Jonah and Its Afterlives

Spring 2014 (2 credits)

Wednesdays 9-10:50

Instructor: Amy Erickson

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**Course Description**

This course invites students to engage the book of Jonah in conversation with works of literature, art, and theology that either interpret Jonah and/or explore questions raised the book, including the nature of God, prophecy, election, death, and transformation. The course will introduce students to the history of interpretation of Jonah in both Christian and Jewish traditions. Of particular interest will be early Christian and medieval art and Jewish midrashic texts based on Jonah. We will also explore conversations between Jonah and works of English literature and consider Jonah’s afterlives in popular culture.

**Grading**

Group leadership of class (50 minute block). 50%

During the second half of the quarter (starting in week 6), students will work in groups to lead discussion on their topic of choice (there will be 8 45-minute discussions in total). Some topics are set while others offer students some choice.

The group’s class preparation materials and individual short papers\* are due one week in advance of the class session. A brief self-evaluation is due one week after the class session.

The entire assignment is worth 50 points.

25 points max. -- 2 page paper (points will be assigned individually)

20 points max. -- class preparation materials (group grade)

5 points max. -- self evaluation (points will be assigned individually)

\*see Assignment Details

Final assignment (May 28). 20%

For the final assignment, students will make or bring an afterlife of Jonah. Students can work in groups or as individuals. They can find and present an afterlife of Jonah we have not encountered or make one of their own (a piece of art, a song, a dance, a midrash, etc). Given the class size, presentations will need to be quite brief.

Participation and Self-Evaluation. 30%

More than one unexcused absence constitutes grounds for failure

Due May 30: a brief self-evaluation of your participation (template available)

\***Assignment Details**

Students lead discussions / two topics per week: 45 min each

Group leaders will be asked to do one of the suggested readings.

**One week before** (by Wed at 1:00)

Each student should submit (upload to canvas, assignments)

-- a 2 page paper based on her/is interaction with the readings (including one of the suggested readings) and the topic. The paper might include but should not be limited to a personal response. You might conclude by articulating questions you are left contemplating

Groups should submit (upload to canvas in discussion)

1. A summary of the central issues and questions raised by the week’s reading (about a page)
2. A list of guiding questions designed to help the rest of the class navigate the assigned readings
3. A teaching agenda/outline (complete with estimated times) and teaching objective(s)
4. A list of good, engaging discussion questions
5. A brief description of any presentation they will make (Powerpoint), etc.
   1. Note: focus should be on generating good discussion as opposed to presentation
      1. I have a number of images of Jonah housed in Powerpoint presentations and will make them available to those whose topics involve art.

**One week after** (by Wed at 1:00).

A brief evaluation of the session and of the student’s individual participation in the process. List the strengths and weaknesses (bullet points are fine). Upload to canvas, assignments.

**Schedule**

**I. March 26**

**Intro to Jonah and the history of interpretation**

Read the book of Jonah in three different translations (or in Hebrew)

Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives*. 1-32, 88-97, 176-96

Read one of the following two articles. Please take some notes based on the guiding questions below. We’ll be discussing these understandings and approaches to reception history, so please come prepared to talk in some depth about the article you read.

Timothy Beal, “Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures,” *Biblical Interpretation 19* (2011) 357-372

Brennan Breed, “Nomadology of the Bible: A Processual Approach to Biblical Reception History,” *BibRecep* 1 (2012) 299-320.

According to the author, what is the best way to conceive of the task or goal of reception history? Said another way, What is the best way to determine the impact and/or reception of biblical texts over time? How does the author characterize the way scholars are ‘doing’ reception history? What problematic scholarly assumptions or misconceptions are pervasive (and why are they pervasive?)? How does the author understand the relationship between text and reception? How does he/she conceptualize (and/or problematize) the difference between a text and an interpretation?

**II. April 2.**

**Jonah 1 and Early Jewish Interpretation**

Read and annotate (with questions and observations) Jonah 1

Sherwood, 252-9, 281-92

Karin H Zetterholm, *Jewish Interpretation of the Bible*, 1-38

In what ways do rabbinic understandings of God’s word and revelation inform rabbinic interpretations of Jonah? (if rabbis see themselves as heirs to the prophets, how might their self-understanding get reflected in their readings of Jonah? Think especially about Zetterholm’s discussion of rabbinic authority on pp 30-32).

