

# Judaism in the Greco-Roman World

JWST 30200/RLST 37500-01  
Tuesday/Thursday 1:10-2:25  
Friends 304

Professor Rebecca Lesses  
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Office Hours: Mondays 2:00-3:30 and Thursdays 2:45-4:00.  
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## Course Description

Judaism emerged as a distinct religious culture out of the encounter between Biblical religion and other cultures, most significantly Greek and Roman civilizations. The Greek conquest of the Middle East under Alexander the Great in the mid-300s B.C.E. brought Greek philosophy, culture, and social organization to Jews living in the land of Israel, Syria, and Iraq. Roman culture and law became important not long afterward, culminating with the Roman conquest of the land of Israel in the first century B.C.E. The rise of Christianity in the first century C.E. and the subsequent Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century continued to influence the development of Judaism.

This course covers the development of Judaism from 300 B.C.E. to 700 C.E. (a period that scholars call antiquity and late antiquity), examining the religious literature of the Second Temple period, the Judaism of the Dead Sea Scrolls, messianic movements in Judaism including the Jesus movement of the first century C.E., relations between emerging Christianity and Judaism, the rise of the rabbinic movement, the development of the synagogue as a religious institution, early Jewish mysticism and magic, and changing roles of Jewish women.

## Course Topics

1. Introduction to course and to written and archaeological sources
2. Biblical legacy of Judaism  
*exile & return*  
*Temple-centered religion under Persian rule*  
*Jewish identity in imperial contexts*
3. Greek culture and Hellenism; Judaism and Hellenism
4. Sectarianism in the Second Temple period: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots
5. Apocalypticism and messianism: Essenes and Christians
6. The Jesus Movement: development of Christianity out of Judaism
7. Development of the synagogue, synagogue as center of Jewish life; women's

role in the synagogue; archaeological evidence for Jewish culture

8. History of the rabbinic movement

9. Rabbinic culture – Palestine and Babylonia

*rabbinic conceptions of women*

*magic and mysticism in Jewish culture*

10. Jews in a Christian empire

11. Jews and the Rise of Islam

### **Books for Purchase (available in the IC Bookstore)**

David Biale, editor, *Cultures of the Jews, Volume 1: Mediterranean Origins* (Schocken, 2006)

Lawrence Schiffman, editor, *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Ktav, 1998)

Alan Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Harvard University Press, 1986)

*New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

There will also be a packet of readings (Course Reader) for sale. Cost: TBA (but probably not more than \$5)

Additional materials will be available on the course's WebCT site.

### **Course Requirements**

1. Class Participation (10% of grade)

Class attendance (5%) and participation (5%): this includes asking questions and speaking up during class discussions, participating in small group work in class, and active listening to lectures and to classmates. You will be graded on class preparation and participation – if you are silent and uninvolved in class, it will lower your grade.

2. Chevruta (10% of grade)

Chevruta, a Hebrew word meaning companionship or friendship, is the traditional Jewish way of studying texts. Chevruta partners gather around a text to read it together, argue about it, and try to figure out what it means. We will be using this method throughout the semester, both in class and outside it. When the chevruta group meets outside of class, I will ask you to appoint a recorder to report on the discussion and hand in a written report.

3. Short Papers (15% of grade)

Every one to two weeks there will be a short assignment requiring you to investigate a question and bring your answer back to class. Some assignments will be done alone, others together with another student or students. They will

generally include a presentation of your findings to the class.

3. Midterm Exam (20% of grade): October 16

4. Research Paper (25% of grade): due November 15. I will hand out an assignment sheet for this paper in the first couple of weeks of the course.

5. Final Exam (20% of grade): December 17

### **Course Policies**

1. No plagiarism on papers or cheating on examinations. **ALL WRITTEN WORK MUST BE YOUR OWN.** Please consult the Student Handbook for a complete statement of the Ithaca College policy on plagiarism, including definitions of plagiarism and proper citation of sources. Plagiarism includes using another student's paper to write your own, or lending your paper to another student to "help" him or her write the paper (do not do this!). I refer proven cases of plagiarism or cheating to the Judicial Affairs office.

2. Attendance Policy. 2 unexcused absences are permitted; if class must be missed because of illness, athletic exercises, concerts, job interviews, or other unavoidable activities, please let me know with a full explanation and if possible a note from the relevant authority (doctor, coach, chorus leader, Dean of Students office, etc.). More than two unexcused absences will lead to reduction of the course participation grade.

3. Respect for others in the class is required. This includes:

- Arrive to class on time.
- Turn off your cell-phone before class starts. This includes the "silent" (buzzing) ringer, which is very irritating to listen to.
- No text-messaging or playing games on your cell-phone during class.
- Don't eat noisy food in class (e.g., potato chips). If you must eat in class, please throw away your trash after class.
- Please do not leave the room during class except in case of dire physical need.
- Respect the instructor and your classmates – listen when they speak and avoid whispering or passing notes in class.

4. All written work must be done to pass the class. This includes exams and papers.

5. If you need help with your writing: Please come speak to me. I also recommend the Writing Center, 228 Park, which is open 9-5 Mon.-Fri. and 7-10 p.m. Sun.-Thurs. To schedule an appointment, call 274-3315.

6. Students with learning disabilities: please approach me early in the semester

and let me know your needs in terms of papers or exams. Also, please have the Office for Support Services send me a letter with your specific needs.

7. If you are having personal or family problems, and find it difficult to complete your assignments – please speak to me to set up special arrangements. Please, do not simply stop coming to class!

