



AREA OF MINISTERIAL PRACTICE: **BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE**

Course Title: **22/23 Session 5: Overview of the Bible**

Course Dates: March 6 to April 30, 2023

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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the content of the Bible and the methods of study that scholars use to understand it. Students will learn about the history of the periods in which various biblical books were written, and about how the individual writings came together into a single book. They will attempt to discover what the biblical writers were seeking to accomplish through their writings. This search will present students with understandings of the world and the place of humanity that can help illuminate alternative ways humans have experienced the world and attempted to make sense of it.

Prerequisites: None

Course Overview:

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the content of the Bible and the methods of study that scholars use to understand it. To fulfill this purpose, we will learn about the history of the periods in which various biblical books were written and about how the individual writings came together into a single book. We will try to discover what the biblical writers were seeking to accomplish through their writings. This search will present us with understandings of the world and the place of humanity. These can help us see alternative ways that human beings have experienced the world and attempted to make sense of it.

The course will include weekly readings from the assigned text, *The Bible: An Introduction*, as well as various readings from the Bible. In addition, a Response to Reading (an open book test) will be submitted each week on that week’s reading, due noon on Saturday. “Classroom” discussion is also an important component of the course. Online discussion will be organized around the readings and supplemental materials each week.

There are two required papers for the course, a Mid-Term paper and a final paper. Both papers are to be 4-6 pages in length. The Mid-Term paper is due by **11:59pm Wednesday CDT, March 29, 2023**. The final paper is due by **11:59pm CDT, Tuesday, May 9, 2023**. Detailed instructions and expectations for these papers are included in this syllabus and will be reviewed near the end of the course.

Required texts:

The Bible: An Introduction, Third Edition by Jerry L. Sumney,
Fortress Press, ISBN 978-1506466781

*As soon as you receive this text, please read the Preface (xxix-xxxv) and Epilogue (pg 413ff).
Also familiarize yourself with the Glossary and the Index.*

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Study Bible. Choose from one of these versions:

New Interpreter's Study Bible, ISBN 978-0687278329, Abingdon

New Oxford Annotated NRSV, ISBN 978-0190276072, Oxford University Press

The Access NRSV Bible, ISBN 978-0199777532, Oxford University Press

Harper Collins NRSV Study Bible. ISBN 978-0060786847, Harper One

Note: In the future, you may wish to purchase copies of several of these Bibles. They can be purchased rather inexpensively from Amazon used books and will give you a broader range of study notes. Also note: there is an updated version of the NRSV, the NRSV-ue. At this time study editions are either unavailable or very expensive. The updated version is available for free online. Those resources will be made available during the course.

Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again by Rachel Held Evans, Nelson Books, ISBN 978-0718022310

Recommended texts: (you are not required to purchase these, but they are very helpful in your coursework and as you begin to explore the Bible)

What Is the Bible?: How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything by Rob Bell, HarperOne, ISBN 978-0062194275

Synopsis of the Four Gospels, Revised Standard Version (Revised Edition) by American Bible Society, American Bible Society, ISBN 978-1585169429

Course objectives:

1. Describe in broad terms the historical development of the Bible, including the social, economic, and political contexts out of which biblical literature grew.

Student Learning Goal:

- a) Learn about the settings in the ancient world that produced various biblical books.
 - b) Develop the ability to respect and converse with a person or persons who hold different values and support an alternative worldview.
2. Distinguish literary genres and theological “schools of thought” that appear in the Bible.

Student Learning Goals:

- a) Recognize biblical books as attempts to make meaning of human existence (that is, see them as theological writings).
 - b) Learn the basic stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition.
3. Identify the role, which the experience and culture of the reader plays in the interpretation of biblical texts.

Student Learning Goals:

- a) Realize the importance of theological reflection for spiritual growth.
- b) Analyze uses of biblical texts in public contexts.

Course requirements, schedule, calendar, assignments, etc.

Reading - Students will read the assigned portions of *The Bible: An Introduction* and the texts of the Bible before each week’s discussion. The reading for the week appears on the class schedule below.

