*En ego tempestas, ego tota insania mundi,* Behold I am the tempest, I am all the madness of the world

*In me, inquit, vobis aether ruit et mare surgit* In me, he says, upper air rushes down and sea rises up

*In me terra procul, mors proxima, nulla dei spes* In me earth is far, death is near, hope of God is none.

- Pseudo-Tertullian, *Carmen de Iona Propheta*

A picture containing old, ceramic ware, porcelain

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The Bible and Its Afterlives: Jonah

TXT-DEPTH / 3000 level, 2 credits

Thursday 1-4:30 (March 31-April 28)

Instructor: Amy Erickson

Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible

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**Course Description**

This course invites students to place the biblical book of Jonah in conversation with works of literature, art, and theology that interpret Jonah or explore themes in the book, including the nature of God, prophecy, election, death, and transformation. The course will introduce students to the history of interpretation (or reception history) by considering Jonah’s afterlives in a variety of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts, artistic programs, and manuscript illuminations.

**Objectives**

1. to help students acquire proficiency in the interpretation of biblical texts
2. to expand students’ imaginations about how biblical texts might speak to different communities in different times and places
   * perhaps learning from pre-modern and creative readers will facilitate an “escape from what has become for many people the prison house of modernism and historical criticism” (Dale Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible*, 47)
3. to empower students to explore and unleash a biblical book’s latent or virtual potentials by studying its afterlives
4. to facilitate student engagement in interdisciplinary learning

**Degree Learning Goals: Sacred Texts (TX)**

1) demonstrate an informed understanding of sacred texts as historically-situated;

2) utilize various methodologies for responsible interpretation of these texts to contemporary audiences

**Course Learning Outcomes**

After taking this class, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the ways Jonah functions as a meta-prophetic text. **DLG 1, 2**
2. Demonstrate an awareness of the social-historical-imperial background and the literary artistry of the book. **DLG 1, 2**
3. Speak knowledgeably about how Jonah came to be interpreted in a variety of ways in different religious and cultural traditions. **DLG 1, 2**
4. Connect themes in the biblical text and its afterlives to things they find important. **DLG 2**
5. Write academic papers with increased ability to formulate a claim and support it with apt textual evidence and with an awareness of the methodological decisions they are making. **DLG 1, 2**

**Attendance Policy**:I will not formally take attendance, but I expect students to attend all class sessions.

**Evaluation**

**Class participation** (20%**)** In preparation for class discussions, students will prepare detailed notes and questions on the assigned primary texts as well as on the secondary readings.

**Short Presentation and Discussion Leadership on Jonah in Art and Popular Culture** (30%). Sign up for Week 2, 3, or 4.

* art and popular culture need not be limited to contemporary popular culture
* how has the historical and social context of the interpreter has shaped the interpretation?
* which latent or explicit elements in the text does the popular interpretation amplify, minimize, expand on, etc.?
* what is the relevance of this interpretation for you and/or your communities (to be raised in discussion)

**~~Final Paper~~** ~~(4-6 pages; 50%) on one of Jonah’s afterlives and how it connects to or even arose from a particular detail, theme, or image in the book of Jonah. I expect your bibliography to include at least 2 monographs and 2-3 scholarly articles. Late papers will be graded down one full letter grade for each 24-hour period they are late.~~ (no paper for 2 cr version of this class)

**Books**

Gregg, R. C. *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. New York: Oxford, 2015.

For reference and for paper ideas, you might take a look at: Erickson, Amy. *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary.* Illuminations Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2021.

Also suggested is: Sherwood, Yvonne. *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

**Schedule**

**Week 1: March 31**

**Jonah 1 and Early Jewish Interpretation**

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

Read the book of Jonah in three different translations (or in Hebrew). Annotate (with questions and observations) Jonah 1.

Primary Texts

# 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 other early Jewish texts. (PDF)

Hare, D. R. A. *The Lives of the Prophets.* In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*: *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*. Ed. J. Charlesworth. New York: Doubleday, 1985. 379-400.

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?

Secondary Readings

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

Gregg, R. C. *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. New York: Oxford, 2015, Chapter 10.

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).

**Class 2: April 7**

**Jonah 2 in the NT and Early Christian Writings and Art**

Primary Texts

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

Read the primary texts:

Matt 12, 16; Luke 11

Excerpts from Origen, Irenaeus, Jerome, Augustine

- Origen, Comm. Matt 16 ([*in Book 7 (Links to an external site.)*](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/101612.htm)); [Against Celsus  (Links to an external site.)](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04167.htm)7.53, 57

- Irenaeus, Against Heresies [3.20 (Links to an external site.)](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103320.htm); [5.1; 5.5.2 (Links to an external site.)](https://carm.org/irenaeus-heresies5-1-18); [5:31 (Links to an external site.)](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103531.htm)

- [Augustine, Letter 102 (Links to an external site.)](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102102.htm) (focus on Question VI, 30-38)

- [Jerome, Comm. Jon 2](http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2016/09/saint-jeromes-commentary-on-book-of_23.html)

*Letter of 1 Clement*

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

Gregg, Chapter 11

Adam, A. K. M. "The Sign of Jonah: A Fish-Eye View." *Semeia* 51 (1990) 177-91.

**Class 3: April 14**

**Jonah in Jewish Liturgy and Midrashim**

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

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

*Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer* 10(translation from Adelman)

~~Bruns, G. L. “The Hermeneutics of Midrash.” In~~*~~Hermeneutics, Ancient and Modern~~*~~. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. 104-123.~~ Steven Daniel Sacks, [*Midrash and Multiplicity*](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/2271976/files/121552477/download?wrap=1) *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Renewal of Rabbinic Interpretive Culture*(de Gruyter 2009), chap 1.

Ego, Beate. "The Repentance of Nineveh in the Story of Jonah and Nahum’s Prophecy of the City’s Destruction-A Coherent Reading of the Book of the Twelve as Reflected in the Aggada." In *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve,* ed. P. Redditt and A. Schart. Walter de Gruyter, 2003, 155-164.

Tigay, Jeffrey. “The Book of Jonah and the Days of Awe.” *Conservative Judaism* 38 (Winter 1985–86) 67–76.

Do your best to read some of: Adelman, R. *Return of the Repressed:* *Pirqe De-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. 3-41, 219-268 (Ch 11)

**Class 4: April 21**

**Jonah 4 and Islam’s Yunus**

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

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

Qur’an. Suras 10, 21, 37, 68

Gregg, Chapter 12 (Islam’s Yunus)

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

Afsar, A. "A Comparative Study of the Art of Jonah/Yūnus Narrative in the Bible and the Qur'ān." *Islamic Studies* 48/3 (2009) 319-339.

**Class 5: April 28**

Draft of Final Paper Due

No residential class (Gathering Days): Canvas discussion of rough drafts