

MIN 790. The Ecology of Faith: An Agrarian Tour of the Holy Land

Instructors: Fred Bahnson and Neal Walls
Spring or Summer I, 2014 (with travel to Israel)

Required Texts

Fred Bahnson & Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace With the Land* (InterVarsity, 2012)
Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 2nd ed. (Polity, 2008)
Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (Cambridge, 2009)
P. King and L. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Westminster, 2001)
Jerusalem, Israel, Petra, and Sinai (Eyewitness Travel Guides) (DK Publishing, 2010)

Recommended Texts

Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron-Age Israel* (Eisenbrauns, 1987)
Daniel Hillel, *Natural History of the Bible* (Columbia, 2006)
Daniel Hillel, *Rivers of Eden: The Struggle for Water...* (Oxford, 1994)
Sandy Tolan, *The Lemon Tree* (Bloomsbury, 2007)
Norman Wirzba, *Food & Faith: A Theology of Eating* (Cambridge, 2011)

Course Goals

Through textual study and first-hand experience in Israel and the West Bank, students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of (1) the agrarian practices of ancient Israel/Palestine; (2) the theological significance of food production and consumption within the Bible; (3) sustainable agricultural and farming practices in modern Israel; and (4) the continuing theological problems of food production, distribution, and consumption in contemporary communities.

Course Description

Class discussions and travel experiences will focus on agrarian practices and thought in both ancient and contemporary Israel/Palestine. We will begin with a consideration of the physical environment, ecology, and weather patterns of the region before turning to the agricultural practices of the Iron Age through Roman periods. Topics will include ancient agrarian practices, animal husbandry, viticulture, land ownership, and labor relations. We will then turn to the “meaning of food” in the Bible and later Jewish traditions. This section considers the agrarian context and content of stories in Genesis, Ruth, and the parables of Jesus, as well as of levitical laws, prophetic oracles, and various New Testament texts. We will examine the practice and theology of meals and table fellowship in the Bible. We will continue to examine the traditions of food production and consumption in post-biblical Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities, with particular attention to the Jewish *kashrut* system. The third section of our class will examine foodways and sustainable agricultural practices in contemporary Israel/Palestine, with particular attention to the twentieth-century *kibbutz* movement, agricultural innovations for semi-arid regions, and the recent move toward sustainable agricultural practices like permaculture. We will also consider the contentious issues of land ownership and water rights. The class will conclude with theological reflection on current Jewish and Christian perspectives on the spirituality of food and efforts to create more just, sustainable food economies in our own societies.

Travel Plans

Much of our two-week trip will follow the normal itinerary of a Christian pilgrimage, with tours of Nazareth, Capernaum, Tabgha, Caesarea Philippi, Yardenit, Jericho, Bethlehem, and the Jerusalem area, as well as the archaeological highlights of Megiddo, Qumran, Masada, and Caesarea Maritime. We will visit important Jewish, Christian, and Muslim holy sites and we will worship with Arab Christians.

The particular focus of this agrarian pilgrimage, however, will allow us to explore rural corners of Israel to seek out olive groves, vineyards, bee keepers, and farming communities. In addition to some

historical (Degania, Yif'at) and contemporary *kibbutzim* (Zionist collectivist farms) and *moshavim* (cooperative agricultural communities), we will explore grass-roots efforts at peacemaking through ecological projects. One significant institute for our study will be the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (<http://www.arava.org/>) in Israel's southern desert region (the Negev). This innovative institute uses environmental studies as a form of peacemaking by including Israeli, Palestinian, and international students in its programs. Another potential site is the "Tent of Nations: Educational and Environmental Farm" (www.tentofnations.org/) outside of Bethlehem, run by Daoud Nassar in peaceful defiance of Israeli attempts to remove the family from its ancestral land. Other possible site visits might include the new Heaven's Field Organic Farm (<http://www.indiegogo.com/p/95349>), where "Israelis and Palestinians create a cooperative organic farm in the West Bank, nurturing the land and neighborly relations."

Our two-week trip will begin in the Galilee, move to Jerusalem, and conclude in the Negev desert. Non-credit participants may choose to return home after nine days of touring, while students will spend the final days of the trip in a community engagement (or service-learning) project, perhaps at the Arava Institute. We will thus be able to experience the lush northern ecology around Banias in the Upper Galilee, the Mediterranean coastal region, the semi-arid regions of Judea, and the desert landscapes of the Dead Sea and Arava as we explore the ecological and agricultural contexts of ancient and contemporary Israel.

Course Requirements

Students are required to attend daily site visits and discussions during our travels in Israel. We will also hold four or five class meetings after our return, as well as two evening gatherings (see below). Active participation in the events of the trip and these meetings will constitute one-third of each student's final grade.

Students must keep pilgrimage journals with the equivalent of 20 single-spaced, typed pages of reflections on their experiences and thoughts during our travels. This academic journal should incorporate critical reflection on the course readings and travel experiences. The journal will constitute one-third of the course grade.

The final requirement for the class (one-third of the grade) will be met by three 5-page (double-spaced) papers on course-related topics, or equivalent projects (with the instructor's permission). These papers should demonstrate a critical, intellectual engagement with the themes or particular topics of the course as discussed in our post-trip seminar meetings.

All assignments must be completed in accordance with the University's Honor Code. Students with disabilities that require special accommodations need to contact the Learning Center (758-5929) and make arrangements with the professor during the first two weeks of classes.

Post-trip Seminar Topics

First Meeting

Physical Environment: Ecology, Land, and Weather
Ancient Foodways: Agriculture and Food Production and Consumption
 Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
 Sown, grown, and harvested
 "Milk and Honey": Animal Products
 The Fatted Calf: Meat Production and Consumption
 Water, wine, and beer
 Land ownership and labor practices
Eating Together (and apart): Meals

Second Meeting

The Meaning of Food: Keeping Kosher (or Not)
Jewish Food traditions: Biblical, Rabbinic, and Modern
 Stories: Genesis, Ruth, Parables
 Levitical Laws (e.g., *kashrut*, Sabbatical years, Jubilee, workers' rights)
 Prophetic Texts
 Rabbinic Perspectives
Hellenistic Christians: Gentiles in the New Testament

Third Meeting

Contemporary Foodways and Sustainable Practices
 Kibbutz Movement: "Making the desert bloom"
 Modern Agriculture, Viticulture, Animal Products, etc
 Land ownership and Water rights

Fourth meeting

The Theology of Food: Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Sustainable Food Systems