

HISTORY OF HEAVEN*

Fall 2015

JUS/HIST/RELI 426

Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:45am

Vista Room, UA Hillel Bldg.

Prof. J. Edward Wright

Office: Judaic Studies, Marshall Building 420

Office Phone: 626-5763

Office Fax: 626-5767

Email: edwright@email.arizona.edu

Open Office Hours: Mon/Wed 8-10am, Tu/Th 11-12

Also available by appointment

* Information contained in this course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policy, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Description

This course presents an examination of the origins and early evolution of images of the afterlife among the ancient peoples of the Mediterranean basin and Near East. The course will focus on ancient Israelite, biblical, and early Jewish and Christian images. Later developments of these images within Western religious will also be discussed.

Objectives

At the end of this course you will be able to:

- 1) Describe biblical and ancient Near Eastern images of the heavenly realms;
- 2) Trace the evolution of biblical images of the cosmos in later traditions;
- 3) Explain why many people believe in a heavenly realm where God and the righteous live; and
- 4) Identify and explain major literary, artistic, and theological traditions about heaven from ancient to modern times.

In addition, you will hopefully acquire the following sensitivities:

- 1) Appreciation for the diversity of images of and beliefs about the heavenly realm;
- 2) Sincere respect for the religious and cultural traditions of others;
- 3) Appreciation for what science can contribute to the religious imagination; and
- 4) Willingness to view things from other people's perspectives.

I also hope that you will be motivated to do the following:

- 1) Learn more about astronomy and modern theories on the size, shape, and history of the cosmos;
- 2) Participate in inter-religious dialogue, especially as it relates to the relationship between science, religion, and culture;
- 3) Value your own religious and cultural background and seek to improve yourself for productive participation in today's multi-cultural society;
- 4) Form and express your opinions clearly on religious issues while remaining respectful of the viewpoints of others; and
- 5) Develop a commitment to life-long learning, realizing that no matter how much you may learn from this or any other class, there is still much more to be experienced and learned in order to become a well-rounded individual.

Textbooks

J. Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, Second Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Class Format

This course uses a lecture format. You are expected to complete the required reading and to consider the study guide questions before coming to each class. Learning is a dynamic process in which the student and teacher interact over the material under discussion. You will learn best by asking questions; all questions are welcome and, if they are of interest to the class as a whole, we will stop and discuss them together. Students who miss class due to illness or emergency are required to bring documentation from their healthcare provider or other relevant, professional third parties. Failure to submit third-party documentation will result in unexcused absences.

The UA's policy concerning Class Attendance and Administrative Drops is available at:
<http://catalog.arizona.edu/2015-16/policies/classatten.htm>.

The UA policy regarding absences on and accommodation of religious holidays is available at
<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/policies-and-codes/accommodation-religious-observance-and-practice>.

Absences pre-approved by the UA Dean of Students (or Dean designee) will be honored. See:
http://uhap.web.arizona.edu/chapter_7#7.04.02

UA Non-discrimination and Anti-harassment policy:
<http://policy.arizona.edu/human-resources/nondiscrimination-and-anti-harassment-policy>

UA Academic policies and procedures are available at:
<http://catalog.arizona.edu/2015-16/policies/aaindex.html>

Student Assistance and Advocacy information is available at:
<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/student-assistance/students/student-assistance>

Requirements

1. Online Midterm Exam (Tuesday 20 October 2015): This ONLINE exam will include all the material covered in class and in the readings to date.
2. Online Final Exam (Tuesday 15 December 2015, 8-10am in our classroom; this is the date listed in the university's official final exam schedule): The ONLINE final exam is comprehensive and will cover all the assigned reading materials and all the class lectures for the term.
3. Term Project: All students will participate in study groups that will submit a group project to the professor no later than the beginning of class on Tuesday, 1 December 2015. Groups may submit their projects before that date. Late projects will not be accepted. Groups will be formed in class during the second week of the semester. The guidelines for this project will be distributed the first day of class.
4. Review of the "Heaven: Beyond the Grave" video. Due by 5pm Tuesday, 1 September 2015. See assignment for this date in the syllabus.
5. Attendance: Attendance is required and will be taken at the beginning of each class session.
6. Weekly Quizzes: There will be a brief online reading quiz each week. These quizzes will be posted under the "quizzes" button on our course website each Friday and are to be completed by 8am the following Tuesday. Once you start the quiz, you will be given 10 minutes to complete the quiz. Students with DRC accommodations will be given the appropriate time adjustments.

