

Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

Hebrew 5603
READINGS IN RABBINIC LITERATURE:
THE MISHNAH

Meeting Time/Location:

Office:
Email:

Office Hours:

Can law be compatible with spirituality? Can a legal handbook be a book of philosophy? Can people perform sacrifices with words alone? Are women persons or property in ancient patriarchal societies? Did ancient Jews carry out the death penalty? These are all questions raised by the Mishnah.

Most people think of Judaism as a religion of the Bible. While this is true to a great extent, Judaism as we now know it is also a product of the Mishnah. The Mishnah, born of the cataclysmic events of the first two centuries of the Common Era and the product of generations of Rabbis, is the foundation document for Rabbinic Judaism. It contains law, wisdom, debate, stories, and even humor. It is a window into a civilization that was different in fascinating ways from our own.

I. Goals of the Course

A. Hebrew 5603 is designed to give the student hands-on experience in reading and understanding the Mishnah. The course will introduce you to Mishnaic Hebrew, the historical background of the Mishnah and its place in Jewish history, the issues it raises for the history of Judaism and the interdisciplinary study of human cultures, and its philosophy of law and life. We will also get a taste of other texts, such as the Talmuds and Midrashim, that were forged in the environment set by the Mishnah.

This course will emphasize the textual study of the Mishnah. Most class sessions will focus on a particular passage from the Mishnah or related text. Each class unit will be introduced by a brief presentation of the historical issues it raises and include a discussion of the major thematic, stylistic, and bibliographic issues pertaining to the text, as well as a reading of assigned passages. We will also learn to use reference works and research tools for Rabbinic literature.

B. By the end of the course you should:

1. Know enough Rabbinic Hebrew to make sense of a passage from the Mishnah with the aid of a dictionary and analyze its Hebrew grammar and syntax;
2. be familiar with the forces of history that produced the Mishnah and be able to say something about why and how it was written, the role it played in the history of Judaism, and how it has been interpreted by traditional believers and modern historians;
3. have read selections from each of the major divisions of the Mishnah, encompassing civil, ritual, agricultural, and sacrificial law and lore;
4. have formed opinions about larger issues raised by mishnaic literature and be able to express those opinions.

II. Class Requirements

A. The class presupposes a good working knowledge of Hebrew. **Hebrew 1103.01 or permission of the instructor** is a prerequisite for this course.

B. **Preparation** of class sessions is an essential requirement of this course. Every class will involve extensive in-class readings of the assignments in Mishnaic Hebrew. These readings will be an important part of your grade. You will be expected to have prepared the reading assignment to the best of your ability, and to be familiar with the thematic and historical issues to be raised in the session, especially as raised in the articles and textbook readings.

PLEASE NOTE: The Hebrew readings for the class must be prepared **without the use of a translation**. Use of a translation may be considered grounds for failure in the class. The only exception is for biblical texts, including biblical quotations that appear in the Mishnah, for which you can use a scholarly Bible translation (such as the JPS Tanakh or the New Revised Standard, etc.)

C. **One presentation and discussion of a brief seminar paper**. The paper will be a broad survey of a topic relevant to the text or issue discussed in that class. The paper is not meant to be comprehensive, but to give the class an overview of the subject. **The topic and a bibliography must be approved by me**. Possible topics are suggested in the class schedule. The oral presentation is to be accompanied by a brief (3-page) précis of the presentation, which should include a bibliography but need not include footnotes. It will last 20-30 minutes, including class discussion.

D. **One In-class text presentation**. The text, from the Mishnah, **must be approved by me**. For this presentation you will teach the class your text, guide them through its language, analyze its logic and rhetoric, and discuss the major issues it raises. The text must be prepared without the use of a translation. The presentation is to be accompanied by a translation and commentary written by the student.

E. Students will participate according to their background in Hebrew and Jewish studies. More advanced students or those fluent in Hebrew will be asked to contribute to the class in such a way that will allow them to learn and not simply rely on prior knowledge. At the same time, students will learn cooperatively, so that beginning students can benefit from their classmates' language skills and more advanced students will be learn to clarify their ideas.

For this reason, and in emulation of the tradition of talmudic study, students will form **study teams** (*hevruta*) for the purpose of preparation and presentation of the material.

