

# Jews in the Ancient World

JWST/RELS 3373

Dr. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau

T/Th 10-11:30 a.m.

Social Work 110K

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**Office hours:** Wednesdays 2:30-3:30 p.m., Thursdays 4-5 p.m., or by appointment



A model of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, as renovated by King Herod the Great. Image by Michael Avi-Yonah.

## **Course description:**

While the biblical period is an important precursor to the Jewish religion, what happened in the centuries afterward truly shaped Judaism into what it is today. This course will give students an overview of that exciting era of Jewish history, from the Persian period through the rise of the rabbis (roughly 500 B.C.E.-500 C.E.). Topics discussed will include the development of the Diaspora, the Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmonean Dynasty, the Herodians, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the formation of the Bible, the growth and demise of Jewish sectarianism, the rise of

Christianity, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the development of the synagogue, and the writing of rabbinic literature. Throughout the semester, students will sample texts produced during this period, including biblical materials, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and rabbinic texts.

### **Course goals:**

- To be able to recount and write about ancient Jewish history, with special attention to Jewish interactions with the various empires of the time.
- To explore the different kinds of Jewish literature produced in this period, and to be able to speak intelligently about the content and reliability of each.
- To draw some general conclusions about the reliability of different kinds of sources for writing history.
- To develop an appreciation for how the religion of the Bible developed into rabbinic Judaism, and how rabbinic Judaism became the dominant and enduring form of the religion.

### **Required books:**

Christine Hayes, *The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2010. (**Hayes**)

Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2014. (**Cohen**)

You should also have access to a Bible that includes the Apocrypha, whether online or on paper.

Other readings, such as non-biblical primary sources, will be provided on Blackboard.

### **Course requirements and policies:**

1. New concepts will be introduced every class session, so students are strongly encouraged to make attendance and punctuality a priority. Attendance will be taken. Excessive absences or lateness will affect a student's grade, as will unexcused early departures from class. If you must miss class, please *let me know in advance* if at all possible; it will be your responsibility to make up work that you have missed.
2. Class participation is important! Please come to class prepared to contribute to class discussions and take part in group activities. I have provided you with questions to guide your reading for each class session; please come prepared to explore these questions together.
3. It is impossible to pay attention and participate if you are checking your e-mail or on Facebook (and it's also incredibly rude), so I ask that you refrain from using your computer, tablet, or phone for any non-class-related purposes during class time. Failure to honor this rule will result in a lowered grade. I strongly encourage you to use paper and pen to take notes.

4. In between class sessions, I will occasionally need to communicate important information to the class via e-mail. It is your responsibility to check your university e-mail regularly.
5. Four times during the semester, you will write a short response paper reflecting on course material. I will distribute prompts for the papers one week in advance of the due dates. Response papers will be due via TurnItIn one half hour (9:30 a.m.) prior to class time.
6. Students will complete a group project aimed at dramatizing some of the events of ancient Judaism.
7. There will be a take-home final exam, which will be due **Tuesday, December 12** at 11 a.m.
8. There will be opportunities to earn extra credit points by attending events on campus. The number and frequency of these opportunities will depend on what events pertinent to the course are scheduled for this semester. Stay tuned for more information.
9. This syllabus is subject to change. If I make any changes, I will notify you.

### **Grading:**

Take-home final exam:	25%
Response papers:	40%
Group project:	15%
Attendance and participation:	20%

Grading for assignments will be on the following scale. Please note that the highest *final course grade* the University permits is A.

97-100: A+	77-79: C+
93-96: A	73-76: C
90-92: A-	70-72: C-
87-89: B+	67-69: D+
83-86: B	63-66: D
80-82: B-	60-62: D-
	<60: F

### **Academic integrity:**

Students at the University of Houston are required to adhere to the university's academic honesty policy, which you can find here: <http://www.uh.edu/provost/academic-affairs/policy-guidelines/honesty-policy/> If you are unsure how the honesty policy applies to a given assignment in this course, please ask me. I have a zero-tolerance policy towards any type of academic dishonesty and will refer all violations to the department hearing officer.