Video “Lecture” - Each week the instructor will post a video regarding the assigned reading. These videos help to focus and extend the assigned reading. Information from the video will be helpful in engaging the discussions and in working toward the final project.

Response to Reading - Engage the material you have read in the text book by responding to the assigned questions before the class discussion. Be thorough in your reflections, but be concise. Please use your best syntax, grammar, and spelling. **Response to Reading, open book exercise, is due each Saturday by 12:00pm (noon) Central time.** These weekly open book tests, taken on the Canvas site, will comprise **30% of your grade.**

On-line Discussions - Each week’s window for posting to the Discussion Forum opens at **8:00am** on Monday and closes at **12:00pm** on Saturday. Respond to the questions in the Discussion Forum(s) no later than **5:00pm** on Wednesday. (Students are encouraged to begin these discussions as early in the week as possible, to facilitate deep engagement with the topics, and one another. *Students are required to participate in at least 2 peer discussions.*

Participation means you will make a minimum of two (2) direct responses to their classmate’s posts. Students are encouraged to facilitate meaningful exchanges with as many other students as possible (more than, ‘Yes, I agree.’). Again, participation in 2 peer discussions is required. Multiple comments and exchanges are encouraged.

Your responses must demonstrate your engagement with and comprehension of (or attempts to comprehend) the lectures, readings, and other assigned resources. Be sure to refer to them, and apply and integrate them, in your responses. In these exchanges, you will show your understanding of the assigned material and your awareness of the Student Learning Goals. Also, in the discussions, you will **demonstrate your ability to respect different experiences, theological perspectives and convictions**. We will speak honestly and courteously, listen carefully, ask questions to clarify, and weigh our words as we respond. *All of these aspects of the discussion will be considered in the evaluation of your participation.* Participation **comprises 30% of your grade.**

Mid-Term Paper – Theological Reflection (minimum 4 pages; maximum, 6) **is due 11:59pm CDT, Wednesday, March 29, 2023.** In this paper students will reflect on their understanding of the nature of the Bible, what importance it holds in their life, and how their understanding of scripture impacts their overall understanding of the world. The link to submit your assignment will be available in Canvas. *Detailed information of expectations can be found in MID-TERM PAPER in the class schedule and assignments.* The paper counts as **20% of your grade.**

Final Paper – Theological Reflection and Contextual Application (minimum 4 pages; maximum, 6) **is due 11:59pm CDT, Tuesday, May 9, 2023.** In this paper students will create a plan for engaging what they have learned in this course within their ministry setting. (The church or institution in whose ministry they participate; whether in a paid or unpaid position (e.g., as the leader of a ministry, a participant in a ministry, as an Elder or Deacon, as a member of the Board/Council/Vestry/etc.) This plan should be detailed and demonstrate an awareness of the learning objectives for the course. The link to submit your assignment will be available in Canvas. *Detailed information of expectations can be found in FINAL PAPER in the class schedule and assignments.* The paper counts as **20% of your grade.**

Supplemental Resources - Each week there will be at least one article or video which relates to the topic for the week and the discussion. Students will be expected to read or watch these materials to effectively engage in the discussions throughout the week.

OPTIONAL End-of-Week Live Sessions – Each week the instructor will offer a time where students can ask questions and/or get clarification about the week’s work (or either of the papers for the course.) These “Office Hours” will be from **9:00-9:45 AM CDT** each Saturday (unless otherwise announced). *The Zoom Room will open between 8:55 and 9:00 and will close at 9:10 if no students appear by then.*

Course grading scale:

Participation in weekly discussions	30%
Weekly Response to Reading	30%
Mid-Term Paper, 4-6 pages	20%
Final Paper, 4-6 pages	20%

Letter grades will be given for the final course grade according to the student handbook.

A+	97 or greater
A	93-96
A-	92-90
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	82-80
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 or below
INC	Incomplete

Course Schedule and Assignments:

ALL DEADLINES ARE CENTRAL TIME. PLEASE MAKE THE ADJUSTMENT FOR YOUR TIME ZONE.

