

**Jewish Literature and Thought in the Rabbinic Period**  
**Revised Version**

Professor Laurence H. Kant

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Cornell University  
Spring, 1995  
Rockefeller 121  
Tu, Th., 11:40-12:55

Near Eastern Studies 242/  
Jewish Studies 242/  
Religious Studies 242  
Classics 243

Office Hours: Tu. 1:45-2:45, Th., 4:20-5:20 in my office at Rockefeller 387, or by appointment. Telephone number: 5-6275 (NES dept.); (315) 428-1893 (home).

Purpose: The course will approach this material from the point of view of the academic study of religion. There are no prerequisites, nor are there any presumptions as to religious background or commitment.

In this course, we will explore the literature and thought of Judaism in late antiquity. Topics to be covered include biblical interpretation, wisdom, law, mysticism, festival celebration, as well as magic. We will be paying close attention to all genres of rabbinic literature (targum, midrash, mishnah/talmud, and merkabah/chariot mysticism). By way of comparison, as well as to help us understand who the rabbis were and what they were trying to do, we will also examine, side by side with the rabbinic texts, Graeco-Jewish literature, especially the works of Philo of Alexandria.

**BOOKS REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE**

Neusner, Jacob. Introduction to Rabbinic Literature. New York: Doubleday, 1994

Yonge, C. D. (translated by). The Works of Philo. Foreword by David M. Scholer. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993.

Schiffman, Lawrence. From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1991.

REQUIREMENTS: I anticipate that this class will be run as a seminar, where discussion of texts is the central focus. Therefore, attendance and active participation are essential and will count for a portion of the final grade. Major criteria for evaluation will also consist of two papers (mid-term and final) and a bi-weekly journal. Some students may wish to work together in groups on papers. If desired, students can submit the mid-term paper early so that it can be read and graded prior to spring break. Paper due dates are: March 30 and May 12.

Readings are grouped together in the order that they should be read, and it is a generally a good idea to read ahead as much as possible. And for those who are interested, I will also provide photocopies of alternative translations and of the Hebrew/Aramaic (though there are no language requirements). Students should always bring the appropriate texts to class. For historical background, all students should consult Lawrence Schiffman, From Text to Tradition. If possible, it would be wise for those students without background in the history of ancient Judaism to read this book (or appropriate portions therein) as early in the semester as possible. For reference purposes (including finding a good translation of a particular text), consult H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (on reserve).

January 24: Introduction

January 26: History of Judaism I: Exile-1st Century CE Roman Rule  
Neusner, pp. xix-xxxi and 1-29

January 31, February 2: Sin and Redemption

Philo: On Rewards and Punishments (in Yonge, pp. 664-81)  
Mekhilta According to R. Ishmael (Exodus) (in Neusner, pp. 250-70)

February 7: History of Judaism II: Jewish War and the History of  
Rabbinic Judaism  
Schiffman, pp. 177-220

February 9, 14, 16: Moses I—Maturity  
Philo: On the Life of Moses II (pp. 491-517)  
Sifre (Numbers), Pesiqta de-Rab Kahana, and Pesiqta Rabbati  
(in Neusner, pp. 315-27)

February 21: Philo, the Rabbis, and Their Interpretive Methods  
Neusner: pp. 52-72  
TBA: other readings

February 23, 28: Moses II—Youth  
  
Rabbinic Selections from the Life of Moses (handout)  
Philo, On the Life of Moses I (Yonge, pp. 459-90)  
Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Moses (on reserve)  
Ezekiel the Tragedian on the early life of Moses (handout)

March 2, 7: Sacrifice  
Philo, On Special Laws I (Yonge, pp. 534-67)  
Sifra (Leviticus) (Neusner, pp. 271-304)

March 9, 14: Creation  
Philo, On the Creation (Yonge, pp. 3-24) and Allegorical  
Interpretation I (Yonge, pp. 25-37)  
Selections from Genesis Rabbah (handout)

March 16: Jacob and the Jewish People  
Genesis Rabbah (Neusner, pp. 355-81)  
Begin reading Schiffman (finish by April 4), pp. 220-69

March 28, 30: Festival Celebration  
Philo, On Special Laws II (chaps. 10-48) (Yonge, pp. 568-93)  
Leviticus Rabbah (Neusner, pp. 382-410)

March 30: Mid-Term paper due.

April 4, 6, 11, 13, 18: Halakhik Explorations: Special Focus on Abodah Zarah  
Philo, Decalogue (Yonge, pp. 518-33) and  
Special Laws III-IV (pp. 594-639)  
Tractate Abodah Zarah in the Mishnah and Talmud (handout selections)

April 20, 25, 27: Wisdom  
Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides (and Sentences of Sextus)  
(Handouts)  
Tractate Abot and the Fathers According to Rabbi Natan  
(Neusner, pp. 571-608)

May 2: Magic  
Sepher ha-Razim (on reserve)

May 4: Hekhalot Mysticism  
Selections (TBA) from 3 Enoch (on reserve)

May 12: Final Paper due.