### **Special accommodations for students with disabilities:**

To receive reasonable accommodations for a disability at the University of Houston, students are to register with the Center for Students with Disabilities. If the CSD has granted you

accommodations, please make an appointment with me to discuss how we can work together to make sure you receive those accommodations in this class.

### **CAPS Statement:**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS ([www.uh.edu/caps](http://www.uh.edu/caps)) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let's Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus.

[http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html)

### **Course schedule:**

#### Week 1

Tuesday, August 22: Introductions, syllabus review, and origins of Judaism and Jews

Thursday, August 24: Chronology, terms, periods, and sources

Read: Hayes Preface and Chronology, pp79-80 (Philo), pp84-85 (Josephus), Cohen pp6-8, 12-14

- How does Hayes define Judaism?
- What terms do Hayes and Cohen use to describe the religion of this period? What is at stake in how we label the Judaism of this time?
- What are the differences among the terms Hebrew, Israelite, and Jew?
- Does Cohen argue for unity, diversity, or a balance of the two among early Jews?

#### Week 2

Tuesday, August 29: Biblical origins

Read: Hayes pp1-14, chapter 3

Genesis 11:27-12:7, Exodus 19-20, Deuteronomy 12, 1 Samuel 8, 1 Kings 12, 2 Kings 17, 2 Kings 25, Ezekiel 18:1-4, Isaiah 53:7-11, Jeremiah 25 and 32

- Where does authority come from in these different passages?
- What is God like?
- What is God's relationship to the people?
- Do the people have loyalty to a nation? A tribe? A king? God?
- To what extent does Israel have a unique/exclusive relationship to God?

Group project assignment distributed

Thursday, August 31: The Persian Period, Elephantine, and the Samaritan Schism

Read: Hayes pp14-15, 73-77, Cohen pp167-169

Ezra 1-3, Ezra 4:1-5, 7, 9-10; Nehemiah 1-6, 8, 13

Elephantine Temple Papyrus, Marriage Contract from the Ananiah Archive, The High Priesthood and the Samaritans, 1 Esdras 2: Opposition to the Temple, Josephus: The Restoration of the Temple

- From whence do Ezra, Nehemiah, and other communal leaders get their authority?
- What is the significance of the event in Nehemiah 8?
- How is exile described?
- Who are the “insiders” of the text? Who are the “outsiders”?
- Who are the foreign women?
- What are the stated causes of the troubles between Samaritans and Jews?
- What is the relationship between the community at Elephantine and the Jews in Jerusalem? Between the Elephantine community and the Persians?

### Week 3

Tuesday, September 5: The Hellenistic Period

Read: Hayes pp15-16, 77-80, Cohen pp26-37

Pausanias: The Greek Cultural Institutions, Josephus: Alexander and the Jews, Babylonian Talmud: Meeting of Alexander and the High Priest, Josephus: Antiochus III Conquers Jerusalem

- What do scholars mean by Hellenism? What is Hellenization? What is Hellenistic Judaism?
- What did a Hellenized city look like?
- What would have been the advantages and disadvantages of Hellenism for the Jews? Was it an all-or-nothing proposition?
- What can Josephus and the Rabbis tell us about Jewish perceptions of the Greeks? What limitations are there on using these sources?

Response paper #1 prompt distributed

Thursday, September 7: Diaspora

Read: Cohen pp38-41

Josephus: The Temple of Onias, An Anti-Semitic Pogrom, Cleopatra’s Jewish Generals, The Conversion of the House of Adiabene; Dedicatory Inscriptions: Evidence of Jewish Religious Life in Hellenistic Egypt,

- According to Cohen, what is the difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism?
- Who was Onias and why did he build a Temple?
- What caused the anti-Jewish violence in Alexandria?
- How would you assess the status of Jews in Egypt?

- How much credence should we give Josephus' account of the conversion of Adiabene?

#### Week 4

Tuesday, September 12: Canon and Septuagint

Read: Cohen pp173-176, 181-185

The Letter of Aristeas, Babylonian Talmud: Translation of the Torah into Greek

Due: Response paper #1

- What is a canon? Did the Jews have one in the Hellenistic period?
- Which books were authoritative to Hellenistic period Jews? How do we know?
- Why are these questions important?

