

Introduction to Judaism Syllabus

5772 - 2012

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Class will be held on Monday evenings in the synagogue meeting room from 8:05 - 9:15 p.m. Due to the occasionally unpredictable nature of the rabbi's schedule, it may be necessary to cancel some scheduled dates. Every effort will be made to cover the missed material during the semester.

Suggested reading list:

The books can be purchased online or ordered through local bookstores. If you have trouble finding any of them, the synagogue will place an order from the publisher and sell them to you at cost. The prices listed are approximate, based on previous years' prices.

The Book of Jewish Practice, Rabbi Louis Jacobs; Behrman House, \$13.50

The Book of Jewish Belief, Rabbi Louis Jacobs; Behrman House, \$13.50

It's a Mitzvah, Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson; Behrman House, \$15.00

Conservative Judaism, Rabbi Neil Gillman; Behrman House, \$15.00

The Jewish Holidays, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld; Harper and Row, \$20.00

The Shabbat Seder, The Art of Jewish Living Series, Dr. Ron Wolfson; Jewish Lights, \$18.00; or

Shabbat: The Family Guide to Preparing for and Celebrating the Sabbath, 2nd edition, Dr. Ron Wolfson; Jewish Lights, \$21.00

Understanding Jewish History (two volumes), Sol Scharfstein, Ktav, \$36.00/set

This is My Beloved, This is My Friend: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations, Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff, Rabbinical Assembly, \$3.00

Tanakh, Jewish Publication Society, \$18.00. Any other readable translation of the Hebrew Bible is also acceptable, but my preference is for a Jewish translation.

Siddur Sim Shalom (or any other traditional Siddur) - available in the Synagogue gift shop.
Any traditional Passover Haggadah - available in the Synagogue gift shop.

Reading list - for further enrichment:

Jewish Thought

Sacred Fragments, Rabbi Neil Gillman
The Death of Death, Rabbi Neil Gillman
A Jewish Theology, Rabbi Louis Jacobs
Healer of Shattered Hearts, Rabbi David Wolpe
Judaism as a Civilization, Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan
God and the Big Bang, by Rabbi Daniel Matt

Jewish History

Jewish People, Jewish Thought, Robert Seltzer
Wanderings, Chaim Potok
A History of the Jewish People, Solomon Grayzel
History of the Jewish People, Max Margolis and Alexander Marx
A History of the Jewish People, edited by H. H. Ben-Sasson
Jews, God, and History, Max Dimont
Jewish Literacy, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin
A History of the Jewish Experience, Leo Trepp
A History of Zionism, Walter Laqueur

Prayer/Liturgy

To Pray as a Jew, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin
Service of the Heart, Evelyn Garfiel
Entering Jewish Prayer, Reuven Hammer

General Judaica, Jewish calendar, life cycle, mitzvot

The Passover Seder, The Art of Jewish Living series, Dr. Ron Wolfson
A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort, Dr. Ron Wolfson
The Jewish Dietary Laws, James M. Lebeau
Jewish Dietary Laws, by Samuel Dresner and Seymour Siegel
The Sabbath, Abraham Joshua Heschel
Jewish Literacy, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin
Jewish Wisdom, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin
The First Jewish Book of Why, Alfred Kolatch
The Second Jewish Book of Why, Alfred Kolatch
The First Jewish Catalog, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld
The Second Jewish Catalog, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld
The Complete Book of Jewish Observance, Leo Trepp

Bible

The Five Books of Moses, translated by Everett Fox, Schocken
Etz Hayim, Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of *Conservative Judaism*
The JPS Bible Commentary series (includes all five books of Torah, Jonah, and Esther)
The Book of Job, translated by Raymond P. Scheindlin
The Book of J, Harold Bloom

About the Course and the Syllabus

The course and syllabus have been designed with multiple audiences in mind. Some students might be serious Jews, involved with Temple or Synagogue, who would like to fill in a few gaps in their basic Jewish education. Some might be totally unfamiliar with Judaism, may or may not be Jewish, but have heard or read something about Judaism and want to learn more. Others might be committed Christians, interested in learning the Jewish background against which Christianity developed. Still others might be working on conversion to Judaism. All are welcome.

