

OT 204 Exegesis of Jonah
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Fall 2021: Mondays 1:30-4:20pm

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Course Description

This biblical exegesis course, taught in a seminar-style, provides an in-depth examination of the prophetic book of Jonah in English translation. This biblical book – 48 verses – presents readers with an excellent opportunity to sharpen historical-critical interpretive skills, to develop better literary approaches to prophetic literature, and to deepen our theological and ethical imaginations. Students will gain a toolbox of hermeneutical methods for contemporary ministry.

Course Objectives:

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe various historical issues, literary features, and theological outlooks of the book of Jonah. [Assignments #1, 2, 3]
2. Engage in conversation with various types of biblical scholarship to cultivate a sense of their own identity as interpreters. [Assignment #2]
3. Respond appropriately and creatively with pastoral sensitivity, theological imagination, and ethical concern to a biblical text in order to educate a given audience. [Assignment #3]

Required Books

1) English translation of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. I recommend the The New Oxford Annotated Bible or The New Interpreter's Study Bible. Bring to class.

2) Two commentaries on Jonah (please purchase or secure reliable weekly access)

Select two commentaries, one from each group below.

Exegetical Commentaries

- A. Jack Sasson, *Jonah*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary, 1990.
A traditional historical, linguistic approach.
- B. Phyllis Trible, "Jonah" in *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, Volume 7, 1996.
A feminist, literary approach.
- C. James Limburg, *Jonah*, Old Testament Library, 1993.
A traditional historical and literary approach
- D. Amy Erickson, *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary*, Illuminations, 2021.
A comprehensive exegetical approach with emphasis on reception history
- E. Uriel Simon, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Jonah*, Jewish Publication Society, 1999.
A Jewish, exegetical interpretation

Theological Commentaries

- A. Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, *The Book of Jonah: A Social Justice Commentary*, 2020.
A progressive Jewish theological commentary.
- B. Rosa Ching Shao, *Jonah: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary*, Asia Bible Commentary, 2019. Chinese and Filipino (evangelical) contextual commentary
- C. Andre Lacocque and Pierre-Emmanuel Lacocque, *The Jonah Complex*, 1981.
A psychoanalytic (progressive) approach.
- D. Janet Howe Gaines, *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah's Dilemma*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2003).
A Jewish woman's reflection on forgiveness including Holocaust and South African contexts.
- E. Jerome's Commentary. Found in *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets, Volume 1, Jerome* (Ancient Christian Texts; InterVarsity Press, 2016): 244-275.
Early patristic commentary.

Assignments & Evaluation:

1) **Attendance & Participation.** (30% of final grade)

Students should come to class each day **eagerly ready** to discuss the assigned readings. Active participation includes, but is not limited to, activities such as listening carefully to others' presentations and thoughts, taking notes, asking relevant questions, responding to others' comments, and inviting others into the conversation. It does not include dominating a group or class discussion by constant talking. Monitor and vary your forms of participation; introverts should force themselves to speak more than they think necessary; extroverts should force themselves to speak less than they think necessary.

Students will be expected to take notes (jot down questions, write up summaries, etc.), while reading the assigned texts outside of class so that they have resources in class to use to speak. I expect that students will need at least 6 hours each week to prepare for our approx. 3 hour class; you should not expect to prepare in one setting per week.

Here's a quick and sketchy grading rubric for participation:

0 – absent without an excuse	85 – present with some participation
70 – absent with an excuse	90 – present and participating readily
75 – present without participation	95 – present, alert, highly participatory
80 – present with limited participation	

2) **Weekly 2-page Papers.** (40% of final grade)

Students will write a 2-page paper in preparation for each class session (excepting the first class); so, 10 papers total. These papers will respond to a specific question or prompt given in this syllabus. A **hardcopy** of the paper is **due in class** each week. Students will often use the paper in class to contribute to class participation (in addition to their notes; see above) and will turn it in for grading at the end of each class.

3) **Campus-Wide Event in celebration of Jonah.** (30% of final grade)

Students will create an event open to the LPTS community. This event can be a play, a poetry reading, a conference, a concert, a discussion, a workshop, a worship service, etc. or some combination thereof. The event needs to incorporate Jonah in some substantial way. You will invite the entire LPTS community—students, staff, faculty, and administration—to this event.

OR, in case of COVID restrictions,

Practical Theological / Christian Education Project

Students will develop a practical theological project that describes how a religious leader might present the course material (or a portion thereof) to a Christian congregation (or subset thereof).

Policies (Excerpted from the Faculty Handbook)

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site with information for current students.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

See also the library's citation help page: <https://lpts.libguides.com/digitalresources/citingsources>

Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

Course Schedule:

Sept 13

Introductions to Course, Syllabus

Class Reading of Jonah

What You Bring to This Study

Required Readings:

Jonah 1-4

Recommended Readings:

Kenneth M. Craig, Jr., "Jonah in Recent Research," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 7 (1999): 97-118. [Canvas]

No Paper Due.

