

CSS-121 The Pastor as Interpreter of the Bible
2023

Asynchronous online work
(To be completed and submitted before July 17, 2023)

Book List

1. Required

Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*

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

2. Enthusiastically Suggested

Davis, Ellen, *Opening Israel's Scriptures*

Pre-Zoom Assignments

Sections A and C are to be entered in the public spaces on Blackboard so that the whole class can interact with each other. The answers in section B and D are to be emailed to me [rwright@sewanee.edu] before the start of our time together. These will form the basis for our discussion on at least one day. Section E should be completed before the Zoom class begins so that you are prepared to discuss it. Nothing written needs to be turned in for E.

A. Introductions (to be entered into Blackboard for all to see and respond to)

1. In two or three sentences, describe the congregation(s) you currently serve.
2. What three things would you like us to know about you?
3. If you've been to Wesley before, what has been your favorite part?
4. What are you most looking forward to about this class?
5. Does anything make you anxious thinking about this class?

After you have answered these questions, respond to the answer of a couple of your classmates as you would if you were in a face-to-face conversation.

B. "The Bible for Normal People"

You may have come across this podcast already, or it may be new to you.

You may listen to it as a podcast or from their website.

Find and listen to the first and last episodes of Season 1. These are episodes 1 and 33 of season 1.

Their over-arching questions are "What is the Bible?" and "What do we do with the Bible?" Give a synopsis of how they answer those two questions. How is their answered changed or expanded from the first to the last episode of the season?

In Episode 33 they assert that "The whole gospel depends on a reinterpretation of the Old Testament story." And they add, "that's scary for people." What do they mean by these statements?

Did you learn anything new from these podcasts? Did they raise any questions for you?

C. 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 here.
- 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.

Allegory

Context

Co-text

Manuscript

Masoretic text

Codex

Scroll

Papyrus

Metathesis

Dittography

Text criticism

Form criticism

Rhetorical criticism

This baker's 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.

D. Finding Your Way Around the Bible

1. Order 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?

2. 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?

3. 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 for centuries after the Bible was first written. How do you think someone could refer to a specific passage without the use of chapter and verse numbers?

E. Old Testament/New Testament Relationship

Go to YouTube and watch the conversation between Amy-Jill Levine (a Jewish professor of New Testament studies) and Giles Fraser (an Anglican priest), moderated by Justin Brierley. The episode is called “Can we recover the Jewish Jesus?”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQNcvw-49Y4>

You may need to watch it more than once. Be prepared to discuss the following questions – and others like them – in class. You do not need to turn in written work ahead of time on this segment.

How did the episode answer the question of its title?

Do you agree with their answer(s)? In what way(s) do you disagree?

What do you think would be the reaction of your congregation(s) to this conversation?

Do you see this as an important question for the church?

What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?

At one point in the conversation Giles Fraser (the Christian) says he uses the term “Hebrew Bible” instead of “Old Testament” and Amy-Jill Levine (the Jew) disagrees with doing that. Why does each person do what s/he does in this case? Does either one seem to change her/his mind? If so, in what way(s)?

For in-class time

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

