



# Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

## كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

March 2019

### Lessons from Ecclesiastes and Babylonian Exile: Two of Our Elective Courses

*We are the light of the world. These words were not meant to be a pat on the back. They should not be a cause for comfort, but rather, they should move us to great discomfort and then, action. Discomfort comes from the awareness that our world is filled with brokenness and restless souls. The good news is that Christ called His Church to action. As part of their transformation, our students share their concern for their societies and their desire to be agents of change. Certainly, the courses we offer play a significant role in that transformation. Our students recently took a number of elective courses that touch on several areas of ministry, both practically and intellectually. Below, we give you an overview of two courses, namely Ministry Among Exiles and Teaching Ecclesiastes.*

#### **Ministry Among Exiles** *Taught by Brian and Sharlene Craig*

How can we be effective leaders in personal, congregational, societal and regional change? Transitions can be disruptive and difficult, but they are a ripe field for God's work. The Bible records a period of Exile for God's people to Babylon (7<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century BC). This course draws insights from the experience of God's people during exile in order to minister in today's "exile" times.

Brian, who has been "pastor to 350 pastors" with Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, and currently teaches at Tyndale seminary, shares, "Growing out of my doctoral studies, I became really fascinated with the biblical literature of the exile as the people of God were taken to Babylon. [...] The course is a combination of studying the biblical literature of that period and applying it when ministering to people in those times. Sharlene, particularly, is bringing insights from her social work

background. What are some of the skills, the techniques, the approaches to this issue? What does the biblical voice bring? What are some of the things other disciplines can add to it?"

Sharlene has years of experience as the Director of Human Resources and Member Care at Canadian Baptist Ministries. Currently, she is focusing on member care. She says from a social work



perspective, "Given some of the themes in *Ministry Among Exiles*, we talked about

understanding grief and depression. We strove to reach the understanding of the emotional and physical impacts of trauma and then find strategies to

minister to the traumatized." Brian adds from a biblical approach, "The biblical literature describes the experiences of exiles – of being taken away from home. What are the songs they needed to learn when they got in exile? They had to learn to sing their laments. They had to learn how to sing assurance. Particularly for us in ministry, God sent people like Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel. What do they teach us about leading the people?"

Sharlene, who is teaching at ABTS for the first time, says, "The eagerness of the students impresses me. They are always taking notes and participating. I admire their determination and commitment to be here. Hearing their stories gives me a lot of respect and inspiration."

Our student Rafed from Syria says,

"The course reflects our reality. My family and I lost everything in the Syrian war. We had to flee our country and to live here as



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exiles. We reflected on our past through a theological lens. Looking back at all we had lost was painful, but it certainly helped us to move on. The course will also enrich our ministry among Syrians in Lebanon. It offered us tools to help refugees heal. Helping them stop blaming God is one example.”



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### Teaching Ecclesiastes *Taught by Perry Shaw*

Our mission is to serve the Church in our region as it realizes its Biblical mission of having Christ acknowledged as Lord. Many churches in the region need to make their teaching more relevant to the felt needs of the congregation so that they can accomplish this mission. This course offers students practical skills to develop curricula that focus on the learner and encourages transformational learning. The book of Ecclesiastes is significant to all generations because it wrestles with basic life issues and seeks to respond wisely. This course focuses on applying the principles covered in *The Art of Teaching* course.

Perry Shaw, our Professor of Education, describes his experience teaching the course,

“In the course *Teaching Ecclesiastes*, we worked together as a class to produce a series of home Bible study lessons on this little-studied book. Each student was responsible for a lesson, but a partner was appointed to have a first look at the lesson. We then field-tested each lesson, with numerous suggestions for ways to strengthen the lessons. The final lessons were collected into a booklet to be made available for use in the churches. We learned together at multiple levels, we came to a far deeper understanding of the book of Ecclesiastes, students’ ability in lesson planning was greatly strengthened, students gained experience in leading small group Bible studies, and all of us learned more about how to work together for a shared goal. It was an outstanding time of learning together.”

Student Abu Kindy from Sudan says,

“This course showed us an unconventional teaching method that depends on learning. Our professor gave us his teaching material and divided us into groups. We then had to deliver the material as he watched. Everyone was participating, expressing their opinions and studying God’s word. This method will be useful for Bible studies, discipling young adults and so on. The book of Ecclesiastes contains a list of impossibilities but are then resolved in the key answer: the fear of God, a wisdom that exceeds all earthly wisdom.”

Student Awad from South Sudan says,

“I got to study chapter three of Ecclesiastes; it was an enriching experience. In all, the book highlights the fact that life is full of toil, but one thing matters in the end: to ‘[f]ear God and keep his commandments’ (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We also applied what we had studied about teaching God’s Word. For instance, we learned how to phrase our questions. Most importantly, when teaching God’s Word, we should not overwhelm people with information without giving them the chance to learn by themselves.”

Student Abeer from Sudan says,

“When you start reading Ecclesiastes, you get the feeling that it has a pessimistic view of life until the solution comes up in chapter 12, verse 13. It taught me to walk according to God’s will. I focused on the topic of ‘toil under the sun’ and the importance of rest in our busy lives. I learned how to use a case study to illustrate the biblical passage I am trying to teach.”

