

COS 121 Bible I: Introduction
Instructor: Dr. April Simpson
april@smu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces biblical interpretation. Attention is given to the inspiration, formation, and function of the canon and to the development of a methodology of interpretation consistent with the nature of scripture. The importance of the Bible as a witness to the life and faith of ancient Israel and earliest Christianity will be emphasized.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the process of the formation of the Jewish and Christian canons of scripture.
2. Articulate and evaluate various perspectives regarding the inspiration of scripture and its authority within the universal community of faith; explain the United Methodist Church's (UMC's) stance on these matters.
3. Assess and articulate the place of scripture in the life of the congregation and the role of the pastor in interpretation.
4. Apply historical, literary, and theological approaches to various types of literature in scripture using Genesis, Hosea and Amos, Mark, and Philippians.
5. Develop a method of exegesis consistent with the UMC's stance on the nature and authority of the Bible.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

Texts to read in full:

- Anderson, Bernhard W. *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*. **Fourth edition**. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. ISBN: 978-0800635602. **(To be read as part of the pre-class assignment.)**
- Hayes, John and Carl Holladay. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0664227753. **(To be read as part of the pre-class assignment.)**

Texts for reference: (You will not be reading these texts in full during our course, *but you will be required to use them during the course. **Substitute resources must be approved by me before you use them.***)

- Petersen, David L. and Beverly Roberts Gaventa. *The New Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2010. ISBN: 978-0687334117.
- Harrelson, Walter J. *New Interpreter's Study Bible: NRSV*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003. ISBN: 978-0687278329.
- Powell, Mark Allan, ed. *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*. Revised and Updated. New York: Harper One, 2011. ISBN: 978-0061469060.

PRE-CLASS ASSIGNMENT

A. Overview of the Pre-Class Assignment

The pre-class assignment is worth 30% of the overall course grade. It includes readings, one 3-page paper (double spaced), and a lengthy open-book quiz. Additionally, you will be asked to attend a pre-class Zoom meeting and complete a pre-class module in Canvas.

1. **Scripture Reading and Reading Log: Due on the first day of class.** Read all of Genesis, Hosea, Amos, Mark, and Philippians. Complete the reading log (use the pdf provided), assessing how carefully you have read each chapter of each book. I recommend reading the New Revised Standard Version, which can be accessed online at <https://www.biblegateway.com/> and is the version found in the *New Interpreter's Study Bible* listed above. **Due July 7, 2025.**

Note: The focus of our Bible I: Introduction course is on *interpretation* of the Bible—both reflection on issues related to interpreting the Bible and engagement in the process of interpretation itself. Discernment and understanding of the Bible's inspiration, formation, and function as well as the process of engaging in interpretation itself are significantly enhanced by familiarity with the Bible's contents, especially the contents of those books we will study in this class (Genesis, Hosea, Amos, Mark, and Philippians). This familiarity should not be based simply having read these books at some point in the past but upon having studied them specifically in preparation for this course. As such, the completion of this part of the pre-class assignment is foundational for accomplishing *all five* of the course objectives.

2. **Reading *Biblical Exegesis* and Completing a Chapter-by-Chapter Quiz: Due June 16, 2025.** Read John Hayes and Carl Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis* in full (all thirteen chapters plus the appendix) and, as you read, complete the **open book** chapter-by-chapter quiz. This quiz is designed to make sure you are tracking with some of the most important principles in each chapter. I recommend completing the quiz as you read through each chapter.

Note 1: Please email me at aprils@smu.edu, and I will send you the quiz directly.

Note 2: This portion of the pre-class assignment is designed to expose you to different aspects of and approaches to exegesis. Thus, it helps prepare you to complete course objectives four and five.

3. **Additional Readings and Paper: Due June 16, 2025.** Complete the readings listed in Steps 1–4 below. Additionally, write a **paper that is 3 double-spaced pages in length** and is divided into four sections, which correspond to the prompts described in Section B.

