

THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE

Religious Studies 209-83-901

Spring Quarter, 1999
Thursday 5:45-9:00

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a general introduction to Judaism focusing on features that shape the subjective experiences of Jews. We will cover four time periods – biblical, classical rabbinic, medieval, and modern. For the first five weeks, we will examine biblical and classical rabbinic sources concerning worship, holidays, and ideals for men and for women. The rest of the quarter will turn to medieval and modern transformations of these aspects of Judaism, as well as major historical events that have shaped contemporary Jewish experiences.

Through intense analysis and discussion of primary sources, we will see how elite Jews have defined sacred time (the rituals of the day, the week, and the year), sacred space (temple, land), and religious leadership (the prophet, priest, rabbi, philosopher). We will interpret these materials to see what symbols and experiences they convey, and we will critically analyze them in terms of historical contexts and power relations. We will focus on the particular case of Judaism, and in doing so, we will explore general questions concerning the nature of religious experience, ritual, theology, gender relations, and political conflict.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- 1) Hebrew Bible, any "scholarly" translation (The JPS version – Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures – is available at the bookstore; also acceptable are RSV, NRSV).
- 2) Robert M. Seltzer, ed., Judaism, A People and its History
- 3) Eli Weisel, Night
- 4) A course reader (available for purchase at the Religious Studies department)

Please bring your course reader and Bible to class every session!

REQUIREMENTS

This course focuses on reading primary sources from an ancient and foreign culture. Many of these sources are difficult and, from a modern perspective, weird. For most class sessions, the central assignment is to work through a relatively short group of primary sources with a worksheet that I will prepare for you. These worksheets will provide basic information and guidance to encounter the text. Weekly preparation and class participation are crucial for this course (the good news is that there are no big papers due at the end!). Specifically, the requirements are as follows:

1) Preparation of reading assignments with worksheets. Each week I will hand out a worksheet with instructions for preparing the next week's materials. Your responsibility is to read the assignment, following the instructions on the worksheet. The worksheet will include questions that you are to answer in writing and hand in before class.

2) Take Home Midterm. The midterm will be handed out at the end of the class of Week 5, and is due at 3:00 PM on the day of class of Week 6. The exam will consist of a number of short essay questions. Your responses should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, with reasonable fonts and margins.

3) Final Exam. The final exam will be in class on Thursday, June 10. It will consist of short essay questions as well as identification of key figures, events, texts, and concepts.

4) Class Participation: My goal is for the classroom to be a safe place for intense encounter with difficult intellectual issues. Class sessions will be used primarily for group discussion and analysis of the material. I expect focused and engaged involvement in conversations. I also expect that you will be respectful and supportive of one another. Mistakes and "stupid questions" are welcome. Distraction or disruption will not be tolerated.

GRADING

I will be using a "point system," with a total of 1000 points for the quarter. I will grade as follows.

- 1) Worksheets: 35%
- 2) Midterm: 25%
- 3) Final exam: 25%
- 4) Class participation: 15%

GROUP STUDY AND PLAGIARISM

I encourage you to study with other people. However, all written assignments must be done individually. You should be aware of the strong sanctions against plagiarism as stated in the current Bulletin/Student Handbook. If proven, a charge of plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course and possible expulsion. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism entails, or how to properly acknowledge source materials and the works of others, be sure to consult me. Proper citation procedures are provided in the manual, "Writing in Liberal Studies," available at the DePaul Bookstore.

OFFICE HOURS

Thursday 3:00 - 5:00 in Fac 450
home phone: 773-955-0014 (10 AM to 10 PM only)
email: jwschofe@midway.uchicago.edu

Week 1: Introduction to Course

Jewish Time – cyclical, chronological

"When did Judaism Start?": Gen 12, 15; Ex. 19-20; 1 Kings 8 (esp. vv. 10-14); 2 Kings 22-23; Nehemiah 8; Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan ch. 4, pp. 35-37 (copies handed out in class)

Week 2: Daily and Weekly Cycles

1. Daily Prayers

Biblical texts: Numbers 15; Deuteronomy 6, 11; Isaiah 6, 45:7; Ezekiel 3

Prayerbook: *Shema, Amidah* (reader)

Rabbinic Texts: M. Berakhot ch. 1 all, ch. 2 all, ch. 3:3, ch. 5:1-2 (reader)

Secondary Sources: Mintz, "Prayer and the Prayerbook" 403-429 (reader); Seltzer 217-220

2. The Sabbath

Biblical Texts: Gen 1.1-2:3; Ex. 20:8-11; Ex. 31:12-17; Deut. 5:12-15

Rabbinic Texts: M. Shabbat ch.1:1-6, ch.7:2 (reader)

Secondary Source: Heschel, The Sabbath 3-10 (reader)

General Background: Seltzer 3-36, 119-137

Week 3: The Yearly Cycle -- Rosh Ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot

Biblical Texts: Lev. 23:23-44; Num. 29; Deut. 16

Rabbinic Texts: M. Rosh Ha-Shanah ch. 1 all; M. Yoma ch. 1 all, ch. 8 all; M. Sukkah ch. 1 all, ch. 5 all (reader)

Secondary Sources:

Seltzer 235-240; Patai, "The Ritual of Water Libation" in Man and Temple 24-53 (reader)

General Background: Seltzer 85-116, 241-259

Week 4: The Yearly Cycle -- Passover, Shavuot

Biblical Texts: Ex. 1:1 to 21:1; Lev. 23; Num. 9, 28; Deut. 16

Liturgy: Glatzer, Haggadah (reader)

Rabbinic Text: Pesikta de-Rab Kahana on *anokhi* (reader)

Week 5: Powerful Men and Women

Priests: Sanders, Judaism, Practice and Belief 112-119 (reader)

Rabbis: Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan 35-38, 40-45; B. Baba Metzia 59a-59b; M. Ta'anit 3:8 (packet)

Women: Abrams, The Women of the Talmud 1-16, 65-83 (reader)

Background: Seltzer 65-84

(MIDTERM HANDED OUT)

Week 6: Medieval Philosophy

Twersky, A Maimonides Reader 1-23, 417-423 (reader)

Prayerbook: Yigdal / "Exalted" (reader)

Background: Seltzer 137-149

(MIDTERM DUE)

Week 7: Medieval and Early Modern Mysticism

Matt, Zohar 3-39, 49-50, 55-56, 111-112, 117-120, 132, 148-152 (reader)

Fine, Safed Spirituality 30-40, 170-172 (reader)

Background: Seltzer 150-182

Week 8: Modernity -- Movements

Meyer, Response to Modernity (Reform platforms) 387-394 (reader)

Gates of Prayer (Reform prayerbook, Shema) 55-58 (reader)

Knobel, "Reform Judaism and Kashrut" 488-493 (reader)

Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization 173-185 (reader)

Background: Seltzer 183-197, 263-320

Week 9: Modernity -- Major Political Events

Zionism: Seltzer 321-332

Holocaust: Weisel, Night

Week 10: Modernity -- Feminism

Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai 1-61 (reader)

Broner, The Telling 7-24 and Women's Haggadah (reader)