

JEWISH CIVILIZATION I: ANCIENT BEGINNINGS TO MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Autumn 2021-22

Section I: Tue + Thu 2:00-3:20

Section III: Tue + Thu 5:00-6:20

Swift 200

Instructor:

Dr. Yiftach Ofek yiftach@uchicago.edu

Office Hours (via Zoom*): Wednesday 4-6, or by appointment (may change, subject to restrictions)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a survey course of Jewish history and thought between the first millennium BCE and the middle of the second millennium CE. Each week we will focus on a particular era or episode in Jewish history and read some representative writings from the period. It is hoped that by the end of the class, you will therefore have had the opportunity to both learn about the trajectory and development of Jewish history during this period, as well as gain basic skills in Jewish literacy.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the quarter, you will:

- Learn the broad contours of Jewish history from its beginnings to the late Middle Ages;
- Gain familiarity with a variety of primary Jewish sources from this period;
- Be able to thoughtfully reflect on the changes in Jewish identity over time, space, and culture, as well as to contribute to ongoing debates on the meaning of the term “Civilization” and its application to Jewish history;
- Develop analytical skills through close reading, classroom debates, and writing.

TEXTS

Required Text

Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*, (Oxford and NY: Oxford UP, 2000)

Other texts will be available either via Canvas, the UChicago Library website, or online.

Many of the Jewish texts discussed in class will be found at the Sefaria website at: <https://www.sefaria.org/>

Should you wish to purchase your own copy of the bible, I recommend the following edition: JPS *TANAKH: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985). (This is the version uploaded to Sefaria).

If you wish to use other translations – such as the King James Edition – you may do so at: <https://www.biblegateway.com/> or at <https://biblehub.com/>

OTHER GENERAL HISTORY OF THE JEWS/JUDAISM

For your benefit, you may consult with any other general history of the Jews. Some of these include:

Goodman, Martin, *A History of Judaism: From Its Origins to the Present*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) (Available as Library EBook)

Chaim Potok, *Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History of the Jews*, (New York: Knopf, 1978)

GENERAL POLICIES

COVID-RELATED ISSUES

These are difficult times, and we are encouraged to show flexibility in all academic matters. Students, e.g., should be prepared to transition to online teaching at any point should this be required of us. We will be following standard university regulations. Please stay safe.

SPECIAL NEEDS

If you have documented special needs, please let me know as soon as possible. Keep in mind that accommodations cannot normally be applied retroactively. In order to receive an accommodation, you must register your requirements with Student Disability Services.

POLICY ON ABSENCES

Please try to email instructor in advance, or as soon as you can, about any absences. You need not to specify the nature of your absence if you prefer not to. If a medical or family emergency arises during the quarter that will cause you to miss several classes, please have your advisor contact me. Again, no details are required, only the duration of your absence. If you wish, you may also email me directly in addition. In accordance with University policy, you will not be penalized for an absence due to a religious observance, as long as the instructor is notified in advance.

POLICY ON ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND NON-PURCHASED BOOKS

Cellular devices are forbidden in class. It is my preference that students do not use a computer during class, but I will not forbid you from doing so. Naturally, if you choose to use a computer during class, you should refrain from using it for other purposes, and maintain your engagement with class discussion at a maximum.

POLICY ON COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE INSTRUCTOR

Please note that I do not check emails between Friday and Saturday evenings. Otherwise, I will attempt to get back to you within 24 hours on weekdays and by Monday on weekends. Please address your emails properly and remember that they are formal and official correspondence between us, in our capacities as professor and student.

Students are encouraged to come to see me at office hours at least twice this quarter. If you cannot make it to my designated office hours, please email me so we can find an alternative time.

FORMATTING

Please follow standard formatting: 12-point font, double-spaced.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Do not plagiarize. Any instance of plagiarism may result in the failure of the relevant paper, withdrawal or failure of the course, and referral to university administration. Whenever you draw on or allude to ideas other than your own, you must reference the original source, whatever it may be (a book, a website, a lecture, an introductory essay, a conversation with a classmate, etc.). This rule applies not only to formally assessed work, but to all of your contributions in this class. Nor is it exclusively applicable in the case of quotations; all distinctive ideas you borrow from others, even where you paraphrase them in your own words, should be referenced.

Students are allowed to consult with each other about class readings throughout the quarter. The work you submit, however, should be your own. Again, I emphasize: please credit your classmates whenever credit is due.

If you have any questions about this while writing your papers, please ask me either via email or in person. If you are unsure about what counts as plagiarism or academic dishonesty, you can consult Charles Lipson's book *Doing Honest Work in College*.

POLICY ON LATE PAPERS AND EXTENSIONS

There will be no extensions on the first assignment ("Why Jewish Civilization?").

Extensions will be granted on an individual basis. If you need an extension, please contact me as soon as you can. Late papers will be deducted 2/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours after the designated due date.

