

Judaism

Religion 126

Classroom: 201 Comenius Hall

Class times: Wednesdays 6:30pm-9:30pm

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Office: 108 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 1:30-2:30pm
and by appointment.

Course Content

Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions, but is constantly changing, now more than ever. While one of the smallest world religions in terms of population, it has been one of the most historically influential, being the primary forerunner of Christianity and a major inspirational resource in Islam. While Judaism is a religion, Jewish life is much more than that, being a culture that can exist independently of the religion. The purpose of this course is to provide a broad overview of Judaism in a generally chronological framework, so the historical development of Jewish life and thought can be observed. We will be studying the origins of Judaism (both as seen within Jewish tradition and in modern scholarly proposals) as well as the development of Jewish national identity and law. In addition to Jewish history, we will study most of the major Jewish rituals and actions, both how and why they are done.

Goals of the Course

1) *Religious Literacy in a Multi-Cultural Society:* Students in this course should be conversant in major Jewish ideas, practices, and terms. We live in a multi-cultural society, and it's essential in today's world to have an at least basic understanding of various religions. Judaism should be understood on its own terms, as it is certainly *not* "Christianity without Jesus."

2) *Understanding the Interrelationship between Jewish religion and culture:* Jewish life is somewhat distinctive in the religious world in functioning sometimes on a cultural rather than just religious level. This class will pay attention to this distinction.

3) *The Academic, Scholarly Method of Studying Religion:* In the modern academic environment, religions should be studied both on their own terms as well as from the point of view of critical textual and historical study. This may result in views of Jewish history that are not always the same as traditional sacred texts claim.

4) *Close Reading Skills:* Close textual reading is a hallmark of Jewish scholarship and devotion; we will also be reading selected texts very closely. With the methods of close reading, small details are brought to the surface rather than glossed over. This skill is useful in a virtually limitless range of life tasks.

5) *Analysis of Contrasting Arguments:* Jewish intellectual life has always been highly dialectical; that is, involving contrasting opinions in dialogue and

argumentation. We will be studying some of these debates closely, and this can be helpful learning how to read contrasting arguments and how to come to one's own conclusion in an intelligent way.

Required Texts

- 1) *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* by George Robinson. New York: Pocket Books (Simon and Shuster), 2000.
- 2) *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism*, edited and translated by Philip S. Alexander; University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- 3) Handouts given out in class.

Grading and Class Policies

- 1) Average of three in-class exams, plus two 5 page research papers.
 - i. Consult the Student Handbook for the academic honesty policy.
- 2) Active, in-class participation. Cell phones must be silenced in class.
- 3) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the
 - i. syllabus; that is, before class.
- 4) Attendance. After two unexcused absences, each further unexcused
 - i. absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence.
- 5) Accommodations: Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, assistant director of learning services for academic and disability support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

Lecture and Readings Schedule

The Background of Judaism

Introduction and Overview

January 16th

What is Judaism? What is Jewish?

Ancient Cultural Background

Canaanite Religion and National Deities

Judaism and the Bible

The Jewish Bible, the Tanakh

Overall Structure and the Patriarchs and Matriarchs <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 257-271	
Torah Moses, Exodus, and Law <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 271-279	January 23 rd
The Rise and Fall of Israel and Judah Monarchy and Exile <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 279-299, 306-308.	January 30 th
Biblical Judaism Exam	
Rabbinic Judaism	
Second Temple Judaism Apocalypticism and Sectarianism <i>Readings:</i> 116-125	February 6 th
The Roots of Rabbinic Judaism Halakhah and the Mishnah <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 310-343, Alexander chs. 2 and 4.	
The Talmud Gemara, and the Two Talmuds <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 343-354, Alexander ch. 5.	February 13 th
Talmudic Dialectic <i>Readings:</i> Alexander ch. 6.	
Jewish Worship and Holidays	
Jewish Prayer Temple in Home and Synagogue <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 7-55, Alexander 3.1	February 20 th
Jewish Holidays Shabbat and the Major Holidays <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 76-111, 118-128, Alexander 3.2-3	
Jewish Holidays II Minor Holidays <i>Readings:</i> Robinson 111-118, 128-137	February 27 th

Rabbinics and Worship exam

Jewish Life Cycle and Lifestyles

The Jewish Life Cycle

Milestones and Rites of Passage

Readings: Robinson ch. 3.

The Jewish Lifestyle

March 13th

The Mitzvot

Readings: Robinson 195-229

The Jewish Lifestyle II

Kashrut

Readings: Robinson 234-256.

Medieval and Early Modern Jewish History

Medieval Jewish History

March 20th

Scholarship and Persecution

Readings: Robinson 404-424, Alexander 171-176, 105-116.

Medieval Jewish History

Kabbalah

Readings: Robinson ch. 5, Alexander 125-132.

Revolutions in 17th century Judaism

March 27th

Sabbatai Zevi and Baruch Spinoza

Readings: Robinson ch. 8

The Haskalah

Moses Mendelssohn and the Jewish Enlightenment

Readings: Robinson ch. 8, Alexander 9.3.1, 11.4.

Hasidism

The Rebbes and their followers

Readings: Alexander 9.1

Lifestyle and Medieval/Early Modern exam

Modern Judaism

Reform Judaism

Judaism for the Modern Age

Readings: Robinson 55-59, 230-231, Alexander 9.2

April 3rd

Conservative and Modern Orthodox Judaism

Tradition in a Modern World

Readings: Robinson 59-66, 232, Alexander 9.3.2-3.

The Holocaust

The Shoah

Readings: Robinson 489-498, Alexander 11.5.

April 10th

Zionism

The Jewish State

Readings: Robinson 480-489, Alexander 10

The State of Israel

Conflict Within and Without

Readings: Alexander 10

April 17th

New Developments in Judaism

Reconstructionist and Secular Humanist Judaism

Readings: Robinson 61-63, 232-233.

April 24th

Feminism and Judaism

Readings: Robinson 65-68.

Last exam

May 1st