

Interpreting the Bible
NT 4313—Online Course Syllabus
Spring 2020

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Exegesis (Greek for “interpretation”) is the art of interpreting a literary text, in this case the Bible. For the purposes of this course, we will be distinguishing between *exegesis*, or the attempt to uncover the original meaning of a text (“what the text meant”) and *hermeneutics* (the application of the text, or “what the text means”). We will be doing some of both in this course.

BA Course Goals:

The student will show mastery of the biblical story and familiarity with various genres of biblical literature (law, wisdom, prophecy, poetry, etc.) and basic methods and principles of biblical exegesis.

Course Objectives:

- 1) The student will acquire a working knowledge of the methods and practice of exegesis.
- 2) The student will be able to take these methods and apply them to select passages of scripture in the Old and New Testaments.
- 3) The student will be able to distinguish between various literary genres in the Bible and be able to articulate important and distinctive features of each.
- 4) The student will be able to relate the practice of exegesis to the life of faith and practical ministry today.

By the end of the course, the student will be acquainted with the tools and terminology related to biblical interpretation. He or she will be able to apply these tools to biblical passages in order to understand them in their historical and literary contexts and to make application both personally and for the life of the church.

Required Texts:

A good modern translation study Bible, such as the *Oxford Annotated Bible of the New Revised Standard Version*, or a study Bible of the New International Version or New American Standard Version; scripture readings as assigned.

Gorman, Michael. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. Revised and Expanded Edition; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Stanglin, Keith. *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.

In addition, there will be occasional readings which will be made available to you.

Recommended Resource:

A Bible search program, such as Accordance (version 13), Logos (version 8), the Bible Study App. (Olive Tree Software, version 6). There is also an excellent free online program called StepBible. I will be making reference to these now and then during the course.

Means of Assessment:

Reflection Papers: Because exegesis is an art which must be learned by doing, we will be working on weekly assigned scripture passages. You will prepare, most weeks, a 1 to 2 page reflection paper on the assigned passage or topic. Each week, particular methods, approaches, and questions will be assigned which will be the focus of that week's study and lectures (60% of grade).

Exegesis Paper: In addition, each student will prepare one five to seven page term paper. The paper will be an exegesis of one approved passage from the Bible, supplied for you below. It will be due on May 11. You will use the guide for writing the paper provided also in week 8 (20% of grade). You will select from these passages:

- 1) Mark 2:1-12 (make sure you compare this passage with the other gospel accounts of this in Matthew and Luke).
- 2) Philippians 2:1-11 (or 1-13, or 1-18; you decide on the context and length of the

passage).

3) Psalm 100

4) Ruth 4:1-12 (or longer; you decide where your passage ends).

5) Isaiah 6:1-7 (or until the end of the chapter; you decide where the passage ends).

Quizzes: There will be two quizzes covering terminology and the history of exegesis (20% of grade).

Schedule of Classes

Week 1 (1/27): *Syllabus and Introduction to the Course; Exegesis and Interpretation*

Syllabus and Introduction to the Course: general comments; definition of plagiarism.

Read AGST Plagiarism Policy; Read William Bardke, “Research Strategies on Plagiarism.”

Exegesis and Interpretation: definition of terms, historical development of exegetical methods; exegesis and hermeneutics, basic principles.

Gorman pp. 10–59.

Brief History of Biblical Interpretation (Part 1)

Grant and Tracy, pp. 8–51.

Stanglin, pp. 47–76.

Week 2 (2/03): *Brief History of Biblical Interpretation (Continued; Part 2)*

Quiz #1, on introduction and terminology.

Week 3 (2/10): *Step 1: Survey and Initial Questions*

Quiz #2, on the history of biblical interpretation.

Gorman pp. 63–68.

Reflection paper: Survey and Initial Questions on Matthew 15:21–28

(due 2/17).

Week 4 (2/17): Step 2: Literary Contexts

Gorman pp. 69–70, 74–81.

In class assignment on words and divisions in Romans 8.

Reflection Paper: literary context of Matthew 15:21–28 (due 2/24).

Week 5 (2/24): Step 3: Historical Contexts (part one); also, Analysis of Difficult Words

Gorman pp. 69–74.

Analysis of difficult words.

Reflection Paper on Sennacherib’s invasion (due 3/2).

Week 6 (3/2): Historical Contexts (part two): Multiple Reports of an Event and Literary Parallels

Reflection Paper: *Multiple reports of an event*, on the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (due 3/9), or

Reflection Paper: *Analyzing Literary Parallels* on the Gilgamesh Epic and the biblical flood story in Genesis 6–9 (due 3/9).

Week 7 (3/9): Step 4: Analyzing Form, Structure, and Movement.

Gorman pp. 83–100.

Reflection Paper on the structure of the epistle *or* the lament (due 3/23).

Week 8 (3/16): No class; Spring Break

Week 9 (3/23): Step 5: Detailed Analysis (part one): Text Criticism and Identifying Key Words and Concepts

Text Criticism: Gorman pp. 101–116.

Reflection paper on the text criticism of 2 Samuel 23:1–7 (due 3/30).

Identifying Key Words and Concepts:

In class assignment on identifying key words and concepts in a passage.

Week 10 (3/30): Detailed Analysis (part two): Redaction

Detailed Analysis (part two) Redaction and Movement of a Passage:

Gorman pp. 117–125.

Reflection Paper comparing Matthew 19:21–28 with Mark 7:24–30 (due 4/6).

Week 11 (4/6): Detailed Analysis (part three): Intertextuality and Literary Analysis and Tools

Detailed Analysis (part three): Intertextuality:

Reflection Paper on Luke 4:1–13 (due 4/13).

Detailed Analysis (part three): Literary Tools.

Week 12 (4/13): Step 6: Synthesis

Gorman pp. 127–138.

In class assignment on the synthesis of Matthew 15:21–28.

Reflection Paper on characters, perspectives, and other literary tools applied to Ruth, Jonah, and Esther (due 4/20).

Week 13 (4/20): Step 7 (Part one): Theological Reflection

Step 7 (part one): Theological Reflection:

Gorman pp. 139–166.

In class assignment on the theological reflection of Matthew 15:21–28.

Week 14 (4/27): *Step 7 (Part 2): Hermeneutics and the Expansion and Refinement of the Exegesis*

Step 7, (part two): Hermeneutics and the Expansion and Refinement of the Exegesis:

Read Gorman pp. 167–179.

Reflection Paper on your own hermeneutical philosophy (due 5/4).

Week 15 (5/4): *Structured in-class work on the exegesis paper.*

Week 16 (5/11): Exegesis papers due.