Note 1: This assignment is divided into four sections (instructions below in part B) that address three different issues related to biblical interpretation, plus a fourth topic that will relate to the Bible only by extension. Please follow the instructions found in part B for each portion of the paper. You are not required to create an overarching introduction or conclusion, nor do you need to create transitions in between sections. However, if it helps you understand the larger goal of the project, at each step in the process, I would encourage you to ask about the assumptions we bring to interpretation as well as the various factors that can affect interpretation.

Note 2: Your paper may be slightly longer than three pages (up to four), but it should not be shorter than three pages. Set 1-inch margins and use a 12-point font. Create a title page, but this does not count toward the total number of pages. If you discuss specific information from any of the required readings, cite the readings using either footnotes or parenthetical citations (in the future, footnotes will be required—we will discuss citation procedures together). Include a bibliography if you cite sources; this does not count toward the page total. Except between sections of the paper, avoid extra spaces between individual paragraphs.

Note 3: The goal of this assignment is to introduce students to the following: (1) engaging biblical books in their canonical context (one application of literary criticism), (2) interpreting biblical books in light of their different historical contexts (an aspect of historical approaches to the Bible), (3) developing sensitivity to the various types of literature present in the Bible (another application of literary criticism), (4) considering the “what” and the “how” of canon, and (5) cultivating a robust sense of curiosity with regard to the biblical text. As such, this part of the pre-class assignment relates especially to course objective four and at least indirectly to course objective five.

4. **Pre-Class Meeting: Date and Time TBD.** A few weeks before our class meets, I will offer a pre-class meeting via Zoom that you are required to attend unless I approve your absence (in which case you will be asked to watch a recording of the event). The purpose of the meeting is to orient students to some of the course features and address questions in advance of the course start date.
5. **Pre-Class Canvas Module: Complete by the first day of class.** In the final weeks leading up to the course, once you are given access to the course in Canvas (our online learning management system), you will be required to complete a brief pre-class module that orients you to the course features in Canvas. The pre-class module in Canvas includes a place to submit your other pre-class work online. **Due July 7, 2025.**

B. Instructions for Part Two of the Pre-Class Assignment:

- **STEP ONE:**
 - Read Bernhard W. Anderson *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*, **fourth edition** (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), **pages 7–90, 99–105**. (You are welcome to read the chapter entitled “Suggestions for Bible Study Leaders,” but it is not required.)
 - Write Section 1 of the paper:
 - **1 paragraph:** Summarize the “unfolding drama” of the biblical story. That is, what is the overarching story found in the Bible as told by Anderson?
 - **1 paragraph:** Discuss the value for interpretation of considering the Bible as a developing story. That is, how is our reading and application of the Bible impacted by knowing the overarching story found in the Bible? (So, what difference does it make to think of the Bible as telling a larger story?)
- **STEP TWO:**
 - Read Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, second edition, revised and updated by Richard Clifford and Daniel Harrington (New York: Paulist, 2012), **pages 1–13**. (Use the pdf provided.)
 - Write Section 2 of the paper by addressing the following (**1–2 paragraphs total**):
 - In light of his longer discussion, what do you think Boadt means when he states, “Above all, [this study] must avoid confusing study of the New Testament with that of the Old, so that the reader may come to understand the Old Testament on

its own terms first” (4)? That is, what does it mean to understand the Old Testament *on its own terms first*?

- How does understanding the historical context surrounding the writing of particular biblical books enhance one’s interpretation of a particular biblical book or passage?

• **STEP THREE:**

- Read Catherine Cory, *A Voyage Through the New Testament* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), **pages 1–13, 17–19**. (Use the pdf documents provided.)
- Write Section 3 of the paper by addressing the following:
 - **1 paragraph:** How does recognizing the different types of literature that are present in the Bible (New Testament as well as Old Testament) impact interpretation? That is, what difference does it make that the Bible contains different literary genres?
 - **1 paragraph:** Articulate a few of your takeaways from the Boadt reading and/or the Cory reading regarding either the process of determining canon or the different canons adopted by different groups. In so doing, address one of the following: What can we learn by understanding that the biblical canon developed over time? What can we learn by recognizing that the biblical canon is different among various groups?

