

**Written Tradition of Judaism, REL 318**  
**Instructor: Michael Pytlik, pytlik@oakland.edu**  
**Online Fall 2012**

"Written Tradition of Judaism" This course examines Jewish sacred texts and their development in Jewish history. The course begins with the development of the Israelites, how and when we identify Jews and Judaism, examples of early bits of writing from archaeology and what they tell us about literacy. We will also identify key concepts and events that are found in the Israelite and Jewish texts, such as, the covenant, commandments and ideas of God. Then we will look at examples from the earliest of texts, the Torah, other biblical books, examples from the Talmud, early mystical texts, Dead Sea Scrolls and their historical setting, development of the Jewish prayer book, devotional texts from medieval Europe, the Kabbalah, and more. All texts will be studied in English translation, but some key Hebrew words and concepts will be covered. The course will cover the development of these texts and their place in history. You should spend a little time getting familiar with the Moodle modules, and please read the contents of any assignment noting any due dates and instructions. Some weekly sessions have more than one exercise.

**Course Purpose:**

- A.** To acquaint students with the written tradition of Judaism and the Jewish people through online lectures, reading assignments, links to web sites, video clips, presentations, and case studies based on textual themes presented during the course. We will examine the writings of the Jewish tradition over the semester and learn about the development of the various texts, address questions about their authorship and examine the content of the texts. We will examine certain themes in the writings that were central to the early Israelites and the Jews; such issues include covenant, election, ideas of God, purity, the Exodus and others.
- B.** The course proceeds with a weekly topic or major text grouping, although some topics may take more than one week.
- C.** The student will become familiar with certain themes in Judaism in a given text during the week. The student will be able to assess some important concepts in the texts such as theological, philosophical and historical themes that appear in the texts. A typical class will include an online lecture which places the topic in context. Students will then read and analyze the texts based on the themes and topics for any given week. Texts will be assigned in written form in the books assigned, and in online access.

**Suggestions for Success:** This course centers on Jewish texts, and about Jewish thinking in those texts. Certainly, there are concepts you've heard from Judaism, like "mitzvah", or "Commandment", or even "Kabbalah". But, I dare say, most of these concepts have been translated into ways of thinking that are not Jewish. So, we might have to unlearn a few things and try to think in terms of how Jews and Judaism have interpreted these concepts. This is all very possible since we have the texts to help us and lectures and readings to support the texts and us. Still, I realize it may take a few lessons to get up to speed and to become familiar with the concepts. This course should be a little challenge but I hope it really engages you to think of the texts on their own terms, but really to integrate some of these concepts into your own life experience. ***We are, after all, learning about a religion, so it should be about you, your growth, and your ideas, even as we base those ideas on the core concepts we are discussing.*** I hope it will be academically challenging, provide you with some academic skills, and challenge your ideas of Judaism and provide some personal application of the material to your own life. No attempt is made here to convert anyone to anything, or to undermine your current beliefs, but I do hope that you solidify your beliefs with new information and new concepts. It should be a journey!

**Please be sure to use the "JPS – Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh (Bible)" – it offers the best Hebrew-to-English translation and is accurate to the Hebrew text. See books required for the course, below.**

**Here are some ideas for the course lessons:** read the class lecture and follow any links or suggestions for side topics: these may include short text portions, a video or audio recording. Like a traditional class, I suggest that you form questions as you go, and bring them to "class" for discussion in forums and online sessions with me or the group. Give yourself time and space to read the texts. The weekly sessions are not

specific to a certain time or day, but assignments are due on specified dates/times, so you should pay attention to the details of any assignment. The lecture provides the context and plan for the weekly session. Then move on to the readings and any assignments. You should leave plenty of time for writing or giving your input in the assignment. There are frequent assignments in the course: these are short-essay, quizzes or exercises that center on the readings and the texts we will cover. There may be group exercises such as forums and responses to your peers.