# Jacob Zallel Lauterbach’s critical edition of *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael* (JPS Classic Reissues). Introduction and Chapter 1 of Tractate Pisḥa (refs to Jonah 1). (pdf)

# Selections from theTalmud (Jerusalem and Babylonian) and Midrash.

What questions does Jonah 1 raise for the rabbis? What texts are read on conversation (intertextuality) with Jonah and why are these texts brought in (or with regard to the Mekhilta, why is Jonah relevant for debate about Exodus 12:1? What questions are raised about Exodus?)? What is the nature/range of the debate btw the rabbis? How is Jonah viewed? (who –what biblical characters- is he compared to?) How is God viewed?

Sherwood on midrash on Jon 1:3 and the nature of prophecy, 119-124

**III. April 9.**

**Jonah 2 in the NT and early Christian art**

Read Jonah in LXX. Read and annotate (with questions and observations) Jonah 2; Matt 12, 16 and Luke 11

Jensen, Robin Margaret. *Understanding Early Christian Art*. London: Routledge, 2000. 8-31.

Perkins, David N. *The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art*. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1994. 1-6, 41-41.

Kugel, James L., and Rowan A. Greer. *Early Biblical Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986. 109-17, 126-42.

**IV. April 16**

**Jonah 3: Repentance in Nineveh. Jews vs Christians**.

# Read and annotate (with questions and observations) Jonah 3

# Sherwood 117-129.

# Targum Jonah. Translation by Cathcart and Gordon (105-109)

Selections from the Talmud (Bavli and Yerushalmi)

Jewish liturgical use of Jonah (Yom Kippur).

J. B. Soloveitchik, “Two T’shuvah Lectures,” 9-17 and

Shlomo Riskin, “Yom Kippur and the Book of Jonah,” 33-36 (both in the *Yom Kippur Reader*)

Selections from Augustine.

**V. April 23**

**I. Jonah 4 and Medieval Responses**

# Read and annotate (with questions and observations) Jonah 4

Steven Bob, Go to Nineveh: Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Book of Jonah. Rashi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and David Kimchi on Jonah 4

Guillaume, Philippe. "Rhetorical Reading Redundant: A Response to Ehud Ben Zvi." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2009).

McDermott, Ryan (2013) The Ordinary Gloss on Jonah. PMLA, 128 (2). pp. 424-438.

**II.** Jonah in the Qur’an (Thomas, Julie, Chris, Marty)

Suras 10, 21, 37, 68

Ernst, Carl W. *How to Read the Qurʼan: A New Guide, with Select Translations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. Selected pages.

***Suggested***

Afsar, Ayaz. "A Discourse and Linguistic Approach to Biblical and Qur'ānic Narrative." *Islamic Studies* (2006): 493-517.

Johns, A. H. "Jonah in the Qur'an: An Essay on Thematic Counterpoint." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5.2 (2003): 48-71.

**VI. April 30**

I. the Zohar (Richard, Paul, Beverly, Nancy)

Wineman, Aryeh. *Mystic Tales from the Zohar*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997. 107-125.

Green, Arthur. *A Guide to the Zohar*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004. 3-27, 63-70, 109-115.

II. Pearl (Katie, Eric, Norman)

“Pearl”

Sarah Stanbury, “The Gawain-poet” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100–1500* Edited by Larry Scanlon Cambridge University Press pp. 139-152 (pdf)

**VII. May 7**

**I. Christian Mystics** (Isaiah, Dawn, and Barb)

St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), *The Dark Night*, Book 2, Chaps 5-7.

Poem and selection from *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila

Edward Howells, “Spanish Mysticism and Religious Renewal: Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross (16th Century, Spain).” In *Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (ed. Julia A Lamm; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 422-436.

***Suggested***

Anette Ejseng, “Jonah: The Crisis of Divine Deliverance” on St John of the Cross.

Suggested. Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Metamorphosis and identity*. New York: Zone books, 2001.

**II.** **Medieval Art** (RuthAnn, David, Sarah)

W. J. T Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 5-11, 27-56.

Alexandra Horowitz, *On Looking: A Walker’s Guide to the Art of Observation*, 1-16

Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” and Johnson, “Thoughts on Utopia”

***Suggested***

*Reader-Response Criticism*, ed Jane Tompkins 50-68

Camille, Michael. *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Eco, Umberto. *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Viii-x, 4-16, 52-64.

**VIII. May 14** *(meet until 11:30??)*

**I.** **Music** (Natalie, Nathan, Joey)

**II. Children’s Materials** (Amy, Allison B, Brenda)

**III. Popular Culture** (Alison W, Spencer, John)

**IX. May 21**

Make-your-own-afterlife: art, music, drama, dance, midrash, homily. Or bring one we haven’t encountered.

To consider: What is this interpretation trying to make happen in its own time / specific context? What other interpretations (or ideas/philosophies) is it reacting to?