Introduction to Jewish Civilization I (Antiquity to 1492)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-4:00 PM, and by appointment

Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-2:50 PM (King 237)
Course Description, Major Themes, and Learning Goals

This course is both a selective survey of Jewish history and an examination of some of the essential Jewish texts from antiquity to the fifteenth century. The course looks at the historical, religious, cultural, literary, and political aspects of Jewish life in different cultural and geographical settings, such as the Israelites in ancient Canaan, Babylonian exile and the return to Zion, Jews and Hellenic Culture, Jewish life under the Roman rule, and during the rise of Islam and Christianity. Topics include the development of the Hebrew Bible and the subsequent rabbinic literature, key concepts of Jewish law, custom, philosophy, languages and literature, politics, occupations and economic niches, and shifting attitudes toward Gentiles.

No background or prior knowledge is required or assumed. The course would provide students with a solid understanding of Jewish life, culture, and identity. Students will gain a working knowledge of the foundational concepts and terms of the Jewish experience, some of which are still pertinent today. Furthermore, the course will give students a grasp of the patterns of continuity and change in Jewish life over different periods, places, and conditions. Finally, students will learn about contending definitions of Jewishness and how they affected the interactions with the non-Jewish world.

Course Requirements:

This class requires attendance, preparation, and active participation.

Attendance: Attendance in lecture is required and constitutes 10% of your final grade. I will take attendance each time and any student who misses THREE or more lectures throughout the semester will get an “F” grade (for those 10% of the final grade). Any student who misses 25% or more of the course’s total number of lectures will FAIL the class. If extenuating circumstances such as illness force a student to miss one or more classes, please email me. The student remains responsible for the material covered during her/his absence. A physician’s note is required in such a case. If a circumstance hinders your ability to attend regularly or fulfill other requirements, please see me as soon as possible. Tardiness is disruptive to the class and unacceptable. If a student is tardy (arriving more than TWO minutes after the beginning of class) THREE times, it will constitute one unexcused absence. The same goes for leaving class before it ends.

Preparation: I cannot overemphasize the importance of your reading assignments. You are expected to read ALL the assigned materials in advance of class, and be prepared to discuss them. A failure to read the assigned materials will affect your final grade. If a class session is cancelled for any reason, e.g., inclement weather, prepare as usual for that missed class day, and prepare the next class reading for its scheduled time: in any case you should stay current with the syllabus. I may examine your level of preparation even unexpectedly (e.g. with a pop quiz).
**Participation:** informed participation in class is required and will affect your grade. I welcome your informed input during class, and may call on you.

**Final Grade Breakdown:**

- Attendance: 10%
- One oral presentation (at least) and its write-up: 15% (combined).

Each student will make at least one (5-7 minute) presentation/s on the MAIN POINTS in or about a session's assigned readings. Do NOT review or report on the readings or simply state subjective reactions to them. Rather, give 3-5 (not more!) informed insights: what struck you, and why? What connections to, comparisons, contrasts with other material we have studied do you see? What implications, conclusions can you state? What questions remain in your mind after you have done the reading?

**Presentation Write-up:** On the day of your presentation, you must hand in a written version of your presentation, not to exceed 3 typed (not hand written), double-spaced pages. It is your responsibility to sign up for your presentation. If class size requires two students to lead off a session, DO NOT “split” the reading between you; EACH student does the assignment. You must meet with one another at least one day before the class to discuss your points to prevent duplication.

- **Informed** participation in class: 10%
- One short assignment: 10%
- Term paper: 25%
- Final exam: 30%

Please note: late assignments will lose 10 points for every day late.

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Standards of Student Conduct:

The use of computers in class is STRICTLY FORBIDDEN. The ONLY exception would be students who can provide an authorization from the learning disabilities office (http://new.oberlin.edu/office/disability-services/documentation/) detailing a learning disability that requires the use of a computer. The use of texting, cell phones and pagers is also strictly forbidden. Students violating these rules will be asked to leave the class for the day, and will have an absence recorded for that date.

Standards of Academic Integrity and the Honor Code:

As all courses in Oberlin, this course operates under the Honor Code, including but not limited to, prohibition of plagiarism. Students are responsible for understanding and adhering to the Code. Information about the Honor Code is available on the College website and the Honor Code committee.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the appropriation and subsequent passing off of another’s ideas or words as one’s own. If the words or ideas of another are used, acknowledgement of the original source must be made through recognized referencing practices. Use of another’s ideas or words must be properly acknowledged as follows:

(1) Direct Quotation: Any use of direct quotation must be acknowledged by footnote citation and by either quotation marks or proper indentation and spacing.
(2) Paraphrase: If another’s ideas are borrowed in whole or in part and are merely recast in the student’s own words, proper acknowledgement must, nonetheless, be made. A footnote or proper internal citation must follow the paraphrased material.