Monday - Video "Lecture," Response to Reading questions, supplemental reading materials, and discussion topics are posted. Begin your week's work by watching the video, engaging materials, beginning discussion posts, and working on Response to Reading

Tuesday – Friday – Continue to engage the reading, discussions, work on a paper for the course, etc.

Saturday – Finalize and submit your Response to Reading (if you have not already done so) by 12:00pm, attend the optional office hours from 9:00 to 9:45am, and finalize any discussions for the week.

Saturday afternoon and Sunday – Rest and engage your own spiritual health. (If ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY use some time to catch up on reading for the coming week.

Use Saturday afternoons to rest, relax, re-center, re-create, and prepare for worship ...
NO POSTING!

Sunday is a DAY OFF from this class ... STILL NO POSTING!

Refrain from worrying about, and working on, course-related matters on Sundays – and preferably on Saturday afternoons and evenings too. Instead, students should worship in a congregation that will feed their spirit as well as their mind (in that order!).

Detailed Course Schedule

PRE-COURSE PREPARATION

READING:

- *The Bible: An Introduction, Preface (xxxiii) and Epilogue (pg 395ff), and familiarize yourself with the Glossary and the Index*
- *Inspired, Introduction (xi)*

There is a substantial amount of material to cover during this course. Familiarizing yourself with the layout of the text before we delve into our study will give you a better understanding of how the text is organized.

DISCUSSION: Please take a moment to introduce yourself to the class in the discussion forum on the Introduction page of the Canvas Course. This will help us interact with one another respectfully throughout the course. Information to be included in your introductions is included in the forum.

WEEK 1 – March 6-12, 2023

WHAT IS THE BIBLE, AND HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 1, 2, & 3; *Inspired*, “*The Temple*” and chapter 1

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- The many voices within the Bible; how the Bible was formed
- Complexity of translation; problem of different versions
- Human voices in sacred texts; meaning of God-breathed

WEEK 2 – March 13-19, 2023

WHAT IS THE STORY OF THE HEBREW BIBLE?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 4-5; *Inspired*, “*The Well*” and chapter 2

Scan Genesis. Read more carefully Genesis 1-4; 6-9, 18:16 - 19:29.

Scan Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- God’s involvement with Israel; promises to Abraham; exodus and liberation as Israel’s identity
- God’s power and flexibility; God willingness to listen to suffering and complaint; a just society

WEEK 3 – March 20-26, 2023

WHAT IS THE STORY OF THE HEBREW BIBLE?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 6-7, *Inspired*, “*The Walls*” and chapter 3.

Scan Joshua through Nehemiah. Read more carefully Scriptures mentioned in the text book. Scan Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, Jonah, and Daniel.

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- Ancient world view of conquest for peace; unfaithfulness of Israel results in political disasters
- Political power brings responsibility for poor & marginalized; prophets speak & show messages

MID-TERM PAPER – Due 11:59pm CDT, Wednesday, March 29, 2023.

The mid-term paper for the Overview of the Bible course is a reflection paper, 4 to 6 pages in length. This paper should be organized around three major topics:

- What is your current understanding of what the Bible is, and how did you come to that understanding?
 - You may want to talk about how you first encountered the Bible, and who has been instrumental in shaping your understanding of the scriptures.
- Why is the Bible important for Christians and Christian communities?
 - You may want to engage Sumney, but be sure to include your own interpretation and why you come to your conclusion.
- What does it mean to say the Bible is “inspired?”
 - Again, engage the text, but be sure to emphasize your conclusions and the reasoning behind them.

The paper should have an introduction and conclusion. The body of the paper should address each of the topics outlined above. Formatting guidelines for this paper are the same as for the final paper (listed later in the syllabus) and are available in the Canvas Course under the Mid-Term Paper heading. The grading rubric is available in the Canvas course.

Due 11:59pm CDT, Wednesday, March 29, 2023. This paper counts as 20% of your grade.

WEEK 4 – March 27-April 2, 2023

WHAT IS THE STORY OF THE HEBREW BIBLE?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 8 & 9, *Inspired*, “*The Debate*” and chapter 4

Scan Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Esther.

