

**NT 4313 Biblical Interpretation**  
**Spring 2018 Course Syllabus**  
**Michael R. Young, Ph.D.**  
**Cell: 334-328-5559**  
**Email: myoung@faulkner.edu**

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**Course Description**

The course is an introduction to the history, literature, and interpretation of the Christian Scriptures as a witness to the faith of the Church. Attention is given to issues of language, genre, text, canon, representative approaches to biblical interpretation, and practical steps involved in biblical exegesis.

**Course Objectives**

- Know the terminology and the various approaches typically employed in carrying out Biblical interpretation
- Understand how historical, literary, and canonical contexts aid in understanding a Biblical text.
- Apply the various forms of exegetical approaches to selected Biblical texts.
- Analyze key words, literary forms, and movement of selected Biblical texts within their larger setting.
- Evaluate competing interpretations of Biblical texts through exegetical, theological, and pastoral concerns.
- Create a sermon or class material on a Biblical text for presentation to a specific audience with intended outcomes.

**Required Texts**

Gorman, Michael J., *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*. Revised and Expanded (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

Davis, Ellen F. and Hays, Richard B., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 2003).

**Recommended Texts**

Boersma, Hans, *Sacramental Preaching: Sermons On the Hidden Presence of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

Boersma, Hans, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

## Course Requirements

- **Attendance:** Due to the intensive seminar format attendance at the monthly meetings is critical. A missed weekend session is a loss of 25% of the course contact time so make every effort to be in attendance. Otherwise you will be in jeopardy being dropped from the course. If a conflict or illness does occur, you will need to make arrangements with the professor to make up the missed content.
- **Class Participation (10%):** You are expected to contribute to the class discussions.
- **Reading (5%):** A close reading of weekly assignments with possible pop quizzes.
- **Quiz (5%):** A quiz over terminology from the required course readings.
- **Writing (30%):** Weekly writing/exercises in preparation for writing the exegetical paper.
- **Journal (10%):** Weekly written journal entries for consideration and reflection.
- **Final Exam (40%):** A written exegetical paper with a detailed outline of your sermon or class presentation with stated intended purpose and outcomes of your message along with a list of any non-verbal materials to be used (visuals, etc.).

## Plagiarism and citation of sources

Plagiarism is the representation of another person's work as your own and is a form of theft. *This includes material composed by other students, purchased from an online paper service, or copied from published books and articles or from the Internet.* If in any assignment you employ material written by someone else, you must give the author proper credit, *documenting the source with an appropriate citation and marking any words directly quoted with quotation marks (or with indentation if four or more lines are quoted).* Failure to appropriately credit the sources you use will result in a reduction in your grade for the assignment in question and/or the requirement that you revise the assignment. *Intentionally representing another person's work as your own will be grounds for academic discipline, including your possible dismissal from the School.* For more information on how to acknowledge sources properly and avoid plagiarism, refer to the School's "Guide to Written Work"

([http://www.austingrad.edu/images/Resources/student/guide\\_for\\_written\\_work.htm](http://www.austingrad.edu/images/Resources/student/guide_for_written_work.htm)).

## Course Schedule

The class sessions are intensive seminar format meeting once a month, January through April, on Fridays and Saturdays. The Friday's meeting time is 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM. Saturday's meeting times are 9:00 AM to Noon, lunch break, and then from 1:00 to 3:00 PM.

**Session One - January 26, 27 Written and Journal assignments Due at the Start of the Session (final copy due Wednesday after session)**

Introduction: the text and task of Biblical interpretation

- I. Text – History of the formation and quality of the text
- II. History of Biblical interpretation
  - A. Literal
  - B. Spiritual
  - C. Allegorical

- III. Exegesis – Definition and Approaches
  - A. Elements of exegesis – investigation, conversation, devotion, and art
  - B. Synchronic Approach – a study of a text in its final form; as we have received it
  - C. Diachronic Approach – a focus on the origin and development of a text
  - D. Existential Approach – understanding the text as something to be personally engaged
- IV. Assignments
  - A. **Read** Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, pgs. 9-59 (be sure to review “Practical Hints” and “For Further Insight and Practice” at the end of chs. 1 & 2); Davis & Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, “Scripture’s Authority in the Church”, pgs. 27-37
  - B. **Write a description** of the three interpretive approaches (synchronic, diachronic, and existential) as if you are telling or teaching others unfamiliar with such methods. Then provide an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each (2 or 3 type written pages double-spaced).
  - C. **Take Quiz #1**
  - D. **Journal Entry** – From the overview of the formation of the Bible, what is your assessment of the reliability and authority of scripture (see Jensen article, “Scripture’s Authority in the Church”)? Are you attracted to any of the particular approaches to interpreting scripture? If so, why do you find it compelling?

