

# Theological German

## TH 3P1110



Wartburg Castle

McMaster Divinity College  
May 7 – June 25, 2025

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### Course Designation

TH 3P1110

### Concentrations

Church History            Ministry Studies  
Old Testament            New Testament  
Theological Studies

### Course Schedule

The course is in an in-person / livestreamed format.  
Class meets Wednesdays 9:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.  
Course duration: May 7 – June 25 (Eight Week Course)

### Course Description

The course will provide a systematic introduction to German grammar to enable comprehension of German research in the areas of bible and theology. Exercises will be provided with the goal of learning to read academic German. The course will not include conversational German nor is there an expectation of memorized vocabulary. There is an expectation that the student will know all basic syntagms and be able to analyse, comprehend, and accurately translate German at a complex syntactical level, such as is used in scholarly journals and texts. There are no minimal requirements of knowledge of German to enter the course, but some familiarity with German will assist in maintaining the pace of the course.

The student will be able to pass a German reading exam for the purposes of the Ph.D. program upon completion of the course. Passing the exam will qualify the student for the modern language requirement

of their respective Ph.D. programs at McMaster Divinity College. Students taking the course from another institution may receive a letter grade for an accredited course if they so desire.

Students must be prepared to dedicate themselves to learning German during these seven weeks. Learning to read German in seven weeks is a major undertaking. It takes hours of practice every day to successfully pass a German reading exam.

## **Course Objectives**

### ***Knowing***

- German use of cases and word order.
- German tense and voice forms and their functions (these not always identical to English).
- German use of subjunctives and imperatives (these are different than in English).
- German use of commas to indicate clause relationships and understand extended sentences.
- Capable and accurate use of a German – English dictionary

### ***Being***

- Awareness of the impact of German theological and biblical research.
- Appreciative of German culture and linguistic expressions.
- Competency in reading German. *Frisch begonnen ist halb gewonnen!* (A fresh start is half the victory.)

### ***Doing***

- Develop bibliographic research with German titles.
- Read current German research in areas of interest and research.
- Read German for enjoyment, including German novels or newspapers.

## **Course Value**

It is challenging to learn to read German without assistance, just as any of the Biblical languages used by students of Bible and theology. There is great benefit in learning together, especially in person in a classroom, as dialogue and comprehension are facilitated much more readily. Classroom experience makes learning German both effective fun. *Wir sollen viel Spaß machen.*

## **Course Texts**

### ***Grammars and Readings***

Christopher Ryan Jones and Katharina Hirt, *Handbook of Reading Theological German*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2021.

This is the working text for the course and is required by all students. It contains all the basic German grammar organized by largely by topics (verbs, nouns, pronouns and particles). It has a good variety of readings, both ancient and modern. These readings will be used in class and for assignments. This text is an excellent introduction to the most influential German theologians.

April Wilson, *German Quickly: A Grammar for Reading German*, revised edition, Peter Lang Publishing, 2007.

Exercises from Wilson will be used in class sessions and posted in Avenue to Learn. Wilson is not written as an analytic grammar, familiar to Hebrew and Greek students, but the text is most helpful in a systematic progression introducing German constructions and has the advantage of diverse readings, both introductory and advanced.

The revised edition will be referred to in class and is considerably expanded from earlier editions. The older editions have the same section numbering and progression but lack some of the examples and detail of the expanded version. Unfortunately, all editions of this text have typographical errors.

### ***Lexicon***

The student must have access to a printed unabbreviated German-English lexicon. It will be used as part of class exercises and is required for the exam. It must be comprehensive in vocabulary. It takes practice to use a German-English dictionary effectively.

It is critical to learn to use a German-English dictionary. It is important to know how to consult for idioms, unique uses of words, principal parts of verbs, and general abbreviations. Dictionaries vary considerably in how they address these various requirements. Online dictionaries are quick and easy for general lexical equivalents, but much less helpful for learning German.

