

Syllabus: REL 4015 Biblical Interpretation

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Site: [AsULearn](#)
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Course Title

REL 4015: Biblical Interpretation

Contact Information

Professor: Dr. Rodney K. Duke



[Personal Web Page](#)

Contact Info.:

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(I check email once a day -- and often not on weekends. If you need a response in less than 24 hours, call or come by.)

NO ASSIGNMENTS ACCEPTED BY EMAIL.

Office hours: (tentative)

MWF 10-11 am.

TR: 8-9 am, 10:45-11:45 am.

Appointments may be arranged to fit your schedule. Call me or email.

Please let me know in advance, when you are planning to come by so that I can put it on my calendar.

General Description and Course Goals

General Description

For over 2,500 years, the scriptures, the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and New Testament, have been interpreted from a wide variety of perspectives both within the Jewish and Christian communities, and more recently, from outside. This course is designed to expose the students to the primary issues which one confronts in the interpretation of the Bible, to help them to understand the major principles and methods that have been used in biblical interpretation, and to enable them to develop and practice such skills. The course will be taught in a seminar format with an emphasis on outside preparation for in-class interaction through presentations and discussion. The main goals of this course are: to train students in the skills and resources needed to do basic biblical interpretation; and, to develop skills in writing, presenting and critiquing papers.

Course Goals

Students should:

- Develop taking responsibility for their own learning.
- Learn how to access, assess, and utilize information on biblical studies from various library and computer resources.
- Improve skills of writing formal papers directed toward instructing their peers.
- Improve skills of delivering a formal paper to one's peers.
- Learn to approach topics and issues from several perspectives.
- Develop skills of leading discussion.
- Practice working together with a community of learners.
- Learn about the history and methods of biblical interpretation.
- Reflect on the contemporary implications/application/relevance of the biblical literature for societies today.
- Have fun learning!

Instructional Methods

This course will be in a **seminar format** in which you will share the responsibility of learning outside of class and then teaching your fellow students in the class. I will be responsible for providing background information, training you for research in biblical studies, and guiding you through the research process. There will be **daily assignments** consisting of readings and reflective questions. You should be able to summarize these readings and reflect on them for class. There will also be some exegetical exercises that will introduce you to some of the biblical study tools and techniques. Another component will be an exegesis paper by each student. (See "Requirements.") It is important that everyone assume ownership and responsibility for the success of this class. We all need to come to

class ready to raise questions, to present our viewpoints, and to give and receive constructive criticism in a respectful and stimulating environment.

Personal note: I see teaching, ideally, as “causing” learning to take place. I want to ensure that a passing grade means that students really have learned something. In a seminar-type class such as this one, one of my goals is to cause students to become self-learners. That is why I am placing responsibility on the class members to learn outside of class and to teach one another in class.

Methods of Evaluation & Determination of Grade

Course Notebook (30%)

[Note: I am exploring whether or not this "notebook" can be kept online through AsULearn. Let me know what you think about that idea.]

The majority of the notebook grade will be based on completeness, with points added or subtracted based on quality. This notebook will be divided into three sections and will consist of:

1. Pre-class written exercises and assignments

There will be various exercises that will require a written response or notes for each class. These will be assigned at each class for the next class.

2. Post-class reflection/response paragraphs on the main learning experience of each class

Soon after each class period, and before the next, students are to write out a one paragraph (can be longer) reaction to that day's class. The purpose of these paragraphs is to identify **what** in-class learning was the most significant to retain and **why**. The purpose is NOT to give a summary or to record a personal journal of one's feelings.

3. One-page responses to the exegesis papers (These will come into play during the last stage of the course and will replace the written assignments.)

Students will read the student exegesis (interpretation) papers in advance of their presentation.

You are to write out a one-page, or more, critique of the paper in which you:

1. identify its thesis,
2. summarize its key points and supportive arguments
3. identify exegetical questions that arose for you as you read it and/or points that you would like clarified (not merely subjective questions),
4. summarize its strengths and weaknesses, and
5. identify areas to probe further and/or possible areas of application.

