

OT 410-2 History, Religion, and Culture in the Land of the Bible

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

J-Term 2017

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Course Description

Through visits to archaeological sites, museums, and holy places in Israel and Palestine, and listening to a variety of people living in the land today, students will learn about the complex history of the region: the growth of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam side by side, and the impact of religious groups upon the culture. We will contemplate not only the past but the interreligious and intercultural situation today, the sources of conflict, and the strategies by which a wide variety of people seek to live day by day. The course is largely based on experiential learning.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate important elements of at least one religious tradition other than Christianity [Judaism and Islam].
2. Articulate important elements of more than one Christian tradition [Eastern Orthodox Christianity]
3. Articulate own theological perspective, mindful of the global, multicultural, multi-religious context of contemporary ministry.
4. Demonstrate a capacity for ecumenical and interreligious relations.
5. Develop a mental map of the times, places, and people that comprise much of the Holy Land, including the Galilee region, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.
6. Participate thoughtfully and compassionately in discussion of historical, faith, cultural, and political issues raised in our travels.

Required Readings

The following books should be read BEFORE the trip:

- 1) Brueggemann, Walter. *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).
- 2) Raheb, Mitri. *Bethlehem Besieged* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).
- 3) Select ONE of the following:
 - 3A) Shavit, Ari. *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2013).
 - 3B) Kashua, Sayed. *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life* (New York: Grove Press, 2016).
 - 3C) Ehrenreich, Ben. *The Way to the Spring: Life and Death in Palestine* (New York: Penguin Press, 2016)

Please bring the following book on the trip with you:

1. Luker, Lamontte M. *An Illustrated Guide to the Holy Land For Tour Groups, Students, and Pilgrims* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013). You are not required to read this book before the trip. But if you want to read it in preparation, that's fine too.

This totally OPTIONAL book could be read a few months AFTER the trip:

1) Martin, James. *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (New York: HarperOne, 2014).

In addition, please watch the following interviews, which will acquaint us with some of the people we will meet on our trip:

Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway

A video interview: <http://vimeo.com/13903732>. You may also want to read his article "[Islamophobia](#)"

Dr. Deborah Weissman

Interview: <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v17153349NZyXbaPG?h1=Inside+with+Deborah+Weissman>

You may also want to read "[Interview with Debbie Weissman,](#)" [part 1](#) and [part 2](#).

Hana Bendcowsky

Interview: <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v1660520957yMg9Zj?h1=Inside+with+Hana+Bendcowsky>

You may also be interested in her speech at Conference on Christians and Jews:

<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2137/conference-on-christians-in-the-holy-land-more-speeches-from-the-first-day> (go down the page to find her)

Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salaam

Interview with the late leader Abdessalam Najjar: <http://insidetheholyland.blogspot.com/2010/07/inside-with-mr-abdessalam-najjar.html>

Assignments & Evaluation

1) Active, constructive participation in travel seminar events and reflection meetings while in Israel and Palestine (40% of final grade).

Active, constructive participation involves going with an open mind and heart—open to others in the group and their reflections and needs, and open to those we meet on the journey, even when we find ourselves differing with them in opinion or sensibility. We will learn through a discipline of reflection, not reaction; of dialogue, not passivity or monologue; and of thoughtful respect.

In addition, the many in the group who have traveled to the region before should think carefully about how, when, and why you wish to share prior trip experiences with others in the group, and refrain from spoiling others' days with constant reminders of what you did or saw before. This is a new day, new experience, and new community of fellow travelers.

2) Pilgrimage Journal (30% of final grade)

Students will continue to keep a journal (started in the fall) while on the travel seminar. This journal should be a travel log, a place of spiritual reflection, a site of questions. There are no specific requirements or particular prompts/questions for this section of the journal except that students should record at least one entry for every day of the pilgrimage. Upon our return from the pilgrimage, students will select a few pages from the journal to photocopy and turn in with a 2-page final summary of some of the major learnings from the trip based on the journal entries.

3) "Presentation" to Louisville Seminary Community. (30% of final grade)

To fulfill seminary requirements for Luce Foundation Travel Fellowships (\$750), students must share their travel experience with the larger seminary community. This sharing will take one of two specific forms:

3a) Chapel Service Worship Design. Chapel service Date: March 9, 2017.

3b) Lunchtime Presentation to Seminary Community, Date TBD, probably Feb.

Students will choose one of these options and work with others to complete the project.