

Department of Religion  
Gustavus Adolphus College

**REL 144-001**  
**ST: Introduction to Judaism**

Fall 2019  
Dr. Samuel J. Kessler  
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T/R  
1:30-2:50PM  
Old Main 004

Office Hours:  
Old Main 304D  
T/H 3-5PM  
(and by appointment)

Final Examination:  
Open from Tuesday, December 6 (at 3PM) to TBD  
(Available on Moodle)

Judaism is often called a “world religion.” But of that group—which can include traditions as diverse as Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism—it has the fewest adherents (approximately fifteen million) and only a single country where it comprises a majority of the population (Israel). Jews are about two percent of the total population of the United States. Why, then, is Judaism so commonly discussed? Why are its texts so widely known? Why have its people so often been targeted for both plaudit and discrimination?

This course explores the religious and cultural life of the Jewish people. Interweaving three thousand years of history, theology, folklore, philosophy, and literature, it seeks to give students a basic working knowledge of the many foundational texts and ideas that have made Judaism so important in contemporary intellectual and cultural life. The semester is built around understanding the meaning and history of Judaism through how Jews have *ordered* things: liturgical time; communal and individual activities; the language of theological awareness; human and divine governance; and the relationship between human society and nature. This class will introduce students to this fascinating and complicated people.

This class has no prerequisites. The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including assignment due dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

**You may not use a laptop or smart phone in class.**  
**You may use an iPad or other tablet device for note-taking purposes only.**

### Guidelines & Policies

#### *Course Readings & Communications*

Most readings for this course will be available either in your Course Packet (CP) or as a PDF document on Moodle. You are required to buy the Course Packet from The Book Mark. Readings should be completed before the Tuesday lecture for the week that they are listed. *You must bring your Course Packet to every class.*

You are responsible for checking your Gustavus email regularly for communications about the course.

#### *Accommodations Resource Policy*

Those who qualify under Gustavus policies and guidelines for reasonable accommodation should alert the professor privately at the start of the semester. Information concerning programs through College's Center for Academic Resources and Enhancement (CARE) can be found at [https://gustavus.edu/general\\_catalog/current/](https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/).

#### *Assignment Policies*

All assignments are to be printed and submitted in class on the day they are due. You will be penalized 10% for each day a paper is late. Papers submitted over one week after the deadline will not be accepted. If you are ill or have a family emergency please contact the professor as soon as possible.

All assignments must be written in 12-point font, Times New Roman or Garamond, with 1-inch margins.

The Gustavus Writing Center provides helpful overviews and links for improving your writing. They also have appointment services available to help edit papers or discuss the writing process with a tutor. You can find more information on these services at <https://gustavus.edu/writingcenter/>.

*Note:* You should not expect a response from the professor about papers or exams beginning 24-hours prior to their due date.

#### *University Honor Code*

The Undergraduate Honor Code states: "*On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others' use of unauthorized aid in completing this work.*" For additional information about the Honor Code, visit [https://gustavus.edu/general\\_catalog/current/](https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/).

### Required Texts

- REL 144-001 Course Packet

### Course Assignments & Expectations

#### *Class Attendance and Participation*

Attendance will be taken during each class period. If you arrive late and attendance has already been taken you are responsible for alerting the professor to your presence. Arrivals more than ten minutes after class begins, or continuous tardiness, will be counted as absence. More than two unexcused absences will impact your final grade by 2% per absence. If you have more than six unexcused absences, you cannot receive a course grade higher than a C. Please notify the professor as soon as possible for absences related to illness or family emergencies. For more information, the Gustavus Class Attendance Policy can be found at [https://gustavus.edu/general\\_catalog/current/](https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/).

Class participation points are based on the following criteria: arriving in class on time; being awake and attentive during lecture; being responsive and active during discussions and small group activities; respectfully listening when others are speaking; and being engaged in the course without checking your mobile devices. Failure to meet these criteria will result in the loss of participation points throughout the semester.

