

NT 508 – Biblical Hermeneutics

Online Course Syllabus

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I. PURPOSE

“You can’t take the Bible literally!” That cliché has become so commonplace that many people take it for granted when discussions of the Bible arise in social gatherings. Yet those familiar with the Bible’s teaching know that while the Scriptures do contain poetry, prophecy, and parables that feature figurative language, there are also portions of the Bible that are clearly intended to be taken literally. But how does one know how to interpret the various types (or *genres*) of literature contained in the Bible? Beginning with the foundational Reformation maxim that *Scripture interprets Scripture*, this course addresses the essential questions of hermeneutics (biblical interpretation) and provides solid guidance in approaching the various biblical genres using reliable, time-tested principles drawn from the Bible itself. Using these solid principles, we examine together various portions of Scripture as test cases for the application of hermeneutical principles. The course will also introduce you to an essential set of tools and resources for engaging in biblical hermeneutics.

II. Educational and Personal Objectives

- To lay the proper biblical foundations for approaching the Scriptures as the holy and self-interpreting Word of God;
- To gain a broad understanding of how the Bible has been interpreted in Christian history;
- To gain a foundational grasp of the grammatico-historical approach to biblical interpretation;
- To become aware of the various genres of biblical literature (history, poetry, prophecy, etc.) and how each should be approached in interpretation;
- To seek appropriate and helpful methods for applying the Bible to our lives personally, corporately, and evangelistically.

III. Course Structure

Modules: You have up to fifteen weeks to complete this online course. The course is divided into thirteen modules, designed to be completed in order over the course of 13-14 weeks. To see a detailed outline of the structure, click the "Modules" link on the left side of this page.

Conferences: Your course instructor will want to meet with you at least monthly using the conferencing capabilities of Canvas. Contact your instructor about setting up a conference within the first couple of weeks of the course.

Mentor: As you proceed through this course, you will need to obtain the services of a course mentor who will meet with you on a monthly basis to interact with you regarding your studies and to proctor the course exams. (The quizzes may be taken without supervision.) Ideally, your course mentor will be a pastor, youth pastor, or other spiritual authority in your church who can guide and counsel you as you pursue biblical and theological training. In the course materials there is a mentor agreement form that your mentor will need to sign and return to New Geneva Seminary before you begin the course.

IV. Lectures

The course lectures provide you with the opportunity to see how your professor balances the course content with his own practical experience. Note taking during lectures is expected, and attention to the material presented will be assessed in two open-book lecture tests, one covering the first five lectures, and the second covering lectures six through nine.

V. Reading Assignments

Since the amount of content that can be communicated through the weekly lectures is limited, and since thoughtful and critical reading is an essential skill for your personal and academic development, reading assignments form an essential part of the learning process for this course. This emphasis is reflected in the fact that the completion of the course reading assignments constitutes one quarter of your final grade. The completion of reading assignments will be assessed by six reading summaries and six reading quizzes, to be alternated throughout the course. The course calendar below shows the reading assignment for each week.

The first text, *Knowing Scripture*, by R. C. Sproul, provides a basic introduction and a practical, hands-on approach to interpreting the various literary genres of Scripture. The book also provides helpful guidance in evaluating the various English Bible translations and tools.

The second textbook, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, by Dan G. McCartney and Charles Clayton, provides a deeper discussion and analysis of the issues of biblical interpretation, focusing on the Bible as the self-interpreting Word of the Living God. Our success in interpreting the Scriptures hinges on our approach to them as the unique and authoritative revelation of our Creator God. This text also reviews each of the various biblical genres and shares insights for interpreting them.

VI. Hermeneutical Analysis Paper

Each student will be required to submit a research paper applying the principles of sound hermeneutics to an interpretively challenging passage of Scripture. Particular attention should be paid to the *genre* of the passage under consideration and to the hermeneutical principles relevant to that *genre*.

The paper should introduce the interpretive issues raised by the passage, lay out the hermeneutical principles that relate to those issues, and thoughtfully apply the principles of interpretation learned in the course to the passage in question. While some exegetical work may need to be done to aid in the interpretation of the passage, the focus of the paper should be on the *hermeneutical principles* that underlie the work of exegesis.

An “A” paper will be approximately 5,000 words in length and will interact with at least five outside sources of published scholarly research (books or articles) that deal with hermeneutical questions. (The five sources may include the course textbooks.) The format of the paper as well as the citation of outside sources should follow the stylistic standards of Kate Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th Edition. There is an excellent set of examples of Turabian style online:

<http://www.bethanyseminary.edu/sites/default/files/docs/academics/TurabianStyleGuide09-rev2f2.pdf>

Below is a suggested basic outline for the hermeneutical analysis paper. While your paper may go beyond the outline, at least these basic points should be covered.

- I. Introduction
- II. Explanation of the Hermeneutical Issues Raised by the Passage
- III. Application of Hermeneutical Principles to the Issues Raised
- IV. Conclusion

You may choose from one of the passages listed below, or you may submit a hermeneutically challenging passage of your choice to your instructor for approval. If you choose your own passage, be prepared to summarize one or two of the hermeneutical challenges your paper hopes to address.

Suggested passages for the hermeneutical analysis paper:

- 2 Samuel 1:19-27
- Proverbs 30:18-19
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 or 12:1-7
- Isaiah 27:1
- Zechariah 6:1-8
- Luke 5:36-39
- 1 Timothy 3:16
- Rev 5:1-3

VII. Grading

Letter grades will be assigned using the scale presented in the seminary catalog. Your grade for this course will be weighted as follows:

- Interactions (instructor and mentor conferences): 10%
- Reading quizzes and summaries: 40%
- Lecture Tests: 30%
- Hermeneutical analysis paper: 20%

VIII. Resources

Required Reading (see daily page assignments below):

R. C. Sproul. *Knowing Scripture*. Rev. Ed. InterVarsity, 2009.

Dan G. McCartney and Charles Clayton. *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*. P&R, 2002.

Recommended Supplemental Reading:

Vern S. Poythress. *God Centered Biblical Interpretation*. P&R, 1999.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Moises Silva. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Zondervan, 1994, repr. 2007.

Course Calendar

LRU = Let the Reader Understand; KS = Knowing Scripture

Week	Lecture Topics	Reading Assignments
Week 1	Hermeneutics: Foundation for Sound Exegesis	KS 13-48
Week 2	Hermeneutical Hurdles	KS 49-68
Week 3	Hermeneutical Presuppositions	KS 69-113
Week 4	The Goal of Interpretation	KS 114-127
Week 5	General Principles of Biblical Interpretation	KS 128-145
Week 6	First Lecture Test Due	

Week 7	Interpreting the Biblical Genres (1) <i>Narratives</i>	<i>LRU</i> 1-60
Week 8	Interpreting the Biblical Genres (2): <i>Law and Instruction</i>	<i>LRU</i> 61-118
Week 9	Interpreting the Biblical Genres (3): <i>Poetry, Proverbs, and Parables</i>	<i>LRU</i> 119-174
Week 10	Interpreting the Biblical Genres (4): <i>Prophecy and Apocalyptic</i>	<i>LRU</i> 175-242
Week 11	Interpretation and Application	<i>LRU</i> 243-312
Week 12	Second Lecture Test Due	
Week 13	Hermeneutical Analysis Paper Due	