• **STEP FOUR:**

- Read Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Black Cat” at the following link: <http://www.classicshorts.com/stories/blackcat.html>.
- While you are reading or after you read, record 3-5 questions about the story. The questions can relate to *any aspect* of the story, its composition, its characters, etc. (There are no right or wrong questions. What are you curious about in the story? What would you like to know more about?)
- Write Section 4 of the paper: (**A single-spaced bulleted list**)
 - List the 3–5 questions you’ve written. Do not attempt to answer the questions. Simply ask them.

C. Rubrics for the Pre-Class Assignments

Reading Log Rubric: Total of 100 points

Timeliness: up to 7 points	On time: 7 points Up to 1 day late: 4 points More than 1 day late: 0 points
Quality of Reading: up to 93 points	For each chapter of each book: A = read thoughtfully = 1 point B = skim read completely = .8 points C = skim read partially = .7 points 0 = did not read = 0 points

Quiz Rubric: Total of 100 points

Timeliness: up to 10 points	On time: 10 points Up to 1 day late: 5 points 1-2 days late: 3 points More than 2 days late: 0 points
-----------------------------	--

Correct Answers: up to 90 points	Each quiz question is worth .75 points except where noted otherwise
----------------------------------	---

Paper Rubric: Total of 100 points

Timeliness: up to 10 points	On time: 10 points Up to 1 day late: 5 points 1-2 days late: 3 points More than 2 days late: 0 points
Length: up to 10 points Paper is at least 3 full double-spaced pages in length (12-point font, 1-inch margins), up to 4 pages	3 pages: 10 points Between 2.5 and 3 pages: 5 points Less than 2.5 pages: 0 points
Grammar, Syntax, Punctuation, Etc.: up to 10 points	Exemplary: 10 points (Excellent grammar, syntax, etc.) Strong: 9-8 (Grammar, etc. is overall strong with few errors) Adequate Overall: 7-5 points (Grammar, etc. is overall adequate with room for improvement) Developing: 4-1 (Grammar, etc. is developing with considerable room for improvement) Needs work: 0 points (Grammar, etc. needs significant improvement); other issues with writing, designated in notes.
Completion of Step 1: up to 20 points Student summarizes the “unfolding drama” of the biblical story succinctly but clearly Student discusses the interpretative value of considering the Bible as a developing story	Exemplary: 20 points (excellent content/reflection) Strong: 19-17 points (strong content/reflection) Appropriate: 16-13 points (content is appropriate and accurate overall but could use additional detail, clarity, accuracy, etc.) Needs improvement: 12-1 points (content/reflection needs significant improvements to detail, clarity, accuracy, etc.) Lacking: 0 points (this portion of the assignment is lacking)
Completion of Step 2: up to 20 points Student insightfully addresses the need to interpret the Old Testament “on its own terms” Student appropriately addresses the interpretative value of understanding historical context	Exemplary: 20 points (excellent content/reflection) Strong: 19-17 points (strong content/reflection) Appropriate: 16-13 points (content is appropriate and accurate overall but could use additional detail, clarity, accuracy, etc.)

	Needs improvement: 12-1 points (content/reflection needs significant improvements to detail, clarity, accuracy, etc.) Lacking: 0 points (this portion of the assignment is lacking)
Completion of Step 3: up to 20 points Student discusses the interpretative value of knowing the types of literature present in the Bible Student discusses the interpretative value of knowing how the biblical canon was formed or knowing the differences among Christian and Jewish canons	Exemplary: 20 points (excellent content/reflection) Strong: 19-17 points (strong content/reflection) Appropriate: 16-13 points (content is appropriate and accurate overall but could use additional detail, clarity, accuracy, etc.) Needs improvement: 12-1 points (content/reflection needs significant improvements to detail, clarity, accuracy, etc.) Lacking: 0 points (this portion of the assignment is lacking)
Completion of Step 4: up to 10 points Student lists 3-5 questions about “The Black Cat,” whether those questions relate to any aspect of the story, its composition, its characters, etc.	3-5 questions: 10 points 1-2 questions: 5 points Lacking: 0 points

Pre-Class Meeting and Canvas Module: Total of 30 points

Student attends a pre-class Zoom meeting offered by the instructor	15 points: attended 0 points: did not attend
Student completes the pre-class module in Canvas	15 points: completed 0 points: not completed