Jewish History: From Biblical Antiquity to Spanish Expulsion
This course is a survey of Jewish history from biblical antiquity through the medieval period in Christian and Islamic realms. No background is assumed or required.

While the course is introductory, it engages questions about the nature and use of sources and about theory and bias in history writing, and will emphasize themes, analysis, and use of primary sources. Its broad sweep is intended to give students a grasp of main tropes in Jewish history and an appreciation of change and continuity in Jewish experience over epochs in different regions and settings. Successful completion of the course will leave students with a solid grasp of foundational dynamics in Jewish history and with working literacy in terms and concepts of Jewish experience and expression.

Basic themes studied in evolving and comparative perspective are: Jewish self-definition and expression; external forces that supported as well as threatened Jewish group existence and religious/cultural survival; Jewish attitudes to political authority, both Jewish and non-Jewish; Jewish strategies of physical and cultural survival.

Topics include: biblical society, religion, and literature; Jewish attitudes to sovereignty, loss of sovereignty and exile and to Jewish and non-Jewish power; sects of the Second Temple and post-destruction period, including Jesus-followers; emergence, nature and triumph of rabbinic Judaism; gender in Jewish society; Jewish family and community; Jewish legal status and economic activities in medieval Muslim and Christian realms; medieval Jewish philosophy, mysticism, and schisms; Christian anti-Judaism and Jew-hatred: Jewish attitudes to non-Jews and responses to persecution.

This course is a requirement for the history track of the JWST major and for some upper level JWST courses. It can be taken for JWST or HIST credit, or both; successful completion gives SS, CD, and Wr credit.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. ATTENDANCE at class meetings is required and will be noted. It is the student's responsibility to obtain from other students any handouts, notes, assignments, or announcements for any missed class. If any circumstance hinders your ability to attend or fulfill other requirements in an ongoing
way, please see me as soon as possible. I will do my best to be of help but can only do so if you
alert me to the need promptly.

PLEASE NOTE:

A. there will be two missed class dates because of non-College holidays, as noted on the syllabus.
One of these sessions will be made up at an alternate time, as noted on the syllabus. Makeup classes pose challenges to all but I ask your cooperation; preparation as usual and attendance at the make up are required, except in case of documented, immovable class conflict or emergency.

B. if a class session is cancelled for any reason, e.g., weather, PREPARE AS USUAL for the missed class day, and prepare the next class reading for its scheduled time: stay current with the syllabus.

2. READING: Required as assigned for the session assigned. I welcome and will ask your informed input during class, based on assigned readings. Lectures and discussions assume and build on readings; they will not recapitulate them. Exams require thoughtful use of readings and lectures.

ALL required reading, except encyclopedia articles, is on shelf reserve in Mudd; this is the default option for doing required reading.

Required reading NOT in titles on the “Required for Purchase” list (see below), is in addition, on ERES (JWST 131). Check for readings more than one way: by author, editor (if an anthology), and/or title of article or book. Refer any problems obtaining required readings to reserve room staff, preferably, the Supervisor, immediately. Emailing me about such problems is not an effective route to help since all I can do is contact reserve room staff; do tell me of any problem your efforts do not resolve (same for the Bookstore). Don’t wait for the last minute to locate (or do) readings. Print outs of some readings are available from the JWST office; see me.

There are 60-65 pages of assigned reading per session, not including notes/illustrations (page numbers on the syllabus include these). Securing and doing the required reading for the date assigned is the responsibility of each student. There are no excused failures to obtain readings. If you cannot do them because of illness or emergency, come to class anyway, and see me.

Titles listed as "Required for Purchase" are used heavily and have been ordered in the Bookstore; using shelf reserve for these readings is not realistic. With the exception of Seltzer, material in these titles is NOT on eRes. If purchase is untenable, try pairing with other students to purchase and share the list. Ohio Link is another option but be sure to order well in advance.

REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:

Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text

Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought *an absurdly expensive but very good paperback (also required in JWST 132), worth owning. Given its expense, these readings (but no others in the “Required for Purchase” list), are on eRes).
Recommended books on writing: I strongly urge you to read the following short, paper backs; they will help you in this course and many others. Rampolla and Benjamin include guides to reading and note taking, as well as writing. Use of Rampolla or Benjamin is REQUIRED for those choosing the paper option:

Mary Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History
William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, The Elements of Style
Jules Benjamin, A Student's Guide to History

Whenever reading is assigned from a primary text in a book you own (e.g., Bible), or have printed out from eres (Schiffman; Chazan, Church), please bring that to class.

