

# Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

**Hebrew 379**  
**THE WORLD OF THE RABBIS**

Office:

Office Hours:

Judaism today has its roots in a remarkable movement of intellectuals who remade an entire people's culture in a few short centuries. These people were known as Rabbis, or Teachers, and are responsible for some of the classics of Judaism, such as the intricate dialectic of the Talmud, the fanciful and insightful biblical interpretations of the Midrash, and the poetry of the Jewish prayerbook. In this course we will get to know this movement its history, its literature, and its religious values. In doing so we will explore questions important to the study of religions, such as how a religious people responds to catastrophe, the relationship of law and spirituality, and the nature of holiness in ancient societies.

**I. Goals of the Course**

By the end of this course you should:

- A. Have an understanding of the history and nature of Judaism in its classical, ancient form;
- B. Learn about central themes in classical Judaism such as creation, revelation and redemption, Torah, and ritual and how they are expressed in Rabbinic literature;
- C. Have read a wide variety of Rabbinic texts in translation and learned how to negotiate their unique forms of logic;
- D. And you will learn how to express your understanding through well-argued essays and analyses.

**II. Texts**

All textbooks (except for translations of the Hebrew Bible, which are available in the reference section of the Main Library) are available at Student Book Exchange (SBX) and are also on reserve. Because most of our classes will include in-class readings of Jewish mystical texts in translation, it is essential that you bring the reading to the class session for which it is assigned.

**A. Required texts:**

Required texts (except Bible translations) are available at the Student Book Exchange (SBX) on High St. and are on reserve at the Main Library. Bible translations are available at many bookstores (including Fortress Press and Cokesbury Bookstore), in the reference section of the Main and Undergraduate Libraries, and in the Middle Eastern and Jewish Studies Reading Room on the third floor of the Main Library.

1. Schiffman, Lawrence, *From Text to Tradition* (=Schiffman)
2. Holtz, Barry, *Back to the Sources* (=Holtz)
3. Bible. Any reliable translation. Recommended translations: *Tanakh: The Jewish Publication Society Translation of the Holy Scriptures*; *The New Revised Standard Bible* and the *Revised Standard Bible* (also contained in the *Oxford English Bible*); *Revised English Bible*.

B. Other required readings:

A packet of required readings will be available at Cop-Ez in Tuttle Park Place on campus. Readings from this packet are marked with an asterisk (\*). Please bring these readings with you in class on days when they are assigned. This packet will consist of two parts:

Part I: Essays: essays and articles for assignments (=\*Essays)

Part II: Sources: Primary sources for study and in-class discussion. (=\*Sources)

C. Recommended readings and resources:

1. A good, reliable introduction to Judaism can be found in Jacob Neusner, *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism* (on reserve at the Main Library). This book presents the structure of Jewish religion and history.
2. The two best encyclopedias for Jewish studies are the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971) and *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), which contains many good articles on Judaism..

### III. Course Requirements

A. **Timely preparation of readings and participation in class discussion** are essential requirements of this course. Class sessions will usually include in-class discussions of the subject matter and assigned texts. Your willingness to learn and to participate can make a significant difference in your grade. 25%.

B. **Four short (10-15 minute) biweekly quizzes**, given at the beginning of class, in which you will be asked to identify important concepts, persons, texts, and dates briefly.

Quizzes: 25%.

**One 5-page essay** on a subject to be assigned by the instructor. The essay will address a key issue in the interpretation of Rabbinic texts, using a text in translation as an example. You may do outside reading in preparation for this essay; however you should consult with me about a bibliography. The essay will be assigned by the fourth week of class and is due on **February 15, 2005 at the beginning of class. There will be no exceptions.** The paper must be typed or word-processed and *stapled*. You are strongly encouraged to meet with me at office hours to discuss your selection and how to approach the assignment. 25%.

C. A **final exam**, to be held in the classroom on **Tuesday, March 15, 2005 at 1:30 PM** (the time designated by the registrar). 25%.