Because of our limited time and the vastness of the material that I would like to cover, we need to begin promptly at 8:05 p.m. I will set aside a few minutes to address questions that have come up in the course of the week, whether from past lessons or from current events. My lectures are designed to be responsive to questions, keeping in mind the Rabbinic admonition, “One who is embarrassed [to ask questions], does not learn.”

Occasionally, I have included “special assignments,” involving areas of Jewish practice and home rituals. These assignments are primarily for those students looking to deepen their own Jewish commitment or for those seeking conversion. All students, however, should feel free to engage in the special assignments.

By the way, all services and programs of the synagogue are open to guests. You may wish to subscribe to the synagogue monthly newsletter, the Voice (\$25/year), to keep track of everything that is happening. Also, feel free to visit our Shabbat services, 9:30 - 11:45 a.m. (approximately) each Saturday.

One note about the book on the Shabbat evening home rituals -- The book *The Shabbat Seder* has been republished in a new edition, called *Shabbat: The Family Guide to Preparing for and Celebrating the Sabbath*, which I have not yet seen. I am going to suggest that we use the new edition; however, the chapter numbers in the syllabus correspond to the original edition. Hopefully, the structure of the 2nd edition will be similar enough that you will be able to figure out which chapters to read.

Now, in the immortal words of the 1st century Rabbinic sage Hillel, Tzei u’lmad, “Go and learn!”

A Quick Overview of the class dates and topics:

Session 1 - Introduction/Ideas in Jewish Theology	
January 9, 2012	5
Session 2 - Biblical Civilization/How Jews Read the Bible	
January 16, 2012	6
Session 3 - Shabbat	
January 23, 2012	7
Session 4 - Kashrut	
January 30, 2012	8
Session 5 - Life cycle I - Birth/B'nai Mitzvah	
February 6, 2012	9
Session 6 - Post-Biblical and Pre-Rabbinic Civilization	
February 13, 2012	10
Session 7 - Life cycle II - Marriage/Sexuality/Divorce	
February 20, 2012	11
Session 8 - Introduction to the Jewish Calendar and the Three Pilgrimage Festivals	
February 27, 2012	12
Session 9 - The Rabbinic Period/Purim	
March 5, 2012	13
Session 10 - Jewish Values/Synagogue Objects/The Siddur (Prayer Book)	
March 12, 2012	14
Session 11 - Life cycle III - Illness and Death	
March 19, 2012	15
Sunday, March 25 - Passover Seder Experience, Fountain Street Church	
Session 12 - Pesah	
March 26, 2012	17
April 2 - No class, Spring Break	
Session 13 - Medieval Jewish Civilization	
April 9, 2012	16
Session 14 - Holocaust/Fast Days	
April 16, 2012	18
Session 15 - Zionism and the Modern State of Israel	
April 23, 2012	19
April 30 - No class (Jewish Film Festival)	
Session 16 - Yamim Nora'im, the Days of Awe	
May 7, 2012	20
Session 17 - American/Conservative Judaism	
May 14, 2012	21

Session 1 - Introduction/Ideas in Jewish Theology

January 9, 2012

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice

Belief in Action

pp. 1-3

Study of the Torah

pp. 4-11

The Book of Jewish Belief

What is Judaism

pp. 1-9

Belief in God

pp. 10-18

Torah

pp. 19-28

The Mitzvot

pp. 29-37

The Chosen People

pp. 38-45

The Messianic Idea

pp. 221-229

The Hereafter

pp. 230-238

Topics to be covered:

- What is Judaism?
- Torah and mitzvot
- Chosen people
- Encountering God
- Proving God's existence
- The End of Days: What will be?
- What is a Jewish life?
- Religious Authority
- Revelation
- Sensing God's presence
- Suffering: Why does God allow it?

Note: For the next class, write two or three short paragraphs on your own personal theology of God and revelation. If you did not receive the syllabus in advance and prepare the reading, please review this reading before the second class session.