Grading Scale

<u>Item and Points</u>		<u>Grades</u>	
Midterm Exam	50 pts.	90.0-100%	= A
Final Exam	75 pts.	80.0-89.99%	= B

Term Paper	50 pts.	70.0-79.99%	= C
Video Review	15 pts.	60.0-69.99%	= D
Attendance	15 pts.	Below 60%	= E
Weekly Quizzes	45 pts. (3 points each x 15 weeks)		
Course Total	250 pts.		

Requests for incompletes (I) and withdrawal (W) must be made in accordance with university policies which are available at <http://catalog.arizona.edu/2015-16/policies/grade.htm#I> and <http://catalog.arizona.edu/2015-16/policies/grade.htm#W> respectively.

Copyright for Course Materials

This professor and The University of Arizona take copyright laws seriously. The professor retains the copyright for all lectures and course materials. The professor's copyright includes student notes or summaries that substantially reflect the professor's lectures or materials. These materials are made available only for personal use by students, and may not be distributed or reproduced for commercial purposes without the professor's express written consent. This does not restrict students from sharing notes on an individual basis for personal use. Violation of copyright laws is strictly forbidden by the Student Code of Academic Integrity and may result in course and/or legal sanctions.

Standards of Student Conduct

The professor encourages the use of computers in class for note-taking and class-related activities. The use of computers for email, web browsing, etc., and the use of cell phones and pagers are strictly forbidden. Students violating this rule will be asked to leave the class for the day.

Plagiarism and other forms academic misconduct are strictly forbidden according to the Student Code of Academic Integrity (see studpubs.web.arizona.edu/policies/cacaint.htm). Behavior that could be considered threatening is also strictly forbidden according to UofA policy (see policy.web.arizona.edu/~policy/threaten.shtml).

Special Needs and Accommodations

It is the University's goal that learning experiences be as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options. You are also welcome to contact Disability Resources (520-621-3268) to establish reasonable accommodations. For additional information on Disability Resources and reasonable accommodations, please visit <http://drc.arizona.edu/>.

Please be aware that the accessible table and chairs in this room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not usable.

If you have reasonable accommodations, please plan to meet with me by appointment or during office hours to discuss accommodations and how my course requirements and activities may impact your ability to fully participate. In keeping with University policy I will provide reasonable accommodation of any student's religious beliefs with regard to the scheduling of examinations and other academic requirements for this course. Please consult with me at least two weeks in advance of any such scheduling issues.

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Standards of Student Conduct

The professor allows the use of computers in class for note taking and class-related activities only. The use of computers for email, web-browsing, etc., and the use of cell phones and pagers are strictly forbidden. Students violating these rules will be asked to leave the class for the day. After a second violation of this rule the student will be administratively dropped from the class.

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Schedule

Week 1

Tuesday, 25 August 2015

Course Introduction and Overview: What is "heaven," and why should we study it?

Note: Throughout the course of the semester several supplementary readings and bibliographic lists will be added to our D2L course website. These are made available for you to peruse according to your interests. Many could be of help to you in preparing your term projects.

Thursday, 27 August 2015

Topic: Prehistoric Afterlife?

Read: <http://news.discovery.com/history/neanderthal-burial-ground-afterlife-110420.html>

Preparation Questions:

To what does the designation “Prehistoric” refer? What kinds of materials are found in burials? What might some of that evidence indicate about images of the afterlife? Could we call this “prehistoric heaven”?

Week 2

Tuesday, 1 September 2015

— No Class Meeting —

Topic: Heaven: Beyond the Grave

Assignment: Watch the “Heaven: Beyond the Grave” video. This video includes comments from academics and religious leaders. Please write a one-page personal assessment of the views expressed by the religious leaders (Rabbi, Priests, Minister, and Imam). This review is due in my email inbox by 5pm today.

Thursday, 3 September 2015

Ancient Egyptian Afterlife

Read: Wright, chapter 1.

Preparation Questions:

What texts contain information on Egyptian images of the heaven realm? Describe four Egyptian models of the heavenly realm. What was the nature of their astronomical knowledge? Was there any conflict between science and religion for the Egyptians? Why or why not? How did the Egyptians imagine the afterlife? What did “heaven” look like? Where was it? Who “made it to heaven” according the Egyptians? How did these images and beliefs change over time?