**Books:** *The Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible, JPS translation), *Back to the Sources*, edited by Holtz, *The Szyk Passover Haggadah* (edited by Byron Sherwin). Scherman, \*Complete Artscroll Siddur\* (prayer book). You may order online or acquire the books from the Oakland book store.

**Resources:** Check out the Kresge library at OU, we have added numerous books in Jewish Studies and other religions too. Also, online help can be found here:

<http://research.library.oakland.edu/sp/subjects/guide.php?subject=REL>

This provides links to the Encyclopedia Judaica, a great resource, and other resources.

**Course Requirements/Grading: Based on 400 total points.** Assignments for this course will total 400 points. The final average will be the number of points divided by four. The final average will then be used to calculate the final grade on the OU 4.0 system, with 90-100 points as 3.6-4.0, 80-89 as 3.0-3.5, 70-79 as 2.0-2.9, 60-69 as 1.0-1.9 and below 60 as 0.0.

- A. Class Participation in forum posts and responses. (7 @ 10 pts each = **70 points**). 20% of grade.
- B. Frequent written assignments or quizzes in the weekly modules: 1-2 pages generally for each written essay. (12 @ 20 pts. = **240 points**). 60% of grade.
- C. Final Exam (**90 points**). Exam includes short answer, essay, textual assessment or analysis. 20% of grade.
- D. An extra credit option for 15 points on the "Prayer Book" week, below.

## **Instructor Contact:**

I answer emails quite frequently, but not from Friday evening until Sunday morning. We can communicate by email, by phone or in person if required. I can arrange office time at the university with fairly short notice. Please contact me rather than fall behind or if you have any other questions. I should answer emails within 12 hours at the latest, except for the above.

**Writing Assignments:** Please write any essays as you would any paper, with proper grammar, double spaced, 12 point font, and always cite your sources. If you refer to the Bible, please use this format example: Genesis 5:1-5. "Bible" is always capitalized, "biblical" is not. If you quote an assigned reading for the course, just use a simple reference, since I know the source I referred to, (Holtz, 38; or for the online lectures, (Lecture) is fine). If you use something outside of the Moodle resources, provide the full citation. If you need help with writing, please ask or see the resources provided by the writing lab or other OU resources.

**Expectations:** While this is an online class, you still need to be "present" and accountable to achieve the best possible grade in the course. Like an on-campus class, you should be in class, participate and do your work. In order to set some expectations of this for an online class, here are some guidelines for success in the grade department.

Be in each class: download materials, read them, participate in each exercise. Moodle tracks when files and links are used, so instructors can see this. It is like being in class and participating. Anyone who does this level of participation, each week, and turns in good essays and forums, will do very well. The expectation for a 4.0 is that all of the materials and assignments will be done on time. If you miss participating in one to two or more lessons, meaning you don't post a forum for two lessons, fail to send in two assignments, you cannot achieve a 4.0, but will be judged on the assignments as they are turned in, but for "missing" two sessions you will automatically be penalized .70 of a point, meaning that if you do

everything else at the highest score, you will be reduced to 3.3. If you miss more three or more sessions without notice to me, you will be penalized 1.5 points of whatever score you otherwise achieve. If you miss more than that, you should consider dropping the course, but I will assume you have walked away and you will only earn the points for the assignments turned in, if any, but will be penalized 2.5 points for missing the lessons. Please keep in touch with me if your circumstances require that you miss any lesson – I am always willing to help.

### **Weekly Overview:**

#### **1. Introduction to the course, and the materials.**

- a. Recorded audio file – welcome, and overview of the course by instructor, how the system works, where to get help, how to succeed, and how a typical class is organized.
- b. Written lecture on texts and Jewish history: Revelation and Torah, Ideas of Holy, Sacred Texts, Biblical portions and some commentary.
  - i. Introduction to Jewish history: Moses – Patriarchs – David – Prophets – Rabbis and how texts apply to these figures or periods.
- c. Covenant Outline with passages lookup
- d. Moodle Exercise: Welcome **Forum**: introductions, interests, goals (10 pts).
- e. Moodle Exercise: **Short essay**: essay based on text portions tied to the Covenant. Upload to Moodle (20pts).
- f. Reading: *Back to the Sources*, “Introduction”, by Holtz.

