

The Emergence of Judaism

Teaching Tips

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Teaching a course on the Emergence of Judaism is challenging for several reasons. First, the subject is by its very nature highly interdisciplinary. History, religious studies, and literature are just three of the disciplines implicated in the study of early Judaism and those without specialized training in the history, literature and religious culture of the biblical and classical rabbinic periods can feel daunted. Second, students in the modern American university will have widely divergent levels of prior exposure to the subject as well as widely divergent assumptions and expectations about the subject and this can make the teacher's task extraordinarily difficult. Many Jewish students raised in secular households have very little knowledge of, but are highly motivated to learn about, the tradition of their ancestors; others raised in traditional Jewish households may have the advantage of familiarity with some of the content of the course, but may be hampered by an uncritical and ahistorical impression of Jewish history and textual traditions. Non-Jewish students with no knowledge of Jewish history and culture will have to work hard to grasp and retain the basic historical narrative of biblical Israel and early Judaism as well as the major religious themes and practices – all of which may be relatively well-known to Jewish students with some traditional education. Christian students may have difficulty appreciating early Judaism on its own terms rather than as a backdrop to and precursor of Christianity. Finally, most students will be influenced by post-Enlightenment constructions of religion as a set of *beliefs* and will have difficulty understanding that religions in antiquity were often organized around and expressed through practices rather than beliefs or doctrines. In addition, the ethnic component of Jewish identity complicates the classification of Judaism as a “religion” altogether – a concept that is difficult for many students to grasp.

The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspectives is designed to meet these challenges. As indicated in the Preface, the book is not primarily a history book covering the history and civilization of the Jewish people (the Jewish *ethnos*). Its focus is *Judaism* – the religious traditions, texts, practices and ideas developed among and nurtured by Jews through late antiquity, with attention to the historical, cultural and ideological circumstances and influences contributing to their emergence. Thus, the book's approach is necessarily interdisciplinary. It opens with a narrative overview of the historical period encompassed by the book because the story of the emergence of Judaism is shaped in significant ways by historical events. Subsequent chapters explore the literary classics that express the major themes, ideas and religious practices of biblical Israel and Jewish society in the 2nd Temple and rabbinic periods. Sidebars (entitled “From a Classic Text”) contain excerpts from the foundational literary sources (the Bible, midrash, Mishnah, and Talmud) with explanation and analysis so that students encounter central religious ideas in their original literary contexts.

The book takes seriously the fact that students come to the classroom with different backgrounds, capabilities, assumptions and expectations. The book is written in a clear, simple style that students with average reading skills should be able to comprehend. Because no prior knowledge is assumed, sidebars (entitled “Personalities in Judaism”) provide detailed sketches of key literary and historical figures. These sidebars quickly orient students lacking any exposure to biblical and Jewish tradition; at the same time, students who possess a good background in the

tradition will be challenged by the sidebars' critical and historical presentation of otherwise familiar material.

The book draws on a wide array of evidence to provide a scholarly account of the emergence of Judaism to the 7th century. At times, this account will diverge from the traditional account reflected in classical sources (Bible and Talmud) or promulgated by subsequent religious tradition. Traditionally educated students (both Jewish and Christian) may find the critical stance of the book towards classical religious sources to be somewhat unsettling. Traditional accounts are not, however, dismissed out of hand. These accounts have played a central role in the creation and maintenance of Jewish identity and an enduring Jewish community and are therefore highlighted, explicated and contextualized at several junctures in the book.

How one utilizes this book depends to a great extent on whether the subject is being taught as a stand-alone course or as one component of a larger course. If the emergence of Judaism from its biblical beginnings to the 7th century is the subject of an entire course, then this book provides an excellent and thorough base that can be supplemented by articles and books that delve more deeply into special areas of interest and by primary sources that enable the students to experience central elements of Jewish culture and religious expression directly. If, however, the emergence of Judaism constitutes one component within a larger course (such as a course on World Religions, The Abrahamic Faiths or an Introduction to Judaism down to the modern period) then this book may well be entirely sufficient for that segment of the course.

The links below provide additional guidance for instructors who are using *The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*.

Tips for Instructors Who are New to the Field

Tips for Experienced Instructors

Tips for All Instructors

Tips for Instructors Who are New to the Field

Instructors who are new to the field should plan to do a substantial amount of background reading before teaching in this area if they hope to do justice to the subject matter. This is particularly true if the emergence of Judaism is taught as a stand-alone course rather than one component of a larger course on, for example, World Religions or Judaism through the modern period. Below is a suggested reading program that will give the instructor a good foundation for teaching an introductory course on the emergence of Judaism from biblical beginnings to late antiquity. The best resources in each category are marked with asterisks (*).

1. A good place to start is with books that provide an overview of Jewish history and/or culture from ancient to modern times, with attention to enduring themes. Several good options are listed below:

- Biale, David, ed. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. New York: Schocken, 2002.
- Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Judaism: History, Belief and Practices*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Goldenberg, Robert. *The Origins of Judaism: From Canaan to the Rise of Islam*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (Covers the same time period as *The Emergence of Judaism*.)
- Holtz, Barry. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Summit, 1984.
- Scheidlin, Raymond P. *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- *Seltzer, Robert. *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History*. New York: Macmillan, 1980.

