DM 802 Biblical Interpretation for Life and Ministry

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Recommended Citation
I. General Course Description

This course seeks to upgrade the students’ use of Scripture in personal spiritual formation, in their D. Min. project/dissertation and in ministry by focused attention to the several critical tasks involved in biblical interpretation. The course will emphasize inductive interpretation of Scripture in its several contexts. In light of the church’s experience at interpreting the text, and benefiting from advances in critical study of Scripture, students will increase their interpretive skills by doing interpretive work on passages important to their ministry and/or project/dissertations.

II. Course Goals

1. Review the tasks involved in Scripture interpretation and upgrade student’s skills in doing them
2. Set present interpreter’s work in context of the Church’s interpretation of Scripture past and present
3. Enhance the student’s use of Scripture in the project/dissertation, in life and ministry

III. Texts


IV. Course Outline & Procedures

A. Pre-class assignments
   1. Read the required texts and write a thousand word critical response to each. Give careful attention to the following matters.
      a. Do not rehearse the content, except as it proves germane to the following tasks.
      b. Identify and discuss the major issues treated by the work.
c. Sketch the theological assumptions which ground the author's approach to these issues.
d. Evaluate the writer's treatment of the issues, including strengths as well as weaknesses.

2. Bring to class a short list of Scripture passages
   a. Likely to bear most significantly on your project/dissertation OR
   b. Which will figure most prominently in next quarter's preaching-teaching

B. Class structure and assignments
   1. Each day will include
      a. Lecture
      b. Laboratory work on selected text(s)
      c. Assignment of exegetical work in light of class session, with debrief the following day
      All three in light of and in conversation with pre-class readings
   2. Main topics covered
      Monday: Literary context and structural analysis
      Tuesday: Literary context and grammatical analysis
      Wednesday: Word meanings and the worlds of the text
      Thursday-Friday: Canonical context and the appropriation of the text

C. Post-class assignment, due postmarked no later than March 15, 2000.
   Write 15 page integrative paper, interpreting a second selected passage in light of the course readings and class experience.

V. Bases of Evaluation

1. Critical responses to pre-class reading (40%)
2. In class interpretive assignments (20%)
3. Participation in class dialogue (10%)
4. Post-class integrative paper (30%)

VI. POST-CLASS ASSIGNMENT, DUE POSTMARKED BY MARCH 15, 2000.

Assignment:
1. In light of the course readings and class experience, and reflecting your best understanding of a sound hermeneutic write a paper, interpreting, evaluating and applying a Scripture passage.
2. Beyond your interpretive, evaluative and applicational results, include also in the paper the significant evidence upon which those results stand and methodological reflection on you approach to the passage, its place in the canon and its appropriation by the present church.
3. The body of the paper should be 15 pages, double-spaced, standard margins. In addition include title page, bibliography and notes.
4. Criteria of excellence by which exegetical projects will be graded appear as “suggestions for improving your work/word study” in the appendixes of the syllabus. Study them carefully and ask whatever questions you wish related to them during our class discussions.

5. *If you want your paper returned, include a self-addressed envelop with postage sufficient to cover the mailing.*

**VII. Incomplete work, Extensions**

1. In exceptional cases work may remain from the class session itself. Any such incomplete work is also due post-marked no later than March 15, 2000.

2. Extensions beyond March 15 *may* be granted on the basis of the student’s illness. Requests for such extensions will be by Academic Petition (forms obtained through D.Min. office).
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR WORK

FORMAT and STYLE
1. For all typed material follow Slade (10th edition), MLA section.

SURVEY
2. Distinguish between various levels of structure—clause, paragraph, segment, and book-level. Segment level structure, e.g., should relate to significant amounts of material in the whole segment..
3. Distinguish between recurrence of significantly related items which form a meaningful pattern over a unit and a collection of miscellaneous items (e.g., a series of questions on unrelated topics).
4. Generally one must go beyond simple recurrence to describe adequately the "logic" in a unit. Recurrence will often be present; press on to see the logic.
5. Generally three to five major sets of structural observations will be required to a unit’s structure well. Proliferation of structures may signal a fragmented view (Some should be combined? omitted?).
6. Focus a full, well ordered set of interpretive questions (Def. > Reason > Impl.) on a single set of observations, so you are not defining one item, reasoning about another, pursuing implications of still another and in the process covering none of them well.
7. Direct interpretive questions both to the materials and to the structures which bind them together.
8. Select key passages on the basis of your structural observations. Support your choice by reference to those structural observations. Select short passages.
9. Approach critical issues inductively too! Do not launch "survey" with study of scholarly works.

OBSERVATION-INTERPRETATION-EVALUATION-APPLICATION
10. Proceed inductively! Go from evidence to interpretation! Let the material speak for itself.
11. Be accurate! Describe what is actually there!
12. Actually observe; don't just quote the text.
14. Make sure your "observations" are actually observations, not already interpretations.
15. Go beyond grammatical identification to probe significance.
16. Make specific observations re. specifics of the text.
18. Be selective but be thorough.
19. **Reason clearly.** Make sure your evidence as stated supports the inferences drawn from it. Make sure *inferences actually do follow* from the evidence cited.