F. **One ten-page research paper** on an aspect of the Mishnah. The paper can expand on the subject covered in the in-class presentation or can cover another subject. It must be submitted in hard copy (stapled) **by Thursday, December 11, 2014 at 12:00 PM** (noon) to the NELC office (Hagerty Room 300). The topic **must be approved by me by the tenth week of class**.

IV. Course Policies

A. Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term

“academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

It is important that you understand what constitutes plagiarism and academic misconduct. For details, please review the University’s guidelines at: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>. If you have any questions, please contact me.

B. Attendance

This course is designed so that much of our learning will take place in the classroom. Therefore, **your attendance at classes and preparation for in-class readings will be critical to your success in the course.** You are responsible for information, assignments, and texts given in class, whether you were present or not. Late papers will not be accepted.

C. Communication

All email communication will be sent to your **OSU email address**. If you do not use this address regularly, please arrange to have your email forwarded from your OSU email account to your usual address.

D. Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

III. Texts

A. The course will use the following texts and textual aids. They can be purchased online at such sites as www.Amazon.com, www.barnesandnoble.com, www.abebooks.com, and others, with the exceptions noted below. They are also available at the Grand Reading Room of the Main library or will be placed on reserve:

1. J. Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud* (=Neusner): A step-by-step guide to reading and interpreting Talmudic literature, including Mishnah, Tosefta, and the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. Please get the latest edition (Wifp and Stock, 2003).
2. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition, A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (KTAV): A very readable historical overview of the Second Temple and Rabbinic periods.
3. M. Jastrow, *Dictionary*. The standard Hebrew-English dictionary for Rabbinic literature. Using this dictionary is a learning experience in itself--it requires some hunting around for roots--and it is dated, but quite comprehensive and most of the interpretations are sound. So far, it is the only good one of its kind in English. This book is now in the public domain. It is therefore available in a PDF edition online in two volumes:

<http://hebrewbooks.org/38237>
and <http://hebrewbooks.org/38236>

It is also available in print editions published by Baker Academic press and others. It is highly recommended that you get a printed edition, which will be much easier to use.

4. I. Jerusalmi, *Basic Pirge Avot*. A guide to the language of tractate Avot. Introduces Hebrew students to the distinctive grammar and idiom of Rabbinic Hebrew. The first three chapters of this textbook will be made available on Carmen. If you would like a hard copy, you may print it out or contact me.
5. Primary text assignments in Hebrew will be distributed in class. I will attach brief notes on the vocabulary and grammar to some of the Hebrew text assignments.
6. Articles and other readings from modern scholarship will be available on Carmen or distributed in class. These are marked with an asterisk (*). Please note that the course is listed under “JEWSHST 5603 - Rdngs Rabbinic Lit (26591)” on Carmen.
7. Other research aids will be listed in a separate handout and during class sessions.

B. You may also wish to consult the following:

1. You should have access to a Hebrew Bible and an English translation of the Hebrew Bible (=Old Testament). A good translation for our purposes is *Tanakh: The Jewish Publication Society Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. These are available in the Judaica reading room in the Ackerman library and in Sullivant Library. You may use a translation **only** for passages from the Hebrew Bible unless otherwise noted.

2. B. Holtz, *Back to the Sources*: A guide through the most important genres of Jewish literature. Introduces the major problems of theme and interpretation in each genre. “Walks you through” examples of each. Good chapters on Talmud and Midrash.

3. M. Segal, *Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar*. Descriptive grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew. Though not a teaching grammar, it does give you the basics of Rabbinic Hebrew, especially in its distinctiveness from biblical Hebrew.

4. R. Alkalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary*. Primarily a dictionary of modern Hebrew, but contains many Rabbinic and medieval words and expressions. If you get stuck looking something up in Jastrow, try Alkalay.

Even better is:

6. Even-Shoshan, *ha-Millon he-Hadash*. Definitive historical Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary. Lists words and expressions by time period and gives sources for meanings of the words. By far the best general dictionary for readers of modern Hebrew.

IV. Course schedule

In this schedule, class sessions are listed by weeks of class. The dates of individual class sessions are given. However, the schedule is subject to change, especially depending on the pace and students' expertise and interests; you will, of course, be notified in advance.

