis”) will be placed on Avenue to Learn and in the course DropBox, as well as discussed on Sept 17 & 24.
4. See attachment for grading criteria

**c. Biblical Studies: Research Paper**

- (1) Student will select and apply an exegetical methodology to a text in the OT or NT (a cohesive unit of 10–15 verses), guided in the selection and application of methodology by the course texts (Gorman and Green or Baker & Arnold).
- (2) Length & style: It should be no more than 5000 words (about 15 pages) of text, excluding footnotes and bibliography. For all matters of style and form, see the MDC Style Guide. There should be a minimum of 15 good academic sources which are current in scholarship used in the footnotes and bibliography
- (3) See attachment for grading criteria. It is also strongly recommended that you watch the PowerPoint presentation on “Writing a Research Paper” available on Avenue to Learn and meet personally with the professor.

**3. Portfolio Project (35%)**

**Due midnight Friday, July 7**

**No projects will be accepted after July 7.**

- a. Utilize the course texts, lectures and the written assignment in your area of specialization to produce a project that applies and practices biblical interpretation that you will include in your portfolio: a creative application, the design of a worship service, liturgy, or a sermon, teaching, applied spiritual formation, or the research of a relevant topic or a project appropriate for your life and/or ministry in other ways.
- b. E-mail a paragraph description of your project to westfal@mcmaster.ca on Nov 19.
- c. Length & style: if written, the project should be no more than 3,000 words (about 12 pages) of text, excluding footnotes and bibliography. For all matters of style and form, see the Mac Style Guide.
- d. Approach: Identity and profile your target audience. The approach to your projects will largely be determined by the application you choose. Creativity is encouraged. Marking will be based on:
  - (1) How the message and content utilizes and applies Scripture and the principles of biblical interpretation studied in the course as the primary goal. You may choose to design an artifact: an art project, poetry or song, but in that case, you must also submit a written detailed description of exactly how your artifact utilizes, interprets and applies Scripture and the principles of biblical interpretation of the course.
  - (2) The appropriateness of the project for the identified target group, particularly in the use of Scripture and biblical interpretation.
  - (3) The quality and proficient use of the medium
  - (4) The estimated effort expended on the project (it should be nearly equal to the effort of a 12 pg. exegetical paper).

**D. Grading Summary**

1.	Participation	15%
2.	Reading	10%
3.	Written assignment	40%
4.	Project	35%

All assignments must be completed by the scheduled final to pass the course.

#### **IV. Textbooks and Materials**

##### **A. Required**

See III.B.2

##### **B. Recommended**

*The IVP Bible Dictionary Series* (4 vols.)

John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.

Craig Keener. *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014.

##### **C. Textbook Purchase**

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, Ontario 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. and some are available electronically.

##### **D. Additional Materials**

1. Handouts for lectures and class discussion will be made available during class and/or online.
2. Procedures and guidelines for assignments will be given in class and/or online on the class web site.

#### **V. Classroom Behavior**

##### **A. Attendance**

1. Students should be on time to class or be prepared to offer an explanation to the professor.
2. Students are expected to stay for the entire class session, unless arranged in advance.
3. Except in extreme circumstances, more than two absences from class will result in grade penalties; four or more absences from class will result in failure of the course.

##### **B. Participation**

1. Please respect the opinions of others without disrespect or ridicule, even if you do not agree with them. However, feel free to respond logically and critically in an orderly manner.
2. Students are not expected to be doing work on any other subject except that which is appropriate in the course outline.
3. Students are not to carry on off-topic conversations in class.
4. Students may eat or drink in class if they do not distract others and they clean up their desks.

Students who fail to respect these guidelines will be dismissed from the class with consequences.

### **C. 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 ~

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

### **\*\*\* 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 the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

### **\*\*\* Disclaimer on Syllabi posted on the web and at the bottom of each syllabus:**

Please Note: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and 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.

#### **Appointments:**

Contact me if I can assist you in any way via E-mail: [westfal@mcmaster.ca](mailto:westfal@mcmaster.ca)  
I'm available for appointments

#### **Office Hours:**

Monday: 1:00–2:00  
Tuesday: 1:00–3:00  
Wednesday: 1:00–3:00

Also available by appointment

## NT2A03 Course Schedule

DATE	CLASS SESSION
Sept 10	Introduction to course Introduction: Identifying fallacies/Scripture Twisting
Sept 17	The process of writing an exegetical paper <b>Bring an example of Scripture Twisting to class written in a paragraph</b>
Sept 24	The process of writing an exegetical paper
Oct 1	The goal and activities of interpretation
Oct 8	THANKSGIVING
Oct 15	The Canon and translations
Oct 22	Interpreting & applying the NT Epistles
Oct 29	Interpreting & applying Narratives/Stories <b>Written Papers due Friday, Nov 2 midnight</b>
Nov 5	Interpreting & applying the Law and Prophecy
Nov 12	Interpreting & applying Poetry
Nov 19	<b>Submit a paragraph description of your project by e-mail</b>
Nov 26	The History of interpretation
Dec	Recent approaches
Dec 10	The role of the interpreter
April 10	<b>Projects due and presented in class Reading Reports due by e-mail</b>



Grading of written materials will be based on the following general criteria

Grade Range	Content	Argument	Presentation
90–100 85–89 80–84	Mastery of subject matter; creativity and individualized integration of insights and their relationships; exceeds required elements	Clear, logical structure; with comprehensive introduction, persuasive argumentation, and innovative conclusions	Detailed adherence to relevant style for formatting of text, notes, and bibliography; no errors of grammar or syntax; elegant presentation
77–79 73–76 70–72	Above-average grasp of principles and concepts, and their inter-relationship; completion of all required elements	Coherent structure and consistent argumentation; well-stated introduction and conclusion	General adherence to relevant style and format; few errors of grammar or syntax
67–69 63–66 60–62	Adequate understanding of theoretical foundations; minimal completion of required elements	Rudimentary structure; minimal introductory and concluding statements	Significant errors of grammar, syntax, or style
57–59 53–56 50–52	Low level of comprehension; required elements incomplete or missing	Lack of coherence or structure in argumentation; no introduction or conclusion	Abundant grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic errors
0–49 %	Inability to grasp basic concepts; required elements missing	Incomprehensible or illogical structure and argumentation	Failure to follow stylistic guidelines; incomprehensible syntax