20. **Actually infer!** Don’t simply rephrase observations and think you are inferring, nor substitute additional observation for the drawing of interpretive inferences.

21. **Actually infer!** Don’t ask more questions here unless you must. Consider posing these questions in the form of possible inferences to be adjudicated later.

22. Entertain various possible inferences

23. Techno-alert! **DON’T JUST DOWNLOAD DATA.** Analyze, process, use that data. And give bibliography even with electronic materials.

24. Pursue **beyond definition.** Deal with reasons and implications also after your basic, definitional work.

25. Make **periodic summaries** of your findings and then bring them together in a final, integrative summary.

26. **Distinguish evaluation from interpretation.** Draw evaluative conclusions. Words such as “affirms, revises, expands, rescinds, “ etc. normally appear, as opposed to inferences still addressing meaning.

27. **Distinguish interpretation from application.** Talk of what the text meant to "them," before you discuss what "I/we" should think or do. Apply after you have interpreted.

28. **Distinguish evaluation from application,** the question of cross-cultural relevance from the actual specification of that relevance for a particular culture.

29. Remember to include the **community of faith/scholars** among your objective determinants.

30. Give **adequate bibliographic** information on sources: author, title, page, at the very least. Note the author (vs. editor) of all resources.

31. Don’t present ideas from secondary sources as your own, either in observations or inferences.

32. Use **interpretive** secondary sources after your own research, including word study tools such as TWOT, TDOT, TDNT, NIDNTT.

33. **Interact** with interpretive sources. Don’t simply cite as authorities without evaluation. Use criteria applied to your own work--evidence? reasoning?

If you have questions, see me. DLT. August 1999
APPENDIX II

WORD STUDY SUGGESTIONS

UP-FRONT WARNINGS:
• Computer Bible Programs. Don’t just download data—lists of meanings, Strong’s numbers, “prime roots,” etc. No! No!
• Strong’s Concordance. Use only as a concordance or for its numbers. Do not use as a dictionary.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS
1. The goal: discern the word’s basic meaning; what it denotes and connotes.
2. Begin with preliminary survey of meaning from standard Hebrew or Greek lexicons.*
3. Use translations versions ancient and modern, English and non-English to further gather a preliminary understanding of your word. Regard the LXX [OT], Vulgate, Targum [OT], KJV, RSV, NIV, etc. already as commentaries on your word, secondary sources already.
4. Do not use etymology unless the word’s use or that of the family to which it belongs is very limited or its meaning is otherwise obscure. And then use etymology as supplementary, not definitive, evidence. Let the place of etymology in your own word use inform you here.
5. Use a concordance that allows you to locate the Hebrew/Greek word in question, either Strong’s, Young’s, Wigrim’s or the biblical language concordances.
6. For this class either study all occurrences of a word or give a cogent justification for the selection of the occurrences cited. Do not use ad hoc, random, “illustrative” passages. If necessary, limit the range of your study by: a) Corpus (Pauline, Prophetic, Deuteronomic, Wisdom, Psalms); b) Book itself, if there are several occurrences; c) Given form, e.g., the imperative of “return,” shub or d) Given expression, “return to me.” Draw tentative conclusions when based on limited samples.

DOING THE WORD STUDY
7. Regard the word as a cipher (lacking meaning, i.e., = “x”) or use the biblical language word itself to refer to it in order to avoid prejudicing your findings, e.g., ruach, or pneuma, not “spirit/wind.”
8. Cite each occurrence. DON’T SIMPLY QUOTE the verse or cite a string of references. Describe the word’s use in each context. Be particularly attentive to the data informing you of the word’s basic meaning.
9. Draw inferences regarding the meaning in your passage, if the particular use appears to be relevant.
11. Remember the **central task** of word study: **to discover the word's basic meaning**, beginning with the assumption that you do not know what it means. Drawing inferences about various other agendas related in some way to your word is a secondary concern, not primary.

12. Be very careful then to **distinguish** between a) the **meaning of the word itself**, from b) important **ideas** in the context **related to it** but not actually an essential part of the word's actual meaning. Don’t load a word’s “meaning” with all the items related to it in its various occurrences.

13. **Begin with the immediate book context.** Then proceed to the corpus (e.g., Pauline) or works with similar theological or historical or ideological concerns (e.g., Deuteronomic history, wisdom literature, prophetic, post exilic, etc.).

14. If you are dealing with a **metaphor/simile** (“the booth of David, ““like chaff”), first you must discern the word/expression’s **concrete** meaning. Then you can infer the **metaphorical meaning**.

15. Be alert to **patterns of use, clusters of meaning**, shades and nuances which differ from setting to setting. Attempt to determine **which best fits your passage**. Do not build a conglomerate (cf. 12).

16. Recognize **informative** and non-informative **uses** and capitalize on the former.

17. Draw conclusions, choosing between possible meanings on the basis of weightiest evidence, on the basis of uses most like your passage, not simply frequency.

18. **After your own examination** of the word’s use, supplement and enrich your work by reference (as you have time) to **theological word books**, such as TWOT, TDOT, TDNT, etc. Be particularly alert here for information on extra-biblical uses of the word in cultures influencing your writer. Use critically. Interact.

“Word Study Suggestions” may be reproduced for non-profit use.

David L. Thompson (98/09)

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