TIPS TO EFFECTIVE READING (see Rampolla, pp.6-37):

When you finish a reading or a part of it, stop and ask yourself what what impressions you are left with and what you have learned. Ask yourself WHY what struck you did. Ask yourself what thesis the author is arguing and what evidence there is for the argument. What are the implications of the evidence; the argument? Asking yourself these types of questions will help you organize the meaning of the reading in your mind, put details in perspective, and orient you to focus on significance, which is what you are most likely to remember and use.

3. ORAL WORK:

PRESENTATION: Each student will make a SHORT (5-7 minute, enforced) presentation on MAIN POINTS in one session's assigned readings. Do not report on the readings, or simply state reactions to them. Rather, give 3-5 focused insights about what you read: what struck you, why? What connections to, comparisons, contrasts with other material we've studied do you see? What implications, conclusions can you state? What questions remain in your mind after you have done the reading? See also “Tips to Reading,” above, for how to approach this assignment.

PRESENTATION WRITE-UP: You must hand in a written version of your presentation, not to exceed 2 typed (not hand written), double-spaced pages, on the day of your presentation; no late submission. This MAY be a detailed outline.

If class size requires that we have two students leading off a session, DO NOT “split” the reading between you; EACH of you do the assignment. The only difference is that you must meet with the
other presenter at least one day before the class to discuss your prepared points to prevent duplication/ repetition.

See me for further guidance. I will solicit everyone's leadoff choice but it is each student’s responsibility to be signed up for a presentation.

4. WRITTEN WORK:

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS: There will be two take home essay assignments at roughly one-month intervals (see syllabus for due dates), and a final, in-class exam on the day and time set by the Registrar (or a substitute paper option, see below). I will hand out essay topics out at least one week in advance of the submission due date. Submit essays to me in class on the due date. Hard copy only, no electronic submissions. Except in case of a documented illness or emergency, late submission will result in a third of a grade reduction per day (an A- becomes a B+, etc.); no credit for late leadoff presentation submission except in case of documented illness/ emergency. The final exam or paper must be submitted at the time set by the Registrar; Instructors have no discretion about this. Requests for Incompletes must be processed with the Registrar.

PAPER OPTION:

Students may opt to write a 10-12 page research paper on a topic on or related to the syllabus in lieu of the final exam, due at the date and time of that exam. You MUST obtain my consent to exercise this option AND for your topic choice, preferably, by fall Break. You must submit a statement of topic and preliminary Bibliography upon return from Thanksgiving Break at the latest. Bibliography and footnotes are required for the paper, using accepted scholarly conventions, as in Rampolla or Benjamin (see above).

All submitted written work MUST have: your name and a signed Honor Code declaration on it to be graded (College requirement). All writing MUST be typed, paginated, and stapled. Any work missing any of these elements will be returned ungraded.

WRITING GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS:

Clear, effective writing is a basic requirement in the study of history. Essays must address the question asked; be substantive (draw from readings and class sessions); coherent; use correct grammar and spelling, and be self-sufficient: comprehensible to an intelligent, interested reader with no independent knowledge of your topic. Such a person, not I, should be your imagined reader. Cite specifics to illustrate points; be precise. If you have any doubts about what is being asked in an assignment, see me.

Avoid use of passive tense and complicated, wordy style. Write simply, directly, concisely, and precisely. Common misuses: "impact" is not a transitive verb unless you mean “collide with” (as in car crash); use "affect; "influence." "It's" is a contraction for "it is; "its" is possessive. Bibliography, footnotes, are NOT necessary and should not be used in essays; use abbreviated citation in the body of your text, e.g., (Chazan, Church, p.62). Clear thinking and writing and solid argumentation
based on evidence count heavily. I am happy to meet with you and read drafts if you submit these a few days in advance of expected comments. Do make use of Writing Tutors the College makes available. History essay writing is a complex skill. Drafts and re-writes-- meaning enough time to reflect on and revise your thinking and prose-- are essential.

**GRADING:**
Oral presentation and its write-up: 15% of final grade  
First essay assignment: 20%  
Second essay assignment: 30%  
Final exam (or paper): 35%

**HONOR CODE:** This course, as all in Oberlin, 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 which is available on the College website, from the Honor Code committee, reference librarians in Mudd; me.

You are responsible for the information on this syllabus; see me with any questions. The syllabus is on the Jewish Studies and History websites should you lose your hard copy.

