

Syllabus: Religion in Israel/Palestine (RL 399 01 Summer I)

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Course Description: This course offers students a nine day study-abroad experience in Israel and the Palestinian territories, a land whose history and major cities and sites allow a unique opportunity to explore the history and development of the Biblical literature, as well as of the three major monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. On-site learning, coupled with reading prior to the trip and a reflective essay after returning, will allow students to explore major aspects of the study of religion in Israel/Palestine as relates to their own interests, majors, career paths— whether focusing on archaeology and the reconstruction of the past using its methods, the intersection of religion and politics in present-day community identities and their daily existence and struggles, or any of the other facets at which the study of religion in Israel/Palestine intersect with the studies of students participating in the trip.

REQUIRED READING: Students will read one text about key archaeological sites and historical issues, and one text about the modern-day situation and the historical roots of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Texts must be chosen in consultation with the professor, and should represent matters in an accurate and fair manner. Within that framework, students are free to choose texts that address their particular interests – for instance, focusing more on sites and archaeology related to the historical Jesus or to ancient Israel. The bibliography below may be a useful starting point. We will meet to discuss the reading during the Spring 2014 semester, as well as to discuss preparatory matters related to the trip.

Bibliography:

- Bright, John, *A History of Israel* (Westminster John Knox, 4th edition 2000).
- Caplan, Neil, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
- Carroll, James, *Jerusalem, Jerusalem: How an Ancient City Ignited the Modern World* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011).
- Cohn-Sherbok, Dan and Dawoud El-Alami, *The Palestine-Israeli conflict: a beginner's guide* (Oneworld, 2008)
- Finkelstein, Israel and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (Free Press, 2002).
- Finkelstein, Israel, Amihai Mazar and Brian Schmidt, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).
- Fisk, Bruce N., *A Hitchhiker's Guide to Jesus: Reading the Gospels on the Ground* (Baker Academic, 2011)
- Gelvin, James, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition 2007).
- Grobman, Alex, *The Palestinian Right to Israel* (Balfour, 2010).

- Kimmerling, Baruch and Joel S. Migdal, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (Harvard University Press, 1994).
- May, Melanie A., *Jerusalem Testament: Palestinian Christians Speak, 1988-2008* (Eerdmans, 2010).
- Pappé, Ilan, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Rotberg, Robert, *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix* (Indiana University Press, 2006).
- Shanks, Hershel (editor), *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (Prentice Hall, 1999).
- Tobin, Maureen and Robert (editors), *How Long O Lord?* (Cowley Publications, 2002)
- Whitelam, Keith H., *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (Routledge, 1997).

Assignments

The central component of this course is, it goes without saying, time spent in Israel. This will include:

- Visits to sites that are of historical importance to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as other oft-neglected groups that are represented in this part of the world.
- Opportunities to observe the diversity within the religious traditions in question – such as orthodox and liberal forms of Judaism as well as Jewish atheism; not only Islam but Christianity among Palestinians/Arabs; and the different Christian traditions that share sacred sites such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

In preparation for travel, students will read and discuss two books in common over the course of the semester prior to the trip. The aim of the reading is to

- ensure that students have sufficient background about the history of the region and the significance of key sites so as to get the most out of visiting them in a manner that appreciates the reason for doing so;
- ensure that students get a broad exposure to not only historical factors that have contributed to the current tensions, but also a range of viewpoints across various constituencies in the region, in a way that allows them to approach meetings that take place in Israel with empathy as well as in a well-informed fashion.

Students are required to blog about the reading and discuss it. The blog, which will be used both for blogging about and discussion of reading prior to travel, and for posting photos and reflections during the trip, can be found at <http://fromindianapolistoisrael.blogspot.com/> This blog was used for the 2012 trip, and so the posts from that trip may be of interest to students traveling in 2014.

After returning, students will write an essay that allows them to focus on one aspect that particularly interests them, whether it be a site, a historical question, or an aspect of life in the region in the present. The paper is intended to be reflective and so can incorporate the first-person to a greater extent than

typical in academic essays; nevertheless, students will be expected to draw on reliable academic sources in the process. Students will be asked to identify a topic that they hope to write about, and begin doing independent research on the topic prior to the trip.

Grade

Participation in preparatory sessions/discussions: 10%

Participation in Trip: 70%

Final essay: 20%

Dr. McGrath and participating students will travel with EF Educational Tours. The web site for the trip is located here: <http://www.efcollegestudytours.com/preview-tour.aspx?pt=1409360us>

The itinerary is as follows:

1. Day 1: Fly overnight to Israel
2. Day 2: Tel Aviv

- o Arrive in Tel Aviv

3. Day 3: Tel Aviv + Acre + Haifa

- o Take a guided tour of Tel Aviv
- o Visit Caesarea National Park
- o Visit Knight's Hall in Acre
- o Continue on to Haifa
- o Make a photo stop at Mount Carmel:

4. Day 4: Nazareth + Haifa

- o Take an excursion to Nazareth:
- o Travel to Cana and Tiberias
- o Take a boat ride to Capernaum
- o Visit Capernaum National Park:
- o Visit the Mount of Beatitudes in Tabgha
- o Return to Haifa

5. Day 5: Jordan Valley + Jerusalem

- o Travel through the Jordan Valley



- Visit the Mount of Temptation in Jericho
- Visit the Dead Sea Scrolls caves in Qumran
- Enjoy free time floating in the Dead Sea
- [Jeep adventure](#)
- Travel to Jerusalem

6. Day 6: Masada + Jerusalem

- Travel to Masada:
- Return to Jerusalem
- View Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives
- Visit the Chapel of the Ascension
- Visit the Garden of Gethsemane

7. Day 7: Bethlehem + Jerusalem

- Take a walking tour of Jerusalem:

8. Day 8: Jerusalem

- Visit the Israel Museum
- Visit the Yad VaShem Memorial and Holocaust Museum
- Enjoy free time in Jerusalem

9. Day 9: Depart for home