

Biblical and Theological Terms For Incoming Seminarians

The intent of this glossary is to provide simple definitions for the important biblical and theological terms that incoming seminarians need to understand, in the context of AGTS, as they begin their studies. Words not in this list are either the professor's responsibility to explain as a part of seminary education or are the student's responsibility to look up in a dictionary. The definitions here are simplified versions of the most likely uses in the context of AGTS classes, early in a student's first semester, and are based on Dr. James Hernando's *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* where possible, which is a recommended resource. The * indicates a word is defined elsewhere in the list.

a priori: an assumption or presupposition* someone has before beginning a study or discussion.

allegorical: not the literal sense but portraying spiritual truths metaphorically* without reference to any actual historical events or people. An allegory never actually happened, like *Pilgrim's Progress*. The Bible stories did happen unless otherwise indicated and so cannot be allegories. However, they can be typological.*

anachronistic: not using technically accurate terminology for the time period. An example is reading NT terms or place names back into the OT context.

apocalyptic: a type of biblical literature that is a dramatic, visionary, depiction of the ultimate cosmic victory of God over evil, using imagery that is significant to that time and culture, such as is used in the book of Revelation.

Apocrypha: books written in the **Intertestamental Period** considered authoritative scriptures (sacred writings) by Roman Catholicism but not by Protestants or Jews and are called deuterocanonicals by the Catholics.

apologetic: referring to making a defense for someone or something, especially for the faith.

the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as understood by the Assemblies of God: the initial filling with the Holy Spirit experience given by Jesus, subsequent to salvation, available to all Christians, in which the Spirit's empowering is released in the life of the Christian for the beginning of a lifetime of prophetic witness for the Lord. It is accompanied by speaking in tongues (languages used in praise and prayer, unknown to the speaker and given by the Spirit), based on Acts 1:8, chapter 2, and chapter 10.

canonical: referring to the set of books historically accepted by Christians as God's authoritative written Word. (Every student should be familiar with the names of the 66 books of the Protestant canon and their order.)

CE and BCE: current politically correct broad era abbreviations—Common Era (formerly AD, referring to time since the birth of Christ) and Before the Common Era (formerly BC, before Christ).

charismatic believers: referring to Christians who believe in a current experience of the gifts of the Spirit found in the New Testament (especially in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14), who practice individual, spontaneous, outwardly demonstrative, worship, and who encourage faith for experiencing many promises of the Bible today, but who are not of the historic Pentecostal* tradition.

Christological: having to do with the truth, doctrines, or the message of Christ.

concordance: a basic tool for Bible study which alphabetically lists every word used in a particular version and every reference (in exhaustive editions) where each word occurs in the Bible. It is very helpful for finding a verse by a certain word in it or seeing all the range of usage of a certain Greek or Hebrew word in the Scriptures.

conservative view of the Bible vs. liberal view of the Bible: refers to viewing the Bible as God's Word written through humans, fully truthful, unified, and authoritative **vs.** as a collection of human documents with some helpful and lofty thoughts but teaching many flawed and contradictory human religious ideas.

cosmology: a theory/belief about the origin, nature, and composition of the universe.

criticisms—especially higher criticism, also called historical criticism, and textual criticism (these should be explained in class when mentioned but may not be): various scholarly methods of analyzing the Scriptures in their historical, cultural, and literary context. Often the scholars who have developed these approaches to the text have treated the Scriptures as strictly human documents, with no allowance for the supernatural or divine revelation and divine supervision of the writing process. It is important to be clear that *textual criticism* is a narrow term for the study of the existing copies of the Bible texts for the purpose of proposing the original wording where there are variations among the copies.

cultic: in biblical studies, a reference to public worship practices such as sacrifices and rituals.

the Dead Sea Scrolls: Jewish religious and Old Testament Scripture documents, existing mostly in pieces, found in the area of the Dead Sea in Israel, mostly from caves at Qumran, dating from the period of 250 BC to AD 70.

the Decalogue: the Ten Commandments.

to deconstruct: basically to point out weaknesses and doubts in the understanding of the meaning of something.

deductive vs. inductive reasoning: to deduce is to reason from a starting truth to particulars while being inductive is to draw conclusions from analyzing all the particulars of evidence/data.

deistic: the belief that God is not involved in the world He created. He set it in motion but does not intervene in it, like a watch maker creating a watch, winding it up, and letting it wind down.

deutero- : second, secondary, or following after; **deutero-canonical** refers to certain books written subsequent to the original Hebrew Old Testament canon, which are accepted by Roman Catholicism but not by Protestants or Judaism (often called the Apocrypha*); **deutero-Pauline*** refers to a belief that some letters traditionally accepted as by Paul were really not written by Paul but by someone after him, and so are secondary to the “true” Pauline epistles*.

