

CSS-121 Bible 1: Introduction
October 8-9 and November 5-6, 2021

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(This is going to be a relatively short syllabus because many of the details to flesh out this skeleton will be constructed each day as we move through the elements to be addressed. Do not be fooled: one page today doesn't mean we will be finished by supper time on our first Friday!)

What to bring to class each day:

- Your wide-awake self
- Two Bibles: the one you use most often and your most "different" one

What is required of you for your grade:

20% Asynchronous work prepared online before October 8

25% 3 small reflection pieces done during our October weekend.

20% Asynchronous work prepared online before November 5

25% 3 small reflection pieces done during our November weekend.

10% •Class participation

This does not necessarily mean talking. One can participate by being an active listener, by asking questions, by writing exit tickets every day. Participating in discussions is encouraged, but the highest grade does not automatically go to the person who says the most words.

What we will cover:

- How to study the Bible – tools and procedures

Why is all this necessary anyway? Isn't the Bible in English? Doesn't it mean what it says? Shouldn't we just believe it and not criticize it? After all, who are we to criticize the Word of God?

Words: dictionary translations/cultural translations

Text criticism

Form criticism

Redaction criticism

Hermeneutics: whose point of view gets to count?

- The content of the Bible – an overview of the story and how it came to be the way we have it now.

- Ways to communicate what you learn at Wesley with those in your parish.

If everything you learn in this course stays securely inside your head, of what use is it to your congregation(s)? There will be a good deal of discussion about "translating" class to your home settings.

Each day I will tell you what text(s) to read and ponder for the next day's class. My choices will grow, in part, out of the direction of the class discussion. That is, there are many, many examples that can be chosen and I want to use whatever is most interesting and most useful to the particular people in the class this year. I know for sure that we will be looking at Genesis 1-4 in great depth as well as Matthew 5 and 25 and Luke 15.

Notes about the Zoom time.

1. Because I live in the Central Time Zone, Zoom will set the times to Central time. Please adjust them to whatever time zone you're in.
2. Because of other responsibilities, I cannot be with you before 2:15 (3:15 Eastern) on the Fridays. I will, however, "open" the Zoom space so that you can get together and chat with each other. Think of it as an opportunity to meet with friends and classmates in your classroom before the class begins.
3. We will NOT be on an active Zoom call for all the listed hours. Friday will have 3 sections and Saturday 2. The exact times of starting and stopping will be discussed when we begin on October 8. You should, however, be prepared to spend all of those hours actively engaged in the class. It simply will not be entirely on the Zoom call.

Book List

Required

Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*

Hays, John and Carl Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*

Strongly Suggested

Davis, Ellen, *Opening Israel's Scriptures*

Asynchronous assignments to be done before October 8. (Asynchronous assignments will be distributed between October 9 and 11.)

These instructions will be repeated in the "Assignments" section of the Blackboard page for this class. You will write your responses in the "Discussion Group" section. Part of these assignments involve reading and responding to what classmates have written. That is, you cannot finish them all alone, but need to interact online with other class members.

Constructing a Basic Bible Study Vocabulary–Group-curated definitions

- A. Skim through the first chapters of your required books. Do you see any words that are not familiar to you? Do you see some words you know but that seem to be used differently from what you are used to? List at least 5 such words.
- B. Give a short definition to any 5 words listed by your classmates –or any of the words you yourself listed. Be sure that your definition has to do with Bible study and not some other use of the term.
- C. Feel free to add to or edit what others have written.

Context
Co-text
Manuscript
Masoretic text
Codex
Scroll
Papyrus
Metathesis
Dittography
Text criticism
Form criticism
Rhetorical criticism

This dozen terms contains many words that have several meanings, depending on where they are found and how they are used. Choose two terms from the list and write a short definition as they are related to biblical study. Then look at the definitions your classmates have written. Can you make improvements to any of them? Remember, that the point is not to write the most words about a term, but to define it relative to biblical study.

Finding Your Way Around the Bible

A. Order of Books

From Genesis through Judges, Christian and Jewish Bibles put the books in the same order. Ruth, however, does not come between Judges and I Samuel in a Jewish Bible. Similarly,

I&II Chronicles is in two very different spots in the two orderings. In neither case is the ordering random. Christian Bibles print the books in roughly chronological order according to the content of each book. Jewish Bibles print the books in roughly chronological order according to when each book reached the form in which we now have it. Think about the different placements of Ruth and Chronicles. Can you come up with some possible different effects due to those different placements?

B. Upper and Lower Case. Original biblical manuscripts, in Hebrew (and a tiny bit of Aramaic) for the Old Testament and in Greek for the New Testament, were quite different from our English printed Bibles. There were no punctuation marks, for instance, because punctuation marks had not yet been invented. There was no distinction between “upper case” and “lower case” letters. There are English words whose meaning is vastly different, depending on whether the first letter is upper or lower case. Think of “Polish” and “polish,” for instance, or “job” and “Job.” Can you find an example in the Bible where the meaning might be different if an upper case letter were printed as lower case or vice versa?

C. Punctuation.

What about punctuation marks? There’s a popular joke about commas saving lives. Look at the difference between

“Let’s eat, Grandma” and
“Let’s eat Grandma.”

Or see how different these two sentences are:

"Woman: without her, man is nothing" and

"Woman, without her man, is nothing."

And of course the simple change between a period and a question mark at the end of a sentence can make a difference.

"John likes maple syrup."

"John likes maple syrup?"

Find a text in the Bible and change one or more punctuation marks to give a different meaning.

In addition, there were neither chapter divisions nor verse divisions. How do you think someone could refer to a specific passage without the use of chapter and verse numbers?

As you are working through these exercises, make note of other questions that come to your mind. Please make a list of them to turn in on the first day of on-line class.