



**McMaster Divinity College**  
**The Book of Hebrews:**  
**How to Find God in your Time of Crisis**

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The Book of Hebrews  
How to Find God in your Time of Crisis

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Mondays 4–5:50 p.m.

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### **Course Description**

Mystery, controversy, deep theology and extreme challenge! The Book of Hebrews is one of the least known books in the New Testament but has so much to offer every student. All will benefit from the exploration of its meaning for today in discipleship, community and ministry, and ultimately Hebrews carves a path straight into the presence of God. The core of this course is an exegetical and interpretative study of the Book of Hebrews in English translation. This class involves an acquaintance with structure, content, message, context and other interpretive issues of Hebrews as well.

### **Specializations**

#### ***Biblical Studies (BS)***

Students taking the Book of Hebrews as a Biblical Studies (BS) course will closely study one of the richest and most unique books in the Bible. It is a showcase for high Christology in early Christianity and the study of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, but with vivid imagery and an ultimately pastoral message that preaches. Hebrews also stands out as a study in fascinating historical, literary, interpretive and canonical issues; Wrede even called it “the mystery of the New Testament”!

#### ***Church and Culture (CC)***

Students taking the Book of Hebrews as a Church and Culture (CC) course will be able to practice the integration of biblical and theological knowledge by tackling the text and context of what some believe is the cultural outlier in the New Testament. Through encountering the text and context of Hebrews, the student can apply the tools developed to interface with other cultures and be challenged to re-contextualize the message of the text in corresponding modes that are relevant to contemporary culture(s)

#### ***Pastoral Studies (PS)***

Students taking the Book of Hebrews as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course will encounter a text that is written to help a first century Christian community in a time of crisis, equipping them to find the face of God as they faced suffering, homelessness and forced immigration. Therefore, when

understood in its context, Hebrews is not only a book that helps us to encounter Jesus at a deeper level, but it models exegetical and theological skills spiritual disciplines and the development of vision and mission.

### ***As an Elective***

All students are encouraged to take the Book of Hebrews to enhance their understanding of a New Testament text that makes some of the greatest theological contributions, but is notoriously difficult to read and interpret. This course will offer an interpretive key that makes the text more accessible and reveals a message that remains central to all Christians: How do I find the face of God in my time of need?

### **Course Objectives**

Specific Objectives – Through reading, lectures, discussion and assignments

#### ***Knowing***

- The student will know the Hebrews teaching on how to draw closer to God and its use in preaching, teaching and Bible Study.
- The student will understand Hebrews in its social, historical, literary and religious Jewish Hellenistic context
- The student will be familiar with critical views concerning introductory questions (i.e. authorship, date, settings, etc.) and identify the features in the text that illuminate the options

#### ***Being***

- The student will be spiritually challenged by message of Hebrews.
- The student will appreciate the distinctive content and theology of the text and goal(s) of the author.
- The student will enter into partnership with Jesus in his heavenly calling.

#### ***Doing***

- The student will review the manuscript of the NCCS Commentary on the Book of Hebrews, and read other studies on Hebrews.
- The student will research and write a paper on an aspect of Hebrews in the area of their specialization.
- The student will utilize their research and the course resources to develop a strategy for the re-presentation of a passage, theme or issue in Hebrews in the area of their specialization in a contemporary context.

### **Reading**

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews: A Commentary*. NTL; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2006.  
 New Testament in a modern version such as NRSV, NIV/TNIV, CEB, New Living Bible, Message. The Greek New Testament (for those with Greek competence). Students with facility in Greek or who are beginning Greek are encouraged to use their Greek Bible. Hebrews has the best

Greek style in the New Testament.

Manuscript of Westfall, Cynthia Long. *Hebrews*. NCCS. Wipf & Stock, forthcoming.  
Distributed by the professor on Avenue.