Scan Psalms and Song of Solomon. Read more carefully Scriptures mentioned in the textbook.

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- Wisdom literature creates space to question God’s purposes; provides an alternative worldview
- Psalms contain emotional content in a formal structure; one example of erotic poetry

WEEK 5 – April 3 -9, 2023

WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 10 & 11, *Inspired*, “*The Beast*” and chapter 5

Scan the Apocrypha. Read more carefully texts mentioned in the textbook.

Read more carefully Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- The parties within First Century Judaism
- Themes in the Apocrypha and how those themes show up in the New Testament
- The influence of the Deuteronomistic outlook in the time shortly before Jesus.

WEEK 6 – April 10-16, 2023

WHAT IS THE STORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 12, 13, & 14, *Inspired*, “*The Water*” and chapter 6

Scan Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Read more carefully Scriptures mentioned in the text book.

Read more carefully Mark 1:1-2; 5:1-20; Mark 1:25, 34, 43-44, 5:43; Matthew 5:1-26; Luke 4:14-30.

Scan Acts of the Apostles. Read more carefully Acts 9:1-9; 10:1-6, 44-48.

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- Formation of the Gospels; synoptic problem, and Historical Jesus.
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each provides a distinct aspect of Jesus for his readers
- Hope for renewal in the new community of faith; a new world order after Pentecost.

WEEK 7 – April 17-23, 2023

WHAT IS THE STORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 15 & 16, *Inspired*, “*The Sea*” and chapter 7

Scan Pauline Epistles and Disputed Pauline Letters.

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- Church unity was important to Paul; he sees in the church socio-economic equality
- In a struggle for unity Paul’s voice is used; “temple” metaphor used to promote unity

WEEK 8 – April 24-30, 2023

WHAT IS THE STORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

READING ASSIGNMENT: *The Bible: An Introduction*, chapters 17 & 18, *Inspired*, “*The Letter*,” chapter 8 and epilogue.

Scan Hebrews, General Epistles, and Revelation.

Read more carefully Revelation 1:9-20; 7:13—8:6.

Response to Reading due by 12:00pm (noon) Saturday.

Discussion: Monday through 12:00pm Saturday. Discussion participation is required.

Key Themes:

- “Temple” metaphor evolved into Jesus as “High Priest”
- Symbols in Revelation require a grasp of literary customs

FINAL PAPER – Due 11:59pm CDT, Tuesday, May 9, 2023

The final project for the Overview of the Bible course is a reflection and application paper, 4 to 6 pages in length. This paper should focus on developing a plan to implement what you are learning in this course in your ministry setting. (The church or institution in whose ministry they participate; whether in a paid or unpaid position (e.g., as the leader of a ministry, a participant in a ministry, as an Elder or Deacon, as a member of the Board/Council/Vestry/etc.) This plan should be detailed and demonstrate an awareness of the learning objectives for the course.

Your paper should be organized around these topics:

- Why is it important to teach how the Bible came to be what it is today in your ministry setting?
- What is your assessment of the level of biblical knowledge in your ministry setting?
- What is your plan for engaging this information?
 - Please be detailed in your plan and include your desired outcomes.
- What obstacles to implementing your plan do you envision, and how will you address those challenges?

The paper should have an introduction and conclusion. The body of the paper should address each of the topics outlined above. The grading rubric is available in the Canvas course.

Formatting Guidelines

- The final paper is to be submitted in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx), using the link provided in the Canvas course.
- FONT & SIZE: Times New Roman 12.
- LINE SPACING: Double-spaced with indented paragraphs; no space before or after a paragraph.
- Citations must be made in a consistent manner and plagiarism is to be avoided. This paper is intended to be a reflection on the topics of this course. No sources beyond the required texts for this course are *required*. However, external sources are acceptable and, if used, a bibliography (not included in the page count) should be included. (You will find resources for citing works and writing in your Primo/Library button on Single Sign On. Your library staff member, Katherine Casey, is also a great resource for works cited).
- Citations should be made as **footnotes** and follow the 9th Edition of Turabian. (A link to a quick guide is available in the Canvas course.)
- Be mindful of the Academic Honesty Policy that follows.