The text by Wilson provides an evaluation of lexicons which the student may wish to consult before making a purchase. There are numerous variations and individual preferences differ. There are many advantages to the large Cassells in learning to use a dictionary accurately and effectively, as described by Wilson. The meaning of verbs with reflexive pronouns are distinctly listed, the third person singular for all verbs with a different vowel, past and participial form of irregular verbs in standard order, and most common idioms in bold type. It is clearest in providing distinct idioms that are used commonly in theological readings; e.g. *beziehen*: 1 cover, 2 take a position, 3 subscribe, 4 *beziehen auf* – refer to (as in a scripture verse). It is generally available used at cost-effective prices. Cassells is a professionally edited dictionary which makes it most useful in finding a correct equivalent. It is not current with some contemporary vocabulary.

*Collins German Unabridged Dictionary*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2019 is the most current and complete unabridged dictionary for advanced students. Collins gives the impression AI has been used to garner a wide variety of word uses which are loosely categorized under an abundance of examples. A correct equivalent can be very difficult for a beginner to be able to find, especially in certain idioms; sometimes it is difficult to know what it might be from all the samples listed. Sample expressions given often come from typical conversation rather than scholarly writing.

Students will use an online lexicon such as Collins for much of their translation, as it provides for a very quick reference (<https://woerterbuch.reverso.net/>). A requirement for full use of an online German

dictionary is a German keyboard to distinguish the marked vowels. It is easy to miss homonyms in an online dictionary, as computers conduct very sequence specific searches.

## **Resources for Learning German**

### ***German Grammars and Readers***

J. D. Manton, *Introduction to Theological German: A Beginner's Course for Theological Students*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004.

This classic introduction has been in print for decades. It is a concise grammar with specialized vocabulary and selections of German readings. Grammar is introduced progressively with the readings.

Carolyn Roberts Thompson, *Reading German for Theological Students: A Grammar and Reader*, Baker, 2021.

This text provides a minimal introductory grammar followed by readings from Biblical Texts as well as theological texts. Most of the grammar is introduced progressively with the readings. Exercises are provided with each reading. All of the readings are quite short.

Helmut W. Ziefle, *Theological German: A Reader*. Baker Book House, 1986.

There are variant editions of this reader. It provides a specialized vocabulary with a variety of biblical and theological readings. Word definitions are paraphrased to the meaning in the accompanying text, so the student is not made aware of highly idiomatic uses of some words or expressions. Readings include several Bible translations for basic reading and theological readings of prominent theologians (Barth, Bonhoeffer, etc.).

### ***Daily Dose of German***

Ambrose Thomson of McMaster Divinity College has produced a series of videos that explain various aspects of the German language. It can be very helpful during this course but perhaps even more so in continuing to develop German reading skills by daily or regularly following this series of videos.

For a fun introduction to the series go to this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvyu1QEf9U>

The series may be found at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/@readingsintheologicalgerma9390/playlists>.

### ***Resources for the Advanced Student***

*Duden: Das Fremdwörterbuch*, 7., neu bearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage, Dudenverlag, Duden Band 5, 2001.

This dictionary lists 53,000 foreign words incorporated into the German language not usually listed in dictionaries. Many words are drawn from English, but they may have unique nuances in German. Gender and case forms are provided which can be an assistance in translation.

*Der kleine Duden, Deutsche Grammatik, 5., überarbeitete Auflage, Dudenverlag, 2016.*

This is a comprehensive but concise German grammar, easy to consult for all German grammar explanations and tabulation of word forms. It is very helpful for organized explanations of all aspects of German grammar. It is quite functional even for a beginner in German.

*Duden: Das Bedeutungswörterbuch, 5., neu bearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage, Duden Band 10, Dudenverlag, 2018.*

This German dictionary can be especially helpful in ascertaining the meaning of polymorphous words. *Zug* (train) for example lists 9 distinct common meanings, with subsets in some of them. This German word is used much like *train* in English, where for example we speak of a *train of thought*. In German *Zug* is commonly used in all writings with senses obliquely related to the material referent train. The Duden dictionary is clear and concise with expert German editing, and consistent listing of verb forms; invariably the sense required in a context is clear from the Duden dictionary. It only lists 20,000 words, so is very limited in vocabulary range, but it is most helpful in understanding modern German.