For more information, see http://www.oberlin.edu/library/avoiding-plagiarism.html

**Required Books:**

Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible*

Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*

The assigned books above are available for purchase at the campus bookstore and will be put on reserve at the Mudd Library. However, using shelf reserve for these readings is not realistic, and you should purchase those books. All the other required readings (marked by #) are available online via Blackboard. **There are no excused failures to obtain readings.**

* Scholarly readings (online)

# Primary documents (online)

**Lectures and Reading Assignments**

**Tuesday, Sep. 1: Introduction – Approaching the Study of Jewish Civilization in a Historical Framework**

**Thursday, Sep. 3: The Hebrew Bible in the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations**


“Torah: Introduction”, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1-7

“The Religion of the Bible”, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 2021-2040
“Historical and Geographical Background to the Bible”, Jewish Study Bible, pp. 2048-2062

**Tuesday, Sep. 8: The Origins of Ancient Israel and the Exodus**  
Bible: Genesis, chapters 28-30.25, 37, and Exodus, chapters 1-14, Jewish Study Bible, pp. 58-63, 74-76, 107-136  
Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 1-7  

**Thursday, Sep. 10: The Hebrew Bible – Concepts of Chosenness and Peoplehood**  
Bible: Exodus, chapters 19-20, Numbers, chapter 25, and Deuteronomy, chapters 7, 20, Jewish Study Bible, pp. 145-152, 334-335, 382-384, 411-413  
* Jon D. Levenson, “The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism”, in Mark G. Brett (ed.), Ethnicity and the Bible, pp. 143-169

**Tuesday, Sep. 15: Class is canceled due to Rosh ha-shana**

**Thursday, Sep. 17: Ancient Israel and Judah to 586 BCE**  
[Short assignment is due on Thursday, Sep. 17]  
Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 7-23  

**Tuesday, Sep. 22: The Hebrew Bible – The Prophetic Tradition and Babylonian Exile**  
“Nevi’im: Introduction”, Jewish Study Bible, pp. 451-461  
Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 25-33  
Bible (Prophets): Isaiah, chapters 1, 40, Jeremiah, chapters 1-5, 19-20, Ezekiel, chapters 23-25, 37, Jewish Study Bible, pp. 784-787, 860-864, 921-935, 965-968, 1084-1090, 1113-1115
Thursday, Sep. 24: The Early Second Temple Period


* Eric M. Meyers, “Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine” (the Persian and early Greek Periods), in David Biale (ed.), *Cultures of the Jews*, pp. 135-143

Tuesday, Sep. 29: The Hellenistic Period and Hasmonean Rule

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 33-42


# Excerpts from First and Second *Maccabees*, in Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Judaism*, pp. 50-54

Thursday, Oct. 1: Jewish Sectarian Society under Roman Rule

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 42-44

* Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Judaism under Roman Domination”, *From Mesopotamia to Modernity*, pp. 57-69

# Josephus Flavius, *The Jewish War*, pp. 142-154 (the Jewish sects)


Tuesday, Oct. 6: Revolt and the Destruction of the Second Temple

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 45-49

# Josephus Flavius, *The Jewish War*, pp. 386-390 (the Roman siege of Jerusalem)

Thursday, Oct. 8: Rabbinic Judaism to the Mishnah

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 51-56

“Classical Rabbinic Interpretation”, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1844-1847

# “The Martyrdom of Rabbi Akiba”, in B. Halper (ed.), *Post-Biblical Hebrew Literature*, pp. 32-34


* The entry “Gentile” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, col. 410-414

Tuesday, Oct. 13: Rabbinic Judaism to the Talmud

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 57-69

“Classical Rabbinic Interpretation”, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1847-1863

* Visotzky, “The Literature of the Rabbis”, *From Mesopotamia to Modernity*, pp. 79-83

# Excerpt from Tractate *Hullin*, *Babylonian Talmud*, chapters 108, 113, 116 (note: first read *Exodus*, chapter 23, verse 19; *Exodus*, Chapter 34, verse 26; and *Deuteronomy*, chapter 14, verse 21 in the *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 160, 190, 398)

# Excerpt from Tractate *Yebamot*, in Ben Zion Bokser (ed.), *The Talmud: Selected Writing*, pp. 130-134

# Selection about “Care of the Body”, in Alexander Feinsilver (ed.), *The Talmud for Today*, pp. 84-91

Thursday, Oct. 15: Rabbinic Readings of Scripture – Midrash


“Midrash and Jewish Interpretation”, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1863-1875

# Excerpts from *Genesis Rabbah*, in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Genesis and Judaism*, pp. 189-197

