RS 3320 - Introduction to Judaism
RS 3320 (CRN 26876), JS 3300 (CRN 26201)
Religious Studies Program
The University of Texas at El Paso
Spring, 2026

Instructor: Dr. Clayton Bench
Time: Online
Room: Online
Office: 210 Worrell Hall
Office Hours: M/W/F – 8:30 – 9:15AM; T/Th – 8:30 – 9:30AM
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Course Description:
This course provides an introductory overview of the history, beliefs, and practices of Judaism. The course is structured in a way that first addresses the historical background of Judaism followed by an exploration of the beliefs and practices of Judaism.

Course Objectives:
After successfully completing the course, students will be able to:

1) Locate Judaism within a historical critical framework and be able to answer historical critical questions such as:
    a. What is the basic history of Israel and Israelite religion within the context of the Ancient Near East?
    b. What is the relationship between Israelite religious tradition and Judaism?
    c. How were the Jewish scriptures produced?
2) Discuss:
    a. The emergence of Judaism in the post-Exilic Second Temple Period.
    b. The development of competing Jewish sects at various times in Jewish history.
    c. The emergence of Jewish literature (Tanakh, Rabbinic Literature, Jewish Liturgical texts, Shulchan Arukh, Responsa, Mystical Texts, etc.)
    d. Topics such as the Exile, diaspora, persecution, the Jewish Messiah(s), covenant, return, the Holocaust, etc.
3) Explain the basic forms of belief and worship in contemporary Jewish communities (the Temple, the synagogue, festivals, rituals within the cycle of life, family relationships, community relationships, eschatology, the afterlife, etc.)

Required Textbooks and Readings:
de Lange, N. *An Introduction to Judaism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002 (available for free via UTEP Library access here: Lange, N. *An Introduction to Judaism*)

*Additional required readings will be provided in Blackboard (see the schedule below)

Assignments and Grade Distribution
30% Participation (group discussions)
30% Research Essay (5 - 7 pages not including title page and bibliography)
20% Midterm Exam
20% Final Exam

Assignment Notes
Participation: Participation points will be given if the student actively participates in the weekly group discussions. This part of your grade is worth 30%. You cannot afford to miss out on the participation assignments. To effectively participate in the group discussions, students must read the lecture slides and the additional readings. **Note**: We are all still learning to use Blackboard Ultra. The group discussion feature is quite different than in the previous version. Please be patient with each other (and with me!) as we navigate this new tool together.
Research Essay: Students are required to submit a 5 - 7 page research essay assignment following these instructions: (1) choose a topic from the Research Essay Topics document in the Research Essay course content folder; (2) write a 5 - 7 page essay that contains the following; a) a clear and concise research question; b) a clear and concise thesis statement (i.e., reform your research question into a statement); c) an introduction that includes your thesis statement and a brief summary of the facts/evidence behind why you are taking the position you are taking; d) a paper body that explains and justifies the facts/evidence stated in the introduction; e) a conclusion that summarizes and restates the facts/evidence supporting the position you've taken. (3) You must use the Society of Biblical Literature Style Guide; I have provided the Society of Biblical Literature Style Guide Student Supplement in the Research Essay folder. (4) You are also required to *use at least four academic/peer-reviewed sources* (not including the textbook) in your paper. (5) For questions about the structure of the Research Essay, review the sample essay and Research Essay Rubric in the Research Essay folder.
Midterm Exam: The midterm examination will be based on your readings from the beginning of the course up to the midterm. It will include multiple-choice questions and two essay questions.
Final Exam: The final exam will have the same format as the midterm but will be based on the lecture slides and readings assigned in the second half of the semester (i.e., the readings assigned after the midterm).
*Note: You will be required to use Respondus LockDown Browser to take both the Midterm and Final Examination in this course.

Course Outline:
The following schedule/outline is tentative. Time constraints, unforeseen events, and class interest may result in slight alterations. Jewish holidays that will occur throughout the semester are given in **(bold parentheses).**

Week 1	Topic	Readings
Jan 20th – 23rd	Introduction to the Course Syllabus, Academic Honesty, Grading Rubrics, and the Research Essay	Please read all documents in the Syllabus and Research Essay folders. Syllabus, Rubrics, and Essay Quiz: your score on this optional open resource quiz will be counted as extra credit toward your participation grade.
Week 2		
Jan 26th – 30th	The Origins of Judaism within the History of Israel Jewish Texts: The Tanakh **(Tu Bishvat – sunset, Sunday, February 1st – nightfall, Monday, February 2nd** "Tu BiShvat is the Jewish New Year of the Trees. The holiday is observed on the 15th (*tu*) of the Hebrew month of Shvat." – URJ.org**)**	Collins "Introduction" in *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* Collins "The Near Eastern Context" in *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* M. Smith, "Yahweh and El" in *The Early History of God* Van der Toorn, "Yahweh" in *The Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*
Week 3		
Feb 2nd – 6th	Founding Stories and Themes in the Tanakh: The Patriarchs and Covenants (Abraham, Israel/Jacob, Moses, David) Disobedience and Exile (Judges, Kings, Covenants, Disobedience, Prophecy, and Exile)	I. Finkelstein, "Searching for the Patriarchs" in *The Bible Unearthed*; "Abraham" Anchor Bible Dictionary; "Isaac" Anchor Bible Dictionary; "Jacob" Anchor Bible Dictionary; "Canaan" Anchor Bible Dictionary; Kuhrt, A. "Israel: the formation of a small Levantine state c. 1200 – 900"
Week 4		
Feb 9th – 13th	The Emergence of Judaism out of Israelite Religion and Culture: Post-Exilic Yehud/Judaea and the Emergence of Judaism Second Temple Period Judaism: Greco-Roman Rule, Hasmoneans, Herodians and Jewish Sectarians	Grabbe, "Introduction: Historical Overview and Sources" in *Introduction to Second Temple Judaism* Grabbe – Religion I and Religion II "Temple, Jerusalem" Anchor Bible Dictionary
Week 5		
Feb 16th – 20th	The Talmudic Era: The Mishna, Gemara, and the Talmud	Video – History of the Talmud, Part 1 (link in the week 5 folder) Video – History of the Talmud, Part 2 (link in week 5 folder)

