

Jewish Religion and Culture

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Office hours: Monday 3:00- 4:00

Course Description:

This course will concentrate on significant moments in the development of Jewish religion and culture from biblical origins up to today. Against the background of Jewish world history we will try to understand Jewish rituals, customs, and beliefs as well as why being Jewish is considered by many to be not only a religious affiliation but also the state of belonging to a special ethnic group or nation.

Judaism and Jewishness have changed so much over the centuries that our course might appear to be similar to a course in comparative religion and culture. Our challenge will be to understand why these changes occurred while also identifying the continuities that connect Jews across time and space.

Required Materials:

- The following four books are available for purchase at the **Northeastern Bookstore** and on reserve at **Snell Library**:
- Philip S. Alexander, *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism*
- Barry W. Holtz, ed., *Back to the Sources*
- Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*
- *Tanakh* (Jewish Publication Society English version)

This is the Jewish Publication Society translation of the Hebrew Bible, and it is the best translation to use in our class. The Hebrew Bible corresponds generally to the Christian Old Testament and thus you may also use another modern translation of the Hebrew Bible such as the Revised Standard or New Revised Standard Versions (RSV, NRSV) or the New International Version (NIV). The King James Bible is beautiful but out of date, and therefore not acceptable for class use. *Bring your Bible to every class.*

- Additional readings will be available on Blackboard, as noted below.

Laptop Policy

A computer can be an excellent learning tool, and you are welcome to take notes on your laptop. However, if you are using your computer in class, I expect you to resist the temptation to check your e-mail, send or receive instant messages, or surf the internet, and I reserve the right to mark you as absent if I find you using

your computer in any of these ways during class. *If you cannot limit your in-class computer activity to note-taking, please leave your laptop at home.*

Academic Support

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don't hesitate to consult with me. In addition, a wide range of services is available on campus to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements. These services include:

- **Writing Center** (37304549, 412 Holmes): in-person appointments with writing consultants as well as online consulting for students working on writing assignments.
- **Disability Resource Center** (373-2675, 20 Dodge): services for students with documented disabilities. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner with a letter from the DRC so that we can make arrangements to address your needs. I will only honor requests for accommodations if they are authorized by the DRC.
- **University Counseling Services** (373-2772, 135 Forsyth): short-term individual therapy, group counseling and referrals to off-campus mental health resources.

Grades

Student grades will be calculated as follows:

- 20% attendance and participation
- 20% synagogue visit write-up (more details provided in class)
- 20% midterm examination (October 13)
- 40% final examination (date TBA)

***Attendance and Participation**

Students are expected to attend every class meeting, to prepare the assigned material in advance, and to participate in classroom discussion. *More than 3 unexcused absences will detract from your grade at a rate of .3% per absence.* It is your responsibility to sign in when you are present in class, and you may not ask a friend to sign in for you or sign in for anyone else.

Schedule of Readings:

Please prepare the following readings in advance of the date on which they are listed. Any changes made to this schedule will be announced in class and via Blackboard.

1. Wednesday, September 8: What is Jewish Religion and Culture?

- "Judaism: An Overview" from *Encyclopedia of Religion* (optional; available on Blackboard)

Thursday, September 9: Rosh HASHANA –NO CLASS

I. FOUNDATIONS

2. Monday, September 13: Ancient Near Eastern Beginnings

- *Genesis* 1-11 (Tanakh)
- Scheindlin, Introduction and Chapter 1

3. Wednesday, September 15: How to Read the Bible

- *Genesis* 1-4 (read again); 12; 20; 26 (Tanakh)
- Joel Rosenberg, "Biblical Narrative" pp. 32-51 (Holtz)

4. Thursday, September 16: Biblical Covenant

- *Genesis* 12-13; 15-18:15; 20-22; 25-28 (Tanakh)
- Michael Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, Chapter 2 (Blackboard)

5. Monday, September 20: Exodus from slavery

- *Exodus* 1-15 (Tanakh)

6. Wednesday, September 22: Revelation and Commandment

- *Exodus* 16-17; 19-21; 24; 32-34 (Tanakh)
- Optional reading: *Exodus* 35 (Tanakh)

Thursday, September 23: SUKKOT-NO CLASS

7. Monday, September 27: God's Home- Tabernacle

- *Exodus* 24-31; 35-36; 40 (Tanakh)
- Optional reading: *Exodus* 37-39 (Tanakh)

8. Wednesday, September 29: Passover

- Two extracts from the Passover *Haggadah*, pp. 75-78 (Alexander)
- Ruth Berg Goldston, "The Four Girls Within All of Us" (Blackboard)
- Allegra Goodman, "The Four Questions" (Blackboard)

Thursday, September 30: Sinchat Tora- NO CLASS: synagogue visit write-up

9. Monday, October 4: God's Home: Temple

- *II Samuel* 5-8 (Tanakh)
- *I Kings* 6-9 (Tanakh)

10. Wednesday, October 6: Destruction and Exile

- Scheindlin, Chapter 2
- *II Kings* 22-25 (Tanakh)
- *Lamentations* 1-4 (Tanakh)

11. Thursday, October 7: Destruction and Exile II

Alan Mintz, Destruction, (Blackboard)