S. Magnus  
JWST/ HIST 131  
Oberlin College  

**Jewish History: From Biblical Antiquity to Spanish Expulsion**

1. **INTRODUCTORY**  9/2

What is "Jewish" history? Were Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Miriam-- Jews? Historical characters?

Assumptions and biases in the study of Jewish history:

"B.C."/ "B.C.E."
"A.D."/ "C.E."
"Old Testament,"Hebrew Bible; “The Bible”
"Hebrews"/ "Israelites"/ "Jews"/ “non-Jews”

Reading texts: Genesis

How, according to Genesis, did creation of the world happen?

What fruit did Adam and Eve eat?

2. **THE BIBLE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND; READING THE TEXT**  9/4

Seltzer, pp.7-21, 43-46 and the chart before p.7.

Niditch, chp.1, pp.3-33; "Timeline" at the back of the book
Genesis, 1:1-11:32 (JPS Tanakh, pp. 1-17)

N.B.: in Biblical readings: the first number signifies chapter, followed by colon and verse number/s. If I list only the name of a biblical book and number/s, with no colon, the number refers to the chapter, all of which is to be read (e.g., Deuteronomy 15-17 = read chapters 15, 16 and 17).

REMEMBER TO BRING THE TEXT TO CLASS

3. FOUNDATIONAL MYTHS: ORIGINS, PATRIARCHS, Matriarchs, God 9/9

Leadoff:

Susan Niditch, Ancient Israelite Religion, pp.34-69


Genesis, 12:1-28:9 (JPS Tanakh pp.3-43): Rapid reading: This is meant to familiarize you with basic outlines of significant portions of text; to be distinguished from more focused reading of shorter selections. Basically, it means skim, but note important themes, events. See how Niditch uses and interprets this biblical material. Remember to bring your Hebrew Bibles to class.

4. FOUNDATIONAL MYTHS, CONTINUED: EGYPT; EXODUS; SINAI 9/11

Leadoff:

Rapid reading:

5. LAW, COVENANT, RITUAL 9/16

Leadoff:

Niditch, pp.70-121

Exodus, 18:13-27, 21-23

Deuteronomy, 5-6, 14, 17, 18:1-5

Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, pp.41-57

Rapid reading:

Leviticus 5-6, 11-13, 17, 18-20, 23, 26
6. CONQUEST (?) OF CANAAN; ISRAELITE KINGDOMS AND EMPIRE  9/18

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp.15-29

Norman Gottwald, The Hebrew Bible, A Socio-Literary Introduction, chp. 6, pp.261-280, 284-288 only

Niditch, Conclusion, pp.119-121 and 122-123 (timeline), 128-130 (maps)

Rapid readings:

Numbers 27:1-11
Joshua 1:1-9, 2, 3, 6-7, 12
I Judges, 1:1-21 and II Judges, 1-5
I Samuel 3, 8-10, 14:47-48, 15-17
II Samuel 5:1-9
I Kings 1:1-40, 4-5:14, 6:1-15
II Kings 21-23:26

7. GOD, SOCIETY AND HISTORY IN CLASSICAL PROPHETS; MONOTHEISM; DESTRUCTION AND EXILE: ISRAEL; JUDAH  9/23

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp.29-39, 77- 82, 93-103, 108-111

Rapid readings:

Amos 2: 4-8, 4, 5:7-14, 8:4-12
Micah 3, 4:1-6
Hosea 8:11-14
Isaiah 1, 10, 47, 51-52, 60, 62
Jeremiah 1-2, 5, 7, 25, 28
Deut. 11, 28, 30
Lamentations, 1-2

8. EXILE AND RETURN; SECOND TEMPLE THEOCRACY; CANONIZING "SCRIPTURE" 9/25

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp.41-43, 43-46 (skim this listing); 112-122, 128-131
Jeremiah, 29:1-14, 30
Ezekiel 5:5-7, 37
Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Hebrew Bible)
Lawrence Schiffman, From Text to Tradition, pp.33-45
Lawrence Schiffman, Texts and Traditions, pp.99-103

NO CLASS 9/30 : Rosh Hashana

9. JEWS, JUDAISM, AND HELLENISM; JEWISH-GENTILE RELATIONS 10/2

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT handout

Anyone wishing to do the paper option (see syllabus front matter), see me before break.