***Pray for our students as they minister to those in pain, as many of them have their own pain too. Pray for God to strengthen them as well as the ones they are caring for. Pray that they, too, find what helps them to identify God’s work in their lives so that they become effective ministers.***



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## The Story and Future of a Building: Serving Servants as They Are Being Equipped

The Family building at ABTS has stood tall since the 1960s. Primarily, it served as a home for hundreds of students who were trained for ministry around the Arab world. It also served as a temporary accommodation for thousands of church members who attended summer conferences held at our premises. It housed missionaries who traveled overseas following God’s calling. It stood tall even during the Lebanese Civil War, bearing marks from shrapnel of artillery shells. The Family building served as a host for countless memories for generations of children and adults. New students fondly share that they occupy the same rooms that once were home to Emad and Walid, who are current ABTS faculty. The building has already been renovated twice, and after many years of service, the building’s time is coming to an end. For a few years, we have been looking for the opportunity to replace it since it is beyond repair. Well, God has a perfect timing for everything. This past year, one of our partners gave us enough momentum to start with the project. Soon afterwards, we received a pledge that would bring the total to around 70% of the cost for the building. Indeed, it was a confirmation that now is the time.

The first step was inviting [EMI](#), an engineering ministry, to send us a team to help with the designing process. Although their schedule was already full, they were surprisingly able to accommodate our hopes of breaking ground in July by sending a team to start the process this past February. Talk about God’s providence! The team was made up of four professional architects and engineers, including two who took time off from their own work to come and serve God through this project. They spent more than a week understanding the ministry and



**For more information about the finances of the building contact Development and Partner Relations Manager, [Loulwa El Maalouf](mailto:information@abtslebanon.org), at [information@abtslebanon.org](mailto:information@abtslebanon.org)**

preparing the architectural design. Members of the ABTS community and our local engineer were closely walking alongside them to provide input, continuously reviewing the design. After long hours of dedication, revision and hard work, the final day came when they presented the work on February 25<sup>th</sup> to ABTS leadership, board members and invitees. The new building will primarily have living units for students and their families, a main kitchen, a dining area, several lounges, a day care area, and storage areas. Currently, we are working on getting all the required permits hoping to start excavation this July.

The students will continue to live in the current building until the new building is complete. As with every project, we know that if it is not God’s work then it is all in vain. We pray that He may be glorified through the plans, the process, the building and the future of our campus.



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## Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Second-Year Students

### Abeer | Sudan

Please pray for strength and focus as I continue my theological training this year.

### Abu Kindy | Sudan

I ask you to pray for Sudan and for my wife and kids there. Please pray that God would keep them unharmed while I am away. Please pray for my ministry in Sudan too.

### Awad | South Sudan

Please pray that the Lord would continue to prepare the field for ministry in South Sudan. Pray also that the Lord would also send me a life partner who has a heart for ministry.

### Awney | Egypt

I ask you to pray that God would show me where to start after I graduate and return to serve in my country.

### Eilia | Sudan

The situation of churches in Sudan is always on my mind, so I ask you to pray for that. An ABTS Sudanese graduate and I started a school back home to teach kids about their Christian faith. Please pray for the teachers and the students. Please pray for my ministry at the school in summer too. I also will get engaged during that time by God's grace.

### Hamed | Sudan

Please pray for my time of study in Lebanon that the Lord would grant me the wisdom to press on till the end. Also, pray for Sudan and its people, who are still demonstrating in the streets.

### Hiba | Syria

I ask you to pray that God would guide us all throughout this academic journey. Please pray for my husband [Rafed] and kids, and pray for me that I would be able to finish all my assignments.

### John | Egypt

Please pray that the Lord would place me where He wants me to

be after I graduate, and please pray that the Lord would give me wisdom when the time comes for finding a life partner.

### Student | Egypt

Please pray that my next visit to Egypt will be a chance to apply what I learned here even more. Pray that I might be able to serve among the people, but also pray that I will not get caught up in the busyness of service and forget to spend time with my family.

### Nabou | Syria

I ask you to pray for me to complete my theological education and to spend my life serving Him.

### Rafed | Syria

I ask you to pray for our future as a family as we serve the Lord together. Pray for peace in our country and that the Lord may use us powerfully and lead us where He wants us to be.

### Waheed | Sudan

Please pray for the unstable situation in Sudan. Whenever I think of it, I am at a loss, and my vision becomes blurred. I think of the negative ways the economic situation will affect the ministry and the living conditions. People are tired, and they refuse to remain silent despite the dire consequences they might face. Many, on the other hand, are selling their belongings and leaving the country for good. In these circumstances, I ask you to pray for the country and my future ministry there.

Additionally, we ask you to lift up two of our first-year students in prayer. Both are ill and consequently had to miss a few classes. Pray for the Lord to heal and sustain them.

Also, one of our colleagues recently had back surgery, and she is passing through a lot of physical pain. Please pray for her healing process.

Finally, please pray for two of our Syrian students who were not able to join us this year due to visa issues. They are currently facing a challenging situation.

### Middle East Consultation 2019

Thinking Biblically about Muslims, Muhammad, and the Qur'an: Practical Implications for the Church Today

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