### **Recommended**

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Guthrie, George. *Hebrews*. NIABC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

Koester, Craig. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Anchor; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001.

deSilva, David A. *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews."* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

### **Course Requirements**

#### ***Class Participation (10%)***

Student participation includes interactive lectures and class and group discussions is expected, based on your readings for the week.

#### ***Reading (10%)***

See the Daily Schedule at the end of the syllabus for dates and pages.

- Read the scheduled material or passage in Johnson.
- Read the scheduled material or passage in the NCCS Commentary on the Book of Hebrews and submit a review to Avenue (see "Book Reviews")
- Read the scheduled passage in Hebrews in a modern translation.

The student will summarize the percentage of reading completed on **December 11, 11:59 p.m.**, submitted to Avenue.

### ***Written Assignments***

**In order to pass the course, all assignments must be completed**

#### **1. Book Reviews of NCCS (15%)**

**Each week at class time** the student will submit a paragraph on Avenue that reviews the chapter from the NCCS Commentary on Hebrews, lightly interacting with the material from Johnson.

#### **2. Research Paper (35%)**

- Each student will write a research paper on an aspect of Hebrews that concerns biblical studies, church and culture or pastoral studies. **It will be due November 1, at 11:59 p.m.** It will be submitted in PDF form to Avenue. Late papers will be docked at the rate of 2% per day for the first 7 days (including weekends) and 5% per day after that.
- Length & style: It should be approximately 4,000 words (about fifteen pages) of text, excluding footnotes and bibliography. For all matters of style and form, consult the McMaster Divinity College Style Guide (see Style)
- Approach: Choose an aspect of Hebrews that reflects your specialization, and do the appropriate research that effectively interacts with the text and with pertinent factors in your specialization. Utilize a minimum of twelve academic sources.

#### **3. Profile Project & Presentation (30%)**

- Each student will complete a paper or project designed to make the research accessible in a specific contemporary context, and present the project in class. **A hard copy will be due at 4 p.m December 9**(at the time of the scheduled exam). No late projects will be accepted. If possible, a copy will also be submitted to Avenue.
- Length & style: If written, it should be approximately 3000 words (about twelve pages) of text, excluding footnotes and bibliography. For all matters of style and form, consult the McMaster Divinity College Style Guide (see Style). If it is a project, it should be somewhat comparable in time and effort to a 12 pg. research paper.
- Each project should be discussed in advance with the professor and a written statement describing the appropriateness for one's specialization, the specific contemporary context targeted, the passage that is being re-presented, the goal of the project and the approach, **due 11:59 p.m. on November 11.**

Ideal: Apply your research paper to your project! Some suggestions include:

- A sermon on a passage in Hebrews
- A study guide that will assist young adult learners in exploring or understanding all or part of Hebrews. Include questions, explanations, directions and other material that both enlightens the text in its historical context and helps learners to connect the text with life today.
- A movie presentation, critical review and discussion which encapsulates a theme of Hebrews with a modern metaphor.
- A parable or allegory that utilizes significant or powerful contemporary imagery, symbols or metaphors that express the message and content of Hebrews.
- A collection of poetry or songs that explore thought, themes and/or emotions in Hebrews.
- An experience for a small group that simulates the situation of the recipients and the achievement of the goal(s) of the author.
- A description of the connections between the characters, contexts and themes in your life story and Hebrews.

### **Grading Summary**

➤ Reading	10%
➤ Books reviews	15%
➤ Participation	10%
➤ Research Paper	35%
➤ Profile Project	30%

### **Classroom Behavior**

#### ***Attendance***

- Students should be on time to class or be prepared to offer an explanation to the professor.
- Students are expected to stay for the entire class session, unless arranged in advance.
- More than 2 absences may result in a penalty. More than 4 absences will result in a failure of the course.

### **Participation**

- 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.
- Students are not expected to be doing work on any other subject except that which is appropriate in the course outline.
- Students are not to carry on off-topic conversations in class.
- Students are not to access e-mail, send or receive text messages, surf the net, etc., while class is in session
- 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 may lose participation points and/or be dismissed from the class.