Diaspora: the Jews scattered around the ancient world living out away from the Promised Land due to the exile* and the Greek conquest.

dictionaries and encyclopedias, biblical and theological: important collections of summary articles by scholars on specific subjects pertinent to biblical and theological studies. Generally there is no significant difference between a Bible dictionary and a Bible encyclopedia. Note that word books which provide essays on the theological usage of the Greek and Hebrew words of the Bible are often titled as theological dictionaries.

Dispensationalism: a system of understanding the salvation plan of God and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments which delineates separate dispensations or periods of God’s salvation dealings with mankind in history and which sees references to Israel as totally separate from God’s plan for the Gentiles (non-Jews), thus taking the prophecies very literally.

doctrinal: having to do with the teachings of the Bible which a Christian group has summarized or expounded from the Bible as the important truths to which God wants people to hold, and therefore these teachings are important to the identity of the group.

doxological: having to do with expressing praise and glory to God.

ecclesiastical: having to do with the earthly institution of the church.

ecclesiological: having to do with the theology of the church.

ecumenical: involving various denominations and groups of Christians in unified efforts.

the Enlightenment: the period of the philosophical shift that occurred in Europe in the late 1700s that exalted human reason and the ability to analyze everything without revelation from God. It is the origin of modernism and now generally represents much of what postmodernism has reacted against.

epistemological: relating to one’s world view and the philosophical discussion of how people know anything and the question of what is truth/true.

epistles: books of the New Testament that are letters, written by an apostle or an associate.

eschatology, eschatological: having to do with the theology of last things and the divine conclusion of history. The adjective is also used by scholars for a reference to God breaking into time and intervening in the world to accomplish His ultimate purpose.

the Eucharist: the Lord’s Supper, Communion.

Evangelical: believing that God has communicated in the Protestant Scriptures the message of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ His Son and that all people need to hear and believe this message to have eternal life.

exegesis, exegetical: dealing with the process of interpreting a text and bringing out the meaning intended by the author. This process applies the principles for how to do this, which is called hermeneutics*.

the exile: the taking away of a major part of the people of Israel from the Promised Land, first the northern tribes to Assyria (722 BC), then later Judah to Babylon (605 BC), because they had been unfaithful to the Lord.

existential: characterized by the philosophical view of life that emphasizes one's present personal experience of existence as the predominant reality and source of meaning.

the exodus: the deliverance of the 12 tribes of Israel, under the leadership of Moses, from slavery in Egypt, by God, through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. It is the great salvation event in their history, recorded in the book of Exodus.

exposition: explaining or elaborating on one's interpretation of a text, especially to relate it to people's lives.

the fall: the event of Adam and Eve's self-focused disobedience which broke the relationship between them and God and lost their original, sinless, and ideal, condition, resulting in all humans being born without a relationship with God and separated from His presence, tending to be selfish, hurtful to others, and contrary to God, headed for physical and eternal death and thus needing God's gift of salvation.

figuratively: not literal but rather intended to be understood differently from what is normally expected when reading or hearing the words.

fundamentalism: an extremely conservative version of a religion. Generally, it does not adequately distinguish the cultural context of its authoritative scriptures from the principles and theological concepts intended. Therefore, it is often associated with distinctive, cultural, external, practices from the time of the writing of various passages of the Scriptures. We, at AGTS, hold to the historic fundamentals of orthodox Christianity but not to much of the culture and rigidly literal, biblical, interpretations of North American (Christian) Fundamentalism.

genre: a type of literature with common characteristics, including style, purpose, and even general subject matter, such as the biblical genres of poetry, narrative, and prophecy.

glossolalia: speaking in tongues (languages unknown to the speaker) given by the Spirit of God.

grammatical terms—graduate students must understand what is meant by a: clause; conjunction; direct object; genitive; imperative; interrogative; nominative; participle; passive voice; predicate; and preposition. (See dictionaries or grammar books for the ones you do not know.)

Hellenistic: involving characteristics of Greek culture from the ancient world to the first few centuries AD.

hermeneutics: the principles of how a reader gets meaning from a text. Conservative hermeneutics seek to determine the meaning intended by the author of the text.

homiletics: the subject/discipline of preparing and preaching sermons.

humanism (secular): human centered world view which exalts human understanding and ignores God.

hyperbole: exaggeration used to make a point.

idiom: a combination of words that expresses a certain idea in a way that is different from the sum of the literal words and that is unique to that language/culture.

immanent: near in space, especially used of the truth that God is all around all of us and permeates everything.

imminent: near in time, used of an event, such as the Second Coming of Christ, which could happen at any moment.

inductive reasoning: from the data to the conclusion (see deductive*)

inerrancy: the belief that the Bible is without error in what God intended to communicate through the writers.

inspiration, inspired Word of God, as understood by the Assemblies of God: the belief that the Protestant Canon of the Scriptures was produced by the revelation of the Holy Spirit through the human writers and is the Word of God written, with final authority for the Christian's faith and conduct. The incarnation of the Son of God in Christ Jesus is parallel to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. The writings are fully human yet without sin/error in what God intended to teach.

