

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

# Biblical Language Tools

BI-610 (3 units)  
Spring 2008 @ MBBS: Fresno  
Monday 6:00-9:00 PM  
January 28—May 12, 2008

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces the student to the original languages of the Bible with English as the language of comparison and contrast. The course is designed for the non-specialist who would like to get maximum benefit from Hebrew and Greek language tools for the study of the biblical text applicable to a wide variety of settings—personal study, worship coordinating, sermon preparation, and lesson planning. The goal is to illuminate the characteristics and distinctive features of each language in order to help the student evaluate commentaries, engage in more sophisticated linguistic and semantic analysis, and use Bible computer programs and printed research aids more effectively.

*This course partially fulfills the MDiv biblical language requirement.*

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through a variety of activities, textbook readings, presentations, and class discussions, students will interact personally and critically with a variety of biblical language tools. At the completion of the course, the student should be able to:

1. Master and explain: a) the basic linguistic and literary features of biblical Greek and Hebrew; b) the basic aspects of discourse analysis; c) the distinctive semantic and syntactic features of the biblical languages and their significance; d) fifty key Hebrew words and fifty key Greek words; and e) the major exegetical tools used and the resources available in the field of biblical studies (*Knowledge Objective*).
2. Confess and appropriate: a) a greater appreciation for the artistry and significance of the biblical text as literature (human) and as Scripture (divine); and b) a deeper sensitivity to the challenge that God's people in every generation have to discern together the always-present Word of God as revealed in the ancient prophetic and apostolic witness (*Values Objective*).
3. Coordinate and execute: a) Hebrew and Greek word-studies; b) sentence diagramming; c) close-readings of OT and NT texts; d) critical assessments of commentaries on OT and NT texts; and e) the basic features included in the Bible Software program, *Pradis: Teaching and Preaching* (Zondervan), for searching, researching, translating, outlining, and copying to a word processor (*Skills Objective*).

## MBBS PROGRAM GOALS

This course contributes to the larger goals of the Seminary program in that it will help the student to:

1. Discern with greater precision the subject matter to which the biblical text gives witness, both its foreignness as well as its power to draw, to claim, and to transform life (MBBS desired outcome #1: *Demonstrate commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus in Christian community*).
2. Engage in the hermeneutical task of exploring ways that the symbolic world of the ancient text can inform, form, and reform the cultural norms which shape our faith communities (MBBS desired outcome #2: *Articulate commitment to a biblical theological Christian perspective*).
3. Nurture healthy interpersonal relationships and effective communication patterns in the context of the learning community (MBBS desired outcome #3: *Interpret diverse cultural contexts of ministry using theological perspectives integrated with social scientific approaches*).
4. Develop and practice skills in sound biblical exegesis and interpretation for preaching, teaching, social advocacy, personal enrichment, and our life together (MBBS desired outcome #4: *Practice skills in pastoral and educational leadership*).

## TEXTBOOKS

Mounce, William D. 2003. *Greek for the Rest of Us: Mastering Bible Study without Mastering Biblical Languages*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. ISBN: 0-310-23485-9.

Zondervan Teacher's Pastor's Library 6.0 CD-ROM, powered by Pradis, ISBN: 0310274451.  
Available at <[http://www.discountchristian.com/zondervan\\_teacher6.html](http://www.discountchristian.com/zondervan_teacher6.html)>.

## COURSE FORMAT

The class will meet for ten sessions (see schedule below). We will work through Mounce's, *Greek for the Rest of Us*, plus additional Hebrew resources. Each week will involve presentations, computer activities, quizzes, and homework assignments. Students will work on a series of projects—word studies, close-readings, commentary reviews—using the computer software and other resources.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The learning activities are designed to promote the course and degree objectives listed above. The anticipated time investment and the percentage of the final grade for each activity are listed below. I expect each student to:

1. Participate in ten class sessions (10x3 hrs = 30 hrs).
2. Do the weekly homework assigned. This includes: learning biblical vocabulary, which by the end of the semester will total 90 Greek words and 45 Hebrew words) and listening to the review lectures on the Mounce CD (9x7 hrs = 63 hrs).
3. Do a weekly quiz (8x10/4 = 20 pts)

4. Do three Close Reading assignments (see *Appendix A*), each of a different biblical genre. Select at least one OT and one NT text, preferably ones that you will be preaching or teaching from in the near future. Confirm your selection with me (3x4 hrs = 12 hrs; 3x10x3/2 =20 pts).
5. Do three Word Study assignments (see *Appendix B*), selecting words from your Close Reading (3x4 hrs = 12 hrs; 3x10x3/2 =20 pts).
6. Do three Commentary Reviews, where you review five Biblical Commentaries (both critical and popular) addressing the text of your Close Reading. Write a three-page review, noting your observations (compare, contrast, analyze). Note also the insights with potential for follow up in a teaching or preaching setting. Use proper citation form (APA or Chicago) with a list of the works consulted at the end (3x6 hrs = 18 hrs; 3x10x3/2 =20 pts).
7. Do a final exam (20 pts).

