General information
Class meets: Tuesday and Thursday, 10.00-11.50, MG2
Catalogue course description: Discusses how to interpret and apply the various biblical genres as
the Word of God written within a particular historical setting by authors who used language and
literary conventions peculiar to that setting. Examines the theological, linguistic, literary,
historical, sociological, and personal aspects of interpretation. Surveys the history of biblical
interpretation in the church and current issues in modern hermeneutics.
Professor: Dr. C. A. Reeder
Contact details: Porter Center 13, ext. 7047, creeder@westmont.edu
Office hours: Monday, 1.00-2.00 in the DC; Wednesday, 2.15-4.15 in PC 13; Thursday, 1.30-
2.30 in PC 13; and by appointment

Interpreting the Bible: Expanded Description
In RS 107, we will delve into the presuppositions, definitions, methods, and history of biblical
interpretation – and we will put our study into practice by engaging in biblical interpretation.
This class will draw together the threads of your major in Religious Studies, assembling the
puzzle pieces of the historical, social, literary, canonical, and theological contexts of scripture,
the nature of communication, the questions and answers of historical-critical scholarship and
more recent modes of reading, and the interaction of faith with biblical study. This class will also
require you to think outside RS: How does reading the Bible well (or poorly, for that matter)
impact the world? How does your entire Westmont education form and mold you into a reader of
the Bible? How does, or should, society outside the bubble impact how we read the Bible?
Moreover, we will be making RS history: we will be joined in the classroom by Telford Work
and RS 131, Biblical Theological Interpretation. With them, we will learn how to read the Bible
theologically; we will work to unite the apparently opposed goals and methods of biblical and
theological interpretation of the Bible. We’ll be reading the Bible together, seeking to faithfully
understand the Word of God for the church.

Our goals
• To consider what the biblical text is: human communication and divine revelation, historically
  bound and eternally relevant, an object of critical academic study but also sacred and
  authoritative.
• To learn to use the tools of biblical study: linguistic, textual, social and cultural, literary,
  historical, and theological methods of interpretation.
• To explore, learn from, and critique the ways the Bible has been read from antiquity to today,
  particularly focusing on historical criticism and more recent readings of suspicion (feminist,
  post-colonial, etc.) and faith (canonical, literary, narrative, theological, etc.).
• To understand how the current divide between theological and biblical interpretation arose,
  and to seek ways forward.
• To read the Bible together as the church: in faith seeking understanding of the meaning(s),
  significance, and ongoing incarnation of God’s word for, among, and in the body of Christ.
**Required texts**

New Revised Standard Bible

Additional required readings are available on Eureka; these are marked with (E) in the course plan.

**Recommended texts**

*Resources for biblical study:*

*Resources for the history of biblical interpretation:*

**Course components**

Your RS 107 experience includes required reading, participation in class discussion, exegetical worksheets, personal response essays, and a major research project.

1. **Participation (15%)**

This class will be conducted (for the most part) through discussion. Your attendance and participation in class discussions are essential for learning. I expect you to be present, engaged, and vocal in class. To aid class discussion, please bring your Bible, assigned readings, and completed exegetical worksheets to each class.

Your participation grade will be determined according to this scale:

- 10 points (full credit): 1 or more substantive comments during each class period
- 8 points (most of the credit): 1-3 substantive comments each week
- 6 points (some credit): 1-3 substantive comments every two weeks
- 4 points (a little credit): 1-3 substantive comments each month
- Less than 4 points (minimal credit): little or no contribution

Part of your participation grade will come from several class presentations to be scheduled throughout the semester; more information on these presentations will be provided in the first week of class.

2. **Reading, exegetical worksheets, and reflective essays (35%)**

Required readings must be completed before class. Read carefully, thoughtfully, critically, and humbly, watching out for the influence of presuppositions (good and bad) and asking what we can learn from the proposed definitions and methods of biblical study.