ASSIGNMENTS

Short Reflections

The students will be divided into three sections of six students each (A, B, and C). Each section will be assigned to write several short reflections on the readings (200-300 words) throughout the quarter (see distribution below). These should be submitted by 9:00 am, before class, on the Discussion Board on Canvas. Late submissions will not be accepted. You may be asked to discuss your thoughts in class.

Begin by selecting a specific (and small) section of the text that you believe merits our attention. Then, ask yourself, what is it about this specific passage, or passages, you find especially thought-provoking and why? What does this passage or passages help us understand about the text, the author's perspective, or about Judaism in this particular period?

Your reflections should then raise a question, identify a tension, or expose something interesting about a particular section of the text. As we progress through our readings, you will want, as much as possible, to make connections to other texts we have read in class. Nonetheless, you should keep your paragraphs focused on a narrow passage (or passages) that we can read together. Be careful not to simply provide a summary of text. Your reflections are meant to help you, and the class, think through various aspects of the text and what might be our thinkers' concerns.

You may build on the ideas expressed here in later assignments, provided that you note this in the footnotes. (E.g., "This analysis is based on the reflection I submitted to the class discussion board on Canvas on September 27th"). You should also note that each assignment will be treated, and graded, separately.

Assignment I:

Write a short paragraph (100-300 words) answering the following question: Why did you choose to take Jewish Civilization? You may include autobiographical information, but your emphasis should be on what aspects particularly interest you in the Jewish religion, experience, history, or otherwise.

Due by Sunday, Oct. 3 (Midnight)

Assignment II:

Select a passage from one of the readings and write an interpretation (1000 words) of the text as a product of its time. Above all, you should seek to answer the question: what does the passage teach us about the author's (or authors') view of the world? Other questions may include: What does the passage teach us about the author's understanding of the nature of God? Does the author view Judaism primarily as a divine faith, a history of a people, a set of rational precepts, or something else?

What can we understand about the nature of the Jewish community from this passage? What governs their ethical and moral worldview?

Please include a copy of your chosen passage on the first page of your assignment (not to be included towards the final word count).

The selected passages should be approved by the instructor in advance.

Due by Sunday, Oct. 31 (Midnight)

Final Essay:

Choose two texts, one from the early part of the course (before Oct. 31) and one from the latter part (Oct. 31 – end). Discuss: How has Jewish Civilization changed in between? You should begin by outlining the main historical and epochal changes that took place in the intervening years. Then you may consider some of the differences in style and language between the two passages, the question of audience, the main political and cultural challenges of each period, different views on the nature of Law, divinity, ethics, and so forth. Length: 1300-1600 words.

Please include a copy of your chosen passages on the first page of your assignment (not to be included towards the final word count).

The selected passages should be approved by the instructor in advance.

Due by Thursday, Dec. 9 (Midnight)

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Assignment I:	5%
Assignment II:	25%
Assignment III (Final Essay):	40%
Participation:	30% (15% Class contributions; 15% Reflections)

READINGS

NOTE ON THE READINGS

The focus of each week's readings are the primary texts, written by authors who lived during the period under discussion. The secondary readings are intended to help you understand these. As such, you should aim to read all the listed primary readings for the session, while reading as much as necessary from the secondary readings to help your understanding. It is expected that if you decide to write on a certain period for an assignment, you will complete all the readings for that section.

CALENDAR

<u>Date</u>	<u>Theme and Assignments</u>	<u>Response Group</u>
WEEK I: INTRODUCTION		
Sept. 28	Introduction: The Study of Jewish Civilization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No readings 	
Sept. 30	Jewish Civilization in Comparative Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S. N. Eisenstadt, <i>Jewish Civilization: The Jewish Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective</i>, (SUNY Press, 1992), 5-17, 23-34 (Library EBook) Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," <i>Mimesis</i> (Princeton, 1946), 3-23 (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cf. Genesis 22:1-19 	
<i>**Assignment I (Why Jewish Civilization?) due by Sunday, Oct. 3 (Midnight)**</i>		
WEEK II: THE HEBREW BIBLE		
Oct. 5	Scheindlin, 1-24 The "World" of the Bible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genesis 1-3 Genesis 11-12, 21:1-20, (+ 22:1-19) Moses and the Giving of the Law <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exodus 19-20 	A
Oct. 7	The Rise and Fall of Judah <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I Samuel 8-10; 1 Kings 1-2, 5 Amos 1-2, 9; Isaiah 2:2-4 Lamentations 1, 5; Psalm 137 	B
WEEK III: SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM		
Oct. 12	Scheindlin, 25-50 The Hasmonean Kingdom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Maccabees (Sefaria/Second Temple) 	C

