

History, Religion, and Culture in the Land of the Bible
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Louisville Presbyterian Seminary

This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

Course Syllabus

Through visits to archaeological sites, museums, and holy places in Israel, and visits with 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.

Students taking the seminar for 3 credits in Bible electives will read selections from a bibliography and participate in a 2-1/2 day seminar prior to the trip. After returning home each will write a reflective paper.

Students who are not traveling may opt to take the pre-trip seminar, including a more limited reading list and a brief paper, for 1 credit.

Preparatory Seminar

Since the seminar is concentrated, please do all the required reading (listed below) before the class begins. The seminar will take place Tuesday (1:00-4:00), Wednesday (9:00-12:00 and 1:00-4:00), and Thursday (same hours as Wednesday), January 6-8. We will have guest speakers, discussions of the readings on the reading list, and orientation to matters religious, political, historical, social, theological, and practical.

Final Paper—three credit course

Students taking this course for 3 credits should reflect, read, and then compose a 7-10 page paper concerning some religious, social, or theological issue you saw emerging as you got to know people and places along the way. It should be an issue that you can identify as one in which you find that your own thinking is “in process,” and upon which you think your opinions have undergone some challenge or shift in the course of the trip. Make it something more specific than “Israeli-Arab Relations” or “The History of the Land.” For instance, it might be, “Differences between western and eastern forms of Christianity and the effects of those differences in Israel” or “What does it mean to be an Arab-Israeli citizen in the Galilee?” Make it a question or issue that is interesting to you. Then write a reflective paper on this theme. You might include:

- a sense of what you thought about this (or didn’t think!) before this trip
- some of the events, anecdotes, sights, or words that inspired, challenged, or changed your thinking during this trip
- reflection on some of the reading that has helped you as you think this through. Be sure to footnote appropriately.
- where your thinking is now, and the questions that you still have.

Turn the paper in by the end of February.

Final Paper—one credit course

Students taking the seminar on campus only will write a 4-6 page paper drawing upon the readings, class, and current events in the Middle East. The guiding question of the paper is, “As Christians and Christian pastors in the U.S., what can we learn from the current situation in Israel that will guide our responsible preaching and teaching?” You may focus on one of several possible themes. Here are some suggestions, but you may think of others: Christian eschatology; interfaith relations; peacemaking; dealing with conflict; racism and prejudice; the place of religion in democracy. Turn the paper in by Thursday, February 5.

Reading List

Background material helpful in coming “up to speed” on the major historical events and present political and social issues as seen by many Israelis and Palestinians. The works with asterisks * are required for all students; those without are required only for those taking the travel seminar for three credits. The Armstrong book is quite long, but most of the rest are relatively short and quite lively. Guiding questions are included in blue. Required books will be available at the LPTS bookstore, and many others will be put on reserve in the LPTS library.

*Armstrong, Karen. *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*. New York: Ballantine, 1997. (you may skim some parts, but do read carefully about the past 100 years)

What roles have religions played in shaping its geography and societies? As you read other books, watch for the impact of this history on the recent and current situations described.

Boys, Mary. *Has God Only One Blessing?: Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding*. Paulist Press, 2000.

How does this book influence Christian teaching and preaching? How does it help Christians understand better the idea of a Jewish homeland?

*Gershom Gorenberg. *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

What parallels are drawn among fundamentalists in the three faiths? What responsibilities do you think non-fundamentalist Christian leaders may have in view of the realities he describes?

Haas, Amira. *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2003. (read at least half the essays)

Haas is reporting as a Jewish Israeli about events to which most Israelis do not have immediate access.

What commitments shape her reporting and how does she get her story across?

March, Eugene. *God's Land on Loan*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

What vision does March offer for the future of discussions of the land?

*Raheb, Mitri. *Bethlehem Besieged*. Fortress Press, 2004.

How does Raheb's understanding of scripture and faith shape his understanding of the situation in Bethlehem? How would you describe his ministry?

Tull, Patricia. “When Symbols Collide: The Jewish Temple, the Christian Sepulcher, and the Islamic Shrine in Jerusalem.” (sent as email attachment and available on Blackboard site)

How has understanding of the holy places been shaped and reshaped by originating stories?

*Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Bantam, 1982.

How does Wiesel make real the dissonance between what should have been and what happened? As you read the books bearing directly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, consider what roles the Holocaust plays in the events and debates.

Other works that may be of interest

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *The Holy Land: An Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 1992

Arranged geographically, including site drawings, archaeological descriptions of primary sites in Israel. Describes many of the archeological and historical sites we will visit. A helpful guide to bring along.

