REL123  
Judaism: Text and Tradition

Dr Meredith J C Warren  
m.j.warren@sheffield.ac.uk

Office: Jessop West Building, Room 2.22 (English)  
Office hours: Tuesdays, 10am–12pm

An introductory module for students of any subject to the origins and development of Judaism, from the Bible through medieval sages, to present practice and debates. This module explores the emergence and development of Judaism, placing its diversity of beliefs and practices in the broader context of world history and current events.

This module aims to provide an introduction to the religion of Judaism as well its historical development and place it within its social contexts. It will
(1) introduce students to the major trends, beliefs, and rituals in Judaism;
(2) develop critical thinking about Judaism and Jewish practitioners in political, social, historical, and religious contexts;
(3) develop critical thinking, writing skills, and communication skills.

Required Texts

1. Please buy from Blackwell’s (they have a price guarantee that will match Amazon’s):  

Assessment

- 3 x 600 word papers 15% x 3 = 45%
- Final Exam 55%

The short papers should respond to the following questions in a concise and analytical way with reference to Alexander and Segal. Outside research is not expected. Introductory and concluding paragraphs are not expected. You must use footnotes to provide citations. You must refer to at least one primary source. You are forbidden to use the word “interesting” or any of its synonyms: tell me *why* something caught your attention instead.

Paper #1: Using one example from the Talmud, Midrash, or Responsa literature, analyse the relationship between oral and written tradition in Judaism.
Paper #2: Drawing on your experience visiting the United Synagogue and using one example from Segal and/or Alexander, analyse the role of sacred space in Judaism.

Paper #3: Read and respond critically to one of the following newspaper/magazine articles (NOTE: selection may be emended depending on current events):


Schedule & Readings

1. Biblical Legacy (Tu BiShvat / New Year of Trees: 11 February)
Read:
- Segal chs. 1-2

2. Talmud & Midrash
Read:
- Segal ch. 3
- Alexander ch. 2

Read:
- Segal chs. 4-6
- Alexander chs. 7–8; 11.1-3

+ Optional day trip to York (Friday 3 March/Week 4) for a Jewish History Walking Tour

4. Modern Era
NO CLASS ON 2 MARCH
 Instead of class on Thursday, students will attend a lecture on **MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY** 2:00-3:30pm by Dr Alana Vincent (University of Chester): “None is Still Too Many: Holocaust Memory and Historical Amnesia”

Read:
- Segal chs. 7–9
- Alexander ch. 9

*** PAPER #1 DUE: 12 noon, 3 March

II. Jewish Beliefs & Customs

5. Calendar and Festivals (Purim: 11–12 March)
Read:
- Book of Esther (all chapters; weblink: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Esther+1&version=NRSV)
- Alexander ch. 3 & 5.1.1-2
- Segal ch. 18

Watch:
- Kiddush (Weblink: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JF5rFC0DQzE)
- Mayim Bialik Explains Rosh Hashanah (Weblink: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0sKHcdjJPg)
- How to Host a Seder (Weblink: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQIdfUEpk10)

6. Places of Worship: Temple & Synagogue
Read:
- Segal ch. 15-16
- 1 Kings 6 (Weblink: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Kings%206)

*** MANDATORY VISIT TO SHEFFIELD UNITED SYNAGOGUE: Friday 17 March 9am

7. Places of Worship: The Home
Read:
- Segal ch. 17
- Alexander ch. 5.2.2-3

Watch:
- Tour of a Jewish Mikvah (Weblink: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOtLygYE0Q4)
- Soul Food: Keeping it Kosher (Weblink: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qTatb6qHEM)
8. Life Cycle Observances
Read:
● Segal chs. 11, 19
Watch:
● Israeli Ashkenazi Orthodox Wedding (Weblink: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvD2lXXFBI8)

*** PAPER #2 DUE, 12 noon, 31 March

(Passover: 10–18 April)

III. Issues in Contemporary Judaism
Note: For these last three weeks, we will also be reading literary and academic texts that synthesise some of the topics covered generally in the assigned textbooks. These excerpts may be more challenging in language, topic, and ideas, so give yourself ample time to read and digest them.

9. Shoah (Yom HaShoah: 24 April)
Read:
● Alexander ch. 11.5
● Literary excerpts (on MOLE): Jacob Glatstein, Without Jews; Elie Wiesel, Night; Emil L. Fackenheim, God’s Presence in History.

10. Zionism (Israeli Independence Day: 2 May)
Read:
● Segal ch. 10
● Alexander ch. 10

11. Gender
Read (all on MOLE):
● Rachel Adler, “The Jew Who Wasn’t There: Halakhah and the Jewish Woman”
● Judith Plaskow, “The Right Question is Theological.”

Watch:
● Trembling Before G-D (2001) Weblink: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts7bhOau0Wc

*** PAPER #3 DUE, 12 noon, 11 May
Further Reading