Exegetical worksheets ask you to dig deep into the biblical text, researching its linguistic and literary content, its historical background, and its theological and practical implications. These worksheets offer you the chance to practice what you’re learning. They will provide the basis for our communal reading of scripture in class. Worksheets will be posted on Eureka, but you will need a hard copy of your completed work with you in class. Worksheets will be collected sporadically during the semester (they must be turned in during class).
Several short (2-3 page) reflective essays on critical questions are due throughout the course. They should be thoughtful, critical, and personal. Draw on class readings and discussion; you may, but do not have to, include outside research.

The readings, worksheets, and essays are essential to a successful class. Please take your responsibility as a learner and participant in RS 107 seriously: come to class prepared to engage with each other and the biblical text.

3. Major research project (50%)
Your research project will investigate a text or theme of your choice (a list of possibilities is provided below, but you are free to go beyond the options listed). You should make thorough use of primary and secondary sources.

Components of the project include the following:
1. A 2-3 page, pre-research discussion of your interest in your chosen topic, initial questions concerning your topic, and expectations for research, due 19 February. 2%.
2. An outline of your research of primary sources and an annotated bibliography of at least fifteen secondary sources (including commentaries, monographs, dictionary articles, and journal articles), due 26 March. 2%.
3. A personal meeting with the professor to discuss your developing project, during the week of 30 March. 2%.
4. A rough draft of your paper, due 9 April. 2%.
5. Two reviews of classmates’ papers (one from RS 107, one from RS 131), including a summary of the paper and thoughtful, helpful, constructive comments on the content and presentation, due 14 April. 2%.
*While it is not required, you are encouraged to take your final draft to Writers’ Corner for expert editing help.
6. A 12-15 page paper, carefully researched and well written, offering an exegesis and interpretation of your chosen text or theme, due 5 May. 30%.
7. A 3-5 page sermon on your topic, particularly exploring the relevance of your topic for the church today, due 5 May. 10%.

Research options:
• Narrative: Choose a single narrative story from Genesis or Luke. Provide a running commentary on and interpretation of the story, paying particular attention to literary, linguistic, and socio-historical concerns.
• Prophecy and poetry: Choose a text from Jeremiah or a text used as prophecy in Hebrews. Examine the text and its scriptural resonance, keeping in mind linguistic, socio-historical, ancient exegetical, and theological concerns.
• Epistle: Explore the meaning of a text in Hebrews as a ‘letter’ to the church. Comment on the linguistic and literary aspects of your text and explore its implied impact on the life of the church.
• Theme: Choose one aspect of the identity of the people of God from the texts discussed in class. Trace this theme through two or three texts not covered in class, interpreting the texts and analyzing the development of your chosen theme in these texts.
**Course plan**
The course will circle around three areas: matters of definitions, presuppositions, and understanding the act of reading; tracing the methods, goals, and results of biblical interpretation through history; and reading biblical texts together.

*Anticipated schedule (subject to change)*

13 January: Reading as a biblical scholar, reading as a theologian
   Required reading: Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, pp. 181-197

15 January: Understanding texts and meaning
   Required reading: Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, chs. 1-3
   Recommended reading: Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, ch. 4 (E)

20 January: No regular class; follow Monday’s schedule today
   Special tour of the library resources for biblical study: Meet at the circulation desk at 3.15 pm. If you are unable to make this meeting, you must schedule a tour with Diane Ziliotto (dziliott@westmont.edu) on your own time.

22 January: Learning to read
   Required reading for class: Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, pp. 109-159
   Required work for the week: Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, Part 2, and accompanying exegetical worksheet (due via email to creeder@westmont.edu by 5pm Friday, 23 January)
   Additional resource: Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*

27 January: Genesis 37
   Required reading: Genesis; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, pp. 157-165
   Strongly recommended skimming: Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*
   *Exegetical worksheet on Genesis 37 due*

29 January: Genesis 38 (and 39)
   *Exegetical worksheet on Genesis 38 (and 39) due*

3 February: Genesis 43-44
   *Exegetical worksheet on Genesis 43-44 due*

5 February: Genesis 37-46: The character of Joseph
   Required reading: Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, ch. 2 (E)
   *Exegetical worksheet on Joseph due*

10 February: Genesis 46-47
   *Exegetical worksheet on Genesis 46-47 due*

12 February: Understanding reading
   Required reading: Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, chs. 4-6; Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, pp. 9-65

19 February: Introducing historical-critical interpretation
   Recommended skimming: Neill and Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament*; Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*
Reflective essay 1 (due 24 February): Identify the major questions that spurred the development of historical-critical study of the Bible and the responses early scholars developed. Do you think that the historical-critical study of the Bible helps or harms the life of the church?

