



Interpreting Scripture Today BIB 510

The mission of MB Seminary is to educate and equip men and women to help lead the church in reaching Canada and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Instructor: Mark D. Wessner, PhD
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Credit Hours: 3
Prerequisites: none
Course Term: November 13, 2023 – January 13, 2024
Instruction: Teaching Intensive at Steinbach MB Church, Steinbach, MB

- November 17 (6:30pm-9:30pm)
- November 18 (8:30am-4:30pm)

Description

How do the Scriptures, the Spirit, and the interpretive community work together to discern the message and meaning of the Bible? How do we read the text carefully so that we can live it out with wisdom and faithfulness? In this introductory course, students will develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the historical, literary, theological, and confessional value of both the Old and New Testaments, with special attention given to the Bible's interpretation and application in the Mennonite Brethren tradition.

Objectives

This course's themes are informed by a distinct MB perspective in accordance with the Mennonite-Brethren Confession of Faith. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify and describe the main historical, literary and theological elements of the Old and New Testaments,
- Effectively interpret each of the various sections of the Bible,
- Articulate and critique various contemporary hermeneutical methods, and apply such methods and tools,
- Describe the history and relevance of the original manuscripts of the Bible, and
- Describe how Mennonite Brethren interpretations of scripture are applied in the current Canadian context.

The most effective learning takes place as you carefully process information through higher-order thinking skills. Your performance and evaluation in this course will be based on demonstrating your engagement and learning, not by simply repeating back basic facts. In all that you do in this class, you should always remember to use higher-order thinking skills, as described below:

- Comprehension: demonstrates the ability to grasp meaning, explain, and restate ideas,
- Application: demonstrates the ability to use learned material in new situations,
- Analysis: demonstrates the ability to separate material into component parts and show relationships between the parts,
- Synthesis: demonstrates the ability to put together the separate ideas to form a new whole, to establish new relationships, and
- Evaluation: demonstrates the ability to judge the worth of material against stated criteria.

Required Texts

- Bird, Michael F., *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About The Bible*, Zondervan, 2021.
- Dueck, Abe J., Bruce L. Guenther, and Doug Heidebrecht. "Sola Scriptura and the Mennonite Brethren." In *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections After 150 Years*, 155-164. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2011.
- Good, Meghan. *The Bible Unwrapped: Making Sense of Scripture Today*. Herald Press, 2018.
- Heidebrecht, Doug, and Mark Wessner. "Interpreting Scripture Today: A Mennonite Brethren Model and Method." *Direction* 49, no. 2 (2020): 115-122.
- Jost, Lynn, Angeline Schellenberg, Jon M. Isaak, Elenore Doerksen, Andrew Dyck, and Connie Faber. "People of the Word." In *Family Matters: Discovering the Mennonite Brethren*, 22-28. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2017.
- Old and New Testaments (read Exodus, Proverbs, Habakkuk, Mark, and Revelation).
- Access to any theological library or a subscription to a digital library such as scribd.com

Schedule and Assignments

| Week | Due Date | Assignments | % of Grade | Cumulative |
|------|-----------|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | Nov 17-18 | Course Intensive (See schedule below) | | |
| 2 | Nov 25 | Reflection Paper #1 | 8% | 8% |
| 3 | Dec 2 | Discussion Group #1 | 2% | 10% |
| 4 | Dec 9 | Reflection Paper #2 | 8% | 18% |
| 5 | Dec 16 | Discussion Group #2 Research Paper | 2% 34% | 20% 54% |
| 6 | Dec 23 | Reflection Paper #3 | 8% | 62% |
| 7 | Jan 6 | Discussion Group #3 | 2% | 64% |
| 8 | Jan 13 | Ministry Curriculum Project | 36% | 100% |

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| Course Intensive (SMBC) | |
| Friday, November 17, 2023 | 6:30pm-9:30pm |
| Session 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal experience with Scripture • MB model and method |
| Session 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History, genre, development, canon • Translations |
| Saturday, November 18, 2023 | 8:30am- 4:30pm |
| Session 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization and structure • Poetry • Wisdom |
| Session 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives • Gospels • Parables |
| Session 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law • Prophecy |
| Session 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters • Apocalypse • Conclusion and next steps |

Assignments and Evaluation

Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups: There are three sets of Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups, with grading based on two components for each Paper/Group set. During three weeks of the course (Weeks 1, 3 and 5), you will write a three-page reflection paper in response to the instructional content and the required readings. Your reflection paper should answer the questions assigned to each of the three weeks (see below). The week after your reflection paper is due, you will meet in church-based discussion groups to discuss your responses to the questions and to explore other related topics. The maximum length for each reflection paper is three pages.

1. **Reflection Papers** (3 reflection papers x 8% = 24% of final grade): The following are the questions you should address in your three reflection papers (there are three questions for each week, so aim for one page per question):
 - **Reflection Paper 1** - review Mennonite Brethren model and method, history, genre, development, canon, and translations.