Thursday, September 14: Apocrypha

Read: Judith 8-16, Tobit 1-14

- Have you read either of these texts before? In what context?
- What surprises you about these texts?

#### Week 5

Tuesday, September 19: The Maccabean Revolt

Read: Hayes pp16-18, Cohen pp22-23

1 Maccabees 1-4; 2 Maccabees 2:19-3:40, 6-7

- What do we know about the structure of the Jewish community immediately before the revolt?
- What were the causes of the revolt? Do different sources posit different causes?
- How do the perspectives of 1 and 2 Maccabees on the revolt differ?
- How did the goals of the revolt change over time?

Thursday, September 21: NO CLASS: Rosh Hashanah

#### Week 6

Tuesday, September 26: The Hasmonean Dynasty

Read: 1 Maccabees 10-15, Josephus on the Hasmoneans

- How did the Hasmoneans become kings? What sources of authority did the Hasmoneans claim for their rule?
- Who were the allies and opponents of the Hasmoneans?
- What were the implications of a revived monarchy in Palestine?
- What challenges did the Hasmoneans face in maintaining their power? Why did their dynasty fall?
- What was the relationship of the Hasmoneans to Hellenism?

Thursday, September 28: Sects

Read: Hayes pp80-87, Cohen pp123-135

Matthew 22, 23:15-26; Acts 23

Various writings on the sects from ancient authors

- What is a sect?
- What Jewish sects may be identified in the Second Temple period?
- What is apocalypticism, and what is its relationship to sectarianism?
- Make a chart listing the primary sources you have read (i.e. New Testament, Josephus, Mishnah; count different parts of the New Testament as different sources) and the attributes they ascribe to each sect they identify.
- What are the benefits and problems with using each of these sources to reconstruct sectarianism in the Second Temple period?

### Week 7

Tuesday, October 3: Pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Read: Cohen pp115-117

Genesis 34, selections from Jubilees and Testament of Levi

- How do the texts of Jubilees and Testament of Levi interact with the biblical material from Genesis?
- What kinds of texts are present among the Dead Sea Scrolls?
- Why do you think the discovery of the scrolls was such a big deal?

Response paper #2 prompt distributed

Thursday, October 5: The Dead Sea Scrolls

Read: The Rule of the Community, The Damascus Document, The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, the “Son of God” text

- What does the Rule of the Community tell us about the beliefs and actions of the people who lived at Qumran?
- How did this community relate to other Jews?

### Week 8

Tuesday, October 10: The Herodian Dynasty

Read: Hayes pp18-20

Josephus on Herod, the Rabbis on Herod

- How did Herod gain power?
- How do you evaluate Herod’s rule?
- How does Josephus evaluate Herod?

- How do the rabbis evaluate Herod? What characteristics do they ascribe to him?

Due: Response paper #2

Thursday, October 12: Judea under Rome

Read: Josephus: Jewish Legal Status in Rome, Inscriptions on Jewish religious life in Rome, the Aphrodisias Inscription, Tacitus: Jewish Origins and Rituals

- What status does Josephus ascribe to the Jews under Roman rule? How much can we rely on Josephus for this purpose?
- What do the various inscriptions tell us about Jewish life in Rome?
- What is a God-fearer?
- How does Tacitus describe Judaism?

### Week 9

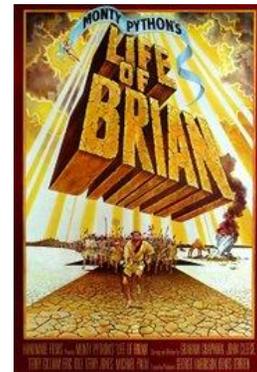
Tuesday, October 17: Film screening--*Life of Brian*

Response paper #3 prompts distributed

Thursday, October 19: Finish *Life of Brian*, The Great Revolt

Read: Josephus on the Great Revolt

- What were the causes of the revolt?
- Why did it fail?