Oct. 14	<p>Community and Apocalypse (The Dead Sea Scrolls)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> John J. Collins, <i>The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Biography</i>, (Princeton: 2012), “Preface”, ff (Library EBook) <p>From <i>The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition</i>, eds. Martínez, Tigchelaar, Eibert, (Brill: 1999) (English only) (Canvas):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Rule of the Community,” 69-98 “The War Scroll,” 113-144 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philo and Josephus on the Essenes (Canvas) <p>Digital Dead Sea Scrolls: http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/</p>	A
WEEK IV: HELLENISTIC JUDAISM		
Oct. 19	<p>Scheindlin, 51-64</p> <p>Josephus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Martin Goodman, <i>Josephus's The Jewish War: A Biography</i>, (Princeton University Press, 2019), 1-17 (Canvas) <p>From <i>The Jewish War</i>, (Oxford World Classics, 2017):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The Siege of Yodfat [Jotapata]” (Canvas) “The Burning of the Temple in Jerusalem” (Canvas) 	B
Oct. 21	<p>Philo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gregory Sterling, “Philo Judaeus” (Canvas) “On the Creation of the World” (Canvas) “On the Contemplative Life” (Canvas) 	C
WEEK V: CLASSICAL RABBINIC JUDAISM		
Oct. 26	<p>Scheindlin, 62-3 (box), 64-69</p> <p>Mishnah, Midrash</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mekhilta de’rabbi Ishmael, Tr. Shirata, Ch. I, 169-176 (English) (Canvas) Pirkei Avot, 1-2 (Sefaria/Mishna) Mishnah Berakhot, 1-2 (Sefaria/Mishna) <p>[Recommended: James Kugel, “Two Introductions to Midrash,” <i>Prooftexts</i>, Vol. 3.2 (1983), 131-55 (Canvas)]</p>	A
Oct. 28	<p>The Talmud</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adin Steinsaltz, “What is the Talmud”, https://steinsaltz.org/talmud/ Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 59b, §1-12 (Sefaria/Talmud) BT Menachot 29b, §3-5 BT Shabbat 33b, §12 – 34a, §2 BT Avodah Zara 17a, §12-15 	B

WEEK VI: MEDIEVAL JUDAISM I: THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES		
Nov. 2	<p>Scheindlin, 71-82 (bottom)</p> <p>Rabbanites vs. Karaites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Karaites,” in “Judaism beyond the Rabbis,” in Goodman, <i>A History of Judaism</i>, 301-10 (Canvas) • From <i>Karaite Anthology</i>, ed. Leon Nemoy, (Yale, 1952): 34-39, 53-68 (Canvas) 	C
Nov. 4	<p>Scheindlin, 82-95</p> <p>The Beginnings of Jewish Medieval Philosophy: Sa’adia Ga’on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saadia Gaon, from <i>The Book of the Beliefs and Convictions</i>, in <i>Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings</i>, ed. Charles Manekin (Cambridge, 2007), 1-22 (Library Ebook) 	A
Assignment II due by Sunday, Nov. 7 th (Midnight)		
WEEK VII: MEDIEVAL JUDAISM II: THE JEWS OF CHRISTENDOM		
Nov. 9	<p>Scheindlin, 97-101 (middle)</p> <p>Rashi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rashi, selections from his commentary on the Torah, in <i>Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature</i>, 225-240 (Library Ebook) <p>Sefer Hasidim (Book of the Pious)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From R Yehudah HaChasid, <i>Book of the Pious</i>, tr. A. Y. Finkel, (Jason Aronson, 1997), 3-6, 11-18 (Canvas) <p>[Recommended: Robert Chazan, <i>The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000–1500</i>, (Cambridge, 2006), 1-13, 23-42 (Library Ebook)]</p>	B
Nov. 11	<p>Scheindlin, 101-121</p> <p>The Crusades and the Violence of 1096</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solomon b. Simson, “The Crusades of 1096,” in <i>Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature</i>, 264-71 (Library Ebook) • Selections from Ephraim of Bonne, in <i>The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse</i>, ed. T. Carmi, (Viking Press, 1981), 379-85 (Canvas) 	C
WEEK VIII: MEDIEVAL JUDAISM III: THE JEWS OF SPAIN		
Nov. 16	<p>Philosophy and Religious Thought</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yehuda HaLevi, <i>The Kuzari</i>, selections TBA • Maimonides, Selections TBA 	A

Nov. 18	Medieval Poetry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peter Cole, <i>The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain</i>, (Princeton, 2009), “Introduction” + Selections TBA (Library Ebook) 	B
WEEK IX: THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS		
WEEK X: THE LEGACY OF MEDIEVAL SPAIN		
Nov. 30	Scheidlin, 123-137 (to Napoleon) History and Antisemitism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selections from Ibn Verga, <i>Shevet Yehuda</i> 	C
Dec. 2	Jewish Mysticism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selections from <i>The Zohar</i> 	
Final Essay due by Thursday, Dec. 9 (Midnight)		

**This syllabus is subject to revisions*