8/27 Week 1: Why study the Mishnah?

- Syllabus, bibliographical aids
- In-class readings and language exercises

9/3 Week 2: Mishnah: Language and History

- M. Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey
- E. Kutscher, "Hebrew Language, Mishnaic," in the Encyclopedia Judaica. To find this article:
 - o Go online to OSCAR (the OSU online library catalog) and do a title search for **Encyclopaedia Judaica** (Please note the "a" in Encyclopaedia).
 - o Click on the link for "**Encyclopaedia Judaica (online)**"
 - o When you arrive at the Encyclopaedia Judaica listing click on the "**connect to web site**" link. (If you are off campus you may have to sign in using your OSU ID.)
 - o This will get you to the Encyclopaedia e-book site. Click on the [eTable of Contents](#) and go to the appropriate volume to find the article, "**Hebrew Language.**"
 - o When you find the article, scroll down to the section "**Mishnaic Hebrew.**"
- Schiffman, chs. 1, 4, 6, 9
- Neusner, Foreword, Ch. 1
- Assigned readings
- Paper: Is there history in the Mishnah?

9/10 Week 3: How and why was the Mishnah written?

- Neusner, Ch. 2
- Schiffman, ch.10
- *Jaffee, "How much 'Orality' in Oral Torah?"
- Reading: Mishnah Berakhot 8 in Neusner
- **Assignment:** *Memorize* Mishnah Berakhot 8:1-2 in Hebrew (pp. 47-49 in Neusner). Be prepared to recite it in class.
- Paper: The Mishnah as oral tradition

9/17 Week 4: Torah and Tradition

- Schiffman, ch., 13
- *M. Lerner, "Avot"
- *J. W. Schofer, "Rabbinical Ethical Formation and the Formation of Rabbinical Ethical Compilations."
- Avot ch. 1.
- Read this and other chapters of Avot with the aid of Jerusalem's *Basic Pirque Avot*.
- Paper: Avot and the Wisdom Tradition

9/24 Week 5. Torah and Wisdom

- Avot, ch. 2
- *Goldin, "A Philosophical Session in a Tannaite Academy"

10/1 Week 6: Mitzvah and Messiah

- *Scholem, "Towards an Understanding of the Messianic Idea"

- Paper: Messianism in the Mishnah

10/8 Week 7: Moed: Ritual and Time

- Reading: Rosh ha-Shanah
- *Swartz, "Scholasticism as a Comparative Category and the Study of Judaism"

10/15 Week 8: The Sabbath

- Reading: Shabbat
- *Goldenberg, "Law and Spirituality"

10/22 Week 9: Neziqin: Criminal Law

- Beth A. Berkowitz, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures*, Chapter 1 (introduction).
This book is available for reading online on OSCAR. Make sure you are signed in if you are off campus. Do a search for the title and choose the option marked "[electronic resource]". You will be able to read the book online. Then go to chapter 1. If you would like a printed copy, please let me know.
- Reading: Sanhedrin
- Paper: Capital punishment in Jewish law

10/29 Week 10: Neziqin: Civil Law

- * Heszer, "Roman Law and Rabbinic Legal Composition"
- Reading: Bava Metzia

11/5 Week 11: Nashim: Men and Women

- *Wegner, "Tragelaphos Revisited"
- Reading: Kiddushin, Ketuvot
- Paper: The Mishnah's attitude toward women

11/12 Week 12: Kodashim and Toharot: Purity and Temple

- Neusner, "Map without Territory: Mishnah's System of Sacrifice"
- *Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (excerpts)
- Reading: Tamid, Kelim
- Paper: The Temple in the Mishnah

11/19 Week 13: From Mishnah to Talmud: Tosefta and Palestinian Talmud

- Neusner, chs. 2-3
- Schiffman, ch. 11

11/26: NO CLASS

12/3 Week 14: From Mishnah to Talmud: The Babylonian Talmud

- Neusner, ch. 4
- Schiffman, ch. 12
- Goldenberg, "Talmud."
- Be prepared to discuss the Talmud text (in translation) in Neusner ch. 4.