### **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.

### **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://mcmasterdivinity.ca/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).

### **Style**

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <http://mcmasterdivinity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/mdcstyleguide.pdf> Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

**Appointments**

Contact me if I can assist you in any way via E-mail (most effective): westfal@mcmaster.ca  
Friend me on Facebook and send me a message!  
Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23605

**Office hours (Rm 242):**

Monday 1–2

Tuesday 1–3

Wednesday 1–3

~~Thursday 3:30–5:30 p.m.~~

**Disclaimer**

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.

## –Weekly Schedule

DATE	CLASS SESSION	Johnson	New Testament Reading
Sept 9	Introduction to the course Specializations The critical introductory issues	1–60	
Sept 16	Pay attention to what the son said— Hang on!	63–84	1:1-2:4
Sept 23	Think of Jesus as an apostle and high priest	84–104	2:5-3:1
Sept 30	Let's not be like the Israelites—let's enter the rest—Move forward!	104–22	3:1-4:1
Oct 7	Since the promise of rest is open, let's enter the rest—Move forward! Themes: Move forward! Hold on! Draw near!	122–37	4:1-4:16
Oct 14	Thanksgiving		
Oct 21	Let's press on to maturity with the new teaching about Jesus' priesthood—Move forward!	137–52	5:1-6:3
Oct 28	The new teaching results in access to God <b>Research paper due 11:59 p.m., Friday, Nov 1</b>	152–73	6:1-7:4
Nov 4	Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek	173–90	7:4-28
Nov 11	Jesus' priesthood Part 1 <b>Proposal for project due 11:59 p.m., Monday, Nov 11</b>	190–215	8:1-9:14
Nov 18	Jesus' priesthood Part 2—Draw near! Themes: Draw near! Hold on! Move forward!	215–67	9:15-10:25
Nov 25* SBL*	Let's run the race—Move forward!	267–312	10:26-12:2
Dec 2	Climax: Let's serve God as priests in heavenly Jerusalem—Draw near!	312–59	12:1-13:25
Dec 9	<b>Projects &amp; presentations at classtime, Dec 9 Reading Reports due 11:59 p.m., Dec 11</b>		



*Selected Bibliography on the Book of Hebrews*

- Attridge, Harold W. *Hebrews*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989.
- Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Hebrews*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2d ed. NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Buchanan, G. W. *To The Hebrews*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972.
- deSilva, David A. *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Cockerill, Gareth. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. NICNT; Eerdmans, 2012.
- Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Glaze, R. E. *No Easy Salvation: A Careful Examination of the Question of Apostasy in Hebrews*. Nashville: Broadman, 1966.
- Gromacki, Robert G. *Stand Bold in Grace: An Exposition of Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.
- Guthrie, Donald. *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.
- Guthrie, George H. *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*. Biblical Studies Library. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hebrews*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Hagner, Donald A. *Hebrews*. Good News Commentaries. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hebrews*. New International Biblical Commentary 14. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Encountering the Book of Hebrews: An Exposition*. Encountering Biblical Studies. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, 2 Volumes. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993.
- Hurst, L. D. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews: A Commentary*. The New Testament Library. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knowx Press, 2006.
- Käsemann, Ernst. *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation into the Letter of Hebrews*. Translated by R. A. Harrisville and I. L. Sandberg. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.
- Koester, Craig. *Hebrews*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

Lane, William L. *Hebrews 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1991.

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Lindars, Barnabas. *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*. New Testament Theology. Edited by James D. G. Dunn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Lea, Thomas D. *Hebrews and James*. Holman New Testament Commentary 10. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999.

Manson, William. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Historical and Theological Reconsideration*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951.

Stedman, Ray C. *Hebrews*. IVP New Testament Commentary. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Thompson, James W. *Hebrews*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008.

Westcott, B. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, 3d ed. New York: Macmillan, 1903.

Westfall, Cynthia Long. *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews*. London: T&T Clark, 2005.