



McMaster Divinity
College

PERSPECTIVES ON THE BIBLE

NT 5XP5/6XP6

McMaster Divinity College
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Winter 2024
Online (Asynchronous)

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 course, we will look behind the biblical texts (at their cultural contexts and compositional history), within the biblical texts (at their literary and linguistic characteristics), and in front of the biblical texts (at their readers and their reception in church and society). In other words, we will explore *where the Bible came from* and *how people read it*.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through your active participation in this course, you will:

KNOWING

- 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;
- Understand debates regarding the compositional history of the biblical texts (e.g. documentary hypothesis, synoptic problem, etc.);
- Be familiar with introductory matters pertaining to the individual books of the Bible (i.e. date, provenance, authorship, etc.);
- Distinguish the major genres of the Bible and appreciate their distinctive social functions and literary conventions;
- Know about the processes by which the biblical canon was formed;
- 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;
- 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 yourself 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;
- Engage in doctoral-level research that invokes the New Testament in a responsible manner.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *Written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as Word documents (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf). A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments, including assignments submitted in incorrect file formats. Assignments cannot be submitted after the final week of class without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (mdcreg@mcmaster.ca).*

LECTURE AND BOOK DISCUSSIONS (15%)

Over the course of the semester, students in 3XP3 will be watching videos, reading books, and then engaging in asynchronous online discussions around these materials. You will watch the lecture videos, skim the assigned readings, and then help to facilitate productive online discussions.

Students in 3XP3 have been instructed to identify and discuss a specific idea in each post. They can discuss the idea itself or the relevance evidence (e.g. extending the idea, disputing the idea, offering an alternative proposal, etc.). They can discuss its status for them personally or for their community (e.g. reflecting on how the idea is novel or challenging or disruptive or dangerous). They can discuss its implications (e.g. relating the idea to other ideas that are important to them or their community, or to practical matters for which it has implications). Regardless, posts should offer a thoughtful, substantive, respectful reaction that can contribute to the learning of others. Your task as an advanced research student will be: (1) to point out positive things in student posts; (2) to orient students towards possible “growing edges”; and (3) to offer concrete suggestions in the direction of next steps.

You will have immediate access to all student posts. You are not expected to initiate your own threads, but you are free to do so if you wish. In general, **it is expected that you will make at least three (3)**

substantive contributions to each forum, including forums to the lecture discussions as well as those related to the assigned 3XP3 textbooks. To be considered for assessment, **posts are due by Sunday at 11:59pm for each of the weeks noted in the schedule below.**

NT 5XP5: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (20%)

DPT students will produce an annotated bibliography that surveys recent biblical scholarship regarding a topic of their choosing that has been approved in writing by the professor. This bibliography must include at least 15 resources for a total of around 3,000–4,000 pages of reading. The bibliography should manifest the wide range of New Testament studies, exemplifying a variety of different questions and approaches as well as different confessional and/or non-confessional perspectives. It can be tailored towards your own research interests, but it must tackle a general topic regarding the Bible. Each annotation should, in approximately 100–150 words, summarize the content of a particular resource and its distinctive contribution to our understanding of your topic. It is due according to the Course Schedule below.

NT 5XP5: THE BIBLE FOR NON-DUMMIES (25%)

Drawing upon the above annotated bibliography, DPT students will compose an introduction to their chosen research topic such as would be suitable for a graduate student (or alum) seeking to think and speak about the topic without being ignorant of contemporary scholarship. This overview should touch on significant issues that impact our understanding of the Bible and/or our reading of it. While you need not attempt to be unbiased, it is not the focus of the assignment to advocate for a particular point of view. Instead, focus on laying a general foundation for more specialized research. The paper will be approximately 3,000 words. It is due according to the Course Schedule below.

NT 6XP6: SURVEY PAPER (30%)

In lieu of a bibliography, PhD students will write an essay that discusses some part of the Bible (either a part of the canon, a book in the canon, or a significant part of a book). The essay must offer a reliable survey of scholarly research as regards: (1) what the biblical text is; (2) where the biblical text came from; (3) what the biblical text's function has been down through history; (4) what outstanding questions remain in NT scholarship as regards the biblical text. The essay need not advance innovative hypotheses or arguments, but it should demonstrate familiarity with contemporary scholarship as regards the chosen part of the Bible and should assess the current state of scholarship (in very general terms) from the student's own perspective. If there are neglected areas of study, these too should be noted. The paper must be approximately 5,000 words in length. It is due according to the Course Schedule below.

NT 6XP6: COURSE SYLLABUS (15%)

PhD students will prepare a course syllabus designed for a college or seminary course. The course must be an introductory course on the Bible and must be intended for a post-secondary institution, but no specific focus and format are prescribed. Your syllabus must clearly define not only the content and organization of your course but also its objectives. In a supplementary document, you must explain in brief paragraphs how each component of the course contributes the overall objectives. The syllabus and accompanying explanation are due according to the Course Schedule below.

RESEARCH PAPER (40%)

In consultation with both the professor and their doctoral supervisor, DPT students will define an area of intersection that involves both the Bible and the student's own practice-led research. A research paper will then be written in which the student explores this area of intersection and thereby advances scholarly understanding of his or her practice. For PhD students, this paper can pursue any line of inquiry that is relevant to the Bible in general and that is potentially publishable as a piece of New Testament scholarship. Research papers must be approximately 8,000 words in length. They are due according to the Course Schedule below.

GRADING SUMMARY

NT 5XP5

Asynchronous Discussions	15%
Annotated Bibliography	20%
Bible for Non-Dummies	25%
<u>Research Paper</u>	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

NT 6XP6

Asynchronous Discussions	15%
Survey Paper	30%
Course Syllabus	15%
<u>Research Paper</u>	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

TEXTBOOKS

All students are required to possess an English translation of the Bible, as well as:

An English translation of the New Testament.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Week	Module	Assignments Due
Jan 8–14	Biblical Scholarship as Bible Study?	Self-Introduction

Jan 15–21	OT Traditions and Texts	Discussions	
Jan 22–28			
Jan 29–Feb 4	NT Traditions and Texts		
Feb 5–11			Bibliography (5XP5)
Feb 12–18	Biblical Genres		
Feb 19–25	Reading Week (No Class)	Bible for Non-Dummies (5XP5) Survey Paper (6XP6)	
Feb 26–Mar 3	Canon Formation, Transmission, and Function	Discussions	Syllabus (6XP6)
Mar 4–10			
Mar 11–17	Hermeneutics		
Mar 18–24			
Mar 25–31	Bible Translation		
Apr 1–7	After Understanding...What Then?	Research Paper	

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. For more information, 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.

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 McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses:

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

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, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

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.