# Excerpts from the *Passover Haggadah*, pp. 24-25, 40-43

# “Aggadah versus Halacha”, Tractate *Sotah* 40a and *Baba Kamma* 60b, in Feinsilver (ed.), *The Talmud for Today* (a single page)

**Oct. 17-Oct. 25 – Fall Recess**

**Tuesday, Oct. 27: Rabbinic Judaism – the Prayer Book and Religious Practice**

*Psalms*, chapters 94, 149, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1388-1389, 1445

# The prayers *Yigdal*, ‘*Alenu* and *In Memory of Jewish Martyrs*, in Philip Birnbaum (ed.), *Daily Prayer Book* (Siddur), pp. 12-14, 136-138, 606-608 (only the even pages)

* Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer*, pp. 75-103

**Thursday, Oct. 29: The Jewish Experience in the Islamic Lands**

[Term paper is due on Oct. 29]

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 71-90

* Robert Chazan, “The History of Medieval Jewry”, *From Mesopotamia to Modernity*, pp. 103-113

# “Troubles in Aden, South Arabia”, in S. D. Goitein (ed.), *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, pp. 212-219


# Nathan Ha-Babli, “The Installation of an Exilarch”, in Halper (ed.), *Post-Biblical Hebrew Literature*, pp. 64-68

**Tuesday, Nov. 3: Jewish Culture and Literature in the Islamic Lands**

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 91-95
* Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, pp. 342-349

# Shmuel Hanagid (Samuel Ibn Nagrela), “Establish the Promise”, in Leon J. Weinberger (ed.), *Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain*, p. 90

# Yehuda Halevi, “Zion, Won’t You Ask”, *Poems*, pp. 100-102

**Thursday, Nov. 5: The Karaite Challenge**


# Saadia Gaon’s Polemics against Hiwi Al-Balkhi, pp. 47, 77

**Tuesday, Nov. 10: The Jewish Experience in Medieval Northern Europe**

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 97-112


# Excerpts from *Nizzahon Vetus* (Jewish polemics) in David Berger (ed.), *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, pp. 68-69, 219-221

# “The Crusaders in Mayence (Mainz), May 27, 1096”, in Marcus (ed.), *The Jew in the Medieval World*, pp. 115-120

**Thursday, Nov. 12: Social Interactions in Medieval Ashkenaz**

* Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, 37-47

# “An Oath Taken by Jews, Frankfort on the Main, about 1392” and “Innocent and the Jews, 1215”, in Marcus (ed.), *The Jew in the Medieval World*, pp. 49-50, 137-141

**Tuesday, Nov. 17: Jews in Christian Spain**

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 112-117


# “Sumptuary and Other Police Laws”, in Marcus (ed.), The Jew in the Medieval World, pp. 193-194

Thursday, Nov. 19: Jews in Medieval Art and Jewish Medieval Art

On that day we will meet at the Allen Memorial Art Museum a little earlier than our regular meeting (probably around 1:25PM, further details TBA)


* Joseph Shatzmiller, Cultural Exchange: Jews, Christians, and Art in the Medieval Marketplace, pp. 73-109

Tuesday, Nov. 24: Markers of Acculturation or Isolation? Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, and Other Languages of the Jews

Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 94-95

* Max Weinreich, History of the Yiddish Language, pp. 1-5, 175-181


# “Leon of Modena on Jewish Languages and Money Lenders”, in Marcus (ed.), The Jew in the Medieval World, pp. 437-440

Class is canceled on Thursday, Nov. 26 (Thanksgiving Break)

Tuesday, Dec. 1: Medieval Jewish Philosophy


# Excerpts from Yehuda Halevi, The Kuzari, pp. 73-74, 106-107

# Two Excerpts from Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed (they appear in separate documents on Blackboard)
# “Maimonides on Art and Charity, 1180”, in Marcus (ed.), The Jew in the Medieval World, pp. 364-366

**Thursday, Dec. 3: Medieval Jewish Textual Interpretations**

“Medieval Jewish Interpretation”, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1876-1893 (up to “Eastern Post-Maimonides School”)

# “How the Medieval Jew Understood the Bible” (a selection of Rashi’s commentary), in Marcus (ed.), *The Jew in the Medieval World*, pp. 412-415


**Tuesday, Dec. 8: Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah**

“The Bible in the Jewish Mystical Tradition”, *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 1976-1990


# Excerpt from “Saba de-Mishpatim”, *The Zohar*, pp. 284-289, 330

**Thursday, Dec. 10: An End or a Beginning? The Expulsion from Spain (1492)**

Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 117-121

# “The Expulsion from Spain” (a contemporary account); and “The Massacre of the New Christians in Lisbon, 1506”, in Marcus (ed.), *The Jew in the Medieval World*, pp. 51-59

**Final Exam: Thursday, December 17th, 2:00-4:00 PM**

No early or late exams will be permitted.