### Week 10

Tuesday, October 24: The Destruction of the Temple

Read: Josephus: The Siege of Jerusalem, Tacitus: Roman Earthworks at Jerusalem, Babylonian Talmud: Rabbinic Account of the Siege, Josephus: The Final Roman Victory, Dio Cassius: A Roman Account of the Revolt, Tosefta: Mourning for the Destroyed Synagogue

- How do the accounts of the siege and conquest given by Josephus, Dio Cassius, and the rabbis differ?
- How did the rabbis deal with the destruction of the Temple?
- In what ways does Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai both break with and ensure continuity with the past? Is he a traitor? What is his relationship to Vespasian?

Due: Response paper #3

Thursday, October 26: The Rise of Christianity

Read: Cohen pp165-167, 231-258

Acts 1-7, 15

Writings from Jews about Christians and from Christians about Jews

- What is the relationship of early Christianity to Judaism? To Jewish sectarianism?
- How does Acts describe the first Christians?
- Why do Christians and Jews split? What role does Rome play?
- What do early Christians have to say about Jews? What do Jews say about early Christians?

- What is the *Birkat ha-minim*?

### Week 11

Tuesday, October 31: The Bar Kochba Revolt

Read: Jerusalem Talmud: Rabbi Akiva and Bar Kochba

- What were the causes of the revolt?
- Why did it fail?
- What role did Rabbi Akiva play?

Thursday, November 2: The Rise of the Rabbinic Class

Read: Hayes pp89-101, Cohen pp222-226

- How did the rabbis' position in Jewish society evolve over time?
- How do the rabbis portray their own origins and rise to power?
- Why did sectarianism decline during this period, according to Cohen?
- What do the rabbis appear to be looking for in a leader?
- To what extent is rabbinic Judaism a continuation of pre-70 C.E. Judaism and to what extent is it an innovation?

### Week 12

Tuesday, November 7: Synagogue and Liturgy

Read: Cohen pp110-114

- How and why does the synagogue develop?
- How and why does it spread?
- What are its functions?
- What is liturgy and why is it important for the study of ancient Judaism?
- To what extent, if at all, is there continuity between worship in the Temple and in the synagogue?

Thursday, November 9: Jews in the Byzantine Christian World

Read: Laws Concerning the Jews, Julian the Apostate Tries to Rebuild the Temple, The Redress of Oppressive Measures, Anti-Jewish Legislation

- What does the Jewish community look like under Byzantine Christianity?
- What kind of leadership does it have?
- What are the details of Jewish persecution in this period?

### Week 13

Tuesday, November 14: Rabbinic Literature

Read: Hayes pp102-123

Mishnah Avot

- What is "Oral Law"? How does this idea develop?

- What is the difference between *halakhah* and *aggadah*?
- How is the Mishnah organized?
- What is the relationship between Mishnah and Talmud?
- Why are there two Talmuds?
- What kinds of rules did the rabbis develop for biblical interpretation?

Thursday, November 16: Rabbinic Literature and Canon Revisited

Read: Hayes chapter 6, Cohen pp176-181, 185-210, 226-228

Targum to Exodus: The Ten Commandments, Babylonian Talmud: The Order of Scripture, Mishnah Yadayim: The Debate over the Biblical Canon, Tosefta Yadayim: The Biblical Canon and Divine Inspiration, rabbinic statements on apocryphal books

- How did the rabbis conceive of God and God's relationship to humans?
- How did the rabbis write about other Jews, about non-Jews, and about conversion to Judaism?
- What do the rabbis have to do with the development of canon?
- What did the rabbis say about noncanonical books? Why?
- What is *Targum*?
- Can we say anything about why some books made it into the Jewish canon and others did not?
- What became of noncanonical texts?

Response paper #4 prompt distributed

#### Week 14

Tuesday, November 21: NO CLASS: Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting

Thursday, November 23: NO CLASS: Thanksgiving!

#### Week 15

Tuesday, November 28: Magic and mysticism

Special guest speaker: Dr. Sara Ronis, St. Mary's University

Due: Response paper #4

Thursday, November 30: Wrap-up and final exam review