

# Biblical Interpretation

## McMaster Divinity College

**NT/OT 2A03: Biblical Interpretation**  
M.A., M.Div, etc.  
BS/CW/PS

Cynthia Long Westfall,  
Phone: Ext. 23605  
Email: westfal@mcmaster.ca

Winter 2020  
Tuesdays 4:00–5:00 p.m.

---

### **Course Description**

This is an essential course for anyone who has a high view of Scripture and believes that it is the primary authority for all Christians. 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.

### **Specializations**

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

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

Students taking Biblical Interpretation as a Biblical Studies (BS) course will build the core skills that they need for the specialization as most assignments are based on them. This is the course that introduces you to the foundational exegetical tools of biblical scholarship. It introduces you to the major critical methods of contemporary biblical scholarship, and teaches you how to develop exegetically responsible material for writing, teaching or preaching.

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

Students taking Biblical Interpretation as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course will develop the essential skills for reading the Bible as well as researching and creating Bible studies and biblical sermons. They will also learn the principles of responsible biblical interpretation in order to establish or develop their biblical basis for leadership strategies, a coherent worldview, ethical decisions and Christian principles and values.

### ***Christian Worldview***

Students taking Biblical Interpretation as a Christian Worldview (CW) course will learn the principles of responsible biblical interpretation in their development of a biblical and coherent worldview. Your assignments are crafted specifically to give you tools and opportunities to engage and dialogue with other hermeneutical worldviews, and recognize fallacies. The course will also teach you the impact of role of the interpreter on interpretation (identity and tradition), and encourage the role of diversity (global and cultural) in the interpretive process.



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

All students are encouraged to take Biblical Interpretation as a course elective. They will benefit from learning the skills needed to read and interpret the Bible which evangelicals hold as authoritative for faith and practice. All will benefit from working on the biblical foundation of a coherent worldview, from the engagement with other hermeneutics and from learning to spot exegetical fallacies that may be damaging to the individual or the community of faith.

**Course Objectives**– Through reading, lectures, discussion and assignments the following goals are set for the student:

### ***Knowing***

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

### ***Being***

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

### ***Doing***

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

### **Course Requirements**

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

Student attendance and participation in interactive lectures and class and group discussions and activities is expected.

Participation in online discussions in Avenue or the “Bulletin Board” on Padlet at least once a week,

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

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

#### **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:

#### **Christian Worldview**

The texts reflect a general introduction to Biblical interpretation and guidelines for responsible reading, interpretation and application of Scripture.

Gorman, Michael J. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009 (302 pp.).

Brauch, Manfred. *Abusing Scripture: The Consequences of Misreading the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009 (294 pp.).

#### **Pastoral Studies**

This text is the standard evangelical text for exegesis in preparation for preaching and teaching.

Klein, William, Blomberg, Craig L. and Hubbard, Robert L. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017 (707 pp.).

#### **Biblical Studies**

The texts reflect the multi-faceted discipline of exegesis.

Gorman, Michael J. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009 (302 pp.).

Choose *one* of the following texts (OT or NT)

Baker, David W. & Arnold, Bill T. *The Face of Old Testament Studies*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999 (512 pp.).

Green, Joel. *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010 (440 pp.).

#### **Reading Report**

On the last day class (**April 6**), each student will submit a reading report to Avenue for the Bible and text reading, stating a percentage of the completed reading.

### ***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 makes a suitable contribution to the student's portfolio. **Submit all assignments in PDF form on Avenue to Learn.**

**Written assignment for Specializations, (40%)**

**Due midnight Friday, March 6. Late papers will lose 1% a day for a week, then 4% a day.**

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.

#### **1. Christian Worldview: Scripture Twisting Journal**

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 submits a first entry by e-mail for feedback on **January 20**.

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).

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.

Format of Scripture Twisting Journal

- Identify the use of Scripture.
- Describe the situation/conversation where you state how the Scripture is interpreted and/or misapplied.
- Explain what is wrong with the use of Scripture
- 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.

See rubric on Avenue or DropBox for grading criteria

## **2. Pastoral Studies: Exegetical Paper**

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.

Length & style: it should be approximately 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 good quality sources used in the footnotes and bibliography. For all other matters, follow the “Steps to Exegesis,” including the subheadings.

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 January 13 & 20.

See rubric on Avenue or DropBox for grading criteria

## **3. Biblical Studies: Research Paper or Exegetical Paper (above)**

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).

Length & style: It should be approximately 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

See rubric 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 discuss your methodology and passage personally with the professor.

## **Portfolio Project (35%)**

**Due class time, Monday, April 6**

**No projects will be accepted after April 6.**

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.

**Submit a paragraph description of your project on Avenue to Learn on March 16**

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.

Approach:

In your introduction, identify 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:

- 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.
- The appropriateness of the project for the identified target group, particularly in the use of Scripture and biblical interpretation.
- The quality and proficient use of the medium
- The estimated effort expended on the project (it should be nearly equal to the effort of a 12 pg. exegetical paper).

### **Grading Summary**

➤ Participation	15%
➤ Reading	10%
➤ Written assignment	40%
➤ Project	35%

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

### **Textbooks and Materials**

**Required:** See *Course Textbooks* above

### **Recommended**

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

Walton, John H., et al. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.

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

### **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.



## COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	CLASS SESSION
Jan 6	Introduction to course Introduction: Identifying fallacies/Scripture Twisting
Jan 13	The process of writing an exegetical paper <b>Bring an example of Scripture Twisting to class written in a paragraph</b> <b>Specify your choice of journal, exegetical paper or research paper</b>
Jan 20	The process of writing an exegetical paper <b>Christian Worldview: turn in 1<sup>st</sup> journal entry</b>
Jan 27	The goal and activities of interpretation
Feb 3	The Canon and translations
Feb 10	Interpreting & applying the NT Epistles <b>Bring an example of a letter to class</b>
Feb 17	FAMILY DAY
Feb 24	Interpreting & applying Narratives/Stories
March 2	Interpreting & applying the Law and Prophecy <b>Written Papers due midnight</b>
March 9	Interpreting & applying Poetry
March 16	The History of interpretation <b>Submit a paragraph description of your project by e-mail</b>
March 23	Recent approaches
March 30	The role of the interpreter