Week 3

Tuesday, 8 September 2015

Topic: Ancient Mesopotamian Afterlife

Read: Wright, chapter 2.

Preparation Questions:

How did the Mesopotamians imagine the heavenly realms? What was the nature of their astronomical knowledge? How did their astronomers work? What role did the astronomers function in society? Was there any conflict between science and religion for the peoples of Mesopotamia? Why or why not? How did the Mesopotamians imagine the afterlife? What did “heaven” look like? Where was it? Who “made it to heaven?” According to the datable textual evidence, who in the ancient Near East was likely the first to imagine that people went to heaven after death? Could belief in heavenly afterlife have predated the written records?

Thursday 10 September 2015

Topic: The Hebrew Bible

Read: McDannell and Lang, chapter 1; The Book of Deuteronomy in the Bible (note that the Bible is available online in a variety of English translations).

Preparation Questions:

What do you know about the Hebrew Bible? When was it written? Who wrote it and with what purposes?

Week 4

Tuesday, 15 September 2015

Topic: Heaven in “Biblical” Israel

Read: Genesis 1-2; Deut 4:15-20, 32:8-9; 1 Samuel 28; Ezekiel 8:14-16; Amos 5:4-9, 25-27; Psalm 19:1-6, 82, 89:5-11, 148; Job 1:6-12, 9:5-10, 38:1-38.

Preparation Questions:

What do the biblical editors think about astronomers/astrologers? Who, in these editors’ opinion, controls astronomical phenomena? Do you think people actually consulted astronomers/astrologers in ancient Israel? Did the ancient Israelites worship other gods? Why or why not? If so, what parts or portions of the population do you think would do this?

Thursday, 17 September 2015

Topic: Heaven in “Ancient” Israel

Read: Wright, chapter 3.

Preparation Questions:

How did the ancient Israelites imagine the cosmos and the heavenly realm of the gods? How and why is this like or unlike the speculations of their ancient Near Eastern neighbors? What “data” did they use to construct these images?

Week 5

Tuesday, 22 September 2015

Topic: Ancient Israel, continued

Read: review Wright, chapter 3.

Preparation Questions:

How did Ancient Israel’s images of heaven and the afterlife evolve through time? What factors may have influenced these changes? Why is it important to distinguish between biblical and Israelite religion? How do the biblical images of the heavenly realm differ from the Israelite images? What were the main features of the Israelite images of the heavenly realm? Why didn’t the biblical editors accept these images?

Thursday, 24 September 2015

Topic: The Afterlife from Ancient Israel to Early Judaism

Read: Daniel 12

When was the Book of Daniel written? What kind of literature is this? What does Daniel 12 add to our understanding of late biblical and early Jewish images of afterlife and heaven? Why is this important in the evolution of Jewish concepts of heaven?

Week 6

Tuesday, 29 September 2015

Topic: The Heavenly Realms Ancient Greece and Rome

Read: Wright, chapter 4

Preparation Questions:

Make a list of the significant people and their contributions while you are reading through these materials. Describe the image of the heavenly realms developed by Plato, Eudoxus, Aristotle, Aristarchus, and Ptolemy. How and why did these images evolve as they did? What data did they use? How is the Greek idea of the ascent of the soul different from ancient Near Eastern conceptions of what happens to the dead? What kind of information or speculation would have inspired the Greek image? Why does the soul desire to ascend to heaven after death?

Thursday, 1 October 2015

Topic: Heavenly Realms in Early Judaism

Read: Wright, chapter 5.

Preparation Questions:

Do these images of the heavenly realm accord with Greco-Roman astronomy? If not, with what image of the cosmos do they fit? What does this say about these people’s approaches to the interaction of science and religion?

Week 7

Tuesday, 6 October 2015

Reading Day — No Class Meeting

Thursday, 8 October 2015

Topic: Heavenly Realms in Early Judaism, continued

Read: Wright, chapter 6.

Preparation Questions:

In what ways would early Jewish and Christian images of heaven differ and why? Judaism eventually marginalized speculation about heaven. Why would the rabbis want to do this? What danger could there be in such speculation?

Week 8

Tuesday, 13 October 2015

Topic: Early Christianity

Read: Wright, chapter 7; McDannell and Lang, chapter 2.

Preparation Questions:

What are some of the hallmarks of Christian images of the heavenly realm? What is it in the religious imagination that inspires these images? What perceived social or religious needs do they address?