Session 2 - Biblical Civilization/How Jews Read the Bible January 16, 2012

Hand in Personal Theology Papers.

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief

The Bible

pp. 46-55

Understanding Jewish History (vol. 1)

pp. 5-69, 72-73

Tanakh

Genesis (the whole book)

Topics to be covered:

- Torah/*Tanakh*
- The Patriarchs and Matriarchs
- Prophecy
- Biblical scholarship and criticism
- Slavery, exodus, and conquest
- Destruction and exile

Session 3 - Shabbat

January 23, 2012

Reading assignment:

Handout from *The Sabbath*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Book of Jewish Practice
The Sabbath, pp. 74-80

The Book of Jewish Belief
The Sabbath, pp. 96-104

It's a Mitzvah
Shabbat: Day of Rest and Renewal, pp. 130-147
Preserving the Earth pp. 50-61

The Shabbat Seder

The Art of Shabbat	ch. 1, pp. 18-47
Preparation for Shabbat	ch. 3, pp. 85-96
Candle Lighting	ch. 4, pp. 97-112
Shalom Aleichem/Peace Be to You	ch. 5, pp. 113-120
Family Blessings	ch. 6, pp. 121-141
Kiddush/Sanctification	ch. 7, pp. 144-156
Washing the Hands	ch. 8, pp. 158-164
Blessing over Bread	ch. 9, pp. 166-172
Blessing after Food	ch. 12, pp. 196-218

Topics to be covered:

- The Meaning of Shabbat
- Friday night Shabbat celebration
- How to observe Shabbat

Special assignment: Have a Shabbat dinner. Use Chapter 3 in Dr. Wolfson's book as your guide.

January 24 -No Class - Rabbi out of town

Session 4 - Kashrut

January 30, 2012

Reading assignment:

It's a Mitzvah

Kashrut

pp. 84-95

Compassion to Animals

pp. 196-217

The Book of Jewish Practice

The Dietary Laws

pp. 66-73

The Book of Jewish Belief

The Dietary Laws

pp. 132-139

Tanakh

Genesis 1:29, 9:1-4, 18:1-8, 32:23-33

Exodus 22:30, 23:19, 34:26

Leviticus 11:1-23, 44-45, 17:10-14

Deuteronomy 14:3-21

Topics to be covered:

- What is kashrut?
- Kashrut in the home and outside
- Why keep kosher?

Special assignment: Using the steps in *It's a Mitzvah*, advance your observance of the mitzvah of kashrut by at least one step. If you do not keep kosher at all, begin with steps 1-3. If you keep kosher only partly, begin keeping kosher more fully using the more advanced steps.

Session 5 - Life cycle I - Birth/B'nai Mitzvah

February 6, 2012

Reading assignment:

It's a Mitzvah

God of our Ancestors
Honoring Parents

pp. 14-21
pp. 96-108

The Book of Jewish Practice

Birth and Education
Honoring Parents

pp. 47-53
pp. 54-59

The Book of Jewish Belief

Marriage and the Family

pp. 215-220

Booklets from Congregation Ahavas Israel

“Pregnancy and Birth Rituals in Jewish Tradition”
“Brit Milah Ceremony”

Topics to be covered:

- Pregnancy traditions and rituals
- Birth ceremonies: Brit Milah and Simhat Bat
- Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Notes: Yom Hazikaron, Israeli memorial day, is commemorated tonight and Tuesday, followed by the celebration of Yom Ha'atzma'ut, Israeli Independence day, from Tuesday night through Wednesday.