#### **2. Israelites and their world: formation of the people, literacy, monotheism.**

- a. Lecture: place Israel in context in ancient Near East. How and when the Israelites emerged as a people, and how we know this. Introduce the assigned online video and why it is important for biblical study, archaeology, formation of monotheism, and texts.
- b. Link to Nova (free-public) program. Watch “The Bible’s Buried Secrets” (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/bibles-buried-secrets.html>)
- c. Earliest examples of literacy in Israel,
  - i. Using primary material from Oakland’s dig in Israel – the *Khirbet Qeiyafa* inscription, and implications/translations for early Hebrew texts.
- d. Moodle Exercise: **Forum** on ideas of holy: What is the Jewish view of sacred texts? (10pts).
- e. Moodle Exercise: **Forum** discussion on the development of monotheism (question centers on the difference between Israelite and Jewish religion and development that is discussed in the online video) (10 pts).

#### **3. The sacred texts of Judaism: a survey of the books, canonization of the texts.**

- a. Lecture on the main books of the Hebrew Bible with examples of video clips of the books, and short descriptions of when the Hebrew Bible was canonized.
- b. Examples of what constitutes a holy text, a survey of the texts in their historical context, dovetailing on the lecture on literacy, introduction of the Oral tradition that is distinguished from the Written.
- c. Moodle Exercise: Students analyze a portion of Deuteronomy and identify given topics and the Shema prayer. **Short essay**. (20pts).
- d. Reading: short reading in *Back to the Sources*.

#### **4. The biblical world and the biblical texts: Torah, Writings, Prophets. Readings for concepts fundamental to Judaism**

- a. Lecture on the Exodus, themes, importance and archaeology of.
  - i. Students will be directed to the relevant passages in the Torah, and other books that reference the Exodus in order recognize this theme in other biblical books. Other themes include the concept of Promised Land, a home for the Israelites, a place on earth for God.

