

# Arab Baptist Theological Seminary كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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## “I Will Show You the Most Excellent Way”

*A Look at Continuing Students' Electives*

How desperately the world needs those who point to a better way. The prevalent worldview is to fend for oneself, self-interest above all else, to stay alert and trust no one, and if the need arises, to bend the rules. How numerous the cycles of hurt, the colossal destruction, humanity could have avoided had we let go of fear and genuinely sought to love others.

From January 6 to March 14, our continuing Bachelor of Theology students took electives that showed them practical ways in which they can encourage healing among the people they serve. These electives were *Reading the Book of Jonah in an Islamic Context*, *Family in the Middle East*, and *Christianity and Islam Beyond Conflict*.

### Reading the Book of Jonah in an Islamic Context Taught by Emad Botros, Assistant Professor of Old Testament

This elective encouraged students to build bridges with people from other traditions in the Middle East and North Africa and to listen to their thoughts on the story of Jonah. In order to achieve this, students were asked to read the book of Jonah with a Muslim friend, as Jonah appears in the Qur'an as Yūnus.

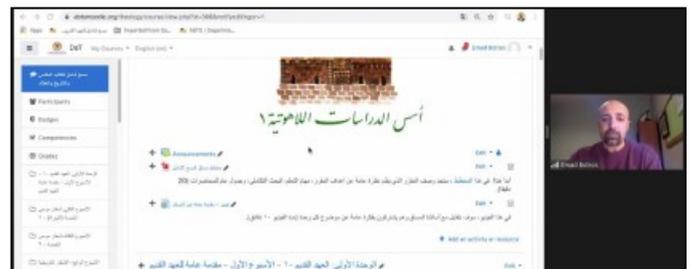
At first, students were worried about how their Muslim friends would react to such a request. They, however, were surprised by the respectful and welcoming attitude of their Muslim friends, and they were very appreciative of such an opportunity. As students accomplished this task, many reported that, “We are now planning to dedicate more time to reading the Bible with our Muslim friends where we can carefully listen and attend to their questions.”

### Read the story of one of our students, Zineb from Morocco.



The course also helped students respond to injustice within the MENA region with the compassion and love of Christ rather than the anger of Jonah. Emad Botros shared,

The majority of students expressed how they personally experienced injustice. Sudanese students expressed how the civil war resulted in the killing of many of Christians and the confiscation of church property. Lebanese students expressed how they experienced injustice at the hands of the Syrian Regime during its occupation of Lebanon. Non-Christian background students expressed how they experienced injustice when their families and communities persecuted them because of their faith.



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The story of Jonah challenged students to replace their angry attitude towards those who practiced injustice with a compassionate, loving attitude. They came to see those who hurt them as created in the image of God regardless of their religion and ethnicity. This helped them see the hurt someone caused them as the result of the unfamiliarity with God's word, rather than the result of people's religion and ethnicity.

For instance, third-year student, Al-Sadig from Sudan shared,

I have applied this course practically through interviewing a Muslim Sheikh who is popular in my neighborhood. He allowed me to visit his home, and I spent a delightful time conversing about the Qur'anic book of Yūnus and comparing it to the book of Jonah in the Bible. This meeting made me realize that the prejudice we had about Muslims not accepting fruitful, constructive dialogue was wrong. We just need to find some common ground for a starting point.

### Family in the Middle East

*Taught by Smyrna Khalaf Moughabghab, Assistant Professor of Marriage and Family Counseling*



The family unit is given much importance in the Bible and in Christian tradition. The Church is often referred to as a family. But how do we understand the role of a family in our contemporary context? If the Arab Church is meant to effectively respond to the needs of parents and children, it needs to understand the various experiences and dynamics of families in our region today.

Smyrna shared, "The *Family in the Middle East* course is significant for students because it helps them think through the different needs of the family in its different stages (marriage, parenting as children grow into adolescents, launching adult children, and then, retirement or senior years). This leads them to understand people better when offering marital counsel or within church ministries. Then they can help families through creating programs or ministries that target specific needs of each life stage."

"I enjoyed interacting with the students during our Zoom sessions, especially our continuing students who were initially part of the traditional in-class residential program. I felt that connecting with them in a synchronous session affected them positively, and they seemed to be looking forward to our next meeting."

Susanna and her husband Yousif are actively serving God through their local church in Khartoum, Bahri. Susanna shared that the *Family in the Middle East* elective really helped her in her ministry. She said,

The course helped me offer wise counsel to married couples, with a focus on raising children. I know parents in Sudan who neglect their children or fail to spend quality time with them. Many parents fight in front of their children with varying degrees of intensity showing no respect to each other. When they grow up, the children will walk in their parents' footsteps. I want to help parents be role models for their children, especially as my husband and I start visiting married couples.

### Christianity and Islam Beyond Conflict

*Taught by Martin Accad, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies*

The history of Christian and Muslim relations is tainted with misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the other. The elective aims to build a better future between Christians and Muslims through a fresh comparison between the basic doctrines of both religions based on a more faithful interpretation of sacred texts. Martin shared,



This course helps students understand the Qur'anic and historical background of theological arguments between Christians and Muslims. When we understand the "story" of a theological argument, it becomes less intimidating emotionally and intellectually, and we are able to identify new potential paths to come out of conversational deadlocks. In addition, students acquire a more

comprehensive grasp of how a holistic approach to mission can combine dialogue and witness in the context of Islam.