Sept 20

Historical Issues: Authorship, Dating, Historicity

Literary Issues: Genre, Literary Structure, Literary Context of the Book of the Twelve

Required Readings:

Eric Siebert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 91-97. [Canvas]

Jack Sasson, *Jonah* (Anchor Bible, 1990), 20-28. [Canvas]

Phyllis Tribble, *Jonah*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, 1996: 463-480. [Canvas]

Recommended Readings:

Your two selected commentaries (especially the exegetical commentary) may address historical and literary issues in the introduction to the commentary.

Jonathan Magonet, "Jonah, Book of" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Volume 3 H-J* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 936-942. [Canvas]

2-page paper topic: Based on the readings this week, name and describe 3 major interpretive issues related to the overall book of Jonah.

Sept 27

Calling and Running: Jonah 1:1-17 (Hebrew vv. 1-16)

Required Readings:

Jonah 1:1-17

Your two selected commentaries on Jonah 1:1-17

2-page paper topic:

Choose two interpretive (historical, literary, theological) issues in Jonah 1 (e.g., depiction of God, cause of Jonah's running, the faith of the sailors, humor) and summarize your two commentaries' explanation of the issues.

October 4

A Psalm: Jonah 2:1-10 (Hebrew vv. 1-11)

Required Readings:

Jonah 2:1-10

Your two selected commentaries on Jonah 2

2-page paper topic:

How does Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2 fit within the overall story and theology of Jonah? Are there particular aspects of the prayer that fit better or elements that stand out as odd in light of the entire book?

October 11

Calling and Repenting: Jonah 3:1-10

Required Readings:

Jonah 3:1-10

Your two selected commentaries on Jonah 3

2-page paper topic:

Choose two interpretive (historical, literary, theological) issues in Jonah 3 (e.g., second divine call, parallels to chapter 1, depiction of Nineveh, God changes mind) and summarize your two commentaries' explanation of the issues.

October 25

Jonah, Booth, and Plant: Jonah 4:1-11

Required Readings:

Jonah 4:1-11

Your two selected commentaries on Jonah 4

Tzvi Abusch, "Jonah and God: Plants, Beasts, and Humans in the Book of Jonah (An Essay in Interpretation)," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 13 (2013): 146-152. [Canvas]

2-page paper topic:

You will write about two interpretive issues. The first one concerns the book's ending in vv. 10-11. You can choose the other interpretive issue (historical, literary, theological) in Jonah 4 (e.g., Jonah's anger, the plant, worm). Summarize your two commentaries' explanation of the issues. You can also discuss the Abusch article in relation to the issue of the book's ending.

November 1

Theological Issues

Required Readings:

David J. Downs, "The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (2009): 27-44. [Canvas]

Chen Nan Jou, "Jonah" in *Global Bible Commentary* (ed. Daniel Patte; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000): 291-294. [Canvas]

Chesung Justin Ryu, "Divine Rhetoric and Prophetic Silence in the Book of Jonah," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Oxford University Press, 2016): 226-235. [Canvas]

2-page paper topic: What is the theology of Jonah? What does the book say about God? About humanity?

November 8

More theological and contextual readings

Required Readings:

Jione Havea, “AdJusting Jonah,” *International Review of Mission* 102.1 (April 2013): 44-55. [Canvas]

Julia O’Brien, “Jonah” in *Theological Biblical Commentary* (eds. Gail O’Day and David Petersen; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009): 273-274. [Canvas]

Sharon Bezner, “A Queer Reading of the Book of Jonah,” in *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Pilgrim Press, 2000), 161-169. [Canvas]

Niveen Sarras, “A Palestinian Feminist Reading of the Book of Jonah,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (Volume 15, Issue 8, September 2015) <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1112>

2-page paper topic:

Compare and contrast two or three of the assigned readings for today. What theological aspects of the book do they emphasize? How do they agree or disagree about Jonah?

November 15

History of Christian Interpretation & History of Jewish Interpretation

Required Readings:

Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible With and Without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently* (New York: HarperOne, 2020), 332-336. [Canvas]

Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2000): 9-32, 97-137. [Canvas]

2-page paper topic: What can we, 21st c. interpreters, learn about Jonah from the history of its interpretation?

November 29

Reading Jonah and Nahum together

Required Readings:

Nahum

Ellen Davis, *Opening Israel's Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 246-255. [Canvas]

Wilda Gafney, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Wisdom Commentary Series, volume 38; Liturgical Press, 2017): 3-12. [Canvas]

2-page paper topic:

Compare and contrast the books of Jonah and Nahum as they relate to Nineveh.

December 6

What Would Jonah Do?

Required Readings:

Miguel De La Torre, *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation* (Orbis, 2007), 148-165. [Canvas]

2-page paper topic: Write about 2 important “lessons” from this semester’s study of Jonah.