- ii. As a foreshadowing of future lesson on the Jewish prayer book and Passover, the prayers in the prayer book that refer to the Exodus and Passover Seder are shown. Students will be directed to the assigned books in order to illustrate the Exodus story that is central to Judaism today; therefore, students will move from the Bible to the Passover book, to the modern prayer book in order to trace the concept through time.
  - b. **Moodle Exercise:** Students participate in a **forum** and response on a question centered on the theme of “freedom”, and how it applies to their lives and to the Jewish concepts in the Exodus story. (10 pts).
  - c. **Moodle Exercise:** Students post a reading journal of the texts they read, and a short personal reaction to the exercise of tracing a single concept through these texts. They will provide a short response indicating that the concepts they found are still alive today in Judaism. **Short essay.** (20pts).
5. **Biblical texts/concepts, Part II.**
- a. **Lecture on Creation**, what it means in Judaism, the “anti-mythology” of the Bible, what it means for monotheism and the problem of evil. Students will read the creation event in the first two chapters of Genesis. We read the seven days of the creation story, and arrive at a fundamental event/concept in Judaism, the Sabbath.
    - i. A short section on how “evil” fits into this concept of creation: if God created everything, then if He is All Good, etc, why is there evil? (Theodicy).
  - b. **Moodle Exercise:** Students will respond to two of several prepared questions on the topic of creation or the Sabbath in this lesson. **Short essay.** (20pts).
  - c. **Moodle Exercise:** A **forum** on the concept of creation and theodicy, with responses to colleagues. (10pts).
  - d. **Reading:** article on Genesis Torah Commentary, and the Problem of Evil.
6. **Rabbinic Period : transition from sacrifice to prayer, important events. The crises of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism.**
- a. **Lecture** updates the historical timeline up to the rabbinic period, covers the Destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70CE, and the events which transformed Judaism into a religion we know today.
    - i. The rabbinic sages had to formulate Judaism to a religion without the Temple, a significant event in Jewish history. The relevance is how the rabbis made this transition and reinterpreted sacred texts and events like Hanukkah. Students will read a central story of the Rabbinic sage who represents this change from Temple and sacrifices to prayer and study of texts.
    - ii. **A case study will foreshadow the next lesson.** Included is an excerpt from the book of Maccabees on the events that became the *Hanukkah* event, and how the later rabbis put the miracle of the lights/oil in the story. This will be tied into the ideas in the Hebrew Bible that the biblical/Jewish tradition is ours to interpret (biblical passages will be offered for online lookup, and discussion in the exercise). Video clips of the holiday of *Hanukkah* will show the modern candle lighting and rituals for the home.
  - b. **Essay/Response:** Students will discuss what it means to interpret the Bible, as a preparation for the next lessons, and to get them invested in thinking about the texts in creative ways. Students will respond to other posts (20 pts).
  - c. **Reading:** Short reading in *Back to the Sources* and uploaded text on Hanukkah.
7. **Dead Sea Scrolls.**
- a. **Lecture** will introduce the student to the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, and the community at Qumran: photos and video clips of the site and the caves of the Dead Sea.
  - b. Life at the site of Qumran involved ritual purity of the inhabitants, something that derived from the biblical texts and was expressed in the material remains. Therefore, we move from text to practice based on Bible, archaeology, and texts specific to the community.
  - c. **In recent years, the Dead Sea scrolls have come online** in their original form, available to study. A short discussion of the scrolls themselves and their online content will be addressed. Links to <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/> will show the scrolls and students can spend time with the actual documents and other resources on this site.

- d. Quiz on reading to this point – 20 pts.
- e. Reading: Relevant passages from *Back to the Sources*.

## 8. **The world of the Talmud.**

- a. The lecture will include discussion about the Oral and Written Torah (introduced earlier). A bit of review will include how the Torah came to be and how Judaism views it. Students will be introduced to the Mishnah and Talmud in a somewhat interactive form – a page of the Talmud will be shown and animation will point to relevant areas of the page. This also shows how the Talmud is a conversation, since commentaries from various centuries are included on the page.
- b. Moodle Exercise: A passage of the Talmud will be offered for student comment. It will be about themes already addressed to this point. The student will be given a Talmudic reference, will look it up, and then comment on the flow of the Talmudic discussion, what it says and give personal input. This will be done by group discussion and then each student will write his/her own response to a **written assignment** and then upload the results. (20 pts). Grade for the **Forum** and the written entry. (10 pts).
- c. Reading: *Back to the Sources*, and online text samples.

## 9. **Prophecy**

- a. The lecture will focus on some ideas of Israelite and Jewish prophecy.
  - i. We explore its role in Israelite society and the Bible.
  - ii. We explore how it was adopted by Christianity and even Reform Judaism.
- b. The concept of the fitting of prophecy in the totality of Judaism.
- c. Moodle Exercise: **Forum** on Jewish prophecy and response. (10pts).
- d. Moodle Exercise: Short **essay** on how prophecy and its role in Jewish texts and Judaism.. (20 pts).
- e. Reading: upload of article by Auerbach.