Intertestamental Period: the time between the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, around 430 BC, and the birth of Christ, around 4-6 BC.

justification (by faith as taught by Paul): the declaration by God that a person who believes in His gift of Christ is released from the guilt and punishment due for his or her sins. It is the event of salvation and the establishment of a right relationship with God.

the Kingdom (of God): the active reign of God as King/Lord, beginning through Christ in the lives of Christians and coming fully over all the world when Christ returns. It involves God's supernatural involvement in His people's lives. It does not refer strictly to a place or a people—to the church—because the church is the subjects of the Kingdom not the Kingdom itself.

legalistic and legalism: focusing on the letter of the law and being consumed with the goal of getting credit for keeping it, especially more perfectly than other people do. In legalism, the focus is on the strict observance of the law rather than any purpose or principle behind it. Legalism makes the keeping of the law more important than the needs of people. A legalistic relationship is based strictly on performance or “works.”

lexicon: a scholarly dictionary of an ancient language like Greek and Hebrew.

liturgical: having to do with liturgy, the formal rituals of public worship.

manuscripts: hand written documents/copies.

Mesopotamia: the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Middle East (Iraq, today) where the most ancient civilizations began and flourished, including Babylon.

Messianic: having to do with the Messiah, the Christ, the promised Savior in the Scriptures.

meta-narrative: overarching story/message/universal-truth that ties everything together.

metaphor, metaphorical: describing someone or something in terms of something else, emphasizing certain characteristics, a kind of comparison but using “is,” such as saying someone “is a bear to live with” or “Jesus is the vine and we are the branches.”

metaphysical: dealing with what is real, the philosophy of the nature of reality. It also may be a reference to what is beyond what one can perceive with the physical senses.

Millennium: the teaching based on Revelation 20 of a 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth, with Satan bound, when the earth has been redeemed from the curse, at the end of history. It is associated with passages describing a kind of return to Eden as an ideal conclusion to the history of the earth. The belief that Christ’s Second Coming comes before it is called **premillennial**; that Christ comes after it is **postmillennial**; and that it is not a later, literal, physical, reign but is spiritual and already happening, is **amillennial**.

modernism vs post modernism: see Enlightenment* as the source of modernism; post modernism is the recent strong reaction to modernism, a very existential* and relativistic view of life, a rejection of certainty and universals, especially any meta-narrative.*

motif: a repeated theme or idea contributing to a writer’s message.

myth: as used by Bible scholars, a people’s explanation of phenomena for which they have no physical explanation.

paradigm: a pattern presented by a writer that shows what others in the same situation will or should follow. In grammar it is a pattern of all the forms of a word.

Pauline: something related to, characteristic of, usually authored by, the apostle Paul.

Pentateuch: the first five books of the Bible, also called the Torah by the Jews, understood to be written or dictated by Moses.

Pentecostal: an Evangelical*, holiness, healing, premillennial*, missionary, back-to-the-Bible, movement of Christians, beginning around 1900, of which the Assemblies of God is the largest denomination. Pentecostals believe God wants to baptize Christians in the Holy Spirit for the purpose of being His witnesses to the ends of the earth, with the accompanying outward sign of

speaking in tongues, according to Acts 2. Pentecostals believe God wants to continue to work miraculously among His people and wants all His people to prophesy and be used in the other gifts of the Spirit, listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, in their worship assemblies. They believe that physical and emotional expressions should be encouraged in worship.

pericope: a distinct passage or literary unit of Scripture often used for liturgical* readings.

pietistic: devotional and godly lifestyle emphases for the Christian life. It also refers to a movement in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe that was a reaction against the extreme intellectualism and doctrinal conflicts of that time.

pneumatological: dealing with the Spirit.

polemical: aggressively refuting an idea or teaching.

post modernism: (see modernism)

premillennial: (see Millennium*)

presuppositions: the ideas and assumptions that one begins with.

primary vs secondary sources: primary sources include original texts, factual records, and actual data. Secondary sources include interpretations and analyses of the data or texts. Graduate research must involve as much primary material as possible.

proof-text: a single Bible reference used to answer or define an issue.

prophetic: passages of the Scripture by prophets, especially those predicting future events OR it is often used in a general sense of some ministry that functions the way the one using the word understands the biblical purpose and ministry of a prophet to be, usually involving challenging authorities or cultures with God's standards.

pseudo- false, especially something claiming to be from a source that it is not from.

rabbinic: the approach and the thinking of the teaching of the Jewish rabbis in their writings from the third century after Christ on, which writings are called the Talmud.

redaction, redactor: the process of editing of the Scriptures, and the word for an editor/writer.

redemption, redeem: to deliver, often by costly payment, in order to restore to the original relationship/situation.