### **Schedule of Classes**

Note: Because we are missing three days of class due to the Jewish holidays, we will need to schedule at least two make-up classes later in the semester. These will be arranged according to student schedules. This schedule is also subject to change, especially in the second half of the course.

Thursday, August 30 Introduction to class

What is this course about?

What are the central beliefs and practices of biblical Judaism?

Handout of course syllabus, assignment for next Tuesday & Thursday

Tuesday, September 4 Survey of Early Jewish History and Basic Institutions

Meeting together with Introduction to New Testament class

Reading: will be handed out in class

Thurs., Sept. 6 Introduction to Sources

Bring your Bible and your copy of Schiffman's book, *Texts and Traditions*, to class

Topics covered will include Tanakh, Apocrypha, New Testament, Pseudepigrapha

Josephus, Philo, evidence from archaeological excavations, and rabbinic literature

Assignment: What are the sources?

Tuesday, September 11 Biblical legacy of Judaism; exile and return under

Persian rule; Judah as the Temple state

Reading: Bible: Ezra chapters 1, 3, 7, 9-10

Schiffman, pp. 71-73 (Declaration of Cyrus); 73-76 (papyri from Elephantine);

CR 8-10 :James C. VanderKam on the Elephantine papyri.

Biale, pp. 135-140.

Recommending reading: Elias Bickerman, "The Jews of Elephantine" (pp. 15-19 in course reader)

Chevruta Assignment: Ezra and the Declaration of Cyrus

Thursday, September 13 – First day of Rosh Hashanah: NO CLASS

Tuesday, September 18 Greek culture and Hellenism

What is Greek culture and what was transmitted to Jews in Palestine?

Reading: Biale, pp. 77-80, 94-102, 140-143

Schiffman, pp. 125-129 (Greek cultural institutions)

Recommended Reading: Morton Smith, "Hellenization" (pp. 20-33 in course reader)

Assignment: Defining Greek culture

Thursday, September 20 Second Century Crisis in Judea and Jerusalem: the Maccabean revolt

Reading: Bible: 1 Maccabees 1-6; 2 Maccabees 3-6 (Read the introductions to both books as well)

Biale, pp. 143-146

Recommending reading: Lester L. Grabbe, "The Hellenistic City of Jerusalem" (pp. 34-49 in course reader)

Tuesday, September 25 Jewish culture in Alexandria:

Reading: CR 59-64, 66-67: Philo of Alexandria on "The Nature of Soul," "Anthropomorphism," and various laws.

CR 4-6: VanderKam on Philo

Bible: Wisdom of Solomon (read the introduction as well)

Thursday, September 27 – First day of Sukkot: NO CLASS

Tuesday, October 2 Women in Hellenistic Jewish culture

Reading: CR 50-58 65-66: Philo's "On the Contemplative Life" and "The Female Nature"

CR 68-72: Testament of Job chs. 47-53.

Bible: Ben Sira 25:13-24 and 42:9-14

Biale, pp. 102-116

Thursday, October 4 – Shemini Azeret: NO CLASS

Tuesday, October 9 The Jewish sects in Palestine according to Josephus:

Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes

Reading: Schiffman, pp. 266-269; 275-284; Biale, pp. 147-157; CR 6-8

VanderKam on Josephus

Thursday, October 11 The Essenes and the Qumran Sect: what were the ideals of the sect of the Dead Sea?

Reading: Schiffman, pp. 285-299 (Rule of the Community, Damascus Document).

CR 73-81, 88-94: On "The Damascus Document", Rules of the Qumran Community, "The Halakhic Letter," "The Temple Scroll."

CR 10-14: VanderKam on the Qumran community

Tuesday, October 16 Midterm Examination

Thursday, October 18 – Fall break, NO CLASS

Tuesday, October 23 Apocalypticism and messianism

Reading: Daniel 7-12 (also, read the introduction to the book of Daniel)

Schiffman, pp. 340-341 (1 Enoch); 354-356 (Peshet Habakkuk).

CR 82-87: On Biblical Commentaries at Qumran and on the Books of Enoch

CR 1-3: VanderKam on apocalypticism

Thursday, October 25 The Jesus Movement

Reading: Gospel of Mark

Segal, Rebecca's Children

Tuesday, October 30 The Jesus Movement

Reading: Letter of Paul to the Galatians, Letter of Paul to the Romans

Segal, Rebecca's Children

Thursday, November 1 Synagogues in the land of Israel and Greek culture  
symbols on synagogue mosaics – zodiac, Helios

Reading: Biale, pp. 152-161, 169-174

Tuesday, November 6 Synagogues in the Roman Empire: Sardis in Asia Minor

Reading: Tessa Rajak, "Jews, Pagans, and Christians in Late Antique Sardis:  
Models of Interaction" (in course reader)

Thursday, November 8 Women's role in the synagogue: literary and  
archaeological evidence

Reading: Brooten, Kramer

Tuesday, November 13 Rise of rabbinic Judaism in the land of Israel

Reading: Biale, 162-174, Schiffman

Thursday, November 15 Rabbinic Jews in a Christian Empire

Reading: Biale, pp. 181-204; Schiffman, pp. 418-427.

Tuesday, November 27: Rise of rabbinic Judaism in Babylonia

Reading: Biale, pp. 205-206, 223-238

Thursday, November 29: Rabbinic culture

Tuesday, December 4 Rabbinic culture

Thursday, December 6 Jewish magic and mysticism

Reading: Biale, 238-253

Tuesday, December 11 & Thursday, December 3 The End of Antiquity and the Rise of Islam

Reading: Biale, pp. 206-209, 267-298

Monday, December 17

Final Exam: 1:30-4:00 p.m., in the classroom