	Rabbinic and Geonic Periods	"Mishnah" Anchor Bible Dictionary (in week 5 folder) "Talmud" Anchor Bible Dictionary Strack and Stemberger "Historical Framework…"
Week 6		
Feb 23rd – 27th	Rishonim, Crusades, and Persecutions Scholars and the Shulchan Arukh (Aruch)	Sloyan "Christian Persecution of Jews" (link in the week 6 folder) "Caro, Joseph" Jewish Encyclopedia (link in the week 6 folder)
Week 7		
Mar 2nd – 6th	Acharonim, Pogroms, and Massacres The Holocaust and the Modern State of Israel **(Purim – sunset, Monday, March 2nd to sunset, Tuesday, March 3rd)**	 Memory of the Camps – Frontline PBS documentary (link in the week 7 folder)
Week 8		
Mar 9th – 13th	Midterm Examination Review **Midterm Examination** *Students are required to use Respondus LockDown Browser to take the examination	Read the "Midterm Examination Review Guide" in the Midterm Exam folder **Midterm Examination due before midnight on Sunday March 15th**
Week 9		
Mar 16th -20th	**Spring Break – No Classes**	
Week 10		
Mar 23rd – 27th	Modern Jewish Sectarianism: Traditionalist, Modernist, and Radical Jewish Movements	de Lange, Chapter 4 "The Jewish Religion"
Week 11		
Mar 30th – Apr 3rd	The Jewish Family: Family Unit, The Jewish Home, Jewish Time, and Rites of Passage **(Passover – begins at sunset on Wednesday, April 1st and ends at sunset on Thursday, April 9th)**	de Lange, Chapter 5 "The Family"
Week 12		
Apr 6th – 10th	The Jewish Community, Part 1: The History of the Synagogue; The Architecture of the Synagogue;	de Lange, Chapter 6 "The Community" p. 119 - 126
Week 13		
Apr 13th – 17th	The Jewish Community, Part 2: Worship in the Synagogue; Religious Services and Associated Texts (Siddur and Makhzor); The	de Lange, Chapter 6 "The Community" p. 127 - 154

	Yearly Cycle of Worship and Associated Texts (The Haggadah) **(Yom HaShoah/Holocaust Remembrance Day – begins at sunset on Monday, April 13th and ends at sunset on Tuesday, April 14th)**	
Week 14		
Apr 20th – 24th	Jewish Theology and Life Objectives: Holiness, Obedience, Righteousness, Faith, Fear, Love, The Messiah(s), Repairing the World and Peace, The Afterlife	de Lange, Chapter 7 "God and the Jewish People"; de Lange, Chapter 8 "Objectives"
Week 15		
Apr 27th – May 1st	Judaism and the Future: Social Pressures, Trends, and Developments	de Lange, Chapter 9 "Judaism and the Future"
Week 16		
May 4th – 8th	Final Examination Review **Final Examination** * Students are required to use Respondus LockDown Browser to take the examination	Read the "Final Examination Review Guide" in the Final Examination Folder The Final Examination is due before Midnight on Sunday, May 10th Research Essay due before midnight on Sunday, May 10th

Grading:
Marks for assignments, tests, and exams are given in percentages, to which letter grades are also assigned, according to the table below. The percentage mark resulting from the entire term work and examination then produces the final letter grade for the course.

Grading Scale

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade	Grade Points
90-100%	A	4.0
80-89%	B	3.0
70-79%	C	2.0
60-69%	D	1.0
0-59%	F	0.0

Academic Standing and Integrity:
"Academic Integrity**:** the University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence. In all matters of intellectual pursuit, UTEP faculty and students must strive to achieve excellence based on the quality of work produced by the individual. In the classroom and in all other academic activities, students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of scholastic dishonesty is an affront to the pursuit of knowledge and jeopardizes the quality of the degree awarded to all graduates of UTEP. It is imperative,

therefore, that the members of this academic community understand the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and that all faculty insist on adherence to these standards.

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the **Handbook of Operating Procedures** (HOP) (available through the **Dean of Students Office**) may result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to failing a grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others." ("Academic Standing," for more information, please visit http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=61879&submenuheader=1)

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is prohibited in this course
Use of AI technologies or automated tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, and/or Grammarly Premium's AI are ***not allowed*** for assignments in this class. Each student is expected to use critical and creative thinking skills to complete tasks and not rely on computer-generated ideas. Any direct use of AI-generated materials submitted as your own work will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR).

Policy for Late Assignments:
Students who consult with me in advance regarding expected issues preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at my discretion, be granted an extension. Students who are prevented from submitting an assignment due to a personal emergency should inform me as soon as possible.

Special Needs
The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Students who become pregnant or have parenting responsibilities may also request reasonable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. The UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) will process requests for accommodations based on a disability, pregnancy, or parenting. Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.