

Preaching Jonah



MCMaster DIVINITY COLLEGE
Fall 2023

Instructor

August H. Konkell, **Affiliate** Professor of Old Testament (Ph.D.)

konkella@mcmaster.ca; 905 525 9140 x 23505

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/faculty-and-administration/august-h-konkel/>

Course Designation

OT 3XJ3

Course Specializations

Biblical Studies

Pastoral Studies

Recommended texts and the final assignment are dependent on the choice of major. These are to facilitate the goals of the respective program.

Course Schedule

Format: classes will be in person and livestream

Time: Monday 9:00 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.

Dates: September 11 – December 4

No Class: October 9 (Thanksgiving Day / Reading Week)

Course Description

Why is there a book of Jonah, and what should it do for you when you read it? Jonah is unique among prophetic books. It is a book about a prophet rather than the message God has given the prophet; only a few of Jonah's own words are recorded, and most of these are his objections to the results of preaching in Nineveh. In the historical notice of Jonah in kings, unlike other prophets, Jonah has positive words for an idolatrous king. In the book, Jonah is reluctant to declare the message he has been given.

This course will probe the intentions and purpose of the author of this prophetic composition, his method of accomplishing his goals, and how ministers can further these goals in preaching. Though a very short book, it provokes a lot of questions about prophecy, about justice and forgiveness, and the way God deals with his people. It is a deceptively simple narrative; the more it is probed, the more profound it becomes.

Course Objectives

Knowing

- Become familiar with the text of Jonah, including translation (exegetical) questions.
- Understand Jonah in relation to the latter prophets and the scroll of the twelve.
- Appreciate diverse perspectives of literary analysis of Jonah in Jewish and Christian traditions.
- Become familiar with interpretations of Jonah from pre-Christian times to the present.

Being

- Becoming Christ-like in forgiving others because they know not what they do.
- Responding to injustice and wrong without hate and a quest for revenge.
- Practicing love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us (Eph. 5:2).
- Dealing with anger in a mature and responsible manner.

Doing

- Preach and teach Jonah to challenge vengeful attitudes and inspire Christian perspectives.
- Correct false emphases on what is important in the book of Jonah.
- Demonstrate forgiveness with help from examples like those of Sokreaksa Himm (see below).

Course Texts

Required Texts

Kevin J. Youngblood. *Jonah, God's Scandalous Mercy*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament 28. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.

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Ehud Ben Zvi. *The Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*. JSOTSup 367. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003.

Biblical Studies Specialization

Susan Niditch. *Jonah: A Commentary*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2023.

Pastoral Studies Specialization

Janet Howe Gaines. *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah's Dilemma*. Atlanta/Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature/Brill, 2003.

Course Topics

September 11

Introduction to Prophecy and the Scroll of the Twelve (The Minor Prophets)

September 18

Textual History of Jonah (Masoretic, Qumran, Septuagint)
Jonah Among the Twelve Prophets

September 25

Historical Jonah and Jonah the Hebrew

October 2

The Book of Jonah (Genre, Purpose, Function)

October 16

Jonah at Sea (Jonah 1:1–2:1)

October 23

Prayer of Jonah (Jonah 2:2–11)

October 30

What is evil? (Jonah 3:1–4:3)

November 6

Is it Good for You to be Angry? (Jonah 4:4–11)

November 13

Theology of Mercy and Judgment (Jonah 4:2, Ex. 34:6; Ps. 103:8)

November 20

Practice of Forgiveness (Story of Sokreaksa Himm)

Himm was left for dead with his family in a mass grave in the Cambodian killing fields in 1975; he went back to forgive his killers, begin a school, and a church. More recently he visited the scene of the grave. His book is called *After the Heavy Rain*. If possible, he will join in person for this session to tell his story.

November 27

Jonah and Jesus: The Sign of Jonah

December 4

Jonah and the Church

Course Assignments and Grading.

1. Discussion questions posted on Avenue to Learn (20%)

The following are sample topics that might serve for threads of discussion that will lead off each week. Others will be added as issues are brought up in discussions that take place during class times. Students are required to initiate threads as well as respond to them. Students may introduce new topics. Interaction with the discussion is expected each week. The requirement is that each student initiate at least six threads over the semester and that there be at least one response each week.

- a. Literary Genre of Jonah
- b. Mercy and Justice
- c. Jonah and the Day of the Lord

2. Jonah as a Prophet (1000–1500 words, due Sept. 25, 20%)

Jonah the prophet preached restoration to Jeroboam in 2 Kings 14:25–27, who by prophetic standards was as wicked as any of the kings of Assyria, but Jonah in the prophetic book preached judgment against Nineveh. The book of Jonah would be read with reference to the historical Jonah. Describe the times of the historical Jonah and what other prophets had to say about those times. Evaluate how knowledge of this background impacts a reading of the book.

3. Genre and Intent of Jonah (2000 words, due Oct. 30, 25%)

Ehud Ben Zvi believes the book of Jonah was written by literati of Jerusalem in the Persian period as a means of discussing their concept of God and related questions. This discussion also reveals a lot about them, not just what they might have thought about other groups. Evaluate Ben Zvi's analysis of Jonah and defend your own position the genre of Jonah and the purpose of the composition.

4. Research Papers (2500 words, due Nov. 27, 35%)

a. *Pastoral Studies Major*

Forgiveness is a discounted value in a world obsessed with political correctness. Every pastor needs to have a biblical theology of forgiveness. Can one forgive those that think they have done no wrong? How does one forgive an abuser and terminate the abuse? How does one forgive wrongs of the past committed collectively?

Janet Howe Gaines focuses on the lessons Jonah has for the importance of forgiveness. Evaluate the way in which Gaines develops the topic of forgiveness in the book of Jonah. From your own research of Jonah, in connection with other scriptures including the New Testament, explain how you would address the complex questions of forgiveness using the message of the book of Jonah.

This paper should be an example of practice led research. Everyone has experience in dealing with wrongs. Research the topic of forgiveness to explain how a pastor or teacher can deal with the question of forgiveness in the various ways it must be exercised.

b. *Biblical Studies Major*

Using the commentaries of Niditch and Youngblood, develop a theology of Jonah in which you defend what you believe to be the message of the book for the contemporary reader. This research must include a theology of the justice and mercy of God as understood by the author of Jonah and the way other scriptures are alluded to in developing this theology.

Summary of Assignments

1. Weekly discussion on Avenue to Learn, 20%.
2. Jonah as a prophet, Sept. 25, 20%.
3. Genre and Intent of Jonah, Oct. 30, 25%.
4. Research paper, Nov. 27, 35%.

Course Policies

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Bookstore

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

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