Session 6 - Post-Biblical and Pre-Rabbinic Civilization

February 13, 2012

Reading assignment:

The Jewish Holidays

Introduction: How to read ... pp. 2-3
Hanukkah: Increasing the light pp. 161-177

The Book of Jewish Practice

Hanukkah and Purim pp. 118-122

Understanding Jewish History (vol. 1)

pp. 74-85

Topics to be covered:

- Post Biblical History
- The Rabbinic Hanukkah
- The Historical Hanukkah

Session 7 - Life cycle II - Marriage/Sexuality/Divorce February 20, 2012

Reading assignment:

Tanakh

Genesis 38:1-11

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

The Book of Jewish Practice

Marriage

pp. 41-46

The Book of Jewish Belief

Marriage and the Family

pp. 212-215

This is My Beloved, This is My Friend: A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations

Topics to be covered:

- The marriage ceremony
- The get - a Jewish divorce

- Mikvah and sexuality
- Judaism and the environment

Session 8 - Introduction to the Jewish Calendar and the Three Pilgrimage Festivals

February 27, 2012

Reading assignment:

The Jewish Holidays

Introduction	pp. 1-2
The Jewish Calendar	pp. 201-203
Sukkot: Creating Shelter	pp. 125-147
Shemini Atzeret/Simhat Torah	pp. 149-159
Shavuot: Revealing the Torah	pp. 69-83

The Book of Jewish Practice

Sukkot	pp. 98-106
Shavuot and Sefirat Ha-Omer	pp. 92-95

Topics to be covered:

- The lunar-solar calendar
- Sukkot and the Sukkah
- Simhat Torah
- Tikkun Leil Shavuot
- Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot
- Shemini Atzeret
- Reenacting the giving of the Torah
- The Book of Ruth

Session 9 - The Rabbinic Period/Purim March 5, 2012

Reading assignment:

It's a Mitzvah

What is Jewish Law?

pp. 22-31

Appendix: Jewish Law

pp. 228-237

The Book of Jewish Belief

Talmud and Midrash

pp. 56-66

Rabbinic Literature

pp. 67-76

Understanding Jewish History (vol. 1)

pp. 74-124

The Jewish Holidays

Purim

pp. 187-198

The Book of Jewish Practice

Hanukkah and Purim

pp. 122-125

Topics to be covered:

- Post Biblical History
- Halakha and Aggadah
- Oral Torah: Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash
- Who were the Rabbis?
- Purim: Celebrating powerlessness

Session 10 - Jewish Values/Synagogue Objects/The Siddur March 12, 2012

A quiz will be given on Medieval Jewish Civilization.

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief

The Synagogue	pp. 115-123
Tallit, Tefillin, Mezuzah	pp. 124-131

The Book of Jewish Practice

Ritual Objects	pp. 28-40
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The Book of Jewish Practice

Charity and Benevolence	pp. 12-18
Ethical Standards	pp. 19-27
Duties of the Heart	pp. 139-144

The Book of Jewish Belief

Love Thy Neighbor	pp. 166-173
Compassion	pp. 174-179
Benevolence	pp. 180-186
Justice	pp. 187-195
Holiness	pp. 196-202
Jewish Ethics	pp. 203-211

Topics to be covered:

- The Synagogue
- Structure of the Siddur
- Ritual objects
- Sources for Jewish values

Session 11 - Life cycle III - Illness and Death

March 19, 2012

Reading assignment:

Handout: Ahavas Israel guide to mourners

It's a Mitzvah

Bikkur Holim, Visiting the Sick pp. 62-73

The Book of Jewish Practice

Death and Mourning pp. 60-65

Topics to be covered:

•Visiting the Sick

•Jewish laws on death and mourning

Note: This coming Sunday, March 25, Ahavas Israel will be presenting a “Passover Seder Experience” at Fountain Street Church. Call the church for registration details.

Session 12 - Pesah

March 26, 2012

Reading assignment:

The Jewish Holidays

Pesah: Feasting for Freedom

pp. 5-45 (skip 17-25)

The Book of Jewish Practice

Passover

pp. 81-85

Tanakh

Exodus 1:1-16:36

Song of Songs

Topics to be covered:

- The meaning of Pesah
- Kashrut on Pesah

- The Song of Songs

Note: There is no class next week, April 2, because of Spring break.