Interpretive Process: Initial Survey

- I. Read through a complete book or letter of scripture (select one that you intend to apply your interpretive skills, see III.) using at least two reliable translations (RSV, NRSV, ESV, NIV, NASB, NJB, KJV, NKJV). Note differences in key terms and textual variations listed in the footnotes.
- II. Preliminary Observations
  - A. Note key themes of the book.
  - B. Detect the various literary forms or genres employed within the text.
  - C. Make a preliminary attempt at stating the overarching purpose of the book.
- III. Select a passage (pericope) within the book that you will develop with a detailed interpretation and application (sermon or class) for a given audience as your final assignment.
- IV. Assignments
  - A. **Read** Gorman, pgs. 63-68; Davis & Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, “Teaching the Bible Confessionally in the Church”, pgs. 9-26
  - B. **Assignment #2** – Selecting a passage Gorman (pgs. 37, 38) suggests several considerations in selecting a passage to interpret. Also, be sure to do the “Practical Hints” and “For Further Insight and Practice” (esp. #2 and #4).
  - C. **List the themes** within the selected passage. Gorman lists seven elements of method (pg. 26).
  - D. **Journal Entry** – Read the passage for your own life in the faith (see Davis article, “Teaching the Bible Confessionally in the Church.”). What discoveries within the text have surprised you thus far? Any information gathered thus far influence your understanding of the text?

**Session Two - February 23, 24 Written and Journal assignments Due at the Start of the Session**  
**(final copy due Wednesday after session)**

Contextual Analysis: Historical, Literary, and Canonical Contexts

- I. Historical, Sociopolitical, and Cultural Contexts
  - A. Research significant events of the people addressed within the book of your passage whether experienced personally or vicariously through stories.
  - B. Note the public and private relationships in which they are engaged.
  - C. Discern the values they embrace, consciously or unconsciously.
- II. Literary and Rhetorical Contexts
  - A. Immediate context: note how your selected passage fits in and functions within the several paragraphs before and after your passage. Does the material prior rhetorically lead into your passage? Does the material following the passage achieve some rhetorical goal?
  - B. Larger Context: note where this passage occurs in the overall structure of the book. What might the location of your passage say about the meaning of your text? How does your passage help achieve the purpose(s) of the entire work?
- III. Canonical Context
  - A. Employ the “Rule of Scripture” (let the Bible interpret the Bible). How might other scriptures aid in understanding your passage?
  - B. How does your passage’s content and themes relate to other passages: parallel, similar, harmonious, in tension? If in tension, should or can a harmony be sought?
- IV. Assignments
  - A. **Read** Gorman pgs. 69-81; Davis & Hays, “Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture”, pgs. 1-5.
  - B. **Write** a paraphrase of your passage as a preliminary interpretation of the text incorporating facts, forms, and themes discovered thus far in your study. Be sure to review “Practical Hints” for help. As practice, try out exercises #1 and #2 and review the material cited in #3 and #4 under “For Further Insight and Practice”.
  - C. **Write** a brief reflection (1 or 2 pages) on how the “Nine Thesis” potentially influence your understanding of your selected passage?
  - D. **Journal Entry** – Begin a description of your own context and the context of your assumed audience to be addressed with your selected passage. How might you and your audience receive this message (as understood thus far in the study)? How open are you and your audience to the message? What might be challenging or off-putting?

Formal Analysis: Form, Structure and Movement of the Text

- I. Literary Form
  - A. An analysis of the distinguishing features and commonly recognized principles and conventions of the various literary forms or genre within scripture
  - B. Overview of general interpretive principles for specific types of literature
- II. Structure

- A. Discerning the structure of the book or letter of your selected passage as well as possible substructures within your text
- B. Implications of structure for interpretation
- III. Movement
  - A. While structure names the parts of a passage, the movement describes the relationship among the parts.
  - B. Some common examples of movement: description, explanation, repetition, logic, catalogue, and compare/contrast.
- IV. Assignments
  - A. **Read** Gorman, pgs. 83-100; Davis & Hays, “Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story” pgs. 38-53
  - B. **Write** a literary analysis (use commentaries) of the book or letter in which your passage is found as well as any specific literary form(s) particular to your passage. For help, review “Practical Hints” and see resource section cited under #2. For practice, review “For Further Insight and Practice.”
  - C. **Create** an outline of the structure of the book or letter with detailed attention to your passage as to how it fits within the overall structure.
  - D. **Journal Entry** – Reflect on how various literary forms can influence your understanding of a passage. Are there particular literary forms you are more attracted to and why? Also, respond to Bauckham’s article about metanarratives. How do you defend the validity of the Biblical metanarrative?