Pre-research essay due

24 February: Jeremiah 30
   Required reading: Jeremiah; Brown, Scripture as Communication, pp. 142-150 and Appendix C
   Exegetical worksheet on Jeremiah 30 due
   Reflective essay 1 due

26 February: Jeremiah 31.1-22
   Exegetical worksheet on Jeremiah 31.1-22 due

3 March: Jeremiah 31.23-40
   Exegetical worksheet on Jeremiah 31.23-40 due

5 March: Jeremiah 32
   Exegetical worksheet on Jeremiah 32 due

10 March: Jeremiah 33
   Exegetical worksheet on Jeremiah 33 due

12 March: Valuable reading
   Required reading: Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism
   Special research assignment: Track down an article or commentary on (all or part of) Jeremiah 30-33 published in the past ten years. Read and summarize the article, and offer an analysis of its quality as a reading of Jeremiah. Bring the reading and your work with you to class.

16-20 March: Spring break
   Required reading: Bockmuehl, Seeing the Word
   Reflective essay 2 (due 24 March): Review Bockmuehl’s Seeing the Word. A book review should include the following components: a summary of the contents (or argument) of the book; an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book; and a response to the book (did you like it, and why? What did you learn? What do you wish had been included, or skipped? What does this book contribute to the academic study of the Bible?).

   Required reading: Luke; Brown, Scripture as Communication, pp. 157-165
   Exegetical worksheet on Luke 13.10-21 due
   Reflective essay 2 due

   Exegetical worksheet on Luke 13.22-35 due
   Outline of primary sources and annotated bibliography due

30 March – 3 April: Personal meeting with professor on your research project

   Exegetical worksheet on Luke 14.7-24 due
2 April: Luke 15
   Exegetical worksheet on Luke 15 due

7 April: Luke 16.19-31
   Exegetical worksheet on Luke 16.19-31 due

9 April: Suspicious reading
   Required reading: Anderson and Moore, *Mark & Method*, ch. 8 (E)
   Recommended reading: Anderson and Moore, *Mark & Method*, chs. 4 and 5 (E); Wimbush, “We Will Make Our Own Future Text”: An Alternate Orientation to Interpretation,” in *True to Our Native Land* (E)

   Reflective essay 3 (due 21 April): Why do recent readers approach the biblical text with a hermeneutic of suspicion? What should readers within the body of Christ learn from these suspicious readers?

   **Rough draft of research paper due**

14 April: Hebrews 9.1-22
   Required reading: Hebrews; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, pp. 150-157 and Appendix D
   Exegetical worksheet on Hebrews 9.1-22 due
   **Peer reviews due**

16 April: Hebrews 9.23-10.10
   Exegetical worksheet on Hebrews 9.23-10.10 due

21 April: Hebrews 10.11-39
   Exegetical worksheet on Hebrews 10.11-39 due
   Reflective essay 3 due

23 April: Faithful reading
   Required reading: Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, pp. 9-65; Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*; Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, ch. 6 (E)

   Reflective essay 4 (due 30 April): Summarize and respond to Barton’s critique of faithful critical scholarship.

28 April: Hebrews 11.1-12.2
   Exegetical worksheets on Hebrews 11.1-12.2 due

30 April: Hebrews 12.3-29
   Exegetical worksheet on Hebrews 12.3-29 due
   Reflective essay 4 due

5 May, 12.00 pm: Final exam period
   Research paper and sermon due