Session 13 - Medieval Jewish Civilization April 9, 2012

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Belief

Jewish Philosophy
Jewish Mysticism
Jewish Movements
The Holocaust

pp. 77-82
pp. 86-95
pp. 140-148
pp. 149-156

Understanding Jewish History (vol. 1)

pp. 70-71, 125-160

Understanding Jewish History (vol. 2)

pp. 161-205
pp. 222-226
pp. 258-284

Conservative Judaism

The European Experience

ch. 1 (and ch. 2 through page 23)

Topics to be covered:

- Exiles and wanderings
- Pogroms
- Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewry
- Jewish philosophers - Sa'adia Gaon, Maimonides
- Rashi
- False Messianism
- Entering modernity
- The pleasures an
- Inquisitions and expulsions
- Expulsions and wandering
- Hasidism
- Mysticism
- Jewish movements

Session 14 - The Holocaust/Fast Days

April 16, 2012

Reading assignment:

The Jewish Holidays

Yom Hashoah

pp. 56-62

The Three Weeks

pp. 85-93

The Book of Jewish Belief

The Holocaust

pp. 149-156

The Book of Jewish Practice

Fast Days

pp. 126-129

Understanding Jewish History (vol. 2)

pp. 258-284

Topics to be covered:

- Fasts of mourning
- Exiles and wanderings
- Pogroms
- Asarah b'Tevet, Shiva Asar b'Tammuz, and Tisha B'av
- Destruction of the Temple
- Inquisitions and expulsions
- The meaning of the Holocaust

Notes: *Yom ha-shoah v'ha-gevurah*, Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, was commemorated yesterday.

I will pass out 100 Basic Judaism review questions at the end of class today. At the end of the last three class sessions there will be time to go over some of the answers.

Session 15 - Zionism and the Modern State of Israel

April 23, 2012

Reading assignment:

<i>The Book of Jewish Belief</i> The State of Israel	pp. 157-165
<i>The Jewish Holidays</i> Yom Ha-atzma'ut	pp. 62-66
<i>It's a Mitzvah</i> Ahavat Tzion	pp. 34-49
<i>Conservative Judaism</i> The Israel Experience	ch. 10
<i>Understanding Jewish History</i> (vol. 2)	pp. 227-233, 238-243, 252, 285-316

Topics to be covered:

- Emancipation
- Theodor Herzl
- History of Zionism and the foundation of the State of Israel
- Israel as a haven - Yemenite, Soviet, and Ethiopian immigration
- Contemporary history and culture of the State of Israel

Notes: Yom Hazikaron, Israeli memorial day, was commemorated last night and today; the celebration of Yom Ha'atzma'ut, Israeli Independence day, is tonight and tomorrow.

There will be time to ask questions about the 100 Basic Judaism review questions.

Note: There is no class next week, April 30, because of the Jewish Film Festival at Celebration Cinema. Contact the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids, 942-5553, or see JewishGrandRapids.org for details.

Session 16 - The Days of Awe May 7, 2012

Reading assignment:

The Book of Jewish Practice

Rosh Hashanah

pp. 107-112

Yom Kippur

pp. 113-117

The Jewish Holidays

Rosh Hashanah

pp. 95-109

Yom Kippur

pp. 111-123

It's a Mitzvah

Teshuvah

pp. 186-195

Tanakh

Genesis 21-22 (Torah readings for Rosh Hashanah)

Leviticus 16, 18-19:18 (Torah readings for Yom Kippur)

Jonah (Haftarah for Yom Kippur afternoon)

Topics to be covered:

- Sin and Teshuvah - the month of Elul and Selihot
- Rosh Hashanah
- The Maḥzor
- Yom Kippur
- Shofar

Note: There will be time to ask questions about the 100 Basic Judaism review questions.

Session 17 - American Jewry/*Conservative Judaism* **May 14, 2012**

Reading assignment:

Understanding Jewish History (vol. 2) pp. 205-221, 234-237, 244-251, 317-331

Conservative Judaism

The Legacy of Frankel	ch. 2
From School to Movement	ch. 3
The Founding Ideology	ch. 4
Maturity	ch. 5
Living as a Conservative Jew	ch. 6
The Emerging Crisis	ch. 7
The Ordination of Women	ch. 8

Topics to be covered:

•History of Jews in America

•Conservative Judaism

Note: There will be time to ask questions about the 100 Basic Judaism review questions.