Due 11:59pm CDT, Tuesday, May 9, 2023. This paper counts as **20% of your grade.**

Center for Ministry and Lay Training Academic Honesty Policy

- The students of the CMLT are engaged in learning ministry skills in a Christian environment of *respect* and *honesty*. This includes respect and honesty when using others' ideas in written work, sermons, and other assignments
- **Plagiarism is unacceptable.** Plagiarism is defined as taking another person's ideas and words and passing them off as one's own. Examples include:
 - Presenting the exact words of an author without citing the source and without putting those words in quotation marks.
 - Using another person's ideas without acknowledging the source of those ideas. This is also plagiarism, even when you re-arrange the words.
 - "Cutting and pasting" information from websites and submitting it as one's own work.
- Instructors are to treat all cases of academic dishonesty as opportunities to impart knowledge, teach skills, and promote the value of academic honesty. The instructor has wide latitude in responding to plagiarism.
 - He or she may choose such options as asking the student to redo an assignment (perhaps with a lowered grade); giving the student a 0 on the paper or assignment; or failing the student in the class. The instructor must notify the Director of Educational Ministries of the issue and the actions taken.
- Expectations regarding written work:
 - Give the source of every fact, idea, or argument which is not your own.
 - Set off by quotation marks all significant words, phrases, sentences, and multi-sentence quotes which are borrowed from another and cite their source.
- Instructors are expected to remind students of this academic honesty policy and to include in their syllabi the expectations for documenting sources.

Other policies and information:

(Students come to our program from a wide range of backgrounds with various theological points of view and opinions on scriptural interpretation. With that understanding, all our discussions and interactions must demonstrate mutual respect, motivated by love.

Late class work: Late assignments will not be accepted, unless the professor has granted prior permission. Such extensions will only be approved for emergencies.

Inclusive language policy: “As a Christian and theological community, we recognize the important role that language plays in shaping, perpetuating, or reshaping our lives. We know that language is not merely a collection of inert tools that enable us to ‘say what we want to say,’ but is a powerful and subtle force that orders the forms and values through which we perceive and interpret our world.

As Christians and ministers of the Word, we commit ourselves to avoid using language that damages or excludes persons or perpetuates demeaning stereotypes.

This includes language that establishes or reinforces bias against people because of their race, gender, ethnic group, age, profession, religion, economic status, national group, sexual orientation, marital status, etc.

- Phillips recognizes that there is room for legitimate differences of opinion on such matters and does not attempt to prescribe in detail precisely which words, expressions, and usage are acceptable.
- Phillips is not attempting to impose an ideology or arbitrary standard on anyone. It is attempting to raise consciousness in regard to language that may be offensive to some.
- **Phillips also encourages the community to be aware of the problem of language with reference to God. We need to be sensitive to the metaphorical, analogical nature of all our language about God, and to be aware that the Bible and Christian tradition use feminine and non-human as well as masculine images and categories for speaking of God.”**

This class was designed to address the following section of the Disciples of Christ Sixteen Areas of Ministerial Practice

- 1. Biblical Knowledge:** Be rooted and grounded in scripture and able to interpret and apply the scriptures in ways that are appropriate to original and contemporary contexts. (Please note that this area is divided into three courses.)

Learning Outcomes: (Outcomes in bold are to be emphasized in this course)

- **Describe in broad terms the historical development of the Bible, including the social, economic, and political contexts out of which biblical literature grew;**
- **Distinguish literary genres and theological “schools of thought” that appear in the Bible;**
- **Identify the role which the experience and culture of the reader plays in the interpretation of biblical texts;**
- **Practice regular Bible study as a spiritual discipline;**
- Read biblical texts from both testaments effectively for preaching and worship, interpreting them in light of the gospel and relating them to the life of faith today;
- Analyze biblical texts using current scholarly methods;
- Assess and use critical commentaries and other resources (for example, print and online “sermon helps” and lectionary studies)