Chacour, Elias. *We Belong to the Land*. HarperCollins, 1992.

Autobiography by an Arabic Melkite priest, now Bishop, in northern Israel. We have visited with him at the school he founded.

Gordis, Daniel. *Home to Stay: One American Family's Chronicle of Miracles and Struggles in Contemporary Israel*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003.

A riveting report of daily events of 1998-2002. The years from 2000-2002 were especially dangerous for Israelis and help explain some of the reasoning behind the “Security Fence.”

Levine, Lee I., ed. *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Continuum, 1999.

33 scholars consider the significance of Jerusalem for Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Moyers, Bill, PBS's Now http://www.pbs.org/now/thisweek/index_022004.html#

Watch the video (Feb, 2004) “God and Politics in the Holy Land” to learn about millennialist Christian Zionism and its close connections with Israeli settlements on the West Bank. Although they do not

believe in the same messiah, ultra-orthodox Jews in the Occupied Territories and fundamentalist Christians agree that Israel must annex these territories in order that the Messiah will come.

Murata, Sachiko, and William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. New York: Paragon House, 1994.

A comprehensive introduction to Islam, recommended by Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway.

Oz, Amos: "Fresh Air" interview, Dec 1, 2004
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4195061>
 In this interview, award-winning author Amos Oz describes life in Jerusalem as young child of European Jewish refugees. A co-founder of the Israeli human rights group Peace Now which advocates for withdrawal from the West Bank, Oz offers an insightful portrait of the Jewish ethos in Jerusalem during and after the Holocaust and the 1948 war between Jews and Arabs that led to the founding of Israel, a time period that set the course of much of subsequent history in the middle east.

Pappe, Ilan. *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Controversial professor of politics at Haifa University, historian and political commentator, Pappé tells the story of Jews and Arabs in the land from the early 1800s: "a story of coexistence and cooperation, as well as oppression, occupation, and exile."

Said, Edward. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992 (orig. publ. 1979).

Said, who died in 2003, was by birth a Palestinian who taught at Columbia University, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and Yale. A well-known cultural critic as well as literary critic, he has been an important spokesperson for and to Palestinians.

Shipler, David. *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*. Penguin Books, 2001.

A fascinating topical essay, from a journalist's standpoint, describing the images that Jews and Arabs in Israel have of one another and the roots of these images in history and cultural myth.

Weber, Timothy P. *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Western dispensationalists, seeing the formation of the State of Israel and the regaining of Jerusalem as the fulfillment of biblical endtimes prophecy, are helping fund Jewish settlements in the hope of hastening the end of history.

Websites of Interest

PBS's Now with Bill Moyers

http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_settlers.html

Interview with Israeli settlers in the West Bank and their supporters and opponents.

http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript223_full.html

Transcript of a Bill Moyers program on Israeli settlements on the West Bank.

Ha'aretz, an independent daily Israeli newsletter. English edition. <http://www.haaretz.com/>

Peace Organizations (see also sites listed on the itinerary):

Amnesty International on Israel and Palestine: <http://www.amnesty.org/results/is/eng>

B'tselem, an Israeli information center for human rights: <http://www.btselem.org/>

Christian Peacemaker Teams trains nonviolent skills in conflict situations. Here is their Hebron website

<http://www.cpt.org/hebron/hebron.php>

Churches for Middle East Peace, based in Washington, D.C., which maintains dialogue with the U.S.

government on Mideast concerns <http://www.cmep.org/>

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, an Israeli human rights group resisting the governments

demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank <http://www.icahd.org/eng/>

Jerusalem Center for Social and Economic Rights, a Palestinian human rights organization that provides

legal assistance and representation to Arab residents of Jerusalem <http://www.jcser.org/main.html>

Peace Now, a large Israeli grassroots peace movement <http://www.peacenow.org/>

The Jerusalem Center for Women <http://www.j-c-w.org/>, a Palestinian women's organization working for peace.

Women in Black <http://www.womeninblack.org/>, a worldwide network of women opposed to war, injustice, militarism, and other forms of violence. In Israel, the Women in Black hold vigils every Friday in nine locations, including Jerusalem.

Machsom (Checkpoint) Watch <http://www.machsomwatch.org/> a group of Jewish women who station themselves at checkpoints in the West Bank to monitor the behavior of Israeli soldiers toward Palestinians, and to report human rights abuses.

Rabbis for Human Rights <http://www.rhr.israel.net/> an organization of Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Jewish Rabbis dedicated to human rights in Israel and Palestine.