I enjoyed seeing how students grew in their understanding of the history of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, leading them to greater openness and desire for dialogical engagement with their Muslim neighbors. What stood out for me was that when student attitudes changed toward Muslims, this freed up their creative ability to begin imagining new approaches to witness in the context of our region.

Yaser from Syria is a believer from a non-Christian background who serves his people through his local church in the Chouf District of Lebanon. He shared,

This elective is quite relevant for my daily ministry with Muslims, whether in presenting sound tools for dialogue or for understanding the other. For my final project, a Muslim and I had a conversation about the narrative in the



Quran in both the Meccan (pre-*hijra*) and Madinah (post-*hijra*) periods of the prophet Mohamad's life. We spoke about the difference in narrative styles – the lenient, easy-going style during the Meccan period compared to the more military, political style during the Madinah period.

**Please pray for our continuing students as they are being shaped during their training at ABTS to be peacemakers and effective witnesses for Christ in each of their different communities across the Arab world.**

## Building a Culture of Peacemaking at ABTS

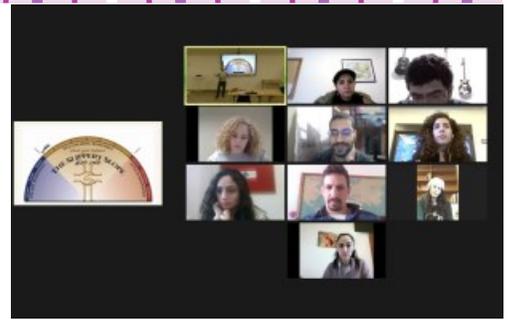
“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Over the past year, with our commitment to our [new strategic direction](#), our approach to ministry at ABTS has changed, and with it our approach to peacemaking. In February, our Dean of Faculty Bassem Melki shared [about our new approach to peacemaking](#), saying that,

the kingdom of God is the kingdom of peace. God is a peace-loving God, and a peacemaking God... God's children ought to have the character of their Father... That is why, at ABTS, we want to challenge our students, faculty, staff, leadership, board, and partners, to walk the talk. Every member at ABTS becomes a peacemaker.

Peacemaking, then, begins between us before it extends outwards. This is why, since January 21, Bassem has been facilitating biweekly sessions on peacemaking for ABTS staff members. During these sessions, we explore what causes conflict, its different aspects and how they impact us, what the Bible has to say, and how we can begin to build a culture of peacemaking between each other before practicing it in our communities. The five sessions we have held so far are informed by a year-long action research project carried out in collaboration with a team of fourteen Lebanese Evangelical leaders. These leaders shared openly about their experiences with conflict resolution and contributed actively to the development of a new theory of peacemaking and reconciliation that is contextual to the needs of the Arab Church.

Held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, Bassem carried out the latest session from our new multimedia Zoom Room that our partners helped us set up for use as a smart classroom, offering a seamless educational experience for students and teachers at ABTS and abroad. During the session, Bassem asked each of us to select one conflict that we had individually gone through and that still impacted us. He then guided us through a practical unpacking of what made up each conflict and helped us work towards internal reconciliation. “Time will not heal unresolved conflicts,” he shared, “our humble prayer is to go beyond confession to repentance and reconciliation so that together we might grow as a community into the likeness of our Lord.”



“The recent peacemaking training sessions have been a journey to my inner self. It’s like looking in and rummaging deep. It hasn’t been easy, but it has been transformational,” shared Christina Khamis, our Media and Public Relations Officer. “There are always worldly ways of thinking that can take root in our mind, which is why we need to constantly have our minds renewed by Scripture. We need to be proactively practicing peacemaking as we engage our churches and our communities.”

**We thank the Lord for continuing to mold us during this season of change. We pray that He uses us to spread a culture of peacemaking among our communities and create new peacemakers wherever we go.**

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**Pray with Us: Prayers from Some of Our Continuing Students**

**Susanna | Sudan**

Pray for my husband and me, and for our newborn baby, that we may be able to raise him and care for him with love. Pray for our ministry in Sudan, specifically with married couples, and pray for our theological education journey.

Christian background believers who cannot return to their home country. Pray that they have access to their basic human rights such as the right to change their religion on their passport.

**El Sadig | Sudan**

I ask you to pray for me so that I overcome all the obstacles in the way of my academic journey. Sometimes the bad infrastructure in Sudan and all the daily pressures can be overwhelming.

**Dani | Lebanon**

The elective courses taught me to deal with others in a new way. I am learning to love and respect those who are different from me and to communicate with them more often. In practice, this is not an easy task. It needs a lot of grace and prayer. I ask you to pray for me that I see others the way God sees them.

**Yaser | Syria**

Pray for all the sick during this time, especially those who caught the coronavirus. Pray for the situation in Lebanon and Syria, both economically and politically. Also, pray for Syrian non-

**Haroon | Sudan**

Pray that God enables me to finish my academic journey well because we are going through many challenges in Sudan (the internet and the financial situation, to name a few). Sometimes I feel immense pressure, so your prayers will be of much help.