

Reading List for Teaching an Introductory Course on The Emergence of Judaism
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In compiling this reading list I have chosen to focus on books that provide more than a good introduction to the history, society, culture, literature and major ideas of biblical Israel and rabbinic Judaism in their broader context. I have also included works that deal in a relatively self-conscious way with the transition from biblical Israel to rabbinic Judaism. It is almost inevitable that a reading list of this sort will be somewhat idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, these works are particularly complementary to *The Emergence of Judaism* and serve non-specialists in the field. The list ends with reference works that the non-specialist can consult as the need might arise.

Overviews of Jewish History, Judaism and/or classic Jewish texts:

Holtz, Barry. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Summit Books, 1984.

An essential and superb introduction to the classic texts of Jewish tradition: the Hebrew Bible, Rabbinic literature, medieval Bible commentaries, medieval philosophical works, Kabbalistic texts, Hasidic writings and the prayer book. Aimed at the non-expert with excellent suggestions for future study.

Scheindlin, Raymond P. *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

An overview of Jewish history that focuses on the major geographical, cultural and political forces that have shaped Jewish history and emphasizes the interaction of Jews with the nations and cultures among whom they have lived.

Seltzer, Robert. *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History*. New York: Macmillan, 1980.

An excellent and comprehensive review of Jewish civilization, history, and thought. An indispensable guide to every period of Jewish social and political history, culture, and religious and intellectual developments.

Jacobs, Louis. *The Book of Jewish Belief*. Behrman House, 1984.

An outline of Judaism's basic beliefs by a distinguished scholar.

Biblical Israel

Gordon, Cyrus H. and Gary A. Rendsburg. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*. 4th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998.

Situates the Hebrew Bible in its ancient historical context. Draws on the latest archaeological and linguistic research and points to cultural and literary parallels.

Matthews, Victor H. *A Brief History of Ancient Israel*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Information on the major events in Israelite history, a basic chronology, and a consideration of extra-biblical data.

Overviews of biblical Israel and Rabbinic Judaism; the transition from the former to the latter

Cohen, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987.

An essential and easy-to-read interpretation of ancient Judaism from the Maccabean period to the third century. Documents the shift from Biblical Israel to late antique Judaism identifying major ideas, salient practices, and unifying patterns.

Goldenberg, Robert. *The origins of Judaism: from Canaan to the rise of Islam*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

An undergraduate textbook that provides an account of the development of ancient Judaism through the rise of Islam, with special attention to the rabbinic contribution.

Vanderkam, James. *An Introduction to Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001.

An accessible survey of Jewish history from the Persian period to the Bar Kokhba revolt. Describes the literature of this period, as well as the most important institutions, sects and practices.

Second Temple Period

Baumgarten, Albert. *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation*. Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997.

A very important study of Second Temple Judaism that offers an insightful explanation for the prominence of sectarian groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, the Qumran community) during this period.

Nickelsburg, George W. E. *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah with CD-ROM*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

An excellent introduction to extra-biblical, nonrabbinic Jewish writings (e.g., the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, Dead Sea Scrolls) with a CD-ROM containing hyperlinks to the biblical text, Web links and discussion questions.

Sanders, E. P. *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1992.

An important presentation of Judaism as a functioning religion in the late Second Temple period that serves as an important corrective to the distortions of earlier scholarship.

Rabbinic Period

Cohen, Shaye J.D. *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

An excellent set of essays by a leading scholar, that considers that intersection of ethnic, national and religious elements in Jewish identity in antiquity. Drawing on classical and rabbinic sources, the author discusses intermarriage, matrilineal descent, conversion and the place of the convert in Jewish society.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

A pathbreaking study arguing that the distinction between Judaism and Christianity was a late development imposed by heresiologists anxious to create a distinct Christian religion.

Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

A fascinating exploration of the culture milieu of the late antique rabbinic academies that produced the Babylonian Talmud, through close readings of talmudic texts that reveal rabbinic values and practices.

Schechter, Solomon. *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.

A useful if dated presentation of central Jewish principles, concepts and ideas drawing on the classics of rabbinic literature.

For reference:

Jacobs, Louis. *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

A compendium of information on nearly every facet of the Jewish heritage, presented in 750 alphabetical entries.

Kugel, James. *The Bible as it Was*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997.

A popular and engaging book that focuses on early readings (especially midrashic) of the Torah (or Pentateuch) from 100-300 C.E. in order to reconstruct the Bible as it was understood at the beginning of the millennium.

Safrai, S. and Stern, M., *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.

A collection of useful and exhaustive introductory essays to the Jewish world of the first century C.E.

Safrai, S. and Stern, M., *The Literature of the Sages: First Part: Oral Torah, Halakhah, Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates*. CRINT II.3. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Scholarly introductions to each of the major works of rabbinic literature.

Strack, H. L. and Stemberger, Günther. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Trans. Markus Bockmuehl. Reprint. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

A revision of the classic introduction to the main works of rabbinic literature. A comprehensive work of reference.

Urbach, E. E. *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*. Trans. Israel Abrahams. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975. Reprint edition Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1987.
A comprehensive guide to classical rabbinic views on God, humankind, the people of Israel and a long list of other topics.