Thursday, 15 October 2015

ONLINE REVIEW FOR MIDTERM EXAM

I will post a review guide for the Midterm Exam on our D2L course website one week prior to the exam. If you are diligent in studying the questions on this guide, you will be prepared for success on this exam.

Week 9

Tuesday, 20 October 2015

ONLINE MIDTERM EXAM

I will post a review guide for the Midterm Exam on our D2L course website one week prior to the exam. If you are diligent in studying the questions on this guide, you will be prepared for success on this exam.

Thursday, 22 October 2015

Topic: Early Christianity, continued

Read: McDannell and Lang, chapter 3; Selections from Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas, and Gospel of Mary Magdalene posted on D2L course website.

Preparation Questions:

What are some of the recurring themes in Early Jewish and Christian images of the heavenly realm? How did the early Christian theologians image heaven? How 'personal' were these images? Could you say that human images of heaven are in essence images of their lives on earth? How do Irenaeus' and Augustine's images of heaven differ and why? What is Gnosticism? Who practiced it and where? How is one "saved" according to Gnosticism? What is Christian Gnosticism and what are its unique features?

Week 10

Tuesday, 27 October 2015

Traditional Jewish Heaven

Read: The Four Rabbis Who Entered "Pardes," *Babylonian Talmud*, Hagigah 14b, and parallels on D2L course website.

Preparation Questions:

What is the general idea that this text communicates regarding the attempt to "enter Paradise?" Is "heaven" always a safe place? What attitude towards this type of mystical practice does this text indicate? What range of attitudes would society at-large have towards this activity and why?

Thursday, 29 October 2015

Medieval Christianity

Read: McDannell and Lang, chapters 4-6.

Preparation Questions:

What social conditions drove medieval images of heaven? How do theological struggles within the Christian community affect their images of heaven? How did the medieval cathedral inspire thoughts of heaven? What role did astronomy play in these medieval images? What two images of heaven dominated medieval speculations and how did the spirit of the Renaissance influence these images in the 15th and 16th centuries? How physical were these images and why? What impact did the reform movements of the 16-18th centuries have on images of heaven? Are these images a reaction to Renaissance images? How do the designations “theocentric” and “anthrocentric” relate to images of heaven? What drives each of these two approaches? Why might the designations “contemplative” and “communal” be more apropos? What is “the beatific vision?” Is it possible to balance the theocentric and anthrocentric images of heaven? How did Catholic reform movements address the issues concerning the nature of the heavenly afterlife? In what ways were these similar to or different from protestant approaches?

Week 11

Tuesday, 3 November 2015

Topic: Dante’s *Divine Comedy*—Paradiso

Read: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Paradise*. Dante is available online at http://www.divinecomedy.org/divine_comedy.html

Preparation Questions:

Conduct your own background research on Dante and his *Divine Comedy*. There are three parts to the *Divine Comedy*, and I ask that you read part three, “Paradise/Paradiso.” How does Dante understand the structure of the cosmos? What are the various cosmic realms and what goes on in each?

Thursday, 5 November 2015

Topic: Dante’s *Divine Comedy*—Paradiso, cont.

How would you characterize the emotions of the text as it describes this region? Some have suggested that Dante was a cruel or vindictive man. Would you concur with this opinion? Why or why not? What is the overall value of this text?

Week 12

Tuesday, 10 November 2015

Topic: Medieval Islam and Judaism

Read: Wright, chapter 8; articles and images posted on D2L course website.

Preparation Questions:

What features characterize later Jewish and Islamic images of the heavenly realm? Does astronomy influence these theological images? Can you detect the biblical roots of some of these images? Why would some prefer to marginalize speculation about the nature of heaven and the afterlife? Is there any facet of human life that is necessarily excluded from heaven? How can people use images of heaven and the afterlife to influence human behavior?

Thursday, 12 November 2015

Topic: Medieval Christian Heaven

Read: McDannell and Lang, chapters 7-8.

Preparation Questions:

Who was Emanuel Swedenborg and what was his image of heaven? In what ways was his image unique? According to McDannell and Lang, what are the four elements of his “modern” view of heaven? Is his idea of heaven as a continuation of life on earth really new? Is his vision or visit to heaven a new idea? How did other Christian groups respond to Swedenborg’s sensual heaven? What trends characterized 19th century images of heaven? What forms of ‘love’ were imagined to take place in heaven? What does this say about people’s beliefs regarding what is important about life on earth and in heaven?