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Meeting #1	January 28	Getting acquainted with Greek
Meeting #2	February 4	The building blocks of language
Meeting #3	February 11	How do we modify ideas?
	February 18	<u>No class</u> (Presidents Day)
Meeting #4	February 25	How do we describe action?
	March 3	<u>No class</u> (Module Week)
Meeting #5	March 10	What else is in a verb?
Meeting #6	March 17	How do we describe things?
	March 24	<u>No class</u>
	<b>March 28</b>	<b><i>First Close Reading, Word Study, Commentary Review due</i></b>
Meeting #7	March 31	Getting acquainted with Hebrew
Meeting #8	April 7	Hebrew roots and stems
Meeting #9	April 14	Hebrew verb systems
	<b>April 18</b>	<b><i>Second Close Reading, Word Study, Commentary Review due</i></b>
Meeting #10	May 12	Exam
	<b>May 16</b>	<b><i>Third Close Reading, Word Study, Commentary Review due</i></b>

## SUMMARY OF GRADING SCHEME

Quizzes .....	20%	} 100%
Close Readings .....	20%	
Word-Studies .....	20%	
Commentary Review .....	20%	
Exam .....	20%	

## NOTES

1. Academic Policies. MBBS academic policies (as well as other school policies) are described at <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies>. These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, accommodations for disabilities, grading, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to me or consult the Registrar.

2. Evaluation. “Student work will be evaluated by two standards: a) by what is considered the appropriate level of graduate performance, and b) by comparison with work submitted in a given class” (<http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/grading>).

All assignments must be completed in order to be eligible to earn a passing grade for this course.

The letter grade conversions follow the MBBS Grading Template: A (100-94%), A- (93-90%), B+ (89-87%), B (86-83%), B- (82-80%), C+ (79-77%), C (76-73%), C- (72-70%), and F (69-0%) (<http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/grading>).

The performance expectations are as follows: “A ‘B’ grade is the baseline. A ‘B’ grade means the student is doing satisfactory work. The ‘B+’ or higher grade indicates that the student has exceeded the baseline performance standard. The ‘C’ grade indicates that the student has not achieved the baseline level” (<http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/grading>).

3. Submitting assignments. Students are asked to submit hard-copy versions of their assignments, if they want hand-written feedback and corrections from me. I will not print papers sent electronically as file attachments. However, I will accept electronically submitted assignments; after reading them, I will assign a grade and let you know your score by email.

4. Due dates. Students are expected to submit assignments on time. Late assignments will be graded down ½ a point (out of the 10 allotted) for each day (or part thereof) after the due date. The late penalty may not apply to students who have a documented emergency, which prevents them from submitting the assignment on the due date. Check with me to see if alternative arrangements can be made.

5. Course evaluations. Course evaluations are to be completed online and are due after the conclusion of the course. Official grades will not be posted until your evaluation of the course is completed.

## APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR A “CLOSE READING”

Note: *The following guidelines are an adaptation of a document produced by Prof. Joel B. Green and they are reproduced here with permission from the author.*

1. Introductory comments: Many find a “close reading” assignment one of the most difficult exercises undertaken at seminary. The reason for this is that the kind of “close reading” required for this assignment cannot be achieved by interacting with commentaries, monographs, dictionaries, journal articles, etc. Instead, a “close reading” assignment aims to measure your observation skills and your question-asking skills. So, what is it?

a) A “close reading” is not:

- *a research paper*—no secondary sources should be consulted as you prepare your paper
- *a finished product*—it should be written using good grammar and spelling, but there is no expectation that you “answer” the questions you raise while interacting with the assigned text; hence, no “introduction” or “conclusion” is required

- *a sermon or application paper*—it is simply too early in the interpretative process to be asserting issues of relevance or appropriation

b) A “close reading” is:

- *a series of observations and questions*—looking at your text from multiple vantage points (see list below), should raise a wide range of interpretive issues; some questions may be more relevant to certain texts than to others
- *a research agenda*—a thoroughgoing “close reading” of the text provides the interpretive questions and hunches that you can then take to the reference materials, the next stage in the interpretive process
- *a community event*—you are encouraged to discuss your preliminary thoughts and questions with others as you prepare to write your observations

2. Questions for a “Close Reading” of the text: The following questions are divided into categories that you might bring with you to the task of “close reading.” Not all questions are equally important to every biblical text, and other questions may emerge as you wrestle with the text. You will need to exercise your judgment in discerning which are relevant. Work through the relevant questions from each of the four main blocks—text, co-text, context, intertext—and then write up your observations in prose form.