Monday, October 11: COLUMBUS DAY- NO CLASS

12. Wednesday, October 13: MIDTERM

II. TRADITION

13. Thursday, October 14: Religion in the Time of the Second Temple

- *Genesis* 22 (Tanakh)
- Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on *Genesis* 22, pp. 61-63 (Alexander)
- Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, I:222-234 (Blackboard)
- Philo, "Description of the Essenes" (Blackboard)

14. Monday, October 18: Sacrifice and Temple Ritual give way to Prayer and Study

- Mishnah, Pirquei Avot 1-2, pp. 57-59 (Alexander)
- Robert Goldenberg, "Talmud," pp. 129-43 (Holtz)
- Scheindlin, Chapter 3
- 15. Wednesday, October 15: Midrash**
- Barry Holtz, "Midrash," pp. 186-201 (Holtz)
- Midrash handout (Blackboard)
- 16. Thursday, October 21: Liturgy**
- Alan Mintz, "Prayer and the Prayerbook," pp. 403-430 (Holtz)
- Weekday liturgy, pp. 68-74 (Alexander)
- 17. Monday, October 25: Jewish Mysticism I**
- Ezekiel 1 (Tanakh)
- Ma'aseh Merkavah, pp. 120-125 (Alexander)
- The Ein Sof and the ten Sefirot, pp. 125-127 (Alexander)
- 18. Wednesday, October 27: Jewish Mysticism II**
- Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, pp. 1-19 (Blackboard)
- "The Creation of Elohim," p. 314 (Holtz)
- "A Passage of Zohar" pp. 330-340 (Holtz)
- 19. Thursday, October 28: Medieval Jewish Philosophy**
- Norbert Samuelson, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy," pp. 266-79 and 295-98 (Holtz)
- "Philosophy and Religion," pp. 105-116 (Alexander)
- Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:24 (Blackboard)
- 20. Monday, November 1: Migration and Jewish Identity**
- Steven Lowenstein, "Regional Cultures," pp. 11-48 (Blackboard)
- 21. Wednesday, November 3: The Jewish calendar I- Shabbat**
- Qiddish for Sabbath evening, pp. 74-75 (Alexander)
- Havdalah service for the end of Sabbath, p. 75 (Alexander)
- Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat, pp. 84-90 (Alexander)
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, pp. 3-10 (Blackboard)
- 22. Thursday, November 4: The Jewish calendar II- Jewish Holidays**
- Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*, pp. 182-97 (Rosh Hashanah); 202-15 (Yom Kippur); 94-108 (Sukkot) (Blackboard)
- 23. Monday, November 8: Jewish life cycle I- Childhood**
- 24. Wednesday, November 10: Jewish life cycle II- adulthood**
- Einat Ramon, Tradition and Innovation in the Marriage Ceremony (Blackboard)
- Thursday, November 11: VETERAN DAY: NO CLASS- Reading response**

III. MODERNITY

25. Monday, November 15: Emancipation and Enlightenment

- "The Assembly of Jewish Notables," pp. 176-178 (Alexander)
- Scheindlin, Chapter 7

26. Wednesday, November 17: Hasidism

- Hasidic tales (Blackboard)
- Arthur Green, "Teachings of the Hasidic Masters," pp. 393-99 (Holtz)

- Scheindlin, Chapter 8, first half (through page 187 top)

27. Thursday, November 18:

Birth of Jewish denomination I: Reform, Orthodoxy and Conservative

- Abraham Geiger, *Sermons*, pp. 247-48; 262-64. (Blackboard)
- “Reform,” pp. 136-143 (Alexander)
- S.R. Hirsch, “The Dangers of Updating Judaism,” pp. 146-150 (Alexander)

28. Monday, November 22: Women and Judaism

- Blu Greenberg, *Women and Judaism*, pp. 39-55(Blackboard)
- Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*, pp. 1-10 (Blackboard)

29. Wednesday, November 24: Thursday, November 12: Mizrahi Jews and Aschenazi Jews

- Scheindlin, Chapters 5 and 6
- Sami Shalom Shetrit, “Who is a Jew and What Kind of a Jew?” (Blackboard)

Thursday, November 25: THANKSGIVING DAY: NO CLASS

30. Monday, November 29: Zionism

- Theodor Herzl, “The Jewish State,” pp. 155-161 (Alexander)
- Ahad Ha-Am, “The deficiencies of Western Zionism,” pp. 161-164 (Alexander)
- “Declaration of the State of Israel,” pp. 164-166 (Alexander)

31. Wednesday, December 1: Jewish in America

- Solomon Schechter, “The Faith of Catholic Israel,” pp. 151-154 (Alexander)
- Philip Roth, “Conversion of the Jews,” pp. 139-158 (Blackboard)
- Scheindlin, Chapter 8, second half (from page 187 middle)

32. Thursday, December 2: Holocaust

- Cynthia Ozick, “The Shawl” (Blackboard)
- Irving Greenberg, “Voluntary Covenant” (Blackboard)

33. Monday, December 6: Jewishness in the Contemporary State of Israel

- Zvi Sobel and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, Introduction to *Tradition, Innovation, Conflict: Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Israel* (Blackboard)

34. Wednesday, December 7: Last class- Summary