Judaism Then and Now

Religion 196  
Professor: Jason Radine  
Classroom: 114 Comenius Hall  
Office: 202 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314  
Class times: MWF 11:30-12:20  
Office Hours: MWF 12:30-1:30 and by appointment.  
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Blackboard TBA

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 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**


3) Handouts given out in class.

**Grading and Class Policies**

1) Seven exams, some of which may be take-home mini-papers each worth 13%. For those that are take-home, the time allotted for them will be lecture instead. Consult the Student Handbook for the academic honesty policy.

2) Active, in-class participation: 9%. Cell phones must be silenced in class.

3) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the syllabus; that is, before class.

4) Attendance. After two unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence.

5) It is within the instructor’s purview to apply qualitative judgment in determining grades for an assignment or for the course.

6) Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

**Lecture and Readings Schedule**

**The Background of Judaism**

| Introduction and Overview | January 19th |
| What is Judaism? What is Jewish? |

| Ancient Cultural Background I | January 21st |
Canaanite Religion and National Deities

January 23rd

Ancient Cultural Background II
Babylonian mythic influences: Creation and the Flood
*Readings:* Handout

Judaism and the Bible

January 26th

The Jewish Bible, the Tanakh
Overall Structure and the Patriarchs and Matriarchs

January 28th

Torah
Moses, Exodus, and Law

January 30th

The Israelite Settlement
Outsiders or Insiders?
*Readings:* Robinson 279-281; Handout

February 2nd

The Rise and Fall of Israel and Judah
Monarchy and Exile

February 4th

Tanakh exam

Rabbinic Judaism

February 6th

Second Temple Judaism
Apocalypticism and Sectarianism
*Readings:* Neusner 49-59, and chapters 3 and 7

February 9th

The Roots of Rabbinic Judaism
Halakhah and the Mishnah
*Readings:* Robinson 310-343, Neusner ch. 6

February 11th

The Talmud
Gemara, and the Two Talmuds
*Readings:* Robinson 343-354, Neusner ch. 5

February 13th

The Talmud (continued)
Talmudic Dialectic
*Readings:* Handout

February 16th

Rabbinic Judaism Exam
**Jewish Worship and Holidays**

**Jewish Prayer**
Temple in Home and Synagogue  
*Readings*: Robinson 7-55.

**Jewish Holidays**  
February 20th
Shabbat and the High Holidays  
*Readings*: Robinson 76-100

**Jewish Holidays II**  
February 23rd
The Pilgrimage Feasts  
*Readings*: Robinson 101-111, 118-128

**Jewish Holidays III**  
February 25th
Minor Holidays  
*Readings*: Robinson 111-118, 128-137

**Jewish Holidays Exam**  
February 27th

**The Jewish Life**

**The Jewish Life Cycle**
March 9th
Milestones and Rites of Passage  
*Readings*: Robinson ch. 3, Neusner ch. 11

**The Jewish Life Cycle II**  
March 11th
Milestones and Rites of Passage  
*Readings*: Robinson ch. 3, Neusner ch. 11

**The Jewish Lifestyle**  
March 13th
The Mitzvot  
*Readings*: Robinson 195-229

**The Jewish Lifestyle II**  
March 16th
Kashrut  
*Readings*: Robinson 234-256.

**Jewish Life Exam**  
March 18th

**Medieval and Early Modern Jewish History**

**Medieval Jewish History**  
March 20th
Scholarship and Persecution

Medieval Jewish History
  Kabbalah
  Readings: Robinson ch. 5.
  March 23rd

Revolutions in 17th century Judaism
  Sabbatai Zevi and Baruch Spinoza
  Readings: Robinson ch. 8
  March 25th

The Haskalah
  Moses Mendelssohn and the Jewish Enlightenment
  Readings: Robinson ch. 8.
  March 27th

Hasidism
  The Rebbes and their followers
  March 30th

Medieval and Early Modern Judaism Exam
  April 1

Modern Judaism

Reform Judaism
  Judaism for the Modern Age
  Readings: Robinson 55-59, 230-231, Neusner ch. 16
  April 3rd

Conservative Judaism
  Modern in Outlook, Traditional in Practice
  Readings: Robinson 59-61, 232, Neusner ch. 18
  April 6th

Modern Orthodox Judaism
  Tradition and the Modern World
  Readings: Robinson 63-65, Neusner ch. 17.
  April 8th

The Holocaust
  The Shoah
  Readings: Robinson 489-498
  April 15th

Zionism
  The Jewish State
  Readings: Robinson 480-489, Neusner ch. 25.
  April 17th

The State of Israel
  Conflict Within and Without
  April 20th

Modern Judaism Exam
  April 22nd
New Developments in Judaism

Reconstructionist Judaism       April 24th
   Readings: Robinson 61-63, 232-233

Secular Humanism and Jewish Renewal       April 27th
   Readings: Neusner chs. 19 and 24

Feminism and Judaism       April 29th
   Readings: Robinson 65-68, Neusner ch. 21.

Other Modern Thinkers       May 1st
   Readings: Neusner ch. 23.

New Developments Exam 8:30am May 7th