2. A helpful next step is to read a couple of books that focus on the biblical and rabbinic periods as well as the transition from the former to the latter. The titles in this section provide excellent introductions to the Hebrew Bible and biblical Israel, while titles in section 3 provide excellent introductions to the transition from biblical Israel to rabbinic Judaism and titles in section 4 cover the rabbinic period in greater depth. *Note: this section contains an excellent article dealing with Biblical Law (see Greenberg, Moshe) as the normative aspect of biblical religion is often not well understood by instructors and is in some ways least comprehensible to modern American students.*

- Brettler, Marc. *How to Read the Bible*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005.
- *Coogan, Michael D. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- *Greenberg, Moshe. "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law." In *The Jewish Expression*. Ed. Judah Goldin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
- *Levenson, Jon D. *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993.
- Matthews, Victor H. *Studying the Ancient Israelites: Sources and Methods*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.

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

McKenzie, Steven L., and Haynes, Stephen R., eds. *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*. Rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999.

3. The books in this section cover the period of transition between biblical Israel and rabbinic Judaism.

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

Grabbe, Lester. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*. 2 vols. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

----- . *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to Yavneh*. London: Routledge, 2000.

*Jaffee, Martin. *Early Judaism: Religious Worlds of the First Judaic Millennium (Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture)*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997. Reprint University of Maryland Press, 2005.

*Sanders, E. P. *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 B.C.E. – 66 C.E.* Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.

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

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1999.

4. The books and articles in this section focus on the history, literature and culture of rabbinic Judaism.

*Alon, Gedaliah. *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age, 70-640 C.E.* Translated by Gershon Levi. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

*----- . *Border Lines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Cohen, Abraham. *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages*. New York: Schocken, Reprint 1995.

* Berlin, Adele, Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. 1844-1863.

*Halbertal, Moshe. *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

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

Schwartz, Seth. *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 C.E. to 640 C.E.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Steinsalz, Adin. *The Essential Talmud*. New York: Basic, Reprint 1984.

- *Stern, David. "Midrash and Midrashic Interpretation" in Berlin, Adele, Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. 1863-1875.
- *Urbach, E.E. *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*. Translated by Israel Abrahams. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975. Reprint edition Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987.

5. For further insight into Jewish religious thought and practice generally the following series of books by Louis Jacobs can be helpful.

- Jacobs, Louis. *The Book of Jewish Belief*. Springfield, N.J.: Behrman House, 1984.
- *The Book of Jewish Practice*. Springfield, N.J.: Behrman House, 1987.
- *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- *Principles of the Jewish Faith: An Analytical Study*. New York: BasicBooks, 1964.

Tips for Experienced Instructors

For instructors who are accustomed to teaching introductory courses on the Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism, much of the material in *The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective* will be familiar, since there are certain issues that every introductory text must address. At the same time, a careful reader will note that there are viewpoints and perspectives that receive special attention in this book such as:

- *the divergence between scholarly and traditional understandings of the emergence of Judaism;
- *the multi-vocal nature of the biblical text and classical rabbinic sources;
- *the pluriform nature of biblical Israel, Second Temple Judaism and Jewish society in the rabbinic period;
- *the complex nature of Jewish identity in antiquity;
- *the avoidance of anachronistic conceptions of “religion” that privilege beliefs and theology over ritual, law, praxis and ethics.

Instructors who disagree with any or all of these viewpoints are welcome to use them as foils for classroom instruction.

For all Instructors

Every effort should be made to introduce students to primary sources from the biblical and rabbinic corpus, above and beyond the texts cited and analyzed in *The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*. The following editions for the principle works of ancient Judaism are recommended:

Hebrew Bible:

- *Berlin, Adele, Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Sarna, Nahum M., and Chaim Potok, eds. *The JPS Torah Commentary Set*. 5 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996.

Rabbinic Texts:

- Bialik, Hayyim Nahman, ed. *The Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*. Trans. by William G. Braude. New York: Schocken Books, 1992.
- Blackman, P. *Mishnayoth: Pointed Hebrew Text, English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Supplement, Appendix, Indexes, Addenda, Corrigenda*. 2nd ed. Gateshead: Judaica Press, 1983.
- Epstein, Isadore, ed. *The Babylonian Talmud. Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices Under the Editorship of I. Epstein*. London: Soncino Press. 1935-52.
- Freedman, H. and Simon, M., eds. *Midrash Rabbah*. London; New York: Soncino Press, 1983.
- Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition*. Trans. and ed. by Israel V. Berman. New York: Random House, 1989-1999.
- *Rubenstein, Jeffrey L., and Shaye J. D. Cohen. *Rabbinic Stories (Classics of Western Spirituality)*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002.

Other Resources:

- Barnavi, Eli, ed. *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*. New York: Knopf, distributed by Random House, 1992.