#### *Film Response Papers* (3 pages, double-spaced)

During the semester you will write two response papers about films. For each paper, you will have a choice between five (5) films, and you must answer the question: What is “Judaism” or “Jewishness” in this film? Your answer must use the evidence you see on screen (including lines of dialogue, specific imagery or locations, particular vocabulary).

**(Due Thursday, Sept. 26 and Thursday, Dec. 12)**

#### *Ethnography Paper: Online Observation of Jewish Rituals* (3 pages, double-spaced)

For this ethnography paper you will be provided with a page of links to various YouTube videos. You will choose one or two of these links, watch the Jewish event or ritual it captures, and write a critical response. Your paper should include: observations about what actions are occurring; who is participating; how they are participating; and what symbols are being used to what effect. You might also choose to include your thoughts on how this event is similar or different from religious practices you are more familiar with, and what those similarities or differences tell us about the nature of Judaism and its adherents.

**(Due Thursday, October 10)**

#### *Midterm*

For the midterm exam you will be asked to define a set of terms that featured prominently in the first half of the semester as well as to accurately identify key locations on a map of Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East. The terms and locations will be of historical figures, geographical locations, key texts, political events, and theological ideas. *All key terms are on the introductory page of each week’s readings in the Course Packet.*

**(Tuesday, October 29)**

#### *Text Analysis Paper: Understanding the Siddur* (3 pages, double-spaced)

For your second paper you will be provided with prayers, readings, and poems from a selection of contemporary Jewish prayer books (*siddurim*). These writings will originate from within different Jewish denominations (e.g. Reform, Orthodox, Conservative Reconstruction, etc.). You must choose two texts, one each from two different

denominations, and write a comparative paper that examines various elements of Jewish life and thought that arise in each reading. Your paper should not be a summary of these two texts. Instead, you are expected to analyze the passages, discussing their theology, cultural references, and ethical and moral ideas. You should focus on both what is similar and what is different between the two texts, as well as how these texts illustrate the diversity of Jewish perspectives on God, religion, morality, and society in the modern world.

**(Due Thursday, December 5)**

### *Final Exam*

The final exam will be cumulative. It will consist of sixty-five (65) multiple-choice questions and maps. The questions will address specific topics, figures, texts, and historical events covered throughout the semester. The maps will focus on the ancient Near East, the Land of Israel, and medieval Mediterranean and European Jewish communities.

*The final exam will be online. You should set aside ninety (90) minutes to complete it.*

*Note: You will only have one opportunity to answer each question; you will not be able to return to flagged questions.*

**The final exam will available on Moodle  
from  
Thursday, December 12 at 3PM to Tuesday, December 17 at 9PM.**

### Grading

Class Attendance and Participation	5
First Film Response Paper	10
Second Film Response Paper	10
First Paper	20
Midterm	15
Second Paper	20
Final Exam	<u>20</u>
	100

Schedule

(An asterisk [\*] denotes texts to be studied together in class)

Week 1: September 3-5

Introduction: Jewish Culture, Theology, and Prayer

*Readings* (for Thursday)

- Jonathan Sacks, "Introduction," *Koren Sacks Siddur* (Moodle)
- \*Exodus 34 (CP)
- \*Jeremiah 32 (CP)

Week 2: September 10-12

Between Earth and Heaven: The Structure of Jewish Time

*Readings*

- Genesis 1-2 (CP)
- Leviticus 23 & 25 (CP)
- Numbers 28-29 (CP)
- Deuteronomy 15 (CP)
- \*Mishna *Rosh Hashana* 1, 2:9 (CP)
- \*BT *Avoda Zara* 10a (CP)
- \*The Meaning of Elul (CP)

Week 3: September 17-19

"And there was evening and there was morning:" The *Shema* and its Blessings

*Readings*

- Weekday Evening Shema and its Blessings (CP)
- \*Mishna *Berakhot* 1 (CP)
- Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, pp. 131-148 (Moodle)

Week 4: September 24-25

Land and Nation: Exodus, Jerusalem, Israel

*Reading*

- Exodus 13-15 (CP)