Leadoff:

Schiffman, From Text to Tradition, pp.60-70
Seltzer, pp.171-177
Lawrence Schiffman, Texts and Traditions, pp.117-120, 130-134, 195-206, 211-220 (top)

10. HELLENISM AND JUDAISM: HELLENIZERS, PIOUS ZEALOTS, MACCABBEES, JEWISH CULTURE WARS (or: "What is Hannukah?") 10/7

Leadoff:
Schiffman, *From Text*, pp.70-72

Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, chps.4-6, pp.175-234 (don’t get stuck in the details; follow his argument and use of sources: what really caused the Greek crackdown on Judaism?)


* NO CLASS 10/9 : COLLEGE HOLIDAY Yom Kippur

First essay assignment due by noon on 10/13. Submit to the JWST office.

NO CLASS 10/14: holiday

* MAKEUP CLASS: * For 10/16, prepare the reading for sessions 11 AND 12. We will have class at our usual time for #11, AND A MAKEUP session at 4:30 PM for #12. Munchies fine.

11. JUDEA AND ROME; SECOND TEMPLE SECTS; GREEK AND JEWISH  10/16

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp.178-183, 195-224

Schiffman, *Texts*, pp. 266 (document 6.2.1)-269, 275-281; 292-299; 517 (document 10.2)-518, top

12. RISE OF RABBINIC JUDAISM; JEWISH REVOLT AGAINST ROME; JEWISH-CHRISTIAN SCHISM  * 10/16 MAKEUP SESSION: TODAY 4:30 PM

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp.183-194, 231-245


FALL BREAK  10/20-10/26

13. EARLY CENTURIES UNDER CHRISTIAN RULE AND IN PERSIAN BABYLONIA; TRIUMPH OF RABBINIC JUDAISM   10/28

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp.245-260

Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, chps. 1-5, pp.3-39
14. MISHNAH AND TALMUD  10/30

Leadoff:
Steinsaltz, chps. 6-9, 12-13, 15, 18, pp.40-73, 89-100, 108-114, 137-144

15. RABBINIC PATRIARCHY, “WOMAN” AND WOMEN; "LEARNING" TALMUD  11/4

Leadoff:
Steinsaltz, chp. 18, pp.137-144


In-class (“yeshiva”) text study; handout

Second essay assignment handout

16. ISLAM AND THE JEWS; JEWISH COMMUNAL STRUCTURE AND AUTHORITY UNDER ISLAM; KARAITE SCHISM  11/6

Leadoff:
Seltzer, pp.325-349

Schiffman, Texts, pp.749-56

17. JEWISH WOMEN, MEN, FAMILY, AND SOCIETY DURING THE ISLAMIC MIDDLE AGES  11/11

Leadoff:

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY IN CLASS
18. ASHKENAZ: JEWS, JUDAISM, JEWISH COMMUNITY IN MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN EUROPE   11/13

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp.350-355

Robert Chazan, *Church, State and Jew in the Middle Ages*, pp.57-70


Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages*, chps. 1-3, selections, pp.6-31 only

19. SPAIN: "GOLDEN AGE"    11/18

Leadoff:


20. MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY 11/20

Leadoff:

Seltzer, 373-408

Handout: Maimonides

21. KABBALAH 12/25

Leadoff:

Seltzer, pp. 419-450

Handout: Zohar

NO CLASS 11/27   Thanksgiving

*  Those doing paper option: statement of paper topic and preliminary bibliography due next class

22. JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS: VERBAL AND VISUAL IMAGES 12/2
SPECIAL SESSION, CLASS MEETS IN ALLEN ART MUSEUM No lead off presentation today

Paper topic statement and preliminary Bibliography due today for those doing a paper.


Robert Chazan, *In the Year 1096: The First Crusades and the Jews*, chp. 1, pp.3-26

(* For those interested in further reading on this subject or for papers, read Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, chps. 1-5, pp.3-63.)

23. THE CRUSADES AND THE JEWS; JEWISH REACTIONS TO PERSECUTION  
12/4

Leadoff:

Chazan, *In the Year 1096*, chps. 3-4, pp.51-103

Chazan, *Church, State and Jew*, pp.99-100, 133-141

"Merciful Father" ("Av Harahamim"): on screen/ or handout

24. JUDEOPHOBIA: RITUAL MURDER, HOST DESECRATION ACCUSATIONS; THEOLOGICAL DISPUTATIONS; CONFISCATING, BURNING THE TALMUD; BLACK DEATH; EXPULSIONS  
12/9

Seltzer, pp.355-372


Film: "The Disputation"

25. SPANISH EXPULSION; END OF AN ERA?  
12/11

Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain*, pp.91-144

Chazan, *Church, State and Jew*, pp. 319-322