For a variety of supporting materials (including primary sources) you may wish to consult:

(1) **Internet Jewish History Sourcebook** (site maintained and edited by Paul Halsall) at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jewishsourcebook.html>

This site provides links to secondary research articles, reviews, discussions, and pictures (2ND) as well as to megasites of web resources (MEGA) and websites focused on specific issues (WEB). The site focuses on providing access to full-text primary historical documents. The contents, listed by topic, are divided into four historical periods: The People of Israel; The Emergence of Judaism; The Jewish Middle Ages; and Jewish Life since the Enlightenment.

(2) **Jewish History.com (Center for Online Judaic Studies)** at <http://jewishhistory.com/>

This site provides materials to support teachers and for individual learning on a range of topics covering the span of Jewish History. For each section overview information is provided as well as primary and secondary sources, bibliographies, newspaper articles, videos, images, maps, artifacts and websites. Topics include: Jews and Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period; The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000-1500; Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism; Jews in the Early Modern Period, 1450-1750 and more.

Additionally, instructors would be well-advised to familiarize themselves with various theories of religion. Theories most compatible with the approach of *The Emergence of Judaism* view religions as cultural systems, or frameworks that shape the entirety of life. Such holistic approaches help to make sense of Judaism as the way of life of a ethnic-religious culture.

Bowie, Fiona. *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.

*Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

*Pals, Daniel L. *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Smart, Ninian. *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Motivating Students to Read the Textbook

One of the benefits of using a textbook that is written in a clear and comprehensible style is that it allows the instructor to use class sessions to analyze and engage with primary sources or develop and critique material in the assigned reading rather than rehashing and unpacking the ideas in the basic text. This can only work, however, if students are actually reading the book. Here are a few strategies for motivating students to do the assigned readings.

1. *Hold daily or weekly quizzes on the readings.* Students are more likely to read the text if they know they will be held accountable for it. The quiz need not be burdensome for the instructor. It can consist of a few short objective questions that can be answered at the beginning of the class session (see the questions at the end of each chapter and in the Study Guide on this website) or the identification of key terms and concepts (see the Study Guide). The quiz may be open book and limited to 8 to 10 minutes.
2. *Require students to turn in short written responses* to questions that appear at the end of each chapter or in the Study Guide on this website. The instructor can limit the length of these responses, and select some rather than all of the questions.
3. *Have students keep reading journals.* Journals encourage students not only to read but to reflect upon the assigned readings. Many instructors give credit for the number rather than the quality of the entries in order to ensure that students will do the assigned readings and be better prepared for classroom discussion.

Classroom Activities

Knowing that the students have read the assigned basic text frees the instructor to be more creative in the classroom and to vary from a straight lecture format. Studies show that students grasp and retain information better when they encounter it in various formats and actively engage with it. Below are some suggestions for classroom activities that can help to promote this kind of learning.

1. *Make regular use of small groups.* Group activities need not take much time out of the class period. Students can meet together to complete a 5 or 10 minute activity or they can work together for the entire class period. Group work can focus on reading and analyzing a primary source (biblical or rabbinic text) in light of the day's reading assignment; collaborating to complete a chapter exercise during class time; staging a debate over a controversial point in the readings (e.g., is historical verifiability of the events of biblical and rabbinic history important for the maintenance of Jewish tradition?). Once the group has finished its work, the members can be asked to share their findings with the entire class.
2. *Assign students to lead class sessions.* There is no better way to learn and retain material than to teach it to others. Depending on the size of the class, individual students or small groups can be assigned to respond to a chapter question or conduct outside research on a point from the readings and share the results orally with the rest of the class. These oral reports need not take up much class time; three to five minutes per report is usually sufficient.
3. *Engage in critical dialogue with the text.* In preparing to teach the course, the instructor will invariably come across scholarly works and readings that present points of view or interpretations of events that differ from those found in *The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*. The instructor could give the class a short article or excerpt from another book containing a diverging perspective and ask the students to identify how and why the two sets of readings disagree and to discuss and evaluate the two views. Such an exercise reinforces the important point that scholarship is a human enterprise requiring subjective judgments and that scholars can respectfully disagree on important points of history and interpretation.

Written Assignments

Instructors vary widely in the kinds of written work that they use to evaluate their students. Some rely heavily on exams while others use a variety of written assignments as the primary basis for student grades. Below are some suggestions for written assignments that can help to reinforce what students are learning from the textbook.

1. *Chapter questions.* Students may be asked to complete some or all of the questions that follow each chapter. If the text is the sole subject of an entire course, it would be possible to assign most if not all of the questions. If the text is the subject of only one component of a larger course, some selection should be made from among the questions. Also, it is always wise to allow some student choice. For example, one might require students to answer two chapter questions of their choice for each chapter.

2. *Research papers.* Many important topics receive necessarily cursory treatment in a textbook that covers an extensive historical period. While it is possible for the instructor to prepare a lecture in order to expand upon topics treated briefly, an alternative approach is to ask students to research the topic and prepare a written report that can be either read or summarized in class. Such an activity replaces passive reception with active learning. Allowing students to suggest their own topics for further research increases student investment in the learning process.