Reformed theology (Calvinism) vs. Arminianism: the teachings of Calvin and his followers such as Presbyterians vs. those of Arminius and his followers such as Wesleyans. The foundational concept of Reformed theology is the sovereignty* of God which includes predestination and the total inability of humans to respond to God. Arminian theology does not deny God's sovereignty but sees the Scriptures as teaching the privilege and responsibility, with accountability, for people's choices, which we have because we are made in God's image.

regeneration: God-given new birth, spiritually, at conversion/salvation.

rhetorical: some aspect of the way people make their point with their choice of certain words, ways of expression, literary devices, and, in more formal contexts, the order of elements of an argument, according to what is effective in a particular cultural context.

sacrament: in Roman Catholicism several rites that, when properly done, act as means of grace. Protestants emphasize that the ritual does not convey anything by itself and that the only two regular observances or ordinances that Christ called for are water baptism and communion. These two are opportunities for a special event of a faith connection with God and reception of His salvation provisions, and are sometimes referred to as external signs of an inner work of God.

sanctification: in Protestant theology, the subject of the working of God in the life of a Christian after salvation/justification*, making them more like Christ.

the Second Coming: the coming back to earth of the risen Christ to end history as we know it, bring judgment on those who reject him, and establish his eternal kingdom for all who follow him.

semantics: the subject of the meanings of words and how those meanings or uses overlap among words.

semitic: broadly, an ethnic and linguistic group of peoples mostly in the Middle East, including Arabs and Jews and several of the ancient peoples of the Old Testament world such as the Babylonians.

Septuagint: the name for the Greek translation of the OT, done by Jews within the Greek culture of Alexandria Egypt, from about 250 -150 BC. This is one of the earliest translations and was the Bible of the Early Church. The symbol for it is LXX because of a Jewish tradition that it was translated by 70 Jewish scholars.

simile: an explicit comparison of one thing to another such as “we are like sheep.”

Sixteen Fundamental Truths: the 16 doctrinal statements agreed upon by all ministers of the Assemblies of God and expected to be taught in our churches.

soteriological: having to do with salvation.

sovereignty of God: The power God has to do whatever He chooses without restrictions or any need for anything outside of Himself, His own character, and His purposes. He is always in control yet He does not manipulate anyone’s will. A simple summary is that God is never threatened, never surprised, and never at a loss for what to do or the ability to do it. Nothing can stop Him from doing what He says He will do.

synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which present the story of Jesus in similar ways, including much of the same material.

syntax and syntactical: the relationship between words in a sentence, a reference to the combination and order of the words, which produces the meaning.

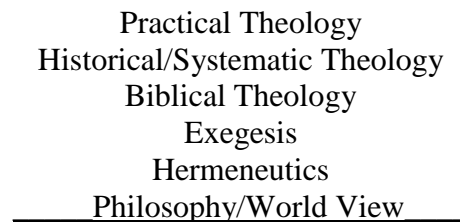
Talmud: (see rabbinic*)

Tanak: the term for the Jewish Scriptures, the same books as in the Protestant Old Testament but in a different order.

theocratic: referring to a theocracy, a nation ruled by God (the only true one was Israel).

theodicy: the subject of the justice of God, and, for conservatives, the defense of His goodness.

theology—systematic, Biblical, and others like practical or historical: the study of the truths that God wants to communicate with humanity through the Scriptures, organized in ways we can relate to. Systematic theology organizes the truths by our questions and philosophical categories. Biblical theology is a technical term in the field of Biblical studies for the study of the messages of the Bible writers in their own terms and context and then in the context of the messages of the other writers in the whole of the canon. Biblical theology is the conclusion of good exegesis* and the basis of good systematic theology, all of which are the basis of practical theology. Historical theology is basically the history of systematic theology or the teachings and theological issues of the church through its history. The relationships of the theological disciplines are pictured below with the upper ones being based on the ones under them:



theophany: an event where God shows Himself to people in some physical way, experienced by at least the senses of sight and hearing.

transcendent: that God is far beyond all that is and totally distinct from material things.

transliteration: writing words of one language in the alphabet of another but not translating them.

typological: referring to an historical event, institution, or person, in Scripture, demonstrating the same spiritual principles as fulfilled by Christ in God's plan for humanity.