#### IV. PLEASE NOTE:

- A. **University policy regarding academic misconduct such as cheating and plagiarism will be strictly enforced.** It is important that you understand what constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct. Please review the University's rules and definitions at [http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource\\_csc.asp](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp)
- B. This course is designed so that much of our learning will take place in the classroom. Therefore, **your attendance at classes will be critical to your success in the course.** You are responsible for information and assignments given in class, whether you were present or not. Late papers and exams will not be accepted.
- C. Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss his or her specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at (614) 292-3307, or visit 150 Pomerene Hall, to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

#### V. Class Schedule

In this schedule, individual class sessions are represented by Arabic numerals (1, 2, etc.). This schedule is subject to change; you will of course be notified in advance. As discussion of the class material is an important element in this course, you should write down any questions about words, facts, or issues that arise in your reading and raise them in class.

##### A. Introduction

- 1. The Heritage of Rabbinic Judaism 1/4
  - in-class readings
- 2. What was Judaism? 1/6
  - Readings from the Bible:
  - Genesis chs. 1-3, Exodus chs. 19-20, chs. Leviticus 16-19
  - Schiffman, chs. 2-3
  - Recommended: Holtz, pp. 83-103

##### B. The Origins of Rabbinic Judaism

- 1. The Second-Temple Period 1/11
  - Schiffman, chs. 4 and 6

2. Masada and Yavneh 1/13  
- Schiffman, ch. 9

### C. The Rabbis

1. The Way of Torah 1/18  
- Schiffman, ch. 10  
- \*Sources #1: Mishnah Avot  
**1/18: FIRST QUIZ: On Biblical and Second-Temple Judaism**

### D. The Mishnah

1. Law and Spirituality 1/20  
- \*Essays #1: Goldenberg, "Law and Spirituality"
3. Men and Women, Life and Death 1/25  
- \*Sources #2: Mishnah Sanhedrin, Kiddushin  
- Wegner, "Tragelaphos Revisited"
4. Sanctification and Sanctuary 1/27  
- \*Sources #3: Mishnah Yoma  
- \*Essays #2: Neusner, "Map without Territory"

### E. The Talmud

1. Talmud 2/1  
- \*Sources #4: Selections from the Talmud  
- Holtz, ch. 2

#### **2/1: SECOND QUIZ: On the Mishnah**

2. Studying the Talmud 2/3  
- \*Essays #3: Swartz, "Scholasticism as a Comparative Category and the Study of Judaism"  
- Assignment: - **Assignment:** Memorize the brief Mishnah passage from the Talmud tractate *Kiddushin* in your packet. Be prepared to recite it in class.

### F. Midrash

**NOTE:** Please bring Bibles to class for the next three classes.

1. Reading and Interpreting 2/8  
- Holtz, ch. 3

2. The Binding of Isaac 2/10
- Read Genesis ch. 22 in the Bible. Make a list of questions that occur to you as you are reading.
  - \*Sources #5: Genesis Rabbah Reading 1

**2/10: THIRD QUIZ: On Talmud and Midrash**

3. Creation 2/15
- \*Sources #6: Genesis Rabbah Reading 2
  - \*Essays #4: Jaffee, "Symbolic Vocabularies and Cosmic Structures"

**2/15: ESSAYS DUE**

**F. Ritual and Worship**

1. The Synagogue 2/22
- \*Essays #5: Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*
2. Prayer 2/24
- Holtz, ch. 5
  - \*Sources #7: Siddur (selections)
3. Ritual Transformations 2/17
- \*Sources #8: The Passover Haggadah
  - \*Essays #6: Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*

**2/24: FOURTH QUIZ: On Ritual and the Synagogue**

**H. Other Judaisms**

1. Mystics and Visionaries 3/1
- Jaffee, "Transformative Knowledge" (to be made available later)
  - \*Sources #8: Ma'aseh Merkavah
2. Magicians and their Clients 3/3
- \*Essays #7: Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity"

**I. Conclusions**

1. The World of the Rabbis 3/8
- Schiffman ch. 13
2. What is Judaism? 3/10
- TBA