## 10. **Jewish texts of the Middle Ages**

- a. The Lecture is a brief overview about the two texts we will encounter regarding the reaction to Islamic philosophy, which was based on the Greek philosophy of Aristotle. Important Jewish philosophers, like Moses Maimonides and Bayha ibn Paquda responded that Judaism was not outdated and out of touch with the resurgent Greek philosophy that was popular in Islam. We will discuss the ideas of the Truth of Philosophy versus the Truth of the Bible, and how Judaism reacted to this seeming incongruity. Some ideas of “Jewish Thinking” are offered.
  - i. A short text sample of Maimonides on miracles (uploaded) will show how this famous philosopher equated the Bible and philosophy; he also wrote that miracles are really normal events woven into the fabric of creation. A one-page excerpt of Maimonides’ ideas on miracles will suffice since his material is dense.
- b. Moodle Exercise: Students will write a response to the question about how the Bible and Philosophy may or may not be equated. What is “Jewish Thinking” in comparison to philosophy? **Short essay** (20 pts).
- c. Reading: short portion by Byron Sherwin on Jewish theology, and *Back to the Sources*.

## 11. **Jewish Mystical texts**

- a. The lecture will include a short overview of Jewish mysticism, and *Kabbalah*. Most people do not know Judaism is a mystical religion. We will build on biblical, Talmudic and modern texts to show that Judaism is mystical from its earliest times.
- b. Kabbalah is a complex system, but we will introduce this form of mysticism and its effects on modern Jewish prayers. Video clips and images will be explored in the lecture.
  - i. Texts will include short sections of Ezekiel, Isaiah, Talmudic stories, and short examples of the *Zohar*, the book of the *Kabbalah*, all will show the progression in mystical thought from ancient to more recent times.
- c. Moodle Exercise: Students will react to a **question from a list** about Jewish mysticism. (20 pts).

## 12. **The development of the Jewish prayer book – ancient and modern examples of Jewish prayer.**

The lecture will place the Jewish prayer book in context and it will discuss the formation of prayers offered at the ancient Temple, and the formation of communal prayer from Dead Sea Scroll examples

A text on the formation of communal prayer.

Moodle Exercise: A **Forum** and a **short essay** on a few given concepts as found in the Friday evening Sabbath service in the prayer book, identify and elaborate on a few of the concepts. (20pts).

- a. **Extra Credit option** on the prayer book – assignment online (15pts).
- b. Reading: excerpts in the *Siddur*, and attached Word document

### 13. Thanksgiving Break

### 14. The Passover Haggadah and its importance.

- a. The lecture is a brief overview of the Passover holiday. Biblical references will supply the most ancient concepts of the Passover, which supports the ideas of the Exodus previously learned. The book of the Passover, the *Haggadah*, “the telling”, tells the story of the Israelites from bondage to freedom. The story has biblical, Talmudic, medieval and modern additions. The *Szyk Haggadah* is assigned for the course, and it contains stunning visual images of Artur Szyk, who illustrated the text of the Passover service in the 1940’s.
  - i. Several key points in the story will be highlighted in the lecture, and the student will be sent to the book to read sections in order to understand the meaning of the text and the order of the service.
  - ii. Students will focus completely on this text for this lesson, since it is so rich and contains so many issues already covered. A few links to internet resources, mostly [www.aish.com](http://www.aish.com), will supply the visuals on “how” the Passover service is conducted.
- b. Students will analyze one illustration and pick out the themes in the image and write a short essay on them. (20 pts).
- c. Reading in the Szyk Haggadah.

### 15. The final exam.

- a. The **Exam** will be a set time window during the final week, will include short text identifications, short essays on recurrent themes from the course, simple text lookups, and short answer questions. **(90pts).**

***Plagiarism will not be tolerated.*** Always cite sources that you use in any academic work. Do not copy someone else’s work (that means a fellow student’s or an author’s work). For whichever assignment you are caught cheating you will fail that assignment, and you may be subject to penalties from the university: **Academic Misconduct: Cheating, plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct will be reported to the Academic Conduct Committee of the University Senate for review and may result in failure for the course, university probation, suspension from the university, expulsion or other penalties. The “Academic Conduct” section of the catalog explains your due process rights and responsibilities. See me if you have questions or doubts.**

***Students with Disabilities:*** students who require any special arrangements due to disabilities should contact me so that we may resolve the issue, or so that we may take advantage of university services.