## **Class Sessions**

The course is an in person / livestreamed format. Distance students should be able to participate as readily as those in class. In person attendance is strongly encouraged when possible. Presence always facilitates participation, but there is the added advantage of personal time outside of class.

Class sessions will not be structured according to the ten steps of the Mainz Method used in the text by Jones and Hirt, because it segregates each aspect of grammar into a single topic. This method will be followed in the translations of German texts, but aspects of grammar will not be segmented that way. The first exercises will be simple sentences and some translations from a German Bible. Beginning with week four translation exercises will include scholarly readings from Jones and Hirt.

- May 7 Present tense of verbs and case endings of nouns and adjectives
- May 14 Syntax of pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions
- May 21 Verb tenses, verbs with separable prefixes
- May 28 Verb voices (active, passive, reflexive, i.e. verbs formed with a reflexive pronoun)
- June 4 Modal verbs
- June 11 Subjunctive mood and clauses
- June 18 Review of assigned translations from textbook and exam preparation
- June 25 Exam

## **Class Exercises**

- Week 1 – Practice and memorization of case endings and present tense verb forms
- Week 2 – Practice correct position and form of adjectives, pronouns, and syntax of subordinate clauses
- Week 3 – Learning and translating verb forms and auxiliaries for verb tenses

- Week 4 – Practice of passive voice and verbs using reflexive pronouns
- Week 5 – Learning and translating the forms and function of the six modal verbs
- Week 6 – Learning and translating the forms and functions of the two German subjunctives
- Week 7 – Comprehensive review through practice in translating assigned sentences
- Week 8 – Exam

### ***Weekly Assignments***

It is imperative that all assignments be completed each week, as each successive week builds on the skills learned previously. Translation assignments will begin in the first week with basic sentences (assigned from Avenue to Learn). Assigned sentences will focus on the grammar studied in class. Beginning with week three translation assignments will be given from the authors in the text, the length will increase with each successive week. All assignments will be reviewed and returned the same week, but no grade assigned unless the student is doing the course for a class credit.

*Avenue to Learn* will be an essential resource in this course as it will contain much of the material for instruction and translation of assignments. Dialogue will be set up in Avenue to Learn for questions which will be answered by the instructor and available for all.

### ***Office Hours***

Office hours will be maintained each week for students to have individual time for discussion of grammar or working through particular examples of translation. Students may come individually or in groups for additional help. Times outside of the posted office hours can be arranged as well as zoom calls.

### **Grading**

Ph.D. students in a McMaster program will write the German exam on a pass / fail basis. A pass on the exam given by the department of these students fulfills the program requirement for reading a modern language. Assignments for these students will all be corrected but will not be evaluated, as they do not contribute to a grade for the course and the course does not contribute to the grade point average of the program. Any concerns with progress should be taken up with the professor, but students will be advised if they are not on a trajectory that will enable them to successfully pass the exam.

For those students wishing to take this course as credit incorporated into a program of study, assignments will be graded. The final exam will count for 30% of the course grade. Seventy percent of the course grade will be calculated from the grades of the weekly last five assignments submitted.

### **Policy Statements for MDC**

#### ***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, including AI) 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.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

### ***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 (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

### ***Bookstore***

All required and recommended books 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](mailto:books@readon.ca). The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

### *Online Etiquette*

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for classmates and the instructor. This is even truer in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that we use to interpret what a person is communicating to us are not present online (except, perhaps in video posts). Therefore, it is especially critical that we be mindful of how our words will be interpreted by those who are reading them. As the instructor of the course, it is my responsibility to monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. Most if not all courses at MDC are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture. Invariably there will be disagreements; these disagreements must be discussed and negotiated in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course. The instructor will expect that you will give some thought to your postings. Excessive postings are also frowned upon because these amount to dominating the discussion. Please limit your postings to less than 200 words. Instructors reserve the right to ask students to take a step back to allow others discussion time if she or he feels that an individual is dominating the discussion. In your responses, please try to be clear which point your response refers to. Students who violate these guidelines may be dismissed from class.

**Disclaimer:** This syllabus is the property of the instructors 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.