*Suggested Readings*

- Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem*, pp. 23-51 (Moodle)
- Simon Schama, *The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words 1000 BC - 1492 AD*, pp. 104-14 (Moodle)

**\*Note: No class Tuesday, September 24 (Nobel Conference)**

*You must submit a two-page (double-spaced) response paper to one of the Nobel lectures.*

**\*First Film Response Paper Due: Thursday, September 25**

Week 5: October 1-3

Torah: God's Word, Israel's Constitution

*Readings*

- Deuteronomy 4-6 & 30 (CP)

- \*BT *Bava Metzia* 59a-b (CP)
- Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Canonization of the Bible” (Moodle)
- Jordan S. Penkower, “The Development of the Masoretic Bible” (Moodle)

**\*Note: No class Tuesday, October 1 (Rosh Hashanah)**

Week 6: October 8-10

The Rabbis: Finding Solutions, Building Communities

*Readings*

- Mishna *Pirkei Avot* 1 (CP)
- Adin Evan-Israel Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, pp. 3-8 (Moodle)

**\*Ethnography Paper Due: Thursday, October 10**

Week 7: October 15-17

The Foundations of Commentary: Rashi

*Readings*

- Elie Wiesel, *Rashi*, 32-62 (Moodle)
- \*Rashi on Genesis 1 (CP)

**\*Note: No class Tuesday, October 15 (Sukkot)**

Week 8: October 22-24

The Sabbath: A Palace of Time

*Readings*

- Shabbat in the Torah (CP)
- \*Shabbat in Jeremiah 17 (CP)

**\*Note: No Class Tuesday, October 22 (Fall Break)**

Week 9: October 29-31

Exile: Babylon, Egypt, Europe, and the Arab Lands

*Readings*

- Psalm 137 (CP)
- Lamentations 1 (CP)
- \*Kinot (Moodle)

**\*Midterm Exam: Tuesday, October 29**

Week 10: November 5-7

The Rabbinic Imagination: Midrash

*Readings*

- \*The Classical Commentaries on *Akeidat Yitzchak* (CP)
- \*Bereishit Rabbah 1:10 (CP)
- \*Bereishit Rabbah 68:4 (CP)

- \*Shemot Rabba 1:26 (CP)
- David Stern, “Midrash and Jewish Interpretation” (Moodle)

Week 11: November 12-14

Disruption and Re-Consecration (Part 1): Mysticism & Hasidism

*Readings*

- \*Ezekiel 1 (CP)
- \*BT *Chagiga* 14b (CP)
- \*Zohar 1:2a-3b (CP)
- \*Chasidic Parable, “The Fire in the Forest” (CP)
- David Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History*, pp. 17-42 (Moodle)

*Suggested Reading*

- David Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History*, 183-221 (Moodle)

Week 12: November 19-21

Disruption and Re-Consecration (Part 2): European Jewry, Zionism, and the Holocaust

*Readings*

- Gershon Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 21-31 (Moodle)
- \*Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism*, pp. TBD (Moodle)
- Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, pp. 85-97 (Moodle)

**\*Note: No class November 26 and 28 (AAR and Thanksgiving Break)**

Week 13: December 3-5

The Jewish Philosophical Tradition

*Readings*

- \*Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (CP)
- Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Moodle)

**\*Text Analysis Paper Due: Thursday, December 5**

Week 14: December 10-12

Contemporary Jewry

*Readings*

- Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, pp. xiii-xx, 356-374 (Moodle)
- Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, pp. 1-13 (Moodle)
- Adam Kirsch, “Why Jewish History is So Hard to Write” (Moodle)

**\*Second Film Response Paper Due: Thursday, December 12**

The final exam will be available on Moodle  
from  
Thursday, December 12 at 3PM to Tuesday, December 17 at 9PM.

“Rabbi Yishmael [son of Rabbi Yohanan ben Beroka] said: One who learns in order to teach will be given the opportunity to learn and teach. One who learns in order to do will be given the opportunity to learn, teach, keep, and do.”

*Pirkei Avot* 4:6