a) The Text

- *Textual Criticism—Are there any footnotes signaling potentially problematic readings? If so, what are they and what is their significance?*
- *Genre and Form—Have you identified “what kind of text this is” and/or to what larger genre it belongs? What is the significance of this identification?*
- *Determination of Boundaries—Where does the text begin and end? Do you agree or disagree with the demarcations assigned by the various English Bible translations? What textual markers support your analysis?*
- *Exploration of the Text’s Internal Development and Argument—Have you been able to identify the structure and/or other strategies by which the author attempts to communicate with the reader? How do the parts flow from one to the next?*
- *Outline the Text—What labels could you attach to the parts, identifying each one’s particular function and contribution to the text? How could you visually represent the text, clearly showing how the parts relate to one another?*
- *The “About-ness” of the Text—Can you summarize what you understand this text to be saying?*

b) The Co-Text (literary context)

- *Situation of Text in Larger Presentation—Given that we read from “left to right,” have you been able to show how your reading of this text is informed by what went on before?*
- *Development of Important Words/Themes—What key words and/or themes are signaled in this text? How have you judged them to be key?*
- *Openness to Interpretive Possibilities—What other readings of this text are possible? What would we miss about the meaning of this text without having read further?*

c) Context (historical situation)

- Socio-Historical Setting—*In what socio-historical setting is this text communicated? How does our knowledge of this setting influence our reading?*
- Appeal to Particular Cultural Conventions/Cues—*In what ways does this text appeal to such cultural concerns or conventions as purity, distribution of power, social roles, household codes, honor and shame, patronage systems, etc. in order to communicate its message?*
- Interface of Contexts—*In what ways does this text appear to stand in tension with the world it addresses? In what ways does your own context intersect with the context of this text?*

d) Intertext

- Sensitivity to OT/LXX/HB Citations and Echoes and their Significance—*What OT passages are explicitly cited in this text? Alluded to? What is their significance in their new setting within this text?*
- Sensitivity to other Inter-Canonical Echoes—*What other biblical passages are brought to mind by a reading of this one? How might these echoes inform a canonical reading of this text?*

3. Concluding remarks: There is no “right” way to do a “close reading” assignment—the essential thing is that somehow you bring to the surface the significance of the themes, motifs, details, etc. in the assigned text. Finally, the key thing is to allow yourself to be playful and imaginative as you engage the text from the four angles (text, co-text, context, and intertext).

## APPENDIX B: GUIDELINES FOR A WORD-STUDY

Note: *The following guidelines are an adaptation of a document produced by Prof. Allen Guenther and they are reproduced here with permission from the author.*

### 1. Word Identification

a) *Give the English transliteration of the Hebrew/Greek word and cite the textual unit in which it is found. Note the Strong’s or GK (Goodrick/Kohlenberger) number attached to the word.*

b) *Parse the word (as completely as you can) giving its grammatical characteristics (e.g., part of speech, root, tense/aspect, voice, mood, person, number, etc.).*

c) *Note implications (if any) for the meaning in this context drawn from the parsing data.*

### 2. Frequency and Distribution

a) *Indicate the number of times the word occurs in Scripture. Count all the occurrences of the root word. Make note of any cognates (verbs, nouns, adjectives). Are there any patterns?*

Comment.

b) *Note the distribution of the word in Scripture. Are there specific genres where the word appears more/less often? Comment.*

### 3. Meaning

a) *Prepare a “working draft” listing each occurrence along with its meaning. Work your way through the list by reading each occurrence in its biblical context. Infer the meaning of the*

word as it is used in each particular context. Do not automatically copy the translation from one English version. Compare various translations and decide on the word or phrase that best captures the meaning of the Hebrew/Greek word in English. Are there distinct groupings of meaning emerging?

b) *Rearrange your working draft list by grouping the meanings into similar usage categories.* Select several representative examples for each category from your exhaustive list.

c) *Organize the meaning categories with representative examples* for presentation in the final draft form of your word-study. Sometimes the semantic field of a word can be arranged using categories that can be plotted at various points on a continuum from literal to figurative. Sometimes other arrangements are more suitable. Determine which presentation form is best for your semantic analysis.

d) *Summarize in a few sentences various meanings of the word within Scripture.*

#### 4. Meaning in Context

a) *Select the most appropriate meaning for the textual unit you are studying.* Be careful to consider both the immediate and larger literary contexts.

b) *Justify your decision using the contextual clues* (literary and historical) as well as the grammatical clues noted above in the parsing of the word.

#### 5. Verification

a) *Compare your decision with the one taken in other translations.* Check those that are more literal as well as those that are more paraphrastic. Note agreements and disagreements. Comment

b) *Compare your decision with the one taken by the standard lexicons.* Note agreements and disagreements. Comment.