Week 13

Tuesday, 17 November 2015

Topic: Copernicus, Newton and the Emergence of a Modern Heaven

Read: “Nicolaus Copernicus” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (available online at plato.stanford.edu/entries/copernicus/). “Isaac Newton,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (available online at plato.stanford.edu/entries/newton/). Selections from Emanuel Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell* (online translation by George F. Dole (Swedenborg Foundation, 2000) available at www.newcenturyedition.org/HH_Translation.pdf. The work is divided into chapters based on various topics. I suggest you have a look at some of the following:

“Three Heavens” (pp. 102-111), “Children in Heaven” (pp. 265-73), “Marriage in Heaven” (pp. 294-306), “Revival and Afterlife” (pp. 338-41), “Nature of the Afterlife” (pp. 358-70).

Preparation Questions

What role did Copernicus play in the history of astronomy? To what does the phrase “Copernican Revolution” refer? Explain the adage “Copernicus made God homeless, while Newton left Him unemployed.” How would Newton’s discoveries and theories influence people’s images of the cosmos, heaven, and the afterlife? As McDannell and Lang note, Emanuel Swedenborg propounded what many regard as the first modern image of heaven. What is ‘modern’ about Swedenborg’s images of heaven?

Thursday, 19 November 2015

Modern Islamic Images of Heaven

Read: Texts and images posted on D2L course website.

Preparation Questions:

Recalling the differences we articulated between Quranic and Extremist versions of Islamic heaven, explain how you would interpret the quotations and images posted on our D2L course website for this lecture. You might also like to do a web search on Islamic heaven and sex or some similar topic. As you do this, note who is sponsoring these sites. Who seems to be more concerned about sex in heaven—Muslims, Christians, or Jews?

Week 14

Tuesday, 24 November 2015

Topic: Modern Images and Concerns

Read: McDannell and Lang, chapters 9-10; “This Man is not a Cyborg, Yet,” *New York Times*, 1 June 2015.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/02/business/dmitry-itskov-and-the-avatar-quest.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

Preparation Questions:

We will begin our discussion by considering van Gogh’s “Starry Night.” Have a look at the painting on the web (www.vangoghgallery.com/painting/p_0612.htm) or in a book and ask yourself “what is van Gogh trying to communicate? What inspires this painting? What does this painting say to you about science and spirituality? In the modern world where we are exploring new ways of understanding “human,” how do or why would religious images of the cosmos and of what happens after death still inspire people? McDannell and Lang focus on Christian images, do you know of any other religions’ images of heaven and the afterlife? What are modern trends in beliefs about heaven? Is there still a place for belief in heaven? From what you know about astronomy, how do modern cosmologists imagine the cosmos? How did they arrive at these images? Nietzsche said that the images created by moderns left the cosmos a “rather cold place.” Is this the only response to the modern cosmos? What do you think is the future of the heaven?

Thursday, 26 November 2015

Thanksgiving Break

No Class Meeting

Week 15

Tuesday, 1 December 2015

*****Group Projects Due at Beginning of Class*****

Topic: Heaven and Near Death Experience

Read: D2L postings on Near Death Experiences

Peter Kreeft, “What will Heaven be like? *Christianity Today* 6/1/2003, online at

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/juneweb-only/6-2-51.0.html?paging=off>

N. T. Wright, "Christians Wrong about Heaven," online at
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1710844,00.html>

David Kessler, "Do the Dead Greet the Dying?" online at
<http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/10/18/o.end.of.life/index.html>).

Preparation Questions:

What is a Near Death Experience? Identify two general approaches to how to interpret Near Death Experiences. To what does the term "Multiverses" refer, and how might that relate to modern images of heaven? Do all Christians share the same views of heaven/afterlife? What is that the modern people fear and or expect at the end of life? How does this differ from the other people and traditions we have discussed so this term?

Thursday, 3 December 2015

Topics: Group Project Presentations

Read: Group projects posted on D2L under "Group Projects"

Tuesday, 8 December 2015

Topics: Group Project Presentations, cont.

Read: Group projects posted on D2L under "Group Projects"

ONLINE FINAL EXAM
TUESDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2015
8-10AM

I will post a review guide for the Final Exam on our D2L course website one week prior to the exam.

This will be a comprehensive Final Exam, covering material from the entire course. If you are diligent in studying the questions on the study guide, you will be prepared for success on this exam.