**Session Three - March 30, 31 Written and Journal assignments Due at the Start of the Session (final copy due Wednesday after session)**

Detailed Analysis of the Text

- I. Whole in Relation to its Parts
  - A. Words – select key terms within your passage for an investigation in the original language (to the extent of one’s background with Biblical languages).
  - B. Sentence segments or utterances
  - C. Sentences – analyze the grammar with attention to the parts of speech
  - D. Text segments – paragraphs, stanzas, or clusters of sentences
  - E. The text as a whole
- II. Figures of speech
  - A. Images, metaphors, parable, hyperbole, apocalyptic, typology
  - B. Function of figures of speech within the selected passage
- III. Assignments
  - A. **Read** Gorman, pgs. 101-125; Davis & Hays, “Preaching Scripture Faithfully in a Postmodern Age”, pgs. 109-124
  - B. **Present** the details of your word studies from the original language along with any significant grammatical notes within your passage. For guidance and help with the assignment, review “Practical Hints” and “For Further Insights and Practice”. Under the latter note especially #6 that refers you to “Resources for Detailed Analysis” and #7 that points you to Appendix C for samples of exegesis.

- C. **Write** a response to the article, “Preaching Scripture Faithfully in a Postmodern Age”, as to how will you teach and/or preach in a postmodern context (approx. 2 pgs.).
- D. **Journal Entry** – Reflect on how words contain multiple meanings (definitions vs. meaning in context) and how this influences your understanding of your passage

### Synthesis and Theological Interpretation

- I. Synthesis
  - A. From your study, propose the main point(s) of the passage.
  - B. Attempt a synthesis of the possible plurality of interpretations.
  - C. Accepting possible ambiguity and living with polyvalence
- II. Principles of Theological Interpretation
  - A. Hermeneutical approaches – antipathy, appreciation or noncommittal, inquiry, suspicion, and trust
  - B. Theological principles – incarnational, catholic, communal, canonical, coherence, charismatic, conversion, and constructive
- III. Assignments
  - A. **Read** Gorman, pgs. 127-166; Davis & Hays, select one the sermons by Ellen Davis, pgs. 277-305
  - B. **Re-write** your earlier paraphrase of your passage exhibiting greater clarity and precision. Include your rationale for your hermeneutical approach and describe your application of the principles of theological interpretation. Be sure to review the “Practical Hints” and “For Further Insight and Practice” at the end of the chs. 7 and 8.
  - C. **Write** a brief analysis (2 pgs.) of one of Ellen Davis’ sermons in *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Note the hermeneutical and theological approach(es). What rhetorical approaches/devices does she use (review Gorman, pgs 74-76). Do you find the sermon compelling? How does it affect your faith (encourage, challenge, chastise, inform, remind, inspire)?
  - D. **Journal Entry** – Which of the hermeneutical approaches do you find most satisfactory for understanding scripture and why?

### **Session Four - April 27, 28 Written and Journal assignments Due at the Start of the Session (final copy due Wednesday after session)**

#### Message: Rhetorical Approaches

- I. What rhetorical means will you employ as the best way to bring about the text driven aim of your message (understanding of the text, faith building, and challenges).
  - A. Forms: informative, persuasive, deliberative
  - B. Elements – voice intonation, silence, physical movement, gestures, illustrations, humor, visuals, music, witnesses
- II. Assignments
  - A. **Read** Gorman, pgs. 167-179; Davis & Hays, select one of Hays’ sermons, pgs. 306-325
  - B. **Write** a brief description (1 pg.) of your audience for whom the sermon/class is intended (age group(s), cultural context, socio-economic situation, racial mix, etc.)

- C. **Write** a brief analysis (2 pgs.) of one of Hays' sermons. Note the hermeneutical and theological approach(es). What rhetorical approaches/devices does she use (review Gorman, pgs 74-76). Do you find the sermon compelling? How does it affect your faith (encourage, challenge, chastise, inform, remind, inspire)?
- D. **Write** a description of your rhetorical approach (informative, persuasive, deliberative, or some combination of these) and elements (voice intonation, silence, physical movement, gestures, illustrations, humor, visuals, music, witnesses).
- E. **Journal Entry** – Reflect on how the study of your selected passage has influenced you: academically and spiritually. How does the passage inform you, build your faith, and/or challenge you?
- F. **Book Summary Presentations – Graduate students** give an oral presentation of their respective Book Summaries.

**Final Exam:** Submit your final exegetical paper and include a detailed outline of your sermon or class with the intended purpose and outcomes of your message along with a list of any non-verbal materials (visuals, etc.). Date: TBA (see Spring Final Exam Schedule).