1. Given your understanding of the origin, development, canonization, and transmission of the biblical texts, describe your level of confidence in the trustworthiness of the Scriptures we have today.
 2. In your opinion, what is the best translation of the Bible today? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the translation, and how do you address that as you read and study scripture?
 3. What do you find appealing and challenging about how Mennonite Brethren read, interpret, and apply scripture?
- **Reflection Paper 2** - review organization, structure, poetry, wisdom, narratives, Gospel, and parables.
 1. What does it mean that Hebrew poetry is “language of the heart”? Specifically, how does the nature of Hebrew poetry influence how you read scripture for yourself and how you teach or preach it to others?
 2. Reflect on the six guidelines for reading Biblical narratives. If you had to identify one or two that you think are the most important, which one(s) would they be (and why)? Describe a time when you have heard a narrative passage taught/preached well and a time when you have heard it taught/preached poorly.
 3. The kingdom of God is central to the Gospels, as is the concept that it is “already, but not yet” realized in our day. Describe how you have experienced the specific elements of the NT kingdom of God lived out and experienced in your context.
 - **Reflection Paper 3** - review law, prophecy, letters, and the apocalypse.
 1. Describe the relationship between biblical law and biblical prophecy. Why is the link between the two so critical, and what happens if that link is broken? How is the concept of “prophecy” used well and misused by Christians today?
 2. What does it mean that a New Testament letter is an “occasional” document, and how does it impact how you read and teach? How do you determine if a letter’s context is similar to or different than yours?
 3. What is the relationship between Genesis and Revelation? Why has Revelation been so often used for purposes other than which it was originally intended? How can you reclaim the beauty, value, and message of Revelation in your life and ministry context today?
2. **Discussion Groups** (3 discussion groups x 2% = 6% of final grade): For the three Discussion Groups, you will meet in a church-based or virtual discussion group to discuss the questions you addressed in your reflection paper, explore other related topics, and contextualize ideas to your ministry setting. A designated leader from the church will facilitate the church-based discussion groups. The assessment of participation in discussion groups involves attendance and actual participation in the group sessions (both are worth 50% of the discussion group mark). The discussion group leaders will use the following rubric to assess each group member’s participation:

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|-------------------------|----------|--|
| Excellent participation | 47-50/50 | The group member consistently engaged in the group conversations. The person did an excellent job listening to other group members and consistently added meaningful content to the conversations. |
| Great participation | 43-46/50 | The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically. |
| Good participation | 40-43/50 | The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically. |
| Fair participation | 35-39/50 | The group member did not often engage in group conversations. The person seemed out of touch with the group conversation and would rarely add relevant content. |
| Poor participation | <35/50 | The group member rarely, if ever, engaged in the group conversations. The person seemed distant and uninterested in the group discussion and even other group members. |

3. **Research Paper** (34% of final grade): A 15-18 page paper on either a poetic or narrative passage (it must be one of these two genres). You can choose any passage you would like to study, provided that Dr Wessner has approved both the passage and your draft bibliography prior to writing the paper. At a minimum, the paper will consist of:

- The appropriate identification of the passage (where the passage starts/stops, its placement within the book, its placement within the Bible, etc), giving specific reasons for each of your conclusions (5 points),
- An analysis of the literary style and characteristics of the passage (citing specific references) (5 points),
- A detailed and thoughtful application of the appropriate interpretive approach suggested during the course (15 points),
- A concluding section on the modern relevance and/or application of the passage (8 points), and
- Specific references from at least five sources, in addition to the Required Texts (1 point)
- All conclusions and opinions must be supported and documented with relevant and appropriate evidence and/or examples.

4. **Ministry Curriculum Project** (36% of final grade): Using the Research Paper as the foundation, you are to create either a small group study guide or a classroom curriculum based on the Research Paper passage. The study guide / curriculum must reflect the content and principles discussed in this course, and it is to include a section on life and ministry application for the participants. You are to work through the study guide / curriculum with a small group of at least four people (one meeting).

- A thorough and detailed study guide / curriculum (22 points), and
- A 2,000 word summary of your small group / classroom experience (14 points).

Course Evaluation

Near the conclusion of this course, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Because feedback is very important to us, the course evaluation is a required part of the course and is tied to the submission of your last assignment. The course evaluation will be integrated into the Populi classroom in Week 8.

Grading Scale

| Letter Grade | Description | Grade Point | Meaning in Graduate Work |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--|
| A+ | Superior | 4.30 | Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight, critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable. |
| A | Excellent | 4.00 | Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use. |
| A- | Very Good | 3.70 | Thorough and plausible development of position. Skillful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage. |
| B+ | Proficient | 3.30 | Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage. |
| B | Good | 3.00 | Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws. |
| B- | Average | 2.70 | Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws. |
| C+ | Adequate | 2.30 | Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style. |

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| C | Acceptable | 2.00 | Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar. |
| C- | Needs Work | 1.70 | Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision or references and resources not taken fully into account or examples are basic or not completely convincing or barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies. |
| F | Below Standard | 0.00 | Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level. |

Artificial Intelligence

Students may use AI tools (eg, ChatGPT, Bing) to assist in research for assignments for this course, as long as any assistance or content that the AI tools provide or create is identified as a source and is properly and fully cited. Citation is not needed for simple proof-reading and editing (eg, Grammarly).

Paper Formatting

Students are required to adhere to the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format for all papers. Please consult the [Purdue Owl](#) website for information or:

Turabian, Kate, L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Thesis, and Dissertations*, 9th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire MB Seminary community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship at MB Seminary.

Assignment Grade Appeals

Students can appeal their grade to the course instructor by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made directly to Dr. Brian Cooper, Director of Student Development, briancooper@mbseminary.ca.

Web Support-Student Portal — <https://mbseminary.populiweb.com>

All students at MBS will receive a MBS-Populi username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application. If you have any difficulty with your password or your login credentials, please contact Keith Reed, Director of Ministry Support, (keithreed@mbseminary.ca).

Course Intensive/Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to your church host and contact.

Equity of Access

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the MB Seminary Director of Student Development (briancooper@mbseminary.ca) of that fact **before the beginning of a course** so that necessary arrangements may be made to facilitate the student's learning experience. To repeat: To ensure that instructors know to accommodate a student who has a learning access issue, the student must inform the Director of Student Development of a disability before the beginning of the class. After that is too late.