The goal of these papers is to prepare you to interact with the presenter in class as if you were at a professional meeting.

Note: Course schedule, class assignments, and study aids are posted on AsULearn. (The instructor may choose to have the “Course Notebook” posted on line.)

Exegesis Paper (30%)

You are to pick out a biblical passage of interest to you, generally consisting of 8-20 verses, and write an exegetical paper of 10-12 pages in which you employ the interpretive skills, tools, and methods that

will be covered in class. The paper will be given to your peers a week in advance, and then summarized and discussed the following week.

Note: Schedule, procedure, format, grading rubric, samples, etc. are posted on AsULearn under "Exegesis Papers Resources and Sample Papers." (Read, "Exegesis Paper Information.")

Attendance & Participation (Policy on Absences) (10%)

Both are required. As has been stated above, the success of this course's learning experience will depend on the active participation of its members. Students will be called on to summarize readings and discuss assignments. Up to three reasonable absences may be excused (e.g. due to extreme illness – "reasonable" to be determined by me). To obtain an excused absence, submit a written explanation by the following class period. More than one unexcused absence will each result in a deduction of 2% from the final grade!

Final Examination (30%)

The students will be given the final examination questions in advance so that students can prepare responses throughout the course. The main purpose of the final examination is to help the students to pull together the individual aspects of the course, identify the major themes, and see the big picture.

Note: The final examination questions are posted on AsULearn. Use them as a study guide.

Absentee Policy

Up to three reasonable absences may be excused (e.g. due to extreme illness, roads closed, etc. – "reasonable" to be determined by me). To obtain an excused absence, submit a written explanation by the following class period. More than one unexcused absence will each result in a deduction of 2% from the final grade!

Additional Course Policies

1. Class notes: Class notes must be kept separate from assignment work (for Notebooks) in order to receive credit for the assignment.
2. Individual work: Although group study and discussion of assignments is encouraged, an individual's written work must be self-composed to receive credit.
3. Academic Integrity: Standards and procedures of the [Academic Integrity Code](#) will be upheld.
4. Final Exam: All students are expected to take the final examination on the date posted in the school calendar and not make arrangements for leaving town earlier.
5. Electronic Devices: Devices used for entertainment are to be turned off during class meetings and put out of sight. Communications devices in the possession of students are to be turned off during class, except for: 1) laptops being used for class functions, 2) medically necessary devices, 3) approved emergency communications devices operated by authorized personnel, and, 4) cell phones registered with APPSTATE-ALERT, which must be placed in vibrate or silent mode during class period and **put out of sight**. Failure to comply may result in: a warning, dismissal from class for the day of the infraction, a reduction in the grade for the class,

or further sanctions as called for in section IV of the Academic Integrity Code.

Required Texts

Bible. A modern translation.

Hayes, J. H. and Holladay, C. R. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, 3rd ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

Montague, G. T., *Understanding the Bible: A Basic Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Paulist, 2007).

Tate, W. R. *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*. 3rd ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008).

Philosophy of Education

“Now it is not difficult to see that one must not make amusement the object of the education of the young; for amusement does not go with learning--learning is a painful process.” (Aristotle, *Politics*, VIII.4:4. 1339a 26) 😊

Actually, I am here to serve you, and to help you to make the most of your educational opportunity at ASU -- not to make learning painful. Biblical literature is a fascinating and wonderful field of study! It will be work for the both of us, but, hopefully, enjoyable and fruitful work.

I believe that the role of a teacher is to cause learning to take place. Therefore, I design assignments for which students must read, think, and then write out their thoughts and observations. This course will have such assignments for almost every class. Also, I realize that most students, soon after a course has ended, tend to forget many of the facts that they have learned. However, students will retain more in terms of theory and skills that they have practiced. Therefore, I have designed this course to be heavy on communication theory and reading/writing skills.

Please, always feel free to let me know how I can be of help.

Dr. Rodney Duke

Additional Departmental and University Policies

For departmental and/or university wide policies regarding: cell phones, disability services, religious observances, academic integrity, General Education, and student engagement with courses (course workload expectations), see [General Classroom Policies](#) and [Syllabi Policy](#).